

# Death and Burial in Iron Age Israel, Aram, and Phoenicia



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# Death and Burial in Iron Age Israel, Aram, and Phoenicia

Rachel Nabulsi

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This work is dedicated with love and thanks to my husband Radi  
and to my son Ali, who bring me joy every day.

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## FOREWORD

This book is not the product of solitary labor. The late Dr. Jorge Gonzales, professor emeritus of Berry College, first introduced me to the study of the texts of the Ancient Near East. He was a gifted teacher and his kindness permeated all that he did. It seems appropriate to express my gratitude again here for the many gifts he gave to his students. Dr. Theodore Lewis, now the Blum-Iwry Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Johns Hopkins University, guided my first foray into graduate studies with patience and wisdom during his time at the University of Georgia.

It is with tremendous gratitude that I thank Dr. Richard Friedman, Davis Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Georgia, for his guidance throughout my years of study for the PhD. Dr. Baruch Halpern, Covenant Foundation Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Georgia, joined the University of Georgia faculty just in time to lend a kind and wise hand to the construction of the dissertation. This book is a revision of that work. Thanks are also due to two other valued committee members, Dr. Wayne Coppins, Associate Professor with the Department of Religion, and Dr. Jared Klein, Director of the UGA Linguistics Program and Distinguished Research Professor of Linguistics and Classics. Miss Sarah Kalfon and Miss Emily Stamper provided assistance with the translation of French materials. The editorial staff at Gorgias Press have improved this manuscript in ways too many to number, and their careful work is sincerely appreciated. Finally, it is with great love that I offer my thanks to my family: to my parents and sister for their support and encouragement, and to my husband Radi and my son Ali for their constant love and patience.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	<i>Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology</i>
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Akkadica</i>	<i>Akkadica</i>
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
ANGSBA	Annual of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ARA	<i>Annual Reviews of Anthropology</i>
ASOR DS	American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series
<i>Atiqot</i>	<i>‘Atiqot</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BAS	<i>Berytus Archaeological Studies</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BAR IS	Biblical Archaeology Review International Series
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BAIAS	<i>Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society</i>
BMB	<i>Bulletin de Musée de Beyrouth</i>
BSAW	Berlin Studies of the Ancient World
ConB	Coniectanea Biblica
CRAI	<i>Comptes Rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i>
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>

CWA	Cambridge World Archaeology
EPRO	Etudes Préliminaires Aux Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain
EJM	<i>European Journal of Mineralogy</i>
HA	<i>Hadashot Arkeologiyot</i>
HFS	Historisk-Filosofiske Skrifter
HANEMS	History of the Ancient Near East Monographic Series
HOS	Handbook of Oriental Studies
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IAAR	Israel Antiquities Authority Reports
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IJNA	<i>International Journal of Nautical Archaeology</i>
<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Iraq</i>
<i>IstMitt</i>	<i>Istanbul Mitteilungen</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JNER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPOS	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften</i>
LASBF	<i>Liber annuus: Studium biblicum Franciscanum</i>
<i>Levant</i>	<i>Levant</i>
<i>Maarav</i>	<i>Maarav</i>

<i>MesCiv</i>	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MMAB	Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin
MMUMP	Museum Monographs of the University Museum of Pennsylvania
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<i>OrAnt</i>	<i>Oriens Antiquus</i>
OIC	<i>University of Chicago Oriental Institute Communications</i>
OIAR	<i>Oriental Institute Annual Report</i>
OIP	University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
OLP	<i>Orientalia lovaniensia periodica</i>
OMA	Oxbow Monographs in Archaeology
<i>Orient</i>	<i>Orient</i>
OTR	Old Testament Readings
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PHBB	Prentice-Hall Backgrounds to the Bible
PICAANE	<i>Proceedings of the International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East</i>
PLoS ONE	PLoS ONE
PSBA	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology</i>
QDAP	<i>Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine</i>
RAr	<i>Revue Archéologique</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RIM	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia
RSF	<i>Rivista di studi fenici</i>
SAL	Society of Antiquaries of London
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology

SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
<i>Science</i>	<i>Science</i>
<i>ScEs</i>	<i>Science et Esprit</i>
SSM	<i>Social Science and Medicine</i>
<i>Syria</i>	<i>Syria</i>
TA	<i>Tel Aviv: Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University</i>
TSO	Texte und Studien zur Orientalistik
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
UCPNES	University of California Publications: Near Eastern Studies
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The goal of this work is to produce a comparative synthesis of archaeology and text which places the cultures of Israel, Aram, and Phoenicia in dialogue in order to yield new understandings about each of these peoples. In the treatment of the dead, what concerns were shared between these groups? What was needful and proper for burial, what variations in practice were accepted, and why? What belief systems underlay and motivated these practices?

Archaeology yields a wealth of information: types of burials, dimensions of tombs, sometimes even the age, gender and cause of death of an individual. These physical remains can also attest to custom and ritual, and human custom and ritual is always laden with meaning. In keeping with this idea, David Ilan proposes a concise set of considerations regarding death and burial in the archaeological record. His framework is as follows:

- 1) Death is a central event in human experience.
- 2) A human being's reaction to death reflects his or her cultural values and life experience.
- 3) Patterns detected in the mortuary remains of the past will reflect cultural values held by a community and not just by an individual.
- 4) Tomb offerings are socially selected and do not represent a random sample.<sup>1</sup>

The physical remains of bodies and the graves and tombs in which they are buried are a result of the complex human response to

---

<sup>1</sup> David Ilan, "Mortuary Practices at Tel Dan in the Middle Bronze Age: A Reflection of Canaanite Society and Ideology," in *The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East* (eds. Stuart Campbell and Anthony Green; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), 117–139.

death. This is more than a simple need to dispose of a dead body. The various practices and types of burials reflect, as Ilan recognizes, the communal values regarding what constitutes an appropriate response to death. The difficulty is in interpreting at this distance removed from the time and culture just what these material remains reveal. Mortuary archaeology can tell us what people do in the face of death, and from this we can often draw reasonable conclusions about why these things are done.

