AN EB IVB (2200-2000 BC) FARMERS’ COMMUNITY
AT KHIRBET AL-BATRAWY
(NORTH-CENTRAL JORDAN)

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ABSTRACT

Recent excavations by Rome “La Sapienza” University at the Early Bronze Age site of Khirbet al-Batrawy revealed the existence of an extensive EB IVB (2200-2000 BC) rural village, consisting of several clusters of dwellings, settled all over the site above the razed ruins of the underlying ruins of the EB II-III city. The numerous and diversified installations for preservation and food preparation, storage devices, child burials and abundant animal remains dating from this period allow us to draw a complete and comprehensive picture of daily life, customs and subsistence economy of this late EB IV Transjordanian rural community.

1. AN INTERLUDE (EARLY BRONZE IVA, 2300-2200 BC, PERIOD BATRAWY IVA)

After the destruction of 2300 BC, which brought the EB II-III city of Khirbet al-Batrawy to an end (Nigro 2009: 670), the hill of Batrawy was deserted for a time (Period Batrawy IVA, Early Bronze IVA, 2300-2200 BC) (Nigro ed. 2006: 37-40). Only after nearly a century of abandonment was Batrawy resettled by a new community, characterized by a poor material culture, quite different from that of the previous urban phase, dating back to the final part of the Early Bronze IV (Period Batrawy IVb, Early Bronze IVB, 2200-2000 BC). Gradually, some sectors of the hill were re-occupied with small groups of huts by a community of shepherds and farmers who, once again, moved from the desert and steppe to the Valley of the Zarqa River and the Jordan.

2. THE EB IVB RURAL VILLAGE (2200-2000 BC, PERIOD BATRAWY IVB)

The reoccupation of the hill took place progressively during the 22nd century BC. A rural village was set over the partially regularized remains of the underlying ruins of

1 Rome Sapienza University; Expedition to Palestine & Jordan, www.lasapienazatojordan.it.
the EB II-III city (Fig. 1); this village consisted of clusters of houses with devices and installations for preservation and food preparation that testify to the return to a rural domestic economy.

Two occupational phases were distinguished in the EB IVB (2200-2000 BC) village of Khirbet al-Batrawy, specifically in Area B South (Nigro 2007: 352-353; Nigro ed. 2008: 127-136), just inside the tumbled down EB II-III northern city-wall, along the edge of an embankment made up of the remains of the earlier collapsed structures (Nigro 2007: 349, fig. 7; Nigro ed. 2008: 102-103, figs. 3.54-3.55).

The earliest occupational phase was a camp-site (up to now excavated only in this area of the hill), consisting of huts, floors with limestone scales, hearths, stone-lined circular bins and shallow benches (Fig. 2). Two child burials belonging to this phase were also excavated, both of them signalled by a small stela or vertical stone: the first one (D.1026) was an oval stone-lined cist, in which the skeleton of a child of perinatal age (38 weeks) was deposited, while the second one (D.1020) consisted of a stone cist, within which the skeleton of a child of an approximately 1 year was buried; two flint blades were associated with the latter burial (Nigro and Sala 2010: § 5.2).

The later phase of the Batrawy IVb village, instead, illustrates the establishment of a widespread rural village with a series of clusters of dwellings, equipped with curvilinear devices for storage and domestic installations for food preparation, which occupied large portions of the hill: the northern slope inside the EB II-III city-wall, the Acropolis, the south-western corner, and the eastern terrace. Each domestic compound consisted of a major rectangular house opening on a courtyard, which hosted several storerooms (usually of curvilinear architecture and covered with a false vault or an adobe roof), pens for animal, silos and other facilities for the storage of barley and other agricultural products. Houses had an elongated rectangular plan, with several installations along their inner walls: fireplaces, benches, paved and raised platforms, troughs, etc. Auxiliary rooms were simply juxtaposed to the main one, always with an independent entrance.

In Area B South, on the northern slope, at least three compounds of dwellings have so far been uncovered:

- to the east, House L.910 showed a relatively solid fieldstone masonry, with a rectangular stone-paved installation in the NW corner, a bench against its northern wall, upon which two mortars stood (in addition, a working table with a pestle was found beside the bench; Fig. 3), and a rectangular installation made of limestone chips in its SE corner (Nigro and Sala 2010: § 5.2);

- in the central sector, stood a wide squared house (L.354), with working platforms, stone slabs used as cutting tables, a semi-circular central installation devoted to food production and storage (with a platform and a bin inside it), and a rectangular juxtaposed unit with a bench probably representing an auxiliary storeroom (further north, a child burial was set underneath the northern boundary wall of the dwelling) (Nigro 2007: 353; Nigro ed. 2008: 170-176); to the west, a two-rowed stone wall
delimited a yard where a circular silo, a rectangular flagstone-paved platform, and an oval-shaped device stood;

- to the west, a rectangular structure, characterized by a stone-paved double installation (Fig. 4) lined by upright small slabs (L.450), abutted directly over the inner edge of the collapsed EB II-III city-wall and was presumably devoted to the processing of liquids (grape juice/wine) (Nigro 2007: 353; 2009, 671-672, fig. 16; Nigro ed. 2008: 168-169); it continued to the south with a solid wall made up with stone headers, delimiting a large rectangular unit (L.480); in the south-western sector of L.480, a circular stone-lined silo was brought to light. Further to the west, two rectangular east-west oriented spaces (L.1062 and L.1010), which opened towards the north, were juxtaposed to the western wall of unit L.480, while to the south a courtyard paved with limestone scales hosted a rectangular installation.

