

CHAPTER 8

THE IRON AGE TOMB AT TSUR NATAN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

What evidentially-justified general observations can be made about this tomb? We cannot enter into a lengthy discussion here—we hope to publish an article soon which will expand beyond the scope of this excavation report—but nevertheless we want to touch on some points raised by our findings.

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Despite some obvious disturbance, the great majority of artifacts were found in what appear to be *in situ* clusters (Fig. 8.1, Tables 8.1-4), in which artifacts are grouped in a way that suggests the survival of original placement in burial kits of the kind documented elsewhere in the Iron Age (see Bloch-Smith 1992: 36). However, given the relatively poor preservation state of the human remains, we must be somewhat cautious in our association of these clusters with the particular interments we identified. Therefore we should draw only tentative conclusions relating to how sex or age may have influenced grave gift choices. That having been said, the clusters themselves should be considered as discrete—if incomplete—burial kits. Upon analysis, the following inter-cluster patterns stand out:

- Seals: three of the six seals came from one cluster (color-coded green) with a further scarab (Fig. 5.1:4; reg. no. 32) found nearby, if not in the same cluster.
- Beads: of the 28 beads for which find spots were recorded (85% of the assemblage), 16 came from the green cluster with the rest quite evenly spread among the others (3-5 apiece).
- Metal objects: all the bronze bracelets/anklets were found in the orange cluster, along with the sole arrowhead recovered, whilst the only iron bracelet

was found in another cluster (blue), and the fibulae and metal beads in a third (green).

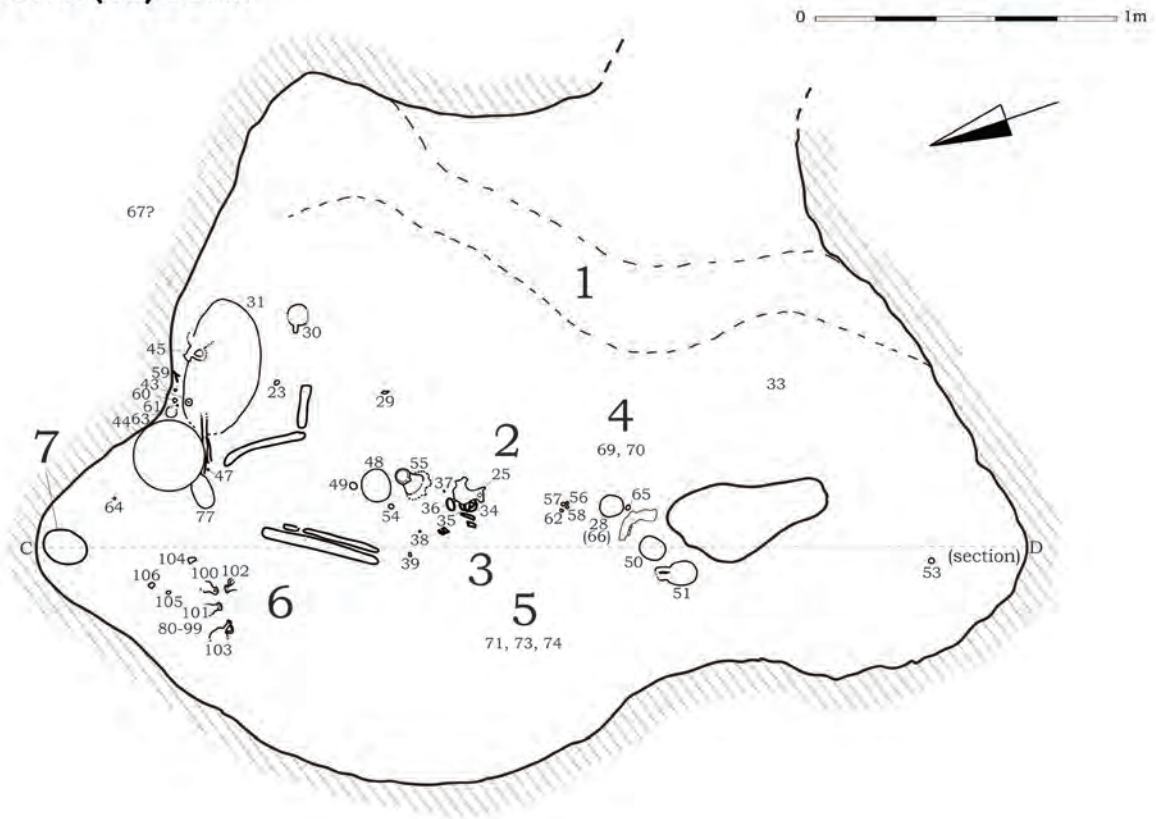
- Equally of interest is that the anthropomorphic pendant was found alone, away from all interments, at the secluded south end of the tomb.

