

A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE TOMB NEAR TALL AL-'UMAYRI*

by

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A Middle Bronze Age tomb was discovered during the first season of salvage excavations at the Bronze Age cemetery near Tall al-'Umayri in September 1993. The cemetery is located south-west of 'Ammān, on the northern edge of the Mādabā Plains along the Airport Highway. The site is on a hill slope [Palestine grid coordinates 234.7 141.6 (K 737 map 3153. 1 SE)] to the east of the major archaeological site of Tall al-'Umayri under investigation by an American team (Geraty *et al.* 1989, 1991; Herr *et al.* 1991).

The limits of the cemetery are still not determined, since much of the area is under cultivation, but tomb robbing and agricultural bulldozing operations on the upper and lower slopes of the hill have revealed the presence of more tombs.

It is important to shed further light on the Middle Bronze Age to be sure if Glueck's theory is acceptable or whether it needs additional investigation given his statement that Transjordan was unoccupied between 1900-1200 BC (Glueck 1960: 265).

Different evidence concerning this period has been found in several discovered tombs in 'Ammān, in Jabal aj-Jofah al-Gharbi (Harding 1953:14; Isserlin 1953: 19-26) and Jabal al-Qala'a (Ma'ayeh 1960: 114; Piccirillo 1978: 73; Najjar 1991: 106).

The tomb was found in the north-east corner of the area planned for the water reservoir. The bulldozer had partially uncovered the southern part of the tomb where the shaft was possibly located (Fig. 1).

The tomb was accessed through the opening left by the collapsed wall. Removal

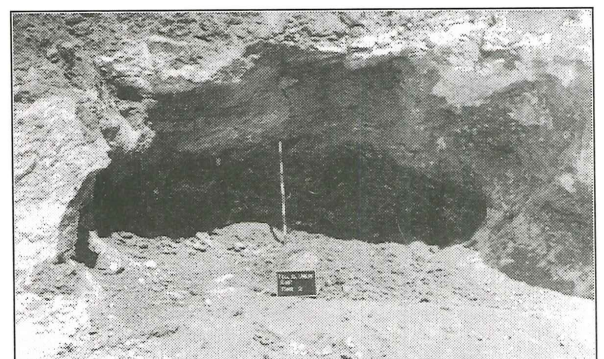
of the deposits around the tomb allowed for the plan and dimensions of the burial chamber to be established.

The external outline of the shaft could not be observed due to the damage which resulted from bulldozing.

The chamber is roughly circular in shape, cut into chalky bedrock and measures 4.00 m north-south by 3.80m east-west. The roof was roughly domed reaching a maximum height of 2.60m (Fig. 2).

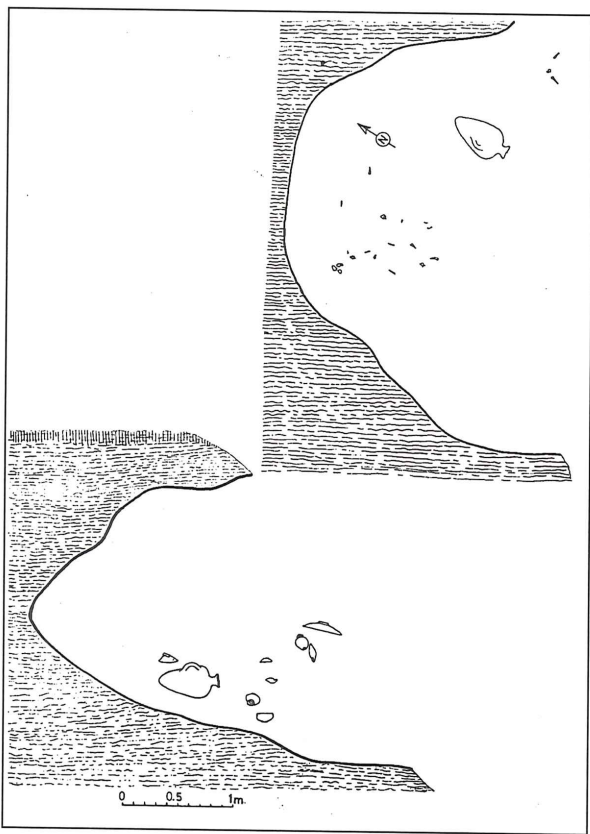
In terms of construction method, no chisel marks were observed on the roof or walls of the chamber. The irregular outline of the chamber suggests little attention has been paid to architectural features. The chamber was possibly cut during the EBIV period and reused during the MBII period. This view is consistent with EBIV body sherds mixed with silt deposits. The tomb was possibly not used as such during the EBIV period but as cistern.

