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A Late Bronze Age II Settlement on the Southern Beach of Ashdod

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In January 1994, a three-week sounding excavation was conducted south of the city of Ashdod, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (Nadelman 1996).[1] The site (map ref. NIG 1637/6309, OIG 1137/1309) is approximately 4 km northwest of Tel Ashdod, 1 km southwest of Ashdod-Yam[2] and 100 m east of the Mediterranean coast (Fig. 1). The excavation took place on a *kurkar* (calcareous sandstone) hill overlooking the sea, at the site of a planned road. The southern half of the hill had been severely damaged by bulldozer activity, which had removed all the sand dunes in the area and shaved deeply into the *kurkar*. Most of the soundings were conducted on the southern slope, and a few were opened on the summit and the central slope (Plan 1). Settlement deposits of Late Bronze Age II were revealed, without any architectural elements (Fig. 2).[3]

The Excavation

Southern Slope

Four squares[4] were opened on the southern slope (Plan 1). Square A (L1) was completely disturbed by bulldozer activity. In Sq B, beneath a layer of yellow sand and *kurkar* pebbles (L2), a large number of sherds was found in a layer of variegated dark sand (L10). The *kurkar* bedrock was reached only in the southern half of Sq C (L7), under a natural accumulation of sand. A ceramic figurine, stylistically Mycenaean (see below, Fig. 6:1), was found just above bedrock in the eastern half of the locus.

The major feature of Sq E is a wide and shallow pit installation (L13) filled with dark gray sand (Fig. 3). To the west of the pit is yellowish sand, the color possibly the result of exposure to high temperatures. Many storage-jar sherds were recovered from the bottom of this pit, and in the light-colored sand (L14) below it.

