

BURIALS FROM THE INTERMEDIATE BRONZE AGE AND THE ROMAN PERIOD AT BET DAGAN

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A number of tombs dating to the Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA) and the Roman period were excavated at Bet Dagan (map ref. NIG 1838–42/6566–69, OIG 1338–42/1566–69).¹ The excavated area is situated 250 m south of the biblical site of Bet Dagan, upon which the Arab village Beit Dajan was founded. The author conducted excavations at the site of Bet Dagan in 1996 (Peilstöcker and Kapitaikin 2000; forthcoming), which revealed settlement remains dating to the Iron Age, the Persian and Hellenistic periods, as well as the Roman and Byzantine periods. In 1967, R. Gophna investigated burials from the Middle Bronze Age II located approximately 1.5 km southwest of the site (Gophna 1967; Gophna and Beck 1981:74, Site No. 32).

THE EXCAVATIONS

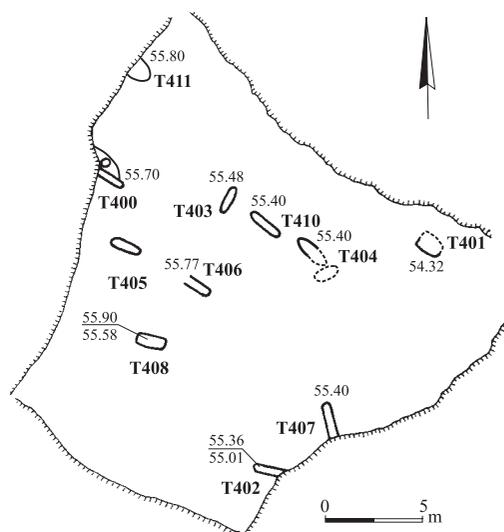
The excavated tombs were concentrated in an area of approximately 15 × 20 m (Plan 1). This area is situated on a narrow *kurkar* hill, covered with a three-meter layer of reddish *hamra* soil, slightly slanting eastward. This part of Bet Dagan had not been settled previously and no signs of agricultural use were visible. However, a single building, dating to British Mandate times, could indicate earlier activities. Due to development work, large parts of this hill were removed prior to the excavation, disturbing the tombs and destroying additional burials, as evidenced by an amphoriskos (see Fig. 3:12) found out of context in the dump of a backhoe working in the area. During the excavation, the area north of the site was already built up; toward the west, south and east construction was

in progress, making any additional attempt to define the original size of the site impossible.

Nine tombs were excavated; seven were dated to the IBA and two cist tombs were dated to the late Hellenistic or Early Roman period. Additional tombs (L404, L411) were discerned at two spots of grayish soil; they were left unexcavated following a request by the Department of Religious Affairs.

The Intermediate Bronze Age Tombs

All the IBA tombs had been damaged. Those situated close to the edge of the hill were partly cut, and the upper layer of the other tombs was removed by mechanical equipment, since its activity was stopped only when pottery appeared. All the IBA tombs seem to have been a simple burial pit dug into the *hamra* soil; however, it has become clear, following



Plan 1. Location of the tombs in the excavated area.

recent excavations (Eli Yannai, pers. comm.) that some of the tombs had shafts, which were mostly destroyed by the development works in the area.

T400 was found in the western part of the site. It was an oval-shaped burial pit (c. 0.4×0.8 m), oriented northwest–southeast. The northwestern part of the tomb was cut off, precluding the reconstruction of its original size. The bones in the tomb, articulated and aligned in the direction of the tomb, with the skull in the southeastern side, belonged to a single individual of undefined age and gender.

The tomb contained three restorable vessels, a jar, a cup and a lamp (Fig. 3:1–3). Since parts of the tomb were destroyed in the past, it seems possible that additional vessels were lost. More bones and potsherds in the northern part of the tomb could indicate either a second burial in the same tomb or an additional tomb close by.

T410, aligned east–west, was situated about seven meters east of *T400* and close to the Roman tomb (*T403*, see below). It was a pit grave of oval shape (0.45×1.11 m), whose upper layer was scraped off and it contained the remains of a single restorable jar (Fig. 3:10). Some human bones in articulation belonged to a young individual of uncertain age and gender.

