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Title: The Early Bronze (c. 3200-2200 B.C.E.) ceramic material from al-Lahun in Central Jordan (Moab). An archaeological, typological and technological study, compared with assemblages from contemporaneous sites in the Southern Levant.

Abstract (English)

Al-Lahun may be considered as an important archaeological site which is located in the Wadi Mujib region, at 30 km east of the Dead Sea. Occupational evidence at the site covers many significant periods from the Pre-pottery Neolithic onwards. Due to its extensive Early Bronze Age (c. 3200-2250), particularly Early Bronze II-III (c. 3000-2200) occupation, al-Lahun may be considered as a seminal site for this period in Jordan.

This research focuses on the material retrieved from excavations at the necropolis in sector B3 and the “proto-urban” occupation level in Sector CI of al-Lahun, dated to the Early Bronze IB (c. 3200-3000) , and the fortified settlement in Sector C1, which could be attributed to the Early Bronze Age II-III (c. 2900-2450). Excavations were carried out by the “Belgian Committee of Excavations in Jordan” in 1982 and during three seasons between 1998 and 2000. To be able to present a more complete and comprehensible examination of the Early Bronze occupation at al-Lahun, this study comprises an entire chapter on the archaeological context, which at the end is linked to the ceramic material and domestic installations found.

The pottery analysis which is the main topic of this research reveals interesting information on the Early Bronze II-III settlement itself, the material culture, the domestic life of the inhabitants and the economic and sociopolitical organization of the settlement. The petrographic analysis of the ceramics from al-Lahun not only provides a better understanding of the provenience of raw materials, the techniques associated with the production of the ceramic objects during this period (e.g. the use of tempering materials, shaping and firing techniques), but also exposes remarkable information on contacts and apparent trade activities.
The Early Bronze (EB I and II-III) potters of al-Lahun were mostly pre-wheel potters. Evidence for pottery production on a turn-table and presumably also for the existence of a professional ceramic workshop, pertains to the discovery of a “tournette” fragment and the existence of luxury or special ceramic wares. Furthermore, the present study includes comprehensive sections on Early Bronze I stamp seal impressions, potter’s marks and incised designs, on Early Bronze II-III textile production, zoomorphic clay figures, small stone and clay objects, and the presence and use of bitumen.

The numerous comparanda taken from assemblages collected at other sites in the region east and west of the Dead Sea, enlighten the position of al-Lahun in the Southern Levant. We were able to classify the ceramic material as a Southern assemblage which is, due to the paucity of certain typological characteristics, clearly separated from Northern and supposedly Central assemblages. From this perspective we may add that the pottery from al-Lahun bears strong similarities to the contemporaneous and corresponding material from published Early Bronze sites in the Southern Levant, such as for instance Arad, Jericho, ‘Ai and Bab edh-Dhra’. This however does not exclude the fact that there are also numerous matches with pottery collections from sites located in the North of Israel and Jordan.

The absence of the earliest phase of the Early Bronze Age (EB IA) is not an uncommon feature. Very often sites with an Early Bronze IB occupation do not substantiate Early Bronze IA remains. As a result of this absence the transition between the Chalcolithic and the Early Bronze I is not well documented at al-Lahun. Nonetheless, the evolution between the Early Bronze IB and the succeeding Early Bronze II and III could be clearly demonstrated. As to the end of the Early Bronze II-III occupation, we can only speculate why this community abandoned the site after a presence of several generations. And why and by whom, years later, perhaps near the end of the Early Bronze III, the settlement area was reoccupied on a relatively small scale.