

YAQUSH

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IDENTIFICATION

Yaqush (map ref. 2024.2244) is located on the rim of the *Ghor*, facing the Jordan River to its east and backed by the dominating heights of the eastern Lower Galilee to its west. It overlooks the small Wadi Kuraïyim, which drains into the Jordan River and which runs parallel to the larger Naḥal Tabor, the mouth of which is directly west of the site (fig. 1).

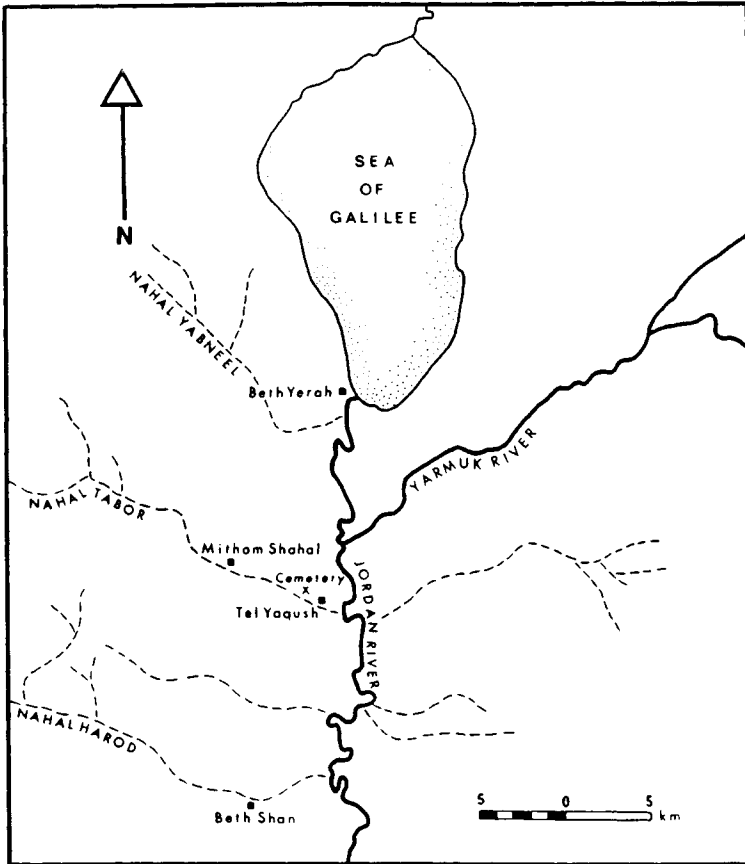


Figure 1. Map of the Tel Yaqush area showing Beth Yerah (major city), Tel Yaqush (medium sized agricultural village), Naḥal Tabor (cemetery of Tel Yaqush), and Mitham Shahal (specialized pastoralist site)

Yaqush was first depicted on the Palestine Exploration Fund map of 1890, where it was identified as Tell ez-Zanbakiyeh (Tell of the Lilies). The Mandate period map of 1930–32 shifted the name Zanbakiyeh to a site 750 meters to the southeast, leaving the site now known as Yaqush nameless. The comprehensive survey of the region conducted by Nehemiah Zori described the site as Giv‘at HaMoqšim (“Hill of the Mines,” site no. 8) because the site was heavily mined during Israel’s War of Independence in 1948 (Zori 1962). The site was cleared of mines and is now listed as Horvat Yaqush on modern maps. Yaqush’s position near one of the major fords of the Jordan River may explain its settlement during the Early Bronze Age. Directly to the east of the site, across the Jordan River, lies the site of esh-Shuneh (North), one of the major urban sites of the Early Bronze Age in the Central Jordan Valley. An Islamic period bridge across the Jordan (Jisr el-Majami‘) as well as an earlier, still preserved, bridge from the Roman period attests to the importance of this ford. Roman milestones, charted by Thomsen in 1917, indicate that the ancient Roman road passed directly by Yaqush (Thomsen 1917). The rusting tracks of the former Haifa-to-Damascus railroad cut the eastern edge of Yaqush. Although Yaqush was essentially abandoned at the end of the third millennium, nearby sites dated to later periods attest to the importance of its location astride the major ancient thoroughfare for north-south travel from Syria to Egypt.

