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The Discovery, Excavation, Study, Conservation and Exhibition of Khirbat Qāzūn

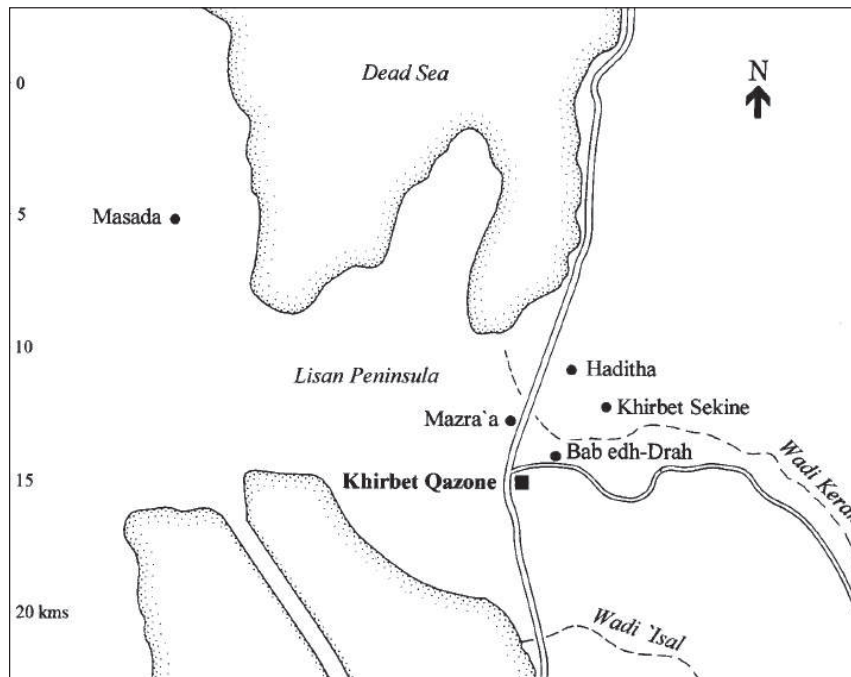
The Discovery

In 1994 the author along with other archaeologists of the Dayr ‘Ayn ‘Abāta excavation project noticed that tombs were being exposed

while the Ghawr al-Mazra‘a to Ghawr aṣ-Ṣāfi highway at the al-Karak intersection was being widened (FIGS. 1, 2). Systematic pillaging by tomb-robbers followed daily (or rather, mostly



1. 1992 aerial photo of al-Karak intersection in Ghawr al-Mazra‘a before discovery and consequent tomb-robbing of Khirbat Qāzūn (Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre).



2. Map locating Khirbat Qāzūn at al-Karak intersection in Ghawr al-Mazra'a (J. M. Farrant).

nightly) but unfortunately nothing was done to protect the site even though a Jordanian police station and the local governor's office were located directly across the road. When mentioned to the authorities their answer was "let them work", referring to the tomb-robbers' illicit activities. An immediate investigation was therefore undertaken by the archaeologists who discovered human bones strewn on the surface along with pottery sherds and many textile fragments. Some samples were taken for analyses which were roughly dated them to the 1st-2nd centuries AD. This prompted further investigations and during the following excavations at Dayr 'Ayn 'Abāta the archaeologists found the opportunity in May 1996 to conduct further exploration of the site and collect more material on the surface which had been thrown out of the robbed-out tombs with the dug-up soil.

Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with local people to ascertain what was being found there. They recounted that complete glass vessels, jewellery and pottery were found in deeply-buried graves lined with adobe bricks and stones. Although many tombs had been looted from nearby Early Bronze Age Bāb adh-Dhrā' (immediately to the north-east), these seemed

quite different.

The landscape was relatively level, not rocky and recently ploughed for agricultural purposes by the landowner, a man from Karak named Ghazigian whom the locals called 'Qazone'. The author therefore named the hitherto unknown site *Khirbat Qāzūn* (the ruins of Qāzūn in Arabic) in all future publications (see comprehensive bibliography below).

Further discussions with locals followed by site inspections revealed that similar graves of the same period were also found at Khirbat Sikin, Ḥadītha and Fayfā south of Ghawr aṣ-Ṣāfī. Sadly though, none of these cemeteries escaped pillaging and had no protection.

The 1997 Excavation

During April and May 1997 a rescue excavation project was begun with permission from the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, funding from the British Museum and logistic support from ARAMEX International Couriers. It was led by the author with staff from the Dayr 'Ayn 'Abāta project (Politis 1998: 611-614).

Initially surface collections and a survey were conducted to understand the extent of the cemetery. Over 3,500 robbed-out shaft graves

were counted on the surface which were orientated roughly north-south (FIGS. 3, 4).

In total, twenty four shaft graves were investigated in detail, twenty of which were excavated. Each of the graves had a single burial and there was no evidence of re-internment. Most of the graves were dug into the soft natural Lisan marls, undercut to the east and covered by adobe brick slabs (FIG. 5).

A few were constructed of stones. Men, women and children were laid out with their heads on the south side of the grave. The dry conditions of the soil in which they were buried allowed many of the corpses to be so well preserved that hair, skin and even internal organs survived (FIG. 6).

