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ON THE ORIGIN AND CONCEPT OF THE LOCULI  
TOMBS OF HELLENISTIC PALESTINE

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## ABSTRACT

A comparison between Persian and Hellenistic period tombs in Palestine revealed that pit, cist and shaft tombs and burial caves were commonly used in both periods, whereas loculi tombs were introduced into the Palestinian milieu during the Hellenistic period. Burial in jars, cairns (tumuli) and built structures was far less common in both periods. The origin of the loculi tombs of Hellenistic Palestine has not commonly been dealt with in archaeological research. This study seeks to examine previous conventions and suggest a local (Phoenician), internal development for the use and concept of the Palestinian loculi tombs.

Hellenistic burial customs in Palestine have never been studied systematically, especially those of Ptolemaic and Seleucid date—that is the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. Hellenistic tombs have been uncovered in many sites in Palestine, and a variety of burial types and customs may be observed.<sup>1</sup> The survey and documentation of all published (and some unpublished) examples enable us not only to study their typology and geographical distribution, but also to postulate social and ideological implications, such as different perceptions and beliefs about the afterlife. A comparison between tomb types of Hellenistic and Persian date can also reveal whether they were subject to any influence, in the dawn of the supposed ‘Hellenic’ diffusion to the East. In the current article, however, I will focus my discussion on the origin and concept of loculi tombs in Hellenistic Palestine, for reasons that will be specified below.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kuhnen 1990, 69–81, is actually the only more recent attempt, albeit using a generalised approach, to list selected tombs of Hellenistic (Ptolemaic, Seleucid and Hasmonean) date.

<sup>2</sup> This article is based on a few of the observations I have raised in one of the chapters (Burial) in my PhD dissertation, *Aspects of the Study of the Material Culture of Hellenistic—Ptolemaic and Seleucid—Palestine* (2002), submitted to the Senate of Tel Aviv University and carried out under the supervision of M.L. Fischer. A draft of this article was presented at the 31st annual conference of the Israel Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies, held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in June 2002. The term ‘loculi tombs’ as it is used here refers to the Hebrew term *kukhim* caves. The literal meaning of the Hebrew (Talmudic) word *kukh* (sg.)/*kukhim* (pl.) can be simply described as a regular (square)-shaped vertical niche the size of a human body, used first and foremost for primary burial. Though anachronistic for Early Hellenistic use, in the Early Rabbinic sources of the Late Second Temple period relating to Jewish burial rites, it became a synonym for perpendicular loculi in a given burial complex of a given date, see also Patrich 1994, 196–99.

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A brief characterisation of the types of burials of Hellenistic Palestine can suggest that they may be divided between individual tombs and familial tombs; and between inhumation and emplacement burial. Inhumation served primary burial, whereas emplacement burial served both primary and secondary burial. Cremation in Palestine in the period discussed is rarely documented, though it was a custom in earlier periods among the Phoenicians who dwelt along the coast and on the adjacent plains.<sup>3</sup>

A concise typology for the tombs in Hellenistic Palestine shows a division between common, less common and rare types; and a somewhat defined geographical distribution of tomb types to geographical/topographical regions in Palestine. These are:

*Jar Burials*

Jar burials usually served for secondary burial of individuals, in which the deceased's bones are placed within a jar. Jar burials also served a primary use for burials of infants. The upper part of the jar was removed in order to facilitate this practice. This type of burial is rather rare in the Hellenistic period and was actually documented so far only in two sites in the Coastal Plain.<sup>4</sup>

*Pit Burials*

Pit burials served for the primary burial of individuals. They were formed by digging (or mining) a pit with the dimensions of the deceased lying on his back. The type predominates in sites of the Coastal Plain, Galilee and the Sharon Plain (as recorded so far), and is usually found together with cist burials.

*Cist Burials*

Like the previous type, these were used for the primary burial of individuals. They were formed like pit burials, but were lined and covered with stone slabs that created a sort of built cist. Their average size is *ca.* 2 m long by 0.5 m wide. Some cist burials, when preserved sealed, provide evidence of

<sup>3</sup> The only Hellenistic cremation documented so far in Palestine was recently discovered in a destroyed rock-cut complex in Galilee within a large alabaster vessel, from which bones of a male, female, child and bird were identified. Pottery found in the complex was dated to the 2nd century BC, see Aviam 2002, XIII. For cremation of Iron Age date, see, for example, Mazar 1990, 539–40, and for cremation of Persian date, Prausnitz 1981.

<sup>4</sup> At Kibbutz Loḥamé HaGeta'ot, see Peleg 1991, 132–34; and at Yafo (Joppa), see Avner-Levy 1998. Their method of publication, however, precludes drawing firm conclusions as to the age of the deceased or type of burial—primary/secondary.

the use of wooden coffins, such as nails and other metal implements. This type predominates on the Coastal Plain, but is also found in inland regions such as the Plain of Jezreel and the Jordan Valley.<sup>5</sup> In both pit and cist burials the deceased were laid on their back, usually along an east-west axis. The presence of stone slabs on the ground near the tombs may testify to their use as stone covers or tombstones; some are decorated and inscribed.

#### *Cairn Burials (Tumuli)*

These served for primary burial of individuals. They are pit or cist burials covered or 'mounded' by a heap of stones marking them out on the ground. This type has a long history of successive use from prehistoric times onward, but it has been neglected in archaeological research on Ancient Israel for lack of interest. Hence it has been excavated only at one site, Mazor,<sup>6</sup> though surveyed at others.

#### *Burial Caves*

Burial caves served for primary and secondary burials together, usually of more than one deceased. In the Hellenistic period the term refers to natural underground spaces (irregular in contour) or artificial underground spaces (regular in contour), usually approached by a horizontal entrance. They are found in most parts of the country, and sometimes were reused.<sup>7</sup> Like the previous type, burial caves have a long history of successive use from prehistoric times.

