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Tracing the Course of EB IV Pastoralism and Sedentism in Transjordan and the Negev

A number of scholars, in particular Kay Prag and William Dever, have presented synthesizing views of the EB IV period in Transjordan. On the basis of a detailed study of the typology and distribution of EB IV pottery, along with the results of excavations at Tall Iktanū, Prag (1974) sketched an EB IV landscape on which interaction between sedentary village occupants and semi-nomadic pastoralists took place (Prag 1974: 102). She later expanded her view on the transhumance of the period in a comparative study of pastoral migration in Jordan and other parts of the Levant (1985). Of special importance, and again stimulated by the work at Tall Iktanū, was her modification of Kenyon's paradigm of nomadic incursions from Syria, which Kenyon viewed on a large enough scale to be a determinative force in the urban decline at the end of EB III. Prag proposed, by contrast, that semi-nomads emanating from Syria, some of whom also practiced cultivation, moved southward by means of normal transhumance, following the breakdown of strong centralized authority in Palestine at the end of EB III. There was, however, no massive egress from Syria. Prag's view has similarities to that of Mazzone, who proposed that whatever Syrian elements are present in the Palestinian EB IV material could be better explained by means of diffusion of cultural elements, especially technological innovations, rather than population movement (Mazzone 1985: 13).

Dever's contributions have been mainly in two directions: 1) a proposal for six "regional families" based on local differences in EB IV pottery (Dever 1980: 48), and 2) the broadly applied interpretation on which we will focus in this article, that Transjordan was the earliest manifestation of EB IV culture and thus probably also the breeding ground for this post-urban successor to the old urbanized cultures of EB II and III (Dever 1971: 212; 1973: 56-58). In a series of articles appearing over the past quarter of a century, Dever has reiterated the theme that Transjordan was a key area for EB IV development. At the same time, in his latest work he has questioned the degree to which outside factors influenced the origins of

EB IV culture (Dever 1989: 228). Thus, rather than looking northward to the Syrian desert regions to find the key for EB IV culture, Dever now prefers to see it as an internal evolution out of the collapsed urban culture of the Early Bronze Age. The differences in ceramics and social organization between Syria and Palestine also are considerably greater than the similarities, and this too argues for the local development of this culture (Dever 1980: 52). More recently excavated data can be added to the role that Transjordan played in the formation and transmission of this culture. We can now follow with some surety the trajectory of EB IV settlement in Transjordan while, as we shall examine below, the discoveries in the tombs at al-Khānāzīr in comparison with Dever and Cohen's work at Beer Resisim open a new vista on the transference of EB IV culture across the 'Arabah to the Negev.

Not to be overlooked in the discussion about EB IV in Transjordan are the remains from Khirbat Iskandar, a settlement extensively enough excavated at this stage that some conclusions can be attempted. The work of Richard and Long has important implications not only for cultural development during EB IV, but also, as will be discussed below, because Khirbat Iskandar can be held to have played a special role in the socio-political realities of the time. The site is a remarkable one for the period, quite unique in comparison to any other EB IV site thus far excavated on either side of the Jordan River. Dever's use of the adjective "startling" (Dever 1989: 226; cf. also Richard 1987: 242-243) in reflecting on the impressive EB IV city wall, gate, and towers at Khirbat Iskandar hardly seems an overstatement, even if the most recent excavations indicate that some of this architecture came into being originally in EB II-III (FIG. 1).

Finally, two other EB IV sites in Jordan throw light upon the course of EB IV settlement in Transjordan. The first is Bāb adh-Dhrā', excavated earlier by Paul Lapp and subsequently by the Expedition to the Dead Sea Plain; the second are the EB IV tombs near al-Khānāzīr mentioned above, excavated in 1990 also by the Dead Sea



1. Early Bronze II/III northwest corner tower at Khirbat Iskandar, looking south with abutting Early Bronze IV perimeter wall running to the southwest (courtesy of the Khirbat Iskandar Expedition).

Plain expedition (unpublished but presently in preparation as part of what is to be the fourth volume of the EDSP).

