

## GLASS FINDS AND ASSORTED BEADS FROM THREE TOMBS AT KURSI-GERGESA

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Three glass vessels (Figs. 1, 2) and forty-five pieces of jewelry made of glass, resin, coral, stone and bone (Figs. 3–5) were deposited in tombs discovered in Area D, behind the apse wall of the church at Kursi (Tombs 1–3; see Tzaferis, this volume).<sup>1</sup> Tomb 1 contained one trailed bottle, which was discovered intact (Fig. 1:1). Tomb 2 yielded no vessels, but produced 18 resin beads (Fig. 4), as well as a small, plain globular bead made of glass of uncertain color (Fig. 4: second row, first from left) and a small cylindrical bead made of bone (Fig. 4: bottom row, first from right). Two decorated beads were also found in Tomb 2: a mosaic-glass bead (Fig. 3:1) and a carnelian bead with a drawn pattern (Fig. 5:1). Tomb 3 had more varied finds, including two decorated glass vessels (Figs. 1:2; 2), two plain glass pendants (Fig. 3:3) and a ribbed bracelet (Fig. 3:4); and twenty plain and decorated beads of varied shapes and sizes, made of glass and carnelian (Figs. 3:2; 5), as well as a single coral bead (Fig. 5:13).

The entire assemblage from the three tombs is typical of the sixth–early seventh centuries CE. Like the previous glass assemblage found at the site, this one is also “limited in quantity and repertory of shapes” (Barag 1983); however, it includes a mold-blown jug with a rare symbolic motif (Fig. 2), hitherto unknown from an excavated context.

### GLASS VESSELS

#### *Trailed Bottles* (Fig. 1)

1. Tomb 1, Basket 15. Found intact. Interior crack on neck. Almost colorless, with a greenish-blue tinge. Small black impurities, silver iridescence,

patches of yellowish weathering, severe pitting. Asymmetrically shaped. Straight cylindrical neck with rounded and thickened rim. Bulbous squat body. High concave base. Applied trail wound eight times around middle neck. Height 17 cm; rim diam. 4.5 cm; body diam. 10.5 cm; base diam. 7 cm.

2. Tomb 3, Basket 97. Two fragments. Complete profile. Mended. Almost colorless, with greenish tinge. Silver iridescence, small patches of yellow-white weathering, sand deposits. Tall cylindrical neck widening upward with long mouth and rounded rim. Slight constriction at joint of neck and shoulder. Piriform body. Concave base. Applied trail closely wound 20 times around mouth. Height 27 cm; rim diam. 6.8 cm; body diam. 11.5; base diam. 8 cm.

The shapes and decoration of both bottles are characteristic of the Byzantine period, and they may well have been produced in the same local workshop. Number 1 is trailed midway up its straight neck, while No. 2 is trailed on the mouth. Bottles of this type were common in the region up to the end of the Byzantine period, e.g., Cave 2 at Khirbat el-Shubeika (Gorin-Rosen 2002a:316–317, Fig. 8:39, 40, and see there further references to Byzantine churches at Shave Ziyon and Bet Yerah). Bottles with trailed necks dated to the last phase of the Byzantine period are mentioned in the preceding excavations at Kursi (Barag 1983: Fig. 9:2, 3).

#### *Hexagonal Mold-Blown Jug* (Fig. 2)

3. Tomb 3, Basket 98. Complete, a small part missing on shoulder near handle. Vessel cracked on neck and mouth and below handle. Nearly colorless with greenish blue tinge. Yellowish green streaks and black

