

TWO ROCK-CUT BURIAL CAVES AND GREEK INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE QIDRON VALLEY, JERUSALEM

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Two rock-cut burial caves (I, II), located at the bottom of the western slope of the Qidron Valley (map ref. NIG 22270–82/63200–40, OIG 17270–82/13200–40; Fig. 1; Adawi 2005), were exposed during the excavation of a drainage channel (Fig. 2). They were documented in 2000, following inspection by the Israel Antiquities Authority.¹

Cave I had been breached by antiquities looters in the past and was, therefore, documented only, while Cave II was found sealed and was partially excavated. Two stone

slabs (tombstones or tomb closing slabs), bearing Greek inscriptions (Nos. 3 and 4, see below), were uncovered *ex situ* in the vicinity of the caves. There is no clear connection between the stone slabs and the burial caves; the slabs may have originated from other burials in the area.

The burial caves are part of the Late Roman and Byzantine cemetery situated on the slopes of the Qidron Valley (Avni 1997:107–109; Kloner 2001:130*, Sites 406, 407).

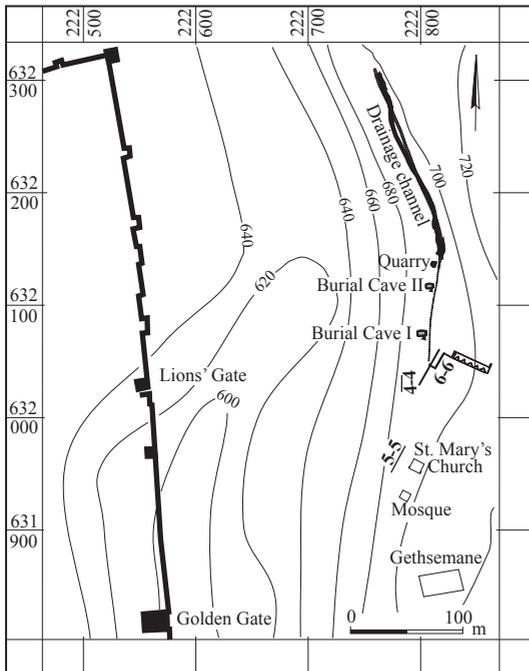
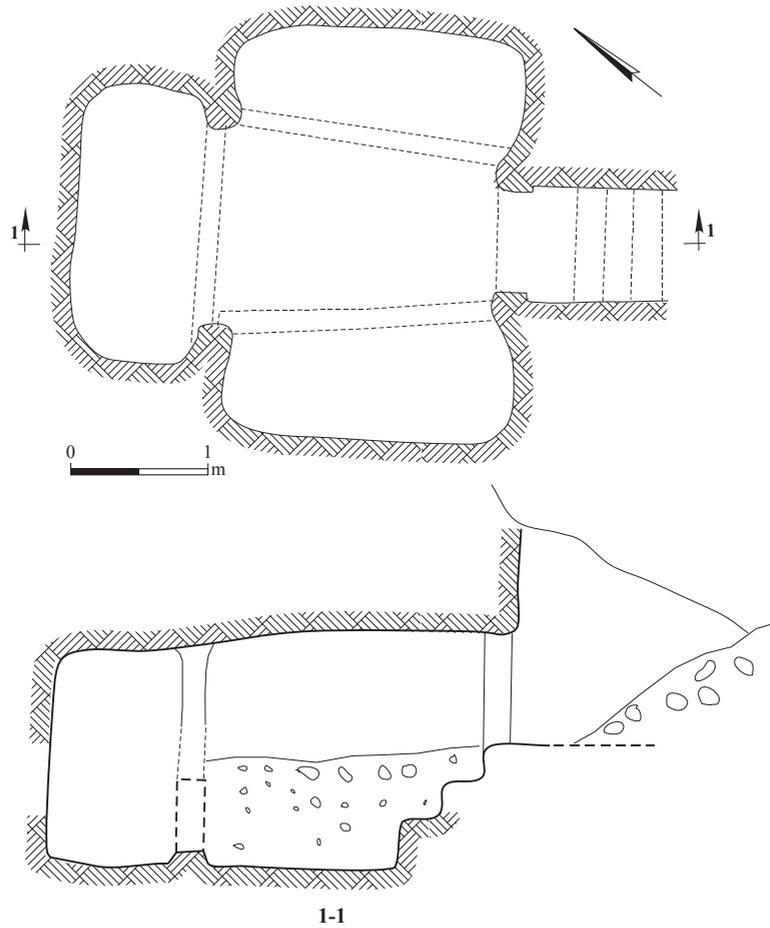


Fig. 1. Location map.