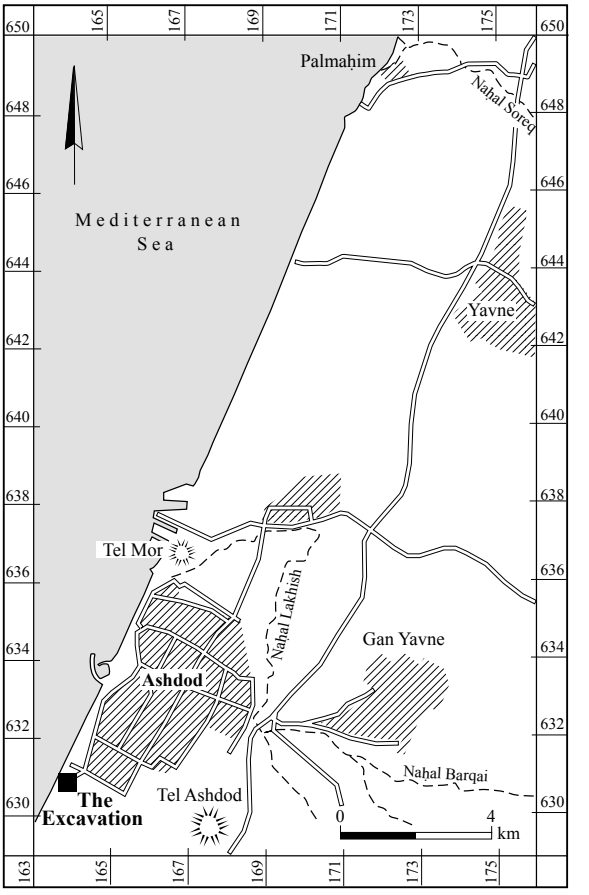
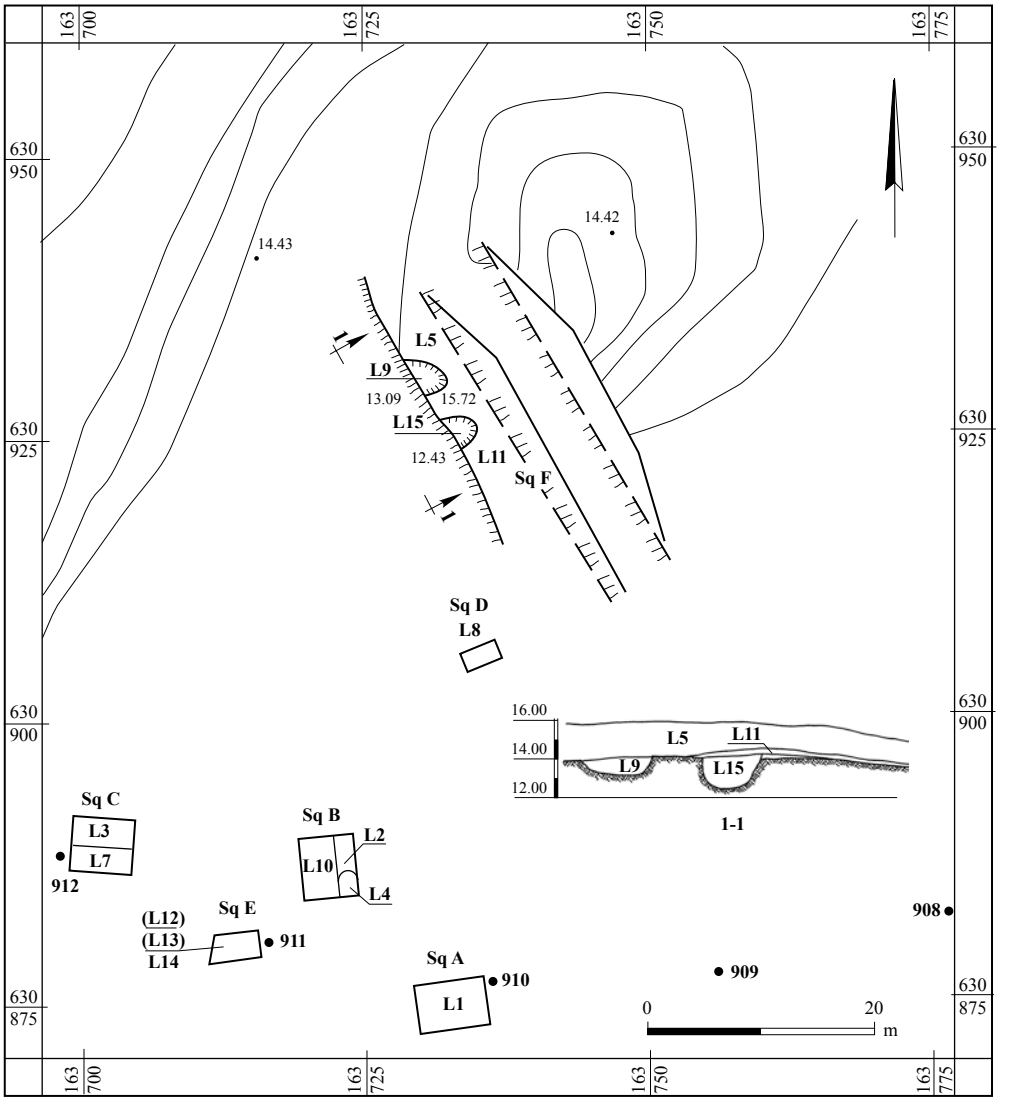


Fig. 1. Location map.



Plan 1. Site plan and section.

Middle Slope

In Sq D (L8), beneath a 5 cm layer of mud material (perhaps dissolved or eroded mud brick), yellow sand and *kurkar* pebbles were found to a depth of 1.8 m (at which point the excavation season ended). This type of material was also found at the opening level of Sq B (L2), and at the closing level of Sq E (L12). No archaeological remains were found.

