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Hellenistic Ashdod-Yam in Light of Recent Archaeological Investigations

Alexander Fantalkin, Matasha Mazis, Yaniv Schauer, Donald T. Ariel, Shahar Krispin, Orit Tsuf, Tzilla Eshel and Eli Itkin*

Abstract

Ashdod-Yam is an important archaeological site with a history spanning the Late Bronze Age to the early Islamic period. The Hellenistic period marked an important phase for the site, when its acropolis served as a military base. This report presents the interim results of recent excavations that focused on the Hellenistic period at Ashdod-Yam. Based on the numismatic and ceramic evidence, the stronghold was established in the first half of the 2nd century BCE and should be considered within the framework of Seleucid military activity. Although it is difficult to determine under which Seleucid king this military stronghold was initially commissioned, it was most probably reinforced in the days of Antiochus VII Sidetes by his general Cendebaeus and then destroyed by John Hyrcanus I towards the end of his reign. The precision in dating the Hellenistic occupation at Ashdod-Yam offers a rare window into the life of a 2nd-century BCE coastal military settlement, enriching our knowledge of the site and contributing new insights into the region's historical and cultural developments.

Keywords

Ashdod-Yam; Hellenistic period; coastal military settlement

Introduction

Ashdod-Yam (Ashdod by the Sea) is a coastal archaeological site in the modern city of Ashdod, southern Israel. Ashdod-Yam boasts a rich tapestry of archaeological remains, marked by distinct occupations from the Late Bronze Age to the early Islamic period. During the Iron Age, a settlement enclosed by substantial fortifications—hereafter the acropolis—was constructed in the elevated southern part of the site, signifying its strategic and defensive importance. In the Hellenistic period, this strategic location became the base for a military settlement.

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Ashdod-Yam is located about 5 km northwest of the ancient Philistine capital at Tel Ashdod (Fig. 1), and its fate was always intertwined with that of the ancient capital. The latter has been extensively and systematically excavated over the years, revealing a wealth of important discoveries (for the latest final report, see Dothan and Ben-Shlomo 2005). Excavations of the massive Iron Age fortifications at the coastal site of Ashdod-Yam were initially conducted in intervals from November 1965 until March 1968 under the directorship of J. Kaplan (1969). Renewed excavations at Ashdod-Yam were initiated in 2013, under the directorship of A. Fantalkin, on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University.

Focusing on the acropolis and the fortification system, four excavation seasons to date (2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019) have uncovered significant Iron Age and Hellenistic remains. Iron IIB remains (Stratum IV) were uncovered in Areas B and D; Iron IIC remains (Stratum III) in Areas C and D; and Hellenistic-period remains (Stratum II) in Areas A, A1 and D (Figs. 2–3; see Fantalkin 2014; Fantalkin *et al.* 2024). In addition, a Byzantine church, located in the northern part of the ancient city (Area L), about 1 km

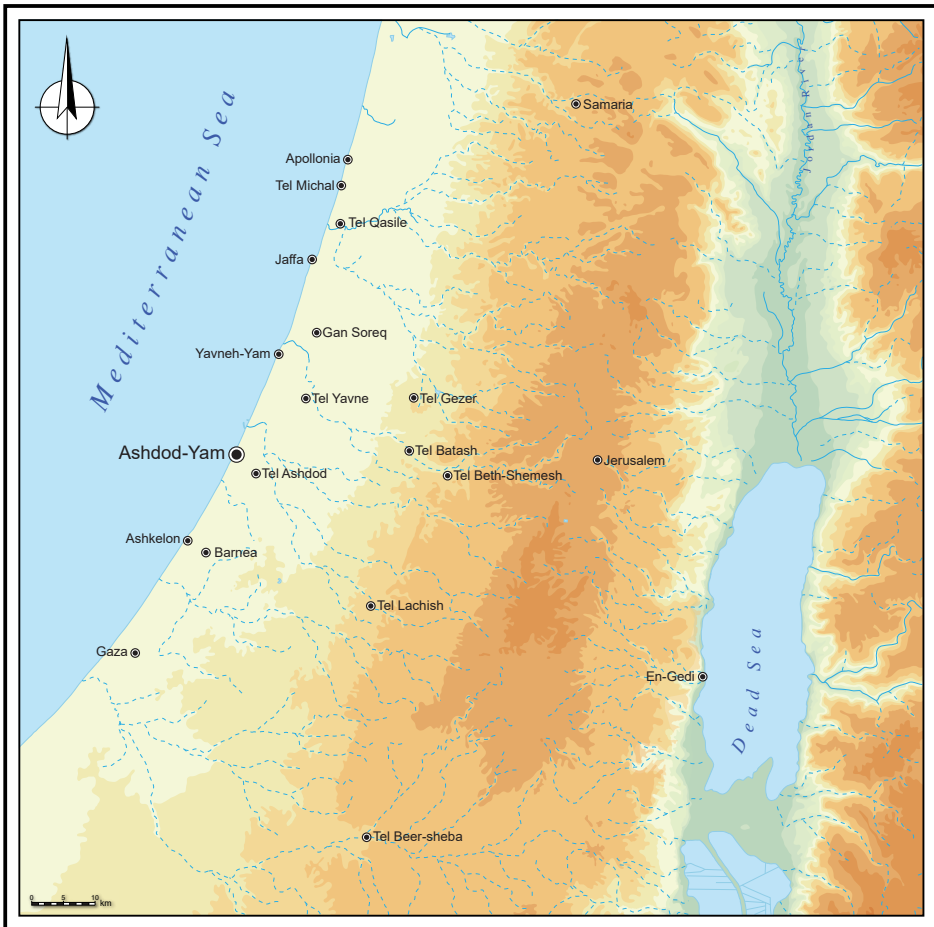


Fig. 1: Location map (drawing by I. Ben-Ezra)



Fig. 2: Aerial view of the acropolis (looking south) in 2013, showing the excavated areas (photo by P. Partouche, Skyview Photography; modified by S. Pirsky)

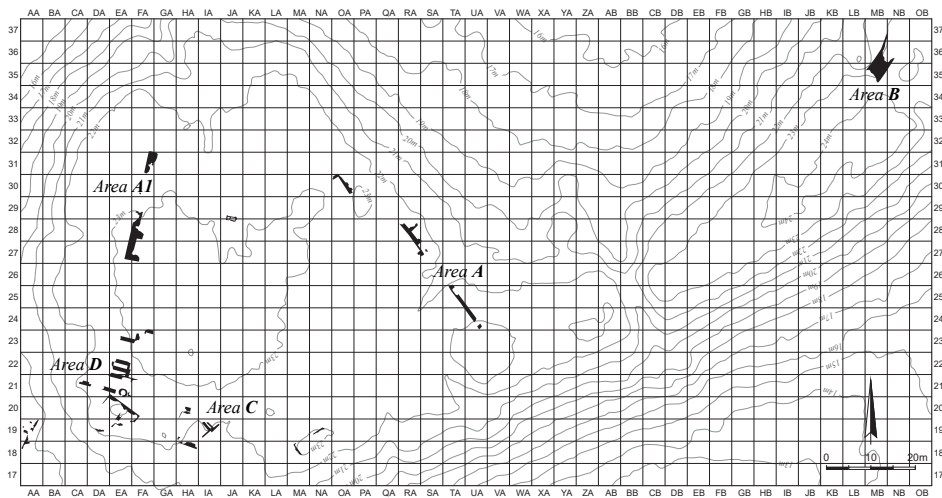


Fig. 3: Plan of excavation areas (drawing by S. Pirsky)

northeast of the acropolis, was investigated during the 2017, 2019 and 2021 excavation campaigns (Di Segni, Bouzaglou and Fantalkin 2023). During the Byzantine period (ca. 4th–early 7th centuries CE), Ashdod-Yam reached its zenith as a city extending across an area of at least 2×1.5 km. Known then as Azotos Paraliot, the city’s importance is evident from its prominence in the 6th-century CE Madaba mosaic map over the inland Azotos Mesogaios at Tel Ashdod. This shift in regional focus to Ashdod-Yam may have begun as early as the Iron Age and continued into later periods, with the coastal city eventually eclipsing the once dominant inland capital (see summary in Bähler and Fantalkin 2023). Excavations of the Hellenistic Stratum II of Ashdod-Yam shed new light on important

sequences of occupation and the evolution of the site over time. Before our excavations, the Hellenistic remains in this coastal region remained largely undocumented. Our work has unveiled new data, greatly enhancing our understanding of the role of Ashdod-Yam in the Hellenistic period.

Azotos (Ashdod): Historical sources and archaeological evidence

Ashdod is mentioned several times in Assyrian and biblical accounts of the 8th–5th centuries BCE (Dothan and Freedman 1967: 8–11). By the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods, references to Ashdod (Azotos in Greek; Azotus in Latin) are more prevalent, especially in the Books of the Maccabees and the works of Josephus (*ibid.*: 11–13). However, the shift in regional prominence from Ashdod to Ashdod-Yam casts ambiguity over whether contemporary mentions of ‘Ashdod/Azotos’ refer to the inland or coastal site.

Azotos appears in the historical records relating to the Battle of Gaza in 312 BCE as the place to where Demetrius I of Macedon retreated following his defeat (Diod. 19.85). Subsequent mentions relate to the Hasmonaean period. Thus, Judas Maccabaeus raided but did not capture Azotos (1 Macc 4:15), although in a later campaign, ‘Judas marched to Azotus, the land of the aliens, destroyed their altars, burnt the images of their gods, carried off the spoil from their towns and returned to Judaea’ (1 Macc 5:68). Judas’ successor, Jonathan, defeated Apollonius, the general of Demetrius I, in the plains of Azotos, where he ‘burned down the city and the villages in the vicinity and plundered them’, destroying in the process the famous Temple of Dagon (1 Macc 10:83–84; cf. 1 Macc 11:4; Josephus, *AJ* 13.99–100).¹ Later in the Hasmonaean period, Simon is reported to have settled Jews in Azotos (1 Macc 14:34) and John Hyrcanus I, following a successful battle against Cendebaeus (a general of Antiochus VII Sidetes in command of the coast of Palestine [1 Macc 15:38]), set fire to the towers in the fields of Azotos (1 Macc 16:10). Under Alexander Jannaeus, the city was under Jewish control (Josephus, *AJ* 13.395). It is listed as one of the cities Pompey detached from Jewish territory and restored to its original inhabitants (Josephus, *AJ* 14.75; *BJ* 1.156).

At Tel Ashdod (the inland city), substantial Hellenistic remains were discovered mainly in Area A, featuring buildings of a new city plan oriented along a north–south axis (identified as local Strata 4–3, with Stratum 3 further divided into Phases 3a and 3b). Several groups of buildings divided by streets were interpreted as remains of the city’s agora (Dothan and Freedman 1967: 17–21). The end of Phase 3b was dated to the late 2nd century BCE, linking it to the Hasmonaean conquests of Azotos. This conclusion is based on a destruction layer at the site, which produced the latest coin dated to Antiochus VIII (114 BCE), thus providing a *terminus post quem* for the conquest of the city by John Hyrcanus I. Phase 3a, therefore, relates to the Hasmonaean occupation (*ibid.*: 27; Dothan 1993: 102). The Hellenistic-period chronology for inland Azotos offers important contextual information, serving as a directly comparable benchmark for understanding the timeline of the coastal site at Ashdod-Yam.

¹ For reconstruction of this battle, see, most recently, Safrai 2022.

