

BUILDING REMAINS FROM THE HELLENISTIC, BYZANTINE AND LATE OTTOMAN PERIODS ON BEN GAMLI'EL STREET, YAFO (JAFFA)

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INTRODUCTION

Ben Gamli'el Street is located in the eastern part of modern Jaffa, between Jerusalem Boulevard on the east and the Flea Market on the west (map ref. 177353–298/662282–41; Fig. 1). This area was part of a city quarter that was built during the British Mandate period over formerly cultivated land. It presently houses apartment buildings, storage spaces and workshops. In recent years, the Tel Aviv-Yafo municipality carried out extensive renovation works of the infrastructure, and old buildings were either refurbished or replaced with new ones. During 2014 and 2015, extensive salvage excavations, directed by Lior Rauchberger, were carried out on Ben Gamli'el Street and adjacent streets, prior to the renovation works (Permit No. A-7071). Among the findings were the bedding of the Mandate-period streets; lime pits that had operated during the construction of the Mandate-period buildings; a few architectural remains from the Hellenistic and late Ottoman periods; waste pits with numerous potsherds of the Byzantine and Ottoman periods; and glass fragments and coins from the Hellenistic, Byzantine, Early Islamic, Crusader and late Ottoman periods. Another salvage excavation on the same street was directed by the author in 2019 (Permit No. A-8559), exposing building remains and pottery from the late Ottoman period, including dozens of fragments of Egyptian-style antilia vessels from a water drawing devise.

The present excavation was carried out in 2014, in a plot situated on 10 Ben Gamli'el Street, prior to the construction of a new building.¹ It was preceded by mechanized ground clearing under archaeological supervision, followed by the digging of trial trenches, reaching

¹ The excavation (Permit No. A-7213), under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority, was conducted over 10 days in September–October 2014. The excavation was directed by the author (field photographs), with the assistance of Eriola Jakoel and Elie Haddad (area supervisors); Lior Rauchberger and Dor Golan (pre-excitation site exposure); Peter Gendelman and Gerald Finkielsztejn (Hellenistic pottery); Brigitte Ouahnouna (glass finds); Robert Kool (numismatics); Polina Spivak (flint); Nimrod Marom (zooarchaeology); Inbar Ktalav (molluscs); Rivka Mishayev and Mendel Kahan (field surveying); Chen Ben-Ari and Angelina Dagot (GPS); Marina Shuiskaya (pottery drawing); Clara Amit (laboratory photographs); Eli Bachar and Yoni Amrani (administration) and Diego Barkan (IAA Tel Aviv district coordination). The excavation was funded by the Boaz Michaeli Construction Engineering firm.