The fill in the tomb consisted of two layers. The upper one was characterized by a deposit of brown soil mixed with gravel wash, which extended from the northern side toward the bulldozed southern wall, to



1. MB tomb near Tall al-'Umayri.

* The author wishes to thank Ms Maryla Kabica for her assistance and comments.



2. Tomb plan.

a maximum depth of about 0.80m. Below this was a much denser compact layer consisting of soft red soil mixed with *ḥuwwār* (roof fall). This lower layer increased in hardness towards the floor of the tomb. This bottom layer covered the floor to a maximum depth of 1.30m.

The floor of the chamber was flat but slightly uneven. Since the tomb was not sealed the tomb interior was completely silted and the influx of water had moved vessels to various places and levels, so that the grave goods were embedded in sterile silt. This silting has clearly resulted from the seepage of water through the chamber roof. These vessels have suffered severely from the effects of water seepage and the roof fall. Small bones and bone fragments were found on the bottom of the floor in fragile condition and belonged to a single disarticulated individual. There was no evidence for a bedding layer or matting.

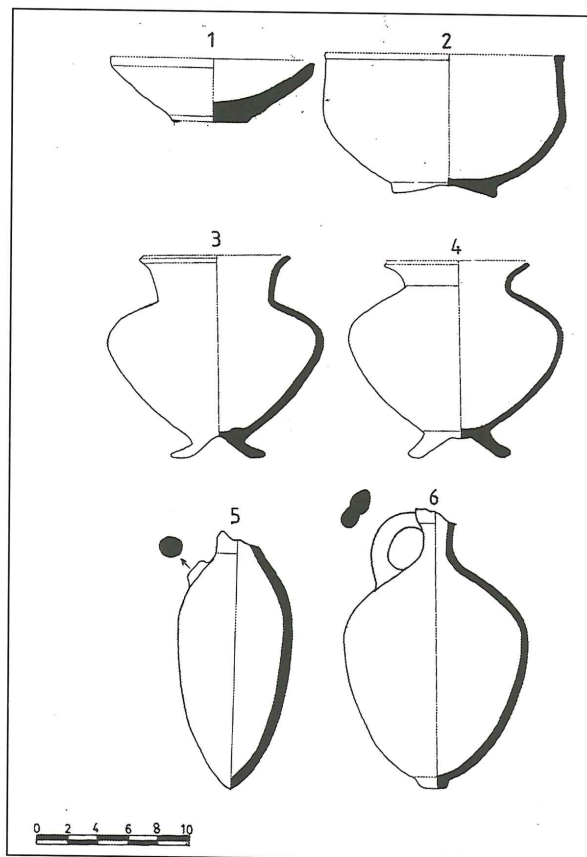
It appears that a thin layer of soft brown soil resting on the *ḥuwwār* floor could have

served as a bedding for the deceased.

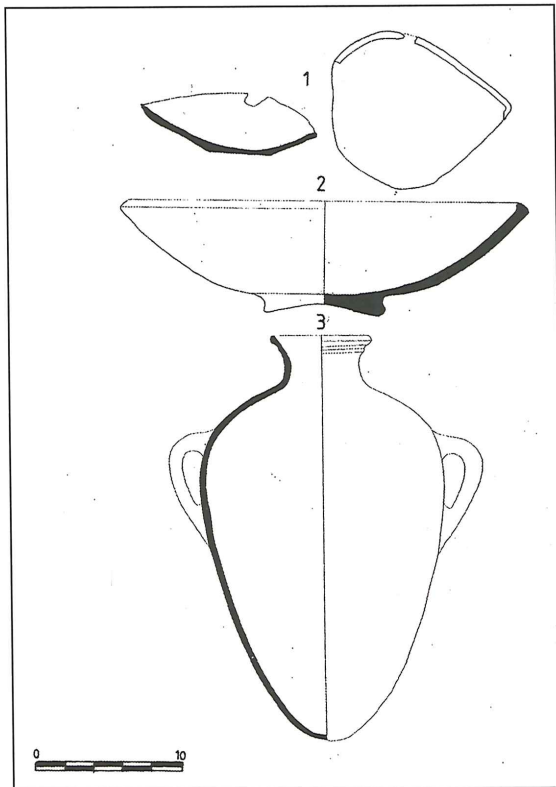
Nine vessels, one scarab and some bone beads were found in the tomb.

