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THE NECROPOLIS OF HELLENISTIC MARESHA JUDEAN FOOTHILLS, ISRAEL

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Abstract
The ancient city of Maresha is identified with Tell Sandahannah, situated in the Judean Foothills, about 40 km SW of Jerusalem. During the Hellenistic period Maresha flourished and became an important city. The archaeological site consists of a Tell - the Upper City (UC), a Lower City (LC) and a Subterranean City (SC). A vast necropolis forms a ring surrounding the LC and includes three main cemeteries (N, E and SW). The cemeteries consist of more than 40 rock-cut burial chambers or hypogea. A typical hypogeum includes an elongated rectangular hall into whose walls *loculi* (burial niches) featuring typical gabled open; sometimes additional chambers were cut, forming a burial complex. Two of the tombs [nos. 1 (551) and 2 (552)], discovered in 1902, had outstanding wall paintings dating from the III century B.C. The paintings are characterized by a mixture of sepulchral motifs, mostly of Greek or Alexandrian origin. The animal frieze painted in Tomb 1 (Sidonian Community Tomb) is a unique document of its kind in the Hellenistic world. Renewed explorations of Tomb 2 exposed a neighboring burial complex (560), hewn initially in the Hellenistic period and reused in the Roman period. This complex is published here for the first time. The Hellenistic period hypogea of Maresha were long-term family sepulchers, hewn in the soft chalk for the burial of the city residents along several generations. The tombs served this purpose throughout the III and II centuries B.C., until the Hasmonean conquest of ca. 111 B.C. Some of the tombs, located in the N and E necropoleis were reused in the Roman period. The architectural plans of the hypogea probably reached Maresha from elsewhere in the Hellenistic world. The hypogea resemble the architectural and artistic style of Ptolemaic period's tombs (mostly from the III century B.C.) in the necropolis of Alexandria (Egypt). The epigraphic evidence reflects the multi-ethnic composition of the city, combining Idumaeans, Phoenicians, Greeks, some Egyptians and possibly a few Judeans. These ethnic elements produced the outstanding social and cultural fabric of the city during the Hellenistic period.
Keywords: Maresha, Tell Sandahannah, Judean, necropolis, sepulchral architecture, Hellenistic wall paintings, funerary art.

Riassunto
L'antica città di Maresha è identificata con Tell Sandahannah, situata ai piedi della collina della Giudea, circa 40 km a SW di Gerusalemme. Durante il periodo ellenistico Maresha fiorì e divenne una città importante. Il sito archeologico è costituito da Tell - la Città Alta (UC), una Città Bassa (LC) e una città sotterranea (SC). Una vasta necropoli forma un anello che circonda la Città Bassa e comprende tre cimiteri principali (N, E e SW). I cimiteri sono costituiti da più di 40 camere sepolcrali scavate nella roccia o ipogee. Tipicamente un ipogeo si compone di una sala rettangolare allungata con loculi alle pareti dotati di classiche aperture a due spioventi; a volte le camere supplementari sono state scavate formando un complesso sepolcrale. Due delle tombe [n. 1 (551) e 2 (552)], scoperte nel 1902, avevano eccezionali pitture murali risalenti al III secolo a.C. I dipinti sono caratterizzati da una mescolanza di motivi sepolcrali, per lo più di origine greca o alessandrina. Il fregio animale dipinto nella Tomba 1 (Tomba della Comunità di Sidonia) è un documento unico nel suo genere in tutto il mondo ellenistico. Le nuove esplorazioni della Tomba 2 hanno portato alla luce un complesso sepolcrale limitrofo (560) scavato inizialmente nel periodo ellenistico e riutilizzato in epoca romana. Questo complesso viene presentato qui per la prima volta. Gli ipogei del periodo ellenistico di Maresha erano sepolcri familiari a lungo termine, scavati nel gesso morbido per la sepoltura dei residenti della città nel corso di diverse generazioni. Le tombe servivano a tale scopo durante il III e II secolo a.C., fino alla conquista degli Asmonei del 111 a.C. circa. Alcune delle tombe che si trovano nella necropoli settentrionale e orientale sono state riutilizzati in epoca romana. I piani architettonici degli ipogei furono probabilmente importati a Maresha da altre parti del mondo ellenistico. Gli ipogei ricordano lo stile architettonico e artistico di tombe di epoca tolemaica (in gran parte del III secolo a.C.) della necropoli di Alessandria (Egitto). L'evidenza epigrafica riflette la composizione multietnica della città, unendo Idumaeans, Fenici, Greci, alcuni egiziani e forse un paio di giudei. Questi elementi etnici produssero l'eccezionale tessuto sociale e culturale della città durante il periodo ellenistico.
Parole chiave: *Maresha, Dillo Sandahannah, Giudea, necropoli, architettura sepolcrale, pitture murali ellenistiche, arte funeraria.*

Introduction

The ancient city of Maresha is identified with Tell Sandahannah, situated in the Judean Foothills, about 40 km SW of Jerusalem. During the Hellenistic period Maresha functioned as an important economic and administrative center (Kloner, 2003; Kloner & Zissu, 2013).

The identification of ancient Maresha with Tell Sandahannah is based on a inscription discovered by Peters and Thiersch (1905) in Tomb I (550; note:

the numbers starting with 500 are given according to the new numbering system of tombs at Maresha). The inscription mentioned the Sidonian community "residing at Marissa" (Maresha; see below). This information has been supported by the discovery of two ostraca in the subterranean complexes of Maresha that mention the toponym "Maresha" (Kloner & Stern, 2007; Kloner et al., 2010).

The area of Maresha is characterized by formations of soft, chalky limestone from the Eocene epoch (approximately 56.5–35.5 million years BP). Maresha is situated on rocks of the Zor'a formation, known as the Maresha member, whose thickness varies from 30 to 100 m. Above the chalky limestone, (a soft but stable type of limestone, known locally as *kirton*), a harder *nari* crust formed, which is 1 to 3 m thick.

The archaeological site consists of a tell, which is composed of the Upper City (UC), a Lower City (LC), and a Subterranean City (SC) (Kloner & Zissu, 2013).

The Necropolis (Figs. 1 and 2).

A vast necropolis forms a ring surrounding the LC and is composed of three main necropoleis, or cemeteries [Northern (NN), Eastern (EN) and South-Western (SWN)].

The necropolis contains more than 40 rock-cut tombs (or hypogea). A typical hypogeum includes an elongated rectangular hall into whose walls *loculi* (known also as *kokhim*=burial niches), and sometimes additional burial chambers, were cut with typical gabled openings. These loculi, or *kokhim,* were used for primary and secondary burials.

The plan of the tombs, the gabled *kokhim*, the paintings, and the inscriptions therein, make it possible to date the beginning of use of these hypogea to the first half of the III century B.C. Although the population of Maresha was a mixture of Idumeans, Sidonians, Greeks, and other peoples (including Egyptians), all were Hellenized and used the Greek language and script.

The hypogea in Maresha from the Hellenistic period were family sepulchers cut in the soft limestone to hold the remains of several generations of city residents. The tombs served this purpose throughout the III and II centuries B.C. until the Hasmonean conquest of the city (ca. 111 B.C.). Some of the tombs located

