Since the Mesolithic period (Sultan Ia, ca. 10,500 BCE), and especially from the Neolithic period onwards, Tell es-Sultan at the foot of the Mount of Temptations by the spring of ‘Ain es-Sultan (Prophet Elisha’s Spring of the Bible), 7 km north of the Dead Sea, was the dominant site in the southern Jordan Valley on the western bank of the river (Nigro 2011) (Pl. 2). The site, lying 270 m under the sea level, graciously profited from the favourable environment of the oasis, formed by the abundant freshwater gushing out from the bowels of the mountains of the Judean Wilderness, and attracted animals and humans since the dawn of prehistory (Nigro 2014a, 26f. figs. 1.1; 1.2). Its natural resources made it easy to start a sedentary way of life for one of the earliest Neolithic communities of the Fertile Crescent, which stably inhabited the limestone hill overlooking the spring since 9,000 BCE.

1 Pre-Pottery Neolithic (Sultan Ib, ca. 8,500–6,000 BCE)

Over a long period of time, the Pre-Pottery Neolithic community at Jericho was one of the most adaptive, innovative and successful ones in the entire ancient Near East. British (Kenyon 1957, 51–76; 1981, passim) and Italian-Palestinian (Nigro et al. 2011, 577f.; Nigro 2017a) excavations from 1955 to 1958 and 1997 to 2019 respectively brought to light portions of a 4 ha wide village (which Kathleen M. Kenyon labelled “town”), with communal buildings, including the Round Tower (Fig. 1), and a “town wall” encircling the settlement and its major installations (Kenyon 1957, 67–69; 1981, 18–43. 203–212 pls. 5–11).

1.1 Adaptation and exploitation

The PPN community at Jericho introduced stable agriculture cultivating barley and emmer, thanks to the excavation of canals in the oasis, and the domestication of sheep and goats, bees, dogs and perhaps also felines. It developed a distinguished architectural tradition, with fine lime floors and plasters, introducing the mudbrick, which, in the course of time, developed from loaf- to cigar-shaped and was produced in regular rectangular moulds (Ben-SHILOMO – Garfinkel 2009, 191 f., table 1). This, of course, facilitated the transformation of the original womb-shaped huts into rectangular domestic units, which could be enlarged by juxtaposing new units and sharing walls (Nigro 2014b, 60f. fig. 6).
Intensive agriculture, also involving legumes and fruits, as well as animal breeding and gazelle and wild goat hunting were the primary subsistence resources of the PPN Jericho community (BAR-YOSEF 1995, 196; KLIJT 2001, 86; KLIJT – GÖRING-MORRIS 2002, 379; TWISS 2007, 27). The verdant environment of the oasis allowed a solid growth of the population and assured success to plant and animal domestication practices.

1.2 Technology

Flint industry also developed quickly and at a high technological and functionally specialized level, the inventory forming a typological reference system for the period (CROWFOOT-PAYNE 1983, 639–706). Obsidian was also found, bearing witness to exchange and transmission systems reaching as far as Anatolia and connecting Neolithic communities all around the Fertile Crescent (MARCHETTI – NIGRO 1998, 87f.).

1.3 Social organization and ideology

Jericho hosted a large human community (more than 500 people) already in the 9th millennium BCE, which increased to at least 2,000 individuals by the end of the PPNA period (7,500 BCE), and elaborated a social organization and an unequal distribution of power and wealth (KLIJT 2001, 86; NAVEH 2003; BENZ 2010, 251. 269 f.; ROLLEFSON 1983, 30; 2004). Land ownership and water distribution influenced social stratification, and the modified social organisation contributed to the nascent ideology of family (GOREN et al. 2001; KODAS 2014; 2016; FLETCHER 2015, 26; NIGRO 2017a, 26). This is reflected in the separation of skulls from the rest of the body, a typical feature of PPNA strata at Jericho. In the following PPNB, through plastering, modelling, sea shell inlaying and painting, the skulls and crania were transformed into familiar emblems or idols (NIGRO 2017a, 6–21; Fig. 2). It is within this context, the rising dominion of cult and rite, that the peculiar raw materials found on the shore of the nearby Dead Sea, namely salt, sulphur, bitumen, and curative mud, were first exploited and transformed into medicines and perfumes by the inhabitants of Jericho.

