

## GLASS VESSELS FROM THE MONASTERY AT KHIRBAT UMM LEISUN, JERUSALEM

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The excavations of the Georgian Monastery at Khirbat Umm Leisun (see Seligman, this volume)<sup>1</sup> yielded a relatively small quantity of glass finds, 144 fragments, and vessel-type could be determined for 109 of them. The rest were unidentifiable body fragments. In general, the state of preservation was poor, and no complete vessels were found. A large part of the glass finds accumulated in a burnt fill (L262) at the top of a staircase that led to a burial crypt; several fragments were found in the crypt itself (Loci 267, 276, 277). The range of types is limited, mainly bottles and windowpanes.

A representative sample, consisting of a decorated bowl or oil lamp (Fig. 1:1), eight plain and decorated bottles (Fig. 1:2–9) and a windowpane (Fig. 1:10), was selected for illustration and discussion. The fabric of the vessel fragments is greenish blue, shiny, often with bubbles and black impurities. One exception (Fig. 1:4) has a distinctive olive green fabric. The color of the windowpanes varies from bluish green to greenish. The glass finds form a small homogeneous group that dates between the sixth and mid-eighth centuries CE. The assemblage comprises simple domestic vessels, widely known from local rural domestic and monastic complexes. The mold-blown bowl or oil lamp (Fig. 1:1) is the only type that is so far unknown in Jerusalem and its surroundings.

*Bowls with Mold-Blown Ornamentation* (Fig. 1:1, 2).

Bowl No. 1 is one of the most interesting glass finds from the site due to its rare, possibly symbolic, decoration of diamond-shaped

lattice. Five fragments were found in burial trough L276 (Fig. 1:1), and a sixth, apparently of the same bowl, came from burial trough L277 (not illustrated). Bowl No. 2, which was found on the floor of the crypt (Fig. 1:2), is possibly the base of the same vessel.

The fabric, shape and style of decoration of this bowl or bowl-shaped oil lamp are characteristic of the glass tradition of the transitional phase between the late Byzantine and early Umayyad periods. A plain bowl with a similar shape was found at Khirbat Siyar el-Ghanam, one of the monasteries in the surrounding area, on the route between Jerusalem and Bethlehem (Corbo 1955:75, Fig. 25:4). A strikingly similar bowl with remains of a small side handle, indicating its possible use as an oil lamp, was found some distance from Jerusalem, in an excavation of a late Byzantine church in the area of the Old Central Market of Be'er Sheva<sup>2</sup> (Permit No. A-2145; L919, B2566; unpublished, courtesy of Peter Fabian). A similar design, consisting of large mold-blown diamond-shaped lattice, appears on a bowl-shaped lamp of a different type, with three handles on a folded rim, which was found in an Umayyad context, in the Byzantine church of Bishop Isaiah at Jerash (Meyer 1988:212, Fig. 12:Q). The base of the lamp from Jerash is decorated with a rosette similar to that of Bowl No. 2. Another comparable base was found in an Umayyad level at Bet She'an (Hadad 2005: Pl. 4:86).

Bowls with mold-blown decoration are not common in domestic contexts of the late Byzantine–Umayyad periods, and oil lamps even less so. Considering that the three above-

