

THE BURIAL GROUND AT HORBAT ZA'AQ*

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INTRODUCTION

Horbat Za'aq is located in the southern Judean Shephelah, on a hill north of Kibbutz Lahav, on the eastern bank of Nahal Kelekh (map ref. NIG 187565/591340; OIG 137565/091340; Fig. 1). The site lies on soft Eocene chalk bedrock, covered by a thin layer of harder *nari* rock. Guérin, who visited the site in 1868 (1868–1869:244), described the ancient remains visible on the surface. His Arab escorts recounted that the site was named after a nearby ancient well (Arabic: *Bir Za'aq*). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the site was again visited, this time by Bliss and Macalister (1902: Pls. 94, 95), who described the vestiges of the buildings and the subterranean hiding complexes there.

Goren and Fabian (1988) excavated the village and the hiding complexes from the Roman and Byzantine periods, which are situated east of the burial ground. It should be noted that no remains of an Iron Age settlement have been found as yet, and it is possible that they lie buried beneath the ruins of the Arab village, which was deserted in 1948.

A short salvage excavation was conducted at the burial ground by David Alon in April 1976 (*HA* 1976),¹ following looting that severely damaged the rock-cut tombs and their contents. Based on the short report, it is sometimes unclear which tombs Alon excavated, and to which he assigned numbers.

During the years 1994–1996, some four weeks were spent at the site, cleaning and re-excavating some of the tombs excavated by Alon. This renewed excavation, directed by the author on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, was undertaken in order to complete the preliminary database of Alon, and prepare a final report of the excavation.² The original numbers assigned to the tombs by Alon were retained and new numbers were given to those without.

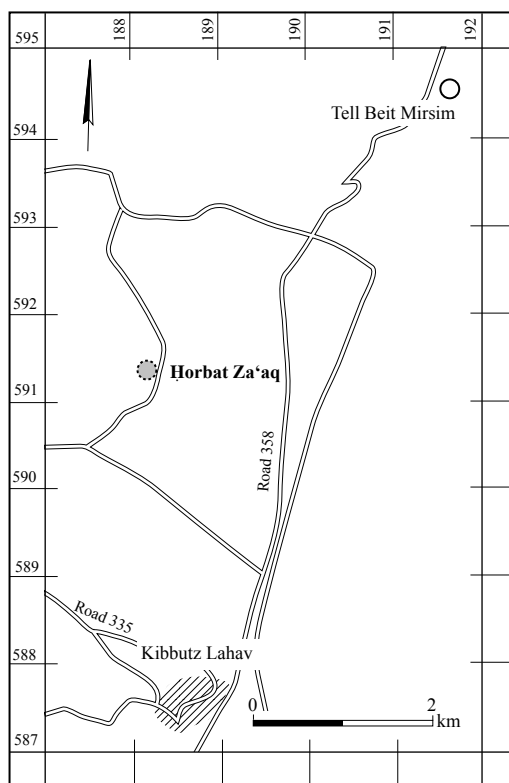
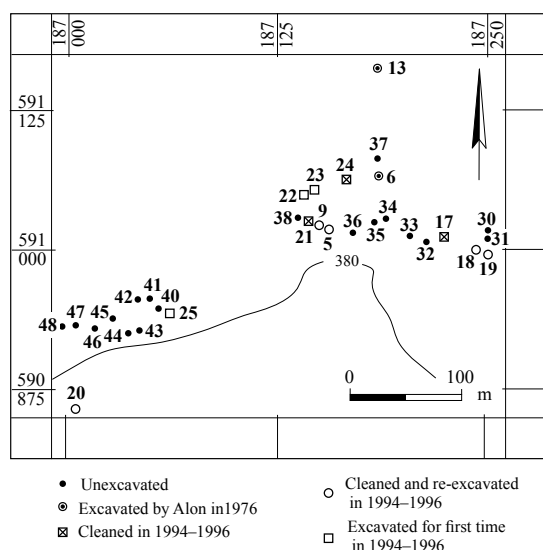


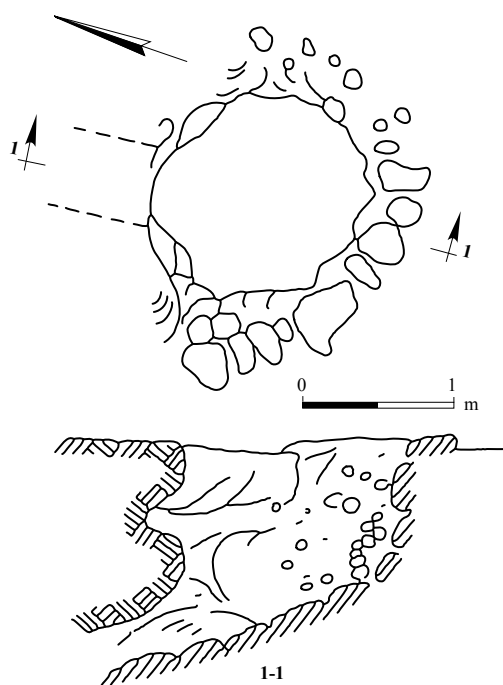
Fig. 1. Location map of the site.

*In memory of David Alon.

The burial ground comprises two clusters of rock-cut tombs, about 10 m apart (Plan 1). The roofs of some of the tombs have collapsed over the years, and others are today in danger of



Plan 1. Location map of the rock-cut tombs in the Horbat Za'aq burial ground.



Plan 2. Tomb 13, plan and section.

collapse. The present excavation was conducted mainly in the northern part of the burial ground, while in the southern part, only Tomb 20 was cleaned and partially re-excavated, and Tomb 25 was partially excavated for the first time.

The majority of the tombs date to Iron Age IIB–III. Tomb 13, dated to MB IIB–C (see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume), was excavated by Alon and comprises an elongated chamber (c. 1.5 m) with a low ceiling, and may have originally been a natural cave (Plan 2). The entrance had collapsed over the years. Tomb 29 is inaccessible and little data is available, while Tomb 48 was examined by Alon and dated by him to the Roman or Byzantine period. These three caves are completely ruined today. In addition, Tombs 22 and 23 were reused in the Roman period (see below).

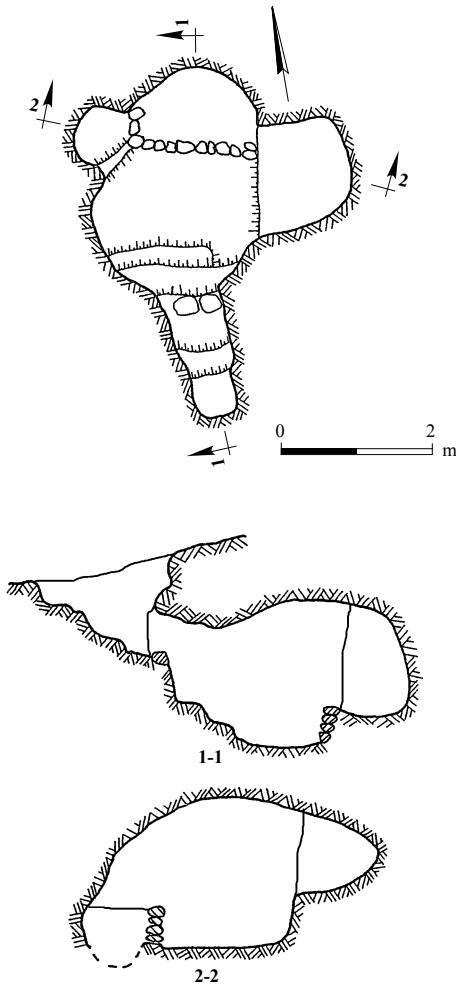
THE IRON AGE II–III ROCK-CUT TOMBS

Some of the tombs excavated by Alon in 1976 were relocated in the renewed excavation of 1994–1996, and retained their original numbers. Some of these were cleaned (Tombs 17, 21, 24), and some were partially re-excavated (Tombs 5, 9, 18–20). Three tombs were excavated for the first time in 1994–1996 (Tombs 22, 23, 25), while several noted by Alon (in the registration of finds) could not be located (Tombs 1, 3, 8, 12, 14, 15). The tombs numbered 30 and up were left untouched for future research.

