

NECROPOLIS AREA F

DEWEY M. BEEGLE

Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

The eight tombs excavated were all in the Necropolis Area F, about 660 meters southwest of the acropolis (see Fig. 1). Five were clustered to the north and northwest of the swinging-door Tomb F.5 (see Fig. 9), and the other three about 105 meters southwest of it.

Of the two basic tomb types, the more common was the *vertical-shaft tomb*. The simpler form of this was a rectangular shaft cut vertically into the limestone, much like an ordinary grave today. The more complex form had a deep shaft which widened out near the bottom on each long side into a small arcosolium-like alcove, with a curved or arched ceiling. A rectangular grave was cut into the floor of each alcove. The upper part of the shaft was cut out a little wider. On the ledge thus formed, stone slabs were laid and covered with earth to ground level. The second basic type was the *chamber tomb with loculi*. Entrance was through a doorway and down steps leading into a main chamber with a square, shallow central pit. The graves consisted of a number of loculi, shafts cut horizontally into three walls at floor level and extending lengthwise at right angles to the walls.

In order to gain as accurate a picture as possible of the history of each tomb, great care was taken to excavate the earth fill stratigraphically. Then the fill was sifted locus by locus for pottery, objects, and bones.

At the beginning of the season, in preparation for continuing the work of 1971, Philip Hammond and his University of Utah team conducted magnetometer and resistivity tests in a sector 10 x 30 m., running northeast to southwest, just to the west of

Tomb F.5. The magnetometer survey results were not useful, but the resistivity chart indicated three or four likely tomb locations.

Tombs F.11a and F.11b.—One of the best prospects for finding other tombs was a sector northwest of Tomb F.5. Moving the 1971 dump north of this tomb revealed two vertical shafts, c. 50 m. deep, to bedrock. The dominant and latest pottery in each was Byzantine. The absence of bones indicated that the shafts were never used as graves, or were thoroughly cleaned out before filling.

Tomb F.12.—During excavation near the bottom of Tomb F.11a, hollow sounds indicated a chamber of some sort underneath. When a probe was made from the ground surface north of F.11a, a vertical-shaft Tomb F.12 was uncovered (see Fig. 9), filled with two separate Byzantine layers of soil (with bone fragments) sealing both graves. It is possible that during the Byzantine period the bones from F.11a and F.11b were deposited in F.12 to prevent further desecration and then covered with earth. Analysis of the thoroughly disarticulated bones in the graves indicated at least thirteen burials (nine adults and four children). One child's skull had the unusual feature of a vertical frontal suture. This could indicate a relationship to the family group buried in rolling-stone Tomb F.1, where six of the individuals (children and adults) had this rare cranial feature.

The pottery of both graves in F.12 was Byzantine or earlier. Four unreadable, lepton-like Roman coins were found. Their presence may reflect the Graeco-Roman custom of putting a coin in the mouth to pay Charon for ferrying the shade across the Styx. The bottom of the shaft, not used as a grave, yielded a crushed Late Roman lamp.

The coins and lamp date the construction and first use of the tomb in the late Roman period. After some reuse the tomb was robbed in either the very late Roman or the early Byzantine period. Later the two graves and the bottom of the shaft were filled; later yet, still within the Byzantine period, the tomb was

filled completely. There was no indication of later reopening.

Quarry F.13 and Tomb F.14.—Under the dump north of Tomb F.5 was found a north-south cut in the bedrock. A probe, labeled F.13, turned out to be a rock-and-earth-filled quarry. However, at its bottom was a breakthrough into a tomb chamber. This was not far from Tomb F.5, where in the process of excavation in 1971 the floor in the northwest corner of the main chamber gave way and revealed a small hollow chamber. Investigation in 1973 proved it to be the *loculus* of another tomb. Its western end had been blocked by large stones. Now a trench west of F.5 allowed location of the entrance of this Tomb, F.14.

A stepped entranceway behind the large slab that sealed Tomb F.14 was filled solid. At the left (north) of the entrance in the main chamber was a mound of rocky fill. Layers of soil covered it and filled the rest of the chamber up to the ceiling. Rodent tunnels, interlacing the fill, had caused some bone disturbance and mixing of small sherds among the layers. The tomb had three *loculi* each on the south, east, and north sides. These were numbered counterclockwise from south to north. In the southeast corner, *Loculi* 3 and 4 were blocked off by the large stones discovered from the breakthrough from Tomb F.5. Other stones above them indicated that they were shoring to prevent the collapse of the ceiling (Plate IX:A).

Underneath the fill on the north side of the chamber was a thick layer of limestone from a massive collapse of the ceiling. At the northeast corner of the chamber was the breakthrough from the bottom of the Quarry F.13. Because the rocky fill in the north half of the chamber continued up through the large hole where the ceiling had once collapsed, excavation of Quarry F.13 was continued to the west to remove the fill over the tomb, thereby lessening the danger of collapse while digging from inside the tomb.

