

SALVAGE EXCAVATIONS AT KHIRBAT MA'RABA

LILLY GERSHUNY

Mining activities near Khirbat Ma'raba in the southern coastal plain (map ref. NIG 1573/6105; OIG 1073/1105; Fig. 1) exposed store jars and other pottery vessels. An ensuing salvage excavation recovered many finds, although some vessels and metal artifacts disappeared before the archaeological work began.¹ Unfortunately, little is known about the early history of the site. Nearby, recent architectural ruins and pool remains have been recorded, as well as surface pottery from the Late Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (Berman, Stark and Barda 2004:60*-61*, Site 199).

THE EXCAVATION AREAS (Fig. 2)

Finds were located in five areas. The following description of each area is based on the field report submitted by Yosef Porath, the excavator of the site.²

Areas 1a and 1b

Two store jars were found in Area 1a, where pottery was first encountered. One was nearly

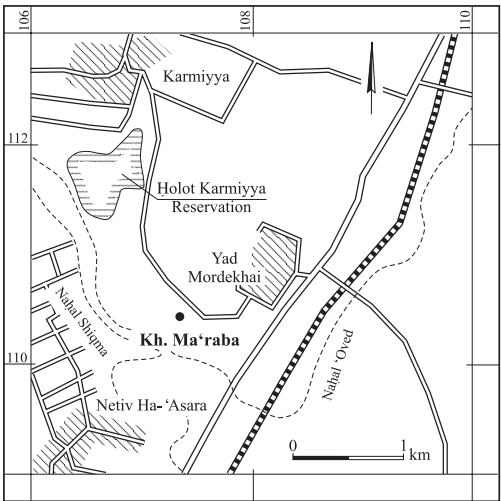


Fig. 1. Location map.

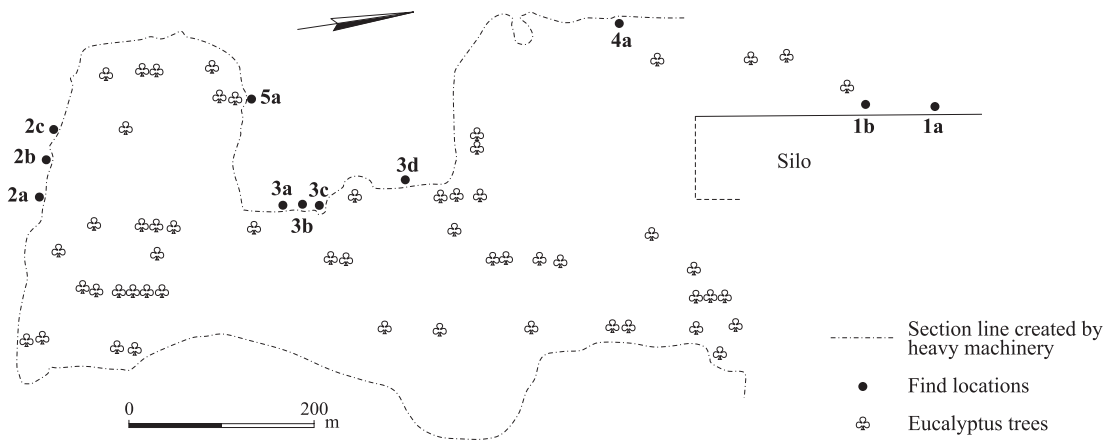


Fig. 2. The excavation areas.

complete, the second had only its lower part preserved. The immediate environment of the store jars was composed of packed soil mixed with *kurkar* stones. It was difficult to discern in the section whether the pottery vessels rested on a floor.

A store jar and a carinated bowl (now lost) had been found in Area 1b before the excavation started. Another store jar (Fig. 3:1) was found *in situ*, positioned in hard, compact *kurkar* soil to the northwest of the latter.

Areas 2a, 2b, 2c

Prior to the excavation, two store jars were discovered in Area 2a. When excavated, only

one jar, *in situ*, was found lying on its side (Fig. 3:2), the other disappeared. Decorated with combed lines around the shoulder, it contained a dipper juglet with traces of red slip. A few potsherds and broken osteological remains were scattered nearby.