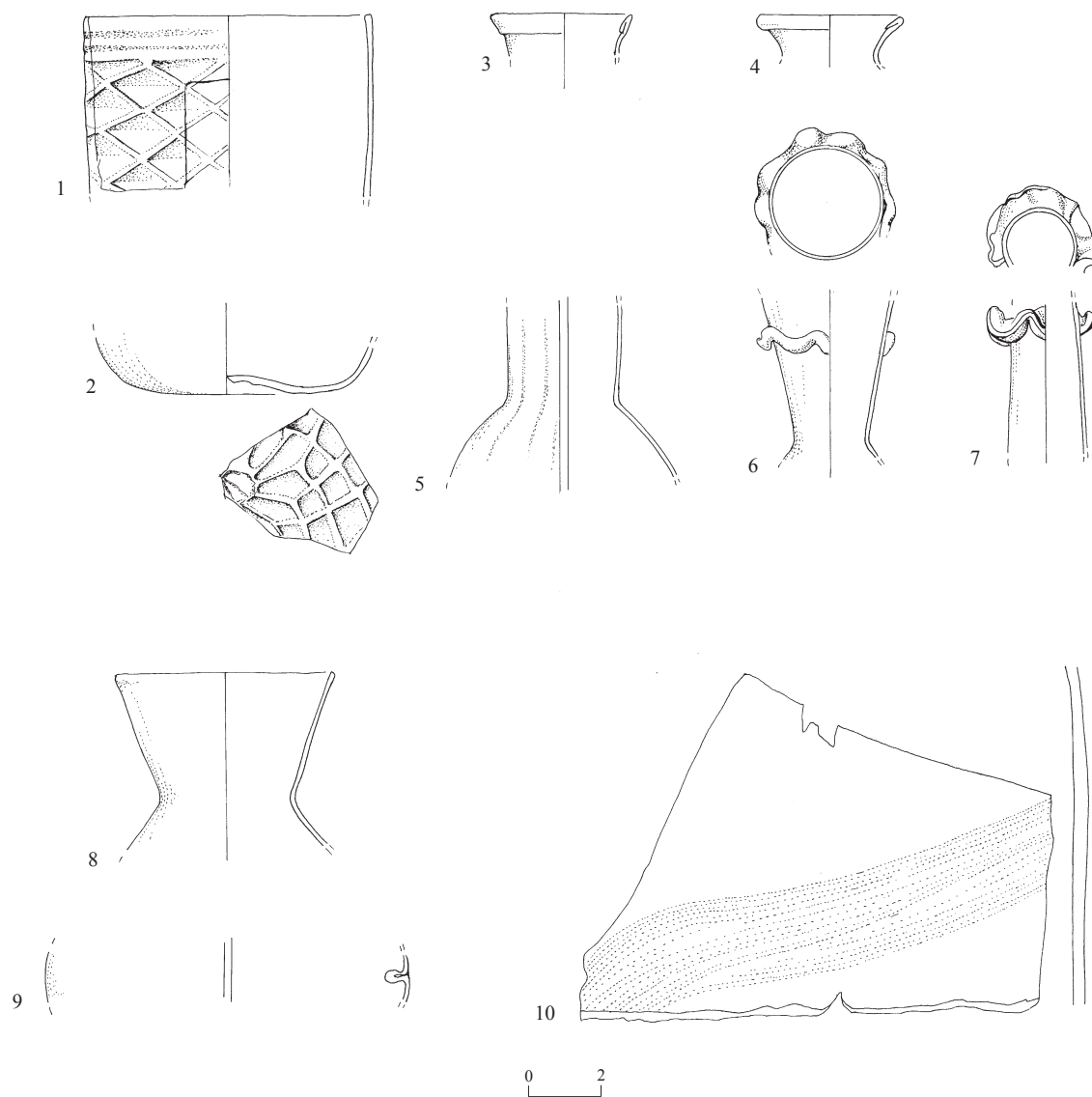


Fig. 1.

mentioned parallels were found in contexts of churches or monasteries, it is tempting to suggest that the diamond-lattice pattern on Bowl No. 1 may have had symbolic meaning. The motif is characteristic of Byzantine glass *eulogia* vessels (bottles, jugs and jars) that were produced in the Holy Land during the sixth–seventh centuries CE, and these vessels are usually decorated with designs of Christian significance. When combined with other

symbols, the lattice design on these vessels may represent the grillwork around the Edicule over the Tomb of Christ in the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem (Newby 2008:31; Cat. Nos. 4, 67, 71, 75, 97). However, since the design of mold-blown diamonds remained in use and was further developed in the Early Islamic period, the design on our bowl does not necessarily have Christian significance.