Two crushed, but restorable, two-handled Byzantine pots were found under the fill in front of *Locus* 2, and a whole carinated

Byzantine bowl was discovered under the limestone roof fall in front of Loculus 7. All the pottery of the pit¹ was Byzantine.

Loculi 1 and 2, filled with earth, contained no objects or bones; they were probably never used as graves. Fill from the main chamber spilled partly into Loculi 5-9, blocking the entrances.

Loculi 5-8 contained some bones, apparently one burial in each, but they were very friable. Further, they lay under slabs of limestone which had pulled loose from the ceilings of the loculi, apparently when the chamber ceiling collapsed. Loculus 9, which had no bones, had a small hole in the rear, opening into a loculus of another tomb.

Although loculus-type tombs were in style during the Early Roman period, exemplified by Tombs F.1, F.6, and F.8, excavated in 1971, the pottery evidence of Tomb F.14 quite conclusively dates its latest use in the Byzantine period. Tombs F.14 and F.6 are similar in size, in having nine loculi similarly oriented, and in having no stones sealing the loculi. One clear difference is that while Tomb F.6 had four lamp niches cut above the loculi, two with "Herodian" lamps still *in situ*, Tomb F.14 had no lamp niches, and no lamps or lamp fragments.

Assuming that Tomb F.14 was later than Tomb F.5, apparently one of the workmen cutting out Loculus 3 of Tomb F.14 cut through the rock of the ceiling and into the chink stones and fill under the north end of the threshold stone of Tomb F.5. To prevent ceiling collapse, Loculus 3 was filled with earth, and then stone shoring was installed, thereby blocking access to Loculi 3 and 4. The fact that the east edge of the central pit was jogged slightly to the west, to clear the northernmost base-stone of the shoring, was taken as an indication that the shoring was constructed before the completion of the tomb.

¹ It should be noted that in the preliminary report on Area F in 1971, this type of pit was interpreted "as a sump, so that water seepage would not affect the burials" (AUSS, 11 [1973]: 115 and note 5). Since some of the *Heshbān* tomb loculi, especially in F.18, sloped away from the center and showed evidence of pools that had formed over the years, this interpretation may not be valid.

Evidently only one burial had been deposited in each of Loculi 5-8 when portions of the ceiling collapsed. It was difficult to ascertain whether robbers had gained entry before the collapse. Though this cave-in could have resulted from the work in the quarry above, the thickness of the roof fall suggested a severe tremor as the cause (perhaps the great earthquake of A.D. 365).

Not long after, the rocky fill was dumped into the tomb and the quarry above. The fill spilled into the northern loculi and formed a mound up to the ceiling break. In addition, earth layers were spread to the east and south of the rocky fill, some of them running into the loculi. Several centuries later, during the Ayyūbid/Mamlūk period, the tomb was discovered and filled to the ceiling. Then the entranceway was filled with earth, the stone slab sealed in place, and the antechamber filled in. Islamic concern to prevent desecration of the dead probably accounted for the care in filling and sealing the tomb.

Tombs F.15 and F.17—While the main crew was searching for the entrance to Tomb F.14, Helmi Musa, a Ta'amireh bedouin, was assigned to probe for other tombs. About 105 m. southwest of Tomb F.14 he uncovered vertical-shaft Tomb F.15 (Plate X:B). Probably because the north alcove had broken into the chamber of another tomb, no alcove was cut into the south face. The absence of bones or objects may indicate that the tomb was never used. The pottery in the fill, Byzantine and earlier, apparently dates the tomb in the Byzantine period.

A probe to the north of Tomb F.15 uncovered F.17, another vertical-shaft tomb (Pl. X:B). Both alcoves, thoroughly disturbed, yielded some bone fragments, but no objects. In the bottom of the shaft the lack of bones or objects indicated no burial. The pottery, none later than Byzantine in either the shaft or side graves, indicated Byzantine construction and use—earlier, however, than Tomb F.15. At least one individual was buried in each grave, but the thorough disturbance of the interior made it uncertain whether there were more than one. Tomb F.17, though designed like the Late Roman Tomb F.12, contained no lamps or lamp fragments.

Tomb F.16.—A few meters west of Tombs F.15 and F.17, at the base of the limestone terrace into which they were cut, Helmi Musa found vertical-shaft Tomb F.16, with a partly articulated skeleton in the east grave. Beneath were other skeletons, badly decomposed and mixed, which could not be accurately separated. Four unreadable coins were found. Bone analysis indicated five individuals in the east grave: the uppermost, a male, aged about 18 or 19, and, beneath him two adult males and two infants. The adults lay one on top of the other, separated by thin layers of earth.

