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THE FINAL DWELLING: FUNERARY ARCHITECTURE AND BURIAL CUSTOMS AT HELLENISTIC-PERIOD MARESHA

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Abstract: The rock-cut tombs of Hellenistic Maresha, dating to the 3rd–2nd centuries BCE, offer vital insights into burial architecture, funerary customs, and the multicultural composition of this urban center. Over fifty tombs, predominantly of the "Alexandrian model," feature rectangular halls with symmetrically arranged *kokhim* (loculi), often gabled and tall, accessed via stepped passages and sealed with stone slabs. A unique architectural repertoire at Maresha includes standing pits with surrounding ledges, apsidal recesses with *kokhim*, and two-tiered halls layouts—elements absent in other contemporaneous burial sites in Israel. The tombs reflect careful planning, facilitated by the local soft chalk and influenced by Alexandrian prototypes, particularly in the elaborate painted tombs (e.g., the Sidonian and Musicians' tombs).

Greek inscriptions name the deceased, often with Hellenistic royal or theophoric names, although the population comprised Idumeans, Phoenicians, Arabs, and others. This elite segment adopted Greek names and cultural forms, likely to align with prevailing norms of Hellenistic urban society. The architecture and names reflect both assimilation and local continuity. Burial practices involved primary interment in *kokhim*, with later reuse and ossilegium indicating Jewish presence in the Roman period.

Tomb inscriptions span the Ptolemaic and Seleucid eras, with the latest dated to 112/111 BCE, aligning with John Hyrcanus's conquest. Subsequent civic activity is attested until 108/7 BCE. Though looted, tomb contents—pottery, lamps, coins, jewelry, and coffin fittings—support this chronology. The Maresha necropoleis, especially their architectural and artistic features, strongly influenced later *kokhim* tombs in Second Temple Jerusalem. These tombs attest to the transmission of Alexandrian funerary models into Coele-Syria and reveal the cultural integration and social stratification of Maresha's inhabitants prior to its destruction.

Keywords: *Hellenistic Maresha, Rock-cut tombs, Funerary architecture, Alexandrian influence, Family hypogea, Hellenistic wall paintings, Greek epigraphy, Idumea, Funerary practices.*

GEOGRAPHICAL-HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Tel Maresha is located within the Beth Guvrin–Maresha National Park in the Judean Shephelah, 2 km south of the Beth Guvrin junction and Nahal Guvrin (Fig. 1). In Arabic it is known as Tel Sandahanna, after the Sandahanna (Saint Anne) church, a Byzantine- and Frankish-period church whose monumental remains have survived *in situ* 700 m to the northeast (Fig. 2). The tell

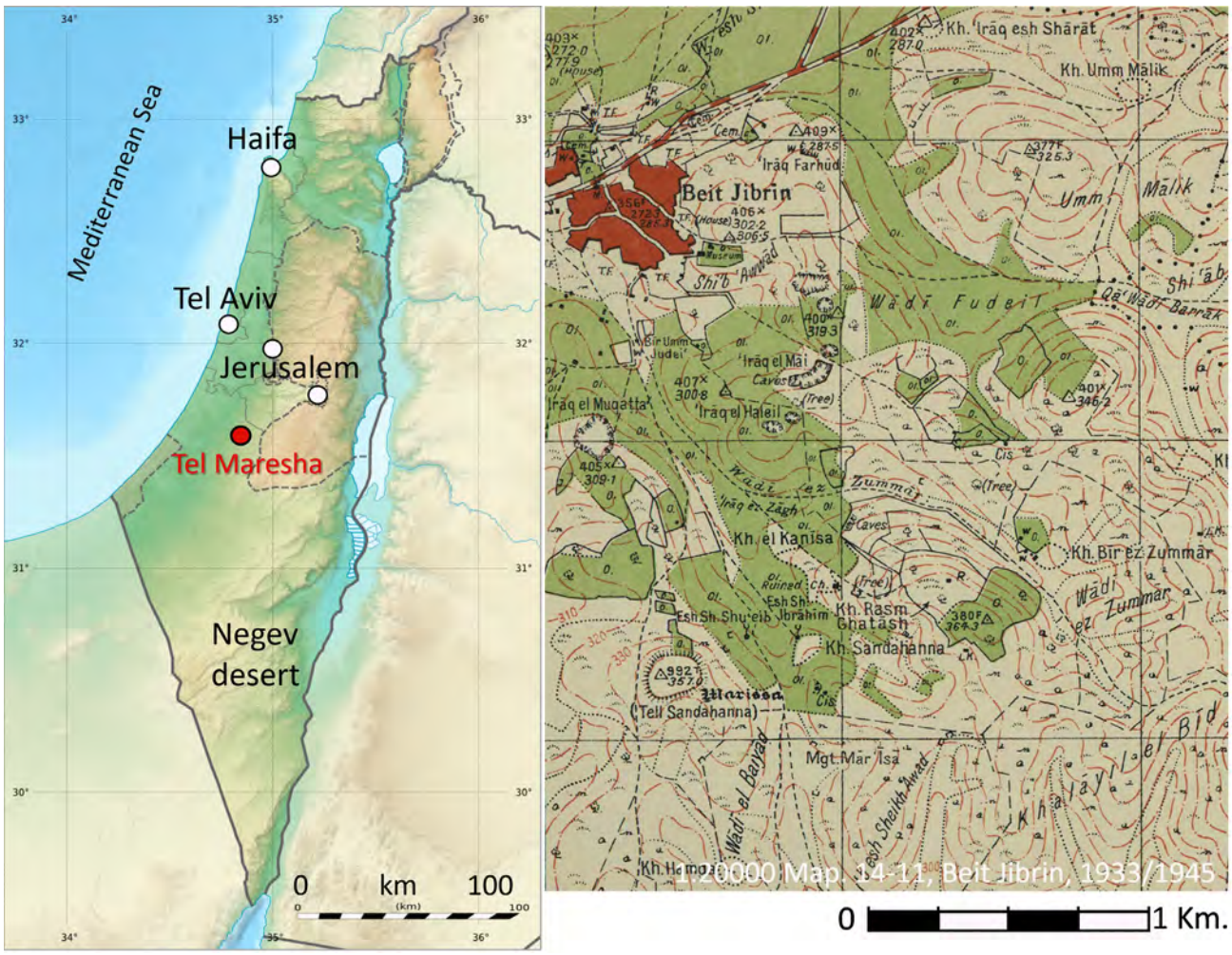


Fig. 1. Location map (B. Zissu).

Fig. 2. Aerial view of Maresha, looking west: A. The tell; B. The lower city; C. Remains of Sandahanna church; D. Location of tombs 554, 555, 556 (B. Zissu).

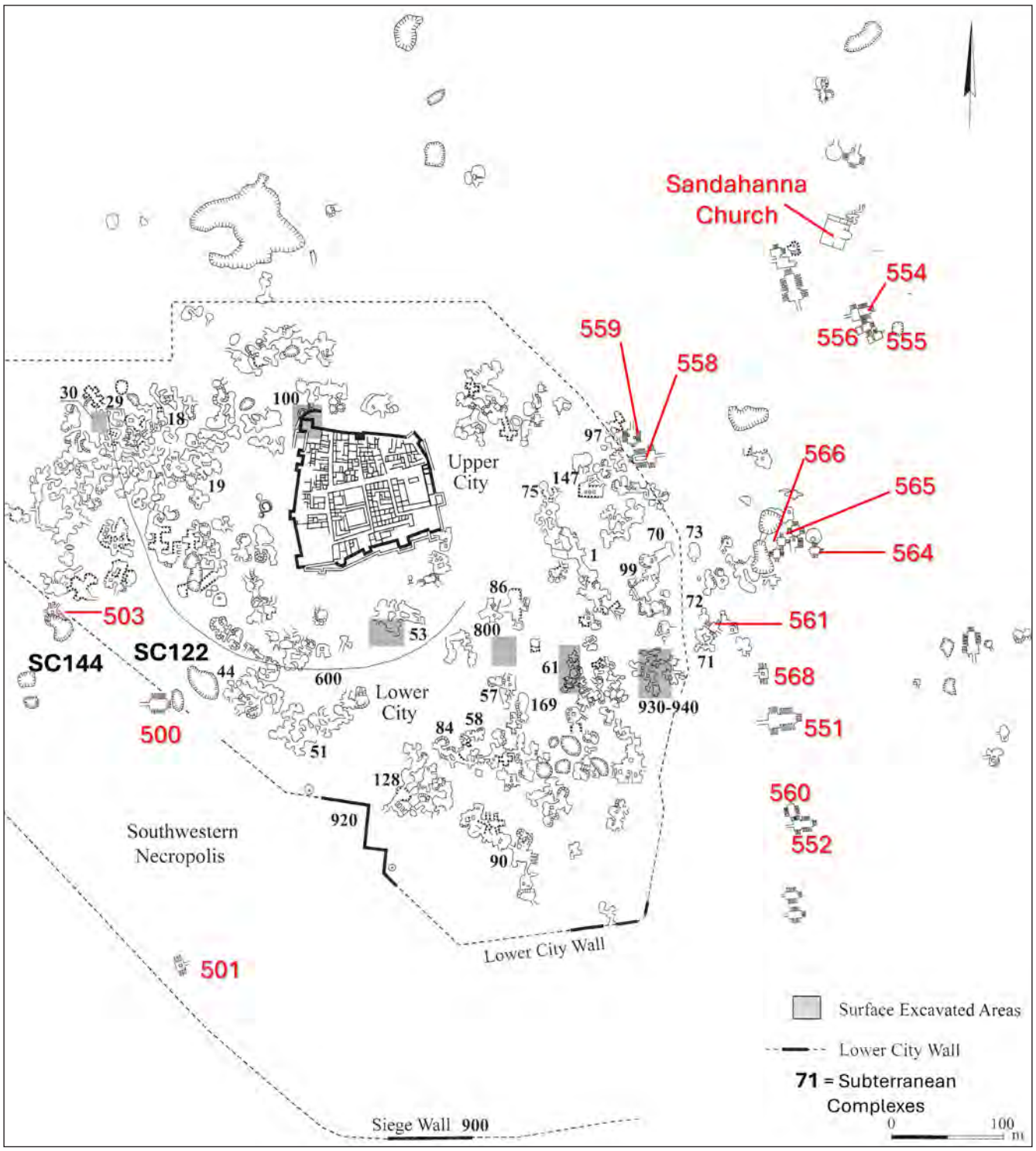


Fig. 3. General plan of Maresha, showing tombs in EN and SWN explored by Kloner's expedition (A. Kloner and B. Zissu).

is situated 357 m above sea level, and it rises about 20 m above its surroundings.[19]

The archaeological site consists of a tell, which comprises an upper city, a lower city, and a subterranean city. Surrounding the lower city is a vast necropolis composed of three main concentrations of tombs (the northern necropolis [NN], eastern necropolis [EN], and southwestern necropolis [SWN]). These cemeteries contain over 50 rock-cut tombs, which are the focus of this article (Fig. 3).

From a geological standpoint, the Maresha area consists of a harder crust (*nari*) 1–3 m thick sitting atop several dozen meters of Eocene chalk, known as the Maresha member of the Zor'a Formation. The *nari* is hard and highly resistant to weathering, whereas the chalk is homogeneous, pale, friable, soft, and impermeable to water, making it easy to carve and shape into artificial cavities. Nearby valleys contain wells dug down to the groundwater level and are covered with gray

[19] KLONER/GRAICER/ZISSU 2023, 19–21. The present study was conducted with the generous support of the Jeselsohn Epigraphic Center for Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University. We extend our gratitude to Dr. David Jeselsohn, Nili Graicer, Tal Tutka, Avner Ecker, Deborah Stern, and Tomer Saragusti for their valuable assistance in data collection and analysis.

rendzina—soil formed by the breakdown of chalk, which is conducive to agriculture.[20]

The Biblical city of Maresha belonged to the tribe of Judah[21] and was given to the sons of Caleb of Hebron.[22] King Rehoboam of Judah fortified Maresha and nearby localities in the Shephelah, including Soco, Adullam, Gath, Ziph, Adoraim, Lachish, and Azeka.[23] The prophet Micah the Morashtite foretold a calamity for the localities of the Shephelah—Maresha, Lachish, Adullam, Moresheth Gath, and Achzib[24]—and his prophesy came true when they were conquered by Sennacherib, king of Assyria. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia who conquered Jerusalem and Judah in 586 BCE, destroyed Maresha and its neighboring cities and exiled their inhabitants.

As described in the Bible, the Persian period began with Cyrus's proclamation in 538 BCE. The exiles in Babylonia returned to their land and rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple from their ruins. Beginning during the reign of Darius I (521–486 BCE), the Persian Empire was governed through administrative districts known as satrapies, which were divided into subdistricts. The southern Levant was part of the satrapy of Ebir-Nari (Transeuphratène), which included the subdistrict of Yehud (or Yehud Medinata). The existence of Yehud is documented archaeologically in the word "Yehud" stamped on tiny silver coins and on jar handles.[25] Idumea, the region that borders Yehud to the south, is presumed to have had its geographical border passing through the Ela Valley and continuing south to Keilah and southeast to Beth Zur. Thus, during the Persian period, Maresha was in Idumea.[26]

The conquest of the Levant by Alexander the Great in 332 BCE marks the start of the Hellenistic period. During this time, far-reaching changes took place in the region, including the Hellenization process, manifested in the adoption and assimilation of elements of Greek language and culture.[27]

After the death of Alexander, the territories he had conquered were divided among the generals who succeeded him (the "Diadochi"). The satrap of Egypt, Ptolemy I Soter, founded the Ptolemaic dynasty in his capital, Alexandria, and took over Coele-Syria, which was divided into large administrative units (eparchies), including Samaria, Judea, and Idumea. Idumea is mentioned for the first time in the writings of the 1st-century CE Greek historian Diodorus Siculus in connection with the diadochos Antigonus Monophthalmus, who recognized Nabatean control of the trade routes through the desert.[28]

The Greek rulers encouraged the migration of Greek, Macedonian, and Phoenician-Cypriot settlers and merchants to Hellenistic cities in the eastern Mediterranean Basin. Municipal institutions conferred status and official positions on the socioeconomic elite and on immigrants with occupations that were in demand, thereby exposing the indigenous population to Greek culture. The authorities developed a standardized form of the Greek language, Koine, based on the dialect used in Athens in the Classical era, and this became the lingua franca throughout the Hellenistic world. The residents of Hellenistic cities spoke and read Greek, went by Greek names, and adopted the Greek way of life and social practices. The Greek lifestyle was evident, for example, in architectural decoration, the use of imported pottery, the blend of local cultic practices with the cults of Greek gods, and the veneration of Greek-style figurines.[29]

Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BCE) initiated the revitalization of cities with military and economic potential. An important source from his time is the archive of Zenon, discovered in Faiyum, Egypt, in 1915. This collection of Greek papyri primarily relates to the administrative and financial activities of Zenon, who served as secretary and agent to Apollonius the Dioiketes, the finance minister under Ptolemy II. Zenon visited the region in 259–258 BCE and reported on his activities to Apollonius. Maresha, mentioned three times in the archive (PCairZen 1.59006, 1.59015, 4.59537, in the Hellenized form *Marisa*), emerges as a major city in Idumea and a hub for the slave trade.[30]

In the 3rd century BCE, the Syrian Wars broke out between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kings over control of Coele-Syria.[31] In the Fifth Syrian War in 198 BCE, Antiochus III (who later added "the Great" to his name) defeated Ptolemy V Epiphanes in the Battle of Paneas. Seleucid Israel was governed through four eparchies: Samaria, to which Judea was subject, Idumea, Paralia (the coast), and Galaaditis (Gilead). Idumea was divided into subunits known as hyparchies, including Gazara (Gezer), Azotus (Ashdod), Jamnia (Yavne), and Marisa—the main city in western Idumea.[32]

The Books of the Maccabees and the writings of Josephus describe the revolt led by Judah Maccabee (167 BCE) against the antireligious decrees of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the hostility of the citizens of the Hellenistic cities toward their Jewish neighbors. In Marisa and the non-Jewish cities of Gazara, Jaffa, Azotus, Ascalon (Ashkelon), and Jamnia, militias were recruited to help the Seleucid troops put down the Jewish uprising. Judah and his brothers took punitive action against them and led their army through Hebron and Marisa to Azotus.[33]

During the decades-long Jewish struggle against Seleucid rule, the positions of high priest and ethnarch were given to Simeon the Hasmonean (142 BCE); after he was assassinated, his son John Hyrcanus led the people (134–104 BCE). Antiochus VII invaded Judea with a large army and besieged Jerusalem. After about two years, John Hyrcanus reached an agreement with the king under which he would pay a fine and would send Jewish troops to take part in the Seleucid military campaign in the east. After Antiochus VII was killed in battle against the Parthians (129 BCE), Hyrcanus formed an alliance with Rome and made peace with Alexander Zabinas, governor of the coastal strip from Jaffa to Ascalon. Disputes broke out between the claimants to the Seleucid throne,

[20] KLONER 2003, 2–5.
[21] JOSHUA 15:44.
[22] 1 CHRONICLES 2:42.
[23] 2 CHRONICLES 11:5–9.
[24] MICAH 1:13–15; JOSEPHUS, *ANTIQUITIES* 8.246.
[25] STERN 2001; LIPSCHITS/VANDERHOOFT 2011.
[26] KLONER 2011; LEVIN 2022.
[27] HORNBLOWER 2014, 359–362.
[28] SARTRE 2021; ELIAV 2021.
[29] BERLIN 1997.
[30] PESTMAN 2020; BERLIN 1997.
[31] For a new discussion of this geographical term, see COHEN 2006, 38–39.
[32] MARCIAK 2018.
[33] KASHER 1990.

Antiochus VIII Grypus and Antiochus IX Cyzicenus, ending with the retreat of Grypus to Syria in 113/112 BCE. At that time, Hyrcanus and his sons Aristobulus and Antigonus launched a military campaign in southern Judea, the Hebron Hills, and the Shephelah. After capturing Marisa, Hyrcanus offered its residents a choice: accept Jewish law or be exiled.[34]

Idumea was under Hasmonean rule until the Roman conquest of Judea and Jerusalem under the general Pompey (63 BCE).[35] Pompey rehabilitated Hellenistic cities that had been destroyed by the Hasmoneans, including Maresha/Marisa, Samaria, and the port cities. His successor, the Roman governor of Syria Aulus Gabinius (57–54 BCE), brought the exiles back to the Hellenistic cities.

In 40 BCE, the Roman Senate made Herod the son of Antipater—an Idumean—king of Judea, Idumea, and Paralia. But Herod's Hasmonean rival Antigonus II Mattathias (40–37 BCE) was declared king of Judea with the support of the Parthians, who had invaded Judea from the north. According to Josephus, the Parthians plundered Jerusalem and then went south and captured the important city of Maresha, which they destroyed completely (40 BCE).[36]

Following the destruction and abandonment of Maresha, the center of the region moved to the nearby village of Beth Guvrin (Aramaic for "house of the men"). It is commonly assumed that this village started to grow in the first century BCE, either following the destruction of Maresha by John Hyrcanus or after the Parthian invasion of 40 BCE. We have little archaeological or historical information about Beth Guvrin in its first hundred years. Josephus reports that Vespasian captured Idumea in 68 CE and stationed military units near a village called Betabris,[37] and its troops seem to have taken part in suppressing the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132–136 CE. [38]

Perhaps due to the Roman military presence, Beth Guvrin eventually became a major city, with most of the Judean hinterland under its jurisdiction. In 199/200 CE, the emperor Septimius Severus founded here the Roman city of Eleutheropolis, the "city of the free."[39] During the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, the local Jewish community constructed a synagogue and produced sages referenced in rabbinic texts.[40]

The church father Eusebius of Caesarea mentioned Maresha in his *Onomasticon* as a city in ruins about two miles from Eleutheropolis.[41] During the Byzantine period, Maresha was not mentioned in written sources, and its exact location was forgotten. However, the name of the Jewish village Beth Guvrin was preserved in the nearby Arab village of Beit Jibrin (Fig. 1).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RESEARCH ON MARESHA AND ITS TOMBS

In 1873–1874, the French scholar and diplomat Charles Clermont-Ganneau documented a tomb north of Tel Sandahanna with *kokhim*[42] carved out of its walls (no. 517 below; Fig. 4).[43] The British army officers Claude R. Conder and Herbert H. Kitchener then surveyed the vicinity of Tel Sandahanna in the winter of 1875 on behalf of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) and documented, among other remains, a rock-cut tomb with two chambers containing 35 gabled *kokhim*.[44]

The American archaeologist Frederick G. Bliss, who surveyed ten sites in the Judean Shephelah in the 1890s, discovered pottery at Tel Sandahanna dating to no later than the Hellenistic period. At the time, the Ottoman government was issuing two-year permits to foreign scholars to excavate 10×10 km squares. Bliss and his Irish colleague Robert Alexander S. Macalister chose an excavation area in the Shephelah with scholarly potential that included four tells: Tel as-Safi (Tel Tzafit), Tel Zakariya (Tel Azeka), Tel a-Judeideh (Tel Goded), and Tel Sandahanna (Tel Maresha). The first three sites were excavated between 1898 and 1900. Bliss and Macalister's excavation at the top of Tel Sandahanna in June–August 1900 uncovered a walled Hellenistic acropolis covering an area of 2.4 hectares, with the streets laid out in a grid pattern on top of ruins of the Judahite Iron Age II city of Maresha. Meanwhile, Macalister documented 63 ramified, rock-cut underground complexes on the slopes of the tell that include agricultural installations and quarries. It did not occur to him, however, that they had been carved out beneath the residential areas of the Hellenistic lower city, which had been completely covered or obliterated. Twelve tombs of two types were surveyed around the Arab village of Beit Jibrin and alongside the road leading south to Tel Sandahanna: *kokh* tombs, which are taller than they are wide and have a gabled ceiling; and shaft tombs with arcosolia (arched burial recesses) and troughs covered with stone slabs.[45]

Following the excavations by Bliss and Macalister at Tel Sandahanna, antiquities looters targeted nearby tombs. Soon after, rumors circulated about extraordinary antiquities from Beit Jibrin being offered for sale in the Jerusalem antiquities market. In June 1902, the scholars John P. Peters and Hermann Thiersch arrived at the site, guided by a local to two looted tombs on the eastern side of the valley, east of the tell. They were astonished by the wealth of rare, colorful paintings in the tombs, which they designated "tomb I" (now known as the "Sidonian Tomb" = E.I; 551) and "tomb II" (now known as the "Musicians' Tomb" = E.II; 552). Unfortunately, by the time they arrived, the villagers of Beit Jibrin had destroyed some of the paintings on the orders of the local sheikh. Peters and Thiersch documented these tombs in great detail, including paintings, inscriptions,

[34] JOSEPHUS, *ANTIQUITIES* 13.396; KASHER 1988, 44–78; KASHER 1990, 116–130; REGEV 2013; ATKINSON 2016.
[35] Or perhaps earlier, in 64 BCE; see CAMERON 2018.
[36] JOSEPHUS, *WAR* 1.269; JOSEPHUS, *ANTIQUITIES* 14.364; SHATZMAN 2013.
[37] JOSEPHUS, *WAR* 4.447–448.
[38] MOR 2016, 213–249; ESHEL/ZISSU 2019, 48–51.
[39] JONES 1971, 779; CASSIUS DIO, *HISTORIA ROMANA* 75.13.1.
[40] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 889–891; AVNI/DAHARI/KLONER 2008.
[41] FREEMAN-GRENVILLE/RUPERT/TAYLOR 2003; EUSEBIUS, *ONOMASTICON* 130.10, no. 682.
[42] *Kokhim* (sing., *kokh*) are elongated niches. Because this term is used in Hebrew and various Semitic texts and inscriptions, we have chosen to use it in this context. KLONER/ZISSU 2007, 72–76.
[43] CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1896, 445–447.
[44] CONDER/KITCHENER 1883, 272.
[45] BLISS/MACALISTER 1902; ZISSU/KLONER 2015a; ZISSU/KLONER 2015b.