2 Pottery Neolithic (Sultan IIa–b, 6,000–4,500 BCE) and Chalcolithic (Sultan IIc, 4,500–3,500 BCE)

In its second major stage of life (Pottery Neolithic, 6,000–4,500 BCE), less known and well preserved than the initial one, the invention of pottery marks another major step in the technological development of the site (NIGRO 2014a, 28–30), and introduces another raw material, clay, among the commodities as-

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1 Pre-Pottery Neolithic A is also known in the flint industry as “Sultanian” (KENYON 1981, passim; CROWFOOT-PAYNE 1983, 623; BAR-YOSEF 1995, 190. 194).
summing an economic value in the exchange and productive system of the settlements in the lower Jordan Valley and the Ghor.

In the following Chalcolithic period (4,500–3,500 BCE), the Jericho community had to face an apparently insurmountable challenge: the spring of ‘Ain es-Sultan reduced its flow or even ceased altogether (Nigro 2014b, 67 f.). Tell es-Sultan was almost deserted and a reduced community settled on the eastern bank of Wadi Nueima, about 2 km to the east, at Tell el-Mafjar (Nigro 2011, 7 f.).

3 Early Bronze Age I (Sultan IIIa1, 3,500–3,000 BCE): the path to urbanization

As the spring recovered, the prominent ruins of Tell es-Sultan were again inhabited by a group of farmers and breeders, which had possibly arrived from beyond the Jordan (Nigro 2005; 2008). The newcomers bear a distinct material culture, markedly different from that of the Chalcolithic. They reset the systematic cultivation of the oasis, keeping strict relationships with nomadic groups of shepherds practicing transhumance from the highlands down into the Jordan Valley and up to the shores of the Dead Sea and the oasis. The farmers gradually started to exploit the Dead Sea resources again, mainly curative mud and salt (Nigro 2014b, 69).

Nomadic entities, moreover, moved north-south along the Wadi ‘Arabah and traded raw materials such as copper (Levy 2007, 27–46), salt, sulphur, and bitumen, but also spices from the Red Sea (Nigro 2005, 4 f.), and, especially in the second stage of this period, the Early Bronze Age IB (3,200–3,000 BCE), Egyptian artefacts (status symbols such as slate palettes, mace-heads, gemstones, stone vessels, decorated pottery, sticks, mother-of-pearl shells from the Nile, but also archaeologically invisible goods such as leather, textiles, rugs, vegetal fibres) (Sala 2012, 277–281).

Along with sedentarization and agriculture, this Early Bronze Age community was thus involved in long-distance exchange networks, especially interacting with Transjordan and Wadi ‘Arabah nomads reaching the Sinai Peninsula. It grew in complexity and the small hamlet progressively turned into a huge village, with internal architectural differentiation and communal buildings (Nigro 2005, 122–124; Montanari 2012, 2–10), such as a long apsidal house excavated by Kenyon in Trench III (close to Area E of the Italian-Palestinian excavation grid; Kenyon 1981, 322–324 pls. 174. 313a. 314). Tomb A, excavated by John Garstang, testifies to the emergence of a leader. The male was buried in primary deposition in a distinguished posture with raised arms and a mace between his legs (Garstang 1932, 19–22 pl. VII.5).

4 Early Bronze Age II (Sultan IIIb, 3,000–2,700 BCE): the rise of the city

Towards the end of the 4th/beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE (Nigro 2019b; Nigro et al. 2019), Jericho underwent a major transformation with the erection of a unique fortification line consisting of a solid city wall made of dune yellowish brick set upon a two-course foundation of limestone blocks encircling the whole tell (Nigro 2006a, 355–361; 2006b, 4–7; 2010a, 11–38; 2010b, 461–463). The inhabited area was terraced, divided into quarters by a main street crossing it north-south, and, on the hill overlooking the spring and the oasis, a temple was built (Nigro 2010a, 51–61. 75–109; 2010b, 464–466). The main gate was located at the southeastern foot of the tell and opened onto the spring area which was included within the city wall. These major transformations were accompanied by a distinguished development of the material culture, especially visible in pottery making and the emergence of copper tools and weapons (Nigro 2014b, 71).

The new-born city inaugurated a new model of economy, based upon the intensive agricultural exploitation of the oasis (for barley, emmer, wheat, legumes, fruit), cattle breeding and use in cultivation, seasonal employment of large squads of workers, labour specialization including potters, smiths, merchants, warriors and city-administrators forming an urban elite. The society thus became more complex and stratified, as did the ideology supporting such organizational model.

The finding in 2017 of five mother-of-pearl shells from the Nile, piled up into a cache in an EBA IIA room with remains of eye make-up inside (Fig. 3), is another indication that the emerging ruling class...
Lorenzo Nigro looked to Egypt after having established an enduring exchange system with the rising Pharaonic reign (Nigro et al. 2018).

