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Echoes of Ossilegium:
A secondary mortuary practice in Iron Age Judah

By

Cody Fenby

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Faculty Advisor: James Osborne

Preceptor: Yasmin Cho

Abstract:

This paper examines the possible connection between the mortuary practice of ossilegium during the Second Temple Period and the mortuary practices of the Iron Age in ancient Judah. The previous literature has made light of the use of bone repositories during the two periods, but a possible connection between mortuary practices has been under-researched. This study directly compares the Iron Age cemeteries of Gibeon, Azor, and Aitun with the Second Temple Period necropoli of Jericho, Jerusalem, and Qumran using four metrics: structural layout and characteristics of the tombs, mortuary practices, grave goods, and miscellaneous details. These specific sites were selected in order to account for the impact of geological conditions on the tomb type used. This study has shown that aside from some structural similarities stemming between the Second Temple necropoli and Iron Age tombs located around the Highlands region, there is not enough evidence from these selected sites to support a connection between the mortuary practices of the Iron Age and Second Temple Period.

Introduction:

Could the secondary mortuary practice evident in Iron Age Judah be connected to the practice of ossilegium during the Second Temple Period? During the Second Temple and Roman periods, approximately from 63 BCE to 70 CE, many Judeans were buried in two phases: primary and secondary burial.¹ The primary burial phase consisted of the body being stored in a wooden coffin for decomposition.² After decomposition, the second burial phase occurred, where

¹ Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, 446.

² Hachlili, “Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis,” 115.

the bones were collected and buried again inside an ossuary.³ This procedure of moving the bones from a temporary deposition to a final burial place is known as secondary mortuary practice. In the context of the Second Temple and Roman periods, this final resting place was an ossuary, which was a stone box or receptacle used for the storage of bones.⁴ The current academia on this topic states that ossilegium in Judah took place during these periods. However, it overlooks the possibility that the practice occurred or developed within the mortuary practices of the Iron Age. When considering the findings within mortuary contexts in Iron Age Judah, there may be evidence of a symbolic secondary mortuary practice in Iron Age Judah that set the foundation for ossilegium later on. This is what I explore in this paper: whether or not the secondary mortuary practices of the Iron Age show any sign of connection to the ossilegium of the Second Temple Period. Furthermore, through my research I found that the geological conditions present at a given mortuary site may be more of a determining factor for the choice in tomb type than initially thought by scholars.

There is currently some evidence that suggests multi-stage burial practices were used in Iron Age Judah in the form of bone repositories, but this has not yet been connected to the ossilegium taking place during the following periods. In fact, it is both still debated whether secondary burial was being practiced during the Iron Age in Judah, and whether it served a strictly functional purpose or if it held symbolic meaning as well. There is no question that there were functional benefits to the relocation of the bones into heaps or repositories, as it cleared space within the tomb for continued use for future generations.⁵ With this in mind, I looked not only for signs of connection between Iron Age secondary mortuary practice and ossilegium, but

³ Hachlili, “Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis,” 115.

⁴ Keddie, “Class and Power in Roman Palestine,” 228.

⁵ Osborne, “Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” 36.

also signs of symbolic secondary mortuary practice, not solely functional in nature. In order to explore connections between tombs of the two periods, I conducted a comparative analysis between the Second Temple necropoli of Jericho, Jerusalem, and Qumran and the Iron Age cemetery sites of Gibeon, Azor, and Aitun. For this analysis, I used published excavation data on these sites. I compared them on the bases of structural characteristics, mortuary practices, grave goods, and other observations that do not fit into the aforementioned categories.

Background:

Iron Age Judah and its Burials

The Iron Age in ancient Judah was a period rife with changes and conflict. In fact, these changes and conflict divide the period into different phases, marked by each major transformation. The first phase, Iron I, is characterized by the invasion of the “Sea People,” including Philistines, to the southern Levant after the collapse of the Late Bronze Age. After their arrival, the Philistines formed settlements around the cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza in the coastal plain.⁶ According to Biblical archaeologist Lawrence Stager, this phase lasted approximately from 1200 to 1000 BCE.⁷ During these two centuries, the Philistines fought with the Egyptians over control of the territory, eventually losing to Ramesses III.⁸ With the reassertion of Egyptian control in the coastal plains, archaeologists identified anthropoid sarcophagi located within sites believed to be Egyptian strongholds.⁹ These sarcophagi were used for the burial of Egyptian troops in Philistine territory, since not every Egyptian corpse could be returned to their homeland for an ideal burial.¹⁰

⁶ Harrison, “The Battleground. Who Destroyed Megiddo? Was it David or Shishak?,” 35.

⁷ Stager, “The Song of Deborah—Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not,” 54.

⁸ Stager, “The Impact of the Sea Peoples in Canaan,” 340.

⁹ Stager, “The Impact of the Sea Peoples in Canaan,” 341.

¹⁰ Stager, “The Impact of the Sea Peoples in Canaan,” 341-342.

The next phase, the Iron IIA, is characterized by the Israelite United Monarchy which lasted from approximately 1000 to 925 BCE.¹¹ The United Monarchy began with the brief reign of Saul of the tribe of Benjamin, however the unity of Israel and Judah was precarious.¹² He was succeeded by king David in 1000 BCE, who consolidated the empire through his warfare and expansion policies and established Jerusalem as the seat of the Davidic dynasty.¹³ Whereas David was known for his strength as a warrior according to Biblical texts, his son Solomon was reputed as a great builder for the monarchy.¹⁴ Solomon's reign, starting in 965 BCE, was a time of economic wealth and administrative reorganization for the kingdom, marked by a breakthrough in trade with southern Arabia.¹⁵ However, Solomon imposed a taxation system during his reign, which unfairly targeted the northern tribes and created tension between North and South.¹⁶ Around 925 BCE, the Egyptian pharaoh Shishak/Sheshonq campaigned through Israel, destroying over fifty towns.¹⁷ This campaign likely exacerbated the tensions already present within the United Monarchy. After the death of Solomon, the North and South split into two different kingdoms, signalling the end of the United Monarchy and the beginning of the Divided Monarchy.

The Divided Monarchy, or the Iron IIB-C, lasted from approximately 925 to 586 BCE.¹⁸ This phase is characterized by the split of the monarchy into two different kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. During this phase, the southern kingdom of Judah remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty, and kept the capital at Jerusalem, the City of

¹¹ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 368.

¹² Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 369.

¹³ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 369.

¹⁴ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 371.

¹⁵ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 371.

¹⁶ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 371.

