

The Beginning of the Iron Age in Transjordan

At the present time it is impossible to reconstruct the history or to clearly define the cultural heritages and material assemblages of the peoples of the Transjordan at the beginning of the Iron Age. Though surface surveys are producing increasingly more precise information on the geographical concentration and type of settlements which existed at that time, the amount of material recovered from systematic excavation, as well as in tomb deposits, is still very limited. Only the excavations at Deir 'Alla (Franken, 1969) have provided a continuous sequence of layers covering this period and most of the pertinent layers have been published. Reference has been made to occupation levels at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Pritchard, 1964: 5) and tombs were excavated at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Pritchard, 1964: 6-9 and 1968: 99-122) and Tabaqat Fahel (Yassine, 1975: 60) but only one of these is published. All of these sites are within a twenty mile stretch on the eastern side of the Jordan Valley and the northernmost site is but twelve kilometers southwest of Beth Shan on the opposite side of the Jordan.

No complete published sequence exists east of the valley but pottery and other artifacts have been excavated at Amman, Sahab, Khirbet el Hajjar, Heshbon, Dhiban, Aro'er and Balu'a. Tombs have been excavated in the Amman area, Sahab, Madeba, Mafrq and Irbed. With our evidence so limited, and much still in the process of publication, the number of comparisons we are able to make between the artifacts found in the Jordan Valley, Palestine and the various districts of the Transjordan is still very restricted. It seems that it will be possible in the future to define cultural variations between many of the districts of the Transjordan, as a manifestation of the political realities of antiquity, but we have many years of work ahead of us before we shall have amassed a large enough body of evidence to substantiate properly such distinctions. For the time being, we must block out the distinctive features of each period and phase as they exist throughout the Transjordan. When we move from the consideration of detailed analyses of ceramic peculiarities, artistic styles, etc. to broader theoretical considerations, we must be careful not to bias our discussions by attaching our evidence to accepted theories and postulations which may

mislead us and require radical corrections in the future. In other words, I would rather see us concentrate on the details and problems of the Transjordan first, build our theoretical framework on that basis (as the evidence becomes available) and then compare this new theoretical design with current designs for the surrounding areas. If this is not done, we run the risk of seeing the Transjordan not for itself but rather as it seems to appear on the basis of evidence gathered west of the Jordan.

What is the implication of 'Philistine' pottery at Deir 'Alla or 'Philistine' coffins at Amman and Sahab or the 'Israelite' house types at Sahab and Sa'idiyeh or 'Midianite' pottery in northeastern Arabia, the Arabah and the Negev, if all of these indeed exist? Recent evidence has created problems for most of these and other ethnic designations which have become associated with specific features. Evidence bearing on two important matters will have a profound effect on our interpretation of the beginning of the Iron Age in the Transjordan: 1) A clear understanding of the Middle and Late Bronze Age assemblages wherever they can be found in the Transjordan and 2) the precise impact of Egyptian influence in Palestine and the Transjordan in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC.

Many of the tomb groups from Amman, Sahab, Madeba and Irbed present a mixture of Late Bronze Age and Iron I ceramics and artifacts, as a result of re-use or continued use of these tombs. Other tombs at the same sites, though overlapping in many features, contain none of the earlier materials. These tomb groups, which are published in sufficient detail to allow study and comparison, document a Transjordanian assemblage which can be paralleled in basic details with material from Tell Beit Mirsim, Beth Shemesh, Ai, Shiloh, Beth Shan, Ta'anach, Hazor and many other sites in Palestine, but particularly with the hill country sites. The evidence from Deir 'Alla and the other sites with excavated materials, helps to fill in the basic ceramic assemblage and provides a limited amount of related artifacts. We have characterized this assemblage as basically parochial with limited external contacts. The imported Cypriote, Mycenaean and Egyptian vessels of the later part of the Late Bronze Age are no longer

present and there are clear changes in the pottery repertoire. But how can studies of ceramic sequences and changes of pottery assemblages be made to relate to historical records and events? We have indicated above that we would like, for the time being, to limit the scope of such discussions, but a few basic observations are in order to highlight specific major questions which will require detailed examination in the future.

