

# Beit Zar'a Tombs (1974)

by

Muhammad Murshed A. Khadija

The site of Beit Zar'a<sup>1</sup> (Pl. LXXVI) was reported to the director of Antiquities by the owner of the Land, Mr. Nabulsi. He mentioned that people were digging tombs illegally on his land. Ibrahim H. Hasan Inspector of Antiquities and the writer were asked to check the site. Later we decided to explore two of the robbed tombs.

The tomb area lies about 3Km. east of the main Na'ur-Madaba road, 1Km. west of Umm el-Birak and Umm el-Basatin. It is a rocky area which slopes down towards the east, and it is surrounded by terraces and cultivated fields. There are many tomb openings to be seen on the surface. A large number of them were robbed out a few years ago as well as recently.

Sherds and fragments of glass scattered on the surface and near the robbed tombs reflect the Early Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic periods. In addition to the tombs there are remains of a wall built of well dressed stones and a cistern.

The tombs are cut in the soft lime stone and have different shapes of loculi inside. Two of the tombs (Fig. 1)<sup>2</sup> were chosen to be dug, located south of the track which leads to Umm el-Birak from the Na'ur-Madaba road. Mr. Rusan, the Madaba Inspector of Antiquities, very kindly supplied the dig with five workers and a technical man. He also helped from time to time in digging.

(1) Major C.R. Conder, *the Survey of Eastern Palestine*, Vol. I, p. 91.

Tomb 1 (Pl. LXXVII, 1, LXXVII, 2).  
Fig. 1.

This tomb lies 10m. south of the road and was opened recently by robbers. It is cut in the soft lime stone and has a small entrance on its eastern side. The entrance measures 0.50 wide x 0.80m. high and it slopes down towards the inside of the tomb.

On April 21, 1974 we started clearing the entrance of the tomb so that we could enter it. Then we concentrated taking out the dug soil from the eastern and southern parts. A large number of medium size flint stone mixed with soil (locus No. 1) filled the tomb almost from the floor to the ceiling. Part of this locus was left for stratigraphic analysis in the south-west corner of the tomb, but someone destroyed it one night and therefore no stratification was drawn.

Locus No. 1, is on the eastern side, and loculi Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5 are on the northern side. Nos. 6, 7, 8, 9 are on the western side. Loculi Nos. 10, 11, 12, 14 are on the southern side, and locus 15 on the eastern side south of the entrance. To the left loculi 12, 13 were blocked with flat rectangular slabs and chinked with very small stones. These were the only two loculi which were prepared for use and not opened by robbers. Three other slabs of the same size were found in the center of the cave, and they were probably used to block other loculi. No objects were found in the 15 loculi

(2) Thanks to Dr. B. Devries for helping in drawing the tombs.

except a small bead and a small bracelet (Pl. LXXVIII 3, 20) in locus 7. A piece of rock from the ceiling was found fallen on the western side and it left an opening measuring 1.5 x 1.2 m. Remains of the two legs of a skeleton and a small complete glass bottle (Fig. 2:10) were found under it. The 15 upper loculi were partly filled with soft red soil which came in by water from upper opening. There is also a small opening measuring 0.7 x 0.5 m. in the south west corner of the tomb.

In the center of the bedrock floor (locus 2), is an almost rectangular rock-cut pit 2.15 m N-S, and 2.00 m. E-W, and 1.10 m deep. There are two loculi (Pl. LXXVII, 1) on each side of this cut, loculi Nos. 16-23. In front of those loculi was a limey soil with big stones (locus 3), in which a small complete pottery unguentarium, a broken incomplete jug and a small green glazed thick sherd were found.<sup>3</sup>

Under (locus 3), was (locus 4), a mixture of lime and dark brown soil. Two spindle-whorls (Pl. LXXVIII, 1: 4, 5), were found in it, probably left from the robbing of loculus 17. An oil lamp (6) and a broken unguentarium (7) were found 70. cm. deep in the north east corner.

