

## A BYZANTINE-PERIOD VILLA AT HERZLIYYA BET, IN THE SOUTHERN SHARON PLAIN

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A unique Byzantine-period villa unearthed in Herzliyya was identified as a luxurious country residential complex. Based on the inscription set in the mosaic floor of the triclinium, and the small finds, it is suggested to date the villa to the fifth century CE. The architectural style indicates that it belonged to a wealthy owner, perhaps a Samaritan, due to the presence of a *miqweh* and the absence of figurative images in the mosaic.

*Keywords: southern Sharon plain, villa suburbana, Samaritan, Greek, epigraphy*

### INTRODUCTION

This report presents a previously unpublished salvage excavation conducted in 1993 at the site of a luxurious domestic building of the Byzantine period.<sup>2</sup> The excavation site, located in Herzliyya Bet neighborhood in the southern Sharon plain, is situated on a rocky hill, adjacent to and east of Road 2 and north of Ha-Sira Interchange (map ref. 674871/182788; Fig. 1). The hill, located c. 1.75 km northeast of Tel Mikhal and about 3.3 km southeast of Apollonia-Sozousa, is part of the second north–south *kurkar* (fossilized sandstone dune) ridge crossing the Sharon plain.

The site was first surveyed in the 1930s by the Mandatory Antiquities Department (see Tal 1995:109), and was subsequently documented in a number of regional surveys (Gophna and Ayalon 1989:48; 1998:23–25; Roll and Ayalon 1989:137, 141, 153). It was initially

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<sup>2</sup> The excavation was conducted by the late Anat Ginzburg on behalf of the Israel Antiquity Authority (Permit No. A-2072). This article summarizes the author's M.A. thesis titled "A Late Roman–Byzantine Villa in the Territory of Apollonia/Sozousa" (Elad 2014). The author thanks the thesis supervisor, Prof. Oren Tal, for his assistance and support. Thanks are also due to Amir Gorzalczy, Moshe Ajami and Uzi 'Ad of the IAA Central District, for their assistance in locating the excavation finds and documents; Etan Ayalon, who participated in the original excavation, for his notes and insights; Dov Porotsky (plan), Pavel Shrago (studio photography) and Yulia Gottlieb (pottery drawings) of the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University; and Mikel Miles (glass finds drawing).

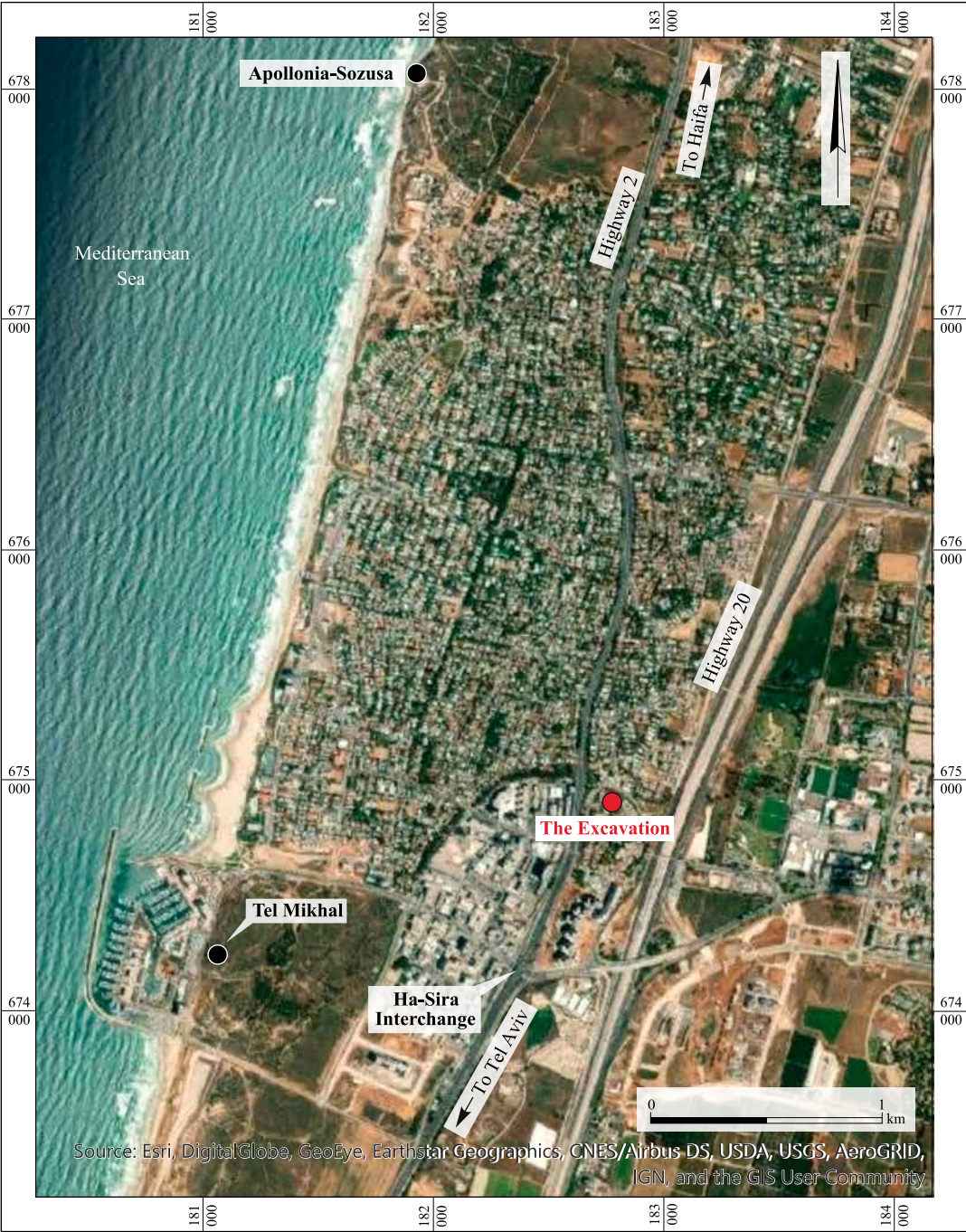


Fig. 1. Location map.