In the past two decades, there has been a review of Egyptian-Transjordanian contacts (Kitchen, 1964; Ward and Martin, 1964: 18–22; Givon, 1971; and Ward, 1972) including a survey of inscriptional evidence found from the Golan Heights in the north to Timna in the south (Rothenberg, 1972: 163–172). It now seems that the power of the Egyptian pharaohs was felt in the Transjordan at least between the reigns of Seti I and Ramses III and at times outright Egyptian control of certain areas was established. A final surge of Egyptian domination in Palestine in the first half of the twelfth century BC is now also well documented (Ward, 1971). Consequently, it is clear that the beginning of the Iron Age in the Transjordan cannot be understood without a proper emphasis on this Egyptian role. The recent publication of the finds at Deir el-Balah (Dothan, T., 1979, 1973 and 1972) and a tomb at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Pritchard, 1968) appear compatible with Oren's interpretation in his publication of the thirteenth to eleventh century tombs at Beth Shan: 'The conclusions arrived at in the foregoing pages that the coffin burials of Beth Shan actually represent a garrison group of Egyptian and a few troops of Aegean origin detailed by the pharaohs of the XIXth and XXth Dynasties sometime between the late 13th and 11th centuries, is well attested by the discoveries made on the tell' (Oren, 1973: 101–150). What we do not know at this point is the effect of these practices on the local population. Did any of the Canaanites of the Jordan Valley or the sea coast adopt the use of anthropoid coffins in their burial practices? Stiebing and Loffreda have indicated that the tombs at Tell el Far'ah south, which have been interpreted as influenced by Aegean models (Waldbaum, 1966), can be explained as a continuation and development of a local tomb type (Stiebing, 1970 and Loffreda, 1968). The presence of the naturalistic type of anthropoid coffin lids at Amman (Yassine, 1975), Sahab (Albright, 1932) and Pella (Yassine, 1975: 62), the late version of this coffin type at Dhiban (Winnett and Reed, 1964: 59–60, PLS. 96 and 97) and the existence of anthropoid coffins in Iron I as far north as the Euphrates River in Syria, indicates that this distinctive feature of burial practice was adopted by the local populations and occurs over a wide geographical area.

Study of the sculpture and figurines of Iron II shows that Egyptian stylistic features were incorporated into a local artistic style which is different in essential features from what is found in Phoenicia and elsewhere (Dornemann, 1970: 392–399, 403–405, 415–416). It seems, though we do not have the evidence to trace this tradition back in detail into the Late Bronze Age, that the adoption of Egyptian artistic

features took place at this time and that these features were maintained as an integral part of the local art style.

In Iron Age II, pottery types with a variety of painted decoration form a significant portion of the ceramic assemblage. Though much evidence is still needed to trace the origins of the specific motifs, many can be found in earlier Bronze Age painted traditions, for example the recently defined 'Midianite' sherds from Qurayyah (Dayton, 1972: 27–37), Timna (Rothenberg, 1972: 153–163) and Tell Massos (Aharoni, Fritz and Kempinski, 1975: 116–117). At present, early Iron I painted pottery from the Transjordan is extremely limited and adds little to the consideration of the problems associated with the origins of the 'Midianite' and 'Philistine' painted pottery traditions. Caution must be exercised in designating as 'Philistine' the bichrome painted sherds of levels A–D at Deir 'Alla (Franken, 1969: 172, 245). With a growing body of late thirteenth to eleventh century painted pottery available in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey, the matter is becoming more complex. In addition to the rich painted pottery traditions in north Cilicia (Goldman, 1956: 205–209, PLS. 336, 337, 391) and the Amuq, contemporary materials are now available from Ras Ibn Hani (Bounni, Lagarde, E. and J., Saliby, 1978: 280–282) near Ras Shamra in Syria, and Tyre (Bikai, 1978: 65, 66, PLS. XXXIV–XXXVI) and Sarepta (Pritchard, 1978: 77–82) in Lebanon. The corpus of 'Philistine' and related pottery has recently been augmented by published examples from Ashdod (Dothan, M. and Freedman, 1967: 114–125, PL. XVI and Dothan, M., 1971: 156–157, 180–187) and other sites. Though tempting, it is not possible to go into detail here. We should, however, be careful in attributing ethnic labels to pottery traditions until the time span for each can be clearly defined and until general features which are widespread in occurrence over great geographical distances can be separated from specific features which are confined to restricted localities. We do not yet know to what extent the Sea Peoples were responsible for the introduction of specific pottery forms, decoration types and specific motifs, much less all of the features which can specifically be defined as 'Philistine' rather than distinctive of some other related group, unless of course the term 'Philistine' is given a very broad definition. In the Amuq, Cilicia, Hama and on the Palestinian coast, it is not yet clear what features of the local painted styles have their roots in foreign or local styles of the Late Bronze Age (Dornemann, 1970: 195–215). Strong localized pottery traditions develop with marked dependence on long-established native traditions but at the same time a range of general decorative motifs and vessel shapes provide a common denominator over a very wide geographical area. The Deir 'Alla painted pottery should be viewed in this context. The specific complex of ceramic features which define the typical 'Philistine' pottery of the Esdraelon Valley and southern Palestinian coastal plain is not fully articulated until well after the A–D phases at Deir 'Alla, while at nearby Beth Shan, painted pottery which could be designated as 'Philistine' is extremely rare (James, 1966: 150). The inter-