Hilltop

Square F was excavated with the intention of checking the remains of two pits cut into the *kurkar*, as revealed in a section cut by a bulldozer (Plan 1: Section 1–1). A layer of white sand (L5) covered a layer of mud material (L11) in most of the area. In the northern part of the square, the upper contour of a pit (L9), filled with dark orange sand, was defined. The second

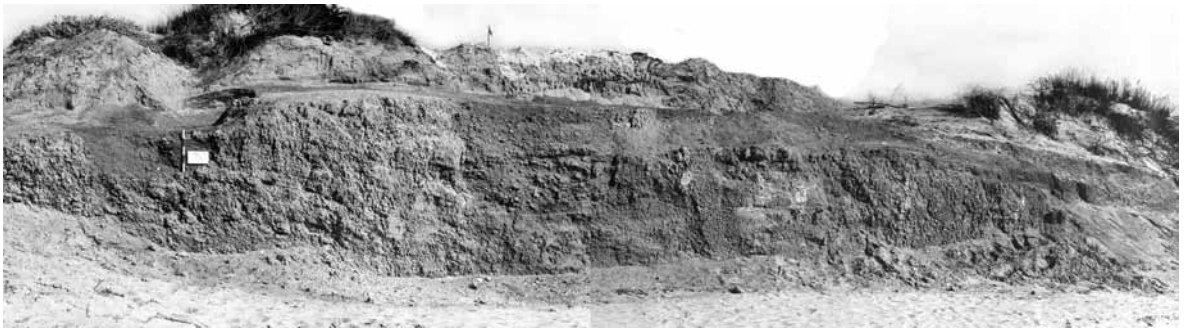


Fig. 2. Bulldozed section showing two pits cut into the *kurkar*, looking northeast.

Fig. 3. Square E, north section: dark earth lens on layer of stone and storage-jar sherds.

pit (L15), which was also cut into the *kurkar*, was filled with thin layers of sand and *kurkar* pebbles, containing sherds and some bone fragments. In the southern part of the square, the outline of two mud bricks lying side by side could be discerned under the white sand. Only one side (39 cm) could be measured.

THE FINDS

The Pottery

While most of the pottery seems to be local, some is clearly imported from elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. Since no petrographic analyses have been done, caution has been exercised in designating the pottery's origins.[5] Parallels are given in the pottery tables.

Bowls (Figs. 4:1–4; 5).— A large percentage of the bowls are tempered with chopped straw, whose charred remains and voids are visible in the section. Of the four Milk Bowl sherds, probably only the two that are slipped and painted (Fig. 5:1, 2) are Cypriot imports (White Slip II). A single fragment of a Base Ring wishbone handle (Fig. 4:4) was found on the surface. Typologically, it fits in with the LB II types excavated at the site.

