

## A BYZANTINE TOMB AT THE VILLAGE OF RAMMUN

H. Taha

The village of Rammun is located on the south central range, ca. 12 km east of Ramallah and about 3 km south of et-Taybeh. It forms a remarkable object in the landscape, being situated on and around the summit of a conical chalky hill and visible from all directions (Robinson 1970: 440, ed-Dabagh 1991: 335). It is surrounded by the villages of et-Taybeh, Burqa and Deir Dibwan.

Rammun is identified in the Bible with rock Rimmon (Judg 20:45, see Robinson 1970: 440). It is not to be confused with Rimmon which is identified by some scholars with er-Rumane north of Nazareth (Negev 1986: 326). Aharoni (1979: 110) suggests that it has the name of a plant. The name is mentioned also by Eusebius and Jerome. It is also identified with Rimmon of the *Onomasticon* (144: 11). It lies fifteen miles north of Jerusalem, on the boundaries between the territories of Aelia Capetolina, Jericho and Beitin, but dependent on Aelia (Avi Yonah 1966: 156). The village of Rammun is identified with Rimmon mentioned on the Madaba map (Donner 1992: 51, Avi-Yonah 1954: 42, 1976: 91). The identification of the site on the Madaba map indicates its special religious importance. It was mentioned in the Ottoman dafters in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century as part of Jerusalem district (Hutteroth - Adbulfattah 1977: 116).

Archaeological surveys indicate a continuous occupation from the early Iron Age to modern time, with evidence of Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Crusader, Ayyubid, Mamluk and early Ottoman periods (Finkelstein - Lederman 1977: 538). The majority of the earliest materials were found on the western slope of the village (Finkelstein 1988: 161). Traces of mosaic pavement in the mosque of the village was reported in the *DOA Mandatorial Files*.

Following information from the village council of Rammun that an ancient burial cave had been found during the process of the digging of a sanitary pit for the new mosque of the village, a salvage excavation was conducted in the first week of 1998 on behalf of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities. The clearance work was directed by H. Taha, assisted by F. Aqel, S. Tawafsheh and I. Iqtait as a draftsperson. Articles were sorted by J. Yasin.

The burial cave is located on the eastern slope of the village, not far from the centre of the old village, just few meters east of the present mosque. The burial cave was breached from the eastern side, through an artificial opening

made by the bulldozer in the north eastern corner of the cave. The original entrance of the burial cave in the south eastern corner is covered with a big heap of dump. The burial cave was disturbed and looted a few years ago. This was evidenced by the accumulation of modern dump in the south eastern corner of the burial cave. The accumulations contain cement and iron bars as well as modern junk. A six-pointed star was inscribed crudely inside one of the painted medallions (Fig. 2), indicating a recent attempt at deliberate deformation. The clay covers were found broken and out of place inside the tomb. No skeletal remains were found in the burial cave.

### **Description of the Burial Cave**

The arcossolia burial cave (Fig. 1-2, Photo no. 1) has a rectangular plan, measuring 5 m (N-S) by 3 m (E-W). It was part of a larger cave, partly hewn in the rock and partly built of limestone rubble and blocks. The walls (Photo no. 2) are built of medium-sized stones, joints are filled with mortar and small stones. The burial cave consists of a central chamber and four graves around it, including two adult size graves (Fig. 1: c and d), measuring 1.70 m long, 60 cm wide and 50 cm deep. One adolescent size grave (Fig. 1:b) measuring 1.62 m long, 60 cm wide and 50 cm deep, and one small child size grave measuring 1 m long, 45 cm wide and 50 cm deep. It is built with small field stones and covered with a thick layer of plaster. The graves are raised ca. 15 cm above the surface of the burial cave. The height of the cave varies from 1.27 m in the western side of the cave to 2.15 m in the eastern side of the cave. The tomb walls contain four small recesses and niches, one 27x10 cm in the northern wall, the second 15x11 cm on the western wall, and the third one 15x10 cm on the north western corner of the cave. A small niche 37x17 cm is found on the western wall. The recesses are presumably used for laying pottery lamps and placing grave goods. The surface and walls inside the cave are coated with a thick layer (3 cm) of light coloured plaster, with two paintings of medallions depicted on the wall plaster.

### **Painting**

The wall painting in the burial cave consists of two medallions, one rounded on the western wall and one rectangular on the northern wall of the tomb. The framework of the medallions was slightly incised on the white plaster then painted with dark blue colour.

