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The Ceramic Ensemble from the EB IIIB Palace B at Khirbat Al-Batrāwī (North-Central Jordan): A Preliminary Report in the Context of EBA Palestine and Transjordan

Introduction

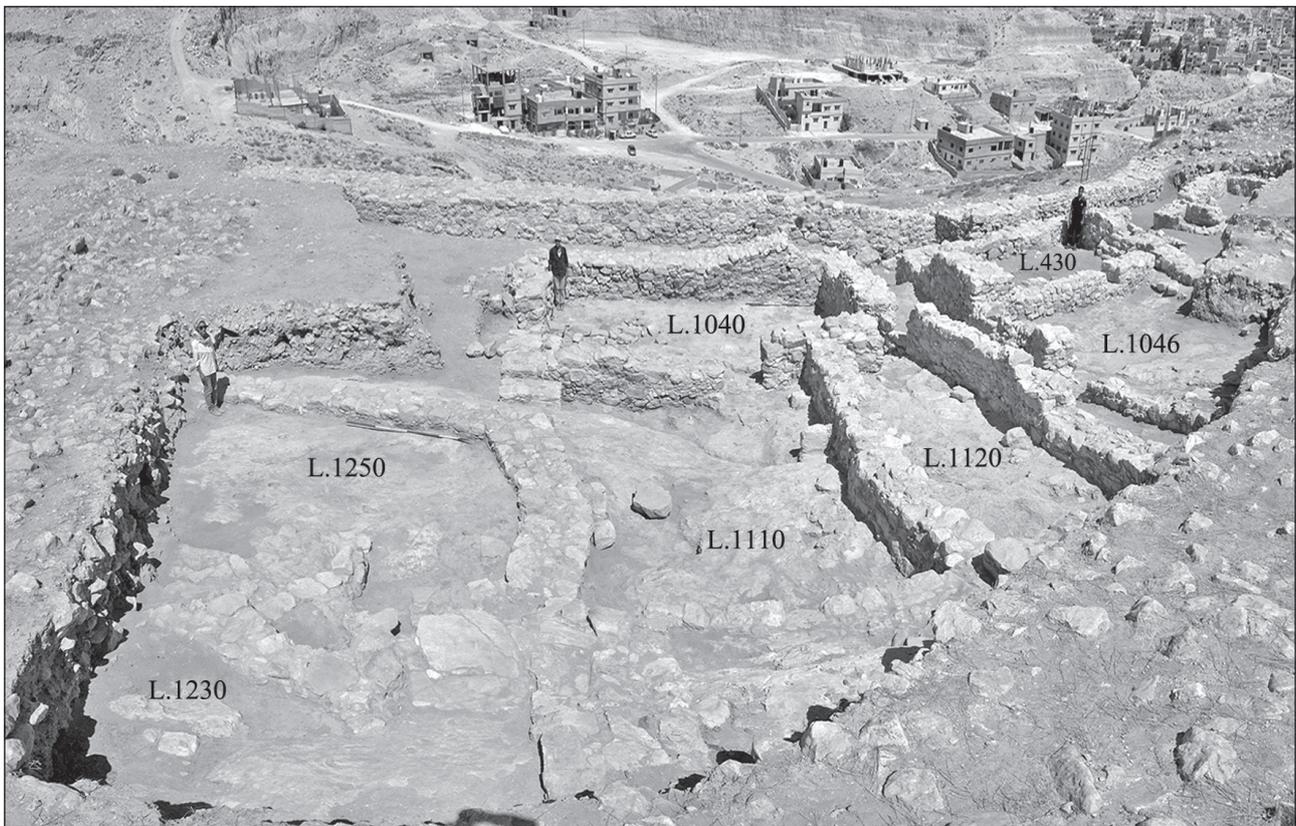
The fifth-ninth (2009-2012) seasons of excavations and restoration carried out by “La Sapienza” University of Rome at the site of Khirbat al-Batrāwī in north-central Jordan focused on the palatial building, designated Palace B. This was uncovered on the northern flank of the acropolis, just inside the triple fortification line, and dated back to the Early Bronze (EB) IIIB (Nigro 2010, 2013a; Nigro and Sala 2011, 2012). The site witnessed the birth of a city at the beginning of EB II, its *floruit* during the third millennium BC and its final destruction in EB IIIB (Nigro 2013b). It yielded a coherent and uninterrupted stratigraphic sequence, covering the whole EB II-III period, with successive episodes of destruction and reconstruction that marked its three main occupational phases, *viz.* EB II, EB IIIA and EB IIIB, each being associated with remarkable changes of ceramic manufacture and repertoire (Sala 2013).

Pottery from Palace B significantly enriched the EB II-III stratified assemblage from the site, yielding an assemblage from the final phase of the city, *i.e.* EB IIIB. It finds good comparisons in EB IIIB layers of northern Palestinian and Transjordanian sites, mainly at Khirbat az-Zarqūn (“späten Horizont”, *i.e.* “Letztbenutzungsphase” [Genz 2002: 120]),

but also at Khirbat al-Karak (late Period D [Greenberg *et al.* 2006]), Pella (latest horizon [Bourke 2000]) and Besan (stratum XI / phase R7a [Mazar *et al.* 2000; Ziv-Esudri 2012: pls. 48-49]). It also finds parallels in the EB IIIB repertoires of central and southern sites, such as at-Tall (phases VII-VIII), Tall as-Sultan (Period Sultan IIIc2), Khirbat al-Yarmūk (de Miroschedji 2000: tab. 18.1), Tall Beit Mirsim (phase J [Albright 1933; Dever and Richard 1977]), Tall al-Ḥandaqūq South (Chesson 2000) and Tall al-‘Umayrī (IP 19; field D, phase 4 [Harrison 1997; Herr 2000]), which are marked by a general trend towards standardization (both typological and technological) that typifies the latest EB III pottery productions, culminating in a greater convergence of regional ceramic assemblages.

Palace B

Palace B (FIG. 1) was erected on a series of carefully regularized bedrock steps on the northern slope of the acropolis, and so far includes two symmetrical pavilions separated by an entrance (L.1050) opening on to the street (L.1060) running inside the city-wall. Each pavilion consisted of a main rectangular hall, with other large rooms behind it (to the south), while courtyards opened further to the west (Nigro 2013a: 198-204). Most of the finds from



1. Khirbat al-Batrāwī: general view of the EB IIIB Palace B located within the EB II-III main inner city-wall (from south).

the palace came from the Western Pavilion, which was discovered in an extraordinary state of preservation owing to the fierce conflagration that brought its life to a sudden end in EB IIIB. Materials were sealed within a 0.5- to 1.2-m thick destruction layer, which buried hundreds of intact and smashed pottery vessels, as well as other items (Nigro 2010: 71-110). It remained untouched thanks to the packed levelling layers of the superimposed EB IV village. The palace halls thus yielded a homogenous collection of whole vessels from firmly dated and reliable stratigraphic contexts belonging to the mature EB III phase. Three halls of the Western Pavilion have been completely excavated so far (Pillared Hall L.1040; Hall L.1110; Storeroom L.1120), while two others (L.1250; L.1230) are under investigation. Along the walls of these halls, large storage containers (loop-handled jars and, especially, *pithoi*) were arrayed, as in Pillared Hall L.1040 where 21 *pithoi* were deposited, containing mainly carefully sieved barley and

other dried or liquid stuff (in one exceptional case [*pithos* 1040/9], red ochre). A number of small and medium vessels had been arranged between them, including medium-sized storage wares (hole-mouth jars and necked jars of different categories), table services (cups and bowls, vats, jugs and *amphoriskoi*), and luxury and ceremonial pieces (red-polished and reserved-burnished kraters, jugs and juglets, and miniature vases).

