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Rural Complexity in the Intermediate Bronze Age: Settlement Patterns and Intra-Site Spatial Organization in Lower Galilee

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This study explores the settlement patterns in Intermediate Bronze Age Lower Galilee, focusing on the Ḥorbat Qishron sites and their socio-economic organization. The spatial arrangement and the hierarchical structures of the settlements are analyzed, particularly in light of the discovery of a walled settlement at Ḥorbat Qishron South, a unique feature in this period. The study also considers the implications of settlement patterns for economic activities, social organization and communal endeavors, shedding light on the role of households as basic economic units and the potential of centralized economic models. Furthermore, it discusses the significance of ceramic assemblages, radiocarbon dating and burial practices in understanding chronological and social dynamics within the region. Overall, the research highlights the nuanced interplay between spatial organization, socio-economic structures and cultural practices in shaping settlement patterns during the Intermediate Bronze Age in Lower Galilee.

Keywords: Intermediate Bronze Age, Lower Galilee, ruralism, black wheel-made ware, spatial organization, socio-economic structures, economic models, settlement patterns

Introduction

The Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA) marks a transitional rural phase between two urban periods, prompting inquiries into the continuity of urban settlement patterns and traits from the preceding Early Bronze Age and the development of urban hierarchical settlement patterns and site organization in the following Middle Bronze Age. Across much of the Southern Levant, the absence of urban networks presents an opportunity to investigate the complexity of rural settlements and networks as an independent entity, shifting the focus away from urban-centric perspectives.

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The rural transformation evident in northern Israel throughout the IBA, is discernible through a reevaluation of settlement patterns, social structures, economic dynamics and cultural networks (Getzov, Stern and Parks 2001; Greenberg 2019; Covello-Paran 2020; 2023; Horowitz 2023). Examining the Southern Levant during this period within the defined framework of 'rural complexity,' as proposed by Richard (2020b), offers a structured approach to understanding the intricate interplay of social, political and economic organization, and cultural interconnectedness. This framework facilitates a nuanced analysis that sheds light on the multifaceted dynamics shaping the region during this pivotal period.

The affirmation of a higher chronology for the IBA has greatly challenged the archaeological record of settlement patterns. Recent radiometric-based research has significantly expanded the temporal framework of the IBA, extending it over the entire second half of the third millennium BCE (Regev et al. 2012; 2014; Höflmayer et al. 2014). This breakthrough has prompted a reevaluation of intraregional dynamics throughout the Levant under this new 'high chronology' paradigm (D'Andrea 2020; Kennedy 2020; Richard 2020a; Sala 2020; Lev et al. 2021; Lev, Bechar and Boaretto 2021). Particularly noteworthy is the examination of synchronisms and connections between the Northern and Southern Levant regions. This comparative analysis gains significance due to the urban continuum observed in the Northern Levant (D'Andrea and Vacca 2015; Kennedy 2016), contrasting sharply with the non-urban rural landscape prevalent in contemporary Southern Levant (Richard 2020b). In northern Israel, as well as in other parts of the country, there are no excavated IBA sites that demonstrate a consecutive occupation from the Early Bronze Age through the Middle Bronze Age.[2]

In rural northern Israel, specifically in the Jezreel Valley and Lower Galilee, the prolonged chronological duration of the IBA is enigmatic considering the dearth of archaeological evidence supporting long-term occupation at excavated settlement sites (Covello-Paran 2020; 2023). Most sites are either single-stratum occupations with only minimal evidence of phasing, or two-strata occupations.[3] This enigma may be solved by reassessing the settlement patterns and intraregional nuances, which may elucidate phasing and ascertain whether all IBA settlements were contemporary or the outcome of a settlement process that is materialized through horizontal and not vertical stratigraphy. The horizontal stratigraphy narrative may be interpreted as a series of cycles involving settlement, abandonment and resettlement at various locations within a confined region or a specific site. The oscillation of IBA occupations may be understood in light of regional settlement patterns and intrasite

[2] This lack of a complete sequence is problematic for the secure anchoring of radiocarbon dating. A key reason for this lacuna of sites with a full trajectory from the Early Bronze Age to the Middle Bronze Age is the alternate settlement patterns and choices of site location in rural IBA. In Lower Galilee, this phenomenon is observed at the site of Tel Gat Ḥefer, which was abandoned after EB IIIA and subsequently resettled in MB I (Covello-Paran 2003).

[3] The sites in the Jordan Valley exhibit a longer sequence, as seen, for example, at Abu en-Niaj, which also yielded secure radiocarbon dates (Falconer and Fall 2019); however, this is an exception.

spatial organization, both of which point to an increasing social complexity in the second half of the third millennium BCE. That said, the homogeneous nature of the material culture that permeates the entire duration of the period poses a substantial obstacle to our efforts to understand the chronological sequence of the period and to conduct a spatial analysis.

Recent salvage excavations of IBA settlement sites in Lower Galilee provide an opportunity to explore the phenomenon of the IBA prolonged chronological duration within a confined radius of 10 km. The micro-regional examination of settlement patterns and intra-site spatial organization of the built-up areas of these settlements contributes significantly to our understanding of rural complexity. This study addresses key issues, such as the diversity of settlement sizes, the identification of a regional center, the existence of evidence of surplus storage and redistribution, the analysis of socio-economic strategies, and the presence of elites and collective burial sites.

Intermediate Bronze Age Settlement Patterns and Intra-Site Spatial Organization in Lower Galilee

This study specifically focuses on southern and central Lower Galilee,[4] a region characterized by narrow valleys and hills, which is delimited by the Jezreel valley on the south, the Nazareth hills on the west, the basalt plateau of the eastern Galilee on the east and the Tur‘an Valley on the north. Notably, this area encompasses the convergence point of two significant ancient international routes: the east–west route historically referred to as *Darb el-Hawarna*, which traversed the Tur‘an Valley and connected the coastal regions with the Jordan Valley and Syria, particularly Damascus; and the north–south route, *Via Maris*, which served as a crucial thoroughfare, facilitating travel between Egypt and the Beqa’a Valley (Dorsey 1991). This latter route, when heading northward, circumvents Mount Tabor to the east and traverses narrower Naḥal Qeshet until reaching Ḥorbat Qishron, where the Tur‘an Valley widens.

The empirical raw data from seven IBA settlements and three IBA burial sites in this region (Fig. 1) is sourced from archaeological surveys (Zori 1977; Gal 1998) and excavations.[5] The extensive salvage excavations at the settlement sites of Ḥorbat Qishron (Smithline 2002; Kohn-Tavor 2020; Covello-Paran and Tzin 2022) and Kafr Kanna North (Abdallah Mokary, pers. comm.) provide the primary data, supported by limited excavations at additional settlement sites, such as Ḥorbat Zelef (Hendrik [Enno] Bron, pers. comm.), ‘En Sheḥor (Feig 2021; Hanna 2024) and Kafr Kanna (Covello-Paran and Smithline, forthcoming). Excavations at burial sites include Ḥorbat Zelef (Covello-Paran 2011b) and

[4] The Lower Galilee region can be geologically segmented into three distinct subareas, the Alonim Hills, the central Lower Galilee and the eastern Lower Galilee, as delineated by Gal (1992:1–2).

