

A LATE BYZANTINE INDUSTRIAL QUARTER AND EARLY ISLAMIC-PERIOD FINDS AT ḤORBAT BE'ER SHEMA'

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INTRODUCTION

The site of Ḥorbat Be'er Shema' (map ref. 156449/574000) is located on a relatively flat, sandy plain, c. 120 m above sea level (Gazit 1996:9*), 4 km east of Naḥal Besor and 20 km west of the city of Be'er Sheva' (Fig. 1). It is situated atop an aquifer located some 25 m below the surface (Gazit and Lender 1993:274). This, together with an average annual rainfall of c. 180 mm, a temperate climate and fertile soil, made it an attractive location for settlement and agriculture in both ancient and modern times. During the first half of the twentieth century the site was known as Khirbat el-Far (see below).

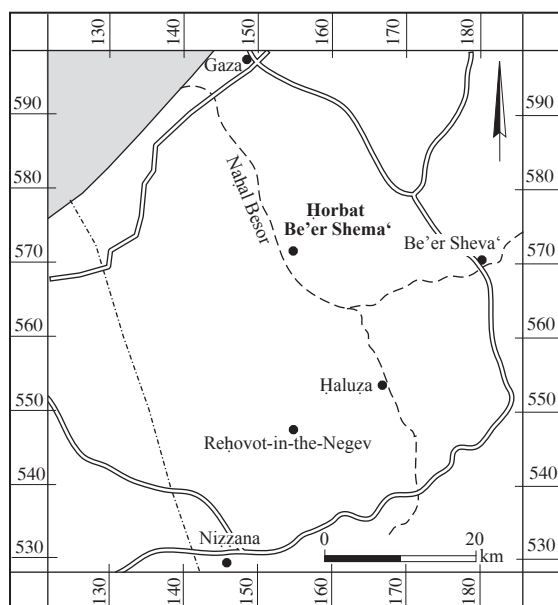


Fig. 1. Location of Ḥorbat Be'er Shema'.

It was first identified by Albrecht Alt (1935) as the ancient town of Berzamma/Birsama, mentioned in Roman and Byzantine sources.

The salvage excavation was carried out following damage to the western side of the site by plowing in 2006.¹ Nine areas were excavated (Areas A–H, N), primarily on a north–south axis along the eastern edge of a plowed field (Fig. 2). Industrial installations dated to the Byzantine period (Late Antique; fifth to early seventh centuries CE), including a large winepress and storage facilities, were discovered in Areas A, C and H, and Early Islamic remains (eighth–ninth centuries CE), in Area F. Structures dated to the days of the British Mandate were uncovered in Areas D, E and N, while no architecture was discerned in Areas B and G. Magnetic prospecting was carried out on the western perimeter of the large elliptical feature in the northern part of the site, which may have been a large reservoir or some type of monumental structure (pool? amphitheater? see Itkis, this volume). This feature has been used as an agricultural installation in recent decades. The authors were prevented from carrying out any probes in this installation to determine its nature. To the north of Area F, a line of tractor probes was conducted, but no building remains were detected (Area G).

The Site of Birsama in the Byzantine Period

The town of Birsama is first mentioned in ancient sources in the mid-second century CE in Claudius Ptolemy's *The Geography*, where it is listed as Mezarmæ/Berzamma in Latin, and Μεζάρμαι/Βέρζαμμα in Greek (Ptol. *Geog.* 5.16.10). It later appears as Birsamis (Βίρσαμῖς)

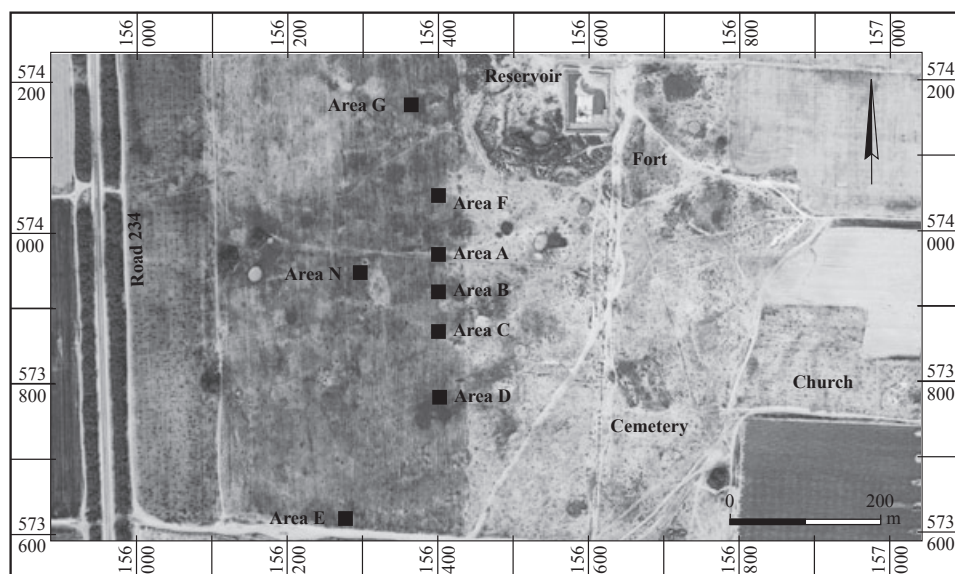


Fig. 2. Ḥorbat Be'er Shema' excavation areas.

in the *Notitia Dignitatum*—a compendium of Early Byzantine fortifications throughout the eastern and western empire in the late fourth–early fifth centuries CE, where it is described as a provincial military base with a *castellum* garrisoned by the *Equites Thamudeni Illyriciani* (*Not. Dign.* 34.10, 22). It also appears in the *Codex Theodosianus* (*Cod. Theod.*; 438 CE), where it is referred to as *Castellum Versaminum*. According to Sozomenus, *The Ecclesiastical History*, a monastic community lived at the site in the fifth century CE, which he refers to as *Geraris*—a name assigned to the ducal region in which it was situated. In Georgius Cyprius' *Descriptio Orbis Romani* (Georg. Cypr.:52), written in c. 600 CE, Birsama is listed as a regional administrative center for the territory of Gerar, or the ‘Σάλτων Γεραϊτικὸς ἦτοι Βαρσάμων’.

The excavation of a Byzantine church on the eastern edge of the site (see below) revealed a number of mosaic inscriptions. According to the initial interpretation of one inscription by Vassilios Tzaferis, the church was built by the military bodyguards (*comites*) of Helladios, the governor of the imperial estate of Gerar

(Ελλαδίου Γερράρων; Tzaferis 1996). This interpretation complimented Michael Avi-Yonah's tentative delimitation of the region of the *Saltus Gerariticus*, based on Albrecht Alt's study, which described Birsama as part of the east–west line of fortifications that ran from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea (Avi-Yonah 2002:148). A correction of the original interpretation of the inscription by Denis Feissel indicates that the villagers built the church, and that it was completed by the efforts of Stephanos the priest when Helladios held the See of Gerara (Feissel 2006:230–231, No. 733). According to Leah Di Segni, the inscription is an epigram that proves that Birsama was a village in the bishopric of Gerar (Di Segni, pers. comm.).²

The Modern Site of Khirbat el-Far

Khirbat el-Far first appears on the British map of southern Palestine, which was completed under the direction of Stewart F. Newcombe, based on a survey carried out during 1913–1914 (Levin, Kark and Galilee 2009:8). According to the geographer Yosef Braslavsky



Fig. 3. Mud-brick structure at Ḥorbat Be'er Shema' in the 1950s (photographed by Ram Gophna).



Fig. 4. Stone and mud-brick structure at Ḥorbat Be'er Shema' in the 1950s (photographed by Ram Gophna).

(1950:399), around 1900 a family of Egyptian *fellahin* settled at the site and was protected by the Tarabin federation. Braslavsky reports that these *fellahin* were still referred to as 'the Egyptians' by the locals nearly two generations later. The *fellahin* apparently cultivated part of the area and were probably responsible for stripping the ancient site for building stones to be sold to contractors from Gaza and Be'er Sheva' (Braslavsky 1950:233–235). At least

four houses were built at some distance from one another at the site, two of which were excavated in 2006 (Areas D and N). These houses were abandoned in 1948. A number of structures were still standing in the 1950s, and were photographed by Ram Gophna, then district archaeologist (Figs. 3, 4).³ These were later dismantled by members of Kibbutz Urin, who transferred the remaining building stones to the nearby Eshkol National Park.

Previous Research

In 1902, Alois Musil reported the presence of a church and a huge ‘reservoir’ at the site of Khirbat el-Far (Musil 1907:61–63). The site was also noted by the German philologist Peter Thomsen (1907:42, 112) during his survey of the region in search of Roman milestones. It was extensively studied by Alt (1929; 1930; 1931a; 1931b) while conducting research for his publication on Roman forts and roads in Naḥal ‘Arava and the Negev desert, and identified by him as ancient Berzamma/Birsama (Alt 1935). It was surveyed by Dan Gazit for the Archaeological Survey of Israel (Map of Urim; Gazit 1996:59*, Sites 160, 161), in which he notes the remains of a church, a farm, watchtowers, a cemetery, a fort and possibly a theater (Musil’s reservoir). In 1989 and 1990, the Byzantine church was excavated by Gazit and Lender, revealing striking mosaic floors and ten inscriptions (Gazit and Lender 1993:274–276).

THE 2006 EXCAVATION

The seven areas in which architectural remains were exposed are described below in chronological order: Areas A, C and H, which

revealed remains from the Byzantine period; Area F, with remains from the Early Islamic period; and Areas D, E and N, with remains dating to the twentieth century.

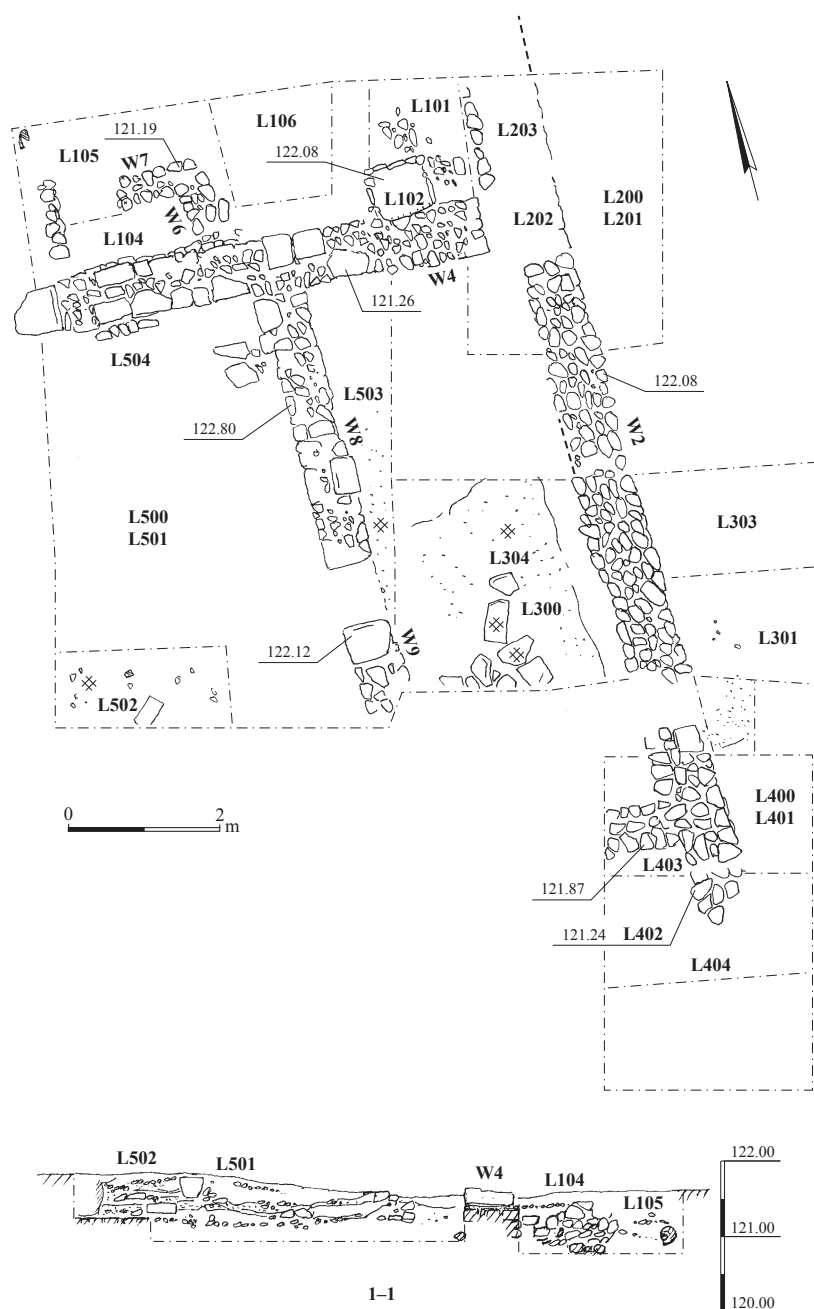
The Byzantine Period

Area A

The remains of a structure oriented northwest–southeast were partially uncovered in Area A (Plan 1). It appears to have been disturbed in recent times, probably when the ancient building stones were removed (Fig. 5). The excavation here produced a large amount of ceramics, primarily storage jars, none of which were found *in situ* (Figs. 27:7–10; 28:3, 4; 29:1–3, 8, 9, 12; 30:4, 5). A number of walls, floor surfaces and installations were revealed that formed part of at least four separate rooms. The main walls measured 0.5–0.7 m wide and were constructed mainly of small, closely packed wadi cobbles and a few dressed limestone blocks bound with mud mortar. Evidence of mud-slurry walls or foundations were discovered in three places, at levels lower than the stone-built walls. These include the northern extension of W2, and walls in L404,



Fig. 5. Area A, general view looking west.



Plan 1. Area A, plan and section.

below the southern end of W2. Excavation of the foundation trench of W2 in L402 revealed the base of an Eastern Sigillata A (ESA) bowl dated to the second–early third centuries CE, which is probably residual.

Two long rooms connected by an entrance between W8 and W9 make up the core of the building. The floor slabs in both rooms appear to have been robbed, and a concentration of stripped-out floor slabs was found in L304. A



Fig. 6. Area C, general view of the winepress to the east.

probe in L502, below the original floor level in L501 in the southwestern corner of the area, revealed no earlier structures or occupation layers.