Some beliefs, for example those regarding the fate of the soul or spirit of a person, are only hinted at by the material remains of graves.<sup>2</sup> While physical remains can inform us about the treatment of the dead, texts are uniquely suited for understanding beliefs relating to death.<sup>3</sup> Theodore Lewis writes about the ways in which mortuary archaeology and texts can support each other:

We need both disciplines working critically and independently yet informing each other. Sadly all too often, textual scholars refrain from wrestling with the archaeology due to its complex nature in an age of specialization and sophistication. Likewise archaeologists more and more bypass the text, perhaps out of fear that the skills of philologists have become equally

---

<sup>2</sup> Occasional reference will be made to the “soul” throughout this work in reference to the incorporal, personal essence of a person. While this English word may not precisely reflect the ancient view of that part of an individual which is not the physical body, there are few better alternatives. In the vast majority of references in the Hebrew Bible the word *nps* is used in ways which mean the inner self: the heart, the mind, and the life essence. The usage is very similar in Aramaic.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore J. Lewis, “How Far Can Texts Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israelite Beliefs about the Dead,” in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (ed. Barry Gittlen; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 169–177. Theodore J. Lewis, “Job 19 in Light of the Ketef Hinnom Inscriptions and Amulets,” in *Puzzling Out the Past: Studies in Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Bruce Zuckerman* (eds. M. Lundberg, S. Fine, and W. Pitard (Boston: Brill, 2012), 99–113.

specialized or perhaps out of a fear that even considering the text may lead to a charge of Albrightian bibliolatry.<sup>4</sup>

The chronological focus of this study will primarily concern the Iron Age, which is here defined as extending from 1200 BCE to the Neo-Babylonian period ending in 539 BCE. Earlier and later material will be included as needed to provide contextual and comparative data. This time period yields rich troves of archeological and textual data. Additionally, this period was chosen for its connection with the world of the Hebrew Bible. The geographic focus will be the territories of Israel/Judah, the Syro-Hittite states (commonly termed “Aram”), and Phoenicia during this period. The chapters related to the Phoenician material are more brief than those for Israel/Judah and Aram.

For the area of Aram, focus will be limited to the cluster of small Aramean and Neo-Hittite kingdoms of western and north Syria that were present prior to the wave of Assyrian annexation in the mid-9th to 8th centuries. This will include evidence from as far south as Aram-Damascus and as far north as Zincirli (Sa’mal), Carchemish, and Gurgum (Marqas, modern Maraş). These states were heirs to the legacy of the Hittite empire of Anatolia, as well as to the influence of powerful Aramean tribes. These states are sometimes called “Neo-Hittite” or Luwian because they were formerly under Hittite rule and many retained strong cultural, linguistic and dynastic connections with Anatolia. At other times, these states are referred to as the “Aramean Kingdoms” based upon the assumed ethnicity of their rulers as well as sections of the population.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the ensuing discussion, we will note the difficulty of separating Aramean from Hittite and Assyrian influences and ethnicities. The term we will use in this book for

---

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, “How Far Can Texts Take Us?” 205.

<sup>5</sup> The indispensable collection and discussion of these Iron Age Luwian inscriptions is found in the two volumes by J. D. Hawkins. Inscriptions are covered from Carchemish, Tell Ahmar, Amuq, Aleppo, and Hama, as well as other sites. J. D. Hawkins, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions Volume I: Inscriptions from the Iron Age Part I* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 639.

these states is “Syro-Hittite,” which will allow for discussion of both those states with more Aramaean and those with more Hittite cultural influence. The territory encompassing these states is referred to as Aram. The Phoenicians are loosely defined as coastal Canaanites, and our primary concern will be the areas of Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre, along with Achziv and Atlit. Some attention will be given to the colony at Carthage as well.

The format of this survey will be first archaeological, and then textual for each group. Individual sites will be discussed in detail as representatives of a type, with the aim of providing a comprehensive view of practice in each area with detail anchored by particular sites. Archeological investigation is addressed first so that an overview of physical evidence can be obtained before using texts to add interpretive information. An additional chapter is devoted to the biblical text and its importance for understanding the treatment of death in Israel. The biblical material has no parallel in Aramaic or Phoenician texts.

The frequent references to death and the afterlife found throughout the literature of the Ancient Near East portray a dreary, shadowy place where all go when they die regardless of personal goodness or wickedness.<sup>6</sup> *The Epic of Gilgamesh* describes:

the house which those who enter cannot leave, on the journey whose way cannot be retraced; to the house whose residents are deprived of light, where dust is their sustenance, their food clay...they cannot see light but dwell in darkness.”<sup>7</sup>

In the *Descent of Ishtar* there is a similar description of the dead who go to

the dark house, dwelling of Erkalla’s god, to the house which those who enter cannot leave, on the road where travelling is

---

<sup>6</sup> Paolo Xella, “Death and the Afterlife in Canaanite and Hebrew Thought” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East Vol. 3* (ed. Jack M. Sasson; New York: Charles Scribner, 1995), 2063.

