

KHALET AL-JAM'A.
A BRONZE AND IRON AGES NECROPOLIS NEAR BETHLEHEM (PALESTINE):
RESULTS OF THE 2019 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

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In Spring 2019 the Italian-Palestinian joint team of Sapienza University of Rome and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Palestine Dept. of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage resumed rescue excavations at the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a, 2.2 Km south-east from the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. Works were focused on Tomb A7, identified in 2015, a huge underground burial place, dating back to the Iron IIC (8th-7th century BC), but also including earlier depositions dating from the EB IVB-MB. This suggests that an original EBIV tomb was modified and re-used in the following Middle Bronze and Iron Age. A provisional report of activities and finds is offered below.

Keywords: Bethlehem; necropolis; Early Bronze Age IV; Middle Bronze Age; Iron Age II

1. INTRODUCTION

In April 2019, the joint team of the Palestinian MOTA-DACH and Sapienza University of Rome¹ resumed archaeological activities at the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a, 2.2 Km south-east from the center of Bethlehem.² Aim of this season was the excavation of Tomb A7, in the south-western sector of Area A (fig. 1), already recognized and surveyed in 2015, when its entrance was first identified.³

2. TOMB A7

Tomb A7 is quite different from the majority of the tombs in the KJ necropolis. It is a huge underground complex with at least seven entrances/shafts and ten large chambers with several recesses connected by passages and arches.

The first investigated entrance of Tomb A7 consists of an irregular oval shaft (Shaft 1; fig. 2), of about 0.80/0.90 m of diameter, 1.60 m deep. The tomb is composed of two sectors (fig. 3), northern (Sector A) and western (Sector B), and Shaft 1 leads to the last one. Sector A, with south-north orientation, counts three chambers joined together (Chambers 1, 9 and 8), and two other attached chambers to the north (Chambers 10 and 6). The second sector, B, is provided with a series of 5 smaller chambers: in order from Shaft 1 to the north, Chambers 2 and 4 (which opens just onto Chamber 2), 3, 5 and 7.

In addition to Shaft 1, six other shafts were found in Tomb A7. One in Chamber 1 (Shaft 2), three in Chamber 9 (Shafts 3, 4 and 5), at short distance one from each other, and another one (Shaft 6) in Chamber 6. Another shaft that runs down (Shaft 8) has been

¹ The team was composed as follows. MOTA DACH: Dr. Mohammed Ghayyada, responsible for the Bethlehem district and Mr. Jaber Ahmed er-Joub, archaeologist. University of Rome La Sapienza: Dr. Gaia Cecconi, field responsible; Mr. Lorenzo Indino, archaeologist and photographer; Ms. Cecilia Ripamonti, draftperson; Ms. Cristiana Liberati, draftperson.

² See Nigro 2015; Nigro *et al.* 2015; 2017.

³ Nigro *et al.* 2015, 190, fig. 20.

identified inside a small niche in Chamber 8, while a circular pit, aside the western wall of the same chamber indicates the presence of another shaft.⁴ All of these shafts were sealed by the same layer of sandy brown soil and limestone chops. In Sector B, the presence of a further shaft is suggested by a cone of earth created by the collapse of the filling from the pit, but it has not been excavated yet (Shaft 7).

Chambers in Sector A have a round or oval shape with several recesses and niches carved along the walls and filled up by earth and stones of large dimensions.

Chambers in Sector B, where the excavation was concentrated during this season, are characterized by an elongated oval shape without niches or subsidiary installations, except for Chamber 2 (fig. 4). The latter one shows a more complex structure, with a height between 1.60 and 1.80 m. Immediately to the right of Shaft 1, there is a platform (Platform 18) carved in the calcareous rock, 2.34 m wide, flanked by a long channel (Channel 17), 1.50 m length and 13 cm wide, and a large niche, 1.05 m wide, is on the southern wall, with some stones inside it (Niche 1; fig. 5). The interpretation of this installation needs further investigation.

Layers in Chamber 2 consist of an upper stratum of collapse of brown soft soil with big stones and just a few pottery fragments (Filling 3). Underneath, there is a layer of compact limestone (Filling 9), made by smashed chops collapsed from ceilings, and covering a third layer of compacted brown sandy earth, with limestone fragments and many pottery sherds (Filling 10), laying directly over the bedrock.

The other chambers of Sector B are filled up with big stones and, underneath, a layer of compacted brown sandy earth similar to Filling 10 of Chamber 2 (named Filling 11 in Chamber 3; Filling 12 in Chamber 4; Filling 13 in Chamber 5 and Filling 14 in Chamber 7). Pottery was collected only in the southern half of Chamber 3, in Chamber 4 (see below § 2.1.) and between Chamber 5 and 7.

According to the ceramic repertoire, Tomb A7 was firstly used during the Early Bronze Age IVB, and then re-excavated and re-used during the Iron Age IIB-C, as already observed in other tombs of the same necropolis (for example Tomb A1),⁵ in the cemetery of Jebel Daher in Bethlehem,⁶ or in the necropolis of Tell en-Nasbeh (for example Tombs 32, 54 and 5).⁷

2.1. Pottery from Tomb A7

The main concentration of pottery was in Chamber 2, in the southern half of Chamber 3 and in Chamber 4, while just a few fragments have been found between Chambers 5 and 7, over Burial 15a+b (fig. 2; see below § 2.4.). The ceramic repertoire consists of a few complete vessels, basically lamps, and a single cylindrical juglets of MB III. The rest of the ceramic inventory was found in fragmentary preservation state, in an Iron Age IIB-C layer of use disturbed by looters.

⁴ Already recognized in 2015, see Nigro *et al.* 2015, fig. 21, above on the right.

⁵ Nigro *et al.* 2015, 185.

⁶ Nigro *et al.* 2017, 16-19.

⁷ Mc-Cown - Wampler 1947, 77-84.

