

AREAS E AND F

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On the eastern flanks of the hills immediately to the west-southwest (Area E) and on the southwest slopes (Area F) of *Tell Hesbân* rock-hewn tombs were examined.¹ Tombs of particular significance which the Heshbon expedition cleared were marked by chiseling their designated numbers above the respective tomb entrances. All tombs which were exposed at the time of discovery were found opened and rifled of their contents. Many of them had been plundered very recently, as evidenced not only by the lack of vegetational growth over the mounds of loose dirt thrown up in the process of searching for them, but also by the reports given us by local people. In one instance the grave robbers had actually been observed at their clandestine work.

Both Areas E and F contained many signs of stone quarrying. It was sometimes within these old quarries that cavernous tombs had been cut, the graves usually having been placed along a given line of rock outcropping. In Area F a number of vats (and possibly presses) were in evidence. The contents of the fill layers in the vats dated from the Byzantine Period.

The tombs which were exposed to view can be divided into four major types:² (1) chamber tombs with loculi. The inner chamber was roughly square in plan, with rectangular horizontal burial niches (loculi) cut straight back into the chamber walls on three sides. (2) Grave shafts cut horizontally into the

¹ Thanks are herewith expressed to Hassan Al-Nabulsi, Secretary-General of the University of Jordan, the owner of the land on which Area F is located, for permission to carry out excavations there.

² An exception would be a tomb in Area E which consisted of a natural, low-ceiling cave into which a series of loculi had been hewn. Also in Area E were found five chambers cut in the face of the rock cliff. The chambers were completely filled with soil.

hillside and ending in a single loculus. (3) Chamber tombs with adjoining alcoves (arcosolia) containing sunken or trough graves. (4) Tombs with rectangular vertical shaft openings, with one or two side recesses at the base, parallel to the sides of the shaft. The recesses frequently were comparable to the arcosolia of the chamber tombs. In some instances, one or two loculi were found to be cut horizontally at one or both ends of the shaft base.³

All four types of tombs were in evidence in Area E, while Area F contained only Types 1, 3, and 4. The chamber tombs with loculi (Type 1) and the single loculus graves (Type 2) display the characteristic features of the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods (ca. 198 B.C.-A.D. 135). The chamber tombs with arcosolia (Type 3) may date from Roman times, but they were particularly popular during the Byzantine Period. The tombs with rectangular vertical shafts (Type 4) also date from the Roman Period, but were more common during Byzantine times.⁴

In Area F, it was discovered that tombs of Type 1 occasionally included, in the rocky eminences which protruded above them, a small vertical rectangular cut in the rock, here provisionally termed a "stela mark." The typical mark in question usually measured ca. .50 m. long, .25 m. wide, and from .05-.08 m. deep. Perhaps such depressions were cut as sockets to support upright, funerary stelae. Besides those of Type 1, the only tomb to possess this distinctive grave mark was Tomb 4 of Area F, a tomb with a rectangular vertical shaft opening.^{4a}

³ See below, the discussion of Tomb F.7, where the point is made that tombs with side chambers apparently were built prior to those which had loculi at the ends.

⁴ For the dates usually assigned to these four tomb types, see Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament* (Princeton, N. J., 1969), pp. 184-187; and W. L. Reed, "Tomb," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York and Nashville, 1962), IV, 663-668. Compare also the discussion by Crystal M. Bennett, "Tombs of the Roman Period," *Excavations at Jericho* (London, 1965), II, 516-545.

