

GLASS VESSELS FROM THE ROMAN, BYZANTINE AND ABBASID PERIODS AT THE FRENCH HOSPITAL COMPOUND, YAFO (JAFFA)

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INTRODUCTION

During a salvage excavation at Yafo (see Dayan, Levy and Samora-Cohen, this volume), about 110 glass fragments were recovered, of which approximately 50% were unidentified body fragments.¹ The finds are attributed to three main periods: a single vessel from the Roman period (Fig. 1); a well-preserved group from the Byzantine period (Fig. 2); and a significant assemblage from the Abbasid period (Fig. 3). Fourteen representative specimens are presented in chronological order. It is worth noting that some of the vessels are rather well-preserved, which is usually the case with burial goods.

The finds primarily consist of bowls and bottles, plain or decorated, and this assemblage contributes to our previously acquired knowledge of the glass-vessel repertoire at Yafo (Gorin-Rosen, in press; Ouahnouna, in prep.).

THE FINDS

THE ROMAN PERIOD

Only one vessel is attributed to the Roman period. The bottle (Fig. 1:1) is dated to the end of the first or beginning of the second century CE and was recovered in the fill of a pit (F43), which yielded material dating mainly from the Late Roman period.

Candlestick Bottle

Candlestick-type bottles are very common in burial assemblages of the Roman period, from the late first up to the mid-third century CE (Barag 1970:209–212). This bottle belongs to the type with a bell-shaped body and a flaring rim, and is characterized by its small size.

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Fig. 1. Glass from the Roman period.

Candlestick bottles were widely distributed throughout Israel. They have been found at tombs in Galilee, such as Yehi'am (Tzaferis 1969:74, Fig. 2:4), Nahariyya (Barag 1970: Fig. 16) and Loḥame Ha-Geta'ot (Peleg 1991: Fig. 10:1–9). Specimens were also found in a decorated Roman tomb near Ben Shemen, dated from the second to the early third century CE (Reich 1982:2019–2021, Fig. 3:6). A large assemblage containing all the variants of this type was found in the Akeldama tombs, Jerusalem, dated to second–third centuries CE (Winter 1996:98, Fig. 5.4:6).

1. Bottle, candlestick type, F43, L521, B5212. Complete (mended). Light greenish bluish glass, covered by gold and brown weathering, iridescence and pitting. Low quality glass, many bubbles. Flaring irregular rim, long uneven neck and triangular-shaped body with slightly concave bottom. No traces of the pontil. Base D 5.5 cm, Rim D 4 cm, total height 9 cm.

THE BYZANTINE PERIOD

Bottles (Fig. 2:1–5)

Bottles of different types were recovered from this period. Mostly, only body and base fragments were preserved. This is an unusual phenomenon, as usually the upper parts of the bottles are preserved, and the thinner walls of their bodies are broken into small pieces. This