Pottery (Figs. 3 and 4)

- 3.1 Lamp: round. Miniature platter bowl. Rim curved in. Flat base. Traces of burning in four places. Missing some of the rim. Many medium to large grits. Vitrificated. Surface: 5YR 6/4 (light reddish brown). Core 5YR 6/1 (gray/light gray). Diameter: 12.8 on. Height: 4.1 on.
- 3.2 Bowl: deep. Upright walls, profiled rim, external projection. Concave disc base. Horizontally smoothed exterior by a sharp tool. Few small to large grits. Vitrificated. Core: upper part 5YR 5.5/1 (gray), 5.5/2 (reddish gray), lower part 5YR 6/5 (light reddish-brown-reddish yellow). Diameter 15.3 on. Height: 9.1 on.
- 3.3 Bowl: narrow-necked. Globular body,



3. Pottery from MB tomb.



4. Pottery from MB tomb.

pedestal base. Wheel-burnished, light slip on the exterior and partly on the interior (neck). Missing some of rim and base. Very few small grits. Underfired. Surface 5 YR 6/4 (Light reddish brown). Core 5YR 6/2 (pinkish gray). Slip 5YR 7/3 (pink). Diameter: 13.5 on. Height: 13.0 on.

- 3.4 Bowl: narrow-necked. Globular body, pedestal base. Light slip on the exterior and partly on the interior (neck). Missing some of rim. Very few small to medium grits. High fired. Ware 5 YR 6/6 (reddish yellow). Slip 10YR 8/2 (White). Diameter: 14.2 on. Height: 12.6 on.
- 3.5 Juglet: dipper. Single, ovoid handle. Pointed base. Missing neck and handle. Light, vertically applied slip on the exterior. Few small to medium grits. Underfired. Surface 7.5YR 7/5 (pink-reddish yellow). Core 7.5YR N6/(gray). Slip 2.5YR 8/3 (pale-yellow). Diameter: 7.3 on. Height: 7.2 on.

- 3.6 Juglet: piriform. Double handle. Flattened button base. Missing some of rim. Few medium to large grits. Medium grog grits. Reduction firing. Core 10YR 6/1 (Light-gray) - 10YR 6/2 (light brownish gray). Diameter: 11.7 on. Height: 17.9 on.
- 4.1 Lamp: one-spouted. Flat base. Traces of burning on the spout executed after the rim was broken. Missing some of rim. Many large to medium grits. High fired. Ware 5YR 6/4 (Light reddish brown). Diameter: 12.1 on. Height: 4.5 on.
- 4.2 Bowl: Platter, sharp inverted rim flattened external edge. Simple, slightly concave disc base. Missing some of rim. Many medium to large grits. Underfired. Surface 5YR 6/4 (Light reddish brown). Core 5YR 7/2 (light gray). Diameter: 27.5 on. Height 7.7 on.
- 4.3 Jar: small. Rim profiled externally, flattened edge. Rounded base. Light, horizontally applied slip. Two incised lines at shoulder. Many small to large grits. High fired. Ware 5YR 6/6 (reddish yellow). Slip 10YR 8/2 (white). Diameter: 33.2 on. Height: 55 on.

Discussion

The MBIIB material found at the Tall al-'Umayri cemetery tomb No.2 fits well with the types found in the 'Ammān area (Dornemann 1983:15-19), especially Jabal aj-Jofah al-Gharbi and Jabal al-Qal'a.

