

INTERMEDIATE AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE BURIAL CAVE 900 IN NAḤAL REFA'IM, JERUSALEM

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INTRODUCTION

Burial Cave 900 in Naḥal Refa'im, Jerusalem, was uncovered in 2000 by mechanical equipment during construction of a new railway line on the southeastern side of the valley (map ref. 21635/62784; Fig. 1).¹ The cave was partially damaged and the opening made by the tractor was used for the excavation. The original entrance shaft to the cave could be postulated although it was not located.

Two main burial phases were identified: the earliest dated to the Intermediate Bronze Age and the later, to Middle Bronze Age II.² Following the final use of the cave in antiquity, an earthen fill of c. 0.6 m accumulated in the cave and was sealed by stone blocks that had fallen from the ceiling.

Location of the Site and Previous Exploration

Cave 900 was hewn into the northern slope of Naḥal Refa'im, c. 20 m above the streambed, at an elevation of 638 m above sea level (asl). Naḥal Refa'im arises near the old train station of Jerusalem (at the northern end of Hebron Road), drains the southwestern part of Jerusalem and continues westward for c. 20 km, where it flows into Naḥal Soreq on its way to the Mediterranean Sea. Its upper part has a relatively moderate slope, running along the city limits of Jerusalem to the area of the Biblical Zoo and the Malḥa Mall. From here, the valley deepens 20–30 m as it meanders west through the hills. Many springs are located in this part of the valley, and fertile alluvial soil extends on either side of the stream. The bedrock here belongs to the Soreq Formation, which is composed of layers of hard limestone

separated by layers of yellowish marl. Remains of settlements on the banks of the river and upslope, testify to man's continuous exploitation of the valley throughout numerous periods.

Two large Intermediate and Middle Bronze Age villages have been uncovered on the northern slopes of Naḥal Refa'im, near Cave 900 (see Fig. 1). On the upper part of the slope, north of Cave 900, remains of a large village, occupied mainly in the Intermediate Bronze Age and MB II, were revealed (Eisenberg 1993; 1994). Cave 900 is located on the lower, eastern margins of this village, and can presumably be associated with its cemetery. At a distance of c. 1.5 km northeast of this village, remains of another village (Malḥa) were exposed, which has been identified as biblical Manaḥat (Edelstein, Milevski and Aurant 1998:125–129). North of this village, within the area of the Holyland compound, dozens of shaft tombs that have been associated with the cemetery of the site of Malḥa/Manaḥat were uncovered (Zelinger and Golani 2005; Milevski, Greenhut and Agha 2010).

These villages, Naḥal Refa'im and Malḥa/Manaḥat, each extending over dozens of dunams, were part of a rural settlement system that first appeared during the Intermediate Bronze Age. During MB II, these settlements comprised the agricultural hinterland of the large urban centers: Battir, c. 2 km to the west of the site of Naḥal Refa'im (Magen, Batz and Shapiro 2008), and Canaanite Jerusalem (Shiloh 1984; Reich and Shukrun 2000), located c. 6 km east of this village (Milevski, Greenhut and Agha 2010). Additional installations, structures and tombs from the

