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THE EL-ATAN TOMB:  
AN EARLY BRONZE IVB FEMALE BURIAL IN THE HEART OF BETHLEHEM

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*An Early Bronze IVB tomb was discovered by the MOTA-DACH on June 2009 in the city of Bethlehem, nearby the Milk Grotto. Its architectural features, burials and associated funerary equipment are here considered and compared with those of other Early Bronze IV cemeteries and necropolises of Southern Levant to grasp the historical-archaeological meaning of this discovery.*

Keywords: Bethlehem; el-Atan; Early Bronze IV; necropolis; shaft-tomb

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study stems from the project of rescue archaeology in the district of Bethlehem started in 2015, which is part of the cooperation agreement between Sapienza University of Rome and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Palestine - Department of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage concerning the protection of sites in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem.<sup>1</sup> The Aim of this paper is to contextualize the el-Atan Tomb in a regional frame, and to appraise it within the funerary customs of Early Bronze IV central Palestine, also in the light of the recently discovered cemeteries of Khalet al-Jam'a and Jebel Dhafer at Bethlehem itself.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. THE EL-ATAN TOMB

On 18<sup>th</sup> June 2009 a tomb was discovered during some construction works for a private house, 400 m east of the Nativity Church, along el-Atan street, in the city of Bethlehem (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> In the same day, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) and the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (DACH) of Bethlehem, directed by Mohammed Ghayyada, with the participation of the Palestinian Tourist Police, started rescue excavations. Works were carried out under pressure of ongoing building activities in a week. A summary of the discoveries is offered in this article.

### 2.1. *The tomb*

The tomb consisted of a large round burial chamber and one vertical shaft (fig. 2). The shaft was explored partially due to its location in a nearby land belonging to a different owner which had already built on it. The bulldozer opened accidentally an entrance on the eastern wall of the chamber, luckily without damaging neither human remains nor the associated funerary equipment (figs. 3-4). This allowed for the excavation of the chamber and for the description of its structure as follows. The tomb consisted of a rock-cut underground chamber (Chamber 1), oval-shaped, 4.9×3.8 m, with the main axis oriented north-south. The domed roof was 1.7 m high, hewn in the yellowish friable limestone

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<sup>1</sup> Nigro *et al.* 2015, 185.

<sup>2</sup> Nigro *et al.* 2015; 2017, 16-21.

<sup>3</sup> Nigro *et al.* 2017, 21-22.

bedrock typical of the eastern slopes of the Nativity Church hill. The shaft and the entrance were to the north of the chamber, closed by a roughly carved limestone slab. On the tomb walls traces of hewing were visible (fig. 5), made by a 4 cm-wide tool (adze?),<sup>4</sup> especially on its western and southern sides. Two niches, circa 30 cm wide, were cut into the northern (Niche 1) and the western (Niche 2) walls of the cave, the former just aside the entrance.

Debris and soil collapsed from the roof, named filling F.1, covered the northern half of the chamber. Under this debris layer, there was a red-brownish silty layer (F.2) spread almost all over the tomb, probably originated by natural drainage and erosion. The first depositional layer was, thus, filling F.3, represented by a dark red sandy soil 17-20 cm thick, with Burial 1 in the middle and its funerary set all around it. Further goods had been displaced along the western wall of the chamber, including some piled-up pottery vessels. Over the flattened bedrock floor (Locus L.4), almost in the middle of the chamber, a complete adult female skeleton<sup>5</sup> (Burial 1; fig. 6) laid, flexed on the right side, north-west oriented and facing west; nearby another fragmentary skull (Burial 2) was found, possibly a relic of an earlier use of the chamber.

## 2.2. *The funerary assemblage*

The funerary set (fig. 7) comprised 16 pottery vessels: 4 four-spouted lamps, 5 bowls, 4 jars, 2 amphoriskoi, and a beaker, belonging to types dating back to the Early Bronze IVB. Several items accompanied the dead, namely a copper pin, 5 carnelian beads and a flint scraper.<sup>6</sup>

Four-spouted lamps with flat base retrieved in the tomb belong to the wheel made type (figs. 8-11). They were manufactured with a fine fabric and fired at a high temperature (more than 800°), with thin walls, suggesting a later date in the Early Bronze IV.<sup>7</sup> The high number of lamps might indicate that the tomb had hosted more burials before.

Five simple wide shallow bowls show slight carination and combed decoration below the rim (figs. 12-13); they belong to a type common in southern Palestine.<sup>8</sup>

Amphoriskoi exhibit a large base, rounded body and small handles (they were made from a lump of clay applied and then pierced with a stick; fig. 14).

Jars are of medium size and have a flat base and ovoid shaped body (figs. 15-16). The body was hand-coiled and inside not always smoothed, the neck is wheel made built separately, and then added to the body, as usual in EB IVB vessels.<sup>9</sup> The decoration, on jars and amphoriskoi, was obtained with a comb, with 5, 6 or 7 teeth, on the shoulders. Incised lines sometimes overlap in order to produce a thicker band. Jar BL1246 presents also a diagonal row of comb indentations. Jar BL1237 (fig. 21) is characterized by a very fine fabric and shows high firing, with a deeply engraved horizontal and wavy combed

<sup>4</sup> These traces are comparable to those from Jebel Qa'aqir (Dever 2014, 20-21, fig. 2:19) and Khirbet el-Karmil (Dever 1975, 20-21).

<sup>5</sup> Human remains were studied by Dr. Mohammad Al-Zawahra of the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage of Bethlehem.

<sup>6</sup> Nigro *et al.* 2017, 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> Nigro 1999, 39.

<sup>8</sup> D'Andrea 2014, vol. 2, 193.

<sup>9</sup> D'Andrea 2012, 24.

decoration.<sup>10</sup> Its capacity is 992-1130 cc.<sup>11</sup> It has been classified as ‘outsize cup’<sup>12</sup> or ‘small biconical jar’<sup>13</sup> and has some possible parallels in a jar from Jericho<sup>14</sup> and in two jars retrieved in Cave II of ‘Araç en-Na‘sanah (Wadi ed-Daliyeh).<sup>15</sup>

### 2.2.1. Pottery catalogue

BL1229, lamp (fig. 8). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware (for special uses). State of preservation: complete. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: medium-high. Outer colour: 2.5 YR 8/4 (pink); inner colour: 2.5 YR 8/4 (pink). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small; frequency: medium. Rim diameter: 17 cm; base diameter: 8 cm; height: 4.5 cm; rim width: 0.4 cm; wall width: 0.8 cm; base width: 0.5 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Dever 2014, fig. 2.97:7

BL1230, lamp (fig. 9). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware (for special uses). State of preservation: whole form, soot on one spout. Technique of manufacture: handmade. Firing: medium. Fabric colour: 2.5 YR 7/4 (light reddish brown); outer colour: 2.5 YR 7/4 (light reddish brown); inner colour: 2.5 YR 7/4 (light reddish brown). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small and medium; frequency: medium. Rim diameter: 11 cm; base diameter: 7 cm; height: 4.7 cm; rim width: 0.5 cm; wall width: 0.5 cm; base width: 0.6 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Dever 2014, fig. 2.90:1.

BL1231, lamp (fig. 10). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware (for special uses). State of preservation: complete, soot on one spout. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: high. Outer colour: 2.5 YR 7/6 (light red); inner colour: 2.5 YR 7/6 (light red). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small; frequency: low. Rim diameter: 15.1 cm; base diameter: 8 cm; height: 4.5 cm; rim width: 0.35 cm; wall width: 0.5 cm; base width: 0.4 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Gonen 2001, fig. 31:10.

BL1234, lamp (fig. 11). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware (for special uses). State of preservation: complete, soot on two spouts. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: medium-high. Outer colour: 5 YR 5/8 (yellowish red); inner colour: 5 YR 5/8 (yellowish red). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small and medium; frequency: medium. Rim diameter: 15.8 cm; base diameter: 8.5 cm; height: 3.5 cm; rim width: 0.4 cm; wall width: 0.5 cm; base width: 0.5 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Smith 1962, pl. X:6-8; Dever 1975, fig. 4:16; Gonen 2001, fig. 21:6.

BL1244, beaker (fig. 12). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: complete. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: low. Outer colour: 2.5 YR 7/8 (light red); inner colour: 2.5 YR 7/8 (light red). Temper/inclusions: mineral; dimension: small; frequency: medium. Rim diameter: 8.5 cm; base diameter: 5 cm; height: 9.5 cm; rim width: 0.3 cm; wall width: 0.5 cm; base width: 0.5 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Prag 1995, fig. 23:11; Gonen 2001, fig. 19:4.

BL1228, bowl (fig. 13). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: complete. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: high. Outer colour: 7.5 YR 8/4 (pink); inner colour: 7.5 YR 8/4 (pink). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small; frequency: medium. Decoration: combed. Rim diameter: 17.8 cm; base diameter: 10.5 cm; height: 6.4 cm; rim width: 0.4 cm; wall width: 0.7 cm; base width: 0.4 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Dever 2014, fig. 2.96:10.

BL1232, bowl (fig. 13). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: complete. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: medium-high. Fabric colour: 7.5 YR 6/8 (reddish yellow); outer colour: 7.5 YR 8/4 (pink); inner colour: 7.5 YR 8/4 (pink). Temper/inclusions: mineral; dimension: small; frequency: medium-high. Decoration: combed. Rim diameter: 20.8 cm; base diameter: 11.5 cm; height: 7.3 cm; rim width: 0.5 cm; wall width: 0.5 cm; base width: 0.5 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Tufnell 1958, pl. 66:430; Dever 2014, fig. 2.89:12.