The west grave contained the thoroughly disturbed bones of four adults, a child and an infant. One of the skulls had a vertical frontal suture like the child in Tomb F.12. Objects found included some jewelry, two whole glass vases, a Byzantine unguentarium, one Late Roman coin, and one (Object No. 1529) of Honorius, A.D. 395-423, early Byzantine. This legible coin and all the pottery indicated that the tomb was used in the Early Byzantine period and reused over a number of years.

The bottom of the shaft, without bones or objects, was probably never a grave.

Tomb F.18.—From the photographs and inspections made through the enlarged breakthrough from Loculus 9 in Tomb F.14 (Plate IX:B) it was possible to estimate the size of Tomb F.18. Our north-south probe trench intersected the rectangular antechamber with the sealing stone chinked in place. The stepped entranceway was packed with earth fill, but inside the chamber the fill, unlike that in Tomb F.14, sloped downward away from the entrance on all sides. Another mound of fill in the southeast corner had resulted from soil washed down through rodent tunnels in the ceiling. The back of Loculus 5 had some earth fill from the breakthrough from Loculus 9 of Tomb F.14. Over the eastern two-thirds of the chamber a thick layer of limestone roof fall separated the fill in the pit from the later layers above.

Loculus 1 held the bones of one adult, and one gold earring. The rest of the loculi (2-4) on the south side had no bones, but they may have been removed previously because a number of bones were found scattered along the south side of the pit. Loculus 3 had the largest collection of artifacts in the whole tomb (jewelry together with a number of whole pottery and glass vessels). Loculi 5-8, on the east side, had at least one adult burial in each grave, but two of them were buried with the feet toward the opening and the other two with the head toward the opening. Loculi 9-12, on the north side, sloped down away from the tomb center (Pl X:A), and Loculus 10 showed marks indicating that pools of water had formed at various times. Early burials in each loculus had been pushed to the rear in preparation for later burials, but such were not found in Loculi 9 and 12. The bone fragments in Loculus 9 did not comprise a complete skeleton. Either they were deposited in it from elsewhere in the tomb, or the skull and long bones had been removed. The practice of preserving the bones after the decay of the flesh was widespread during the Early Roman period in Palestine, but there was no clear evidence of this custom at Heshbon in Roman times. The infant bones in the Early Roman pot of Loculus 5 indicated concern, though the practice, if such it was, differed from usual patterns.

Tomb F.18 was well cut, with large loculi, most of which measured .50 x 1.00 x 2.00 m. The construction and first use of the tomb in the Early Roman period was quite evident from the three pots, two lamps, and six (Nabatean) coins, the latter from the reign of Aretas IV (9 B.C.-A.D. 40). Some of the glass vases found in the tomb may have come from this time. It was not possible to say how many of the loculi were used as graves in this period, since some of the pottery came from the main chamber. Moreover, some vessels may have been moved from one loculus to another. In general, however, it appeared that later users respected previous burials and artifacts (e.g. the infant bones in

the Early Roman pot). Whether robbers entered the tomb in the Early Roman period was uncertain.

A cooking pot, cup, unguentarium, and lamps indicated clearly that the tomb was used again in the Late Roman period. Pottery in the upper layers of the pit showed that the ceiling fell in near the end of the Late Roman or early in the Byzantine period. The amount of limestone roof fall (plus that in some of the loculi) indicated a rather severe disturbance, though with less destruction than in Tomb F.14. It is quite possible that the severe earthquake of A.D. 365 was responsible for the collapse of the ceilings in both Tomb F.14 and Tomb F.18.

Some whole Byzantine vessels (two-handled pot and trumpet-base lamp) and single gold earrings in four separated loculi² indicated use also in the Byzantine period. When it was decided to abandon the tomb, earth fill in two layers, consistently Byzantine, was deposited, but whether at the same time is not certain. Locus F.18:6 contained some Umayyad and also Ayyūbid/Mamlūk sherds. These, if not intrusive, would indicate that both topmost layers were deposited between A.D. 1187 and 1441. There was no evidence that the tomb was reused during this period, though apparently someone discovered the tomb and made an inspection. Since the Byzantine fill did not cover the entrance completely, more was added. Unlike Tomb F.14, however, F.18 was not filled to the ceiling, but to the top of the inside entrance; the entranceway was packed solidly, the seal slab chinked into place, and the antechamber filled in. The tomb escaped subsequent disturbance until the official tomb excavators of 1973 came on the scene.

²The Amman Museum has similar earrings from Jerash dated 5th-6th century A.D. Since, as in Tomb F.18, only one earring was found with each burial, it was apparently a Byzantine custom to bury the deceased with a single earring.