Overview: The Chalcolithic period is one of the most formative in the prehistory of the southern Levant. The transition to regional polities occurred, often called chiefdoms. How did this happen and why? This seminar will explore these issues. Students are expected to write a 25 page research paper.

Week 1 – Foundations
A review of the discovery of the Chalcolithic period in the late 1920s, the hallmark site of Tuleilat Ghassul northeast of the Dead Sea, the nearby mortuary complex and the contribution of the early research in the northern Negev desert
Readings:

Week 2 – Overviews of the Chalcolithic Period
The shifting paradigms of interpretations of the Chalcolithic period are presented from the first scientific synthesis by Jean Perrot in 198, to the first anthropological archaeology overview by Thomas Levy in 1986, to a reactionary position by Isaac Gilead two years later, to post-20th century views by Yorke Rowan and Jonathan Golden in 2009 up to the most recent summary by Mikki Sebbane et al for an exhibition at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University in 2014.
Readings:

Week 3 – Jordan Valley ‘Ghassulian’ Chalcolithic Culture
As we learned early in the course, the ‘type’ site for the Chalcolithic period is Tuleilat Ghassul, extending over 20 hectares. Accordingly in this weeks readings we become acquainted with the more recent long-term excavations let by Stephen Bourke of the University of Sydney. Further up the Jordan valley, the French archaeologist Claudeine Dollfus and Jordanian archaeologist Zaidan Kafafi carried out excavations at Tel Abu Hamid. It is important to become familiar with the regional cultures of the Chalcolithic in the southern Levant.
Readings:
Week 4
Week 5 – The Beer Sheva Valley Chalcolithic Culture
By the early 1950s, the Israeli Kibbutznik and pioneer settler in the northern Negev desert, David Alon, carried out un-systematic surveys in the region and discovered the first Chalcolithic sites, among them – Abu Matar, Bir es-Safadi, and Horvat Beter. As we saw in the Week 1 reading about Abu Matar, the French prehistorian Jean Perrot carried out the first large scale excavations at these sites. This was followed by Moshe Dothan at Horvat Beter. By 1979, Levy and Alon carried out the first excavations at Shiqmim re-opening scholarly interest in the Beer Sheva valley Chalcolithic period. Since then, many emergency and salvage excavations have taken place at sites such as Tel Sheva. These readings given overviews of the main Beer Sheva valley excavations.
Readings:

Week 6 – Beginnings of Metallurgy
The southern Levant was one of the hearth areas for the development of metallurgy in the Old World. These papers focus on the contribution of the Beer Sheva valley to this process. This region is highlighted as it is the only area where extensive evidence of smelting has been found. Why did this happen? How did the system work? These are some of the issues we will cover based on the readings.
Readings:

Week 7 – Mortuary Behavior during the Chalcolithic Period
As part of the development of regional polities during the 5th millennium BCE in the southern Levant, a wide range of mortuary sites emerged. In this weeks readings we discuss the nature of these cemeteries and the range of theories used by researchers to explain their function and meaning.
Readings

Week 8 – Modeling Chalcolithic Society
The question of what the social organization of Chalcolithic societies was like has been a hotly debated topic. Levy was the first researcher to apply a chiefdom model to explain the changes observed in settlement patterns and material culture for this period. Those ideas were contested by Gilead. This week's readings focus on different interpretive models concerning the nature of Chalcolithic social organization.
Readings:
Week 9 – Secondary Products Revolution

Andrew Sherratt's model of a secondary products revolution involved a widespread and broadly contemporaneous set of innovations in Old World farming. The use of domestic animals for primary carcass products (meat) was broadened from the 5th-3rd millennia BCE to include exploitation for renewable 'secondary' products: milk, wool, traction (the use of animals to drag ploughs in agriculture), riding and pack transport.[10]

The SPR model incorporates two key elements:

1. the discovery and diffusion of secondary products innovations
2. their systematic application, leading to a transformation of Eurasian economy and society

Levy used Sherratt’s model to explain the emergence of specialized pastoralism, a system that goes beyond village-based transhumance to explain the emergence of a central part of the Levantine subsistence economy that continues to today.

Readings
Note: For Khazanov, read Introduction to the second edition pp. xxiv – lix; Chapter 1; Chapter 2; and Chapter 5 pp.263 -290.

Week 10 – Review of Shiqmim MS Chapter 2 hosted on DropBox

References


Several decades after the discovery of the spectacular Nahal Mishmar Hoard (a collection of cast metal goods, some quite ornate, found in a cave high in the cliffs of the Judean Desert) many important questions about Chalcolithic metallurgy in the southern Levant remain unanswered. What is the origin of the materials used? Where were the final goods produced and what were the dynamics of production? In fact, new questions have also arisen as recent discoveries force us to reconsider previous interpretations of Chalcolithic metallurgy and the societies within which it evolved. Such will be the focus of this paper.


During the late fifth and fourth millennia B.C. significant technological and social changes occurred among societies living in Palestine. This paper, the first of a new series in BA, surveys the archaeological research that illuminates these changes.


The 1987 excavations in the Shiqmim Chalcolithic settlement and cemetery marked the beginning of the Phase II investigations at that site. This project focuses on elucidating the evolution of early agricultural settlement in the Beersheva valley of Israel's Negev desert. The report presents the results of a deep trench excavation and illustrates the complex stratigraphic development of this single-period site. In addition, contextual data is discussed concerning the discovery of a copper foundation deposit consisting of a mace head and scepter. An interim quantitative study of flint tool and animal bone distributions is also discussed.


Sebbane, M., et al. (2014). *Masters of fire : Copper Age art from Israel*. Focuses on the people of the southern Levant who harnessed the power of metallurgy during the fourth millennium BCE. Artisans produced extraordinary copper objects while other craftsmen molded pottery and stone into complex anthropomorphic burial containers, statuettes, and ritual objects. Taken together, these artifacts reveal the first stratified culture known in the ancient Near East. Highlights of the exhibition include a selection of material from the Na’al Mishmar hoard, an unprecedented collection of copper prestige and ritual objects, organic materials from the Cave of the Warrior, and an exceptional group of ritual figurines.

Sebbane, M., et al. (2014). *Masters of fire : Copper Age art from Israel*.


