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A Site from the Iron Age until the Early Islamic Period near Ṭamra in the Lower Galilee

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Introduction

The village of Ṭamra (locally known as Ṭamra ez-Zu'bi) is located in the eastern Lower Galilee on the Issachar Heights, about 6 km south of Mt. Tabor (Fig. 1). The soil layer covering the underlying basalt formation is very thin and there are few water resources (Gal 1982:80). The site (map ref. NIG 23830–1/72670–1; OIG 18830–1/22670–1) is on the steep eastern slope of the village, near the spring of 'Ein et-Taḥta, where columns apparently belonging to a Byzantine church were found (Gal 1998:57*). Shaked (1999), Gal et al. (2001) and Goren (2001) conducted excavations nearby, in which all the finds were dated to the Roman, Byzantine, Early Islamic and Mamluk periods.

In 2001, a row of four squares was excavated, exposing sherds from Iron Age I and five strata: Iron Age II, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic (Porat 2005). [1]

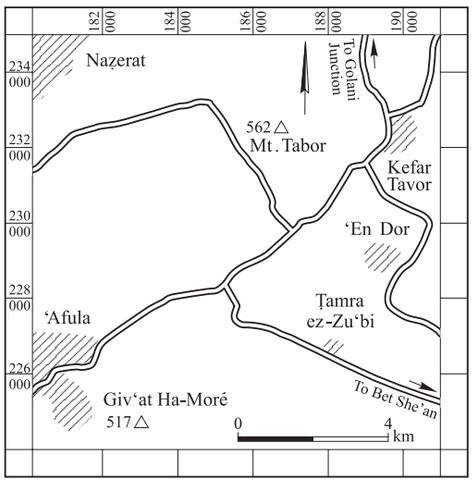


Fig. 1. Location map.

The Excavation

Iron Age I

No architectural remains from this period were found. However, a few pottery sherds (Fig. 2:1, 2) were recovered from accumulation layers.

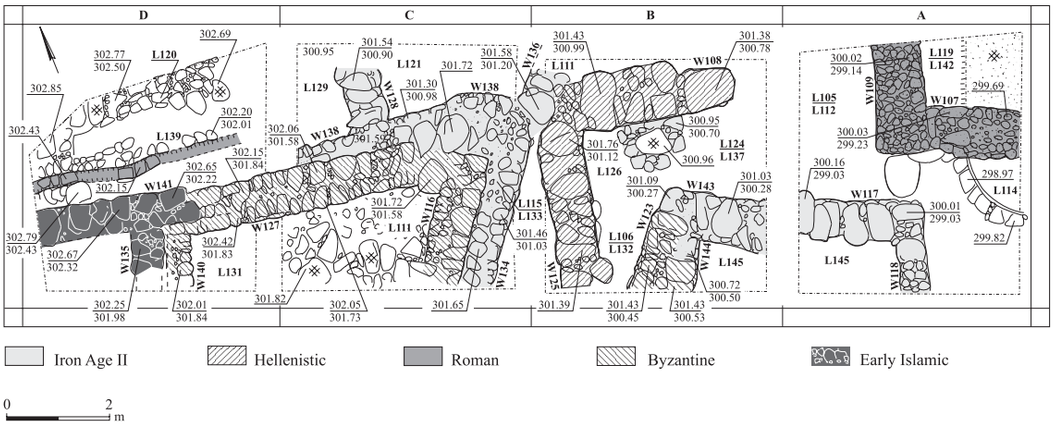
Iron Age II (Stratum I)

The remains of two or three partly excavated Iron Age buildings were found in Sqs A, B and C (Plan 1). Bedrock was reached in L129 (Sq C).

Walls 138 and 134 (Sq C) seem to form a corner, but both are partially covered by Walls 127 and 116 of a Byzantine structure. Walls 128 and 136 abut the northern face of W138, forming one end of a room that had a hard, light yellowish brown earthen floor (L121). The walls were constructed of medium-sized fieldstones averaging 0.40 × 0.30 × 0.22 m, interspersed with smaller stones.