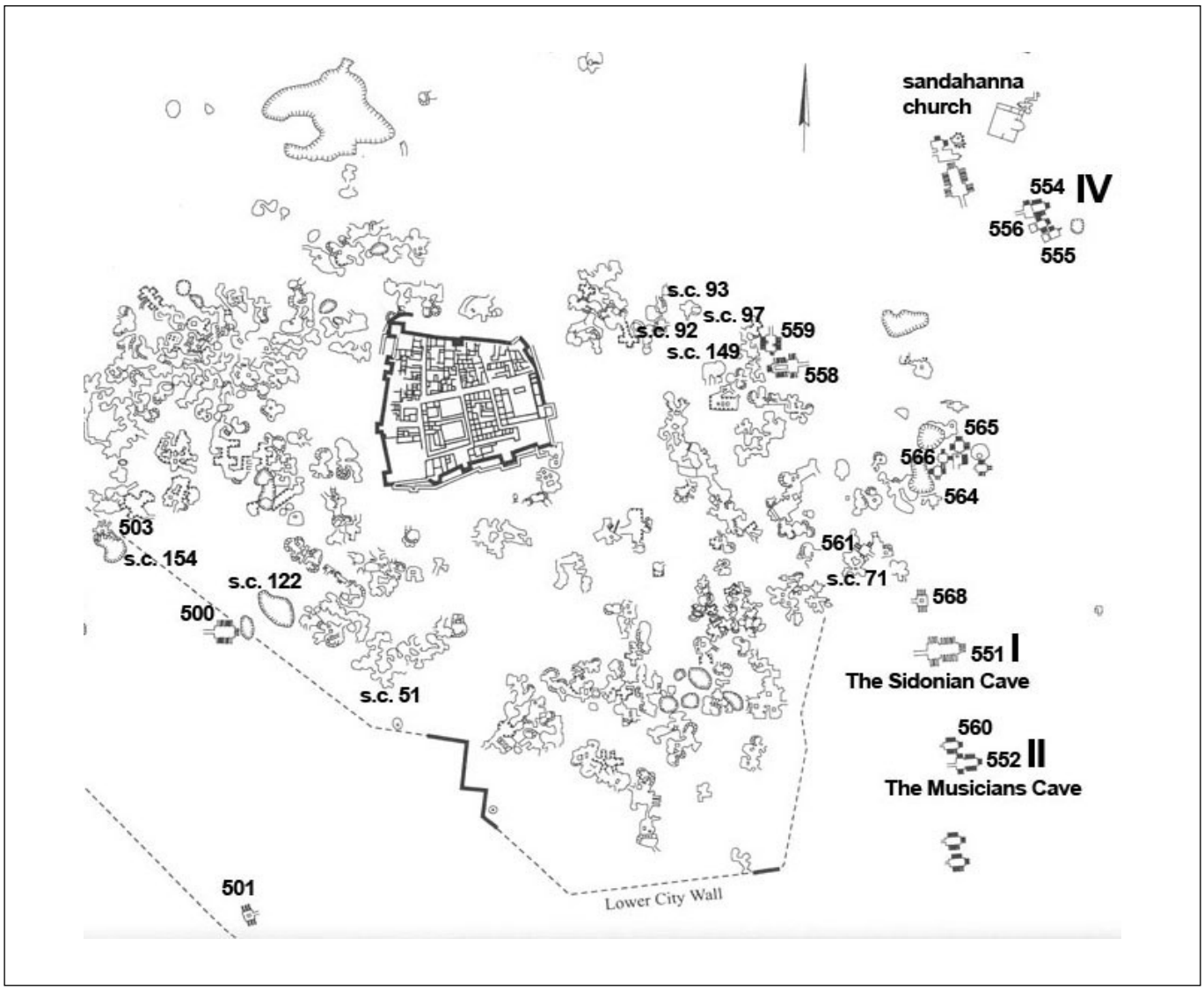


Fig. 1: plan of the EN and SWN necropoleis of Maresha (drawing by N. Graicer and A. Kloner, after Bliss and Macalister, IAA).
Fig. 1: planimetria delle necropoli est ed ovest del complesso di Maresha (elaborazione N. Graicer e A. Kloner, da Bliss e Macalister, IAA).

in the NN and EN necropoleis were reused during the Roman period. Seven shaft tombs, presumably from the Persian period, were excavated in 1994 in Area 940. Only one of them contained a few human bones but no archaeological finds; they are therefore dated based on their typical design. We assume that the other six were cleared of their contents in antiquity, due to construction activities in the area.

The Eastern Necropolis (EN)

E of Maresha, along a valley running N-S at a distance of 250–300 m from the UC, is a concentration of at least 25 rock-cut tombs, arranged in a strip nearly a kilometer in length (Figs. 1 and 2). Their basic architectural form is a rectangular hall with benches along the walls and *kokhim* cut into them. These *kokhim* have typically gabled facades and ceilings; some feature Greek inscriptions above the opening. The first three tombs were discovered and described (but not drawn) in 1873 by the Survey of Western Palestine (SWP) team, C.R. Conder and H.H. Kitchener (1883, 272). In the same year, Ch. Clermont-Ganneau (1896) presented the plan of the third tomb mentioned by Conder and Kitchener and described another, possibly identical to one of those mentioned by the SWP team.

Thus, this area of the necropolis was already known in 1902, when J.P. Peters and H. Thiersch studied and published four tombs after they were penetrated by antiquity thieves. Two of the hypogea (Tombs I and II, renumbered as Tombs 551 and 552) contained wall paintings and Greek inscriptions. These tombs, as well as two others (Tombs III, IV), were looted in 1902, after the completion of Bliss and Macalister's excavations. The report published by Peters and Thiersch (1905) is extremely important, despite slightly flawed reconstructions of some of the paintings, as shown by D.M. Jacobson (2007). In 1913, Moulton (1915) located another tomb of the same type (Tomb VII). In 1923, the Dominican fathers explored several more tombs with inscriptions (Tombs V, VI, and VII) (Abel, 1925; note that Tomb VII had been initially published ten years earlier by Moulton).

There are seventeen additional tombs located in the EN, ten of which are close to and E of Tombs I and II. One of these, Tomb VIII (Oren & Rappaport, 1984), is decorated with engaged columns topped by capitals, which are carved in relief.

The N extension of EN contains an impressive tomb (557) with twenty-eight *kokhim*, twenty-one gabled and seven with flat ceilings. The *kokhim* were arranged on two levels, one above the other, with a row of dentils above each level. Two ships and additional schematic drawings were incised on the walls of this tomb (see below). Additional caves with gabled or rectangular *kokhim* were discovered in the vicinity of the bell-shaped quarries south of Bet Guvrin (575). The bell-shaped quarries were hewn in the Late Roman and the Early Islamic period and clearly damaged the tombs. Two large *kokhim* tombs with Greek graffiti, naming Gades and Simidos (559) and Qosnatan (558), among others, were found in the E row of tombs, some 250 m

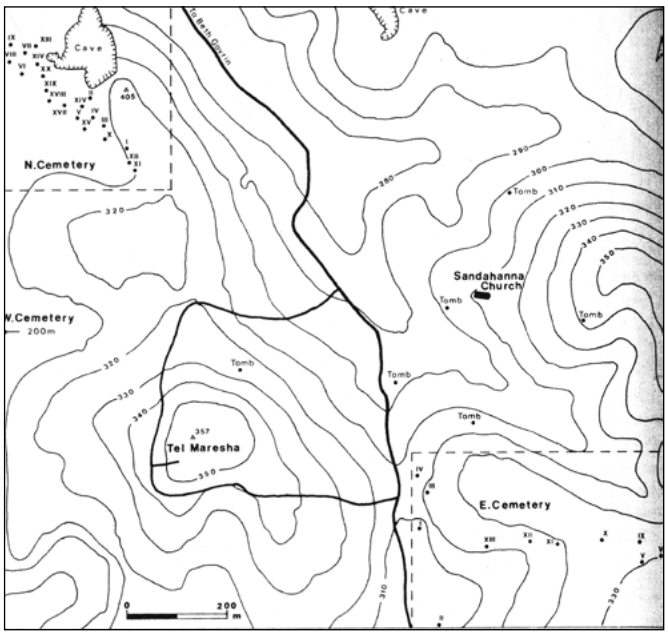


Fig. 2: plan of the NN, EN, and SWN of Maresha (Oren and Rappaport, 1984).

Fig. 2: planimetria delle necropoli nord - est ed ovest del complesso di Maresha (Oren and Rappaport, 1984).

from the UC fortifications. These "new" tombs will be described here for the first time.

Following the discovery of the painted tombs and their publication by Peters and Thiersch in 1905, the tomb-chambers of EN attracted much attention (e.g. Kloner, 2000, 2003; Jacobson, 2005; Erlich, 2009 and references therein) because of their unique architectural form and outstanding decorations, which resemble the architectural layout and artistic style of Ptolemaic-period tombs in Alexandria, Egypt (Empereur & Nenna, 2002, 2003; Venit, 2002 and references therein). They are considered a unique record of Hellenistic art, and *"the only surviving evidence in Israel of true Hellenistic paintings"* as Erlich (2009) has stated. Though they have been discussed in the past, we will describe them in detail here with special reference to their contribution to an understanding of the site.

Tomb I (551; Figs. 3a, 3b**)**

This is the largest (17×21 m) and most richly decorated tomb; it consists of a decorated central entrance chamber (A) that leads to three burial halls (B, C, D). Chamber A opens onto Hall D by means of a wide opening flanked by a pedestal for a statue on one side and an altar on the other. Thirteen gabled *kokhim* are cut into the walls of Hall D, six in the N and seven in the S; two long benches run along the walls beneath them. In the rear wall, a recess flanked by pilasters serves as a passage to three additional chambers. Hall B has five *kokhim* in each of its long walls and four in the short wall opposite the entrance. Hall C has five *kokhim* in each long wall and three in the short wall.

One of the most interesting features of this tomb is its wall paintings and inscriptions. The longer walls of Hall D feature a carved garland, painted with dots, above a continuous frieze of hunting scenes and animals, most

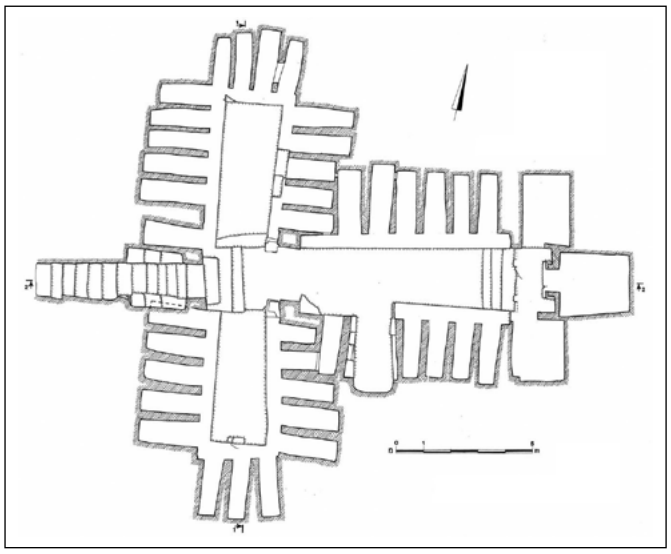


Fig. 3a: new plan of tomb 551 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).
Fig. 3a: nuova pianta della tomba 551 (A. Kloner e spedizione IAA).

of them identified in Greek script. The scene starts at the SW corner with a youth blowing his trumpet. Following is a horse and rider and a running dog. The rider hurls a spear at a bleeding female leopard, which already has an arrow in its breast; another hunting dog attacks the beast from the rear. Above is the inscription "Hyppos Lybanou tou hippikou," which Peters and Thiersch translated "The horse from the Lebanon of the rider" (1905) and Meyboom rendered "The horse of Libanus the cavalry commander" (1995). The hunted beast is labeled *pardalos*, i.e., "leopard." A black palm tree separates the leopard from the stalking lion on the left, which is erroneously labeled "panther" (*pantheros*) in the inscription above. The figure of the next animal was destroyed when two of the *kokhim* were joined. To the left is a huge bull (*tauros*) collapsed on its forelegs, with blood running from its mouth. To the left of the bull there is a large coiled snake. Behind the bull are a giraffe (*kamelopardalos*) facing left and a boar facing right. To the left is a griffin (*gryps*) composed of a lion's body and eagle's head and wings. In the same direction is a running antelope (*oryx*). A tree, similar to the previous one, separates the antelope from a red rhinoceros (perhaps hippopotamus) ambling to the left; the inscription above is "rhinoceros" (*rinokeros*). To its left is a black war elephant (*elephas*) bearing a saddle for the mahout and a canopy. Two figures to the left of the elephant were destroyed in 1902, as were the faces of the trumpeter and the rider (Peters & Thiersch, 1905). The defaced figure is identified as *Aithiopia* (Ethiopia). This concludes the description of the right-hand frieze.

