

Bab adh-Dhra' Tomb A 72 South, Jordan: Object Biography and Object-Based Learning

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Abstract

In 1978 the University of Melbourne acquired 44 pots from Tomb A 72 South at Bab adh-Dhra', Jordan, excavated by Paul Lapp in 1965. In response to archaeological collection management concerns, Nancy Lapp, in consultation with the Jordanian Department of Antiquities (DoA), had innovatively proposed that the tomb groups from the original Lapp excavations be distributed to interested American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) member institutions for the purposes of display and education. The University of Melbourne was one of 24 institutions to receive material from Bab adh-Dhra'. This paper discusses the biography of the objects from Tomb A 72 South. It begins at the start of the Early Bronze Age in Jordan, then follows the journey of the 44 pots from Tomb A 72 South, first to Amman and then to Melbourne, where the objects are used for curriculum and community engagement purposes. The evolving life of the objects from Tomb A 72 South is discussed: manufacture and mortuary use, looting and salvage excavations, the curation crisis and archaeological collections management practices, museum exhibits and displays, and aids for research, teaching and object-based learning. The biography of the objects reveals they are not static, they are animated by our ongoing relations with them.

Keywords: *Bab adh-Dhra', Near Eastern archaeology, curriculum and community engagement, archaeological collections management, object-based learning, object biography*

Introduction

“Every object has its history as every person has their own biography.”¹ Gosden and Marshall suggest that the notion of object biography goes back to Kopyoff (1986), who felt that things could not be fully understood at just one point in their existence, and processes and cycles of production, exchange and consumption had to be looked at as a whole. Not only do objects change through their existence but they often have the capability of accumulating histories, so that the present significance of an object derives from the person or events to which it is connected.² Archaeological objects can have complex lives. They are manufactured and used. They can be broken and discarded, excavated or looted, conserved and studied, stored and sold, exhibited and displayed, moved and more. This article discusses the biography of the objects from Bab

¹ Biggs 1988, p. 27.

² Gosden and Marshall 1999, p. 170 (cf. Kopyoff 1986). See also Joy 2009.

adh-Dhra' Tomb A 72 South in Jordan,³ tracking their movement and evolving life at different times and in different locations. The discussion in this paper contributes to the research undertaken by Morag Kersel and Meredith Chesson. Their project, 'Follow the Pots',⁴ in the Dead Sea Plain of Jordan, attempts to explore the social lives of Early Bronze Age pots by employing a conventional archaeological investigation of the emergence of prehistoric urbanism and increasing social complexity, and an ethnographic inquiry into the multiple and contested values of this archaeological heritage.⁵

Biography

3300–3200 BCE

This biography begins at the start of the Early Bronze Age (EB IA, *c.* 3300–3200 BCE) in southern Jordan, when the pots were manufactured by hand for use as part of a mortuary assemblage deposited in Tomb A 72 South at the site of Bab adh-Dhra'. Results of a petrographic analysis of inclusions in ceramics from Bab adh-Dhra' indicate (local) wadi sand was used in fine and common ware bowls, jars and juglets from the Early Bronze Age.⁶ In the EB IA tomb wares, wadi sand was the only temper agent used. It is found in all of the formal types of vessels (bowls, jars and juglets) except hole-mouth jars, which are not found in the tombs. Two basic wares are represented: a fine, thin-walled ware, most likely ceremonial, and a plain thick-walled utilitarian ware. Markings on the Bab adh-Dhra' burial pots combined with the asymmetry of the vessels are indicative of a hand-made method of construction (using flattened coils). Decoration is minimal, generally limited to a few impressed bands below the rims of some vessels. Exterior surfaces are self-slipped and smoothed. Most of the pots have a pale buff (pinkish light brown) colouration and appear evenly fired to a moderately high temperature. Some discolouration ('fire clouds') is visible on the surface of the pots, signifying wood firing, possibly in a simple pit. At this time (EB IA), clay preparation, manufacture and firing was most likely organised locally and undertaken by individual households.

Bab adh-Dhra' is located on the Jordanian side of the Dead Sea (Fig. 1), near its southeast corner and on the south bank of Wadi Kerak. In the late Chalcolithic – Early Bronze Age a cemetery was established at the site (Fig. 2), which was later supplemented by the establishment of a town that flourished throughout the Early Bronze Age. The site was originally identified in 1924 by W. F. Albright on a survey expedition;⁷ however, excavation of the site did not begin until 1965, under the direction of Paul Lapp (see below).

Lapp's excavations at Bab adh-Dhra' revealed that the site experienced four phases of occupation, referred to as the pre-urban phase (EB IA), the period of urbanisation (EB IB–EB II), the

³ The spelling Bab adh-Dhra' is used throughout this paper. The name may also spelt Bab edh-Dhra, Bab Edh-Dhra', Bâb edh-Dhrâ.

⁴ The 'Follow the Pots' project commenced in 2009. For details, see: <https://anthropology.nd.edu/news/anthropologist-meredith-chesson-follows-the-pots/>

⁵ Kersel and Chesson 2013, pp. 678–679.

⁶ Benyon *et al.* 1986, pp. 297–305. See also Chesson 2000.

⁷ Albright 1924.

