THE WORLD BEYOND THE TELLS: PRE-CLASSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE BASALT LANDSCAPE OF THE HOMS REGION, SYRIA

Jennie BRADBURY, Graham PHILIP*

Introduction

Episodes of major social or economic change – the adoption of agriculture or the emergence of complex societies for example – will result in the creation of contrasting archaeological records in different landscape types. Moreover, the form in which these present themselves to present-day researchers is further complicated by the different ways in which these landscapes have been altered subsequent to the creation of that record.[1] Therefore, if we wish to undertake an integrated investigation of long-term interactions between humans and their environments, and we wish this to be meaningful at more than a local scale, we have to design projects which can deal with the potentially contrasting archaeological records of different environmental zones.

This issue lies at the heart of the Syrian-British regional survey Settlement and Landscape Development in the Homs Region, Syria, which was designed to obtain evidence on human activity from sample areas of adjacent but contrasting landscape types located in the Orontes Valley close to the present-day city of Homs (*Fig. 1*). The two major features of the study area are an extensive spread of fertile lacustrine marls located east of the Orontes River, and a volcanic basalt landscape to the west. The evidence from the marl region has been described elsewhere[2] and so need not detain us further here.

The basaltic region has been studied through the investigation of a sample area measuring 120 *sq*. km. This lies within the Northern Study Area (NSA) of the overall project, within which it is designated as Unit 3 (*Fig. 2*). Because of its complexity, survey in the basalt landscape proved technically more challenging than work in the marl. As a result, systematic fieldwork could not proceed until the acquisition of high-resolution satellite image data, with accurate ground control. Subsequently, work has proceeded through a combination of the examination of satellite imagery supported by ground observation.[3] We now feel that we have done sufficient fieldwork to be confident of our ability to link features visible on the imagery to broad categories of remains that can be identified on the ground, and can say with confidence that the area retains traces of a unique suite of archaeological remains.

The evidence for Graeco-Roman through Islamic villages and the associated agricultural infrastructure such as field boundaries is very obvious (*Fig. 3*) and comparable remains are documented in several other parts of Syria.[4] However, in stony "upland" landscapes of this type, evidence for pre-classical activity has generally remained elusive.[5] Yet the investigation of this particular landscape has revealed another striking feature, the presence of a large number of stone cairns. Similar cairns or tumuli have been reported from several areas of Syria and Lebanon[6] and from numerous locations in the southern Levant, where they have usually been interpreted as evidence for the presence of pastoralist groups.[7] While we have no direct dating evidence for the cairns west of Homs, similar structures elsewhere in the Levant are generally assigned a Chalcolithic-EBA date, that is the 4th-3rd millennium BC,[8] a view reiterated by several contributors to this volume.

* Department of Archaeology, Durham University, South Road, Durham, DH1 3LE, United Kingdom.

1. Wilkinson 2003, p. 42-43.
2. Philip 2007; Philip *et al*. 2002, p. 5-14; Philip *et al*. 2005, p. 22-27, 38-40.
3. Beck *et al*. 2007.
4. *E.g*. Tate 1992. For a recent study of Graeco-Roman period activity in this region see Newson *et al*. 2009/2010.
5. Philip *et al*. 2005, p. 37-38; Philip and Bradbury 2010.
6. *E.g*. Steimer-Herbet 2004; Steimer-Herbet and Braemer 1999.
7. Prag 1995, p. 84; Zohar 1992, p. 43.
8. *E.g*. Prag 1995, p. 77; Steimer-Herbet 2004; Steimer-Herbet and Braemer 1999, p. 175.

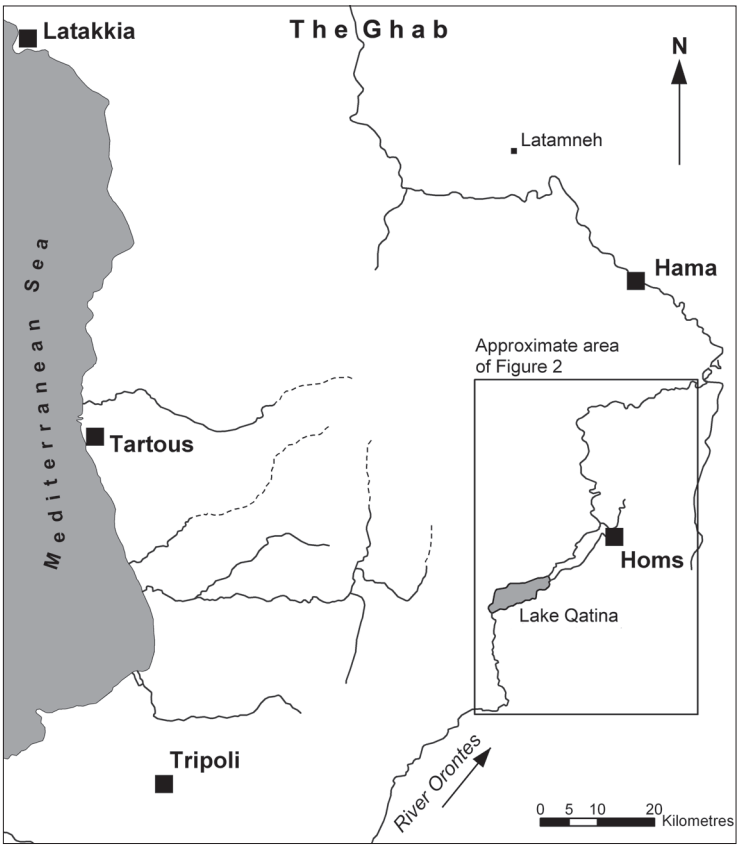


Fig. 1 – Map showing general location of survey area.