2.1.1. Pottery: Classes

The Iron Age repertoire includes the following classes: Simple Ware, Red Slip, Cooking Ware and Storage Ware. Out of 620 fragments from the pottery found in Chambers 2, 3 and 4, 31.93% belong to Specialized Production (MNV⁸ 69 vessels),⁹ 44.99% Simple Ware (MNV 82 vessels and 24 lamps); 1.78% Cooking Ware (MNV 3 pots) and 21.30% Storage Ware (MNV 25 jars).

Pottery found in between Chambers 5 and 7 is distributed as follows: 21.22% Specialized Production (MNV 7 vessels);¹⁰ 60.6 % Simple Ware (MNV 8 vessels and 2 lamps); 18.18% Storage Ware (MNV 4 vessels).

2.1.2. Pottery: Classes

Most frequent vases belong to specialized productions: Red Slip carinated bowls¹¹ and hemispherical bowls,¹² deep bowls,¹³ and kraters (fig. 6),¹⁴.

Simple Ware enumerates plain bowls, carinated bowls, kraters (fig. 6),¹⁵ jug and juglets,¹⁶ sometimes with a cross incised on the handle.¹⁷ Among Cooking Ware, pots¹⁸ (fig. 7) show an everted grooved or an out-turned rounded rim, with two ribbon handles, sometimes with a cross incised above them.¹⁹ Moreover, also Storage Ware jars, the so-called hole-mouth pithoi²⁰ and hole-mouth jars (fig. 7),²¹ typical of IA IIB-C, were found. Two Storage Ware lids' pommels were also found²² (fig. 7).

Furthermore, some stamped handles²³ were collected: two 2-winged *lmlk* specimens²⁴ of 0 II Type, and one²⁵ of X II Type (fig. 8). X II Type represents a diagnostic mark of 7th

⁸ Minimum Number of Vessel (Rice 1987, 292-293; Voss - Allen 2010).

⁹ 25.52% Red Slip Ware (MNV 39 vessels) and 1.13% Simple Painted Ware.

¹⁰ 9.09% Red Slip Ware (MNV 3 vessels).

¹¹ KJ.19.TA7.11/10.

¹² KJ.19.TA7.8/11.

¹³ They exhibit mainly an everted, cut and down-folded or outward-folded rims, as in typologies 4, 6 and 8 of De Groot - Bernick-Greenberg's classification (De Groot - Bernick-Greenberg 2012, 58-62). Sometimes the Red Slip is applied in a concentric circles pattern.

¹⁴ KJ.19.TA7.3/43 and KJ.19.TA7.7/9. Kraters are characterized by a thick profiled rim and a high rounded carination (Gitin 2015, 347). KJ.19.TA7.7/9, Red Slip krater with black painted decoration cf.: Beer-Sheba (Singer-Avitz 2016, 593, fig. 12.35:8).

¹⁵ KJ.19.TA7.3/33 (fig. 7).

¹⁶ KJ.19.TA7.11/64 and KJ.19.TA7.11/69. They are characterized by simple or everted rounded rim, flaring neck and handle extended from the rim to the shoulder (Gitin 2015, 349-350).

¹⁷ KJ.19.TA7.11/155. Some of them have also a punctuation at the center of the cross. This feature is already attested in Jerusalem/al-Quds (De Groot - Bernick-Greenberg 2012, fig. 4.30:2-3, 6) and Tel Moza/Qalunya (Brandl - Greenhut - Vainstub 2009, fig. 5.7).

¹⁸ KJ.19.TA7.4/15.

¹⁹ Gitin 2015, 347-348.

²⁰ KJ.19.TA7.8/55. Sometimes this kind of vessels is defined "jar-krater" (Gitin 2015, 348, pl. 3.3.4:3-5). It found comparisons at Jerusalem/al-Quds (Gitin 2015, 351), Beer-Sheba (Singer-Avitz 2016, 619-620) and Tel Moza/Qalunya (Greenhut - de Groot 2009).

²¹ KJ.19.TA7.11/118. They are characterized by a plain rim, perpendicular to the wall (Freud 2016, 262), as also at Lachish (Gitin 2015, 349, pl. 3.3.5:10), Jerusalem/al-Quds (De Groot - Bernick-Greenberg 2012) and Tel Moza/Qalunya (Greenhut - de Groot 2009).

²² KJ.19.TA7.10/138.

²³ Lemaire 1981; Lipschits - Sergi - Koch 2010; 2011; Sergi 2016.

²⁴ KJ.19.TA7.8/42 and KJ.19.TA7.11/103.

century, that appears in hill-country sites not destroyed in the 701 BC Assyrian campaign.²⁶ Parallels have been found at Ramat Rahel,²⁷ Gibeon/el-Jib²⁸ or in the same area of Bethlehem, on the slope north of the Basilica of the Nativity.²⁹ Other two handles shows two Concentric Circles Type impression with a central dot³⁰ (fig. 8). Concentric Circles Type mainly spreads over Highland sites after the end of 8th century,³¹ as Ramat Rahel,³² Jerusalem/al-Quds³³ and Tel Moza/Qalunya.³⁴

2.2. *Objects and other finds from Tomb A7*

Objects are distributed in Tomb A7 over the same area of the pottery. A pillar figurine³⁵ (fig. 9), depicting a female torso missing head and arms, belonging to Kletter's Type B ("mold-made face JPF")³⁶ or Type A3c of Gilbert-Peretz's classification ("pillar torso, broken hands"),³⁷ was found in Filling 11. This type of figurine is widely spread between the 8th and early 6th century BC³⁸ in Central-Southern Levant,³⁹ e.g. in Jerusalem/al-Quds,⁴⁰ Tell Beit Mirsim,⁴¹ Gibeah/Tell el-Fûl,⁴² Tell en-Naşbeh,⁴³ Tel Moza/Qalunya.⁴⁴ Such kind of figurines is usually interpreted as votive objects for official or domestic cult of fertility, perhaps as representations of the goddess Asherah⁴⁵ or Astarte.⁴⁶ According to some scholars they could be toys,⁴⁷ or women representations, linked with some sympathetic magic properties.⁴⁸

²⁵ KJ.19.TA7.10/137.

