

DEBATE ON THE SITE OF QIRYAT ATA IN ISRAEL  
- A REJOINDER TO THE ARTICLE  
BY ELIOT BRAUN PUBLISHED IN *SAAC* 16

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MORE PERSPECTIVES ON THE LATE  
PREHISTORIC SITE OF QIRYAT ATA:  
A REJOINDER TO ELIOT BRAUN

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**Abstract:** *In a recent SAAC article, Eliot Braun (2012) has published a critique of my excavations at the late prehistoric site of Qiryat Ata. Reexamination of a site's stratigraphy and reinterpretation of archaeological data are welcome, if their purpose is to truly enhance our understanding of the history of the site and thus gain a better understanding of the archaeological periods of its occupation. Such a reevaluation should be based on factual evidence, exacting analysis and the realization that even the same data can and is open to different interpretation. Reexamination of the data would strive to offer accurate and useful conclusions that could substantially augment our perception of the archaeological record and be a catalyst for future research and fruitful collegial discussion among scholars.*

*The purpose of the following is to address the claims and allegations raised by Braun in his article. While some points of Braun's critique may have their merit and provide a future basis for discussion, examination of his major points shows them to be basically unfounded.*

**Keywords:** *Near Eastern archaeology; Southern Levant; Early Bronze Age; Qiryat Ata; Stratigraphic interpretation; archaeological methodology*

In an article published in *SAAC* 16 (2012), Eliot Braun has presented a critique of my work undertaken at the late prehistoric site of Qiryat Ata, located in the Zebulun Valley, Israel. This project began in 1990 as the first rescue excavation at the site (Area A), conducted under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority, and was directed by myself along

with Eliot Braun who acted as one of the excavation directors. Numerous additional excavations were conducted at the site for several years afterwards by myself and other colleagues (Fig. 1). A final report for the first seven excavation areas (Areas A-G) was published as a monograph (Golani 2003). Since that publication, more excavation areas have seen publication (Fantalkin 2000 [Area L]; Baruch *et al.* 2007 [Area H]; Abu Hamid 2010 [Area P]; Tabar 2010 [Areas Q, R]; Golani 2013a [Area O]; Golani 2014a [Area N]; Golani 2014b [Area S]) while more excavations are presently being prepared for publication by other colleagues (Segal, forthcoming [Areas T, U]).

