

RECENT DISCOVERIES IN BETHLEHEM (PALESTINE):
RESULTS OF THE 8TH (2022) ITALIAN-PALESTINIAN RESEARCH SEASON

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The joint Italian-Palestinian Expedition of Sapienza University of Rome and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Palestine – Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (MoTA-DACH) to Bethlehem, funded by Sapienza University and by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation,¹ has been active since 2015 with annual excavation seasons and research study on the necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a, and with emergency excavations, surveys and documentation campaigns in other threatened sites, in order to protect the archaeological heritage of the district of Bethlehem, subject to increasing building activity. The following is the summary report of the research activities carried out during the 8th season, in spring 2022.

Keywords: Bethlehem; Beit Sahur; Middle Bronze Age; Iron Age; necropolis

The Sapienza archaeological expedition to Bethlehem operates jointly with the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) and the local Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (DACH) since 2015,² born as a rescue operation, twinned by the archaeological mission to Tell es-Sultan/ancient Jericho.³ The archaeological expedition is engaged in programmatic research, archaeological excavation and documentation in the necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a (§ 1.), Jebel Dhaher,⁴ el-Atan Tomb⁵ and Hindaza Tomb (§ 2.), recognition and protection activities (§ 3.), publication, dissemination

* Paragraphs 1 and 3 are by Daria Montanari, paragraph 2 is by Eman Z. Titi, paragraph 4 is by Daria Montanari and Eman Z. Titi.

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² The excavation, research and documentation activities of the joint expedition were supervised by MoTA-DACH functionaries: Dr. Mohammed Ghayyada, responsible for the Bethlehem district between 2015 and 2019, and by Dr. Eman Z. Titi, Director of the Cultural Heritage Office in Bethlehem since 2020. The Sapienza team in the year 2022 was composed as follows: Daria Montanari, director; Gaia Ceconi, research fellow; Cecilia Ripamonti, PhD student and draft person; Bianca Eugenia Berti, MA student and draft person; Lorenzo Indino, MA student, photographer and GPS expert; Lucrezia Teodori, BA student and expert in human remains.

³ Nigro 2018, 3.

⁴ Nigro *et al.* 2017a, 16-21.

⁵ Nigro *et al.* 2017b.

and enhancement of the archaeological heritage of Bethlehem strongly threatened by the growing building enterprises (fig. 1).

1. NECROPOLIS OF KHALET AL-JAM'A

Because of the continuation of the construction of Bethlehem Multi Industrial Park (BMIP), a new survey was made in the 8th (2022) season to verify the state of conservation of the necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a (N31°40'54.34" E35°12'38.25"),⁶ 2.2 km south-east of the center of Bethlehem, that covers an area of about 3 hectares, arranged on terraces sloping from north to south, composed of tombs dug into the soft local limestone, equipped with shafts and underground chambers. Moreover, the excavation of the Iron Age Tomb A7 was resumed.

1.1. *Survey of Khalet al-Jam'a*

The survey of the necropolis performed during the 2022 was focused on the central terrace, in Area A, and on the higher northern terrace, in Area D.

In Area A, Tombs A1 and A2⁷ were still recognizable thanks to the presence of the shafts, but they were sealed with dump soil from the foundations of neighboring industrial warehouses and were no longer accessible. Moreover, Tombs A3 and A4⁸ were sealed by the retaining wall of the street.

In Area D, the Barmil Tomb (Tomb D13)⁹ at the time of survey it was still recognizable and reachable, but the shaft was cut.

1.2. *Tomb A7*

Tomb A7,¹⁰ differs in plan and structure from most of the tombs of the necropolis, it consists of a large underground complex with at least seven entrances and/or ventilation shafts, ten chambers with different recesses connected by passages and arches. This structure is the outcome of separate tombs, hewn between Early Bronze Age IV and Middle Bronze Age, unified into a single large underground structure during Iron II. At this stage Wells 3 and 4 were opened, as pits of light, ventilation channels or to allow the passage of materials. These variations indicate a change in the use of the hypogeum system, transformed into an underground area of production and storage.

During the 8th (2022) season, the natural floor, a whitish marly layer named L.24, of the underground structure was reached in the main part of Sector A, the northern one with three chambers (Chambers 1, 8, 9) joined together, and two other attached chambers (Chambers 6, 10) to the north, removing an upper rubble layer (F.21) with scanty Iron Age, Roman and Byzantine pottery sherds (fig. 2), and a sandy brown layer (F.25). Sector B, the western one, was provided with a series of five smaller chambers (Chambers 2, 3, 4, 5, 7), Shaft 7 (fig. 3) was identified and excavated, removing the incoherent sandy layer with collapsing stones, named F.23, from the inside. In Chamber 7, the run-off layer (F.22) for seasonal waters,

⁶ Nigro 2015, 5-8; 2020, 39-41; Nigro *et al.* 2015; 2017a, 10; 2019, 1.

⁷ Nigro *et al.* 2015, 186-189; 2017a, 11.

⁸ Nigro *et al.* 2015, 190; Nigro *et al.* 2017a, 11.

⁹ Nigro 2015, 6; 2020, 43-44; Nigro *et al.* 2015, 192; 2017a, 12-13.

¹⁰ Nigro *et al.* 2015, 190; Nigro *et al.* 2019.

containing scarce pottery material dating back to the Iron Age, has been removed, exposing the natural floor (L.24).

2. THE TOMB 1 OF HINDAZA

A Middle Bronze Age II family tomb was accidentally discovered during works of hydraulic infrastructures for the Abu Joura family's land in the Hindaza site (N31°41'84" E35°12'04"), 2 km southeast of the Church of the Nativity, in the Municipality of Hindaza-Breda. The tomb, named Tomb 1, tomb was partially disturbed by the cutting of the mechanical means that removed only the southernmost edge.

In April 2022, a survey was conducted to the south and to the west of the tomb for a radius of 10 m. To the south, where the trench was opened in 2020 and where the bed rock was thus exposed, and to the west, where an olive tree grove was located, no archaeological material was found. To the west of the tomb is the perimeter wall of the house, about 1.5 m higher, founded on the bed rock in which the tomb was excavated. Over the bed rock is a layer of humus of 0.2 m which yielded no archaeological material. The sector north of the tomb is entirely occupied by the modern asphalted road called Shara Breda/Shara Abu Joura. After the survey the tomb was closed and can no longer be explored. A cistern was installed in the southern sector of the underground complex.

Tomb 1 of Hindaza (fig. 4) consists of a shaft and two underground chambers, for a total length of 4.70 m north-south and a width of 3.60 m east-west. The plan of the tomb is of the bilobed type and is composed of two adjoining circular chambers, oriented north-south, dug into the friable local whitish limestone rock (*hawwara*). Chambers are named A, the northern one, and B the southern one. The access shaft was recognized from inside the tomb but not investigated because it was located below the modern asphalted road, and it was labeled Shaft 6. This is at the northern end of Chamber A and measured 0.8 m in width. At the time of discovery, the access was still sealed by two large, superimposed blocks arranged at its base and externally from the chamber. Access to the chamber from the shaft was via a step of about 0.6 m.

The northern Chamber A had a semi-domed roof with a maximum height of 1.10 m, a north-south length of about 2.5 m and a width of about 3.40 m. The passage to the southern Chamber B was by means of a sort of lowered arch that protruded slightly from the chambers and reached 1.25 m in height. Chamber B, approximately 2.20 m long north-south, 3.60 m wide east-west, had a domed roof whose maximum height was 1.67 m.

The study of human remains has highlighted the presence inside the tomb of at least two adult individuals and one subadult individual (§§ 2.1.1., 2.2.1.).¹¹

The funerary equipment consisted of about 90 items, including 15 personal objects, such as bronze weapons, limestone pommels, alabaster vases, bronze pins, a decorated ostrich egg, bone inlays of wooden boxes/furniture. The ceramic repertoire is represented by lamps, carinated bowls, carinated bowls on trumpet base, Tell el-Yahudiyeh juglets, Black Burnished and Red Burnished juglets, large bowls, jugs, and storage jars (§§ 2.1.2., 2.2.2.). Moreover, also some animal bones were collected (§§ 2.1.3., 2.2.3.), as part of funerary supply, as food offerings.

¹¹ The identification of human remains was carried out by Lucrezia Teodori.

The architectural characteristics, the funerary equipment (fig. 5), and the comparison with the neighboring tombs of Khalet al-Jam'a, with the repertoires of the necropolis of Tell es-Sultan and with el-Jib/Gibeon suggest a dating to the Middle Bronze Age II for Tomb 1 of Hindaza (§ 4.).

2.1. Chamber A of Tomb 1 of Hindaza

An upper layer consisting of a sandy-clayish soil filtered by the cracks in the limestone ceiling was distributed unevenly in both chambers at the time of the discovery, this layer is named F.1. A platform made of approximately 0.2 m long limestone slabs, named Bench 5, was in the northern side of Chamber A, about 1.86 m south of Shaft 6 along the western wall. The installation measured 0.68 m east-west and 0.7 m north-south and was raised above the tomb floor by about 0.6 m. On this platform some human remains were found (§ 2.1.1.), suggesting that this was as a place of deposition for the dead.¹²

The runoff of seasonal waters and its debris has only partially and superficially upset the depositions on the platform and the arrangement of the equipment. A greater concentration of this stratum was in correspondence of the access as the soil better permeated through the shaft.

