

REPORT ON A LATE BRONZE TO EARLY IRON AGE TOMB ON TALL IRBID

Mohammad Al-Shalabi, Teresa Bürge and Peter M. Fischer

Introduction: Discovery of the Tomb

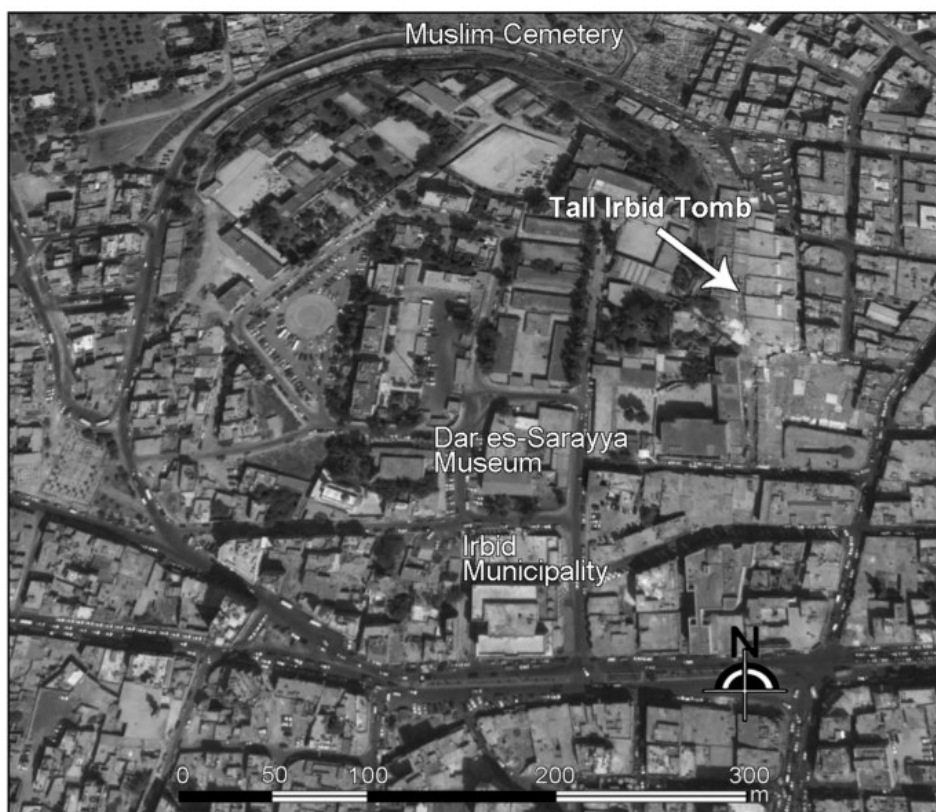
During construction work for an Irbid municipality commercial building in 2001, a tomb was partly exposed by a bulldozer. A limited area of the tomb entrance was destroyed as the workmen were unaware that archaeological remains might be present. Professional excavations directed by Mohammad al-Shalabi from the Irbid Department of Antiquities took place as soon the presence of a tomb was verified. The tomb is located at UTM 32°33'32.05" N, 35°50'57.78"E (**Fig. 1**).