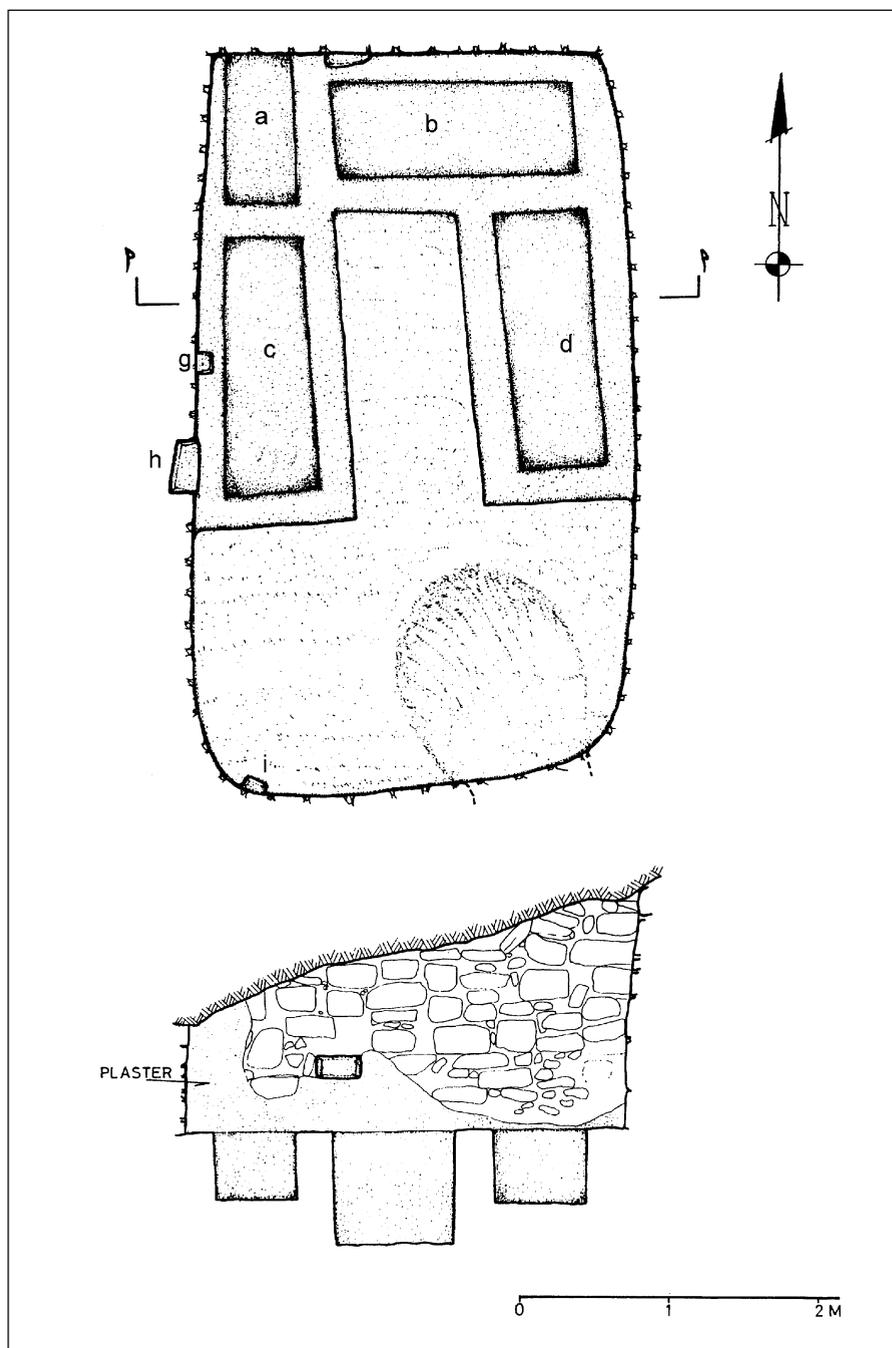


Fig. 1-2 Plan and section.