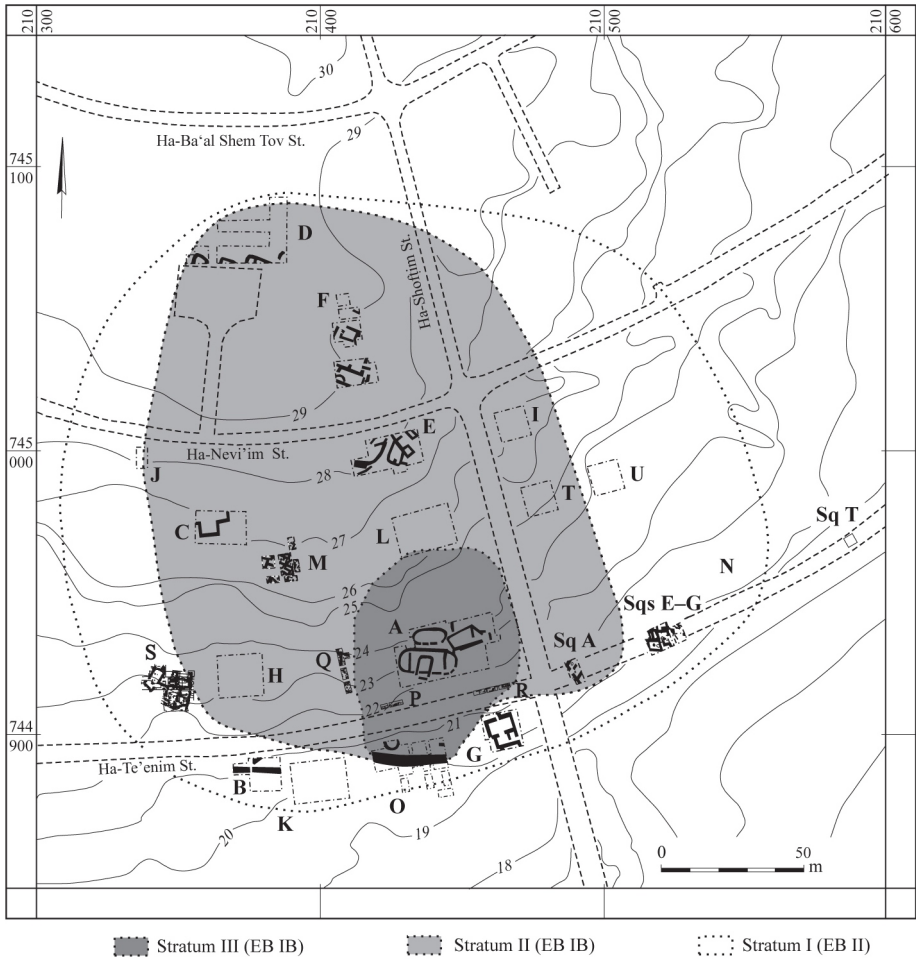


Fig. 1. Location map of all excavation areas within the Early Bronze Age site and an updated assessment of the site boundaries in the various periods. Courtesy of the IAA

## Was there a Pre-EB I occupation at Qiryat Ata?

The major occupation of the site dates to the Early Bronze Age (henceforth EB) period in which three primary settlement strata have been identified. Strata III-II are associated to a late phase of the EB I (EB IB) while Stratum I is associated to the EB II. In addition to finds from the EB period, substantial amounts of ceramics, flints and groundstone vessels dated to the Chalcolithic and the Neolithic periods were occasionally found throughout many of the *loci*, though none of the excavation areas to date has yet produced clear occupational surfaces or architecture of these earlier periods. Artifacts associated to the Pottery Neolithic period were also found in disturbed fills upon the bedrock in Area L (Fantalkin 2000). Accordingly, the excavator of Area L proposed a Neolithic occupation at the site in that area (Fantalkin 2000). Subsequent publications also noted Neolithic and Chalcolithic artifacts, most of which originated in Area A (Bankirer 2003, 180-181; Golani 2003, 71-72; Khalaily 2003, 220; Rowan 2003, 199-220), located in proximity to Area L. Most of these artifacts were recovered from *loci* associated to Stratum III of the EB IB. This stratum, the earliest clear occupation identified in Area A, was often found to have been founded upon the bedrock itself and included several buildings and numerous occupational surfaces. In lack of clear architectural remains and living surfaces of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, these latter publications all concluded that a settlement from these earlier occupations was located in the immediate vicinity.

In his article, Braun purports to offer an 'expanded occupational sequence' for the site that beyond the three major EB strata defined in the excavations, 'is significantly different' from the one I presented and includes an earlier occupation in the Pottery Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, stating that I have 'failed to consider copious evidence of remains of earlier, *in situ* occupations' (Braun 2012, 7-8). He further proclaims that his reevaluation of published data will offer 'an expanded archaeological profile of the site' in order to 'present a more clearly focused and enhanced understanding of the site's place in the late prehistory of the southern Levant' (Braun 2012, 8). According to Braun, 'Golani was unable to discern the true significance of the pre-EB I pottery he recovered, primarily because *his methodology was geared to mask it* (my italics) and probably because some pre-EB I pottery types bear rather uncanny resemblance to EB I types' (Braun 2012, 13).

The excavation report that Braun is referring to (Golani 2003) documents the presence of ceramic, flint and groundstone remains predating the EB I that are also discussed in specialist reports (Bankirer 2003; Khalaily 2003; Rowan 2003). A Neolithic and a Chalcolithic presence at the site was therefore recognized (Golani 2003, 71-72), yet in all the *loci* excavated, these earlier remains were always mixed with EB material culture finds, which were the majority in every excavated *locus*. Even deposits below floors and foundation levels of the earliest defined strata, such as Stratum III, dated to the late EB I, contained ceramics and other finds of that period.