Table 1. Archaeological chronology at Bab adh-Dhra.*

Period	Dates	Phase
EB IA	3300–3200 BCE	Pre-urban
EB IB	3200–3100 BCE	Transition to urbanisation
EB II	3100–2750 BCE	Urban
EB III	2750–2350 BCE	Urban
EB IV	2350–2000 BCE	Post-urban

* Table adapted from Ortner and Frohlich (2011, 2).

urban phase (EB II–EB III), and the post-urban period (EB IV) (see **Table 1**).⁸ Mortuary patterns in the cemeteries were closely correlated with settlement changes throughout the EBA, providing a unique look into shifting societal structures, methods of remembrance and funerary beliefs at the site.⁹

It is estimated that the cemetery holds over 50,000 burials, suggesting that Bab adh-Dhra' acted as a central burial ground for the area.¹⁰ Use of the cemetery began in the EB IA period (3300–3200 BCE), with the appearance of shaft tombs. Shaft tombs have a central circular shaft, dug 1–3 m into the earth, with between one and five chambers extending out from the bottom of the shaft. Dental genetics analysis has indicated that the tomb chambers were linked to family units.¹¹ All burials in the tombs were secondary and disarticulated in nature.¹² The most common artefact found in the shaft tomb chambers was pottery. Other artefacts included basalt vessels and wooden bowls (some of which contained residual evidence of food having been placed inside) as well as less common items, such as limestone maceheads, jewellery beads, unfired clay female figurines, gold pieces and semi-precious stones.

The EB IA mortuary tradition was largely static, with human remains and cultural artefacts being carefully placed within the tombs according to a distinctive pattern (that is, high rates of uniformity, consistency, homogeneity, et cetera).¹³ Mortuary goods were not clearly associated with a single burial, highlighting the possibility of an egalitarian society – or at least one which did not implement social stratification in death.¹⁴ Indeed, through their analysis of the skeletal remains, Ortner and Frohlich have determined that there was no distinction based on either age or sex when it came to who was buried in a tomb chamber.¹⁵

⁸ Ortner and Frohlich 2011, p. 2.

⁹ Chesson 1999; Ortner and Frohlich 2008, 2011; Rast and Schaub 2003; Schaub and Rast 1989.

¹⁰ Sheridan *et al.* 2014, p. 175. According to Sheridan *et al.* (p. 133), 'Bab edh-Dhra' has provided the only large, well-excavated, and well-curated skeletal collection spanning the Early Bronze Age (EBA) I–IV for the lower southern Levant'.

¹¹ Ortner and Frohlich 2008, pp. 281–296.

¹² Chesson 1999, pp. 143–146; Rast 1999, p. 167.

¹³ Rast 1999, p. 171.

¹⁴ Ortner and Frohlich 2008, pp. 297–298; Rast 1999, pp. 171–172.

¹⁵ Ortner and Frohlich 2008, p. 48.

While the cemetery was in continual use throughout the EB IA there has been no evidence of a permanent settlement at Bab adh-Dhra' during this period. Indeed, the first village at the site does not appear until the EB IB phase, approximately 100 years later. The lack of permanent EB IA habitational evidence, alongside the secondary nature of the burials, led to the conclusion that during the EB IA the utilisation of the region was temporary. Evidence of semi-permanent campsites near the large cemetery may suggest the presence of seasonal, seminomadic pastoralists using the site as a burial ground.¹⁶ This hypothesis, proposed by Walter Rast and Thomas Schaub, is supported by Meredith Chesson, whose analysis of the mortuary evidence indicates that the people buried at Bab adh-Dhra' were moved from an initial burial place and reburied at the site.¹⁷ However, Chesson concedes, along with co-contributors Susan Sheridan, Jaime Ullinger and Lesly Gregoricka, that the presence of the fine ceramics, the sheer number of work hours necessary to dig the shaft tombs, and the presence of a nearby water source may indicate a greater pattern of sedentism than originally thought.¹⁸ Paul Lapp's initial idea, which David Ilan echoes, is that a settled population nearby used the site as a burial ground.¹⁹ Whether or not the occupants of Bab adh-Dhra' were nomadic or sedentary, the mortuary traditions practised there reveal the growing importance of this site to those who gathered there during the EB IA.

The southern chamber of shaft tomb A 72, whose ceramic contents now reside at the University of Melbourne (see below), was one of the EB IA tombs to be excavated (Fig. 3). It is an irregular rectangle in shape and was relatively well preserved.²⁰ The placement of objects within the tomb was purposeful and followed the general rule-of-thumb discovered in the other EB IA shaft tombs. A bone heap was carefully laid out on a reed mat slightly left of the centre of the tomb, with three mostly intact skulls lined up to the left of it. Four pottery vessels and a rounded macehead were placed behind them, against the wall to the left. The remaining vessels were positioned against the wall to the right and rear, with two of them holding a number of jewellery beads.²¹ This structured placement of the grave goods within the tomb is also reflected in the two remaining chambers of the shaft tomb, A 72 NW and A 72 NE. Both these tombs also had a carefully stacked disarticulated bone heap slightly left of the centre, with skulls lining the left-hand side. Ceramic vessels were then placed along the walls of the chambers.²² Tomb A 72 South is, therefore, a typical example of the mortuary tradition practised during the EB IA period at Bab adh-Dhra'.

The homogeneity of the Bab adh-Dhra' pottery is reflected in the consistency of the mortuary practices observed at the site. The lack of diversity suggests a community with the same communal beliefs and values. Adhering closely to this shared response to death and dying are the occupants of Tomb A 72 South.

¹⁶ Lapp 1968, p. 13; Rast 1999, p. 170; Rast and Schaub 2003, pp. 12, 43–44; Schaub and Rast 1989, p. 549.

¹⁷ Chesson 1999, p. 146.

¹⁸ Sheridan *et al.* 2014, p. 138. See also Ortner and Frohlich 2011, p. 114, and Ilan 2002, pp. 94–95, who identify that many traits usually attributed to nomadic groups, such as secondary burial, are also practised in sedentary communities.

¹⁹ Ilan 2002, p. 95.

²⁰ Schaub and Rast 1989, pp. 136–140.

²¹ Schaub and Rast 1989, pp. 40–142.

²² Schaub and Rast 1989, pp. 132–136.

