# SUBADULT INHUMATIONS
# IN THE NECROPOLIS OF KHALDÉ (BEIRUT, LEBANON):
# A REVIEW OF ROGER SAIDAH'S DOCUMENTATION

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*Abstract*: The Phoenician necropolis of Khaldé, located on a beach in the southern suburbs of modern-day Beirut, was extensively excavated between 1961 and 1970 by Roger Saidah. Due to the loss of a large part of the documentation during the Lebanese civil war, the final report of the excavation was never published. In the frame of a research project aimed at the recovery and study of the documentation from Khaldé, this article reviews the information and presents new data about the inhumations of children.

*Keywords*: Phoenicia, Khaldé, funerary practices, children, inhumation.

## 1. Introduction

The unpublished materials and the documentation elaborated by Roger Saidah during the excavation of the necropolis of Khaldé have undergone an extensive review and study since 2011.[1] While the final presentation of the results is still in progress, it seems useful to share the preliminary data about the subadult inhumations, in order to give an account of the complexity and continuity in time of the cemetery and to respond to the rising interest in the recognition and analysis of child burials in the Iron Age Mediterranean.[2]

The excavation of the necropolis, located on a beach south of the landing strips of modern-day Beirut International Airport, was carried out between 1961 and 1970 on behalf of the National Direction of Antiquities of Lebanon and more than 400 tombs were discovered.[3] However, only the first results of the excavation of ten funerary contexts were presented through preliminary reports,[4] due to Saidah's untimely death in 1979 and to the loss of a large part of the documentation during the Lebanese Civil War.

The documentation recovered between 2011 and 2014 consists of a large photographic archive of 530 slides, the pencil drafts of 16 partial plans of the excavation, and the data provided by the study of the about 450 ceramic containers from the grave goods, presently stored in the National Museum of Beirut.[5]

The analysis of the documentation from the 1961 and 1962 excavations has shown that, during the first two campaigns, at least 188 burials were brought to light, dated approximately from the second half of the 11th century until the end of the 7th century BCE. The funerary rituals are heterogeneous: inhumation is prevalent, but numerous incinerations are mixed with the inhumations and in close relation with them.

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1 Mura 2016; 2017. This research started as a PhD project and is the result of the collaboration between the Archaeology Laboratory of the Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona, Spain) and the National Museum of Beirut (Lebanon). I was allowed to work on Roger Saidah's photographic archive thanks to the generosity of Claude Doumet-Serhal. The dissertation thesis, directed by María Eugenia Aubet, is focused on the 1961 and 1962 campaigns and was presented in 2016; the research project is still in progress.

2 See, for example, the essays in Tabolli 2018.

3 The last tomb number that I could find in the documentation is T487, probably excavated in 1970.

4 Saidah 1966; 1967.

5 Mura 2017, pp. 257-258.

While it is possible to recognize that the inhumation ritual was practiced throughout the whole time the necropolis was in use, the state of the recovered documentation makes it difficult to understand exactly when the incineration ritual began to be practiced.[6] The tombs are pits dug in the sand where one incinerated or inhumated individual was deposed with his or her grave goods; occasionally two individuals were inhumated in the same pit. The only exception is one shaft tomb (T121) built in the ashlar technique: it contained multiple burials, both inhumations and incinerations, and was in use for generations from the Early Iron Age until the Late Iron Age.[7]

Children appear to be inhumated in individual pits among the adult burials, seldom in close connection with an adult. The nature of the documentation, mainly photographs and drawings with no explanatory notes, makes it impossible to rely on biological indicators of growth such as the ossification of the skeleton, the length of the long bones or the tooth growth in order to determine individual's age at death.[8] Moreover, assessing sex in subadults based on the examination of the skeletons is always a problematic task, due to the low sexual dimorphism prior to puberty.[9] Thus we will necessarily consider all apparent subadults as a unique group, since only in a few cases are we able to distinguish different age sets – infants, children, adolescents – which might have possibly determined the belonging to distinct social subgroups.[10]