pretation of 'Midianite' wares poses a similar problem. These wares have been found in a stretch in the south from Northwestern Arabia (Dayton, 1972; Kalsbeek and London, 1978) to the coast at Tell Far'ah (south), Gaza and Tell el-Ajjul (see references cited in Aharoni, Fritz and Kempinski, 1975: 16 and 17). When one examines, as we have done at greater length elsewhere, the many decorative motifs found on Iron Age pottery, the forms on which this decoration occurs and the treatment afforded decorated bands, metopes, etc. and isolated motifs, one is struck by many basic and underlying similarities which have long (though often interrupted) histories in many areas. Such a study urges us to exercise caution in defining the significance of new innovations, the time of their introduction and their existence as intrusive or native elements.

Similar to the problems indicated in the ethnic identification of painted pottery styles of the Iron I period are the problems associated with the interpretation of the metal working traditions of the eastern Jordan Valley. We have no new evidence to add to the discussion here, but again can only inject a word of caution. In our historical reconstruction, it is imperative that we balance possible intrusive influences of a short-lived nature, with peculiarities which re-occur in the history of a given area. Why should the established metal working traditions be associated with an intrusive element, namely knowledge introduced by the Sea Peoples or with an itinerant group of smiths? The Late Bronze Age II–Iron Age bronzes excavated by Pritchard (Pritchard, 1968: 102–109) and the metal working furnaces found by Franken (Franken, 1969: 36–40) seem to confirm the Solomonic tradition of metal working in this area. But how much knowledge and experience had been built up and passed on by the local inhabitants of the Jordan Valley from the time of Chalcolithic–Early Bronze Age finds summarized by Hennessy (Hennessy, 1967: 33, 86; and also Rothenberg, 1972: 24–52) to the Late Bronze Age–Iron I metal working operations at Timna (Rothenberg, 1972: 63–124)? In both cases, Egypt seemed to be heavily involved in the exploitation of copper mining and production but, was this a foreign impetus to crafts developed by the local population or were Egyptians themselves the miners and artisans? Economic, political and technological factors determined whether or not known deposits of useable metal ores were exploited. We must, however, seek ample evidence before we can successfully define the role played by local and foreign individuals in these activities.

Drastic changes are evident in the ceramic repertoire of the Transjordan between the beginning and the end of Iron I. Our evidence currently indicates that the limited painted decoration evident in the Jebel Nuzha tomb in Amman becomes even more limited in the next tombs, if our typological comparisons with the published Madeba tomb A are representative (Dornemann, 1970: 88–92). The most elaborate painting continues on flasks and the remaining painted decoration is on jugs and imitation Mycenaean pithides. Other features like

sharply carinated kraters, specific jug types and ring bases continue to be common in the twelfth century BC, but then disappear. Franken and Kalsbeek have shown that at Deir 'Alla the manufacturing system was changing and that an earlier tradition of decorative painting could no longer be used on the new products (Franken, 1969: 172–174). The abandonment of the use of the fast wheel, a technique which had been in decline for centuries, and the development of alternative means of producing satisfactory utilitarian pottery were major factors in determining the kinds of vessels which were produced (Franken, 1969: 92–94, 97–99).

When the pottery forms of the Madeba tomb, just mentioned, and contemporary materials from other tombs are compared with earlier products, a new simplicity of forms and specific features is clear. This decline is noted through levels A–D at Deir 'Alla but by phase G new features begin to appear which seem to be the beginning of a development leading up to the repertoire of forms present in the material from our 1969 Jebel Qala' sounding in Amman. The phase which should, by descriptions given so far, be contemporary with or just slightly earlier than the earliest of our Amman 1969 materials, is phase M. Zayadine has excavated contemporary materials on the second plateau of the Amman Citadel (Zayadine, 1973: 30) and recent materials from Sahab should be contemporary also but are not yet available in published form for comparison (Ibrahim, 1978). Whether any of the Dhiban, Heshbon or Aro'er pottery continues this late in Iron I is not yet clear, but contemporary sherds have been collected at Tell Jalul (Ibach, 1978: 218–222) and Tell Safut.