2.1.1. Human remains in Chamber A

Human remains collected in Chamber A were concentrated on the Bench 5 platform, disturbed by infiltrations and post-depositional collapses of walls and ceiling. It was therefore possible to recognize: a proximal extremity of right ulna (H.22.T1.B5.HR.1), an extremity of right ulna (H.22.T1.B5.HR.2), an extremity proximal end of right radius (H.22.T1.B5.HR.3), distal end of right fibula (H.22.T1.B5.HR.4), distal end of left femur (H.22.T1.B5.HR.5), four sub-adult vertebrae (H.22.T1.B5.HR.6), three adult vertebrae fragments (H.22.T1.B5.HR.7), two tubercles of right ribs (H.22.T1.B5.HR.8), a right navicular of subadult (H.22.T1.B5.HR.9), a proximal phalanx of thumb (H.22.T1.B5.HR.10), a skull fragment (H.22.T1.B5.HR.11), fragmentary long bones (H.22.T1.B5.HR.12), fragmentary ribs (H.22.T1.B5.HR.13). Based on the human remains identified above the platform, it is possible to estimate the presence of two adult individuals (= 2 right ulna) and one sub-adult individual (= navicular).

Fewer human bone fragment remains were sampled within the jars BL11848 and BL11850 in Chamber A. In the jars BL11848 and BL11850 there were some human remains, probably intrusive, respectively: in BL11848 a larger sized long bone fragment (H.22.T1.BL11848.HR.1) and a smaller fragment of long bone (H.22.T1.BL11848.HR.2); in BL11850 a fragmentary skull (H.22.T1.BL11850.HR.1), a distal end of the right humerus

¹² A similar feature is documented in Tomb 3 of the nearby necropolis of Jebel Dhaher (Nigro *et al.* 2017a, 17-18) and in Tell es-Sultan, where in Tombs H6 (Kenyon 1960, 454, fig. 193), J14 and P21 (respectively Kenyon 1965, 312-314, fig. 151; 428-430, fig. 223) mudbricks platform were retrieved. Common elements between Tombs of Group III of Kenyon's typology, such as in this case Tombs H6 and P21, are not limited to the platform for deposition, but encompass also the presence of luxury items, like alabaster bowl with ram head, in Tomb H6 (Kenyon 1960, fig. 187:11), and ostrich egg, in Tomb P21 (Kenyon 1965, fig. 192:2), with the same decoration of the one found in the Tomb 1 of Hindaza, in addition to bone inlays (Kenyon 1965, fig. 228).

(H.22.T1.BL11850.HR.2), long bones (H.22.T1.BL11850.HR.3), ribs (H.22.T1.BL11850.HR.4), and fragmentary vertebra (H.22.T1.BL11850.HR.5).

2.1.2. Funerary equipment of Chamber A

In Chamber A, between the arched passage in the two chambers, along the western and eastern side, some jars were arranged, 6 with four handles and 1 with two handles.¹³ The jars were supposed to be originally standing upright, sunken into the floor of the room, the first at the western end of the arch and the seventh just before the opposite end, in the shape of a horseshoe, leaving free the passage in front of the shaft, as three jars (BL11850, BL11849, BL12003),¹⁴ found near each other still almost vertical, seem to suggest.¹⁵ The jars at the time of discovery had fallen with the bottoms facing the walls of the chamber and the rims towards the centre, partially crushing the other elements of the funerary set, as in the case of jar bases (BL11995, BL11996),¹⁶ of a carinated bowl with a trumpet base (BL11854),¹⁷ bases of carinated bowls (BL11997, BL11998, BL12016),¹⁸ a base of a jug (BL11999),¹⁹ and a fragmentary jar (BL12006).²⁰ To the west of Chamber A, near the jar BL11846 were the remains of bone inlays (BL12008, BL12009)²¹ probably from a decorated object/furniture (box or wooden table?).

In the eastern sector of the chamber, about 0.7 m from the wall, was a concentration of pottery partly covered by layer F.1 and on which the fallen jars laid. Here the funerary set, from north to south, was displaced as follows: a large bowl (BL12015),²² a base of a carinated bowl on high foot (BL12017),²³ below these was a baking tray (BL11994),²⁴ two fragmentary Black Burnished jugs (BL12004, BL12005),²⁵ a base of jar (BL12002)²⁶ further south, three large bowls (BL11838, BL11840, BL11841),²⁷ one carinated bowl with ring base (BL11835),²⁸ one single-spout lamp (BL11825),²⁹ a four-spout lamp (BL11827)³⁰ and one Black Burnished jug (BL11817),³¹ stacked on top of each other.

¹³ Respectively from west to east: BL11846, BL11850, BL11849, BL11848, BL11847, BL11851, and BL12003.

¹⁴ Cf. Kenyon 1965, figs. 161:3, 198:2.

¹⁵ The calcareous concretions, a sign of water washout, and the signs of sinking into the ground at the base of the vessels seem to confirm their erect arrangement.

¹⁶ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 149:2-3.

¹⁷ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 213:1.

¹⁸ Cf. Kenyon 1965, figs. 95:11, 247:2, 118:14.

¹⁹ Cf. Pritchard 1963, fig. 37:1.

²⁰ Cf. Pritchard 1963, fig. 50:37.

²¹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 173:7, 2.

²² Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 116:13.

²³ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 125:11.

²⁴ Cf. Loud 1948, pl. 7:10.

²⁵ Cf. Kenyon 1965, figs. 97:15, 113:7.

²⁶ This has been restored in ancient times by the means of two holes pierced from the outside in order to let a rope pass through (see Kenyon 1965, fig. 220:2).

²⁷ Cf. Kenyon 1965, figs. 116:1, 4, 164:3; 212:4; Pritchard 1963, fig. 61:2.

²⁸ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 212:8.

²⁹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 169:16.

³⁰ In the MB Tomb D22 in the necropolis of Tell es-Sultan an Early Bronze IV lamp was found as well, without any other remains of an Early Bronze IV burial (Kenyon 1965, 242), such as in the case of Tomb1 of Hindaza.

³¹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, figs. 126:7 (shoulder and base), 190:14 (rim and handle).

Further south three dipper juglets (BL11808, BL118011, BL11813),³² a Black Burnished jug (BL11816),³³ a bowl (BL11856),³⁴ a single-spout lamp (BL11824)³⁵ and a Red Burnished jug (BL11814)³⁶ were piled up on each other.

There were also a carinated bowl with a trumpet base (BL11804)³⁷ over a Black Burnished jug (BL11820),³⁸ a carinated bowl with a trumpet base (BL11845),³⁹ a dipper juglet (BL11800),⁴⁰ a Black Burnished jug (BL11819)⁴¹ and a carinated bowl (BL11831).⁴²

The bronze pins BL11861 and BL11862 were to the east of these vessel.⁴³ This ceramic concentration is considered as offering depositional layer, named F.2. Between the bottom of the jar BL11848⁴⁴ and the earth cone in front of the Shaft 6, a carinated bowl with a trumpet base was also found (BL11806).⁴⁵

Moreover, between jar BL11851⁴⁶ and the eastern wall, there were two large bowls (BL11839, BL11842),⁴⁷ a chalice (BL11834)⁴⁸ and a carinated bowl (BL11805),⁴⁹ stacked on top of each other. A little further east, close to the chamber wall, a curved knife (BL11858)⁵⁰ was on the floor, most likely originally placed inside the stacked tableware (as in the case of Chamber B; § 2.2.). A carinated bowl (BL11830)⁵¹ was at the southern end of Chamber A, alongside jar BL11851.⁵² In this chamber an ovoid jug of Tell el-Yahudiyeh (BL11799),⁵³ a cylindrical jug of Tell el-Yahudiyeh (BL12014),⁵⁴ a cylindrical Gray

³² Cf. Loud 1948, pls. 33:23, 12:10; Kenyon 1965, fig. 169:5.

³³ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 98:3.

³⁴ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 133:12.

³⁵ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 153:15.

³⁶ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 126:2.

³⁷ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 144:4.

³⁸ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 214:4.

³⁹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 166:14.

⁴⁰ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 231:24.

⁴¹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 168:8.

⁴² Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 96:11.

⁴³ They are fragmentary plain toggle pins with circular cross-section, about typology, chronology and distribution of this class of personal metal ornaments see: Iamoni 2012; Prell 2020.

⁴⁴ Cf. Pritchard 1963, fig. 24:90.

⁴⁵ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 131:4.

⁴⁶ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 149:2.

⁴⁷ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 116:1-2.

⁴⁸ Cf. Amiran 1969, pl. 27:18.

⁴⁹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 234:6.

⁵⁰ Cf. Pritchard 1963, fig. 24:93. The knife is of single-edged type with three rivets arranged in a triangle, curved blade and tip bent upwards (=Type 1, Philip 2006, 69, 75, fig. 34:3, n. 7142).

⁵¹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 117:3.

⁵² Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 149:2.

⁵³ Cf. Loud 1948, pl. 32:32; Kenyon 1965, fig. 168:27. BL11799 is an ovoid juglet of Early Palestinian group with two bands, filled with couple of dotted lines, two in the upper band and three in the lower one, dated to the 1750-1650 BC (Bietak - Aston 2019, 138, pl. 2.1.1:7).

⁵⁴ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 183:9; Nigro *et al.* 2015, 188. BL12014 is a cylindrical juglet of the Late Palestinian group (Bietak - Aston 2019, 139, pl. 2.1.2:2) has a cylindrical body, broad flat base, sloping shoulders, bipartite handle, decorated with two bands with herringbone pattern, as it is in the case of the cylindrical juglets of Type Group D.6.3 (=Kaplan's Cylindrical 2; Kaplan 1980, 15-18) of Aston and Bietak's typology (Aston - Bietak 2012, 120, fig. 66; Kaplan - Hardbottle - Sayre 1982, 129, fig. 5:2) dated to the 1750-1550 BC.

