



TELL QIRI

A Look at Village Life

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The great urban centers and their temples are customary objects of enchantment for both the specialist and the general reading public. Our knowledge of antiquity derives almost solely from the remains of elaborate bureaucracies, cultic specialists, and artisan workshops. The voice of the common villager, however, is silent—he has little need for written records and leaves none behind to tell his story; furthermore, there are no massive mounds or wonderful artifacts to draw the archeologist or the financing public. Most of what we know of the material culture is based upon excavations like Megiddo, Hazor, Samaria, and Dan. Therefore, recent work at Tell Qiri, a village site, gives us the unusual opportunity of taking a brief look at the remains of village life in the hopes of adding to our scanty knowledge.

Excavation at Tell Qiri is part of the Yoqneam Regional Project. The region, which includes the western part of the Jezreel Valley, as well as the northeastern slopes of Mt. Carmel (roughly 120 km²), forms a triangle whose points are Megiddo, Samaria, and Tell Amar. Two important junctions are located in the area: the Megiddo junction at the outlet of the Wadi Ara into the valley and the Yoqneam junction at the outlet of the Wadi Milh.

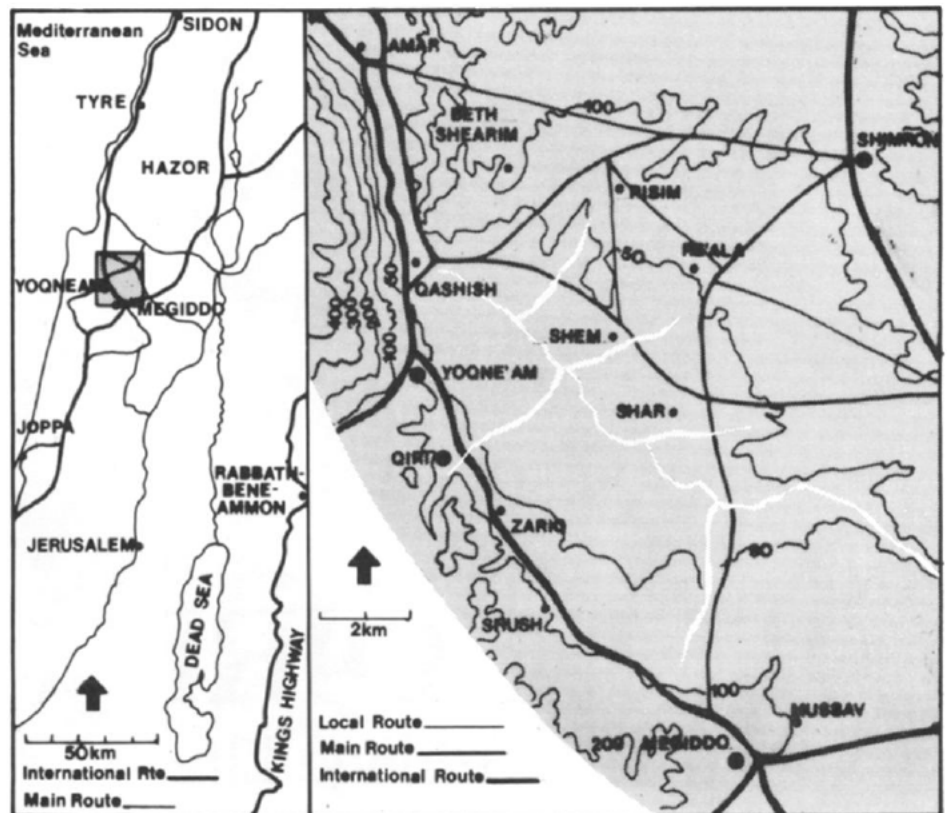
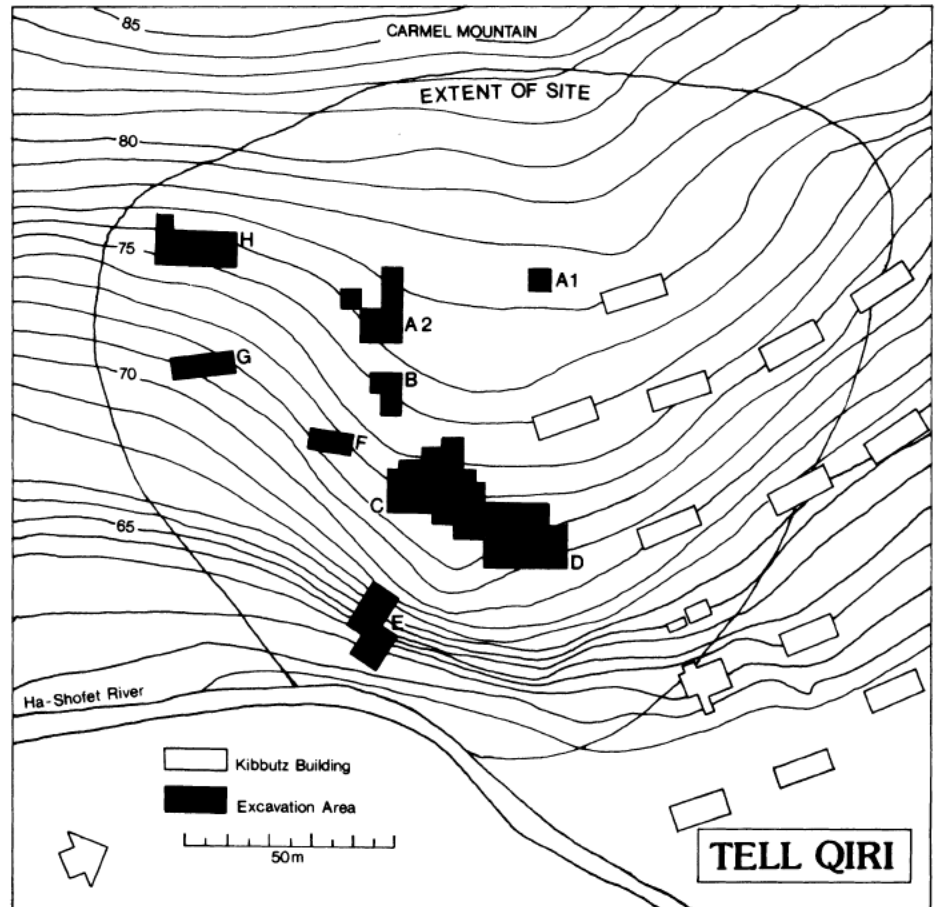
Tell Qiri—a flourishing village site during the 12th-7th centuries B.C.E.—escaped serious military intervention, thus providing scholars with the unique opportunity to study its uninterrupted culture over a period of nearly 500 years.

