

A Middle Bronze II Tomb from the Vicinity of Jerusalem

by
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In 1958 a Jordanian farmer discovered on his land a rock-cut tomb containing pottery. Most of the vessels had been shattered by the partial collapse of the ceiling of the chamber. All of the pottery was covered with a thick incrustation of calcium carbonate deposited over the centuries by the interaction of soil and ground water. Perhaps because of this coating, which caused potsherds to resemble chunks of limestone, the farmer failed to notice all of the fragments of the broken vessels; he did, however, gather all of the pottery he saw and bring it to Jerusalem. Because of the damaged condition of most of the vessels, he was unable to find a purchaser among the antiquities dealers in the city, and eventually sold the group to a clothing merchant on David Street for a few piastres. It was there that I noticed them, piled randomly in a cardboard box on a dusty back shelf, in April, 1959. In cooperation with the Department of Antiquities I obtained the pottery for study. Since that time the group has become a part of the permanent archaeological collection of Ashland Seminary in Ashland, Ohio.

Description of the Pottery

The tomb group consists of thirty-three identifiable vessels, twenty-five of which are sufficiently intact to warrant illustration (see Plates I and II). Color is indicated according to the Munsell Soils Color Charts¹ and hardness according to Mohs' Scale.²

1. Platter. Ware 2.5 YR 6/6-8; burnished slip 10 YR 8/3 on interior (including rim). Hardness 2.25.

2. Bowl. Ware 5 YR 7/6; slip not preserved. Hardness 1.00.

3. Miniature bowl. Ware 10 YR 4/1 (irregular) on interior, 5 YR 6/4 on exterior. Hardness 1.25. Base is string-cut and has a thin, irregular pad of clay attached to the base prior to firing.

4. Miniature bowl. Ware N 3 on interior, 10 YR 7/3 on exterior. Hardness 1.75. Base is string-cut.

5. Bowl. Ware 5 YR 7/6, one side fired irregular gray; slip not preserved. Hardness 1.25.

6. Bowl. Ware 2.5 YR 6/8; slip 5 YR 7/6 on exterior. Hardness 1.50.

7. Pedestal bowl. Ware 7.5 YR 6/2; slip 10 YR 8/2. Hardness 2.50.

8. Pedestal bowl. Ware 7.5 YR 6/2, becoming 5 YR 6/2 on interior; white slip on exterior. Hardness 2.00.

9. Pedestal bowl. Ware 2.5 YR 6/4-6; slip 5 YR 7/6 on exterior, burnished horizontally. Hardness 2.25.

10. Pedestal bowl. Ware 5 YR 5/4; slip 10 YR 8/3 on exterior, burnished horizontally. Hardness 2.50. There are traces of cloth impression like "combing" on part of the body constituting a part of the slip which was left unburnished.

(*) See plates pp. 47-48.

(1) Published by the Munsell Color Company (Baltimore, 1954).

(2) Concerning the use of both the Munsell color

charts and Mohs' Scale, see Robert Houston Smith, "An approach to the drawing of pottery and small finds for excavation reports," *World Archaeology*, II (1970-1971), pp. 212-228.

11. Pedestal bowl. Ware 5 YR 7/6; slip 10 YR 8/3 on exterior, burnished horizontally. Hardness 2.00.

12. Pedestal bowl. Ware 7.5 YR 6/4; slip 10 YR 8/2 on exterior. Hardness 2.25.

13. Jug. Ware 7.5 YR 7/4; slip 10 YR 8/4 on exterior, burnished horizontally. Hardness 2.50.

14. Jug. Ware 5 YR 6/3; slip 10 YR 8/3 on exterior, burnished horizontally. Hardness 2.50.

15. Small jug. Ware 10 YR 6/1 on interior, N 4 on exterior; slip N 3 on exterior. Hardness 2.25.

16. Small jug. Ware N 3; slip N 2 on exterior, burnished horizontally on shoulder and vertically on body below shoulder. Hardness 1.50.

17. Small jug. Ware N 3; slip N 2 on exterior, burnished (direction not evident). Hardness 2.50.

18. Small jug. Ware 10 YR 5/1; slip of same color, perhaps burnished vertically. Hardness 2.00.

19. Small jug. Ware 5 YR 6/4 on interior, 10 YR 4/1 on exterior; traces of slip, perhaps originally 10 YR 7/2, on exterior. Hardness 2.00.

20. Small jug. Ware N 4 on interior, 10 YR 5/2 on exterior; slip 10 YR 4/1 on exterior, burnished (direction not evident). Hardness 1.00.

21. Small jug. Ware 10 YR 7/3; white slip on exterior, burnished (direction not evident). Hardness 2.75.

22. Small jug. Ware 10 YR 5/1; exterior slip not preserved. Hardness 1.50.

23. Small jug. Ware 10 YR 7/2; traces of slip in exterior, perhaps originally white. Hardness 1.50.

24. Small jug. Ware 5 YR 6/4; exterior slip not preserved. Hardness 1.00.

25. Small jug. Ware 7.5 YR 4/4; traces of slip on exterior, perhaps originally 5 YR

7/4, burnished horizontally on shoulder and vertically on body below shoulder. Hardness 2.00

Not illustrated: .