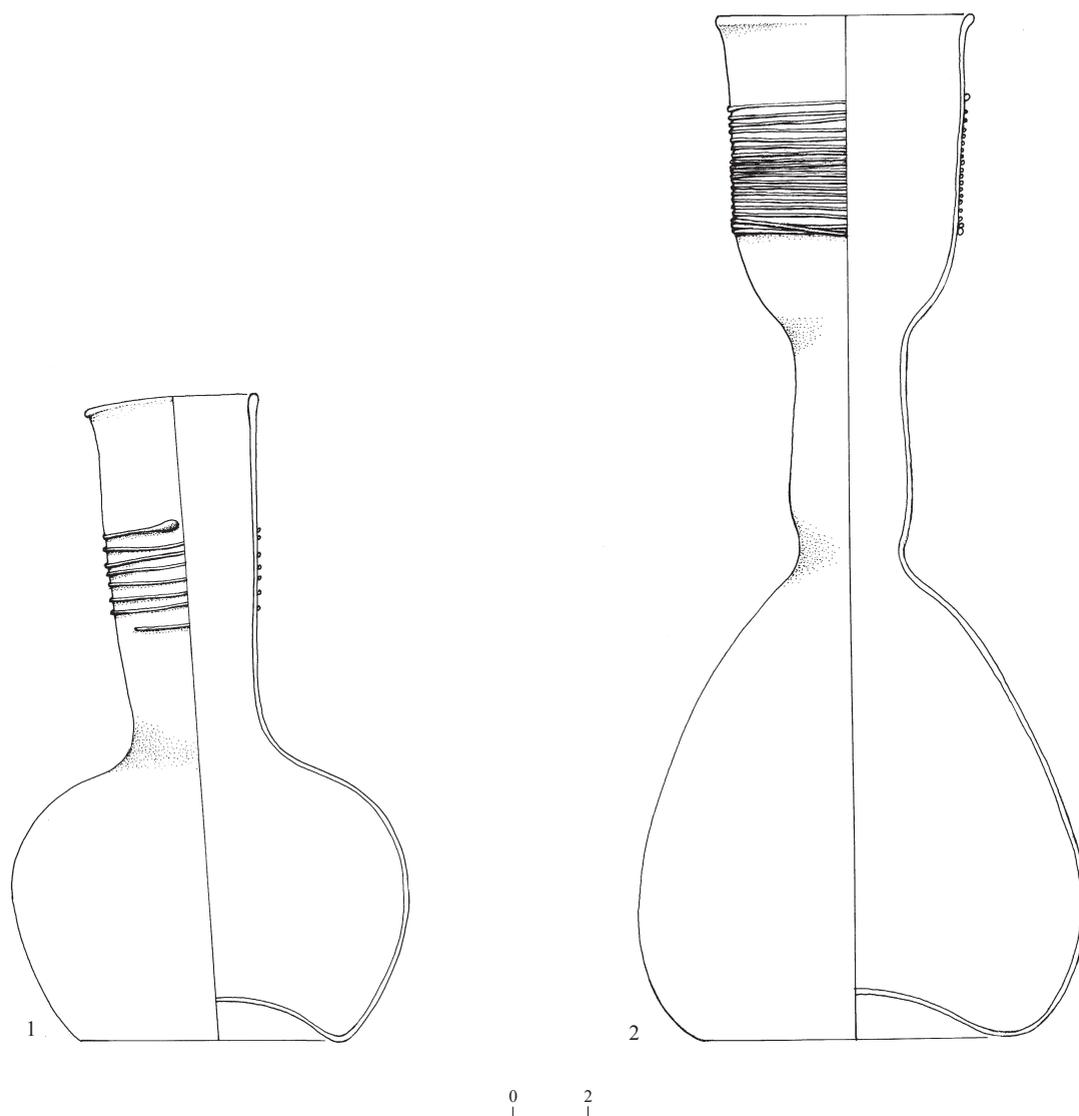


Fig. 1. Trailed bottles from Tombs 1 and 3.

impurities on rim, neck, shoulders and handle. Large elongated bubbles around rim. Cloudy weathering, iridescence, pitting, light sand deposits on interior. Rim flaring, folded unevenly inward, short funnel mouth, cylindrical neck, rounded shoulder, six-sided body, concave base with pontil mark. Strap handle rises from shoulder to rim, attached to rim with unevenly set fold and slightly ribbed at its base. Elongated strip of glass at the top of the handle. Trail unevenly wound once around neck, not sealed. Sides and base are decorated with sunken motifs. Body

decoration consists of three motifs occurring twice in the same order: a) small diamond-shaped bosses arranged in 5 staggered rows; b) two large conjoined lozenges one on top of the other with central bosses flanked by two half-lozenges; c) stylized palm frond with six pairs of leaves and a male mask among the top leaves. One depiction of a masked face is very schematic; the other is more distinctive with large sunken eyes and mouth. On the base, sunken shallow pattern of rosette with seven unevenly spaced petals. Height 15 cm; body diam. 7 cm; rim diam. 5.2 cm;



Fig. 2. Hexagonal mold-blown jug from Tomb 3.

base diam.  $7.0 \times 8.2$  cm. Pontil scar underneath: diam. 1 cm.