Strategically located on the coastal route from Egypt to Syria, each of the cities at these junctions controlled a major pass which cut through the Carmel ridge into the valley. Tell Qiri is situated along the route between these two important cities, a route which is also a section of the main road leading from the mountainous Ephraimite hinterland to the Phoenician coast and beyond.

The region enjoys a moderate climate, an abundance of water, and fertile soil. This favorable combination of climate, soil, water, and communication explains the significance and wealth of the region throughout the history of the country. As expected, the area was densely populated as is evidenced by the numerous ancient sites of different sizes which are scattered throughout the region. The area supports an agricultural economy, including the cultivation of crops in the valley and the herding of sheep and goats on the slopes of Mt. Carmel and the Manasseh Plateau.

The purpose of the Yoqneam Regional Project is to study the region through the excavation of Tell Yoqneam as the main site, concurrently with a survey and partial excavation of a representative group of sites in the region. In addition to the study of individual sites, we intend to deal with various problems which may best be approached on a regional basis, such as: problems of settlement patterns—for example, the nature of the relations between a city (like Yoqneam) and its dependencies (like Tell Qiri, about 3 km away); the problem of transition in the fifth-fourth millennia B.C.E. from the Neolithic into the Chalcolithic period; aspects of the conquest and settlement of Canaan by the Israelite tribes; archeological aspects of the Assyrian conquest. It is in the framework of this project that the excavations at Tell Qiri (ha-Zorea) should be reviewed.

Map of the location of Tell Qiri along the important coastal route between Megiddo and Yoqneam.



