

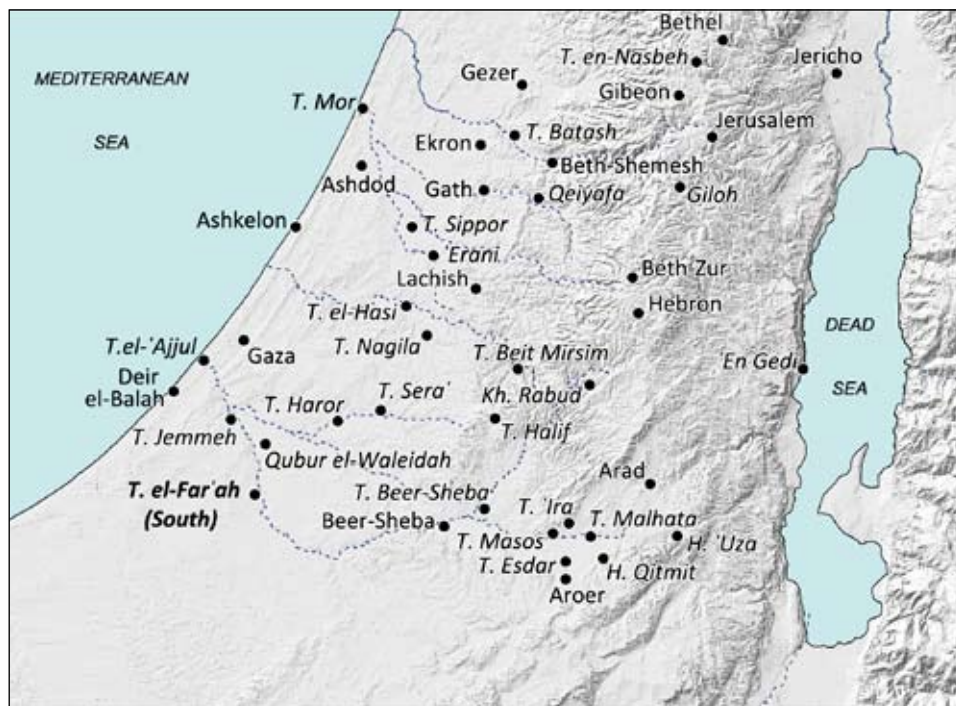
Tell el-Far'ah (South) Cemetery 200 Revisited

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Abstract

The Iron Age Cemetery 200 at Tell el-Far'ah (South) in southwest Israel was excavated by Flinders Petrie in 1928. The evidence was never fully published and was studied by a group of

archaeologists from Ben-Gurion University and the University College London. The new evaluation of the cemetery discusses the evidence in the context of recent archaeological research in the southern Israel and the northwestern Negev.¹



1 Map

Introduction

Tell el-Far'ah (South) is located in southwest Israel and is the last tell site on the route from the Mediterranean southwards into the desert of the Negev (Fig. 1). The site lies 24 kilometers southeast of Gaza and 30 kilometers west of Beersheba on a loess cliff above the banks of the Nahal Besor (Wadi Ghazze) (map reference: New Israel Grid 1507.5770). The site is to be distinguished from Tell el-Far'ah North, ancient Tirza near Nablus (ancient Shechem).

The name of the site does not reflect any ancient toponymy. The Arab name "Tell el-Far'ah" (or Tell el-Fari'ah) simply means "tall, towering mound."² The ancient name of the site is still disputed. Petrie identified the site with Biblical Beth-Pelet (hence the title of his site report). W.F. Albright identified the site as Sharuhin (Abel 1938: 33; Albright 1929: 7). Albright's identification was rejected by Kempinski (1974: 150) and Shea 1979 (1979: 2). Nadav Na'aman proposed identifying the site with Biblical Shur³ (Na'aman 1980: 100-105). Knauf and Niemann identify Tell el-Far'ah (South) with Ziklag (Knauf and Niemann 2011).