In Area 2b, four meters to the west, rains exposed a large, well made store jar, which might have been covered by the lower part of another store jar or a bowl. Nearby, a now-missing bronze dagger was found. Another crumbling store jar was located to the north (Fig. 4:1). It contained a small dipper juglet that had traces of red slip (Fig. 4:2). A very thin horizon of osteological remains (c. 2 cm thick

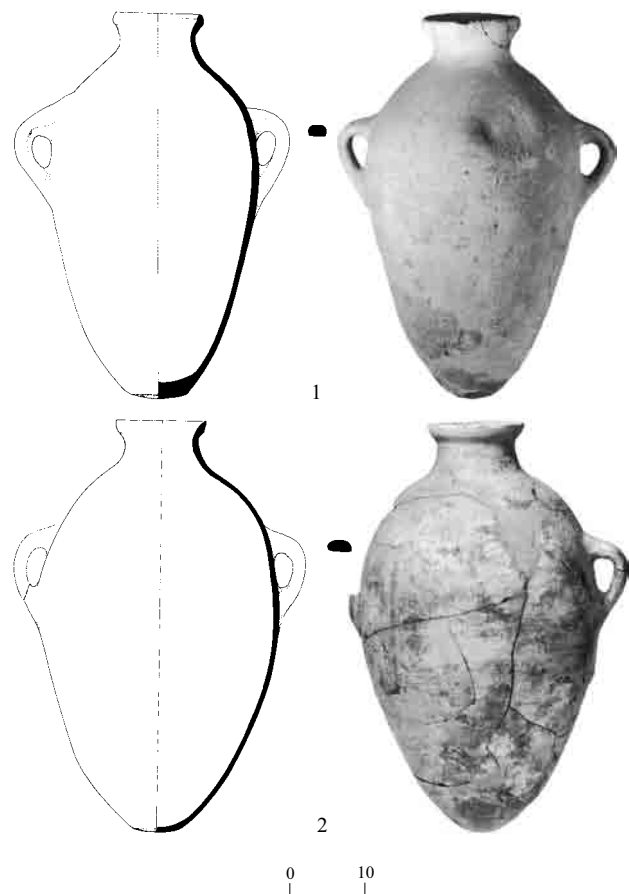


Fig. 3. Store jars from Areas 1b (1) and 2a (2).

No.	Vessel	Area	Reg. No.	IAA No.	Description
1	Store jar	1b	3	78-2377/1	Red-brown fabric (5YR 7/8) covered with lime patina
2	Store jar	2a	4	78-2379	