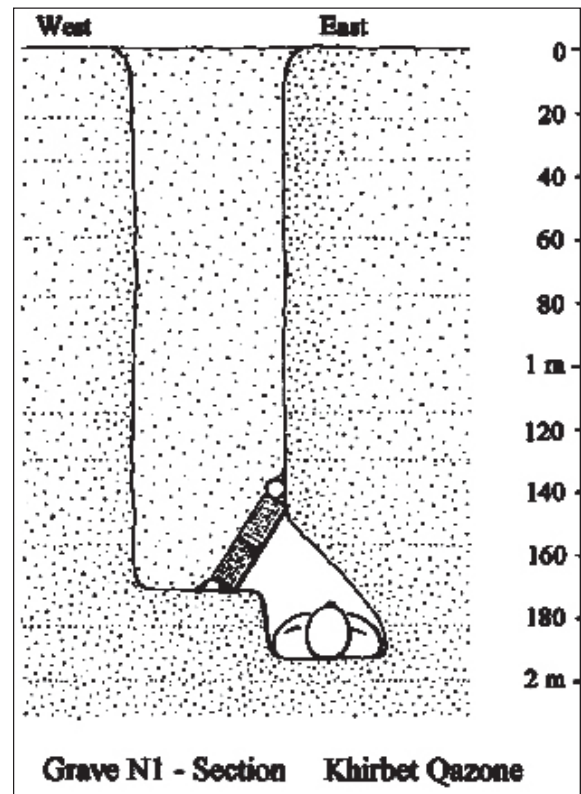
Some of the bodies were encased within decorated, painted and stitched leather shrouds.



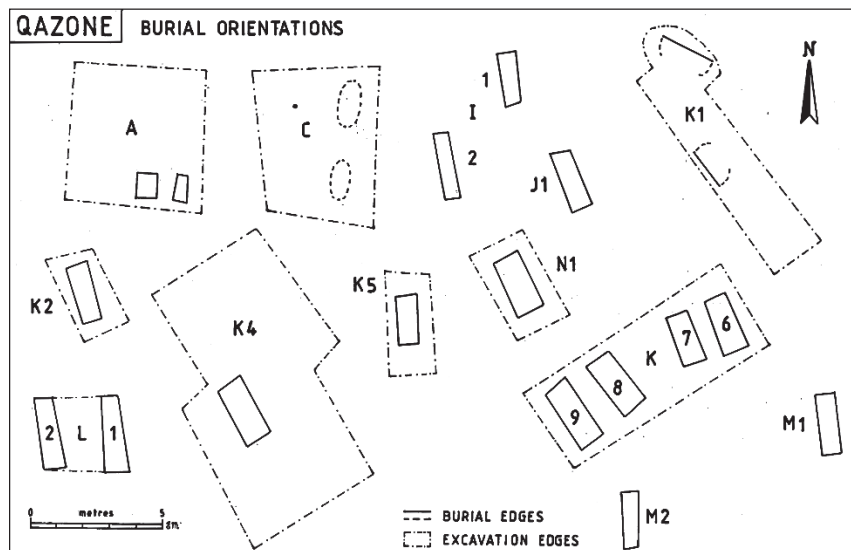
3. Aerial view of Khirbat Qāzūn after extensive tomb-robbing in late 1990s (K. D. Politis).

(FIG. 7 a, b) Others had reused clothing wrapped around them (FIG. 8).

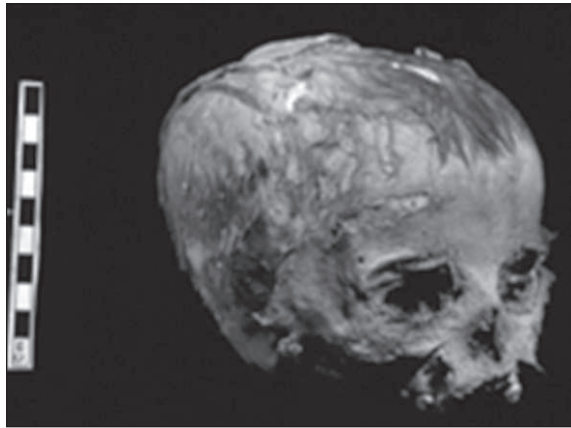
From robbers' spoil and excavations thirty-five complete and partial tunics, mantels and scarves representing some the most intact textiles (mostly made of wool) found in the ancient Near East were retrieved.



5. Section of grave N1 which was characteristically undercut to the east and covered by adobe brick slabs (J. M. Farrant after C. Pickersgill).



4. Burial orientations of excavated burial at Khirbat Qāzūn (W. E. Moth).



6. Well-preserved head of youth from Khirbat Qāzūn (T. Springett).

Only a few of the burials which were excavated contained any grave goods. They included iron, copper, silver and gold earrings (FIG. 9 a, b) and bracelets, beads, a scarab, a wooden staff, a pair of leather sandals and a laurel wreath; all very typical Graeco-Roman accoutrements.

A preliminary identification and analysis of the textiles was done by Hero Granger-Taylor and initial laboratory conservation was conducted by Karen Horton who also compiled a catalogue of the textiles (FIG. 10).