#### *Shaft Tombs*

Shaft tombs were used for primary burials. They are actually rock-cut caves with a rectangular, oval or irregular contour, approached through a vertical shaft. Some have a single and others a double room. Many of the Hellenistic shaft tombs were reused. They are found in those regions where they were common in earlier periods: in Galilee, since they were common in the Intermediate Bronze Age; and on the Coastal Plain and the Plain of Judah

<sup>5</sup> For pit and cist burials in the Coastal Plain, at 'Akko (Acco), see Fortuna 1966, *passim*; Tzaferis 1986; Feig and Eisenberg 1991; Lieberman-Wander, Tatcher and Muqari 1999; and at Yafo, see, Avner-Levy 1998. For pit and cist burials in inland regions, at Beth Yerah (Philoteria), see Getzov 1998, 21, for example; and at Beth Zur, see, Sellers 1933, 21–22, pl. 2, Loci 146 and 149.

<sup>6</sup> For Mazor, see Zilberbod and Amit 1999, 64\*.

<sup>7</sup> For example, at Gezer in the Plain of Ajalon, see Macalister 1911–12, I, Tomb 103, 340–42; III, pls. 8, 59, 14, 95–97; and at Ramat Avishur and at Lachish, both in the Plain of Judah, see Gudovitch 1996; Tufnell 1953, Tomb 217, 201–03, figs. 23–24, pls. 108, 125, respectively.

(Judean Shephelah), since they were common in the Persian period.<sup>8</sup> Those restricted to the Hellenistic period date from the late 2nd century BC; they are usually characterised by a single or double niche, measured in terms of the width of the deceased lying on his back, and have been discovered so far in the environs of Jerusalem<sup>9</sup> and Tel Aviv.<sup>10</sup>

### *Loculi Tombs*

Loculi tombs were normally approached by stairs leading to an entrance. They are rock-cut complexes of rectangular contour with loculi cut along their sides. The loculi were used for primary burials of individuals, although some served as repositories in which bones were placed for secondary burials. Unlike the types described above, they made their first appearance in the Hellenistic period. Loculi tombs can be divided into two sub-types: the first is plain, found in most parts of the country, but principally on the Coastal Plain and in Galilee, and characterised by the small number of loculi (not exceeding ten) with a convex (and sometimes plain) ceiling, serving as the burial complex of a nuclear family;<sup>11</sup> the other sub-type is elaborate, found only in the Plain of Judah, and is characterised by the large number of loculi (more than ten) with a gabled ceiling, serving as the burial complex of an extended family.<sup>12</sup> In both sub-types, those loculi that were preserved sealed, having been blocked up with ashlar, testify to the use of wooden coffins, evident from nails and other metal implements (Figs. 1–2).

The architectural concept of both types is similar: vertical spaces (loculi) of roughly uniform size, 2 m long, 1 m wide and 1 m high, cut along the sides of a rectangular rock-cut hall, in a rather symmetrical layout, with a sunken standing pit (area) in the centre.

<sup>8</sup> For Galilee, at HaGosherim, see, for example, Yeivin 1966; and for the Coastal Plain, at Atlit, see Johns 1933, Tombs L/21B and L/24, 76–82, 94–100, pls. 26, 619, 34, 907, 909.

<sup>9</sup> Such as Mamilla, see Reich 1993, 107–08.

<sup>10</sup> Such as Tell Qasile, see Kaplan 1958. Though the tomb discovered at Tell Qasile was dated to the early 1st century BC, the pottery found (which I recently sorted and inspected) permits an earlier date.

<sup>11</sup> For the Coastal Plain, at Ramat Aviv, see Kaplan and Ritter-Kaplan 1989 (though designated as a cult place for the Egyptian god Serapis); at Tell Qasile, see Kaplan 1958; and at Yafo, see Avner-Levy 1998. For Galilee, at HaGosherim, see Ovadiah 1999; and at Tell er-Ras, see Rochman-Halperin 1999.

<sup>12</sup> For example, at Tel Goded, see Sagiv, Zissu and Avni 1998; at Maresha (Marisa), see Peters and Thiersch 1905; Moulton 1915; Abel 1925; Oren and Rappaport 1984; Kloner 1991, 73–76; 2001; Regev 1992; at Kh. (= Hirbēt [Arabic]) Za'quqa, see Kloner, Regev and Rappaport 1992; and at H. (= Hōrbāt [Hebrew]) Hōresh, see Zissu and Ganor 1998.

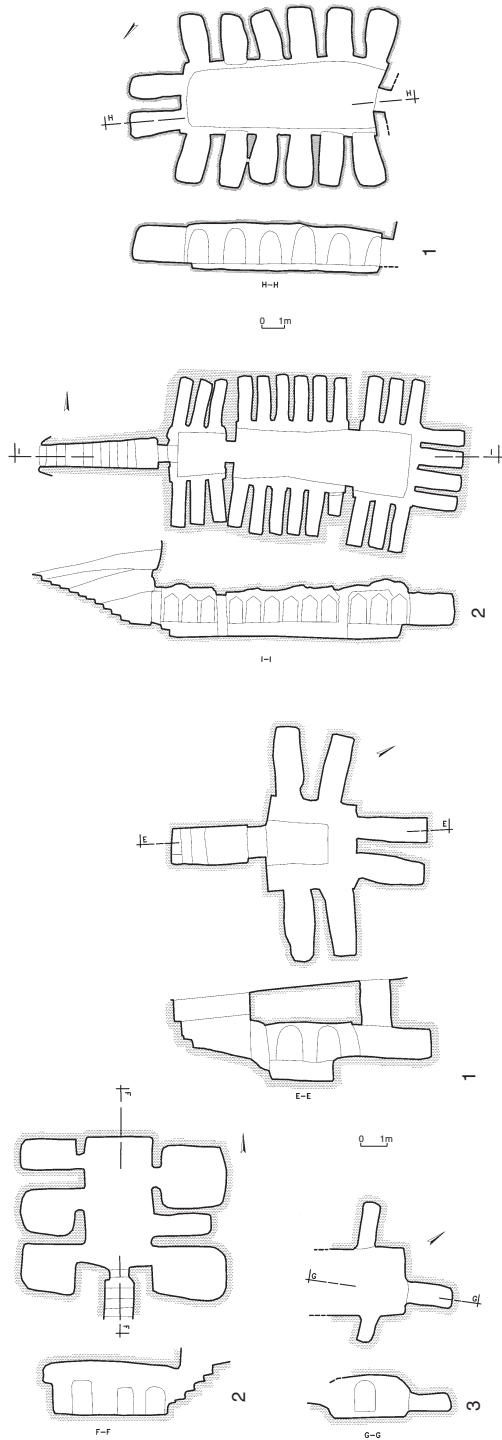


Fig. 1. Plain loculi tombs. 1: HaGosherim, after Ovadiah 1999, 34\*, plan 1, modified); 2-3: T'ell er-Ras, after Rochman-Halperin 1999, 165, 167, plans 1 and 2 (modified).