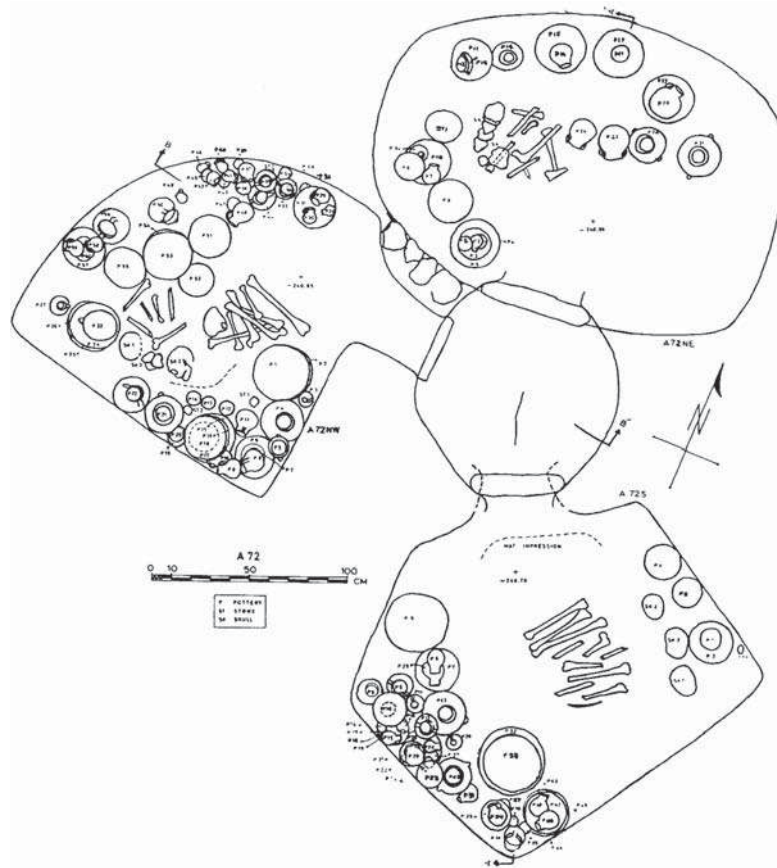


Fig. 3. Plan of tomb A 72 NW, NE and S in Cemetery A, at Bab adh-Dhra', Jordan (After Schaub and Rast 1989, Fig. 76).

One possible function of the pots placed in the tombs at Bab adh-Dhra' is that they represented 'gifts' the living gave to deceased persons to take with them into the afterlife. Although this is a common assumption about the role objects play in ancient Near Eastern mortuary rituals, it is likely that funerary objects possessed multiple functions and meanings. In a study on "contextualizing grave goods," Ekengren argues that graves are seldom approached by archaeologists as the result of a sequence of actions, and archaeologists working within this perspective rarely discuss what effects the various archaeologically observable activities performed at the grave sites may have had on the function and meaning of the objects that were used.²³ In order to understand the function and meaning of grave goods, it is necessary to consider intentionality, ritual sequences, spatial arrangement, typology and physical properties. According to Ekengren, "the functions and meanings stipulated by tradition, the functions and meanings formed and

²³ Ekengren 2013, pp. 173–192.

embodied by the practitioners handling the objects and the bystanders observing them, as well as the functions and meanings recalled and/or recreated after the performance (e.g. memories),” all warrant attention.²⁴

At Bab adh-Dhra' the dominant vessel types are bowls, juglets and jars. One theory accounting for these particular containers accompanying the human constituents is that they are vessels of feasting. It is observed the pots seldom exhibit any notable visible signs of obvious use or traces of wear, signifying that they were not in circulation for long periods prior to their placement in the grave. The uniformity of the pottery found in the burials at Bab adh-Dhra' suggests that the pots were probably manufactured specifically for funerary use.

Regardless of their precise function or functions, the pots of Tomb A 72 South remained in situ and undisturbed for over 4000 years in the cemetery at Bab adh-Dhra'. It is unlikely another use beyond burial or removal from the grave was envisaged by those responsible for the manufacture of the pots and their deposition in the tomb. Subsequent looting of burials at Bab adh-Dhra' impacts significantly on the biography of the objects from Tomb A 72 South. Kersel and Chesson note that in the Dead Sea region of Jordan there were reports of looting as early as the 1920s, when Mallon and Albright first identified the cemetery and settlement of Bab adh-Dhra' as EBA.²⁵

1950s and 1960s CE

From the 1950s, quantities of pottery, reportedly from the Dead Sea area, started appearing in antiquities shops in Jerusalem. By 1963, it was reported that pottery had “glutted the market.”²⁶ In 1964 Professor Paul Lapp, then director of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem, discovered that the objects had been taken from robbed tombs at Bab adh-Dhra'.²⁷ With the help of local guides, Lapp and his colleague Sigfried Mittmann located the tombs and discovered the area to be in disarray.²⁸ Lapp, keen to preserve the site and its history, continued on to conduct three seasons of rescue excavation at Bab adh-Dhra' between 1965 and 1967.²⁹

During Lapp's first excavation season, in the spring of 1965, he determined the extent of the mortuary area, designated cemetery A, and discovered two methods of burial – shaft tombs and charnel houses. While the shaft tombs dated to the EB IA period, the charnel houses were in use considerably later, dating to the EB II–III, when the town at Bab adh-Dhra' was at its zenith. Through study of these tombs, Lapp was able to delineate most of the major phases of occupation at Bab adh-Dhra' during the Early Bronze Age.³⁰ A second season was conducted in the fall of that same year, where Lapp and his team excavated part of the settlement area as well as a new

²⁴ Ekengren 2013, pp. 173–192.

²⁵ Kersel and Chesson 2013, p. 680.

²⁶ Lapp 1966, p. 104.

²⁷ Lapp 1966.

²⁸ Lapp 1966.

²⁹ Lapp 1965, 1966, 1968a, 1968b; Schaub and Rast 1989.

³⁰ Schaub and Rast 1989, pp. 18–19.

section of the cemetery, designated cemetery C. This area of the cemetery also contained shaft tombs; however, the mortuary tradition was slightly different to that discovered in cemetery A.

