

ROMAN-BYZANTINE CEMETERIES AND TOMBS AROUND APOLLONIA

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Introduction

The area of the southern Sharon coastal strip is characterized by a narrow beach bordered in most places by a long *kurkar* (fossilized dune sandstone) ridge which once formed the coastal cliff. Some areas of the coast and the *kurkar* ridge are covered with sandy red soil. Nowadays most of the coastal strip is covered with sand which in some places penetrates even further eastward. A second *kurkar* ridge is located ca. 1.5 km. east of the former, just east of the coastal highway. The *kurkar* hills which compose it have little soil cover, therefore few settlement remains have been found, but a large number of burial caves and industrial installations from various periods have survived. Between these two ridges extends a long narrow plain covered with alluvial soil, suitable for agricultural cultivation. A third *kurkar* ridge located to the east of these two, and east of the Tel-Aviv — Haifa railway line, is mostly covered with sandy red soil (for the physical geography and the environment of the Sharon coastal plain see Bakler 1989; Gifford and Rapp 1989; Grossman, Degani and Shmueli 1990:19–146).

Apollonia (Map Ref. 13191/17804) is located on the westernmost *kurkar* ridge overlooking Herzliya beach, near the northern edge of Nof-Yam, while its necropolis is located to the northeast, east, southeast and south (Fig. 1).

The present study attempts to delimit the cemeteries of Roman-Byzantine Apollonia based on archaeological data collected in the area since the British Mandate period until today, including the brief reports of district inspectors which usually mention only the archaeological finds and seldom describe the site, letters from local residents and others, and the few excavation reports and surveys conducted in the area. These reports are kept in the archives of the Israel Antiquities Authority in Jerusalem.

El-Jalil. (Map Ref. 1320/1750–1320/1740–1330/1750–1330/1740). Mandatorial surveys which took place in 1922, 1926 and 1927(?) reported several tombs in the *kurkar* ridge, some with *kokhim* (internal loculi), apparently dating to the Roman-Byzantine periods. These probably were destroyed by quarrying activities during the 1960s.

A trial excavation on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority was carried out intermittently during May–August 1990, prior to the expansion of the Gelilot road intersection. The excavation revealed, among other finds, a robbed burial cave with a collapsed ceiling. The cave was irregularly-shaped, comprising an entrance, sepulchral chamber and two *kokhim*. Sherds and an intact Late Roman juglet were

