

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE BURIALS IN THE SOUTHERN LEVANT: SPARTAN WARRIORS OR ORDINARY PEOPLE?

Summary. Intermediate and Middle Bronze Age tombs with weapons (mainly daggers) in the southern Levant were often interpreted as 'warrior graves'. Taking into consideration new data from Rishon Le-Zion (Israel), recent work on early warfare and warriors, and a study of so-called 'warrior graves' in Mesopotamia (Rehm 2003), we suggest that most of these graves are not graves of elite warriors, but typical male burials. We also discuss the assumed 'burial kit' and the decline in numbers of weapons per burial, which is in our view related to the shift from individual burials (in the Intermediate Bronze and Middle Bronze IIA periods) to multiple shaft burials (in the Middle Bronze IIB period).

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE 'WARRIOR GRAVES'

Over the last decade there has been growing interest in the study of early warfare, and warriors are 'in' again (Vandkilde 2013, 64). Hence, the so-called 'warrior tombs' of the Intermediate Bronze (IB) and Middle Bronze II (MBII) periods in the southern Levant deserve reassessment.¹

In the past, people of the IB Age in the Levant were seen as nomadic Amorites (Kenyon 1957, 197; Mazar 1968, 3–4). They conquered and destroyed the Early Bronze Age urban culture, so they had to be warriors. In contrast to Early Bronze Age tombs, hundreds of weapons, mainly daggers, were found in their graves, and thus the graves were interpreted as warrior graves (e.g. Yadin 1963, 61; Amiran and Kochavi 1985, 363; Gophna 1982, 125; Prag 1971, 315, though she spoke only of some groups, not all burials).

Today it is clear that the IB Age population included sedentary people and even a few towns (Prag 1974; Dever 1980; Greenhut 1995, 30; Sala 2012; Greener 2012). For the MBII B period, the Hyksos were seen as a warrior elite, responsible for chariot warfare and the huge earth fortifications of this period (Burke 2004, 12–17; 2008; Uziel 2010). However, the population as a whole was seen as peaceful (e.g. Kenyon 1957, 148–78). Nevertheless, various MBII tombs with weapons were interpreted as warrior tombs, for example at Tell el-'Ajjul:

1 We use the nomenclature Intermediate Bronze Age (termed also EB4 or MB1) and Middle Bronze Age IIA–B (sometimes called MB1 and MB2, or MBIIA–B–C).

Could it not be, however, that this warrior and others like him, armed with a dagger and spear or axe, were buried ready and equipped for battle, the left hand resting on a dagger at the waist, and in the case of Tomb 1417 and of the upper burial in Tomb 308, with the right arm extended to hold a weapon of some kind? (Tufnell 1962, 5, fig. 4; cf. Robertson 1999).

The term ‘warrior graves’ was used in sophisticated studies of the metallurgy of the weapons (Philip 1989, 99–100; 1995, 140),² and remains in use today. An elite MBII grave at Tel Arqa (Lebanon) is defined as a ‘warrior burial’. Perhaps so, but the excavator suggests that warrior burials are ‘widely distributed at the very beginning of the second millennium from northern Palestine to northern Syria and Baghouz on the Euphrates’ (Thalman 2010, 98; Gernez 2008, 226, 261).³ Similarly, Montanari (2013, 109 n. 37) sees weapons in tombs as the private property of warriors, so the tombs are warrior tombs. In his view, ‘only a single ranged weapon was usually added to warrior burial . . . [so] warriors existed with specific weaponry, possibly depending on their specialization’ (Montanari 2013, 110). In theory, there could be dagger-warriors, javelin-warriors and spearhead-warriors. However, the weapons are not ‘added to warrior burials’; rather, they are the sole evidence for interpreting burials as ‘warrior burials’.

In 2001, Garfinkel made an important observation concerning 13 MBIIA burials at Gesher (Galilee). Half of the males were warriors, if we identify warriors based on weapons in graves. This percentage is too high; it ‘could not represent a segregated class of warriors. It rather suggests that most of the [should be added: *male*] adult population carried arms’ (Garfinkel 2001, 155; cf. Garfinkel and Cohen 2007, 63).

Yet Garfinkel continued calling these tombs ‘warrior tombs’. Nowadays scholars stress symbolic and ideological aspects of burial. According to Hallote, finding perceptions of weapons by MB people is a straightforward matter:

Tombs from the early part of the MBA, the MBIIA (ca. 2000–1750), contained a proportionally larger amount of weapons than tombs from later in the period, the MBIIb and MBIIc (together ca. 1750–1550) . . . The early abundance of weapons could represent the way in which individuals perceived important or elite members of their own groups, namely as warriors. This perception existed in spite of the presence of only a few well fortified cities and the lack of historically known enemies in this period, facts which suggest that fighting was not a major part of daily life. The MBIIA battles that did exist were probably relatively minor, yet were endowed with enough significance to cause members of the society to perceive themselves as soldiers or warriors (Hallote 1995, 96).

This is possible, but the perceived ‘abundance’ is relative (to other periods) and found in tombs, not in daily life. Since the MBII period is almost devoid of written sources, who can tell if enemies were lacking? Why should minor battles produce ‘enough significance’? The assumed abundance of weapons, perceptions about warriors and significance of battles recall the modern USA, with its abundance of weapons in daily life – although USA battles since Vietnam have been minor. Imagine if archaeologists were one day to excavate the pistols, guns and machine guns in domestic USA houses, but find no written sources. They might suggest that all Americans perceived themselves as warriors.