T401 was found close to the northern edge of the hill, approximately six meters east of *T410*. The northern part of this burial pit had been damaged before the excavation; nonetheless, it became clear that the tomb (c. 0.37×0.96 m; height 0.37 m) followed the same general east–west direction as the other tombs. The burial consisted of two badly preserved pottery vessels (Fig. 3:4, 5), together with human bones and a skull. The anthropological examination of the skull indicated a male individual, 40–50 years of age. The bones were not in articulation, possibly due to the disturbances mentioned above.

T405 was located approximately three meters southeast of *T400*. The tomb's dimensions ($0.35 \times 0.39 \times 1.10$ m) and its east–west axis were similar

to the other tombs. This tomb was disturbed, yielding a single cup (Fig. 3:6), though some more fragments show that additional vessels were part of the burial. The human bones were too disrupted to allow any conclusions concerning age, gender or orientation of the interred.

T406 was four meters east of *T405*. The remains of this tomb followed the east–west general direction; its western part was badly damaged and its upper layer had been mechanically removed prior to the excavation. Consequently, a single cup could be restored from this tomb (Fig. 3:7), although it undoubtedly contained more vessels. The human bones were articulated, following the axis of the tomb, with the skull on the western side. The bones and some teeth attest to a burial of a juvenile individual, four to ten years of age.

T407 was very close to the eastern edge of the hill. It followed the general orientation of the other tombs, though it was aligned slightly more north–south. A single vessel was discovered in the remains of the tomb (Fig. 3:8). The exposed bones were part of the upper skeleton of an individual of undetermined gender, approximately 40 years of age.

T408, which had been damaged in the past, was located at the highest point of the hill, south of *T406*. The tomb ($0.27 \times 0.40 \times 1.05$ m), lying in the same east–west orientation, contained a single IBA vessel (Fig. 3:9). The human bones were badly preserved and could not assist in defining age, gender or other characteristics of the interred.

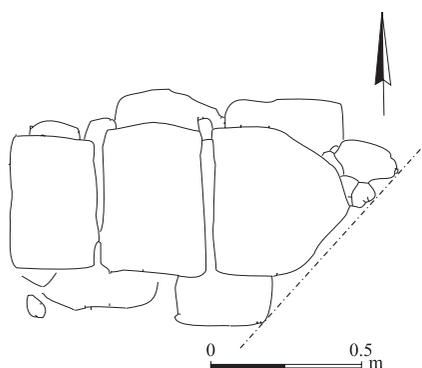
The Roman Tombs

Two tombs that are attributed to the Roman period were excavated at the site. Pottery from this period was found scattered all over the hill and particularly concentrated in the area of IBA *T408*, which contained the restorable remains of a cooking pot (Fig. 3:13).

T402. Remains of a stone-lined tomb were traced in the southeastern section of the hill; its precise

measurements could not be reconstructed. The tomb (Plan 2; 1.3×0.75 m) was aligned east–west and constructed from unworked fieldstones of different sizes. It was covered with two limestone slabs and a basalt grinding-stone in secondary use. The walls of the tomb (0.8 m high) consisted of smaller *kurkar* and limestone blocks. Remains of a single interred individual, of undefined age and gender, were found in articulation, with the skull resting on the western side.

T403. The second constructed tomb was located in the northern part of the area. The tomb was similar to T402 in the construction method, but was oriented north–south (Fig. 1). It had been



Plan 2. Tomb 402.

disturbed and the covering slabs were missing. The burial pit (1.3×2.3 m; inner dimensions 1.10×1.95 m) contained the remains of a single individual of uncertain gender, with the skull on the southern side. Close to the skull were a bronze vessel (Fig. 2) and a small clay juglet



Fig. 1. Tomb 403, looking south.



Fig. 2. The metal jug (B4020) from T403.

(Fig. 3:14), both dating to the Hellenistic–Roman periods.

THE FINDS

The assemblage from the excavated tombs was composed of pottery vessels and a single metal vase; no other grave goods were detected, although metal artifacts are typical of IBA burials. Twelve vessels dating to the IBA could be fully restored and two others were partly restored; ten of the vessels could be associated with certainty to one of the tombs (Table 1).