Continuing on the opposite side are two fishes; one has the trunk and nose of an elephant, the other has the head of a rhinoceros. To their left is a crocodile (*krokodilos*), with an ibis (*ibis*) perched on its back. Behind them are a hippopotamus (without an inscription), a wild ass (*onagrios*) fighting with a snake, and a wolf crowned by an upright tuft of hair. To its left is another rhinoceros with one horn, which might be an Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*). Next is a porcupine (*ustrix*), whose body is directed down and forward. Further to the left is a lynx (*linx*). At the end of the frieze stands a *lamassu*, that is a lion with a human face and beard. Beneath the frieze is a painted band, and below it laurel wreaths tied with red ribbons; below them, at the tops of the pilasters, between the *kokhim*, are painted Ionic capitals.

In chamber A, above the altar, is a drawing of a red cock, and, probably, a matching one above the pedestal, flanking the doorjamb. On the doorjamb near the entrance to the middle hall (Room D) is an image of Kerberos (Cerberus). The recess in the middle burial chamber leading to the rear burial room is decorated with a triangular pediment similar to that of a Greek temple. The pediment is ornamented with a stylized (ivy?) leaf design, and below it runs a Doric frieze. The two pilasters flanking the entrance are painted red and have a rosette under the capital. On either side of the pilasters are tall painted amphorae, the one on the right surrounded with a wide, white-painted band, and that on the left with a red band. The amphorae are covered with lids painted in the same colors and have long fillets tied to the handles (Kloner, 2000). At the base of the recess, the legs of a bed are carved in relief. In front of the recess on either side of the pediment, two eagles with outspread wings stand on the garland that runs the entire length of the walls. Under each eagle is a yellow table whose legs end in a lion's foot. On each table rests a white-colored (i.e., made of silver) incense burner in the form of three griffins set on a base (Peters & Thiersch, 1905).

Thirty inscriptions, mainly names of the deceased, and five graffiti, all in Greek, were found in the tomb, in addition to the sixteen labels of the animals and man in the main frieze. Above the entrance to Burial Chamber XXXVI, to the right of the above recess (Room E), is the epitaph of Apollophanes, son of Sesmaios, head of the Sidonian colony in Marisa (Peters & Thiersch, 1905). The inscriptions show that many members of his family were buried in this tomb. The fathers' names are generally Semitic, while several of the sons' names are Greek. The Idumean names (Babas and theophoric names compounded with 'Qos') attest to the assimilation of the Sidonian family into the surrounding Idumean population; the Greek names are evidence of gradual Hellenization.

The dates found in Tomb I are according to the Seleucid era, covering the period 196–191 B.C. U. Rappaport had shown that an "odd" series of dates (years I-V) are according to a Ptolemaic regnal era, perhaps of Ptolemy V Epiphanes. This king reigned in Egypt in 204–180 B.C., but his control over Palestine ended with the Fifth Syrian War ca. 200 B.C. The years would cover his rule in Palestine (Oren & Rappaport, 1984). The dates of Ptolemy V's reign are followed in the Maresha inscriptions by dates according to the Seleucid era, of which the earliest is 196 B.C. Thus there is a sequence of dates from the Ptolemaic to the Seleucid period.

It becomes clear that the family of Sesmaios began to use its tomb in the first half of the third century B.C., since the great-grandsons of Sesmaios were buried there in year II (203/2 B.C.) and year V (201/200 or

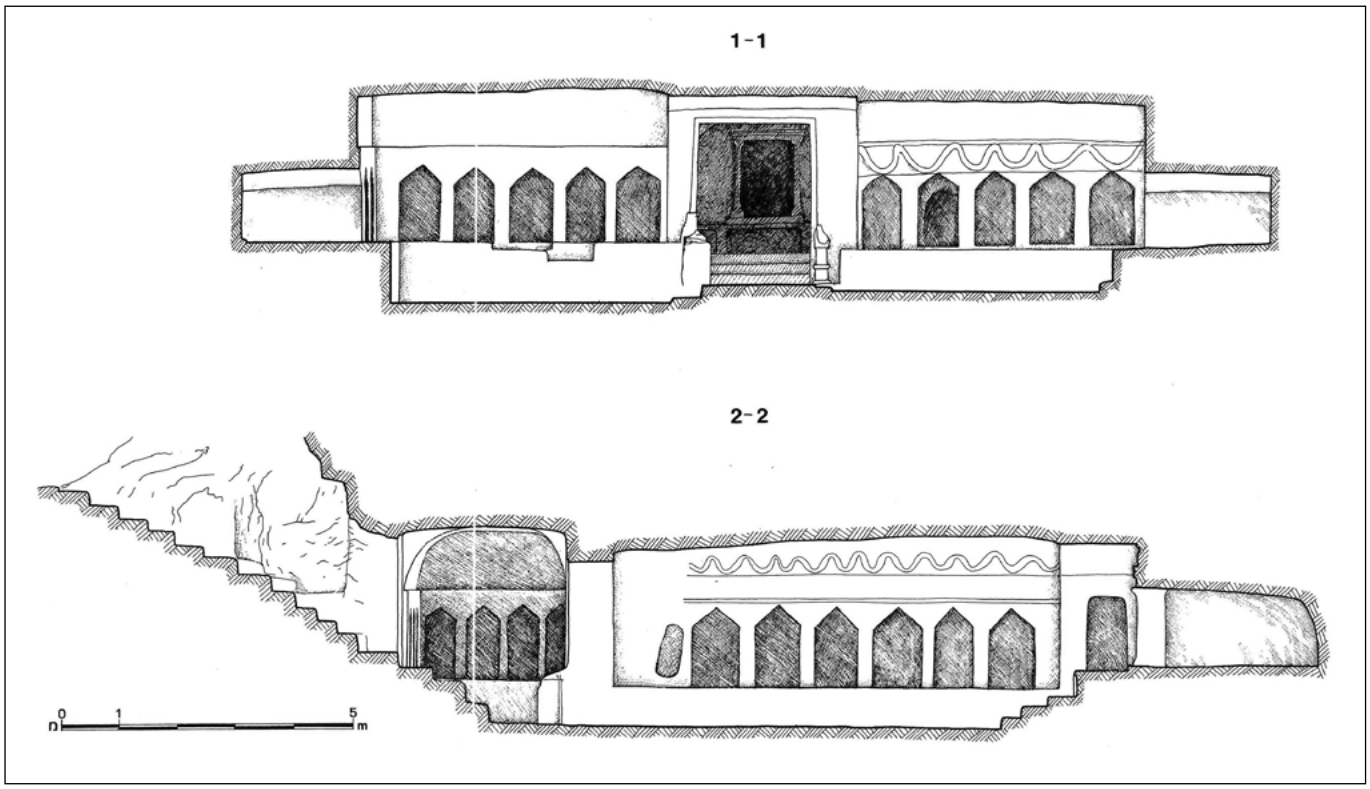


Fig. 3b: new sections of tomb 551 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).
Fig. 3b: nuove sezioni della tomba 551 (A. Kloner e spedizione IAA).

200/199) according to the regnal era of Ptolemy V Epiphanes (Oren & Rappaport, 1984). Erlich's detailed analysis (2009) yielded a date ca. 250 B.C. or slightly later for the tomb paintings.