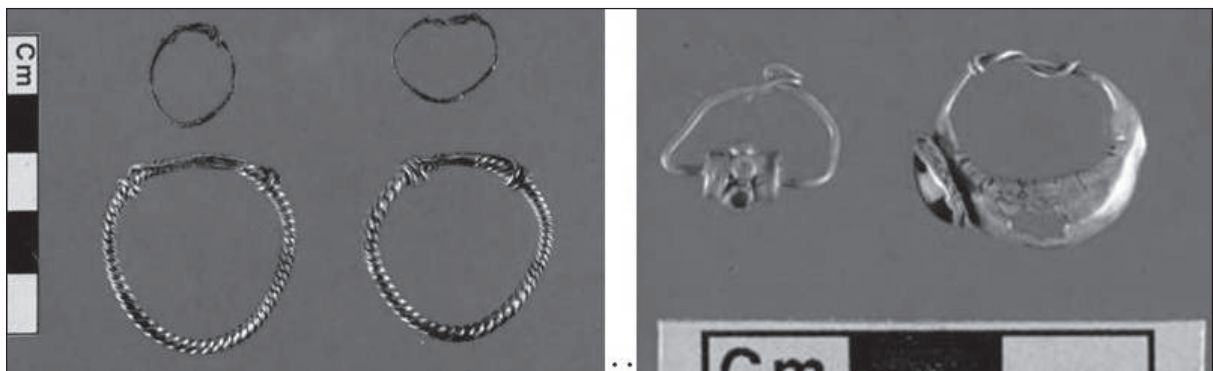
From surface collections more metal work was recovered, as well as pottery (FIG. 11) and



7a, b. Burial with body encased within stitched leather shroud (K. D. Politis).



8. Burial A1 with clothing wrapped around body (T. Springett).



9a, b. Silver and gold earrings (T. Springett).

inscribed in Greek, ΑΥCΕΝΗ Η ΚΑΛΗ (“Afseni the virtuous”) (FIG. 13).

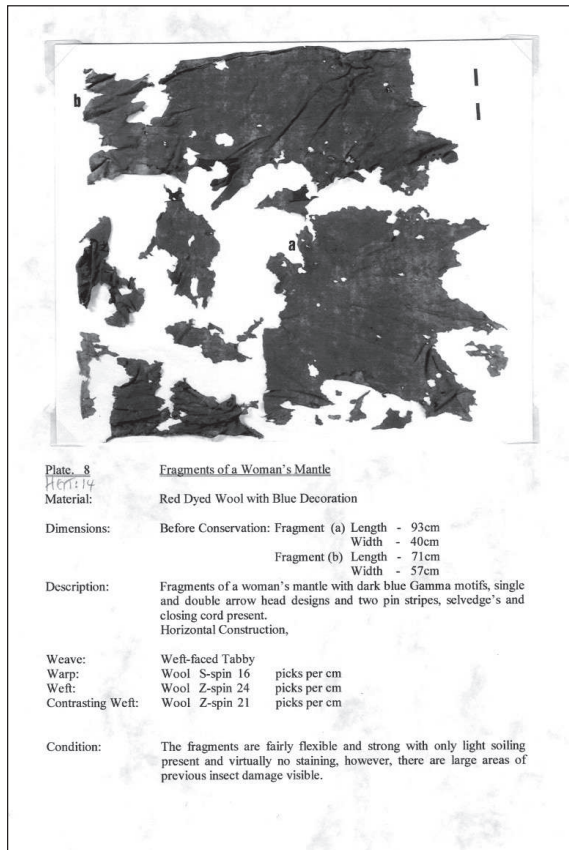
The 2004 Survey and Excavation

Survey and excavation were conducted at the cemetery of Khirbat Qāzūn during April and May 2004. The work was an extension of the earlier rescue excavation conducted in 1996 and 1997 (Politis 1998: 611-614) with the objective to identify the full extent of the site. The main aim of this season was to complete all field work and studies at the site and prepare for publications. The project was sponsored by the Hellenic Society for Near Eastern Studies and supported by the National Geographic Society and the British Academy.

The Survey

A complete contour survey of the cemetery was conducted incorporating previous excavation areas. Finally a digital map was produced recording all natural features and excavation trenches (FIG. 14).

Trimble Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers were utilised to achieve an accurately geo-referenced survey. Using Trimble survey software loaded onto a hand-held data logger thousands of spot heights were recorded enabling post production of a Digital Terrain Model (DTM) and contour map of the cem-