Smaller rooms and installations were discovered along the northern side of the building. These include a shallow, square installation (L102; 0.8×0.9 m), of unclear purpose. A small room (L104) on the northern side of W4 was apparently accessed from an opening in W7. The mud-slurry foundations of W4 enclosed L106 on the north. The large quantity of Byzantine storage jars discovered in this building suggests it functioned as a storage facility for jars produced in nearby kilns. The exact location of the kilns is as yet unknown. However, pieces of kiln slag were found scattered in the adjacent field to the west.

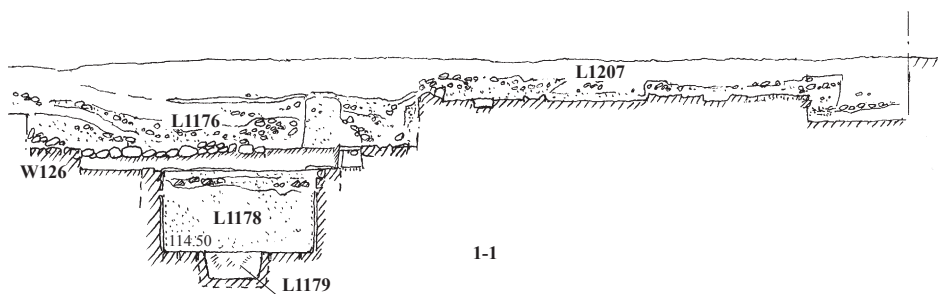
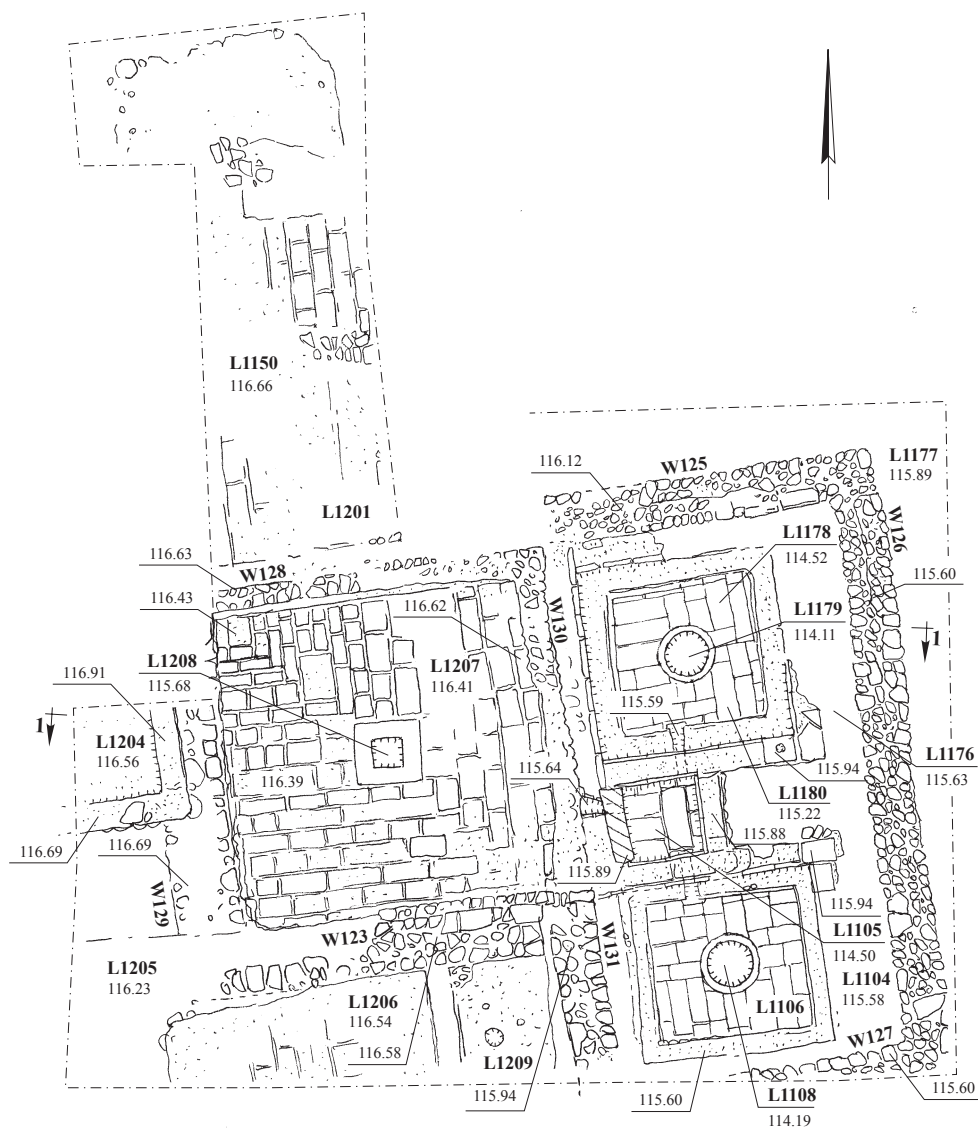
Area C

The remains of a large, industrial winepress were discovered on a hilltop in Area C (Plan 2; Fig. 6), oriented west–east, with an upper level (treading floor, water tank, storage compartments) on the west and a lower level (settling tank, collection vats) extending to the east (Fig. 7). The upper level of the press had been stripped for building stones in recent

times, including the pavement stones of the treading floor, of which only the negatives of the surrounding mortar (L1207) and the central socket (L1208) remained. The water tank on the northwestern side of the structure (L1204) had been damaged by plowing prior to excavation.

The type of winepress uncovered in Area C corresponds to Frankel and Ayalon's 'four-square' type (Frankel and Ayalon 1988:53, Type 4), in which the various installations (treading floor, storage compartments, settling tanks and collection vats) are all contained in a square compound. According to Frankel and Ayalon, during the Byzantine period, this was the most common type of winepress in the center of the country, from the Jezreel Valley in the north to the Hebron Hills in the south (Frankel and Ayalon 1988: Fig. 71).

The Upper Level. The treading floor (*forum vinarium*; L1207; 4.0×4.2 m) was employed for the first pressing of the grapes (*mustum*). A heavy central well or socket, used for the second pressing (*mustum tortium*; L1208; 0.92×0.94 m), is located in the middle of the floor (Fig. 8). The treading floor was apparently constructed of hard limestone slabs similar to those found *in situ* in the floors of the lower



Plan 2. Area C, plan and section.



Fig. 7. Area C, the winepress with the collection vats in the foreground, looking west.



Fig. 8. Area C, central socket in the stripped treading floor of the winepress, looking north.

level. A channel below the floor led downward from the press socket eastward into a channel next to W130 that led to a small settling tank (L1105; Fig. 9) between the two collection vats (*lacus musti*). The floor of the channel is nearly one meter lower than the treading floor.



Fig. 9. Area C, intermediate pool (L1105) leading to the two collection vats, looking north.



Fig. 10. Area C, water tank (in foreground), next to the treading floor of the winepress, looking east.

The walls surrounding the treading floor (W123, W128, W129, W130) were constructed of small to medium-sized stones of soft limestone. These may have been foundation walls that supported dressed stones like those in the walls of the collection vats in the lower level, which had been robbed. Only a very small number of larger dressed blocks were found in the upper level. Traces of the storage compartments were discovered at a slightly higher level than the treading floor along its northern and southern perimeters. Those along the southern side, L1206 and L1209, were better preserved than those on the northern side (L1150), and were divided by a mud-brick wall (W132; 0.6 m wide). The length of these apparently elongated rooms is unknown since they run northward and southward under the balks. Mortar negatives in the floors of the compartments indicate that they were originally paved with hard limestone slabs. The function of these side compartments is somewhat disputed (see Sidi, Amit and 'Ad

2003:261). We prefer to view them as storage compartments, noting the process recorded by Pliny the Elder concerning the production of wine in Greece:

“This wine is made in the following manner: the grapes are plucked before they are quite ripe, and then dried in a hot sun: for three days they are turned three times a day, and on the fourth day they are pressed, after which the juice is put in casks, and left to acquire age in the heat of the sun” (Pl. *NH*, Book 14:10).

The compartments in the Be'er Shema' winepress and at others in the region may have been used for this type of production process, to dry them in the sun prior to pressing. Alternately, they may simply have stored the produce of a number of cultivators prior to pressing.

Part of a water tank constructed of small to medium-sized cobbles covered with a thick layer of hydraulic cement (L1204; Fig. 10) was uncovered directly west of the pressing floor. This installation had thick walls, nearly 0.8 m wide. The upper level of the walls had

been damaged shortly before excavation. The tank was built into the western wall (W129) of the treading floor, and no evidence of any connection between the tank and the floor was preserved. A sherd of a large pithos, possibly a *dolium*, with plaster accretions (Fig. 29:11) was discovered in the upper levels of the water tank. The plaster accretions suggest that it had been used in the immediate area during construction of the winepress.

The Lower Level. The lower level was enclosed by low walls, 0.25 m high and 0.65 m wide, constructed of small, closely packed wadi cobbles (W125, W126, W127). Compared to the extensive damage and robbing in the upper level, the collection vats and walls in the lower level were better preserved. The collection vats (L1178, L1106) are square in shape, c. 3.6×3.8 m, and situated on either side of the small, shallow intermediate pool or settling tank (L1105; 1.7×2.0 m, 0.25 m deep). It is located 0.15 m above the walls of the collection vats, but well below the pressing floor (0.73 m). Each vat was connected to the settling tank by an opening in the wall adjoining the tank. The vats are 1.2 m deep, with plastered walls and floors paved with hard limestone slabs. The northern collection vat (L1178, L1180) contains a flattened stone fixed along its southern wall, 0.52 m below the edge, which was used as a step. Hard limestone blocks with round depressions (L1179, L1108; c. 0.3 m deep; Fig. 11) were located in the center of the floor of each vat. The depressions were used to settle organic debris, mainly grape skins, during the production process and thus, facilitated collecting the juice in the vats. It is of particular interest that the opening between the settling tank and the northern vat (L1178) was at some point plastered over. In the southern vat (L1106; Fig. 12), repairs were made in the plaster walls, indicating that it remained in use longer than the northern vat. The repairs in the southern vat were made primarily along the western interior wall, using ceramic sherds pressed into plaster, which may have then been plastered



Fig. 11. Area C, depression in the floor (L1179) of the northern collection vat (L1178).

over. According to Frankel and Ayalon, the presence of two collection vats in ‘four-square’ winepresses facilitated the simultaneous use of both the treading floor and the screw press. Alternatively, one collection vat could be free for use, while the second was covered over with wooden boards and used for fermentation (Frankel and Ayalon 1988:53).

The tops of the walls of the collection vats were originally surfaced with hard limestone slabs, but with only a few exceptions, these slabs had been stripped away in recent times. One remaining slab on the top of the wall in the southeastern corner of the northern vat (L1178) has a carved depression, apparently used to hold a storage jar in place.

A minimal amount of ceramic material was recovered from the winepress, mostly sherds of bag-shaped storage jars and the latest form of the Gaza wine jar (Fig. 29:4, 5, 10). Two bronze coins, dated to the early sixth century CE, were discovered in the layer of debris overlying the lower level: one of Justin I (518–527 CE; IAA No. 113549), the other, a large bronze *folles* of Anastasius I (512–517 CE; IAA No. 115438).⁴



Fig. 12. Area C, southern collection vat, looking north.



Fig. 13. Area H, general view looking west.

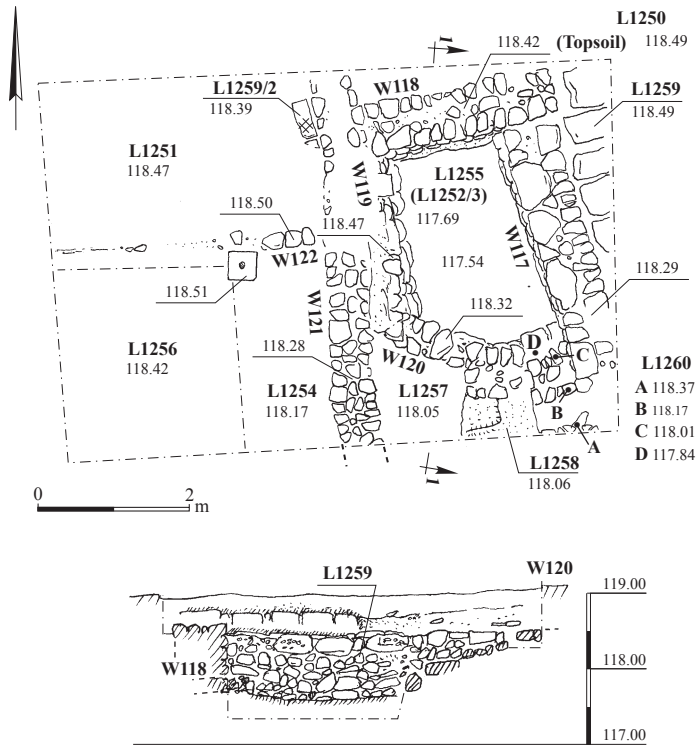
Area H

Area H, to the north of Area A, was opened in an attempt to discover the source of a scatter of Byzantine ceramic wasters, probably a pottery kiln somewhere nearby. Although the source of the wasters was not found, part of a building used for storage was uncovered (Plan 3).

This structure is oriented east-west, with two long rooms (L1256, L1251) situated on

its western side (Fig. 13). These rooms were separated by remains of a wall with a mud-slurry foundation (W122), the upper stones of which had been mostly stripped away. Traces of hard limestone slabs abutting W122 and W121 (L1259/2) indicate that the floors may have been paved.

The eastern half of the structure was divided from the western half by W121. This



Plan 3. Area H, plan and section.



Fig. 14. Area H, Cellar 1255, looking west.

half included a room containing a shallow, underground cellar (L1255) preserved intact, which may have been a wine cellar, or used to ferment wine (Fig. 14). This cellar is irregularly shaped (1.1, 1.8, 2.0, 2.2 m, 0.8–1.0 m deep),

with a beaten-earth floor. The excavation continued another 0.4 m below the lowest courses of the walls, to a depth of 0.15 m below the floor surface. The cellar was accessed from the upper room by four steps in W120 leading



Fig. 15. Area F, walls from the Early Islamic period overlying an ash layer, looking east.



