

EXPEDITION TO KHIRBAT ISKANDAR AND ITS ENVIRONS: THE 2019 SEASON

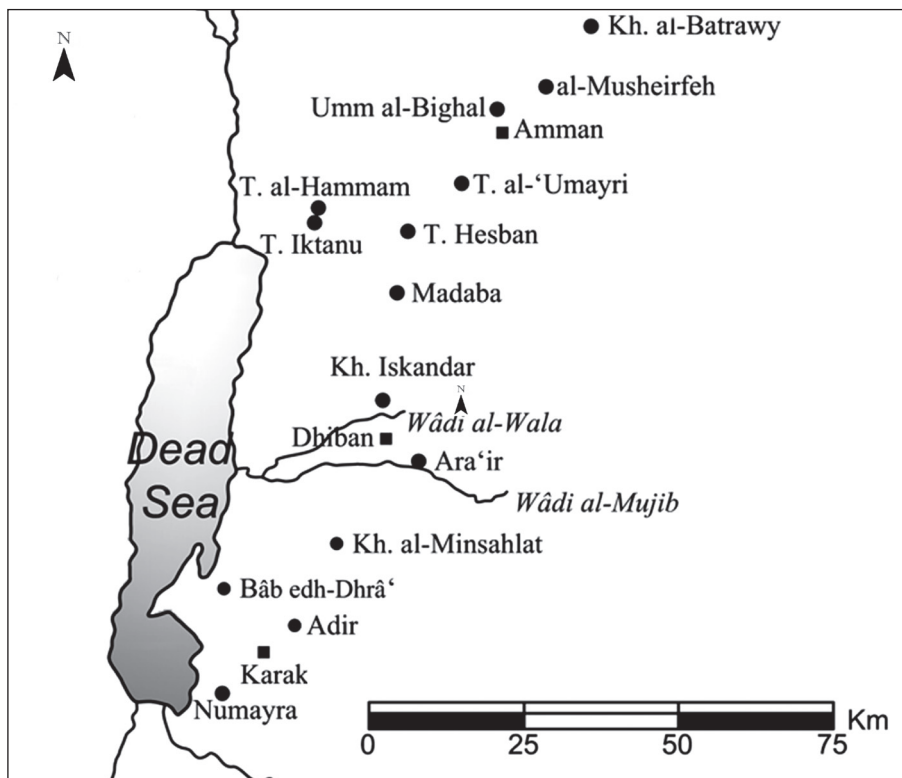
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Introduction

This short preliminary report summarizes the four-week season of renewed work at the site of KHirbat Iskandar from June 9-July 10, 2019. The project operates under permit by the Department of Antiquities, for which we are extremely grateful.

The site of KHirbat Iskandar, located on the Wādī Al Wālah about 20-25km south of Mādabā and just north of DHībān (Fig. 1), is known as one of the major Early Bronze IV (EB IV) small towns/regional centers in the southern Levant in the second half of the third

millennium BC. Recent excavations have illuminated a picture of an important EB III urban site as well. KHirbat Iskandar's importance lies in the fact that it is one of the few sites to have multi-phased *strata* from both the EB III and EB IV periods extant on the mound. The fortified Early Bronze Age (EBA) site of KHirbat Iskandar owes its prominence to the perennial stream in the Wādī Al Wālah, to the caravan route ("the King's Highway") that passed close by the site, and to the expansive agricultural lands contiguous to the site (Cordova and Long 2010: 21-35; Cordova 2007: figs. 5.8 and 6.6,



1. Map showing the location of KHirbat Iskandar, north of DHībān.

and see pp. 189-90). Data show that erosion and destruction of the floodplain from the end of EB III through the EB IV period gradually diminished the carrying capacity of the landscape, eventually causing the abandonment of the site near the end of the period, *ca.* 2000/1950 BC.

This year represents the eleventh major excavation season at the site, the previous seasons being 1982, 1984, 1987, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2013 and 2016 (Richard *et al.* 2018 and bibliography cited there; D'Andrea *et al.* forthcoming). Along with two pilot seasons, Phase 1 in 1981 (Richard 1982) and Phase 2 in 1994 (Richard and Long 1995), two seasons were devoted solely to preservation and restoration: 1998 (Long and Libby 1999) and 2006, although restoration, preservation, and consolidation of walls is an integral component of each excavation season. The major archaeological periods investigated at the site thus far date to the EB II/III and EB IV, although earlier materials have been encountered on the *tall* and in the cemeteries (EB I).

This long-term project has in the past several seasons refocused its energies toward investigating the considerable EB III occupation on the mound in new areas away from the northwest fortifications, with the specific intent to closely examine the stratified profile at the EB III/IV transition. Given its multi-phased EB III and EB IV settlements on the mound, KHirbat Iskandar is one of the rare sites where such a research objective is possible. This new focus aligns well with the growing scholarly acceptance of higher dates for the Early Bronze Age of 3600-1950 BC (Regev *et al.* 2012; Höflmayer 2014, 2017), which has radically altered traditional scholarly views on both the EB III and EB IV. The latter (the so-called pastoral-nomadic period) is now almost 500 years long and one that correlates with the late Old Kingdom as well as the First Intermediate period in Egypt, thus now overlapping with state societies in both Syria (the Kingdom of Ebla) and Egypt (Richard 2020; Höflmayer 2014, 2017; D'Andrea 2019, 2020). Previously, the dates for the EB IV culture, *ca.* 2350-2000 BC, virtually equated with the decentralized Egyptian First Intermediate Period, thus bolstering a cultural synchronism with an EB