The Structure and its Context

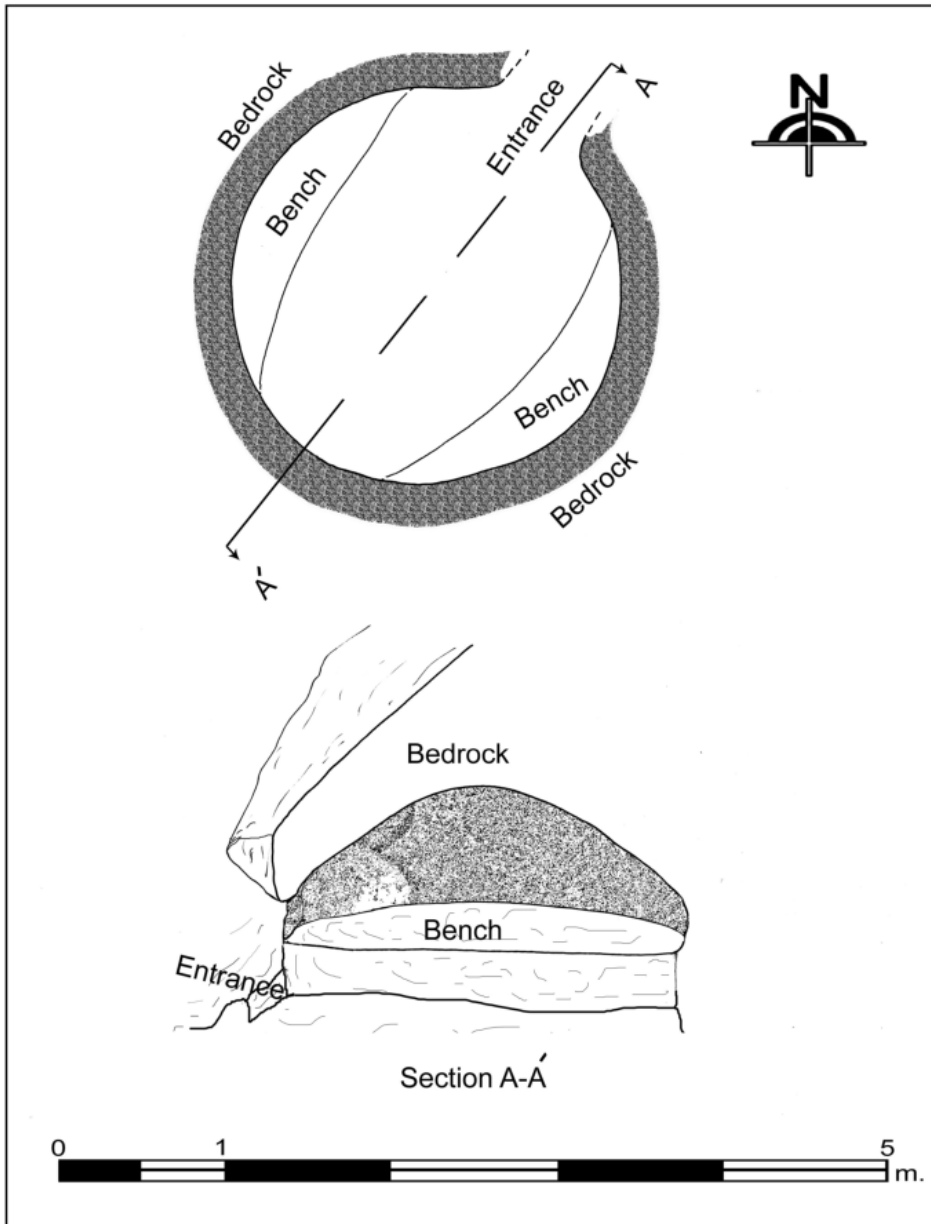
The burial chamber of the rock-cut chamber tomb was carved into soft limestone. Parts

of a 0.6 m-wide by 0.6 m-high shaft were preserved to the north-east, which is the area of the accidental bulldozing. From this shaft, the chamber to the south-west could be entered. It was circular, measuring 2.3 m in diameter, and had a domed ceiling with a maximum height of ca 1.4 m (**Fig. 2**). The tomb fill consisted of a layer of clay-rich soil ca 0.3 m in depth which contained a single human skeleton with jewellery, ivory objects and numerous complete and broken pottery artefacts, including intact jugs and lamps. Below this clayey layer, the original floor consisted of levelled bedrock that sloped slightly down to the south.

Two benches were carved into the limestone



1. Location of the tomb on Tall Irbid.



2. Plan and section of the tomb.

on the north-western and south-eastern sides of the chamber. These were wedge-shaped, being ca 2 m long and 0.3 - 0.4 m high, with a maximum width of 0.5 m. Several vessels were found lying on these benches.