The site is located within the boundaries of Kibbutz ha-Zorea, and due to the building activities of the Kibbutz, whose land reserves have almost completely been exhausted, the ancient site was damaged. Thus, the excavation of the site was a rescue operation. When work began in 1975, only an area of roughly one acre of the ancient site stood free of modern structures, and even this area diminished rapidly, so that today almost nothing of the site remains. Due to the modern building activity, the resulting picture of the excavated area is somewhat disconnected. It seems, however, that one should adopt an optimistic point of view and point out what the archeological investigation of the site was able to unearth.

The excavation of Tell Qiri revealed remains covering a very long time-span extending from the fifth-fourth millennia B.C.E. to the Islamic period. The most complete and representative sequence at the site, however, is that relating to the Iron Age. Therefore, the periods

Cemetery of the Persian Period (5th-4th centuries B.C.E.).

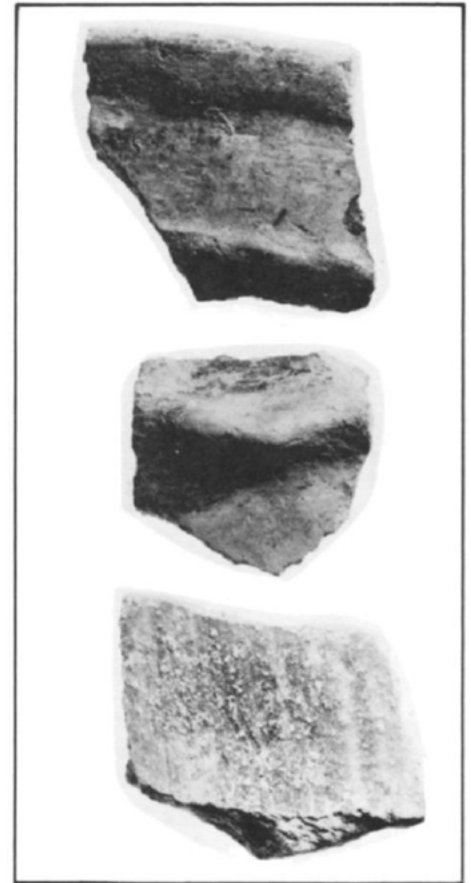
Sherds from Tell Qiri:
Top: EB I sherds; **Bottom:**
 Ghassulian-type sherds.

