

EXCAVATIONS AT SHIQMONA—1994

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INTRODUCTION

During the year 1994 two short seasons of excavation took place at the site of Shiqmona, situated on the outskirts of modern-day Haifa, on the northwestern tip of the Carmel Coast (map ref. NIG 1962/7479; OIG 1462/2479).¹ The excavation was carried out as part of the widening of the railway track on the Tel Aviv–Haifa line, which passes along the eastern edge of the site; thus, the excavation area was confined to a narrow strip (over 300 m long) on either side of the track (Figs. 1, 2). The excavation area along the railway track is located some 200 m east of

Tel Shiqmona (Tell es-Semak, Tell es-Samak). Excavations, carried out by Joseph Elgavish at the same site some 20 years ago, revealed that Byzantine Shiqmona expanded onto the plain to the south and east of the tell (Elgavish 1993; 1994:109–110). According to contemporary sources, Byzantine-period Shiqmona was a Jewish settlement and a way station on the coast (Tsafrir, Di Segni and Green 1994:237). Elgavish's excavations exposed streets, houses, shops and industrial installations. On the basis of these finds the excavator originally estimated the area of Byzantine Shiqmona as at least 220 dunams (Elgavish 1993:1373), although he



Fig. 1. Aerial photograph of Shiqmona, view to the east (photo by Zeev Radovan).

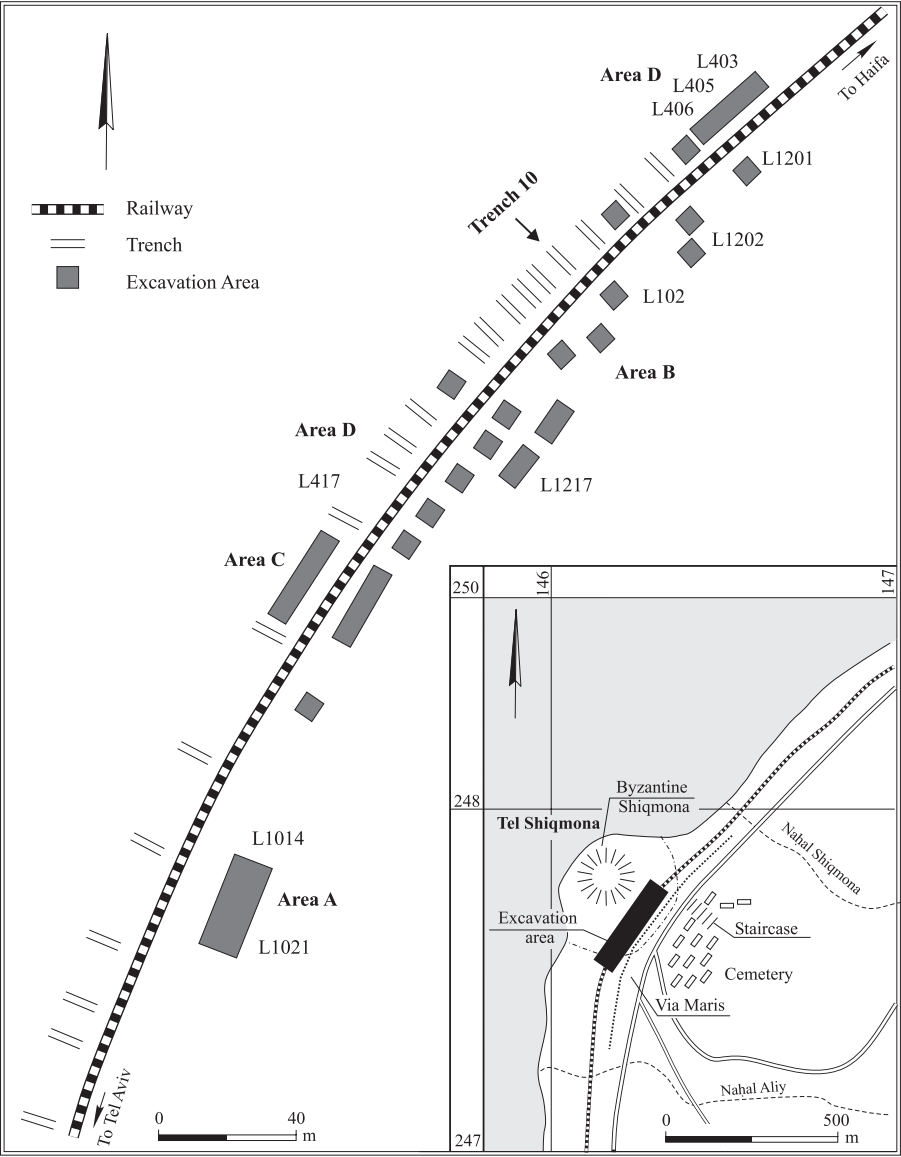


Fig. 2. Location map of the site and the excavation areas.

