AND DEATH SHALL DO US NO PART: SIMULTANEOUS BURIALS IN MIDDLE BRONZE AGE SOUTHERN LEVANT

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Abstract

Much has been written on funerary assemblages and burial customs of the Middle Bronze II in the Southern Levant (KENYON 1960; 1965; HALLOTTE 1994; BAKER 2012; COHEN 2012). Some MBII tombs show a unique phenomenon: simultaneous burial of several individuals together. It was first noticed by KENYON (1960), but hardly discussed since. In this article we bring new evidence from the large MBII cemetery of Rishon le-Zion, Israel, and show that simultaneous burials appear in quite a few other sites. It is a significant phenomenon which deserves attention, though its meaning and the identity of those buried remain enigmatic.

Keywords: Middle Bronze, tombs, death, burial customs, Levant.

Introduction

The salvage excavations carried by one of us (Y. Levy) at Rishon le-Zion, on the coastal plain 20 km south of Tel-Aviv, brought to light one of the largest Middle Bronze II (MBII) cemeteries found in the Southern Levant (LEVY 1993; 2005; 2008; SHALEV et al. 2013). There are several rural MB sites in the immediate vicinity (AD 2008; AD and DAGOT 2008; ARBEL 2008; DAGAN and MARDER 2010), but no large urban centre, hence, we are not sure to which site/s the cemetery was affiliated. More than 200 tombs were excavated in the 1990s; this is a minimum number, since more tombs existed, but could not be excavated or were not preserved due to the humid environment. Also, we excluded loci which could be tombs, but lacked secure evidence of human burial. Excavated tombs included 178 shallow pit tombs (Areas B, C, and E) and 23 complex deep shaft tombs (Areas A and F). Both types of tombs are typical of the MBII period; comparable cemeteries, though smaller, are known from nearby sites such as Dhahrat el Humraiya (ORY 1948), Jaffa (KAPLAN 1955), Tel Qasile (KLETTER 2006), Azor (GORZALCZANY, BEN-TOR and RAND 2003), and Aphek (KOCHAVI, BECK and YADIN 2000).[1] The tombs held at least 605 burials. Of them, 339 burials were primary (articulated) and 221 were disarticulated. In the remaining 45 cases the human remains were too fragile to indicate the exact mode of burial. The disarticulated burials were not secondary burials moved from elsewhere, but remains of primary burials in the shaft tombs, which had been pushed aside to make room for newer burials (a few disarticulated burials could be the result of post-burial disturbances, for example by the modern development works).

The Rishon le-Zion tombs included a rich assemblage: thousands of pottery vessels, 154 scarabs and scaraboids, hundreds of bronze weapons, various personal items, sheep/goat bones, etc. (Figs. 1–2) We will not discuss here the issue of 'warrior graves' (see PHILIP 1995; GARFINKEL 2001; REHM 2003; COHEN 2012).
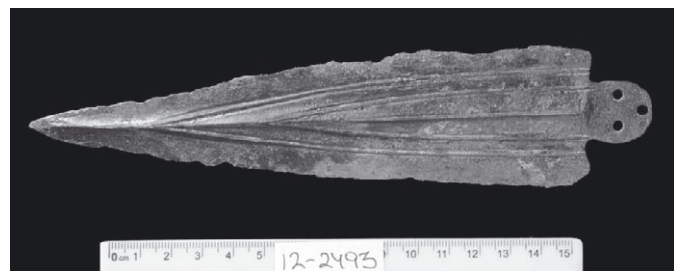

Fig. 1 Bronze dagger from Rishon Le-Zion, L607 B6084.

In the course of working on the finds we have noticed an enigmatic phenomenon: simultaneous burials. By this term we mean remains of two or more human individuals in articulation, found together in the same tomb and phase, apparently buried as part of one 'event'.

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[1] For MBII settlement patterns in the southern coastal plain see UZIEL 2008.

Fig. 2 Scarab from Rishon Le-Zion, B2874/2.

What do we mean by one event? Before the modern era with its mechanical tools, bodies were always interred one after another, as they were too heavy to be lifted up and disposed of together, at exactly the same moment. Thus even in mass burials after epidemics or wars, bodies were interred one after another. Unfortunately, archaeology cannot reconstruct the exact timing of each burial, since our ability to date – whether archaeologically or by methods of natural sciences – is limited to plus/minus a few dozens of years. When we find a row of articulated burials in the same locus, and the associated finds do not indicate different temporal phases, we cannot tell if one body was placed a day or a month before or after another. Stratigraphy helps, but tombs often do not exhibit clear, layered stratigraphy. One event of simultaneous burials means several primary burials found together, one next to the other, all maintaining anatomic articulation, without evidence for intervals. The adding of a new body did not cause disturbance to former skeletons, because the latter were not yet decayed, so the bones were still tied together by soft tissues. This can sometimes be seen from the arrangement of the burials, for example, when body parts of two skeletons (arms, legs) are intertwined. In such cases, we can assume that the span of time between the burials did not exceed several weeks, which is the typical time period required for the decay of the soft human tissues. This time period can last longer in extreme dry or frozen climates, or when the body is treated, for example, by mummification. However, in the warm and humid climate of Rishon le-Zion decomposition of bodies must have been fast, a matter of days or a few weeks at the most (DUDAY 2009: 50–52). Of course, intervals between burials could be shorter, a matter of minutes or hours rather than weeks.

Simultaneous MBII burials in the southern Levant were first noticed by Kathleen Kenyon at Jericho in the 1950s. Therefore, we discuss first the evidence from Jericho.

Simultaneous Burials at Jericho

Many MBII shaft tombs in Jericho show multiple *successive* burials, that is, earlier burials pushed aside to accommodate new, later burials. The pushing aside creates 'secondary heaps' of mixed bones (often of several individuals) and finds. In such tombs the last burials in each locus, which are usually kept in better articulation, give the best evidence about burial customs (KENYON 1960: 263–4).

In the first Jericho report Kenyon noticed six tombs, each of them containing 4–13 *simultaneous* burials (KENYON 1960, 264–5, Tombs G1, H6, H11, H13; H18, H22). She described them thus:

"These final bodies lay neatly disposed across the cleared space of the chamber. There can be little doubt that they were all put in together, and in the case …[when] the chamber was completely full of bodies, the limbs were so intricately intertwined that it would have been impossible for the bodies to have been put in successively" (KENYON 1960: 265).

The bodies were usually placed in rows and seem to belong to families (adults and children together), though conclusive evidence is lacking. They follow general practices of MBII burials in Jericho, and are by no means poorer in finds than other MBII burials. All these simultaneous burials belong to the final MBII phase at Jericho. One could be tempted to relate them to the destruction of Jericho at the end of the MBII period. However, the skeletons showed no evidence of violence. Once the city was destroyed, the conquerors – or the survivors – would hardly have either the means or the motives to make such elaborate burials for war victims. Kenyon suggested that:

"It is therefore probable that disease of some sort was responsible for the simultaneous death of entire families. This may have taken place very shortly before the final destruction of the [MBII] town… The site was then completely abandoned for a considerable period, and therefore no subsequent burials were made in these tombs" (KENYON 1960: 276–268).

This is possible. However, one should assume a quite complex scenario: a disease hit Jericho, yet the survivors managed to bury the victims quite

elaborately. A moment later they were conquered and the city was abandoned (the issue of LB abandonment is often tied to the 'biblical' conquest of Jericho; cf. BIENKOWSKI 1986; WOOD 1990; SCHEFFLER 2013).

The finds published in the second Jericho reports only added to the mystery. One tomb (P19) included a row of seven burials side by side (KENYON 1965: 171, 388–390). One primary burial (female, c. 28 years old) was perhaps earlier than the rest and was disturbed after interment. The six other skeletons (two male adults c. 24 and 26 years old; two c. 15- and 17-year-old girls; one boy and one girl, both c. 11 years old) were found in perfect order, placed simultaneously, but the three males lacked their right hands – and all six were killed by blows to the head with a blunt instrument (murdered – as indicated by the mutilation of the six skulls; it is hard to find another reasonable explanation for it). Kenyon suggested that this tomb belonged to a wealthy lady. It was robbed, but:

"[The] tomb-robbers were caught in the act, were accorded the time-honoured treatment of thieves in the east of having a hand cut off, and were then executed with other members of the family, and placed in the tomb they had violated" (KENYON 1965: 171).