¹⁷ Harrison, "The Battleground. Who Destroyed Megiddo? Was it David or Shishak?," 30.

¹⁸ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 403.

David.¹⁹ The city underwent substantial growth during this phase, including the construction of a residential quarter at the eastern slope of the city.²⁰ However, in 701 BCE the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib began to campaign against the kingdom of Judah, leaving the kingdom devastated.²¹ Judah remained autonomous, but its reigning king Manessee submitted to Assyrian hegemony.²² The Assyrian power over Judah was challenged by Babylonian ruler Nabopolassar, who united the anti-Assyrian forces and attacked Assyrian cities, including Nineveh.²³ Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar II, attacked Judah twice, once in 597 BCE and again in 586 BCE.²⁴ During his second attack, Nebuchadnezzar II captured the city of Judah (Jerusalem), seized the king, and appointed his own king of choice.²⁵ Thus the Iron Age ends and the Babylonian/Exilic period begins, with the deportation of the upper class Judeans to Babylonia following shortly after.²⁶

In order to understand more about the different burials in Iron Age Judah, we must also discuss the conditions of the land itself. Judah can be divided into three geological zones: the coastal plains, the highlands, and the Jordan rift valley. These different zones each provide their own geological limitations in regards to the feasibility of different tomb types. Thus, the types of tombs found between these areas are different from one another. However, it must be noted that while geological conditions did play a role in the type of tomb commonly used, it alone was not the determining factor. This is because many tomb types have been found in environments with infeasible conditions, such as pit graves dug into bedrock and bench tombs hewn into kurkar.²⁷ In addition to the anthropoid sarcophagi discussed previously, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith classified Iron

¹⁹ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 417.

²⁰ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 418.

²¹ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 405.

²² Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 405.

²³ Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 756-757.

²⁴ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000 to 586 B.C.E.*, 548.

²⁵ Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 785.

²⁶ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 548.

²⁷ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 19.

Age tombs in the southern Levant into seven more distinct tomb types. These types are the simple grave; cist grave; jar burial; bathtub coffin burials; cave, chamber, and shaft tombs; arcosolia and bench tombs; and cremation burials.²⁸ In the following paragraphs, I will briefly describe these eight tomb types, since a broader understanding of the different Iron Age tombs will help in comparing site-specific finds to Second Temple finds.

Simple or pit graves were used during the Late Bronze Age, and their practice stayed relatively the same during the Iron Age; each pit held approximately one to three individuals and their grave goods, and they were typically dug into either coastal sands near settlements or into debris around tells.²⁹ The range of objects buried with the body in these burials was limited compared to other Iron Age tomb types, and typically consisted of ceramic vessels such as bowls, jars, and jugs, and sometimes included personal possessions like jewelry and scarabs.³⁰ These graves have been consistently found in the lowlands region of Judah, however there may be burial fields not yet located in the highlands area that consist of these simple graves.³¹

Cist graves were made by lining a rectangular space with stones or mudbricks and digging a pit, and they occasionally had stone-gabled and mudbrick roofs.³² These graves typically contained one to three individuals, similar to the simple graves; in graves with more than one individual, one was often either an infant or child.³³ Offerings found in these graves appear more rich than the simple graves, and include imported vessels, daggers, and blades, in addition to local ware.³⁴ Again similar to the simple graves, cist graves were typically found near settlements along the coast, but have yet to be found in the highlands.³⁵

²⁸ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 25.

²⁹ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 25-26.

³⁰ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 26.

³¹ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 27-28.

³² Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 29.

³³ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 30.

³⁴ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 30.

³⁵ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 31.

Jar burials required one to insert the deceased into a jar, insert any other contents, then cap the jar using either bowls, stones, or other jars; thus, most of the individuals found in these burials were either infants or children.³⁶ These were primarily found along the coast and through the Jezreel and Jordan River Valleys.³⁷ In the burials of most infants and some adults, the only grave goods found were a bowl or lamp and beads, rings, bracelets, or shells; wealthier burials included items like earrings, anklets, pins, and daggers.³⁸

According to Bloch-Smith, “anthropoid coffins consisted of a ceramic box, approximately two meters long and tapered at one or both ends, with a modelled lid depicting a human face and upper body.”³⁹ These coffins and fragments have been found in a wide variety of burials, including pit graves, cists, cave, and bench tombs.⁴⁰ These coffins are Egyptian in origin, as evidenced not only by the depiction of Egyptian wigs and headwear on the lids, but also by the presence of imported Egyptian objects like vessels, scarabs, and jewelry.⁴¹ Anthropoid coffins are also only found in Egypt and in sites in Transjordan and Cisjordan with suggested Egyptian presence.

Bathtub coffins, instead of being box-shaped, were ceramic vessels shaped like a tub with handles and were likely introduced to the southern Levant by the Assyrians.⁴² These coffins were mostly found in the northern kingdom of Israel, however two have been uncovered in rock-cut tombs near Jerusalem and one at Khirbet el-Qôm.⁴³

³⁶ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 32.

³⁷ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 33.

³⁸ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 32.

³⁹ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 33.

⁴⁰ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 34.

⁴¹ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 34.

⁴² Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 36.

⁴³ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 36.

Bodies and associated objects were placed in either natural or hewn caves in cave tombs, located in tell slopes or wadi cliffs.⁴⁴ As many individuals were stored in these cave tombs, a large number of grave goods have been recovered as well, including lamps, jars, bowls, personal possessions, and scarabs.⁴⁵ Cave tombs were mostly restricted to the highlands area, and was the predominant burial type of the highlands throughout the first centuries of the Iron Age.⁴⁶ Chamber and shaft tombs were similar to the cave tombs, sometimes classified together with them, only differing in their room-like plans and way of access.⁴⁷

Arcosolia, or loculi tombs, and bench tombs were very similar to each other in plan, both consisting of a rectangular entry doorway and a burial chamber that could have been either rounded or square/rectangular in shape.⁴⁸ The bench tomb in particular was the signature burial form of Iron Age Judah from 8th to 6th century BCE.⁴⁹ In these tombs, three benches used for primary burial lined the three walls of the burial chamber opposing the entrance.⁵⁰ Conversely, in loculi tombs shafts were either hewn into the side walls of the chamber or radiated out from the center.⁵¹ These tombs also commonly contained bone repositories, where the bones were deposited after decomposition of the deceased. Grave goods found commonly include pottery, personal possessions, jewelry, and small objects and statuettes and scarabs.⁵²

There are three forms that cremation burials have been discovered in: partially cremated remains in cave tombs, more common to the highlands, and cremated remains in vessels and pyre burials in the sand, both more common to the coastal area.⁵³ Grave goods for burials of this type

⁴⁴ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 36.