BL1233, bowl (fig. 13). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: complete. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: medium. Outer colour: 7.5 YR 6/6 (reddish brown);

<sup>10</sup> D’Andrea 2014 vol. 1, 102, fig. 3.62.

<sup>11</sup> Shaub - Rast 1989, 493-494, fig. 285.

<sup>12</sup> Dever 1974, 38, pls. 12:6, 13:3.

<sup>13</sup> Nigro 2003a, fig. 20:5.

<sup>14</sup> Kenyon - Holland 1982, fig. 94:10.

<sup>15</sup> Dever 1974, 38, pls. 12:6, 13:3. These two can be compared especially for combed decoration and S-shaped profile, but not for the rim, pointed in the el-Atan specimen and flattened in the other two.

inner colour: 7.5 YR 6/6 (reddish brown). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small; frequency: medium. Rim diameter: 17.7 cm; base diameter: 10.7 cm; height: 6 cm; rim width: 0.3 cm; wall width: 0.6 cm; base width: 0.4 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Dever 2014, fig. 2.91:10.

BL1235, bowl (fig. 12). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: complete. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: high. Outer colour: 7.5 YR 7/4 (pink); inner colour: 7.5 YR 7/4 (pink). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small; frequency: medium. Rim diameter: 15.8 cm; base diameter: 8 cm; height: 6.4 cm; rim width: 0.3 cm; wall width: 0.7 cm; base width: 0.5 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Dever 2014, fig. 2.97:8.

BL1236, bowl (fig. 13). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: complete. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: medium-high. Outer colour: 7.5 YR 8/3 (pink); inner colour: 7.5 YR 8/3 (pink). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small and medium; frequency: medium. Rim diameter: 26.7 cm; base diameter: 9.5 cm; height: 10 cm; rim width: 0.5 cm; wall width: 0.6 cm; base width: 0.8 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Dever 2014, fig. 5.10:4.

BL1227, amphoriskos (fig. 14). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: complete. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: medium. Fabric colour: 5 YR 7/6 (reddish yellow); outer colour: 5 YR 7/6 (reddish yellow); inner colour: 5 YR 7/6 (reddish yellow). Temper/inclusions: mineral; dimension: small; frequency: high. Decoration: combed. Rim diameter: 8.3 cm; base diameter: 8 cm; height: 15.5 cm; rim width: 0.4 cm; wall width: 0.4 cm; base width: 0.5 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Dever 2014, fig. 2.88:5.

BL1245, amphoriskos (fig. 14). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: whole form. Technique of manufacture: handmade. Firing: medium-high. Fabric colour: 10 YR 7/6 (yellow); outer colour: 10 YR 7/6 (yellow); inner colour: 10 YR 7/6 (yellow). Temper/inclusions: mineral; dimension: small and medium; frequency: medium-high. Decoration: combed. It was made after the application of handles, as it also at Efrata.<sup>16</sup> Rim diameter: 10 cm; base diameter: 7 cm; height: 15 cm; rim width: 0.3 cm; wall width: 0.4 cm; base width: 0.5 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Dever 2014, fig. 2.89:7.

BL1246, jar (fig. 15). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: whole form. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: medium-high. Fabric colour: 2.5 YR 7/6 (light red); outer colour: 2.5 YR 7/6 (light red); inner colour: 2.5 YR 7/6 (light red). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small and medium; frequency: medium. Decoration: incised and combed. Rim diameter: 11 cm; base diameter: 13 cm; height: 24.5 cm; rim width: 0.4 cm; wall width: 0.6 cm; base width: 0.5 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Sa'ad 1964, pl. XXXV:1; Gonen 2001, fig. 21:1.

BL1237, jar (fig. 16). Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. Class: Simple Ware. State of preservation: complete. Technique of manufacture: hand and wheel made. Firing: medium-high. Fabric colour: 2.5 YR 6/6 (light red); outer colour: 7.5 YR 7/2 (pinkish gray); inner colour: 7.5 YR 7/2 (pinkish gray). Temper/inclusions: mineral and vegetal; dimension: small; frequency: low. Decoration: combed. Rim diameter: 14.7 cm; base diameter: 13.5 cm; height: 19 cm; rim width: 0.4 cm; wall width: 0.9 cm. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Kenyon - Holland 1982, fig. 94:10; Dever 1974, 38, pls. 12:6, 13:3; Aharonovich 2016, fig. 11:2.

### 2.2.2. Personal items catalogue (fig. 17)

BL1238, copper pin. Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. State of preservation: complete. Material: copper. Technique of manufacture: moulded. Length: 12 cm; width: 0.6 cm (head); diameter: 0.2 cm; weight: 3 g. Description: copper pin with rolled head and circular cross section belonging to a well-known type.<sup>17</sup> Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Lapp 1966, fig. 2:8.

BL1226, flint scraper. Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. State of preservation: complete. Material: flint. Technique of manufacture: chipped. Fabric colour: 5 YR 4/6 (yellowish red). Length: 4.2 cm; width: 2 cm; thickness: max 0.8 min 0.2 cm. Description: flint scraper with trapezoid cross section, cortex on the tang, retouched along the blade. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Ellis 2010, 255, fig.13.1:1.

BL1225, bead. Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. State of preservation: complete. Material: carnelian. Technique of manufacture: smoothed, pierced. Fabric colour: 5 YR 7/8 (reddish yellow). Thickness: 0.3 cm; diameter: 0.8 cm. Description: donut shaped carnelian bead. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Kenyon 1965, figs. 25:2; 33:5.

<sup>16</sup> Gonen 2001, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Gernez 2008, 247-248, type Ep.1, fig. 8, pl. 11.

BL1239, bead. Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. State of preservation: complete. Material: carnelian. Technique of manufacture: smoothed, pierced. Fabric colour: 2 YR 7/8 (light red). Thickness: 0.2 cm; diameter: 0.6 cm. Description: donut shaped carnelian bead. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Kenyon 1965, figs. 25:2; 33:5.

BL1240, bead. Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. State of preservation: complete. Material: carnelian. Technique of manufacture: smoothed, pierced. Fabric colour: 5 YR 7/8 (reddish yellow). Thickness: 0.3 cm; diameter: 0.9 cm. Description: donut shaped carnelian bead. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Kenyon 1965, fig. 25:1.

BL1241, bead. Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. State of preservation: complete. Material: carnelian. Technique of manufacture: smoothed, pierced. Fabric colour: 5 YR 7/8 (reddish yellow). Thickness: 0.2 cm; diameter: 0.7 cm. Description: donut shaped carnelian bead. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Kenyon 1965, figs. 25:2; 33:5.

BL1242, bead. Context: Chamber 1, Filling 3. State of preservation: complete. Material: carnelian. Technique of manufacture: smoothed, pierced. Fabric colour: 2.5 YR 7/8 (light red). Thickness: 0.2 cm; diameter: 0.7 cm. Description: donut shaped carnelian bead. Dating: EB IVB. Bibliography: Kenyon 1965, figs. 25:2; 33:5.

### 3. EARLY BRONZE IV CEMETERIES IN THE AREA OF BETHLEHEM

The district of Bethlehem and especially the rocky flanks of the mountains of the Judean Deserts hosted several cemeteries during the Early Bronze IV/Intermediate Bronze Age, possibly referring to tribes of semi-nomadic shepherds living in the radiant valleys descending down to the Dead Sea from the central highlands.<sup>18</sup>

Numerous attestations are indicative of the presence of Early Bronze IV cemeteries in the area of Bethlehem, on rocky plateaux and hills all around the town.<sup>19</sup>

A group of tombs was excavated in the easternmost fringe of the Beit Sahur hill in 1908-1909,<sup>20</sup> on the slopes of the nearby “Shepherds’ Field”, and some pottery vessels, said to come from these tombs, are nowadays preserved in the St. Mary’s Dormition Museum in Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> EB IV tombs in the area of Bethlehem are reported as the sources of a group of vessels in the Herbert E. Clark Collection of ancient pottery presently in the YMCA of Jerusalem, recovered in 1912 and published by G.E. Wright.<sup>22</sup>

An Early Bronze IV amphoriskos said from Battir (fig. 18), acquired in 1957, is in the Museum of the Flagellation Monastery at Jerusalem. It has a flat base, round body and a decoration on the shoulders composed by an upper line of diagonal grooved incision (as a comb stamping) and a combed band.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in the Flagellation Museum there is an Early Bronze IV jar (fig. 19), with combed decoration on the shoulder, ovoid body and flat base, found in Bethlehem and brought to the same museum in 1957.<sup>24</sup> Both vessels might come from the cemetery of Beit Sahur.

To these sparse data it is now possible to add new records from the recently discovered cemeteries of Khalet al-Jam’a<sup>25</sup> and Jebel Dhaher,<sup>26</sup> both located within a radius of 2.5 km south of Bethlehem.

<sup>18</sup> Nigro 2003a, 138-139; D’Andrea 2014 vol. 1, 231.

<sup>19</sup> Nigro 2015, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Hänsler 1908; 1909; Vincent 1909, 116-117.

<sup>21</sup> Saller 1962, 160-162.