This is theoretically possible. Yet, would an entire family, including children, be executed for tomb robbery? If tomb-robbery was punishable by execution, why bother with cutting the hands off, and only those of the males? This custom is documented for 'ordinary' thieves, or for dead victims of war. Personal items, such as bracelets, scarabs, and leather sandals (indicating some wealth) were found in association with the six simultaneous burials. Would despicable tomb robbers be buried in neat order besides the person whose tomb they had violated, and be allowed to maintain valuables, which may have been the fruits of their hideous crimes? A more likely scenario is that all the burials in this tomb belong to the same family.

Chapman noticed the difficulties with Kenyon's interpretation of Jericho Tomb P19. He suggested that the burials relate to cutting off the hands of dead enemies as proof of their annihilation. Sometime after the first female burial,

"There was an enemy raid on the city, which did not result in its destruction, in which the members of the family of the deceased [female] were caught outside the city walls, perhaps working in the fields, and killed by the maces of the enemy, and the hands of the males, and only the males, were cut off as proof … After the attackers had been driven off, the relatives of the deceased recovered their bodies, and buried them with lavish offering and due ceremony in their family tomb" (CHAPMAN 1987: 32).

Chapman's scenario is reasonable. The custom of cutting off and presenting the right hands (or penises) of enemies as proof of kill was common in Second Millennium BC Egypt. It finds corroboration in the recent discovery of 16 cut-off right hands in pits at Avaris/Tell el Dabᶜa (BIETAK 2012). Burials with hands cut off, presumably victims of war, were also found in an Iron Age cave in the Samaria Mountains (AIZIK and PELEG 2007).[2] If one follows Chapman, one should relate Jericho Tomb P19 with a surprise attack, since people would not be working outside the walls if the presence of an enemy was suspected. Also, it would be necessary to assume that the raiders killed an entire family including girls, and removed also the hand of the boy.

This reconstruction may explain Tomb P19, but does not fit other tombs from Jericho, which also show skeletons missing arms/hands. Tomb G73 has multiple successive burials with some missing arms (KENYON 1965: 448–450, fig. 233). The eighteen burials from six successive phases in Tomb J19 all lacked one or two arms.[3] They cannot be explained as punished tomb robbers. Kenyon suggested that superstition was involved: the family removed the arms to prevent potential harm-doing by the dead (KENYON 1965: 171, 372–374, fig. 184). It is certain that the Tomb J19 burials were not victims of enemy raids, since they were buried in successive phases. Jericho could not be surprised six times, with people venturing outside to meet the same deadly fate, over and over again. Removal of hands/arms exists elsewhere. For example, some Bronze Age burials at Enkomi (Cyprus) had portions of the right/left arms removed (KESWANI 2004: 103). The lack of arms is a detail which occurs with some but not all simultaneous MB

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[2]   For mutilation of killed or captive enemies by the Assyrians, see DE-BACKER (2010); for biblical sources about mutilation see LEMOS (2005).

[3]   Or 19 burials, with one additional skull not shown in plan, KENYON 1965: 372.

Table 1 Simultaneous Burials – Jericho

Tomb	No. of Burials	Details and data about age/sex
G1	7	Skeletons A-E, F, R
H6	4	Two adults, two children
H11	12	Nine adults, three children
H13	6 (at least)	Skeletons Ci, Bi, Ai, V, M, A.
H18	12	One adult, eleven children; second adult placed on a wooden bed, perhaps (but not necessarily) from the same time
H22	12	Four "not very old" adults, eight children
P19	6	Two male adults (c. 24 and 26 years old); two girls (c. 15 and 17 years old); one boy and one girl (both c. 1 years old)
P17	18	At least 3 children and 4 adults
M11	7	Skeletons A-H; C is a young or small person
P23	2	Skeletons C-D
P1	10?	Two phases: earlier (L, K, F, E, D, C and probably A) and later (Z,Y, R). More skeleton groups found, but not clearly simultaneous
A136	?	Possibly skeletons Ai, W, V and children Az, Z
J9	?	Skeletons J and K?
D641, HAR	?	Intramural burials
Total	96 at least	

burials; it occurs in non-simultaneous burials too. In the present paper we focus on the simultaneous burials and will not discuss this feature further.

Seven simultaneous skeletons were discovered in a row in Jericho Tomb M11 of Group V (KENYON 1965: 227–229, fig. 105).[4] Tomb A136 was found packed to the roof with 26 burials in six successive stages, separated by short intervals of time, though in this case there is no decisive proof for simultaneous burials (KENYON 1965: 466–468, fig. 246). However, with the Jericho II report it became clear that not all the simultaneous burials belonged to the latest MBII phase. In Tomb P23 from Group II a layer of seven adults in anatomical articulation was found. Some of the skeletons were disturbed and they were placed in more than one event. There were probably two stages of burial; at least the two latest burials seem simultaneous (KENYON 1965: 286–8). A row of ten bodies was put in two stages in Tomb P1, though they could be successive, with short intervals in between each burial. This tomb is dated to Group II-Early III (KENYON 1965: 295–298, fig. 143). In Tomb P17 of Group III there were eighteen burials, all placed simultaneously or during very short intervals of time, when earlier bodies were not yet decayed (KENYON 1965: 359, fig. 175).

Simultaneous burials are perhaps documented also in built MB tombs inside the urban area of Jericho (KENYON 1981: 349–350, Fig. 5, pls. 188–189; cf. NIGRO 2009: Tombs D641; HAR).[5] Of course, tombs with simultaneous burials could belong to different segments of the population (e. g., in terms of class), and vary in circumstances of burial.

Simultaneous burials appear in Jericho in c. ten out of 51 excavated tombs, with at least 96 burials (Table 1 below). KENYON (1965:167–170) estimated that 772 individuals were buried in all the MB tombs at Jericho. Roughly speaking, simultaneous burials occupy c. 12 percent of all MB burials. Even if the general population number is unknown, Kenyon must be right in observing that the tombs in general represent a wealthier minority; while a large segment of probably poorer people is not represented (KENYON 1965:170). The 'invisibility' of burials of the poor is documented in various other periods and regions (compare MORRIS 1987:105; MAGNESS 2012).

The anthropological data are very limited, but prove that the Jericho simultaneous burials include males, females, and children. Though Kenyon spoke about "mass simultaneous burials", she interpreted some of them as burials of families. For example, in her view H6 represents a tomb of

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4   Kenyon divided the tombs into five groups based on the typology of the finds, I being the earliest and V the latest. Tomb M11 had two phases – the first from Group II and the second, with the simultaneous burials, from Group V.

5   In her extensive catalogue of MB burials, HALLOTE (1994, Vol. II: 211) mentioned briefly Kenyon's views about Tombs J19 and P19.

Table 2 Multiple Primary Burials in Shaft Tombs – Areas A, F

No.	Burials	Tomb	Details	Figures
1	2	F1 L764 Phase 2	1 female adult, 1 adult, B7924–5; skeletons not fully complete	3–4
2	2	F5 L720 Phase 2	2 adults, B7364–5, one badly preserved with leg above the other	
3	2	F9 L745+709	2 male adults, B7541, B7648	Fig. 6
4	2	F9 L716 Upper Phase	1 male 1female, adults, B7265, B7330	
5	2	F9 L763	1 male adult, 1 child, B7867–8	Fig. 7
6	2	F10 L759 Upper Phase	2 adults, B7985–6, one incomplete with legs above the other	
7	2	A1 Level II L227	Probably 2 adults, B2782+3, B2875+6, leg of one above that of the other	
8	3	F1L764 Phase 1	2 adults, 1child, B8086–8; leg of one adult above the other, but could fall after death; burials either simultaneous or in short time intervals	Fig. 5
9	3	A5 Level II L251	3 children, skeletons not entirely complete, perhaps due to the humid environment	
10	3	A9 L215 Level II	3 fairly complete skeletons with some intertwined arms/feet	
11	4	A6 Level V	2 children, 2 adults (male and female); perhaps the adults were added after the children	
12	4	A6 Level II L224+L266	2 males, 1female, 1 child; near and partially above each other; but not described in detail	
13	6	A1 Level IV	2 females, 2 adults, 2children. Very close and sometimes partially one above the other. Perhaps from several stages, but two are interlocked – probably simultaneous	

an important person (one adult), his wife (second adult), and their children (KENYON 1960: 454). Tomb H18 belonged to a family with the paterfamilias placed on a wooden bed, his wife (the second adult), and their children (KENYON 1960: 488). As we have seen (above), even the six simultaneous burials in Tomb P19 were interpreted as one family, whether of tomb robbers (thus KENYON 1965: 171) or of victims of war (thus CHAPMAN 1987: 32).