⁴⁵ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 38.

⁴⁶ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 39.

⁴⁷ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 40.

⁴⁸ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 41.

⁴⁹ Osborne, “Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” 35.

⁵⁰ Osborne, “Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” 40.

⁵¹ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 41.

⁵² Osborne, “Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” 40.

⁵³ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 52.

are few, with the presence of many types of pottery (red-slipped, Samaria ware, Cypro-Phoenician) and other items like scarabs and amulets.⁵⁴ Cremation burials in particular are potentially important to my research because they differ drastically from the other Iron Age tomb types. Any similarities found between cremation burials and the Second Temple period tombs would be strong on account of this individuality. Further, if there is no strong similarity between cremation burials and Second Temple tombs, then the cremation burials can serve as a distinct marker or boundary on where the similarities with other tomb types end.

The Second Temple period and its Burials

The Second Temple Period lasted from approximately 63 BCE to 70 CE.⁵⁵ The period began with the removal of Jewish control from the Greek coastal cities, Transjordan including Judah, Amareitis, Galilee, Peraea and Idumaea.⁵⁶ Judah was invaded by the Parthians in 40 BCE, and Herod the Great reclaimed Jerusalem with Roman help in 37 BCE.⁵⁷ After this reclamation, Herod the Great served as a “client king” of Rome, ruling over Judah.⁵⁸ As a part of his building program, Herod ordered the reconstruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.⁵⁹ Despite the reconstruction of the temple, both Herod’s and his son’s rule are characterized by frequent Jewish insurrections.⁶⁰ This period ended with the First Revolt of 66 CE, after which Judah was made a praetorian province.⁶¹

During the Second Temple Period in Judah, many burials were discovered in loculi tombs with ossuaries. Ossuaries are stone boxes or receptacles used for the storage of bones after

⁵⁴ Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 54.

⁵⁵ Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, 446.

⁵⁶ Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, 446.

⁵⁷ Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, 446.

⁵⁸ Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, 446.

⁵⁹ Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, 446.

⁶⁰ Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, 446.

⁶¹ Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, 448.

decomposition of the deceased; this mortuary practice is known as ossilegium.⁶² This practice remained in Judah throughout the Early Roman period, specifically within the elite population.⁶³ At the Jericho Cemetery in particular, all burials uncovered, both primary and secondary, were located inside of loculi tombs.⁶⁴ The Second Temple necropoli appear to have been consistently located outside of cities and living habitation in accordance to Jewish law. In the case of the Jerusalem necropolis, the tombs formed a ring with a circumference of five kilometers around the city's walls.⁶⁵ In Jericho, the cemetery was also located outside of the city's limits.⁶⁶ The cemetery at Qumran also follows this trend and was located 50 cubits or 25-30 meters away from the site.⁶⁷

The general plan of a Second Temple Period tomb (Fig. 1.) consisted of a square/rectangular burial chamber, a floor pit in the center of the chamber, three to four benches around the edges of the pit, and one to three loculi hewn into the three walls of the tomb opposing the entrance side. The entrance to the tomb was square and closed by either a rectangular blocking stone or by mudbricks and small stones.⁶⁸ Two types of burial are present within these tombs: primary burial in wooden coffins and secondary burial of collected disarticulated bones in either ossuaries or heaps.⁶⁹ It would seem that the loculi tombs were first designed and used for primary burials in

⁶² Keddie, "Class and Power in Roman Palestine," 228.

⁶³ Keddie, "Class and Power in Roman Palestine," 229.

⁶⁴ Hachlili, "Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis," 110.

⁶⁵ Hachlili, "Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices, and Rites in the Second Temple Period," 1.

⁶⁶ Hachlili, "Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis," 110.

⁶⁷ Hachlili, "Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices, and Rites in the Second Temple Period," 15-16.

⁶⁸ Hachlili, "Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis," 110.

⁶⁹ Hachlili, "Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis," 115.

wooden coffins, then later used for secondary/ossuary burials; this is evident in the loculi being coffin-length (2m), rather than ossuary-length (70cm).⁷⁰ One wooden coffin would have been placed in each loculus and only placed on the benches located within the tomb when all other loculi were filled.⁷¹ The ossuaries were located on the benches or within loculi, and according to inscriptions found at the Jericho necropolis, occupants of ossuaries placed together within a loculus are typically related.⁷² Little is known about the kinds of grave goods that were included in these tombs, as many of them have been looted with very little remaining. However, a few of the grave goods that have been found include unguentaria, bowls, lamps, and cooking pots.⁷³ It should be noted that although cooking vessels were placed in the tombs, many of them were found dented or broken. It is currently unknown whether or not this may have been a symbolic act, as there are currently no textual sources to ascertain this, but Hachlili cited two perspectives in her article that might explain why this phenomenon occurred: one from Pessah Bar-Adon and one from Yigael Yadin, both archaeologists in Israel. At the site of En el Ghuweir, similar broken pottery was found, which Bar-Adon suggested may be in some way symbolic of death.⁷⁴ Conversely, Yadin believes that the vessels within the house of the deceased became

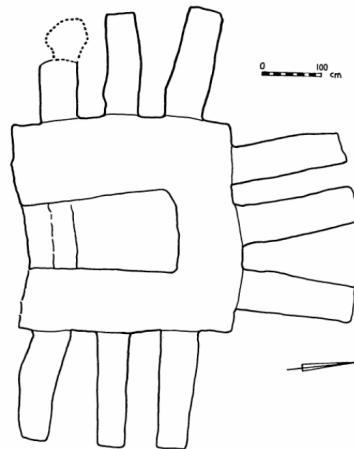


Fig. 1. General plan of Second Temple Period tomb. Hachlili, “Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis,” 111.

⁷⁰ Hachlili, “Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis,” 110.

⁷¹ Hachlili, “Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis,” 115.

⁷² Hachlili, “Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis,” 119.

⁷³ Hachlili, “Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis,” 121.

⁷⁴ Hachlili, “Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis,” 130.

contaminated after death, and these vessels needed to be broken and placed inside the grave before burial.⁷⁵ Both interpretations further support the idea of a symbolic mortuary practice during the Second Temple period, the kind of mortuary practice I plan to look for in the Iron Age Judean context.

