



## New Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Discoveries at Tell Koubba in Northern Lebanon

Kamal Badreshany, H el ene Sader & Graham Philip

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bunkers, spaces that can help conceptualize new ways of thinking about Palestinian resistance, via new movements acting to disrupt global transport and trade infrastructure elsewhere. Given that the corridor is entrenched and fixed in space and time, disruptions, frictions and resistance are inevitable; but first, we need to make sure that what is hidden in plain sight becomes visible to those of us who seek a different future in Palestine.

### Acknowledgements

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### New Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Discoveries at Tell Koubba in Northern Lebanon

Kamal Badreshany (Durham University), Hélène Sader (AUB) and Graham Philip (Durham University)  
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The first season of excavation at Tell Koubba I was undertaken between 24th August and 19th September 2015 by a joint team from the American University of Beirut (AUB) and Durham University. The excavation team consisted of an international group of students and academics representing Lebanese (AUB), British (Durham and Oxford), and Australian (University of Sydney) institutions. The work of the team was greatly aided by four Syrian workmen from Idlib Province and kind logistical support from a number of individuals in the surrounding towns and villages. For example, it is thanks to local guidance that the existence of a heavily disturbed, previously undocumented EB III tell site, Tell Koubba II, was noted by the team and brought to the attention of the Lebanese Department of Antiquities.

Tell Koubba I is a low mound with an area of roughly 5 ha, located about 60 km north of Beirut (just north of the city of Batroun). The site is situated on the fertile coastal plain, 100 m east of the Mediterranean and around 200 m north of the *Nahr al-Jawz*. Tell Koubba I abuts raised beach deposits at the edge of the Ras Shiqaa formation. This rocky outcrop dominates the site to the north and, with its numerous natural caves, forms a dramatic and distinctive landscape feature that no doubt has drawn people to the area for millennia. A full report on

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the 2015–2017 seasons of fieldwork at Koubba will appear soon in BAAL.

**Tell Koubba I** was bisected by a railway that was constructed during the Second World War, leaving two long continuous sections exposed. Copeland and Wescombe (1965:101) visited the site in the 1960s, examining the sections and reporting that Tell Koubba I yielded mainly Neolithic and Chalcolithic remains. The first season of work in the current project, including a sounding located immediately to the east of one of the sections and a systematic survey of the immediate area, produced a substantial amount of much earlier and later material, including Palaeolithic hand axes as well as Early Bronze Age II ceramics. These finds indicate that the immediate area of the site, with its numerous natural shelters, abundant springs and fertile soils has been attracting settlement for many thousands of years. Additionally, the first season of work suggests that **Tell Koubba I represents a rare Neolithic to Early Bronze Age coastal occupation sequence** that has potential to yield valuable archaeological information on the development of early settlements on the Lebanese coast and in the broader Levant.

The discovery of **Tell Koubba II** located about 500 m to the east of Tell Koubba I promises to extend our understanding of settlement in the area at least through the end of the EB III. The location of Tell Koubba II commands the only major access route through Ras Shiqaa (Fig. 1), a limestone headland which completely bisects the coastal plain, and simultaneously takes advantage of accessibility to good farmland and water resources. The shift in location from Koubba I to Koubba II during the EBA indicates the growing importance of trade and access to major routes



Fig. 1. Modern satellite image of the known extent of Tells Koubba I (grey outline) and II (white outline). Koubba I is bisected by a railway line represented by the black dashed line and Koubba II is bisected by a road.



Fig. 2. View of Tell Koubba I, looking southwards from the top of the raised beach deposits. The red arrow indicates the position of the section cleaning operation, the black arrow the highest part of the site.



Fig. 3. Chipped stone denticulated blades.

for settlement at this time (Marfoe 1998). It is possible that Tell Koubba I was abandoned because it was orientated towards the coast, and possibly the caves found to the north of the site, and was, therefore, not so well-positioned in terms of regional communications routes.

Investigations during the initial season at Tell Koubba I produced remains pertaining to two main chronological phases: the Ceramic Neolithic and Early Bronze II. The majority of the finds from the first season date to the Ceramic Neolithic (probably 7th millennium BC). A diverse assemblage of chipped stone, including denticulated blades, obsidian blades and a greenstone axe, were recovered from the site (Fig. 3). In addition large amounts of Dark Faced Burnished Ware (DFBW) pottery, typical of the Ceramic Neolithic (Fig. 4), were also recovered. This interesting assemblage of finds indicates that the inhabitants of Tell Koubba I were deeply entwined in a far-flung system of trade routes connecting much of the Near East at the time. The obsidian blades were surely imported over long distances, as the nearest source of obsidian is found in Anatolia. Additionally, petrographic and chemical analyses indicate that similar DFBW pottery, produced at an, as yet, undetermined production centre, was not only present at Tell Koubba I and Byblos, but was

also being traded as far afield as the southern Biqaa, providing the first evidence of significant trade links between the Lebanese Coast and the Biqaa during this period.

