



ISRAEL
ANTIQUITIES
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IAA Reports

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THE AZOR CEMETERY
MOSHE DOTHAN'S EXCAVATIONS,
1958 AND 1960

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The Cemetery of Azor and Early Iron Age Burial Practices

David Ben-Shlomo

A new examination of the results of the excavations by Moshe Dothan at the cemetery of Azor (1958, 1960) is presented, indicating a variability in burial practices in a relatively small area. The different types of burials are discussed as well as the finds from the graves, which date to the late Iron I and Iron IIA. The variability of burial customs is evaluated in relation to the quantity and character of burial goods, and possible cultural, ethnic and socio-economic differences within the population. While other evidence on late Iron I–IIA burial customs is quite limited in the southern Levant, similar phenomena appear in somewhat earlier cemeteries as at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh. Thus, at Azor a continuation of Late Bronze II burial customs may be combined with certain components of Philistine material culture.

Keywords: Southern-Levant, Azor, Iron Age, burial customs, cemetery

The evidence on Iron I and Iron IIA (12th–9th centuries BC) burial customs from the southern Levant is quite limited, especially on the background of the relatively well known cemeteries and burial caves from the Late Bronze II (henceforth LBII) and Iron IIB–C periods. Philistine burial practices are also practically unknown to us as no cemetery of the Philistine city sites was yet excavated. A renewed examination of the results of Moshe Dothan's excavation at the cemetery of Azor, near Tel Aviv (1958, 1960), which are currently prepared for final publication by the author, aims to shed more light on these poorly known practices. In the main area excavated at Azor (Area D) at least 50 late Iron I and Iron IIA graves were unearthed. The results indicate a variability in burial practices in a relatively small area. The finds from the Iron I graves contain a certain amount of Philistine pottery and might reflect Philistine or Philistine-related burial practices. The variability of burial customs is evaluated in relation to the quantity and character of burial goods in order to examine the potential 'ethnic' character of the burial practices and attempt to identify any foreign components, while socio-economic, rank differences of the deceased within the community, or more

practical reasons, as limitations of area in the cemetery, are considered as well.

The Iron Age Cemetery at Azor

Archaeological remains at Azor are spread on a relatively large area covering the modern towns of Azor and Holon (especially its industrial area). The site of Tel Azor itself is located about 6 km south-east of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, on the road to Jerusalem (map reference 131·159), in the midst of a densely populated region. Scores of rescue excavations unearthed remains from the Chalcolithic to the Ottoman period continuously (Golani and van den Brink 1999, appendix 1). The archaeological site of the Iron Age and possibly the Bronze Age should be probably identified with an ancient settlement of the same name, as the name of the Arab village, Yazur, indicates. It is mentioned in Joshua 19:45 (LXX version), where it appears among the cities of Danin in the place of Jehud in the Mesoretic text. The site is mentioned also in Sennacherib annals—in relation to the subjugation of the rebellious Sidqa of Ashkelon, the conquest of 'Ashkelonite' towns of Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Bene-Berak and Azor are mentioned (Frahm 1997, 53–55; Na'aman 1998, 222–23).

The main focus of this article is the results of the salvage excavations at Azor that were conducted by Moshe Dothan during 1958 and 1960 on behalf of the Department of Antiquities of Israel, which are to be

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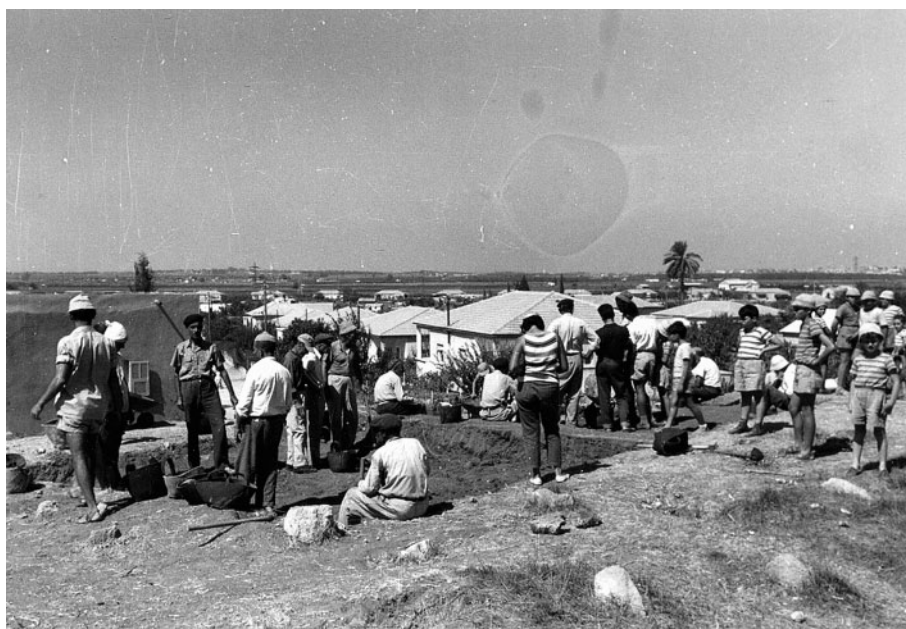


Figure 1 The excavations at Azor (Area D), 1960

brought to final publication by the author (Ben-Shlomo in preparation). Only several short reports have been published on the result from this excavation (Dothan 1958, 1960, 1961a, 1961b, 1961c, 1961d; Ferembach 1961; Dothan 1989; Dothan 1993); later descriptions by T. and M. Dothan (Dothan 1982, 54–57; Dothan and Dothan 1992, 101–17) and E. Bloch-Smith (Bloch-Smith 1992a, 152–53, 156–58, 160–62, 178, 183) also refer to this excavation. The graves at Azor were also mentioned in relation to a group of elaborately decorated Philistine Bichrome vessels coming from various illicit excavations and collections and attributed to the site (Dothan 1982, 114, 124–25, 166, 171, 183, 188) (some of this material was collected by Yariv Shapira and is stored in the local museum at Azor). Moshe Dothan's excavations brought to light a large group of late Iron Age I (c. 1100–1000 BC) graves representing diverse burial customs in the main area, 'Area D' (Figs 1–2); a group of Iron IIA graves were also uncovered, as well as more limited evidence of LBII and Iron IIB–C graves. The uppermost layer included various Islamic tombs (Table 1).¹ This area located on the so-called

'tombs hill' of Azor, just east of the highway, was also excavated by Pipano (1984), reporting Byzantine and 10th century BC remains, and Buchennino (2006); the latter revealing very similar results, i.e., a dense and variable burial ground of the 13th–11th centuries BC. The hill, just east of the old Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway (Highway 44) is about 50–60 m long, rises 3.5 m above its vicinity and 31.50 m above sea level and has an area of about 4 *dunam*.

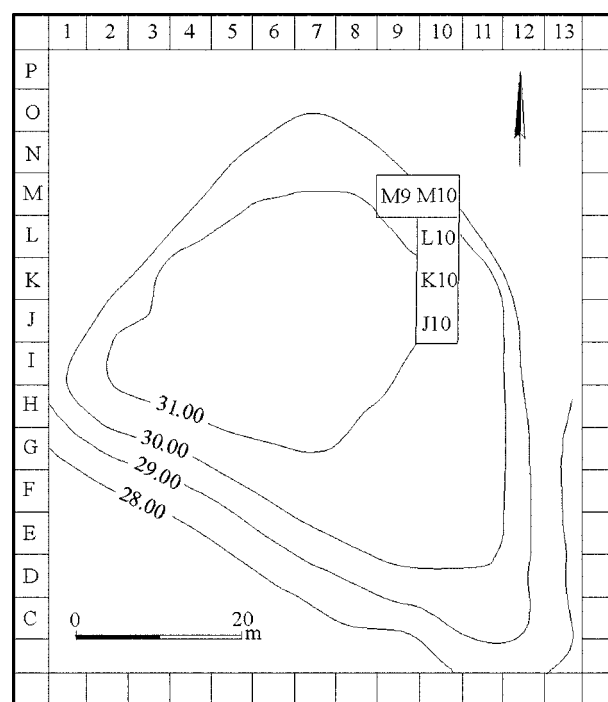


Figure 2 Area D of Moshe Dothan's excavations at Azor

¹Certain difficulties rise from the fact that this salvage excavation was conducted nearly 50 years ago. The records include the field notebooks, graphic diary, notes on tombs inventory, pottery cards and previous publications. The burials excavated during 1958 (No. D1–D39) were not as well recorded as those of the 1960 season (Nos D40–D91). All finds not recovered from the burials were assigned to running basket numbers and usually the context defined was the general $5 \times 5 \text{ m}^2$. Thus, it was not possible to evaluate the finds found outside the burials contextually. Much of the skeletal remains, which were, in many cases, found in articulation, were not recovered at this stage.

Table 1 Phasing sequence of Azor, Area D

Phase	Period	Description
I	Islamic (Mamluk/Ottoman?)	Cist tombs, other burials, walls
II	Iron Age IIB–C	Possible burials, pottery remains
III	Iron Age IIA	Pit burials, multiple burials (at least two phases)
IV	Iron Age I	Pit burials, jar burials, cremation burials
V	Iron Age I	Brick-case tombs
VI	Late Bronze Age	Pottery and few disturbed burials

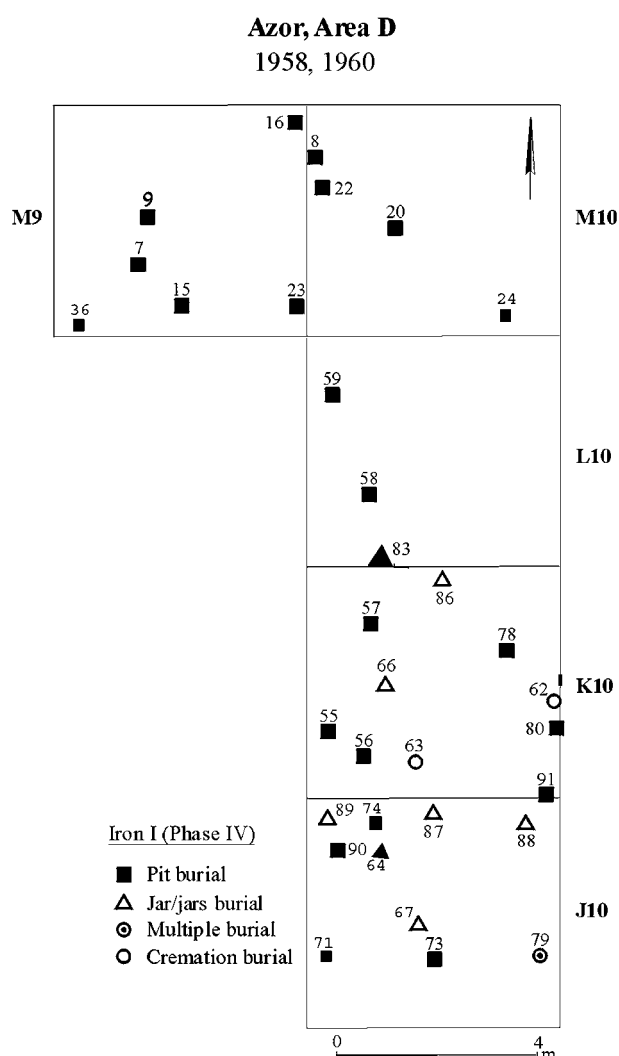
Two 5 × 5 m squares were excavated during the 1958 season (Fig. 2: Sqs M9 and M10) adjacent to the north-eastern side of the hill, and three additional squares were excavated during 1960 (Fig. 2: Sqs J10, K10 and L10; Dothan 1961a, fig. 1). The excavation was limited by the presence of a modern Muslim cemetery nearby (Dothan 1989, 163), mainly on the southern part of the hill, and penetrated about 3.0 m deep into the ground.