IV pastoral nomadic intermediate period in the southern Levant, called by some scholars the Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA). The period was generally thought to have little connection with either the urban period before or after, and for surveys of the period, see Richard (1987, 2014), D'Andrea (2014), and Prag (2014). The new chronology, along with a growing data from new excavations, has engendered recent reevaluations of EB IV society (*e.g.*, Prag 2014; Richard 2014, 2020; D'Andrea 2014, 2020; Greenberg 2002, 2017; Falconer and Fall 2019). A new synthesis of the period, which gathers a plethora of evidence from the permanent settlement sites, posits the view that there was a high level of rural complexity in the EB IV period, as well as strong continuities with Early Bronze Age tradition (Richard 2020). The continuing work at KHirbat Iskandar is shedding new light on facets of the reoccupation of the mound in the aftermath of the destruction of the urban EB III settlement. Based on radiocarbon dating and survey of diagnostic ceramic types, this destruction appears to have occurred before the end of the period, so in EB IIIA. The 2019 season at KHirbat Iskandar has brought to light a stratigraphic profile having all the hallmarks of a new dataset that could very well proffer cogent new information on the events and activities of inhabitants in the immediate wake of the EB III destruction.

Objectives of the 2019 Season

The primary objective for the season was to excavate more of the EB III occupation on the mound and especially to investigate the EB III/IV transition, *ca.* 2500 BC. There exists no scholarly consensus on the cause for a shift in the complex socio-political and economic organization at the nexus of change from more urban to more rural frameworks. The question is twofold: What were the diverse causes throughout the southern Levant for the urban EB III system to become unsustainable, and, what followed thereafter (Cohen 2018; Richard 2020). In the case of KHirbat Iskandar, was there continuity between the two periods or was there a hiatus/abandonment before the EB IV settlement. We have always argued for continuity based on comparative cultural analysis, although the specifics attending the

actual transition have remained elusive. This summer's work has provided excellent and unforeseen stratified evidence regarding the particular transition at KHirbat Iskandar for that very critical nexus. This evidence may help to explain why *tall* sites in Transjordan with both EB III and EB IV *strata* are more abundant than elsewhere in the southern Levant. KHirbat Iskandar now has the stratified profile to support the view of strong continuity between the EB III urban and post-urban (rural) EB IV. To meet the objectives outlined above, the strategically focused areas of work in 2019 (as well as continuing goals) included (Fig. 2):

- 1) Excavation in Area C at the southeast corner, in particular Squares C6 and C8 at the eastern edge of the Gateway;
- 2) Excavation in Area B at the northwest corner, in particular the fortifications, both the recently discovered EB III defensive line and its relationship to the "Rubble Wall" previously discovered;
- 3) Excavation in Area B at the southwest corner, in particular Squares B21 and B21A, where once again more data were sought to reaffirm earlier evidence of rebuild and reuse of the EB III fortifications in EB IV, and to seek transitional EB III/IV remains at this edge of the site.
- 4) Research in Area B rechecking of all drawings and sections in view of publication work on the EB IV occupation in Area B (Vol. 2).
- 5) Consolidation in Area B and C of standing walls to continue.

The 2019 Season

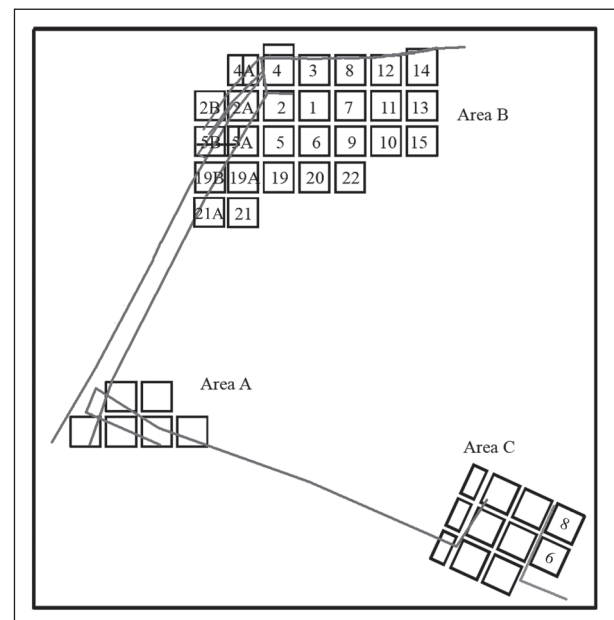
Area C: Squares C6/C8

Although the work in Area C (the Gateway) was completed in 2007, the architecture restored, and the final report published (Richard *et al.* 2010), the team revisited Area C in 2016 in order to reinvestigate especially the earliest, somewhat controversial EB IV phase. As presented in the final report and other publications (Richard *et al.* 2010, 2018) the three phases of EB IV occupation, including a gate in the uppermost level, revealed a remarkably well-preserved and fairly prosperous occupation including the earliest Phase 1 (Long 2010). This phase, although attested at other

