

THE PELLA HINTERLAND TOMB PROJECT: A SHORT REPORT ON THE 1996 SEASON*

by

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Introduction and Objectives

The first season of the Pella Hinterland Tomb Project took place during September and October 1996. The project is an independent research project directed by Fiona Baker of FIRAT Archaeological Services, Scotland and has developed as an offshoot to the Pella Hinterland Survey 1994 - 1996, directed by Pam Watson and Margaret O'Hea. The 1996 fieldwork was undertaken by Fiona Baker, David Connolly and Ruth Ward.

The Pella Hinterland Survey has identified some 700 tombs of probable EB I and EB IV date in the foothills of the Jordanian plateau to the east of the tall (Fig. 1). During the 1995 PHS season some 638 burial monuments were discovered in the 12 km square area subjected to intensive survey; the majority, 566 examples, are megalithic tombs averaging from 3m to 5m in diameter. Most of the megalithic tombs appear to have been corbelled constructions and the tombs have frequently been built on specially constructed platforms or natural bedrock outcrops that form a platform, (Fig.2). During the PHS 95 season 72 kerbed cairns and cairn tombs were discovered including a large multi-chambered cairn (Fig. 3), that appears to be of a type previously unrecorded or unpublished in the Levant. The large numbers of tombs and the discovery of a previously unknown type prompted a programme of research dedicated to evaluating and recording the tombs in detail – the Pella Hinterland Tomb Project.

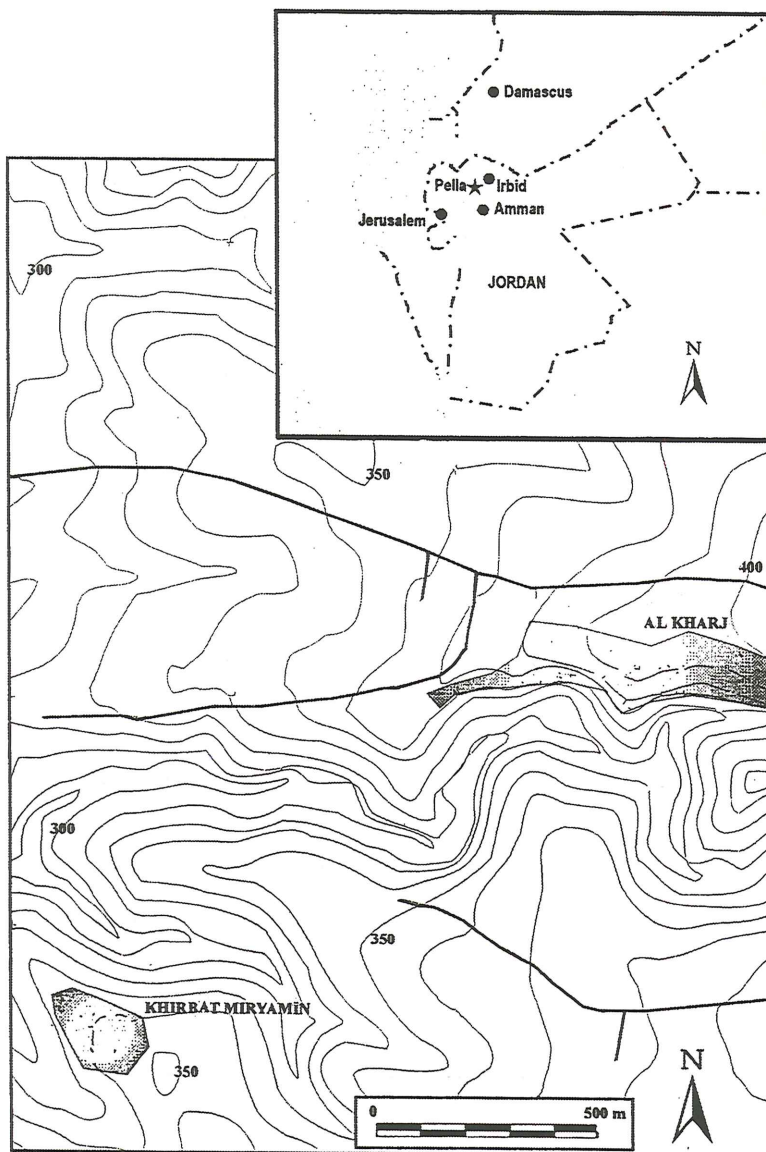
The tombs of the Pella Hinterland are in

the vast majority of cases located on limestone outcrops with sparse oak forest above the 200m asl contour although there are a few outliers as low as the 50m asl contour.