Both occupational phases in Area B South provided a wide set of ceramic materials and several objects and tools (including flint blades, stone pestles, basalt grinders, stoppers and spindle whorls; Fig. 5), all belonging to the same EB IVB local horizon (Nigro 2007: 353, figs. 12-13; 2009: figs. 15, 17; Nigro ed. 2008: pls. XXII-XXXIII, XXXVI), thus testifying that the latest sedentary occupation of the site took place only in the final part of the Early Bronze IV (Early Bronze IVB, 2200-2000 BC).

A major cluster of houses of the Batrawy IVb village was excavated on the Acropolis, in Area A (Nigro 2006: 237-240, figs. 10-19; 2007: 348-349, fig. 3; Nigro ed. 2006: 77-102, figs. 3.15-3.51, plan II; 2008: 28-36, figs. 2.26-2.37). To the west, two major rectangular units opened towards a courtyard, each showing a series of installations for food preparation along the inner walls and other devices: House L.20 to the west, with a triple installation made of two juxtaposed square cists and a third parallel stone, and a raised platform in the western end of the room, with a hole-mouth jar smashed over it; and House L.240 to the north-east, hosting a stone-paved installation, a silo and a square cist inserted in a plastered bench, similar to the triple installation in House L.20. Both houses opened on a central yard, which connected to another possible unit to the south-east. Two other rooms were identified to the west of House L.20: L.70 and L.80, possibly an auxiliary curvilinear structure, flanking the rear wall of House L.20. In the eastern sector of the Acropolis, where a boundary wall delimited the eastern edge of the village by terracing the collapsed remains of the underlying EB II-III city, two domestic compounds flanked a path, each one consisting of main rectangular living rooms, subsidiary units and several annexed devices, which usually showed a curvilinear architecture (figs. 6-7), equipped with installations for food preparation and storage, among which working platforms, benches, and a circular silo cut into the bed-rock and made of large vertical slabs; the opening of the silo consisted of a small channel flanked by two vertical limestone slabs and preceded by a third flat stone, which facilitated the filling up and emptying of the installation.

A third group of houses was excavated on the easternmost terrace of the hill, in Area F (Nigro 2007: 358, fig. 19; Nigro ed. 2008: 294-305), where again rectangular
rooms represented the main dwelling units, with installations for food preparation inside them (platforms, mortars, etc.) and adjoined curvilinear storage devices. A major compound was identified, including a large rectangular house (L.530), with a raised platform and a cist in the middle, a round bin in the SE corner and a separate rectangular room (L.560) in the opposite SW corner, and a semi-circular storeroom adjoined to its western side. A second domestic unit (L.520) was juxtaposed to the southern wall of House L.530, possibly as a successive enlargement of the latter. West of the house, there was an open courtyard, hosting another circular device, while further to the north-west, a third rectangular unit (L.540) was partly preserved, apparently joined with other subsidiary curvilinear annexes.

The overall picture is, thus, that of a relatively modest village, but spread all over the site with clusters of houses concentrated in selected spots. The distinguished feature of these domestic compounds was the irregular arrangement of units around courtyards and lanes, the curvilinear layout of annexes in respect of the main rectangular rooms, the agglutinant juxtaposition of houses and devices, and the adoption of single-line unworked stone walls, which supported ceilings made of leafy branches or, in some cases, corbelled stone or mud-brick vaults.

3. Installations for Food Preparation and Storage

The variety of installations for food preparation and storage related to the domestic compounds of the Batrawy IVb village provides interesting insights into subsistence economy and social organization of this EB IVB rural community of shepherds and farmers. They illustrate, in fact, a range of transformation and storage processes linked to the household economy of a rural village, founded on subsistence strategies and on an economical organisation completely different from the complex and organized economy of the previous EB II-III city. They were: stone-paved platforms, where liquid or semi-liquid stuff (olive oil or wine) had to be processed; triple installation for food transformation, consisting of two juxtaposed square cists, made of upright limestone slabs, and a third cist possibly supporting a jar which either contained the food pulped in the cists or water to be mixed with the smashed stuff; stone slabs, usually flanked by a bench, used as cutting tables, as the retrieval of flint blades on them testifies to; angular troughs for temporary storage, lined by small vertical stones

