

BURIAL CAVE 2 IN THE AZOR-HOLON CEMETERY: AN EARLY BRONZE AGE I TOMB WITH EGYPTIAN FINDS

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INTRODUCTION

This is the final report of a late Early Bronze Age I (henceforth EB I) burial cave at Azor (Fig. 1). The cave is one of two adjoining, artificial burial cavities simultaneously investigated in 1968¹ by Asher Ovadiah on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (henceforth IDAM).²

HISTORY OF EXCAVATION

In May 1968 the late Moshe Dayan, while clandestinely excavating this cave (Fig. 2), was injured when its roof collapsed and partially buried him. Dayan, then Minister of Defense, was rushed to the hospital, at which time the IDAM became aware of his unauthorized excavation. Subsequently Asher Ovadiah was assigned to complete the excavation on behalf of the IDAM and a license (A-163/1968-01³) was eventually issued him *ex post facto*.

Ovadiah's investigation of the tomb indicated Dayan had virtually finished looting it. All that was left to do was to sift Dayan's spoil tip at the entrance to the cave. Nothing is known about the finds removed by Dayan from this cave prior to its collapse.⁴ OVADIAH (1968) was able to retrieve only a limited number of small items by sieving Dayan's spoil heap at the entrance to the cave (Fig. 3a–b), to be presented below.

THE SITE

This tomb is one of fifteen artificial burial caves hewn into the local *kurkar* sandstone, some few outcrops of which are to be found in the environs of Tel Azor. The site is located in the Lod Valley, central coastal plain (Fig. 1) about 6 km from the present-day Mediterranean seashore, just south-east of Yafo (Jaffa; ORNI and EFRAT 1976).

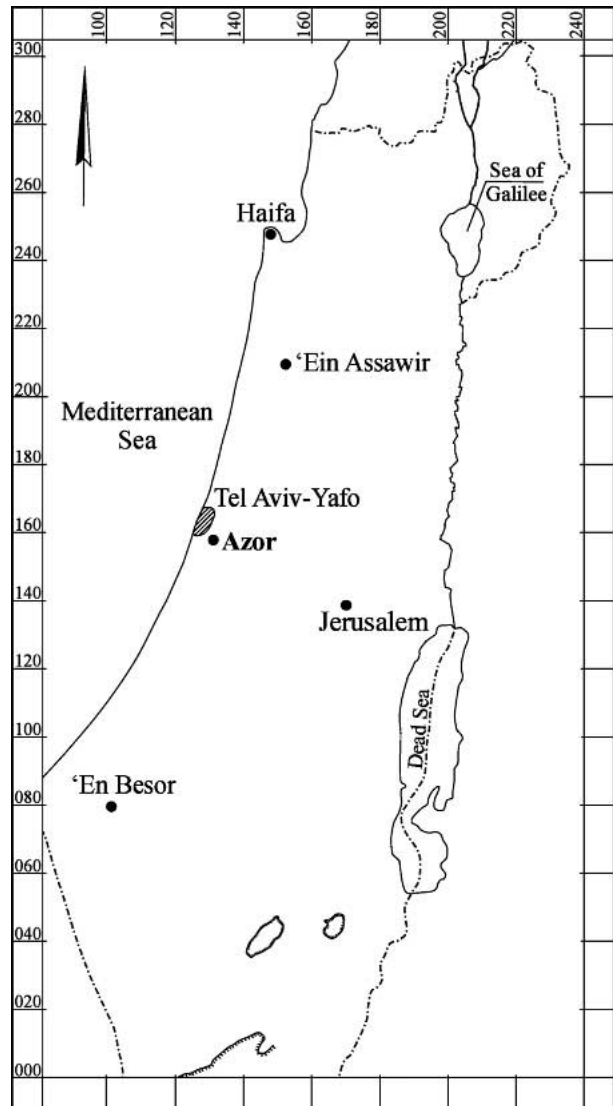


Fig. 1 Map showing location of Azor

DESCRIPTION OF THE CAVE

The cave, measuring ca. 3 m × 2 m and 1.2–1.5 m in height was quarried into the slope of a *kurkar*

¹ The second cave yielded sparse finds of the Intermediate Bronze Age and is the subject of another report.

² IDAM is the forerunner of the Israel Antiquities Authority. For a history of the IDAM, see KLETTER 2006.

³ This is an Israel Antiquities Authority (the statutory body that replaced the IDAM in 1990) License no.

⁴ For Dayan's involvement in the excavation of other parts of this cemetery, see e.g. PERROT 1961: note 1, with reference to the «Dayan Collection» (see also ORNAN 1986).



