

# THE KATARET ES-SAMRA PROJECT: 1985

by  
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During January 1985 a one-month programme of excavation was conducted by the University of Missouri-Columbia<sup>1</sup> at Kataret es-Samra located just a few kilometres southwest of Deir 'Alla. The purpose of the short season was to answer three questions raised by the author's previous preliminary work at the site in 1978.<sup>2</sup>

## The Late Bronze Age Tomb

One of the principle questions that remained after the 1978 season was whether the large tomb cleared by the Department of Antiquities and later tested by the author had been an isolated occurrence or part of a larger LB cemetery. This year's excavation to the north of that tomb produced a vertical shaft cut into the marl, filled with over fifty intact or restoreable vessels, and a burial chamber holding about a dozen skeletons, a small deposit of pots, a scarab, glass beads and a few fragments of bronze. Although the exact relationship of shaft to burial chamber has been erased by seismic shifting it is most probable that the chamber was entered from the western side of the shaft. The ceramic material would be at home during much of the Late Bronze Age, with special emphasis on the 13th century B.C. The deposit included two Cypriote imports (BR I and BR II) as well as a chalice with a profiled (Early Iron I?) foot.

The fact that sherds from the funerary chamber joined with vessels in the shaft indicate that this tomb was disturbed in antiquity.

## Tell Kataret es-Samra

A major topographical feature on the 1:10,000 map is "Tell" Kataret es-Samra. Our work here in 1978 produced a surface collection that covered a wide chronological spectrum but absolutely no evidence for architecture even in two deep trenches cut into the summit. The second goal of the 1985 season, then, was to determine if this was a natural feature or whether it contained the sequence of occupation that defines a true tell. Re-examination of the eastern slopes during the 1985 season produced evidence of mudbrick *detritus* while a small sounding exhibited a sequence of walls and associated debris deposits that indicate that this is, in fact, a true tell. Although we were not able to excavate these walls to secure *loci* due to the brevity of the season, we were amazed at the amount of MB II/LB I(?) in these disturbed contexts and in the general survey of the summit and slopes of the tell. Rolled-rim cooking pots were especially frequent as well as "Chocolate-on-White" ware which was found in a profusion of colours, strongly suggesting a place of manufacture at, or very close to, the site.

## The Kataret es-Samra Plateau

The third goal of the 1985 season was to determine whether the extensive spread of Proto-Urban/Early Bronze I (PU/EBI) artefacts over the Kataret es-Samra plateau was to be associated with a settled or with a transhumant society. Unfortunately much of the plateau had been

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<sup>2</sup> A. Leonard, Jr., "Kataret es-Samra: A Late Bronze Age Cemetery in Transjordan?," *ADAJ*, XXV (1981) p. 179-195, and *BASOR*, 234 (1979) p. 53-65; and "The Proto-Urban/Early Bronze I Utilization of the Kataret es-Samra Plateau," *BASOR*, 251 (1983) p. 37-60.

recently bulldozed for farming — a process which was quickly halted by the intervention of the Department of Antiquities. The periphery of this bulldozed area does present us with some yet-undisturbed areas, however these must by their very placement on the plateau reflect only “suburbs” of the original settlement. A small probe in one of these areas produced evidence of mudbrick walls and *debris* together with the major pottery types of the period: red-burnished (PUA/EB1A), dark-on-light painted (PUB/EB1B), the so-called “Esdraelon Ware” (PUC/EB1C), and the more domestic vessels with PUD (*pre-urbaine D*) techniques of bands of incisions and impressed cordons.

Below this stratum was the major surprise of the 1985 season: a unique(?) handmade pottery which in fabrication and vessel-form relates to the Chalcolithic Period, but which exterior surfaces are embellished with red and/or black painted

decoration, often on a white slip. All who have seen the material agree that this is not a Mamlūk imitation of earlier pottery styles and that it must represent a pre-PU/EB1 pottery type as its position in the stratigraphy had already shown. This ware certainly indicates a presence of at least one artistically sophisticated potter living at the interface between the *zor* and the *ghor* of the eastern Jordan Valley toward the end of the Fourth Millennium B.C.

In summary, the 1985 season at Kataret es-Samra was very rewarding in that it has answered the three major questions raised by our previous work, as well as given direction to future research at the site.

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