Fig. 16. Area F, clay *tabun* (L454) of the Early Islamic period, looking west.

downward in the southeastern corner (Plan 3: A, B, C, D). Traces of cooking fires and other domestic activities were uncovered on the surface adjoining the steps (L1257, L1258). The eastern wall of the cellar, W117, was constructed of large, dressed limestone blocks and smaller stones, while W118 on the north and W121 were well-built of small to medium-sized wadi stones. The western and southern walls of the cellar, W119 and W120, are not as substantial. A floor made of hard limestone slabs abutted W117 on the east (L1259).

The eastern half of Area H produced a significant amount of pottery. Several nearly intact ceramic vessels were discovered in the cellar (L1255; see Figs. 26:1–5; 27:1–6; 28:1, 2, 5–8; 30:1–3). These were apparently damaged or partially broken vessels that had been thrown as debris into the cellar prior to abandonment of the building in the Byzantine period.

The Early Islamic Period

Area F

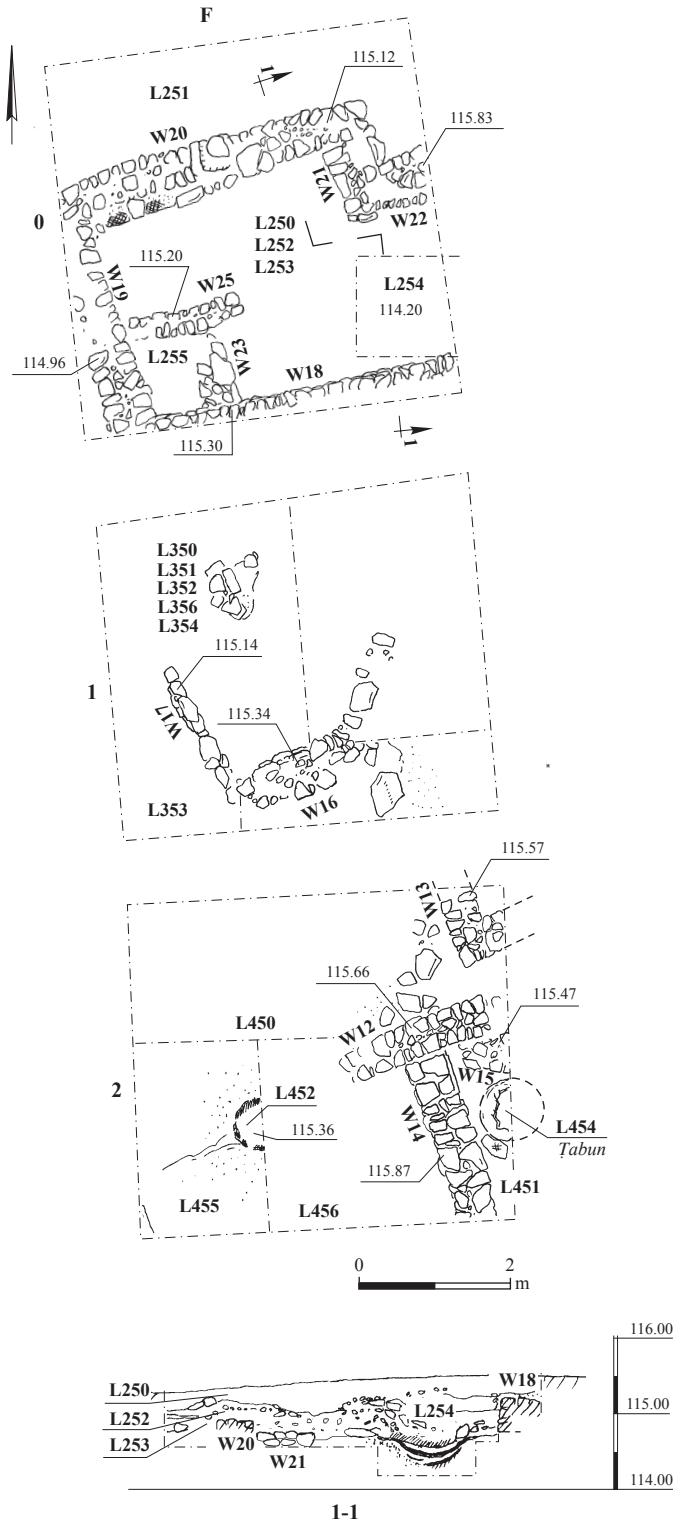
The remains of a low, wide field wall or enclosure wall, dating to the first half of the twentieth century, were discovered in Area F, north of Area H (Plan 4). Subsequently, a row of three squares, oriented north to south, was excavated, which revealed occupational

remains of the Early Islamic period (eighth–ninth centuries CE) directly below the modern surface.

A few centimeters below the modern field wall in Sq F2, the southernmost square, at least three walls were uncovered, 0.5–0.6 m in width, made of small to medium-sized cobbles and preserved to a height of one to five courses. Wall 14 overlay a layer of black ash (Plan 4; Fig. 15). A partially intact clay *tabun* (L454; Fig. 16; diam. 0.73 m), was revealed directly under the modern field wall in a room (L451) enclosed by W14 and W15. The corner of another room was formed by W13, which extended into the next Sq F1. The floors in the rooms abutting the walls were made of beaten earth, and pottery sherds upon them date these rooms to the Early Islamic period (see Fig. 32:1, 3, 4, 13).

Walls 16 and 17 in Sq F1 were not well-preserved, and a modest amount of pottery was found here (see Fig. 32:2, 5, 6, 8, 10–12, 14). Traces of a wall or installation were discovered in L352, apparently dating to the Early Islamic period.

In the northernmost Sq F0, almost an entire room was exposed (L252, L253; Fig. 17), dating to the Early Islamic period. The walls of this structure, up to 0.7 m in width and built of small cobbles, were relatively well-preserved to a height of three or four courses. A fire pit



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Plan 4. Area F, plan and section.

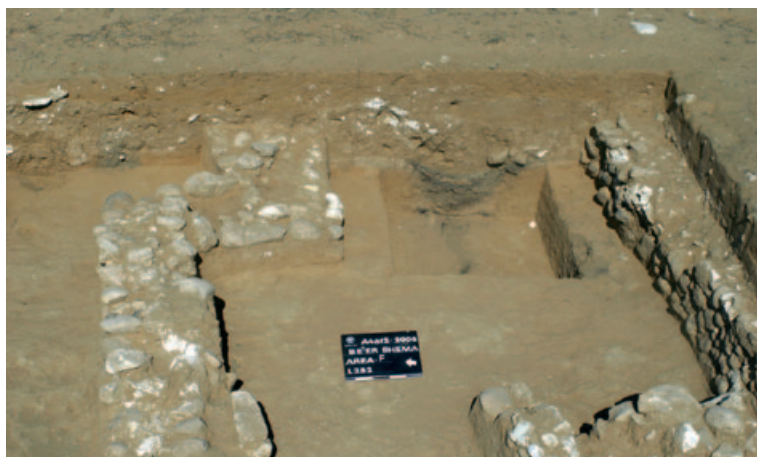


Fig. 17. Area F, room from the Early Islamic period, looking east.

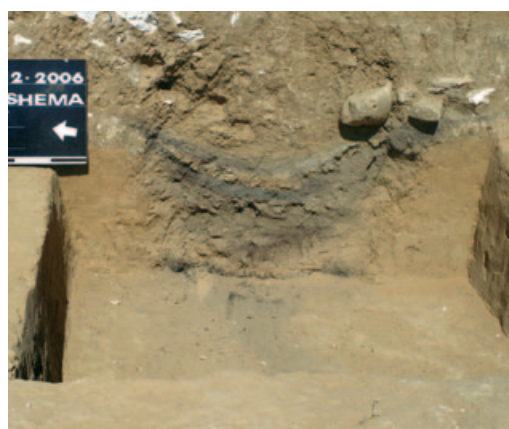


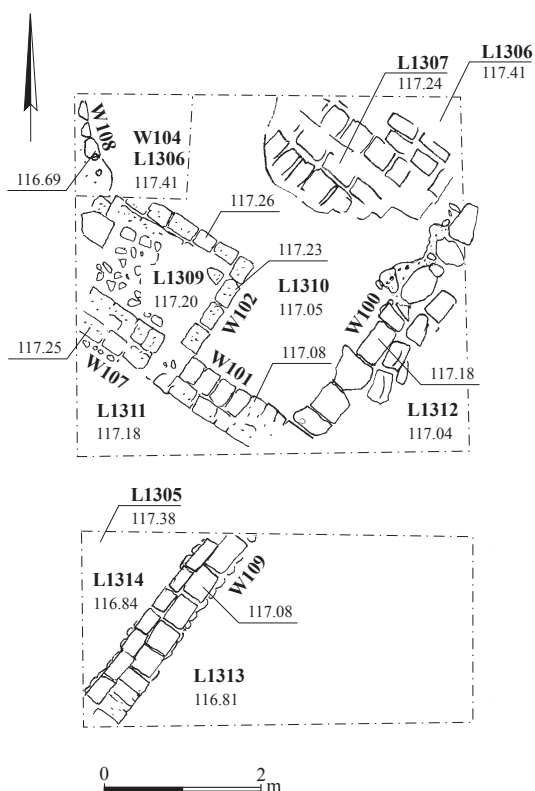
Fig. 18. Area F, fire pit from the Early Islamic period (L254).

(L254; Fig. 18) was revealed on the eastern side of the room, running under the balk. North of the room and W20, W21 and W22, a sherd bearing an Arabic inscription was discovered in L251 (Fig. 34:6).

The Twentieth Century

Area D

To the south of the winepress in Area C, the remains of a building constructed of mud bricks on stone foundations were uncovered (Plan 5; Fig. 19). Debris discovered on the



Plan 5. Area D.

dirt floor of the structure indicates that it was constructed and occupied sometime in the first half of the twentieth century. Two courses of



Fig. 19. Area D, general view of the northern room, looking east.



Fig. 20. Area D, mud bricks upon a stone foundation, looking northwest.



Fig. 21. Mud-brick structure at Ḥorbat Kasif (photographed by Tali Erickson-Gini and Benjamin Saidel, 2006).

mud bricks were preserved on the foundations, made of medium-sized cobbles (Fig. 20). One brick from W109 was collected and stored for future comparative analysis. Three rooms of the structure were exposed (L1309, L1310, L1311). The collapse of at least five courses of a mud-brick wall (L1307) was located in the northern part of the structure in L1310. A small installation or storage room (L1309) was located in the southwestern corner of L1310, with small stones scattered on the floor. The debris in the structure, mainly in L1309 and L1310, consisted mostly of rusted metal and sherds of modern Black Gaza Ware.

Remains of such mud-brick structures are still extant in various parts of the western Negev. At nearby Ḥorbat Kasif, mud-brick structures from the first half of the twentieth century are still standing to a height of several meters (Fig. 21).

Area E

The stone foundations of two mud-brick walls were uncovered on the southwestern perimeter of the site (Plan 6; Fig. 22). This area had been partially plowed, destroying the upper



Fig. 22. Area E, general view of the field-wall foundations to the west.

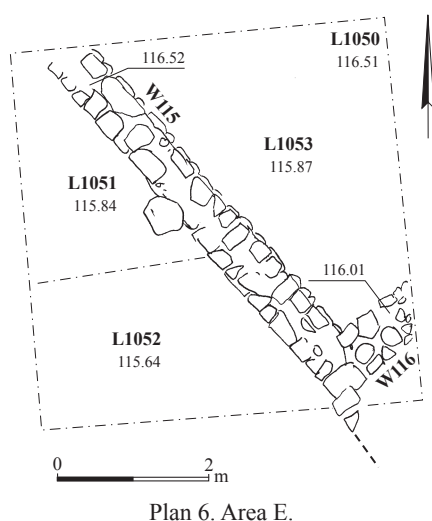


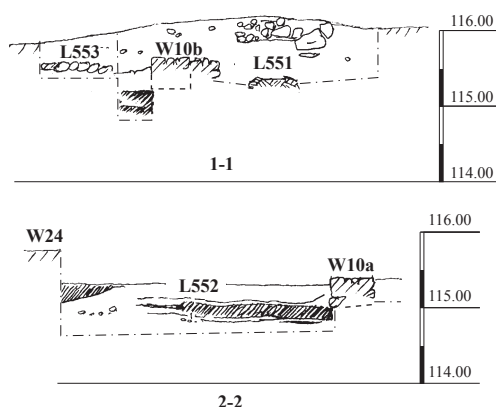
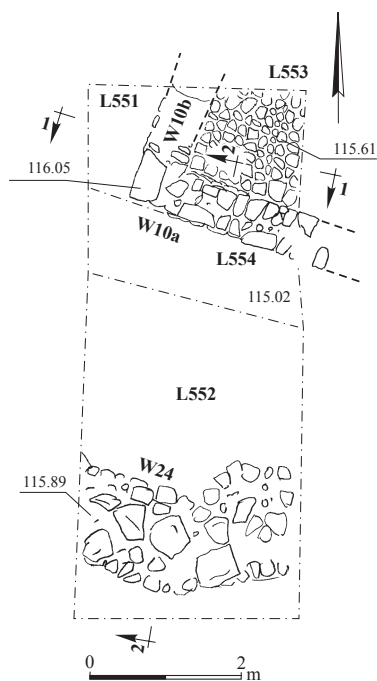
Fig. 23. Area E, remains of mud bricks in the section, looking east.

courses of the foundations. The main wall, W115, oriented northwest–southeast, abuts a second wall, W116, running to the northeast. The foundations were constructed of large and medium-sized fieldstones and bonded with mud mortar. Both walls are 0.6 m in width. Wall 115 is preserved to a height of four to five courses, while W116 is only two courses high. Collapsed mud bricks were visible in the section of the balk over this wall (Fig. 23). The function of the walls in this area is unclear, and only a small quantity of modern Black Gaza

Ware sherds was discovered in the excavation of the walls. The sand surrounding the walls was nearly sterile, which may indicate that they were field walls or enclosure walls outlining agricultural plots.

Area N

Part of a stone building and a stone enclosure wall were discovered in Area N, to the west of Area A on the western perimeter of the site (Plan 7; Fig. 24). The building appears to be oriented south–north and was surrounded by a low enclosure wall (W24) of irregular dimensions, up to 1.09 m wide and 0.6 m high. It was constructed of fieldstones of various sizes.



Plan 7. Area N, plan and sections.