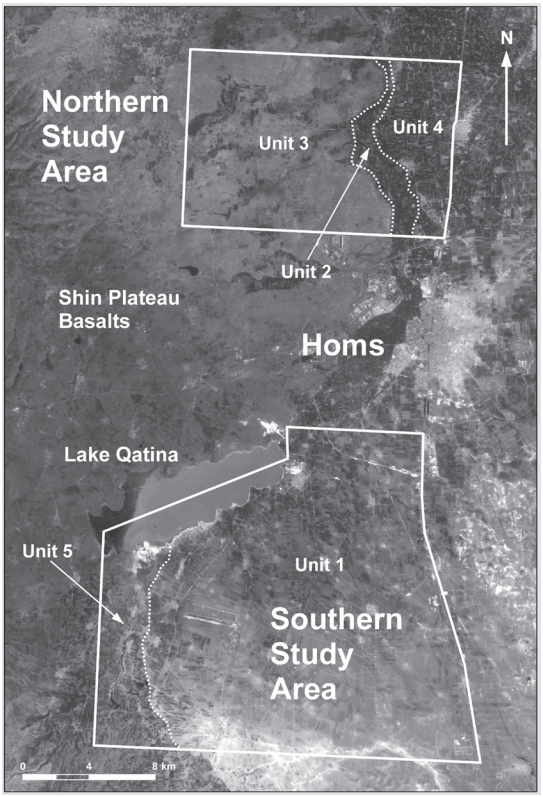


Fig. 2 – Position of basalt landscape (Unit 3) in relation to the project's other study areas.

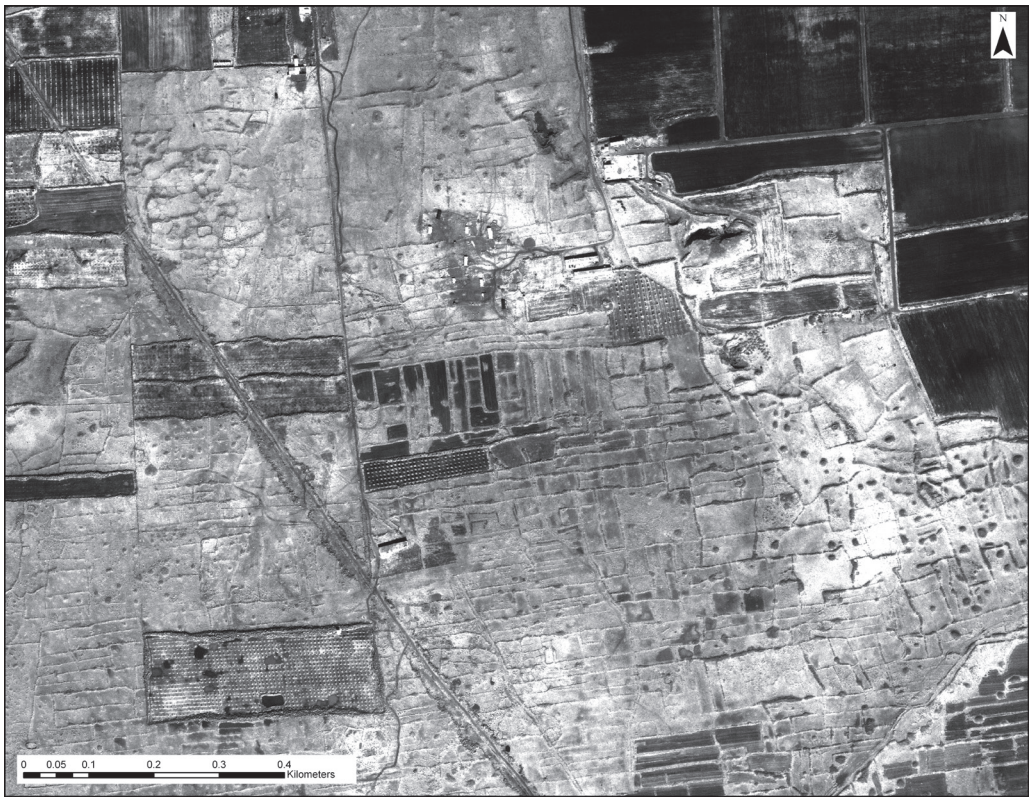


Fig. 3 – This Ikonos image (Feb. 2002) reveals the complex palimpsest of structural remains which has been preserved in the basaltic landscape.

The present article serves two main functions. First, it provides a preliminary account of the form of the cairns, their number, distribution and landscape context. Secondly, having outlined the sheer scale and obtrusiveness of the phenomenon, it offers a few pointers as to how we might understand the significance of these structures to the past occupants of this landscape.

As far as documentary evidence is concerned, texts from Ebla reveal that by the middle of the 3rd millennium BC confederations of pastoralists, with their own settlements and rulers, were established in areas to the east and south of the city.[9] Moreover, efforts by Syrian urban elites to assert control over tracts of landscape to the east of Ebla[10] indicate that steppe grazing land was seen as a valuable resource by this time. Archaeological evidence for an increase in human activity in the steppe zone in the 3rd millennium BC has only recently been recognised,[11] and attention to date has focused upon easily recognized walled-settlements; the wider landscapes remain poorly understood. Moreover, it is not clear whether any of this evidence is of direct relevance to our understanding of developments in the basalt landscape west of Homs.

The Landscape Setting

The volcanic plateau of the Wa'ar is located to the west of the River Orontes, and consists of what is known as the Shin basalt plateau, and in topographical terms comprises a series of low boulder-strewn plateaus, interspersed with shallow valleys and depressions. Annual precipitation, which lies between 300 and 600 mm, is some way above that of the marl landscape to the east of the Orontes, although it is the latter which represents the prime agricultural zone, and in which the major tell sites are located. Despite good rainfall, for much of the year the basalt appears bleak and windswept. However, during the spring that follows the winter rains, the whole landscape is covered in a rich carpet of vegetation, and agricultural communities have settled the area in a number of different periods. As this appears to render the term "marginal" inappropriate, we prefer to characterise the area as "sub-optimal."

While rainfall appears plentiful, its utility is mediated by the nature of the local geology which consists of a large expanse of late Miocene to early Pliocene basalt flows overlying earlier marl deposits. Consequently, although the resulting surface soils are rich in minerals, they are often thin and boulder-strewn. In addition, the nature of the basalt determines the utility of the rainfall. While some basalt flows have a loose rubble surface, with voids through which water can flow, other flows are interbedded with palaeosols and/or slope deposits, which provide a means for groundwater to flow around. Thus as de Vaumas[12] observed the hydrological conditions are such that much of the rainwater is lost immediately either as surface flow or into the basalt where underground flows are created. In practice most of the rainfall ends up flowing out of the area through small seasonal wadis or is contained within depressions where it forms seasonal lakes (ram). The lakes and wadis can in some years contain water until the early summer, but thereafter, as with most of the region, remain dry until the winter.