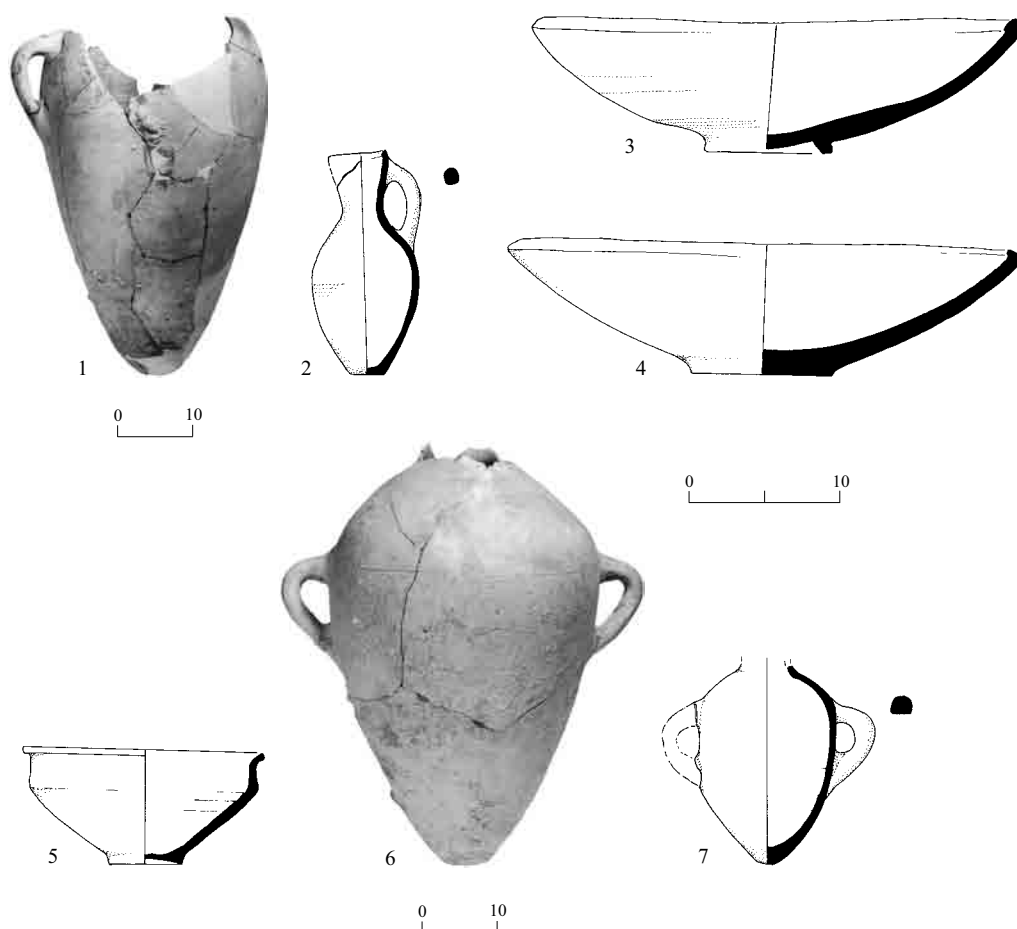


Fig. 4. Pottery vessels from Areas 2b (1, 2), 2c (3, 4) and 3b (5–7).

No.	Vessel	Area	Reg. No.	IAA No.	Description
1	Store jar	2b	6	78-2380	Inner fabric is pinkish (5YR 7/3), core is light brown (5YR 5/6) and exterior surface is reddish brown (2.5 YR 5/6); some medium-sized lime grits and numerous minute lime and dark grits
2	Dipper juglet	2b	7	78-2383	Few traces of red slip and combing around the body; well fired; core is dark brown (2.5YR 5/6); exterior surface, no slip (2.5YR 6/6)
3	Open bowl	2c	8	78-2375	Rather well fired; traces of gray core in upper part; minute dark and lime grits; core is yellow-brown (10YR 6/8); fabric is reddish brown (7.5YR 5/8)
4	Open bowl	2c	9	78-2376	Thin gray core, light to dark brown core (7.5 YR 4/6); plain exterior covered with patina; tiny black grits
5	Carinated bowl	3b	18	78-2374	Well fired; red-brown fabric (2.5YR 5/8); red core (2.5YR 6/8); exterior surface covered with lime patina
6	Store jar	3b	16	78-2378	Plain, buff exterior surface (10YR 8/3); small lime grits, sporadic, minute dark grits; combed lines around center body; lower body has patina; a non-uniform dipper incision around top of handles; small, flattened base (D: 5.3 cm)
7	Amphoriskos	3b	17	78-2384	Well fired; brownish fabric (7.5YR 6/6); buff slip (10YR 7/4), possibly burnished

and c. 1.5 m long) was discerned to the east of the jars.

An open bowl had been uncovered before the excavation began three meters to the west in Area 2c. This bowl was removed during the excavation (Fig. 4:3). Slightly east was another open bowl (Fig. 4:4), with a juglet and three store jars. This now-lost juglet had a double-strand handle. The store jars were positioned in different directions. The westernmost jar had its base toward the southwest, the middle store jar had its base pointed toward the northeast, and the third jar was aligned east–west, leaning on the middle jar.

It was possible to distinguish different earth layers in this area. The 0.7–1.0 m thick topsoil layer was removed by mechanical equipment. Below this layer and above the pottery vessels was a 0.5 m thick layer of dark, heavy soil mixed with lumps of chalk and *kurkar* (Layer 1). The 0.4 m thick vessel layer was composed of yellowish-brown, lumpy *kurkar* soil (Layer 2). The bottom layer, below the vessels, consisted of soft, light yellow *kurkar* sand, also mixed with lumps (Layer 3).

