

# A CANAANITE-HYKSOS CITY AT TELL NAGILA

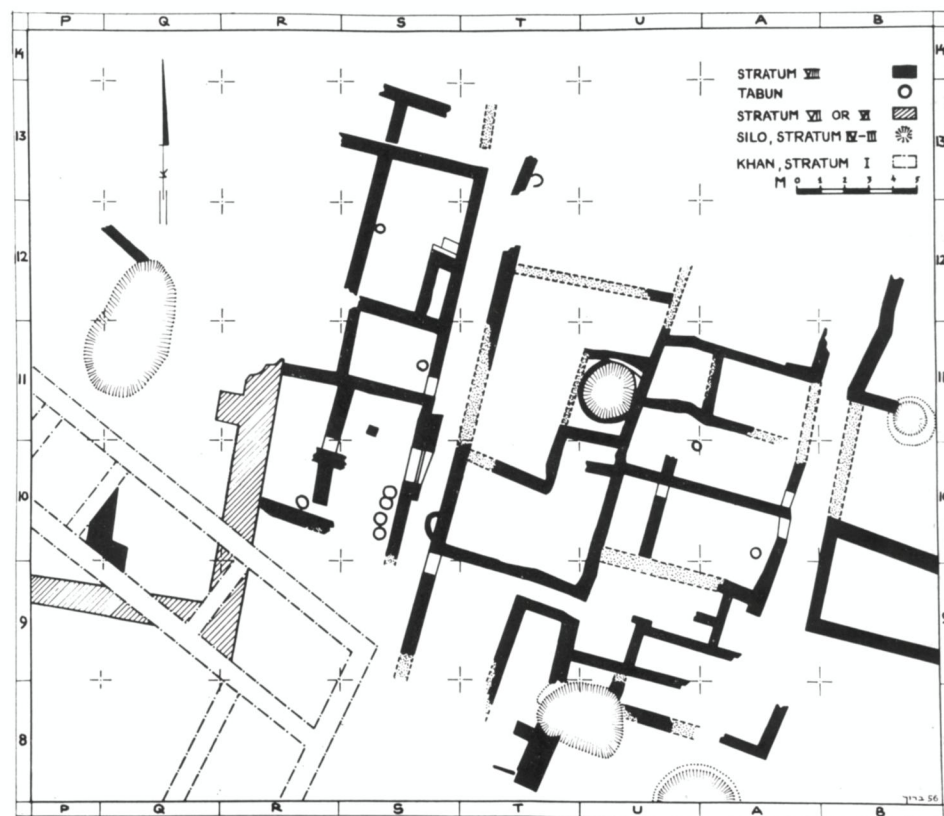
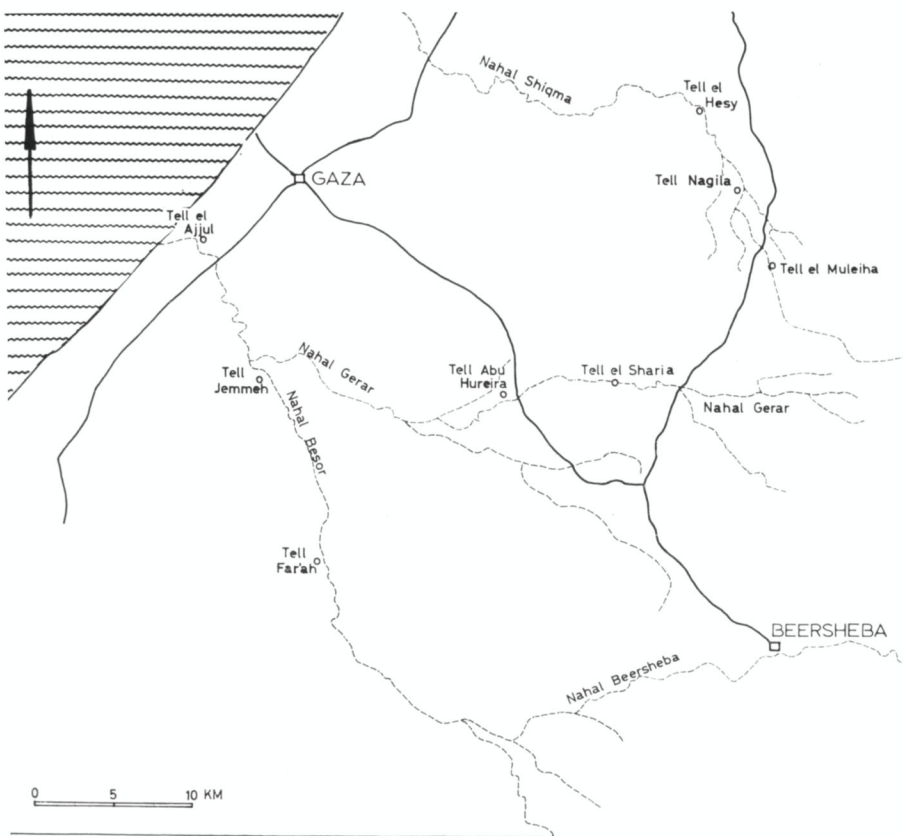
By RUTH AMIRAN and A. EITAN

*Two campaigns have been conducted at Tell Nagila, in 1962 and 1963. The expedition is sponsored by the Institute for Mediterranean Studies, founded by Mr. Richard A. Mitchell, who is Executive Director. The authors served as Field Director and Chief Assistant respectively. The United States Department of State financed the two seasons through local counterpart funds. Both the Department of Antiquities and the Israel Exploration Society extended all possible help and assistance to the expedition. The hospitality of Kibbutz Beth Qama, in allowing our living and working quarters to be constructed on their property, is highly appreciated. Archaeology students of the Hebrew University and of the Bezalel Art School formed the main professional staff, while students of the Negev Seminar, organized by the Institute for Mediterranean Studies, as well as volunteers from various countries, were of great assistance. U. Paran served as chief surveyor and M. Padan-Piletzki as photographer.*