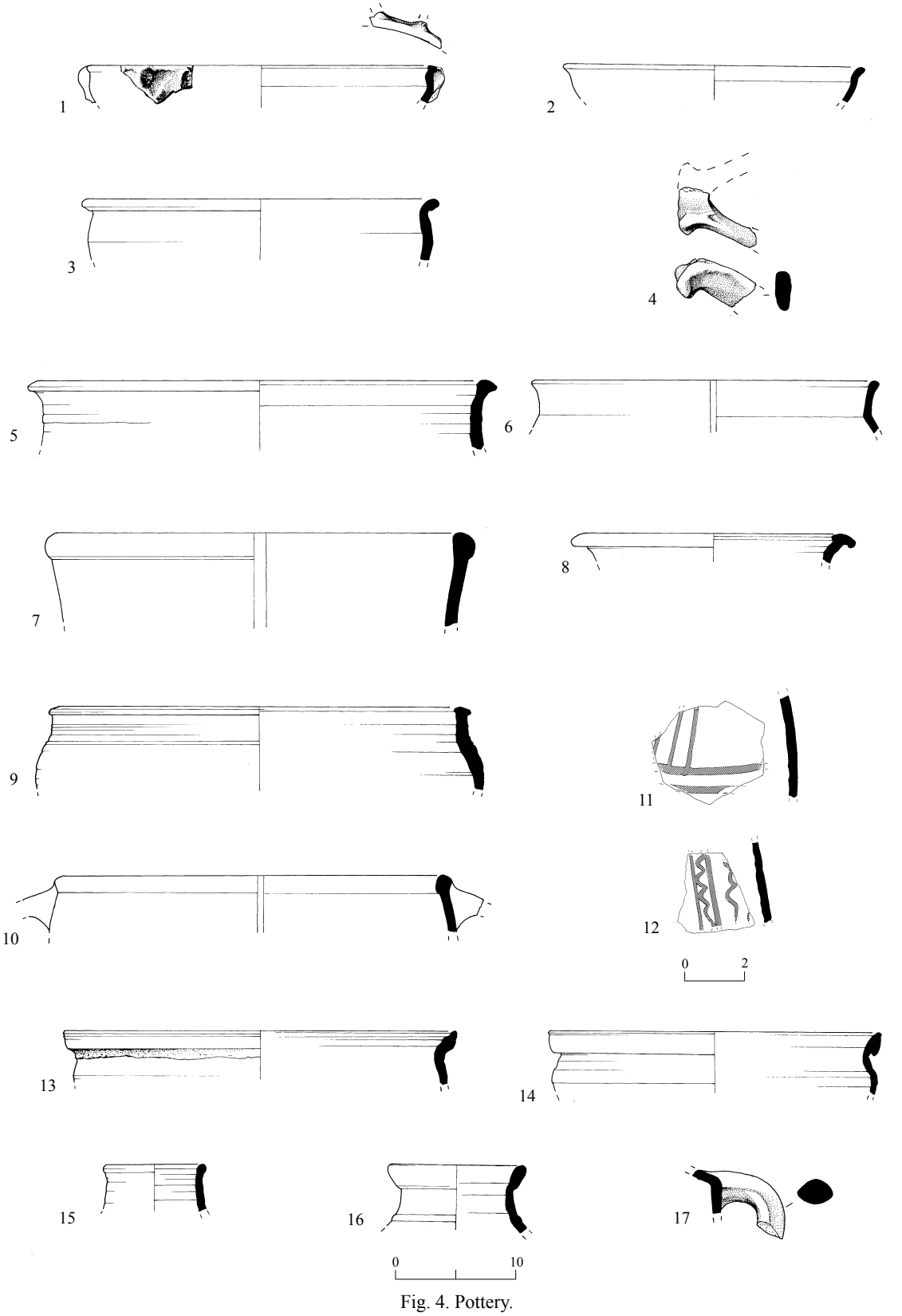


Fig. 4. Pottery.