The exploitation of the Dead Sea resources also contributed to trade, as rare raw materials (especially salt, used for food preservation and as healing substance) were exchanged over long distances through commercial activities organized by the new-born city of Jericho. Caravans regularly travelled along the Wadi ‘Arabah connecting the southern Jordan Valley with the Sinai, the Red Sea and beyond it Egypt, as well as to the north and east, i.e. to Syria, Anatolia and Mesopotamia, and to the Mediterranean in the west. Again, sea shells are the most common finds showing the centripetal afluence of imported items (Nigro et al. 2018, 119 f.).

The flourishing EBA II city came to a sudden end when it was struck by a violent earthquake around 2,700 BCE (Nigro 2014b, 72). This event marks both the stratigraphy and the urban layout of the city, and is followed by overall reconstruction (Nigro 2019a).

5 Early Bronze Age III (Sultan III, ca. 2,700–2,300 BCE): Jericho’s transformation

Jericho was completely rebuilt starting from its defensive works at the beginning of the 27th century BCE. The fortification line was doubled adding an Outer Wall (1.5–2.2 m wide) to the main Inner Wall (3.9–4.2 m wide), with a series of blind rooms at regular intervals inbetween, while a ditch completed the fortification at the bottom (Sellin – Watzinger 1913, 20–33; Garstang 1930, 128 f.; 1931, 191 f.; Kenyon 1981, 161–163, 210–213; Marchetti – Nigro 1998, 81–94. 129 f.; Nigro 2006a, 361–375; Nigro – Taha 2009, 738 f.; Nigro et al. 2011, 580 f.). The massive mudbrick structures were harnessed with wooden beams (Nigro – Taha 2009, 738 fig. 15), and secured by inserting gaps (0.4–0.5 m) between different wall sections in order to hamper domino-effects in case of collapse. A balcony allowed to walk all around the top of the main city wall (Nigro – Taha 2009, 738 fig. 14).

5.1. Palace G and the rise of centralised economy in the oasis

A major intervention of this second urban stage (Sultan IIIc1, EBA IIIA, 2,700–2,500 BCE) was the erection of a palace on the eastern flank of the “Spring Hill” overlooking the oasis (Sellin – Watzinger 1913, 39–42 figs. 18–20; Garstang 1932, 17 f.; Kenyon 1981, 344–346; Nigro et al. 2011, 586–592 figs. 16, 20; Nigro 2016, 10 figs. 1, 9; 2017b, 159–162). The palace was subdivided into three wings each on a different terrace descending down to the spring (Fig. 4). The main entrance of the palace was on its southern side and opened onto a square in the main street which climbed the “Spring Hill” in a northerly direction. It led to the middle terrace, where a porch opened onto a hall with a raised podium on its north side (Fig. 5), a reception suite, flanked by a small subsidiary room. Some stairs led to the upper storeys which presumably hosted the royal apartments. The upper terrace was accessible directly from the main street, through a door in the western perimeter wall of the palace. It hosted industrial installations, with rooms for food preparation and other workshops (perhaps also a smith). A third entrance to the palace was located on the eastern lower terrace and connected it directly with the spring area and the market just inside the city gate. This door gave access to the administrative and storage wing of the
Fig. 4 General view of the EBA III (2,700–2,300 BCE) Palace G on the eastern flank of the Spring Hill (© Sapienza University of Rome – Expedition to Palestine and Jordan).

Building, and to a corner tower which possibly also served to control access to the main street from the market area. Several finds from the palace may illustrate multiple functions of this building (Fig. 6). A copper axe and a dagger (with the preserved part of the handle) were found in the courtyard of the lower wing (Kenyon 1981, fig. 15.4; Nigro 2016, fig. 11), while a basalt potter’s wheel (Dorrell 1983, 559 f. fig. 231.2 pl. 21.b) and several stone tools, including grinding stones, pestles, polishing pebbles and flints were found in the upper western wing. In the central wing, big jars and pithoi belonged to the furnishings of the royal apartments (Nigro et al. 2011, fig. 18), while the bull-shaped spout of a cultic vessel (Nigro et al. 2011, 591 fig. 21) was found in the subsidiary room behind the throne room. Here, a hearth was excavated, set against the east wall of the hall. The central room yielded other symbolic items: two fragmentary Egyptian palettes (one with an engraved sign, unfortunately broken), and a marble mace-head (Holland 1983, 804 f. fig. 365.5), a symbol of power which became popular among the emerging urban elites of the Southern Levant (Sala 2012).