An interpretation as burials of families is possible for some cases (H6), but does not fit all these tombs. For example, the relations between skeletons of adults and children in tombs H11 and H18 hardly fit families. The number of children in H18 seems exceptionally high, while the two male adults in the same age group in P19 do not fit a nuclear family. In addition, an explanation should be offered for the death of complete families together at the same time. Such tombs do not represent a natural death curve within a family (joint, extended or nuclear – we need not enter here into the complications of family structures, as discussed by WILLIAMSON 2003; ALLEN et al. 2008). Nine adults (H11), eight (H22) or eleven children (H18) do not die out at the same time in a family, unless in grave circumstances, such as famines, epidemics, or wars.

Simultaneous Burials at Rishon Le-Zion

Some Rishon le-Zion shaft tombs (Areas A, F) included two to six multiple primary burials side by side (Table 2).

Are these natural deaths of family members, added one after another over time, or simultaneous burials of victims of wars, famines or epidemics? In shaft-tombs, bodies could be added and the shaft could be re-opened many times. Closure was necessary as protection from scavenging animals. At Jericho, the shafts were closed at the bottom with stones. Kenyon concluded that the shafts were indeed re-opened many times for successive burials (KENYON 1960: 425). Burials in the Rishon le-Zion shaft tombs were often successive, for example, the row of at least five primary burials in F11 L728 Phase 3. In this case, the skeletons are not simultaneous: earlier-placed skeletons are less well-preserved and are located partially under the later, better-preserved burials. Apparently, addition of new burials damaged the older ones. Still, the succession was quite fast.

None of the examples from the abovementioned shaft tombs is simultaneous beyond doubt. The documentation about relations between skeletons is often not sufficient and it is possible that these are successive burials.
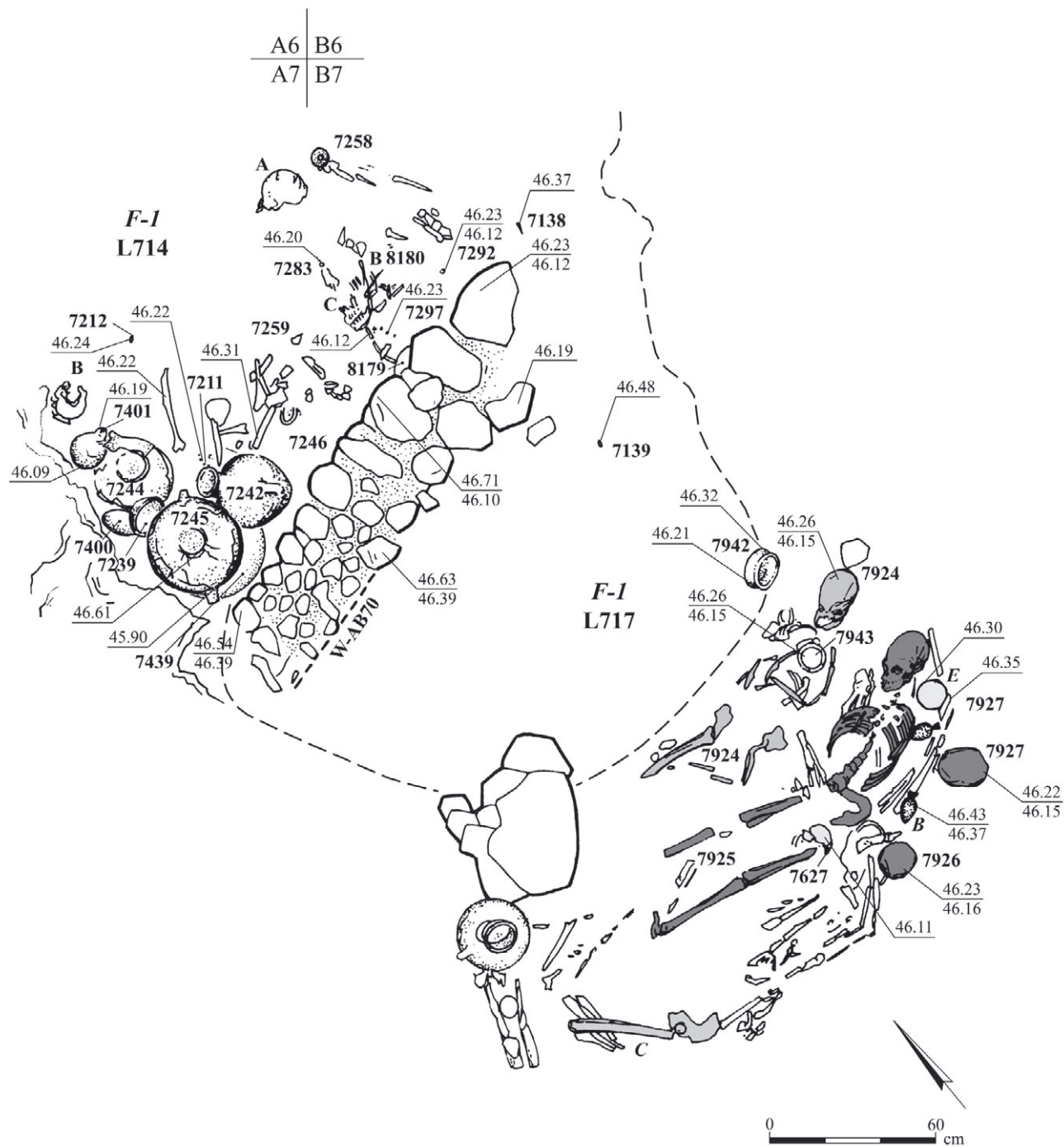
Fig. 3 Plan of Tomb F1 L764 Phase 2.

However, definite evidence comes from the pit tombs of Area B. We must stress that these are primary burials. The "secondary heaps" of bones and finds, common in shaft tombs of Areas A, F, and in MBII pit tombs at other sites, e.g., Tel Qasile (KLETTER 2006), are not found here.[6]

Four tombs (out of 163) in Area B were defined as having remnants of secondary burials, meaning remains lacking anatomical articulation (Tombs B2, B6, B7, B128). In fact, each of these tombs had one clear, primary burial. The additional human remains were not secondary heaps, but only scant remains, a few badly-preserved and perhaps disturbed bones. In any case, this is a tiny, unrepresentative minority. Multiple primary burials appear in 29 tombs of Area B (Table 3).

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[6]   Secondary burials can also mean that the body is left to decay elsewhere and later all or some of the bones are collected for burial in the tombs (e.g., in ossuaries or coffins). This practice is not documented at Rishon le-Zion and is also not typical in the MBII period.

Table 3 Multiple Primary Pit Burials – Area B

No. of Burials	No. of Tombs	Details
2	23	B1*, B12, B17*, B43*, B48, B49, B57*, B86, B89, B91, B92*, B98*, B100, B101+108, B105a*, B105b*, B107, B110, B135, B142, B149, B159, B167
3	5	B24, B81, B115, B116, B123
4	1	B104
Total:	29	

Legend: * denotes badly-preserved tombs, where the relations between the burials are uncertain.

At least eight of these multiple primary tombs show *simultaneous* burials – the most telling feature is intertwined limbs:

1. Tomb B24 (Figs. 8–9): three adults. The skeletons are complete (if they were successive, the earlier would have been at least partially disturbed). Two are intertwined: the head of one is placed on the other, but its leg seems to rest under the other's leg.

Fig. 6 F9 L745, view NE: pair of articulated skeletons, one not yet fully exposed.