^{4a} Editors' note: Only in Tomb F.4 was stratigraphic excavation procedure attempted. The double tomb, F.8/10, was only partially cleared out, although it had not been entered in recent times. The other tombs (notably Tombs F.1 and F.5) which had already been opened by modern tomb robbers and

Chamber Tombs with Loculi (Type 1)

Tomb F.1: This was an exceptionally fine tomb, named the "Rolling Stone Tomb" because a disk-shaped stone, 1.27 m. in diameter and .36 m. thick, closed its entrance (see Fig. 8; Pl. XI:A). This stone could be rolled to either side of the low, central entrance which led to the main chamber. From this chamber radiated 12 loculi, four each on the north, east, and south sides. In the center of the main chamber a square pit had served as a sump, so that water seepage would not affect the burials.⁵ The unusual manner of tomb closure is an architectural feature observed thus far only on West Bank tombs and can be dated in the Early Roman period up to A.D. 70.⁶ The purpose of this type of movable door was to allow for sequential multiple burials. The tomb was probably cut as a family sepulcher to be used over a long period of time. It was most unfortunate that the tomb had only recently been looted.⁷

During the clearance of the forecourt an Early Roman lamp was found and two partial skeletons in the right part of the rolling stone's track. From the disturbed soil inside the tomb came pottery—all broken—which was predominantly Early Roman, although there were smaller amounts of Late Roman, Byzantine, and even some late Iron II sherds. The soil layer within the sump contained only Early Roman sherds.⁸

cleared of practically all antiquities were cleaned of their debris in order to allow study of the structures; no effort was made to excavate the dirt stratigraphically.

⁵ It has been suggested that the depression served as "a place for the collection of skeletal remains" (Finegan, *Archaeology of the NT*, p. 185), or created so as to provide "a shelf for funerary objects" (Robert H. Smith, *BA*, 30 [1967], 87, 88). George E. Mendenhall, who visited the excavations at *Tell Hesbân* just after he had examined a number of tombs in the Middle Euphrates area, pointed out that the purpose of the architectural feature was to serve as a sump. Our findings tended to confirm that observation. See below, n. 8.

⁶ Finegan, *Archaeology of the NT*, pp. 167, 202; Smith, *BA*, 30 (1967), 87.

⁷ From what was learned from the owner of the field where Tomb F.1 was located, the discovery and robbing of this tomb took place during the spring of 1970. This information agreed with what we heard from the villagers of *Hesbân*.

⁸ We discovered that the sherds found within a given tomb's sump provided information concerning the date of that tomb's construction. The major

