

A ROMAN-PERIOD MAUSOLEUM IN 'AKKO

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In March 2015, a trial excavation was conducted west of Lily Sharon Park in 'Akko (map ref. 20848–53/75875–80; Fig. 1), north of Tel 'Akko, prior to construction. The excavation¹ unearthed the remains of a mausoleum, containing a clay coffin that held human remains and an exceptional combination of grave goods dating from the Roman period. An earlier excavation, about 150 m to the west, exposed graves from the Roman period (Fig. 1: A-4063;

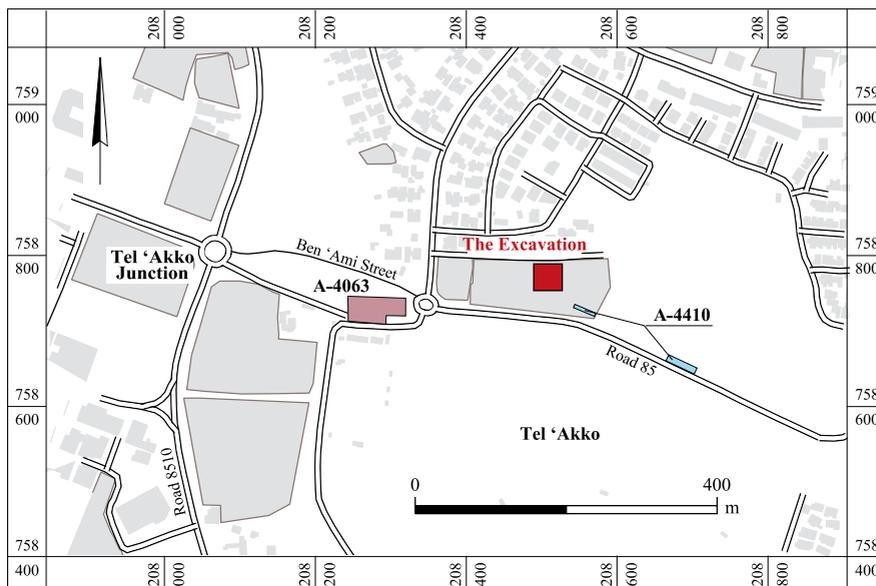


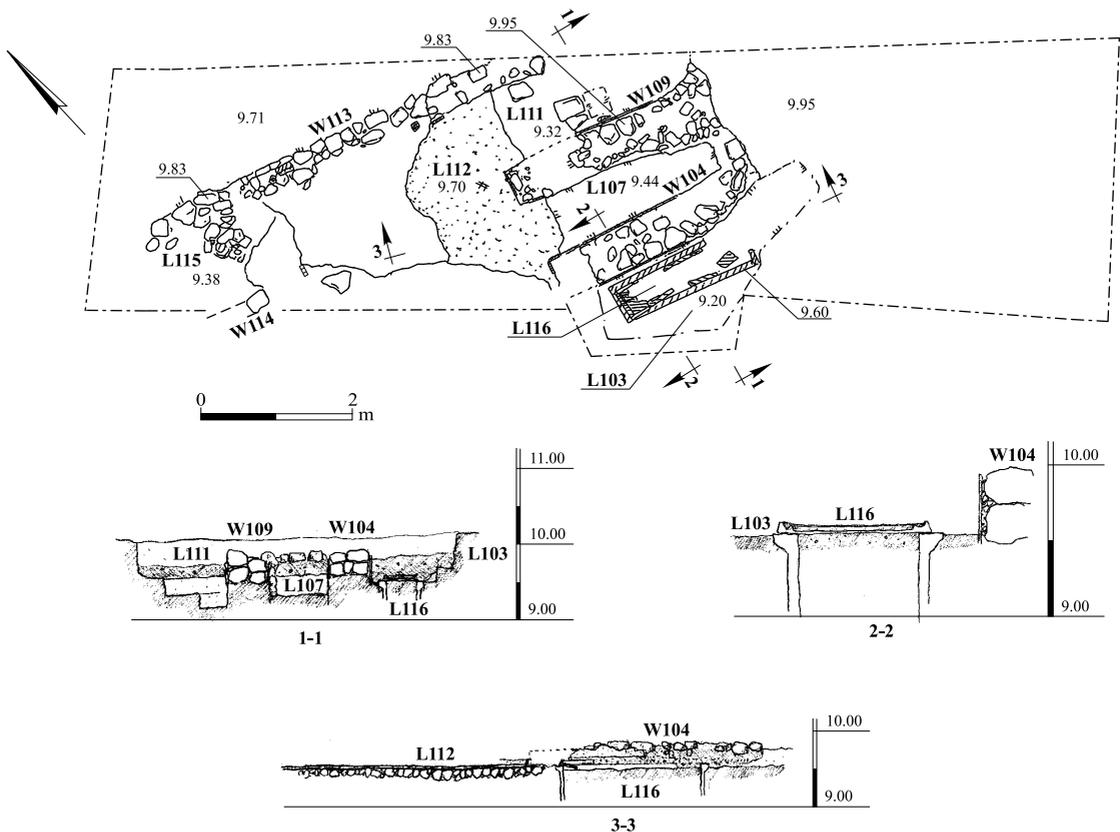
Fig. 1. Location map.

