

A SOUNDING NEAR THE SUMMIT OF GUSH HALAV

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INTRODUCTION

The most ancient periods (Early Bronze Age–Roman period) of settlement at Gush Halav (Greek: Gischala; Arabic: el-Jish) were located at the summit of a chalky limestone hill. Later, certainly by the Mamluk period, the village spread out onto its lower slopes (Hartal 2005; 2006c; Fig. 1:3, 4). The small salvage excavation described here, conducted by the author in 2002, was located on the western slope, c. 50 m west of and 10 m lower than the present Greek Catholic Church of St. Peter, which is situated at the summit of the hill (map ref. NIG 24182/77030, OIG 19182/27030; elevation 823 m).¹ The excavation was undertaken prior to the construction of a private house.

Despite being a prominent, historically-attested multi-period site, as identified in a

survey (Frankel et al. 2001:41, Site 340), Gush Halav has not been subjected to a large-scale excavation. The remains of a synagogue on the summit were surveyed in the nineteenth century, but only a few remnants of it are visible today (cf. Meyers and Meyers 1990:22; Stepansky 1999). Two rock-cut tombs, located somewhere on the southern slopes of the village, were excavated in 1937 (Makhoul 1939). These tombs contained some material from the fourth or fifth century CE, as the excavator correctly reports, but the majority of the finds dates to the sixth and seventh centuries CE (Harden 1964: 50–51; Rahmani 1985:168). In the early 1970s, Vitto and Edelstein excavated an impressive Late Roman period mausoleum on the southwestern slope of the hill (Vitto 1993; Fig. 1:6). A lower synagogue, located c. 500 m east of the summit, was excavated in 1977–1978 by Meyers and Meyers (1990; Fig. 1:9); its date was subsequently discussed by Magness (2001; 2002; 2004; cf. Meyers 2001; Hartal 2005:22). In 1983, and later in 1995, Aviam excavated part of a Roman earthworks complex on the western slope, c. 40 m north of the present excavation (Aviam 1984; 1999; 2004a; Fig. 1:1, 2). In 1989, Damati and Abu 'Uqsa (1992; Fig. 1:8) excavated a group of interconnected rock-cut caves and a cistern on the southern slope of the hill, perhaps in the same vicinity as Makhoul's excavation. In 2003–2004, Hartal conducted four small salvage excavations, one on the northern slope (Hartal, forthcoming; Fig. 1:3), two on the southeastern slope (Hartal 2006a, b; Fig. 1:4, 5), and one on the southern slope (Hartal 2006c; Fig. 1:7), revealing occupational strata

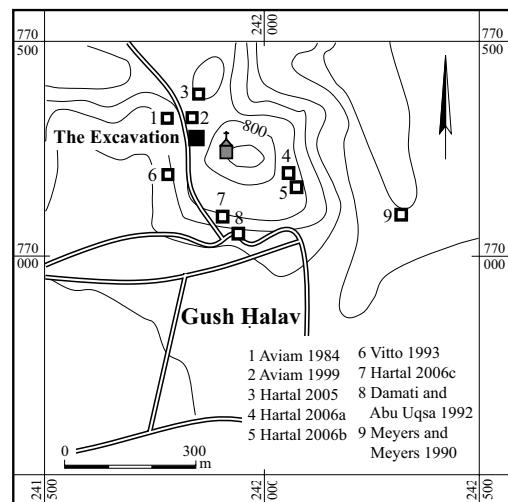


Fig. 1. Location map indicating various excavations at the site.

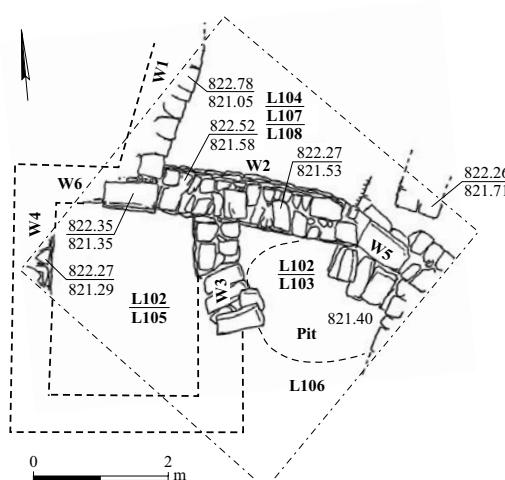
from the Late Roman period (second–fourth centuries CE), the thirteenth century CE, and the Mamluk and Ottoman periods.

