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Cover: photographs from site at Tsur Natan

English cover: Left: zoomorphic vessel and bronze bracelets *in situ* in the Iron Age tomb (p. 26-27, 44-45).

Center: the F12 quarry, with the truncated Iron Age tomb and L7 press basin (p. 53-57) visible in the center.

Right: the stamp seal from the Iron Age tomb (p. 32-33).

Hebrew cover: Finds from the Iron Age tomb.

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Rescue Excavation at Ramat Bet Shemesh (Gimel) - 2011

A Roman-Byzantine Structure

Yitzhak Marmelstein

This excavation was conducted in 2011, on behalf of the Hebrew Union College in the north Judean Plain, at the western edge of Be'er Halaf, about 8 km southeast of Tel Yarmut and 10 km northeast of Bet Natif (Fig. 1). The excavation was directed by the author (Y. Marmelstein; ceramics) with the assistance of C. Herriott (site drafting and pottery drawing), S. Alon (field photography), and O. Varoner and Y. Govrin (oversight).

INTRODUCTION

This excavation was conducted ahead of the construction of a residential neighborhood at Ramat Bet Shemesh (Gimel). The excavation area comprised two and a half squares at two points located 3m apart: Israel Antiquities Authority survey Point 18 was a ruin (390m asl) covered by stones (scattered all over the area), *rendzina* soil and typical Mediterranean forest vegetation; and Point 19 was a cup mark (389m asl) covered by *rendzina* soil.

THE EXCAVATION

Point 18

At this point were revealed the remains of a circular structure. It was built on an Eocene-formation chalk outcrop, typical of the Judean Plain (Buchbinder 1969). The structure was filled by an alluvial *rendzina* soil (L1000), forming a hump shape before excavation. The structure (3 x 2.85m; Fig. 2) had mostly collapsed, many of its stones being found in the immediate area. It comprised a circular outline wall (W1, length 4.2m, width 0.6m; Fig. 2) built directly on the bedrock outcropping which sloped gently down from north to

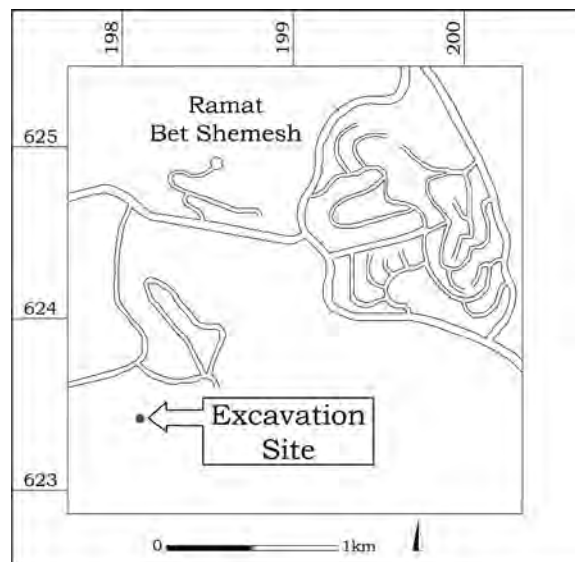


Figure 1. Site location (New Israel Grid: 623396/198108; 390m asl).

south (Fig. 3). The wall base was built of large fieldstones laid in dry construction, the gaps between the fieldstones being filled with small cobbles. Above the wall base were placed medium-to-large fieldstones. The structure was preserved for up to two courses on the south side (1.25m high). The entrance was on the