2 We cited Philip, because his seminal work on metal weapons is now a ‘classic’.

3 A new study of ‘warrior tombs’ (Gernez 2014) is not yet available to us.

Numbers of tombs with weapons remained roughly constant in the MBIIA (13 per cent) and the MBIIB periods (15 per cent). Yet in MBIIA tombs weapons form 20 per cent of all items, while in the MBIIB–C only 2 per cent (Hallote 1995, 112). This is related to the fact that ‘new’ items appear in MBIIB–C tombs (scarabs, pins, bone inlays, etc.). Hallote concludes:

The intent of the populace of the Southern Levant was no longer to portray itself as military . . . Prestige items, the symbols of the wealth and prosperity of a ruling class, began to predominate over weapons and subsistence items . . . These were the new symbols of social status, which rose in proportion to the decline of weapons as tomb items. While in MBIIA the society had intended to be perceived as militarily oriented, in the MBIIB and MBIIC periods the elite image was civilian and power-oriented (Hallote 1995, 113–14; cf. Hallote 2002).⁴

Possibly so, but what is a ‘civilian and power-oriented’ elite image? Are weapons not prestige items related to power too? The assumed symbolism is perceived as intentional: a population ‘intended to portray itself’ as a militaristic one. Where was the audience for this show off, since in the tombs the weapons were invisible to the living?

Burke (2004) did not discuss the term ‘warrior graves’ in detail, since his study was focused on siege warfare. Yet, occasionally he seems to accept that ‘warrior graves’ indicate a warrior class (Burke 2004, 85, 92 table 3, 82 n. 35). Burke suggested that in the later MB period:

The status of elite professional warrior may no longer have been associated with the spear, ax, and dagger, but instead became identified with the composite bow and chariot. Spears may have become so ubiquitous that they were no longer symbols of a privileged warrior class and thus are not represented in tomb assemblages (Burke 2004, 85).⁵

This is a possible explanation and a sophisticated one too. Notice how the evidence can be read in opposite ways. While some scholars interpreted weapons in tombs as a direct reflection of common use by warriors in life, Burke interpreted the *lack* of spears in tombs as reflecting their common use in life. Compare Wengrow’s (2011) ‘archival’ and ‘sacrificial’ model – weapons in the archaeological record may relate to various economic, symbolic or ritualistic patterns (Needham 2001; Gauthier 2007; Hakulin 2013, 25–6). However, Burke’s words reflect agreement with those who see ‘warrior graves’ as evidence for a class of warriors. Moreover, if bows and chariots became dominant in warfare and as status markers, people could have expressed this in tombs. Wooden bows would not have survived, but metal or bone arrowheads would. Furthermore, chariot warriors still need personal, short-range weapons, so why should daggers ‘disappear’ from tombs?

Cohen (2012, 307, 310) spoke about a ‘warrior burial’ tradition as an expression of a ‘specific class of individual’. She suggests that the decline of ‘warrior burials’ relates to changes in military considerations and practices of warfare; it may even reflect a decline in the status of the warrior (Cohen 2012, 312). However, we have no evidence that the MBIIB period was more peaceful than the IB or MBIIA period. The huge MBIIB fortifications and development of chariot warfare do not suit a decline in the status of warriors.

Biblical scholars have inherited the term ‘warrior graves’ from archaeologists. Smith (2014, 24) writes, ‘In the Middle Bronze Age, the Levant attests to what is characterized by

4 The data were first presented in Hallote’s Ph.D. thesis (1994, 76–83, 168–9); see also Singer-Avitz 2004, 1005.

5 For a similar view of chariot warfare as a reason for the change in tomb weapons, see Cathran 2004, 122.

archaeologists as warrior burials, defined as “burials interred with artifacts whose design indicates ‘weapon’ as their primary function”⁵. He is sceptic, he notices the difficulties, but does not criticize this definition.

In 2003, Ellen Rehm published a study of Mesopotamian and Syrian ‘warrior graves’, which received little attention by archaeologists of the southern Levant. Rehm did not base her conclusions on population estimates (since in her view the statistics are not reliable). She compared weapons from so-called ‘warrior graves’ with those depicted in other sources of the same period. In ‘warrior-graves’, one finds mainly axes and daggers, but warfare in the same period employed mainly lances, shields, bows and helmets, and axes only as additional weapons. Rehm concluded:

Es sich bei den Waffengräbern nicht um Kriegergräber handelt. Wahrscheinlich sind die Waffen – hier sind besonders Axt und Dolch zu nennen – als Kennzeichen einer gesellschaftlichen Gruppe zu deuten, die vielleicht viele Generationen lang mit dem Kriegshandelwerk verbunden war, für die nun aber die Waffen wohl nur noch als Statussymbole galten (Rehm 2003, 138).

Rehm suggested that weapons used by ‘real’ warriors were not private weapons, unlike privately owned daggers and axes in ‘warrior graves’. Here too questions arise. Was warfare in ancient periods limited to professional armies? War must have reached ordinary people too. While certain sophisticated military items, such as battering rams and chariots, were probably supplied by royal courts, simpler weapons – including long-range ones like bows and slings – could be privately owned. What defines a warrior? Is it the type of weapon, the social status, or perhaps personal characteristics like physical ability and courage?