[5] Many of the excavations presented here are in varying stages of research prior to the final reports. Therefore, most citations are to personal communication with the researchers and in some cases, based on collaborative research of the author with the excavator.

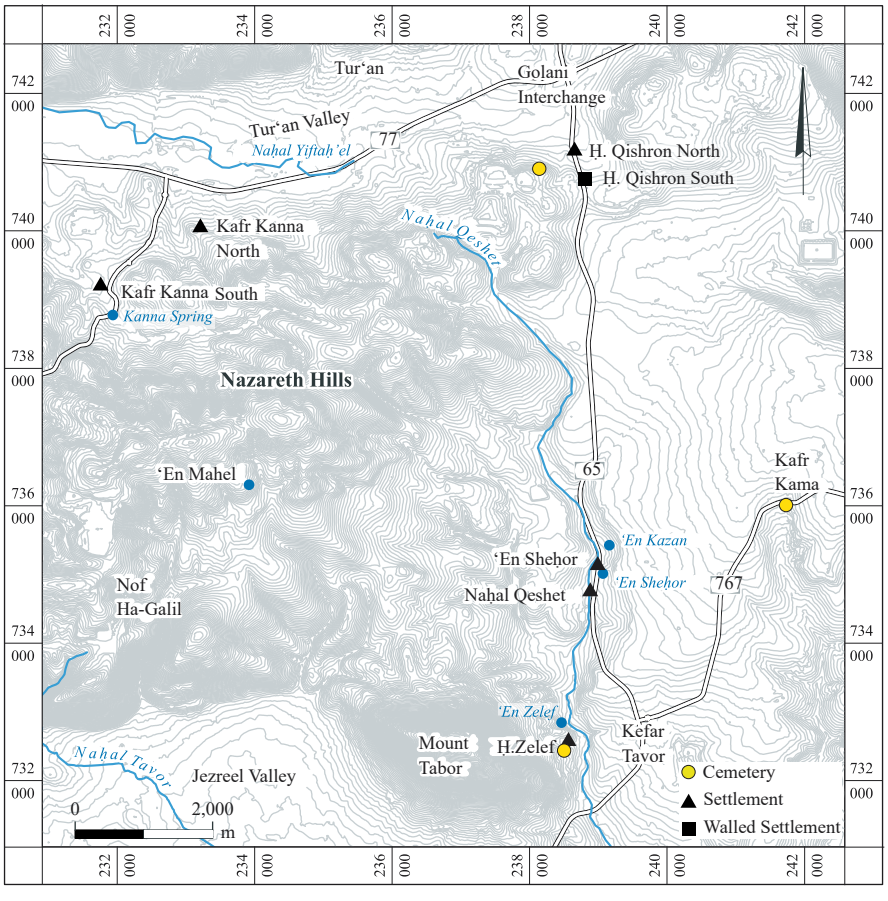

Fig. 1. Location map showing the region of study.

Kafr Kama (Covello-Paran 2008; Haya Ben Nahum, pers. comm.). Evidence gathered from excavations and surveys unveils spatial patterns concerning the relationship between settlement locations and burial sites, as well as site density, intra-site organization and the trajectories of settlement development over time. Following the presentation of Ḥorbat Qishron, the sites are arranged from east to west.

Ḥorbat Qishron

Ḥorbat Qishron is located at the interface between the eastern slopes of the Nazareth Hills on the west and the lower valley lands to the east (Fig. 2), strategically located at the junction between the two major ancient transport routes (see above) and at the opening of the fertile Tur'an Valley (Fig. 3). The site was initially surveyed and identified as Khirbat Kaisharun by Conder and Kitchener (1881:400), who described stone heaps and a water cistern, and later by Gal (1990:38), who collected potsherds dating from Iron Age II and the Byzantine period. Six excavation expeditions were carried out at the site, revealing its history and

Fig. 2. General view of Ḥorbat Qishron, Qishron North, Qishron South and the cemetery, looking south; red dotted line marks the estimated boundaries of the IBA settlement (photography: Skyview Ltd.).

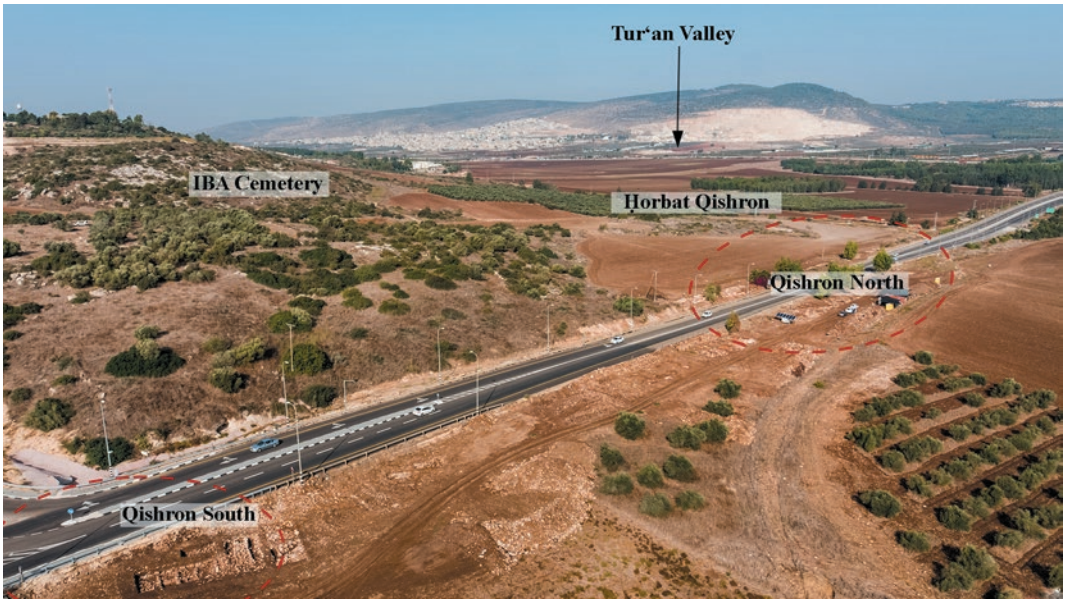

Fig. 3. General view of Ḥorbat Qishron, Qishron North, Qishron South and the cemetery, looking northeast; red dotted line marks the estimated boundaries of the IBA settlement (photography: A. Peretz).