Fig. 2 General view of the excavation area



Fig. 3a-b View of Cave no. 2, with Dayan's dump in foreground

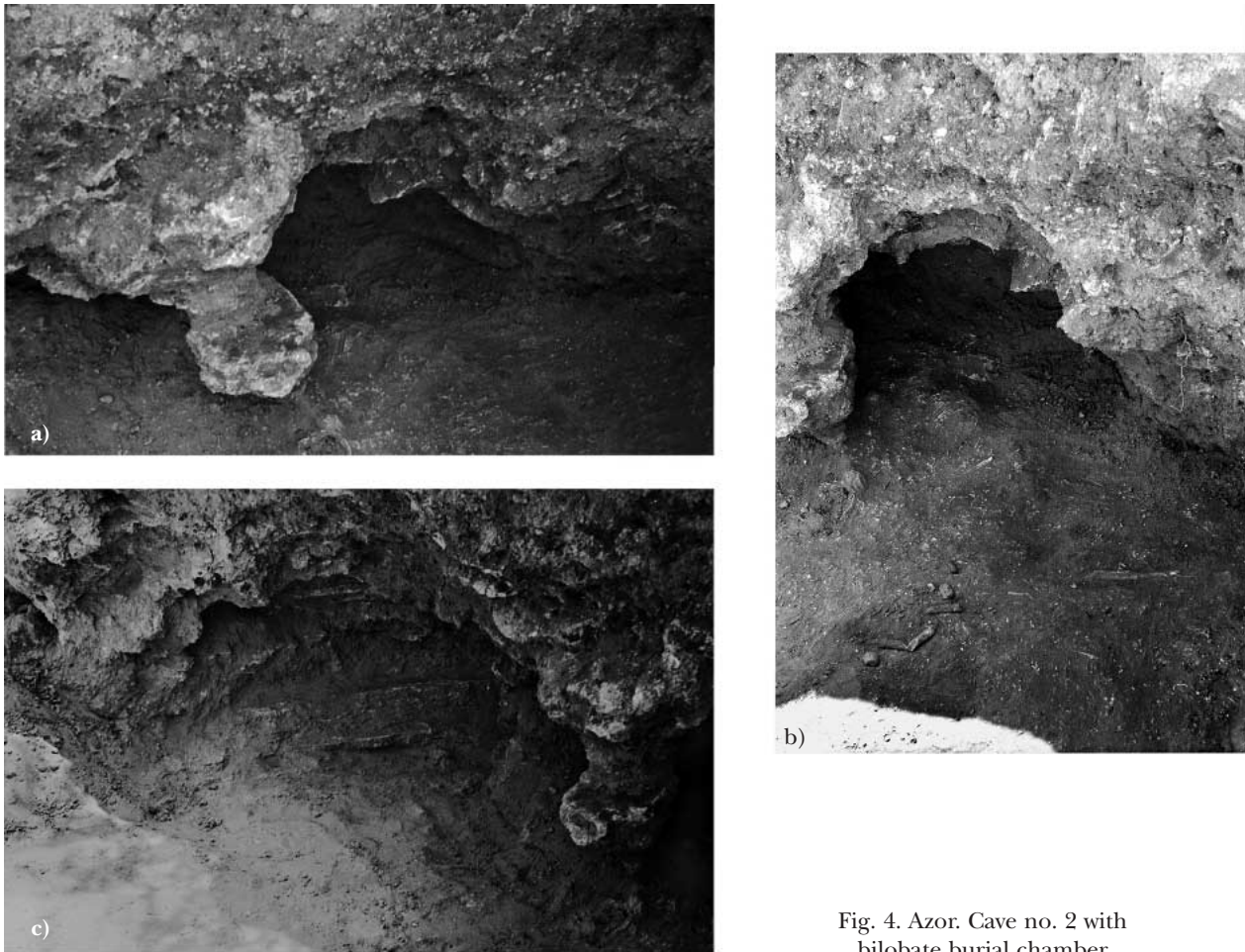


Fig. 4. Azor. Cave no. 2 with bilobate burial chamber

hill (Fig. 4:a–c). It has two rooms separated by a ‘pillar’ left in the *kurkar* that supported a roughly vaulted roof. The general layout of the cave with its two relatively small burial chambers separated by such a pillar, is typical of other, late EB I tombs in the same cemetery.⁵

Presentation of the Finds from Burial Cave no. 2

*Human Remains*⁶

Remains of a human skull were retrieved from the cave’s spoil heap. They are small parts of the crown and frontal cranium as well as a small part of the left eye socket (Fig. 5).

Based on the thickness of the bone fragments (between 8–9mm), the skull is assumed to be that of a male. The condition of the closure of the

sutures indicates that this individual was between 25–35 years old. Due to the very bad state of bone preservation it was not possible to restore the skull. No further conclusions, therefore, could be drawn.

Pottery

This tiny assemblage includes fragments of a small, hemispheric bowl with a pierced lug-han-



Fig. 5 Photograph of the human bone fragments

⁵ See, for instance, BEN-TOR 1975, in particular note 5.

⁶ This section is based on an internal report dated October 29th, 1970 written by David Westler, Tel Aviv University, School of Medicine, Dept. of Anatomy and Anthropology.