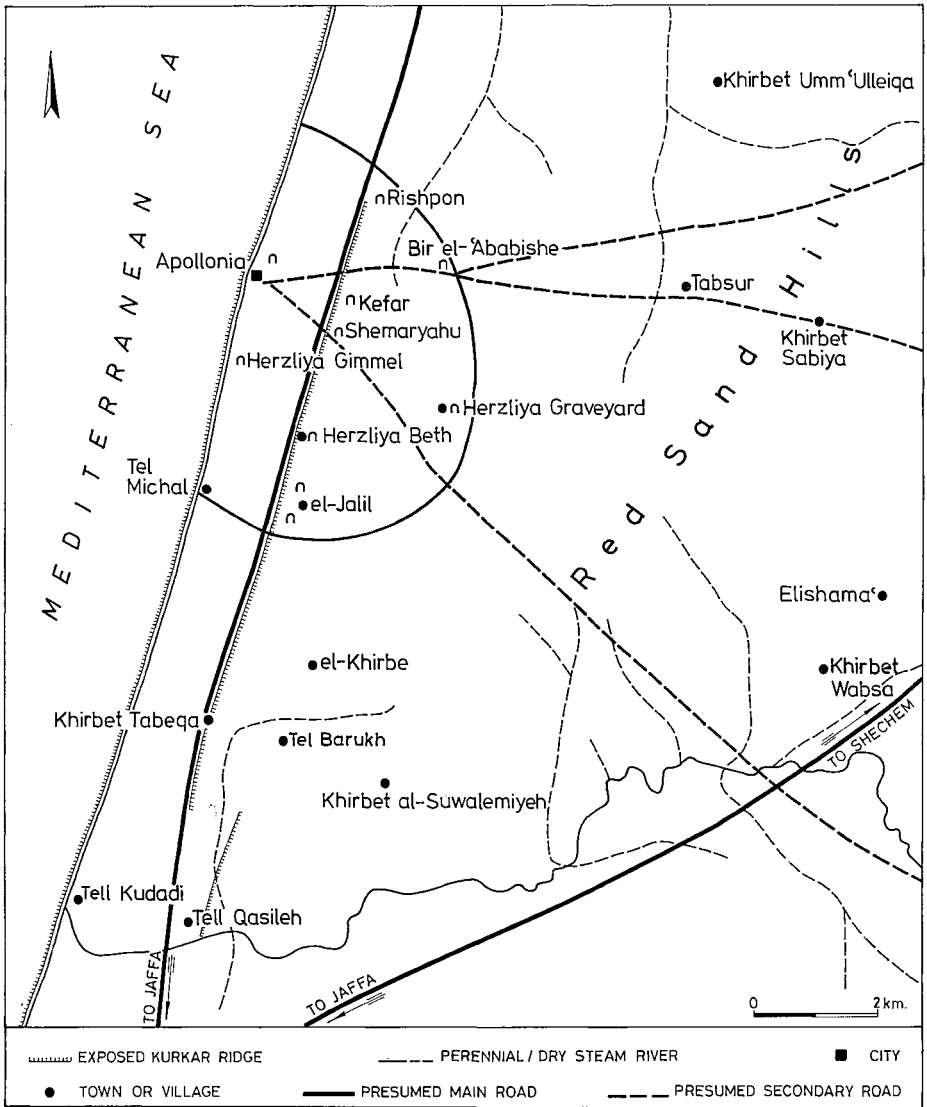


Fig. 1. The area of Apollonia's necropolis during the Roman and Byzantine periods.

found. No osteological finds were recovered (Levy 1991a:121).

A few burial caves were also found in the *kurkar* ridge to the north and south of the site containing Byzantine sherds and fragments of glass (Roll and Ayalon 1989:153). Other finds such as inscribed Samaritan rings were found on the surface. The site "Galil on the Sea", mentioned in the Samaritan Chronicle, can be identified with el-Jalil (Ben-Zvi 1935:110–111).

Herziya Graveyard. (Map Ref. 1343/1752). From the 1950s to the 1970s both travellers and employees of the Israel Department of Antiquities (now the Israel

Antiquities Authority) have reported on this site Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic remains of industrial character and abundant finds.

In 1970 a local resident reported to the Department of Antiquities on the discovery of seven burial caves in the *kurkar* ridge, some of which had been recently excavated by himself and others, assisted by mechanical tools. The plans of the burial caves (from the sketches included with the report) usually comprise an entrance sealed with a blocking stone, and a square central chamber surrounded by three side chambers with niches. The finds retrieved at that time seem to reflect (from the sketches) two periods of use: 1st–2nd centuries C.E. — represented by bowls, jugs, juglets, lamps, cooking-pots, etc.; 6th–7th centuries C.E. — a repertoire of Byzantine lamps, cooking-pots, tiles, etc. The osteological finds have not yet been examined. These burial caves were destroyed four years later.

Herzliya Beth and Gimmel. (Map Ref. 1321/1750–1320/1740–1331/1750–1330/1740). Reports of the Mandatorial Department of Antiquities discuss surveys and minor excavations conducted in the years 1930–1931, 1934–1938 and 1942, which uncovered a number of Roman and Byzantine rock-cut tombs with niches and *kokhim* in the *kurkar* ridge. In 1948 the discovery of another simple Roman rock-cut tomb was reported (Map Ref. 1327/1749). Reports of several burial caves in one of the hills were received in 1954 from E. Danelius. In 1963 the Israel Department of Antiquities reported on a large number of rock-cut tombs and shaft tombs west and south of the water pool. Roll and Ayalon (1989:153) reported on the excavation of a Byzantine tomb (Map Ref. 1321/1749) in the modern industrial area of Herzliya.

In 1968 the Department of Antiquities reported on the excavation of a MB II shaft tomb (Map Ref. 1328/1749 — based on architectural evidence), in an extensive area of burial caves, which was re-used in the Roman period for unknown purposes as evidenced by sherds and a complete jug. A Late Roman dump containing ceramics and coins uncovered on the western slope of the hill can be associated with the unexcavated part of the cemetery, the industrial installations and the quarries that date mainly to the late Byzantine period (*Had. Arkh.* 72:26; Roll and Ayalon 1989:141, 153).

In October 1990 a trial excavation was carried out on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority following the discovery of a rock-cut complex on the northern slope of the site (Map Ref. 13285/17475), during preparation work for the Herzliya Gimmel highway interchange (Levy 1991b:169). Based on its plan, it appears that this complex was originally a burial cave cut in the 2nd–3rd centuries C.E.