¹ The excavation (Permit No. A-7362), undertaken on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, was directed the author (field photography), with the assistance of Zach Horowitz, Yoav Lerer (metal detector), Karen Covello-Paran (guidance), Yossi Ya'aqobi (administration), Rivka Mishayev (surveying), Yossi Nagar (physical anthropology), Yael Gorin-Rosen (glass), Anastasia Shapiro (GPS), Leea Porat (pottery restoration), Elizabeth Belashov (location map), Clara Amit (studio photography), Adrienne Ganor (glass restoration), Carmen Hersch (drawing of glass vessels) and laborers from Kafr Manda.

Tepper 2010) and another excavation, 20 m east of the current excavation, yielded burials and finds from the Late Bronze Age to the Roman period (Fig. 1: A-4410; Abu-'Uqsa 2009).

THE ARCHITECTURE

Part of the mausoleum's foundations were exposed, superposed and surrounded by a layer of natural sand (Plan 1; Fig. 2). The plan of the mausoleum, a central room flanked by *loculi*, was not uncovered in its entirety. Four *loculi* were excavated: three on the eastern side (L103, L110, L111) and one on the west (L115). The central room had a plaster floor (L112), which preserved the impressions of the missing parts of the walls separating the different *loculi* (W104, W109, W114; Fig. 3). Remains of plaster were observed on the *loculi* walls (Fig. 4) and where the edges of the floor were preserved, as well as on the join of the floor with the wall. The foundations of the partition walls and the northern wall were all built of fieldstones and dressed stones in secondary use. The collapse of the upper part of the walls was mixed with black earth; it was found on the floor and in the *loculi*.



Plan 1. The mausoleum, plan and sections.



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



Fig. 3. The imprint of the end of W104 in the plaster floor, looking east.

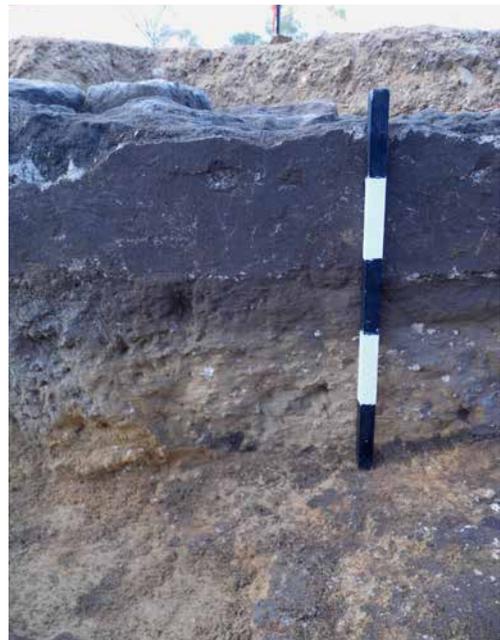


Fig. 4. Plaster on the walls between the *loculi*, looking north.

