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THE EARLY BRONZE AGE IV VILLAGE AT KHIRBET AL-BATRAWY, JORDAN

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ABSTRACT

Recent excavations by Rome “La Sapienza” University at the Early Bronze Age site of Khirbet al-Batrawy revealed a sparse village arisen on top of the ruins of the EB II-III town during the Early Bronze IVB (2200-2000 BC). Such a village, consisting of several clusters of dwellings with installations for storage and food preparation, spread all over the site, has provided a wide range of materials and several examples of domestic devices illustrating the local horizon of the EB IV Transjordanian culture.

The final destruction of the EB II-III city at Khirbet al-Batrawy was followed by a relatively short period of abandonment (Batrawy IVa, Early Bronze IVA, 2300-2200 BC).¹ Then, the ruins of the city were reoccupied by several clusters of dwellings irregularly displaced all over the mound (Fig. 1), belonging to a rural village dating to the final part of the Early Bronze IV (Batrawy IVb, Early Bronze IVB, 2200-2000 BC).

The earliest nucleus of houses arose just inside the collapsed EB II-III city-wall in the northern sector of the site, in Area B, along the edge of an embankment made up with the remains of earlier collapsed structures.² Here, a sequence of two occupational phases of domestic units and installations illustrates the progressive growth of the village.³ The latest phase included several dwellings with domestic devices for food preparation and storage. From east to west, it was represented by the corner of a quite substantial house (L.122), which showed a relatively solid fieldstone masonry (W.117), and a rectangular stone-paved installation (S.127) inside it, while outside the building to the west an open area with a very partially preserved stone-flagged pavement (L.152) had been badly ravaged by later pillage activities.⁴ To the west, in the central sector of the excavated area, the more recent phase included a wide square house (L.354), with working platforms and a semi-circular central installation (L.370) devoted to food production and storage (with a platform and a bin), while outside the

1 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 37-40.

2 Nigro 2007: 349, Fig. 7; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 102-103, figs 3.54-3.55.

3 Nigro 2007: 352-353; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 129-136.

4 Nigro 2006: 242-243, Fig. 21; Nigro (ed.) 2006: 167-174, Figs 4.19-4.30.

northern wall (W.357) of the house a square juxtaposed unit (L.356) with a bench (B.367) probably represented an auxiliary storeroom. Further north, a child burial (D.350) was set underneath the northern boundary wall⁵ of the dwelling.⁶ To the west, a rectangular structure (L.450), abutting directly over the inner edge of the collapsed city-wall, was characterized by a stone-paved double installation, presumably devoted to the processing of liquids (grape juice/wine). In the central sector, underneath central House L.354, sparse remains of an ephemeral earlier occupation⁷ (huts and related installations) of the village were uncovered, including hearths, cists, and stone platforms. Hole-mouth jars fragments found in large quantity spread all over the area belong to the same EB IVB local horizon of pottery as the ones retrieved in the overlying more substantial structures, thus testifying to that the latest sedentary occupation of the site homogeneously belongs to the final part of the Early Bronze IV (Batrawy IVb, Early Bronze IVB, 2200-2000 BC).⁸

A major cluster of houses was excavated on the Acropolis, in Area A.⁹ To the west, two major rectangular units opened towards a courtyard, each showing a series of installations for food transformation and other devices. In House L.20,¹⁰ a triple installation made of two juxtaposed square cists (S.207, S.209) and a third parallel stone, and a raised platform (B.214), with a hole-mouth jar smashed over it, occupied the western end of the room (Figs 2-3). In front of the entrance to House L.20, a small yard (L.30) introduced to the door of another possible unit (L.50), while a third unit (L.60) was entered through a lane (L.40), and, apparently, had the same orientation of L.20; two other rooms were identified to the west of House L.20: L.70 and L.80, a curvilinear structure, flanking the rear wall of House L.20. A second major house (L.240) to the north-east, showing the same NE-SW orientation, hosted a stone-paved installation (S.243), a silos (S.245) and a square cist (S.249) inserted in a small bench (B.251), similar to the triple installation in House L.20.¹¹ Flint and stone tools, as well as pottery from these dwellings, provide a wide representative inventory of domestic materials of this period (Fig. 4). In the eastern sector of the Acropolis, a distinctive feature was a boundary wall (W.23+W.5), which delimited the eastern edge of the village by terracing the collapsed remains of the underlying town.¹² Two domestic units flanked a path (L.35), each one consisting of a main rectangular living

5 Nigro (ed.) 2008: 170-176.

6 This is the second burial of this kind found on the mound; the first one (D.200) was discovered in 2005 in Area D, on the south-western spur of the hill (Nigro [ed.] 2006: 11, Figs 1.11-1.12).