It is unclear whether Walls 117, 118, 143 and 144 (Sqs A, B) actually enclosed a room (L145), as the base of W117 is 1.25 m lower than the base of W143. The difference in height may well follow the slope of the hill. However, this could not be verified as, due to a lack of time, neither the 0.7 m wide balk separating W117 and W143 nor the collapsed stone fill of L145 was excavated. Walls 144 and 143, built of large basalt fieldstones interspersed with smaller fieldstones, are 0.9 m wide and survived to a height of 0.75–0.82 m, while Walls 117 and 118 are only one stone wide (0.6 m) and still stand to a height of over 1 m. The upper course of W144 is incorporated into the Byzantine W123.

North of W143 and W144 (Sq B) was an isolated segment of an Iron Age floor (L126)



Plan 1. Excavation plan.

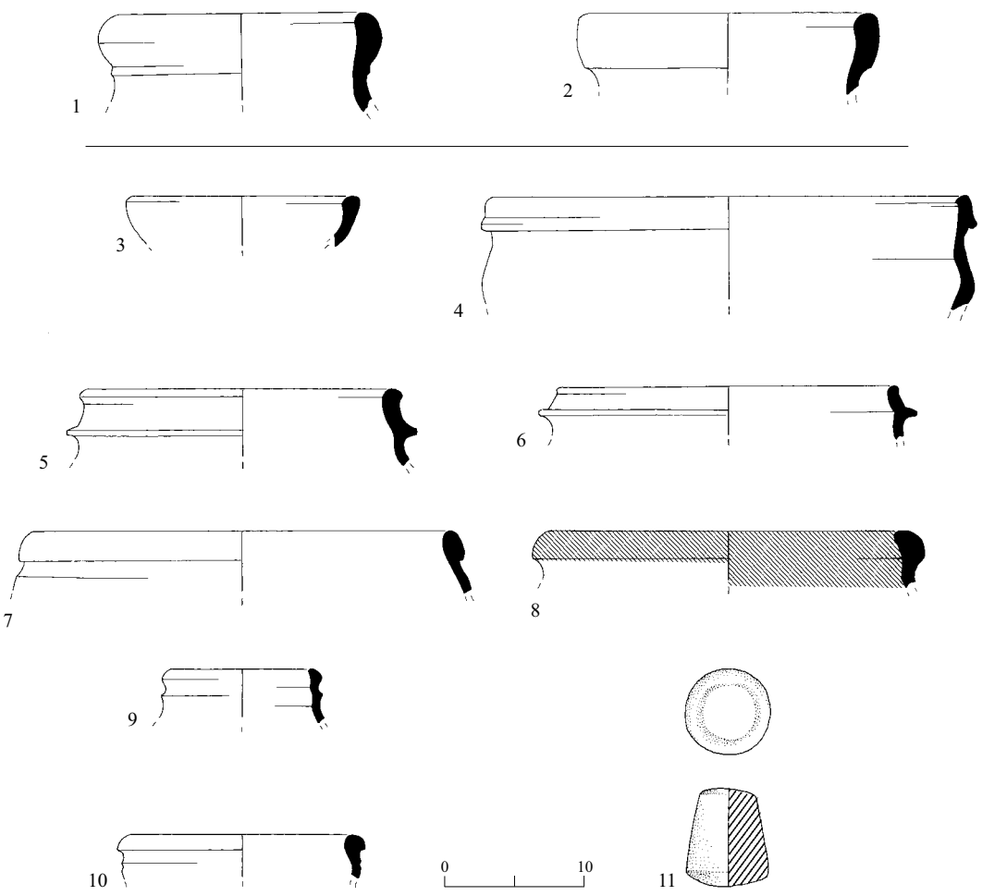


Fig. 2. Iron Age finds.