Burnished jug (BL11815),⁵⁵ an alabaster juglet (BL12010),⁵⁶ a limestone pommel (BL11855)⁵⁷ and a decorated ostrich egg (BL12013; fig. 6)⁵⁸ were also found.

The funerary equipment was placed on top of a thin buffy layer of beaten earth floor, namely L.4, which covered the natural limestone and marl rock flooring, called L.10.

2.1.3. Faunal remains and organic samples in Chamber A

Nearby platform B.5 some remains of animal bones of *ovis vel capra* were collected: fragmentary long bones (H.22.T1.B5.FR.1, H.22.T1.B5.FR.2), vertebrae (H.22.T1.B5.FR.3), phalanges (H.22.T1.B5.FR.4), bone fragments (H.22.T1.B5.FR.5). In the platform were also some remains of coal (H.22.T1.B5.Sample.1).

Other animal remains were collected in jars BL11846, BL11847, BL11850, BL11851 jars. Jar BL11846 preserved the greatest concentration of animal bones: skull fragments (H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.10), rib fragments (H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.3), vertebrae fragments (H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.9), proximal fragment of an ulna (H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.2), fragments of phalanges (H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.1), long bone fragments (H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.4, H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.5, H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.6, H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.7, H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.8), and bone fragments (H.22.T1.BL11846.FR.11). The animal remains in the BL11846 jar seem to relate to a small equine. In the same jar a significant concentration of coal was found (H.22.T1.BL11846.Sample.1).

A few fragmentary remains of animal bones (H.22.T1.BL11847.FR.1) were in the jar BL11847. A skull fragment (H.22.T1.BL11850.FR.1), two vertebrae (H.22.T1.BL11850.FR.2) and small fragments (H.22.T1.BL11850.FR.3) were sampled in the jar BL11850 jar, related to *ovis vel capra*. In the jar BL11851 there were respectively: fragments of ribs (H.22.T1.BL11851.FR.6), a vertebra (H.22.T1.BL11851.FR.4), a phalanx (H.22.T1.BL11851.FR.3), long bone fragments (H.22.T1.BL11851.FR.1, H.22.T1.BL11851.FR.2, H.22.T1.BL11851.FR.5), bone fragments (H.22.T1.BL11851.FR.7) by sheep or goats.

2.2. *Chamber B of Tomb 1 of Hindaza*

In Chamber B the upper debris layer F.1 was unevenly distributed, a thicker concentration was along the western side. The eastern sector was occupied by some limestone boulders collapsed from the ceiling due to infiltrations of water, and due to structural problems, that effected the tomb over time, perhaps also related to the activities of the mechanical vehicle. Below layer F.1, a thin light brown layer of beaten earth floor, named L.7, is in Chamber B. The funerary equipment of Chamber B is arranged in this stratum, underneath the natural limestone and marl flooring laid, called L.12.

A platform was also found in Chamber B, about 4.20 m south of the shaft along the western wall, it was made of limestone slabs, measured 0.36 m north-south and 0.22 m east-

⁵⁵ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 231:6.

⁵⁶ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 154:4.

⁵⁷ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 11:4.

⁵⁸ The ostrich egg, fragmentary preserved, is painted with yellow horizontal, vertical and diagonal bands, like the one retrieved in Tomb P21 of Jericho (Kenyon 1965, fig. 209:2).

west, and it was embedded into layer L.7 and named Bench 3. Its dimensions might suggest its use as sort of offering table or bench. Along the south-eastern wall of the chamber was a long shelf excavated in the rock, named Niche 8, in which a single-spout lamp on a high foot (BL11826) was placed.

2.2.1. Human remains in the Chamber B

Scarce human remains were sampled in Chamber B from jar BL11852: a rib fragment (H.22.T1.BL11852.HR.2) and an intermediate index phalanx (H.22.T1. BL11852.HR.1). The lower concentration of human remains in this part of the tomb could be due to the distance from platform B.5, the preferred place of deposition.

2.2.2. Funerary equipment of Chamber B

In Chamber B, south of the jar BL11846⁵⁹ which occupied part of the passage between the two chambers, but which originally had to be in an erected position close to the arch between the two rooms, was located jar BL11852⁶⁰, along the western wall, found broken in half due to the collapse. More pottery was found in the centre of the chamber: a large bowl (BL11843)⁶¹ and inside it a carinated bowl (BL11807),⁶² a Black Burnished jug (BL11821),⁶³ an alabastron (BL12011),⁶⁴ an alabaster bowl (BL12012; fig. 7)⁶⁵ above which was a bronze pin (BL11860),⁶⁶ a dagger (BL11857)⁶⁷ and a curved knife (BL11859; fig. 8),⁶⁸ a little further east was a carinated cup (BL11833).⁶⁹ Moreover, to south-west were four dippers (BL 11801, BL11809, BL11810, BL11812),⁷⁰ a carinated bowl with trumpet base (BL11803)⁷¹ above another carinated bowl (BL11832),⁷² two carinated bowls with a trumpet base (BL11802, BL11828),⁷³ a Red Slip carinated bowl (BL11844),⁷⁴ two Red Burnished jugs (BL11818,

⁵⁹ Cf. Pritchard 1963, fig. 63:55.

⁶⁰ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 136:3, 5.

⁶¹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 95:6.

⁶² Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 235:1.

⁶³ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 120:14.

⁶⁴ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 154:10.

⁶⁵ The alabaster bowl of Tomb 1 of Hindaza has a decorated rim with incised diagonal pattern, ram's head handles, and a rather worn surface. Quite similar bowls were collected in the necropolis of Tell es-Sultan in Tombs H6 (Kenyon 1960, 463, fig. 187:11), J1 (Kenyon 1960, 435, fig. 171:15), P19 (Kenyon 1965, 397, fig. 179:11) with ram's head handle and without decoration on rim, H18 (Kenyon 1960, 492, fig. 187:17), and J54 (Kenyon 1965, 267, fig. 100:14), with ram's head handle and incised decoration on the rim. Actually, the one from Tomb J54 represents the most reliable comparison.

⁶⁶ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 114:1-3.

⁶⁷ Cf. Garstang 1932, pl. XXXVII: 899. The dagger has a triangular blade with wide and thick midrib, and short tang with two rivets (Maxwell-Hyslop 1946, 27; Philip 2006: 47-50; Kan-Cipor-Meron *et al.* 2018, 21).

⁶⁸ Cf. Pritchard 1963, fig. 50:40. BL11859 is a single-edged knife with curved blade with the tip of the blade bent upwards and three rivets arranged in a triangle (=Type 1, Philip 2006, 69, 75, fig. 34:3, n. 7142).

⁶⁹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 222:4.

⁷⁰ Cf. Pritchard 1963, fig. 23:75; Kenyon 1965, figs. 121:6, 169:5, 9.

⁷¹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 147:6.

⁷² Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 144:1.

⁷³ Cf. Kenyon 1965, figs. 166:4, 153:1.

⁷⁴ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 95:11.

BL12001),⁷⁵ a Black Burnished globular jug (BL12000),⁷⁶ and a Gublite bowl (BL11829),⁷⁷ with a Black Burnished jug (BL11822)⁷⁸ inside it. South of bowl BL11829,⁷⁹ under a fragment of jar BL11852, there was also painted bowl BL11836⁸⁰. A Black Burnished pyriform jug (BL11823),⁸¹ and a set of two hemispherical bowls (BL11837, BL11853)⁸² were also found in Chamber B.

2.2.3. Faunal remains and organic samples in the Chamber B

Five fragments of goat bone (H.22.T1.BL11852.FR.1) were collected in jar BL11852 in Chamber B.

3. THE SURVEY IN THE EASTERN AND SOUTHERN SECTORS OF BETHLEHEM

The joint Italian-Palestinian expedition to Bethlehem has mapped, monitored, and surveyed natural, archaeological, historical, and cultural sites and monuments, dating back to the Early Bronze Age until the Islamic period, for their protection and valorization, in the area of the modern city and its municipality between 2015 and 2022. This georeferenced surveying activity is carried on in order to develop thematic maps of the city of Bethlehem and its surroundings and constitutes a tool for the control and protection of cultural heritage.⁸³

During the 8th (2022) season the exploration was focused on the eastern and southern sectors of Bethlehem investigating the following sites: Birket al-Abadiya, Beit Sahur, Wadi et-Tin, Khirbet Hindaza, Khalet al-Badd.

3.1. Birket al-Abadiya

Al-Ubeidiya is a town part of the Bethlehem Governorate, 8 km east of the Nativity Church, and a local tradition reports that the town was named by people from the Arabian Peninsula in the 17th century AD.⁸⁴

In this area the Monastery of St. Theodosius (Deir Ibn 'Ubeid in Arabic)⁸⁵ and the Monastery of Mar Saba⁸⁶ were established during the Byzantine Period.

In the eastern branch of the Nahal Gorfán, just in the center of al-Ubeidiya, there is the Birket el-Abadiya site (N31°43'27'' E35°17'13''; 507 m asl), a pool (fig. 9) built during Byzantine times, and probably restored during the Islamic period, with hydraulic infrastructures, canals, wells and cisterns, fed by an underground channel dug into the local limestone rock identified further north, in a site named Ain el-Abadiya (N 31°43'8.00" E

⁷⁵ Cf. Pritchard 1963, fig. 22:55; Kenyon 1965, fig. 168:211.