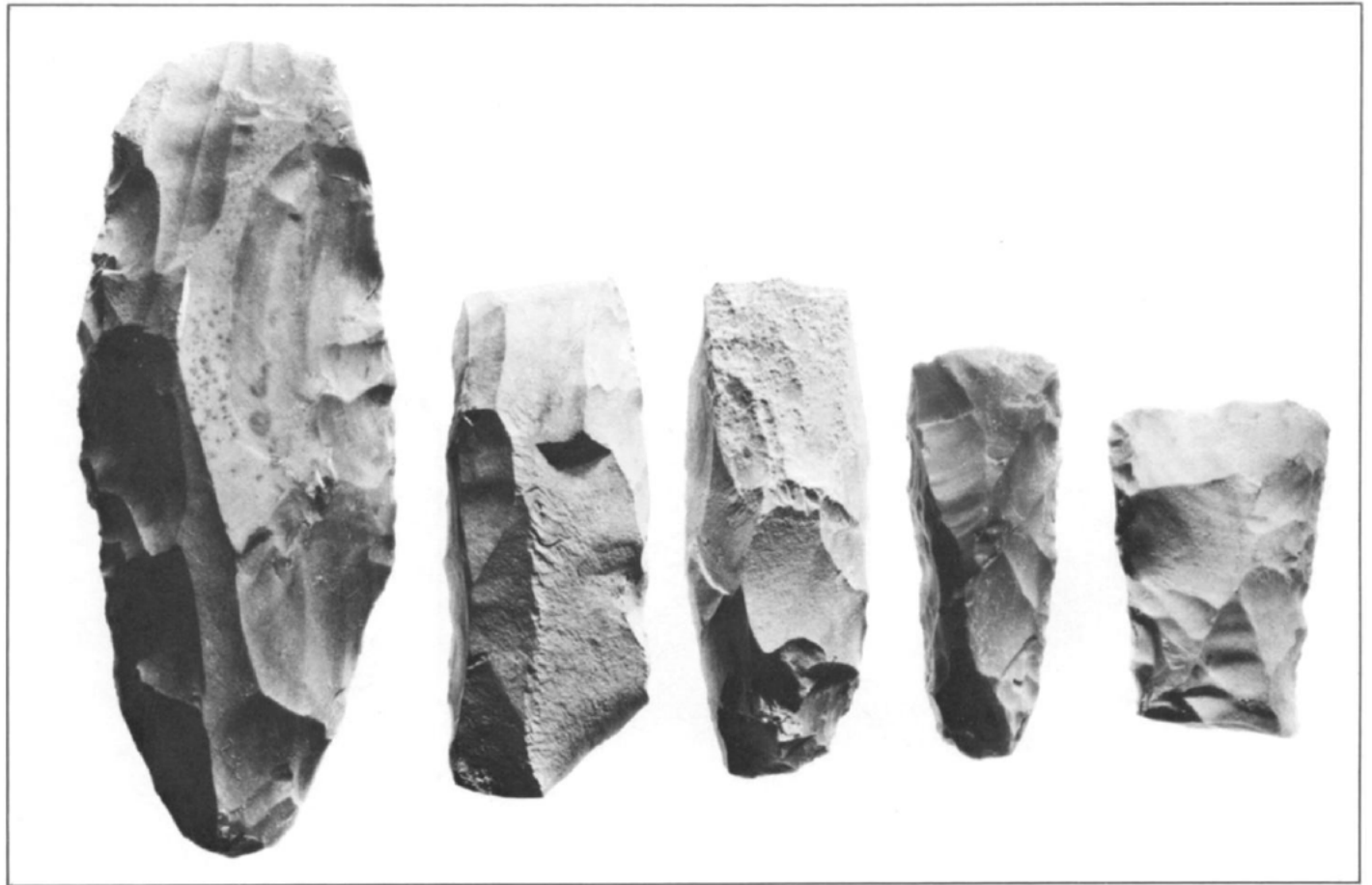
represented at Tell Qiri may be divided into three major units: a) the late periods—from the Islamic to the Persian period; b) the Iron Age; c) the early periods—from the Late Bronze Age (?) to the Late Neolithic (or Early Chalcolithic) period.

Since the Iron Age sequence is the most complete, we shall deal first with the later and earlier periods and end with the description of the Iron Age remains.

The Late Periods

The remains of the later period were severely damaged by erosion and leveling activities. The Islamic through Hellenistic periods were encountered mainly in the western (higher) part of the site. These include several tombs of the Arab period, fragmentary remains of dwellings and domestic installations of the Roman period. From the Persian period, one should note the necropolis in Area H. Almost no architecture of this period survives,





but the great amount of pottery encountered all over the site points to a rather intensive occupation during the 5th-4th centuries B.C.E. The pottery assemblage includes a small number of sherds belonging to imported vessels from Greece as well as Cyprus, while the majority belongs to the local repertoire, with clear coastal ("Phoenician") affinities. A rather large (public?) building of the Hellenistic period is datable, mainly on the basis of the numismatic finds, to the 3rd century B.C.E.

Clay vessels of the Persian period (5th-4th centuries B.C.E.) (above left).

Flint tools of the Late Neolithic-Early Chalcolithic periods (fifth millennium B.C.E.) (below left).

The Early Periods

One of the most difficult problems to which as yet no clear-cut answer can be offered is whether the site was occupied during the Late Bronze Age. No trace of any architectural element attributable to this period was encountered in any of the areas of excavation. However, a handful of sherds, including a minute fragment of Cypriot base-ring ware, was found. This may be explained in one of two possible ways: either the LB pottery was brought to Tell Qiri from a nearby LB site during the Early Iron Age, as part of fill material, or the LB architectural remains from Tell Qiri were destroyed completely by leveling activities which took place

at the site during the Iron Age. In this context it should be noted that in two of the excavated areas (Areas F and G), building remains of the Iron Age are founded directly over the remains of the fifth-early fourth millennia B.C.E.