Human Remains

The skeleton was difficult to expose because of the relatively high humidity in the tomb and the limey soil that adhered to the brittle bones. The tomb contained just one skeleton, lying in a stretched position in front of the entrance with its head turned towards the west. Only the cranium could be used for sex and age estimation.

The most indicative traits of the skull are its thin cranial vault bones, the shapes of the forehead, orbita, supraorbital margins and brow ridges, the widths of the zygomatic arcs, and the development of the nuchal lines. All these traits are indicative of a female. Numerous teeth had been lost during life and dental disease was apparent. On the basis of the closure of the cranial sutures, the female appears to have been around 30 years at death, or perhaps in her fourth decade.

Tomb Material

The tomb contained 23 complete ceramic vessels (see selected pottery at **Figs. 3 and 4**).

Other finds included a white marble stamp seal (see Fig. 10:1) and a rock crystal scarab (Fig. 10:2). A necklace was found in situ around the neck of the skeleton; it consisted of a white marble pendant and several beads, including one large glass example (see Fig. 11:2) and others of stone, mainly carnelian (Fig. 11:3). Metal finds comprised a bronze bowl (see Fig. 9), bracelet and anklet, and a gold earring (Fig. 11:1).

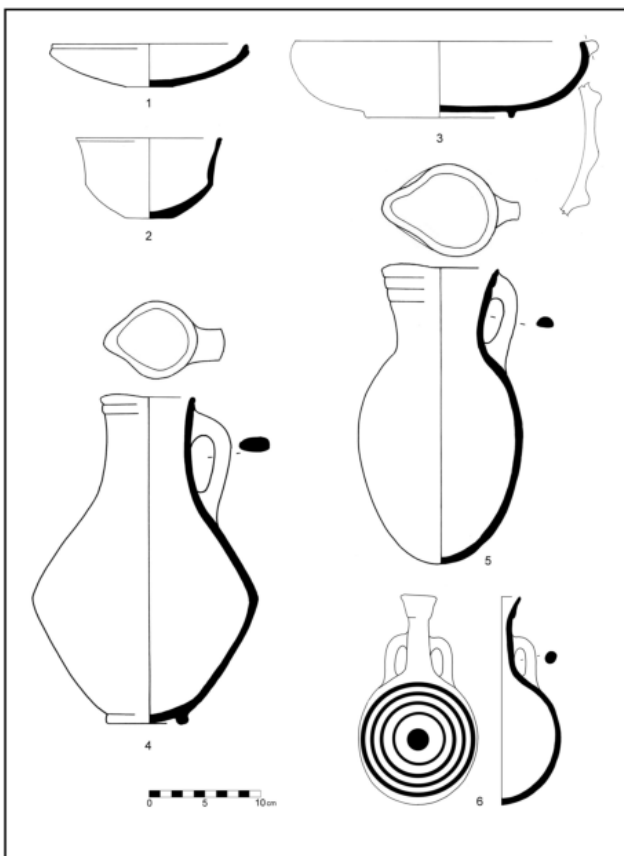
The most striking tomb goods were made of ivory. These included three exquisitely carved palettes (Fig. 5:2-4) and a lid (Fig. 5:1) belonging to one of the palettes. There was also a horn-shaped object with carved decoration (Fig. 5:5a), a lid (Fig. 5:5b) and a small, approximately funnel-shaped object (Fig. 5:5c), all from the same item.