THE CLAY COFFIN

A rectangular clay coffin (L116; 180 cm long, 45 cm wide, 30 cm high; Fig. 5) was found in *Loculus* 103. The coffin is made of light brown clay and has straight walls about 2 cm thick; its flat rim is 7 cm wide. The coffin was filled with earth. Still covering the sides of the coffin, but collapsed inward, lay three complete but broken tiles (58 × 45 cm; Fig. 6) that covered the width of the coffin but were 2 cm short of covering its full length. The roof tiles had upright edges along their long sides. On one of the short sides (1.5 cm thick) was a ridge, and the other side (4 cm thick) carried two symmetrical incisions.

On top of the coffin were four complete oil lamps and sherds of at least ten more (see below); near the coffin was another complete lamp. Inside the coffin were the skeletal remains of one individual with three glass vessels at its feet (see Gorin-Rosen, this volume).

The Oil Lamps (Fig. 7)

Thirteen of the lamps and lamp fragments were identified as Syro-Palestinian discus lamps (Sussman 2012:59, Type R26), four of which were complete (Lamp Nos. 1–4). They can be dated from the second third of the first century to the third century CE. Intact lamp No. 5 is from a Phoenician workshop (Sussman 2012:35, Type R13). Sussman dates these lamp types to the mid-first–second centuries CE. One sherd could not be classified to any lamp type.



Fig. 5. The clay coffin (L116) in *Loculus* 103.



Fig. 6. One of the three roof tiles that covered the coffin.

Lamp No. 1 (Fig. 7:1).— The lamp is made of light orange clay covered by a dark red slip, with *ovolo* decoration on the shoulder. This intact discus lamp is decorated with a scene of a rabbit eating grapes. It has a flat base with a *planta pedis* pottery mark. The same scene is depicted on discus lamps from Jerusalem (Sussman 2012:65). Almost identical depictions



Fig. 7. Roman discus lamps (1–4) and a Northern Judean lamp (5).

are found on lamps in the Schloessinger collection (Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: Nos. 130 and 147). The scene appears on mosaics at Roman Zippori (Talgam and Weiss 2004: Fig. 2) and at Hanita (Byzantine period; Barasch 1974: Pl. 49: B), and on Roman sarcophagi (Dodd 1972:73–74; Barasch 1974:225). The motif is not merely a nature scene, as the rabbit often symbolizes fertility, while grapes sometimes signify redemption (Barasch 1974:225). This interpretation fits well with the burial context in which the lamp was found.

Lamp No. 2 (Fig. 7:2).— The lamp is made of light orange clay covered by a red slip, with a rough *ovolo* decoration on the shoulder. This intact lamp is adorned with the face of Pan, horned and with goat ears. Pan may represent fertility, like the rabbit depicted on Lamp No. 1. Soot remains on the nozzle indicate that it had been used.

Lamp No. 3 (Fig. 7:3).— The lamp is made of light brown clay covered by a brown slip, with an *ovolo* decoration on the shoulder. It is complete, with a geometric decoration on the discus.

Lamp No. 4 (Fig. 7:4).— The lamp is made of light brown clay covered by a dark orange slip, with *ovolo* decoration on the shoulder. It is complete; its discus is plain.

Lamp No. 5 (Fig. 7:5).— The lamp is made of white clay covered by a gray slip. On the shoulder are two double axes combined with floral decorations, and on the base is a *planta pedis* pottery mark.

Human Skeletal Remains

Yossi Nagar

A small number of fragmentary human skeletal remains was found scattered in the ruined structure (L100, L103, L108, L110) and inside the clay coffin (L116), described here according to locus. The remains were inspected on-site and then reburied under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

L100 (top soil). The remains included a few postcranial fragments and two permanent teeth, identified as an upper lateral incisor showing dentine cup and a lower second molar showing enamel attrition characteristic of an individual aged >30 years (Hillson 1986:176–201).

