

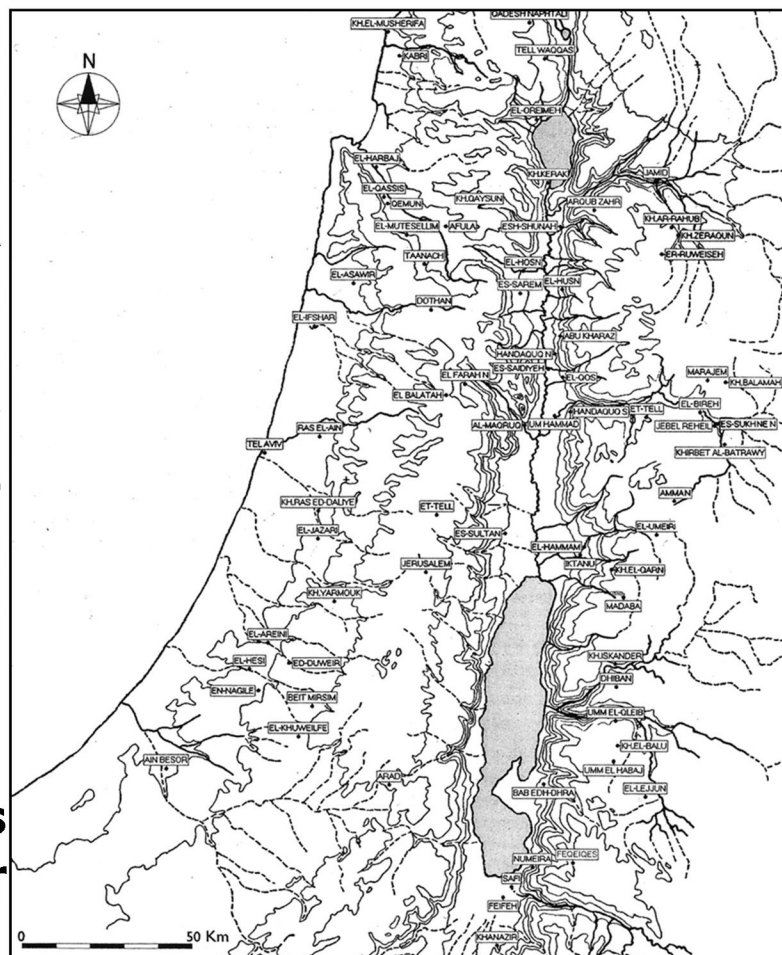
BURIAL PRACTICES AND DEVIANT BURIALS AT TELL ES-SULTAN, ANCIENT JERICHO IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

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THE JERICHO NECROPOLIS

Tell es-Sultan is one of the sites with the longest stratigraphic sequence of the Near East. During the excavations, close to the tell, a huge necropolis was found, at first used by a large family group and then by the entire community. The necropolis was in use from the Early Bronze Age up to the Late Bronze Age. The EBA phases of the Jericho necropolis allow to understand the socio-economic structure and ideology of the community lived at the site, at the very beginning of the first urban experience in Southern Levant (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1- Settlement and necropolis in EBA Southern Levant (after Nigro 2005, pl. I).



JERICHO TOMB A AND THE CASE OF BURIAL N. 24

J. Garstang excavations in 1930s revealed two Early Bronze I tombs west of the tell, the most important one is Tomb A (Fig. 2).



The number of dead, the large size of the funerary chamber, and the deep stratigraphy inside it, clearly indicate the intense use and the importance of Tomb A.