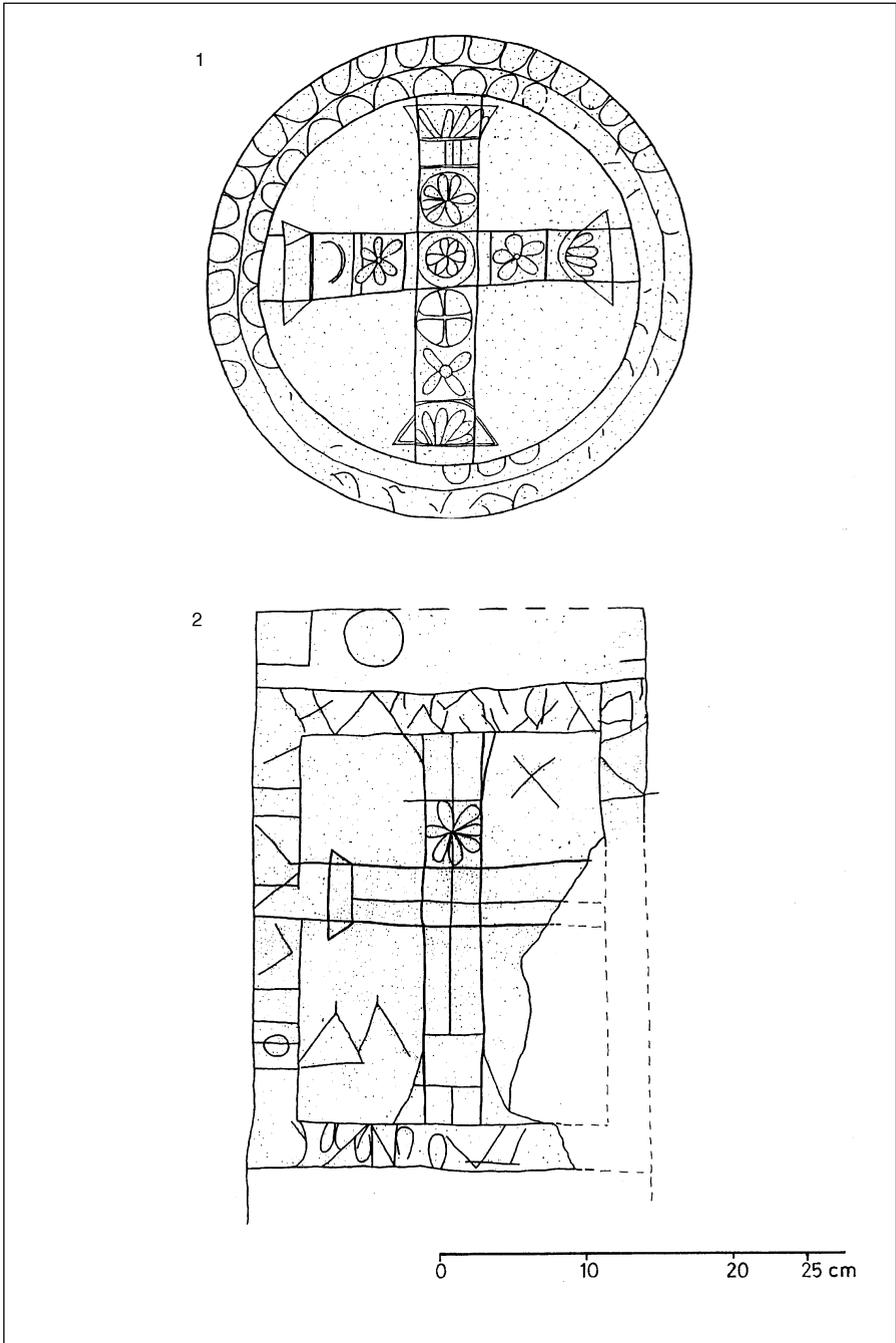


Fig. 3 Medallions no. 1 and 2.

### **Medallion No. 1**

The medallion (Fig. 3:1, Photo no. 3) has a circular shape with 42 cm in diameter. The frame of the medallion is 4.5 cm thick, divided by a thin line and decorated with geometric patterns, consisting mainly of semi-circles. Inside the inner circle is a large cross. The cross is divided into metopes consisting predominantly of floral patterns, with a rosette with six petals framed by two concentric circles in the central metope. The horizontal axe of the cross consists of four metopes divided by one line or two lines without asymmetry and filled with floral designs. The right segment has a rosette with five petals and the left segment has a rosette with six petals.

The vertical axe of the cross is divided into six metopes. The upper segment consists of a rosette with seven petals inside a circle and a simple geometric pattern consisting of three lines, while the end of the cross, of floral design. The lower segment of the vertical axe consists of a cross inside a circle and a rosette with four petals in one metope and half a rosette at the cross. The four ends of the cross have a flower basket form, three ends with four, five, six petals, the fourth end has no flower.

