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BYBLOS AT THE BIRTH OF SETTLED LIFE

DR. NADA ELIAS

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Abstract

Over more than a century, extensive archaeological excavations have taken place in Byblos. The aim of this paper is to shed light on the Neolithic settlement of Byblos and narrate the story of human communities in Byblos during the emergence of settled life. It encompasses the dawn and development of this settlement, the evolution of architecture, the expansion of settlements and continuity from the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic period. Furthermore, it delves into subjects like the dynamics of life and death in prehistoric Byblos, and presents the origins and legacy of this city through an interdisciplinary lens that combines prehistoric archaeology and anthropology. This study has integrated old archaeological drawings while introducing novel illustrations and reconstructions to enhance our understanding on Byblos during the Neolithic period.

Keywords

Byblos, Neolithic period, Revolution, Life & Death, Architecture, Settled life, First villages, agriculture, Hunter-gatherer, Fishing, Landscape, Material culture, Supply chain, Creativity, Burial practices.

Introduction

Byblos, as one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites (date of inscription: 1984), holds its place as one of the oldest cities in the world and also one of the rare sites that have been continuously inhabited from their foundation at the early period of the development of sedentary life and the intensification of agriculture to the present.

The site (34°07 08 N-35°38 46 E) is located approximately 40 kilometers northeast of Beirut, along the Mediterranean coastline of present-day Lebanon (Northern Levant), (Fig.1). The old settlement is situated on a thirty meter high promontory of quaternary sandstone¹ (Fig.2), just to the south of a small creek, which once served as the ancient port and continues to function as a fishing harbour. The entire site had a total area of 10 hectares.

Byblos has been the subject of numerous archaeological investigations and research studies for more than a century (1860-2023). The first archaeological excavation of Byblos ancient site can be attributed to a series of French expeditions. It started on December, 3, 1860 by Ernest Renan with the help of the 4th company of the 16th chasseurs à pied battalion (BCP) of the French Army under the Second Empire (Renan, 1864). Afterwards, excavations were initiated by Pierre Montet² in 1921 and carried forward in 1926 by Maurice Dunand³ until the mid-1970s, spanning more than forty-five years, only to be paused due to the Lebanese civil war. These extensive archaeological expeditions resulted in the excavation of at least 1.5 hectares of the site down to bedrock and unveiled the remarkable chronological continuity of the Byblos site, indicating occupation for at least 8,000 years⁴, extending from the Late Neolithic period onward (Fig.3). Other Lebanese archaeological excavations took place in the last few years, and lately, the Louvre is excavating again in Byblos with the partnership of the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA), but focusing on the Bronze Age period.

Dunand's excavations have led to the discovery of different occupation layers, including the foundational layers of the Neolithic settlement, which is the oldest on site. Actually, almost 9,000 years ago, during the Neolithic period, fishermen founded a small village by the sea, some remains of which are still visible in western part of the archaeological city (Fig.3: 1). The Neolithic houses/huts of this small village were constructed with a single-cell floor coated with lime plaster (Figs.4-5). The early inhabitants produced a significant quantity of tools (lithic, worked bones, pottery, ornaments) and weapons dating from that era. Burial practices during this period were interrelated to religious beliefs. This way of life continued into the Chalcolithic period (4500-3000 BC), although with new burial practices involving burying the deceased in large pottery jars

with grave goods inside.

This paper aims at shedding light on various aspects of life in Byblos, including the emergence of settled communities, architectural evolution, settlement expansion and continuity from the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic period. It also digs into topics such as life and death in prehistoric Byblos and presents the origins and legacy of this ancient city through the lenses of prehistoric archaeology and anthropology. Additionally, the study will incorporate existing archaeological drawings while proposing new illustrations and reconstructions.



Figure 1 : General geographic map of archaeological sites dating from the Neolithic and which includes burials in the floors of houses. The map was created using ArcGIS 10.4.1 (Mapsources: Esri, USGS, NOAA, Creation: Nada Elias), (Elias, 2023: Fig. 2).

¹ Ramleh.

² Montet, P., 1928.

³ Dunand, M., 1939, 1954, 1968, 1973.

⁴The site witnessed continuous occupation from 6900 BC until 1926 AD when Dunand conducted excavations. However, the contemporary city of Byblos remains inhabited by residents.



0 12.5 25 50 75 100
 Meters
 Coordinate System: World Robinson
 Central Meridian: 100°0'0"E

Figure 3 :

Map of the archaeological remains using Esri, Maxar, geoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID and rhe GIS User Community imagery (September 2023):

1. Neolithic settlement (6900-4500 BC) . 2. Chalcolithic habitats (4500-3000 BC). 3. The spring 4. Proto-urban structures (3200-3000 BC). 5. Temple with the obelisks that used to be on top of the L-shaped temple (After 2700 BC). 6. The L-shaped temple (2700 BC). 7. Temple of Baalat Gebal (2700 BC). 8. Ancient ramparts (before 2500 BC). 9. Main north-eastern gate of the city (Bronze Age: IIIrd mill.).

10. Residential Quarter (Bronze Age). 11. Foundations of Bronze Age habitats. 12. Indented ramparts (Bronze Age: IIIrd mill.). 13. Great Residence (Bronze Age: IIIrd mill.). 14. Pre-amorite buildings (2500 - 2150 BC). 15. Foundations of Amorite buildings (2150- 2000 BC). 16. Amorites quarries. 17. Royal Necropolis (IIInd mill.). 18. Glacis from the Hyksos period (1725 - 1580 BC). 19. Persian fortress (555 - 333 BC). 20. Roman road. 21. Nympheum (IIInd c. AD). 22. Roman Theatre (218 AD). 23. Crusader Citadel (12th c. AD). 24. 19th c. traditional Lebanese house.



Figure 4 :

Reconstruction of the Neolithic settlement of Byblos (Image generated by Nada Elias through AI generation using Midjourney).