Areas 3a, 3b, 3c

A section made by heavy machinery uncovered several vessels. Three layers were discerned in Area 3a, after the topsoil layer (0.5–0.7 m thick) was removed. Unlike Area 2, the upper layer (1) here consisted of *kurkar* soil mixed with light brown, medium to hard soil and contained several pottery vessels, among them were a juglet with a ring base, a jug, a dipper juglet, a store jar, and two carinated bowls. Yet, most of these vessels were looted.

The second layer (2) was composed of *kurkar* soil mixed with a small quantity of softer, yellowish-brown soil. This layer contained fragmentary human bones and several teeth. Nearby was a bronze toggle pin and slightly to the east, a very fragmentary dipper juglet, lying on top of long bones. The lowest layer (3) consisted of light yellow, soft and crumbling *kurkar* soil.

Area 3b was 100–120 m north of Area 3a. A store jar (Fig. 4:6) that contained a small amphoriskos (Fig. 4:7) was found in Layer 1. Next to it was a broken carinated bowl (Fig. 4:5). The store jar was placed over *kurkar* stones. Several stones, which may have partitioned Areas 3a and 3b, could have crushed the store jar.

Area 3c was not excavated, but following exposure by rains, a Kibbutz member gave the excavator two store jars and a dipper juglet that was placed inside one of the jars.

Area 4

This area was located at the northern side of the site, to the west of a silo pit. Two store jars and two bowls were revealed, c. 0.5 m below the surface. One of the bowls (Fig. 5:1) was placed on top of the one-handed small store jar (Fig. 5:3); unfortunately, the second disintegrated. The second store jar (Fig. 5:4) contained a dipper juglet (Fig. 5:2).

Area 5

A large, open bowl that regrettably fell apart was found c. 13 m to the west of Area 3. Near it was a large store jar (Fig. 5:5) that contained a small dipper juglet (Fig. 5:6).

THE CERAMIC ASSEMBLAGE

The assemblage is made up of store jars, open and carinated bowls and dipper juglets, which are fairly homogeneous and discussed together. The small deviations in form indicate the upper and lower chronological boundaries of the assemblage. Although some of the vessels have disintegrated or were stolen before and during the excavation, they are known and could therefore be included in the statistical analysis of the assemblage (Fig. 6).

The store jars form the largest group within the assemblage (51%), together with the dipper juglets (20%), which in many cases were located within the jars. Carinated bowls (15%)