Fig. 5 General view of Palace G with Hall L. 644 with podium (B. 645), central pillars (S. 1159) and the restored EBA III (2,500–2,300 BCE) storage jars in situ, seen from the north (© Sapienza University of Rome – Expedition to Palestine and Jordan).
5.2 Dwellings and interregional exchanges

The dwelling quarter on the northern plateau of the tell has revealed the life of the inhabitants of Jericho towards the mid-3rd millennium BCE (Pl. 7,1). A number of domestic units were distributed on both sides of the main street reaching the northeast gate (Marchetti – Nigro 2000, 22 f. figs. 1.2; 1.15). The street pavement grew to a height of about 1.5 m in three centuries and so the flanking houses, which were rebuilt and refurbished many times, became a thick intermingled agglomeration of mudbrick walls, fillings and floors (Marchetti – Nigro 2000, 15–120; Nigro 2006b, 5 f. 10–17 figs. 7. 9; Nigro – Taha 2009, 740 f. fig. 17). Finds from these houses show a vivid picture of early urban Jericho (Marchetti – Nigro 2000, 24–39 figs. 1.41–48; 1.51–56), e.g. agricultural products (including legumes – lentils and chickpeas –, fruits, and vegetables) and animal remains (ovicaprids, but also cattle, gazelle, wild boar, and hippopotamus were tamed and hunted in the Jericho oasis). Precious commodities testify to trade contacts: salt, sulphur and bitumen from the Dead Sea, sea shells from the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, raw materials such as timber (tamarisk, oak), softstone, and copper from Wadi Feinan and Sinai along the “copper route” (Nigro 2014c), as well as precious or imported items or wares (gemstones like carnelian, rock-crystal, Egyptian-like pottery, especially the so-called lotus vases, Khirbet Kerak Ware bowls and craters, imported from the north [Nigro 2009a]). Finally, there are the tools illustrating the life of an urban community: tokens, calculi, sealings and seals, balance weights for precious metals (gold and
silver) or rare spices. All these finds, in absence of writing, mark the step towards a more complex and stratified society and witness the existence of a central institution ruling over the city and the oasis and controlling its territory and road network.

6 Intermediate Bronze Age/Early Bronze Age IV (Sultan IIIId, 2,300–2,000 BCE): urban fragility

Towards the mid-24th century BCE this fragile urban experiment collapsed due to an enemy attack (Nigro 2009b, 187 f.; 2014b, 77–80). Jericho was completely burnt, its main buildings pillaged and the city walls razed. Its social and economic organization thus imploded, and the oasis was probably also plundered and destroyed. After the destruction, sparse squatters re-occupied the ruins on the tell for a certain while, then the site was deserted.

After some decades new settlers occupied the tell summit and the Spring Hill (Kenyon 1957, 186–209; Marchetti 2003, 303 f.; Nigro 2003, 131 f.; Nigro et al. 2011, 586). They first lived in tents and then in rectangular dwellings with flimsy walls made of a single row of bricks often re-employed from the earlier buildings. These new settlers were nomad shepherds which basically inhabited the oasis during summer, practicing transhumance in autumn and spring across the wadis connecting the Jordan Valley and the Wadi ‘Arabah and the surrounding deserts. Along with livestock rearing, they transported trade goods back and forth from these fringe regions, where numerous raw materials were extracted. For this reason, some of them became expert metalworkers and played a major role in the further development of metallurgy leading to the introduction of copper alloys, including bronze in the last century of the 3rd millennium BCE (D’Andrea 2014, 156 f.; Montanari 2014, 106). The tribal organization of this new community and its semi-nomadic origins are well illustrated by a huge necropolis which spread across the limestone plateau northwest of the tell (Kenyon 1960, 180–262; 1965, 33–166). Differences in tomb type, funerary equipment and deposition amongst the single burials show social differentiation. The rural village developed in the second stage of the IBA (EBA IVB), extending over the terraced tell flanks (Nigro 2003, 132 fig. 13). The community became fully stable and agriculture spread again over the oasis. Pottery typology remained restricted to a few broad functional shapes, basically descending from the Early Bronze Age tradition.

7 Middle Bronze Age (Sultan IV, 2,000–1,500 BCE): urban rebirth

The re-urbanization of Tell es-Sultan occurred during the 20th century BCE and was due to the arrival of a new cultural group, according to Kenyon the Amorites of Mesopotamian and Biblical sources (Kenyon 1963). In this case, the foundation of the city was planned and realized as a whole. Ruha, this is the name of the city as recorded on a scarab found in a princely tomb underneath the palace, was conceived as the capital of a city-state which extended over the southern Jordan Valley and the northern shore of the Dead Sea. The presence of a city identifiable with Ruha in the lists of the Egyptian execration texts is not certain.

