

## ROCK-CUT TOMBS FROM THE INTERMEDIATE BRONZE AND IRON AGES AT KAFR KAMA, LOWER GALILEE

KAREN COVELLO-PARAN

### THE SITE AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In November 2002 a salvage excavation was carried out in the southern outskirts of Kafr Kama (map ref. NIG 241709–866/735908–6004, OIG 191709–866/235908–6004) as a result of modern trenching activities.<sup>1</sup> The site is situated above a basaltic ridge overlooking Naḥal Kama and Ramat Sirin. The modern Circassian village of Kafr Kama, founded in 1878, is located on a hill atop an ancient site that is identified in Crusader texts as Kaphar Cheme (Itzhaki 1978:144–145).<sup>2</sup> The ancient site was surveyed in the past by Conder and Kitchener (1881: Map VI pi), Saarisalo (1927:55–56) and Zori (1977:140–141). Zori attributed the remains of the ancient settlement at Kafr Kama to two separate sites, 'Kafr Kama South' and 'esh-Shaham', located on either side of the modern Kefar Tavor–Tiberias road. At the

former site, Zori recorded architectural remains and finds dating to the Iron, Persian, Roman and Byzantine periods; at the latter he noted architectural remains including a mosaic floor and a Corinthian column. However, the results of the excavations at the site (below) indicate that these two sites were probably a single site (Fig. 1).

The northern part of the site (esh-Shaham, or esh-Shakhs) has been repeatedly excavated. Saarisalo directed two seasons of excavations<sup>3</sup> there on behalf of the Finnish Oriental Society (1961–1963; Fig. 1:2) and uncovered a Byzantine-period basilica complex of St. Thecla, which the excavators dated to the second quarter of the sixth century CE,<sup>4</sup> as well as additional small finds from the Early and Late Islamic and Mamluk periods (Saarisalo 1961; 1963; Saarisalo and Palva 1966). Zori (1969; 1977:141, Pl. 35:1) excavated a partially robbed, stone-built tomb dating to the Roman period (Fig. 1:3).<sup>5</sup> In 1994 and 1997, Ben-Nahum (2007; pers. comm.) directed excavations in the center of the village,<sup>6</sup> exposing tombs dating to the Intermediate Bronze Age and the Roman period, as well as remains of domestic architecture from the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (Fig. 1:4). In 1998, Mokary (2004) excavated architectural remains dating to the Early Islamic period (Fig. 1:5), and in 2002 Syon (2006) exposed architectural elements dating to Iron Age II, and the Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (Fig. 1:6).

The southern part of the site was excavated by N. Makhouly in 1941<sup>7</sup> following quarrying activities carried out to supply basaltic gravel for the construction of the Kefar Tavor–Yavne'el road (Fig. 1:1). Makhouly documented stone-

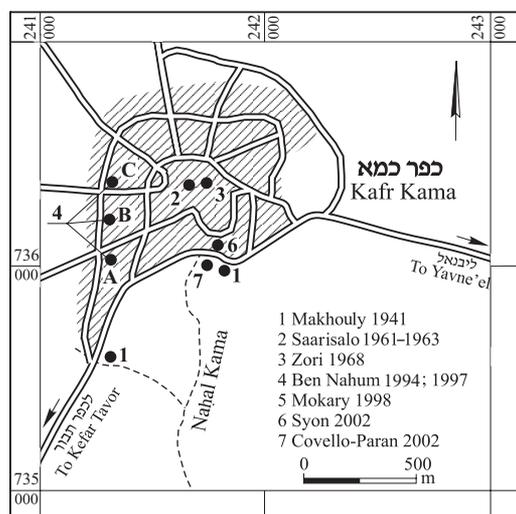
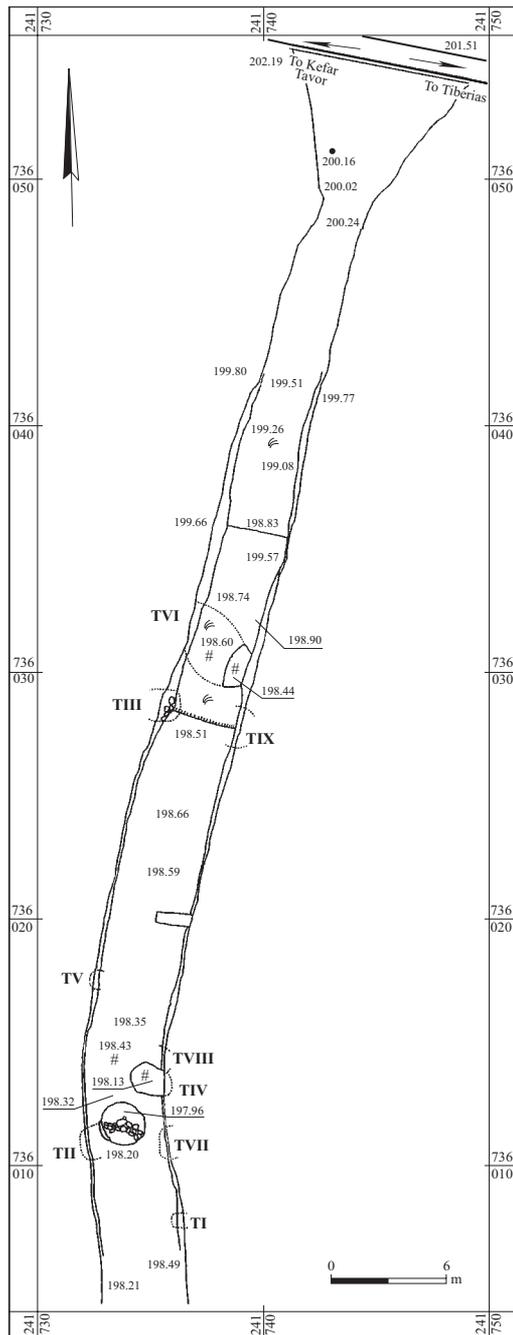