This report will focus on the most important finds and on those of chronological significance. These include the pottery, the ivory objects and the bronze bowl. The stamp seal and the scarab are described,

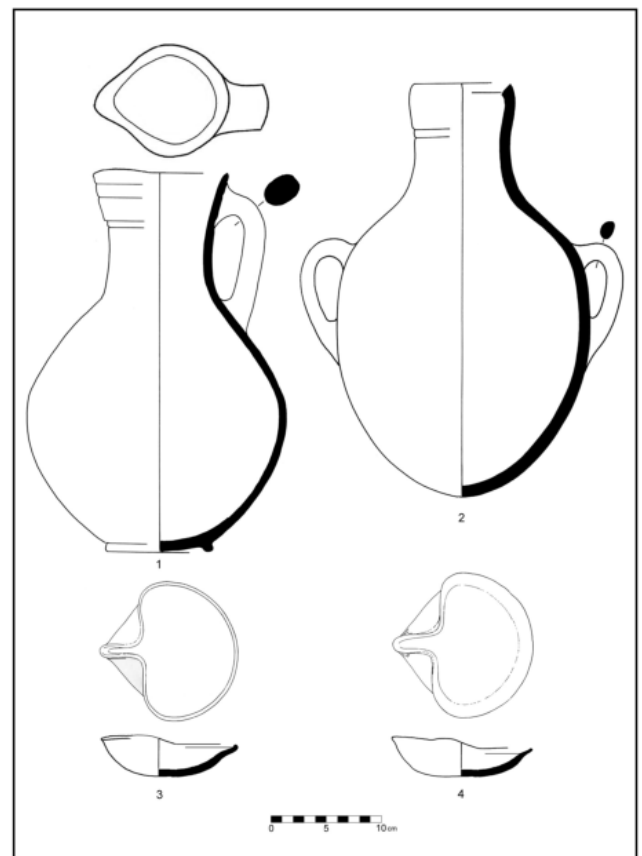
but their chronological usefulness is restricted.

Pottery

The repertoire of pottery shapes comprises shallow bowls with stepped rims and flat bases, a rounded bowl with a ledge handle and ring base, and deep carinated bowls with flat bases (Fig. 3:1-3). The jugs and jars have spherical, ellipsoidal or slightly biconical bodies, mainly with trefoil mouths, and rounded or low ring-bases (Figs. 3:4-5 and 4:1). Single handles that extend from just below the rim to the shoulder predominate, but there is also a jar with a circular mouth and two handles on the mid-section of the body (Fig. 4:2). The single pilgrim flask (Fig. 3:6) has a folded-over rim, long neck and depressed globular body. It is decorated with reddish-brown concentric circles on one side only. The lamps have oblique or slightly upturned rims and deeply pinched mouths above shallow body profiles (Fig. 4:3-4).



3. Selected pottery.



4. Selected pottery.

Carved Elephant Ivory

The three circular, decorated ivory palettes can be divided into two categories:

Two palettes which are almost identical (Figs. 5:2-3 and 6). This type is thick-walled and has a deep profile. It has two rectangular ledge handles that are perforated in order to fasten a flat lid with string or a peg. Both palettes are decorated on the flat rim. One of the palettes had a flat lid of carved ivory (Fig. 5:1). The lid is circular with two rectangular ledge handles with perforations corresponding to those of the palettes.

A single palette with a shallow profile (Figs. 5:4 and 7). It is decorated with two pairs of exquisitely carved felines on either rim of the palette. Centred between the felines on the rim are two pyramidal knobs, one on each side. The base of the bowl is decorated with a carved fourteen-leaved rosette.