Lapp's final season of excavation at Bab adh-Dhra' occurred in 1967. Here, Lapp focused on uncovering more of the cemetery, leaving the town site for excavation in later seasons. Additional shaft tombs discovered during this season provided further evidence for the conclusion that this tomb type was used during the EB IA period. Indeed, this conclusion was one of Lapp's major contributions to the study of Bab adh-Dhra', as outlined by Schaub and Rast. Lapp's work also revealed that Bab adh-Dhra' was permanently settled during the EB II–III and the discovery of tombs dating to the late EB IV phase, also in the 1967 season, revealed crucial information about the culture in Transjordan during this period.³¹

Tomb A 72 South excavated by Lapp was found in cemetery A in the first season of salvage excavations in 1965.

1970s and 1980s CE

The sudden death of Paul Lapp was to have a further bearing on the biography of objects recovered from the excavations at Bab adh-Dhra'. At the age of 39, on Sunday 26 April 1970, he died unexpectedly in a swimming accident off the coast of Cyprus, before publishing the results of his excavations at Bab adh-Dhra'. Morag Kersel notes that "in addition to being a great loss for the archaeology of region, [Lapp's death] meant that the Bab adh-Dhra' material remained in storage in unpublished limbo."³² The finds from the Lapp excavations at Bab adh-Dhra' were transferred to Jerusalem and Amman.

Kersel recounts that "in a letter from David McCreery (an archaeologist based in Amman) to Edward Campbell (an ASOR representative), McCreery outlined an assessment of the stored Bab adh-Dhra' pottery in Amman, suggesting that the documentation of the collection was inadequate, the artefacts were at risk, and some of the pots were 'missing'. ... The tenuous storage situation of the Bab adh-Dhra' material was compounded when archaeologists Walter Rast and R. Thomas Schaub applied for permission to renew excavations at the site, beginning in 1975."³³

Kersel goes on to note that in 1977, the Jordanian Department of Antiquities (DOA) and ASOR decided to distribute the tomb groups from the original Lapp excavations to interested ASOR member institutions for the purposes of display and education.³⁴ Nancy Lapp, Paul Lapp's widow and an archaeologist herself, led this initiative. In a letter to the ASOR Board outlining the proposal, she wrote: "There is reason to think that this unusual proposal will be picked up! It could mean that a group of 8 or 10 complete or fully reconstructed pots could be available for roughly \$150, delivered directly to a museum."³⁵ By October 1977 the proposal was accepted, with

³¹ Schaub and Rast 1989, p. 20.

³² Kersel 2015, 50. For obituaries on Paul Lapp see *Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 64/2-3, April-July 1971, pp. 129–134; Campbell 1970, pp. 60–62; and Hillers 1970, pp. 2–3.

³³ David McCreery to Edward Campbell, Nancy Lapp and R. Thomas Schaub, 2 September 1977, as reported in Kersel 2015, p. 50.

³⁴ Nancy Lapp to Adnan Hadidi, the director of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, 1 August 1977, Bab adh-Dhra' file, ASOR Archives, as reported in Kersel 2015, p. 50.

³⁵ Nancy Lapp to the ASOR, 1 September 1977, as reported in Kersel 2015, p. 50.

the Department of Antiquities in Jordan agreeing to distribute some of the Bab adh-Dhra' vessels for purposes of permanent display and only for the costs of shipping and handling.³⁶ A total of 1186 pots and 10 basalt bowls were divided into tomb groups and distributed to 24 institutions located in the United States of America, Canada and Australia.³⁷

The original motivation for this initiative was to increase educational access to the Bab adh-Dhra' collection.³⁸ The government of Jordan also hoped that the movement of the tomb groups would increase interest in Jordanian archaeology and cooperative archaeological efforts between the United States and Jordan. Ultimately, it was anticipated that the Bab adh-Dhra' groups would act as 'ambassadors' for the country in their new homes.³⁹ To ensure that these goals would be met, institutions that were to receive a tomb group needed to adhere to four key obligations:

1. The groups should remain intact with no further division without the permission of ASOR, thus ensuring that ASOR and the DOA would be able to keep accurate records of the location of the Bab adh-Dhra' material
2. The pots should be displayed publicly, with the proper attribution
3. They should be available for study for those responsible for the publication of Bab adh-Dhra'
4. The 'charge' for the collection should be paid in full in a timely manner.

In 1978 the University of Melbourne paid \$855 for 44 pots from Tomb Group A 72 South.⁴⁰ The Middle Eastern Studies department at the University of Melbourne was active in establishing a collection of objects for teaching and learning purposes.⁴¹ At the time the contents of Tomb A 72 South was acquired, the department offered subjects in 'Biblical Archaeology' and the 'Archaeology of Palestine': objects from Tomb A 72 South at Bab adh-Dhra' would enhance this curriculum as teaching aids. In 1978, the Reverend Dr John Arthur Thompson (12 October 1913 – 23 November 2002) was giving archaeology lectures in the department. Many years earlier, in August 1951, Thompson had spent 12 months in the Middle East, where he was an honorary fellow of the American Schools of Oriental Research.⁴² Christopher Davey, current director of the Australian Institute of Archaeology (AIA), notes that while at ASOR, "John Thompson dug with Professor F. V. Winnett, Dr James Pritchard and Dimitri Baramki at Dhiban and Jericho. He also worked as a site supervisor and undertook a survey of cisterns in the Dhiban region. He travelled with Gerald Lancaster Harding and a team to Jawa and other desert locations in Jordan to record Safaitic inscriptions."⁴³ It is likely Thompson's connections with ASOR provided the impetus and opportunity for the University of Melbourne to purchase the contents of Tomb A72

³⁶ David McCreery to Edward Campbell, Nancy Lapp and R. Thomas Schaub, 13 October 1977, as reported in Kersel 2015, p. 50.