One is tempted to conclude that the green cluster was the most high-status burial kit, as it contained the most objects, such as at least half of all scarabs, the majority of beads (including both the metal beads), and the only recovered fibulae.

Table 8.1. Breakdown of artifacts from blue-colored cluster in Figure 8.1.

Reg. no.	Object	Period
23?	Iron bracelet/anklet fragment	?
30	Jug	IA IIA
31	Jar	IB-IIA
43	Elongated stone pendant	?
44	Large bowl (not preservable)	?
45	Small jar (not preservable)	?
47	Iron bracelet/anklet fragment	?
59	Short globular glass bead	?
60	Flint (non-diagnostic)	?
61	Long oblate glass bead	?
63	Juglet	IA IIA
64	Cut <i>Conus</i> shell bead	?
77	Juglet (not preservable)	?

TOMB (L2) PLAN



TOMB (L2) SECTION

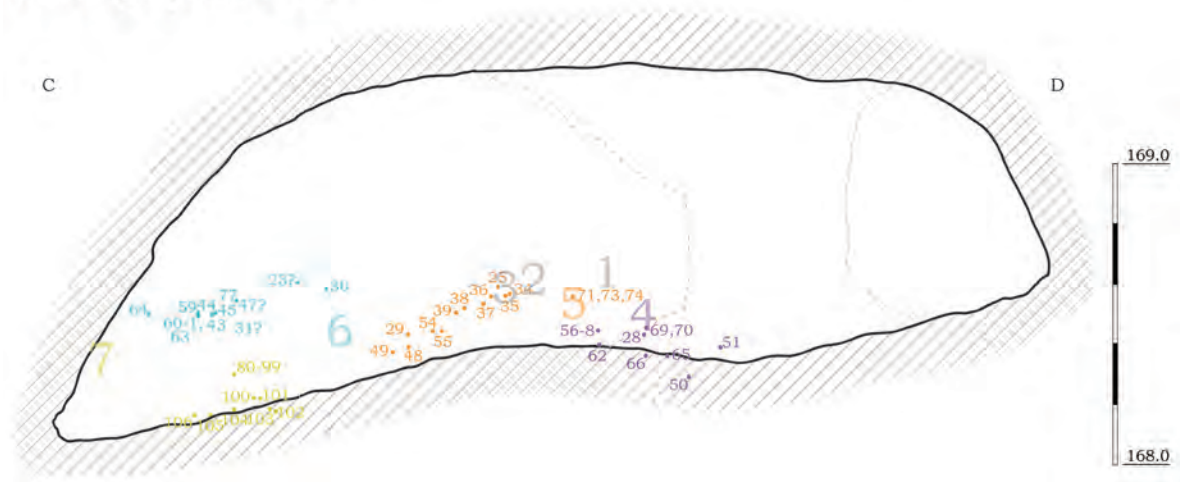


Figure 8.1. Plan and section of the tomb from the west, with the shaft marked on the east side, several identified human remains (large numbers) and the finds (small numbers) which according to our tentative spatial analysis seem most likely associated with each interment. Note also the irregular cave shape and the non-anthropogenic bedrock column near the south side of the cave.

Table 8.2. Breakdown of artifacts from green-colored cluster in Figure 8.1.