The Intermediate Bronze Age

Bowl.— The single carinated bowl (Fig. 3:4) resembles the bowls of Type 1 from Ḥorshim (Gilboa and Yannai 1992: Fig. 1:1, 2). The bowl has slightly closed carinated walls, decorated with combing on the exterior above the carination, a rounded rim and a concave base; it is made out of greenish clay. This bowl type appears in tombs, as well as in domestic contexts, and is more popular in the south (Dever 1980: Fig. 4:8) than in the north of the country.

Cups.— The seven handmade cups (Fig. 3:2, 5–7, 9, 11; one cup is not illustrated) have flat bases and almost straight walls. The cups can be divided into two groups, according to size:

small (Fig. 3:6, 7, 11) and large (Fig. 3:2, 5, 9). All the cups, except one (Fig. 3:6), are combed on the upper half of the exterior wall. The decoration varies between a few incised bands (Fig. 3:2) and dense combing (Fig. 3:5). Similar cups were discovered at Ḥorshim (Gilboa and Yannai 1992: Fig. 1:6–10). The cup shape is also common to southern assemblages, as Gophna (1992:146) pointed out.

Jars.— The two jars with simple, rounded rims and flat bases (Fig. 3:1, 10) are plain and have no handles. Both jars were handmade; the joint between the body and the wheel-thrown neck in the smaller jar (Fig. 3:10) was carried out carelessly, leaving an overlap of clay inside the vessel. Barrel-shaped jars are again most frequent in the repertoire of the country's southern regions. Analogies for both jars can be seen at Ḥorshim, although decorated or with handles (Gilboa and Yannai 1992: Figs. 2:2–4, 3:1–4).

Aphoriskoi.— Two undecorated samples (Fig. 3:8, 12) were recovered from the tombs. Gilboa and Yannai (1992:4*) describe the amphoriskoi as very common at Ḥorshim. Amphoriskoi appear in all geographical regions of the country; the smaller, more globular vessel (Fig. 3:12) indicates connections with the northern family.

Table 1. Inventory of IBA Tombs

Tomb	Bowls	Cups	Jars	Amphoriskoi	Lamps	Total
400		1	1		1	3
401	1	1	1**			3
405		1				1
406		1				1
407				1		1
408		1				1
410			1			1
499*		2**		1		3
<i>Total</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>14</i>