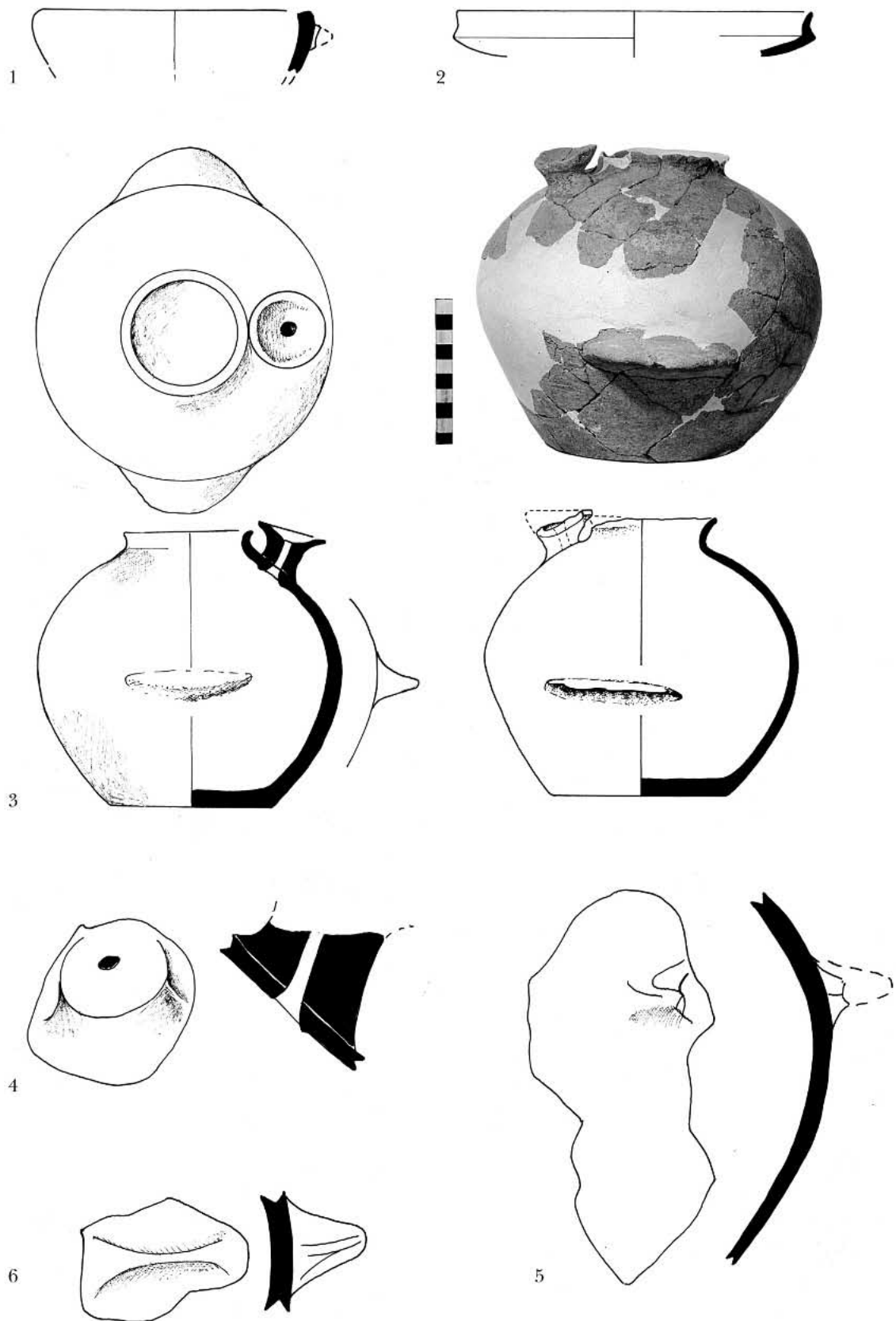


Fig. 6 Azor. Cave 2. Pottery finds: 1) Small hemispheric bowl with lug handle (cf. BEN-TOR 1975: fig. 5:9); 2) Small carinated bowl (cf. KOCHAVI *et al.* 2000: fig. 8.5:19–20; GOPHNA 1996: figs. 39:6, 46:1); 3) Jar with pillar-spout (cf. BEN-TOR 1975: fig. 9:6, pl. 16:1); 4) Pillar-spout; 5) Shoulder fragment of jar with ledge handle; 6) Ledge handle

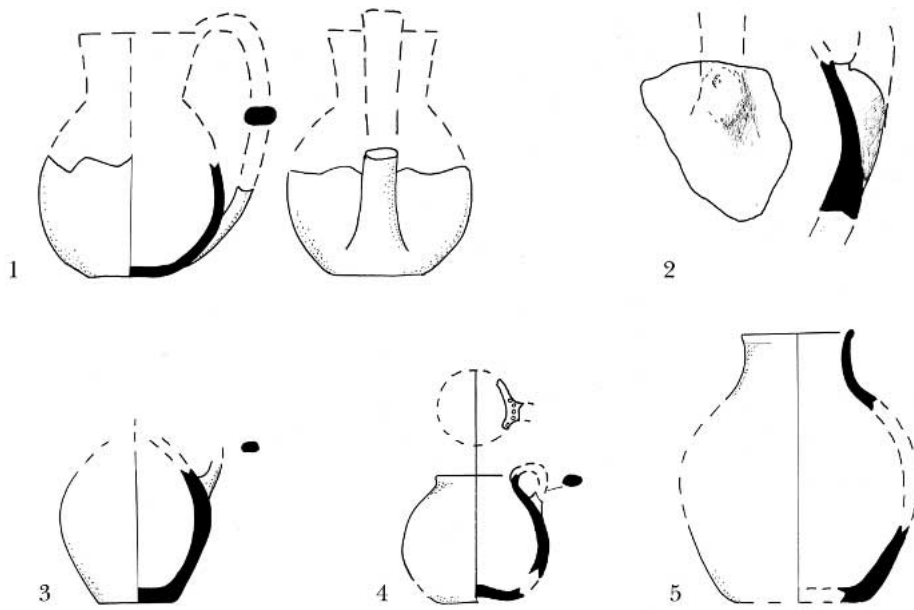


Fig. 7 Azor. Cave 2. Pottery finds: 1) Loop-handled jar (cf. BEN-TOR 1975: fig. 6:6–8, pl. 8:4); 2) Loop-handle fragment; 3) Loop-handled jar; 4) Loop-handled cup with punctured design on rim (cf. BEN-TOR 1975: fig. 6: 6–7; for the mode of decoration cf. BEN-TOR 1975: fig. 6:3; 5) jar

dle (Fig. 6.1), a small carinated bowl (Fig. 6.2), two pillar-spouted jars (Figs. 6.3 and 6.4) and two plain ledge-handles (Fig. 6.5–6). These last three fragments probably belong to one and the same jar. Fragments of at least three loop-handled jugs and juglets (Fig. 7:1–3), a small loop-handled cup with impressed decoration on its rim (Fig. 7.4) and portions of another jar (Fig. 7.5) complete this very tiny assemblage.