It has been suggested[13] that the subsurface flow can give birth to small springs; these occur mainly in the southern part of the Wa'ar. We have observed that the major modern villages in the basalt are generally on the sites of nucleated Roman-Byzantine villages, which themselves may have been founded upon even older settlements (many such villages appear to have a tell at the centre). As there is little rain for six months of the year, and as this is rapidly lost, a regular water supply is a major determinant for any permanent settlement within the region, so the apparent consistency of settlement location might be explained by favourable water supplies.

The Homs cairns

Throughout 2006-2007 research began examining the Homs cairns (tumuli). Whilst, observations had been made during previous seasons concerning the presence of these monuments within the NSA,[14] the absolute number of cairns, and thus their density and distribution across the landscape could not readily be established from ground observation alone. Rather the identification of potential burial cairns was established using satellite imagery which rapidly highlighted the vast extent of these monuments within the study area (cf. *Fig. 3*). Moreover comparison of 1960s Corona space photography with more recent Ikonos imagery highlighted the speed with which these monuments were being destroyed by efforts to improve agricultural returns.

While the imagery proved invaluable for the mapping of cairns, preliminary fieldwork in 2002 and 2003 had revealed that the cairns showed a marked degree of variability, suggesting that the interpretation of the image data would be much enhanced by a selective programme of ground observation. Accordingly, during 2006 and 2007 a preliminary field investigation of the

9. Bonechi 1993, p. 186-188; Fronzaroli 2003, p. 124.
10. Archi and Biga 2003.
11. Braemer *et al*. 2004; Castel and Peltenburg 2007.
12. Vaumas 1957, p. 224.
13. Vaumas 1957, p. 265.
14. Philip *et al*. 2005, p. 34; Philip *et al*. 2002, p. 16.

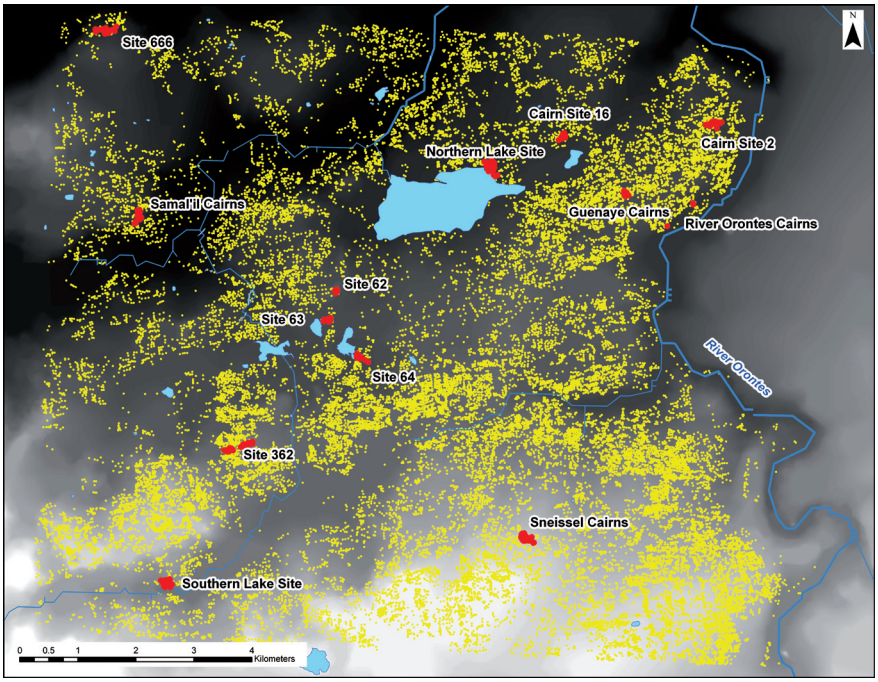


Fig. 4 – Distribution of cairns within the NSA; those digitised from imagery are shown in yellow, those surveyed on the ground in red.

cairns was undertaken in order to assess those features of the cairns which could not be readily established from image data, *e.g.* variations in morphology, detailed typology and their relationship to nearby structural elements and local topography.

The nature of the data collected was also influenced by the needs of potential theoretical frameworks within which such monuments might be interpreted. While monuments have played an important role in recent studies of European prehistory, we were not convinced that approaches which emphasised the ritual phenomenology of monuments[15] were necessarily appropriate for the data from the Middle East.

Moreover, despite various debates, the monuments of Neolithic Europe are generally assumed to relate to societies at a relatively early stage in the development of agriculture,[16] a *floruit* in the 4th and 3rd millennia BC for the Syro-Palestinian examples would place them contemporary in terms of the sequence in the southern Levant (which is much better documented at this point than is western Syria), with the development of walled settlements, and a period of significant agricultural intensification.[17] On a rather wider scale, this is also broadly contemporary with the development of complex societies and the growth of urban communities in Mesopotamia.

Rather than impose a model or explanation from the "outside", our ultimate aim is to try to think through the role and significance that these monuments may have had to the past populations who lived their lives around them. To this end, we felt that Ingold's concept of "taskscapes"[18] might provide a useful way of considering the monuments within wider frameworks of everyday activity. The notion of takscapes implies a series of mutually interlocking tasks, embedded within social activity, which are shaped by both the process of dwelling, as well as historicity.[19] Thus, rather than trying to separate the ritual from the domestic we considered it pivotal to regard these monuments as embodying social relations. In terms of fieldwork this is an aspiration which requires not just the recording of the features of each monument on a "tick list" description, but a degree of engagement with the structures themselves. For the sake of clarity we offer two examples for illustrative purposes. It is important when recording any monument to consider: its position with respect to other structures; intervisibility or obstructed views; visibility of features in the landscape; the nature of views in different directions; the proximity to other monuments and the presence or absence of low connecting walls. Another example is the matter of considering how the monuments might relate to a landscape that, while usually habitable, shows significant seasonal variation in terms of the availability of water, the nature of ground cover and the ease of movement across it.

15. *E.g.* Cummings *et al.* 2002; Cummings and Whittle 2004; Fowler and Cummings 2003; Tilley 1994, 2004.
16. Cooney 1997, p. 27; Patton 1997, p. 48; Whittle 1997, p. 16.
17. Philip 2003.
18. Ingold 2000, p. 194.
19. Ingold 2000, p. 194-208

The use of satellite imagery and traditional survey permit analysis to be pitched at a variety of scales, ranging from that of a single cairn, or a local cluster of cairns, to the distribution of cairns across the entire Study Area. Examination of satellite imagery has indicated the presence of around 30,000 potential cairns within the NSA (*Fig. 4*). Moreover, it shows that while the distribution of these monuments expands to the north and west of this study area, their distribution at the present-time is restricted to the area of basalt geology.