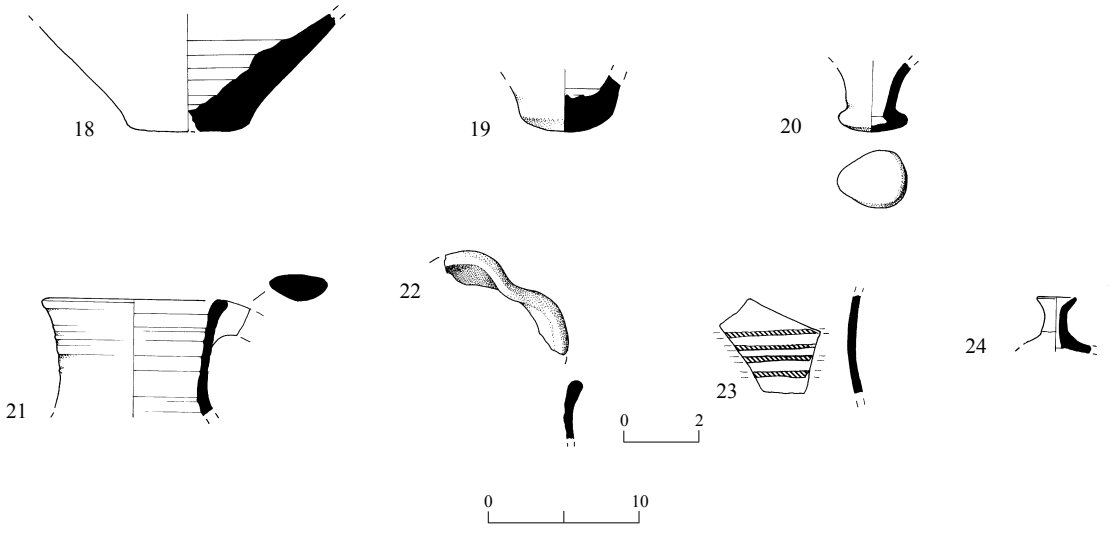


Fig. 4. (cont.)

No.	Locus	Reg. No.	Vessel	Description	Parallels
1	13	1060/7	Bowl	Light reddish brown 5YR6/4; blackened straw temper	
2	14	1066/6	Bowl	Light brown 7.5YR6/4; small and medium grits	Tel Ḥarasim: Feldstein 1991: Fig. 1:6, 14 (Str. V)
3	13	1046/2	Bowl	Light olive brown 2.5Y5/4; blackened straw temper	
4	6	1027/3	Base Ring bowl(?)	Ware: light gray 10YR7/1; slip: very dark gray 5YR3/1	ʿAkko: Ben-Arieh and Edelstein 1977:18, 24, Fig. 12:3 Tel Ḥarasim: Feldstein 1991: Fig. 2:13
5	13	1046/10	Krater	Ware: light gray 10YR6/1; slip: white 10YR8/2	Ashdod: Dothan and Porath 1993:164–165, Fig. 10:5 (Str. XV, LBII)
6	14	1066/1	Krater(?)	Pink 7/5YR8/3	
7	13	1043/2	Krater	Reddish yellow 5YR6/6; blackened straw temper	
8	13	1046/16	Krater	Int.: light yellowish brown 2.5Y6/4; ext.: light red 2/5YR6/8	Tel Ḥarasim: Feldstein 1991: Fig. 4:3 (Str. V)
9	13	1042/4	Krater	Ware: light brown 7/5YR6/4; slip: very pale brown 10YR7/3	Lakhish: Ussishkin 1983:126–127, Fig. 15:8 (Area G, Level VI)
10	13	1042/11	Storage jar	Int.: gray 2.5YR6/0; ext.: light red 2.5YR6/6	
11	10	1030/1	Krater	Int.: dark gray 10YR4/1; ext.: reddish yellow 5YR7/6; paint: light red 10R4/2	Ḥaẓor: Yadin et al. 1958: Pl. 108:4 (LBII)
12	10	1030/2	Krater(?)	Int.: gray 5YR6/1; ext.: reddish yellow 5YR7/6; paint: light red 10R5/3	Ḥaẓor: Yadin et al. 1958: Pl. 108:4 (LBII) Tel Ḥarasim: Feldstein 1991: Fig. 2:10
13	7	1050/2	Cooking pot	Int: yellowish brown 10YR5/4; ext.: light red 10R5/3; large white grits, blackened straw temper	Ashdod: Dothan and Porath 1993:168–169, Fig. 12:10 (Str. XIV) Tel Ḥarasim: Feldstein 1991: Fig. 4:7