Ashdod-Yam Stratum II: Stratigraphy and architecture

Area A

Area A is at the northern edge of the Ashdod-Yam acropolis. It features major architectural remains dating to the Hellenistic period, comprising three separate structural units with a northwest to southeast orientation (Fig. 4). Based on the relatively modest amounts of pottery and coins found among these structures, it seems that the buildings were abandoned sometime in the late 2nd century BCE before their subsequent collapse—possibly (as detailed in the discussion) from a major earthquake. The three units are described below:

Unit 1: The remains of a mudbrick wall were exposed along with the adjoining remains of an impressive collapse (Fig. 5). The wall was established directly on sand with no foundation (Fig. 6) and was preserved to a height of five courses with the sun-dried mudbricks laid in a running bond technique. No adjoining floors were detected in this unit, except for a patchy clay surface abutting the southern part of the wall from the west. The bricks measured approximately 39×39×10 cm. In general, the matrix of the Hellenistic mudbricks presents a similar geochemical pattern to earlier Iron Age mudbricks used at the site; however, an additional stage was detected in the Hellenistic production—the inclusion of crushed seashells and crushed pottery (Lorenzon *et al.* 2023). Finds recovered among the eroded bricks included three coins of Antiochus IV, all from a mint of Ptolemais (‘Akko), ca. 173/2–168 BCE, and a single coin from the reign of Antiochus III (see below, Coins).

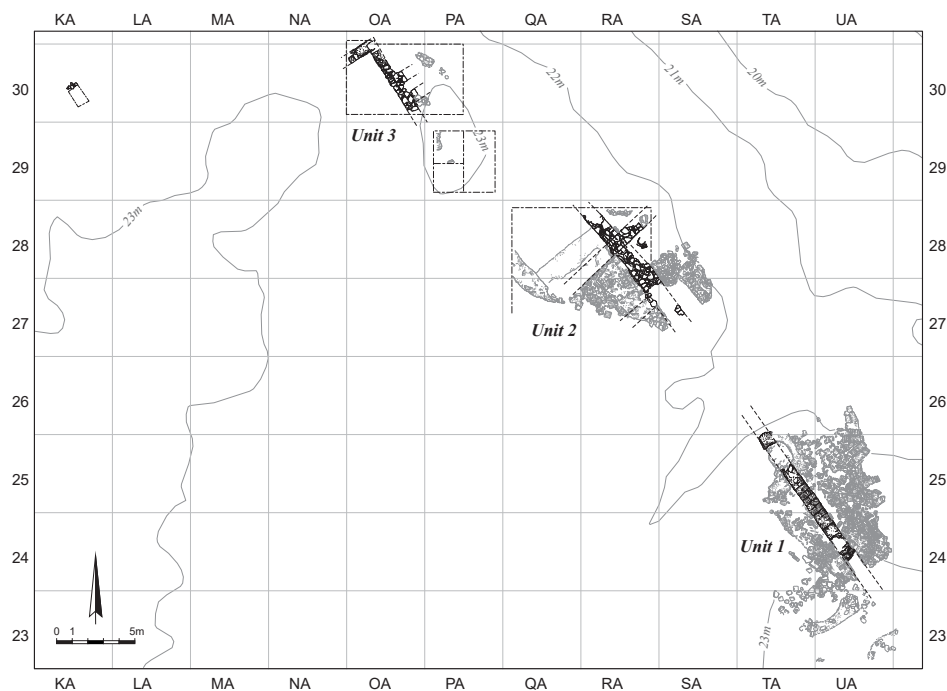


Fig. 4: Plan of Area A (drawing by S. Pirsky)

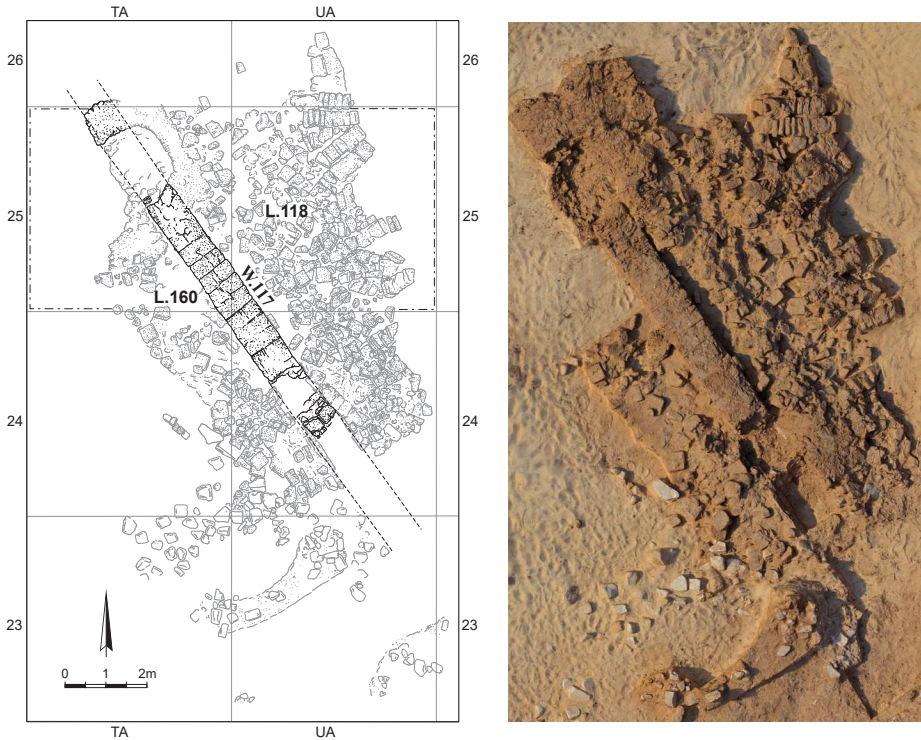


Fig. 5: Unit 1 in Area A, featuring evidence of the mudbrick wall collapse (drawing by S. Pirsky; photo by P. Partouche, Skyview Photography)



Fig. 6: Unit 1 in Area A: W.117, built of mudbricks directly on sand, looking northeast (photo by P. Shrago)

Unit 2: The partially preserved remains of a building were discovered here (Fig. 7). Two major intersecting walls divided the area into four rooms. The collapsed walls were of sun-dried mudbricks, similar in dimensions to those uncovered in Unit 1, but laid on foundations of local beachrock (1 m wide; 0.5 m high), the trenches for which had been dug in the sand. Some of the foundation stones had been robbed, accessed by a robber's trench. The collapsed mudbricks from the upper parts of the walls covered traces of poorly preserved occupation surfaces made of beaten earth. In Room A, mudbrick detritus covered such a deteriorated surface (L.141). In Room B, the poorly preserved surface (L.168) was covered by collapsed mudbrick debris, related to the collapse of the upper mudbrick courses

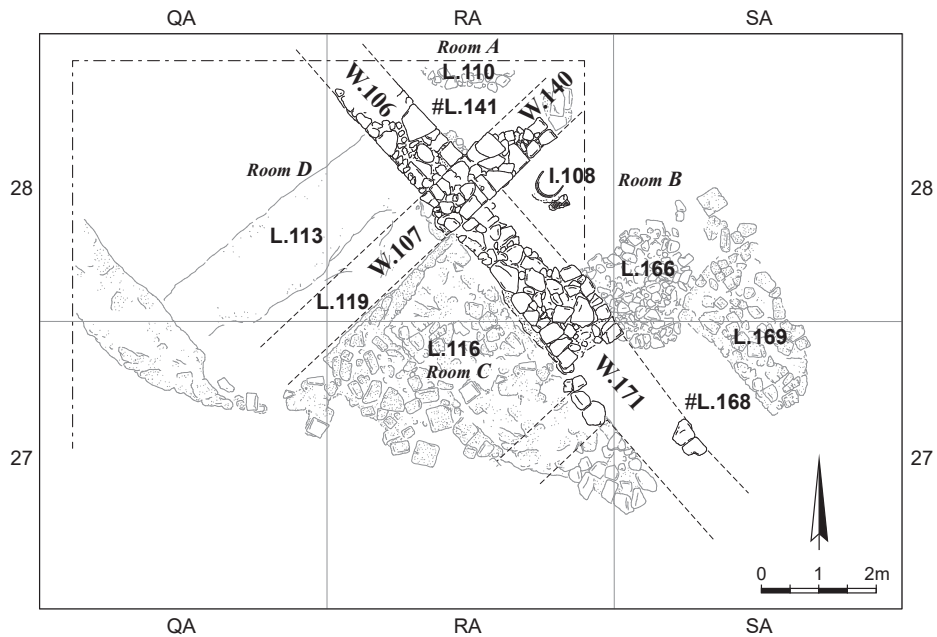


Fig. 7: Unit 2 in Area A: remains of a structure with intersecting beachrock foundations for mudbrick upper courses (since collapsed) (drawing by S. Pirsky; photo by P. Partouche, Skyview Photography)

of W.171. A coin of Ptolemy II, from Alexandria, ca. 266–261 BCE, was recovered from the eroded bricks. To the west of the collapse was a horseshoe-shaped clay *tabun* (I.108). The surviving part of Room C was covered by a mudbrick collapse (L.116) related to the robbed foundation of W.107 to its northwest. This collapse was partially excavated, revealing a poorly preserved occupation surface without finds.

Unit 3: The remains of a poorly preserved structure with lower foundations of beachrock were discovered here (Fig. 8). Two coins of Antiochus IV, both from a mint of Ptolemais (‘Akko), ca. 173/2–168 BCE, were found in the eroded brick of this structure. A deep probe undertaken in the southeastern corner (Square PA29) revealed that beneath the Hellenistic structure, there was a very thick layer of sterile sand (L.120; Fig. 9). This suggests that the Hellenistic occupation was established long after the destruction and abandonment of the Iron Age settlement. About 15 m west of Unit 3 (Square KA30), a refuse pit filled with stones, Hellenistic pottery sherds and four phallic-shaped lead weights was uncovered (see below, Metals and Fig. 25:9).

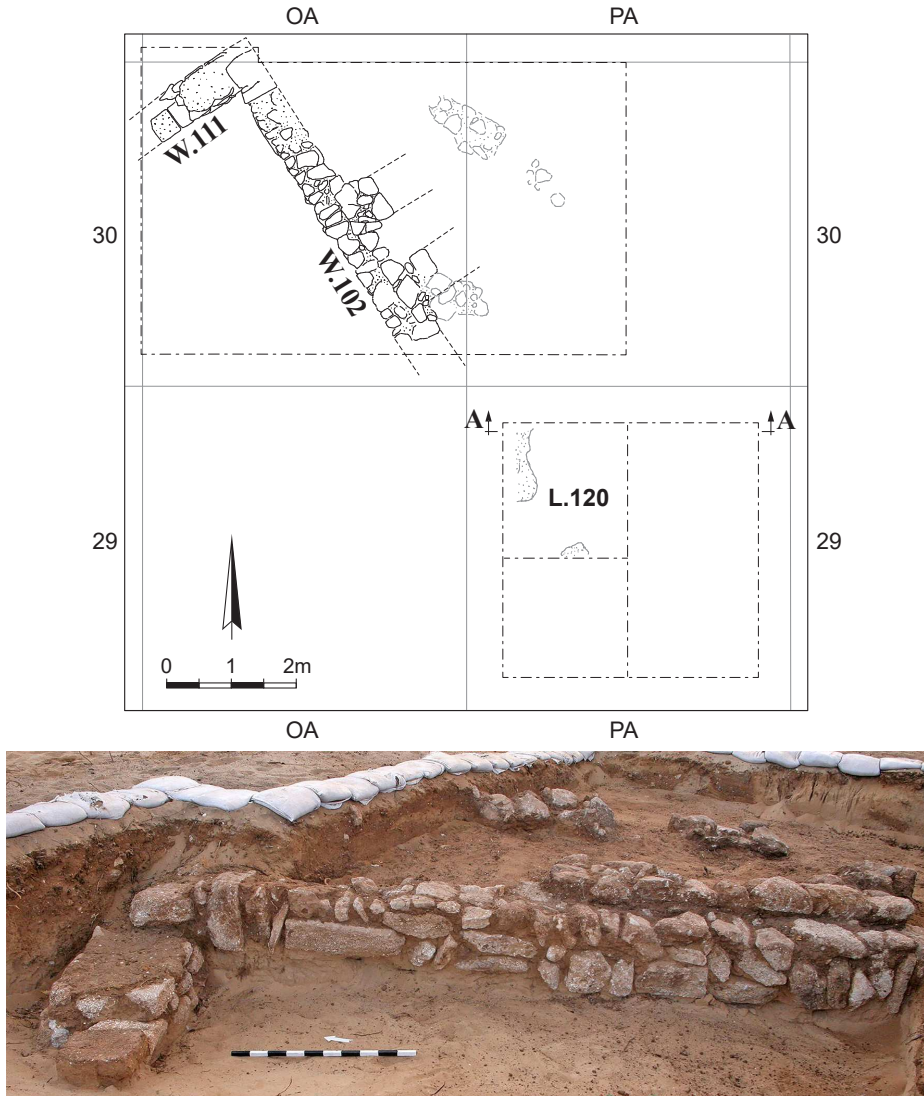


Fig. 8: Unit 3 in Area A: remains of a structure consisting of eroded mudbrick and lower foundations of beachrock, looking northeast (drawing by S. Pirsky; photo by P. Shrago)

