

ḤAME YO'AV: HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS

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During the 2013 salvage excavations at Ḥame Yo'av, human skeletal remains were found in two large cyst tombs oriented east–west, dated to the late Byzantine period (L131, L133; see Avner 2022). The remains were extremely fragmentary. Due to external constraints, the fragments were rapidly inspected on-site and immediately sent for reburial. Although many fragments were found scattered, partial anatomical articulation of the bones indicated primary burials. The remains included in each of the tombs a skull, teeth and postcranial bones of at least three individuals.

TOMB 131

H1. An adult individual, buried with the head in the west. The morphology of the skull and lower jaw indicate a male (Bass 1987:82; Loth and Henneberg 1996). Age at death, based on tooth attrition stages (Hillson 1993:176–201) and the growth of osteophytes in a thoracic vertebra (Bass 1987:20), was estimated at 50–60 years.

H2. An adult individual, buried with the head in the east. Sex was determined as a male, based on the vertical diameter of the femoral head (measured as 48 mm; Bass 1987:219). Age at death, based on tooth attrition stages (Hillson 1993:176–201), was estimated at 40–50 years.

H3. An adult individual, buried with the head in the west. Skull morphology indicated a female (Bass 1987:82). Age at death, based on epiphyseal closure in a cervical vertebra, was estimated as 20< years (Johnston and Zimmer 1989).

TOMB 133

H4. An adult individual, buried with the head in the west. Skull morphology indicated a male (Bass 1987:82). Age at death, based on suture closure in the vault, was estimated as 30< years (Hershkovitz et al. 1997). A femoral head, whose vertical diameter was measured as 48 mm (indicating a male; Bass 1987:219), may have belonged to this individual.

H5. An adult individual, buried with the head in the west. Epiphyseal closure on long bone fragments indicated an adult individual (Johnston and Zimmer 1989). However, its sex could not be determined.

H6. A child, buried with the head in the west. The remains of this individual include two teeth, indicating its aged at 5–7 years (Hillson 1993:176–201), and two long bone fragments without epiphyses.

CONCLUSIONS

The human skeletal remains found in these Byzantine-period cyst tombs were in a very poor state of preservation. Yet, they were indicative of at least six individuals, three in each grave. These included a child 5–7 years old; a female aged 20< years; three males aged 30<, 40–50 and 50–60 years; and an adult aged 20< years, whose sex could not be determined. The dead were interred in a primary burial, with their heads in the west, apart from one skull found in the east.

A multiple burial in a similar Byzantine-period large, east-west gabled-roof cyst was uncovered in Ashqelon by Kogan-Zehavi (1997). The bones in this excavation, inspected by Y. Nagar and J. Verdene, represented at least 17 individuals, all with their heads in the west. It is possible, therefore, that the bones in the present tombs were also all buried with their heads in the west, and the only skull found in the opposite direction (L131) among scattered fragments, was moved from its original posture over the course of time.

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