<sup>22</sup> Wright 1938, figs. 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Bagatti 1952, 265-267.

<sup>23</sup> Saller 1962, 166, figs. 1:10; 3:3.

<sup>24</sup> Saller 1962, 162-163, fig. 2:16.

<sup>25</sup> Nigro *et al.* 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Nigro *et al.* 2017.

The shaft-tombs necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a was in use since the Early Bronze IV, throughout the Middle Bronze until the Iron Age. In Tomb C12 of the Early Bronze IV a single primary deposition is documented.<sup>27</sup>

The shaft-tombs of the necropolis of Jebel Dhaher were also first excavated during the Early Bronze IV and remained in use during the Middle Bronze and, some of them, also in the Iron Age.

The el-Atan Tomb, being included within the elongated burial area surrounding to the east and to the south of the Nativity Church,<sup>28</sup> might, nonetheless, represent a north-western ramification of the Beit Sahur cemetery.

#### 4. BETHLEHEM IN THE FRAME OF THE EARLY BRONZE IV CEMETERIES OF THE CENTRAL HILLS AND JUDEAN HILLS OF PALESTINE

Due to the fragmented knowledge and the lack of a clear profile of Bethlehem's history in the Bronze Age IV/Intermediate Bronze Age, it is perhaps useful to observe the regional scenario in an area circa 30 km to the north, up to Dhahr Mirzabaneh in the Central Hills, and to the south, down to Khirbet el-Karmil in the Judean Hills (fig. 20).<sup>29</sup>

A northern cluster of cemeteries has been identified in the area between Dhahr Mirzabaneh<sup>30</sup> and 'Ain Samiya.<sup>31</sup> At this site D.G. Lyon recognized in 1906-1907 more than one-hundred plundered tombs, dating from the Early Bronze IV until the Middle Bronze II. They had round shafts with one or more circular or oval chambers with domed roof. Funerary sets were composed by pottery vessels, like four-spouted lamps, bowls, ovoid jars, bottles, teapots, as well as pins, dagger, javelins, and personal items. The necropolis of Dhahr Mirzabaneh was excavated in the sixties of the twentieth century by P.W. Lapp, who uncovered more than 150 graves.<sup>32</sup> It was a necropolis with single- or multi-chambered shaft tombs. Shaft were round and usually show a step at their bottom introducing into the underground chamber, a feature also occurring at el-Jib, Jebel Dhaher, and Khirbet el-Karmil.<sup>33</sup> Chambers were domed and circular in plan, sealed by large blocking stones.<sup>34</sup> As it concerns human remains, none of the burials seems to be a primary articulated deposition; they usually are single, but some multiple-burials are also attested.<sup>35</sup> Funerary sets include medium and small jars, amphoriskoi, cooking pots, bowls and cups. Dating features can be distinguished in small jars with flat base, rounded handmade body and attached wheel made neck: the decoration is represented by incised, combed and finger-

<sup>27</sup> Nigro *et al.* 2017, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Bagatti 1952, 261-262; Saller 1963, 325; 1964, 287; 1968; Gutman - Berman 1970, 585; Prag 2000, 177, fig. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Finkelstein 1991, 23-26.

<sup>30</sup> Lapp 1966; Dever 1972.

<sup>31</sup> Lyon 1907, 46-48; Finkelstein 1991, 24-25. An "anchor" axe from Kefar Malik (Nigro 2003b fig. 8), 3 km west to 'Ain Samiya, should be related to the same net of cemeteries.

<sup>32</sup> The necropolis appears to be connected to a nearby shrine/place of worship and to an ancient Bronze Age village located in correspondence of a rocky spur of the promontory, Khirbet Marjame (Finkelstein 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Pritchard 1963, 4; Nigro *et al.* 2017, 17-18; Dever 1975, 20.

<sup>34</sup> Lapp 1966, 30-39.

<sup>35</sup> Lapp 1966, 40.

moulded elements, as it is typical of Early Bronze Age IVB.<sup>36</sup> The pottery collected in these cemeteries have been ascribed to the ‘Central Hill Family’.<sup>37</sup>

The tomb types established by K.M. Kenyon<sup>38</sup> after the study of the Jericho necropolis,<sup>39</sup> one of the largest of the whole Levant,<sup>40</sup> may be also used to classify the el-Atan Tomb, which falls into the so-called “Dagger Type”, although it hosted a female primary deposition.<sup>41</sup>

Some parallelisms can be established also with the shaft-tombs cemetery of el-Jib.<sup>42</sup> Here tombs had round shaft and one round or elliptical chamber and a funerary equipment represented by a limited ceramic repertoire, small and medium globular jars, often with combed decoration, four-spouted lamps, and weapons.

Moreover, a pattern of burials on hill slopes around the boundaries of Jerusalem can provide convincing comparisons to the el-Atan Tomb. A cemetery on the Mount of Olives was discovered and excavated by K.M. Kenyon during the 1965.<sup>43</sup> Eleven tombs in three areas, Area A, B, and C, were identified.<sup>44</sup> They were rock-cut tombs with round shaft and roughly round chamber, showing architectural features similar to those of Jericho’s “Dagger Type”, but quite larger, like the tomb of el-Atan.<sup>45</sup>

Another possible comparison is the tomb discovered in the village of Silwan (Hablat al-Amud), in September 1941.<sup>46</sup> This tomb had square shaft and two chambers. The funerary equipment was composed by seventeen Early Bronze IV vessels, as medium jars, bottles and four-spouted lamps, four plain pins, some rivets, and numerous beads made of different semiprecious material, including carnelian.<sup>47</sup> The neighbourhood of Jerusalem was populated by EB IV cemeteries<sup>48</sup> used by semi-nomadic tribes, a scenario parallel or similar to that reconstructed in the area of Bethlehem (fig. 1).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, also material from Sinjil (Dever 1971) should be add to try to propose a more complete reading of the funerary equipment related to that net of cemeteries.

<sup>37</sup> Dever 1972, 109-110. According to D’Andrea (2014 vol. 1, 38, 125-126, 201-206; vol. 2, 91-95) this pottery horizon can be ascribed to the ceramic province of South-central Palestine (with previous literature).

<sup>38</sup> Tomb types were distinguished on the basis of location, shape of the rock-cut chamber and shaft, burial custom and funerary assemblage (Kenyon 1960, 180-185; 1965, 33-38).

<sup>39</sup> Nigro 2003a, 134-138.

<sup>40</sup> J. Garstang discovered it during the first British Expedition of the Thirties (Garstang 1932; 1934; 1936).

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Tomb A105 shows the same skeletal displacement of el-Atan (Kenyon 1960, 197; Palumbo 1986, 292). The presence of female burials within the “Dagger Group”, characterized by the presence of copper pins has been already pointed out (Palumbo 1987; Nigro 2003a, 135).

<sup>42</sup> Pritchard 1963. Some other Early Bronze IV shaft-tombs were found at Giv’at Ze’ev, north-west of el-Jib, in 1990 (Dadon 1997; The West Bank and East Jerusalem Searchable Map - <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/map/collection/p15799coll74>).

<sup>43</sup> Kenyon 1966.

<sup>44</sup> Prag 1995. Some EB IV vessels found by Captain Charles Warren in 1867 possibly derive from the same cemetery (Wilson - Warren 1871, 306, 475-477). Another four spouted lamp was found in the vicinity by H. Vincent (Vincent 1914, fig. 9:e).

<sup>45</sup> Funerary assemblages of these tombs, however, are characterized by pottery, including bottles and four-spouted lamps; no weapons, beads or personal ornaments are present (Prag 1995, 234-235).

<sup>46</sup> Sa’ad 1964.

<sup>47</sup> Sa’ad 1964; Rahmani 1981, 230.

<sup>48</sup> An Early Bronze IV shaft-tomb cemetery was uncovered north of Jerusalem, at Geva Binyamin (Aharonovich 2016), and at Ras Abu Ma’aruf/Pisgat Ze’ev (Seligman 1993, 52; 1995). This cemetery exhibits similar

South of Bethlehem and between it and Hebron, other two cemeteries may belong to groups connected with those using the cemeteries of Jebel Daher and Khalet al-Jam'a: Efrata and Kirbet Kufin. The necropolis of Efrata is extended on the southern slope of a hill over an area of 0.2 hectares. Tombs have round or square shafts, and one or more chambers.<sup>50</sup> In all of the seven intact caves dating from Early Bronze IV, burials were secondary and disarticulated, as it was also in the case of Silwan, Dhahr Mirbaneh and Jebel Qa'aqir. The pottery repertoire was limited and included jars, amphoriskoi, carinated bowls, cups, and lamps, but teapots are missing, as in the case of el-Atan.<sup>51</sup>

It is worth recalling the site of Tequ'a, south-east of Bethlehem. A group of vessels dating back to the Early Bronze IV is kept in the collection of the Museum of Flagellation in Jerusalem. They are said to come from the neighbourhood of Tequ'a.<sup>52</sup> A recent survey has in fact shown that a cemetery of round shaft tombs did exist also on this prominent mound,<sup>53</sup> and it seems quite probable that material in the Flagellation Museum came from this cemetery.

The western slope of the Khirbet Kufin was occupied by a necropolis of shaft-tombs dating back to from the beginning of the Early Bronze Age to the Middle Bronze II, terraced with orchards at the moment of discovery in 1962. Combed globular jars of Tomb 2 and of Lower Stratum of Chambers 3-4, in Tomb 3 of Khirbet Kufin,<sup>54</sup> present general features similar to two jars of the el-Atan Tomb.