Excavations were conducted in 1989 and 1991 by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. A total area of 1055 sq. m was cleared during the two seasons (figs. 2–3). A preliminary estimate indicates that the site was approximately 2.5 ha in size during the EB I period. By the EB III period the village had declined in area to roughly 0.50 to 0.75 ha.



Figure 2. Aerial view of Yaqush, 1991; looking to the east over the fish ponds and fields of Kibbutz Geshher toward the Hills of Jordan in the background; Squares K 9 and L 9 in foreground

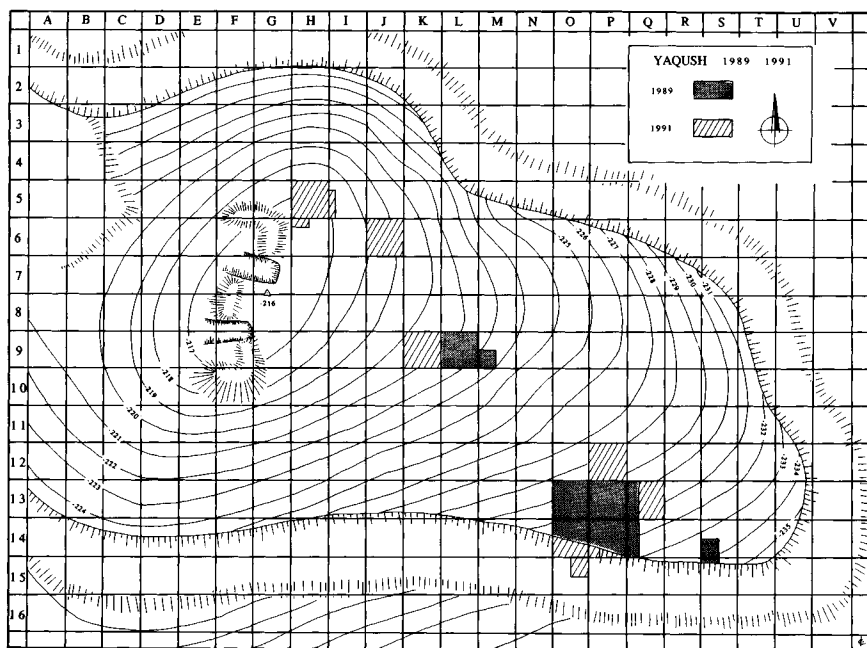


Figure 3. Contour map of Yaquash showing areas excavated in 1989 and 1991

EXCAVATIONS

Early Bronze Age I

The Early Bronze I was the earliest period reached at Yaquash. Evidence for at least four architectural phases of the Early Bronze I was recovered. One of the earlier phases was represented by a large building in Square P 14 at least 11 m in length (fig. 4). Although severely damaged by modern military earth moving equipment, at least four courses of a stone wall forming the northern edge of the building were preserved. The stones were laid in a herringbone fashion. Traces of later EB I remains sealed this structure.

The latest phase of the Early Bronze I was recovered more extensively on the summit of the mound (Square H 5) and in a small trench to the east of the main excavation area at the southeast edge of the site (Square T 14). Both areas were dominated by evidence of an extremely destructive conflagration. Traces of carbonized roofing beams and roof fall were preserved well enough to indicate that the roofs of the EB I houses were constructed using small wooden beams with brush and twigs placed above them. This framework was then covered and sealed with successive layers of packed clay.

The northern end of one of the structures on the summit was curvilinear. Although not completely excavated, at least two flat stone pillar bases placed



along the main axis of the room were recovered as well as a stone mortar. Dozens of smashed pottery vessels, some containing charred grain, were found on the floor, exhibiting a wide array of ceramic forms, including large grain-wash store jars, a grain-washed spouted vat with loop handles, red-burnished jugs, small jugs and juglets, and a bottle. Bone awls and flint knives and sickle blades were recovered, as well as a perfectly preserved copper ax. Sealed beneath the collapsed roof of a nearby structure were two store jars, one a common grain-washed store jar, the other a fully developed combed metallic-ware store jar. Ceramically, this would force a date at the very end of the EB I.