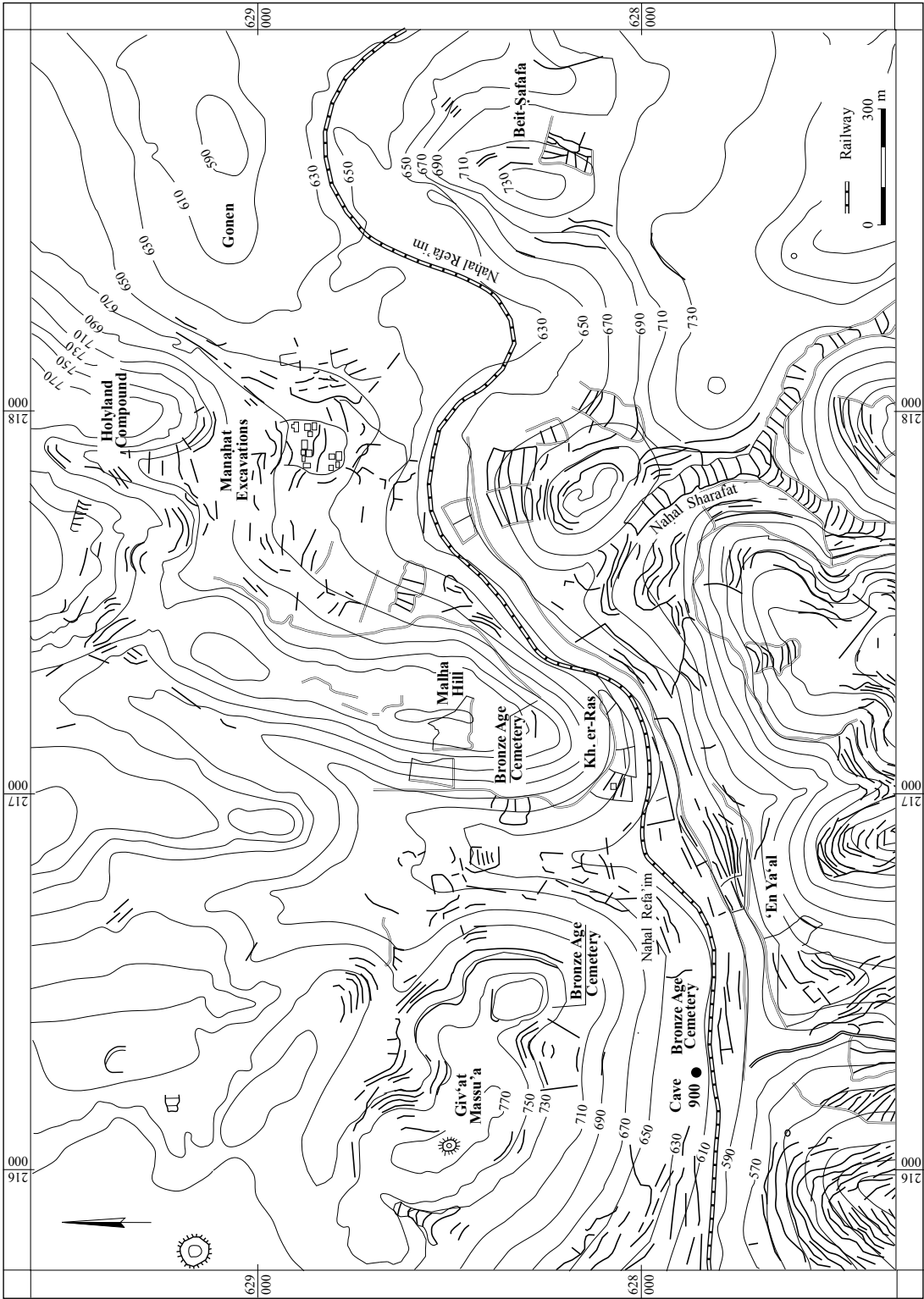


Fig. 1. Location map (after Milevski, Greenhut and Agha 2010).

Middle Bronze Age and the end of the Iron Age were discovered, as at Khirbat er-Ras (Feig and Abd-Rabu 1996; Edelstein 2000; Kloner 2000:29, Site 39). Additional Middle Bronze Age shaft tombs were discovered at Giv'at Malḥa (Zehavi 1994; Edelstein 2000) and Giv'at Massu'a (Edelstein and Eisenberg 1985). A temple dated to MB II was recently discovered on the southern bank of Nahal Refa'im, about 1 km southwest of Cave 900 (Ein Mor 2015).

Methodology

The interior of the cave was arbitrarily divided into four areas for purposes of excavation, without balks between them. The excavation began in the northwestern quarter, and from there continued to the southeast. The 'surface' of the fill inside the cave was higher around the edges, and lower in the center. Thus, the higher areas around the edges were excavated first, and then the center. The fill in the cave was excavated down to bedrock throughout. During the excavation, concentrations of pottery vessels and bones from each area were assigned a separate locus (see Appendix 1). Within the locus, every intact vessel, and most of the fragmented vessels that could be defined as broken *in situ*, received separate basket numbers. The following data for every item was documented: exact location, orientation, position, height (relative to a point defined on the wall of the cave) and general condition. In addition, many photographs were taken. The distribution of the items in the cave, as they were discovered during excavation, was documented by the author on a schematic plan at a scale of 1:20. The items were then removed from the cave and transferred to the IAA storerooms.

After removal of all the intact vessels from a locus, the soil was excavated in that location as a general basket of the same locus. This basket was sieved. Sherds from the general basket were collected and sent for pottery restoration at the end of the excavation. Small finds recovered during sieving, such as pins and scarabs, received separate basket numbers. At

the end of the excavation, a detailed plan and sections of the cave were prepared by Tania Kornfeld. The plans included here are precise copies made from the drafts prepared in the field and the photos taken during excavation. The plans reflect the location and distribution of the complete vessels and some of the broken vessels on the different levels, although they do not include all the finds. For example, vessels that were restored from fragments in most cases do not appear on the plans, nor do bone fragments, which were carefully collected while noting their location. Reports on the pottery, metal and stone finds (see Gershuny, this volume), the petrographic analysis of a number of sherds (see Cohen-Weinberger, this volume), the anthropological (see Nagar, this volume) and archaeozoological remains (see Horwitz, this volume) and the scarab (see Ben-Tor, this volume) discovered in the cave, accompany this report.