* Locus 499 was the surface locus of the excavation

** Fragmentary, not illustrated

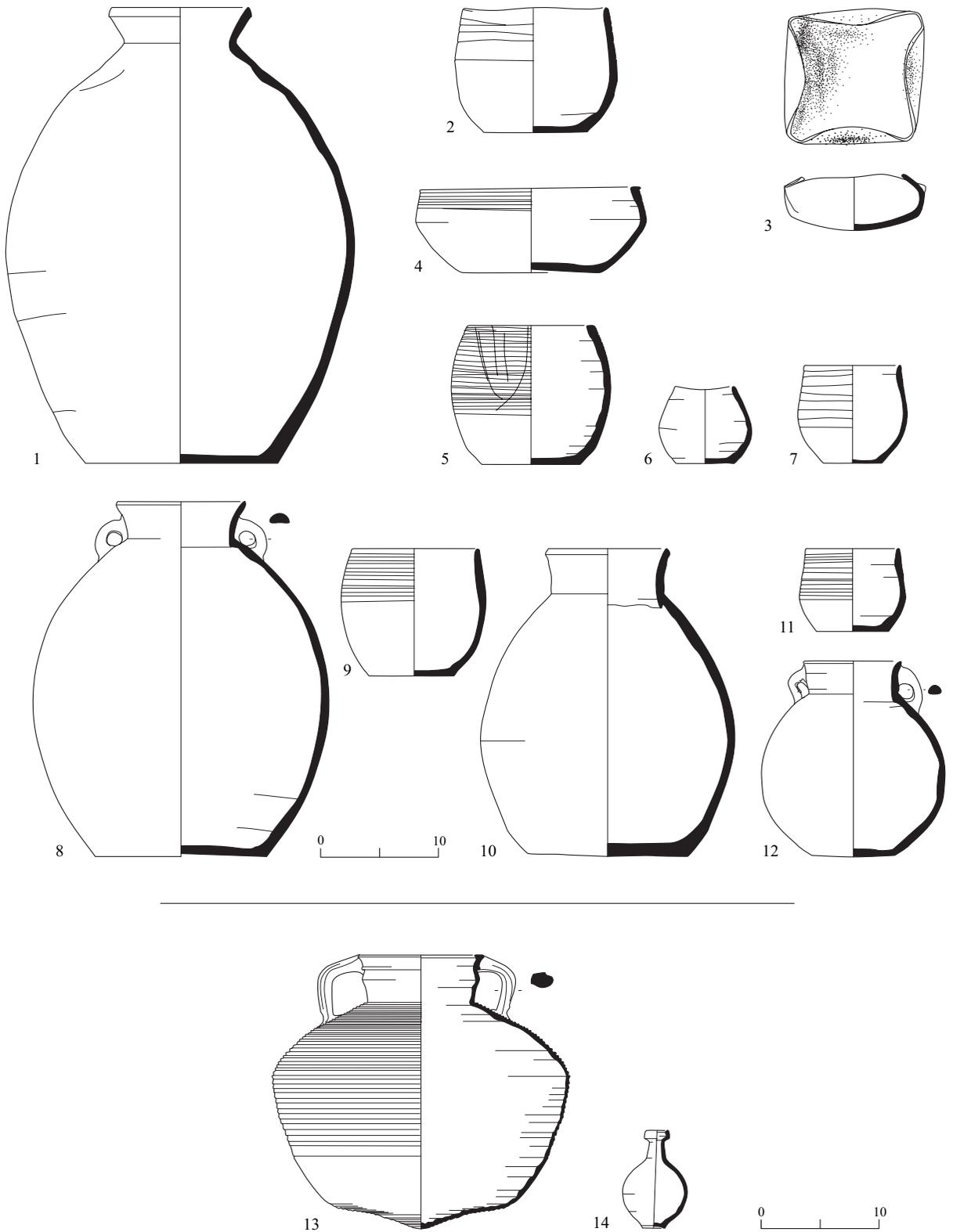


Fig. 3. Pottery.

◄ Fig. 3

No.	Locus	Reg. No.	Vessel
1	400	4002	Jar
2	400	4000/4	Cup
3	400	4000/7	Lamp
4	401	4005	Bowl
5	401	4005/1	Cup
6	405	4018	Cup
7	406	4017	Cup
8	407	4010	Amphoriskos
9	408	4006	Cup
10	410	4022	Jar
11	499	4012	Cup
12	499	4021	Amphoriskos
13	408	4014	Cooking pot
14	403	4013	Juglet

Lamp.— A single four-spouted lamp in T400 (Fig. 3:3) belongs to the popular lamp type of the period, which is current in Ḥorshim (Gilboa and Yannai 1992: Fig. 3:5–7). It is noteworthy that no single-spouted lamp was discovered.

Summarizing the IBA ceramic discussion, it should be pointed out that the vessels resemble the southern family, as described by Dever (1980), and lately by Gophna (1992). Moreover, the strong similarities between the vessels from Ḥorshim, Azor (Eli Yannai, pers. comm.) and Bet Dagan further supports the hypothesis of a regional group that includes the Yarqon basin sites, as initially suggested by Gilboa and Yannai (1992:7*).

The Hellenistic–Roman Periods

Pottery.— Two vessels, which can be dated to the Late Hellenistic or the Early Roman period, were found. The first, a cooking pot (Fig. 3:13), is similar to a vessel from Ḥorbat Metaḥ (Elisha 2000: Fig. 126), which has a chronological range from the second century BCE to the first half of the second century CE. Similar vessels are known from other Late Hellenistic and Early Roman contexts, such as Ashdod (Dothan 1971: Fig. 61:12), Tell Keisan (Briend and Humbert

1980: Pl. 11.3b) and Tel Mikhal (Fischer 1989: Fig. 13.3:18, 19). This type of cooking pot with a straight neck and two handles, extending from rim to shoulder, is typical of the Hellenistic period, but continues into the Roman period, as already observed by Dothan (1971:118). The second vessel is a small juglet without handles (Fig. 3:14). Similar juglets, although with handles, are known from Caesarea (Oleson et al. 1994:125, Fig. 46:D44, D46) and from Tel Anafa (Berlin 1997:142–143). A juglet without handles, but with a slightly different shape, came from Samaria (Crowfoot, Crowfoot and Kenyon 1957: Fig. 70:6). This juglet should be dated, as well, to the later part of the Hellenistic, or the beginning of the Roman period.