Fig. 2. Drainage channel, looking southwest.



Plan 1. Burial Cave I, plan and section.

BURIAL CAVE I (Plan 1)

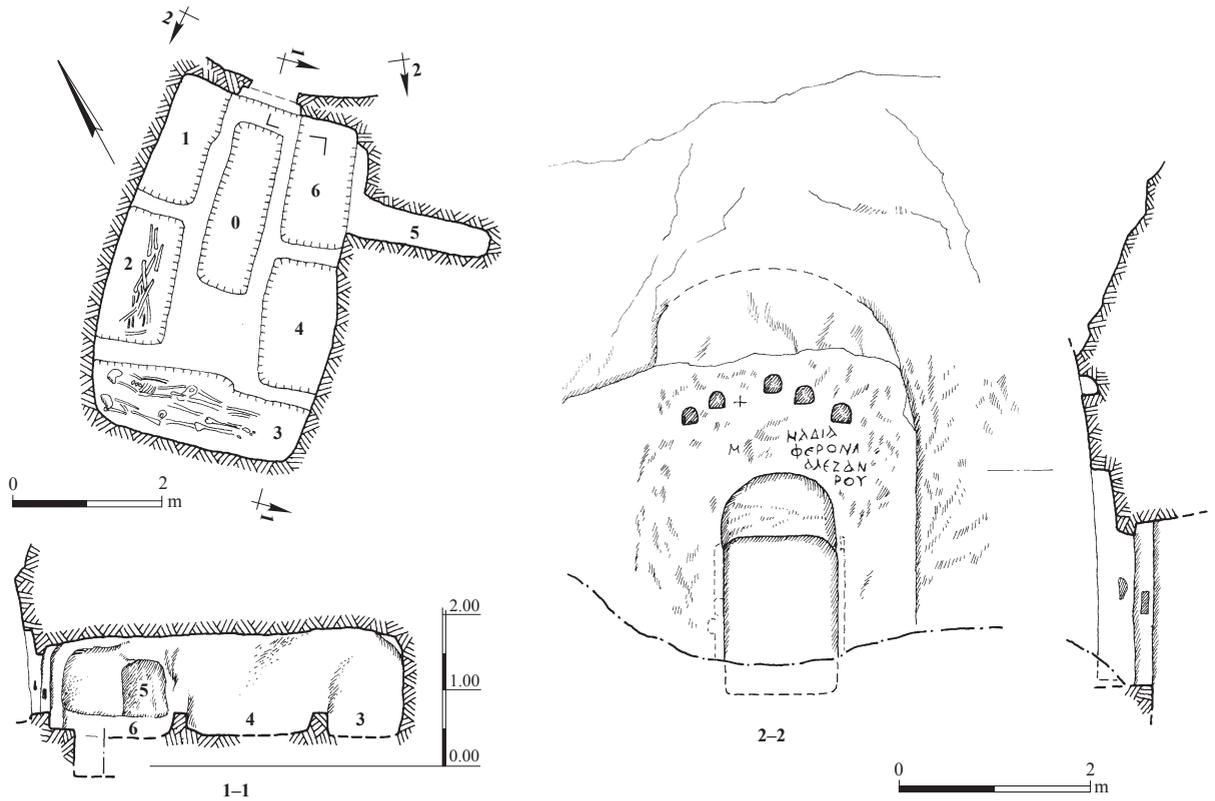
The entrance of the cave was hewn in a south-facing bedrock wall. The entrance led into a nearly square burial chamber (1.5 × 1.5 m) with three arcosolia cut into three of its walls. The cave had been opened and looted in the past and had subsequently filled with soil. No finds were recovered. The plan of the cave suggests a Late Roman–Byzantine date (Avni 1997:38–40).

BURIAL CAVE II (Plan 2)

The entrance to the cave was hewn in an east-facing facade (Fig. 3), which apparently continued the line of the stone quarry. The facade was purposely covered in antiquity

with a soil fill that contained marble chips, stone debris and two coins, one from 569/70 CE, and one from 1361 CE (see Ariel, this volume: Nos. 11, 13). Five niches (c. 0.15 × 0.15 m, 0.15 m deep), perhaps for lamps, were carved in the facade above the opening; similar niches were cut in the wall above the entrance to a Byzantine tomb in the Ben Hinnom Valley (see Macalister 1900:247). A small cross was incised between the second and third niches from the left. A Greek inscription (No. 1; Figs. 4, 15) was carved beneath the niches, above the right side of the entrance.