The small trench along the southeastern edge of the mound also yielded dramatic evidence for a great conflagration. The main walls, separated by a doorway, of the room exposed in this trench were constructed with a stone foundation and a brick superstructure, with at least four courses of vitrified brick remaining in place. The destruction debris was 0.75 m thick, and consisted of burnt brick and large chunks of roof fall. In one of the rooms a large ceramic silo set on a stone base held a substantial cache of carbonized

emmer wheat. Carbon 14 tests on the wheat indicate a date of 3200 B.C. Also found on the floor was the antler of a deer.

The discovery of complete grain-washed ware and combed metallic-ware jars sealed on a floor beneath burnt roof fall on the summit of the mound would strongly argue for a date at the very transition from EB I to EB II. The ^{14}C date of 3200 B.C. from the emmer wheat in the lower area of the mound, keeping in mind the possible chronological variance for any single ^{14}C date, would strengthen this assessment. Earlier phases of EB I were recovered at Yaqush. The ceramic repertoire of these stratigraphically earlier phases is not yet clearly defined. Although present, no significant amounts of Gray Burnished ware have been recovered in any architectural context. This suggests that the village of Yaqush underwent its greatest development and expansion in the latter part of EB I and reached its greatest extent at the transition from EB I to EB II, when the entire village was violently destroyed.

Early Bronze Age II

Evidence for Early Bronze Age II occupation was recovered in the main excavation area (fig. 4). A house measuring 7×5 m (Square Q 14) partially eroded along its southern edge, was recovered. A large stone slab served a pillar base for roof support, while a carved basalt door socket was located just inside and to the left of the doorway. Traces of an adjacent room or building were recovered along the eastern wall of the house. A small forecourt opened off the entrance to the north.

The house was apparently destroyed by earthquake, for the entire structure was sealed with sheets of collapsed mudbrick walls. The bricks remained coursed, indicating a sudden and complete collapse, although at least four courses of mudbrick remained intact on the stone foundations. Some traces of burned brick and charred wood were recovered in the forecourt. Wood charcoal samples sent to the Oxford University Radiocarbon Lab for ^{14}C analysis were removed from the forecourt, the interior of the house itself, and the area just west of the house. Most of the dates clustered around 3100 B.C. The latest date was 2745 B.C., and probably more accurately reflects the destruction date of the house, because the samples were wood charcoal and not a short-lived sample like grain.

A street 2.50 m wide ran adjacent to the EB II house. The street was in use over a fairly long period of time with at least six detectable surfaces and a total buildup of at least 0.40 m over the years. A row of small boulders aligned along the southern, or downslope, side of the street formed a curb which delimited the street through several phases.

The ceramic repertoire was typical of the EB II of northern Palestine. Predominant among the forms and wares was an orange/brown metallic ware,

used both for small bowls and platters, as well as for larger store jars with combed exteriors. The ceramic finds from EB II Yaqush were identical with those from the EB II levels of the major urban site of Beth Yerah ten kilometers to the north.

Early Bronze Age III

By the EB III period, the village had declined in size to an area roughly 0.50 to 0.75 ha in area. Remains from the EB III village were detected in two areas of excavation (Squares K9 / L9 and Squares P 13, Q 12-13, R 13). The largest area exposed was located in the main excavation area along the southern edge of the mound. At least three major superimposed architectural phases dated to this period have been revealed.