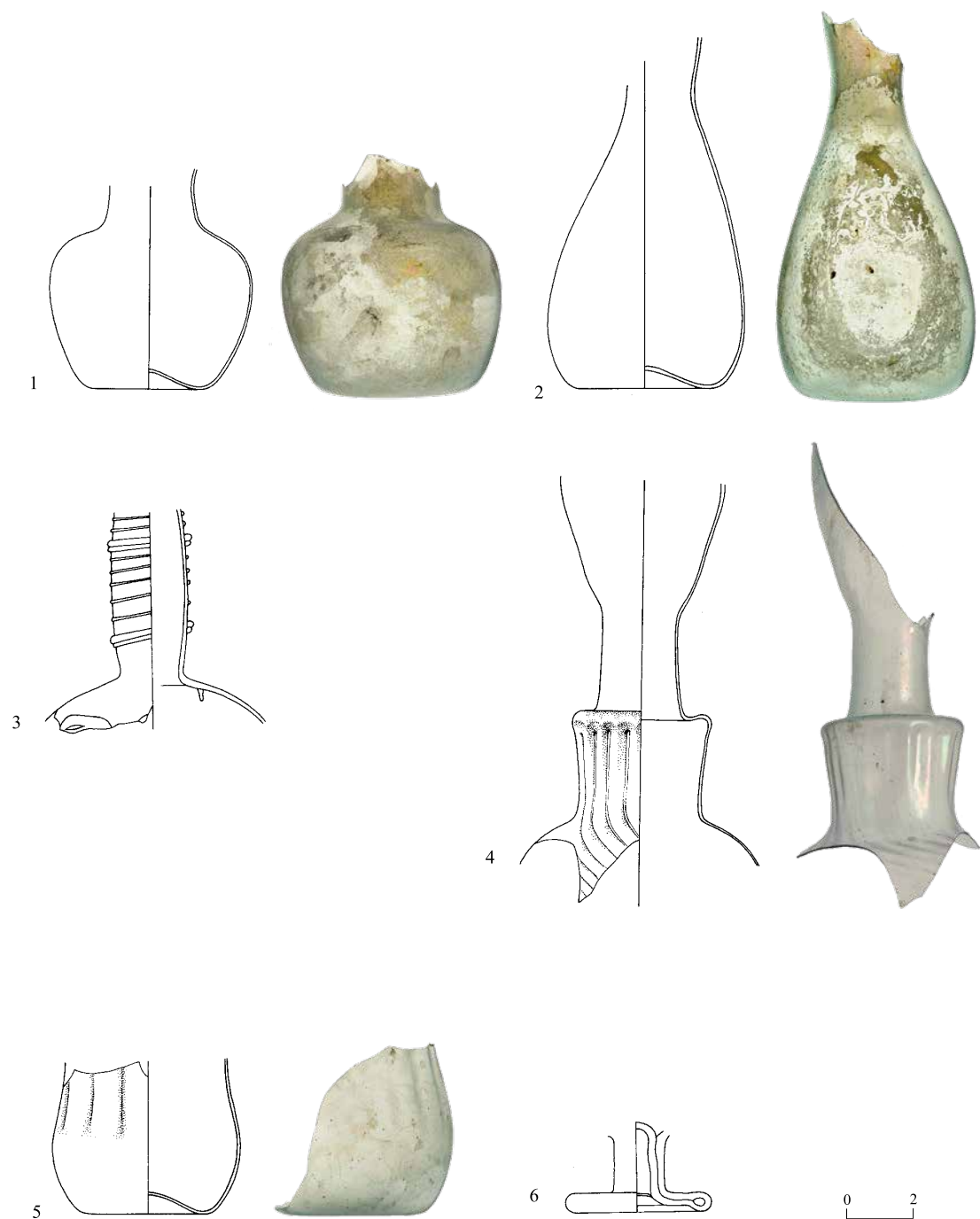


Fig. 2. Glass from the Byzantine period.

good state of preservation is probably due to the fact that at least part of them were found in tombs.

Bottle Nos. 1 and 2 are from fills (L481, L482) from the entrance of a tomb that yielded material from the Byzantine period (T39). They have globular (Fig. 2:1) and pear-shaped bodies (Fig. 2:2) and concave bases. The rims of this type of bottle, missing in the illustrated examples, are sometimes folded in, with a funnel or vertical mouth, and the necks taper directly down to the body. Similar vessels were found at Caesarea Maritima (Israeli 2008:379, Figs. 117–119).

Bottle No. 3 is from F34. It is the neck of a probably globular-shaped bottle. The neck is decorated with a turquoise thread wound around to its base. On the small preserved part of the body, the beginning of another applied turquoise ornament, contrasting the color of the body, is visible. On the body of such vessels, rings were formed by trails wound equidistantly around it and then pinched at several points to the wall; where the trails converge, knot-like projections were produced. This type of decoration is characteristic of the Byzantine period (Israeli 2003: No. 187). Bottle No. 3 bears a unique feature: a vertical short thorn tooled from the upper shoulder downward inside the vessel. This feature was deliberate, not accidental. In the past, vessels exhibiting this feature were known only from private collections; however, during the past two decades, a substantial number of fragments were uncovered at various sites ranging from the northern Galilee to the Negev and northern Sinai (Gorin-Rosen and Winter 2010:175, 176, and see further references therein).

Bottle No. 4 is from T23. It is a very fine bottle with a mold-blown decoration on the body. It has a funnel mouth (rim missing), a short, cylindrical neck, stepped and carinated, that slopes to the shoulder. The mold-blown ribs are vertical on the lower neck below the step and are twisted on the body. The stepped neck and the delicacy of the bottle are uncommon. No exact parallels were found for this bottle. Vessels with mold-blown patterns and carinated shoulders are found in the Ernesto Wolf Collection (Stern 2001: Nos. 166–168).