The rock-cut tombs are described sequentially below, from the entrance inward, and thus the terms 'right', 'left' and 'back' wall, etc., should be understood accordingly. The chronological framework of the burial ground within the Iron Age IIB–III is discussed separately with the finds (see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume).

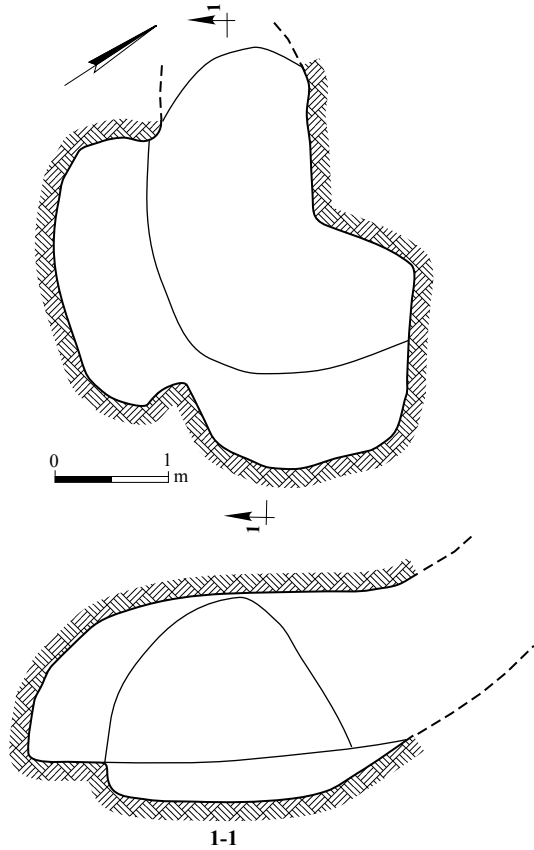
Tomb 5

This tomb had stood open for a long time, but was nevertheless well-preserved. Hardly any rock collapses had occurred, although it was empty of finds (Plan 3; for pottery, see Yezerski



Plan 3. Tomb 5, plan and sections.

and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 3). The entrance is from the south, through a corridor (length 1.6 m) that slopes down moderately toward the opening. The opening is small and square (width 0.65 m, height 0.58 m), and two coarsely carved, narrow steps lead down to the burial chamber floor. The tomb consists of an irregularly shaped chamber. The walls are not straight, the corners are rounded, the ceiling is slightly arched, and the floor is roughly hewn. In the wall to the right of the opening, a square bench-niche was hewn (0.75 m), whose ceiling is at the same height as the tomb ceiling (c. 1.9 m). A second irregularly hewn bench-niche (height 0.5 m) faces the opening. The front of



Plan 4. Tomb 6, plan and section.

the bench was revetted with three courses of large, unworked stones to prevent cracks and collapse. The revetment wall continues on the left side of the bench, forming the right side of the collecting pit.

The collecting pit (diam. 0.6 m, depth 0.3 m), located on the left side of the chamber, is a well-hewn hole with a cylindrical section and a raised rim carved in the bedrock (width 0.25 m, height 0.1 m above the floor).

Tomb 6 (Plan 4)

This tomb was relocated, but was not cleaned due to technical considerations (for pottery, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Figs. 4, 5). The entrance to the tomb had not been excavated. The following description is based upon the plan, drawn in 1976.

The entrance to the rock-cut tomb was from the northwest. Today it is difficult to enter the cave since the floor is covered with an earthen fill up to the height of the benches. The tomb comprises one irregularly shaped chamber (max. length 2 m) with a slightly arched ceiling. Two bench-niches with arched ceilings (max. height 1.8 m) were hewn on the eastern and southern sides of the tomb (width 0.9 m, height 0.4 m).

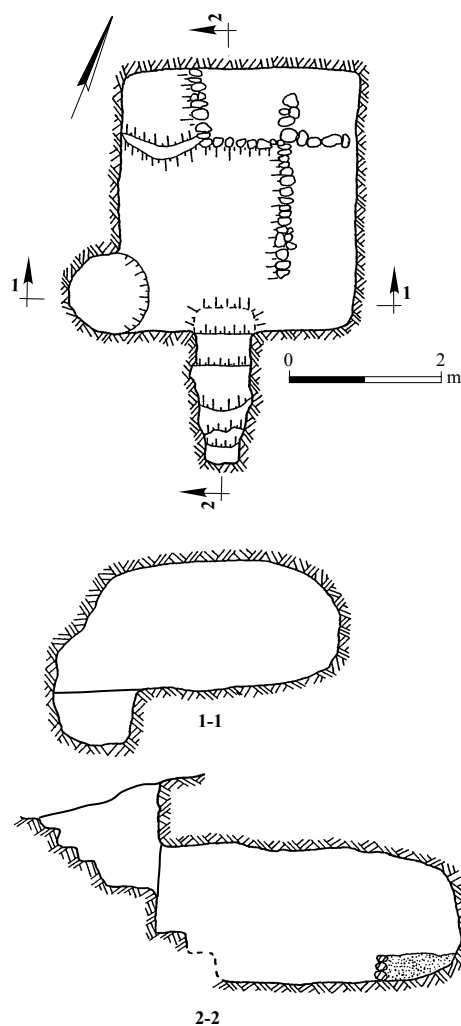
Tomb 9 (Plan 5; Figs. 2–5)

This cave was partially excavated by Alon, and cleaned and fully excavated in the renewed excavation (for pottery, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 6). The entrance to the tomb is from the south, through a long, stepped corridor (Fig. 2) that slopes down moderately. The opening is a small, finely carved square (0.55×0.55 m) from which three steps, also finely carved, descend to the tomb.

The tomb consists of one rectangular chamber (3.5×3.0 m), with straight, well-hewn walls in comparison to other tombs at H. Za'aq. The corners of the room are rounded and the ceiling is slightly arched (1.65–1.75 m) and somewhat higher than the entrance lintel.

The room contains two very low benches along the right and back walls (Fig. 3), built of light-colored soil mixed with pebbles and stones, and supported by a low wall of two courses of fieldstones (height 0.2 m). The right bench measures 1 m wide and 2.4 m long up to the inner wall; the back bench is 1 m wide and 2.2 m long. The supporting walls of the two benches extend up to the cave wall, thus forming a square in the northeastern corner. The purpose of this stone-built square, filled with light-colored soil mixed with pebbles, is unclear.

A square collecting pit (0.95×0.90 m, depth 0.7 m) was hewn in the northwestern corner of the cave, next to the left side of the back bench, where it is revetted with a stone wall up to the height of the bench. The southern side of the



Plan 5. Tomb 9, plan and sections.