According to Braun, 'late disturbances, especially EB I construction in the lowest levels accounts for the admixture of pre-EB I materials as residual in the matrix in which the EB I occupations were unearthed' (Braun 2012, 13). This is one possible interpretation of the evidence, yet does not in itself prove the actual presence of an earlier occupation in that specific area. Conclusive proof of such an earlier occupation, *in situ*, would necessarily include architectural remains and/or clear occupational surfaces. Common and straightforward archaeological methodology would conclude that a Neolithic and Chalcolithic occupation must be located in proximity to the excavated area as no clear remains of these periods were found *in situ*. The meaning of this latter term is crucial, as it supposes that an archaeological occupation is dated by the latest associated finds that were not moved from their original deposition.

Braun goes to great lengths to present evidence for a large amount of pre-EB I artifacts which according to him were 'diminished [in] their importance by assigning them to "non-stratified" deposits, thus effectively relegating them to background "noise" derived from a nearby region' (Braun 2012, 12). However, none of these artifacts were "diminished" in their importance, their significance is dependent on their context. Braun (2012, 12) goes on to claim that a significant percentage of Neolithic flint tools and Chalcolithic groundstone fragments recovered from Stratum III deposits in Area A are actually *in situ* deposits that were essentially disturbed by later disturbances of the EB period. Using the term *in situ*, this claim assumes that these finds were not moved after their original deposition. This is of course one possible interpretation that cannot serve to discredit my own, that the lack of any architectural remains and clear living surfaces prior to the earliest EB stratum along with EB ceramic remains indicates that any earlier material is probably not *in situ*. This does not mean that an earlier occupation predating the earliest EB stratum did not exist

somewhere within the site of Qiryat Ata, yet only that any such occupation cannot as yet be conclusively located.

Braun (2012, 15, fig. 7) further gives an example of two complete jars that were reconstructed from fragments recovered upon and above a floor within an oval structure associated without any doubt to Stratum III of the late EB I, claiming they are of Neolithic or early Chalcolithic date. The state of preservation of these vessels (completely restorable) and their clear context upon a floor within an EB I building makes it very probable that they are *in situ* deposits associated to that building, clearly dated to the late EB I by its plan and other associated finds. Despite numerous parallels for these vessels that serve to firmly place them within the repertoire of the late northern EB I (Golani 2003, fig. 4.8: 6), Braun (2012, 13) notes that some pre-EB I pottery types do resemble EB I forms and he chose to redraw and re-publish these vessels, accentuating features that may suggest an earlier date (Braun 2012, figs 7, 8). As these vessels were found upon a floor associated to a building of clear EB I association, their ‘uncanny resemblance’ to EB I vessels may simply indicate that they are of EB I date, as the parallels given to them also appear to suggest.

Braun may have realized that his sweeping and forceful allegations may not stand a critical appraisal themselves. His claims of an undetected *in situ* pre-EB occupation based only on the presence of scattered artifacts would have to be bolstered by the finding of architectural remains that could be ascribed to a pre-EB occupation and this is precisely what he proceeds to claim (Braun 2012, 18-19).

Braun assigns two walls in Area A that are associated to Stratum III (W517, W504) to a pre-EB stratum on the basis of their slightly lower elevation to other recognized Stratum III remains and because they do not appear to be a part of a clearly ordered building plan. The occupation in Area A was positioned on a mild slope. Therefore, architectural features of the same constructional phase can and will often be found at different heights. For example, W517, found downslope to W516, is interpreted as a supporting terrace wall (and not a peripheral wall) for an oval building of which W516 and W522 are the main remnants (Golani 2003, 23).

The architecture in Area A was a dense and compact agglomeration of remains, with later building phases often dismantling earlier phases and adapting selected portions into a new plan. In Area A, the earliest architectural remains of Phase IIIB included a few walls of unclear plan that Braun claims belong to a pre-EB I building phase. Identification

of what is earlier and later in a constructional sequence comprises much of the ‘nuts and bolts’ of archaeological methodology in the field, while the specific dating of each constructional phase is reliant on finds that may be associated to each phase. Excavation (L46) next to and below the base of the two walls proposed by Braun as being pre-EB I structures produced EB I ceramic remains. These facts appear to indicate that these are not necessarily ‘likely’ remains of pre-EB I structures (Braun 2012, 18).