7.1 Rampart fortifications

The MBA I city walls consisted of a solid wall of mudbricks on a stone foundation with rectangular towers (Fig. 7). They were re-built twice, by adding a rampart made of intermingled strata of earth and

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2 Italian-Palestinian excavations in the southern Lower City (Area A) revealed a rectangular tower with mudbrick walls upon an orthostates foundation (Tower A1) (Nigro – Taha 2009, 731–735 figs. 5–7; Nigro et al. 2011, 573–577 figs. 3–5). The MBA I fortification system was also exposed in the Spring Hill area, where the East Tower was excavated by Garstang at the foot of the Spring Hill (Garstang 1932, 15–17; Garstang – Garstang 1948, 85 f. fig. 4), connected with the city wall running at the foot of the tell on its southern and eastern sides (a portion of the MBA I city wall – Wall 7 – was exposed by the Italian-Palestinian Expedition; Marchetti – Nigro 2000, 167–171; Nigro 2000b, 26).
crushed limestone and a stone retaining wall at its bottom called Curvilinear Stone Structure (MBA II, 1,800–1,650 BCE) (Nigro et al. 2011, 581–584 figs. 13. 14). In the latest enlargement phase which took place about 1,650 BCE a Cyclopean wall was built to support the rubble rampart, also including the spring and thus doubling the fortification line (Sellin – Watzinger 1913, pl. I; Kenyon 1981, 175 ff. 178–182 pls. 236. 259. 273; Nigro 2006b, 34 ff.; Fiaccavento et al. 2013). This turned Jericho into a heavily fortified city, which, however, could not resist a final terrible attack which fully destroyed it.

7.2 The city temple

Recent excavations by the Sapienza University of Rome have located on the southwestern summit of the central hill of the tell the badly ruined and largely pillaged remains of a major building, which on account of its plan (a rectangle with two protruding towers at the front), orientation (with the main façade to the east), and the presence of two orthostates has been identified as the Middle Bronze II–III city temple. Even though the foundations of the building were extremely eroded, it was possible to reconstruct its rectangular plan (14 × 10 m), with the main entrance looking east (Nigro 2016, 15). Temple P was a typical “Migdol”/long-room temple, with an elongated cella, subdivided at two-thirds of its length, characterized by very high and thick walls (2.2 m in width). A very close comparison is offered by the MBA temples in Tell Balata/Shechem (Sellin 1928; Stager 1999) or Tabaqat Fahl/Pella in Jordan (Bourke 2012). In the vicinity of the temple, a set of cult vessels, including a turtle dove-shaped rhyton3 (Garstang 1934, 127 pl. XXVI.8) was found by John Garstang, suggesting that the worshipped deity was the Canaanite goddess Ishtar (Pinnock 2000; 2014).

3 Musée du Louvre, AO 17151.
7.3 The palace of the Lords of Ruha

In the MBA II–III period (1,800–1,550 BCE) a new palace was built over the flattened remains of its EBA II–III predecessor. It was entered from the south through a porch and had a rectangular plan extending north-south (Garstang 1933, 41; 1934, 100 f. pl. XV nos. 80, 81; Garstang – Garstang 1948, 99–101 fig. 4; Marchetti 2003, 306; Nigro et al. 2011, 585 f.). It rested upon a perimeter wall, which supported the palace on the northern and eastern sides. The plan of the building was organized around two rectangular courtyards with rooms and halls on all sides. A staircase led to the upper storeys, where the residential apartments were presumably located. South of the palace a huge area was occupied by the palace storerooms (Garstang 1934, 101. 118–130 pls. XV. XVI. XL.a; XLI. XLII), a separated building, where the precious agricultural products of the oasis (barley, wheat, wine, beer, dried fruit [figs, almonds] and legumes [chickpeas, lentils]) were stored in jars and pithoi, together with other precious commodities (many of them, unfortunately, of a perishable nature, e.g. spices, leather and textiles) and raw materials (including salt and bitumen from the Dead Sea, timber from the north and the west, copper from the south). To the east of the palace was another subsidiary building which served as stable. A cobble-paved street connected it through a postern with the underlying area of the spring. The paved passage ended on the opposite top at the eastern side entrance of the palace.

