

THE GLASS FINDS FROM A ROMAN-PERIOD FARMSTEAD AT EL-QABU, SOUTH OF ASHQELON

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The glass discussed in this report was found in 2002 during a salvage excavation at an agricultural settlement situated 3 km south of Ashqelon (see Sion, this volume). El-Qabu yielded a small amount of glass finds, consisting of 48 fragments, of which 14 representative pieces were chosen for illustration and discussion (Fig. 1).¹ They all belong to the family of Roman glassware. A few of the vessels discussed were found in proper contexts: No. 1 was recovered from Winepress 1; No. 8 was collected from *Kokh* 1 of the burial cave on the Southern Hill; No. 11 came from Building 3; and No. 12, from above a floor between Buildings 1 and 3 on the Northern Hill.

The material was found in a very poor state of preservation; no complete vessels were discovered and none were restored. Many fragments have a fine fabric of greenish colorless glass, covered with a gold-like iridescence and a crust of milky-colored, enamel-like weathering. The color, fabric quality and milky weathering are characteristic of the second–fourth-century CE glass from Karanis (Harden 1936:10–11, 31–32), Dura-Europos (Clairmont 1963:4–5), as well as Sinai (Oren, forthcoming; Oren and Netzer, forthcoming). Finds of this glass are quite rare in the region,² but are common at Negev sites, e.g., at Mo'a and Hazeva (unpublished, courtesy of R. Cohen). A few of the other fragments (Nos. 2, 9, 11) have a blackish layer of weathering, a difference that may indicate regional or chronological variance.

The assemblage of vessels consists of four bowls (Nos. 1–4), two bowls/beakers (Nos.

5, 6) and six bottles (Nos. 7–12). While most of the fragments are unadorned, fragment No. 10 is from a flask that probably featured body ornamentation. The small sizes, fine fabrics and delicate shapes that characterize the whole group are typical of luxury containers used mainly for cosmetics. The assemblage also included an elaborately decorated bracelet (No. 13) and a rare mosaic-glass inlay (No. 14), which, together with the containers, indicates that the owners of this agricultural settlement were fairly well-off.

Bowls (Fig. 1:1–6)

Fragment Nos. 1–6 belong to open vessels. They consist of several types, all of similar small size and high-quality fabric. The published comparisons, albeit few, and certain peculiarities of the vessels' shapes and glass fabric, point to their dating not later than the third century CE.

1. L132, B246. Very small rim fragment. Probably a shallow bowl. Thickened flaring rim, which was folded and then pressed with no hollow. Slanting thin walls. Fine fabric of colorless glass with light greenish tinge. Iridescence. Pitting. Rim diam.: 120 mm.

Fragment No. 1, with a delicate, broadly flaring rim, is too small for proper reconstruction. It resembles a bowl rim from the first–second-centuries CE level in the Callirrhoé villa at 'Ein ez-Zâra, Jordan (Dussart 1997:97, Pl. 22:10).