◂ **Fig. 2**

No.	Object	Reg. No.	Locus	Description	Comparisons
1	Jar	1016/1	105	Reddish yellow, 5YR 6/8	Aharoni 1957: Pl. 5:20 (Iron I) Yadin et al. 1961: Fig. CLXVIII:18, 19 (Ḥaẓor, Iron Age I)
2	Jar	1020	112	Reddish brown, 5YR 6/4	Aharoni 1957: Pl. 4:4 (Iron I) Yadin et al. 1961: Fig. CLXVIII:18, 19 (Ḥaẓor, Iron I)
3	Bowl	1083	132	Light brown, 7.5YR 6/3, dark gray core	Garfinkel and Greenberg 1997: Pl. III.23:2 (Ḥaẓor, 10th c. BCE)
4	Cooking pot	1079	112	Dark reddish gray, 5YR 4/2	Gal 2000: Pl. 20:8 (Tel Par, Iron II)
5	Cooking pot	1016/2	105	Grayish brown, 10YR 5/2, core black	Gal 2000: Pl.17:11 (Tel Par, Iron II)
6	Cooking pot	1075/3	126	Dark brown, 7.5YR 4/3	Shalem and Gal 2000: Pl. 3:7 (Tur'an, end of 10th–beginning of 9th c. BCE)
7	Krater	1081	112	Reddish brown, 5YR 5/4	Garfinkel and Greenberg 1997: Pl. III.22:6 (Ḥaẓor, 10th c. BCE)
8	Krater	1085	133	Light yellowish brown, 10YR 6/4, yellowish red slip, 5YR 5/6	
9	Jar	1072	126	Reddish yellow, 5YR 6/6	Shalem and Gal 2000: Pl. 4:6 (Tur'an, end of 10th–beginning of 9th c. BCE)
10	Jar	1075/1	126	Light reddish brown, 5YR 6/4	Shalem and Gal 2000: Pl. 4:7 (Tur'an, end of 10th–beginning of 9th c. BCE)
11	Basalt pestle	1071	126		

with a round installation made of a large, flat stone surrounded by smaller stones (Fig. 3). Loci 132 and 137 are Iron Age accumulations beneath the level of L126.

The Stratum I pottery included a small, rounded bowl (Fig. 2:3), but consisted predominantly of cooking pots (Fig. 2:4–6), kraters (Fig. 2:7, 8), and jars (Fig. 2:9, 10); most dated to the tenth and ninth centuries BCE. The majority of the pottery was found in accumulations in L112, L132 and L137, as well as in the mixed L105 (overlying L112); only a small amount of pottery (Fig. 2:6, 9, 10) and a basalt pestle (Fig. 2:11) were found on Iron Age Floor 126.

The Hellenistic Period (Stratum II)

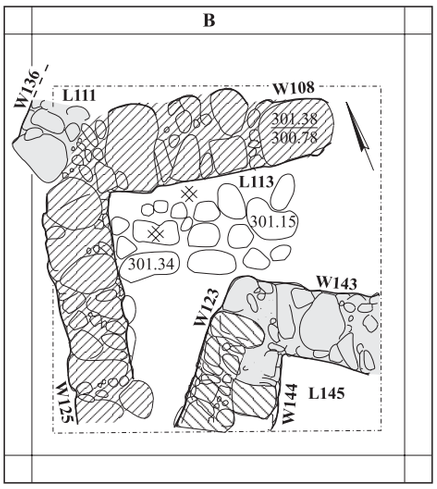
Walls 108 and 125 (Sq B) form the corner of a room with a stone floor (L113; Plan 2) and cut into the earlier Iron II earthen floor (L126). The walls are made of large basalt fieldstones and

Fig. 3. Iron II circular installation in L126.

smaller filling stones, with some of the larger stones occupying the full width of the wall (0.70–1.15 m).

Fragments of pottery found on the floor belong to a single type of storage jar (Fig. 5:1), dating to c. 175–100 BCE. A silver drachm of Alexander the Great, although not found *in situ*, is confirmation of Hellenistic occupation

at the site (see Syon, this volume). Roman and Byzantine finds in the accumulation directly above L113 probably originated in the overlying earthen floor, L106.



Plan 2. Plan of Hellenistic walls and floor.

The Roman Period (Stratum III)

The only certain remains of a Roman building were found in Sq A (Plan 1). Part of a room (L119) with a hard-packed earthen floor mixed with ash was exposed. The inside faces of W107 and W109 were built of large dressed basalt blocks with a course of small stones and hard whitish mortar between them (Fig. 4; not visible on plan). The outer faces of the walls were very uneven and the only pottery in the loci associated with them (L112 and L114) was from the Iron Age (i.e., no Roman pottery). It seems that these were foundation courses whose outside faces were not intended to be seen; perhaps they were the walls of a cellar. The pottery beneath the earlier Floor 142 was from the second century CE (Fig. 5:2–4), while the pottery in the fill on Floor 119 was mostly fourth century CE (Fig. 5:5, 7–12).

Wall 107 cut an earlier circular kiln (L114) constructed of roughly hewn basalt stones with a brick inner facing. Since only a small portion of the kiln was excavated and no finds were

Fig. 4. Roman Walls 107 and 109, with inner faces of large, dressed basalt blocks and a course of small stones.