sites (Richard and Long 2010; Richard 2020; D'Andrea 2014, 2016, 2020), is still somewhat enigmatic. Its features at KHirbat Iskandar, with comparisons elsewhere, reflect strong EB III ceramic tradition; moreover, at KHirbat Iskandar in particular, the well-known EB IV "caliciform" characteristics had a virtual null value in the statistical ceramic study (Holdorf 2010; Richard 2010; D'Andrea 2012, 2016). The Phase 1 repertoire of types convinced the excavators to identify it as a transitional EB III/IV phase (Richard and Long 2010). The 2016 work also provided additional ceramics against which to test earlier hypotheses about the chrono-typological phasing put forth in Vol. 1 (Richard 2010; Holdorf 2010, 2021.; Long 2010). The 2016 work centered on Squares C8 and C6 (Fig. 3) in the eastern sector to lessen the impact on the preserved Gateway (for a full report see Richard *et al.* 2018; Long, D'Andrea, and Richard 2018). Although the plan was to investigate EB III levels, the meticulous work in these two squares rendered that goal impossible. Thus, we returned in 2019 to these Area C squares with the specific intent to reach pre-EB IV layers.

Square C6

Starting in Square C6, work began at the level of the mudbrick that had been exposed below the Phase 1 surface in 2016 but not excavated (Fig. 4). At the time, the assessment



2. Plan showing excavation areas at KHirbat Iskandar.

To summarize the 2019 discoveries in Square C06, and despite the somewhat restricted area of excavation, it nevertheless appears that three levels of EB IIIB occupation are extant at KHirbat Iskandar (and see further evidence in C8 below). It also appears that these three levels post-date the destruction of the site in

EB IIIA. Moreover, the stratigraphic profile indicates continuous occupation without discernible break through the three EB III phases and into Phase 1 of the EB IV period. This quite unexpected discovery of stratigraphic evidence for an EB III reoccupation in the immediate aftermath of destruction offers a



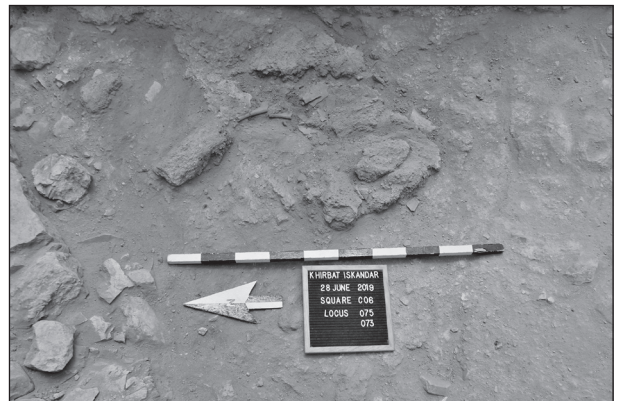
4. Area C, Square C6: mudbrick underlying EB IV Phase 1 surface; Phases 1-3 walls at the right; looking north.



6. Area C, Square C6: EB III Subphase 1b stone wall with associated surface showing burning from tabun remains, looking north.



5. Area C, Square C6: EB III Subphase 1a mudbrick structure below Phase 1 EB IV wall and surface; looking north.



7. Area C, Square C6: close-up of EB III Subphase 1b surface showing blackened cookpot in tabun.



8. Area B, Square B1: horseshoe shaped mudbrick tabun with platform, EB III, pre-destruction Phase C2 in Area B, looking west.



9. Area C, Square C6: EB III Subphase 1c stone wall and pivot stone with associated surface; looking north.

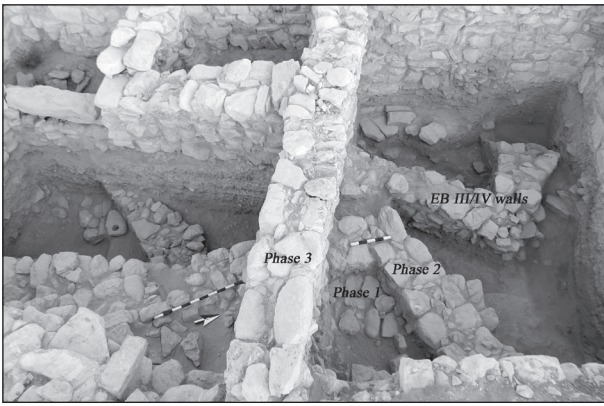
new and extraordinary lens through which to view what is clearly a more complex trajectory of deurbanization than previously realized. However, note that the *Stratum* 6/Period E settlement at KHirbat Al Karak (Beth Yerah) is described as a transitional phase from urban to post-urban, although apparently there is no

evidence for EB IV (IBA) materials (Greenfield and Eisenberg 2006: 157; for other transitional references see below). Previously, the scholarly view held on the EB III/IV transition was that there was urban collapse and/or abandonment followed at some point by a reoccupation in EB IV. The new evidence at KHirbat Iskandar suggests a late EB III transition and recovery at the site that helps to explain the prosperous and seemingly well-established Phase 1 EB IV settlement and its very early EB IV repertoire that harkens back strongly to EBA tradition. This new information offers insight into the regional development in central and southern Transjordan especially of EB III and IV occupation on mounded sites.