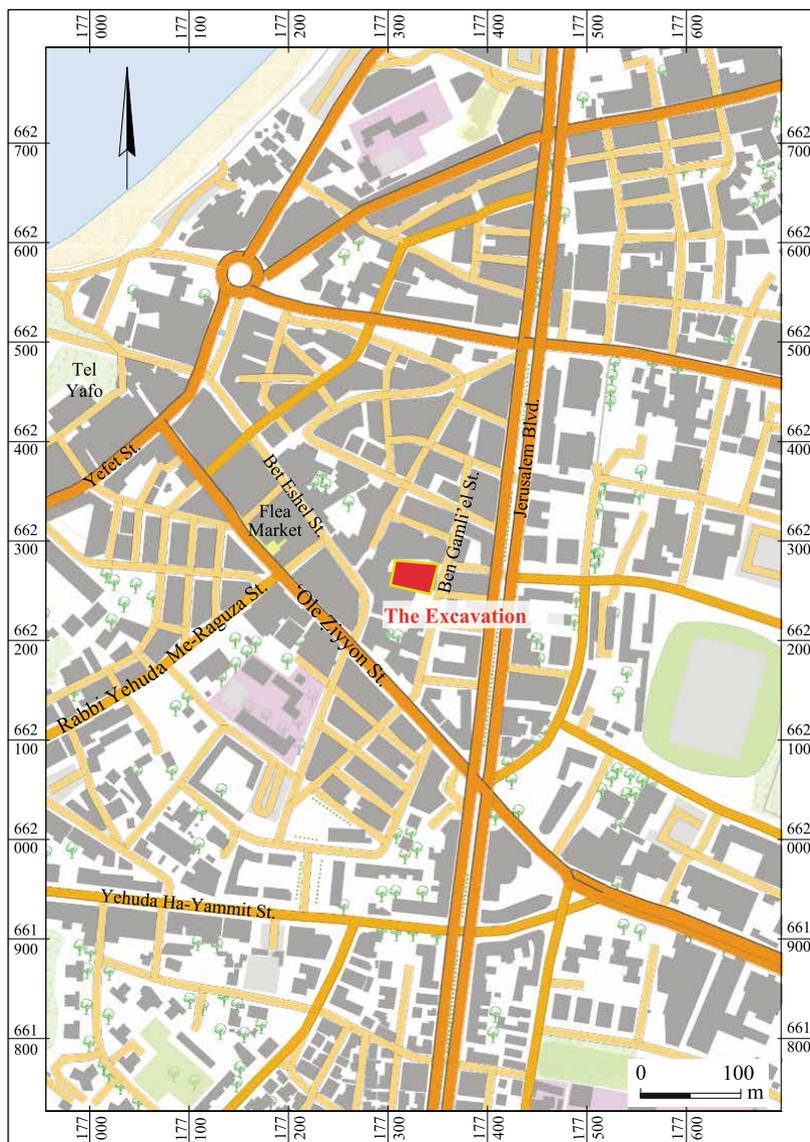


Fig. 1. Location of the site.

a depth of 3 m below topsoil. Two excavation areas (A, B) were opened: Area A, including 12 squares (4×4 m each) in the southern part of the plot, and Area B, including 9 squares (4×4 m each) in its northern part (Plan 1; Fig. 2).

THE EXCAVATION

The excavation exposed building remains and a waste pit from the Hellenistic period (fourth–second centuries BCE; Stratum III), a large quantity of Byzantine-period pottery (fourth–



Fig. 2. General view of the excavation, looking southwest.

seventh centuries CE; Stratum II) and two late Ottoman-period walls (late nineteenth–early twentieth centuries CE; Stratum I).

STRATUM III: THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

The building remains attributed to the Hellenistic period consist of only two walls (W113, W106; Plan 1); however, the ceramic assemblage of this period is among the richest found outside of the Hellenistic-period city center, which was located within the precincts of Tel Yafo.

Wall 113 (1 × 7 m) was exposed in the western part of Area A (Fig. 3). For most of its length, only one course of this wall survived, while two additional courses were preserved in its southern part (Fig. 4). Neither end was preserved, and therefore, it must have been longer than its surviving part. Wall 113 was built of roughly hewn sandstone (*kurkar*) blocks, with no consolidation materials. It was founded on a natural layer of sand; no signs of a foundation trench were detected. This wall appears to have been a foundation built below ground level, as part of a substructure, as no entrances or adjoined installations were found. Clusters of stones found near W113 (L120, L131) and in other squares (L114, L213), some of which appeared to be arranged in a line, may be the debris of the same architectural complex or the remains of poorly constructed walls of another structure. The exposed remains might represent a dwelling or a storage structure. They are less likely to have been part of a terrace



Fig. 3. Wall 113, looking north.



Fig. 4. Wall 113, with its three preserved courses in the southern end, looking southeast.

wall or a fence delineating a field, as the construction quality of W113 exceeds that of a typical agricultural feature. The finds from the layer abutting W113 include pottery from the third and second centuries BCE (not illustrated), and a third-century BCE coin of Ptolemy I (see Kool, this volume: Cat. No. 1).