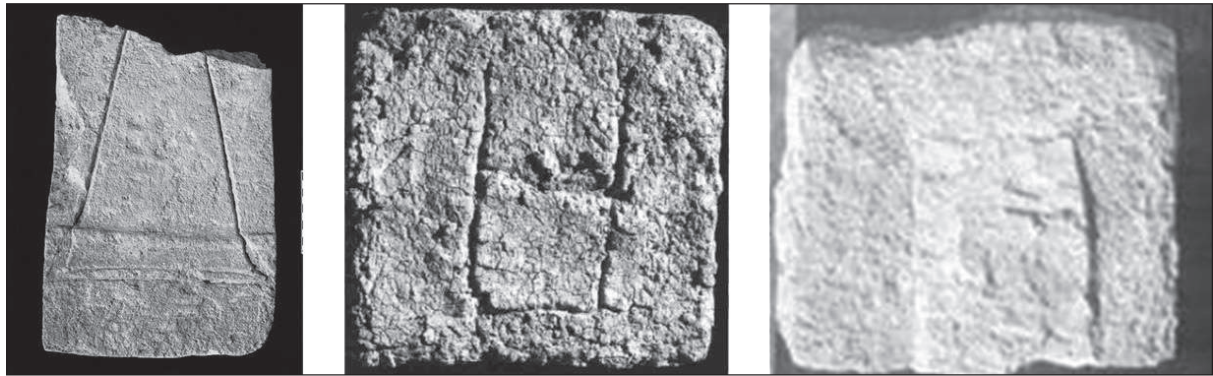


10. Sample of initial catalogue of textiles from Khirbat Qāzūn (K. Horton).

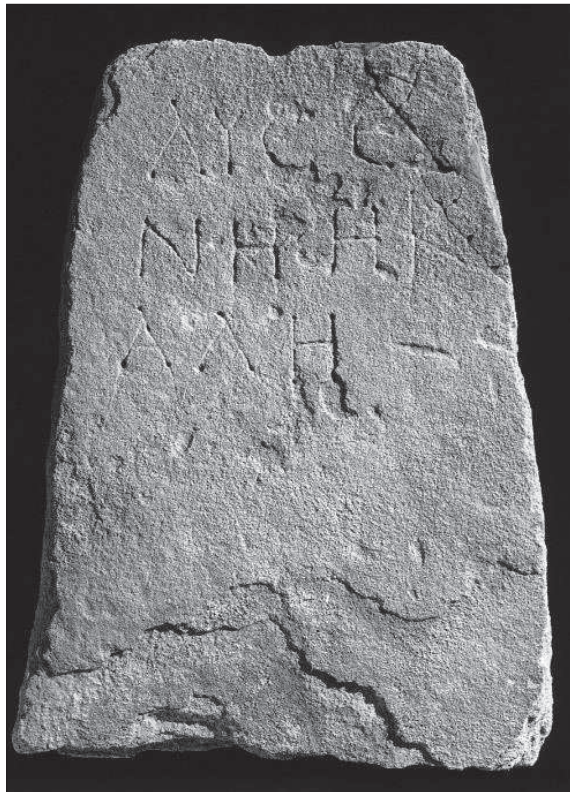
glass fragments belonging to the 1st - 2nd century AD. Five funerary stelae were also discovered from robbed-out tombs, three of which had engraved rectangular signs (*betyles* or 'Dhusharā blocks') (FIGS. 12 a, b, c) and one which was



11. Pottery sherds from Khirbat Qāzūn (T, Springett).



12a, b, c. *Betyles* or ‘Dhusharā blocks’ engraved on tombstone (a) and adobe brick (b) (T. Springett).



13. Tombstone inscribed in Greek, ΑΥCΕΝΗ Η ΚΑΛΗ (“Afseni the virtuous”) (T. Springett).

etry. Also specific points of plan detail were recorded such as trench edges and specific tombs. Once control points from earlier phases were coordinated, all the survey work carried out to date could be referenced within the new geodetic survey framework.

The 2004 Excavation

In total twelve trenches (each measuring 5 metres × 5 metres) were opened in various areas of Khirbat Qāzūn. The objectives of this strat-

egy were to help establish the variety of tomb types throughout the cemetery and the chronological sequence of various areas within it.

A total of twenty new graves were recorded and DNA samples were taken from all of the intact skeletons in order to help ascertain the ethnicity of the interments and whether specific tomb types are indicative of ethnic/cultural groups.

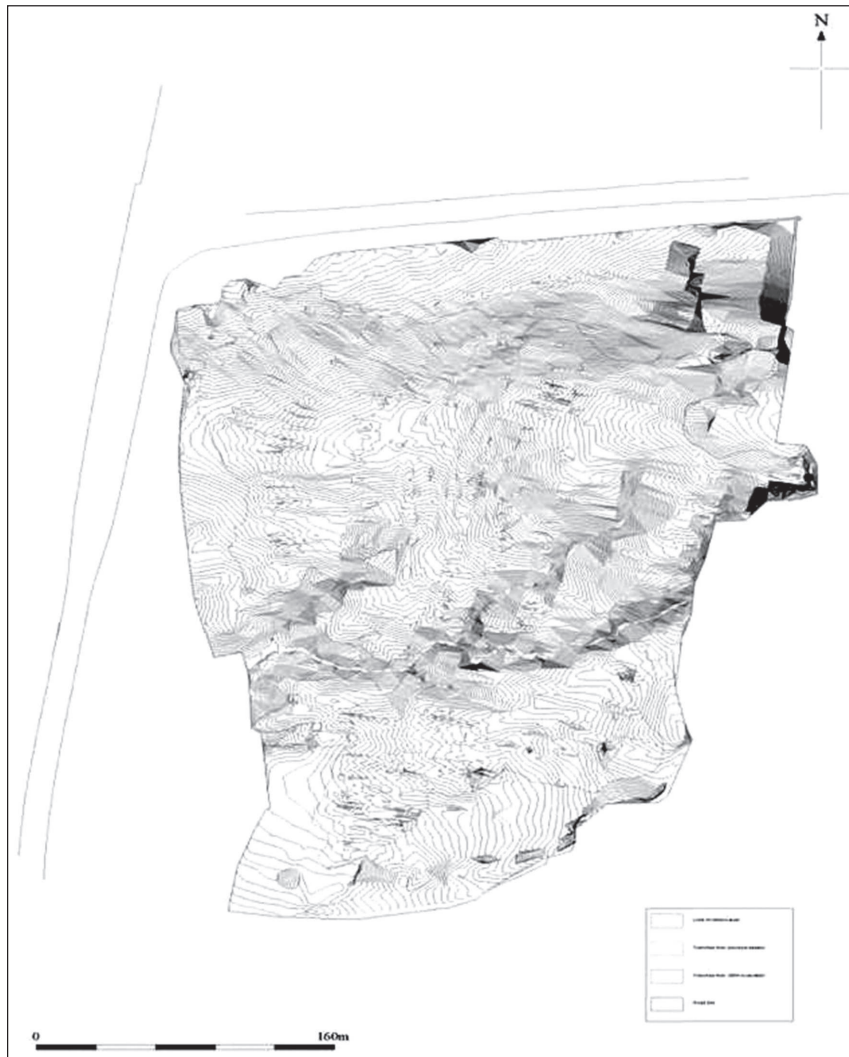
Grave Typologies (FIG. 15)

Grave-type A represented the predominant grave-type in the cemetery and included Graves T1, T2, U1, W (both inhumations), Y1, Y2 and Z1 (FIG. 16). The grave-type consists of a shaft grave with a *loculus* undercut to the east at the base of the shaft. This undercutting is sealed by adobe bricks propped at an angle against the east wall of the shaft. The grave is orientated north-south, with the skull to the south in every case.

