

ASHQELON, BARNE‘A: THE GLASS FINDS

TAMAR WINTER

The glass finds from the excavation in the Barne‘a neighborhood in Ashqelon (see Peretz 2016) were recovered from Squares A–C/6–7, B–C/1 and B/2–5.¹ They include some 50 small fragments, of which 31 are diagnostic pieces, ranging in date from the Late Hellenistic through the late Byzantine periods. The only later glass find from the site is probably a neck of an *omom*, characteristic of the Mamluk period (L163, B1108; not illustrated).

Corpora of Byzantine-dated glass vessels from Ashqelon have been published quite extensively (e.g., Katsnelson 1999b; Katsnelson and Jackson-Tal 2004). Therefore, only exceptional pieces from the Byzantine period are hereby highlighted, while attention is focused on Roman-period glass finds, the likes of which have so far been scarcely published from the city, and those that have been published are mostly from burials (e.g., Katsnelson 1999a; Varga 1999).

The earliest vessels from the site were recovered from Squares A–C/6–7, and included a Late Hellenistic (the second century BCE to the mid-first century CE) colorless cast bowl with three interior horizontal grooves below the rim (diam. 120 mm; L185, B1137; Fig. 1:1); and several Early Roman (the first–second centuries CE) vessels, among them a light green jug with a ribbed strap handle (L114, B1021; Fig. 1:2) and a thick bottom part of a small greenish blue candlestick-type bottle (diam. 30 mm; L185, B1137; Fig. 1:3).

Glass vessels from the Late Roman and early Byzantine periods (i.e., the third to the early fifth centuries CE) were collected in Squares A–C/6–7 and B–C/1. A light green jug with a funnel-shaped mouth and a fold below the rim (diam. 90 mm; L155, B1091; Fig. 1:4) and an opaque-white bowl base (diam. 60 mm; L141, B1074; Fig. 1:5) are both distinct in their fabric and corrosion, which are characteristic of Egyptian material during this period. These vessels may attest to trade with Egypt and northern Sinai in the Late Roman period, a phenomenon that has been recognized at other sites in the area. A greenish blue base encircled with a thick trail (diam. 26 mm; L114, B1026; Fig. 1:6) is noteworthy, as remains of glass and metal from the pontil survived on the bottom, indicating the vessel was not finished properly.

The glass finds characteristic of the Byzantine period (i.e., the fifth–seventh centuries CE) were unearthed in all areas of the excavation. They comprise fragments of various plain bowls, beakers, bottles and jugs, as well as a wineglass with a hollow ring base, bottles decorated with applied trails and mold-blown ribbing, lamps and a single glass tessera.