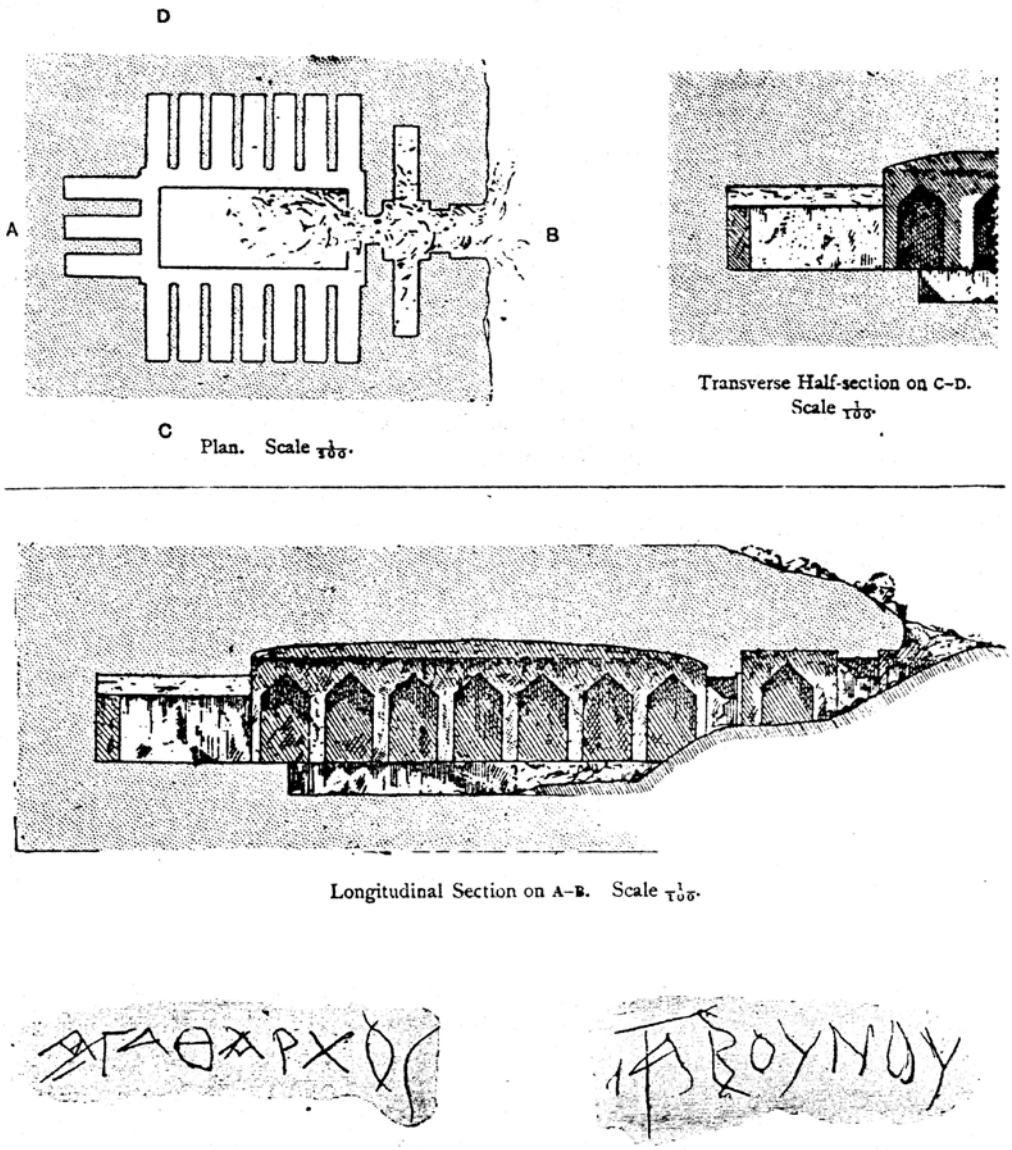


Fig. 4. Plan, sections, and two inscriptions documented by Clermont-Ganneau tomb 517 (CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1896).

and architectural and cultic elements (Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8). After about a week, the two scholars returned together with the Jerusalem-based photographer Chalil Raad to photograph the tombs and their paintings and discovered two more looted tombs in the area: tombs III and IV (E.III = 553 and E.IV = 554).[46]

The discovery of the painted tombs aroused tremendous interest among archaeologists. The Dominican priests Marie-Joseph Lagrange, Louis-Hugues Vincent, and Raphaël Savignac of the École biblique et archéologique française à Jérusalem, who were invited to the site, copied colorful frescoes and inscriptions in the two painted tombs in watercolor, and the documentary material was handed over to the PEF.[47]

The Dominican priest Félix-Marie Abel published three previously discovered *kokh* tombs: tomb V, discovered by Chester C. McCown near the Sidonian Tomb in the winter of 1921; and tombs VI and VII, discovered by Warren G. Moulton near the Musicians' Tomb in the spring of 1913.[48]

Israeli archaeologists resumed exploration of tombs and caves in the Tel Maresha area in the second half of the 20th century. Eliezer Oren surveyed the slopes to the east, north, and west of Tel Maresha between 1961 and 1963 (Fig. 9). Twenty tombs were found 500–700 m north of the tell wall and were designated N.I–N.XX; some of them were excavated. In the eastern necropolis, Oren examined seven tombs that he designated E.V–E.XI, continuing the numbering system used by Peters and Thiersch, and he also discovered three more tombs (E.XII–E.XIV). Uriel Rappaport deciphered inscriptions written or engraved on the tombs.[49]

From 1985 to 1989, Gideon Avni, Uzi Dahari, and Amos Kloner examined 12 tombs (bloc I) that had been discovered by Bliss and Macalister on the eastern slope of the Ahinoam Cave north of Tel Maresha. The tombs were designated I.75–I.86. Tombs investigated by Oren south of bloc I that had been reused later for the burial of Jews were designated I.89–I.92.[50]

[46] PETERS/THIERSCH 1905.
[47] JACOBSON 2007.
[48] ABEL 1925; MCCOWN 1923; MOULTON 1915.
[49] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984.
[50] AVNI/DAHARI/KLONER 2008, 78–79, 119–120.

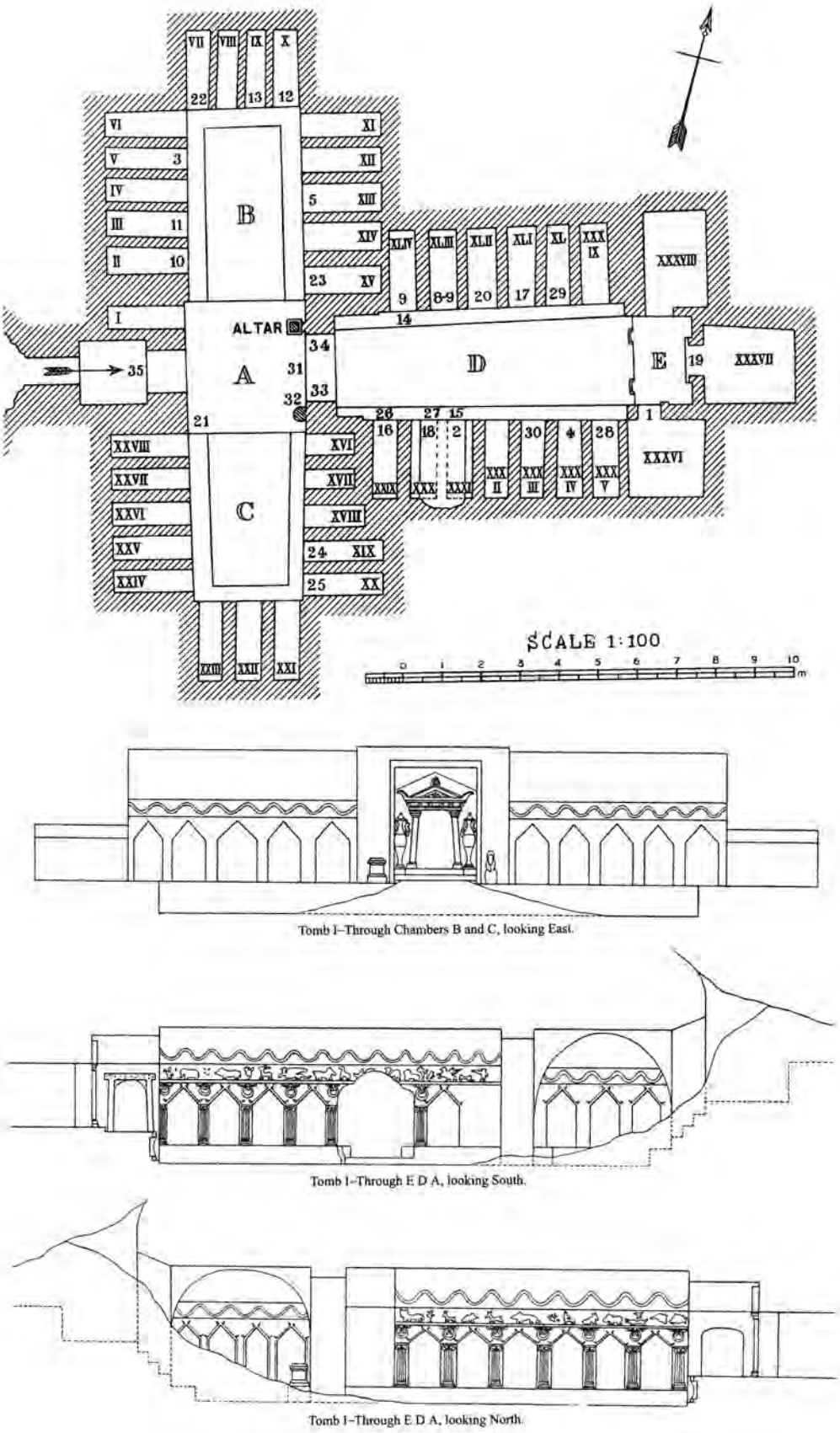


Fig. 5. Plan and sections of the Sidonian Tomb = E.I; 551 (PETERS/THIERSCH 1905).

Fig. 6. The Sidonian Tomb: colored photo of the eastern wall of Hall D, fashioned as a Greek temple (PETERS/THIERSCH 1905).

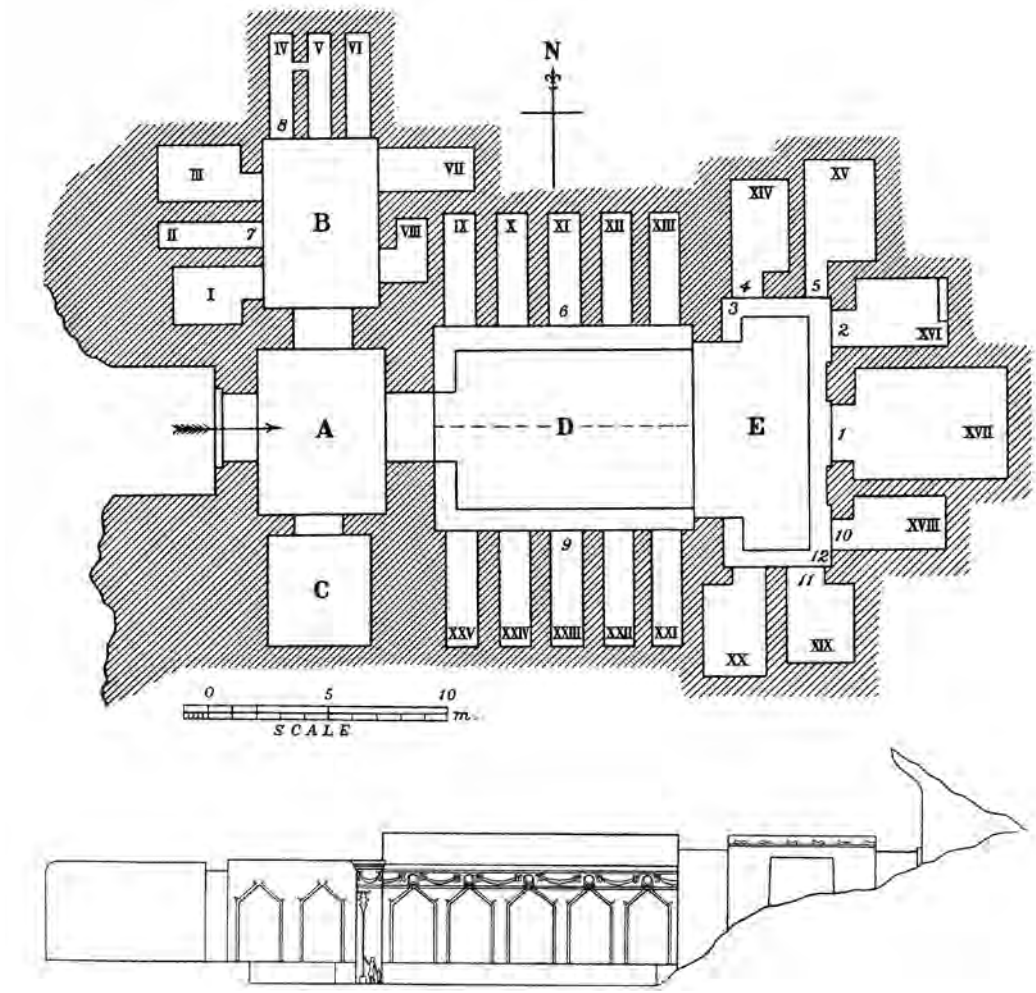


Fig. 7. Plan and sections of the Musicians' Tomb = E.II; 552 (PETERS/THIERSCH 1905).

Fig. 8. The Musicians' Tomb: colored photo of the musicians (PETERS/THIERSCH 1905).

Kloner and Yair Zoran surveyed 15 additional tombs in the 1980s, and Kloner and Bernie Alpert excavated some of them beginning in the 1990s. To create order in the designation system, all the known tombs surrounding Maresha were given new numbers: 500–509 southwest of the tell, 510–549 north of the tell, and 550–599 east of the tell.[51]

Yigal Tepper and Yuval Shahar surveyed and documented olive presses and livestock-raising installations near the tell.[52] Kloner and Nachum Sagiv, together with Zoran, documented olive presses in 1985–1986.[53] From 1989 to 1996, Kloner and Zoran documented subterranean complexes around the tell. Intensive excavations above ground and in rock-cut subterranean complexes on the slopes around Tel Maresha were conducted between 1989 and 2000 by the Maresha Excavation Expedition headed by Kloner on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and in conjunction with the National Parks Authority and the Jewish National Fund.

Since 2000, excavation of the subterranean complexes surrounding the tell has continued through the Archaeological Seminars, headed by Alpert and Ian Stern, under the direction of Kloner—in some cases as salvage excavations following looting.

Studies of the excavation finds show clearly that the subterranean complexes— which contained quarries, agricultural installations such as olive presses, stables, columbaria, bathing and immersion facilities, and cultic rooms—were carved out beneath the residential homes of the Hellenistic lower city of Maresha, which extended over the slopes surrounding the Hellenistic acropolis (upper city).[54]

Archaeological evidence indicates that each residential structure incorporated a rock-cut subterranean component designed to house agricultural installations fundamental to the household economy.[55] Stratigraphic analysis reveals that these underground complexes initially existed as separate units, which were subsequently connected through crude breaches in partition walls and roughly hewn connecting passages. The archaeological evidence suggests that the subterranean network connecting private cavities beneath residential structures was likely created during a period of acute crisis, potentially corresponding to the siege conducted by John Hyrcanus. The hasty and seemingly unplanned nature of these connections indicates that they were excavated under duress, ultimately contributing to the structural compromise of the city's economic infrastructure and rendering its agricultural installations inoperable. Material culture recovered from the site, including ceramic assemblages, numismatic evidence, and epigraphic finds, suggests that the city fell to John Hyrcanus circa 108 BCE or shortly thereafter and was abandoned.[56]

Homes in the lower city, whose walls were built mainly out of chalk, disintegrated over the millennia and their aboveground ruins were obliterated and vanished. Extensive, varied epigraphic, numismatic, and material finds slid down the slope into the rock-cut cavities and complexes together with dirt and debris from the homes. Excavations unearthed homes built atop subterranean complexes, with finds dated to the Hellenistic period, including architectural elements, everyday household implements, a variety of oil lamps, imported wine amphorae and prestigious goods, ceramic figurines and sculpted pottery, glass vessels, stone altars, loom weights and spindle weights, coins and lead weights, lead slings, talus bones, and ostraca with inscriptions in Aramaic and Greek.[57] These finds contribute greatly to our understanding of the functioning of the Hellenistic city and the lives of its residents and reflect the importance and status of the city of Maresha over the centuries, derived from its strategic location in the Judean Shephelah near a major crossroads and from the beneficial properties of the local chalk, which the inhabitants took advantage of for economic and commercial development.

The discovery of the Hellenistic tombs around the lower city gives us rare, unique information about the people buried there and about burial practices at the time—despite the unfortunate fact that most of the tombs had been looted. The diverse finds, both in the tombs and in the homes and subterranean complexes, represent the ethnic mosaic of the city, which included communities and residents of Sidonian, Idumean, Greek, and Arab origin who spoke Aramaic and Greek, created a rich material and religious culture, maintained a thriving economy, and experienced a social lifestyle with an indigenous and Hellenistic character.[58]

[51] KLONER 2003, 20–21, 28–29.
[52] TEPPER/SHAHAR 1988/1989.
[53] KLONER/SAGIV 1988/1989.
[54] KLONER/ZISSU 2019.
[55] KLONER/ZISSU 2013.
[56] KLONER 2003, 153–155; KLONER *et alii* 2010, 205–255.
[57] GRAICER 2012, 108–197; ERLICH/KLONER 2008; KLONER/ZISSU 2013; KLONER/GRAICER/ZISSU 2023.
[58] BERLIN 2002; ZISSU/KLONER 2015a.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE TOMBS OF THE HELLENISTIC CITY OF MARESHA

More than 50 tombs have so far been surveyed and documented in the vicinity of Maresha, including approximately 23 in the northern sector in a cluster located about 600 m north of the site (Figs. 3, 9). Approximately 27 tombs are known east and northeast of the site, scattered on the slopes over a broad area 1 km long; tomb 557 (the "Tomb of the Ships") is more distant, to the northeast. The locations of five tombs in the eastern necropolis—553 (E.III), V, VI, VII, and 562 (E.VIII)—were not identified in the survey conducted in the 1990s. A group of three tombs (554, 555, 557) located on the slope of the hill next to the Sandahanna church northeast of the tell were recently reexamined. Four tombs (500, 501,502, 503) are known in the southwestern sector.[59]

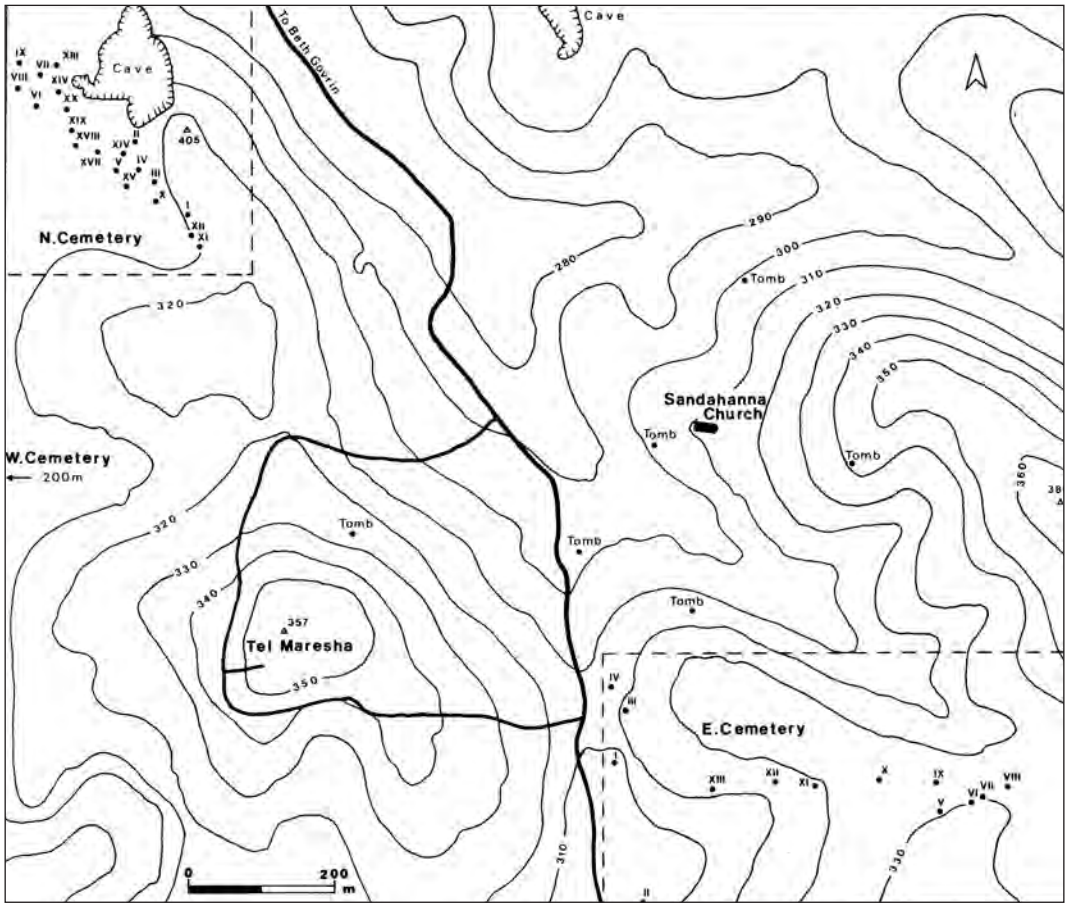


Fig. 9. Map of tombs prepared by E. Oren and U. Rappaport, focusing on NN, EN, and SWN (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

A segment of an exterior wall was uncovered in area 920, south of the underground complexes belonging to the homes of the lower city. The presumed continuation of the wall to the northwest apparently marked the boundary between the built-up urban area and the necropolis, assuming that the burial grounds were kept at a distance from the built-up area, as was customary in Hellenistic cities. The overall data are indicative of dynamic interactions between the locations of the tombs and the homes of Lower Maresha on all sides. However, in certain cases, as in the case of tomb 503 and nearby subterranean complex 154, it seems that as the city grew and underground systems expanded beneath the homes, they affected burial in the area. This created a need to cease burial in the area and to clear or reuse the tombs for the needs of the city. Next to tombs 558 and 559, in underground complexes 92, 93, and 149, partly preserved tombs were surveyed that had been repurposed for economic uses when the city expanded.

We have no way of knowing exactly how the locations of tombs outside the city were determined—whether they were on private property or in open areas allocated for burial of the city's dead. Perhaps the elaborate tombs in the eastern necropolis overlooking the city beyond the valley were hewn on property belonging to officials. For comparison, in Jerusalem in the late First Temple period, the tombs of priests and government ministers were carved out of the cliff east of the Kidron Valley (Silwan) across from the City of David, and in the late Second Temple period, monumental tombs overlooking the City of David and the Temple Mount were hewn in the Kidron Valley.[60]

THE NORTHERN NECROPOLIS

All the tombs, with the exception of tombs 518, 519, and 526, were studied and published by Oren and Rappaport (Fig. 9; for the new plan and context, see Fig. 21B).[61] Below we describe some of the tombs that have been documented in detail.

Tomb 511 (N.I)[62]

The tomb entrance was sealed with a stone door. From the entrance, a stepped dromos leads down to a front hall with two sections, A and B (Fig. 10). In its walls are three

[59] Not all previously documented tombs were identified during renewed field surveys. The entrances to numerous tombs have been obscured by soil accumulation and vegetation growth, rendering them indiscernible. This article synthesizes data regarding both published tombs and those documented in the archives of the Israel Antiquities Authority expedition under Kloner's direction. Additionally, we present new evidence discovered during our 2019 survey and attempt to elucidate, rectify, and integrate previously ambiguous data points.

[60] KLONER/ZISSU 2007.

[61] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984.

[62] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 117–119.

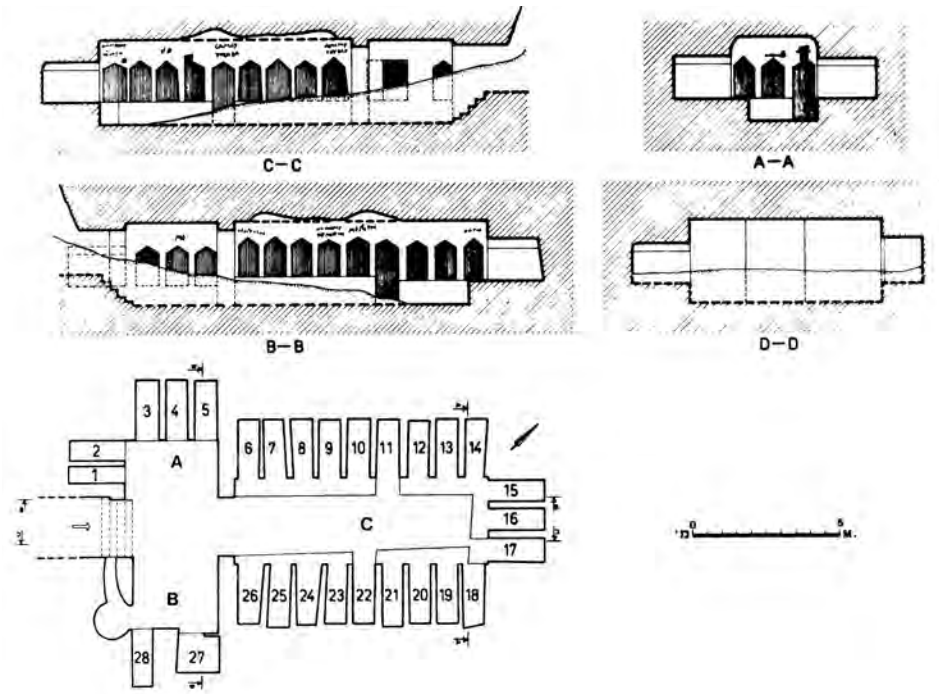


Fig. 10. Plan and sections, tomb 511 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

long, gabled *kokhim* and a shallow, wide, flat-ceilinged *kokh* in which bones were found. A standing pit surrounded by ledges was carved out of the floor of the inner chamber (C). There are 18 symmetrical gabled *kokhim* in the long walls and three gabled *kokhim* in the rear wall; the *kokhim* were closed with stone slabs and sealed all around with mud mortar. Above about a third of the *kokhim* are 11 Greek inscriptions written in paint, mortar, or charcoal, some of which have been deciphered. The inscriptions mention names, some of them Greek, such as Nicander and Megistus, and others Semitic, such as Zabbaeus and Samaus, son of Abd. In another inscription, the son has a Greek name while the father has a Semitic name: Onesigenes, son of Natra.[63]

The finds include a variety of pottery and lamps, a bronze ring, iron nails, and seven pierced terracotta palmettes (tiny ceramic objects shaped like palm fronds), each 4–6 cm long. The Hellenistic tomb was apparently used in the 2nd century BCE.

Tomb 512 (N.II)[64]

A stepped dromos leads down to the tomb entrance. A standing pit surrounded by ledges was carved out of the floor of the hall (Fig. 11). There are 14 gabled *kokhim* along the long walls and two more flanking the entrance. All the *kokhim* were closed with stone slabs. Above four of the *kokhim* are inscriptions written in charcoal. The inner chamber (*kokhim* 9–13) is separated from the hall by a passage with pilaster-like doorjambs.

On the floor of the hall are four rock-cut ossilegium pits in which skulls and other bones of adults and children were placed. The pits were found sealed with stone slabs. Another ossilegium pit was carved out of the floor of *kokh* 14, and another at the end of *kokh* 8. Ossilegium niches were created above four of the *kokhim*. Iron nails were found in the cave.

The tomb was first used in the Hellenistic period. Later, in the 1st–3rd centuries CE (Roman period), Jews were buried in it. These Jews practiced double burial: primary burial in *kokhim* and secondary burial in ossilegium pits and niches.

