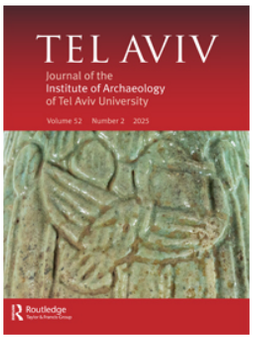

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A Unique Assemblage of Cremation Burial from Ḥorvat Tevet and Assyrian Imperial Rule in the Jezreel Valley

Omer Peleg, Karen Covello-Paran, Hannes Bezzel, Yuval Gadot and Omer Sergi*

Abstract

The excavation at Ḥorvat Tevet revealed a unique cremation burial assemblage, dating to the Iron IIC. This diverse assemblage, richer than comparable burials throughout the Levant, includes unparalleled pottery objects and luxury items that reflect extensive trade networks across the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia and emphasise the high status of the deceased and the community that carried out the burial. The opulence of the burial contrasts sharply with meagre findings in the site's Iron IIC occupational level. In this article, we present the assemblage and discuss the practice of cremation burials in the Iron Age Levant. In this light, we then demonstrate how this assemblage may contribute to the ongoing discussion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire's socio-economic dynamics and territorial strategies in the Jezreel Valley and beyond.

Keywords

Ḥorvat Tevet; Iron IIC; Southern Levant; Jezreel Valley; Neo-Assyrian Empire; Cremation burial; Tel Megiddo

Introduction

During most of the 7th century BCE, the Jezreel Valley was under Assyrian rule, within the province of Megiddo (Magiddû). The Megiddo province consisted of the northern valleys and the northern parts of the coastal plain of the Southern Levant, with its capital at Tel Megiddo (Stratum III), a newly built Assyrian urban centre (Peersmann 2000; Ussishkin 2018: 419–438). Several substantial urban centres from the preceding Iron IIA–IIB underwent abandonment or a significant reduction in size—e.g., Tel Taʿanach (Lapp 1975), Tel Yoqneʿam

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Stratum XI (Ben-Tor, Zarzecki-Peleg and Cohen-Anidjar 2005), Tel Reḥov Stratum II (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2020) and Tel Beth-Shean Stratum P6 (Mazar 2006). Amidst these changes in the urban network, however, some rural settlements in the region, such as Tel Qiri (Ben-Tor and Portugali 1987) and Tel Qashish (Ben-Tor, Bonfil and Zuckerman 2003), exhibited continuity, while others, such as Tel Kedesh (Arie 2011: 294–302) in the Jezreel Valley and Tell el-Ḥammah (Cahill, Lipton and Tarler 1987) in the nearby Beth-Shean Valley, exhibited resettlement and even growth.

The discourse regarding the socio-economic dynamics of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Southern Levant is characterised by an ongoing debate over its impact on the regions it had governed. The settlement pattern observed in the Jezreel Valley—most notably, the decline of urban centres and reduced public planning—has led some scholars to argue that this reflects the Assyrian approach of resource exploitation with minimal investment, suggesting a lack of concern for the provinces (Faust 2015: 778–780; cf. Grayson 1991: 216–217; Schloen 2001: 196). Others argue that the Assyrians viewed these provinces as long-term investments for stability (e.g., Naʾaman 2004; Younger 2015: 198–199). In this case, emphasis is given to the continuity and growth in the rural hinterlands of the Jezreel and Beth-Shean Valleys, alongside the renewal and construction of the Assyrian city at Tel Megiddo, as evidence of the valleys' role as a regional bread basket (Finkelstein *et al*. 2006: 771–773). According to this perspective, the Neo-Assyrian Empire aimed to maintain the region's agricultural economy and the corridors connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia through the northern valleys of the Southern Levant (Radner 2017: 215). Therefore, the transformation in settlement structure following the Assyrian conquest should be viewed as a change in the nature of investment rather than a lack of it (Koch 2023: 695–698; Squitieri 2024).

In this article, we provide a new perspective on this subject, viewed from the rural hinterland of the Jezreel Valley. Our study focuses on a unique assemblage associated with a cremation burial discovered at Ḥorvat Tevet. Cremation was an uncommon burial practice in the northern valleys of the Southern Levant, especially the Jezreel Valley. In addition to the uncommon burial practice, the assemblage associated with it is exceptional in its abundance and diversity, including prestigious artefacts rarely seen in the Southern Levant. In this article, we present the assemblage, delve into the practice of cremation burial and analyse its significance within the context of Assyrian rule. Through this analysis, we aim to offer insights into the dynamics of Assyrian imperial rule in the Jezreel Valley.[1]

[1] This article is based on Omer Peleg's M.A. thesis, written under the supervision of Omer Sergi and Yuval Gadot and submitted to Tel Aviv University.

Ḥorvat Tevet in the Jezreel Valley

Ḥorvat Tevet (Arabic: Khirbet Bîr Tibis; see Conder and Kitchener 1881: 162; Zadok 2011: 356; Finkelstein *et al.* 2006: 758) is a small site (ca. 3 ha) located in the northeastern margins of the Jezreel Valley, 15 km northeast of Tel Megiddo (Fig. 1). The site is situated on three rock-terraces sloping south to the northern bank of Naḥal Tevet at the foot of the Ha-Moreh Hill (Fig. 2). Successive trial and salvage excavations at the site uncovered a sequence of nine occupational levels spanning the MB III/LB I–Middle Islamic period (Table 1).[2]

Six occupational levels were attributed to the Iron Age, from the Iron I (Level 8) to the Iron IIC (Level 3). Four are dated to the Late Iron IIA (Levels 7–4). They are characterised by a series of three public buildings built on the upper terrace, with two successive destructions (at the end of Level 7 and at the end of Level 5) and an abandonment (at the end of Level 4). According to the excavators, during the Late Iron IIA (Levels 7–5, late 10th to the second half of the 9th century BCE) Ḥorvat Tevet functioned as an administrative hub for a royal estate in the service of early monarchic Israel (Butcher *et al.* 2022; Spiciarich *et al*. 2023; Sergi *et al*. 2024).

Table 1: Occupational levels in Ḥorvat Tevet

Level	Period	Date	Settlement type
Level 1	Middle Islamic	13th–14th centuries CE	Cemetery
Level 2	Roman–Byzantine	3rd–6th centuries CE	Rural settlement
Level 3	Iron IIC	7th century BCE	Royal Assyrian estate?
Level 4	Final Iron IIA	Late 9th–early 8th centuries BCE	Fort-like Building 4000, granary
Level 6/5	Late Iron IIA	9th century BCE	Pillared Building 5000 (Israelite royal estate)
Level 7	Late Iron IIA	Late 10th–early 9th centuries BCE	Pillared Building 7000 (Israelite royal estate)
Level 8	Iron I	11th century BCE	Rural settlement and a cemetery
Level 9	MB III/LB I	16th–15th centuries BCE	Sanctuary

[2] Trial excavations were carried out on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority in 2013 in the cemetery (Area D; directed by Abu-Zedan), in 2012 on the upper (Area A) and middle (Area C) terraces (directed by Karen Covello-Paran; Licence No. A-6134) and in 2018–2019 on the lower terrace (Areas F and G, directed by Yoav Tsur). Two seasons of extensive salvage excavations on the upper and middle terraces of the site (Areas A, B and C) and in the cemetery (Areas D and E) were carried out by the Israeli Institute of Archaeology on behalf of the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University (Licence No. B-467), directed by Omer Sergi (2018) and by Omer Sergi and Rachel Lindemann (2019).

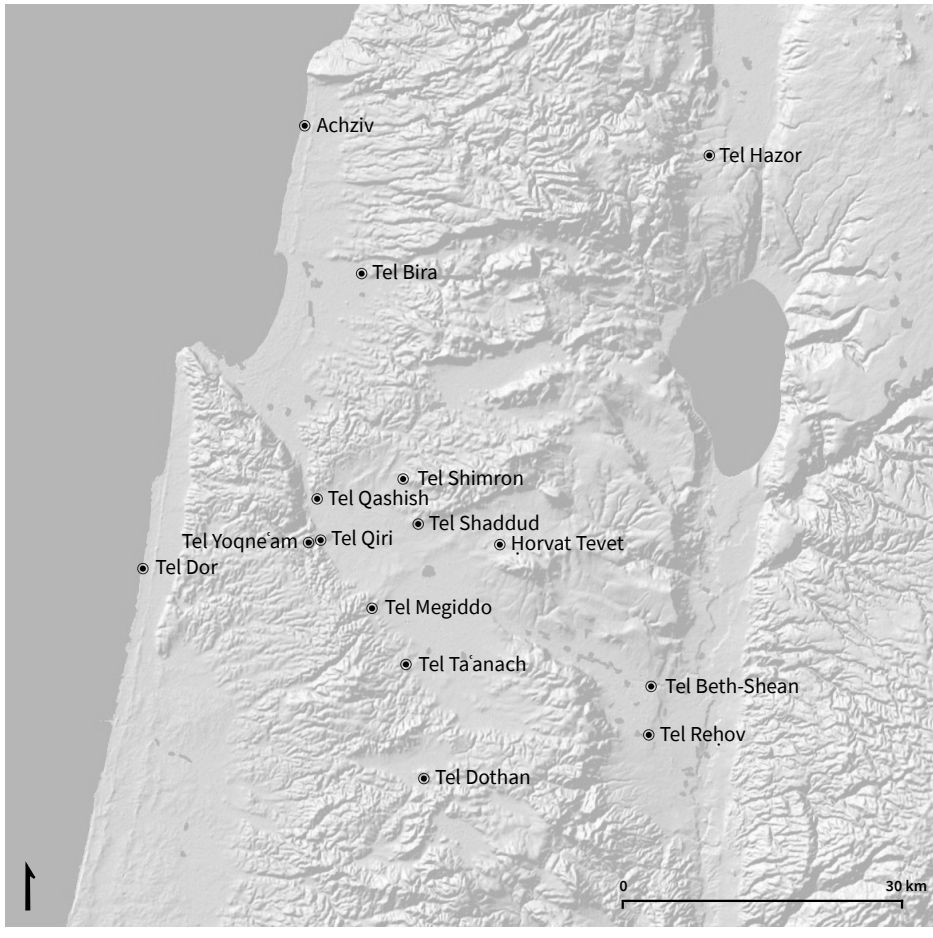

Fig. 1: Map showing the location of sites mentioned in the article (prepared by Omer Peleg)

Evidence for the utilisation of the fertile fields around Ḥorvat Tevet as royal lands dates back to the period of Egyptian dominance in the region during the LB II–III.[3] Textual sources attest to the use of local corvée labour for various public agricultural assignments in the rural hinterland, located on the northeastern margins of the Jezreel Valley, as part of the Egyptian imperial network and economic enterprise in the region.[4]

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[3] The term 'royal land' denotes land holdings owned by a political institution and managed by a centralised bureaucratic authority. This is distinct from lands allocated to individual farmers or private individuals, who cultivated them in exchange for a portion of the harvest (Finkelstein and Gadot 2015: 230). For further discussion of the royal lands in the Jezreel Valley, see Sergi *et al*. 2024: 109–110, and further below.

[4] Naʾaman 1981; Finkelstein *et al*. 2017; van den Brink *et al*. 2017.