Tomb II (552; Figs. 4a, 4b**)**
This tomb, located about 80 m S of Tomb I, is similar in plan to the former, but smaller (16×17m). From the corridor (A) one enters the central hall (D), with five *kokhim* along each side. Behind it to the E is another room from which seven small burial chambers branch off. There are eight *kokhim* in the hall (B), N of the entrance chamber. The S hall (C) does not contain any *kokhim*. Above the *kokhim* in Hall D is a painted decoration of garlands interrupted by wreaths. Large amphorae, similar to those in Tomb I, are painted on either side of the entrance to Hall D, on its W wall. These amphorae represent *loutrophoroi*, which were generally made of stone, especially marble, and were used to mark graves in the Hellenistic world (Bergemann, 1996). The vessel above a grave mound in vase paintings and adorned with ribbons on a grave relief is common in Greek funerary art (Kurtz & Boardman, 1971). This custom evidently became widespread in the Hellenistic period, mainly in the IV to III centuries B.C. There are two types of *loutrophoroi*—with three handles (*hydria*) and with two handles (*amphora*). Those at Maresha are of the two-handled type (Kloner, 2000). Tall *thymiateria* with burning candles are on the pilasters between Hall D and Room E (Peters & Thiersch, 1905). There are two small figures beside each *thymiaterion*. A fresco on the panel to the left of the door to the central burial room (XVII) shows a man crowned with a wreath, wearing a striped tunic and playing a double flute. Behind him walks a woman in a multicolored dress and playing a lyre. On the other side of the opening is a libation scene and, behind it, a tripod and *kantharos* (see detailed discussion by Erlich, 2009). There are twelve inscriptions in Tomb II, dated by Peters and Thiersch from 188 to 135 B.C.
The architecture and decorative elements of burial

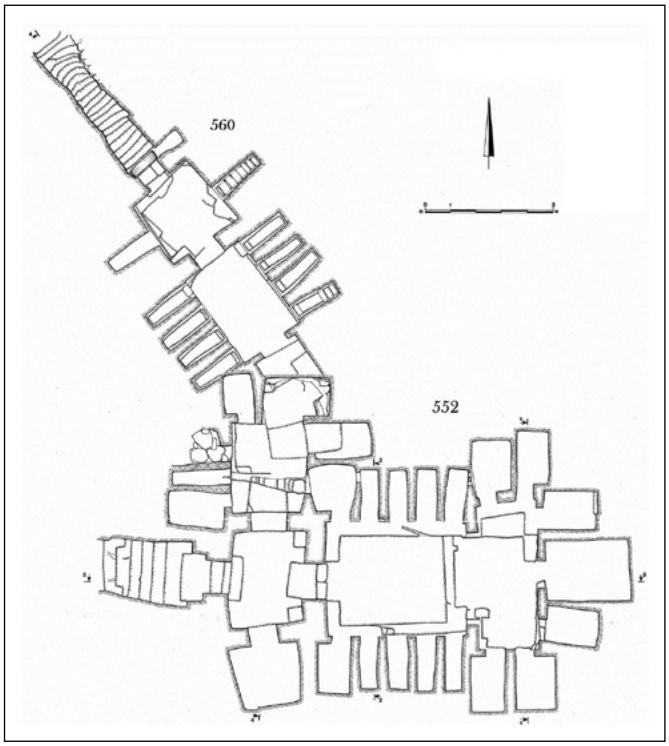


Fig. 4a: plan of tombs 552 and 560 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).
Fig. 4a: pianta delle tombe 552 e 560 (A. Kloner e spedizione IAA).

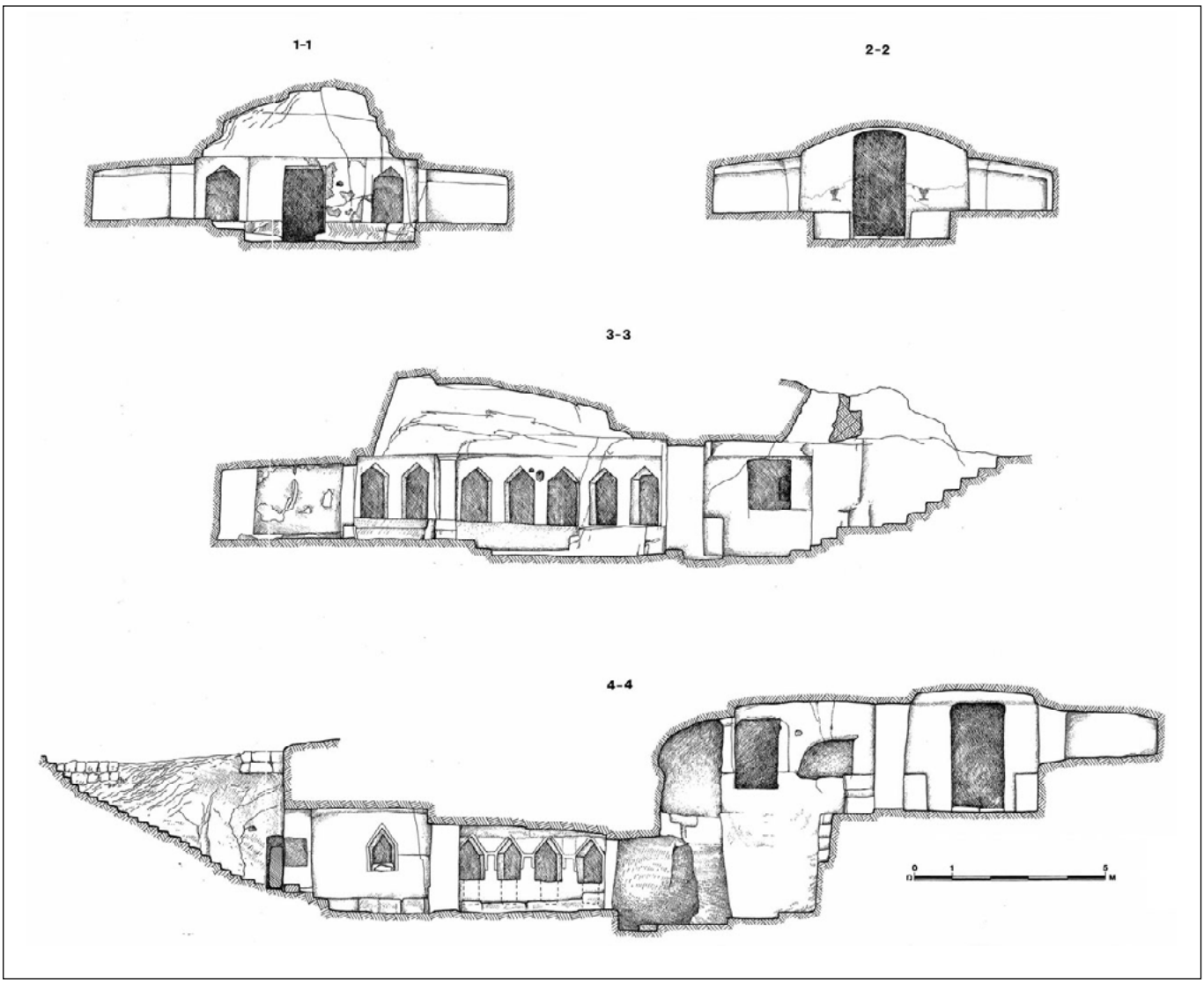


Fig. 4b: sections of tombs 552 and 560 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).
Fig. 4b: sezioni delle tombe 552 e 560 (A. Kloner e spedizione IAA).

caves 551 and 552 resemble the hypogea of Ptolemaic Alexandria (McKenzie, 1990; Empereur & Nenna, 2001, 2003; Venit, 2002, and references therein). The closest parallels to tombs 551 and 552 are found at Shatby, Alexandria. For example, the gabled *kokhim*, characteristic of almost all the Maresha tombs, appear in Hypogeum A at Shatby, which has been dated to 280–250 B.C. (McKenzie, 1990).

O. Tal (2003) has suggested that the *kokhim* tomb is a new type, which was locally developed at the beginning of the Hellenistic period, possibly influenced by V-century B.C. shaft tombs in Phoenicia. According to this study, there are two types of *kokhim* tombs in Israel: the simplest one, of a Phoenician influence, has up to ten *kokhim* and is used by a basic family unit. The more sophisticated type, known especially from Maresha and the surrounding area, has a few dozen *kokhim* and is used by an extended family over a long period. In Tal's opinion, this type shows no Alexandrian influence.

The paintings in the Maresha tombs are characterized mainly by Greek sepulchral elements: the eagles, the flutist, Kerberos, the cock, the amphorae (Kloner, 2000) and probably also the rider; the harpist, on the other hand, is likely to be an Egyptian influence. The animal frieze is influenced by Ptolemaic menagerie drawings, which are known to have existed in Hellenistic Alexandria. Under Aristotle's influence, there was great popular interest in the natural sciences. From descriptions by Agatarchides, we know that the menageries of Ptolemy II contained lions, leopards and other large cats, rodents, buffaloes from India and Africa, a wild ass from Moab, large snakes, a giraffe, a rhinoceros, and various birds — these are, in fact, some of the very animals represented at Maresha. The griffin was a Persian legacy. The animal with the human face was a version of the Assyrian lamassu (a fabulous creature with a lion's body, eagle's wings, and human face, statues of which guarded palace entrances). Fish with an elephant or rhinoceros face are taken from legends based on the belief, held by Greek scholars, that there was an exact correspondence between terrestrial and marine animals. Hellenistic travel stories are replete with descriptions of animals of this kind, which were found, they claimed, in remote corners of the earth. The animal frieze at Maresha is a



Fig. 5: ancient quarry which damaged tombs 552 and 560, showing the SE end of tomb 552 (photo B. Zissu).
Fig. 5: antica cava che ha danneggiato le tombe 552 e 560, vista dall'estremità sud est della tomba 552 (foto B. Zissu).