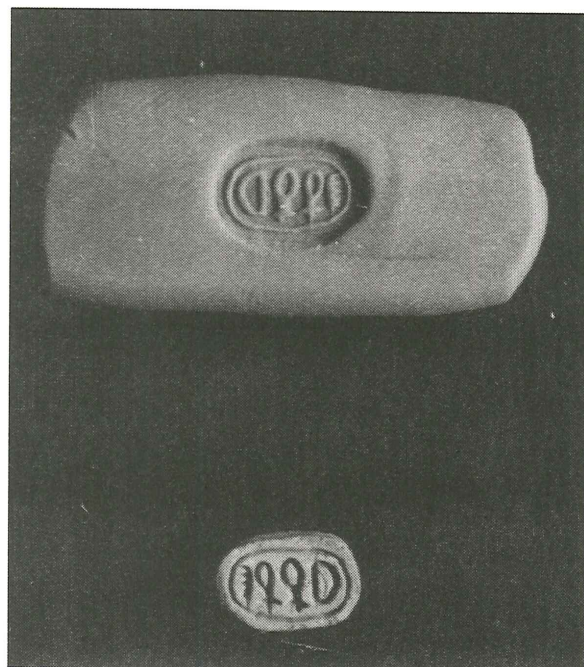
Some of the vessels belong both to MB IIB-C and LB I. The small jar (see Fig. 4:3) externally ridged ware is popular at the end of MBIIB and in MBIIC (Cole 1984: PL, 41k; Seger 1965: PL.LX:a). The piriform juglet is best placed in the MB IIB period but it also occurs in MB IIC (Cole 1984: PL, 28: 1,m,p; Seger 1965: XLLX:b). The type of dipper juglet found has many parallels in the MBIIB-C period (Cole 1884: PL. 27:f; Seger 1974: Fig. 6:23,27). Both

narrow-necked bowls are similar in form, but different kind of slip has been applied and only one of them is burnished as in the Chocolate-on-White style. These types of bowls with pedestal bases start to be popular already in MB IIB, but they are more common in the MB IIC period through to LBIA (Cole 1984: Pl.15: c-e; Seger 1965: Pl. XXV:C). Globular bowls already start to appear in MB IIB and are met especially at the end of the Middle Bronze Age as a result of general decline of form and quality. The convex disc base is also more familiar in the MBIIC period (Cole 1984: Pl. 6: c.7:c). Miniature bowls, as lamps, occur in MBIIB-C (Cole 1984; Pl.9:h; Seger 1965: Pl.XV:c).

One-spouted lamps with its slight pinch are common in the MBII and LBI periods (Seger-1974: Fig. 6:36; Herr 1989: 19.9.16). The platter bowl with its inverted rim is very popular in MB IIB-C, but the concave disc base is more common in MB IIC (Cole 1984: Pl.2:i-m; Seger 1974: Fig. 3: 22, 6:39).

The pottery seems to be contemporaneous to that found at Tall al- 'Umayri (Geraty *et al.* 1989: Fig. 19.19; 1-18; Geraty *et al.* 1991: Fig. 5.5:12-22, 5.12; Herr *et al.* 1991) and relates to a recently found (on the southern slope of the tall) MBII cave tomb (publication in preparation). Most of the vessels can be placed both in MB IIB and in MB IIC, but the presence of trumpet and concave disc bases and white slip tends to suggest MBIIC.

The scarab with its design reading *nb nfr. wj n* belongs to scarab types indicating good wishes. It has parallels in class IIC (Tuffnell: 1984) and is dated to MBII-C (Fig. 5).¹



5. Scarab seal from MB tomb.

It seems likely the chamber was cut during the EBIV period and reused as a burial site during the MBII period after the deposits inside were removed. The fact that bronze material has not been found in the tomb is not atypical since the chamber was silty. The bronze material was possibly robbed before this silting, presence of EBIV body sherds mixed with a silty deposit indicates that the tomb was not well-sealed therefore allowing wash to fill the chamber.

The location of this tomb in a relatively isolated site, without clear remains of a considerable settlement of the same period, is puzzling. Further investigation in the cemetery and the surrounding area will help to clarify the problem.

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1. The scarab was kindly studied by Prof. Joachim Sliwa to whom we want to express many thanks.

It is hoped that the scarab will be the subject of further detailed study.

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