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Early Bronze IV Peoples: Connections Between the Living and the Dead at Khirbat Iskandar

Introduction

This essay presents a summary of the completed study of the Khirbat Iskandar Area C gateway, the EB IV cemeteries in the immediate vicinity, and the quantitative study of the corpus of EB IV ceramics from both the cemeteries and from Area C. First, what the final excavation report will show is that there are three stratified phases in Area C: an early EB IV (possibly transitional EB III/IV) domestic phase (Phase 1); an EB IV domestic phase centering around a well constructed broadroom house and a work area (Phase 2); and, an EB IV gateway complex in the latest (Phase 3) phase. Second, what the final report on the cemeteries will show is that important distinctions exist between Cemeteries D and E in terms of location of graves, tomb type, and ceramic assemblage. And, third, what the quantitative ceramic study will show is that: 1) there are three typo-chronological ceramic phases correlating with the three-phased stratigraphic profile in Area C; 2) that comparative analysis between the assemblages of Area C and the cemeteries shows a close correspondence; and 3) that comparison with the Bāb adh-Dhrā' corpus allows for a correlation of phases with Khirbat Iskandar.

This essay hopes to offer some insight into EB IV society on the basis of the above combined studies, viewed in the larger context of work across the mound, as well as ongoing survey and excavation of the megalithic features in the vicinity of the site. Previous work has revealed tantalizing evidence for differentiated social identities in residence at the site, i.e., unequal access to precious materials, unusual structures and stores of vessels, the continued use of the earlier fortifications, and excellent construction of well-preserved houses, etc (Richard 2006; Richard and Long 2006, 2007). With burial remains, we have an additional lens through

which to view the EB IV population at Khirbat Iskandar. As is well known from a myriad of studies on the archaeology of death, burial traditions are as much a window onto the world and the social structures of the living, as a lens into the religious ideology associated with death (Keswani 2004; Boyd 1995; Baxevis 1995; Parker Pearson 1999; Chesson 1999). The latter is elusive, unfortunately, except for general inferences. The former is more tangible and observable, especially in this instance, given the wealth of data at Khirbat Iskandar and its unique landscape setting. A comparative analysis of tall and tomb assemblages provides a new view of the connection between the living and the dead in EB IV — from the viewpoint of sedentists, not pastoral nomads.

Area C: The EB IV Settlements

The site of Khirbat Iskander, well known as one of the best exemplars of a permanent agricultural settlement in the EB IV period (ca. 2300-2000BC), sits astride the ancient "King's Highway", on the north bank of the Wādī al-Wāla, just north of Dhibān. Current excavations now focus on the earlier, urban (EB II-III) settlement at the site and the nature of the transition to the non-urban EB IV period. For a survey of the excavations, see Richard and Long (2006) and Richard, Long, and Libby (2007).

First, regarding Area C, the superposition of architecture, realignment of structures, the associated surfaces, and quantitative ceramic study all contribute to the conclusion that there were three EB IV occupational phases in that area (see FIG. 1). The stratigraphic profile and the quantitative ceramic study both indicate continuous development through three phases, the major distinction in occupation occurring between Phases 1-2. Although the central area suffered some sort of destruction at the



1. Khirbat Iskandar Area C6: three superimposed architectural phases.

end of Phase 2, immediate rebuilding in Phase 3 is indicated by reuse of structures. A brief summary of each phase follows.

Phase 1

In order to preserve the Phase 3 gate, the architectural remains in Phase 1 are somewhat limited. Nevertheless, what appear to be two typical Early Bronze Age (probably broadroom) domestic structures came to light in Area C, one of which a well-constructed 3m wide building. On present evidence, the structures appear to be freestanding, not interconnected as typical in upper phases; yet, continuity is apparent not only in the superposition of Phases 1-2 architecture, but also in the orientation of the buildings. In light of changes in the ceramics between Phases 1-2 (below), a major inference drawn about the Phase 1 settlement is that it appears to be a very early, possibly transitional EB III/EB IV occupational phase. Adding support