It was apparent to the field surveyors during the PHS 95 season that there are a number of differences and variables within the main tomb types of *Megalithic*, *Kerbed Cairn* and *Multi-chambered Cairn*. All three main types of tomb can be found in association with each other but it is apparent that discrete tombfields or cemeteries of a particular broad type exist. A number of *Dolmens*, most notably in the Forest of Jufayn in the PHS 94 area, have also been discovered above the 300m asl contour. The dolmens do not appear to be mixed with other types of tombs but they do have associated megalithic structures which are rather enigmatic and require further study.

The Pella Hinterland Tomb Project was set up to survey and record two discrete tombfields in detail with a view to establishing a typology based on this core data of a 10% sample. The resulting typology will be applied and tested against all of the tombs within the Pella Hinterland Survey area and, it is hoped, over a wider geographical area. It had become apparent during the general PHS that there is considerable variation in the constructional details of the tombs of all classes but without detailed and rigorous recording it would not be possible to quantify, determine and define the true characteristics of the tombs. The PHTP selected two tombfields, at al-Kharj and Khirbat Miryamin, that appeared

* All illustrations have been done by David Connolly.



1. Map showing the location of the al-Kharj and Khirbat Miryamin tombfield east of Pella.

to offer the best chance of establishing a typology. At this stage of post-survey work it is apparent that up to thirty sub-types exist within the three broad tomb categories.

Al-Kharj

Al-Kharj lies 4.3 km east of Pella at PG 211.570 / 204.850 (Fig.1). Topographically the tombfield stretches along the plateau top of a spur running east to west from 390m asl to 360m asl. A steep drop down to the Wādī Šāliḥ is present on the south side of the spur and to the north there is an open aspect over gently rolling hills and wadis. There is a panoramic view of the Jordan

Valley and up the Jizrīl Valley to the north-west. Limestone bedrock outcrops cover the majority of the spur with settlement, ploughed fields and olive groves on the north side along the line of the road. A Middle Palaeolithic flint scatter is present on the spur and a number of artefacts have been used as cairn make-up material.

49 monuments are present in the al-Kharj tomb group including 13 megalithic tombs, 13 multi-chambered cairns and 20 kerbed cairns, (three sites are not burial monuments). This tombfield was selected for the variation it contained and the number of multi-chambered cairns present.

The multi-chambered cairns appear to form an east-west alignment although this may be due to topography rather than design. These large complex cairns (see below, Fig. 3) range in length from 9m to 28m, in width from 7m to 22m wide and stand to a maximum height of about 4m. These tombs are characterized by containing multiple chambers and kerbs. The kerbs form steps or tiers. In some instances these tier kerbs are quite regular and in other examples they are irregular suggesting the monuments were added to over a period of time rather than being of one build. Circular or oval kerb settings taken to represent chambers may be identified in the cairn make-up. The number of chambers ranges from 7 to 84 though between 25 and 40 is the normal range. Robbed chambers indicate that the kerb settings represent small corbelled chambers. There is evidence of intercutting chambers suggesting use of the tomb over a period of time and also the suggestion of "founder's burials" in the form of larger chambers located at the highest point of the cairn. Upcast earth and stone is present where chambers have been exposed suggesting dug pits or chambers are present under the mass of stones. All of the multi-chambered cairns have utilized the slope in their construction and all are near flush to the ground surface on the highest side.

There is one example of a megalithic corbelled tomb and multi-chambered cairn together, EK 1, and while it appears the megalithic tomb is earlier this could not be proved without excavation. Also of note at al-Kharj are short stretches of megalithic walls associated with all three classes of tomb. While the stratigraphic relationship between the features cannot be determined at this point it seems likely that these walls are contemporary and are associated with the definition of ritual space.

