THE EARLY MIDDLE BRONZE AGE IIa PHASES AT TEL IFSHAR AND THEIR EXTERNAL RELATIONS

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Introduction

The presence of Middle Kingdom (MK) Egyptian pottery at Middle Bronze IIa (MB IIa) Tel Ifshar (Marcus, Porath, Schiestl, Seiler and Paley 2008) represents an important development in the study of the southern Levant and its foreign relations. The importance of these finds is that they contribute to the increasing evidence for trade during this period, variously, between Egypt, the Levant, Cyprus and the Aegean (Marcus 1991; 1998; 2002; 2007; Artzy and Marcus 1992; Kislev, Artzy and Marcus 1993; Artzy 1995; Bietak 1996; Stager 2001; 2002; Doumet-Serhal 2006), which suggests that long-distance exchange may have had an important role in the history of the southern Levantine coastal plain. In order to better understand the archaeological context of this evidence for Egyptian – Levantine contacts, the following overview will present the initial stratigraphic phases at Tel Ifshar in which the MK pottery was found and present some of the contemporary Levantine pottery of both local and foreign origin or inspiration. Together, this evidence offers possible synchronisms between the cultures of the Levantine littoral, sheds light on their trade relations and contributes to a better understanding of the early Middle Bronze Age.

The geographical setting of Tel Ifshar, its excavation and previous research

Although a summary description of the site's locale and excavation have been presented elsewhere (Paley and Porath 1993; 1997), a brief introduction is necessary to emphasize a number of important characteristics of this ancient settlement. Tel Ifshar is a 40 dunam (4 hectare) site located in the Sharon Coastal Plain approximately 4 km upriver from the sea, where it was established upon a summit of the easternmost sandstone *(kurkar*) ridge on the northern side of the Alexander River watergap (Paley and Porath 1993, 609). This 600 m watergap is complemented by a smaller 300 m gap in the intermediate ridge and a larger 1600 m breach in the coastal ridge, all attesting to the impact of this river during the Pleistocene, when its flow prevented the accumulation of sand from which the ridges were formed (Porath 1985a, 19–20). In antiquity, the coastal breach may have been a broad bay, suitable for sheltering ships and providing access to the river, which may have been navigable as far as Tel Ifshar (Paley and Porath 1993, 609). If not for a sandbar and modern exploitation of its water sources, this perennial river might still be navigable either for small boats or barges, the latter ideally suited to be towed along the low river bank. From the Late Bronze Age onwards, Tel Mikhmoret, on the northern end of the coastal breach, served as the port for this stretch of coastline (Porath 1985b, 126–127; Porath, Paley and Stieglitz 1993). Raban (1985, 17) suggested that Tel Mikhmoret belonged to a general pattern of MB IIa rivermouth ports, but excavations at Tel Mikhmoret did not reveal any MBA remains (Porath *et al.* 1993).[4]

In addition to potential riverine-maritime communication, Tel Ifshar also controlled an important fording point, where the main longitudinal route along the eastern *kurkar* ridge meets the Alexander River. Lateral roads offer this vantage point access along the river bank to both the sea and to the Central Highlands. Water was available from the river and a number of nearby springs (Paley and Porath 1993, 609). Wood would have been available from the park

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[4] In light of post-Bronze Age sand dune formation, which tends to obscure ancient remains, e.g., Nami East (Artzy 1995, 17–20), it would be worthwhile to resume the search for MB IIa remains, either in some unexplored area at Mikhmoret, perhaps on its eastern side, or further inland along the perimeter of the presumed palaeo-embayment now covered by sand dunes.

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forest of Tabor oak and stone pine covering the red *hamra* hills of the Sharon plain (Waisel and Agami 1990, 115, 117–120). Finally, abundant alluvial soils in the intermediate and eastern troughs of the Coastal Plain, and along the river system, provided verdant farm land, as indicated by archaeobotanical analysis (Chernoff 1988; Chernoff and Paley 1998). Thus, the site offered superb conditions for the establishment of a thriving agricultural settlement with immediate access to longitudinal and latitudinal land-based arteries.

Excavations were carried out at Tel Ifshar, intermittently, between 1979 and 1992, as part of the Emek Hefer Archaeological Research Project (EHARP), during which five areas of the tell were explored (Paley and Porath 1993; 1997). Among the general observations that may be made from these investigations are evidence for occupation at the site from the Chalcolithic through the Byzantine periods and that natural erosion and soil quarrying had destroyed the perimeter of the site already in antiquity. Two areas produced stratified remains of the Middle Bronze Age IIa: Area C on the northeastern side near the main longitudinal road, where the greatest exposure (1250 m^2) of MB IIa occupation was achieved and Area A, in the west, where some limited remains were found in deep sondages.

In addition to preliminary reports that appeared regularly throughout the field excavation phase of the project (Paley and Porath 1979; 1980; 1982; 1985; Paley, Porath and Stieglitz 1982; 1983; 1984a; 1984b; Porath and Paley 1982; 1983; 1985; 1991, 1993), some limited summary results and analysis of finds have been published (Paley and Porath 1993; 1997). Additional studies have included archaeobotany (Chernoff 1988; Chernoff and Paley 1998), the radiocarbon chronology of the MB IIa strata (Marcus 2003), and archaeozoological analysis (Hesse and Wapnish 2002, Table 17.5). Despite the preliminary nature of the published ceramic data, it has been incorporated in some specialist studies on the Levantine Painted Ware (Bagh 2000) and the petrography of the MBA ceramics (Cohen-Weinberger 2007), specifically, on the origin of the Tell el-Yahudiyeh Ware.[5] Moreover, quite a number of scholars, both who have viewed some of the finds and those who have not, have recognized the importance of the data from this site, not the least because of the discovery of Egyptian pottery in its MB IIa levels (Bietak 1989, 96; 1991, 54; 2002, 39; Weinstein 1992, 34–35; Cohen 2002, 83, 129–130; Marcus 1998, 152–153; 2003, 96–98, 104–105; see now Marcus *et al.* 2008). However, it is the fine stratification of eight distinct MB IIa phases (A-H) with varied, abundant, and restorable pottery found on living levels and separated by at least five clear destruction layers that make this site of such great potential in comparison to the many contemporary sites in the southern Levant.

Current Project

After more than a decade during which the EHARP was dormant, the present research was initiated as an Israel Science Foundation funded project entitled, "Tel Ifshar: the earliest Middle Bronze Age IIa settlement of the coastal plain of Israel and its relations to Egypt and the northern Levant" (ISF Grant 1113/06). Some of the principal goals of this project are: 1) to explore the nature and origin of the culture (and, hence, population) that established the earliest MB IIa phase of the site in order to demonstrate whether firm evidence exists for migration/immigration as a factor in the initial emergence of southern Levantine MB culture; 2) to establish whether this site was the initial settlement from which subsequent sites derived or if Tel Ifshar was settled as part of a larger parallel and contemporaneous process; and 3) to create a robust relative chronological sequence of regional application, based on largely complete ceramics from habitation levels, which can be linked to Egypt (via Tel Ifshar and Ashkelon), the northern Levantine coast, and compared with radiocarbon determinations.

In order to accomplish these goals, a program of analysis has been underway that has included a detailed review of the stratigraphic sequence based on the documentary evidence. The small finds, which include, inter alia, pottery, ground and chipped stones, and animal bones, have been assembled from a number of storage facilities – in some cases repatriated from abroad – and collat-

[5] Numerous vessels also appear in the chapter on MB IIa pottery of the forthcoming volume, *The Ancient Pottery of Israel and its Neighbors* (Ilan and Marcus forthc.)

ed with any registration, illustration, photographic documentation that was carried out while the EHARP was active. All of these finds are currently undergoing analysis or will be in the near future.

The stratigraphic sequence of Phases A and B

Prior to the commencement of the current project, the basic stratigraphic sequence had been fairly well established already in the early 1990s (Paley and Porath 1993; 1997). In this sequence, Phase B was considered the first principal building phase, which was destroyed in fierce conflagration. A similar fate befell Phase C which was built along a fairly similar plan. Phase D comprised a phenomenon of burial pits, whose stratigraphic assignment will be more closely examined in the near future. Phases E through H, three of which also were destroyed, mark the transformation of the area from a public to a much more domestic character.

All of the stratified remains preceding Phase B (small, segmented walls, patches of living surfaces, pits and fills), were lumped together into what was termed Phase A. This approach was a result of the fact that Phase A was discovered partially as a by-product of the exploration of the foundations of the Phase B walls; only during the final seasons was a more concerted effort made to understand Phase A. The effect was a sort of downplaying of the importance of this phase compared to the more prominent architecture and finds of the Phase B building complex. As one of the goals of the present project is the identification of the founding culture of the site, this evidence and approach were re-examined in detail. The results of this analysis have demonstrated that Phase A is much more complex and potentially more significant than previously thought and in some places includes up to four stratigraphic sub-phases.

Phase A

Phase A represents the earliest discernible stratified remains of the Middle Bronze Age in Area C. These were found primarily within, and to a lesser extent south of, the large mudbrick complex of Phase B and covering approximately 350 m^2 (Fig. 1). Within the mudbrick building complex, the floors and walls of Phase B provide a secure *terminus ante quem* for the preceding phase. However, to the south of the building, where no Phase B remains were found, a clear stratigraphic bound begins only in Phase C and the separation of Phases A and B is not yet possible. Thus, the two sections of Area C are being analyzed separately and the latter is not presented here. Similarly, much of the eastern wing of the area (Squares N-O/5–7, O-P/8) was damaged by later pitting and soil quarrying that cut below the floors of Phase B and left no clearly defined Phase A elements.

Unfortunately, nearly all of the Phase A remains are non-contiguous and must be treated individually; a meaningful reconstruction of a continuous architectural plan might only be attempted in a limited manner (e.g, Squares M/7–8, L/7, and L–M/6; see below). Moreover, although many of these discrete sections of Phase A remains repeatedly have three sub-phases, it is impossible, at present, to offer a generalized area-wide relative scheme that would connect these stratigraphic components. Note also that bedrock or the natural hill soil was not reached in all instances.

The remains of Phase A are presented on the backdrop of the labeled unexcavated Phase B walls; the latter were not in existence at the time, and not disassembled during excavation in order to explore the previous phase. Nevertheless, the general difficulty in connecting Phase A components on either side of the Phase B walls demonstrates how much damage was done to the former habitation levels. The preparatory leveling and filling for the Phase B floors and walls suggests that the remains immediately below the floor should be associated either a) with a mixture of Phase A and Phase B immediately before the construction began or b) solely from Phase A, i.e., an indeterminate time period prior to the construction of Phase B. The defined and sealed loci below these preparatory deposits are associated solely with Phase A.