This jug belongs to a large group of mostly hexagonal vessels decorated with repeating, unframed geometric designs in sunken relief,

whose symbolic meaning is unclear. They plausibly were used to contain *eulogiae* (blessings) of sanctified oil, water or earth from the Holy Land, similar to other large and varied series of mold-blown containers, which bore

more distinctively Christian or Jewish symbols or motifs. Most of these vessels were produced on the local market, which was especially developed during the sixth–mid-seventh centuries CE, when Christian pilgrimage was at its height (Barag 1970; see also discussion in Israeli 2003:270–271).

Yael Israeli suggests that in contrast to other classes of *eulogia* vessels, these jugs were made mostly in closed molds, which formed the base as well. A metal mold with a rosette on the base, discovered at Samaria-Sebaste, was probably used for such production (Israeli 2003:277, see also Newby 2008:259–260, Fig. 5.01, with references therein).

Comparable jugs come from museums and private collections; many were reputedly found in our region, e.g., Nazareth, Mount Carmel, Bethany, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, as well as Jordan and Syria (Newby 2008:259, nn. 6, 50, 51). A similar complete specimen was excavated in Tomb 10 at Ḥorbat Qaṣṣra (unpublished, courtesy of Ze'ev Yeivin and Gerald Finkielstejn, IAA) and small body fragments were reported from a Byzantine church at Ḥorbat Karkur, in the northern Negev (Katsnelson 2004:282, Fig. 63:11–16, see there other parallels, including from the Kathisma church and the Byzantine glass workshop at Bet She'an).

Despite the above-mentioned similarities, the jug from Kursi is distinguished from other more common examples by an additional design: an unclear human face or mask superimposed on the upper part of the traditional palm frond. Three parallel occurrences of this motif, all from the region of Syria-Palestine and dated to the sixth–seventh centuries CE, appear on two jugs in the Shlomo Moussaieff collection, London (Newby 2008:284–289, Nos. 94–96, and see there for further references to other collections). One of these jugs (No. 96) is especially similar to our Fig. 2. Mask-like faces depicted on all these examples are made in a very similar, faint and unclear manner. Nonetheless, the varying positions of the face

on the palm-branch pattern (below the branch, in the middle or above it, as on Fig. 2), preclude the use of the same mold, and indeed, Newby (2008:268–270) distinguished five versions of “mask” molds. It is likely that the artisans added the ‘face’ motif to standard molds featuring the palm branch motif, or produced it by secondary blowing into another mold depicting a face.

The meaning of the human face inserted within the palm frond is uncertain. Newby suggested that it may have represented the skull associated in Christian symbolism with Golgotha (*golgolet* in Hebrew), the place where Jesus was crucified. Alternatively, it might have been a depiction of the head of St. John the Baptist, which according to a Christian legend was kept in a glass vase in Emesa, Syria, in which case such jugs might have been used for carrying ‘holy’ water from the Jordan River (Newby 2008:270–271). It cannot be ruled out, however, that the “image” might have represented some other Christian saint.

#### JEWELRY

##### *Mosaic-Glass Bead* (Fig. 3)

1. Tomb 2, Basket 84. Complete. Small, missing one of the ‘caps’ at the end. Hexagonal, elongated shape. Rod-formed from two cane sections: one in a concentric pattern with brownish-red central spot and yellow and dark green(?) rings and a second of octafoil pattern with leaves in yellow and dark green; yellow ‘caps’ around bead ends. Length 2.8 cm; diam. 0.8 cm.

This type originated in Roman Egypt or Syria and is known as “capped millefiori beads”. It was especially popular in our region during the Byzantine period (Spaer 2001:121, Nos. 221–223). Similar beads were excavated in burials in Galilee dated to the fourth–sixth centuries CE, e.g., Cave 2 at Kisra and Cave 1 at Khirbat el-Shubeika (Katsnelson 2002:323, Fig. 1:14 a, b, and see there for further references). Three examples of such beads come from the late sixth–early seventh-century CE tomb at Ma'in (Jordan), where glass pilgrim bottles were also



Fig. 3. A mosaic-glass bead from Tomb 2 (1) and glass beads (2), pendants (3) and a bracelet (4) from Tomb 3.

found (Barag 1985:373–374, Fig. 9:XII, Photo 24).

#### *Miscellaneous Glass Beads (Fig. 3)*

2. Tomb 3, Baskets 117, 118. Eight small, globular or barrel-shaped glass beads, of which five are illustrated.

These glass beads were found together with an assortment of carnelian beads, discussed below (see Fig. 5). They are totally weathered, their color and decoration hardly visible. Two are plain; one bears remains of ‘crumb’ design (Fig. 3:2, bottom right); five others are ornamented with strips and ‘eyes’.