ON THE INNER COASTAL PLAIN of southern Israel, about twenty miles north of Beersheba and nineteen east of Gaza, is situated the mound known as Tell Nagila (Figure 1). Covering an area of about ten acres and rising six-seven meters above the surrounding area, Tell Nagila is in the shape of a rectangle with rounded corners. It is founded on a low, natural hill overlooking the left bank of the river called Nahal Shiqma. Tell el Hesya lies on the same river. Other important mounds nearby are Tell Far'ah, Tell Jemmeh, Tell el 'Ajjul, Tell el Sharia, Tell Abu Hureira and Tell el Muleiha. The first excavations in this area were carried out by Flinders Petrie, the great pioneer of Near Eastern archaeology, who worked here between 1890 and 1935. Tell el Hesya, in fact, was the first mound ever excavated in Palestine. In this region, near the important bridge-head of the coastal road, at the southern gateway leading to Canaan and to one of its major ports, there was much political and military

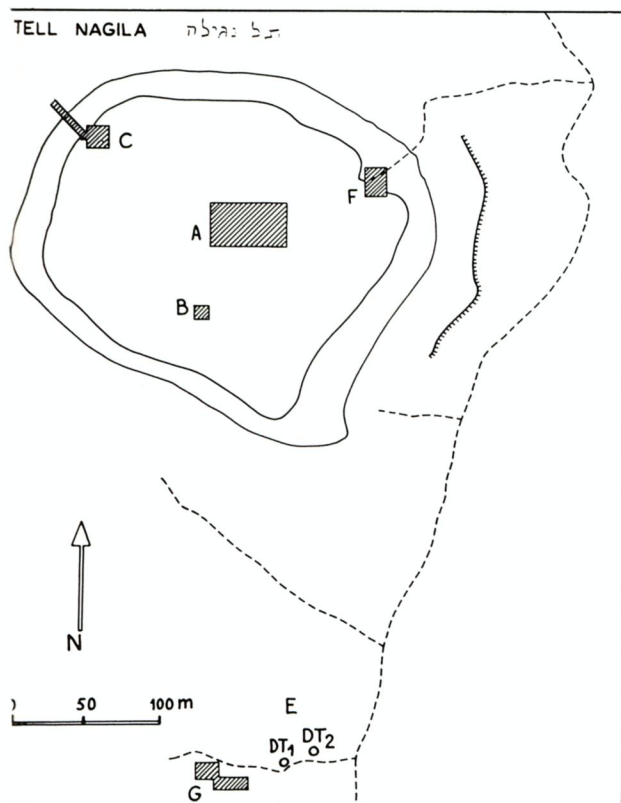


1. View of Tell Nagila looking southwest. The northern slope and the northeast corner, with Area F, are shown.



3. Area A, plan showing the various strata. Stratum VIII: MB IIC; Stratum VII: MB IIC; Stratum VI: LB I; Strata IV-III: Iron II A-B; Stratum I: twelfth-fifteenth centuries A.D.





2. Plan of the tell indicating areas excavated. Area A: city center; Areas C and F: fortifications; Areas E and G: unfortified settlements, tombs.



4. Area A, street and houses of the Hyksos city looking south; in background appear northeast corner and part of north wall of the Mameluke khan.

## Tell Nagila continued

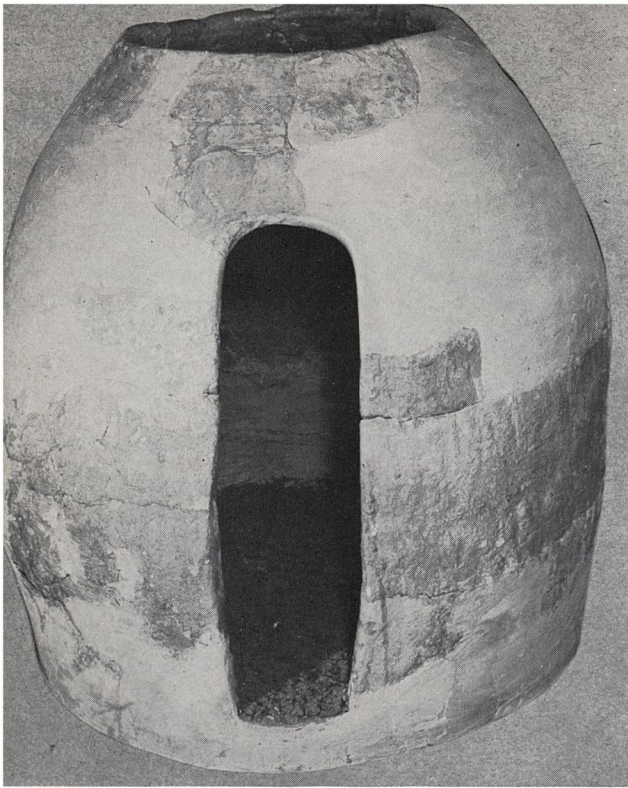
contact between Canaan and Egypt.