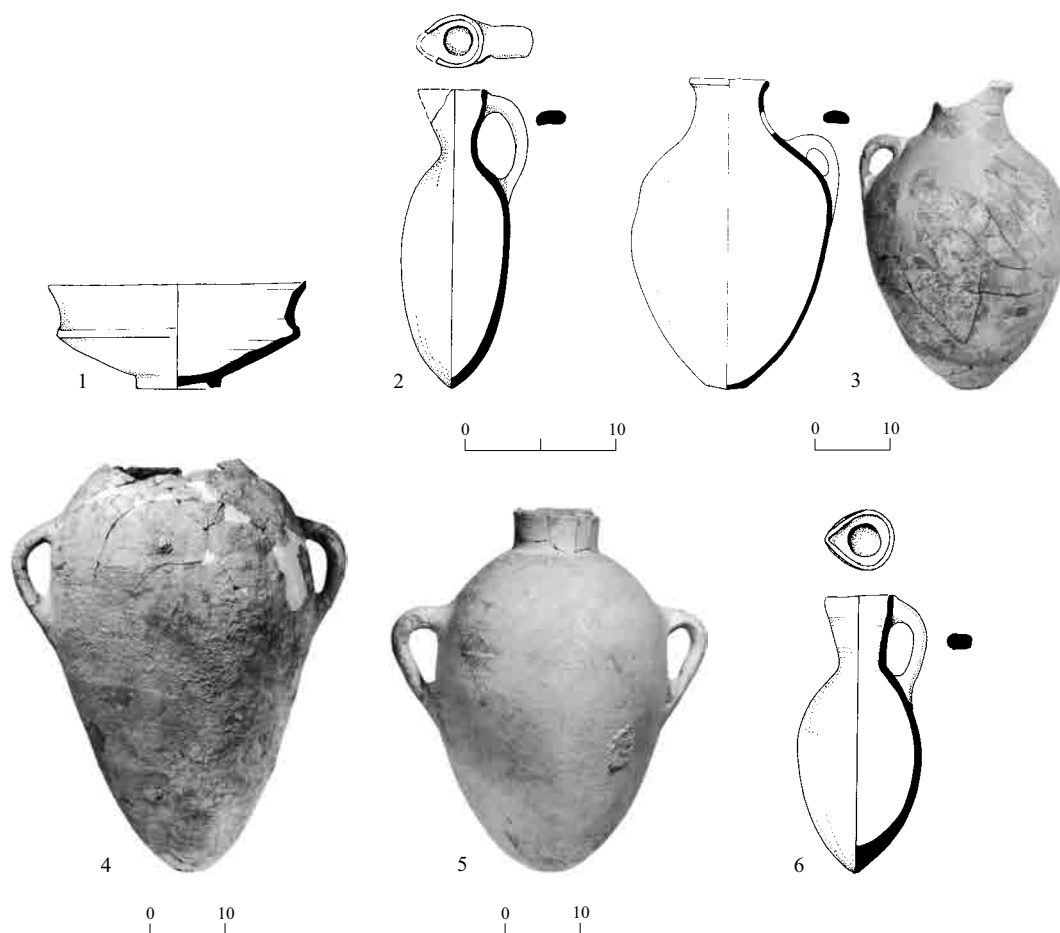


Fig. 5. Pottery vessels from Areas 4 (1–4) and 5 (5, 6).

No.	Vessel	Area	Reg. No.	IAA No.	Description
1	Carinated bowl	4	19a	78-2373	Exterior surface is covered with patina; appears plain, buff to brown (5YR 6/6); core is light gray (10R 5/1) and brownish red (2.5YR 5/6)
2	Dipper juglet	4	21	78-2371	Tiny black grits; plain exterior, buff to brown (7.5YR 6/4); brown fabric (5YR 5/4)
3	Store jar	4	19		Reddish brown exterior (2.5YR 6/4) and brown core (5YR 4/6)
4	Store Jar	4	20	78-2382	Plain exterior, reddish (2.5YR 6/4); interior is pinkish (7.5YR 7/4) and core is brown-gray (2.5Y 5/2); minute and small dark grits, sporadic lime grits
5	Store jar	5	23	78-2381	Exterior is buff-brown (2.5Y 6/2) with some red firing patches; well fired, minute and small dark grits
6	Dipper juglet	5	22	78-2372	Intact; traces of red slip (10YR 5/6); brownish red fabric (5YR 5/6)

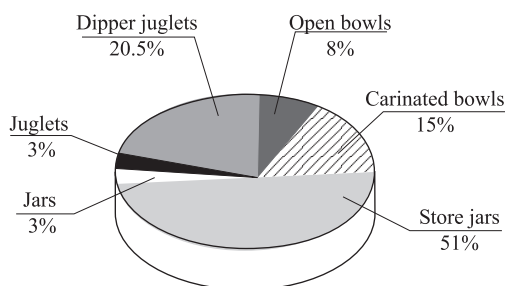


Fig. 6. Pottery assemblage, statistic chart.

appear in larger numbers than open bowls (8%), whereas the jars and juglets form a conspicuous minority (3% each). The store jars and dipper juglets undoubtedly make up the 'burial core'.

Bowls

Two open bowls and two carinated bowls are presented here. The bowls in Fig. 4:3, 4 are two variations of the open bowl, current throughout the Middle Bronze Age. While the first has a shallow ring base and a folded-in rim, the second has a flat disc base and an externally beveled rim, with an inverted lip. The familiarity of the different features is widespread, to mention but a few comparisons, at Dhaharat el-Ḥumraiya, Grave 18 (Ory 1948: Figs. 17–19), Ashqelon, Barne'a (Selin 2002: Fig. 131:1) and various Middle Bronze Age tombs at Gibeon (Pritchard 1963). The carinated bowls (Figs. 4:5; 5:1) are of the unrestricted type (rim diam. 16 and 17 cm, max. diam. 15.25 and 16 cm respectively). The bowl in Fig. 4:5 has a concave disc base and a fairly vertical shoulder, with a carination angle at two-thirds of the total height. The bowl in Fig. 5:1 has a shallow ring base and a concave shoulder. The carination angle is approximately at the middle of the total height. Both bowls are prevalent during MB II,³ for example, at el-Jisr (Ory 1945:36, No. 25; Pl. XII:21), and Dhaharat el-Ḥumraiya, Grave 63 (Ory 1948: Fig. 41), though they show up already at the closing stage of MB I.