Fig. 7: main burial chamber of tomb 560, looking NW towards the entrance (photo B. Zissu).
Fig. 7: principale camera sepolcrale della tomba 560, guardando nord-ovest verso l'ingresso (foto B. Zissu).

unique document of its kind in the Hellenistic world. Only Roman mosaics, such as the one at Palestrina (ca. 100 B.C.), show influences of the same Hellenistic-Egyptian sources that inspired the artist at Maresha (Meyboom, 1995). The same visual source apparently inspired the drawings of animals sketched on the "Papyrus of Artemidorus" (Gallazzi et al., 2008). This papyrus, of debated authenticity, was allegedly found in Egypt in the *cartonnage* of a funerary mask (Canfora, 2007). Initially, it was intended to be a deluxe edition of the *Geographoumena* of Artemidorus of Ephesos (I century B.C.). An error in one of the maps in the text evidently caused the copying to be suspended. The papyrus produced until then was reused as a sketchbook for anatomical parts (copied from statues) on the front and for animals, real or imaginary, on the reverse, the latter accompanied by labels in Greek.
The paintings in tombs 551 and 552, which were damaged and have faded since their discovery, were restored in 1993 (Kloner, 1996; Jacobson, 2007).



Fig. 6: entrance to tomb 560, showing notches cut in each of the entrance doorjambs (marked "a") and round blocking stone in situ (marked "b") (photo B. Zissu).
Fig. 6: ingresso alla tomba 560, si notino le incisioni su ciascuno degli stipiti (lettera "a") e una pietra rotonda ancora in situ ("b") (foto B. Zissu).

Tomb 560 (Figs. 4a, 4b)
This tomb, physically connected to tomb 552, was excavated in 1993 by Kloner and Alpert and is published here for the first time. Tomb 560 was hewn from NW to SE, against the slope of the hill. Its S *kokhim* were cut at a lower level, just underneath the NW part of tomb 552. During the initial stage of use, in the Hellenistic period, there was no connection between the two adjacent tombs. At a later stage, apparently during or after the Roman period, a quarry operated in the SE part of tomb 560. This quarry, used for the extraction of limestone blocks, created a shaft approximately three meters deep, which damaged both tombs and linked them (Fig. 5). Following the 1993 excavations, this quarry was cleared of the chalk chips and debris that filled it, thereby enabling passage between the tombs on metal stairs and a bridge that ran over the quarry.
The entrance to tomb 560 was located at the bottom of a stepped *dromos* (Fig. 6). The original opening was large and rectangular (ca. 2.1 m high and 1.2 m wide); In the Roman phase, a small vault was built on two notches cut in each of the entrance doorjambs (marked "a" in Fig. 6), which created a smaller opening sealed with a round stone (diam. 1.1 m) that was rolled into an appropriately sized niche in the E wall ("b" in Fig. 6). Two steps descend from the opening to the floor of the first burial chamber, which had two *kokhim* with gabled ceilings cut in two of its walls, on both sides of the entrance. A burial trough (ca. 0.4 m wide, ca. 0.6 m deep), covered with slabs, was cut in the bottom of the E *kokh*, perhaps in the later, Roman stage of use. A wide passage leads to the next chamber, which has a wide standing pit, surrounded by ledges (Fig. 7), parts of which were cut at a later stage. Eight *kokhim* with gabled ceilings and (apparently later) burial troughs (ca. 0.4 m wide, c. 0.6 m deep), covered by slabs, were cut in the side walls, four in each wall. In the rear wall, a recess flanked by pilasters served as a passage to six additional double *kokhim*. They are arranged symmetrically, three on each side, flanking a burial chamber, which was hewn in the short wall opposite the entrance.

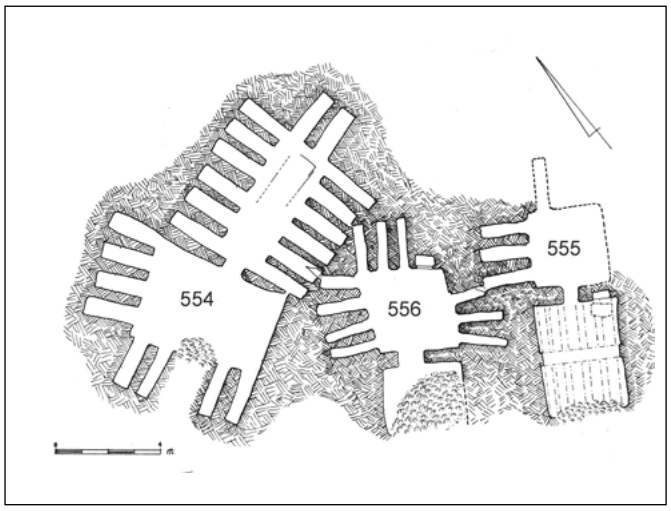


Fig. 8: plan of tombs 554, 555, 556 (A. Kloner and IAA expedition).
Fig. 8: planimetria delle tombe 554, 555, 556 (A. Kloner e spedizione IAA).

This tomb was looted in the past. The few remaining artifacts included fragments of storage jars, cooking pots, and oil-lamps from the Hellenistic period (Ambar-Armon, 2007). The few finds from the Roman period (II and III centuries A.C.) included "Roman provincial" oil lamps, fragments of glass vessels, a bracelet, and two copper-alloy rings. Three perforated terracotta palmettes (ca. 6.5 cm long, 4.8 cm wide) of a type known from other tombs at Maresha were apparently decorations attached to a wooden coffin.

Tomb IV (554; Fig. 8**)**
This tomb, located near the Sandahanna Church, was explored by Peters and Thiersch (1905) and reexamined in 1984. The first explorers gave only a general description and did not draw a plan; the location of the tomb has not been accurately marked on maps published since. The tomb consists of two rectangular halls, containing twenty-two gabled *kokhim* (each ca. 2 m long, 0.55 m wide, and 1.25 m high). Only one painting was preserved, on the partition wall between the two *kokhim* on the rear wall. It depicts a winged figure with a stylized human face above a disk, in red. The *kokhim* were sealed with stones and mud and bore Greek inscriptions, mainly the names of the deceased, incised on the walls above and between them. Additional inscriptions in a less formal hand were painted in reddish brown on the walls. The two scripts and the plan of the tomb attest to sequential stages in the use of the tomb. It was hewn around the mid-III century B.C., the incised inscriptions were done about that time and toward the end of the century, and the painted inscriptions were added at the end of the III century and during the II century B.C. The majority of the names are Greek; a few are Semitic, of Idumean or Sidonian provenance (Avi-Yonah & Kloner, 1993).

Tombs 555 and 556 (Fig. 8**)**
Two tombs, adjacent to 554, were documented by Kloner in the early 1990s. Tomb 556 comprises a vestibule and a burial chamber with 10 *kokhim* with arched ceilings and a bone collection niche. The plan is typical to Jewish burial caves of the I and II centuries A.C. Crosses marked above some of the *kokhim* belong to the last, Byzantine phase of use. Tomb 555 was heavily damaged. It consists of a courtyard and a burial chamber with at least four *kokhim*. It seems that tomb 554 was cut first and afterwards 555; tomb 556 was the last one

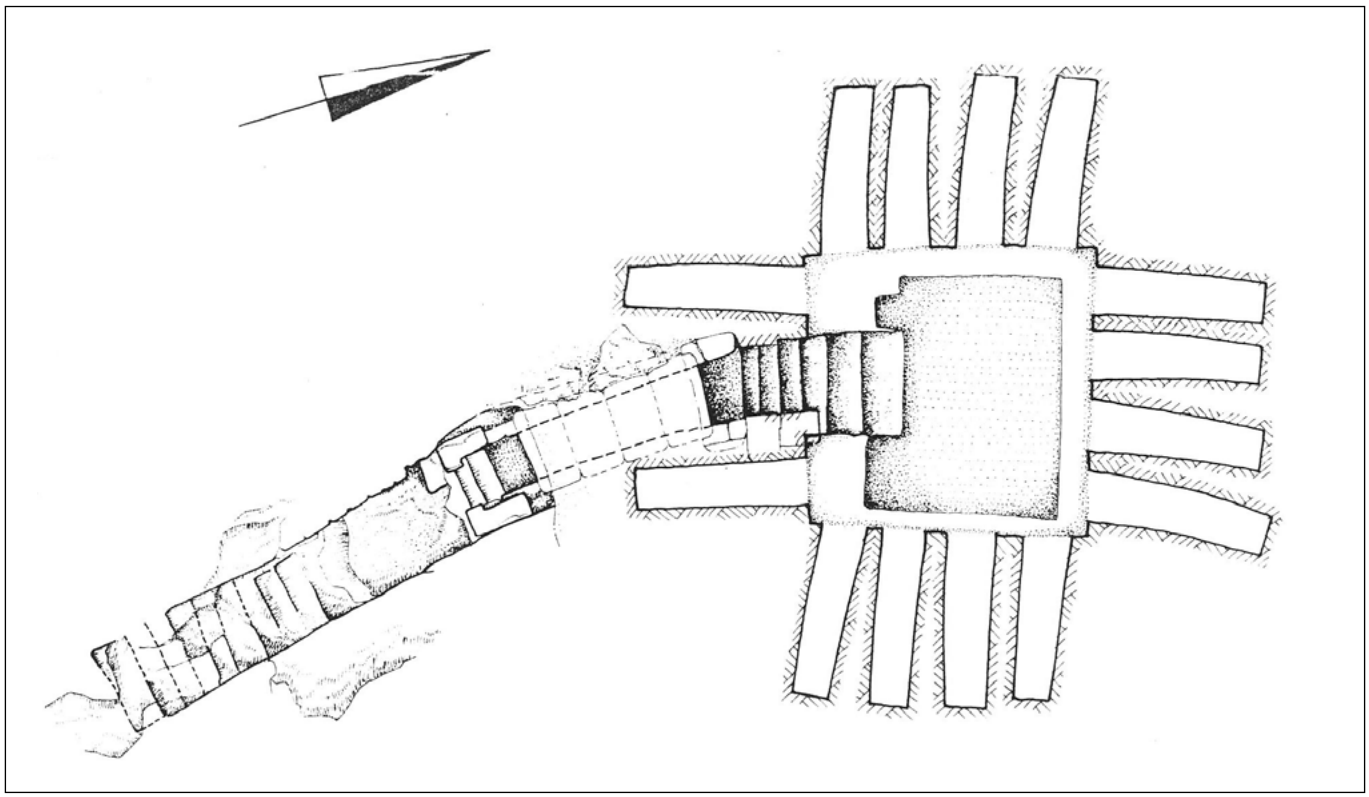


Fig. 9a: plan of tomb 557 (A. Kloner., B. Alpert and IAA expedition).
Fig. 9a: planimetria della tomba 557 (A. Kloner, B. Alpert e spedizione IAA).