³⁷ Kersel 2015, p. 51.

³⁸ Kersel 2015, pp. 50–51.

³⁹ Kersel 2015, p. 50.

⁴⁰ Kersel 2015, p. 51. Nancy Lapp to Professor A. D. Hallam May 17, 1978.

⁴¹ The acquisition of objects was initiated by Professor John Bowman, see Sagona 2006.

⁴² Davey 2014, p. 23.

⁴³ Davey 2014, p. 23.

South.⁴⁴ By the time the pots were acquired, Professor Arthur Dudley Hallam was acting head of the Middle Eastern Studies department. Correspondence between Nancy Lapp and Arthur Hallam documents the transaction involving the contents of Tomb A 72 South. In a letter to Professor Hallam dated 17 May 1978, in reply to his letter of 5 May, Nancy Lapp encloses a list of the pottery she sent to him (four cartons). Only 44 items were sent, since “apparently the 45th vessel was lost somewhere in storage during the past ten years.” Enclosed with the pots were two black and white photographs, one showing a general view of the cemetery, and another looking down the shaft of tomb A 72 with A 72 S to the left. Another letter from Nancy Lapp to Arthur Hallam, dated the next day (18 May 1978), noted that in the publication (expected in a year or two), “your institution will be listed as the repository for your tomb group.”⁴⁵

During the 1980s, objects in the Middle Eastern Studies collection, including the 44 pots from Bab adh-Dhra’, were displayed in glass cases in the corridors outside the staff offices of the department (Fig. 4). In addition to aiding the teaching of archaeology, the objects were also used as topics of study for student assignments and research essays.

In 1983, 14 of the 44 vessels featured in an exhibition titled *Ancient Middle Eastern Ceramics and Australian Archaeology in the Middle East*, curated by Colin Hope and Jenny Zimmer, that was displayed in the Faculty of Art Gallery at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) from June 14–24.⁴⁶ Zimmer states in the catalogue preface, “the exhibition presents ancient ceramics from archaeological excavations in Palestine, Cyprus and Egypt.” She notes the exhibition was designed “for the benefit of those within the community, and from other educational institutions, who have an interest in the subject.”⁴⁷ One of the stated aims of the exhibition was to “introduce the role of pottery studies in archaeology.”⁴⁸ The exhibition catalogue also contained an essay on “Palestinian Pottery” by Dr Thomas L. McClellan, archaeology lecturer in Middle Eastern Studies from 1982 to 1985. The arrangement of the Palestinian pottery was chronological, and “the large and important Proto-Urban (Early Bronze I) ceramic collection from Tomb A 72 South, from the Transjordanian site of Bab adh-Dhra’” was noted by McClellan.⁴⁹

In the late 1980s, Dr Greg Wightman, a research fellow in Middle Eastern Studies at that time, reorganised the archaeological exhibits in the department and added object labels and text panels to the displays. Some of the pots from Bab adh-Dhra’ were included in the installations curated by Wightman, while those pots not displayed were stored in the Middle Eastern Studies archaeology laboratory.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ On John Thompson see Davey 2002, pp. 3–6.

⁴⁵ This correspondence forms part of the Classics and Archaeology Collection archive, stored at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.

⁴⁶ Zimmer 1983. For the 14 vessels exhibited see McClellan 1983, pp. 160–161: P41 (1424), P24 (1407), P34 (1417), P39 (1422), P29 (1412), P38 (1421), P36 (1419), P40 (1423), P13 (1396), P3 (1386), P42 (1425), P2 (1385), P33 (1416), P23 (1406).

⁴⁷ Zimmer 1983, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Zimmer 1983, p. 1.

⁴⁹ McClellan 1983, p. 153.

⁵⁰ In 1988, Andrew Jamieson undertook a study of pottery in the Middle Eastern Studies collection for his fourth-year honours thesis, *Catalogue of the Ceramic Artifacts in the Collection of the Department of Middle Eastern Studies*, which included the pots from Bab adh-Dhra’. In 1989, the pottery from Lapp’s excavations was published by R. Thomas Schaub and Walter E. Rast (Schaub and Rast 1989): the description of material from Tomb A72 is discussed on pp. 132–149 (A72S pp. 136 and 140).



Fig. 4. Display cases in the Middle Eastern Studies department (Photographer Andrew Jamieson).

1990s and 2000s CE

With increasing concerns over object security, in 1995 all the items in the Middle Eastern Studies collection were transferred to a new University of Melbourne art museum.⁵¹ The museum, which was to include a gallery devoted to Classics and Archaeology, not only offered greater security but was equipped with climate controls providing stable environmental conditions in the galleries and storage areas.

In 1998 (on 11 August) the Ian Potter Museum of Art officially opened, though the Classics and Archaeology wing would not be ready until the following year.⁵² Henry Gaughan (from the Potter Museum) and Frank Sear (Professor of Classics) selected the objects for the inaugural display in the Classics and Archaeology gallery. The pots from Bab adh-Dhra' Tomb A 72 South were included. The new antiquities display was popular with students and staff of the university and also attracted interest from the wider community, including many groups from local secondary schools (Fig. 5). For the next seven years the pots from Bab adh-Dhra' remained on public display as part of a broad survey exhibition, organised chronologically and regionally, featuring key works from the Middle Eastern Studies and Classics collections.

⁵¹ Also in 1995, a proposal for a Virtual Museum was initiated. The Virtual Museum Project aimed to transform teaching, research and public education in Classics and Archaeology and related areas by opening up access to the University's valuable collections of antiquities. <http://vm.arts.unimelb.edu.au/report/proj.html#aim>

⁵² Scott 2012, p. 135. According to Roger Scott, the Classics collection was kept within the department until 2001.