Fig. 4 Tomb F1 L764 Phase 2: View NE. Three articulated skeletons side by side; secondary bones along the edge of the burial niche.

Fig. 7 F9 L763, view S: pair of articulated skeletons.

2. Tomb B89: one female adult and one child, very closely placed, partly touching. The adult head is maybe slightly disturbed and the feet are not preserved.

3. Tomb B91 (Fig. 10): one adult, one baby (1.5 years old), intertwined. The right arm of the adult was placed above the upper body of the baby, with the hand under the child's knee; one delicate arm of the baby was preserved though partially covered by the adult body. There is no doubt that the two burials were placed at the same time, or with only a short interval before decay sat in.

3. Tomb B104: two adults (ages 18–25; 30–40) placed parallel to each other and two children (7–8 years old). One child is between the
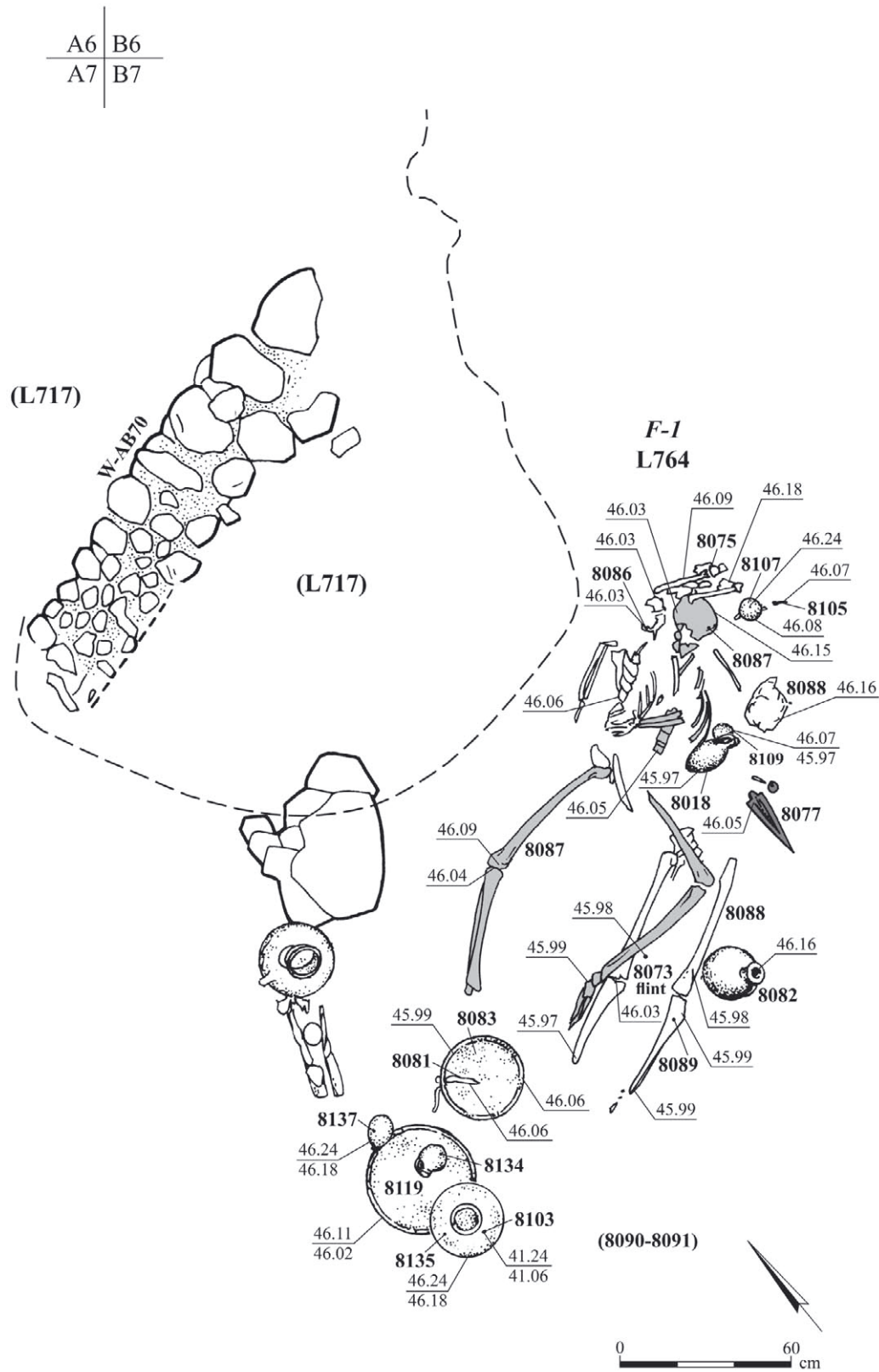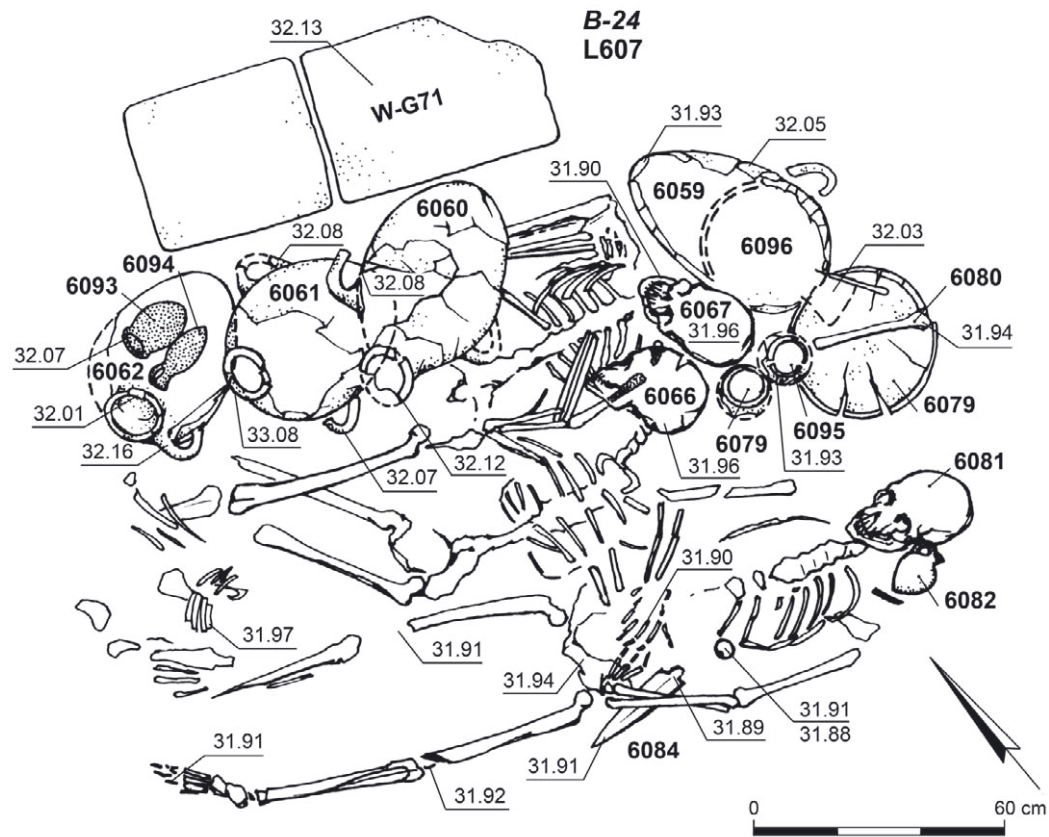

Fig. 5 Plan of Tomb F1 L764 Phase 1.

Fig. 8 Plan of Tomb B24.

Fig. 9 Tomb B24, view N: three articulated skeletons; notice the bad state of preservation.