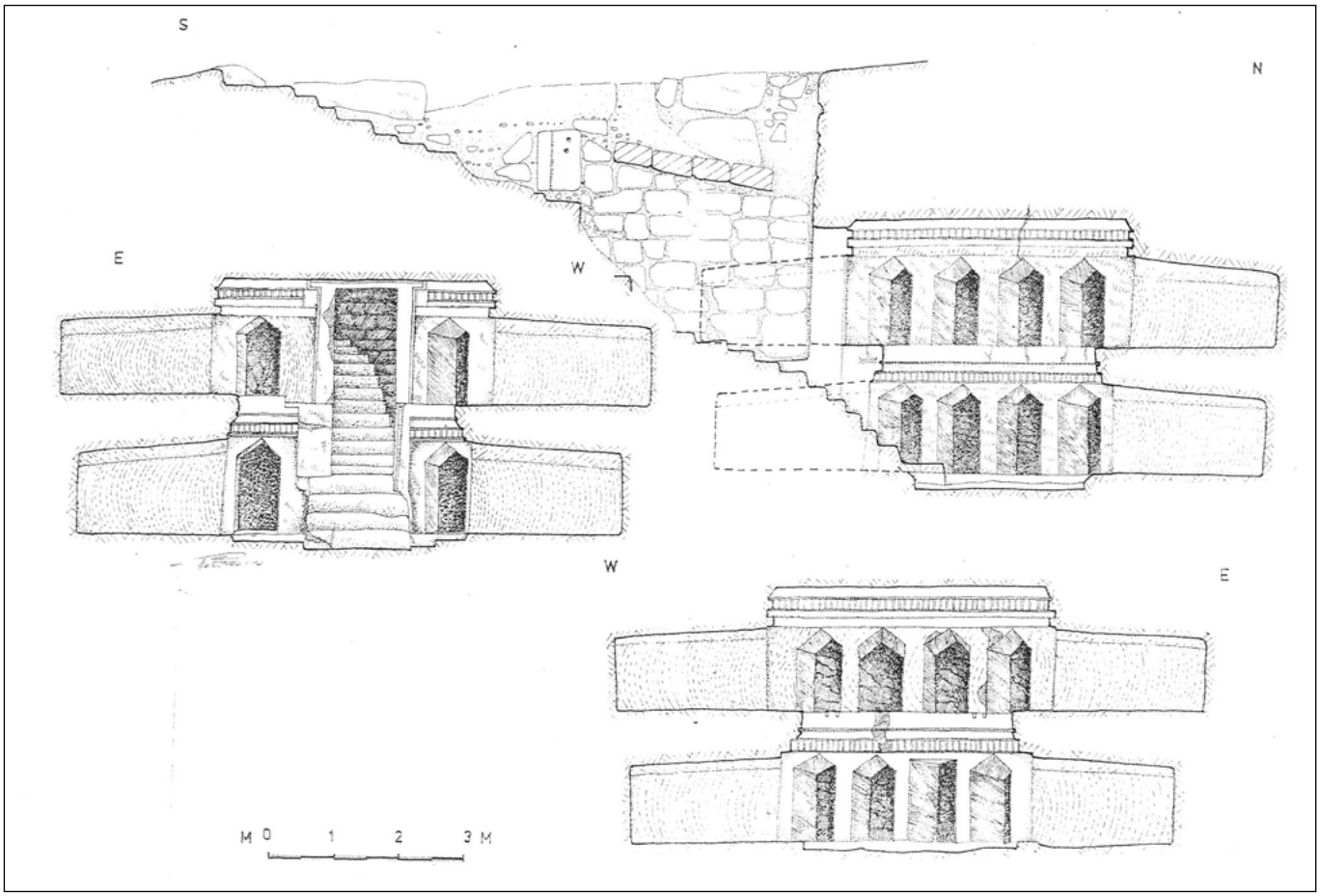


Fig. 9b: sections of tomb 557 (A. Kloner., B. Alpert and IAA expedition).
Fig. 9b: sezioni della tomba 557 (A. Kloner, B. Alpert e spedizione IAA).

to be hewn, as its plan is adapted to accommodate the neighboring tombs.

Tomb 557 (Fig. 9**)**
The tomb is located on the S-facing slope (map. ref. NIG 190743/611999), ca. 40 m south of the partially collapsed complex of bell-shaped caves known as "ʿIraq el-Haleil" or "Meʿarat Halulim." The tomb was excavated by Kloner and Alpert in 1994.
A stepped *dromos* (ca. 1 m wide) descends NW towards the entrance. The impressive rectangular entrance (2.9 m high, 1 m wide) was decorated on the inner side with an Attic frame (Fig. 10). In the Roman period, massive doorposts were erected on the course of the *dromos*, cutting it into two parts. These doorposts were erected to create a much smaller opening that could be easily closed with a stone door. The lower part of the *dromos* (ca. 4.5 m long) is narrower (ca. 0.6 m), built of massive stones, and covered with stone slabs.
From the entrance, one descends via four steps into the burial chamber, which has a standing pit in its center, surrounded by benches (0.15 m high, 0.5 m wide). The *kokhim* were hewn on two levels one above the other (Fig. 11). The upper level was cut ca. 0.5 m into the depth of the bedrock, creating a ledge 0.5 m wide, which was needed to perform the burial and close the *kokhim*. The ceiling of the tomb chamber is flat and surrounded by a double cornice. A dentillated frieze is enclosed between the cornices. The cornices and frieze continue from one side of the Attic door frame to the other. The lower level has a similar decorative scheme carved under the ledge. Its E side starts from a low pillar, which the masons purposely left to support three narrow steps that provide access to the ledge. Each level had 14 *kokhim*, which were cut in the walls of the burial chamber along the same pattern: one on each side of the entrance and four in each of the other three walls. The typical dimensions of the *kokhim* are 0.7 m wide, 2.4 m long, and a maximum height of 1.3 m. Twenty-seven *kokhim* had typical gabled roofs; the other had a flat ceiling. Looters discarded the closing slabs for the *kokhim* on the floor.
Several graffiti were incised with a sharp tool on the lower cornice: two ships, two schematic birds (?), and a schematic human figure. The ships were discussed in detail in a recent article by Hadad and Artzi (2011). Additional carved schematic designs were found on some of the dentils. Some had an elongated and/or rounded element within a square frame, which resembles a very schematic *nefesh* or a Nabataean *baetyl*. The graffiti on both doorjambs were purposely obliterated. The less damaged carving, on the eastern jamb, depicts a triangular element set inside a square, perhaps representing a schematic *nefesh* (a pyramidal tomb marker or monument). The carvings on the dentils survived in a much better shape. Our interpretation of these graffiti as *nefashot* or perhaps as *baetyls* deserves further research. Based on the few artifacts uncovered



Fig. 10: tomb 557; photo of burial chamber, looking south, towards the entrance and the decorative "Attic" frame (photo B. Zissu).
Fig. 10: tomba 557; foto della camera sepolcrale, guardando a sud verso l'ingresso e le decorazioni a "greca" (foto B. Zissu).



Fig. 11: tomb 557; photo of burial chamber, looking north (photo B. Zissu).
Fig. 11: tomba 557; foto della camera sepolcrale, guardando verso nord (foto B. Zissu).

in the tomb and its peculiar architecture, the tomb was cut in the Hellenistic period and was reused in the Roman and Byzantine periods.