THE EXCAVATION

The excavation consisted of a single 5×5 m square. Previously cut backhoe trenches, filled-in and later reexcavated as L101, indicated the presence of an ancient wall and artifacts, thus requiring that a salvage excavation be undertaken. The excavation yielded several walls attributed to different cultural horizons, and a huge rubble-filled pit, which cut through debris of all previous phases.

The fact that there were no clean excavated loci, no preserved floors, and a situation whereby walls were added several times to earlier constructions, clearly demonstrate that the excavated area suffered much from use and reuse. The earliest wall, W1, was the best preserved and most sturdily constructed of all the exposed walls (Plan 1; Fig. 2). Founded on bedrock, seven courses were preserved to

a height of 1.73 m. At a later stage, a couple of sidewalls (W2, W6) were added to W1. Later yet, W3 was added to the southern face of W2 (Fig. 3). Wall 3 was damaged at a later stage on its southern end. Set into W3 was a reused column drum whose height measured 0.53 m (diam. 0.66 m; Fig. 3). A fragment



Plan 1. The excavation.



Fig. 2. Walls 1 (right) and 2 (center), looking south.



Fig. 3. General view: Walls 3 (foreground), 6 (far left), 2 (upper center), 5 (far right) and 1 (upper left), looking northeast.

of yet another wall, W4, was also exposed; apparently it formed a room with W2/W6, W3 and an additional wall on the south that was not exposed (see reconstruction, Plan 1). Wall 5, abutting the eastern end of W2 at a slight angle, appears to have been earlier than W2; its original shape and relationship to the other walls remains uncertain, disturbed as it was by a large, deep rock-cut pit (L103) that cut the entire area between W5 and W3. This pit, full of stones, pottery and roof tiles, was excavated to a depth of c. 2.7 m, when excavations were ceased due to danger of collapse.

One may suppose that W1 was built in the Late Roman or early Byzantine period. This is supported by a concentration of Late Roman or early Byzantine potsherds found near this wall, just above bedrock (L107 and L108). These loci also contained material from other periods (i.e., Figs. 4:5; 5:5–7). Similarly dated concentrations of Late Roman–early Byzantine

pottery were found above bedrock in L106 to the south of Pit 103. Since the next ceramic phase present is that of the eleventh century CE, perhaps W2 and W6 were added at this time. These assignations remain conjectural, given the absence of floors that relate to these walls. By the thirteenth century CE, the architectural complex went out of use, as evidenced by the large refuse Pit 103, whose latest material dates to this phase. While the architectural remains exposed in the excavation are fragmentary and disturbed, the fact that they continued beyond the excavated area shows that they are part of a larger complex.

POTTERY

Pottery was discovered from several periods. The earliest pottery dates to Iron II (e.g., Fig. 4:1). Sherds from this period were also attested in the survey (Frankel et al. 2001:41, Site 340).