<sup>7</sup> A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts Vol I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 645.

one-way only, to the house where those who enter are bereft of light, where dust is their food, clay their bread.<sup>8</sup>

The ritual to honor Niqmaddu, the deceased king of Ugarit, (KTU 1.161) also relates a similar idea of going down into the earth, and parts of this ritual may be interpreted as attempting to aid the dead king and make his afterlife more bearable.<sup>9</sup>

Was this general view also shared by Iron Age Israel, Aram and Phoenicia? Material from as far north as Hattuša, which has a close cultural connection with Aram, reinforces the widespread nature of these ideas. The dead are forgetful – sisters, brothers, parents and children do not recognize one another. The dead do not eat wholesome food, but instead eat bits of mud and drink foul water.<sup>10</sup> Texts from Iron Age Aram are not as explicit on this matter, being primarily short funerary inscriptions rather than longer poems or mythological texts, but the combined archeological and textual evidence will show that there is little reason to amend this view of death and the afterlife for Aram. The Hebrew Bible also shares this idea. Sheol can mean either the grave itself or the realm of the dead. References to a similar dreary and shadowy existence there is found widely throughout the Hebrew

---

<sup>8</sup> William Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture Vol. I* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 381.

<sup>9</sup> Johannes De Moore, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 165–167; also David Tsumura, “The Interpretation of the Ugaritic Funerary Text KTU1.161,” in *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the First Colloquium on the Ancient Near East – the City and its Ljê* (ed. Eiko Matsushima; Heidelberg: Winter, 1993), 40–55. This text also mentions the *rpum* – *rephaim* – shades or ancestors. The text may be commanding the furniture to go down to the underworld as well to serve the former king. The title also mentions a “feast,” which bears further discussion as well.

<sup>10</sup> These are the Ankara fragment KBo 22.178 and the Berlin fragment KUB 48.109. Harry A. Hoffner Jr., “A Scene in the Realm of the Dead” in *Scientific Humanist: Studies in Honor of Abraham Sachs* (ed. Erle Leichty and Maria Dej Ellis; Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1988), 191–199.

Bible, and descriptions of, or “The Pit,” mark it as a place of destruction, darkness, forgetfulness, and silence.<sup>11</sup>

In this worldview, the divine beings were gods or goddesses of the living and not of the dead. While they were highly concerned with justice and righteousness in life, the gods did not sentence one to pleasure or pain in the afterlife. Unlike in Egyptian religion and mythology, here there is no cosmic framework established for the benefit of the human soul or spirit after death. This becomes clear through the ways in which funerary texts are formulated and gods are presented. In the Hebrew Bible, YHWH is petitioned for help in this life – for rescue from enemies, for fertility of land, animals and humans, and for rewards.

In treaties and texts concerning Baal/Hadad, Astarte, Asherah, and others, divine power is called upon in order to enforce the agreements of men.<sup>12</sup> In Canaanite myth, even Mot, the god of death, has no interest in the death and afterlife of individual humans, but rather rules over the kingdom of the dead and is almost analogous to a force of nature. Mot is the king of the underworld. His city is the “Pit”, but he does not administer the city or care for the inhabitants, being more akin to a great living entrance to the underworld, one who consumes all.<sup>13</sup> M. Astour calls Mot “a personification of death as a permanent status, of the great infernal abyss with yawning mouth into which all men alive

---

<sup>11</sup> Job 26:6; Prov 15:11; 27:20; Ps 88:12; 94:17; 115:17; Job 10:21–22. Rainer Albertz and Rudiger Schmitt, “Care for the Dead in the Context of the Household and Family,” in *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 431. See also Isa 14:11, Prov 1:12, and Jon 2:2 among many others.

<sup>12</sup> Possibly hundreds of biblical verses could be cited in support of this idea of intercessory prayer by the living for help in this life. Psalms very obviously contains a great many such statements. For treaties, the most famous is probably the Sefire treaty. See Joseph Fitzmyer, “The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire I and II,” *JAOS* 81 (1961): 178–222, but see also Simo Parpola, “Neo-Assyrian Treaties from the Royal Archives of Nineveh,” *JCS* 39 (1987): 161–189 for additional examples of the gods as enforcers of treaties.

<sup>13</sup> Hallo, *The Context of Scripture Vol I*, 243–274.

must ultimately descend forever.”<sup>14</sup> Both Mot and Erishkigal, goddess of the underworld, are more interested in their own conflicts with other gods than in dead humans.<sup>15</sup> Part of what will be revealed by our examination of archaeology and text is this: despite wide variation in religious beliefs, the people of Israel, Aram, and Phoenicia held similar views regarding the disinterest of the gods in the death and ultimate fate of humans. Possible exceptions to this view will carry interest for us as we examine several unusual pieces of evidence, particularly the amulets from Ketef Hinnom in Judah. Evidence from the royal court of Šam’al also suggests the possibility of the soul residing in an afterlife if provided with appropriate offerings. This likely relates to the Hittite/Neo-Hittite connection of this state, as some Hittite inscriptions do envision the deceased sitting with the gods.<sup>16</sup> This does not negate the importance of human action in caring for the dead, as offerings were crucial to the fulfilment of this hope.

How are humans to respond to this worldview? What is to be done then to care for the dead if the gods do not? If the gods do not care about the fate of humans in the afterlife, humans must care for their ancestors themselves. There was a strong but sometimes vaguely defined relationship between the dead and the living. In some conceptions, the dead need the living to “feed them” to make the shadowy world more bearable. Requests for offerings are made, and such rituals are depicted in stone. Such care for the dead is found in the Hittite and Syro-Hittite material.

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Astour, “The Nether World and its Denizens at Ugarit,” in *Death in Mesopotamia: XXVVI Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (ed. Bendt Alster; Mesopotamia 8; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 230.

<sup>15</sup> See the conflict between Mot and Baal and Anat in the Baal cycle, as well as the interaction/trickery at play between Erishkigal and Innana/Ishtar in *The Descent*. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture Vol 1*, 243–273, 381–384.

<sup>16</sup> J.D. Hawkins, “The Soul in the Stele?” in *Tradition and Innovation in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 57th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Rome 4–8 July 2011* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 49–56.