As the information about the stratigraphy is lost, the dating of the burials is based, where possible, on the morphologic and stylistic analysis of the pottery from the grave goods. This chrono-typologic study permits to place the containers or the groups of containers in the evolutive sequence of the eastern Phoenician pottery, extensively documented in the publication of the materials from the excavations at Tyre and Sarepta.[11] In this article I use as a main reference the chronological sequence elaborated by F.J. Núñez Calvo, in which two main morphological and stylistic "full" phases (Early Iron Age, dated approximately between 1050 and 900 BCE; Late Iron Age, dated approximately between 820/800 and 550 BCE) and a transitional phase (Middle Iron Age) are differentiated.[12]

## 2. Subadult inhumations published by Roger Saidah

Five inhumations of subadult individuals were published by Roger Saidah in his preliminary report, although no emphasis was put on the age of the deceased.[13] Two more inhumations of children aged approximately six and ten are mentioned in the publication of the anthropological study conducted during the first seasons of excavation, but no further information is provided.[14]

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6    Mura 2016, pp. 226-232.

7    Saidah 1966, pp. 64-72; a new interpretation of the chronology is in Aubet 2013, pp. 283-286.

8    Séguy – Buchet 2013, pp. 35-38; Buckberry 2018, pp. 56-63.

9    Buckberry 2018, pp. 65-66.

10    When the information is available, I use the classic age sets distinction based on tooth growth and bone development: fetus, newborn, infant I (0-6), infant II or child (7-12), adolescent (13-19): Buckberry 2018, pp. 56-57.

11    Bikai 1978; Aubet 2004; Aubet – Núñez – Trellisó 2014; Aubet 2015; Anderson 1988. Roger Saidah proposed an accurate and pioneering study of the ceramic funerary gifts based on the traditional "biblical" sequential and chronological frame, however more than six decades of progress in the knowledge of Phoenician ceramic productions and in the debate about Levantine Iron Age chronology make it necessary to propose a re-reading of Khaldé's tombs chronology. In this contribution only a few ceramic containers are taken into consideration, while the detailed analysis of the pottery from the graves has been conducted elsewhere: Mura 2016, pp. 165-199.

12    Núñez 2008; 2010; 2015.

13    Saidah 1966, pp. 57-59, 76-82.

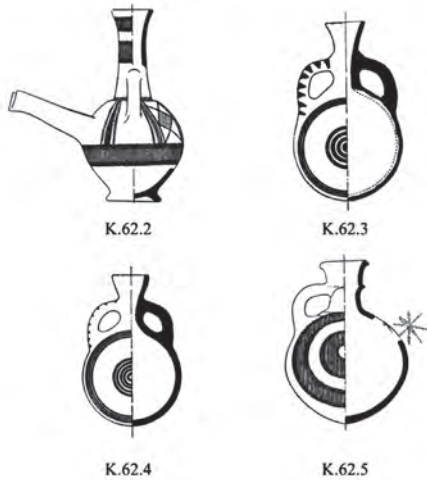14    Shanklin – Ganthus 1966, pp. 91-94; table II, T32 and T35.

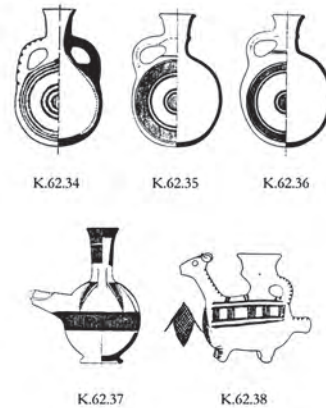Fig. 1. Tomb 166 (Graphic elaboration from Saidah 1966, pl. IV, 3; figs. 49, 40, 51, 52; not to scale).

Fig. 2. Tomb 167 (Graphic elaboration from Saidah 1966, pl. IV, 4; figs. 54, 55, 56, 57, 58; not to scale).

The more ancient are the tombs of an infant (T165) and of two children (T166 and T167);[15] they are all described as individual burials. It is not possible to localize exactly these tombs in the plans,[16] nor to recognize the items from the grave goods among the material stored in the National Museum, so no fresh data can be added to the information originally published by Saidah.

