

## FRAGMENTS OF A ROMAN-PERIOD WALL PAINTING AT 'EN YA'AL (NAḤAL REFA'IM), JERUSALEM

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Seventy-five painted plaster fragments (Table 1) were found in a Roman villa excavated on the northern bank of Naḥal Refa'im (see Weksler-Bdolah, this volume). Most of the fragments were found above the mosaic floor in the southern room (L1031; see Talgam, this volume) and near the room's walls (W11–13).

The painted plaster fragments exhibit a mediocre standard of workmanship. Two or three layers of plaster of different thickness were discerned. The lower layers are 1–3 cm

thick, with an irregular and coarse texture, sometimes consisting of gravel, coarse sand, reeds and even small stone fragments. The uppermost, painted layer (0.5 cm thick) is finer in texture, yet not completely smooth. The paint on the upper layer does not penetrate the plaster's surface, indicating that it was applied when the plaster was dry. Brush strokes were discerned on some of the fragments, especially in the painted bands. The paint application technique was poor, probably the product

**Table 1. Catalogue of Painted Plaster Fragments**

No.	Fig.	Description	Dimensions (cm)
1–5		White	c. 1.5 × 2.0, 2.0 × 2.5, 2 × 3
6		White with remains of a dull red band (0.3 cm wide)	c. 2 × 2
7, 8	1	White with vestiges of a black band (0.8–1.0 cm wide)	1.7 × 2.0, 2.2 × 2.8
9, 10	2	Dull red	2.0 × 2.8, 3.0 × 3.6
11–16		Red	< 2 × 2
17		Purple–red	1.5 × 1.5
18–21		White/pink, perhaps originally dull red	< 2.5 × 2.5
22, 23	3	Dark green	c. 1.5 × 1.5
24, 25		Dark green, one with remains of white on one side	0.6 × 1.5, 1.5 × 2.0
26–62		Light green	2 × 3, 2.5 × 3.0, 3 × 3, 3.0 × 4.5, 3.5 × 4.0; the rest are < 3 × 3
63–68	4	Light green with vestiges of red lines and bands (0.2–0.7 cm wide)	1.0 × 1.5, 1.5 × 1.5, 1.7 × 1.7, 3.0 × 3.8, 3.7 × 3.5, 4.0 × 4.3
69		Light green with remains of a black decoration	1.6 × 2.5
70, 71		Light green with remains of a black decoration, and a black band (1 cm wide)	1.2 × 1.7, 2.0 × 3.5
72		Light green with a red spot; slightly curved	1.5 × 2.0
73–75		Black	< 1 × 1

of a local workshop, which did not have the expertise that was known in the country during the Herodian and Early Roman periods (Rozenberg 2008:247–282).

The fragments are painted in basic colors with no brilliancy: dull, opaque shades of white, red, green and black. White seems to have been used as a background color in panels decorated with red or black bands (Fig. 1). It is a natural color that was probably made from white chalk or some form of calcium carbonate, usually obtained from dolomite or calcite. A few fragments indicate the existence of large areas painted in red (Fig. 2), which was the preferred color in the painting of murals during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. It is a natural earth pigment, probably made from hematite or red ocher. The fragments contain two shades of green, light and dark (Fig. 3), both probably made from a green earth (*terra verte*) pigment containing glauconite or celadonite. This color

was common in murals of the Roman period. The light green fragments are decorated with red (Fig. 4) and black bands. One fragment has remains of green and white areas, perhaps from neighboring panels. It is not clear whether green was used to cover large areas in addition to decorating narrow bands or divisions between larger panels, as was common in the Roman period. Black appears only on three fragments. According to ancient texts, most of the black pigments—*atramentum*—were made from carbon black, as is probably the case here as well. Black was a common color of decoration for the lower parts of walls during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, but was also used for narrow strips that divided the panels. It is thus impossible to determine from which part of the wall the black fragments fell.



Fig. 1. Fragment No. 7.



Fig. 2. Fragment No. 9.



Fig. 3. Fragment Nos. 22 and 23.



Fig. 4. Fragment No. 63.

The walls were probably decorated with large, rectangular monochrome panels with narrow divisions in a different color. However, the mural's fragmentary state of preservation precludes any reconstruction of the position or color composition of the different zones of decoration. Hence, it is difficult to precisely date the fragments. The poor technique and the dullness of the colors indicate that the fragments are later than the Herodian or Early Roman period. The simple decoration; the mediocre workmanship; the reduction of color

scales, as indicated in the lack of yellow or dark purple; the irregular borders of the bands; and the inexact rectilinear outlines—are all typical of murals that date from the late-second and early-third centuries CE in Israel, such as those found at Zippori (Sepphoris; Viložny 2004:57, 60). Similar characteristics are also known from this period in Italy (e.g., in Ostia; Meiggs 1973:437), although one such mural has been dated only in general terms to “later than the first century CE” (Ling 1991:175ff; see also Borda 1958:110, 119; Joyce 1981:65–68).

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