7 Nigro (ed.) 2008: 168-169, Figs 4.73-4.75.

8 Nigro 2007: 353, Figs 12-13; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 164-176.

9 Nigro 2006: 237-240, Figs 10-19; Nigro (ed.) 2006: 77-102, Figs 3.15-3.51, plan II; Nigro 2007: 348-349, Fig. 3.

10 Nigro 2006: 238-240, Figs 17-19; Nigro (ed.) 2006: 89-93, Figs 3.31-3.40. A general comparison for layout and building technique of House L.20 can be found in the domestic architecture of other EB IV Transjordanian sites such as Khirbet Iskander (Richard, Boraas 1984: 70-74) and Tell Iktanu (Area A, phase 2: Prag 1991: fig. 1).

11 Nigro 2007: 348-349, Fig. 3; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 28-36.

12 Nigro 2006: 237, Figs 10-11; Nigro (ed.) 2006: 77-80, Figs 3.16-3.18.

room, subsidiary chambers and several annexed spaces, with installations for food preparation and storage, including a circular silos (S.37), working platforms, benches and some curvilinear devices (Fig. 5). A distinguished feature of this architecture was the irregular arrangement around courtyards and lanes, the curvilinear layout of annexes in respect of the main rooms, and the adoption of single-line unworked stone walls, which supported ceilings made of leafy branches or, in some cases, simple corbelled vaults. The overall picture provided by Area A is, thus, that of a relatively small village with rectangular houses flanked by courtyards and subsidiary structures (many of which curvilinear in plan) in use for a single constructive phase.

A third group of houses was excavated on the easternmost terrace of the khirbet, in Area F, where again rectangular units represented the main dwelling model, with some food processing installations inside (platforms, mortars, etc.) and adjoined curvilinear storage devices (Fig. 6). Such dwellings, similarly to the ones in Area A, showed only a single stratigraphic phase, and they presumably represent a somewhat short-lived occupation of Terrace V, towards the end of Early Bronze IV.¹³ A major house was identified, including a large unit (L.530), with a raised platform and a cist in the middle, a round bin in the south-eastern corner, and a separated rectangular room (L.560) in the opposite south-western corner. A semi-circular storeroom (L.564) was adjoined to the western side of this unit. West of the house, the area of an earlier EB II-III building was left open, even though another circular device (S.511) leaned on its southern wall, while to the north a secondary unit was erected with a mortar embedded into the floor. Further to the north-west, a rectangular unit (L.540) was partly preserved, apparently joined with other subsidiary curvilinear structures, one of which (S.538) was cut into the western wall of the house itself. As in Area A West (House L.20), the entrance to this unit was through the short side, marked by a flat stone. A third domestic unit (L.520) was added to the southern wall of House L.530, possibly as a successive enlargement of the latter.

The above mentioned structures spread over several spots of the site, providing a quite rich set of materials belonging to the last phase of the Early Bronze IV, and testifying to the process of ephemeral re-sedentarization and reverse to a rural based economy at the end of Early Bronze Age in the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa Valley, when the major site of the district was Jebel er-Reheil.¹⁴

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13 Nigro 2007: 358, Fig. 19; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 294-305.

14 *JADIS* site n. 2417.022; Palumbo 1990: 57-59; Palumbo *et al.* 1996: 393-401.

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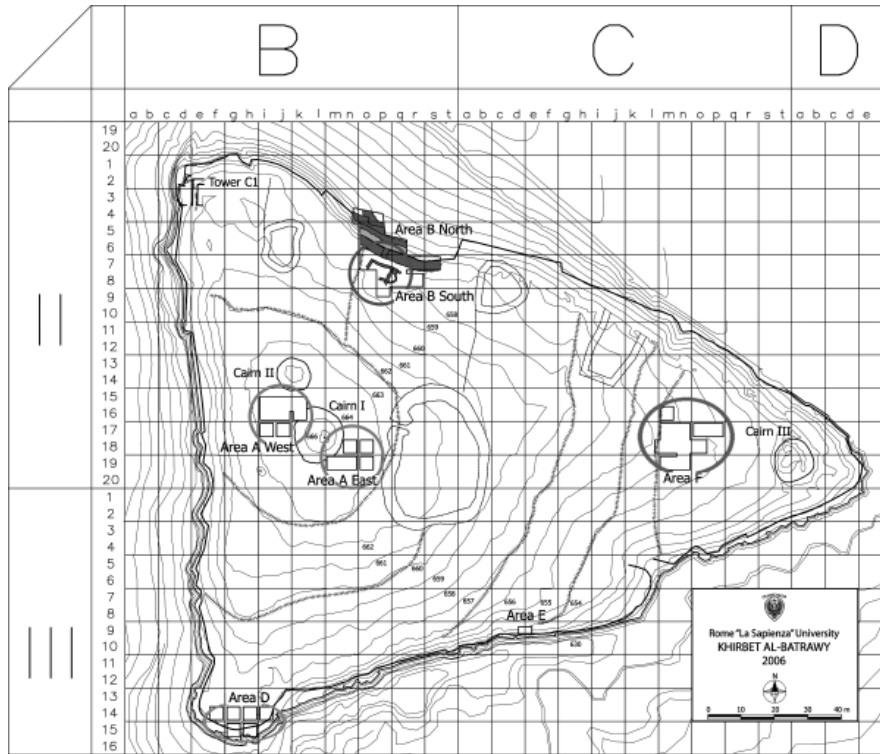


Fig. 1: Topographical plan of Khirbet al-Batrawy with indicated the excavated quarters of the EB IVb village (Batrawy IVb, Early Bronze IVb, 2200-2000 BC).