1. Six fragments of rim and body, three mended (L276, B2034; L277, B2035—not illustrated). Cylindrical body with rounded rim, blown into a mold (diam. rim 8 cm). Almost colorless glass, with greenish blue hue, iridescence and small patches of soil deposits. Shiny fabric, with long horizontal bubbles and black impurities below the rim. The molded decoration consists of two shallow horizontal ridges below the rim, and a pattern of diamond-shaped lattice in low relief lower down. Four diagonal lines of the decoration are preserved.

2. Fragment of base and body, blown into a mold (L265, B2019). Almost colorless glass, with greenish blue hue; small patches of black and silver weathering. The molded decoration consists of a rosette on the underside of the base, from which rows of diamond design radiate to the body. Base diam. 5 cm, pontil scar 1 cm.

*Plain and Decorated Bottles* (Fig. 1:3–9)

Several bottles were found. All clearly date to the same period, between the sixth and early eighth centuries CE. The types are known in Israel and Jordan from excavated contexts of the late Byzantine/Umayyad periods; however, not many have been published so far from the area of Jerusalem.

*Small Bottles or Jars with Short Funnel Mouth and Rim Folded Inward* (Fig. 1:3, 4).— The rim of No. 4 was slightly deformed when it was tooled. A similar rim and neck fragment, possibly of a rectangular juglet, was found in the Byzantine church at Khirbat el-Karak (Delougaz and Haines 1960: Pl. 60:2). Complete examples usually have globular bodies, either plain or with pinched decoration, and date either shortly before, or shortly after the Arab conquest. They were found, for example, in the nearby Georgian monastery of St. Theodore at Bir el-Qaṭṭ (Corbo 1955:131–132, Fig. 40:10); the residential quarter of the Christian compound at Kursi (Barag 1983:37–38, Fig. 9:7, 8, and see there further references to the seventh-century monastery of St. Theodore at Jerash); and the sixth–eighth centuries tomb in

the monastic complex at Umm al-Rasas, Jordan (Alliata 1994:287, Fig. 9).

Fragment No. 4 is distinguished by its fabric, which is of rich olive-green hue. It may belong to a decorative jar similar to a small square jar with a cross and a stylized tree design on its walls from the Shlomo Mousaieff collection, which dates to the sixth–seventh centuries CE (Newby 2008: Cat. No. 54).

3. Rim and top of a short funnel neck (L262, B2023). Greenish blue glass with many bubbles, silver iridescence and pitting. The rim is folded inward (diam. 4 cm).

4. Rim and part of a short funnel neck (L262, B2041). Olive green, shiny fabric, with bubbles and black impurities at the rim. No weathering. The rim is folded inward (diam. 4 cm).

*Bottles with Mold-Blown Ribbing Decoration* (Fig. 1:5).— Decorated bottles of this type are very common in the Byzantine period. The sixth–seventh centuries crypt in an Armenian monastery, excavated north of Damascus Gate, Jerusalem, is one of the numerous sites in which such bottles were found (for discussion and further references, see Katsnelson 1999:76\*–78\*, Fig. 4:9, 10, 13, 14).

5. Part of a cylindrical neck and piriform body, blown into a mold (L262, B2041). Almost colorless glass with bluish green hue and iridescence. The molded decoration consists of vertical shallow ribbing on the neck and upper body.

*Bottles with a Wavy Trail on the Neck* (Fig. 1: 6, 7).— Bottles with an applied trail-decoration on their neck were widely distributed in the Syro-Palestinian region between the late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. The subtype with a wavy trail is usually found in Umayyad-period contexts. Published references from Israel concentrate in the north of the country, e.g., Khirbat el-Karak, Ḥamat Gader and Bet She'an (for a discussion and further references, see Hadad 2005:25, Pl.

14:270–275). Examples similar to Nos. 6 and 7 were found in association with a chapel and an oil press at Horbat Hermeshit (Winter 1998:176, 10\*, Fig. 2:3, 13) and at Ras Abu Ma‘aruf, Jerusalem (Gorin-Rosen 1999:210, Fig. 1:20). Both contexts were attributed to the end of the Byzantine–beginning of the Early Islamic periods.

6. Two fragments of a cylindrical neck (L262, B2023). Greenish blue glass, with silver iridescence. The decoration consists of an applied wavy trail around the neck.