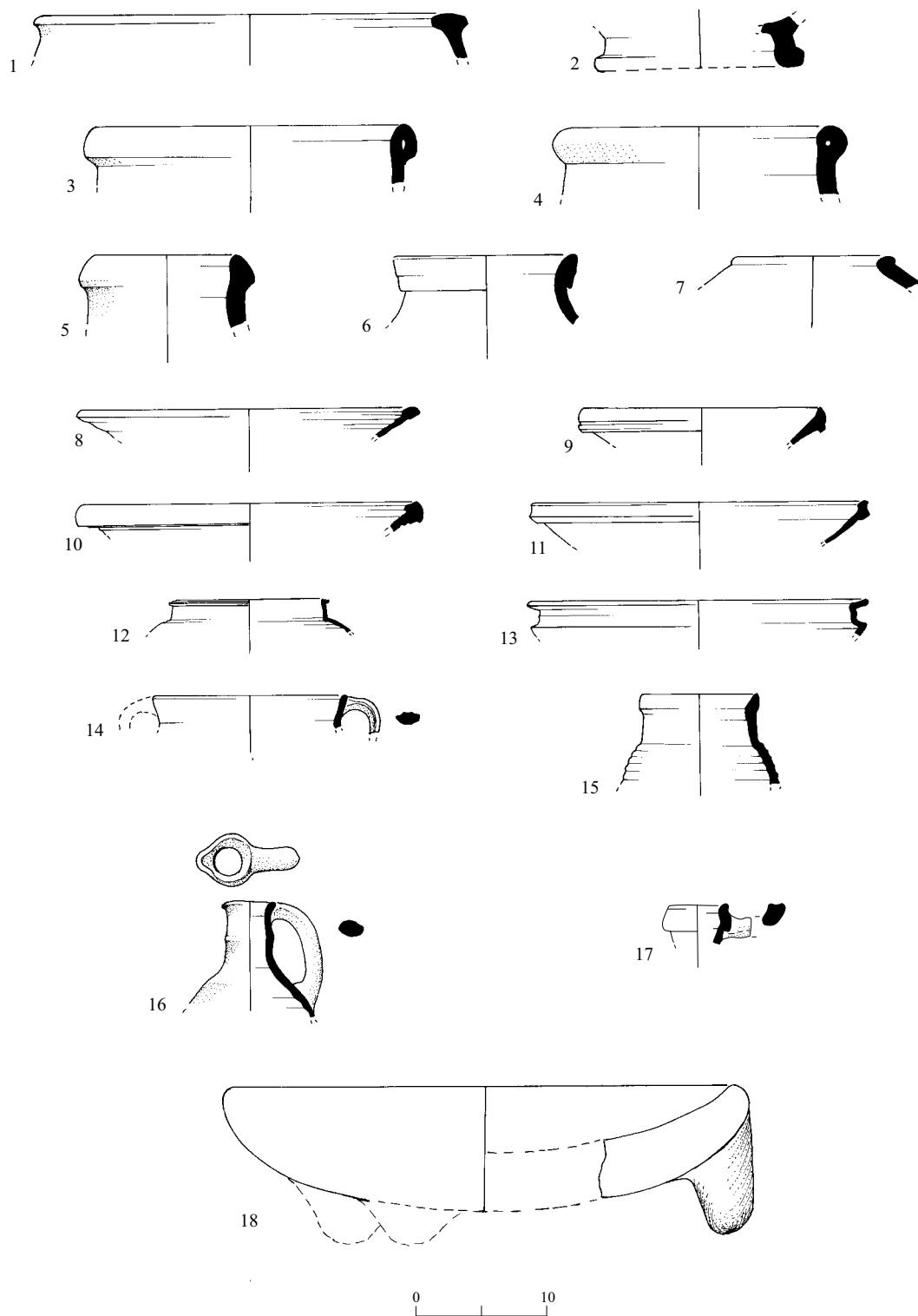


Fig. 4. Pottery from Iron II (1), and the Persian (2), Persian–Hellenistic (3–5), Hellenistic (6, 7) and Late Roman–early Byzantine (8–17) periods; basalt grinding bowl (18).

◀ Fig. 4

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Krater	101	4/1	Very pale brown fabric, gray core, red slip on int. and ext. rim	
2	Mortarium	102	5/3	Pale yellow fabric, many tiny black inclusions	Hazor, Str. II: Yadin et al. 1961: Pl. CCLVII:6, 7
3	Pithos	103	14/3	Grayish brown fabric, many tiny white inclusions	Gush Halav: Meyers and Meyers 1990: Pl. N:13
4	Pithos	103	14/2	Brown fabric, few medium white inclusions	As No. 3
5	Pithos	108	16/1	Pale yellow fabric, gray core	Gush Halav: Meyers and Meyers 1990: Pl. N:15
6	Storage jar	103	14/1	Light brown fabric, many white and brown inclusions	Dor: Guz-Zilberstein 1995: Fig. 6.37:1
7	Storage jar	101	1/6	Reddish yellow fabric	Dor: Guz-Zilberstein 1995: Fig. 6.38
8	Galilean bowl	102	5/7	Red fabric	Kefar Hananya: Adan-Bayewitz 1993: Form 1E, Pl. 1E:8
9	CRS Form 9 bowl	102	5/8	Light red fabric, red slip int. and ext.	Cf. Hayes 1972: Fig. 82:13
10	ARS Form 104 bowl (local imitation?)	103	7/12	Light red fabric, dull red slip int. and ext.	Cf. Hayes 1972: Fig. 30:29
11	LRC Form 3 bowl	103	17/3	Reddish yellow fabric, red slip int. and ext.	Cf. Hayes 1972: Fig. 69:40
12	Cooking pot	101	1/1	Red fabric, some white inclusions	Kefar Hananya: Adan-Bayewitz 1993: Form 4C, Pl. 4C:4
13	Cooking pot	107	15/5	Red fabric	Kefar Hananya: Adan-Bayewitz 1993: Form 3B, Pl. 3B
14	Cooking pot	105	22/2	Red fabric	Kefar Hananya: Adan-Bayewitz 1993: Form 1E, Pl. 1E:8
15	Jar	105	22/3	Red fabric, gray core, metallic ware	Cf. Horbat Shema': Meyers, Kraabel and Strange 1976: Pl. 7.19:10 Gush Halav: Meyers and Meyers 1990: Pl. X:17
16	Jug	107	13/1	Pale yellow fabric, dark gray core, blackened int.	Cf. Jalame: Johnson 1988: Fig. 7–45:659
17	Juglet	102	5/10	Brown fabric, many tiny white inclusions	Horbat Shema': Meyers, Kraabel and Strange 1976: Pl. 7.22:4, 5
18	Stone grinding bowl	105	20	Non-vesicular basalt, polished int., rough ext.	