Bottle No. 5 is from T39. The preserved part of the body and base are concave and have no pontil mark. The body is decorated with shallow, almost invisible ribbing, fashioned only by preliminary mold-blowing. Many plain bottles of this type were found in the painted tomb at Ashqelon, dating from the fifth/sixth centuries CE; one bottle has the same type of decoration (Katsnelson 1999:74*, 76*, Figs. 3:16; 4:13–15).

1. Bottle. T39, L481, B4809. Complete body and beginning of neck. Light bluish glass. White weathering, iridescence and severe pitting. Flattened spherical body. Very thin wall. Slightly concave base without pontil trace. Base D 4 cm.

2. Bottle. T39, L482, B4828. Complete body and beginning of neck. Light bluish glass. White weathering, iridescence and severe pitting. Pear-shaped body. Very thin wall. Slightly concave base without pontil trace. Base D 4.5 cm.

3. Bottle. F34, L430, B4300. Fragment of neck and beginning of body. Light bluish glass. Weathering and iridescence. Cylindrical neck with thin turquoise trail wound in a spiral around the neck. Fragment of turquoise trail on the body.

4. Bottle. T23, L324, B3210. Fragment of neck and body. Very light bluish glass. White weathering and iridescence. Very thin wall. Funnel mouth (rim missing), short cylindrical neck, stepped and carinated, sloping to the shoulder. Decoration of mold-blown ribs, vertical on the lower neck below the step and twisted on the body. Preserved height 13 cm.

5. Bottle. T39, L482, B4814/1. Base and part of body. Light bluish glass. White weathering, iridescence and pitting. Concave base without pontil. Thin wall with shallow, almost invisible vertical ribs. Body D 4 cm.

Wineglass with Footed Base (Fig. 2:6)

Vessel No. 6, from T39, is the base of a footed wineglass. This type was very common during the Byzantine period.

6. Wineglass. T39, L481, B4804. Complete base. Green glass. White weathering, iridescence and severe pitting. Tubular ring base, hollow foot, with almost flat bottom and pontil mark. Base D 4.5 cm.

THE ABBASID PERIOD

Plain and decorated bowls and several types of bottles attributed to the Abbasid period were recovered from different loci. They represent daily wares, which were probably produced locally in one of the glass workshops in the region, possibly even at Yafo. This group is among the first Abbasid-period assemblages unearthed and studied from an excavation at Yafo.

Plain Bowl (Fig. 3:1)

Many types of plain bowls dated to the Abbasid period were found in excavations throughout Israel. They vary from shallow to deep bowls, have rounded or straight walls and different rim profiles.

Bowl No. 1 is from F23. It is a shallow bowl with a rounded rim and convex walls, made of bluish-green glass, and is the simplest version of shallow bowls.

An example dated to the eighth–early ninth centuries CE was recovered from Tiberias (Lester 2004:168, Fig. 7.1:1); another example from Bet She'an was dated from the mid-eighth to the tenth century CE (Hadad 2005:35, Pl. 25:493).



Fig. 3. Glass from the Abbasid period.

1. Bowl. F23, L321, B3203/1. Incomplete, mended. Complete profile. Greenish bluish glass. White weathering, iridescence and severe pitting. Many bubbles. Low quality glass. Rounded rim, convex wall. Thickened concave base with pontil mark. Base D 8 cm, total height 4 cm.

Decorated Bowl (Fig. 3:2)

Vessel No. 2 is from F23. It is a cylindrical bowl or beaker, decorated with a mold-blown pattern of lozenges on the body. Mold-blown vessels are common during the Abbasid period. They were found at Bet She'an (Hadad 2005:36–37, Nos. 567–607, and see further references therein), Tiberias (Lester 2004:201–204) and Ramla (Gorin-Rosen and Katsnelson 2005:107, 110, Nos. 21, 22, 34, 35; Gorin-Rosen 2010:246–248, Pl. 10.9:1–10).

2. Bowl. F23, L321, B3203/2. Incomplete, mended. Complete profile. Light greenish bluish glass. White weathering, iridescence and severe pitting. Many bubbles. Low quality glass. Rounded rim, vertical wall. Thickened, slightly concave base with pontil mark. Mold-blown decoration of lozenges on the walls and under the base. Base D 7.58 cm, total height 6.8 cm.