An apparent corner of another structure (W106) was exposed east of W113 (Fig. 5). A single course remains of this wall, which was dry-built of roughly-cut and tightly-packed sandstone blocks. Pottery from accumulations to the north of W106 was dated to the Hellenistic period, including a complete mortarium found in L129 (Fig. 6; see Gendelman, this volume: Fig. 4:4). A Ptolemaic coin, with no identifiable ruler, was also found in that locus (see Kool, this volume: Cat. No. 2).

No building remains were exposed east of W106, but a large amount of Hellenistic pottery and stone scatters found in this area may indicate that buildings once stood there as well. The soil in this part of the site was heavy and viscous, possibly the result of seasonal flooding after the period of occupation, which could have contributed to the disintegration of the architectural remains.

A large, shallow, irregularly-shaped pit (L216; diam. c. 6 m, 0.6 m deep) was discovered in Area B, northeast of W113 (Fig. 7). It was filled and sealed with an accumulation of ash containing bits of clay, 0.1–0.3 m deep. The bottom of the pit was made of tamped earth, 0.1–0.3 m thick, laid over the natural sand (Fig. 8). The ash fill contained a large quantity of Hellenistic-period pottery, comprising vessel types that were found throughout the site (Gendelman, this volume: Figs. 2:9, 10; 3:5–11; 5:5; 6:5), as well as glass (see Ouahnouna,



Fig. 5. Wall 106, looking southwest.



Fig. 6. *In situ* Hellenistic mortarium (L129), looking east.



Fig. 7. Ash layer within a large and shallow pit (L216), looking east.



Fig. 8. Bottom of large ash pit, looking south.

this volume), metal and clay objects (see Figs. 11, 12). The bones of domesticated species and shells were also found in this pit (see Marom, this volume; Ktalav, this volume).

It is reasonable to suggest that the pit served for the disposal and burning of waste from the adjacent buildings. Given the absence of industrial waste, such as slags from a smelting installation or deformed pottery sherds, the pit did not serve as a furnace. The possibility of a destruction event at the site was also ruled out, as no evidence for such an event (e.g., ash remains) was identified in other parts of the site. A Seleucid coin found above the ash fill (see Kool, this volume: Cat. No. 3) may indicate the latest use of the pit.

STRATUM II: THE BYZANTINE PERIOD

Most of the Byzantine-period pottery and glass sherds originated in two squares in the eastern end of Area B (L210, L215; Plan 1), at an elevation approximately 1 m above the adjacent Hellenistic-period remains. The upper part of the Byzantine layer comprised dark soft soil, below which was a light-colored soil, mixed with small stones. Despite the large pottery assemblage found within this layer, it lacked affiliated walls or occupation levels. The Byzantine pottery (see Gendelman, this volume: Fig. 9) may have accumulated over centuries of agricultural activity, or was brought in with fill material to thicken and enrich the soil. It should be noted that a similar pottery assemblage from this period was documented in excavations nearby (Permit No. A-7071; Lior Rauchberger, pers. comm.)

STRATUM I: THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD

Buildings of the Ottoman period still remain standing west of the site, among them the recently renovated Al-Siksik Mosque. Two north–south walls (W138 and W139; Plan 1) of another Ottoman-period building were exposed during mechanical works prior to the excavation. The walls consisted of cut and uncut *kurkar* blocks, consolidated with dense red clay, the typical construction method of large buildings of the late Ottoman period in Yafo. Ten courses of W138 (approximately 0.8 m wide) were exposed in its southern part (Fig. 9), while only one to three courses remained of W139 (Fig. 10), of which the precise width could not be determined. The proximity of the two walls, and their similar orientation and style of construction indicate that they were part of a single building or building complex, whose function and plan could not be reconstructed from the remains.

The Ottoman-period ceramic assemblage includes mostly body sherds of Gaza Ware and plain ware vessels from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries CE, as well as sherds of imported pseudo-porcelain tableware (see Fig. 13).