As a result of excavations at Khirbat Iskandar and Bāb adh-Dhrā' it is possible to reflect on what may have been the relation between these two sites, the one on the plateau and the other in the southern Ghawr. One striking feature is the close match-up of pottery forms at the two sites (cf. Richard and Boraas 1988: 125, fig. 19 with Schaub and Rast 1989: 477-81, figs. 274-76). Petrographic analysis has shown that in most cases pottery at Bāb adh-Dhrā' was made from local clays nearby the site (Beynon, Donahue, Schaub and Johnston 1986: 304). Nevertheless, the correspondence of the forms and the treatment of some of the vessels with the same type of red slip suggest a close relation between these two sites, if not in direct ceramic production at least in cultural and probably also social and political associations.

As Dever pointed out some time ago, vessels of the type found at Bāb adh-Dhrā' (representing his TR Group) should most likely be dated to the initial phase, that is, to EB IVA. Notably, Dever and Cohen found a number of sherds in a fill at Beer Resisim that displayed the same kind of red-burnished treatment as that found on EB IV vessels at Bāb adh-Dhrā' and Khirbat Iskandar. One of their examples was from a rilled-rim "teapot" of the same type as found at both Bāb adh-Dhrā' and Khirbat Iskandar (Cohen and Dever 1979: 56, fig. 18: 15, 17).

What can we conclude from these similarities in the cultural traditions of Khirbat Iskandar and Bāb adh-Dhrā', and their appearance also in the central Negev? We propose that EB IV culture began to crystallize at the various EB IV sites that have been found along the Transjordan plateau and in the Jordan valley (Dever 1980: 48; Richard 1987: 242; Ibrahim, Sauer and Yassine 1976: 51-54), and that Khirbat Iskandar played an important role in the consolidation of this culture during its development in

Transjordan. From Khirbat Iskandar the tradition spread further to Bāb adh-Dhrā' in the southern Ghawr, carried by the movement of some of the population into the Dead Sea region. In a further dissemination at a somewhat later date (EB IVB) the tradition was carried on by migrants who moved southward in the 'Arabah to al-Khanāzīr, and other parts of the region near al-Khanāzīr (MacDonald 1992: 68), before passing across to the Negev, from which it spread into the hill country of Palestine. We can therefore specify a progression in this culture beyond the assumption of a general directional development from north to south. All of this fits nicely with a chronological development in the pottery through two or three EB IV phases, since the later phases are most abundantly represented in the Negev and Israel, while the earlier are found in Jordan.

If this directional development of the EB IV culture holds, it means both that Khirbat Iskandar played a role in the dispersion of EB IV culture, and that Bāb adh-Dhrā' was one of its important transmission points as this culture worked its way further to the other side of the Rift Valley. This position expands on Dever's early attempt to trace the path of EB IV settlement in Transjordan. In his earlier studies before the evidence from the southern Ghawr was available, Dever viewed the spread of EB IV culture as having occurred across the Transjordan plateau into the Jordan Valley near Jericho, from which it diffused into the Negev and the highlands of Israel (see the map in Dever 1971: 200; also 1980: 47). Dever segregated Jericho and other Jordan Valley sites into his Family J, differentiating this family from the TR family of Transjordan, although he entertained the idea that the former was related to the Transjordan traditions. What we are proposing here is that the movement of this culture progressed further south on the Transjordan side, until it passed across to the west, most likely via the southern Ghawr and the 'Arabah.

It is at this point, and precisely from the southernmost part of the Ghawr that another source of information can be found bearing on the problem of the progression of EB IV culture from Transjordan to the Negev. During December of 1989 and January of 1990 the Expedition to the Dead Sea Plain excavated the EB IV cemetery located above and east of Wādī al-Khānāzīr. The area had been identified previously by the survey team led by MacDonald, which designated it Site 141 (MacDonald 1992: 69). The EDSP has simplified the identification and location by referring to it as the al-Khanāzīr cemetery, since it is nearby the ruins at al-Khanāzīr and the latter are the most marked archaeological remains in the area (Rast and Schaub 1974: 12-13, 18). The tombs near al-Khanāzīr consisted of stone-lined shaft and chamber tombs reminiscent of the stone-lined EB IV shaft tombs at Bāb adh-Dhrā'. But a unique feature is that many of these tombs