Fig. 2. Tomb 9: the approach corridor and the opening of the tomb, looking north.



Fig. 3. Tomb 9: the stone-built benches with the collecting pit at upper left, looking north.



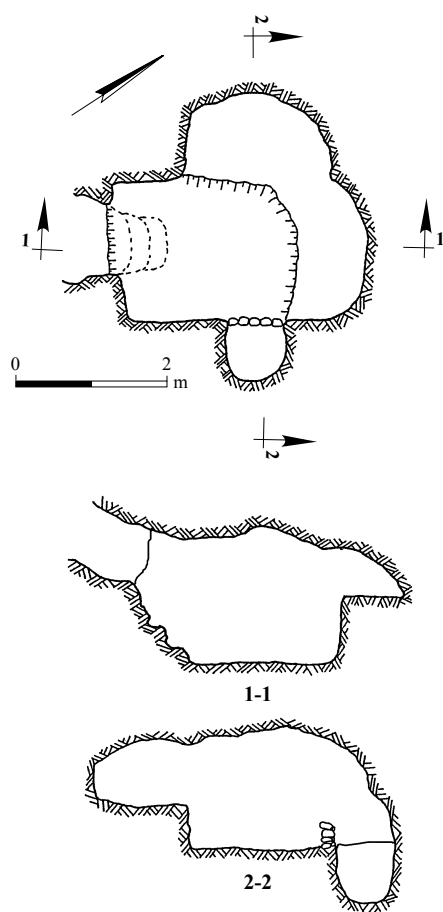
Fig. 4. Tomb 9: the triangular-shaped stone on the southern side of the collecting pit, looking northwest.

collecting pit is bound by a large, well-carved, triangular-shaped stone, c. 0.27 m high (Fig. 4). The collecting pit contained some lamps, bowls and a jug.

A second collecting pit, hewn to the left of the opening (Fig. 5), is cylindrical in section with a wide mouth (diam. 1.05 m, depth 0.75 m).



Fig. 5. Tomb 9: the collecting pit in the southwestern corner near the entrance steps, looking south; note the tomb's arched ceiling.



Plan 6. Tomb 17, plan and sections.

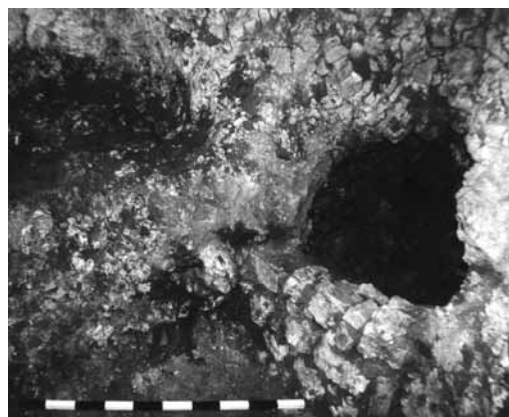


Fig. 6. Tomb 17: the stone-built wall of the collecting pit on the right, and the niche-bench along the back wall on the left, looking east.

This collecting pit was apparently excavated by Alon, as it was empty of finds.

Tomb 17 (Plan 6; Fig. 6)

This tomb was cleaned in 1994–1996 (for pottery, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 7). The entrance is from the southwest, although the corridor that approached it was not excavated and its plan is unknown. The frame of the opening has eroded over time.

Descent to the tomb floor was by way of three poorly preserved steps. The tomb contains one irregularly shaped and roughly hewn chamber (2.5×2.0 m), and the ceiling is slightly arched (max. height c. 1.8 m).

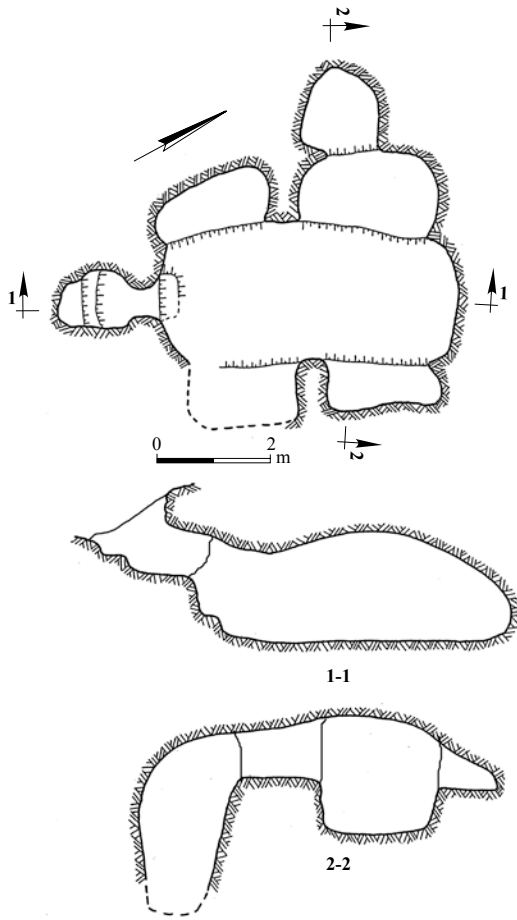
A wide bench (width 1.1–1.3 m) was roughly hewn along part of the left wall and along the back wall (height 0.6 m, height of arched ceiling above the bench 0.7–1.0 m). While an effort had been made to level the upper surfaces of the benches, the sides facing the room remained rough and unfinished.

A small, oval collecting pit was hewn on the right side of the room, measuring 0.9 m in diameter and 1.1 m deep. The opening of the pit was bordered by a roughly built stone wall of approximately three courses, 0.7 m in length and 0.4 m above the floor (Fig. 6). The collecting pit contained lamps and black juglets.

Tomb 18 (Plan 7; Figs. 7–10)

This tomb was damaged by looters, who broke in through the eastern wall, and most of the tomb chamber was subsequently excavated by Alon in 1976 (for pottery, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 8). The tomb was cleaned during the renewed excavation, as was the approach corridor. The opening at the southern end of the tomb was excavated.

It was found blocked with a large, heavy, rectangular stone, slightly worked in order to fit the opening. In addition, a pile of large stones had been heaped upon the blocking stone (Figs. 7, 8). Descent to the approach-corridor floor is by two roughly hewn steps. The corridor (length 1.8 m) slopes down to the roughly cut,



Plan 7. Tomb 18, plan and sections.



Fig. 7. Tomb 18: the opening prior to excavation, looking north.



Fig. 8. Tomb 18: the opening and approach corridor prior to excavation, looking north; note the pile of heavy stones heaped upon the blocking stone.

rectangular opening (height 0.66 m, width 0.75 m; Fig. 9).

Two roughly-cut steps lead down to the rectangular chamber (5.2×2.4 , height 2 m) with an arched ceiling. Two bench-niches were carved along the walls on either side (Fig. 10). The height of the benches in the four niches is one meter above the floor; the benches along the right wall and the first bench on the left of the opening are 2 m in length, and the fourth bench is 2.5 m.

The collecting pit lies at the back of the second bench on the left. It is a wide, deep hole, 1.5 m in diameter. During cleaning, we reached a depth of 1.5 m, but had to stop due



Fig. 9. Tomb 18: the approach corridor and opening after excavation, looking north.



Fig. 10. Tomb 18: the bench-niches along the left wall, prior to excavation, looking west; note the collecting pit in the left corner of the right bench.