The earliest and most complete phase yielded a complete house/courtyard complex (fig. 4, Square Q 13). The house was composed of at least three rooms, one of which was built perpendicular to the main axis. Two of the rooms had earthen floors, while a third was paved with large flat stones. Flat stones also served as pillar bases for wooden pillars. The pillars were held in place by a small circle of wedging stones which were discovered in situ. The house had both an eastern and western entrance. The western courtyard was partially paved with stone. Set into the earth was a basalt mortar. Nearby was a large basalt saddle quern. The small eastern courtyard held several clay and stone supports for storage vessels, the bases of which were recovered in the excavations. Two clay ovens were located to the east of the house, both constructed with successive layers of clay with their exteriors packed with broken store jar fragments to conserve heat. A pebbled path, lined with curbstones on each side led from the eastern courtyard toward the southeastern area of the site. The street was deliberately constricted at the point where it met the courtyard, and a door socket located at this junction indicates that a small "garden gate" would have given privacy to the household.

Although only exposed in a limited area in the 1991 season, the following architectural phase (Square Q 12) seemed to be unrelated in plan to the earlier house/courtyard complex. A portion of a building was excavated, with its main wall running northeast-southwest and exposed for a distance of at least 7.5 m. The wall was built with stone foundations and at least five courses of the brick superstructure were preserved. The floor of the building was partially paved with large flat stones. During the life of the building the floor was raised and a partition wall was added, dividing the building into at least two rooms. The building may have served as a shrine. Recovered from the earliest floor was a large well-made Khirbet Kerak ware andiron, a complete Khirbet Kerak ware red polished bowl and a highly polished red slipped button base juglet. In the later phase of the building a cache of ten votive juglets was found in association with two votive bowls, one of which had been used as a lamp.

The latest phase of EB III in this area saw a reversion to domestic architecture. Just below the mound's surface, a pebbled street and several small domestic structures and rooms were excavated. One house was of broad-room type with a large stone mortar and a stone pillar base. Khirbet Kerak ware was ubiquitous, with all types of the standard assemblage represented.

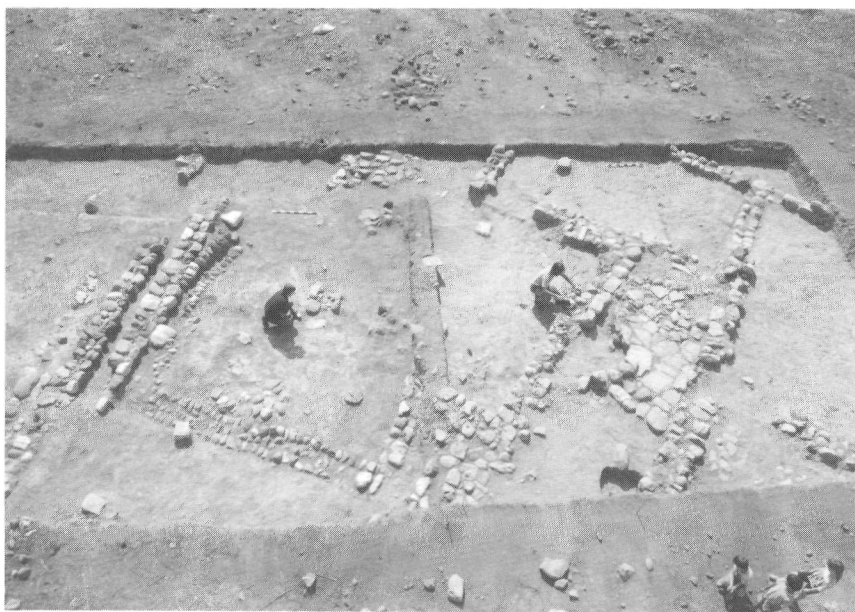


Figure 5. Aerial view of Squares K9 and L9, 1991 season

In Squares K9/L9 (figs. 2, 5) erosion had damaged the EB III levels, but a portion of one large structure remained, with stone-paved floors and fairly substantial walls. Nearby, a broad street, 3 m wide, ran in a north-south direction. The street was composed of packed earth, small pebbles and pottery sherds, including a large percentage of Khirbet Kerak ware. Running along the western edge were at least two phases of curbing, indicating that at some point the street had been widened. The street was supported on the east by a battered retaining wall constructed of boulders, which was at least 5 m wide and 1 m high. The width of the street, the effort made to modify the site topography to support it, and the strong and well-built character of the building with stone-paved floors would suggest a possible public function for this quarter of the village.