⁷⁶ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 168:8, 10.

⁷⁷ Cf. Kenyon 1965, figs. 116:18, 152:10.

⁷⁸ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 144:10.

⁷⁹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, figs. 116:18, 152:10.

⁸⁰ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 116:4.

⁸¹ Cf. Kenyon 1965, fig. 177:2.

⁸² Cf. Kenyon 1965, figs. 222:6, 212:13.

⁸³ Nigro *et al.* 2017a, 5-10.

⁸⁴ <https://pf87.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=60b0495a716d400e97198e11070f8e2e>.

⁸⁵ Amiran 1953, 75-77.

⁸⁶ Al 'Ubeidiya Town Profile (http://proxy.arij.org/vprofile/bethlehem/pdfs/VP/Al%20Ubeidiya_tp_en.pdf).

⁸⁵ Schick 1899, 36-37; Hirschfeld 1992, 198-199, 257-260.

⁸⁶ Patrich 1995.

35°16'43.75"), probably related to an underground collecting water system or a spring active in ancient times, as no spring has been detected in the surroundings during survey.

The pool is built up along the western flank of the wadi, almost at its base, with the walls entirely built up on the northern, eastern and southern sides, while the western one exploited the emerging rock spur, naturally sloping down eastwards, forming an irregular rectangular plan, north-south oriented, measuring 27 m on the eastern side, 12.5 m on the northern side, 15.30 m on the southern side, and 37 m on the western side, for a perimeter of 90.51 m, corresponding to 516.3 square meters, and 4.150 cubic meters.

The walls of the pool are made of semi-finished blocks of smaller size and numerous splinters in the lower section. While the upper part of the walls is composed of fewer, squared blocks of about 0.5 m. The last row is crowned by a series of blocks projecting towards the inside forming a sort of shelf. Inside the pool, in the middle of the eastern side, there is an apsidal niche approximately 3 m high. Outside the eastern side of the pool, at the base, the wall is strengthened by a protruding plinth, at the point of greatest water pressure. This plinth was covered with a hydraulic mortar.

Birket el-Abadiya pool has been interpreted as the water reservoir of the Monastery of St. Theodosius, which is about 800 meters away, and the recess as a sort of prayer niche identifier of the property of the monastery.⁸⁷

The pool is provided by some hydraulic infrastructures: a channel hewn in the bedrock that runs directly into the pool in the western corner from above; a square cistern dug into the rock and a second cistern from a natural circular cave along the western side.

The latter one was equipped to the south with an L shaped staircase with two ramps, carved into the rock with steps 0.2-0.3 m high which gave access to the cistern itself. To the south of the staircase a small canal with hydraulic mortar revetment runs sloping eastwards, towards a pear-type well, dug into the rock with a round well made of stones. Both installations, the canal and the well, according to position and dimensions seem to be related to an individual and immediate use, rather than to feed the pool.

A channel dug into the bed rock emerges at about 3 meters from the north-east corner, downstream of the pool, related to the irrigation system of the bottom of the wadi.

3.2. *Beit Sahur*

The modern town of Beit Sahur is approximately 2 km east of Bethlehem and part of its governorate. Nowadays the urban layout of these two cities is united in correspondence of el-Atan Street due to the recent pressing construction activity, but until the beginning of the last century they were separated into distinct centres.⁸⁸ As it concerns the name Beit Sahur, two different translations are attested, namely 'The house of vigilance/the house of the night watch'⁸⁹ and 'The house of magicians'.⁹⁰

Archaeological data and historical information on the ancient site of Beit Sahur are fragmented and sometimes incomplete, occasional discoveries were registered just in brief notes, while surveys carried out during the British Mandate (1918-1948) were in many cases

⁸⁷ Hirschfeld 1992, 159-160, figs. 84-85.

⁸⁸ de Cree 1999, 65; Prag 2000, 173; Nigro *et al.* 2017b, 225.

⁸⁹ Abu A'mar *et al.* 2014, 43.

⁹⁰ Palmer 1881, 286.

collected and published later in time.⁹¹ A complete collection of the available data has been made by Fernand de Cree more than twenty years ago.⁹²

Archaeological evidence known for the area of Beit Sahur testifies a long-lasting occupation of the area, mainly as burial place, starting from the 5th millennium BC.⁹³ These attestations are represented by some Neolithic flints patchy collected in the town,⁹⁴ an underground complex for dwelling in the western sector of the town, in use between the Chalcolithic Period and Iron Age II, according to the ceramic repertoire, with some refurbishing and reuse. The structure was later damaged by the construction of a tomb hewn in the Herod's period.⁹⁵

Moreover, a necropolis of eleven underground shaft-tombs dating back from the Early Bronze Age IVB to the Middle Bronze Age was discovered in Beit Sahur in 1908 and published by P. Hänsler and G.E. Wright,⁹⁶ and an Early Bronze Age II-III tomb was discovered in 1962.⁹⁷

During the 8th season (2022) the exploration of Beth Sahur was carried out in order to improve the archaeological map of the town and to register the location of historical and holy places.

3.2.1. The road to the Shepherds' Field

Descending from the eastern mound of Bethlehem to reach Beit Sahur, along Milk Grotto Street, in the upper part, and Saint Joseph Street, in the lower one, after crossing the radial street of el-Atan, there is the Church of the House of St. Joseph (N31°42'13.20" E35°12'47.37"; fig. 10).⁹⁸ The church has a rectangular plan,⁹⁹ with a single nave and apse, and stands on two limestone cliffs sloping down towards the east, surrounded by a garden with olive and citrus trees and a well, reminiscent of the gardens of the traditional houses. A small church in this place, where according to the Gospel of Matthew (2:13) the Angel appeared to Joseph and pointed out to him the flight into Egypt, is mentioned in the travel stories of Florentine pilgrim of the 14th century.¹⁰⁰ The modern church, inaugurated in the 1893, stands above an older one, most likely the one visited by the 14th century pilgrims, as evidenced by the remains of the ancient apse saved inside.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, a huge limestone

⁹¹ Conder - Kitchener 1883, 29; Bagatti 1952, 265-268.

⁹² de Cree 1999.

⁹³ Greenberg - Keinan 2009, 121, n. 807; Nigro 2015, 4.

⁹⁴ Stockton 1967, 134, n. 17.

⁹⁵ Dinur 1986. A survey in the terraced slope in between the eastern edge of Bethlehem and the western border of Beit Sahur discovered a site covering at least 50 dunams built on a terraced and cultivated slope (Finkelstein - Gophna 1993, 17, n. 60). The pottery dates from the Chalcolithic period onwards, with most of the material from Early Bronze I and Iron Age II (Dinur 1986, 16). A burial place dated to the Iron Age (N31°42'63" E35°12'68") investigated with salvage excavations during '90s by the MoTA-DACH was mapped during the 8th (2022) season by the Sapienza team.

⁹⁶ Hänsler 1908; 1909; Vincent 1909, 116-117; Wright 1938.

⁹⁷ Saller 1963, 325; Hennessy 1963, 421; 1966; Finkelstein - Gophna 1993, 18, n. 1.

⁹⁸ La Terra Santa III/1 (1925), p. 142.

⁹⁹ Bagatti 1952, 263, fig. 66.

¹⁰⁰ *Viaggio di Leonardo di Niccolò Frescobaldi Fiorentino in Egitto e in Terra Santa*, Rome 1548, p. 140.

¹⁰¹ In the second half of the nineteenth century, before the construction of the modern church, there were ruins known as the House of Joseph in this place (Baedeker ed. 1876, 250-251).

block, under the nowadays altar, represents, according to what is narrated by local tradition the place where the Holy Family rested until the flight into Egypt.

Moreover, this church is the place where, again following the narration of the Gospel of Matthew (2:11), the Three Wise Men visited Jesus.

The cult of St. Joseph is very much felt in Bethlehem, as it is testified by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos monk and historian of the 13th-14th century who mentions (book 8th, chapter 30) a church built by Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, for Saint Joseph betrothed.¹⁰² This statement by Nikephoros Kallistos took up a more ancient source, from the 7th century, which probably referred to the first church in the Shepherds' Field.¹⁰³

Continuing east, towards the so-called Shepherds' Field, crossing the historic center of Beit Sahur, there is the Church of the Well of the Virgin Mary (N 31°42'12.95" E35°13'6.20").¹⁰⁴

Bir as-SyDAH is among the many wells of the town, but it is also known as the Virgin Mary's Well, considered the deepest and most important well in the Old City of Beit Sahur. The spring lies directly under the church and consists of a natural elliptical underground cistern, fed by the ground water, similar to the one below Saint Helena's Coptic Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, nearby the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

The Church of the Well of the Virgin Mary (fig. 11), built in 1969, is an underground single-room with a minor chamber on the back side for the well and its veneration facing directly on the cistern.

Continuing in the land of Beit Sahur, to the east of this church there are the sites of the Shepherds' Field of Roman Catholic tradition (Khirbet Siyar al-Ghanam/Ruins of the Sheepfold),¹⁰⁵ to the north, and of the Shepherds' Field of Greek Orthodox tradition (Keniset er-Ra'wat/Church of the Shepherds),¹⁰⁶ to the south, 500 meters away from each other, both visited by the team during the 8th (2022) season. The Shepherds' Field is also quoted in written sources, by travelers and pilgrims of ancient times as *Poimnion* (sheepfold), *Ad Pastores*, Migdal Eder or Tower of the Flocks (Gen. 35:21).¹⁰⁷

The Shepherds' Field represents the Biblical place of the announcement by the Angel of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-11), identified also by S. Jerome with the Tower of Ader at thousand steps from the cave of nativity in Bethlehem.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² *Vita, e culto di S. Giuseppe sposo di Maria Vergine, e padre putativo di Gesù Cristo salvator nostro*, D. Giovan-Grisostomo Trombelli, Bologna 1767, p. 237.