As a general illustration of the widespread and longstanding nature of this idea, we can point to the ritual of maintaining sacrifices for the good of the dead – often called “feeding the dead” – which can be found in the widespread *kispu* ritual of Mesopotamia. Legal documents from Susa, Nippur, Nuzi, and Mari attest to the practice, which was often an incorporated aspect of inheritance and adoption contracts. Offering *kispu* for dead parents was considered a crucial part of the obligations of children. It was so important that the lack of such offerings could cause a family ghost to become malevolent and dangerous.<sup>17</sup>

Also relevant to this idea of connection between the generations of the living and the dead is the Ugaritic *Tale of Aqhat*, in which the man Daniel needs a son, “Someone to raise up the stela of his father’s god, in the sanctuary the votive emblem of his clan; to send up from the earth his incense, from the dust the song of his place.”<sup>18</sup> This reference probably encompasses both the act of setting up a memorial stela for a parent as well as the offering of sacrifices for the dead. The Baal cycle also depicts the goddess Anat as she mourns for Baal. Her actions follow a familiar pattern: she “weeps for him and buries him” and then makes a large sacrifice of “buffalo, small livestock, and wild game as a tribute to mightily Baal.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In addition to inheritance and adoption documents, we should see, for example, Šamši-Adad’s journey to Mari to carry out the ritual before the ancestors, as well as another text related to Mari – a prophecy of Dagan that reminds the king to carry out the offerings for the dead. Dominik Bonatz, “Syrio-Hittite Funerary Monuments: A Phenomenon of Tradition Or Innovation,” in *Essays on Syria in the Iron Age* (ed. Guy Bunnens; Louvain: Peeters, 2000), 196; Walter Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 123–125; also Aaron Skaist, “The Ancestor Cult and Succession in Mesopotamia,” in *Death in Mesopotamia: XXVI Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (ed. Bendt Alster; Mesopotamia 8; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 123–128.

<sup>18</sup> Hallo, *The Context of Scripture*, 344. See also the discussion by T. Lewis in Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, 53–71.

<sup>19</sup> Hallo, *The Context of Scripture*, 268–269.

This mythological material serves as helpful context to the discussion at hand. We will examine references to such sacrifices and mourning for the dead in the Hebrew Bible, as well as the importance of the memorial stela in Aram, which reflects similar beliefs to the *Tale of Aqhat*. Funerary inscriptions in Israel, Phoenicia, and Aram all point to the importance of remembering the dead and the care of the dead by their descendents and loved ones. Finally we will discuss throughout this work the evidence of grave goods such as pottery gifts and personal items for the dead in all three cultures.



## **CHAPTER 2: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF MORTUARY REMAINS IN ISRAEL AND JUDAH**

### **CANAAN IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Before turning to Iron Age mortuary archaeology in Israel, it will first be useful to briefly survey earlier customs in the Late Bronze Age Levant in order to have a context for the later material and to see points of continuity and change. This idea of continuity will become increasingly important through the sections and chapters that follow, as the overall shape of this work will confirm strong continuity of perspectives on death and treatment of the dead in Israel, Aram, and Phoenicia, across time, cultures and religions. Throughout the discussions that follow, reference will be made to common chronological divisions of the Bronze and Iron Age Levant.

By the Middle and Late Bronze Age, a number of practices, such as cave burials, become established that persist through the entire Iron Age and into the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. Other practices, such as simple pit burials, jar burials, and burial beneath houses, changed in frequency over time but never entirely disappeared. In addition, a variety of other burial customs were present during the Late Bronze Age, including masonry chamber tombs, shaft burials, and masonry cist tombs.

Period Name	Chronological Span	Dominant Factors/Characteristics
Middle Bronze I	2100–2000	Egyptian First Intermediate Period
Middle Bronze IIA	2000–1750	Egyptian Middle Kingdom, 12 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty
Middle Bronze IIB	1750–1550	Canaanite city-states; 13–17 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.
Late Bronze I	1550–1400	Egypt New Kingdom- earlier 18 <sup>th</sup> Dyn. (to Amenhotep II)
Late Bronze IIA	1400–1300	Egypt New Kingdom – later 18 <sup>th</sup> Dyn. (from Tuthmosis IV)
Late Bronze IIB	1300–1200	Egypt New Kingdom 19 <sup>th</sup> –20 <sup>th</sup> Dyn. – Ramesses
Iron IA	1200–1100	Deurbanization phrase; Israelite “settlement” Middle Assyrian Period
Iron IB	1100–1000	Growth of settlements, regional centers. Middle-Assyrian Period
Iron IIA	1000–900	United Monarchy (David, Solomon), Neo-Assyrian Period
Iron IIB	900–800	Nation-states (Israel, Judah, Ammon...). Neo Assyrian Period
Iron IIC	800–586	Neo-Assyrian period through collapse of Assyria, begin Neo-Babylonia Period
Babylonian-Persian Period	586–333	Babylonian, Achaemenid Periods

Figure 1: Chronological table for archaeology of Israel and Canaan in the second and first millennia. Adapted from Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 410.

By the Late Bronze Age, extramural pit and cist grave cemeteries were widely distributed throughout the lowlands.<sup>1</sup> These Late Bronze Age pit burials included a fairly well-defined group of vessels – two or three large storage jars with cover bowls and dipper juglets, additional bowls, and some smaller containers. The exceptions to this assemblage are found at Tell el-Ajjul, Tell el Farah South, and Megiddo, which have fewer jars and may reflect continuity with earlier types.<sup>2</sup> One striking feature here is that by

<sup>1</sup> See for example the 17 Early-Late Bronze Age burials at Afula. Eleazar L. Sukenik, “Archaeological Investigations at ‘Afula,” JPOS 21 (1948): 1–79.