Metal jug.— A bronze jug was found together with the juglet in T403. The jug (see Fig. 2) is 10.5 cm high and has a diameter of 7 cm (rim) and 9.5 cm (body). The base is missing and the vessel is damaged. The rim is decorated on the outside with small circles, set within an ovolo enclosed within two bands. The decorated handle was found separately, close to the jug and had originally extended from the rim to the shoulder. Its thumb-rest is leaf shaped and curves inward, whereas the escutcheon bears the visage of a woman with long hair. Bronze vessels of this type, dating to the Roman period, are fairly rare in the country; the best known samples came from the Cave of the Letters, excavated and published by Yadin (1963). Yadin found 14 jugs, which he divided typologically into five groups. Although none of his jugs is identical to the sample from Bet Dagan, the shape of our jug fits best into Yadin's Group II (1963:64, in particular jug No. 12). The various decorative elements, such as the rim (like Yadin's No. 8), the handle (Yadin's No. 19) and the escutcheon (Yadin's No. 20), are familiar in the jugs from the Cave of the Letters, though not in the combination that exists on the Bet Dagan jug. Such metal jugs are, however, well known in Europe, particularly from Italy, e.g., Pompeii (Tassinari 1993:21–32), but also from other countries, like Switzerland (Kaufmann-Heinimann 1977: Nos. 227, 248–250).

CONCLUSIONS

The excavated burial ground was first used in the IBA. It remains uncertain to what site the cemetery belonged, since excavations at the tell of Bet Dagan did not reveal any pottery dating to this period. All the tombs follow a general unified direction that may point to some form of an organizing authority, being responsible for the site. The site was damaged so badly in the past that little can be said about the total number of tombs or the average number of offerings. Metal artifacts or any other offerings, i.e., beads, which are typical of IBA burials, were not found in the tombs. This may well be connected to the disturbances, or it may indicate the low socio-economic level of the interred. The region of Bet Dagan has sparse archaeological information with regard to this period. The IBA cemetery of Azor (Eli Yannai, pers. comm.) and another cemetery, recently excavated in Tel Aviv (Kaplan Junction; Edwin van den Brink, pers. comm.) are, so far, the only other large sites from this period excavated in the region. Additional tombs

are reported from Shoham (Edwin van den Brink, pers. comm.), Ḥolon (Eli Yannai, pers. comm.) and Ḥorshim (Gilboa and Yannai 1992). Unlike the tombs excavated at Bet Dagan, all the other tombs were bedrock-hewn burial caves, most probably due to the location of the settlement sites nearby. In general, the IBA sites were situated along the streams' floodplains, as pointed out by Gophna (1992:133); it seems possible that additional settlement sites in the Bet Dagan region are still concealed below the accumulation of alluvial soils.

Contrary to the early tombs, the two constructed tombs have different orientations. The sample is too small to draw conclusions about the general direction of the tombs in this period; it is, however, known from other sites that sometimes, not all the tombs followed the same alignment, as exemplified by the cemetery of 'Ein el-Ghuweir (Bar-Adon 1971: Fig. 11), dating to the Early Roman period. It remains unclear whether additional tombs exist in the area; at any rate, they most probably belong to the Roman-period site of Bet Dagan.²

NOTES

¹ The excavation was conducted in December 1998 (Permit No. A-2980) on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, and directed by the author, with the assistance of Vadim Essman and Viatcheslav Pirsky (surveying), Yossi Nagar (physical anthropology), Elisheva Kamaisky (pottery

restoration), Marina Rappaport (pottery drawings) and Ella Altmarm (metal conservation). Dr. Eli Yannai provided important information about other IBA tombs in the region.

² Possibly to be identified with Caferdago, as proposed by Avi-Yonah (1936:154).

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