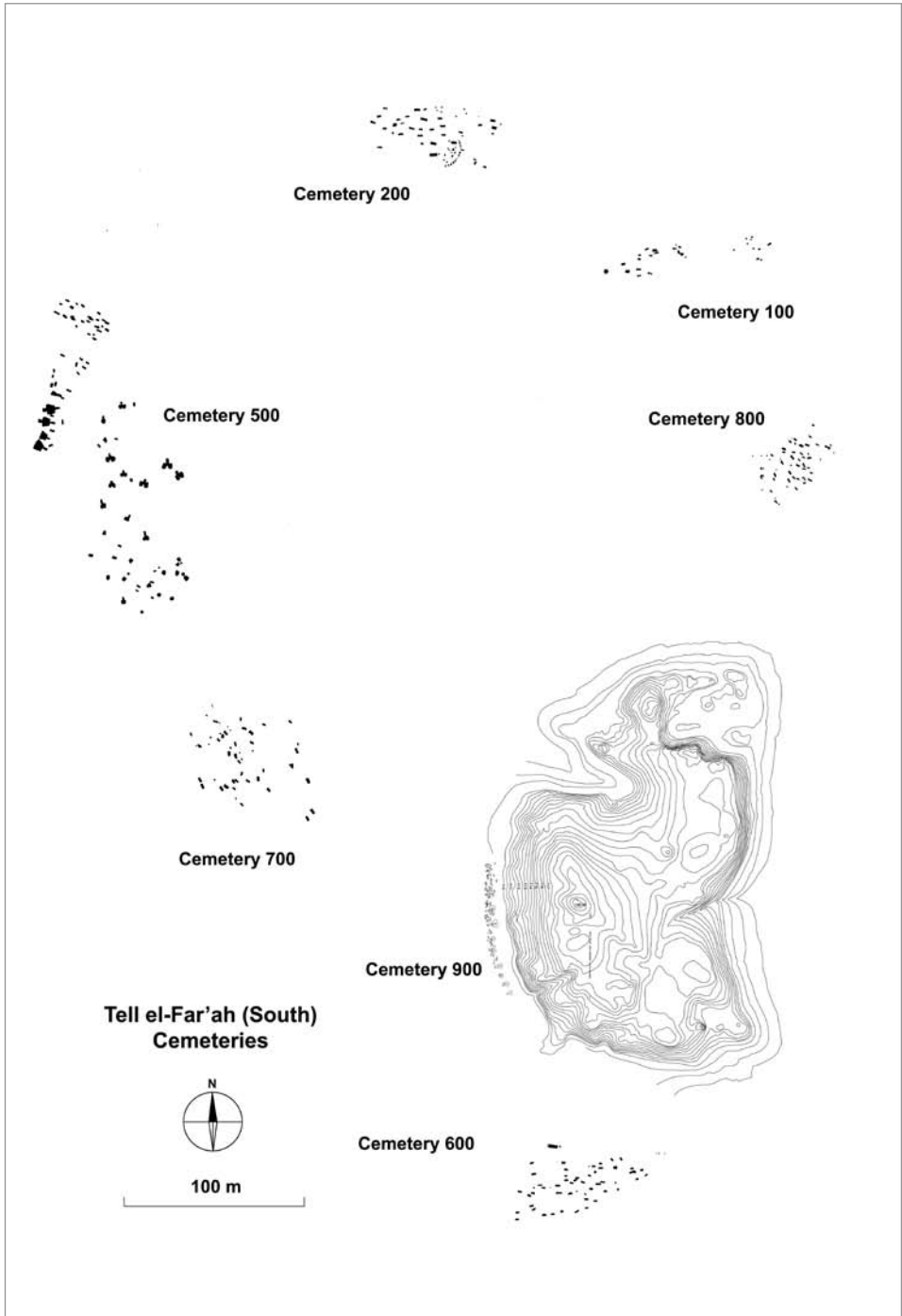
Tell el-Far'ah (South) was previously investigated in two seasons of excavations conducted in 1928 and 1929 by the British School of Archaeology in Egypt under the direction of W.M.F. Petrie.⁴ The publication of the excavated areas on the mound revealed little in comparison with the many tombs that were investigated in the cemeteries around the tell. Two reports were published by Petrie (1930) and Starkey and Harding (1932). More finds were published by Duncan (1930) and Price Williams (1977). In 1976, Rudolph Cohen directed salvage excavations at the site

(Cohen 1977). After an intensive archaeological survey on the site in 1998, excavations were resumed at Tell el-Far'ah (South) in 1999 under the direction of Gunnar Lehmann of Ben Gurion University of the Negev in cooperation with Tammi J. Schneider of Claremont Graduate University, California and H. Michael Niemann of Rostock University, Germany.⁵

The previous excavations by Petrie also provided finds and data for a number of studies concerned with the Egyptian architecture at the site (Morris 2005; Oren 1984; Yannai 1995; 2002); specific small finds (Iliffe 1935; Keel 1996; Khalil 1986; Münger 2011), (Maxwell-Hyslop *et al.* 1978a; Maxwell-Hyslop *et al.* 1978b; Platt 1976; Shea 1986); figurative art discovered in the settlement (Fischer 2011; Liebowitz 1980) and epigraphic evidence from the site (Goldwasser and Wimmer 1999; Naveh 2009: 28-30, 118-124).