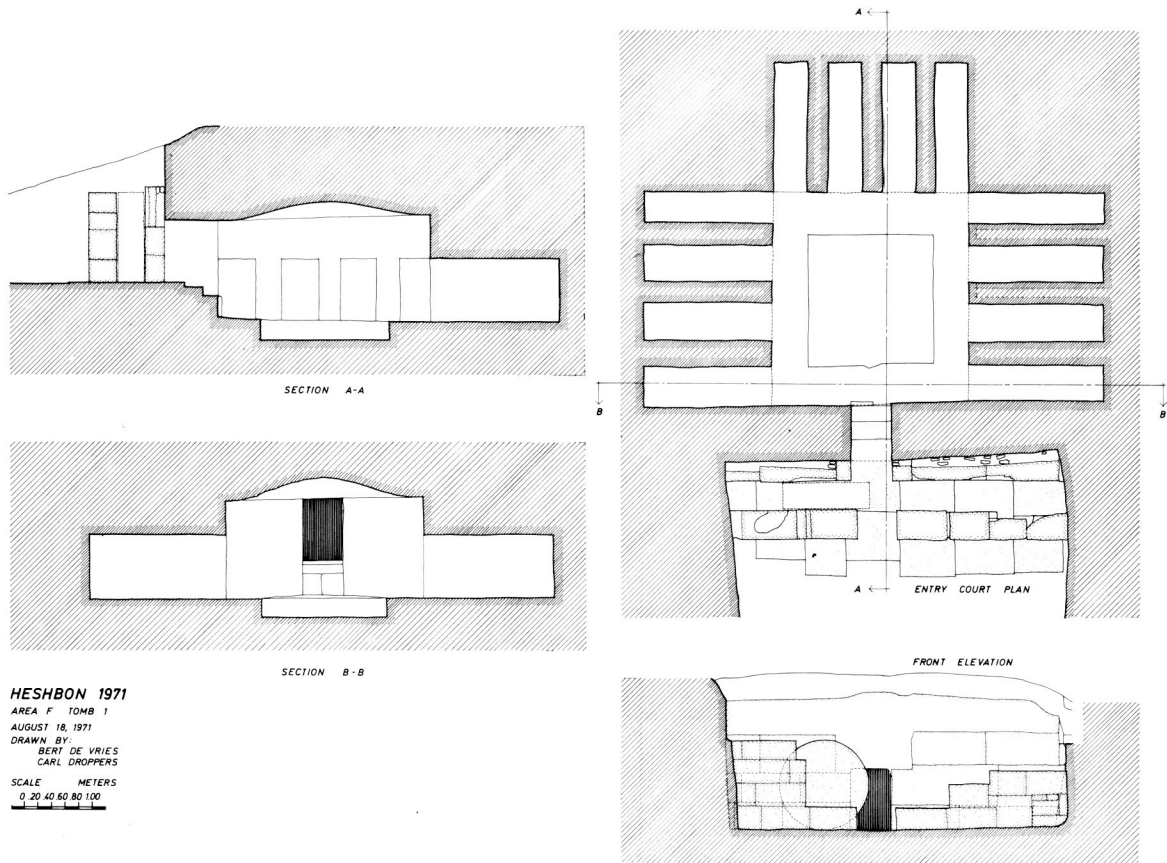


Fig. 8. Plan and sections of the Rolling Stone Tomb (F.1)

The skeletons were scattered throughout the tomb, but a count of the recovered mandibles showed that at least 77 individuals had been buried there. The only objects recovered from this recently looted tomb included some beads, rings, bracelets (see Pl. XV:A), and bone hairpins.

Tomb F.6: Although cut into the same rock outcropping, and directly to the north of Tomb F.1, this sizable tomb had escaped detection by the modern grave robbers. To the right of the tomb entryway, hewn into the dressed rock facade, was a deep, large, cup-like indentation. It evidently was designed "to hold water for ceremonial washing and possibly for libations for the dead."⁹ The approach to the tomb consisted of three steps cut into the limestone. The steps led into a low arched doorway which was sealed by a flat rectangular dressed stone. Small chink stones were used to wedge the door-slab tightly in place. Within, the square chamber was typical of a sepulcher of the Early Roman period. Nine loculi (which were numbered from right to left) radiated from the chamber, three on each side except the west, which contained the entrance. Spaced between and above some of the loculi were four lamp niches. In two of these niches, still *in situ*, were "Herodian" lamps. In the center of the chamber floor was a large square sump.

Most Roman tombs at *Tell Hesbân*, including Tomb F.6, had been plundered long ago. What was left inside included disturbed skeletal remains (see Pl. XI:B), pottery, and a surprising amount (18 vessels) of partly intact glassware of various types. Some of the pottery had been broken by the ancient grave robbers. Since the ancients considered it their religious duty to throw earth upon an exposed corpse,¹⁰ it is not surprising that at some point after the robbery a great amount of loose soil had been thrown over the disarrayed contents of both chamber and loculi. In the main chamber this dirt reached from the floor to

reason why the sump sometimes contained a "pure" locus was due to the fact that the soil filling the sump was laid down by water. The soil, when solidified as water seeped away or evaporated, effectively prevented foreign matter from intruding easily.

⁹ Smith, *BA*, 30 (1967), 86.

¹⁰ William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (New York, 1845), p. 455.

the top of the front door, blocking ready access. While the artifacts in the tomb were entirely Early Roman, clearance of the tomb revealed that both the inside dirt layer and the stone slab, which sealed the doorway, were put there in Byzantine times.¹¹ In sum, this Early Roman tomb had been looted—in a time when pottery and glassware were not considered valuable—only to have been resealed sometime during the Byzantine Period (either by pious individuals, or, perhaps, by a government decree which had ordered the resealing of all exposed graves).