In the eastern (lower) part of the site, fragmentary architectural remains dated by the pottery to MB II were unearthed. Traces of architecture of this period were discovered *in situ* only in Area E in the lower part of the site. It seems that if, indeed, leveling activities took place at the site during the Iron Age, as just suggested, such activity did not extend to the lower slopes of the site.

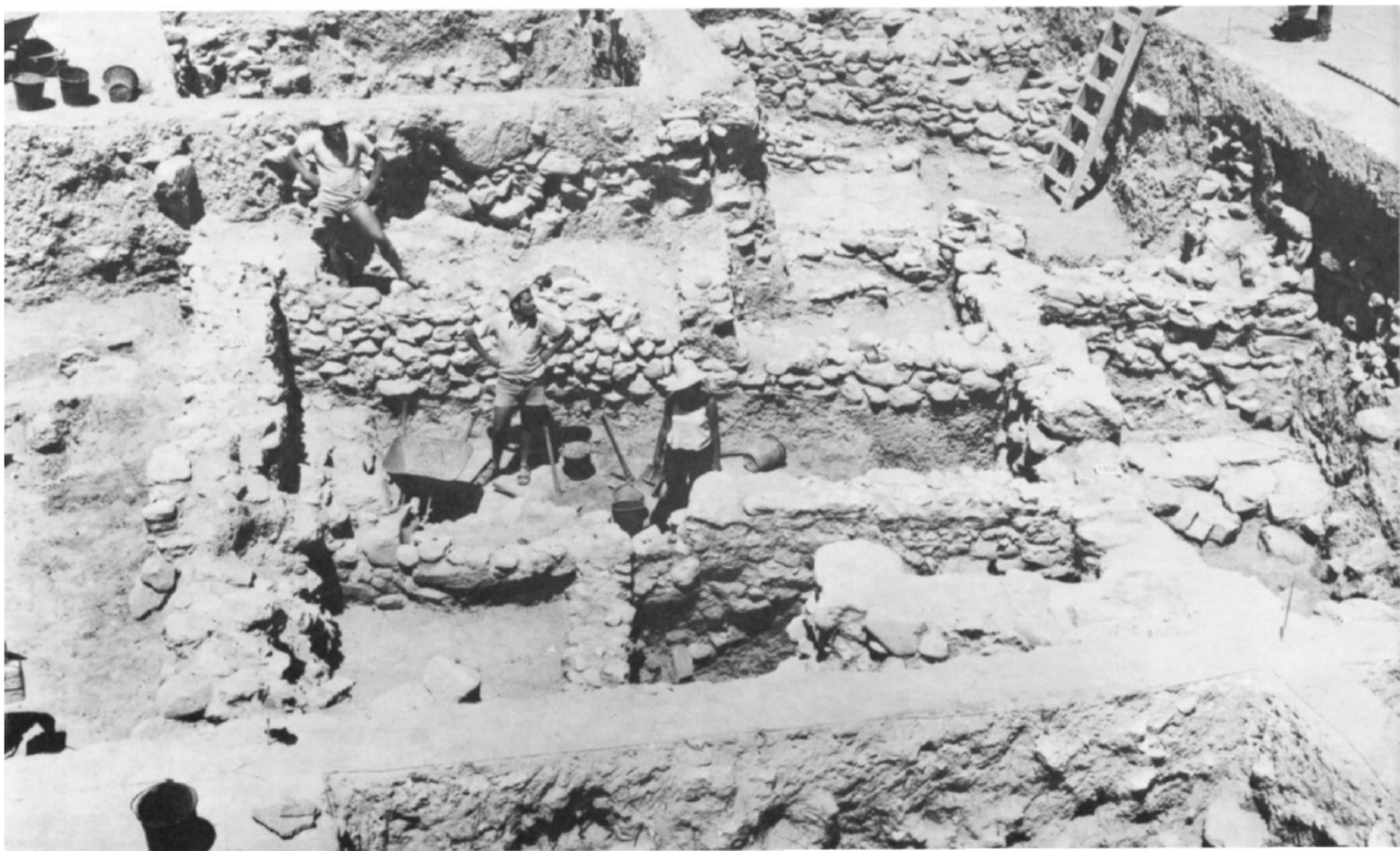
A rich collection of EB I pottery was found in all the excavated areas. This pottery includes gray burnished and band-slipped wares. Again, with the exception of the eastern slope (Area E) and perhaps also in the adjacent Area C, this pottery was not found *in situ*. This is true also for some EB II sherds, as well as several sherds, including the fragments of churns and cornets, clearly datable to the Chalcolithic ("Ghassulian") period. Of the two possible explanations for the presence of pottery and the total absence of architectural remains of the various periods, the second alternative seems preferable, i.e., intensive building operation which took place at the site during the Iron Age resulted in leveling activities, perhaps even more than once. These activities totally destroyed the strata of the Late Bronze, MB II, EB II (limited occupation?). It is important to remember, however, that these conclusions apply only to the excavated areas, admittedly of limited extent, in which the excavation reached the levels predating the Iron Age. The slopes of the site were apparently not affected by the leveling.