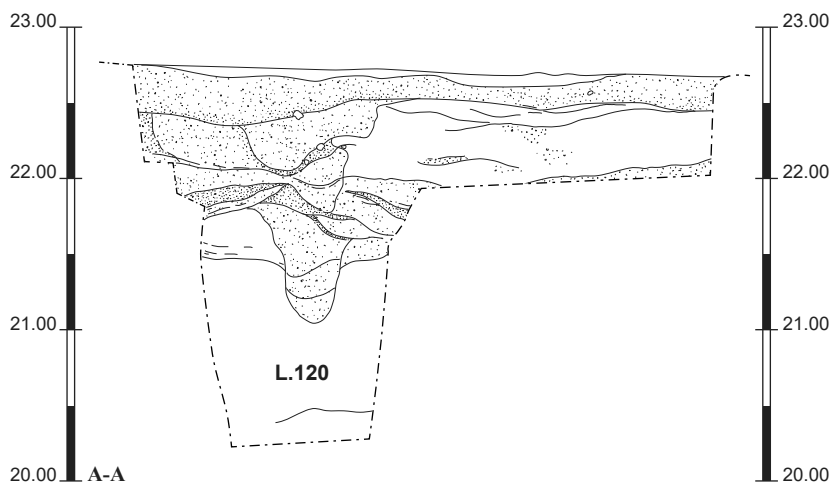


Fig. 9: Unit 3 in Area 3: Section A-A showing thick deposit (L.120) of sterile sand (drawing by S. Pirsky)

Area A1

Area A1, near the northwestern edge of the acropolis, features the foundations of a wall (W.248) of a substantial building oriented north–south (ca. 26×1.6 m) (Fig. 10). It appears to be the outer western wall of a monumental structure, almost certainly a fortress, that would have dominated the highest spot on the acropolis. The upper courses of the exposed wall had been robbed in antiquity; however, the lower courses of large ashlar stones were partially preserved in several places. The remains included three monumental pillars made of colossal ashlar blocks, incorporated into the wall.

The northern pillar (I.207) was located at the northern end of Wall 248 (Fig. 11). It had several surviving courses, comprising semi-dressed beach-rock followed by large, dressed *kurkar* (a calcareous sandstone) and, topping these lower courses, a finely dressed limestone monolith measuring 1.5×1.2×1.4 m—i.e., 2.52 m³. On the assumption that the density of limestone is 2,711 kg/m³ at standard atmospheric pressure, the estimated weight of the monolith would be around 6,832 kg. Traces of plaster found on the northern pillar suggest that it had originally been plastered. A plaster floor with embedded crushed shells (L.246), found abutting the northern pillar, is probably an occupation surface connected to the main building from the outside (Fig. 12). An ashy destruction layer mixed with mudbrick debris was exposed on top of this surface. An additional plaster floor with embedded crushed shells and *kurkar* (F.247) was detected northwest of the northern pillar, abutting the foundations of a small partition wall (W.261). Two courses of Wall 261 were preserved, abutting the northern pillar from the west (Fig. 13).

The remains of a middle pillar (I.257) were found about 14.4 m south of the northern pillar along the line of Wall 248 (Fig. 14). The middle pillar comprised a monolith of dressed limestone, measuring 1×1.2×1 m—i.e., 1.2 m³, with an estimated weight of around 3,253 kg. Traces of plaster were also observed on this pillar. The preserved height of its monolith top is considerably lower than that of the northern and southern pillars



Fig. 10: Area A1 (drawing by S. Pirsky)

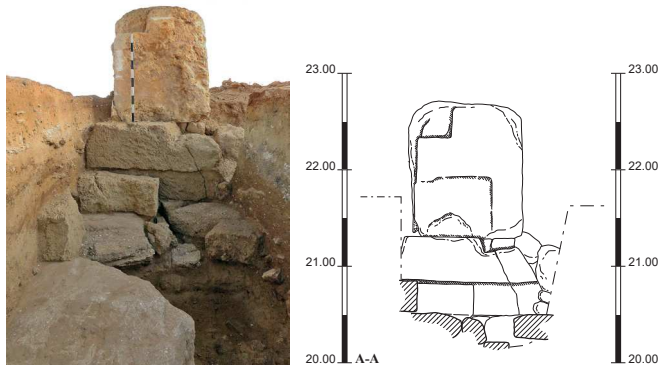


Fig. 11: Section A-A: northern pillar (I.207) in Area A1, looking north (drawing by S. Pirsky; photo by S. Krispin)



Fig. 12: Floor 246 in Area A1, made of plaster embedded with crushed shells visible in section; the northern pillar is right of frame; looking west (photo by S. Krispin)



Fig. 13: Floor 247 in Area A1, looking north; the floor was located northwest of the northern pillar and abutted the foundations of a small partition wall, W.261, visible on the left (photo by S. Krispin)

(see below); this means that an additional monolith would have been required to bring the middle pillar up to the same level. Abutting the base of the middle pillar from the north were two remaining foundation courses of W.248, comprising a row of well-dressed *kurkar* stones, arranged as headers. From the south side of the middle pillar, the dismantled debris of W.248 could also be observed, providing a physical connection between this pillar and the next.

The southern pillar (I.258), 6.7 m south of the middle pillar along the line of W.248, comprised three lower courses of dressed *kurkar* and an upper course of a large limestone monolith, $1.2 \times 1.8 \times 1.3$ (Fig. 14)—i.e., 2.808 m^3 , with an estimated weight of around 7,612 kg. An upper part of what appears to be an additional monolith was discovered east of and adjacent to the southern pillar's monolith. This structure may have been part of a wall approaching the southern pillar from the east. North of the southern pillar, the two remaining courses of the foundations of W.248 were of well-dressed *kurkar* stones, partially arranged as headers and stretchers. Some featured marginal signs of dressing (Fig. 15) and clearly belonged to *spolia* from an earlier Hellenistic building, located elsewhere. Considering the distance and physical connection between the surviving middle pillar and the northern pillar, one may assume that an additional pillar would have been required between them. The missing pillar (estimated to have been near Square FA30; see Fig. 10) was likely robbed in antiquity.



Fig. 14: View of Wall 248 from above, showing the positions of the middle pillar (I.257) and the southern pillar (I.258) (photogrammetry by P. Sapirstein and V. Workman)



Fig. 15: Foundations of Wall 248 abutting the southern pillar (I.258); note the marginal dressing on one of the ashlars, belonging to *spolia* from an earlier building, looking southwest (photo by V. Workman)

As a result of stone robbery, as well as seasonal rainfalls and landslides, earlier Hellenistic surfaces that originally abutted Wall 248 of the monumental building eroded and collapsed into the stone-robbers' trench, where they were ultimately buried by sand (Fig. 16). Accumulations of eroded material from the floors were visible at the bottom of the trench and along its section. One of these, from a floor of the monumental building, yielded an especially rich assemblage in terms of restorable Hellenistic pottery and accompanying metal finds (L.252). Judging from the thick ash deposits on the floors, the charred organic materials and the variety of small finds and restorable vessels, the entire structure was destroyed by fire in the late 2nd century BCE.

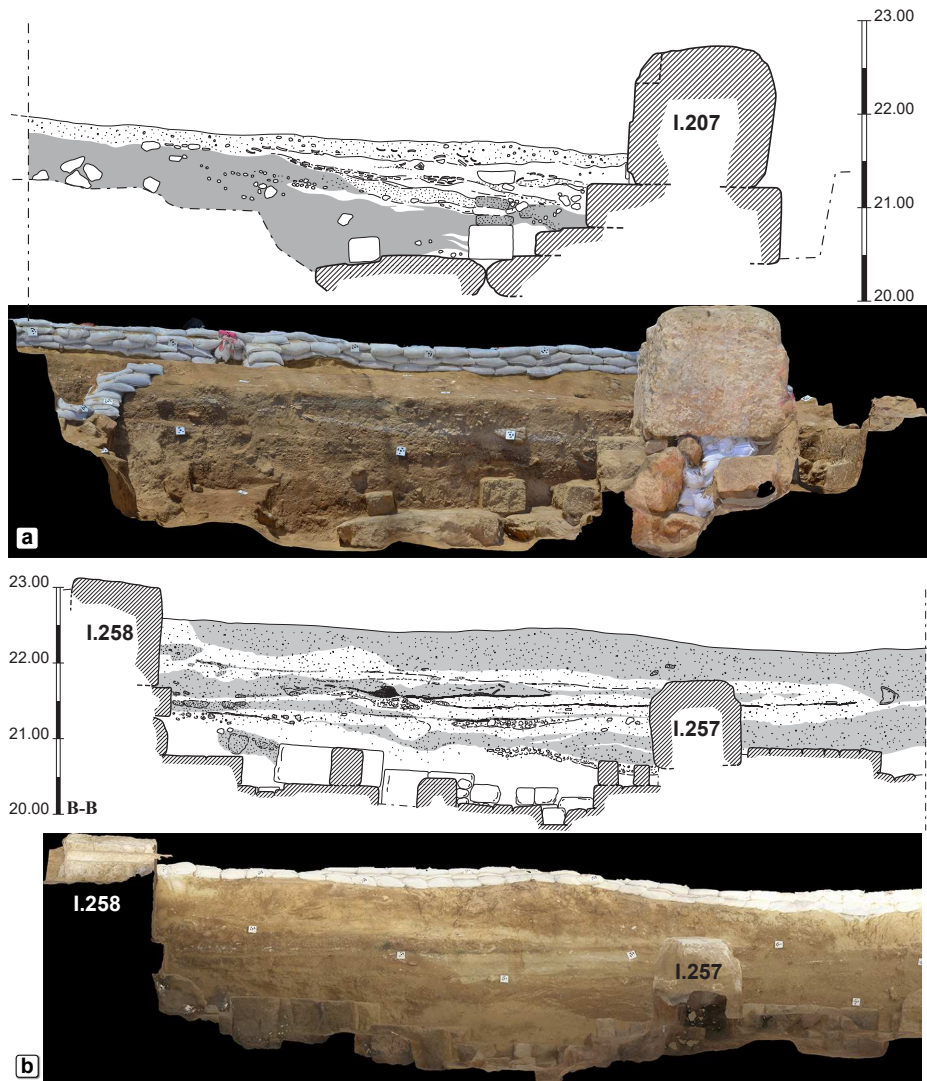


Fig. 16: Area A1, Section B-B, showing the stone-robbers' trench; a) the northern part of the section; b) the southern part of the section (drawing by S. Pirsky; photogrammetry by P. Sapirstein and V. Workman)

Area D East

Area D East features a single architectural unit—Building 5174—and a round installation (L.5066) (Fig. 17). Building 5174 is a rectangular structure (8×8.5 m), divided into three spaces, with mudbrick walls built on partially hewn beachrock stones. The northern wall consisted of five courses (ca. 7.7×0.9 m), which were cut into the Stratum III (Iron IIC) remains. The eastern and southern parts of the structure were poorly preserved and lacked evidence of a floor. Better preservation was attested in the southwestern corner (Square EA20), where a compacted, crushed, *kurkar* floor was uncovered. The accumulation above this floor contained Hellenistic pottery and several pieces of plaster. Below it, an additional patch of collapsed wall plaster appears to have sealed the occupational accumulation above an earlier floor containing several restorable vessels.