Petrie's excavations the cemeteries uncovered hundreds of graves dating from the Middle Bronze Age through the Persian period (Fig. 2). The excavators published only very short accounts of their finds (Petrie 1930; Starkey and Harding 1932). The various cemeteries became later the focus of several studies mostly focusing on particular periods (Braunstein 1998; 2011; Laemmel 2003; McClellan 1979; Price Williams 1977; Stiebing 1970; Waldbaum 1966; Wright 1959).

None of these studies published and analyzed the finds from Cemetery 200 in full. Except for a short paper by Olga Tufnell (Tufnell 1930), this cemetery remained neglected in the research. The graves, dated to the "Solomonic" period by Petrie and Tufnell, belong in fact to the 10th through the 8th centuries BCE with one grave



2 Plan of the cemeteries at Tell el-Far'ah South

dating to the 8th/7th century BCE and two to the Roman period. Since 2015 a group of researchers from Ben-Gurion University began recording and studying the graves of Cemetery 200. The group was supported and joined by Dr Rachael Sparks, Keeper of the Institute of Archaeology Collections at University College London.

The finds of Cemetery 200 are today dispersed in many countries.⁶ The bulk of the material and the original records are kept in the collections of the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. The current locations of most of the dispersed finds were identified by R. Sparks in many years of investigations. The available material in the United Kingdom and in the Rockefeller Museum also known as the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem includes most of the finds from Cemetery 200 and allows a comprehensive publication and investigation of this Iron Age cemetery.

The study of a cemetery with burials dating to the Iron Age IIA and IIB in the northwestern Negev is in particular of importance against the background of recent progress in the Iron Age chronology. Until recently, the Iron Age of the northwestern Negev was little known in terms of modern archaeological research. The excavations of the Ben-Gurion University at Qubur el-Walaydah (Berlejung and Lehmann 2010) and Tell el-Far'ah (South) (Lehmann *et al.* (in print)) yielded new evidence which can be compared with the P. Nahshoni's excavations at Nahal Patish (Nahshoni 2009) and the finds from Eliezer Oren's excavations at Tel Sera' (Tell esh-Sharia'), which is currently prepared for excavations (Golding-Meir 2015). In addition, Gus Van Beek's explorations at Tell Jemmeh

have been published recently (Ben-Shlomo and Van Beek 2014).

A current, yet unpublished study of the Iron Age pottery in the northern Negev connects the ceramics with the radiocarbon based new Iron Age chronology, sub-dividing the Iron Age IIA in two groups, the early and the late Iron Age IIA (Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004). The publications of the pottery from Khirbet Qeiyafa (Kang 2012; 2015) and Tell es-Safi (ancient Gath) (Shai and Maeir 2012; Zukerman 2012) provide essential references for dating the finds from Cemetery 200. The pottery comparisons and in particular the appearance of Late Decorated Philistine Pottery (or Ashdod Ware) at Qubur el-Walaydah, Tell el-Far'ah (South) and Tel Sera' allowed defining the early and late Iron Age IIA assemblages of the 10th and the 9th centuries BCE.

Cemetery 200 is the northernmost cemetery of the seven major cemeteries excavated at Tell el-Far'ah (South). It is the only one with a significant number of graves from the late Iron Age IIA. This period is today dated to the 9th century BCE. Burials from the late Iron Age IIA were not found at any other cemetery of the site.

According to his records, Petrie excavated 65 graves of Cemetery 200. Of the 65 burials, 37 graves are inhumations and 28 are cremation burials. The inhumations were, according to Tufnell's short publication (Tufnell 1930: 11) all cist graves which were stone-lined and covered with large slabs of limestone from the nearby wadi-bed. The only exceptions were three graves, 204, 205 and 222, which represent burials of children. A stone floor lining inside a cist was noted only once in grave 202.

The graves were most probably marked, since there are only very few cases in which a later grave cut into an earlier one. It appears, that throughout the use of Cemetery 200 the graves remained marked or at least their location was known. At two graves, 201 and 202, finds were made which suggest some activities such memorial services at the burials. Above the covering slabs pottery sherds were found and even a whole lamp, which suggests that these tombs were held in some reverence by later visitors (Tufnell 1930: 11). It was usual to find the ground by the entrance, on the east, blackened by the original mud sealing, and the blocking stones had obviously been removed and replaced at least once.