ELITE AND PART-TIME WARRIORS

It seems to us that two sorts of warriors should be differentiated, even if crudely (cf. Sarauw 2007; Vandkilde 2006). Specialized or elite warriors are those who lead active military lives, forming a class which encompasses a minor segment of society, part of the elite (they do not have to be ‘full-time’ warriors). Part-time warriors include, in principle, all the able-bodied adult males. They lead peaceful lives, but can take an active role in wars and battles whenever these occur. They can belong to various classes, but most are not elite members. Women can be warriors of both types (Jordan 2009), but most warriors are male.

Graves with outstanding military equipment (in comparison with other graves in the same culture) can be graves of elite warriors (Vandkilde 2013, 45–6), for example Kelvedon in Essex (Sealey 2007), or a grave from Kazakhstan of a man equipped with a helmet, quiver, arrows, sword and sabres, and buried beside a gilded-harnessed horse (Holloway 2014).⁶ Compare the fabulous swords in the shaft tombs of Mycenae. One may debate whether they belonged to the dead or to mourners and whether they were practical weapons, status/wealth symbols, ritual objects, etc. (Gauthier 2007, 90–9, 126–8; Harrell 2014). Yet, these were objects of elite warriors, though maybe some elite members only posed as warriors.

Discussing warriors in the Bronze Age Baltic region, Čivilyte asks rhetorically, ‘is a warrior without a weapon not a warrior?’ In this region, unlike other regions of Europe, weapons

6 Perhaps Late Bronze Age stunning bolts mark elite warfare too (Genz 2007).

in graves are rare and hence also ‘warrior graves’. Čivilyte suggests that there were warriors, who used stone, bone and wood instead of bronze weapons. Yet, concerning her question, warriors can be defined in the archaeological record mainly on the basis of military equipment. A lack of weapons does not rule out warriors – it is only negative evidence. The presence of weapons in tombs is not a guarantee of warriors either, since weapons may represent symbolic personae, deposits of wealth/status, ritualistic customs, etc. (Needham 2001; Gauthier 2007; Hakulin 2013). When Čivilyte (2007, 41) writes that any bronze weapon, even a simple spearhead, is ‘an inseparable element of elite society’, it may be true where bronze weapons are rare. In IB–MBII southern Levant they are not.⁷

There is no reason to doubt that warriors existed in the Baltic region during the Bronze Age, as in most human societies since the beginning of history. Which kind of warriors? We like to view our ancestors as great warriors, rather than as peaceful pastoralists. The question of warrior identity in ancient societies is often related to our identities, while societies are not monoliths of either ‘noble warriors’ or ‘peaceful farmers’ (Vandkilde 2006; 2013, 54–5).

Skogstrand’s (2010) gender criticism of studies on warfare and warriors in northern Bronze Age Europe is eye-opening. In one 1960s study, the warrior figure is ‘just the box into which weapons and related status objects are sorted . . . more a label or a tag than a role or a social category, because except for weapons it doesn’t have any content’ (Skogstrand 2010, 62). A new study is explicit about the warrior as male, but ‘does not seem to realize that males usually constitute only half of the population, and consequently that most women and probably some or even many men were not warriors’ (Skogstrand 2010, 63–4). In addition, ‘the existence of the warrior (or hunter) is a premise for the interpretations of weapons in male burials, not a conclusion of the discussion of artefacts’ (Skogstrand 2010, 64). Does it sound familiar in the context of Levantine ‘warrior burials’?

Distinguishing between specialized/elite and part-time warriors is sometimes feasible according to military gear. As Rehm (2003) observed, major battle ‘gadgets’ in early Mesopotamia included lances, bows, shields and helmets; axes and daggers played only secondary roles. For the MB southern Levant, the bow and the sling provided the greatest firepower and range. The spear and the axe came next, while daggers were useful only in hand-to-hand fighting (Burke 2004, 58–69, 82–6); similarly in early Greece (Finney 2005, 97–119: bows, spears, swords) and prehistoric Europe (Vandkilde 2013, 48: axes, bows, swords, spears). In the Hebrew Bible too, the dominant weapons were bows, swords and spears (Finney 2005, 77–96),⁸ to which should be added chariots and later cavalry as major battle gear.

The Hyksos are often portrayed as the elite of chariot warriors, and MBII burials of *equids* appear in the southern Levant at Tell el-‘Ajjul, Tell Jemmeh, Jericho Tomb J3, Accho and Tel Haror (add perhaps Holyland in Jerusalem, Milevski *et al.* 2010, 403; and Rishon Le-Zion, but very badly preserved and without clear connection with human burials).⁹ We speak about *equids*, since often the bones do not offer precise identification of species. In Egypt, *equid* burials are found in Tell el-Maskhuta and Tell el-Dab’a – in the last, donkey burials were discovered in pairs near entrances to tombs (Tufnell 1962, 4; Wapnish 1997; Oren 1997, 265–6, figs. 8.16–18;

7 So when weapons are common in (male) tombs and are not a rare item, there is no justification in speaking about ‘warriors’ (e.g. Longa 2011).

8 This study takes ‘Iron Age Israel’ (in fact, biblical Israel) as a test case for warfare in Iron Age southern England, but the main biblical weapons are portrayed with clarity.