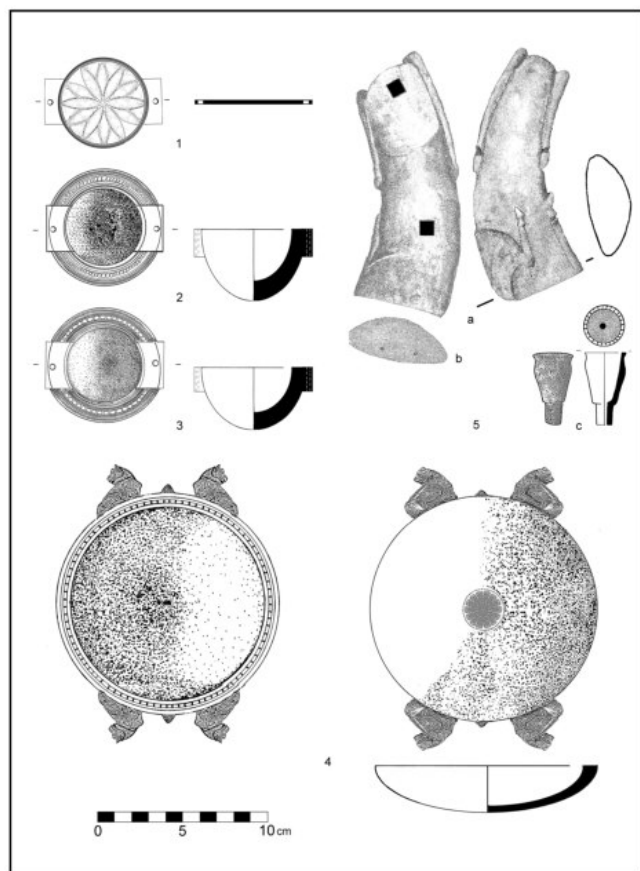
Carved Hippo Ivory

This carved object, consisting of a hippo lower canine tooth, is approximately 15 cm long and hollow, with an opening on one side only (Figs. 5:5a and 8). The surface has been carved in high-relief, leaving a slightly elevated representation of a pair of hooved legs and the front and hind parts of a bull on both ends of the object. On the upper side of the object are two rectangular openings. There is a small funnel-shaped juglet of ivory (Fig. 5:5c) that is an exact fit in each of two square holes. There would undoubtedly have been another funnel that has not been discovered. The open, wider part of the object was closed with a perforated lid (Fig. 5:5b) that exactly fits the opening.

Bronze Bowl

This medium-deep bowl has a maximum diameter of 11 cm (Fig. 9) and a flat rim that protrudes inwards somewhat.

Seals



5. Ivory objects.



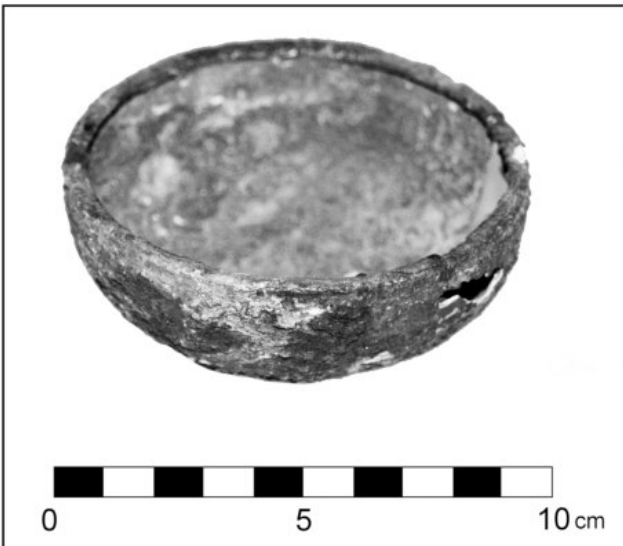
6. Ivory palette.



7. Ivory palette with felines.



8. Horn-shaped object.



9. Bronze bowl.

The stamp seal is of white marble and has an elongated half-spherical shape (**Fig. 10:1**). It is pierced at the top. The flat base is carved with a cross and square. The pierced scarab of rock crystal has a flat underside with no carving (**Fig. 10:2**).