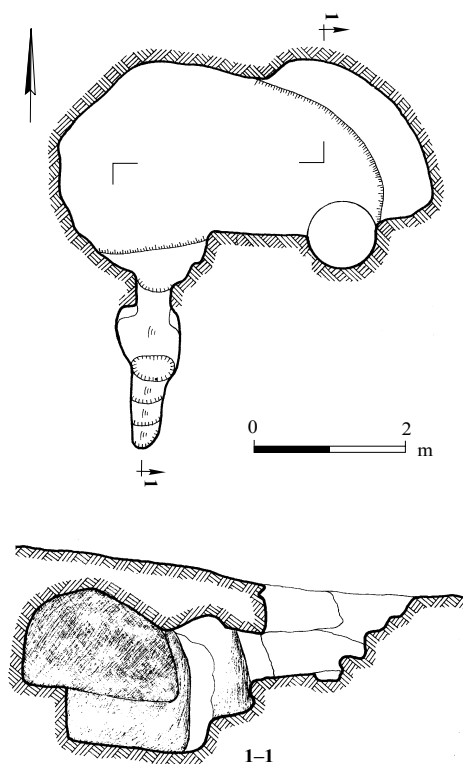
to technical problems. The collecting pit was empty of finds.

Tomb 19 (Plan 8; Figs. 11, 12)

This tomb was fully excavated by Alon (for pottery, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 9). The long (2 m), well-hewn approach corridor lies to the south (Fig. 11), with three small hewn steps at the beginning enabling easy descent to the corridor floor.

The opening is rectangular (width 0.45 m, height 0.55 m) and descent to the burial chamber floor is by way of two roughly carved steps. The irregularly shaped and crudely hewn chamber has a slightly arched ceiling, and the walls are rounded (max. 4.9×3.0 m, height 2 m). The burial chamber is spacious, large enough to accommodate several people during a burial ceremony.

A round and very shallow collecting pit (diam. c. 0.9 m, depth 0.2 m) was hewn in the far right corner, attached to the narrow, rounded bench along the eastern wall and part of the back wall (c. 2.6×0.7 m, height c. 0.85 m above the floor; Fig. 12).



Plan 8. Tomb 19, plan and section.



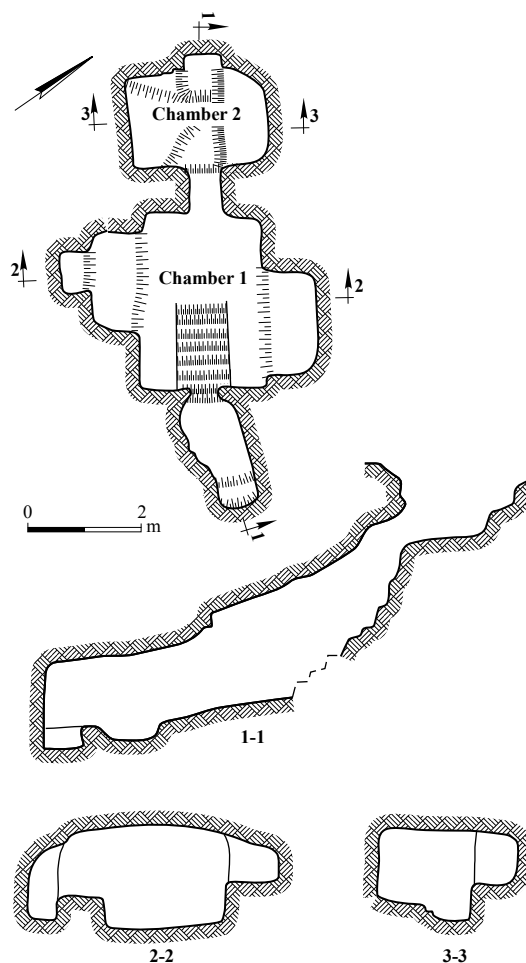
Fig. 11. Tomb 19: the stepped approach corridor, looking north.



Fig. 12. Tomb 19: the narrow, rounded bench, looking east.

Tomb 20 (Plan 9; Figs. 13–17)

This tomb is located at the southern edge of the burial ground, somewhat isolated from the other tombs (for pottery, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 10) (see Plan 1). As noted by Alon (*HA* 1976), the tomb had been emptied by looters. Alon had excavated the major part of it; therefore, we cleaned the tomb completely and completed the excavation, including the small, inner chamber.



Plan 9. Tomb 20, plan and sections.

The approach corridor is from the southeast, hewn into the southern slope of the hill; its walls are particularly low (Fig. 13) in comparison to the approach corridors of other tombs at Ḥ. Za‘aq. The opening is square and finely hewn, and a staircase in the middle of the southern wall descends to the chamber floor (Fig. 14). Only the upper four of eight presumed steps are preserved. The tomb contains two burial chambers, hewn on a roughly south–north axis.

As the tomb had stood open for several decades, the rock surface inside is cracked and deeply grooved. In some places, large stone blocks had collapsed from the walls and the



Fig. 13. Tomb 20: the shallow approach corridor and the opening, looking north.



Fig. 14. Tomb 20: the staircase, looking south; only the four upper steps are preserved.

ceiling. Stones and soil debris covered the floor up to a height of over half a meter.

Chamber 1.— The spacious, rectangular room has parallel walls (3.0×2.1 m, height c. 1.9 m), and is large enough to accommodate several people during a burial ceremony. The chamber floor and the ceiling slope gently downward toward the opening of Chamber 2.

A bench-niche (1.0×1.7 m, height of the bench above the floor c. 0.7 m) was hewn along part of the right wall, with an arched ceiling (max. height 1.5 m above the bench). At the southern end of the bench, a slightly raised headrest was carved, of which little remains. At the end of the bench, near the edge facing the chamber, is a carved cup mark. Deep carving marks, made by a tool with a 1.05 cm edge, can be clearly discerned in the bench facade.

A second bench-niche (1.7×0.9 m, height 0.45 m) with an arched ceiling (height above the bench 1.1 m) was hewn along part of the left wall (Fig. 15). The remains of a headrest and a carved cup mark are visible at the southern end of the left bench, similar to those of the right bench. The well-hewn, rectangular collecting pit (0.90×0.65 m, depth 0.4 m) lies at the back of the left bench.

The opening to Chamber 2 was hewn in the back wall of Chamber 1, on the longitudinal axis with the tomb entrance (Fig. 16). A recessed door frame was carved into the rectangular stones that stood one atop the other to form the doorposts (Fig. 17), as well as into the ceiling rock, to create a frame around the door. The opening is trapezoidal in shape, widening upward (base width 0.66 m, height 1.5 m, depth 0.7 m). The left doorpost was broken and its three decorated, rectangular stones were found scattered on the floor. A step leads down into Chamber 2.

Chamber 2.— This is a small, nearly square room ($1.5\text{--}1.7 \times 1.5$ m without the bench, height c. 1.5 m), the floor and ceiling sloping slightly from south to north, as in Chamber 1. The floor is damaged at the entrance. Along



Fig. 15. Tomb 20: the left bench-niche in Chamber 1, looking west.



Fig. 16. Tomb 20: view from Chamber 1 to the trapezoidal-shaped opening to Chamber 2.