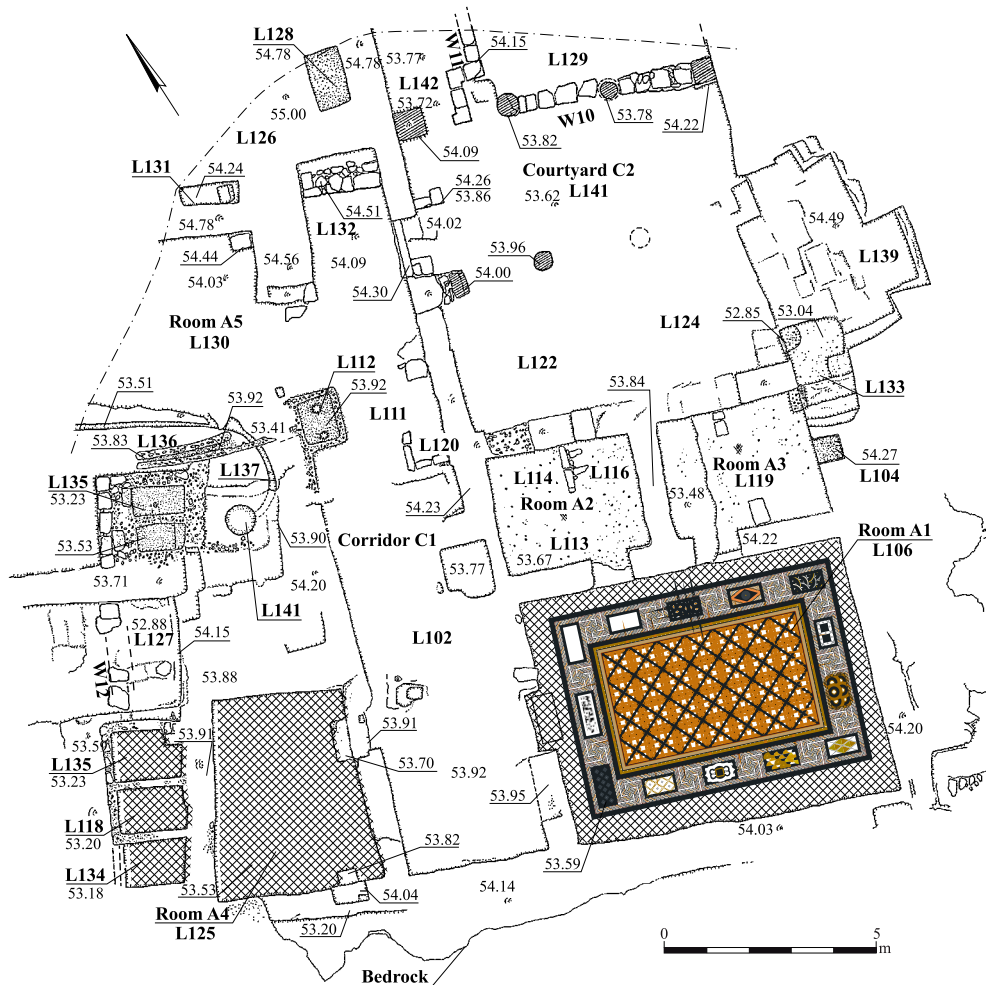
excavated in 1979 by Ayalon, as part of the Survey of Herzliyya (Ayalon 1980:41; Gophna and Ayalon 1998:31–33), revealing an installation with several vats. The 1993 excavation exposed the villa complex and investigated the previously uncovered installation that was part of the complex. In 1995, a quarry was revealed on the northern slope of the *kurkar* hill

by Tal (1996). The description of the 1993 excavation is based on information gleaned from the original excavation register, consultation with Etan Ayalon and recent field observations of the exposed remains.

### THE EXCAVATION

The villa (c. 625 sq m; Plan 1), of which the northern and western parts were not preserved due to ridge collapse, was partly hewn in bedrock and partly built aboveground. Almost none of the walls' stone courses survived, likely due to robbing, leaving only a hewn imprint of the structure's contour, its inner divisions and floors.

A long corridor (C1; length c. 17 m) traversed the villa from south to north, connecting the various wings of the complex. It lay on a slightly higher elevation than most of the surrounding rooms from which it was approached by a step. At the southern part of the





corridor were two doorways facing each other, each leading into one of the two southern wings of the villa.

The eastern doorway led into a *triclinium* (Room A1; Fig. 2), the floor of which was decorated with a colorful mosaic (L106; see below) and the walls coated with a layer of grayish white plaster. An accumulation above Floor 106 contained several square building stones that probably collapsed from the *triclinium* walls, and a large quantity of plaster fragments.