Fig. 1. Kafr Kama excavation areas.

built tombs and a plastered stone-built cistern dating to the Byzantine period, and decorated mosaic floors. Subsequent to Makhoul's investigations, this part of the site was not excavated until the present excavation (Fig. 1:7; Plan 1).



Plan 1. General plan and location of the tombs.

## THE EXCAVATION

A three-meter-wide trench, cut through the limestone lenses overlying basalt formation east of the Kafr Kama soccer field, exposed the contours of burial caves on both sides, and on the floor of the modern trench (Plan 1; Fig. 2). The tombs observed in the section of the trench were not excavated due to the poor condition of the bedrock and the minimal modern destruction.<sup>8</sup>

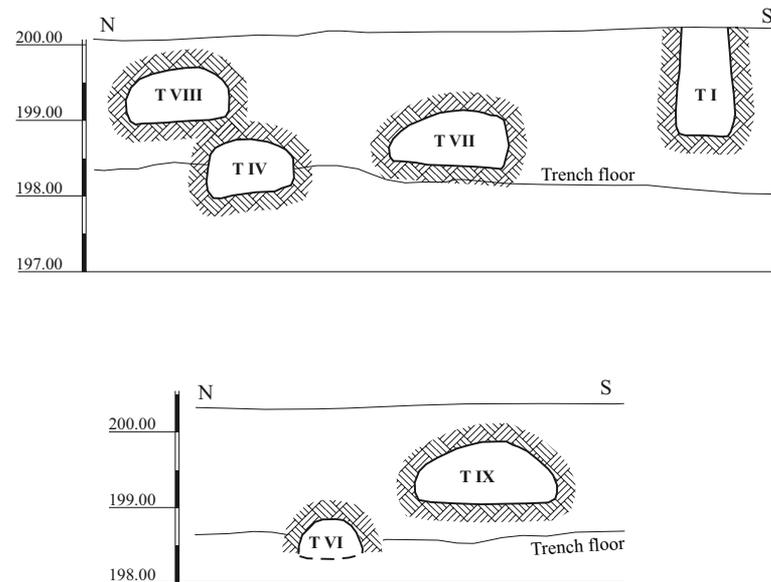
The following report describes all the tombs that were exposed and registered.

### *Tomb I*

Tomb I was discerned in the eastern section of the modern trench (Fig. 3). It was apparently a shaft tomb, although only the shaft, which contained light brown debris (Plan 2), was visible (1.2 m deep, 0.85 m wide). At the base of the shaft and protruding from the section



Fig. 2. General view of the modern trench, looking south.



Plan 2. Eastern sections of the modern trench.



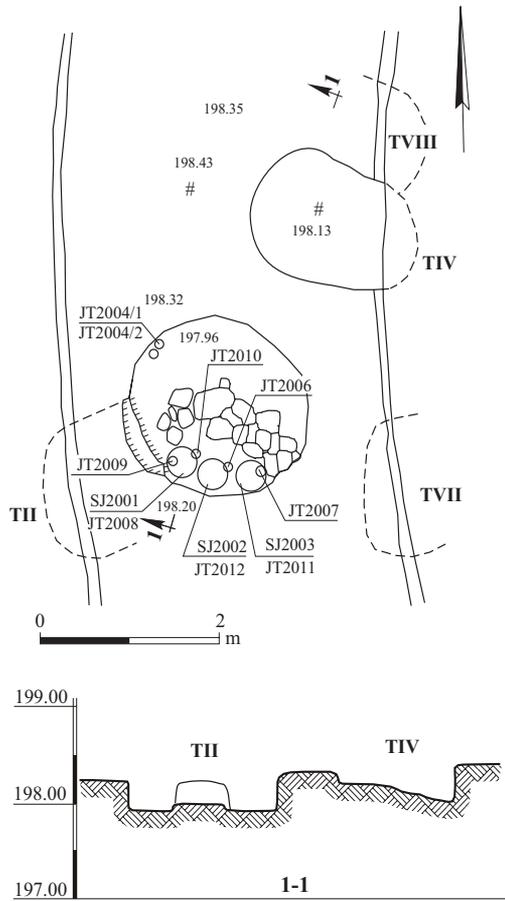
Fig. 3. Tomb I in the eastern section of the modern trench.

were human skull fragments and a metacarpal. South of the shaft, the bedrock exhibited signs of rounded hewing, probably indicating the location of the tomb chamber. This tomb was not excavated and thus, remains undated.