Three cemeteries dated to the Early Bronze IV were identified in the site of Jebel Qa'aqir, under the direction of W.G. Dever between 1967-1971.<sup>55</sup> They were characterized by shaft-tombs with round shaft and one circular, sometimes irregular, single chamber, just occasionally double chamber. The roofing was frequently domed and some tombs had a decorative incision around the doorway. Several tombs had a lamp niche in the walls near the entrance, like Niche 1 in the el-Atan Tomb.<sup>56</sup> Burials were secondary and disarticulated, and the funerary set was limited to ovoid jars, small amphoriskoi, both often with band

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features to those observed at Nahal Ref'aim (Eisenberg 1993; Edelstein - Milevski 1994; Weksler-Bdolah 2017, 19-22), and Giv'at Massuah (Edelstein - Eisenberg 1984, 51-52). Near site of Manahat two different cemeteries were identified (Negbi 1964; Zehavi 1993, 67; Edelstein - Milevski - Auran 1998). These are adjoining the site of er-Ras, where an Early Bronze IV necropolis was discovered (Hänsler 1909, 33-36; Saller 1962, 160). Moreover, a shaft-tomb cemetery was uncovered east of Jerusalem, during the construction of the Holyland Compound (Ben-Arieh 2000; Zelinger - Golan 2005; Milevski - Ben Or 2007; Milevski - Greenhut - Agha 2010; Prag 2013, 105; Eirikh-Rose 2016). A group of Early Bronze IV vessels found in the site of 'Ain Karim, west of Jerusalem, now in the YMCA (two medium jars with combed decoration; Wright 1938, 29, fig. 1:5-6) and in the Flagellation Museum (an amphoriskos with combed decoration; Saller 1962, 166, fig. 1:9) should be mentioned. At Motza, near 'Ain Karim, an Early Bronze IV shaft-tomb was excavated by Bahat (1975).

<sup>49</sup> Prag 2013, 105.

<sup>50</sup> Gonen 2001, 17-19.

<sup>51</sup> Gonen 2001, 30-33.

<sup>52</sup> Saller 1962, 164-165.

<sup>53</sup> Lapp 1963, 124; 1966, 67; Saller 1964, 288; Nigro *et al.* 2017, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Smith 1962, 9, 14, pls. X-XI, especially pls. X:1-2, 4-5; XI:2.

<sup>55</sup> Dever 2014, 9-65.

<sup>56</sup> Nigro 1999, 34.



combed decoration, bowls, cups, and four-spouted lamps, seldom copper daggers, javelins, and pins.<sup>57</sup>

The southernmost site taken into account in this article is Khirbet el-Karmil. Here one of the largest Palestinian necropolis of the Early Bronze Age was identified at the end of Sixties, displaced on five different areas, unfortunately heavily looted.<sup>58</sup> Shaft-tombs were in use during the Early Bronze IV, only occasionally reused during the Middle Bronze Age, and had both single round chamber or double chamber; round shafts were widespread, even if square shapes were distinguished just in one area. Chambers had low domed roof and often lamp niches. The repertoire is represented by four spouted lamps, cups, bowls, ovoid jars, amphoriskoi, teapots, and pitchers, often decorated with a peculiar concentric incision or combing. Funerary sets were sometimes completed by copper daggers and javelins.

A seemingly recurrent feature in the Central Hills (Dhahr Mirzabaneh, 'Ain Samyia, and Sinjil), the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and Judean Hills (the Bethlehem region) is the displacement of cemeteries in clusters, grouped e.g. on both sides flanks of wadis flowing towards the Jordan Valley, suggesting the use of nearby sites by tribes living and moving up and down the wadis. These clusters are often not clearly connected with a settlement, except for the case of Jericho, and seem to fit a pastoralist spatial organization and way of life.

##### 5. FINAL REMARKS

The Bethlehemite tomb uncovered at el-Atan exhibits architectural features common to Early Bronze IV tombs known from several cemeteries, especially those of the Mount of Olives for shape and dimensions, and to those of Jebel Qa'aqir and Khirbet el-Karmil for the hewing technique of the underground chamber.

As regards the treatment of dead, and their funerary sets, Burial 1 of el-Atan, differently from what happens in numerous tombs at Dhahr Mirzabaneh, Silwan, Efrata, and Jebel Qa'aqir, is a female primary deposition in crouched position, similar to some burials of the "Dagger Type" at Jericho. Such a treatment for a female individual is barely attested, and may suggest to re-appraise several burials from the above mentioned cemeteries, with special focus on the gender of the inhumations.<sup>59</sup>

As it concerns the pottery repertoire, that of the el-Atan Tomb follows the same composition of other Early Bronze IVB shaft-tombs, with a somewhat limited typological variety. The presence of given vessel types with their specific ceramological features (§§ 2.2.-2.2.1.; lamps, bowls with slight carination, amphoriskoi, and small jars) as well as the absence of other shapes (teapot) point to a date late in the EB IVB and place the tomb's pottery repertoire within the southern tradition (presence of shallow carinated bowls, lack of squat jars, bottles, and teapots).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Dever 1993, 665-666.

<sup>58</sup> Dever 1975.

<sup>59</sup> Palumbo 1986, 300.

<sup>60</sup> D'Andrea 2014 vol. 1, 201.

In conclusion, the funerary custom and tomb equipment (with special reference to the wheel fashioned pottery), fit well the el-Atan Tomb into the central-southern pattern of Palestinian Early Bronze IVB.<sup>61</sup>

The presence of a copper pin and five carnelian beads highlight the female gender of the inhumation (Burial 1).

As regards the connection of the el-Atan Tomb to a cemetery, as it is commonly attested for such tombs, it seems reasonable to relate it to the nearby necropolis of Beit Sahur, located about 1.6 km east of it.

In conclusion, in spite of its partial destruction, the el-Atan Tomb adds one more tessera to the variegated mosaic of 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC Bethlehem<sup>62</sup>, especially illustrating the funerary custom of the semi-nomadic tribes living in the area during the Early Bronze IV.

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<sup>61</sup> Greenhut 1995.

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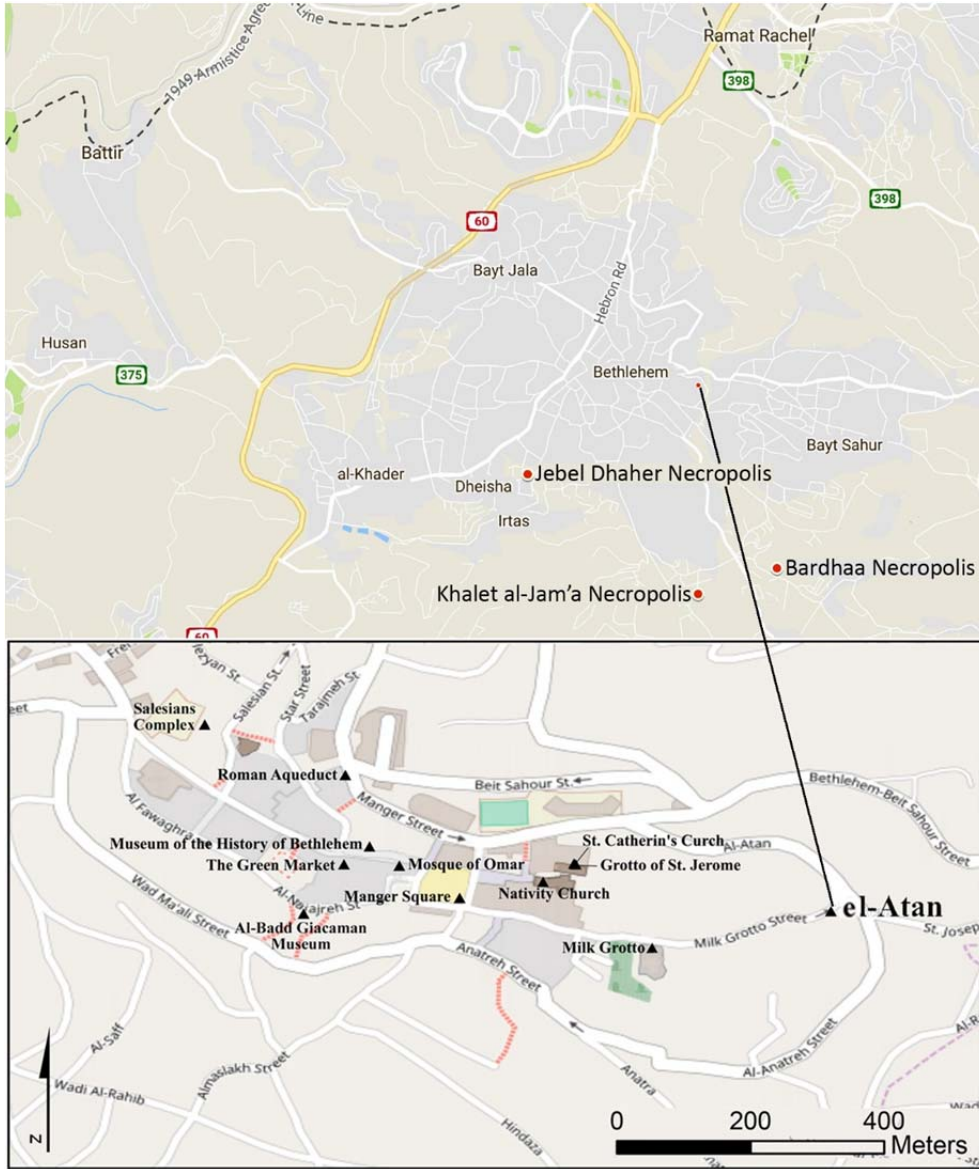


Fig. 1 - Map of the area of Bethlehem with cemeteries cited in the text (up), and a detail of the city centre and the position of el-Atan Tomb (down).