This is the most characteristic grave-type found at Khirbat Qāzūn and is particularly important in relation to similar graves first discovered at Khirbat Qumrān (Politis 2005a: 149-151).

Grave-type B is the type found to the north-west of the cemetery, specifically in Trench R. These graves are aligned along an east-west axis, with the skulls to the west. Large roughly-hewn slabs seal the grave-cut which tapers slightly to the east. The graves are multiple and in one instance (*i.e.* Grave R) contained seven individuals (FIG. 17).

Grave-type C is the type found to the west



14. Contour map of Khirbat Qāzūn boundaries, 2004 (J. Severn).

of the cemetery (represented by graves $\Theta 2$, $\Theta 3$, $\Sigma 1$, $\Sigma 2$ and $\Sigma 4$). These graves are orientated east-west but, as opposed to those in Trench R, each grave contains only a single burial. Most of the skeletons associated with this grave-type have been positioned on their right sides, fac-

Type A	Length of shaft (north-south)	Width of shaft (west-east)	Depth of shaft
Grave T1	2.30m	0.40m	1.12m
Grave T2	2.08m	0.45m	0.82m
Grave U1	1.90m	0.50m	1.20m
Grave W	2.22m	0.62m	1.76m
Grave Y1	1.95m	0.50m	1.60m
Grave Y2	1.98m	0.62m	1.48m
Grave Z1	2.24m	0.52m	1.24m

15. Grave Type A at Khirbat Qāzūn (Politis *et al* 2005b: fig. x).

ing south, and secured in this position with the aid of small stones. No grave-goods accompanied the bodies. These five graves contained a narrow *loculus*, in which the skeleton was laid out, forming a wide platform feature within the northern section of the grave-cut. None of the *loculi* were sealed and were all filled with soil.

Grave-type D (represented by graves $\Theta 1$ and $\Sigma 3$) is the type found in association with type-C graves. These graves are composed of a simple cut and lack the platform feature associated with type C. The skeletons are supine with the head turned to face south. The left arm was slightly bent over the lower vertebrae with the hand placed on the pelvis.

Grave-type E is characterised by a stone sarcophagus and is represented by one unique



16. Grave KQ.W with *in situ* well-preserved bodies of a mother and child wrapped in two textiles (A. Kelley). shaft grave in Trench P in the south-eastern of the cemetery (FIG. 18 a, b).

Grave-type F is represented by two robbed-out tombs to the southeast of the cemetery and is characterised by a rectangular receptacle constructed of adobe bricks. The receptacle is located centrally at the base of the shaft. This *loculus* was capped with horizontal adobe bricks which sealed the receptacle.

In the northwest sector of Khirbat Qāzūn two tombstones were found, one with an engraved cross in a square (FIG. 19) and the other with an etched palm branch flanked by the Greek letters alpha and omega (FIG. 20). These are clearly early Christian symbols and date the northwest of the Khirbat Qāzūn cemetery.

The 2015 Excavation

In 2015 a rescue excavation by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan just north of the Khirbat Qāzūn cemetery, revealed a triple-



17. Multiple burials in Grave R at Khirbat Qāzūn (K. D. Politis).

apsed basilical church paved with mosaics with geometric designs and four Greek inscriptions in the chancel, diakonikon and south aisle (Zahrān 2017; Politis 2018) (FIG. 21a, b). Apparently, this was associated to the early Christian graves in the northern sector of the Khirbat Qāzūn cemetery (Trench R mentioned above).

The Studies

Studies of the finds from Khirbat Qāzūn cemetery began from the onset of the discovery and subsequent rescue project in order to discern the date of the new site. Most of the material culture was consequently dated between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD, clearly within late Roman and Nabataean times.

Textiles

World-renowned ancient textile historian Hero Granger-Taylor was the first to identify the material found at Khirbat Qāzūn as being



18a, b. Limestone fragments of upper part of sarcophagus in Trench P (K. D. Politis).



19. Tombstone with an engraved cross in a square from north-western sector of Khirbat Qāzūn (T. Springett).

Graeco-Roman (FIG. 22). She has since studied all 53 textiles and published preliminary results on them (Granger-Taylor 2000, 2005). Her general conclusions are that they represent a unique collection of complete and semi-complete ancient clothing unparalleled in the Near East.

Pottery

Pottery analysis was first made by Prof. Dr Stephan Schmid who dated them to the late Nabataean period, between 1st-2nd century AD. Isabelle Sachet included the pottery in her Ph.D. thesis and had a similar conclusion (Sachet 2006:214-216, Pl. 121-123) (FIG. 23).

Human Remains

An initial study of the human remains from Khirbat Qāzūn was made by Dr Kathy Grus-



20. Tombstones with an etched palm branch flanked by the Greek letters alpha and omega from north-western sector of Khirbat Qāzūn (T. Springett).

pier who undertook their exhumation in 1997. During the course of the 2004 excavations, Lisa Usman, forensic scientist, lifted the bodies and made their basic identifications (Politis *et al* 2005b: xx). She also took systematic DNA samples of most of the bodies. Since then, more specialised studies on the human remains have been conducted by Jessica Walker under the supervision of Dr Megan Perry (FIG. 24).