Fig. 10 Tomb B91, view E: tomb of an adult and a child.

adult's legs, the second above their feet (not preserved or not shown in plan; but all the burials are primary and simultaneous). The dead seem to face their neighbours and are neatly arranged, the adults 'engulfing' the child in between. Presumably the child was added immediately after adult B6577, then the second adult B6574, finally the older child B6577 above the adults' feet. Adding a later burial would have required re-opening of the pit, therefore, disturbing the former burials. The
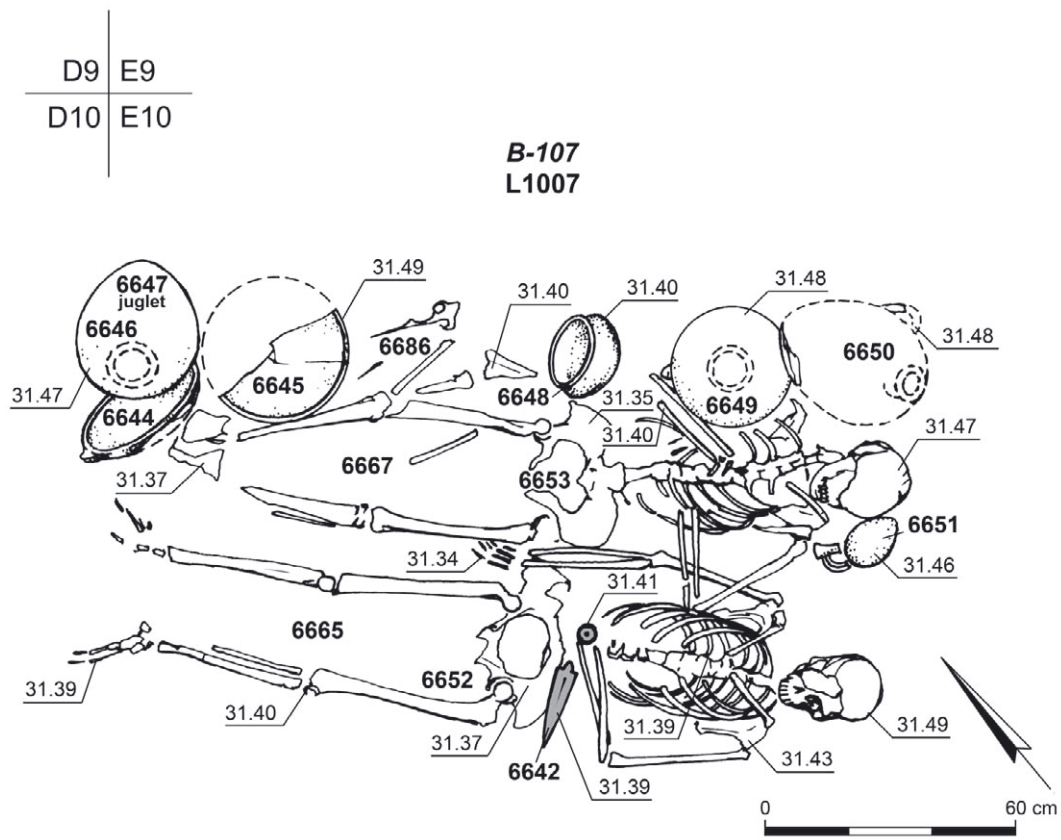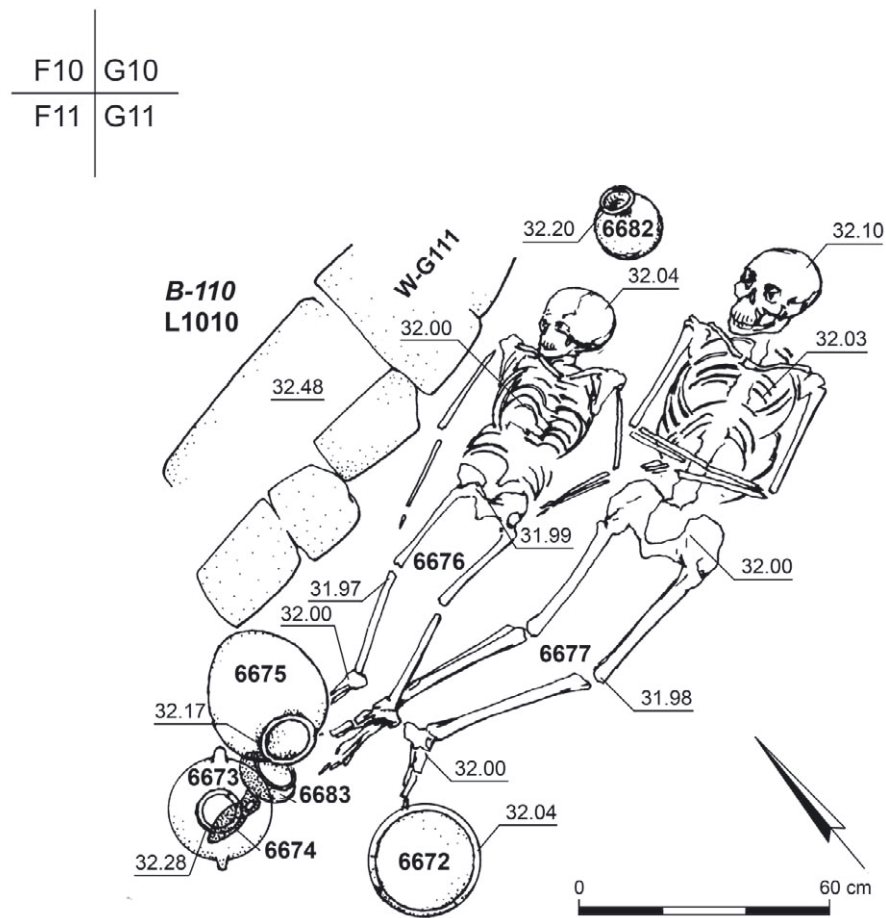
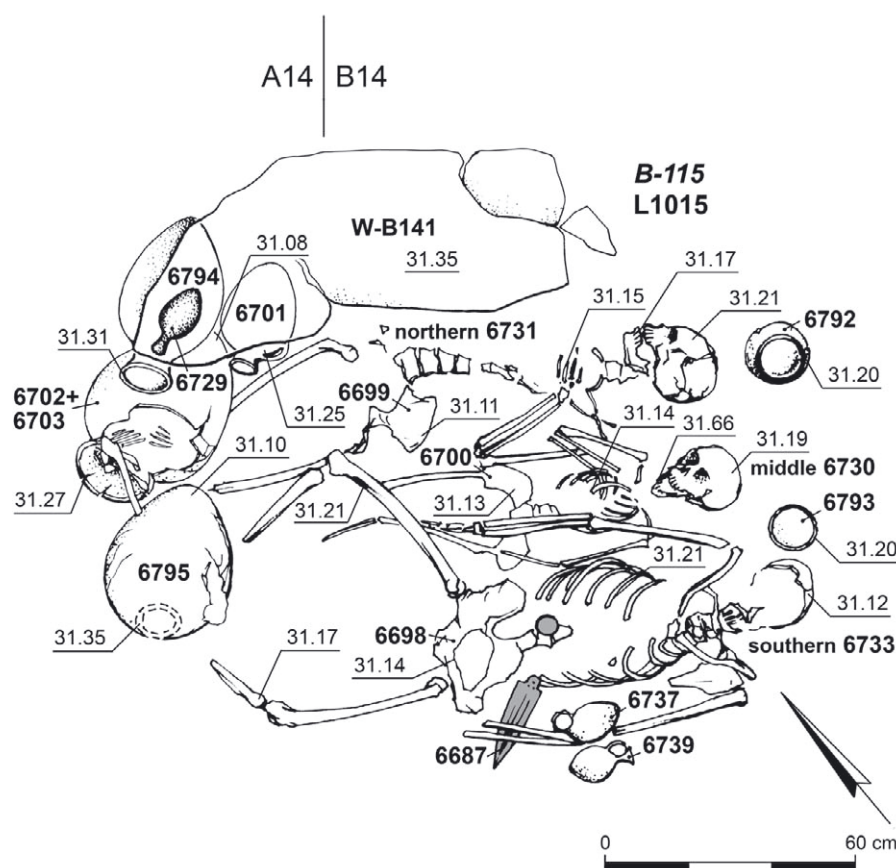Fig. 11 Plan of Tomb B107.

Fig. 12 Plan of Tomb B110.

Fig. 13 Plan of Tomb B15.

four were laid immediately one after the other, or at least when the soft tissues were not yet decayed. It also seems that each burial was supplied with vessels, though we cannot always ascribe each vessel to a specific burial.