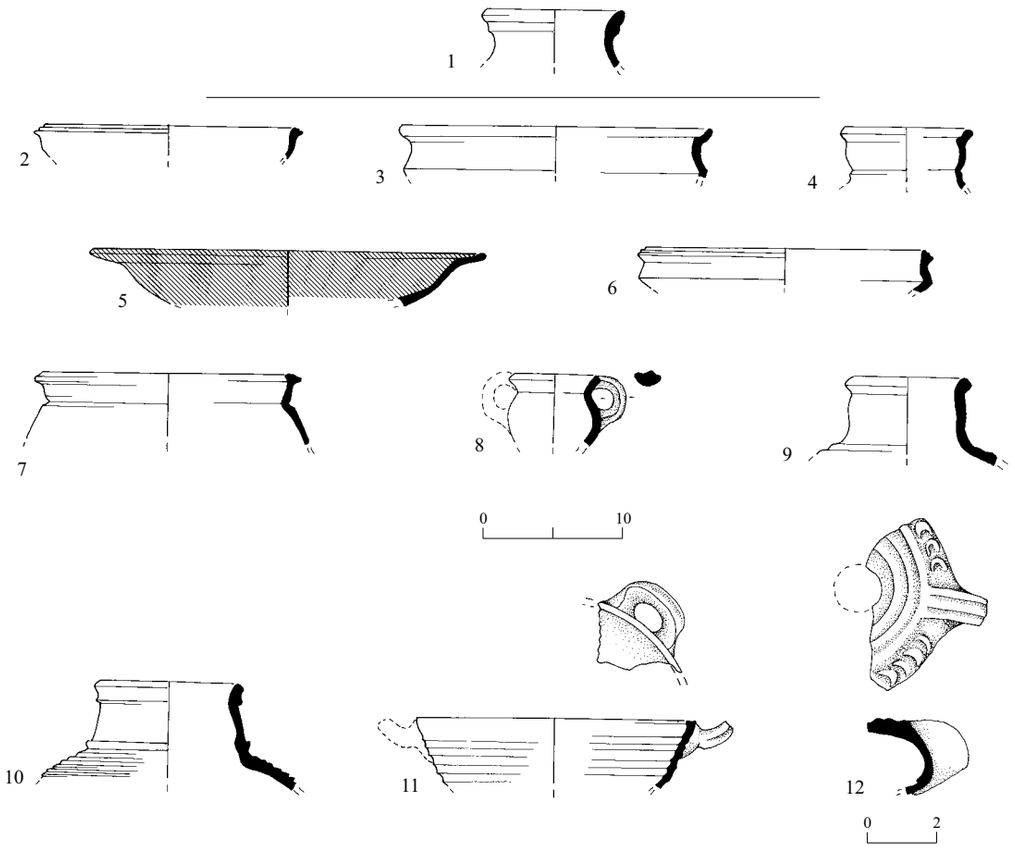


Fig. 5. Hellenistic (1) and Roman (2–12) pottery.

associated with it, the dating is problematic. A fragment of a ceramic waster found in L142 might be connected with this kiln.

Most of the Roman-period vessels are plain wares: bowls (Fig. 5:6), cooking vessels (Fig. 5:7, 8, 11), and jars (Fig. 5:9, 10); exceptions are a red-slipped bowl (Fig. 5:5) and a lamp fragment datable to the third century CE (Fig. 5:12).

In addition, in L139 (Sq D) a line of small stones alongside a row of roof tiles (the cover of a channel?) has been tentatively dated by the associated pottery to the Roman period.

The Byzantine Period (Stratum IV)

Walls 140, 127, and 116 (all c. 0.8 m wide) belong to a segment of a building with a partly preserved stone floor (L131, L111) in Sqs C and D (Plan 1). The inner and outer faces of these walls were constructed of large stones (averaging 0.44 × 0.43 × 0.34 m) interspersed with smaller stones. Walls 116 and 127 were built along the contours and partially covered the Iron II Walls 134 and 138, respectively. To the east of W116, a packed earthen floor (L115 and L106) extended over Iron Age W134 and the Hellenistic Walls 125, 108 and L113. Floor 106 reached as far as W123 (Sq B), which was built on the earlier Iron II W144. This floor was probably the foundation of a mosaic, as it was imbedded with small pieces of stones and pottery and many free, large white tesserae were found in the accumulation above it.