Fig. 2: Area A: House L.20, with the triple installation consisting of two juxtaposed square cists and a third parallel stone; in the background, raised platform B.214 with a hole-mouth jar smashed over it (Batrawy IVb, Early Bronze IVb, 2200-2000 BC).





Fig. 3: Area A: general view of the western sector of the EB IVB village on the Acropolis, from south-east; in the centre, House L.20 with courtyard L.30; on the right, the entrance to House L.60 with yard L.40 (Batrawy IVb, Early Bronze IVB, 2200-2000 BC).



Fig. 4: Domestic inventory and tools from houses of the EB IVB village: blades and flint tools for butchering, stoppers and spindle whorls, storage jars, polishing stones and pestles for grinding and pulping cereals (Batrawy IVb, Early Bronze IVB, 2200-2000 BC).

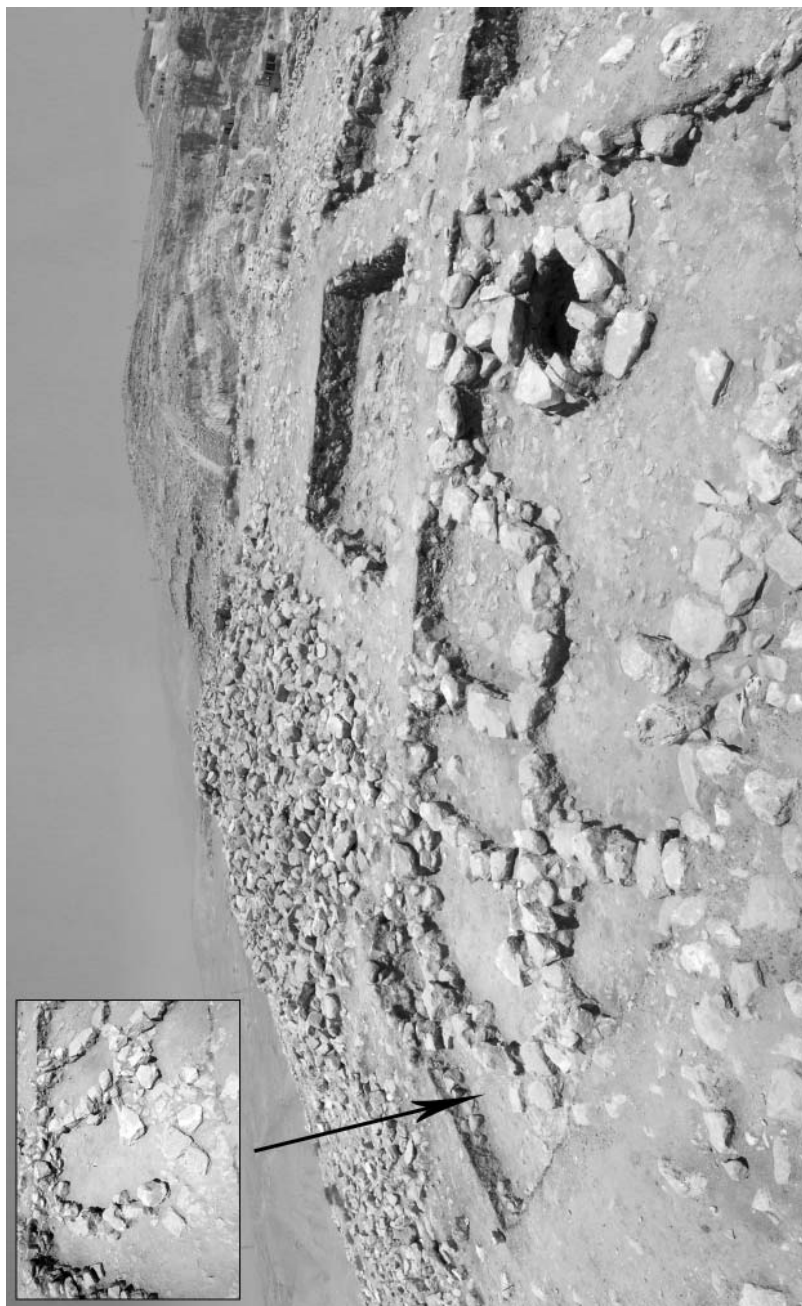


Fig. 5: Area A: general view of the eastern sector of the EB IVB village on the Acropolis, from south; from right to left: silos, curvilinear storage devices and annexed domestic installations (Batrawy IVb, Early Bronze IVB, 2200-2000 BC).



Fig. 6: Area F: general view of the EB IVB dwellings and installations on the easternmost terrace of the khirbet, from west: in the foreground, semi-circular storeroom L. 530; in the right background, the secondary domestic unit L.564 (Batrawy IVb, Early Bronze IVB, 2200-2000 BC).

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