The Palace B Assemblage

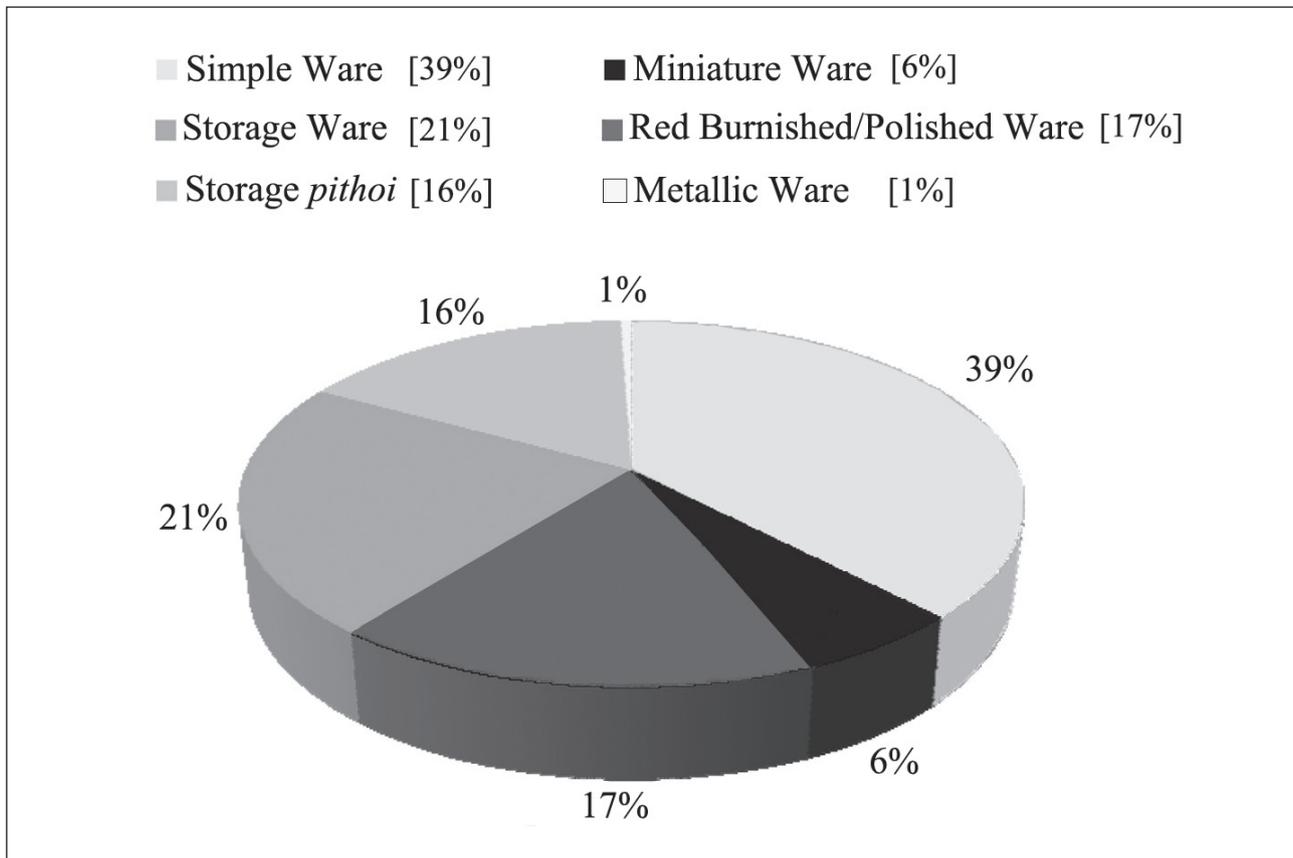
The palace collection added around 200 complete vases to the EB IIIB inventory (along with a significant set of diagnostic fragments). It also provided a series of shapes and sophisticated decoration, so far known primarily from tomb contexts and minimally attested within settlements, *e.g.* exquisite red-polished and reserved-burnished jugs and juglets (Philip 2008: 203) that were primarily intended as precious containers (for wine or fine

/ scented ointments) and which exhibit a high level of refinement and decorative patterning.

A quantitative overview of the pottery classes and productions found in the palace (FIG.2)¹ immediately demonstrates a significant concentration (23% of the whole assemblage) of luxury vessels and vases for special use (e.g. miniature pottery, or decorated jars with snake and scorpion motifs), and also the high proportion (16% of the whole assemblage) of huge, standardized storage containers, the big *pithoi*, for communal storage. The high frequency of fine vessels is even more apparent when the palace repertoire is compared with those from other EB IIIB al-Batrāwī contexts (e.g. domestic or storage), where common ware vessels typically represent more than the 80% of the assemblage. This testifies to a different pattern of both production and consumption, viz. the rank and wealth of an emerging urban

elite who encouraged the manufacture and acquisition of luxury vases.

The transition to EBIIIB, the *floruit* of the city of al-Batrāwī, was marked in pottery manufacturing by more evident craft specialisation and increasing standardisation in pottery shape, fabric and function. Vessels' shapes homogenize according to function; use of the wheel becomes common in refining open shapes and small / medium vases (above all in fine wares), as well as in manufacturing rims and necks of medium- and large-sized containers, and rims of hole-mouth jars²; fabrics further differentiate and standardize according to the different functional classes, i.e. the uses to which the containers were put. Such trends are well-attested in the ceramic assemblage from Palace B, which includes common ware vessels for table ware, vases for food preparation, containers for medium- and long-term storage,



2. Different pottery productions from the EB IIIB Palace B.

1. Calculation based on the assemblages from the fully excavated halls of the Palace: Pillared Hall L.1040, Hall L.1110 and Store-room L.1120.

2. For a thorough analysis of the use of the slow wheel in southern Levantine EBA ceramic manufacture see, for instance, the study by V. Roux on the pottery from Khirbet Yarmouk (Roux 2009).

and specialized containers for both long-term storage and transportation, as well as luxury and ceremonial pieces of specialized productions.

The Fabrics

Five main fabrics have been identified in the palace collection so far, showing similar petrographic features, but with differentiation according to grain size, type of aggregate and temper³:

*Fabric A*⁴

A red / reddish-brown / dark red ware, medium-fired, with an irregular and coarse-grained texture characterized by a high percentage of coarse inclusions of calcite and micritic calcite, along with fragments of sedimentary rocks and grog, and the diffuse presence of dark clay pallets in the matrix. This fabric is introduced and exclusively employed in EB IIIB, and is used for the majority of simple ware vessels and storage ware containers, well exemplifying the process of increasing standardization that characterizes the pottery manufacture of the mature EB III phase.

Fabric B

A quite depurated pink / light reddish-brown fabric, with a fine-grained and compact texture, and medium-sized inclusions of calcite; well-fired; it is basically used for simple ware jugs and juglets, and *amphoriskoi*.

Fabric C

A calcareous fabric with color ranging from beige-brown, red to dark brown, with an irregular but compact texture, characterized by inclusions of calcite, fragments of basaltic rocks and fossils (dark clay pallets in the matrix are also present); well-fired; it is used for both medium and medium-large table ware jars, as well as for storage jars and *pithoi*.

Fabric D

An orange-brown fabric, with a fine-grained and very compact texture, characterized by a few inclusions of micritic calcite and calcite; highly fired; it is used exclusively for highly specialized vessels, such as red-polished and burnished jugs and juglets (for wine, oil and ointments), or metallic ware jars (for oil).