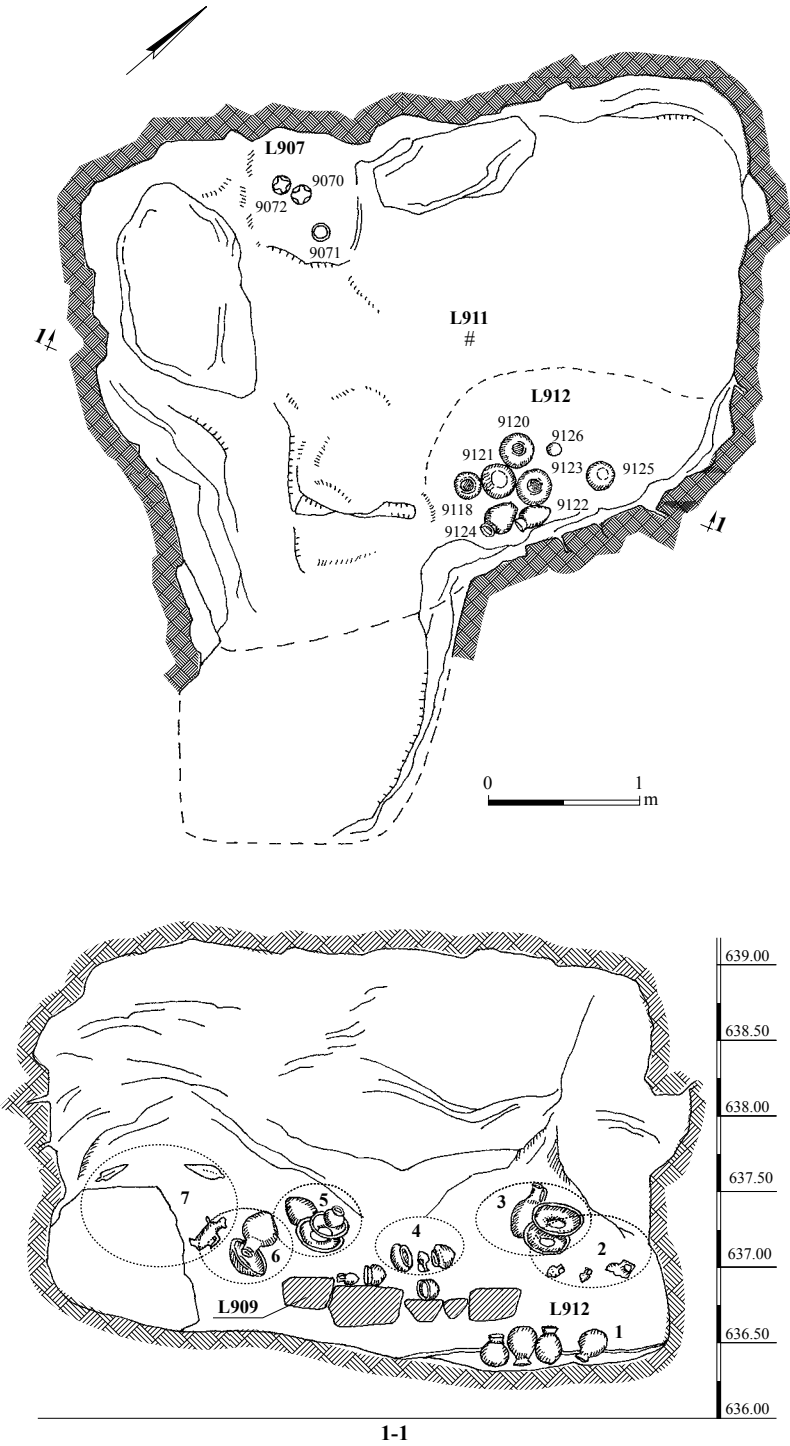
THE EXCAVATION

Intermediate Bronze Age (2200–2000 BCE)

The cave (Plan 1) was hewn in this period, apparently for burial purposes. The roughly oval interior is relatively large (4.0–4.3 m long, c. 3 m wide, c. 2.4 m max. height). The cave had a smooth, leveled floor at an elevation of 636.60 m asl. An entrance shaft or corridor was most probably hewn from the surface to the interior, although this was not identified in the excavation. The general shape of the cave resembles that of other shaft tombs known in the Judean Hills in this period (Greenhut 1995), although it is somewhat larger.

On the smooth bedrock floor was a sterile layer of marl (L911; 0.2–0.3 m thick) that was sealed by a packed layer, apparently a floor. It is possible that this layer of marl represents natural erosion of the rock prior to the cave's use for burial, and if so, attests to a certain amount of time between its hewing and the first burial.

On the floor, near the western wall of the cave (L907), were two four-spouted lamps



Plan 1. Intermediate Bronze Age burial layer.

(Fig. 2), one complete (B9070; Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 1:5), the other broken (B9072). The complete lamp lay on the slope facing the center of the cave. Near the lamps was the lower part of a closed vessel that served as a lamp in secondary use—its rim blackened with soot (B9074). A fragment of another four-spouted lamp was found on the floor of the cave (L911, B9110). Also recovered from the floor were isolated fragments of additional vessels.

In the northeastern corner of the cave, a shallow, oval-shaped pit was dug into the marl fill (L912; max. dimensions: 1.8×1.1 m, c. 0.25 m deep; Plan 1: Section 1–1). The pit contained nine similar jars, packed closely together, two complete or almost complete, the rest broken (Figs. 3, 4). Jar No. 9120 (Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 1:2) stood on its base leaning eastward. Its rim was broken, probably caused by the stone blocks that fell from the ceiling. Next to it was a stone stopper that apparently belonged to it (B9126; Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 1:6). Jar No. 9121 (Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 1:1) was found standing upside down, on its neck. Near these two jars were seven additional jars that had clearly been placed within Pit 912 intact, but were broken sometime later, probably by the collapsed ceiling (B9117/2, B9118—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 1:4; B9122, B9123—Gershuny this volume: Fig. 1:3; B9124/1; B9124/2; B9125). Apparently some of the jars stood on their bases, two stood on their necks (B9121, B9125), while others had originally been laid on their sides before they were broken. The jars were empty.