Such attempts for an ongoing relationship with the dead were not observed at Ashkelon and the excavators assumed that the lack of memorial rituals are a characteristic of “Philistine” burial practice (Master and Aja 2017: 156).

The graves are orientated west-east, with the heads usually lying in the west. The cist graves were repeatedly used for burials. While in most graves there were less than 20 burials, a few contained many more, with grave 201 containing as many as 116 adults and six children. As is usual in early Iron Age graves, all genders and age groups are represented.

Only two inhumation graves are exceptional in having extraordinary many burials and numerous grave goods. These are graves 201 and 229. Graves 213, 228, 238 and 239 have all more than 18 burials, but contained only a modest number of grave goods. In contrast, graves 202, 222, 240 and 241 are rich graves that do not contain many burials, but a substantial amount of grave goods.

Among the 37 inhumations in cist graves, 23 graves (62%) were first buried in the early Iron Age IIA. 10 early Iron Age II graves (43%) were not continued in the late Iron Age IIA, yet most (57%) of the early Iron Age II graves were continuously in use in the late Iron Age II. In the late Iron Age IIA 28 cremation burials were prepared in Cemetery 200, introducing a new burial custom. During the Iron Age IIA, Cemetery 200 is characterized by continuity and expansion. During the Iron Age IIB burial ceased in Cemetery 200 and only one grave is dated to the 8th/7th century BCE; even later two graves were dug in the Roman period.

The construction of the inhumation graves, their grave goods and in particular their pottery is very similar to the recently excavated and published cemetery at Ashkelon (Master and Aja 2017). The graves at Ashkelon also date to the early and late Iron Age IIA.

The cremation burials of Cemetery 200 are a unique phenomenon among the cemeteries of Tell el-Far’ah (South). The only other grave at the site containing charred remains of humans is grave 740, dating to the Persian period. The cremations of Cemetery 200 were previously discussed by Culican, Bienkowski and Bloch-Smith (Bienkowski 1982; Bloch-Smith 1992; Culican 1973). Culican correctly pointed out that the cremations at Tell el-Far’ah (South) seem to date to the 9th century BCE. Our study of the pottery demonstrates that the earliest inhuman burials of Cemetery 200 begin in the early Iron Age IIA in the 10th century BCE. The cremation burials all date to the late Iron Age IIA and possibly to the early Iron Age IIB.

The cremation burials are graves for single human individuals. With a few exceptions, all cremation burials were interred in a limited area south of the inhumation graves. The cremation graves appear to have noticed the contemporary inhumation graves since cremation burials never cut into an inhumation grave.

The cremated remains were buried in urns. While some of the urns appear to have been specifically produced for this purpose, in many cases large “Philistine” cooking jars were used as urns. The types used are in mostly late Iron Age IIA types (Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2008: Fig. 3h, 3i and 3k). The vessels used as urns never appear in the inhumation burials, neither the specialized urn types, nor the large “Philistine” cooking jars.

Among the grave goods are small pottery vessels which were placed inside the urn. The vessels are often of Bikai’s type jug 8A.e and 8A.f (Bikai 1978). Those small jugs are apparently a “Phoenician”, more precise Tyrian production and date to the late Iron Age IIA and early Iron Age IIB. We did not identify any examples of Black-on-Red vessels in the cremation burials. Although “Phoenician” juglets appear more frequently in the cremation burials than in the inhumation graves, we find it difficult to identify the cremation burials as Phoenician graves based only on the appearance of these juglets. There seem be other explanations for the presence of the juglets, which are characteristic of many contemporary burials and settlement contexts all along the Levantine coast.

Other grave goods included typically iron and copper bangles and bracelets. The jewelry of the Iron Age II graves was studied by A. Golani (2013). In many cases, the urns were closed flat

dishes that were placed invert over the opening of the urn. In other cases, the urn was closed with small stones (Petrie 1930: Pl. 39A:1). For the excavator it was difficult to determine the gender and age of the cremated individuals. Tufnell mentioned for some burials charred bone remains of males, females and infants. She also noted that small areas of mud plaster, partly burnt red by fire, and covered with black ash, may have some connection with the cinerary urns (Tufnell 1930: 13).