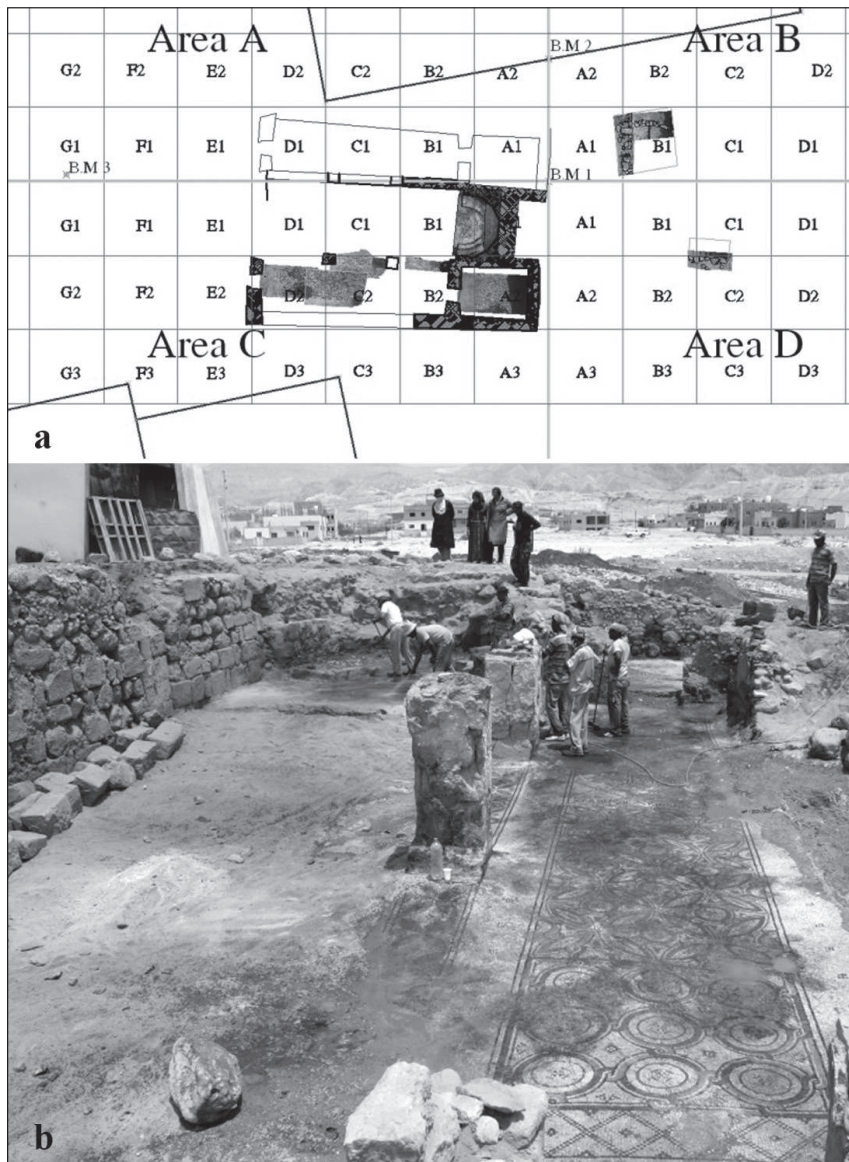
Conservation

Textiles

The Khirbat Qāzūn textiles were first catalogued in 1998 by Karen Horton at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London (for an example FIG. 10). This was an invaluable first step in organising the collection and recognising its significance as a whole. It was the basis for all future study by Hero Granger-Taylor. This was followed by the relocation of the textiles to the Textile Conservation Centre at the University of Southampton where Karen Horton commenced a post-graduate research on the material in 2007 (FIG. 25).

Then with a substantial grant from the British Museum all the textiles were taken to London for final conservation and a selection was mounted for display in Jordan. Following an official agreement with the Jordanian Government, six pieces were returned to Jordan and the remaining retained at the British Museum.

Two textiles (nos. 52 and 53) found during



21a. Grid plan locating church of Khirbat Qāzūn in 2015 (J. Safi). 21b. View of south aisle and nave of Khirbat Qāzūn church from west during rescue excavations (M. Zahran).

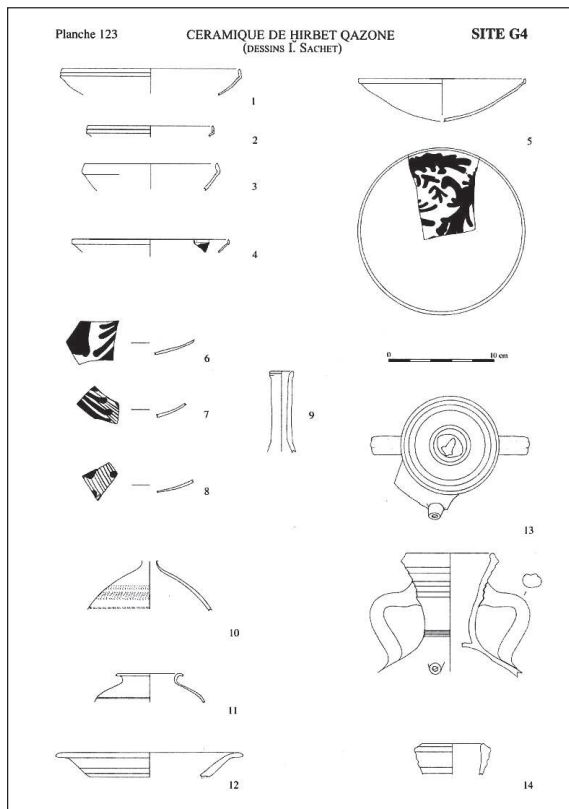


22. Hero Granger-Taylor inspecting conserved and mounted textiles from Khirbat Qāzūn with Tall Vogel at British Museum conservation lab, London (K. D. Politis).