The ‘crumb’ design was produced by rolling a hot bead over small glass crumbs in yellow and white. Those with ‘eye’ decoration consist of a central spot surrounded by two concentric circles striped in white and blue and placed around the center of the bead and perforation. One bead is so badly weathered that all of its three ‘eyes’ are missing (Fig. 3:2, top right). Similar ‘eye beads’ are usually dated to the fifth–seventh centuries CE or later (Spaer 2001:87, Nos. 121–123). Both ‘crumbed’ and ‘eye’ designs on beads were very popular during the Late Roman–Byzantine periods and many such beads were found locally, e.g., from Khirbat el-Shubeika (Katsnelson 2002:323, 327, Figs. 1:16; 2:12–14).

#### *Perforated Glass Drop-Pendants (Fig. 3)*

3. Tomb 3, Basket 113. Two intact pieces. Light greenish(?). Translucent. Crust of yellowish black weathering. Pear-shaped, pointed disk with small perforation, hemispherical cross-section. Length 1.5, 1.7 cm; width 1.3 cm; thickness 0.3, 0.4 cm.

The dating of such simply shaped pendants is often problematic. Like the rest of the jewelry found, they may be attributed to the Byzantine period, e.g., a similar pendant from a tomb at Ashqelon dated to the fourth–fifth centuries CE (Gorin-Rosen 2002b:88\*, Fig. 136:26).

#### *Ribbed Glass Bracelet (Fig. 3)*

4. Tomb 3, Basket 106. Two parts, mended, obviously seamed. Flattened cross-section, with five horizontal

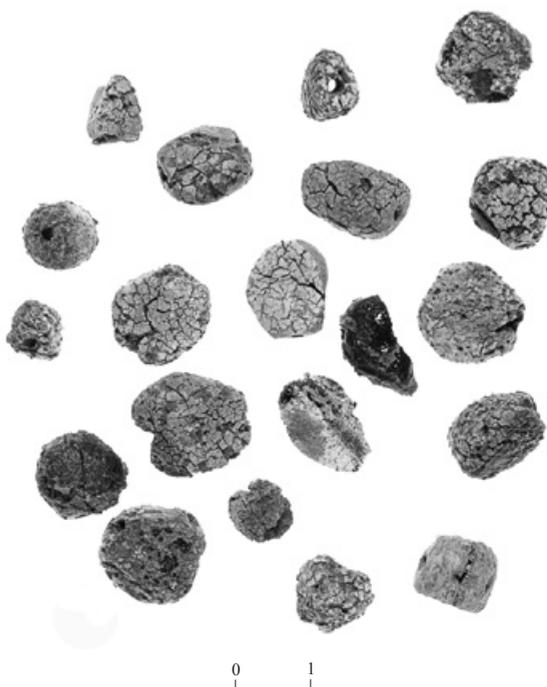


Fig. 4. Resin beads and a glass bead from Tomb 2.

ribs. Translucent, purple. Black crust of weathering, iridescence. Diam. 6.5 cm; width 1.2 cm.

This type is generally attributed to the fifth–seventh centuries CE. Such bracelets, in various colors, were excavated at Tell en-Nasbeh, Jerusalem and at Kafr Kama. Many examples in purple glass dated to the sixth–early seventh centuries CE are known from Resafa, central Syria (Spaer 1988:57, Type B 4a, and see there for further references). Similar bracelets of yellowish brown glass were unearthed in a tomb at Migdal Ha-‘Emeq, dated to the fourth–seventh centuries CE (Tatcher and Gal 2009:30\*, Fig. 20:1), and at Kabul, dated to the fourth–early fifth centuries CE (Vitto 2011: Fig. 12:5–7).

#### *Resin Beads (Fig. 4)*

A group of 18 resin beads was registered in Tomb 2 (Baskets 73, 91, 93). All are very weathered and partly broken. Some are rounded and flattened, while others have unevenly shaped facets. They are made of a natural resin

(copal).<sup>2</sup> Resin beads dated from the Byzantine and Ottoman periods are common finds in local burials (Katsnelson 2002:323, Fig. 1:27). They were probably a cheaper substitute for amber and carnelian beads, resembling the shapes of the latter.