Methodology:

I conducted my research with one major goal in mind: to conduct a comparative analysis between the Second Temple Period and Iron Age burial sites in ancient Judah. In order to achieve this goal, I primarily used Rachel Hachlili's book *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period*, and Hachlili and Ann Killebrew's article "Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis," to directly compare the findings of the Second Temple necropoli of Jerusalem, Jericho, and Qumran with the findings from three Iron Age burial sites: Gibeon, Azor, and Aitun. These findings on the Iron Age sites all come from published excavation data. Specifically, for analysis on the cemetery in Gibeon, I used Hanan Eshel's article "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," as it gave detailed descriptions and diagrams of the tombs' layouts. To supplement this analysis, I also used Auni Dajani's article "Excavations in Jordan, 1949-50," since he was able to give more information on the grave goods recovered in one of the Gibeon tombs. For the cemetery at Azor, I primarily used information garnered from David Ben-Schlomo's article "The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices," since it gave a comprehensive look at the six different tomb types all found within the site. Finally, in order to analyze the cemetery at Aitun, I used Avraham Faust and Hayah Katz's article "Tel 'Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,"

⁷⁵ Hachlili, "Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis," 130.

since it gave a detailed description of the tomb plans at the site. In order to conduct my comparative analysis, I looked for similarities between these three Iron Age burial sites and Second Temple period burials in ancient Judah in the structural characteristics and plans of the tombs, mortuary practices, grave goods, and miscellaneous observations that do not fit within the other categories. By comparing them in this way, I believe I can determine if there is a connection between the ossilegium of the Second Temple Period and the secondary mortuary practices of the Iron Age.

For my selection of archaeological sites, I wanted to be all-encompassing of the different tomb types present during the Iron Age, while keeping in mind the impact geological conditions might have on the tomb types commonly used. In order to do this, I selected Gibeon, a highlands site; Azor, a coastal plains site with many different tomb types present; and Aitun, a site situated in the Shephelah, the area between the hill country and the coastal plains. These three sites represent three different geological areas, which will aid in a more comprehensive comparative analysis. In the future, I wish to include the analysis of a couple burial sites from the Jordan Rift Valley, as a means to include all three major geological zones in Judah. In doing so, this analysis will encompass the different tomb types and mortuary practices brought about by the differing geographies of each zone.

Results:

Structural Characteristics

First, the structural properties of Gibeon, Azor, and Aitun must be examined in order to make a comparison with the Second Temple tombs. Of the 14 tombs excavated at the cemetery at Tell Gibeon, eight of the tombs had a square/rectangular burial chamber. Tomb 1 (Fig. 2.) was the

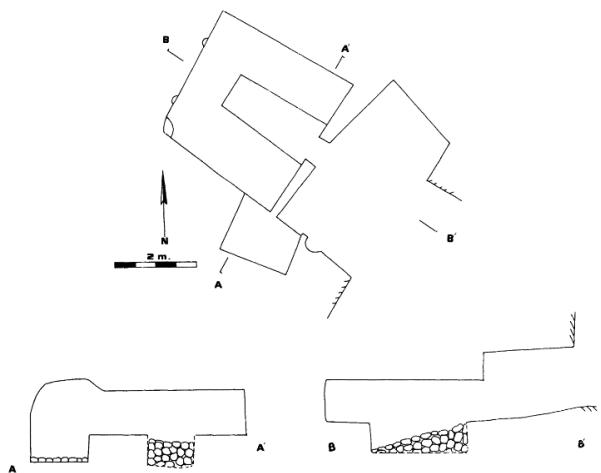


Fig. 2. Plan and sections of Tomb 1 at the Iron Age cemetery at Gibeon. Eshel, "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," 3.

should be noted that even though no bone repository could be distinguished in tomb 10, it does not necessarily mean that there was never one within the tomb,

it just cannot be said for certain that there was. Although half of the tombs are fairly uniform in structure and plan, the other half vary greatly and each have their own distinct plans. Tombs 2 and 7 (Fig. 3.) both had plans resembling a central passageway, with two benches lining the walls beside the entrance and a bone repository in the wall opposite of the entrance.⁷⁶ Tomb 3 contained only one bench with a burial trough hewn into it and no bone repository; Eshel notes that this tomb may have been used for a single burial, rather than

largest, and contained both an entrance room and burial chamber, three benches along the walls, lamp niches, and a bone repository.⁷⁶ Tombs 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12 also all were square/rectangular in shape and contained either three benches along the walls opposing the entrance, or one bench along those three walls. These tombs, with the exception of tomb 10, also contained bone repositories. It

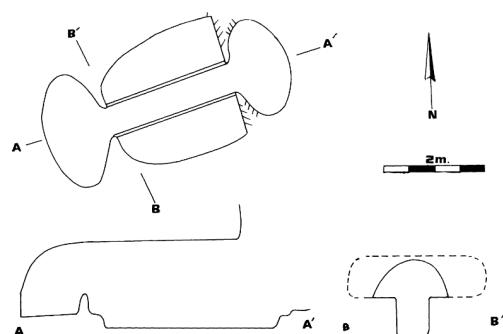


Fig. 3. Plan and sections of Tomb 7 at the Iron Age cemetery at Gibeon. Eshel, "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," 8.

⁷⁶ Eshel, "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," 4.

⁷⁷ Eshel, "The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon," 14.

the typical family burial.⁷⁸ Tomb 11 was a large natural cave with two chambers, each with their own entrance and connected by a passageway.⁷⁹ Tombs 13 and 14 had aspects of both trough and bench burials; once the troughs were occupied, stone slabs were placed over the troughs and they were used as a bench for another burial.⁸⁰

The tombs uncovered at the cemetery in Tel Azor, specifically within the excavated Area D, are highly variable and include multiple different types. There are about 50 Iron Age

graves that cover phases III, IV, and V, and were classified into six general tomb types.⁸¹ These types are simple pit burials, brick-case tombs, jar burials, cremation burials, partly-built tombs with multiple burials, and various. The simple pit burials were the most common type, with an undetectable pit and a concentration of skeletal remains and artifacts forming the burial.⁸² The brick-case tombs consisted of a four-walled brick chamber in which the body of the deceased was placed.⁸³ It seems that these tombs existed on a spectrum of completion, with tomb D75 being the most complete with a brick covering and lining.⁸⁴

Jar burials found at Azor consisted of one or two jars laid horizontally, likely within a pit.⁸⁵ However, all of these jar burials used storage jars, and there is no evidence that pithoi were



Fig. 4. Photograph of Tomb D63 at the Iron Age cemetery of Azor during excavation. Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 39.

⁷⁸ Eshel, “The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon,” 5-6.

⁷⁹ Eshel, “The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon,” 10-11.

⁸⁰ Eshel, “The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon,” 15.

⁸¹ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 31.

⁸² Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 31.

⁸³ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 35.

⁸⁴ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 35.