Reg. no.	Object	Period
80	Possible ochre fragment (lost)	?
81	Pottery vessel (lost)	?
82	Burnt flint (non-diagnostic)	?
83	Truncated cone stamp seal	IA IB
84	Scaraboid seal	Late IA IB-early IA IIA / 21 st dynasty
85	Scarab seal	Late IA IB-early IA IIA / 21 st dynasty
86	Bowl (non-diagnostic)	?
87	Fibula fragment	?
88	Fibula fragment	?
89	Short tubular glass bead	?
90	Standard globular glass bead	?
91	Short globular faience bead	?
92	Metal bead	?
93	<i>Glycymeris</i> shell	?
94	Medium jar (non-diagnostic)	?
95	Standard globular faience bead	?
96	Standard globular faience bead	?
97	Metal bead	?
98/1	Short tubular stone bead	?
98/2	Short tubular stone bead	?
98/3	Standard globular glass bead	?
98/4	Long tubular stone bead	?
98/5	Long biconical stone bead	?
99	Long granulated faience bead	?
100	Juglet (not preservable)	
101	Juglet	IA IIA
102	Juglet (not preservable)	?
103	Juglet (not preservable)	?
104	Flint (non-diagnostic)	?
105	Standard globular faience bead	?
106	'Shell'	?

Table 8.3. Breakdown of artifacts from the orange-colored cluster in Figure 8.1.

Reg. no.	Object	Period
25	Zoomorphic vessel	IA IIA
29	Arrowhead	IA IB
34	Bronze bracelet/anklet	IA IIA?
35	Bronze bracelet/anklet	IA IIA?
36	Bronze bracelet/anklet	IA IIA?
37	Standard globular faience bead	?
38	Standard globular faience bead	?
39	Cut cowry shell bead	?
48	Chalice	IA IB-IIA
55	Jug	IA IIA
49	Non-worked stone (discarded)	-
54	Bead (lost)	?

Table 8.4. Breakdown of artifacts from purple-colored cluster in Figure 8.1.

Reg. no.	Object	Period
28	Juglet	IA IIA
50	Lamp	?(LB-IA IIA)
51	Juglet	IA IIA
56	Bead (lost)	?
57	Short globular glass bead	?
58	Perforated <i>Nassarius</i> shell bead	?
62	Perforated <i>Nassarius</i> shell bead	?
65	Scarab seal	IA IIA
66	Possible turquoise fragment (lost)	?
69	Long tubular faience bead	?
70	Long oblate faience bead	?

FINDS CONSPICUOUS BY THEIR ABSENCE

All of our tomb findings are common and fit with previous understandings of south Levantine burial cultures during the period in question. Other artifacts, however, might have been expected and therefore their absence is worth commenting upon. For instance, we note that no gold or silver was found. Objects made from these materials have been found in tombs of the coastal plain, and the Jezreel and Jordan Valleys dating to the 12-10th centuries (Bloch-Smith 1992: 84). They are known also from highland tombs of the 7th century on. In between, however, during the 10-8th centuries, it seems no gold or silver was left in tombs. The Tsur Natan tomb supports the conclusion that gold and silver were scarce during that period.

Bodies are thought to have usually been buried with clothes (Bloch-Smith 1992: 87). But we found only two possible fibulae. This relative dearth of clothes pins is reflected in most Iron Age interments. Addressing this peculiarity, Bloch-Smith (*ibid.*) proposes: (1) poor preservation, (2) that only elites possessed those items, or (3) that pins were worn on cloaks or other articles of clothing not usually worn in burial.

The lack of combs, mirrors, cosmetic accessories and hair clasps in this tomb may also be telling. These items are associated exclusively with adolescent and adult females (*ibid.*), suggesting that no such were interred here.

Finally, the lack of Egyptian, Philistine and Cypriot pottery in this tomb may conceivably be seen as reflecting a culture whose external contacts were of a limited extent (see Bloch-Smith 1992: 87-88).