Two openings in the northern *triclinium* wall led into Rooms A2 and A3 (c.  $3.5 \times 3.0$  each), with a nearly symmetrical layout. Rooms A2 and A3 had plaster floors and plaster-coated walls. A square plastered installation with a small sump in its floor (L104; Fig. 3) was set into the eastern wall of Room A3. This room was abutted from the east by a rock-hewn stepped pool identified as a *miqweh* (ritual bath; L133; Fig. 3). The *miqweh* was entered via a set of five stairs descending to the north, the last of which was much shorter than the others and square in shape. A small circular sump was uncovered in the northwestern corner of the *miqweh*'s floor. The *miqweh* appeared to have been cut into the rock at a later construction phase than Room A3, as its quarrying left only a very thin and flimsy wall between them. A plaster-covered rectangular stone set in the northeastern corner of Room A3 may have been an attempt to buttress this thin wall segment. Part of the wall



Fig. 2. The *triclinium*, looking west.



Fig. 3. The *miqweh*, looking west.



Fig. 4. Rectangular stone in the corner of Room A3, looking northeast.

behind the stone was plastered (Fig. 4), reinforcing the assignment of the stone to a later phase of construction, when the *miqweh* was built.

A trapezoidal room in the southwestern wing of the villa (Room A4) was approached by two entrances, one from Corridor C1 and another from its southern wall, apparently from outside the building. Room A4 had a white colored mosaic floor (tesserae size  $1.5 \times 1.5$  cm). Three rectangular storage compartments of similar size were arranged in a row (L118, L134, L135; c.  $1.3\text{--}1.5 \times 1.0$ ) west of Room A4. All the compartments were paved with a white mosaic floor and their walls were covered with a thick coat of plaster.



A doorway installed in the eastern walls of Corridor C1, near its northern end, led to a courtyard (C2; L141), apparently of the peristyle type, consisting of an open space flanked by *stoas* on the southern and northern sides (L124/L122, L129, L142); only part of the northern *stoa* survived due to the ridge collapse. The roof of each *stoa* was supported by two square pilasters and two columns set between them. The bases of the pilasters and columns were hewn in bedrock, affording them greater stability than if they had been built. The eastern pilaster and column bases of the southern *stoa* were not found, and may have been removed by later quarrying activity on the eastern side of Courtyard C2 (L139). The passageway between the two columns of the northern *stoa* was blocked at some time by a wall of square building stones (W10). Another wall (W11) was built across the northern *stoa*, dividing it into two spaces (L129, L142).

The northwestern wing (Room A5; L130) was only partly preserved, and unlike the other rooms, its floor was level with that of Corridor C1. Several installations were found in this part of the building. A plastered vat with two shallow depressions in the bottom (L112; Fig. 5) was found near the doorway leading from the corridor. A built channel (L136) exited the vat heading westward. As this channel descended toward the west, it seems that it conveyed fluids away from the vat outside the building. Another installation in Room A5 was the one previously uncovered by Ayalon (L117; Fig. 6; Ayalon 1980; Gophna and Ayalon 1998:31–



Fig. 5. Installation 112, looking south.



Fig. 6. Installation 117, looking east.

32). This installation included two plastered vats, whose function is unclear. Ayalon (1980) suggested that it may have been connected to leather processing, or dyeing, although this suggestion now seems unlikely given its residential context; it may have been used for water collection or perhaps for cooking. South of Installation 117, a rectangular-shaped cavity was cut deep into the rock (L127), c. 1 m deeper than the level of adjacent hewn surfaces, and a badly preserved wall (W12) was built within it. This cavity may have been used for food storage. A round opening of a water cistern (L141; not excavated) whose shape and depth remain unknown, was revealed east of Installation 117. The cistern was fed through a rock-hewn channel (L137) that passed north of Installation 117 in an east–west direction, swerving to the south and making a nearly complete turnaround to connect to the cistern, passing beneath the built channel (L136) exiting Installation 112.

#### *The Mosaic Floor of the Triclinium*

The colorful mosaic floor in Room A1 (6.0 × 7.7 m; Fig. 7) was preserved in an excellent state of preservation, its small tesserae (1 × 1 cm) forming geometric designs executed in black, white, gray, red, brown, yellow and orange.<sup>3</sup> The floor was of high quality, comprising a high density of tesserae (c. 100 stones per sq dm) that did not decrease at the margins. It displays no figurative images, only a great diversity of geometric patterns in a wide variety of colors. An inscription written in ancient Greek was found in the center panel on the western edge of the mosaic (see Di Segni, this volume).

<sup>3</sup> The author thanks Rina Talgam for her important insights regarding the mosaic floor of the *triclinium*.