<sup>2</sup> L. Steel has also noted this phenomenon of extramural interment at Cyprus at the beginning of the Iron Age. Formal burial areas were

the Late Bronze Age, some of these cemeteries are associated with only a small settlement or no settlement at all. The assemblage of goods, as well as personal and luxury items, reflects ideas of provisions for the dead. Bench tombs also begin to be adopted in the southern Levant at this time.<sup>3</sup> By the Late Bronze Age in the western foothills, cave burials with multiple interments are present, while pit burials and individual interments are more common in the Coastal Plain.<sup>4</sup> A. Mazar claims that the biblical distinction between the “Canaanites” of the plains and the “Amorites” of the hill country is reflected here, but the evidence is not sufficient to substantiate such an assertion.<sup>5</sup>

The valleys and urban centers are marked by a mix of burial customs. Two trends can be seen in the Late Bronze Age: a spread

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established outside the settlement at this time and a new tomb type was introduced (rock-cut chamber tombs). She connects these changes with “major changes in the island’s settlement pattern and material culture,” but she does not speculate if this was related to the invasion of the Sea Peoples or to Phoenician expansion and colonization at this time (but 40% of pottery from these burials are classified by Steel as “Phoenician”). Louise Steel, “Differential Burial Practices in Cyprus at the Beginning of the Iron Age” in *The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East* (eds. Stuart Campbell and Anthony Green; OMA 51; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), 199–204. See Gonen’s discussion of the contents of pit burials. Typical forms are egg-shaped or straight-shouldered jars, Cypriot Monochrome or White Slip and small Cypriot juglets or Mycenaean stirrup or piriform jars. Rivka Gonen, *Burial Patterns and Cultural Diversity in Late Bronze Age Canaan* (ed. Baruch Halpern; ASOR DS 7; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 15–20. P. L. O. Guy, *Megiddo Tombs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 224 and plates.

<sup>3</sup> Bloch-Smith, “Bronze and Iron Age Burials and Funerary Customs in the Southern Levant,” 108–109.

<sup>4</sup> For a good presentation of a typical Middle and Late Bronze Age group of cave tombs with their grave goods, see Sara Ben-Arieh and David Alon, *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim* (IAAR 23; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004), 212.

<sup>5</sup> Amihai Mazar et al., *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 277–279.

of pit burials along the Coastal plain and the “receding” of cave burials into the hills. R. Gonen attributes the spread of pit burials to increasing Egyptian influence along the coast, with more traditional cave burials remaining in the less accessible hill country. Gonen argues this on the basis of the geographic spread of pit burials, which mirrors increased Egyptian control of the coastal plains and central valleys. She connects the practice with Egyptian emphasis upon the preservation of the body – intact burial and an avoidance of communal burial in which bones could be intermixed.<sup>6</sup> However there is no reason to believe that pit burials were the provenance of Egyptian cultural influence when they were widespread and preexisting in the Levant. Pit burials were a low cost and low labor endeavor, and so well suited to expedient burial and burial of the poor. We also cannot make any good estimation of the number of pit burials, as pit burials are easily disrupted and destroyed by human activity and natural occurrence. By contrast, a practice that is probably related to the Egyptian presence and influence in the area is the use of anthropomorphic coffins such as those found at Beth Shan.

Gonen also argues that the increase in individual pit burials and village cemeteries at the expense of intramural burial may be related to social upheaval at the end of the Late Bronze Age, wherein people lost family property and the family tombs that they held, and cities and settlements lost large percentages of their populations. When use of these traditional burial sites was discontinued or disrupted, so was the use of and claim to the farmland, buildings, and homes associated with them. Despite this trend, the use of caves and family tombs continued.<sup>7</sup>

While we lack explicit documentation that family burial established land rights, it is fairly clear that these rights were widely assumed to be tied to established family holdings that were passed

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<sup>6</sup> Gonen, *Burial Patterns and Cultural Diversity in Late Bronze Age Canaan*, 37–38.

<sup>7</sup> Gonen, *Burial Patterns and Cultural Diversity in Late Bronze Age Canaan*. 39. Shlomo Bunimovitz, “On the Edge of Empires – Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 BCE)” in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (ed. Thomas Levy; New York: Facts On File, 1995), 330–331.

from father to son. This is supported by biblical evidence as well as Mesopotamian adoption contracts and inheritance law.<sup>8</sup> This relates to the idea of a family burial on a landholding because in this understanding, land cannot simply be sold to any buyer, but its passage among owners is governed by kin relationships. Burial of ancestors in this land could therefore be a way of establishing this family right and relationship by serving as proof of a continuing kinship connection between previous generations of owners and the current one. The connection between family burial places and land ownership will continue to be important as we move into our discussion of Iron Age practices.

## **BURIAL PRACTICES IN IRON AGE ISRAEL AND JUDAH**

### **Iron Age I: A Gradual Transition of Forms**

There is no clear break between burial practices in Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Israel. Bronze Age tombs were frequently reused during the Iron Age.<sup>9</sup> Normal practice in Iron Age Israel was interment and burial outside the city.

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<sup>8</sup> For example the Law of Eshnunna: "If a man becomes impoverished and then sells his house, whenever the buyer offers it for sale, the owner of the house shall have the right to redeem it." Martha Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (2d ed.: Atlanta, Scholar's Press, 1997), 65. More complicated is the Code of Hammurabi, which devotes significant space to consideration of inheritance laws and how property may and may not be disposed of within a family. Roth, *Law Collections*, 76–142. See also the sale-adoption document of Kuzu and Tehip-tilla from Nuzi. James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East Vol I: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 167–170. For the biblical texts see Num 27:8–11; 36:2–9; Deut 19:14 (notes the use of landmarks as boundaries); 1 Kgs 21:3–4; Ezek 46:16–18 as examples of the rich language of land rights. A large part of the plot of the book of Ruth is also governed by this framework.

