

The Relative Chronology of Khirbet Qeiyafa

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The pottery unearthed in the Iron Age settlement at Khirbet Qeiyafa has been dated by the excavators to the early Iron IIA period. They further state that the site provides the best example of early Iron IIA pottery in Judah and southern Israel (Kang and Garfinkel 2009a). The paper shows that the assemblage belongs to the late Iron I horizon in southern Israel.

KEYWORDS Khirbet Qeiyafa, Iron Age chronology, Early Iron IIA, Late Iron I

An Iron Age pottery assemblage unearthed at Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Valley of Elah in 2007–2009 (Kang and Garfinkel 2009a, 2009b) has been assigned by the excavators to a ceramic phase of the early Iron IIA. At the end of their detailed report, Kang and Garfinkel observe that certain Iron Age I pottery forms, such as bell-shaped Philistine bowls and goblets with a swallow body, are absent from the assemblage. They state that the Khirbet Qeiyafa pottery assemblage shows similarities to the pottery of Stratum XII at Arad, and is earlier than the pottery of Level V at Lachish, Stratum IVa at Tel Batash and local Level III at Tel Zayit. They conclude that the Khirbet Qeiyafa assemblage provides the best example of early Iron IIA pottery in Judah and southern Israel (2009a: 146). In what follows I suggest that the Khirbet Qeiyafa assemblage belongs to the late Iron I horizon in southern Israel.

Typology

Considerable continuity in pottery types makes it difficult to distinguish between the late Iron I and the early Iron IIA assemblages. Indeed, as is clear from Kang and Garfinkel's comparisons, most vessels of the Khirbet Qeiyafa assemblage are known in both ceramic phases.¹ Dating such an assemblage can therefore be done only according to forms that appear *exclusively* in one of these ceramic phases.

¹ The comparisons they cite from Iron I strata are: Tel Batash V, Tel Beersheba IX, Tel Masos III, Ashdod XIII, XI, Tell Qasile XI, X. Those cited from early Iron IIA strata are: Tel Batash IV, Lachish V, Tel Beersheba VII, VI, Tel Masos II, Arad XII, Ashdod X, Tell Qasile IX, VIII.

The foremost feature of the pottery assemblages of the Iron IIA in the highlands of Judah, the Shephelah and the southern Coastal Plain is the prominence of red-slipped and hand-burnished bowls and kraters.² This phenomenon has been observed at Lachish where “the most predominant feature characterizing the pottery of Levels V and IV... is the red slip which is often hand burnished” (Zimhoni 2004: 1673). In Stratum IV at Tel Batash “red slip becomes ubiquitous, along with irregular and horizontal hand burnish” (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 149), and at Tel Miqne “...red slip and hand burnished pottery... became the most prominent in the ceramic assemblage of Stratum IV” (Dothan and Gitin 2008: 1955). This is also true for Stratum 3 at Beth-Shemesh and Strata A-4 and A-3 at Tell eṣ-Ṣafi (Shai and Maeir 2008: 420). Similar surface treatment of the pottery can be observed in western Coastal Plain sites such as Ashdod Stratum X (Dothan and Porath 1982: 8; Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005: 170) and Tell Qasile Strata IX–VIII, where the most prominent feature “is the heavy, thick, red hand-burnished slip appearing on kraters and bowls” (Mazar 1985: 127). At Tel Masos in the Beersheba Valley, “one of the outstanding characteristics of Stratum II, in contrast to the previous stratum, is the common appearance of hand-burnished bowls” (Fritz and Kempinski 1983: 76). The same is true for Tel Beersheba Strata VII–VI (Brandfon 1984: 61) and Arad Strata XII–XI (Singer-Avitz 2002: 119). To the best of my knowledge, there is no Iron IIA site in the highlands of Judah, in the Shephelah or in the southern Coastal Plain that lacks this indicative pottery.

At Khirbet Qeiyafa “bowls with red-slip appear only sporadically... and irregular hand-burnish is even rarer” (Kang and Garfinkel 2009a: 121). The red-slip and hand-burnish treatment has been observed on 15 sherds (*ibid.*: 121) out of 19,623 sherds identified as belonging to the Iron IIA period (*ibid.*: 119). In comparison, red-slip and hand burnish appear on 92% of the bowls of Level V at Lachish (Zimhoni 2004: 1675–1676) and 65% of the registered bowls of Stratum VII at Tel Beersheba. At Tel Batash Stratum IV, 64% of the bowls are red-slipped (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 149).