Tomb 513 (N.III)[65]

A dromos leads down to vestibule A at the front of the tomb entrance. The front hall has two sections, B and C, and a standing pit surrounded by ledges in the floor. There are eight gabled *kokhim* in the long walls of the hall and flanking the entrance (Fig. 12). An ossilegium pit was carved out of the floor of the standing pit of section B, and the skulls and other bones of a man, a woman, and two children were placed in it. The pit was covered with three stone slabs, one of them a fragment of an ossuary lid. In the floor of the inner chamber (D) is a rock-cut standing pit surrounded by ledges. There are 18 symmetrical gabled *kokhim* in the long walls and three gabled *kokhim* in the rear wall. All the *kokhim* were closed with stone slabs. A total of 46 collection niches were carved out of the walls above the *kokhim*; they were closed with

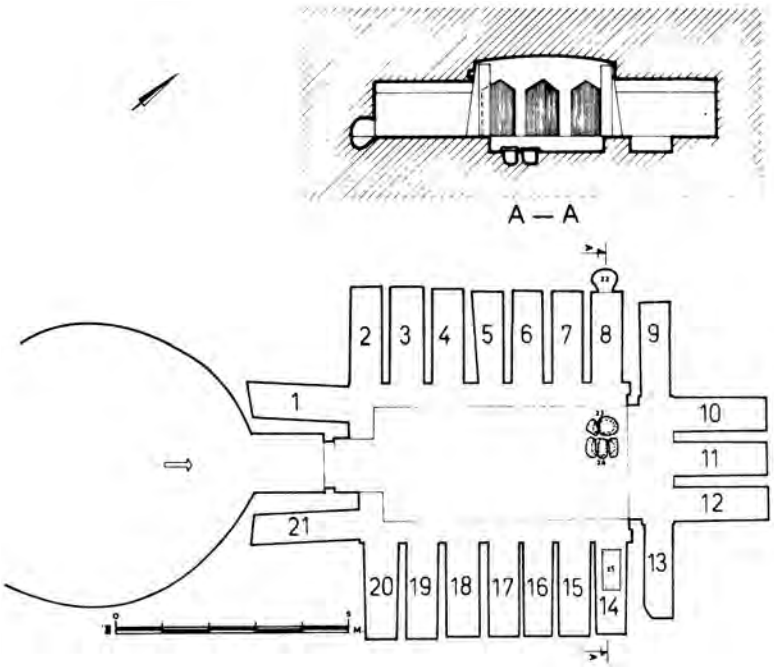


Fig. 11. Plan and sections, tomb 512 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

[63] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1098–1104.
[64] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 119–121.
[65] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 121–126.

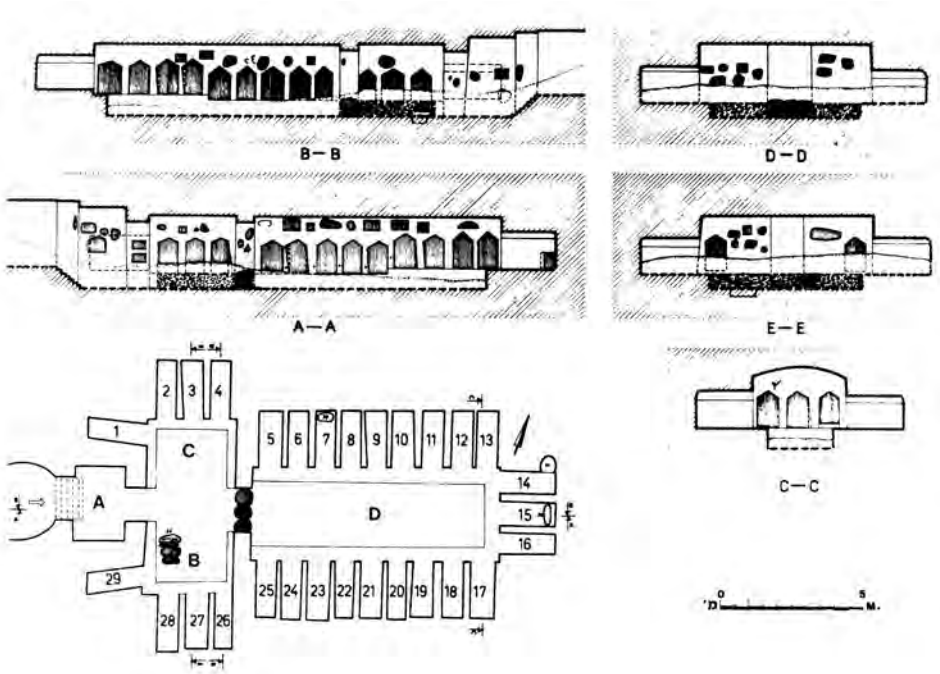


Fig. 12. Plan and sections, tomb 513 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

matching stone slabs and sealed all around with mud mortar. At the interior end of the floors of *kokhim* 7, 14, and 15, ossilegium pits were hewn. An illegible Greek inscription was engraved on the doorjamb at the entrance to the passage between the halls, and a graffito of a ship with oars was incised above it. Above a few of the *kokhim* are illegible painted Greek inscriptions and incised graffiti. Fragments of approximately 40 ossuaries were found in *kokhim* 7–9 and on the floor of chamber D, some of them decorated with rosettes painted in red and some with incised Greek letters.

The finds in this tomb are the richest in all of the northern necropolis. They include more than 100 discus lamps, 31 Herodian lamps, about 35 mold-made lamps, a few Judean "Darom" lamps, and four Jerash lamps; diverse ceramic vessels such as a frying pan, jars, jugs, bottles, and about 40 cooking pots, including one cooking pot found *in situ* on a stove with ashes; about 30 glass spindle bottles; a bronze mirror; and iron nails. The Hellenistic tomb was first used in the 3rd–1st centuries BCE. Later, in the 1st–mid–2nd centuries CE (Roman period), Jews were buried in it in *kokhim* in primary burial and their bones were collected in ossuaries, ossilegium pits, and ossilegium niches.

Tomb 514 (N.IV)[66]

A stepped dromos leads down to the tomb entrance. The entrance is large and its interior side is adorned with an Attic "ear" pattern. A standing pit surrounded by ledges was carved out of the floor of the hall. There are 18 symmetrical gabled *kokhim* in the long walls, five gabled *kokhim* in the rear wall, and two gabled *kokhim* flanking the entrance (Figs. 13, 14). A total of 29 ossilegium niches and pits were hewn in the floor, on the ledges, in the walls next to the entrance, and in the walls above the *kokhim*; 16 of them were found closed with stone slabs and containing the collected bones of 27 adults and children.

A breach in the rear wall of *kokh* no. 2 in the northern wall provides access to the adjacent tomb 515. Stratigraphically, tomb 515 post-

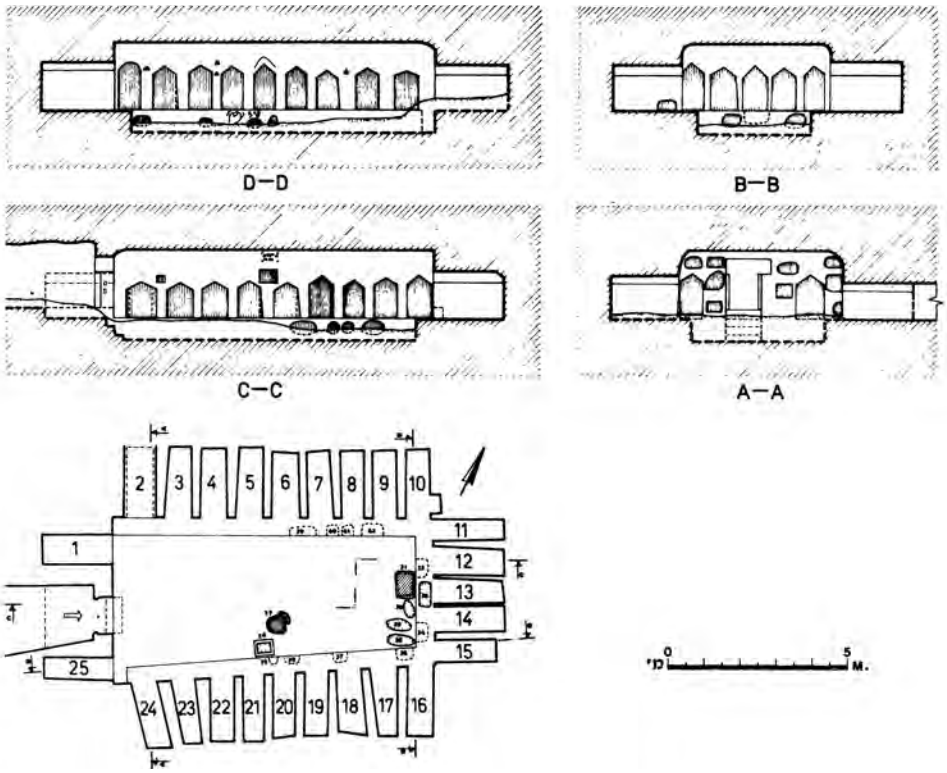


Fig. 13. Plan and sections, tomb 514 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

dates tomb 514; the ancient quarriers cutting tomb 515 exercised caution to avoid damaging tomb 514. The later breach appears to have been created by antiquities robbers.

Greek inscriptions were painted in red on the walls above the *kokhim* and ossilegium niches. Another inscription, reading ŠLM, was written in Nabatean letters above ossilegium niche 36; and an Idumean(?) name, Abselamus (Absalom),

[66] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 126–127.

Fig. 14. Photo of tomb 514, N corner (B. Zissu).

was written in Greek above an ossilegium niche between *kokhim* 5 and 6.[67]

The finds include wheel-made oil lamps, bowls, and Hellenistic jars. Discus lamps and "Darom" lamps were found in the ossilegium pits. The Hellenistic tomb was used first in the 2nd century BCE. Later, in the 2nd–3rd centuries CE (Roman period), Jews were buried in *kokhim* and their bones collected in niches.

Tomb 515 (N.V)[68]

Depressions for bars were made in the doorjambs at the tomb entrance. This two-tier tomb has a total height of 3.5 m. A shallow standing pit without ledges was carved out of its floor. The top tier is set back from the bottom tier to form a ledge. There are 16 gabled *kokhim* in each tier: 13 in the long walls(each 1.8 m long), and three shorter ones in the rear wall (Figs. 15, 16). Thus there are a total of 32 *kokhim* in the two tiers. The three *kokhim* in the rear wall of the top tier are surrounded by a sunken frame. Ossilegium niches and pits—including 12 found closed with stone slabs—were hewn in the walls next to the entrance, in the corners of the hall, in the floor of *kokh* 7, and in the floor of the hall.

Tomb 515 has *kokhim* cut on two superimposed levels, an element notably absent from Oren and Rappaport's plan, which depicts only the lower level. The tomb presents several significant characteristics. The original large rectangular entrance was purposely narrowed during the secondary use of the tomb in the Early Roman period, a feature discerned in other reused tombs as well (e.g., 560; see below). The entrance underwent deliberate modification during reuse, being constricted through the installation of hard limestone blocks that formed a square frame designed to accommodate a square blocking stone. The wall and frame collapsed, but the blocking stone is still *in situ* (Fig. 17, asterisk). This architectural modification parallels patterns observed in other reused tombs from this period, with such narrow, square openings being characteristic of Early Roman tombs.

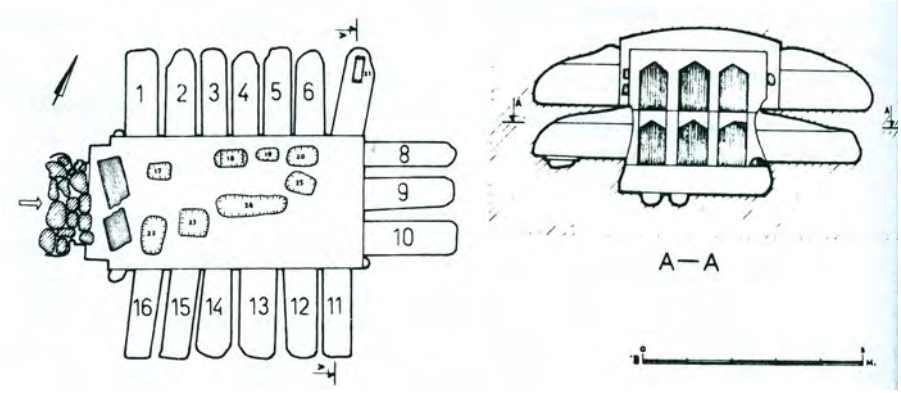


Fig. 15. Plan and sections, tomb 515 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

During this phase of reuse, apparently by the Jewish population of nearby Beth Guvrin, the Hellenistic-period tomb was modified through the systematic carving of small niches in both the walls and the floors. These niches functioned as

[67] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1104–1106.
[68] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 127–128.

Fig. 16. Photo of tomb 515: the burial chamber, looking N (B. Zissu).

Fig. 17. Photo of tomb 515, looking W, toward the entrance (B. Zissu).

improvised ossuaries for secondary burial, a practice well documented in contemporaneous Jewish funerary customs.

A previously undocumented architectural feature overlooked by Oren and Rappaport is the tomb's unusual access point through an interconnected *kokh* shared with tomb 514. This architectural arrangement explains the preservation of tomb 515's original blocking stone *in situ*.

Bones of dozens of adults and children were collected in ossilegium pits and niches. Other finds in the tomb include dozens of radial lamps, discus lamps, and Herodian lamps, as well as dozens of glass bottles.

Fig. 18. Two Roman provincial lamps from tomb 515 (B. Zissu).

Illicit excavations conducted in the 1990s disturbed the tomb floor. Amidst the resultant debris, two Roman provincial lamps were recovered by a visitor and subsequently examined by the authors (Fig. 18). One lamp suffered deliberate damage to its discus, while the other preserves an intact decorative scene depicting Europa astride a bull. Such Roman provincial lamps are common in assemblages from the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE.[69]

The Hellenistic tomb was first used in the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE. Later, in the 2nd–4th centuries CE (Roman period), Jews were buried in *kokhim* and their bones were collected in niches.

[69] WEXLER/GILBOA 1996.

Tomb 516 (N.VI)[70]

A stepped dromos leads down to the western entrance. The tomb ceiling is gabled (Fig. 19). A deep standing pit (approx. 2 m deep) surrounded by ledges was carved out of the floor of the hall; the depth of the pit suggests that the tomb was originally intended to hold two tiers of *kokhim* but was never completed. Two gabled *kokhim* carved out of the southern wall belong to the top tier. A schematic head—a sort of mask with eyes and a mouth—was engraved above *kokh* 2.

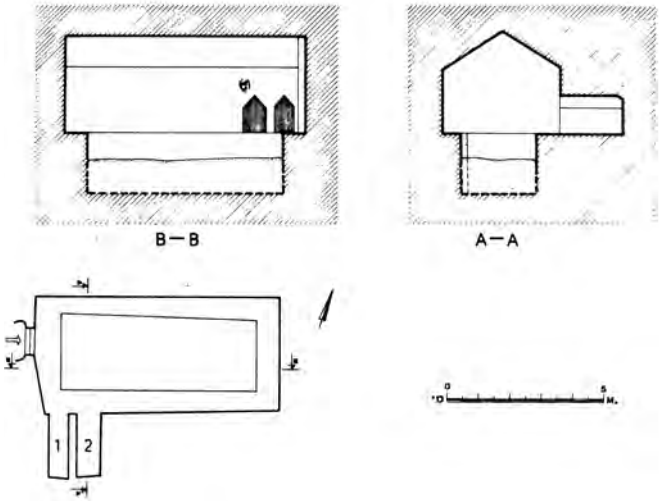


Fig. 19. Plan and sections, tomb 516 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

Tomb 517 (N.VII)[71]

Clermont-Ganneau documented this tomb and deciphered two names inscribed in Greek above the *kokhim*: "Agatarchos," of Greek origin, and "Abounos," of Semitic origin (Figs. 4, 20).[72] Oren later reexamined the tomb. A stepped dromos leads down to a vestibule at the front of the tomb entrance. In the walls of the vestibule are two symmetrical gabled *kokhim*. Depressions for bars were carved in the doorjambs. A standing pit surrounded by ledges was carved out of the floor of the hall. On the floor, next to the rearmost ledge, a step leading up to the rear section was left in place. There are 14 gabled *kokhim* arranged symmetrically in the long walls and three gabled *kokhim* in the rear wall. Above the *kokhim*, traces of approximately 12 illegible Greek inscriptions were painted in red, brown, and black, and geometric shapes were engraved. Two pits cut in the floor and covered with stone slabs contained skeletons of infants in primary burial. The discovery of a complete "delphiniform" lamp dates the use of this Hellenistic tomb to the 2nd century BCE.

[70] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 128–129.
[71] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 129–130.
[72] CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1896, 445–446.

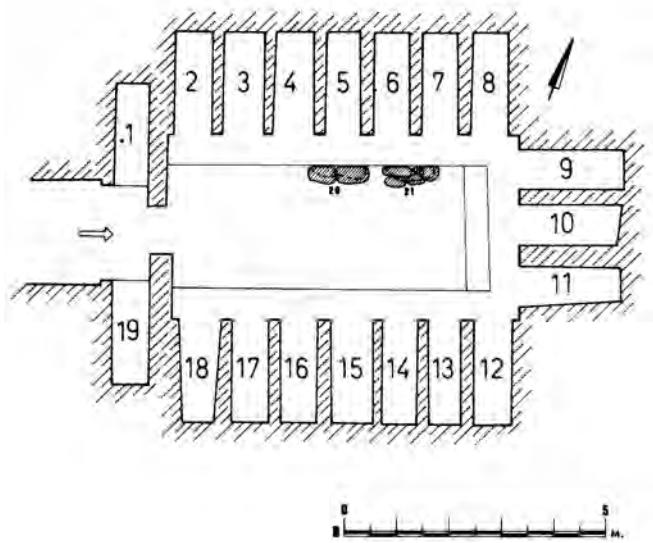


Fig. 20. Plan, tomb 517 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

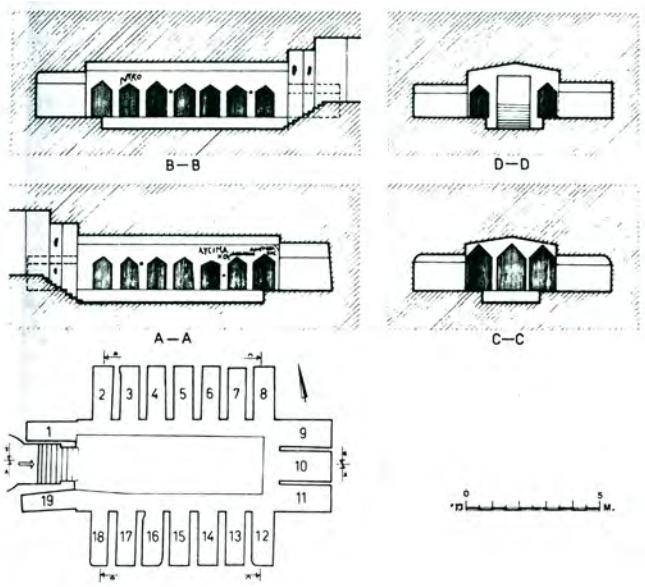


Fig. 21a. Plan and sections, tomb 510 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

Tomb 510 (N.VIII)[73]

The tomb was documented by Oren (Fig. 21A) and then excavated again in 1992 by Kloner and Alpert (Fig. 21B). A dromos with ten steps leads down to a vestibule at the front of the tomb entrance. A standing pit surrounded by ledges was carved out of the floor of the hall. There are 14 gabled *kokhim* (68–70 cm wide) arranged symmetrically in the long walls and separated by partitions (30 cm wide). Two gabled *kokhim* flank the entrance. In the rear wall there are three wide, gabled *kokhim* (1 m wide) about 20 cm taller than the other *kokhim*, separated by thin partitions (13 cm wide; Fig. 22). The *kokhim* were closed with stone slabs and sealed all around with mud mortar. Above ten of the *kokhim* are names such as Lysimachus, Athanaeus, and Aristocleia (Fig. 23) inscribed in Greek using brown mortar.[74]

The finds include various kinds of lamps and pottery, bronze strings of beads and bracelets, a bronze kohl stick, metal rings, 17 pierced terracotta palmettes, iron nails, and wooden beams with nails in them. The Hellenistic tomb was first used in the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE.

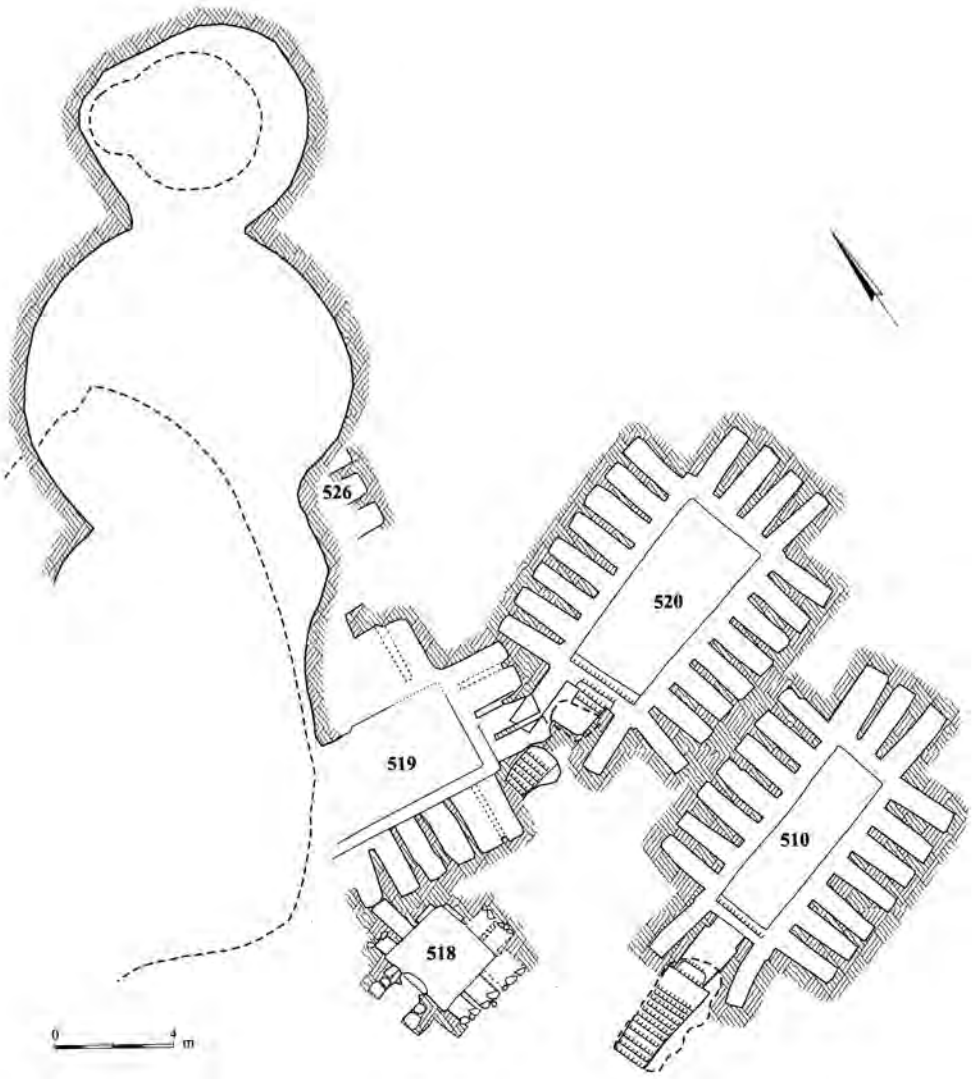


Fig. 21b. Plan of tombs 510, 518, 519, 520, 526 (A. Kloner and IAA Expedition).

[73] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 130–132.
[74] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1106–1108.

Fig. 22. Photo of E wall, tomb 510 (A. Kloner).

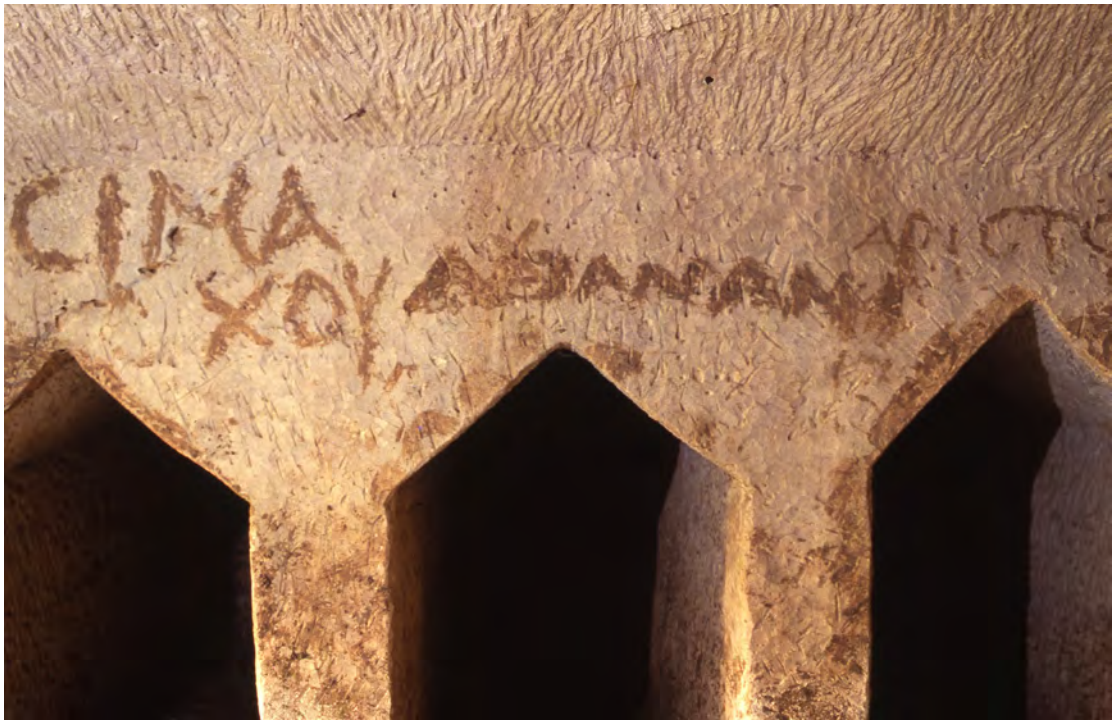


Fig. 23. Photo of N wall, tomb 510 (A. Kloner).

Tomb 520 (N.IX)[75]

The tomb was first documented by Oren (Fig. 24) and later excavated in 1992 by Kloner and Alpert (Fig. 21B). Its layout is similar to that of neighboring tomb 510. There are 18 gabled *kokhim* along the long walls, including on either side of the entrance. The rear wall features four *kokhim*: two gabled ones of standard width, one very narrow, and one vaulted. Above the *kokhim*, 13 inscriptions were written in Greek using red paint, charcoal, or mortar. Names such as Athenaeus, Phila, Damas, Damas the Elder (Fig. 25), and Erotion (Fig. 26) were legible.[76] The *kokhim* were closed with stone slabs and sealed all around with mortar.

The finds include various kinds of domestic pottery, a small bottle, and a Rhodian amphora. The Hellenistic tomb was used in the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE.

[75] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 132–133.

[76] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1109–1113.