Loculus 20, the richest one of all, was used to bury a woman. The skeleton was laid with the head out-side and the legs inside the loculus. The necklace and other objects (No. 11-19) found proved that the dead was a woman. The spindle-whorls were probably re-used in the necklace, and they could be earlier than other objects found in the tomb. Such spindle whorls were common in the Iron Age, and continued to be used in later periods.

Another interesting objects (Fig. 3; Pl. LXXVIII, 2, LXXVIII, 3) of an earlier date and reused in the necklace is a cylinder seal made of steatite. The seal shows a standing human figure wearing a short skirt and holding a spear (?) pointed downwards. The human figure is facing two animals above each other (probably a gazelle above a small goat). A third animal also with long horns running away to the opposite direction is difficult to identify. Dots are cut to point out the feet of this last animal, while other dots are just for decorative purpose. Two triangles with dots below the two large animals and facing the small one may indicate mountains. No direct parallels were found to this cylinder seal. The hunting scene and other elements (the way of treatment, the short skirt, and the dots) remind of the seals with Mitanian influence from the second half of the second millenium (14th to 13th century B.C.). Cylinder seals with similar treatment and scenes were found in North Syrian and East Anatolian sites.

Loculus 21 had a huge skeleton of a man, since on jewelry was found with it. The body was laid on the right side facing west and the head was at the entrance of the loculus.

Loculus 22 contained a few stones, sherds and three objects (No. 15 a complete lamp, No. 16 a broken bowl and No. 17 a lower part of a globular juglet) (Fig. 2: 17).

Loculi 17, 18 were robbed recently, and the bones were mixed with stones and soil. Objects 4, 5, 8, 9, and 21. (Pl. LXXVIII, 1) were found in front of them, probably scattered during the robbing.

**Tomb No. 2 (Fig 1).**

This tomb is located about 30 meters east of Tomb 1, also cut deep

(3) This sherd came in probably while robbers entered the tomb.

in the rock. In front of the entrance is a long cut 2 m long, one meter wide and 0.8 m deep. This leads to the entrance which measures 0.65 m high and 0.50 m wide. Two high steps inside lead to the floor of the tomb. The first step is 40 cm. high from the floor and the second is 65 cm.

The tomb is almost square (2.60 m E-W x 2.55 m N-S). In the center there is a shallow rock-cut pit 15 cm. deep and measuring 1.85 m E-W x 1.78 m N-S.

This tomb has seven loculi cut into the sides and a small square cut in the eastern wall north of the steps. Its measurements are 0.60 m S-N, 0.65 m E-W, 1.33 m from bottom to ceiling and 0.40 m deep in the rock. The loculi in this tomb differ in shape from the loculi in Tomb 1. The floor of each locus (Pl. LXXIX) has a long cut

in the center and two benches 18 cm. high on both sides of it, and the locus ceiling also has a concave cut. The approximate measurements of each locus are 1.60 m deep in the rock, 1.05 m wide and 0.65 m high, its entrance width is 0.37 m and height 1.00 m.

The tomb was completely robbed and nothing was left untouched. Some medium size stones, fragments of bones and soil were in it, but it was cleared and drawn to show its plan.

### Conclusion

The site of Beit Zar'a was used as a burial area in the Early Roman period, between the first century B.C. and the second century A.D. Further diggings and investigations may produce more historical evidence to give an exact date to the site and its structures.