There are two exceptions to the cremation burials described above. Grave 235 is a rectangular shallow pit cut in the marl, filled with burnt earth and charred bone. The only objects Tufnell noted were some heavy bronze bangles (Tufnell 1930: 12). The tomb card, however, notes an early Iron Age IIA bowl (24O4). If this grave represents a cremation burial, it would be the oldest cremation in Cemetery 200 with a different burial form that did not use an urn.

The other exception is the inhumation grave 223 dates to the early and late Iron Age IIA. In the late Iron Age IIA, the large roofing slaps of the grave were opened and a late Iron Age IIA urn, resembling a “Philistine” cooking jar, but with two handles, was placed in the grave. This is the only case in Cemetery 200, in which inhumation and cremation appeared together. The urn stood at the west end of the cist grave, just under the roofing slabs, and contained charred bones.

The cremation burials of Cemetery 200 seem to represent a local tradition that is best compared with the evidence at Tell el-‘Ajjul, Tell er-Ruqeish, Ashkelon and Azor (Ben-Shlomo 2012; Culican 1973; Master and Aja 2017; Petrie 1932 graves 1022, 1024, 1038, 1093,

1102, 1106, 1120, 1126, 1134, 1135, 1136, 1151, 1153 and 1160). These cremation burials are all located at or near the southwestern coast and follow similar customs. They are however not all contemporary.

The cremations at Azor and Ashkelon are earlier than those of Cemetery 200. They date to the late Iron I and/or to the early Iron IIA (Master and Aja 2017: 144). At Tell er-Ruqeish, the cremation burials overlap with those of the Cemetery 200, but some are later and date to end of the Iron Age IIB (Culican 1973). The cremations at Tell el-‘Ajjul appear to be mostly contemporary with those of Cemetery 200 (Petrie 1932). However, a more detailed study is necessary to evaluate the Iron Age graves of Tell el-‘Ajjul.

We are hesitant to assign to the Cemetery 200 any ethnic affiliation. We have already mentioned the reasons, why we do not consider the cremation burials as “Phoenician” or Tyrian. The appearance of “Phoenician” juglet does not provide evidence for “Phoenician” burials at Tell el-Far’ah (South). Such juglets were frequently in use in various settlement and burial contexts in the entire Levant during the Iron Age II. Likewise, Black-on-Red vessels do not seem to be an indicator for Phoenician presence at Tell el-Far’ah (South). Bikai has emphasized that Black-on-Red style is extremely rare in many “Phoenician”, including Tyre (Coldstream and Bikai 1988: 37).

Recently, Master and Aja have suggested that the cemetery excavated at Ashkelon is a Philistine burial ground. Since the Cemetery 200 at Tell el-Far’ah (South) has many characteristics in common the cemetery at Ashkelon, their suggestions raises the question, whether Cemetery 200 is “Philistine”.

Clearly, the coastal plain extended a marked influence on the burial customs at Tell el-Far’ah (South). Yet, recent discussions on the identity in Iron Age Philistia demonstrate the fluid and multidirectional character of cultural change in the region (Maier and Hitchcock 2017). While we do hold that there were migrations from the Mediterranean during the 12th century BCE, the interaction between the local and the immigrating population were complex and multidirectional. Each group influenced the other in significant aspects of their habitus.

We agree with Master and Aja that the burial practices do not constitute a reliable indicator for “Philistine” identity (Master and Aja 2017: 156). Master and Aja further argue that during the Iron Age II “Philistia” was a meaningful ascribed identity in a political sense defining the territories of polities between Egypt and the kingdom of Judah. While such an argument may define Ashkelon’s burials in some way as “Philistine”, this is not necessarily the case at Tell el-Far’ah (South).

There are significant similarities in the burial customs of Ashkelon, Tell el-‘Ajjul, Tell er-Ruqeish, Tell el-Far’ah (South) and – to some extent – Azor. These cemeteries are notably located in the same region of the southwestern coastal plain of the Southern Levant. The burial customs of the Iron Age IIA north of Azor are clearly different, as are those in the Judahite highlands (Lehmann and Varoner 2018). Philistine identity or identities in our understanding was/were negotiated, merged and re-interpreted over time. Thus, these cemeteries are “Philistine” in the sense of the interacting traditions of local and immigrating populations

of the early Iron Age, which were merged and entangled by the Iron Age IIA.