### **Medallion No. 2**

The medallion (Fig. 3:2, Photo no. 4) is located on the northern wall, part of the plaster has been damaged. The medallion has a rectangular form with a cross inside a frame of two lines. The frame is divided into metopes, consisting mostly of geometric designs. The cross itself is divided into metopes and only one rosette was drawn in the upper segment of the vertical axe. The arrangement of the decorative patterns differs from the first medallion. Few Greek letters are inscribed in the frame of the medallion. The painting consists of geometric and floral patterns only, with the cross in the central position. The upper segment of the vertical axe is filled with a flower of seven petals. Painting occurs in several tombs in Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods. The painting contains Christian religious symbols represented by crosses, but it is not clear whether the occurrence of flowers has any special meaning.

### **Finds**

Unfortunately, the tomb had been looted in the recent past, therefore few objects (Fig. 5-7) were recovered during the excavation, including pottery

lamps, pottery shards, one bracelets, iron nails, and some few other finds. A rim fragment (Fig. 7: 5) of a cooking-pot, with shallow ribbing is also found.

### Pottery Lamps

Several pottery lamps (Fig. 4, Photo no. 7) were found in the tomb, including three complete lamps, one almost complete and two fragments. The lamps found at Rammun are of the common Byzantine slipper type. Four lamps bearing religious symbols consisting of a cross.

Most of the lamps are shaped like an elongated triangle with a sharpened apex and raised rounded ring base. The large filling-hole is surrounded by a raised ridge. The most common decoration is a radial pattern on the rim and crosses, stars and palm branches on the nozzle. The nozzle is either surrounded by a raised ridge (Fig. 4:3) or marked by a line (Fig. 4:5-6). The clay is light brown to dark brown with no slip. Lamp (Fig 4:1, Photo no. 7a) has an almost ovoid shape, with large filling-hole and a small knob handle. The shoulder of the lamp is ornamented with radial pattern. The space between the filling-hole and the nozzle is ornamented with a cross in a square frame.

Lamp (Fig. 4:2, Photo no. 7b) is decorated with a palm branch on the rim and around the filling-hole, the nozzle is decorated with a cross (Rosenthal - Sivan 1978: nos. 453, 458). Lamp (Fig. 4:3, Photo no. 7c) is not complete, the shoulder is decorated with a radial pattern and the area between the filling-hole and the nozzle is decorated with a palm branch, which is the most common pattern of the slipper lamps (Rosenthal - Sivan 1978: nos. 476-479, Israeli and Avida 1988: nos. 407, 421).

Lamp (Fig. 4:4, Photo no. 7d) is the only large and elongated slipper lamp in the group. It is made of grey clay. The shoulder and the area around the filling-hole is decorated with geometric patterns. One circle of zigzag decoration and one of radial strokes. The nozzle is ornamented with a small cross above three horizontal lines and marked with two vertical lines, flanked by circles. Parallel lamps were found at Jerusalem, Ramat Rahel Bethany and Gezer (Mazar 1969: Pl. XII: 2, Aharoni 1964: Fig. 26: 8, Saller 1957: Fig. 16: 3, Macalister 1912: III, Pl. CXIX: 18, Rosenthal - Sivan 1978: no. 474 on p. 115).

The two lamps (Fig. 4:5-6, Photo nos. 7e-f) are not complete. The rim of the first lamp bears the common Byzantine radial decoration and the area between the filling-hole and the nozzle is decorated with a star. The other

