

## A MONUMENTAL BURIAL CAVE IN THE TEL ARZA NEIGHBORHOOD, JERUSALEM

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### INTRODUCTION

The Tel Arza neighborhood was built above the remains of the Second Temple period northern necropolis of Jerusalem. Many quarries and burial caves of this time span were documented here, as well as in the adjoining neighborhoods of Maḥanayyim, 'Ezrat Tora, Ha-Bukharim and Sanhedriyya (Fig. 1). Most notable is the group of monumental burial caves in the Sanhedrin Park, located c. 250 m to the north of the cave discussed below (Brandenburg 1926; Jotham-Rothschild 1952; 1954; Rahmani 1961; Kloner and Zissu 2007:399–424).

In 2013, during the archaeological inspection of construction work on 12 Ha-Rav Shim'on Ḥakham Street (map ref. 220774/633665; Fig. 1), a facade of an elaborate burial cave was partly revealed beneath an old building which was used as a winery. Following the demolition of the old building, and in preparation for the construction of an apartment building, the upper part of the facade was revealed carved within a dense white *meleke* limestone.<sup>1</sup> In 2014, a salvage excavation was carried out to uncover the facade and the courtyard of the burial cave, and a quarry (Baruch and Wiegmann 2013:445–448; 2014:191–199).<sup>2</sup> This facade was previously documented in 1935 by Galling, who also exposed its upper northern part and proposed a reconstruction without excavating its entire height or width (Galling 1936). The cave aroused much interest among scholars due to its unique facade; however, the facade was

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<sup>1</sup> The authors documented the facade with the assistance of Kfir Arviv (supervision) and Yakov Shmidov (drafting). Due to difficult conditions during the exposure of the facade, it was drawn from photographs, based on measurements taken in the field.

<sup>2</sup> The excavation (Permit No. A-6983) was conducted on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) under the direction of Alexander Wiegmann (including field photographs), with the assistance of Kfir Arviv (supervision), Benjamin Dolinka (pottery processing), Natalya Zak (preparation of Fig. 1), Avraham Hajian (surveying and drafting of Plan 1), Yakov Shmidov (drafting of Plan 1 and Figs. 11, 12), Nissan Nehama (administration), Orit Peleg-Barkat (architectural style and decoration), Leah Di Segni (reading of Greek/Latin inscription) and Nitzan Amitai-Preiss (reading of Arabic letters).