The skeleton from T165 is 53 cm long, laid on his or her back with flexed legs and accompanied by only one vessel, a miniature carinated container with horizontal handles and with a bichrome linear decoration. Its shape, if not the decoration, finds a comparison in the sub-stratum G1 at Sarepta, contemporary with Bikai's Tyre XIV: these layers correspond to the transition period between the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age.[17]

The two children from T166 (Fig. 1) and T167 (Fig. 2) are laid on one side with their arms stretched and their legs slightly flexed; this seems to be the more common position for children's deposi-

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15    Conventionally, when the tomb numbers are the ones originally given by Roger Saidah, they are preceded by the letter T. The numbers of the burials documented only in the photographic archive are preceded by the letter S and the numbers of the burials documented only in the plans are preceded by the letter P.

16    All the burials published by Roger Saidah in 1966 are from areas "L" and "K", two large stripes next to the highway, on the eastern part of the excavated area: Saidah 1966, pp. 53-54; Mura 2017, pp. 258-259, fig. 3.

17    Anderson 1988, pl. 28, 6; Bikai 1978: pls. XXXIX-XLI; Núñez 2015, p. 122.

Fig. 3. Tomb S101. Photo by Roger Saidah.

tions. They are both accompanied by a rich set of vessels, similar to the standard set displayed in contemporary adult burials, with the only exception of the zoomorphic askos (Fig. 2, K.62.38)

From the ritual point of view, it is especially remarkable that, as Roger Saidah reports, in T167 the containers were intentionally smashed during the funeral and all the pieces were placed over the upper part of the body when the tomb was being closed. This ritual is broadly attested in the Phenician world and especially in the necropolis of Tyre-al Bass.[18]

The containers from both T166 and T167 display the typical morphologic and decorative features of the Early Iron Age. The neck ridge jugs (Fig. 2, K.62.35, K.62.36) with a squat body, globular, slightly asymmetric belly and bichrome decoration with vertical concentric circles (a wider red band enclosed by thin black circles) as well as the strainer-spouted jugs with a direct rim and a methopal decoration (Fig. 1, K.62.2; Fig. 2, K.62.37) are representative of the earliest phases of the Early Iron Age ceramic productions, which correspond sequentially with Bikai's Stratum XIII at Tyre.[19]

Tomb T2 is described by Saidah as the burial of an adolescent. The body is laid on its back, with the arms and legs stretched and the head turned on one side, looking towards the west, which, in coastal Lebanon cemeteries, points to the sea. The deceased is accompanied by a scarab and a small funerary ceramic set placed next to the skull and composed of a pilgrim flask with a broken rim, a plate with a vertical rim and an *amphoriskos*, all undecorated.[20] The chronological information provided by the pottery is uneven: the global shape of the pilgrim flask is comparable with the flasks from T166 and T167 and the *amphoriskos* is the miniature version of a storage jar documented in the Early Iron Age at Tyre,[21] while the shape of the plate is commonly documented from the Early Iron Age until the transitional period.[22] On the whole, Tomb T2 might be dated as well in the Early Iron Age, but it seems to be more recent than T166 and T167.

Tomb T1 is as well described as the burial of an adolescent, although the length of the skeleton is declared to be of approximately 105 cm. The body is laid on its back with the arms and legs stretched

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18    Aubet 2014, p. 515.
19    Bikai 1978: pls. XXXIII-XXXVII; Núñez 2008, pp. 28-31; Núñez 2015, pp. 120-122.
20    Saidah 1966, pp. 58-59; a short description of the scarab is provided by Saidah (1966, p. 59).
21    Bikai 1978, pl. XXIV, 10; stratum XIII-I.
22    For example at Al Bass, in contexts from Phase II: Núñez 2014, p. 279.

and the head turned on one side, facing north. The funerary gifts are a plate placed on the deceased's knees and a red slipped neck ridge jug with an expanded lip, placed next to the skull.[23] The formal and decorative features of the jug (piriform body, slightly pendent lip, the exterior surface completely covered with red slip) find a close comparison in the tombs from phase 5 at Al Bass,[24] and permit to date the burial in the Late Iron Age C. The plate, recovered in the National Museum storage rooms (Inv. No. 51726), is red slipped with a painted thick black linear decoration.[25]



Fig. 4. Child inhumations lying on one side with flexed legs: Tombs S102 and S103. Photos by Roger Saidah (not to scale).