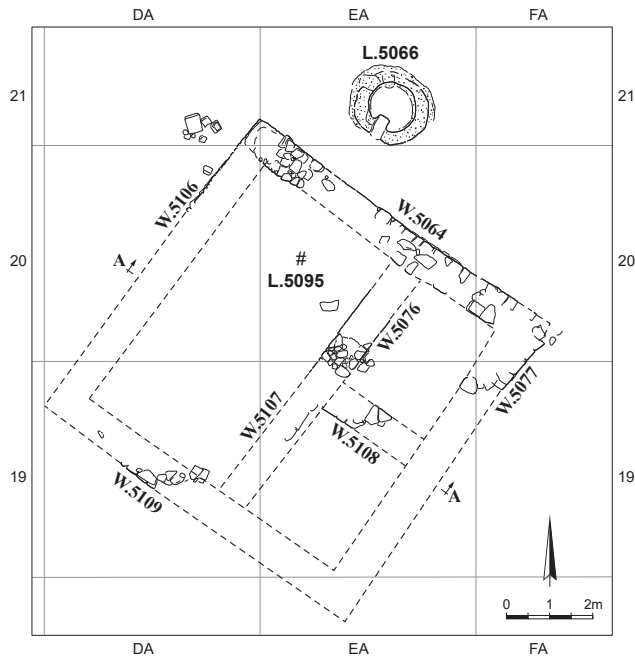


Fig. 17: Area D East showing Building 5174 and installation L.5066 (drawing by S. Pirsky; photo by E. Aladjem)

No evidence of a conflagration or deliberate destruction was found in Building 5174. This, combined with the limited ceramic assemblage, suggests that the building was probably deserted. However, the northern bounding wall of the structure is noticeably tilted southward and the entire building is tilted westward (Fig. 18). Coupled with the bad state of preservation, this phenomenon may be the result of a natural event—perhaps the earthquake postulated from the remains in Area A. The location and plan of the structure suggest that it served as a watchtower. Such an identification is supported by the impressive width and depth of its foundations, which must have supported a large superstructure (Fig. 19).

The circular, mudbrick-lined installation L.5066 is 37 cm deep and ca. 2 m in diameter, with a channel cut in its southern half. Like Building 5174, the installation penetrated earlier, Stratum III, remains. Although its function is unclear, it resembles a small silo or possibly a platform/foundation for a bread oven. Similar bread ovens, dating to the Hellenistic period, have been uncovered at Heliopolis and Tell Timai in Egypt (Hudson 2016: 210, Fig. 10). If this was indeed its intended function, the construction of this installation must have been left unfinished in antiquity, as there is no evidence of fire (e.g., ash or charcoal) in or around it.

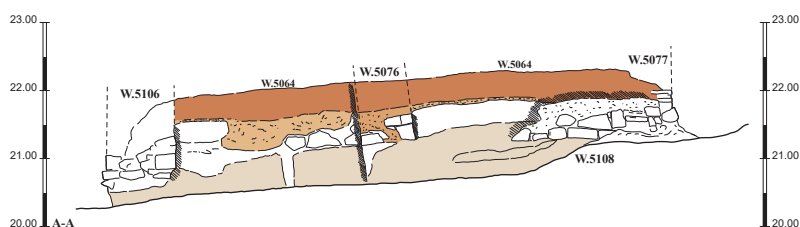


Fig. 18: Section in Building 5174 (Area D East), showing that the entire building tilts westward (drawing by S. Pirsky)



Fig. 19: Foundations of the northern wall (W.5064) of Building 5174, looking south-east (photo by S. Flit)

Pottery

The Stratum II pottery of Ashdod-Yam consists of local, common semi-fine and fine wares and imported fine wares and amphorae. This collection represents a typical Eastern Mediterranean assemblage of the 2nd century BCE. Here we present a selection of the pottery finds.

The common table, cooking and storage wares are represented by plain bowls, cooking pots with a straight and relatively long neck, casseroles and storage jars of local and Phoenician origin.

In the fine tableware category, Red-Slip Wares represented by bowls, cups and plates are especially prominent. During the late 3rd–late 2nd centuries BCE, these wares were particularly widespread throughout the Levant, having been produced in numerous locations across the Mediterranean (Tsuf 2018: 103, with further references).² The widespread distribution of these wares in Levantine coastal sites suggests they were often produced locally (Berlin and Stone 2016: 140), and this is probably the case for many of them at Ashdod-Yam. Many examples were found beneath the collapsed mudbrick walls of Unit 2 in Area A (e.g., Fig. 20:16–27). A small table amphora comes from this unit as well (Fig. 20:6).

The imported fine wares include numerous mould-made relief bowls characterised by their plain and pointed rims, hemispherical bodies and extensive relief designs on the exterior (e.g., Fig. 20:1–4). Many of Ashdod-Yam's bowls of this type seem to have been produced in the Ionian workshops located around Ephesos, which operated during the second half of the 2nd to the early 1st century BCE (Laumonier 1977: 7), although some may have originated from production centres in Antioch, Tarsus and Pergamon.

In Area A1, one of the floors of the monumental building marked by signs of destruction (L.252) yielded an especially large quantity of restorable pottery. The assemblage includes a significant number of late 2nd-century BCE imports, including an exceptional, large mould-made bowl (Fig. 21). Decorated with scenes arranged in registers, separated by horizontal ridges, the bowl depicts a vivid hunting scene featuring mounted spearmen chasing stags, fighting wild boars and confronting a bear. Similar bowls with floral designs and hunting scenes are well known in the assemblages of the Athenian Agora (Rotroff 1982: 74–76, Nos. 243, 247–248, 252; Pl. 48–50, 85, 98). They are typically attributed to the contemporaneous Workshop A and the Workshop of Bion, active in the late 3rd century and the first quarter of the 2nd century BCE (*ibid.*: 28). The Ashdod-Yam specimen, however, is unique among bowls of this type in featuring a bear among the hunted animals. Its origin is likely one of the workshops of Asia Minor, although the Neutron Activation Analysis of this piece has produced a chemically unique signature.

In the same location of the Area A1 monumental building, a complete amphora, likely of southwestern Anatolian origin (possibly Lycian), was uncovered (Fig. 22:1). Amphorae of similar design have been found at numerous Anatolian sites, with examples spanning the entire Hellenistic period (Dündar 2012: 47–50, Figs. 6–10). In addition, the complete upper

² The ware is pink (7.5YR8/4) and reddish-yellow (7.5YR8/6), and the slip is bright red (2.5YR5/6), frequently fired blackish.

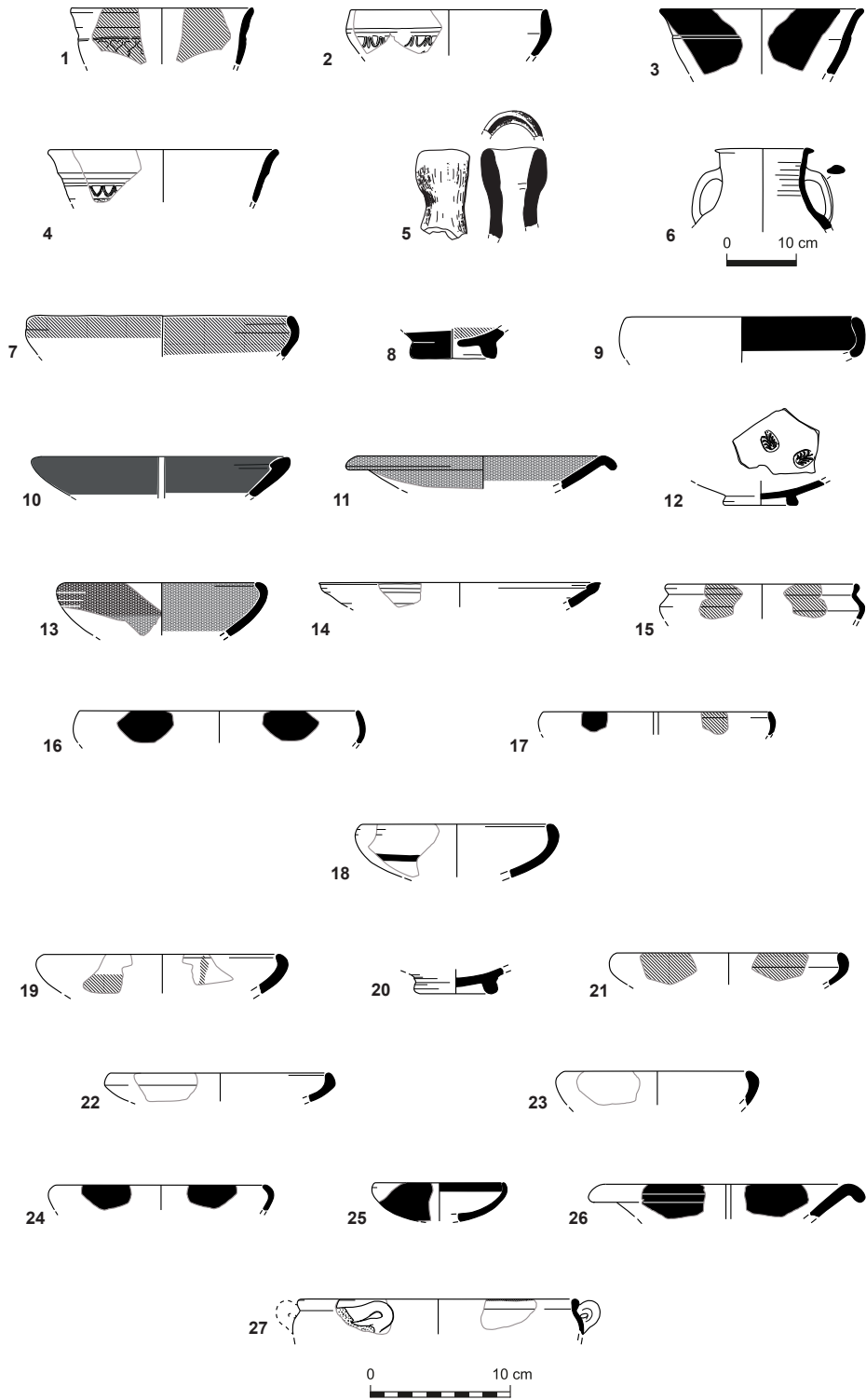


Fig. 20: Select pottery from Stratum II (drawings by A. Perry and N. Earon)

Fig. 20: Select pottery from Stratum II

No.	Type	Area	Locus	Reg. No.
1	Mould-made bowl	A1	242	1260/1
2	Mould-made bowl	A	148	10215/1
3	Mould-made bowl	A	133/101	10001/1
4	Mould-made bowl	A	133/101	10001/2
5	Baking-pan handle	A1	236	1224/1
6	Table amphora	A	119	10130/1
7	Bowl	A1	252	1406/1
8	Bowl	A1	252	1406/3
9	Bowl	A1	252	1406/2
10	Plate	A1	252	1406/4
11	Plate	A1	226	1261/1
12	Plate	A1	226	1261/2
13	Bowl	A1	226	1261/3
14	Plate	A1	240	1235/1
15	Bowl	A1	240	1235/2
16	Bowl	A	141	10206/1
17	Bowl	A	155	10269/1
18	Bowl	A	155	10269/2
19	Bowl	A	155	10243/19
20	Bowl	A	155	10261/1
21	Bowl	A	155	10243/8
22	Bowl	A	155	10243/7
23	Bowl	A	155	10243/13
24	Bowl	A	155	10243/12
25	Bowl	A	155	10243/9
26	Plate	A	155	10261/2
27	Bowl	A	155	10243/4

part of another amphora (Fig. 22:4), corresponding to the general Western Mediterranean Dressel 1a–b type (cf. Sciallano and Sibella 1991), was found in the vicinity of the Area A1 monumental building. This type of amphora has close parallels in several locations, such as Adria, Canal Bianco (dated to the mid-2nd century BCE) (Toniolo 2000: 184–185), and the late 2nd-century BCE Apani IIA type workshop (Bezeczky 2004: 86; Fig. 1:8). Several 2nd-century BCE Rhodian amphorae were recovered both from stratified levels and as surface finds (Fig. 23; and see Stamped amphora handles, below). A number of Hellenistic amphorae from Knidos were detected as well.