9 Some *equid* burials are from the LB period, e.g. at Schechem and Tel Beth Shemesh.

Brink 1982, 46–7; Klenck 2002, 55; Schiestl 2002; Way 2006, 6–13, 137–70; 2010, 212–15; Forstner-Müller 2010, 132; Bar-Oz *et al.* 2013). Burials of humans with weapons near *equids* can indicate high status and a military role. Since such burials are rare, they reflect elite warriors. Other MBII objects that may reflect elite warriors are metal belts. Examples from the southern Levant are known from Jericho, Tell el-Far'ah, Jerusalem, and Fassuta; five belts have been found at Tell el-Dab'a in Egypt and four at Rishon Le-Zion (Keswani 2005, 392, fig. 16b; Gershuni and Aviam 2010, 35–8; Ziffer forthcoming). Such metal belts were costly and rare. They most likely belonged to elite warriors and were also markers of wealth/status.

Distinguishing elite from part-time warriors by different military gear is not an absolute matter. It must be judged separately for each culture and based on the relative distribution and amounts of various types of weaponry. For the MBII period, we have good evidence for elite warriors in the shape of rare 'gadgets' like belts, *equid* burials, etc. In the IB period, there is less evidence and one may doubt that elite warriors were a meaningful phenomenon (but perhaps burials with both a dagger and an axe or spear can fit such an interpretation). Our main concern is not with identifying elite graves and elite warriors, but with understanding hundreds of typical IB and MBII tombs called 'warrior burials'.

RISHON LE-ZION AND THE 'BURIAL KIT'

Salvage excavations in the 1990s at Rishon Le-Zion, near the Mediterranean coast south of Tel-Aviv, have revealed large and diversified Middle Bronze (MB) II cemeteries (Levi 1993; 2005; 2008). The burials were found in five areas (A–C, E–F). Determining the number of tombs depends to some extent on the way one defines a burial. If one considers only loci with remains of human skeletons (more than just a few small fragments), then at least 203 burials have been documented at Rishon Le-Zion with c.600 buried individuals. This is a minimum number, since the state of preservation of the anthropological remains was quite poor owing to the humid environment. In addition, the excavation did not cover the entire area. In salvage excavations, the nature and scope of development determine the location, size and even depth of the excavated areas. Thus, excavators are not free to address research issues at will.

Most of the graves at Rishon Le-Zion date to the transitional MBIIA–B and MBII B phases, but the cemetery had functioned since the MBIIA period. The tombs belong to two types:

- A) Pit tombs (Areas B, C and E, probably also Tomb F8; total 178 tombs): these are shallow, usually elongated pits, often found with a few *kurkar* (beach-rock) stones or mud-bricks along one side (Fig. 1). Parallels are found in the nearby cemeteries of Dharat el Humraiya (Ory 1948) and Tel Qasile (Kletter 2006).
- B) Shaft tombs (Areas A and F; total 23 tombs): these deep tombs cut through the *kurkar* layer to the red *hamra* soil underneath (Fig. 2). Usually they have several phases indicating continuous burial over time. The deceased are placed in burial niches curved from the shaft outwards.¹⁰ Similar MBII shaft tombs are common, for example at Tel-Aviv harbour (Kaplan 1955) and Jericho (Kenyon 1960; 1965).

Pit tombs include preliminary burials – skeletons in (full or partial) anatomical articulation. In some cases, there were later disturbances, or the skeletons could not be fully

¹⁰ Three jars, perhaps with burials of children, have been reported from area G, but as none could be excavated, their nature remains unclear.



Figure 1
Rishon Le-Zion, typical pit tomb, Area B Tomb B78 (photo: Tsila Sagiv).

exposed, but the deceased were interred in the pits as entire bodies, soon after death. Most pit tombs (122 out of 163 in Area B) included single burials, but about two dozen included two individuals, five included three individuals, and one included four (Figs. 3 and 4).

Shaft burials show preliminary burials too, sometimes resting in small groups side by side. However, here one finds also 'heaps' of secondary burials, with no (or little) anatomical articulation. Although it cannot be proved in each case, bones in the Rishon Le-Zion secondary burials were apparently not collected from bodies left to decay outside the tombs. Rather, bodies



Figure 2

Rishon Le-Zion, shaft tomb, Area F Tomb F9, burial niche L763 (photo: Tsila Sagiv).

were buried in the same tomb, but pushed aside (often carelessly) when space was required for new burials. Thus, bones were broken and several individuals mixed together. Sometimes, partial articulation is kept, indicating that bodies were moved from their primary burial place before the decay of the soft tissues.