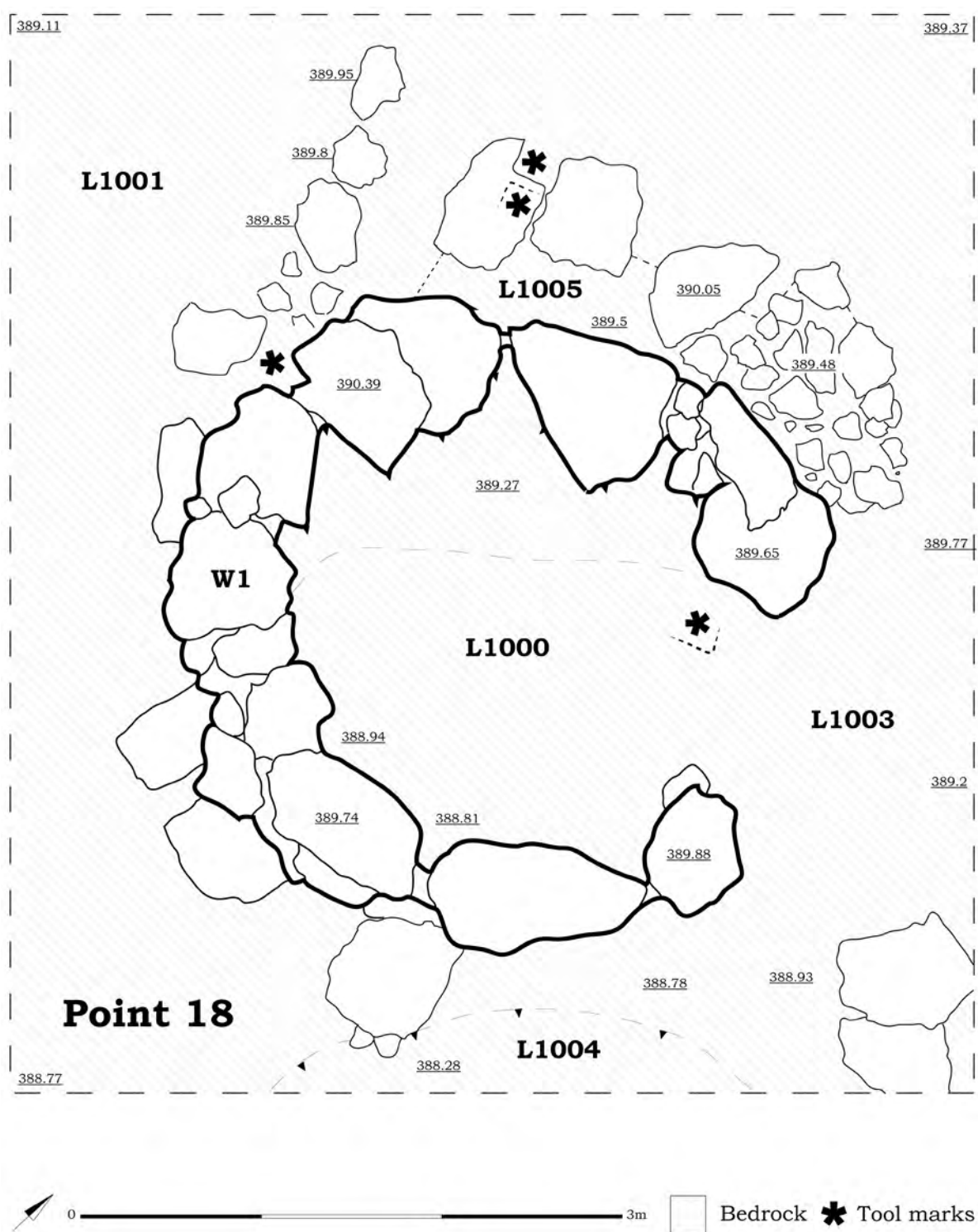


Figure 2. Plan of the structure.



Figure 3. L1003, the Point 18 structure entrance (facing west).



Figure 4. L1000, the Point 18 structure fill (facing north).



Figure 5. L1004, The Point 18 structure's bedrock surface (facing north).

east side (1.03m wide; Fig. 3) and was preserved to the height of a single course (0.84m).

As mentioned, the structure was filled up to its maximum extant height with alluvium and weathered stones (L1000; Fig. 4). The potsherds found on the bottom of this fill included scant body fragments of jars from the end of the Roman period.

Adjacent to the structure we excavated a layer of fill (L1004) inside a shallow natural bedrock decline (Fig. 5). The *rendzina* soil fill contained potsherds dating to the Roman and Byzantine period. Represented were a flask (Fig. 6:6), *terra sigillata* bowl (Fig. 6:1), cooking-pot (Fig. 6:5), cooking jug (Fig. 6:7), and jug (Fig. 6:4) from the Roman period, and a jar (Fig. 6:3) of Byzantine date. Other alluvial deposits (L1001 and L1003) outside the structure were composed of stone collapse mixed with layers of *rendzina* soil, in which we found fragments of a jug (Fig. 6:8) and jar (Fig. 6:2) from the Byzantine period.

North of the structure were identified several asymmetrical anthropogenic cuts in a large fieldstone (L1005; length 0.1m, width 0.12m), possibly part of an installation the hewing of which had never been completed.

The pottery finds allow us to date the structure's apparent first use to the Roman period (*terminus ante quem*) and its probable last utilization to Byzantine times (*terminus post quem*). However, it seems that the pottery originated from the alluvium mixed with the *rendzina* soil that filled the structure. Therefore it is impossible to determine its date with certainty.

A similar structure, circular in plan and hump-shaped in pre-excavation profile, was discovered in the recent Israel Antiquities Authority's Ramat Bet Shemesh survey, about 100m north of Khirbat el-'Alya (Stark 2007: Site 12). The surveyors interpreted this as associated with a nearby oil press. Another structure identified in survey at Ramat Bet Shemesh, dating to the same period as our Point 18, was interpreted as a watchtower (Dagan 2010: 238, Site 306.5). Other similar structures dating to the same period were revealed outside Ramat Bet Shemesh at Horbat Nazur (Yannai 2010: 87-88). These structures have been identified as stone heaps.