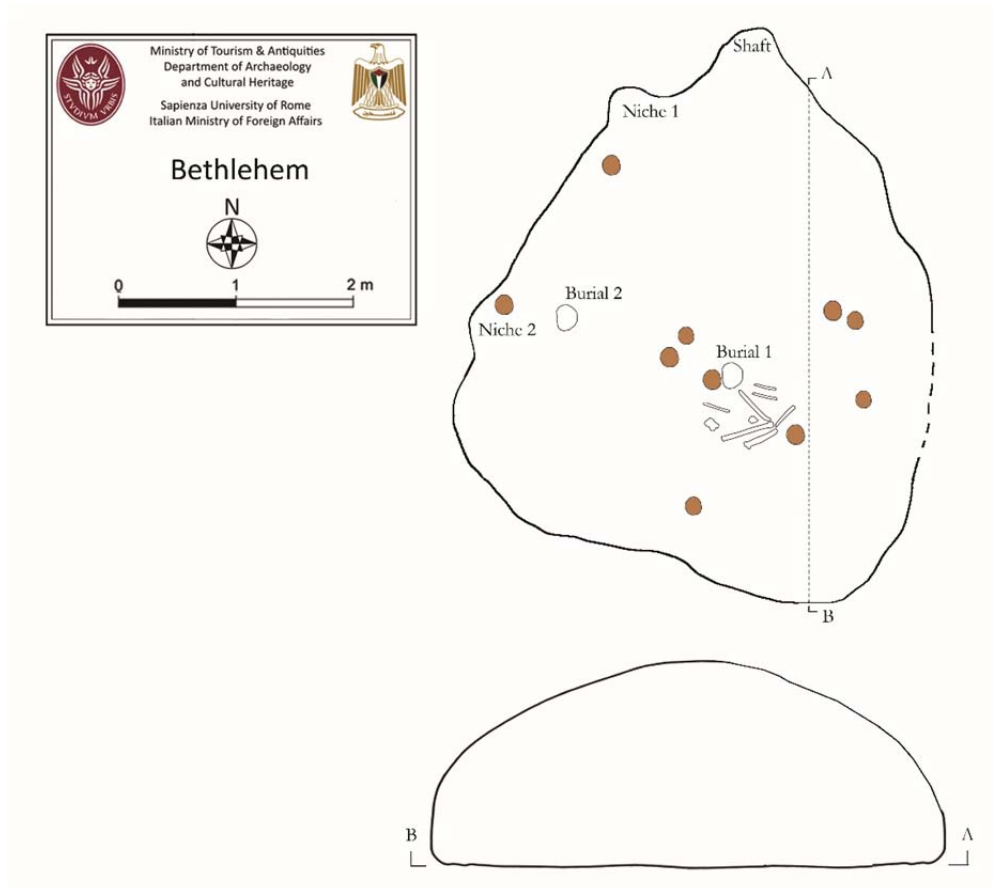


Fig. 2 - Plan of el-Atan Tomb.



Fig. 3 - On the left, the entrance to el-Atan Tomb at the moment of discovery in June 2009; on the right, the same place under construction in November 2016.





Fig. 4 - Entrance to the el-Atan Tomb at the moment of discovery on June 2009.



Fig. 5 - Tool marks in southern and western walls of the chamber of el-Atan Tomb.



Fig. 6 - A detail of Burial 1 in the el-Atan Tomb during excavations on June 2009.





Fig. 7 - The Early Bronze IVB funerary equipment of el-Atan Tomb.

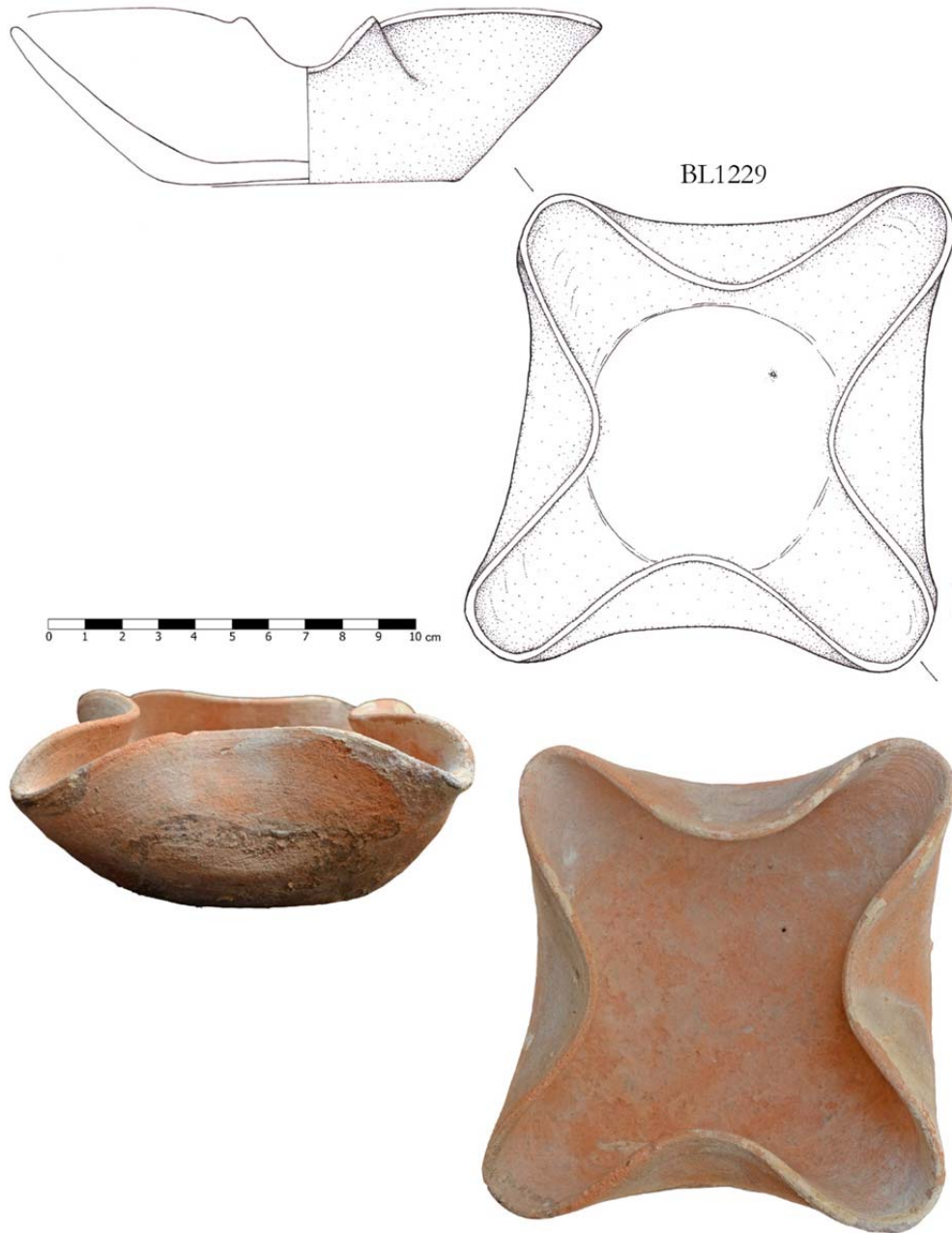


Fig. 8 - The four-spouted lamp BL1229 of el-Atan Tomb (ratio 1:2).