Square C8S-C8N

As mentioned above, the 2016 goal in Area C was to investigate Phase 1 and earlier occupation; in C8 this meant expanding the square to 5m. The expansion, however significant the new Phases 2-3 occupational remains (architecture and surfaces) that came to light, thwarted the goal to investigate earlier occupation in this square in 2016. There also was no time to concentrate on the series of wall lines exposed near the western balk in a probe in 2007 that had uncovered what appeared to be EB IV Phase 1 rebuilding of earlier EB III walls, as demonstrated by different construction techniques, as well as surface evidence (Long 2010: fig. 3.25, here see **Fig. 11**). Thus, in 2019 the objective was to investigate that area along the west balk as well as to excavate below the Phase 2 surfaces discovered in the square in 2016. Again, the overall goal was to glean new data about the EB III/IV transition. Given the natural division of Square C8 by an east-west wall (C8002/002a), in 2019 the decision was made to compartmentalize the work by describing the northern area as C8N and the southern as C8S. Most of the work accomplished was in C8S, which is discussed first.

In 2019, when work began to trace the lowest surface reached in the previous season, it became clear that this surface was in fact a Phase 1 (not an earlier Phase 2) surface. The first hint of this phasing was a line of stones emerging below the Phase 2 wall (W. C8066),



10. Area C, Square C8(S): below upper EB IV Phase 3 walls, there are Phases 1-2 structures superimposed at bottom; EB III-EB IV Phase 1 wall at back; looking west.



11. Area C, Square C8(S): interior of EB III-EB IV Phase 1 wall at the west balk, showing distinct construction techniques; fragment of EB IV Phase 2 wall on top; looking east.

the corner of which was discovered in 2016 to be the extension of a wall originating in Square C6 (W.C8061/66). Secondly, work clarifying the interior of the Phase 2 structure uncovered the continuation of the Phase 1 wall from C6, whose corner was the line of stones mentioned previously (W. C8080/91; **Fig. 10**). Moreover, the newly identified Phase 1 surface, when traced westward to the multi-phased and multi-rebuilt stone wall near the west balk mentioned above, helped the team confirm the Phase 1 date of the upper wall, which proved to be a corner (W. C8018A/31; **Fig. 10**). It is also clear now that the fragment atop the Phase 1 wall (at the south end) was indeed a Phase 2 wall (mostly removed during previous excavation) that can now be associated with Phase 2 surfaces discerned previously. The Phases 1-2 structures, one above the other in C6/C8 show a sequence of buildings in EB IV, both corners

of which indicating two sequential rooms to the east, unexcavated. The series of surfaces and makeup within Square C8 was extraordinary, pointing to multiple occupational layers and build up in EB III and EB IV (Richard *et al.* 2018; D'Andrea *et al.* forthcoming). There was a layer of mudbrick encountered below the Phase 1 surface which was traced southward and in all likelihood will link up with the mudbrick level in C6 (as discussed above; EB III Sub-Phase 1a). A subsidiary balk was left intact at the southern balk as the only way in future to connect the stratigraphy of C8 with the three EB III layers found below Phase 1 in C6. This will be pursued in the next season. Toward the north balk, a large pit was discovered, and its outlines and depth determined. This pit unfortunately cut some of the surfaces delineated in the square, but only at the northern end.

It is the architectural features at the west end that finally became unraveled since first emerging in a deep probe in 2007. The judicious removal of rubble revealed toward the north end the corner of a structure that continued westward into the balk and southward into C6 under structures and a subsidiary balk still standing (**Fig. 10**). Earlier stratigraphic observations (Long 2010) proved correct in that the bottom courses of this structure proved to be EB III, while the course with smaller stones above was an EB IV Phase 1 wall (**Fig. 11**). Surfaces were found on the interior of the structure, along with what appeared to be a series of benches or paving stones stretching out of the west balk, but whether connected to the EB IV Phase 1 wall or to the EB III segment is not certain (**Fig. 10**). This constricted area at the west rendered excavation difficult. Moreover, contiguous upper Phase 2-3 walls in the balks had to be reconsolidated, thus compromising the area somewhat with rubble and marring surface lines in the balks observed in 2007. Further study of the 2007 excavation will hopefully provide us with data needed to correlate the work of this season. Although the stratified profile needs to be pieced together in the different sectors of Square C8, nevertheless, it is clear that, as in Square C6, EB III occupation postdates the destruction. More research in future will clarify the connections between Squares C6 and C8.

C8N. This sector, north of W. C8002 (and west

into Square C3), included the southern portion of a structure with doorway that extended much further into unexcavated areas to the north and east and, as such, represented a unit distinct from the southern sector of C8 (see **Fig. 3**). This building and surface were left at the Phase 3B level when work concluded in the field (and see Long 2010) and remained unexcavated in 2016. In 2019 work in the northern sector was limited to several weeks, but a Phase 3A surface was traced that could be correlated with C8S. Excavation below encountered a segment of a wall and a surface that also seemed to generally correlate with Phase 2 that had been excavated in 2016 to the south. At this point, however, the large pit found in C8S appeared and the work until the end of season was spent defining its outlines and depth. Very little new information arose from this particular area and much study of C8 (N/S) is necessary to be more definitive about the correlation between the two in the earlier phases.

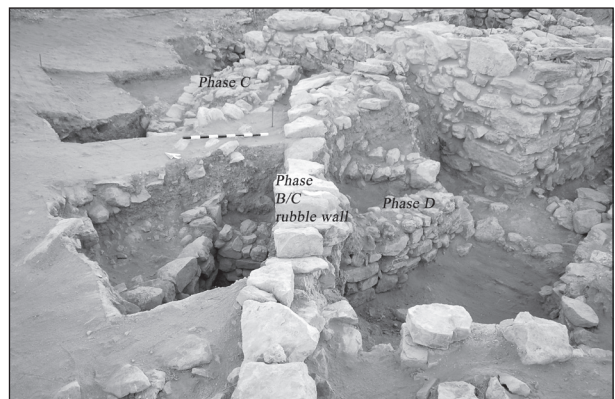
Area B: B2A/B4A/B5A/B5B.