The walls of the building, 0.4 m wide and preserved to a height of six to eight courses (0.85 m high), were constructed of various-sized wadi cobbles and fieldstones, and of what appear to be reworked limestone blocks. The walls were founded on a layer of sterile sand (Fig. 25). The room (L553) was paved with small, closely packed cobbles. Crushed Black Gaza Ware jars were discovered upon the floor (see Fig. 33).



Fig. 24. Area N, general view to the south.



Fig. 25. Area N, detail of the exterior (southern face) of W25, looking north.

THE POTTERY

The Byzantine Period

Most of the ceramic vessels recovered from the excavation date to the Byzantine period (mid-fifth through early seventh centuries CE). They originated in Area A (a storage facility), Area C (a winepress) and Area H (a structure with an underground cellar). Parts

of a relatively large number of broken storage jars, mainly bag-shaped jars and Gaza wine jars, were found in the building in Area A. The presence of kiln wasters scattered over the surface of the site, west and north of Areas A and H, suggests that some of these jars and other vessels may have been produced at the site. A number of complete or nearly complete vessels were apparently damaged and discarded into the cellar in Area H.

Bowls and Basins

There is a strict division between the types of open vessels within the Byzantine assemblage of Be'er Shema': shallow bowls or dishes are nearly all imported wares, whereas the plain wares are deeper and comparable in shape to several types of large basins in the assemblage.

Imported fine-ware bowls include rouletted Cypriot Red-Slipped Ware (CRS) Form 9 bowls discovered in Area H (Fig. 26:1–3), dated by Hayes to between 550 and the end of the seventh century CE (Hayes 1972: Fig. 81:9, Form 9). The nearly complete bowl from the cellar in Area H (Fig. 26:1) was heavily encrusted with light-colored deposits (gypsum?), possibly the result of water seeping into the underground room. The bowl in Fig. 26:2 corresponds to a variant of CRS Form 9, Hayes' Type B, dated between 580/600 and the end of the seventh century CE (Hayes 1972:382). The rim of an African Red-Slipped Ware (ARS) bowl (Fig. 26:4) corresponds with Hayes' Form 104, dated between 570 and 600 CE (Hayes 1972:166). A ring base of an imported fine-ware (FW) bowl was also found (Fig. 26:5).

Parts of fine-ware bowls were discovered in a probe (L1301) excavated to the south of the winepress in Area C. One is a ledged-rim sherd (Fig. 26:6) of an ARS bowl, corresponding to Hayes' Form 95, and dated by him to the first half of the sixth century CE (Hayes 1972: Fig. 27, Form 95, No. 3). Another is a possible local imitation of an imported bowl type (Fig. 26:7), with a short, angular rim similar to bowls found near Ashqelon (Nahshoni 1999: Fig. 5:1, 2). A sherd decorated with an impressed cross (Fig.

26:8), with two round pendants and one open end, originated in the same locus. According to Hayes, this is a common motif found on Late Roman C wares at the end of the fifth–early sixth centuries CE (Hayes 1972: Fig. 78:67, LRC Motif No. 67). In the area of the winepress itself, a rim of a LRC bowl (Fig. 26:9) was discovered that corresponds to Hayes' Form 1A, dated to the late fourth–early fifth centuries CE (Hayes 1972: Fig. 65:2).

From the cellar in Area H comes a complete, plain-ware small bowl or cup (Fig. 27:1). This vessel has a slightly everted rim, thin upright walls carinated below the rim, and a flat, thickened base. It appears to be a slightly taller version of Magness' Fine Byzantine Ware bowl, Form 1F, dated "to the period spanning the late seventh–early eighth centuries CE or later" (Magness 1993:194).

A variety of deep bowls and basins were discovered in Areas H and A. These include a rill-rimmed bowl (Fig. 27:2) from the cellar in Area H, with a deep groove below the rim. The plain bowl in Fig. 27:3, also from Area H, has flaring walls ending in a thick, flared rim. A similar vessel was discovered at Hura in the Be'er Sheva' basin (Paran 2007: Fig. 2:5).

The basin in Fig. 27:4, also from the cellar in Area H, has a thick, drooping rim with a deep groove beneath it, corresponding to Magness' Arched-Rim Basin Form 2A (Magness 1993:206, No. 6). Magness dates this variant to the Byzantine through Early Islamic periods. A nearly complete basin (Fig. 27:5) has upright walls ending in a thickened, inturned rim that bulges slightly outward, a globular lower body and a slightly raised base. Small loop handles extend from the rim to the upper body, and a wide band of straight and wavy combing is present below the rim. This vessel is made of a light, yellowish brown fabric covered with a pale slip. Similar basins were found nearby at Ma'on–Nirim (Levy 1960: Fig. 4:1) and at the Byzantine site of Kh. Jememah (Gophna and Feig 1993: Fig. 15:3). This type may be a predecessor of Magness' incurved-rim basins that were produced in darker fabrics in later

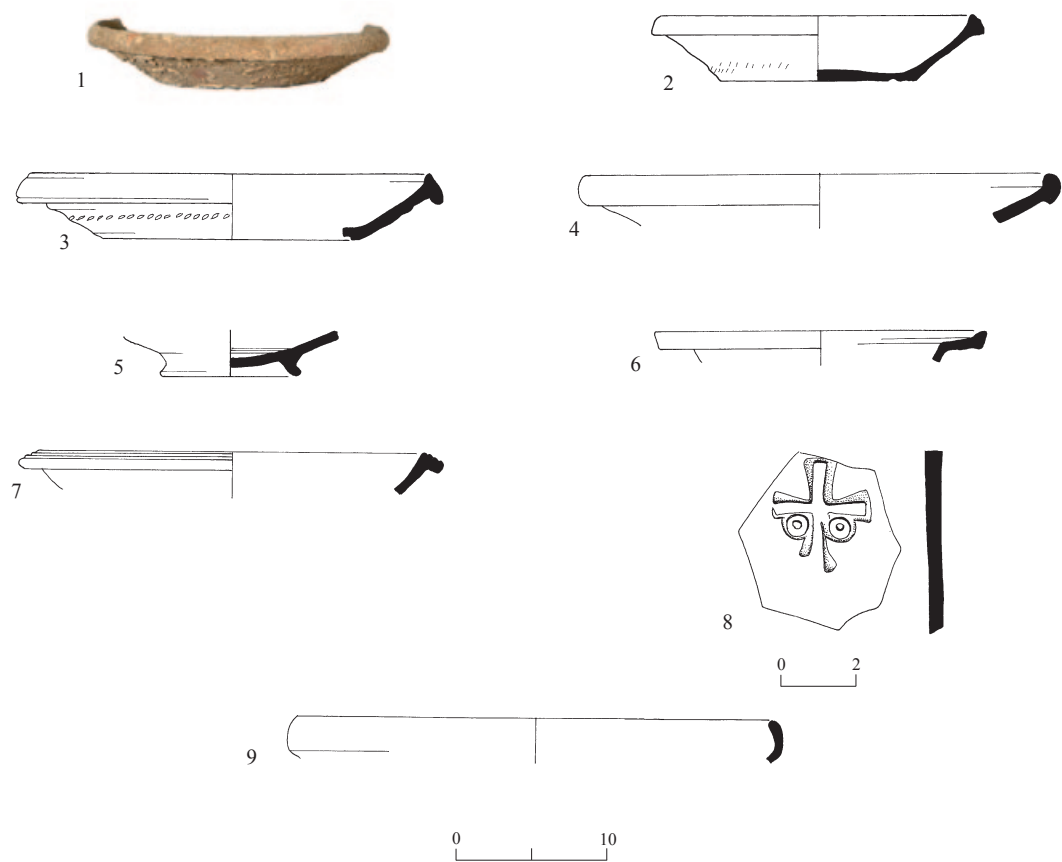


Fig. 26. Byzantine pottery: imported fine-ware bowls.

No.	Type	Area	Reg. No.	Locus	Description
1	CRS Bowl	H	466	1255	Light red 2.5YR6/6, covered with light brown salt encrustations; pieces of charcoal on base
2	CRS Bowl	H	469	1257	Yellowish red 5YR5/6; dark gray core; incised decoration above base
3	CRS Bowl	H	469	1257	Yellowish red 5YR5/6; dark gray core; incised decoration above base
4	ARS Bowl	H	455	1252	Red 10R5/8; numerous tiny dark gray inclusions and occasional small white inclusions; red matte slip 10R5/8
5	Unidentified bowl base	H	455	1252	Red 10R4/8; numerous tiny white and occasional small gray inclusions; red slip 10R5/8
6	ARS bowl	C	401	1301	Light red 2.5YR6/8; worn, light red matte burnish 2.5YR6/8
7	FW bowl	C	405	1301	Red 2.5YR5/8; red matte burnish 2.5YR5/8
8	Sherd	C	405	1301	Red 2.5YR5/8; white accretions; cross impression
9	LRC bowl	C	472	1106	Light red 2.5YR6/6; red matte burnish 2.5YR5/6

periods (Magness 1993:210–211). A second large basin of a similar type (Fig. 27:6) was found in the upper level of Area H.

The excavation in Area A also produced a number of basins. The example in Fig. 27:7 has a heavy, flaring rim and combed decoration,

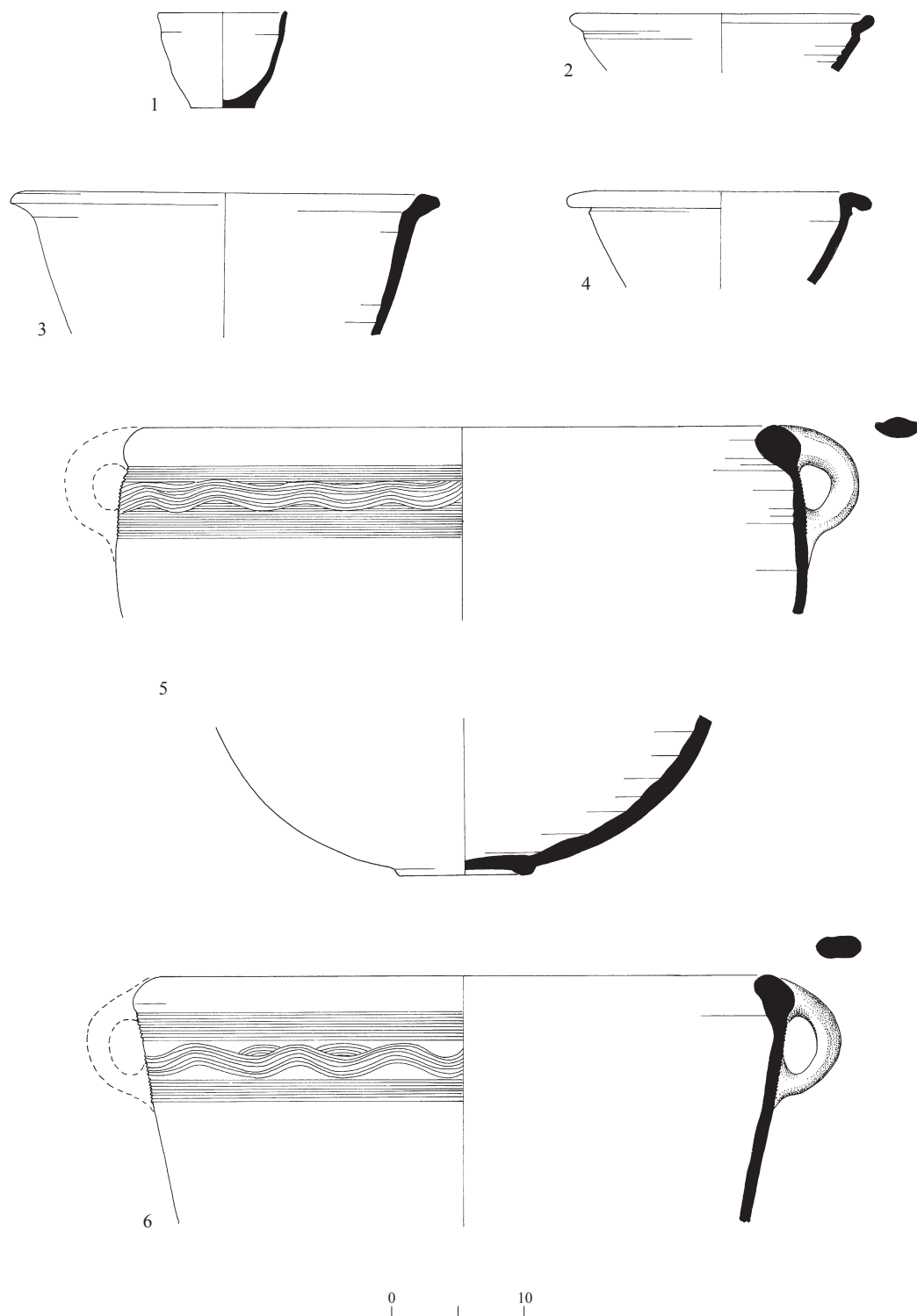


Fig. 27. Byzantine pottery: plain-ware cup and basins.

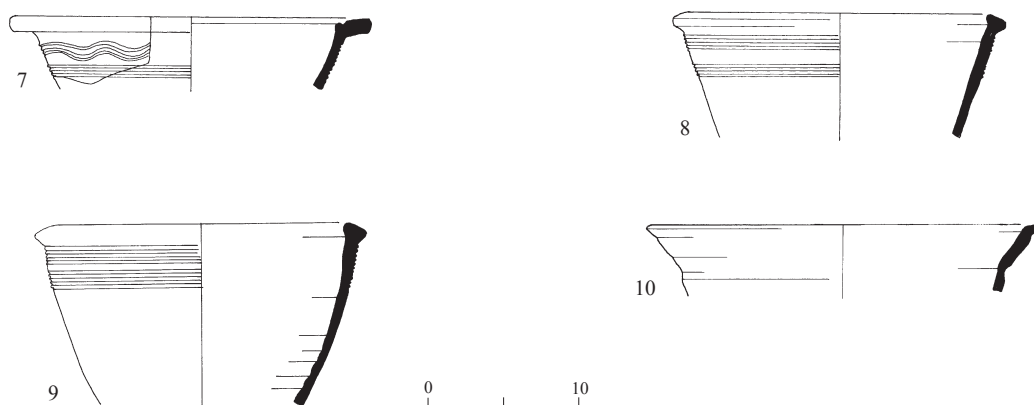


Fig. 27. (cont.).