In light of the fact that pre-EB I finds have so far been found only in mixed contexts, none of which are associated to architectural remains or occupational surfaces, an occupation from the Neolithic or Chalcolithic period at the site can at present only be suggested, but not conclusively proven. Occupation during these periods may even be likely in the very immediate region, possibly near or even adjacent to Area A itself, as the evidence of ceramic and lithic finds appears to suggest, yet this same evidence is at present still circumstantial. As finds of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods have not been disregarded in the final report, Braun’s remarks cannot serve to ‘significantly expand the occupational sequence’ at the site, yet they do provide a point of departure for examination how and why we may interpret archaeological data.

### **Should the stratigraphic profile of Qiryat Ata be considered anew?**

The architectural remains in Area A at Qiryat Ata included architectural elements of the three main strata (III-I) identified throughout the site, with Strata II being clearly superimposed upon Stratum III. Both strata III and II are dated by associated finds to the late EB I. Braun states that my claim for two successive strata of the EB I is ‘based on interpretation rather than layered deposits as nowhere was definitive evidence of a Stratum II building found superimposed on remains of Stratum III’. He then proceeds to determine that ‘there is no good evidence for superimposition of deposits’ (Braun 2012, 20-21, 23). A ‘single possible exception’ (Braun 2012, 21) is Building 4, a complete rectangular building with rounded outer corners assigned to Stratum II that is directly superimposed above an elliptical building of Stratum III after the latter had undergone a violent destruction. If the rounded corner structure (Building 4) is indeed to be attributed to Stratum II, then it appears that this would constitute ‘definitive evidence’ of Stratum II directly superimposed over Stratum III.

Claiming that the ‘the chrono-cultural ascription [of Building 4] ... is of dubious *bona fides*, neither floors nor artifacts of any date were associated



with [it]' Braun (2012, 21) suggests that this rounded-corners building is to be associated to Stratum I of the EB II, remains of which were identified in topsoil clearance immediately above Building 4. Ceramic material from a floor (L24) within Building 4 and another related surface (L33) nearby, may be dated to the late EB I (Golani 2003, figs 4.2: 13, 29, tab. 4.14-4.15), yet Braun apparently did not notice this. Notably, while elliptical buildings are generally considered as characteristic of the early EB I and into the late EB I period (Braun 1989), rounded-corner buildings are an architectural phenomenon of the late EB I and into the beginning of the EB II period (Golani 1999). More significantly, identical rounded corner structures have also been found in Areas D, E, and N at Qiryat Ata (Golani 2003, plans 2.11, 2.15 [Areas D, E]; Golani 2014a: plans 1, 2 [Area N]). In all three areas, these buildings were dated by associated *in situ* finds such as whole ceramic vessels upon their floors to the late EB I as well. In all three areas, these buildings were also overridden or cut by rectilinear structures that are associated to Stratum I of the EB II. Moreover, these buildings of Stratum II found in different areas of the site are all of similar construction and identical orientation. The association of all these rounded corner buildings to Stratum II at Qiryat Ata is based not only on their similarity, but also on the fact that they are all dated by associated material to the late EB I and are all immediately post-dated by EB II remains. Even if Building 4 in Area A was not datable by associated finds, its similarity and identical orientation with other Stratum II buildings found throughout the site and its stratigraphic position below Stratum I and above a building of Stratum III, make its association to Stratum II inevitable.

During the EB I and EB II periods, elliptical buildings of the early and late EB I are often replaced by rounded-corner structures of the late EB I and early EB II which are in turn often replaced by wholly rectilinear structures during the EB II (Golani 1999). This evolutionary process is broadly representative of architectural development during this period as conceded by Braun (2012, 21) yet was never proposed as being an absolute paradigm. Braun's difficulty appears to stem from his refusal to accept that Strata II and III are superimposed one atop the other as is clearly found in Area A (Golani 2003) and also in Area O (Golani 2013a).

Braun's claim of no real continuity at Qiryat Ata during the late EB I period thus remains unfounded as does his denial of the three stage architectural evolution that characterizes and is linked to the three major strata at the site. His unwillingness to separate Strata III and II into two successive but distinct occupational episodes within the late EB I may stem



from chronological considerations that seek to limit the length of the late EB I occupation at the site.