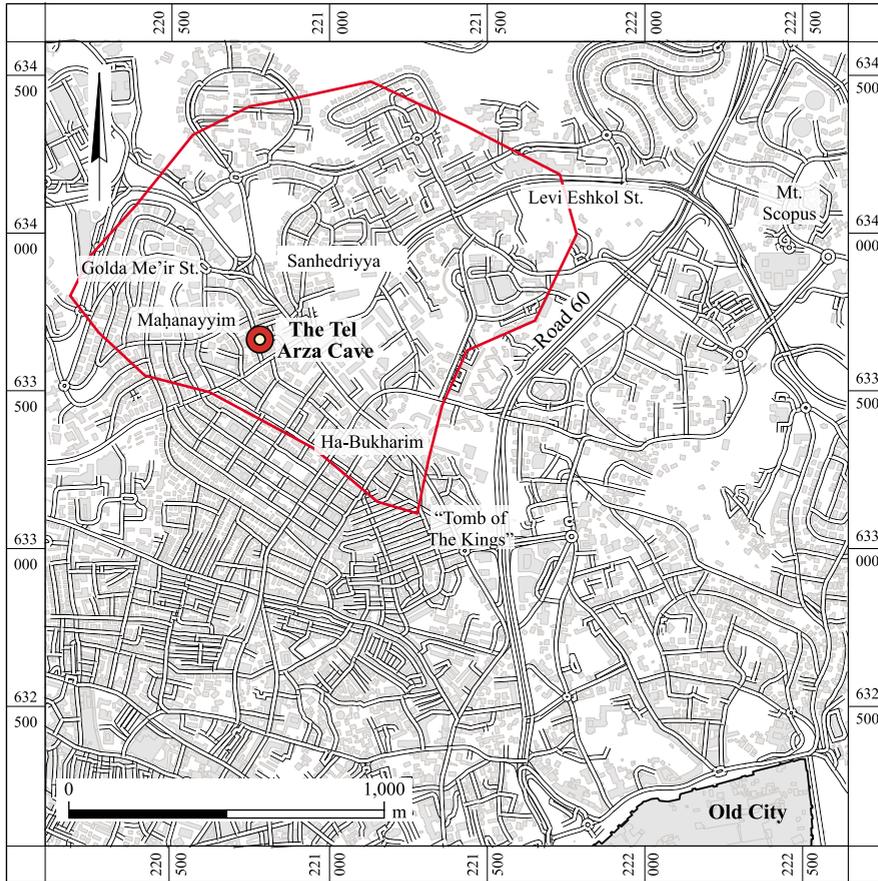


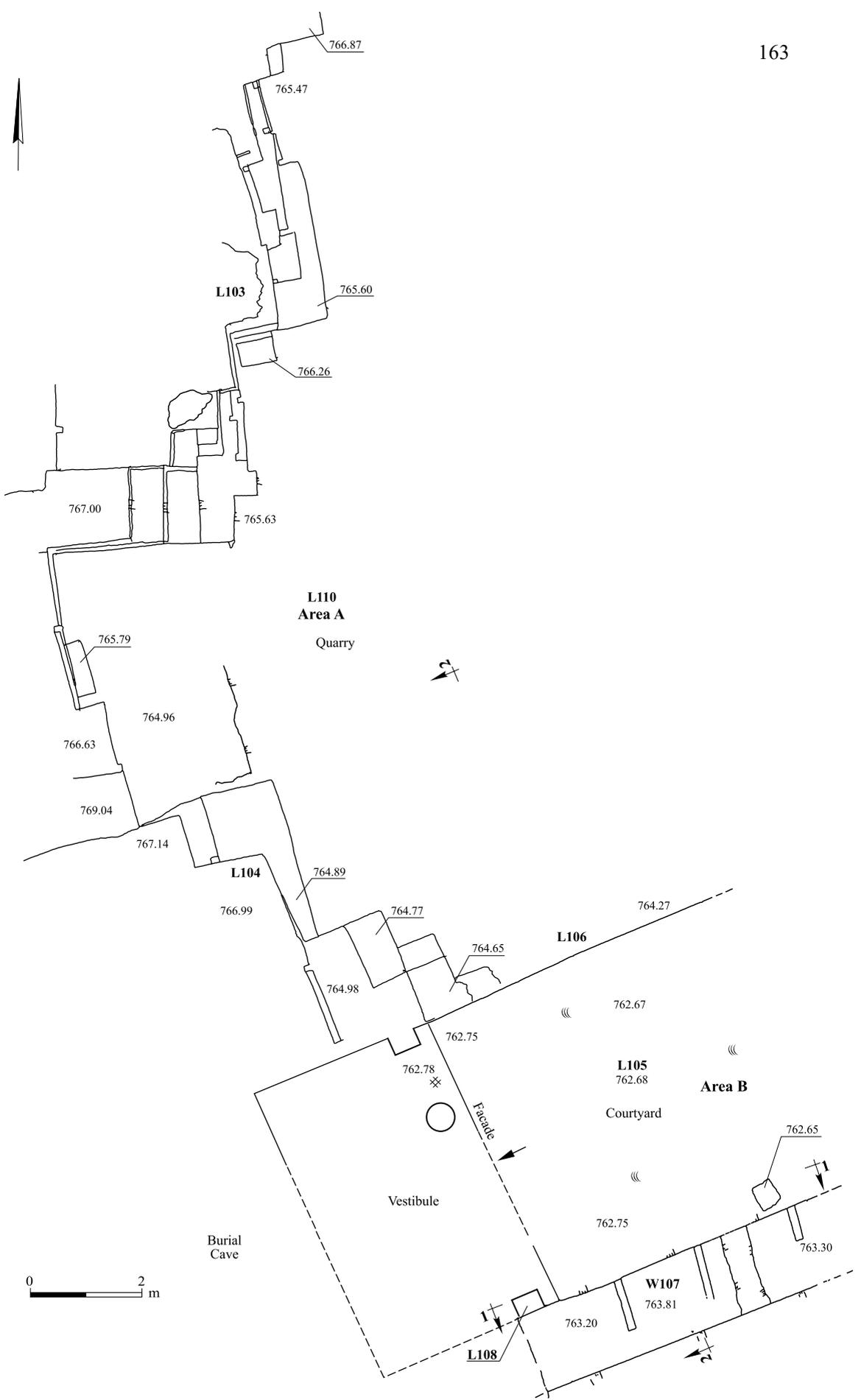
Fig. 1. Location map of the burial cave within the precincts of the Second Temple period necropolis (marked in red).