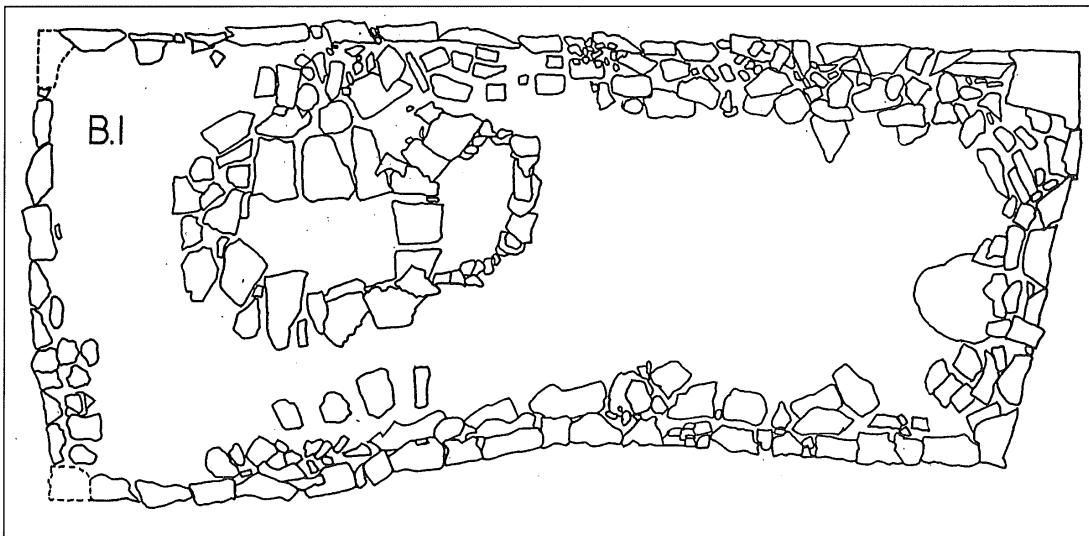
were enclosed by low walls made of stone material naturally spalled from the adjacent limestone slopes. The surrounding enclosures were usually in the form of rectangles (FIG 2). In most cases the burials in the tombs were disarticulated, although in one example a group of burials was also articulated. In contrast to Bāb adh-Dhrā' where an EB IV settlement existed alongside the cemetery, at al-Khanāzīr no signs of a settlement appeared. Schaub has placed the pottery slightly later than the main corpus at Bāb adh-Dhrā', with some forms paralleling the latest EB IV stage ceramics at Bāb adh-Dhrā', probably EB IVB (personal communication).

The importance of this evidence from the al-Khanāzīr cemetery is that it supplies a further location point in the advance of EB IV culture southward in the Ghawr and 'Arabah. Al-Khanāzīr lies some 30 km south of Bāb adh-Dhrā', and it seems probable that the al-Khanāzīr tombs were constructed by the successors of the EB IV population at Bāb adh-Dhrā', even though no other EB IV evidence has been found between Bāb adh-Dhrā' and Ghawr al-Khanāzīr. Thus, while Bāb adh-Dhrā' was a settled village, the farther south we go in the southern Ghawr the evidence points to the more usual nomadic pastoralist mode found elsewhere, suggesting a fading-out of the village culture found on the plateau and at Bāb adh-Dhrā'. New excavations in Wādī Faydān in the 'Arabah may indicate something other, however, particularly if an EB IV settlement there was connected with specialization in mining.

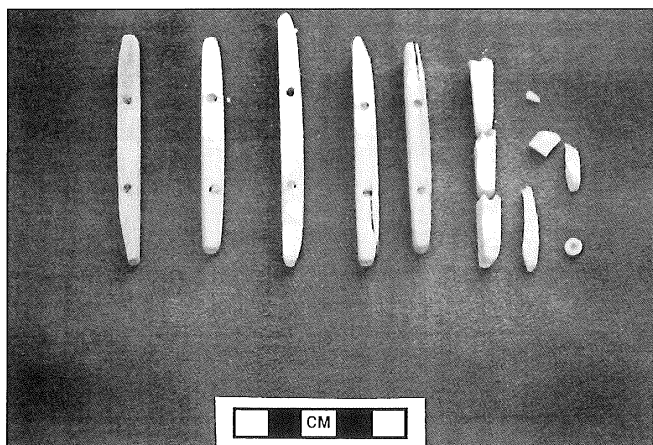
As for the link between the southern Ghawr and 'Arabah and the Central Negev in EB IV, it is not without significance that the cemetery at al-Khanāzīr is situated at nearly the same latitude as Beer Resisim in the Negev (approximately Pal. Grid 020 for Beer Resisim and 030 for Khanazir). It is also indicative of probable contacts be-