With the exception of the carinated bowl, all diagnostic forms have clear parallels in pottery assemblages from two other burial caves at Azor (BEN-TOR 1975) and Stratum V–IV of Tel Dalit (GOPHNA and IRON-LUBIN 1996). They are dated to an advanced phase of EB I. The carinated bowl is of a type dated to the very end of EB I period (cf. BECK 1985:17–20; KOCHAVI *et al.* 2000: fig. 8.5:19–20) or EB II.⁷

A Flint Sickle Blade

A single flint sickle blade was recovered from the spoil tip. It concerns a straight, truncated and retouched blade. One edge has been worked bifacially (Fig. 8), creating a finely denticulated edge marked by sickle gloss.

This type of blade is reminiscent of few other blades possibly produced by the same technique, found in EB I settlement contexts at Tel Erani (ROSEN 1988), En Besor (GOPHNA and FRIEDMAN 1993), Tel Halif Terrace (LEVY *et al.* 1997: 42), and most recently at Tel Lod (H. Khalaila, pers. comm.) and Megiddo (BLOCKMAN and GROMAN-YEROSLAVSKI, forthcoming). They are considered to be Egyptian or Egyptianized, although most of the above mentioned blades were probably pro-

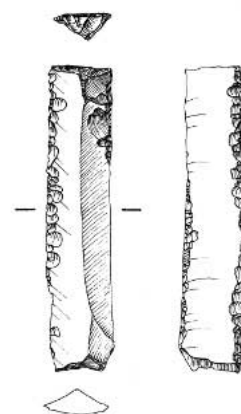


Fig. 8 Azor. Cave 2. Flint blade

⁷ Fragments of similar, carinated bowls were uncovered in two additional, nearly contemporary burial caves (Tombs 40 and 60) excavated by A. DRUKS in 1969 for

IDAM (fig. 11:3; DRUKS, BEN-DOV and VAN DEN BRINK, in prep.).

duced in Israel. The specimen from Cave no. 2 at Azor is the only example of such a blade found in a burial context.

Jewelry

A few beads were retrieved from the spoil heap. They include three near-cylindrical beads of bone (Fig. 9:1), one of carnelian, a perforated disc-shaped bead (Fig. 9:2) and two perforated conical shells made into beads (Fig. 9:3).

Bone beads very similar to those illustrated in Fig. 9:1 were uncovered e.g. in burial contexts in Cave no.1 at Sha'ar Ephraim (cf. VAN DEN BRINK 2005). Carnelian beads similar to the one represented here were discovered in an EB I cemetery in the Qiryah Quarter of Tel Aviv (BRAUN and VAN DEN BRINK 2005).

Two shells retrieved from the spoil belong to the genus *Conus*.⁸ Both have man-made holes in their tops, probably created by rubbing the apex of the shell over a firm object such as a stone. In this way the shells were converted into beads. The specific identity and origin of the shells is prob-

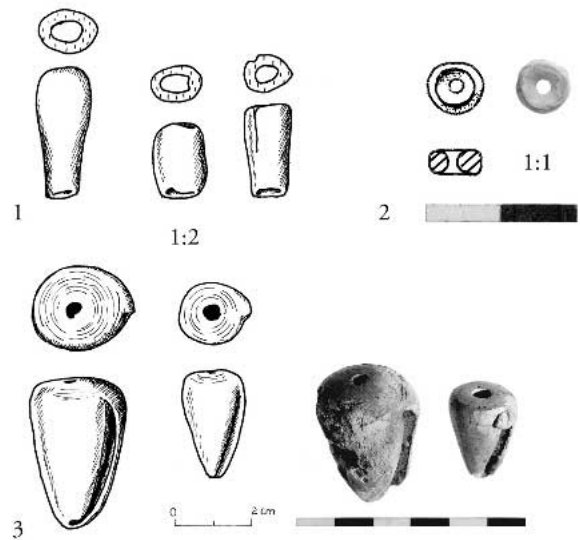


Fig. 9 Azor. Cave 2: 1) Three bone beads; 2) Carnelian bead; 3) Two Cones shell beads

lematic. Only one species is known to live in the Eastern Mediterranean and not less than 28 species in the northern part of the Red Sea, i.e.,