One chamber of a multi-chambered cairn tomb, EK 11, which contains 84 chambers, produced 85 pot sherds in the upper 0.10m

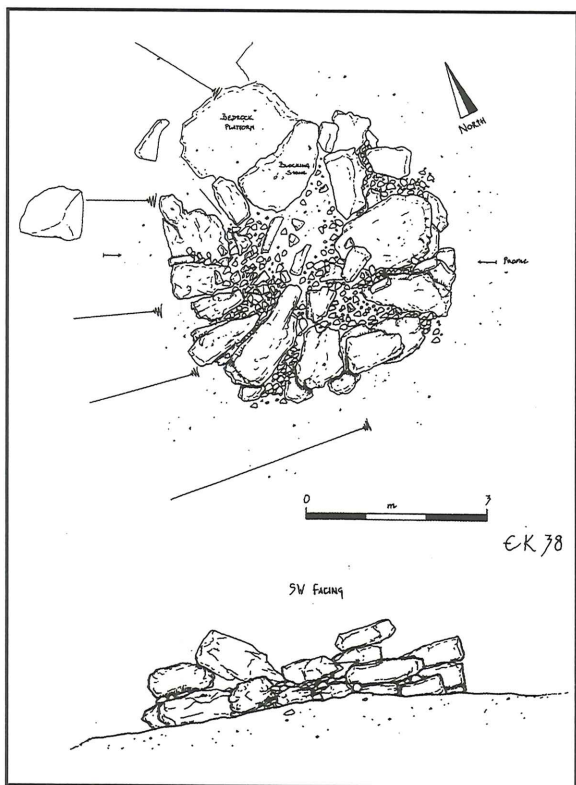
of cairn material. No diagnostic sherds were present but it is thought the assemblage represents 1 medium-sized jar and 2 small flat based jugs. The fabric is orange buff to orange-pinkish buff with many small and medium chert grit inclusions and occasional orange grog. It is likely limestone was also present but has weathered out. There is little evidence of a central core and the clay appears to be medium levigated. One handle fragment with chaff tempering is present in the assemblage. The pottery is for the most part handmade and has been finished on a slow wheel. Two sherds appear to have been finished on a fast wheel although the fabric is the same as the other sherds. These sherds have been provisionally dated to EB IV - MB I.

Khirbat Miryamīn (Figs. 2 and 3)

The Khirbat Miryamīn tombfield is located 3.5km to the south-east of Pella at PG 210.600 / 204.100, (Fig.1). Topographically the tombfield occupies an area of limestone bedrock outcrops on the plateau top of a spur with the Wādī Ṣālīḥ along its north-west side, the Wādī Ḥabīb on its north-east side and a small unnamed wadi along its south-west side. To the south-east of the tombfield ploughed *terra rossa* fields are present. The plateau lies between the 330m asl and 350m asl contours with gentle but distinct slopes at the intervening 10m contour points. Two megalithic walls run along the contours and encircle the plateau. It is apparent that the megalithic walls were built after the tombs and a number of the tombs have been badly damaged by the wall construction.

28 monuments are present, 22 megalithic tombs, 4 kerbed cairns and 2 small rectangular structures thought to be later in date. This tombfield was selected for detailed survey as it represents an almost exclusively megalithic tomb group. Circular, square and oval megalithic chamber tombs are present, all of the tombs are constructed

on platforms which may be either specifically constructed or natural bedrock or a