The first (and largest) loculus contained the skeletons of five adults. Each of the other loculi contained the remains of one or more bodies. Besides these human remains, the loculi contained such items as bracelets (in one instance the bracelet was still on the humerus), finger rings, glass beads, garment needles, buttons, a small scarab charm, a gaming piece, part of a wooden coffin, and nails. The most exciting finds were recovered from the loose soil at the opening to Loculus 1. Here, 11 glass vases of different shapes were closely grouped together (and fortunately not broken). Also found were a bronze spatula and a glass cosmetic applicator. A most striking find was a cosmetic box whose container was a shell. Into its ivory lid fit a swan's ivory neck, wings, and tail. (For some of the finds from Tomb F.6, see Pls. XIII:A, B; XIV:B; XV:A.)

Tomb F.8: The largest of the loculi tombs discovered, Tomb F.8 comprised an unusually long central chamber and 18 burial spaces. Twelve of the latter were loculi radiating from the southern and the northern sides. Six additional burial spaces were at the eastern side. At the time of discovery, the tomb had been "sealed" with a slab stone and the chamber had been filled with loose soil. Due to the dangerous condition of the chamber roof, a sector of the northern side was left uncleared so that the details of the tomb plan remain incomplete. Apparently, the opening of each loculus had been originally closed with a single

¹¹ In Tomb F.6 the sump contained sherds which all can be dated to the Early Roman period. Directly above the sump level, the soil fill contained sherds, none of which dated later than the Byzantine Period. The same held true for the soil and sherds in the shaft leading to the entryway and around the stone door slab.

stone slab. Also, at some time, all the burial spaces probably had been covered with capstones. Unfortunately, massive cave-ins had obliterated the architectural features of the main chamber walls and ceiling. A series of ancient tomb robberies must have taken place, since all of the loculi had been stripped bare of both their capstones and contents.

When the tomb was first entered, heaps of rubble, roof fall, soil seepage, and dirt piles blocked easy passage. Furthermore, what was first seen as an extremely long (12.30 m.) tomb turned out to be two tombs! It was found that a chamber tomb of arcosolia type (Type 3), Tomb F.10, had accidentally been cut into the east end of Tomb F.8.

In an attempt to ascertain the date of the tomb, the following factors may be noted. The architectural features examined were characteristically Early Roman. This observation is supported by the fact that the tomb was already in existence when the Late Roman chamber tomb was cut into two of its easternmost graves. Loculus 6, which was found with all capstones intact, was of paramount interest in this connection. Directly under the tightly fitted capstones lay the remains of what seemed to have been a thin layer of melon(?) seeds. While no objects were found, a few broken sherds within the grave gave evidence of an Early Roman burial.¹²

However, there is little doubt that the tomb had been reused for burial purposes during Late Roman times. The easternmost grave, Loculus 10, also possessed all capstones *in situ*. But this time the meager contents of the grave produced Late Roman, as well as Early Roman sherds. The fact that Loculus 10 lay directly under a Late Roman tomb chamber (Tomb F.10) helps explain the possible source of such secondary burials.¹³

Disturbances of the tomb were not limited to Late Roman times. Byzantine and Ayyūbid/Mamlūk sherds provided evidence

¹² When the pottery from Loculus 6 was read, a fragment of Ayyūbid/Mamlūk ware was noted. I consider this piece to be intrusive. As reported below, there were Ayyūbid/Mamlūk sherds in the dirt which filled the tomb chamber and the loculi. The predominant ware within Loculus 6 was Early Roman. Loculus 13, though not sealed by capstones, did not contain any sherds later than Early Roman.

¹³ Late Roman sherds were found also in Loculi 1-4.

that vandals had entered the cavernous chamber sometime during the 4th-6th cent. and 13th-14th cent., respectively. Outside of a very few small objects (mostly beads), no artifacts of significance were uncovered. Loculi 4 and 12 contained sheep bones, possibly remains of a food offering.