### 3. Child inhumations in the photographic archive

Among the photographs from Saidah's archive, at least 12 burials are clearly recognizable as child inhumations. They are all single burials, however in one case, Tomb S101 (Fig. 3), the body of the child seems to have been deliberately deposed in connection with an adult burial.

The two bodies are superposed and oriented perpendicularly, with the head of the child laying on the knees of the adult. Although we have no means to establish whether the two had been buried together in the same funeral, it seems safe to say that the two tombs were arranged in a short time span and that the connection between the two was not casual. The funerary gifts are two large jugs placed next to the skull of the adult. In the picture they both appear to be smashed, thus they can't provide reliable information about chronology, although their large size and a recognizable double strand handle hint to an Early Iron Age dating.

In the rest of the tombs, the bodies appear to have been laid down in different positions: on one side with flexed legs (Tombs S102, S103, S107, S114/T397, S117: Figs. 4-5), in a supine position with extended or flexed legs (Tombs S110/T378, S112, S116: Fig. 6) or prone with extended legs (S105, S109/T376, S111: Fig. 7).

Five of these children were buried with no personal ornaments, while the others have a bronze bracelet or anklet, often in combination with one or two strings of beads. As far as it can be observed in Saidah's photographs, the beads are small Cypraea shells (Tombs S102, S107), as well as globular, cylindric or disc trinkets made of stone or glass; in one case it is possible to recognize a scarab (Tomb 102). The strings of beads could be bracelets or necklaces, but, as they are usually found next to the pelvis, they might also be related with the belt of a dress that the child was wearing.

Contrary to what is observed in the tombs published by Saidah, the child burials recognized in his photographic archive do not display any ceramic funerary set. Considering the absence of data about stratigraphy and the impossibility to analyze the small finds, the immediate consequence of the lack of pottery in association with the burials is that we have no means to discuss their chronology. However, the interpretation of this fact is challenging: on the one hand, we cannot exclude that some vessels were originally present in

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23    Saidah 1966, pp. 57-58.

24    For example U.7-3: Núñez 2004, pp. 72, 142.

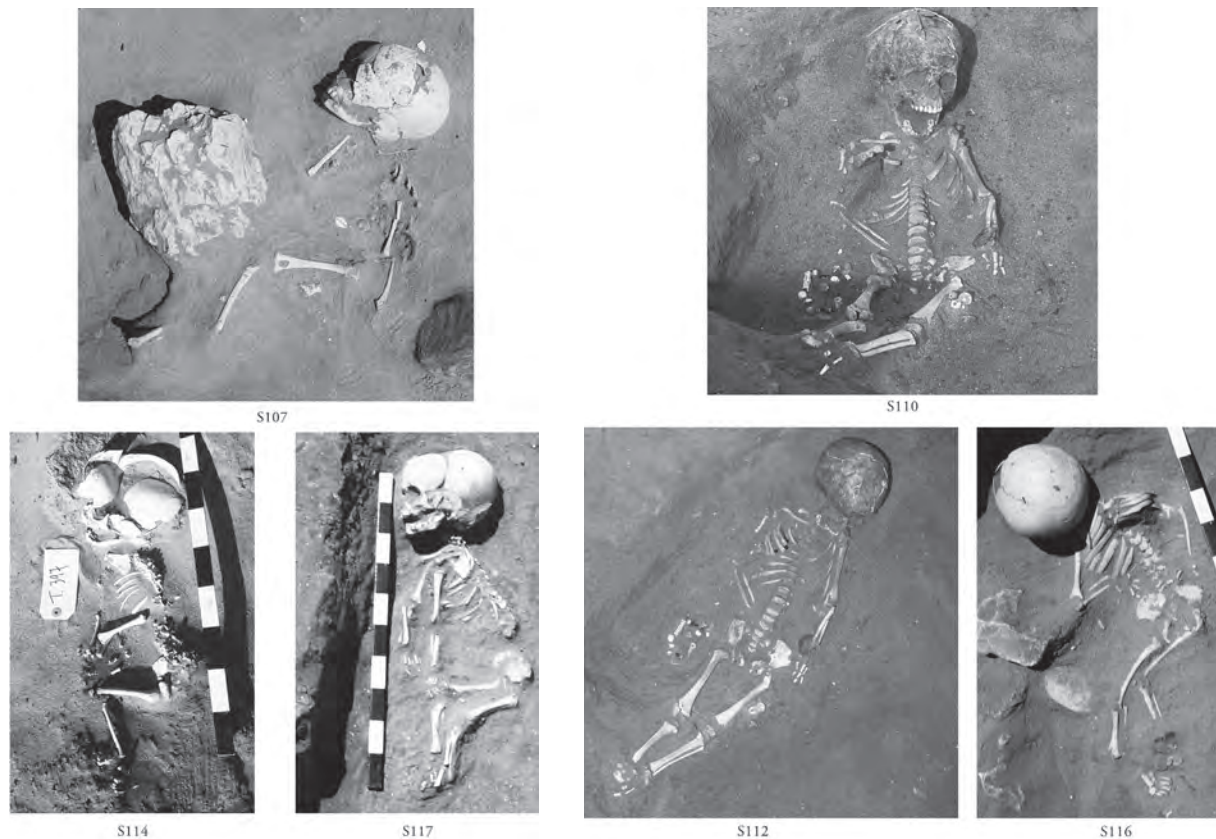25    Saidah 1966, pp. 57-58, fig. 1.