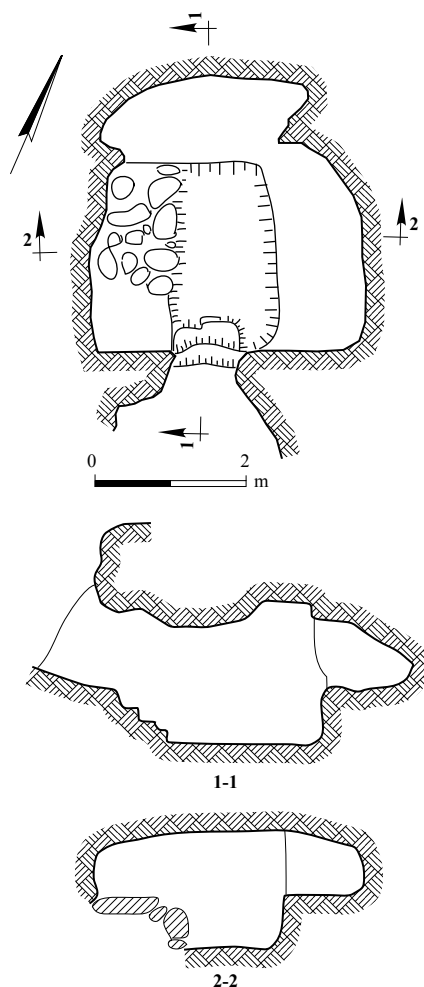
the right wall is a hewn bench (1.85×0.80 m, height above floor 0.65 m), whose outer face and upper surface are lined with large, flat, well-carved stone slabs.

All along the back wall is a rock ‘shelf’ into which a square collecting pit was hewn

(0.65×0.65 m, depth 0.4 m). The collecting pit was full of earth and some pottery sherds, upon which lay a heavy, rectangular stone. It is unclear how the stone got there, as the wall and the ceiling above are intact with no signs of collapse.



Fig. 17. Tomb 20: detail of Chamber 2 door with carved, recessed frame.



Plan 10. Tomb 21, plan and sections.

Tomb 21 (Plan 10; Fig. 18)

This tomb is located close to Tombs 5, 9 and 38, all of which open to the south (for pottery, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 11). Tomb 21 has a wide, deep approach corridor. The opening had suffered damage over time and its original dimensions are unknown (Fig. 18). Descent to the tomb floor was by way of three roughly hewn steps. The chamber is a coarse rectangle with a slightly arched ceiling (height c. 1.6 m). There was no collecting pit.

Along the right wall is a bench-niche (max. length 2.2 m, width 1.1 m, height 0.65 m) with an arched ceiling at the same height as that of the chamber. The northern edge of this bench-niche curves toward the bench along the back wall, creating one long bench. The back bench-niche (max. length 2.5 m, max. width 1.1 m, height c. 0.8 m) appears to have a carved 'window frame', although it is so roughly carved that it is barely detectable (and perhaps only imagined).³ This bench-niche was carved



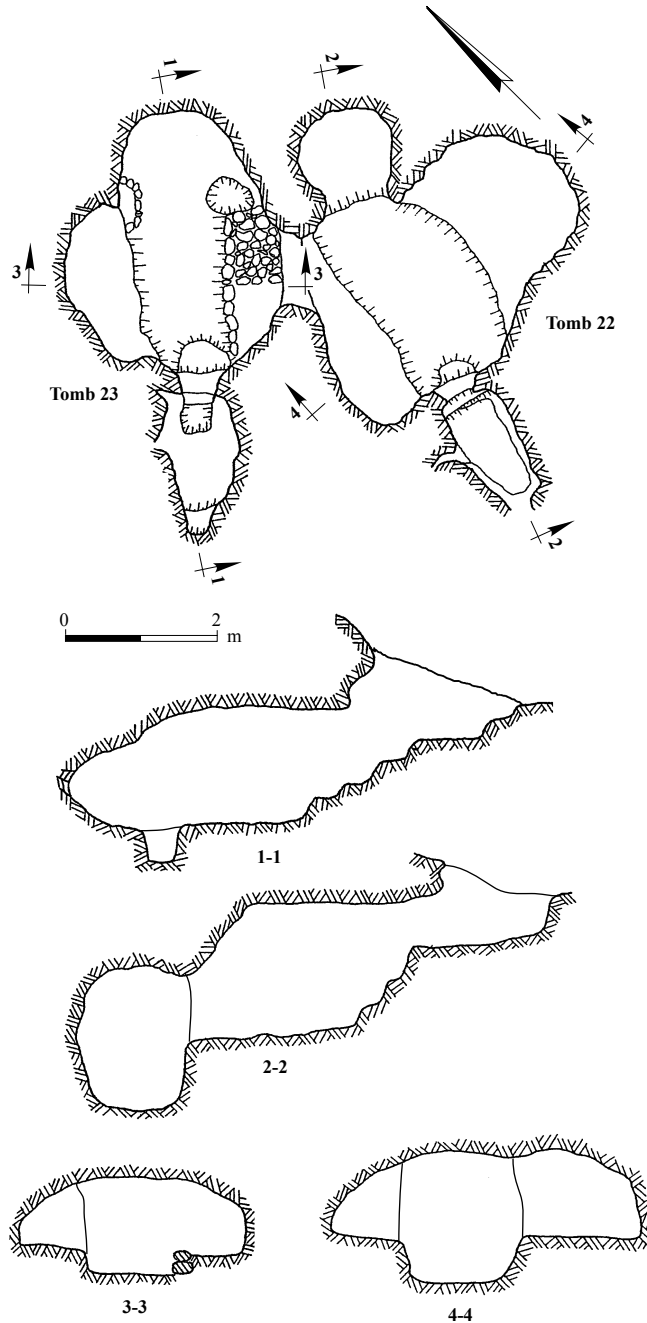
Fig. 18. Tomb 21: the stepped approach corridor and the opening to the tomb, looking north.

especially roughly and is higher than the other benches.

The bench along the left wall was hewn in very soft stone (2.5×1.0 m, height c. 0.65 m), and the side facing the room is supported by a low, stone-built wall.

Tomb 22 (Plan 11; Figs. 19–22)

The sloping, stepped corridor (length 1.6 m) of this tomb approaches approximately from the southwest (Fig. 19) and opens at a height of 1.3 m above the chamber floor (for pottery and other finds, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this



Plan 11. Tombs 22 and 23: Phase 1 (Iron Age II), plan and sections.

volume: Figs. 12–16). The descent to the floor is by way of two crudely carved steps.

The chamber is roughly rectangular in shape (2.7×1.6 m), with a slightly arched ceiling (max. height 1.65 m). An irregularly shaped bench-niche (max. length 2.2 m, max. width 1.5, height of bench 0.45–0.75 m) along the



Fig. 19. Tomb 22: the approach corridor and the opening to the tomb, looking east.

right wall also has a slightly arched ceiling (max. height above the bench 1.1 m).

An oval-shaped collecting pit (1.45×1.35 m, depth 0.85 m) was hewn into a small niche in the back wall with a slightly arched ceiling (width of opening at base 0.88 m, depth 0.8 m; Fig. 20). The collecting pit had not been looted and was found intact (Fig. 21), containing many complete vessels together with broken human bones (see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Table 1).