#### *Carnelian Beads* (Fig. 5)

Twelve beautiful carnelian<sup>3</sup> beads were collected from the tombs (Fig. 5). They include a lentoid bead ornamented in white from Tomb 2 (Fig. 5:1) and 11 beads cut in spherical, disk or cylindrical shapes from Tomb 3. The latter probably belonged to the same string, since five of them still have remains of a similar metal string within their perforations (e.g., Fig. 5:2–4). The colors of carnelian beads range from reddish yellow to reddish brown and from greenish yellow to brownish. A disk-shaped bead (Fig. 5:4) has marks of facet cutting on one of the sides, as does a polygonal elongated bead (Fig. 5:5). A roughly made, elongated bead (Fig. 5:6) is probably unfinished. Six of the special beads have been singled out for detailed description (Fig. 5:1–6).

1. *Ornamented carnelian bead*. Tomb 2, Basket 91. Intact. Reddish yellow. Roughly lentoid disk. Decorated in white, with design on both sides of four dots within two crossed lines and are uneven additional line around the perimeter of the bead. Diam. 1.3 cm; thickness. 0.7 cm.

This bead was found in Tomb 2 together with the mosaic-glass bead (Fig. 3:1) and the resin beads (Fig. 4) discussed above. The piece is decorated in white with crossed lines and dots. A similar bead or pendant, identified by the excavator—perhaps erroneously—as glass, has the motif of an actual cross depicted in white. It was discovered in a sixth–seventh-century CE tomb in the church at Umm al-Rasas (Jordan) (Piccirillo and Alliata 1994:106, Photo 103; Tav. XXVIII: bottom, third row).

Our bead belongs to the so-called ‘etched’ carnelian beads, although no acid was used in their decoration. The design was created by drawing the motif and then tracing it with

an alkali solution (soda or potash) that, when heated to the proper temperature, penetrated the surface, ‘etching’ it and leaving smooth, indelible white or black lines on the stone (Beck 1933, and see the typological and chronological discussion therein). Parallels to our bead are to be found in Iran dated to the Parthian or Sasanian period (249 BCE–642 CE; Dubin 1987:16–17, Photograph).

2. *Spherical carnelian bead*. Tomb 3, Basket 117. Intact. Reddish yellow. Remains of metal string within perforation. Diam. 2 cm.

3. *Spherical carnelian bead*. Tomb 3, Basket 17. Intact. Reddish yellow. Remains of metal string within perforation. Diam. 1.5 cm.

Two smaller beads (diam. 0.9 cm and 1.2 cm) of a similar color were also found (Fig. 5:7, 8).

4. *Disk-shaped carnelian bead*. Tomb 3, Basket 117. Greenish yellow. Slightly chipped. Unevenly polished on surface. Remains of metal string within perforation. Diam. 1.4 cm; thickness 0.7 cm.

Two beads of a similar shape and rose-red and brownish colors were found, also with metal string remains. Diam 1.4 cm; thickness 0.9–1.0 cm (Fig. 5:9, 10).

5. *Biconical carnelian bead*. Tomb 3, Basket 117. Elongated. Reddish yellow. Chipped. Length 1.8 cm; thickness. 0.9 cm.

6. *Elongated carnelian bead*. Tomb 3, Basket 117. Reddish brown. Unevenly cut on surface. Length 1.8 cm; thickness 0.7 cm.

A similar bead of reddish yellow color was also found. Length 1.6 cm (Fig. 5:11).

#### CONCLUSIONS

The glass, resin and stone finds from Kursi comprise an assemblage of burial objects dated by the excavator to around the Persian invasion in 614 CE (see Tzaferis, this volume). The glass hexagonal jug from Tomb 3 (Fig. 2) and the