Fabric E

A calcareous fabric with color ranging from pink, through reddish to brown (sometimes with a reduced grey core), with a quite coarse but homogeneous texture, characterized by large-sized pores and by diffuse inclusions of calcite, micritic calcite, sparry calcite, fragments of basaltic and sedimentary rocks, fine quartz and grog; well-fired; it is used mainly for storage containers, such as *pithoi* and the big loop-handled jars.

Pottery Classes and Productions

Simple (Table) Ware

The standardization and reduction / selection of fabrics in comparison to the previous EB IIIA inventory (Medeghini *et al.* 2012), according to the function of ceramics, is primarily evident among simple ware vases. Here, a further leap towards standardization in the mature phase of EB III produces a drop of fabric quality and diversification in vessels for common (table; storage) use. The latter are made mostly of Fabric A. This fabric is introduced in EB IIIB, and starts to be used mainly for simple ware manufacture, for bowls, cups and small jugs, and for almost all vats, small jars and medium-sized necked jars, as well as for miniature vases. The diffuse presence of dark clay pallets in the matrix (presumably representing lumps of the base clay used to produce these ceramics) points to an absence of purification associated with a faster and more cursory manufacturing process.

3. For a thorough analysis of the use of the slow wheel in southern Levantine EBA ceramic manufacture see, for instance, the study by V. Roux on the pottery from Khirbet Yarmouk (Roux 2009).

4. The labelling of ceramic fabrics here is provisional. Their defini-

tive classification, envisaged for the final publication of the palace pottery, will take into account the whole corpus of ceramic fabrics identified in the EBA assemblage of Khirbat Al-Batrāwī.

Fabric B is, instead, employed for jugs, juglets and *amphoriskoi*, while medium and medium-large jars are also produced in Fabric C.

The table ware repertoire includes a few open shapes, among which are small curved bowls (10-12cm in diameter) and medium bowls with straight sides and inturned flattened rims, inherited from previous EB III phases (FIG. 3:1)⁵, along with deep bowls (20-25cm in diameter) with oblique walls and inturned rounded rims (FIG. 3:2). A few small bowls / cups have been found (FIG. 3:3-5), possibly used as measuring cups for liquid poured from jugs and jars; they were, in fact, usually found at the base of such vessels. Medium-sized vats (20-30cm in diameter) with flat base, oblique walls and inturned rims, with or without pushed-up ledge handles, are also present (FIG. 3:6-7), as they are in EB IIIB contexts at et-Tall (Marquet-Krause 1949: pls LXXVI:1609, LXXVII:2052, 2083; Callaway 1980: fig. 129:20), Tell es-Sultan (Kenyon and Holland 1982: fig. 71:1) and Tell Beit Mirsim (Albright 1933: pl. 1:4). Notably absent in the palace repertoire are the shallow, flat-based bowls which characterize late EB IIIB pottery horizons, mainly on southern Palestinian sites such as Tell es-Sultan (Garstang 1932: pl. IV:3, 11; Garstang *et al.* 1935: pls XXXIII:28-29, XXXIV:9-13, 34-36 [Tomb 351]; Nigro *et al.* 2011: fig. 19:5-7) and Khirbat al-Yarmuk (de Miroschedji 2000: fig. 18.8:12-14); they are also absent at Khirbat az-Zarqūn.

Small jars (15-25cm high), with both elongated and squat ovoid bodies and short everted rims (FIG. 4:8-9), and medium-sized ovoid jars (35-45cm high), with flaring necks, a variety of everted rims (no more than 13 cm in diameter) and a couple of pushed-up ledge handles applied at the girth of the body (FIG. 5:2-3), are also widespread in the palace halls. The latter examples sometimes have incised

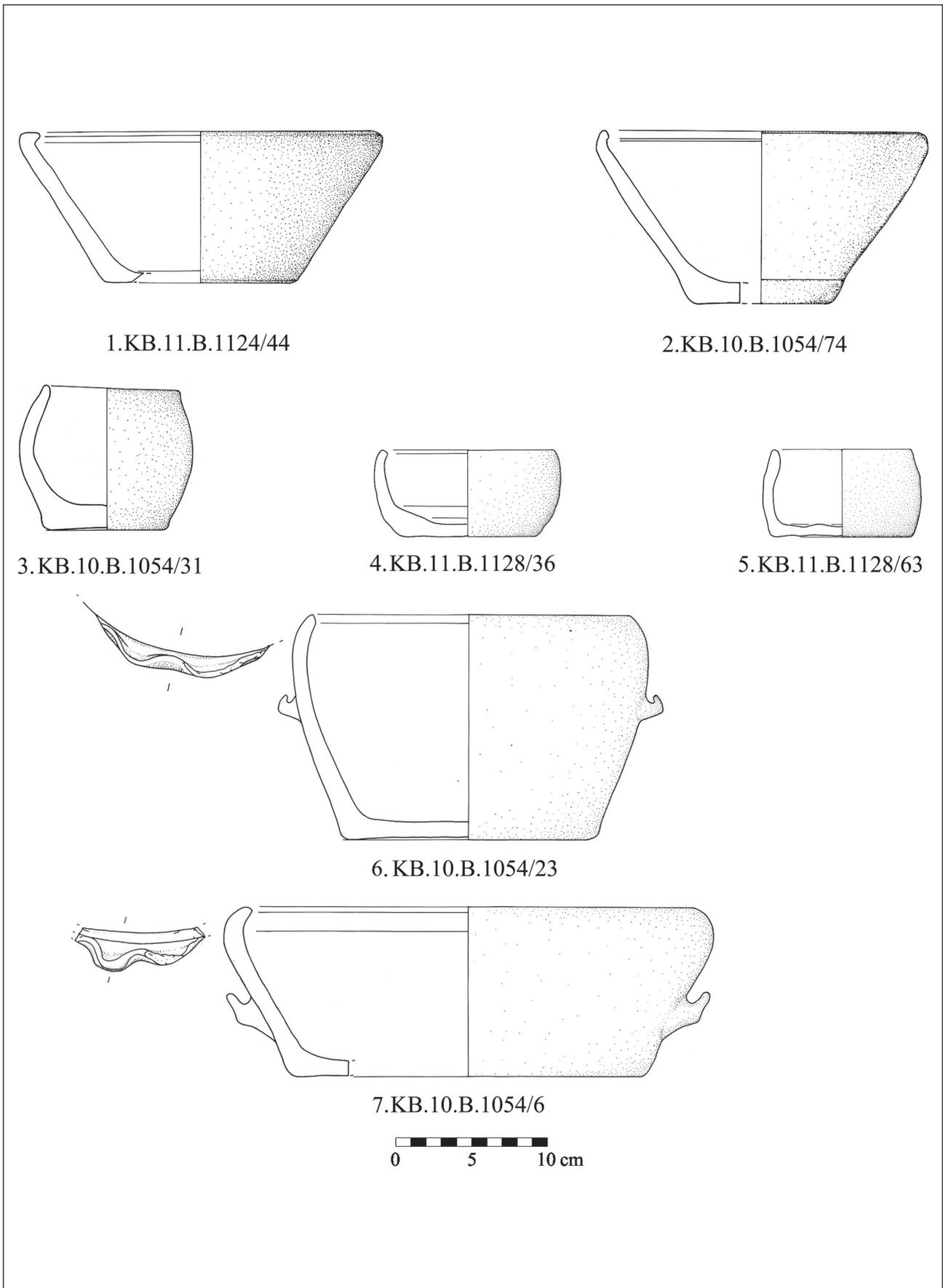
slash decoration at the base of the neck, in order to disguise the join between the wheel-made neck and coil-built body. They were used as temporary containers for a variety of dry stuff and liquids.