²⁶ Lipschits - Sergi - Koch 2011, 7.

²⁷ For 0 II Type at Ramat Rahel see Sergi 2016, 333-339; for X II Type see Sergi 2016, 326-333. The handle KJ.19.TA7.8/42 (fig. 8) has also two concentric circles incised above the stamp, a common specimen in the southern sites of the Levant as Ramat Rahel (Sergi 2016, 339, figs. 151-152).

²⁸ For 0 II Type at Gibeon/el-Jib see Pritchard 1959, fig. 12:5; for X II Type see Pritchard 1959, 18-19, fig. 8:530; photos of the University of Pennsylvania Museum nos. 60-13-110, 60-13-112, 60-13-117.

²⁹ Lipschits - Sergi - Koch 2011, 17, tab. 1; Nigro 2015, 9.

³⁰ KJ.19.TA7.11/101 and KJ.19.TA7.11/102.

³¹ Lipschits - Sergi - Koch 2011, 8.

³² Sergi - Koch 2016.

³³ Prag 2001, 220-221.

³⁴ Brandl - Greenhut - Vainstub 2009, fig. 5.5.

³⁵ KJ.19.TA7.10.

³⁶ Kletter 1996, 29-30.

³⁷ Gilbert-Peretz 1996, 29.

³⁸ Holland 1977, 137; Moorey 2001, 67. Kletter argues that the earliest figurines can be dated to the 10th-9th centuries, but the Pillar Figurines become a common phenomenon only starting from the 8th century (Kletter 1996, 40). The debate about the first appearance of these figurines is still open, see Johnston 2003, 86-87.

³⁹ Johnston 2003, 86-87; Seevers 2016, 37.

⁴⁰ Gilbert-Peretz 1996, 30.

⁴¹ Lapp 1978, pl. 32:15.

⁴² Albright 1939, pls. 31:7,5; 54b: 11, 12; 55:7; 56:7; 57c:5.

⁴³ McCown - Wampler 1947, pl. 86:13,18.

⁴⁴ Petersson-Solimany - Kletter 2009, fig. 4.1.

⁴⁵ Kletter 1996, 29; 2001; Hadley 2000, 196-205; Yezerski - Geva 2003, 63-64; Johnston 2003.

⁴⁶ Darby 2014, 35-37.

⁴⁷ Johnston 2003, 99; Seevers 2016, 37.

⁴⁸ Moorey 2001, 28; Meyers 2002, 286.

Three handmade zoomorphic figurines, one head of an equid, and two bodies of equid were found between Chambers 2 and 3, in Fillings 10 and 11. The head⁴⁹ (fig. 9), almost complete, preserves applied eyes and a cylindrical nose with a punctuation at the end. It is a popular typology in the Levant, sometimes with pierced muzzle to libate,⁵⁰ and found comparisons at Jerusalem/al-Quds,⁵¹ Tel Moza/Qalunya,⁵² Samaria,⁵³ and Beer-Sheba.⁵⁴ The two bodies are preserved in the chest and part of the neck.⁵⁵ Equid figurines are common in southern sites of the Levant during the 8th-7th centuries, as other zoomorphic figurines (sheep, horned animals, birds) and clay models of tables and chairs. They are sometimes interpreted as votive offerings or toys.⁵⁶

Moreover, several flint cores, three fragments of stone vessels⁵⁷, five stoppers⁵⁸, six pestles,⁵⁹ one grinding stones⁶⁰ were found just inside Chambers 2 and 3, in Fillings 10 and 11, and three *marābiṭ faras* for tying animals (fig. 10)⁶¹ inside Chamber 2, in Filling 3.

2.3. Faunal remains

Faunal remains from Tomb A7 were hand-collected and analyzed during the excavation. Most of the bones have been found in Chamber 2 (59.64% of NISP⁶²). However, some samples were collected also in Chambers 3, 5, and 7 (tab. 1). In Tomb A7, the most represented animals are sheep and goats (*Ovis vel capra*, 11.40%, and *Capra hircus*, 3.50%), followed by donkeys (*Equus asinus*, 8.77%), equids (*Equidae*, 4.39%), cattle (*Bos taurus*, 4.39%), birds (*Aves*, 1.75%) and a few pigs (*Sus scrofa*, 1.75%). Medium mammals represents 44.74 %, large mammals 22.80 % and indeterminate 32.46 % of total.

In Chamber 2, a high concentration of mammals of medium size, including sheep, one goat, represented by four fragments of horn, and a very small percentage of pigs were

⁴⁹ KJ.19.TA7.20.

⁵⁰ As in the case of Beer-Sheba (Kletter 2016, fig. 21.17:314).

⁵¹ Gilbert-Peretz 1996, 31, pl.6:6, 15.

⁵² Petersson-Solimany - Kletter 2009, fig. 4.2:12.

⁵³ Crowfoot - Crowfoot - Kenyon 1957, pl. XII:4.

⁵⁴ Kletter 2016, fig. 21.7:75, 21.10:101.

⁵⁵ In the previous excavations of Tomb A7, a very similar statuette has been found (Nigro *et al.* 2015, 190, fig. 22:KJ.15.TA7/d).

⁵⁶ Kletter 1996, 60.

⁵⁷ KJ.19.TA7.9, KJ.19.TA7.22 and KJ.19.TA7.32. The first one is a basalt tripod bowl that preserve one leg with triangular section (Squitieri 2015, 209). Other two are stone bowl with a ring base, Type 2.C of Sparks' classification (Sparks 2007, 127, fig. 48:5). Both the shapes are very common in the Southern Levant during both Early Bronze and Iron Age, in the regions of Eastern Galilee, the Jezreel Valley and the northern Jordan Valley, while basalt bowls is poorly attested in southern region (Sparks 2007, 129; Squitieri 2015, 211).