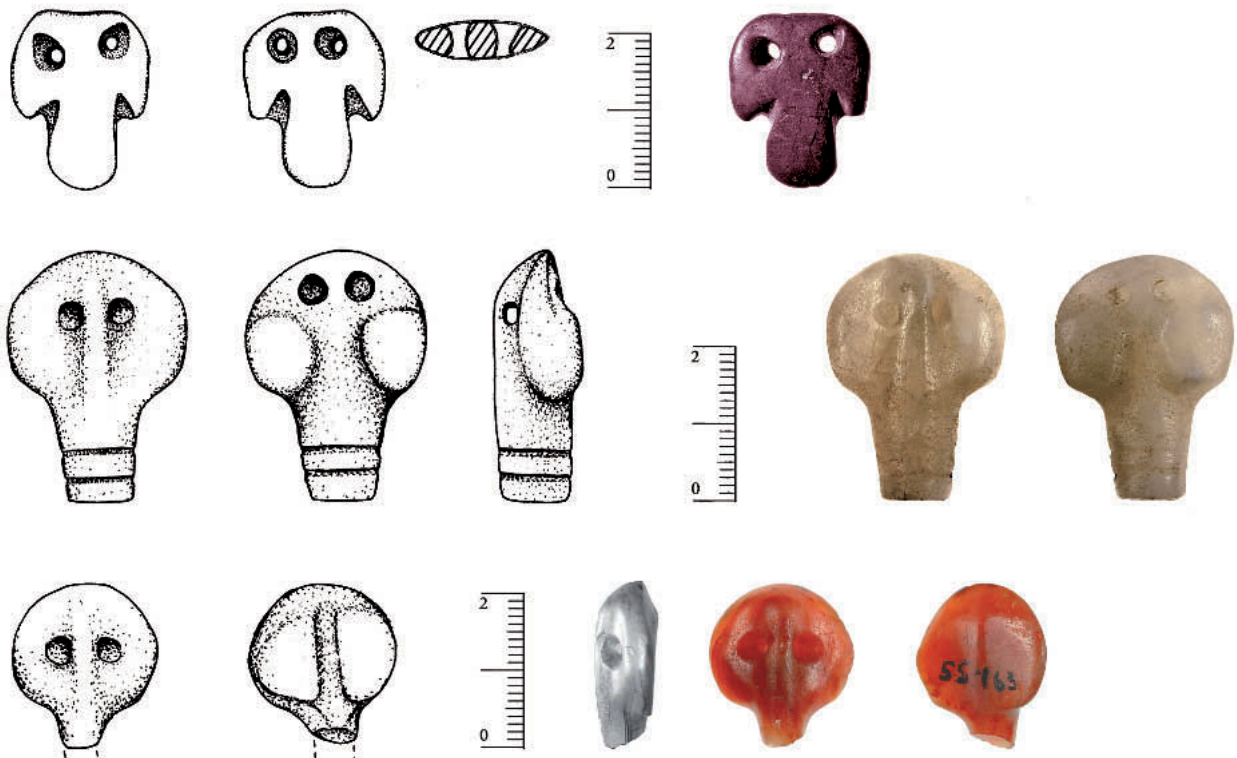


Fig. 10 1) Azor. Cave 2. Bull's head amulet-pendant ; 2) En Besor, Stratum III. Bull's head amulet-pendant; 3) Barkai/En Assawir. Bull's head amulet-pendant

⁸ Identification and description of the Cones was kindly provided by Prof. Henk K. MIENIS, the National Mollusc Collection, Tel Aviv University, based upon a drawing and photograph of the actual specimens.

the Gulfs of Aqaba and Suez. The form of the shell (more or less straight conical sides with a flat top) rules out its identification with the Mediterranean species *Conus mediterraneus* (HWASS, 1792⁹). Several *Conus* species from the Red Sea are more likely candidates of having served as the raw material for these shell-beads, especially *Conus flavidus* (Lamarck, 1810). The lack of traces of the color pattern and more details of the original micro-sculpture of the top whorls, however, does not allow a more specific identification. In respect to *C. flavidus*, it is noteworthy that 12 shells belonging to that species, all with man-made holes in their apexes, have been found in burial cave no. 1 near Sha'ar Ephraim (MIENIS, in press), the very same cave that also yielded several bone beads similar to the ones found in Azor cave No. 2.

Cone shells holed in a similar way have been reported also from a number of other EB I sites in Israel. For example shell beads made from *Conus mediterraneus* have been reported from Tell Ta'anach (EZZUGHAYYAR and AL-ZAWAHRA 1996) and Megiddo (BAR-YOSEF MAYER 2000), while a bead made from *Conus textile neovicarius* DA MOTTA, 1982, a Red Sea species, has been excavated at Gesher HaBesor (HORWITZ *et al.* 2002).

Notable is the presence of an Egyptian bull's head amulet-pendant retrieved from the cave's spoil tip. This minute item (Fig. 10:1) was carved from Chalcedonian jaspis and measures 22 mm (L) × 27mm (W) × 7mm (thickness).

In comparison with other known specimens of this type of amulet from Egypt (see, e.g., PETRIE 1914:44, pl. 38:212 a–m), it is somewhat atypical. In contrast to most others, in this specimen the 'bull's eyes' are pierced *all the way through* and a horizontally perforated 'pillar', usually forming the back of this type of amulet-pendant, is absent. It is, therefore, unlikely that it was worn as a pendant but rather must have formed part of a necklace of beads. The choice of material for this particular object is also unique amongst this group of artefacts.

Additional bull's head amulets-pendants found in Israel

To date, only two other, comparable specimens are known to have been found in Israel, both deriving from late EB I contexts (Table 1 below). One derives from a settlement context at 'En Besor, Stratum III (Fig. 10:2; GOPHNA 1980: fig. 5:

no. 1, Pl. III, no. 4), while the other was uncovered in a karstic burial cave, excavated by DOTHAN (1970; 1993a) at Barkai, near 'Ein Assawir (Fig. 10:3). Notably, a necklace of 23 stone beads and pendants, including two conical pendants of Egyptian calcite (DOTHAN 1970: pl. 8: 2–3), was uncovered in that same cave. The latter are very similar to two other stone pendants deriving from two additional EB I burial caves in the same Barkai cemetery (Tombs 3 and 20; see YANNAI 2002: fig. 22.1:25–26).

Bull's head amulets-pendants from Egypt

Over forty specimens belonging to this generic type, made of ivory, bone and a wide variety of stones (Table 2 below), are known in Egypt to date. They derive from Predynastic and Early Dynastic burial and domestic contexts in (mainly) Upper Egypt (HENDRICKX 2002).

Discussing the representation of bovines in Egyptian Pre- and Early Dynastic iconography in a recent paper, HENDRICKX (2002) suggested that the so-called bull's head amulets at issue could have been worn either as a distinct pendant or as part of a necklace. In Egypt this type of amulet-pendant occurs as early as during Naqada IC (synchronous with the Levantine Late Chalcolithic period), is most common during Naqada II and continues to be used well into Naqada IIIC (cf. Table 2; terminology after HENDRICKX 1996), the later phase being partially synchronous with the late EB I.