The area is dotted with similar mounds, only a few of which have been tested by the archaeologist's spade. Some of the mounds have been identified with ancient cities. Tell Far'ah is thought by Professor W. F. Albright to be Sharuhēn, which is known from biblical and Egyptian (early XVIIIth Dynasty) sources to have been captured after three years of siege by Ahmose, the first ruler of that dynasty, and turned into an Egyptian military center. Professor Benjamin Mazar has suggested that Tell Jemmeh may have been Yursa, described in the same Egyptian sources as a town which rebelled immediately after the campaign of Ahmose. It will be of interest to learn how the history of our *tell* fits into this picture.

UP TO NOW four areas have been excavated on the *tell* itself, as well as one area and two tombs on the lower ridges south of it (Figure 2). Fourteen strata have been distinguished, representing the history of

the town from the Chalcolithic to the Mameluke period (fourth millennium B.C. to ca. A.D. 1500). It was not continuously occupied, however, during this long span of time. The extent of the first Chalcolithic settlement is still unknown. Above it there must have been a considerable settlement during the Early Bronze II-III periods, to judge by architectural remains uncovered in the center of the *tell*. A small tomb (DT 1) south of the *tell* belongs to this settlement. A long gap of six or seven hundred years followed, before the city of the Middle Bronze II B-C period (1750-1550 B.C.) came into being during the regime of the Hyksos, who ruled both in Egypt and in Canaan. This city seems to have had the main—if not the only—period of prosperity in the history of Nagila. The *tell* owes its shape and the accumulation upon it mostly to this period. The Late Bronze Age is represented thus far only by some architectural remains and a few finds, testifying perhaps to a sparsely built settlement. Another gap in the history of the *tell* occurs in the following period (Iron Age I, 1200-1000 B.C.). During the Iron Age II period (1000-586) unfortified set-