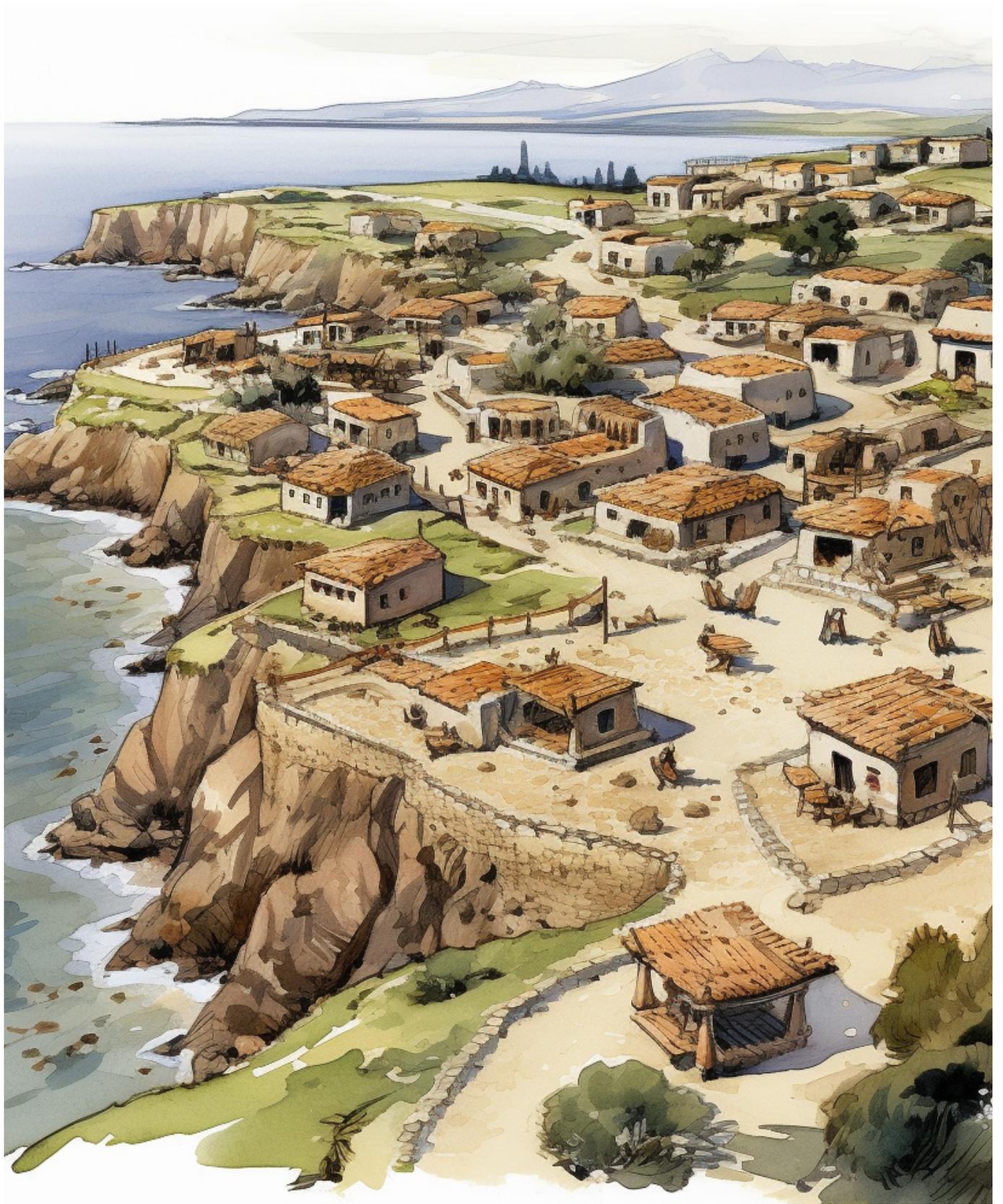


Figure 5 :
Reconstruction of the Neolithic settlement of Byblos (Image generated by Nada Elias through AI generation using Midjourney).

Chronological Framework

Almost 9000 years ago, the world witnessed the Neolithic revolution. The warmth and moderation of the climate, in addition to the existence of the great rivers, made the fertile crescent an abundant ground for life, with an abundance of wild flora and fauna. This abundance has made the land of the Fertile Crescent suitable for human life and the establishment of first permanent settlements. Thus, this area was the birthplace of the agricultural villages and towns and the cradle of history.

In Lebanon, dating back to the Paleolithic period, Men initially took refuge in caves and rocky shelters provided by the rocky coastline. Later, with the dawn of agriculture, they gradually settled along the seashore, which offered a set of favourable conditions. The sea played a crucial role, offering a temperate climate, access to valuable flint resources, and serving as a vital source of food (Dunand, 1954: 5). This narrow, fertile land held significant agricultural potential for Neolithic communities, containing freshwater sources

and nutrient-rich soil. Stretching from Tripoli, through Byblos, and onward to Beirut, the coastal region contains potential Neolithic sites (Dunand, 1954: 8).

For Dunand, the term Neolithic designate especially the first agro-pastoral experiments in an environment that was still hunter-gatherer and the Chalcolithic (Eneolithic) designate the phase where, in an agricultural environment, metal appears (Dunand, 1954: 5). The transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer communities to settled food-producing societies marked a transformative moment in human prehistory, with profound effects on landscape, resource sustainability, interactions, mobility, technological advancements, social behaviours, and religious beliefs (Maher, 2020: 32).

Dunand's excavations reveal the presence of three Neolithic phases and two Chalcolithic phases (referred to as Eneolithic by Dunand) in Byblos, as shown in Table 1 & Fig. 6.

Period		Chronology (Cauvin 1997)	Byblos (Artin 2009)
Natoufian		12 500 – 10 000 BC	-
PPNA (Pre-Pottery Neolithic A)	Khiamian	10 000 – 9 500 BC.	-
	Mureybetian	9 500 – 8 700 BC.	-
	Sultanian	9 500 – 8 300 BC.	-
PPNB (Pre-Pottery Neolithic B)	Early PPNB	8 700 – 8 200 BC.	-
	Middle PPNB	8 200 – 7 500 BC.	-
	Late PPNB	7 500 – 7 000 BC.	Early Neolithic 6900-6400 BC
PNA (Pottery Neolithic A)	Yarmoukian	7 000 – 6 300 BC.	End of Early Neolithic 6400-5800 BC
PNB (Pottery Neolithic B- Early Chalcolithic)		6 300 - 5 000 BC.	Middle Neolithic 5800-5400 BC.
Middle Chalcolithic			Late Neolithic 5400-4500 BC
Late Chalcolithic			Early Eneolithic (Early Chalcolithic) 4500-3700 BC
Early Bronze I		3300- 2000 BC.	Late Eneolithic (Late Chalcolithic) 3700-3000 BC

Table 1:

The chronology of the phases and their dates. Each period is representative of a specific culture, but the dates are approximate and vary from one site to another. Periods ranging from the Natoufian to the end of the Neolithic according to Cauvin (1997). For Byblos, the chronology is according to Artin (2009: 13).

Neolithic Period			Chalcolithic (Eneolithic) Period	
Byblos			Byblos	
Early Neolithic	Middle Neolithic	Late Neolithic	Early Chalcolithic	Late Chalcolithic
6900 BC	5800 BC	5400 BC	4500 BC	3700 BC
				3000 BC

Figure 6:

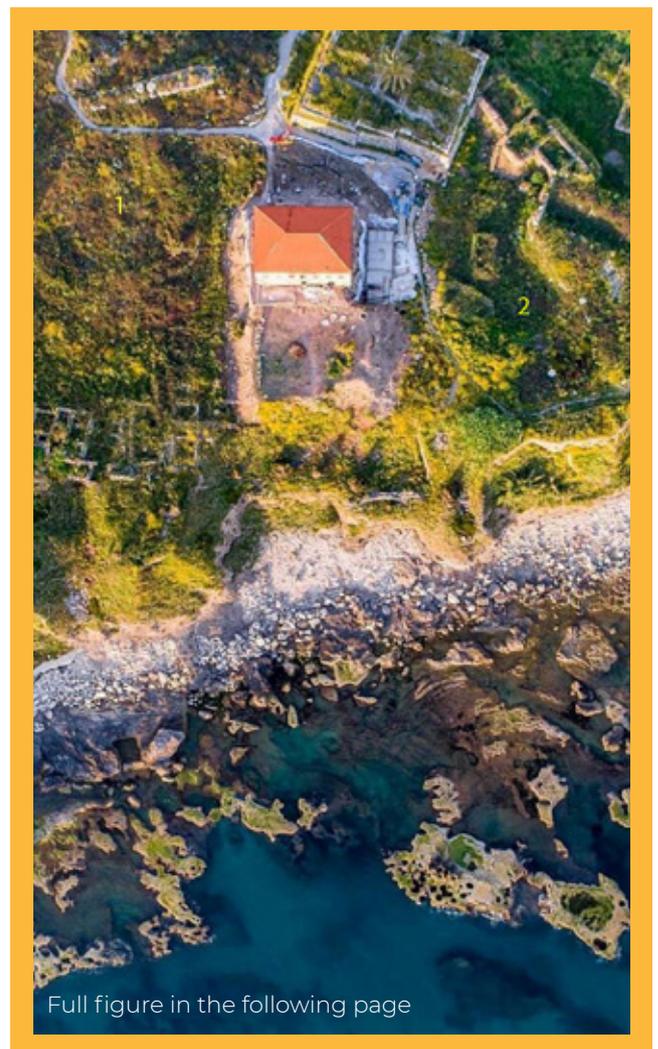
Prehistoric timeline in Byblos according to Artin. Periods ranging from the early Neolithic to the late Chalcolithic.