later suggested a more modest figure of 110 dunams (Elgavish 1994:109). Our excavations indicate that Byzantine Shiqmona was in fact much smaller.

DESCRIPTION OF THE REMAINS

Based on the estimation of the former excavator, Elgavish, and on the distribution of sherds on the surface, the area designated for excavation along the railway line reached about 600 m to

the south of the tell. However, immediately on commencement of the excavation it became apparent that the original estimate of the area was considerably exaggerated. In most of the probes in the southern part of the site, there were no remains other than sherds scattered across the surface (see Fig. 2). To clarify the situation, about 30 trial trenches were opened by backhoe along the western side of the railway track at intervals of c. 10 and 12 m. The more distant trenches to the south of the tell revealed

an agricultural area with no architectural remains whatsoever; the numerous sherds on the surface probably resulted from the intentional spreading of soil from the tell to improve soil quality in the fields. According to the description of Victor Guérin, who visited the site in the 1870s, the area to the south of Tel Shiqmona was under agricultural use (Guérin 1875:275–276) and thus the spreading of soil from the ancient tell by local farmers could have taken place at any time over the past generations or in ancient times.²

The results of the trial trenches enabled us to identify four areas that contained archaeological remains (see Fig. 2): Areas A and B east of the railway tracks, and Areas C and D west of the tracks.

Area A

This area contains the southernmost remains of Byzantine Shiqmona, some 300 m south of the tell. Along the section, which borders the excavation area to the west, the remains of a marble and mosaic floor could be seen at a depth of 0.6 m beneath the surface (L1014; Fig. 3). During the excavation it became apparent that the walls of the building had not survived and the stones had been reused in later periods. The floor was poorly preserved and only fragments of the paving slabs remained. The slabs were made of gray marble, 2–3 cm thick, and were laid in a generally east–west direction. According to the depressions between the paving slabs, their width can be estimated at 0.7–0.9 m. Their length could not be ascertained.



Fig. 3. Section in Area A, looking northeast.

The foundation of the floor consisted of two layers: a lower layer (0.1 m thick) made up of medium-sized fieldstones (5–7 cm) covered with white plaster, over which was an additional layer of plaster (7 cm thick), on which the slabs were laid. On the floor were sherds dating to the sixth–seventh centuries CE, glass tesserae and many fragments of roof tiles.

In the southernmost squares of Area A segments of two mosaic floors were uncovered (L1021). Only a comparatively small part of the northernmost floor has survived (0.6×0.7 m), consisting of coarse, white tesserae. The foundation layer is composed of small pebbles and white plaster.

Two segments of a colored mosaic from the southernmost floor have survived on an east–west axis (Fig. 4). These two segments, the one to the west measuring 0.9×1.5 m and that to the east measuring 1.2×3.1 m, were part of a large floor, most of which is missing. The same design of a decorated frame bordered by two black lines appears in both segments, evidence that they were part of the same floor (Fig. 5). The design is 0.65 m wide and is made up of interconnected half-circles in a broad range of colors: green, yellow, black, brown, red and white. At the points where they connect, concave diamond shapes interchange with ellipses. North of this decorated frame are four toothed diamonds that



Fig. 4. Segment of a colored mosaic floor uncovered in Area A, looking west.

formed part of the (central?) decoration of the floor.

Adjacent to the colored mosaic floor a finely-dressed doorpost was found, not *in situ* (0.25×0.50 m). The finds above the mosaic floor were similar to those found above the marble floor: Byzantine sherds and fragments of roof tiles. These finds, like the quality of the floors, are evidence of the importance and luxury of the building in Area A. Due to the lack of walls it was impossible to determine the plan of the building or its components.