The Iron Age graves can be divided between three phases: Phases III, IV and V. Phase V burials

underlie the Phases III–IV burials in several places, while the designation of burials to either Phases III or IV was done often according to the date of the pottery from the burials. Phases III and IV–V represent two distinct pottery assemblages, which could be dated respectively to the Iron IIA and the late Iron I. Phases IV–V are marked by Philistine Bichrome, degenerated Philistine forms and red-slipped vessels. The later assemblage is marked by Cypro-Phoenician (mostly ‘Black on Red’ juglets) and local ‘black’ juglets (see below). Scanty Iron IIB may represent burials from this period (Phase II).

At least 50 Iron Age graves were identified (Table 2) and these can be classified into six general categories (Fig. 3):

1. Simple pit burials with usually one individual, seldom two. According to the better-preserved examples the burial was primary and the position supine. These burials are the most common type numbering more than 30 burials. In many cases the pit was not detected and the concentration of skeletal remains and artefacts is the sole feature defining the burial, which is thence assumed to be a pit grave. At least 16 burials could be dated to the Iron I (Phase IV), many are relatively well preserved. Of the better preserved pit burials Burial D24 (Fig. 4; Dothan 1961d, 82, fig. 2) had an articulated supine skeleton with the head to the west; the skull was somewhat raised and turned to the south. A similar position of the skull can be seen in a LBIIB–Iron Age I pit grave from the IAA excavations nearby (Buchennino 2006, fig. 1). The skull was found to be of a female youth (Ferembach 1961, 86).² On the waist a large carinated bowl was placed upside down (Fig. 18:2); the burial also contained another similar carinated bowl, a flask (Fig. 18:12) and a pyxis, both intact, which were placed near the right hand of the body. There are

**Figure 3** Area D with Phase IV graves

²Most of the remarks relating to the human remains are based on notes that were taken by anthropologists N. Haas and H. Nathan upon initial inspection of the bones (Dothan 1961a, 11; Dothan and Dothan 1992, 112–13), as well as to another publication of several skulls (Ferembach 1961), and a recent report by Y. Nagar of the IAA. The terms relating to the alleged skull types should be taken with much reservation.

altogether three or four cases of pit burials with bowls placed on the waist of the deceased (Burials D16, D20, D22 and D24). This practice may reflect an attempt to cover/protect the waist (sex organs?). A

bronze bowl was similarly placed on the stomach in an LBII/Iron I grave at Tel Zeror (Ohata 1970, 71).

Burial D56 was of a child (7–8 years old) with the skull pointed to the east and the upper part of the

Table 2 Comparison of Iron Age I–IIA burials in Area D according to various aspects of burials

No.	Type	Period (Iron)	Human remains	Age sex	Position (head)	Pottery	Metal/ Jewl.	bead seal	Scarab stone	Other stone	Remarks
D5	Pit burial	IIA	Skull		?	+	+/+	+	+		
D6	Pit burial	I–IIA	Skull	50+	?	+	–	+			
D7	Stone-lined burial	I	Skeleton		sup. (w)	?		+			
D8	Pit burial	I	Skeleton		sup. (nw)	+	+/-	–			
D9	Pit/cremation burial	I	Skeleton	adult	sup.	+	–	–			
D14	Pit burial	IIA	Skull	?	?	+	-/+		+		
D15	Pit burial	I	Bones	?	?	+	+/+	+		+	
D18	Burial in structure A	IIA	Skull, bones	?	?	+	–	+			
D20	Pit burial	I	Skeleton	25–30	sup. (w)	+					bowl on waist
D21	Burial in structure A	IIA	Skull, bones	?	?(w?)	+					
D22	Pit burial	I	Skull	?	?(w?)	+					bowl on waist
D23	Pit burial	I	Skull	?	?	+					
D24	Pit burial	I	Skeleton	youth F	sup. (w)	+					bowl on waist?
D28	Burial in structure A	IIA	Bones	?	?(w?)	+	-/+	+			
D29	Pit burial	IIA?	Skeleton	?	sup. (w)	+	–	+	+		
D30	Pit burial	IIA	Bones 2 ind.	?	?	+	–	+	+	shell	
D31	Pit burial	IIA	Bones	?	?	+					
D33	Pit burial	IIA	Skeleton	20 F	sup. (w)	+					
D34	Pit burial	IIA	?	?	?	+	–	+	+		
D35	Pit burial	IIA	Skeleton	?	?	+					
D41	Brick case tomb	I	Bones	?	?	–					
D56	Pit burial	I	Bones	7–8	sup?(e)	+	-/+	+	+		
D57	Pit burial	I	Skull	?	?(w?)	+	-/+				
D58	Pit burial	I	2 skulls	adult F, child	?(e)	+	-/+				
D59	Pit burial	I	Skeleton(2?)	?	?(w)	+					
D59A	Brick-case tomb	I	–	?	?	–					
D62	Cremation burial	I	Burnt bones	10+	–	+					
D63	Cremation	I	Burnt bones	12–16, 40–45M	–	+	+/+				
D64	Jar burial	I	Bones	?	(se-nw)	+					
D66	Jar burial	I	Skull, bones	?	(se-nw)	+					
D67	Jar burial	I	Bones	15+	(n-s)	+					
D74	Pit burial	I	Bones	4	?	+					
D75	Brick-case tomb	I	Skeleton	adult F	sup. (w)	–					
D76	Brick-case tomb	I	Skeleton	adult M	sup. (w)	+				flint, bone	
D77	Brick-case tomb?	I	Skeleton	adult	sup. (nw)	–					
D78	Jar burial?	I	Skull	?	?	+	-/+	+		shell?	
D79A	Burial in Structure B	IIA	Bones (5 ind.)	adults, children	sup. (se)	+	-/+	+	+		D79:total 17 ind.
D79B	Burial in Structure B	IIA	Skeletons (2)	adult	sup. (w)	+	+/+	+	+	?	
D79C	Burial in Structure B	IIA	Bones, 6 skulls	?	?	+	+/+	+			
D79D	Burial in Structure B	I?	Bones?	?	?	+					
D80	Pit burial	I	Skeleton	adult M	sup. (w)	+					
D83	Jar burial	I	Bones	?	?	–					
D84	Brick-case tomb	I	Skeleton	adult F	sup. (w)	–					
D85	Brick-case tomb?	I	Skeleton	adult M	sup. (w)	–					
D86	Jar burial	I	Bones	1	(s-n)	+					
D87	Jar burial	I	Bones	14+	se-nw	+	-/+			+	
D88	Jar burial	I	Bones	?	–	+				+	
D89	Jar burial	I	Bones	9	?	+					
D90	Pit burial	I	Bones	?	?	+					
D91A	Pit burial	I	Bones	1, child	?	+					



Figure 4 Pit Burial D24, Azor

body in articulation (Fig. 5; Dothan 1961a, 171, pl. 31:1). This burial was very rich with finds including several Philistine Bichrome vessels as bell-shaped

bowls and kraters, juglets and a red-slipped pyxis, a scarab (on the neck, Keel 1997, Azor: No. 1), several bronze bracelets and beads. This in an interesting



Figure 5 Pit Burial D56, Azor



Figure 6 Pit Burial D80, Azor

example of a richly furnished pit burial of a child. Another pit burial (D58) contained an adult female and a child (mother and child?). The bones were found near fragments of a jar. It seems the jar was related to the pit burial and was not a burial vessel in this case. Several bowls and jugs were also found in the burial as well as four bronze bracelets, recovered from the hand of the female body.

Burial D80 contained a complete skeleton of a male in articulation (reported as a '*brachicephalic*' skull), in a supine position with the head pointed to the west (Fig. 6). The legs continued into the eastern balk and were possibly bent. A complete jar was laid horizontally parallel to the left of the body with its neck towards the legs. Other pottery vessels from the burial include fragments of a bell-shaped bowl, an open bowl and Philistine jugs. This burial is a relatively well preserved example of a pit grave, including one individual with a complete jar laid beside it together with other goods. This form of burial seems to be typical of a number of Iron Age tombs in Area D (as Burials D57 and D91A), and can be compared to LBII burials from Tell Abu Hawam (Anati 1959, 92, fig. 3), Tell es-Sai'diyeh (Pritchard 1980, 17–19, Tombs 105 upper, 107, 110, 119, 136;

Tubb 1998, fig. 56) and anthropoid burials from Deir el-Balah (Dothan 1979, Tombs 114, 116), where Canaanite storage jars were placed near the heads of the coffins, possibly marking the grave above ground (Bloch-Smith 1992a, 76). Burial D15 contained a relatively rich assemblage of goods, probably located near the skull. The burial included two Philistine bell-shape kraters, a jar neck and one jug. Other finds are a square stone bowl, and metal objects including a bronze mirror (Fig. 21:3), a bronze pin and a silver earring and several beads.

Iron IIA pit burials (Phase III) were mostly concentrated in the northern part of the area and included at least six burials. Burial D5 includes at least three Cypro-Phoenician juglets (one near the skull), an amulet, a scarab, a bracelet and beads. Burial D14 has two White Painted Cypriote juglets near the skull, two chalices, a bronze bracelet and a scarab. Burial D33 included a complete articulated skeleton of a twenty-year-old female (Ferembach 1961, 86–87, fig. 3) in a supine position with the head turned to the right side (Dothan 1961d, 82, fig. 3) pointing to the west. The nearby Burial D35 was poorly preserved but yielded several artefacts as two red-slipped juglets, two 'black juglets' (Fig. 19:8), at

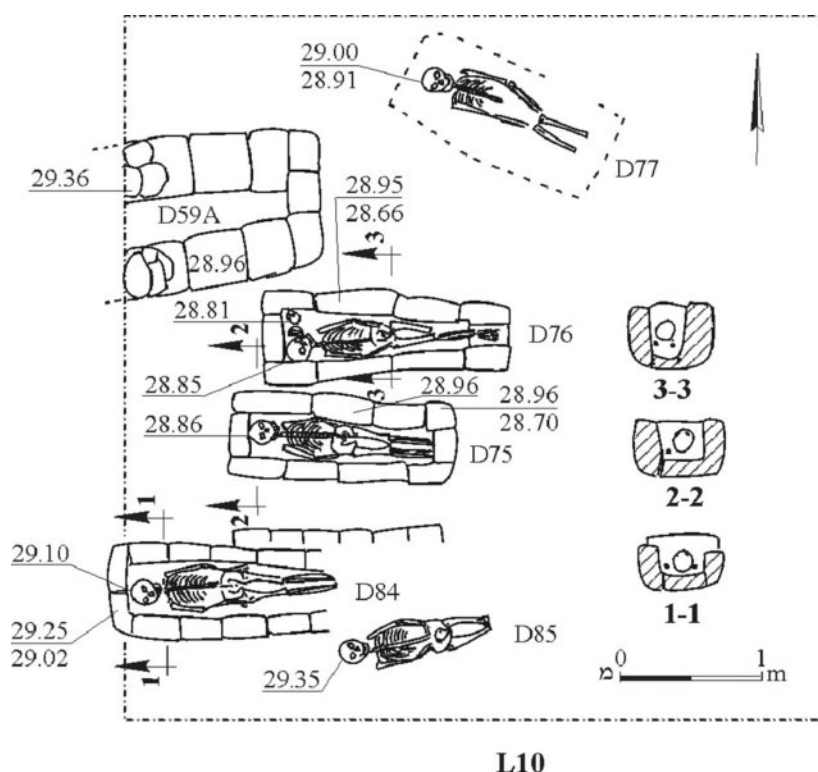


Figure 7 Plan of brick-case burials, Phase V, Azor

least two Cypro-Phoenician juglets, a scarab and beads; two 22nd Dynasty scarabs as well as other small finds came from Burial D30 (Figs 19:10, 21:8–9, see below).