⁵⁸ KJ.19.TA7.24, KJ.19.TA7.26, KJ.19.TA7.27, KJ.19.TA7.29, KJ.19.TA7.31.

⁵⁹ KJ.19.TA7.1, KJ.19.TA7.2, KJ.19.TA7.4, KJ.19.TA7.12, KJ.19.TA7.16, KJ.19.TA7.18. Mainly round or squared pestles with round section and two or more faces of use (Wright 1992, fig. 8:77-78). Two of them, made of flint, are probably reused nodules.

⁶⁰ KJ.19.TA7.15, partially preserved, that is made of limestone with a loaf-shaped section.

⁶¹ KJ.19.TA7.5, KJ.19.TA7.6, and KJ.19.TA7.7.

⁶² Number of Identified Specimens (Marshall - Pilgram 1993; Connor 2004, 54-57).

found.⁶³ Mandibulae with teeth and fragments of long bones are the most numerous among ovine remains. Retrieved bones and especially teeth and mandibulae suggest the presence at least of two juvenile individuals of sheep/goat.

In Chamber 3, mostly mammals of large size (cattle and donkey) were found, in particular ten donkey's teeth from the same individual.⁶⁴

In conclusion, faunal remains from Tomb A7 follow the general trends of the southern sites of the Levant,⁶⁵ where the ovine is the most spread animal species, both for wool/milk production and meat consumption, followed by cattle, and a very small percentage of pigs and birds.

	Chamber 2 KJ.19.TA7.2.FR1; KJ.19.TA7.2.FR.2; KJ.19.TA7.2.FR.4		Chamber 3 KJ.19.TA7.2.FR3, KJ.19.TA7.2.FR7		Chamber 5 KJ.19.TA7.2.FR5		Chamber 7 KJ.19.TA7.2.FR6	
	NISP	MNI	NISP	MNI	NISP	MNI	NISP	MNI
<i>Aves</i>	1 (FR.1)	1	1 (FR.3)	1				
<i>Capra hircus</i>	4 (FR.4)	1			4	1		
<i>Ovis vel Capra</i>	4 (FR.1); 3 (FR.2); 6 (FR.4)	2			5	1	3	1
<i>Sus scrofa</i>	1 (FR.2) 1 (FR.4)	1						
<i>Bos taurus</i>		1	5 (FR.3)					
<i>Equus asinus</i>			10 (FR.7)	1				
<i>Equidae</i>	1 (FR.1), 1 (FR.4)	1	3 (FR.3)	1				
Medium mammals	8 (FR.1); 12 (FR.4)		2 (FR.3)		1			
Large mammals	2 (FR.4)				4			
Indeterminate	3 (FR.1); 9 (FR.2); 12 (FR.4)		3 (FR.3)		5		5	

Tab. 1 - Number of Identified Specimens (NISP) and Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) of the faunal remains found in Tomb A7 of Khalet al-Jam'a.

2.4. Burial 15a+b

In the western half of Chamber 5, along the northern wall of the tomb (fig. 11), a burial was identified (Burial 15a+b) under a thick layer of collapsed ceiling (Filling 16, that was covered by Filling 13, see § 2.). Human bones were preserved in a scattered and mixed distribution. Due to the preservation state, it was possible to recognize (tab. 2): a skull

⁶³ Pig is not very common in IA II southern sites of the Levant, although a very small percentage has been found in IA IIB strata at Tel Moza/Qalunya and Jerusalem/al-Quds and a slightly big amount at Beer-Sheba (Sapir-Hen - Finkelstein 2015, 311, fig. 3; Maeir - Hitchcock - Horwitz 2013, 5, fig. 2).

⁶⁴ KJ.19.TA7.2.FR7. They are left and right molars and premolars in connection with each other, identifying a single individual (Barone 2003).

⁶⁵ Horwitz 1996, 313; Horwitz - Tchernov 1996, 298-299; Sade 2009, 202-205; Horwitz - Lernau 2018, 292-293.

fragment, some deciduous teeth, a mastoid process,⁶⁶ four pelvis bones, several ribs, vertebral bodies and branches, one cervical vertebra with almost welded branches, two astragali of different size, several not-welded epiphyses. Preliminary analysis of bones, in particular of the size of the vertebrae, of the size of the two astragali and of the number of pelvis, revealed that there were two buried childhood individuals: the first one was less than 2 years old (fig. 15),⁶⁷ and the second one over 6 years old (fig. 16).⁶⁸

Burial 15a (KJ.19.TA7.15.HR1)	Burial 15b (KJ.19.TA7.15.HR2)
	1 skull fragment
18 vertebral bodies and 6 vertebral branches	1 cervical vertebra with welded branches
	2 upper part of scapulae (left and right side)
2 pelvis	2 pelvis
5 epiphyses of long bones, of which 2 femur heads and 1 distal tibia epiphysis	1 femur head
1 astragalus	1 astragalus
13 non-welded diaphyses of ribs	12 diaphyses of ribs
7 non-welded diaphyses of phalanges	9 phalanges
	6 long bones fragments

Tab. 2 - List of human bones found in Burial 15a and Burial 15b of Tomb A7 of Khalet al-Jam'a.

The ceramic finds were laid in the eastern part of Chamber 5 and found mixed with bones. They accompanied different inhumations (figs. 12-14). Pottery vessels date back from different epochs: one EB IVB jars with combed decoration on the shoulders⁶⁹ (fig. 14); one MB I Gublite carinated bowl⁷⁰ (fig. 12), one Red Slip cylindrical juglet⁷¹ (fig. 13), one Black Burnished piriform juglet with button base⁷² (fig. 12), one Black Burnished piriform juglet with ring base⁷³ (fig. 12), one MB III Simple Ware platter with inner folded rim⁷⁴ (fig. 12), one Simple Ware juglet⁷⁵ (fig. 12, preserved at rim and neck), one Simple Ware dipper⁷⁶ (fig. 12), one MB II Storage Ware jar⁷⁷ and one Iron Age II jar, apparently intrusive from the upper layer⁷⁸ (fig. 14).