7.4 The built-up elite tombs on the Spring Hill

In between the foundation walls of the palace and on the eastern flanks of the Spring Hill, mudbrick tombs were built to host the members of the ruling elite. These tombs are especially noteworthy because a huge necropolis with shaft tombs and multiple burials was in use (Nigro 2009c, 361–368 figs. 3–11), showing how the members of the ruling elite were accorded individual burials in the very centre of the city (Nigro 2009c, 368–374). In one of these tombs, a young lady and her adult maid were found buried together (Nigro 2009c, 370–372 figs. 16–23). The lady wore distinguished personal ornaments, including a necklace, a bracelet, and two earrings (Fig. 8). On her breast was found a scarab belonging to a
signet ring (TS.99.G.500; Nigro 2009c, fig. 22). It bore a hieroglyphic inscription: “Adjmer Ruha”, literally “Administrator of Jericho”, using an ancient Egyptian title well-suited for an oasis (“administrator of canals”), followed by the ancient Canaanite name of the city: Ruha (Nigro 2009c, 372 f. fig. 23). This was possibly the signet ring of a lord of Jericho. This scarab was engraved in Tell ed-Dab’a and provides further evidence for the strict relationships established between the Egyptian kings of the 13th Dynasty and the local rulers (Nigro 2009c, 374; Massafra 2013; Nigro 2018). This, incidentally, may suggest that Jericho extended its control over the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea with its coveted natural resources.

7.5 Warrior tombs in the necropolis

The largest number of MBA tombs, however, was uncovered in the necropolis on the limestone plateau northwest of the tell (Garstang 1932, fig. 7; 1933, 4–38; Kenyon 1960, 263–518; 1965, 167–478 fig. 91). Here, shaft tombs were occupied by extended families for generations and hosted numerous primary burials which were re-displaced together with their wealthy equipment each time a new burial was added. Some individuals show a special treatment and wear weapons typical of the MBA warriors’ class (Cohen 2012): fenestrated, duck-bill or chisel bronze axes, triple-veined bronze daggers with marble or fine limestone pommels, studded waist belt such as the bronze one found by Kenyon in Tomb J3 (1960, 311 fig. 117.1, 3–4) of a distinguished type also attested in Sidon (Doumet-Serhal 2004, 54 figs. 18.19) and Tell ed-Dab’a (Philip 2006, 83 f. no. 6140 fig. 38.2). These groups of warriors assured the city-state security and control over the road networks back and forth from the Dead Sea, Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley for two centuries.

7.6 Ruha and Egypt

In the tomb of one of these officials, Tomb 30, Garstang found a scarab bearing the prenomen of Pharaoh Hotep-ib-ra (Garstang 1934, 130 f. figs. 4–7; Rowe 1936, 5 pl. I.18; Nigro 2009c, 373 fig. 24), the sixth or ninth king of the 13th Dynasty, who ruled over the “Hyksos” capital in the Delta, Avaris/Tell ed-Dab’a, about 1,770–1,760 BCE (Bietak 1984, 74; 1991, 49; 1996, 30). This king, as many of the 13th–17th Dynasties, underwent a systematic damnatio memoriae by the Theban pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty, who re-established the Egyptian unified reign in the middle of the 16th century BCE (Ryholt 1998). It is thus quite rare outside Tell ed-Dab’a and especially in Asia to have inscribed items of one of these previous and almost obscure rulers. Nevertheless, Jericho has given back three scarabs of Hotep-ib-ra found in tombs of military officials,4 thus suggesting that at least during the reign of this pharaoh a strong political (and possibly familiar) connection existed between Jericho and Egypt. Moreover, the scarab found in the tomb of the princess underneath the palace, as well as the other princely tombs lined with mudbricks in a way reminiscent of Egyptian tomb types, confirm that Jericho and Tell ed-Dab’a established a strong and mutual relationship from the 13th Dynasty onwards. The oasis was one of the few places in Palestine recalling the Nilotic environment, with its canals and intensive agriculture and horticulture. It is conceivable that since this time they were also practised with the help of expert peasants from Egypt, while the temples and palaces in Tell ed-Dab’a exhibit clear signs of the Syro-Palestinian culture (Bietak 1991, 33; 1996, 14–30). Jericho products (wine, olive oil, perfumes, herbs, essences, including salt, bitumen and sulphur from the Dead Sea) reached Egypt and were exchanged for gold and gemstones.

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4 In addition to the scarab from Tomb 30, a second one, showing the same script, was bought at the antiques market in Jerusalem (Giv’eon 1978, fig. 1), and a third one, still unpublished, belonged to the Blanchard/Michaelides collection in Berlin (370.73).
7.7 The final destruction

In the second half of the 16th century BCE (MBA III), Ruha, fortified with a double line of walls, the outer one supported by a heavy underground Cyclopean wall and a rubble rampart, was completely destroyed by an enemy attack which left the city in ruins (Garstang – Garstang 1948, 103 f.; Bietak 1991, 57–62; Ilan 1995, 314 f.; Maeir 2010, 165–175; Massafra 2014, 196 f.). The dramatic event can probably be attributed to an attack of either Ahmose or, hypothetically, Amenhotep I during their campaign assuring Egyptian control over Asia. Radiocarbon dates fix this turning point in the history of Jericho between 1,550 and 1,520 cal BCE (Bruins – Van der Plicht 1995, 213–220). What is certain is that the independent Canaanite city-state fell, and from about 1,500 BCE became a town with reduced influence and international relationships.