concealed under modern construction shortly after Galling's documentation and was thought to have been destroyed (Avigad 1950–1951:103–104; Kloner and Zissu 2007:48, 422–423).

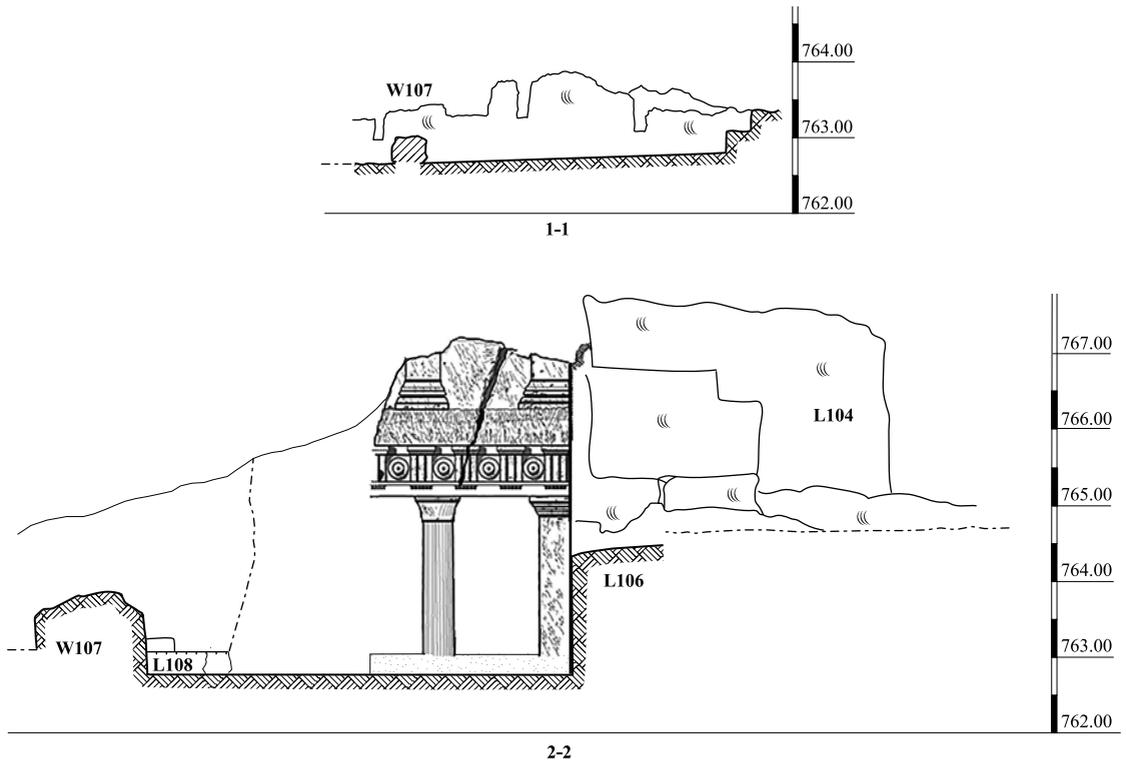
### THE EXCAVATION

Two areas were excavated (Plan 1): in Area A, to the north and northeast of the facade, remains of a quarry (Loci 103, 104, 106, 110) were found; and in Area B, to the east of the facade, the courtyard of the burial cave (L105) was exposed.