The 2016 work in Square B2A uncovered more of the new EB III fortification (W. 4A006) –discovered in 2010–2013 in Squares B4A/B2A (and see Richard *et al.* 2013, 2018)– including its definitive dimensions (1.75m in height, 2.0m in width) attesting to the remains of a substantial western defensive line matching in depth and wall construction the northern EB III Phase C outer wall. It abutted the northwest corner of the bastion/tower (**Fig. 12**). The 2019 project sought a broader exposure of the fortification southward as well as another check of the relationship between it and the parallel “rubble wall” fortification (W. B2053), discovered long ago (and identified at the time as Phase C EB III), that abutted the tower bastion at the southwest corner (**Fig. 12**).

The two parallel trace walls on the western perimeter, of different construction and foundation levels, represent two of the three major phases of fortifications at the site; the third is the mudbrick-and-stone “inner wall” on the northern perimeter. Prior to 2010, the defenses at the site seemed straightforward enough stratigraphically: the inner mudbrick and stone wall was constructed first (Phase D); following a destruction, the inner wall was

encompassed within the Phase C stone outer defensive line. The “rubble wall” (overriding the Phase D mudbrick and stone circular features on the west) was the latest and the only candidate at the time for the Phase C EB III western trace wall, although the nature of its construction never seemed comparable to the northern line. The rebuilding, reinforcing, and strengthening of the site’s defenses in Phase C, evident in the segments of defenses reaching 7.0m in width, now included a massive tower and platform (see tower in **Fig. 12**). The new fortification line (W. B4A006) introduces complexity into the above sequence that –along with new data pointing to a use and rebuild of the “rubble wall” in EB IV plus other cogent factors– requires continuing re-evaluation of the construction history of the fortifications at KHIRBAT ISKANDAR (most recently, Richard 2016)

To that end, Square B2B was opened and B5B expanded into a full 5m square (see **Fig. 2**). In 2016, a segment of an unidentifiable fortification, whether extension of B4A006 or the “rubble wall” or overlap of the two, had come to light in Square B5B; the 2019 goal was to resolve this question. The 2019 excavations in Squares B2B/B5B, unfortunately, involved moving the dump on the western crest of the mound from years earlier. It was with great effort that the rubble was removed and the first stratified level uncovered: a level of mudbrick remains of a probable superstructure, since immediately below lay the continuation of W. B4A006. As shown in **Fig. 13**, excavation revealed that W.4A006 continued to run

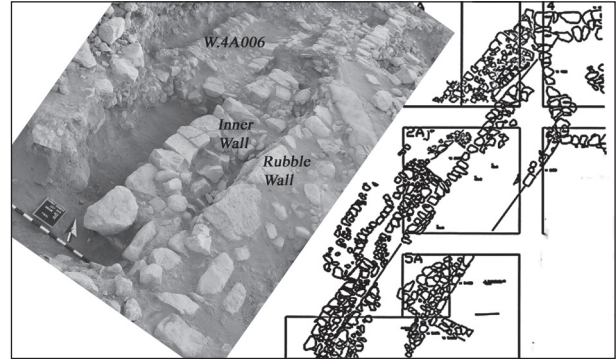


12. Area B northwest corner fortifications: from left, Phase C (W.4A006) outer wall, remaining outer segment of Phase B/C “rubble wall,” circular tower Phase D below “rubble wall.” Tower/bastion at top; looking east.

parallel to the “rubble wall,” and that the B5B segment proved to be part of the latter, thus resolving the question posed earlier. However, excavation did find that the nature of the underlying wall, over which the “rubble wall” had been built, was much more massive than in the north. The additional 10.0m stretch of wall has the appearance of a somewhat segmented, multiple phased, and rebuilt fortification, the configuration of which was not immediately apparent in the field. Much more analysis and further exposure is surely a necessity in order to comprehend how these new segmented walls on the western perimeter fit in with the other fortification phases; nonetheless, some observations are in order. The new features, when set into a broader context, have brought into sharper focus an earlier hypothesis that a gate had existed in this area in Phase D (Richard *et al.* 2013).

The hypothesized gateway uncovered previously comprised a 2.0m wide opening with threshold and remains of a pavement juxtaposed by two curvilinear towers of stone and mudbrick (Fig. 14). A mound of mudbrick debris was associated with the southern tower (W. B2108 on the right and see Fig. 15), although articulated, in-situ layers of mud bricks were clearly discernible. Stratigraphically, W.B2108 proved to continue eastward under a Phase C structure, into which it may have been incorporated. Connected to this southern tower structure was Pier B2A007, a stone transverse wall or buttress that clearly was part of the Phase D defenses at one point (as Fig. 15 shows). On analogy with reinforcements in the northern fortifications, this buttress appeared to represent a similar reinforcement in the Phase C reconstruction and expansion of the Phase D fortifications. However, in light of the new evidence from 2019, it is likely that the buttress was originally part of the Phase D defenses, but reused in the Phase C rebuilding. The northern tower (B2077) is less well-preserved. Our working hypothesis is that it was cut by construction of the Phase C tower bastion, cut by the outer wall (W4A006), and encompassed into the Phase C reconfiguration of the defenses (see Fig. 12). Excavation in Square B2a in 2016 uncovered possible remnants of the circular structure on the interior of W.4A006, but the

badly preserved remains renders this conclusion problematic (Fig. 16). This northern tower lies under the “rubble wall” (and see Fig. 12). In any case, what became clear in 2019 is that the small gap or opening that the 2016 excavations discovered just south of the northern tower,



13. Area B photo and plan of the western perimeter exposure of fortifications. From left W.4A006 outer wall, inner wall with possible gate opening, and the “rubble wall”; looking north.