Also recovered from this pit were isolated, disarticulated fragments of human bones representing one individual (see Nagar, this volume), as well as sheep and goat bones (see Horwitz, this volume). Red *terra-rosa* soil, different in color from the sterile marl of the accumulation in the cave, filled Pit 912 and covered the jars that were in it. It appears that this *terra rosa* was purposely brought from elsewhere to fill the pit, perhaps as part of the burial cult after the jars were inserted. The pit

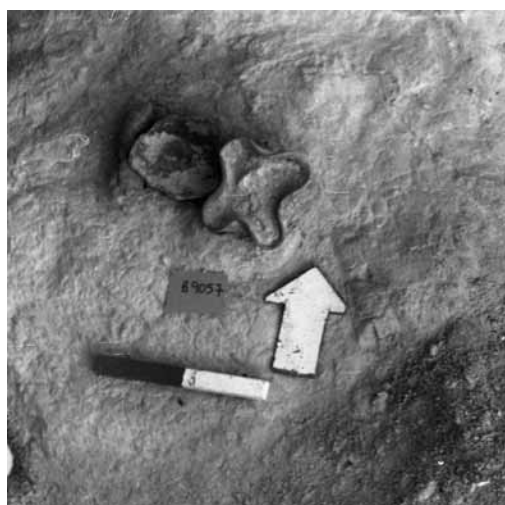


Fig. 2. Two four-spouted lamps lying on the floor of the cave *in situ* (L907): Lamp 9070 is intact, and near it, to the west, is the base of Lamp 9072, looking north.



Fig. 3. Burial Pit 912: two almost-complete jars, and around them sherds of other jars *in situ*, looking south; Jar 9121 (Gershuny, this volume, Fig. 1:1) stands upside down, on its neck.



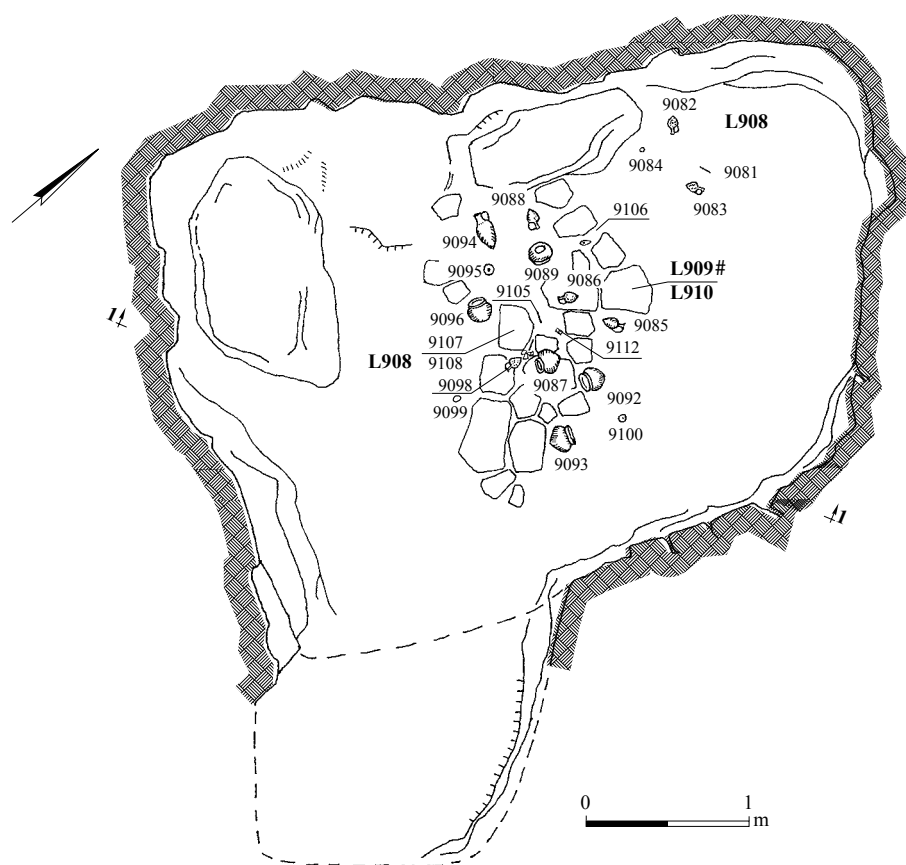
Fig. 4. A group of four jars from L912.

was sealed by large and medium-sized stones that had probably fallen from the ceiling of the cave. According to its shape and contents, it can be assumed that Pit 912 contained the secondary burial of a single individual, together with burial offerings. A similar phenomenon is seen in other Intermediate Bronze Age tombs, for example in Cave 12 at Efrata, where a burial pit inside the cave was separated from its surroundings by a low partition wall composed of one row of fieldstones (Gonen 2001:24–25).