FIG. 5. Child inhumations lying on one side with flexed legs: Tombs S107, S114/T397, S117. Photos by Roger Saidah (not to scale).

FIG. 6. Child inhumations in the supine position with extended or flexed legs: Tombs S110/378, S112, S116. Photos by Roger Saidah (not to scale).

some of the burials but they do not appear in the photographs for a number of reasons, including the possibility that they had been ritually smashed over the tomb, as observed in T167, and that the layer of broken pottery had been removed before the picture was taken. On the other hand, the absence of a ceramic set considered to be associated with the ritual consumption of food and drink during the funeral and, ideally, in the afterworld[26], could be an indicator of the fact that infants and children were generally excluded from such rituals and that the children from T166 and T167 were exceptions.

## 4. DATA FROM THE PLANS: SPATIAL ANALYSIS AND QUANTIFICATION

Twelve of the drafts of plans recovered in the National Museum of Beirut storage rooms document the excavation of the areas K and L, carried out in 1961 and 1962;[27] all of the burials excavated during those campaigns are documented in these plans. A total number of 188 tombs are displayed; of these, 33 (17,5%)

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26    A recent comparative analysis of the funerary rituals performed at Tyre-al Bass is in Aubet 2014, pp. 508-529.

27    The pencil drafts have been digitized and graphically elaborated in order to put them to the same scale, join them and place them in the grid of the general plan of the site published by Saidah in 1966. In the drafts the borders of the pits are never marked: Mura 2016, pp. 119-130; pls. I-IV.
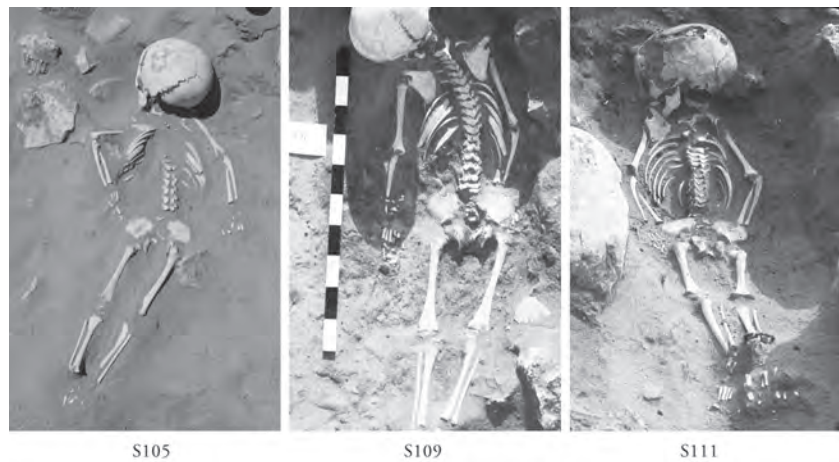
Fig. 7. Child inhumations in the prone position with extended legs: Tombs S105, S109/T376, S111. Photos by Roger Saidah (not to scale).
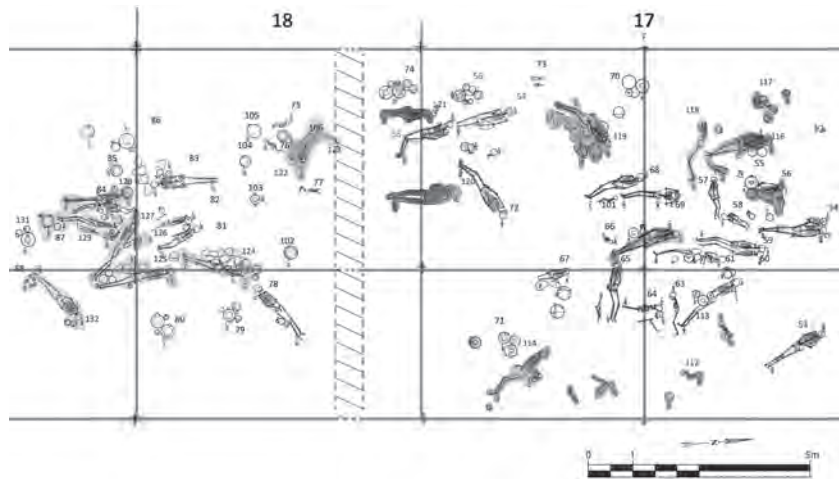


Fig. 8. Necropolis of Khaldé, plan of the squares L18 and L17 (Mura 2016, tav. IV, offset table). Graphic elaboration from the original drawings nos. 8-12. Courtesy of the National Museum of Beirut.

are incinerations and 155 are inhumations; 28 inhumations (18%) are surely recognizable as child burials. It must be stressed that the word "child" is used here in its broader sense to indicate those skeletons which are clearly recognizable as subadults in the drawings, based essentially on their dimensions: they most probably belong to the "infant" and "infant II" sugroups, while the "adolescents" subgroup is by far underestimated.