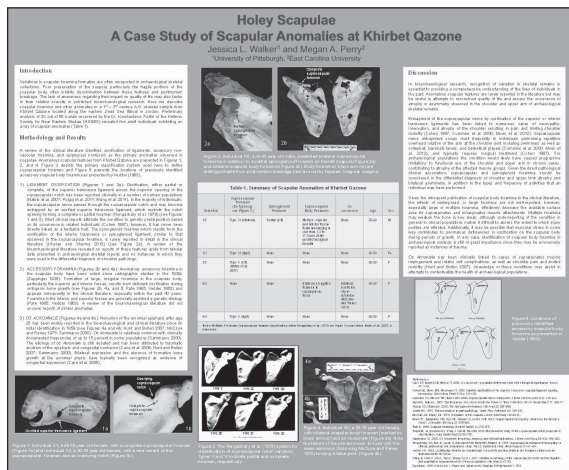
the 2004 excavations were taken for treatment and analysis at the Technical Training Foundation of Athens under textile conservator Rula Rapti (FIG. 26). When completed they were returned to Jordan and placed on exhibition in the Museum at the Lowest Place on Earth (MuLPE) in aš-Šafi (FIG. 27).

Exhibition and Storage

Khirbat Qāzūn has four information panels and four exhibition cases dedicated to excavations and material finds from the site at the Museum at Lowest Place on Earth (FIGS. 28, 29, 30, 31a, b). Objects not on display there are located



23. Selection of pottery from Khirbat Qāzūn drawn for Ph.D. thesis (I. Sachet).



24. Human bones study by Jessica Walker supervised by Megan Perry.

in storeroom (FIG. 33a). The only exceptions are six complete and some fragmentary textiles which were officially bequeathed by the Jordanian Government to the British Museum in London where they are currently in secure storage (FIG. 33b). One textile is on permanent display in the new Jordan Museum in Amman (FIG. 32).



25. Karen Horton at Textile Conservation Centre, University of Southampton where Khirbat Qāzūn textiles underwent further treatment and study (K. D. Politis).

The gold and silver earrings (FIG. 9a, b) went on temporary display at an exhibition at the Basel Museum of Ancient Art in Switzerland entitled ‘Petra - Miracle in the Desert’ from October 2012 to March 2013 followed by the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden at *Leiden in the Netherlands in 2013*.

Summary and Conclusions

Khirbat Qāzūn is comprised of a cemetery with over 5,000 burials dating from the 1st-4th centuries AD according to Nabataean pottery, jewellery, inscribed tombstones and textiles discovered at the site. These latter finds include at least 53 identifiable Graeco-Roman style tailored clothes, many of which are complete. They are comparable to garments found at Fayum in Egypt, Palmyra in Syria and Mas‘da in Palestine. But their exceptionally well-preserved condition makes them invaluable for study and exhibition.

Historically Khirbat Qāzūn has been identified as Mahoza as mentioned in the 2nd century AD. Babatha papyri discovered in the ‘Cave of

Letters' on the north-western shore of the Dead Sea (Bowersock 1996). The manner in which the bodies were interned, in a metre and a half deep *arcosolia* under-cut to the east and tightly sealed with adobe bricks, is similar to the characteristic burial method of nearby Khirbat Qumrān (Politis 2005a), which up until recently was considered unique. The last phase of the cemetery at Khirbat Qāzūn was clearly Christian as indicated by a different burial method,



26. Hero Granger-Taylor examines KQ textile 53 with conservators before treatment at Technical Training Foundation of Athens (K. D. Politis).

مقبرة خربة قيزون The Khirbat Qayzun Cemetery

In 1996 a unique archaeological discovery was accidentally made at Khirbat Qayzun. Rare evidence of Nabataean people was found in a cemetery of over 5,000 individual burials. The graves in the southern sector were deep shaft tombs, under-cut to the east, similar to those found at Khirbat Qumran, as-Sikkīn and other cemeteries on the Dead Sea shores dating to the 1st-2nd centuries AD on the basis of pottery, clothing and other finds. The graves in the northern part were mostly shallow cist tombs with virtually no grave goods except for a few early Christian tombstones dated to around the 4th century AD.

في عام ١٩٩٦ تم العثور بالصدفة على موقع أثري فريد من نوعه في خربة قيزون كذليل على وجود الأنباط، وهو عبارة عن مقبرة تحوي أكثر من ٥٠٠٠ مدفن، وكانت المدافن في القطاع الجنوبي تتألف من حفر عمودية مشابهة لتلك التي وجدت في قمران والسكينة ومقابر أخرى قريبة من شواطئ البحر الميت والتي تعود في تاريخها إلى القرنين الأول والثاني الميلاديين كما يستدل من اللقى الفخارية والانسجة والشواهد الأخرى. أما القبور في الجهة الشمالية فكانت في الغالب تتألف من قبور ضحلة مقبرة باللقى والمكتشفات باستثناء بعض الشواهد لقبور المسيحيين الأوائل والتي ترجع إلى القرن الرابع الميلادي.