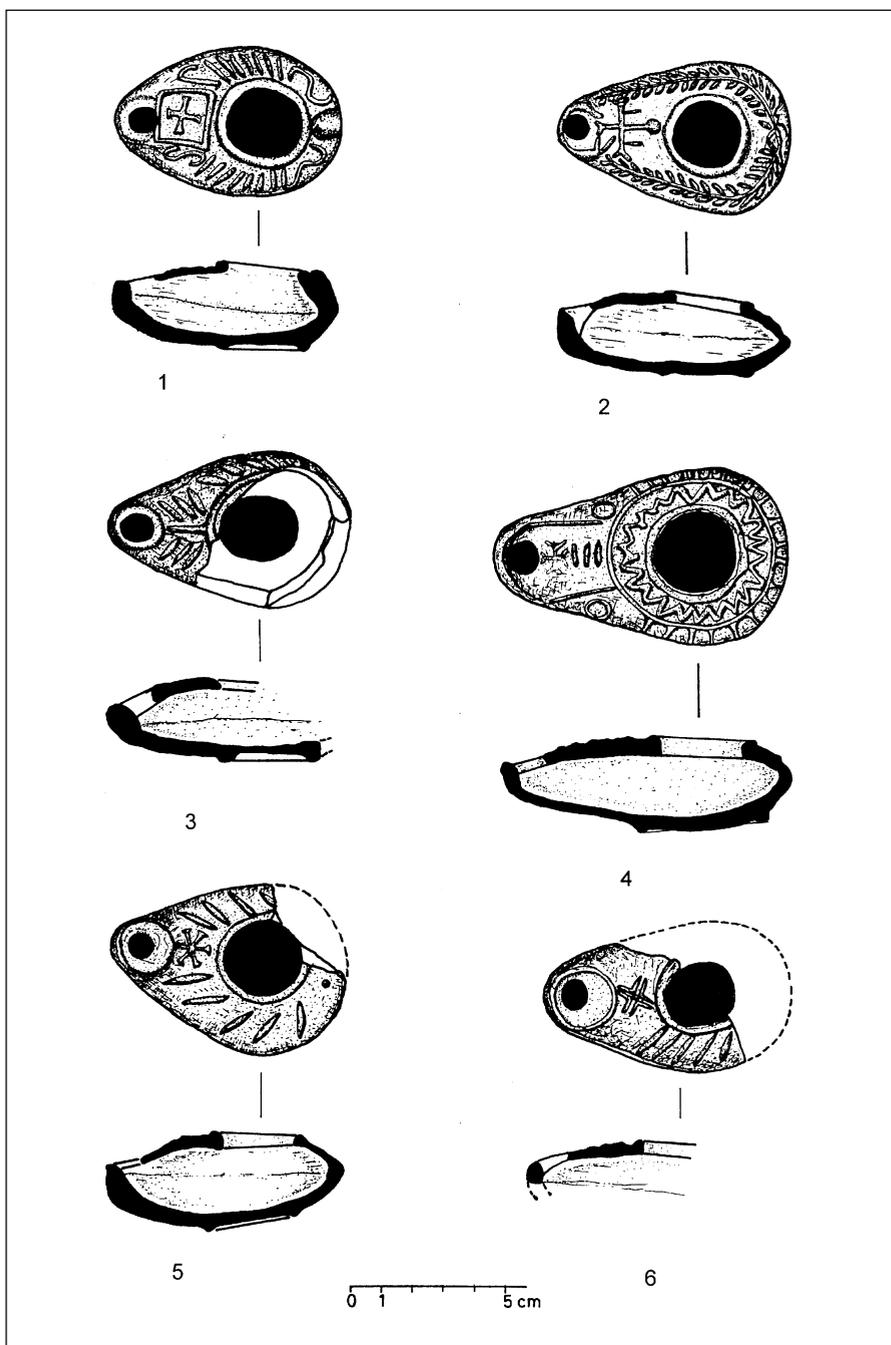


Fig. 4 Lamps.

fragment has a radial decoration on the rim and a cross on the nozzle (for parallel examples see Israeli - Avida 1988: no. 413, on p. 147).

Most of the lamps found at Rammun are of the common Byzantine type. They have close parallels in Jerusalem and Ramallah regions (Rosenthal - Sivan 1978: 112-120). They are very close to the Ain Yabrud (Husseini 1938) type, indicating their local production. The pottery lamps made of burial and Christian religious symbols place the burial cave in the Byzantine period, most likely to the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

### **Other Finds**

The other finds consist of seven large iron nails (Fig. 5:7). The nails have irregular rounded and squarish heads and squarish in section. The presence of iron nails may suggest the use of a wooden coffin. The other grave goods consist of a bronze bracelet (Fig. 6:1), one large iron ring (Fig. 5:2), slightly eroded, which may have been used as part of a chain or the handle of a wooden box. A fragment of an iron buckle (Fig. 5:3) was found. Glass objects consist only of an elongated base fragment (Fig. 5:4) of a cup. One bead (Fig. 5:6) was also found in the tomb.

The clay lids (Photo nos. 5-6) were found broken and disturbed apparently by tomb robbers. The four restorable lids are hand-made, medium fired and of a standard size. They measure 78 x 42 cm, with a relatively even overall thickness (3.5 cm in average). The lids are made of unlevigated rough clay, containing a high proportion of coarse and irregular tempering materials, with evidence of chopped straw, similar to tabun clay. The upper surface (Photo no. 5) and the four sides of the lids are roughly smoothed and washed with a brush, while the lower part of the lids (Photo no. 6) bears no special treatment. This is clear from the impressions left on the lower surface of the lid.