Discussion

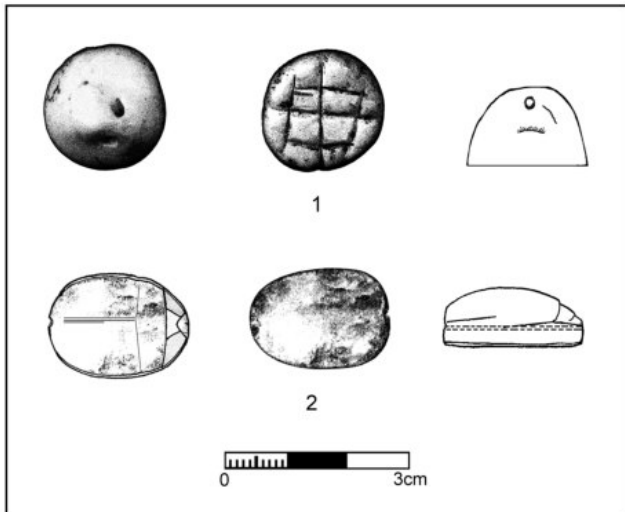
The deep carinated bowls (**Fig. 3:2**) are part of the repertoire of the later part of the Late Bronze Age. At Saḥm, ca 22 km north of Irbid and 5.5 km south of the Yarmouk river, the pottery shapes that correspond to these types have ring bases (Fischer 1997: 109, fig. 6:1-3). Parallels with flat

bases come from the Late Bronze Age temple at Kamid al-Lawz (Metzger 1993: pls 98-100) and from Tall Dayr ‘Allā, Phase E (Franken 1992: 29, fig. 3-7:3), which corresponds to Phase 12 (van der Kooij 2006: 224, table 10) and is dated to the end of the Late Bronze Age II (1,186 BC).

The rounded bowl (Fig. 3:3) is, except for the handles, a clear imitation of bronze counterparts (cf. Saḥm [Fischer 1997: 131, fig. 28:5], or Megiddo and Gezer [Gershuny 1985: pl. 3:40-41] - both without handles). It has a close parallel in clay from Megiddo, Stratum VIII that is dated to Late Bronze Age IB/C (Loud 1948: pl. 61:21). The bowl from Megiddo, however, has a shallower profile and a different handle.

The form of the biconical jug (Fig. 3:4) survived from the Late Bronze Age into the Iron Age. There is, for instance, a matching vessel at Saḥm (Fischer 1997: 112, fig. 9:1). A remote parallel comes from Beth Shean, Stratum R-1b that has been dated to the late 15th century BC (Mullins 2007: 509, pl. 60:7; but here with a wider neck). A similar jug comes from Megiddo, Stratum VIA (Loud 1948: pl. 75:12) that has been dated to Iron Age I or the beginning of Iron Age II.

The pilgrim flask with its long neck and two handles (Fig. 3:6) has its closest parallel at Saḥm (Fischer 1997: 118, fig. 15:1). A similarly long neck is reported from Stratum VII (12th



10. Stamp seal and scarab.



11. Necklace, gold earring and glass bead.

century BC) at Megiddo (Loud 1948: pl. 72:9), but this is wider with a funnel-like flaring rim. Pilgrim flasks with this type of neck are attested at Megiddo until the first Iron Age deposit, Stratum VI (e.g. Loud 1948: pl. 86:5-9).

The lamps with slightly folded-over / inturned rims (Fig. 4:3-4) clearly indicate a date extending from the later part of the Late Bronze Age into the Iron Age. Similar lamps from Saḥm usually have flaring rims (Fischer 1997: 123-125, figs 20-22). At Megiddo, for instance, this type of lamp appears in Stratum VIII, becoming more frequent in Strata VII and VI (Loud 1948: passim). At Tall Dayr ‘Allā they are frequent in Phase E (Franken 1992: 29, fig. 3-7:5-7; 39, fig. 4-2:4; 49, fig. 4-9:21-22; 54, fig. 4-14:7), which is dated to the end of the Late Bronze Age II, ca 1,186 (see also Phase 12 [van der Kooij 2006: 224, table 10]).