The first graves at Cemetery 200 were interred during the early Iron Age IIA. During the late Iron Age IIA, in the 9th century BCE, more graves were dug and the cemetery expanded. The new graves were placed next to older ones. At some point in the late Iron Age IIA, cremation burials were added to the cemetery. There is no evidence that the cremations post-date the inhumations. Rather, the two burial customs seem to have existed side-by-side as is indicated by the occurrence of both customs in one grave, 223. The graves were apparently well marked since none of the graves cut into earlier ones in the cemetery. The pottery suggest that Cemetery 200 was abandoned during early in the Iron Age IIB.

Graves of the early Iron Age IIA have been found at other cemeteries of Tell el-Far'ah (South) (Laemmel 2003). Yet, only at Cemetery 200 there is a continuation from the early to the

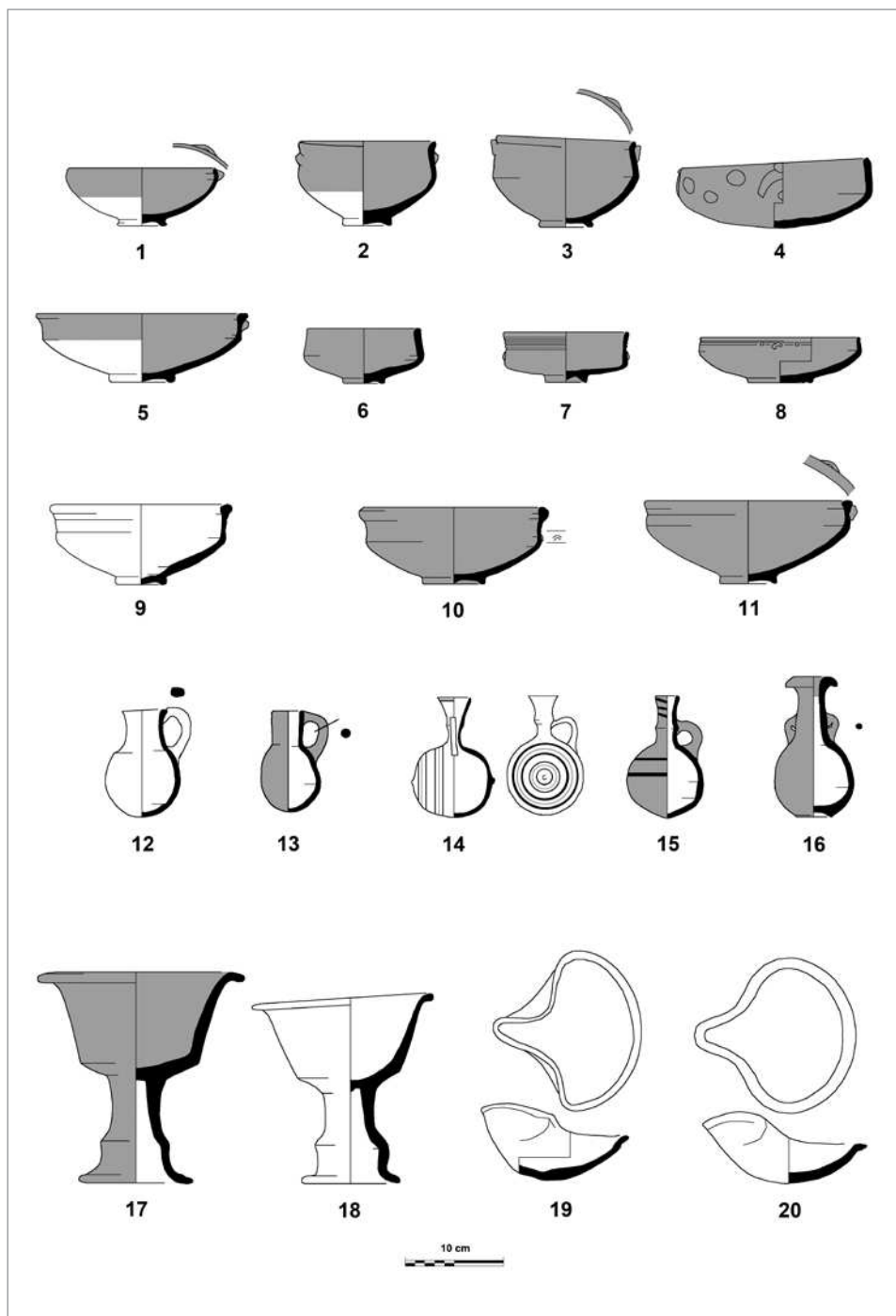
late Iron Age IIA. Late Iron Age IIA graves are missing all together at the other cemeteries. In our view, this is a significant phenomenon.