The Rishon Le-Zion tombs show typical MBII burial customs. The most common type of find is pottery, placed near the head and feet of the deceased. The most popular vessel is the juglet (868 baskets, 37.2 per cent), followed by bowls (720, 30.8 per cent), jars/pithoi (537, 23

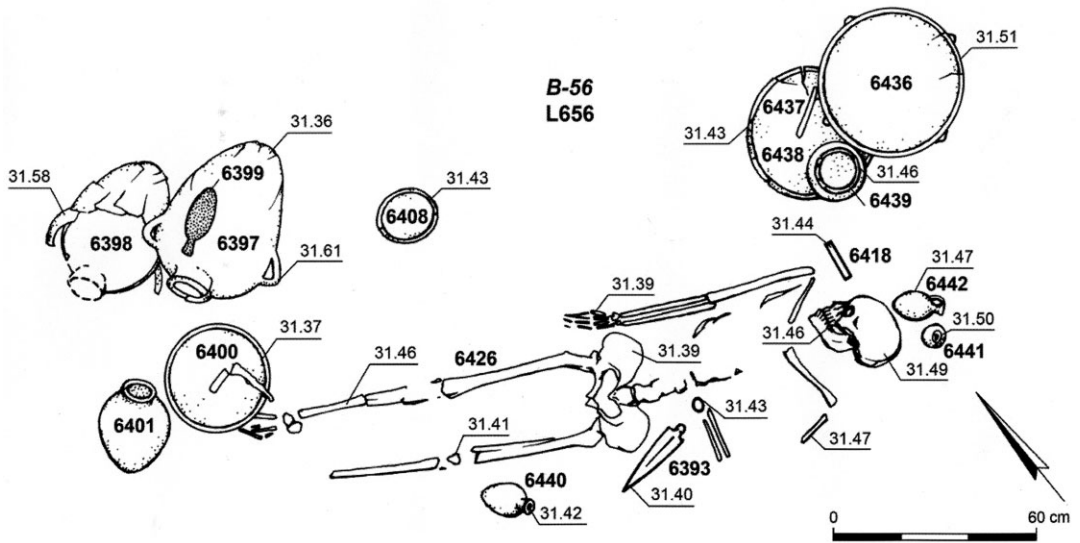


Figure 3
Plan of single-burial pit tomb, Area B Tomb B56 (drawing: Dov Porotzki).

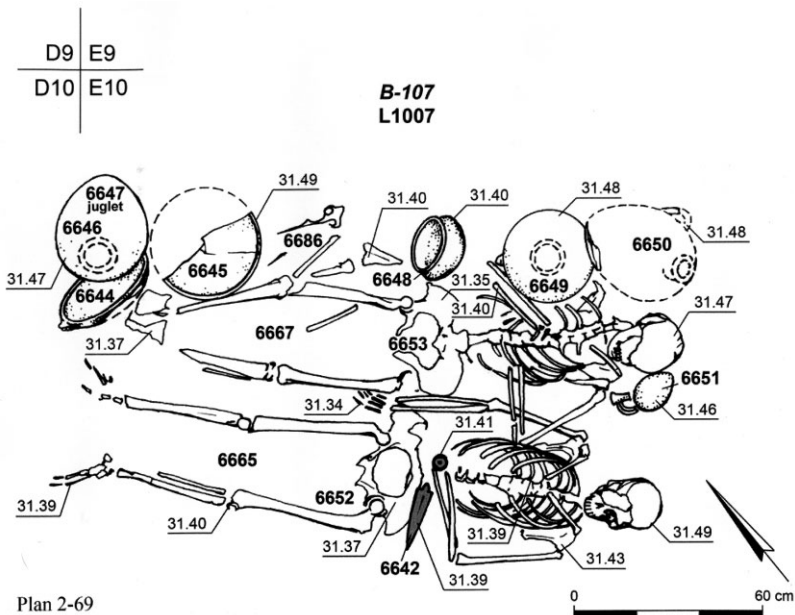


Figure 4
Plan of pit tomb with two burials, Area B Tomb B107 (drawing: Dov Porotzki).



Figure 5
Carinated bowl B8012, Tomb F4 L768 (photo: Clara Amit).



Figure 6
Large shallow bowl B7288, Tomb F2 L741 (photo: Clara Amit).

per cent) and jugs (171, 7.3 per cent) (Figs. 5–8). Jugs, carinated bowls and juglets (excluding dipper juglets) are more commonly placed near the head, while jars are typically found near the feet. Dipper juglets are evenly distributed. Some burials were accompanied by large parts of sheep/goats;¹¹ more often smaller parts were placed in bowls. These are not gifts to deities, but food for the deceased (Horwitz 1987; 2001). Some burials included special finds – scarabs (Fig. 9), silver objects, ostrich eggs, beads (Fig. 10), etc.

Scholars have defined burial kits as an average or typical set of finds (Maeir 1997, 325; Garfinkel 2001, 155; Garfinkel and Cohen 2007, 61; Baker 2012, 13). The data from Rishon Le-Zion suggest that tombs with multiple burials, especially those with several phases and heaps of secondary burials, are not a good source for the analysis of burial kits, because one cannot ascribe the finds to individual skeletons. There is no stratigraphy in the common sense of the term

11 Bones of goats and sheep are very similar, but sheep were more common in this area and period (Horwitz and Milevski 2001, 296, 299–300, fig. 4.16).



Figure 7
Tell el Yehudiyeh juglet B9149, Tomb B162 (photo: Clara Amit).

(Kenyon 1960, 264, 317, 395, 427; Hallote 1994, 71 n. 9), and the numbers of individuals in secondary heaps are not secure. Baker (2006; 2012) employs a ‘technical solution’, ascribing finds to the nearest skeleton/heap of bones. However, burials have been pushed aside and added, so measured distances do not reflect the original relations of finds and bones; one cannot assume that a certain find belongs to the nearest bones. Also, loci with multiple primary and secondary burials do not yield stable averages that can be considered typical. Each tomb or niche is different. For example, in the Rishon Le-Zion shaft tombs, one locus has an ‘average’ of 8–9 finds per burial; another with a similar number of burials yields very few finds, resulting in an ‘average’ of 1.4 finds per burial.