In March 1991 a robbed burial complex was uncovered in a trial excavation carried out in order to obtain a construction permit. The blocking stone of the entrance was not *in situ*, and its niches contained late ceramic material, but it was dated, based on its ground plan(?), to the 6th century C.E.

Kefar Shemaryahu. (Map Ref. 1330/1780–1330/1760–1340/1760–1340/1780).

This site is usually considered as Apollonia's main cemetery. Mandatory period files discuss the site extensively.

In August 1922 this report was filed: "The hills east of Arsuf contain many rock-cut tombs and caves. Fig trees are growing in the courts of some of the tombs. The ordinary tomb consists of a chamber containing niches under *arcosolia* but *kokhim* also occur. In many cases the rock wall separating the different tombs was broken down to allow passage from one tomb to the other, and the side walls of niches removed, probably caused by men inhabiting the ruins in want of rooms". In 1930, July 1937 and March-June(?) 1939, several rock-cut tombs, probably Roman and Byzantine, were reported, similar to the above, some of which were inhabited by the Bedouin tribe which occupied the area till the 1930's.

In June 1940 the significant discovery of a tomb hewn in the *kurkar* rock was reported, revealed in the course of surface levelling for the road now known as Hama'apilim St., when part of the tomb's roof collapsed forming a hole ca. 1x0.70 m. This was excavated in the following month by E.L. Sukenik on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Sukenik 1944:195–196; Gophna 1978:1074). The tomb (ca. 8x8 m.; Fig. 2) is partially rock-cut, partially constructed (its builders apparently utilized part of a natural cave). Most of the front hall was filled up with debris from the collapsed roof, while the rest of its space was empty. The top of the original entrance, closed with a blocking stone, may be seen at the southern end. On the eastern and western sides of the cave were built stone walls forming four small burial chambers and loculi. The walls of Chambers I and II consist of *kurkar* blocks probably laid in mortar with joints, covered with dark grey mud plaster. This applies to all other masonry in the tomb. The chamber walls were built up to the roof and each has a door ca. 60 cm. wide and a window ca. 15–20 cm. wide and ca. 1.50 m. above the floor. Chamber I has an additional opening in its south wall. The partition-wall of Loculus I is low and required no opening. An opening was provided in the partition-wall of Loculus II as it was somewhat higher.

At the back of the main hall, on a ca. 25 cm.-high platform, stood an intact marble sarcophagus (Fig. 2:2; 2.10 m. long, 72 cm. wide and 75 cm. high) with a gabled-roof lid and *acroteria* at the corners. The lid was intact and appeared to be in its original position, since the line of mortar joining coffin and lid was still preserved. However, it seems that the sarcophagus had been opened long ago, as could be seen from the state of the bones within. No decorations nor inscriptions were noted. Behind the sarcophagus rested a lead coffin in a square depression (Fig. 2:1), the lid of which appeared to have been tampered with as it was half removed. It bore no decorations other than lozenges and a number of small circles. In the coffin the buried remains had been disturbed. Both the chambers and loculi on either side of the hall contained burials apparently preserved intact, but in a decayed state.