¹⁰³ A church built by St. Helena to celebrate the angels of the annunciation is mentioned also by Guérin (1868, 207).

¹⁰⁴ Tobler 1849, 263; Letts 1946, 190; de Cree 1999, 70, 73. According to the local tradition, the Holy Family passed by the well during their flight to Egypt. The Virgin Mary, being thirsty, asked a local woman, who was fetching water in a bucket, if she could have a sip because the well was so deep, but the woman refused. Suddenly the water from the well rose spontaneously and the Virgin was able to drink directly from it (Baedeker ed. 1876, 251). Since then, the well is always full and is said to have healing powers.

¹⁰⁵ Corbo 1955.

¹⁰⁶ Conder – Kitchener 1883, 103.

¹⁰⁷ For a complete examination of the literary traditions and sources about the Shepherds' Field: *La Terra Santa* III (1923), 262-266; IV (1924), 34-38, 60, 82-85, 194-197, 266-269, 294-297; V (1925), 40, 38-39, 57-60.

¹⁰⁸ St. Jerome clarifies the position of the tower in his translation of the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius of Caesarea and in the Letter 108 to Eustochium for the loss of her mother Paula; Conder – Kitchener 1883, 55.

At Khirbet Siyar al-Ghanam (N31°42'26.82" E35°13'47.46"), identified with the place of the monastery of Jhon Cassian of the 4th century,¹⁰⁹ there is the Sanctuary of the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, or the Catholic Shepherds' Filed, dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima and St. Theresa of Lisieux (fig. 12). First explorations of the area were carried out in 1858 by Carlo C.C. Guarmani, traveler and explorer of the 19th century, at that time official of the Imperial Messengers of France. He exposed the rest of a monastery and claimed to have found the three "shepherds' tombs"¹¹⁰ mentioned by the pilgrim Bishop Arculfus around the year 680.¹¹¹ Only in 1951-1952 the Franciscan Fathers undertook systematic excavations under the aegis of Father Virgilio Corbo¹¹² for the construction of the new chapel designed by the architect Antonio Barluzzi in form of a nomadic tent with five apses in 1953. In the site are preserved the rests of a watchtower, of a church and monastery, provided with cisterns, canals, oven, oil-press, millstone, cave-cellar, with two main phases of use, the former dating back to the end of the 4th-beginning of the 5th century AD, and the latter between the 6th and the 8th century AD, after which the monastery was abandoned. Below the Byzantine church and the area of the new chapel there are some caves, used since the 1st century, as testified by the findings of Herodian pottery and coins of the First Jewish War, nowadays converted into small churches and places of worship for modern pilgrims.¹¹³

At Keniset er-Ra'wat (N31°42'6.88" E35°13'35.68"), identified with the place of the monastery erected by the Abbot Marcianus in the 5th century,¹¹⁴ the excavations carried out by V. Tzaferis in the 1972 exposed overlapping structure dating back from the 4th to the 10th century AD (fig. 13).¹¹⁵ A mosaic floor in the church in a cave dated to the 4th century AD represents the earliest remains in the site. In the course of the 5th century the cave was modified to create a small Byzantine church above it, paved with mosaics depicting a vine trellis issuing from an amphora, and to the north there was a tower. At the turn of the 6th century AD the entire area was raised, and a large basilica was erected with plain white mosaics in the courtyard; the eastern part of the tower was cut and used as a burial vault for monks. During the Persian invasion of 614 the basilica was destroyed and replaced by a new one. In the following centuries, after the Arab conquest, the basilica was transformed in a monastery with walls and towers, until its obliteration during the 10th century AD, under the caliphate of el-Hakim. These ruins were deserted up to the return of the Greek monks in the 16th century. A modern church, dedicated to the Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos, to St.

¹⁰⁹ *La Terra Santa IV* (1924), 294.

¹¹⁰ Guarmani 1859, 24.

¹¹¹ *The Pilgrimage of Arculfus in the Holy Land*, translated and annotated by Rev. James Rose Macpherson, London 1889, 30-31.

¹¹² Corbo 1955.

¹¹³ Among the materials from Siyar al-Ghanam preserved in the Archaeological Collections of the Terra Sancta Museum of the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* of Jerusalem, mostly dated to Herodian and Byzantine times, there are also some vases dating to the Bronze Age (RA-00003938; RA00005138). A special thanks is for Father Eugenio Alliata, Director of the Archaeological and the Multimedia Sections in the museum, and Dr. Daniela Massara, executive director and curator, which kindly allowed the study of findings from the Bethlehem area kept at the museum, as well as shared archival information.

¹¹⁴ *La Terra Santa IV/1* (1924), 294.

¹¹⁵ Tzaferis 1973a; 1973b.

Panteleimon, and to the Synaxis of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel was inaugurated in 1989 (fig. 14).¹¹⁶

3.3. *Wadi et-Tin*

The Wadi et-Tin (the Valley of Fig; fig. 15) runs east-west for a length of about 2 km, it is 2 km north of the Herodium and 3.4 km southeast from the Nativity Church. The western branch of Wadi et-Tin has been explored in the 8th season (2022), where reports of excavations¹¹⁷ and historical maps¹¹⁸ indicate the presence of tombs and cisterns.

The northern flank of the wadi, 610 m asl, was particularly affected by the modern building activities and mechanical means that removed large slices and sections of the rocky walls. During the survey some natural caves were identified, nowadays refuge for the flocks that here graze in large numbers, but without traces of use in ancient times and no recognizable archaeological material.

As it concerns the southern flank, the survey was carried out along the southern side of the modern paved road leading to the Omar Ben al-Khatib Mosque, 682 m asl, at the eastern fringe of the wadi, and the northern strip of land, between the modern road and the top of the flank, in an area called Beit Ta'mar by the local people.¹¹⁹

Here a modern Islamic cemetery dominates the area in front of the mosque, to the north of the modern road. In the eastern sector occupied for the most part by the cemetery, only a few ceramic fragments dating back to the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods (4th-11th century BC) have been collected. In the western sector, a pear-shaped well with a horseshoe-shaped monolithic vera (fig. 16), 1.03 × 1.2 m, has been identified, 686 m asl, adjacent to the road, together with some nearby installations and cups in the bedrocks connected to a hydraulic infrastructure which also included a cistern/cave for water collecting further south. The pottery collected in the western sector belongs to Early Bronze Age III (1 holemouth fragment) and, as in the previous case, to the Byzantine (fig. 17) and Early Islamic Periods (4th-11th century BC).

On the same side of the wadi, but in the lowest bed rock ridge there is a cave, 665 m asl, that measures of 7.55 m in east-west length and 4.70 m in north-south width. Inside it there were remains of modern activity as well as signs of combustion on the ceiling in the innermost recess. This cave seems to be quite similar to the one described by L.H. Vincent discovered in the northern flank of the wadi¹²⁰ and can be interpreted as a troglodyte dwelling, probably used also in ancient times.

The sector to the west of the mosque and south of the modern road was also explored. Here remains of a collapsed structure, consisting of square blocks of 50-70 cm × 20 cm together with some architectural elements, were identified at an elevation of 690 m asl. Numerous installations hewn in the bed rock spurs were to the east of this structure. The pottery finds here date back to the Byzantine Period (4th-6th century BC).

¹¹⁶ In the small museum in the underground chapel, some Iron Age vases from excavations of the area are exposed, such as a lamp, simple jug and juglet, Red Slip jug, and Black Burnished juglets, testifying the long occupation.

¹¹⁷ Vincent 1947.

¹¹⁸ Conder - Kitchener 1883, Sheet XVII.

¹¹⁹ Conder - Kitchener 1883, 29-30.

¹²⁰ Vincent 1947; Mirazón Lahr - Haydenblit 1995.

3.4. *Khirbet Hindaza*

Khirbet Hindaza (N31°41'45'' E35°12'24'') is the highest peak of Bethlehem, at 770 m asl. Here some agricultural structures from the Ottoman era have been identified and documented. They are a *mintar* (fig. 18), dry stone fence walls, and hydraulic infrastructures related to farming activities. The *mintar* is an agricultural watch-tower, and in the case of Hindaza it is a single-celled truncated cone structure, with a circular plan, built dry for seasonal use in order to control cultivated land, with an entrance made of large blocks and a lintel. The hydraulic infrastructures are represented by a stone-built canal used for fields irrigation and a well with a circular stone vera.

3.5. *Khalet al-Badd*

The survey at Khalet al-Badd (N31°41'21" E35°12'81"),¹²¹ a terraced sloping site from east to south-west that measured approximately 3 hectares, allowed us to identify the rests of different structures distributed on three main ledges. On the upper terrace there was a hydraulic system consisting of a well with a circular monolithic mouth (diameter 1.36 m) flanked by a basin (0.7 × 0.45 m), at 697 m asl. In the first two upper terraces, south and east of the well, there were some structures with dry stone fence walls, preserved for the height of 3 rows, set directly on the bed rock outcrops. These seem to be connected with the 2 *mintars* present on the site: one with a circular plan to the north, and one with a square plan to the south. Farther south-east a second well was identified in the second terrace of Khalet al-Badd, at 692 m asl, consisting of a circular monolithic vera (diameter 1.45 m; fig. 19); 5 m south-east of the well is a large cave with shaft, probably for water collection. A third hydraulic system, at 690 m asl, made of a circular well and two elliptical basins is located on the third terrace, in the center of the site. In this case the well is not equipped with a vera or a mouth, but it opens directly into the bed rock (diameter 1.2 m). The latter well represents a modern reuse, consolidated by concrete, to water the flocks that graze on the site.

