

# Excavation at Tsrifin - 2008

## Early Islamic Domestic and Industrial Features

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*with a contribution by Achia Kohn-Tavor*

*This excavation (license B-329/2008) was carried out by Y.G. Contract Archaeology Ltd. in August–September 2008, under the academic auspices of the Hebrew Union College, at the archaeological site of Tsrifin in the central coastal plain. The project was instigated by the construction plans of owners Shlomo Group's real estate division, Shir Real Estate. The excavation was directed by the author, with area supervisors Amir Cohen-Klonimus, Tamar Shavi and Ariel Wenderboim. Site plans were drafted by Dov Porotsky and Viatcheslav Pirsky. In post-excavation Anna Dodin illustrated, Vladimir Naikhin photographed and Achia Kohn-Tavor analyzed the ceramics and other finds.*

### INTRODUCTION

This excavation was carried out in two stages: the first was conducted in Area A (378m<sup>2</sup>), situated in the southwestern section of the site; subsequently we

excavated Area B (275m<sup>2</sup>), located in the center of the compound. These areas were chosen as a result of the Israel Antiquities Authority test digging (Fig. 2), which indicated them as locations of significant archaeological potential.

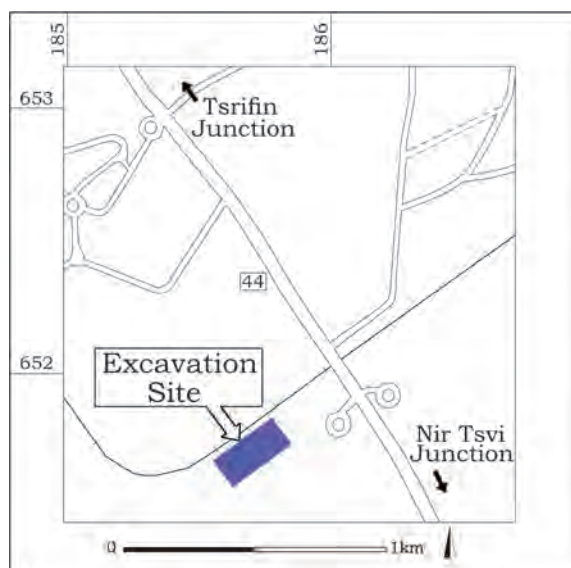


Figure 1. Site location (New Israel Grid: 185669-651767; 52m asl).

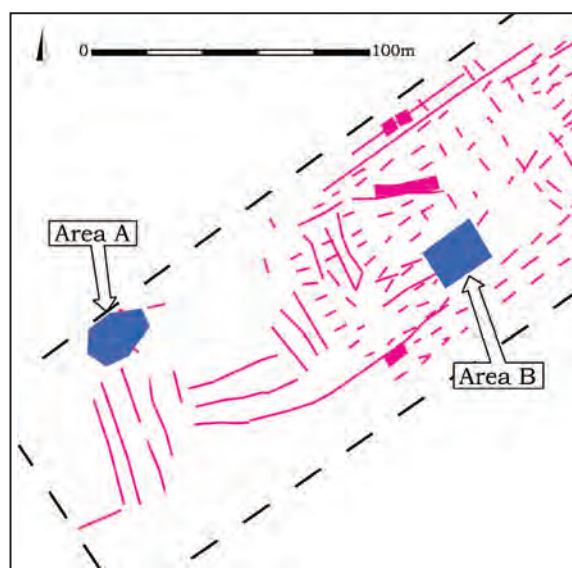


Figure 2. Close-up of site, with excavation Areas A and B marked, as well as Israel Antiquities Authority test trenches (in pink).