The fills and leveling sealed by Phase B floors were probed on either side of W1171 (Phase B). In Square L/9, L1133 was excavated down to the natural hill (14.08[6]) without any discernible features or sub-phases being encountered. In Square M/10, L1204 and L1172, on opposite sides of the wall, were probed to 14.28, but no natural hill or

[6] All elevations are above mean sea level.

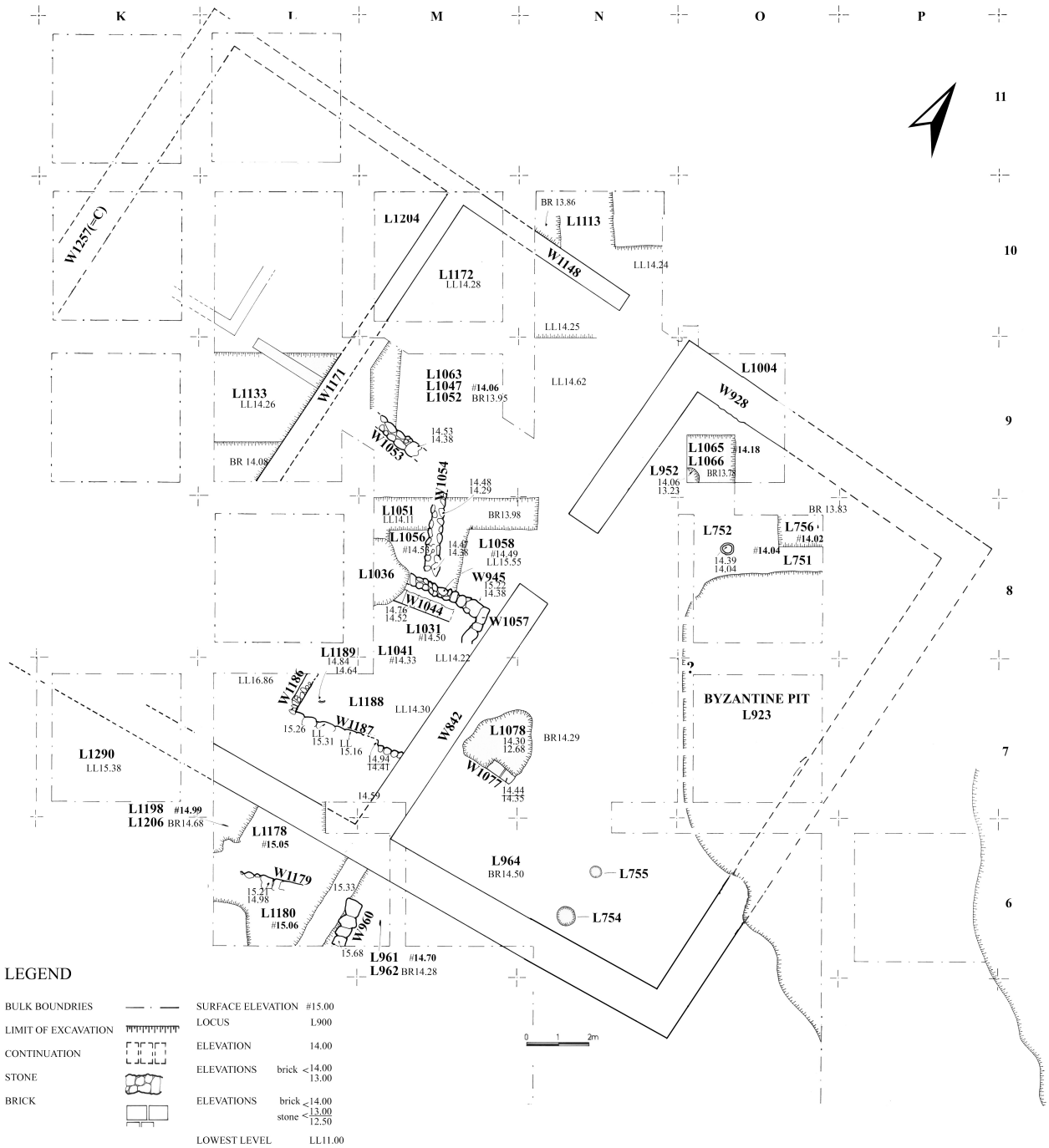


Fig. 1 Tel Ifshar, Area C, Phase A architecture and principal loci

bedrock was reached. These could be part of a foundation trench although no sign of a pit was discerned. A similar situation was encountered in Square N/10, where an accumulation or fill, L1113, was excavated down to natural soil at 13.86.

In Square O/9, L1004, which was not clearly sealed by a Phase B floor, is also a fill, but it was not excavated completely to its bottom and may not necessarily belong to Phase A, but might be associated with W928 (Phase B). South of this wall, four sub-phases of A were identified under the Phase B floor, L927. These include: 1) an accumulation or fill, L1066, which was found on top of the natural hill (13.78); 2) a pit, L952, which cut through L1066 and bedrock (13.23); 3) an ash layer, L1065, at 14.18 that sealed the pit; and, finally, 4) L935, which represents an accumulation or the floor make-up, beginning approximately 8 cm above L1065 and sealed by L927.

In Square O/8, south of the previous

sequence, three sub-phases were discerned under the same Phase B floor: 1) the natural hill was encountered at 13.83, upon which an accumulation, L756, was probed in the northeastern corner of the square; 2) ash layer L1065 was not discerned here, but a crushed *kurkar* floor, L751, was found at 14.02–14.04, upon which a portion of an *in situ tabun*, L752, was preserved to a height of 14.39 with its scattered fragments spread out over the floor ; and 3) as in the adjacent square, L935 sealed this square just beneath L927.

In Squares M/7 and N/7, W1077 is a mudbrick wall at 14.44, which is preserved only to a height of 9 cm. This wall is cut by a pit, L1078, which was excavated into bedrock down to 12.68. The fact that two nearly complete vessels (see Fig. 7 below) were found in this pit might indicate that it had some sort of special function, but no evidence of a tomb or any other finds were discerned. These appear to be sealed by L1061, which is an accumulation that begins from natural soil at 14.30 and ends with L914, a Phase B floor at 14.60. However, the pit was only discerned as it cut through bedrock and may have cut through L1061 as well.

South of the previous sequence, in Squares M/6 and N/6, L964, another fill or accumulation was found under a Phase B floor, L841, which continues down to bedrock. The only discernible features were two pits, L754 from 14.44 to 14.24 and L755 from 14.38 to 14.29 that cut this fill down to bedrock and thus date to the last subphase of Phase A.

The best preserved architecture from Phase A was found underneath L955, the floor of the central courtyard of the Phase B building (Squares L/7, M/8, and M/9). In Square M/9, an accumulation or fill, L1052, was encountered on natural soil at 13.91. This locus is sealed by a crushed *kurkar* surface, L1047, at 14.03 to 14.06. The similarity in elevation and composition with the floor remains ca. 7 m to the east (L751) might support a circumstantial argument for combining them into a single sub-phase. As this surface is significantly lower than W1053 (14.53–14.38), the wall is probably later than L1047. Finally, L1063 is an accumulation or fill above L1047 and the preparation for the Phase B floor, L955. As the heights, particularly the bottom, of W1053 are fairly similar to W1054 and W945, it would be tempting to make an association between them. However, all three walls are on different orientations and seem to be constructed in a dissimilar fashion. Moreover, given their abrupt truncation and orientation, it might be argued that W945 cuts both W1054 and W1044 (a poorly preserved mudbrick wall) and, in turn, W1054 cuts W1053. However, there are surfaces or floors (L1056, L1058 and L1031) around these walls at a fairly uniform height: 14.53, 14.49 and 14.50, respectively. This height would be consistent with W945, but not with the remains of W1054, unless the top of the stone foundation was shaved off for the construction of Phase B. This floor was not noticed in association with W1053 or any other feature in Square M/9. Between this square and L1056, a probe was excavated down to bedrock through a fill, L1051. South of W945, a floor, L1031, appears to cover W1057, indicating an earlier phase for this wall and the eastern part of W945, which probably should be associated with another surface, L1041, at 14.33. This area was not excavated down to bedrock or the natural hill and thus there may yet be an even earlier phase(s). Note that the orientation of W945 and W1057 appears to be mirrored by W1186 and W1187, creating a room of 5 × 3 m. L1188 is a living surface that rises from 14.76 in the north to 14.87 near the walls and may be related to an undiscerned surface near W945, where mudbrick wall W1044 is preserved to the same height. A *tabun* located near the corner of the latter two walls is sitting on a horizon at 14.64, which might be related to L1031 if a slight rise in the floor is accepted.

Finally, in Squares L/6 and M/6, there are two walls, W1179 and W960, which might continue along the same orientation of the walls in Squares L/7–M/8, creating two more rooms or enclosed spaces. Two surfaces, L1178 + L1180 and L1198 were found, respectively, at 14.70 and 15.00 to 15.06, which are apparently to be associated with two phases of use. The lower floor rests on an accumulation, L1206 and L962, on bedrock. In contrast, in Square K/7, L1290 was sealed by a Phase B floor, but was only excavated to 15.38. At present, these are the southernmost examples of stratified remains of Phase A discerned in Area C.

Thus, the remains of Phase A are seemingly domestic structures, spanning perhaps as many as four phases. On the eastern side of Area C only living surfaces and a *tabun* were preserved. In the center, there are 2–3 architectural phases preserved with one *tabun*. These are arrayed from north to south, perhaps along a contour of the ancient hill. The series of simple rectangular rooms, which marks the last Phase A habitation

has parallels at village and urban sites such as Tel Nami on the coast, Kfar Rupin in the Jordan Valley and Tell Nagila in the Negev (GOPHNA 1979; MARCUS 1991, 101–110, figs. 24 and 27; BEN-DOV 1992, 99–101). The construction of the Phase B building apparently required much leveling and filling of topographical depressions. It is also quite possible that many stones were robbed for re-use and the ground-testing and foundation trenching for the much larger walls of Phase B eradicated many of the Phase A walls and features. The slightly better degree of preservation in the central courtyard is probably a result of the fact that only leveling was required there.