#### *Tomb II*

Tomb II was a shaft tomb; the shaft was visible in the western section of the trench and the burial chamber was exposed on the trench floor (Plans 3; 4). This tomb was the most well preserved, enabling a discussion of the plan. It is uncertain whether the shaft (diam. 0.8 m) had a circular or squarish contour. Two rock-hewn steps (each c. 5–10 cm high) led down to the burial chamber, which had an almost circular plan (diam. 1.8 m; Fig. 4).

The chamber was divided by a partition wall constructed of various-sized, very soft limestone rocks. South of the partition and leaning against the southern wall of the tomb were three upright storage jars (Fig. 5). In each storage jar was a



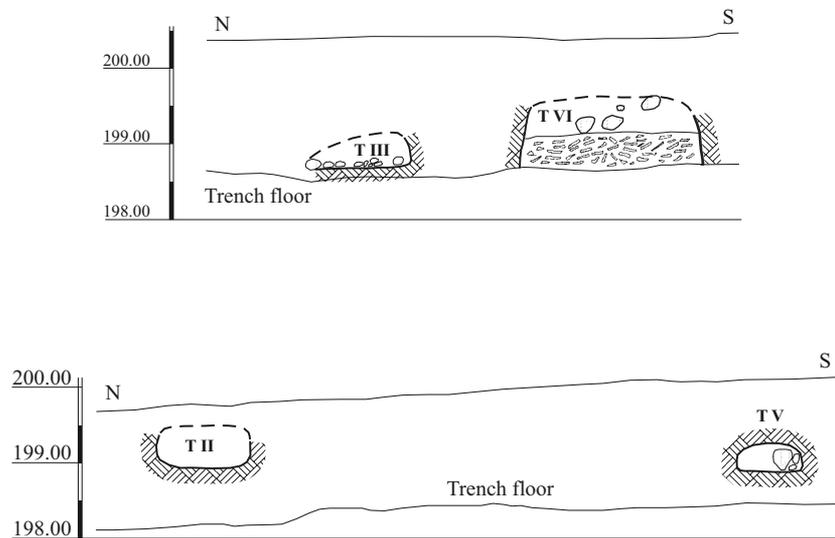
Plan 3. Plan and section of Tombs II, IV, and VII.



Fig. 4. Tomb II, looking west.



Fig. 5. Tomb II: storage jars along the southern wall of the chamber.



Plan 4. Western sections of the modern trench.

smaller dipper juglet; four additional juglets were embedded between the bases of the jars and the partition wall. In the space to the north of the partition wall, measuring  $0.6 \times 1.9$  m, two juglets (Fig. 6:6, 7) were found along the western wall. Despite the absence of preserved skeletal material,<sup>9</sup> it is proposed that the partition wall divided the tomb chamber into two areas—one for the burial goods, the other for the interment (not preserved). It is possible that the two juglets were placed near the mouth of the deceased. Thus, the body would have been aligned on an east–west axis.

The architecture of this tomb and the burial goods indicate it was hewn for a single burial.

#### *Burial Goods*

The only burial goods accompanying the interment were containers for liquids—three storage jars and nine juglets (Fig. 6).

*Juglets.*— Five dipper juglets were found, three inside the storage jars (Fig. 6:2–4) and two propped up alongside their bases (Fig. 6:1, 5). These juglets are cylindrical with a straight neck and a slightly pinched mouth. The handle, from rim to shoulder, was sometimes attached irregularly (Fig. 6:5). The exterior surface of the juglets bore red-burnished slip and one had red slip on the inner rim (Fig. 6:3). The body varied from a cylindrical to a squatter profile, with an emphasized shoulder (Fig. 6:4). This type of dipper juglet is known throughout the Iron Age at settlement sites in northern Israel, such as the Ḥ. Rosh Zayit Fort Stratum IIb–a (Gal and Alexandre 2000:61–62, Type JT1) and in mortuary contexts at Ḥ. Menorim (Braun 2001: Fig. 3:5) and Kefar Veradim (Alexandre 2002: Fig. 5:6, 7), and were often placed inside storage jars, as at Nazerat (Alexandre 2003: Fig. 2:5, 6). These juglets were probably suspended over the jar opening with the aid of a wooden stick that has since disintegrated.

Three very small ‘black juglets’ (Fig. 6:6–8), wheel-made from distinctive gray-black clay and bearing signs of burnishing, have a straight neck, a handle from mid-neck to shoulder and

a raised button base. Such juglets are known from mortuary contexts at Megiddo (Lamon and Shipton 1939: Pl. 5:125, 126) and Et-Ṭaiyiba (Yannai 2002: Fig. 8:22–27). Juglets of similar form, but fabricated of a lighter clay and often red burnished, are considered a separate type and known from graves at Ḥ. Menorim (Braun 2001: Figs. 3:1; 5:1), Kefar Veradim (Alexandre 2002: Fig. 5:8) and Ḥ. Rosh Zayit<sup>10</sup> (Gal and Alexandre 2000:66, Type JTIV).