A parallel for the small, deep ivory palettes (**Figs 5:2-3 and 6**) comes from the ‘Mycenaean Tomb’ at Tell Dan (Ben-Dov 2002: 145, fig. 2.103; dated to the end of the 14th and beginning of the 13th centuries BC); this also has a lid. A similar bowl comes from the cemetery at Tall as-Sa‘idiyyah, Tomb 101 (Pritchard 1980: 39, fig. 3:8; dated to the 13th century BC); this also has a lid but with less elaborate decoration. It is suggested above that the lid is likely to have been fastened with pegs. There are preserved

pegs from the royal palace at Ugarit (Gachet-Bizollon 2007: 359, pl. 9:62, 63), which was destroyed at the beginning of the 12th century BC.

The shallow palette with felines (Figs. 5:4 and 7) has parallels from the royal palace at Ugarit, to the extent of the felines having backwards-turned heads (Gachet-Bizollon 2007: 399, pl. 49:414).

Parallels for the carved horn-shaped object with its lid and inserted funnel-shaped juglets (**Figs. 5:5 and 8**) are difficult to demonstrate. As regards the perforated lid there are two vessels, though of a totally different type (i.e. upright standing flasks) but with two or three perforations, from Tomb 101 at Tall as-Sa‘idiyyah (Pritchard 1980: 39, fig. 3:6, 7). The closest parallel for this object comes from the ivory hoard from the Stratum VIIA palace at Megiddo (Loud 1939: pl. 24:129; destroyed 1,130 BC); this only has incised decoration including, inter alia, rosettes, but none in high-relief. Other similarities with our object are the facts that the item from Megiddo has small circular holes, though not the square ones of our object, and that the ivory hoard included several funnels (e.g. Loud 1939: pl. 24:131; the shapes are somewhat simpler in design, more like standard funnels). It is most likely that such objects were used in libation ceremonies: a liquid or various liquids may have been poured into the funnels and were subsequently mixed in the horn.

The seal and the scarab (**Fig. 10**) are difficult to date. However, the bronze bowl (**Fig. 9**) is of chronological significance (see the rounded bowls in Gershuny 1985: pl. 2, in particular no 24 from early Iron Age Stratum VI(B) at Megiddo, which is larger but shallower). We maintain that the flourish of bronze vessels in the southern Levant was during the later part of the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (see also Gershuny 1985: 57-58). However, the repertoire of vessel shapes did not change over that period.

Conclusions

Considering all the evidence and comparanda, we date this rich tomb to the very end of the Late Bronze Age, i.e. around 1,200 BC or possibly the beginning of the 12th century BC. It is most likely that this tomb was built for a single individual. The 30 - 40 year-old female must have been of very high social status in view of the associated tomb offerings of ivory, gold and bronze, all of which were luxury items.

Four other tombs, though not as rich as the one under discussion here, dating from the later part of the Late Bronze Age into the Iron Age were excavated nearby in 1958, on the northern slope of Tell Irbid (Dajani 1964, 1966; see also Kafafi 1977). One of the tombs, Tomb D, was dated by Dajani to 1,350 - 1,100 BC (Dajani 1964: 101), although the illustrated material does not permit a date later than the 13th century BC. While Tombs A and C can be dated to Iron Age IIA on the basis of associated material, Tomb B was in use from the Late Bronze Age until well into the Iron Age (as suggested by Dajani 1966: 95). This means that the area was used as a cemetery for quite a long time, i.e. from the second half of the Late Bronze Age until at least Iron Age IIA.

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Mohammad A. al-Shalabi
Director of Antiquities of North Jordan Valley
Department of Antiquities of Jordan
PO Box 88, Jordan
Email: shalabimuhammad@yahoo.com

Teresa Bürge MA
PhD student at the Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology
Department for Egypt and the Levant
Austrian Academy of Sciences
A-1010 Vienna
Austria
Email: teresa.buerge@gmx.de

Peter M. Fischer
Professor of Cypriote and Near Eastern Archaeology
Department of Historical Studies
University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Contact: Dörjeskärsgatan 37,
SE-421 60 Västra Frölunda
Email: peter@fischerarchaeology.se

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