Store Jars

Four of the seven store jars lack a rim and neck (Figs. 4:1, 6; 5:4, 5); two are complete (Fig.

3:1, 2); and one is a short, one-handled store jar (Fig. 5:3). All store jars are ovoid-shaped and have a convex base; the store jar in Fig. 5:5 has a flat base and a more egg-shaped body. Its handles are also curved in the upper section, unlike the more shallow upper part that is customary of store-jar handles. The store jars have a plain exterior, although some are covered with lime incrustation (Figs. 3:1; 4:1; 5:5). Others have traces of combing around the upper body (Fig. 4:1, 6) and two store jars have an incised band around the body just above the handles (Figs. 4:6; 5:5). The two complete store jars each have a different rim. One of the complete store jars (Fig. 3:1) has a thickened rim that is turned-in, and the other (Fig. 3:2) has an everted rim that is vertically trimmed on the exterior. The single-handled store jar (Fig. 5:3), a dominant shape in MB II, has a slightly bulging rim, somewhat beveled on the exterior. Similar store jars have been found in Grave 61 at Dhaharat el-Ḥumraiya (Ory 1948: Fig. 34), at Shiloh, Stratum VII, Area F (Bonimovitz and Finkelstein 1993: Fig. 6.20:1) and at Gibeon, Tombs 15 and 40 (Pritchard 1963: Figs. 24:88; 44).

Amphoriskos

Although the neck and rim of the small amphoriskos are missing (Fig. 4:7), it is similar in size to the dipper juglets. This could be the reason that prompted the excavator to regard it as a votive vessel. It has a small, flattened thick base and an ovoid shape, rather wide where the handles are attached (max. diam. 9 cm). The loop handles seem too big for the fairly small body, giving the vessel an odd profile. The buff-slipped and possibly burnished amphoriskos was found over the mouth of a store jar, quite similar to dipper juglets.

Small amphoriskoi are rather rare in Middle Bronze Age contexts. The closest analogies for this amphoriskos come from Kabri, on the northern coast, where they were found in tombs of the Middle Bronze Age (Kempinski, Gershuny and Scheftelowitz 2002: Tomb 502, Fig. 5.20:8; Tomb 498, Fig. 5.40:6). Both are

red-slipped, burnished and have a piriform shape.

Dipper Juglets

The three dipper juglets are similar to each other, yet differ in details. All have an ellipsoid shape, except for one (Fig. 4:2) that appears truncated due to its small flat base (base diam. 2.25 cm) and is also the shortest of the three (height 15 cm). It is also the only juglet that has traces of combing on the body, as well as remnants of red slip. The well proportioned juglet in Fig. 5:2 has a neck height of slightly over a quarter of the total height. The neck of the juglet in Fig. 5:6 is about one third of the total height; otherwise, this juglet has a thick pointed base and traces of red slip. The broken dipper juglet (not illustrated) has a more ovoid body shape and traces of red slip. Another fragmentary dipper juglet (not illustrated) has a pointed base, ovoid shape and a single, ribbon-like handle.

Dipper juglets retained their elementary shape and average size throughout the Middle Bronze Age and in later periods as well. It is usually the context in which the dipper juglet is found that determines its chronological association. In the present context, the juglet in Fig. 4:2 belongs to MB I, with a comparison in the 'Palace' phase at Afeq (Beck 2000: Fig. 10.12:19).⁴ The other two dipper juglets (Fig. 5:2, 6) can be associated with MB II date, as manifested at other southern sites, e.g., Dhaharat el-Humraiya, Grave 63 (Ory 1948: Fig. 40) and el-Jisr (Ory 1945: Pl. XII:14).