A trench (c. 1.5 m wide) was excavated along the width of the facade, reaching down to the floor level of the courtyard. After documenting the remains of the facade, a concrete wall was built adjacent to it to seal-off the burial cave; only then were the courtyard and quarry excavated.



Plan 1. General plan and sections.



Plan 1. (cont.).

The exposure of the facade revealed new details, which triggered a reevaluation of its architectural decorations (see Peleg-Barkat, this volume) and allowed us to propose a more accurate reconstruction thereof (see below).

### THE QUARRY (Area A)

The remains of the quarry (L103, L104, L106, L110; c. 9 × 20 m; Plan 1) were obscured by modern construction. The quarrying activities were apparently carried out along the natural slope that descends eastward, to the upper Nahal Sanhedriyya. The eastern part of the quarry (L110) comprised roughly flat bedrock, sloping gradually to the south, with few scattered shallow severance channels. Some parts of the cement foundations of the modern winery were cast directly on bedrock; a soil accumulation above bedrock contained modern refuse mixed with dark brown soil, small fieldstones and quarrying debitage.

On the northern side of the excavated area (L103), below modern refuse and construction debris, an undisturbed deposit of dark brown soil covered the lower quarrying steps. The deposit contained quarrying debitage, small- to medium-sized fieldstones, a meager quantity of non-diagnostic body sherds characteristic of the Roman and Byzantine periods, and a few diagnostic body sherds dated to the Byzantine–Umayyad and Ottoman periods (not illustrated).



Fig. 2. The quarry, looking north.

The depth of this deposit did not exceed 0.5 m; however, along the southwestern side, which was not excavated due to safety constraints, this deposit reached a height of c. 2 m.

The northwestern side of the excavated area comprised quarrying steps which were higher toward the south (from c. 1.5 m high in L103 to c. 4.5 m high in L104; Fig. 2). The northern section of the quarry was probably used to extract medium-sized building stones ( $0.42 \times 0.55\text{--}0.63 \times 1.40$  m), whose outlines were preserved in the imprints of the severance channels (2–4 cm wide). The highest quarrying steps were uncovered in the southern section of the quarry (L104; 4.4 m high; Fig. 3). Although it was not possible to estimate the dimensions of the stones quarried in this part, the severance channels on the upper steps were up to 0.5 m deep, and therefore, the size of the stones quarried here seems to be similar to those quarried in the northern section.

We propose that the stones were uniform in size, arranged in small groups and extracted in rows by a small number of laborers. It seems that this quarry was used to extract medium-sized stones, as was the case in the other quarries nearby. The standard unit for measuring stones prior to their quarrying is not clear. Finkielsztejn (2009) suggested that it was a cubit of 0.425 m, which is different from the known measurement units of the Roman period and is smaller than the standard Roman cubit of 0.4436 m. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the extraction of uniform-sized stones was intended to cater for specific building requirements and thus, attests to systematic and well-planned quarrying activities executed by highly skilled stonecutters.



Fig. 3. The quarry, looking west.

### **The Burial Cave (Area B; Plan 1)**

The burial cave is adjacent to the southern section of the quarry, where the quarrying steps are the highest. The facade of the cave (5.72–5.76 m wide) faces generally east onto a courtyard (Fig. 4).

#### *The Courtyard*

The courtyard was only partly exposed (6.50 × 5.72 m), continuing to the east beneath the foundations of the building on 10 Ha-Rav Shim'on Hakhham Street; its total length is unknown. The floor of the courtyard (L105) was smooth, with a slight decline eastward.

On the northern side of the courtyard was a rock-hewn step (L106; 1.6–1.9 m high; Fig. 5) and on its southern side was an upright rock wall (W107; Plan 1: Section 1–1; Fig. 6; 1.4–1.5 m wide, 0.55–1.10 high), which was chiseled on both sides. The total height of southern W107 could not be exposed due to safety concerns. It seems that both courtyard walls were originally higher, but after the burial cave went out of use, they were extensively quarried. This is evident especially in W107, where several deep severance channels survived.