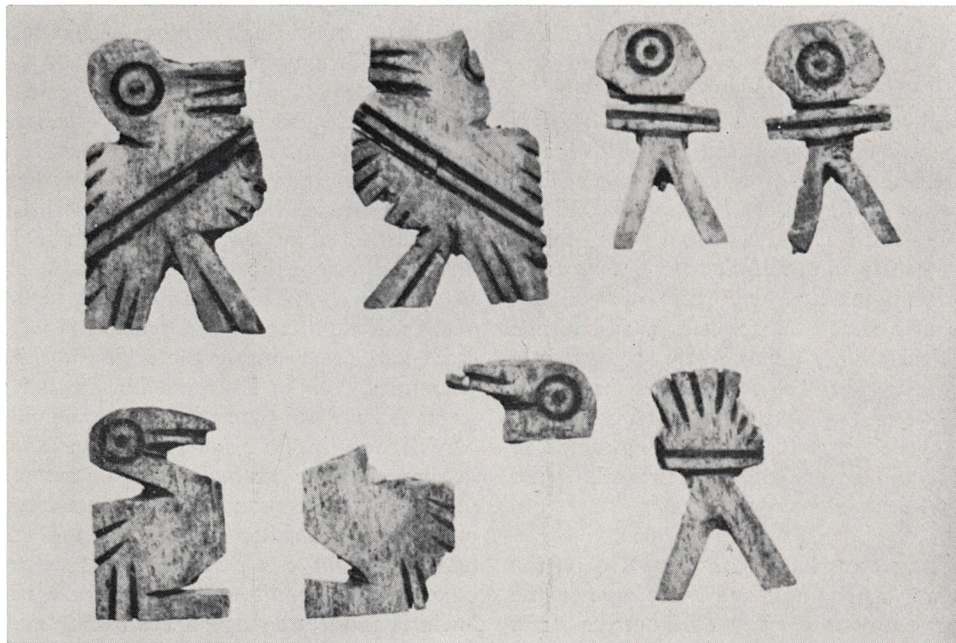




5. Restored oven (*tabun*) found in Area A.

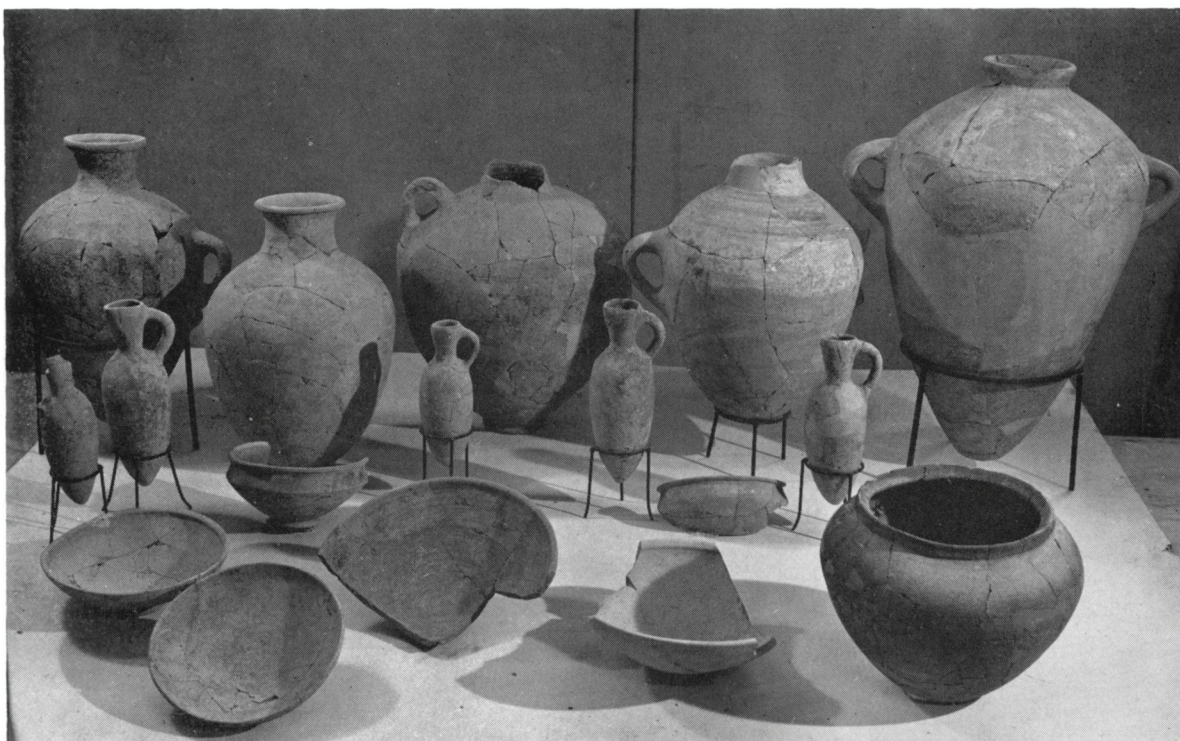


7. A group of two dishes (one within the other) and five juglets as they were found in a courtyard in Area A.



6. Bone inlays from a wooden box: stylized birds and human figures (?). From Area A.





8. Group of vessels (including those shown in Figure 7) found in a courtyard in Area A. Among these are a cooking pot, various bowls and dishes, jugs and storage jars. Photo by Y. Lehman.

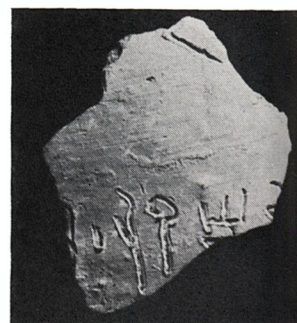
## Tell Nagila *continued*

lements existed both on the mound and on two natural slopes south of it (Areas E, G). On the *tell* only a few architectural remains, mainly of silos, represent this period. On the hills and slopes south of the *tell* toward the river, part of a village was excavated, which proved to contain rich finds of the seventh century B.C. Only scanty remains represent the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods. Then followed a long gap in the occupation of the site—six or seven hundred years—before a large rectangular khan, or caravanserai (about 2½ acres in extent), was built on the flat western part of the *tell*; this was the last occupation. In spite of this long history the accumulation of debris does not exceed 3-4 meters in thickness, at least not in the center of the *tell*, where virgin soil has been reached.

OUR EXCAVATIONS have given us a detailed picture of the extensive fortified city of the Canaanite-Hyksos period (Middle Bronze II B-C). We uncovered a living quarter and part of a public building in the

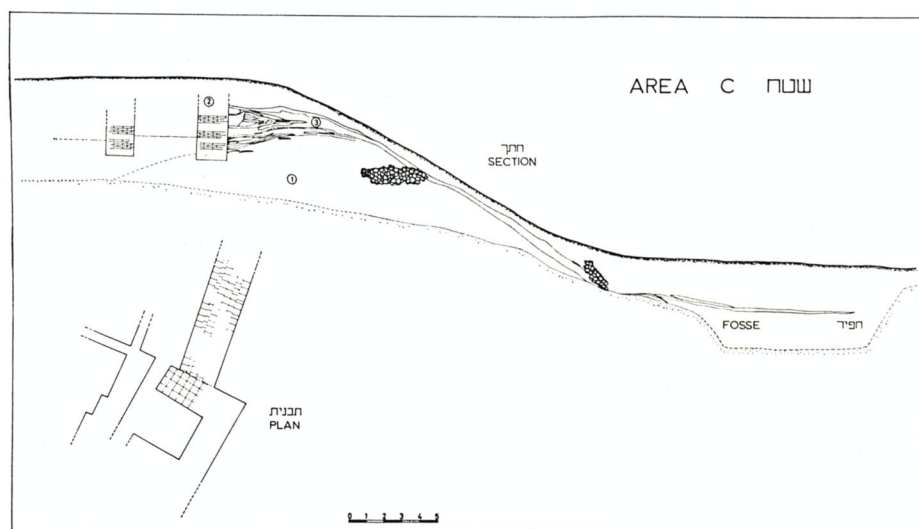
center of the city (Area A), an elaborate fortification system around the city (Areas C and F) and a rich tomb (DT 2) south of the site (Area E). At this period, as test pits have proved, the settlement was not confined to the walled city but spread outside it on the north and south as well as on the eastern slope immediately above the river. Information about the ordinary houses of the city has come from the area in the center of the *tell*. Four or possibly five strata covering the two hundred years of the Middle Bronze II B-C period came to light. The three upper strata are similar in plan and in character, but not enough information is as yet at hand to describe the two lowest levels.

The changes from one stratum to the next are slight and do not affect the general plan and orientation of the houses: walls are re-used, sometimes repaired, and floors are raised; sometimes new walls are added and others removed. The plan of the excavated section (Figure 3) shows parts of four blocks of houses opening onto two parallel streets (Figure 4). We already have some hints that there are also streets or lanes at right angles to these, which surround the