Although the study is still in progress, we can say that the proportion of recognizable child burials appears to be approximately the same in the plans representing the other areas of the excavation. This observation suggests that the small number of child burials described in Saidah's publication and pictured in his photographic archive is to be considered as his selection of the most significant and better preserved inhumations.

The spatial analysis of the necropolis is not the focus of this article, nonetheless some considerations can be useful. The plans show that the burials are organized in small groups, where incinerations and inhumations are mixed (Fig. 8). Child burials are generally integrated in the groups and occasionally related to an adult tomb, as seen in Tomb S101. The position and the orientation of the deceased, both adults and children, is variable and the overall impression is that the vicinity and association of the burials was felt as essential: very possibly their proximity is a reflection of a social tie, most probably a family relation.[28]

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28    Mura 2016, pp. 122-125.

Comparison with the spatial organization and localization of subadult burials in contemporary ceme-teries in Phoenicia is a difficult task, due to both the remarkable variability in the use of the funerary space[29] and to the difference in the quality and quantity of information available about each necropolis.[30] A large part of contemporary cemeteries are composed of chamber or cist tombs containing incinerations (as in Tel Rachidiyeh, for example[31]) or inhumations (as in the eastern and southern cemeteries at Achziv[32]), or both (as in the only chamber tomb in the northern necropolis at Achziv[33]); in most cases there is evidence that the burial space was reused for generations, and this continuity suggests the existence of a perceived social or kinship tie among the deceased. In the incineration cemeteries of Tyre al-Bass[34] and in the northern cemetery of Achziv,[35] where, as in Khaldé, the urns were arranged in pits cut in the sand, the funerary space appears as well to be organized in clusters of tombs, which also probably are a reflection of an existing social tie.[36] However, it is not clear if and how the representation of the social and family relations in the funerary space included children. In fact, the presence of subadults has only occasionally been documented in Iron Age cemeteries in Phoenicia,[37] and in the case of Tyre – Al Bass the accurate anthropological studies conducted on the incinerated remains have shown that children were excluded from the necropolis.[38] At the current state of knowledge, Khaldé is the only Iron Age necropolis in Phoenicia where the presence of a large number of children is clearly visible in the archaeological record.