### **Conclusion**

The arcosolia burial cave found at Rammun furnishes primary evidence of the history of the village which has been identified with Rimmon of the *Onomasticon* and Madaba map. Although the tomb had been looted and no skeletal remains has been preserved, the remaining materials, especially the wall painting and the pottery lamps bearing Christian religious symbols permit some valuable information on the occupation of the site during the

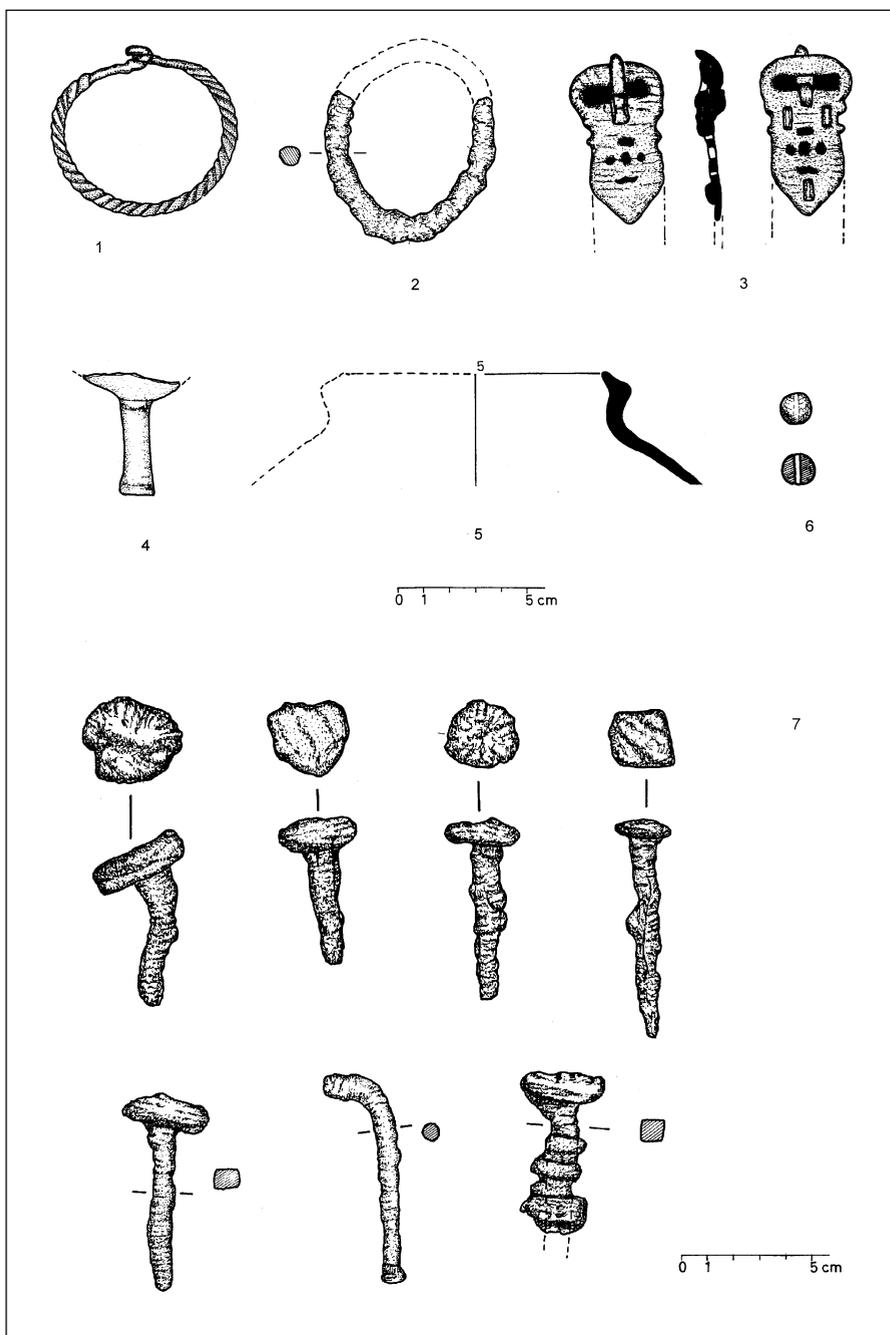


Fig. 5 Objects.

Byzantine period. All the objects belong to the Byzantine period. The lamps have close affinity with Ain Yabrud type. Consequently, this burial cave attests to the significance of the village of Rammun during the Byzantine Period.

Hamdan Taha  
Palestinian Department of Antiquities

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