During fieldwork 231 cairns were recorded on the ground (*Fig. 4*). The information included data on location, morphology and the presence of associated features. While the current sample represents only 0.8% of the potential cairns within the area, this was felt to be sufficient to provide a preliminary indication of the level of variation existing within them.

Morphology, Chronology and Context

Conventional practice in studies of burial monuments has been to present a typological catalogue, in which individual examples are placed in one of a range of pre-defined "types". Thus, while in many cases authors have sought to highlight the variation within forms,[20] the mode of presentation (a series of linked types and sub-types) allowed the monuments as a whole to be represented as comprising a single coherent category, and so has supported the belief that they formed a single phenomenon. In contrast, rather than trying to develop a series of idealised "types" to which individual cairns can be assigned, we have sought to examine the extent of variation existing within the Homs cairns. Thus we have identified and examined a range of variables, and investigated the relationships present between these, in the expectation that this will allow us to gain a better understanding of the range of potential uses of these monuments and the ways in which they may have been conceptualised.

Burial monuments or agricultural clearance? Aspects of morphology and location

Many researchers, working within both European and Near Eastern archaeology, have viewed cairn-like features as representing the remains of land clearance associated with agricultural activity or perhaps boundary markers.[21] However, in the case of the cairns in the Homs basalts, both their appearance and location argue against this explanation. Piles of stone resulting from modern bulldozing activity are readily observable within the Homs basalts, and can be differentiated from ancient structures by clear differences in the colour of the stone and the extent to which lichen covers the exposed surfaces. This is simply the result of stones having been moved from their original positions. Moreover, these modern dumps lack visible evidence of either internal structure or associated features (see below).

In contrast, analysis has indicated that these were present in more than 80% of the sample of ancient cairns surveyed to date (*Fig. 5*). These include: internal uprights or chambers, external revetments, areas of external paving, enclosure walls, internal chambers/cists or platforms/plinths, all of which we take as indicative of planned construction. As other cairns may have contained similar features, now obscured by vegetation or stone tumble, the actual percentage of cairns with associated features probably exceeds 80%. If we view the sample as broadly representative of the whole, it would suggest that a high percentage of the cairn-like features identified from the satellite imagery represent genuine ancient structures.

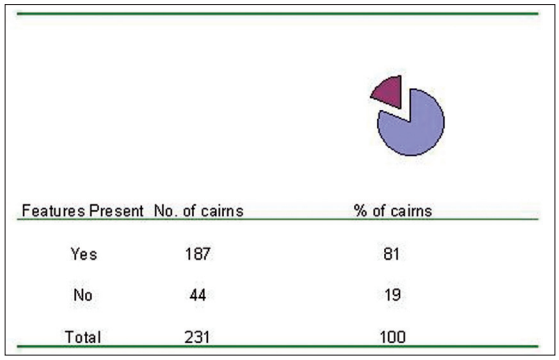
While the NSA contains a number of highly impressive cairns, many others are of more modest size and appearance. In addition, given a recorded density of 208 cairns per square kilometre, it is easy to understand how their use as burial monuments might be questioned, and an interpretation as ancient clearance cairns – dating to the Roman period for example – preferred. However, the arguments against such a view are strong. While some cairns could have resulted from ancient clearance activity this is contradicted by the point made above regarding the clear evidence for internal structure in most cases, and fact that in contrast to recently bulldozed areas, the surfaces of the ancient fields (*i.e.* those still enclosed by extant ancient field walls) are generally extensively strewn with rocks and boulders, and so provide no evidence for clearance activity. Moreover, in terms of location, it is clear from 1960s Corona imagery, which we believe to predate any large-scale clearance activity, that there are far fewer cairns in the fields located along the bottoms of the main wadi systems which represent the best potential agricultural land, than are present along the slopes and crests of the main ridges. All in all, we feel that there is little reason to interpret any significant proportion of these monuments as representing the results of agricultural clearance. That said, the nature of any burials associated with these monuments cannot be discussed without further investigation, and in particular the excavation of some of the Homs cairns.

Variability among cairns: shape and appearance

The recording of the shape and appearance of cairns are to some extent subjective interpretations and it is clear that categories such as "circular" or "square" may not have been recognized or understood in the same way by past populations

20. *E.g.* Steimer-Herbet 2006, p. 53.

21. *E.g.* Betts 1982, p. 32; Frodsham 2004, p. 208, 341-342; Gentelle 1985, p. 35.



Features Present	No. of cairns	% of cairns
Yes	187	81
No	44	19
Total	231	100

Fig. 5 – Percentage of cairns with and without associated features.

Blocky Cairns

	No. of cairns	% of cairns
Circular	36	47
Ovoid	21	27
Rectangular	4	5
Square	0	0
Irregular	15	19
Unknown	1	1
Total	77	100

Cobbly Cairns

	No. of cairns	% of cairns
Circular	31	44
Ovoid	28	40
Rectangular	6	9
Square	1	1
Irregular	4	6
Unknown	0	0
Total	70	100

Rubbly Cairns

	No. of cairns	% of cairns
Circular	20	25
Ovoid	33	41
Rectangular	2	3
Square	1	1
Irregular	24	30
Unknown	0	0
Total	80	100

Soil-filled Cairns

	No. of cairns	% of cairns
Circular	0	0
Ovoid	4	100
Rectangular	0	0
Square	0	0
Irregular	0	0
Unknown	0	0
Total	4	100

Fig. 6 – Comparison between cairn shape and building material.

Fig. 7 – Possible Islamic period burial cairn located outside the village Samal'il.