Then, according to the pottery repertoire, it seems to be possible that the tomb was first excavated during the Early Bronze IVB when burials 15a+b belong to, and it remained in

⁶⁶ These samples are currently being analyzed at the Dept. of Biology of the University of Florence (Prof. D. Caramelli), for the ancient DNA extraction.

⁶⁷ Burial F.15a, KJ.19.TA7.15.HR1.

⁶⁸ Burial F.15b, KJ.19.TA7.15.HR2. Age estimate is based on the fusion status of the vertebrae (Canci - Minozzi 2011, 132, tab. 8.7).

⁶⁹ KJ.19.TA7.15/7.

⁷⁰ KJ.19.TA7.15/10. For comparisons see: Nigro 1997; 2002.

⁷¹ KJ.19.TA7.15/2.

⁷² KJ.19.TA7.15/3.

⁷³ KB.19.B.TA7.15/5.

⁷⁴ KJ.19.TA7.15/1.

⁷⁵ KJ.19.TA7.15/4.

⁷⁶ KJ.19.TA7.15/9.

⁷⁷ KJ.19.TA7.15/8.

⁷⁸ KJ.19.TA7.15/6.

use during the whole Middle Bronze Age until the end of Middle Bronze III, similarly to what happened for other tombs of the same necropolis.⁷⁹

3. CONCLUSIONS

Tomb A7 seems to have originally consisted of three different tombs, subsequently unified into one large underground complex during the Iron Age II. One tomb corresponded to Chambers 1, 8 and 9 with shafts 5 and 2, the second tomb to chambers 6 and 10, with Shaft 6, and the third one to Chambers 3, 4, 5, and 7, with Shaft 7.

The third tomb should represent the oldest nucleus of the structure, hewn in the EB IVB-MB I and kept in use during the whole Middle Bronze Age, as suggested by the funerary equipment. Its entrance was probably through Shaft 7. Afterward, in the 8-7th centuries BC, the three tombs were rearranged, cleaned and then joined together by means of Chamber 2 and Shaft 1. Chambers 1, 9, 8, 10 and 6 were connected, by widening rooms and straightening walls. Shafts 3 and 4 were excavated, as aeration wells or for dropping raw materials. These variation of the tomb arrangement apparently indicate a change in the use of the cave, which was transformed into an underground production and storage area, associated with the nearby Iron Age Tower.⁸⁰

Pottery (§ 2.1.), small finds (§ 2.2.), human (§ 2.4.), and faunal (§ 2.5) remains collected in Tomb A7 provide more information about Bethlehem in Iron Age II, while the city was an administrative center related to the Jerusalem/al-Quds district,⁸¹ as already seen in the rich assemblage found in the Barmil Tomb (D13) of Khalet al-Jam'a.⁸²

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⁷⁹ A nice comparison is Tomb C5, where a fragment of jar with the same combed decoration of KJ.19.TA7.15/7 was collected (Nigro *et al.* 2015, 192; 2017, 12).

⁸⁰ Nigro *et al.* 2015, 191, fig. 36.

⁸¹ Nigro 2015, 9.

⁸² See Nigro *et al.* 2015, 191.

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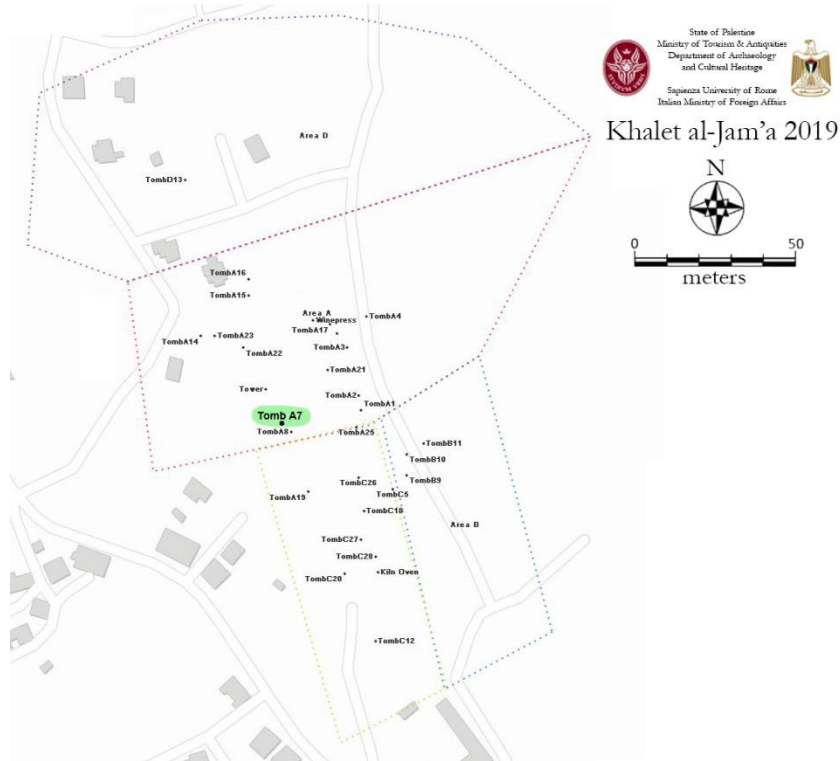


Fig. 1 - Map of the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a (lasapienzatojericho.it/Betlemme/MAP).



Fig. 2 - Shaft 1 of Tomb A7 of the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a, from south.