A single Black-on-Red (BOR) juglet (Fig. 6:9) has a ridged neck, a flaring funnel-like mouth and a handle from neck ridge to shoulder. This juglet was not fully restorable; however it appears that the globular body was elongated and tapered toward the small flat base. The fine red ware is well levigated and the juglet’s surface bears burnishing and faint remains of black-painted decoration typical of BOR juglets. These juglets are commonly found in Iron II burial contexts in northern Israel, e.g., in Megiddo Tomb 73 (Guy and Engberg 1938: Pl. 66:16) and Kefar Veradim (Alexandre 2002: Fig. 6:1–3), as well as in settlement assemblages (see references and discussion in Gal and Alexandre 2000:75–76).

*Storage Jars.*— The three storage jars (Fig. 6:10–12) were all found standing upright, protruding above the surface after the modern destruction. It is possible that the upper parts of the storage jars, i.e., the neck and rim, were broken off by the trenching activities, or alternately, deliberately broken prior to placement in the tomb. In contemporary burials at Ḥ. Menorim, the excavator concluded the latter alternative (Braun 2001:177–178, Fig. 6). One jar (Fig. 6:10) has a round squat body with thick loop handles on the shoulder, the other two jars (Fig. 6:11, 12) have a narrower body and a small flat base. One of these jars (Fig. 6:11) is slightly warped. The body forms are typical of Iron Age jars at numerous sites (e.g., Braun 2001: Figs. 4:2; 5:2), although the lack of a neck and rim does not enable a more precise dating.

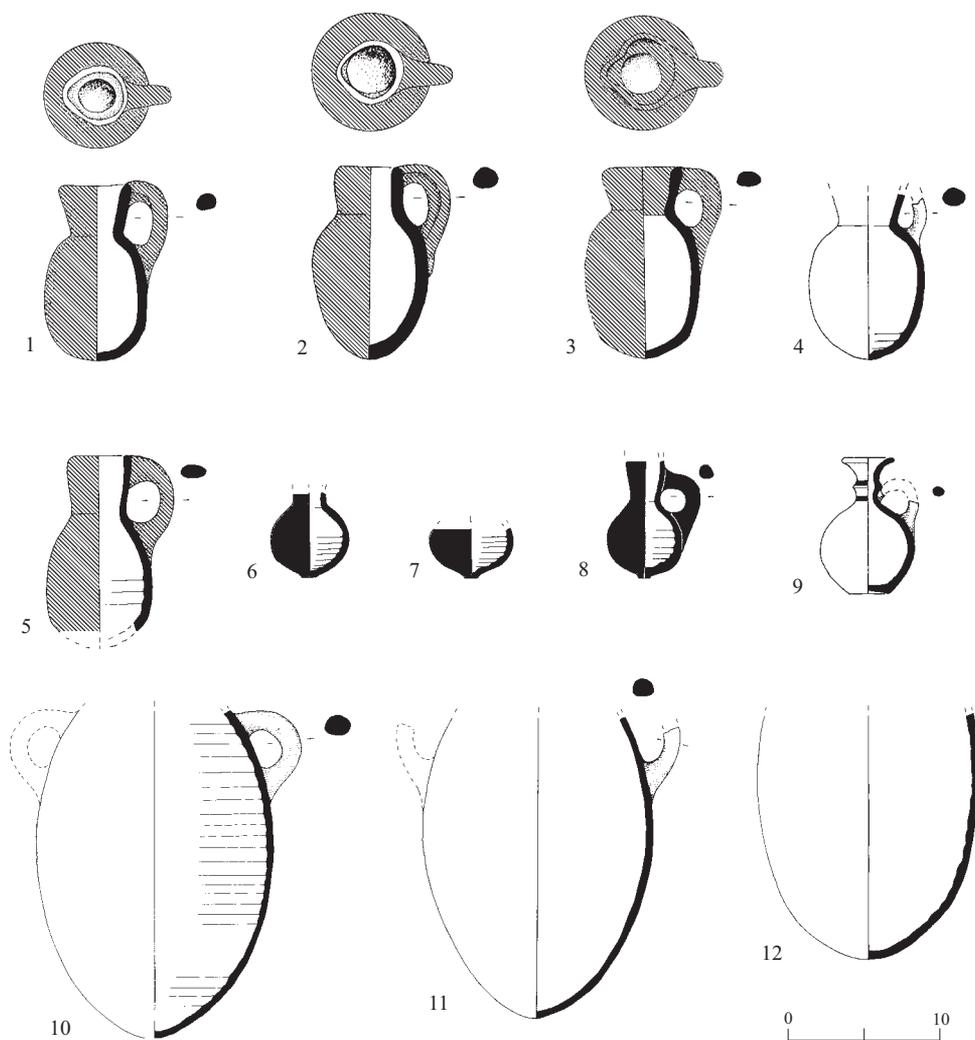
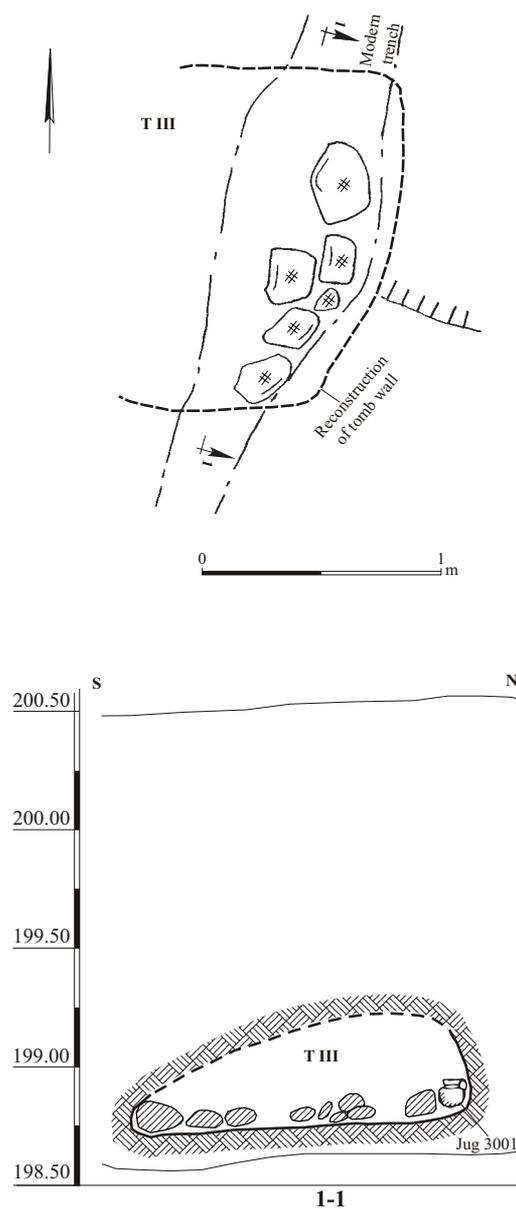