The arched entrance of the cave (c. 0.60 × 1.15 m) was fitted with a stone closing slab, bearing a Greek inscription (No. 2; Figs. 3, 16). The slab was found *in situ*, still carefully



Plan 2. Burial Cave II, plan and sections.



Fig. 3. Entrance to Burial Cave II during excavation, with stone slab *in situ*.

sealed with white plaster; a coin, dated 572/3–573/4 CE (see Ariel, this volume: No. 12), was embedded in this plaster. The inner part of the



Fig. 4. Facade and entrance to Burial Cave II; notice cross between niches and Greek inscription.

entrance is rectangular (c. 0.55×0.80 m), with a carefully worked lintel and jambs.

Inside the cave, a juglet was found *in situ*, hanging on an iron nail set in the eastern wall of the cave, south of the entrance (Figs. 5, 13, 14:1). A glass bottle (Fig. 11:4), also *in situ*, lay on the inner side of the entrance threshold.

From the entrance, one descends to the nearly rectangular burial chamber (wall lengths: c. 4.5, 2.85, 4.7, 2.55 m) with a central passage. Six burial troughs were cut into the chamber floor: one in its center (No. 0; 0.7×2.2 m, 0.5 m deep; Fig. 6; this trough may also have



Fig. 5. Burial Cave II, juglet *in situ*, hanging on iron nail, near opening.



Fig. 6. Burial Cave II, burial chamber, looking northeast.

served as the passage); and two along each side wall (Nos. 1 and 2 along the northern wall, and Nos. 4 and 6 along the southern; each c. 1.7 × 0.9 m, 0.2 m deep). The final trough (No. 3; 2.9 × 0.9 m, 0.3 m deep) was hewn the length of the short, western wall, opposite the entrance. The troughs were separated by low partition walls, c. 0.2 m wide and c. 0.2 m high.

The burial troughs, of which only Nos. 1, 4, and 6 were completely excavated, contained human remains (Fig. 7; see Nagar, this volume). Two coins were retrieved from Trough 0, dated to the reigns of Justin I (see Ariel, this volume: No. 9) and Justinian I (527–538 CE; see Ariel, this volume: No. 10). A bronze ring was found in Trough 6 (Fig. 14:2) and the latch of a bronze clasp (Fig. 14:3) came from Trough 2.

Four glass bottles (Figs. 8, 10–12) were found on the low partition wall, between burial Trough 4 and the central Trough 0.

A vaulted *kokh* was hewn in the southern wall of the cave (No. 5; Fig. 9). The *kokh* was found empty. *Kokhim* are a characteristic feature of the Second Temple-period tombs in the



Fig. 7. Burial Cave II, Trough 4, with articulated human bones *in situ*, looking southwest.



Fig. 8. Burial Cave II, glass bottles on partition wall between Trough 0 and Trough 4, looking southeast.



Fig. 9. Burial Cave II, vaulted *kokh* located in the southern wall of the cave.

Jerusalem area and elsewhere, while *kokhim* clearly dated to the Byzantine period are rare (Avni 1997:50–51).

The Finds

Human remains of 27 individuals, 17 children and 10 adults were found in the three burial troughs that were examined (Nos. 1, 4 and 6; see Nagar, this volume). The other troughs contained undisturbed articulated bones which were not examined due to ultra-orthodox intervention.

The ten objects found in the cave comprise five glass vessels, one pottery juglet, one ring and a bronze clasp latch, presented below, and two coins (see Ariel, this volume).

*Glass Finds.*²— Burial Cave II yielded five intact glass bottles. All the bottles are free-blown (Figs. 10–12). Bottle No. 1 is made of a yellowish greenish glass with white and silver

iridescence, and Nos. 2–5 are made of greenish translucent glass with white iridescence.

Bottle Nos. 1 and 2 have a rounded rim, a neck that flares at the top, a pear-shaped body and a concave bottom (Fig. 10:1, 2). These bottles are similar to Barag's Type 15:12, from the second half of the third–first half of the fourth centuries CE (Barag 1970:191, Pl. 42), which apparently evolved into Barag's Type 15:25, dated to the fifth and sixth centuries CE (Barag 1970:21–36, Pl. 4-7; 195, Pl. 43).