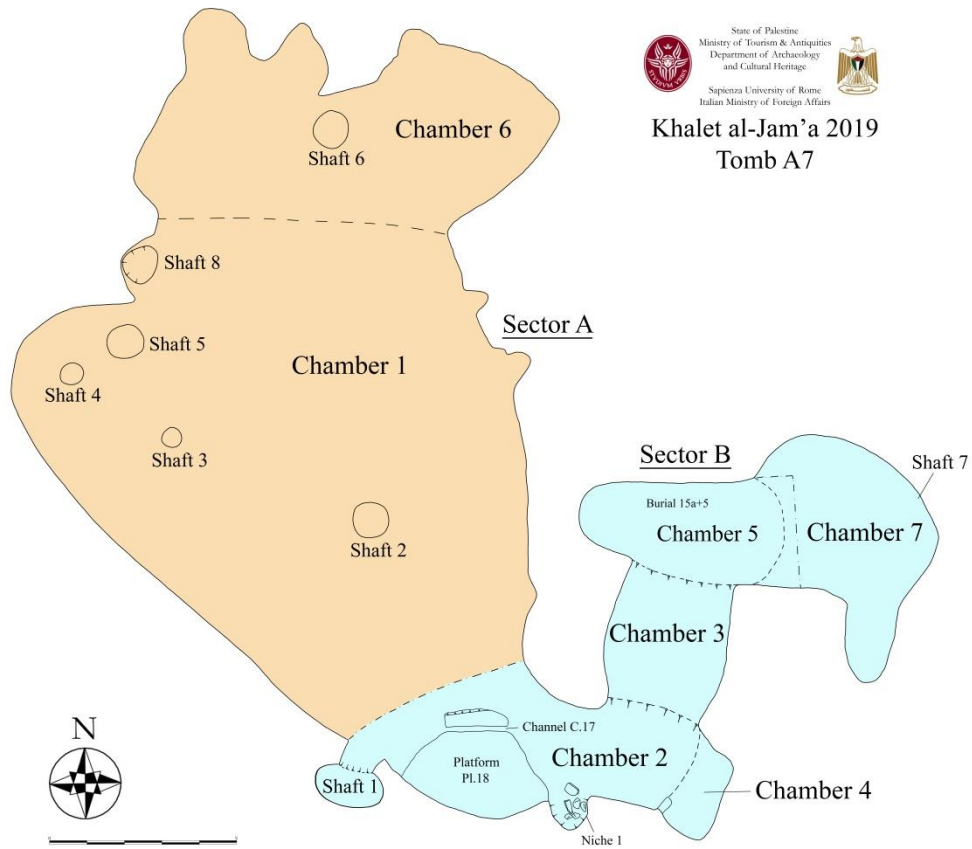


Fig. 3 - Plan of Tomb A7 of the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a.

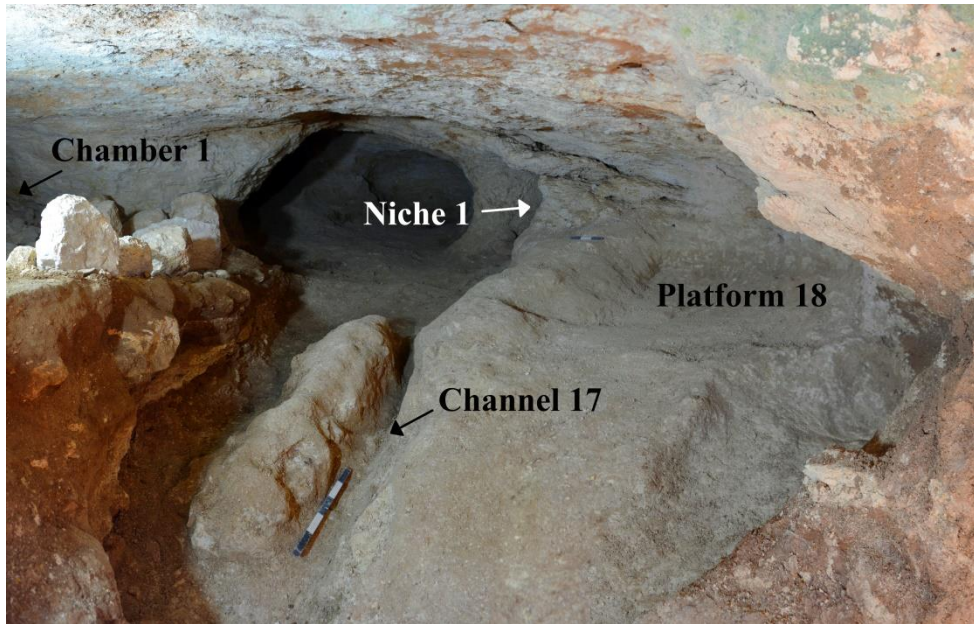


Fig. 4 - Chamber 2 of Tomb A7 of the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a, view from Shaft 1.



Figure 5 - Niche 1, carved inside the southern wall of Chamber 2 of Tomb A7 of the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a.