Fig. 6. Tomb II: burial goods.

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Description
1	Juglet	2006	Red-slip ext.
2	Juglet	2012	Red-slip ext., inside SJ2002
3	Juglet	2008	Red-slip ext. and int. rim, inside SJ2001
4	Juglet	2011	Inside SJ2003
5	Juglet	2007	Red-slip ext., below SJ2003
6	Juglet	2004/1	Black; traces of burnishing
7	Juglet	2004/2	Black; traces of burnishing
8	Juglet	2010	Black; traces of burnishing, below SJ2001
9	Juglet	2009	Black-painted decoration on red burnish, below SJ2001
10	Storage jar	2001	
11	Storage jar	2002	
12	Storage jar	2003	

*Dating of Tomb II*

The hewing and use of Tomb II is dated to Iron II, i.e., the late tenth–early ninth centuries BCE, based primarily on the presence of the Black-on-Red juglet and the black juglets, contemporary with the H. Rosh Zayit Fort Stratum II in the Lower Galilee and Megiddo Strata VA–IVB in the Jezreel Valley.



Plan 5. Plan and section of Tomb III.

*Tomb III*

Tomb III in the western section of the trench was partially excavated (Plan 5). It was apparently a shaft tomb, although only the burial chamber was documented. This chamber, 2.2 m long, was cut lengthwise by the modern trench that destroyed the eastern wall of the chamber. In the section it was evident that the ceiling of the burial chamber had collapsed in antiquity, resulting in a 0.5 m deep buildup of brown debris above the floor of the tomb (Fig. 7). The floor comprised smoothed bedrock, partially paved with medium-sized limestones. The excavation, limited to a width of 0.8 m, did not enable a more complete plan.

*Burial Goods*

A single pottery jug (Fig. 8) was placed directly above the bedrock surface, leaning against the northern and eastern wall of the burial chamber. The jug has a short, wide neck with a pinched mouth, the body is squat with a wide flat base and a flat loop handle extends from rim to shoulder. An incised band encircles the shoulder of the jug and is crossed by three sets of vertically combed decoration made with a four-pronged comb. The same four-pronged comb was employed to incise additional vertical lines below the handle, resulting in a symmetrical decoration around the jug in four



Fig. 7. Tomb III in the western section of the modern trench.

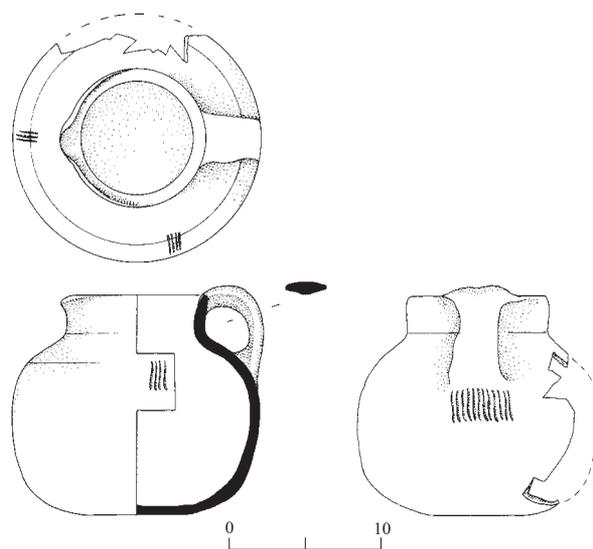


Fig. 8. Tomb III: jug (Reg. No. 3001).

places. This jug is dated to the Intermediate Bronze Age and is similar in form to jugs from burial caves at nearby H. Zelef (Covello-Paran, forthcoming) and Menaḥemya (Bahat 1976: Fig. 2:6), although the combed decoration on the Kafr Kama jug is unique.