Bottle No. 3 (Fig. 11:3) has the same shape and proportions as Nos. 1 and 2, but is smaller and bears a row of parallel vertical ribs. This bottle is similar to Barag's Type 15:1-2, dated to the fourth century CE (Barag 1970:191, Pl. 42).

Bottle No. 4 (Fig. 11:4; Reg. No. 1020), the sole bottle found inside the threshold of the burial, has characteristics similar to those of Nos. 1 and 2, but its body is globular. This bottle apparently belongs to Barag's Type 15:24, dated to the fourth century CE (Barag 1970:194–195, Pl. 43).

Bottle No. 5 (Fig. 12:5) has a funnel-shaped mouth, an elongated neck with parallel threads, a squat body and a concave bottom. The bottle belongs to Barag's Type 15:1-29, and also resembles Type 15:21, dated mainly to the sixth century CE (Barag 1970:193–194, Pl. 42).

In summary, these bottles belong to Barag's Types 15:1-29, 25, 24, 1-12, 12 (Barag 1970:187–196, Pl. 41-43), dated to the Byzantine period—the fourth to sixth centuries CE. Similar bottles were recently found in tombs and monasteries from the Byzantine period in the Jerusalem region.

Pottery and Small Finds.— The intact juglet (Figs. 5; 13), which was found hanging on an iron nail (Fig. 14:1) set into the left side of the entrance wall, is of poor workmanship and made of coarse red-brown ware, although its shape is similar to that of FBW juglets. Magness dates this type from the mid-sixth to the eighth centuries CE (Magness 1993:239–240, Form 2A).