Tombs with a Single Loculus (Type 2)

Tombs E.2 and E.3: An investigation of a recently exposed tomb, E.3, led to the discovery of a hidden, nearby tomb which was subsequently designated Tomb E.2. Architecturally, both were of the same type. Each possessed a nearly horizontal shaft which sloped down to a single loculus. The approach shafts contained no steps, but the loculus of Tomb E.2 was sealed by a stone slab wedged tight by chink stones. The interiors of both tombs were found filled to the ceiling with a light tan soil of sandy texture. Neither tomb contained an intact burial. All that remained were small fragments of human bones mixed in soil containing both Early Roman and Byzantine sherds. The tombs, probably of Early Roman date, had been looted of their contents and, as the sherds indicated, were resealed during the Byzantine Period.

An unusual feature of Tomb E.2 was the fact that its single loculus had cut accidentally into a natural cave, which consequently formed a side chamber. This chamber was also filled to the ceiling with sandy-like fill, which, due to the very unstable condition of the rock ceiling, could not be cleared.

Chamber Tombs with Arcosolia (Type 3)

Tomb F.5: Noting a depression in the soil, we began clearance and quickly uncovered four broad steps cut into the limestone. They led to a low vertically cut rectangular tomb entrance. This tomb had apparently been opened recently, robbed of most of its contents, and then again covered with dirt.¹⁴ The tomb's facade surrounding the door comprised two fluted bas-relief pillars and a heavily dressed lintel. A swinging (still movable)

¹⁴ A school teacher in *Hesbân* told me that this tomb had been plundered during the spring of 1970. Other reports seemed to confirm this possibility; see above, n. 7.