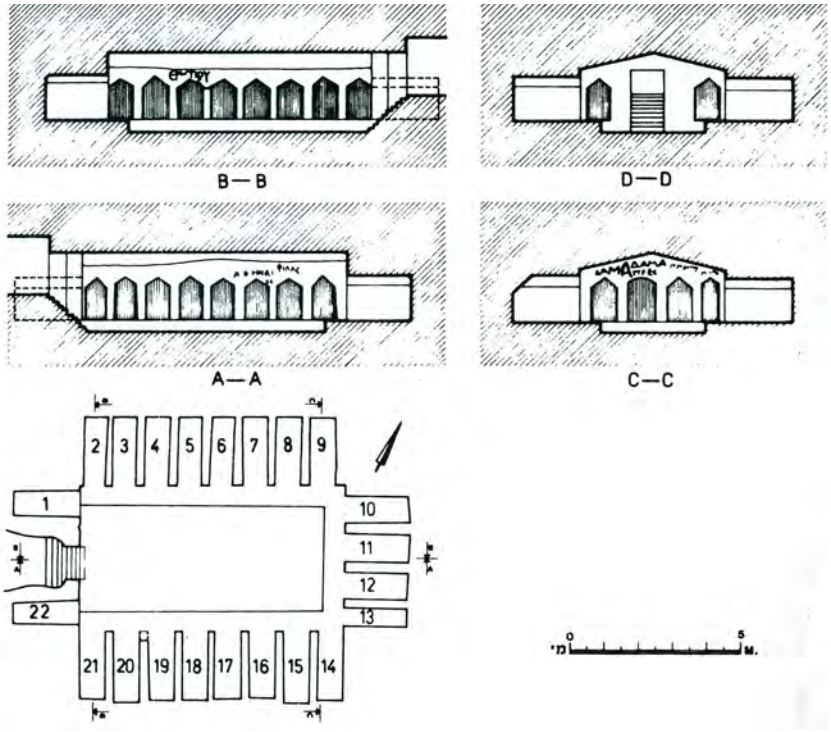


Fig. 24. Plan and sections, tomb 520 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

Fig. 25. Photo of E wall, tomb 520 (A. Kloner).

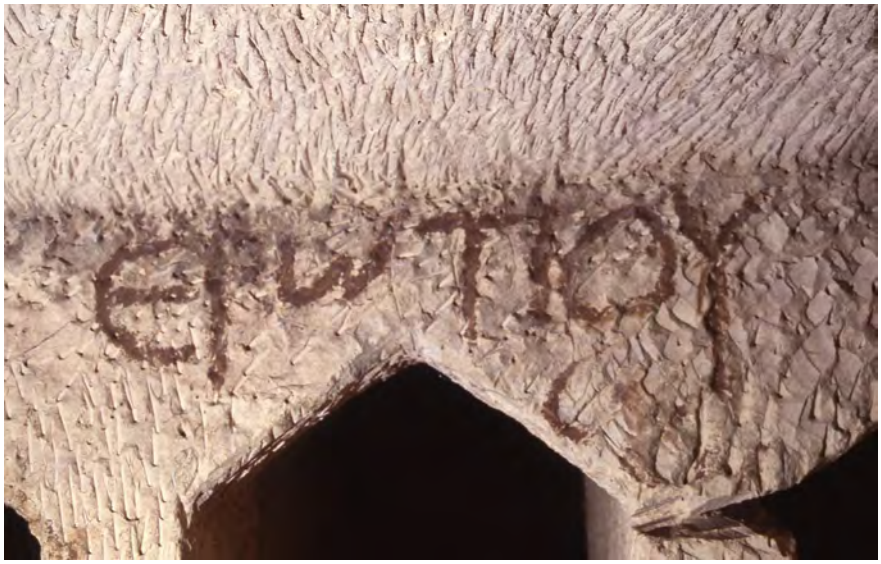


Fig. 26. Photo of S wall, tomb 520 (A. Kloner).

Tomb 522 (N.XI)

The layout of this tomb was similar to that of the Musicians' Tomb (below). It contained three halls with 34 *kokhim* and a square room in the rear section. Its walls were decorated with paintings in shades of blue and red. Later the tomb was converted into a cistern, destroying most of its features and decorations.

Additional Tombs in the Northern Necropolis

Kokh tombs 518, 519, and 526 were damaged by the hewing of bell-shaped quarries (Fig. 21B).[77]

THE EASTERN NECROPOLIS

Two tombs in the national park are open to visitors: the Sidonian Tomb and the Musicians' Tomb, both of which contain colorful wall paintings. Since the tombs were broken into and looted around 1900 and subsequently documented in 1902, their paintings have suffered damage from looting, graffiti, and vandalism, and their colors have completely faded. When the tombs were redocumented in 1993, the decision was made to reconstruct the wall paintings and inscriptions: The decorations were copied precisely from Peters and Thiersch's original report onto fiberglass sheets, which were placed in the paintings' original locations on the walls of the Sidonian Tomb (Fig. 27). Similarly, the painting of musicians was reconstructed in the Musicians' Tomb (Fig. 28).[78]

David Jacobson's study raises significant doubts about the credibility of the publication process for the plates in Peters and Thiersch's report (Figs. 6, 8). Although the photographer Chalil Raad documented the paintings in detail, his monochrome photos only partially captured what was visible in 1902. Shortly thereafter, the Dominican priests Lagrange, Savignac, and Vincent recreated the paintings in watercolor, but their reproductions included some inaccuracies and restorations. These reproductions were sent, along with Raad's negatives, to the PEF in London. The PEF forwarded both to a lithographic printer, where various elements from the French sketches—beyond just colors—were incorporated into the colored lithographic plates published in 1905. Upon rediscovering Raad's negatives and comparing them with Lagrange's watercolors, Jacobson found that the published plates revealed details missing from the photographs. He concluded that the colors and features depicted in the published illustrations were derived from the Dominican watercolors.[79]

The Sidonian Tomb (Tomb 551, E.I)

The tomb was documented and examined in detail by Peters and Thiersch in 1902, who designated it "Tomb I" (Figs. 5, 6). Today, it is commonly referred to as the "Sidonian Tomb" due to the Greek inscription mentioning a Sidonian

Fig. 27. Overall view of the Sidonian Tomb (551), looking E, after 1993 restoration (B. Zissu).

Fig. 28. The Musicians' Tomb (552): detail of the restored musicians fresco, looking N (B. Zissu).

[77] KLONER 2003, 28–29.
[78] KLONER 2000.
[79] KLONER 2000; JACOBSON 2007.

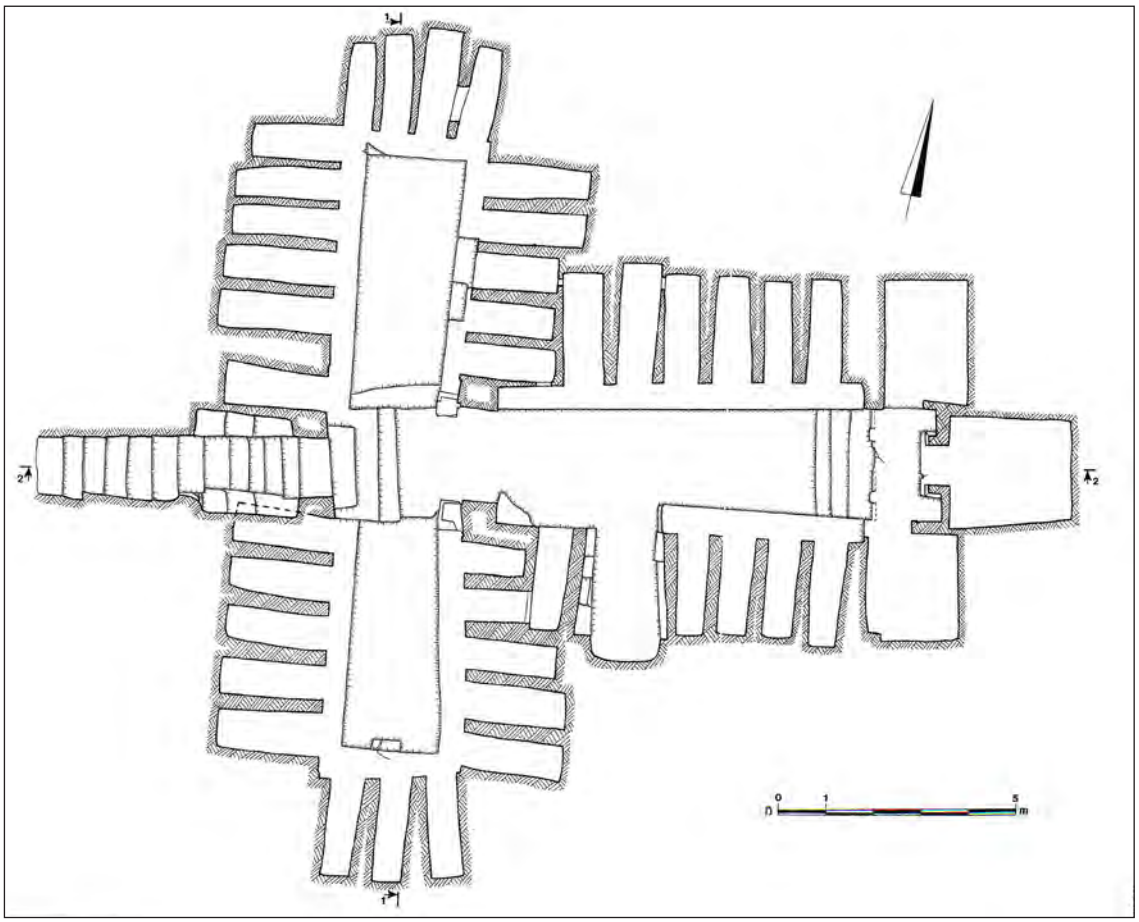


Fig. 29. New plan of tomb 551 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).

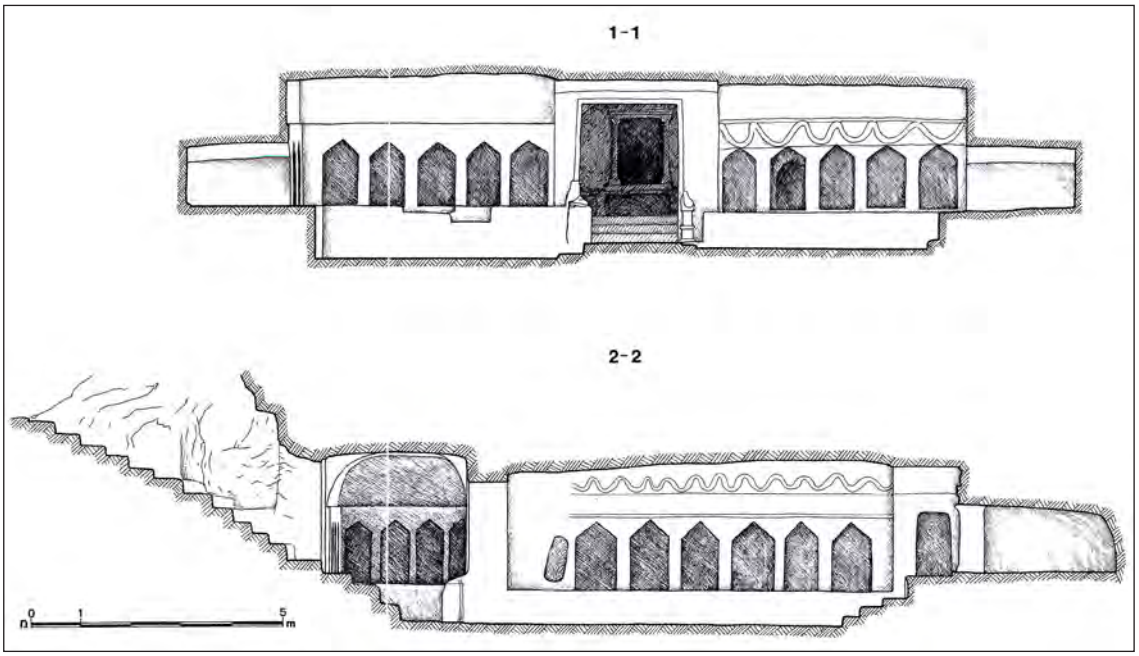


Fig. 30. New sections of tomb 551 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).

community at Maresha. Kloner redocumented the tomb in 1993 (Figs. 29, 30).[80]

This is the largest (17×21 m) and most richly decorated tomb at Maresha. It consists of a central entrance chamber (A) that leads to three burial halls (B, C, D) arranged symmetrically. Chamber A opens into Hall D through a wide opening flanked by two pilasters. In front of the left (northern) doorjamb was a stone altar, while a statue of a woman wearing an Egyptian headdress (possibly the goddess Isis) stood on a pedestal in front of the right (southern) doorjamb. Both the altar and the statue were damaged by locals following the discovery of the tomb.

Thirteen gabled *kokhim* were cut into the walls of Hall D, six in the northern wall and seven in the southern one; two long benches run along the walls beneath them. In the rear wall, a recess flanked by pilasters serves as a passage to three

[80] KLONER 2003, 21–24.

additional chambers. Hall B has five *kokhim* in each of its long walls and four in the short wall opposite the entrance. Hall C has five *kokhim* in each long wall and three in the short wall.

Paintings

The most fascinating feature of this tomb is its wall paintings and decorations, skillfully painted directly on the smoothed chalk walls (Fig. 27).

The partitions between the *kokhim* in the longer walls of Hall D are painted to resemble fluted columns topped with Ionic capitals, each adorned with a wreath. Above the gables on each long wall, a smoothed band features a painted frieze. Beneath the frieze is a painted band, and above the frieze hangs a wavy garland adorned with red and black dots representing flowers and leaves.

The frieze depicts a hunting scene followed by a procession of exotic wild animals and mythological creatures, each labeled in Greek. The scene starts at the southwestern corner with a youth blowing his trumpet (Fig. 31). In front of him are a horse and rider and a running dog. The rider is hurling a spear at a bleeding female leopard, who already has an arrow in her breast; another hunting dog attacks the beast from the rear. Various readings have been proposed for the caption above the hunter: Peters and Thiersch read "The horse from Lebanon of the rider," [81] whereas Meyboom rendered it as "The horse of Libanus the cavalry commander." [82] Dov Gera reexamined Raad's original photograph and read: "Horse of Libanus of Tyre."[83] The hunted beast is labeled *pardalos*, i.e., "leopard." A black palm tree separates the leopard from the stalking lion on the left, which is erroneously labeled "panther" (*pantheros*) in the inscription above. The figure of the next animal was destroyed when two of the *kokhim* were joined. To the left is a huge bull (*bous*) collapsed on its forelegs, with blood running from its mouth (Fig. 32). To the left of the bull there is a large coiled snake. In front of the bull are a giraffe (*kamelopardalos*) facing left and a boar facing right. Farther to the left is a griffin (*gryps*) composed of a lion's body and eagle's head and wings (Fig. 33). Next in the same direction is a running antelope (*oryx*). A tree, similar to the previous one, separates the antelope from a red rhinoceros ambling to the left (Fig. 34); the inscription above is "rhinoceros" (*rinokeros*). To its left is a black war elephant (*elephas*) bearing a saddle for the mahout and a canopy. Two figures to the left of the elephant were destroyed in 1900, as were the faces of the trumpeter and the rider. The defaced figure is

Fig. 31: Restored paintings in the SW corner of tomb 551: the hunting scene (B. Zissu).

Fig. 32: Animal frieze, S wall of tomb 551: a bull, a snake, and a giraffe (B. Zissu).

[81] PETERS/THIERSCH 1905.
[82] MEYBOOM 1995.
[83] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1005–1006.

Fig. 33: Animal frieze, S wall of tomb 551: a boar, a griffin, and an antelope (B. Zissu).

Fig. 34: Animal frieze, S wall of tomb 551: an antelope, a red rhinoceros, and a war elephant (B. Zissu).

Fig. 35: Animal frieze, N wall of tomb 551: two fish, a crocodile with an ibis on its back, and a hippopotamus (B. Zissu).

Fig. 36: Animal frieze, N wall of tomb 551: a wild ass fighting with a snake, a wolf, and rhinoceros (B. Zissu).

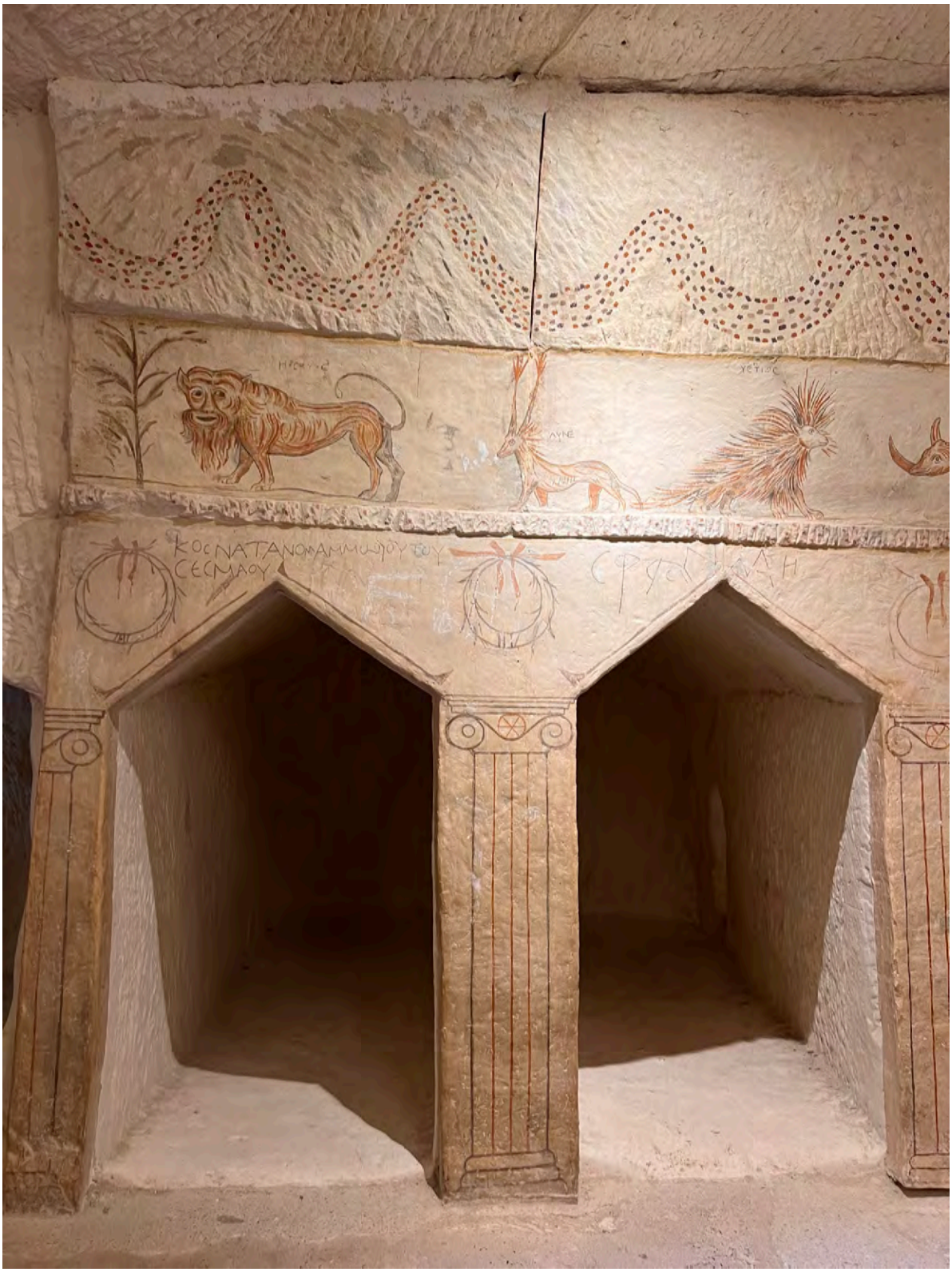


Fig. 37: Animal frieze, N wall of tomb 551: a porcupine, a lynx, and an unidentified mythical creature (B. Zissu).

identified as *Aithiopia* (Ethiopia). This concludes the description of the right-hand frieze.

Continuing on the opposite side are two fish, one with the trunk and nose of an elephant, the other with the head of a rhinoceros (Fig. 35). To their left is a crocodile (*krokodilos*), with an ibis (*ibis*) perched on its back. Past them are a hippopotamus (with a reconstructed inscription reading *hippopotamus*), a wild ass (*onos agrios*) fighting a snake, and a wolf crowned with an upright tuft of hair (Fig. 36). To the left of the wolf is a one-horned rhinoceros, possibly an Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*). Next is a porcupine (*ustrix*), whose body is directed down and forward. Further to the left is a lynx (*lynx*). At the end of the frieze stands an unidentified mythical creature resembling a lion with a human face and beard (Fig. 37).

In chamber A, above the altar, is a painting of a red

Fig. 38: Southern doorjamb of the entrance to hall D: a painting of Kerberos and a four-line Greek inscription (B. Zissu).

rooster; a matching one was painted above the pedestal on the right side of the doorway. On the southern doorjamb of the entrance to the middle hall (D) is a painting of Kerberos (Cerberus), the three-headed dog who guards the entrance to the underworld in Greek mythology (Fig. 38). Both Kerberos and roosters are associated with the dead and the underworld. Above Kerberos is a four-line erotic Greek inscription (see below).

In the eastern wall of Hall D, facing Hall E, there is a wide gabled doorway (Fig. 6). Three steps lead up to the raised floor of Hall E, which features a gabled ceiling. Its rear (eastern) wall is designed as a triangular pediment, reminiscent of a Greek temple. The two pilasters flanking the entrance are painted red and have rosettes beneath Doric capitals. The lintel above the entrance is styled as a Doric frieze, while the gable is adorned with a stylized (ivy?) leaf design and acroteria.

On either side of the pilasters stand tall, painted amphorae, with the one on the right featuring a wide, white-painted band and the one on the left having a red band. These Panathenaic(?) amphorae are topped with conical lids painted in matching colors and feature long fillets tied to their handles. The amphorae resemble Panathenaic(?)

amphorae and also marble urns used as burial monuments in classical Greece. Perhaps they represent *loutrophoroi*—vessels used for washing and purifying the dead.[84] The base of the doorway to Hall E is fashioned like the side of a two-legged burial couch (*kliné*), carved in relief. An eagle with outspread wings is painted on each side of the gabled doorway, set in the eastern wall of Hall D. The eagles stand on a garland that runs the entire length of the walls. A three-legged wooden table (*mensa delphica*) on a red base whose legs end in lion's paws is painted under each eagle. On each table rests a white incense burner, made of silver, mounted on a base with three griffin-shaped legs; the vessels contain burning incense.

The paintings in tomb 551 (and tomb 552 below) are characterized mainly by Greek sepulchral elements: eagles, a flutist, Kerberos, roosters, amphorae (*loutrophoroi*), and probably also the rider; the harpist, on the other hand, depicted in tomb 552 (see below), is likely an Egyptian influence.

The architecture and many decorative elements of the Sidonian Tomb resemble the hypogea of Hellenistic Alexandria, exemplifying their influence on local funerary art and architecture (see discussion below).

The hunting scenes and animal processions in the frieze feature fauna from North Africa and the Nile Valley beside mythical creatures. The paintings and decorative choices indicate close contact with Egypt, and were perhaps influenced by Ptolemaic menagerie drawings, which are known to have existed in Hellenistic Alexandria. The subjects depicted—such as a giraffe, a hippopotamus, a rhinoceros, a crocodile, and an ibis—were part of an artistic tradition aimed at evoking Egypt. This aligns well with a 3rd-century BCE context when Maresha had close connections with Ptolemaic Egypt. Some studies suggest that the selection of exotic animals and other decorative elements reflects a connection with the Dionysiac cult at the Ptolemaic court. Others propose that the motifs may have been inspired by a catalog of wild animal paintings from the zoo built by Ptolemy II in Alexandria.[85]

Under Aristotle's influence, there was great popular interest in the natural sciences. From descriptions by Agatharchides, we know that the menageries of Ptolemy II contained lions, leopards, and other large cats, rodents, buffaloes from India and Africa, a wild ass from Moab, large snakes, a giraffe, a rhinoceros, and various birds—and these are, in fact, some of the very animals represented here.

On the other hand, the griffin was a Persian legacy. The animal with the human face was apparently a version of the Assyrian lamassu (a fabulous creature with a lion's body, eagle's wings, and human face, statues of which guarded palace entrances). Fish with the face of an elephant or rhinoceros are perhaps taken from myths based on the belief, held by Greek scholars, that there was an exact correspondence between terrestrial and marine animals. Hellenistic travel stories are replete with descriptions of animals of this kind, which were seen, the authors claimed, in remote corners of the earth. The animal frieze at Maresha is a unique document of its kind in the Hellenistic world. Only Roman mosaics, such as the one at Palestrina (ca. 100 BCE), show influences of the same Hellenistic-Egyptian sources that inspired the artist/s at Maresha.[86]

Adi Erlich's renewed analysis yielded a date ca. 250 BCE or slightly later for the tomb paintings.[87] Taken together, the decoration of Hall E suggests that the distinguished ancestors of the family, possibly including its founders, were buried in the flat-ceilinged chambers, likely in sarcophagi, although no traces of sarcophagi or coffins were found.

Funerary inscriptions

Thirty-five Greek inscriptions, primarily names—some including the date of burial—along with warnings against grave desecration, were painted and incised on the tomb walls and above the *kokhim*. Additionally, 16 captions identify animals, men, and creatures depicted in the main frieze.

Some of the names are Greek, such as Ortas (the Macedonian), Apollophanes (the son), Demetria, Protus, Apollodorus, Straton, Alexander, Heliodorus, Ptolemaeus, Tryphon, and Antagoras son of Zenodorus. Others are Idumean, including Cosbanus, Cosacabus, and Ammoius son of Zabdi. There are also Nabatean/Arab names like Sabo (referring to two individuals: the daughter of Sesmaeus and the daughter of Cosnatanus), as well as Aramean names such as Babas (son of Cosnatanus, son of Ammoius) and Babata (daughter of Cosnatanus, son of Ammoius), Phoenician ones like Meerbalus, and Semitic ones: Illasius. Additionally, there are mixed names such as Demetrius (Greek) son of Meerbalus (Phoenician) and Cosnatanus son of Ammoius (Semitic—either Idumean or Arab) son of Sesmaeus (Idumean), Apollodorus (Greek) son of Zabbaeus (Semitic), and Maimmus (Semitic) son of Sonicus (Greek).[88]

In the three interior walls of Hall E are entrances to flat-ceilinged chambers. The lintel in the doorway to the room in the southern wall[89] is dressed in an Attic "ear" pattern and had a two-line Greek inscription incised on it (Fig. 39):

Apollophanes son of Sesmaeus led the Sidonians in Marisé for thirty three years, and was considered the most worthy and the most kin-loving of all his contemporaries. He died, having lived for seventy-four years.[90]

[84] *Loutrophoroi*, which were commonly made of stone, especially marble, were used to mark graves in the Hellenistic world (BERGEMANN 1996). The vessel above a grave mound in vase paintings and adorned with ribbons on a grave relief is common in Greek funerary art (KURTZ/BOARDMAN 1971). This custom evidently became widespread in the Hellenistic period, mainly in the 4th to 3rd centuries BCE. There are two types of *loutrophoroi*: with three handles (*hydria*) and with two handles (*amphora*). Those depicted in tombs 551 and 553 are of the two-handled type (KLONER 2000).