It appears that Tomb 22 was hewn after Tomb 23 (see below), and the original plan had to be altered to avoid breaking through the wall of Tomb 23. This is clearly evident in the peculiar shape of the left bench of Tomb 22 (length 2.6 m, max. width 0.8 m, height 0.4 m), which is not wide enough to lay a human body upon (Fig. 22). During the Roman period, a connecting ‘window’ was hewn between these two tombs, seen above the bench in Fig. 22 (see below).

As this tomb was excavated for the first time by us, a large quantity of pottery vessels and other finds were recovered, some of which were found on the right bench, others scattered on the floor.



Fig. 20. Tomb 22: the arched niche of the collecting pit prior to excavation, looking east.



Fig. 21. Tomb 22: the intact collecting pit prior to excavation, looking east.



Fig. 22. Tomb 22: the narrow left bench and the 'window' from the Roman period, looking north.

Tomb 23 (see Plan 11; Figs. 23–25)

This tomb adjoins Tomb 22 on the west and its opening is similarly from the southwest (for pottery and other finds, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 17). Two steps were hewn at the entrance to the approach corridor (1.9 m long). The roughly trapezoidal-shaped

opening to the tomb widens upward toward the lintel (base width 0.4 m, lintel width 0.47 m, height 0.52 m; Fig. 23). Above the lintel is a hewn depression, probably to prevent visitors from striking their heads. A similar depression is reported in a rock-cut tomb in Jerusalem, north of Damascus Gate (Mazar 1976:5).



Fig. 23. Tomb 23: the approach corridor and the opening to the tomb, looking southeast.



Fig. 24. Tomb 23: the stone-built installation between the left bench and the back bench, looking northeast.

Roughly hewn steps lead down to the burial chamber, which is irregular in shape (max. length 3.7 m). Although part of the ceiling has disintegrated and collapsed, one can easily

discern that it was slightly arched (max. height 1.6 m).

Along the right wall, a low bench (2.00×0.85 m, height 0.3 m) was hewn into crumbling



Fig. 25. Tomb 23: the remains of the right bench and the 'window', looking south.

rock, which necessitated support on the upper surface and outer face with stones and pebbles. A shallow, rounded pit (depth 0.4 m), which may have served as a collecting pit, was hewn at the far end of the bench. Along the back wall is a niche with what seems to be an unfinished bench. The bench is not horizontally level, and the height of the inner part is higher than the outer part, so that a corpse laid on such a sloping surface would surely roll onto the floor. Following excavation of a pile of soil heaped upon it during the Roman period (see below), a bronze fibula and complete, seventh-century BCE lamps with high, heavy bases were discovered.

Between the back niche and the left niche, a low, rounded installation was built of three courses of fieldstones (Fig. 24), each course slightly recessed from the one beneath it, resulting in a slightly sloping wall. The installation, which was found empty, is too small to be defined as a collecting pit.

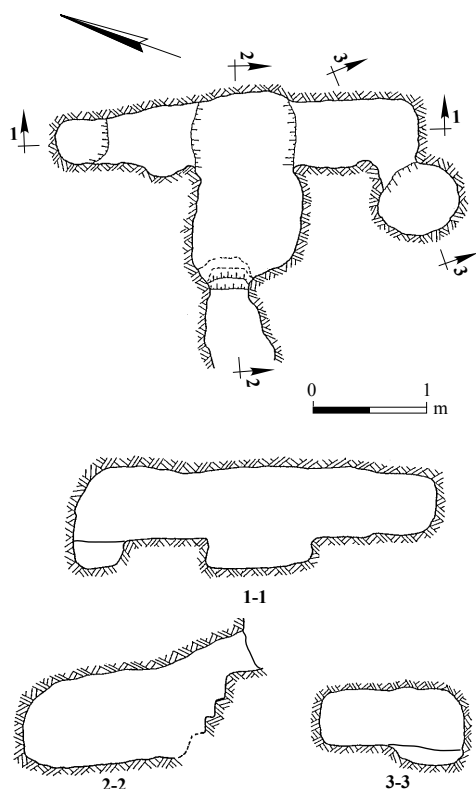
Another bench-niche with an arched ceiling (max. dimensions 2.0×0.9 m, height 0.35 m, height of ceiling above bench 0.75 m) was hewn along the left wall.

Tomb 24 (Plan 12)

The entrance to this tomb is from the west (for pottery, see Yezerki and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 18). Apparently, there was no approach corridor, as there was in all the other tombs at Ḥ. Za‘aq. The opening of the tomb is rectangular (width 0.58 m, height 0.7 m), and the descent to the crudely hewn rectangular burial chamber (max. dimensions 3.1×1.8 m, height 1.7 m) is by way of four roughly hewn steps.

An elongated bench-niche (length 1.1 m, height 0.45 m, height of ceiling above the bench c. 1.1 m) is hewn in the southeastern corner perpendicular to the burial chamber. It extends to the south and then turns westward, where it ends in an oval-shaped hole, probably a collecting pit, measuring east–west 1.75 m, north–south c. 1.45 m, and c. 0.4 m deep.

A similar elongated bench-niche (length 1.5 m, height from floor 0.2 m, height of niche above the bench c. 1.2 m) extends northward from the northwestern corner of the chamber, and also ends with a collecting pit. The collecting pit is rounded and shallow, measuring east–west 0.7 m, north–south 0.8 m, and c. 0.3 m deep.



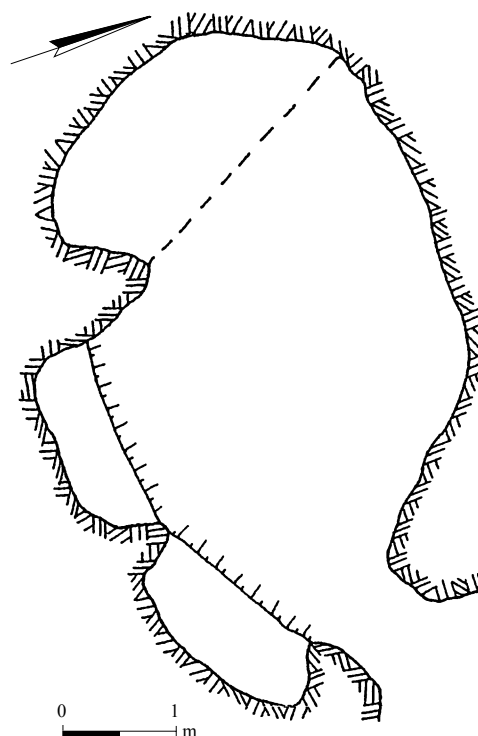
Plan 12. Tomb 24, plan and sections.

The plan of this tomb is unparalleled among all Iron Age II Judahite rock-cut tombs known to date. It was hewn in an extremely rough manner, even in comparison with the other H. Za'aq rock-cut tombs.

Tomb 25 (Plan 13)

This tomb is located on the southeastern slope of a hill, and its sloping approach corridor opens from the east (for pottery, see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 19). The tomb floor was found covered with earthen fill and collapsed rock from the ceiling and the northern wall of the cave. Only the southern half of the burial chamber was excavated in 1994–1996.

The tomb comprises a large central chamber and two bench-niches (length 1.65 m, width 0.5–0.7 m) hewn into the left (southern) wall.



Plan 13. Tomb 25.

A large, deep collecting pit (diam. 2.5 m) was hewn into the back wall.