Several jugs and juglets with either elongated, ovoid or piriform bodies and a flat base were found (FIG. 4:1-4). They belong to various sub-types of table ware, *viz.* narrow-necked jugs and juglets and wide-mouth jugs, and were used as containers for liquids (water; wine). Among them, a large water jug (KB.10.B.1054/26; FIG. 4:5), found with a cup (which seems to be a forerunner of the later EB IV beakers), appears to be a typical EB IIIB shape, with striking comparisons in EB IIIB examples from at-Tall (Marquet-Krause 1949: pl. 65:11.1565), Tell es-Sultan (Sellin and Watzinger 1913: pl. 21:C.i; Kenyon 1960: fig. 47:3, here with a slender ovoid body), Khirbat al-Yarmūk (de Miroschedji 2000: fig. 18.9:11) and Tall ad-Duwayr (Tufnell 1958: pls 15:3, 62:288).

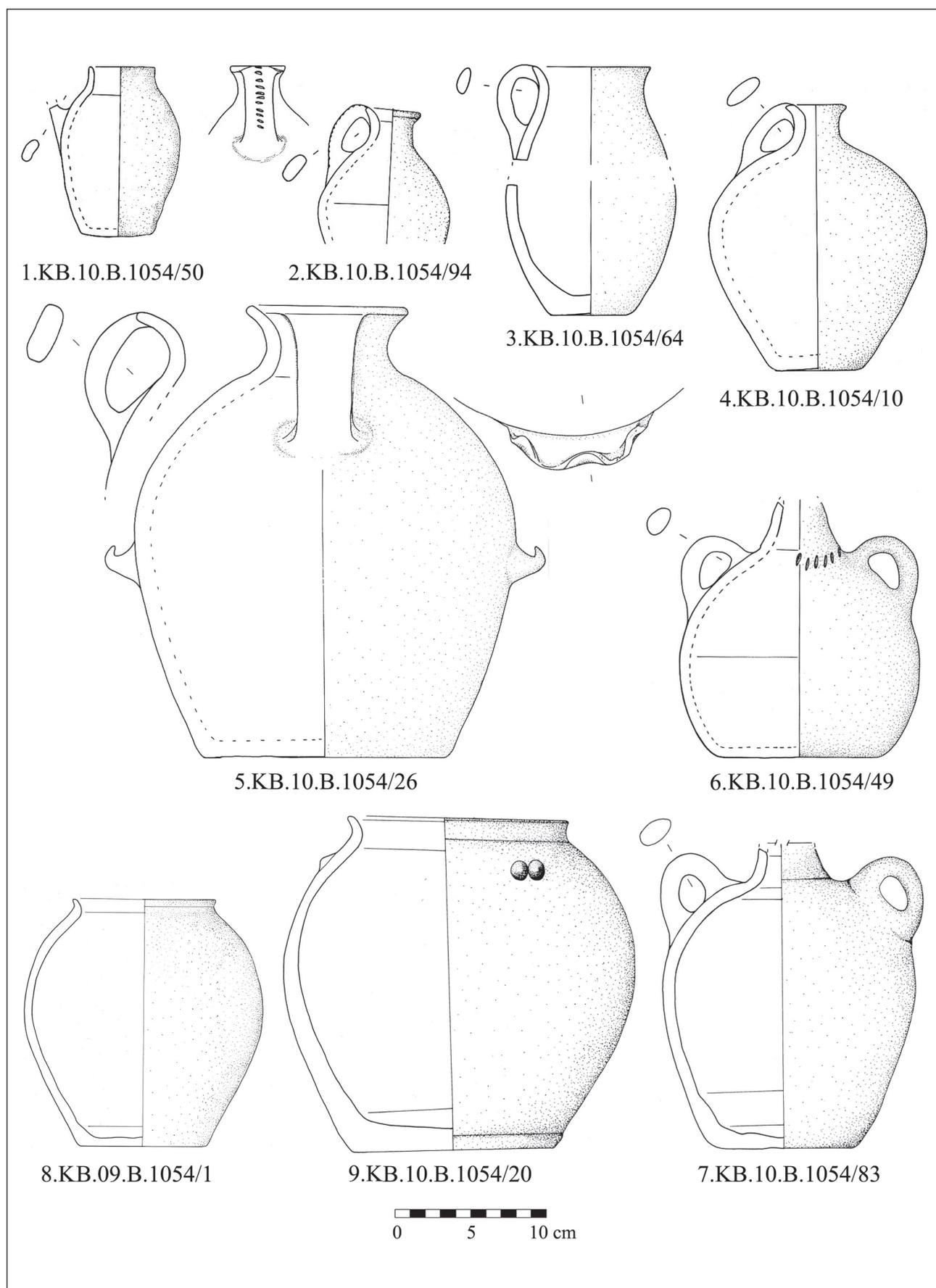
A couple of big *amphoriskoi* or, more properly, double-handled jars were also found in Palace B. They belong to two different sub-types: one with a large globular body and elongated tapering neck (FIG. 4:6) and another with a slender body and cylindrical neck (FIG. 4:7). Both of them find many comparisons in examples from EB IIIB contexts at Khirbat az-Zarqūn (Genz 2002: 27, pls 4:4-5, 54:3, 83:4), Khirbat al-Karak (Greenberg *et al.* 2006: figs 5.81:7, 5.88:1, 5.91:12, 8.69:3, 8.77:3, 8.89:9, 8.100:8), Tall al-‘Umayrī (Harrison 2000a: fig. 19.3:7-8), at-Tall (Marquet-Krause 1949: pls LXX:628, LXXV:1282), Tall ad-Duwayr (Tufnell 1958: pls 59:168-169, 61:254) and Tell Beit Mirsim (Dever and Richard 1977: fig. 1:12), testifying to the resilience of this shape which dates back to the beginning of the Early Bronze Age.

5. For comparisons see, respectively: FIG. 3:1: Khirbat az-Zarqūn (Genz 2002: pl. 13), at-Tall (stratum VII; Callaway 1972: fig. 68:3, 6; Callaway 1980: figs 123:1-2, 4; 124:5; 126:1, 5, 7, 18; 128:12, 14, 16, 18; 130:1-4, 8-15), Tall ad-Duwayr (Tuf-