Phase B

Phase B marks a major development in the history of Area C and, presumably, the settlement as a whole, as a large building complex is constructed upon the remains of the modest domestic dwelling(s?) of Phase A. The long-term impact of this development is all the more significant as the main walls define the general layout and orientation of all subsequent phases. This complex is comprised of rectangular rooms and courtyards, whose north-south walls are oriented approximately 17 degrees east of true north (Fig. 2). Although the complete building plan is not preserved and portions remain unexcavated, the dimensions of the building so far may be calculated as 19.5 meters north-south and over 26 meters east-west, for a total area of 507 m^2. The main western external wall has not yet been excavated down to Phase B, but its existence may be inferred by its presence in subsequent phases. The layout of the complex consists of two wings separated by a wide courtyard (L955) between them. The east wing has a suite of small rooms at its south end (L841, L914, and L919) and a larger room or courtyard to their north (L927). Presumably, this suite was entered from the north somewhere through an unpreserved continuation of W921. A passageway through W842 connects L927 to the central courtyard. Although the excavation of the western part of the complex was never completed, a flipped mirror of the eastern wing may be surmised with a suite of small rooms to the north (L1201 and L1202) and a larger room or courtyard, L1111, to the south. The only feature discerned within the courtyard is W945, which originated in Phase A and may have been utilized in this phase as a low partition to create a small separate area on the southern side of the courtyard. The main floor, L955, rises up and meets W945, but on the southern side the floor rises up and nearly covers W945. The corner with W1057 was covered and the space between W945 and W842 was filled in with bricks and mortar before being plastered over for the Phase B floor. Along the southern wall, W646, L954 is a floor that was reused in Phase C. Only further excavation in squares L/7 and L/8 will clarify this part of the courtyard.

So far, based on the extent of the excavation, the only entrance to the complex appears to be an opening 2.3 m wide in wall W1148 in the northeastern corner of the central courtyard. This inconspicuous passageway led to an open area on the north side. There is no difference in the make up of the beaten earth floor that connects the courtyard and the outside of the building. The surface (L1154 and L925) discovered south of wall W646 seems to have served as another open area between the building complex and the rest of the settlement, perhaps private homes as in later phases of this area.

Construction materials and methods for this building are as follows. The outer and the inner walls separating the main courtyard from the two wings were constructed of sundried mud bricks, set with a mud mortar on *kurkar* stone foundations. The walls that form the interior suites were narrower and built entirely with brick and mud mortar, including the foundations. The bricks were made in rectangular frames and their average dimensions were ca. 60 × 40 × 11 cm. The size and the arrangement of the bricks determined the thickness of the walls, which were, variously, ca. 0.40, 0.60, 1.00 and 1.20 m wide. All of the walls were plastered with a 1 cm thick coat of mud similar to the mortar. Floors were made of beaten earth mixed with small potsherds and crushed *kurkar*. Burnt pieces of the roofing in the building's destruction debris show that it was made of mud laid on thatch and branches supported by rafters. The rafter wood has been identified as Lebanese cedar (PORATH and PALEY 1993, 34; LIPHSCHITZ 2007, 40, table, 116–117, 122), which can grow to a height of 24 m and has a diameter range of 1.5 to 2.4 meters (PULAK 2001, 24). These beams could easily have spanned any of the rooms of Phase B and supported their roofs. The presence of beams in L927 suggests that this room or courtyard was partially, if not entirely, roofed. The 1.00–1.20 m wide walls of the southern wing could easily have supported large rafters and a second story, although no evidence for such a superstructure was found. Roofing debris was

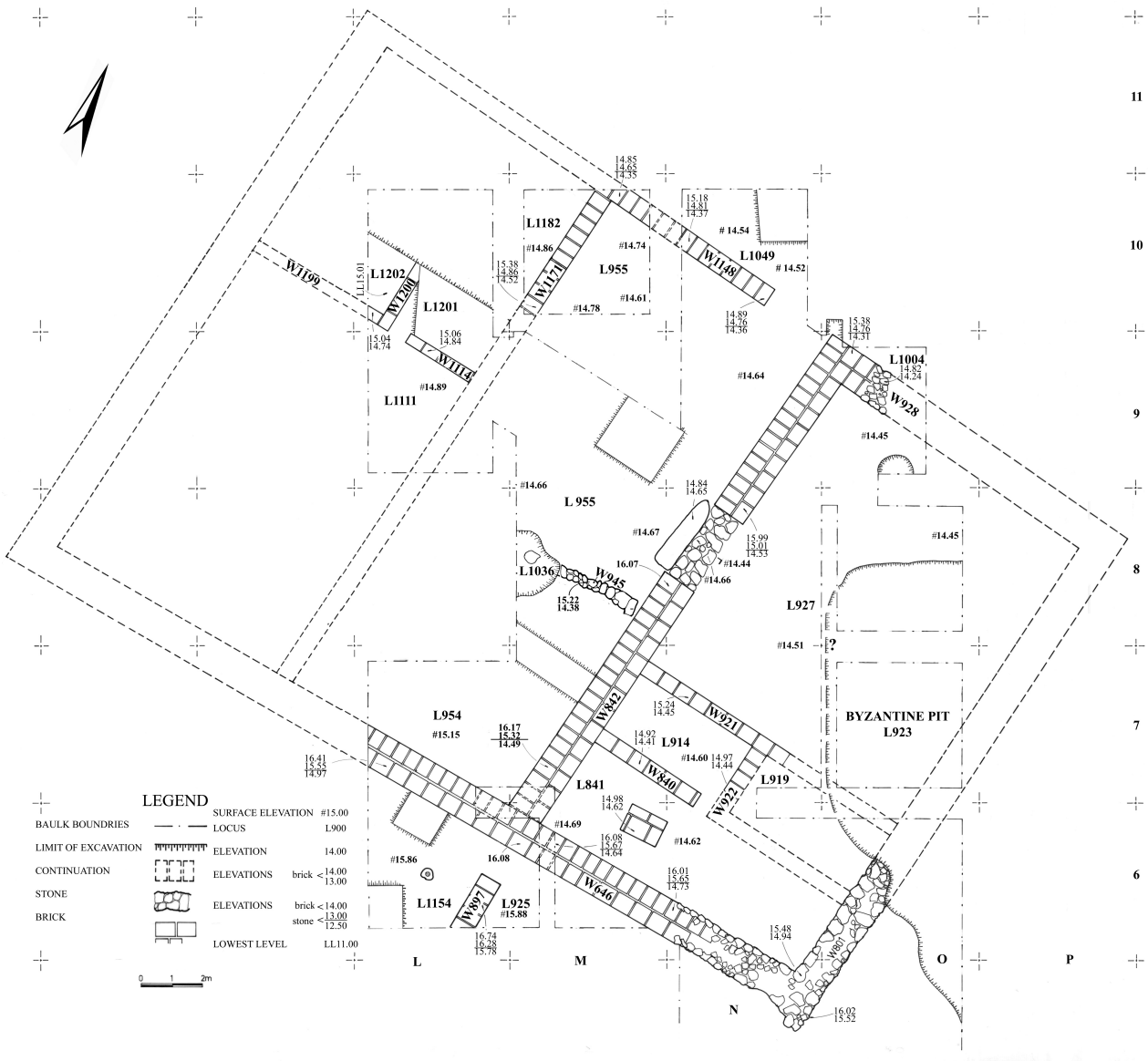


Fig. 2 Tel Ifshar, Area C, Phase B architecture and principal loci

found not only in all the larger rooms and courtyards, but throughout the entire excavated area of this complex.

An unusual feature, which deviates from the otherwise consistent use of beaten earth floors that usually marked the transition from one room to the next, is the threshold in wall W842 that connects the main room of the eastern wing (L927) and the central courtyard (L955). In this particular case, a large *kurkar* monolith slab was found lying west of the opening on the central courtyard side. The monolith was slightly shorter than the width of the entrance and was aligned with the threshold. Two possible explanations may be offered to explain its presence. One, as the level of floor L927 is lower than that of the center courtyard, it served as a step and or as a retainer for water draining across the beaten earth floor during rainy seasons. Such an explanation is supported by the fact that the monolith was found flat and set partially in the floor with no destruction remains below it. Two, that it was standing next to the threshold and was purposely toppled prior to the destruction of the building. Any doubt regarding its stratigraphic position in Phase B should be set aside as the stone was covered in Phase B debris, which was sealed by the floor of Phase C. The dressed monolith is 2.20 m long, 0.65 m at its wider (southern) end and is tapered so that it ends in a rounded top in the

north; its thickness varies from 0.19 to 0.21 m. The size and shape of the monolith resemble some of the MB II stelae discovered at Byblos (JIDEJIAN 1971, 35–39, pls. 63, 65–67; SALLES 1998, 69) and Gezer (MACALISTER 1912, 381–406, fig. 486; DEVER 1973, 68–70, fig. 3; USSISHKIN 2006). Thus, it is possible that this stone was originally hewn for use in a cultic context of this, or an earlier, MB IIa phase at Tel Ifshar. The stone is cracked in several places. In the vicinity of the tell, the *kurkar* tends to be fragile and cannot be hewn into large blocks. Thus, it may have been brought from a distance, perhaps from the shoreline, where the *kurkar* is much stronger.

No obvious installation (e.g., platform, bench, silo, *tabun*, etc.) was discovered in this building. However, the lower part of a rectangular brick construction was found on the floor in the middle of room L841. As the superstructure of this feature was shaved off by the builders of Phase C, its function is not clear, but it could have been a platform or a column.

This building complex was destroyed in an intense conflagration that left signs everywhere. Crushed pottery vessels, charcoal, ash and charred seeds were buried by the collapsed brick walls and burnt roof materials. Most of the building complex was later reconstructed on a fairly similar plan in Phase C.

Precise parallels for this building plan are not known in the southern Levant, but comparison may be drawn, for example, with the rectangular rooms reconstructed for Palace I at Aphek (KOCHAVI 1989, 35–36, fig. 31; BECK and KOCHAVI 1993, 67; HERZOG 1997, 111–112, fig. 4.6C).[7] The walls of this palace are 1.00–1.20 m wide (BECK and KOCHAVI 1993, 67; GAL and KOCHAVI 2000, 82, figs. 7.26, 7.30); even wider walls were built in the later Palace II (YADIN and KOCHAVI 2000, fig. 9.26). While the overall dimensions of the Phase B building may pale in comparison to those of the contemporary palaces, the wall sizes of the eastern wing of the Phase B complex clearly are on a monumental scale and reflect a high status owner (HERZOG 1997, 111).