tween the EB IV inhabitants around al-Khanāzīr and those at Beer Resisim that both sites produced virtually identical ornamental pieces. A group of these, which Broeder and Skinner analyzed as cylinder spacers made from aragonite (mollusc shell) and commonly containing two perforations, was found at Site 120E in the al-Khanāzīr tomb area by the MacDonald survey (FIG. 3 and MacDonald 1992: 138-139). Identical examples came from Bir Resisim (Cohen and Dever 1980: 52, fig. 12), and the excavations of the Expedition to the Dead Sea Plain found one in one of its tombs at al-Khanāzīr. Regarding the further movement of EB IV culture into central Palestine, Dever has proposed that pastoralists from the Negev made their way into the more verdant hill country during the time of the year when the Negev was at its most arid (Dever 1985b: 119-121), and as they moved, EB IV cultural tradition accompanied them. Thus, while it is possible that influences other than those transmitted from Transjordan could have occurred at EB IV sites in Israel, it seems that it was the Transjordan EB IV culture that ultimately spearheaded the emergence of this culture at many of the sites in Israel.

The situation in Transjordan raises the further problem of how we might view political organization during this last phase of the Early Bronze Age. The political features of EB IV have received only limited discussion in the literature. Some efforts have been made in relation to social and economic dynamics, while the politics of pastoralist society have been dealt with mostly tangentially (Dever 1985a; Palumbo 1987). The paradigm of pastoralism itself tends to screen out a focus on political determinants, since it can be assumed that in such societies little incentive to the formation of political structures would be present. Palumbo's excellent restudy of evidence in the Jericho EB IV tombs led him to argue for a certain



2. Plan of Tomb B.1 at the al-Khanāzīr cemetery, with enclosure wall and stone-lined shaft and chamber.



3. Cylinder spacers with two perforations, analyzed as aragonite, possibly mollusc shell, from Site 120E near al-Khanāzīr (MacDonald 1992: 176-177, photograph 28).

amount of stratification in EB IV society, but he concluded that there was an absence of “central government” or a “series of local powers” in Palestine during this period, presumably on the grounds that we are dealing with a society of nomadic pastoralists (Palumbo 1987: 56).

A good starting point for a discussion about political arrangements during EB IV again would be Khirbat Iskandar. Richard (1987: 242) has suggested that other sites like Khirbat Iskandar should come to light, but it is noteworthy that some of the best known EB IV sites like Bāb adh-Dhrā', Ader and Aro'er, are no match for Khirbat Iskandar. At present, the distinctive character of Khirbat Iskandar is attested in its substantial fortifications, including its bench-lined, two-chambered gateway rooms (Richard 1990: 51, fig. 24). By contrast, the EB IV settlement at Bāb adh-Dhrā' seemingly made no use of the destroyed fortifications of the previous EB III town. The main EB IV construction over the ruins of the previous town was a cult center along the northern ridge of the site (Schaub and Rast 1984: 57), most other EB IV occupation having been in an area east and northeast of the ruins of the EB III town.

