Dolmen and Tower Tombs

STEIMER-HERBET, Tara

Dolmen and Tower Tombs
(3600 - 2000 BC)

Tara Steiner-Herbet

In the proto-historic period, the territory of contemporary Jordan was covered with megalithic tombs of two types that correspond to different livelihoods, associated with more or less arid environments. Thus, sedentary settlements developed dolmen necropolises, while the steppe was covered with tower tombs.

In Jordan, the construction of megalithic tombs began in the early 4th millennium BC and faded at the turn of the 2nd millennium BC. Two types have been identified: dolmens and tower tombs (plates II.11 and II.12). The

Figure II.15 — Tower Tombs and Dolmens in Ancient Bronze Time.
The dolmens are grouped into large necropolises of sometimes over a thousand monuments (Jabal Mutawwaq, Mount Nebo), the necropolises are mostly built on high lands and are close to Chalcolithic villages (Jabal Mutawwaq), Early Bronze age villages (Al Mugeghat, Dahmiyah, al-Dehma, Kufri Yuba) and Middle Bronze age villages (Marajem). Whereas the tower tombs are isolated or in small groups not exceeding half a dozen, they overlook small hamlets and / or are close to structures related to hunting or herding (kites). Recent excavations in the region of Ma’an have yet to provide precise dates but the elements of relative chronology observed on satellite images show that they are contemporary to the dolmens. The megalithic tombs are sometimes surrounded by an enclosure, covered with a tumulus and / or associated with a tail. This tail consists of either a continuous wall or a series of caissons, stacks or standing stones. They are 5m to 300m long and sometimes link two tombs together, in which case we call them funeral chains (Ayn Jadida, Marajem, the Samra region, Jabal Dhalma, Ayn Quaya). The dolmens and tower tombs were part of daily protohistoric life. These funerary monuments overlooked villages and hamlets, were located on prominent points visible from afar; to a certain extent they structured the landscape.

Plate II.11 — Dolmen near Irbid.
as additional resources to shepherding. The dolmens belonged to sedentary shepherds and tower tombs to nomadic or semi-nomadic shepherds. Studies on the distribution of megalithic tombs in Jordan show that proto-historic men sought, using their dead, to mark or define their territories. The interpenetration of dolmens and tower tombs seen in the Zarqa region indicates that societies with very different livelihoods lived together. The human impact on the landscape in the 4th millennium is concomitant with profound social transformations in the societies of the Southern Levant (Plate II.12).
The First Cities in Early Bronze Age
(3600 - 2000 BC)

Wael Abu Azizah

The Early Bronze Age marked a watershed in the history of the southern Levant. This period represents a milestone in the march towards the urban era, expressing profound changes in the organization of societies.

A series of technical innovations allowed the development of an agricultural economy. Irrigation, already used during the previous period, became the rule, and the introduction of the ox and plough improved yield and allowed the farming of new lands. The cultivation of olives and vines increased. Finally, the use of the donkey as a beast of burden and the spread of bronze tools facilitated this process of the intensification of production.

Furthermore, a series of transformations in the design of towns shows a growing level of social organisation into a hierarchy. Some sites, mostly concentrated in the north and along the Jordan Valley, stand out from other villages and have added fortifications (Bab al-Dhra’, Kh. Zeraqun, Numeira, Tell Handaqqu (N) and Pella). Defensive structures such as rectangular towers and bastions were erected along stone ramparts, along with monumental gateways. In some cases, privileged acropolis sectors accommodated new forms of public and administrative buildings, while most domestic premises were located in the lower town (Tell Hammam, Tell Handaqqu (S), Leijjun) (fig. II.14). Places of worship, previously built both inside villages and outside, henceforth occupied a central place. The site of Kh. Zeraqun illustrates these characteristics of Early Bronze Age towns. Defended by large stone ramparts, the design of the town attests to the planning of urban construction in two distinct areas. The main city gate is in the upper town, protected by a 30 metre long bastion, there was a religious complex comprising an enclosure and four long rooms opening onto a courtyard. The discovery of a great number of storage jars in a building of this raised fortified area highlights, as observed on a number of sites, the development of the centralized management of resources and the emergence of political control. The lower city, in the southern part of the site, is an area of residential and domestic blocks surrounded by an organized transportation network.