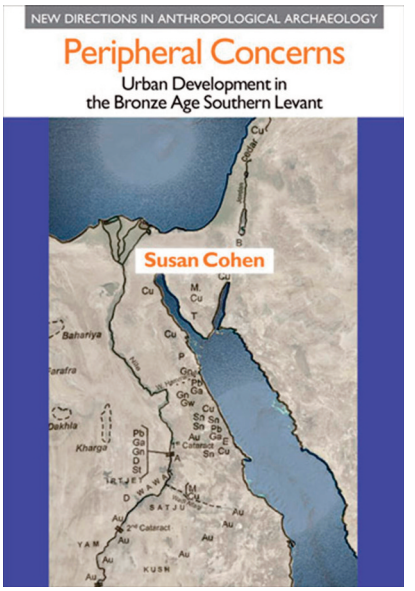
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REVIEW

Peripheral Concerns: Urban Development in the Bronze Age Southern Levant

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Reconstructing the processes that led to the development of the world's first urban societies can be an elusive scholarly task. In the latest contribution to the New Directions in Anthropological Archaeology series, Susan Cohen attempts to do just that for the southern Levant (here defined as modern-day Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and portions of Jordan), comparing and contrasting the evidence for urban development in two significant eras of the region's history: the Early and Middle Bronze Ages. Taking a core-periphery-interaction approach to the problem, *Peripheral Concerns* starts from the intriguing premise that fluctuating levels of Egyptian involvement in the southern Levant directly influenced the drastically different characteristics of urbanism in the region during the two periods.

The resultant study builds on Cohen's doctoral work on urban society in, and Egyptian interconnections with, the southern Levant during the MB IIA (*Canaanites, Chronologies, and Connections*, Eisenbrauns 2002). Topics considered in the present work include the processes involved in urban development, the role played by outside actors (in this case Egypt) in the development of urban systems, and the importance of frequently overlooked smaller sites to the sustainability of such societies. Relying almost exclusively on settlement-pattern data collected by extensive survey projects in the region, Cohen works to prove her theory that the critical difference between south Levantine urbanism during the Early and Middle Bronze Age was the role, or lack thereof, that Egypt played. In order to do so, she employs a "long-term and broad-scale" macro approach.

The first chapter begins with a brief summary of the differing characteristics of urbanism in the Early and Middle Bronze Age southern Levant. Highlighted differences include the speed of growth and consistency of organization, homogeneity of material culture, and regions of settlement concentration. Acknowledging that the stark differences have traditionally caused the two periods to be studied separately, Cohen chooses instead to make them the nucleus of her examination. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to ruminations on the study of urbanism more generally, references to previous studies on Egyptian-south Levantine interactions during the Bronze Age, and an introduction to the theoretical approach used in the present study, which relies heavily on core-periphery models. Theoretical approaches to urbanization and state formation are further discussed in Chapter 2, which presents a speedy overview of several prevalent theories employed in the study of ancient Near Eastern societies, including World Systems Theory and evolutionary models of state formation, with an emphasis on core-periphery interaction models.

Chapters 3 and 4 outline the urban systems of the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze Age southern Levant respectively, with a particular focus on settlement patterns. An overview of archaeological and historical evidence for interaction between Egypt and the southern Levant during each period is further discussed, and also

appears in a handy appendix listing Egyptian material found in the southern Levant, Sinai, Nubia, and the deserts and oases from the protodynastic period through the Middle Kingdom. Having established Egyptian interest (or lack thereof) as a prime factor in the manifestation of urban organization in each period, Cohen then turns to a chronological summary of Egyptian interaction with Nubia as a lens of comparison in Chapter 5. This is accompanied by a brief overview of the Nubian fortress system of the Middle Kingdom, with a list of fortresses provided in an additional appendix.

Having accepted the premise that the divergent processes of urban development that took place during the EB and MB were significantly influenced by Egypt, Chapter 6 synthesizes changes in settlement patterns over time, bearing in mind the archaeological and historical evidence for interconnections presented in Chapters 3 and 4. Spatial changes are illustrated in eight maps displaying settlement hierarchies starting with the MB Ia and moving through the MB II. Particular emphasis is placed on the ratio of small sites (those measuring 1 ha or less) to large sites (those measuring 5 ha or larger), with the number of small sites in proportion to large sites increasing significantly over time. The raw data for the chapter is provided in an appendix, which provides an alphabetical list of 686 sites considered in the study, together with pertinent data such as geographic coordinates, site size, and dates of occupation, as well as an abbreviated bibliography for each site.

In the end, Cohen concludes that the settlement patterns visible in the southern Levant from the EB Ia through the MB II accord with what one would expect in an area where a strong Egyptian core exerted considerably more interest during the former rather than the latter. She surmises that the low proportion of small, supportive sites to larger settlements during the EB I is directly tied to the system's strong reliance on the Egyptian core, reflecting a core-periphery hierarchy. The insufficient number of small sites also doomed the system to collapse when Egypt withdrew from the region, resulting in reorganization during the EB II/III. A more proportionate system with a range of site sizes appeared during the MB, when Egyptian interests were more focused towards the south than the east.

Each chapter of *Peripheral Concerns* is thoughtfully laid out and utilizes a clear, easy-to-follow writing style. The fourteen accompanying maps provide useful visualizations of the regions under discussion as well as shifting settlement patterns over time, but would benefit from more precise labeling. Chronological tables provided throughout the text identify the author's current understanding of the contentious topic of Bronze Age chronology in the southern Levant and its synchronizations with that of Egypt without getting bogged down in the long-standing and oft-published debates on the topic, a reflection of the narrow focus of the study at large. Furthermore, while her dedication to cementing Egypt's pivotal role in south Levantine urban development creates a concise narrative, her disinterest in discussing other potential influences, such as the effects of other cores or climate change, results in a less-than-comprehensive treatment of the material. Similarly, her deliberate avoidance of more concrete archaeological data, such as pottery sequences and stratigraphic analysis, detracts from the impact of the author's conclusions.

This very brief volume presents a useful introduction to the current state of the study of urban development in the southern Levant, and will serve as a beneficial reference, particularly for those unfamiliar with the body of evidence for Egyptian interaction with the region during these early periods. Its focus on processes rather than concrete archaeological and historical data pertaining to the fully fledged systems further allows for an overarching view of urban formation, as reflected both in the evolution of settlement patterns and system collapse. Although the study is unlikely to definitively quell uncertainty surrounding the factors that contributed to the rise of two distinct forms of urbanism in the southern Levant, *Peripheral Concerns* provides a thought provoking model for considering such queries and furnishes a helpful starting point for future studies.