⁸⁵ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 36.

used for these burials.⁸⁶ Cremation burials, specifically tomb D63 (Fig. 4.), consisted of a square structure made of stones surrounding an upright standing jar, likely with a pit dug out in the floor of the structure.⁸⁷ It seems likely that the space between the jar and the stone structure was filled with soil or sand, with vessels then placed around the jar.⁸⁸ The partly-built tombs with multiple primary burials consisted of a 3-2 x 2m area defined by three stone walls; within this structure the deceased and artefacts were laid.⁸⁹ Both burial structures of this type found at Azor were made up of large kurkar blocks and had an inner space 1.7m wide.⁹⁰ Other various types of burials include tomb D7, which was a supine burial lined with an oval stone frame, and cist tombs.⁹¹

The structure of the tombs located in Aitun bore resemblance to many found at Gibeon, in that they had a square/rectangular burial chamber.⁹² Tomb C1, dated to the Iron I Period, contained five loculi hewn into the cave's walls and a round repository.⁹³ An Iron Age IIA tomb, Tomb C3, also included five loculi or vaults branching out from the burial chamber.⁹⁴ This tomb contained a circular pit, however its purpose is currently unknown. A few of the Aitun tombs were dated to the Iron IIB as well. One of these tombs, Tomb A2, bears resemblance to the earlier tombs; it consisted of five loculi, with one being used as a repository.⁹⁵ Another Iron IIB tomb differs drastically from the other tombs at the site. Tomb A1 consists of a natural cave that was

⁸⁶ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 38.

⁸⁷ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 38.

⁸⁸ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 38.

⁸⁹ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 40.

⁹⁰ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 40-42.

⁹¹ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 42.

⁹² Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 41.

⁹³ Faust and Katz, “Tel ‘Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,” 176.

⁹⁴ Faust and Katz, “Tel ‘Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,” 176.

⁹⁵ Faust and Katz, “Tel ‘Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,” 180.

only slightly modified for use as a tomb.⁹⁶ According to the figure of the tomb given by Tzaferis, it appears to consist of a central room with two niches or vaults hewn into the sides of the cave.

To summarize, Gibeon generally contained bench tombs with square/rectangular burial chambers and bone repositories. In contrast, Azor held a great variety of tomb types, including brick-case tombs and cremation burials, but no bench tombs. Finally, the tombs in Aitun were generally of the loculi type, with one ascertained repository.

Mortuary Practices

Next, any observable mortuary practices at these cemeteries should be considered, starting with Gibeon. Many of the tombs found at the Gibeon cemetery show evidence of secondary mortuary practice. As stated previously, tombs 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12 all contained bone repositories. These repositories would have been used for storing the disarticulated bones of the deceased that were previously laid upon the benches for decomposition.⁹⁷ The presence of these repositories at the Gibeon tombs are indicative of a secondary mortuary practice taking place. Unfortunately, because of the ransacked nature of the Late Iron Age Gibeon cemetery, there is currently no information or analysis on any skeletal remains from this site. However, there is a very small possibility that some secondary mortuary practice may have occurred in Gibeon during the Bronze Age. Fiona Jensen-Hitch from the University of Pennsylvania has recently conducted bioarchaeological analysis of some skeletal remains from Gibeon that were held in the Penn Museum. A cranium discovered in tomb 15, ID No. T15 83, may have been treated after its primary burial, as Jensen-Hitch notes that the cranial surface was particularly

⁹⁶ Faust and Katz, “Tel ‘Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,” 178.

⁹⁷ Osborne, “Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” 40.

clean, as if it had been cleaned before.⁹⁸ Furthermore, Jensen-Hitch noticed a dark green coloring on the right temporal bone, which she stated could possibly be either writing or discoloration from a metal.⁹⁹ It is only a slight possibility, but there may have been a cleaning of the bones after the primary burial and decomposition of this individual. If this is the case, then it is also possible that this practice could have continued into the Iron Age at Gibeon. Writing on the skull after primary burial may also be indicative of some sort of secondary mortuary practice, however it is neither confirmed to be writing nor stated whether or not this discoloration is modern. If this discoloration is modern, then it cannot inform us about mortuary practices occurring during the Iron Age.

In the simple pit burials at the Azor cemetery, each burial typically held one individual, although burials with two individuals have been found.¹⁰⁰ According to Ben-Schlomo, this burial was primary and the body was arranged in a supine position.¹⁰¹ In three or four of the pit burials, there are bowls placed on the waists of the deceased; this practice may have been an attempt to protect the waist or sex organs of the deceased.¹⁰² There may have been differences in skeletal orientation dependent on the age of the deceased. It seems as though older bodies, both male and female, were oriented with their heads facing west, while children may have been oriented with their heads facing east. In burials D24 and D80, a female youth and a male respectively, both heads were turned facing west.¹⁰³ In contrast, in burial D56 the body of a child aged 7-8 was uncovered with the skull facing east.¹⁰⁴ A larger sample from this site or nearby sites is needed to corroborate this, however I found it to be a peculiar observation. If the bodies of deceased adults

⁹⁸ Jensen-Hitch, “Gibeon Revisited: An Integrated Approach to Bioarchaeological Collection,” 51.

⁹⁹ Jensen-Hitch, “Gibeon Revisited: An Integrated Approach to Bioarchaeological Collection,” 51.

¹⁰⁰ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 31.

¹⁰¹ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 31.

¹⁰² Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 32.

¹⁰³ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 31, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 32.

and children are found consistently oriented in these differing ways, it may indicate specific mortuary practices and beliefs dependent on the deceased's age. The built brick-case tombs had a similar orientation of the deceased, with all tombs oriented east-west with the head pointing westwards.¹⁰⁵ The skeletal remains in these tombs were found in articulation and in a supine position.¹⁰⁶ Because the skeletons were found in articulation, I believe it can be inferred that the built brick-case burials were primary as well, as the bones often become disarticulated when collected for secondary burial. In the jar burials, human bones of both children/infants and adults were placed inside of the jars. In the case of adult jar burials, since the jars were relatively small, this may be indicative of a secondary burial and the possibility cannot be ruled out. This is also supported by the complete or partial cremation of the body in similar jar burials in Sahab.¹⁰⁷ I am unsure whether cremation burials typically held more than one individual, however Tomb D63 contained the remains of both an adult male aged 40-45 and an adolescent male aged 12-16.¹⁰⁸ In the partly-built tombs with multiple primary burials, specifically Burial Structure A, the deceased were generally laid in a east-west orientation, in a supine position.¹⁰⁹ Only the latest burial was found in articulation, as some bones from the previous burials were moved to make room for new ones.¹¹⁰ This movement of the bones after decomposition and initial burial may be indicative of secondary mortuary practice. The orientation of the deceased in Burial Structure B differs from that of A; many detached skulls were found in the structure, and depending on which stage of the structure the deceased was buried they were oriented in different directions.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Ben-Schlomo, "The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices," 35.