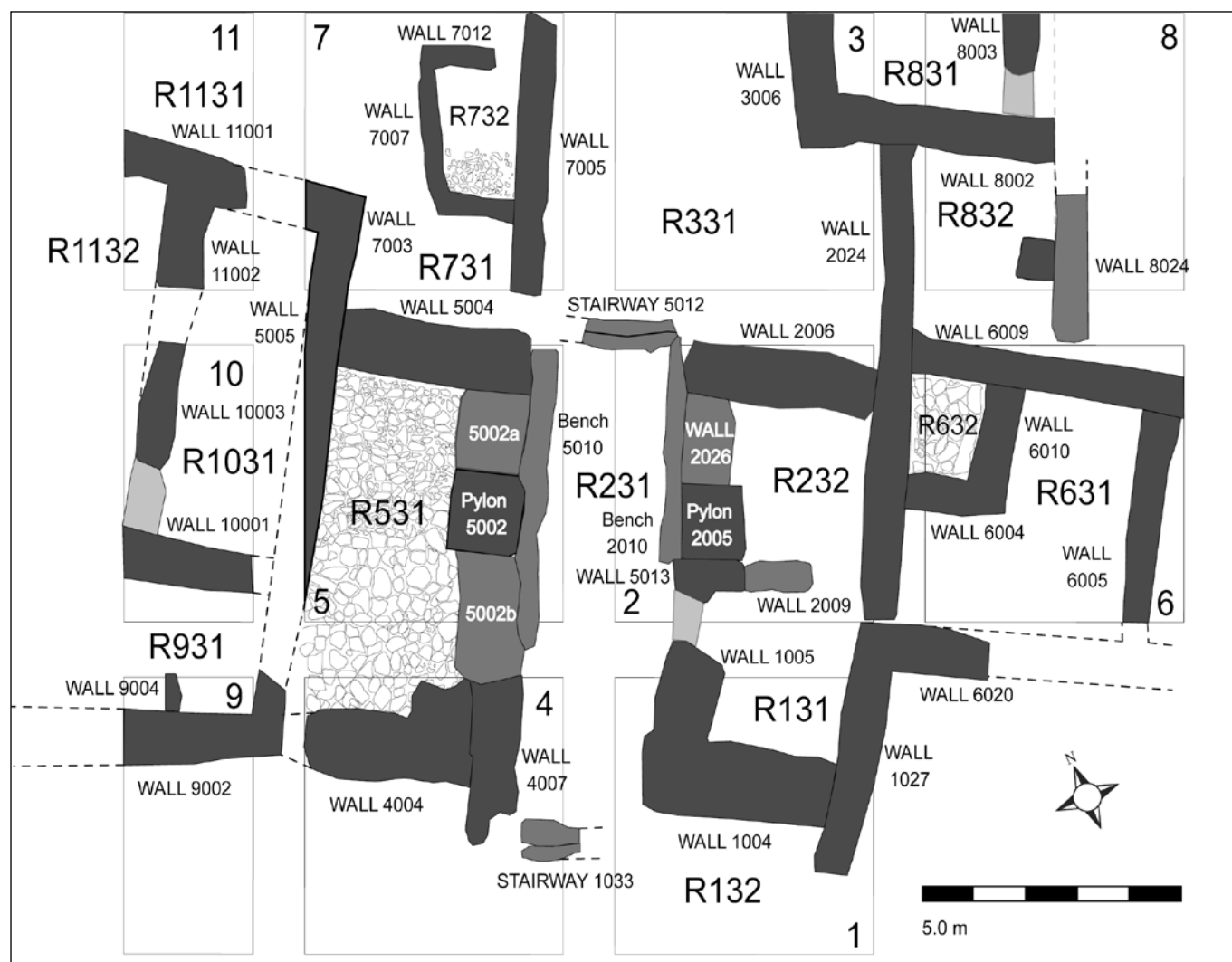
to this view is the evidence for reuse of a pre-EB IV wall.

Phase 2

More is known about the Phase 2 settlement, although, again, to preserve the Phase 3 gate, excavation was somewhat limited. From a sampling of the architectural remains across the area, it appears that there were a series of interconnected structures running north south. However, the best evidence came from the central broadroom structure and an apparent workshop at the east end. In the destruction level of the multi-room central structure, there were remains of beams along with evidence for domestic activities, such as spinning, storage (short and long-term), food preparation and serving, as well as special usage vessels (basins). At the east end, within a curvilinear wall, an apparent courtyard work area contained two rounded stone/mud-brick worktables, whose associated living surface included quantities of flint debitage, 2 handstones, 1 hammerstone, and a pierced stone.

Phase 3

The preserved and restored Phase 3 settlement (Long and Libby 1999) provides the greatest lateral exposure in Area C, and a view of EB IV lifeways not encountered elsewhere in the southern Levant, as yet. The plan (see FIG. 2) of the Area C gateway is fairly well known. What the final study has concluded is that there were two sub-phases in the construction of this complex. The upper plan (Phase 3b) shows a blockage of the walls lining the plastered passageway, and the erection of a stairway at both ends, as well as stone benches against the blocked walls. Previously, a simple single entryway existed juxtaposed by rooms with a central pylon (Phase 3a). The plan and monumentality (for the EB IV period) of the Area C complex suggests a public function for the area. The 9m long and 2.5m wide passageway was clearly the focus of the complex, enabling traffic to and from the upper site. The erection of benches suggests some modification in function in Phase 3b to include a communal gathering place, apparently. A great deal of evidence for processing of agricultural product (numerous basins), found in the outer area of a specialized room/bin/storeroom (Room 732) likewise points to a work rather than a residential area. To the east, there was a similar pattern of workshop activities with associated features and quantities of



2. Khirbat Iskandar Phase 3b Gateway (drawing: J.C. Long, Jr.).

lithic debitage.