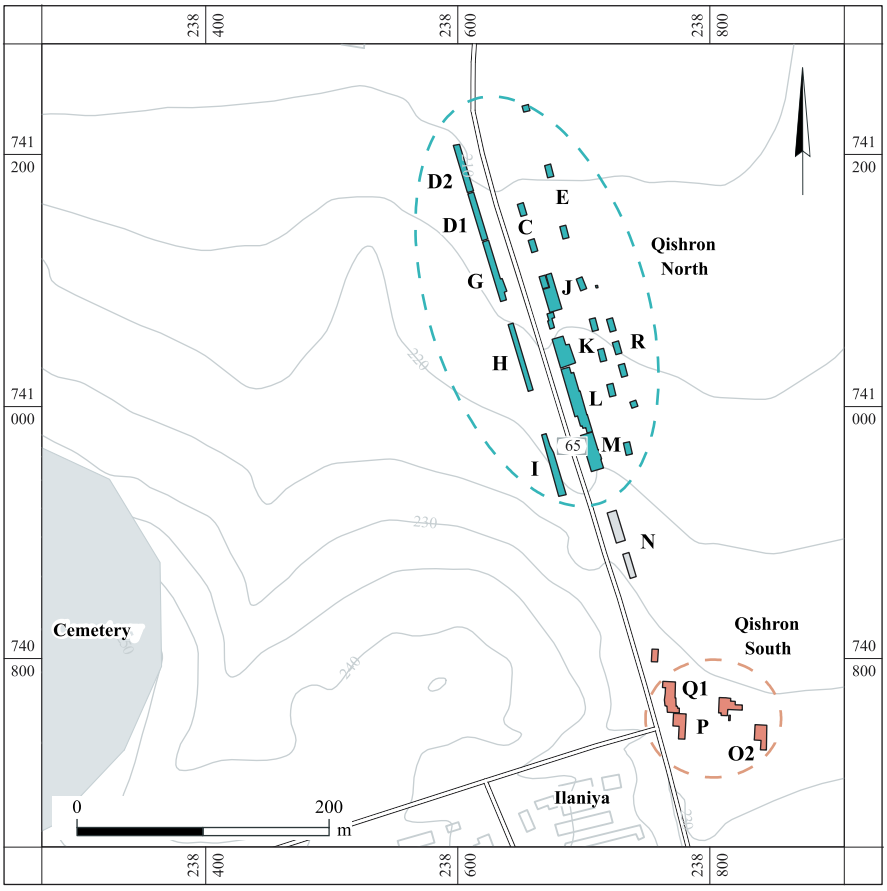

Fig. 4. Map of the excavation areas at Qishron North and Qishron South.

function during the Paleolithic, Neolithic, EB I, IBA, MB II, LB I and Iron I–II, as well as the Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Mamluk and Ottoman periods (Smithline 2002; Kohn-Tavor 2020; Covello-Paran and Tzin 2022).

The large-scale 2018–2019 excavations at Ḥorbat Qishron,[6] supplemented by pre-excavation trial trenches, led to the understanding that the site comprised two clearly delineated sites—Qishron North and Qishron South—which were separated by an area of c. 300 m that was devoid of archaeological remains (Fig. 4).[7] Qishron North is a large (c. 8 hectares) multi-period site that includes a small mound and surrounding lower areas.

[6] The excavations (Permit No. A-8304) were conducted between May 2018 and January 2019, and directed by the author and Reuven Kapul on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

[7] Smithline (2002:44*) also noticed the existence of two separate sites at this location based on surface remains. This lacuna of built-up settlement remains was later determined by the excavations (Fig. 4:N) and numerous trenches dug in the 2018 excavations. For the different occupation histories of the sites of Qishron North and Qishron South, see Covello-Paran and Tzin 2022: Appendix.

It was founded in the IBA, with later occupations in the Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age and the Persian and Roman periods. Qishron South is a small (c. 0.5 hectares) single-stratum settlement dating from the IBA, established above sterile colluvial soil.

The extramural, rock-cut shaft-tomb cemetery of the IBA settlement is located on the hill overlooking the settlement site from the west. Two excavated tombs had multiple interments and local and non-local[8] ceramic burial offerings (Zagorski and Rosenblum 2008). The cemetery was probably founded together with the IBA occupation at Qishron and paired with it, continuing in use in the Middle Bronze Age. The excavated and surveyed evidence does not permit linking specifically to Qishron North or Qishron South.

Ḥorbat Qishron North

The earliest settlement at Qishron North was dated to the IBA (Stratum VI). It was built directly atop bedrock or sterile soil, and marks the most extensive phase of occupation at the site. Notably, the easternmost section of the site, above the alluvial soil, was not inhabited following the abandonment of the IBA settlement, indicating that the Middle Bronze Age settlement contracted to the higher area of the mound. Consequently, architectural remains from the IBA extend above the topsoil layer, providing visible evidence of this settlement phase and more well-preserved remains. The excavations covered an area of c. 0.5 hectare on a north–south axis,[9] constituting a section through the site and enabling the investigation of the settlement margins. Most of the architectural remains were associated with a single stratum, yet there is evidence of an architectural change that was attributed to an additional stratum or phase.

The site plan comprised a spatially segregated system of built-up areas in the center and open work areas on its outer perimeters, which signify the border of the settlement. The built-up area is not uniform, including both individual multiroom units (Fig. 4:D, G, H, J) and a block-plan or cluster of juxtapositioned units (e.g., Fig. 4:K, L; Figs. 5, 6). The individual multiroom buildings were separated by open areas; their substantial size, along with their lack of uniformity, suggest a gradual process of expansion. In contrast, the block-plan units incorporated preplanned alleyways between the buildings, attesting that the planning and construction of these blocks was contemporaneous.

Although none of the architectural units were exposed in their entirety due to excavation constraints, several preliminary observations may be made. The walls of the individual multiroom buildings were mostly built of fieldstones for the lower courses, interspersed with some roughly hewn stones. The buildings' superstructures likely comprised a combination of stone and mud-brick courses.[10] The room floors were made of tightly packed earth,

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[8] The trickle-painted ware vessels (Zagorsky and Rosenblum 2008: Fig. 7:1, 8) were produced in the Jordan Valley (see Covello-Paran 2015; 2023).

[9] The excavation areas were according to the requirements of modern development (e.g., roadworks, gas line, drainage channels), which resulted in the elongated excavation areas on a single axis.

[10] Fragmentary evidence of brick collapse was found in the building accumulations.

Fig. 5. Qishron North, Area L, block-plan units with alley between them, looking east (photography: A. Peretz).

Fig. 6. Qishron North, Area K, block-plan, looking northeast (photography: A. Peretz).