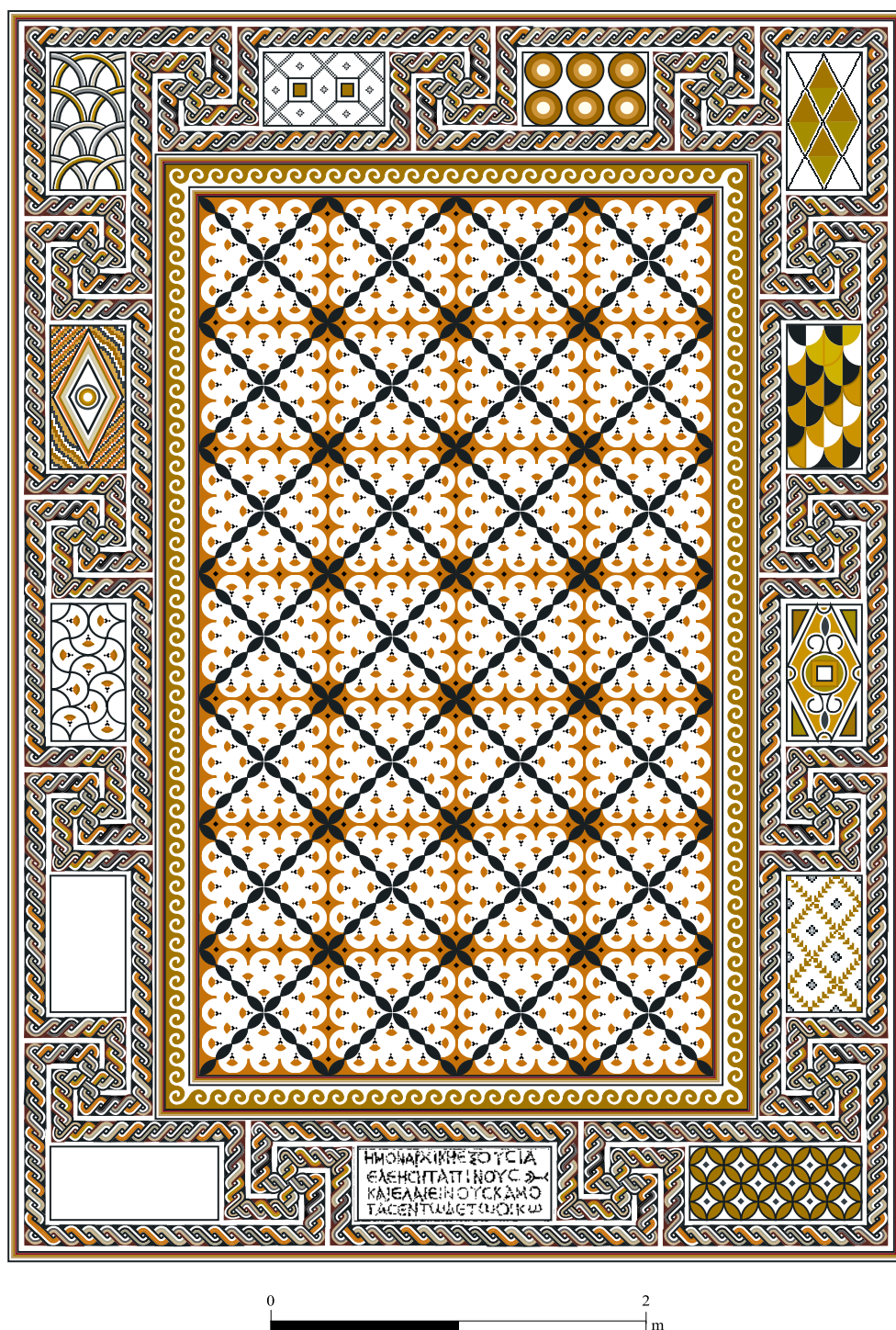


Fig. 7. Mosaic floor in Room A1, showing the frame and center carpet; empty rectangles represent mosaic panels that either did not survive or were damaged and could not be reconstructed.





Fig. 8. The margins of the mosaic floor in Room A1, looking west.

The mosaic could be generally divided into three main components: the margins, the frame and the center carpet. The margins, abutting the *triclinium* walls, are white with a center row of black- and red-colored lozenges, arranged in intervals of 0.3 m (Fig. 8). A rectangular panel that was part of the mosaic's western margins and situated in front of the step leading into the *triclinium* from the corridor did not survive. The frame of the mosaic displays a meander pattern of single-return swastikas filled with guilloche and forming staggered spaces, each occupied by a rectangular panel. Each of the panels, except for the one bearing the inscription, displays a unique geometric design (Fig. 9). The center carpet is bordered by a running-wave design and displays a polychrome pattern of two-poised superimposed grids of squares, one arranged orthogonally and composed of scales radiating from quadrilobed nodes, and the other arranged diagonally and composed of recumbent spindles.



Fig. 9. Panels in the southeastern corner of the mosaic floor in Room A1, looking west.

Judging by the tesserae size, their density and color range, it can be determined that the mosaic was of finest quality. This observation constitutes a key consideration in the identification of the building as a villa. The designs presented in the mosaic have many parallels in Byzantine-period domestic and public buildings; that of the center carpet was particularly common in public buildings. Examples can be found in the nave of the northern church at Herodium, dated between the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth centuries CE (Netzer, Birger-Calderon and Feller 1993:220–225), and in the church at ‘Agur, dated to the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century CE (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987:11, Pl. 1). Parallels for the designs in the frame panels can be found among the mosaics of the monastery of St. Martirius at Ma‘ale Adummim, dated to the mid-sixth century CE (Magen and Hizmi 1985:68–69, 79–82, see picture in Table b), including, for example, those of the entrance hall to the main church and the apsis of the chapel of the pilgrim’s hostel.

## THE FINDS

### Pottery (Figs. 10, 11)

The potsherds presented here, all originating from accumulations above floors or hewn surfaces, are representative of the variety of vessel types found in the excavation. The majority of the pottery retrieved from the villa can be dated to the Byzantine period, while only a few sherds date to the Late Roman period. The vessels are generally of domestic nature, comprising mainly cooking and serving vessels, and storage jars for foods and liquids. Apart from one sherd of an imported bowl, all vessels were of local production.

*Bowl* (Fig. 10:1).— An imported bowl of the CRS type is characterized by a wide flat base and a thickened rim that has a vertical interior and a concave exterior; there is a groove at its bottom, where the rim meets the vessel's wall. The ware is of high quality, covered with a thin slip with no decorations. This bowl belongs to Hayes' Type 9b, dated between the late sixth and the end of the seventh century CE (Hayes 1972:382). This is the most common type of CRS bowl found in the region, of which there are many parallels, among them examples from Caesarea Maritima (Johnson 2008:26–29, Nos. 107–120), Ramat Ha-Nadiv (Calderon 2000:152–154, Pl. XXVII:96, 97) and Jalame (Johnson 1988:160–163, Fig. 7-15:265–299).