It is worth recalling that the northernmost occurrence of a stamped *lmlk* storage jar handle was found in the excavation of the Gush Ḥalav synagogue (Meyers and Meyers 1990: Object Pl. D:1).² The most diagnostic pottery from the Persian–Hellenistic periods is Galilean Coarse Ware (GCW) pithoi sherds (Fig. 4:3–5), a type found in almost every excavation conducted at the site and at other Persian–Hellenistic sites

in the Galilee (cf. Frankel et al. 2001:61–62; Aviam 2004b:46–49; Aviam 2004a:107, Fig. 10.3.6–9). The presence of Kefar Hananya Ware, including Galilean bowls (Fig. 4:8, 12–14), is the most dominant feature of the Late Roman–early Byzantine pottery assemblage (third–fifth centuries CE; Fig. 4:8–17), as to be expected at a site in this location (cf. Frankel et al. 2001:64–65, 132). In terms of quantity and

size of pottery fragments, the eleventh century CE phase (Fatimid period) was the most prominent in this area (Fig. 5). The latest pottery is from the Crusader/Ayyubid period (thirteenth century CE; Fig. 6:1–6); some Mamluk sherds may be present, but without definite indicators,

it is difficult to identify them with certainty, as so many types continued in use from the thirteenth century (Miriam Avissar, pers. comm.). One early Ottoman sherd (Fig. 6:7) was found in the fill of the tractor trench, i.e., out of context.

