



Khirbet Kerak Publication Project

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The 1982-1983 academic year was the inaugural year for the Khirbet Kerak publication project. Khirbet Kerak (ancient Beth Yerah) is a site of approximately fifty acres located at the southwestern corner of the Sea of Galilee. The site guards the exit of the Jordan River from the Sea of Galilee. Khirbet Kerak was a large and thriving city throughout most of the third millennium B.C. The remains of this Early Bronze Age city were the focus of an archaeological project sponsored by the Oriental Institute in 1963 and 1964 and directed by Professor P. P. Delougaz. Professor Delougaz also directed the first phase of excavations at Khirbet Kerak in 1952. In the 1952 season the Oriental Institute team concentrated its work on the well-preserved Byzantine Church located at the northern portion of the tell. This church was fully published in OIP 85, *A Byzantine Church at Khirbat al Karak*.

The Khirbet Kerak publication project is designed for the complete publication of the material recovered from the 1963-1964 excavation seasons. Although there is some Persian and Hellenistic material from those seasons, the bulk of the pottery and objects which are now being processed dates to the Early Bronze Age. In many of the trenches Early Bronze Age remains lay just below the surface, and in some cases the third millennium deposits were as much as seven meters thick. We are fortunate to have a complete stratigraphic sequence that spans the entire period from EB I through EB III. A study of this sequence enables us to place the relative chronology of northern Palestine during the third millennium on a much firmer footing. Much recent work has been done in southern Palestine on this period through excavations at Bab edh Dhra, Arad, Lahav, and Tell el Hesi, and in central Palestine at Ai. Little has been done in northern Palestine, however, since the two extensive excavations in the 1920's and 1930's at Megiddo and Beth Shan, so the presentation of the Khirbet Kerak material becomes all the more crucial.

Khirbet Kerak has yielded some of the most diagnostic ceramic types for each of the three major subdivisions of the Early Bronze Age. During the Early Bronze Age I period one of the most distinctive



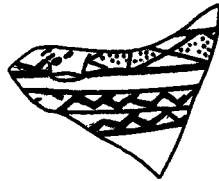
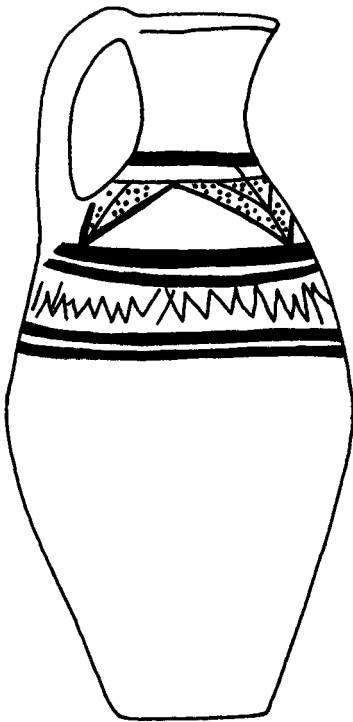
Gray burnished ware bowl BY III 5 from Khirbet Kerak. Early Bronze Age I.

chronological indicators of northern Palestine was Gray Burnished Ware. Gray Burnished Ware appeared in most of the trenches that reached the Early Bronze Age I levels, and in one case a large Gray Burnished Ware bowl was found *in situ* on the floor of a small circular Early Bronze I house (see fig. 1). During the Early Bronze II period the relative chronology of Palestine becomes firmly linked to that of Egypt for the first time. Syro-Palestinian jugs, decorated with a distinctive pattern of dotted triangles and wavy lines, appear for the first time in Egyptian tombs of the First Dynasty near Sakkarah in Lower Egypt and Abydos in Upper Egypt (see fig. 2). Several sherds painted in this distinctive style (Light Faced Painted Ware) have also been recovered from Khirbet Kerak in stratified contexts.

One of the most important diagnostic types for the Early Bronze III period is a distinctive assemblage of vessels that are named after the site itself. Khirbet Kerak Ware forms a significant percentage of the pottery types found at the site in the EB III period. It has been discovered in quantity at least as far north as the Amuq in northern Syria. Khirbet Kerak Ware is mainly limited to sites in northern Palestine. There is little doubt that the appearance of this ware, so different in decoration and construction techniques from the standard local ceramic repertoire, indicates the movement of a group of “Khirbet Kerak folk” from northern Syria into northern Palestine by the middle of the third millennium. We are sure that this ware was not simply imported as the result of trade, both because of the large quantities found at the site, and because we have what was clearly their “kitchen” ware. The knobbed lids of their cooking pots and their portable cooking hearths with distinctive anthropomorphic features

make it certain that we are dealing with a new group of people. Culinary practices as indicators of cultural boundaries sometimes are most helpful in allowing us to move from “pots to people.” From the evidence of the Khirbet Kerak excavations, there seems to be no indication that the arrival of the “Khirbet Kerak folk” caused a severe disruption in the indigenous culture. At least from the ceramic evidence, the forms and wares typical of the Palestinian EB III continued along similar lines to those from sites to the south and west.

I would like to express my thanks to Professor Helene Kantor who served as the Field Ceramicist on the 1963-1964 expeditions. Professor Kantor has given a great amount of her time in discussions on the stratigraphy of the site and especially on the fine points of ceramic typology. The final report will be published as an Oriental Institute Publication.



*Light faced painted ware sherd BY II 34
from Khirbet Kerak. Early Bronze Age II.
Scale 2:5.*

*Light faced painted ware jug. H. Bonnet,
“Ein frühgeschichtliches Graberfeld bei
Abusir.” (Leipzig: 1928), Pl. 27. First
Dynasty. Scale 2:5.*