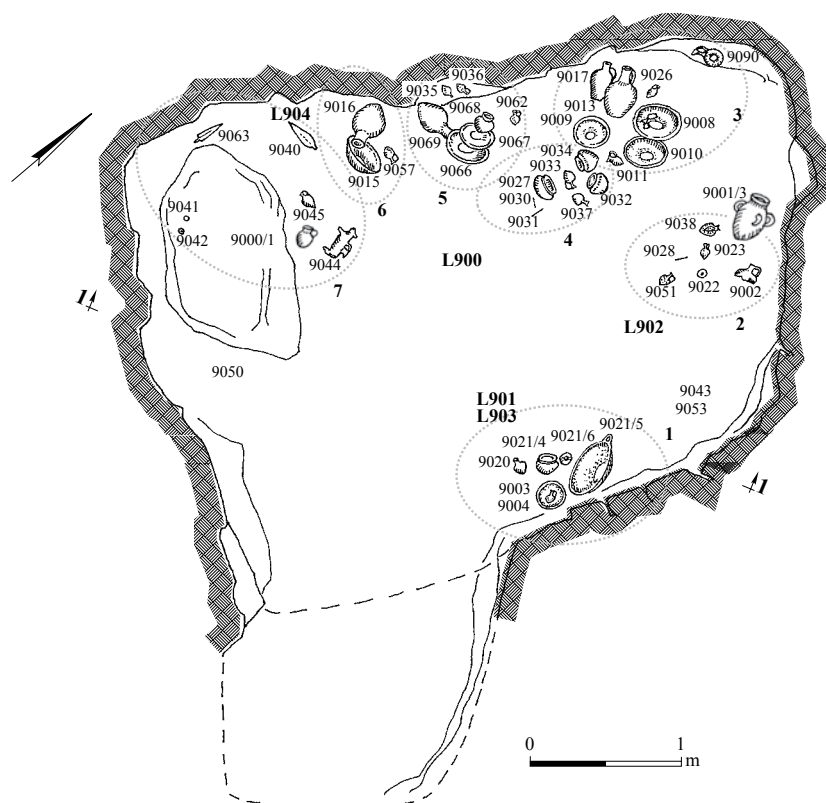
The Intermediate Bronze Age layer and the burial pit within it were sealed by a sterile marl fill and by large stone blocks that had fallen from the ceiling of the cave. Above them was a burial level dating to MB II.

Middle Bronze Age II (1750–1550 BCE)

The main use of the burial cave took place during MB II. Preparation of the cave for renewed burials included removing the large stone boulders in the center of the cave that had collapsed from the ceiling. These boulders were moved to the sides of the cave, and remained next to the cave walls. As a result of these works, the floor of the cave became concave in shape—lower in the center and higher along the edges. During the excavation, two burial levels of this period were discerned. To the earlier level (Plan 2) belongs an oval-shaped stone pavement discovered in the center of the cave (L909; Fig. 5; Plan 1: Section 1–1). Below this stone pavement (L910) and along



Plan 2. Middle Bronze Age II, the lower burial level (for Section 1–1, see Plan 1).



Plan 3. Middle Bronze Age II, the upper burial level (for Section 1-1, see Plan 1).



Fig. 5. The pavement in the center of the cave (L909), looking north.

its sides (L908), human bones representing at least 12 interments, animal bones and various offerings were recovered. To the later level (Plan 3) are attributed groups of pottery vessels and human bones, apparently representing secondary burials (Burial Groups 1-7; L900, L901, L902). These groups were situated around the edges of the cave, near the walls. No relative stratigraphy could be determined for certain between the two levels. It seems most likely that as the oval, stone-paved area in the center of the cave (L909) was the lowest, it was also the earliest level, while the groups of vessels lying at a higher elevation around the edges of the cave (L900, L901, L902) represent later burials. On the other hand, the possibility that the secondary burials around the edges of the cave were pushed aside from the center to make room for new burials, and the center burial area was actually the later level, cannot be ruled out.



Fig. 6. A group of vessels from the lower MB IIB burial level.

The Lower Burial Level (L908, L909, L910)

In the center of the cave, above the Intermediate Bronze Age layer, was a concave-shaped layer of reddish brown soil, 0.2 m thick. The central part (L910; Plan 2), the lowest of this layer, was sealed by a level, oval-shaped stone surface (L909; Fig. 5), while the edges of the soil layer (L908) protruded above the oval pavement on the north and south.

Pavement 909 (1.8 m long, max. 1.2 m wide, 636.90–636.95 m asl) consisted of small- and medium-sized stones, whose upper surfaces were flat, creating a floor-like pavement. On its western side, the pavement reached a large boulder on the edge of the cave that had already existed at the time the pavement was laid, and in the southwestern part, a few stones were missing. On the pavement, and among the stones, some ten intact and several broken vessels were discovered (Figs. 6, 7), mainly piriform juglets (B9088—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 3:6; B9085, B9086, B9095—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 3:5; B9098), as well as carinated bowls (B9087) and globular bowls (B9089—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 3:3; B9096/9097—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 3:2; B9093, B9092). A single dipper juglet was also found (B9094). Some of the vessels were standing upright, mostly leaning to one



Fig. 7. A globular bowl (B9089) and to the east of it, a piriform juglet (B9086), *in situ* above Pavement 909, looking west.

side or another, while others were lying on their side. Each vessel was isolated; they were not touching or leaning against each other. On either side of the pavement, within the reddish soil layer (L908), were several additional vessels of the same types (B9082, B9083), as well as fragments of a Tell el-Yahudiyeh juglet

(B9108, B9111—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 11:1) and a Canaanite scarab (B9084, Ben-Tor, this volume: Fig. 1). On either side of the southeastern end of the oval pavement were two limestone pommels of daggers (B9099, B9100—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 15:3, 4).

Recovered within the soil layer (L910) sealed below the pavement, were a bronze toggle pin (B9081—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 14:7) and fragments of others (B9105, B9107), a whetstone in secondary use as a stone pendant (B9106—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 15:7) and a bone bead (B9112—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 15:6).

Many fragments of human bones were recovered from this burial level, attributed to 12 individuals (see Nagar, this volume). Of these, the bones of five individuals were sealed below the pavement (L910). The bones of the other seven individuals were discerned mainly in the soil fill around the edges of the pavement (L908), and a few on top of the stone pavement (L909). The human bones were disarticulated and very poorly preserved, probably indicative of secondary burial, or perhaps the result of being pushed aside for later burials. In addition, animal bones were recovered, mainly of sheep and goat (Kolska Horwitz, this volume).