Although the Area C direct access, single entry-way gate bears a resemblance to more monumental gate structures in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages (see McLaren 2003), the obvious disparity is that there are no towers flanking the entryway and no monumental curtain wall. However, McLaren's view that the sites of Rukays and Khirbat Iskandar represent transitional gate types is apropos (43). We interpret this complex as the only ingress in an otherwise unbroken east-west boundary wall that joins and reuses the earlier outer fortification line. This interpretation hinges, to a certain extent, on the expedition's work elsewhere on the mound, where EB IV architectural links to the outer fortifications are definite (Richard, Long, and Libby 2007), along with a tower in Area A with links to the east-west wall. The important observations made

by Nelson Glueck concerning defenses at the site are also relevant in this regard (1939). All of these data suggest a type of gateway context for the Area C structure, and may represent additional evidence for continuity between the two urban periods.

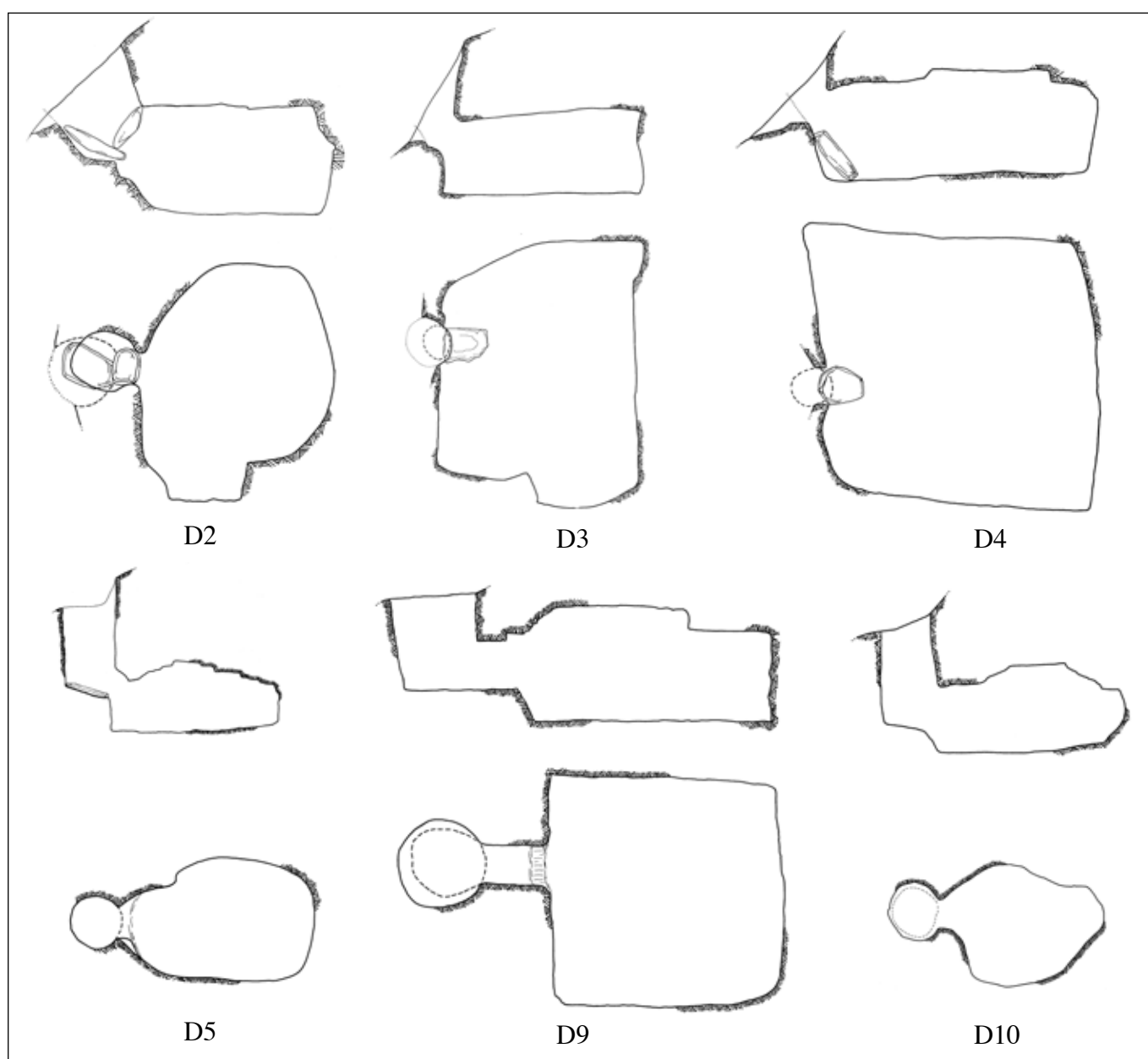
The Cemeteries

Regarding the cemeteries at Khirbat Iskandar, excavation revealed the EB IV tradition of shaft chamber tombs with multiple, secondary burials, rather than primary burials as found, for example, at Bāb adh-Dhrā' (Schaub and Rast 1989: 473-82). Although there was disturbance/roof collapse/robbing in virtually every tomb excavated, a variety of studies offer an interesting view of the burial traditions of EB IV sedentary peoples. On the basis of tomb types and a quantitative ceramic study comparing tall and tomb, and comparing tombs within