2. Built 'brick-case tombs' were comprised of a four-walled brick chamber wherein the body was placed. Nearly all of the brick-case type tombs were uncovered in Sq L10 (Fig. 7). The orientation of all of the brick-case tombs is east-west with the head pointing westwards; they were all roughly on the same level. Most tombs did not contain any burial goods. Tomb D75 is a complete brick-case tomb measuring 1.6 × 0.65 m (inner dimensions 1.2 × 0.3 m) (Fig. 8); the rectangular structure was built from one course of bricks, 25–30 cm high, and reaching about 10–20 cm above the height of the head. The brick material on the upper part probably indicates that the tomb was covered with a layer of bricks; the lower part is also reported to be lined by bricks. The body was found inside in articulation in a supine position and it fitted the frame in an exact manner — as the bones were touching the inner faces of the bricks. According to anthropologists records the skeleton is of a female with a 'Mediterranean' type (*'doliocephalic'*) skull. The tomb was empty of finds. Tomb D76, adjacent to Tomb D75 from the north, is quite similarly built with the frame of one course of dark bricks covered by another layer of

bricks (Fig. 8, left). A complete skeleton of an adult male in articulation and supine position was found inside. The shape of the tomb is not rectangular and the region of the head is about 20 cm wider than the side of the legs. The reason for this was evidently to create room for several pottery vessels placed to the left of the head. The hands were to the sides of the body and the head was turned to the left — towards the vessels. The goods from this tomb include a complete Philistine bell-shaped bowl, another bowl fragment and an intact flask placed to the left of the head. Also found in association with the tomb were two sherds, and a flint blade. According to their delicate proximity and matching positions Tombs D75 and D76 seem to be related to each other and closely contemporary. As the skeletons are of a larger male and a smaller female this could be a twin grave of a man and wife (or father and daughter?).

Other 'brick-case' tombs include Tomb D84 lying to the south of Tomb D75 with a skeleton in articulation, supine, with the hands to the sides of the body, legs joined and head straightened, and no finds. According to reports the body is of a female with a '*brachicephalic*' type skull. Adjacent to it Tomb D85 contained another articulated supine burial with no finds. The skull and the left side of the body were damaged but it can be observed that the right hand was laid on the pelvis. The skeleton



Figure 8 Brick-case Tombs D75-D76, Azor

was noted to be of an adult male with a '*brachicephalic*' type skull. Tombs D59A, D41, D77 (Fig. 7) and D91 (6 m to the south between Sqs J–K10) are also most probably similar brick-case tombs. Similar Iron I tombs built of unfired mudbricks were also reported from the recent IAA excavations nearby (Buchennino 2006, Area A).

3. Jar burials comprised of either one or two jars lying horizontally, that were probably laid in a pit. As most of the jars are relatively small (about 50 cm long) they would be problematic for a primary burial, especially of an adult. Jar burials seem to appear mostly in Phase IV, especially the type with two adjoining jars (Fig. 3; at least eight examples). The pottery associated with these burials includes also Philistine Bichrome vessels. Jar burials were defined only when the human bones were reported to have been found inside the jars.

Burials D64, D78 and D66 are examples where the bones were found inside two jars, which had their upper part cut (above the shoulder). Burial D66 contained a bowl and a lamp (possibly laid in the bowl) that were placed to the east of the jar and a red-slipped flask (Fig. 9). Burial D86 is comprised of a

north-south horizontally laid jar with a skeleton within (Fig. 10; Dothan 1961a, 173, pl. 35:3); several bones of a one-year-old were identified. The fragments of another jar adjoin its neck, and thus, this could be defined as a two-jar burial (a large jar or pithos fragment was also found). Within the jar a bowl and a red-slipped pyxis were found, while a larger group of sherds was found around the jar including Philistine Bichrome bowls, kraters and strainer-spouted jug fragments, as well as fragments of rounded and miniature bowls, kraters, jars and a lamp. Burial D87, with two jars laid horizontally, parallel, and at some distance from each other, contained skeletal remains of an individual over 14 years. Philistine vessels as two complete bell-shaped kraters and 'degenerated' bell-shaped bowls were found. A similar burial with two parallel jars was also reported from Azor (Buchennino 2006, fig. 2, left) as well as from Tel Zeror (Ohata 1970, pl. LVI). Burial D88 with a single jar, yielded a Philistine bell-shaped krater with cups (Fig. 17:5); a funerary object with Aegean sources (see Dothan 1982, 237–49); the only other examples of such vessels come from Azor (Buchennino and Yannai in press), Ashdod Stratum



Figure 9 Jar Burial D66



Figure 10 Jar Burial D86

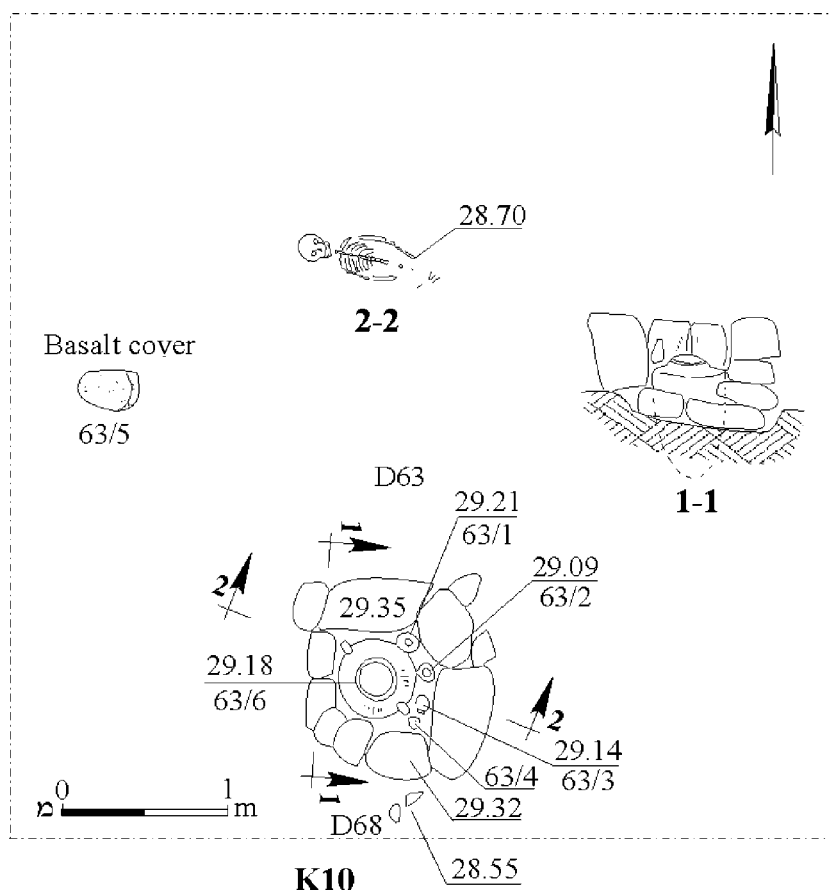


Figure 11 Plan and section of Cremation Burial D63

XII (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, 118, fig. 3.34:11) and possibly from 'Eitun cemetery (Dothan 1982, 237, fig. 10). A good example of a double jar/pithoi burial comes from the recent excavations at Azor (Buchennino 2006, Area A, fig. 2). There, two large jars or pithoi of a unique form were placed as burial containers rim to rim; the neck of one of the jars was cut so it could fit into the neck of the other. It should be noted that there is no clear evidence from Area D for the use of pithoi for burials; in all documented cases storage jars were used. Some of the human remains in these burials are of young children/infants. Possibly the jar burials reflect the practice of covering the deceased with jar fragments, or child/infant burials in jars. Secondary burial cannot be ruled out, also with relation to complete or partial burning or cremation of the body. While there is no direct evidence for this practice at Azor, other jar/pithoi burials from Sahab, Jordan were found with remains of fire (Ibrahim 1972, 32).

4. Cremation burials include Tombs D62 and D63 and an additional possible example. Tomb D63 was previously published in relative detail in Hebrew (Dothan 1989). The tomb is located in Sq K10 and

was uncovered about 1 m below the surface (Figs 11–13). Essentially, this is a square structure made of stones, measuring 1.25×1.2 m surrounding an upright standing jar, which is the burial vessel. The structure was built of large stones measuring up to 60×30 cm; the upper course was not completely preserved and was about 25 cm above the rim of the jar. The wall was built to a maximum of four courses of stones. The base of the jar was buried about 30 cm below the lower level of the lower course; the height of the jar itself is about 75 cm. The lower courses of stones were smaller and flatter and in the western side the structure was only one course high (Fig. 11: Section 1). Upon discovery the jar's mouth was covered by a basalt slab (Fig. 11; Dothan 1989, 165, fig. 17); this was a grinding stone or a flat bowl. Four pottery vessels stood between the eastern wall of the structure and the top of the jar (Fig. 12). According to this positioning it seems that a pit was dug initially, thence the jar was placed in the pit, partly sunk in the ground, and about 50 cm protruding above it; the stone structure was built around the jar and slightly above it, and the space between the jar and the structure, and possibly the jar



Figure 12 Cremation Burial D63, during excavation



Figure 13 Cremation Burial D63, after excavation

itself, were filled with soil and sand; eventually, the vessels around the jar and jar basalt cover were placed. Near the base of the jar, and to the east of it, an articulated skeleton was found, with its head to the west, probably a disturbed LBII burial (Burial D68, Fig. 11: Section 2; Fig. 13). Outside the stone structure a skeleton of a horse or a camel was reported; its relation to the tomb is questionable.

Inside the jar (Fig. 18:5) a layer with burnt skeletal remains and dirt was found (Dothan 1989, 169, fig. 19); above this were placed a pottery flask, a bronze bowl and a golden 'mouthpiece' (Fig. 21:1, 4; Dothan 1989, 169, figs 15–16). Several sherds and shells were also found in the jar. According to the initial anthropological analysis (N. Haas) the remains were of an adult male aged 40–45 ('*brachicephalic*' skull), 172 cm high, and adolescent male aged 12–16 (also '*brachicephalic*' skull) together with bones of birds and household animals as pig. Later, only a skull and a jaw were recovered (Dothan 1989, 69–170, figs 20–21), and according to P. Smith the skull was of an adolescent and the jaw of an adult. Deformations in the skull indicate heating of about 250°C and the jaw indicates uneven temperatures of heating. Generally, the remains indicate a relatively low temperature of cremation (Dothan 1989, 170). The finds from outside of the burial jar include four jugs (Fig. 18:6). Tomb D63 is unique at Azor from several aspects, such as the cremation, the stone structure, the shape of the jar and 'exotic' finds, such as the bronze bowl and golden mouthpiece. Cremation burials with such structures occur in Early Iron Age Torone in northern Greece (Papadopoulos 2005, e.g. Tomb 104, 181–82, pls 210–15), but are not known in the Levant. The jar used in burial D63 (Fig. 18:5) is also quite unique; it was rarely found outside Azor.