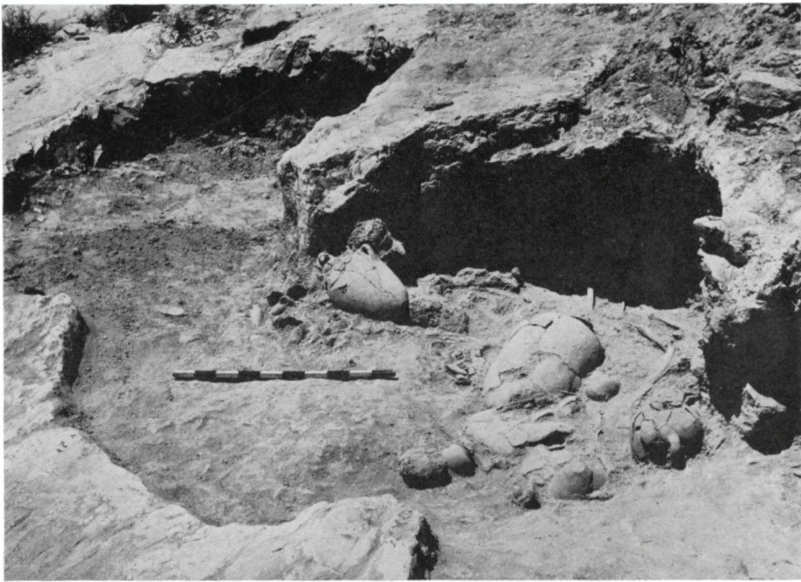
9. Red-slipped and burnished vessel in the shape of a bull, from Area A. Height 16.5 cm. 10. Fragment (right) of an inscription from Area A.

## Tell Nagila continued

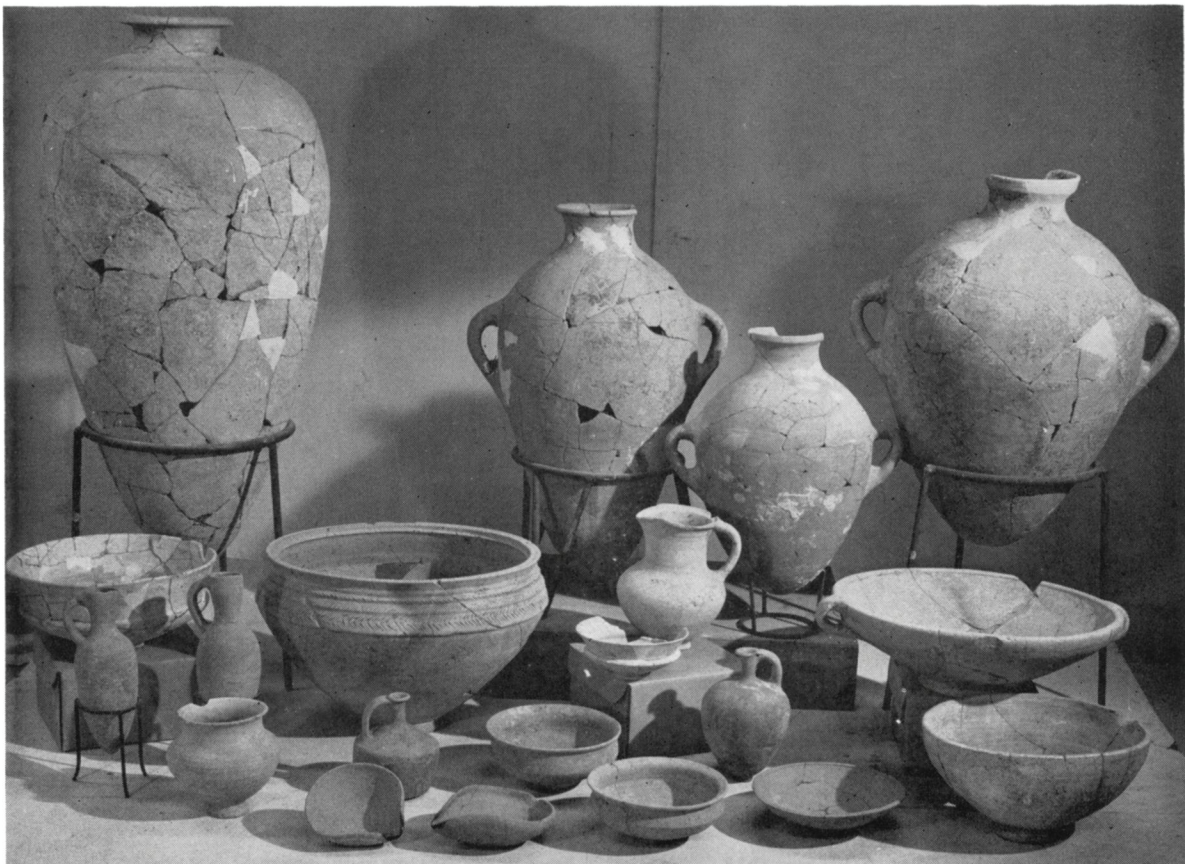


11. Area C, plan and section of the fortifications. 1: earth embankment; 2: brick wall; 3: earth thrown against the wall; fosse, or moat, at lower right.