In Egypt most examples of this type of amulet were found in tombs, but they appear also in temple and settlement contexts (HENDRICKX 2002: 285; and see Table 2). HENDRICKX (2002: 287) argues that "the bull's head amulet is a combination of female elements, with the emphasis on fertility, and the bull", whereby the arms of women curved underneath their breasts – as represented in early ceramic statuettes also starting from Naqada I – coincide with the downward-curved horns and eyes of the bull. This apparently finds its clearest expression in the earliest 'bull's head' amulets. He also states that the original symbolism expressed in the 'bull's head amulets' might have been lost during Naqada III, because of a stark degradation of its original shape. This degradation is especially notable in the Azor specimen discussed above (Fig. 10:1).

⁹ This species has a more pointed, conic apex and should have revealed a much larger hole in the top if ground down to its present level.

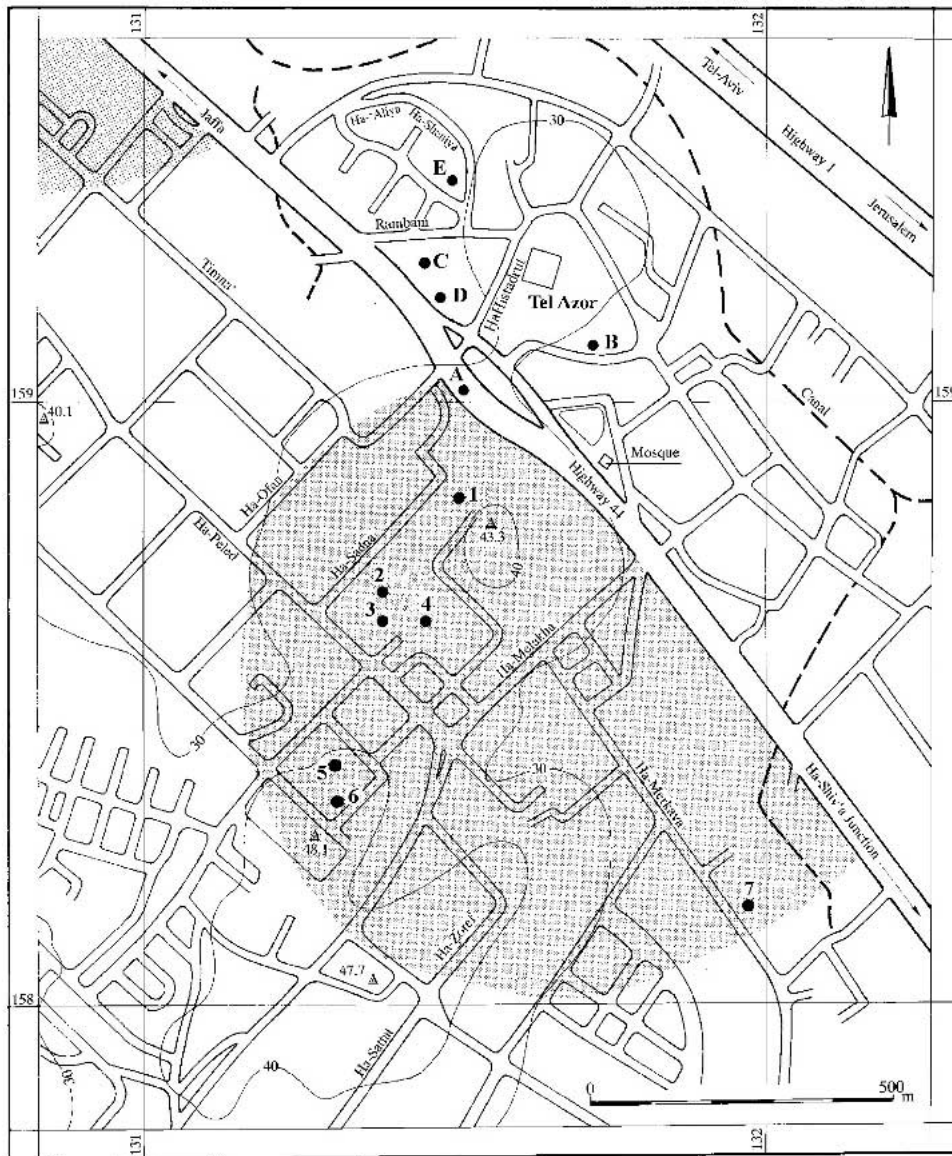


Fig. 11 Map showing the location of EB I burial and settlement remains at Azor/Holon [Legend: 1) two burial caves (Tombs 1 and 4; BEN-TOR 1975); 2) three burial caves (SHAPIRA 1963); 3) four burial caves (DRUKS and ZAFIRIS 1970a, b); 4) one burial cave (DAVIES 1975); 5) Burial Cave 2 (this volume; OVADIAH 1968); 6) one burial cave (BUSERI 1969); 7) five burial caves (NEGBI 1975); A: 'Installation C' (USSISHKIN 1961), settlement remains (DOTHAN 1958); B: settlement remains (GOPHNA and BUSERI 1967; GOPHNA 1974); C: settlement remains (GOLANI and VAN DEN BRINK 1999); D: various pits (RAND 1999); E: washed-in pottery (SHAPIRA, not published)]

Burial Cave 2 in Context

The Azor-Holon EB I cemetery

The burial cave described above is but one of fifteen EB I burial caves excavated in the 1960's

and 1970's¹⁰ within the Azor-Holon cemetery. They clearly form part of an extensive burial ground¹¹ that most likely served the inhabitants of the EB I settlements situated only few hundreds of meters northeast of the burial site and

¹⁰ Cf. SHAPIRA (1963), DRUKS and TZAFERIS (1970a, b), BUSERI (1969), BEN-TOR (1975), NEGBI (1975), DAVIES (1975), RAND (1999) and DRUKS, BEN-DOV and VAN DEN BRINK (in prep.).