Neolithic Settlement Landscape

The earliest settlement dating to the Early Neolithic is located between a water spring and the edge of a coastal promontory (**Figs. 7-8**). This piece of land stretches 30 meters in depth and extends for 100 meters in length. It is strategically positioned facing the sea at the top of the promontory (Cauvin, 1968: 40). The environment of earliest settlement during the Early Neolithic was very abundant. Remains of wheat, barley, olives, vetch, lentils, broad beans, almonds, figs, grapes, pomegranates, and carob trees have been confirmed on the site (Dunand, 1973: 35). Wild fauna makes up 40% of the representation, including deer, fallow deer, roe deer, gazelle, wild boar, and a very small proportion of bears, hippopotamus, and crocodiles. Domesticated animals account for 60 %, including cattle, sheep, boars, and dogs. Fish are also a source of food. This is a sedentary population engaged in agriculture, where hunting and fishing remains an important activity (Dunand, 1973: 35-36).

The Middle Neolithic settlement (**Fig. 8**) occupies the same area as the Early Neolithic, with a slight expansion to the east (inland). The settlement still lies between the sea and the water source (Cauvin, 1968: 41).

Conversely, the Late Neolithic (**Fig. 8**) occupation exhibits a different topographical distribution compared to the previous periods. Notably, the northern part of the previously occupied area is abandoned. The Late Neolithic settlement significantly expands to the east and south and encompasses the water spring to a greater extent (Cauvin, 1968: 42, Dunand, 1973: 127).



Full figure in the following page

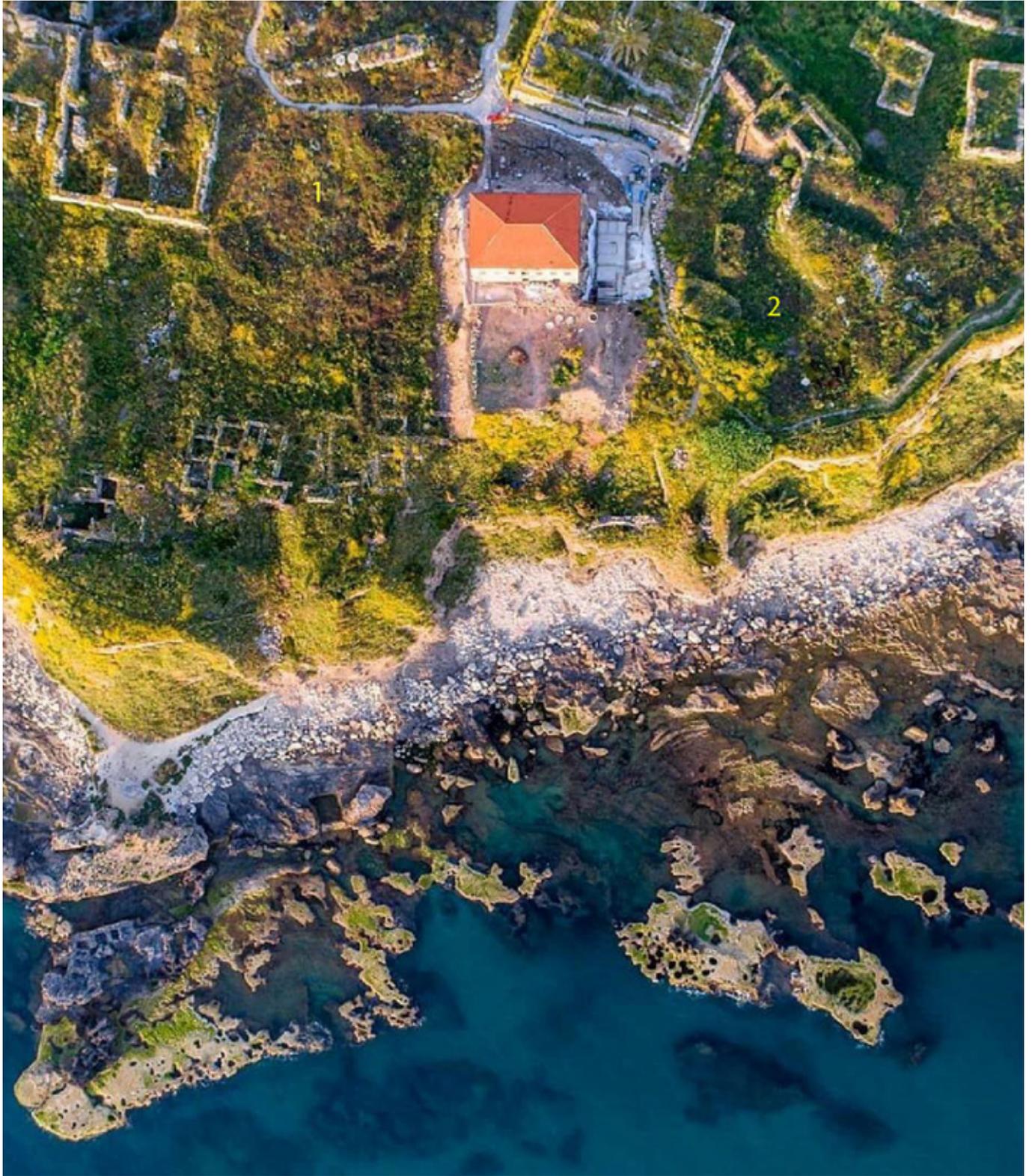


Figure 7:

Aerial photo of the archaeological remains: 1. Neolithic settlement (6900-4500 BC) . 2. Chalcolithic habitats (4500- 3000 BC). (Courtesy to Photographer Rami Rizk, 2019).



Figure 8: General map of Byblos Neolithic Settlement (Early, Middle, and Late Neolithic). Plan of Dunand 1973: Tome V: Plates, Pl. H,b.

Byblos Neolithic Architecture

The Neolithic settlement is located to the west of the promontory, directly facing the sea, and remarkably with no defensive walls. The natural promontory itself would have offered ample protection to the settlement (**Fig.7**).