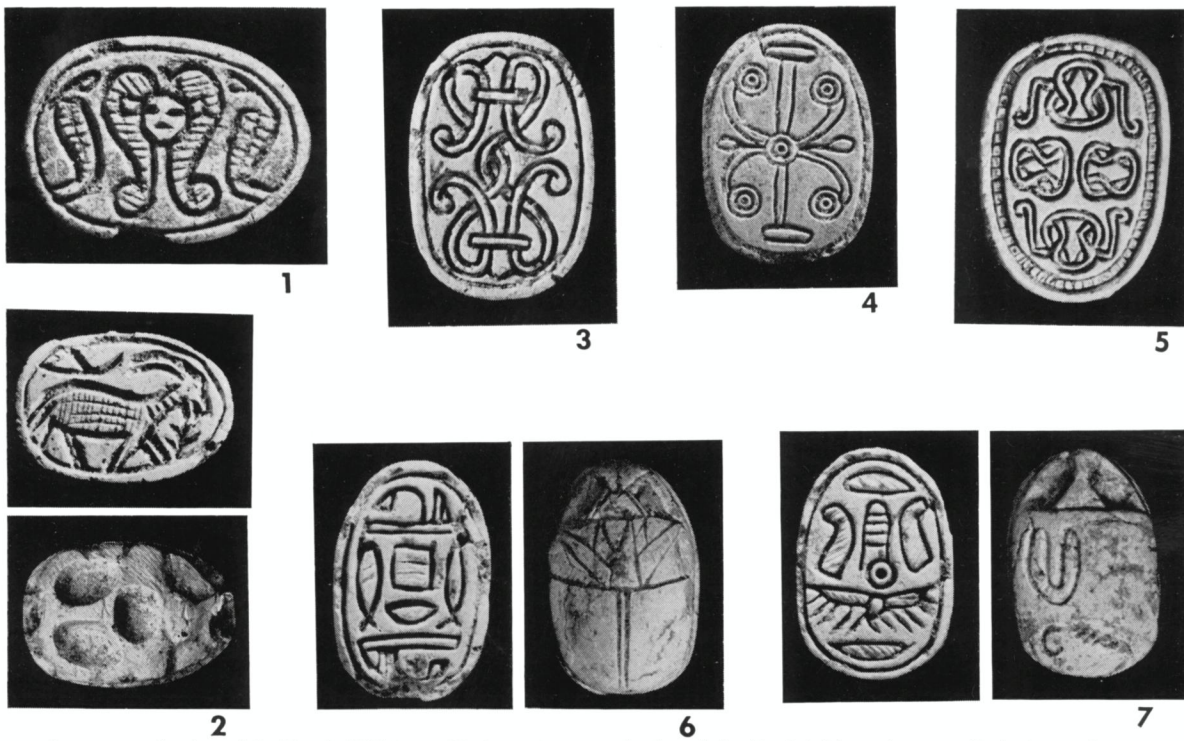




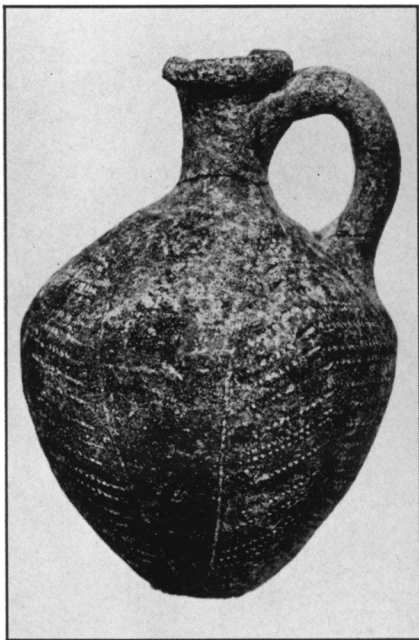
12. General view of Middle Bronze Age tomb DT 2, as found.



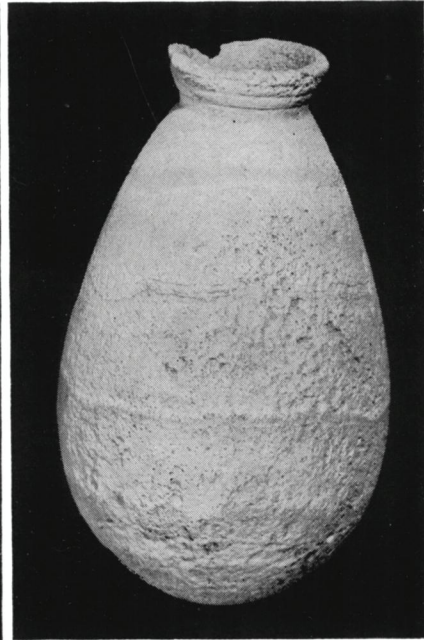
13. Representative group of vessels from Tomb DT 2. Near the middle of the picture is an unusual bowl decorated with incised designs. Photograph by Y. Lehman.



15. Seven scarabs found in Tomb DT 2. 1: Hathor; 2: goat, back originally inlaid; 3,4,5: scroll designs; 6,7: meaningless signs on the faces, lotus and sign on backs.



14. Juglet of Tell el Yahudiyeh ware, from Tomb DT 2.



16. Alabaster bottle (right) and faience bottle (left) from Tomb DT 2. Both are Egyptian importations.



## Tell Nagila *continued*

blocks. The streets are about 1.50 m. wide, paved with pebbles and potsherds laid in beaten whitish clay.

The houses are built close together, always having common walls, either a back wall common to two rows of dwellings, or a side wall or front wall connecting adjoining houses. In some cases a flight of a few steps leads down from the street into the house. Generally rectangular in shape, the houses seem to be composed of one or two small rooms opening onto a courtyard. The size of a room is generally 2 x 3 m., while a courtyard averages 3 x 5 m. One side of the courtyard is sometimes roofed, as is indicated by column bases found in a few courts. The columns themselves must have been made of wood, which has long since decayed. These roofed sheds are often paved with flagstones, but generally the floors of the rooms and the courtyards are of beaten earth. Both stone and sun-dried bricks were used as building material. Usually the lower parts of the walls are built of rough field stones, while the upper structures are of brick. The foundations generally extend two or three courses below the floors. The thickness of the walls varies between 40 and 60 cms. The walls are not always straight and are mostly of poor workmanship, suggesting that there were no second stories except perhaps for light sheds on the roofs. The walls were plastered with mud. It may be assumed that the plan of this area is representative of the general town-plan, which seems to be oriented to conform with the rectangular shape of the whole settlement.