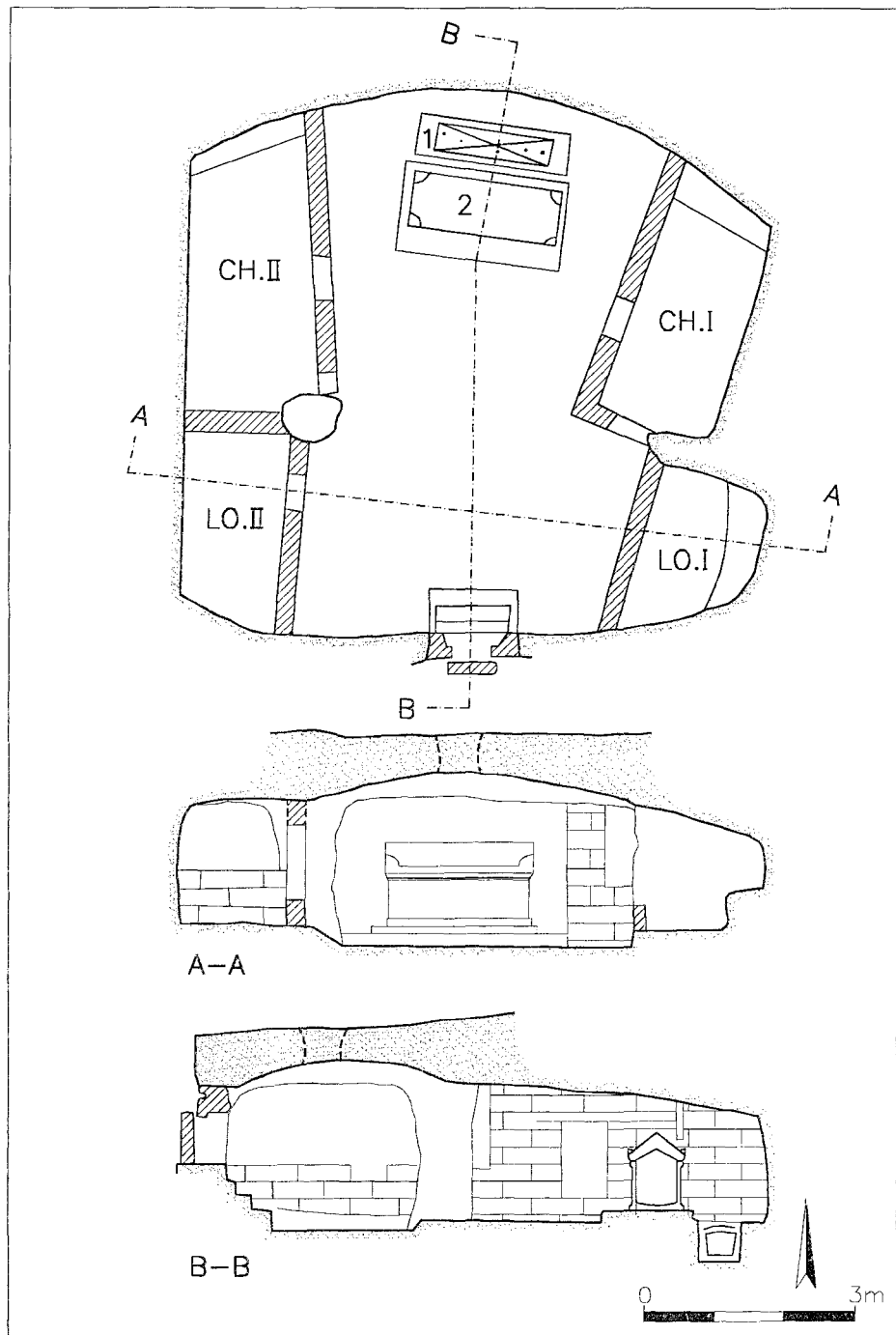


Fig. 2. Kefar Shemaryahu. The tomb excavated by E.L. Sukenik.

Among the remains in Loculus II were fragments of two human skulls, one at each end. In the wall of Loculus I is a recess ca. 70 cm. above the floor. In the northwest corner of Chamber II is a roughly-circular rock column supporting the roof, for some reason so left when the tomb was hewn. The layout of this peculiarly-designed family tomb is of interest, as it was apparently adapted to accommodate new deceased. Thus the back wall had been further recessed to accommodate the lead coffin. Nowadays the main part of the tomb is covered by the road.