Similar stone pavements are known in other burial caves of the Bronze Age, for example at Efrata (Gonen 2001:49, 54, 63, 67), and it has

been suggested that they served as a platform to lay the bones of the dead. In our case, it seems that the stone pavement was used to seal and mark out the burial place.

The Upper Burial Level (L900, L901, L902)

Around the walls of the cave, among and above the stone boulders, and thus at a higher elevation than the center of the cave, groups of vessels together with human and animal bones were found (Burial Groups 1–7; Plan 1: Section 1–1; Plan 3). Each group contained between 10 and 20 intact and broken vessels, except for Groups 5 and 6 that had less than 10 vessels. The vessels were arranged side by side, often close together, facing in various directions or sometimes one within the other. It seems that each group of vessels was associated with the secondary burial of one individual, with a total of seven vessel groups and seven interments in this level. Following is a description of the burial groups, counter-clockwise from the eastern wall.

Burial Group 1 (L901; Fig. 8).— This group, found near the eastern wall of the cave, contained 19 intact and broken vessels (Gershuny, this volume: Table 3), as well as animal bones. The vessels included a carinated bowl (B9021/4—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 6:5), two globular bowls (B9003—



Fig. 8. The vessels from Burial Group 1.

Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 6:7; B9025³) and three piriform juglets (B9004—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 10:8; B9020, B9021/6—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 10:3). Juglet 9004 was placed within Bowl 9003. Around Juglet 9020 were fragments of additional vessels (B9021), among them globular bowls (B9021/2—Gershuny, this volume, Fig. 6:10; B9021/1, B9021/3), a platter bowl with four lug handles (9021/5—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 5:2), a jar (B9021/11), a jug (B9021/7) and three piriform juglets (B9021/9—Gershuny, this volume, Fig. 10:1; B9021/12, B9021/10). To the north of this concentration, along the wall of the cave, were fallen stones and a few sherds (B9043, B9053), which were tentatively assigned to Burial Group 1.

Burial Group 2 (L902).— This group was found in the northern part of the cave, near the wall, within a fill of whitish soil. It contained 15 vessels, most of them broken (Gershuny, this volume: Table 3), including three piriform juglets (B9022, B9023—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 10:4; B9051—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 10:5). Juglet 9022 stood upright, Juglet 9023 was close to it, leaning slightly, its mouth facing north, while Juglet 9051 was found at a slightly lower level, lying on its side with its mouth facing north. To the north was a broken Tell el-Yahudiyyeh juglet with a unique decoration (B9038—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 11:2), which had apparently stood upright before it was broken; near it were bones and a fragment of a skull. To the north of Juglet 9051 was a toggle pin (B9028—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 14:5). Near the intact vessels were sherds (B9001, B9002) from which two carinated bowls, a globular bowl, two jars and a pithos (B9001/3), a jug and a dipper juglet were restored. Among the vessels were a few human and animal bones.

Burial Group 3 (L900; Fig. 9).— This group, found in the northwestern corner of the cave, comprised 11 vessels (Gershuny, this volume: Table 3), including two intact platter bowls side



Fig. 9. Burial Group 3: two intact open bowls (B9008, B9009; see Gershuny, this volume, Figs. 4:5; 6:1), and near them sherds of another open bowl (B9010; see Gershuny, this volume, Fig. 4:1) and an intact jug (B9013), *in situ*, looking south.

by side (B9008, B9009—Gershuny, this volume: Figs. 4:5; 6:1), and near them sherds of an additional one (B9010—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 4:1). Within Bowl 9008 were body fragments of another platter bowl (B9012—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 4:3). Near them, to the east, was a broken black jug (B9011—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 8:4), and to their north, an intact piriform juglet (B9026—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 10:9). To the west of this group of bowls lay an intact jug (B9013—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 9:3), its mouth facing west and its base toward the interior of the cave, and below it, a broken jug (B9017—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 9:1). Around this concentration of vessels were scattered body sherds and bones (B9005, B9006, B9014). In the northern part of Burial Group 3, on a narrow rock shelf that protruded from the northwestern wall of the cave, was a unique ring flask (B9090—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 12) lying with its mouth facing southwest. Above it were a number of long bones.

Burial Group 4 (L900).— This group, immediately to the south of Group 3 and at a

somewhat lower level, may have been laid slightly earlier than Burial Group 3. It included 12 vessels (Gershuny, this volume: Table 3). In the center of this group were a carinated bowl (B9027—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 6:1) and a globular bowl (B9034 = B9024/1—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 6:6), which lay on their sides facing each other. Between them was an intact piriform juglet lying with its mouth facing the center of the cave (B9033—Gershuny, this volume, Fig. 10:6). To the east of Bowl 9034 were fragments of an additional globular bowl (B9032) lying on its side, its mouth facing west toward Bowl 9034. Next to it was a piriform juglet (B9037). In addition to these vessels were sherds of many other vessels (B9024; Fig. 10), including two carinated bowls, a globular bowl, two jugs and three piriform juglets. Below Bowl 9032 were many bones. To the south of Bowl 9027 were two toggle pins: one (B9031—Gershuny, this volume, Fig. 14:4) lay in a north–south direction, the other (B9030—Gershuny, this volume, Fig. 14:3) in an east–west direction.