*Cooking Pan* (Fig. 10:2).— This deep pan is characterized by a ribbed body and an incurved rim. It is a relatively rare vessel type, found only at a few sites in the northern coastal region of Israel. Such vessels typically have a spout for pouring liquids and a long handle positioned opposite it. Two examples of such pans were found at Ramat Ha-Nadiv, among them an intact vessel found in a refuse pit dated to the sixth–seventh centuries CE (Calderon 2000:110, Pls. VIII:49; 142–143, XXIII:59), and another was found at Caesarea Maritima (Johnson 2008:79–81, No. 950). Petrographic analysis of one of the cooking pans from Ramat Ha-Nadiv showed that it was of local production; the relatively limited distribution of this type of pan led to suggest that it was produced in a single workshop near Caesarea (Calderon 2000:143).

*Cooking Casseroles* (Fig. 10:3–5).— These deep cooking casseroles have a round body, a flat rim and two slightly raised horizontal handles. The exterior is combed. These casseroles belong to Magness' Type 1, dated between the end of the third/beginning of the fourth century and the eighth–ninth centuries CE (Magness 1993:211–213). This casserole type was found at many sites, including the nearby site of Apollonia-Arsuf (Tal 2009:336, Fig. 7:1, 2) and Caesarea Maritima (Johnson 2008:71–72, Nos. 820–825).

*Cooking Pots* (Fig. 10:6–9).— These cooking pots belong to the closed type. Figure 10:6 has an upright neck and a slightly thickened rim with a rill at its upper part. The handle is drawn from the shoulder to the rim and has a double-ridged section. This example is typical of the Late Roman period, a similar example of which was found at Tell Qasile, where it was dated to the second–third centuries CE (Ayalon 1984:177, Fig. 2:5). Figure 10:7, 8 belong to the same general type as Fig. 10:6, but display minor variations: No. 7 is characterized by a slightly concave neck and a thickened rim, while No. 8 has a straight neck with two thin ridges on its exterior and a round rim. Figure 10:9 has a round rim and a short neck with one ridge. A pot resembling Fig. 10:9 was found at Ḥorbat Gelilot (Calderon 2011:64, Fig. 1:8).

*Lids* (Fig. 10:10, 11).— Two types of lids were noted: a lid with a thick curved wall, a protruding rim with a square section and a combed exterior (Fig. 10:10); and another with a carinated body and a cut rim (Fig. 10:11).



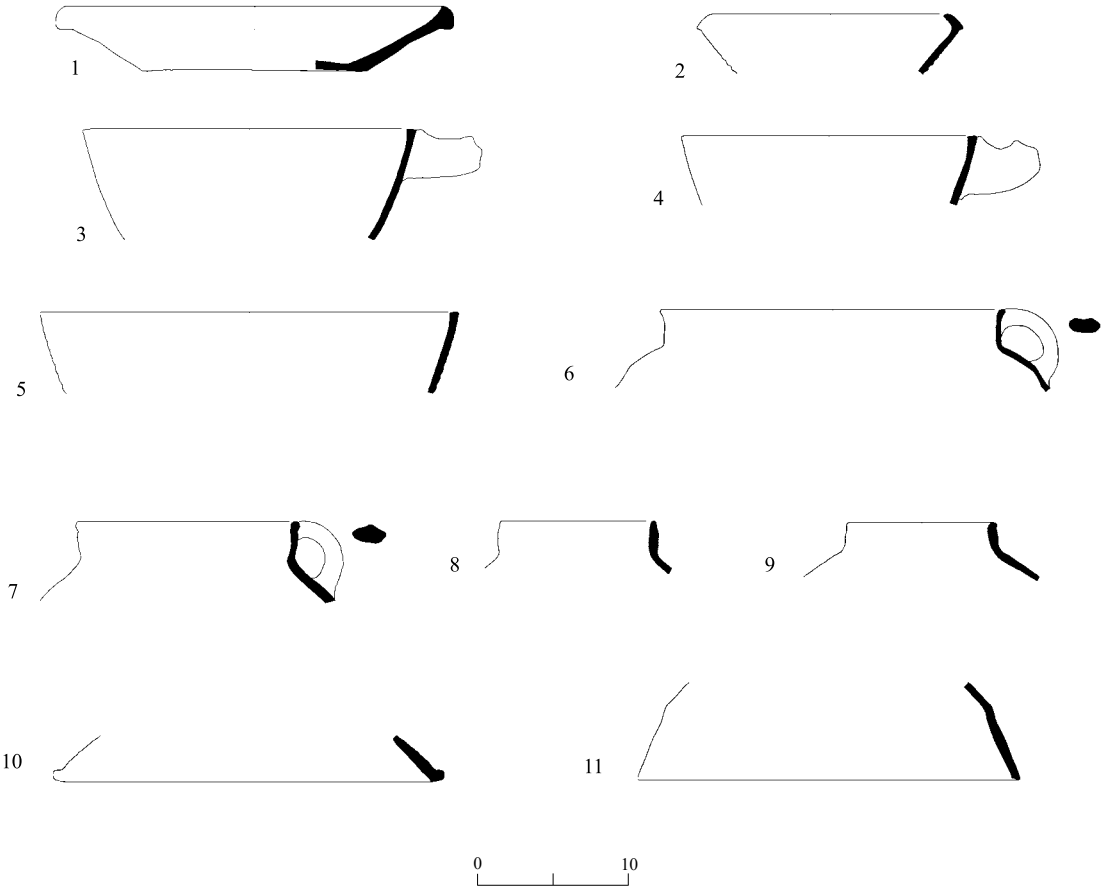


Fig. 10. Pottery: bowl, cooking vessels and lids.