Fig. 2. Elaborate loculi tombs. 1: Kh. Za'aluqa, after Kloner, Regev and Rappaport 1992, 27\*, plan 1 (modified); 2: Maresha, after Regev 1991, fig. 116 (modified).

*Burial Structures*

This type refers to impressive built (or rock-cut and built) structures. The few that have been documented and dated to the Hellenistic period were found in sites on the Coastal Plain. They are variable in plan and may be labelled house-tombs. According to the archaeological data it is probable that burials within them were carried out in wooden coffins.<sup>13</sup>

A comparison between tombs of the Persian and Hellenistic periods revealed that pit, cist and shaft tombs, and burial caves were all commonly used in both periods, whereas loculi tombs (both plain and elaborate) were introduced into the Palestinian milieu during the Hellenistic period. Burial in jars, cairns (tumuli) and built structures was far less common in both periods. Wooden coffins were probably used in both periods, side by side with stone and clay coffins.

There has been little investigation of the origin of these rock-cut loculi tombs in the archaeological research on Palestine;<sup>14</sup> and it seems that Hermann Thiersch's tentative attribution of an Egyptian/Alexandrian origin, through development from another Egyptian type—the shaft tomb, linking pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic times in the Levant<sup>15</sup>—was largely accepted.<sup>16</sup> One must stress that a few scholars attributed Egyptian loculi tombs (or *kokhim* tombs, as they are termed in the Palestinian milieu) to a Phoenician origin, because of the earlier date of their first appearance at 'Amrit and Sidon (4th century BC if not earlier).<sup>17</sup> Thiersch believed, however, that Alexandrian influence was visible not only in the plan of the tombs but also, especially, in the gabled ceiling decoration of the loculi.

There are, however, some problems in accepting Thiersch's arguments. Those 'Egyptian' shaft tombs which he sees as linking pre-Hellenistic and

<sup>13</sup> As is evident from 'Akko—Tzaferis 1986, 267, Fig. 3; and Ashqelon (Ascalon)—Berman *et al.* 1973, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Kloner 1980, 228–29, and Hachlili and Killebrew 1999, 57–59, are the only notable attempts (although suffering from inaccuracies) at a summary of opinions and origin, while analysing loculi tombs in Jerusalem and Jericho of the Late Second Temple period.

<sup>15</sup> Thiersch made his observation whilst publishing Tombs I, II, III and IV of the eastern cemetery of Maresha together with John Peters. See Peters and Thiersch 1905, 81–84.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Watzinger 1935, 19–20; Barag 1978, 55; Kloner 1980, 228–29; 1991, 75; Oren and Rappaport 1984, 150; Kuhnen 1990, 73–75.

<sup>17</sup> Although Perrot and Chipiez 1885, 144–73, 'La tombe en Phénicie', which largely refers to Renan's survey and excavations (1864), made valuable observations concerning Phoenician tombs architecture and furnishing, it was Schreiber 1908, 202–06, and esp. 205, who pointed out that the loculi tomb type originated in 4th century BC Phoenicia and Palestine, an opinion that was adopted by others in later studies, see, for example, Noshy 1937, 21–22, 39; and also Dunand 1965, 10–11 (both referring only to Phoenicia). Other probable 4th/3rd century BC examples found in the Greek cultural zone such as the Chamyleon in the island of Kos (Schazmann 1934), the rock-cut Doric order peristyle tombs of Nea-Paphos in Cyprus (Nicolaou 1966, 600–01) and Tomb M.3 at Cyrene in Libya (Rowe 1956, 22, fig. 10; see also Kurtz and Boardman 1971, 281) are few in number and of a rather conjectural dating.

Hellenistic times are known in Palestine from proto-historical periods, and were used, almost continuously, in historical (including Classical) periods (as demonstrated above). The rock-cut gabled ceiling did originate in Egypt, but it had been introduced to Palestine as early as the Iron Age, as is evident from tombs in Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, a revised chronological (and architectural) study of the Alexandrian tombs whose plans resemble those in Palestine, and especially those documented in the Plain of Judah, yields a mid-3rd century BC date for the earliest Alexandrian examples, which, as will be shown below, overlaps that of the earliest Palestinian examples, if indeed it is not later.

In general monumental tombs in Hellenistic Alexandria may be divided into two subterranean types, both usually reached by a staircase: the first is generally classified as a *kline* tomb, normally comprises three halls, comparable to the court, *oikos* and *prostas* of the Greek house, and is ornamented with varied architectural motifs; the other is normally classified as the multiple-hall type, containing vertical loculi the size of the human body cut along the walls, and parallel in plan to the loculi tombs found in Hellenistic Palestine. As such, the latter is of interest to us.<sup>19</sup> Few date to the Early Hellenistic period, that is the late 4th and 3rd centuries BC. Notable among them are those discovered at Shatby—Hypogeum A, Moustapha Pasha—Tombs 1 and 3, and Hadra—the Tomb of Stefanos. Other renowned examples, such as the ones discovered at Gabbari, Anfoushy, Ras el Tine, Antoniadis Garden and Kom el Shogafa, are customarily dated to the late 3rd, 2nd and 1st centuries BC onward.<sup>20</sup>

A revised dating for these earliest examples shows that the correlative dating of Shatby—Hypogeum A to the early 3rd century BC, on the basis of the Hadra vase found in room *h* (which is considered to be a later addition to the tomb) and its comparability to the three vases signed by Philo from the Soldiers' Tomb (which are customarily dated to the years 242 and 239 BC), is acceptable only if the vase came from the original burial.<sup>21</sup> However, it may have originated in one of the earlier burials in the tomb and been removed later to room *h*. Moustapha Pasha—Tombs 1 and 3 are considered earlier than Tomb 2 on the basis of their architectural decoration, and since Tomb 2 has yielded 20 coins of Ptolemy VI Philometer (181–146 BC) or Ptolemy IX Soter II (116–80), Tombs 1 and 3 are placed somewhere in the

<sup>18</sup> See Ussishkin 1993, Tombs 3, 9–10, 13–15 and 19.