¹⁰⁶ Ben-Schlomo, "The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices," 35.

¹⁰⁷ Ben-Schlomo, "The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices," 38.

¹⁰⁸ Ben-Schlomo, "The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices," 40.

¹⁰⁹ Ben-Schlomo, "The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices," 40.

¹¹⁰ Ben-Schlomo, "The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices," 40.

¹¹¹ Ben-Schlomo, "The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices," 42.

Not much appears to be known about the mortuary practices at Aitun specifically, however there is some support for secondary mortuary practice. Of the tombs mentioned, two contained bone repositories. Since the purpose of the circular pit found in Tomb C3 has not been affirmed, it is possible that this pit may have served as a repository as well. Details of the cemetery excavations given by Avraham Faust and Hayah Katz make only one mention of skeletal remains found at the site. When excavating Tomb C3, Dothran discovered scattered skeletons and burial offerings, likely so due to looting.¹¹² It may be assumed that the looting at Aitun left little to no skeletal remains for study, which greatly impacts any available knowledge on mortuary practices that may have occurred at the site.

In short, the bone repositories at Gibeon indicate that a secondary mortuary practice was likely taking place. Furthermore, there is a slight possibility that this practice could have occurred as early as the Bronze Age, if Jensen-Hitch's cranial sample was cleaned and subsequently discolored at the time of burial. Moreover, the different tomb types at Azor presented mortuary practice in differing ways, one of which being the placement of bowls over the waists of the deceased. There is also an interesting dichotomy between the orientations of deceased adults and children at Azor, which may indicate developing beliefs concerning the dead. Aitun, like Gibeon, also contained bone repositories that indicate a secondary mortuary practice.

Grave Goods

On account of issues such as looting, data on grave goods recovered from funerary sites can be lacking. However, I believe that this data, albeit limited, still has the potential to provide insight into mortuary practices and beliefs about the dead. For this reason, I have opted to include grave goods in my comparative analysis. Concerning the Gibeon findings, Eshel does not

¹¹² Faust and Katz, "Tel 'Eton Cemetery: An Introduction," 176.

describe any grave goods found within the tombs, as he states that the tombs were vandalized, reused in antiquity, and robbed.¹¹³ Fortunately Auni Dajani, who excavated tomb 11, gives a record of the grave goods found within the tomb. He states that about 400 vessels were located within the tomb, among many other objects: water decanters, flasks, bracelets, anklets, dagger handles, and scarabs to name a few.¹¹⁴ Eshel believes that the findings in tomb 11 may be indicative of the original contents in the other Gibeon tombs.¹¹⁵

Along with a wide variety of tomb types, the Azor cemetery also offered a wide range of grave goods. In particular, the rich simple pit burial of a child contained several Philistine Bichrome vessels, a scarab, bronze bracelets, and beads.¹¹⁶ Some other findings from pit burials include various metal objects like a bronze mirror, a pin, and a silver earring.¹¹⁷ Particular to the pit burials dated to the Iron IIA, White Painted Cypriote juglets, Cypro-Phoenician juglets, and chalices were also found among the grave goods.¹¹⁸ In the built brick-case tombs, the grave goods were fairly similar, but also contain a flask and a flint blade among their findings.¹¹⁹ Much of the grave goods found within jar burials consisted of pottery in some form or another; many vessels like bowls, kraters, jars, and some lamps were found within the burial jars, and in the case of burial D86 some sherds uncovered surrounding the burial jar.¹²⁰ Tomb D63 at Azor (Fig. 3.), one of two only confirmed cremation burials at the site, is unique in that one of the grave goods recovered is a golden ‘mouthpiece’; other findings within the cremation burials include a bronze bowl and some Philistine Bichrome kraters.¹²¹ The partly built tombs with multiple primary

¹¹³ Eshel, “The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon,” 2-3.

¹¹⁴ Dajani, “Excavations in Jordan, 1949-50,” 48.

¹¹⁵ Eshel, “The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon,” 3.

¹¹⁶ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 33.

¹¹⁷ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 34.

¹¹⁸ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 34.

¹¹⁹ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 35.

¹²⁰ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 36.

¹²¹ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 40.

burials were rich in grave goods, and included items such as sea shells, various juglets, bronze and silver jewelry, scarabs, and a bi-metallic knife.¹²² No grave goods were reported for the sixth tomb type of various burials at Azor.

Similar to the Gibeon cemetery, Aitun also suffered from heavy, systematic looting.¹²³ It is likely because of this looting that not many grave goods were reported from Aitun. Fortunately, some grave goods could still be recovered in Tombs C1 and C3. Philistine bichrome pottery and metal objects were the finds of Tomb C1.¹²⁴ Tomb C3, however, had a wider range of grave goods. These grave goods, in addition to pottery vessels, included bracelets, iron knives, bronze hooks, and plaques.¹²⁵

To sum up this subsection, these three cemeteries all included some variation of pottery, although the specific type varied between sites. This makes sense, as coastal wares such as Philistine Bichrome are typically not found in the Highlands to the north. All three cemeteries also contained some type of knife or dagger within their findings, as well as varying forms of jewelry. Azor appears to have the most diverse arrangement of grave goods, which is consistent with its diverse range of tombs. Most significantly, it is the only site out of these three in which pieces like mirrors or mouthpieces were found.

Other Details

Finally, I wanted to note any observations that did not quite fit into the preceding subsections, but seemed peculiar or significant. According to Eshel, there is an observable pattern in the orientation of the deceased in Gibeon tombs 4 and 8. Using the benches with headrests as a

¹²² Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 42.

¹²³ Faust and Katz, “Tel ‘Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,” 176.

¹²⁴ Faust and Katz, “Tel ‘Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,” 176.

¹²⁵ Faust and Katz, “Tel ‘Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,” 176.

guide, it seems as though the body to the left of the entrance was placed with its head towards the back of the tomb, and the body to the right of the entrance was placed with its head towards the entrance.¹²⁶ There were also lamp niches and parapets found in the Gideon tombs, which were considered by Osborne to be “comfort features” for the deceased.