Another important deposit of pottery was recovered on the surfaces around Pillar I.207 of the monumental wall in Area A1: Red-Slip Ware (Fig. 20:7–15), an Aegean amphora (Fig. 22:2), a Koan amphora (Fig. 22:3) and a baking-pan handle (Fig. 20:5).

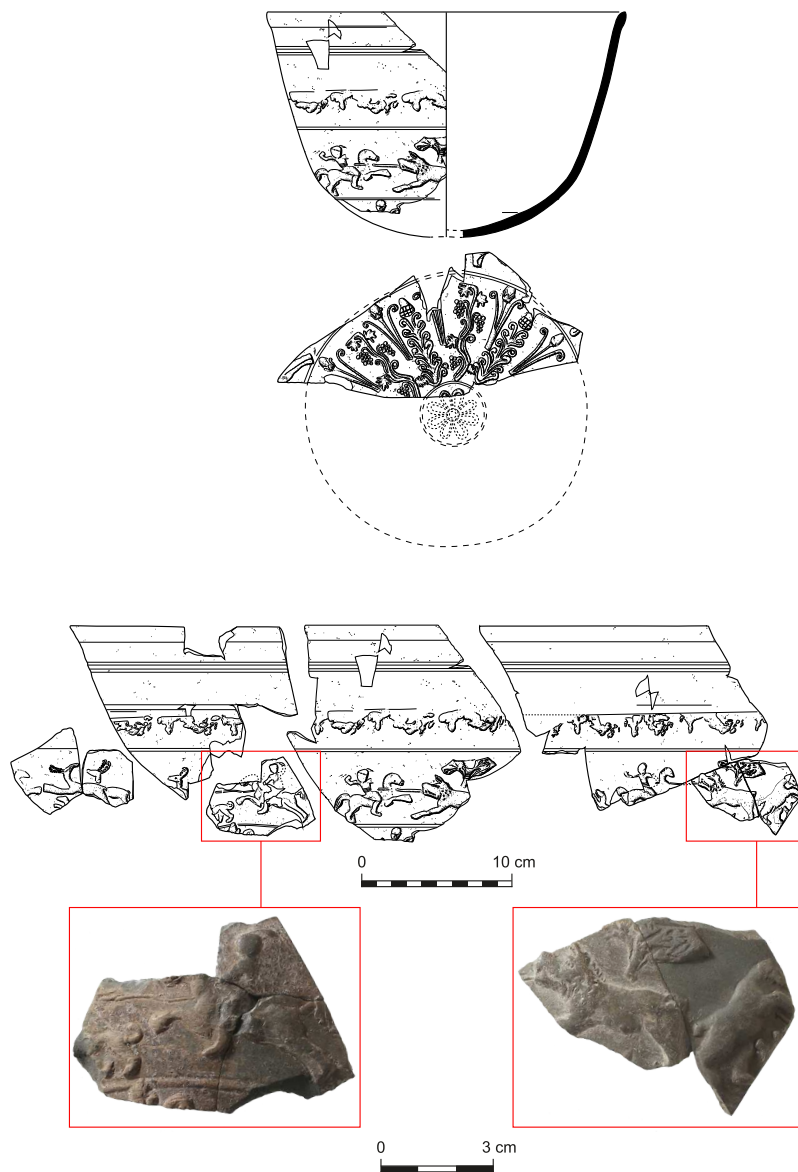


Fig. 21: Mould-made bowl (Reg. No. 1382/1) from Floor 252 (drawings by I. Ben-Ezra; photos by P. Shrago; montage by N. Earon)

The diverse range of imported and local ceramics found in Stratum II encompasses the entire 2nd century BCE and firmly places the site within the interconnected network of the Eastern Mediterranean, mirroring comparable Hellenistic assemblages from Ashkelon, Yavneh-Yam and Tel Dor (see below). The end of the Hellenistic occupation in the late 2nd century BCE, as it emerges from the ceramic finds, is consistent with dates derived from both coins and stamped amphora handles, discussed below.

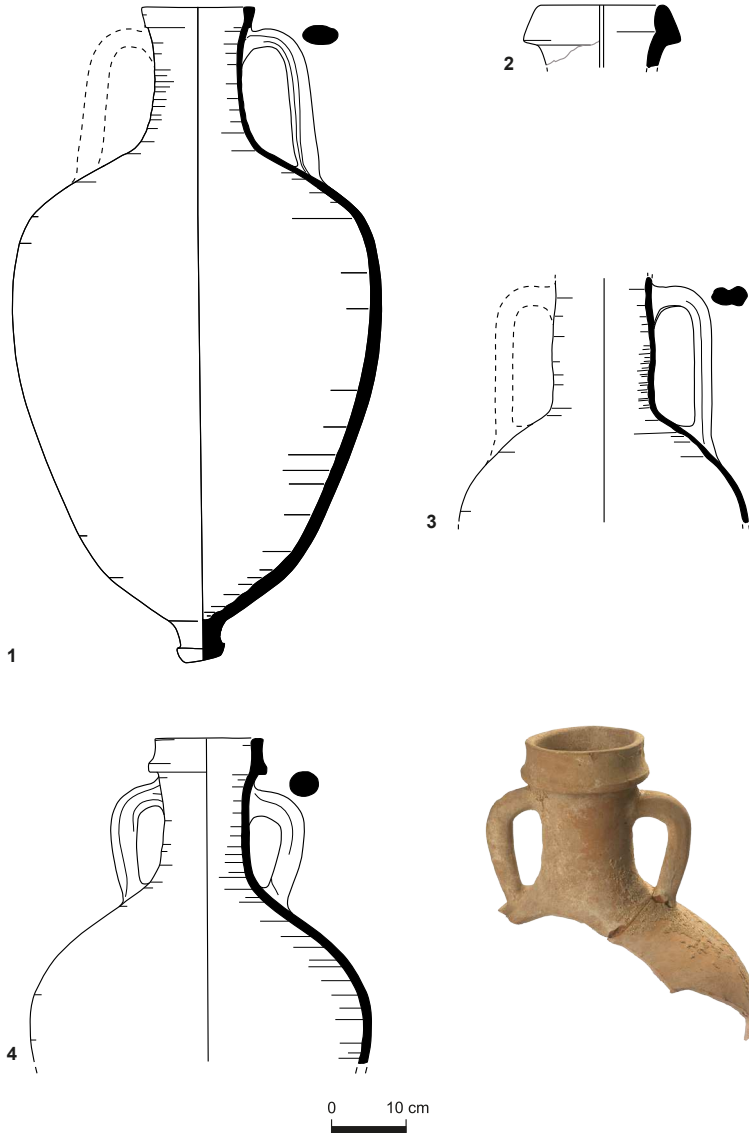


Fig. 22: Select amphorae from Stratum II (drawings by I. Ben-Ezra; photo by P. Shrago; montage by N. Earon)

No.	Area	Locus	Reg. No.
1	A1	252	1404/1
2	A1	228	1115/1
3	A1	231	1190/1
4	A1	200	1052/1

Stamped amphora handles

Eight Hellenistic stamped handles of imported transport amphorae have been found at Ashdod-Yam. In the following we focus on three of them, all belonging to the Rhodian class, for which the names of the eponym (No. 1) or fabricants (Nos. 2–3) are legible or restorable.³ Notably, the stamped handles presented here were surface finds, collected near the Hellenistic remains in Area D East. Their dates all fall within roughly the third quarter of the 2nd century BCE.

No. 1 (Fig. 23:1)

Context: Area D East, L.5000, Reg. No. 50122

Inscription: Ἐπὶ Εὐδάμου/Ἀρταμιτίου

Rhodian eponym: Εὐδαμος

Date: 151~150 BCE

Matrix in Cankardeş Şenol 2015: 124: RE-EΥΔΑΜΟΣ-ΑΡΤΑΜΙΤΙΟΣ-003

The handle was found in two pieces. A handle with an identical stamp was excavated at Maresha (Finkielsztejn 2019: 323, No. 216), 34 km to the southeast.

No. 2 (Fig. 23:2)

Context: Area D East, L.5000, Reg. No. 50065

Inscription: Δρακον[τί]δα

Feature: Anchor pointing left

Rhodian fabricant: Δρακοντίδας

Rectified date: 147~146–132~131 BCE

Matrix in *Amphoralex*: RF-ΔΡΑΚΟΝΤΙΔΑΣ-015

Stamps of Δρακοντίδας are rare, especially those with the anchor device. Three stamps of this fabricant are known from the Southern Levant: two from ‘Akko-Ptolemais (both with anchor devices: one unpublished [IAA 1957.51] and one published [Finkielsztejn 2017: 174, No. 41]) and one from the 2022 excavations at Tell Izṭabba (with a caduceus device).⁴

³ The arrangement of the handles and the conventions regarding the readings follow Finkielsztejn 2001: 213–216. The dating of these stamps is based on G. Finkielsztejn’s most recent update on the chronology of this class (2021a), except for the eponym whose term was 160 BCE, Periods IVa and IVc (ca. 160–110~109 BCE). Finkielsztejn (2021a: 203–206) assigned the one-year eponymic terms to one of two years by employing a tilde (~) between the two alternative dates. The ranges of activity for fabricants are denoted here as a range between the earliest certain eponymic term in which a fabricant is known to have been producing amphorae to the latest eponymic term. These eponym–fabricant associations derive mostly from Cankardeş-Şenol (2017)’s indices and some other publications. These fabricant datings, styled here as ‘rectified dates’, should all be viewed as minimal ranges for the fabricants’ periods of activity.

⁴ We are grateful to Prof. Achim Lichtenberger and Prof. Oren Tal, the co-directors of Tell Izṭabba expedition, for an opportunity to cite this item.

No. 3 (Fig. 23:3)

Context: Area D East, L.5000, Reg. No. 50088

Inscription: [Τι]μ[οξέ]νου (inscription oriented from perimeter inwards; retrograde(?); rose)

Rhodian fabricant: Τιμόξενοϛ

Feature: Red spot on handle⁵

Rectified date: 138~137~132~131 BCE⁶

Matrix not found in *Amphoralex*



Fig. 23: Select Rhodian stamped amphora handles (drawings by I. Ben-Ezra; photos by S. Flit; montage by N. Earon)

⁵ These well-known spots of unknown meaning are usually found on the upper portion of the Rhodian amphora handle.

⁶ Based upon secondary-stamp connections (Finkielsztein 2018: 91, No. 285; 114, No. 361), Τιμόξενοϛ's period of activity would be extended to 127~126 BCE.

Most of Τιμόξενοϲ's stamps are unusually read from the outside to the centre (Finkielsztejn: centripetal). The fabricant Τιμόξενοϲ is considered the last in a line of productive fabricants, the first of whom was Δαμοκράτης Α', who followed the norm of engraving inscriptions with readings from the centre to the perimeter of the stamp.⁷ Τιμόξενοϲ was apparently the first fabricant to begin the fashion of centripetal inscriptions on circular rose stamps, although some of his (early?) stamps apparently employed the more normal 'centrifugal' orientation. Following Τιμόξενοϲ's period of activity, five fabricants (Finkielsztejn 2001: 143) more consistently adopted the centripetal inscription practice. The closest stamp in the Southern Levant bearing this fabricant's name was found in Yafo (unpublished).