<sup>9</sup> Gonen, *Burial Patterns and Cultural Diversity in Late Bronze Age Canaan*, 24–25.



Figure 2: Iron Age I Sites. Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 309.

Cremation as a burial practice was rare, with only a few examples found in the archaeological record, and those before the 10th century are not in the territory of Israel, being located at Azor and

Amman.<sup>10</sup> One textual reference to cremation in Israel is found in 1 Sam 31:12, but this is presented as an unusual situation.<sup>11</sup> Generally, graves were located outside the city walls, and a comment in 2 Kings 23:6 mentions the “graves of the common people” which are outside of Jerusalem. Megiddo, Lachish, and Tel el Farah South all had large cemeteries with simple graves and few grave goods – often including just a few bowls.<sup>12</sup>

Bronze Age burial practices extended into the Iron Age, although throughout the Levant cist, jar, and anthropoid coffin burials decreased during the Iron Age while bench tomb burials increased, particularly in Israel and Judah.<sup>13</sup> Other types of burial also increased, such as simple burials and cremations. Burial in so-called “Bathtub coffins”, which were often associated with Assyrian elements and are found with more frequency from the 8th

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<sup>10</sup> The find at Amman is of a temple with rich finds of Mycenaean, Minoan, and Egyptian material and burnt human bones. The interpretation of this site is very hotly contested. Mazar et al., *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 255–256.

<sup>11</sup> This text regards the treatment of the bodies of Saul and his sons. However, this was an unusual situation – as the bodies had already been desecrated – and cannot be taken as in any way reflective of standard practice.

<sup>12</sup> J. D. Schloen and Amir Sumaka'i Fink, “New Excavations at Zincirli Höyük in Turkey (Ancient Šam'al) and the Discovery of an Inscribed Mortuary Stele,” *BASOR* 356 (2009): 23; Guy, *Megiddo Tombs*, 224 and plates.

<sup>13</sup> See as a few examples the cist graves at Tel Yavne from the 8th century and later. Raz Kletter, “Tel Yavne,” *HA* 116 (2004). See also pit burials at Afula stratum IIIA (1050–1020) and IIIB (1200–1150) which yielded nine skeletons and one jar burial of an infant with pottery which continues the LB tradition. This pottery shows a slow and gradual transition to Early Iron Age forms. Moshe Dothan, “The Excavations at Afula,” *Atiqot* (1955): 47–52. Also of note are the wide variety of burial types at Iron Age Tel Dan and Dothan. Moshe Hartal, “Tel Dan (North),” *HA* 118 (2006). Daniel M. Master, *Dothan: Remains from the Tell (1953–1964)* (Vol. 1 of *The Excavations of Joseph P. Free at Dothan (1953–1964)*; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

century and later, also increased.<sup>14</sup> Because the division is not sharp, it is difficult to define what constitutes distinctive Late Bronze Age burial practices and what can be classified as Early Iron Age (ca. 1200–1000 BCE).

The biblical text also suggests this type of variation. Samuel is buried “at his house” (1 Sam 25:1).<sup>15</sup> Joab also is buried “in his own house in the wilderness” (1 Kings 2:34). Burial under the floor of houses is well attested in Bronze Age excavations. Burial of infants and children under the floors of houses was more common in the Middle Bronze II period, with the burial of adults becoming a more common practice in the Late Bronze Age. This can be seen at Megiddo, Tell el-ʿAjjul, Hazor, and Tell el Farah South.<sup>16</sup> The change from burial under houses and within settlements to burial

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<sup>14</sup> The cremations at Azor were very unusual and may indicate an individual from another area – such as Greece. Tomb D63 contained a golden mouthpiece, a bronze bowl, and the cremation jar itself, which was of a type rarely found outside of Azor. Tomb D62 included two Philistine Bichrome kraters, a complete carinated red-slipped bowl, a jug and a double-flask vessel. David Ben-Shlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” *Levant* 40 (2008): 38–40.

For a short and general description of Iron Age burial types in the Southern Levant – including pit and cist graves, jar burials, anthropoid coffins, cremation burials, bathtub burials, cave, bench, and arcosolia tombs see “Southern Levantine Iron Age Burial Types (1220–586 BCE),” *NEA* 65 (2002): 124–127. By far the best detailed and comprehensive work on Iron Age burials in Judah is Elizabeth Bloch-Smith’s work. Of particular use is Bloch-Smith’s tally of numbers of these grave types across the Levant in the 12th–11th and the 10th–8th centuries. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 314.

<sup>15</sup> Klaas Spronk, *Beautiful Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Butzon and Bercker Kevelaer, 1986), 238.

<sup>16</sup> David Ilan, “The Dawn of Internationalism: The Middle Bronze Age,” in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*. (ed. Thomas Levy; New York: Facts on File, 1995), 318–319; Gonen, *Burial Patterns and Cultural Diversity in Late Bronze Age Canaan*, 98–123; and Yigael Yadin, Aharoni, et al., *Hazor II: An Account of the Second Season of Excavations, 1956*. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1958), 81–86, 125.

in cemeteries outside of the city, town, or village seems to be a gradual shift. The archaeology clearly indicates a change of practice but we can only speculate as to the reason why.

*The Missing Early Iron Graves of the Highland Area*

An issue that further adds to the difficulty of comparing burial practices is the lack of excavated burial sites for the Early Iron Age in the highlands of Israel. This phenomenon extends from Samaria through the territory of Benjamin and Judah. Graves prior to 1200 are present, and excavations have uncovered remains from the 9th century and later, but there is a distinct gap in data for this time and place.<sup>17</sup> Bloch-Smith notes that surveys by M. Kochavi (1972), Z. Gal (1982) and I. Finkelstein (1986) in the highlands all “failed to locate even a single burial” and simple and cist graves were either not found or had vanished.<sup>18</sup> Raz Kletter remarks upon this paucity of Iron I (and extending into Iron IIA) burials in the Central Highlands of Israel. He notes “many Late Bronze caves” in contrast to few Iron I burials. Kletter disagrees with Spronk and Bloch-Smith regarding the difficulty in distinguishing between Late Bronze and Early Iron Age burials, using the very paucity of burials as major dividing criteria. While this is an argument from silence, Kletter states that it indicates a different burial custom that did not leave a lasting mark in the archaeological record.