No.	Type	Area	Reg. No.	Locus	Description
1	Cup	H	466	1255	White 2.5Y8/2; light yellowish brown slip on ext. and upper int. rim 10YR6/4
2	Bowl	H	466	1255	Red 2.5YR4/6; numerous small white inclusions; very pale brown slip 10YR7/4
3	Basin	H	466	1255	Reddish yellow 7.5YR7/6; tiny dark gray and occasional small white inclusions; light yellowish brown slip 10YR6/4
4	Basin	H	447	1251	Reddish yellow 7.5YR6/6; pink slip on ext. 7.5YR7/3; numerous small white inclusions
5	Basin	H	466	1255	Light yellowish brown 10YR6/4; numerous tiny dark gray inclusion; pale yellow slip 5Y8/4
6	Basin	H	450	1250	Very pale brown 10YR8/3; numerous tiny gray inclusion; wavy and band decoration
7	Basin	A	4	400	Reddish yellow 7.5YR7/6; pale yellow slip 2.5Y7/4; brownish discolorations
8	Basin	A	4	400	Reddish yellow 7.5YR7/6; pale yellow slip 2.5Y7/4; brownish discolorations
9	Basin	A	21	105	Pale yellow 2.5Y8/3; numerous tiny gray inclusions; self slip
10	Basin	A	15	500	Light brown 7.5YR6/4; tiny gray and occasional small white inclusions; white slip 2.5Y8/2

similar to vessels found at Hura (Paran 2007: Fig. 2:4) and at Ramot Nof in Be'er Sheva' (Ustinova and Nahshoni 1994: Fig. 3:10). Another has flaring sides and a thick, triangular rim that is grooved along the interior (Fig. 27:8). Two bands of combing decorate the vessel below the rim. A similar vessel was discovered nearby at Ma'on-Nirim (Levy 1960: Fig. 4.4). The deep basin in Fig. 27:9 has a similar rim and incurved sides. The basin in Fig. 27:10 has a distinctive carinated profile and a flaring rim that ends in a short, everted tip. This type of bowl appears frequently in Byzantine contexts

in southern Israel, as at nearby Tell el-Far'ah South (Tubb 1986: Fig. 6:8) and Ma'on-Nirim (Levy 1960: Fig 4:5, 6), as well as at Rehovot-in-the-Negev (Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1988: Pl. IV:171), Migdal Ashqelon (Nahshoni 1999: Fig. 4:8) and Nizzana (Nessana; Baly 1962: Pl. LI:71).

Juglets (Fig. 28:1, 2)

Two juglets were discovered in Area H, directly below the surface. The neck and rim in Fig. 28:1 belong to a Byzantine juglet with a long, narrow neck that bulges slightly below

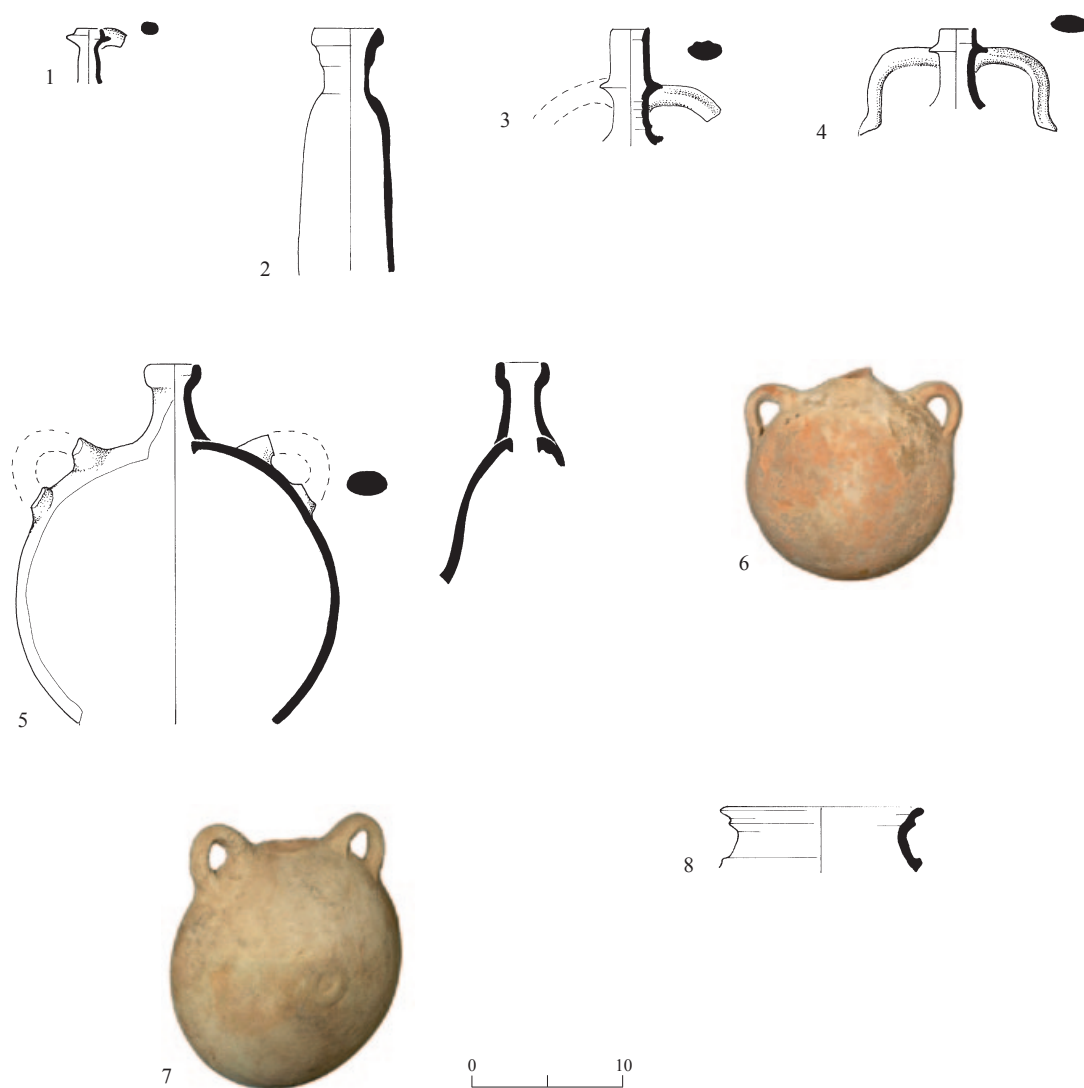


Fig. 28. Byzantine pottery: juglets, flasks and jar.

No.	Type	Area	Reg. No.	Locus	Description
1	Juglet	H	448	1250	Yellowish red 5YR4/6; light gray slip 10YR7/2
2	Elongated juglet	H	466	1255	Pale yellow 2.5Y7/3; numerous tiny gray inclusions and occasional small white inclusions; brown discolorations on int. and ext.
3	Flask	A	10	302	Yellowish red 5YR5/6; small white inclusions; white slip 2.5Y8/2
4	Flask	A	11	103	Yellowish red 5YR5/6; occasional small to medium white inclusions; pink slip 7.5YR7/3
5	Flask	H	466	1255	Light yellowish brown 10YR6/4; tiny dark gray inclusions; pale yellow slip 2.5Y7/3
6	Flask	H	466	1255	Red 2.5YR5/6; numerous small white, reddish brown and gray inclusions; worn white slip (10YR8/2) on upper ext.
7	Flask	H	464	1255	Light brown 7.5YR6/4; pale yellow slip 2.5Y7/4
8	Jar	H	448	1250	White 2.5Y8/2; self slip

a horizontally flanged rim. A small, round handle extends from the rim. It is made of yellowish red ware covered with a light gray slip. Juglets of this type have been found at Migdal Ashqelon (Kogan-Zehavi 1999: Fig. 22.1) and Nizzana (Baly 1962: Pl. LIII:96). The second juglet, made of pale yellow ware, has a thickened, everted rim, and an elongated body carinated below the rim and at the base of the neck (Fig. 28:2). A similar juglet was found at Nizzana (Baly 1962: Pl. LIII:110).

Flasks (Figs. 28:3–7)

A number of small flasks with flanged necks were found at the site. The two presented here are from Area A. The example in Fig. 28:3 has a tall, narrow neck that is flanged well below the rim, which is upright and slightly everted at the edge. Handles attached to the neck directly below the flange extend outward from the vessel. The second flask (Fig. 28:4) has a short rim above a narrow, flanged neck with handles extending from below the flange horizontally and downward. Both flasks are made of yellowish red wares covered with light-colored slips. This type of flask was found at 'En Boqeq and described as a 'stirrup jug' (Gichon 1996). At Ramot Nof, a subtype of this form appeared in contexts dated to the seventh century CE (Ustinova and Nahshoni 1994: Fig. 5:1), and variations were also discovered at nearby Tell el-Far'ah South (Tubb 1986: Fig. 6:8), as well as at Migdal Ashqelon (Nahshoni 1999: Fig. 5:15) and Nizzana (Baly 1962: Pl. LVII:FDH 1–5).

Three nearly complete large flasks discovered in the cellar in Area H (Fig. 28:5–7) have almost identical forms. They are round with loop handles attached to the shoulders on either side of the neck. While the necks of two of the flasks were broken, the example in Fig. 28:5 has a relatively tall, narrow neck that slants inward toward the rim, which is cup-shaped. One flask displays thick raised rings around a raised circle on both sides (Fig. 28:7). Although these flasks appear to be of the same type, they are made of different wares covered with pale

slips. Flasks of similar shape, with raised loop handles, have been found in Byzantine contexts in southern Israel, as at Ramot Nof (Ustinova and Nahshoni 1994: Fig. 5:10) and Rehovot-in-the-Negev (Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1988:88, Ill. 133). However, no parallel was found for the small, cup-like rim and incurved neck of Fig. 28:5.

Jar (Fig. 28:8)

A jar from Area H has a flanged, everted rim, a short inverted neck and a raised ridge at the base of the neck. It is made of a white ware and self-slipped. No comparisons for this type of jar were found.

Storage Jars (Fig. 29)

A large number of bag-shaped jars and Gaza wine jars were found throughout the Byzantine areas of the excavation. Many of these jars may have been produced in or near the site. The building in Area A appears to have been used to store locally produced storage jars, although the deposits here were heavily disturbed in the twentieth century when it was stripped for building stones. The bag-shaped storage jars display a number of minor variations in the form of the rim, whereas the Gaza wine jars all belong to one specific type. Only a few other types of storage jars were recovered from the excavation.

Bag-Shaped Storage Jars (Figs. 29:1–7).—

The bag-shaped jars share main features of short, thick, upright necks, a raised ridge at the base of the neck, densely ribbed shoulders and loop-handles attached to the upper shoulder. The rims are generally everted. The fabrics range from yellowish red to pale brown and the jars are either self-slipped or covered with pale slips. The excavation at nearby Tell el-Far'ah (South) also produced several similar variations of bag-shaped jars. According to Tubb, this type of jar (Tubb's Type 3, divided into three subtypes) was the most numerous among the jars discovered in the well at Tell el-Far'ah, and it is extremely well-represented throughout central and southern Israel (Tubb 1986:56–60).

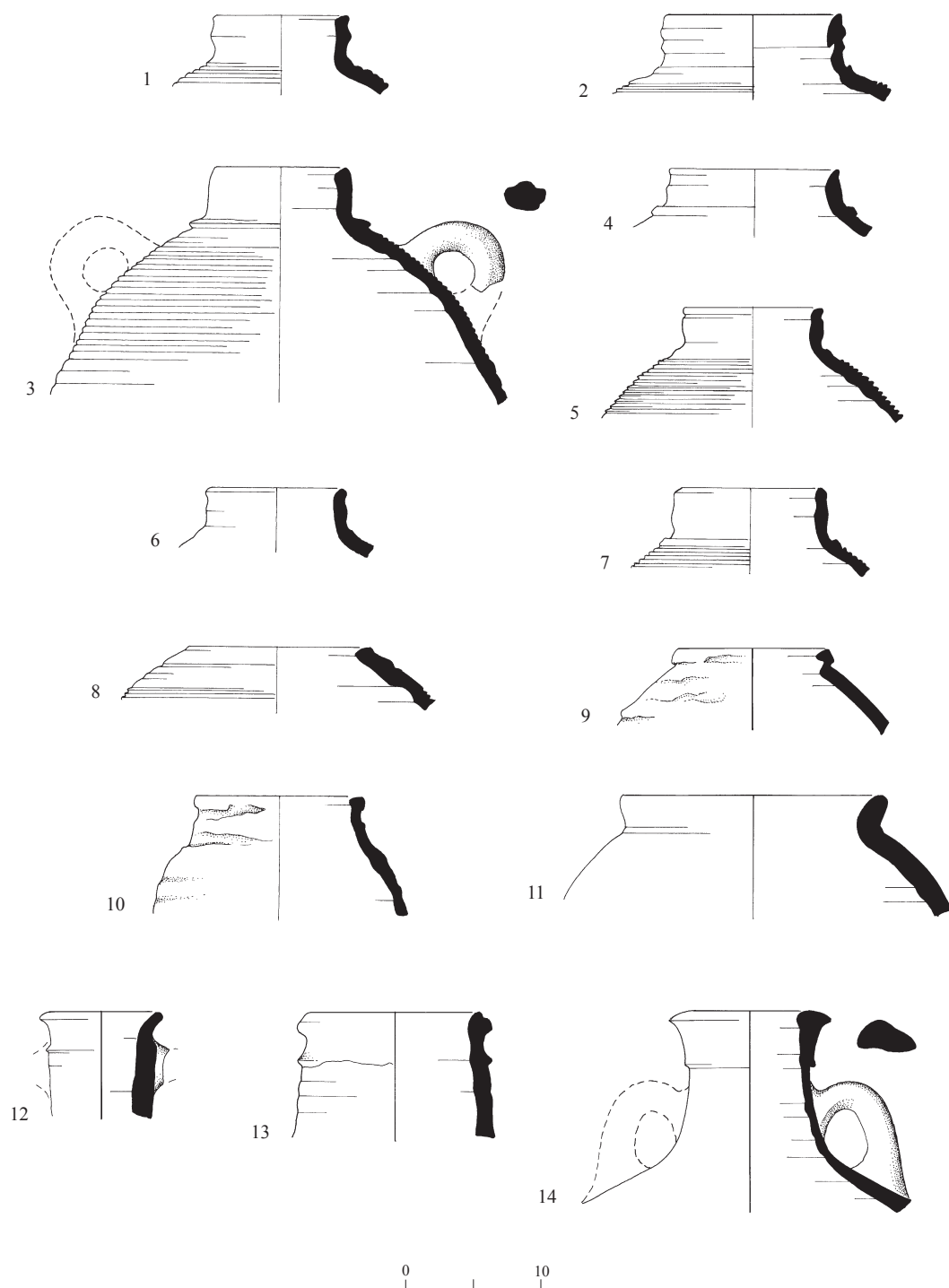


Fig. 29. Byzantine pottery: storage jars.