14. Area B, Phase D gateway between two juxtaposed mudbrick and stone curvilinear towers, threshold and pavement at top; looking east.



15. Area B, Phase D southern tower with mudbrick superstructure and Phase C/D pier/buttress; looking east.



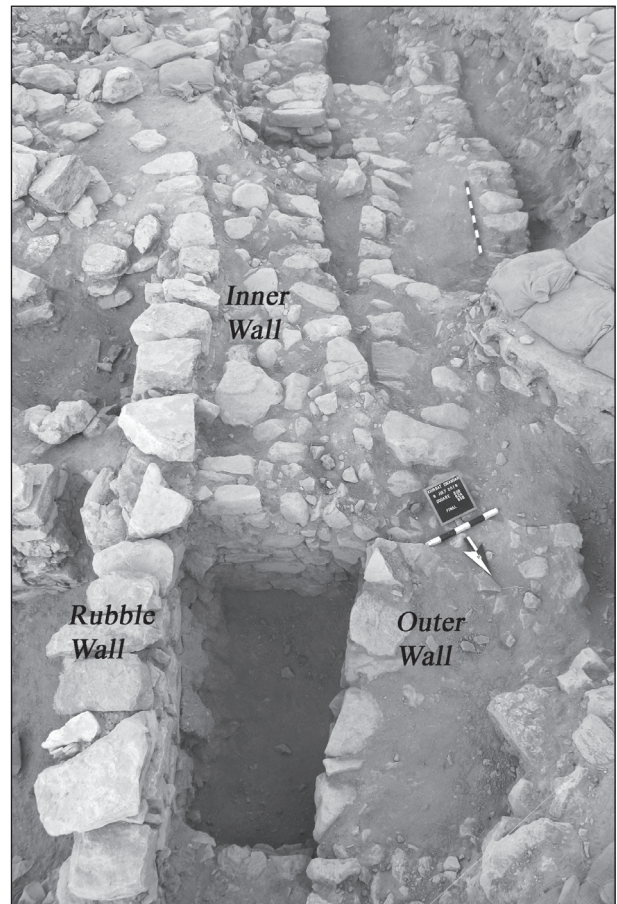
16. Area B, poorly preserved wall, possible circular structure on interior of W.4A006; looking north/northeast.

turned into a 2.0m wide gap bounded in the south by Pier B2A007, although somewhat obscured by the “rubble wall” (Fig. 17). This space matches precisely the width of the distance between the two towers (as mentioned above).

All of the above factors combined suggest a new iteration of the gate hypothesis is in order (and see Fig. 13). Given the newly discovered 2.0m gap, it is with more confidence that in Phase D there was an early gateway that led through a passage between two mudbrick and stone towers over a threshold and pavement into the town. The Phase D *stratum* is dated to late EB II or very early EB III, but pottery from surfaces within the gateway must be analyzed more closely to clarify the date. What seems evident now is that this gateway was later incorporated into the Phase C realignment of the fortifications, which effectively blocked it with the construction of outer fortification W.B4A006. As Fig. 17 suggests, the newly recovered defenses on the west resemble the northern fortifications in that a Phase D inner wall with buttress is encompassed into an outer Phase C fortification. So, where was the Phase C gateway? Although the articulation of a gate is not immediately recognizable due to multiple phases and continued rebuilding on the west, there are some indications that an opening existed further south, but much more exposure is needed. The team did find several surfaces

and pottery, all of which needs further analysis to incorporate into the overall phasing of the fortifications.

As a further observation of the 2019 exposure at the west, the stratigraphic phasing of the two western perimeter walls, as determined previously at the northwest corner, proved to be correct: the “rubble wall” was constructed last; it overrides the Phase D (rebuilt and consolidated with Phase C) architecture and, likewise, its foundation is at a level higher than the top of the outer EB III wall (W. 4A006). The two walls continue in parallel fashion without overlap as far as we have excavated. Complicating the sequence of construction somewhat (as alluded to earlier) are 1) the considerable evidence accumulating to suggest rebuilding and reuse of the “rubble wall” in EB IV, and 2) the new evidence for a post-EB III occupation at the site (see Area C discussion above). So, if the new outer wall (W4A006) is the western trace



17. Area B western perimeter exposure of fortifications. From left “rubble wall,” Phase D gate opening and inner wall line, W.4A006 outer wall at right; looking south.

wall matching the Phase C northern outer fortifications, what is the “rubble wall” (in the past identified as Phase C)? The hypothesis that it may be a transitional EB III/IV wall takes on more credence given the above two factors. We await further evidence of this hypothesis before identifying a new stratigraphic phase and will continue to call the “rubble wall” an EB III/IV (Phase C/B) fortification.