<sup>19</sup> Other types such as the more elaborate shaft tombs and chamber tomb can hardly be termed monumental, see Noshy 1937, 16–47, *passim*, for Egyptian tombs typology.

<sup>20</sup> See McKenzie 1990, 63–69, *passim*, with earlier literature, and especially tabl. 16. For Gabbari, see also Empereur and Nenna 2001, esp. 513–26. For Kom el Shogafa, see also Guimier-Sorbets and Seif el-Din 2001.

<sup>21</sup> McKenzie 1990, 63–64.



late 3rd and/or early 2nd centuries BC.<sup>22</sup> The necropolis of Hadra is customarily dated to the late 3rd and early 2nd centuries BC, and since the Tomb of Stefanos is considered the oldest example in the necropolis, on the basis of the objects found within it, it may be placed in the mid-3rd century BC.<sup>23</sup> All earlier Alexandrian examples show that the burial practice in this type of tomb most probably emerged in the mid-3rd century BC, during the last years of the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus and his successor Ptolemy III Euergetes, a time of prosperity for the Ptolemaic kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

It is worthy of mention that most disagreements concerning these 'loculi styled' tombs in Alexandria are based on palaeographical, ceramic—the absolute and relative chronology of the allegedly 'dated' Hadra vases<sup>25</sup>—and artistic considerations: the chronology of the artistic style of the tomb furnishings (architectural decoration and glyptic material),<sup>26</sup> side by side with other pottery types (for example, black glazed and lamps),<sup>27</sup> and coins.

It should also be borne in mind that close study of the 3rd and 2nd century BC Alexandrian examples shows that they were cut according to the Egyptian cubit, whether the short cubit measuring 0.45 m<sup>28</sup> or the long cubit of 0.525 m,<sup>29</sup> a standard seldom to be found within most Palestinian examples;<sup>30</sup> and that they are usually square in plan, unlike the rectangular/longitudinal Palestinian examples. Moreover, the loculi in the Egyptian examples were often closed

<sup>22</sup> McKenzie 1990, 64–65.

<sup>23</sup> McKenzie 1990, 68.

<sup>24</sup> See Hölbl 2001, Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>25</sup> This refers to the few dozens of vases that bear inscriptions of Ptolemaic regnal years but with no indication of the king's name. Only a few bear the high numbers that can only be accommodated in Ptolemy II's reign, and can thus be firmly dated to the 250s BC, see Cook 1969, 123–24, 135, nos. 3–4, 6; and also 1984. Other 'dated' examples, including the ones signed by their manufacturers/painters, call for groundless speculations in order to fix their absolute date, see Callaghan 1984, esp. 790; and McKenzie 1990, 64, note 61 for a thorough discussion of the subject and its flexibility.

<sup>26</sup> A chronological artistic development in the architectural decorative material follows the three main classical architectural orders—Doric, Ionic and Corinthian and their variants as described by Vitruvius (3–4, *passim*). These primarily include bases, columns, pilasters and piers, and their capitals, and components of entablature (architraves, friezes and cornices), side by side with other components of monumental tomb furnishing such as wall paintings, doors and false doors, ornamented ceilings, etc.

<sup>27</sup> The proved assumption of a continuous development in the typology of Hellenistic black glazed ware through to relief ware, as well as Hellenistic wheel-made lamps to moulded lamps.

<sup>28</sup> As seen for example in Shatby, Hypogeum A, room *f*, 13 × 11 cubits, room *d*, 13 × 4 cubits, room *h*, 4 × 3 cubits etc., and each loculus 3 × 1 cubits; Moustapha Pasha, Tomb 1, room 1, 9 × 9 cubits, room 11, 4 × 4 cubits etc., and each loculus, 3 × 1 cubits. For a discussion of the origins of the Egyptian cubit, see Legon 1996, with earlier literature.

<sup>29</sup> As seen for example in Moustapha Pasha, Tomb 2, room 1, 6 × 6 cubits, room 7, 5 × 4 cubits, room 2, 6 × 3 cubits etc., although each loculus is 3 × 1 according to the short Egyptian cubit.

<sup>30</sup> As opposed to the more elaborate rock-cut 'Egyptian styled' burial complexes of Iron Age Judah, see Ussishkin 1993, 283–89; Barkay 1986.

with stone slabs decorated as false doors, a phenomenon not recorded in any of the Palestinian examples. Furthermore, to suggest that the Alexandrian 'loculi styled' examples developed from earlier Egyptian types such as the elaborate subterranean complexes of the Third Intermediate Period and Saite and Persian Egypt, requires substantial evidence that is not available.<sup>31</sup> In addition, many of the deceased placed in these Alexandrian tombs were cremated, a custom rarely found in the Palestinian examples.<sup>32</sup>

Among the documented Palestinian examples, those of the Plain of Judah are of primary importance: at both Kh. Za'azuqa and Maresha dated Greek inscriptions have been recorded within loculi tombs. Uriel Rappaport has suggested that the dates recorded within some of these inscriptions refers to a Ptolemaic dating, in which regnal years were counted, but with no mention of either the king's name or his title.<sup>33</sup> This suggestion has been preferred in modern research; the one put forward by Peters and Thiersch for a local (municipal) era dating in Tomb I ('Tomb of the Sidonians') at Maresha is unacceptable. The presence of two different systems of dating in the burial inscriptions within this tomb—'short', which refers to Ptolemaic regnal years, and another which refers to the Seleucid era, its earliest documentation at the site (L IZP = 117 = 196/5 BC)—lends support to Rappaport's hypothesis. The burial inscriptions (above and between the loculi) should be explained in terms of internal use by family members—usually labelling the deceased by his name, sometimes alongside his father's name; in a few cases the year of death is also given—in order to identify him at the time of burying other family members or conducting ritual.