In the southernmost portion of the site, at 680 m asl, there is an underground chamber with a square shaft nearby.¹²² The structure recalls the multiple tombs with several shafts already investigated in the neighboring necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a.

The pottery collected is dating back to the Byzantine, Islamic-Ayyubid period and (4th-11th century AD; fig. 20) and testify to a longtime occupation of the site, probably due to the hydraulic infrastructures and water availability.

Sloping terraces of bed rock emerging from west to east and natural cavities opened below them in different spots were exploited as water reservoirs associated to wells in what appears to be a seasonal camp of Islamic (Ottoman) period, as it is suggested by the two *mintars*. The structures built with walls preserved for 3-4 rows of semi-finished blocks of local stone set directly above the cliffs of bed rock can be part of enclosures for animals and agricultural buildings.

¹²¹ Conder - Kitchener 1883, 107.

¹²² The historical map of Conder and Kitchener (1883, Sheet XVII) indicated the presence of a tomb and a cistern in this spot.

4. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Some worship and holy places in Bethlehem, such as the Nativity Church, the Milk Grotto, and the Shepherds' Field, show how it is a recurring trait, over centuries, to use underground structures and caves, natural formations abundant in the region, for various purposes, such as domestic and funerary reasons, sheltering and as shelter for animals. Tomb A7 of Khalet al-Jam'a can be ascribed to this category, as it is an underground complex dug as a burial place at the end of the Early Bronze Age, reused during the following Middle Bronze Age, and reconverted into a place of production and perhaps also a shelter or seasonal dwelling, in the middle of the 1st millennium BC.

The Tomb 1 of Hindaza participates in the same cultural horizon, burial practices, and funerary rituals as Tomb 15 of el-Jib/Gibeon¹²³ and tombs of Group III of Tell es-Sultan,¹²⁴ as indeed it is also for some family tombs of Khalet al-Jam'a (Tombs A1 and A2),¹²⁵ suggesting a Middle Bronze Age IIB dating, as well as the two Tell el-Yahudiyeh juglets, BL1179 and BL12014, do.¹²⁶

The repertoire of Hindaza's tomb, includes large bowls with simple or inverted rim, disc or ring base, bowls with sharp or round carination, necked goblets, piriform and cylindrical juglets, typical of the Middle Bronze Age II.¹²⁷

At the same time, bronze weapons and ornaments, such as and the presence of a dagger with one flat midrib,¹²⁸ curved knives,¹²⁹ furnishing/box with bone inlays, a decorated ostrich egg¹³⁰ and alabaster vases, as regards bronze weapons and ornaments, appear to find fitting comparisons with the funerary offerings of the Tombs P19 and P21 of Jericho.¹³¹

Carinated bowls, for wine, aromatic drinks, and libations, pyriform and cylindrical juglets, for oils and perfumes, alabaster vases and bowls, for precious substances and make-up,¹³² together with metal weapons and the ostrich egg are luxury objects and wealth items symbols of a ruling class, to which the family owner of Tomb 1 of Hindaza may have belonged.

The recently discovered tomb and the already known cases of Khalet al-Jam'a allow to profile for the city of Bethlehem of the mid of the 2nd millennium BC the existence of a prestige-power oriented system during the second urban growth.

Moreover, the system of cemeteries displaced on the flanks of the hills to the south and to the east of Bethlehem, between Wadi 'Artas, Hindaza, Beit Sahur, and Wadi et-Tin, usually inaugurated during the Early Bronze Age IV, and reused during the Middle Bronze Age, in some cases even further during the Iron Age, represents a form of clan, tribal or group

¹²³ Pritchard 1963, 102-113.

¹²⁴ Matoian 2008.

¹²⁵ Nigro *et al.* 2017a, 11.

¹²⁶ Bietak - Aston 2019, 138-139.

¹²⁷ Bonfil 2019.

¹²⁸ This kind replaced the multiple ribbed daggers of the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (Philip 1989, 117-118; Nigro 2003, 26), being a continuation of that kind in the course of the 2nd millennium BC.

¹²⁹ The association of curved knives with Tell el-Yahudiyeh Ware is documented also in funerary equipment at Tell ed-Dab'a (Bietak 1991, 184-186, fig. 141).

¹³⁰ Kenyon 1960, 268-269; 1965, 167-175.

¹³¹ Respectively: Kenyon 1965, 388-410, 421-438.

¹³² Pinnock 1989, 34.

administration of lands,¹³³ and a sort of cult of ancestors. This practice was performed reusing tombs and caves hewn at the end of the 3rd millennium BC, to claim, in the following centuries, the lands populated by family groups.¹³⁴ Therefore, cemetery can be intended as a hallmark of the territory around the southern edge of Bethlehem and a landscape characterization.¹³⁵

Recent discoveries continue to provide new data on the pre-classical city of Bethlehem and illustrate how this area participates in the culture of the Bronze and Iron Age Southern Levant, and the Judean region especially, making new studies and research of the Italian-Palestinian expedition desirable.

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¹³³ Nigro *et al.* 2017a, 22.

¹³⁴ Hallote 1995.

¹³⁵ Chapman 2003.

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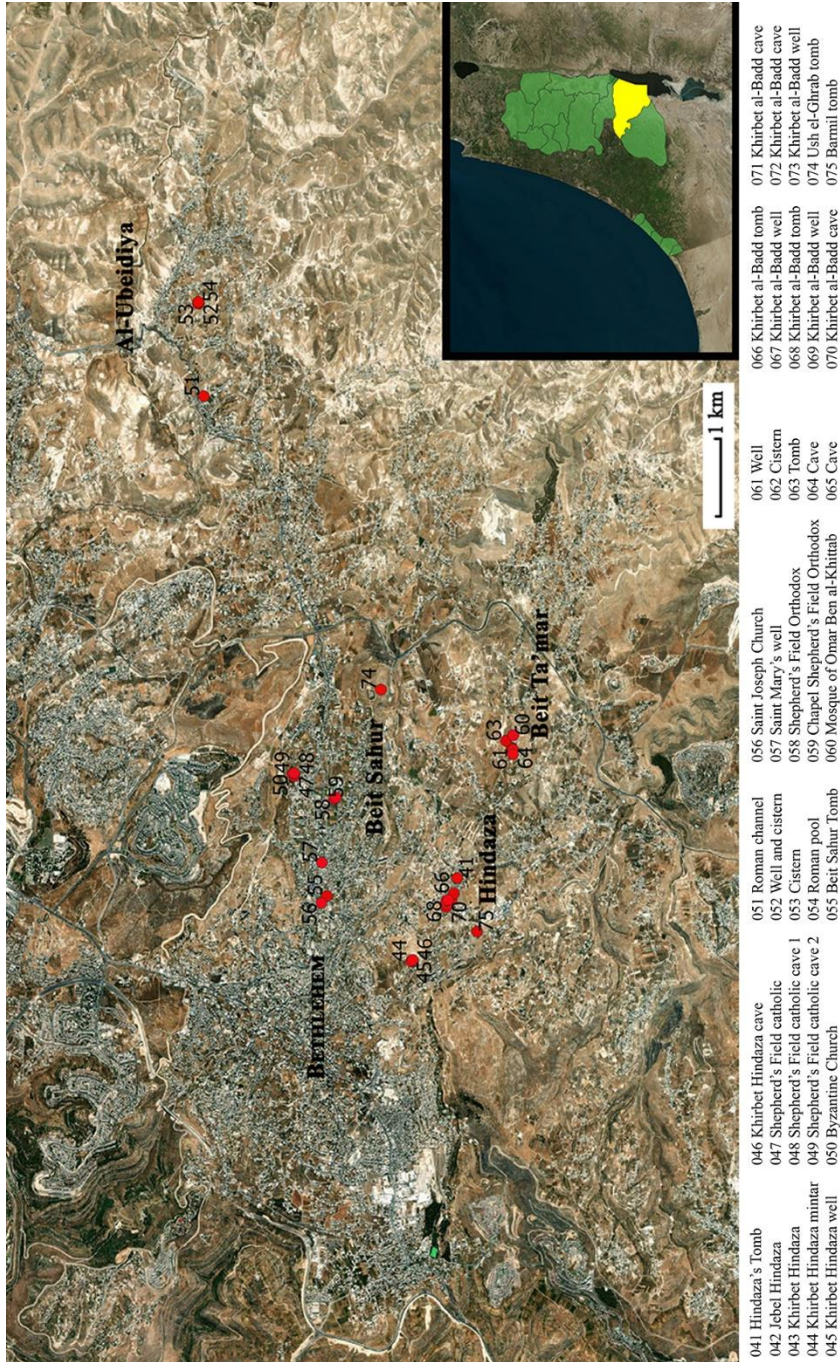


Fig. 1 - Map of the sites surveyed, documented, and excavated by the Italian-Palestinian expedition to Bethlehem between 2015 and 2022, mentioned in the text.