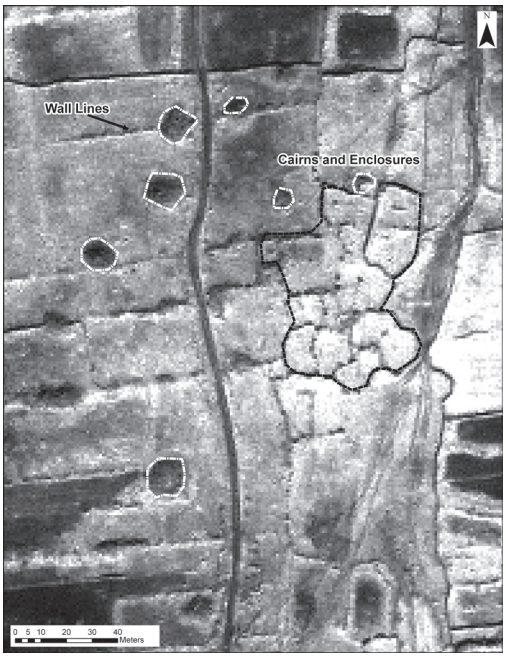


Fig. 8 – Corona Image of site SHR 63 which includes a cairn cluster and associated features.

as they are by present-day archaeologists. Despite this, the great variety apparent in the form taken by cairns within the NSA is interesting, and each monument was surveyed by measuring and by being assigned, on a judgemental basis, to one of six shape categories. The resulting data shows that while oval and circular cairns dominate the sample (*Fig. 6*) there remains a large degree of variation, both between members of local spatial clusters, and at an inter-cluster level. No spatial cluster consisted of cairns of a single shape, while 85% of clusters contained examples of three or more different shape forms.

Another aspect of cairn morphology which was recorded was the size and appearance of the predominant class of constructional material, with each cairn classed in the field as either soil-filled, cobbly, rubbly or blocky (cf. *Fig. 6*). As with cairn shape, no cluster shows cairns that were composed exclusively of a single type of material, although cairns built in rubbly and blocky stone were predominant in a number of clusters. In the sample, soil-filled cairns represented only 2% of the total, and were all recorded as being of ovoid shape. This is in clear contrast with the more equal distribution of the other shape forms across the different categories of building material.

While discussion of the relationship between shape form and building material types is preliminary at this stage, some potentially interesting patterns can be discerned. For example there are patterns which might suggest associations between chronology and monument shape, form and appearance. Analysis has shown that at 60% of clusters where square and rectangular cairns are visible there is some evidence for multi-period activity and possible re-use of monuments. Such an interpretation questions the attribution of such monuments solely to the 4th/3rd millennia, an assumption which has also been challenged by other investigators.[22] While it cannot be assumed that square and rectangular monuments all post-date the 4th/3rd millennia – Early Bronze quadrangular tombs exist in southern Syria for example[23] – the evidence from Homs warrants further investigation.

The use of cairns as a burial form is clearly attested over a lengthy period of time, from their probable first conception around the 4th/3rd millennium, through to their use in the Jordan Valley during the 18th/19th centuries.[24] Discussion with local people has suggested that in the NSA there may be an association between low, ovoid soil-filled cairns, and the burial practices of recent centuries. This is supported by the consistency of the ovoid form in this case, the limited growth of lichen on the exposed surfaces of the stones, and heights of consistently less than 0.5 m (*Fig. 7*). However, not all such tombs were clearly orientated E-W, a feature which has been observed in Islamic cemeteries elsewhere within the Levant.[25] The likelihood that cairns were used for burial over potentially vast periods of time is important because it invokes questions concerning aspects of their re-use, continuity and memory.

Variability among cairns: size and complexity

The relationship between cairn size and complexity is an aspect of their construction which requires consideration. As Cooper[26] has recently pointed out, the size of a tomb may reflect a wide range of factors other than simply the wealth or importance of the deceased, or the number of burials. The Homs cairns highlight this, suggesting that although a relationship does exist between size and complexity, there is not always a direct correlation.

In this case, complexity was assessed on the basis of the number of different associated features which were associated with a cairn. The highest potential number, and thus the greatest degree of complexity, was six. This "complexity score" was then compared to cairn size calculated as the base area in square metres, which allowed for the variation in cairn shape discussed above. The result revealed that there was no simple correlation between cairn size and complexity. In fact, those cairns with the highest complexity scores appeared to be clustered within the middle size ranges, although a number of the larger cairns also revealed as many as four associated features. That said, the obscuring of features by stone tumble, or modern reconstruction might in some cases, confuse the complexity scores. A number of cairns revealed material built on top to provide wind shelters, or piled up against or over them through the construction of modern field walls or through the dumping of stone as result of recent field clearance.

Associated Features

Another concept that we consider important is the idea that cairns should be considered as components of cairn clusters, and not just as single entities. During survey it became apparent that whilst some cairns revealed no evidence for associated external features, around 45%, were associated with wall lines, external paving, enclosures or other features. SHR 63 highlights this phenomenon with clear external features and wall lines which appear to connect cairns to form linear alignments which run down-slope towards a seasonal lake (*Fig. 8*).

22. De Maigret 1996, p. 328; Thuesen 2004, p. 111; Toombs 1985, p. 34-35.
23. *E.g.* Braemer *et al.* 2004, p. 218; Philip and Bradbury 2011, p. 42.
24. Prag 1995, p. 80; Sartre-Fauriat 2001, p. 174-177.
25. Toombs 1985, p. 35.
26. Cooper 2006, p. 223.

This pattern is one not unique to the Homs basalts. Wall-lines, enclosures and external paving associated with tumuli are attested at number of sites, such as Wadi Jadidah,[27] Khirbet al-Umbashi[28] and Tall al-Umayri.[29] The occurrence of these features highlights the likelihood that these monuments were not just single entities designed for burial, but were embedded in wider landscapes.

Issues arising from the above discussion include questions regarding the ways in which we might theorise variation within burial monuments, and so begin to account for the great variety evident in shape, size, complexity, layout and appearance. Whatever way analysis proceeds, it is important to avoid the temptation to make simplistic correlations between cairn variability and chronology, or assumed ethnic or lifestyle categories. Rather, we need to be flexible and to draw upon a range of theories and evidence from a variety of disciplines.