Burial D62 is located 2 m to the north-east of Tomb D63 and was comprised of an upright standing jar with skeletal remains within; the mouth of the jar was covered with a bowl; adjacent to it a complete jug was standing upright and probably also related to this burial. Several other vessels were uncovered in relation to this burial together with jar fragments similar to those of Tomb D63. The skeletal remains from this burial, albeit only partly recovered, show clear indications of cremation of an individual older than 10 years. The position of the burial vessel, its covering, and the proximity to Tomb D63 strengthens the possibility that this burial was also a cremation burial. The pottery from the burial

includes two Philistine Bichrome kraters, a complete carinated red-slipped bowl (Fig. 18:3), a complete jug and a double-flask vessel (Fig. 18:13). Another burial (D9) with evidence of an adult individual (Ferembach 1961, 85) and traces of blackened earth might have been a cremation burial.

In the past the appearance of cremation burials at Azor was related to a new wave of Aegean influence (Dothan 1982, 57; Dothan 1989; Dothan and Dothan 1992, 115–17; Gilmour 1995, 167–69), and the cremation burial at Azor was also mentioned as the earliest cremation in the southern Levant (Dothan 1961a; 1989; Dothan and Dothan 1992, 115–16), yet several examples do appear in the Bronze Age, possibly at Jericho and Tell Beit Mirsim (Bloch-Smith 1992a, 179; Gilmour 1995, 167–69). Cremation is often considered as an alien element in the Levant (e.g., regarding its appearance in the LBII at the sites of Alalakh (Woolley 1955, 202) and Hama (Riis 1948, 44; see Bienkowski 1982, 86–87)). At the LBII temple at Amman Airport burnt human bones are also likely to represent cremation (Herr 1983, 23; Little 1983, 49–50). Note, that at this site a golden mouth piece was found also (Hankey 1995, 175, fig. 3:5872, 5878), and thus there is an interesting analogy with Tomb D63 at Azor.

5. Partly built tombs with multiple primary burials are made of three stone walls defining an area of about 3–2 × 2 m wherein the bodies and artefacts were laid. Two such structures were uncovered: Structure A dating to Phase III and Structure B (Tomb D79) in Square J10 dating to Phases III (with possible evidence of an earlier stage as well). The structures contain together at least 23 burials, that were relatively rich with burial goods.

Burial Structure A (Fig. 14) is located in Sqs M9–M10 and is comprised of three stone walls creating a rectangular structure with an opening to the south-west measuring about 2.7 × 2.4 m. The walls were built of large kurkar blocks and were standing at least 70 cm high; this was probably a defined burial space with an internal width of 1.7 m. It contained four to seven separate burials, in several stages of burial. When new burials were placed some of the bones of the previous burials were moved and thus only the latest burial could possibly be found in articulation. Nevertheless, according to the remains found it seems that the bodies were laid in a relatively uniform east-west orientation, all in a supine position. The structure itself overlies earlier Phase IV pit burials, which contain late Iron I finds. Notable finds from these burials include 'black juglets', Black on Red



Figure 14 Burial Structure A



Figure 15 Burial Structure B (Tomb D79)

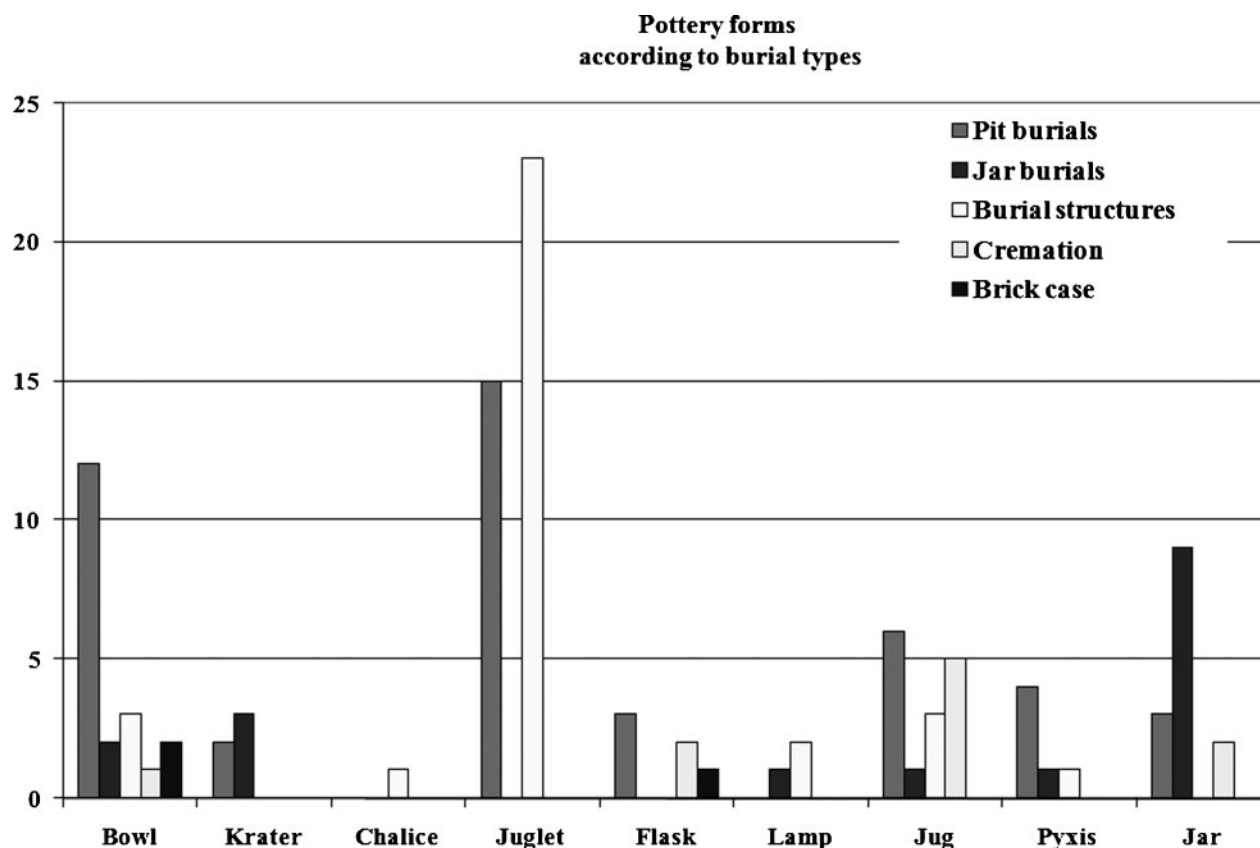


Figure 16 Pottery forms from Iron Age graves (according to 110 complete examples)

and White Painted Cypriote juglets, bracelet fragments, beads of various types and sea shells.

Burial Structure B (Tomb D79) is a 3 × 2.5 m structure adjoining to the eastern balk of Square J10 (Fig. 15). Three walls, built of large kurkar blocks, partly hued, created an inner space 1.7 m wide and 1 m high with two courses preserved. There was a minimum of thirteen burials here altogether in three or four burial phases. In lower stage (D79C) there were four detached skulls aligned near the western wall of the structure with their caps pointing to the east; in addition two skulls were located in the western part of the structure, and a complete skeleton in articulation supine with its head to the north-west and legs to the south-east. In the upper stage (D79B) an articulated skeleton was laid in a south-east (head)-north-west supine position; near the leg there was another skull. In the uppermost stage (D79A) two articulated skeletons were placed adjoining each other in an east-west supine position. The preliminary analysis of the skeletons indicated male adults and human teeth remains, indicating both children and adults. The location of the finds was recorded and each find was assigned to a specific burial, however, goods found to the sides of the skeleton could have been pushed aside when this skeleton was placed and

thus belong to earlier burials. The finds include an intact bar-handled bowl, chalices, red-slipped bowls, a pyxis, 24 juglets (many complete including Cypro-Phoenician and 'black' juglets, Fig. 19:4–8), jewellery of bronze and silver, other metal objects including a bi-metallic knife (Fig. 21:2), beads of various materials and two scarabs (Dothan 1961a, pl. 34). A complete chalice was embedded in the south-western corner (Fig. 19:2). Several Iron I forms, as well as fragments of Philistine pottery, probably come from an earlier stage of this burial structure or from earlier pit burials disturbed by it.

6. Various types of burials include a supine burial lined with an oval stone frame (Tomb D7) yielding a bronze bowl and pin/kohl stick. Cist tombs lined and covered with large kurkar slabs were reported from Buchennino's excavations (Buchennino 2006, fig. 3); similar tombs were excavated by M. Dothan in Area D, but these are probably dated to the Islamic period.

The Iron Age Pottery and Small Finds from Azor and the Dating of the Graves

The pottery from the graves includes a relatively large proportion of closed vessels, especially jugs and juglets (according to 110 complete examples from well identified graves, 49% in Phases V–IV and 95%

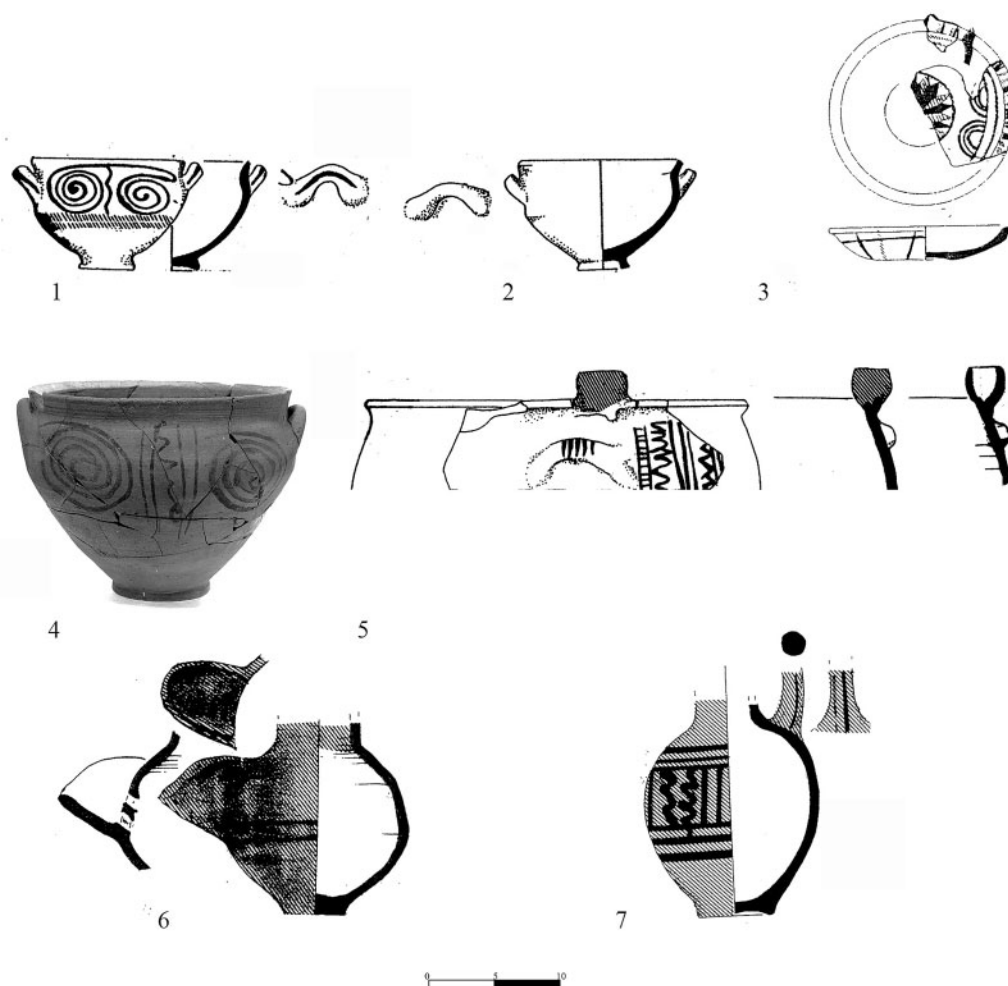


Figure 17 Selection of Philistine pottery from Iron I graves at Azor

in Phase III are closed vessels; see Fig. 16). The pottery of the Iron I graves comprised of a mixture of Philistine forms (Fig. 17, Table 4) and local 'Canaanite' forms (Fig. 18) typical of the late Iron I. According to 66 complete vessels from the Iron Age I burials, a substantial 18% are of Philistine forms. This assemblage is very similar to that of Tell Qasile Strata XI–X (Mazar 1985, see below). Philistine pottery forms include Philistine Bichrome (Fig. 17:1) and degenerated (debased) bell-shaped bowls (Fig. 17:2), bell shaped-kraters (Fig. 17:4), various open bowls decorated in Philistine Bichrome style (as Fig. 17:3), stirrup jars, strainer-spouted jugs, 'feeding bottle' jugs and various jugs decorated in the Philistine Bichrome style. Bell-shaped bowls and kraters, as well as strainer-spouted jugs, appear also with red slip, a typical phenomenon for the late Iron I (Fig. 17:6–7; see good parallels at Tell Qasile, Stratum X, Mazar 1985, fig. 50:2–3). Of special