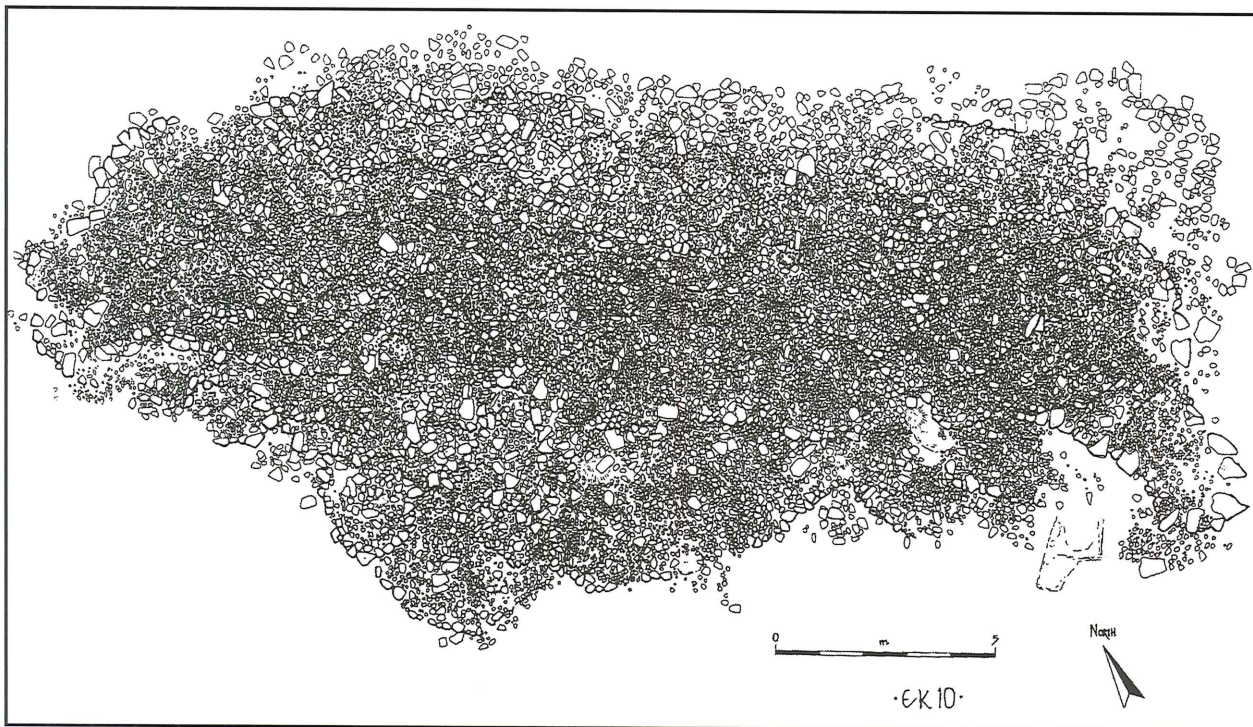


2. Tomb EK 38, megalithic corbelled tomb, plan and profile.

combination of the two. The megalithic tombs do not exceed 8m in diameter and usually have only a single chamber although one example has two chambers. A few of these megalithic tombs have distinct blocking stones built into the lower course of their corbelled structure. The burial chamber has, in almost every case, been constructed directly on the platform but this is not always the case throughout the Pella hinterland where subterranean chambers are also present.

Field Recording

A very detailed recording system related to a specially created database was established for the tombs. A seven-page field recording form was used to record the details of the tombs in as objective a manner as possible supplemented by a general description section. The database orientated questions require simple yes / no answers, measurements, orientations, stone types etc. so that the results may be statistically analysed to determine if patterns or defining characteristics exist. In addition to the al-



3. Tomb EK 10, plan of multi-chambered rubble tomb with recessed kerb.

Kharj and Khirbat Miryamin specific database all tombs recorded during the Pella Hinterland Survey will be entered onto a more general database which it is hoped will help develop and refine the typology. It is also hoped this approach may reveal distribution patterns within the landscape.

Every tomb in the two selected tomb-fields was located by the EDM survey, planned at 1:50 and photographed in colour slide, black and white print, and colour print. In addition every tomb was filmed and described on video and it is the project's intention to incorporate video footage into the specific database which will be stored on CD ROM.

Post-survey Work and Future Proposals

Analysis and development of the database is ongoing. It is envisaged that statistically significant results that will help to establish a typology for the Pella Hinterland tombs will result from this approach. On completion of the typology for the Pella Hinterland tombs this will be compared to existing tomb typologies and published examples of tombs in the Levant in the hope of establishing a useful framework for further study and eventually a broader typology that may be applicable for a wide geographical area.

It is hoped the Pella Hinterland Tomb Project, set up as a three year research project, will obtain further funding to enable excavation to take place in 1997. The majority of sherds found in association with the tombs of all classes fall in the Hellenistic - Umayyad date range with only the sherds from tomb EK 11, described above, providing an EB IV date. It is essential, dating evidence is recovered from secure contexts. At the present time the tombs are pro-

visionally dated to EB I in the case of the megalithic examples and EB IV in the case of the multi-chambered cairns on the basis of the few sherds recovered, comparative material and topographic location. However, at the present time no dates can be ascribed to the tombs with certainty. Following a programme of excavation it is hoped chronological and socio-economic questions may be pursued.

Excavation potential was assessed during the 1996 season and total excavation of one multi-chambered tomb, EK 10 (Fig. 3), and one megalithic corbelled platform tomb, KM 12, along with clearance of a number of robbed chambers is proposed. Although the majority of tombs have been robbed it appears that a number of chambers in the multi-chambered tombs may be intact.

Acknowledgements

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