Monuments as social entities

Feasting, mortuary activities and rites of passage

The strict segregation imposed by western societies between events such as marriage, birth, death and exchange is not so readily visible in ethnographic accounts. Instead, in traditional societies such activities are viewed as a part of wider reciprocal and group relations, embedded within concepts of rites of passage.[30] While we cannot simply impose meaning and practice drawn from ethnography upon the past, it is likely that mortuary events would have represented a key locus for the re-negotiation of identity and thus, reproduction of society.[31] There exists a large variety of ethnographic and archaeological examples of extra-funerary activities, such as feasting, exchange, games and offering practices occurring alongside burial.[32] Ethnographic research examining burial practices at Tlatico have shown the importance of viewing such events as social occasions.[33] Additionally, Chesson has highlighted the pivotal nature of commemorative places for the manipulation of identity, both individual and social.[34] Given the presence of external features such as areas of paving, and walls connecting and/or enclosing groups of cairns, it is perhaps within this context that the Homs cairns should be considered. While a number of researchers have suggested the potential for "ritual" monuments to also act as locales for exchange[35] the role of monuments as foci for the negotiation and reproduction of social relations through acts such as feasting have not been fully theorised by archaeologists working in Syria-Palestine. Good iconographic, archaeological and textual evidence exists for the practice of funerary feasting in this region[36] and it is clear that in many situations the idea that a strict dichotomy was drawn between the living and the dead is open to debate. In line with this, Chesson's work examining the Bab edh-Dhra' charnel houses has highlighted the importance of the deceased within living society[37] In such a situation, these monuments cannot be viewed as singularly associated with burial, but may also have had meaning and significance as "…tombs for the living…".[38]

Ancestors and Kinship

The ability to demonstrate descent, inheritance and lineage ties through invocation of the "ancestors" or the deceased is highly important for many ethnographic groups.[39] However, such concepts within archaeological investigation have often been obscured by the misplaced use of the umbrella term "ancestral veneration". Clearly, the way in which people may have experienced and employed the deceased within aspects of social life may have altered radically through time, and from group to group, as ancestors may have offered a flexible resource which could be deployed in various ways in response to different situations. It has recently been suggested[40] that in the southern Levant the later 4th and earlier 3rd millennia were characterised by significant changes in the production and valuation of agricultural products, and an

27. Thuesen 2004, p. 109-110.
28. Braemer *et al*. 2004, p. 189.
29. Dubis and Dabrowski 2002, p. 172.
30. De Coppet 1981; Turner 1967; Turner 1969; Van Gennep 1909, 1960.
31. Manning 1998, p. 39-40.
32. Bayliss 1973, p. 123; Bottéro 1980, p. 38-39; Granqvist 1965, p. 181; Jellicoe 1976, p. 113; Keesing 1970, p. 755; Peltenburg 1999, p. 428; Pinnock 1994, p. 19-21; Toynbee 1971, p. 50-51.
33. Joyce 2001, p. 12.
34. Chesson 2001, p. 110.
35. Coleman, Elsner 1994; Petersen 1994.
36. *E.g*. Baker 2006, p. 1; Cooper 2006, p. 221; Mazzoni 1994, p. 247, 249-250; Peltenburg 1999, p. 432; 2006; Tsukimoto 1985, p. 61, 68-73; Woolley 1934, p. 61-62.
37. Chesson 1999, p. 161-162; 2001, p. 110.
38. Fleming 1973, p. 177.
39. *E.g*. Casimir 1992, p. 162; Fortes 1965, p. 123-124; Glazier 1984; Keesing 1970; Metcalf and Huntington 1991, p. 13.
40. Philip 2003, p. 105-108; Philip in press.

associated revision and part-intensification of land-use, which resulted in an increased emphasis upon land as a key element in the creation of wealth and power. In this light the appearance of stone burial monuments as major landscape features suggests that the initial conception of such monuments, may have been linked to access to land and resources, and the reproduction of such rights over time, points surely fundamental to the organisation of society.[41]

While these interpretations should not be transferred directly to the rather different landscape of the Homs basalts, it seems reasonable to suggest that groups occupying the basalt landscape, perhaps moving in and out of the region, and engaging in subsistence strategies that altered both seasonally and perhaps also annually, would have required various social strategies to manage conflicting interests and to maintain social stability. For many ethnographic groups, the key to this may lie in their dynamic nature. Through a fluid concept of inheritance, access to resources and the role of the deceased within social life, changes and developments within a group's dynamics could be successfully negotiated. The ability to demonstrate social relations present within kin-groups, for example through the use of wall lines connecting tumuli, has been suggested for other contexts.[42] Such divisions and delineation would have allowed monuments spread across the landscape, to be tied into set lineages and descent lines as and when necessary. Thus, they would invoke the ties and co-operation present during their construction, allowing representation and remembrance of past identities and social relations.

Power and Identity

The role of human groups in the active manipulation and creation of space is critical for the consideration of power relations and social identity. The sheer number of tombs present in the Homs basalts suggests that it is unlikely that cairn construction was the preserve of elites: in fact, there is as yet no evidence for the existence of archaeologically recognizable elites in western Syria during the 4th millennium BC. We posit therefore that operating within an environment in which little central control was exercised, various groups and individuals may have actively altered their environs through the construction of such monuments. However, we suspect that this may have taken place within a climate in which there was a growing awareness of the need to inscribe rights of continued access within the landscape in some way.

While each monument and cluster of cairns would have been experienced and conceptualised differently by each individual,[43] it is likely that group cohesion and solidarity was actively fostered through the manipulation of space, and the invocation of shared memories.[44] Such ideas may have been constantly negotiated and reformulated, with the conceptualisation and use of the monuments changing as did the dynamics of the groups. The picture would have been further complicated by the regular appearance of new monuments, which may have served, *inter alia* to revalue or reposition existing structures within the wider landscape. In the pursuit of group differentiation, of course, the same monuments may also have functioned to create circumstances of exclusion and separation, perhaps emphasised through the deliberate screening and control of access.

Summary and Conclusions

As shown by the proceedings of the Ifpo colloquium "Standing stones, anthropomorphic stelae, and dolmens – Cultic aspects of the fourth and third millennia BC in the Levant and the Arabia peninsula" dialogue between various researchers working within Syria-Palestine and Arabia is beginning to develop. However, further exchange of concepts and discussion between disciplines such as ancient linguistics, anthropology and archaeology is clearly needed. Additionally, the potential of dialogue with local populations concerning their understanding of and beliefs surrounding, such monuments remains an under-utilised resource. Through the multi-disciplinary consideration of burial monuments, our understanding of social change, everyday subsistence practices and landscape conceptualisation can be enhanced, indicating potential paths of further investigation. This study has sought to highlight the potential of moving beyond the traditional approaches to burial monuments, and to highlight an area with immense potential for further investigation. Finally, it remains for us to thank Tara Steimer-Herbet and Ifpo for organising such a thought provoking colloquium and inviting us to take part in it.

41. Philip 2003, p. 106; Schloen 2001, p. 347.

42. Thuesen 2004, p. 109-110.

43. Bender 2002, p. 106; Ingold 2000, p. 156-157.

44. Bender 2002, p. 107.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARCHI A., BIGA M.G. 2003, "A victory over Mari and the fall of Ebla", *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 55, p. 1-44.