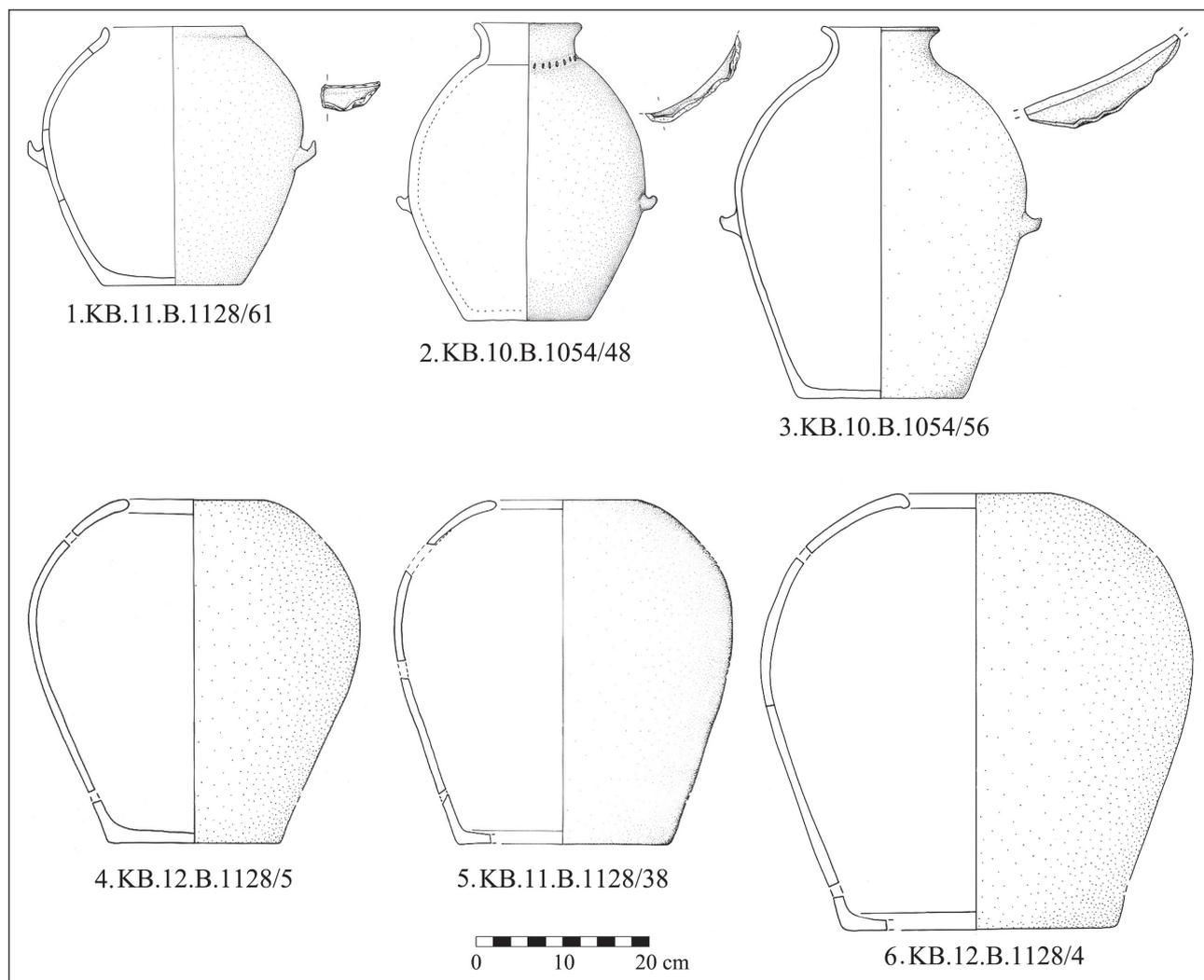
nell 1958: pls 59:148; 62:276; 63:308-310; 64:346, 351) and Tall al-‘Umayrī (Harrison 1997: figs 5.28:18; 5.29:4, 7-8, 12; 5.30:3); FIG. 3:2: Tell es-Sultan (Kenyon 1960: fig. 57:4; Kenyon and Holland 1982: fig. 55:35-37).



3. Simple ware bowls and vats from the EB IIIB Palace B.



4. Simple ware jugs and juglets, *amphoriskoi* and small jars from the EB IIIB Palace B.



5. Simple ware double-handled jars and storage ware hole-mouth jars from the EB IIIB Palace B.

A few miniature vessels were also found (FIG. 6), including small jars, juglets and bowls, some of which had incised net decoration that probably imitates stone prototypes; these may have been used as small mortar-bowls or for cosmetics.

Simple Painted Ware

Simple painted ware, which reached its highest frequency and greatest variety of decoration in EB IIIA (Sala 2013: 596-598; also documented in EB IIIA layers at Tell es-Sultan, Khirbat al-Yarmuk, Tall al-Ḥisi and Tall al-‘Umayrī), is still present to a limited extent, evincing a general trend that witnessed the progressive disappearance of painted

decoration during the transition from EB IIIA to EB IIIB⁶. Painted decoration consisting of larger and rather irregular bands is occasionally present on medium-large simple ware jars; it can be associated with the painted decoration termed “unregelmäßige Streifenbemalung” at Khirbat az-Zarqūn (Genz 2002: 32).

Red-Burnished / Polished Ware

Red-polished and often reserved-burnished vessels are numerous in the palace assemblage, and exhibit a high quality of manufacture, decoration and refinement. They represent the main fine specialized production of the al-Batrāwī palace.

6. This trend is documented at Khirbat Kerak in the transition from early Period D (EB IIIA) to late Period D (EB IIIB), at Tell es-Sultan in the transition from period Sultan IIIb1 (EB IIIA) to

period Sultan IIIb2 (EB IIIB) and at Tall al-‘Umayrī in the transition from phase 6B to phase 6A (Daviau 1991).



6. Miniature vases from the EB IIIB Palace B.

The use of red-burnished slip, and especially the pattern-burnished decoration introduced in EB IIIA, spreads in EB IIIB. Vessels of this type display a fine standard of finish, above all in the case of the luxury jugs and juglets, which exhibit sophisticated decorative patterns. This class of vessel is universally produced in Fabric D.

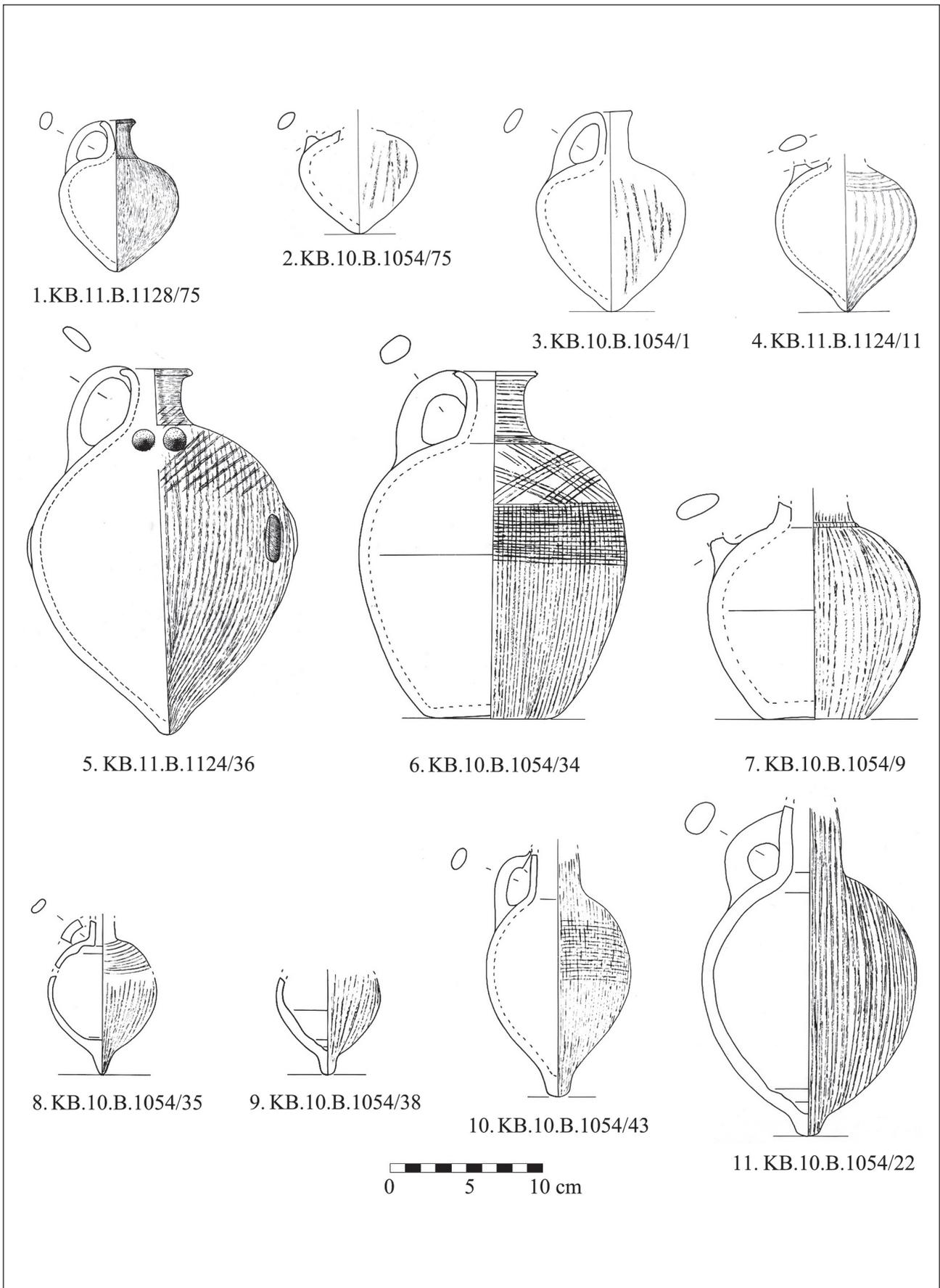
A few red-burnished bowls with inturned rims, shaped in a mould and refined on a slow wheel, were retrieved from the palace. Among them, bowls with sharply inverted and pushed-down rims are a diagnostic shape of late EB III as attested to at different sites, from Khirbat al-Karak to Tell Beit Mirsim (Dever and Richard 1977: 3; de Miroschedji 2000: 331-332; Harrison 2000a: 349-351). Notable is the absence (so far) in the palace repertoire of large red-burnished platters, which characterize other EB IIIB assemblages all over Palestine and Transjordan.