## 5. Conclusions

The necropolis of Khaldé appears as an inclusive cemetery, where different ages and different funerary rituals are present and mixed together. Unfortunately, the fragmentary nature of the retrieved documentation and, most of all, the lack of the excavation diaries by Roger Saidah, make the recovery and interpretation of the archaeo-logical evidence a difficult task. However, the cross-comparison of the photographic archive, of the plans and of Saidah's preliminary publication provides some new solid data about subadult burials that are worth sharing.

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29    A tentative comparative analysis of the cemeteries of Tyre-al Bass, Achziv and Khaldé is in Mura 2014.

30    Information about Iron Age cemeteries in Phoenicia is uneven: while some cemeteries have been accurately studied, only frag-mentary information is available for others, due to illegal excavations, to the lack of systematic documentation of the explorations undertaken in the 19th and in the early 20th century, and to the partial publication of excavations carried out in the past decades, as it is the case of Khaldé and Achziv. The documentation of the excavations carried out by I. Ben Dor in the eastern and southern cemeteries at Achziv between 1941 and 1944 has been published by M. Dayagi-Mendels in 2002; the complete publication of the documentation of the excavations undertaken by M. Prausnitz in 1963-65, partly in conjunction with a mission from the University of Rome, is in progress: Prausnitz 1982; Edrey *et al.* 2018. An overview of the existing documentation about Iron Age cemeteries in Phoenicia has been presented by H. Sader: Sader 1995; 2015; 2019, pp. 216-248.

31    Doumet 1982; Doumet-Serhal 2003.

32    Dayagi-Mendels 2002.

33    Mazar 2004, pp. 21-23, 135-136. The spatial organization of the northern cemetery at Achziv, with its one chamber tomb sur-rounded by simple incineration pit burials, appears to be very similar to that of Khaldé, although inhumation is prevalent at Khaldé.

34    Aubet 2004; Aubet – Núñez – Trellisó 2014; Aubet 2015.

35    Mazar 2009-2010, pp. 21-27, 207.

36    Aubet 2014, pp. 523-524.

37    A remarkable example is in a rock-cut chamber tomb excavated by M. Prausnitz at Achziv, where 19 of the 52 buried individ-uals were children: Prausnitz 1962; Smith – Horowitz – Zias 1990. An exceptional cist tomb containing the burial of two adults and a child, dated to the eight century BCE, has recently been discovered in the tell of Achziv, but a complete report is not yet available: P. Bohstrom, *Whole nuclear family found in ancient Phoenician tomb in Israel,* Haaretz, Dec. 24, 2019.

38    Trellisó 2004, pp. 263-264; Trellisó 2014, pp. 470. Four fragments of bones belonging to a fetus were found in association with the bones of a woman inside the incineration urn 3 from Tomb 3/5 (Trellisó 2004, p. 268). Rather than as the deliberate association of an infant and adult burial, this situation can be interpreted as the incineration and burial of a women who died during the last months of pregnancy or in childbirth, when the fetus/newborn/stillborn had not still acquired the social status of an individual.

As shown by the Tombs T165, T166 and T167, subadult inhumations are documented since at least the very beginning of the Early Iron Age until the last phase of the Late Iron Age, represented by the Tomb T1. They generally are individual burials, but occasionally the skeleton of a child appears to be in a close relation with an adult burial. Personal ornaments, where present, are quite standardized and very simple, probably corresponding to the ornaments that the child wore during his or her life. At current state of knowledge, the presence of a ceramic funerary set is exceptional, and it is documented mainly in Early Iron Age tombs.