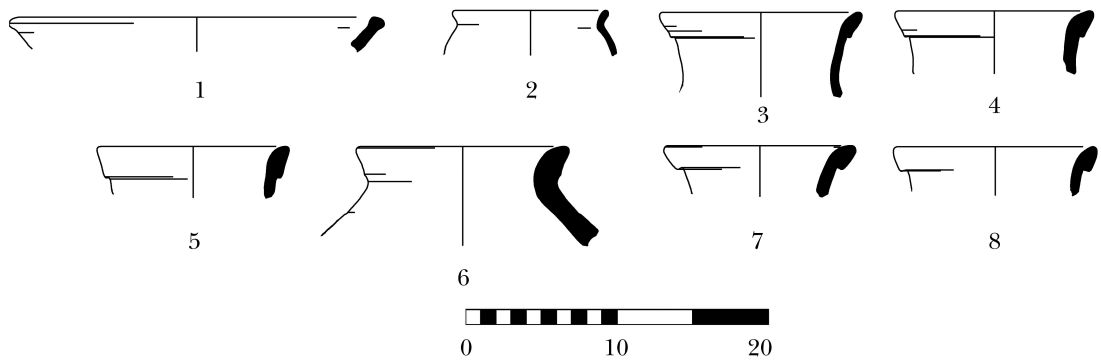
Summary

The initial phase of MB IIa settlement in Area C at Tel Ifshar is of a modest domestic character that lasted two to three phases of habitation. The final Phase A occupation was leveled and filled in for the construction of a building complex of public or elite character, which would have had a prominent position on the eastern side of the tell overlooking the main north-south road. This building altered the layout of the area and established building lines which were followed in all subsequent phases. At this stage of architectural analysis, it is far too premature to make any conclusions regarding the overall function of the building, whether administrative, ritual, or a combination of both (see below). Moreover, given the limited extent of the excavation in the western wing and to the southwest, it is uncertain whether this building is a single entity, or two buildings sharing a single central courtyard and entrance. The development of this complex after what appears to be a very short period of occupation, in terms of accumulation and floor raising, gives the impression of a rapid process.

The pottery assemblages

While a full treatment of the entire pottery assemblages of Phases A and B is beyond the scope of this present work, a number of representative assemblages will be presented in order to offer some initial relative synchronization with the local sequence and an indication of some foreign connections. Comparison will be made principally with the most reliable and, since 1975, the most widely used MB IIa sequence of Tel Aphek (KOCHAVI, BECK and YADIN 2000; KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002). Given the short distance between Tel Aphek and Tel Ifshar, ca. 30 km or two days walk, even a limited presentation of the pottery should be an indication of their relative chronological relationship. In addition, the results of other settlement excavations were consulted as well, including, *inter alia*: from the Coastal Plain, Kabri (KEMPINSKI 2002) and Ashkelon (STAGER 2002); and, from the Jordan Valley, Dan (BIRAN, ILAN and GREENBERG 1996) and Tell el-Hayyat (FALCONER and FALL 2006). Evidence for contacts with the northern Levant are considered based on the excavations at Sidon (DOUMET-SERHAL 2008) and Tell ᶜArqa (THALMANN 2006) and to some extent with Egypt, based on comparisons with some of the earliest imports at sites such as ᶜEzbet Rushdi

[7] Note that KEMPINSKI (1992, 170) considered these remains to be a patrician structure.



No.	Type	Locus	Item no.
1	Bowl	1047	5568/12
2	Bowl	1047	5568/7
3	Storage jar	1047	5568/2
4	Storage jar	1047	5568/3

No.	Type	Locus	Item no.
5	Storage jar	1047	5575/2
6	Storage jar	1047	5575/1
7	Storage jar	1047	5568/6
8	Storage jar	1052	5589/1

Fig. 3 Phase A occupational level pottery from Locus 1047 and Locus 1052

and Tell el-Dabᶜa (Czerny 1998; 2002; Bagh 1998; 2000; 2002; Aston 2004).

Phase A

As noted above, Phase A subsumes all of the remains that precede the founding of the main building complex in Phase B. It includes both Pre-Phase B occupational levels of up to three sub-phases and the preparatory activity (leveling, fills, sub-foundation, etc.) for the construction of the Phase B building. Thus, the pottery of Phase A derives from assemblages that include material ranging from what was in use immediately before the laying out of the Phase B complex to earlier occupational levels that existed at an indeterminate time prior to Phase B. This preliminary presentation of the material will maintain a separation by *locus* with the earliest possible material, from the occupational levels. being presented first. Note that these assemblages are representative and do not include all of the extant examples or variations.

The earliest secure deposits with ceramics presented derive from: L751, a floor with an *in situ tabun*; L952, a pit sealed below Phase A deposits; L754, a pit below a Phase B floor, in which an MK Egyptian sherd was found (Marcus *et al.* 2008, fig. 2:3); L1047 and L1052, respectively, a floor and an accumulation on the natural soil that the former seals; and L1058 and L1056, which are apparently two parts of the same floor north of W945. Contexts that may be from a Phase A occupational level, but also might be related to the preparatory fills are: L1051, a probe beneath L1056; and L1078, a pit that cuts through a Phase A accumulation. Preparatory fills that form the sub-strata and make up of Phase B floors are L1133 and L1172. Middle Kingdom Egyptian sherds were found in two of these fills: L1204 and L1133 (Marcus *et al.* 2008, fig. 2:1, 2).

Phase A occupational levels

Bowls

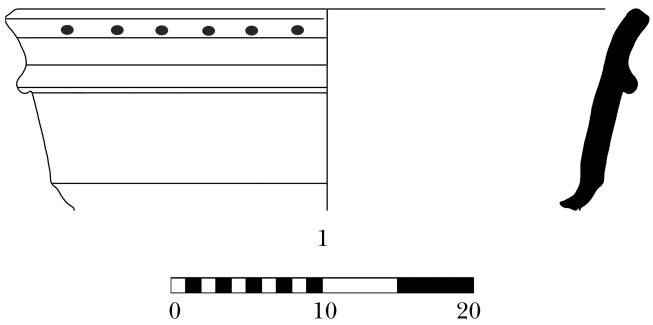
These two bowl-sherds are from open and S-shaped types, both of which are lacking any surface treatment (Fig. 3:1, 2). The open bowl is somewhat shallow; the rim is slightly thickened. Similar rims are found on slightly deeper open bowls at Aphek Phase 2 (Beck 2000a, fig. 10.18:7; 2000b, fig. 8.10:2, 3; Kochavi and Yadin 2002, fig. 14:3, 4, and 7). Only the rim and shoulder of the S-shaped bowl is preserved, but the soft carination of the rim belies its identification. A number of parallels may be drawn with examples from Aphek Phases 1 and 2 (Beck 2000b, figs. 8.10:25, 8.12:7; Kochavi and Yadin 2002, figs. 12:5, 13:14).

Cooking pot

This straight walled cooking pot (Fig. 4:1) is one of the earliest examples of a type common in all phases at Tel Ifshar. This particular vessel has a slightly everted wall, an applied ridge and puncture decoration. This type of everted wall is paralleled at Aphek Phases 1–2 and in very fragmentary examples in Phase 3 (Beck 2000a, figs. 10.10:23, 10.12:18, 10.13:20; 2000b, figs. 8.10:10, 8.11:4; Kochavi and Yadin 2002, figs. 12:11, 23:13–14).

Jars

Rim types of jars fall into three different basic types: simple everted and thickened, folded with various section shapes (Figs. 3: 3–5, 7, 8; 5:1–4)



No.	Type	Locus	Item no.	Description
1	Cooking pot	751	4527/1	Handmade

Fig. 4 Phase A occupational level pottery from Locus 751

and molded (Fig. 3:6). The first two types find numerous parallels at Aphek Phases 1–2 (BECK 1985, figs. 2:12–15, 4:9, 10; KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, figs. 12:13,14, 17:2, 3, 6, 7–9). It seems that the elongated folded rim with and without the ridge, which are characteristic of Phase 2 onwards (KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, 200), are absent in this admittedly small assemblage. The molded rim appears to be of a type similar to the elongated handleless jar from Phase B (see below).

Phase A possible occupational levels

Bowls

One open bowl with a simple rim and no surface treatment was found in the L1051 probe (Fig. 6:1). It has a good parallel in Aphek Phase 2 (BECK 2000a, fig. 10.1:12).

Cooking pots

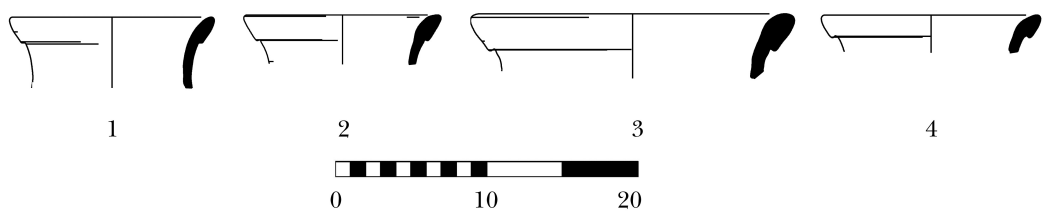
The wheel-made cooking pot with everted rim (Fig. 6:2) has a slight gutter, a feature that becomes more pronounced from Phase 1 to 2 at Aphek (KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, 198, 200, figs. 12:10, 16:2). What appears to be a miniature straight-walled cooking pot (Fig. 7:1) might have been a toy or an ex-voto.

Jar

One flaring folded rim of a storage jar (Fig. 6:3) is of a type similar to those discussed above.