Two other pottery forms found at Khirbet Qeiyafa indicate a date in the late Iron I:

(1) *Deep, large, carinated krater with an everted rim* (Kang and Garfinkel 2009a: Fig. 6.6: 1–5). These kraters are very common in strata dating to the Late Bronze Age and are most popular at sites in the Shephelah and Coastal Plain (for references, see Gadot 2009: 211). They continue to appear in Iron I strata such as Stratum V at Tel Batash (Type KR 1–Panitz-Cohen 2006: Fig. 61: 13–18), Strata 6–4 at Beth-Shemesh, Stratum A-4 at Tell eṣ-Ṣafi, Stratum VA at Tel Miqne and Strata XII–X at Tell Qasile (Mazar 1985: Figs. 14: 2, 5; 15: 26; 17: 1; 24: 15; 27: 7; 40: 3–4). At all these sites such kraters are not found in the Iron IIA layers, i.e., Stratum IV at Tel Batash,³ Stratum 3 at Beth-Shemesh, Stratum A-3 at Tell eṣ-Ṣafi, Stratum IVA at Tel Miqne and Strata IX–VIII at Tell Qasile. A similar picture emerges in the Beersheba Valley. At Tel Beersheba deep, large, carinated kraters with an everted rim appear in Strata IX–VIII of the late Iron I (Brandfon 1984: Figs. 17: 18; 20: 8). However, these kraters are absent at various sites in layers attributed to the early Iron IIA,

² This technique appears in small quantities toward the last phase of the Iron I (Brandfon 1984: 65; Mazar 1985: 83; 1998); it reaches its peak in the Iron IIA.

³ Some rims of this type of krater (Type KR 14c) are illustrated in the figures (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: Fig. 3), but they seem to be earlier, intrusive sherds (*ibid.*: 63).

such as Stratum VII at Tel Beersheba and Stratum XII at Arad.⁴ Especially noteworthy is the absence of this type of krater in the Iron IIA strata of Arad and Lachish—sites that were not inhabited in the late Iron I. This is not a regional phenomenon, as this type of krater does appear in the Late Bronze strata of Lachish.

(2) *Elongated storage jars with a rounded shoulder and a small flat base* are found in large numbers at Khirbet Qeiyafa (Kang and Garfinkel 2009a: Figs. 6.23; 6.24: 1–5, 10–15). Elongated jars are well known in Iron I and Iron IIA layers. They are common at Tell Qasile, where they appear in Stratum XI and continue until Stratum IX (Mazar 1985: 54, with additional references to many other sites such as Wright's Beth-Shemesh Strata III and IIA, Tel Zippor Stratum I, Tell Eitun, Ashdod Stratum X, Tel Esdar Stratum III, Tel Masos Strata II–I). One Storage jar is known from Tell eš-Šafi Stratum A-4 and many jars of this type appear in several layers at Tel Miqne: Strata VIIA, VC, VA, IVB and IVA. They also appear in Stratum IX at Tel Beersheba (Brandfon 1984: Fig. 19: 1–2). This type of storage jar is derived from the Late Bronze tradition. Some of the Late Bronze and Iron I examples have a flat base that is a later version of the Late Bronze stump base or bulging base (Dothan and Porath 1993: 78). They can be found at Tel Batash Stratum V (Panitz-Cohen 2006: 79, Pl. 76: 10), Beth-Shemesh Stratum 4, Tel Miqne Stratum VIIA, Ashdod Stratum XII (Dothan and Porath 1993: Fig. 34: 5), Tel Mor in a pit of Stratum III (Barako 2007: Fig. 3.26: 2–3) and Apeh Strata X14 and X12 (Gadot 2009: Figs. 8.39: 6; 8.56: 13). To the best of my knowledge, the Iron IIA storage jars of this type have a rounded base; none of them has a flat base. Apart from a single jar (Kang and Garfinkel 2009a: Figs. 6.24: 11), all the published Khirbet Qeiyafa storage jars have a flat base (Kang and Garfinkel 2009a: Figs. 6.23; 6.24: 10, 12–15).