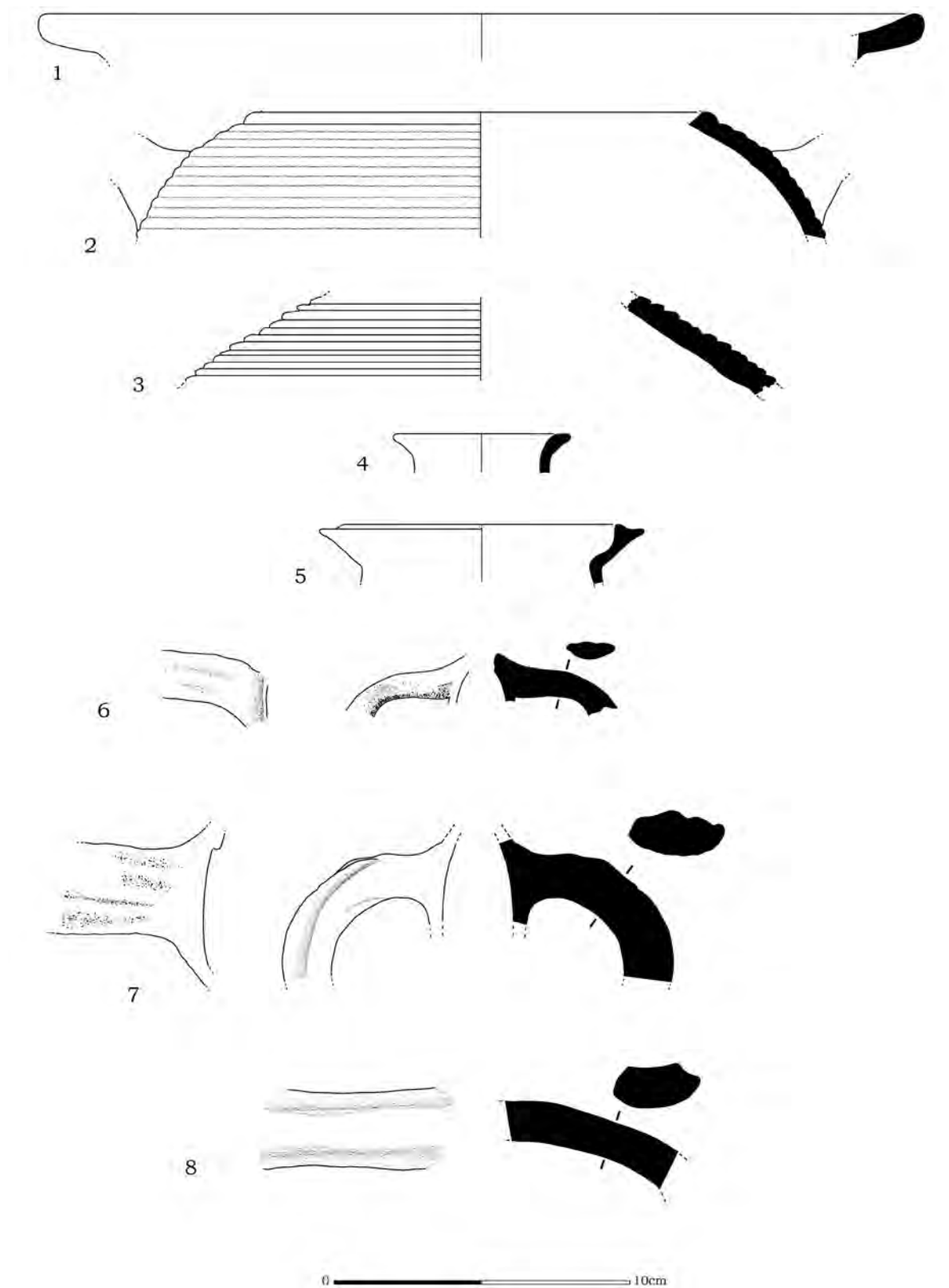


Figure 6. The finds from the Point 18 structure.

Figure 6.

No.	Type	Locus	Reg. no.	Description	Period
1	Bowl	1004	105/1	Terra sigillata	Roman
2	Jar	1003	104/1	Red/brown ware	Byzantine
3	Jar	1004	105/2	Red/brown ware	Byzantine
4	Jug	1004	105/3	Red/brown ware	Roman
5	Cooking pot	1004	105/5	Red/brown ware; few white inclusions	Roman
6	Flask	1004	105/4	Red/brown ware	Roman
7	Cooking jug	1004	105/6	Red/brown ware; few white inclusions	Roman
8	Jug	1001	101/1	Red/brown ware; few white inclusions	Byzantine

Point 19

This feature was a cup mark (Fig. 7), circular in plan and with a concave base (1.05m x 0.8m, 0.35m deep), hewn in the chalk bedrock surface. The feature was filled entirely with alluvial soil (L1006) devoid of any potsherds or other finds. Similar cup marks were revealed in a recent Ramat Bet Shemesh survey (Dagan 2010). Many sites across Israel suggest that such cup marks had an agriculture-related function, mainly in the olive oil industry (Frankel 1999).



Figure 7. L1006, the Point 19 cup mark (facing north).

CONCLUSIONS

The Point 18 structure has parallels in the Bet Shemesh area. However, its purpose is not clear. Due to a lack of finds which might support a particular interpretation, it is not possible to determine whether the structure was

used as a watchtower or was related to the production of oil. It can only be assumed that this was a shelter of some kind. Likewise our interpretation of the Point 19 cup mark must remain inconclusive, although parallels suggest a role in olive oil production.

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