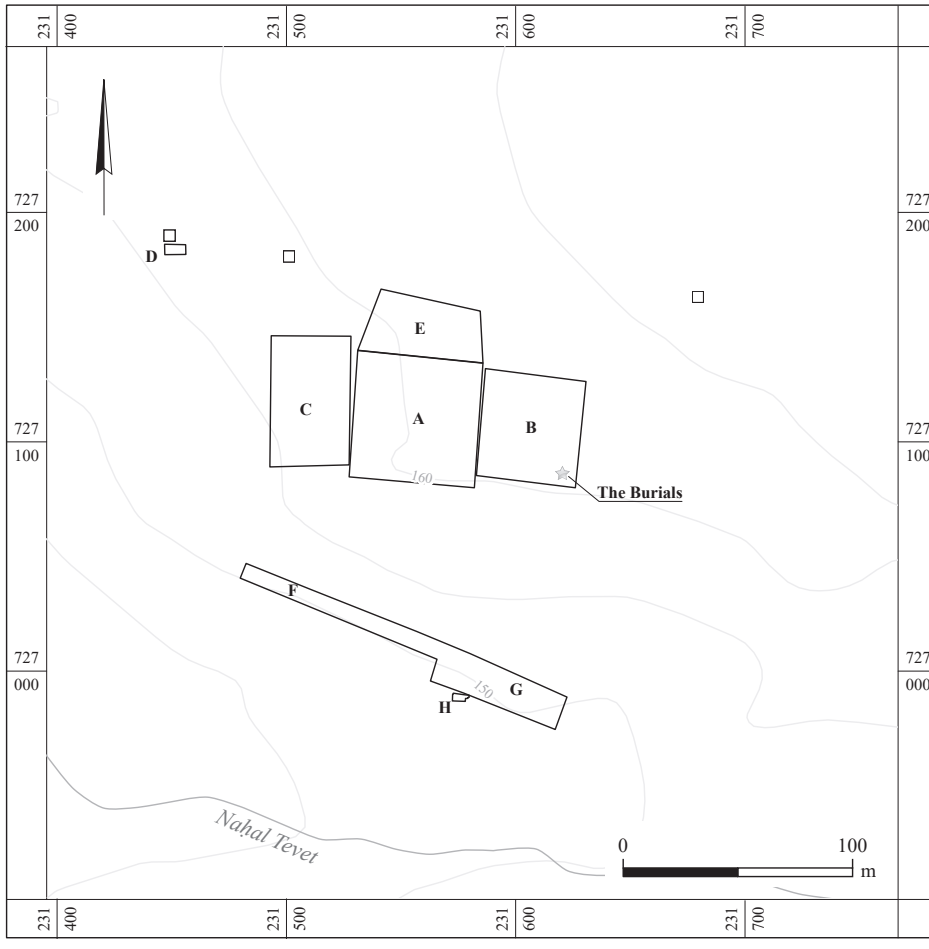

Fig. 2: Plan of Ḥorvat Tevet showing location of the Level 3 cremation burial (prepared by Anastasia Shapiro, Israel Antiquities Authority; courtesy of Karen Covello-Paran and Omer Sergi, the Ḥorvat Tevet Expedition)

The Israelite administrative hub in Ḥorvat Tevet was destroyed by fire in the second half of the 9th century BCE, a destruction that may be associated with the campaigns of Hazael of Aram-Damascus against Israel (Vaknin *et al.* 2022). Following a short-lived attempt to rehabilitate the site immediately after its destruction (Level 4), during the final phases of the Late Iron IIA (the last decades of the 9th century BCE) the site was abandoned, and it remained uninhabited throughout the Iron IIB (8th century BCE). Habitation resumed during the Iron IIC when the Jezreel Valley came under Assyrian rule.

The very few architectural features that were attributed to Level 3 at Ḥorvat Tevet (Fig. 3) were assigned to this level on stratigraphic grounds (they postdated Level 4 and pre-dated the Middle Islamic cemetery from Level 1). However, not all could be dated beyond doubt to the Iron IIC on the basis of pottery. Two floors in the southwestern and

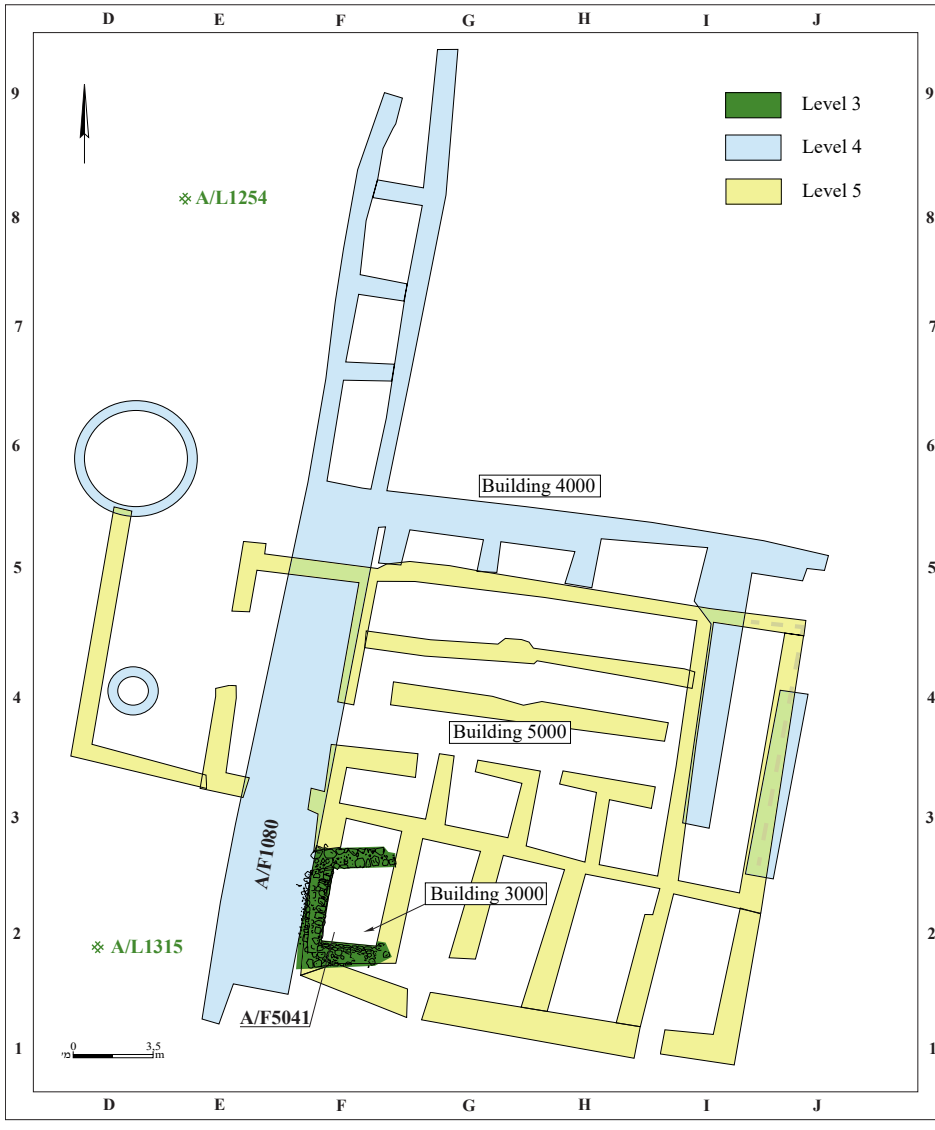

Fig. 3: Schematic plan of Iron Age stratigraphic sequence on the upper terrace, Area A, showing Building 3000 (Level 3) (prepared by Elena Ilana Delerzon, Israel Antiquities Authority; courtesy of Karen Covello-Paran and Omer Sergi, the Ḥorvat Tevet Expedition)

northwestern ends of Area A (A/L1315 and A/L1254, respectively) were detected, but no structures were found associated with these floors. Two broken 'torpedo'-type storage jars were recovered from these floors (Fig. 4). These jars corresponded to types TJ4 and TJ2, as classified by Shalvi and Gilboa (2022). Consequently, these floors may likely be dated to the early stages of the Iron IIC, and therefore we attribute them to Level 3.

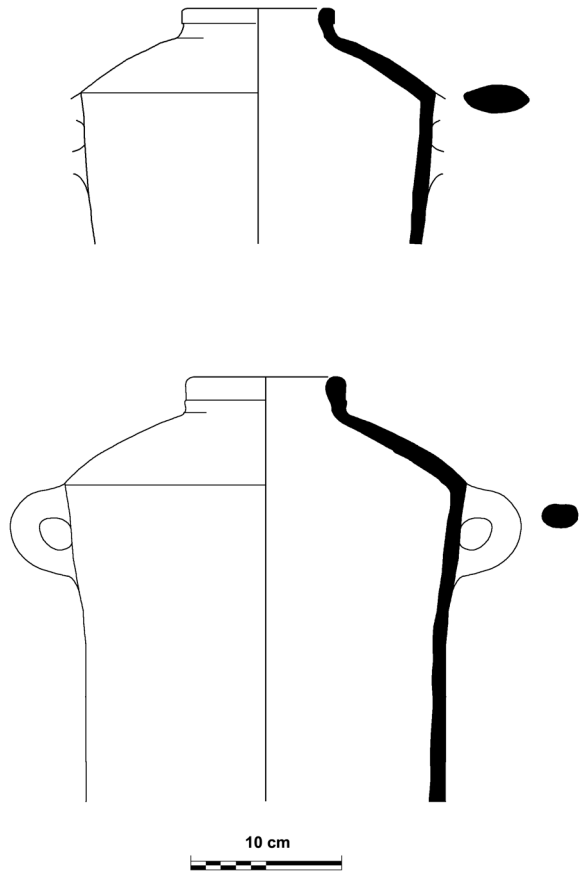

Fig. 4: 'Torpedo' storage jars found on Level 3 floor (drawing by Gunnar Lehmann, courtesy of Karen Covello-Paran and Omer Sergi, the Ḥorvat Tevet Expedition)

No.	Type	Locus	Reg. No.
1	Storage jar	1254	11934/1
2	Storage jar	1315	12342/1

In addition, a single structure, termed Building 3000, situated on the upper terrace of the site, to the south and east of the two floors (Fig. 3), may be associated with Level 3; another may be a single structure on the lower terrace (Area G). Building 3000 was relatively small and consisted of three walls. No floors were preserved due to later intrusions associated with burials from the Middle Islamic period (Level 1). Stratigraphically, this

structure was constructed atop the existing walls of a room (A/F5041) within the former Building 5000, attributed to Level 5 (Late Iron IIA), and a massive wall (A/F1080), attributed to Level 4 (Final Iron IIA). Finally, the additional structure detected on the lower terrace of the site (Area G) was attributed to Level 3 due to pottery sherds associated with its constructional phase.[5] In the following, we focus on the cremation burial attributed to this occupational level.

The cremation burial from Ḥorvat Tevet

The cremation burial was found in Area B, on the eastern section of the summit of the site, ca. 70 m to the east of Building 3000 (Fig. 2). It consisted of two adjacent burial pits (B/F1014 and B/F1015), containing a cremation burial and an inhumation articulated burial, respectively. These burials, ca. 1.3 m below topsoil, were cut into the basaltic bedrock and natural soil composition (Fig. 5). Burial B/F1014 was carved in a somewhat oval shape (length 1.28 m, width 1.22 m, depth 0.42 m). Three ceramic urns were interred in the burial pit, arranged in a north–south line (Fig. 6). A small niche was cut in the eastern side of the urns and held several complete juglets (for a detailed inventory of B/F1014, see Figs. 7–14). Fragments of a single decorated juglet with red monochrome bands

Fig. 5: Area B, Level 3 burial pits, looking southeast (photo by Jordan Weitzel, courtesy of Karen Covello-Paran and Omer Sergi, the Ḥorvat Tevet Expedition)

[5] These remains will be discussed in a future paper.