BAKER J. 2006, "The Funeral Kit", *Levant* 38, p. 1-31.

BAYLISS M. 1973, "The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylonia", *Iraq* 35, p. 115-125.

BECK A., PHILIP G., ABDULKARIM M., DONOGHUE D. 2007, "High precision satellite survey of a basalt landscape: problems and procedures", *Antiquity* 81, p. 161-175.

BENDER B. 2002, "Time and Landscape", *Current Anthropology* 43, p. 103-112.

BETTS A.V.G. 1982, "Prehistoric Sites at Qa'a Mejalla, Eastern Jordan", *Levant* 24, p. 1-34.

BONECHI M. 1993, *I nomi geografici dei testi di Ebla*, Wiesbaden.

BOTTÉRO J. 1980, "La Mythologie de la Mort en Mésopotamie Ancienne", *in* B. Alster (ed.), *Death in Mesopotamia*, Copenhagen, p. 25-52.

BOTTÉRO J. 1985, "The Cuisine of Ancient Mesopotamia", *Biblical Archaeologist* 48/1, p. 36-47.

BRAEMER F., ÉCHALLIER J.-C., TARAQJI A. (eds) 2004, *Khirbet al-Umbashi*, Beirut.

CASIMIR M.J. 1992, "The Determinants of Rights to Pasture: Territorial Organisation and Ecological Constraints", *in* M.J. Casimir, A. Rao (eds), *Mobility and territoriality: social and spatial boundaries among foragers, fishers, pastoralists, and peripatetics*, London, p. 153-203.

CASTEL C., PELTENBURG E. 2007, "Urbanism on the margins: third milllennium BC Al-Rawda in the arid zone of Syria", *Antiquity* 81, p. 601-616.

CHESSON M.S. 1999, "Libraries of the Dead: Early Bronze Age Charnel Houses and Social Identity at Urban Bab edh-Dhra', Jordan", *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 18, p. 137-164.

CHESSON M.S. 2001, «"Embodied Memories of Place and People: Death and Society in an Early Urban Community", *in* M. Chesson, S. Virginia (eds), *Social Memory, Identity, and Death: Anthropological Perspectives on Mortuary Rituals,* Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association Number 10, p. 100-113.

COLEMAN S., ELSNER J. 1994, "The pilgrim's progress: art, architecture and ritual movement at Sinai", *World Archaeology* 26/1, p. 73-89.

COONEY G. 1997, "Images of settlement and the landscape in the Neolithic", *in* P. Topping (ed.), *Neolithic Landscapes*, Oxford, p. 23-31.

COOPER L. 2006, *Early Urbanism on the Syrian Euphrates*, London.

CUMMINGS V., JONES A., WATSON A. 2002, "Divided Places: phenomenology and asymmetry in the monuments of the Black Mountains, Southeast Wales", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 12, p. 59-70.

CUMMINGS V., WHITTLE A. 2004, *Places of special virtue: megaliths in the Neolithic landscapes of Wales*, Oxford.

DE COPPET D. 1981, "The Life-giving Death: the anthropology and archaeology of death, in Mortality and Immortality", *in* S.C. Humphreys, H. King (eds), *Mortality and immortality: the anthropology and archaeology of death: proceedings of a meeting of the Research Seminar in Archaeology and Related Subjects held at the Institute of Archaeology*, London, p. 175-204.

DE MAIGRET A. 1996, "New Evidence from the Yemenite 'Turret Graves' for the Problem of the Emergence of the South Arabian States", *in* J. Reade (ed.), *The Indian Ocean in Antiquity*, London, p. 321-337.

DUBIS E., DABROWSKI B. 2002, "Field K: The Dolmen and Other Features on the South Slopes of Tall al-'Umayri", *in* L.G. Herr, D.R. Clark, L.T. Geraty, R.W. Younker, and O. Labianca (eds), *Madaba Plains Project: The 1994 Season at Tall al-'Umayri and Subsequent Studies*, Berrien Springs.

FLEMING A. 1973, "Tombs for the Living", *Man* 8/2, p. 177-193.

FORTES M. 1965, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa", *in* M. Fortes, G. Dieterlen (eds), *African Systems of Thought: studies presented and discussed at the Third International African Seminar in Salisbury*, December 1960, Oxford, p. 122-242.

FOWLER C., CUMMINGS V. 2003, "Places of transformation: building monuments from water and stone in the Neolithic of the Irish Sea", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, p. 1-20.

FRODSHAM P. 2004, *Archaeology in Northumberland National Park*, York.

FRONZAROLI P. 2003, *Testi di cancelleria: I rapporti con le città (Archivio L.2769)*, Rome.

GENTELLE P. 1985, "Éléments pour une histoire des paysages et du peuplement du Djebel Hauran septentrional", *in* J.M. Dentzer (ed.), *Hauran I. Recherches sur la Syrie du sud à l'époque hellénistique et romaine*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 124, Paris, p. 19-62.

GLAZIER J. 1984, "Mbeere Ancestors and the Domestication of Death", *Man* 19/1, p. 133-147.

GRANQVIST H. 1965, *Muslim Death and Burial: Arab Customs and Traditions Studied in a Village in Jordan*, Helsinki.

INGOLD T. 2000, *The perception of the Environment*, London.

JELLICOE S. 1976, "The development of the Mughal Garden", *in* E.B. Macdougall and R. Ettinghausen (eds), *The Islamic Garden*, Washington, p. 109-129.

JOYCE R.A. 2001, "Burying the Dead at Tlatilco: Social Memory and Social Identities", *in* M. Chesson, S. Virginia (eds), *Social Memory, Identity and Death: Anthropological Perspectives on Mortuary Rituals*, Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association Number 10, p. 12-26.

KEESING R.M. 1970, "Shrines, Ancestors, and Cognatic Descent: The Kwaio and Tallensi", *American Anthropologist* 72/4, p. 755-775.

MANNING S.W. 1998, "Changing Pasts and Socio-Political Cognition in Late Bronze Age Cyprus", *World Archaeology* 30/1, p. 39-58.

MAZZONI S. 1994, "Drinking Vessels in Syria: Ebla and the Early Bronze Age", *in* L. Milano (ed.) *Drinking in ancient societies: history and culture of drinks in the ancient Near East*, papers of a symposium held in Rome, May 17-19, 1990, Padova, p. 245-276.