By way of caveat, we must append to these tentative observations the fact that diachronic patterns in the burial culture of this period are obscured by the long use of these tombs, and the disturbance of human remains and artifacts (Bloch-Smith 1992: 63).

BURIAL TYPE: ETHNIC VS. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Often in order to understand one archaeological phenomenon it is necessary to compare it to others

and place it in a wider context. Cave tombs are found primarily in soft chalk and limestone outcrops of the hills east and west of the Jordan River. From the limited information we have gleaned through archaeology, it appears that in these regions cave tombs were the predominant burial type during the LB (Gonen 1979) and on into the early IA centuries (Bloch-Smith 1992: 39). The number of cave tombs in use during the IA IB-IIA period is double that of both the previous and subsequent centuries (*ibid.* 59). In terms of time and space, therefore, the Tsur Natan tomb seems to fit this pattern. Archaeological research suggests that from the 10th century on, there was an increase in the number of cave tombs, which seems to go hand in hand with increased settlement (*ibid.*). Subsequently it appears that the bench tomb became more and more common in the region and fewer sites were associated with the former interment type. So at Lachish, Bet Shemesh, Gezer and Tell en-Nasbeh the cave tomb was the only burial form in the 12th and 11th centuries; from the 10-8th centuries, the bench tomb was introduced and was used alongside cave tombs (*ibid.*).

Bloch-Smith (1992: 39-40, 55, 58) proposes two interesting alternative theories for what these parallel burial types are saying about their culture or cultures. One theory focuses on ethnicity, developing the idea that the different Levantine burial types represented distinct populations. Bloch-Smith saw a “very high” correlation between burial types and the settlements of groups “known” from the Bible and other texts. Thus she associates with Canaanites the simple and cist burials found in the coastal plain and lowlands (including the Jezreel, Beth Shean and Jordan Valleys). Jar burials were a northern ethnic tradition and clustered in what is now northern Israel, the central and north coast, and the contiguous northern valleys and the Transjordanian plateau. Egyptians buried their dead in pit graves, cist graves and anthropoid coffins, the Assyrians in bathtub coffins, and the Phoenicians both cremated and inhumed along the coast from Khalde down to Tell er-Ruqeish. The “indigenous” highlanders—mentioned in the Bible as Amorites

and others—were being buried in caves since the Bronze Age. By the 8th century the bench tomb tradition was introduced by the Judahites, distinguishable by their Yahwistic religion. By this “ethnic” model, the juxtaposed burial types can be explained as reflecting distinct, coexisting groups. Azor, Lachish and to a lesser extent Jerusalem display a large variety of types, which supported for Bloch-Smith the impression—also offered by other evidence—that these urban centers were more cosmopolitan (*ibid.*).

Whilst a general picture of ethnic/cultural associations for burial types is somewhat supported by artifacts and distributions, Bloch-Smith concedes—rightly, we believe—that the picture in the Shephelah and highlands is less than clear. It is possible that a single population who buried their dead in cave tombs developed from within its own culture an offshoot practice of bench tomb burial. To accommodate this possibility, Bloch-Smith proposed an alternative, economy-based model, whereby a multicultural population buried their dead in both cave and bench tombs, the choice to use one or the other coming down to effort and therefore cost. In support of this, Bloch-Smith pointed to the following patterns and trends:

1. “co-existing” cave and bench tombs at Amman, Gezer, Jerusalem, Lachish, Tell en-Nasbeh and elsewhere,
2. the spread of bench tombs from the coast and close-by valleys up into the highlands over the course of the Iron Age,
3. the fact that in the Shephelah and western highlands cave tombs were only slowly complemented by bench tombs (Bet Shemesh, Gibeah, Gibeon, Khirbet Rabud),
4. and a pattern whereby throughout the upland region, on either side of the Jordan Valley, as bench tombs became more frequent, cave tombs became more scarce.