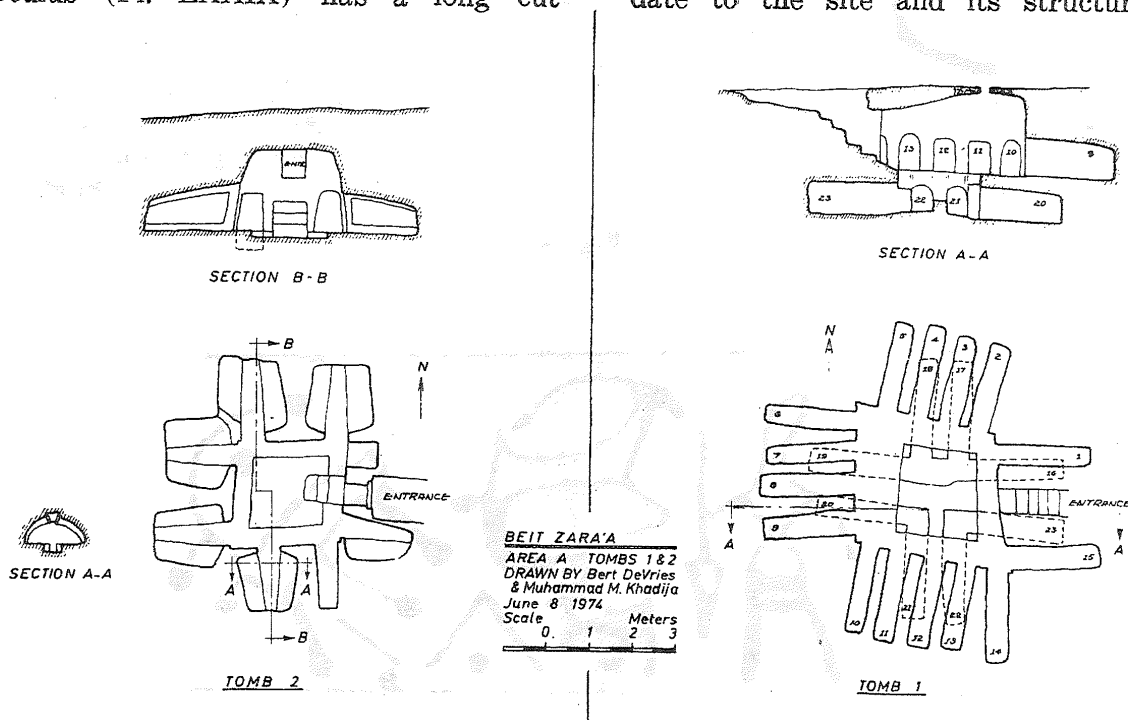


Fig. 1

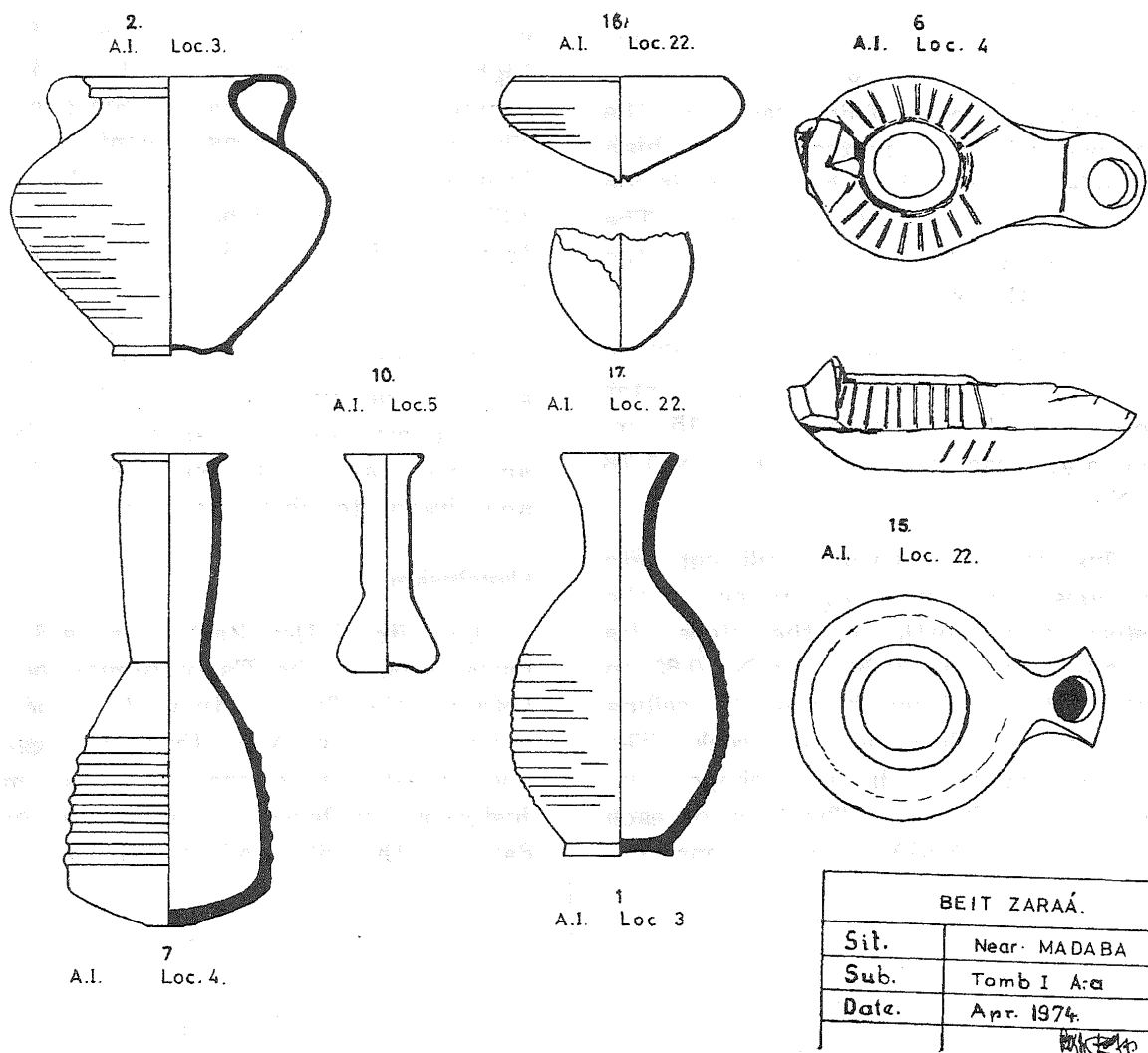


Fig. 2

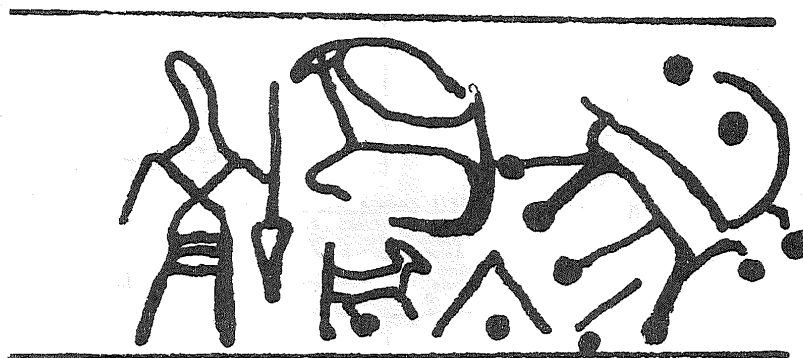


Fig. 3

## List of Objects

Ex. No.	Provenance	Description and parallels	Plate No.
1	B. Z. A. I Locus 3	Pottery unguentarium, complete except a small hole in body, wide body, short neck, rim everted, low string cut base, ribbing on lower part of body and neck, height 11 cm. Color SY 6/2 Light Olive grey. Date: Early Roman.	Pl. LXXX, 2 Fig. 2:1
2	A. I Locus 3	Two handled jug, pottery, incomplete, one handle and body parts missing, mended. Ring base, everted rim, ribbing on body, medium size, short neck, buff ware height 17 cm. mouth opening 11.5 cm. Color: SYR 6/8 light red.  Dated: Early Roman. P. Lapp, POC (1961 p. 170, 45.3; R. De Vaux, Les Grottes de Murabba'at et leurs documents, RB LX (1953), fig. 4:17; Fouilles au Khirbet Qumran, RB LXI (1961) fig. 4:17.	Fig. 2:1 Pl. LXXX, 1
3	A. I Locus 7	Glass bead, blue color, hole in the middle, vertical lines on body. Lachish III (1953), Pl. 38: 2; 66; 66.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1
4	A. I Locus 4	Stone spindle - whorl, greenish grey color, with a hole in the middle, small. Lachish III (1953), Pl. 45: 42; N. Tsori, A spindle Whorl with Hebrew Inscription, IEJ, (1959), p. 191, Fig. 1.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 4
5	A. I Locus 4	Medium size stone spindle-whorl, black color, with a hole in the middle. See No. 4.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 5
6	A. I Locus 4	Pottery lamp, handle missing and added secondarily, vertical incisions on upper part, flat base, long nozzle, blackened. Lapp, PPC (1961) p. 194: D. R. Smith, The Household lamps of Palestine in New Testament Time, BiAr XXIX (1966), p. 4.	Pl. LXXX, 2 No. 6 Fig. 2:6
7	A. I Locus 4	Pottery unguentarium, incomplete, mended, long neck, everted rim, ribbing on body, flat string cut base, height 13.5 cm. Color 2.5 YR 6/8 light red. Date: Early Roman. F. Zayadine, Syria	Pl. LXXX, 2 No. 7 Fig. 2:7