2. L113, B225. Rim and body fragment. Small deep bowl. Rounded rim flaring horizontally. Thin

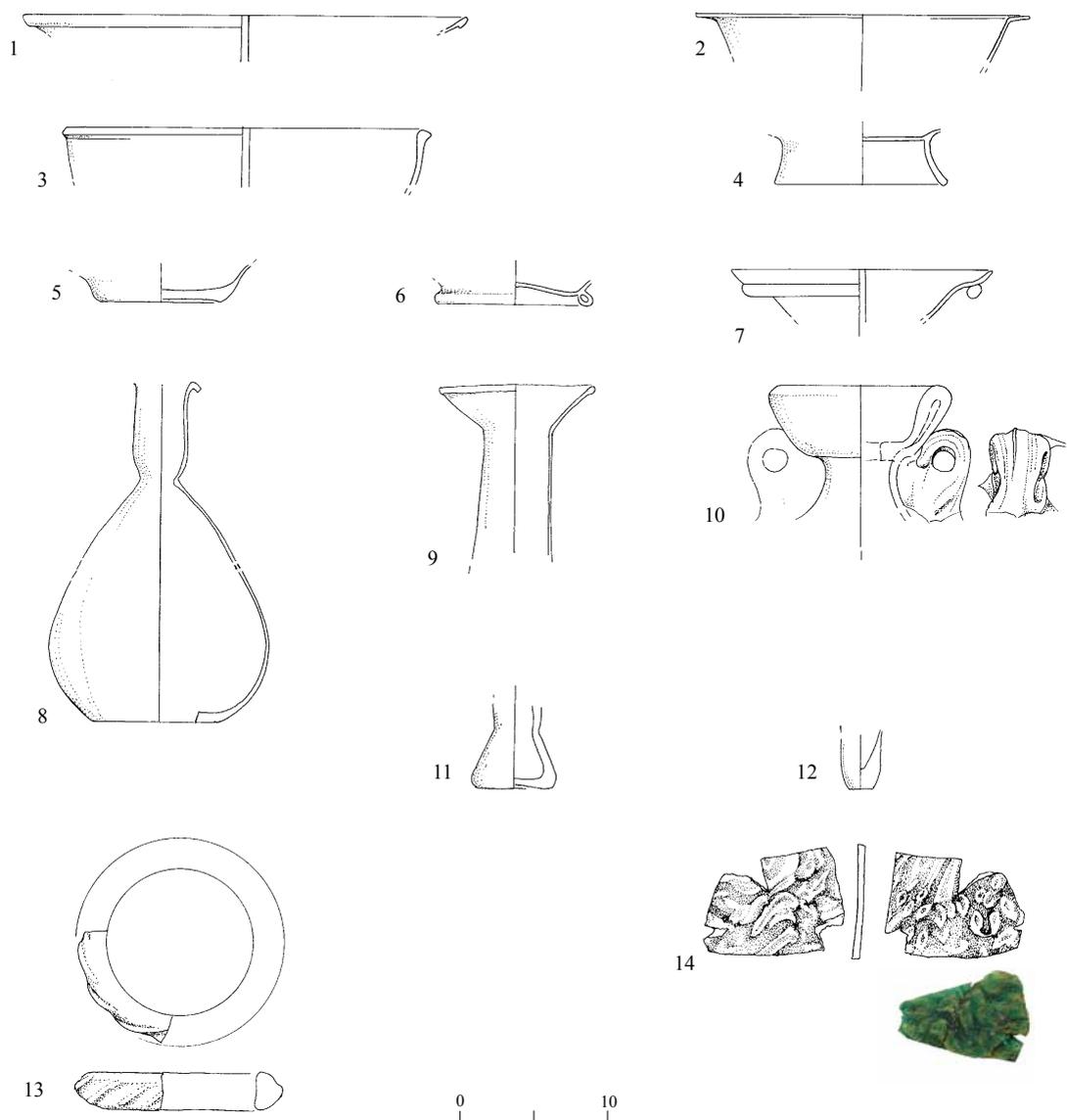


Fig. 1. Glass objects.

slanting walls. Colorless. Patches of rusty-blackish weathering. Rim diam.: 90 mm.

Fragment No. 2 is a deep bowl, distinguished by its short, horizontally splayed rim and thin slanting walls. A small cylindrical bowl from Ḥanita features a similar rim. The shape, dated

from the second century CE onward, has parallels in Cyprus (for discussion, see Barag 1978:23, No. 39). Bowls similar to No. 2, but trailed beneath the rims, were found in the Middle Imperial assemblage at Dura-Europos, which was destroyed in the mid-third century CE (Clairmont 1963: Pl. VI:226, 227).

3. L113, B268. Small rim and body fragment. Small deep bowl. Up-lifted rim, slightly flaring at its thickened edge. Slightly curving walls. Fine fabric of colorless glass. Iridescence. Pitting. Rim diam.: 100 mm.