A recent study of dipper juglets at Tell ed-Dab'a makes a distinction between the combed juglets and those that are red-slipped and burnished (Kopetzky 2002:244); yet, the juglet in Fig. 4:2 is combed and has traces of a possibly burnished red slip. It would appear to belong to the juglets of F=b/3 horizon (Kopetzky 2002: Fig. 2) as far as its size is concerned, but it differs in its flat base and combined surface treatment. Dimensions of the juglets in Fig. 5:2, 6 would seem to fit the horizon of E/2-E/1 (Kopetzky 2002: Fig. 4). Their rather flat, strap

handles, however, appear at Tell ed-Dab'a during the later E/1 phase.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The excavation areas represent pit graves dug into the *kurkar* sandstone during the Middle Bronze Age. Such graves with similar contents are found dispersed along the southern coastal *kurkar* ridges at Ashqelon (Gershuny 1995a; 1995b; Selin 2002), Dhaharat el-Humraiya (Ory 1948), El-Jisr (Ory 1945), Rishon Le-Ziyyon (Levy 1993) and Tel Aviv (Kaplan 1955; Kletter and Ayash 2000; for a more detailed list, see Gophna and Beck 1981:71-75). The pits were usually quarried to various sizes, which probably depended on the number of interments intended for each pit. In several sites, the pits contained poorly preserved primary burials.

The 'burial core' consisting of one or more store jars and dipper juglets, is homogenous, with a somewhat limited variety of vessel shapes. Frequently, dipper juglets were found inside store jars, indicating they had originally hung over the store-jar aperture and sunk in during the course of time. Bronze artifacts usually included daggers, toggle pins, and a rare shaft-hole ax.

Most of the vessels have no slip or burnish, except for the dipper juglets. A few of the store jars are combed on their upper bodies. The open bowls have a long range throughout the Middle Bronze Age and the carinated bowls of the unrestricted type occur already at the end of MB I, but are predominant during MB II.

The striking correspondence of the assemblage to other Middle Bronze Age burials suggests that the pastoral settlements or perhaps small rural communities of the Middle Bronze Age had a fairly uniform burial method, as evidenced along the country's southern coastline. Perhaps these pit-grave cemeteries served as territorial markers for an administrative and political center (Hallote 1995:109). The closest large city to Kh. Ma'raba during the Middle Bronze Age was Tel Ashqelon, which lies c. 8 km away as the crow flies. The possible affiliation of the

rural settlement at Kh. Ma'raba to the territory of Ashqelon has already been suggested by Gophna and Beck (1981:77). However, it is also possible that the as-yet-undiscovered community residing at Kh. Ma'raba had its own burial grounds. If so, the demolished pit graves at the site indicate that some form of settlement existed here, as is the case at other coastal plain sites (Gophna and Beck 1981:76).

The ceramic assemblage from the pits at Kh. Ma'raba conforms to the beginning of MB II in the southern part of the country. Chronologically,

the burial remains at this site fall within the last decades of the eighteenth and the first decades of the seventeenth century BCE. It is our contention that MB II assemblages in the south began earlier than in the north of the country and the early MB II phase in the south matches the transitional MB I–MB II period in the north. The date offered for the E/2–E/1 phases at Tell ed-Dab'a (Bietak 2002:41) shows that the dipper juglet types associated with these phases appear at a decidedly earlier date in the southern Levant.

NOTES

¹ Yosef Porath directed the salvage excavation in 1977, on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (Permit No. A-732). Members of Kibbutz Yad Mordekhai participated in the excavations. Several pottery vessels and metal artifacts uncovered by heavy machinery and rains unfortunately disappeared before the salvage excavation began. Yosef Porath sketched the field plan and Natalia Zak prepared the final draft. Carmen Hersch drew the pottery. I am grateful to them all, and particularly to Yosef Porath, for the permission to study and publish the material.

² The excavation file in the archive of the Israel Antiquities Authority contains the field report and a

sketch plan, on which the different subareas of the excavation are marked.

³ The terminology throughout this article uses MB I (= MB IIA) and MB II (= MB IIB). The preference for these definitions stems from the acceptance of the IBA terminology for the former EB IV–MB I and thus, the necessity presented itself to begin the MBA with I, rather than with IIA. I venture to recommend that such a division should be applied to the LBA as well, which will eventually unify the terminology of the Bronze Ages in the country.

⁴ While the vessel is referred to as a juglet in the text (Beck 2000:193, St. A XIVb), it is a jug in the figure descriptions (Beck 2000:200–201).

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