[85] MEYBOOM 1995 and lit. cit. there.

[86] MEYBOOM 1995. The same visual source apparently inspired the drawings of animals sketched on the "Papyrus of Artemidorus" (GALLAZZI/KRAMER/SETTIS 2008). This papyrus, of debated authenticity, was reportedly found in Egypt in the cartonnage of a funerary mask (CANFORA 2007). Initially, it was intended to be a deluxe edition of the *Geographoumena* of Artemidorus of Ephesus (1st century BCE). An error in one of the maps in the text evidently caused the copying to be suspended. The papyrus was reused as a sketchbook for anatomical parts (copied from statues) on the front and for animals, real or imaginary, on the reverse, the latter accompanied by labels in Greek.

[87] ERLICH 2009 and lit. cit. there.

[88] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 978–1051.

[89] The chamber is XXXVI on the plan published in PETERS/THIERSCH 1905. The report does not mention the location of the inscription; however, JACOBSON (2007) fortunately found a photograph from the British Mandate period in the IAA archives and was able to identify the original location.

[90] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1046.

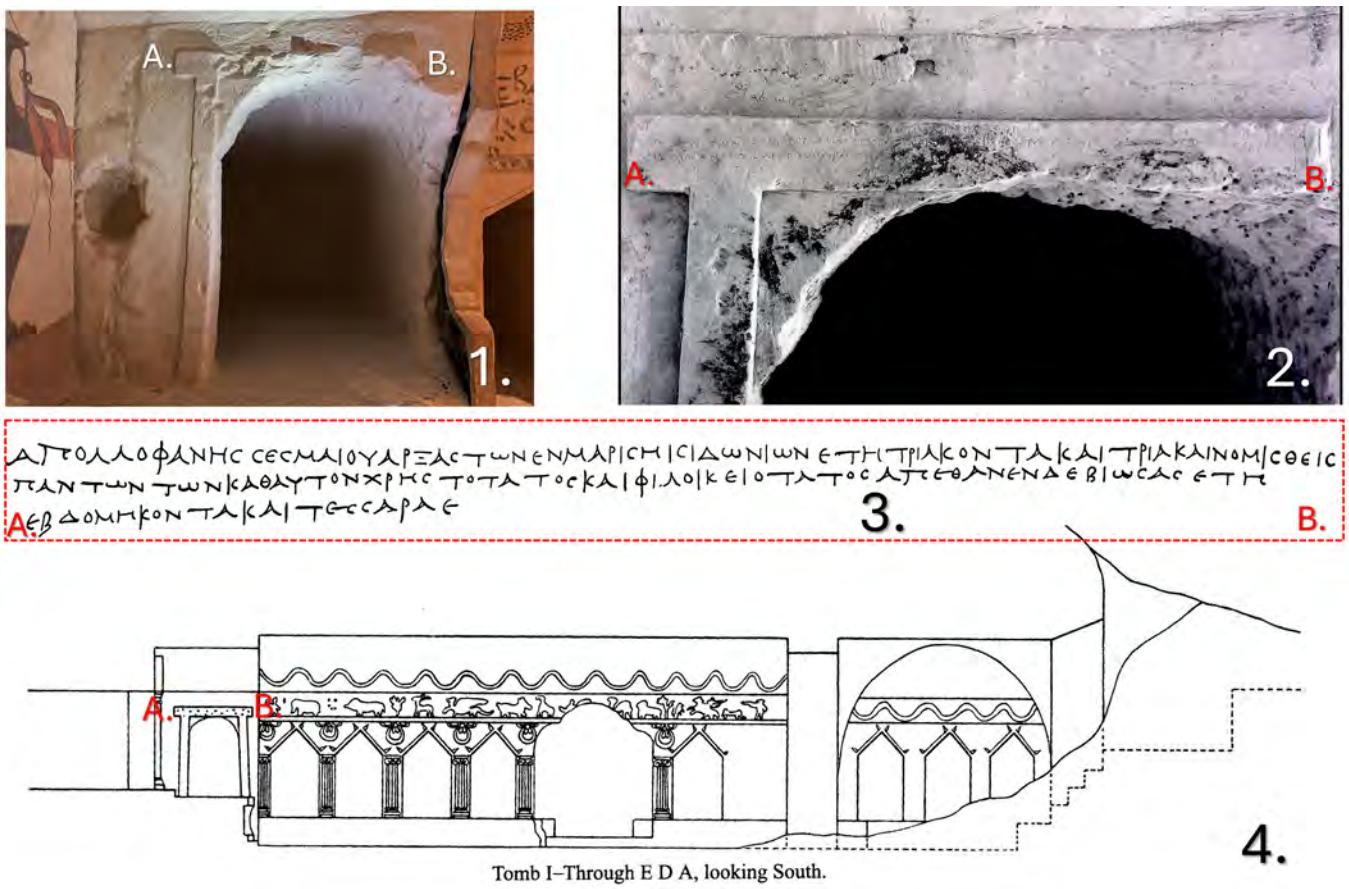


Fig. 39: Doorway lintel, southern wall: (1) current state; (2) the lintel as documented in the 1930s, showing the preserved inscription; (3) facsimile drawing of the inscription; (4) tomb section, with inscription location marked A-B (composite image by B. Zissu; IAA archives, British Mandate; PETERS/THIERSCH 1905).

The discovery of this epitaph enabled the identification of ancient Marisa/Maresha at Tel Sandahanna. In a recent discussion, Lucia Criscuolo compared this funerary inscription with dated papyri and suggested a mid–3rd century BCE date based on its paleographic characteristics.[91]

Most of the tomb inscriptions refer to four generations of the family of Sesmaeus, who were buried here during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. The onomastics of those interred in this tomb are characterized by a mix of Greek, Idumean, Phoenician, and Nabatean/Arab/Aramean elements and confirm the diverse influences on the population of the city. However, they do not provide chronologically useful information for definitively specifying ethnic origins, as Greek names often appear in non-Greek families, nor do they clarify the social status of the deceased.

Above the painting of Kerberos on the southern doorjamb leading into Hall D is a four-line erotic Greek inscription (Fig. 38). The translation is as follows:

I know not why I suffer for you, or how I can grant you favors. I lie (regularly) with another man, even though I love you dearly. But, by Aphrodite, I take exceeding delight in the fact that your cloak lies as a pledge (with me). But I am leaving, and I leave behind for you a large open space. Go on doing what you like. Do not strike the wall, (because) noise arises; the agreement has already been made with nods through the door.[92]

This inscription has intrigued scholars since its first publication.[93] Interpretations vary widely, ranging from a modest epitaph to a woman's final farewell to her husband to an erotic dialogue, perhaps a conversation between a wife and her lover. Some readings even depict clandestine lovers or a woman compelled to marry another man. However, these interpretations often overlook the inscription's context: it was found within a sealed tomb and was placed at the entrance, lacking a connection to a specific burial.

Criscuolo proposed a more compelling interpretation consistent with typical epigraphic practices: it is a funerary inscription where a woman addresses her husband from beyond, expressing enduring love and comfort.[94] The text serves to alleviate her distress about dying without implying a direct dialogue.

On the opposite doorjamb, to the left of the entrance, there was a lightly incised graffito mentioning Myron the

[91] CRISCUOLO 2020. Criscuolo proposed that our Apollophanes may be identified with an individual of the same name who is mentioned multiple times in the Zenon archives (e.g., PCairZen 59804, PCairZen 59093, PCairZen 59019, PCairZen 59025). This individual was clearly involved in the slave trade and had various dealings with Phoenician cities in 258 and 257 BCE. However, we cannot definitively identify Apollophanes son of Sesmaeus with the Apollophanes of the Zenon papyri due to the absence of a patronymic in the latter source.

[92] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 996–1001 and extensive lit. cit. there.

[93] LAGRANGE 1902.

[94] CRISCUOLO 2020. Criscuolo also discussed the inscription's paleography. She suggested that the distinctive features of the script align with cursive papyri, supporting a mid–3rd century BCE dating.

priest and a woman named Calypso. It has been suggested that this may be related to the erotic inscription discussed above.[95]

Dates

The common view used to be that the dates found in tomb I are according to the Seleucid era, covering the period 196–119 BCE.[96] The earliest dated inscription in tomb I is the funerary inscription of Apollodorus son of Zabbaeus, painted over the crocodile and the ibis (Fig. 35).[97] This inscription, dated by Peters and Thiersch to the year 117 of the Seleucid era (196/5 BCE), provides a *terminus ante quem* for the frieze beneath. Recently, Gera reexamined Raad's photographs and proposed that this inscription should be dated to more than 50 years later, to the year 171 of the Seleucid era (141 BCE).[98] This proposal is interesting but raises the question of whether it is possible for the tomb to have been used for about half a century without any date being mentioned at all in the inscriptions, in a literate society that occasionally recorded dates of death and burial. Gera addresses this question by postponing the entire chronology of the tomb, including the date of the paintings, by about fifty years.

Uriel Rappaport suggested that an "odd" series of single-digit Greek numerals (years I to V) relate to a Ptolemaic regnal era, perhaps of Ptolemy V Epiphanes. This king reigned in Egypt in 204–180 BCE but his control over Palestine ended with the Fifth Syrian War, ca. 200 BCE. The years would cover his rule in Palestine.[99] According to this view, accepted by Kloner and others, the dates of Ptolemy V's reign are followed in the Maresha inscriptions by dates according to the Seleucid era, of which the earliest is 196 BCE (see above). Thus there is a sequence of dates from the Ptolemaic to the Seleucid period.

According to this view, the family of Sesmaeus began to use this tomb in the first half of the third century BCE, since his great-grandchildren, Babata and Babas (daughter and son of Cosnatanus son of Ammoius son of Sesmaeus),[100] mentioned in an inscription dated to "year E" (year 5 of Ptolemy V Epiphanes), were buried here in 200/199 BCE.[101]

Gera questioned the possibility that a Ptolemaic era was used. He proposed identifying this era as a local one, starting with the refounding of Marisa following the arrival of Aulus Gabinius in Syria (57/6 BCE–no later than 55/4 BCE).[102] Thus, Babata (daughter of Cosnatanus son of Ammoius son of Sesmaeus)[103] was, in Gera's view, buried in 53/52 BCE. This chronology is problematic for many reasons. First, it undermines previous attempts to reconstruct the genealogy of the Sesmaeus family and to establish a correlation between the art and the epigraphy. Gera finds support for his view in a group of dated coins minted by the city, which Shraga Qedar related to Gabinius's elusive refoundation.[104] However, a recent study has shown that these coins were minted during the Seleucid period.[105] Furthermore, large-scale excavations led by Kloner did not uncover any stratigraphic or ceramic evidence that Maresha existed in the first century BCE.[106] Therefore, Gera's suggestion that a Gabinian era was employed in the Sidonian Tomb is improbable.

The inscriptions and art of the Sidonian Tomb are invaluable because of the unequivocal identification of the Hellenistic city of Maresha, given the explicit mention of the place name Marisé in the Apollophanes inscription, and because they show us the ethnic complexity and family ties among the socioeconomic elite and the influence of the tombs of Hellenistic Alexandria on funerary art, architecture, and architectural decoration.

The Musicians' Tomb (Tomb 552, E.II)

The Musicians' Tomb was documented in detail by Peters and Thiersch in 1902 (Figs. 7, 8).[107] Kloner documented the tomb again in 1993 (Figs. 40, 41).[108]

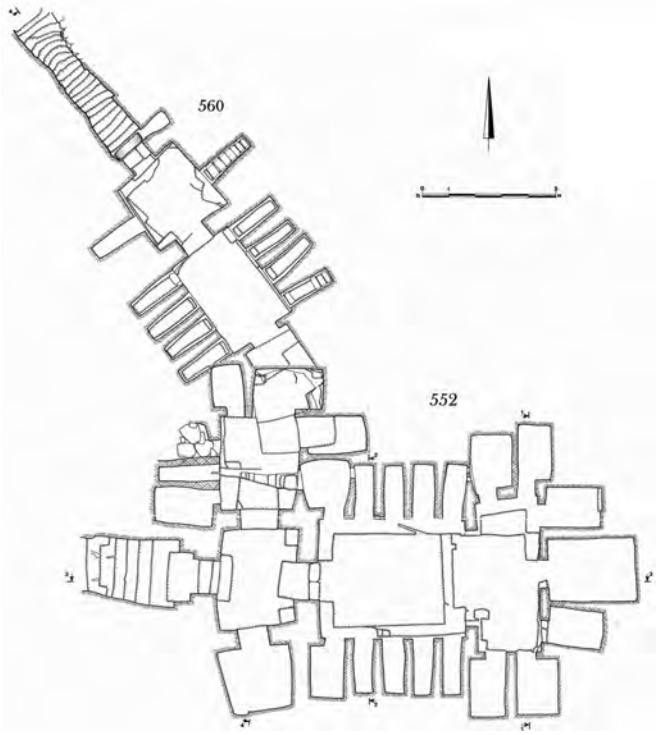


Fig. 40. Plan of tombs 552 and 560 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).

The tomb, located about 80 m south of the Sidonian Tomb, is similar in plan to the Sidonian Tomb but smaller (16×17 m). From the corridor (A) one enters the central hall (D), with five *kokhim* along each side. Behind it to the east is another room from which seven small burial chambers branch off. There are eight *kokhim* in the hall (B) north of the entrance chamber. The southern hall (C) does not contain any *kokhim*. From hall D, one would walk up two steps to hall E, which has six double-width gabled *kokhim* in its walls.

[95] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1001–1003 and lit cit. there.
[96] KLONER 2003, 24; AMELING *et alii* 2018, 978–984 and lit cit. there.
[97] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1028–1030, no. 3557.
[98] GERA, in AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1028–1030, no. 3557.
[99] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984.
[100] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 994–995, nos. 3528, 3529; 1043–1044, no. 3570.
[101] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984. This chronology aligns well with the studies of the paintings in MEYBOOM 1995; ERLICH 2009.
[102] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 996–1001 and extensive lit. cit. there.
[103] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 994, no. 3528.
[104] QEDAR 1992–1993.
[105] ARIEL/HOOVER 2011
[106] KLONER 2003, 5.
[107] PETERS/THIERSCH 1905.
[108] KLONER 2003, 24–25; ZISSU/KLONER 2015a.

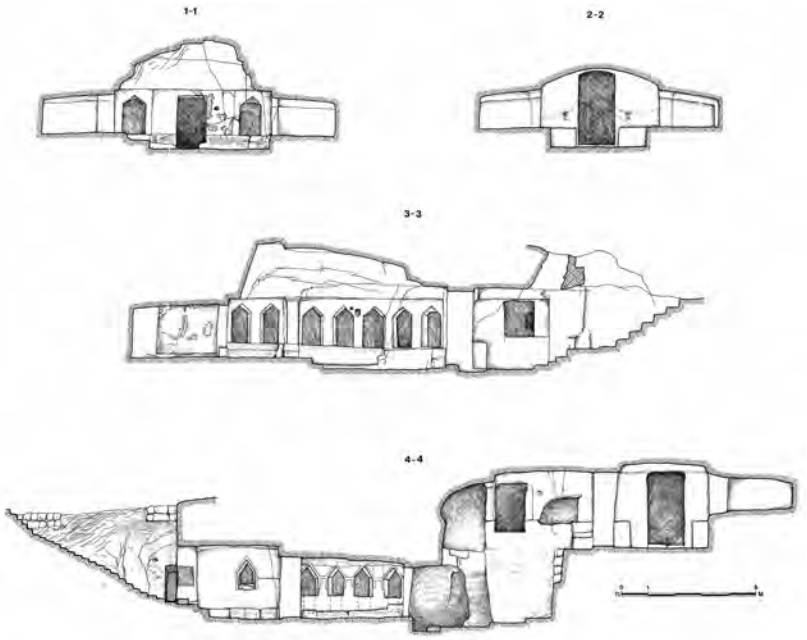


Fig. 41. Sections of tombs 552 and 560 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).

In the rear wall is the entrance to a central, flat-ceilinged chamber.

When the tomb was discovered in 1902, inscriptions and wall paintings on a high artistic level were found (Fig. 8). Some of them were documented and others were merely described in words. Palm branches and clusters of fruit were painted on the pillars at the entrance to hall A. On the pilasters between hall D and chamber E are paintings of tall thymiateria with flames burning in a ceramic oil lamp. Two small figures stand beside each thymiaterion. Above the *kokhim* in hall D is a painted decoration of garlands interrupted by wreaths. Large amphorae, similar to those in tomb I, are painted on either side of the entrance to hall D, on its western wall.[109]

The fresco on the panel to the left of the door to the central burial room (XVII) shows a man crowned with a wreath, wearing a striped tunic and playing a double flute (a *diaulos*). Behind him walks a woman in a multicolored dress playing a lyre. The musicians are walking one behind the other as if taking part in a funeral procession. The reconstructed painting of the musicians is currently on display in the tomb, next to the entrance to the central chamber in hall E (Fig. 28).

On the other side of the entrance to the central burial room (XVII), there was a worn painting depicting a libation scene, and behind it stood a tripod and a kantharos.[110]

Above the *kokhim* are 12 inscriptions in Greek, eight of them dated to the years 125–178 of the Seleucid era (188–135 BCE). Most of the names are Greek, such as Zosas, Apollophanes, Philotion the Sidonian, Persis, Apollodorus, Isodemus, Antiochus, Heliodorus, and Zenodorus son of Apollophanes. Others are Phoenician, like Balsalo the Priest, or Semitic: Badon. There was also an illegible long graffito.[111]

The architecture and decorative elements of Tombs 551 and 552 resemble the hypogea of Ptolemaic Alexandria.[112] The closest parallels to tombs 551 and 552 are found at Shatby, Alexandria. For example, the gabled *kokhim* characteristic of almost all the Maresha tombs appear in hypogeum A at Shatby, which has been dated to 280–250 BCE.[113]

Oren Tal has suggested that the *kokh* tomb is a new type, developed locally at the beginning of the Hellenistic period, possibly influenced by 5th-century BCE shaft tombs in Phoenicia. According to this study, there are two types of *kokh* tombs in Israel: The simplest one, of Phoenician influence, has up to ten *kokhim* and was used by a basic family unit. T; The more sophisticated type, known especially from Maresha, has a few dozen *kokhim* and was used by an extended family over a long period. In Tal's opinion, this type shows no Alexandrian influence.[114]

Tomb 560

Tomb 560, located northwest of the Musicians' Cave and physically connected to it, was excavated by Kloner and Bernie Alpert in 1993 (Figs. 40, 41).[115] The tomb was hewn from northwest to southeast, against the slope of the hill. Its southern *kokhim* were cut at a lower level, just underneath the northwestern part of hall B of tomb 552. During the initial stage of use, in the Hellenistic period, there was no connection between the two adjacent tombs. Later, apparently during or after the Roman period, a quarry operated in the southeastern part of tomb 560. This quarry, used for the extraction of limestone blocks, created a shaft approximately 3 m deep, which damaged both tombs and linked them (Fig. 42). Following the 1993 excavations, this quarry was cleared of the chalk chips and debris that filled it, thereby enabling passage between the tombs on metal stairs and a bridge running over the quarry.

The entrance to tomb 560 was located at the bottom of a stepped dromos (Fig. 43). The original opening was large and rectangular (approx. 2.1 m high and 1.2 m wide). In the Roman phase, a small vault was built on two notches, one cut in each of the entrance doorjambs (marked *a* in Fig. 43), thereby creating a smaller opening sealed with a round stone (diam. 1.1 m) that was rolled into an appropriately sized niche in the eastern wall when the tomb was opened (*b* in Fig. 43). Two steps descend from the opening to the floor of the first burial chamber, which had two *kokhim* with gabled ceilings cut in each of two walls, on both sides of the entrance. A burial trough (approx. 0.4 m wide and 0.6 m deep), covered with slabs, was carved out of the bottom of the eastern *kokh*, perhaps in the later, Roman stage of use.

A wide passage leads to the next chamber, which has a wide standing pit surrounded by ledges; parts of the standing pit were cut at a later stage. Eight *kokhim* with gabled ceilings and (apparently later) burial troughs with a raised "pillow" at the end of each trough (approx. 0.4 m wide and 0.6 m deep),

[109] KLONER 2000, and see discussion above.
[110] ERLICH 2009.
[111] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1051–1061.
[112] MCKENZIE 1990; EMPEREUR/NENNA 2001; EMPEREUR/NENNA 2003; VENIT 2000 and references therein.
[113] MCKENZIE 1990.
[114] TAL 2003.
[115] ZISSU/KLONER 2015a

Fig. 42. Photo of ancient quarry that damaged tombs 552 and 560, showing the SE end of tomb 552 (B. Zissu).

Fig. 43. Photo of entrance to tomb 560, showing notches cut in each of the entrance doorjambs (marked "a") and round blocking stone *in situ* (marked "b") (B. Zissu).

Fig. 44. Photo of main burial chamber of tomb 560, looking NW toward the entrance (B. Zissu).

Fig. 45. Detail: *kokhim* framed by polished borders in tomb 560 (B. Zissu).

covered by slabs, were cut in the side walls, four in each wall (Fig. 44). These slabs remain *in situ* on a few of the troughs. While the finish of the walls is rough and the masons did not bother to conceal the marks left by carving, the openings of the *kokhim* are framed by narrow, gabled, polished borders (Fig. 45). A thin, horizontally polished strip carved into the partition walls separating the *kokhim* connects these gabled frames, creating the illusion of dressed stone construction.

In the rear wall, a recess flanked by pilasters served as a passage to six additional double *kokhim*. They are arranged symmetrically, three on each side, flanking a burial chamber, which was hewn in the short wall opposite the entrance.

This tomb was looted in the past. The few remaining artifacts include fragments of storage jars, cooking pots, and oil lamps from the Hellenistic period. The few finds from the Roman period (2nd–3rd centuries CE) include Roman provincial oil lamps, fragments of glass vessels, a bracelet, and two copper-alloy rings. Three perforated terracotta palmettes (approx. 6.5 cm long and 4.8 cm wide) of a type known from other tombs at Maresha were apparently decorations attached to a wooden coffin.

Tomb 553 (E.III)

The tomb was carved near the top of the hill, just north of the Sidonian Tomb. A dromos descends into a front hall featuring eight gabled *kokhim* along its walls. The ceiling of the inner hall is slightly gabled. In total, there are 16 *kokhim* along the long walls of the inner hall and four in the rear wall; the two middle *kokhim* in the rear wall have flat ceilings, whereas the two side ones are gabled. The tomb was later altered, resulting in the removal of the internal partitions between the *kokhim*. Peters and Thiersch provided a brief description of the tomb and its inscriptions but did not include a plan or photographs.[116]

On the rear wall, there are two Greek inscriptions written in reddish-brown mortar. One of them mentions a date—the year 179 of the Seleucid era (134/3 BCE)—but the names of the interred are illegible. The other inscription is almost completely worn away.[117]

Tomb 554 (E.IV)

This tomb, located south of the Sandahanna church, was explored by Peters and Thiersch in 1902.[118] Kloner reexamined it in 1984 and filled in missing details.[119] The first explorers gave only a general description and did not draw a plan; the location of the tomb has not been accurately marked on maps published since.

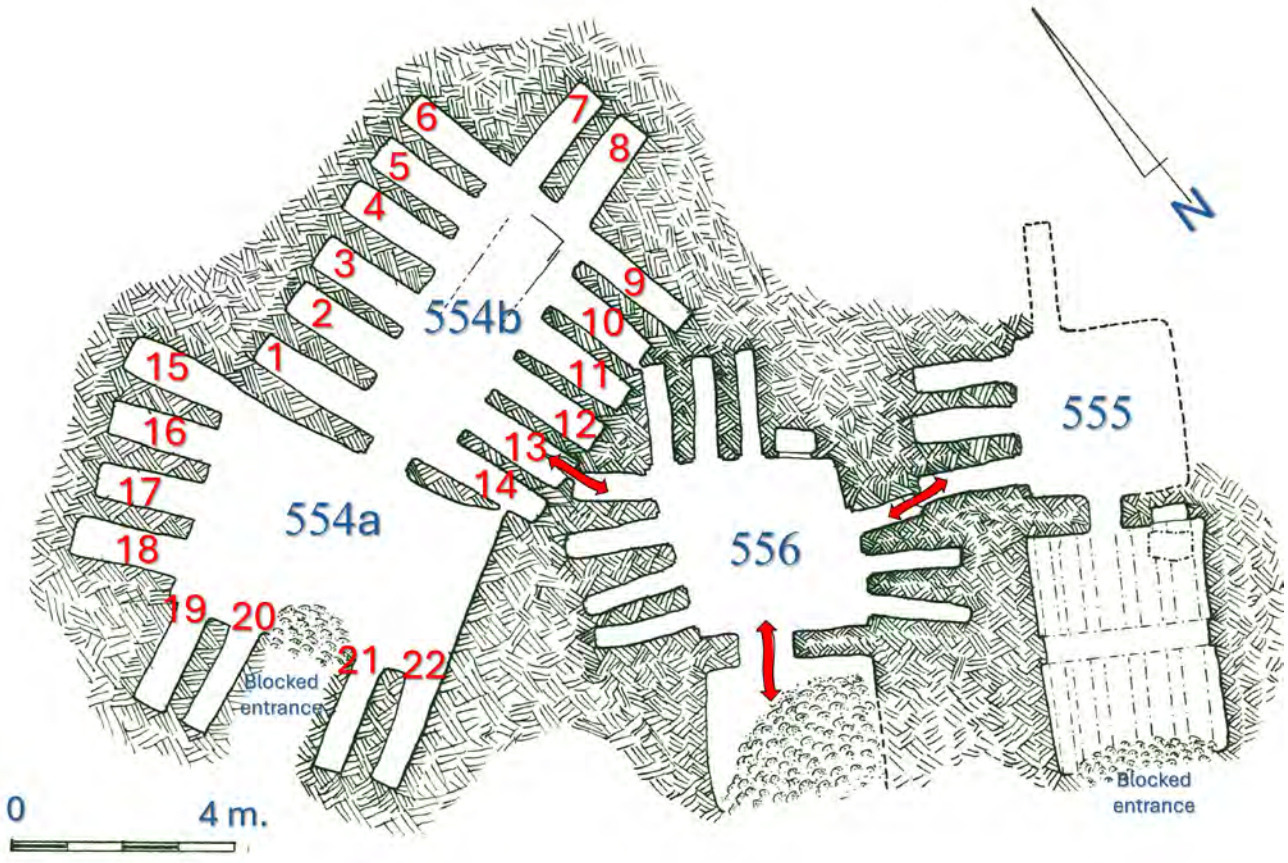


Fig. 46. Plan of tombs 554, 555 and 556 (A. Kloner, IAA expedition, B. Zissu).