Fig. 7. Qishron North, Area G, basalt-paved cooking installation (photography: A. Peretz).

often incorporating flat stone slabs. Many rooms contained stone-built corner installations, such as stone platforms; sometimes, the corner was closed-off by a wall and *in situ* storage vessels were found within. Each unit featured a designated basalt-paved cooking installation (Fig. 7), occasionally situated above a raised platform. The basalt used for these floors was sourced from a quarry located within a radius of 2 km away from the site.[11]

Of the units in the block-plan clusters in the southern part of the site, two (Figs. 5, 6) yielded unique finds, one in Area K and one in Area L. Room 1731 in Area K (Fig. 6) included an *in situ* assemblage of storage jars, cooking pots and black wheel-made ware (BWMW) teapot and jug (Fig. 8);[12] one of the storage jars contained large amounts of carbonized grape pips that yielded a ^{14}C date in the twenty-third century BCE (Lev et al. 2021:156–159). A courtyard in the adjoining building in Area L (Fig. 5) yielded a concentration of grinding stones, including sets of upper and lower ones (Fig. 9), and inset mortars.

[11] The author is indebted to Anastasia Shapiro and Yotam Asscher, for conducting a geological survey to determine the sources of the basalt used within the site for different purposes.

[12] Substantial quantities of BWMW potsherds of vessels (>100) were found throughout the excavated units.

Fig. 8. Qishron North, Area K, Room 1731 with storage jars filled with grape pips, cooking pots and BWMW vessels, looking southeast (photography: A. Peretz).

Fig. 9. Qishron North, Area L, one of the sets of upper and lower grinding stones (photography: A. Peretz).

Accumulations above the floors contained pottery, and also above some building floors were numerous nearly complete vessels, metal artifacts, groundstone and flint items, including Canaanean sickle blades and ad hoc tools, as well as animal bones.[13] Among the pottery vessels were many serving (Fig. 10:1–3, 6), cooking (Fig. 10:4, 5) and storage (Fig.

[13] The archaeozoological analysis has not yet commenced.

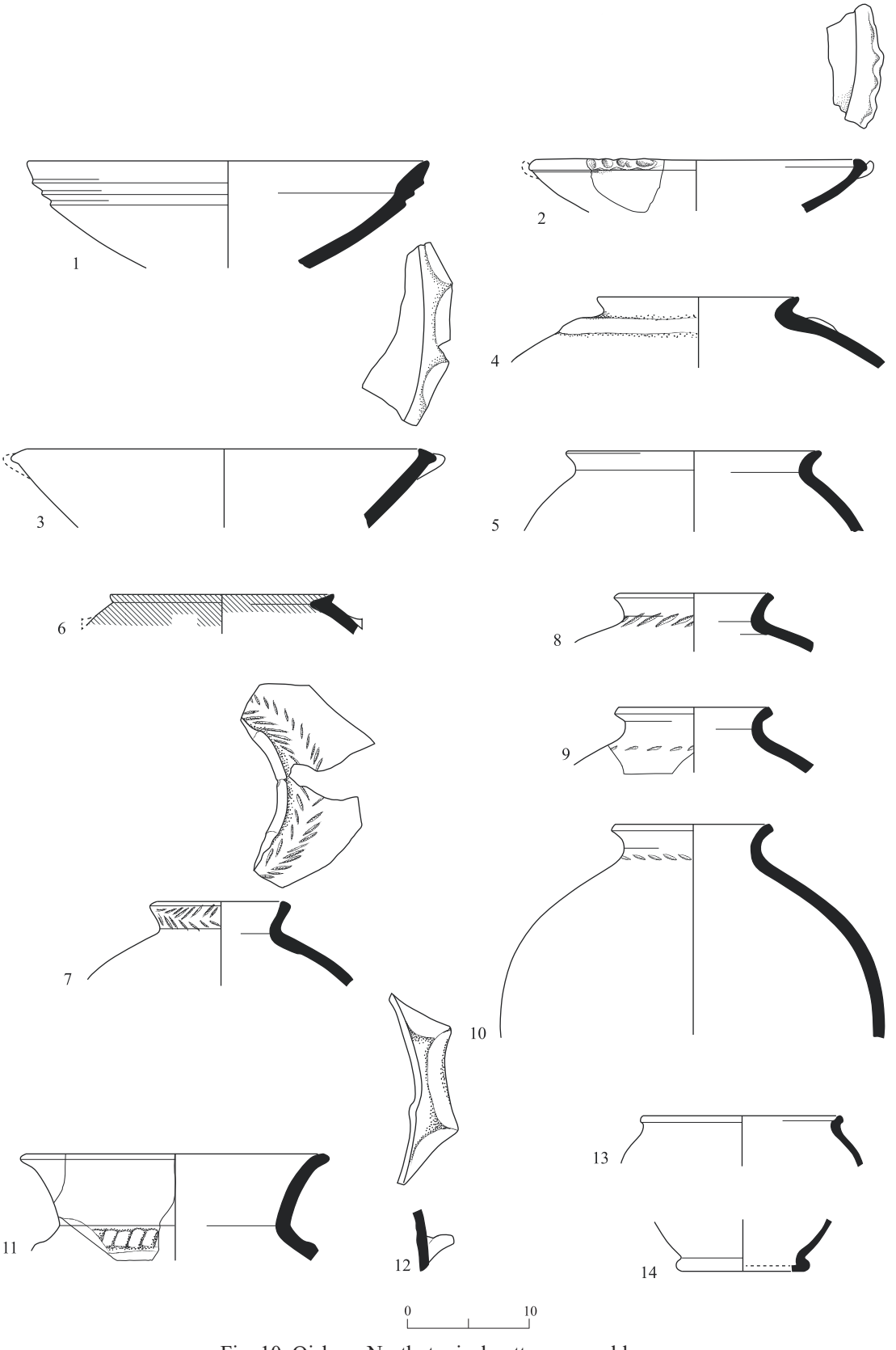

Fig. 10. Qishron North, typical pottery assemblage.

◂ **Fig. 10**

No.	Type	Locus	Reg. no.
1	Bowl	513	5243/1
2	Bowl	512	5233/2
3	Bowl	572	5270
4	Cooking pot	513	5221/2
5	Cooking pot	528	5253/2
6	Holemouth krater	546	5258/4
7	Storage jar	546	5258/2
8	Storage jar	513	5243/2
9	Storage jar	512	5233/1
10	Storage jar	528	5253/1
11	Pithos	513	5087/1
12	Ledge handle (storage jar)	511	8119/1
13	Teapot (BWMW)	839	8189
14	Goblet (BWMW)	905	9035

10:7–12) vessels, including non-local BWMW teapots (e.g., Fig. 10:13) and goblets (e.g., Fig. 10:14). Copper-alloy awls were found in units throughout the site; a dagger was found in Area G. The individual structures had parallel sets of grinding stone installations and inset basalt mortars, cooking places and other installations, suggesting that they were self-sufficient domestic buildings.