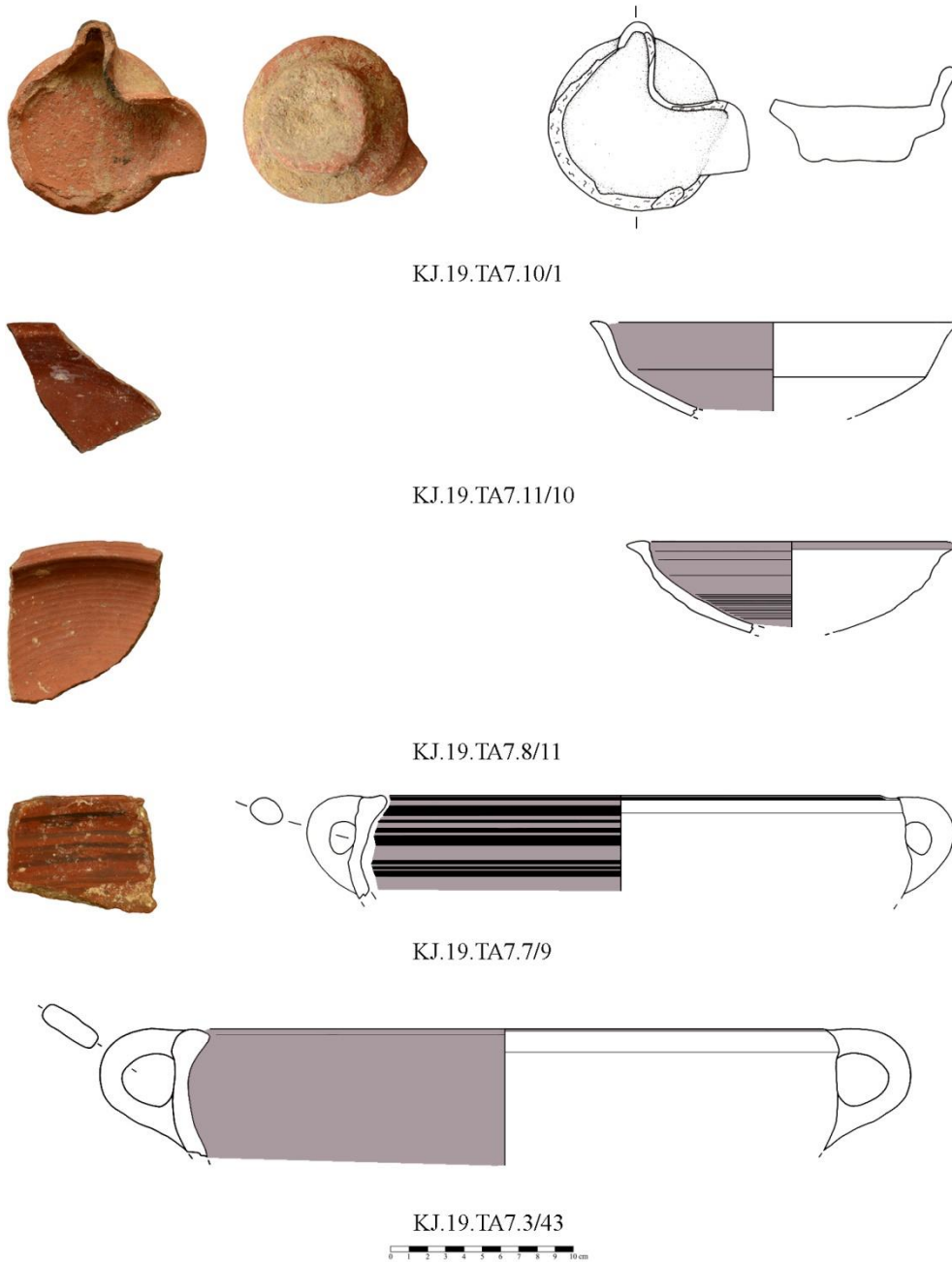


Fig. 6 - Selection of pottery from Tomb A7 of the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a.