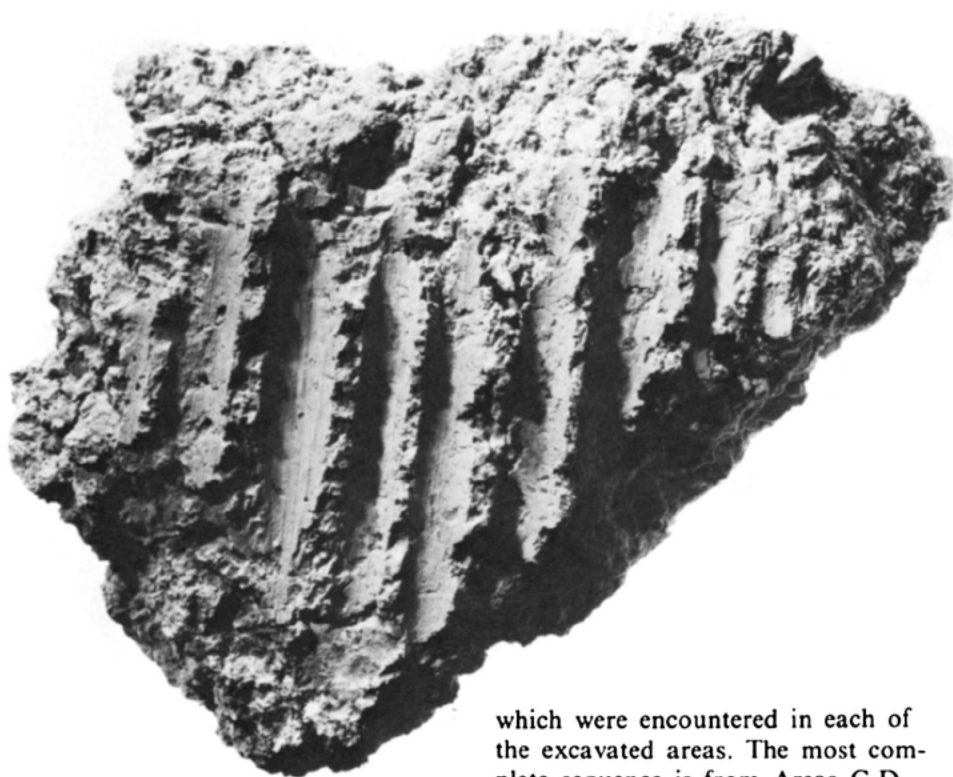
Finds dating to the late fifth-early fourth millennia were encountered mainly in Area G. The total exposed area of these remains reaches nearly 50 m²; included



Collared-rim jar from Tell Qiri (12th-11th centuries B.C.E.).