An accumulation of dark soil (L105), similar to the one revealed in the quarry, covered the courtyard; it contained small- to medium-sized fieldstones and quarrying debitage mixed with modern refuse. A cement column, which had supported the winery, was cast



Fig. 4. The courtyard, looking north.



Fig. 5. The northern step of the courtyard (L106), looking north.



Fig. 6. The southern wall of the courtyard (W107), looking south.

directly on the surface of the southeastern part of the courtyard. A very small quantity of pottery was retrieved from the accumulation, comprising ribbed body sherds characteristic of the Roman and Byzantine periods and a few body sherds from the Byzantine–Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman periods. A single small, chiseled building stone ( $0.30 \times 0.37 \times 0.50$  m) was found on the surface of the southeastern part of the courtyard.

#### *The Facade and Vestibule*

The northern part of a two-story *distylos in antis* facade was preserved (2.65 m wide; 4.6 m high; Figs. 7, 8) to less than half of its original width (for a detailed description of the facade, see Peleg-Barkat, this volume).

At the northern end of the facade, a rectangular baseless *anta* (0.39 m wide, 0.46 m deep, 2.29 m high) was attached to the northern wall of the vestibule. To the south of the *anta* is a baseless hewn column (upper diam. 0.4 m, lower diam. 0.42 m, 2.29 m high).<sup>3</sup> A deep cut was noticed below the capital—probably the result of an attempt to remove the column for reuse.<sup>4</sup> The floor of the vestibule was 0.22 m higher than the floor of the courtyard (Fig. 9). In the southwestern corner of the courtyard, remains of a base (L108) were found standing on the floor of the vestibule. This was the base of the southern *anta* of the *distylos in antis*

<sup>3</sup> It was impossible to accurately measure the lower diameter as the back portion of the column was concealed by a soil accumulation, which was not excavated.

<sup>4</sup> Galland did not note this cut. Therefore, it was either made after he visited the cave, or it was concealed below a soil accumulation at the time of his visit. The robbing of architectural elements in modern times or in antiquity may be the cause for the destruction of the southern half of the facade.



Fig. 7. Facade of the burial cave, looking west.



Fig. 8. Lower part of the facade, looking west.



Fig. 9. The floor of the vestibule.



Fig. 10. Capital of the southern pilaster.

facade of the burial cave, preserved to a height of 0.35 m and attached the southern wall of the courtyard (W107). The width of the base (0.39 m) and the distance between it and the eastern edge of the vestibule floor (0.3 m) are identical to those of the northern *anta* base. A fragment of the capital of the southern *anta*, identical in style to the capital of the northern *anta*, was discovered in a soil accumulation nearby (Fig. 10).

The columns and *antae* supported a Doric entablature (1.15 m high) comprising a very low architrave and a frieze (0.52 m high), decorated with metopes and triglyphs (Figs. 11–13). The metopes between the triglyphs are carved with discs comprising two concentric circular surfaces, four of which were preserved. Slight differences between the profiles and measurements of the inner circles of the discs indicate variations in style. The cornice that had once decorated the facade above the frieze is c. 0.5 m high. Unfortunately, it was deliberately destroyed; hence, its original shape and style are unknown.

The upper story of the facade contains a relief of two engaged pilasters, protruding 6–7 cm from the rock surface that was finely smoothed by a toothed chisel. The northern pilaster (50.5 cm wide, 0.67 m base width, 0.75 m preserved height) was apparently attached to the northern wall of the courtyard, which was not preserved this high. The distance between the northern and southern pilasters (0.47 m wide, 0.67 m base width, 0.75 m preserved height) is 1.2 m. According to Galling, approximately 1.35 m above the bottom of the northern pilaster base, the wall had a rough, unchiseled prominent face (Galling 1936:117, Abb. 4; Taf. 4:C). No capitals were carved and it seems that the work on the second story of the facade was never completed. The upper part of the second story was destroyed sometime between Galling's visit and our excavation.