It is interesting to note the breadth of tomb types found at the cemetery in Azor. Such a wide variety may be indicative of a heterogeneous population inhabiting the site during the Iron Age. It may also simply reflect a large network of cross-cultural connections that Azor was part of. Ben-Schlomo states that the appearance of cremation burials in particular was likely related to a new wave of Aegean influence in the southern Levant.¹²⁷

The only other interesting detail to note from the Aitun cemetery is the presence of lamp niches within Tomb C1.¹²⁸ It is possible that these niches served as “comfort features,” similar to those found in Gibeon.

Discussion:

Immediately the structural characteristics of the tombs found within the Gibeon cemetery bear great resemblance to the structure of those dated to the Second Temple Period. Particularly Tombs 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 12 are similar to the structure of the Second Temple tombs, and can almost pose as a prototype to these later tombs. Despite not having niches hewn into the sidewalls of the burial chamber, they all contain a square/rectangular burial chamber with a floor pit, three benches surrounding the floor pit and lining the walls, and bone repositories, all elements present in the structure of a Second Temple Period tomb. Hanan Eshel, who wrote on the findings at the Gibeon cemetery, in his footnotes even compared the structure of tomb 1 to

¹²⁶ Eshel, “The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon,” 16.

¹²⁷ Ben-Schlomo, “The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices,” 48.

¹²⁸ Faust and Katz, “Tel ‘Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,” 176.

tombs dated to the Second Temple period.¹²⁹ However, the bone repositories at this site take the form of pits and heaps, not a structure resembling an ossuary. In terms of mortuary practice, the practice of moving the bones from a temporary location (benches) to a final resting place (bone repositories) does echo the basic secondary mortuary practice that took place during the Second Temple Period.

The secondary burial practiced at Gibeon could have been purely for functional reasons rather than symbolic or meaningful ones, however the presence of “comfort features,” in the form of lamp niches and parapets, within these tombs should be analyzed. Part of James Osborne’s argument for the practice of symbolically meaningful secondary burial during the Iron Age is the presence of comfort features: traits that were intended to bring comfort to and decrease the suffering of the spirit during the intermediary stage of burial, when the deceased’s spirit awaited access to the afterworld.¹³⁰ These features often take the form of lamp niches, which imply the continued symbolic use of the lamps by the dead after the living have left the tomb, and parapets, which would have ensured the spirit that their body would not roll off the bench during decomposition.¹³¹ When lamp niches aren’t present, lamps placed beside the head of the deceased can also imply the continued use of the lamp by the dead.¹³² This placement of objects near the head of the deceased itself is a fascinating observation, since personal objects belonging to women and children were also placed at the heads of the deceased in Second Temple tombs.¹³³ The occurrence of this practice between both periods may imply some idea or belief that the spirit of the deceased could be comforted by being surrounded by light or their possessions. Furthermore, seeing that both lamp niches and parapets are present within the Gibeon tombs

¹²⁹ Eshel, “The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon,” 4.

¹³⁰ Osborne, “Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” 42.

¹³¹ Osborne, “Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” 42.

¹³² Osborne, “Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” 42.

¹³³ Hachlili, “Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis,” 116.

implies that the secondary burial practiced there served a symbolic purpose alongside a functional one.

The tombs at Aitun also bore similarities to both the Gibeon and Second Temple tombs, which I feel is important to note given the proximity between Gibeon and Aitun. As the sites are from the highlands and the Shephelah respectively, they were both relatively near each other and near Jerusalem and Jericho; this proximity may explain the greater resemblance between these cemeteries than in other sites. Like Gibeon and the Second Temple tombs, the Aitun tombs contained bone repositories and showed potential for secondary mortuary practice. The presence of lamp niches at Aitun may also imply that this practice was symbolic, as these could have served as comfort features. The Aitun tombs' structure also resembled that of the Second Temple tombs, with the use of loculi or vaults for the deceased. However, there were still no remarkable similarities, like wooden coffins or ossuaries, found at the site.

Although there is no obvious connection between the mortuary practices of the Iron Age and the Second Temple Period, there may still be potential to map a chronology between the tomb structures of these periods. At least, that is what I initially thought in the midst of my research. The presence of parapets within the Iron Age bench tombs made me think of a possible evolutionary chain leading to the widespread use of loculi tombs and ossuaries during the Second Temple and Roman Periods; to me, going from including parapets on benches to using a hewn niche seems like a step further in ensuring the comfort of the deceased, and ensuring that the body doesn't roll during decomposition. My logic was thus: if the bench tombs without parapets are older than those with them, and the loculi tombs are more recent than both of these types of bench tombs, it might show a chronological development of the Judean tomb structure and mortuary practice. However, this speculation does not hold weight after analyzing the cemetery

at Aitun. As explained by James Osborne, the bench tomb, like those found in Gibeon, was the signature burial form during the Iron II.¹³⁴ This is corroborated by Eshel, who described the Gibeon cemetery as a Late Iron Age cemetery. Furthermore, Eshel dated the square burial chamber tombs, the tombs which bore the most resemblance to the Second Temple tombs, to the 7th and 6th centuries BCE.¹³⁵ In order for my initial speculation to hold weight, these bench tombs would have to predate the loculi tombs. Unfortunately, the findings at Aitun suggest that the two tomb types are not chronologically related. Aitun contains tombs from most of the Iron Age, from Iron I to Iron IIB. The oldest tomb in the cemetery is Tomb C1, which was dated to the 11th century BCE.¹³⁶ The discovery of this tomb proves that loculi tombs were already in use during the Iron I, and that the loculi tombs actually predate the bench tombs. One could easily change the order of my logic, and argue that the chronology begins with loculi tombs, then bench tombs, then the ossuaries of the Second Temple Period. However, I do not believe the findings at Aitun support this chronology either. If this alternative speculation was true, then one would expect to see some gradual change within the Aitun tomb structure, like the addition of benches in some of the Iron II tombs. Yet, the Aitun tomb structure shows no such change. Only loculi tombs were found within the cemetery, no bench tombs. If there is a chronology of evolving tomb types from the Iron Age through the Second Temple Period that can be identified by archaeologists, it is not supported by my selection of mortuary sites in this paper.

When considered after discussing the findings at Gibeon and Aitun, the tombs at Azor do not seem to bear nearly as much similarity with the Second Temple tombs. The tombs at Azor are highly variable, and thus not many of them are a structural match. The closest structurally seem to be the partly built tombs with multiple primary burials and the built brick-case tombs, although

¹³⁴ Osborne, “Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah,” 35.

¹³⁵ Eshel, “The Late Iron Age Cemetery of Gibeon,” 14.