notice are several examples of a degenerated form of bell-shaped krater with attached 'cup' (Fig. 17:5). This type of vessel probably relates to funerary rituals (Dothan 1982, 237–49, fig. 14, pls 31–32, with examples from 'Eitun'), and it was suggested that the cup held terracotta figurines of mourning females, similar to kraters which had figurines applied to their rim (other examples for these come, e.g., from Enkomi (Dikaios 1969, pl. 107:41)).

Typical late Iron I 'Canaanite' forms include hemispherical (Fig. 18:1) and carinated (Fig. 18:2) bowls, some with red-slip and black decoration (Fig. 18:3). The assemblage also includes chalices, a few cooking pots and kraters, as well as jars with ovoid body typical of the Iron I (Fig. 18:4; e.g., Mazar 1985, 54–56, fig. 48, SJ1) coming from pit and jar burials. A large and diversified assemblage of jugs was found. Some have a globular body and long neck and are decorated with white or red slip and with

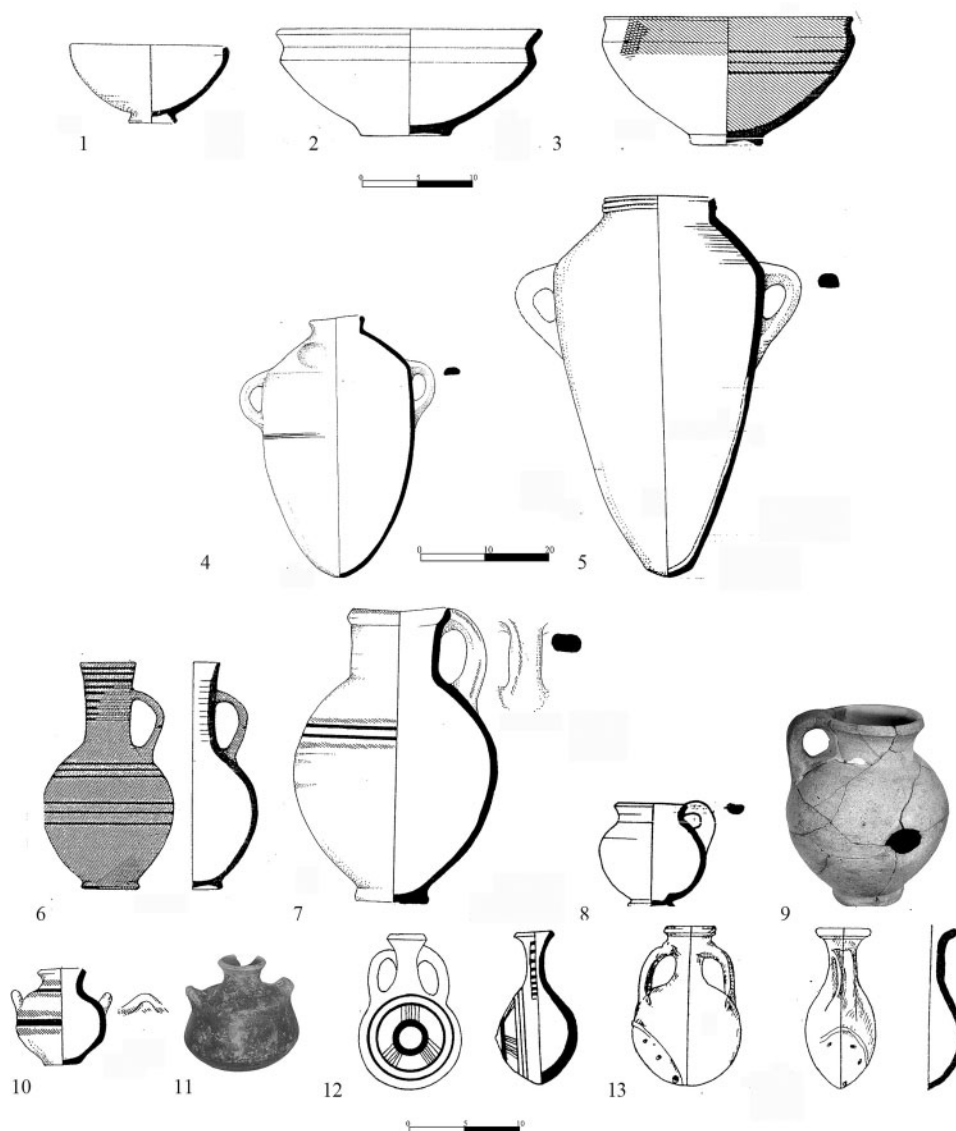


Figure 18 Selection of non-Philistine (Canaanite) pottery from Iron I graves at Azor

linear decoration (Fig. 18:6–7); two examples of cooking jugs (Fig. 18:8–9) should also be noted.³ Many of these forms also have parallels in Tell Qasile Strata XI–X (Mazar 1985, 60–63) or at Tel Miqne Strata VB–IVA (Ortiz 2000, 162–63). Flasks, either plain or with black decoration appear (Fig. 18:12), with one example of a ‘double flask’ (Fig. 18:13), as well as several complete pixides (Fig. 18:10–11), plain, decorated in bichrome (Fig. 18:10) or red slipped (Fig. 18:11).

³The shape of the jug is very similar to Iron I Aegean style cooking jugs (Killebrew 1999, 93–94; Dothan and Zukerman 2004, 28–31, figs 36–37, Type P) but it appears here outside the Philistia core, in a late Iron I context and is very small (8 cm high). Possibly, the jug had some function in relation to funerary customs. Cooking jugs appear in LCIII burials at Kourion (Daniel 1937, 70, pls II:10, V:8,31) and a cooking amphora was used for a dog burial at Ashkelon Phase 18 (Stager 2006, 15).

Petrographic analysis conducted by the author on about 30 samples from the burials indicate that the Philistine pottery from the various burials at Azor was made of local clay. This pottery was made, similarly to the non-Philistine pottery, from *hamric rendzina*-derived soil, typical of the central coastal plain, and not occurring in proper Philistia, to the south. This implies that potters familiar with the Philistine tradition worked at Azor; they could have been Philistine themselves, non-Philistine individuals catering a Philistine population, or local potters supplying their customers with Philistine style vessels as elaborate burial gifts.

The pottery of Phases IV–V graves represents a typical late Iron I assemblage, which is not known from many excavated sites, and especially not from

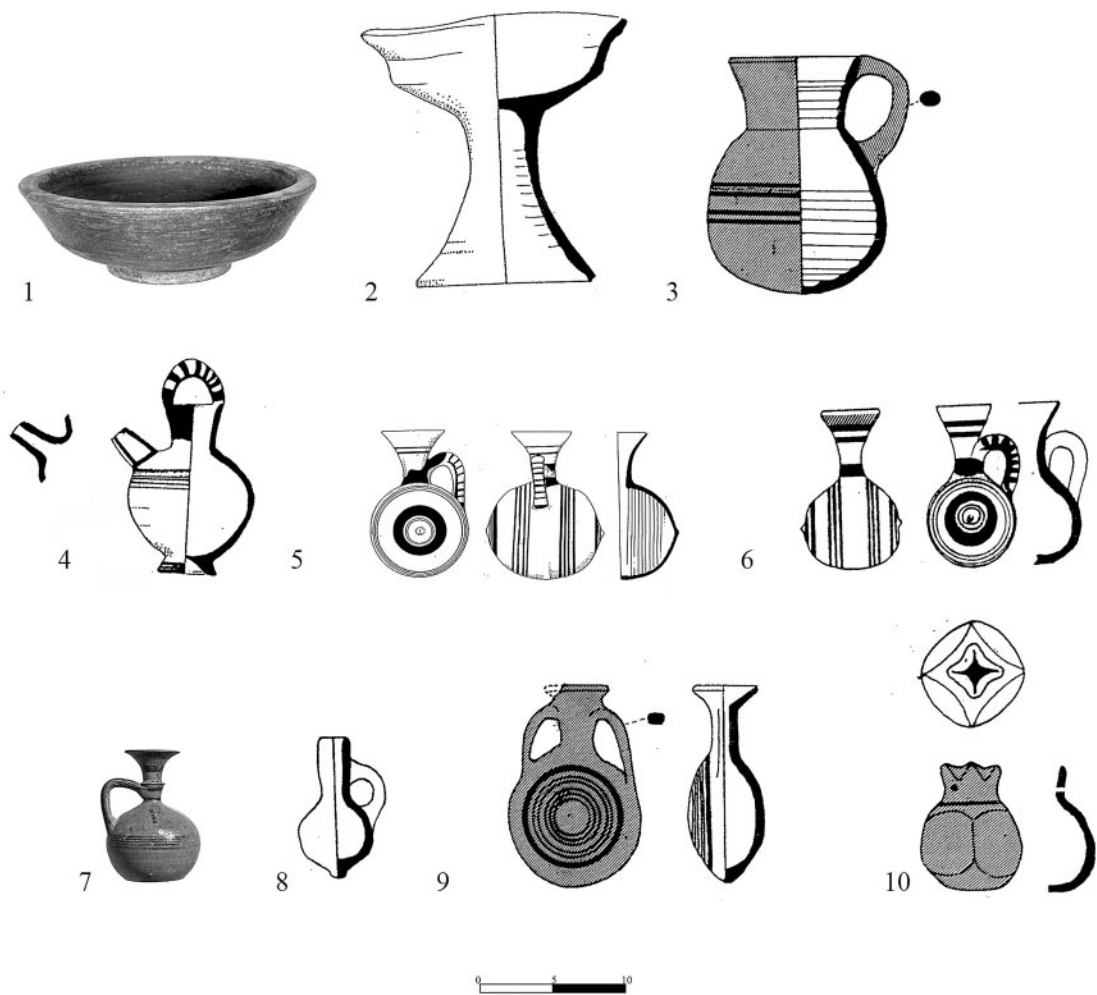


Figure 19 Selection of Iron IIA pottery from Azor

funerary sites. The early Iron I (the 12th century BC) is not represented, as Philistine Monochrome, elaborate Philistine and Iron IA Canaanite do not appear in the assemblage. On the other hand, this assemblage is earlier than the ‘full blown’ Iron IIA as it lacks the thick red-slipped and burnished pottery and the