One of the inscriptions of a family member of the third generation in the tomb documented at Kh. Za'azuqa reads (Inscription 1): ET IB Βούτου Δημοφίλου = Year 12, of Boutas son of Demophilos. This refers, according to its publishers, to year 12 of Ptolemy II (= 272/1 BC). In view of historical considerations, i.e. the improbability of Greek migration to the site before the Macedonian conquest—it was identified as a tomb of a Greek family; and together with the dates of the finds (especially the pottery) retrieved within the tomb—was dated to the second half of the 4th and early 3rd centuries BC.<sup>34</sup> It is worthy of mention that correlating the 'transitional' Persian/Hellenistic date for most pottery types found within this tomb (at least in its final stage

<sup>31</sup> It is commonly accepted that these Ptolemaic and Roman rock-cut tombs in Egypt though containing few traditional Egyptian decorative motifs, are different in plan, and some scholars even claim that they are 'wholly alien' and designed to accommodate hundreds of deceased, for example, Dodson 1991, 55; but see Daszewski 1994, who suggests that their architectural models were borrowed from Ancient Egypt.

<sup>32</sup> Above, note 3.

<sup>33</sup> Oren and Rappaport 1984, 148–49.

<sup>34</sup> Kloner, Regev and Rappaport 1992, esp. 37\*, 46\*–47\*. It is worth noting that Inscription 2 bears identical dating, though the name of the deceased is illegible, *ibid.*, 38\*.

of use) with the reign of Ptolemy II is not essential, as these pottery types can also suggest a later date in the 3rd century BC, and even in the 2nd, though in this case the inscription does not permit us to do so.

Two of the inscriptions of family members of the third generation in Tomb I ('Tomb of the Sidonians') in the eastern cemetery of Maresha read (Inscription 11): L E ἜΑΒ ΒΙ Βαβατὰς Κοσνατανοῦ τοῦ Ἀμμώϊου = Year 5, 12th day of Ab, Babatas son of Kosnatan(os), Son of Am(moi)os; (Inscription 28): L B Δύστρον Σαβοῦς τῆς Κοσνατανοῦ = Year 2, [month] Dystros, of Sabo daughter of Kosnatan(os); referring according to Rappaport to the 5th and 2nd years of Ptolemy V, respectively (= 202/3 and 199/200 BC).<sup>35</sup>

These dated Palestinian examples provide a date not later than the mid-3rd century BC for the use of loculi tombs, and permit the possibility that they might have been used at the beginning of that century. Genealogical analysis of the Kh. Za'azuqa tomb shows that it served for three or four generations (*ca.* 75–100 years), and the 'year 12' of a family member of the third generation cannot refer to a king later than Ptolemy IV, as Ptolemy V reigned over Palestine for less than ten years. The convex contour of the ceiling of the loculi in the Kh. Za'azuqa tomb may also indicate an earlier date, as most examples of loculi tombs in the Plain of Judah, which are probably later in date, are characterised by a gabled ceiling. This suggests a local development in the rock-cut loculi of this geographical region from the convex ceiling in earlier examples to gabled in the later ones, which are (according to the archaeological data) the majority. The 'year 5' and the 'year 2' in Tomb I at Maresha of family members of the third generation may suggest a *terminus ante quem* of *ca.* 250 BC for its rock-cutting, as these years can also refer to kings earlier than Ptolemy V. What has been said demonstrates that attributing an Alexandrian origin to the loculi tombs in Hellenistic Palestine is not supported by the archaeological evidence, as one may easily claim that the dates of the earliest Palestinian examples overlap those of the earliest Alexandrian examples, indeed may be earlier—an argument that forces us to seek a different explanation. As stated above, it was Theodor Schreiber who pointed out that the loculus tomb type originated in Phoenicia and Palestine, where the earliest examples are of the 4th century BC.<sup>36</sup> Schreiber, of course, referred to the customary Persian period (Achaemenid) dating of the monumental loculi tombs (such as 'le tombeau au dôme'), and other loculi tombs in the necropolis of 'Amrit, as well as those in the necropolis of Mugharat Ablun at Sidon. The dating of 'le tombeau au dôme' at 'Amrit was partly corroborated during

<sup>35</sup> Peters and Thiersch 1905, 45–46, 54. It is worth noting that an identical system of dating appears also in other burial complexes at the site such as Tomb E. VIII, see Oren and Rappaport 1984, 143–49, *passim*, Inscription 7 (L A) and Inscription 16 (L B); but without firm genealogical analysis it can refer to any 3rd century BC date.

<sup>36</sup> After Renan 1864; Perrot and Chipiez 1885, 144–73, *passim*; above, note 17.

examination of its surroundings, in which very few sherds of Late Persian and Hellenistic date were found.<sup>37</sup> A similar, slightly later date was established by the finds from 'hypogée (N5)', which is about 27 m to its east.<sup>38</sup> Renan's loculi tombs of the necropolis of 'Amrit have no clear dating, although usually linked with the Persian period settlement of the site, which continued to exist in Hellenistic times as well.<sup>39</sup> However, a loculus tomb approached via a stepped *dromos* was recently found north of 'Amrit, and dated to the second quarter of the 5th century BC, on the basis of the artistic design of the clay anthropoid sarcophagi found within the loculi.<sup>40</sup> Further corroboration for a Persian period date for loculi tombs in Phoenicia is provided by the anthropoid sarcophagi found in the loculi of some of the tombs in the necropolis of Mugharat Ablun at Sidon. Marble anthropoid sarcophagi dated from the third quarter of the 5th to the second half of the 4th century BC, found within the loculi,<sup>41</sup> confirm the dating of these loculi. The similarity between the burial complexes of Late Iron Age (8th, 7th and early 6th centuries BC) Judah and the loculi tombs of Hellenistic Palestine may be seen in their stepped antechambers, rectangular burial halls,  $\Gamma$ -shaped loculi, arrangement of the loculi around the burial hall, standing pits, primary burials and repositories, and may reflect traditional (Judean and Edomite) influences as well.<sup>42</sup> But the near-absence of rock-cut burial complexes in Persian period Judah and Edom does not permit methodical analysis of such an influence.<sup>43</sup>