Juglet

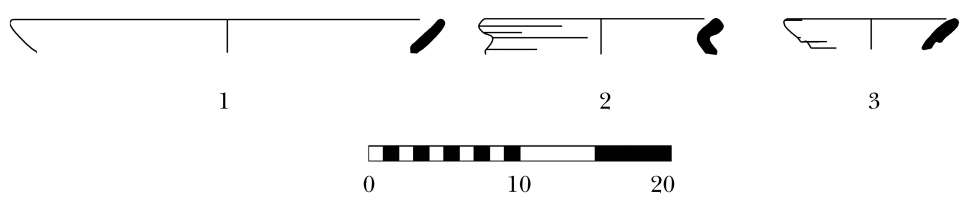
A nearly complete juglet was found in the pit, L1078 (Fig. 7:2). It was slightly warped prior to firing, but appears to have had a spherical to slightly piriform shaped body. Juglets appear



No.	Type	Locus	Item no.
1	Storage Jar	1058	5603/3
2	Storage Jar	1058	5602/1

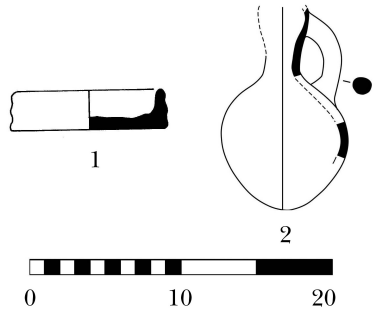
No.	Type	Locus	Item no.
3	Storage Jar	1058	5603/2
4	Storage Jar	1056	5596/1

Fig. 5 Phase A occupational level pottery from Locus 1058 and Locus 1056



No.	Type	Locus	Item no.
1	Bowl	1051	5588/3
2	Cooking pot	1051	5588/4
3	Storage jar	1051	5588/1

Fig. 6 Phase A possible occupational level pottery from Locus 1051



No.	Type	Locus	Item no.	Description
1	Cooking pot	1078	5049/1	Handmade
2	Juglet	1078	5823/1	Warped, remains of white wash

Fig. 7 Phase A possible occupational level pottery from Locus 1078

only from Phase 2 onwards at Aphek (KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, 206), but these all have flattened button bases. Other than its lack of a base and the slight gutter rim, this example is paralleled by a Phase 2 juglet in an unstratified burial at Aphek (BECK 2000a, fig. 10.1:9; KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, fig. 20:3)

Phase A preparatory fills and floor foundations.

Bowls

Four bowls are presented here (Fig. 8:1–4), of which only one has a complete profile. It is a simple, small bowl with a flat base; its rim simply thins out from the wall. The vessel is not symmetrical and the inside was not finished; there are signs of a mat impression on the bottom. The shape and the simple flat base are paralleled at Aphek Phase 2 (BECK 2000a, fig. 10.1:10). The second bowl has a more globular shape and an inverted rim that was flattened at the top, similar to types that begin to appear in Aphek Phase 2 (BECK 2000b, fig. 8.11:14). The last two bowls stand out in the use of a thin red slip on the inner and to some extent on the external surface. The first (Fig. 8:3) is similar to the first bowl, but has the remains of a knob handle, a feature that makes its first appearance in Aphek Phase 2 (KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, 200, fig. 14:15, 17). The last example (Fig. 8:4) is too fragmentary to precisely identify, but appears to be a type of S-shaped or hemispheric bowl with a slightly everted rim (cf. KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, fig. 13:9, 20).

Krater

This krater (Fig. 8:5) has an external square sectioned rim (cf. KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, fig. 15:9).

Cooking pot

This straight-walled cooking pot (Fig. 8:6) has a slightly inverted wall.

Jars

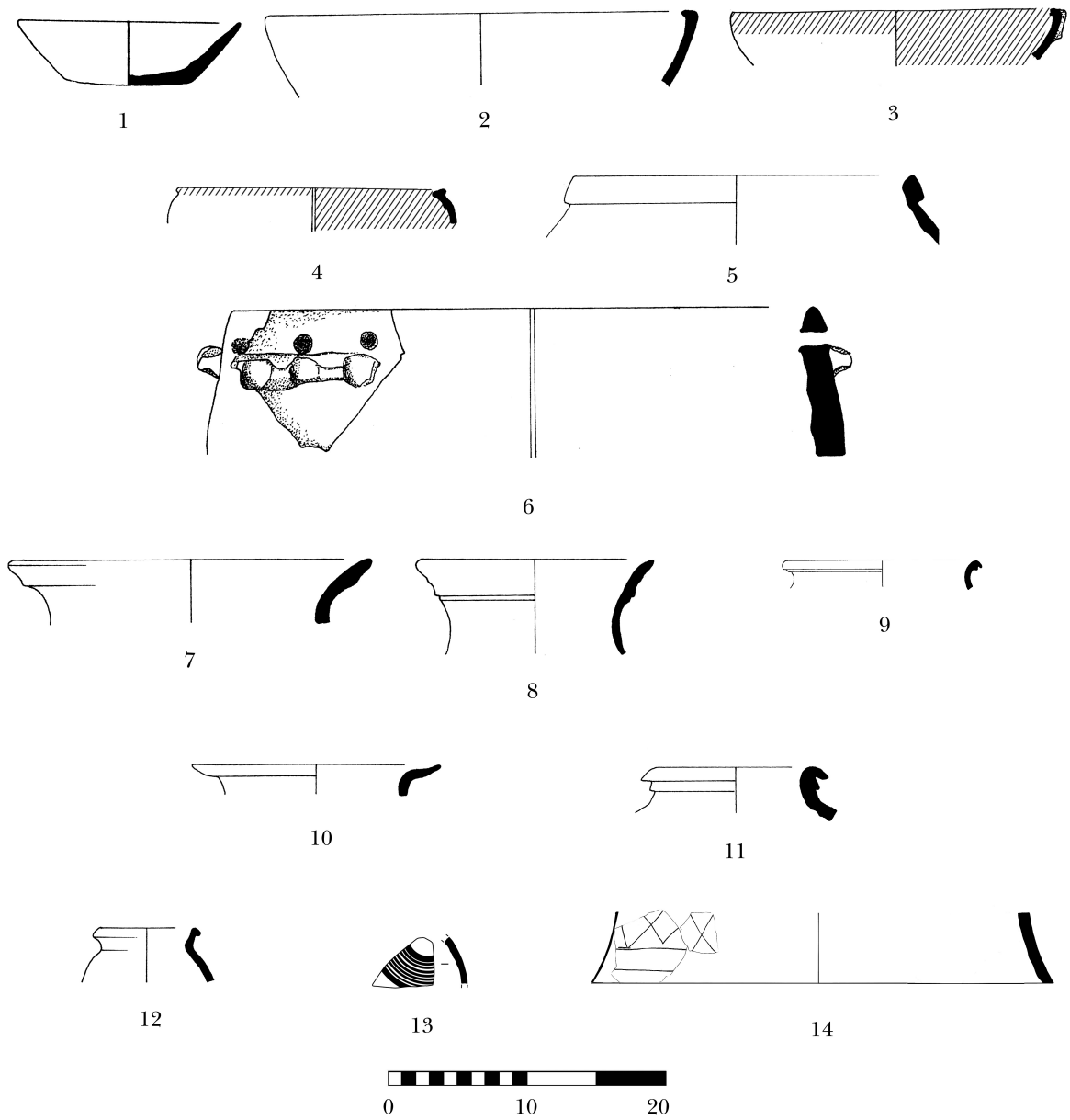
The storage jar rims presented here include folded, elongated folded with (Fig. 8:8) and without a ridge (Fig. 9:3), flaring (Fig. 8:7), thickened (Fig 9:2) and molded (Fig. 8:11), all of which have parallels at Aphek Phases 1–2 (KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, fig. 12:12–15, 17:1, 17). A number of other examples demand slightly more consideration:

The flat, flaring rim (Fig. 8:10) with a slight gutter is made of a highly fired, metallic-sounding brown fabric. Typologically, it is paralleled in the northern Levant at Tell ᶜArqa Phase N (THALMANN 2006, 141–143, pls. 86:4, 87:3, 5, 89:2, 90:1, 3).[8]

The flaring, externally folded and molded rim (Fig. 8:9), which creates a horizontal groov is known from the Jordan Valley at Dan Stratum XII (ILAN 1996, 222, fig. 4.103:2), Tell el-Hayyat Phase 4 (FALCONER and BERELOV 2006, fig. 4.5:u) and a tomb at Hagosherim (COVELLO-PARAN 1996, fig. 4:15). This rim shape is best known from Lebanon, at Tell ᶜArqa Phase N (THALMANN 2006, 142–143, pls. 88:6, 8–11, 89:1, 90:2) and in Syria at Mardikh IIIA2 (NIGRO 2002, figs. 7:18, 22, 9, 10:1–2), where it is referred to as a double rim.

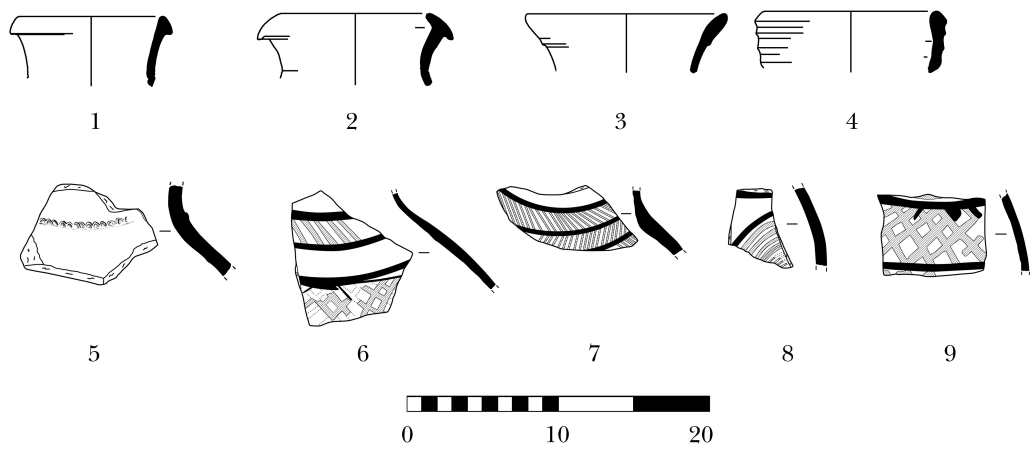
The coarsely ridged rim with a thick white wash (Fig. 9:4) recalls the "ridged neck" pithoi rims from the Ashkelon Moat Deposit that have been shown, petrographically, to have originated in Lebanon (STAGER 2002, 357, figs. 17, 18:D). In contrast to these examples, most ridged rim types generally have smoothed ridges and are rare along the southern Levantine coastal plain (BECK 2000a, fig. 10.13:22). They are much more common in the Jordan Valley, such as at Dan Stratum XII (ILAN 1996, 222, fig. 4.103:1), Hagosherim (COVELLO-PARAN 1996, fig. 4:16), Tell el-Hayyat Phase 4 (FALCONER and BERELOV 2006, fig. 4.5:o, p) and in Syria at Mardikh IIIA2 (NIGRO 2002, fig. 7:2–5). A glob-

[8] See also the discussion of the Phase B example below.