The excavations on the northern and southern boundaries of the site offer insights into space utilization in these peripheral areas. In the southernmost squares of the site (Fig. 4:E,[14] I, M), stone mortars and grinding stones were found in association with surfaces paved with small stones, suggesting their function in communal processing of agricultural produce. Smoothed rock-hewn stone surfaces and hewn installations were identified on bedrock outcrops in the northernmost areas (Fig. 4:C, D). Evidence of on-site pottery production was observed on the southeastern border of the site, where a pit-kiln[15] for pottery production was exposed (Fig. 4:R; Covello-Paran and Tzin 2022), and on the western perimeter of the site (Fig. 4:G), where a rock-hewn installation was found in association with a basalt tournette. Additional tournettes were retrieved from other IBA settlement sites, such as Naḥal Refa'im (Roth 2024), providing further evidence of on-site pottery production (for the employment of a 'rotary device' in the IBA, see Roux 2015:72).

[14] The northernmost excavation squares of Area E.

[15] The kiln was exposed in the 2020 excavations directed by Barak Tzin (Permit No. A-8765) on behalf of the IAA.

Ḥorbat Qishron South

Qishron South is located c. 300 m south of Qishron North and is separated from it. There is no evidence of a settlement or other human activity between these two entities, and thus, the borders of the site were determined by the results of the excavation, probes and topography. The site was not resettled post-IBA; however, the lack of later remains may be the result of the intense plowing of the area over the years, resulting in the existence of poorly-preserved remains directly at topsoil.

The settlement at Qishron South features three dispersed multiroom buildings with open areas in between them enclosed within a wide wall (c. 2.5 m wide; Fig. 11) uncovered in the easternmost (Fig. 11:O1) and northwesternmost (Fig. 11:Q) areas. The wall was constructed of medium- and large-sized fieldstones, preserved to a height of less than one meter; it was reinforced by another row of stones. A wall segment (W3302) exposed in Area Q (Fig. 12) most likely continued west toward the modern highway, and it is suggested that it had originally reached the foot of the hill due west of the site (Fig. 3).

Of the multiroom buildings (Areas O2, P, Q), one (Area Q) was constructed adjacent to the enclosing wall; its rooms were of uniform size, displaying a symmetrical layout

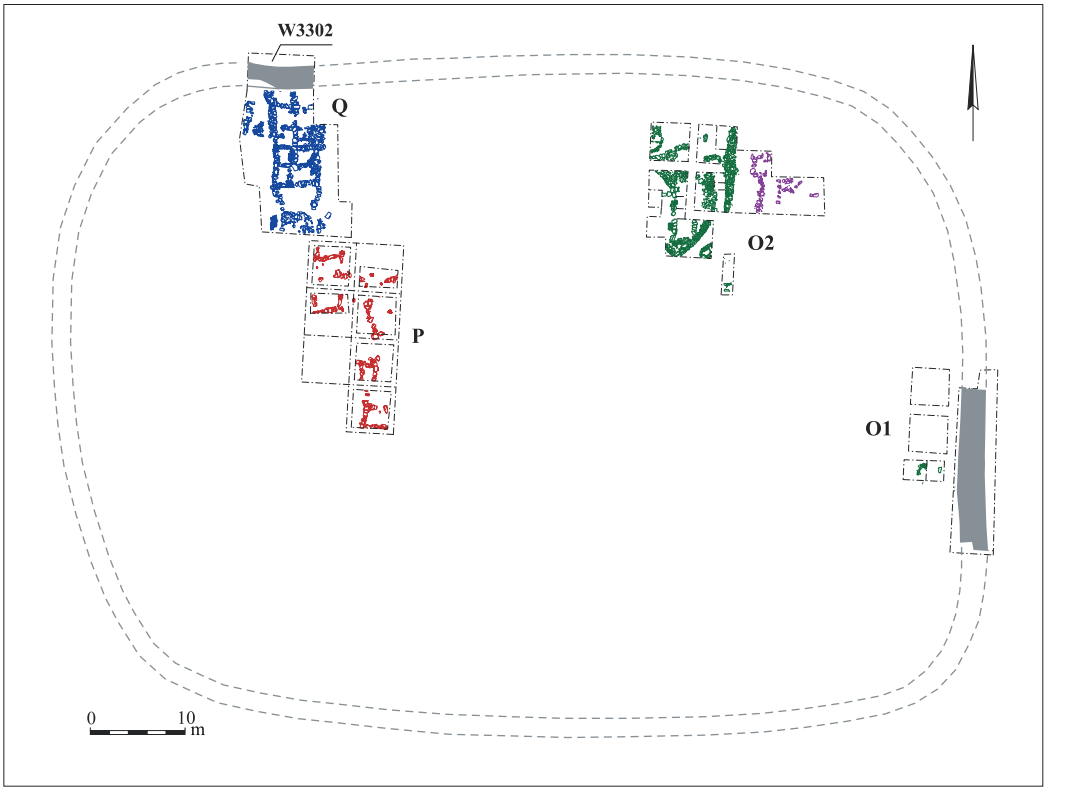

Fig. 11. Qishron South, intra-site spatial distribution of units and enclosing wall; the dashed line marks the proposed borders of the settlement (drafting: D. Porotsky)

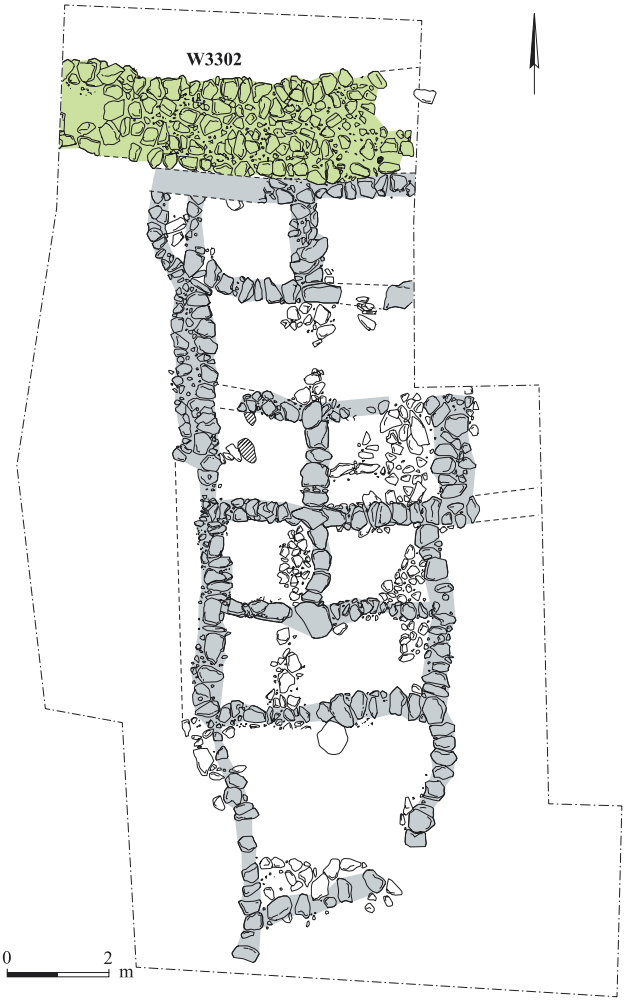

Fig. 12. Qishron South, Area Q (drafting: D. Porotsky).