8 Late Bronze Age (Sultan V, 1,500–1,300 BCE)

After the final destruction, the city gradually recovered (Bienkowski 1986), becoming a town again, though with much weaker fortifications which consisted of a mudbrick wall erected on top of the Cyclopean Wall (Garstang 1931; Fig. 9). The ruins of the MBA Palace were re-adapted into a residence (called by Garstang the “Middle Building”) for a new ruler, possibly a vassal lord of the Egyptians (Garstang 1934, 100–102. 105 f. 108–116 pls. XIII. XIV. XXXI–XXXVII; Bienkowski 1986, 71. 90. 101 f. 112–122 figs. 55. 56. 59. 60; Nigro 1996, 52–55 fig. 8.2; Marchetti 2003, 316 f.). A cuneiform tablet,
found on the tell slope by Garstang,\textsuperscript{1} testifies to the existence of a chancellery and an administration of the town and the oasis (Garstang 1934, 116; Horowitz et al. 2006, 96ff. 231). Later on, however, Ruha, or Jericho, does not appear in the Amarna letters. Nevertheless, in the Late Bronze Age the exploitation of the oasis’ resources was resumed together with the extraction and trade of salt and other raw materials from the Dead Sea. Some tombs excavated by Garstang have provided us with wealthy assemblages of LBA I–II pottery and some Egyptian scarabs (Garstang 1933, 14–38; Bienkowski 1986, 32–102). In Tomb 5 were found a scarab of Thutmose III (ca. 1,504–1,450 BCE) (Garstang 1933, 28 pl. XXVI.1–2) and one of Hatshepsut (ca. 1,473–1,458 BCE) (Garstang 1933, 28 pl. XXVI.9), while Tomb 4 yielded two scarabs with the cartouche of Amenhotep III (ca. 1,417–1,379 BCE) (Garstang 1933, pl.XXVI.7.9). This may indicate the direction in which Jericho’s products were headed.

In the last century of the Late Bronze Age, during the Ramesside reign of Egypt, Jericho shows a dramatic drought of archaeological evidence, which has been interpreted as the definitive abandonment of the Bronze Age city (Kenyon 1951, 113). This coincides with an epochal crisis in the Levant and the Near East, which will be followed by a new era, the Iron Age.

9 Iron Age (Sultan VI, 1,200–586 BCE)

Tell es-Sultan resumed its major role in the Iron Age. New tribes arrived in the Judean Desert and in the Jordan Valley during the Iron Age IA (1,200–1,136 BCE). They belonged to a new wave of nomadic pastoralists entering Syria-Palestine from Arabia and taking advantage of the dissolution of pre-existing polities (Nigro 2014d, 263). They have been traced by archaeologists both in Transjordan and in the Negev and the wadis connecting the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea (Liverani 2003, 47–49). In the Jericho area, they used to live in the wilderness surrounding the oasis that had lost its flourishing aspect after being largely abandoned; the Bible calls them Yerakhmelites (further on included into Benjamin’s tribe) – turning the root of the name of the site into the name of the tribe.

In the early Iron Age IB (1,136–1,070 BCE), more complex social organizations were developing in the highlands of Palestine and in Transjordan. Some of these groups rapidly coagulated into new nations and these early reigns overlooked the King’s Highway and extended their territorial control over the southern Jordan Valley. New long-distance trade had started with the diffusion of the Arabian camel (dromedary) (Liverani 2003, 94; Grigson 2012) and fortresses, outposts and garrisons were built along the main overland routes of the Southern Levant (Liverani 2003, 62). Tell es-Sultan, overlooking one of the richest springs of the region, thus was again settled and possibly hosted one of these strongholds (Nigro 2011, 15). Garstang in fact excavated a pit grave with pottery dating from the Iron Age IB period (Tomb 11; Garstang 1933, 36 fig. 11).