L103. The remains included two femoral shafts, alongside the coffin. The bone ends were deteriorated; however, their proportions indicate an adult individual.

L108. The remains included few postcranial fragments and three permanent teeth. The teeth were identified as a canine, a lower premolar and a third upper molar, all showing enamel attrition characteristic of an individual aged >30 years (Hillson 1986:176–201).

L110. The remains included few postcranial fragments and a metatarsal bone with an unfused epiphyses representing a young individual, whose age at the time of death is estimated at 10–15 years (Johnston and Zimmer 1989).

L116. The remains in the clay coffin included a fragmentary skull vault, one tooth and postcranial fragments. The bones were anatomically articulated, indicating primary burial. The deceased lay on its back, head to the east. A metatarsal bone with fused epiphyses represents an adult individual, whose age at the time of death is estimated at 15 years or older (Johnston and Zimmer 1989). The tooth was identified as a lower premolar, showing enamel attrition, indicative of an adult individual whose age at the time of death was 15–25 years (Hillson 1986). The sex of this individual could not be determined.

The skeletal remains represent at least four individuals. The bones from the clay coffin represent a 15–25-year-old individual in primary burial, while scattered fragments in the rest of the mausoleum represent at least three more individuals—aged 10–15, >18 years and over 30 years.

DISCUSSION

The mausoleum apparently comprised at least six *loculi*, three on either side of a central room (Fig. 8). The entrance to the structure was probably from the south. It seems that at least the lower part of the mausoleum was underground, as it is built on and surrounded by the same layer of sand.

The mausoleum can be dated by the coffin and the burial goods. Burial in clay coffins was common in the western Galilee during the Roman period. Aviam and Stern (1997) dated the beginning of this custom to the second century CE. Vitto (2011) argued that there are no well-dated examples until the third century CE and perhaps even the second part of that century. The coffin is well-fitted in the *loculus* and there is no evidence that it was placed there after the mausoleum commenced use, as is the case in other Roman-period burials in Lower Galilee (Vitto 2011:40*–41*). As the lamps were mostly found on top of the coffin lid, they provide a clear *terminus ante quem* for the coffin. It must have been placed before the end of the second century CE, making it one of the earliest clay coffins of its type in the area. Such coffins were imported from Cyprus or from Turkey (Shapiro 1997). Their dates seem to correspond with the dates of the Galilean coffins, but there, they are often in secondary use and robbed (Parks, Aviam and Stern 1997). Lamp No. 5, dating to the late first–early second centuries CE, was found next to the coffin and indicates the mausoleum's earliest use. The glass finds, dated between the late first and the beginning of the third century CE (see Goren-Rosen, this volume) accord well with this dating.

The mausoleum is most likely part of a pagan cemetery (Tepper 2010); however, the ethnic or religious connotations of the grave goods and burial customs are ambiguous. During the Roman period, two distinct sets of burial customs are known in the western Galilee:

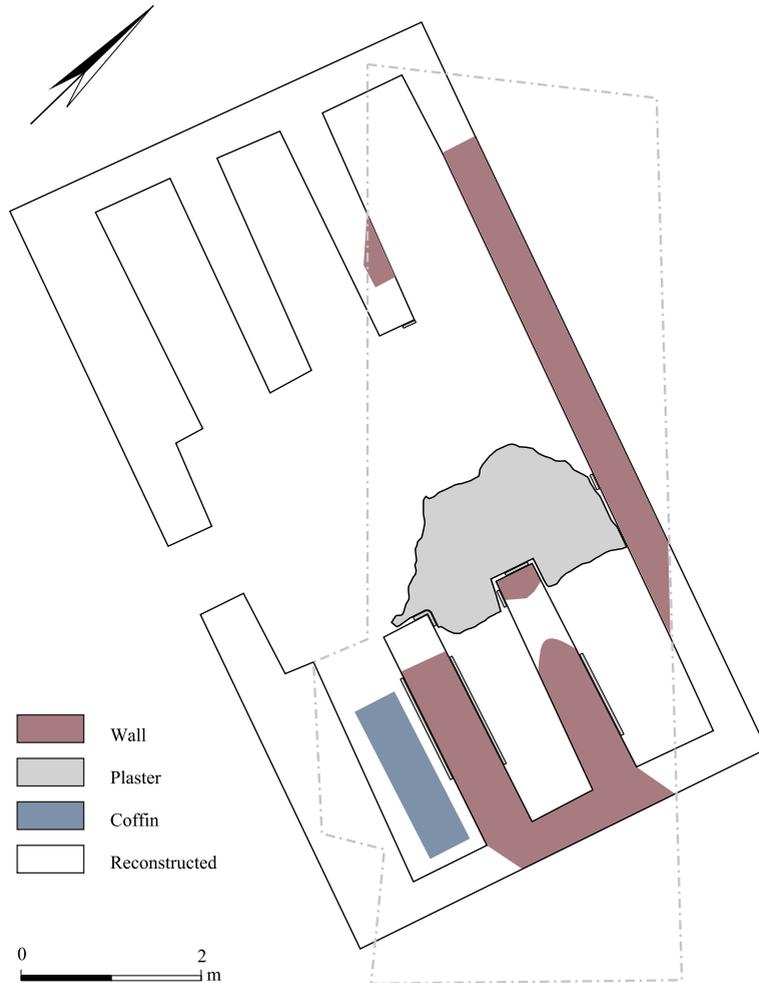


Fig. 8. Reconstruction of the ground plan of the mausoleum.

Jewish and Phoenician-pagan. The spatial distribution of these two sets corresponds to the distribution of the populations, as understood from historical sources and archaeological research. Clay coffins are found in both Jewish and pagan burials. The placement of oil lamps on top of coffins is common in Jewish burials but very rare in pagan graves (Stern and Getzov 2006:118). In Jewish burials, the discus was purposely broken (Vitto 2011:51*–52*), as it often carried scenes of faunal or human images; its removal could be related to the Mosaic prohibition against graven images. Alternately, it may be related to Mishnaic texts requiring that the filling hole of the lamps be larger for reasons of purity (Vitto 2011:51*–52*). In contrast, in pagan burials, glass vessels, mostly bowls and beakers but also bottles, as well as coins, bracelets and sandal rivets, are the diagnostic finds (Stern and Getzov 2006:118).

The lamps found here on top of the coffin carry images with obvious pagan imagery and have small filling holes. No coins, bracelets or sandal rivets were found and the three glass vessels inside the coffin are not of the types usually found in pagan graves: one is an imported bowl of high quality and the other two—a kidney-shaped and a bird-shaped vessel—are rare and together seem to serve a special purpose. Two of the glass fragments, one found in another *loculus* and one in the fill on top of the northern part of the mausoleum (L108), do belong to vessel types commonly found in pagan graves (see Gorin-Rosen, this volume).

The mausoleum does not seem to adhere clearly to either of the two sets of burial customs usually found in the western Galilee. It does not align with Jewish burial customs, but it lacks most of the common pagan characteristics. The large number of lamps is significant, but so is the pagan imagery. The special combination of burial goods may reflect a mixed or different ethnic background of the deceased or his relatives. Vitto (2010) suggested that the oil lamps in the Jewish burials might have reflected impurity laws forbidding Jews to reuse the lamps after they were taken into a burial chamber. Here, the lamps were placed on a coffin in a pagan cemetery, possibly to partially preserve Jewish traditions.

CONCLUSIONS

The Roman mausoleum is probably part of the pagan Roman-period cemetery excavated by Tepper (2010). It was in use from the second half of the first century to the beginning of the fourth century CE. The burial in the clay coffin predates the end of the second century CE, making it one of the earliest known burials in a clay coffin. The burial is accompanied by an unusual combination of burial goods that do not align clearly with either of the two common sets of grave assemblages in the western Galilee during the Roman period. It is highly unlikely that a Jew would have been buried in a pagan cemetery, but I suggest that the burial customs were influenced by Jewish burial customs that were practiced not far to the east of 'Akko.

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