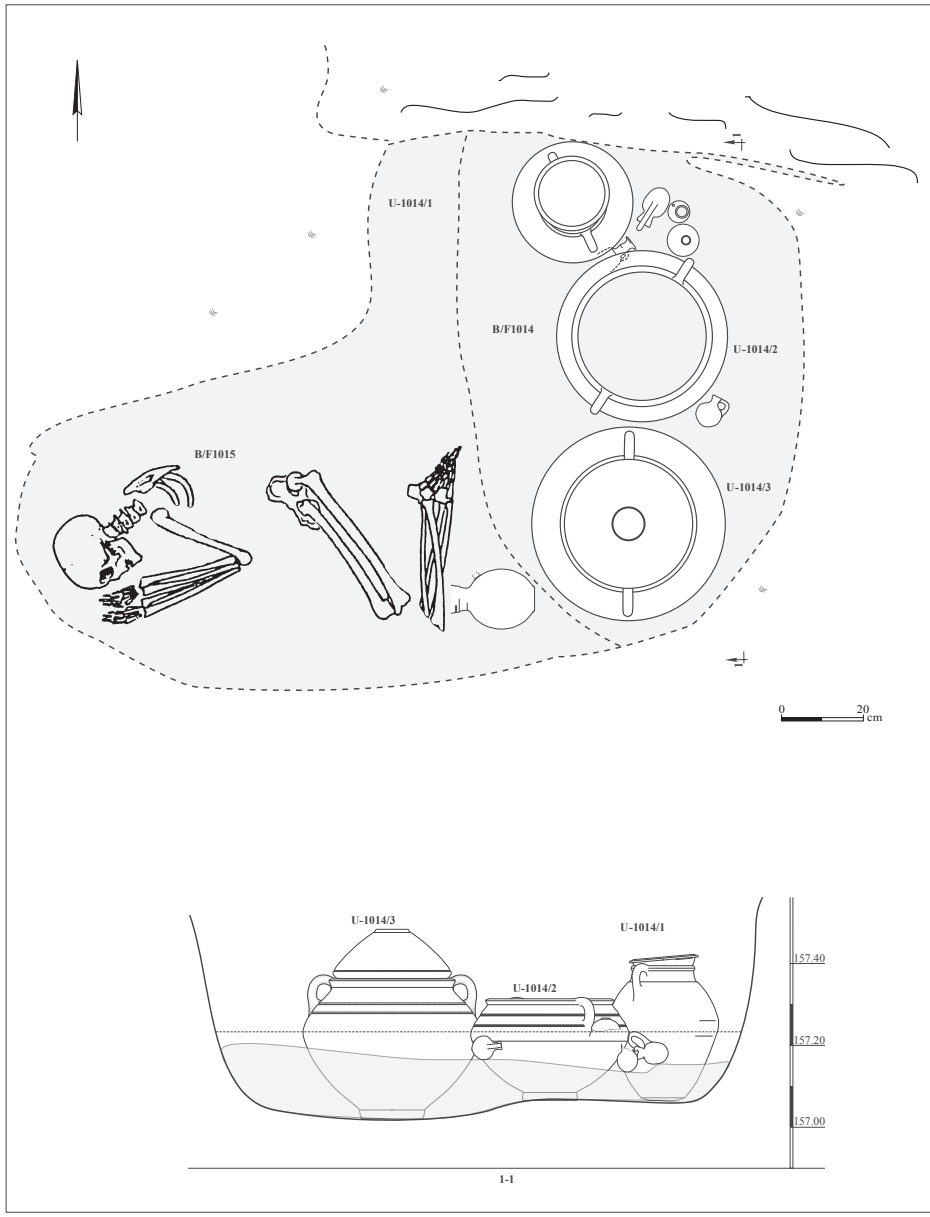

Fig. 6: Burials B/F1014 and B/F1015: plan and section (prepared by Elena Ilana Delerzon, Israel Antiquities Authority; courtesy of Karen Covello-Paran and Omer Sergi, the Ḥorvat Tevet Expedition)

were discovered within urns U1014/1 and U1014/3 (Figs. 7:3 and 12:3, respectively), as well as in the niche itself (Fig. 14:3). It seems that this juglet was broken and its pieces intentionally distributed between the various components of the burial. An additional black juglet (Fig. 14:5) was found between urns U1014/2 and U1014/3. Situated west of

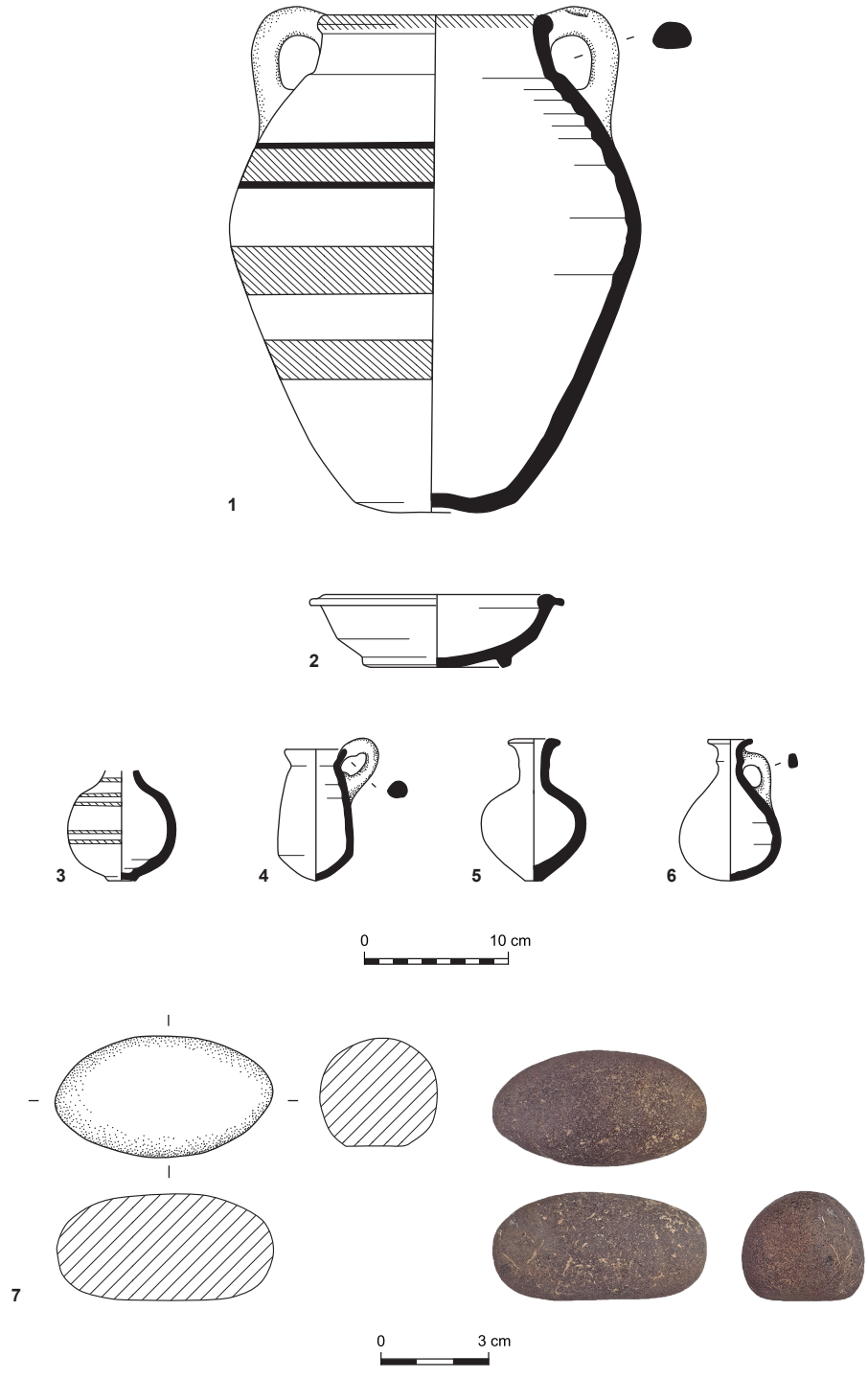

Fig. 7: Urn 1014/1: the container (No. 1) and artefacts: pottery and weight stone

Fig. 7: Urn 1014/1: the container (No. 1) and artefacts: pottery and weight stone

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Remarks
1	Amphora	101471	Red and black painted bands on body and neck
2	Bowl	101461	
3	Juglet	101531/2	Sherd with red painted bands
4	Juglet	102101	
5	Juglet	102111	
6	Bottle	102171	
7	Weight stone	10157	Quartz cemented with hematite

Burial B/F1014, Burial B/F1015 contained an articulated inhumation adult burial in a shallow pit (length 1.00 m, width 0.50 m, depth 0.35–0.40 m). The individual was laid on his or her right side in a flexed position, on an east–west axis and facing south (Fig. 6). To the east and adjacent to the legs of the deceased, a jug was positioned (Fig. 15). Two beads were discovered alongside the individual.

Inhumation is the most common burial type in the Southern Levant, with individuals typically laid in a supine position, arms parallel to the body (Bloch-Smith 1992: 25–28). This posture is also seen in inhumations found alongside cremations (Mazar 2010) and in Iron I burials at Ḥorvat Tevet (Weitzel *et al.* 2024). However, the individual in B/F1015 was placed in a fetal position—a rare arrangement in burial contexts. A similar phenomenon is noted at ʿAtlit, where some cremated individuals were arranged in a fetal position before cremation (Johns 1938; Abercrombie 1979: 33–34; and see further below).

As aforementioned, the cremation burial (B/F1014) consisted of three urns. Burial offerings were placed both within and around the urns and included, in addition to pottery vessels, a range of objects, some exceptionally rare (Figs. 7–9). The rich assemblage of burial offerings was accompanied by sparse and poorly preserved human bone fragments. The analysis of the skeletal remains suggests that they belong to a single individual—an adult aged over 25 years.[6] The cremated remains, including both ashes and bones, were distributed among the three urns. The acidic soil conditions at the site, as noted in the Iron I cemetery at Ḥorvat Tevet (Amir *et al*. 2021: 2; Weitzel *et al*. 2024: 147–148), may have contributed to the poor preservation of bones. It is plausible that a similar acidic environment affected the bones within the urns.

The positioning of offering vessels outside the urns and alongside the middle urn (U1014/2) indicates that they were placed simultaneously during a single burial ceremony. The fragments of the juglet decorated with red monochrome bands, found within the niche and two urns, further support this notion. The use of two or more urns for the burial of one individual is known from the Iron II Tyre al-Bass cemetery (Aubet 2004). Considered

[6] The skeletal remains were analysed by Yossi Nagar (Israel Antiquities Authority).

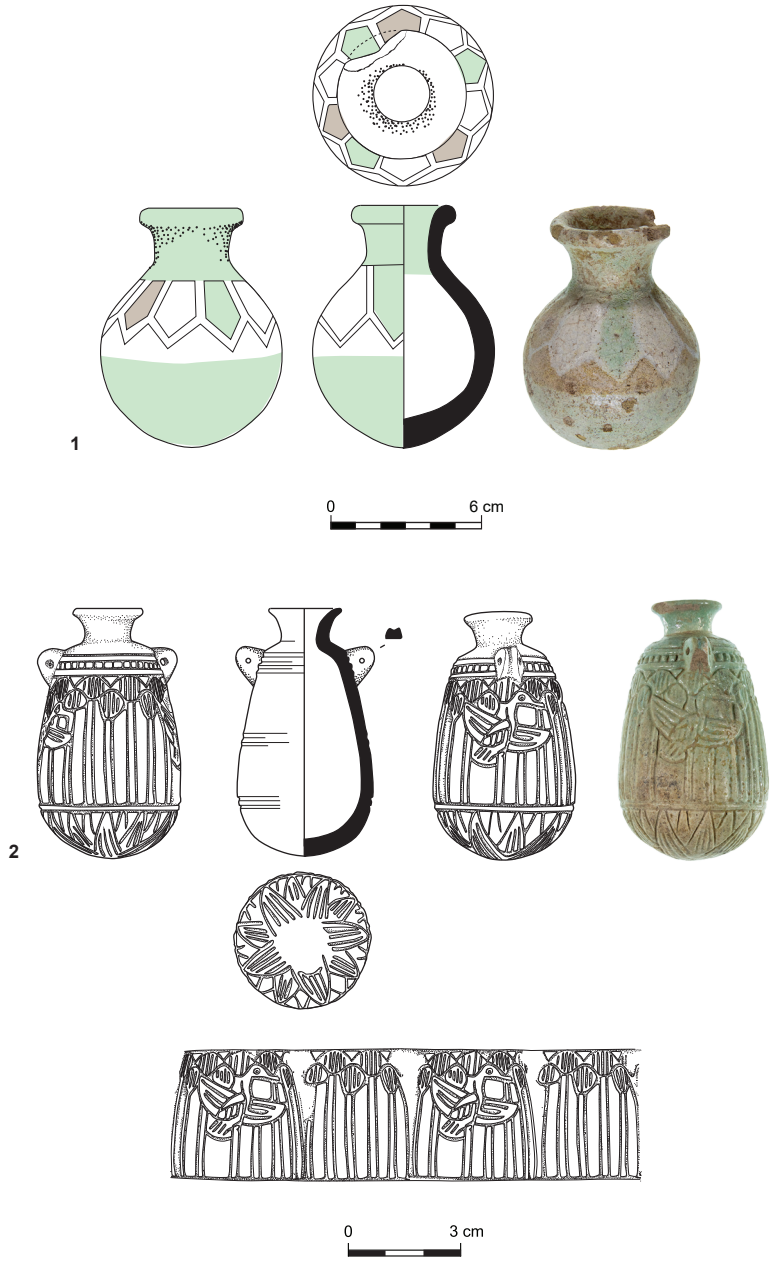

Fig. 8: Artefacts found inside Urn 1014/1: bottle and alabstron (prepared by Hagit Tahan-Rosen, Israel Antiquities Authority)

No.	Type	Locus	Remarks
1	Bottle	102121	White, yellow and green glaze
2	Decorated alabastron	10220	Faience

in conjunction, the evidence for a single burial ceremony and the scarcity of bones indicate that the cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet represents a single individual interred during a single ceremonial funerary event.