Area B

In this area, east of the railway tracks (230 m in length), 16 squares were opened (see Fig. 2); however, only four revealed architectural remains. The southernmost of the four squares (L1217) is located 130 m to the north of the

remains in Area A. In this square a segment of a floor was discerned, of which three limestone ashlarls survived *in situ*, 0.5 m below the surface (Fig. 6). They measure 0.3×0.5 m and are 0.15 m thick.

In the square south of L1217 a horizontal layer of packed, chalky soil was noted. The level of this layer is the same as the top of the stone floor. Below this level are numerous Byzantine sherds but no architectural remains. The absence of walls suggests the possibility that the chalky layer and perhaps the segments of paving were part of an ancient road that passed along the eastern periphery of Byzantine Shiqmona.

At the center of L102, located 70 m to the north of L1217, two worked stones were exposed, one beside the other (Fig. 7), each measuring 0.3×0.7 m and 0.35 m thick. Together

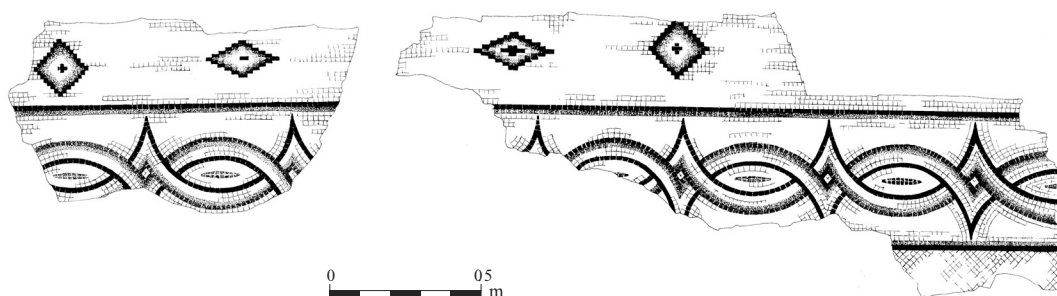


Fig. 5. Sketch of the colored mosaic in Area A.



Fig. 6. Segments of floors in section in Area B, looking east.



Fig. 7. Pier base in Area B (L102), looking north.

they formed the base of a pier measuring 0.6×0.7 m. The stones lie on bedrock which in this square is 0.7 m below the surface.

At the center of L1202, located c. 30 m north of L102, three pairs of ashlar were laid one on top of the other (Fig. 8). They are of the same dimensions as the stones in L102 and together they form a pier that measures 0.6×0.7 m and reaches c. 0.8 m high. The lowest stone is c. 1.2 m below the surface (Plan 1), embedded in a 0.2–0.4 m thick level, which contained

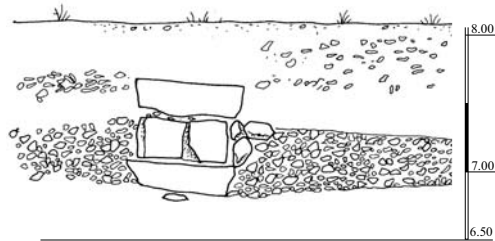


Fig. 8. Pier in Area B (L1202), looking east.

Byzantine sherds. However, other than the scattered sherds and the pier, nothing else was found in this square.

The discovery of the pier and pier base aligned on a basically north–south line suggests a connection between them. It is possible that they functioned as markers along the above-mentioned road or the borders of the settlement.

The fourth square in Area B, which contained architectural remains (L1201), is situated 25 m north of L1202. In this square, part of a wall and above it a section of a mosaic pavement were uncovered (Fig. 9). The wall (W51), on a generally north–south alignment, measures



Plan 1. Area B, section of the pier (L1202), looking south.



Fig. 9. Fragment of a mosaic floor collapsed upon W51, looking northeast.

0.7 m wide and is preserved to a length of 2.7 m. One course of stones survived, constructed of uniform limestone ashlars, each measuring 0.3×0.7 m and 0.2 m thick. Wall 51 stands on a foundation at elevation 7.72 (Plan 2), which contained sherds of Byzantine date. Floating about 0.5 m above the wall, over a layer of rubble debris, is a mosaic fragment. The discovery of the mosaic above the rubble layer suggests the possibility that the building to which W51 belonged had two stories. If so, the mosaic originated in the upper story and fell onto the collapsed ground-floor wall.