It is difficult to completely reconstruct the upper story of the facade. Galling suggested two alternatives: a gabled structure or a flat architrave (Galling 1936:118, Abb. 5). In our opinion, it was designed to be crowned with a *nefesh* structure, or a stela. Avigad claimed that the common form of the *nefesh* structure in the classical period was a pyramidal stela; he further suggested that the sealed stela is referred to in the Mishnah (Oholot 7:1): “a solid

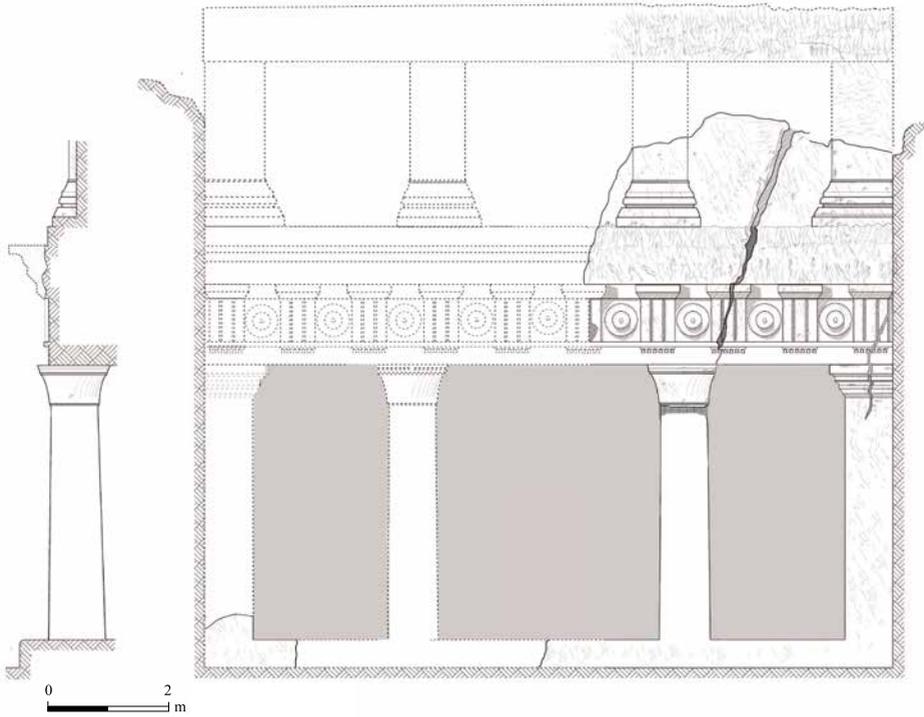


Fig. 11. Reconstruction of the facade, looking west (prepared by Yuval Baruch, Alexander Wiegmann and Yakov Shmidov).



Fig. 12. Detail of the frieze with the engraved inscriptions, looking west.



Fig. 13. A disc curved in a metope between triglyphs, looking west.

tomb monument, a person who touches it from the side remains clean” (Avigad 1954:66–78, 130–133). In Israel, and in the neighboring countries, very few examples of *nefesh* structures are neither pyramidal nor conical (Peleg-Barkat 2013). It is possible that the second story of the facade of the Tel Arza burial cave represented a raised, sealed base, its facade decorated in relief with attached pilasters, which supported a pyramidal stela. This stela may have been stepped, as for example in the Nabatean Ḥamrath cave at es-Suwēda in Jordan (Avigad 1954:67–68). Another possible reconstruction is that the upper part of the facade had a sealed rectangular structure. Barag (2003:89) reconstructed a *nefesh* in the form of a rectangular tower for the Bene Ḥezir cave. A similar structure was documented by Conder and Kitchener (1883:413) in the southern Hebron hills, on the facade of a burial cave near Eshtamo‘a.

Although the vestibule of the burial cave was not excavated, it was possible to examine its ceiling and the upper parts of its western and northern walls. The walls and ceiling are straight and smooth, and carved at precise right angles. The distance between the back wall and the facade is 3.15 m. The entrance from the vestibule into the burial cave was



Fig. 14. Incised crosses near the top of the western wall of the vestibule, looking west.