Fig. 5. A Presbyterian Ladies College secondary school student with Bab adh-Dhra' pottery in the Classics and Archaeology Gallery at the Ian Potter Museum of Art (Photographer L. O'Rourke. Courtesy of The University of Melbourne).

2000s and 2010s

In 2005, the biography of the pots from Bab adh-Dhra' Tomb A 72 South continued to evolve with the appointment of a Classics and Archaeology curator.⁵³ The curator initiated a new phase of curriculum and community engagement centred on objects from the Classics and Archaeology Collection.⁵⁴ While object-based learning (OBL) had always featured in the teaching of ancient world studies subjects at Melbourne, with the appointment of a curator it was now possible to significantly expand such activities using the Classics and Archaeology Collection. This was timely for several reasons: first, students of ancient world studies subjects exposed to OBL responded favourably to engagement with authentic objects; second, OBL was experiencing something of a revival in tertiary education;⁵⁵ third, the University of Melbourne made a commitment to OBL in its *Engagement at Melbourne: 2015–2020* strategy;⁵⁶ and finally, the Arts

⁵³ This position was primarily funded by the R. E. Ross Trust, with some additional funds from the Russell and Mab Grimwade Fund (also known as the Meigunyah Fund). It was a dual position: the appointee worked both in the museum as a curator and in the academic program as archaeology lecturer.

⁵⁴ On the collection see Jamieson 2015b.

⁵⁵ See for example, Hannan *et al.* 2013; Jamieson and Van de Ven 2015.

⁵⁶ On the *Engagement at Melbourne 2015 to 2020* strategy see https://about.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/15348/Engagement-at-Melbourne-2.pdf

Faculty was about to embark upon a major new building project that would include OBL in its design philosophy by including teaching spaces designated specifically for object-based learning in the building (see below).⁵⁷

Meanwhile, in 2015 Morag Kersel published an important article in the 'Forum' section of the *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* on "Storage Wars: Solving the Archaeological Curation Crisis?"⁵⁸ In her essay, Kersel argued that "across the globe, storage (here implying curation and permanent care) is one of the most pressing issues facing archaeology today." She "examines the curation crisis and some of the traditional and innovative solutions to the 'storage wars' "in the area of archaeological collections management", arguing that rather than something that is viewed as a time-consuming, costly afterthought; curation should be an integral part of archaeological praxis." Kersel discusses several potential solutions to the archaeological curation crisis: Catch-and-Release Archaeology (recording artefacts in situ and returning material to places of origin); Deaccessioning "Old" Collections (removing material from collections deemed redundant); Sharing the Spoils: *Partage* (dividing artefacts at the end of a field season, once commonplace in the Middle East); and Long-Term Loans or Leasing (lending material for the purposes of display). Kersel looks at the distribution of the Early Bronze Age pottery from Paul Lapp's excavations at Bab adh-Dhra' as a case study in solving the "storage wars."⁵⁹ She revisits the unusual proposal to distribute tomb groups from the original Lapp excavations to interested ASOR member institutions for the purposes of display and education and asks, "Could the innovative plan of Nancy Lapp be the solution to the curation crisis?"⁶⁰

Because the University of Melbourne received objects under this plan, Andrew Jamieson, who had the role of Classics and Archaeology curator, was one of four specialists invited to respond to Kersel's paper. He discussed object-based learning activities at the University of Melbourne in the context of the curation crisis and Nancy Lapp's innovative plan,⁶¹ and concluded they resulted in both pedagogical and research benefits for students and faculty.

Another defining moment in the biography of the objects from Tomb A 72 South occurred in 2016 when the pots formed the centrepiece of a major exhibition (Fig. 6) titled *The Dead Don't Bury Themselves*, which went on display from 27 September 2016 to 19 March 2017 in the Classics and Archaeology gallery at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.⁶² The objects from Bab adh-Dhra' allowed for multiple levels of interpretation, reflecting the evolving life of an archaeological object from its original context of use, to its excavation, to its place within the museum through its management and display as part of a wider collection. The aim was to situate the objects within this evolving narrative, as well as to allow visitors to consider what a collection like Bab adh-Dhra' might be able to reveal about not only the archaeology of death, but also current attitudes to dying and disposal of the dead.⁶³ Alongside the Bab adh-Dhra' material in the exhibition were

⁵⁷ Jamieson 2016b.

⁵⁸ Kersel 2015.

⁵⁹ Kersel 2015.

⁶⁰ Kersel 2015, p. 53.

⁶¹ Jamieson 2015a. See also Jamieson and Fitzpatrick 2014 and Jamieson 2016.

⁶² The name of the exhibition was inspired by references to 'the dead do not bury themselves' in the literature on the archaeology of death and burial (see Pearson 1999, p. 84; Ekengren 2013, p. 175).

⁶³ Van de Ven and Jamieson 2019.



Fig. 6. Bab adh-Dhra' pottery on display in the *Dead Don't Bury Themselves* exhibition, Ian Potter Museum of Art (Photographer Christian Capurro. Courtesy of The University of Melbourne).

Bronze Age objects from a number of other cemeteries and tombs in the southern Levant, including items from Tell Ajjul, Tell Far'ah, Lachish and Megiddo. The exhibition also included five skulls from Jericho, on loan from the Australian Institute of Archaeology. These skulls highlighted the corporeality of death, as well as the process of archaeological excavation and the changing standards of archaeological recording for human remains.