The tomb consists of two rectangular halls containing a total of 22 gabled *kokhim* (Figs. 46, 47). There are eight gabled *kokhim* in the walls of the front hall. A total of 12 gabled *kokhim* are arranged symmetrically in the long walls of the inner hall, and there are another two *kokhim* in the rear wall: one gabled and the other with a flat ceiling. The

[116] PETERS/THIERSCH 1905.
[117] AMELING *et alii*. 2018, 1062–1063
[118] PETERS/THIERSCH 1905.
[119] KLONER 2003, 25–26.

Fig. 47. Photo of tomb 554B, looking E (B. Zissu).

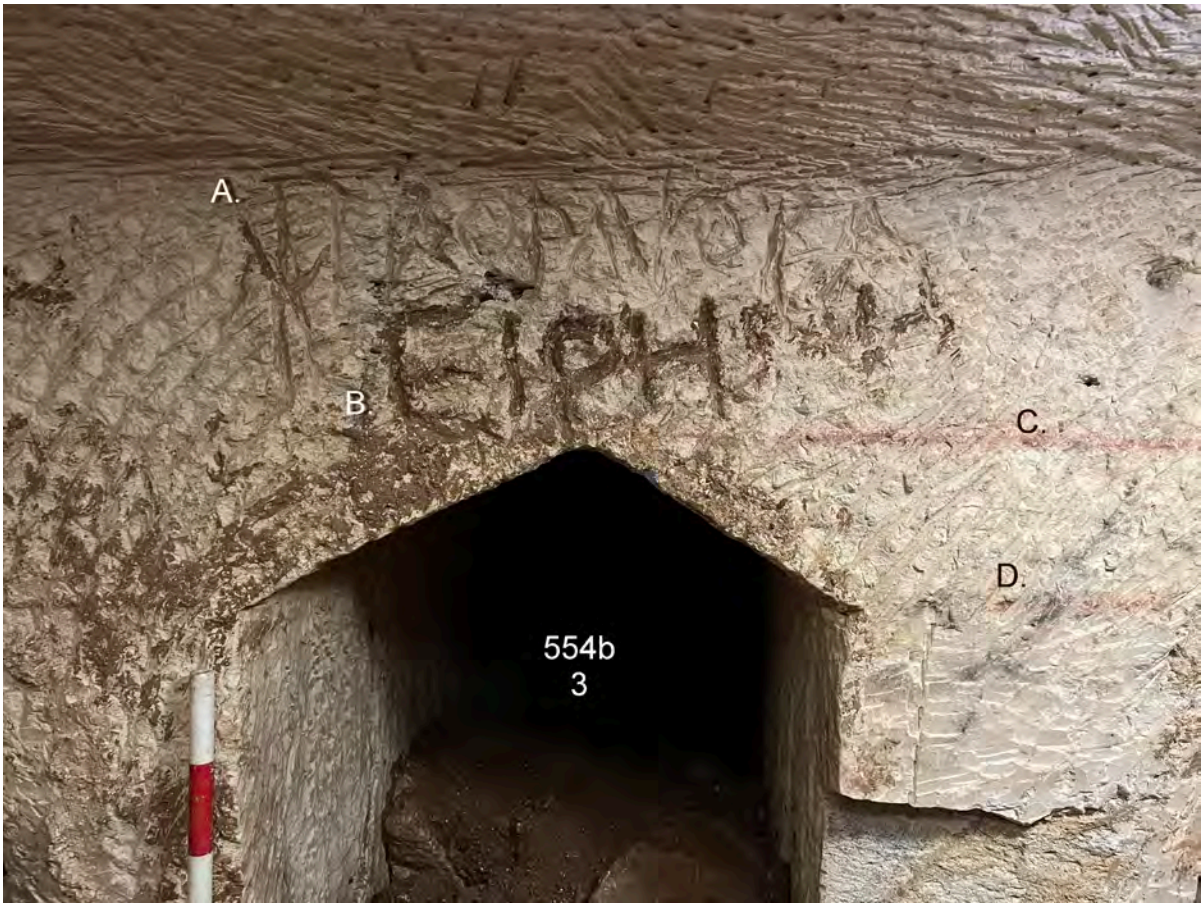


Fig. 48. Photo of *kokh* 3 in tomb 554B, showing inscribed names (Irene and Nikordeia) and parallel lines (C and D) marking the location of gables (B. Zissu).

Fig. 49. Photo of *kokhim* 1 and 2 in tomb 554B, showing inscribed names: Aristeides and additional names and/or date (B. Zissu).

Fig. 50. Photo of *kokhim* 4 and 5 in tomb 554B, showing inscribed names: Berenice and Adaeus (B. Zissu).

Fig. 51. Photo of *kokhim* 5 and 6 in tomb 554B, showing inscribed names: Adaeus and Philoxenus (B. Zissu).

Fig. 52a, b. Photos of *kokhim* 7 and 8 in tomb 554B, showing inscribed names: Aristeides son of Poba(?), Aristeia daughter of Apollo[phanes? doros?], and additional illegible names (B. Zissu).

mouths of the *kokhim* (each 2 m long, 0.5–0.6 m wide, 1.25 m high) were closed with blocks of chalk and sealed all around with mud mortar. In the inner hall, two horizontal red lines painted above the apex of the gables and along the base of the gables of the *kokhim* on both sides of the hall appear to belong to the planning phase, prior to the hewing of the *kokhim* (Fig. 48, C, D).

A total of 21 Greek inscriptions, mostly the names of the deceased, were incised or painted in a less formal hand in reddish-brown mud on the walls above and between the *kokhim*.[120]

The majority of names are Greek, including Irene and Nikordeia (Fig. 48, A, B), Aristeides (Fig. 49), Adaeus (Fig. 50, C), Philoxenus (Fig. 51, B), Aristeides son of Poba(?) (Fig. 52a, A), Aristeia daughter of Apollo[phanes? doros?] (Fig. 52a, B; 52b, A, B), Deme[tria?] (Fig. 53), Ptolemaeus

[120] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1063–1072.

Fig. 53. Photo of *kokh* 9 in tomb 554B, showing an inscribed name: Deme[tria?] (B. Zissu).

Fig. 54. Photo of *kokhim* 10, 11 in tomb 554B, showing inscribed names: Patrobalaus; "Apollonia daughter of …" (B. Zissu).

Fig. 55. Photo of *kokhim* 11 and 12 in tomb 554B, showing an inscribed name: Saria (?) (B. Zissu).

Fig. 56. Photo of *kokhim* 12, 13, and 14 in tomb 554B, showing inscribed names: Philous and Demetrias (B. Zissu).

Fig. 57. Photo of *kokhim* 13 and 14 in tomb 554B, showing inscribed names: Philous, Demetrias, Babas (B. Zissu).

Fig. 58. Photo of *kokhim* 16 and 17 in tomb 554A, showing an inscribed name: Sarias (B. Zissu).

and Berenice (Fig. 50, A, B), Apollonia (Fig. 54, B), Philous (Fig. 56, A), and Demetrias (Fig. 56, B; 57, B). A few names are Semitic—specifically, of Idumean origin, such as Sarias (which appears twice; Figs. 55, 58) and Babas (Fig. 56, D; 57, C), or of Phoenician provenance. One interesting name, Patrobalaus (Fig. 54, A), seems to be the Greek form of the common Phoenician name Ab-ba'al or Abi-ba'al.

Only two schematic paintings have been preserved. A stylized palmette is painted on each side of the opening leading from the front hall to the inner hall (Fig. 59a, b, *c*). The

Fig. 59. a: Photo of opening leading from 554A to 554B with two stylized palmettes painted on its sides; b, c: Detail (B. Zissu).

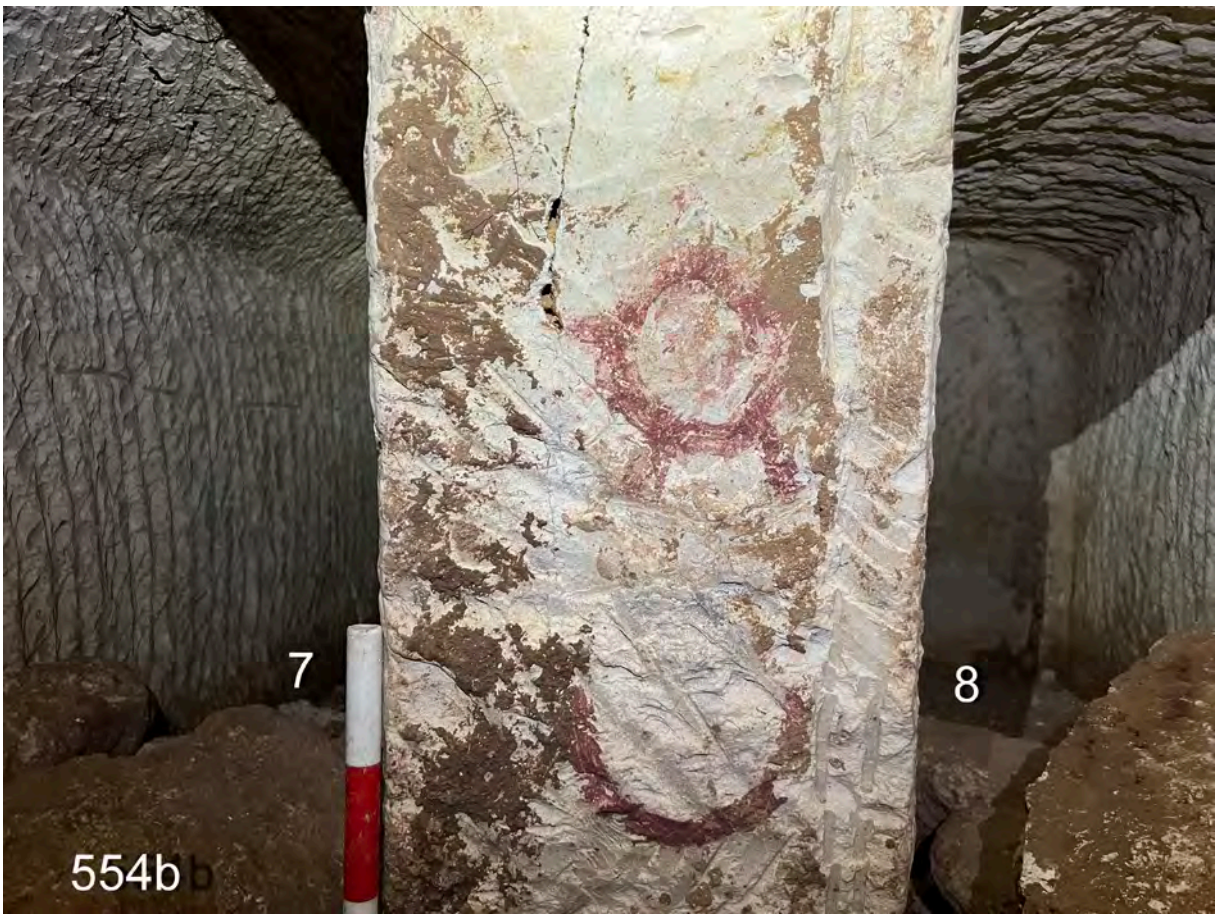


Fig. 60. Photo of *kokhim* 7 and 8 in tomb 554B, showing a disc painted above an oval on the partition wall between the *kokhim* (B. Zissu).

other painting is on the partition wall between the two *kokhim* in the rear wall; it depicts a disc (possibly with a stylized human face?) above an oval (Figs. 47, 60).

The Hellenistic tomb was in use from the mid–3rd century to the 2nd century BCE.

Tombs 555 and 556 (Fig. 8*)*

Two tombs adjacent to Tomb 554 were documented by Kloner in 1984 (Fig. 46). Tomb 556 features a vestibule and a burial chamber containing ten *kokhim* with arched ceilings, as well as an ossilegium niche. This layout is typical of Jewish tombs from the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. Crosses marked above some of the *kokhim* belong to the last, Byzantine phase of use (Fig. 61). Tomb 555, on the other hand, which is heavily damaged, consists of a courtyard and a burial chamber with at least four *kokhim*. Tomb 554 seems to have been cut first, followed by tomb 555, whereas tomb 556 was the last to be hewn, with its plan adapted to fit the neighboring tombs. During the hewing of one of the *kokhim* in tomb 555, a *kokh* in tomb 554 was damaged. Today, the entrance to tomb 554 is through this breach, as the original opening of tomb 555 is blocked by a collapse.

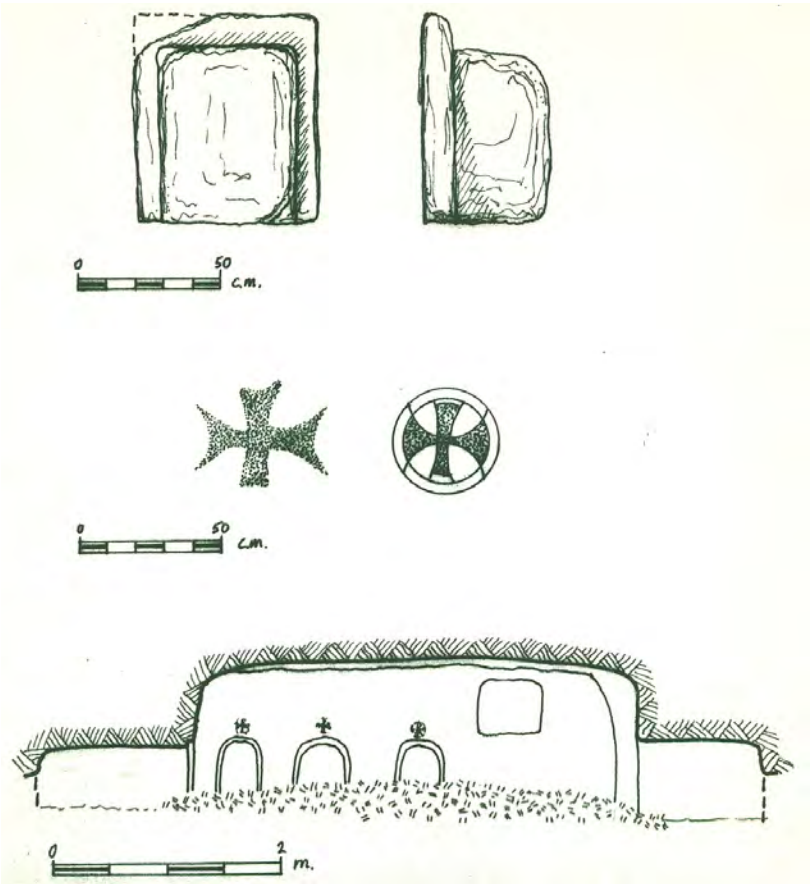


Fig. 61. Tomb 556: section and detail (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).

Tomb V

In 1921, Chester McCown discovered a tomb with *kokhim*, a central column, and Greek inscriptions located north of the Sidonian Tomb.[121] This tomb was reexamined by Abel in 1923, who designated it tomb E V, unaware of McCown's earlier publication (Fig. 62).

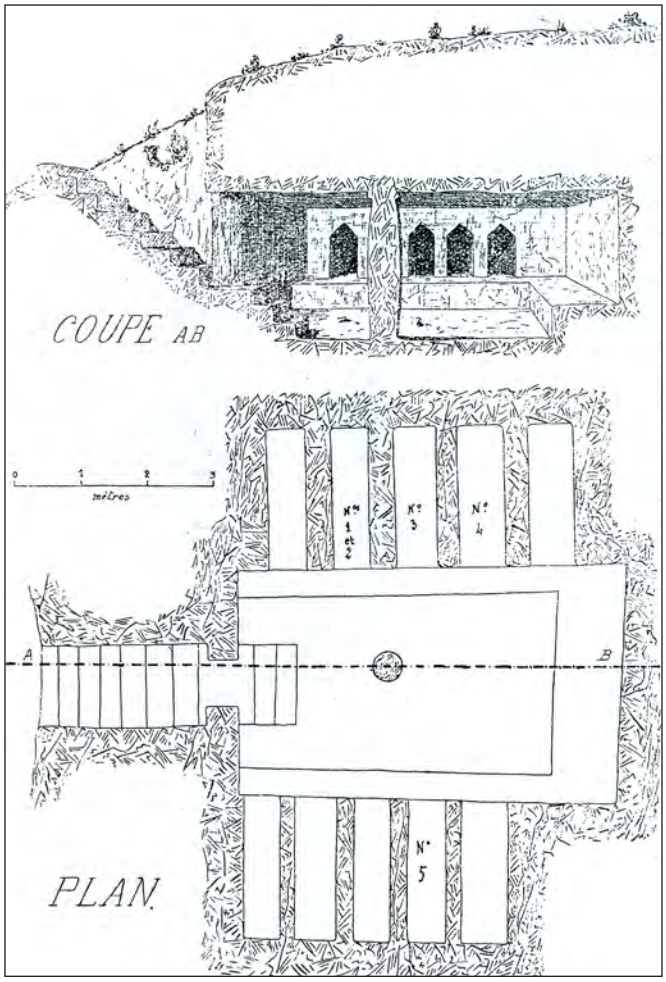


Fig. 62. Plan and section of tomb E V (ABEL 1925).

The entrance to the tomb is located on the western side and is accessed via a stepped dromos. From there, three additional steps lead down to a rectangular hall (approx. 5.75×3.55 m; height approx. 2.20 m) with ten gabled *kokhim* cut into its walls (average dimensions: 1.12–1.25 m high, 2.1 m long). The ceiling of the hall is supported by a carved round central column topped with a Doric-like capital. A bench runs along the northern, eastern, and southern walls, its width varying from 40 cm to 1.00 m.

The finds recovered from the looted tomb include pottery and an imported stamped amphora handle. Abel deciphered five names that were carelessly engraved and painted in Greek letters: Eunice (of Greek origin), Tzana and Scodris (of apparent Greek origin), and Salam/Salamps and Nauma (of Semitic origin).[122]

Tomb VI

Tomb VI was discovered by Moulton and reexamined by Abel (Fig. 63).[123] The tomb features a front hall connected by a passage to an inner hall, which has an apse at the far end. In the floor of the front hall, there is a standing pit surrounded by ledges. In the walls of the hall, including to the sides of the entrance, are a total of eight gabled *kokhim*. The partitions between the *kokhim* were designed to look like pilasters surmounted by a cornice. In the floor of the inner hall is a standing pit rounded toward the apse and with ledges around it. There are 12 gabled *kokhim* in the walls of the inner hall (average dimensions: 2.1 m long, 0.7 m wide, 1.25 m high) and six wider *kokhim* along the perimeter of the apse.

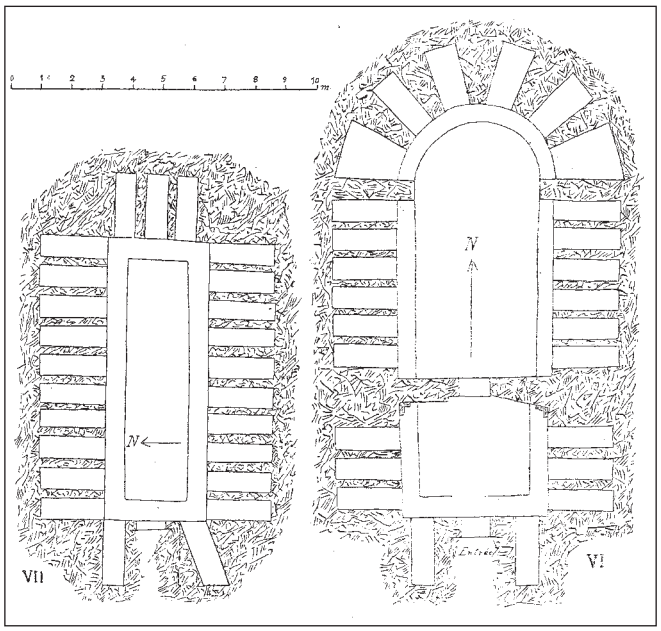


Fig. 63. Plans of tombs E VI and E VII (ABEL 1925).

Tomb VII

Moulton also discovered tomb VII, situated approximately 90 m south of the Musicians' Tomb. Abel later reexamined the tomb and deciphered the inscriptions (Fig. 63).[124] The entrance to the tomb hall is 3.5 m wide. A standing pit surrounded by ledges was hewn in the floor of the hall (width of each ledge: 50 cm). There are 25 *kokhim* in the walls, including to the sides of the entrance; 24 of them are gabled, but *kokh* 16, in one of the long walls, has a flat ceiling. The average dimensions of each *kokh* are as follows: 2.1 m long, 0.7–0.8 m wide, and 1.30–1.45 m high. The openings of the *kokhim* were blocked by closing slabs and sealed with mortar. A jug for pouring was discovered in the tomb.

There are 12 Greek inscriptions written in brown mortar above the *kokhim*. Some of these inscriptions include burial dates ranging from 172 to 201 of the Seleucid era (141/40–112/1 BCE). The legible names include Sabo daughter of Apollodorus, Dositheus, Antiochus, Demetria, Antiphilus son of Dionysius, Diodotus, Heliodora daughter of Aeneas, and Apollodorus. One inscription refers to "Iconion, the Sidonian woman."[125]

[121] MCCOWN 1923.
[122] ABEL 1925, 267–271; AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1073–1077.
[123] MOULTON 1915; ABEL 1925, 270, 272.
[124] MOULTON 1915; ABEL 1925, 270, 272–275.
[125] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1078–1086.

Tomb 557: The Tomb of the Ships

The tomb is located on a south-facing slope far to the north-east of the tell (map. ref. NIG 190743/611999), approximately 40 m south of the partially collapsed complex of bell-shaped caves known as "ʿIraq el-Haleil" or "Meʿarat Halulim." The tomb was excavated by Kloner and Alpert in 1994.[126]

A stepped dromos, approximately 1 m wide, descends toward the entrance (Fig. 64). The entrance is large: 1 m wide and 2.9 m high). The interior side of its lintel features an Attic frame. In a secondary phase, during the Roman period, massive doorposts were installed along the dromos, dividing it into two sections (Fig. 65). These doorposts were designed to create a much smaller opening that could be easily secured with a stone door. The lower part of the dromos, about 4.5 m long, is narrower than the upper part (approximately 0.6 m), constructed from large stones, and covered with stone slabs.

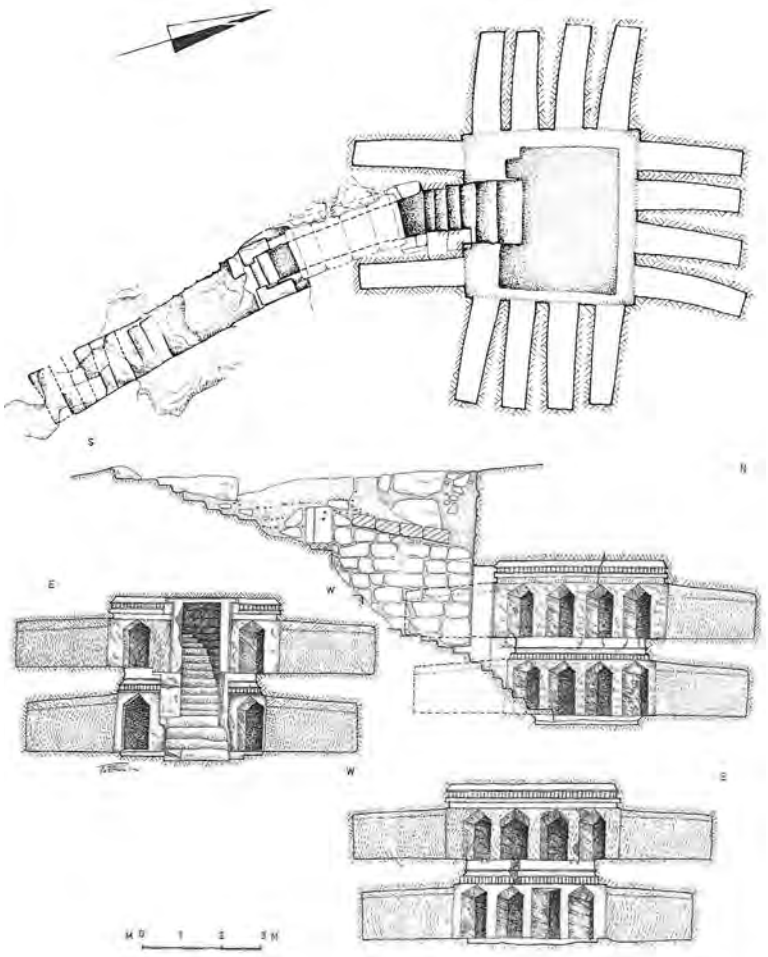


Fig. 64. Plan and sections of tomb 557 (A. Kloner. B. Alpert and IAA expedition).

The tomb has two tiers of *kokhim* (total height approx. 3.5 m), with the top tier set back to form a ledge 50 cm wide (Fig. 66). The tomb ceiling is flat and surrounded by a double cornice. A dentillated frieze is enclosed between the cornices. A double cornice with a similar frieze surrounds the ceiling of the bottom tier.

In the floor of the hall is a shallow standing pit surrounded by ledges. There are a total of 14 *kokhim* in the walls of the bottom tier—four in each of three walls and two flanking the entrance. Thirteen of them are gabled (0.7 m wide, 2.4 m long, maximum height 1.3 m); one *kokh* in the rear wall has a flat ceiling. There are 14 gabled *kokhim* in the walls of the top tier, aligned with those in the bottom tier. Approximately 40 stone slabs or fragments thereof, which had been used to close the mouths of

Fig. 65. Tomb 557: photo of burial chamber, looking south toward the entrance and the decorative "Attic" frame (B. Zissu).

[126] ZISSU/KLONER 2015a, 107–109.