After more some 150 years of continuous burials in Iron Age I and early Iron Age IIA cemeteries, these earlier cemeteries were all abandoned and a new cemetery, 200, was founded. The earlier cemeteries were abandoned in the early Iron Age IIA. The new Cemetery 200 commenced in the same period, the early Iron Age IIA. There must have been important reasons for the families, who maintained for generations the earlier cemeteries to abandon them in the early Iron Age IIA.

We are suggesting that there might have been profound changes at the Tell el-Far'ah (South), if not an exchange of the population that caused these significant changes. Since the Egyptian expansion of the 22nd Dynasty under pharaoh Shoshenq I (Shishak) took place at exactly this time, we wonder whether the political processes initiated by this pharaoh may have contributed to the foundation of the new Cemetery 200.

Captions

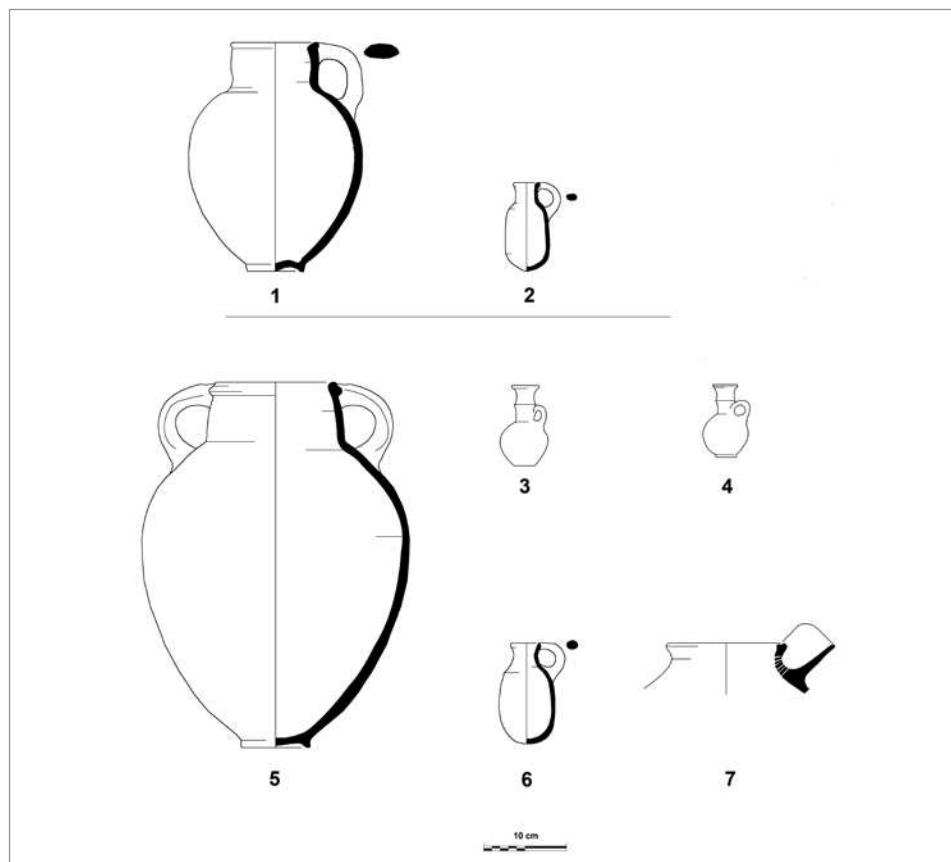
no.	UCL accession no.	Object	Duncan 1930 Type (CPP)	Description	Parallels
1	E7.85-7	Bowl	22J1	Orange brown clay, red slipped internal and external upper part	Tel Masos Str. II and III (Fritz and Kempinski 1983: Pl. 132:12, 135:1); Tel Sera Str. VIII (Golding Meir 2015: Pl. 1:6)
2.	E7.85-3b	Bowl	24R2	Light brown orange clay, red slipped internal and external upper part	Tel Jemmeh Str. 11 (Ben-Shlomo and Van Beek 2014: Fig. 8.5-e, f, g); Hazerim (Gophna and Singer-Avitz 1984: Fig. 41:13); Tel Sera Str. VIII (Golding Meir 2015: Pl. 2:14)
3	E7.85-3a	Bowl	24R2	Light brown clay, red slipped	



