Middle Arabian Pastoral

**ABSOLUTE TIME PERIOD:** 5750–4200 B.P. (Chalcolithic-EB III)

**RELATIVE TIME PERIOD:** Follows the Early Arabian Pastoral tradition and precedes the Late Arabian Pastoral tradition.

**LOCATION:** Arabian Peninsula.

**DIAGNOSTIC MATERIAL ATTRIBUTES:** The distinction between Early Arabian Pastoral (hereafter EAP) and Middle Arabian Pastoral (hereafter MAP) is largely artificial, but can be supported on the basis of a marked reduction in the lithic inventory, accompanied by the concomitant rise in copper and bronze production. The end of the MAP however is clear. By 4200–4000 B.P., a major ecological, sociopolitical change is evident. These events and trends are tied to the demise of Old Kingdom Egypt (2181 B.C.), the Early Bronze Age Canaanite city states (ca. 2100 B.C.), and Akkad/Ur III Mesopotamia (2200–2004 B.C.) (see Late Arabian Pastoral [LAP] entry).

**REGIONAL SUBTRADITIONS:** These are vague and difficult to define (see Dever 1971 for traditions in the Negev/Sinai based on ceramic typology). A rather arbitrary division can stress relations with the Levant (western zone) versus an eastern zone with closer ties to Mesopotamia.

**IMPORTANT SITES:** These include Bir Resisim in the Negev, Rajajil (and the possible contemporaneous Wadi Sirhan sites) in North Saudi Arabia, Jawa in Jordan, and Khirbet el Umbashi/Hebariye in southern Syria. (For important southern Arabian sites, see the Late Arabian Pastoral [LAP] entry).

**CULTURAL SUMMARY**

**Environment**

**Climate.** During the early part of the period, conditions described for the EAP largely apply. However, during the latter part, in gradual stages, dessication set in as the summer monsoon system (Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone [ITCZ]) weakened and moved southward towards its more present location. Bronze Age societies of the MAP were eventually faced with alternative solutions for remaining in the Arabian peninsula. The percentage of insolation and rainfall (from 300 mm–250 mm annually to under 50 mm) decreased annually for most of the region during a 200–300 year period.

**Topography.** The topography of the region during the MAP was much the same with the western shield area, two large sand deserts (but now with increasingly drier lakes), and a large limestone plain (dikakaka/hamad). The major river systems of the EAP (Batin/Rimah,
Sahba, Dawasir, Hadramaut/Jowf/Masilah) now become ephemeral and choked with silt. (For the geology, see EAP.)

**Biota.** The EAP fauna and flora continue into the MAP period but as drier conditions began to prevail (see for example, the parallel conditions in the larger Sahara and Pharaonic Egypt itself, Marcolongo 1987), xeric grasses became more dominant (see the Nafud study by Schulz and Whitney 1986). Additionally, domestic EAP animals increasingly came under stress. Areas with specialized bovid domestication disappeared (except in the southernmost portion of the peninsula). MAP populations gradually placed a greater reliance on domestic goat as a food resource. Domestic *E. asinus* (donkey) was phased out in favor of the dromedary (*C. dromedarius*). The horse, *E. caballus*, introduced to northern MAP populations by the mid-third millennium B.C., has remained a prestige animal to the present day.

**Settlements**

MAP sites are not significantly different from EAP sites except in number and location. Houses and settlements still use the interlocking style with stone foundations. Larger aggregate sites are more complex (winter) and smaller homesteads are simpler in size and complexity (summer). Detailed surveys, particularly in settlements still use the interlocking style with stone foundations. Larger aggregate sites are more complex (winter) and smaller homesteads are simpler in size and complexity (summer). Detailed surveys, particularly in the Negev/Sinai, have shown that by far the largest number of sites are attributed to the EB IV (ca. 2100 B.C.). This pattern could be interpreted as suggestive of greater mobility caused by increasing dessication and soil erosion.

MAP populations begin to encounter a changed landscape. In Mesopotamia itself, settlements were affected by increased dessication. Populations gradually left small village life (usually found near small canals, river oases, and swamps) and created larger urban entities along more reliable larger streams (Late Uruk-Ur III periods). In the Levant, the opposite happened to EB I–III city states. Greater environmental stress led to lower agricultural production, and eventually the towns found themselves reduced greatly in number and size as populations dispersed. In Egypt, dessication created a significantly lower Nile flow. The ultimate cause of this phenomena was the southern retreat of the ITCZ in stages between the Nagada II period (ca. 3600 B.C.) and the end of the Old Kingdom (VI Dynasty, ca. 2180 B.C.). In all of these cases, an urban landscape was created (between 3000–2100 B.C.), which differed significantly from the earlier farming villages and towns. The concomitant changes in social stratification, trade relations, and social interaction, not only affected them, but the MAP populations of Arabia as well.

**Suggested Readings**


**SITES**

**Jawa**

TIME PERIOD: 5000–3700 B.P.

LOCATION: The HarrajWidyan zone of eastern Jordan/western Iraq, southern Syria, and northern Saudi Arabia. Jawa itself is to be found in the northern part of the eastern arm of Jordan (Harrat al Rajil). The site’s largest extent occurs in the Chalcolithic with smaller occupation phases in the MB I (LAP).

**DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY**

Jawa is found in the basaltic zone of eastern Jordan and its peculiar setting has created erosional wadis, as