¹¹ Since the early 1920s, archaeological research in the

region of Azor (Arabic: *Yazûr*) and the present-day Holon industrial area zone adjoining immediately to its south has yielded numerous sites and finds dating from the Chalcolithic period onwards. On the identification and history of Azor see PERROT 1993: 125 and for a sum-



Fig. 12 Tel Azor. Gophna/Busheri probe (cf. Fig. 11: B)

is separated from them by a topographic depression or saddle.

The EB I settlement remains at Azor (Fig. 11: A, C–D)

Sporadic remains of an early EB I settlement at Azor were exposed in the past over a limited area on a *kurkar* outcrop by PERROT and USSISHKIN (“installation C”: USSISHKIN 1961)¹² and DOTHAN (1958:272). GOPHNA and BUSERI (1967; GOPHNA 1974: 38–40; pl. 7) uncovered additional *in situ* late EB I settlement remains in a 6 × 5 m probe (Stratum IV) on the edge of Tel Azor itself (Figs. 11:B, 12). The findings consist of a pavement with a spread of late EB I pottery above *kurkar* bedrock at a depth of 2.5 m below present surface. Notably, two Early Dynastic Egyptian pots sherds were noted in this probe by one of the authors (R.G.); one from Stratum IV and possibly another one from higher up in the probe.

In 1968 Shapira made a probe about 200 m northwest of Tel Azor, in an area adjacent to the

floodplain of the Ayalon river (Fig. 11:E). In a 3 m high cross-section three layers of washed-in soil could be distinguished. Within two of these layers EB I sherds could be identified, probably washed down from the adjacent tell. These sherds were similar to some of those exposed previously by Gophna and Busheri in 1966 on the tell (Gophna, pers. obs.).

Based on the position of the locations where *in situ* early and late EB I settlement remains have been uncovered, it is possible to estimate the extent of the site in these periods to have covered at least 50–60 *dunams*. As a result of subsequent salvage excavations at Azor in more recent years (cf. GOLANI and VAN DEN BRINK 1999; RAND 1999), it is now clear that the EB I settlement was not a continuous one that would have covered this whole area, but may have consisted of a series of smaller settlements.

Azor’s nearest-neighbor with attested Egyptian affiliations in the central coastal plain is the late EB I settlement at Tel Lod (cf. VAN DEN BRINK 2002, VAN DEN BRINK and BRAUN 2002, PAZ *et al.* 2005, YANNAI and MARDER 2000). A contemporary cemetery that could be associated with that settlement has, however, not yet been located.

Additional Egyptian Finds from the EB I Azor-Holon Cemetery

Apart from the bull’s head amulet presented above, additional Egyptian finds were uncovered in at least five other tombs in this cemetery. Two Egyptian cylindrical jars and about 16 diminutive, Egyptian ceramic vessels were uncovered in nearby Caves 10, 40 and 60 excavated by A. Druks in 1968 (DRUKS, BEN-DOV and VAN DEN BRINK in prep.). Cave 40 also yielded an Egyptian slate palette, published by AMIRAN (1985) as well as an amphibolite bowl. Three small Egyptian ceramic vessels, some Nilotic shells (*Chambardia rubens arcuata*, formerly known as *Aspatharia rubens*) and an Egyptian flint knife were uncovered in burial Caves 1 and 4 excavated in 1971 by A. BEN-TOR (1975: 29).

mary on the excavations of the various ancient tombs see PERROT 1993: 125–126, BEN-TOR 1993: 126–127 and DOTHAN 1993b: 127–129. For the location, brief listing of finds and references to the excavations carried out between the years 1923 and 1998 at Azor and the adjoining Holon industrial area, see GOLANI and VAN DEN BRINK 1999:1–2, plan 1 and Appendix 1. Between the years 1998 and 2004 an additional seven excava-

tions were undertaken at Azor (cf. VAN DEN BRINK and KAPITAKIN, in press: plan 1), none of which yielded EB I remains or materials.

¹² In 1958/59 J. PERROT excavated a large Chalcolithic cave at this spot (PERROT 1958; 1959). ‘Installation C’ was erected on the debris of this very cave during the early EB I after its roof had caved-in.

Egyptian finds from the EB I Barkai/ Ein Assawir cemetery

The only other EB I cemetery known to date that yielded sporadic Egyptian artifacts in EB I context is a group of karstic burial caves at Barkai, located in Israel's northern coastal plain, ca. 7km east of Hadera at the western entrance to Nahal 'Eron (Wadi 'Arah; see Fig. 1). One such burial cave, excavated by DOTAN (1970), also yielded an Egyptian bull's head amulet-pendant (Fig. 10:3), similar to the one discussed above, together with a bead necklace with two conical Egyptian stone pendants (DOTAN 1970: pl. 8: 2–3). Three nearby tombs (nos. 3, 20, 40), excavated by E. Yannai, yielded three, possibly four Egyptian and Egyptianized ceramic vessels, few Egyptian stone pendants, a rectangular graywacke palette and a small, calcite jar (YANNAI 2002: fig. 22.1:12–13, 15, 21–22; HENDRICKX and VAN DEN BRINK 2002).