THE FINDS

The rich pottery assemblage from Hellenistic-period Stratum III comprised local household vessels, as well as imported fine tableware and containers (see Gendelman, this volume,



Fig. 9. Remains of late Ottoman-period W138, looking south.



Fig. 10. Foundations of late Ottoman-period W139, looking north.

Figs. 2–8). Among the numerous sherds of imported amphorae were 11 stamped handles dating between the late fifth and the late second century BCE, originating from production centers mainly in the eastern Mediterranean but also in its western regions (see Finkielsztejn, this volume: Cat. Nos. 10–19, 22). The Stratum III numismatic finds include two Ptolemaic coins, one Seleucid coin and a fourth coin that was barely identifiable and could be generally attributed to the Hellenistic period (see Kool, this volume); all four coins date between the third and first century BCE. Additionally, the large Stratum III pit in Area B yielded several noteworthy artifacts: a double-faced glass pendant and a possible glass seal (see Ouahnouna, this volume: Fig. 1), parallels for which could be found in contexts of the sixth–third centuries BCE; an intact bronze pin (Fig. 11), possibly for the preparation of fishing nets; and a clay roller from an unknown device (Fig. 12). A small mollusk assemblage (see Ktalav, this volume) and the faunal remains of farm animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, equids, dogs and pigs, and a wild species, gazelle (see Marom, this volume) were also found in the pit.

The pottery of Byzantine-period Stratum II included mostly sherds of bag-shaped jars of the sixth and seventh centuries CE (see Gendelman, this volume: Fig. 9:10, 11), while additional finds include cooking pots, mortaria and antilia vessels from the late fourth/early fifth to the seventh century CE (see Gendelman, this volume: Fig. 9:6–9). Glass fragments dating to the Byzantine period were also found (see Ouahnouna, this volume). The presence

of mortaria of a North Syrian source (see Gendelman, this volume: Fig. 9:6, 7) and of a Nilotic species of mollusc (see Ktalav, this volume) is evidence of trade activities.

The majority of the late Ottoman-period Stratum I pottery assemblage consisted of common household vessels of local production, while a few imported pseudo-porcelain bowl sherds from the mid-nineteenth century CE were also present. Among the imported bowls were sherds decorated in the Flow Blue technique, probably of English provenance (Neale 2005:135; Fig. 13:1–4). One of these sherds displays a Chinese figure with a stereotypical hairstyle (Fig. 13:1). The decoration of the bowls conforms with the *Chinoiserie* fashion of the period—the European manufacture of domestic objects in a supposedly oriental style (Neale 2005:81–86). A fragment of a roof tile carrying a stamp with the image of a bear



Fig. 11. Complete bronze pin from the ash pit.



Fig. 12. Ceramic roller from the bottom of the ash pit.

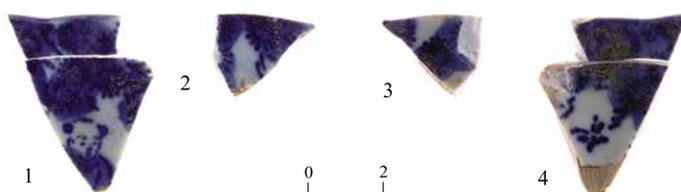


Fig. 13. Sherds of an English(?) pseudo-porcelain bowl in *Chinoiserie* style.