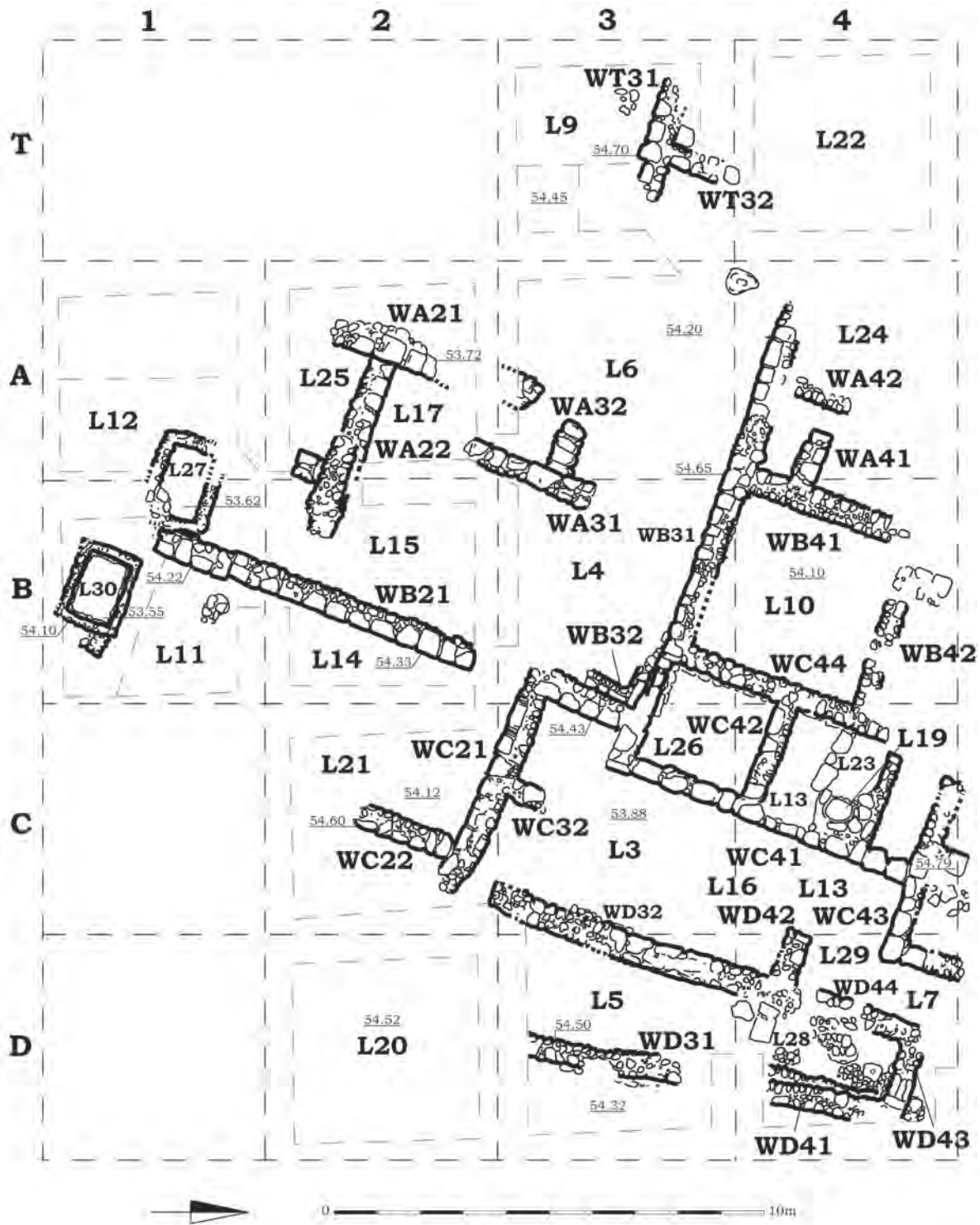


Figure 4. General plan of the Area A building remains.

## AREA A

Y.G. Contract Archaeology Ltd. opened 16 excavation squares in this area, exposing the remains of an Abbasid (750-900 CE) building and compound. This was located at the western fringe of the known contemporary settlement, on a low *hamra* hill beside a dry watercourse.

Various factors particular to this area influenced our work. The *hamra* topsoil had been heavily compacted by mechanical equipment. Also, a large modern garbage pit had truncated much of the ancient structure's north end. Finally, the archaeological remains had been disturbed in places by the overlying modern Arab village of Sarafand.

### Abbasid Building

As mentioned, this structure was built directly on the natural *hamra* soil, on a small undulating hill close to a seasonal watercourse. Only the southeastern wing of the building survived, as well as several extant wall sections outside it which seem to have been part of the compound's yards and associated installations. This building was constructed in several phases. The bases of the walls were preserved to different heights (having presumably been robbed out at some point), and several of the walls abutted one another. The walls were built of dressed stones, especially on their external faces, often on a foundation of small limestone chips (Fig. 5).