The assemblage

The assemblage from the cremation burial is notable for its remarkable abundance, the exceptional quality of the materials used and of the vessels themselves and the extensive geographical range from which these items originated. The assemblage in its entirety will be presented and discussed in future publications. Here we focus on chronological and cultural aspects.

Urn 1014/1

This is an amphoroid krater decorated with bichrome bands, characterised by its elongated cylindrical body with a mid-body carination and an impressed base (Fig. 7.1). Parallels to this vessel have been frequently observed in funerary contexts throughout south Phoenicia, spanning the late phases of the Iron IIB to the early Iron IIC, for example at Tyre al-Bass (Aubet 2004: Fig. 82:1), Tel Kabri E2a (Lehmann 2002: Fig. 5.81:1) and Tel Keisan 4 (Briend and Humbert 1980: Pl. 28:9). Notably, an exact parallel in form and surface decoration dated to the Iron IIC was found in the Phoenician cemetery at Achziv (Mazar 2010: Fig. 26).

This urn contained three juglets, two bottles, a faience alabastron, a cylindrical seal, a stone weight, seven metal objects and 55 beads (for detailed inventory, see Figs. 7–10). The krater was sealed by a carinated bowl with a sharply outturned ridged rim (Fig. 7:2). Although the bowl is likely of local origin, it exhibits influence from Neo-Assyrian ceramic traditions (Anastasio 2010: 34–35; Gilboa 2015: 303). Bowls of this type were widely utilised in Assyrian centres and regions under Assyrian control (Anastasio 2010: Type BW07), such as Aššur (Haller 1954: Pl. 6) and Tell Aḥmar (ancient Til Barsib) (Jamieson 2012: Fig. 3.3:7). In the Southern Levant, they were prevalent throughout the Iron IIC at sites such as Tel Megiddo III–II (Lamon and Shipton 1939: Pl. 23:5–9), Tel Keisan 5 (Briend and Humbert 1980: Pl. 41:2–5) and Tel Dor (Gilboa 1995: Fig. 1.3:11–16).

Urn 1014/2

This is a locally produced carinated krater characterised by a simple everted rim and two handles, a mid-body carination and a ring base (Fig. 11:1). Parallels have been uncovered at Tel Keisan 6 (Briend and Humbert 1980: Pl. 49:5), Tel Hazor VI (Yadin *et al.* 1960: Pl. LXVII:13) and Tel Megiddo III (Lamon and Shipton 1939: Pl. 29:112), with the latter site offering the closest parallel. The Ḥorvat Tevet krater contained fragments of a bowl and a broken faience amulet (for detailed inventory, see Fig. 11). A broken, deep rounded bowl (Fig. 11:2) with a thickened folded rim was found within the urn and was likely placed on top of it to seal it.

Urn 1014/3

This carinated krater, with simple everted rim and two handles (Fig. 12:1), contained a juglet alongside a sherd from another juglet, which had been dispersed among the other urns.

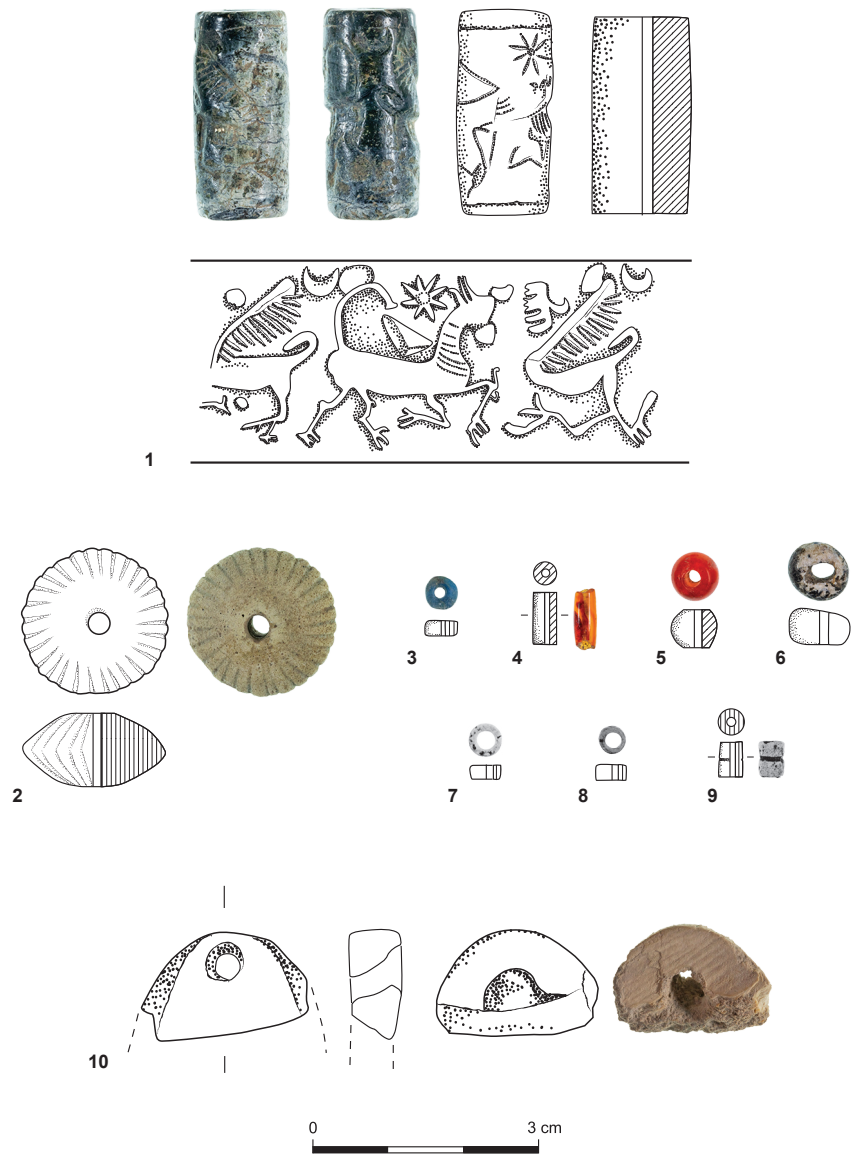

Fig. 9: Artefacts found inside Urn 1014/1: cylindrical seal and beads

Fig. 9: Artefacts found inside Urn 1014/1: cylindrical seal and beads

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Remarks
1	Cylindrical seal	10274	Soft rock (hardness 3.5–4 by Mohs scale), signs of exposure to fire
2	Bead	10219	Faience, traces of light blue covering glaze in the grooves
3	Bead	10211	Egyptian blue
4	Bead	102213	Carnelian
5	Bead	102214	Carnelian (11 beads)
6	Bead	102212	Glass
7	Bead	102215	Faience (37 beads)
8	Bead	102216	Faience, bluish and light blue (15 beads)
9	Bead	102217	Faience (two beads stuck together)
10	Bead	10226	Shell

The assemblage further included two faience amulets, a stone pendant and 36 beads (for detailed inventory, see Figs. 12–13). Accompanying this urn was a deep rounded bowl with a thickened folded rim (Fig. 12:2), found upside-down, sealing the opening of the urn. The two deep bowls serving as lids for urns 1014/2 and 1014/3 (Figs. 11:2 and 12:2, respectively) exhibit similarities to parallels found in Tel Megiddo IVA (Lamon and Shipton 1939: Pl. 25:62–64) and Tel Hazor VA (Yadin *et al.* 1960: Pl. LXXXI:18–19). Parallels are often wheel-burnished and decorated with red slip. These bowls continue to be present in the Iron IIC strata of various sites in the Southern Levant, including Tel Megiddo III (Lamon and Shipton 1939: Pl. 25:66), Tel Kabri E2 (Lehmann 2002: Fig. 5.77:9) and as far south as Kadesh-Barnea (Tell el-Qudeirat) (Cohen and Bernick-Greenberg 2007: Pl. 11.116:1).

The many juglets found within and next to the urns exhibit coastal traditions encompassing both the southern (i.e., Philistia) and northern (i.e., south Phoenicia) littorals of the Southern Levant. The red-slipped dipper juglets characterised by oversized elbow-shaped handles extending upward beyond the rim and down to the shoulder (Figs. 12.3 and 14:2,4) exhibit a high degree of commonality along the Southern Levantine littoral (Stager, Master and Schloen 2011: Fig. 5.66). Other juglets discovered in the burial context represent the south Phoenician pottery tradition. These include a black juglet (Fig. 14:5), a bottle with oval body and elongated neck (Fig. 7:6), a typical coastal dipper juglet with bag-shaped body and a simple, short everted rim (Fig. 7:4), a red-slipped mushroom-lipped juglet (Fig. 14:1), a spherical juglet with ridged neck and mushroom lip (Fig. 7:5) and juglets decorated with red monochrome bands (Figs. 7:3, 12:3 and 14:3).

Chronologically, the ceramic assemblage presented above spans the Iron IIB to the later strata of the Iron IIC, aligning with sites such as Tel Megiddo III–II (Singer-Avitz 2014), Tel Keisan 4 (Briend and Humbert 1980) and Tel Kabri E2 (Lehmann 2002). It clearly post-dates the ceramic assemblage of Ḥorvat Tevet Levels 7–4, which

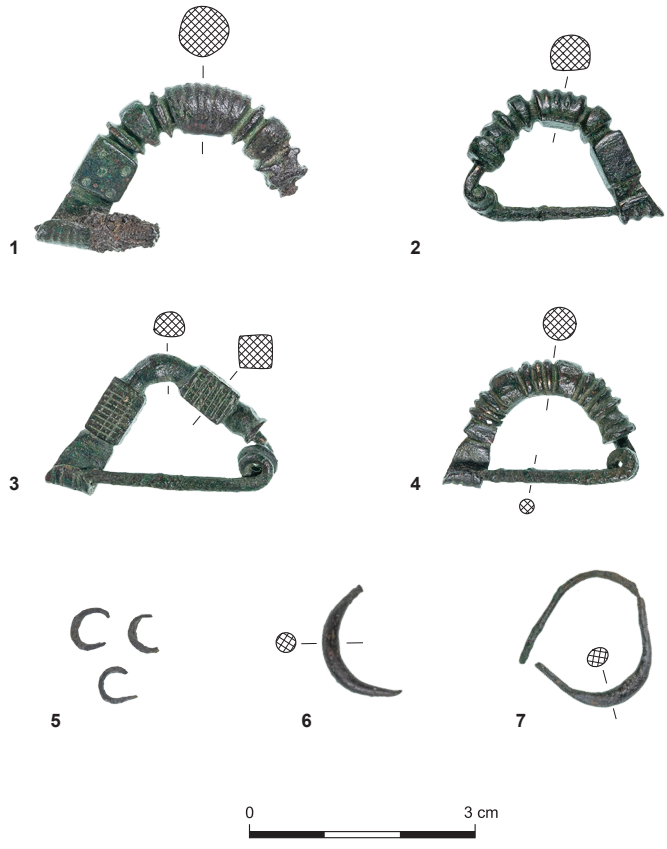

Fig. 10: Artefacts found inside Urn 1014/1: fibulae and earrings

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Remarks
1	Fibula	10224	Bronze
2	Fibula	102181	Bronze
3	Fibula	102182	Bronze
4	Fibula	10228	Bronze
5	Earring	102252	Bronze (three items)
6	Earring	102251/1	Bronze
7	Earring	102251/2	Bronze