¹³⁶ Faust and Katz, “Tel ‘Eton Cemetery: An Introduction,” 176.

drawing a good comparison here is a stretch; the only real comparative aspect here is that the bodies were laid in some sort of built chamber. The other four classified tomb types in Azor bear no similarity to the Second Temple tombs concerning structural characteristics. In regards to mortuary practice, one of the broad similarities between the Azor tombs and the Second Temple tombs was how the body of the deceased was positioned; the body was frequently laid supine. However, this is not much to draw comparison from. There is also some similarity with the adult jar burials, but only in the fact that a secondary mortuary practice cannot be ruled out. The only other similarity to note is the secondary movement of the deceased in the partly built tombs with multiple primary burials. However, since there are no comfort features present in these tombs, it would seem as though this movement only served the functional purpose of clearing more space for new bodies. The wide variety of grave goods found at Azor do bear some similarity with those found in the Second Temple tombs, but only in the fact that many of them could be considered personal possessions and daily use items. Because of the lack of similarity in other aspects, like structure and mortuary practice, the vague similarity here is likely coincidental.

With these findings in mind, it would seem as though the tombs located in or near cemeteries in the highlands area of Judah bear greater resemblance to Second Temple period tombs. This is supported by the fact that Azor, the site furthest from the Highlands, also has the most discordance from the Second Temple tombs. Furthermore, the high number of bench tombs uncovered at Gibeon, the site closest to the Second Temple tombs, bears some similarity in both structure and mortuary practice. The similarity in tomb structure at the Aitun cemetery also supports this, as it is located relatively close to the highlands.

There is one branch of thinking I immediately follow that might explain this phenomenon. Following the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians during the 6th century BCE,

the Judean upper classes were exiled and deported to Babylonia.¹³⁷ They stayed there until the rise of the Persian Empire, where a province was initiated by the name of “Yehud,” although the province’s exact borders are still debated among scholars.¹³⁸ At the very least, we know that the province encapsulated the city of Jerusalem and the hill country, since Jerusalem became the capital of the province during the middle of the 5th century BCE.¹³⁹ The Judean deportees were allowed to travel back to Yehud, as there were no restrictions on the Judeans at this time.¹⁴⁰ However, only the upper classes were deported, as there is evidence that some Judeans remained in the territory. In fact, Biblical texts imply that the poorer population was likely left to till the land.¹⁴¹ This inevitably led to tension when the deportees returned to the land. My thinking is since the province of Yehud seems to encapsulate much of the highlands region, the people who remained in the territory during the exilic period may have been primarily from the highlands, where the use of bench and loculi tombs was commonplace. They could have continued the use of these tombs, perhaps developing their burial methods and including the practice of secondary burial and ossuaries. Then, when the deportees came back to Yehud during the beginning of the Persian Period, they possibly could have appropriated that mortuary practice. An argument can absolutely be made that the tension between the two groups would hinder the communication or spread of ideas between them, but geological necessity could also explain why the use of loculi tombs became so widespread. This, in turn, places more importance on the geological conditions present at a site, contrary to Bloch-Smith’s claim. Bloch-Smith stated in her book that although they were considered, geological conditions were not the determining factor in which tomb type

¹³⁷ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 548.

¹³⁸ Wright, “Remapping Yehud: The Borders of Yehud and the Genealogies of Chronicles,” 67.

¹³⁹ Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.,” 34.

¹⁴⁰ Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.,” 33.

¹⁴¹ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 548.

was used.¹⁴² Keeping this in mind, I think it is very possible that any deportees originating from outside the highlands region of Judah had to appropriate the local mortuary practice, as their own local practice could have either been impossible or required too much energy and resources for the highlands' geology. Since the only archaeological finds we currently have from the Persian province of Yehud are stamp seals and coins, this must remain hypothetical for now.¹⁴³ At the very least, it is incredibly unlikely that ossilegium originated in Babylonia and was brought to Judah during the return of the deportees. This is because following the Neo-Babylonian conquest, the Babylonians did not introduce a new populace into the region.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, no ossuaries were used in Neo-Babylonian burials. Some burials used coffins, but these coffins were bathtub and oval shaped, and typically made out of ceramic or clay.¹⁴⁵ These differ drastically from the wooden chest-shaped coffins characteristic of the Second Temple Period.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion:

These results indicate that although there could have been a meaningful secondary mortuary practice in Iron Age Judah, there is not enough evidence to directly connect it to the ossilegium of the Second Temple Period. The presence of comfort features, in the form of parapets and lamp niches, are indicative of a desire among Iron Age Judeans to comfort the spirits of the deceased, indicating a symbolic mortuary practice. However, all of the Iron Age sites examined are missing crucial elements of ossilegium, such as the use of ossuaries and wooden coffins. There does seem to be greater similarity between the Second Temple tombs and

¹⁴² Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 19.

¹⁴³ Timothy Harrison, "Palestine after the Iron Age: the Babylonian and Persian Periods (ca. 612-332 BCE)," (Lecture notes, University of Chicago, March 6, 2025).

¹⁴⁴ Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 548.

¹⁴⁵ Baker, "Neo-Babylonian Burials Revisited," 213, 216.

¹⁴⁶ Hachlili, "Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis," 115.

Iron Age tombs located near the highlands region of Judah. Whereas the tombs in Azor varied too significantly to bear much similarity with the Second Temple tombs, the tombs at Gibeon and Aitun proved to bear an intriguing amount of similarity in regards to tomb structure, as well as evidence of a symbolic secondary mortuary practice. Although this similarity could indicate a possible link, it could also very well stem from similar geological conditions between the Highlands and the Second Temple necropoli. If so, this would contest Elizabeth Bloch-Smith's claim that geological conditions were not the determining factor in tomb choice. If not, one has to wonder if the similarity in tomb structure is in some way related to the mass deportations of Judeans by the Babylonians, and their subsequent return to Yehud during the Persian period. Furthermore, my findings do not support an evolutionary chronology in tomb types between the Iron Age and Second Temple Period tombs. Following my initial speculation, the bench tombs of the Iron Age should have predated the loculi tombs of the same period. However, after analyzing the loculi tombs of Aitun, this appears to not be the case.

In order to further this research, different Iron Age sites from different zones throughout Judah should be analyzed. Even though none of the sites analyzed within this paper show a connection to the Second Temple Period ossilegium, that does not mean that a connection does not exist at all. The same sentiment goes for building a tomb chronology on the basis of comfort features. Even the loculi tombs at Aitun predate the widespread use of bench tombs, does not mean that loculi tombs will predate bench tombs at every Iron Age site.¹⁴⁷

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