4. Tomb B107 (Fig. 11): two adults, B6667 (age 30–40) and B6665 (male, age 20–30). They are placed in intimate proximity without any disarticulation, and their arms are intertwined (probably B6667 above B6665; if so, B6667 was placed later, but in the same 'event').

5. Tomb B110 (Fig. 12): a child 8–9 years old (B6676) and an adult (B6677). The bodies closely match in position. The right foot of the adult was placed under the left foot of the child; there is no sign of disturbance in either skeleton.

6. Tomb B115 (Fig. 13): three burials – northern (B6731, 35–45 years); central (B6730, 6–7 years); and southern (B6733, 15–18 years). They are simultaneous since they are well preserved, intimately placed beside each another without damage to their 'neighbours', and intertwined. The right arm of B6733 was placed above the arm, chest and pelvis of B6730. The right leg of B6733 was placed

above the legs of B6730 and B6731. The right arm of B6730 was placed above the hand of B6731. The order of placement was probably B6731 first, B6730 second, B6733 last; but the interval of time must have been very short. We note that the northern burial (B6731) seems to lack the right arm.

7. Tomb B116: three burials – northern (B6732, 30–40 years); central (B6734, 12–15 years); and southern (B9494, 18–25 years). It is difficult to assign some arm bones to specific skeletons. According to the excavation files, the arms were folded, but the plan suggests that the external burials had one extended and one folded arm. Anyhow, the burials match each other and are very close. We cannot determine the exact order of placement, but all are from one 'event'.

8. Tomb B142 (Fig. 14): an exceptional tomb with two burials: an adult B9510 (40–50 years old) *above* burial B9511 (age/sex unknown, but not a small child). The lower burial is better preserved (normally the opposite happens). This suggests that the damage to the upper burial was caused by post-depositional (perhaps recent) disturbances. The two burials are
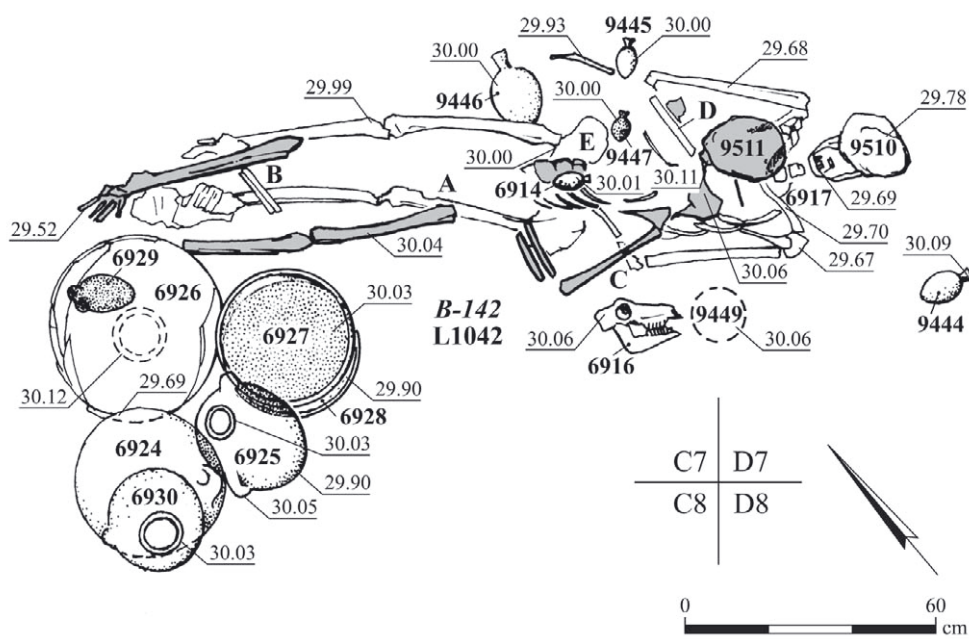
Fig. 14 Plan of Tomb B142.

simultaneous, because the upper one did not disturb the articulation of the lower. When it was placed, the lower body was intact, accepting the load without suffering disarticulation.

Twelve other tombs from Area B have remains that probably, but not certainly, belong to simultaneous burials (Table 4):

Table 4 Possible Simultaneous Pit Burials – Area B

| No.	Tomb	Details	Figures
1	B48	1 adult, 1child, facing each other, very close, skeletons fully preserved; the child's arm is perhaps under the adult's arm.	
2	B49	2 adults (18–25, 35–45 years old), close but without disturbing each other; sharing a large bowl, probably placed above the feet of both.	
3	B81	3 children: one incomplete, two almost complete.	
4	B86	2 adults, legs perhaps combined, but feet not preserved.	
5	B100	2 adults (30–40, 15–20 years old), perfectly preserved beside each other, the arm of one (B6561) is missing.	
6	B101+108	2 adults; one badly preserved, exact relations unclear.	
7	B123	3 children, 9–10 years (B6787); 2–3 years (B6786); and 2–3 years. Preservation is not very good, yet the right leg of B6785 fits the position of the right foot of B6787. The head of B6785 was maybe placed on the feet of B6760. The order of positioning was first B6786, second B6787, finally B6785.	Fig. 15
8	B135	1 adult, 30–40 years old (B9516), 1 child 4–5 years old (B9517). The tomb is not well preserved; the skeletons are close, but not intertwined.	
9	B149	1 child 6–7 years old (B9472=B6972), 1 adult 18–25 years old (B9473 =B6973). They rest close to each other, but are not intertwined.	
10	B159	1 male 30–40 years old (B9078), one child 9–10 years old (B9079). The two perfectly match in position, the child placed after the adult, covering the edge of his dagger, perhaps due to movement after decomposition. The time interval must have been short.	Fig. 16
11	B167	2 adults: northern (B9124, 30–40 years old); and southern (B9125, 18–25 years). Placed in close proximity without disturbing each other. Most likely simultaneous.	
12	B168	3 burials: eastern (B9197, 20–30 years old, skull a bit tilted); central (B9198, 20–25 years); and western (B9199, 9–10 years, skull seems dislocated). B9199 partially above B9198. They could be two parents and a child – but we lack decisive proof.	