No.	Vessel	Locus	Basket	Description
1	Bowl	106	1013/1	Pinkish-orange clay, thin orange slip, no grits
2	Cooking pan	106	1022/1	Bright reddish-brown clay, few small white grits
3	Casserole	131	1096/1	Reddish-brown clay, small white grits
4	Casserole	133	1109/2	Reddish-brown clay, small white grits
5	Casserole	137	1123/2	Reddish-brown clay, small white grits
6	Cooking pot	125	1075/2	Reddish-brown clay, small white grits
7	Cooking pot	133	1120/2	Bright red clay, many small white grits
8	Cooking pot	127	1114/1	Reddish-brown clay, many small white grits
9	Cooking pot	121	1062/3	Dark reddish-brown clay, many small white grits
10	Lid	127	1112/4	Dark brown clay, small white grits
11	Lid	133	1102/3	Reddish-brown clay, small and medium white grits

*Storage Jars* (Fig. 11:1–11).— The storage jars belong to two main groups commonly found at Roman- and Byzantine-period sites in Israel: bag-shaped jars, of which two types were found in the excavation, and Gaza-type jars. One type of bag-shaped jar (Fig. 11:1–4) has a round rim, sometimes thickened, a long neck and a rounded shoulder. The body is ribbed, often with denser ribbing on the shoulder. The examples from Herzliyya Bet correspond to Riley's Types 1b or 1c, dated to the fifth–seventh centuries CE (Riley 1975:26–27). Similar examples were found at Caesarea Maritima (Johnson 2008:87–88, Nos. 1024–1044) and

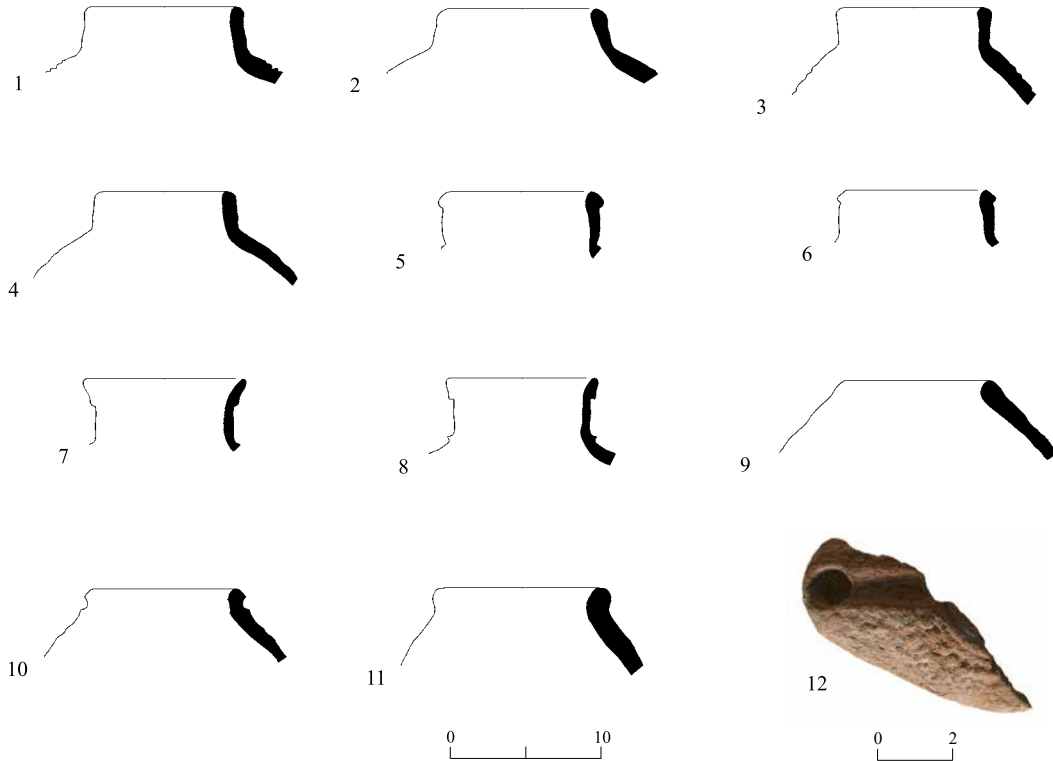


Fig. 11. Pottery: storage jars and lamp.

No.	Vessel	Locus	Basket	Description
1	Storage jar	131	1097/1	Bright brown clay, small white grits
2	Storage jar	113	1040/1	Orange clay, few small white grits
3	Storage jar	117	1115/1	Reddish-brown clay, very small white grits
4	Storage jar	127	1123/3	Orange clay, small and medium white and black grits
5	Storage jar	133	1102/2	Orange clay, small white and black grits
6	Storage jar	116	1050/1	Orange clay, small white grits
7	Storage jar	133	1102/1	Bright brown clay, small and medium white and black grits
8	Storage jar	125	1075/1	Bright brown clay, many small white grits
9	Storage jar	137	1119/1	Dark brown clay, small and medium white grits
10	Storage jar	137	1112/1	Reddish-brown clay, small and medium white grits
11	Storage jar	137	1108/1	Bright orange clay, few very small white grits
12	Lamp	139	1128/1	Pinkish-orange clay, few small white grits