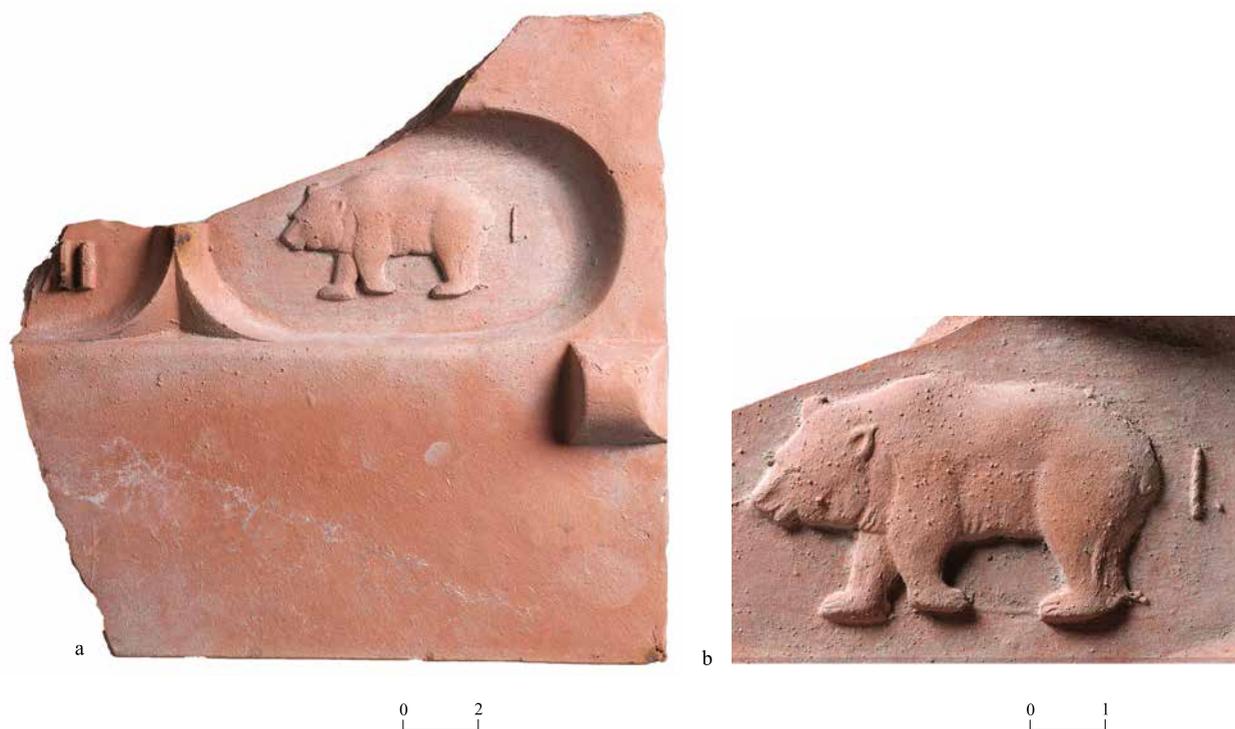


Fig. 14. A roof tile with a bear stamp (a) and detail (b).

(Fig. 14) was also retrieved during the mechanized ground clearance. This stamp does not belong to the known producers of Marseille, the source of most of the roof tiles imported to this region in the Ottoman period; the roof tile may, therefore, belong to an unidentified factory from the British Mandate period.

The finds from the excavations also included a few sherds of bowls, cooking pots, jars and a lamp from the Early Roman period, dated between the end of the first century BCE and the early second century CE (see Gendelman, this volume: Fig. 9:1–5); sherds of amphorae, a cooking pot and a krater dated to Iron Age II–III (eighth–sixth centuries BCE, see Gendelman, this volume: Fig. 1:1–4); and a large flint sickle blade (L176, B1179; see Appendix 1), which may also date to the Iron Age. The presence of Iron Age and Early Roman artifacts likely represents limited activity or secondary deposition in areas outside the city boundaries. It should be noted that Iron Age architecture and artifacts are not commonly found at sites located outside the mound of Yafo (see Rauchberger 2015; Jakoel and Marcus 2017:44).