Fragment No. 3, an almost up-lifted thickened rim, also belongs to a deep bowl. The fragment is distinguished by its fine colorless fabric. This form was excavated in the first–second-century level at ‘Ein ez-Zâra (Dussart 1997:97, Pl. 22:8) and in the early second-century CE assemblage from Alon Shevut (Gorin-Rosen 1999:87, Fig. 2:5, 6). However, the shape continues in use later, e.g., a small bowl from the third–early fourth century tomb at Ḥanita (Barag 1978:23, Fig. 11:41).

4. L117, B221. Part of base and beginning of walls. High solid ring base, splayed outward. Colorless with greenish tinge. Milky weathering crust. Golden iridescence. Base diam.: 45 mm.

The delicate high solid ring base belonging to Bowl No. 4 exhibits “an influence from Egypt” (Barag 1978:23, Fig. 11:43). Two versions of the type were found in a tomb at Ashqelon, one of which came from a sealed context dated not later than the third century CE (Katsnelson 1999:69*, Fig. 1:5, 6).

5. Square 12, B313 (Building 4). Part of base and body. Small bowl or beaker. Low base, thick and flattened. Thin walls, curving upward. Fine fabric of greenish colorless glass. Golden iridescence. Severe pitting. Base diam.: 34 mm.

6. L117, B221. Part of base and beginning of walls. Small bowl or beaker. Low ring base with rounded hollow. Colorless. Milky weathering crust. Golden iridescence. Severe pitting. Base diam.: 42 mm.

Base Nos. 5 and 6 represent other typical shapes of Roman glass. Number 5, featuring a thickened flat base, belongs to a small bowl or cup. A similar base, from the first–second-

centuries level, was found at ‘Ein ez-Zâra (Dussart 1997:98, Pl. 23:14). Number 6 has a more common shape—a ring base with a small round hollow.

Bottles and Flasks (Fig. 1:7–12)

7. L117, B221. Small rim and mouth fragment. Flask. Funnel mouth with rounded rim. Single horizontal trail below rim. Fine fabric of colorless glass. Yellow crust with golden iridescence. Pitting. Rim diam.: 70 mm.

8. Burial cave. *Kokh* 1. Most of rim and part of base missing. Mended. Flask. Beginning of flaring rim. Cylindrical neck, constricted at the base. Thin-walled. Pear-shaped body. Base thickened and flattened. Fine fabric of colorless glass. Patches of milky weathering. Iridescence. Small rounded bubbles on body. Base diam.: 30 mm.

The shape of Nos. 7 and 8 belongs to the third–fourth century group of Egyptian cosmetic flasks, typically featuring pronounced constriction at the base of the neck and a pear-shaped body. Such bottles have broad funnel-mouths, often decorated by a horizontal trail, as is No. 7. The type, known primarily from Egypt (Harden 1936: Pl. XVII:516, 537, 542–544; Morrison 1989:195, Figs. 14.94–5), is rarer in Israel, e.g., a fragment from the ancient coastal town of Yavne (Vitto 1998:124, Fig. 18:6, not stratified) and a decorated colorless flask from a tomb at Khirbat el-Ni‘ana dated to the fourth–early fifth centuries CE (Gorin-Rosen and Katsnelson 2007:106–108, Fig. 15:1).

9. L244, B131. Part of rim and neck. Bottle. Funnel mouth with unevenly folded rim. Tall cylindrical neck. Colorless with greenish tinge. Black and rusty patches of weathering. Rim diam.: 40 mm.

Fragment No. 9 belongs to another type of bottle, with a tall cylindrical neck and broad funnel-mouth, similar to a globular bottle from Ḥanita (Barag 1978:27, Fig. 13:53).

10. L117, B221. Two fragments: upper part and handle. Flask. Thick funnel mouth, deeply folded inward. Thick loop-handle with small round hollow and remains of short cylindrical neck. Colorless. Milky patches of weathering. Iridescence. Lime deposits. Small black impurities at handle. Rim diam.: 50 mm.

Fragment No. 10 is the third-century CE version of a globular oil container (*aryballos*), which has two ‘dolphin handles’ for suspension. The bodies of such flasks are often decorated with wheel-cut patterns of facets and circles. A similar flask was found at ‘Amman, but the type is known mainly from Egypt and Nubia (for discussion and further references, see Israeli 2003:215, 217, Cat. No. 264).