Beaker with Wheel-Cut Decoration (Fig. 3:3)

Vessel No. 3 is the complete flat base of a cylindrical beaker from F31. It is decorated with one horizontal groove above the base and small faceted cuts above the groove, and belongs to the group of vessels with wheel-cut decoration. Continuing the Sasanian tradition, this decorative technique of cutting and engraving became highly popular in the ninth–eleventh centuries CE in the manufacture of luxury goods (Carboni 2001:71–73).

These vessels were decorated with the aid of a wheel and their shapes are quite diverse, ranging from both shallow and deep bowls to bottles of different sizes and goblets. Similar objects were produced throughout the Islamic world (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Egypt) and therefore, it is often difficult to determine their origin.

Fragments of cylindrical beakers like this vessel were found on Markus Street, Ramla, in contexts dated to the ninth and tenth centuries CE (Pollak 2007:111–113, Fig. 6:36, 37, with further references therein to Caesarea, Nishapur and North Africa). Similar beakers are also known from the Serçe Limani shipwreck, dated to the tenth century CE (Kröger 1995:153–161, Cat. 203–208, 210–218).

3. Beaker. F31, L401, B4002. Fragment of base. Yellowish glass. White and silver weathering, iridescence and severe pitting. Flat bottom slightly thickened at the center with a thin pontil mark. Beginning of vertical wall decorated with one horizontal groove above the base and small faceted cuts above the groove. Base D 4 cm.

Bottles (Fig. 3:4–7)

Vessel No. 4 is also from F31. It belongs to a bottle with a flaring shelf-like rim. Such bottles, both plain and decorated, were recovered in many excavations. The specimens

found at Caesarea Stratum VI are dated to the late ninth–mid-tenth centuries CE (Pollak 2003:167, Fig. 3:44, 50, 51), and two rims of this type from Tiberias Stratum I are dated to the late tenth or eleventh century CE (Lester 2004: Fig. 2:16, 17, and see further references therein). Many bottles with various decorations were discovered in the shipwreck at Serçe Limani, dated to the first quarter of the eleventh century CE (Bass 1984:66, 68, Figs. 2:a; 5:h). In addition, this type of bottle was predominant at Ramla (Gorin-Rosen and Katsnelson 2005:111–113, Fig. 4:43).

Vessel No. 5, from F31, and No. 6, from F23, are rims belonging to plain bottles with a high narrow neck and nocked-off rims—a feature that first appeared in the Abbasid period. Parallels dated to the ninth–tenth centuries CE come from Bet She'an (Hadad 2005: Nos. 706–710), Fustat (Shindo 1992: Fig. IV-6-12:24–26), Ḥama (Riis 1957:41, Fig. 77) and 'Ana (Bamber 1988:125, Fig. 53:15).

Vessel No. 7 is from F31. It is a bottle neck with an outcurving rim. Bottles of this type were found at Bet She'an (Hadad 2005: Nos. 727–729).

4. Bottle. F31, L402, B4009. Complete rim and neck, and beginning of shoulder. Blue glass. White and silver weathering, iridescence and severe pitting. Flaring shelf-like rim. Tapering neck. Rim D 5.6 cm., neck height 7 cm.

5. Bottle. F31, L403, B4011/1. Complete neck. Colorless glass with yellowish tinge. Silver weathering and iridescence. Narrow neck, cut-off rim. Neck height 5 cm.

6. Bottle. F23, L321, B3203. Complete neck. Bluish greenish glass. White and silver weathering, iridescence and pitting. Narrow neck, cut-off rim. Neck height 6.5 cm.

7. Bottle. F31, L403, B4011/2. Complete neck. Colorless glass with yellowish tinge. Silver weathering and iridescence. Broken out-curved rim. Neck height 5 cm.

CONCLUSIONS

The glass assemblage retrieved from the excavation at the French Hospital Compound in Yafo covers a broad period of time, from the Roman until the Abbasid periods.

Vessels from the Byzantine period were well-preserved, probably due to the fact that at least part of them were found in tombs. Notable is the presence of an uncommon vessel—the mold-blown decorated bottle (Fig. 2:4).

The variety of shapes and decorations of the vessels from the Abbasid period belong to common types known in the eastern Mediterranean during the Early Islamic period. They include daily wares, as well as some luxury items (Fig. 3:2, 3). The daily wares were probably produced locally in one of the glass workshops in the region, possibly even at Yafo. This group is among the first Abbasid-period assemblages unearthed and studied from Yafo.

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