The earliest houses of the Neolithic settlement at Byblos, for which no architectural traces remain, were basic shelters consisting of single-room houses and constructed over a stone foundation made from pebbles collected from riverbeds. These huts had

roofs made from tree branches, which were then plastered with mud. Afterwards, the inhabitants of Byblos began making floors made of crushed limestone. These floors were surrounded by low walls, typically consisting of one or two layers of stones. Bent poles were raised on these walls to support roofs constructed from branches and animal skins (Jedejian, 1968 : 10). Later, evidence of another settlement emerged with houses having floors made of beaten earth, rather than crushed limestone.

In summary, during the Early Neolithic period, rectangular houses/huts (4x 5.50 m or 2x4.50 m) were constructed with single-room layouts and lime-coated floors that were renewed up to six times (Figs. 9-11). The floors are not perfectly horizontal since they often slope in the direction of the terrain's incline (Dunand, 1973: 13). Progressing into the Middle Neolithic, architectural remains became rarer, characterized by single lime-coated floors within more complex funerary structures. The huts of the early Neolithic period became houses (Dunand, 1973: 126). These houses retained their rectangular shape but this time had earthen floors (Fig.12). Finally, in the late Neolithic period, large rectangular houses emerged, without coated floors (Fig.13) but this time the walls are constructed with sandstones and limestones (Dunand, 1973: 127). The houses are long and narrow and consist of several small cells arranged on either side of a single wall.

One of Neolithic Byblos most defining attributes was its simple house/huts constructed from stones and pebbles, rectangular in shape with a single-room layouts. These houses played a very important role in various aspects of the inhabitants life's covering mate-

rial, social and ritual dimensions. These houses were closely situated to one another with sometimes pathways in-between. People used these pathways to access their homes through an entrance in the longest side (Dunand, 1973: 10). All the houses found at Byblos followed a general layout. Within these houses, the interior floors served for a variety of activities, including sleeping and other domestic activities. Beneath these floors inhabitants buried their dead. Thick wooden posts were raised in the central room likely serving to reinforce the structure, create internal divisions of space and support the roof.

During the Chalcolithic period, these Neolithic houses/huts evolved into rectangular structures with rounded corners, eventually transitioning into circular houses unlike some other Near-Eastern sites where the transition followed the opposite pattern. However, in Çatalhöyük, similar to the Neolithic houses in Byblos, the houses maintained a rectangular shape and did not undergo a previous transition from circular to rectangular structures (Hodder, 2021). On the other hand, in contrast to Byblos, the houses in Çatalhöyük did not evolve into circular shapes.



Figure 9: Early Neolithic houses 22-48, 22-50, 28-11 in Byblos. Photo of Dunand 1973: Tome V: Plates, Pl. IX: 1.

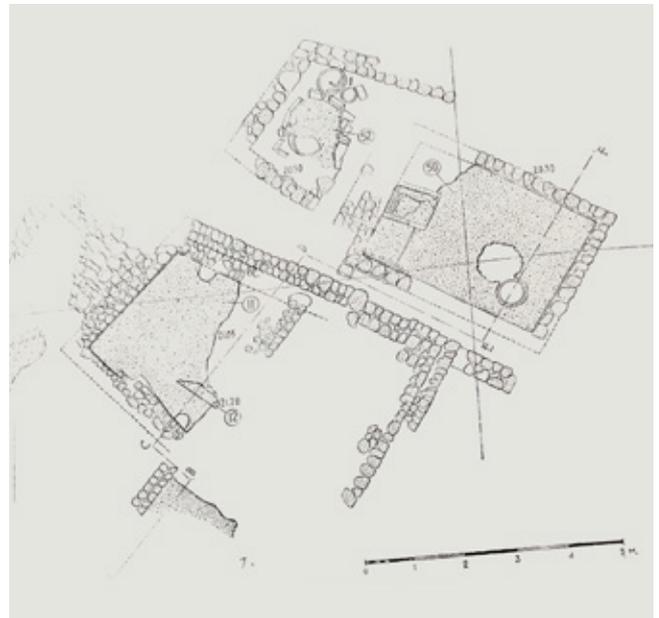


Figure 10: Early Neolithic houses 28-11 & 22-50 in Byblos (Plan of Dunand 1973: 26 – fig.10).

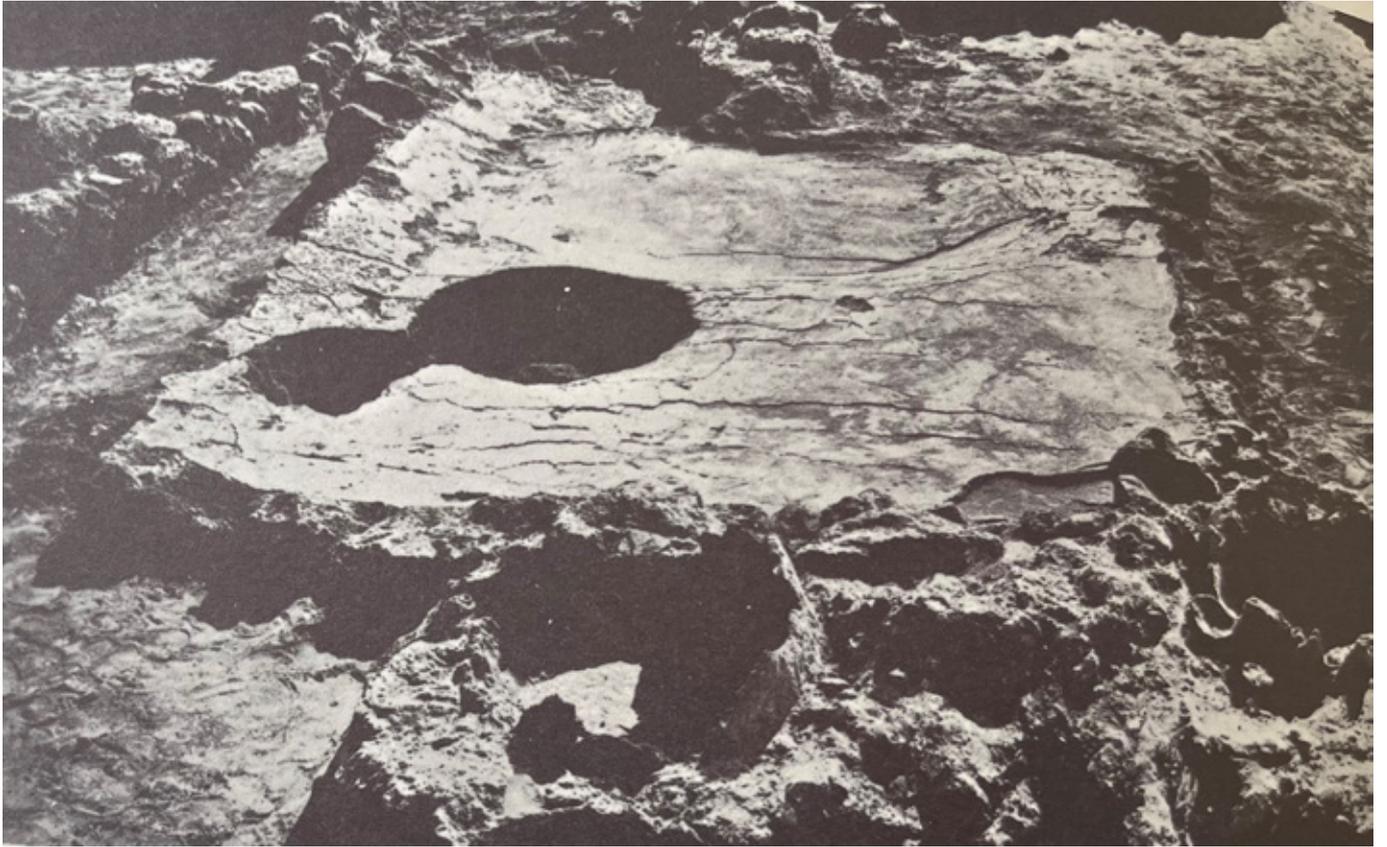


Figure 11:

Early Neolithic floor of house 22-51 in Byblos. Photo of Dunand 1973: Tome V: Plates, Pl. XIV: 3.