Right: Oil press at Tell Qiri (8th century B.C.E.). **Left:** Building remains and agricultural installations (9th-8th centuries B.C.E.). **Bottom:** General view of an Iron Age cottage at Tell Qiri. **Far right:** Iron Age ceiling fragment.





among the remains were several fragments of walls, an agricultural installation, and a great amount of pottery as well as flint tools. The domestic-agricultural nature of those remains is evident. Results of the testing of a C¹⁴ sample originating in this assemblage are, unfortunately, not yet available. Judging, however, from the pottery typology, the bulk of which is related to the dark-faced burnished-ware family, it may be suggested that our settlement is slightly later than the one discovered at nearby Tell Abu-Zureiq and contemporary with a site recently surveyed at the foot of Tell Yoqneam, approximately 3 km to the west. A rough estimate would fix the date of this assemblage in the late fifth-early fourth millennia B.C.E. As stated above, the study of this period, which is so far only in its beginning stages, constitutes one of the aims of the Yoqneam Regional Project.

The Iron Age

The period best represented at Tell Qiri is the Iron Age, remains of

which were encountered in each of the excavated areas. The most complete sequence is from Areas C-D, where an uninterrupted sequence of 12 architectural phases, spanning the 12th-8th (7th) centuries B.C.E. was revealed. These phases may be grouped into five major strata. It is noteworthy that no major destruction resulting in a complete change of plan was discernible throughout this long sequence. In each phase at least some of the walls constructed in the previous phase were still in use. It seems, therefore, that Tell Qiri was never the target of any military campaign during the period in question, most probably because it was not considered to be important enough.

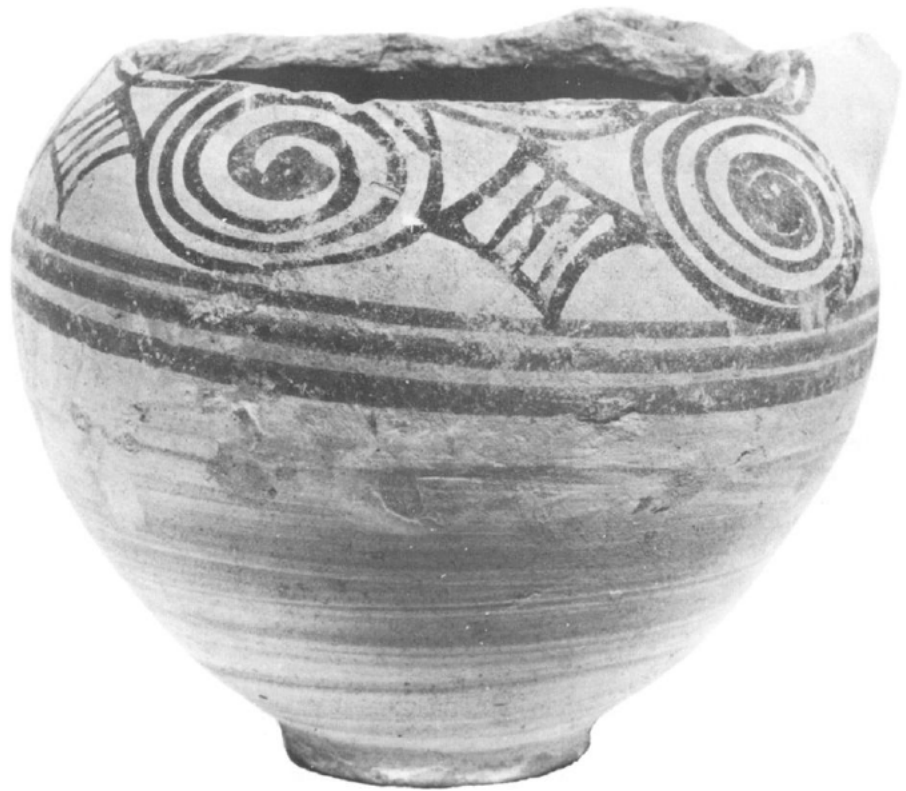
This situation enables us to follow and study the uninterrupted development of the site and of its material culture over a period of nearly 500 years. One of the most interesting aspects of such a study is the pottery assemblage. Four major families were chosen for the purpose of this study: bowls, craters, cooking pots, and storage jars. Each of these families has been typologically subdivided. During the course of excavation, all the sherds of the above-mentioned types were collected and grouped according to type. It

is hoped that the detailed study of these data, done with the aid of a computer, will enable us to determine not only which types of each family are represented in each of the strata, but also the relationships among the four families—for example, which of the types of one family appear together with other types of another family, and how frequently? Considering the continuity of the Iron Age ceramic types over comparatively long time-spans, such information may lead to a refinement of the chronological criteria based on present pottery typology.