compared to the other structures at the site and at nearby Qishron North. All the buildings share these features: cooking installations and *in situ* grinding stones. Artifacts recovered from the accumulations above the building floors included a diverse array of pottery vessels, groundstone and flint tools, as well as animal bones (see n. 13). The pottery assemblage comprised a variety of vessels used for cooking, storage and serving, including fragments of BWMW vessels.[16]

[16] The quantitative analysis of the pottery assemblages from Qishron North and South could provide valuable insights into the similarities and differences among vessel types.

‘En Sheḥor

‘En Sheḥor is a small site (0.2 hectare)[17]—a hamlet located on the eastern lower bank of Naḥal Qeshet, next to the spring of ‘En Sheḥor and in the vicinity of ‘En Kazan. Two excavations were carried out at the site (Feig 2021; Hanna 2024), both revealing occupation levels dating to the IBA and MB I–II; the dense Middle Bronze Age stratigraphic sequence considerably disturbed the IBA levels. Based on the excavation results, the site was established in the IBA directly above the basalt bedrock, contra to the survey data, which indicated an earlier occupation (Gal 1998: Site 47).

The architectural remains attest to a single IBA occupation stratum at the site. The spatial data regarding the site’s organization is limited, yet the architectural remains exposed near the spring[18] and in the main excavation area bear evidence of individual multiroom units throughout the site. Numerous small stone levels were found in association with cooking installations, alongside concentrations of grinding stones and storage vessels.

Naḥal Qeshet

A few hundred meters southwest of ‘En Sheḥor, a surveyed site (Gal 1998: Site 52) was recorded, which occupies an area of one hectare. This site was established in the IBA, resettled in the Middle Bronze Age and subsequently abandoned, closely resembling the stratigraphic profile of ‘En Sheḥor. Although it is plausible that ‘En Sheḥor and the Naḥal Qeshet site represent a single settlement, based on the settlement patterns observed at Qishron, they seem to be alternative developments of two spatially segregated neighboring sites. The available data does not allow for a clearer distinction.

Kafr Kama

A cemetery dating to the IBA is the earliest period recorded on the hilltop of Kafr Kama.[19] The IBA shaft tombs were hewn into the limestone bedrock, which underlies the modern built-up area of the village; its southern boundary is the basalt outcrops. The IBA cemetery was excavated in two expeditions[20] (Haya Ben Nahum, pers. comm.; Covello-Paran 2008). Two tombs (TIII, TX) were partly excavated, and there is limited data regarding T111 of Ben Nahum’s excavation. Tomb III of Covello-Paran’s excavation had a stone platform

[17] The size estimation is based on the survey data (Gal 1998: Site 47). Occupation from later periods is noted by architectural elements on the elevated plain above the IBA site.

[18] The author wishes to thank Butros Hanna, who directed excavation (Permit No. A-6994) on the southern and northernmost areas of the site. The interpretation here is based on the author’s consultation with the excavator in the field.

[19] For a review of expeditions and settlement patterns from later periods, see Covello-Paran 2008.

[20] The excavations were directed by Haya Ben Nahum in 1994 and 1997, on behalf of the IAA (Permit Nos. A-2320, A-2663) and by Karen Covello-Paran in 2002 on behalf of the IAA (Permit No. A-3779).

above bedrock; the tomb was not fully excavated, yet a jug burial offering suggests that interments were placed above a stone platform with accompanying offerings. No settlement remains have been recorded to date at Kafr Kama, and therefore, the location of the IBA settlement is enigmatic. Consequently, our understanding of the community that utilized the tombs for burial purposes remains limited. The IBA cemetery was reused in the Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman period.[21]

Ḥorbat Zelef

Ḥorbat Zelef is located on the lower eastern slopes of Mount Tabor, within the confines of modern-day Shibli. Here, shifting settlement patterns were observed between the mound of Ḥorbat Zelef and the spring. The settlement and cemetery of Ḥorbat Zelef provide valuable insights into the juxtaposition of domestic and burial landscapes.

An IBA settlement was exposed on the lower slopes near the valley floor, c. 250 m south of the ʻEn Zelef spring,[22] whereas near the spring (Covello-Paran 2011b) were exposed EB I and Middle Bronze Age occupation layers. The IBA settlement (100 sq m) comprised only few architectural remnants of a single building, featuring walls constructed from a single row of large fieldstones. The size of the IBA settlement could not be determined; however, it was most likely a small site (less than 0.5 hectare). The IBA settlement overlays remains dating to EB IB and EB II, and after its abandonment, it was reoccupied in MB I (Hendrik [Enno] Bron, pers. comm.).

Overlooking the settlement site is a rock-cut shaft-tomb cemetery that was partially excavated (Covello-Paran 2011b). One of the tombs was initially hewn in EB IB, later reused in EB III, and then again, in the IBA (Covello-Paran 2011b). In the IBA, multiple burials were arranged along the walls of the burial chamber, or positioned atop a stone platform that sealed the preceding interments. The burial offerings primarily comprised serving vessels, such as amphoriskoi, jugs and bowls, along with storage jars; no BWMW was retrieved.

Kafr Kanna South

The presence of an IBA settlement was documented in the central area of present-day Kafr Kanna, near the spring, overlying earlier Chalcolithic and EB I settlement remains (Covello-Paran and Smithline, forthcoming). The spatial distribution of the IBA remains indicates that during this period, the settlement was not densely populated and extended both to the north

[21] Additional salvage excavations of Middle Bronze Age and Roman-period tombs were directed by Zohar Turgeman-Yaffe in 2017 on behalf of the IAA (Permit No. A-7899).

[22] The excavation was directed by Hendrik (Enno) Bron in 2018, on behalf of the IAA (Permit Nos. A-8172, A-8332).

and southeast in the vicinity of the Kanna spring. The fragmentary architectural elements comprise single-row stone walls. The finds, including serving, cooking and storage vessels, and a spindle whorl, bear evidence of craft activities within the household.