7. Part of a funnel neck and the beginning of a shoulder (L62, B2023). Greenish blue glass, bubbly, with silver iridescence. The decoration consists of an applied wavy trail around the neck.

*Bottle with Broad Funnel Neck* (Fig. 1:8).— This is a subtype with an exceptionally broad neck, of a large family of bottles with funnel necks, which was common in the Byzantine period. A complete short and squat bottle (height 11.1 cm), with a similarly wide rim (diam. 7 cm) that was found in a tomb in the Kidron Valley (Corbo 1965:65, Fig. 57:1), was attributed to the late fifth or sixth century CE (Barag 1970:206, Pl. 45:8). Another parallel came from a late Byzantine burial phase at Neshet-Ramla Quarry (Hadad 2010: Pl. 14.3:9). A similar rim and neck fragment was also found in a late Byzantine/early Umayyad locus at Jerash (Meyer 1988: Fig. 11: U).

8. Part of rim, neck and shoulder (L262, B2041). Light greenish blue glass, with small bubbles, covered with silver iridescence. Broad and short funnel neck with rounded rim (diam. 6 cm).

*Vessel with Tooled-In Fold* (Fig. 1:9).— Vessels with an internal fold on the body occurred during the late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (for an example, see Barag 1967:36–37, Fig. 16:14). The fragment from Kh. Umm Leisun is characterized by a very thin wall and seems to be part of a bottle.

9. Small body fragment (L262, B2041). Greenish blue glass with iridescence. Inside the thin wall there is a tooled-in fold.

*Thick Flat Windowpane* (Fig. 1:10).— A relatively large number of such windowpane-fragments were found at the site, 45 of them in L262, and several others in L261 and L267. Flat, rectangular or square windowpanes of this type may have been inserted into the plaster window frame of Room 1, which was possibly a chapel (see Seligman, this volume). The thickness of the windowpanes at Kh. Umm Leisun ranges between 2.5 and 4 cm. Where the edges are preserved, they often have serrated rims, as No. 10. Several techniques of casting and blowing were developed during that period for the production of windowpanes (see Meyer 1989:214). Windowpane No. 10 has linear marks on its matte underside, probably from a mold; however, it is difficult to establish a manufacturing technique based on small fragments.

Flat, thick windowpanes, with rims that are partly serrated and partly rounded, are frequent in Byzantine/early Umayyad contexts throughout the Syro-Palestinian region, and were popular in Jerusalem as well. Numerous finds from the city suggest local production, but only a few examples have been published (e.g., Khirbat Ṭabaliya; Gorin-Rosen 2000:92\*, Fig. 3:38, and see discussion and further references therein).

Complete examples of such windowpanes are hardly known from excavations in the country. One notable exception are the similar, but thinner, fragments from the late sixth–seventh-century CE glass workshop at Bet She’an (Gorin-Rosen and Winter 2010:178). The size-range of restored windowpanes from Bet She’an (on permanent display in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem) is: length 17.0–35.5 cm, width 20.0–28.5 cm.

10. Fragment of a large windowpane, mended from two parts (L262, B2041). Greenish glass, 0.4 cm thick. The surface is pitted, with patches of yellow

and silver weathering and iridescence. One side is shiny and scratched, the other is dull and shows molding marks. The windowpane is rectangular and flat; the rim unfinished and serrated.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The glass assemblage from Khirbat Umm Leisun is a small, yet useful contribution to the data of glassware that was prevalent in the

region of Jerusalem during the late Byzantine/early Umayyad periods. The limited repertoire of types has parallels in many monasteries and churches in Israel and Jordan, which existed up to the Islamic conquest. Usually, these types are dated between the sixth and early eighth centuries CE, but the Kh. Umm Leisun group, which was found in a secure context, provides a rare opportunity for a more precise dating, in the seventh century CE.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank the excavators, Jon Seligman and Zubeir 'Adawi, for inviting me to study the glass

finds. The objects were restored by Olga Shorr and drawn by Carmen Hersch.

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