### *Installations (L27 and L30)*

We found a number of noteworthy features in this complex. Beyond the south end of the building (probably in the yards) we uncovered two built features (L27 [Sq. A1] and L30 [Sq. B1]). The western feature, L27 (Fig. 6), measured 1.5 x 1.0m and was preserved to a height of ca. 0.5m. Its northwestern corner had been damaged. The feature was built of small stones bonded by rough mortar. Inside, mixed into the yellowish ash fill were found a number of non-diagnostic glass bottle, glazed pottery and bone fragments.



Figure 3. General view of the building (Area A) (facing north).



Figure 5. Extant dressed stone wall courses, Wall WB21, Area A (facing southeast).



Figure 6. L27 (facing south).



About 1.0m southeast of this structure we found L30 (Fig. 7), a feature of similar dimensions which was also built of small undressed stones bonded with mortar. Its north side was also damaged. However, unlike its neighbor L27, the interior walls of L30 were lined with several thin layers of plaster.

### **Room (L28)**

In the area's northeastern-most square (D4) was found part of a threshold into a small room (L28), the floor of which was cobbled and at least partially plastered. Adjacent to the north side of the threshold were unearthed the remains of a plastered gutter with a basalt slab at its base.

*In situ* within the room and close to the building's corner lay a *tabun* (ceramic oven, L19). Near the *tabun* was an ash-rich context.

### **Finds**

A large quantity of potsherds were recovered, most of which constitute waste thrown into the yards and the building's rooms. Notable was the large quantity of bowl fragments, jars and cooking pots. It was these finds which allowed us to date the complex to the Abbasid period. A number of Early Islamic decorated oil lamps typical of this period were also found (Fig. 18:12-14), as well as glazed pottery (Fig. 16:2) and the aforementioned *tabun*. Finally, in the yards a number of large animal bones, a fragment of a stone bowl and fragments of a basalt grinding stone were also retrieved. A more detailed finds report is provided below (p. 147).

### **Area A summary**

In this area were discovered the remains of an Abbasid-period residential building. The majority of the architectural remains which survived comprise the lower wall courses. Most dressed stones presumably were robbed out in antiquity or destroyed in recent centuries by the excavation of a large rubbish pit which devastated most of the northern end of the building.



Figure 7. Room L26 (facing northeast), an element of the complex similar to L28.

This structure was probably a private residence, a farmhouse removed from the contemporary nearby village. It is probable that the Area A building's location on a low *hamra* hill at a distance from the village and close to a dry watercourse was a mark of its owner's relatively high status. During the building's history several changes and additions were made to its original plan. The structure probably went out of use during the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, after which began the process of its near-total disassembly and the robbery of dressed stones from its walls.

## **AREA B**

The focus of the excavation's second phase, this area at the center of the compound (i.e. northwest of Area A) is close to the location of test excavations previously conducted by the IAA (Kohn-Tavor 2008). These test trenches defined the area requiring further excavation. Here we opened 275m<sup>2</sup>, divided into ten and a half squares to which an extra half-square was added in order to expose the entirety of a feature at the north end of the area (Fig. 8, L57). The orientation of our square grid was decided by the archaeology, not the cardinal points of the compass.

The soil in this area was black and included ash and potsherds down to a depth of 1.0-2.0m. The British Mandate-period layer reached to a depth of ca. 0.4m, rich in Marseilles-type tiles and dressed stone blocks. At a depth of ca. 0.5-0.9m we found lenses of loamy