It is, therefore, only logical to explain the presence in Hellenistic Palestine of plain loculi tombs in the Coastal Plain and Galilee as originating from Achaemenid Phoenicia, where they were first used among the elite (the royal dynasties of Arwad and Sidon and their administrative personnel) and later, in Early Hellenistic times, among other (though still high) classes in other geographical regions of Phoenician affinity. Thus, their distribution pattern in Palestine may be generally explained in a north-south coastal pattern—from

<sup>37</sup> Dunand, Saliby and Khirichian 1954–55, 202; Saliby 1989, 26.

<sup>38</sup> The tomb was discovered in 1976 and dated to the 4th–3rd centuries BC according to the finds retrieved inside the loculi, see Saliby 1989, 27.

<sup>39</sup> Elayi and Haykal 1996, 36–37.

<sup>40</sup> Elayi and Haykal 1996, 87–117, 120–21, *passim*, fig. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Frede 2000, 23–25; Lembke 2001, 8–14. Although there is no consensus among scholars on the exact dating of the different types of Phoenician anthropoid sarcophagi made of marble, stone and clay, all agree that they date to the Persian period. The Egyptian anthropoid sarcophagi were probably looted during the earlier Achaemenid occupation of Egypt, when they were assisted by a Phoenician fleet, and therefore date to the second half of the 6th century BC at the latest.

<sup>42</sup> For Late Iron Age examples from Judah, see Bloch-Smith 1990; Barkay 1994; Yezerki 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Though we do have some evidence for the continual use in Persian-period Judah of rock-cut burial complexes of Iron Age date such as occur, for example, at Tel 'Ira, see Beit-Arieh, Freud and Baron 1999, Tomb 23, 162–66; and at Jerusalem (Ketef Hinnom), see Barkay 2000, Cave 24, 95–105, *passim*, and esp. 98.

Phoenicia proper southward; but since loculi tombs were used by the wealthier classes, one should consider interactions with groups of the elite dwelling inland as another means of distribution, as reflected in the Plain of Judah examples. The elaborate loculi tombs of the Plain of Judah mostly differ from those of Phoenicia in their gabled ceilings, as some of the Phoenician examples have an elaborate ground plan with a few dozen loculi arranged in a symmetrical layout.<sup>44</sup> The gabled ceiling, as suggested above, replaced the convex ceiling of the earlier loculi tombs of the Plain of Judah and, though customarily attributed to an Egyptian origin, it is well documented in Iron Age burial complexes in Judah.<sup>45</sup> Even though there might be some direct or indirect Egyptian influence, there is no reason to seek the origin of the ground plan of these loculi tombs in Egypt on the following counts:

- They are identical in ground plan to loculi tombs of some two centuries earlier found in Phoenicia, where they formed one of the predominant types of burial until Roman times.
- In the Phoenician and most of the Palestinian examples, the burial practice is inhumation (with primary and secondary burials); by contrast, in the Egyptian examples it is more than frequently cremation.
- The use of decorated false doors in Egyptian loculi tombs, which was not recorded in any Phoenician or Palestinian tombs.
- The cultural and political, social and economic affinity of Palestine to Phoenicia in both the Persian and Hellenistic periods.<sup>46</sup>

Here, one needs to emphasise that the presence of loculi tombs in Hellenistic Palestine as one of the predominant types of burial should also be explained against an ideological and even cognitive background, since their plan comes to serve functional, environmental and socio-economic needs. Their initial integration into the culture of the southern Levant and their use among different populations—Phoenicians on the coast and in Galilee, Samaritans in Samaria, Jews in Judah, Edomites in Edom, and Egyptians in Alexandria—indicate common aspects to their ideology and behaviour. Thus, it may be assumed that these elaborate burial complexes spread simultaneously in the southern Levant as a result of the adoption of a common architectural perception.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See Renan 1864, pl. 62.

<sup>45</sup> Above, note 18.

<sup>46</sup> One must emphasise that in the biblical accounts Phoenicians are sometimes synonymous with the Canaanite ethnic groups who dwelled in Ancient Israel. See, for example, Peckham 1992, 349–51.

<sup>47</sup> Such a social (though theoretical) approach to the study of the loculi tombs in Hellenistic Palestine may explain better their presence and cast light upon such aspects as social structure, ritual and symbolism. See Morris 1992, 1–30.

Loculi tombs as rock-cut burial complexes are one of the types of tombs in Hellenistic Palestine requiring the greatest economic investment. They were cut in a relatively soft rock environment according to a master plan, in which the size of their components and the number of their loculi were set in advance, as is evidenced by their symmetrical layout. They usually have a stepped antechamber leading to a rectangular entrance which provides access to a burial hall with a sunken standing pit in its centre and loculi cut along its sides. The loculi tombs are symmetrical: one side is almost a mirror image of the other. The average number of the loculi in any particular cave in the Plain of Judah is 25 (usually numbering between 25 to 30 per tomb). Taking this datum in conjunction with the average number of rooms of the domestic building at Maresha permits us to assume that these burial complexes served for the burying of extended rather than nuclear families. This is supported by those loculi tombs where genealogical analysis was undertaken. The collecting of bones into one or more of the loculi permits the burial of other members of a given family without difficulties, and therefore it seems that the symmetrical layout of the loculi answers an aesthetic concept rather than a functional need. The quality of carving in loculi tombs is not uniform, and in the environs of an urban centre it is usually better than in an area of rural settlement. Since I distinguish two sub-types of loculi tombs, plain and elaborate, whose basic difference is the number of loculi, the size of the burial halls is not uniform, although that of the loculi is, more or less (*ca.*  $2 \times 1 \times 1$  m, on average), providing sufficient space for the individual deceased, who was laid out on his/her back, head innermost, and for their burial deposits.