◂ **Fig. 5**

No.	Object	Reg. No.	Locus	Description	Comparisons
1	Jar	1036	113	Pale brown, white grits, 10YR 6/3, white grits	Lapp 1961: Type II.11 (c. 175–100 BCE)
2	Cooking bowl	1098/1	142	Red, 10R 5/8	Adan-Bayewitz 1993: Pl. 1B:10 (early 2nd–mid-4th c. CE)
3	Cooking pot	1098/3	142	Red, 2.5YR 4/8	Adan-Bayewitz 1993: Pl. 3B:12 (early 2nd–late 4th c. CE)
4	Jar	1098/4	142	Red, 10R 4/8, black core	Loffreda 1974: Fig.1:1, Type A1 (Capernaum, 63 BCE–135 CE) Avshalom-Gorni and Getzov 2002: Fig. 5:10
5	Bowl, Form 56	1056/6	119	Reddish yellow, red slip, 5YR 7/6	Hayes 1985: Pl. VII:7 (late 2nd c. CE)
6	Carinated bowl	1009	105	Red, 2.5YR 5/8, dark gray core	Johnson 1988: Pl. 7-25:413 (Jalame, before mid-4th c. CE)
7	Cooking pot	1056/2	119	Red, 10R 5/8, darker core	Adan-Bayewitz 1993: Pl. 4B:2 (mid-1st–mid-2nd c. CE)
8	Cooking pot	1056/4	119	Red, 10R 5/8	Lapp 1961: Type 34 (0–68 CE)
9	Jar	1056/5	119	Red, 10R 4/8, light gray surface	Johnson 1988: Fig. 7-51:781–783 (Jalame, 4th–6th c. CE)
10	Jar	1054	119	Red, 10R 4/8	Johnson 1988: Fig. 7-51:775 (Jalame, 4th–6th c. CE)
11	Cooking bowl	1056/1	119	Red, 2.5YR 4/6	Magness 1993: Casserole Form I:1, 2 (4th–5th c. CE)
12	Lamp	1037	119	Reddish yellow, 5YR 7/6, reddish brown slip	Abu-Uqsa, in prep.: Pl. 4:3 (3rd c. CE)

The pottery of Strata IV and V was mixed and dated to the sixth–eighth centuries CE. Most of the pottery was found in the accumulation above the stone Floors 111 and 131 and the earthen Floors 115 and 106. The most frequently occurring vessels were jars, as well as bowls, plates, and basins of Cypriot Red Slip Ware (Fig. 6:1–3), African Red Slip Ware (Fig. 6:4, 5), and Late Roman C Ware (Fig. 6:6–8); there were almost no cooking vessels. Some basins and a few lamps were also found. Fragmentary *in situ* remains of a *ṭabun* and the massive base of a pithos (Fig. 6:10) were uncovered on Floor 115, next to W116. Additional finds include some fragments of basalt mortaria (Fig. 6:16), a few bones and a small amount of glass. Eleven badly preserved fifth–sixth century CE coins from above the floor in L113 (Stratum II) probably filtered down from the overlying L106 (see Syon, this volume).

The Early Islamic Period (Stratum V)

In Sq D, two wall stubs (W135, W141), adjoining at a right angle, were identified as Early Islamic since they overlie the earlier Byzantine Walls 140 and 127 (Plan 1). Walls 135 and 141 are two stones wide (0.7 m), constructed of medium-sized basalt fieldstones. A segment of a stone pavement (L120), though not contiguous, might belong to these walls. The fill above L120 contained mixed pottery from the sixth–eighth centuries CE (as well as a fourth-century BCE coin; see Syon, below).

Sherds found in other loci provide further evidence of this date range and may well derive from the Early Islamic period, especially the basins (Fig. 6:11, 12) and jars (Fig. 6:13–15).