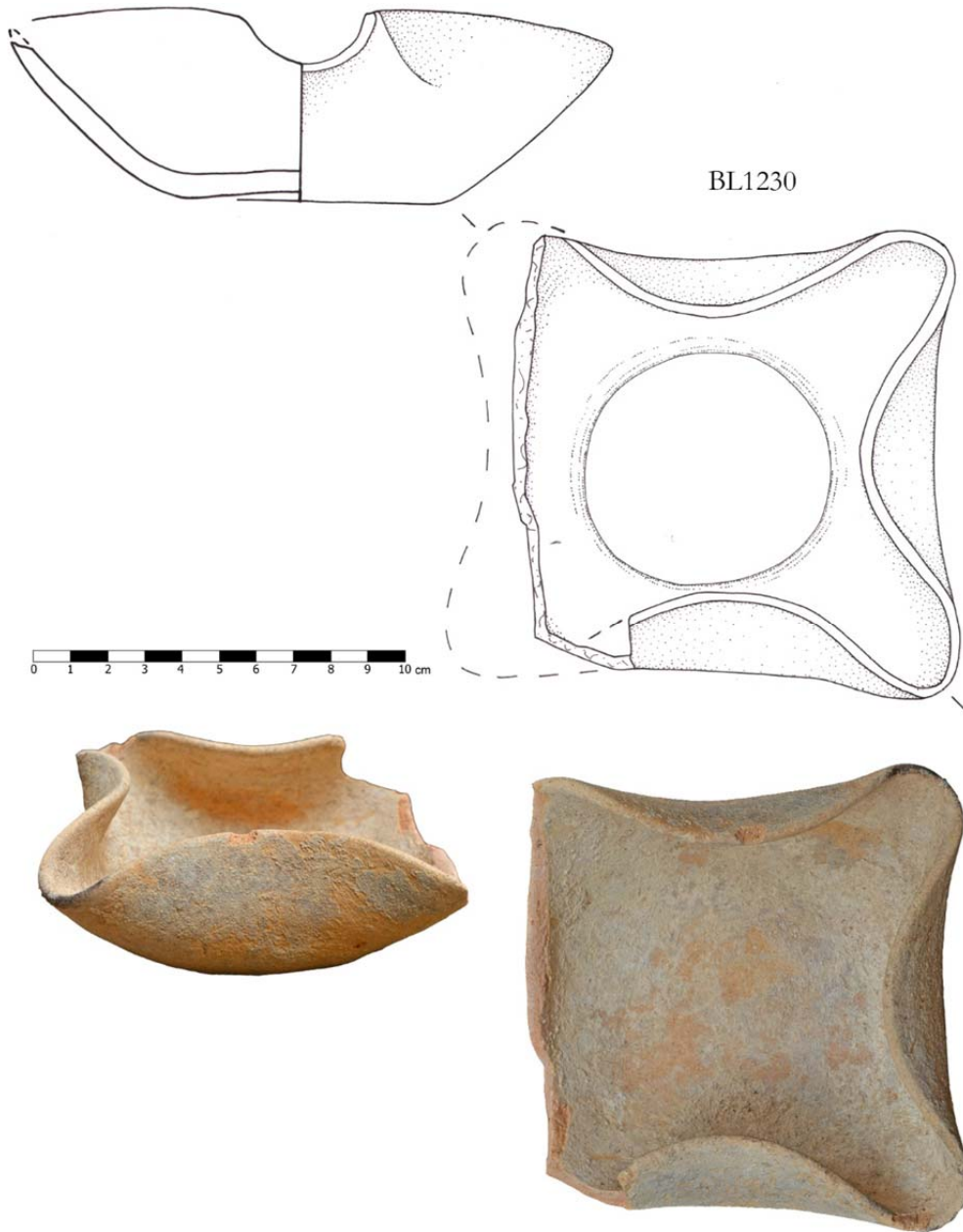


Fig. 9 - The four-spouted lamp BL1230 of el-Atan Tomb (ratio 1:2).



Fig. 10 - The four-spouted lamp BL1231 of el-Atan Tomb (ratio 1:2).

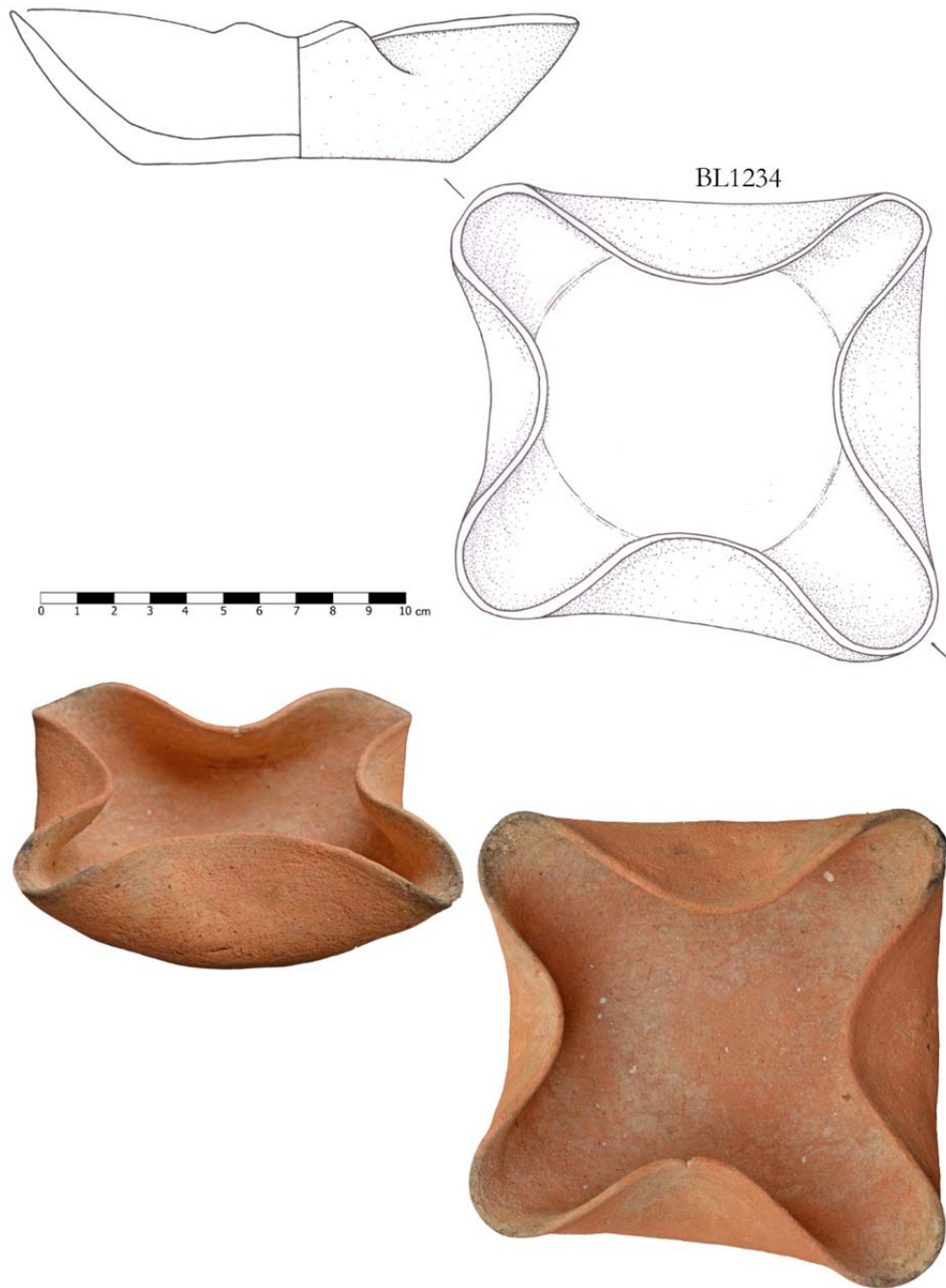
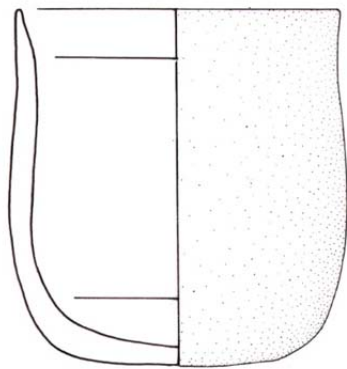
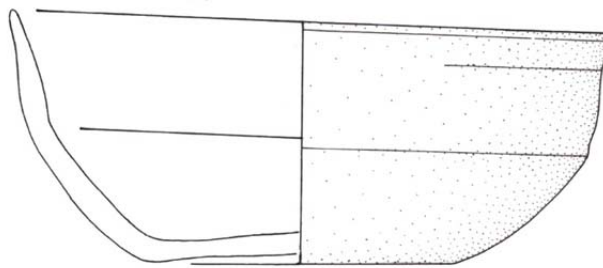


Fig. 11 - The four-spouted lamp BL1234 of el-Atan Tomb (ratio 1:2).





BL1244



BL1235



Fig. 12 - The beaker BL1244 and the carinated bowl BL1235 of el-Atan Tomb (ratio 1:2).



Fig. 13 - Carinated bowls of el-Atan Tomb: BL1228 and BL1232 with grooved decoration under the rim; BL1233 and BL1236 carinated bowls (ratio 1:4).

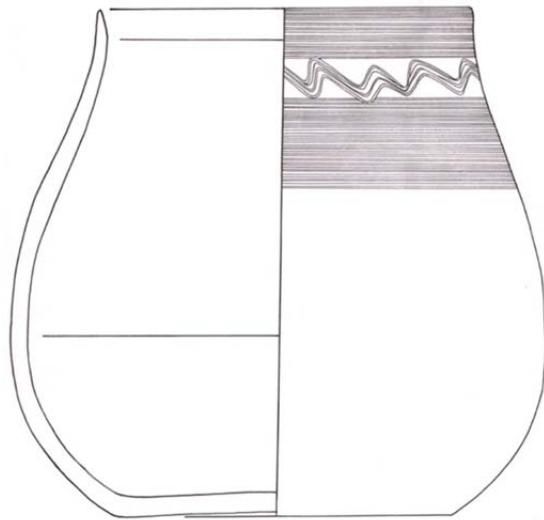


Fig. 14 - Amphoriskoi BL1227 and BL1245 of el-Atan Tomb (ratio 1:2).





Fig. 15 - Jar BL1246 with combed decoration of el-Atan Tomb (ratio 1:4).



BL1237



Fig. 16 - The 'oversize cup' BL1237 with band and wave combed decoration of el-Atan Tomb (ratio 1:3).