separate cemeteries, there were two major discoveries: 1) patterning and variations in the cemeteries indicated distinctions between Cemeteries D and E; and, 2) ceramic traditions of the “living” were remarkably similar to those of the “dead” at Khirbat Iskandar. There are cemeteries to the east (Area E), west (Area J), and south (Areas D and H) of the site. In Area J, bulldozing activities uncovered several tombs, one dating to the EB I, the other to the EB IV period. The latter included the remains of a chamber in which there were two lovely whole vessels along with one stone bead in association with two juvenile interments (Richard 1990: Fig. 28).

Cemetery D

Across the wadi to the south, on Jabal as-Sultāniyya, survey and excavation indicate a fairly extensive area of tombs. A robbed shaft tomb at the east end, caves and modified shaft tomb/caves in Area H, and a series of excavated shaft tombs in Area D at the west. Exploration beyond the road to Dhibān (Area F) suggested an area of probable tombs as well. Concerning Area D, two rows of tombs indicate that shaft tombs were dug every 5-6m. All had a round shaft and single chamber, the chambers being generally square or squarish, except for two that were slightly irregular (for the types, see FIG. 3).



3. Khirbat Iskandar shaft tomb types in Cemetery D.

Two tombs, D2 and D3, contained an alcove, one with bench. Tomb D2 had two blocking stones, one pushed aside; Tomb D3 had a pushed-aside blocking stone and the entrance blocked with stones. Thus, evidence for reuse of the tombs is clear. Both tombs yielded quantities of ceramics, in relation to the number of interments: e.g., 93 restorable vessels in Tomb D2 with an MNI of three adults and one juvenile, roughly 23 vessels per person (or more per adult), and metal objects. In Tomb D3, with an MNI of two adults, there were 56 vessels (five whole lamps and several other whole vessels), roughly 28 vessels per person, and metal and lithic objects.

Unfortunately, due to the considerable disturbance/robbing in Cemetery D, we cannot speak of “rich” or outstanding burial depositions, despite tomb morphology suggesting clear elements of distinction. For example, Tomb D4 stands out among the tombs due to its size and well cut, almost perfectly square (ca. 4 x 4m) chamber, flat roof, and unusually small round shaft. The huge chamber contained a scatter of bones with an MNI of two adults, 18 vessels, and several metal fragments. Similarly distinctive, Tomb D9 was almost perfectly square, though smaller (ca. 3 x 3m) with flat roof, had a wide round shaft (1.45m in diameter) and what could be called a dromos. In the form of teeth of a child and an adult, the MNI was two; there were 30 restorable vessels and two lithic objects. Tomb D5 had been cleared out perhaps in antiquity, except for a few bone remains and four EB IV vessels. The two irregular chambers were both in the upper row, Tomb D5 being slightly oblong and Tomb D10 being the smallest and most irregular of all the tombs. Interestingly, Tomb D10 showed distinctiveness in its grave goods, nine beads only, including carnelian. Despite the disturbance in the tombs, the tomb types and the array of ceramics, metal, jewelry, and lithics hint at variability in the burials in Cemetery D. As recovered, the skeletal remains appeared to be secondary disarticulated burials in all the tombs in this cemetery.

Cemetery E

There is also variability between the tombs of Cemeteries D and E, hinting at possible distinctions in burial location of the interred as well. Part of the difference is geological. The peculiar formation on the eastern ridge, a type of breccia conglomerate, appears underground to be a honeycomb of partially natural, partially cut chambers of some irregu-

larity. It is clear that tomb cutters opportunistically utilized these cavities (Tomb E3) or modified them into shaft tombs (Tombs E9, E12, E14). This is in sharp contrast to the stratified layers of marl, chert, limestone, chalk on Jabal as-Sultāniyya, which are much more conducive to cutting a classic shaft and chamber. However, even given these geological differences, Cemetery E provides a contrast to Cemetery D in a number of ways. It is in Cemetery E, where the only example of a double-chambered tomb came to light (E9/E14).

Tomb E3 was a modified natural cavity in the rock 0.50m wide x 1m deep x 0.70m in height. Unlike the Cemetery D remains, this burial appeared to be an undisturbed context, yet it was a secondary disarticulated burial as well. The cave held two juvenile skulls, carefully placed on either side of a bone pile with the remaining bones between and over them (see Richard and Boraas 1988: Fig. 17), all lying on a prepared surface of small stones. The skulls faced east. The deposit included six small vessels and three flint blade fragments.