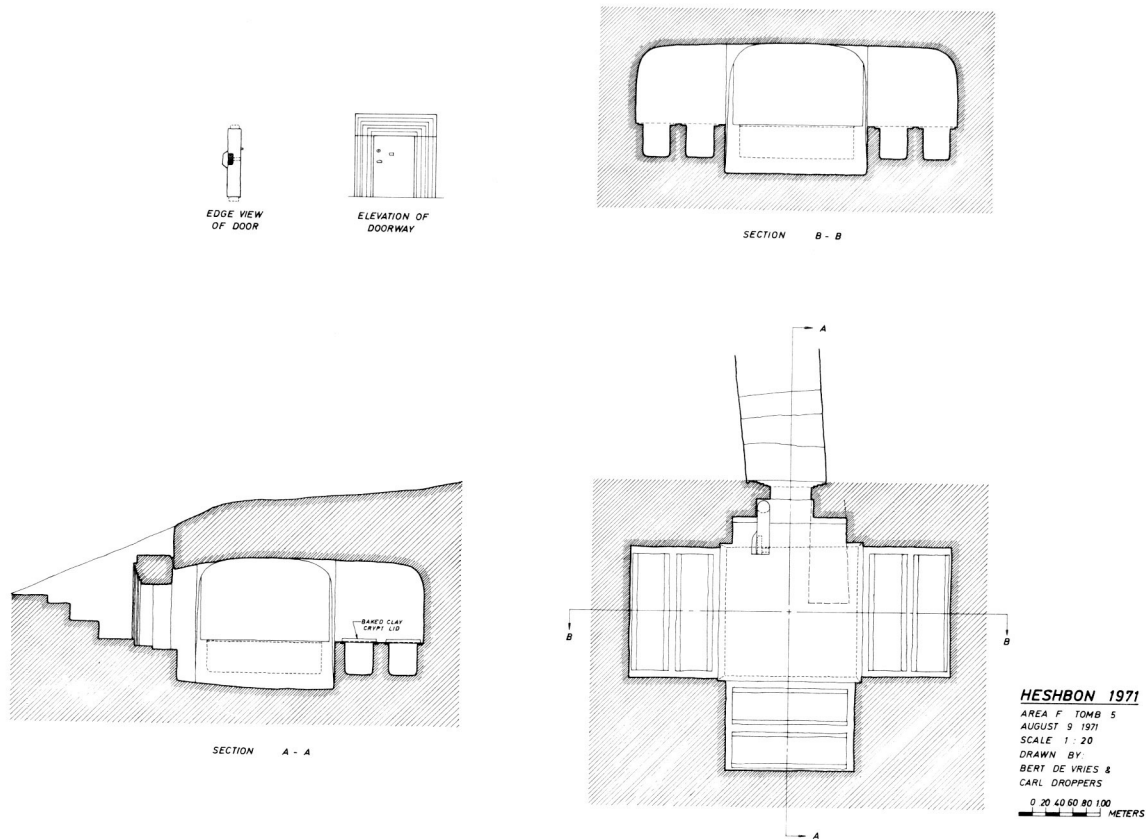


Fig. 9. Plan and sections of the Swinging Door Tomb (F.5)

stone door was attached (see Pl. XII). Within the tomb chamber were found three arcosolia, each containing two deep trough graves. The graves had been covered by square, ceramic, tile-like lids. The ceiling of the arcosolium facing the entrance displayed a thick patch of plaster, apparently applied to repair damage from an ancient cave-in. (Fig. 9.)

The tomb interior was covered by a thick fill of soil which had been disturbed by the modern robbers. All six of the grave troughs showed signs of having been thoroughly plundered. Fortunately, part of the soil in the central tomb chamber had not been disturbed. Here, on the floor, hard against those chamber sides which faced the three arcosolia, were unearthed 11 unbroken pottery vessels, including four lamps, two large jars, and a bowl. In sifting the soil in the graves, we found a few small objects such as bird-shaped glass beads, rings, bracelets, and two coins. One of the coins was of Philip I (243-249) and another was of Constantine II (337-340).¹⁵ Broken pieces of glassware mixed with splintered pieces of human bones were reminders of the damage done by the looters. Both the sherds and artifacts found suggest that the tomb uses may be assigned a date at the end of the Late Roman and the beginning of the Early Byzantine periods (ca. 250-350).

Tomb F.10: A large chamber cut into bedrock at the eastern end of Tomb F.8 was not recognized as a separate tomb until much of the soil had been cleared from its interior. Set off from the central chamber were three arcosolia (to the north, west, and east). In the center of the tomb chamber was the square sump frequent also in Type 1 tombs. The original door was sealed with a large stone slab.

A study of the tomb showed that the western arcosolium had remained unfinished. Only one trough grave out of the three had been completed. The initial cutting for the other two had led to the accidental breakthrough into the lower earlier Tomb F.8. Since the other two arcosolia contained three trough graves each, the symmetrical arrangement of the tomb had been marred by this defect.

¹⁵ A Terian, Nos. 55, 59, in his forthcoming article on the Heshbon 1971 coins.

In addition to the arcosolia graves, the tomb had also two recesses, one horizontal and the other vertical. Since these burial recesses did not fit into the symmetrical plan of the tomb, they may have been additions to accommodate later burials. The openings of both recesses had been closed by stone slabs, although nothing of consequence was found within except some loose dirt in the vertical recess.

Sizeable capstones covered all but one of the trough graves. Robbers had been there in antiquity and all but three of the trough graves had been seriously violated. The heavy stone covers and the stone slabs represent reburial work which took place sometime after the looting. The tomb itself dates to the very end of the Late Roman period, based on the pottery recovered.¹⁶

The dirt fill over the center of the chamber yielded an unexpected quantity of dessicated dates. At the eastern edge of the chamber's sump, several broken pieces of an unusual six-spouted lamp turned up. The thick fill also produced the cracked remains of two large Late Roman jars found respectively at the two southern corners of the tomb chamber, to the right and left inside the door. At the back of the arcosolium opposite the entrance a small juglet rested above and behind the center trough grave. In the four trough graves in the northern and western arcosolia the robbers had left only fragmented bones and two belt buckles, a ring, an iron bracelet, a gold earring, a broken alabaster vase, and a few beads. Two of the trough graves of the eastern arcosolium, however, were intact, while the third grave of that same group had been violated. From these graves a few distinctive objects came to light: two glass vases, a small bell with its clapper, a juglet, and various small beads.