Burial Group 5 (L900).— This group, near the center of the western wall, comprised seven vessels (Gershuny, this volume: Table 3). Jug 9069 (Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 8:3) lay in the center with its mouth facing the cave's interior. Above its neck were three bowls, one inside the other: a platter bowl (B9066—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 4:4) lying at an angle facing the center of the cave, its base on the neck of Jug 9069; another platter bowl (B9067) inside it; and in this one, a sherd of a globular bowl (B9068). To the north of the bowls was an intact piriform juglet (B9062—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 10:10) standing upright. To the west of the bowls, on a rock shelf protruding from the wall of the cave, was a broken dipper juglet (B9035) and an intact piriform juglet (B9036—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 10:7). The juglets lay horizontally on a flat stone with their mouths facing the center of the cave. Below this stone was a fragment of a skull and long bones.



Fig. 10. Burial Group 4: sherds of *in situ* vessels (B9024), looking west.

Burial Group 6 (L900).— South of Group 5, near the wall of the cave, were three vessels (Gershuny, this volume: Table 3). They comprised a jar (B9016—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 8:1) that lay with its neck facing east toward a platter bowl (B9015—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 4:2), which lay on its side, facing the jar, and inside it, bones of sheep and goat (Horwitz, this volume); and immediately to the north of Bowl 9015, a globular bowl (B9057—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 6:9), its upper part facing the center of the cave.

Burial Group 7 (L900).— In the southwestern corner of the cave was an impressive group of finds (Gershuny, this volume: Table 3), including two bronze daggers (B9040, B9063—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 14:1, 2). The pottery vessels included a piriform juglet (B9045—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 10:2), a bull-shaped rhyton (B9044—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 13) and sherds of additional vessels, among them an unusual juglet (B9001/1—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 10:11). This group was probably originally placed near the wall of the cave, but for some reason the vessels slid down toward the center of the cave. Dagger 9040 was resting horizontally on a stone shelf with its point facing westward, toward the wall of the cave,



Fig. 11. Burial Group 7: zoomorphic rhyton (B9044), looking east.

while Dagger 9063 was found to the south of it, resting parallel to the wall with its point facing north. To the west of Dagger 9040 was Pommel 9061, and another pommel (B9042) was found southeast of Dagger 9063, on a large stone boulder near the southern wall of the cave. Near it was a metal earring (B9041—Gershuny, this volume: Fig. 14:9). To the east of the daggers were vessels and bones on a slope descending toward the center of the cave. The zoomorphic rhyton in the shape of a bull lay on its side at a 45° angle toward the center of the cave, its head facing north, its legs upward to the west and its back downward toward the center of the cave (Fig. 11). To the west of the rhyton and higher than it, was a piriform juglet (B9045), a jar sherd (B9046) and sherds of other vessels. In addition, skull fragments of an individual were found in Group 7 together with animal bones (B9050).

SUMMARY

The Intermediate Bronze Age

The cave was first hewn during the this period, apparently for burial purposes. The

original entrance of the cave was not found and it is uncertain if it was entered by a shaft of the type common in burial caves of this period. The interior of the cave was hewn as a large space (over 4 m in length), although its original height is unknown, as its ceiling began to crumble soon after it was hewn. The bedrock-hewn floor was leveled, and above it a sterile layer of marl was laid. The relatively large size of this cave in comparison to other contemporary shaft tombs, the sterile marl fill that accumulated on its floor prior to the digging of the burial pit, and the possible lack of the usual entrance shaft, raise the possibility that the cave was initially hewn for the purpose of quarrying the marl stone, and only subsequently was it used for burial.

In the northeastern part of the cave, a shallow burial pit was dug, belonging to a single individual, together with animal bones and nine jars of different sizes but similar in type, which had been arranged closely together. The two intact jars and sherds of the other jars indicate that all of them can be attributed to a single burial phase, and the entire group was inserted into the burial pit at the same time. A stone stopper of one of the jars suggests that at the time they contained a liquid or some other content, although they were discovered empty. The burial pit was sealed with *terra rosa* soil that was purposely brought from outside the cave. Above the fill of *terra rosa* were stones that had apparently collapsed from the ceiling of the cave, although it is possible that the burial pit was purposely sealed with stone boulders.

On the floor of the cave, near the southwestern wall, were two oil lamps (Fig. 2) and the lower part of a closed vessel that was also used as a lamp. These apparently served during the hewing of the cave itself, or at the time of burial, and were left behind in the cave.

In general, shaft-tomb burials in this period were secondary burials (Kenyon 1960; 1965; Pritchard 1963; Greenhut 1995; Gonen 2001), and this is supported by the discoveries in

Cave 900. The bones of a single individual were recovered from the Intermediate Bronze Age layer, although it is possible that others were also buried here whose bones were not preserved, or that some of the finds attributed to the MB II burial levels actually belong to this period.

Middle Bronze Age II

Above the boulders that sealed the Intermediate Bronze Age layer and a fill of sterile soil upon them, two MB II burial levels were discerned.

To the earlier MB II level belongs the oval stone pavement in the center of the cave. Below this pavement and around it was a fill of reddish soil, rich in human bones that represent some 12 individuals. Five burials were discerned in L910, sealed below the oval pavement, and seven were discerned mainly on the sides of the pavement (L908). On top of Pavement 909 were a number of fragmentary human bones and potsherds, among them ten *in situ* intact vessels, mainly carinated and globular bowls and piriform juglets. On the sides of the pavement, personal items such as a scarab, two dagger pommels, a toggle pin and a stone pendant were found. These were most certainly buried together with their owners, and attest to the relatively high status of the deceased.