3 Pottery from tomb 202

no.	UCL accession no.	Object	Duncan 1930 Type (CPP)	Description	Parallels
4	E7.85-6	Bowl	22H1	Brown clay, red slipped internal and external, hand burnished	
5	E7.85-1c	Bowl	18D8	Light brown orange clay, red slipped internal and upper part external	Qubur el-Walaydah Str.1a-3 (Golding Meir 2015: Pl. 9: 15-16)
6	E7.85-5	Bowl	22G	Light brown orange clay, red slipped internal and external	
7	E7.85-4	Bowl	18E5	Orange brown clay, red slipped and hand burnished internal and external	
8	E7.85-26	Bowl	14Z	Brown orange clay, red slipped and hand burnished internal and external	Tel Masos Str. II (Fritz and Kempinski 1983: Pl. 144:3)
9	E7.85-2	Bowl	25M3	Light brown clay	Tel Sera Str. VII (Golding Meir 2015: Pl. 16:13-15); Tel Jemmeh Str. 9 (Ben-Shlomo and Van Beek 2014: Fig. 8.26- h, i, j, k)
10	E7.85-1a	Bowl	25M1	Orange clay, red slip and hand burnished	
11	E7.85-1b	Bowl	18D6	Brawn clay, red slipped and hand burnished	
12	E7.85-8	Juglet	53E	Light brown clay	Tel Beer-Sheba Str. IV (Singer-Avitz 2016a: Pl. 11.40:12)
13	E7.85-9	Juglet	53H4	Brown clay, red slipped	
14	E7.85-11	Barrel juglet	86D	Buff self-slipped, brown and red painted decoration on rim and body	
15	E7.85-12	Juglet	89C2	Orange brown clay, red slipped with black painted bands on body and upper neck	Tel Masos Str. II (Fritz and Kempinski 1983: Pl. 143:4)
16	E7.85-13	Juglet	83K3	Orange brown clay, dance red slip and hand burnished	Beer-Sheba Str. II (Singer-Avitz 2016b: Type JD-13); Ashdod Str. VII (M-7b) (Dothan and Porath 1982 Fig. 21:8)
17	E7.85-15a	Chalice	17H3	orange light brown clay, red slipped internal and external	Tel Sera Str. VII (unpublished); Beer-Sheba Str. V (Singer-Avitz 2016a: Figs. 11.16:2, 11.28: 10)
18	E7.85-15b	Chalice	17K3	Buff\ white slip external, remains of black and red decoration	
19	E7-85-16	Lamp	91G4	Brown clay, Soot marks on the lamps rim	
20	E7.85-17a	Lamp	91G4	Light brown orange clay, no soot marks	

fig 3. Pottery from tomb 202 (CPP = Duncan 1930)



no.	UCL accession no.	Object	Duncan 1930 Type (CPP)	Description	Parallels
1	E7.30-2	Cooking jug	34U2	Light brown clay, brown surface	Tel Sera Str. VII (Golding Meir 2015: Pl.19: 6)
2	E7.30-1	Juglet	53P1	Reddish brown clay	Tel Beer-Sheba Str. IV (Singer-Avitz 2016a: Pl. 11.40:12)
3	E7.62-2	Cooking jug	33T	Light brown clay, light buff surface	Tel es-Safi Str. A3 (Shai and Maeir 2012: Pl. 14.4:9)
4	-	Juglet	83B3	CPP	Tyre Str. IV (Bikai 1978: 14:2-5)
5	-	juglet	83C4		
6	E7.62-1	Juglet	53P1	Light brown clay, buff surface	Tel Beer-Sheba Str. IV (Singer-Avitz 2016a: Pl. 11.40:12)
7	E7.62-3	Jug (strainer)	67B3	Light brown clay	

Fig. 4 Pottery from cremation tombs. 1-2 tomb 219, 3-7 tomb 255.

notes

- 1 The research of this project was supported by the Israel Science Foundation, Research Grant no. 1247/12. We also want to thank Dr. Rachael Sparks, Institute of Archaeology, University College London, for her support of our research during our visits at the collections of the Institute of Archaeology.
- 2 See *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Wehr 1976: 707).
- 3 Genesis 16,7; 20,1; 25,18; Exodus 15,22; 1 Samuel 15,7 and 27,8.
- 4 For accounts of the excavations see Drower 1995: 371-375 and Petrie 2003: 261-267.
- 5 Lehmann *et al.* (in print), the field supervisor of the 2002 season was Svetlana Talis (Israel Antiquities Authority).
- 6 To date we know of material being sent to: Australia, Israel, the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales), Ireland, Poland and the USA. We currently know of 32 institutions that hold material from Tell el-Far'ah (South).

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