Figure 12:

Middle Neolithic house 46-17 in Byblos. Photo of Dunand 1973: Tome V: Plates, Pl. XXIII: 3.



Figure 13:

Late Neolithic house 15-35 in Byblos. Photo of Dunand 1973: Tome V: Plates, Pl. XXX: 4.

Life in Byblos During the Neolithic Period

Daily life in the Neolithic settlement of Byblos extended to the surrounding coastal and inland landscapes. To understand whether men and women shared similar lifestyles, it is imperative to conduct studies on ancient diets based on human skeletons. Additionally, investigating infant mortality rates and conducting anthropological analyses on human remains can provide insights into the overall health and well-being of the Neolithic population in Byblos.

In the village, stones gathered or piled up here and there, some low walls serving as benches. A grindstone and its handle for grinding grains, a small stony area for various tasks, and fire spots brought life to the surroundings of the dwellings. Rocks seemed to emerge almost everywhere, except on the flat areas and in the depressions where layers of red earth spread out (Dunand, 1973: 29).



Figure 14:

Reconstruction of two Neolithic women making pottery in Byblos (Image generated by Nada Elias through AI generation using Midjourney).



Figure 15:
Reconstruction of Neolithic man making flint tools in Byblos (Image generated by Nada Elias through AI generation using Midjourney).

Inhabitants of Byblos crafted tools from both flint and bone, in addition to fabricating pottery materials. These resources served not only practical purposes for subsistence but also enabled the creation of intricate objects, including anthropomorphic and animal engravings and ornaments. The flint used for these purposes was sourced from a nearby source at Ouadi el Banat, which contained open-space quarries.

Concerning pottery, the Early Neolithic period pottery was characterised by the simplicity of its shape. The predominant decoration, found on both light beige and occasionally dark pottery, featured scattered impressions created using a cardium shell (using the shell's back). These impressions covered the entire body of the pottery or, in the case of bowls, extended to the point where they met an incised line running parallel to the rim. As we transition to the Middle Neolithic period, pottery becomes notably more abundant and takes on more sophisticated shapes and decorations. Impressions on this pottery were made but not using cardium. In the Late Neolithic period, there is a stark shift in pottery style. It becomes significantly impoverished, devoid of gloss, linear designs, or impressed decorations (Figs.14, 17).

In the Early Neolithic, Dunand have unearthed several archaeological artefacts: White pottery crafted from a mixture of lime and silica, anthropomorphic incised

pebbles, mixture of lime and silica, anthropomorphic incised pebbles, offering glimpses into the artistic and symbolic expressions of this period. Advancing to the Middle Neolithic, Dunand discovered: anthropomorphic incised pebbles, demonstrating the persistence of symbolic themes. An unchanged bone industry, evidence to the sustained craftsmanship of this period. Transitioning to the Late Neolithic, Dunand revealed distinctive artefacts such as: Hard stone pendant seals, showcasing intricate craftsmanship and artistic sophistication. A selection of vessels and spherical basalt mace heads, indicating a diverse range of functional and ceremonial uses (Fig. 17).

When interpreting the socio-economic aspects of Early Neolithic tools, it becomes evident that the lithic industry of this era reflected the two primary activities within the village: agriculture and persistent hunting. This period saw the application of old practices with new ingenuity, enabling the adaptation of tools to a wide range of situations, thus granting greater flexibility (Cauvin, 1968: 93-94), (Figs.15- 17).

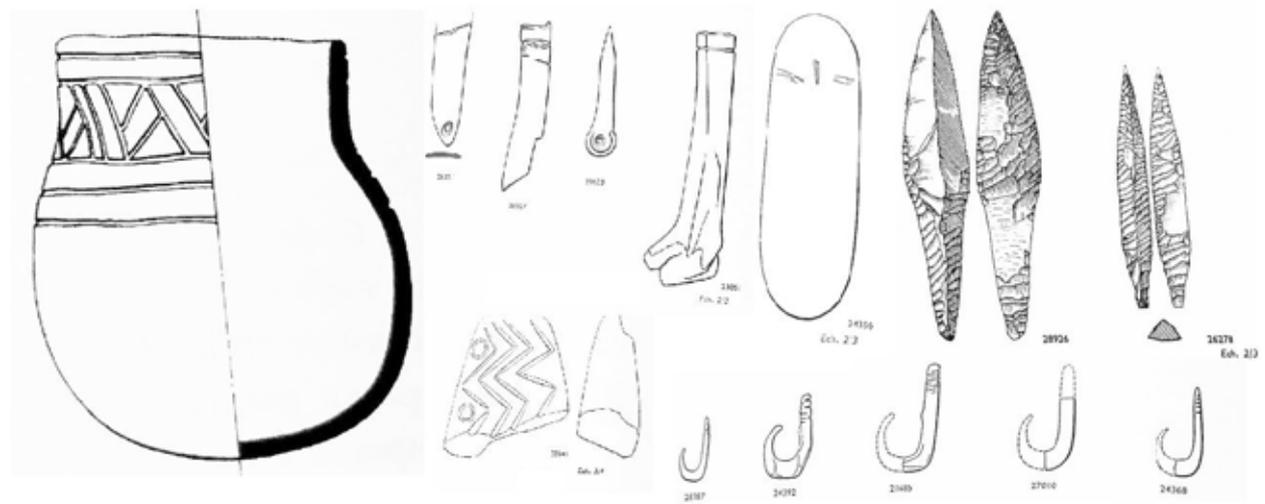
Transitioning into the Middle Neolithic, a remarkable 494 lithic tools were documented. This phase witnessed a typological explosion and a surge in creative tool-making. While the fundamental economy remained relatively consistent, centered on agriculture and hunting, there was a discernible technological advancement, likely attributed to increased mobility among human groups and intensified exchange networks. Remarkably, there were indications of specialisation in woodworking (Cauvin, 1968: 125).

In the Late Neolithic period, the limited availability of flint weapons is closely linked with the progression of animal domestication, marking a gradual shift away from hunting practices. Additionally, owing to the proximity of forests, there was a noticeable increase in artisanal wood exploitation.