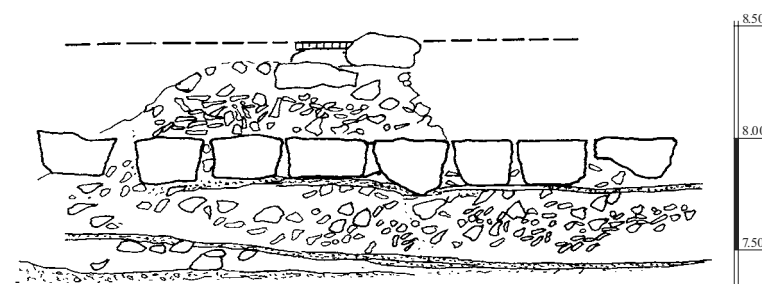
Area C

The squares of Area C are situated to the west of the railway track, c. 100 m to the north of Area A and c. 60 m southwest of the southern square

in Area B. The wall fragments excavated in Area C are in extremely poor condition (Fig. 10; Plan 3). The walls were constructed of worked limestone blocks averaging 0.6 m in width and have survived to a height of one or two courses. The foundations of the walls rest directly on bedrock, which had been leveled with soil and packed rubble. The poor condition of the walls does not permit reconstruction of the building's plan. Coins and sherds that were found between the walls and close to the foundations are of Byzantine date.

Area D

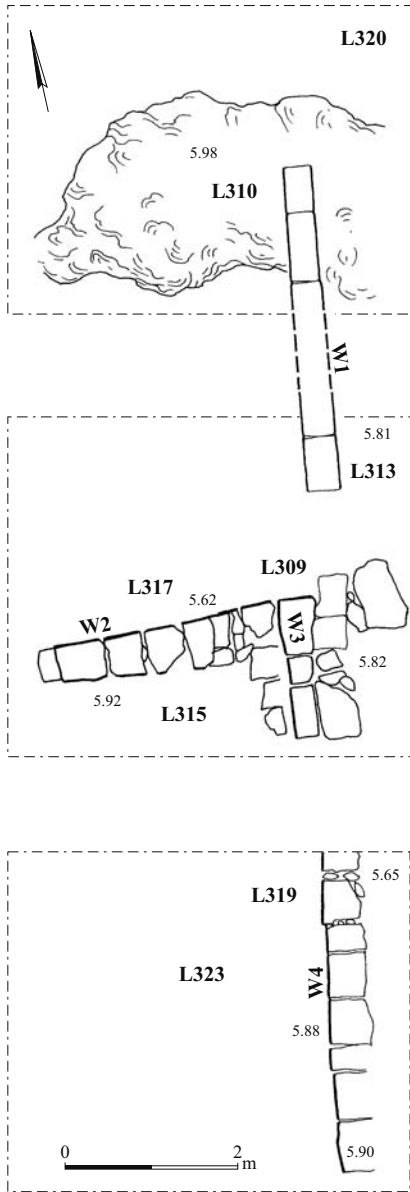
The finds in Area D, like those of Area C, consist of fragments of Byzantine structures. The southernmost square of Area D, where finds were uncovered (L417), is c. 10 m north of



Plan 2. Area B, section showing W51 and part of the mosaic floor above it.

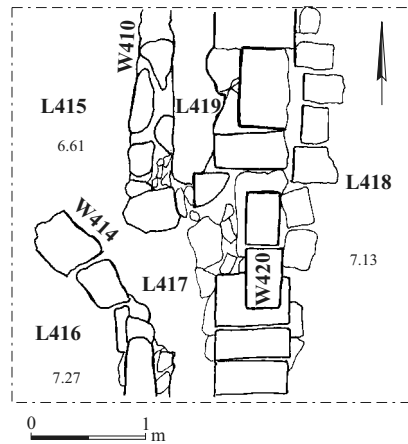


Fig. 10. Remains of walls in Area C, looking southeast.



Plan 3. Plan of Area C.

Area C. In this square, part of a poorly-preserved wall (W420) was exposed, 0.7 m wide (Plan 4; Fig. 11), of which one to two courses have survived. The foundation course (at elevation 7.13) rests on a packed ash layer containing numerous Byzantine sherds. The wall lies on a north–south axis and its stones were tooled in a similar manner to the other walls uncovered in the excavation.