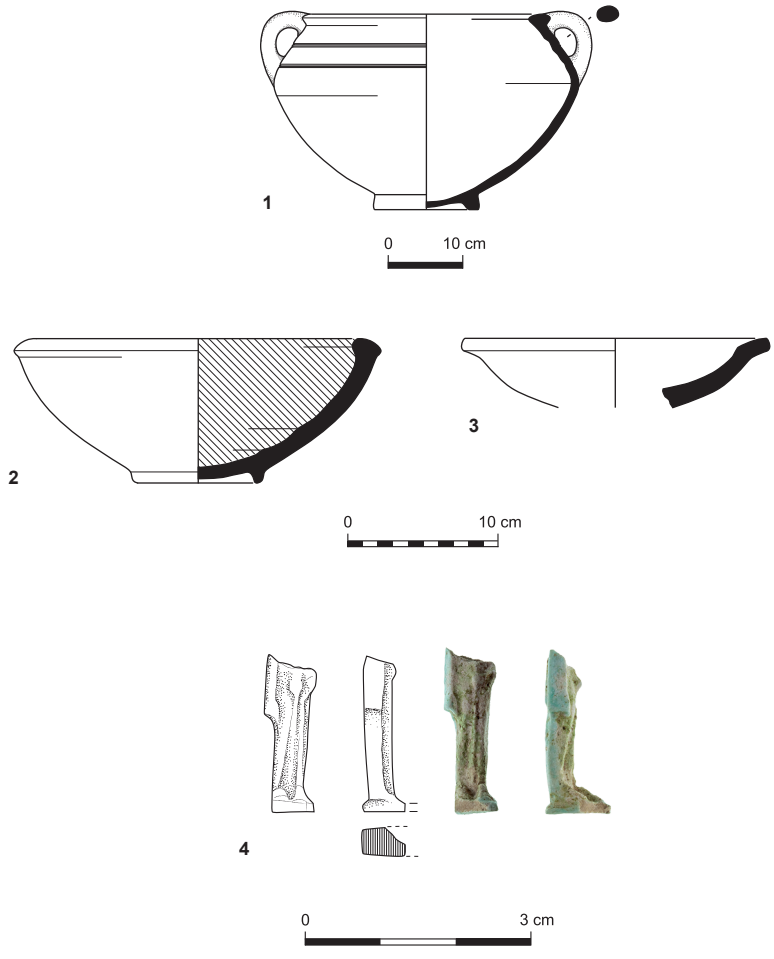

Fig. 11: Urn 1014/2: the container (No. 1) and artefacts found inside it: pottery and amulet

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Remarks
1	Krater	101481	
2	Bowl	102371	
3	Bowl	101482	Black slip
4	Amulet	10235	Faience

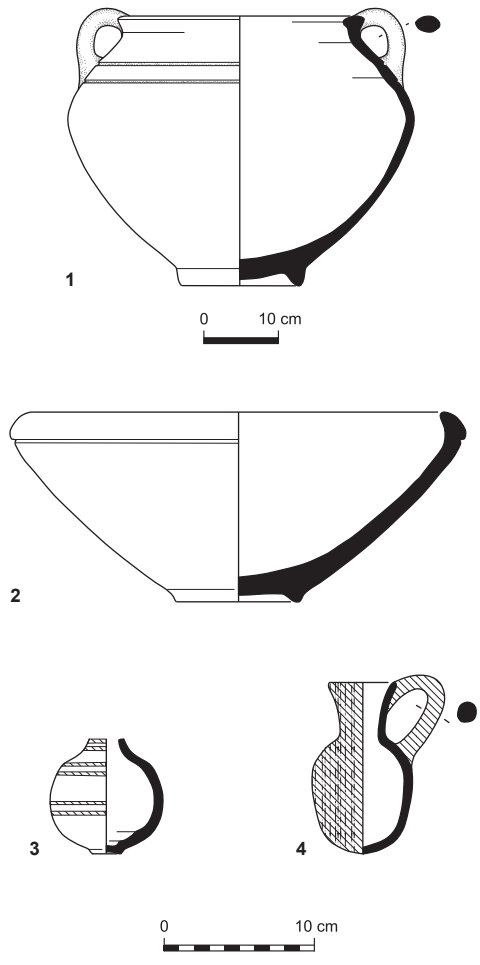

Fig. 12: Urn 1014/3: the container (No. 1) and artefacts: pottery

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Remarks
1	Krater	101501	
2	Bowl	101502	
3	Juglet	102571	Red slip, vertical hand burnish
4	Juglet	101531/3	Sherd with red painted bands

was attributed to different phases of the Late Iron IIA (Sergi *et al*. 2024: 100–102). It correlates well with the presence of two 'torpedo' jars on floors associated with Level 3, which mostly date to the early stages of the Iron IIC. This, together with the appearance of specific items associated with Assyrian influence in the Levant (such as a glazed Assyrian bottle, a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal and other items discussed below), contributes to the dating of the burial assemblage to the early phases of the Iron IIC. This timeframe corresponds to the Assyrian rule in the Jezreel Valley during the first half of the 7th century BCE.

The association of the cremation burial with Assyrian rule in the Jezreel Valley is supported by the presence of two items uncovered within urn 1014/1: a glazed Assyrian bottle (Fig. 8:1) and a faience alabastron (Fig. 8:2), both considered rare and unique. The former is a spherical ceramic bottle decorated with a glazed green, yellow and white lotus petal pattern. The term 'glazed Assyrian bottle' has become commonly used for this type because of its widespread presence in Assyrian burial sites and centres of power (see, e.g., Hassanzadah 2016). Parallels from the Assyrian heartland indicate that these bottles were often discovered within specific burial settings, alongside other valuable offering vessels (Anastasio 2010: 49–50). Such finds frequently occur in prominent Assyrian urban centres and royal burial chambers, such as those uncovered at Aššur (Haller 1954: Pl. 3, as–at3) and Nimrod (Hussein 2016: 45, Pl. 180:b). Furthermore, numerous similar bottles have been discovered at Assyrian provincial centres throughout the Neo-Assyrian Empire, including Tell Sheikh Hamad (ancient Dur Katlimmu), along the lower Khabur River, as well as Khirbet Khatuniyeh in northern Iraq and Tell Aḥmar (ancient Til Barsib), the administrative hub of Kar-Shalmaneser, situated on the northern Euphrates. Notably, these glazed Assyrian bottles were found within both residential and public structures that correlate with Assyrian dominance in the region (Jamieson 2012: 36–39; Kühne 1984: 175, Fig. 67:16; Curtis and Green 1997: 89–90).

Only two parallels have been unearthed to date in the Levant, both within an Assyrian context. One was discovered within the Assyrian governor's residence at Tell Taʿyinat (Harrison 2005: 25); the other, an oval glazed bottle, was recovered from a pit adjacent to the Assyrian siege rampart at Tel Lachish (Magrill 1989). Similar glazed vessels, although not exactly of the same type, were found at other sites throughout the Southern Levant that were dated to the Iron IIC and related to the Assyrian domination; it has even been argued that these vessels may represent officials within the Assyrian colonial network (Daviau and Klassen 2014, but cf. the following discussion).

The faience alabastron (Fig. 8:2) has a cylindrical, nearly oval-shaped body and petite vertical handles, featuring delicate wire holes positioned at the upper part of the body and a rounded base. The entire surface of the alabastron is adorned with patterns, divided into three horizontal sections or metopes. The lowest section, at the base, bears an elaborate design portraying a prominent lotus blossom. The middle section, covering the body of the vessel, showcases a scene featuring two birds, likely ducks, depicted in flight at the centre. These ducks are set against a backdrop of papyrus plants. This section is bordered

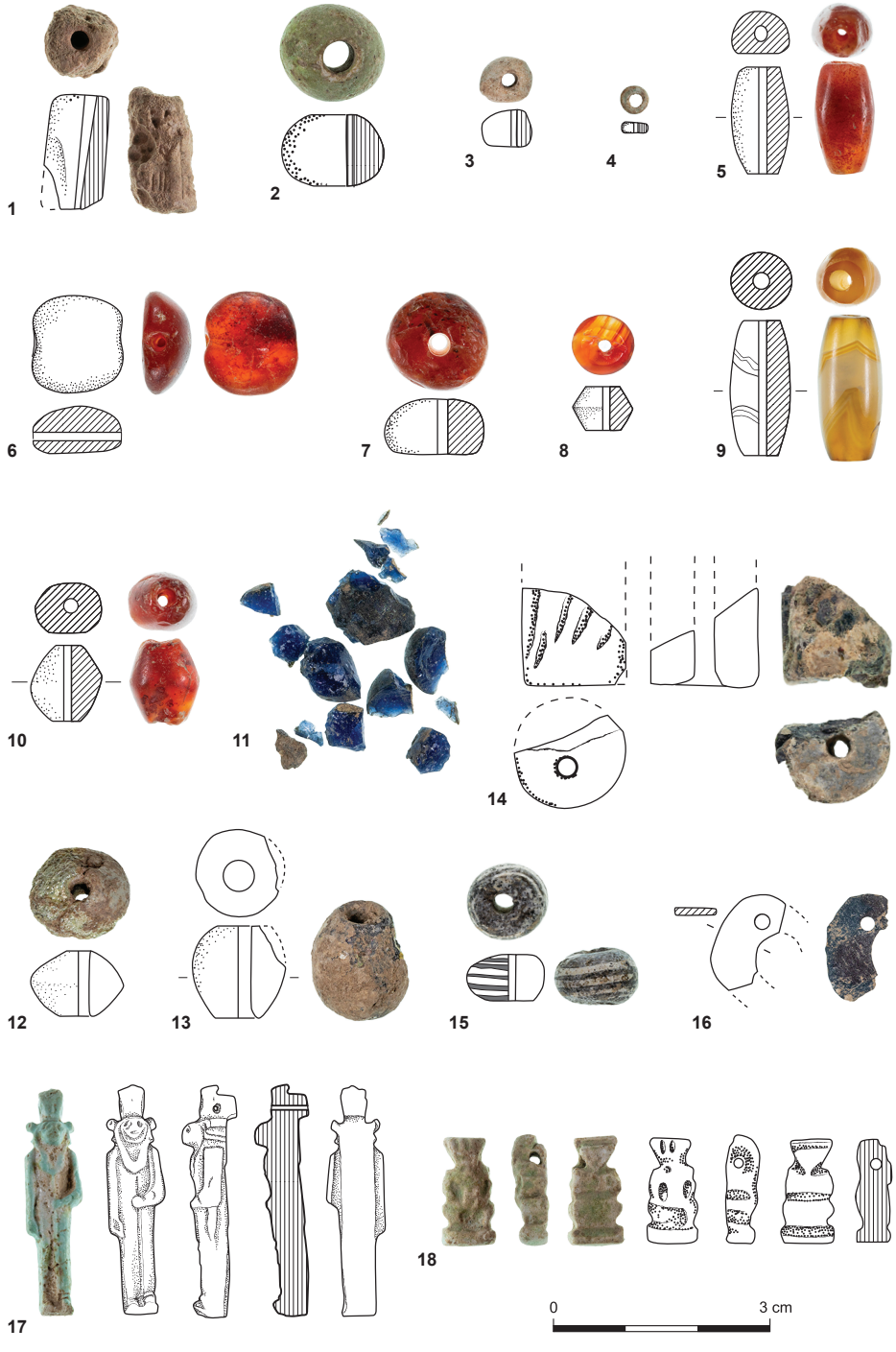

Fig. 13: Artefacts found inside Urn 1014/3: beads, pendant and amulets

Fig. 13: Artefacts found inside Urn 1014/3: beads, pendant and amulets

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Remarks
1	Bead	102661	Faience
2	Bead	102663	Faience
3	Bead	102668	Faience
4	Bead	102672	Faience
5	Bead	102666	Carnelian
6	Bead	102662	Carnelian
7	Bead	102667	Carnelian
8	Bead	102670	Carnelian (seven beads)
9	Bead	10251	Agathe
10	Bead	10260	Carnelian
11	Bead	10265	Glass
12	Bead	102669	Glass
13	Bead	102671	Glass
14	Bead	102664	Nephelinite
15	Bead	102665	Glass, layers of white and brown glass
16	Pendant	10268	Quartzite
17	Amulet	10263	Faience
18	Amulet	10271	Faience

at the top by decoration extending from the handles to the shoulder and is characterised by a series of small square ridges encircling the vessel.