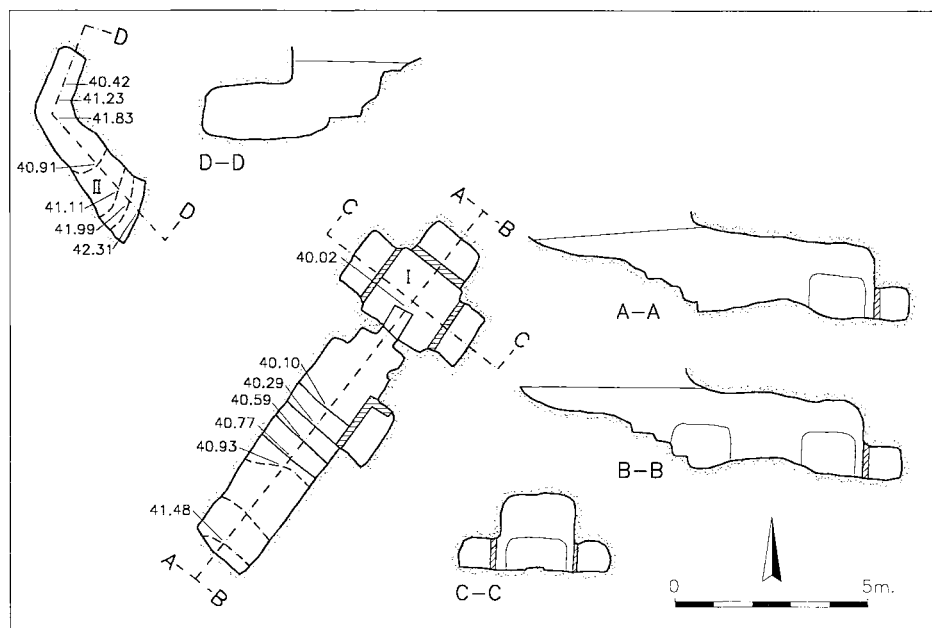


Fig. 3. Kefar Shemaryahu. A tomb surveyed by F. Berger.

Additional finds include a glass bracelet, an iron bracelet, strigils, fragments of iron and iron nails, and a broken lead bowl. The tomb is dated to the 4th century C.E. based on the ceramic evidence.

In February 1949 additional information regarding natural caves used for burials in the area was received from a traveller. In 1957 E. Danelius reported the discovery of several subterranean Byzantine tombs, corroborated by inhabitants of Rishpon who found at the site an inscribed stone slab and Roman and Crusader coins. Her description of the discovery is as follows: "It is the most impressive Byzantine graveyard which I have seen, except Beth-Shearim. The tombs are underground, some of them two storeys high. In one is left the remains of a black mosaic pavement from very small stones and wall-paintings, we did not dare to enter the tombs for fear of 'Kadachat Mearoth'. Something should be done to protect the

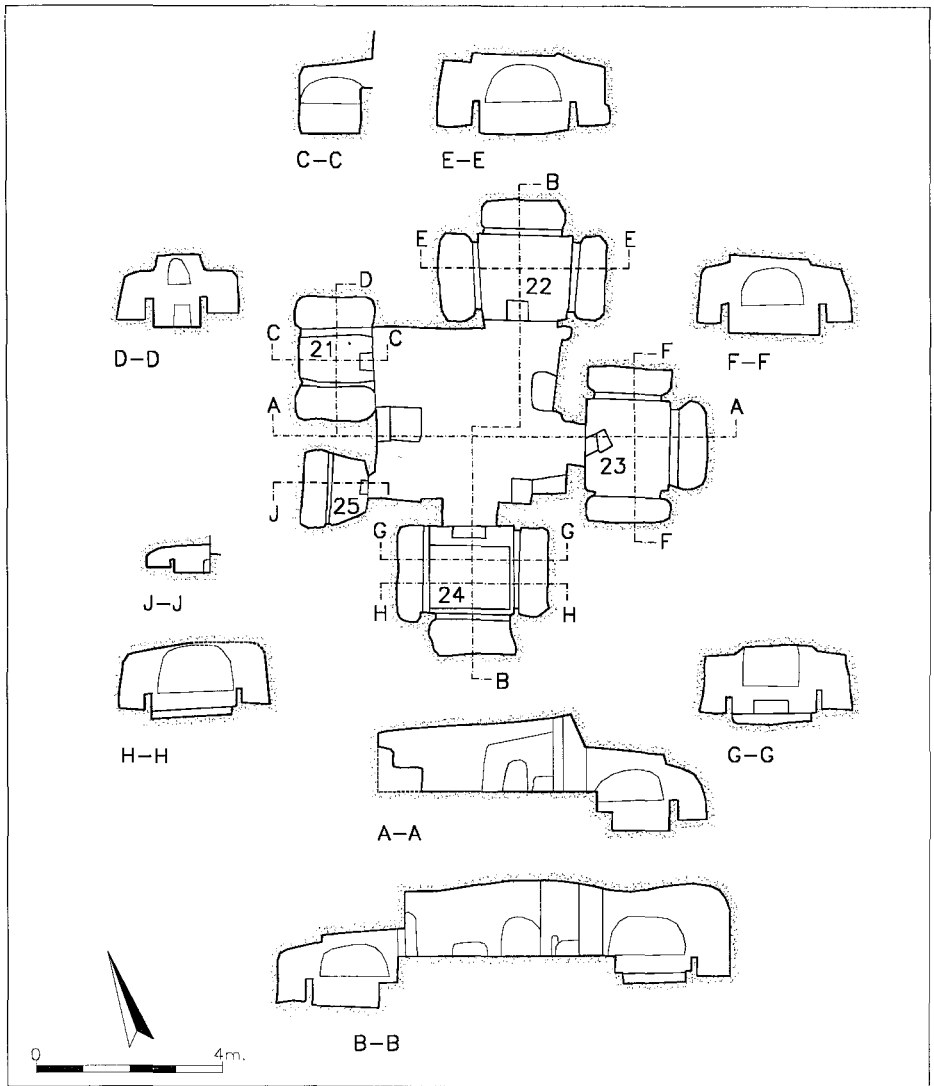


Fig. 4. Kefar Shemaryahu. F. Berger excavations — the northern complex.

painting from further deterioration, as rain and wind enter the open caves freely”.