A comparison between the plan of loculi tombs, one of the predominant types of burial in Hellenistic Palestine, and the plan of the commonest type of domestic building in Hellenistic Palestine, the open courtyard house, shows a common architectural and ideological outlook (Fig. 3):<sup>48</sup>

- Both are often approached by stairs leading to an entrance;
- The courtyard in the domestic building is the largest delimited space, as is the burial hall in loculi tombs;
- Cornices in the upper part of the walls of the burial halls in some loculi tombs apparently represent a known architectural decorative feature from the upper part of the courtyard walls of the house, one that has not survived because of its location and/or material;

<sup>48</sup> The elements common to the elaborate burial complexes of Hellenistic Alexandria and those of the Greek house were put forward by Thiersch (1904, 13–15). Scholars who studied the burial complexes of Hellenistic Alexandria, such as Schreiber (1908, 160–77, *passim*) and Pagenstecher (1919, 97–167, *passim*), supplied further evidence for the duplication and symbolisation of the Greek house in Alexandrian burial architecture, an opinion that was adopted in recent studies. See, for example, Hoepfner and Schwandner 1994, 240, fig. 229.

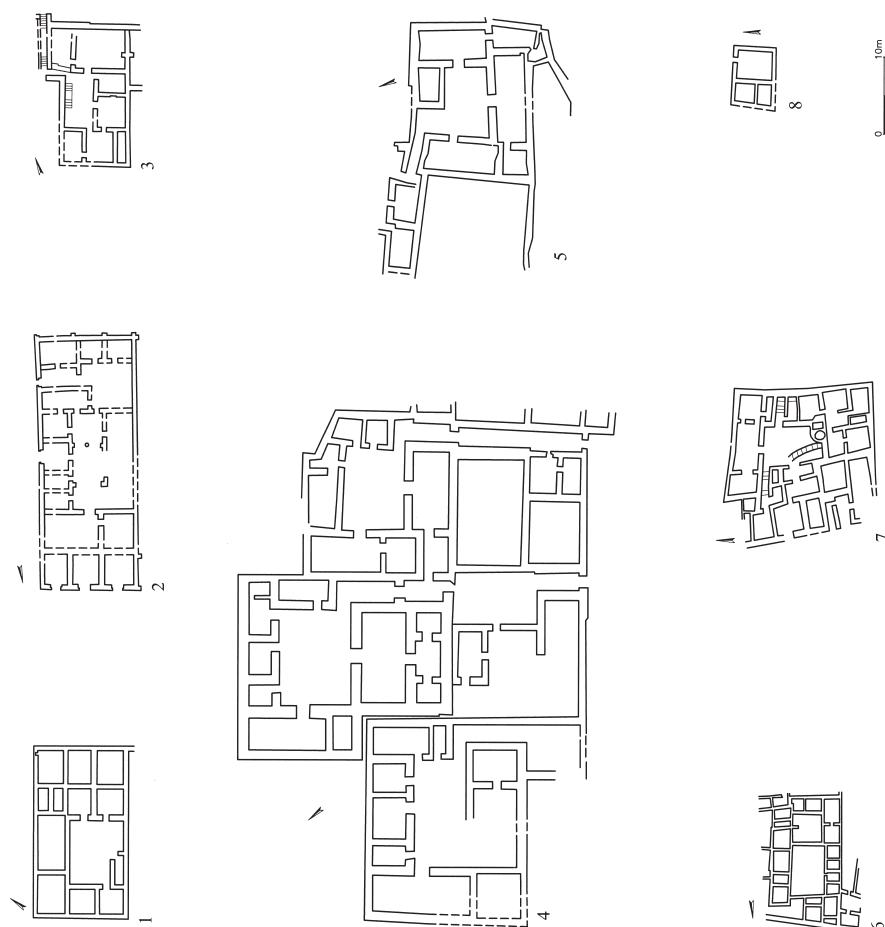


Fig. 3. Selection of open courtyard houses from Hellenistic sites in Palestine. 1: Beth Yerah; 2-3: Samaria (Insula IV, Building A; Insula VIII, Building C); 4-5: Mount Gerizim (Area A, Buildings I-III; Area B, Building B2); 6-7: Maresha (Upper Tel; Area 61, Building B); 8: Ashdod (Area A). (All modified after earlier publications.)

- Both courtyard and burial hall are surrounded by other delimited spaces, rooms and loculi respectively;
- Both domestic buildings and loculi tombs were occupied by members of a particular family;
- Both domestic buildings and loculi tombs reflect the socio-economical status of their owners: just as there are unremarkable and magnificent houses, so too with loculi tombs;
- Architectural items documented in some of the more elaborate loculi tombs (especially in Maresha), such as cornices, shallow reliefs and painting of bases, pillars, capitals and friezes in Doric and Ionic order flanking the entrances of the loculi,<sup>49</sup> and other painted ornamental motifs (such as the 'animal frieze' of Tomb I and the 'scene of the musicians' of Tomb II in the eastern cemetery of Maresha),<sup>50</sup> are a duplication and symbolisation of known elements in domestic architecture (of the higher classes) into the world of the dead, and not, as commonly accepted, borrowed from public and royal monumental architecture.<sup>51</sup> The presence of similar architectural items in some of the domestic building at Maresha and the presence of wall paintings in the domestic architecture of Hellenistic Palestine lend support to such a hypothesis.<sup>52</sup>

The open courtyard house is well documented from prehistoric times, in Palestine in particular and in Coele-Syria in general, having been used continuously (though under various schemes of building) through to the Hellenistic period and far beyond.<sup>53</sup> It seems that during the Hellenistic period its use peaked, as it became compatible with almost any type or use of building—domestic, public and military.<sup>54</sup> The progressive development of the open courtyard house can explain its duplication and symbolisation in the plans of loculi tombs (and, moreover, of built burial structures, though these are beyond the scope of this article).

The suggested architectural, artistic and ideological perceptions shed light on the manner of belief in the afterlife among the surviving members of the

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Peters and Thiersch 1905, 15–28, 96, Tomb I, Chambers A, D and E, figs. 1–2; Oren and Rappaport 1984, 133–35, Tombs E. VIII, E. X, fig. 11; Regev 1992.