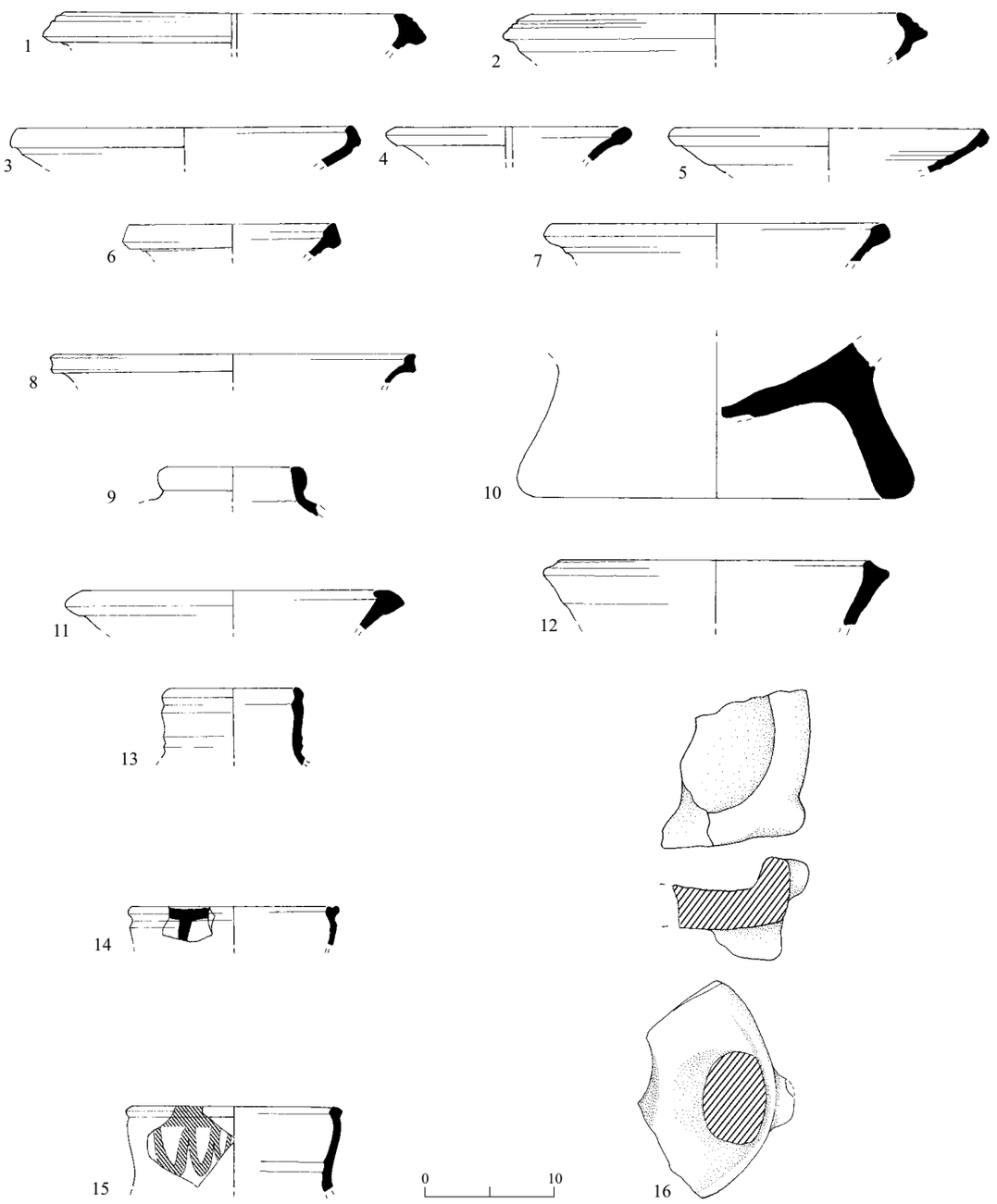


Fig. 6. Byzantine (1–10; 16) and Early Islamic (11–15) finds.