◂ **Fig. 4**

No.	Locus	Reg. No.	Vessel	Description	Parallels
14	13	1046/9	Cooking pot	Light red 2.5YR6/8; blackened straw temper	Ashdod: Dothan and Freedman 1967:98–99, Fig. 22:10 (Area B, Str. 1, destroyed 13th c. BCE; Dothan and Porath 1993:162–163, Fig. 9:15 (Str. XVI, LBII)
15	10	1028/6	Storage jar	Reddish yellow 5YR6/6	
16	10	1057/1	Storage jar	Ext.: reddish yellow 5YR6/6; int.: very dark gray 5YR3/1	Ras Shamra: Courtois and Courtois 1978:264–265, Fig. 23:11
17	13	1042/7	Storage jar	Int.: light red 10R5/3; ext.: reddish yellow 7.5YR7/6	Deir el-Balaḥ: Dothan 1979:10, 14, Fig. 17 (Tomb 114: 13th c. BCE)
18	13	1042/22	Storage jar	Light reddish brown 2.5YR6/4; tiny and small white grits (including shells), tiny and large pulverized sherds	Ras Shamra: Courtois and Courtois 1978:265, Fig. 23:17
19	13	1053/3	Storage jar		Ashdod: Dothan and Freedman 1967:100–101, Fig. 23:4 (Area B, Str. 1, 13th c. BCE) Ras Shamra: Courtois and Courtois 1978:264–265, Fig. 23:20 (Ugarit recent 3, 1365–1200 BCE)
20	13	1042/2	Storage jar	Ware: light reddish brown 5YR6/4; ext.: pink 5YR7/4	
21	13	1042/1	Jug(?)	Int.: light yellowish brown	
22	10	1030/9	Jug	Dark brown 7.5YR5/6	
23	10	1041/6	Juglet	Ware: light gray 7.5YR7/0; paint: brown 7.5YR5/3	
24	10	1023/1	Stirrup jar	Very pale brown paint 10YR7/3	Amman: Hankey 1974: 150–151; Fig. 6:48 (Myc. IIIA2/IIIBI)

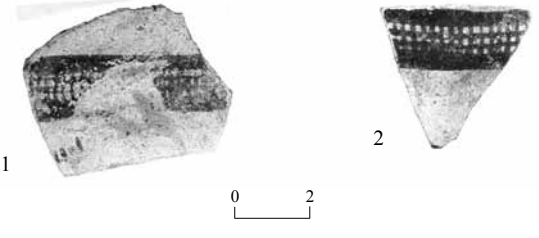


Fig. 5. Cypriot Milk Bowl fragments, White Slip II.

Kraters (Fig. 4:5–12).— Some of the ware has charred remains of chopped straw. The two closed krater fragments (Fig. 4:11, 12) are painted with a metope pattern.

Cooking Pots (Fig. 4:13, 14).— The cooking pots are characterized by folded and out-turned rims. A high percentage of the vessels are tempered with chopped straw.

Storage Jars (Fig. 4:15–20).— A few of the fragments have straw temper. The bases are flat or rounded (Fig. 4:18–20).

Jugs (Fig. 4:21, 22).— Plain and trefoil rims are represented.

Juglet (Fig. 4:23).— One painted sherd of a juglet was found.

Stirrup Jar (Fig. 4:24).— The spout of a stirrup jar of fine ware, with traces of paint, is possibly Mycenaean III.

Small Finds

Ceramic Animal Figurine.— An elongated animal with a short tail (Fig. 6:1), the rest of its limbs broken off, was found in Sq C. The ware is fine, possibly a Mycenaean import.

Spearhead.— A complete spearhead (Fig. 6:2), made of a copper alloy, was recovered on the surface of the northern section of Sq B. The length of the blade is 130 mm and its maximum width, 38 mm. It has a flat rib on both sides. The haft is 92 mm long, and is folded to accommodate a rounded shaft, 20 mm in diameter. Approximately 15 mm from the end, the haft has a double perforation (each hole c. 3 mm in diam.) for a nail or peg to secure