خريطة موقع خربة قيزون
Khirbat Qayzun location map

صورة جوية لخربة قيزون عام ١٩٩٦ تظهر المخطط المعماري المكتشف
Khirbat Qayzun aerial view in 1992

خريطة كنتور تظهر حدود المقبرة
Contour map showing the limits of the Khirbat Qayzun cemetery

رأس مسمي ينتمي من خربة قيزون معقود
Well-preserved Nabataean boy's head from Khirbat Qayzun

بقايا فخارية من خربة قيزون
Marble bust of a Nabataean present with felt cap from Petra, similar to one found in Khirbat Qayzun

بقايا فخارية من خربة قيزون
Preserved hand and nails of adult in grave W at Khirbat Qayzun

بقايا فخارية من خربة قيزون
Preserved body of adult in grave W at Khirbat Qayzun

بقايا فخارية من خربة قيزون
Marble bust of a Nabataean present with felt cap from Petra, similar to one found in Khirbat Qayzun

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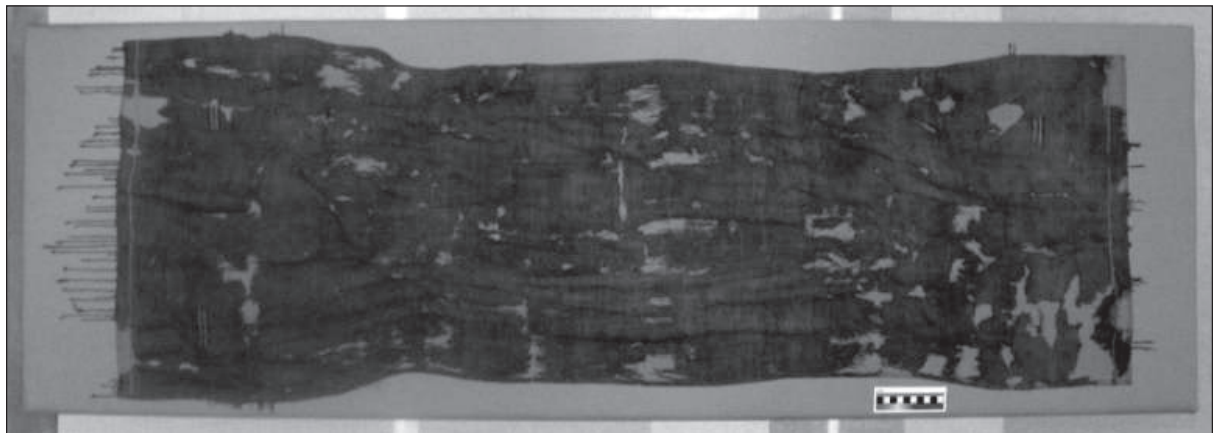
بقايا فخارية من خربة قيزون
Preserved body of adult in grave W at Khirbat Qayzun

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Preserved hand and nails of adult in grave W at Khirbat Qayzun

بقايا فخارية من خربة قيزون
Preserved body of adult in grave W at Khirbat Qayzun

28. Information panel on Khirbat Qāzūn excavations in MuLPE (Hellenic Society for Near Eastern Studies).



27. KQ textile 53 conserved and mounted on board for display in MuLPE (R. Rapti).

The Khirbat Qazun Textiles

Around 60 clothing textiles were found in burials at the Khirbat Qazun cemetery. They include tunics of several styles, large rectangular mantles, women's head-veils and hats of felt and combed-wool. The collection is very important for our understanding of how people living on the Dead Sea shores were dressing during the 1st-3rd centuries AD.

These textiles are being systematically conserved. Some are displayed in the Jordan Museum in 'Amman, the British Museum in London and some in this museum.

أقمشة خربة قزون

تم العثور على نحو ٦٠ قطعة من القماش داخل مدافن في مقبرة خربة قزون الأثرية. وهي تشمل على أزياء ذات اشكال مختلفة وعباءات مستطيلة الشكل، وأغطيت رأس نسائية وقيبعات من اللباد والصوف المنذوف. إن هذه المجموعة مهمة جداً لمعرفة كيف كانت ملابس سكان شواطئ البحر الميت خلال الفترة الواقعة ما بين القرنين الأول والثالث الميلاديين. لقد تم عمل صيانة لهذه الأقمشة، البعض من هذه القطع معروض في المتحف الوطني الأردني في عمان و المتحف البريطاني في لندن، والبعض الآخر معروض في هذا المتحف.

29. Information panel on Khirbat Qazun textiles in MuLPE (Hellenic Society for Near Eastern Studies).



30. Objects from Khirbat Qazun and other Nabatean sites on display in MuLPE (K. D. Politis).



32. Conserved, mounted and framed KQ textile on display at Jordan Museum, 'Ammān (K. D. Politis).



31a, b. Bodies from KQ.W on display at MuLPE in 2016 and later stored in box (K. D. Politis).



33a, b. File cabinets storing KQ textiles stored flat in MuLPE (a) and British Museum (b) (K. D. Politis).

corpse orientation and inscribed symbols. This is now associated to the discovery in March 2015 of a church just north of the cemetery.

It is hoped that from the field work and research so far completed of Khirbat Qāzūn, sufficient material evidence will be made available to understand the nature of this key site in the context of the Dead Sea region during the late Nabataean period.

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