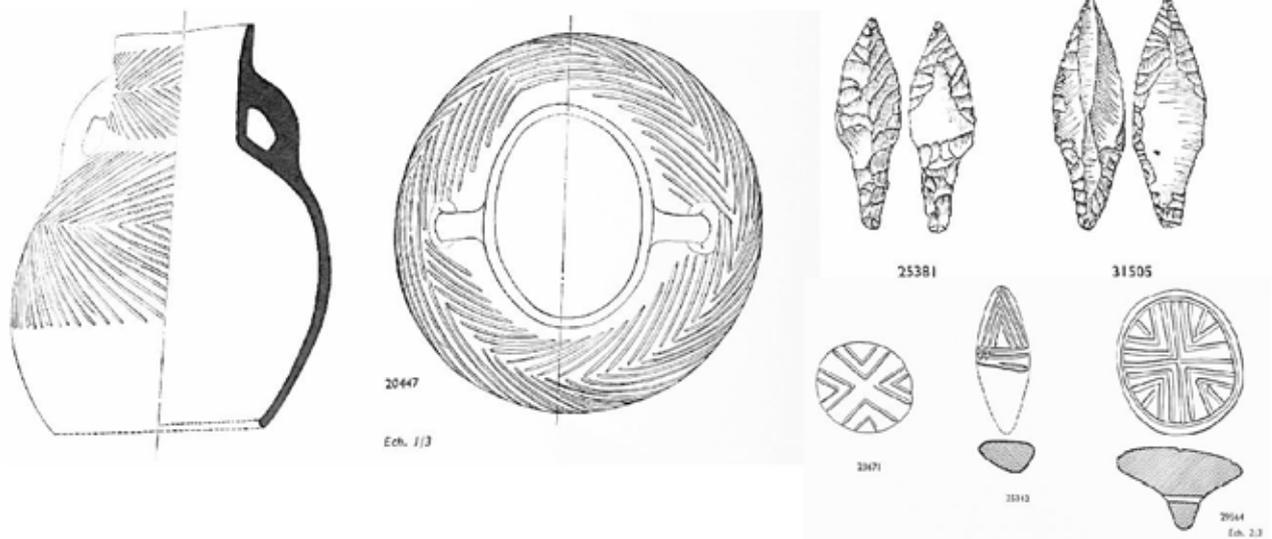
The bone industry indicated as well in all the neolithic division fishing activities. (Fig. 16,17).



Figure 16:
Reconstruction of Neolithic men fishing in Byblos (Image generated by Nada Elias through AI generation using Midjourney).



MIDDLE NEOLITHIC



LATE NEOLITHIC

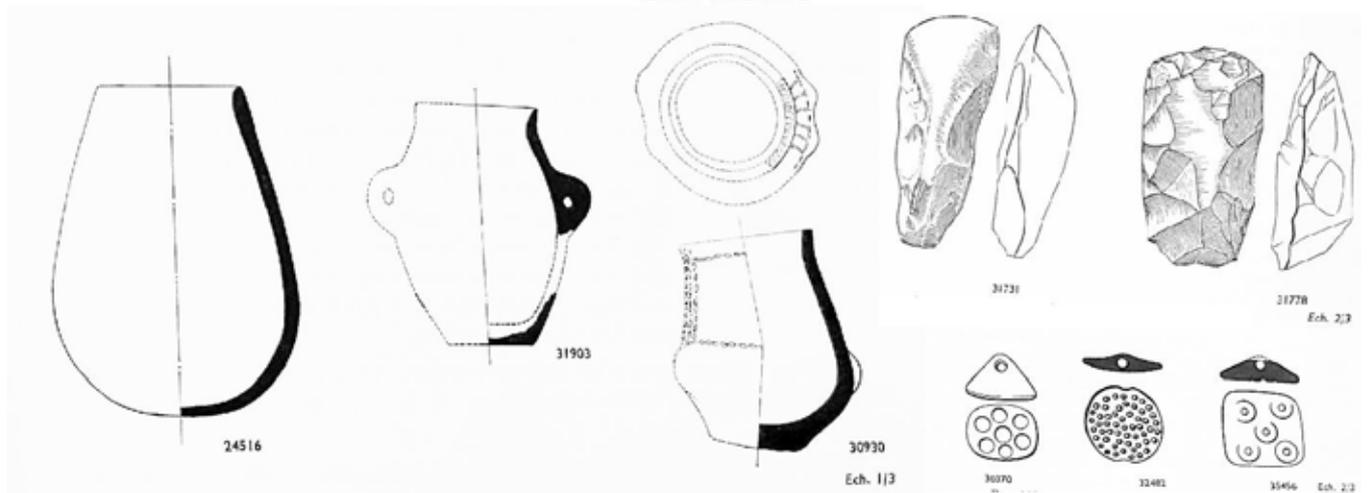


Figure 17: An assortment of the artefacts found at Byblos including flint and bone tools, incised pebbles and stamps (Dunand, 1973).

Death in Byblos During the Neolithic Period

Funerary practices include all the technical or ritual arrangements that a particular society or community takes when one of its members dies (Forest, 1983: 7). Each society or community has an organised funerary system according to symbolic codes which testify to its social structure and its religious beliefs. The prehistoric man began in the Pleistocene to bury his dead. But it is with *homo neanderthalensis* and *Homo sapiens* that complex funerary practices will emerge. These funerary practices and gestures indicate that prehistoric man wondered about the secrets of death and he began to invent rites to help him overcome the fatality of death following uncommon practices (Salamé-Sarkis, 2021: 72).

The funerary gestures of the Neolithic man indicate that he must have believed in some sort of life after death: Why would Man need funerary grave goods after death? Is this a belief in a "post-existence"? The presence of funerary grave goods probably implies a post-mortem survival (Leroi-Gourhan, 1964: 62-63, Eliade, 1984: 21). Why do most Neolithic burial positions and especially in Byblos resemble to a foetus (**Fig. 18**) within its mother's womb? This type of position suggests that death was probably considered as a new birth through the passage into the earth. Did these burials in the Near Eastern Neolithic took place under the houses and not far from the residences as currently? These funerary behaviours and gestures probably have a role that goes beyond material reality and falls within the framework of religious behaviours.

From the Natufian, passing through the Pre-pottery Neolithic A and B and continuing into the Pottery Neolithic and the Chalcolithic, more than thirty discovered Near Eastern Neolithic sites contained burials under the floors of houses (Anatolia, Northern Levant, Southern Levant, Iraqi Jezirah and Cyprus), (**Fig.1**). These burials are part of the domestic setting. However, during the early PPNB, there were also specific spaces devoted to burials, such as special houses and structures with a collective function. Then, during the recent PPNB, funerary spaces were also set up outside residences in several Near Eastern sites.

Answering questions about funerary practices in Byblos is not always evident, especially when consid-



Figure 18:

Medical illustration of a foetus within its mother's womb (courtesy to Jonathan Dimes for BabyCenter).

ring questions related to the gender of the deceased or the relationship between houses and burials. In fact, two types of studies are required in order to answer these questions. The first approach requires a comprehensive and in-depth review of the Dunand archive to investigate the relationship between houses and burials. It is essential not only to examine the architectural type of the burials but also, in the case of burials discovered within the houses, to determine whether they are foundation burials deposited during the construction phase of the houses or burials made inside the houses during their occupation or even burials deposited during the abandonment of the houses. Additionally, an archaeoethanatomical analysis is needed to reconstruct the initial placement of the deceased and determine if there were any decayed containers or soft wrappings involved. The second approach should be biological, at the very least to estimate the age at death and determine the gender of the deceased, enabling us to discuss whether any funerary practices are associated with age and gender. Nonetheless, the review of Dunand's published excavations in Byblos has provided some insights into the general aspects of Neolithic funerary practices in the area. Still, as mentioned, further post-excavation work is necessary to paint a complete picture of Byblos' Neolithic funerary practices and the biological characteristics of these communities.