No.	Type	Locus	Item no.	Description
1	Bowl	1133	7068/1	Slightly warped; mat impression on base; not smoothed on inside
2	Bowl	1133	7040/2	
3	Bowl	1133	7040/3	Red slip; remains of a handle
4	Bowl	1133	7073/5	Red slip on inside, rim and outside just below rim
5	Krater	1133	7025/1	Light combing; white painted lines (groups of three) on outside and rim
6	Cooking pot	1133	5999/2	Handmade; applied and punctured decoration
7	Storage Jar	1133	7002/1	
8	Storage Jar	1133	5999/7	Combing
9	Storage Jar	1133	5986/7	
10	Storage Jar	1133	7008/1	Metallic firing
11	Storage Jar	1133	7008/2	
12	Bottle?	1133	7040/1	Vestige of white wash?
13	Juglet	1133	7008/4	Red paint
14	Incense Stand	1133	7002/2	Incised decoration

Fig. 8 Phase A pottery from accumulation/fill Locus 1133



No.	Type	Locus	Item no.	Description
1	Jar	1172	7259/4	Some remains of white paint in horizontal bands
2	Jar	1172	7259/2	Some remains of dark paint in vertical lines
3	Storage jar	1172	7259/6	
4	Storage jar	1172	7259/7	Thick white wash or paint on ridges
5	Jar	1172	7259/3	Applied decoration
6	Jar	1172	7259/9	Combing; faded black and red paint
7	Jar	1172	7259/1	Combing; brown and red paint on a white background
8	Jar	1172	7259/10	Combing; brown and red paint on a white background
9	Jar	1172	7259/8	Combing; black and red paint

Fig. 9 Phase A pottery from accumulation/fill Locus 1172

ular jar found in a tomb in Beirut has vestiges of a soft ridged rim (SAIDAH 1993–1994, pl. 4).[9]

Bottle?

No parallel has been found thus far for this vessel (Fig. 8:12), which could be a bottle or a flask. There was some consideration of it being of Egyptian origin, but the fabric precludes this possibility, but it might be evoking some sort of stone (alabaster?) vessel form. There is some similarity to a flask from Ugarit Moyen II (SCHAEFFER 1949, 102:18).

Stand

This (incense?) stand bottom (Fig. 8:14) is decorated with an incised repeating "X" pattern that creates a diamond motif. Similar designs were found adorning an applied plastic decoration on a stand at Nahariya (BEN-DOR 1950, 17, figs. 9, 10, pl. VII:9, 12, 13, 17) and on an applied plastic decoration on an unidentified vessel from Megiddo XV (LOUD 1948, pl. 112:11).[10]

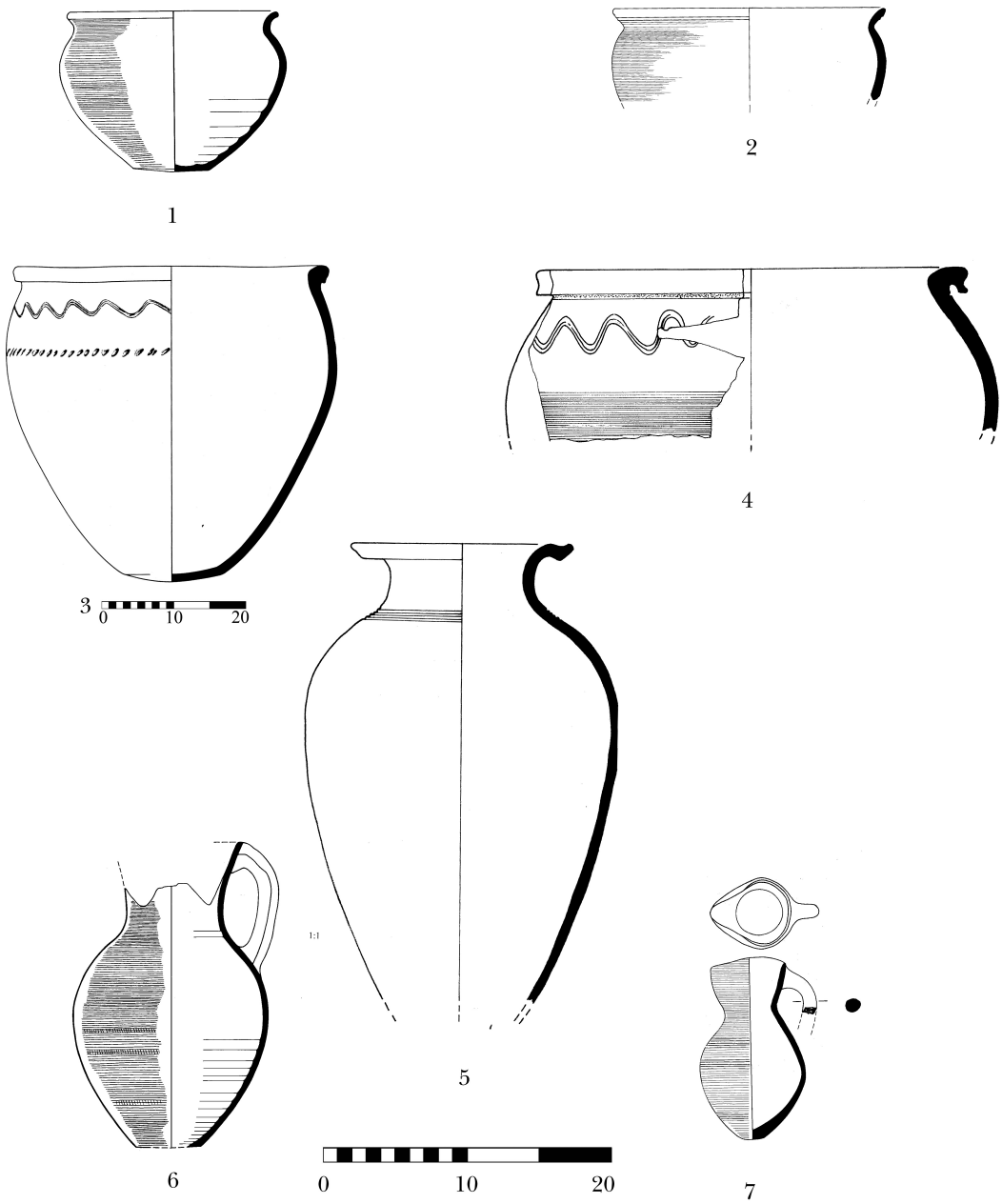
Decorated pottery

In addition to combing and white wash, storage jars are also decorated with rope decoration (Fig. 9:5), incised and applied, and painted decorations in both monochrome (Fig. 8:13) and bichrome patterns (Fig. 9:6–9). The last belong to the Levantine Painted Ware or family of pottery,[11] which has long been considered a *fossile directeur* of the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age IIa (BECK 1975; 1985)

[9] See, also, BAGH (2000, fig. 46:c), for an amended drawing that emphasizes the ridges.

[10] The two sherds (rim/shoulder and body) that comprise this vessel appear to be parts of a krater with an externally folded and flattened rim (see example from Phase B below). It is also decorated in what is described as a red painted checkerboard pattern, but which looks more to be a minimum of four criss-crossing rows of dark lines filled in with a lighter (red?) paint creating a sort of diamond pattern. Although ascribed to Stratum XV, it probably belongs to the early MB IIa Levantine Painted tradition. The combination of painted and applied decoration recalls the Montet Jar (BAGH 2000, 95–99, fig. 51:c).

[11] The term Levantine Painted Ware was first coined by TUBB (1983) and is still maintained despite the fact that it is not technically a ware (BAGH 2000, 29–30).



No.	Type	Locus	Item no.	Description
1	Bowl	841	4763/1	Complete; combed
2	Bowl	841	4546/1	Combed
3	Krater	841	4370/1	Complete; incised rope and combed decoration
4	Krater	841	4746/2	Combed decoration
5	Jar	841	4296/1	Dark reduced metallic fabric; incised decoration
6	Jug	841	4370/2	Combed; bottom cut off
7	Juglet	841	4348/2	Nearly complete; combed

Fig. 10 Selection of Phase B pottery from Locus 841

and has been extensively studied by BAGH (1988; 2000; 2002; 2003). The earliest appearance identified thus far at Tel Ifshar is in fragmentary examples in the preparatory fills below the Phase B floors. In her study of its "first appearance" at ᶜEzbet Rushdi, Bagh has suggested that the earliest painted pottery is typically monochrome on burnished surface, with the classic bichrome decoration developing

later. At Tel Ifshar, the bichrome decoration appears from the earliest occurrence of Levantine Painted Ware, although monochrome examples do appear. The examples from Tel Ifshar Phase A include the net pattern decoration, concentric circles, and a reversing hatched or herringbone pattern, often on a white washed background. All of the examples presented here are from jars, with the exception of the jug in L1133 (Fig. 8:13). Fig. 9:7 and 9:8 are very similar in fabric and decoration and may belong to the same vessel.

The motifs on these sherds (net pattern decoration, concentric circles, etc.) are all documented in Phase B at Tel Ifshar (Paley and Porath 1997, fig. 13.6:4, 5; see Fig. 11 below). The herringbone decoration (Fig. 9:7) also appears in an unpublished example from Phase B. Parallels for these decorative motifs can be found at Aphek Phases 1 and 2 (Beck 1985, fig. 3:7, 8, 10; 2000a, figs. 10.2:17–19, 10.4:3; 2000b, figs. 8.10:14, 8.11:16) and elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean littoral (Bagh 2000, *passim*).

Summary

The preliminary comparative analysis of the Phase A pottery suggests that the albeit limited assemblages have good parallels in Aphek Phases 1–2. The early occupation levels might suggest a synchronization with Phase 1, but the absence of the elongated folded storage rims and red slip could be a result of sample size. The preparatory fills appear to have much more in common with Aphek Phase 2 and also with the earliest MB IIa stratum at Tel Dan and Tell ᶜArqa. The Phase A material defined as possibly being from occupational levels (Figs. 6–7) shows no greater affinity to either of these sub-phases. Further analysis is required to better qualify these observations.

Phase B

The Phase B assemblages contain numerous complete or restored ceramic vessels along with even more voluminous fragmentary sherds. As this material is still undergoing study, for the purposes of this presentation only a relevant selection of complete or nearly complete vessels will be presented, all of which derive from a single Phase B room (L841), which also produced most of the MK Egyptian pottery (Marcus *et al.* 2008). Some of the Phase B pottery from L841, L927, and L1111 has already been presented previously in very preliminary form (Paley and Porath 1997), but without reference to its context.

Bowls

These two S-shaped bowls (Fig. 10:1–2) are paralleled at Aphek from Ory's earlier excavation (Illife 1936, 122, no. 7, 124, no. 52; Beck 2000a, fig. 10.27:10) and while no details are known of its stratigraphic context, they certainly belong in Phase 2 (Beck 2000b, fig. 8.18:7).