Children are clearly recognizable in the plans and they constitute approximately 18% of the inhumations. This percentage is indeed low if compared to the subadults death rate in preindustrial societies,[39] so we can suppose that not all the children of the community had access to a formal inhumation in the cemetery. They might be buried in different spaces or undergo a different funerary ritual, but at present we have no data that would allow further speculation on this topic.

The spatial organization of the burials in small groups suggests they reflect a social relation, and the presence of children leads to think to a family tie.

## 6. Catalogue of the child burials in Saidah's photographic archive

1. Tomb S101 (Fig. 3)
    References: Slides folder N_1964_HI.
    Location: Area of squares H or I.
    Year of excavation: 1964.
    Position: extended supine position. The body of the child is in connection with an adult burial: the child's head is positioned on the knee of the adult.
    Personal ornaments: /
    Grave goods: /

2. Tomb S102 (Fig. 4)
    References: Slides folder N_1964_HI.
    Location: Area of squares H or I.
    Year of excavation: 1964.
    Position: individual burial; the body is one-sided, with flexed legs.
    Personal ornaments: a bracelet (?) consisting of 3 small Cypraea shells, 2 beads and 1 scarab.
    Grave goods: /

3. Tomb S103 (Fig. 4)
    References: Slides folder N_1964_HI.
    Location: Area of squares H or I.
    Year of excavation: 1964.
    Position: individual burial; the body is one-sided, with flexed legs.
    Personal ornaments: a bronze bracelet; at least two beads are visible next to the collarbone.
    Grave goods: /

4. Tomb S105 (Fig. 7)
    References: slides folder O_1964_HIbis.
    Location: area of squares H or I.
    Year of excavation: 1964.
    Position: individual burial; the body is prone with extended legs.
    Personal ornaments: /
    Grave goods: /

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39   A recent study about human child mortality rates can be found in Volk – Atkinson 2013.

5. Tomb S107 (Fig. 5)
    References: slides folder O_1964_Hibis.
    Location: area of squares H or I.
    Year of excavation: 1964.
    Position: individual burial; the body is one-sided with flexed legs.
    Personal ornaments: a bronze bracelet; a small Cypraea shell.
    Grave goods: /

6. Tomb S109/T376 (Fig. 7)
    References: slides folder T_1966.
    Location: /
    Year of excavation: 1966.
    Position: individual burial; the body is prone with extended arms and legs.
    Personal ornaments: Possibly one bead next to the cervical vertebrae (the photograph is unclear).
    Grave goods: /

7. Tomb S110/T378 (Fig. 6)
    References: slides folder T_1966.
    Location: /
    Year of excavation: 1966
    Position: individual burial; the body is supine.
    Personal ornaments: a bronze bracelet; a string made of at least 12 beads next to the right femur; a bracelet (?) made of at least 3 beads next to the left femur.
    Grave goods: /

8. Tomb S111 (Fig. 7)
    References: slides folder T_1966.
    Location: /
    Year of excavation: 1966.
    Position: individual burial; the body is prone with extended legs.
    Personal ornaments: a bronze anklet.
    Grave goods: /
    Sequence: /

9. Tomb S112 (Fig. 6)
    References: slides folder T_1966.
    Location: /
    Year of excavation: 1966.
    Position: individual burial; the body is supine with extended arms and legs.
    Personal ornaments: a bronze bracelet; a string made of at least 14 beads next to the right femur; a blue faience scarab and a bead (?) next to the left femur.
    Grave goods: /

10. Tomb S114/T397 (Fig. 5)
    References: slides folder V_1967b
    Location: /
    Year of excavation: 1967.
    Position: individual burial; the body is one-sided with flexed legs.
    Personal ornaments: /
    Funerary gifts: /

11. Tomb S116 (Fig. 6)
   References: slides folder E_1967_LI; Saidah 1967.
   Location: area of the squares L.
   Year of excavation: 1967.
   Position: individual burial; the body is supine with flexed legs.
   Personal ornaments: a bronze anklet on the left ankle.
   Grave goods: /

12. Tomb S117 (Fig. 5)
   References: slides folder F_1966_H16.
   Location: square H16.
   Year of excavation: 1966.
   Position: individual burial; the body is one-sided with flexed legs.
   Personal ornaments: /
   Grave goods: /

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