These three legible stamped handles all fall within the two decades before the end of the reign of Antiochus VII, who issued several of the coins found at Ashdod-Yam. This, along with Finkielsztejn's observation of a clustering of Rhodian stamps around the same terminus at both the inland city of Tel Ashdod and at Ashkelon (Finkielsztejn 2021b: 298), draws attention to the 130s BCE in the history of the region (and see below).

Coins

In total, 234 coins were uncovered on the acropolis, the earliest dating to the Persian period, 5th–4th centuries BCE (e.g., Fig. 24:1–2)⁸ and the latest to British Mandatory Palestine. Quite a number of the coins came from secure stratigraphic locations, but most were found on the surface with the aid of a metal detector.⁹ Although at first glance the chronological range represented by the coins might suggest a continuous settlement, this is not the case. The majority of the coins are concentrated in two distinct periods with significant gaps in between: the Hellenistic period and the Late Roman to early Byzantine periods. Here we present only a selection of the most relevant attested types.

The coins dated to the Hellenistic period constitute most of the identified numismatic material found during the excavations of Areas A and A1. They provide a relatively good *terminus post quem* and *terminus ante quem* for the site's occupation during this period. The assemblage of 122 identified Hellenistic coins may be divided into two basic categories: royal and civic issues. Among the earliest are two, likely posthumous, types of Alexander the Great (e.g., Fig. 24:3) and four coins of Ptolemy I and II (e.g., Fig. 24:4). The Ptolemaic coins may attest to Ptolemaic rule of the area prior to Seleucid annexation.

While the specific dates of circulation of the various royal issues minted by the Seleucid dynasts at Ashdod-Yam remain uncertain, the numismatic material does display

⁷ One stamp of Δαμοκράτης Α' has a legend reading outwards (RF-ΔΑΜΟΚΡΑΤΗΣ-01-054).

⁸ All of them—five in total—are of local Philistian type. These coins have already been thoroughly studied and published, but unfortunately, they cannot shed light on the settlement at that period because they were found in secondary and later contexts (Fantalkin, Johananoff and Krispin 2016). Nevertheless, one of these coins (Fig. 24:2) was of great numismatic importance due to its find spot, which helped to reattribute it to the coastal area of Philistia instead of its previous Samaritan attribution (Gitler and Tal 2016).

⁹ We are grateful to Dr. Mati Johananoff for his invaluable help in operating the metal detector prior to and during the excavations.

a variety of rulers mainly from the 2nd century BCE.¹⁰ There is abundant material dated to Antiochus III (e.g., Fig. 24:5), Antiochus IV (e.g., Fig. 24:6) and Antiochus VII (e.g., Fig. 24:8–10). Although fewer in number, there are also coins of Demetrius I (Fig. 24:7), Demetrius II (e.g., Fig. 24:11–12) and Alexander II Zabinas (Fig. 24:13). The fact that most of the coins of Demetrius II found at the site belong to his second reign (all are dated 129/8 BCE), the presence of the coin of Alexander II Zabinas (a surface find), the lack of Hasmonaean coinage and the subsequent lack of any coin dated before the 3rd century CE all support the theory that the site was destroyed by John Hyrcanus I towards the end of the 2nd century BCE.¹¹ The finding of a single coin of Ptolemy IX (Fig. 24:14) is significant because, with the exception of his coins, those of Ptolemaic rulers following the loss of their kingdom's northern territories are virtually absent in the Levant.¹²

Of the civic issues, the most dominant coinage at the site comes from ṢAkko-Ptolemais (e.g., Fig. 24:15) and Arados (e.g., Fig. 24:16), pointing to commercial activity across the coastal region (Ariel 2022: 375–377). In fact, most of the royal Seleucid coinage found at the site that was not minted at Antioch was also attributed to the ṢAkko-Ptolemais mint (19 coins, dated 175–168 BCE). Another phenomenon at Ashdod-Yam is coinage minted in the Asia Minor city of Side (e.g., Fig. 24:17): five such coins were uncovered at the site. It has been suggested that the presence of this currency at certain South Levantine sites is connected to payments to Sidetan mercenaries recruited in the Seleucid army (Johananoff 2017).

¹⁰ There is one exception: an Antiochus I coin that may have remained in circulation for a long time.

¹¹ Roman-period coinage ranging from the 1st through the 2nd century CE is absent from the acropolis, and only four coins dated to the 3rd century CE, the earliest of which is dated to the reign of Septimius Severus, have been found so far. After another short hiatus, the second most common coinage found at the site of Ashdod-Yam belongs to the Late Roman to early Byzantine periods: a total of 54 coins were identified. The majority of these are dated to the 5th–6th centuries CE. Most of these coins are small denominations, common to various sites throughout the region and discussed at length by Bijovsky (2012). Coins dated later than the 6th century CE are very scarce; in fact, only four coins dated to the Islamic period have been uncovered thus far, with only one securely identified as an early Umayyad issue.

¹² An exception can be found in a maritime hoard (Syon, Lorber and Galili 2013). Gitler and Stein (1999: 48–49) noted that the presence of Ptolemy IX's coins may be connected to his attempted recapture of the coastal cities. The presence of a Ptolemy IX coin in a hoard at the nearby city of Ashkelon may strengthen that argument (Ariel 2022: 392). However, since at Ashdod-Yam this coin came from the surface, there are numerous possibilities for its arrival and deposition.



Fig. 24: Select coins (photos by S. Flit; montage by N. Earon)

Fig. 24: Select coins

No.	Area	Locus	Reg. No.	Comments
1	A	101	10042	Philistia 5th–4th centuries BCE AR fraction; weight: 0.18 g; diameter: 6 mm; axis: 3 Obv.: Helmeted head of Athena r. Rev.: Owl standing r., head facing. Olive spray and traces of crescent in upper l.; r. field, AΘE and lotus bud Cf. Gitler and Tal 2006: Type XII.13F; Fantalkin, Johananoff and Krispin 2016: 27, No. 3a
2	A	206	1156	Philistia 5th–4th centuries BCE AR Hemi-obol; weight: 0.27 g; diameter: 6 mm; axis: 1 Obv.: Bearded male head to r., surmounted by a forepart of a lion on the forehead as a headdress; traces of a circular guilloche-pattern border Rev.: Forepart of a horse with bent forelegs to r., with concealed owl in its body; in upper l. field <i>shin</i> ; incuse square with a dotted border. Fantalkin, Johananoff and Krispin 2016: 27, No. 3d
3	A1	200	1340	Alexander the Great Colophon, 336–323 BCE (or posthumous) AR Drachm; weight: 3.81 g; diameter: 17 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Head of Heracles r., wearing lion scalp Rev.: Zeus seated on stool-throne l., holding eagle on outstretched hand and sceptre: ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ; under throne: N; l. field: B or wreath Price 1991: 253, 1799 or 1801, Pl. 127
4	C	3050	30172	Ptolemy I Alexandria, c. 306–294 BCE or later AE; weight: 3.95 g; diameter: 16 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Head of deified Alexander r. Rev.: Eagle standing l., with spread wings; [ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ Β] ΑΣΙ[ΛΕΩΣ]; l. field, monogram (?) Cf. Lorber 2018: No. B39
5	A1	229	1331	Antiochus III Uncertain (Coele-Syria), 202–195 BCE AE; weight: 6.91 g; diameter: 20 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Laureated head of Apollo r. Rev.: Elephant standing r.; below, horse head r.; [ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ] ANTIOXOY Houghton and Lorber 2002: No. 1086
6	A1	200	1069	Antiochus IV Ptolemais (‘Akko)?, 173/2–168 BCE AE (serrated); weight: 2.21 g; diameter: 15 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Radiate head r. Rev.: Veiled goddess standing facing, holding long sceptre or torch; ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ / ANTIOXOY Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008: No. 1479
7	A1	200	1201	Demetrius I Seleucia on the Tigris, 161–150 BCE AE (serrated); weight: 2.66 g; diameter: 13 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Diademed head r. Rev.: Apollo seated left on omphalos, testing arrow and resting left hand on grounded bow; [ΒΑΣΙ]ΛΕΩ[Σ] / ΔΗ[ΜΗ]ΤΡ[ΙΟΥ] Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008: No. 1692

Fig. 24 (continued)

No.	Area	Locus	Reg. No.	Comments
8	A1	200	1208	Antiochus VII Damascus (?), 135/4 BCE AE; weight: 2.14 g; diameter: 14; axis: 12 Obv.: Draped bust of Artemis r. Rev.: Apollo standing left, testing arrow; ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ANTIOXOY EYEPΓETOY; inner l. field: ΠΑ Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008: No. 2098.5
9	A	101	10021	Antiochus VII Antioch, 132–131 BCE AE (bevelled); weight: 4.71 g; diameter: 19 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Winged bust of Eros r. Rev.: Isis headdress; ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ / ANTIOXOY / EYEPΓETOY; below: ΑΙΠ Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008: No. 2067.16
10	C	3050	30174	Antiochus VII Ptolemais (‘Akko) (?), 136–134 BCE AE (bevelled); weight: 3.23 g; diameter: 17; axis: 12 Obv.: Helmeted head of Athena r. Rev.: Owl standing r., head facing to front.; [ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ] ANTIOXOY EYEPΓETOY; outer l.: monogram; exergue, date (illegible) Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008: No. 2119
11	C	3050	30188	Demetrius II’s first reign Laodicea ad Mare (?), 142/1 BCE AE; weight: 4.14 g; diameter: 18 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Diademed and draped bust of Demetrius II r. Rev.: Poseidon standing l., holding uncertain attribute and resting on trident; ΒΑΣΙΛΕ[ΩΣ] / ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟ[Y]; inner l. field: Α / Σ Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008: No. 1932
12	A1	200	1024	Demetrius II’s second reign Damascus, 129–128 BCE AE bevelled; weight: 4.96 g; diameter: 18 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Diademed head r., bearded Rev.: Apollo standing left, testing arrow and resting left hand on grounded bow; ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ / ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ / ΝΙΚΑΤΟΡΟΣ; exergue: ΔΠΡ; outer r.: Α Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008: No. 2183.2
13	A1	200	1247	Alexander II Zabinas Antioch, 129–125 BCE AE bevelled; weight: 5.46 g; diameter: 19 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Diademed head r. Rev.: Dionysus standing left, holding cantharus and thyrsus; [Β]ΑΣΙΛΕ[ΩΣ] / [Α]ΛΕΞΑΝΔ[ΡΟΥ]; inner field, date illegible Houghton, Lorber and Hoover 2008: No. 2229
14	C	3050	30177	Cleopatra III and Ptolemy IX Cyrene, 116–107 BCE AE (bevelled); weight: 2.09 g; diameter: 13 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Diademed head of Zeus-Ammon r. Rev.: Eagle standing l., with spread wings; ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ [ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ]; l. field, monogram (slightly simplified abbreviation of his epithet Soter) Asolati 2011: No. 105; Lorber 2018: No. B799

Fig. 24 (continued)

No.	Area	Locus	Reg. No.	Comments
15	A1	200	1123	Civic Ptolemais (‘Akko), 169–164 BCE AE; weight: 2.61 g; diameter: 16 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Jugate busts of the Dioscuri r. Rev.: Cornucopia; ANTI[OXEΩN] / T[ΩN] / EN ΠITO[ΛEMAIΔI] Cf. Meshorer, Bijovsky and Fischer-Bossert 2013: 8, No. 71; Pl. 5
16	A1	244	1361	Arados, 143/2 BCE AE; weight: 3.43 g; diameter: 15 mm; axis: 12 Obv.: Head of Zeus r. Rev.: Ram of Prow; Ψ (year 117) Duyrat 2005: no. 2118
17	A1	200	1249	Side (<i>Pamphylia</i>), ca. 3rd century BCE AE; weight: 3.19 g; diameter: 16 mm; axis: 6 Obv.: Helmeted head of Athena r. Rev.: Pomegranate Johananoff 2017: 42, Pl. 5, No. 4; <i>SNG Cop.</i> VI: No. 382

Metal finds

Numerous metal objects can be attributed to the Hellenistic period of Ashdod-Yam. An initial archaeometallurgical analysis of some of these artefacts, made of copper alloys, lead and iron, has already been published (Ashkenazi and Fantalkin 2019). In the following, a selection of key and hitherto mostly unpublished finds is presented.