The double-chambered tomb (E9/E14) was a modified cave/shaft tomb. Despite disturbance in these tombs, both originally had several architectural elements at the entrance: lintel stones, blocking stones, stone wall. Tomb E9 provided the best example of all excavated tombs at Khirbat Iskandar of a nicely shaped round chamber. It also had the best evidence to suggest the possibility of primary burial originally: three fairly discrete interments, with long bones, skulls, and vertebral elements (Richard and Boraas 1988: Fig. 18). There were 13 vessels, lithic, bone, and metal objects. Tombs E10 and E14 were less well preserved, but were similarly irregular cave/chamber shaft tombs.

What of the distinctions between D and E? Some of these include architectural elements in Cemetery E, a double chambered tomb, and reduced number of vessels per interment. The location of this cemetery just east of the site and in the area of the aboveground megalithic features are also a consideration. The quantitative ceramic study also noted distinctions between the cemeteries.

The Quantitative Ceramic Study

As for the third part of the study, the major conclusions drawn from the quantitative ceramic study were that: 1) there were three typo-chronological phases at Khirbat Iskandar in EB IV; 2) that the assemblages of Cemeteries D and E were contem-

porary with and comparable to the Area C corpus (Phases 1-3); and, 3) that correlation with Bāb adh-Dhrā' provides quantitative ceramic links between the central and southern plateau areas in EB IV.

The quantitative study showed that the best evidence for typo-chronological phasing at both sites is clearest in the platter bowl category. The sequence is that Phase 1 flat rim and rolled rim platters are superseded in Phase 2 by the EB IV "fossil-type" platter bowl with turned down rim. In Phase 3 earlier platter bowl types are virtually non-existent and varieties of the turned down rim dominate the repertoire. This sequence matches that at Bāb adh-Dhrā' (Schaub 2000; Rast and Schaub 2003; Richard and Holdorf 2000). Further, at Khirbat Iskandar, there is the appearance in Phase 3 of the straight-sided cooking pot with steam holes, as well as a typologically new variant, the beveled-rim bowl/platter bowl (FIGS. 4:22-23, 5:14). The cooking pot is a well-known MB IIA type; the beveled-rim bowl likewise foreshadows an MB IIA bowl with shelf rim as seen, for example, at Geshur (Cohen and Bonfil 2007: Fig. 5.5). There were numerous statistically significant diagnostics supporting this typo-chronology. Other factors include size increases and changes in richness of types in each of the three phases.

A major contribution of the quantified comparative study of ceramic assemblages at Khirbat Iskandar and Bāb adh-Dhrā' is that it is a first step toward developing interregional ceramic cross phasing in a period where one-period sites, isolated cemeteries, and regionalization are the norm. It is hoped that this EB IV ceramic study will offer some chronological pegs for other sites. A seriation of tombs, based on quantified comparative analysis with the Area C stratified assemblage, revealed that the tombs were in use contemporaneously through three phases. Quantified study also revealed the close correspondence of the cemetery repertoire to the site, thus strengthening the inference that those buried in the cemeteries were the sedentists from the site, rather than outside populations. Obviously, the possibility exists that others using the cemeteries purchased vessels made from the site.

The similarities between tall and tomb ceramic corpora are immediately apparent (FIGS. 4-5), shown graphically in the histogram in figure 6. Even with the rare cooking pot and holemouth storejar (FIG. 5:1, 3) removed from the tombs, the profiles of tall and tombs are similar. Yet there are