The Khirbet Qeiyafa assemblage is different from those retrieved from nearby Iron I sites in the Shephelah (Tel Batash, Tell eš-Šafi and Tel Miqne) and Coastal Plain sites (Ashdod and Tell Qasile). The pottery assemblage from Stratum 4 at Beth-Shemesh, the latest Iron I stratum at the site, forms the best parallel to the Khirbet Qeiyafa repertoire. In both assemblages, there are deep carinated kraters in the Late Bronze tradition, elongated storage jars with a small flat base, cooking-pots with a flattened rim—and in both assemblages hand burnish is virtually absent. The typical Iron IIA pottery types are totally absent from both. Philistine decorated pottery is not represented at all at Khirbet Qeiyafa, while in the Beth-Shemesh assemblage there are some Philistine sherds (a total of 25). As the site of Beth-Shemesh was inhabited during all phases of the Iron I, it is possible that these sherds originate from those earlier phases. The Khirbet Qeiyafa pottery is also comparable to more inland late Iron I sites such as Tel Beersheba Strata IX–VIII.⁵

⁴ The stratigraphy at Tel Masos is complicated due to continuity of occupation without major destruction layers. Some of the Stratum III buildings were in use in Stratum II, and since the floors of the two strata were very close to each other (Fritz and Kempinski 1983: 37), a penetration of early sherds into later debris is possible. For this reason the pottery repertoire of Tel Masos is not included in this discussion.

⁵ The presence at Khirbet Qeiyafa of decorated vessels the excavators called “Middle Philistine Decorated Ware” (Kang and Garfinkel 2009b) is not surprising, as this ware is known at Iron I Judahite sites such as Strata IX–VIII at Beersheba (Brandfon 1984: Figs. 19: 7; 20: 15).

Discussion

Kang and Garfinkel are correct in stating that Level V at Lachish, Stratum IVA at Tel Batash and Local Level III at Tel Zayit are later than Khirbet Qeiyafa (2009a: 146), but they are wrong in arguing that the Khirbet Qeiyafa pottery shows similarities to the assemblage of Arad Stratum XII (*ibid.*: 146). They base the latter conclusion on a certain type of cooking-pot with inverted rim that appears at both sites and on other types, such as amphoriskoi, black juglets and the Cypriot ‘Black on Red Ware’,⁶ which are absent in both Arad XII and Khirbet Qeiyafa (*ibid.*: 146). Yet, the latter vessels are also absent in Level V at Lachish and Stratum IVA at Tel Batash. Lachish Level V, Tel Batash Stratum IVA and Arad Stratum XII contain similar pottery assemblages (for comparison, see Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004) and are therefore contemporaneous and there is no basis for creating this distinction between them when comparing them to the pottery assemblage of Khirbet Qeiyafa.

Kang and Garfinkel maintain that “previous work on the Iron IIA pottery in Judah was not founded on a satisfactory database” and add that “Khirbet Qeiyafa offers, for the first time, an important resource for our understanding of the pottery development of Judah in the early Iron Age IIA” (2009a: 119). They state that the Khirbet Qeiyafa pottery assemblage is a point of departure “for clearer dating of early Iron IIA strata in tell sites in the Shephelah and Judah” (*ibid.*: 146). Based on the fact that Khirbet Qeiyafa was occupied during a brief period of time, they create a new phase at the beginning of the Iron Age IIA period (that is, earlier than the conventional early Iron IIA)—a phase that is unknown at other sites.

This is methodologically wrong. Such a definition can be made only at a multi-layered site, where ceramic phases can be defined in superimposed strata and then compared to other sites. A single-stratum site must be adjusted to the well-known, wider stratigraphic/chronological scheme and not vice versa.

To sum up, the pottery assemblage of Khirbet Qeiyafa consists of local Iron I pottery in the Late Bronze tradition with not even a single type that can be ascribed *exclusively* to the Iron Age IIA.⁷ This assemblage should therefore be defined as belonging to the late Iron I period.⁸ The exact definition of the period is important because it allows placing the site within the appropriate cultural and settlement framework.

⁶ Mistakenly termed “Phoenician Black on Red”.

⁷ One jar rim from Khirbet Qeiyafa is similar to the pre-*lmlk* and *lmlk* jars. Accordingly, Kang and Garfinkel believe that this jar type appears earlier in this region than elsewhere (2009a: 135, Fig. 6.24: 9). It is hard to accept this assumption. If it is indeed a sherd of *lmlk* jar, it probably belongs to a later occupation at the site or its vicinity; Iron IIB sherds were found at Khirbet Qeiyafa or its slopes by Dagan (Dagan 2009: Fig. 4: 7–15, Table 1 on p. 74).

⁸ The fact that collared-rim jars, which are considered a hallmark of the Iron I assemblages, have not been found at Khirbet Qeiyafa is not surprising since these jars are very rare in the Shephelah (Panitz-Cohen 2006: 90) and are missing from the Negev.

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