Kletter places emphasis upon the assignment of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age categories as a result of cultural indicators rather than absolute dates. He recognizes that the Iron Age arrived in different areas at different times. So while Bloch-Smith might assign everything with a date after 1200 to the Iron Age, Kletter would assign some of these to the Late Bronze Age. He takes issue with the dating or interpretation of Dhahr Mirzbaneh, Tel Rumeidah (Hebron), Tel en-Nasbeh, and Gibeon, arguing that the pottery finds at these sites are more indicative of Late Bronze and

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<sup>17</sup> Avraham Faust, “Early Israel: An Egalitarian Society,” *BAR* 39 (2013): 45–46.

<sup>18</sup> Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 52.

Iron Age II with a gap during Iron I, rather than continuous use from Late Bronze Age through Iron II.<sup>19</sup>

Kletter concludes by acknowledging that limited archaeological data, the short time span of the period, the limited population in the highlands, and the lack of destruction layers by which to separate periods all contribute to the difficulty of separating LB and Iron I data. He nonetheless stands by his claim that these factors are not sufficient to explain the phenomena. Kletter extends his argument beyond the direct data and claims that “the lack of burials must be acknowledged as a sharp break from the burial customs of the preceding Late Bronze Age.” He expands the speculation to include possible “abandonment of the dead” or shallow graves with few or no grave goods that might indicate a relatively poor, egalitarian society and make the burials “invisible” to the archaeological record.<sup>20</sup> We should remember that abandonment of the dead is contrary to all previous and later custom in the Levant. Ultimately, Kletter raises an interesting issue but fails to prove his argument.

A. Faust picks up Kletter’s idea, arguing that the simple, undecorated pottery, lack of temples and cultic buildings in towns, and lack of royal inscriptions point to an egalitarian ideal that was reflected in “simple” ground inhumation burial with minimal grave goods. Faust takes care to acknowledge that Early Iron Age society in Israel and Judah was not actually egalitarian, nor was it as poor as has been previously conjectured. He also draws parallels to other societies in which simple burial does not reflect social status, so his suggestions must also be considered quite speculative.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Raz Kletter, “People without Burials? The Lack of Iron I Burials in the Central Highlands of Palestine,” *IEJ* 52 (2002): 28–48.

<sup>20</sup> Raz Kletter, “People without Burials?,” 28–48.

<sup>21</sup> Faust, *Early Israel: An Egalitarian Society*, 45–63. That Israel may have held such values is not a new idea, and Faust notes a long line of scholars including Speiser, Gottwald, Mendenhall, Gordis, Kelso, Lenski and others. In keeping with the ideas of Kletter and Faust regarding a relatively simple and egalitarian society, evidence of obvious central authority or large public works have not been found during this time period. With the exceptions of the Bull Site in the northern part of the

New technologies begin to appear at this time, such as plastered cisterns and stone-lined silos. Bronze and flint are still in use, but we begin to see the introduction of iron items, such as plow points, in the 12th–11th centuries in the hill country.<sup>22</sup> These things taken together begin to create a distinguishable cultural complex. The absence of pig bones at Israelite sites is a feature that makes a distinction between particularly Philistine and Israelite settlements.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the issue of the “missing” graves of the highlands, the material that can be assigned to Iron I shows a notable decrease in both the quantity and quality of pottery grave goods. Lamps and bowls are commonly associated with highland burials, while pyxides, pilgrim flasks and kraters were found more often along the coast as well as through the Shephelah and valleys.

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Samaritan hills, and Mount Ebal, there are no major temples or shrines. See Adam Zertal, “Early Iron Age Cultic Site on Mount Ebal: Excavation Seasons 1982–1987,” *TA* 13–14 (1986): 105–165 for the preliminary report and interpretation of the Iron I site of Mt Ebal as a cultic site. See Amihai Mazar, “The “Bull Site” – an Iron Age I Open Cult Place,” *BASOR* 247 (1982): 27–42, for a discussion of the “Bull Site” and the major find there of a bronze bull figurine, as well as the identification of the site with the early Iron Age and the Israelite tribe of Manassah. Thanks to Dr. B. Halpern for his comment on this.

<sup>22</sup> William Dever, *Who were the Early Israelites and Where did they Come from?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 117–118. Regarding the general spread of iron use in the Levant: while there are a few examples of iron items at Tell es Zuweid, Tell el Farah South, Beth Shan, Megiddo, and Tel Qasile from 1200–1100. In the next centuries the number of iron items located in the Levant jumped to 78 examples from 13 sites in 1100–1000, and 192 examples from 17 sites in 1000–900. The general movement was from ornamental items such as rings and bracelets to tools such as hoes, axes, arrowheads and plowshares. Vagn Fabritius Buchwald, *Iron and Steel in Ancient Times* (HSF 29; Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2005), 74–45.

<sup>23</sup> William G. Dever, *What did the Biblical Writers Know, and When did They Know it? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 111–123.