Ramat Ha-Nadiv (Calderon 2000:104, Nos. 6–13). Another type of bag-shaped jar (Fig. 11:5–8) is characterized by an out-folded rim and a ridge at the base of the neck. The examples in Fig. 11:5, 6 have a rim with a triangular section and a slightly convex neck. Jars of this type, dated to the first–fourth centuries CE, have been found at many sites, e.g., Ḥorbat Gelilot (Calderon 2011:69, Fig. 6:1). The examples in Fig. 11:7, 8 have a straight high neck that is concave on the inside of Fig. 11:7. The Gaza-Type jars (Fig. 11:9–11) are characterized by a thick wall and a round rim that is everted in one example (Fig. 11:10). Jars of this type are most common at sites in northern Sinai, the western Negev and along the coastal plain. Their production began in the fifth century CE and they became widespread during the sixth–seventh centuries CE. Many examples were found at Caesarea Maritima (Johnson 2008:97–98, Nos. 1167–1178) and two can be mentioned from Ḥorbat Gelilot (Calderon 2011:75, Fig. 9:1, 2).

*Lamp* (Fig. 11:12).— This mold-made Samaritan-type lamp can be assigned to Sussman's Type S2, which was very common from the late third/early fourth century until the fifth century CE (Sussman 2002:342).

### **Glass** (Fig. 12)

The excavation yielded a small assemblage of glass shards, some of which were diagnostic.<sup>4</sup> The representative vessel types, comprising tableware, serving vessels and lamps, are presented here. These are typical everyday vessels that can be dated to the Byzantine period (late fourth–seventh centuries CE).

*Bowls* (Fig. 12:1–4).— Two types of glass bowls were identified. One type has an out-folded rim (Fig. 12:1, 2) and a hollow ring base (Fig. 12:3). Such bowls are a common component of Byzantine-period assemblages, such as at Shiqmona (Gorin-Rosen 2010:211, Fig. 2:4) and Khirbat el-Ni'ana (Gorin-Rosen and Katsnelson 2007:79, Fig. 2:1–3). The other type is characterized by a ring base made of glass strings wrapped around a thick flat bottom (Fig. 12:4). A similar bowl was found in a refuse accumulation of the glass workshop at Jalame, dated to the second half of the fourth century CE (Weinberg and Goldstein 1988:58–59, Fig. 4-21:152).

*Wineglass* (Fig 12:5).— This wineglass has an oval-shaped body, a hollow stem and a hollow ring base. This type of wineglass is dated to the sixth–seventh centuries CE. A similar vessel was found in a late Byzantine-period structure at Shiqmona (Barash 2012:131–133, Fig. 2:19).

<sup>4</sup> The author thanks Ruth E. Jackson-Tal for her help with the analysis of the glass assemblage.