Even in pit tombs with single, preliminary burials (Area B), only a few items are shared by most tombs – mainly bowls, juglets and jars. Otherwise, there is no ‘typical kit’ in the sense



Figure 8
Jar B8111, Tomb F4 L769 (photo: Clara Amit).

of a fixed array of items that recur in most tombs. Rather, there is a wide variety. Some single-burial pit tombs lack pottery finds; others have three times the ‘average’. The types vary too: some tombs have 9–12 juglets, others have none.

Jars were often placed standing in the tomb, traversing several phases or even the entire ‘stratigraphy’. They were not pushed into secondary heaps as frequently as small vessels, serving more than one burial (either refilled, or performing a symbolic function without actual refilling). This was noticed also at Tel Qasile (Kletter 2006, 91–2). If we find, for example, a burial with one primary and two secondary burials accompanied by one jar, three bowls and six juglets, we would think that the burial kit is one-third jar, one bowl and two juglets. However, if the jar was placed with the first burial and ‘used’ by all three, the burial kit is one jar, one bowl and two juglets. The concept of the burial kit can be cautiously used on a general level, but one must remember that it is a statistical tool and not a real ‘kit’.



Figure 9
Scarab with ring B2874/2, Tomb A1 L201 (photo: Clara Amit).



Figure 10
Beads B7460, Tomb F7 L746 (photo: Clara Amit).



Figure 11
Copper alloy axe B9293, Tomb B186 (photo: Clara Amit).

Data about sex/age at Rishon Le-Zion are limited, owing to the bad preservation of the bones. Among 95 single-burial pits in Area B, 11 are identified as female, 19 as male and 18 as children/youths. Few differences appear between gender and types/numbers of finds. Male burials show more sheep/goat bones. Child/youth burials are not significantly poorer than adult burials. The one major difference is that weapons are not found in female burials and are rare in burials of children/youths, while most of the 11 single male tombs were supplied with weapons (ten daggers, two axes, one belt).

WEAPONS IN THE RISHON LE-ZION TOMBS

Since the interpretation of ‘warrior burials’ relates to weapons in tombs, let us look more closely at weapons from Rishon Le-Zion.¹²

Fourteen axes were found in the Rishon Le-Zion tombs (Shalev *et al.* 2013) (Fig. 11). Except for one or two, axes with clear provenances were found beside skulls or shoulders. They had long wooden handles, which did not survive, placed in/near the hands (compare Garfinkel 2001, 155). In almost all the cases when a deceased was provided with an axe, a dagger was found at the hip too.

Eighty-four daggers have been recorded from the tombs (Figs. 12 and 13), together with two daggers attached to belts (not recorded separately). Often, pommels were found *in situ* near the metal blades, while the wooden handles had deteriorated (at Tell el-‘Ajjul, part of a sheet bronze that covered a wooden handle survived: Tufnell 1962, fig. 4:1a).

¹² A detailed report on the typology and metallurgy of these weapons was prepared by Kan-Cipor-Meron and Shalev (forthcoming; cf. Kaufman 2012). Here we discuss mainly the contexts of the weapons.



Figure 12
Copper alloy dagger with stone pommel B6084, Tomb B24 (photo: Clara Amit).



Figure 13
Copper alloy dagger with stone pommel B6806, Tomb B117 (photo: Clara Amit).

The nine daggers from Area A and two from Area C were not found in locations that suggest specific functions. For the 20 daggers from Area F and 55 from Area B, the dominant find-spot is at the hip of the deceased, suggesting that they were carried on the hip. Only one dagger was found in a right-hip position (B6419), while 14 were found at/on the left hip. Some were found near the hips (perhaps fallen off from hands, or tied to cloth belts that did not survive); seven were found above the pelvis (probably worn on the hip).

We conclude that daggers were worn by adult males on the left hip, probably as private weapons. They could be drawn with the left hand, but it would be inconvenient for right-handed people (which form some 90 per cent in modern populations). We assume that most men drew and used their daggers with the right hand. The position of daggers in tombs reflects real life, i.e. worn on the left hip, used with the right hand.

However, in the tombs the deceased were sometimes shown with hands in the area of the (missing) handle, i.e. clutching the dagger with the *left hand*, folded for that purpose – it does not

seem to be a natural posture (B6394?; B6393; B6642; B6924; B6955; may be also B9144; B9294). The one dagger from a right-hip location is held in the left hand too (B6419). Why this 'wrong' posture? We can only guess. In three cases (tombs B54, B56, B185), the deceased had an axe in addition to the dagger. The axe, a longer-range weapon, was wielded in the stronger right hand, so the dagger was left for the other hand. Yet, why maintain such a posture when there was no axe? Perhaps it was a convention, or a matter of convenience when arranging the body.

The data cast doubts on the supposition (Baker 2006, 4; 2012, 67, fig. 3.4) that MBII supine burials were placed with their arms uniformly crossed on the chest, only later falling down into various positions documented by archaeologists. It seems that there were several positions for arms, such as holding a dagger or wielding an axe. Pairs buried side by side were often arranged so that the arms were intertwined, and some bodies were placed with straight, extended arms along the body, perhaps to save space. Placing the knees folded in the air was not a fixed position either. Sometimes it was done to save space; often it seems that individuals were placed with extended legs.