11. L103, B258. Small part of neck and body of a small cosmetic bottle. Conical body with thick walls. Base thickened and flattened. Cylindrical neck, slightly constricted at its base. Bright greenish blue. Patches of black weathering on interior. Iridescence. Base diam.: 20 mm.

Fragment No. 11 was found on a floor in Building 3. It belongs to a family of short candlestick bottles that are generally dated to the late first–mid-third centuries CE (Winter 1996:98, Fig. 5.5:1–3). This version features a small conical body, thick walls and almost flat base. A very similar bottle, attributed to the late first–early second centuries CE, was found in the Cave of Letters in the Judean Desert (Barag 1963:104, Fig. 38:6).

12. L147, B292. Small lower part. Tubular flask. Narrow cylindrical body with conical hollow. Solid bottom, flattened by pontil. Colorless with greenish tinge yellow crust with golden iridescence. Pitting.

Fragment No. 12, from a small tubular bottle, is identified only by its thick bottom. Such flasks usually have a simple shape with slightly flaring rims. A similar small ‘toilet bottle’ of uncertain date was found at Karanis (Harden 1936:266–267, Pl. XX:837). Two larger examples,

assigned to the late first–early second centuries CE, came from the mausoleum at Tel Rosh Ha-‘Ayin (Eitan 1969:66, Fig. 13:5, 7).

Bracelet (Fig. 1:13)

13. L154, B305. Small fragment of bracelet. Semicircular in section. Decorated with delicate diagonal ribs. Black(?), opaque. Patches of rusty weathering. Pitting. Diam.: 55 mm.

This small thick bracelet is made of dark, opaque, almost black glass and decorated with diagonal short ribs. A bracelet with similar ribs was excavated in the third-century CE tomb at ‘Amman (Spaer 1988:56–57, Fig. 5, Type 3a, with further references). However, this type continued in use during the fourth century CE. A very similar bracelet made of dark opaque glass was found in the cist grave at Khirbat Jarrar dated to the late third–fourth centuries CE (Gorin-Rosen 2004: Fig. 27:5). Another contemporaneous bracelet, of black glass decorated with spiral ribbing, was found in Building 1 at El-Qabu (not illustrated, L137, B272. Diam.: 10 cm).

Inlay (Fig. 1:14)

14. L143, B281. Small fragment of a mosaic-glass plaque. Partly preserved and mended. Mold-made. Flat. Uneven pattern features two colors: small yellow wedges against dark bluish green background. Thickness: 2 mm.

This fragment was probably part of an inlaid plaque, very poorly preserved. The plaque from which it derived was made in mosaic-glass technique, with sections of rods and segments of different colors fused together into a lump of glass and then molded into various shapes of inlay. The fragment had suffered from weathering, which rendered the pattern and colors very indistinct. The simplicity of the design and its dominant colors of yellow and green indicate that the fragment belonged to a later group of mosaic glassware, produced between the third and the beginning of the fifth centuries CE. Examples

of such glass have been unearthed both in the East and the West, but at this late period, such a plaque is likely to have been produced only in Egypt (Nenna 2002:155, 156, Fig. 7).

CONCLUSIONS

The group as a whole, representing a limited but interesting assemblage of Roman glass,

dates from the second to the fourth centuries CE. It is a small but important addition to glass finds from the southern regions of the country, which are yet to be sufficiently studied. The many parallels from Egypt, Sinai, Jordan and Syria are not surprising and indicate that some of these vessels may have been brought by merchants on the Incense Route, while others were produced in local workshops.

NOTES

¹ I wish to thank the excavator for inviting me to study the glass finds. The objects were restored by Olga Shor. Drawings of the glass finds were made by Carmen Hersh and a photograph is by Clara Amit.

² A few publications from the Ashqelon area deal mostly with local types of the Late Roman–Byzantine periods, e.g., Iliffe 1933, Barag 1967, Katsnelson 1999 and Gorin-Rosen 2002.

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