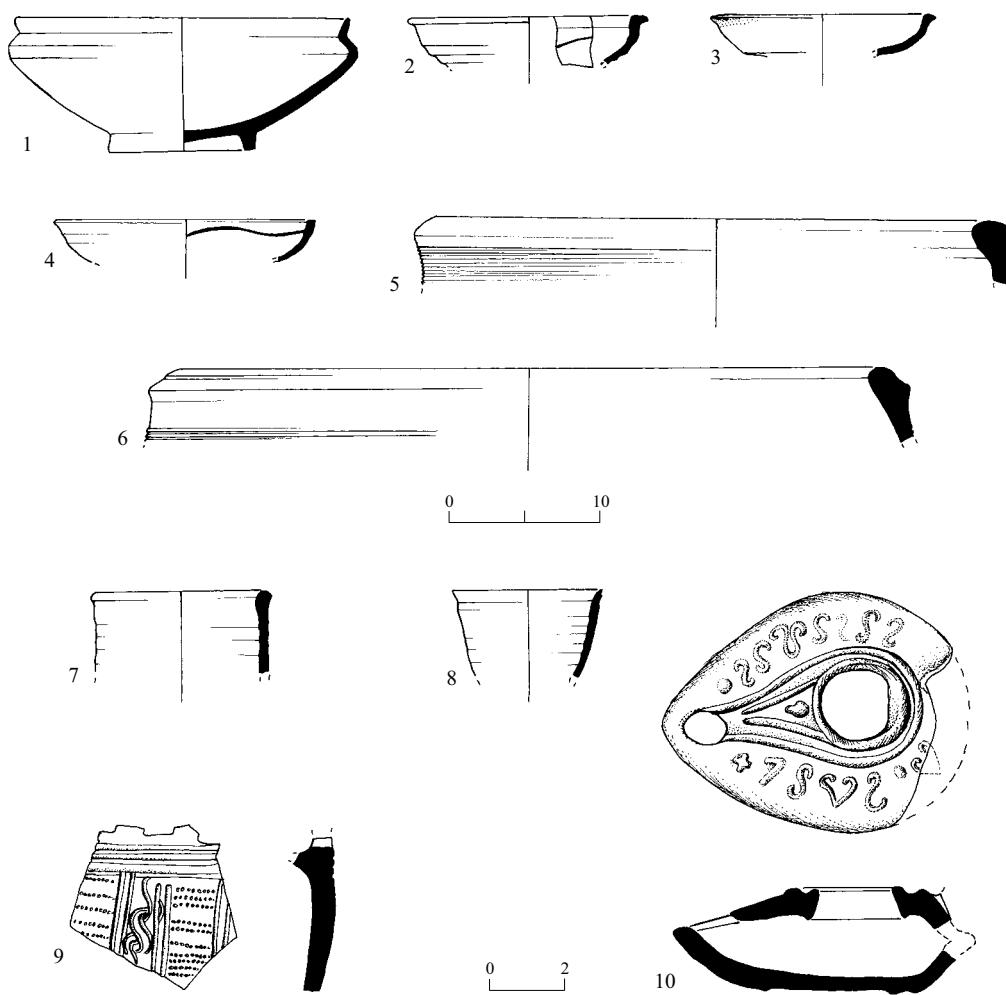


Fig. 5. Pottery from the eleventh century CE (Fatimid period).

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Bowl	107	12	Pink fabric, polychrome splashware	Tiberias: Stacey 2004: Fig. 5.25:7
2	Bowl	104	8/8	Red fabric, green glaze on int. and rim, sgraffito on int.	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.21:1–3, Type 30; cf. Avissar and Stern 2005: Type I.1.1, Fig. 1:7
3	Bowl	101	1/15	Red fabric, green glaze on int., sgraffito on int.	As No. 2

◀ Fig. 5 (cont.)

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description	Parallels
4	Bowl	103	9/2	Red fabric, green glaze on rim and int., sgraffito on int.	As No. 2
5	Krater	107	15/11	Brown fabric	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.79:2, Type 26
6	Krater	107	15/12	Dark brown fabric, dark gray core	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.78:2, Type 25
7	Storage jar	108	16/4	Dark brown fabric, gray int. and ext.	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.114:2, Type 4
8	Jar	106	23/14	Pale yellow fabric	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.128:1, Type 2
9	Jug?	103	14/5	Red fabric	
10	Lamp	105	20/1	Pink fabric	Cf. Bet She'an: Hadad 2002: No. 447, Type 37 Tiberias: Stacey 2004: Fig. 6.17–20, Type 3D

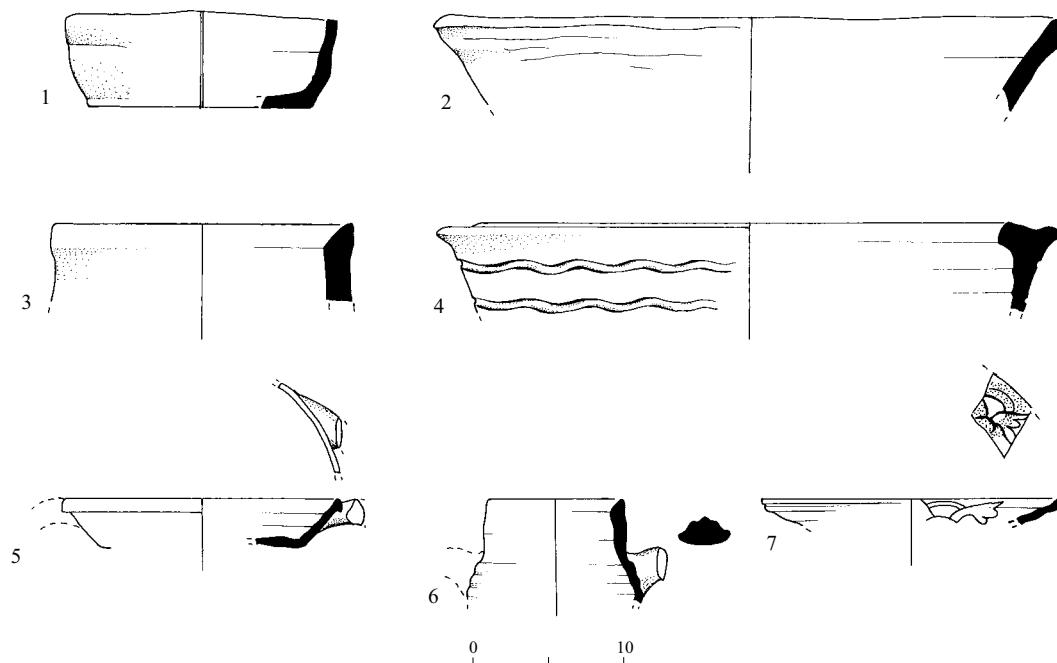


Fig. 6. Pottery from the thirteenth century CE (Crusader/Ayyubid period) (1–6) and Ottoman period (7).