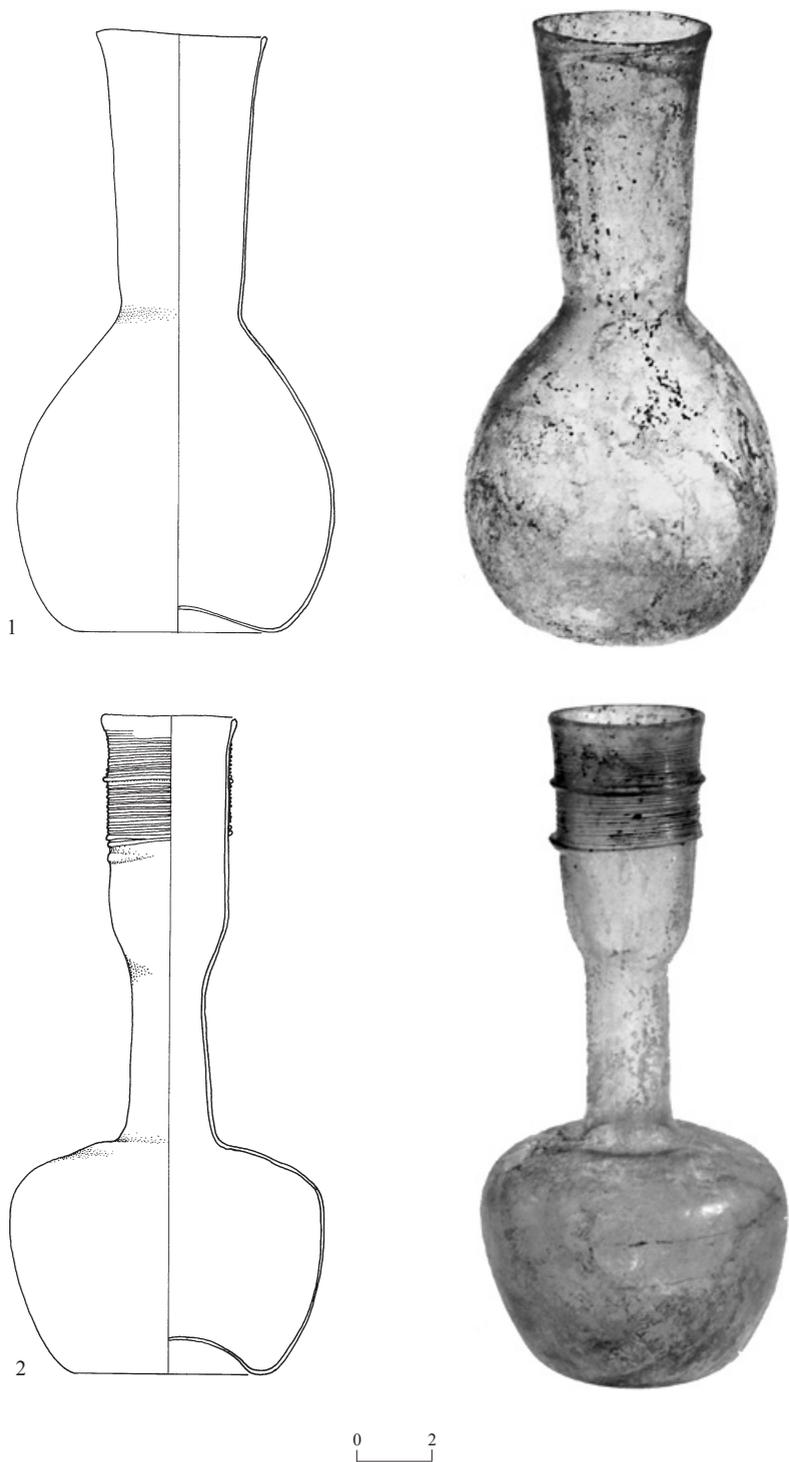


Fig. 10. Burial Cave II, glass bottles.

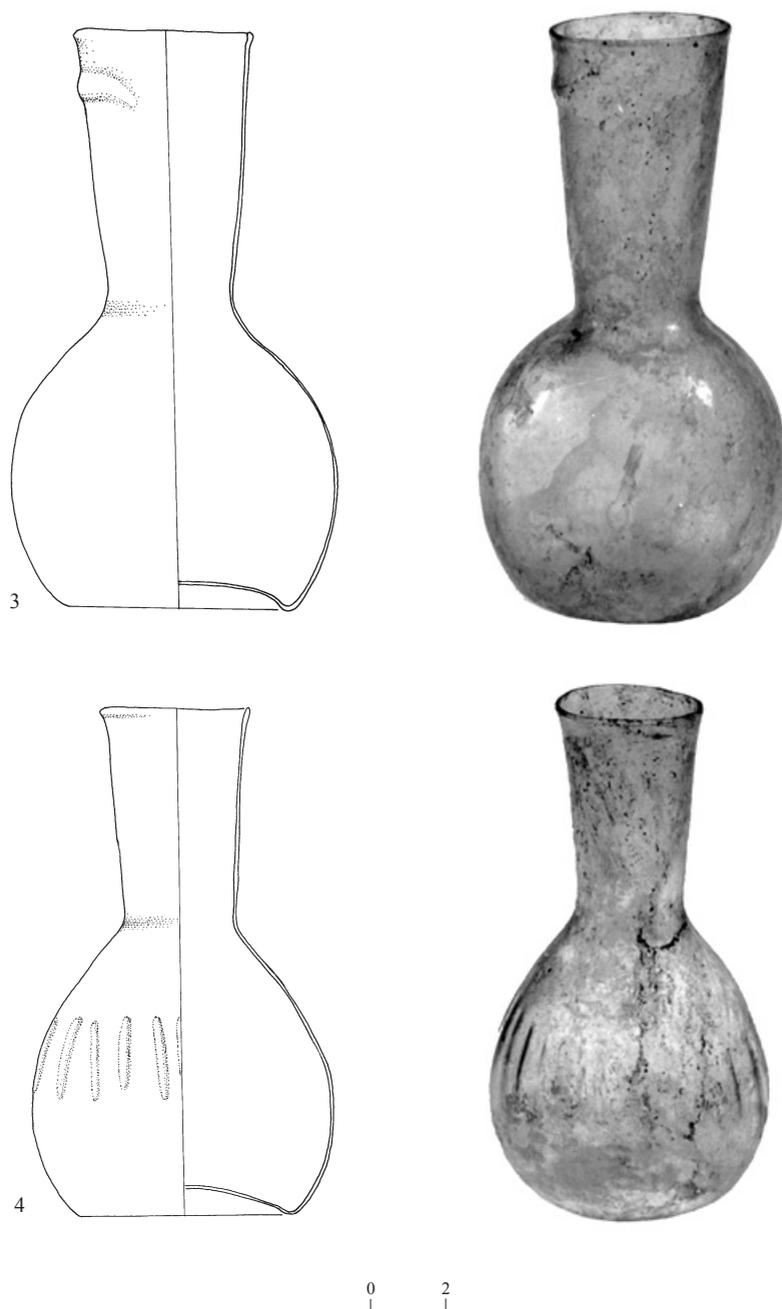


Fig. 11. Burial Cave II, glass bottles.