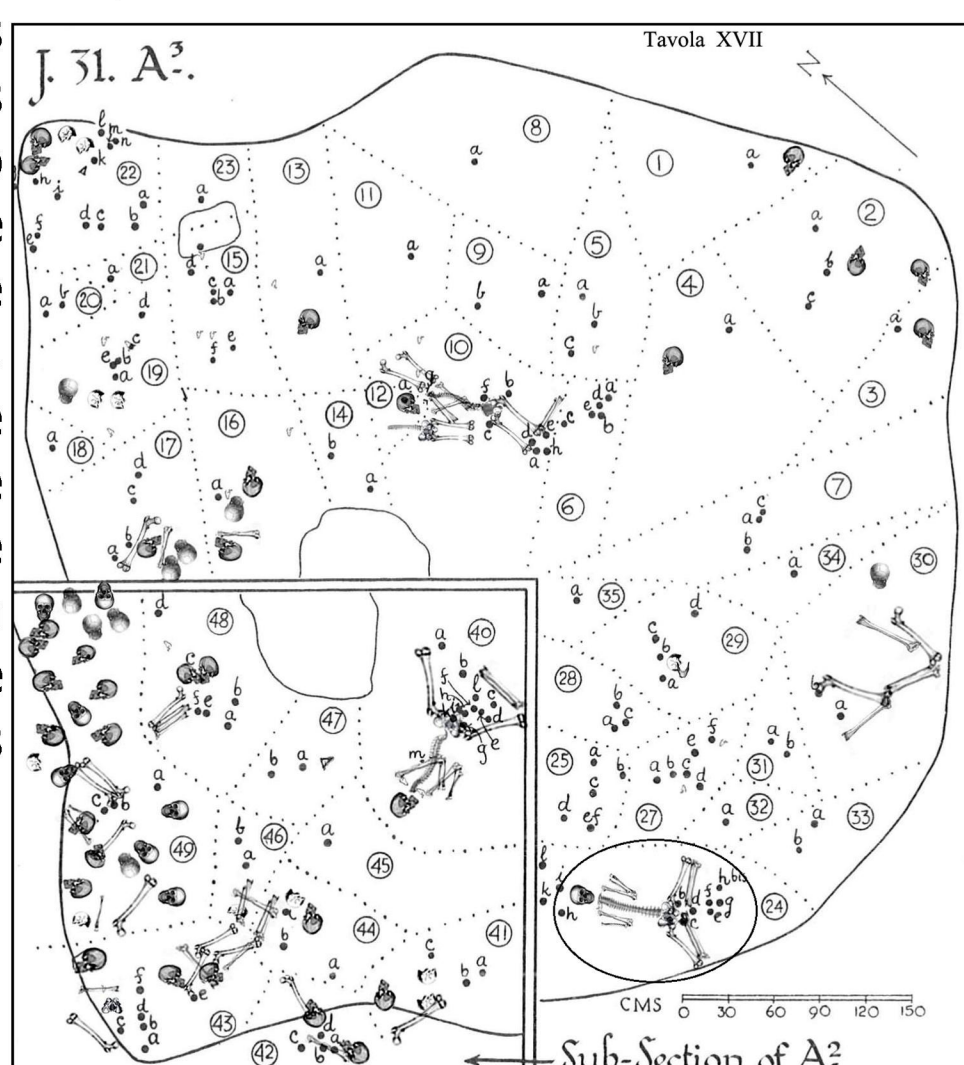
Fig. 2 - Tomb A during excavations (PEF).

Garstang first assumed that approximately five hundred individuals had been deposited inside the tomb; as the excavations continued the archaeologist proposed a different number, which was around three hundred burials (Garstang 1932). According to this stratigraphic reconstruction, below the collapsed roof, there are five layers and one "sub-layer", each one assigned to a number of burials consisting of bones depositions and funerary sets.

Inside Tomb A two examples of deviant burials were recognized. The most important one is a distinguished burial found in Layer 3 (Fig. 3), named deposition n. 24 (section 24, layer 3), which is dated to the Early Bronze IB and represents the earliest in primary deposition in Tomb A. The body was found near the southern wall of the room, with legs crossed each other, arms raised and head facing to NW. Eight jars were disposed between the legs, close to the basin, and four vessels were around the head. A mace head, unique in the whole tomb, was recovered in between the legs of the dead, distinctive of his rank.

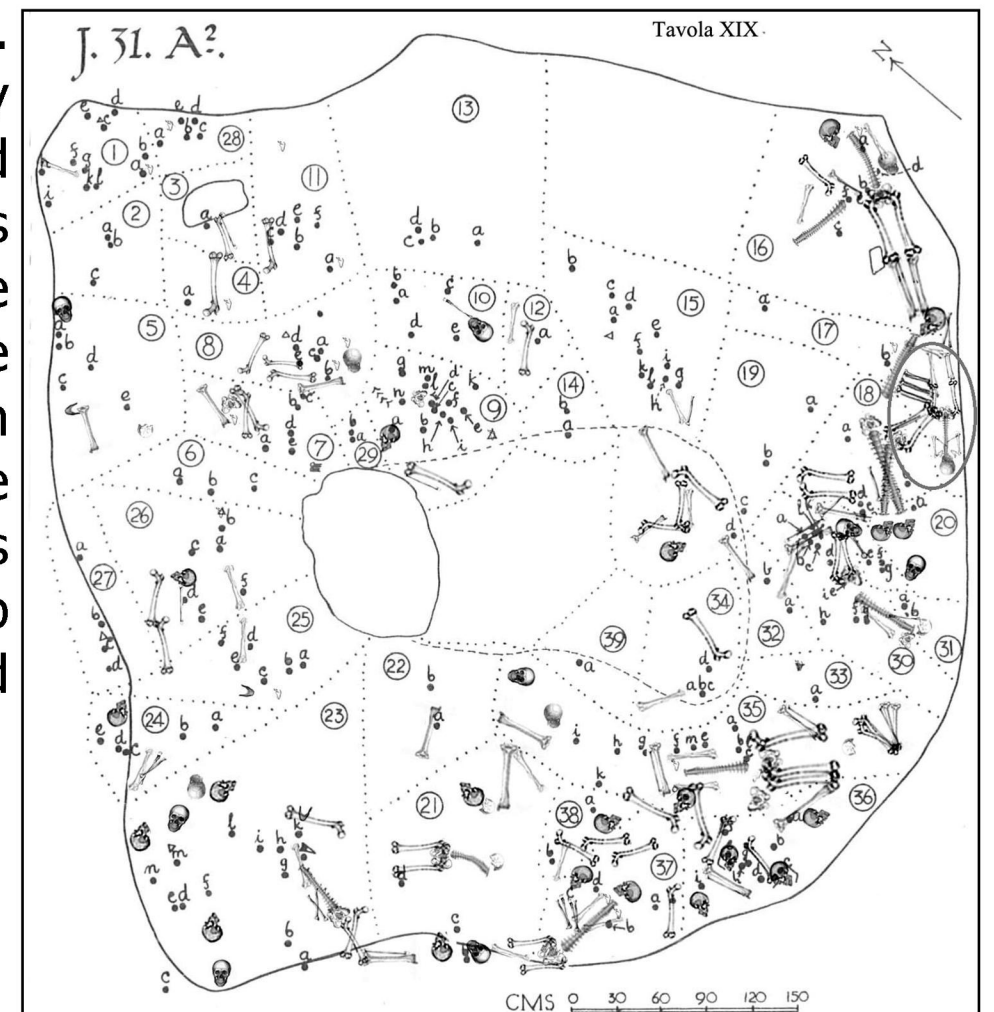
Another deviant burial was found in sector 17, layer 2 (Fig. 4). In this case the individual was buried face down, with the arms crossed on the chest. This particular funerary deposition is attested only in this case, and it is interpreted as a negative connotation of the position of the dead in the society. Is strange that this individual was buried in a familiar tomb rather than in an isolated space.