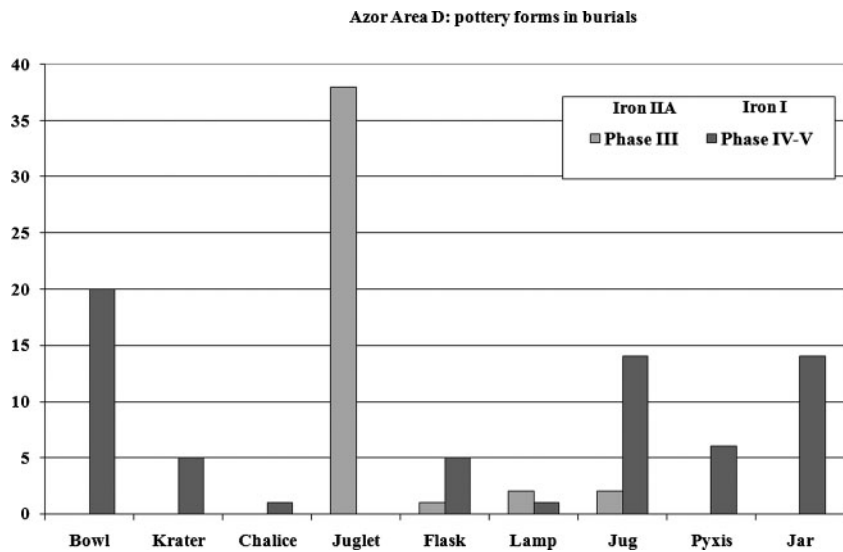


Figure 20 Pottery types according to grave period (110 complete vessels)

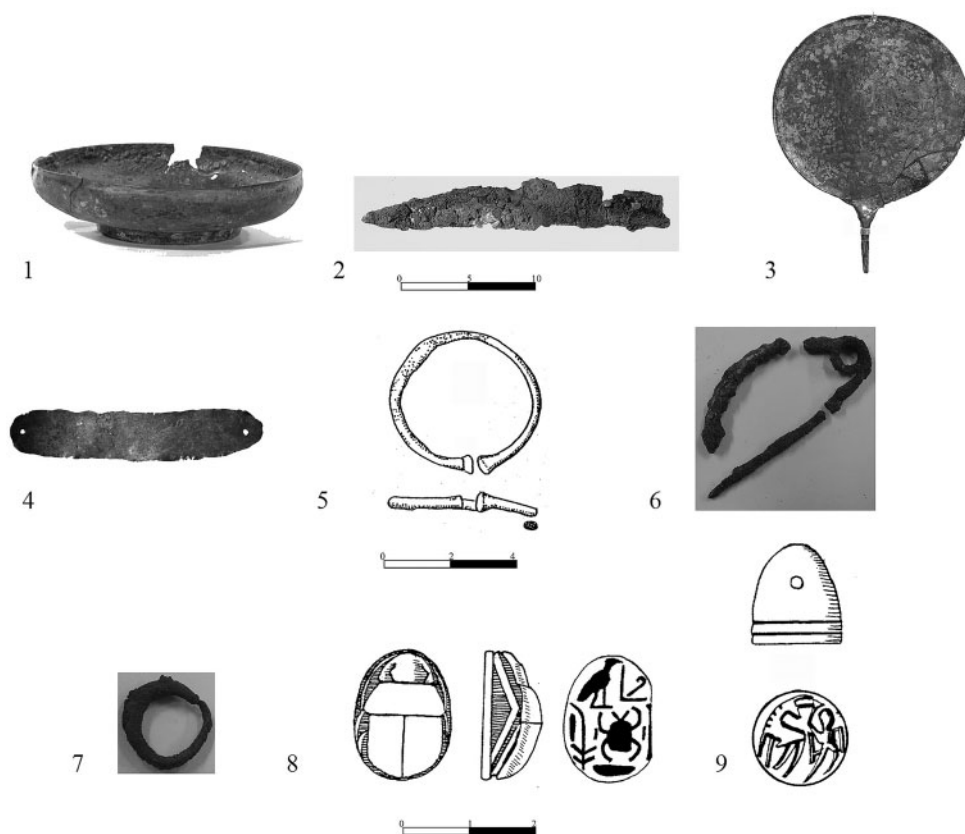


Figure 21 Selection of small finds from the graves at Azor

Cypro-Phoenician ware and, furthermore, it still contains Philistine pottery. Thus, this horizon of burial Phases IV–V can be roughly dated to the 11th century BC, parallel to Tell Qasile, Stratum X, Tel Migne Strata VA–IVB, Ashdod, Stratum XI and Tel Batash, Stratum V (Mazar 1985, 122–24; Dothan *et al.* 2006, 94).

The pottery of the Iron IIA graves (Phase III) is markedly different from the late Iron I graves and is much more limited in its repertoire (Fig. 19, Table 4). It contains mostly jugs and juglets of local style and Cypro-Phoenician juglets, including Black on Red juglets (Fig. 19:7), White Painted (Fig. 19:5) and Bichrome (Fig. 19:6) juglets and a rare example of a White Painted ‘feeding bottle’ jug (Fig. 19:4) from Tomb D79. This is an imported vessel from Cyprus probably of the White Painted III ware (Gjerstad 1948, 54, fig. XIX:12–13).

A red-slipped globular jug with vertical hand burnish and black bands (Fig. 19:3) could be classified as a ‘Late Philistine’ (‘Ashdod Ware’) form, and has parallels at Tell es-Safi Stratum A3 (Ben-Shlomo *et al.* 2004, JG5, fig. 3:4). Local ‘black juglets’ (Fig. 19:8; Dothan 1961a, pl. 34:1–2) are very common. These have a button base and handle from mid-neck to body and are either red, brown or

black burnished (or black burnt). This type appears initially during the Iron IIA in both northern and southern Israel (e.g., Amiran 1969, 256, 259, pls 86:12, 87:13, 88:19; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001, 127, JGT9; Ben-Tor *et al.* 2005, 334). Most of these juglets from Azor were found in Tombs D28 and D79 and are very small, 7–9 cm in height. Such juglets are common for Iron IIA–B tombs, as at Tel Zeror (Ohata 1967, pl. X:5), Tell Beit Mirsim (Ben-Arieh 2004, 23, figs 2.47:26–33, 2.82:14–20), Tel Halif (Biran and Gophna 1970, figs 8, 9:18–21) and Tell es-Sa’idiyeh (Pritchard 1980, figs 16:3, 17:1).

There is almost a total absence of open forms in the Iron IIA burial assemblage (Fig. 20), and juglets comprise 88% of the complete vessels from the burials (according to 44 vessels from securely dated graves), while they are absent from the Iron Age I burial gift assemblage. The juglets from the tombs, found in groups, may have contained some liquids related to the burial rituals or to ‘provisions’ for the deceased. Imported Cypro-Phoenician juglets comprise 39%. Jars, which are very popular (21%) in the Iron I burials, are absent from the Iron IIA ones. The pottery from the Iron IIA graves is paralleled to assemblages from Ashdod X–IX (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, 185, 200), Tell es-Safi, Stratum A3

(Shai and Maeir 2003), Lachish Level IV, Tell Qasile, Stratum IX (Mazar 1985, 127), and probably dates to the early 9th century BCE (the later part of the Iron IIA (Herzog and Singer-Avitz 2004, 214)).

When the burial gifts are compared according to the types of burials (Fig. 16, according to 110 complete vessels), it can be observed that in jar burial juglets are absent and jugs are rare, while these forms are very popular in pit and multiple burials (largely of Iron IIA date); cremation burials have mostly jugs and flasks.

The predominant non-pottery finds are metals, including several examples of bowls (Fig. 21:1) (Table 4), a mirror (Fig. 21:3) and a knife (Fig. 21:2), and most commonly jewellery (Fig. 21:5–8), including pins, fibulae (Fig. 21:6), needles, bracelets of bronze and Iron (in the Iron IIA burials), rings and earrings of bronze, iron (Fig. 21:7) and silver, as well as an example of a golden mouthpiece from Tomb D63 (Fig. 21:4).⁴ Several scarabs and seals also occur, as well as beads of various types. Flint blades and sea shell occur in a few burials (see Table 2). Most of these objects are not chronologically indicative. Personal metal objects, such as pins, rings, earrings and bracelets are very common in Iron Age burials (see, e.g., Iron I, Tell Farah(S) (Petrie 1930); Iron II, Achziv (Dayagi-Mendels 2002, 142–43)), and were probably worn on the deceased body or clothes, and should be considered as private/personal items. There is a significant rise in Iron items in the Iron IIA burials; one good example is an iron knife with bronze rivets from Burial Structure B (Tomb D79C; Fig. 21:2).⁵

⁴A sheet made of gold found within the cremation burial jar of Tomb D63 is interpreted as a mouth piece (Fig. 21:4; Dothan 1989, 168, figs 15–16). It is 7.2 cm long, 1.5 cm wide and about 1 mm thick; the shape is oval, elongated and slightly asymmetrical; there are perforations on either end, probably for fastening the piece to the face. Similar objects were found in LBII–Iron Age tombs at Tell Farah(S), Cemetery 201 (two examples, Petrie 1930, 11–13, pls XL:500, XXXVI), Megiddo (Guy and Engeberg 1938, pls 128:9, 165:12), Beth Shean (Oren 1973, 15, 119, fig. 46:15) and the Persian Garden at Akko (Ben-Arieh and Edelstein 1977, 26, fig. 14:10–11; see Dothan 1989, 169 for references and discussion). Two golden mouth pieces were also found in the LB temple at Amman Airport (Hankey 1995, 175, fig. 3:5872, 5878), while somewhat similar gold strips were found in the Mycenaean tomb at Dan (Biran and Ben-Dov 2002, 174, figs 2:137–38). Parallels from Cyprus are known as well (Gjerstad 1948, 168, fig. 36:24–26). It was suggested that these objects reflect an Aegean burial practice, as many well known parallels come from Mycenaean tombs (see Dothan 1989). While all of these objects, found in LBII–Iron Age I are made of gold, an example made of silver comes from Achziv, Tomb T.C.3, dated to the 11th century BC (Mazar 2001, fig. 5:5, Locus 306). The silver example from Achziv may reflect local adaptation of an Aegean(?) tradition using silver that was, by the end of the Iron I, becoming more common.

⁵The blade is slightly curved, its edge truncated in a similar way to Iron Age knives from Tell Farah (S) (Petrie 1930, pls XXI:96, XXIV:T.562), Tell Jemmeh (Petrie 1928, pl. XXXI:45,56) and Hazor (Yadin *et al.* 1961, pl. CLXXIV:28). A similar bi-metallic knife comes from a burial at Ashdod, Area H, Stratum X (Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005, 187, fig. 3:81:1).

Almost no figurines or terracottas were found, while bone and ivory finds are also very rare.