Ex. No.	Provenance	Description and parallels	Plate No.
		XLVII (1970), p. 134, Fig. 11.217, Fig. 13: right.	
8	A. I Loculus 16	Stone spindle-whorl, black, small size, two horizontal lines on edge with a hole in center.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 8
9	A. I Loculus 16	Stone spindle-whorl, thick black, one horizontal line on edge with a hole.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 9
10	A. L Locus 5	Small glass bottle, complete, rim everted concave base. D. Baramki, An Ancient Tomb chamber at Wa'r Abu Es-Safa Near Jerusalem, QDAP IV (1934), Pl. LXXX: 8.	Pl. LXXX, 2 No. 10 Fig. 2:10
11	A. I Loculus 20	Bronze spatula, complete. 15.5 cm. long.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 11
12	A. I Loculus 20	Bronze bracelet, twisted, complete, almost broken.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 12
13	A. I Loculus 20	Stone spindle-whorls of black color (9 pieces of different sizes, small, medium and large). Some with horizontal lines and other with vertical lines and each with a hole in the middle. See No. 4.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 13
14	A. I Loculus 20	Group of shells, beads and stones which were used as a necklace.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 14
15	A. I Loculus 22	Herodian lamp 30 BC - 70 AD. small size, wheel made complete, flat rounded base, large opening, color 5 YR 7/6 reddish yellow. P. Lapp PCC (1961) p. 193, fig. 82.1. J. Pritchard, The excavation at Herodian Jericho, (1951), AASOR XXXII-XXXIII (1958), pl. 59: 33.	Pl. LXXX, 2 No. 15 Fig. 2:15
16	A. I Loculus 22	Pottery bowl almost complete, mended, low string cut base, wheel made. Grooved rim on out-side, thin ware ribbing, red slipped. Diam. 11.5 cm, depth 5 cm. color 2.5 YR 6/8 light red. Date: Early Roman. P. Lapp, PCC (1961), p. 172: fig. 1.	Pl. LXXX, 1 No. 16
17	A. I Loculus 22	Globular juglet, lower part only, white slip, ribbing. Color 10 YR 8/3 very pale brown. Date: Early Roman.	Pl. LXXX, 1 No. 17 Fig. 2:17

Ex. No.	Provenance	Description and parallels	Plate No.
18	A. I Loculus 20	Cylinder seal of black stone (steatite) with animals and human representations, and a hole in the middle. 3 cm. long.	Pl. LXXVIII, 2, 3 Fig. 3
19	A. I Loculus 20	Die, made of bone large hole cut secondarily, decorated with small circles and shallow holes in them to show the number 1-6. size 1.5 x 1.5 cm.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 19
20	A. I Loculus 7	Very small bronze bracelet which was covered probably by silver. Diam 2.5 cm.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 20
21	A. I Loculus 16	Small stone spindle-whorl with a hole in the middle.	Pl. LXXVIII, 1 No. 21

Muhammad Murshed A. Khadija