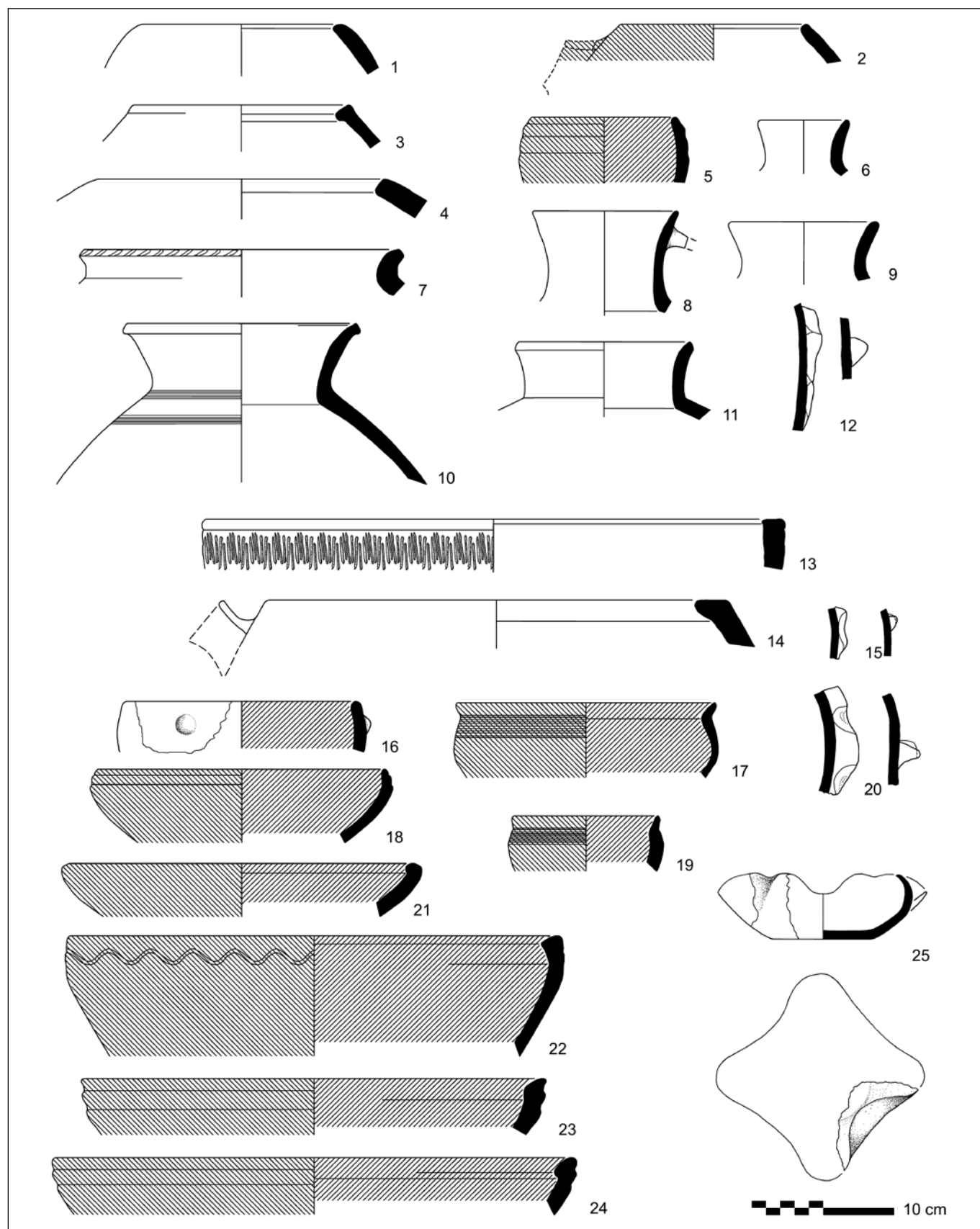
distinctions to note. The tombs (FIG. 5) lack holemouth bowls (including basins) and pithoi, both of which are found in Area C (FIG. 4:10-11, 13-14). Also, the platter bowls have a smaller size range, the large - medium deep bowls are fewer, and there were no envelope handles in the tombs, as found in Area C (FIG. 4:12, 15, 20). However, there are more medium-to-small to miniature necked jars, pitcher/juglets, and lamps in the tombs. The lack of long-term storage and/or food preparation/or processing/industrial (i.e., olive oil manufacturing) equipment in the tombs, as well as the general lack of large sizes, probably relates to the constrained space within the tomb. Alternatively, those items were not considered appropriate grave goods. It is interesting that there is nothing in the tombs that is not found on the tall, even though it might be the rare lamp or miniature vessel (FIG. 4:6, 25).

As for distinctions between Cemeteries E and D, the quantitative study showed the former to include proportionately many more medium-small bowls, fewer (and smaller) platter bowls, and well-fired pottery. These and other characteristics are comparable to the assemblage in Field XVI (the cultic area) at Bāb adh-Dhrā'. There are numerous statistical details for each cemetery, of which these are just a few examples. In summary, what we may glean from the quantified ceramic study is that differentiation between Cemeteries D and E is apparent.