Scholars define the metal parts of MB spears as spearheads (Tubb 1985; Philip 1989, 88–101; Cathran 2004, 100–4, 119–20; Gernez 2007). It is not clear if such parts were used as thrusting spears, or as lightweight throwing javelins (Burke 2004, 66 n. 26, 82–5; Philip 1989, 99–101; 2006, 147). Philip noticed that at Tell el-Dab'a, about two-thirds of the 14 spear parts appear in pairs in the same tomb. He suggested that such pairs represent conspicuous consumption, since usually one individual did not use two spears in battle (Philip 2006, 147–8).

In two single-burial tombs at Rishon le-Zion, pairs of spear parts were found together, side by side with the tips pointing in the same direction (B174, B9204+5; B184, B9265+6). Perhaps another pair was found in L117 (B6689–90), but this is not certain. We suggest that this pattern indicates one spear broken in half, perhaps in a funerary ritual. The two halves were placed side by side, and the wooden parts (except one tiny piece) deteriorated. The two metal tips, which would have pointed in opposite directions on the whole spear, point in the same direction in the tombs. Thus, each pair is composed of one spearhead (B9204; B9265) and one spear-butt (B9205; B9266). The heads are more pointed, the butts more rounded, but otherwise they are very similar. Similar pairs are known from Tell el-Dab'a, Tel Rehov Tomb GR2 (Philip 2006, 147–8); probably also Fassuta Tomb 1 (Gershuni and Aviam 2010, fig. 13:3–4) and Tell Khariji (El Morr and Mödinger 2014, fig. 2, 56064, 56066). Spear-butts (also called *ferrules* or lizard killers) are known from later periods. Their main uses were as secondary weapons when the head was damaged or broken, or to finish off fallen enemies (perhaps also to ward off attacks from the rear). They also enabled the spear to be stuck in the earth when not in use (Hanson 1993, 24, 72–5).¹³

Knives are not common at Rishon Le-Zion (18 examples) (Fig. 14), and are not considered to be weapons, but kitchen utensils (Kan-Cipor-Meron and Shalev forthcoming). In Rishon Le-Zion, they seem to have a strong connection with sheep/goat bones – either in bowls that carry sheep/goat bones (B2886; B7458; possibly also B7781; B7784), or found near sheep/goat parts (B486; B6164; B6915; B9159). Possibly such knives were used to butcher the animals (Philip 2006, 150).

13 Terms for spears in Mari suggest division by size, *zamratum* (small), *nazinum* (middle) and *šukurrum* (big). I thank Ilya Arkhipov for this information. Yadin (1963, 62) interpreted some IB period remains as butts of javelins or spears, but cf. Lapp (1966, 50–2).



Figure 14
Copper alloy knife B6146, Tomb B22 (photo: Clara Amit).

THE LARGE PICTURE

When speaking of Levantine ‘warrior graves’, scholars almost never considered their weight *versus* the entire cemetery/site. It is not easy to find reliable statistics and in many cases tombs have been looted or excavated without detailed recording. We focus on large cemeteries with relatively good data:

1. *Tell el-‘Ajjul*, IB period. In Cemetery 1500, a total of 58 graves were found, with 19 daggers, all associated with single burials. In Cemetery 100–200, a total of 48 tombs were excavated, but only one yielded weapons – a single dagger (Baxevasi 1995, 91–2). If we look at both cemeteries together, assuming a 1:1 ratio of female to male burials (admitting that this is short of adequate, but we have no better method), daggers exist in about half of the assumed male tombs (20:53). This is too high a percentage for elite warriors. If we consider each cemetery separately, daggers appear in about 68 per cent of assumed male tombs in Cemetery 1500 (19:28), but in only 4 per cent of such tombs in Cemetery 100–200. Should we claim that one cemetery had a single (elite?) warrior, while the other was so full of (part-time?) warriors that females were not accepted? It does not make sense.
2. *Jericho*, IB period. Leaving aside a few doubtful cases, we count 181 tombs, with 34 daggers from 30 tombs. Thirty-two daggers were found in 53 ‘composite’ and ‘dagger’ type tombs, but 128 other tombs (mainly ‘pottery’ tombs) included only two daggers. In addition, three javelins were found in ‘composite’ tombs and one in an ‘outsize’ tomb that also had a dagger (Greener 2006, appendix J). Daggers were associated mainly with primary burials, and, though data on age/sex are limited, with adult males. The most likely explanation is that ‘dagger tombs’ indicate male tombs, as Greener (2006; 2012) noticed. However, excluding 11 child burials and assuming an equal rate of male to female burials means that 85 burials would have been male ([181–11]:2=85). If so, weapons (including javelins) appear in 39 per cent of the male tombs (33:85). Such a high rate cannot fit a class of warriors.
3. *Rishon Le-Zion*, MBIIA–B period. We chose single burials as they form the most reliable evidence. Daggers and axes appear in 28 graves in Area B, i.e. 29.5 per cent of the 95 single graves in this area. Excluding children/youths (19 burials with two daggers), there are 76 adult single burials with 26 weapons. Assuming an equal ratio of female to male burials, male burials should account for 38 graves. If so, 68 per cent of the males in single tombs carried weapons (26:38). Even if we assume that males were given preference over women as far as single burial is concerned, the rate remains much too high for specialized/elite warriors.