Discussion

The evidence for burial practices in the southern Levant during the Iron I and Iron IIA (12th–10th/early 9th centuries BC) is clearly far from abundant. Apart from isolated graves only the cemeteries of Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Pritchard 1980; Tubb 1995; Tubb and Dorrel 1993; Tubb *et al.* 1997), Tel Nami (Artzy 1995; Zioni 2005), Tell Farah(S) (Petrie 1930, 6–9; Dothan 1982, 29–33), 'Eitun (Dothan 1982, 29–33; Edelstein *et al.* 1971) and Wadi Fidan (Levy *et al.* 1999) are known, and most of these are only partly published. Several tombs from the cemetery at Tel Zeror are probably dated to this period as well (Ohata 1967, 35–41; Ohata 1970, 67–74). Other graves are scattered in various sites at Megiddo, Jericho, Gezer and Beth Shemesh, mostly dating to the late Iron IIA (see Bloch-Smith 1992a for overview). The late 11th–early 10th centuries BC are especially poorly represented. This poor situation is in contrast to the LBII (Gonen 1992) and Iron IIB–C (e.g., Bloch-Smith 1992a, 1992b) periods, which yielded abundant evidence of burials practices. Kletter related the phenomenon of paucity of Iron I burials, especially in the central hills, to an ideological refraining from depositing burial goods in pit burials, thus, making these difficult to identify in surveys and excavations (Kletter 2002, 39).

Thus, the cemetery at Azor dating to the end of the Iron I and the Iron IIA, fills a certain gap in our knowledge. Apparently, most of the features of Azor's pit burials can be paralleled at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (e.g., Pritchard 1980; Tubb 1998, 86–90), which dates somewhat earlier to the Iron Age burials at Azor. These burials could be considered as 'Canaanite'-type burials, at least according to their cultural character if not according to the ethnic identity of the buried. Burials within a mudbrick case were also reported from Tell es-Sa'idiyeh (Pritchard 1980, 10–11, 30 especially Tombs 101, 102, 108, 117; Tubb 1988, 60, fig. 40), although those were rather rich in burial goods.⁶ Possibly, the examples from Iron I Azor reflect a simpler version of the built cist brick tombs of the LBII–Iron I. There are certain similarities between several tombs at Azor and Zeror

⁶A very similar tomb was excavated near Damascus (Bounni and al-Maqdissi 2002, 8, figs 2–3) and is dated to the Iron Age. This type of tomb was also linked to Egyptian customs (Dothan 1961a, 173, to Tell el-Yehudiyyeh: Naville and Griffith 1890, 44–45, pl. XIV; Bloch-Smith 2002, 124), yet the parallels are not exact.

cemeteries. Notably are the jar/pithoi burials appearing also at Zeror and dated to the LBII (Ohata 1970, 71–74, pl. LVI), as well as regular pit burials dated to the LBII/Iron I (Ohata 1970, 71, pl. LV) appearing in both cemeteries. The cist graves with multiple burials at Zeror (Ohata 1967, 36, pls XXXV–XLV; Ohata 1970, pls LI–LIV), are somewhat similar to the burial structures at Azor. Note, however, that the published evidence regarding the dating of the various tombs at Zeror is rather limited. An Iron Age cemetery was reported from Tell ‘Eitun (Dothan 1982, 29–33; Edelstein *et al.* 1971), but only a few tombs were excavated and published. One of the tombs containing several Philistine Bichrome vessels (Edelstein and Auran 1992) may be relevant to the issue of Philistine burial practices (Dothan 1982, 44), yet the ‘Philistine tomb’ at ‘Eitun is distinctly different from the tombs at Azor (it is a rock cut burial with five burial ‘loculi’ hewn within it), yet somewhat similar to the ‘Philistine’ tombs at Tell Farah(S) (see below).

Two types of burials that were related by scholars to foreign influence at Azor are the cremation (Dothan 1989) and jar burials (Gonen 1992, 142–44). It has been shown that jar and pithos burials are in fact not so rare in the southern Levant during the 13th–12th century BC (Bloch-Smith 1992a, 32–33; Zioni 2005, fig. 9) and therefore should not be considered as a foreign element (Singer 2006, 741).⁷ Zioni suggested that the appearance of this burial custom is related to the changes in Egyptian control in the southern Levant during this period, possibly as an increasing tendency to protect the buried body and give the individual deceased more attention (Zioni 2005, V–VI, 93–94). The burial of infants or small children in storage jars is well known from the 2nd millennium BC, mostly within the settlement (during the MBII–LBI), while during the LBII and early Iron Age there is a revival of the practice, and it is used also in cemeteries (see Bloch-Smith 1992a, 33,

59–62; Zioni 2005, 10). In Iron I Philistia child and infant burials in jars under floors were reported from Ashkelon Phase 18 (Stager 2006, 15) and Tel Miqne-Ekron Strata VIIA–V (Gitin *et al.* 2006, 54–55). The practice of covering the body with large fragments of jars also appears in the same period, as at Tell es-Sai’diyeh (Tubb 1988, 61; Zioni 2005, 59, table 7), Megiddo (Esse 1992), Tel Miqne-Ekron Stratum VIA (Gitin *et al.* 2006, 55, n. 69) and Tel Dothan (Cooley and Pratico 1994, 166), and could be represented by several examples from Azor (see above).

The appearance of cremation burials at Azor was related to a new wave of Aegean influence (Dothan 1982, 57; Dothan 1989; Dothan and Dothan 1992, 115–17; Gilmour 1995, 167–69), and was mentioned as the earliest cremation in the southern Levant (Dothan 1961a, 1989; Dothan and Dothan 1992, 115–16). Yet several examples do appear in the Bronze Age, possibly at Jericho and Tell Beit Mirsim (Bloch-Smith 1992a, 179; Gilmour 1995, 167–69), and according to the archaeological evidence the ‘foreign’ character of the cremation burials are not so evident (Bienkowski 1982, 87), as cremation appears in the Levant quite early during the LBA as well (see also Tenu 2005). Cremation in Greece first appears in LHIIIC as at Perati, the Dodecanese and other regions (Iakovidis 1969, 43–57; Iakovidis 1980, 10–15; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 93–94). It becomes more common during the Sub-Mycenaean and Proto-Geometric periods (see, e.g., Snodgrass 1971, 187–91, at Lefkandi: Popham *et al.* 1980, 210, fig. 69; Hägg 1987; Coldstream 2003, 145). It seems that in most regions, as well as the southern Levant, cremation is rather sporadic in its appearance until the late Iron Age. Therefore, the few late Iron I cremation burials at Azor could not be seen as necessarily indicating the existence of Philistine burial customs at the site. Only later during the 9th or 8th centuries BC and onwards do we have cremation appearing on a large scale, mostly in cemeteries related to the Phoenicians, such as Ruqeish (Culican 1973), Tell Farah(S) (with at least 28 examples in jars: Petrie 1930, 12, pls XXXIX, XL:43, LXVII), Tell el Ajjul (including both open air and jar cremations, Petrie 1932), Achziv (Mazar 1996; 2004, Dayagi-Mendels 2002, 106), Khalde (Sa’ideh 1966) and ‘Atlit (Johns 1938, 135–37; Haggi 2006, 44–49) (see Bloch-Smith 1992a, tables 2–4), as well as Tyre (Aubert 2004) and Shiuk Fawqani (Bachelot and Fales 2005; Tenu and Bachelot 2005). Burials in partly walled burial structures seem to be typical of the Iron IIA at Azor, and include no definite Iron I burials. There are

⁷Examples come from Tel Nami East (Artzy 1995, 25–26, fig. 2:12; Zioni 2005:38–53), Tel Zeror (Ohata 1970, 71–74, pl. LVI), Kfar Yehoshua (Druks 1966), Tel Kinneret (Edelstein 1964), Tell es-Sai’diyeh (Tubb 1988, 61, figs 42–43; Tubb 1995, 142; Tubb 1998, 97–98, fig. 64; see Zioni 2005, table 7), Sahab (Ibrahim 1972, 30–32, pl. VI, fig. 1), Jabal el-Qusur near Amman (Dajani 1966, 103) and possibly Megiddo (Esse 1992, 88, fig. 4, T1765) and Tell Farah(N) (de Vaux and Steve 1948, Gonen 1992, 143). This phenomenon appears in a wide geographical zone, both in southern and northern Israel and on both sides of the Jordan, yet, in the region of Azor, the southern-central coastal plain, it is relatively rare. The many parallels of this practice from Anatolia (as at Gordion: Mellink 1956, and Alişar Höyük: Osten 1937, 84–108, in eastern Anatolia and Beşik Tepe: Basedow 2000, 17–36, 175–76, in western Anatolia; see also Zioni 2005, 75–79 and more references therein) and other regions are not concentrated in a specific chronological horizon. In fact, these burials are more common during the early 2nd millennium BC, and therefore their significance to supposed influences on the southern Levant during the 13th–12th centuries BC is questionable (see Zioni 2005, 82–85).

Table 3 Main characteristics of the various burial practices at Azor

Burial type	Burial position	Burial age	No. of individuals	Burial goods	Date (typical)	No. of graves
Pit burial	supine	0–50	1–2	yes	Iron I–IIA	27–28
Brick-case	supine	adult	1	mostly no	Iron I	6–8
Burial structure	supine	adults/children	multiple	yes	Iron IIA	2
Jar burial	?	0–14	1	yes	Iron I	8–10
Cremation	cremation	10–45	1–2	yes	Iron I	2–3

no clear parallels for this customs during this period, as this is not a usual cist grave (contra to Bloch-Smith 1992a, 183), as it includes several layers of burials and was not placed in a pit (it was surrounded by walls which were probably visible above the ground). A possibly similar burial comes from Tomb 201 at Tell Farah (S) (Petrie 1930, 17). This type of burial may be a certain substitute for the multiple burial in caves, common during the LBII (e.g., Gonen 1992, 41–69).

As noted, excluding cremation burials, the resemblance of the Azor cemetery to the 13th–12th century BC cemetery of Tell es-Sai'diyeh is quite striking. On top of the similar pit burial and brick-case burials, similar jar burials occur in both sites; similarly, figurines are lacking from the burials (Pritchard 1980, 30), while metal finds are abundant. A recent study of the cemetery (Green 2005, 34–36; Green 2006) further illustrates these similarities, and indicates that two-thirds of the 500 tombs excavated in the cemetery are dated to the LBII–Iron IIA, a time slot identical to the the period of the main use of the Azor cemetery excavated by M. Dothan. The resemblance could be explained by a certain relationship in the populations of the two sites, and indeed it was suggested, on these grounds, that a certain population of Philistines of

Sea Peoples settled in the transjordan (Tubb 1998, 98; Tubb 2000). Yet, these similarities could result from the fact that both sites reflect to a large extent typical local Canaanite burial practices.