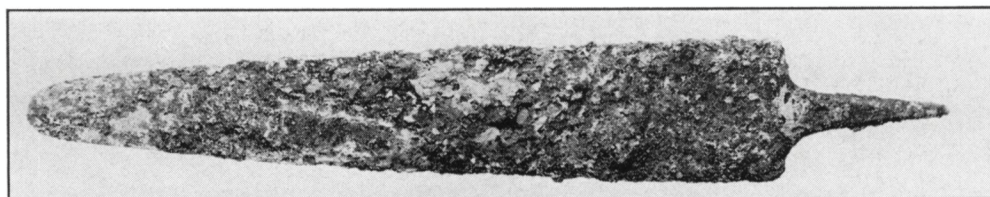
Built-in furniture includes clay ovens, with openings on the top and on the side (Figure 5), benches of clay or stone, small rounded depressions in the floors lined with pebbles to hold vessels, and rounded silos either lined with stones and plastered or simply mud-plastered. Of the movable furnishings, of course, only those made of imperishable materials have been preserved. Pottery is the commonest of these, along with flint implements and grinding stones. Much rarer are objects of luxury type such as faience and

alabaster bottles, ostrich eggshells used as vessels, bone inlays from wooden toilet-boxes, in the shape of stylized birds and human figures (Figure 6), scarabs and a cylinder seal. Very few bronze implements were found—which may be accidental. Figure 7 shows part of a rich assemblage of typical vessels *in situ* in the courtyard of one house, while Figure 8 shows the whole group after they were mended. There were jars and jugs for storing both liquids and dry food-stuffs, juglets used as dippers, cooking pots, dishes and bowls, some red-slipped and burnished, as well as a pair of grinding-stones. One vessel, a simple jar, has a painted decoration on its shoulder consisting of straight and wavy lines, red and bluish-black, on a white background, a style typical of this period. Two ovens were also found in this courtyard.

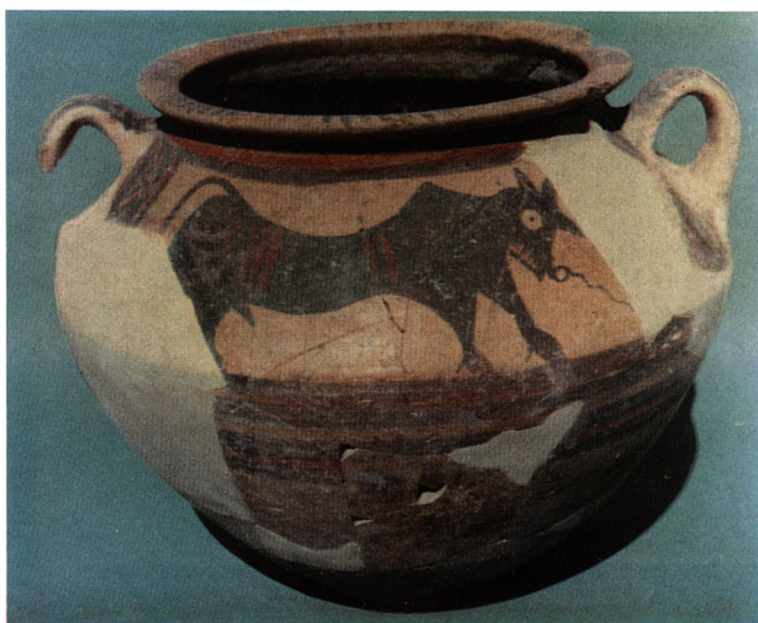
In the immediate vicinity of these houses there came to light parts of two large buildings possibly having some public function. We have not yet finished excavating them. These buildings are constructed on a larger scale and their walls are much thicker (1.50 m.), which may indicate that there was a second story.

A clay vessel in the shape of a bull (Figure 9), comes from one of these public buildings. The body, which is hollow and has an opening on top of the back, is wheel-made, while the legs are solid, with divided hooves. The dewlap is prominently shown. The vessel is red-slipped and burnished; the eyes are painted black. This zoomorphic vessel is reminiscent of similar vessels which are common in the Hittite Middle Bronze repertory.

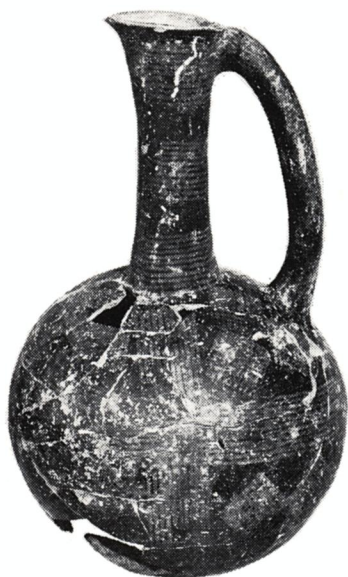
Among the finds of special importance is a potsherd with a fragmentary inscription (Figure 10). Incised deeply before firing, the signs are in two horizontal lines, apparently to be read from right to left. Of the first line only one fragmentary sign is preserved. An important feature is the dot in the second line separating two words, neither of which is complete. Although the reading is uncertain, it is clear that the inscription is in the alphabetic Proto-Canaanite script. The context in which this sherd was found is not yet completely clear but, nevertheless, it