This type of alabastron is commonly found across the Mediterranean, particularly along the Aegean Sea, and is often placed as a burial offering in cremation burials. It has been found in various burial sites along the Mediterranean coast, mainly dating to the Iron IIC.[7] Interestingly, no similar vessel has been discovered in the Levant to date.

In addition to these two unique items, many other objects, often prestigious, were uncovered among the remains of the deceased. These include 91 beads scattered within urn 1014/1 (Fig. 9:2–10) and urn 1014/3 (Fig. 13:1–15), made of various materials, such as carnelian, agate, nephelinite, faience, glass, Egyptian blue and shell.[8] A small stone pendant was also discovered within urn 1014/3 (Fig. 13:16). Metal objects, including

[7] For a comprehensive discussion of parallels, see Webb 1978: 36. These vessels have been found throughout the northern Mediterranean basin (Webb 2021) and became common in burials at urban sites along the coast (López-Ruiz 2021: 191–194).

[8] The authors wish to thank Anastasia Shapiro (Israel Antiquities Authority) for identification of these materials.

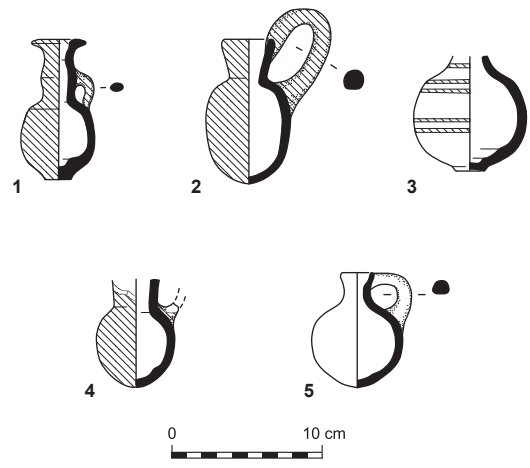

Fig. 14: Locus B/1058 adjacent to the cremation urns: pottery

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Remarks
1	Juglet	101591	Red slip, burnish
2	Juglet	101521	Red slip, vertical hand burnish
3	Juglet	101531/1	Sherd with red painted bands on body and neck
4	Juglet	101541	Red slip
5	Juglet	101551	Black

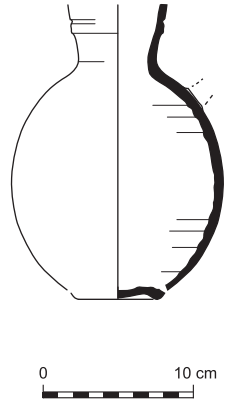

Fig. 15: Jug (Reg. No. 101561) retrieved from Burial F1015 (the inhumation burial)

decorated fibulae (Fig. 10:1–4) and earrings (Fig. 10:5–7), were all crafted from copper alloy. Three faience amulets were recovered, including two depicting the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet (Figs. 11:4, 13:17) and one featuring Bes (Fig. 13:18). Two stone objects were uncovered within urn 1014/1: a weight (103.3 g) composed of transparent quartz cemented with haematite (Fig. 7:7), possibly sourced from Lebanon,[9] and a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal (Fig. 9:1). The cylinder seal is the sole item in the assemblage that displayed signs of burning, suggesting that the deceased wore it around the neck during cremation.

The assemblage of pottery and artefacts from the cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet is notable not only for its extensive quantity and quality but also for its indication of a broad network of connections. This network extends from the eastern Mediterranean, along the Levantine coast, and reaches into Mesopotamia and the heartland of Assyria. This collection essentially combines influences from both the East and the West, representing a fusion of Assyrian political and cultural influence in the Southern Levant and trade within the broader eastern Mediterranean region.

Discussion

In the following discussion, we aim to highlight the social and economic aspects of the cremation burial from Ḥorvat Tevet and to examine its Levantine and broader Assyrian context—particularly in light of comparable cremation practices—with the aim of exploring how it may reflect on Assyrian rule in the Jezreel Valley and the province of Megiddo.

Economic interactions and social status

The exceptional nature of the cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet offers insights into the economic resources and exchange networks accessible to both the individual and the community involved in the burial. Most of the ceramic burial assemblage consisted of imported vessels, originating primarily from southern Phoenicia and to a lesser extent from the southern littoral of the Southern Levant. One notable pottery vessel, the Assyrian glazed bottle, was imported from Mesopotamia. Most of the imported vessels consist of small, closed containers, such as jugs, juglets and bottles, designed for storing and serving liquids.

The presence of faience objects, bronze earrings and a substantial quantity of beads reflects the community's ability to provide additional non-local items for the deceased, indicating that significant resources were dedicated to this burial. Jewellery and amulets are typically manufactured using specialised moulds in professional workshops in urban centres (Golani 2013: 23). Given the limited settlement evidence in Ḥorvat Tevet during this period, it is unlikely that the diverse jewellery was made at the site. Instead, it is plausible that these items originated from the nearby (and only) urban hub, Tel Megiddo III, which could have served both as their source and potential production place.

Due to the uncommon nature of the cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet, it may be safely assumed that its wide range of resources was meant to reflect the high social status

[9] According to a study by Anastasia Shapiro (Israel Antiquities Authority).

of the deceased and the community involved in the burial process.[10] Thus, for instance, the alabastron further extends the geographical scope of economic resources and trade networks, highlighting connections to maritime trade within the eastern Mediterranean basin, predominantly operated by Phoenician urban centres (Aubet 2008: 185–187). This underscores the robust maritime trade that flourished during the Iron IIC due to the prevailing influence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire over the coastal urban centres and trade networks (*ibid*.; Naʾaman 1994). The presence of the rare alabastron in the burial assemblage suggests that the deceased and the burying community had access to the extensive Mediterranean trade in luxury goods.

Similarly, the presence of the glazed Assyrian bottle offers an important indication of the social status of the deceased. This type of vessel is commonly found in royal burial chambers in the core cities of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, particularly at Aššur and Nimrud (see above). While glazed vessels were also used in domestic contexts within the Assyrian heartland, they remained relatively rare in burial complexes. For example, among the 530 vessels and objects recovered from the War Kabud cemetery in the Zagros Mountains, only a single vessel with lotus-petal glazed decoration was identified (Haerinck and Overlaet 2004: Fig. 9:A-102-4).

Beyond the Assyrian heartland and in the western and northern parts of the empire, glazed vessels tend to appear primarily in provincial centres and colonial hubs associated with Assyrian presence, such as Khirbet Khatuniyeh (Curtis and Green 1997: 89–90) and Tell Aḫmar (Jamieson 2012: Fig. 3.29:1). In the Levant, a glazed Assyrian bottle similar to the one found at Ḥorvat Tevet was found only in the Assyrian provincial centre in Tell Taʿyinat (Swift 1958: 155; Harrison 2005).[11] This pattern suggests that glazed vessels held symbolic significance in these contexts, likely serving as markers of elevated social status. Their limited presence in the Levant suggests that they were not part of the broader

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[10] Cf. Saxe 1971; Binford 1971; for grave goods as an indicator of social complexity, see also Baker 2012: 26–28.

[11] Daviau and Klassen (2014) published three glazed bottles uncovered in Transjordan, at the northern edge of the Dhiban Plateau. Two (Reg. Nos. MT3043 and MT3096) were discovered at Khirbat al-Mudayna ath-Thamad, a walled town with industrial and domestic areas, while a fragment from the base of another bottle (WT 373) was found at a nearby shrine, Site WT-13. These bottles are dated to the Iron IIC and are interpreted as evidence of Assyrian administrative presence or involvement in the economy of Khirbat al-Mudayna ath-Thamad, within the context of Assyrian control over small kingdoms like Moab in the Southern Levant (*ibid.*: 114). This interpretation supports the idea that glazed bottles functioned as markers of high status within the Assyrian imperial network. However, their morphology differs from that of glazed bottles from Ḥorvat Tevet and other previously mentioned examples, making a direct comparison difficult. Nonetheless, since the site continued into the early Babylonian period (*ibid.*: 118), it is plausible that these bottles date to this later period. In addition, a glazed bottle found in a Babylonian-period tomb at Tel Megiddo (Deutsch 2000: 425–426) shows that glazed bottles of various forms appeared in the region after the Assyrian retreat, further supporting the presence of diverse glazed bottle types in the area during the subsequent period.

material repertoire but were instead selectively distributed or acquired, possibly within the framework of official provisioning or elite exchange networks tied to the Assyrian provincial system. The inclusion of such a vessel in the burial at Ḥorvat Tevet may therefore reflect the deceased's association with the Assyrian colonial network or, at the very least, their integration into the elite circles operating within its sphere of influence.

This theme of symbolic vessels representing, on the one hand, the Assyrian colonial network and, on the other hand, access to long-distance trade may also be attributed to two stone objects found within the assemblage: the stone weight and the Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal. Stone items were buried alongside individuals who used them in their daily lives, such as merchants, blacksmiths and officials (Hafford 2012: 42). These objects played pivotal roles in trade-based societies, where they were used for stamping and securing goods, validating documents, ensuring accurate measurements and confirming receipt of commodities. The stone weight held particular importance, as precise weighing systems were essential for the organised flow of goods in such societies. The cylinder seal, on the other hand, was used to imprint markings on vessels, baskets, sacks and various records (Feingold 2014: 67–70). This practice confirmed ownership and authority, not only over commodity but also over structures, specific rooms and even burial grounds (Seevers and Korhonen 2016: 2).

The presence of both the stone weight and the Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal, like the presence of the Assyrian glazed bottle and the faience alabastron, reflects, on the one hand, access to long-distance trade and, on the other, the Assyrian colonial network and sphere of influence. Furthermore, both items likely held personal meaning, namely, by indicating the community's intention to symbolise the status and profession of the deceased, both for themselves and possibly out of the belief that the deceased might need these items in the afterlife. It is plausible that they envisioned the deceased continuing their work or needing their personal and professional items to identify with the gods in the afterlife.[12]

In sum, the presence of these four items—the glazed Assyrian bottle, the alabastron, the Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal and the stone weight—suggests the community's attempt to forge a connection between the deceased's personal life, likely associated with the Assyrian colonial network (or more broadly, its sphere of influence) and with long-distance Mediterranean trade, and the ritual context of the burial ceremony.

The cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet in light of cremation burials in the Iron II Levant and the Neo-Assyrian Empire

The practice of cremation burial was relatively uncommon in the Levant, and it was only during the Iron II that it became more popular along the South Levantine littoral. During the Late Bronze Age, it was sporadically practiced at sites such as Alalakh in the Northern Levant (16th–13th centuries BCE), Tell Sukas on the Syrian coast (13th century BCE) and Tell Hama (12th century BCE). It became more common in the Iron IIA, but only along

[12] As suggested by Ward (1910: 10–14); cf. Porada 1993.

the Southern Levantine coast, with sporadic attestations inland (Fig. 16). It persisted in these regions throughout the Iron IIB–IIC, but by the end of the Iron Age, it had become sporadic across the Southern Levant.

Iron II cremation burials were uncovered along the Southern Levantine coast, stretching as far north as Sidon. Notable sites include Khalde (Saidah 1966), Qarye and Tanbourit (Chapman 1972), and there were concentrations along the southern coast of Phoenicia and around the city of Tyre. Cremation burial sites in the vicinity of Tyre were found at Tyre al-Bass (Aubet, Núñez and Trellisó 2014), Tell el-Rashidiyeh (Doumet-Serhal 2003), Qasmiyeh and Jwaya (Chapman 1972). A cremation burial site was also excavated at Khirbet Slim, located farther inland to the east of Tyre, yet still in clear connection to Tyre's periphery (*ibid.*: 57). Numerous cremation burials were discovered at Achziv (Mazar 2001; 2010) south of Tyre, in the Acco Valley at Tel Bira (Alexandre and Stern 2001), and farther south, at ʿAtlit (Johns 1938) and Tel Megadim (Broshi 1969), situated along the Carmel coast (Fig. 16).