Several of the metal finds from secondary contexts at Ashdod-Yam may predate the Hellenistic occupation at the site. They include three small bronze trilobate arrowheads (Fig. 25:1–3) commonly associated with the Scythian culture but also found in Greek and Achaemenid contexts dating from the 6th century BCE (Schmidt 1957; Baitinger 2001; Hellmuth 2014). Similar examples from Tel Ashdod, however, come from Hellenistic strata (Dothan 1971: 64, Pl. 20:8,10). In contrast, the bronze arrowheads (Fig. 25:4–5) found on the surface are of well-known Hellenistic types, particularly the arrowhead with the monogram (Fig. 25:4), which likely dates to the 2nd century BCE (Mazis and Wright 2018; Ariel 2019: 31; Mazis 2023: 72–75; cf., however, Redon and Faucher 2022). From topsoil in Area A1 comes an intaglio finger ring with Archaic Greek–Achaemenid-period features (Fig. 25:13) (cf. Boardman 1970: 157, Fig. 198: M–N). The intaglio was mould-cast, but includes incised details to form an enigmatic design, possibly of a warrior or mythological being.

A lead astragalos was also recovered from topsoil in Area A1 (Fig. 25:6). Astragaloi, or knucklebones, are derived from the hock joints of ungulates such as goats and sheep. These bones are used not only in popular games of chance but also in cleromancy, as amulets, and as votive offerings, reflecting their connection to concepts of fate and divine favour (Larson 2001: 11–12). The Ashdod-Yam astragalos is technically an imitation, as it is made entirely of lead rather than bone. Imitation astragaloi can be crafted from various materials, including bronze and lead. In the case of the Ashdod-Yam astragalos, it was



Fig. 25: Select metal finds (photos by M. Mazis, P. Shrago, Y. Bornstein and S. Flit; montage by M. Mazis)

Fig. 25: Select metal finds

No.	Type	Area	Locus	Reg. No.	Material
1	Arrowhead	C	3050	30203	Copper alloy
2	Arrowhead	C	3050	30168	Copper alloy
3	Arrowhead	C	3050	30194	Copper alloy
4	Arrowhead	A1	200	1130	Tin bronze
5	Arrowhead	A1	200	1061	Leaded bronze
6	Astragalos	A1	200	1251	Lead
7	Pin	A1	252	1347	Copper alloy
8	Arrowhead	A1	252	1364	Iron
9	Weights	A	101	10027	Lead
10	Net sinker	A1	221	1329	Lead
11	Net sinker	A1	221	1328	Lead
12	Scrap/waste	A1	221	1330	Lead
13	Finger ring	A1	200	1103	Copper alloy
14	Amulet	A1	252	1398	Tin bronze
15	Amulet	A1	200	1337	Copper alloy

found to have an addition of lead-tin solder in one spot (Ashkenazi and Fantalkin 2019). It may have been modified to influence outcomes in games of chance or divination.¹³

In Area A1, at the base of a stone-robbers' channel of the monumental building, a significant deposit that included metal objects was found (L.252). The cache of metals included an iron key (Ashkenazi and Fantalkin 2019: 923, 931, Fig. 8a), a copper-alloy pin (Fig. 25:7), an iron arrowhead (Fig. 25:8) and a bronze box amulet (Fig. 25:14). The design of the copper-alloy pin (Fig. 25:7), reminiscent of Archaic Greek garment fasteners and also similar to pins in Hellenistic disc brooches, is detailed in various studies (Kourouniotis 1910; Deonna 1938; Dedyulkin and Zaytsev 2019). The iron arrowhead (Fig. 25:8) (Ashkenazi and Fantalkin 2019: Fig. 8b) features a two-bladed design with a gradual transition from the blade to the tang. The weapon point is fractured, but its original shape may have been either lanceolate or wedge-shaped—both arrowhead forms attested in Hellenistic assemblages. Iron arrowheads with these specific design traits were recovered from the Hellenistic military settlement at Jebel Khalid, Syria (Mazis 2023: 70–72, Nos. M37, M48, M49 and M55, dated to the 3rd–2nd centuries BCE). The bronze box amulet (Fig. 25:14) contained coloured faience beads, a red stone piece and four tiny twigs of *Arbutus andrachne* wrapped with a knotted linen cord (Berlejung and Fantalkin 2017). Another amulet (Fig. 25:15) found in topsoil was a shallow box that may have held inscribed organic parchment, akin to *tefillin* or phylacteries. Comparable is a bronze

¹³ Some natural bone astragaloi have been found to have been altered with lead or iron inserts or metal attachments (Gilmour 1997; Trantalidou and Kavoura 2006–2007: 469). These modifications presumably loaded the astragaloi in games of chance (Greaves 2012: 184) or divination.



Fig. 26: Selection of lead fishing-net sinkers (photos and montage by M. Mazis)

amulet from the En-Gedi burial caves (Ganor, Ganor and Hofesh 2010). Though arguably for practical use, a set of four small phallus-shaped weights (Fig. 25:9) (Ashkenazi and Fantalkin 2019: 921–923, Fig. 11) may have also served a ritual purpose (Ascalone and Peyronel 2001).

Numerous lead fishing-net sinkers were recovered from around the Hellenistic-period structures through metal-detection surveys (Fig. 26). Many, however, also emerged from Stratum II deposits (e.g., Fig. 25:10–12). Totalling over two hundred, these sinkers highlight the significance of net fishing at Ashdod-Yam. Moreover, the presence of scraps and failed or unfinished net-sinker pieces (e.g., Fig. 25:12) suggests that the devices were likely produced on site. Net sinkers occasionally feature decorative geometric patterns or motifs, possibly signifying specific fishers (Dütting and Hoss 2014), similar to those found in the Ashkelon shipwreck from the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods (Galili *et al.* 2010). Several of the Ashdod-Yam sinkers are patterned (Fig. 26, top row). In general, the Ashdod-Yam sinkers may be classified into three broad groups on the basis of size, weight, colour and markings. Group 1 comprises long and thin dark-grey sinkers with simple ribbing or crimping patterns, consistent in size and weight (mean: 29×6 mm, 4.9 g). Group 2, similar in colour, size and weight to Group 1, lacks decoration (mean: 24×9 mm, 6.8 g). The most numerous, Group 3, consists of light-coloured undecorated sinkers, with large variations in size and weight. A subgroup of Group 3 includes heavier and thicker variants, ranging from 30 to 130 g in weight (e.g., Fig. 25:10).

Seven lead (Pb) artefacts were subjected to detailed chemical and isotopic analysis in order to determine potential sources of material. These are: three phallus-shaped weights

(Fig. 25:9a,b,d), one astragalos (Fig. 25:6), two net sinkers (Fig. 25:10–11), and a scrap/waste piece (probably an unfinished net sinker) (Fig. 25:12). Lead isotope analysis is used to provenance certain metals by comparing the Pb-isotopic composition of Pb in metal to those of known ores. Pb-isotopic ratios do not significantly fractionate during the smelting, cupellation and remelting processes of production. Therefore, they may serve as a ‘fingerprint’ of the mineral ore deposits, which can be compared with the end product (Eshel *et al.* 2019).

Pb-isotopic ratios were measured using a Neptune plus multi-collector ICP-MS (inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometer) at the Institute of Earth Sciences of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Table 1). Three Pb artefacts have an isotopic fingerprint consistent with Pb ores in Laurion, Greece: the astragalos (Fig. 25:6), the net sinker (Fig. 25:11) and the scrap piece (Fig. 25:12). The isotopic fingerprints of the remaining artefacts are inconsistent with the Laurion ores. One of the phallus-shaped weights (Fig. 25:9b) was found to not be consistent with any ore. The three remaining objects—two phallus-shaped weights (Fig. 25:9a,d) and a net sinker (Fig. 25:10)—have Pb-isotopic fingerprints consistent with several overlapping Anatolian and Aegean Pb ores, including from Thasos and Chalkidiki (Gale and Stos-Gale 1981; Pernicka *et al.* 1981; Vaxevanopoulos *et al.* 2022). However, the results of these specimens also fall isotopically between Laurion and the phallus shaped-weight in Fig 25:9b, and are therefore suspected of being mixed.

The results align with a growing body of Pb-isotope studies, which collectively indicate that from the 6th to the 3rd centuries BCE, the Laurion mines were a primary source of Pb and silver—the latter being a byproduct of Pb processing—to Greece and the Aegean islands (Birch *et al.* 2020; Stos-Gale and Davis 2020) and to the Southern Levant (Klein *et al.* 2022; Eshel *et al.* 2023). In addition, the data corroborate evidence suggesting multiple Aegean origins for Pb and silver during these periods. These sources include not only Laurion but also Thasos/Chalkidiki (regions with overlapping mining areas) and the Rhodopes in northern Greece.

Table 1: Lead isotope ratios of Hellenistic-period lead artefacts (see Fig. 25) from Ashdod-Yam

No.	Type	$^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$	$^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$	$^{208}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$	Consistent with
6	Astragalos	18.861	15.689	38.894	Laurion, Greece
9a	Weight	18.785	15.689	38.898	Anatolian/Aegean ores
9b	Weight	18.647	15.694	38.827	Unknown
9d	Weight	18.797	15.668	38.898	Anatolian/Aegean ores
10	Net sinker	18.784	15.670	38.868	Anatolian/Aegean ores
11	Net sinker	18.855	15.691	38.903	Laurion, Greece
12	Scrap/waste	18.863	15.666	38.877	Laurion, Greece

Discussion

Before dealing with our interpretation of the Hellenistic remains, it should be stated that the nature of the settlement at Ashdod-Yam during the preceding Persian period remains unclear, since only a few pottery sherds and some tentatively attributed metal finds from

this period have been discovered on the acropolis so far.¹⁴ It is possible that the remains of any Persian-period settlement at Ashdod-Yam lie beyond the fortified perimeter of the acropolis, in areas not yet explored by our team. The Persian-period silver coins mentioned in this report (see above, n. 8) came from secondary contexts, either as unstratified finds or from contexts associated with the Hellenistic-period buildings. Whether these coins are connected to undiscovered contemporary remains or represent continued circulation in the Hellenistic period remains to be seen. Both scenarios are plausible.

The Hellenistic remains in Area A1 comprise the ruins of a monumental stone-built fortress likely constructed in the first half of the 2nd century BCE and destroyed towards the end of that century in a significant conflagration.¹⁵ The use of *spolia* (in the form of marginally dressed stones) suggests that there may have been earlier Hellenistic buildings nearby that were used for building material. Numerous artefacts—including pottery, coins, weaponry and weights—found in the building's remains support the possibility that it had a military function and was perhaps the location of a garrison. Furthermore, two almost complete artillery stone balls were discovered in the vicinity (Fig. 27). Similar artillery balls, made of limestone, are known from Hellenistic contexts at Tel Dor (Shatzman 1995) and Antiochus VII Sidetes' siege of Jerusalem (Sivan and Solar 2000; Ariel 2019: 31).