*Two Examples of Late Bronze/Early Iron Transition: Beth Shan and Tel Beit Mirsim*

Beth Shan (Beit She'an), in the north of Israel northeast of Dothan, also has tombs with mixed Late Bronze and Early Iron Age material. The Beth Shan necropolis is comprised of over 200 tombs cut over a period of many centuries. Some of these tombs seem to have been intended only for a single burial. The tombs encompass a wide variety of forms, including single chamber shaft tombs and multi-chambered tombs.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the large number of Early to Late Bronze Age tombs, the so-called "Coffin Group" from Beth Shan includes two tombs from the Late Bronze Age, four tombs yielding material of mixed date, and five tombs (Tombs 7, 66, 69, 202, and 227) which are assigned exclusively to the Iron I period of the 12th–11th centuries.<sup>25</sup> The "Coffin Group" takes its name from the nearly fifty clay sarcophagi found in 11 funerary deposits. All of these had been damaged and often smashed by looters. The damage was so severe that only two coffins were complete enough to merit restoration and display.

An exceptionally large amount of Egyptian-influenced pottery and grave goods were associated with these finds, including two shawabti figurines. A gold mouth plate was also discovered (Tomb 202). The coffins are cylindrical in shape, with the face, arms and hands modeled in relief in either "naturalistic" or "grotesque" style. The unique nature of these coffins – with strong Egyptian elements but locally made and with distinctive designs on the heads – has led to the suggestion that some of these represent the final resting place of members of a group of Sea Peoples, while others were for members of Egyptian troops garrisoned at Beth Shan. Both groups may have served as part of the garrison.<sup>26</sup> These coffins have a few parallels from Amman and Lachish (Tomb 570), and the facial

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<sup>24</sup> Eliezer D. Oren, *The Northern Cemetery of Beth Shan* (MMUMP; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 307. Oren relates the Beth Shan site more closely to Early Bronze burials in the Northern Levant and coastal Syria. The Megiddo Early Bronze cemetery is a particularly good parallel.

<sup>25</sup> Eliezer D. Oren, *The Northern Cemetery of Beth Shan*, 129–131 Oren compares these to the "900" and "500" cemeteries at Tell el Farah South

<sup>26</sup> Eliezer D. Oren, *The Northern Cemetery of Beth Shan*, 132–139

segment of a similar coffin was found at Tel Midras. Finally, three more anthropoid coffins come from Tel el Farah South. These were previously interpreted as being Philistine burials, but this is dismissed by E. Oren primarily due to the lack of any evidence of Philistine pottery connected with the coffins.<sup>27</sup>

Tel Beit Mirsim in the south further illustrates the points already made regarding the gradual and sometimes subtle nature of the transition between Bronze and Iron Age burials and continuity over time. Tel Beit Mirsim is in the eastern region of the Judean foothills. Pottery forms are often the only way to distinguish between Bronze and Iron Age burials here. Five tombs are dated as Middle Bronze, two as Late Bronze Age, and four as Iron II, with another three that have both Late Bronze and Early Iron Age material. Excavations here were carried out by W.F. Albright in the 1920s and 1930s. It was only in the 1970s that the necropolis of the tel was located, and salvage projects were undertaken from 1978–1982 by D. Alon, E. Braun, and D. Bahat. All tombs had been looted prior to excavation.<sup>28</sup> Even after looting, however, some of the tombs yielded rich finds: Tomb 24 for example held 200 pottery vessels, Tomb 500 about 150, and Tomb 100 approximately 600 vessels. All of these were Middle and Late Bronze Age tombs. Most of the tombs were created from natural caves and enlarged limestone cavities.

A number of both the Bronze and Iron Age tombs have sealing stones. Benches are not described in any of these cave tombs. Tomb 1, which has both Late Bronze and Iron Age material, contains a central support pillar, on top of which boulders were stacked to assist in supporting the ceiling. From the Iron Age tombs, the pottery assortment of lamps, bowls, jugs and juglets, often red-slipped, can be compared to Lachish III and Tel Halif 16,17, and 20, giving us dates of the 9th and 8th centuries.<sup>29</sup> While continuity in finds and usage is important, there is some indication

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<sup>27</sup> Eliezer D. Oren, *The Northern Cemetery of Beth Shan*, 140–142

<sup>28</sup> Ben-Arieh and Alon, *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ben-Arieh and Alon, *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim*, 3–10.

of change at this site. Only the Iron Age tombs show “significant investment” in shaping the tombs, while the Bronze Age caves are left largely in their natural state.<sup>30</sup>

### **Iron IIA–B: Continued Differentiation**

Beginning in the 10th century BCE, there occurred a change in the pottery assemblages found in graves with the addition of new forms of bowls, jars, juglets and cooking pots. For Bloch-Smith, this is not sufficient to distinguish between Israelite and Canaanite gravesites. While she does remark that the continuing use of cave tombs alongside bench tombs could reflect two distinct populations, she also states that the use of cave tombs could just as easily have been employed by early Israelites along with their Canaanite neighbors.<sup>31</sup> The issue of what constitutes Israelite versus Canaanite burial reflects the same sort of cultural continuity and gradual divergence we see in other culture markers. It is not a radical change, for example, to a previously unknown four room house plan or to a brand new type of large storage jar. Instead, it is the total assemblage taken together that indicates a cultural shift. In a similar way, early inscriptions are designated as Hebrew, Phoenician, or Aramaic by their location, not necessarily by distinguishing features. As specialization and divergence continue, distinctive and recognizable features such as letter form and spelling conventions emerge. In the realm of mortuary archaeology, bench tombs do not suddenly appear as a new Israelite form of burial. Late Bronze Age burial caves with benches are known from 16 sites, mostly found along the coastal plain from Sidon to Tell el Farah in the south, and occasionally in the mountain regions. Except for Tell el Farah South, these early sites usually have only one bench in the burial cave. They are quite diverse in their plans and features, and are grouped together primarily based upon the presence of the bench.

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<sup>30</sup> Ben-Arieh and Alon, *Bronze and Iron Age Tombs at Tell Beit Mirsim*, 3–10.

<sup>31</sup> Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 36–41.