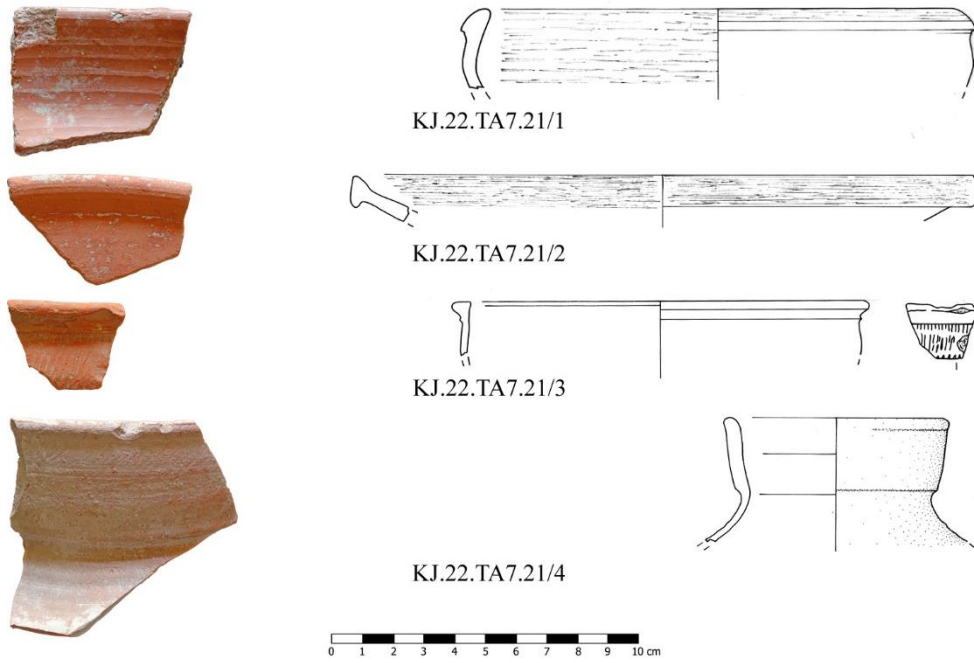


Fig. 2 - Pottery from layer F.21 in Sector A of the Tomb A7 of the necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a.



Fig. 3 - The excavation of the Shaft 7 in Sector B of the Tomb A7 of the necropolis of Khalet al-Jam'a.

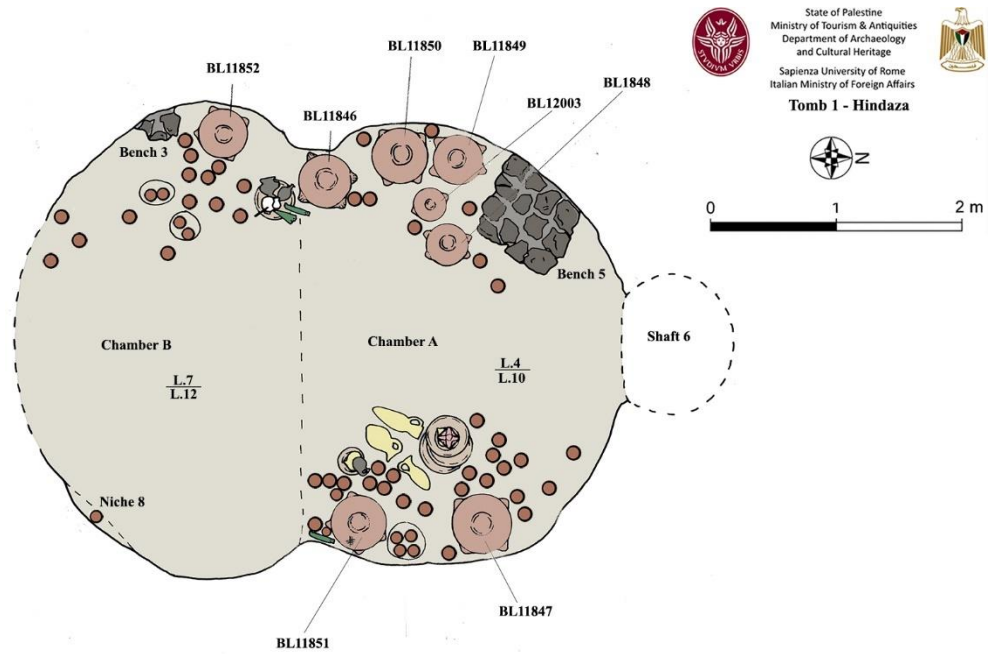


Fig. 4 - Plan of the Middle Bronze Age II Tomb 1 of Hindaza.



Fig. 5 - The funerary equipment and human remains of the Middle Bronze Age II Tomb 1 of Hindaza.



Fig. 6 - The decorated ostrich egg BL12013 from Chamber A of the Middle Bronze Age II Tomb 1 of Hindaza.



Fig. 7 - The alabaster bowl BL12012 with ram's head from Chamber B of the Middle Bronze Age II Tomb 1 of Hindaza, with the particular of the ram's head handle.



Fig. 8 - The curved knife BL11859 from Chamber B of the Middle Bronze Age II Tomb 1 of Hindaza.



Fig. 9 - The pool of Birket el-Abadiya: with the channel hewn in the bedrock in foreground, from north-west (top); with the crowning shelf in the foreground; from south-west (bottom).

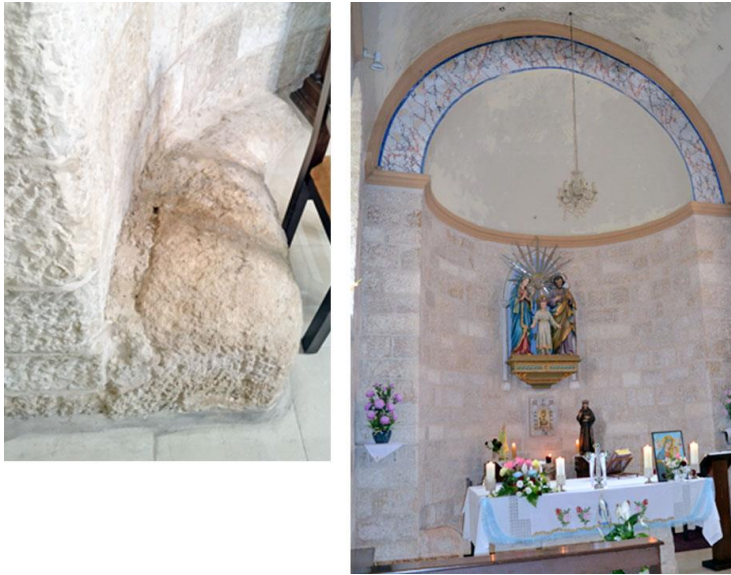


Fig. 10 - The apse of the Church of the House of St. Joseph at Bethlehem, with the particular of the ancient foundation.



Fig. 11 - The Church of the Well of the Virgin Mary at Beit Sahur with the particular of the underground cistern (left).

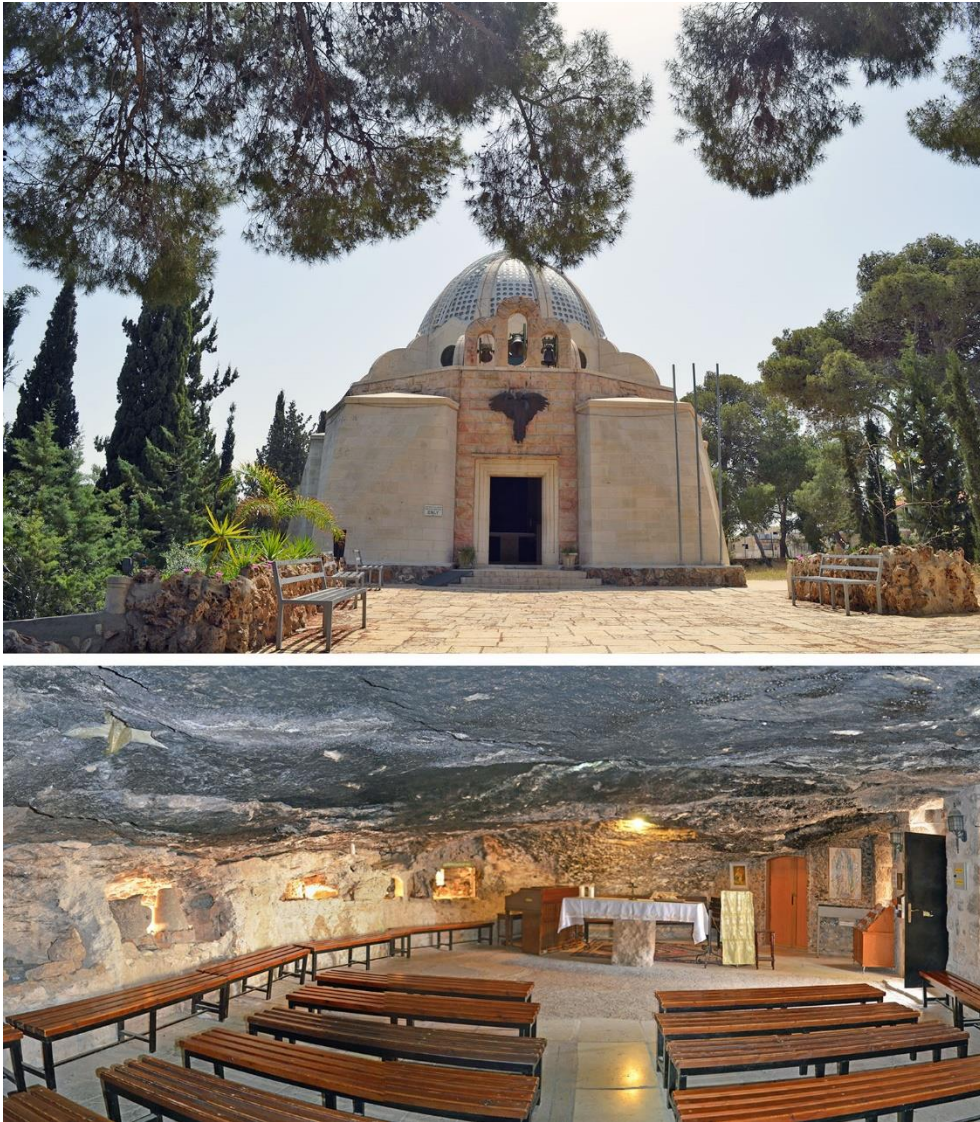


Fig. 12 - The Shepherds' Field of Roman Catholic tradition at Khirbet Siyar al-Ghanam - Beit Sahur; the chapel by Antonio Barluzzi (top), and the Cave 1 of Annunciation (bottom).