<sup>50</sup> Peters and Thiersch 1905, 23–28, 32–33; Kloner 2000, with earlier literature.

<sup>51</sup> *Contra* Meyboom 1995, 101–02; Kloner 2000, 10. For the architectural decoration of Hellenistic Palestine, see Fischer and Tal 2003.

<sup>52</sup> See at Maresha, Area 53, Kloner 1991, fig. on p. 82; at Tel Anafa, Gordon 1979; Weinberg 1994; and at 'Akko, Segal and Porat 2000.

<sup>53</sup> For the Chalcolithic period, see Porath 1992; for the Early Bronze Age, see Ben-Tor 1992; for the Middle and Late Bronze Age, see Ben-Dov 1992; for the Iron Age, see Netzer 1992; for the Persian period, see Stern 1982, 54–57; for the Hellenistic period, see Kuhnen 1990, 60–68; and for the Roman and Byzantine periods, see Hirschfeld 1995, 57–97.

<sup>54</sup> This was argued and proved in one of the chapters (Architecture) in my PhD dissertation, above note 1.



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families of those placed in loculi tombs. One may argue that the relatively wide variety of tomb types in Hellenistic Palestine, as specified above, obviously reflects social stratification. Moreover, it reflects different beliefs and perceptions of the death, be it temporary sleep, eternal sleep or a survival of the soul; and this has a direct influence on the tomb type, which is the eternal dwelling of the deceased, its inner contour and contents.

Individual tombs in which primary burials are usually found, such as the jar burials, pit burials, cist burials and cairn burials (or tumuli), reflect a belief in the physical mortality of the body. The deceased were buried in a container that was sealed forever. There were few if any grave goods (usually table ware); these probably served a ritual purpose at the time of the burial. Some of the excavated individual tombs formed part of sizeable burial grounds and, unless they had been marked out on the ground, were probably unidentifiable by family members. Those buried in some of these tombs (pit, cist and cairn burials) 'enjoyed' semantic connection with the earth ('for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'—Genesis 3:19). Familial tombs such as burial caves (and especially loculi tombs) and structures, in which both primary and secondary burials are found, reflect a belief in the physical immortality of the body. Secondary burial within these tombs lends support to a strong belief in physical resurrection. The deceased were placed in a given space (loculus), avoiding direct contact with the earth, inside their eternal dwelling, which was designed to be reopened not only for continuous burials, but also for the continuous supply of food products (as is evident from ceramic and stone cooking, kitchen, storage and utility vessels) and objects (such as clothing accessories, jewellery and personal belongings, side by side with coins), which imply a daily need.<sup>55</sup> Although most of the Hellenistic loculi

<sup>55</sup> In general, the tombs of Hellenistic Palestine contained varied finds, including pottery, glass, stone, metal, bone, and wooden vessels and objects, as well as jewellery and coins. Many tombs had been disturbed, thus their surviving contents represent but a fraction of what was once there. Pottery vessels predominate. They may be divided between table and personal vessels, cooking vessels, storage vessels and lamps. While individual tombs are often discovered with few table vessels, familial tombs typically contain many types of vessels of different use. We may assume that food products were placed on table vessels, while basic products were stored in cooking and storage vessels. Small containers such as juglets and bottles housed scented oils, while lamps were used as lighting utensils. Next to the pottery we find metal objects and jewellery. Among the metal objects there are table and cooking vessels side by side with objects used for hunting and for processing agricultural products. We also have objects such as mirrors and kohl tubes used for the toilette. The jewellery is restricted mainly to rings, bracelets and earrings, and garment accessories such as fibulae. Finds of other material are rather rare in the tombs of the period, but core-formed glass vessels (Mediterranean Core-Formed II and III) and monochrome cast/sagged glass vessels are of special importance among them, as they are important chronological tools. The grave goods (except for the large pottery vessels) were usually placed next to the deceased, while jewellery was probably worn. Burial deposits may be regarded as proof of the belief in an afterlife. The finds placed next to the deceased are similar to those he had used during his life, as the living needed to believe in an afterlife.

tombs in Palestine were only documented after being completely robbed or interfered with in later times, it is obvious that their finds can be understood as grave goods, i.e. those deposited whilst the deceased were placed in the tombs.

The common position of the deceased in most of the types mentioned—lying on their back—suggests the perception of death as a sleep of the body (temporary or eternal), but not necessarily of the soul. It is probable, therefore, that the parallel arrangement of the loculi in loculi tombs represents the arrangement of beds in the domestic architecture of the period. It is logical to assume that the act of burial in loculi tombs may be considered as a compromise between the individual and his family. The *loculus* is individual, but it is next to other members of his family, thus there is commonality.

The above-mentioned ornamental motifs discovered in Tombs I and II in the eastern cemetery of Maresha also attest to a belief in the physical immortality of the deceased.<sup>56</sup> The motifs fall into two groups: one which represents the world of the living by means of hedonism—the ‘animal frieze’ as a narrative of a hunting expedition, and the ‘scene of the musicians’ as a narrative of festivity, reflecting time of leisure; the other which represents the world of the dead by means of funerary motifs—mainly Kerberos and animals possessing chthonic implications such as eagles and cocks. The integration and dualistic perception of both worlds testify to a belief in the continued being of the dead, but in a different sphere. Engraved figural scenes of a lesser artistic value, such as those of Kh. Za‘aquqa, may attest not only to the existence of popular art in these tombs but also to the same dualistic perception.

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<sup>56</sup> See Peters and Thiersch 1905, 23–28, 32–33, 86–92; but also comments concerning these scenes in Watzinger 1935, 17–20; Rostovtzeff 1941, I, 318; Goodenough 1953, 69, note 51; Hengel 1974, II, 59, note 235; Fuks 1983, 32; Meyboom 1995, 44–49, 101–02; and Kloner 2000; with diverse opinions as to the artistic origin (Greek, Phoenician, Egyptian/Alexandrian) and inspiration (Hellenistic, Semitic).

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