Fig. 15. Incised cross on the right side of the third triglyph from the north, looking west.

not detected. The vestibule was filled with an accumulation of dark brown soil, stones and modern rubbish up to a height of c. 0.5 m below the ceiling. Two large crosses were incised near the top of the vestibule wall; their height indicates that the incisions were made after the lower part of the vestibule was already covered with soil (Fig. 14). A small cross was also incised on the facade, on the right side of the third triglyph from the north (Fig. 15).

## DISCUSSION

*Historical and Geographic Contexts*

Kloner and Zissu suggested that the Second Temple period burial caves were located within private farmsteads, whose land was purchased by the residents of nearby settlements (Kloner and Zissu 2007:32). Following Jotham-Rothschild (1952:26), also Kloner and Zissu noticed the connection between the burial caves and the quarries of this period (Kloner and Zissu 2007:15–19), as indeed is the case of the Tel Arza burial cave, located within an ashlar-stone quarry.

Burial caves hewn within quarries are a well-known phenomenon in Second Temple period Jerusalem, mainly in the necropolis spanning the Sanhedriyya–Maḥanayyim area; most of the Sanhedriyya burial caves were hewn in the walls of active quarries (Bar-Nathan 2008; Sion and Rapuano 2013; Wiegmann, ‘Adawi and ‘Oz 2014). The ancient quarries in the Sanhedriyya–Maḥanayyim region are known to have produced stones that were used in the construction of public and private buildings in Jerusalem during the Second Temple period, from the second century BCE to the second century CE. However, its main period of use was from King Herod’s reign to the mid-first century CE (Bar-Nathan 2008; Mizrahi 2014). There is no doubt that the abundance of masonry stone quarries at these sites should be related to the intensive building activities carried out throughout Jerusalem during the Second Temple period, especially in the days of King Herod. In some quarries, the finds indicate that the stones were used in the construction of public buildings, whereas most of the quarries produced small and medium-sized stones for the construction of private dwellings. It seems that the quarries went out of use once these vast public building activities had ceased.

Following Finkielsztein (2009), we suggest that after Hadrian re-established Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina, many quarries were turned into agricultural fields, and by the third–fourth centuries CE, they were assigned to military veterans. Finkielsztein considered that the agricultural activities, as well as some of the quarrying activities, continued until the end of the Byzantine period and perhaps until the Early Islamic period. Arabic letters, engraved high on the facade of the Tel Arza burial cave (see Amitai-Preiss, this volume), might support the continuation of these activities at the site in the Early Islamic period.

We further suggest that at Tel Arza, the owner of the family burial cave also exploited the area as an economic resource by operating a masonry stone quarry on site. It seems that one of the important figures of this family was named Eliyahu (אליהו), whose name was engraved on the architrave of the burial cave facade (see Di Segni, this volume). The magnificent burial caves hewn within the quarries of the Sanhedriyya–Maḥanayyim necropolis are evidence that masonry stone quarries were a source of economic wealth during the Second Temple period.

*Chronology*

The Tel Arza burial cave exhibits one of the most elaborate facades among the Second Temple period burial caves in Jerusalem. In our opinion, the closest parallel is the Doric

facade of the tomb of Bene Ḥezir in the Kidron Valley (for other parallels, see Peleg-Barkat, this volume).

A comparison between these two facades reveals close similarities in architectural style and proportions (Baruch and Wiegmann 2013:197). Avigad, in his discussion of the Bene Ḥezir tomb, noted that the exclusive application of the pure Doric order in the facade stands in contrast to other monumental burial caves in the Kidron Valley that incorporate a mixture of elements from several orders. Accordingly, he dated the Bene Ḥezir burial cave to the second century BCE—first quarter of the first century BCE (Avigad 1954:51–59). Later, he revised this dating to the end of the Hasmonean period, while the Hebrew inscription on the architrave was dated to the beginning of Herod's reign (Avigad 1993:750). Barag suggested that the Bene Ḥezir burial cave was used by a priestly family until the last generation before the destruction of the Second Temple (Barag 2003:94–95); however, following, an analysis of the architectural components of similar facades (see Peleg–Barkat, this volume), the Tel Arza burial cave seems to be later than the tomb of Bene Ḥezir—dating from the time of King Herod until 70 CE.

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