Throughout its entire history, Tell Qiri remained a village which was never fortified. It was a prosperous village, as demonstrated by the impressive nature of the dwellings: the building material was mainly stone, yet there is evidence of the use of sun-dried mud bricks. Three standard sizes of bricks were used: 60 x 60 x 15, 60 x 40 x 15, and 40 x 30 x 15 cms. The entrances into the houses and rooms are, as a rule, close to the corners; ceilings were flat and made out of beams and branches covered with plaster. The average span measured 2.20-2.40 m, so that no supporting pillars were needed.

The economy was clearly based on agriculture, as indicated by the large number of ubiquitous flint sickle blades, as well as by the many agricultural installations, comprised mainly of silos and oil presses. Large quantities of food remains were collected, among which the following are noteworthy: bones of sheep, goat, cattle, pig, poultry, and fish, shells of different species of mollusca, as well as remains of olives, wheat, pomegranates, and various kinds of legumes.

In one of the houses, first constructed in the 12th century B.C.E. but occupied into the 11th century, an interesting collection of cultic vessels, including an incense burner and a double vessel used for libations, was unearthed. Due to the domestic character of the building, we were, at first, somewhat reluctant



Various remains from Tell Qiri dated to the 12th-11th centuries B.C.E. **Top:** Decorated Philistine vessel. **Opposite:** Right forelegs of goats found in a cultic room. **Bottom:** Various cultic vessels with details of incense burner.



to call this room a shrine or temple. However, after studying the animal bones recovered from this structure and its immediate vicinity, we discovered that these were almost exclusively right forelegs of goats. This phenomenon contrasted sharply with the kind and number of bones discovered in other loci at Tell Qiri. The large percentage of forelegs found in one area is reminiscent of the custom of sacrificing the right shoulder (Exod 29:22; Lev 7:32, etc.). Archeological evidence for this sacrificial procedure was found also in the LB temple at Lachish, and scholars, such as W. F. Albright, noted the widespread nature of this practice throughout the ancient Near East. The combination of cultic vessels and animal bones which evidently are the remains of sacrifices leads to the conclusion that, in spite of the domestic nature of the building in which they were found, the room may have had a cultic function. A collection of cultic vessels was discovered in a very similar context at neighboring Megiddo. They originated in a standard house, dated to the 10th century B.C.E. In Area CC at Megiddo, numerous 11th-century cultic vessels, including chalices and incense burners, were found in a context which is clearly of a residential nature. To the west of the Hellenistic temple at Lachish, Y. Aharoni, in what he calls a "cult room" (3.5 x 2 m), unearthed a collection of cult vessels which bears a close resemblance to the Megiddo assemblage noted above and perhaps also originates from a similar context. The story of Micah from Mount Ephraim, who kept a graven image and a molten image "in the house" (Judg 17:4), may offer a literary reflection of the archeological discoveries cited: "And the man Micah had a house of God and he made an ephod and teraphim." Thus, it appears that during the early Iron Age (though perhaps not only then), the cult was not practiced exclusively in temples built specifically for such purposes (e.g., those unearthed recently at Tell

Qasile) but also was practiced in private houses, or in parts of such houses. Such a practice may thus be considered one characteristic of the cult practices of the Israelites in the period of settlement.

The importance of the excavations at Tell Qiri must not be overlooked. First, there is the possibility of studying an almost uninterrupted sequence of 500 years of occupation at the site. Second, Tell Qiri forms part of the framework of the Yoqneam Regional Project. Even now, after only one season of excavations at Tell Yoqneam, one may draw important conclusions from studies of the two sites. An example of this is the comparative study of contemporary ceramic finds originating from the city (Yoqneam) and from one of its dependencies (Tell Qiri). Finally, the excavation of Tell Qiri and similar sites contributes to the process of closing an important gap in our knowledge: the way of life of the majority of the inhabitants of the country, namely, those living in the villages.



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