Notes: total 12 tombs, 27 burials.
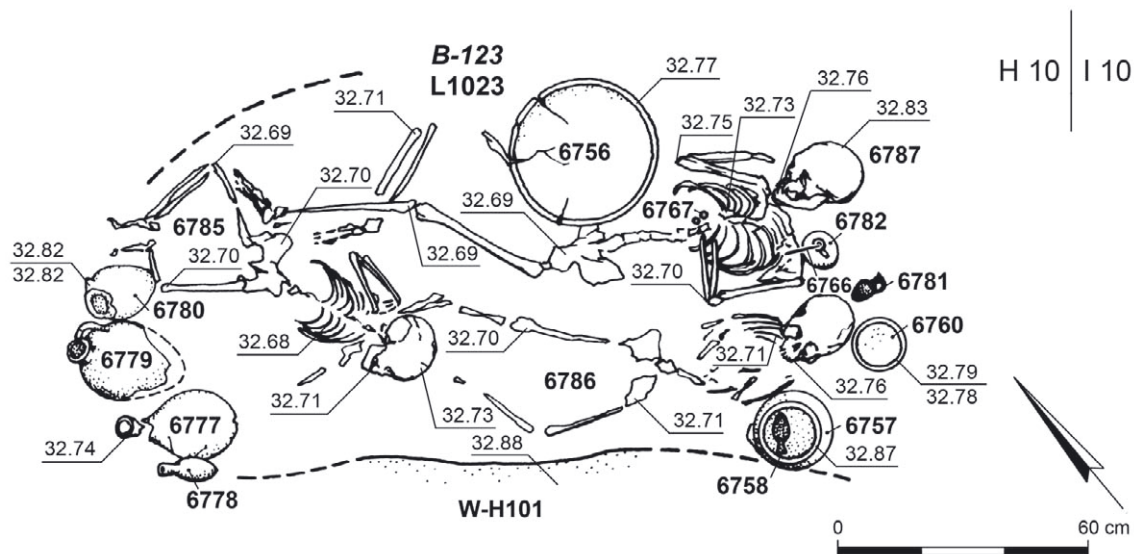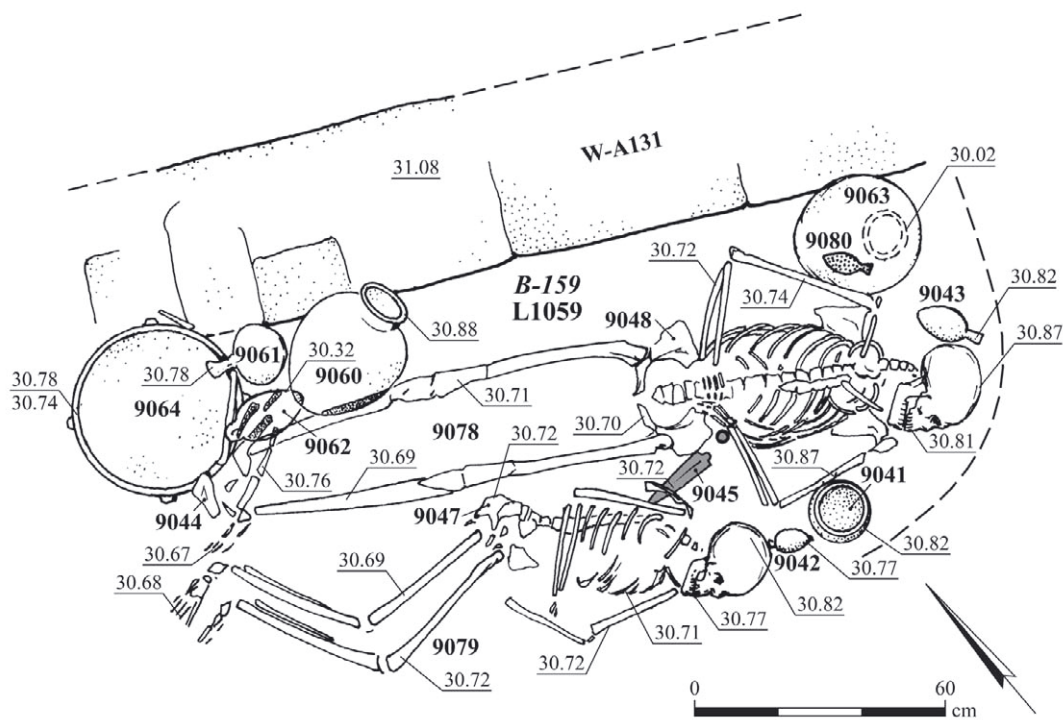
Fig. 15 Plan of Tomb B123.

Fig. 16 Plan of Tomb B159.

The Rishon le-Zion Area B simultaneous burials were 'intimately' arranged side by side. Those buried together may have been family members, since they included males, females and children; but data on age/sex is limited. Some material was given for genetic analysis, but no results have been obtained. There is no evidence for violent deaths. Also the general mortality curve of the population seems natural (as reported by Vered Eshed and Yossi Nagar, who are preparing the data for the final report). The simultaneous burials often face one another (yet facial position could also be a result of decomposition, the head falling aside randomly). Often, simultaneous burials have intertwined arms or feet, yet maintain anatomical articulation.

Addition of burials over time is not documented in Area B. The Area B shallow cist tombs lack a central shaft that could be re-opened for successive burial. Once a cist burial was covered it would have been impossible to re-open it and add another burial without disturbing – at least partially – the articulation of former burials. The excavators noted that the dark silt-like soil, which covered the burials, hardened considerably when dry, becoming difficult for excavating. Therefore, it was not

an easy task to expose carefully the skeletal remains. The ancients did not have at their disposal modern excavation methods (the first to use them in the Levant was Petrie in 1890). Such methods enable archaeologists to expose skeletons carefully without damaging the anatomical articulation, using various small tools (such as dental picks and brushes). The ancients also lacked the motive that we have for careful excavation of burials, that is, scientific research. Throughout history tombs have been robbed for valuables, but the robbers did not care about careful, methodical exposure of skeletons.

Discussion

It is not an easy task to recover social meanings from the funerary record (BINFORD 1971; SAXE 1971; MCHUGH 1999; LANERI 2007). For the Intermediate Bronze Age tombs at Jericho, scholars reached very different conclusions concerning social structure from the same set of tombs (SHAI 1983; PALUMBO 1987).

It is important to note that simultaneous MBII burials are not limited only to Jericho and Rishon Le-Zion alone. They are documented from many sites, though the quality of the published data varies (Map 1). For old excavations, cases often remain in doubt. Simultaneous MBII tombs are known from Accho (one female adult and two children); from Tell 'Arka Level 13 Tomb 9 (two adults and a child, THALMANN 2006); from Tell Tweini tomb TW-A-000934 (a female and a c. 1 year old baby, HAMEEUW and JANS 2008: 77, fig. 6);[7] and from Pella Tomb F106 (two adult females and a child, BOURKE *et al.* 2007: 21–22). In a cemetery of 16 pit graves near Ashkelon, one grave included two nearly complete skeletons side by side (ERICKSON-GINI and YISRAEL 2013: fig. 7, L129). Remains of more than one skeleton were reported from two more graves (L124, L127), but according to the plans, only one skeleton in each grave was anatomically articulated. At Tel Burga, a simple pit (L4), possibly of the MBII period, included three articulated burials of young adults, of which two were males (GOLANI 2011: 72, fig. 3). Simultaneous burials probably existed in cist tombs from the cemetery of Dhahrat el Humraiya on the Mediterranean coast, not far from Rishon le-Zion. Unfortunately the bad state of preserva-
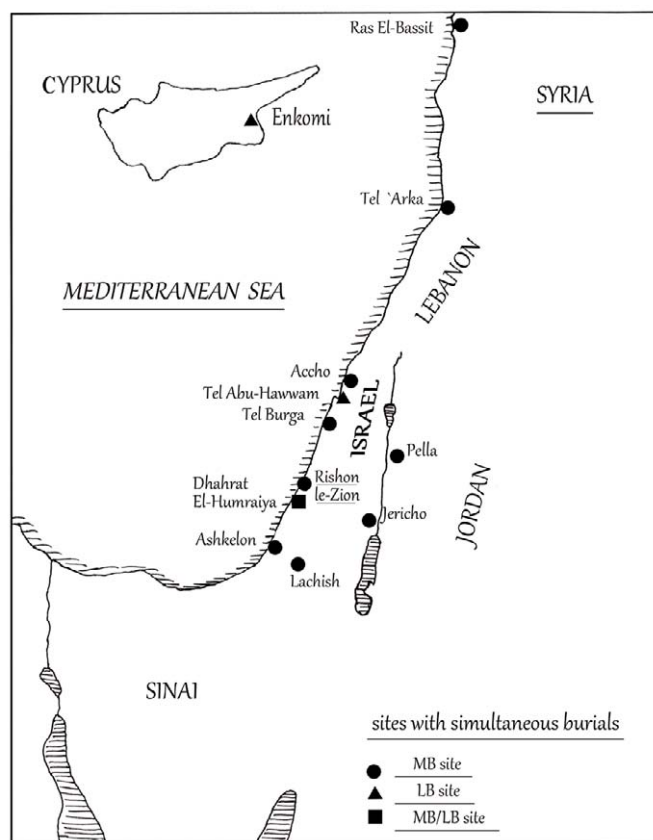
Map 1 Map of Sites with Simultaneous Burials

tion of the skeletons prevents secure conclusions (ORY 1948: graves 2–3[?], 11, 51+52).

Two MBII graves with simultaneous burials were found in the Lachish 9000 cemetery, which included 17 shallow pit graves – mostly from to the MBII period (SINGER-AVITZ 2004: 971). Two articulated burials facing each other, a male c. 15 years old and a child c. four years old, were found in Grave 9002 (early MBII). Two articulated skeletons were discovered in Grave 9054 (MBII), both 20–25 years old (sex unknown). In addition, there was one secondary adult burial in this grave.

According to SINGER-AVITZ (2004: 1004), all the tombs in the cemetery were simultaneous, in that there is no evidence for re-opening of tombs or for heaps of pushed-aside burials. In her view, all the burials in a given tomb, both secondary and primary, were placed at the same time. This is possible; but only Tombs 9002 and 9054 were simultaneous in the sense defined here, that is, more than one skeleton in articulation (primary burials) buried at the same time.