During the Early Neolithic, the deceased remained within the community, actively participating in its life. They were buried in close proximity to the houses, ensuring that the graves were just deep enough not to disturb the living or attract scavengers like hyenas. Upon their death, some people were buried also under the floors of houses. The bodies were often tightly bound in a flexed position and placed in a simple grave with few or no artefacts. There were 33 primary single burials discovered and divided in three types:

Graves Dug in the Soil with no visible container (21 burials):

These burials showed no preferred orientation. The individuals were buried in a foetal position, with the skeleton hyper flexed, lying on their left side, hands brought to the chest, and knees at the level of the abdomen. Some of these burials contained grave goods such as flint hatchets or knives or incised decorative pottery bowls. It is important to do archaeotha-

natological analyses in order to reconstruct the initial inhumation microcosm inside these burials and to reconstruct the type of perishable container or soft envelope if it existed.

Stone Cradle Burials (7 burials):

Then, a new burial practice was introduced, involving cradle or cist graves (**Fig.19**). The deceased were placed in semi-flexed or flexed positions within cradles constructed from upright stones. This suggests a more careful approach to the disposal of the deceased (Jidejian, 1968: 10). Stone cradle burials contained a pavement made of small stones, roughly the size of two fists, typically surrounded by a row of more or less spherical stones measuring around 15 to 20 cm in their largest dimension. The skeletons within these burials were positioned similarly to those in soil graves but were often accompanied by more elaborate grave goods, including ornaments and pottery vessels (Dunand, 1973: 30).

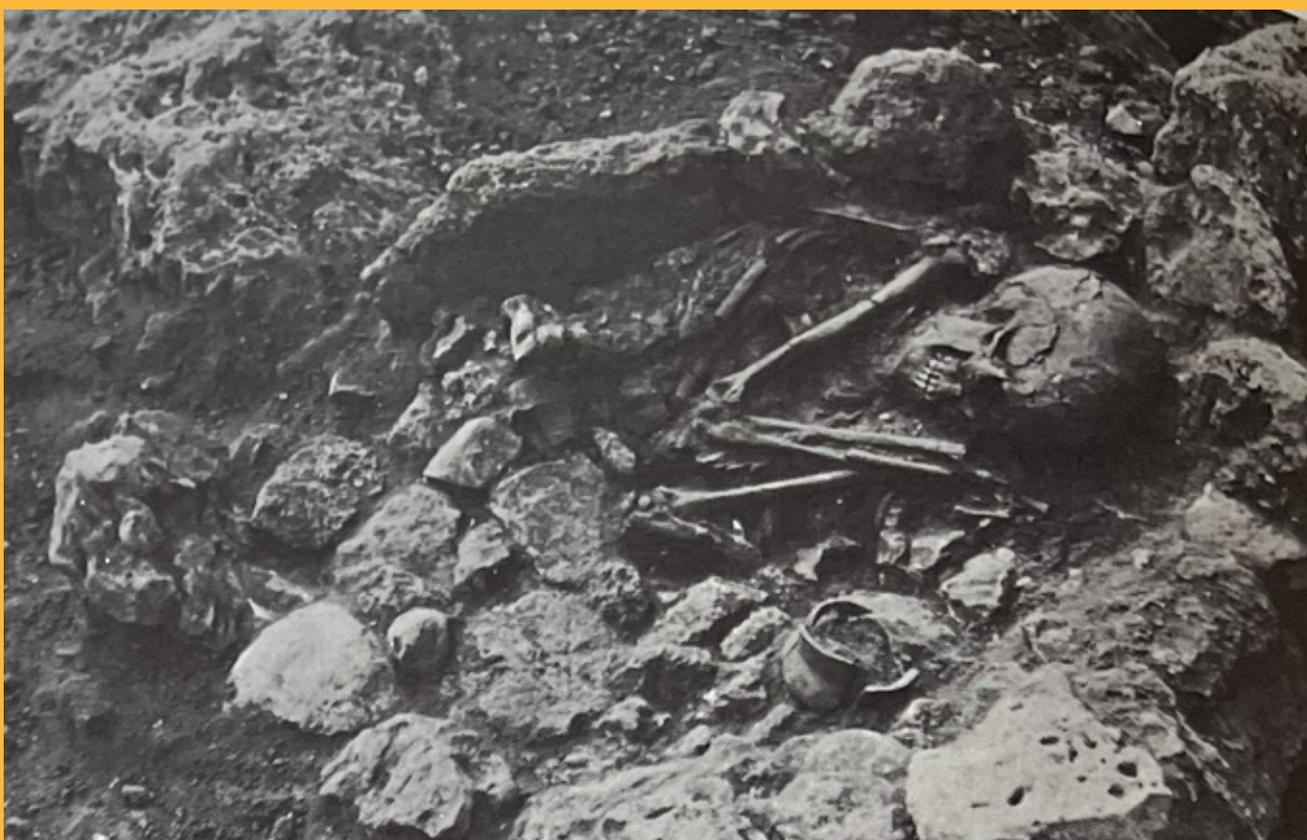


Figure 19:

Stone Cradle Burials (courtesy to Dunand, 1973: Pl. XXXVI - 1).

Pottery Jar Burials for Immature Individuals:

Only five burials of this type were discovered in the earliest settlement, and they were exclusively reserved for children. For example, burial 682 was a large jar with incised decoration, although incomplete, resting on a small fragment of a coated floor. This jar contained the well-preserved skeleton of a new-born. In another example, in the eastern part of dwelling 22-51, a new-born was buried with a globular vase decorated with cardium motifs.

Funerary practices discussion during the Early Neolithic period:

The presence of grave goods in some burials revealed that these early Neolithic people had already organized their concept of an afterlife. Just as in their earthly existence, they believed that nourishment and protection were necessary, hence the presence of amulets and ornaments in the graves. The living were obligated to assist the deceased, making their existence in the afterlife more comfortable and preventing them from returning, either in spirit or otherwise. This belief nurtured an emotional communion between the living and the dead, keeping them united within the same community (Dunand, 1973: 32).

During the Middle Neolithic, similar to the earliest settlement, various types of graves were discovered, including those dug in the ground with no visible containers, stone cradle burials, and pottery jar burials. However, their proportional distribution is not uniform.

Additionally, they seem to be more densely grouped (Dunand, 1973: 98). The total number of these burials includes 26 single and multiple burials, in addition to a collective funerary building.

Graves Dug in the Soil with no visible container (2 types):

Two types of this burials were discovered; the isolated burials (11 burials) and the burials associated with building 46-14, to which Dunand attributed religious significance (Dunand, 1973: 99).

The isolated graves consist of 11 burials of adults and children. They are either primary single burials with each, an individual resting either on his side or sometimes on his back but in a strongly flexed position with his hands in front of his face (**Fig. 20**). Alternatively, multiple burials were discovered as well. Inside these multiple burials, the presence of reburied skulls next to the primary single deceased was attested as is the case with burial 1696.