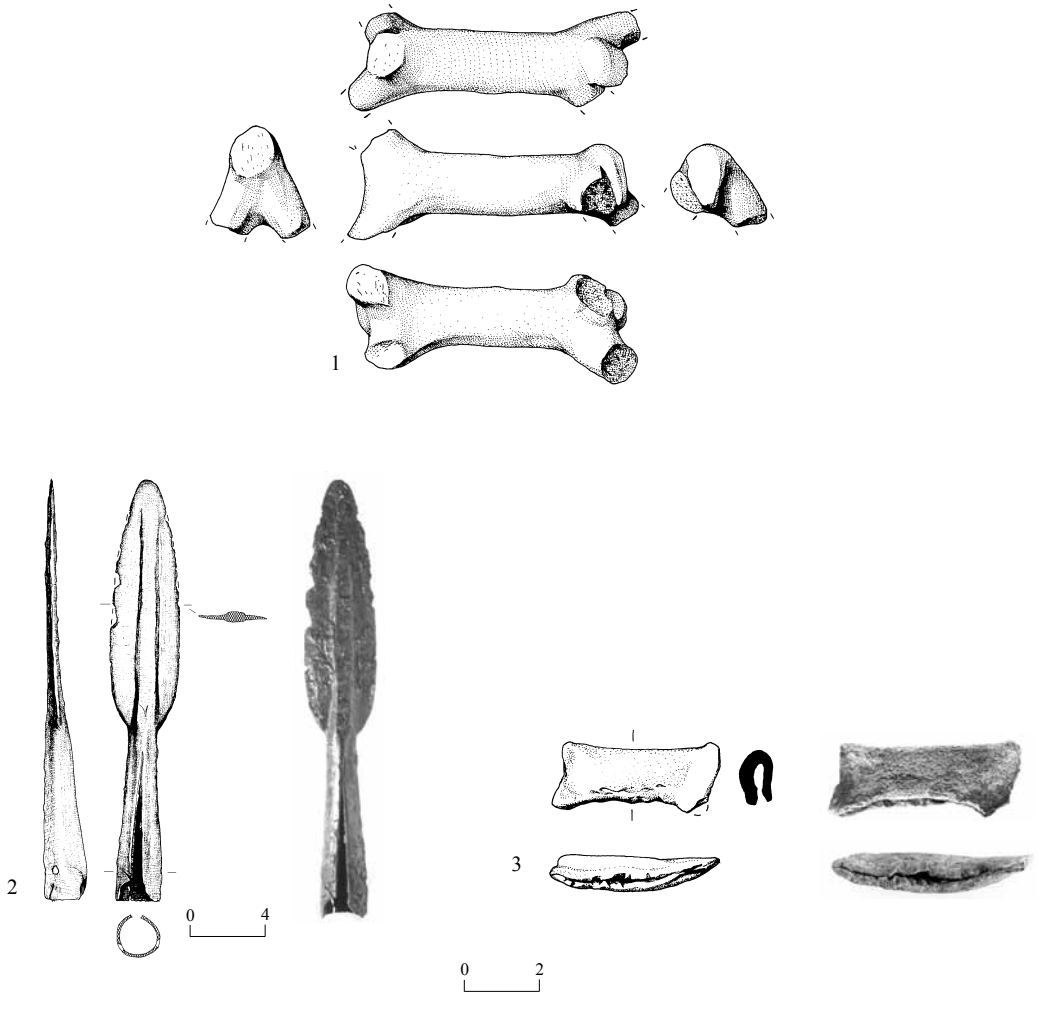


Fig. 6. Small finds.

No.	Locus	Reg. No.	Artifact	Material	Parallels
1	7	1031	Figurine	Painted ceramic	Dan: Biran 1994:119, Fig. 83:9 (Str. VII, LBII) Ras Shamra: Courtois and Courtois 1978:352–353, Fig. 55:6, 9–13 (figurines Myceniennes—Helladique récent IIIB/Ugarit récent 3)
2	2	1004	Spear	Copper alloy	ʿAkko: Ben-Arieh and Edelstein 1977:34, Pl. 18:12, Fig. 20:2 Brewer 1977:77–78 Megiddo: Guy 1938: Pls. 146:3, 137:8 Ras Shamra: Schaeffer 1956:261, Figs. 225, 241, 276, Pl. 10 (14th–13th c. BCE)
3	2	1001	Weight	Lead(?)	

a wooden shaft. Typological parallels from Ugarit and ʿAkko place this spearhead within LB II, a date which is corroberated by the ceramic evidence.