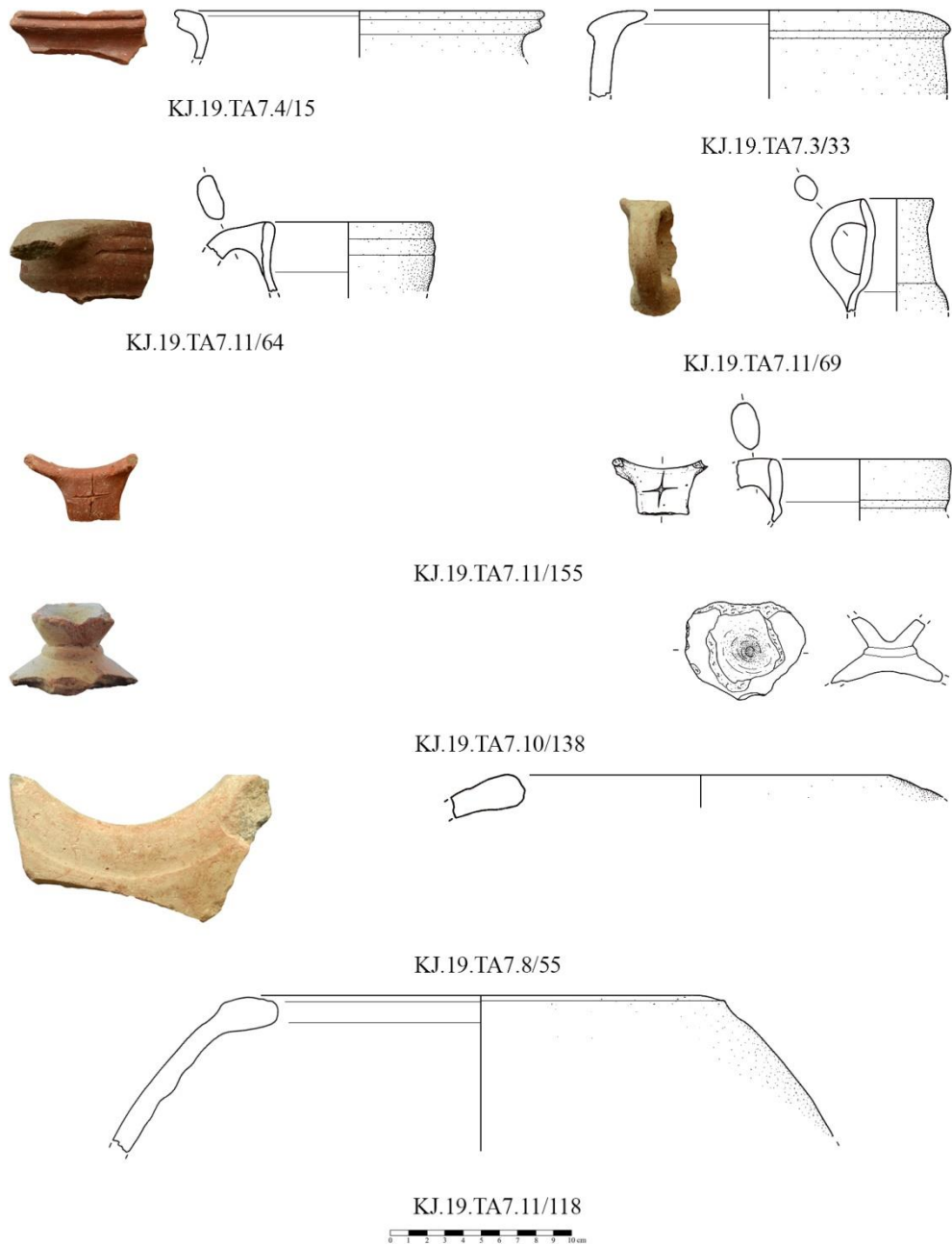


Fig. 7 - Selection of pottery from Tomb A7 of the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a.



Fig. 8 - Upper line, from left to right: KJ.19.TA7.8/42 with 2-wingled *lmlk* stamp impression (0 II Type) and concentric circles; at the center, handle KJ.19.TA7.10/137 with 2-wingled *lmlk* stamp impression (X II Type), handle KJ.19.TA7.11/103, with 2-wingled *lmlk* stamp impression (0 II Type); lower line, from left to right: KJ.19.TA7.11/101 and KJ.19.TA7.11/102 with Concentric Circles Type stamp impression.



Fig. 9 - Torso of female Pillared Figurine, KJ.19.TA7.10 (left); head of equid figurine with applied eyes, KJ.19.TA7.20 (right).



Fig. 10 - Three *marābiṭ faras* found in Chamber 2 of Tomb A7: KJ.19.TA7.6 (above, left); KJ.19.TA7.5 (above, right); KJ.19.TA7.7 (down).

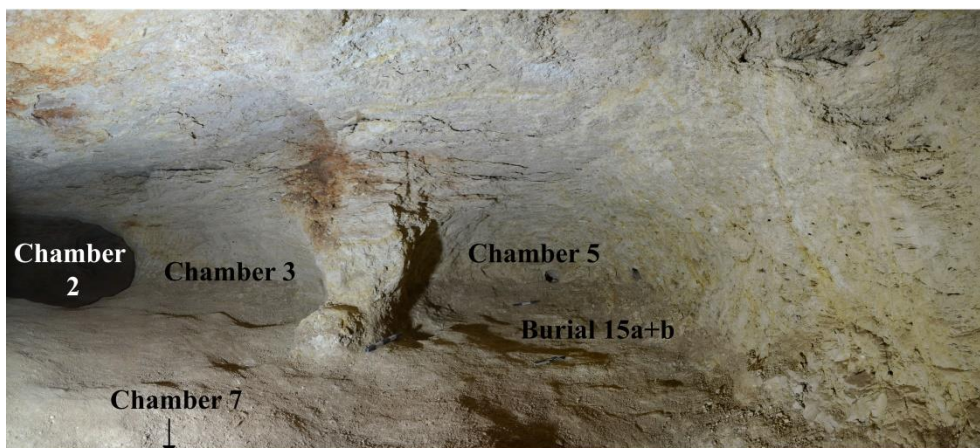
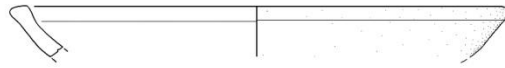
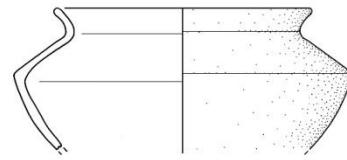


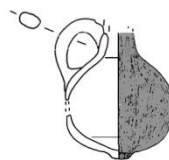
Fig. 11 - Chambers 2, 3, 5 and Burial 15a+b view from Chamber 7.



KJ.19.TA7.15/1

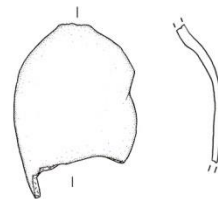


KJ.19.TA7.15/10



KJ.19.TA7.15/5

KJ.19.TA7.15/3



KJ.19.TA7.15/4



KJ.19.TA7.15/9

Fig. 12 - Pottery funerary equipment of Burial 15a+b of Tomb A7.

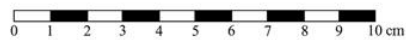
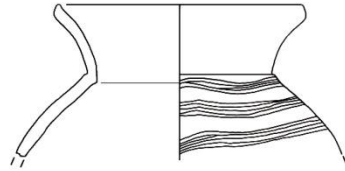
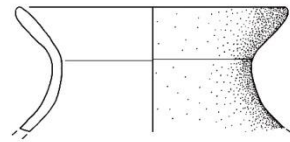


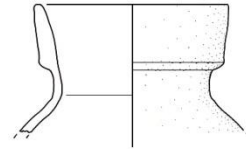
Fig. 13 - Red Slip cylindrical juglet KJ.19.TA7.15/2 found in Burial 15a+b of Tomb A7.



KJ.19.TA7.15/7



KJ.19.TA7.15/8



KJ.19.TA7.15/6

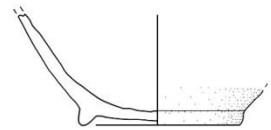


Fig. 14 - Pottery funerary equipment of Burial 15a+b of Tomb A7.



Fig. 15 - Human bones of Burial 15a (KJ.19.TA7.HR1) of Tomb A7 of the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a.



Fig. 16 - Human bones of Burial 15b (KJ.19.TA7.15.HR2) of Tomb A7 of the Necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a.