Numerous organic remains, including animal bones and charred botanical material were also recovered. Our current knowledge of subsistence modes on the Lebanese coast during the Ceramic Neolithic is limited; there have been few such sites excavated. This season's work at Tell Koubba I has begun to give us a better understanding of life in this important area during a key phase of human history. The fragments of sickle blades recovered, and the presence of domesticated animals in the faunal assemblage, indicate that Neolithic populations were invested, to some degree, in agriculture. However, the presence of arrowheads and wild animal bones show some continued reliance on the natural environment. A key aim for future research at the site is to assess the degrees to which the inhabitants of the area are invested in agriculture and/or remained reliant on wild resources for subsistence, and how this changed over time.

No significant architectural units were exposed during the season dating to the Neolithic, and the sounding appears to have uncovered the remains of external courtyards and work areas, including a *tannur*, and fragments of what may have been patches of white plaster surface. The associated buildings are probably located nearby, in as yet unexcavated areas.

The EB II remains may be represented by the remains of a monumental stone wall measuring roughly 3 m in width and orientated almost exactly north–south (Fig. 5). The wall appears to have two phases of construction. The second consisted of two parallel lines of stone, separated by a mud/pebble fill; the easternmost line was composed of large, rectilinear limestone blocks. Removal of a short stretch of this wall at the southern edge of the sounding revealed an area of heavy burning, below which lay two further large stones, which we suspect relate to an earlier phase of the wall. No associated floors were identified, but both the style of construction and the presence of several well-preserved EB II sherds may indicate an early 3rd millennium BC date. Work in the 2016 season hopes to track the extension of this wall using non-invasive geophysical techniques, such as magnetometry and ground penetrating radar, to understand the associated building and identify the most suitable areas for targeted excavation.

Current work suggests that Koubba I was abandoned during EB II (early 3rd millennium) in favour of the nearby site of Koubba II. The latter is currently being destroyed by the construction of dwellings for Syrian refugees and the Lebanese DGA have requested that the AUB-Durham team conduct an emergency rescue investigation as part of a 2016 season. The construction has exposed three vertical sections yielding numerous well-preserved stone architectural remains and large amounts of ceramic material. Though the destruction of the site is unfortunate, the rescue investigation of the sections will provide a good opportunity to gain an understanding of the settlement history of the site and make an assessment of its function. A surface collection of ceramics in 2015 yielded material of an EB III date, and an initial investigation shows that the ceramics