A distinguishing feature of the palace ensemble is the presence of several sub-types of red-polished and reserved-burnished jugs and juglets (FIG. 7), with ovoid, piriform and globular bodies, and flat, pointed or spike bases. A distinctive group is represented by

red-burnished jugs and juglets with a globular body, vertical neck and pronounced pointed base (FIG. 7:1-5), and jugs and juglets with a spike base (FIG. 7:8-11). Pronounced pointed and spike bases are a diagnostic type of late EB III (Dever and Richard 1977: 7, 10; Mazar *et al.* 2000: 267). These vessels are usually known from tomb contexts (as attested by the numerous specimens from the Jericho necropolis), appearing only to a limited extent in settlements as they were mainly used as containers for perfume and precious materials. Their conspicuous presence in the al-Batrāwī palace expands in a quite unexpected manner the corpus of these shapes, from a very well-stratified context. Equally remarkable is the absence of narrow stump bases, which frequently characterize late EB III pottery repertoires⁷, but they are similarly absent at Khirbat az-Zarqūn.

Three red-polished and pattern-burnished jugs prominently represent the palatial ceramic service. The first jug (1054/34; FIG. 7:6) has a vertical ovoid body with flat, slightly concave base and flaring neck, and exhibits a complicated pattern of burnish dividing the vase into zones

7. As attested, for instance, by specimens retrieved in the EB IIIB layer of Garstang's Tomb A at Jericho / Tell es-Sultan (Garstang 1932: pls III:19-21; VIII:6; XXVII:9).



7. Red-polished and burnished jugs and juglets from the EB III B Palace B.

(vertical burnish on the lower half, net-pattern on the mid-body and horizontal burnish on the neck). The second jug (1054/9; FIG. 7:7) has a globular body with a flat, slightly concave base and cylindrical neck, and exhibits a thick polished red slip with a bright vertical burnish. The third jug 1128/49 (FIG. 8) is characterized by a highly polished piriform body with a sharply tapering base and narrow cylindrical neck, with a net-burnished pattern on the girth of the body, an applied vertical ridge and two plastic knobs on the shoulder. This latter vessel, on account of the excellent finish of its polish and the sophistication of its decoration, surely

belongs to a palatial service. The combination of pattern-burnish and plastic decoration is displayed by several other luxury examples from the palace, *e.g.* jug 1124/36 (FIG. 7:5), and again recalls valuable vessels from palatial or funerary contexts, such as those from the Jericho necropolis, or from the EB IIIB Palace G at Jericho / Tell es-Sultan itself⁸. A striking comparison for jug 1128/49 (FIG. 8), in terms of both shape and reserved burnish decoration, was recently found in the Megiddo temples area (Phase J-6a [Adams 2013: 324-325, 327, figs 8.14:2-3, 8.15]), pointing again to the precious and ceremonial nature of such vessels.



8. Red-polished jug KB.11.B. 1128/49 from EB IIIB Palace / Hall L.1110.

8. A red-burnished jug with applied plastic knobs on the shoulder was retrieved in EB IIIB Palace G (TS.10.G.1172/49; Nigro *et al.* 2011, fig. 19), as well as numerous body fragments with a vertical burnish and an applied vertical ridge; while other

specimens were found in the Jericho necropolis, in Garstang's Tomb A (Garstang 1932, pls. VII:3, 6-7; XXVII:2, 8, 11), and Kenyon's Tombs D12 (Kenyon 1960, fig. 39:2) and F2 (Kenyon 1960, fig. 59:5).

A quite extraordinary vessel from Pillared Hall L.1040 is a double-handled, carefully red-burnished krater (1054/11; FIG. 9), with a hole-mouth globular body and high grooved trumpet-shaped pedestal (possibly imitating some Khirbat al-Karak ware devices: Getzov 2006: fig. 3.53: 4-5; Greenberg *et al.* 2006: figs 3.13; 3.27:9; 3.46:5; 5.90:14; 5.91:22; 6.31:16; 6.34:11), interpreted as a ceremonial vase (Nigro 2010: 73, 2013b: 201). The only comparison is an example from Khirbat az-Zarqūn, *i.e.* a large mouth, double-handled bowl from the temple area (Genz 2002: pl. 21:15).

Storage Ware

Storage ware illustrates several types of quite standardized medium-large and huge containers, falling into three main functional classes: hole-mouth jars for medium-term / temporary storage (35 - 55 litres), medium-large handled jars (55 - 75 litres) and *pithoi* for long-term storage (from 70 up to 120 litres), and medium-sized ovoid jars with loop-handles (*ca.* 30 litres) for, most likely, transportation (mainly produced in metallic ware).

Such storage containers were made in three different fabrics. Fabric A, introduced in EB IIIB and (primarily) used also in simple ware manufacture, was employed for hole-mouth jars, medium-large jars and *pithoi*. Fabric C, was used for both medium-large jars and *pithoi*, while Fabric E was used mainly for *pithoi*.

Hole-mouth jars for medium-term storage (the most common storage container in the daily life of the EBA southern Levant) are attested within the palace in almost equal percentages in each hall excavated so far. They exhibit either a piriform (FIG. 5:4) or ovoid body (FIG. 5:5-6), with plain / swollen rounded and flattened rims. Flattened recessed rims also appear as a hallmark of the EB IIIB period, as at Tall al-'Umayrī⁹, and continue into the succeeding EB IV repertoire at the site (Sala 2006: 104-106: fig. 3.56). They fall into two size categories: medium (16 - 18 cm in diameter and 35-40cm high [FIG. 5:4-5]) and large (20-22cm in diameter and *ca.* 50cm high [FIG. 5:6]).