Rectangular Shaft Tombs (Type 4)

Tomb F.4: A bedouin by the name of Helmi Musa (belonging to the famous Ta'amireh tribe), desiring employment, showed

¹⁶ The sump (see above, n. 8) contained only Late Roman sherds. The large jars on either side of the entryway were also Late Roman—as were the other datable artifacts found with the individual graves.

us a "stela mark" which he said indicated a tomb directly below. It was he who brought to our attention the fact that these so-called "stela marks" were closely associated with tombs. His observation proved rewarding. Digging through the ground surface soil soon revealed a rectangular-shaped vertical shaft cut into the limestone rock. Clearing the shaft to a depth of 1.12 m., we uncovered the tops of five large capstones which rested on narrow ledges running the length of both sides of the shaft. At 1.50 m. below the capstones the shaft floor led to recesses on each side (north and south) and loculi at each end (east and west).

Each of the two side recesses contained a grave which was found covered by both dirt and large capstones. Clearance of the south grave revealed that nine bodies had been placed in it, one atop the others, over an extended period of time.¹⁷ Earrings, bracelets, and two brooch-like bronze fibulae were among the objects associated with the burials. In clearing the north grave chamber, the remains of four bodies, two gold earrings, a bronze ring, and a bracelet were found.

The east end loculus contained the remains of three skeletons, an incense shovel, two gold earrings, a large copper ring, and part of an iron key. In the west end loculus, the entire burial evidence had been smashed by ceiling fall. The bones within were all fragmented. Nevertheless, it could be determined that remains of an earlier burial had been shoved toward the rear of the loculus in order to make room for a second burial. Small skull fragments found turned out to be those of a very young child. Four glass bracelets were found intact in spite of the heavy ceiling fall.

Among the indicators which point to a Roman date for the tomb, the two fibulae and the incense shovel are worthy of

¹⁷ Not only did the south grave contain nine skeletons within a space .50 m. wide and 1.75 m. long, but other clues were available. The skeletal material was in considerable disarray, and large stone fragments (suggesting broken pieces of capstones?) were found incongruously within the grave. This evidence suggests that the tomb had been repeatedly opened for secondary burials.

mention (see Pls. XV:C, XIII:C).¹⁸ No whole pieces of pottery were found. The small, fragmented sherds recovered from the soil and the graves were probably Early Byzantine. The tomb had most likely been cut sometime during the Roman Period and had remained in use as a family tomb possibly into the beginning of the Byzantine Period.

Tomb F.7: The rectangular-shaped vertical shaft was 2.50 m. long, ca. .60 m. wide, and 2.20 m. deep. On the north end of the south side of the floor of the shaft was cut a small recess, with two upright stone slabs sealing the opening. Within the recess was a single burial. Outside of the few bones of a small child, only tiny sherds were present. Five of the sherds could be read; they were all Early Roman.

Two observations are pertinent. First, this tomb suggests that in Area F tombs with rectangular vertical shaft access had been constructed and used during the Early Roman period. Second, the tomb may illustrate the planned long-term use of the type of tomb under consideration. Rectangular shaft tombs were subjected to enlargement periodically as the need for more space arose. Possibly Tomb F.7 represents the beginning of what was planned as a family sepulcher.

Tomb F.9, a robbed tomb which we examined, not only contained the usual quota of four graves on the four sides of the shaft, but also a grave trough in the floor of the shaft. Here, again, it is suggested that multiple burials within the rectangular shaft tombs necessitated periodic enlargements. Evidently in the type of tomb under discussion, the recessed grave chambers were the first to be cut, the loculi being cut later. Finally, when all space had been used, a grave trough was cut into the shaft floor.

¹⁸ The incense shovel is almost identical with one of the three found hidden by the followers of Bar-Kokhba, A.D. 132-135 (see Yigael Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba* [New York, 1971], p. 109).