Fig. 66. Tomb 557: Photo of burial chamber, looking north (B. Zissu).

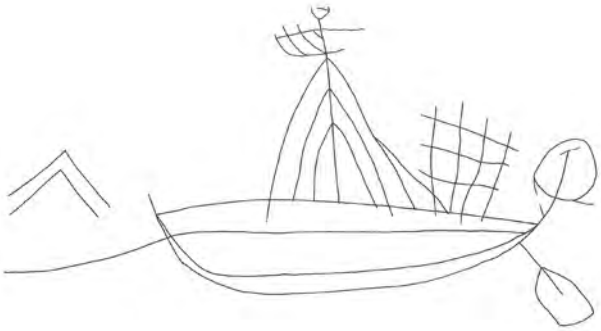


Fig. 67. Tomb 557: a. Photo of ship; b. Drawing of ship (B. Zissu).

the *kokhim*, were piled up inside the *kokhim* and on the tomb floor.

Several graffiti were incised with a sharp tool on the side of the ledge above the lower cornice, including two Phoenician-style sailing ships (each measuring approximately 20×30 cm; Figs. 67, 68),[127] schematic birds(?), and a human figure beside a standard and a cross-shaped feature (Fig. 69). Additional carved designs were found on some of the dentils, featuring a circle atop an oval and/or within a square frame, resembling a highly schematic Nabataean *baetyl* (Fig. 70).[128] The graffiti on both doorjambs were deliberately obliterated. The less damaged carving on the eastern jamb depicts a triangular element set inside a square, potentially representing a schematic *nefesh* (a pyramidal tomb marker or monument). The carvings on the dentils are in much better condition.

The finds included pottery from the Hellenistic, Late Roman, and Byzantine periods, glass vessels from the Byzantine period, and metal objects. Based on the few

[127] HADDAD/ARTZY 2011.

[128] Compare with the similar but much larger feature in Tomb 554; see Fig. 60 above.

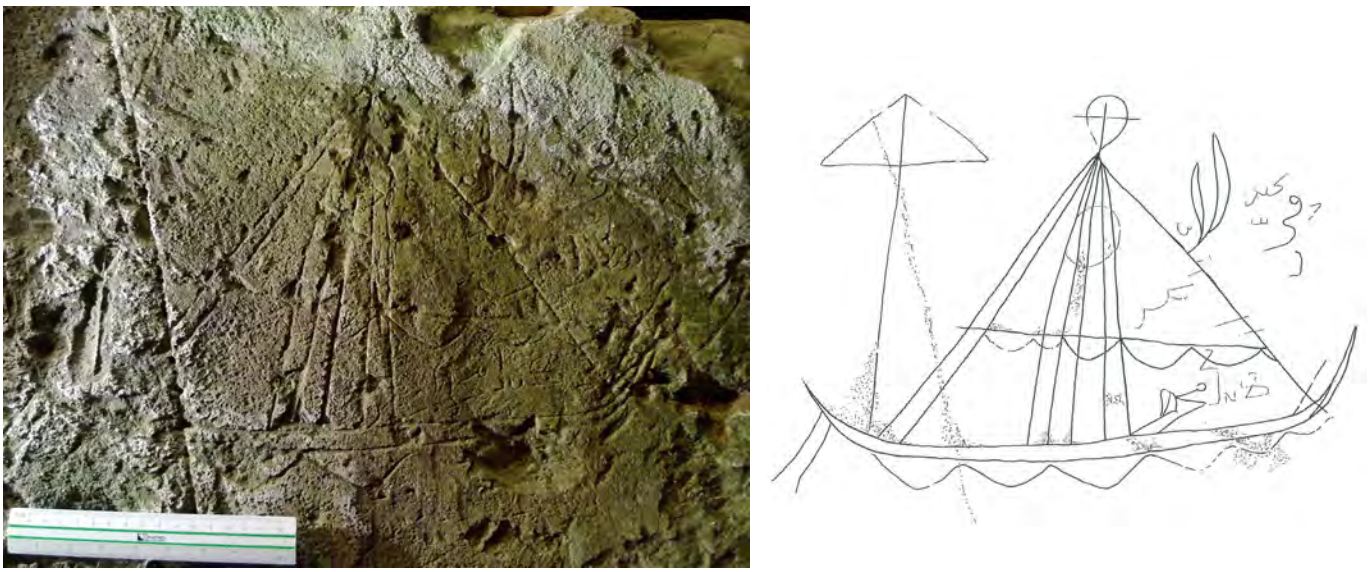


Fig. 68. Tomb 557: a. Photo of ship; b. Drawing of ship (B. Zissu).

Fig. 69. Tomb 557: photo of graffiti (B. Zissu).

artifacts uncovered in the tomb and its unique architecture, it appears that the tomb was cut during the Hellenistic period and reused in the Roman and Byzantine periods.

Maritime symbolism, particularly imagery of boats and ships, is prevalent in Hellenistic and Roman funerary contexts. These vessels often symbolize not only the soul's journey to the afterlife but also broader themes such as transition, the transformative nature of death, and the belief in an existence beyond the material world.[129]

Additionally, maritime imagery in funerary art can reflect the social status and identity of the deceased. Ships were often associated with trade, exploration, and power, especially in maritime cultures. The depiction of ships in funerary contexts could indicate the deceased's status as a merchant, sailor, or influential figure, possibly of Phoenician/Sidonian origin, who lived in Hellenistic Maresha.

[129] ZISSU 2015.

Fig. 70a and b. Tomb 557: photos of carved figures (B. Zissu).

Tomb 558

The tomb was excavated by Kloner. A stepped dromos leads down to the entrance to a transverse front hall. There are 12 *kokhim* in its walls, including ones flanking the entrance. The inner hall contains a standing pit surrounded by ledges and 23 *kokhim* in the walls. The name Cosnatanus was written in Greek on one of the walls.[130]

Tomb 559

The tomb is situated near tomb 558 and subterranean complex 97. It was excavated by Kloner and Alpert in 1998.[131]

A stepped, vaulted dromos (95 cm wide, 1.7 m high) leads down to a vestibule at the entrance (width: 1.5 m). The burial hall is divided into two sections, front and rear, separated by a passage (Fig. 71). The sides of the passage are carved to create pilasters surmounted by capitals. In the center of the passage stand two carved round columns (diameter: 55 cm; height: 2.1 m) on round bases (diameter: 80 cm; height: 23 cm). The columns are topped with square capitals that support a ceiling beam also resting on the capitals of the pilasters (Fig. 72a).

There are eight *kokhim* in the walls of the front section, including two flanking the entrance. Seven of the *kokhim* are gabled (80 cm wide, 1.4 m high, approximately 2.4 m long). The eighth *kokh* has a flat ceiling, and the edges of its mouth are smoothed, suggesting it may have been used to hold collected bones. Above this *kokh* is a two-line Greek inscription: the top line states the year 129 of the Seleucid era (183 BCE), while the bottom line features Semitic names written in Greek: Gaddes and Simis (Figs. 72b, 72c).[132]

[130] KLONER 1991, 76; KLONER 2003, 21.
[131] KLONER 2003, 21.
[132] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1095–1096.

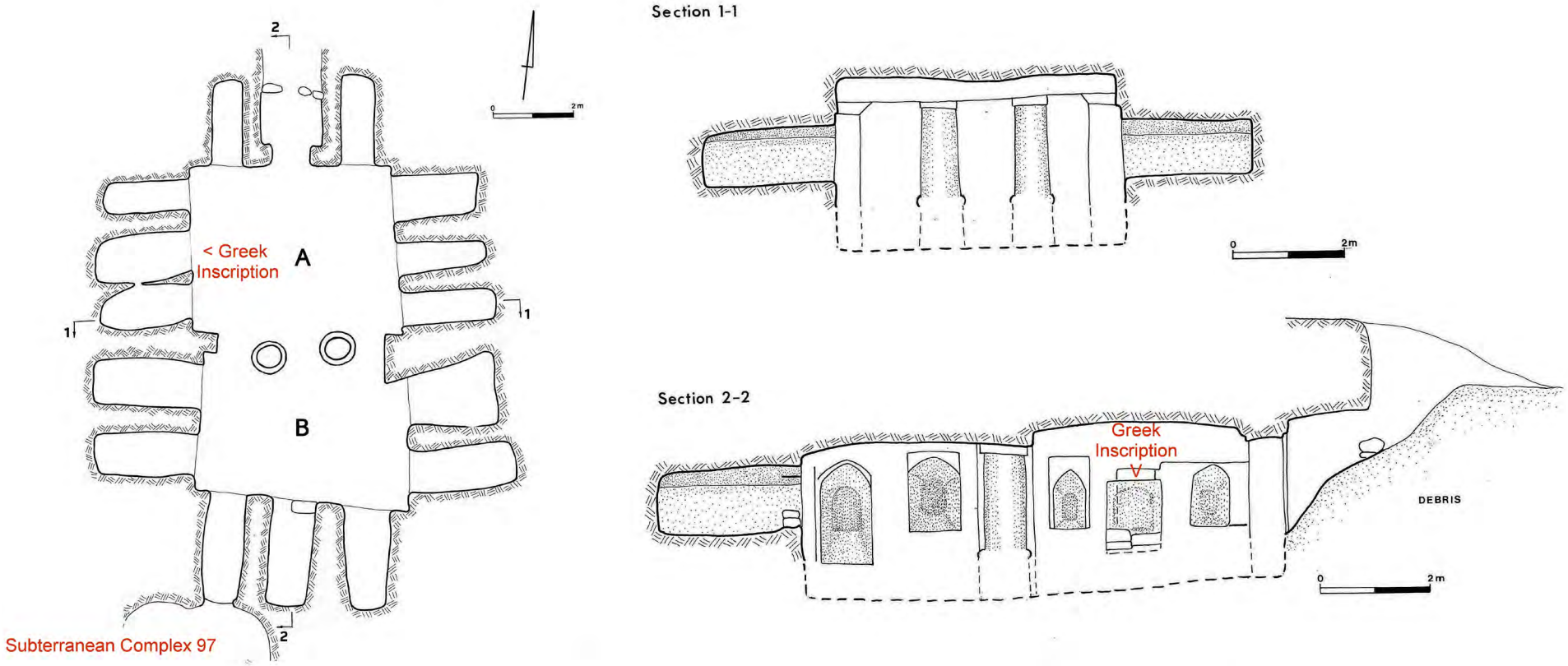


Fig. 71. Plan and sections of tomb 559 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition; B. Zissu).

Fig. 72. Tomb 559: a: View to the south; b: *Kokhim* cut in the western wall (note location of inscription); c: Detail of the inscription (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).

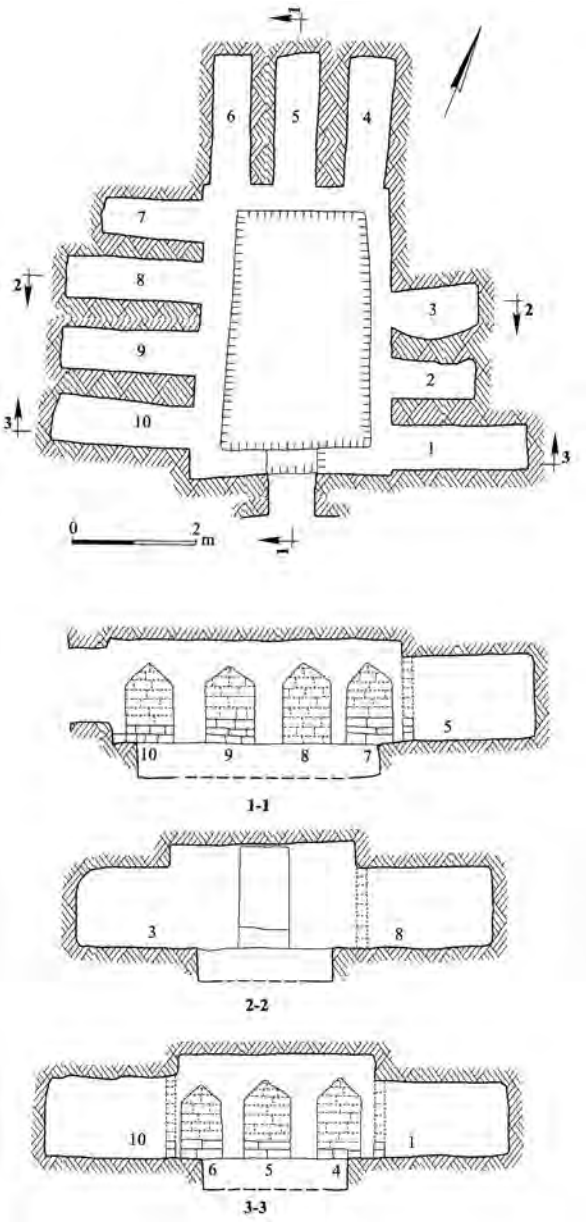
The rear section contains seven *kokhim* of various dimensions, slightly larger than those in the front section. All the *kokhim* were sealed with stone slabs. Ceramic artifacts and lamps date the use of the Hellenistic tomb to the 2nd century BCE.

The spatial relationship between subterranean complex 97 and tomb 559 is particularly noteworthy. As is well established, the subterranean complexes at Maresha were typically excavated beneath residential structures and served the inhabitants of these dwellings. The location of this particular complex reflects the urban expansion and development of both the city and its subterranean systems toward its peripheral burial grounds. It appears that in antiquity, the excavators of the subterranean complex were aware of the adjacent burial system and deliberately avoided disturbing it. Modern antiquities looters, however, recognized that only a thin partition separated the complex from an adjacent cavity and subsequently breached it, entering one of the rear *kokhim*. This resulted in dirt deposits with ceramic finds from that complex accumulating inside the tomb.

Tomb 561

In a survey of subterranean complex (SC) 71 in 1985, Kloner discovered tomb 561 still closed (Fig. 73). One edge of a *kokh* in the tomb wall seems to have been damaged when SC 71 was hewn, and it was sealed with mortar in antiquity.

The tall, wide tomb entrance was closed with a wall made



of ashlar blocks. A standing pit surrounded by ledges was hewn in the floor of the hall. There are a total of ten gabled *kokhim* of various lengths in all the walls, with the exception of the wall in which the entrance is located, and their mouths were closed with structures built of courses of stone.

Bones in primary burial were found in some of the *kokhim*. The collected bones of nine adults and two children were found in *kokh* 3, a shallow, tall *kokh*. In *kokh* 7, the skeletons of a man and a woman were found facing each other. A quarter of those buried in the tomb were youths and infants. The bones of three adults showed signs of tuberculosis, a disease uncommon in archaeological contexts. The Greek name Megis[tas] is incised on the wall.[133]

The finds include a small jar and nine small perfume bottles from the 3rd century BCE, fragments of glass vessels, a bronze ring and bracelet, an iron ring, and an axe. The Hellenistic tomb was used for primary burial and the collection of bones in secondary burial.[134]

Due to the discovery of collected bones in *kokh* 3, Kloner proposed that the people of Hellenistic Maresha were practicing secondary burial. This practice was attributed to the local Idumean community.[135]

Tomb 562 (E.VIII)

Tomb 562, near the hilltop east of the Sidonian Tomb, was excavated by Oren (Fig. 74). The tomb was blocked when the work was finished.[136] The layout of Tomb 562 is similar to that of the Sidonian Tomb: A stepped dromos leads down to the entrance. The hall consists of three consecutive sections, A, B, and C, separated by passages. The doorjambs and lintel between sections A and B are designed in an Attic pattern. The ceilings of sections A and B are gabled and have a ridge adorned with a deep groove. The doorjambs between sections B and C, on the side facing section B, are carved to look like pilasters surmounted by capitals. The ceiling of section C is flat. A standing pit surrounded by ledges was carved out of the floor of the hall. There are 24 gabled *kokhim* arranged symmetrically in the long walls, as well as two gabled *kokhim* flanking the entrance. The rear wall contains four *kokhim*—the two side ones gabled and the two middle ones with flat ceilings. The *kokhim* were closed with stone slabs and dressed blocks of stone. The surfaces of the partitions between the *kokhim* are designed to look like pilasters surmounted by capitals with a cornice above them. Two steps lead up to the rearmost room, whose walls are decorated with alternating chiseled grooves.

On the walls above the kokhim and at the bottom of one of the lintels, there are approximately 20 Greek inscriptions written in red paint, brown mortar, and charcoal. Ten of these inscriptions have been deciphered. They include Greek names such as Dosithea, Menas, Antiphilus, and Ptolemaeus; Semitic names like Pheroras and Babata; and three Idumean names: Cosnatanus, Audocus, and Cosiabus. Two inscriptions mention burial dates: the years LA and LB of the reign of Ptolemy V (204–180 BCE), which correspond to 203 and 202 BCE. If we accept Gera's suggestion that the single-digit numerals should be interpreted as dates corresponding to a local era of the city, refounded under Aulus Gabinius as governor of the province of Syria in 57/6 BCE, we arrive at much later dates: 57/6 and 56/5 BCE, respectively.[137]

[133] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1097.
[134] KLONER 1991, 74–76; KLONER 2003, 26–27.
[135] KLONER 2011, 571–572.
[136] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 135–155.
[137] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 1086–1095; GERA 2017, 216–222. See discussion above regarding the chronology of the Sidonian Tomb.

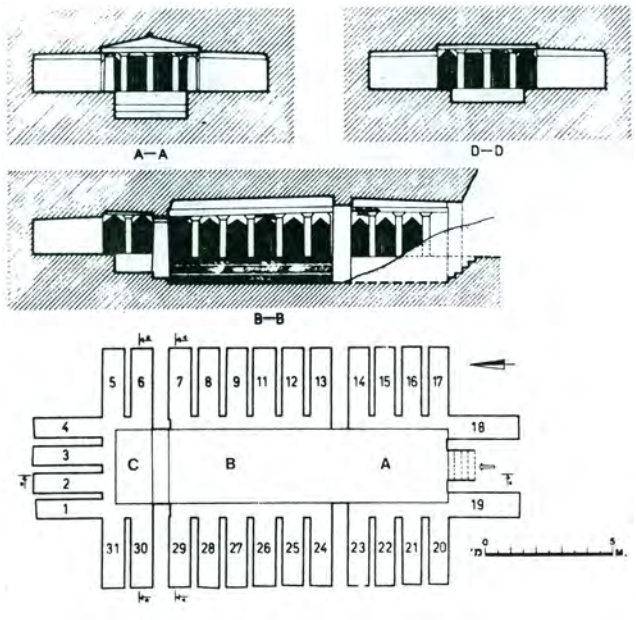


Fig. 74. Plan and sections of tomb 562 (OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984).

The finds include ten wheel-made lamps, three ceramic spindle-shaped bottles, and iron bowls and nails. The Hellenistic tomb was used in the 3rd–1st centuries BCE.

Tomb 563

The tomb is situated on the lower portion of a slope, approximately 800 m northeast of the tell and south of the system of bell-shaped quarries known as "ʿIraq el-Haleil" or "Meʿarat Halulim," at map reference 191032/611998. It was discovered by Tal Tutka following illegal excavations and was documented by the first author with Avner Ecker as part of an archaeological survey conducted in 2022.[138]

A dromos leads down to an entrance (width: 1.3 m) that is blocked by a wall; the wall is still *in situ*. The looters gained access to the tomb by removing part of the lintel and the uppermost course of this wall. Both doorjambs of the entrance are shaped like square pilasters topped with Doric capitals (Fig. 75).

The rectangular burial hall (approx. 10.5 m long and 3 m wide) has a gabled ceiling and is divided into two sections, front and rear, separated by a passage. The sides of the passage were carved to create pilasters surmounted by Doric capitals (Fig. 76). The capital on the left side remains unfinished. In the center of the passage stand two carved square columns. The right-hand column is topped with a Doric capital similar to that on the adjacent pillar, whereas the capital of the left-hand column is unfinished and resembles an abacus or square capital. Both columns support a beam that rests on their capitals. Above this beam, an additional ceiling beam adorned with a row of dentils is supported by the side pillars. Some elements of this decorative scheme are finely smoothed, whereas other parts were left unfinished.

In the walls of the front section, there are ten gabled *kokhim*, including two flanking the entrance. The *kokhim* are

[138] ZISSU/ECKER, in press. The tomb was explored on behalf of the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University, with the participation of Tal Tutka, Atara Cohen, Shemesh Ya'aran, and Esther Melet-Rakow (IAA permit S–1157/2022).

Fig. 75: Tomb 563, looking toward the entrance; notice the name Oinanthes inscribed on the left (B. Zissu).

Fig. 76: Tomb 563, looking toward pillars surmounted by Doric capitals; notice the name Herophilos inscribed on the left (B. Zissu).

of similar dimensions (approximately 80 cm wide, 1.4 m high, and about 2.4 m long), except for the first *kokhim* on the right and left, which are double the width.

The rear section contains 20 *kokhim* of similar dimensions: eight in the right wall, eight in the left wall, and four in the back wall. The *kokhim* on the right and left sides of the back wall are gabled and double-width, while the two *kokhim* in the center have flat ceilings. A standing pit surrounded by ledges was carved into the floor of the hall. At some point in antiquity, the pit was deepened, probably in order to extract additional masonry blocks or slabs. It was later filled with carving debris (chips). This pit is visible only in the rear section.

Where the back wall meets the gabled ceiling, a gabled façade is formed. The sides of this façade are supported by two decorative pillars topped with Doric capitals, similar to those found in the passage between the two sections of the hall.

The *kokhim* were sealed with chalk slabs or masonry, the remnants of which were discarded by the looters throughout the hall. On the walls above the *kokhim*, there are approximately 24 Greek names written in red paint, brown mortar, and charcoal. Most of the names have been deciphered, including Greek names such as Magas, Herophilos (Fig. 76), Galates, Damas, Euphanes, Demetrios, Demarchos, Athenodoros, Philoxenos, Ammias, Auge, Praxo, Demo and Oinanthes (Fig. 75), along with a single Semitic name, Nauma. One inscription mentions a burial date corresponding to 146 BCE.

Fragmentary ceramic artifacts date the use of the Hellenistic tomb to the 2nd century BCE; the tomb was then reused in the 1st–2nd centuries CE.

Tomb 575

The tomb is located on a slope northeast of the tell (at map. ref. NIG 190768/612080) and is part of the system of bell-shaped quarries known as "ʿIraq el-Haleil" or "Meʿarat Halulim," which damaged the tomb significantly (Fig. 77). Bell-shaped quarries operated in the area during the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods.[139]

A dromos descends northward toward the entrance. The tomb consists of a single carefully hewn burial chamber whose floor and much of the lower parts of whose walls were destroyed by the bell-shaped quarry. Fifteen *kokhim* were cut in the walls of the tomb: one on each side of the entrance, five on the right side, five on the left side, and three on the wall opposite the entrance. All have typical gabled ceilings, with the exception of the three *kokhim* in the wall opposite the entrance, which have flat ceilings. The ceiling of the tomb chamber itself is gabled and surrounded by a cornice. Due to the extent of the destruction, there were no finds in this tomb. Based on its typical architecture, it was cut in the Hellenistic period.

Within this extensive bell-shaped quarry, there is an

[139] ZISSU/KLONER 2014.

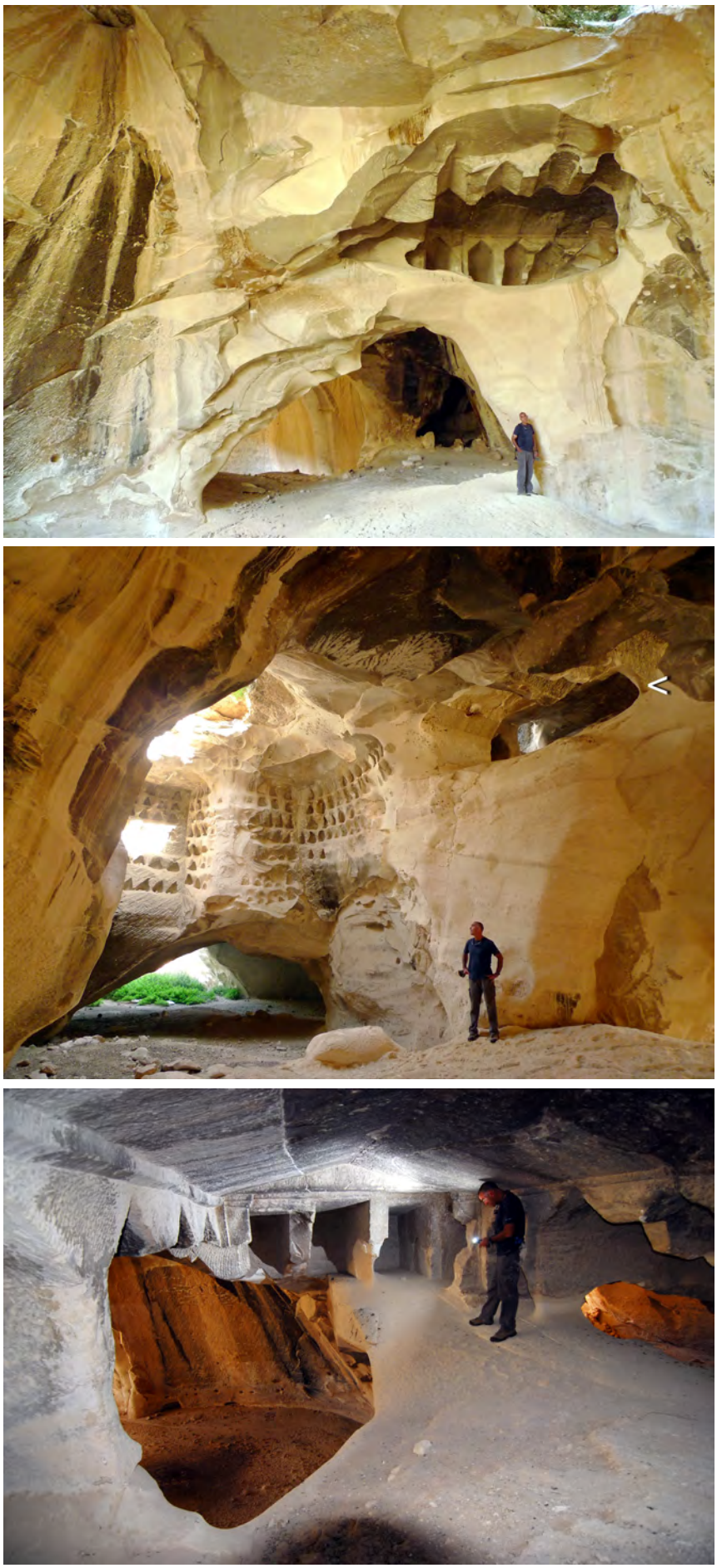


Fig. 77. Tomb 575: a, b: Photos of the tomb from the bottom of the quarry; c: Photo from inside the damaged tomb (B. Zissu).

additional partly destroyed tomb that was not examined due to safety issues. An earlier columbarium cut into by the quarry is also visible.