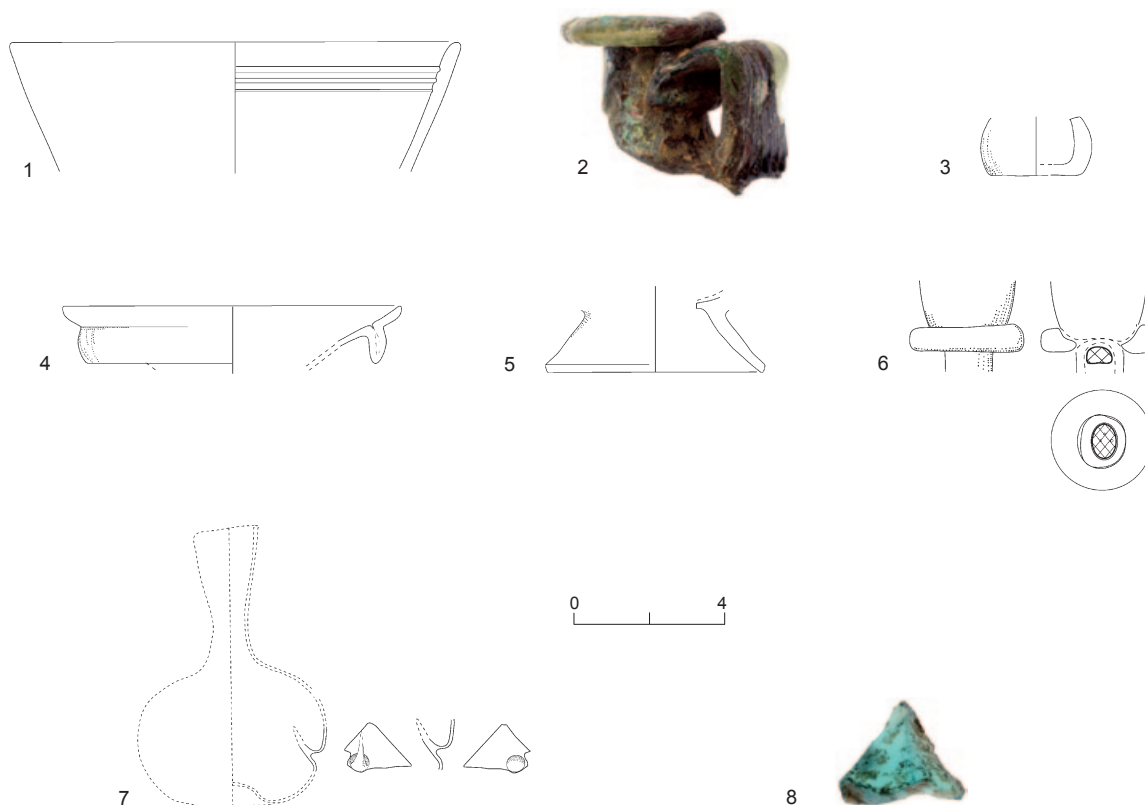


Fig. 1.

Especially noteworthy are two specimens from the late-sixth–seventh centuries CE, discovered in Square B2. One is a small body fragment with an unclear mold-blown pattern, possibly depicting lozenges and knobs (L122, B1042; not illustrated). It probably belonged to a hexagonal vessel, possibly a *eulogia* jug, such as those which served pilgrims in the sixth–seventh centuries CE as containers of blessed oil and water from the Holy Land (e.g., Israeli 2003:277–279). The other significant piece from the Byzantine period is a tiny wall fragment of a light green bottle with internal threads, only one of which partially survived (L112, B1035; Fig. 1:7, with a probable reconstruction, not to scale). Of the known examples of this type, the southernmost were excavated in Church A-152 at Ostrakine in northern Sinai. The function of these unique vessels is unclear, yet their distribution and their provenances, which are mostly ecclesiastical, suggest that the vessels may have served in Christian liturgy and were made locally in one or several workshops in Palestine (see Gorin-Rosen and Winter 2010:175–176, Fig. 6). Both pieces from Ashqelon may be associated with liturgical vessels and may indicate the existence of a public building, possibly a church or a chapel, at the site or in its vicinity during the late Byzantine period. This coincides with additional evidence, such as a marble fragment incised with a Greek inscription, which was discovered nearby (see Peretz 2016:20).

Additionally, a small chunk of greenish blue raw glass (max. length 35 mm; L111, B1024; Fig. 1:8) was discovered at the site. It has natural breaks and a triangular cross-section, suggesting that chunks of raw glass were at times used for cutting. This single chunk is insufficient evidence, yet several other raw-glass chunks have been discovered in Ashqelon and its vicinity in previous excavations, suggesting the presence of a glass industry in or around the ancient city.

NOTE

¹ The glass finds were drawn by Carmen Hersch and photographed by Clara Amit.

REFERENCES

- Gorin-Rosen Y. and Winter T. 2010. Selected Insights into Byzantine Glass in the Holy Land. In J. Drauschke and D. Keller eds. *Glass in Byzantium: Production, Usage, Analyses (International Workshop Organised by the Byzantine Archaeology Mainz, 17th–18th of January 2008)* (Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Tagungen 8). Mainz. Pp. 165–181.
- Israeli Y. 2003. *Ancient Glass in the Israel Museum: The Elisha Dobkin Collection and Other Gifts*. Jerusalem.
- Katsnelson N. 1999a. Glass Vessels. In E. Kogan-Zehavi. Late Roman–Byzantine Remains at Ashqelon. *'Atiqot* 38:119*–121*.
- Katsnelson N. 1999b. Glass Vessels from the Painted Tomb at Migdal Ashqelon. *'Atiqot* 37:67*–82*.
- Katsnelson N. and Jackson-Tal R.E. 2004. The Glass Vessels from Ashqelon, Semadar Hotel. *'Atiqot* 48:99–109.
- Peretz I. 2016. Ashqelon, Barne'a: Remains from the Roman to the Early Islamic Periods. *HA-ESI* 128 (30 September 2016) http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail.aspx?id=25076&mag_id=124 (accessed 30 September 2016; Hebrew).
- Varga D. 1999. Ashqelon, Hof Ha-Dayyagim (Fishermen's Beach). *HA-ESI* 109:89*.