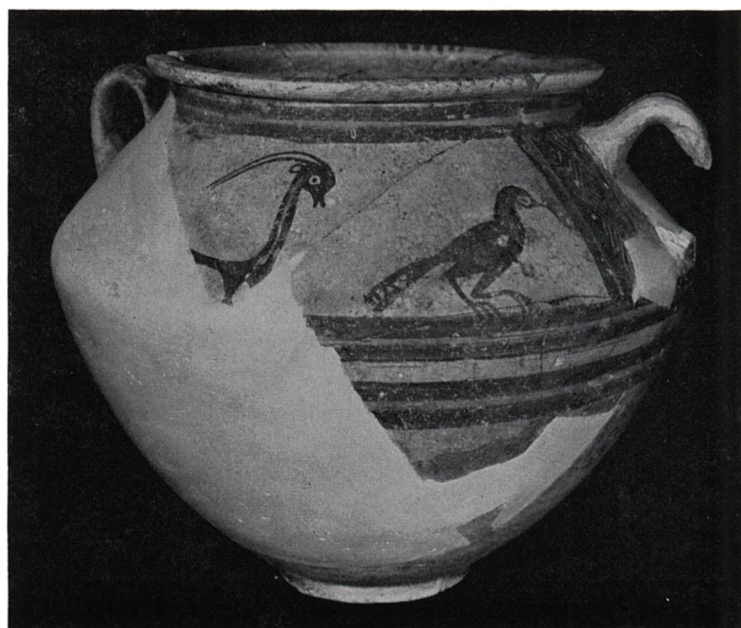
17. Bronze sword found in Tomb DT 2.



19. Bichrome krater (two-handled vessel) of Late Bronze I. Height 31 cm.



18. Red-on-Black Cypriote jug from Tomb DT 2, similar to one found in a tomb at Ugarit.



20. Reverse of Bichrome krater shown above.



## Tell Nagila *continued*

seems to bear one of the earliest Proto-Canaanite inscriptions and thus adds an important contribution to the existing corpus.

We have learned a great deal about the fortifications of this city from a section cut in the northwest slope (Area C), which extends from the flat top of the slope to the foot of the *tell* (Figure 11). The type of fortification uncovered here is usually designated as "Hyksos *terre pisée glacis*." It is an elaborate construction composed of four elements: an earth embankment, a brick wall, earth thrown against the brick wall, and a moat at the foot of the slope. It was an enormous task to build such a fortification. First, the embankment of earth was piled up, encircling the area of the city; then a sun-dried brick wall 2.30-2.50 m. broad was erected on the inner slope of the embankment; finally large quantities of earth and crushed chalk were thrown and beaten against the wall and over the whole slope, creating an even, hard surface. In section this *terre pisée* shows alternating layers of the various kinds of fill used. At the foot of the hill a moat was dug. The *glacis* extends down to the inner rim of the moat. The brick wall, which was preserved to a height of about three meters, served on the outside as a supporting wall for the *terre pisée*, but on the inside was a normal upright wall, originally higher than it now stands. The level inside the wall is about 1.50 m. lower than the level of the top of the *glacis* outside.

THE LOCATION of one of the city's cemeteries seems to be indicated by the finding of a tomb (DT 2, Figure 12) of the Middle Bronze period, cut in the soft chalk on a slope south of the *tell*. (The Early Bronze Age tomb was also found in this area.) The tomb is shallow and composed of three small chambers in a row, with an entrance to the southernmost chamber, and passages from one to another. It seems that this tomb, although cut in the rock, must have had an outer wall built in stone or brick. The roof was partly the living rock and partly of the usual roofing material (brush and earth) supported by the wall. There were about forty-five skeletons in this one tomb. The bones were in disorder, but the skulls were found assembled carefully along the walls and in the corners. About 150 pottery vessels of various types (Figure 13) include many juglets and dipper-juglets, various bowls and a number of jugs and jars. Inside two of the jars were dipper-juglets, which suggests that they were originally suspended within the jars from a small stick laid across the mouth. Among the vessels were a single black juglet with

punctured dots, of the so-called Tell el Yahudiyeh ware (Figure 14), and a unique bowl decorated with incisions on its shoulder and rim (see Figure 13). Forty-eight scarabs of various local styles were found, which show great skill in workmanship (Figure 15). One alabaster bottle and one of faience were found in the tomb (Figure 16), as well as some toggle-pins, three bronze swords (Figure 17) and the shell of an ostrich egg. A jug of Red-on-Black ware (Figure 18) imported from Cyprus was among the finds. This and the alabaster and faience bottles, which must have been imported from Egypt, corroborate the well known fact that there was commercial contact in this period among Canaan, Egypt and Cyprus.

One of the most interesting objects is a krater of Bichrome ware (Figures 19, 20) which was found while we were clearing the side of a gully cut by the rains into the northeast slope of the *tell* (Area F). It was found in pieces, lying on a stone pavement which seems to belong to the Late Bronze I settlement, according to the stratigraphy. The krater, with two shoulder-handles, is a shape typical of this ware, in which the vessels have geometric and figure designs in red and black. On one side there is a single figure, a humped bull tied to a rope with a nose-ring; the other side has two figures, an "ibex" and a bird. The bull may be considered a *pars pro toto* representation of a sacrificial scene, as for example in the wall-painting at Mari (A. Parrot, *Mission archéologique de Mari, vol. II, Le palais, peintures murales* [Paris 1958] 20, figure 18). This implies that there is more than mere decorative purpose in the figurative element of the Bichrome style, and eventually we may hope for light on the function of the vessel on which it is depicted. The "ibex" is not rendered true to nature, for it has a bird-like, smiling face, too long a neck and too short legs, while the other two figures, the bull and the bird, are more naturalistic. Can the "ibex" have symbolic significance or is it just the result of the artist's imagination? This, as well as many other questions raised by our excavations, is yet to be answered.

Our intention, when we resume work in Tell Nagila, is to concentrate on specific points which should complement the picture obtained during our two seasons of work. These include, for instance, additional information on the fortifications, on town planning, on the houses and the large public building, as well as additional data concerning the character of the settlement at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. Nagila is certain to contribute to understanding the problems of the end of the Hyksos regime in southern Canaan.