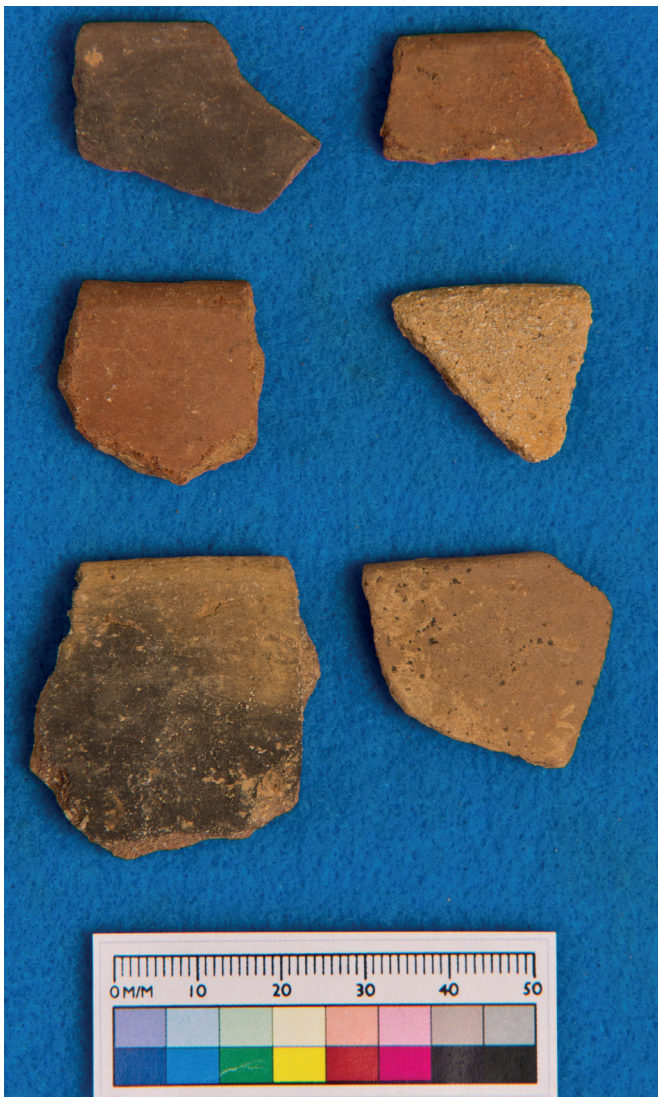


Fig. 4. Dark Faced Burnished Ware.

from Koubba II are similar to the EB III assemblage from Tell Fadous-Kfarabida, located about 7 km to the south of Koubba II, and Byblos, potentially indicating strong connections between these sites. In fact, an earlier petrographic analysis by Badreshany and Genz (2009: 80), showed that some of the pottery from Tell Fadous-Kfarabida matched the geology found near Tell Koubba I, indicating links between the two sites and suggesting that an EB III production centre might exist in the area.

The main aims of the research at Koubba II are to gain a better understanding of activity at the site and to elucidate the nature of links with Tell Fadous-Kfarabida and Byblos, and thus shed light on the nature of early urban societies on the Lebanese coast, at a regional, rather than a single-site level. Like Koubba II, Tell Fadous-Kfarabida was not positioned near obvious harbours (Badreshany *et al.* 2007), suggesting that by EB III maritime activity was focused upon a small number of larger sites. Byblos comes to mind, but the nearby settlement at Batroun, where the ancient remains are buried below the modern town, is another possibility. Seen in this light, the relocation of settlement away from Koubba I to a more strategic location, at the junction of the Wadi Jawz with the main north–south route may be linked to wider-scale political and economic changes, including the development of the earliest nucleated settlement landscape in northern Lebanon.

The sites of Tell Koubba I and II offer a well-preserved and, currently, unique sequence on the coast of the northern Levant spanning the 7th through 3rd millennia BC. The continued investigation of these sites is particularly important as northern Lebanon has seen little archaeological research compared to other parts of the Levant, and its particular part in wider regional narratives of change remains opaque. Through a focused research programme, the team seeks to gain a better understanding of the development of one of the world's



Fig. 5. Koubba II—Archaeological deposits exposed by road-cutting.

earliest agrarian settlement landscapes in the Neolithic, and the path leading to its development into a centre of early urbanism during the Early Bronze Age.

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### The Excavations at Tell Iktanu and Tell Hammam in Jordan

Kay Prag (*The Manchester Museum*)

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The excavations of Tell Iktanu and Tell Hammam in Jordan were part of the Shu'aib/Hisban Project, conducted over four seasons (1966, 1987, 1989 and 1990). A further botanical survey was conducted in 1992, and air photography analysis was undertaken with David Kennedy in 1995. The project aimed at assessing a regional archaeology in the south-east Jordan Valley, and much has been published in preliminary reports and research articles since the field work was completed. (For a summary of the project see the *Bulletin of the Council for British Research in the Levant*, 2012, 52–53). Good progress on the completion of the final report on the excavation of the Early Bronze I, Intermediate Bronze Age and Iron Age occupation at Iktanu and of Early Bronze III remains at Hammam was made in 2014 and 2015, but other demands have since intervened.

The text of the stratigraphic and ceramic analysis of the Early Bronze I remains has been completed, with multiple phases distinguished on both the north and the south tells. The different areas have distinctive settlement patterns. Area D.I on the north tell has well preserved mudbrick structures on stone foundations, which continued to be rebuilt on the same alignment over a long period. Area C on the south tell had multiple rebuilds on different alignments of structures, of which only shallow stone foundations survive, suggesting interrupted occupation on the site. Excellent ceramic assemblages have been recovered from both areas. The remains continue to indicate they are those of a small unfortified agricultural settlement. The digitization and setting of the plans, sections, photographs and pottery is now complete.

A long period followed the abandonment of the Early Bronze I site so that the new settlement was founded in Area C directly on the eroded remains of the previous occupation and a ground surface littered with Early Bronze I sherds. These became associated with the



*Flotation in progress for the recovery of botanical remains from archaeological sites.*