The exhibition provided opportunities for the consideration of a range of issues covering the looting and subsequent excavation and post-excavation management of the site's artefact assemblage. *The Dead Don't Bury Themselves* installation fulfilled the obligations to exhibit the Bab adh-Dhra' material and to allow students and visitors to learn about its context of use, excavation, preservation and display. Significantly, the exhibition foregrounded the fact that objects are not static; they are animated by our ongoing relations with them, and they contain ample information about the past and present cultures within which they reside. The exhibition also emphasised the centrality of death in human experience and the rituals created around it. The objects selected for display and the accompanying information (text panels, object labels, archival documentation, didactic elements and curator-led floor talks) invited viewers to explore the various facets of our engagement with the Middle East based on their own interests, whether they be in archaeology, physical anthropology, museum management, politics, conservation or any other area. This flexibility in content and display ultimately allowed for a collaborative creation of knowledge and

experience that is valued by the visitor, rather than a curatorial monologue with no relevance to the visitor's own reality.⁶⁴

In a collection of papers on "Museums of the Ancient Near East: Curatorial Practice and Audiences," Van de Ven and Jamieson note university museums provide a way to embrace the possibilities of Nancy Lapp's innovative engagement-oriented approach, through their focus on teaching and outreach – in other words, their commitment to curriculum and community engagement.⁶⁵ In the case of *The Dead Don't Bury Themselves* exhibition, this strategy took an interdisciplinary form: scholars from anthropology and computer science contributed alongside archaeologists to the conceptualisation of the exhibition and its dissemination through public events, such as a related symposium that incorporated themes ranging from ancient burial practices to death in a virtual world.⁶⁶ In her opening address to the *Dead Don't Bury Themselves* exhibition, anthropologist Professor Tamara Kohn stated "we understand each other across time and space through our human capacity to seek connection."⁶⁷ By studying the often humble but sometimes extraordinary world of things, it is possible to shed new light on both past societies and ourselves. The more methods provided for this search, the more connections visitors and students will be able to find.

In 2017, Gemma Lee commenced a PhD research project examining "The Role of Bab adh-Dhra' in the Archaeological Curation Crisis." As part of this study, the Bab adh-Dhra' objects were incorporated into several undergraduate Near Eastern archaeology classes at the University of Melbourne. Lee's doctoral research aims to evaluate the efficacy of the Bab adh-Dhra' Tomb A 72 South assemblage in teaching and learning outcomes through a student questionnaire distributed at the end of each OBL session. Classes were held over a two-year period from mid-2017 to mid-2019 and involved undergraduate students at all study levels. Due to the increased use of the objects during this research project, at the beginning of 2019 the Bab adh-Dhra' vessels were placed on display in the OBL labs to better facilitate access to the collection (Fig. 7).

Discussion: object-based learning and object biography

Using objects to teach is not a new method of instruction. The term 'object-based learning' was initially coined by Scott G. Paris and refers to the use of objects in classroom teaching to promote an active, student-led learning environment.⁶⁸ Active learning encourages students to directly participate in the knowledge acquisition process by actively engaging with their learning environment. This often involves learning through experience rather than passively taking in information, such as through a lecture-based class. OBL, therefore, provides students with an active learning experience by encouraging a multi-sensory interaction with objects. Objects have been shown to provoke enquiry, particularly when students are being exposed to the artefact for

⁶⁴ Van de Ven and Jamieson 2019.

⁶⁵ Van de Ven and Jamieson 2019.

⁶⁶ Van de Ven and Jamieson 2019.

⁶⁷ Van de Ven and Jamieson 2019.

⁶⁸ Paris 2002.



Fig. 7. Bab adh-Dhra' pottery on display in the Object-Based Learning Laboratories, Arts West Building (Photographer Christian Capurro. Courtesy of The University of Melbourne).

the first time.⁶⁹ During their enquiry into the object, students create rather than replicate knowledge discovery.⁷⁰ This emphasis on knowledge generation empowers students to take control of their own learning experience and results in stronger learning outcomes and longer memory retention of concepts learnt in class.⁷¹

The employment of OBL in higher education has been widely studied in recent years. Researchers at University College London (UCL) have conducted numerous investigations into the uses of OBL across several disciplines and have received positive results. From their multi-disciplinary survey of students at UCL in 2010–2011, Leonie Hannan, Rosalind Duhs and Helen Chatterjee found that OBL aided students in developing transferable skills and acquiring subject-specific knowledge.⁷² Students in the study also stressed the “importance of learning by doing to long-term understanding.”⁷³ A second study conducted at UCL by Arabella Sharp, Linda Thomson, Helen Chatterjee and Leonie Hannan echoed these results. The study determined that a visual and tangible experience is necessary to promote student engagement and effective object-based learning.⁷⁴ Students involved in their study hailed from a range of academic disciplines and reported increases in knowledge and understanding, analytical and observational skill

⁶⁹ Hannan *et al.* 2013; Sharp *et al.* 2016; Tam 2016.

⁷⁰ Tam 2016, p. 126.

⁷¹ Cook and Speight 2010.

⁷² Hannan *et al.* 2013, p. 163. Transferable skills include the development of teamwork, communication, research, analytical and observation skills, and critical thinking.

⁷³ Hannan *et al.* 2013, p. 163.

⁷⁴ Sharp *et al.* 2016, p. 117.

development, engagement, enjoyment and empowerment as a result of their learning experience.⁷⁵ Importantly, the study discovered that students with the least previous experience of OBL showed greater gains than those who had experienced it several times previously. For first- and second-year undergraduates, who are least likely to have had these experiences, OBL can therefore contribute to rapid increases in knowledge acquisition.⁷⁶

Sharp *et al.* also reported that students associated the OBL experience with stronger memory retention of concepts learnt in class.⁷⁷ Information gained through the tactile exploration of objects has been shown to significantly improve memory in research conducted by Alberto Gallace and Charles Spence. They suggest that multisensory stimulation during the learning process may provide stronger and longer-lasting memories than those acquired through only a single form of stimulation (whether this be visual or auditory).⁷⁸ Improved memory retention has also been linked to emotionally charged experiences. Touch can serve an affective or emotional function, alongside discriminative and haptic functions, through providing a range of sensations that the individual may find pleasant or unpleasant.⁷⁹ Students have reported that hands-on learning provides this type of affective experience which appears to have a direct impact on the motivational and emotional aspects of learning, including memorising content.⁸⁰ Memory retention, skill development and knowledge generation are all therefore linked to the tangible, tactile experience that OBL provides. It is important to emphasise that tactile exploration of objects does not include passive touch, such as simply placing your hand upon an artefact, but rather the active manipulation of an object.⁸¹ The student must be fully engaged in the process of handling or interacting with an artefact for OBL to be an effective teaching strategy.