9.1 Iron Age IIA–C (960–586 BCE)

By the 9\textsuperscript{th} century BCE, Jericho had once again become a city surrounded by a wall, built exploiting the massive Middle Bronze Age ramparts and supporting works (Sellin – Watzinger 1913, fig. 26; Pl. 6). The eastern flank of the Spring Hill hosted a tripartite public building, that the German archaeologist Helga Weippert called “Hilani” (Sellin – Watzinger 1913, 67–70 fig. 42 pls. 15. 16, I, IV; Garstang 1934, 102–104 pl. XIII; Garstang – Garstang 1948, 147f.; Weippert – Weippert 1976; Marchetti 2003, 317), like the reception buildings of the Neo-Hittite and Neo-Syrian cities of the north. The rest of the city was intensively inhabited and extended to the lower western, northern and southern slopes of the tell, with large houses (such as a tripartite building found at the foot of Trench I; Kenyon 1981, 111–113. 171–173. 219), industrial installations (Nigro et al. 2011, 578–580), and slab-paved stairs climbing the 15 m high site, like in Tell es-Sa’idiyeh (Tubb et al. 1996, 35f. figs. 29. 30).

\textsuperscript{5} The tablet is preserved at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem (RM1485).
The material horizon of the Iron Age II period is well illustrated by finds of the Austro-German Expedition of 1907–1909 (now in Istanbul and Berlin) (WEIPPERT – WEIPPERT 1976, 105–148), and by the assemblage of Kenyon’s Tomb A85 (TUSHINGHAM 1965, 482–489). A double-winged royal stamp on a jar handle (BARTLETT 1982, 537 fig. 220.1) may indicate that Jericho was included in the administration of the Kingdom of Judah in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE. It surely supplied the capital with oasis products, including newly introduced cultivars from the Far East, such as sandalwood for perfumes.

Moreover, the city kept its position as a stronghold controlling the track running along the western bank of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea and its diversion to Jerusalem, Bethel and ‘Ai, and as a hub of spices and drugs to be shipped north and west.

10 Neo-Babylonian and Persian period (Sultan VIIa, 586–332 BCE)

After the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and its destruction, Jericho fell under Neo-Babylonian and, successively, Persian administration. The site, though on a reduced scale, continued to be occupied (a barbed arrowhead found in Trench I is a tangible relic of Persian warriors active in this area). The period nevertheless envisaged a decline in settlement and cultivation activities throughout the whole oasis (only one site, a ritual bath in Wadi Nueima, was attributed to Persian occupation; DINUR – FEIG 1986). The built-up area on the tell was drastically reduced to some defensive towers and warehouses. An ostracoon with an Aramaic inscription (LEMAIRE 1975; BARTLETT 1982) and some stamp seal impressions (HAMDON 1957a; 1957b; KENYON – HOLLAND 1982, pl. III.b) are also attributed to this period. The access to the oasis from the south and the west (Jerusalem) started to be fortified, with the erection of a stronghold on the banks of the Wadi Qelt at Tell el-‘Aqaba / Cypros, Nuseib ‘Uwieshira and Jebel Quruntul (NIGRO 2011, 17). This shows the strategic role played by Jericho for the control over the road network on the northern shore of the Dead Sea.

11 Hellenistic period (Sultan VIIb, 332–53 BCE)

In the Hellenistic period, the Jericho oasis witnessed again an extraordinary flourishing, with the systematic exploitation of the springs of ‘Ain Duk and ‘Ain el-Auja, thanks to the excavation of new canals and dams, and the construction of the aqueduct of Wadi Qelt (NETZER – GARCRECHT 2002). The cultivation of trees, herbs and flower plants such as sandalwood, frankincense, myrrh and rose for the production of perfumes in the oasis enabled a marked economic development and established Jericho as a hub in the distribution and trade of these precious essences. At the same time, the Hasmonean dynasty established its winter palace at the southern fringe of the oasis, on the northern bank of Wadi Qelt, definitely transforming the site into a luxury resort (NETZER 1996; 2001, 11–174. 334–338). Villas and estates of a Hellenized aristocracy occupied the oasis and its surrounding.

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6 This aromatic resin was used to produce incense from bushes of Boswellia sacra (family of Burseraceae); in Latin known as *olibanum*; in Hebrew: וֹלְבֵן‎ [levona], in Arabic: al-lubān.

7 The palatial complex has been excavated at the site of Tulul Abu el-‘Alayiq North and extended over an area of ca. 30 dunams (NIGRO 2011, 17f.).
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Reconstructive plan of the Iron Age II (960–586 BCE) city of Jericho (© Sapienza University of Rome – Expedition to Palestine and Jordan).
1 (Nigro) View of the EBA II–III dwellings in Area F with House L. 305 brought to light by the Italian-Palestinian Expedition, looking northwest. – Sketch drawing of northern domestic quarter by Lorenzo Nigro (© Lorenzo Nigro).

2 (Zangenberg) En-Gedi oasis looking south (photo and © Jürgen Zangenberg).
ÄGYPTEN UND ALTES TESTAMENT

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Gegründet von Manfred Görg
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Life at the Dead Sea

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