Squares B21/B21A

The project’s return to these two southwestern-most squares in Area B included several goals: recheck connections between EB IV and the “rubble wall,” begin exploration of EB III levels in this sector, and, especially, seek stratified evidence of the EB III/IV transition (and see **Fig. 2**). In 2019 work renewed in B21 –where a cache of EB IV vessels had been recovered on a plaster floor in 2013– in a structure that included a bench room on the east (Richard *et al.* 2013). In 2019 work also renewed in square B21A by expanding it to a full 5.0m in order to comprehend the multiple-phase wall lines discovered in 2016, and to clarify what was thought to be a segment of the “rubble wall.”

In Square B21 the strategy was to first bring the bench room surface into phase with the western sector and then concentrate on the latter to investigate earlier levels. To that end, excavation discovered, below the Phase B EB IV plaster surface, a very thick and hard layer of plaster at the north end, interpreted as makeup for the Phase B plaster surface and construction of buildings above. Although it may have been a feature (bin?), given the similar evidence for thick plaster/limestone in the consolidation of earlier layers and construction of the storeroom/bench room in Squares B7-8 at the north, it likely represents a similar phenomenon. As we will see, a similar phenomenon came to light in B21A, likely an extension of the plaster *locus*. This conclusion seems warranted by excavation below which uncovered a phase of a badly preserved east-west stone wall partially covered and surrounded by limestone plaster, including a possible plaster surface. Unfortunately, there was a pit south of this structure, which effectively cut off connections with the southern sector. However, it seems clear that related

contemporaneously to the wall in the north was the badly preserved east-west wall at the southern end, also covered partially with plaster and limestone. An out-of-place pillar base, partially covered with plaster, overlay the wall. The two weeks spent on Square B21 ended with more questions than answers, except to say that there was no sign of the EB III destruction layer and that the several phases excavated predate Phase B, although it is not certain if we have encountered the enigmatic EB IV Phase 1 or the EB III transitional materials as seen in Area C. Work in contiguous Square B21A to the west did shed some light on the Square B21 materials.

B21A. Work in this square proved to be far more successful in the objectives mentioned above: investigating the “rubble wall” and earlier, pre-EB IV levels; it was also possible to clarify the reuse of several Phase A-B walls rebuilt on earlier walls. Excavation revealed a series of superimposed architectural elements and surfaces but no destruction layer, suggesting we may have an occupational profile similar to that recovered in Area C. Expanding the square to a full 5.0m provided the broader exposure needed to affirm that the wall at the northwest corner was indeed the “rubble wall” (**Figs. 18, 19**). Repeating a pattern noticed upslope, the Phase A EB IV wall ran up to it and a lower Phase B parallel wall, badly preserved, appeared to intersect with it, but one cannot be certain without dismantling the upper section of the “rubble wall.” Associated with the Phase B wall was a badly preserved surface on which



18. Area B, Square B21A: “rubble wall” at bottom left, Phase A EB IV abutting wall; lower EB IV Phase B intersecting “rubble wall” and associated surface with remains of roof collapse; multiphased wall at top right; looking northeast.

a great deal of rubble, presumably from the “rubble wall” had fallen (**Fig. 18**).

Dismantling the poorly preserved Phase B wall revealed a possible earlier use surface in an associated pavement that ran under it (**Fig. 19**). The stone pavement was found only in one area, but contiguous to it and apparently contemporaneous was a very thick plaster/mudbrick surface traced to the south and west balks (**Fig. 20**). The thickness and hardness of the plaster recalls the similar phenomenon encountered in B21 and is presumably contemporary. It is worth noting that wherever excavation has discovered EB IV Phase B remains, it has found a very thick plaster surface on top of smoothed over mudbrick, as a first use surface. Leaving the pavement in place, the team investigated the plaster/mudbrick layer to the south and west, where it soon became clear that this plaster/pavement surface was an occupation phase covering at the west an earlier and very substantial wall line (W. B21A043; **Fig. 21**). The latter consisted of massive flat stones, thought at first to be pavers but with more exposure turned out to be part of a structure of at least two courses and two rows. This stone feature at the west underlay both the Phase B wall and the “rubble wall.” Unfortunately, the season ended before the significant stratigraphic profile in B21A could be further explored and analyzed. However, several observations are in order: Excavation reaffirmed the stratigraphic position of the “rubble wall”: it is the latest fortification and built over earlier fortifications. The massive new trace wall uncovered in Square B21A

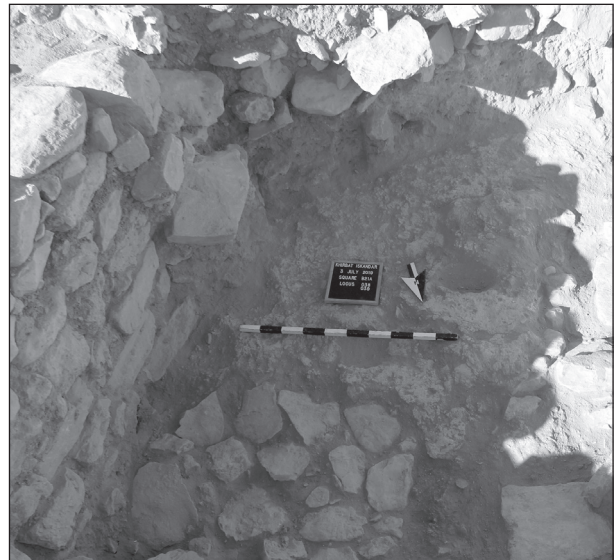
appears similar in dimensions to the substantial wall underlying the “rubble wall” in Square B5A, as noted above. Although tentative, the newly uncovered phasing in B21A recalls the transitional levels encountered in Area C, including no trace of a destruction layer.