A bronze finger ring (Fig. 14:2) was recovered from Trough 6. The center of the ring bears incised letters and designs, perhaps intended to be used as a private seal. A christogram decorates its center; to its left, the letter S

(digamma) and the abbreviation mark /; to its right, the letter Λ (or A).

The latch of a bronze clasp latch (Fig. 14:3), was discovered in Trough 2. The latch consists of a heart-shaped tablet with a schematic floral



Fig. 12. Burial Cave II, glass bottle.

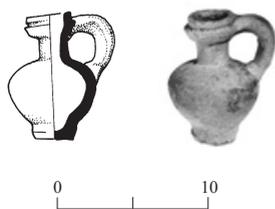


Fig. 13. Burial Cave II, pottery juglet.

motif incised on its face. At one end it has an attached perforated loop, to which the axis was fastened, and on its back it has remains of a perforated protrusion (for other latches with different decorations, see Zitronblat and Geva 2003:357, 363, M 34, 35).

Coins.— Nine of the eighteen coins recovered during the excavations may belong to the use-period of the burial cave, although only two were found in the cave (see Ariel, this volume).³



Fig. 14. Burial Cave II, small finds: (1) iron nail; (2) bronze ring; (3) bronze clasp latch.



Fig. 15. Inscription No. 1 above the entrance to Burial Cave II.

THE INSCRIPTIONS

Inscription No. 1 (Plan 2; Figs. 3, 4, 15)
Carved on the rough-chiseled bedrock facade,
above the entrance of Burial Cave II.

1. +
2. ΜΑΔΙΑ
3. ΦΕΡΟΝ/
4. ΑΛΕΞΑΝ
5. ΡΟΥ

+ Μ(νῆμ)α Δια | φέρον/ (τες) Αλεξαν(δ) | ρου
“Private tomb of Alexander”

The abbreviation Μ(νῆμ)α was found on inscriptions from Jaffa (Clermont-Ganneau 1896:143, 144, 146). According to Leah Di Segni (pers. comm.), the paleography of this inscription points to a date not after the mid-sixth century CE.

Inscription No. 2 (Fig. 16)

Reg. No. 1016; IAA No. 2000-2370.

Inscribed on the *in situ* closing slab of Burial Cave II. Measurements: length 110 cm; width 58 cm; thickness 9 cm. The upper right part of the slab is weathered.

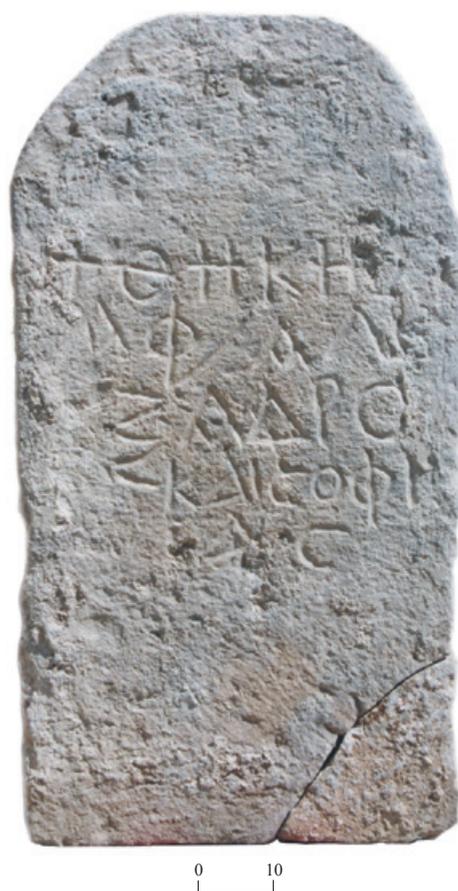


Fig. 16. Inscription No. 2, on closing slab of Burial Cave II.



0 10

Fig. 17. Inscription No. 3.

1. + ΘΗΚΗ [ΔΙ]
2. ΑΦΛΛ[Ε]
3. ΞΑΔΡΟ[Σ]
4. ΚΑΙ ΣΟΦΙ
5. ΑΣ

+ Θήκη [Δι] | αφ(έροντες) Αλ[ε] | ξα(ν)δρο[ς] |
και Σοφι | ασ
“Private tomb of Alexander and Sofia”

Inscription No. 3 (Fig. 17)

Reg. No. 1018; IAA No. 2000-2371.