To the later MB II level are attributed the seven groups of bones and vessels discovered around the perimeter of the cave, which could be clearly differentiated. They were discovered above and between the large boulders that had been moved to the sides of the cave prior to the beginning of this later burial level (L900–L902; Plan 3). The human bones were not articulated, and it seems that secondary burial was practiced. Alongside the human bones were animal bones that may have originated in burial ceremonies, as well as pottery vessels and personal items, such as daggers, dagger pommels and an earring. We suggest that each of these groups of vessels represents a separate burial. The poor condition of the bones did not enable a precise determination of the sex or age of the deceased in each group, although a total

of seven individuals could be estimated for this level (L900), which corresponds to the number of vessel concentrations. Thus, we cautiously suggest that each group of vessels represents the secondary burial of one individual, although there is, of course, the possibility that other interments have not survived. It can be assumed that the accompanying items in each 'grave' represent the status and sex of the deceased. For example, Group 7 contained a bull-shaped rhyton and two daggers, suggesting the deceased was a person of importance.

The vessels were usually placed upright, or, if they did not have a stable base, were laid with their mouth facing the center of the cave. However, many vessels also lay in other directions, perhaps moved from their original setting at a later time, or for some other reason. The close proximity, even crowding, of the vessels in each burial group is noteworthy. Most were arranged in relation to the others, some were found inside another vessel or one in front of the other. Sometimes the vessels were buried in the soil, and sometimes they lay on boulders or on rock shelves protruding from the walls of the cave. It is difficult to determine whether the crowding of the vessels within the burial groups was deliberate, or due to lack of space.

The assemblage of vessels recovered from the center of the cave and around its edges is typologically homogenous and can be dated to the beginning of MB II (see Gershuny, this volume). However, there are distinct differences in both the burial customs and in the composition of the ceramic assemblages between the earlier and later levels. In the earlier level, multiple burial was practiced. The bones of five deceased were found below Pavement 909 in the center of the cave, and seven additional individuals were identified around it. The bones of the deceased were not articulated, and can be defined as secondary burials. The finds from other caves of this period indicate that primary burial was also practiced within caves of this period, sometimes on stone pavements inside the caves. It may be that some

of the bones found on Pavement 909 are the remains of primary burials. In the later burial level, secondary burial of single individuals was practiced, and each burial was characterized by a group of vessels and personal items that were buried with the deceased.

Another difference between the two levels of burial is seen in the components of the ceramic assemblages—the variety of vessels in the later level was richer in comparison with that of the earlier level. While the earlier level was characterized mainly by small vessels, including carinated and globular bowls and piriform juglets, in the later level the groups also contained

a bull-shaped rhyton, a ring flask and an unusual Tell el-Yahudiyeh juglet. All the metal items that have survived belong to the later level, although the existence of dagger pommels in the earlier level suggests the existence of daggers in that level as well, which were not preserved.

As there is no chronological significance to these variations in the burial customs and ceramic assemblages between the early and later levels, they may have been a result of the status of the deceased, or of some other circumstances that dictated such differences. However, this issue cannot be determined at this stage of the research.

APPENDIX 1. LOCUS LIST

Locus	Description	Date and Stratigraphy
900	Groups of vessels (Groups 3–7) belonging to secondary burials along the western wall of the cave	MB II, upper burial level
901	A group of vessels (Group 1) belonging to a secondary burial along the eastern wall of the cave	MB II, upper burial level
902	A group of vessels (Group 2) belonging to a secondary burial along the northern wall of the cave	MB II, upper burial level
903	Fill below L901	MB II, upper burial level
904	Collapsed boulders on top of Group 7 in L900; sterile	
905	Entrance corridor into the interior of the cave; opened by a tractor at the time of excavation in the area of the tractor damage; sterile	
906	Marl layer on the floor of the cave in the southeastern part of the cave	
907	Packed marl floor near the western wall of the cave, vessels upon it; below L900	Intermediate Bronze Age
908	Reddish earth fill in the center of the cave, around the sides of Pavement 909, containing fragments of human and animal bones and vessels	MB II, lower burial phase
909	Stone pavement in the center of the cave	MB II, lower burial phase
910	Earth fill containing bones and vessel fragments, similar to L908; sealed below Pavement 909	MB II, lower burial phase
911	Sterile marl fill, sealed by a floor-like surface with a few pottery sherds	Intermediate Bronze Age
912	Burial pit near the northeastern corner of the cave	Intermediate Bronze Age

NOTES

¹ The salvage excavation, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, took place in October 2002 (Permit No. A-3707), and was directed by Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah together with Lilly Gershuny, who also processed the pottery and small finds. They were assisted by Tania Kornfeld (surveying and drafting), Raid Abu-Khalaf (administration), Olga Shor (pottery restoration), Carmen Hersch (pottery drawing), Yossi Nagar (physical anthropology), Liora Kolska Horwitz (analysis of faunal remains), Daphna Ben-Tor (scarab) and Anat Cohen-Weinberger (petrographic analysis). Many others contributed to the success of the excavation, including Keren Ben-

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² The terminology used in this article is IBA = EB IV/MB I (2200–2000 BCE; *NEAEHL*), MB II = MB IIB (1750–1550 BCE; *NEAEHL*).

³ Bowl 9025 was found in L903, located slightly below L901, although it most likely originated in Group 1.

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