We may ask, then, what purpose a fortified settlement such as Khirbat Iskandar served during EB IA. The explanation we propose here is that we are dealing with a key, if not the key, administrative center of EB IV society in this region of Transjordan. That is, from Khirbat Iskandar there radiated a certain amount of influence, and conceivably control, over the various smaller EB IV settlements and nomadic pastoralist encampments across the plateau. How far this extended can only be surmised. The common interpretation of EB IV Palestine as tribal and pastoral would not militate against such an interpretation, since “even at a simple tribal level centrally-located, fortified towns may provide protection for neighbouring small villages” (Trigger 1978: 162), and one

could add, encampments. This point would seem to fit well with the data from various surveys involving EB IV material in Jordan, and from the unique site of Khirbat Iskandar itself. The recent findings substantiate what has been supposed for some time, including Prag's conclusion cited at the beginning, that Transjordan in EB IV was marked by temporary, camping settlements and by unfortified agricultural villages. Mittmann's work in north Jordan produced evidence of EB IV (MB I) settlement or burials from near the Syrian border as far south as Wādī az-Zarqā' (see his list in Mittmann 1970: 256-264). The Miller survey of the al-Karak plateau gathered data on small EB IV settlements along the plateau, with an apparent decline of sedentism in the latter part of EB IV (Miller 1991: 184, the conclusion of Robin Brown in her section on the pottery of the survey). MacDonald's survey of Wādī al-Ḥasā produced only small amounts of conclusive EB IV pottery (MacDonald 1988: 163-166), but in the southern Ghawr and 'Arabah the survey led also by MacDonald found much more evidence for EB IV, mostly in the way of tombs, including those at al-Khanāzīr discussed here (MacDonald 1992: 66-69). These results of the newer surveys put a new perspective on Glueck's findings as well, for he also had concluded for a fairly dense occupational pattern across the plateau in EB IV, although his supposition that there existed a number of EB IV settlements with defensive systems was based on mistaken dates assigned the pottery. Many of the sites he called EB IV have subsequently been redated to EB II or III, as Glueck himself came to realize (Glueck 1934: 81-82; 1970: 139-140; Prag 1974: 74; Schaub 1992: 162-167).

In contrast to Transjordan, on the other side of the Rift Valley no EB IV site comparable to Khirbat Iskandar has come to light, whether in the Negev, the hill country or further north. The description of EB IV culture as an essentially pastoralist one, known through its tombs and seasonal settlements, thus actually fits Israel and the West Bank better than it does Jordan. The evidence from Jordan suggests a degree of political organization, obviously not of the level of that during the preceding urban age but significant nonetheless, a system appropriate to the pastoral-agricultural nature of this period. Such a political arrangement would have included policing parts of the region to keep potential hostilities between tribes, and between tribal pastoralists and villages, under control. Khirbat Iskandar's imposing architecture provided it with recognizable symbols of power to exercise a monitoring function over the region, and its location on a major route was advantageous. Bāb adh-Dhrā' also, although lacking fortifications, was the scene of substantial village life (Schaub and Rast 1984: 55-58), as were probably also Ader and Aro'er. It seems best to view these three sites as secondary units in a system in which Khirbat Iskandar

played the leading role. Since all of this is an echo of the preceding EB II and III urban period, although at a considerably suppressed level, it seems that the arguments for continuity from EB III into EB IV, advanced by Dever and Richard, have validity also from the perspective of a certain carryover of political organization. The latest reports from Khirbat Iskandar, which claim that earlier EB II and III construction was incorporated into the EB IV system, are showing this as well.

As a region where the germination of EB IV culture occurred, then, Transjordan not only experienced its own changes in political and social organization, but also played an instrumental role in the settlement that was to take place west of the Rift Valley, following the decline of the EB III urban settlements. In the course of time groups of EB IV migrants moved southward and westward in a directional drift that took them through the southern Ghawr into the northern 'Arabah. From there they eventually passed through the wadis that led into the Negev, making their way into the hilly areas of central Palestine. Since these latter regions were remote from an administrative center like Khirbat Iskandar or even secondary administrative units such as Bāb adh-Dhrā', the pattern of EB IV settlement here took on the more typical pastoral nomadism associated with the period.¹

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¹ A point raised by Kay Prag at the Copenhagen conference alerted me to look more closely at the latest contention of the excavators at Khirbat Iskandar, that EB II and III fortifications are appearing at this site. Discussions with Richard and Long subsequently have confirmed this is the case. Although the data are unpublished at this writing, they will provide an important new dimension to under-

standing the site, which has so far been associated mainly with EB IV, apart from the EB I material at the base of the settlement and in nearby tombs. I do not sense in the discussions with the directors that this in any way diminishes in their estimation the importance of Khirbat Iskandar as an EB IV settlement.

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