According to Danelius, the tombs were located on a hill just north of the so-called Baghdad Hill. These hills were surveyed and excavated five years later, intermittently from February to May 1962, by F. Berger, as the area was designated for building. During this survey an outstanding cemetery containing *arcosolia* tombs dating to the 1st–2nd centuries C.E. until the Byzantine period was discovered (*Had. Arkh.* 2:24; Gophna 1978:1074; Roll and Ayalon 1989:129, note 34). Three types of rock-cut tombs were noted:

- 1) Six vault tombs with carved stairs leading to a central chamber surrounded by

three side chambers with *arcosolia* (Fig. 3: right-hand tomb). The tombs were white-plastered and painted with red. Some of them were provided with a marble mosaic in the central chamber and burial chamber, and a fresco was noted in one tomb. Two door blocking stones were found *in situ*; a number of rectangular ornamented doors and door segments with lead hinges and a fragmentary stone inscription reflect some architectural elements that were in use in these tombs.

2) A number of caves with a single-vault sepulchral chamber and an upper portal reached by a shaft (Fig. 3: left-hand tomb). Some of them were plastered (the plan is similar to Intermediate Bronze Age shaft tombs, therefore the possibility that they are IBA tombs in secondary use is reasonable). Apparently in a more recent period, a door between one chamber to the next was carved, and the shaft blocked with a stone.

3) Single-burial rock-cut rectangular tombs. Most of the finds were Roman and Byzantine, with a single recent one reflecting use by the Bedouin tribe which camped in the area until the 1930's.

Most of the tombs were filled with earth before the area was levelled for construction.

The excavation uncovered two burial complexes at this site. The northern complex contained a central courtyard surrounded by five tombs (Fig. 4), and the southern complex a longitudinal central courtyard surrounded by five tombs and the portal of an unfinished one (Fig. 5).

In the northern complex all the tombs were excavated. The two-stepped entrance is from the west. The first tomb on the left (No. 21) has two *arcosolia*, the next three (Nos. 22, 23, 24) have three *arcosolia* each, and the fifth tomb (No. 25) has a single *arcosolium*. Tombs 21, 22 and 25 have door blocking stones.

Only two tombs of the southern complex were excavated (Nos. 28 and 29), each with three *arcosolia*. The entrance to the courtyard is from the south. Tomb 28 had a rectangular door blocking stone *in situ*, while Tomb 29 was found open and contained modern finds, testifying to its use by the Bedouin tribe for dwelling and storage.

Based on the scanty ceramic finds, the two complexes were in use during the 3rd–4th centuries C.E. (Roll and Ayalon 1989:141), perhaps even earlier (see Figs. 6–8 for a general photographic impression of the 1962 survey and excavations).

In 1992, in the course of laying the foundations for a public building (Map Ref. 1333/1771), two tombs carved in the *kurkar* ridge were exposed. The site had been excavated in the past, as mentioned above, revealing a Roman and Byzantine cemetery attributed by some scholars to the Samaritans. In August–September 1992 the Israel Antiquities Authority conducted a trial excavation here, and uncovered two tombs with loculi under *arcosolia*, also attributed to these periods (*Had. Arch.*, forthcoming).