Plan 4. Plan of the remains in L417, Area D.



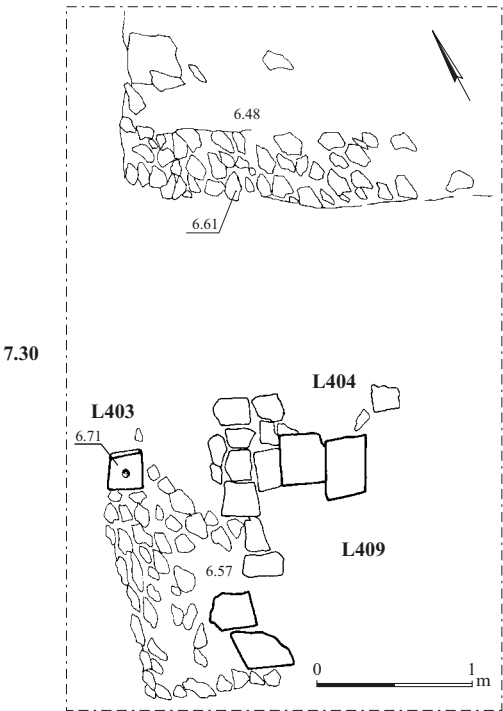
Fig. 11. Remains of W420 in Area D, looking east.

To the west of W420 a narrow curved wall was discovered (W414). This wall is 0.3 m thick and was apparently part of an installation. Of the northern continuation of W420 only the foundation survives, at elevation 7.07 m, constructed of fieldstones and packed rubble.

The northern squares of Area D, in which architectural remains were found (Loci 403–406), are located 150 m north of L417. The finds in these squares include fragments of flooring and an unidentified installation constructed in the floor foundation, which includes a stone with a hole in its center (Fig. 12; Plan 5). The dimensions of the stone are 0.20×0.22 m and the diameter of the hole is 5 cm. The stone lies



Fig. 12. Installation containing a stone with a hole, in the north of Area D, looking east.



Plan 5. Plan of the installation in northern Area D and the remains alongside it.

in a packed rubble fill, which apparently formed part of the floor foundation. Continuing the foundation at elevation 6.57 m was a platform of worked stones. On the foundation and the platform were found sherds of Byzantine date, as well as a considerable quantity of glass slag, thus the installation may have been part of a glass factory.

To the south of the installation a fine floor combining segments of mosaic and marble paving, similar to the floor in the Area A building, was exposed (L405). The floor is in poor condition (Fig. 13). The direction of the mosaic design and the nearby marble slabs indicate that both floor segments belonged to the same building (Plan 6).

In the surviving mosaic segment (L405), measuring 2.0 × 2.5 m, a frame can be seen consisting of an interwoven design and to its east is a simple pattern of arches and flowers. The colors of the mosaic are white, red and black. Of the marble paving (L406), an area of 2 × 2 m was exposed. The slabs were placed one beside