METCALF P., HUNTINGTON R. 1991, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, Cambridge.

NEWSON P., ABDULKARIM M., MCPHILLIPS S., MILLS P., REYNOLDS P. and PHILIP G. 2009/2010, "Landscape study of Dar es-Salaam and the basalt region north west of Homs, Syria", *Berytus* 51-52, p. 1-35.

PATTON M. 1997, "The social construction of the Neolithic landscape of the Channel Islands", *in* P. Topping (ed.), *Neolithic Landscapes*, Oxford, p. 41-53.

PELTENBURG E.J. 1999, "The Living and the Ancestors: Early Bronze Age Mortuary Practices at Jerablus Tahtani", *in* G. del Olmo Lete, J.-L. Montero Fenollós (eds.), *Archaeology of the Upper Syrian Euphrates: the Tishrin dam area: proceedings of the International Symposium held at Barcelona*, January 28th-30th 1998, Barcelona, p. 427-442.

PELTENBURG E. J. 2006, "Re-excavating Qatna", *in B.A.N.E.A.* Edinburgh.

PETERSEN A. 1994, "The archaeology of the Syrian and Iraqi Hajj routes", *World Archaeology* 26/1, p. 47-56.

PHILIP G. 2003, "Early Bronze Age of the Southern Levant: A Landscape Approach", *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*, p. 103-132.

PHILIP G. 2007, "Natural and cultural aspects of the development of the mari landscape east of Lake Qatina during the Bronze and Iron Ages", *in* D. Morandi Bonacossi (ed.), *Urban and Natural Landscapes of an Ancient Syrian capital. Settlement and Environment at Tell Mishrifeh/Qatna and in Central-Western Syria*, Proceedings of the International Conference held in Udine, 9-11 December 2004, Studi Archeologici su Qatna 1, Udine, p. 218-226.

PHILIP G., JABOUR F., BECK A., BSHESH M., GROVE J., KIRK J. and MILLARD A. 2002, "Settlement and landscape development in the Homs region, Syria: Research questions, preliminary results 1999-2000 and future potential", *Levant* 34, p. 1-23.

PHILIP G., ABDULKARIM M., NEWSON P., BECK A., BRIDGELAND D., BSHESH M., SHAW A., WESTAWAY R. and WILKINSON K. 2005, "Settlement and Landscape Development in the Homs Region, Syria. Report on work undertaken during 2001-2003", *Levant* 37, p. 1-43.

PHILIP G. and BRADBURY J. 2010, "Pre-classical activity in the basalt landscape of the Homs region, Syria: the implications for the development of 'sub-optimal' zones in the Levant during the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age", *Levant* 42, p. 136-169.

PHILIP G., BRADBURY J. and JABBUR F. 2011, "The Archaeology of the Homs Basalt, Syria: the main site types", *Studia Orontica* 9, p. 38-55.

PINNOCK F. 1994, "Considerations on the Banquet Theme in the Figurative Art of Mesopotamia and Syria", *in* L. Milano (ed.), *Drinking in ancient societies: history and culture of drinks in the ancient Near East*, papers of a symposium held in Rome, May 17-19, 1990, Padova, p. 15-26.

PRAG K. 1995, "The Dead Sea Dolmens: Death and the Landscape", *in* S. Campbell, A. Green (eds) *The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East*, Oxford, p. 75-85.

SARTRE-FAURIAT A. 2001, *Des tombeaux et des morts. Monuments funéraires, société et culture en Syrie du sud (Ier siècle av. J.-C.-VIIe siècle ap. J.-C.)*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 158, Beyrouth.

SCHLOEN J.D. 2001, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol*, Winona Lake, Indiana.

STEIMER-HERBET T. 2004, *Classification des sépultures à superstructure lithique dans le Levant et l'Arabie occidentale (IVe et IIIe millénaires avant J.-C.)*, BAR International Series 1246, Oxford.

STEIMER-HERBET T. 2006, "Chraya: une nécropole de dolmens dans le Léja (Syrie du Sud)", *Orient Express* 2, p. 53-56.

STEIMER-HERBET T. and BRAEMER F. 1999, "Monuments funéraires mégalithiques au Proche-Orient", *in* J. Guilaine (ed.), *Mégalithismes*, Paris, p. 175-189.

TATE G. 1992, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du Nord du IIe au VIIe siècle: un exemple d'expansion démographique et économique à la fin de l'antiquité*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 133, Paris.

THUESEN I. 2004, "Messages in Stone: The Megaliths of the Nebo Region in Jordan", *in* K. von Folsach, H. Thrane and I. Thuesen (eds), *From Handaxe to Khan*, Aarhus, p. 105-117.

TILLEY C. 1994, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Movement*, London.

TILLEY C. 2004, *The Materiality of Stone*, Oxford.

TOOMBS L.E. 1985, *Tell el-Hesi: Modern military trenching and Muslim cemetery in Field I, Strata I-II, The Joint Archaeological Expedition to Tell el-Hesi*, vol. 2., Ontario.

TOYNBEE J.M.C. 1971, *Death and Burial in the Roman World,* Ithaca – New York.

TSUKIMOTO A. 1985, *Untersuchungen zur Totenplefge (*kipsum*) im alten Mesopotamien* (AOAT 216), Neukirchen-Vluyn.

TURNER V. 1967, *The Forest of Symbols*, Ithaca.

TURNER V. 1969, *The Ritual Process*, Chicago.

VAN GENNEP A. 1909, *Les Rites de passage*, Paris.

VAN GENNEP A. 1960, *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago.

VAUMAS E. (de) 1957, "Plateaux, plaines et dépressions de la Syrie intérieure septentrionale. Étude morphologique", *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d'Égypte* 30, p. 97-236.

WHITTLE A. 1997, "Moving on and moving around: Neolithic settlement mobility", *in* P. Topping (ed.) *Neolithic Landscapes*, Oxford, p. 15-22.

WILKINSON T. and J. 2003, *Archaeological Landscapes of the Near East*, Tuscon.

WOOLLEY C.L. 1934, *Ur Excavations II. The Royal Cemetery,* London.

ZOHAR M. 1992, "Megalithic Cemeteries in the Levant", *in* O. Bar-Yosef and A.M. Khazanov (eds), *Pastoralism in the Levant: Archaeological Materials in Anthropological Perspectives*, Madison, p. 43-63.