Kraters

A large and a medium size krater are presented here. The complete krater (Fig. 10:3) was found sunk in the floor of L841, such that its incised wavy band and rope impression decorations were no longer visible. A jug (Fig. 10:6) was found inside near the top of the debris within the krater. The fragmentary example (Fig. 10:4) was found in the destruction debris above the floor. They both have externally folded rims; the larger of the two has been flattened. Complete kraters are a rare find in the MB IIa southern Levant, although their rims are well-represented in settlement levels; a nearly complete example was found in Dan Stratum XII, but it is unclear whether it is from a settlement context, or reused as a burial vessel or cultic receptacle (Ilan 1996, 204, fig. 4.103:3). That example also has an incised wavy band on its upper third; its rim is much more like the fragmentary example presented here. In general, this vessel type and decoration are more common in the Jordan Valley (Falconer and Berelov 2006, figs. 4.4:i, 4.6:k) and inland Syria (Matthiae 1981, figs. 37–38; Nigro 2002, figs. 3:21–23, 20:14), with a variant occurring also in Lebanon (Thalmann 2006, pl. 92:9–12). However, there is a rim of this type at Phase 2 Aphek (Beck 2000a, fig. 10.1:18).

Jars

Two elongated handleless jars and a jar rim from L1111 were published previously (Paley and Porath 1997, fig. 13.6:1–3). The slender version of this type (Paley and Porath 1997, fig. 13.6:3) has been discussed by a number of scholars (Beck 2000a, 180; Kochavi and Yadin 2002, 200, 205; Schiestl 2002, 346–350, fig. 13), who have noted parallels at Aphek Phase 2 (Beck 2000a, fig. 10.6:4), Akko (Dothan 1990, fig. 5),[12] Kabri Stra-

[12] See, now, Beeri (2008) on the late MB remains in Area AB including this vessel.

tum 4 (KEMPINSKI, GERSHUNY and SCHEFTELOWITZ 2002, 467, fig. 5.44:6),[13] Afula Stratum IV (GAL and COVELLO-PARAN 1996, 22:10), a burial jar assigned to Megiddo XIIIA (LOUD 1948, pl. 18:7), Ugarit Moyen 2 (SCHAEFFER 1949, fig. 100:28, 31, 32) and among the Levantine imports at Tell el-Dabᶜa Stratum d/1=G/4 (SCHIESTL 2002, 346–350, fig. 13:1). Three additional parallels, which are extremely similar to examples from Aphek and Ugarit, can be found in an MB IIa Tomb 1 at Kfar Veradim (GETZOV and NAGAR 2002, 6–11, figs. 8:2, 3, 9:1).[14] Beck notes that the ware of the Aphek example is made of a yellowish-white clay, which is similar to the Tel Ifshar jar, but quite different from the example at Akko. A petrographic analysis by Goren of the Akko jar is quoted by DOTHAN (1990, 148, n. 3) as indicating a local Galilean origin. Petrographic analysis by COHEN-WEINBERGER and GOREN (2004, 93, table 1:17) place the origin of the import to Tell el-Dabᶜa, which is described as a creamy whitish yellow fabric (SCHIESTL 2002, 347), in the region of Ugarit, the Amuq or the Cilician coast. Thus, a northern origin for the examples from Aphek and Tel Ifshar seems highly likely.

Another import is a piriform handleless jar from L841 (Fig. 10:5) from which a nearly complete profile has been reconstructed.[15] This vessel has a combed decoration around its neck. The fabric has a very dark grey color and is highly fired to a metallic sound. These characteristics and the distinctive flaring gutter rim permit a fairly certain identification with the jars and rim tradition of Tell ᶜArqa and the Akkar Plain (THALMANN 2006, 141–144, pls. 86–89). There is no exact parallel for the Tel Ifshar jar, which is smaller (h = ca. 35 cm), has a shorter neck and broader shoulder than most of the published examples of this type.[16] Nevertheless, a number of the vessel rims are quite similar (THALMANN 2006, pls. 86:4, 8, 87:2–5, 89:2, 90:1). Exports from Tell ᶜArqa or the Akkar Plain to other areas of the northern Levant have been documented by THALMANN (2008, 67), but the site at the greatest distance from the source where these wares have been found is Tell el-Dabaᶜa. There, a fairly substantial amount that was found, beginning no earlier than Stratum G/4 (KOPETZKY 2008), i.e., somewhat later in the Middle Bronze Age IIa than the example presented here.

Jugs and Juglets

Locus 841 produced quite a few jugs and juglets, a sample of which is presented here. The combed jug (Fig. 10:6) and juglet (Fig. 10:7) have a very similar appearance to one of the bowls discussed above (Fig. 10:1). As noted above, the jug was found inside the sunken krater; unfortunately, the rim was never restored. An unusual feature is that the very bottom of the vessel is neatly cut off, but it is not yet clear if this was intentional or not. If the latter is the case, it may have functioned as a funnel. Although the rim and base are missing, a parallel for the body type is known from Aphek 2 (BECK 2000a, fig. 10.18:8). The squat dipper juglet with a carinated or bi-conical body is unparalleled, but seems to herald later squat juglets. The fine, deep wheel combing hearkens back to Early Bronze Age antecedents and has also been found on various MB IIa forms at Beirut (BADRE 1997, 32, 34, fig. 14:2–4).

The five examples of Levantine Painted Ware from L841 presented here have been published before (PALEY and PORATH 1997, fig. 13.5:1–3, 5, 6).[17] BAGH (2000, 68–69; 2003, 229, fig. 5) has discussed some of them and noted both the Levantine Painted Ware motifs and the combined Syro-Cilician and Levantine Painted Ware char-

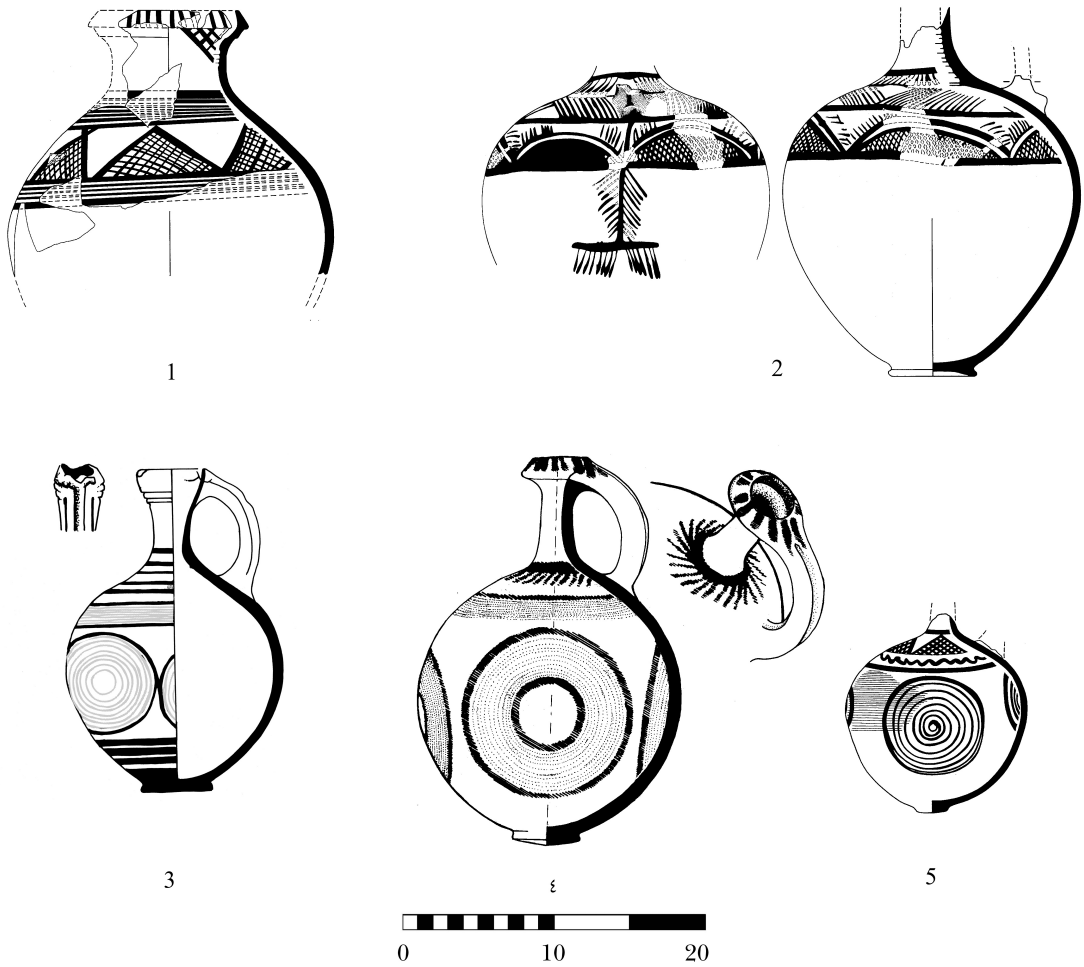
[13] This vessel comes from L473, a floor which is not discussed in the final report apart from appearing in the the list of *loci* (KEMPINSKI 2002, 467). For more details on this context and the associated mid-MB IIa pottery, see MIRON's (1988, 26–28) preliminary report.

[14] This burial cave was badly damaged and was in a state of disorder. It was used for a lengthy time, during which 19 individuals were interred. The ceramic remains include material from Aphek Phase 2 through possibly the MB IIa–IIb transition.

[15] Part of a flat base of an identical fabric was also found, but a join to the remainder of the vessel has not been located yet.

[16] Using Pot_Utility 1.05 (©J.P. Thalmann & ARCANE), the volume of this vessel was estimated at no more than 7 liters, which is less than all of the jars in Tell ᶜArqa Phase N (THALMANN 2003, 31–34; 2006, fig. 62).

[17] The quantity of Levantine Painted Ware at the site, in general, is quite impressive, in particular the numbers of complete or restorable vessels from settlement, rather than mortuary contexts. So far, 79 examples have been itemized; their phasing, minimum and maximum number of objects, etc., will be presented in a separate study. In addition to those presented here from Phase B, L927 also produced four globular handleless jars, two of which have been published previously (PALEY and PORATH 1997, fig. 13.6:4, 5).