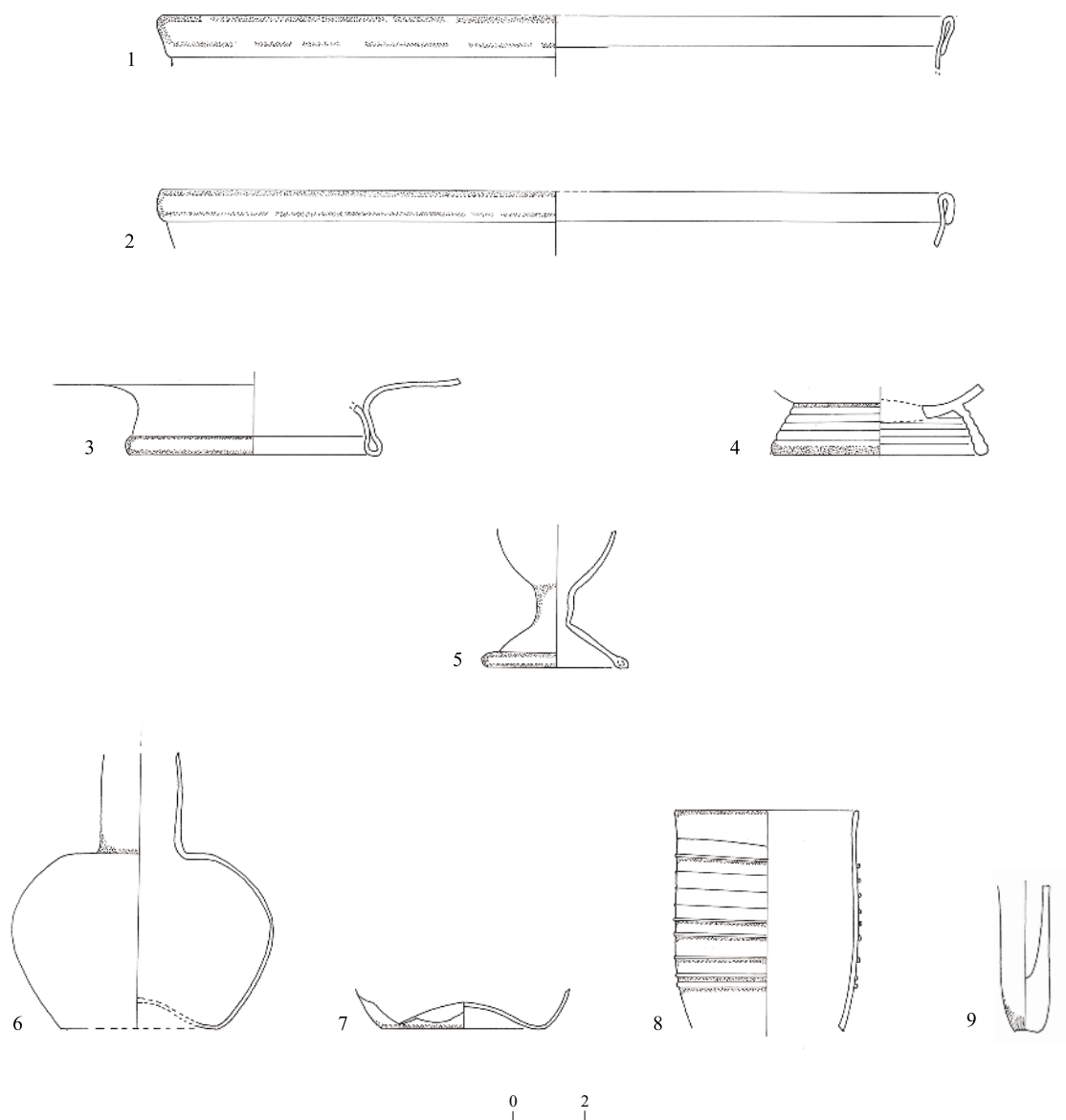


Fig. 12. Glass finds.

No.	Vessel	Locus	Basket	Color
1	Bowl	119	1059/1	Bluish green
2	Bowl	119	1059/2	Bluish green
3	Bowl	119	1059/3	Green
4	Bowl	119	1094/1	Greenish blue
5	Wineglass	120	1083/1	Green
6	Bottle	129	1129/1	Greenish blue
7	Bottle	119	1059/4	Blue
8	Bottle	131	1082/2	Green
9	Lamp	113	1036/1	Green

*Bottles* (Fig. 12:6–8).— These bottles are characterized by a spherical body and a long cylindrical neck. The example in Fig. 12:8 is decorated with thin glass strings wrapped around the neck. This common type of bottle can be dated to the late Byzantine period, and parallels can be mentioned from Bet She'an (Hadad 2006:627, Fig. 19.3:41) and Jalame (Weinberg and Goldstein 1988:70–71, Fig. 4-32:272).

*Lamp* (Fig 12:9).— A base fragment of a hollow-stemmed lamp was found. This lamp belongs to a very common type of the Byzantine period, of which parallels can be mentioned from Shiqmona (Barash 2012:131–132, Fig. 9:1) and Caesarea Maritima (Israeli 2008:384, Nos. 169–172).

## Coins

Six coins were found in the excavation, of which only two could be identified:<sup>5</sup> one from L102, an accumulation above Corridor C1, and the other from an accumulation inside an installation in Room A5 (L120). Both coins are dated to the fourth–fifth centuries CE.

1. L102, Basket N/A, IAA 48955.

Fourth–fifth centuries CE.

*Obv.*: [---] Bust r.

*Rev.*: Illegible.

Æ, 0.75 g, 9 mm.

2. L120, B1058, IAA 48956.

Fourth–fifth centuries CE.

*Obv.*: Illegible.

*Rev.*: Stg. figure.

Æ, 1.48 g, 12 mm.

## CONCLUSIONS

The villa unearthed at Herzliyya Bet represents an exceptional example of a luxurious residential complex located in the countryside. It is difficult to determine the construction date of this complex, as its foundations were hewn in bedrock. The earliest pottery sherds retrieved from the excavation were dated to the Late Roman period, generally indicating that the initial activity on the hill on which the villa was built took place at that time; however, this was not necessarily the time that the villa was constructed. The fifth-century CE date suggested for the inscription set in the mosaic floor of the *triclinium* (see Di Segni,

<sup>5</sup> The author thanks Donald T. Ariel for the identification of the coins.

this volume), together with the fact that the lion's share of the small finds is dated to the Byzantine period, is strong evidence that the villa should be dated to that period.

The Byzantine-period date of the villa is reinforced by the dating of ceramic assemblages found in two previous excavations: the excavation of Installation 117 (Gophna and Ayalon 1998: Site 48) and that of the quarry on the northern slope of the hill (Tal 1996). These assemblages, comprising cooking pots, casseroles, jars, jugs and lamps of local production, closely resemble the pottery from the 1993 excavation. The location of the quarry on the hillslope north of and below the villa raises the possibility that its pottery originated from the villa following the collapse of its northern part.

The villa is a unique feature of settlement in the southern Sharon plain. Its architecture and luxurious style indicate that it belonged to a wealthy owner, perhaps a former resident of the nearby city of Apollonia-Sozousa. The absence of agricultural or industrial installations indicates that it was not part of a productive estate but rather a sort of *villa suburbana*. Several similar complexes were previously documented near Caesarea Maritima (Porath, Gendelman and Gorin-Rosen 2006).

The construction of the villa in the southern Sharon plain is probably a reflection of the development of that region during the Byzantine period. At that time, the southern Sharon plain saw the establishment of an elaborate road system, which made travel more convenient, and the drainage of the swampy area east of the *kurkar* ridge that allowed settlement to expand into previously unoccupied areas (see Tsuk and Ayalon 1993).

A number of finds indicate the identity of the villa inhabitants. The presence of a *miqweh* and the absence of figurative images in the mosaic floor suggest that the inhabitants were either Jews or Samaritans. The latter possibility is more likely given considerable evidence for the existence of a Samaritan population in the southern Sharon plain during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods (e.g., Tal and Taxel 2015), while no indication of the existence of a Jewish population has been found so far in the written sources or the archaeological finds. If this is true, the villa may have been abandoned during the Samaritan rebellions of the fifth and sixth centuries CE.

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