Tomb 559 (Fig. 12**)**
The tomb is located near tomb 558 and was slightly damaged in antiquity by Subterranean Complex 97, part of the LC. The tomb was excavated by Kloner and Alpert in 1998.
The tomb is accessed through an arched *dromos* and a vestibule, which descend southward towards a rectangular opening (at least 1.8 m high, 0.9 m wide). The burial chamber, oriented N-S, is divided in two by two asymmetric pilasters that flank two monolithic freestanding pillars (0.55 m diam., 2.1 m high) with square capitals and round bases (Fig. 13a). The pilasters and the columns support the ceiling.
Fifteen *kokhim* were hewn in the walls of the tomb; seven of them, located in the N part, have gabled ceilings. The eighth *kokh* cut in this part has a flat ceiling and was perhaps used for collected bones (Fig. 13b). A Greek inscription was incised above this *kokh* (Fig. 13c); the upper line mentions the Macedonian month of Hyperberetaios (equivalent to September/October) of the Seleucid year 129 (183 B.C.).
It ends with four letters, EMBO, which are perhaps an abbreviation of the Greek word *emboule*, which means "with the consent of the city council." If our interpretation is correct, it has interesting implications for the civic institutions active in Hellenistic Maresha and their functions. The lower line mentions the names "Gaddes" (the Greek equivalent of the Semitic name Gad) and "Simidos" (perhaps the Greek equivalent of the Semitic name Shemida, mentioned twice in the Bible (Numbers 26:32 and 1 Chronicles 7:19).
Tomb 561
The tomb was discovered in 1985, during the course of work on the modern road, which follows the ancient road from Bet Guvrin to the Hebron Hills. The tomb is located E of the mound, some 300 m from the defensive line of the UC and ca. 100 m NW from Tomb I (551). This was the first tomb uncovered at our site that had not been raided by looters. The tomb was detected during the exploration of Subterranean Complex 71 (also found as a result of this construction), when it became clear that a crack, which connected the underground system to one of the *kokhim* of 561, had been carefully plastered over in antiquity. The tomb comprised a rectangular hall (5.1 m long, 3.5 m wide, and 2.2 m high), with a low bench cut along its walls (0.4 m wide and 0.5 m high). The original entrance to the tomb, located in its S wall, was blocked with masonry. Most of the *kokhim* are 2.2 m. long and 0.7 m wide. Each has a gabled façade and roof 1.3 m above floor level. The *kokhim* were found sealed with masonry and contained primary burials.

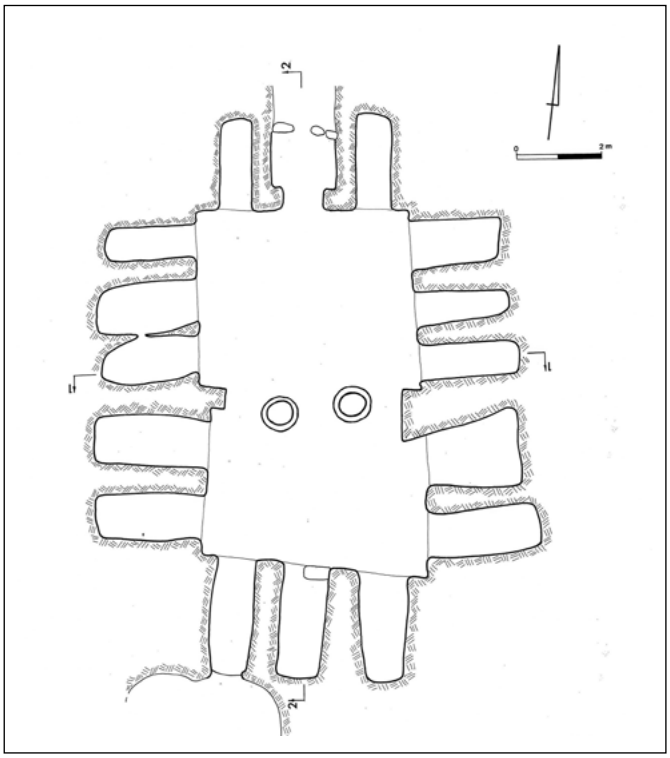


Fig. 12a: plan of tomb 559 (A. Kloner, B. Alpert and IAA expedition).
Fig. 12a: planimetria della tomba 559 (A. Kloner, B. Alpert e spedizione IAA).

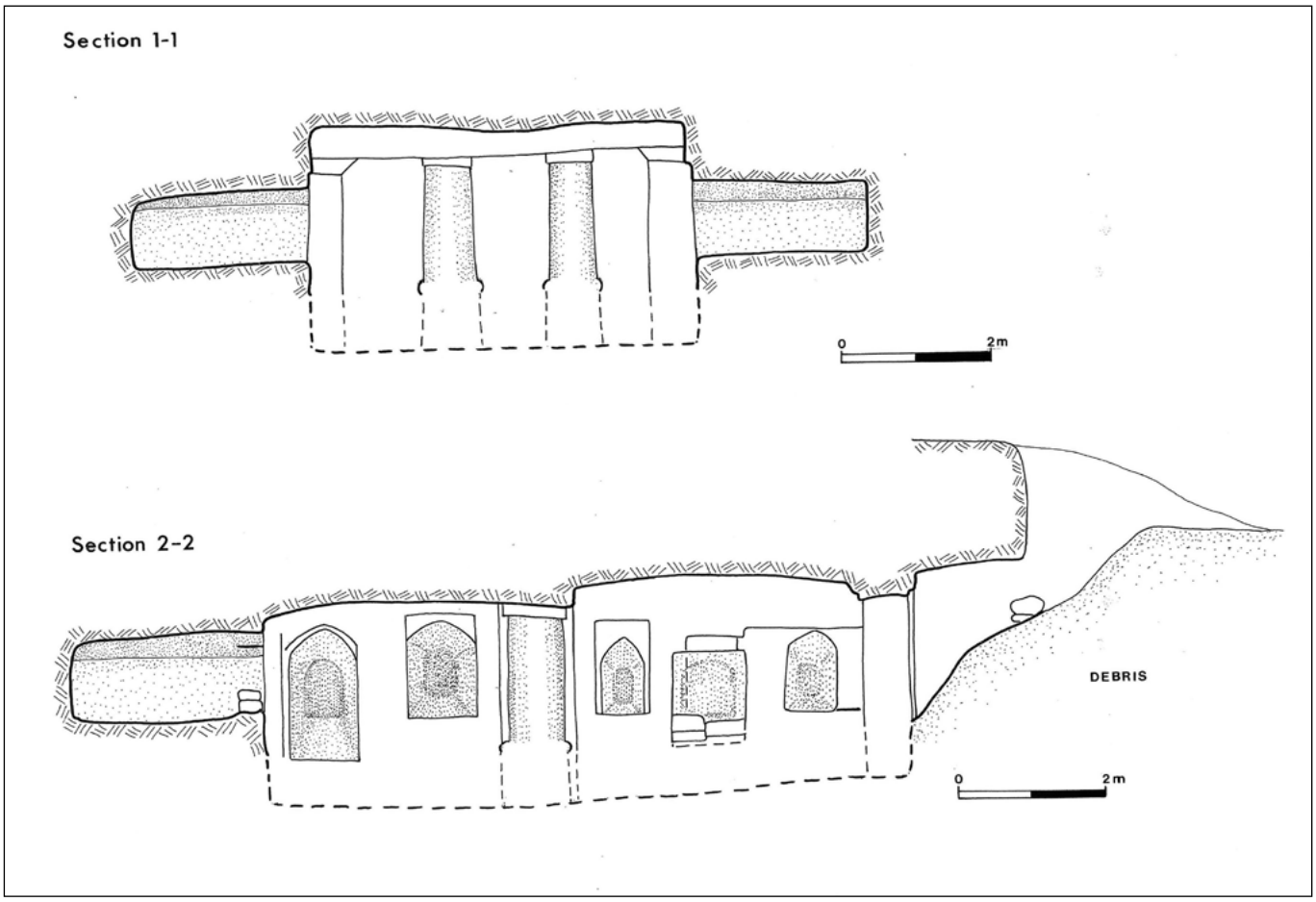


Fig. 12b: sections of tomb 559 (A. Kloner, B. Alpert and IAA expedition).
Fig. 12b: sezioni della tomba 559 (A. Kloner, B. Alpert e spedizione IAA).

Only *kokh* 3 contained collected bones, of nine adults and two children. A quarter of those buried in the tomb were youths and infants. The bones of three adults showed signs of tuberculosis, a disease uncommon in archaeological contexts. Ten pieces of pottery were found in the tomb, some from the III century B.C. The tomb also contained fragments of glass vessels and few metal finds. Only one Greek graffito was found, with an unclear name that might be read "Megis[tas]."

Tomb 575

The tomb is located on a slope, NE of the tell (map. ref. NIG 190768/612080), and is part of the system of bell-shaped caves known as "ʿIraq el-Haleil" or "Meʿarat Halulim," which damaged the tomb significantly (Fig. 14a). The tomb, never documented in the past, was visited by the authors in 2013 as part of our planned renewal of the exploration of the necropolis.

A *dromos* descends to the N towards the entrance, which was mostly destroyed long ago. The tomb consists of a single, carefully hewn burial chamber, whose floor and significant parts of the lower part of the walls were cut into by the bell-shaped quarry (Fig. 14c). Fifteen *kokhim* were cut in the walls of the tomb: one on each side of the entrance, five on the right side, five on the left side, and three on the wall opposite the entrance. All have typical gabled ceilings, with the exception of the three *kokhim* in the wall opposite the entrance, which have flat ceilings. The ceiling of the tomb chamber itself is gabled and surrounded by a cornice. Due to the extent of the destruction, there were no finds in this tomb. Based on its typical architecture, it was cut in the Hellenistic period.

We should mention that within this extensive bell-shaped quarry, there is an additional partly destroyed tomb that was not examined due to safety issues. An earlier columbarium cut into by the quarry is also visible (Fig. 14b).

The Southwestern Necropolis (SWN)

Three tombs (Nos. 500, 501 and 502) were discovered in the SW necropolis, 250–500 m from the slope of the UC, thus providing an outer limit for the LC in this area, similarly to the tombs of the E necropolis. Tombs 501 and 502 are close to the UC; they are therefore of a relatively early date, having been hewn before the expansion of the lower city.