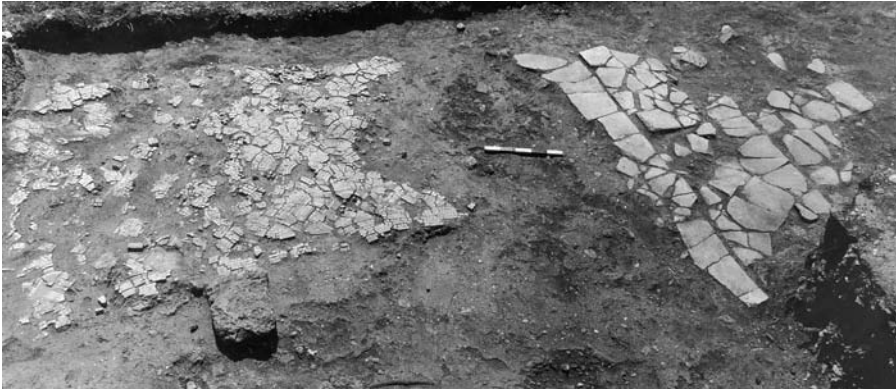
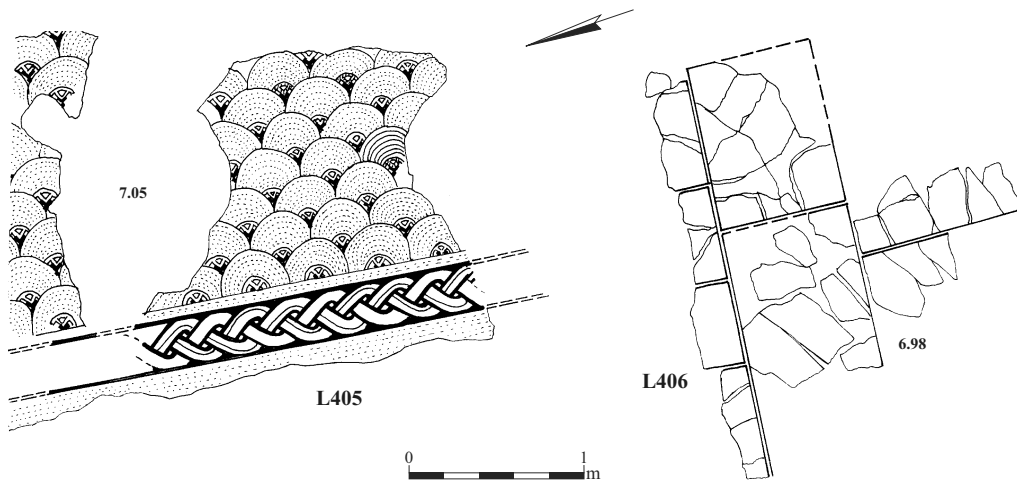


Fig. 13. Remnants of a mosaic and marble floor in the north of Area D, looking east.

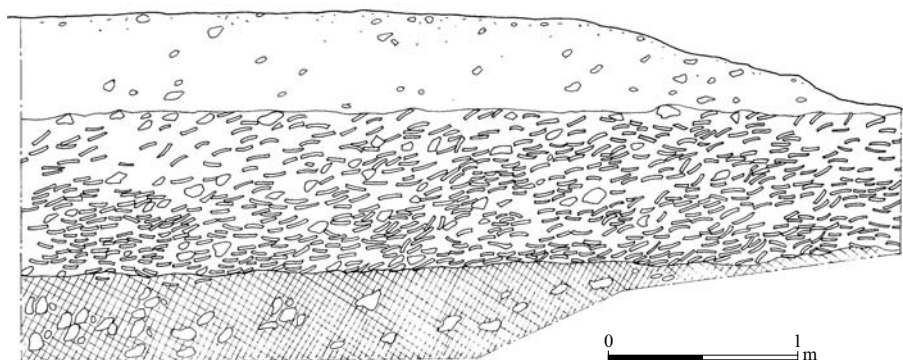


Plan 6. Plan of the floor fragments.

the other in a general east–west direction. The slabs measure 0.7 m wide and 2–3 cm thick; their length was not determined. They are made of gray-colored marble, identical to that of the floor in Area A. On the surface of the floor, at elevation 7.05, coins and sherds of Byzantine date were found. The marble and mosaic floor is evidence of the high quality of construction.

Between Areas C and D, 13 trial trenches were opened with mechanical equipment. In most of these trenches the finds consisted of isolated

sherds. Only in Trench 10 was a rich deposit of Byzantine sherds uncovered (Plan 7; see Fig. 1), 0.8 m thick, located 0.5 m below the surface. Under this layer was sterile, brown-colored soil. On the basis of the large amount of sherds on the one hand, and the lack of walls on the other, it is reasonable to assume that this was a refuse dump. This further strengthens the theory that the excavated area was on the eastern periphery of Byzantine Shiqmona, an area of open spaces between buildings and occasional waste dumps.



Plan 7. The northern section of Trench 10.

DISCUSSION

The finds from the excavation along the railway track were extremely meager, especially in comparison with the rich finds from the excavations of Elgavish in the area adjacent to the tell. However, in spite of the poor finds, it is possible to draw a number of conclusions of some importance regarding the nature and size of this site.