◀ Fig. 29

No.	Object	Area	Reg. No.	Locus	Description
1	Bag-shaped jar	A	10	302	Yellowish red 5YR5/6; small white inclusions; pink slip 5YR7/4
2	Bag-shaped jar	A	11	103	Light brown 7.5YR6/4; pale yellow slip 2.5Y7/4
3	Bag-shaped jar	A	8	400	Reddish yellow 5YR7/6; small to medium white inclusions; pale yellow slip 2.5Y8/3
4	Bag-shaped jar	C	472	1106	Yellowish red 5YR5/8; light gray slip 2.5Y7/2
5	Bag shaped jar	C	472	1106	Yellowish red 5YR5/8; numerous tiny to medium white inclusions; self slip
6	Bag-shaped jar	H	466	1255	Pale brown ware 10YR6/3; light brownish gray core; brown slip 10YR5/3
7	Bag-shaped jar	H	466	1255	Reddish brown 7.5YR6/6; tiny white inclusions; self slip
8	Ḥaluza jar	A	5	100	Yellowish brown 10YR5/4; small to medium white inclusions; very pale brown slip 10YR7/4
9	Gaza wine jar	A	9	402	Reddish yellow 5YR6/6; numerous tiny to medium white inclusions
10	Gaza wine jar	C	467	1105	Brownish yellow 10YR6/6 to yellowish red 5YR5/6; numerous small to large white inclusions and occasional tiny dark gray inclusions
11	Pithos	C	409	1201	Red 2.5YR6/6; small white inclusions; micaceous; light-colored ext. from firing; heavy plaster accretions
12	Imported storage jar	A	11	103	Red 2.5YR4/8; pale brown slip 10YR7/4
13	Imported storage jar	C	472	1106	Light yellowish brown 10YR6/4 to pink 7.5YR7/4; numerous tiny and occasional medium white inclusions; self slip; reddish brown mark (graffito?) on neck
14	Imported storage jar	Surface	-	-	Red 2.5YR4/8; occasional medium white inclusions; pale yellow slip 2.5Y7/3

Ḥaluza Jar (Fig. 29:8).— One rim of a ‘Ḥaluza’ jar was found in Area A. This is an imitation of the Gaza wine jar, produced locally of light-colored ware at the site of Ḥaluza (ancient Elusa) in the Byzantine period (Fabian and Goren 2002). The example from Be’er Shema displays a wide, holemouth opening with a slanted, bevelled rim and an everted tip. The jar is densely ribbed from above the shoulders. This type of jar was apparently in limited use during the Byzantine period and it is far outnumbered by the ubiquitous Gaza wine jars produced in the western Negev (see below). In the Early Byzantine residential quarter at Oboda, only one rim of this type was found

in the assemblage of the early fifth-century destruction layer (Erickson-Gini 2004: Fig. 6:46).

Gaza Wine Jars (Figs. 29:9, 10).— Numerous examples of Gaza wine jars were found in Areas A, C and H, generally with very narrow shoulders and a slight carination (Fig. 29:10). The upper part of the shoulders and neck are usually covered with clay accretions to facilitate sealing, and the rims are hooked and inverted, resembling the rims of Majcherek’s Form 3, dated to the fifth–sixth centuries CE (Majcherek 1995: Fig. 3). However, it should be noted that the narrow shoulders of the Be’er

Shema' jars are similar to the latest form of the Gaza wine jars, Majcherek's Form 4, dated to the later sixth–early seventh centuries CE (Majcherek 1995: Fig. 4). The jars from Be'er Shema' are made of brown and reddish yellow fabrics, possibly produced locally in nearby workshops, or at the site itself. Wasters of Gaza wine jars were discovered at a kiln site during the survey of the Naḥal Besor region west of the site (Gazit 1996:76*, Site 201), the southernmost example in the region. A survey of kiln sites in the western Negev revealed numerous such sites in the region (Israel 1993). The closest parallel to the variation of Gaza wine jar with narrow shoulders found at Be'er Shema' was published from the nearby site of Tell el-Far'ah (South) (Tubb 1986: Fig. 1:1), further confirmation that the jars were made in the vicinity. Byzantine settlements such as Be'er Shema' probably made their own wine jars to store and market wine also produced at the site. The large number of Gaza wine jars found in the Negev Highlands to the east, were probably brought from the western Negev, as no kiln sites are known from that region.

Pithos (Fig. 29:11).— The rim of a large pithos or *dolium*, made of reddish fabric with thick walls and an everted rim, was discovered in Area C. Heavy plaster accretions indicate that this sherd was used in the construction or repair of the winepress.

Imported Storage Jars (Figs. 29:12–14).— Three imported storage jars were found in several areas, two corresponding to Peacock and Williams' Class 44 (Peacock and Williams 1986: Fig. 104, B). The jar in Fig. 29:12 has a narrow, upright, carinated neck that ends in a simple, everted rim. Handles extend outward from below the neck carination. It is made of red ware and covered with a pale slip. The jar in Fig. 29:13 is a larger version of the same type, with an upright, carinated neck that is slightly incurved, and ends in a rounded, everted rim with a slight groove on top. It is made of a light yellowish brown ware and bears a brown

mark (*graffito*?) on the neck. This type of jar is commonly found in Byzantine contexts throughout the Negev, and examples have been published, for example, from Rehovot-in-the-Negev (Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1988: Pl. II:125). The Class 44 amphorae are dated by Peacock and Williams (1986:185–187) to the early fifth–mid-seventh centuries CE.

A single example of what appears to be an imported Peacock and Williams' Class 35 amphora (Peacock and Williams 1986:161, Type XXXVB), a North African vessel dated to the fourth–sixth centuries CE, was discovered on the surface north of Area F (Fig. 29:14). It has an upright, carinated neck that thickens above the carination and ends in a flattened, everted rim. Short handles curve upward from the neck below the carination, and then sharply downward to the sloping shoulder. It is made of red ware and covered with a pale yellow slip.

Cooking Vessels (Fig. 30)

Cooking wares from the Byzantine areas of the site include parts of three vessels discovered in the cellar in Area H (Fig. 30:1–3). One is the upper part of a small closed cooking pot with a short neck and a projecting, triangular rim, a densely ribbed, globular body and handles from the rim to the upper shoulders (Fig. 30:1).

The lower half of a small cooking pot or cooking jug (Fig. 30:2), bearing signs of charring, has a closely ribbed, globular body tapering down to a ring base, and may in fact belong to the vessel in Fig. 30:1. However, this part has a smoother finish, possibly as the result of firing or use. A casserole also found in the cellar has a rim that is angled inward to fit a lid, a closely ribbed body tapering toward the base, and horizontal, slightly drooping handles attached a few centimeters below the rim (Fig. 30:3).

Other forms of closed cooking pots were recovered from Areas A and C. The example in Fig. 30:4 is a typical Byzantine cooking pot with a short, flared neck and a triangular rim, a closely ribbed body and handles extending from the neck. This vessel corresponds to

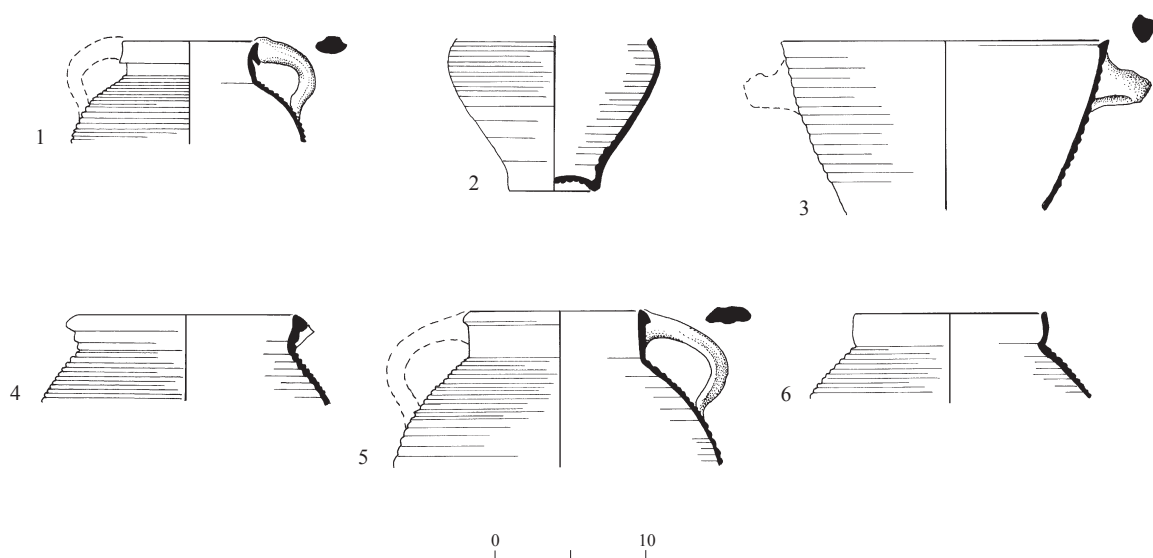


Fig. 30. Byzantine pottery: cooking vessels.

No.	Object	Area	Reg. No.	Locus	Description
1	Cooking pot	H	466	1255	Red 2.5YR5/8; small to medium gray and white inclusions; light reddish brown patchy slip 5YR6/4; fine-ware quality
2	Cooking pot base	H	466	1255	Red 2.5YR4/6; numerous tiny white and dark gray inclusions; charred ext.
3	Casserole	H	466	1255	Red 2.5YR4/8; numerous tiny white and dark gray inclusions; dark red slip on ext. 2.5YR3/6
4	Cooking pot	A	5	100	Red 2.5YR5/8; red slip on ext. 2.5YR4/8
5	Cooking pot	A	6	202	Yellowish red 5YR5/8; occasional small white inclusion dark gray slip 5YR4/1; brittle fabric
6	Cooking pot	C	473	1178 C2	Red 2.5YR5/6; occasional small white inclusions; red slip on ext. 2.5YR4/8

Magness' Cooking Pot Form 4A dated to the late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (Magness 1993:239, No. 2). A large, globular cooking pot (Fig. 30:5) from Area A has a tall, upright neck ending in a triangular, everted rim, a closely ribbed body and flattened handles that extend from the rim and neck to the upper shoulders. No exact parallels were found for this vessel.

The pot in Fig. 30:6, from Area H, has a short, upright neck and rim, and a closely ribbed, globular body. This vessel corresponds to Magness' Cooking Pot Form 1A dated to the second–third centuries CE (Magness 1993:216), and is probably residual from a nearby settlement or campsite.

Lamps (Fig. 31:1–3)

Several parts of wheelmade lamps were discovered in various loci in Area A, of types commonly found in southern Israel and southern Jordan in Byzantine contexts. These include two nozzles (Figs. 31:1, 2) of the type usually attributed to Rosenthal and Sivan's Sandal Lamp Variant A (Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: Nos. 506, 507). The back half of a lamp (Fig. 31:3), corresponding to their Variant B (Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: Nos. 508, 509), has a flat, flared rim, thick, smooth sides, a flat base and a handle from the rim to the back shoulder. Both variants are dated to the Byzantine period, between the mid-fifth and mid-seventh centuries CE (Rosenthal and Sivan 1978:122).

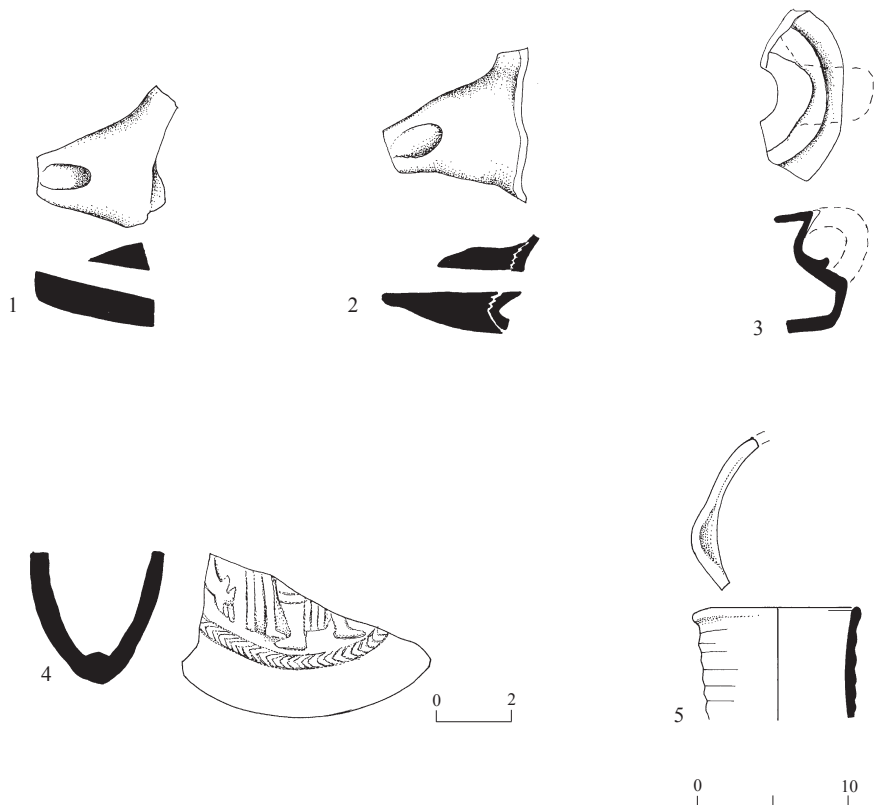


Fig. 31. Byzantine pottery: lamps and miscellaneous ceramic finds.