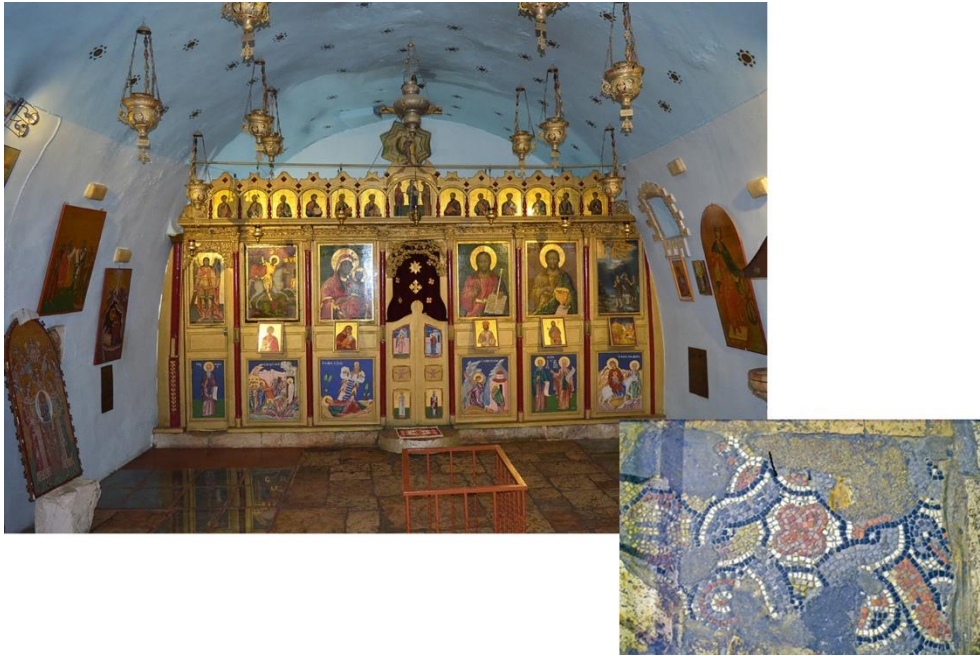


Fig. 13 - The iconostasis of the church in cave of the Shepherds' Field at Keniset er-Ra'wat with the remains of the 4th century AD mosaic floor.



Fig. 14 - The modern Greek Orthodox church of the Shepherds' Field at Keniset er-Ra'wat.



Fig. 15 - The western branch of the Wadi et-Tin from north, looking to the village of Beit Ta'mar and the Herodium in the background.



Fig. 16 - The horseshoe-shaped monolithic vera of the pear-shaped well in the Wadi et-Tin.



Fig. 17 - Byzantine pottery collected in the survey of the western branch of the Wadi et-Tin.



Fig. 18 - The mintar at Khirbet Hindaza.



Fig. 19 - The well in the second terrace of Khalet al-Badd with circular monolithic vera.



Fig. 20 - Byzantine pottery collected in the survey of Khalet al-Badd.

ARABIC ABSTRACT

الاكتشافات الأخيرة في بيت لحم / فلسطين
نتائج الموسم البحثي الثامن (2022) الإيطالي – الفلسطيني

الملخص

ضمن التعاون المشترك ما بين البعثة الإيطالية الفلسطينية المشتركة لجامعة سابينزا في روما ووزارة السياحة والآثار في فلسطين - دائرة الآثار والتراث الثقافي (MOTA-DACH) في بيت لحم، بتمويل من جامعة سابينزا ووزارة الشؤون الخارجية الإيطالية والتعاون الدولي، نشطت منذ عام 2015 مع مواسم التنقيب السنوية والدراسات البحثية في مقبرة خلّة الجامع، وحملات التنقيب الطارئة والمسوحات والتوثيق في المواقع المهددة الأخرى، من أجل حماية التراث الأثري لمنطقة بيت لحم، مع مراعاة زيادة نشاط البناء. فيما يلي تقرير موجز للأنشطة البحثية التي أجريت خلال الموسم الثامن، ربيع 2022.

نتائج البحث

تُظهر بعض أماكن العبادة والأماكن المقدسة في بيت لحم، مثل كنيسة المهدي، مغارة الحليب وحقل الرعاة، وعلى مدى قرون أصبح صفة متكررة استخدام المجمعات تحت الأرض والكهوف، والتكوينات الطبيعية الوفيرة في المنطقة، لأغراض مختلفة، مثل الأسباب المنزلية والجنائزية، والمأوى ومأوى للحيوانات. يمكن أن يُنسب القبر A7 في خلّة الجامع إلى هذه الفئة، حيث إنه مجمع تحت الأرض تم حفره كمكان للدفن في نهاية العصر البرونزي المبكر، وأعيد استخدامه خلال العصر البرونزي الوسيط وأعيد تحويله إلى مكان الإنتاج وربما أيضاً مأوى أو مسكناً موسميًا، في منتصف الألفية الأولى قبل الميلاد.

يشترك قبر هندازة I في نفس الأفق الثقافي، ممارسات الدفن والطقوس الجنائزية مثل القبر 15 الجب / جبجون ومقابر المجموعة الثالثة في تل السلطان، كما هو الحال أيضاً لبعض مقابر عائلة خلّة الجامع (المقابر A1 و 2A)، مما يشير إلى تأريخ IIB من العصر البرونزي الأوسط، بالإضافة إلى أباريق تل اليهودية، BL1179 و BL12014. تشتمل مجموعة قبر هندازة على أوعية كبيرة ذات حافة بسيطة أو مقلوية، والقاعدة إما قرص أو حلقيّة، وأوعية ذات زاوية حادة أو دائرية، وكؤوس ذات عنق، وأباريق كثرته الشكل وأسطوانية، نموذجية (معروفة) من العصر البرونزي الوسيط الثاني.

في الوقت نفسه، تظهر الأسلحة والحلي البرونزية، مثل وجود خنجر ذو شق واحد متوسط مسطح، وسكاكين منحنية، وأثاث / صندوق مرصع بالعظام، وبيضة نعام مزخرفة، ومزهريات من المرمر، فيما يتعلق بالأسلحة والحلي البرونزية تم العثور على مقارنات مشابهة مع القرابين الجنائزية للمقابر P19, P21 في اربحا. الأوعية الجوّية كانت تستخدم للنبذ والمشروبات العطرية والكحول، الأباريق الأسطوانية كانت تستخدم للزيوت والعمور، المزهريات والأواني المرمرية كانت تستخدم للمواد الثمينة والمكيّاح، جنباً إلى جنب الأسلحة المعدنية وبيض النعام هي أشياء فاخرة ورموز تدل على الثراء والطبقة الحاكمة، والتي ربما كانت تنتمي إلى العائلة المالكة لقبر I في هندازة.

القبر الذي تم اكتشافه مؤخراً وحالات خلّة الجامع المعروفة بالفعل تسمح بملف تعريف لمدينة بيت لحم في منتصف الألفية الثانية قبل الميلاد وهو وجود نظام موجه نحو القوة أثناء النمو الحضري الثاني.

علاوة على ذلك، تم تغيير مكان نظام المقابر على جوانب التلال، إلى الجنوب وإلى الشرق من بيت لحم، وبين وادي إرطاس، هندازة، بيت ساحور ووادي التين، وعادة ما تم تدشينها في أوائل العصر البرونزي الرابع، وإعادة استخدامها خلال العصر البرونزي الوسيط، وفي بعض الحالات أبعد من ذلك خلال العصر الحديدي، يمثل شكلاً من أشكال إدارة العشائر أو القبائل أو المجموعات للأراضي، ونوعاً من عبادة الأجداد. تم تنفيذ هذه الممارسة لإعادة استخدام المقابر والكهوف المحفورة في نهاية الألفية الثالثة قبل الميلاد، للتضرع، في القرون التالية الأراضي كانت مسكونة بمجموعات عائلية، لذلك يمكن أن تكون المقبرة سمة مميزة للمنطقة المحيطة بالحافة الجنوبية لبيت لحم وتوصيفاً للمناظر الطبيعية.

تستمر الاكتشافات الحديثة في تقديم بيانات جديدة عن مدينة بيت لحم ما قبل الكلاسيكية وتوضيح كيفية مشاركة هذه المنطقة في ثقافة العصر البرونزي والعصر الحديدي جنوب بلاد الشام، ومنطقة يهودا على وجه الخصوص، جعل الدراسات والبحوث الجديدة للبعثة الإيطالية الفلسطينية مرغوبة.