◀ Fig. 6

No.	Type	Locus	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Bowl	106	23/5	Handmade, chaff voids, reddish brown ext., brown int.	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.86:3, Type 33
2	Large bowl	103	7/7	Handmade, very dense clay, dark gray core, discolored reddish brown int. and ext.	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.86:5, Type 33
3	Large bowl	102	5/15	Handmade? Dark gray core, pale brown and burnished int. and ext.	As No. 2
4	Krater	102	3/15	Reddish yellow fabric	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.84:2, Type 31
5	Frying pan	106	23/22	Red fabric, brown glaze on int.	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.102:1, Type 15; cf. Avissar and Stern 2005: Fig. 41:1, 2, Type II.2.3.1
6	Storage jar	104	8/6	Red fabric	Red Tower: Pringle 1986: Fig. 44:16–18
7	Bowl	101	1/17	Pink fabric, green and cream glaze on int., brown on ext. rim, light green ext.	

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that this area was disturbed in antiquity and that the excavation was limited in size, several important conclusions can be drawn:

1. The presence of sherds dating to the Iron II, Persian and Hellenistic periods, and the lack of architectural features from these same periods, suggests that strata dating to these periods existed and may still be found upslope, closer to the summit of the settlement.
2. A massive earthworks system was revealed immediately to the north of our excavation by Aviam (1984; 1999; 2004a), who dated it to the Early Roman period. A similar construction was identified in an excavation located to the north of the summit (Hartal, forthcoming), where it was dated to the third–fourth centuries CE. Whatever may be the case, this feature did not extend as far south as the area of the present excavation.
3. As previously mentioned, a column drum was found in secondary use within W3. Obviously, where this column was originally erected is not known, but assuming that it stood not far away, and, perhaps, uphill, it may have belonged to

the ancient synagogue that stood at the summit of the mound (Stepansky 1999:68).

4. The identification of remains dating to the eleventh century CE (i.e., the Fatimid period) provides the first excavated evidence discovered at Gush Halav for this period. Occupation from this period is not unexpected, given that a reference to the site is attested in the Cairo Geniza, which dates to the years 1022–1023 CE (Stepansky 1999; Frankel et al. 2001:116–117). The Early Islamic period is underrepresented in the Upper Galilee (Frankel et al. 2001:116–117), although the site of Khirbat al-Khurumiya helps fill the gap (Stern and Stacey 2000; Yehuda 2007). The city of Tiberias, the administrative center of Jund al-Urdunn in the eleventh century CE, was flourishing at that time (Stacey 2004:247).
5. Little is known about Gush Halav in the Crusader period. Travelers' accounts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE inform us that the town was renowned for its ancient synagogue and graves of rabbis and Jewish sages. Benjamin of Tudela (writing between 1165–1173 CE), during his visit to Gush Halav, mentions that it had “about twenty Jewish inhabitants” (*Benjamin of Tudela*:82).

A pilgrim named Samuel ben Simson recorded his journey in 1210 from Zefat to Gush Halav, to Meron and back to Gush Halav (Carmoly 1847:134–135; Régnier-Bohler 1997: 1352). He celebrated the festival of Purim there and described the inhabitants as “good and generous.” He states that there were more than two *minyanim* present, which means that the

total Jewish population, including females and children, certainly numbered much more than twenty. Finally, Rabbi Jacob of Paris arrived at the site in 1258 from Meron and Bar‘am and also referred to the graves of Jews (Carmoly 1847:184). Thus, at least part, if not all, of the local population of Gush Halav in the Crusader period was Jewish (cf. Meyers 1985:62).

NOTES

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² This find is so far beyond the distribution pattern of *lmlk* handles that it must be considered *ex situ* in all respects. Leaving aside this find, the most northern occurrence of *lmlk* handles is at Nahal Tut, located near Wadi Milih (Gorzalczany, n.d.), where eight examples were found in a proper archaeological context.

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