#### *Tomb IV*

Tomb IV is a shaft tomb whose burial chamber was revealed on the floor of the modern trench, while the shaft is located beyond the excavated area to the east (see Plan 3). The trench destroyed most of the tomb chamber, leaving only a preserved depth of 0.35 m (Fig. 9). The chamber is roughly rectangular with rounded corners, measuring 1.1–1.2 × 1.5 m. The floor slopes slightly northward, possibly the result of the tabular limestone bedrock that breaks off in horizontal layers. The small dimensions of this tomb chamber suggest that it was intended for a single interment, similar to Tomb II.

#### *Burial Goods*

The finds in this tomb were very meager, and no skeletal material nor pottery vessels were recovered. Two bronze<sup>11</sup> bracelets (Fig. 10) were found in the eastern part of the chamber,



Fig. 9. Tomb IV in the eastern section of the modern trench.

ovoid in section and flattened on one side. The lack of diagnostic pottery vessels from this tomb precludes establishing a date for its use.

#### *Tomb V*

Tomb V was detected in the western section of the trench, where the bedrock floor of either the shaft or the corner of the almost totally destroyed tomb chamber was visible (see Plan 4). A fragment of a dipper juglet (not illustrated) was found in the dark brown debris

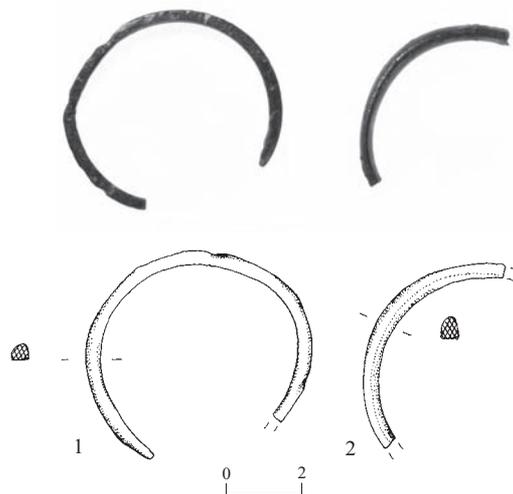


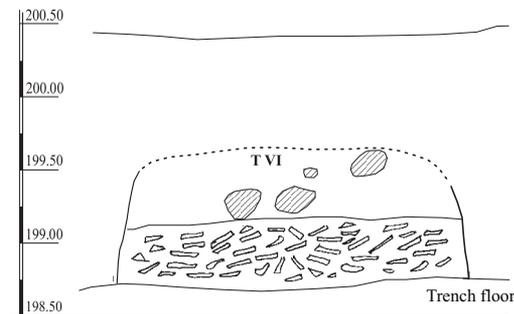
Fig. 10. Tomb IV: bracelets.

No.	Reg. No.	Description	Diam. (cm)
1	4001/1	Bronze	5.9
2	4001/2	Bronze	6.3

in this corner, alongside large limestone and basalt stones. The form of the preserved body sherd can be dated only generally to the Middle Bronze–Iron Ages. The limestone bedrock in the vicinity of Tomb V was especially friable and the tomb was not excavated.

#### Tomb VI

This tomb, visible in the western section of the modern trench, contained a large amount of human skeletal remains. The modern trenching activities cut lengthwise through the burial chamber (2.2 m long; Plan 6). The large quantity of bones suggests there was a bone pile along the now-destroyed wall of the cave and that the chamber was used for multiple interments, which were repeatedly pushed to the side of the cave with the addition of each new burial. The northern and southern walls of the cave were carefully hewn; the floor of the tomb was not observed in the section. This tomb was not excavated and was consequently sealed with a concrete wall to preserve its contents. Although the date of this tomb is uncertain due to a lack



Plan 6. Section of Tomb VI.

of substantial *in-situ* burial goods, body sherds of wheel-made vessels suggest a date no earlier than MB II.

#### Tomb VII

This tomb was detected in the eastern section of the modern trench due to the arched contour of the cave walls and the horizontal floor (1.7 m long) of what appears to have been a burial chamber (see Plan 2). This tomb was not excavated. However, numerous pottery sherds were observed in the dark brown debris inside.

#### Tomb VIII

The walls (0.6 m preserved height) and leveled floor (1.2 m long) of a rock-hewn burial cave were noted north of and above Tomb IV in the eastern section of the modern trench (see Plan 2; Fig. 11). The ceiling of the cave appears to have partially collapsed. The fill of light brown debris in the tomb contained numerous small limestone fragments. This tomb was not excavated and its date could not be determined.