◂ **Fig. 6**

No.	Object	Reg. No.	Locus	Description	Comparisons
1	Basin, CRSW Form10	1025/3	113	Yellowish red, 5YR 5/8, red slip, 2.5YR 5/6	Hayes 1972: Fig. 82:1 (2nd half of 6th–early 7th c. CE)
2	Bowl, CRSW Form 9C	1017/4	106	Reddish yellow, 5YR 6/6, red slip, 2.5YR 5/6	Hayes 1972: Fig. 82:13 (580–end of 7th c. CE)
3	Bowl, CRSW	1010	106	Light reddish brown, 5YR 6/4, int. reddish brown slip, 5YR 4/4, on ext. rim very pale brown slip, 10YR 8/3	Hayes 1972: Fig. 85:C (6th c. CE and later)
4	Plate, ARSW Form 104 C	1025/1	113	Yellowish red, 5YR 5/8, Light red slip, 2.5YR 6/8	Hayes 1972: Fig. 30:23 (mid-6th c. CE and later)
5	Bowl, ARSW Form 99A	1092/1	131	Reddish yellow, 5YR 6/6, red slip, 2.5YR 5/6	Hayes 1972: Fig. 28:12 (c. 510–540 CE)
6	Bowl, LRCW Form 10	1017/3	106	Yellowish red, 5YR 5/8, red, 10R 4/6, and dark red to pale red slip, 10R 3/6, 5/2	Hayes 1972: Fig. 71:15 (early–mid-7th c. CE)
7	Plate, LRCW Form 10A	1025/2	113	Reddish yellow, 5YR 6/8, red, 2.5YR 4/8, and light reddish brown slip, 2.5YR 6/3	Hayes 1972: Fig. 71:4 (late 6th–early 7th c. CE)
8	Bowl, LRCW Form 3F	1084/2	131	Light red, 2.5YR 6/6, slip from red 10R 4/6 to light reddish brown 5YR 6/4	Hayes 1972: Fig. 69:25 (early 6th c. CE)
9	Jar	1092/2	131	Reddish yellow 5YR 7/6, gray core, light gray surface, 2.5YR 7/1	Avshalom-Gorni 1998: Pl. 5:1.6.1 (end of 5th–6th c. CE)
10	Pithos	1094	115	Reddish brown, 5YR 5/4	Loffreda 1974: Fig. 13:5 (300–638 c. CE)
11	Basin	1017/2	106	Dark gray, 2.5YR 4/1, black slip all over	Watson 1992: Pl. 6:46 (6th–8th c. CE)
12	Basin	1084/1	131	Reddish yellow, 5YR 6/6, reddish yellow surface, 5YR 6/6	Smith and Day 1989: Pl. 52:27 (6th–7th c. CE)
13	Jar	1035/1	111	Yellowish red, 5YR 5/8, brown surface, 7.5YR 5/2	Smith and Day 1989: Pl. 48:15 (6th–7th c. CE)
14	Jar	1014/1	106	Reddish yellow, 5YR 7/8, white slip, 10YR 8/2 with grayish brown, 10R 5/2 paint	McNicoll, Smith and Hennessy 1982: Pl. 142:3 (8th c. CE)
15	Jar	1035/3	111	Pink, 5YR 8/4, white slip, 10YR 8/2 with pale red, 10R 5/4 paint	Smith and Day 1989: Pl. 55:10 (early 8th c. CE)
16	Basalt mortarium	1014/3	106		

CONCLUSIONS

This was the first excavation in Ṭamra ez-Zu‘bi to yield information about periods earlier than the Roman period. The first occupation layer belongs to Iron II. In his survey of the area, Gal (1982:85) showed that none of the surrounding sites was occupied before the tenth century BCE, suggesting that the tribe of Issachar settled in the heights of the eastern Lower Galilee only after the downfall of the Canaanite cities in the Bet She’an and Jezreel Valleys. Although a few pieces of Iron I pottery were found in the excavation, no architectural remains of settlement from this period were found.

The Issachar Heights are suitable for only the most marginal type of agriculture (Gal 1982:80). Even so, the recurrent occupation from Iron II to the Early Islamic period, as indicated by the ceramic evidence, can be explained by the

proximity of the ‘Ein et-Taḥta spring. The walls of all the phases are similarly oriented because of the topographical conditions and later walls often use earlier walls as their foundations.

It would appear that, throughout its history, Ṭamra ez-Zu‘bi was a small, rural settlement. The pottery assemblage consists mainly of plain domestic kitchenware (mainly cooking pots, jars, and simple bowls), although in the Byzantine period, some imported plates reached the site. The numismatic finds (see Syon, this volume) are predominantly Byzantine, but they also indicate a Hellenistic and Roman presence at the site.

NOTE

[1] In May–June 2001, a salvage excavation (Permit No. A-3419) was conducted at Ṭamra ez-Zu‘bi on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority. It was directed by Leea Porat with the assistance of Yossi Yaakobi (administration), Howard Smithline (photography), Avraham Hajian and Viatcheslav Pirsky (surveying), Danny Syon (numismatics), Hagit Tahan (pottery drawing), and Ella Altmark (cleaning of coins). I thank my co-workers in the Northern District, and especially at ‘Akko, for help with the pottery analysis.

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