Additional Tombs in the Eastern Necropolis

Two two-tier *kokh* tombs, E.VI and E.IX, were found near the hilltop east of the Sidonian Tomb. Two other tombs, E.V and E.VII, are next to one another and have a rear apse.[140]

THE SOUTHWESTERN NECROPOLIS

Three tombs (nos. 500, 501, and 502) were discovered in the southwestern necropolis, 250–500 m from the slope of the upper city, thus providing an outer limit for the lower city in this area, similarly to the tombs of the eastern necropolis. Tombs 501 and 502 are close to the upper city; they are therefore from a relatively early date, having been hewn before the expansion of the lower city.

Tomb 500

Tomb 500 was discovered on the slope near subterranean complexes 44 and 81 and was excavated in 1989 by Dalit Regev on behalf of the Kloner IAA Expedition (Fig. 78).[141] A stepped dromos leads down to the tall tomb entrance (0.8 m wide, 1.8 m high), which is adorned on its interior side with an Attic "ear" pattern. The tomb contains three consecutive halls. In the floor of the front hall is a standing pit surrounded by ledges. Six gabled *kokhim* are arranged symmetrically in the long walls of the hall. The surfaces of the partitions between the *kokhim* are carved to look like pilasters surmounted by capitals with a cornice above them. The walls of the middle hall contain 12 gabled *kokhim*, one of them shallow. The partitions between the *kokhim* in the northern wall are similar to those in the front hall. In the floor of the inner hall is a standing pit surrounded by ledges. The side walls of the hall contain six gabled *kokhim* arranged symmetrically, and the rear wall has four flat-ceilinged *kokhim* the same height as the gabled ones. Thus the cave contains a total of 28 *kokhim*, all of which were closed with stone slabs. The stone slab was inserted into a depression in the edges of the *kokh* and sealed all around with mortar. The *kokh* next to the entrance to the front room was closed with an ossuary fragment decorated with a rosette.

Twelve Greek inscriptions were engraved or painted on the cornices above the *kokhim*; most of them state the name of the deceased and the date of burial. Only some of these inscriptions have been deciphered. They include Greek names such as Telemachos son of Basileides, Theophilos son of Protogenes, Apollonios son of Antipatros, and Athenion.

Three inscriptions mention burial dates according to the eras of Ptolemaic kings. Years 1, 3(?), and 7 are regnal years and may be attributed to either Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282–246 BCE), Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–222 BCE), or Ptolemy IV Philopator (222–205 BCE). Additionally, two inscriptions provide dates according to the Seleucid era: one from 194 SE (118/117 BCE) and the other from 200 SE (112/111 BCE).[142]

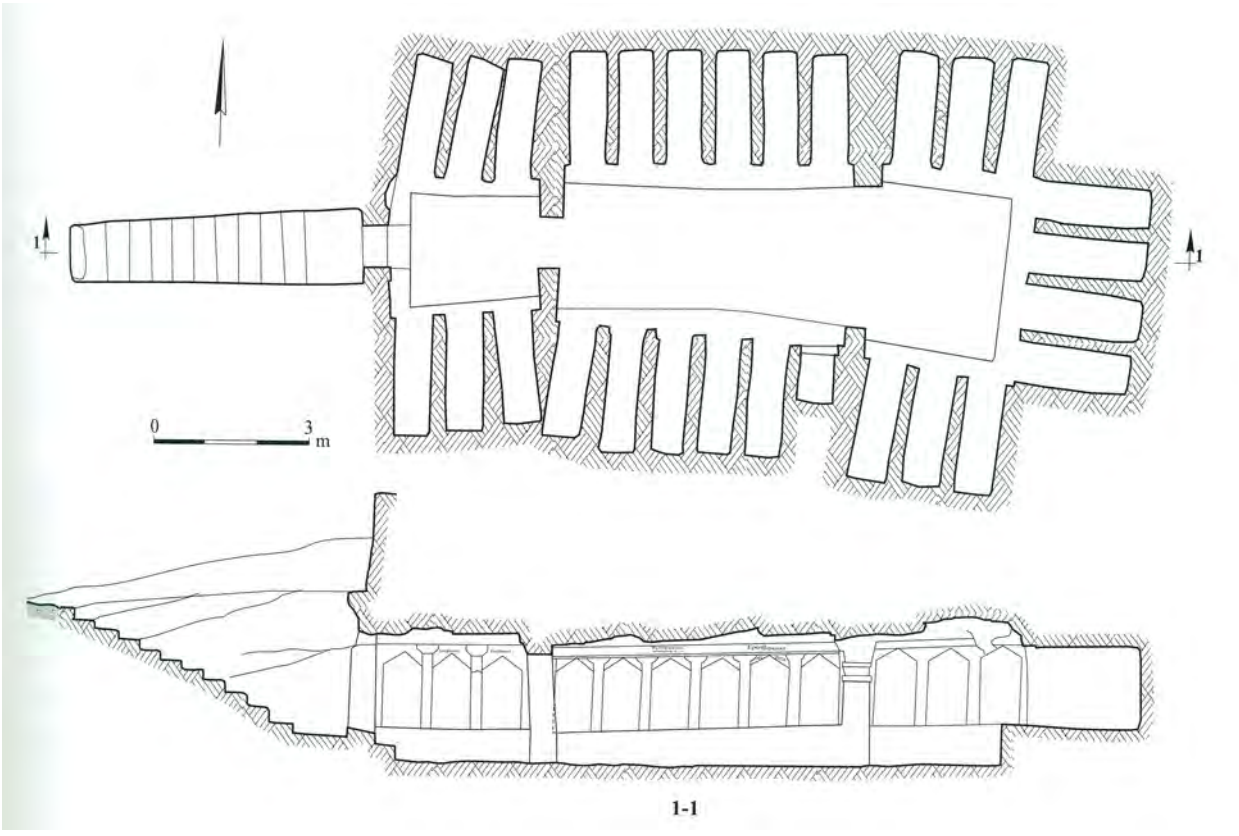


Fig. 78. Plan and section of tomb 500 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).

[140] OREN/RAPPAPORT 1984, 133.
[141] REGEV 2017.
[142] REGEV 2017, 23–25. However, see the discussion above regarding single-digit numerals in Tombs 551 and 562. Gera suggested that these numerals refer not to the Ptolemaic kings but to a local era starting in 57/56

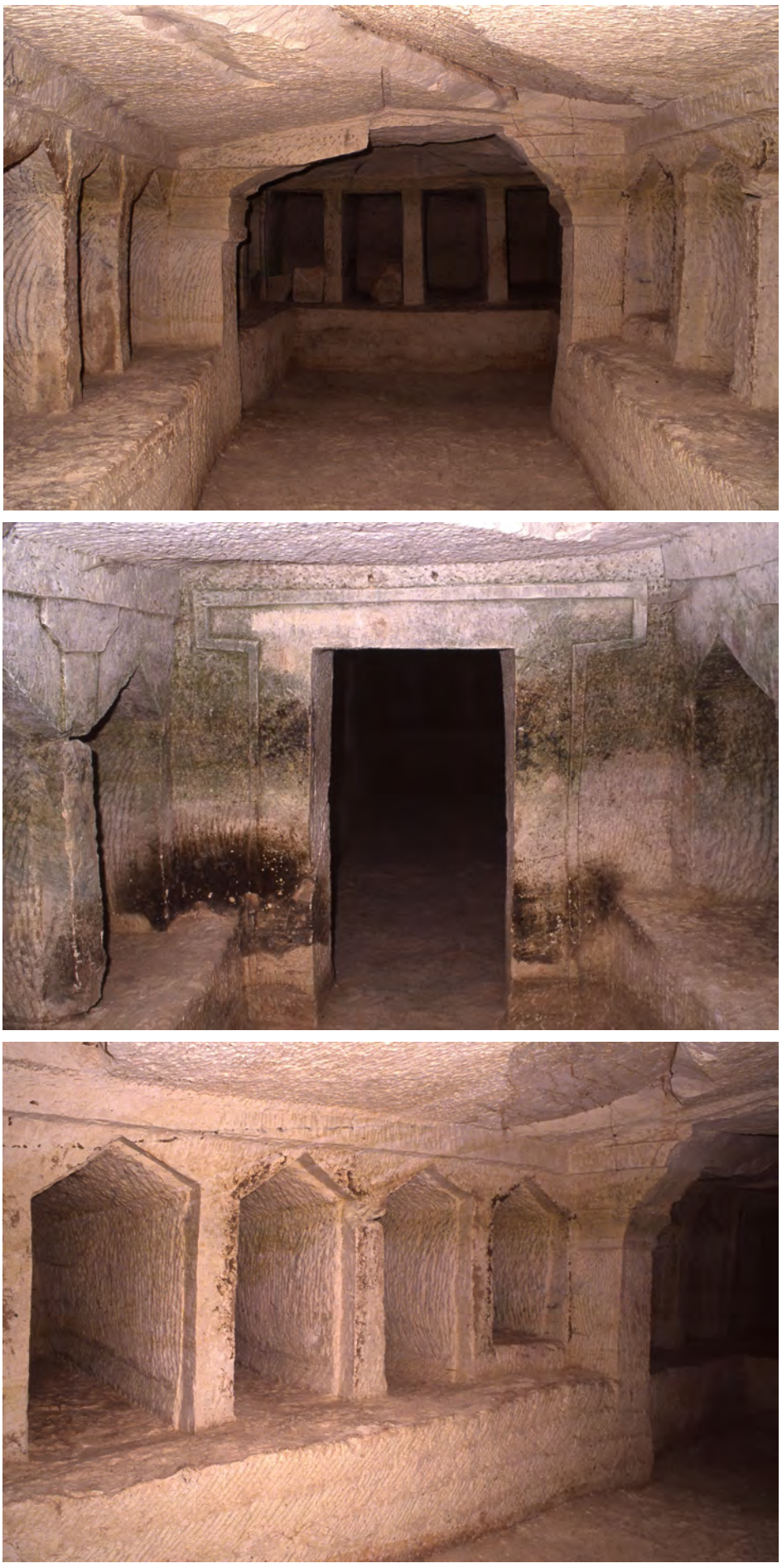


Fig. 79a-c. Photos of tomb 500 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).

The finds include household pottery (some of it intact), rings, strings of beads, iron nails and nails inserted into wooden beams, other metal objects, bones, and five coins of Alexander II Zabinas (128–123 BCE). In the area of the dromos, 12 stamped amphorae from the 2nd century BCE, imported from Rhodes, were found.

The Hellenistic tomb was used until roughly 112/111 BCE. Later, in the 1st century CE, Jews were buried in it, as attested by ceramic finds and an ossuary fragment.[143]

DISCUSSION

Three cemeteries (*necropoleis*) are known in the vicinity of Hellenistic-period Maresha, containing over 50 tombs, most of them designed similarly: rectangular halls with *kokhim* cut into the walls, typically featuring gabled openings. The tombs served as family sepulchers for multiple generations throughout the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE.

Two notable tombs, discovered in 1902, feature remarkable wall paintings. Although the paintings have suffered damage and faded since their discovery, they were restored in 1993.

The Tomb Architecture

Above tombs 510, 511, 517, and 520 in the northern necropolis, heaps of polished stones were noted that may belong to pyramidal tomb markers (*nefashot*).[144] These are the only examples of external, above-ground architecture in Hellenistic Maresha, despite the prevalence of tomb markers and monuments in contemporaneous cultures and nearby regions.[145]

The architecture of the tombs of Hellenistic Maresha was well planned and designed in advance. A stepped dromos cut deep into the rock opposite the direction of the slope led down to a wide, tall tomb entrance that was closed with masonry.

The most common layout of Hellenistic tombs at Maresha, known as the "Alexandrian model," features an elongated rectangular burial hall with *kokhim*. More elaborate tombs adopt a T-shaped design, consisting of a transverse front hall and a well-crafted passage leading to an axially oriented rectangular hall. *Kokhim* with gabled ceilings were carved out of the walls of the halls, arranged symmetrically in rows at fixed intervals. Each *kokh* was intended to hold a body in an extended position in primary burial. The *kokhim* are typically 1.8–2.4 m long, 0.5–0.8 m wide, and 1.1–1.45 m high, including the gable.

A standing pit surrounded by ledges was carved out of the floor of the hall, with the ledges at the same height as the floor of the *kokhim*. The handling of the body apparently took place on the ledge: in primary burial the body was placed in the *kokh* supine, and the mouth of the *kokh* was closed with a matching stone slab in the shape of a gable or with a built structure, and was sealed all around with mud mortar. Thus the sealed *kokh* resembled a sarcophagus.

The inner, rear section of many of the tombs contains elements with a conspicuous design: a flat-ceilinged chamber; wide, double, or extra-tall *kokhim*; flat-ceilinged *kokhim*; or a unique painted or engraved adornment or inscription. Apparently, this section was meant for burial of the founder of the dynasty and ancestors of the extended family. Over the generations, family members were buried in the other *kokhim*.

A few tombs at Maresha have a different layout. Tomb VI is a hall with *kokhim* of ordinary dimensions and a rear apse with wide *kokhim*. Tombs E.V and E.VII contain a hall with *kokhim* and an apse. Tombs 515, 516, 557, E.VI, and E.IX have a two-tier layout, with the top tier set back.

The tombs at Maresha contain original architectural elements not found in other ancient tombs in Israel:

- A standing pit surrounded by ledges in the burial chamber
- Rows of tall, gabled *kokhim* in the walls of the burial chamber
- A two-tier layout, with the top tier set back in the rock
- A rear apse with *kokhim* in its walls

Several factors seem to have influenced the creation of tall, gabled *kokhim* in the Maresha tombs:

1. The quality of the local rock: The soft chalk was easy to hew and work with and made it possible to shape the *kokhim* and to shape and decorate the entire tomb.

2. The structural aspect: Chalk allows for a more stable, durable gabled *kokh* ceiling.

3. An economic motive: When carving a tomb from soft chalk, there is little difference in cost between creating a low *kokh* and a tall *kokh*. In fact, a tall *kokh* is often easier to cut, as it provides more space for the mason. Ultimately, the carved chalk was extracted in blocks and used for construction elsewhere.

4. Planning of the tomb: The height of the *kokh* above the ledge was determined by the height of the burial chamber, which was planned in advance.

5. Artistic-aesthetic design: The pointed gable in the *kokh* was chosen to resemble the shape of the pediment of a temple or shrine.

6. The sociocultural aspect: The family burial complex was designed under Alexandrian influence to serve as a standard Hellenistic marker of the urban elite.

Thiersch noted that the T-shaped layout of the Maresha tombs, the systematic arrangement of the *kokhim*, and the gabled *kokh* ceilings were influenced by the tombs of Alexandria, such as those discovered in the Hellenistic Hadra necropolis in Alexandria and in the Faiyum oasis. Gabled *kokh* ceilings are rare in areas characterized by hard rock; they are mainly seen in environments characterized by soft, friable rock.[146]

Marjorie S. Venit examined the extent to which the architecture and artistic style of decorations in Hellenistic Alexandrian tombs influenced the design of the tombs at Maresha: The Sidonian and Musicians' tombs were planned according to the Alexandrian model, which is not known

BCE. Therefore, year 1 corresponds to 57/56 BCE, year 3 to 55/54 BCE, and year 7 to 51/50 BCE.

[143] KLONER 1991, 75–76; REGEV 1991; KLONER 2003, 24.

[144] OREN 1965, 212.

[145] TRIEBEL 2004; HACHLILI 2005, 339–353.

[146] PETERS/THIERSCH 1905, 81–82, 85.

in Israel prior to its presence at Hellenistic Maresha; they resemble tombs at Mafrousa and Sidi Gabr in Ptolemaic Alexandria. The rear section with a kliné in the Sidonian Tomb is typical of Alexandrian tombs, but the frieze depicting a procession of exotic animals and inscriptions is unique, having no exact parallel in Alexandrian funerary art. Hence the tombs of Hellenistic Maresha are a cultural link in the transmission of tomb style and architecture from Alexandria to Coele-Syria in that period.[147] The African animals in the procession in the Sidonian Tomb were probably copied from a picture book on wild animals in the zoo of Ptolemy II in Alexandria. These paintings resemble the decorations in tombs 1 and 2 at Anfoushy in Alexandria, which date from approximately 200 BCE.[148]

Some technical architectural similarity can be seen between Jewish *kokh* tombs in Jerusalem and Judea of the late Second Temple period, which were carved out of hard limestone, and the tombs of Hellenistic Maresha, carved out of soft chalk. Examples include the standing pit in the floor of the hall and rows of *kokhim* in the walls. Nevertheless, compared to the wide, tall mouths of the tombs at Maresha, most tombs in Jerusalem have small entrances (50–70×50 cm). They were closed cork-like with a blocking stone and their edges were sealed. The mouths of several monumental tombs in Jerusalem were closed with stone doors on hinges. In contrast to the tall, gabled *kokhim* at Maresha, the *kokhim* in the Jerusalem tombs are low and have vaulted ceilings; wide, shallow *kokhim* were designed for ossuary storage and ossilegium. None of the known Jerusalem tombs have an apse, and two-tier tombs are rare there.[149] Apparently, the basic pattern of *kokh* tombs in Jerusalem in the Early Roman period was borrowed from that of the tombs of Hellenistic Maresha, with changes mandated by the requirements of Jewish law and the ecological and geological conditions in the Jerusalem area.

The Names in the Tombs

The inscriptions in the Maresha tombs were written in Greek in paint, mud-like mortar, and charcoal, or else they were engraved with a nail on the walls between and above the *kokhim*. The inscriptions state the name of the deceased, whether the deceased was a man or a woman, sometimes their family lineage, and sometimes the date of burial.

Research on the names of the people buried there—women and men—indicates that most of them are distinctly Greek. The most common are names of kings and queens such as Alexander, Antiochus, Ptolemaeus, Agrippa, Cleopatra, and Demetria. Greek theophoric names are also common, such as Apollodorus, Apollonius, Apollophanes, Athanaeus, Dionysus, and Heliodorus.

The Phoenician names contain a theophoric element derived from the Phoenician deity Baal, such as Meerbalus and Balsalo. The typical Idumean names include a theophoric element referring to the Idumean deity Kos, such as Cosnatanus, Cosiabus, Cosacabus, Cosbanus, and Audocus. A few names are of Nabatean origin, such as Babas, Babata, Natra, Sabo, and Pheroras. The few other Semitic names include Abd, Gaddes, Zabbaeus, Salam, and Abselamus (an Idumean name?). Aegyptus is apparently an Egyptian name or a nickname.

It seems that the inhabitants of Maresha—people of Idumean, Arab, and Semitic descent, both natives and migrants from the surrounding area—took names from their own traditions of origin and translated them into Greek. For example, the common Greek name Apollodorus is an exact translation of the Idumean name Cosnatanus.

Nevertheless, the ethnic composition reflected in the onomasticon of the tombs does not represent the entire population of Hellenistic Greater Maresha; rather, this is a sample of affluent families belonging to the social and ruling elite who could afford to buy and maintain burial plots near the city. For instance, four generations or so of families belonging to the wealthy, Hellenized elite and local dignitaries were buried in the luxurious tomb complexes in the eastern necropolis.[150]

The Method of Burial

The body of the deceased was apparently placed on the ledge and handled by a person standing in the standing pit. For primary burial, the deceased was placed in the *kokh* supine. The mouth of the *kokh* was closed with a matching gabled stone slab or a structure made of stone and was sealed all around with mud mortar. Thus the sealed *kokh* resembled a sarcophagus and obviated the need for a wooden or stone coffin.

Iron nails, some of them inserted into wooden beams, were discovered in several tombs. The beams with the nails may be from wooden coffins.[151] Another suggestion is that these may be the remains of a wooden frame around which a sheet of cloth was wound, forming something like a stretcher to carry the body of the deceased for burial.[152]

Collected bones were found in a *kokh* in tomb 561, which was discovered sealed. Kloner therefore suggested that Idumean residents of the city collected bones in a different *kokh* as early as the Hellenistic period, just as bones were collected in repositories in the tombs of Jerusalem and Judea in the Late Iron Age.[153]

In tomb 500 and in the northern necropolis, the later reuse of Hellenistic tombs in the 1st century BCE and the 1st and 2nd centuries CE (Roman period) was documented. Then they were used for primary burial, and the bones of the deceased were subsequently collected in ossuaries, ossilegium pits, and ossilegium niches. The practice of ossilegium at Maresha at a later stage indicates that Jewish residents of the area knew of the older tombs and were buried in them, following the practice prevalent among Jews in Jerusalem and Judea in the late Second Temple period and the interbellum period (70–132 CE).

Dating of the Burials

The tombs in the eastern necropolis and tomb 500 contain inscriptions stating the year of burial and giving us a

[147] VENIT 2000, 173–178.
[148] MCKENZIE 1990, 67.
[149] KLONER/ZISSU 2007
[150] REGEV 1994.
[151] REGEV 2017.
[152] GRAICER 2012, 224–225.
[153] KLONER 2011, 571–572.

clear date range for the period of use of the tombs: the late Ptolemaic era and the Seleucid era. Most of the inscriptions state the years according to the Seleucid era.

A few inscriptions use single-digit Greek numerals; Kloner, following Rappaport, assumed that these refer to a Ptolemaic era, specifically counting the regnal years of Ptolemy V Epiphanes (204–180 BCE).[154] Gera questioned this idea, suggesting instead that they represent a local era, with years counted from the refounding of Maresha following Aulus Gabinius's arrival in Syria (57/56 BCE or slightly later).[155] Based on the artistic style and dating of the paintings in tombs I and II, the paleographic evidence examined by Criscuolo, and additional contextual factors, we favor the Ptolemaic era.

The following are the inscribed dates discovered in the tombs:

- Sidonian Tomb (551): Seleucid era—196–119 BCE;[156] Ptolemaic era—204, 203, 199 BCE
- Musicians' Tomb (552): Seleucid era—188–135 BCE
- Tomb 553: Seleucid era—134/3 BCE
- Tomb 559: Seleucid era—183 BCE
- Tomb 562: Ptolemaic era—203, 202 BCE
- Tomb 563: Seleucid era—146 BCE
- Tomb VII: Seleucid era—141/140, 112/111 BCE
- Tomb 500: Seleucid era—118/117, 112/111 BCE; Ptolemaic era—Years 1, 3(?), and 7, attributable to either Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282–246 BCE), Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–222 BCE), or Ptolemy IV Philopator (222–205 BCE)

The latest date, found in Tomb 500 (112/111 BCE), combined with the dating of ceramic and numismatic finds from Maresha, confirms the date of the conquest of Maresha by John Hyrcanus.

Dan Barag examined the latest coins found at sites that Josephus says were conquered by John Hyrcanus, such as Beersheba, Tel Balata/Shechem, Mt. Gerizim, and Samaria. At these sites the latest coins discovered are consistently from 112/111 BCE, sometimes mixed with coins of John Hyrcanus. Barag concluded that Josephus had erroneously reported that John Hyrcanus's conquests began after the death of Antiochus VII (129 BCE). In fact, Hyrcanus set out on his campaign of conquest years later, after the conflict between Antiochus VIII Grypus and Antiochus IX Cyzicenus in 116 BCE and Grypus's retreat to Syria (113/112 BCE). At that time Hyrcanus developed his policy of conquering regions neighboring Judea: first he conquered Idumea and Maresha, and then he turned north and captured Mt. Gerizim, Shechem, and Samaria.[157] The finds from Maresha include a series of lead weights issued by the agoranomos Agathocles, dated to the year 205 SE (108/7 BCE).[158] These represent the latest dated finds from the city, indicating that civic institutions were still functioning as of 108/107 BCE. This shifts the date of Hyrcanus's conquest and the abandonment of the city to that year or shortly thereafter.

The Finds in the Tombs

All the tombs documented thus far at Maresha had been broken into and looted, with the exception of tomb 561, the only one found still sealed. Nevertheless, most of the tombs still contained items ranging from a few ceramic vessels to an abundance of material finds that help us date their original use to the Hellenistic period—the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. Some tombs contained pottery, glass, oil lamps, and fragmentary ossuaries in secondary use by Jews from Beth Guvrin during the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.

The material finds include household pottery such as cooking pots, bowls and jugs of various sizes, and jars; a variety of Hellenistic and Herodian oil lamps, discus lamps, Judean "Darom" lamps, and Jerash lamps; glass bottles, iron nails, nails inserted into wooden beams, other metal objects, and coins. Women's personal items found in the tombs include a wooden box, strings of beads, rings, a kohl stick, bronze bracelets, and bronze mirrors.

Pierced terracotta palmettes were discovered in tombs 510, 511, and 560, apparently having been used to decorate wooden coffins.[159]

CONCLUSION

The tombs contribute greatly to our understanding of the extent of the lower city, the design and artistic style of the family tombs, burial practices, and ways of honoring ancestors.

The planning of these tombs, which was influenced by the tombs of Ptolemaic Alexandria, was outstanding in its originality and architectural innovation, as manifested in the decorations on the sides of the tombs and the wall paintings.

On the whole, the architectural finds in the tombs of Hellenistic Maresha, which held the remains of people from the various ethnic groups that made up the local society at the time, suggest a clear architectural influence on the tombs of Jewish Jerusalem in the late Second Temple period (1st century BCE–1st century CE).[160] Very likely, the main influencers in this regard included Aramaic- and Greek-speaking members of Idumean communities in the Judean Shephelah and Maresha prior to the Hasmonean conquest. After the conquest some of them converted to Judaism, became integrated in the Jewish people, and held high-ranking administrative and military positions in the Hasmonean kingdom, and later under Roman rule.

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[155] GERA 2017; AMELING *et alii* 2018, 996–1001 and extensive lit. cit. there.
[156] Gera reexamined the original photographs of the funerary inscription of Apollodorus son of Zabbaeus and proposed dating it to 171 SE (141 BCE) instead of 117 SE (196/195 BCE). For further discussion and bibliography, see the section on the Sidonian Tomb above. Even if this new dating is correct, we are not inclined to accept Gera's proposal to shift the entire chronology of the Sidonian Tomb 50 years later.
[157] BARAG 1992/1993.
[158] AMELING *et alii* 2018, 937–938, 1125–1131.
[159] ERLICH/KLONER 2008, 64, 97.
[160] KLONER/ZISSU 2007.

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