Kafr Kanna North

This is the second-largest excavated IBA settlement site in the region, after Ḥorbat Qishron (see above). The site is located on the gradual sloping foothills that connect Kafr Kanna and the Tur'an Valley. A large-scale excavation (0.7 hectare) and a surface survey in 2023[23] exposed at least two IBA building clusters (I, II). Following the abandonment of the site, a successive occupation dated to the Roman period was revealed, comprising a road, a farmstead and associated installations.

Cluster I comprised a complete domestic block-plan of over 35 rooms of various sizes, which was built above bedrock on the lower slopes of the Kafr Kanna hills (Fig. 13; Abdallah Mokary, pers. comm.). The pre-planning of most of the built-up area is indicated

Fig. 13. Kafr Kanna North, general view of main block-plan architectural unit, looking southeast (photography: A. Peretz).

[23] The excavation was directed by Abdallah Mokary in 2023, on behalf of the IAA (Permit No. A-9384). The author thanks the excavator for the permission to present the excavation results here.

by an alleyway that dissected the block of rooms and by the enclosure of the cluster by a narrow wall. The walls of the rooms primarily comprise a single row of large stones and show an adaptation to the sloping bedrock (floor levelling, stepped wall foundations). Also exposed at the site were basalt-slab cooking installations, benches and indications of a metallurgical activity near a monolithic standing stone at the northernmost edge of the site. The architectural remains of Cluster II were poorly preserved beneath the Roman-period farmstead, revealing only fragmented wall segments.

DISCUSSION: SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

An essential aim of the settlement pattern analysis was to investigate the rural settlement network and ascertain the presence of inherent central settlement sites. The settlement pattern observed in Lower Galilee is linear, aligning closely with communication routes and roads, notably in the Tur'an Valley, where the settlements were strategically situated along its margins. The significant absence of a dendritic clustering of sites in the study area negates the existence of a central site or place exerting jurisdiction over surrounding satellite settlements. Based on the available data, two hierarchical tiers may be identified based on site size: a higher tier—represented by Qishron North, the largest village in the region—which indicates an elevated status; and a lower tier—represented by smaller sites, such as 'En Sheḥor and Naḥal Qeshet—which served as hamlets. Furthermore, initial examinations of the Qishron sites indicate a heightened level of complexity, particularly evident in the walled settlement at Qishron South that represents a third tier in the settlement pattern.

The comparable settlement patterns in Lower Galilee with Qishron South, Qishron North and 'En Sheḥor may present a parallel tiered system in the north, also during the second half of the IBA. Applying these patterns to the Qishron sites and the immediate region is tempting, yet the smaller scale of settlements in Lower Galilee, including the size of Qishron South, are problematic when considering whether Qishron North and South were central sites. At present, prior to the complete research of Qishron, it seems that all the residential structures and installations were associated with a specific domestic unit. It is notable that the succeeding Middle Bronze Age settlement at Qishron North also exhibits a rural character, as at 'En Sheḥor and Ḥorbat Zelef. Thus, no pattern of development from an open settlement to an urban center was observed in this region but rather, the rural nature of this area continues.

Walled Settlements in the Intermediate Bronze Age

The walled settlement at Qishron South, the first to be unearthed west of the Jordan Valley, enables a reevaluation of the social organization, economic strategies and settlement hierarchies in this period. To date, IBA settlements were distinguished by an absence of a defensive wall—a typical trait in central urban sites. This, and the preference of the IBA population to settle in the lower lands, which is less conducive to fortified structures, exhibit a break from the EB III settlement patterns, for example in the Jezreel Valley (Covello-

Paran 2023). The intra-site spatial analysis of Qishron North, and the erection of a walled settlement at Qishron South, indicate a two-tiered settlement hierarchy between these sites, wherein the walled settlement indicates socio-political organization and control, albeit within the confines of rural complexity. The dating of the walled settlement at Qishron to the twenty-third century BCE, based on the retrieval of BWMW, places it in the later phase of this period.

The pattern of development observed specifically at Qishron, where two juxtaposed sites—one walled and one not—are present, may be compared to the settlement patterns at Khirbat el-Meiyeteh in the eastern Samarian Hills. The fortified multistrata IBA site at Khirbat el-Meiyeteh (0.8 hectare) was established in a late phase of the IBA (Bar, Cohen and Zertal 2013; Bar 2020). Its two-meter-wide fortification wall is comparable to the Qishron South wall, yet the former was preserved to a much greater height (Bar 2020: Fig. 19.5). At a distance of c. 400 m from Khirbat el-Meiyeteh are an unwalled IBA site, el-Bird (c. 2 hectares), and clusters of circa 50 smaller sites, which according to Bar (2020:362) represent a three-tiered organizational structure, with the fortified site serving as the central site (Bar 2020:363). Notably, the settlement pattern in the el-Meiyeteh region demonstrates a development during the later phase of the IBA with the establishment of this fortified center. According to the excavator, el-Meiyeteh is likely interconnected with the neighboring fortified sites east of the Jordan Valley, rather than with contemporary sites and settlement networks in other regions of Israel (Bar 2020).

Despite the significance of the fortifications of the IBA[24] sites in the Jordan Valley, such as Khirbat Iskandar (Richard et al. 2010) and Tell el-Ḥammam (Collins 2020), these sites demonstrate direct continuity from the Early Bronze Age and are of a larger scale and distinct organizational structures, site trajectories and intensities compared to the Lower Galilee sites in general, and Qishron in particular.

The precise function of the enclosing wall at Qishron South remains enigmatic, and it is uncertain whether it served as a defensive fortification linked to external or intra-regional factors. However, the resources required for its construction indicate elite control.

Intra-Site Spatial and Socio-Economic Organization

The main data for understanding the intra-site spatial organization in the region was recorded at the Qishron sites and at Kafr Kanna North. The two Qishron settlements differ in size and layout: Qishron North is much larger than Qishron South, and exhibits a denser plan; Qishron North was not walled, its borders identified by the open areas flanking the site—a cultural feature noted at numerous sites in the Jezreel Valley (Covello-Paran 2023), where the open areas were used for cooperative processing of agricultural goods.

[24] Note that they are labelled there "EB IV".

The prosperity of the village community at Qishron North could indeed be attributed to a well-developed agricultural base,[25] which likely supplied the necessary resources for undertaking projects on a collective basis. The construction of the wall at Qishron South serves as evidence of the capability to undertake such projects, yet the distinction of this site remains to be determined with future analysis.

The distribution of the units at Qishron North is suggestive of an extended settlement process, including the initial agglomeration of dispersed self-sufficient households (farmsteads),[26] followed by the pre-planned block of adjacent courtyard buildings. Note that the assemblage of grindstones in the southernmost building at Qishron North (Area L; Fig. 5) represents a change in the social structure of the site. While the separate multiroom units had parallel sets of grinding stones and mortars, reflecting individual and separate processing of agricultural commodities, the block-plan building had a courtyard with a high concentration of grinding-stone sets and mortars that is beyond the need of the domestic use of one unit. This phenomenon may signify either collective domestic activities among certain units, or the deliberate organization of such activities by an elite or a person of elevated status.