In the funerary building 46-14, Dunand uncovered 7 single burials containing complete individuals, as well as two single burials with individuals missing their skulls. Furthermore, in room 14, collective burials were discovered. According to Dunand, these are associated with consecration or propitiatory rites (Dunand, 1973: 100). Dunand Archive need to be explored in details in order to study the number of individuals buried in this structure and to understand its function.



Figure 20:

Single burial 1736 with a grave dug in the soil, the individual is buried laying on his left side, hyperflexed with no visible container but associated with pottery grave goods (courtesy to Dunand, 1973: Pl. XL - 1).

Stone Cradle Burials (3 burials):

Three burials with a circular-shaped grave and stone cradles were discovered as well during the middle Neolithic. They are primary single burials of an adult, an adolescent and a child.

Pottery Jar Burials for Immature Individuals (15 burials):

This type of burial practice would expand during this period but was exclusively reserved for immature

individuals. These were small jars intended for new-borns and children. They were discovered in the eastern part of station 46. The jars are placed upright or at an angle and typically contain very young children, especially new-borns. The position of the bodies is somewhat vertical, resembling a foetal position (**Fig. 21**). This delicate treatment of children likely had the primary purpose of protecting and sheltering them, placing them in a container that resembled the secure environment of a mother's womb, with the hope of a new birth in an afterlife.



Figure 21:

Reconstruction of Neolithic pottery jar burial containing the remains of a new-born in Byblos (Image generated by Nada Elias through AI generation using Midjourney).

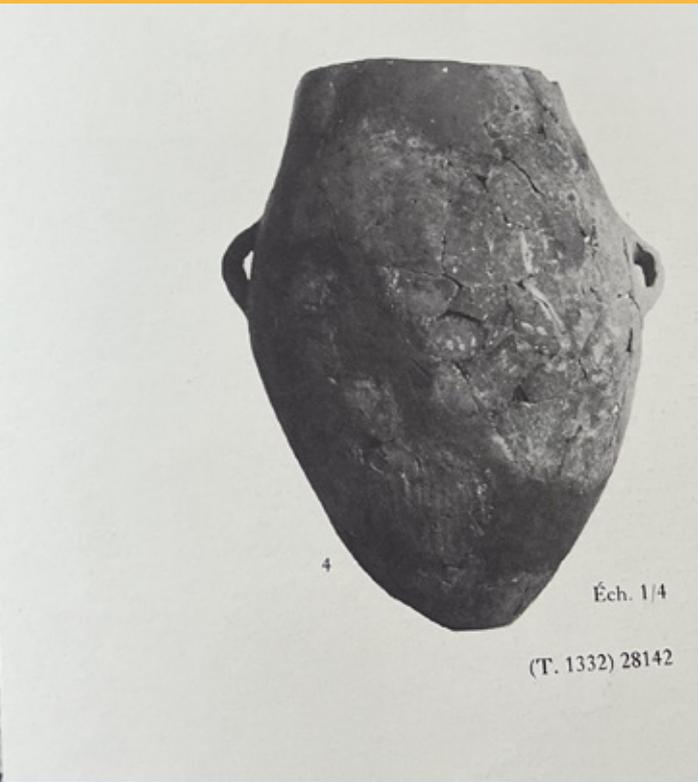


Figure 22:

Single burial of a child in a pottery jar (1332), (courtesy to Dunand, 1973: Pl. XLI – 3-4).

During the Late Neolithic, 19 burials were exhumed mostly, burials in circular graves, without visible containers. There are no cradle burials, but we have examples of the deceased placed on a simple pavement of stones without borders or in a stone enclosure without pavements. We lack information about their stratigraphy and locations, except that the deceased were buried in the same area as the Late Neolithic dwellings on the southern part of the high hill:

Graves Dug in the Soil with no visible container (6 burials):

Only six burials were discovered, and on top of one of them, a small enclosure of upright flat stones was set up to mark the location of the burial and thus serve as a reminder of the deceased to the living (Dunand, 1973: 136). These single burials contained adults and children, always in a hyper-flexed position, sometimes with lithic or ceramic artefacts.

Stone pavement Burials (1 burial):

One individual was buried on a rough stone pavement. The grave goods were 14 lithic tools and three shells and an incised pebble.

Burial surrounded by stones (4 burials):

Four burials of this type were excavated and dates back to the late Neolithic period. For instance, burial 1870 consists of a rectangular stone enclosure measuring 0.91 meters in length and 0.60 meters in width, upon which an adult was placed in a hyperflexed position facing east, with the right knee toward the stomach and hands toward the face. In the case of burial 1253, on the other hand, the stone enclosure has an elliptical shape measuring 1.25 meters along the major axis. In other examples, the arrangement of these stones has a circular plan (Dunand, 1973: 136).

Pottery Jar Burials for Immature Individuals (9 burials):

This type of burial practice continued to be used during this period but remained exclusively reserved for immature individuals. These were small jars intended for new-borns, one of these pottery jars is only 20 cm high and buried vertically (Burial 1382). The maximum height of these jars was 40 cm, allowing only children to be placed inside them (**Fig. 22**). This funerary rite would persist and evolve into the Chalcolithic period, eventually allowing adults to benefit from these containers in the following periods.

Conclusion

The Neolithic house at Byblos includes a big part of social life of its occupants. This rectangular huts/houses constructed of stones consists of a single room in the earliest period or several lateral storage rooms with a living space in the late Neolithic. This single room served as the centre for almost the majority of social activities, whether culinary activities or social and resting activities.

Burial activities sometimes took place in the house, especially beneath the floors reserved for sitting and sleeping, while at other times, they occurred between houses, in abandoned spaces.

The practice of inhumation inside houses during their occupation is a practice widely expanded in the Near-East and was also attested in Byblos during the Neolithic period (6900 – 5700. BC.). The dead were buried in stone cradles and children in pottery jars inside rectangular houses (Artin, 2005: 12, 175, 195). It lasted during the Chalcolithic (4500-3000 cal. BP), but this time the adult and immature individuals were buried inside jars in the floor of oval houses (Artin, 2005 : 12-13, 175).



Figure 23: Reconstruction of Neolithic man grieving over a burial in Byblos (Image generated by Nada Elias through AI generation using Midjourney).



Figure 24: Reconstruction of a daily life scene from the Neolithic settlement of Byblos (Image generated by Nada Elias through AI generation using Midjourney).

So, sometimes the funerary space in Neolithic Byblos was a "domestic" space as it is situated within the dwelling, in association with the living. The deceased occupied the lower space of the houses simultaneously with the living occupying the upper space. This funerary space is accessible through the floor of each house. It was opened, sealed, and repaired with each burial. Burial was, therefore, a social act taking place within the house, much like childbirth. This proximity of the dead to the living makes death more acceptable, as this closeness provides comfort, with the living sleeping above the dead, and the dead ones remaining closely in the memory of the place (Elias, 2023).

However, in an earlier period, there was a desire to bury the dead in a dedicated place. These locations were discovered beneath the old houses. In this case, the term "cemetery" can be used, or rather "foundation burials," as this Neolithic funerary space is highly reserved and fragmented. Houses were built over these previous burial spaces. Furthermore, after the abandonment of houses, another type of burial is attested. The abandoned houses sometimes served as a burial site. Nevertheless, at Byblos, the living and the dead together contribute to the organization of space.

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