With the material so limited we can now only try to define the ceramic assemblage. Many of the new features which Franken notes at Deir 'Alla in phases G–L seem to be foreign to that part of the Jordan Valley and some of these features seem to have their origin farther east (Franken, 1969: 246–247). Whether, however, the direction is from the north or southeast is not yet clear nor is even a basic articulation of the assemblage from which they originate. Three tombs at Irbed (Dajani, 1966b) must be positioned between tomb A at Madeba and the Amman citadel 1969 sounding materials. We have discussed the details elsewhere and cannot repeat them here. Several new and distinctive jug, juglet and krater forms are present and most have good parallels at Deir 'Alla in phases J–L. The most important new feature to be found in the Irbed tombs is the use of red-burnished surface finish on various pottery forms. Unlike other areas of the Near East where red-burnished forms begin with a dark red shade and with many brown to dark red-brown variants, the red-burnished surface treatment at Irbed is most often in fairly light red shades.

Working jointly with Jordan University and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, the American Center in Amman conducted a small scale excavation at the northwest corner of Jebel Qala' in 1969 (Dornemann, 1970: 222–268). We excavated a series of layers associated with two phases of building activity which spanned most of the tenth century BC

with additional late tenth century to early ninth century BC materials in overlying fills associated with a much later Islamic wall. Since the undisturbed area was so limited, interpretation of the architectural remains is difficult. The location and elevations of the segments of walls on this portion of the citadel and the cuts in bedrock where the foundation stones had disappeared, indicated that we have excavated a portion of the Iron Age defense wall. In the southwestern portion of the area this wall ran under the later Hellenistic-Byzantine defense walls.

Once again we have little more to discuss than the pottery since few other small finds were excavated. The material is quite important at this point since there is currently very little contemporary evidence. The sherds from both periods I and II continue the tradition of simple forms, without complicated profiles, as has been common throughout Iron I. Only in the overlying layers are there more pronounced carinations, thickenings or angling of rims, out-flarings and the like in bowl, jar and other forms. For the most part, the forms were already present in periods I and II of the sounding but the elaboration of these forms seems to be a consistent development toward the elaborate, sophisticated, and technically well-produced vessels that characterize the end of Iron II. The simple bowls with curved sides and rounded or flat bases continue the earlier tradition, but most have a medium-red slip and are well hand-burnished. The surface preservation of many of these sherds is such that it is difficult to detect the burnishing in all cases. Small rounded or vertical oval lug handles are common on bowls. A variety of the round-sided bowls, particularly one with a short side or slight carination, is a form which becomes more common and which is a basic form from which numerous variants develop. Fairly heavy platter rims with squared off ends seem to begin in phase two. They are usually hand-burnished or polished and have a dark red or dark red-brown slip, sometimes inside and out but usually inside and over the rim. This form is characteristic for the beginning of the red-burnished Iron Age tradition and can be found as far away as the Amuq to the northwest of Syria.

Globular bowls with short, vertical rims and platter bowls with slightly angled, nearly horizontal sides and wide, flat, horizontal rims, begin in phase I. Both types have long histories in the Transjordan and a series of variations were derived from these early forms. The sharply inturned ledge rims on various small and large vessel forms seem to begin in phase I. The larger versions are folded over or so made as to leave a steep step on the outside below the rim. One variety with grooves on the horizontal surface of the rim occurs after phase II. A triangular rim which is normally well burnished or polished also occurs after phase II and is usually decorated with painted bands, slashes, or other designs in a variety of paints—red, white, black, purple and brown. The unpainted rims develop into the class of cylindrical jar rims common at the end of Iron II and other related wider rims seem to be derived from these early, undecorated inturned-ledge rims. In period II of our sounding, these inturned-ledge rims occurred

predominantly on small forms which were red-burnished and quite often bore, on the upper surface of their rims, incised marks—conical holes, slashes, multiple slashes, and marks resembling Vs, Ws, Xs and #s.

