

YAQUSH PROJECT REPORT

David Schloen

A seven-member team from the Oriental Institute worked at Yaqush for four weeks in September 1995. This site, which is located in the northern Jordan Valley, on the western side of the Jordan River near a major ford, was an Early Bronze Age village that survived for an unusually long period, from about 3300 to 2300 B.C. Several hundred square meters of the site were excavated on behalf of the Oriental Institute in 1989 and 1991 under the direction of the late Douglas Esse, then professor of Syro-Palestinian archaeology in the Institute (see his report in the *1991/92 Annual Report*). Esse's successor, David Schloen, has undertaken to complete the project and to publish the results of the Oriental Institute's work at Yaqush. The 1995 excavations were purposely conducted on a small scale as a means of becoming acquainted with the site and developing a plan for further excavation. The team members consisted of David and Sandra Schloen, Timothy Harrison (formerly a student of Douglas Esse who completed his

University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation on Early Bronze Age Palestine in the summer of 1995), and four students of Near Eastern archaeology from the University of Chicago: Catharine Clark, Judith Harris, Robert Harris, and Jason Ur. Accommodations and logistical support were provided by the members of Kibbutz Gesher, whose friendly cooperation is greatly appreciated. A new square, 10 × 10 m, was opened on the summit of the site, in an area where Esse had discovered well-preserved architectural remains from the earlier part of the Early Bronze Age, dating to the “pre-urban” phase at the end of the fourth millennium B.C. The 1995 team exposed the remainder of a domestic complex that had been partially uncovered in 1991, discovering evidence of a fiery destruction, including charred roof beams that had fallen in place and smashed pottery vessels lying on the floor of the house. The archaeological potential of this area of the site was confirmed, and it will be a focus of future excavations, providing evidence to complement the later material from the “urban” phase of the Early Bronze Age that Esse had unearthed elsewhere on the site. The work of analyzing and publishing the material from Yaqush has also begun and will continue over the next few years; in particular, a major goal of the Yaqush project is the detailed quantification of pottery, stone tools, bones, seeds, and other material found on the floors of destroyed houses, with the aim of determining patterns of human activity and changes in that activity over time. This will contribute to our understanding of the function of the site and could suggest explanations for the long-term survival of this village in a period when many neighboring villages were abandoned, their inhabitants having been absorbed into the larger urban centers that emerged in the area around 3000 B.C.
