

## *Soundings at Khirbat Al-Karak in Israel*

The resumption of Oriental Institute excavations in Israel in 1963 was made possible by a grant under Public Law No. 87-843 from the Counterpart Funds which have accumulated in that country. When the moneys of this grant became available early in July 1963, Professor Helene J. Kantor and the writer terminated their campaign in Chogha Mish in Khuzestan and transferred their activities to the site of Khirbat al-Karak (Beth Yerah), where the writer had conducted excavations in the season of 1952/53. At that time, in addition to clearing a Byzantine church (now published), we reached virgin soil in a small trench on the east slope of the site facing the Sea of Galilee. The material from that trench was of the Early Bronze Age and presented certain problems concerning the date of the earliest occupation of this very large site. The aim of the new expedition was, then, to concentrate as much as possible on the early occupations and to determine the extent and the time of each on the site as a whole. The season lasted from mid-July until the end of September. In addition to Dr. Kantor and the writer, the staff consisted of Mr. R. Dornemann, a graduate student in the Department of Oriental Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, and a number of Israeli archeologists and students. The trench of the 1953 season was enlarged, and a similar trench was dug on the western slope of the site facing the ancient bed of the river Jordan. Three soundings were located at carefully selected points elsewhere on the site.

The results of this short campaign exceeded our best expectations, for in all the trenches and test pits virgin soil was reached. To our surprise, no extensive architectural remains of the Hellenistic, Roman, or Byzantine periods were encountered. Everywhere we found evidence of Early Bronze Age occupation relatively near the modern surface (discounting disturbances

caused by deep plowing, leveling of the ground for planting, trenches dug for water pipes, etc.). In terms of absolute levels, that is, of height above the mean level of the Sea of Galilee or below the level of the Mediterranean, virgin soil was reached rather higher than expected, an indication that the earliest settlements were founded on a fairly high natural hillock.

The earliest remains were those of the earliest phase of the Early Bronze Age (some of it formerly considered Chalcolithic). Pottery of the later phases (Early Bronze II and III) was found stratified above these earliest deposits. A most interesting observation was that, while the earliest phase (Early Bronze I) was represented in all our soundings, the last phase (Early Bronze III), which is characterized by the famous "Khirbat Karak ware" (highly polished black-and-red pottery which was named after the site), was absent or rare in the northernmost soundings.

The presence of Early Bronze I pottery in all our soundings, as well as in all other excavations which have been conducted on the site, led us to conclude tentatively that this was the period of most extensive occupation. Should the same phenomenon be discovered in further soundings, this conclusion will be substantiated. Since Khirbat al-Karak is one of the largest sites in the whole region, covering an area of over fifty acres, the proportions of such a settlement might even justify its classification as a "city." The knowledge of the existence of a city at such an early date and the possibility of examining its features would be of exceptional importance for the understanding of the cultural history of the region as a whole.

In addition to the soundings at Khirbat al-Karak, the expedition, at the request of the Director of Antiquities of Israel, cleared an Early Bronze Age tomb at Nahal Tabor (Wadi

Bira). The most interesting, nearly complete, objects from that tomb belong to exactly the same period as the early occupation levels at Khirbat al-Karak, where the pottery is extremely fragmentary. We requested that the whole area of the Early Bronze Age cemetery at Nahal Tabor be included in our concession for the summer of 1964.

The finds from Khirbat al-Karak, mostly pottery, have reached the Institute and are being unpacked and classified in preparation for preliminary publication.

At several points on Khirbat al-Karak soil resistivity tests were conducted so that we could determine whether this method would be useful under the local conditions. Narrow, deep trenches were dug with the aid of a mechanical ditchdigger and substantial stone walls were, indeed, encountered at or near the spots indicated by the electrical resistivity graph. Further and more extensive tests were planned for the summer.

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