Tomb 500

The tomb, which is aligned E-W, was entered from the surface through a 5.4 m–long rock-cut passage with eleven steps, which widens from 1.1 to 1.4 m; the lowest step is 2.2 m below the highest. The entrance, which faces W, is 0.8 m wide and 1.79 m high.

The layout consists of a hall divided into three chambers with *kokhim*. A bench, which doubles as a step at the entrance, was built along the walls in the first chamber. Three gabled *kokhim* were hewn into the wall on each



Figs. 13: tomb 559; a) view to south; b) Kokhim cut in the western wall - note location of inscription; c) detail of the inscription (photos A. Kloner., B. Alpert and IAA expedition).
Figg. 13: tomba 559; a) vista da sud; b) Kokhim scavato nel muro occidentale in cui si trova l' iscrizione; c) dettaglio della iscrizione (foto A. Kloner., B. Alpert and IAA expedition).

side of the chamber. Engaged columns, in low relief and topped by Doric capitals, decorate the area between the *kokhim*, six on each side, with an irregular bench in front. The ceiling, most of which has collapsed, took the form of a gable with a groove running along its length. In the second chamber, engaged columns like those in the first chamber were carved only along the N wall, but a cornice runs along both walls. Columns with different capitals were carved at either side of the passage from the second to the third chamber. The third chamber differs from the others in the direction of the stone-cutting marks and in the lower level of its floor. A bench of uniform width runs all around it and the only decoration is a cornice carved above the *kokhim*, of which six were hewn in each of the long walls and another four in the rear wall across the width of the chamber.

Because most of the ceiling has collapsed, it was not possible to determine the original shape of the third chamber, which was probably a later extension of the original tomb.

In all the chambers, traces of plaster used to seal the *kokhim* with stones were visible around the openings. These stones, some of which bore fragmentary inscriptions, were found scattered in the tomb. About a dozen Greek inscriptions, mainly names and dates, had been incised or painted on the cornices above the *kokhim*; these inscriptions attest to use of the tomb in the III and II centuries B.C.

A large assemblage of pottery and few coins discovered in the tomb were dated to the same time span. Thirteen inscriptions were discovered in Greek, bearing names common among the Idumeans. Some inscriptions were dated to the last third of the II century B.C.; the latest inscription was from 112 B.C., a short time before the conquest of the city by John Hyrcanus.

The Northern Necropolis (NN)

The NN extends ca. 500 to 700 m N of the walls of the UC and includes some twenty *kokhim* tombs.

The plan of tomb No. 517 was published by Clermont-Ganneau, who recorded two Greek inscriptions (1896). The plans of nine tombs (510–516, 520, 522) were published by Oren and Rapapport (1984).

Three additional tombs (nos. 518, 519, and 526), located at the N edge of the necropolis, were documented by Kloner (2003).

The tombs of the NN have common architectural characteristics, are exceptionally well-executed, and generally resemble the "Sidonian type" tombs of Maresha. The tombs consisted of rock-cut burial chambers with *kokhim* cut in their walls and a long, stepped corridor (*dromos*), which leads down to the impressive rectangular tomb opening (ca. 2.2 m high and 1.2 m wide), which is sometimes decorated with an Attic frame. These openings were typically closed with a wall built of limestone bricks and white mortar. As a rule, the *kokhim* have gabled tops; a long bench runs along the walls below them. The *kokhim* in the back wall opposite the entrance are often larger and were probably intended for the burials of the heads of the family.

Elsewhere, the spaces between the *kokhim* are decorated with pilasters in low relief. No coffins were used; the *kokh* opening was sealed with a stone slab or filled with smaller stones and plastered over with brown mud. Most tombs bore incised Greek names and graffiti and can be dated to the III to II centuries B.C. Only tomb 514 has a Nabataean name. Burial epitaphs were usually written haphazardly in mud or else were incised above and between the *kokhim*. Occasionally, new inscriptions covered older ones; when the space for an inscription was not carefully calculated, the initial



Fig. 14a: tomb 575; photo of the tomb from the quarry (photos B. Zissu).
Fig. 14a: tomba 575; foto della tomba dalla cava (foto B. Zissu).

letters were often more widely spaced than those at the end. The inscriptions usually contain the names of the deceased and sometimes a date and a short formula. The new inscriptions are of the same type as those found in the "Sidonian" tombs. The similarities in paleography and onomastics, and the use of the same dating system, make it clear that the tombs belonged to families of the Hellenistic settlement at Maresha, of an ethnic background similar to the "Sidonian" colony. Judging by the goods associated with the grave, it appears that these tombs were used for primary burials during the III and II centuries B.C.

During excavations in the N cemetery it became evident that a number of tombs were reused during the I through IV centuries A.C. These tombs reflect a "new" procedure, i.e., secondary burial, in which bones were collected in stone ossuaries or deposited in *ossilegium* pits cut in the floor and in niches above and below the *kokhim*.

This custom was unknown in the Hellenistic necropolis of Maresha but was common in Jewish cemeteries in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Judea during the I century A.C. and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in the country during the ensuing three centuries (Oren & Rapapport, 1984).

Towards the late III to early IV centuries A.C., the residents of nearby Bet Guvrin began using a new cemetery cut in the slope E of the Ahinoam cave. Tombs 510 and 520 (Oren & Rapapport, 1984) at the NE edge of this cemetery were resurveyed and excavated in 1992 by Kloner and Alpert. Several stones, apparently remains of a tomb marker or *nefesh* were located above the tombs that contained finds from the Hellenistic and from the Roman period. The remains of three additional hypogea *(n*os. 518, 519, and 526) were mapped in the 1990s. These last three caves were heavily damaged by the activity of the bell-shaped quarries, during the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (Zissu & Kloner, in press).

Tomb 515 has *kokhim* cut on two levels, one above the other (Fig. 15a), but Oren and Rapapport omitted this basic feature on the plan, which presented only the lower level. This tomb has additional interesting features. Its original large and wide opening was purposely narrowed during the secondary use of the tomb in the Roman period, a feature discerned also in other reused tombs (see above). The narrowing was done with large slabs of harder limestone, which created a square frame, intended to hold a square, blocking stone, found *in situ* (Fig. 15b). Such stones are typical of Early Roman burial caves. During this stage, when the tomb from the Hellenistic period was reused by Jews living in nearby Bet Govrin, small niches were systematically cut in the walls and floors of the



Fig. 14b: tomb 575; photo of the tomb from the quarry (photo B. Zissu).
Fig. 14b: tomba 575; foto della tomba dalla cava (foto B. Zissu).



Fig. 14c: tomb 575; photo from inside the damaged tomb (photo B. Zissu).
Fig. 14c: tomba 575; foto dall'interno della tomba danneggiata (foto B. Zissu).

tomb. These held collected bones (known as secondary burials), which was a common custom among the Jews, as explained above. During the 1990s, illegal excavations were carried out on the floor of tomb 515. A visitor found two Roman provincial lamps in the heap of debris left by the looters; the present writers were able to examine them. One of the lamps has a discus that was deliberately broken off; the other has a well-preserved decoration of Europa mounted on a bull. Roman provincial lamps are common in assemblages of the II and III centuries A.C. (e.g. see above, Tomb 560; Wexler & Gilboa, 1996). Another interesting feature not mentioned by Oren and Rappaport is that Tomb 515 is entered through a *kokh* connected to one of the *kokhim* of Tomb 514. This explains how the original blocking stone of Tomb 515 remained *in situ*.

Conclusions

Three cemeteries (necropoleis) are known in the vicinity of ancient Maresha. The necropoleis contain more than 40 tombs, most of them of a similar design: a rectangular chamber into whose walls loculi (niches; *kokhim* in Hebrew) were cut, most featuring typical gabled openings. All the burial caves were initially cut in the Hellenistic period. Two of these tombs (nos. I and II), discovered in 1902, had outstanding wall paintings dating from the III century B.C. The paintings are characterized by a mixture of Semitic and Greek sepulchral elements. The animal frieze painted in Tomb I is a unique document of its kind in the Hellenistic world. The paintings, which were damaged and have faded since their discovery, were restored in 1993.

The Hellenistic period burial caves of Maresha were family tombs intended for several generations of citizens. The tombs continued to serve this purpose throughout the III and II centuries B.C., with many dozens, sometimes hundreds, of burials over several generations. In some caves, the interment continued for six or seven generations.

The plans of the halls and loculi of the hypogea probably reached Maresha from the Hellenistic world with which it had social and economic intercourse, mainly from Alexandria in Egypt, then the major cultural and administrative hub of the eastern Mediterranean. The burial caves resemble the architectural and artistic style of Ptolemaic period tombs (mostly from the III century B.C.) in the Shatby necropolis at Alexandria.

Inscriptions and other epigraphic remains from Maresha's necropoleis reflect the multi-ethnic composition of the city, which included Idumeans, Phoenicians, Greeks, some Egyptians, and possibly a few Judeans. These ethnic elements produced the outstanding social and cultural fabric of Maresha during the Hellenistic period.

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Figs. 15: tomb 515; a) photo of the tomb to east; b) photo to west, towards the blocked entrance (photos B. Zissu).
Figg. 15: tomba 515; a) foto della tomba a est; b) foto della tomba a ovest, verso l'ingresso chiuso (foto B. Zissu).

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