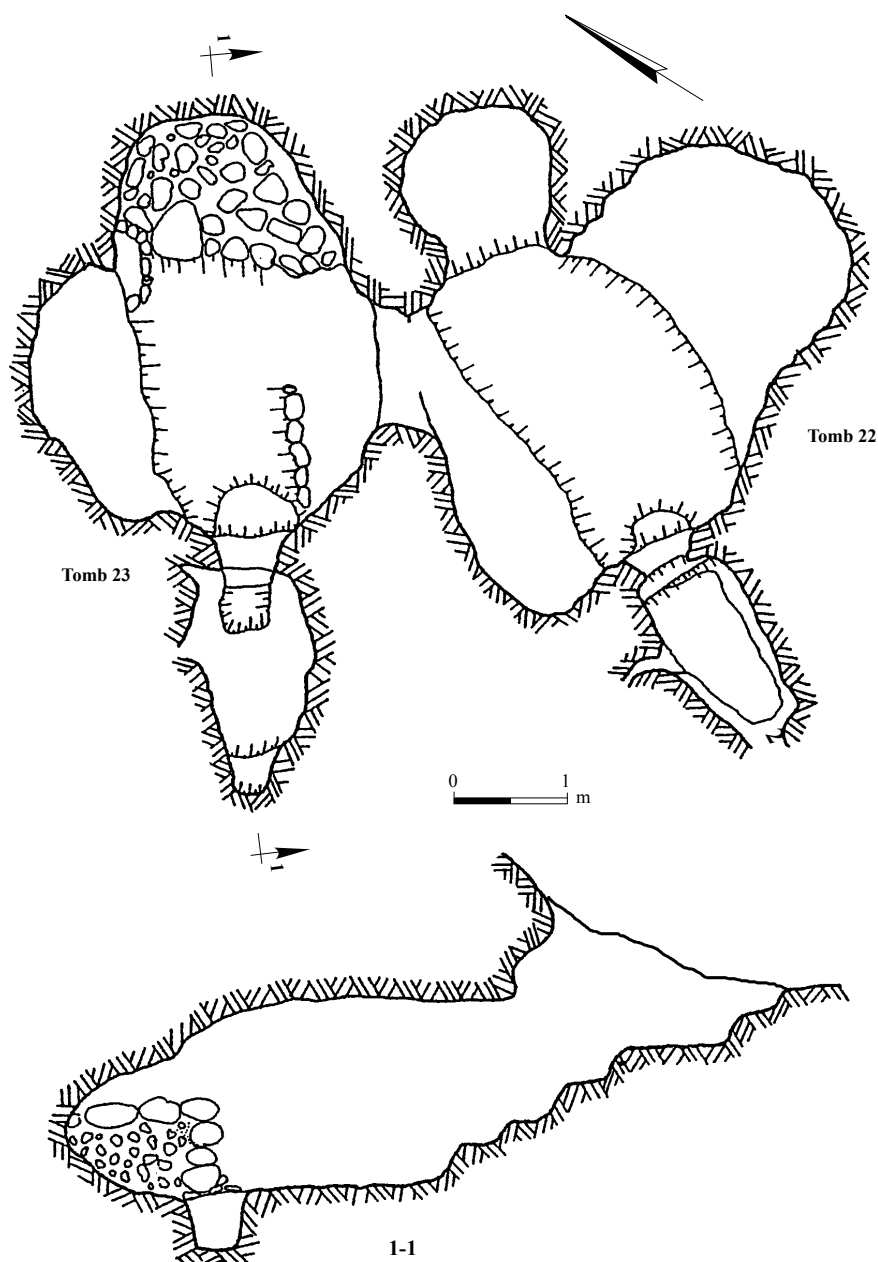
If we reconstruct two additional bench-niches along the right wall, the tomb plan would be similar to that of Tomb 18 (see above).

TOMBS REUSED IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

Remains of Early Roman pottery and metal artifacts were found in several of the Iron II rock-cut tombs (see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume), although only in Tombs 22 and 23 could any actual modifications be discerned, including major changes in the plan of Tomb 23.

Tomb 22 (Plan 14)

During the Early Roman period, Tombs 22 and 23 were connected by breaking through the joint wall and creating a sort of 'connecting window' (see Fig. 22). A small, almost complete



Plan 14. Tombs 22 and 23: Phase 2 (the Roman period), plan and section.

limestone ossuary had been overturned by the looters, near the foot of the right bench (see Yezerski and Nahshoni, this volume: Fig. 16:13) and additional pieces of the same ossuary were found in Tomb 23, above the heap of soil and stones that covered the back bench-niche (see below).

Tomb 23 (Plan 14)

In the Early Roman period, a number of alterations were made in the cave. The right wall adjoining Tomb 22 was broken above the bench and an irregularly shaped 'window' was created (height above the floor c. 0.85 m). The bottom of the window was revetted with a row

of stones, and the wall beneath the window was supported by a pile of stones (Fig. 25). It seems that these stones had been dismantled from the upper surface of the right bench, beneath the window. Part of the bench was removed, leaving only 1 m.

The sloping bench against the back wall was covered with a pile of earth and large heavy stones to a height of 1 m, almost reaching the ceiling. This pile also covered the built installation (collecting pit?) against the left wall. A piece of the limestone ossuary from Tomb 22 was found in this pile.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Thirty-two rock-cut burial tombs were documented in the H. Za'aq burial ground during the two excavations, of which eleven Iron Age tombs were cleaned or excavated in the 1994–1996 excavations. Some of these tombs are dangerous and inaccessible, and we were unable to locate three of the tombs that were excavated by Alon (1, 8, 14). The Iron Age finds from these tombs are described by Yezerski and Nahshoni (this volume: Fig. 20).

Based on the extent of the burial ground, and the presumption that more tombs are

yet to be discovered, it is my estimation that during Iron II–III, some forty families were buried there. These families lived in villages or farms in the vicinity of the burial ground. Only two tombs are attributed to periods other than the Iron Age: Tomb 13, to MB II, and Tomb 48, to the Roman or Byzantine period. Furthermore, disturbances and modifications took place during the Early Roman period (first century CE) in Tombs 22 and 23. All the tombs suffered severe damage by looters, except for the collecting pits in Tombs 17 and 22. The collecting pit in the left corner of Tomb 9, although probably partially excavated by Alon, nevertheless yielded some complete pottery vessels.

The characteristic architectural elements of the Iron Age rock-cut tombs at H. Za'aq are as follows (Table 1):

1. Open and shallow approach corridors, most well-preserved due to being quarried into the hard limestone *nari* layer. In most cases, two narrow steps were hewn at the beginning of the corridor facilitating a gentle descent to the corridor floor.
2. The openings to the tombs are small, square or rectangular.

