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TELL EL-'UMEIRI, 1994 AND 1996:
POTTERY FROM A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE BURIAL CAVE

A very representative assemblage of pottery vessels was found among burial gifts in the MB II C burial cave on the southeastern slope of Tell el-'Umeiri. The cave was excavated during two seasons, in 1994 and 1996, by an expedition from the Madaba Plains Project.

The excavations at Tell el-'Umeiri revealed a fortified city dated from Middle Bronze Age II; an analysis of the pottery shows that the occupation of the tell is contemporaneous with the use of the cave. Another MB II tomb was found half a kilometer southeast of the tell.

Middle Bronze Age pottery from the Transjordan is still very little known. Some settlements have been identified during surveys undertaken in recent decades, but only a few have been excavated. Several more burials have been investigated, but most of them are still unpublished. For many years, scholars have accepted the results of a survey made by Glueck in the 1930s, claiming that

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3 Unpublished. see: M. Waheeb, G. Palumbo, Salvage Excavations at a Bronze Age Cemetery near Tell el-'Umeiri, ADAJ XXXVII, 1993, pp.147-163.

the Transjordan was unoccupied during Middle and Late Bronze Ages. The investigations of recent years have completely changed this picture: during the second millennium B.C. this area belonged to a unified Canaanite culture. In spite of the high degree of uniformity in this culture, there always exist certain regionalisms, but our knowledge of these in the Transjordan is still very modest.

The pottery vessels from the cave were compared primarily with stratified deposits coming from neighboring sites. This is a very typical group for Palestine. It consists of 15 vessels, among which are forms known from burial contexts: bowls, jars, jugs, juglets, lamp, and stand.

The platter bowl (No. 1) has no exact parallels; a similar rim form, coming from an unstratified context, was found at the tell. Such features as the plain rim and everted external edge come from a MB IIB context, and increase in frequency in MB IIC.

The carinated bowls (Nos. 2 and 3) are only partially preserved, which makes it more difficult to identify parallels. Similar bowls were found at the tell. They are made of thin ware, and belong to the family of white-slipped vessels attested in MB IIC and LB I contexts. Bowl No. 2 has a ring base, most typical for MB IIC, while No. 3, with its concave disc base, fits better into the LB I period.

Medium and small-sized jars (Nos. 4, 5, and 6) belong to an assemblage, all of which have two handles attached below the shoulders. The similar flaring and everted rim forms of our No. 4 and No. 5 can be compared with the finds at the tell. Such very simple rims are spread across a very broad chronological range: they are known from MB IIB and MB IIC contexts.

There are four jugs in our assemblage. Nos. 9 and 10, with their rim-to-shoulder handles and rims inverting slightly at the lips, are common throughout the late MB period. No exact parallels have been found. A similar jug/jar rim form

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8 J. D. Seger, The Pottery of Palestine at the Close of the East Gate at Shechem, Levant VI, 1974, Fig. 3: 23, 5: 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 6: 37, A. W. McNicoll et al., Pella in Jordan 2, Mediterranean Archaeology Supplement 2, Sydney 1992, Pl. 35.10.
10 R. Amiran, Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land, Jerusalem 1969, Pl. 49: 1-4; Seger, The Pottery, Fig. 3: 30; McNicoll, Pella, Pl. 35: 12.
12 Herr, Field C, Fig. 5.12: 5.6.
13 Herr, Field C, Fig. 5.12: 7.
14 Cole, Shechem I, Pl. 40: d.m.
15 Seger, The Pottery, Fig. 5: 31; 6: 13; McNicoll, Pella, Pl. 34: 14, 15.
16 Seger, The Pottery, Fig. 3: 28, 32; McNicoll et al., Pella, Pl. 34: 9.
was found at the tell. The pinched lip and the body of No.10 resemble our dipper juglets (see below). Shoulder-handled jugs with ring-bases (Nos. 7, 8) are very popular throughout the MB II B-C and LB I periods. Our white-slipped jug (No.8), painted in reddish-brown, has many parallels. A painted jug rim fragment is known from the tell. Painted decoration becomes popular with the end of the MB II period, and increases in popularity in the LB I period. The decoration, which covers the shoulders, the handle, and, probably, the lip (missing), is executed in metope-style.

Dipper juglets (Nos. 11-13) enjoy a long history throughout the Middle and Late Bronze Age. Our specimens, with their shortened bodies, straight narrow necks, and well-defined shoulders, are standard LB IA forms. Most of the juglets - and this is the case with two of our vessels - are white-slipped. Such forms have been attested in MB IIC assemblages as well.

The oil lamp with a single slightly pinched spout (No.14) is a typical form for the MB IIB-C and LB I periods. It is also known from the tell.

The pedestal base (No.15), white-slipped, possibly from a carinated bowl or a goblet, is familiar from the MB II B-C period; they are also attested in LB I contexts. A similar base is known from the tell.

It is worth mentioning that some of the vessels – one bowl (No. 3), one jar (No. 6) and two shoulder-handle jugs (Nos. 7 and 8) – were found with their necks broken. They were probably trampled in the fill and ruined while the cave was in use. Another solution might be that they were broken intentionally before an offering. One dipper juglet (No. 13) was found inside a jar (No. 6); these two vessels were offered together. The pedestal base (No. 15) was worked, and probably served as a stand for one of the dipper juglets.

We may safely assume that the pottery from our assemblage does not fall within a narrow chronological range. More indicative potsherds are missing, and there are no imported vessels. Most of the forms are consistent with the MB IIB-C and LB I periods. The lack of such forms as piriform and cylindrical juglets, the presence of white/cream slip (10 vessels covered with different shades of light slip), as well as disc and pedestal bases, indicate that the best date for this assemblage would be the very end of the Middle Bronze Age. The lack of

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17 Herr, The Pottery, Fig. 19.19: 2.
19 Herr, The Pottery, Fig. 19.19: 3.
20 Amir, Ancient Pottery, Pl. 49: 9; Ph.155; McGovern, The Late Bronze, Fig. 19:2; Fischer, Tall Abu, Pl. 8: 1,3.
21 Amir, Ancient Pottery, Pl.46: 8; McGovern, The Late Bronze, Fig.19: 11; S. J. Bourke et al., Preliminary Report on the University of Sydney’s Fourteenth Season of Excavations at Pella (Tabaqaṭ Fahl) in 1992, ADJ, 1994, Pl. 17:6.
23 Herr, The Pottery, Fig. 19.19: 16.
24 Seger, The Pottery, Fig. 3: 17.
25 McGovern, The Late Bronze, Fig. 23: 43.
26 Herr, The Pottery, Fig. 19.19: 17.
imported vessels seems to indicate that the use of the cave does not extend to the LB I period. We cannot, however, exclude this possibility, especially in view of the presence of such features as metope-style decoration and the shape of the dipper juglets. The large quantity of vessels with white/cream slip would confirm the thesis that the Transjordan was a center for their production.

The assemblage from the cave burial is indistinguishable from the Canaanite ware used throughout Palestine in the middle of the second millennium B.C.

**CATALOGUE**


\(^ {27} \) colours according to Munsell Soil Color Charts, New York 1990.


Fig. 1. Tell el-Umeiri. Pottery, Nos 1-3.
Fig. 2. Tell el-Umeiri. Pottery, Nos 4-6.
Fig. 3. Tell el-Umeiri. Pottery, Nos 7-10.
Fig. 4. Tell el-Umeiri. Pottery, Nos 11-15.