All of this could be explained as a single native culture or multicultural milieu giving rise to varying practices in a period of increasing wealth and urbanization, whereby bench tombs were favored across

cultures not in order to make ethnic references but as one option for families seeking elaboration and fashion.¹ Or perhaps there spread a Judahite/Yahwistic cultural preference to which this burial type was a reference? The picture is naturally unclear; we should expect that both ethnic and socio-economic factors probably played a role in bringing about such a rich and varied *bricolage* of mortuary customs.

HOW DID THE IRON AGE PEOPLE CONCEIVE OF THE DEAD AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LIVING?

This question is one which any tomb excavator is bound to wonder; it should be one of our primary research questions. Perhaps one reason why not enough of these tombs have been published is that there is a lack of awareness of how desperately our understanding of Iron Age beliefs relies on well-published burial data. In addressing this question for the Iron Age we have the happy advantage of being able to read contemporary or near-contemporary words, written by members of those self-same societies (Bloch-Smith 1992: 110-2, 121-31). The many biblical references to burial show it to be considered a form of “gathering to one’s ancestors” (Gen. 25.8; 35.29; Num. 20.24; Judg. 2.10). Ancestral tombs were also thought to have efficacy in that the deceased could influence the living: the dead were believed to have consultation powers, giving instructions and messages (see Bloch-Smith 1992: 121); they could bestow and revive life (i.e. fertility blessings) (2 Kings. 13.20-21, 1 Sam. 1); and there are also biblical references to a belief that the dead could exact vengeance (2 Sam. 4.12). Tombs were also a claim on the land or served as boundaries of territory (see Bloch-Smith 1992: 122-124) (what is known as enculturation, a phenomenon also most relevant to the region’s socio-political landscape today!). Over time considerable pressure was applied to limit this cult of the dead, with 7th century Deuteronomic and

1 Population estimates are nowhere near satisfied by the burials so far found, so we might assume that the poor of all cultures were merely buried in simple graves (Bloch-Smith 1992: 149).

other writings going so far as to establish laws on the matter (Deut. 26.14, Gen. 28.22). It is likely that any local cults or any such homage paid to supernatural powers other than Yahweh were perceived as threats to the power of a Jerusalem-centered hierarchy which was learning to wield the powerful political weapon of exclusivist Yahwism.

CONCLUSIONS

Our impression is that this Tsur Natan tomb was probably a family/kin group burial place, fitting with the pattern noticed in the area by Ayalon *et al.* (1994: 2), who pointed out clusters of wine and oil presses, cisterns and tombs on and around the hilltop. The burial gifts found in the tomb appear to have been quite common and to comply with broader cultural trends, indicating local patterns and cultural and economic contacts further afield. At the same time, the artifact clusters indicate differential treatment of the individuals interred here, with the green-colored cluster in Fig. 8.1 receiving the lion's share of burial

gifts in terms of both quantity and quality (see also Table 8.2), except for the metal objects which were focused in the orange cluster (Table 8.3). The possible anthropomorphic pendant, meanwhile, was deposited in an isolated location within the tomb, away from all the interments.

By adding to the growing corpus of Iron Age tombs in the southern Levant, we hope this publication will contribute to much-needed research in the archaeology of death, and other areas reliant on particular artifact assemblages. We have tried to touch upon questions which we believe are worthy of further investigation. However, in making it our priority to publish our findings, we recognize that we have placed more emphasis on description than on discussion, and we have not invested in as broad and up-to-date research as we might have. This was a decision required by the constraints of time and budget. In an article to be published soon we hope to expand upon and investigate at a higher resolution the questions this tomb has provoked in its excavators.

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CHAPTER 9

FEATURES RELATING TO WINE, OIL AND FOOD PRODUCTION (PHASE 2)

Conn Herriott

One oil press and one press basin were found at the site. These had been respected and avoided by the quarry features, which may indicate that—whilst pre-dating the quarry—they were still in use at that time.

L5 is a simple press installation (Fig. 9.1 and Plan 3 [p. 68]) consisting of a small treading floor (1.05 x 0.85m) linked by a channel to a 0.52m-deep vat, which in turn led to a smaller, cupmark-like