Firstly, the architectural remains represent a single occupation level of the Byzantine period. This conclusion is supported both by the numismatic and ceramic evidence. The vast majority of the coins found in the excavated areas are of mid-fourth to late seventh century CE date. In all, 35 of 40 coins (87.5%) found in stratified deposits of the excavation date to this period. Approximately half of these (15 coins) are of sixth-century date, while nine coins date to the fourth and fifth centuries CE. This points to a flowering of the settlement at Shiqmona toward the end of the Byzantine period. Of the remaining coins, one is Roman (early third century CE) and several date to the Early Islamic period and the Middle Ages (see Amitai-Preiss, this volume).

The evidence from the ceramic finds matches that of the numismatic finds. The vast majority of the ceramics found in the excavation date to the sixth and seventh centuries (see Amir, this volume). Most of the material (over 80%) is imported ware, including bowls and basins that

were manufactured in Cyprus, Syria and North Africa. This type of assemblage is evidence of Shiqmona's coastal location and its role as a port of call for passing trade ships. Elgavish reached the same conclusions following his excavations, which concentrated on areas to the south and east of the tell. According to him, the architectural remains in these areas belonged to a single period of prosperity, which began in the fourth century and reached its peak in the sixth, then declined in the early seventh century CE (Elgavish 1993:1377). In the historical sources, Shiqmona in this period is described as a settlement and way station on the coast between 'Akko and Caesarea. The Bourdeaux pilgrim in 333 CE mentions Shiqmona as a stopping point close to Mount Carmel (*Itinerarium Burdigalense* 584, 2). The Church Father Eusebius, at the beginning of the same century, mentions Shiqmona as a village on the coast between 'Akko and Caesarea (*Eusebius, Onomasticon* 108, 30).

In a later source from the second half of the sixth century, a pilgrim known as Antonimus of Placentia mentions Shiqmona as a settlement of Jews (*Civitatem Sucamina Iudaeorum*) situated on the coast (*Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 3). This important information, which hints at the ethnic makeup of the local population, is supported by two additional sources, unrelated to each another. One is a historical source known as 'Jacob's Doctrine' (*Doctrina Iacobi*), dating to the beginning of the seventh century

CE (Avi-Yonah 1976:254–255), in which the Jews of Shiqmona are clearly mentioned a number of times (*Doctrina Iacobi* III, 2; IV, 1). The second source is a bronze standard that was recently retrieved from the sea opposite ‘Atlit (Ullman and Galili 1994). On one side of the standard the name Shiqmona is mentioned and on the other are depicted decidedly Jewish symbols: menorah, *lulav* and *shofar*. Thus, Byzantine Shiqmona was apparently settled by Jews.

This conclusion is in opposition to the conclusions of Elgavish, who interpreted one of the buildings in the area to the south of the tell as a chapel that “belonged to a very large Christian monastery situated there” (Elgavish 1994:110–111). This is, in our opinion, an unacceptable statement. It is known from other places (for example, southern Judea and eastern Galilee) that monks did not set up monasteries in areas that were settled by Jews.³ Elgavish bases his identification of the chapel at Shiqmona on the semi-circular wall and a reliquary chest, which according to him were found at the site. However, this evidence (which is mentioned but not presented), is insufficient to prove the presence of a Christian monastery in Byzantine Shiqmona.

Furthermore, finds such as oil lamps bearing various cross designs are not proof for the statement “towards the end of the Byzantine period a large Christian community was established there” (Elgavish 1994:143). Artifacts decorated with motifs such as crosses and menorahs have been found at many sites, both Christian and Jewish. We should take into account that the various finds—lamps, ceramic and bowls—could have been used by all, regardless of religious persuasion. In our excavation as well, a lamp decorated with a cross was found (L327). It would be unacceptable to base the presence of a Christian community on this alone. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that, as was typically the case in villages of the Byzantine period, the settlers of Shiqmona were all of the same religion, that is, Judaism.

A second conclusion that arises from our excavations concerns the area of the site. We are able to scale down considerably the area of Byzantine Shiqmona in comparison with the conclusions of Elgavish. In the trial trenches on the western side of the railway track, the Byzantine remains did not extend beyond Areas C and D. To the east of the track, no architectural remains were uncovered (Area B) except for the building in Area A, which in our opinion was situated outside the settlement (see below). On the basis of these results, we suggest that Byzantine Shiqmona covered an area with a diameter of no more than 250 m (see Fig. 1), including the excavation area of Elgavish to the north, east and south of the tell, as well as Areas C and D of our excavation. Thus, the overall area of Byzantine Shiqmona was no more than c. 50 dunams (12.5 acres), that is, less than half of Elgavish’s minimal estimate (Hirschfeld 1997:45–46).