#### Tomb IX

Opposite Tomb III, in the eastern section of the modern trench, a burial tomb was indicated by an arched contour of light brown debris containing scattered limestone chunks, a few undiagnostic pottery sherds and friable, human bone fragments (see Plan 2). The leveled

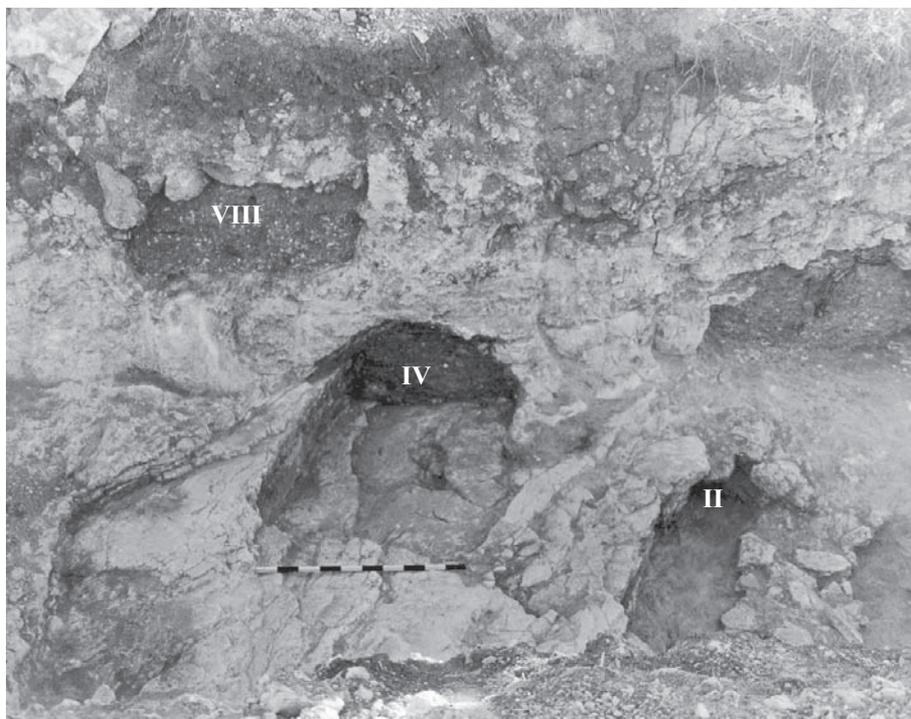


Fig. 11. Tomb IV below Tomb VIII and alongside Tomb II.

bedrock floor of the tomb was 1.8 m wide and the walls of the cave were preserved to a height of 0.8 m. It appears that this chamber was cut along its width by the trench.

#### *Tomb X*

In the northernmost part of the excavation, c. 7 m south of the main road, a bronze<sup>12</sup> dagger (Fig. 12; see Plan 1) was found in a pile of brown debris that originated from the trench. The dagger was originally hafted at the base, which is slightly rounded and contains four rivet holes arranged in two rows; three of the square rivets are still preserved in place. The narrow blade (18.5 cm long, 1.6 cm wide) has a thickened midrib. This dagger is similar in form to a bronze dagger from Intermediate Bronze Age tombs at Nasr ed-Din in nearby Tiberias (Alexandre 1999: Fig. 4:5).<sup>13</sup> This dagger was probably one of the burial goods from an additional tomb, Tomb X, which was damaged during modern construction.

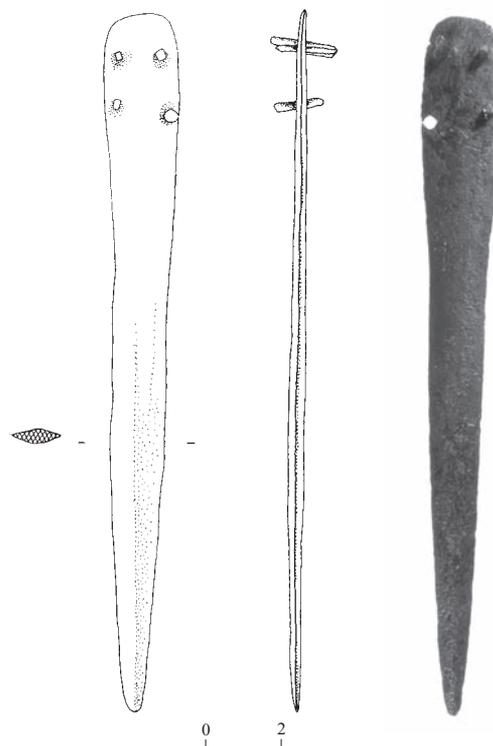


Fig. 12. Tomb X: bronze dagger.

## DISCUSSION

The excavation at Kafr Kama revealed part of an ancient cemetery that was in use during the Intermediate Bronze and Iron Ages and extended from the eastern part of the modern village (Area A of Ben Nahum's excavations; see Fig. 1:4) southeast as far as the present excavation. A total of ten rock-hewn shaft graves were excavated or registered, and it is probable that there were more tombs in this area that were destroyed by the modern trenching activities. This large concentration indicates a high density of burial caves in this area of the cemetery, where the tombs were hewn into the chalky limestone overlying the basalt bedrock. The southern limits of the cemetery are located to the south of Tomb I, where the limestone is replaced by basalt; no caves were hewn into the basalt.

While most of the tombs were only partially excavated, providing limited data regarding tomb architecture and burial traditions, there is indirect evidence for single-interment tombs (size of chamber) and direct evidence for multiple burials (Tomb VI bone pile).