No.	Object	Area	Reg. No.	Locus	Description
1	Sandal lamp	A	19	500	Brown 7.5YR5/4; charred wick hole
2	Sandal lamp	A	14	103	Red 2.5YR4/8; charred wick hole
3	Sandal lamp base	A	17	500	Dark gray 10YR4/1; light brown slip 7.5YR6/4
4	St. Menas ampulla	A	16	105	Pale yellow 2.5Y8/3; occasional small white inclusions; light yellowish brown slip or discoloration 10YR6/4
5	Tubula	A	11	103	Red 2.5YR5/6; numerous tiny to small white inclusions; light brown slip 7.5YR6/4

St. Menas Ampulla (Fig. 31:4)

The lower part of a St. Menas ampulla was discovered in Area A. It bears a molded decoration depicting a dromedary kneeling to the left of the feet of St. Menas. The feet and lower legs of the saint are bare and the cuff of one trouser leg is visible, and he appears to be wearing a cloak that nearly reaches the ground behind his feet. The scene is separated from the smooth edge of the vessel by a running band of chevrons.

St. Menas was an Egyptian-born ascetic, formerly a Roman soldier, who was executed for being a Christian in 309 CE. The monastery that was later built around his grave in Abu Mina (45 km from Alexandria) became a popular site for Christian pilgrims from the fifth century CE onward. These small ceramic ampullae, filled with water or oil from the site, were bought by pilgrims and made their way to distant parts of the Christian world in that period (Anderson 2004:79). The details on

Fig. 32 ▶

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Locus	Description
1	Decorated bowl	116	452	Pink 5YR7/4; pale yellow slip 2.5Y8/3 and greenish glaze on int.
2	Decorated bowl	107	351	Very pale brown 10YR7/4; occasional small to medium, gray inclusions; pale yellow slip on ext.; pale yellow glaze on int.; green glaze decoration
3	Decorated bowl base	116	452	Pink 5YR7/4; pale yellow glaze 5Y7/3 with grayish glaze markings
4	Decorated bowl base	116	452	Pale brown 10YR6/3; pale yellow slip on ext.; light bluish turquoise glaze on int.; dark turquoise glaze decoration on ext.
5	Bowl	128	352	Dark brown 7.5YR5/6; occasional large whitish gray inclusions; self slip
6	Basin	101	350	Pink 7.5YR8/4; very pale brown slip 10YR7/4
7	Basin	109	250	Pale yellow 2.5Y7/3; occasional small to large white inclusions; self slip; wavy incised decoration
8	Jug	101	350	Reddish yellow 7.5YR7/6; white slip 10YR8/2
9	Decorated jug handle	114	451	Very pale brown 10YR7/3; occasional small white inclusions; very pale brown slip 10YR7/4
10	Jar	110	351	Dark reddish brown 2.5YR3/4; occasional medium, light gray inclusions; brittle cooking-pot ware
11	Jar	101	350	Red 10R4/8; occasional white inclusions; very pale brown slip 10YR7/4
12	Storage jar	107	351	Reddish yellow 5YR6/8; numerous tiny gray and white inclusions; gray core; light brown slip 7.5YR6/4
13	Storage jar	115	452	Light brown 7.5YR6/4; tiny dark gray inclusions; very pale brown slip 10YR7/4
14	Storage jar	101	350	Red 2.5YR4/8; occasional small white inclusions; pinkish gray slip 7.5YR7/2; Thumb-impressed rim

the ampulla from Be'er Shema' correspond to Lapp's Group II from the excavations of Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria, which is dated to 480–560 CE (Lapp 2000: Fig. 2).

Tubulum (Fig. 31:5)

Part of a ceramic *tubulum*, made of red ware with a light brown slip, was uncovered in Area A. *Tubuli* were probably produced at the site for use in the bathhouse near the *castellum*.

The Early Islamic Period

Pottery of the Early Islamic period (eighth–ninth centuries CE) was discovered in Area F, and includes glazed bowls, a large plain-ware bowl and basins, a jug and a decorated jug handle, and jars.

Splash-Glazed Bowls (Fig. 32:1–4)

The vessels decorated with glaze conform to the 'Splash-Glazed Ware' found at Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010:111) and the 'Common-Glazed Bowls' at Yoqne'am (Avisar 1996:75), both of which date to the eighth–tenth centuries CE. Two bowls have out-curved rims. The example in Fig. 32:1 is covered with a pale yellow slip and a greenish glaze applied to the interior. The second bowl (Fig. 32:2) has a pale yellow slip on the exterior, while the interior is covered with a pale yellow glaze over which a greenish-glaze decoration was applied. Their forms are similar to common-glazed bowls from Yoqne'am (Avisar 1996: Fig. XIII.3:4). Two low ring bases from bowls (Figs. 32:3, 4) have a surface treatment similar to those mentioned above, and the base in Fig. 32:4 is glazed on both the

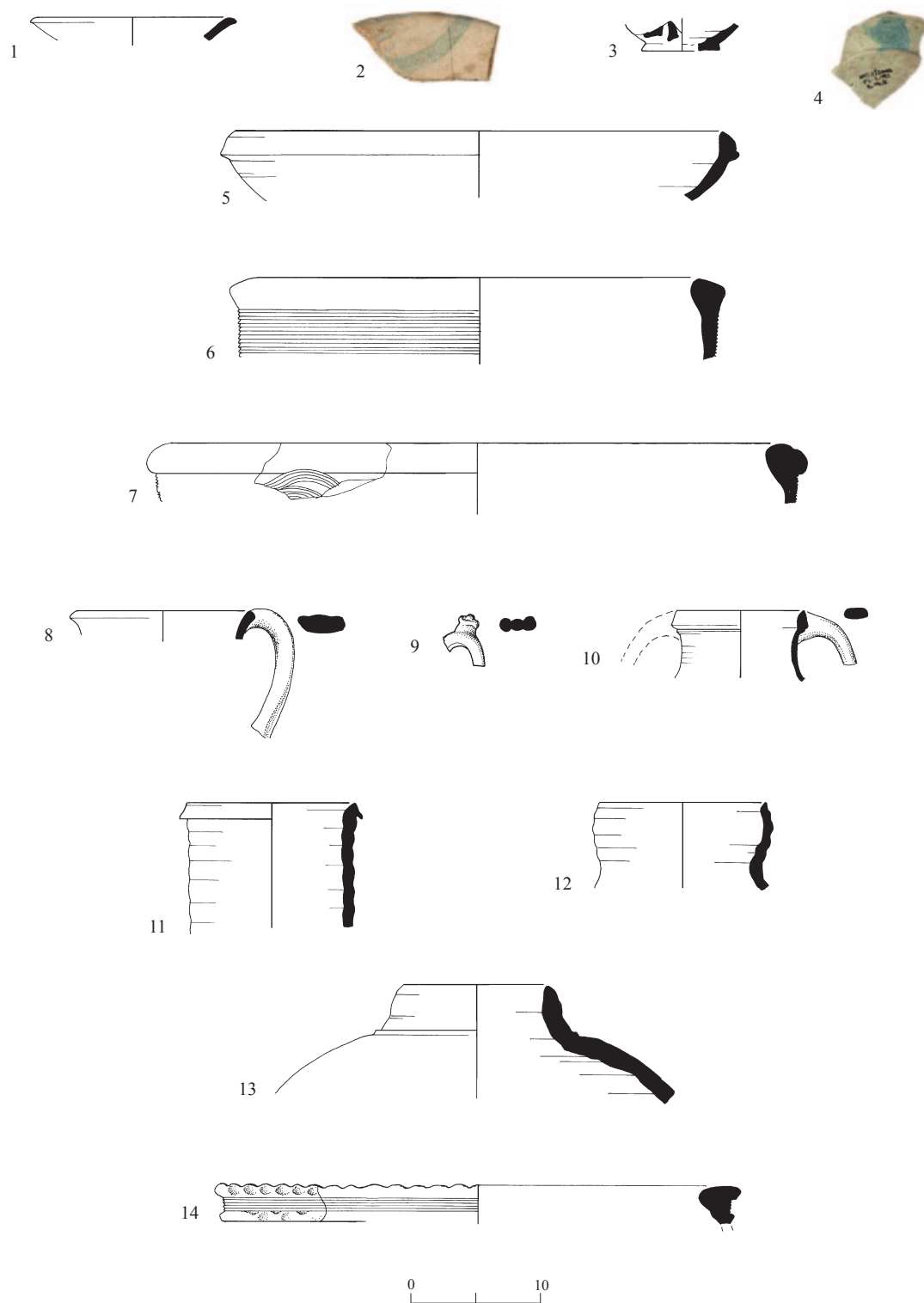


Fig. 32. Early Islamic pottery from Area F.

interior and exterior. They are comparable to Type 2 common-glazed bowls from Yoqne'am (Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.2:3).

Plain Ware Bowl and Basins (Fig. 32:5–7)

Among the other ceramics from Area F was a large bowl (Fig. 32:5) with a rim that curves in on the interior and is slightly flanged on the exterior, made of a brown ware that is self-slipped. The form compares to a type uncovered at Ramla together with wares of the eighth–ninth centuries CE (Toueg and Arnon 2010: Fig. 12:4). The basin in Fig. 33:6, with a thick, incurved rim that is slightly flattened on top, is made of pink ware covered with a pale brown slip on the exterior. It is densely ribbed below the rim. This form is similar to Magness' incurved-rim basins, dated to the eighth–tenth centuries CE (Magness 1993:210, No. 2). The basin in Fig. 33:7, made of a pale yellow ware, has an incurved rim that is rounded on the exterior, and a slight groove is visible on the top of the rim. A second groove separates the rim zone from the body of the vessel, which is decorated with wavy-band combing directly below the rim. A similar example was found at Aqaba (Whitcomb 1989: Fig. 3:K).

A Jug and a Decorated Jug Handle (Figs. 32:8, 9)

The jug in Fig. 32:8 has a wide mouth and an out-curved rim with an elegant handle that curves upward from the rim and then down to the shoulder. Wide-mouthed jugs appeared during the Abbasid period in a number of variations, and in the Yoqne'am assemblage, for example, they are termed 'Drinking Jug Type 2' (Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.129).

The jug handle in Fig. 32:9 has a knob upon the upper curve that probably served as a thumb rest. This type of decorative handle conforms to Avissar's 'Plain and Decorated Jug Handles Type 12' (Avissar 1996:161, Fig. XIII.138), which are found at a number of sites in Umayyad and Abbasid contexts throughout the southern Levant, but are not present in later contexts.

Jars (Figs. 32:10–14)

Five types of jars were discovered in Area F. The example in Fig. 32:10 has an incurved neck, a short vertical rim that ends in a slightly everted point, and two handles that extend from the rim down to the shoulder or the body, which is not preserved. This jar form is comparable to a type discovered in Early Islamic contexts at Ramla (Toueg 2011a: Fig. 19:4; 2011b: Fig. 10:8), although these examples lack handles.

The jar in Fig. 32:11 has a tall, ribbed neck that ends in an everted, triangular rim. It appears to correspond to a type of jar discovered in Umayyad contexts at Mt. Nebo (Sauer 1982: Fig. 10:1).

The storage jar in Fig. 32:12 has a ribbed, bulging neck that ends in a flattened rim with a pointed tip. The vessel walls are incurved at the joint between the neck and the body. No exact parallels were found for this vessel, although it probably represents a variation of a bag-shaped jar from Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Pl. 9.2:2; Toueg 2011a: Fig. 19:5). Another storage jar type, made of light brown ware covered with pale brown slip, has a thick, upright neck that terminates in a pointed rim (Fig. 32:13), and a pronounced groove below the neck that clearly separates it from the body of the vessel. This type corresponds to Magness' Storage Jar Form 5 (1993:226), which dates from the late sixth to the early eighth centuries CE.

The large holemouth storage jar in Fig. 32:14, made of red ware covered with a pinkish gray slip, has a heavy, flattened rim with thumb indentations along its exterior and a horizontal band of combing below the rim. This type corresponds to Magness' Holemouth Jar Form 2 (Magness 1993:233), dated to the sixth–seventh/early eighth centuries CE. Large, handmade and neck-less storage jars with decorated rims were popular in the Umayyad period and continued to be produced throughout the Early Islamic period (Avissar 1996:149, Fig. XIII.116:1–6, Type 6).

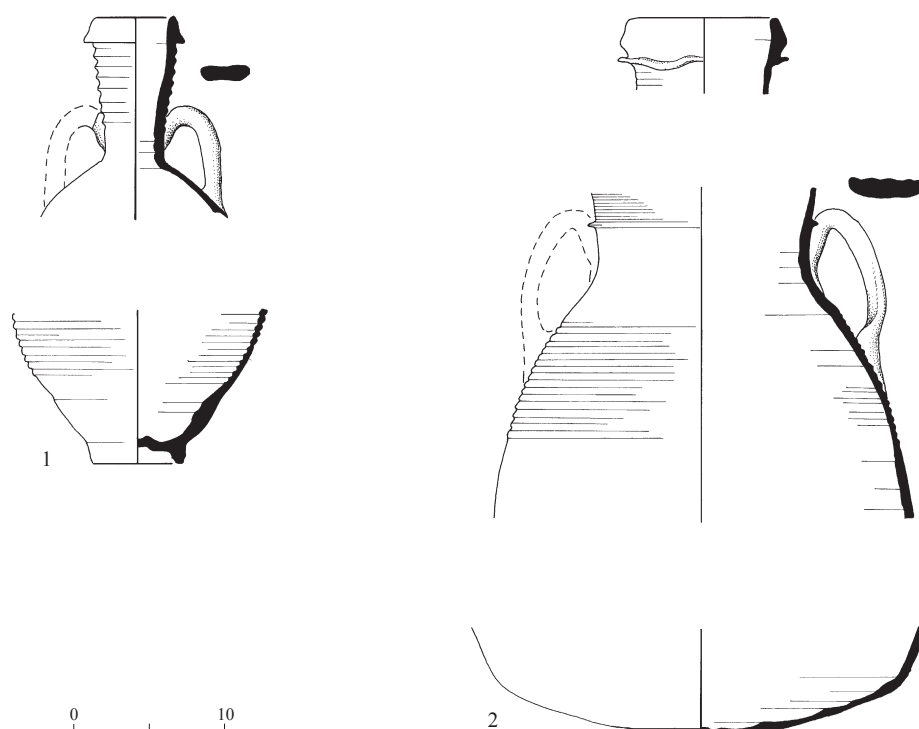


Fig. 33. Twentieth-century Black Gaza Ware vessels from Area N.