26. Rim-fragment, similar in size, ware and color to that of vessel 7.

27. Base, similar in size, ware and color to that of vessel 6.

28. Base, similar in size, ware and color to that of vessel 6.

29. Base, similar in size, ware and color to that of vessel 12, but slightly lower.

30. Base, similar in size, ware and color to that of vessel 12, but slightly lower.

31. Base, similar in size, ware and color to that of vessel 12, but slightly lower.

32. Base, similar in size, ware and color to that of vessel 12, but slightly lower.

33. Two fragments of a small gray-ware jug similar to vessel 16.

The absence of large vessels from this tomb group is notable, particularly the lack of storage jars. One might be tempted to suspect that the farmer who discovered the tomb sold any storage jars separately, were it not for the fact that there are also no dipper jugs in the tomb group. Although dipper jugs were not used exclusively in connection with storage jars, the absence of such jugs tends to support the conclusion that storage jars were never a part of the contents of the tomb.

The vessel types which appear in this group are relatively few and are, for the most part, common in the repertory of Palestinian ceramics. Only vessel 14, with its beak spout (damaged, but clearly indicated by the surviving portion of the lip), footed base and thin walls and handle, may be considered rare. With it one may compare a jug from Tomb B 51 at Jericho.³ Although sufficiently like the

(3) Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Excavations at Jericho, II* (London, 1965), Fig. 168, no. 2.

other pottery of the group in ware to indicate Palestinian manufacture, the vessel seems to display Syrian influence, probably mediated through vessels such as that found in Tomb 5050 at Megiddo.⁴ Syrian prototypes themselves are abundant at Ras Shamrah during Middle Ugarit 2.⁵

Vessel 13 is less rare, but by no means common in Palestinian ceramics of this period. In contrast with vessel 14, it is characterized by excessive thickness of vessel walls and handle. Its shape is essentially that of a dipper jug with an added ring base, a form which also has prototypes in vessels of Middle Ugarit 2 at Ras Shamrah.⁶

The two small, crudely-made bowls, 3 and 4, are of special interest. They are of considerably coarser workmanship than any other vessels in the group, both in turning and in firing. Both bowls have string-cut bases. There is no evidence of carbon deposits as such on the vessels, but both display irregular gray patches on the interior--presumably an indication of casual firing procedures. Good parallels for these miniature bowls come from some Jericho tombs, such as Tomb A 347; the Jericho specimens show many of the same distinctive features as these two bowls do, and Miss Kenyon suggests that most of them were made on a tournette rather than on a potter's wheel as such. One is reminded of the still cruder--and earlier--cult vessels from the temple at Nahariyah.⁸ In view of the fact that

such vessels could have held only token amounts, a ritualistic function seems plausible. Closely related are some coarse miniature bowls with uncarinated sides and incurved rims, such as the specimen in Jericho Tomb A 34⁹ and specimens in the MB stratum of Plot A in the East Cemetery at Pella.¹⁰ Apparently both the carinated and the uncarinated varieties of these miniature vessels served the same function.

Provenance

The find-spot of this tomb group was said by the shopkeeper, on the basis of his recollection of a statement by the farmer who sold the pottery to him, to have been "east of the city wall of Jerusalem." If this description is accurate, the tomb would seem to have been located on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives, or perhaps somewhat farther south on the slopes occupied by the northern part of the village of Silwan. In favor of this alleged location is the fact that the powdery limestone accretion on the pottery appeared to consist of Senonian chalk, a variety of limestone which is abundant east and south of Jerusalem. Furthermore, the ceramic affinities of this group of vessels are with the pottery of central Palestine rather than other regions. It seems reasonable, therefore, to accept the statement about the alleged location of the tomb as essentially correct.

(4) Gordon Loud, *Megiddo II* (Chicago, 1948), Pl. 34, no. 16.

(5) See, for example, Claude F. A. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica II* (Paris, 1949), Pl. XL (Tomb LVII).

(6) See, for example, Schaeffer, *op. cit.*, Pl. XLIV, second row from bottom, third and fourth vessel from left.

(7) Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Excavations at Jericho, I*

(London, 1960), Fig. 140, nos. 26-29.

(8) I. Ben-Dor, "A Middle Bronze-Age Temple at Nahariya," *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine*, XIV (1950), pp. 1-41, especially Figs. 14-17.

(9) Kenyon, *op. cit.* (1960), Fig. 140, no. 30.

(10) Robert Houston Smith, *Pella of the Decapolis* (forthcoming).

Date

This tomb group is relatively homogeneous. The small jugs—always an important diagnostic feature in this period—are both cylindrical and piriform, but the latter have only button bases, ring bases clearly having gone out of style by this time. The pedestal vases are all of a somewhat advanced form, and have cordons at both neck and base. There is not a single vessel in the group which is obviously out of phase with the rest. All of the vessels date from the 17th century B.C.,

and most of them seem to cluster around the middle of that century. The group is contemporary with Group IV tombs (and perhaps middle to late Group III) at Jericho, and with Group E tombs at Megiddo.¹¹ It also corresponds with deposits in Tombs 15, 19, 44 and 57 at Gibeon, and with still other tomb groups which have been excavated in Palestine. Because of its essential homogeneity, this group of vessels has a typological value which is greater than that of some larger tomb groups which range more widely in date.

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(11) Kathleen M. Kenyon, "The Middle and Late Bronze Age Strata at Megiddo," *Levant*, I (1969), pp. 25-60.