Table 1. Architectural Elements in Iron II Rock-Cut Tombs at H. Za'aq

Tomb No.	Corridor	Rooms	Bench	Bench-Niche	Collecting Pit	Additional Elements
5	1	1	-	2	1	
6	?	1	-	2	-	
9	1	1	2	-	2	
17	?	1	-	2	1	
18	1	1	-	4	1	
19	1	1	1	-	1	
20	1	2	1	2	2	2 headrests 2 cup marks
21	1	1	1	2	-	
22	1	1	1	1	1	
23	1	1	1	2	1	1 built installation
24	?	1	-	2	2	
25	1	1	-	2(?)	1	

3. Most of the tomb plans are irregular, and the walls were not hewn at 90° angles (except Tombs 9 and 20).
4. Almost all the hewn architectural elements in the tombs, e.g., benches, collecting pits, arched ceilings, etc., have rounded outlines (except Tomb 20).
5. Bench-niches are the most common architectural component in the tombs (except for the ones in Tombs 9 and 19).
6. Stone-built or stone-supported elements, such as benches and collecting pits, were found in Tombs 5, 9, 17, 20, 21 and 23. This phenomenon is unique among the Iron II Judahite burial caves, appearing at only a few other sites: in Cave 521 at Lakhish, a stone-built bench was found (Tufnell 1953: Pl. 8:1–3), in a cave at Tel Ḥalif, a stone partition was built above the edge of the collecting pit to enlarge its capacity (Biran and Gophna 1970: Fig. 2).
7. Most of the tombs are small, but some are especially large (Tombs 18–20, 25). The ceiling of Tomb 29 had collapsed, but it can be estimated as over 4 m long.
8. Almost all the tombs contain one or two collecting pits (except Tomb 21).

Comparison of the Iron II tombs at Ḥ. Za'aq with other Judahite burial grounds leads to the following observations:

1. Approach corridors, deeper than those at Ḥ. Za'aq, are found at Tel 'Ira (Beit-Arieh, Freud and Baron 1999: Figs. 4.4; 4.7; 4.40; 4.44), Tel 'Eṭun (Ussishkin 1974: Fig. 5) and Tel Ḥalif (Borowski 1994: Plans 2–7). This architectural element differs from the hewn 'forecourt' in front of many rock-cut tombs throughout northern Judah, such as those at en-Nabi Danyal (Amit and Yezerki 2001: Figs. 7; 11; 13; 16; 18; 25; 27; 30), Giv'on (Eshel 1987: Figs. 2–10) and Bet Shemesh (Mackenzie 1912–1913: Pls. VIII, X; Grant 1931:10). Thus, it can be safely concluded that the approach corridor is a common, if not characteristic, element of southern Judahite rock-cut tombs.
2. Bench-niches, often equipped with slightly arched ceilings, are very common in Iron II burial grounds in southern Judah, from Tel

Goded in the Shephelah (Kloner 1985) to Tel 'Ira in the Be'er Sheva' Valley (Beit-Arieh, Freud and Baron 1999: Fig. 4.5). This architectural element, seen at Ḥ. Za'aq, is also observed at the nearby burial grounds of Tel Ḥalif (Borowski 1992; 1994), Tel 'Eṭun (Ussishkin 1974) and a tomb in lower Ḥorbat 'Anim (Yezerki and Lender 2002). Thus, it seems that this is a well-crystallized architectural tradition that existed in southern Judah for many generations (see also Yezerki 1999a; 2009).

3. The openings of rock-cut tombs throughout Judah are small squares or rectangles, whereas the opening to a second burial chamber within a tomb is higher, enabling an easy entry. A high, trapezoidal-shaped opening, similar to that in Tomb 20, was found, for example, at St. Etienne in Jerusalem (Barkay and Kloner 1986: photograph on pp. 30–31).

4. Tombs 18 and 25 are similar in plan to those found at Tel 'Eṭun (Ussishkin 1974), and another such plan is seen in Lakhish Cave 536 (Tufnell 1953: Pl. 126, AB/22–23). It seems safe to conclude that the distribution of this plan is restricted to southern Judah, and reflects a well-established, local architectural tradition.

5. 'Headrests' and cup marks were found only in Tomb 20. Such elements are rare in northern Judahite burial caves,⁴ but are more common in the Tel Ḥalif (Borowski 1992; 1994) and Tel 'Eṭun (Ussishkin 1974) burial grounds.

6. Collecting pits are common in the Ḥ. Za'aq rock-cut tombs. Tombs 9, 20 and 24 contained two collecting pits each. Two collecting pits in a single tomb are also recorded in the nearby Tel Ḥalif burial ground (Borowski 1994: Plans 2, 4, 7).

7. Besides the small rock-cut tombs, there are also several large tombs at Ḥ. Za'aq (Tombs 18–20, 25, and the inaccessible Tomb 29). Large tombs are common in other southern Judahite burial grounds, such as Tel Ḥalif (Borowski 1992; 1994) and Tel 'Eṭun (Ussishkin 1974).

Small rock-cut tombs are the dominant type in the Ḥ. Za'aq burial ground, usually irregular in plan and roughly hewn into the poor-quality, crumbly local limestone (see Yezerki

2009). Thus, it can be concluded that a rural population with modest economic resources was buried here (contra Fantalkin 2008). In contrast, Tomb 20 is large and spacious, with two finely hewn burial chambers containing elaborate architectural elements that are not seen in the other tombs at the site, such as headrests, cup marks and a decorated door frame. The isolated location of Tomb 20 at the far southern edge of the burial ground suggests that it belonged to a family of high social rank with greater economic means (Yezerski 1999b).

The rock-cut tombs at H. Za‘aq were hewn according to local architectural traditions; however, they share certain features with the nearby burial grounds at Tel Ḥalif and Tel ‘Eṭun (Yezerski 1999a:255–257; 2009). It is clear that most of the ancient tombs found so far in Judah are in the south, at Tel ‘Ira and Tel ‘Eṭun. At Tel ‘Eṭun, a continuous use of the rock-cut tombs can be observed, from the late phase of the Late Bronze Age to Iron IIB–III. This may be evidence that (a) the people of Judah adopted this custom from their Canaanite

neighbors, and that (b) the tradition of burial in family tombs was adopted from a Late Bronze Age custom. The plans of Tombs 18 and 25 resemble the tradition of rock-cut tombs at Tel ‘Eṭun, and they may represent two families at H. Za‘aq who originally came from Tel ‘Eṭun, and hewed their family tombs according to their ancestral tradition.⁵

Another aspect of the tradition of burial in family tombs in southern Judah may be gleaned from the biblical sources concerning the various ethnic groups whose origins and background are vague, but were probably of Canaanite stock: the Kenites, the Calebites and the Othnielites. They joined the tribe of Judah politically, culturally and genealogically, but probably continued to maintain their original, Canaanite architectural tradition of family rock-cut tombs. These ethnic groups lived in the southern Hebron Hills, neighboring the upper Shephelah, an area that has never been thoroughly and systematically surveyed or excavated. Along the road to Hebron, one can see dozens of burial-cave entrances, which have never been researched or documented.

NOTES

¹ Permit No. A-612. The only documentation of this excavation is the brief report in *HA* 1976, and registration numbers on the finds.

² The results of the excavation (Permit No. A-2411; Site No. 1165/0) were incorporated by the author into the database collected for her M.A. thesis (Yezerski 1995). The location map of the burial ground and the plans of Tombs 6, 13, 18 and 19, were drawn by Israel Vatkin in 1976. The remaining tomb plans were drawn by Tali Krinkin-Fabian. The author wishes to thank Haim Lavi for his assistance, and Yosef Lavi for the field photography.

³ Beautifully planned and hewn ‘window frames’ were found in some rock-cut tombs in Silwan; see, for example, Ussishkin 1993: Fig. 75.

⁴ Hewn ‘pillows’ of all types have been found to date in c. 18% of the benches in Iron II Judahite rock-cut tombs (Yezerski 1995: Pl. 33). Worrel (1923) was the first to suggest a connection between cup marks and the tombs in the Karaite burial ground, Jerusalem.

⁵ From a lecture given by the author at a seminar held in honor of David Alon at the Joe Alon Center on May 3, 1998.

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