No.	Type	Reg. No.	Locus	Description
1	Black Gaza Ware <i>ibrick</i>	61	L551	Dark gray 2.5YN4; small to medium white inclusions; gray slip 2.5YN5
2	Black Gaza Ware <i>jarrah</i>	61	L551	Brown 7.5YR5/2; tiny white and light gray inclusions; grayish brown slip 10YR5/2

The Early Twentieth Century

Sherds of gray-ware vessels known as 'Black Gaza Ware' were uncovered in Areas D and E, which were occupied in the first half of the twentieth century. Two nearly complete vessels of this ware (called *ibrick* and *jarrah* in Arabic) were also uncovered in Area N (Fig. 33).

The almost-complete *ibrick* in Fig. 33:1 has an upright rim that is flanged on the exterior, and the neck bulges slightly below the rim. The body is globular in shape and densely ribbed, and there is a high, narrow ring base. The handles curve upward from the bottom of the neck, then down to the upper shoulders. The spout is missing. This vessel corresponds to Israel's Subtype 6, which he dates from the Late Ottoman period to 1948 (Israel 2006:155–

156, Fig. 136). The spouted *ibrick* was used primarily as a water jar for drinking and bathing, and is one of the most common Black Gaza Ware vessels (Israel 2006:146).

The *jarrah* in Fig. 33:2 has a carinated, incurved rim with an uneven, horizontal ridge below the carination. The neck is carinated and densely ribbed above the carination. The vessel is smooth and incurved between the neck and the narrow, ribbed shoulders. The sides of the vessel slant outward from the wide, rounded base. Handles curve upward from below the neck carination and then sharply downward, with the lower ends pinched against the upper shoulders. This jar corresponds to Israel's Subtype 14, which he dates to 1900–1975 (Israel 2006:104–115, Fig. 68). According to Israel, the *jarrah* appears in a variety of sizes

and was a multi-purpose jar for everyday use. The modern jars have a capacity of about eight liters (Israel 2006:93, 104).

The extensive documentation concerning the occupation of Be'er Shema' in the early twentieth century offers a rare insight into the date of the Black Gaza Ware discovered at the site. The jars described here date to the latest occupation of the site in the 1940s.

Although Black Gaza Ware vessels are commonly found in surveys and excavations throughout the Be'er Sheva' basin, the western Negev and the Negev Highlands, few have been recorded or published from stratified contexts, although a corpus of forms has been compiled (Israel 2006). The characteristic color of the Black Gaza Ware was the result of reduction firing. This ware was produced and distributed throughout southern Palestine at least from the late nineteenth century, and continued to be produced there until recently.

Little is known concerning the earliest appearance of Black Gaza Ware in southern Palestine. It may have its roots in gray wares produced in northern Israel and Jordan in the Umayyad period (Schaefer 1989:42). The ware was marketed in the Be'er Sheva' area following the establishment of the modern town in 1901. The widespread presence of the

ware in campsites in the Negev Highlands and the western Negev dates to the first half of the twentieth century, when Bedouin tribes and confederations became concentrated in the region around Be'er Sheva' and the Turkish railway line that led from Be'er Sheva' to Qusseima in North Sinai. In his study of archaeological remains in the northwestern Negev, Schaefer notes the presence of the ware at over 70 sites in a survey area of 30 sq km, as well as an abundance of the same ware in Bedouin encampments elsewhere in the Negev (Schaefer 1989:42). During this period, a number of workshops located in and around Gaza produced this ware. According to Israel, Black Gaza Ware was produced mainly in Gaza and the surrounding area. For example, a large production center also existed until 1948 at Faluja, near the modern town of Qiryat Gat (Israel 2006:XI). The ware is still produced and marketed in the Hebron area, as witnessed by the writer in June 2008.

SMALL FINDS

The Byzantine Period (Fig. 34:1–4)

The small finds from the Byzantine period include fragments of glass vessels, a bronze spatula (Fig. 34:1), iron nails, a seashell, and

Fig. 34 ►

No.	Object	Area	Reg. No.	Locus	Period and Description
1	Bronze spatula	A	11	103	Byzantine period
2	Stone object	C	452	1252	Byzantine period
3	Decorated marble fragment	C	Surface	Surface	Byzantine period; decorated with incised lines
4	Carved bone	C	437	1204	Byzantine period
5	Sherd with incised lines	F	110	351	Early Islamic period; incised lines on a pale yellow sherd (2.5Y8/2)
6	Inscribed sherd	F	122	252	Early Islamic period; blue-painted Arabic inscription on a large storage-jar sherd
7	Glass cylindrical flask	F	112	250	Early Islamic period; molded, greenish glass
8	Metal weight	F	128	352	Early Islamic period; gilded lead(?), octagonal shape
9	Metal weight	F	120	452	Early Islamic period; gilded lead(?), spherical with 12 surfaces
10	Modern antillia box	N	62/61	552	Early 20th c.; wooden box, metal fittings



Fig. 34. Small finds.

a bone-shaped object carved from stone (Fig. 34:2). A decorated piece of a marble vessel (Fig. 34:3) was uncovered in an area void of

architecture, between Areas A and C, and may originally have belonged to a vessel used in the church at the site. It includes part of the

rim and a leaf-shaped handle decorated with carved lines. A similar object was discovered at nearby Ma'on–Nirim (Levy 1960:63). Pieces of carved bone (Fig. 34:4) were discovered in the socket in the treading floor of the winepress in Area C. A similar piece of worked bone was published from Nizzana, where it was found in a Byzantine context (Colt 1962: Pl. XXI:25).

The Early Islamic Period (Fig. 34:5–9)

In Area F, a sherd of pale yellow fabric decorated on the exterior with incised lines, which may be a decoration or a potter's mark, was recovered (Fig. 34:5). A sherd from a large storage jar (Fig. 34:6) bears the name *Allah* in Arabic script, written on the exterior surface in barely visible, very light blue paint.

Other finds from Area F include a completely preserved, molded, cylindrical flask, 6 cm in length, made of greenish glass (Fig. 34:7). It has a flared neck, two wide ridges below the shoulders, and a flat button base. Similar flasks have been found in Abbasid contexts at Ramla (Gorin-Rosen 1999:8) and Tiberias (Lester 2004: Fig. 7.9.106).

Two metal weights from Area F appear to be made of gilded lead. The example in Fig. 34:8 has an octagonal profile with two flat sides, and concentric circles in the middle of each side. The second weight (Fig. 34:9) is spherical in shape with twelve sides. The center of each surface has a pierced hole within concentric circles.

The Early Twentieth Century (Fig. 34:10)

From the first half of the twentieth century, metal and wood finds include part of a wooden and metal container, or antillia box (Fig. 34:10), from Area N, designed to raise water out of wells. Little of the wood has survived, but the metal frame and fittings indicate that it was a small rectangular box originally fixed to a water wheel. A number of wells using water wheels were refurbished by the British authorities in the 1930s in the area west of the site (Gazit 2002:224), and this box probably originated in one of these.⁵

It should be noted that parts of *kurkar* rotary grinding stones, including at least one complete example, were discovered in various parts of the site. This type of grinding stone was used in recent times and one example was found together with Black Gaza Ware on a floor of an excavated room near Tell Jemmeh (Schaefer 1989:35).

SUMMARY

The 2006 excavation, carried out along the western perimeter of the site of Ḥorbat Be'er Shema', revealed a number of occupations in different parts of the site, spanning the Byzantine period (fifth–early seventh centuries CE), the Early Islamic period (eighth–ninth centuries CE) and the first half of the twentieth century CE (Late Ottoman and British Mandate periods). This mirrors the results of other studies carried out in the region, which indicate a rapid depopulation of settled communities following the Byzantine period, and subsequent reoccupation at intervals in the Early Islamic, medieval and Late Ottoman periods (Schaefer 1989:54).⁶

In the Byzantine period, the western perimeter of the site served as an industrial quarter containing a large winepress, a building for storing jars that were apparently made in a nearby kiln, and at least one structure with an underground cellar for storage and possibly, fermenting wine. The large quantity of bag-shaped jars discovered in the storerooms, together with the evidence of a nearby kiln, suggest that these jars were produced on-site, as at other Byzantine sites (see Israel 2001:223–224). An equally large number of Gaza wine jars was found in the excavations, which may also have been produced at the site or nearby. Gazit reported the discovery of a kiln producing the latest form of the Gaza wine jar close by in the Naḥal Besor area (Gazit 1996:76*, Site 201).

The 2006 excavations indicate that the site of ancient Be'er Shema' extended over some 30 dunams during the Byzantine period, and was

probably much smaller in size than previously reported.⁷ The site appears to have been a moderately sized village housing a Roman fort (*castellum*) and associated bathhouse, the remains of which are visible east of Area A, and a monastic community that used the local church, which was excavated by Gazit and Lender (1993:274–276). Thus, the remains of the Byzantine village are probably located in the unexcavated area east of the industrial area uncovered in the 2006 excavations, south of the fort, north of the Byzantine cemetery, and west of the church, an area that covers approximately 30 dunams (see Fig. 2).

The reason for the cessation of use of the Byzantine installations in the seventh century CE is unclear. It may have been due to a decline in population as a result of the Justinian Plague of 541/542 CE, and, following the Islamic conquest in 637 CE, the eventual collapse of the local economy that was heavily dependent on the production and export of wine. According to the excavators of the church, by the second half of the seventh century CE the structure had been abandoned in an orderly fashion (Gazit and Lender 1992; Gazit 1996:18*).

A meager occupation occurred during the Early Islamic period in new areas of the site, and the inhabitants did not make use of the nearby facilities, such as the storerooms and winepress, choosing to settle slightly to the north in Area F. There does not appear to have been any occupation at the site after the Early Islamic period, similar to the situation in the interior regions of the Negev Highlands. The absence of Crusader remains in the Negev and Sinai Peninsula, according to Gazit, was the result of their policy of leaving this region empty to function as a barrier against invasions from Egypt (Gazit 1996:18*).

By the Middle Ages, the interior regions of the Negev may have been so insecure that travelers skirted the region of the Be'er Sheva' basin, traveling from Gaza as far north as Hebron, and then down to the Dead Sea into southern Jordan by way of the Zuweira (Zohar) Pass (Dov Nahlieli, pers. comm.). Only two Mamluk

campsites have been recorded near Ḥorbat Be'er Shema' (Gazit 1996:18*, Sites 170, 213). To date, no Mamluk occupation has been discovered anywhere in the Negev Highlands. The factors contributing to the abandonment of the site following the Early Islamic period may include instability or epidemics in the region, as described by al-Maqrizi in the mid-fourteenth century (Meyer 1907:91; Hitti 1957:638). In addition, Bedouin raids on caravans traveling between Cairo and Gaza became quite frequent by the fifteenth century (Schaefer 1989:56). Another factor may have been the steady encroachment of sand from the southern coast of Israel into the western Negev Highlands, a process that apparently accelerated sometime in the Byzantine period and lasted well into the nineteenth century (Avneri 2005:59). By the fifteenth century, the hyper-arid desert region of the interior Negev, south of Be'er Sheva' and west of Gaza, was in effect abandoned, with no permanent settlements anywhere south of the Gaza–Hebron line, and by the end of the Ottoman period this line extended as far north as the Gaza–Ramla–Jerusalem road (Haiman 1995:46).

In summary, for nearly 1000 years, and in spite of abundant ground water, the site of Be'er Shema' remained unoccupied. It was finally resettled sometime after 1900 by the Abu Sosein clan, Egyptian *fellahin* who exploited the high water table for agricultural purposes. The arrival of clans of *fellahin* to the site was part of a larger migration of Egyptian peasants from Gaza that began in the later part of the nineteenth century (Marx 1967:76–77; Avitsur and Shavit 1983:49).⁸ This family constructed a handful of dwellings at some distance from one another, which included structures built of mud bricks on stone foundations and others built of stone. They apparently stripped the high-quality building stones of the ancient structures at the site, such as the winepress, the storerooms, the church and the fort, and sold them to contractors who transported the stones to nearby Gaza, which was undergoing a building boom, and to the town of Be'er Sheva', newly founded by

the Ottoman Turks in 1901. The excavations and the photographic record of the four modern dwellings at Be'er Shema¹ indicate that they did not utilize many ancient stones in their

construction. According to the residents of the local kibbutzim, particularly Kibbutz Urim, these structures were eventually destroyed in the 1960s, years after their abandonment.

NOTES

¹ The excavation was carried out in 2006 by the authors, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (Permit No. A-4812). We would like to thank Sonia Itkis for carrying out a magnetic survey at the site prior to excavation; Irena Lidski-Reznikov, for drawing the ceramics; Clara Amit, for photographing the finds; Olga Shorr, for pottery reconstruction; Lena Kupersmidt, for cleaning the metal finds; Vadim Essman, Viatcheslav Pirskey and Tatiana Bitler, for surveying and drawing the sections; Haim Lavi, for logistical support; and Sharon Gal, for technical support. We are also grateful to Dan Gazit and Yigal Israel, for their observations and advice before and during the excavation, and to the editors of this paper.

² We would like to thank Leah Di Segni, of the Hebrew University Jerusalem, for bringing the correction of the inscription to our attention, and providing us with the relevant references.

³ We would like to thank Ram Gophna for permission to publish these photographs, which were provided by Dan Gazit.

⁴ The authors wish to thank Donald T. Ariel for examining and identifying the coins.

⁵ According to Gazit, the British built at least fifteen wells that utilized water wheels and diesel pumps. At present, only four are extant (Gazit 2002:224).

⁶ Magness (2003), in her valuable study of the Early Islamic settlement in Palestine, deals with the problematic, and relatively under-represented phase of post-Byzantine occupation, particularly in southern Israel. She concludes that while there was a contraction of settlement and outright abandonment of some sites at the end of the Byzantine period, there is no direct evidence for widespread violent destructions in the seventh century, as proposed by scholars in the past. She also presents abundant evidence to show that many Byzantine settlements, like Ḥorbat Be'er Shema¹, contain a later phase of Early Islamic occupation, and some new settlements were also founded in that phase (Magness 2003:134).

⁷ In Gazit's survey map, the site is described as covering at least 500 dunams (Gazit 1996:59*).

⁸ During the excavation, the workmen and their managers, all from the modern Bedouin town of Rahat, frequently described themselves to us as being of Egyptian origin and not 'true' Bedouin (in their words), whereas one member of the Azazmeh federation, who guarded the equipment at night, was described by them as *badawi 'asli*, i.e., a 'true Bedouin'. Clearly, according to the family names and testimony of many of the present inhabitants of Rahat and the western Negev, their roots lie only a generation or two distant from Egypt.

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