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2 As well as in the domestic architecture of other EB IV Transjordanian sites, such as Jebel er-Reheil (Palumbo et al. 1996: 399-400, figs. 24-25) or Tell Iktanu (phase 2: Prag 1991: fig. 1).
3 A remarkable example is represented by rectangular installation L.450 in Area B South, where the whole unit was stone-paved (Nigro 2007: 353; Nigro ed. 2008: 168-169, figs. 4.73-4.75).
4 Examples of such installations were found in Area A West, in House L.20 (S.207+S.209; Nigro 2006: 238-240, figs. 17-19; Nigro ed. 2006: 90, figs. 3.35-3.36), and in House L.240 (S.249+B.251; Nigro 2007: 348, fig. 3; Nigro ed. 2008: 31, figs. 2.30-2.31).
5 An example is represented by the stone slab inserted in installation B.374 in House L.354 in Area B South (Nigro 2007: 353; Nigro ed. 2008: 170, figs. 4.76-4.77).
and adobe walls around 0.5 m high, and usually place in a corner of the houses;\(^6\) silos for seasonal storage, cut into the bed-rock and made up of vertical stone slabs.\(^7\) The analysis of the above mentioned installations, moreover, allows us to identify the following food as usually processed in the Batrawy IVb houses: beans, lentils, chick peas, olives, grapes, and meat.

### 4. Conclusions

The new inhabitants, who reoccupied the hill of Batrawy in the last centuries of the 3\(^{rd}\) millennium BC, were individual family groups, who, initially, settled in a provisional way, with huts, fences for domestic animals and other facilities (sometimes realized by reusing the remains of the collapsed buildings of the underlying EB II-III city), and, then, built more substantial domestic structures, which spread over several spots of the site. The final overall picture is that of a relatively small village with rectangular houses flanked by courtyards and subsidiary structures (usually curvilinear in plan), in use for a single construction phase, which testify to the process of temporary re-sedentarization of the hill and the reversion to a household rural based economy at the end of Early Bronze Age in the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa Valley, when the main site of the district was probably Jebel er-Reheil (Palumbo 1990: 57-59; Palumbo et al. 1996: 393-401).

The village provided an abundant set of materials, all homogenously belonging to the last phase of the Transjordanian Early Bronze IV (2200-2000 BC), and illustrating a quite poor material culture, with limited specialization and a relatively restricted inventory of pottery shapes and flint tools. The pottery assemblage mainly included storage jars (with short everted neck, hole-mouth, and of Metallic Ware production), mostly devoted to store liquids (drinking water, olive oil, possibly wine or beer), semi-liquids (ovine fat), and dried stuff (cereals, beans and fruits); cooking pots; small Simple Ware jars; and a few open shapes, among which were vats for mixing food. Subsistence was, in fact, based on the control and cultivation of the Wadi az-Zarqa banks, and on the integrated breeding of various animals, mainly sheep and goats, but also equids and cattle (Alhaique 2008: 342-350). Beans, lentils, chick peas, olives and grapes were the basis of the diet, as testified to by the numerous installations for food preparation inside the houses of the village (such as cists and working platforms, all related to the grinding and pulping of cereals and beans).

However, the life of this village was short, and the stronghold of Batrawy was again abandoned around 2000 BC; after this time, the hill was never reoccupied.

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\(^6\) Such installations were found in several houses of the Batrawy IVb village, such as House L.240 in Area A West (trough S.245; Nigro 2007: 348, fig. 3; Nigro ed. 2008: 31, fig. 2.32) and House L.530 in Area F (trough S.523; Nigro 2007: 358; Nigro ed. 2008: 298, fig. 7.42).

\(^7\) An outstanding example of this kind of storage devices is represented by silos S.37 in courtyard L.54 in Area A East (Nigro 2006: 237, figs. 13-14; Nigro ed. 2006: 84-85, figs. 3.15, 3.17, 3.25-3.26).
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Fig. 1: Khirbet al-Batrawy, Area B South: a sector of the latest EB IVB (2200-2000 BC) village, built inside the EB II-III line of fortifications and over the regularized remains of the underlying EB IIIB city, from west.

Fig. 2: Khirbet al-Batrawy, Area B South: stone-lined circular bins belonging to the earliest EB IVB (2200-2000 BC) campsite.
Fig. 3: Khirbet al-Batrawy, Area B South: EB IVB (2200-2000 BC) House L.910, with the stone bench, the working table and the pestle found aside it, and the rectangular installation in the SE corner of the house, from south.

Fig. 4: Khirbet al-Batrawy, Area B South: EB IVB (2200-2000 BC) stone-paved double installation L.450.
Fig. 5: EB IVB (2200-2000 BC) pottery materials, tools and objects from Batrawy IVb (2200-2000 BC) village in Area B South.

Fig. 6: Khirbet al-Batrawy, Area A East: general view of the curvilinear storage devices of the Batrawy IVb (2200-2000 BC) village and silos S.37, from south.
Fig. 7: Reconstruction of Batrawy IVb (2200-2000 BC) village in Area A East.

Fig. 8: Khirbet al-Batrawy, Area A West: square cist S.249 set into plastered bench B.25,1 inside EB IVB (2200-2000 BC) House L.240.
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