No.	Type	Locus	Item no.	Description
1	Jar	841	4298/1	Reddish brown paint
2	Jug	841	4347/1	Burnished; cream slip; dark brown paint
3	Jug	841	4346/1	Complete; signs of burnishing; brown and red paint
4	Jug	841	4761/1	Complete; burnished; red and brown paint
5	Juglet	841	4762/1	Combed; dark brown paint

Fig. 11 Selection of Phase B Levantine Painted Pottery from Locus 841

acteristics in, for example, the long-necked jug (Fig. 11:2), which is paralleled at Ugarit. Parallels for these motifs and forms can be found throughout the Levantine coast (BAGH 2000, *passim*; 2004), but largely in fragmentary examples at Aphek Phases 1–2 (BECK 1985, fig. 3:7–9; 2000a, figs. 10.2:17–19, 10.18:9, 10.29:9).

Summary

Although this presentation was not intended to be a complete consideration of the full range of pottery of Phase B, a number of observations may be made based on the above and previous published reports. Surface treatments such as combing, white wash, bichrome painting on white wash or combing, cream colored and red slips, burnishing – the last two on a more limited scale – suggest that Phase B is coeval with Aphek Phase 2. More importantly, the nature of the assemblages suggest that, *inter alia*, activities such as storage, food preparation and serving were carried out in this building, as well as perhaps some ritual activity.[18] While the painted jars, jugs and juglets, the "onion-shaped" vessels (PALEY and

[18] In addition to the monolith, an incense stand was found in L927.

PORATH 1997, fig. 13.6:6)[19] could have all been sealed for the transport of a high value contents, all could have equally served as fancy table ware, for pouring and communal drinking, activities which befits an elite structure as this building phase appears to be. What is all the more impressive is the quantity of wide-ranging imported or foreign related items (i.e., those for which it is not yet possible to distinguish between truly traded and inspired items), both ceramics and cedar for construction.

DISCUSSION

For more than 30 years the results from the excavation of Tel Aphek have provided the key stratigraphically based ceramic typological sequence for the relative chronology of the MB IIa southern Levant. Moreover, the character of its finds have set the tone and the agenda for research on the region's foreign relations or, in light of the limited evidence from Tel Aphek, the lack thereof. In contrast, the finds from Tel Ifshar offer evidence of demonstrable contacts with Egypt, the northern Levant and inland Syria. This evidence offers the opportunity to synchronize some of the sites of the Middle Bronze Age IIa with other regions both in relative and absolute terms, and offer insight into the nature of foreign trade during this period.

In relative terms, the earliest occupation levels in Tel Ifshar Phase A can be synchronized either with Tel Aphek Phase 1 or 2. Tel Ifshar Phase B and the preparatory fills of Phase A are coeval with Aphek Phase 2. Through Tel Ifshar, parallels with Tell ᶜArqa Phase N and Ugarit Moyen 2 may eventually enable the synchronizing of the southern and northern Levantine coast. Possible comparisons with the sequence of inland Syria, e.g., Tell Mardikh IIIA2, offer potential comparisons with Mesopotamian chronology. Unfortunately, synchronizing the early phases of Tel Ifshar with the Tell el-Dabᶜa sequence is not yet possible. Apart from the appearance of bichrome Levantine Painted Ware, which appears first in Tell el-Dabᶜa in Phase H=d/2, Phases A and B at Tel Ifshar seem to be much earlier. If BAGH's argument (2002, 96–101; MARCUS 2007, 160–161) is correct that the monochrome painted bands and wavy lines typically on a burnished surface at ᶜEzbet Rushdi represents an early Levantine Painted Ware phase, then the presence of bichrome motifs at Tel Ifshar would place it at a later stage between ᶜEzbet Rushdi and Tell el-Dabᶜa Stratum H. However, this sequence of solely monochrome to later bichrome pottery has yet to be confirmed elsewhere and could be the result of very selective assemblage of imports to Egypt. In addition to the various early monochrome painted motifs from various Levantine sites which appear in some cases alongside bichrome examples (MARCUS 2007, 160–162), a monochrome painted concentric circle motif on a hand burnished jug appears at Aphek Phase 2 (BECK 2000b, fig. 8.10:14). In absolute historical terms, the Middle Kingdom Egyptian pottery in Tel Ifshar Phases A and B offers a time frame in the reigns of Amenemhet II through Senwosret III (ca. 1911–1850 BCE) for the transition between these two phases (MARCUS *et al.* 2008). This historically based date range, which is supported by radiocarbon evidence from Tel Ifshar (MARCUS 2003), offers the first available time frame for the period of Palace I at Aphek.

Until recently, the presence of such a combination of finds in the southern Levant reflecting contacts between the southern Levant, Egypt and the northern Levant (Lebanon and coastal and inland Syria) would have seemed devoid of any historical context. However, a number of recent studies of MK Egyptian texts provide a possible background for the imports at Tel Ifshar. The Mit Rahina inscription, which represents a portion of the royal annals of Amenemhet II, recounts maritime expeditions to the northern Levant, and possibly Cyprus and Cilicia, and the import of a variety of finished products and raw materials, principally cedar (MARCUS 2007). This evidence, together with SCHNEIDER's (2002) new reading of various place names in the *Tale of Sinuhe*, which he identifies as Kizzuwadna (Cilicia) and Qatnah, along with the mention of a Hurrian royal title, suggests that Egypt had contacts with the Lebanese and Syrian coast as far north as southern Turkey. Finally, James Allen's analysis (lecture given at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 5 March 2008) of an inscription of Khnumhotep III from a mastaba

[19] This example, which is red-slipped and burnished, is one of three such vessels from L927. The other two are cream-slipped.

from Dahshur indicates that, as in the Mit Rahina inscription (MARCUS 2007, 150–154, 171–173), Egypt imported cedar from places other than Byblos – in this case Ullaza (a city north of Byblos, perhaps Tripoli, see GOREN, FINKELSTEIN and NA'AMAN 2002, 198–199; 2004, 101–102, fig. 7.1). According to Allen, the inscription portrays a period of enmity between Egypt and Byblos (see also MARCUS 2007, 171–173); only after a military conflict with Byblos during the reign of Senwosret III were the traditional close formal relations established. Contemporary archaeological evidence from ᶜEzbet Rushdi, where imported jars from the southern Levantine coast were found, suggests that various ports-of-call in the southern and northern Levant were employed in this maritime network (MARCUS 2007, 164–170). Thus, the presence at Tel Ifshar of pottery from (or related to) the Akkar plain (north of Tripoli), Ugarit, and Egypt, and the extensive use of cedar in the Phase B building fits into an documented pattern of maritime exchange between these regions during the period covered by the Mit Rahina and the events of the Khnumhotep III inscription.

If the above reconstruction is correct, evidence for this trade should be found at contemporary ports and perhaps inland polities as well. However, in the current state of regional research, it seems that Tel Ifshar, nestled some 5 km from a sea that is not visible from the tell, albeit on a navigable river, is unique in the quantity and variety of such evidence.[20] Until the study of Phases A–C is completed, it would be premature to attempt an explanation for Tel Ifshar's unparalleled assemblages. Nevertheless, a number of observations and speculations can and should be made. One, the degree to which this early MB IIa phase has been explored among sites along the southern Levantine coast is quite limited. Tel Ifshar may be a case of archaeological hyper-visibility. Those sites where these early phases were identified (e.g., Aphek, Tel Kabri, Tel Nami, etc.) have largely been defined by mortuary contexts or by fragmentary sherds. Thus, the high state of preservation as a result of Phase B's destruction may offer both an opportunity and the potential for bias. It is conceivable that more detailed and systematic fabric analyses of the fragmentary remains from these sites might shed more light on the foreign relations outlined above.[21]

On the other hand, it is quite possible that something was indeed afoot at Tel Ifshar in the early Middle Bronze Age. Despite its apparently small size, it may have benefited from either an amenable location, or either local or foreign initiative. As noted above, its location is hardly one that would have made it stand out any more than other sites in the Coastal Plain. However, it is quite possible that for a relatively brief period of time (ca. 50–60 years) at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age IIa, the mouth of the Alexander River offered an attractive bay for ships that interacted with Tel Ifshar via some as yet undiscovered rivermouth site. The dynamics of coastal geomorphological processes could have rendered such conditions unfavorable in a few generations. Until then, the roads and paths converging at Tel Ifshar from the north, east and south would have had increased importance. The location on a river system that leads up to the Highlands could have provided access to goods from that region, such as possibly *pistacia terebinthus* resin (MARCUS 2007, 151) or raw materials and products being transshipped from further east. In any event, the location brought both prosperity and suffering upon the inhabitants, the latter reflected in the multiple destructions of the site.

If the development of Tel Ifshar Phase B was the result of the initiative of its inhabitants, they were clearly capable of reaching a level of prosperity rapidly and displaying this wealth both in immovable and movable property. Unfortunately, given the limited extent of the excavation in the western wing and to the south west, the size of the overall complex is still uncertain, as well as

[20] A cedar sample from the small MB IIa anchorage at Tel Nami (LEV-YADUN, ARTZY, MARCUS and STIDSING 1996) along with some Levantine Painted Ware with combined Syro-Cilician motifs (ARTZY 1995, 20, fig. 2.4), may also be a reflection of this early network.

[21] Note that no reference has been made to MCGOVERN's Neutron Activation Analysis of samples from Tel Ifshar (2000, 172–173), largely because, as with most of the samples from the southern Levant, no interpretation of the results was offered other than an indication by asterisk of what he considered to be local. This study will be engaged and contrasted once a planned petrographic study of Tel Ifshar's pottery is completed.

whether this building is a single entity, or two buildings sharing a single central courtyard and entrance. Whatever the case may be, following a fairly short period of archaeological time, ca. 1–2 phases of occupation, an impressive monumental complex was constructed with walls of a size usually reserved for palaces, temples and other such edifices, and roofed it with imported cedar rafters. Although it is premature to make any conclusions regarding the overall function(s) of the building, whether administrative, ritual, or a combination of both, the rapidity with which it developed suggests a degree of prosperity for the site or for the upper echelon of its population. The fact that MK Egyptian and northern Levantine pottery appears in Phase A is evidence for foreign contacts preceding the founding of the building, which suggests that trade was a feature of this site's economy at a fairly early stage of its existence. Whether these initial imports or their inspiration, or the fancy table ware of Phase B are a reflection of the origin of the population or the contemporary fashion for what should be considered "elite" must be explored further within a broader consideration of the entire Phase B occupational level and assemblage. Only then will it be possible to distinguish whether the impressive remains in Tel Ifshar are a result of local or exogenous factors.

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