The estimated area of Shiqmona as c. 50 dunams accords well with what we know of villages in the Byzantine period. For comparison, Ḥorbat Sumaqa, a Jewish settlement on the Carmel, spread over an area of c. 35 dunams (Dar 1993:1415), and Merot in the Upper Galilee covered an area of 48 dunams (Ilan 1993:1029). Thus, Shiqmona can be defined as a large village, based on both area and quality of construction, a definition which accords with its description as a “village” in the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius (see above).

The remains of the building in Area A represent, on the one hand, a magnificent structure, as can be seen from the mosaic and marble floors and the small finds, which include roof tiles and glass tesserae. On the other hand, it would appear that this building stood alone, considering that in the area of over 100 m between this building and the buildings in Areas C and D, no finds whatsoever were recovered in spite of intensive examination. What then was the function of the magnificent structure that stood, as it would appear, outside the settled area of Shiqmona? It is possible that

it functioned as a hostel. This supposition is supported by the presence of the road, remains of which were found in Area B; this road may have been part of the Via Maris that passed between Shiqmona and the Carmel Range. The location of the building alongside the road strengthens the theory that it was the hostel mentioned in the sources. Nonetheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that the building was part of a villa, that is, a magnificent domestic structure constructed in the proximity of the village.

The architectural remains in Areas C and D, to the west of the railway tracks, may be interpreted as domestic buildings on the outskirts of Byzantine Shiqmona. As the trial trenches revealed that there were areas with no construction whatsoever, it is evident that the periphery of the village was not bordered by a line of buildings or a wall, but rather unconnected buildings, which thinned out toward the edge of the settlement. Between these houses were the cultivated fields of the settlement and, in places (as in Trench 10), refuse dumps.

In this connection, the remains of the building exposed in the excavations of Moshe Dothan in the 1950s at the site of Sha'ar Ha-'Aliya near Shiqmona should be mentioned (Dothan 1955).

The excavator identified the building as a monastery. On the mosaic floor of the building two inscriptions were found. In one, a priest is mentioned (presbyter) in association with a cross. The second inscription reads: "This is the place of lucky days" (Dothan 1955:100). In another excavation, a chapel was found close to the remains exposed by Dothan (Peleg 1988:25–27). It has been assumed that this chapel was part of the above-mentioned monastery in the Byzantine period. A monastery close to a Jewish village, similar to the one found at Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, is not impossible.

The remains of the road in Area B accord well with the topography of the site. The main road, the Via Maris, would have passed between Byzantine Shiqmona (Areas C and D) and the Carmel slopes only some 50 m to the east. Not by chance, both the modern road and the railway line to Haifa pass along this route. On the slopes of the Carmel opposite Shiqmona, Elgavish uncovered 13 burial caves of Byzantine date (Elgavish 1994:148–158), part of the cemetery of the village. This find completes our knowledge of Shiqmona in the period discussed here.

NOTES

¹ The excavation was conducted on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority in March and October 1994 (Permit No. A-2104). The excavation team included Yizhar Hirschfeld (general director), Roni Amir, Ummeima Faran, Sarrie Pinkas, Amit Romano and Kattie Raphael (area supervisors), Sandu Mendrea (photography), and Raz Niculescu (surveying). This was an emergency salvage excavation confined to an area destined for construction. In this case the area of excavation was 50 m wide, lying on either side of a railway line, the length of the area determined by the finds exposed during excavation.

² This phenomenon has been recorded at many sites in Israel (for example in the survey maps Ziqim and

Ashqelon in which I took part together with Ariel Berman in the early 1970s) and can be the cause of extreme errors in both the estimation of site area and date (see also Feliks 1990:92–93).

³ In the southern Judean Desert the monks resisted establishing monasteries in areas adjacent to the "southern" Jewish settlements (see Hirschfeld 1987:85). From archaeological research in the Galilee it appears that the Christians resisted setting up monasteries or churches in the area of eastern Galilee that was settled by Jews (see Aviam 1993:458).

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