In contrast to the stone-built fortress, the contemporary adjacent structures in Areas A and D were constructed of mudbricks that either stood on stone foundations made of local beachrock or were laid directly on the sand. Moreover, these structures appear to have been abandoned and not destroyed by fire. Based on the proximity of Units 2 and 3 in Area A to the monumental structure in Area A1, it is plausible that they represent auxiliary buildings, which served various logistic functions related to the maintenance of the fortress. These buildings, located at the edge of the acropolis, may have been part of a protective fortification line that surrounded the entire military establishment, which included a mudbrick defensive wall discovered in Unit 1 in Area A. Part of this wall was established directly above the fortification line of the enormous Iron IIB rampart and incorporated several watchtowers detected along its southern line, the most impressive being the one discovered in Area D East. Fig. 28 offers a reconstruction of the settlement's layout, which took advantage of the remains of the fortified Iron Age enclosure.

Geophysical surveys and archaeological investigations at Ashdod-Yam indicate that the acropolis and fortified enclosure in the southern part of the site were initially constructed and maintained during the Iron IIB–C (8th–7th centuries BCE) (Fantalkin *et al.* 2024). We suspect that these works protected an artificial anchorage established at the site (Fantalkin 2014; Lorenzon *et al.* 2023; Fantalkin *et al.* 2024), utilising and reconfiguring an existing estuary of the branch of Naḥal Lachish, which is not visible today. Over time, this once thriving anchorage fell into disuse, gradually becoming buried under accumulating sand.

¹⁴ This is quite surprising given the prominent position of Ashdod during the Persian period, mentioned specifically in Neh 13:23–24, although attested archaeologically only to a limited extent at Tel Ashdod (Gitler and Tal 2006: 37).

¹⁵ For instances of contemporary military architecture in the Southern Levant, see Tal 2006: 138–163.

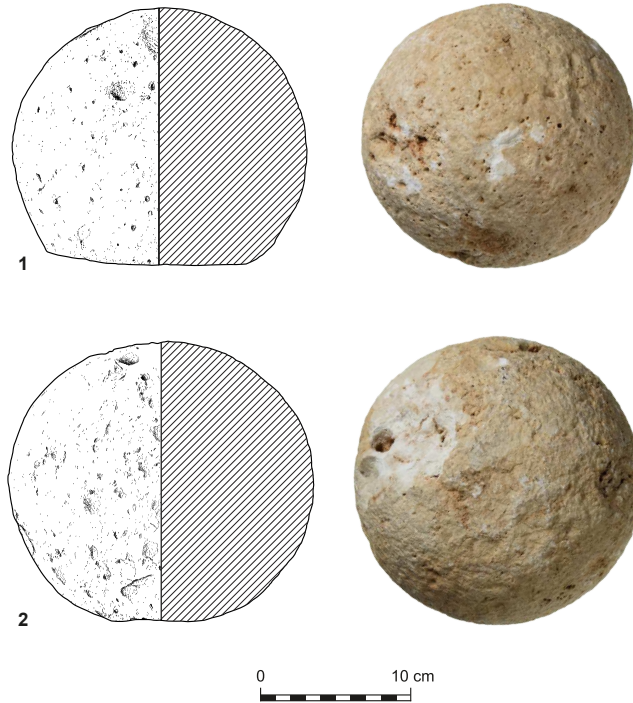


Fig. 27: Hellenistic artillery stone balls from Area A1, Locus 200 (photos by S. Flit; drawings by I. Ben-Ezra); 1) Reg. No. 1053; 2) Reg. No. 1054

The archaeological evidence shows that the acropolis at Ashdod-Yam was reoccupied during the Hellenistic period, after a long period of abandonment. Although the former Iron Age anchorage would no longer have been in operation, the establishment of a Hellenistic fortress with accompanying buildings and fortifications over the Iron Age settlement suggests the existence of some kind of mooring solution nearby. For example, merchant and military ships could have anchored offshore and used small row boats or barges to transfer goods and passengers from the moored vessel to the beach and back. In addition, certain ships would no doubt have been capable of landing directly on the shallow sandy beach at the base of Ashdod-Yam's enclosure. The location of the fortress and the watchtower at the highest point of the acropolis may have also served as prominent landmarks for incoming ships.

In terms of the contemporary political environment, the establishment of the fortress and accompanying buildings at Ashdod-Yam during the first half of the 2nd century BCE should be viewed within the framework of Seleucid military activity. The shift to Seleucid rule in the area of Ashdod was most probably smooth and, in a sense, purely administrative, as was the case at other sites on the southern Coastal Plain of Palestine, such as Jaffa (Fantalkin and Tal 2008) and Ashkelon (Birney 2022: 3–11; see also Tal 2006: 177–216, 329). The remains of the relatively short-lived Hellenistic occupation at Ashdod-Yam, detected so far only on the acropolis, most probably represent a mercenary garrison

stationed there in the service of the empire. It is difficult to determine under precisely which Seleucid king the establishment of this military stronghold was commissioned. It was probably reinforced during the days of Antiochus VII Sidetes by his general Cendebaeus, who was appointed commander of the coast of Palestine and is said to have attacked Judaea from Iamnia (Yavneh-Yam), ca. 20 km to the north of Ashdod-Yam (1 Macc 15:38–40; cf. Josephus, *AJ* 13.225). Even though, according to 2 Macc 12:9, Judas Maccabaeus ‘attacked the Jamnites (Iamnitai) by night and set fire to the harbor and the fleet’, archaeological evidence demonstrates that the town continued to prosper following this event, being finally destroyed only as part of the conquests attributed to John Hyrcanus I towards the end of his reign or the beginning of that of Alexander Jannaeus (sometime around 110–100 BCE) (Fischer *et al.* 2023).

In contrast, a contemporaneous Hellenistic settlement at Gan Soreq, ca. 7.5 km northeast of Yavneh-Yam, which reached its greatest extent in the early 2nd century BCE, was abandoned already in the mid-2nd century BCE (‘Ad and Dagot 2006), perhaps following the hostilities related to Judas Maccabaeus’ campaigns. A comparative Hellenistic settlement in the Barnea neighbourhood of Ashkelon, located ca. 4 km to the northeast of ancient Ashkelon (Haimi 2008), was established in the early 2nd century BCE and abandoned around the same time as the settlement in Gan Soreq or perhaps slightly later (Peretz 2017). The Hellenistic sequence at Ashkelon, however, suggests continuity through

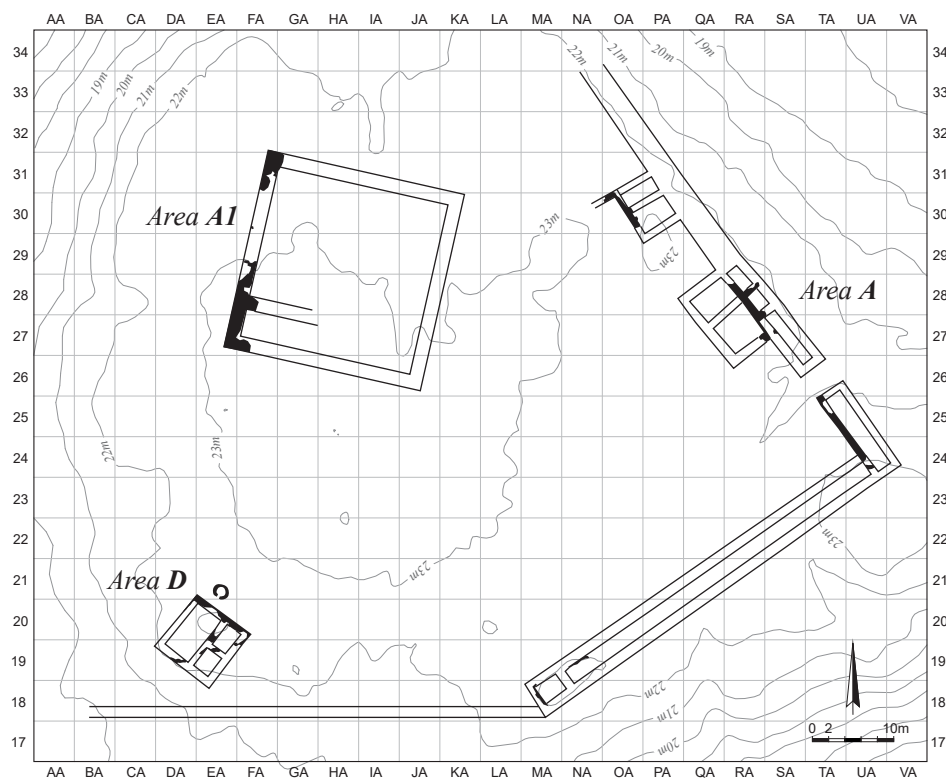


Fig. 28: Reconstruction of the Stratum II settlement (drawing by S. Pirsky)

the 1st century BCE (Birney 2022: 10–11). Both the establishments at Gan Soreq and Barnea were interpreted by their excavators as possible *katoikia*, settled by Greek and/or Anatolian veterans and their families (‘Ad 2021: 96–100).

The destruction by fire of the monumental stone building marked the end of the Hellenistic military settlement of Ashdod-Yam in the late 2nd century BCE (Area A1). Coinciding with the destruction of Tel Ashdod Phase 3b and the contemporaneous destruction at Yavneh-Yam, it is likely that these events are related and may be attributed to the campaigns of John Hyrcanus I towards the end of his reign.¹⁶ From the scarcity of finds, it is plausible that the auxiliary buildings (Area A) and the watchtower (Area D East) had already been cleared out by the defenders and abandoned before the fortress was destroyed. Perhaps considered too insignificant to burn down with the main edifice, the abandoned structures collapsed some time afterwards, possibly during an earthquake in the 1st century BCE or later (cf. Zohar, Salamon and Rubin 2016; Grigoratos *et al.* 2020). Following these events, the acropolis saw no further settlement, and over time, the once formidable walls of the fortress fell victim to extensive dismantling by stone robbers. Significantly, the numismatic evidence from the site aligns with these events. A notable gap in the coin record from the 1st century BCE and the absence of Roman coins from the 1st and 2nd centuries CE corroborates the hypothesis of a late 2nd-century BCE destruction and subsequent permanent abandonment of the Hellenistic military establishment on the acropolis. Consequently, the metal and ceramic artefacts from Stratum II, including those of Hellenistic type recovered from surface finds, can be confidently dated to the 2nd century BCE. Given Phase 3a at Tel Ashdod, which relates to the Hasmonaean occupation of the 1st century BCE, it is possible that this currently missing phase in Ashdod-Yam’s Hellenistic sequence is located elsewhere within the vast extent of the coastal site, beyond the perimeter of the fortified compound. Regardless, the precision in dating the Stratum II occupation on the acropolis of Ashdod-Yam offers a rare window into the life of a 2nd-century BCE coastal military settlement.

Summary

To encapsulate, the archaeology of Ashdod-Yam yielded the ruins of a monumental edifice most likely built in the first half of the 2nd century BCE and violently destroyed towards the end of that century. This massive stone construction found in Area A1, along with associated pottery, coins and weaponry, supports the interpretation that it had a defensive military function. Adjacent mudbrick structures, believed to be auxiliary to the main fortress, were, in contrast, not destroyed by fire but showed signs of having been abandoned followed by a collapse, perhaps as the result of an earthquake. Ashdod-Yam’s strategic significance during the Hellenistic period appears relatively emphatic: a garrison was likely stationed there as part of the Seleucid empire’s control of the territory, later contested by Hasmonaean forces. The destruction of the monumental stone fortress and the abandonment of the auxiliary buildings likely took place during the Hasmonaean

¹⁶ However, one cannot exclude the possibility that this wave of destructions took place at the beginning of Alexander Jannaeus’ reign.

consolidation of power under John Hyrcanus I. The end of Hellenistic Ashdod-Yam frames a dynamic period of conflict and transition in the region. Further research is needed to bring to light the full archaeological narrative of Ashdod-Yam, particularly its role in the era of Hasmonaean occupation.

Disclosure statement

The authors report that there are no conflicting interests to declare.

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