Along the southern littoral of the Southern Levant, cremation burials were identified at Ashkelon (Master and Aja 2017), Tell el-ʿAjjul (Petrie 1932), Tell el-Farʿah (South) (Petrie and Tufnell 1930) and Ruqeish (Culican 1973). These cemeteries are geographically distinct from the prevalent cremation burial sites located predominantly along the southern Phoenician coastline.[13] Moreover, cremation burials in the Southern Levantine littoral exhibit a unique custom, which includes the interring of juglets within urns alongside the deceased's remains. This practice, which is widely known from inhumation burial customs in the Southern Levant from the Middle Bronze Age onward, is exclusively observed in cremation burials along the Southern Levantine littoral (as well as in the cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet).

In Iron II cremation burials in the Southern Levant, the deceased were typically cremated either in crematoria or in makeshift burning pits, with their remains then placed in the ground or inserted into an amphora urn with a wide rim. These urns were often decorated with red or red-and-black painted bands, following the Phoenician Bichrome style. Sometimes other storage vessels, such as storage jars, pots and kraters, were used for this purpose. The urns were then sealed with an inverted bowl and placed in the ground. The deceased was frequently accompanied by burial offerings, which commonly included trefoil-mouthed jugs, mushroom-lipped jugs and other vessels such as drinking bowls or juglets (Bloch-Smith 1992: 52–54; Ilan 2017: 59).

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[13] Tell el-Farʿah (South) is situated ca. 20 km inland from the coastline. Despite its distance from the coast, the cremated burials unearthed at its cemetery unmistakably reflect a local coastal tradition, akin to findings at nearby coastal sites such as Tell el-ʿAjjul, Ruqeish and Ashkelon. This observation is reinforced by the position of Tell el-Farʿah as the final tell site along the route leading from the Mediterranean Sea southward into the Negev desert, thus indicating that the site is undoubtedly related to the southern coast. The cremation burials at Tell el-Farʿah (South) have been re-dated on the basis typological analysis to the Late Iron IIA or the beginning of the Iron IIB (Lehmann *et al*. 2019).

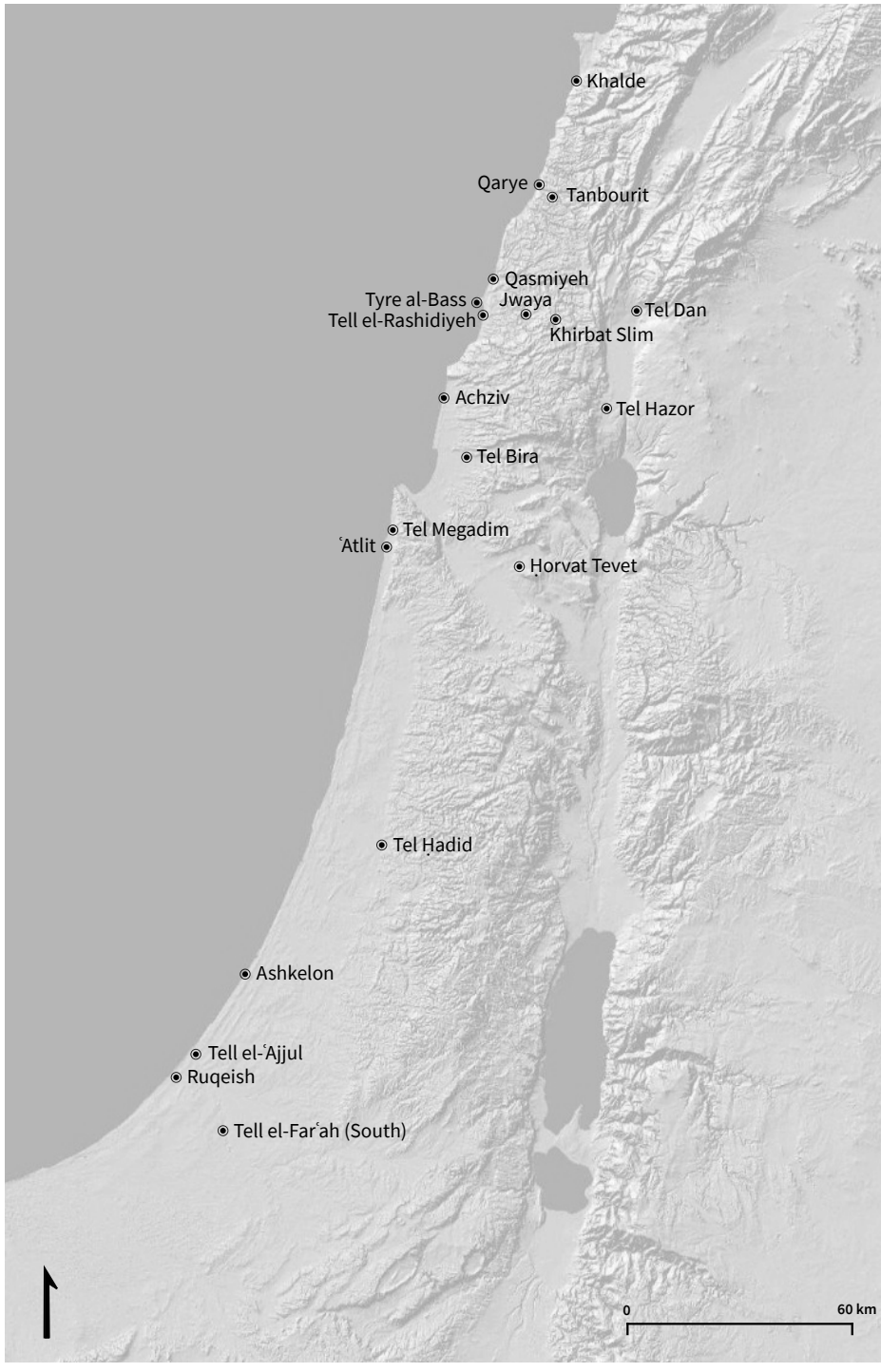

Fig. 16: Cremation burial sites in the Southern Levant during the Iron II (prepared by Omer Peleg)

Most of the above-mentioned examples were uncovered within cemeteries or defined and bounded burial zones, situated in proximity to inhabited sites. Among the various types of burials, cremation in pits is the most common, although shaft burials and rock-cut tombs are also known.

In contrast to the cremation burials along the Southern Levantine coast, only a few inland cremation burial sites dated to the Iron Age have been discovered to date. At Tel Hazor, a cemetery dating to the Late Iron IIA yielded 46 cremation burials—half in urns and half in fire pits (Ben-Tor 1996)— the earliest recorded instance of an inland cremation burial in the Iron II. Notably, there is no evidence of its continuous use. With this exception, the custom appears inland solely in the Iron IIC and interestingly, only in connection with Assyrian centres (Fig. 17). At Tel Dan (Stratum I), a single krater containing a cremation burial was found in an Iron IIC cemetery, alongside inhumation burials (Hartal 2006). The burial at Tel Dan was discovered in the context of Stratum I, coinciding with the substantial expansion of the settlement there. According to Thareani (2016), this settlement played a significant role in the Assyrian provincial system and its imperial economy, overseeing the agricultural lands of the Huleh Valley.

At Tel Ḥadid, ca. 10 km north of Tel Gezer, a cremation burial, containing burnt human bones, a seal, an iron nail and several stone pebbles, was found within a storage jar dating to the Iron IIC (Koch and Rinon, forthcoming). This cremation burial is associated with a settlement that likely housed exiles. Naʾaman and Zadok (2000) suggest that the use of cuneiform writing at the site indicates the involvement of Assyrian officials in the local economy. The discovery of cremation burials at Ḥorvat Tevet reinforces this pattern, as the site is positioned ca. 15 km from the Assyrian provincial capital at Tel Megiddo. These cases demonstrate that the Assyrian presence in the Southern Levant during the Iron IIC aligns with the resurgence of inland cremation burial in proximity to Assyrian colonial centres.

The practice of dual burial types, combining inhumation and cremation, is not unique to Ḥorvat Tevet, but is a well-documented phenomenon at various sites across the Southern Levant in the Iron II. This pattern is attested along the northern coast at sites such as Khalde (Saidah 1966), Achziv (Mazar 2001; 2010) and ʿAtlit (Johns 1938: 135–137), as well as along the southern coastal plain at Ashkelon (Master and Aja 2017), Tell el-ʿAjjul (Petrie 1932), Tell el-Farʿah (South) (Petrie and Tufnell 1930) and Ruqeish (Culican 1973). It is also documented inland at Tel Dan (Hartal 2006). These examples suggest that the combination of burial practices was part of a broader cultural framework that allowed for, or even integrated, different forms of interment within a single chronological horizon. At Ḥorvat Tevet, the spatial and ceramic association between the two burials, particularly the shared pit and the typological parallels in the assemblages, strongly suggest a connection. Due to the limitations of the archaeological record, however, it remains unclear whether the two individuals were interred simultaneously or in succession within a relatively short span of time. Regardless, the phenomenon clearly reflects a broader regional practice and not an isolated anomaly.

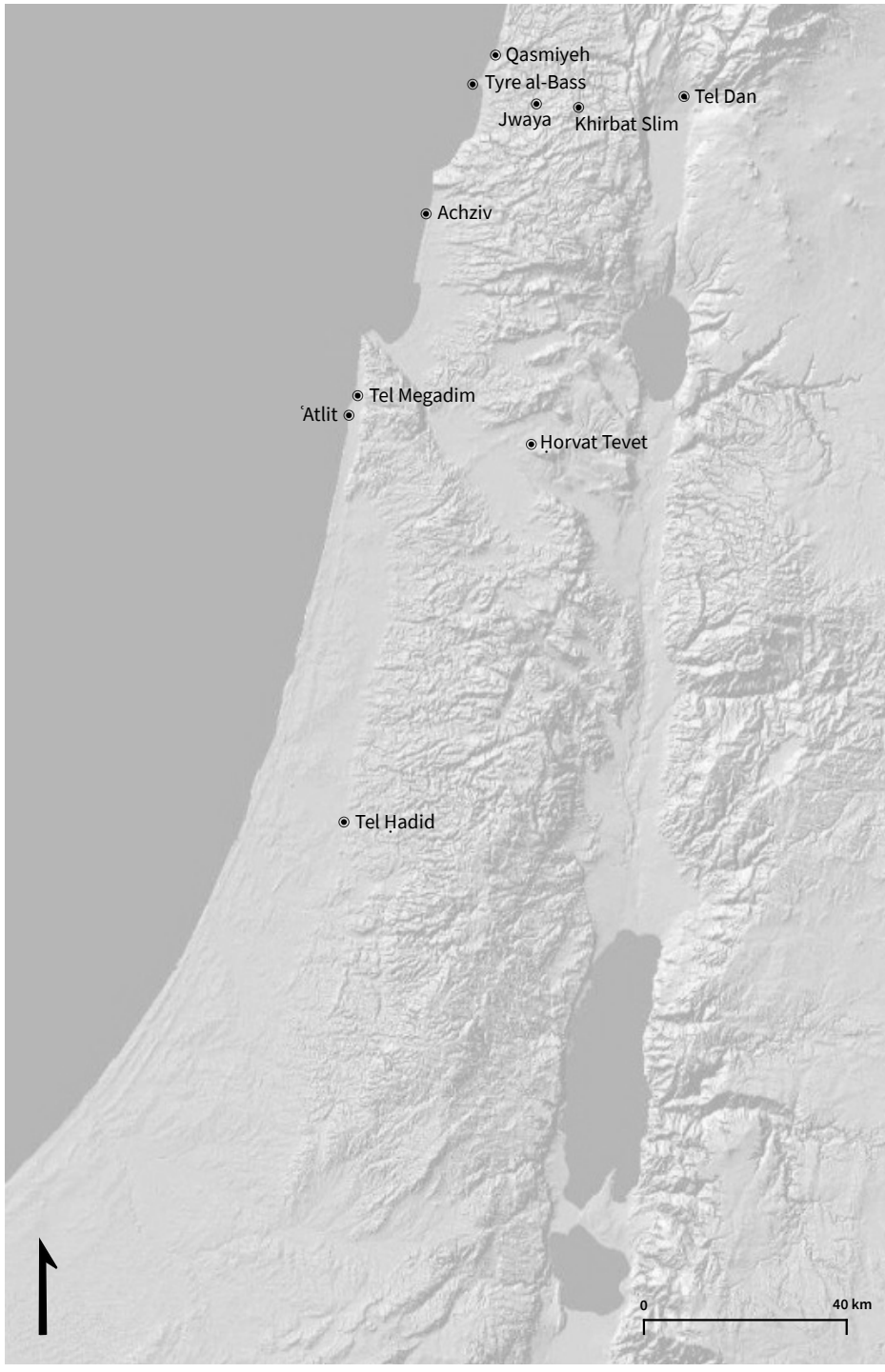

Fig. 17: Southern Levant cremation burial sites in the Iron IIC (prepared by Omer Peleg)