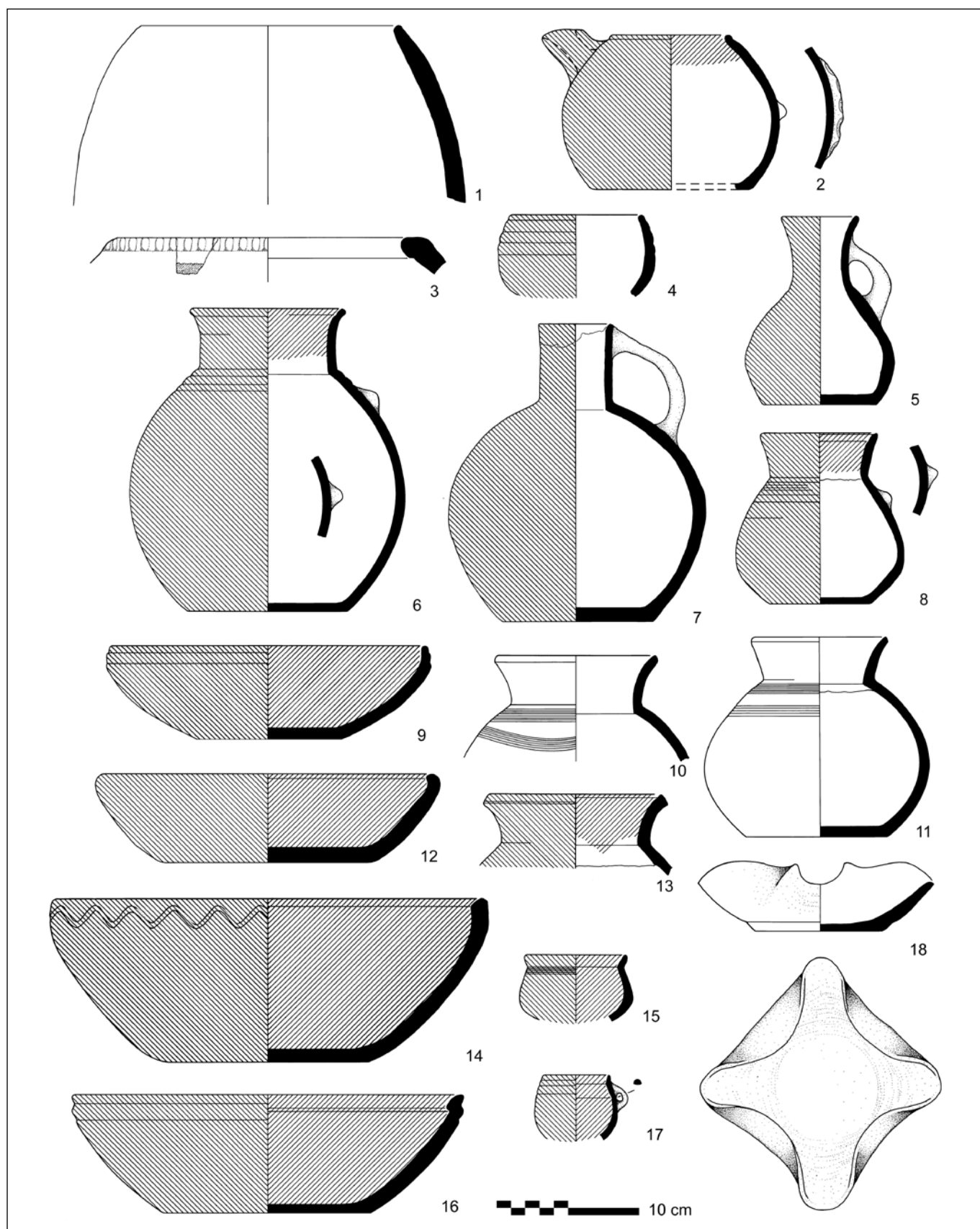
Conclusions

The Cultic Landscape of Khirbat Iskandar

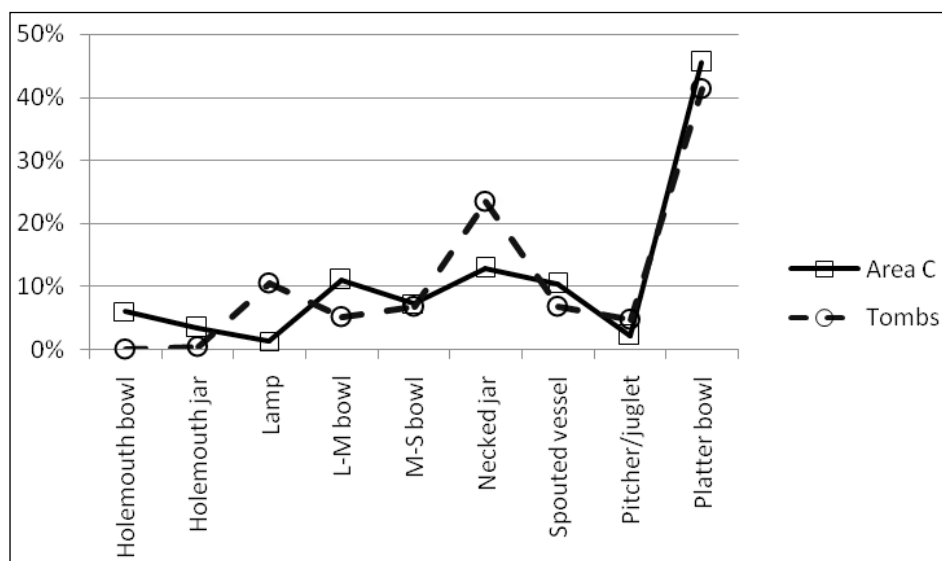
The stratified profile at Khirbat Iskandar, like the evidence for multi-phase occupation at other sites in Jordan, affirms a significant permanently settled population in the EB IV period. Excavated sites, such as, Tall Umm Ḥammād (Helms 1986), Tall Iktānū and Tall al-Ḥammād (Prag 1991), Abū an-Ni'āj and Dhahrat Umm al-Marār (Falconer, Fall and Jones 2007) Tall al-Ḥayyāt (Falconer, Fall, Berelov and Metzger 2006), Bāb adh-Dhrā' (Rast and Schaub 2003), Aro'er (Olavarri 1969), Adir (Cleveland 1960), al-Batrāwī (Nigro 2005), Khirbat Ḥamrat Ildān (Adams 2000), document the settled element in what was, undoubtedly, some variant of a dimorphic society, where there was a symbiotic relationship with the pastoral nomads. What the data from Khirbat Iskandar show, further, is that strong continuities with Early Bronze tradition characterized the EB IV period in Transjordan, including,



4. Khirbat Iskandar Area C EB IV pottery.



5. Khirbat Iskandar EB IV pottery from the Cemeteries.



6. Histogram comparing the ceramic assemblages of Area C and the cemeteries at Khirbat Iskandar.

some evidences for social stratification.