CONCLUSIONS

The excavation on Ben Gamli'el Street exposed occupation remains from the Hellenistic and late Ottoman periods. The evidence for a Hellenistic-period occupation at the site is on a par

with the results of other excavations conducted in the areas surrounding the ancient mound of Tel Yafo. These remains included structures and numerous burials, evincing a major expansion of the settlement east of the mound, the result of economic and demographic growth (Avner-Levy 1998; Peilstöcker et al. 2006; Arbel 2008; 2017:68–70; Peilstöcker and Burke 2011:179; Barkan and Buchenino 2012; Jakoel 2016; Glick 2017; Arbel and Rauchberger, this volume [a]; Michal Marmelstein, pers. comm., Permit No. A-8477). Additional Hellenistic-period remains were uncovered somewhat farther away from the mound, and outside the enlarged urban area of the new Hellenistic lower city, probably representing farmsteads (Haddad 2010; Arbel 2012; Jakoel and Marcus 2017:44–46).

The Hellenistic-period occupation on Ben Gamli'el Street, which according to ceramic evidence had Persian-period origins, appears to have persisted during both the Ptolemaic (third century BCE) and Seleucid (second century BCE) periods. The presence of pig bones in the deposits dated to these periods (18% of the overall assemblage), including at least one bone with butchery marks (see Marom, this volume), indicates the pagan identity of the inhabitants of the site at that time. The site appears to have been gradually abandoned during the second half of the second century BCE. This might be due to the ongoing conflicts between the Hasmonean Jews and Yafo's pagan population (II Maccabees 12:3–7; I Maccabees 10:75–76; 12:33–34). Following the final takeover of Yafo, the Hasmoneans enacted a policy of expelling non-Jewish populations and replacing them with Jews (I Maccabees 13:11), eventually resulting in a predominantly Jewish presence that was confined to the mound. The eastern outskirts of Yafo were subsequently abandoned in the first century BCE, and remained that way until the Byzantine period. Previous excavations at Yafo have also shown that the town of the Hasmonean and Roman periods contracted once again into the confines of the ancient mound; there is no evidence for the presence of farming communities outside the mound at that time.

The finds from the present excavation, together with the remains of olive- and winepresses found in excavations at the Flea Market (Peilstöcker et al. 2006) and the Magen Avraham Compound (Arbel and Rauchberger, this volume [b]), indicate intensive agricultural activities and industries during the Byzantine period in this area, which served as a hinterland at that time.

Urban construction outside the mound resumed on a large scale in the late Ottoman and British Mandate periods, replacing the former orchards and plantations (Kark 1990:100–106; Goren 2016:192–196).

APPENDIX 1: AN IRON AGE FLINT BLADE

Polina Spivak

A fragment of a large trapezoid-shaped sickle blade with one glossed working edge (Fig. 15) was found in the excavation. Its trapezoid shape was the result of truncations on both ends.

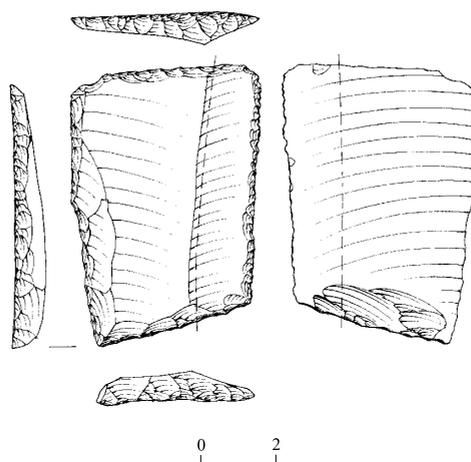


Fig. 15. Iron Age flint sickle blade.

Such large geometric sickle blades are known from the Middle Bronze Age through the mid-Iron Age, and were finally replaced by iron-made equivalents in the late Iron Age. These sickles, of which the manufacture was based on the flake-blade technology, are wider than those from earlier periods (Rosen 1997:140). Their chaîne opératoire remains unclear as no workshops for their primary production have been found. Indirect evidence that these large sickles were produced by specialists was found in the caches of blanks from the manufacturing process from Tel Gezer (Rosen 1986) and Tel Dan (Rosen 1997:143).

The artifact from Ben Gamli'el Street is provisionally assigned to the Iron Age based on the presence of Iron Age II pottery sherds (see Gendelman, this volume), and the absence of Middle Bronze Age material at the site.

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