The ceramic repertoire of both excavation areas was typical of EB III in northern Palestine. Red washed platters with radial burnish, buff storage vessels, and Khirbet Kerak ware were present, similar to the late EB horizon attested at Beth Yerah. The range of Khirbet Kerak ware was complete, with

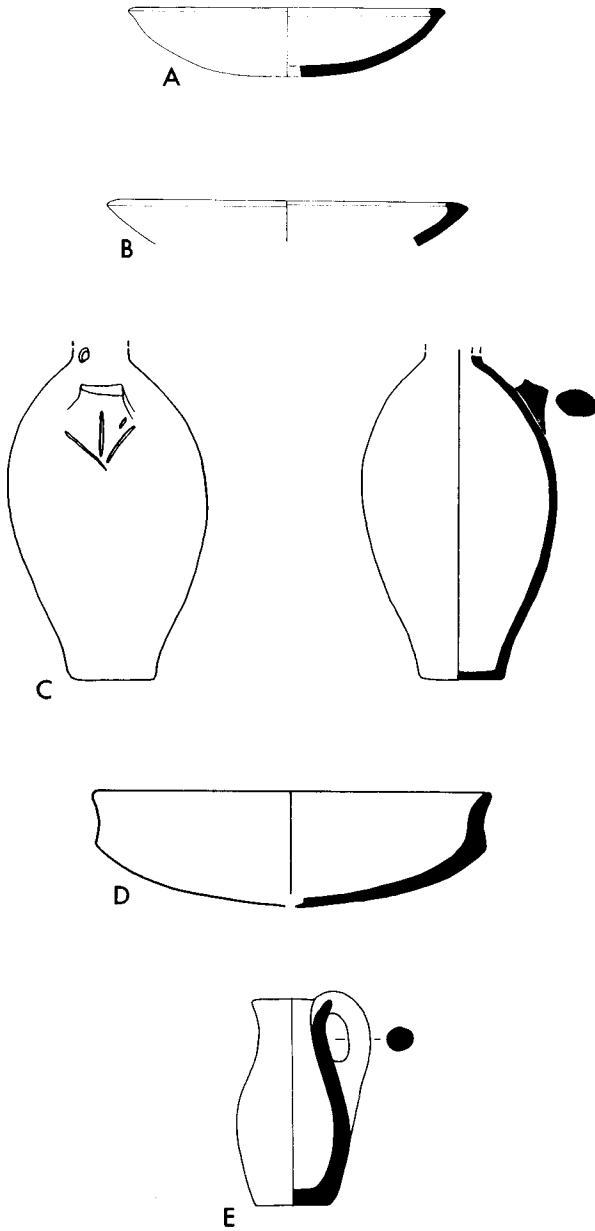


Figure 6. Diagnostic pottery vessels. (A–B) metallic-ware bowl, EB II; (C) two views of metallic-ware flask with potter's mark on base of handle, EB II; (D) metallic-ware bowl, EB I/II Transition; (E) metallic-ware flask, EB I/II. Scales 2:5, except A 1:10 and B 1:5