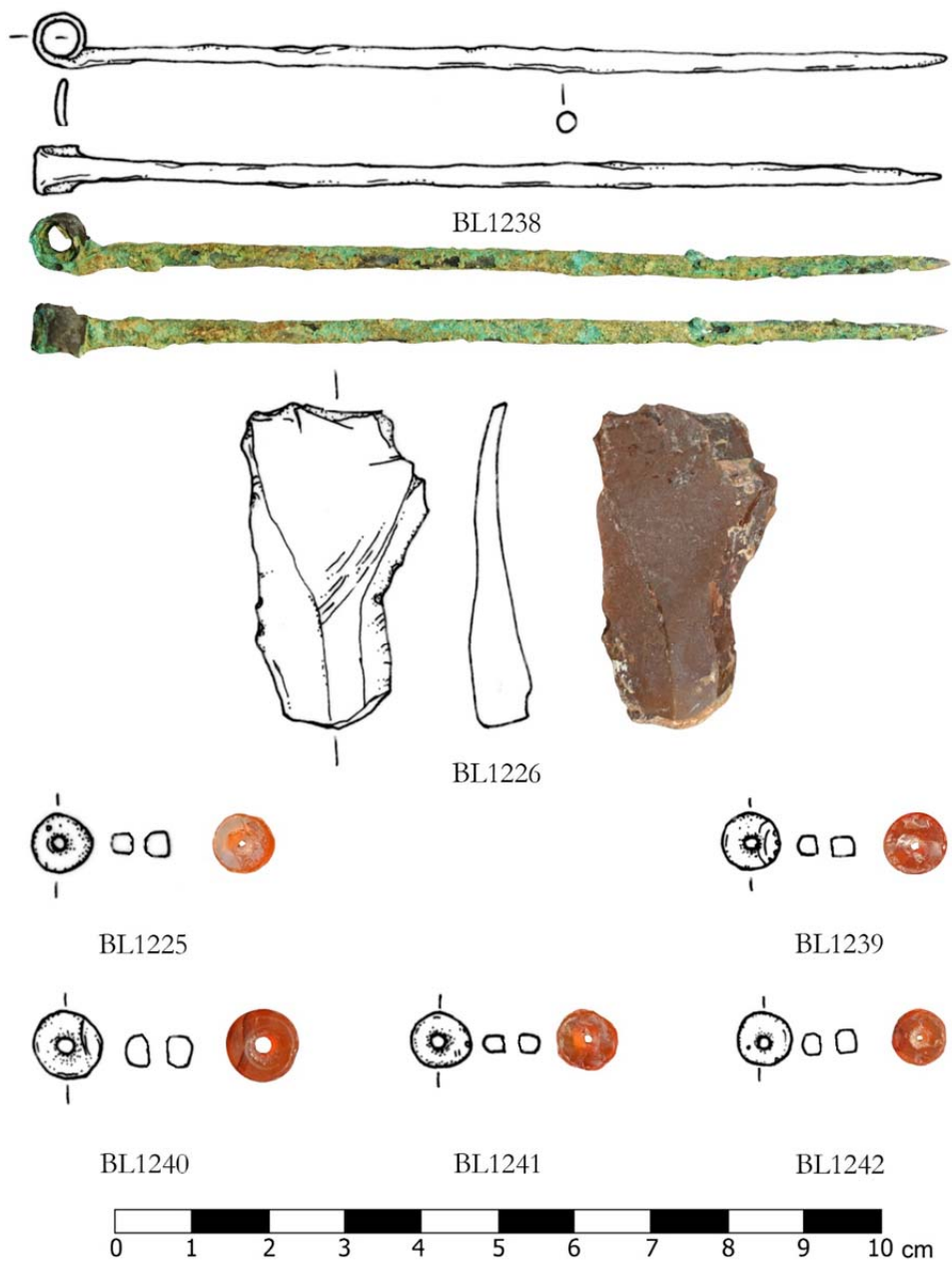


Fig. 17 - Rolled pin BL1238, flint scraper BL1226 and carnelian beads of el-Atan Tomb (ratio 1:1).



Fig. 18 - Early Bronze IV amphoriskos from Battir in the Flagellation Museum (after Saller 1962, fig. 1:10).

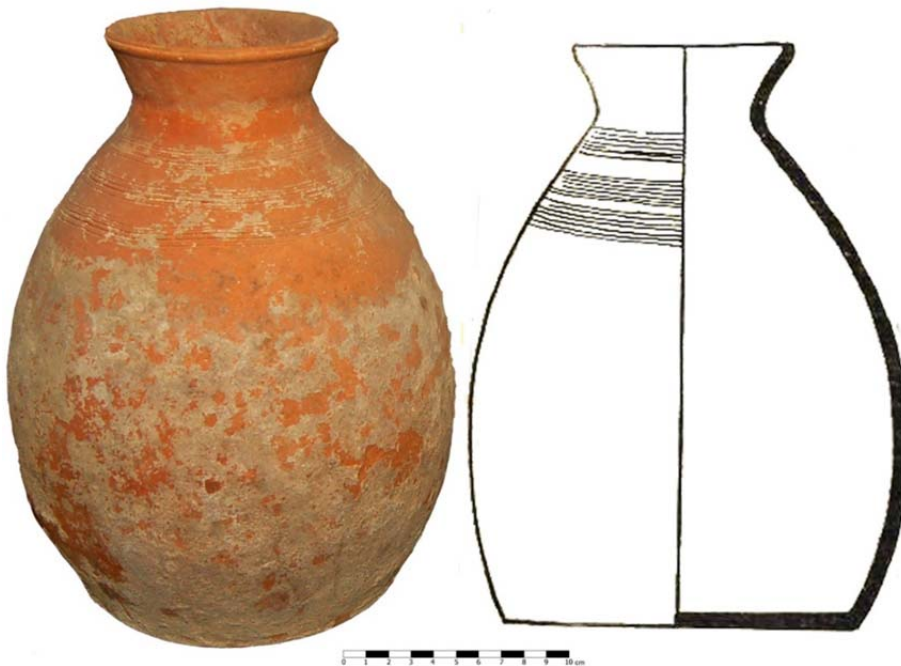


Fig. 19 - Early Bronze IV jar with combed decoration in the Flagellation Museum (after Saller 1962, fig. 2:16).



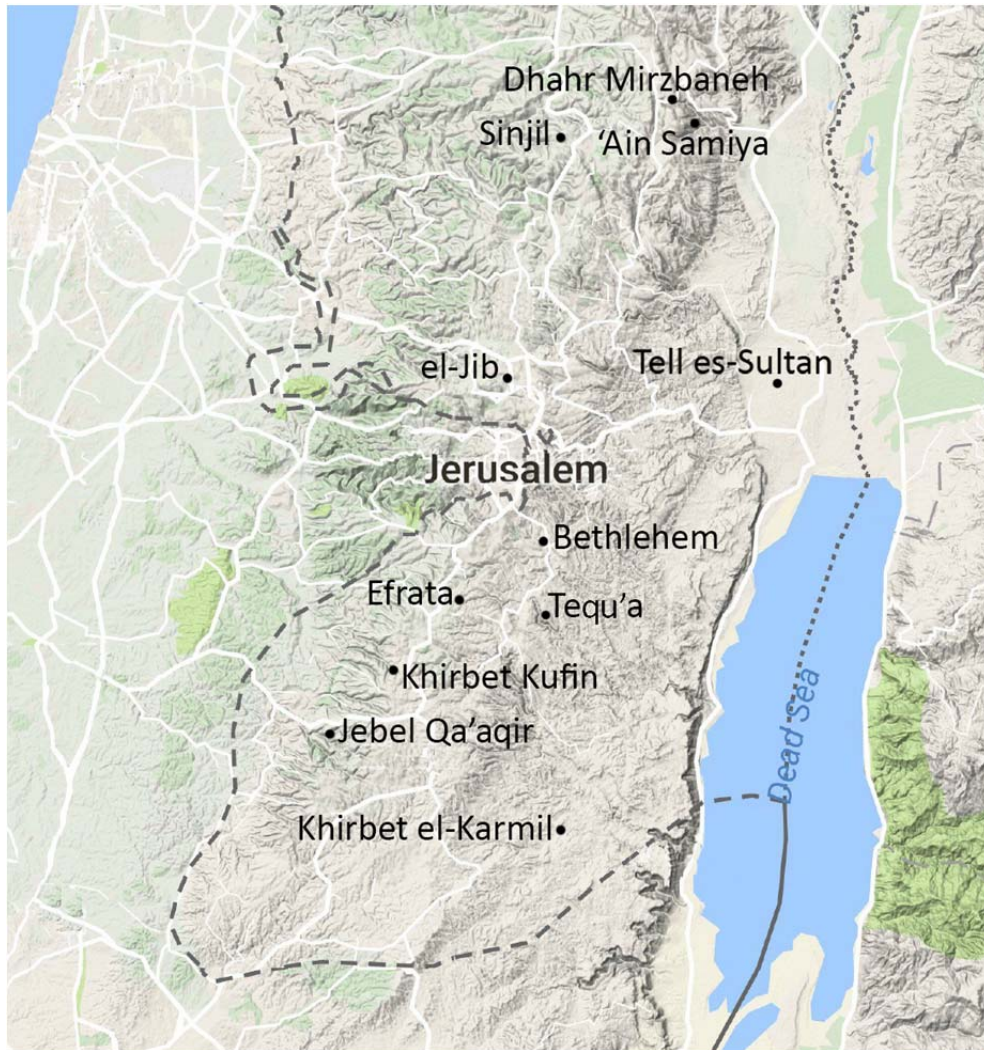


Fig. 20 - Map of Central Hills and Judean Hills with cemeteries quoted in the text.