Fig. 3 - Layer 3+2b with Burial n. 24(drawing by the author).



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Fig. 4 - Layer A2 with Burial n. 17(drawing by the author).



THE INTERPRETATION OF BURIAL N. 24

The deviant character of this burial is indicate by its particular position and the type of the findings composing the funerary set. The body was outstretched, with raised arms and flexed legs, and this position can be considered a *unicum* in Southern Levant (Ilan 2002). Furthermore, the association to this burial of a piriform mace-head suggests the lineage of chief for the dead (Fig. 5). Based on comparisons with the Stele of Arad, this personage was associated with a priest (Polcaro 2005; 2006). This deduction has been possible by identifying the particular position of the arms of dead n. 24, with a gesture of adoration or prayer for a god, a gesture that could only be performed by a religious official. In fact, the position taken by a common individual during the prayer was different. Iconographic evidences, especially from cylinder seals, show man praying on their knees or with hands up to the face. The particular position and the unusual funerary gifts, such as the stone mace-head, allow to recognize the different social role played by the dead, a chief or a leader in the proto-urban community of Jericho at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age.

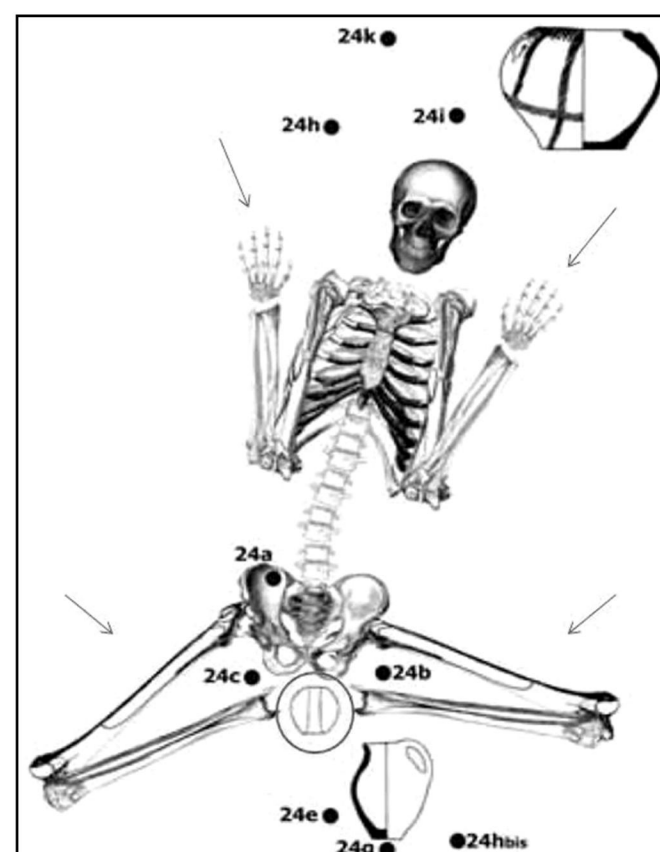


Fig. 5 - Burial 24 (after Polcaro 2005, fig. 3.50).

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