### **Was there a continuity of occupation during the EB I and into the EB II periods at Qiryat Ata?**

The EB settlement at Qiryat Ata appears to have been fairly continuous from the late EB I in Strata III-II and into the early EB II as exemplified in Stratum I. Though the transition between Stratum III and Stratum II is punctuated by a violent destruction in Area A, the temporal continuity between Strata III and II is based not only on the direct superimposition of their archaeological deposits that have so far been identified in two excavation areas (A and O), but also on the near identity of their ceramic assemblages (Golani 2003, 243). While the former is strongly suggestive of but does not necessarily constitute temporal continuity as noted by Braun (2012, 24), the latter does indicate that they are both of the same temporal cultural horizon so that a temporal continuity between the two strata is probable.

Braun (2012, 24-27) also contests the continuity in occupation between Strata III-II of the late EB I and Stratum I of the EB II. Braun argues that the presence of a late form of Gray Burnished Ware (GBW) found in both Strata III and Stratum II (Wright's [1958] Types 3 and 4) indicates that the late EB I assemblage of Strata III-II at Qiryat Ata should be assigned to the early portion of the late EB I and cannot be stretched all the way to its end, a claim that would distance it, and the Strata III-II occupation of the EB IB, away from the late EB I – EB II transition. Early types of GBW (Wright's Types 1 and 2) are generally agreed as being indicative of the early EB I (EB IA). Wright's GBW Types 3 and 4 are indeed typical of the late EB I, their association to an early phase of the late EB I would thus hinge on a certain continuity of this specialized ware from the early to the late EB I. The association of early types of this 'highly specialized' family of bowls to the early EB I period would thus indicate that the early and late forms of GBW at least spanned the transition from the early to the late EB I (EB IA-EB IB). The duration and specific chronological framework of the EB I period, in all its phases and subphases, is a complicated issue that is still debated (cf. Yekutieli 2000; Yekutieli 2001; Regev *et al.* 2012; Golani 2013b), so that the actual chronological extent of the late EB I in the north, as well as the date for the beginning of the EB II in this same region, is still obscure. Recent radiocarbon dates do place the beginning

of the EB II at around 3000 BCE or only very slightly later (Regev *et al.* 2012), a date that is generally agreed upon, yet is not necessarily relevant for all of the southern Levant as at some sites the EB II may have begun slightly earlier and at some slightly later. The presence of two successive occupational strata of the late EB I at Qiryat Ata (Strata III and II) do suggest a substantial amount of time for the settlement at Qiryat Ata during the late EB I and could allow for its existence to the very end of this period.<sup>1</sup>

Stratum I remains of the EB II in all the excavation areas at Qiryat Ata were positioned immediately upon those of Stratum II and in several instances the architectural remains of both Strata III and II were evident to the Stratum I builders who incorporated them into their own constructions, dismantled them or directly cut into them. This does suggest that a minimal amount of time elapsed between the two settlements, though nowhere have I claimed that a direct temporal continuity with no hiatus took place between Stratum II of the late EB I and Stratum I of the EB II.

The chronological placement of the Stratum I occupation within the early portion of the EB II period is also contested by Braun (2012, 26-27). That Stratum I should be placed within the early EB II is suggested by the apparently short hiatus between Strata II and I and the large proportion of North Canaanite Metallic Ware (NCMW) associated to Stratum I that comprises up to 47% of the entire assemblage, as opposed to non-NCMW wares (Golani 2003, 147). This percentage of NCMW ware is a mean average from excavation areas A-G where a statistical analysis has been carried out; the actual percentage is probably much higher when a specific area at the site with Stratum I remains is examined that does not have a previous occupation in the late EB I (see for example in Area G, where the earliest and only occupation, founded upon the bedrock, dates to the EB II [Stratum I] and the amount of metallic ware reaches 81.7%, see Golani 2003, tab. 4.7; see also Area S, where the amount of metallic ware of Phases 1-3 dated to the EB II and founded on virgin soil with no previous occupation in the EB I is 51.7%, see Golani 2014b, 81). Growing indications for the presence of 'proto-metallic ware' in the region of the Jordan Valley during a period attributed to an EB I – EB II transitional phase (Paz *et al.* 2009) indicate the very initial appearance of this ware in this region only. However, this phenomenon is not found in the western Galilee