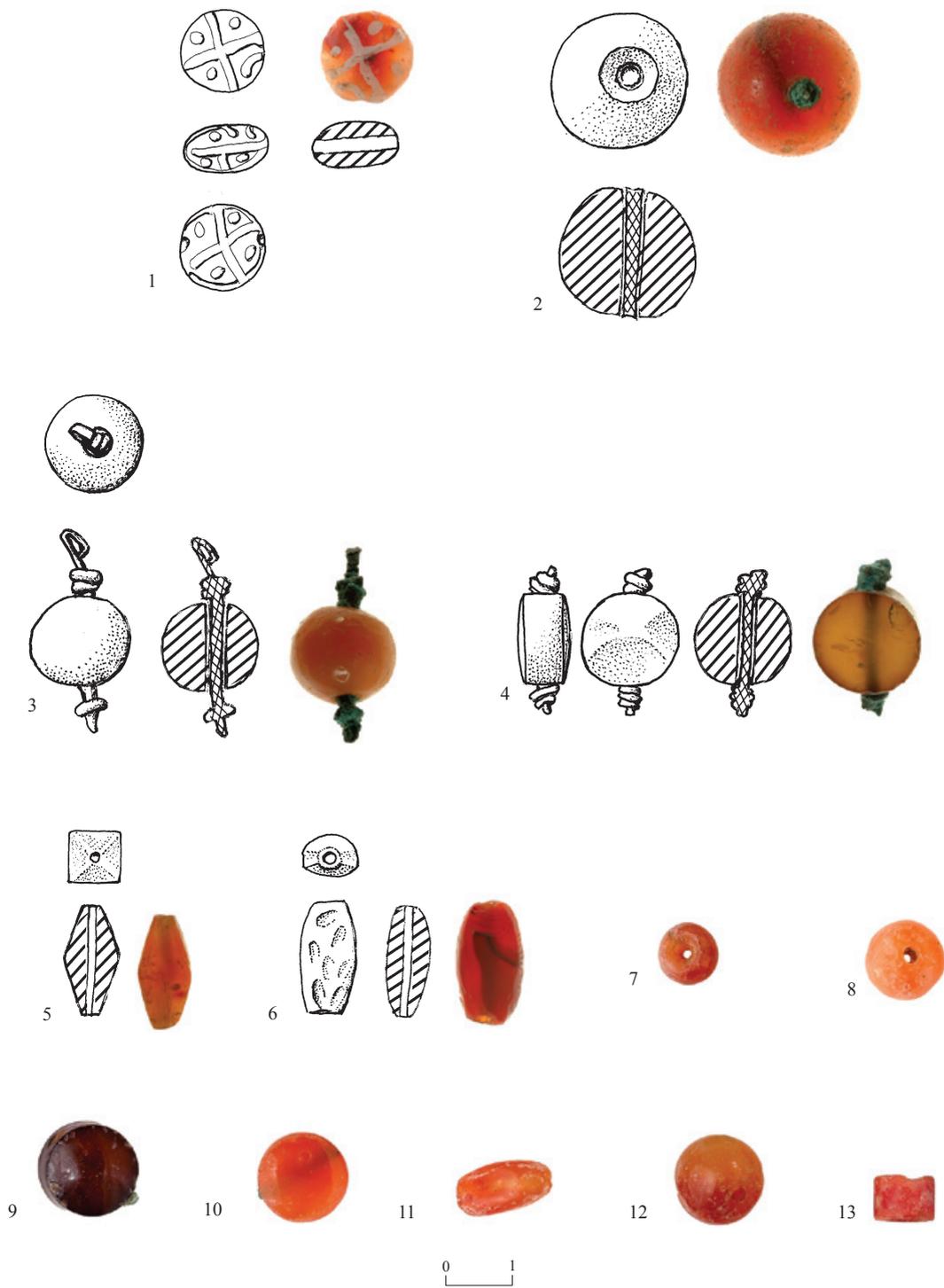


Fig. 5. Carnelian beads from Tombs 2 (1) and 3 (2–12), and a coral bead from Tomb 3 (13).

mosaic-glass bead from Tomb 2 (Fig. 3:1) have parallels in a Christian tomb at Ma'in dated to 595/604 CE, where two *eulogia* containers of a similar class were found alongside a pair of hexagonal jugs with typical Christian symbols (Barag 1985). The monastic location of the Kursi tombs, as well as their contents, especially the iron rings engraved with depictions of Jesus (see Tzaferis, this volume: Fig. 18:1, 2), suggest that many of the deceased were Christians. Consequently, the hexagonal jug from Tomb 3 has special significance: its discovery once more supports Barag's suggestion that most

of the hexagonal glass vessels with "unassigned" symbols are Christian artifacts, produced in the Holy Land at the end of the Byzantine period (Barag 1985:374). Furthermore, the fact that the jug from Kursi was deposited in a tomb corresponds to Newby's interesting proposal that "the final, intended use" of glass *eulogiae* vessels was "for inclusion in burials." She further suggests that some of these fragile types, especially jugs, were possibly made primarily for a local market, for pilgrims who lived within the Holy Land, rather than for those who traveled long distances abroad (Newby 2009:305).

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> IAA License No. G-86/2002. I am grateful to the excavator, Vassilios Tzaferis, who brought me these finds to study. The vessels were restored by Olga Shorr, drawn by Noga Ze'evi and photographed by Clara Amit.

<sup>2</sup> The resin was collected from living trees and did not undergo chemical changes that create real amber (Dubin 1987:296).

<sup>3</sup> A translucent form of chalcedony stone that was used in the ancient world for the production of beads, amulets and inlays.

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