At Jericho, all the simultaneous burials with clear anthropological data included both adults and

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[7]   For burials in Lebanon see also GERNEZ 2014–1015; WAGNER DURAND 2014. We are not aware of MBII simultaneous burials at Sidon, but not all the reports are available to us (DOUMET-SERHAL 2004; 2006; 2014).

children (Table 1). This seems also to be the case in other sites – adults and children were buried together at Accho, Tell ʿArka, Tell Tweini, and Lachish Grave 9002. At Rishon le-Zion too, most of the Area B simultaneous burials include adults and children; but a few have adults alone (B24, B107, perhaps also B142; cf. Lachish grave 9054).[8]

At Tell el-Dabᶜa in the Nile Delta one finds burials of servants (in Stratum F) and (usually pairs of) donkeys at or near the entrances to tombs (Strata H to E/1). They accompany and are from the same time as the burials inside the tomb. However, they are not simultaneous burials as defined above, for they are not found in the same locus. Shaft tombs with multiple burials are found in Stratum D/2 (late MBII) at Tel el-Dabᶜa. They are presumably family tombs, but with burials added over time (Forstner-Müller 2008; 2010; Schiestl 2008; 2009).

The phenomenon of simultaneous burials is also not limited to the MBII period: it continues in the LB period. Simultaneous burials were found at Ras el Bassit Tomb 46 (two adults and one child); Enkomi Tomb 19A (three adults – two males and one female); Dharat el Humraiya Tomb 57; Tell Abu Hawwam Tomb 6–7 (two adults, female and male); and possibly Enkomi Tomb 10 (two adults); (Darque 1996: 139; Gonen 1992: 86, 94; compare Keswani 2004: 102, but she uses the term simultaneous in a different sense, related to secondary burials). Darque (1996) suggested that these were family graves, and that the rarity of the phenomenon indicates that it resulted from accidents, or contagious diseases, which killed several members of the same family at the same time.[9] To the best of our knowledge, simultaneous burials are more common in the MB than in the LB period (based on numbers of published cases).

To the best of our knowledge, there are no simultaneous burials in the period preceding the MBII – the Intermediate Bronze Age (EBIV–MBI). In this period most of the tombs are single burials and the burials are often disarticulated (Greener 2006: 8–27; Cohen 2009:6).

Simultaneous MBII burials always appear as a small minority within larger assemblages from the same sites (compare Aspöck 2008). They are not limited to one specific region and appear in differ-

ent MBII phases. It thus seems a regular, repeated burial custom. Apart from being buried together at one time, the dead share the same gamut of 'regular' MBII burials, documented in hundreds of non-simultaneous cave- and pit- tombs: the same types of tombs and of body positions, the same typical objects like jars, jugs, and bowls; the sheep/goat bones, the weapons, the personal ornaments, and so on (Kenyon 1960; 1965; Epstein 1974; Halotte 1994; 2002; Damati and Stepanski 1996; Ilan 1996; Maeir 1997; Baker 2006; 2012; Garfinkel and Cohen 2007; Gershuni 2008). There are no distinctive features that set simultaneous burials apart in terms of qualities and quantities of funerary objects. As far as the archaeological record is concerned, those dead are treated just like any other in the MBII society.

How should we explain the phenomenon of simultaneous burials? Several scenarios may be explored, but we lack clear answers:

A. *War victims.* Other than in a few exceptional cases (Jericho Tomb P19), there is no evidence for violence in MBII simultaneous burials. Since the phenomenon appears in several sites in different phases, it cannot be related to a single war. The dead include females and children, so they do not represent soldiers. Victims of war are normally buried in mass graves, in a way that differs from natural deaths in the same society. In addition, we would expect to find more evidence of violent deaths.[10]

B. *Criminals.* The explanation as burials of tomb robbers (or other types of criminals) can be safely ruled out, since the population buried in the simultaneous burials represents a 'normal' section of the society, including young children. They are buried in the same manner as other dead in this period. Execution by hanging or decapitation would be noticeable in skeletons, and 'heavy' criminals are often differentiated in death, for example, by burial outside regular cemeteries or with few or no burial gifts (Linderlauf 2001: 88–89; Olyan 2005: 606).

C. *Ritual Killing.* People were killed as part of rituals in various cultures, for example, retainers executed in the Royal Tombs of Ur (Wooley 1965; Davies 1981; Law 1985; Galvin 2005; Morris

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[8] In the group of possible simultaneous tombs – Table 4 – the picture is as follows: five tombs contain adults with children (B48, B135, B149, B159, B168); five tombs adults only (B49, B86, B100; B101+108; B167); and two tombs of children only (B81; B123).

[9] For early Iron Age burials with two individuals from Greece see Ruiz-Gálvez 2007.

[10] Not all violent deaths are reflected in the skeletons, for example, poisoning. Yet such means were hardly used on a large scale against captives.

2014). Such a custom can explain some features of MBII simultaneous burials: the limited scale (few cases in each community); the inclusion of males, females and children; and similarity to other tombs. If death came by poison, the skeletons could remain complete. However, ritual murder is very rare (while simultaneous MBII burials are not), and is usually related to high-ranking individuals or to extreme circumstances (e. g. the sacrifice of sons during an enemy siege). The vast majority of MB simultaneous burials are not of especially high status, and they appear as part of 'regular', typical burials of this period.

D. *Famine*. We can rule out this explanation, because famines usually affect general populations (though different classes may be affected differently: GRADA 2009; KLEBER 2013). In addition, some simultaneous tombs include ample food gifts, such as portions of sheep/goat (HORWITZ 2001).

E. *Diseases and Epidemics*. The fact that simultaneous burials included males, females and children can be explained by epidemics affecting entire populations (GREFF 2005; FINKEL and GELLER 2007; DUTOUR 2013). This also fits the distribution and date of the simultaneous tombs. We may assume that there were several outbursts, or several diseases operating over time. A minority of the society perished, but still received the usual burial treatment of this period. Therefore, it could not be a horrible plague, which prevented the performing of elaborate burial rituals. Yet, it must have been severe enough to kill groups of people, perhaps even from the same families. It remains a possible explanation, but conclusive evidence is lacking.

F. *Communal Burials*. We tend to assume that MBII tombs are family tombs. However, could the simultaneous burials belong to communal, not family tombs? Those who died in the entire community during a certain period were "gathered" from different families to one tomb or burial niche. While theoretically possible, we do not believe that this is a convincing explanation. Family ties are very important in most human societies, and family members are usually responsible for treating the family dead. When "communal" cemeteries appear in Rome, the types of burial change, but the family still maintains its responsibility for burial (e. g., BODEL 2008: 180, 189; OLYAN 2005: 603–610; Genesis 49–50). Communal burials are often limited to certain segments of the society, such as monks and nuns, poor people, or criminals (LINDERLAUF 2001). Yet MBII simultaneous dead are not differentiated from the rest of the commu-

nity and do not show signs of exceptional circumstances, except the simultaneous mode of burial.

Conclusion

In this paper we call attention to the enigma of simultaneous MBII burials in the Southern Levant and discuss the typology, geographical distribution, definition and possible explanations of these burials.

Perhaps the simultaneous burials relate to several factors, rather than one. For example, those buried simultaneously in Jericho Tomb P19 were violently killed for some offence or by an enemy, while the many children and few adults in Jericho Tomb H18 died in an epidemic. Since we do not know the exact structure or structures of MB families, we cannot be certain if these tombs represent family burials. Simultaneous burials appear in both pit and shaft tombs, so the tomb type is not a factor. The picture is striking since on the one hand, small groups of people from the same settlements are buried at the same time, not something that happens on a daily basis in peaceful conditions. If the tombs were family tombs, several deaths at the same time in a family must have been a shock to the survivors. On the other hand, the dead received the same regular treatment of non-simultaneous MBII burials, as if their death was just like any natural death in the society. Such a "business as usual" type of burial does not fit well with deaths by wars, horrible crimes, or lethal epidemics. At present we lack a convincing explanation for this tension.

Simultaneous burial is a meaningful phenomenon that merits further study. It is to be hoped that careful excavation and publication of more burials in the future will be able to solve this riddle.

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