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<sup>1</sup> The presence of early forms of GBW (Wright's Types 1 and 2) at Ashqelon Barnea Strata IV and III, which are dated by C<sup>14</sup> dates to 3500-3300 BC and 3200 BC at the latest appears to indicate that late forms of GBW could not have appeared before 3300-3200 BC. This would provide a timespan of at least 200 years for the production and use of these early forms of specialized ware.

and northern coastal plain. A sharp decline in the amount of NCMW is a characteristic of the EB III (Greenberg 2002, 44-48; Getzov 2006, 110) and according to the latest radiocarbon research, the EB II period itself appears to have been very short-lived (Regev *et al.* 2012, 558-559) lasting no more than 100-200 years. The very intense Stratum I occupation during the EB II at Qiryat Ata, at times depositing over 1.5m of occupational debris in the central regions of the site and including several sub-phases, appears to show that this was not necessarily a short-lived occupation and may have lasted the entirety of the EB II period as well.

Braun's attempt to discredit or minimize any claim for continuity from the late EB I and into the EB II periods at Qiryat Ata thus appears to fall short of its purpose and remains unconvincing. The massive appearance of NCMW during Stratum I is a veritable revolution in the material culture of the site in the transition from Stratum II of the late EB I to Stratum I of the EB II, yet the abruptness of this transition does not mean that Stratum II and Stratum I were separated by a lengthy amount of time.

### **The urbanization process at Qiryat Ata**

Braun continues by criticizing our conclusions concerning the urbanization process that Qiryat Ata went through at the transition between the third and the second millennium BC. The whole question of what constitutes urbanization is complex and multi-faceted and is far beyond the scope of this paper. Braun (2012, 29) rightly claims that 'large aggregations of populations do not, *ipso facto*, create urban environments' yet the bottom line on what constitutes urbanization is the creation of a complex social organization with a clearly multi-layered hierarchical society. The archaeological record at Qiryat Ata offers a wealth of definitive and not necessarily interpretive evidence for this. For most scholars, the clear presence of an EB II fortification wall revealed in Stratum I of Area O (Golani 2013a) would suffice in proving that by Stratum I the community at Qiryat Ata had become urbanized, yet Braun also seeks to discredit our approach that the urbanization process is evident from other factors notable in the archaeological record of the site.

These include several phenomena found throughout Strata III-I at Qiryat Ata as well as at other sites throughout the southern Levant. The gradual evolution of architectural styles from curvilinear to rectilinear with rounded corners and then to wholly rectilinear plans during the EB I and into the EB II expresses the conformity of building styles to a more

crowded and ordered urban plan (cf. Golani 1999). This phenomenon is not a function of the urbanization process but rather an outcome – the adaptation of architectural styles in order to better function within a crowded and ordered urban environment. ‘Pre-planning’ at the site is not apparent merely in the existence of regular alleyways between buildings that are necessarily somehow separated from one another, but is the outcome of these buildings sharing the same orientation. That in itself is definitive evidence of pre-meditated planning and its implementation during Strata II-I. Population growth at Qiryat Ata is evident not only in its rapid growth in size in the transition from Strata III-I (Fig. 1), but also in the gradual creation of more crowded building environments with smaller rooms. This is also clearly seen in other forms of archaeological evidence at the site. As the urbanization process progressed, the economy became more market-oriented and the economic conditions for most of the inhabitants appear to have worsened, while the evidence also points to the rise of elites that appear to have segregated themselves from the rest of the population (cf. Faust and Golani 2008). All these factors are definitive evidence for development of a complex hierarchical social organization at Qiryat Ata.

It is thus puzzling why the urbanization process at the site is called into question, as Braun’s (2012, 30-33) next observations on the site and its environs now assume the opposite and appear to agree with our own, that the site did undergo an urbanization process and was fully urbanized by Stratum I of the EB II (Braun 2012, 30-31). This calls into question the whole purpose of Braun’s article as he is now assuming the very conclusions he was trying to debunk. Braun’s article does not appear to present a very different picture from the one already published.

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