This burial ground most likely once served the population of the nearby EB I settlement at Tel Assawir, Stratum 2 (cf. YANNAI 2002:334). In contrast to the EB I settlement probed at Tel Azor in near vicinity of the Azor-Holon EB I burial ground, no Egyptian materials have been uncovered to date in the EB I settlement at Tel Assawir, even though the latter site has been excavated much more extensively than the EB I settlements at Azor.

CONCLUSIONS

The burial cave presented above is part of an extensive, late EB I burial ground in the Azor-Holon region. To date fifteen late EB I burial caves have been excavated in that cemetery. Egyptian finds were uncovered in six of them. These include Egyptian pottery vessels and local imitations thereof, a palette, a flint knife and the bull's head amulet from Cave no. 2 at issue here.

The finds from this late EB I burial ground seem to reflect the situation of the associated, nearby settlement, probed so far only to a very limited extent. This settlement can be considered part of the hinterland of ancient Yafo (Jaffa; see GOPHNA and LIPHSCHITZ, 1996).

Ein Assawir/Barkai in the northern coastal plain is the only other late EB I burial ground that has yielded a variety of Egyptian finds, including Egyptian pottery and local imitations thereof, a stone palette and stone vessel, beads, and a bull's amulet. In contrast to the Holon/Azor burial ground, the Assawir burial finds are not reflected in the associated, contemporary settlement.

In conclusion it should be noted that although Chalcolithic and late EB I burial caves were discovered at Azor, no *early* EB I burial caves have yet been found associated with the site (but see RAND 1999). The few Egyptian finds, however, found in association with early EB I *Installation C* (USSISHKIN 1961) at Azor could indicate possible interrelations already during early EB I at the site.

Hardly any EB II materials have been found in the burial caves at Azor,¹³ although EB II sherds were encountered by Gophna and BUSHERI in their probe (see above). The EB Age cemetery at Azor/Holon, therefore, seems to postdate early EB I, was in use during the late EB I and may have been abandoned during early EB II.

Acknowledgements

Osnat Misch Brandl kindly provided new drawings of all three bull's head amulets currently at display in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Henk K. Mienis kindly gave his expertise concerning the two Cone shells. Eliot Braun commented on an earlier draft of this text. Stan Hendrickx provided additional information concerning the bull's head amulets found in Egypt proper.

¹³ For a carinated bowl of the 'Apeh family', with irregular burnish inside deriving from Cave 60 and most probably dating from the EB II, see DRUKS et al. in prep.

| Site | Context | Period | Material | IAA license | Measurements | IAA reg. no. |
|------------------------|-------------|-----------|--|-------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Azor | Burial cave | Late EB I | Chalcedonian jaspis | A-1968-01 | 22 × 27 × 7 mm | 72-63 |
| En Besor Stratum III | Settlement | Late EB I | Carbonate rock, metamorphic marble [limestone] | A-653/1976 | 31 × 24 × 7.5mm | 76-1186 [7237] |
| Barkai/ Ein Assawir | Burial cave | Late EB I | Carnelian | 6-24/1953 | 17 × 15 × ? mm | 1953-568 (71130) |

Table 1 Bull's head amulets found in Early Bronze Age I contexts in Israel

| Cemetery site | Period | Material |
|------------------|--------------------|---|
| Abadiya | Nagada IIC-D? | Serpentine |
| Abusir el-Meleq | ? | Limestone |
| Abusir el-Meleq | Nagada IIC-III | Ivory |
| Abusir el-Meleq | Nagada IIC-II | Calcite |
| Abusir el-Meleq | Nagada IIIA2? | Stone |
| Abydos | Nagada IIIC1/Djer | ? |
| Badari | ? | ? (UC.10328) |
| Ballas | ? | Serpentine |
| Debod | Nagada IIIA-B | Stone |
| Gerza | Nagada IIC-IID2? | Gypsum |
| Helwan | Nagada IIIC-D | Green diorite |
| Hemamiya | Nagada IIIC2 | Black limestone |
| Hemamiya | Nagada II | Limestone |
| Hemamiya | Nagada II-III A | Limestone |
| Hu (2) | Nagada IIIA1-A2? | Stone + ivory |
| Matmar | Nagada IIIA2 | Amethyst |
| Matmar | Nagada IIC | Malachite |
| Mediq | ? | Serpentine ? |
| Mediq | Nagada IIIA1-A2 | Green stone |
| MAO (several) | ? | ? |
| Nagada | Nagada IC-IIB? | Elephant ivory, eyes filled in with paste |
| Nagada | Nagada IC-IIB | Hippopotamus ivory |
| Naqa ed-Deir | 2nd Dyn. | Limestone |
| Shellal | Nagada IIIA2? | Green steatite |
| Sialy | Nagada IIIA-B | Green stone |
| Tarkhan | Nagada IIIA2-IIIC2 | Green serpentine |
| Zawiyet el-Aryan | ? | Ivory (Boston 11.2641) |
| Habitation site | Period | Material |
| Hemamiya | Nagada IIC-IID? | White limestone |
| Hierakonpolis | Nagada II-III A2 | Diorite |
| Hierakonpolis | Nagada II-III A2 | Serpentine |
| Temple site | Period | Material |
| Abydos | ? | Green serpentine |
| Abydos | ? | Green serpentine |
| Abydos | 1st dynasty | Stone |
| Abydos | ? | Graywacke |
| Hierakonpolis | Main deposit | Limestone |

Table 2 Bull's head amulets found in Pre- and Early Dynastic contexts in Egypt (after HENDRICKX 2002 and supplemented by Hendrickx, pers. comm., 2004 and 2007)

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