Few cooking pot rims were found and the number of large vessel rims was limited. We have time to mention only one of these rim types here. The collar-rim, which is considered characteristic of Iron I in Palestine and which Albright (Albright, 1934 and Ibrahim, 1978: 117) and others have considered to be a hallmark of Israelite presence, is not found in phase I but good examples exist in phase II and post-phase II layers. All of our examples are of the low, heavy rim types which, though late in the typological development of this form, have good contemporary parallels in the tenth century BC (Dornemann, 1970: FIGS. 53: 10, 11, 33; 54: 5, 6, 35; 67: 1–3, 6, 7, 11–13). The Iron I tombs did not contain such large storage jars and only one good example of the early type of collar-rim jar was found at Deir 'Alla in level A. Ibrahim has found many collar-rim jars in his Iron I levels at Sahab and in a recent study he stresses the difficulties in assigning the manufacture or use of these vessels to a specific ethnic group (Ibrahim, 1978). Collar-rim sherds at Jalul, Safut, Dhiban, the evidence from the Amman sounding and the sherds collected on the surface of the Amman Citadel indicate an established, continuing use of this type of storage vessel.

Finally, a surprisingly large number of sherds excavated in this sounding bore painted decoration. The majority were simple bands of various colours but the variety of combinations is instructive in that they illustrate the continuation of old styles and the beginning of new ones. None of the simple concentric circles on the interior of bowls, as found earlier in the Jebel Nuzha tomb, are present but the use of bichrome, usually red and black on a light background of primarily grey, tan or buff, is quite possibly a continuation or development of the earlier Late Bronze Age tradition. Several bichrome patterns on white slips appear on forms which are atypical for vessels bearing 'Philistine' decoration. In one case the use of a series of thin black lines bordered by two heavy bands is found on a jug sherd which resembles the decoration frequently found later on locally produced Cypriote-looking jugs and jars (Dajani, 1966a: PLS. v: 122–125; vi: 77, 83, 87; vii: 81, 86; and viii: 125–127). Most of the decoration is on sherds with a red surface colour. Simple parallel black lines are most common. Quite a number of sherds have alternating black and white lines or black lines framing a white line or band, a common decoration on red-burnished vessels until the end of the Iron Age and which at present seems to be more common in the Transjordan than elsewhere. As stated above, we are dealing with a small selection of sherds but, one which provides clear evidence for a rich, diverse and lively painted Iron Age pottery tradition in the Transjordan.

In conclusion, we have tried to give a survey of the Iron I period in the Transjordan by reviewing the limited evidence that exists. We have, of necessity, had to concentrate primarily on a somewhat pedantic and less than exciting discussion of

pottery forms and decoration. However, in the ceramic evidence one can trace broad changes in the decline of the Late Bronze Age tradition and the establishment of a new ceramic assemblage by the end of the twelfth century BC. This assemblage does not remain static in the following century but innovations occur to such an extent that by the mid-tenth century BC a radical transformation has taken place. The ceramic tradition of the succeeding Iron II period, then, develops out of the assemblage established in the tenth century BC.

Additional evidence is a prerequisite to going beyond very general statements and to understanding the import of some of the shreds of evidence we now possess. Clearly, there was an abrupt change effecting the civilization of the Transjordan in the twelfth century BC. A seemingly introverted, parochial culture developed for a time but did the power and influence of the nineteenth and twentieth Egyptian dynasties have any lasting effect on the culture of the Transjordan? Did any of the Sea Peoples have a lasting effect on this culture? What local traditions, experience or technology provided a continuity between the earlier cultures of the second millennium and what was to follow in the first? Is the absence of the typical red-burnished decoration at Aro'er somehow connected with this problem (Olavarri, 1965: 83)? How distinctive are the painted pottery repertoires from different parts of the Transjordan, what development exists over the course of six or seven centuries, and what basic features are common throughout that can define a Transjordanian style? What was the role of trade and foreign entanglements in the formation of this cultural fabric?

These are specific questions more oriented to our past scholarly traditions which were interested in specific local histories and the identification of specific national groups. We will also have to ask the currently relevant questions of the placement of distinct assemblages in their environmental, regional, geographical, ecological and technological settings. We should, with a number of strategic and select excavations, be able to create a secure progression of ceramic forms based on what currently is at hand. It is to be hoped that then many of the associated artifacts and their architectural settings will also become available to provide a better insight into the material culture of this period. It will still be a long time, however, before we shall satisfactorily be able to answer even a percentage of the basic questions posed above.

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