The sum of the characteristics of Cemetery E noted above, along with the aboveground megalithic markers and proximity to the tall, combine to suggest some social distinctiveness to those interred there in contradistinction to those interred in the large cemetery of reused shaft tombs in Area D. If this is a correct inference, then the Jabal as-Sulṭāniyya hillside was the major burial ground for the population. Even so, the variability in Cemetery D itself is suggestive of social distinctions. For a discussion of social stratification in EB IV tombs, see Palumbo (1987) and Baxevari (1995).

A major question posed in this study was: Why is there such a close correspondence between the living and the dead at Khirbat Iskandar; further, why is the burial repertoire more limited and specialized elsewhere, such as, *Dhahr Mirzbānah* (Lapp 1966: Figs. 1-40: *passim*) and Gibeon (Prichard 1963: Fig. 62:34-40: *passim*), where we see the ubiquitous small jars or “milk bottles” and little else. The answer may be as simple as that the cemeteries at Khirbat Iskandar served the needs of the sedentary occupants of the site, whereas, seasonal peoples probably utilized the Central Hills cemeteries. The different assemblages probably reflect sedentary vs pastoral burial custom distinctions. Other permanent sites and associated cemeteries seem also to reflect a similar tomb/tall repertoire, e.g., Bāb adh-Dhrā’ (Schaub and Rast 1989) and Jericho (Nigro 2003).

Excavation and survey of the present expedi-

tion affirms observations made by Nelson Glueck about the area east of the site. Glueck commented (1939: 128) on the numerous circles of stone, menhirs, and rectangular structures (open air sanctuaries) across the ridge as probably indicating a “tremendous ancient cemetery”. Indeed, our excavations have uncovered remains of that cemetery, as well as numerous features visible at the time of Glueck’s visit. The remaining features are the vestiges of what originally must have been a visually captivating landscape of not inconsiderable symbolic significance mirroring connections between the living and the dead.

Adding to this landscape is the recent discovery of a “high place”, on the summit of Umm ‘Idrum, overlooking the site from the north, and completing the virtual 360 degree cultic ring encircling the tall (and the living). Although this apparent ring could merely be utilitarian and/or fortuitous, it is highly likely that it was a purposeful and planned symbolic manipulation of the ecocultural landscape, and is reflective of a religious ideology, a sociopolitical ideology, or both. Along with the close connections between tall and tomb noted in the ceramic assemblages, this landscape suggests a symbolism of close ties between the living and the dead (Parker Pearson 1999: 124-41). Such strong ties are particularly obvious in the EB II-III charnel houses at Bāb adh-Dhrā’, houses of the dead that are identical to houses of the living (and see Chesson 1999).

As tomb and tall assemblages evoke the close ties between the living and the dead, the 360 degree

cultic/mortuary landscape may reflect the watchful eye of the ancestors over the site and the living. As Parker Pearson notes, "Placing the dead is one of the most visible activities through which human societies map out and express their relationships to ancestors, land and the living (1999: 141)". If our interpretation of the distinctions between Cemeteries D and E has merit, then, at a deeper symbolic level, the megalithic aboveground features in that area may validate an ideology of inequality in the social organization of the site. For a discussion of archaeological correlates to complexity at the site, see Richard (2006) and Richard and Long (2006).

The megalithic structures at Khirbat Iskandar are part of a tradition of stone monuments that includes dolmens, menhirs, cairns, circles of stone, rectangular open sanctuaries. These date primarily to the EB I and IV periods, although there are examples from other periods. Scholars have surmised that megalithic structures (especially dolmens) may represent territorial markers of pastoral societies, or symbolic landscape markers between the agriculturalists and the pastoralists, or, at least, a border where the nomads and sedentists came into contact and maybe conflict (Zohar 1989: 27; Prag 1995), or perhaps the burials of EB II-III populations (Vinitsky 1992). Although the megalithic structures at Khirbat Iskandar could originate earlier in the Early Bronze Age, excavation has revealed sealed EB IV pottery in one of the megalithic structures; usage of the cemetery was in EB IV. From the vantage point of a well-established permanent Early Bronze Age settlement like Khirbat Iskandar, it is difficult to conclude that the megalithic structures represent territorial markers of a pastoral-nomadic society. More likely, they reflect a sacred landscape. Whether the symbolism evoked is an ideology associated with the ancestors and/or the social structure at the site, or whether it reasserts traditional hierarchies of the past, it seems clearly to reflect the close ties between the living and the dead in the EB IV at Khirbat Iskandar.

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