Medium-large necked jars, *ca.* 50-75cm high, are present in two variants: one with an ovoid body and ledge handles, and a higher



9. Double-handed red-burnished ceremonial vessel KB.10.B.1054/11 from EB IIIB Palace / Pillared Hall L.1040.

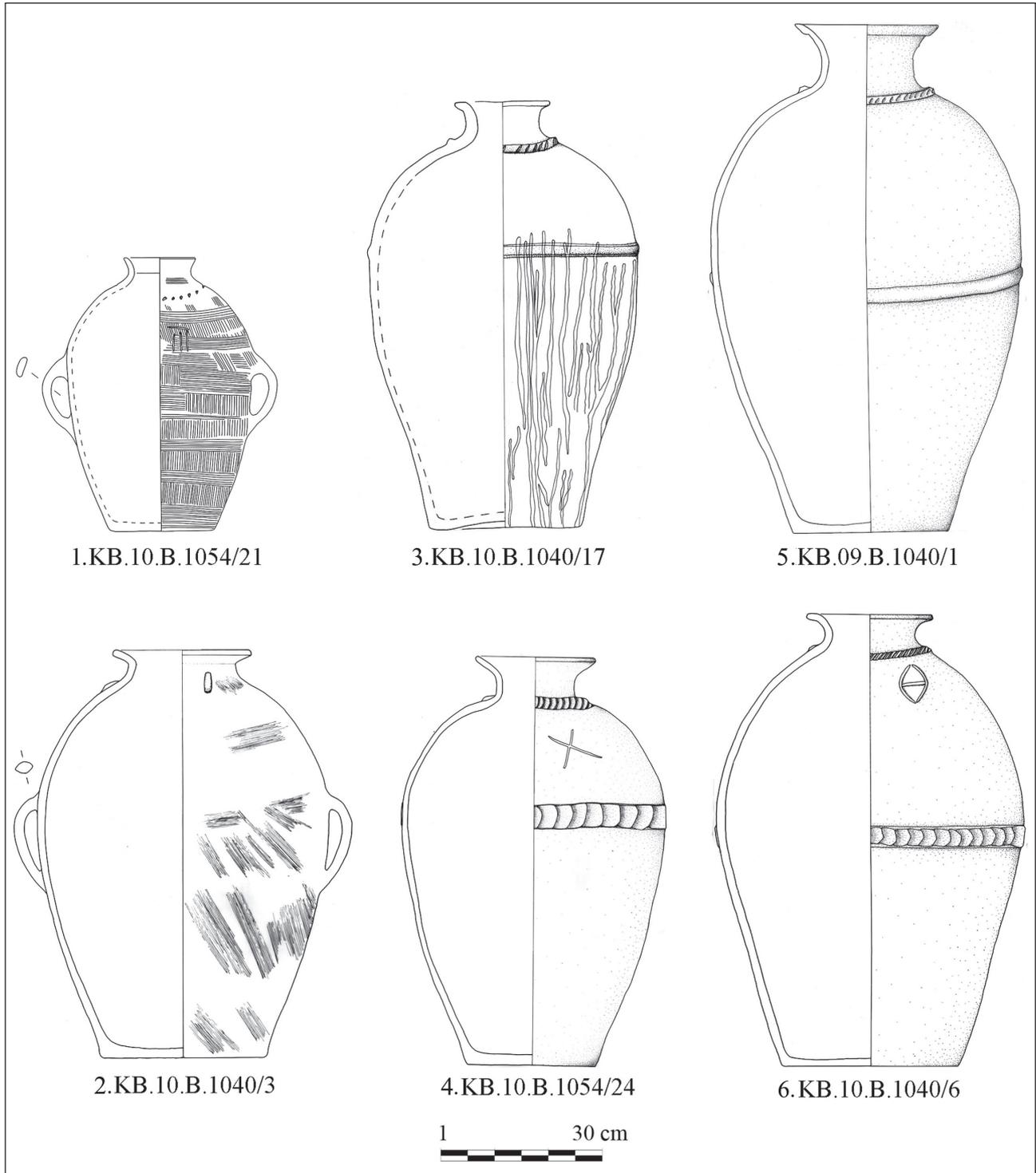
9. For the flattened recessed (sometimes inner expanded) rims see comparisons at Khirbat az-Zarqūn (Genz 2002: pls 43:8; 50:5; 63:2; 77:4; 102:9; 107:5; 121:2), Beth Shan (Mazar *et al.* 2000:

fig. 14.6:7), Tall al-'Umayrī (Harrison 1997: figs 5.15:9, 11-18, 20; 5.16:7-8, 12, 14).

variant (up to 75cm high) with an elongated ovoid / piriform body and loop-handles (FIG. 10:2). Band-painted decoration consisting of large irregular bands is occasionally present on these loop-handled jars, as similarly attested in some specimens from Khirbat az-Zarqūn (the so-called “breite Streifen” decoration). It

is sometimes associated with a light combing, actually quite rare in the al-Batrāwī repertoire with the exception of metallic ware jars.

Among the storage containers, a metallic pattern-combed transportation jar, with ovoid body, flaring neck and loop-handles, was identified (FIG. 10:1). This type of container, 40-



10. Metallic ware jar, loop-handled jar and *pithoi* from the EB IIIB Palace.

50cm high and produced in a local, highly-fired orange fabric (Fabric D), was used for olive oil trade and transportation. This type spread all over the Levant around the mid-Third Millennium BC (Mazzoni 1987) and is often refined with outer vertical or alternating horizontal and vertical combing, as attested, for example, at Khirbat az-Zarqūn and Khirbat al-Karak (Genz 2002, pl. 5, 1-2. 25, 1. 29, 1-2; 4. 32, 1; 3-4. 34, 3. 56. 61, 2. 70, 5. 83, 1; 3. 95. 108, 4. 113, 2. 131, 1; Greenberg *et al.* 2006: fig. 8.69, 5. 8.80, 7). This jar also exhibits a potter's mark, which might also point more to commercial use.

Finally, a large proportion of the palace storage containers consisted of large *pithoi* for long-term storage (FIG. 11). These can be subdivided into two rough size categories: *ca.* 70-80cm high (80-100 litres; FIG. 10:3-4) and up to 110cm high (*ca.* 100-120 litres; FIG. 10:5-6). Such containers were manufactured in three main fabrics (Fabrics A, C and E), in all probability according to the material being stored. *Pithoi* from Palace B are thus one of the best examples of the pottery standardization and

specialization within the al-Batrāwī repertoire. In the literature dealing with the development of ceramic specialization, paste uniformity has been often suggested as a surrogate index of standardization and the result of a more intensive level of specialization. Actually, a variety of factors, not only technological and social but also environmental (*e.g.* natural variability of ceramic raw material, procurement, changes in resource *etc.*), influence paste variability. Thus, more so than paste uniformity, paste specialization and differentiation, *i.e.* the use of homogenous pastes related to specific vessel shapes and functional classes, can be used as an index of manufacturing specialization. *Pithoi* from the al-Batrāwī palace can confidently be used as a surrogate marker of this process.

These huge containers were made of two joined halves with a more or less elongated ovoid body, narrow flat base and a distinctive flaring / cylindrical neck made on a wheel¹⁰. They are characterized by rope-like decoration, applied on the middle of the body and at the base of the neck in order to hide and strengthen



11. *Pithoi* from EB IIIB Palace / Pillared Hall L.1040 after restoration carried out during the 2013 season.