It is true that some tombs are very rich in weapons. One IB tomb at ‘Enan had 20 weapons (nine spearheads, 11 daggers). The remains of six individuals were identified, but perhaps more did

not survive (Eisenberg 1985). However, there are many more tombs with few or no weapons. We offer some unlooted examples, with the contents representing original repertoires:

1. *Tel 'Amal*, IB period. Twelve burial caves were found sealed by blocking stones, with 31 pottery vessels, mostly complete – but no weapons (Feig 1991).
2. *Majdal*, IB period. Six burial caves with pottery vessels, but no weapons (Yannai 1993).
3. *Bet Dagan*, IB period. Six burials with pottery vessels, but no weapons (Peilstöcker 2006).
4. *Tell Fadous*, IB period. One burial with few pottery vessels, a bead and some animal bones (Genz 2010).
5. *Dhar Mirzbaneh*, IB period. There are thousands of tombs at this site. Lapp cleared several dozen, some robbed, others not fully excavated. We counted *c.*25 undisturbed, excavated tombs (some found with *in situ* blocking stones at the bottom of the shaft). Yet, only two weapons were found (a javelin and a dagger), both in Tomb A41 (Lapp 1966, 50–1).

The discourse about warrior graves focused on weapons of great appeal, ignoring the general picture. A contrast was drawn between peaceful EB graves and IB–MBIIA warrior graves. However, the same contrast arises within each period, and even in the same sites. We cannot interpret the data ‘flatly’ as peaceful *versus* militaristic clans, warriors *versus* peaceful pastoralists. Although graves with weapons are a minority among all IB–MBII graves, at cemeteries with large numbers of well-excavated graves (Tell el-‘Ajjul, Jericho, Rishon le-Zion) the rates of weapons in supposed male burials cannot fit elite warriors. This supports the conclusion that these are not (elite) ‘warrior graves’, but typical graves of adult males. To prevent confusion, we should cease calling them ‘warrior graves’. We may call them instead weapon graves or dagger type tombs (following Kenyon 1965, 170).

A ‘DECLINE’ IN WEAPONS?

Scholars spoke about a gradual decline in numbers of weapons in tombs, assuming that it indicates general changes in warfare or in the status of warriors between the IB–MBIIA periods and the MBIIB period. In the MBIIB period, tomb assemblages grow and become more varied (Hallote 1994, 76, fig. 9). Hence, weapons occupy a smaller segment, yet their numbers also decline absolutely, per buried individual.

In comparing tombs with single burials and with two–four burials at Rishon Le-Zion (both from Area B), an interesting picture emerges. Weapons occupy 6 per cent of the assemblage from single-burial tombs, but only 3 per cent from tombs with two–four burials. The weight of weapons decreases by half, though all the tombs are of the same period and from the same cemetery. The frequency of weapons per tomb remains similar: 0.38 weapons per tomb for single-burial tombs; 0.33 for tombs with two–four burials. So there are fewer weapons not per tomb, but per burial (nine weapons per 42 individuals, as opposed to 26 weapons per 38 individuals in single-burial tombs). The ‘decline’ is stronger in comparison with (mostly MBIIB) shaft tombs with multiple burials from Area F. Fifty-five daggers were found in the Area B pit tombs, but only 20 in the Area F shaft tombs, though both areas have a similar number of burials.

Thus, the ‘decline’ is perhaps related to the type of burial: it marks a shift from cave and pit tombs (mostly with single burials) to shaft tombs with multiple burials. Various explanations were suggested (as mentioned above, e.g. growing insecurity, changes in warfare, etc.). However, if the decline is related to tomb types, perhaps it has something to do with the nature of these tombs. Single-burial tombs are (almost always) used only once. A weapon placed inside is a

weapon that stays permanently inside. Shaft graves with multiple burials are reopened for new burials. Weapons could be retrieved by relatives, e.g. from a former burial that was being pushed aside (if funerary gifts were not *tabu*). A more likely explanation is that weapons in multiple burials ‘served’ more than one burial (like jars, see above). Upon the addition of new burials, weapons were left behind and not pushed into secondary heaps as frequently as small pottery finds. It is also likely that multiple shaft burials were family burials, unlike single pit burials. Perhaps in shaft tombs only the male heads of families were given weapons, whereas earlier, each male required a weapon, if the family could afford one. We do not claim to have an answer, we only stress that such explanations should be studied, rather than assume that behind each weapon in a tomb stands a warrior.

CONCLUSIONS

Data from Rishon Le-Zion and other IB/MBII sites in the southern Levant indicate that the so-called ‘warrior graves’ are mostly male graves typical of their period. Weapons in these graves were mostly close-range weapons of secondary military importance. They were privately owned and served as markers of adult masculinity, but, at the same time, of status and wealth too. A small minority of graves that show major military ‘gadgets’ (belts, long-range weapons, *equid* burials, etc.) were elite warriors. The ‘decline’ in numbers of weapons per burial noticed by scholars is related to the shift from single to multiple burials. It may relate to some feature of multiple-burial shaft tombs, rather than to changes in warfare or in the status of warriors.

The funerary world and the world of life stand in complex, dialectical relations. Tombs are neither completely detached from, nor directly a reflection of, the world of life.

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