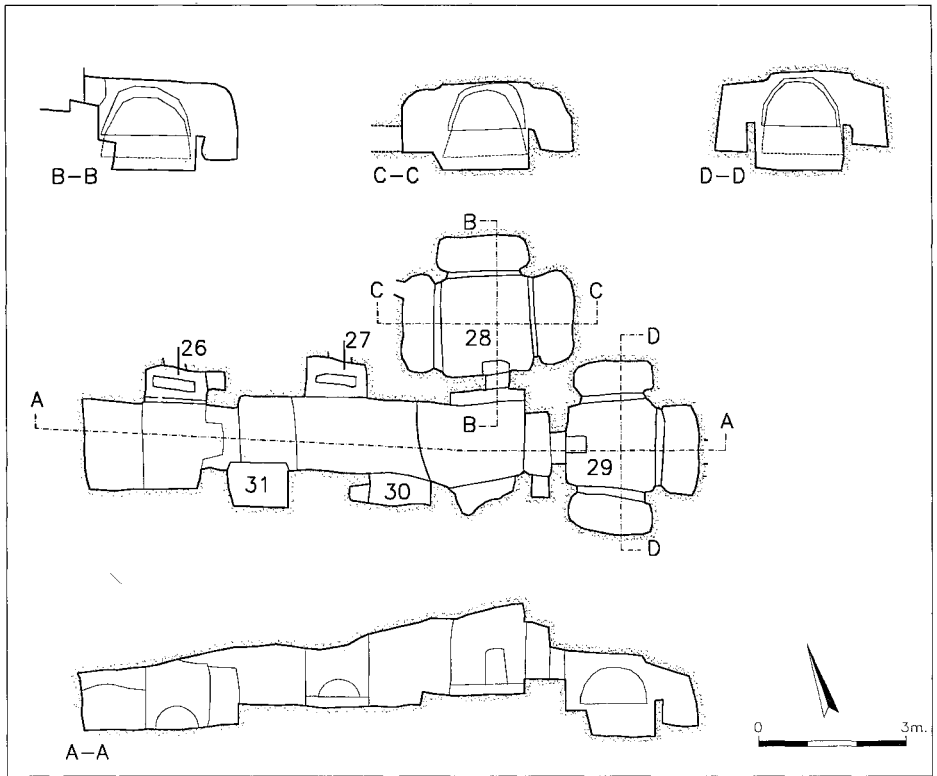


Fig. 5. Kefar Shemaryahu. F. Berger excavations — the southern complex.

In February 1993 the Israel Antiquities Authority carried out another trial excavation (Map Ref. 132031/174050), discovering a family tomb complex apparently dating to the Byzantine period (Ginzburg 1994:121–122).

Rishpon. (Map Ref. 1329/1790–1330/1778–1340/1790–1340/1778). Files from the British Mandate period report briefly on visits and minor surveys which uncovered rock-cut tombs scattered throughout the *kurkar* ridge, apparently dating to the Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (Figs. 9–10). In August 1922 reports were received of “tombs with loculi under *arcosolia*, on the low range of the coastal hills. There are courts common to five or more tombs. The side walls of the loculi were removed as at Mughr el-^cAbabisha (Kefar Shemaryahu) to the south. Tombs and quarries continue interruptedly northwards up to Ibreiktas...” In August 1935 additional rock-cut tombs and caves were reported (Plot Nos. 21–28, 39–40 and 46 on site-map serial number 554). Other reports mention rock-cut tombs, caves and quarries over the years: 1930; June, August, December 1935; November 1936; February 1938. Roll and Ayalon mention numerous additional Byzantine burial caves, most with vaults (1989:153).



Fig. 6. Kefar Shemaryahu. F. Berger survey and excavations. A burial stone.

Discussion

The necropolis of Apollonia in the given periods can be delimited by el-Jalil in the southeast and Rishpon in the northeast, extending over an estimated area of 15 sq. km. (Fig. 1). This necropolis may reflect the size of the settlement and its direct area of influence in these periods.

The geography of the region also played a role in the distribution of the tombs. The settlement of Apollonia was located on the westernmost *kurkar* ridge, while the tombs were situated mainly on the two more easterly ridges. Thus, the inhabitants of Apollonia probably utilized the land between the ridges as agricultural land.

It should be noted that the tombs discussed here reflect only a relatively minor percentage of the total number which existed during Roman and Byzantine times, due in part to quarrying operations carried out in antiquity.

Four categories of rock-cut tombs can be defined here based on architectural style, which were in use during the Roman-Byzantine periods, not only in the Sharon coastal region but also in major parts of the Roman and Byzantine empires:

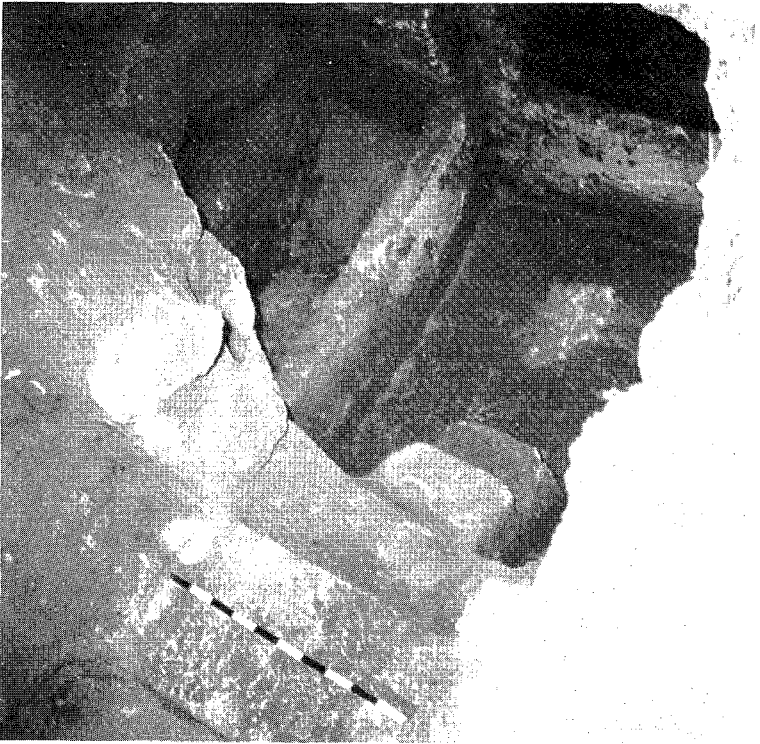


Fig. 7. Kefar Shemaryahu. F. Berger survey and excavations. An hypogeum.

1) **Multi-vault tombs** (hypogea)

The tomb has an entrance with hewn steps leading to a central chamber surrounded by three side chambers, each containing an *arcosolium* covering a carved-out space containing one or more loculi/niches/troughs for the body or bodies, sometimes with *kokh/im* instead of loculi, or a combination. A number of multi-vault tombs may occur together, opening onto a common courtyard, or connected by a passage. Each tomb is a family complex which could be enlarged as the need arose, and the rock permitted.

2) **Single-vault tombs** (hypogea)

A single sepulchral chamber having one or more loculi under an *arcosolium* and an upper portal entered through a shaft.

3) **Rectangular rock-cut tombs** (*fossae*)

A simple rock-cut rectangular tomb.

4) **Miscellaneous rock-cut tombs**

These have a slightly different architectural style and plan from the above. Their characteristics are varied, but the combination of stonecutting with construction is common. It should be noted that the term hypogea can also be applied to this group.



Fig. 8 Kefar Shemaryahu. F. Berger survey and excavations. A decorated stone door.



Fig. 9. Rishpon. Rock-cut tombs.



Fig. 10. Rishpon. Rock-cut tombs.

As revealed in a number of surveys, the finds from the Kefar Shemaryahu necropolis apparently reflect, in most cases, burials of the upper social classes, in an area that was especially designated as a necropolis in this period. Other sites where industrial installations were revealed alongside the graveyards may represent the burials of Apollonia's middle and lower classes. Burial complexes with *kokhim* or *arcosolia* were apparently used by all the inhabitants of Palestine without faith differentiation. This tradition, which developed from the tombs of Iron Age Palestine, reached its peak in the Roman period.

The Roman and Byzantine cemeteries and tombs around Apollonia reflect the art, aesthetical concepts, and the variegation of the society and the economy that prevailed in the area (see Toynbee 1971; Morris 1992). The architecture of these tombs is paralleled, in particular, by rock-cut tombs at other Roman and Byzantine sites along the *kurkar* ridge of Israel, for example the Mughar el-Sharaf cemetery (Porath and Levy 1993), the ancient Jewish cemetery at Abu Kabir (Clermont-Ganneau 1896:2–5, 130–133; Kaplan 1978:1168) and that near Tel Barukh (*ibid.*), as well as in other parts of Palestine.

The Jewish burial complexes at Beth She'arim in the Lower Galilee, which were in use from the Roman to the Early Byzantine periods, contain similar architectural features in spite of the difference in rock type (e.g. *Beth She'arim I*:55–58; Plan 1; Pl. VIII:1; *Beth She'arim III*:51–53, 84–86; Pls. LVIII–LIX:1).

In light of the above-mentioned data, it appears that there were no specific

architectural characteristics or burial customs in the cemeteries surrounding Roman-Byzantine Apollonia.¹

1 I wish to express my thanks to Y. Levy and A. Rochman of the Israel Antiquities Authority, for their time and permission to use part of the above material.

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