Lead Weight.— This lead weight (of fish/bird net?) (Fig. 6:3) was also found close to the surface that the bulldozer exposed in Sq B. It is 43 mm long and weighs 25.624 g. The weight was made by folding a rectangular piece of lead along its length and crimping the narrow ends. At the time of recovery, the imprint of the net's strings appeared to be visible between the folds.

SUMMARY

Despite the relatively wide range of shapes and variations, the vessels that were found at the site seem to indicate both typologically and proportionally, a single-period LB II settlement. The fabrics point to a number of sources, both local (Canaanite) and foreign (Cypriot, Mycenaean and possibly Egyptian). This international character is clearly in keeping with the general picture of the period.

The excavation has raised some intriguing questions as to the site's occupation and *raison d'être*. It is located on the shortest line between the sea and Tel Ashdod (Fig. 1). The overland access route, subsequently covered by sand dunes, probably traversed inhospitable but passable coastal terrain. In contrast, the sites usually considered to be the seaports used by Ashdod in antiquity—Miẓpe Yona (Dothan 1973) and Tel Mor (Dothan 1973; Dothan and Porath 1993:9)—are approximately three times the traveling distance to Tel Ashdod. They had, however, the advantage of being situated on Naḥal Lakhish, which provided a navigable outlet to the sea, facilitating international trade to Ashdod via smaller secondary shipping vessels (Dothan and Freedman 1967:5, with nn. 3 and 6).[6] It is conceivable that the land route from our site was used during dry seasons when Naḥal Lakhish could not be navigated.[7]

In any case, there should be no question as to the connection between our site and Ashdod, the closest urban center during LB II. It can be conjectured that our site may have been used as a watch station (highest preservation c. 14.5 m), observing the sea traffic for cargo, passengers and enemies. Communication to Ashdod could have been signaled via an intermediate station somewhere in between.

NOTES

[1] The excavation (Permit No. A-2091) was directed by the author, assisted by Yehudah Bueller and fifteen workers from Ashqelon. Field photography and section drawings were done by the author; surveying, by Israel Vatkin and Pavel Gertopsky; drafting, by Natalia Zak; drawing of pottery and small finds, by Aster Stark; and studio photographs, by Clara Amit. I wish to express my gratitude to Yeshayahu Lender (Ashqelon Regional Archaeologist) and Nitzan Sarig (Regional Antiquities Inspector) for their technical assistance during the excavation.

[2] Ram Gophna may have encountered our site, judging from Kaplan 1969b:137, n. 1. In the original Hebrew version of that article (Kaplan 1969a:130, Fig. 1) our site seems to appear on the map as an unlabeled dot on the coast southwest of Ashdod-Yam.

[3] A surface survey conducted within a couple of hundred meters from the excavation yielded one sherd from each of the following periods: Iron Age II, Hellenistic, Byzantine and Ottoman.

[4] Three of the squares were 5 × 5 m in size. Due to time limitations, Sq E was excavated as a 3.0 × 1.5 m probe.

[5] The storage-jar fragments from the site were sampled by Michael O. Sugerman (Harvard) on January 21, 1996. They were processed as part of his study of over 500 Late Bronze Age storage jars from the eastern Mediterranean (Sugerman 2000).

[5] The change of Naḥal Lakhish's course within the twentieth century (Dothan 1973:2) would explain the fact that its present course is far from Tel Ashdod.

[6] Yavne-Yam, approximately 1 km to the northeast on the coast, is not known to have remains earlier than Iron Age II (Kaplan 1969b:137–138) and therefore, cannot be considered as an alternative.

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