Qishron South is characterized by three individual units with no apparent signs of planning within the walled settlement. It is conceivable that additional units lie below the modern road.

While both settlements comprise multiroom buildings, the rooms at Qishron North are larger and less regular in size compared to those at Qishron South. Nevertheless, some pre-planning seems to have taken place at Qishron North as well, as suggested by the alleys separating the buildings and the designation of specific areas for industrial activity. There are both roofed and open areas in all the excavated households. Placing the pottery kiln at the southeastern edge of the settlement likely indicates an intention to keep polluting industries on the outskirts of the built-up area.

The diverse plan at Qishron North, consisting of block-plan domestic units separated by alleyways alongside a densely populated settlement nucleus of dwellings, bears resemblance to the site of Sha‘ar Ha-Golan in the Jordan Valley (Eisenberg 2012), albeit the latter’s remains are on a much large scale. The largest complete block-plan cluster in the region was uncovered at Kafr Kanna North. It comprised 35 rooms,[27] compared to the 25 rooms recorded at Sha‘ar Ha-Golan Area 100 (Eisenberg 2012: Plan 1).[28]

The significant abundance of BWMW at both Qishron North and South holds value not only for absolute dating (see below) but also for discerning social display. The surpassing

[25] This is attested by the numerous flint sickle blades and basalt pounding and grinding stones retrieved in all the excavations at the site (Smithline 2002; Kohn-Tavor 2020; Covello-Paran and Tzin 2022).

[26] Sites such as ‘Ein el-Ḥilu (Covello-Paran 2009) and Murḥan (Covello-Paran 2017) consist solely of dispersed households.

[27] The author is grateful to Abdallah Mokary for this information.

[28] The diverse plan, comprising both dispersed individual units and dense block-plan units, is a countrywide phenomenon, also observed, for example, at Naḥal Refa’im (see Eisenberg 2012:67).

quantities found at these sites, exceeding those at other contemporary sites in the study area,[29] suggest a propensity for elite emulation within both Qishron North and South. The origin of this ware in the northern Ḥula Valley and Syria indicates a strong interconnectivity with urban centers in Syria. Future analysis of the intra-site distribution of this ware at Qishron holds the potential to provide valuable insights into intra-site social differentiation.

Chronology

Understanding the connections between the settlements in this region hinges on the issue of absolute and relative chronology. However, there is minimal data available from recent large-scale excavations at the four key sites: Qishron North, Qishron South, ʻEn Sheḥor and Kafr Kanna North. Currently, the prime data for absolute and relative dating is based on the Qishron sites. Radiocarbon dates retrieved from grape pips found in association with BWMW in the Area K building at Qishron North provide a range of 2300 to 2200 BCE (Lev et al. 2021: Fig. 6, Table 1). These dates comply with the dating of BWMW at additional sites, firmly establishing this ware as a key marker for the twenty-third century BCE (see above). Therefore, the presence of BWMW pottery at Qishron South and Qishron North, suggests a date around the twenty-third century BCE for these settlements. A small amount of BWMW was retrieved from Kafr Kanna, connecting the settlement process there to that at Qishron. All these sites were abandoned, leaving numerous vessels and implements *in situ*; however, it remains uncertain whether they were abandoned simultaneously. Regarding the Qishron settlements, additional *fossile directeurs* must be established to determine whether the two settlements were fully contemporaneous.

Household

Qishron North is characterized by an organized settlement layout, with open areas surrounding clusters of built structures or household units. These spaces accommodated various activities, including pottery production, typically located on the outskirts of the settlement, alongside other installations for agricultural processing. While the individual multiroom units suggest that the household served as the basic economic unit, the presence of block-plan clusters at Qishron North, with one unit featuring concentrated grinding installations, implies the existence of an alternative, more centralized economic model beyond the traditional household economy. Notably, there are no indications at any of the excavated sites of large storage facilities for surplus commodities, and it appears that small-scale storage was within the household framework. While at Qishron North and South, Kafr Kanna North and ʻEn Sheḥor there are no stone-constructed silos, it is noteworthy that all these sites feature some clay-lined storage pits; however they were not intended for accommodating large quantities.

[29] Noteworthy is the absence of BWMW among burial offerings at Ḥorbat Zelef and Kafr Kama, and the minute quantities retrieved from Kafr Kanna North.

Households in Qishron North and South, and Ḥorbat Zelef, demonstrated activities such as spinning, and potentially weaving, as indicated by the discovery of loomweights and spindle whorls. Moreover, the presence of ad hoc flint production suggests additional economic diversification within the community. The household is the basic economic unit and is devoid of substantial indications of social and economic disparities, suggesting that the village comprised kinship-based units (Covello-Paran 2015). Social interactions, including kinship ties or alliances, could have also played a role in the clustering of households (Crumley 1995).

Cemeteries

Additional communal endeavors are the extramural cemeteries in the region, as noted at Ḥorbat Zelef, Kafr Kama and Qishron. The settlements and cemeteries of Qishron and Ḥorbat Zelef are informative toward the pairing of domestic and burial landscapes known from the Jezreel Valley (Covello-Paran 2023) and Western Galilee (Getzov 1995), where the burial grounds all overlook the settlements. This phenomenon suggests that in IBA Lower Galilee, as well as in the western Galilee, there were no regional cemeteries, but instead, the settlement and burial landscapes were closely intertwined with one another, a phenomenon also known from other parts of the country (Greenhut 1995; 2019; Roth 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

Evidence of complexity in rural IBA has increased with the ongoing exposure of hamlets and villages dated to this period in Lower Galilee. From the abovementioned database of settlement and burial sites, the following observations may be made: (1) the IBA population aggregated in various-sized settlements, ranging from a clustering of a few family units to a larger aggregation of variously-densed households; (2) the inhabitants cooperatively engaged in agricultural processing, with craft specialization zoned within the settlements as seen from pottery production at it's outskirts; (3) the pre-planned collective extramural burial grounds, with rock-hewn shaft tombs, are also indicative of a 'craft' specialization during this period; (4) the presence of elites is evident, and it is expected to be more pronounced with continued analysis of contemporary sites.

The settlement process identified in this region in the second half of the IBA may aid in elucidating the emergence of urbanism in the following Middle Bronze Age. Qishron North and Qishron South are the most substantial IBA sites in the region, embodying the closest approximation to a central settlement. These sites offer a comprehensive understanding of how rural communities functioned autonomously, adapting to environmental, political and social challenges, without relying on urban centers. Furthermore, analyzing rural flexibility and complexity in isolation offers valuable insights into the unique dynamics that shaped these communities and their interactions within broader regional contexts.

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