Evidence for burials during the Intermediate Bronze Age is noted in Tombs III and X of the present excavations, and Cave 111 in Area A of Ben Nahum's (pers. comm.) excavation. Since no pottery sherds from this period were retrieved in the surface survey of Kafr Kama, there is no data pertaining to the Intermediate Bronze Age settlement whose inhabitants buried their dead in the excavated tombs. Contemporary sites within a 5 km radius include Ḥ. Qishron (Smithline 2002) and Ḥ. Soda-Qasatil (Zori 1977:136–137), while contemporary tombs in the immediate vicinity have been excavated near Ḥ. Zelef (Covello-Paran, forthcoming) and Ḥ. Qishyon (Carmela Arnon, pers. comm.).

The extent of the Iron Age occupation at Kafr Kama is still enigmatic. The previous excavations by Saarisalo and Syon produced only small quantities of Iron Age pottery and did not expose any architectural elements. It is

conceivable that the Iron Age settlement was located to the north, below the built-up core of the modern village, which afforded a strategic, defensible position. Contemporary sites in the vicinity include Ḥ. 'Arpad (Zori 1977:136), Kh. Sheikh Muḥammad (Zori 1977:137), Ḥ. Mesah (Gal 1992:32), Ḥ. Atosh and the fortified site of Tell 'Ein Hadda (Zori 1977:142; Gal 1992:96). According to Dorsey (1991:98, 106), the alignment of Iron Age sites, such as Kafr Kama, Kh. Sheikh Muḥammad and Ḥ. Atosh indicates the route of two ancient roads linking the coastal highway with both the Lebanese Baqa' Valley and northern Transjordan. No doubt the location of Kafr Kama along these trade routes or road networks enhanced the village economy. The discovery of the Black-on-Red juglet provides further evidence for connections between the village inhabitants and sites further north and west toward the Phoenician littoral.

Although the present excavations did not expose any post-Iron Age tombs, Makhoul's 1941 excavations in an adjacent area exposed Byzantine-period cist graves constructed of limestone and basalt that provide evidence for the continuing tradition of burial in the cemetery.<sup>14</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Kafr Kama has been repeatedly investigated through a series of small-scale excavations. An intrasite spatial analysis of the excavation results suggests that the core of the ancient settlement is located beneath the houses of the modern Circassian village and that the adjoining cemetery is situated on the southern periphery of the site. The earliest evidence for the hewing or construction of tombs in this cemetery dates to the Intermediate Bronze Age, with successive burials during the Iron II, Roman and Byzantine periods. Future exploration at the site will hopefully expose evidence and enable an investigation of the late third millennium–first millennium BCE settlements whose inhabitants were buried in the excavated cemetery.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The excavation, on behalf of and financed by the Israel Antiquities Authority, was directed by Karen Covello-Paran with the assistance of Leea Porat (pottery restoration), Hagit Tahan (drawing of finds), Lena Kupersmidt (preservation of metal), Clara Amit (photography of finds), Regem Co. Limited (field surveying) and Natalia Zak (drafting of final plans).

<sup>2</sup> The Crusader-period village of Kaphar Cheme was probably part of the settlement system in the area that included the Crusader fortresses of the Hospitallers' Order, such as Belvoir, Sarona, Ahori and Kafr Sabt.

<sup>3</sup> License Nos. C-57/1961, C-57/1963.

<sup>4</sup> Saarisalo and Pavla dated the church complex based on their historical, paleographic and epigraphic study of the votive pavement inscriptions of the southern church. This dating was later upheld by Bagatti (1971:219), but recently disputed by Margalit (1995:395–397), who reanalyzed the stratigraphical sequence and thus attributed the construction of the complex to the Early Byzantine period, with a rebuilding during the Late Byzantine period.

<sup>5</sup> The results of Zori's excavation (Permit No. A-179) are presently being processed by Rachel Bar-Nathan of the IAA.

<sup>6</sup> Permit Nos. A-2320 and A-2663.

<sup>7</sup> The author wishes to thank Arieh Rochman-Halperin of the IAA Archives for his assistance with the material pertaining to Makhouly's excavations (License No. W-6/1941; British Mandate Record Files: File No. 117, Kafr Kama).

<sup>8</sup> The openings of the disturbed tombs in the modern trench were covered with cement to preserve their unexcavated contents.

<sup>9</sup> A fine meshed sieve was employed for sieving all debris from the tomb, yet no bone fragments were retrieved.

<sup>10</sup> At H. Rosh Zayit, a single example of a gray-burnished juglet of this form was noted (Gal and Alexandre 2000:66); however, an exact parallel is unavailable.

<sup>11</sup> Based on observation; no metallurgical analysis was performed.

<sup>12</sup> Based on observation; no metallurgical analysis was performed.

<sup>13</sup> Weapons of this type are often categorized as swords rather than daggers due to their length, which sometimes reaches 26 cm, e.g., the weapon from Menahemya (Bahat 1976: Fig. 4:1).

<sup>14</sup> Makhouly excavated one double and four single cist graves in addition to what he termed a "burial chamber" with two barrel-vaulted recesses, which appears to have been a mausoleum.

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