The close link between inland cremation burials and Assyrian dominance in the Southern Levant directs one's attention eastward to the Assyrian province city of Dur Katlimmu, located on a crossroads within the Neo-Assyrian Empire along the Khabur River (Kühne 2010: 120–124). Cremation burials were found at Dur Katlimmu (Kreppner 2008: 265–266) within oval pits beneath the floors of a Neo-Assyrian residential area (Lower Town II). The pits were carefully dug under floors and into the ground, and the deceased were cremated in those pits without being placed into urns. Once the process was complete, the pits were sealed with mudbricks, interring the deceased beneath the residents' floors while life continued above. Among the cremation burials at the site, only one contained cremated remains within an urn, found in a pit beneath a sealed floor. The cremation burials of Dur Katlimmu revealed a diverse array of objects and pottery as offerings, including glazed pottery and luxury artefacts, such as fibulae, bronze and gold earrings, beads, scarabs and ivory objects. Animal remains were also discovered—predominantly domesticated species, but also more unusual ones, like camels, wild donkeys and turtles (Kreppner 2014). Since cremation burials at Dur Katlimmu were only located in the residences attributed to Assyrian rule and the garrison present at the site, Ferreri (2015: 45–49) suggested that those who performed the custom were part of the Assyrian elite and Assyrian officials.

Similarly, some 11 cremation urns were found in the city of Aššur (Haller 1954: 52–53), placed beneath house floors or within palace tombs. Some urns were decorated and glazed, occasionally with plates or bowls as lids. Similar glazed bottles and bowls, like those at Ḥorvat Tevet, were sometimes part of the offerings. Beads, fibulae and gold earrings were also uncovered. While as a whole, cremation burial was not a common practice in Assyria, the Iron Age examples listed above, and specifically at Dur Katlimmu, exhibit a fusion of burial customs, combining the Levantine coastal practice of cremation burial and the Assyrian tradition of burial beneath house floors or within palace tombs (Hauser 2012: 249–255).

Given the above overview, the sporadic appearance of cremation burials in the Southern Levant during the Iron IIC near Assyrian provincial centres can be attributed to the unique circumstances brought about by the dominance of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the region. In areas under Assyrian control, the Assyrian provincial centres served as a gathering place for individuals or groups from various backgrounds, including merchants, officials, soldiers, exiles from various parts of the empire and local inhabitants (Koch 2018: 381). This diverse mix of people likely contributed to the appearance of various practices, including cremation. The close interactions and exchanges of ideas within this colonial network provide fertile ground for cultural transformation. In this context, this web of connections within Assyrian centres likely facilitated the exchange of diverse ideas and customs, resulting, *inter alia*, in the emergence of inland cremation burials in their immediate vicinity.

Despite notable differences in the geographical distribution of cremation burials—whether found along the coastline or inland—the uniformity of finds and their modest,

locally oriented nature emphasise the uniqueness of the cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet. This uniformity is evident in several aspects. First, the pottery is predominantly local. Second, there is a limited and consistent range of no more than two to four vessel types that typically feature an average of seven or eight ceramic vessels accompanying the deceased. Third, there is a consistent, albeit meagre, quantity of artefacts in these burials—a character shared across the Southern Levant. These three features differentiate the cremation burial practice throughout the Iron II Levant from the cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet, which contained a remarkable assemblage of 17 pottery vessels, consisting of 15 pottery types, along with 107 other objects and artefacts. These items were made using different techniques and advanced skills, often employing materials from distant sources, some of which were prestigious and exotic. Hence, the cremation burial from Ḥorvat Tevet stands out in the abundance, diversity and exceptional quality of the pottery and other artefacts.

The cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet bears a closer resemblance to burials at Assyrian provincial centres—particularly at Dur-Katlimmu—than to those along the Southern Levantine littoral. Both contexts feature the relatively rare practice of cremation, reflecting a complex blending of cultural traditions, likely resulting from trans-culturation processes triggered by interactions around key nodes in the Assyrian colonial network, such as Dur-Katlimmu and Tel Megiddo. In addition, this resemblance is evident in the broader context of the burial assemblages, particularly in the quantity and quality of the grave goods, which in both cases include glazed vessels. The close parallels between the cremation burials at the Assyrian provincial centre in Dur-Katlimmu and that of Ḥorvat Tevet—located near the provincial centre at Tel Megiddo III—suggest that in both instances the deceased were somehow connected to the local Assyrian colonial system. The presence of a glazed bottle, which in the Levant was linked to high social status within the sphere of the Assyrian colonial network, supports this interpretation.

Ḥorvat Tevet and the Jezreel Valley under Assyrian rule

During the Iron IIC Tel Megiddo III served as a thriving administrative Assyrian city, which maintained strong economic ties with the eastern Mediterranean, including the coastal trade centres along the Southern Levant (Ussishkin 2018: 419–439). The cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet mirrors the level of complexity seen in urban centres like Tel Megiddo III. This complexity was tied to long-distance trade and exchange networks, involving luxury items from both the East (Mesopotamia) and the West (eastern Mediterranean). It is unlikely that such a rich and diverse assemblage could have been local to Ḥorvat Tevet, which lacks any signs of substantial habitation or accumulation of wealth during the Iron IIC. The high social status of the deceased points to a probable connection with the nearby Assyrian provincial centre at Tel Megiddo.

Texts from the Neo-Assyrian Empire strongly suggest that the Assyrian imperial network in the provinces involved the strategic incorporation of royal lands as an element within their provincial economy. An example comes from a letter associated with a

northern province of the empire during the days of Sargon II (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990: No. 109). In this letter, an official requests that soldiers stationed in his territory use their private lands instead of the lands designated for his fortress. Another letter (Fuchs and Parpola 2001: No. 119), authored by governor Samas-bēlu-usur, sheds light on his struggles in an attempt to send his men from his town to cultivate lands (cf. Ponchia 2014: 407–408). These letters indicate that not all lands taken by the Assyrians in the provinces were divided solely into private agricultural estates and villagers. Instead, some lands remained directly under the control of Assyrian governors, serving as royal lands within the province, meant to provide supplies for the Assyrian administrations, military units and other benefactors of the Assyrian provincial system. In such cases, these governors would likely designate Assyrian officials to manage and supervise the cultivation of these lands, often using forced labour and public assignments.[14]

The fertile lands of the northeastern Jezreel Valley, where Ḥorvat Tevet is located, functioned as royal estates under the Egyptian and Israelite rules and then again during the Hellenistic period (Naʾaman 1981). In light of the broader Assyrian policy of land confiscation in the vicinity of provincial centres, it is reasonable to assume that the northeastern Jezreel Valley retained its status as crown land under Assyrian rule in the Iron IIC as well. The use of this region as royal land appears to have begun as early as the MB II–III (Covello-Paran 2025), to have continued under Egyptian control during the LB II–III, and to have persisted under the Kingdom of Israel in the Late Iron IIA (Sergi *et al*. 2024: 106–111). The continuation of this pattern into the Hellenistic period further suggests that the designation of these lands as royal estates likely remained intact during Assyrian rule in the Iron IIC. The cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet—likely that of an individual associated with the Assyrian colonial network centred on Tel Megiddo III (whether as a merchant or otherwise)—may offer additional support for this conclusion.

The exceptional assemblage of the cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet stands out as the richest and most diverse among known cremation burials from the Southern Levant—both the coast and inland regions. It includes pottery and luxury items that reflect participation in trade networks spanning the Southern Levant, the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. Four items—the glazed Assyrian bottle, the alabastron, the Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal and the stone weight—may hold particular significance regarding how the deceased was perceived by the burial community. The seal and the stone weight were likely personal belongings of the deceased. When considered alongside the Assyrian glazed bottle, typically associated with the Assyrian colonial network in the Levant, and the alabastron, which is associated with long-distance Mediterranean trade, the assemblage appears to reflect an intentional

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[14] Zilberg (2018: 67–69) asserts the existence of a bureaucratic layer of officials within the Assyrian administration that was responsible for instituting the agricultural system and for overseeing tax collection within rural regions. The letters discussing the officials' tasks clearly show the extent to which Assyrian officials from the provinces were involved in managing everyday life in the rural areas.

effort by the burial community to link the personal identity of the deceased—likely tied to both the Assyrian networks and broader trade connections—to the funerary ritual.

In this light and given that the region where Ḥorvat Tevet is located likely functioned as royal land serving the Assyrian province centred on Tel Megiddo III, we propose that the cremation burial marks the interment of an individual involved in the Assyrian colonial network. This person likely had access to long-distance Mediterranean trade, operated primarily by Phoenician urban centres—either in his capacity as an official within the Assyrian provincial administration or as a merchant. We do not attempt to determine the deceased's precise social identity—whether Assyrian, Phoenician, or otherwise. Nor do we seek to draw a rigid distinction between colonial official and merchant, as these roles may have overlapped and been held by the same individuals. For that matter, it is also possible that the deceased was local, who gained an elevated social status under the auspices of the Assyrian colonial network. The point to be made is that the burial's location on royal lands near the Assyrian provincial centre at Tel Megiddo III, together with the character of specific items in the assemblage, situates the deceased within the broader Assyrian colonial network and its intersection with long-distance Mediterranean trade.

If this conclusion is accepted, the rationale underlying the burial of an individual connected to the Assyrian sphere of influence at the sparsely inhabited site of Ḥorvat Tevet, located in the rural hinterland, requires further consideration. This phenomenon may be understood through the anthropological concept that burial sites serve as expressions of territorial claims, wherein societies 'root' their ancestors in the land to order to legitimise their presence and control (Saxe 1970: 119). From this perspective, the establishment of burial grounds may be seen as a response to complex social structures seeking to reinforce authority over resources. The prominence of a cemetery, in turn, tends to correlate with the power and organisational complexity of the group maintaining it.

It is likely that the cremation burial at Ḥorvat Tevet should be interpreted within this ideological framework. The deceased was probably transported for burial from the nearby provincial centre at Tel Megiddo, implying a funerary procession that materially and symbolically linked the urban administrative hub with its rural hinterland. The interment of a presumed official or merchant associated with the Assyrian colonial network within the agricultural landscape of the northeastern Jezreel Valley may have served to assert the authority of the provincial administration over this fertile territory. This act effectively extended the reach of Assyrian control beyond the confines of Tel Megiddo into the surrounding countryside.

Thus, the significance of the Jezreel Valley within the Assyrian economic system appears to transcend the organisation of agricultural production in small rural settlements. It also involved the designation of portions of the valley as royal land held directly under Assyrian control. This interpretation highlights the strategic importance attributed by the Assyrian authorities to the economic resources of the region and challenges the view that they neglected the local rural economy.

Summary and conclusions

The excavation at Ḥorvat Tevet has uncovered a unique cremation-burial assemblage—the richest and most diverse of its kind to be identified thus far in the Levant. The burial location, the exceptional richness and composition of its assemblage, the presence of specific items linked to the deceased and the notable resemblance to cremation burials from other Assyrian provincial centres, all suggest that the individual was in some way connected to the Assyrian colonial network centred on Tel Megiddo—as an official, as a merchant, or perhaps in a role encompassing both functions. As such, this burial illuminates how the Assyrians understood the region and highlights their approach to overseeing certain aspects of the administrative system within the broader Megiddo province, with a specific focus on the Jezreel Valley. Contrary to the commonly held argument that the Assyrians overlooked this region, the burial at Ḥorvat Tevet might point to efforts to assert control over the agricultural lands of the Jezreel Valley and to create a developed agrarian economy system, using royal lands under direct Assyrian rule.

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Disclosure statement

The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

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