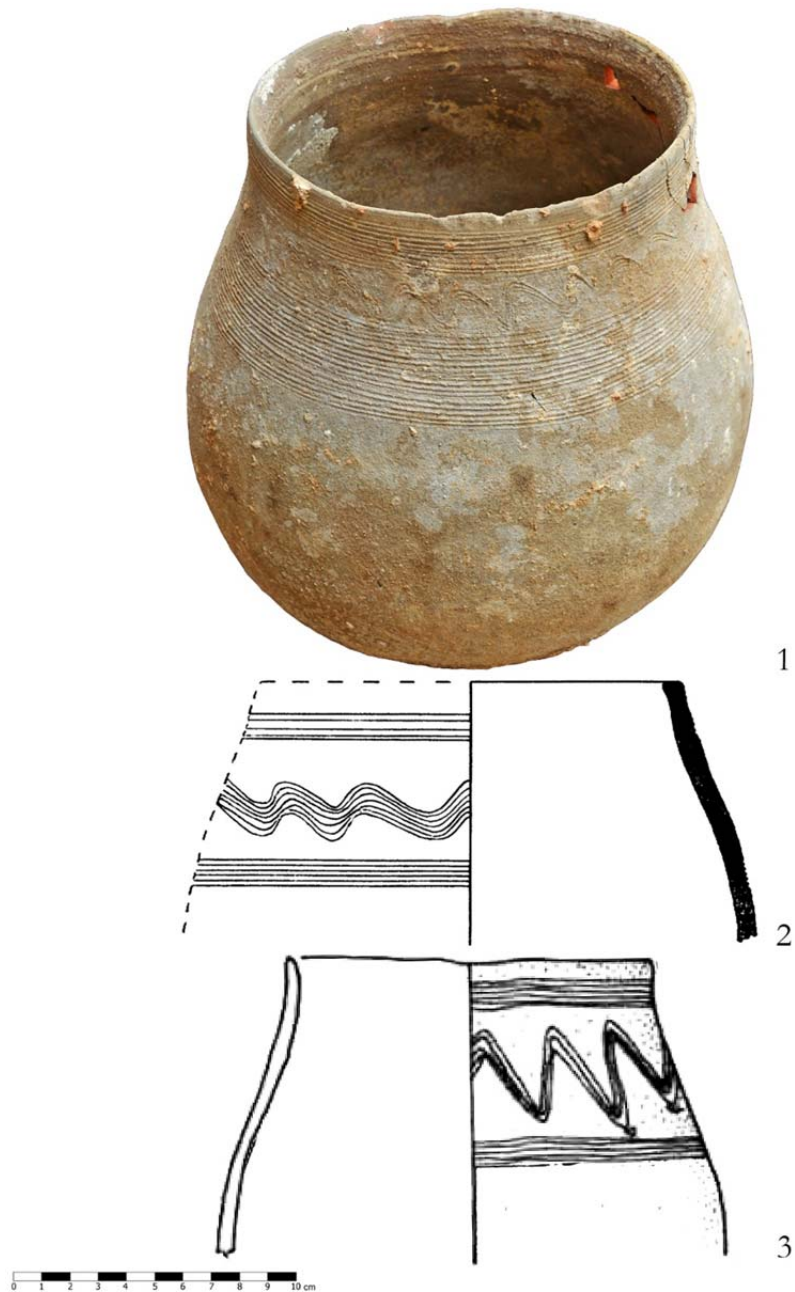


Fig. 21 - Biconical jar of el-Atan (1); (2) from Wadi ed- Daliyeh (after Dever 1974, pl. 13:3); (3) from Tell es-Sultan (after Nigro 2003, fig. 20:5).

## ARABIC ABSTRACT

## قبر العطن

**اعمال التنقيب :** في 18 حزيران عام 2009، بينما كان السيد نصري البندك يقوم بتسوية قطعة الارض التي تعود اليه لبناء بيت جديد، والواقعة في منطقة العطن الى الشرق من كنيسة المهدي ومغارة الحليب والتي تبعد عنهما شرقا نحو 400 متر تقريبا. كما انها تقع على سفح الشرقي لتل بيت لحم القديم. وخلال اعمال التجريف فقد ضربت الاليات بالجدار الشرقي من القبر عاملة فتحة فيه، ولحسن الحظ ان القبر بقي سليما لم يتأثر. وعليه فقد قام البندك صاحب الارض بالاتصال مع شرطة السياحة والآثار والتي بدورها اعلمت دائرة اثار محافظة بيت لحم بهذا الاكتشاف، وعلى الفور توجه طاقم من دائرة الآثار وعلى راسه كاتب هذا التقرير الى الموقع. حيث قام بتصوير الموقع قبل البدء في اعمال الحفر والتنقيب، تجدر الإشارة الى ان العمل في القبر تم من خلال الفتحة التي أحدثتها الاليات وليس من خلال مدخل القبر الاساسي الذي كان يقع في ارض الجبران وتحت البيت مباشرة مما جعل من الصعب التنقيب فيه.

**وصف القبر :**

يحتوي هذا القبر على حجرة دفن واحدة ببيضاوية الشكل قطعت في الصخر الجيري وكان ذلك في العصر البرونزي المبكر الرابع مستخدمين في قطعه الازميل العريضة والفؤوس و لكون الصخر من النوع الجيري الطري حيث ساعدهم في تشكيله بالشكل الذي عليه الان. يبلغ طول القبر من الشمال الى الجنوب حوالي 490 سم وعرضه من الشرق الى الغرب 380 سم، اما المدخل فيقع في الزاوية الشمالية الشرقية وهو عمودي (بنري الشكل) ينتهي في اسفله بمدخل صغير يفضي للحجرة الدفن وقد اغلق بواسطة بلاطة مستطيلة الشكل 80 سم 60X سم

سمكها 22 سم وضعت في وضع راسي، ووضع حولها حجارة صغيرة من اجل احكام الاغلاق، الا انه مع ذلك وجدت فيه كمية من التربة الحمراء الناعمة والتي ربما تسربت اليه من تلك المنطقة عبر الزمن، بالإضافة الى كمية من التربة الحورية التي تشكلت بفعل تساقط اجزاء من السقف وكذلك بقايا من فتات الصخور اثناء عملية قطع القبر، تجدر الإشارة الى ان لها سقف مقبب وجدرانها منحوتة جيدا خاصه الجدار الغربي والجنوبي حيث استخدمت الازميل في اعداده، اما الارضية فهي مستوية، غطيت بطبقة من التربة الحمراء التي تميل الى اللون البني الداكن. ومن الملفت للنظر الى انه قطعت كوات صغيرة في جداره الغربي والجنوبي والتي كانت تستخدم لوضع الأسرجة الفخارية. حيث كانت ترافق المتوفي وكذلك استخدمت اثناء عملية الدفن للإنارة.

**المعثورات الاثرية :**

عثر في هذا القبر على العديد من الاواني الفخارية والتي اشتملت على زيادي وجرار وقد ظهرت عليها زخارف تتألف من اشربة تحزير غائرة ربما نفذت بواسطة اداة مسننه وحادة حينما كانت الانية لدهن وقيل عملية حرقها. بالإضافة الى العديد من الأسرجة الفخارية، كما اشتملت المرفقات الجنائزية التي عثر عليها، والتي هي عبارة عن ممتلكات شخصية للمتوفي مثل الخرز والتي كانت تستخدم كاحلي مثل العقود، ومشبك من البرونز، وادوات صوانيه ربما استخدمت كمكاشط. وقد دلت هذه اللقى الاثرية على تاريخ هذا القبر الذي يرجع الى فترة العصر البرونزي المبكر الرابع الحقبية (ب)، تجدر الإشارة الى ان جميع المعثورات وجدت في موقعها الاصلي في الاغلب مع وجود القليل منها في مكان قريب وليس في مكانه الاصلي، وربما تحرك بفعل تراكم التربة عليها.

تجدر الإشارة الى انه تم العثور على بقايا لعظام شابة كانت في وضع الانتناء وعلى جانبيها الأيمن ووجها يتجه نحو الغرب، بالإضافة الى عظام اخرى ربما تمثل شخص ثاني دفن بجوارها ان هذا الاكتشاف يضيف لبنه جديدة في فسيفاء تاريخ وحضارة مدينة بيت لحم، ولكن يبقى العقد ناقصا مالم يتم الكشف والعمل على معرفة اماكن الاستقرار البشري القديم في محافظة بيت لحم والتي تعود اليه هذه

المدافن سواء في منطقة العطن او منطقة خلة الجامع وجبل ظاهر او خلايل اللوز وهذه المنطقة تعتبر بكر  
وبحاجة الى مسح اثري شامل وكذلك اجراء المزيد من الحفريات العلمية وبناء على ما تقدم فان هذا النشر  
العلمي لهذه الاكتشافات والتي ستصيف سفرا جديدا في تاريخ المحافظة من قبل دائرة الاثار الفلسطينية  
وبالتعاون مع جامعة لا سابينزا الايطالية في روما ضمن مشروع مشترك يهدف الى تطوير المواقع الاثرية  
والتاريخية في محافظة بيت لحم  
محمد غياظة  
مدير دائرة محافظة بيت لحم