Consolidation of Walls

As in every season, the team continued the important consolidation of walls across the site, with a view toward facilitating ultimate preservation and restoration of the EB III and IV architectural units in Area B in future (as occurred in Area C). Although continued upkeep has occurred every season, the weather (in particular rain) has not been kind to past consolidated



19. Area B, Square B21A: view of “rubble wall” to west, EB IV Phases A-B walls in center; lower pavement emerging under Phase B wall; looking north.



20. Area B, Square B21A: view of pavement and contemporary thick plaster/mudbrick surface; looking south.



21. Area B, Square B21A: end of season photo of newly emerged massive stone wall at left under “rubble wall”: pavement to right, and supervisor Tucker Deady; looking north.

walls. In 2019, for example, it was necessary once again to consolidate several walls in danger of collapse in Square C8S. Reconsolidation and shoring up of a number of walls in Area B was required to stem the tide of weather-related destruction of walls. Unfortunately, the team likewise encountered more indication of treasure hunting in the number of holes dug on the site since last season, one so deep as to indicate a mechanical or motorized type of equipment was used. The team reported the problem to the Madaba office of the Department of Antiquities and received prompt assistance from the regional director and staff.

Conclusion

While the findings of the 2019 season are preliminary and exposure limited, it is possible to conclude that occupation is extant on the mound following the EB III destruction and preceding the Phase 1 EB IV settlement. The clearest picture may be drawn from Area C, Square C6, where three architectural phases with late EB III pottery were discovered sandwiched between the Phase 1 EB IV settlement above and, apparently, a destruction level below (not excavated). No break in this sequence of stratified layers was distinguishable. Somewhat comparable phasing did come to light in Square C8(S), that is, a late EB III phase with mudbrick walls and surface, as well as the layer on which the mudbrick structures were built; but efforts continue to correlate the two squares. It is suggestive, however, that in C8(S) Phase 1 EB IV walls were built on top of EB III remains. Work in B21A brought to light evidence that may very well be contemporary with the transitional occupation in Area C, but without more exposure and research this inference is speculative at this point. Work reaffirmed the “rubble wall” as the last phase of continuous rebuilding of the fortifications in the Early Bronze Age. Again, the connections with Phase B walls suggest rebuild as well as reuse in EB IV; more importantly, there is growing evidence to suggest that the “rubble wall” may have served as a transitional fortification on the west during the recovery in late EB III, recently come to light in Area C primarily. The newly discovered transitional EB III/IV data at KHirbat Iskandar now allows for more

comparative study with transitional remains at other sites, e.g., Tall Al Hammām, which appears to be a continuously fortified site from EB III-IV-MBA (Collins, Kobs, and Luddeni 2015), KHirbat Al Karak (Beth Yerah), which evinces a post-urban phase (*Stratum 6/Period E*) that includes transitional ceramics in the EBA tradition and forms anticipating the EB IV (IBA), according to the excavators (Greenberg and Eisenberg 2006: 157), as well as sites exhibiting an early EB IV repertoire (and see D’Andrea 2014, 2016, 2019, 2020; Richard and Long 2010; Richard 2020)

The 2019 season also added new information about the fortifications near the northwest tower/bastion. Although the new stretch of trace walls on the west awaits further investigation, there is compelling new evidence to reinforce the hypothesis that a gateway stood at that point in Phase D. The 2.0m wide opening proved to match the width of the open area juxtaposed by two curvilinear mudbrick and stone towers, threshold and pavement, pointing to a gateway in Phase D. What became clear is that the continued reinforcement and strengthening of the defenses in Phase C (as seen on the north) incorporated this gateway and blocked it by construction of the outer wall (W. 4A006). Although the sequence of Phase D, Phase C, and the “rubble wall” is reaffirmed, there is growing evidence to suggest that the “rubble wall” (Phases B/C) served as the defensive line on the west for the transitional occupation on the mound in late EB III and again in EB IV.

Thus, while other scholars argue for a complete break between EB III and EB IV, it is now clear (what many of us have thought for years) that in certain areas of the southern Levant, EBA occupation continued after the devastation of destruction. In the particular case of KHirbat Iskandar, it now appears that there was no abandonment of the site. If this proves to be the case, then one can offer an explanation for the Transjordanian phenomenon that finds greater continuity between EB III and EB IV on tell sites than elsewhere in the southern Levant. The surprise finding of the 2019 season is that it was resilient EB III inhabitants at the site that strove to recover and rebuild following the destruction –the three post EB III destruction architectural phases attest to that– and that

their habitational efforts appear to have laid the foundation for the following EB IV period. This new evidence helps to explain why even the Phase 1 EB IV architectural remains at KHirbat Iskandar seem somewhat advanced, and also explains the early pottery discerned for Phase 1, with virtually no rilled wares typical of EB IV in a repertoire of EB III forms with red slip and burnish. The results from this summer's work are truly significant for offering a first glimpse at the efforts of the site's occupants to rebuild after the destruction. Work next season in Areas B and C will concentrate on testing the hypothesis that KHirbat Iskandar includes a transitional phase between the EB III destruction and the beginning of EB IV.

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