Inscribed on a stone slab, found in a fill in the area of the tombs, not *in situ*. Measurements: length 95 cm; width 68 cm; thickness 25 cm.

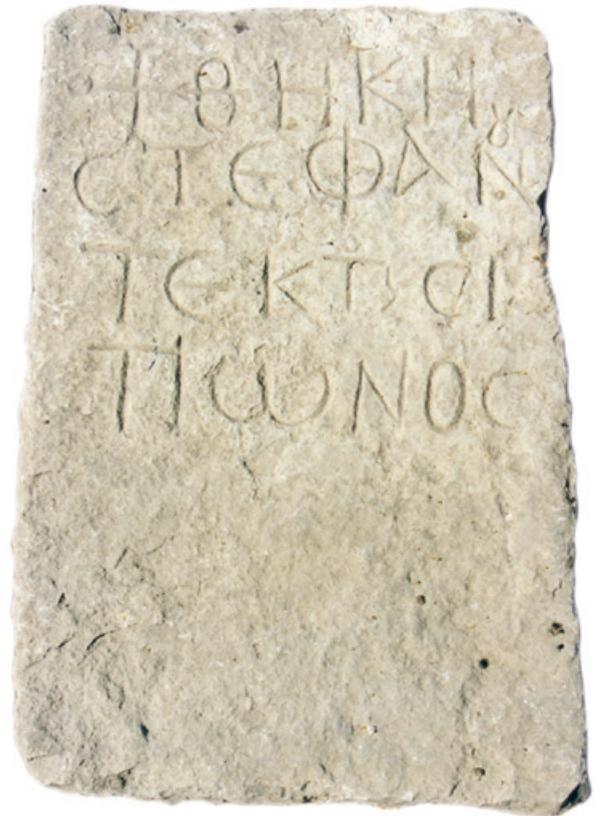
1. +
2. ΜΝΗΜΙΟΝ ΛΑΠΑ
3. ΔΙΟΥ ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΥ

+ Μνημ(ε)ῖον | Λα(μ)πα | διου Πρεσβυτέρου
“Tomb of Lampadius the elder”

According to Leah Di Segni (pers. comm.), the paleography of this inscription points to a late fourth century–first half of fifth century CE date.

Inscription No. 4 (Fig. 18)

Reg. No. 1017; IAA No. 2000-2372.



0 10

Fig. 18. Inscription No. 4.

Inscribed on a stone slab, found in a fill in the area of the tombs, not *in situ*. Measurements: length 107 cm; width 71 cm; thickness 19 cm.

1. + ΘΗΚΗ
2. ΣΤΕΦΑΝ
3. ΤΕΚΤῸ CΙ
4. ΤΙΩΝΟC

+ Θήκη | Στεφαν(ου) τεκτ(ονος) Cι | τιωνος
 “Tomb of Stephanos the builder [son of?] Sition”, or “Tomb of Stephanos the builder [from?] Sition”

According to Leah Di Segni (pers. comm.), the paleography of this inscription points to a date not before the sixth century CE.

CONCLUSIONS

Burial Cave I, based solely on its plan, as it lacked finds, can only be dated generally to the Late Roman–Byzantine periods. The architecture and finds of Burial Cave II, however, date its use to the Byzantine period—apparently the fifth–sixth centuries CE. Both caves probably served Christian families dwelling in Jerusalem.

NOTES

¹ Burial Cave I was discovered by Sa‘id el-‘Amleh and briefly excavated on May 31, 2000. Cave II and the tombstones were found by Haled Abu Ta‘a of the IAA. Both authors documented and partly excavated Burial Cave II on behalf of the IAA (Permit No. A-3240) in 2000, with the participation of Yossi Naggar (physical anthropology), Vadim Essman, Tania Kornfeld and Natalia Zak (surveying and drafting), Tsila Sagiv, Mariana Salzberger, Clara

Amit and Abraham Graicer (photography), Amir Ganor, Amit Re‘em and Sa‘id el-‘Amleh, as well as Gideon Avni and Leah Di Segni.

² We thank Yael Gorin-Rosen and Tamar Winter for helping us in the analysis of the glass finds.

³ Coins found in fills that are unrelated to the excavation of the burial caves during the salvage excavations (L100–L03, L106; Adawi 2005) appear in Ariel, this volume.

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