Various studies have provided guidance as to how to provide this type of active learning experience for students. Prown led the way with his three steps for object analysis, which encourage the student first to describe the object, then to deduce or interpret the type of interaction between object and receiver and finally to speculate on the meanings behind various aspects of the object.⁸² Linda K. Friedlander has promoted a similar method, where students are encouraged first to describe in detail the object before them before attempting to construct any conclusions or interpretations.⁸³ In both of these methods, the object is used actively as evidence by the student, rather than as a passive illustration.⁸⁴ It is the use of the object which turns it into a source of meaning, and thus it is important for students to involve themselves in critically analysing the artefacts before them.⁸⁵ Teachers can facilitate this process by guiding students through the analysis by posing additional questions to broaden student thinking. This also creates an opportunity

⁷⁵ Sharp *et al.* 2016.

⁷⁶ Sharp *et al.* 2016, p. 118.

⁷⁷ Sharp *et al.* 2016.

⁷⁸ Gallace and Spence 2008, p. 179.

⁷⁹ McGlone 2008.

⁸⁰ Meecham 2016, p. 73.

⁸¹ McGlone 2008; Tiballi 2016.

⁸² Prown 1982.

⁸³ Friedlaender 2013, p. 150.

⁸⁴ Prown 1982.

⁸⁵ Bain and Ellenbogen 2002.

for students to converse about their inquiry with teachers and peers and to draw on this social interaction for aid in the meaning-making process.⁸⁶

It is clear that OBL is a beneficial method of teaching that promotes greater engagement, and stronger learner motivation and overall knowledge and skill development. What much of this research does not address, however, is the type of objects that are being employed in OBL classes to reach these outcomes. Lee's doctoral research, focusing on the use of the Tomb A 72 South pottery, which offers many different levels of interpretation, will provide greater insights into how specific categories (regional, chronological, morphological, technical, et cetera) of material contribute to teaching and learning outcomes on a wide range of issues.

From an examination of the biography of the Bab adh-Dhra' objects, it is clear that the collection has a rich history beyond Near Eastern mortuary practices during the EBA which can be used to inform students about a variety of topics relating to Near Eastern archaeology. Some of these topics address the ancient world, such as the archaeology of death and ancient ceramic technologies, but others involve current issues in archaeological praxis, such as post-excavation collection management practices, the curation crisis and the looting of archaeological sites in the Middle East.

Preliminary findings from Lee's study indicate that the Bab adh-Dhra' vessels can be successfully deployed in the classroom to develop student knowledge and understanding of several topic areas, such as those mentioned above. Students engaged in the study reported increases in both transferable and subject-specific skills and felt more confident about entering the archaeological field after their experience with the Bab adh-Dhra' collection (Fig. 8).⁸⁷ The Bab adh-Dhra' assemblage now features frequently in undergraduate teaching and learning, making the Melbourne context an excellent example of the benefits of the legal global movement of objects.

By tracking the biographies of objects, it is possible to begin to unpack the histories that they have accumulated, and continue to accumulate, throughout their lifespan. Doing so not only increases our understanding of these objects and the persons and events to which they are connected, but also forces us to recognise how we can influence (and conserve) the ongoing lives of these objects.

The biography of the objects from Bab adh-Dhra' A 72 South continues to evolve. In 2020 Morag Kersel plans to travel to Melbourne to see and study them. The purpose of the visit is twofold: firstly, it relates to Kersel's own research and the 'Follow the Pots' project; and secondly, it is part of a new collaborative venture between Kersel and the authors of this article, known as 'Object Lessons' and inspired by the movement of objects from the Early Bronze Age site of Bab adh-Dhra'. This project plans to investigate the effects of the movement of objects from Bab adh-Dhra', in order to assess the consequences of such movement for our understanding of the past and the impact that movement has on university-level pedagogy. As part of the 'Object Lesson' collaboration, we are interested in documenting and understanding the movement of objects from their original archaeological findspots: archaeological artefacts may be transferred through leasing or long-term loans, legalised trade, or diplomatic gifts (that is, positive movement), or at

⁸⁶ Bain and Ellenbogen 2002, p. 163; Rowe 2002.

⁸⁷ Lee 2019, pp. 53–57.



Fig. 8. Undergraduate students at the University of Melbourne handling and discussing the Bab adh-Dhra' vessels in the Object-Based Learning Labs in the Arts West Building (Photographer Gemma Lee).

other times through clandestine excavations, theft, unauthorised border crossings, or object laundering (that is, negative movement).

The positive movement of archaeological artefacts, such as the example from Bab adh-Dhra', to educational institutions guarantees that Jordanian archaeological material is readily available for study, is curated and stored in safe facilities, and can be viewed publicly, resulting in both pedagogical and research benefits. Responsible pedagogical access to this material, with the participation of the Jordanian government, adds to the production of archaeological knowledge in a way that benefits everyone. Further research and assessment are required to understand the mechanics of such movement of objects so that this might become a model of international collaboration.

The biography of the Bab adh-Dhra' objects has thus informed a new program towards the responsible and positive management of archaeological material across borders. From their manufacture and mortuary use, to the looting and salvage excavations at Bab adh-Dhra', to their path through the curation crisis and various archaeological collections management practices, the Bab adh-Dhra' tomb groups have significantly increased our understanding of key issues facing archaeologists in Jordan and the surrounding regions. It is expected that in their current role as museum objects and aids for teaching and research they will continue to provide inspiration for tracking object movements and biographies going forward.

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