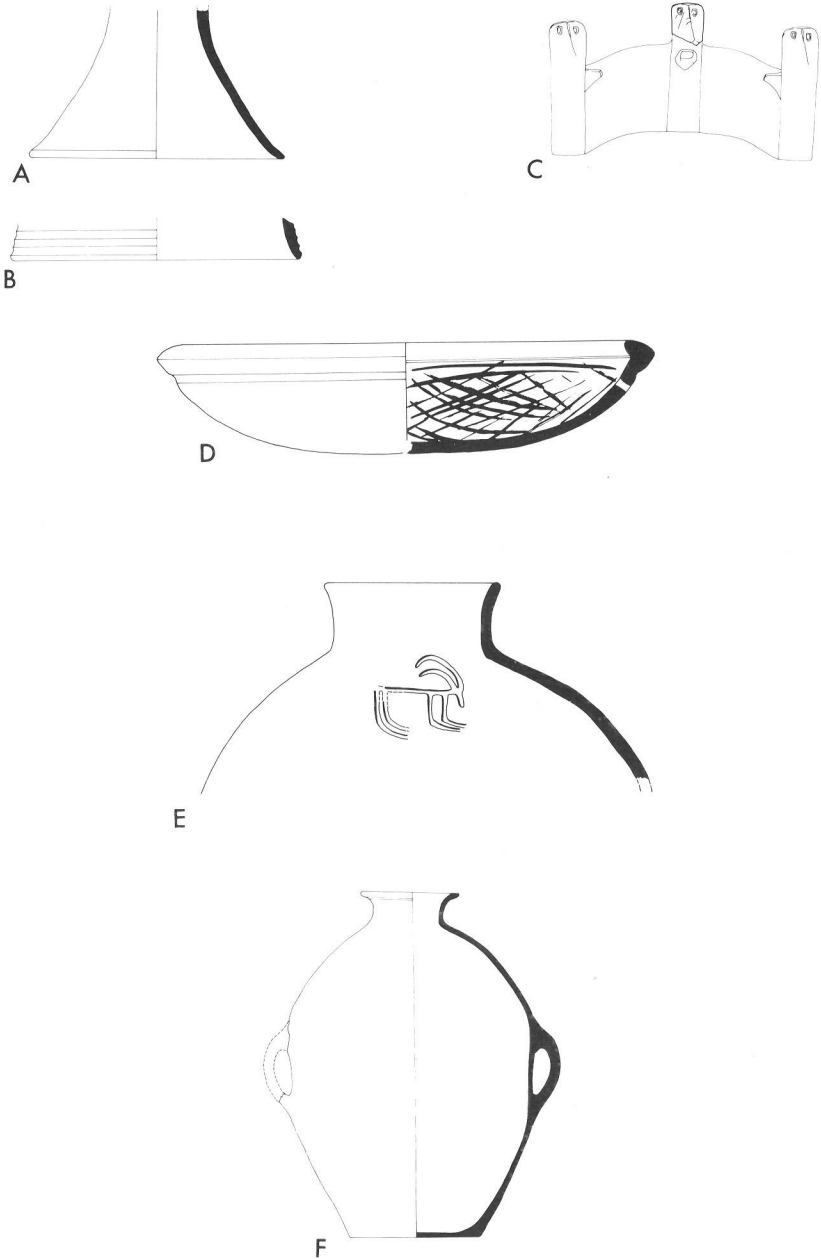


Figure 7. Diagnostic pottery vessels. Intrusive Khirbet Kerak pottery, EB III: (A–B) ridged stands, (C) andiron with human faces restored from fragment. EB III pottery: (D) metallic-ware with irregular burnish, (E) standard-ware jar fragment with incised animal figure, (F) metallic-ware pithos. Scales 1:10, except D–E 1:5

small red and red/black bowls, kraters, stands with corrugated decoration, knobbed lids, and andirons, including one andiron fragment with a human face modeled and incised on it. Two loop handled lids have their closest parallels with sites of the "Red/black Burnished Ware" or "Karaz" ware tradition in central and southern Anatolia.

A stone-lined pit was built into the retaining wall's slope. The pit yielded sherds from the Middle Bronze-Late Bronze Age transition, the only indication encountered during the 1989 or 1991 seasons of a post-EB III phase.

The evidence from the excavations suggests that Yaqush was predominantly an agricultural settlement located on the major north-south thoroughfare that linked Canaan with Syria. The flint repertoire yielded hundreds of Canaanite-type sickles and knives in addition to many locally made flake tools. Wheat, barley, and lentils were the main crops. The faunal remains suggest a dependence on sheep, goat, and cattle husbandry. Remains of fallow deer and hartebeest were also recovered.

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