The variability of burial practices at Azor can be attributed to several reasons. The ethnic or cultural aspect has received relatively more attention, affiliating the cremation burials with Aegean practices. Religious and cosmological beliefs are naturally strongly related to burial customs and can be reflected in types of burial and burial goods (e.g., discussion and references, Biran *et al.* 1996, 255–58; Hallote 2002, 108–10). Ethnographic studies show us, however, that it is quite difficult to anticipate the social or ideological background of certain burial customs or burial gifts (e.g. Ucko 1969, 275–77; Bartal 1982). Philistine burial customs are quite unknown as no cemetery was uncovered in the main Philistine cities (Dothan (1982, 252–88), concentrated in her study on the phenomenon of anthropoid coffin burials, which hardly appears in Iron Age Philistia). Yet, certain tombs were affiliated with the Philistines or with Aegean or Cypriote influence, including Cemetery 500 at Tell Farah (S) and certain example at Tell el Ajjul and other sites (Waldbaum 1966;

Table 4 Description of Figs 17–19, 21

Fig.	Form	Reg. No., IAA No.	Tomb	Fig.	Form	Reg. No., IAA No.	Tomb
17:1	Bowl	56d/1, 60–141	D56	19:1	Bowl	79d/27, 60–543	D79D
17:2	Bowl	D68/1, 58–611	D20	19:2	Chalice	79d/21, 60–531	D97A
17:3	Bowl	60–555	D56	19:3	Jug	D65/1	D21
17:4	Krater	87d/25, 60–142	D87	19:4	Jug	79d/3, 60–570	D79C
17:5	Krater	88d/1, 60–514	D88	19:5	Juglet	79d/7, 60–564	D79C
17:6	Jug	74d/3	D74	19:6	Juglet	D44/4	D14
17:7	Jug	58d/11	D58	19:7	Juglet	79d/13, 60–141	D79C
18:1	Bowl	D56/1, 58–612	D16	19:8	Juglet	D83/27	D28
18:2	Bowl	D78	D24	19:9	Flask	D94/2	D30
18:3	Bowl	62d/24a	D62	19:10	Pomegranate vessel	D94/1	D30
18:4	Jar	D101	D36	21:1	Bronze bowl	63d/7, 60–552	D63
18:5	Jar	93–2841	D63	21:2	Iron knife	79d/16, 60–544	D79C
18:6	Jug	63d	D63	21:3	Bronze mirror	D53/9, 68–1035	D15
18:7	Jug	62d/15, 60–532	D62	21:4	Gold mouth piece	63d/9, 60–63	D63
18:8	Cooking jug	D67/1, 68–603	D23	21:5	Bronze bracelet	58d/19b	D58
18:9	Cooking jug	74d/4, 60–530	D74	21:6	Bronze fibula	79d/22	D79B
18:10	Pyxis	56d/2, 60–140	D56	21:7	Iron earring	79d/46	D79D
18:11	Pyxis	86d/2, 60–567	D86	21:8	Steatite scarab	D87/5	D30
18:12	Flask	D78/3, 58–604	D24	21:9	Stone seal	D86/14b	D30
18:13	Flask	62d/25	D62				

Dothan 1982, 29–33, 260–68; Brug 1985, 149–64; Gonen 1992, 124–31; Gilmour 1995, 155–63), which include rock-cut tombs with a *dromos* and benches. The most typical examples are the five large rock-cut tombs at Tell el-Farah(S), Tombs 542, 552, 562, 532 and 544 (Petrie 1930, 6–9, pls XVII–XXII, LXIV; Dothan 1982, 30), that were considered to have been used by single families for several generations. They are lined in a row and are built of a stepped *dromos*, a large hall with elevated benches and in two cases an additional inner hall. The multiple burials included supine burials, many burial goods of Canaanite and Philistine pottery, small finds, and in two cases anthropoid coffins. The ‘Philistine’ tomb at Eitun (Edelstein and Auran 1992) may also be similar. Note, however, that this type of tomb may also be traced to some extent in bi-lobate Late Bronze Age tombs of the southern Levant (Stiebing 1970). Thus, generally, the Philistine character of other Iron I burials is not evident from distinct funerary practices, but rather, the relation to the Philistines is inferred, either from the geographic location (in Philistia), or from the Philistine vessels found in the graves, and is, thus, highly circumstantial.

The social and cultural aspects of the burials at Azor can be examined according to the type of burial and the burial goods. The brick-case tombs are very poor in burial goods, while some of the pit burials are richer, as well as the jar burials (Table 3; Fig. 20). Items buried with the deceased can reflect either personal items (such as clothes, jewellery), items showing status (such as weapons) and items essential for ‘the well being of the spirit’ for the world beyond (see O’Shea 1984, 8–13; Baker 2006, 1). Both burials of children and females at Azor often include many burial gifts, such as pottery and scarabs, as well as personal items, such as jewellery and beads (see Table 2). Jewellery appears with children and adults, while the finds of various pin types suggests that the bodies were buried clothed. There is not enough information about scarabs, but they appear mostly in pit burials; scarabs are usually considered as amuletic objects related to the well being of the spirit (Baker 2006, 21). The burials in Burial Structure B (Tomb D79), reflecting a mixture in terms of age and gender of the deceased, contain all types of burial gifts. Weapons do not appear, with the exception of a bi-metallic knife (Fig. 21:2), but this could be considered as a tool too. Therefore, no clear correlation between burial types and social status or rank of the deceased can be identified. If social status rather than ethnic origin is to be inferred from the burial goods recovered, one may suggest that there were no great

socio-economic differences between the buried individuals at Azor, as most classes of objects appear in most types of burials. An exception could be Tomb D63 which contains a gold item (the mouth piece).

Philistine pottery, mainly bowls, kraters and closed vessels are included in all types of burials during the Iron I. Philistine jugs including ‘feeding bottles’ appear; this form often appears in LHIIIC/Iron I Aegean tombs as at Perati (Iakovidis 1969, pls 117, 134, 138) and Cyprus (Steel 1995, 200). During the Iron IIA the pit burials and burial structures contain mainly Cypro-Phoenician and other juglets. The Philistine pottery within the burials could be interpreted as reflecting the ethnic identity of the deceased as Philistines, but, these vessels could have been selected as burial goods on account of their elaborate appearance, similar to the imported Cypriote and Mycenaean vessels during the LBII and the Cypro-Phoenician/Black on Red vessels during the Iron IIA (Bloch-Smith 1992a, 79). According to petrography the Philistine, as well as the non-Philistine, vessels were locally produced and possibly local workshops already specialized in producing Philistine vessels, or Philistine-imitations, to cope with the large demand of burial goods at Azor. Therefore, at this stage, the appearance of Philistine Bichrome vessels in burials at the southern Levant cannot be considered as an indicator for a Philistine ‘ethnic’ identity of the individuals in these burials. While distinct Aegean or Philistine burial customs are difficult to identify in this stage, some of the material culture from the Iron I graves at Azor has certain Philistine components; whether Philistine people were indeed buried in some of these graves is still difficult to determine. The anthropological evidence quoted from Azor, relating to the many ‘*brachicephalic*’ type skulls from the graves (especially from the brick-case tombs), which allegedly represent foreign individuals (Dothan and Dothan 1992, 115–17), should be taken with extreme reservation, as most of these skulls were not examined after the preliminary inspection, and the ethnic significance of skull geometric characteristics is also questionable (Y. Nagar, pers. comm.). Moreover, decorated, as well as non-decorated, pottery vessels from graves were possibly important because of their content, which was related to certain funerary rituals (e.g., Pitard 2002, 149). Bloch-Smith distinguished between burial customs or ‘kits’ of the lowlands and highlands in Iron Age Palestine (1992a, 143, table 9; Bloch-Smith 2002, 120–21, 124–25); such standard burial kits could represent the burial ceremony rather than the status or rank of the

deceased within the society (as suggested by Baker for MB–LB Ashkelon (2006, 1–2)).

Temporal differences could be responsible for some of the variability in the cemetery at Azor, and may include the earlier appearance of the brick-case burials. These were better organized, maintaining the same orientation, and were also more space consuming. Possibly, in a later stage, there was no space for such burials in the cemetery. Note, though, that in most cases these early brick-case burials were ‘respected’ and not cut by the later pit burials. A sequence in which a well ordered assemblage of tombs is superimposed by a less ordered one was noted also at Tell es-Sa’idiyeh (Tubb 1988, 61) and Tel Nami East (Zioni 2005, 31). The difference in the type of burial pottery forms used for the Iron I and Iron IIA burials at Azor should also be noted. While the Iron I burials include many bowls, kraters and jars, the Iron IIA burials do not have jars but mostly closed forms as jugs, pyxides and juglets. This distinct change in burial goods could testify to differences in funerary rituals, such as the use of small containers instead of open vessels with provisions for the dead and/or for a funerary rite. Such changes in funerary rituals could suggest differences in ethnic identity and/or religious beliefs of the buried individuals. However, as other aspects of the burials do not change, such as the position and direction of the body, this option seems less likely. Note also, that due to limitation of space used for burials the placing of larger pottery vessels as jars and kraters becomes very difficult; thus, one could suggest that the shift towards the usage of small juglets as burial goods in this case resulted also from space constraints.

When all parameters are taken into account it seems that there was a certain flexibility in burial practices at Azor (see Table 3), possibly in similarity to other LBII and early Iron Age cemeteries, such as the cemetery of Tell es-Sa’idiyeh, Tel Zeror and Tel Nami. This is attested by the variability of burial practices, which are not necessarily correlated by variability in burial goods. The brick-case tombs, found at Azor, are empty of finds while those at Tell es-Sa’idiyeh have burial goods; the jar burials are found with burial goods at Azor (as well as at Kfar Yehoshua and other sites), and are often empty of finds at Tel Zeror, Tell es-Sa’idiyeh and Tel Nami (see also Zioni 2005, 67–68).

Conclusions

The results from the excavations at the cemetery of Azor are important as they represent a very poorly-known period in the southern Levant in terms of

funerary contexts: the late Iron I–Iron IIA (11th–9th centuries BC). Moreover, they reflect an interesting variability in burial customs. The cemetery was related to the Philistines, on account of its geographical location, possibly some burial customs, but mainly according to the type of burial goods. Yet, as shown, the appearance of these goods, especially Philistine Bichrome vessels, cannot, by itself, indicate the ethnic identity of the deceased, especially as these vessels appear in such otherwise diverse burial types in the southern Levant. It is suggested that the variability of burial customs at Azor may reflect the local southern Levantine customs existing during the late LBII and Iron I, possibly related to differences in Egyptian influence and to the rise of local ethnic entities. Yet, the same evidence could reflect a situation where a fixed code of treatment of the dead had not yet developed in this period, leaving a free hand for various local, ethnic or even clan-based burial traditions. During the Iron IIB–C, when the multi-chambered bench tombs become very common (e.g., Loffreda 1968; Bloch-Smith 1992a, 42–52, 137; Bloch-Smith 1992b, 216–19; Bloch-Smith 2002, 128–29), there is more uniformity in burial practices, possibly related to new religious or ideological factors. Thus, the continuation of the LBII more ‘lenient’ burial customs during the Iron I–IIA stands in contrast to the relative uniformity and normative nature of burial customs of the subsequent Iron IIB–C in Palestine.

The Iron I material culture at Azor, which includes some Philistine components, is possibly ‘projected’ onto a situation of the local variability of burial customs of the time, but whether some graves represent actual burials of Philistine individuals is not yet clear. The isolated examples of cremation burials cannot indicate distinct connections with Aegean or Cypriote funerary traditions, while the jar burials seem to be a phenomenon more characteristic of the Levant in this period. The only possible evidence of types of tombs reflecting foreign influence in Iron I Philistia are, so far, the tombs from Tell Farah (S). Hopefully, the evidence from Azor will help to fill, at least partly, the gap existing in our knowledge of burial practices in Israel from the Iron I and Iron IIA periods. As more archaeological data, in the form of excavated cemeteries, becomes available from these periods, especially relating to sites in Philistia, perhaps the various characteristics of the burial practices will be better understood in their chronological, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic context.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the Israel Antiquities Authority for allowing me to publish the results from the excavations at Azor, and Professor Trude Dothan for her co-operation. All illustrations are courtesy of the IAA. The plans were prepared by Natalia Zak and Elizabeth Belashov; some of the drawing are by C. Hirsh. The final publication of the Azor cemetery is supported by a generous grant from The Shelby White-Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications, as well as by a grant from the 'Mediterranean Archeological Trust'.

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