10. Two potter's wheels were found stored inside the palace rooms, *viz.* KB.10.B.87 from Pillared Hall L.1040 and KB.11.B.110 from Storeroom L.1120 (Fiaccavento 2013). In a study based on findings from Palace B1 at Khirbet Yarmouk, it has been pointed

out that such *tournettes* were used in palatial contexts for the production of ceramic containers related to palatial functions, as in the case of big *pithoi* for communal storage (de Miroshedji and Roux 2009: 171).

the junctures of the different parts of the vessel. The rope at the base of the neck often shows a kind of stick-impression, while the rope applied to the body juncture is represented by modelled rope-like decoration (FIG. 10:4, 6), raised bands with stick impressions or simple plain bands (FIG. 10:3, 5), as in specimens from Tall al-‘Umayrī (Harrison 1997: figs 5.20:1, 5.21-5.22, 2000a: fig. 19.5:3), Khirbat al-Yarmuk (de Miroschedji 2000: fig. 18.6:10) and Tall ad-Duwayr (Tufnell 1958: pl. 62:302), according to the different morphologies of the containers and their related fabrics (*pithoi* 1040/17 and 1040/1 [FIG. 10:3, 5] are both produced in Fabric E, while *pithoi* 1054/24 and 1040/6 [FIG. 10:4, 6] are produced in Fabrics C and A respectively).

Pithoi also show different rim types: everted squared and outer-folded rims, with a slight outer ridge, continue from the previous EB IIIA phase, as at (Genz 2002: pl. 11:13; 17:8; 37; 65:3; 77:6), at-Tall (Callaway 1980: fig. 132:10, 12, 15), Tall al-Ḥandaqūq South (Chesson 2000: fig. 20.3:11) and Tall al-‘Umayrī (Harrison 1997: fig. 5.19:12-22, 26-27), while sharply out-flaring rims, with rounded or pointed edge, appear and become a hallmark of the EB IIIB repertoire, as in EB IIIB contexts at Khirbat az-Zarqūn (Genz 2002: pls 11:13; 23:6; 36), Tall al-Ḥandaqūq South (Chesson 2000: fig. 20.3:12), Tall al-‘Umayrī (Daviau 1991: fig. 6.40:20; Harrison 1997: fig. 5.22; 2000a: 353, fig. 19.5), Tall ad-Duwayr (Tufnell 1958: pl. 62:282-283, 291-292, 294, 297), Khirbat al-Karak (Greenberg *et al.* 2006: fig. 7.38:10), at-Tall (Callaway 1972: figs 61:21-22; 67:8, 1980: figs 132:2-3, 11, 13; 141: 9, 13) and Tell Beit Mirsim (Stratum J; Dever and Richard 1977: 10, fig. 2:12).

A variety of surface treatments refine the outer surfaces of *pithoi*. Grain wash decoration, consisting either of large painted bands (*cf.* *pithos* 1040/10), as similarly attested in some specimens from Khirbat az-Zarqūn (so-called “breite Streifen” decoration) and Khirbat Karak (Genz 2002: pls 28; 30; 33; 71:2;

86; 97; Greenberg *et al.* 2006: figs 8.78:3-4; 8.80:4), or in a ‘smeared wash’ variant in white or red wash (*cf.* *pithoi* 1040/14; 1040/17; 1054/101), also attested at Khirbat al-Karak (Greenberg *et al.* 2006: fig. 5.82:7), is often used for *pithoi*, as well as for medium-large storage jars. The classic grain wash decoration is, nonetheless, still present, as it is – more frequently – at Khirbat az-Zarqūn (mainly on *pithoi* [Genz 2002: 35, pls 35:3; 62; 76:2; 87; 154:D-E]). Finally, a chalky white coating is sometimes employed as an outer finish for storage containers (as in *pithos* 1054/15). The white coating is actually a surface treatment more common in EB III central and southern Palestine, where the application of chalky slip on vats, jars and *pithoi* follows the pattern-combing (Harrison 2000a: 353-355).

Conclusions

Comparing the al-Batrāwī ensemble with the EB IIIB ensembles from contemporary palaces at Khirbat az-Zarqūn (Genz 2002) and Khirbat al-Yarmuk (de Miroschedji 2006: fig. 7), storage containers – mainly *pithoi* – represent a high proportion of the assemblage, clearly pointing to an economic function for such administrative buildings (Genz 2003: 68). Small and medium-sized jars and jugs are widely distributed, and big vats may have been used for food-processing. A big vat, 51 cm high, was found in Palace B during the 2012 season, but it differs from the well-known examples from Khirbet Yarmouk, Khirbat az-Zarqūn and Khirbat al-Karak by having ledge-handles instead of the more common loop-handles, which were indeed distinctive of the northern pottery repertoires. No cooking vessels or large serving platters have been retrieved so far from the al-Batrāwī palace. Conversely, the Palace B repertoire includes a large quantity of luxury and special purpose vessels, surely palatial, *e.g.* the unique red-burnished hole-mouth krater (FIG. 9), the red-burnished pointed juglets and the beautiful highly red-polished jugs (FIGS.

7 and 8). This points to a role for pottery in marking status in daily life (not just in funerary contexts as previously suggested [Philip 2008; 203]).

Two remarkable ceremonial jars with a peculiar applied and incised snake decoration complete the ensemble: one (KB.11.B.1054/4) shows a plastic-applied, sinuous punctuated snake on the shoulder, while the other (KB.11.B.1054/1) exhibits incised decoration subdivided into *metopae*, separated by a herringbone motive, depicting a snake and a scorpion on opposite sides of the vase (both animals are known from coeval glyptic in Palestine; snake applied decoration is also known in Wādī az-Zarqā‘ from the EB I sanctuary of Jabal al-Muṭawwaq [Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2008: 30-32]).

Finally, an Egyptian-style ‘lotus vase’ (KB.11.B.1128/76; FIG. 12), evidence of Egyptian contact / influence extending as far as this remote easternmost EB III city of Transjordan, was recovered from Hall L.1110. This vessel type appears in southern Palestine as early as EB IA (as attested by two specimens

from Kenyon’s Tombs A114 and K1 in the Jericho necropolis [Sala 2005: 177-178]) and spread into south-western Palestine in the succeeding EB IB. The EB IIIB date of the al-Batrāwī ‘lotus vase’ is thus meaningful. The best comparisons can be found in the Egyptian-style vessels found in the *cachette* from the Level J-4 temple at Megiddo / Tall al-Mutasallim (Joffe 2000: 170-174, figs 8.6, 8.8), while other comparable specimens come from the EB IIIB Sanctuary A at ‘Ai / at-Tall (Marquet-Krause 1949: 195-197, pls LII:1534,1536,1541, LXV:1524,1534,1536, LXXVI:1541; Callaway 1972: 303-304, figs 73:1, 76:3-5), demonstrating enduring Egyptian-Palestinian cultural connections during the EB II - III urban phase.

The ceramic ensemble excavated in Palace B during the 2009 - 2012 seasons thus provides, with its collection of complete vessels found in well-stratified contexts, a unique opportunity for (1) a general reassessment of the north-central Transjordanian EB IIIB pottery horizon within the setting of the EBA southern Levant and (2) study of the technological achievements,



12. Lotus vase KB.11.B.1128 /76 from EB IIIB Palace / Hall L.1110.

typological features and aesthetic devices developed by Levantine potters in the final, mature stage of earliest urbanization in the region. It provides not only a representative assemblage, but also deep insights into the role of ceramics in the economy and social life of an early urban community.

Pottery from Palace B, along with other precious items from palace contexts, has positioned Khirbat al-Batrāwī as a key site in the framework of the earliest Palestinian and Transjordanian urban civilization.

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