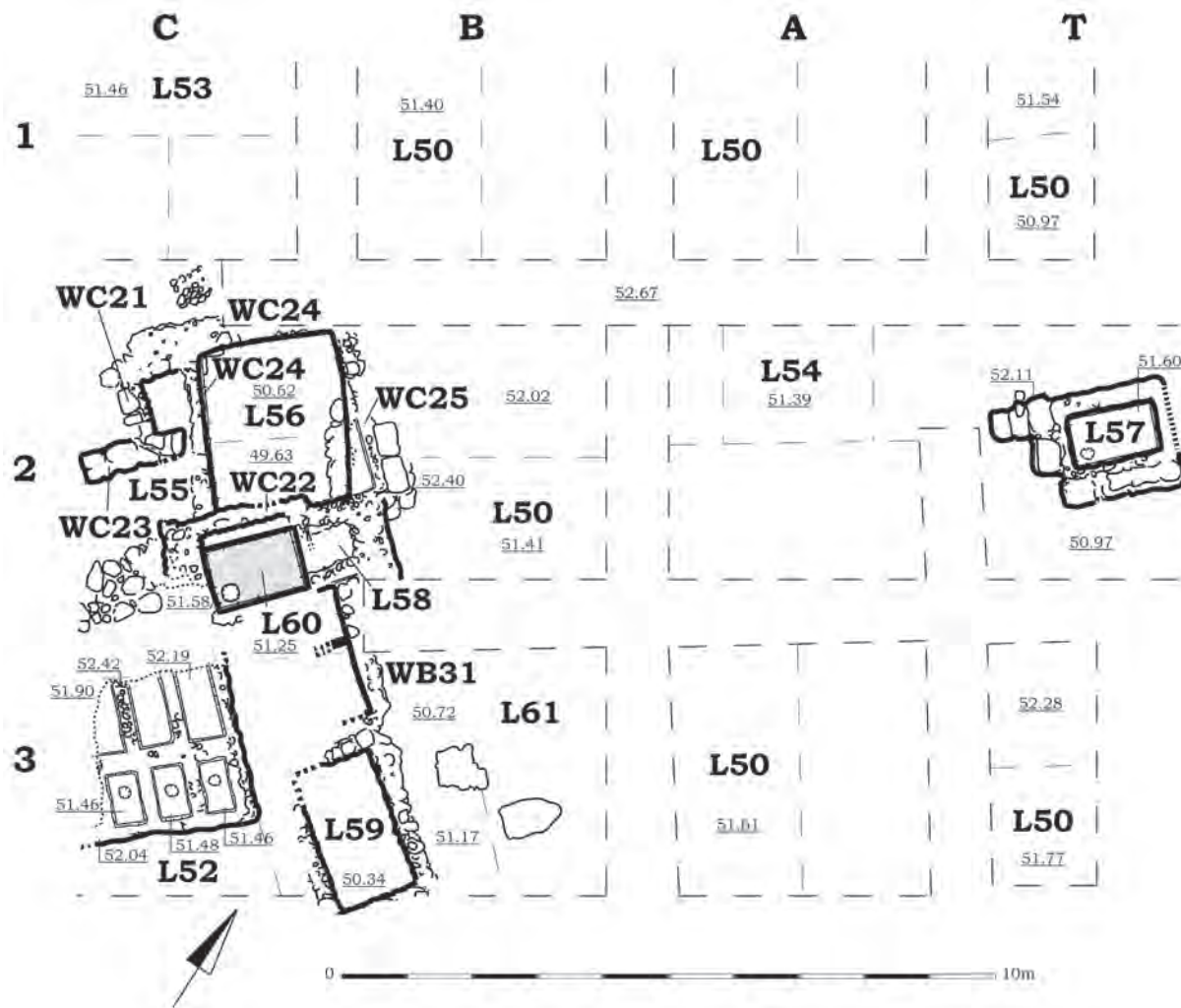


Figure 8. General plan of Area B.

soil mixed with the occasional Mamluk-Ottoman potsherd. At 1.0-1.5m depth we came upon a layer of light brown soil containing small amounts of Early Islamic pottery. Beneath this lay *hamra* soil, sterile and devoid of finds.

It appears that this area encompassed the western outskirts of the ancient and modern Arab village of Sarafand, some of the remains of which were undoubtedly contemporaneous with the building found in Area A nearby. In Area B we uncovered such features as subterranean household constructions, industrial/agricultural installations, and what appears to have been a waste disposal area close to the dry channel.

To begin with, all squares were excavated to a depth of ca. 0.4m, removing the Mandate-period occupation layer. Thereafter in the squares where no architecture was found—a quarter of the area—excavation continued down to the sterile *hamra*. A number of squares on the western side of the area (A1-C1, T1) were partially excavated by backhoe in order to confirm the apparent absence of architecture. Squares yielding architectural remains were excavated solely by hand, including baulks in order to obtain as complete as possible an architectural picture of the area.



Figure 9. General view of the L52 installation (facing northwest).



Figure 10. L52 (facing south).



Figure 11. The mosaic floor of the L60 plastered pool (facing northwest).

Mentioned here are the most noteworthy archaeological features of Area B. All date to the Early Islamic period.

#### ***Structure (L52)***

In Square C3 a structure was exposed just below the surface (Figs. 8-10). This was constructed of small mortar-bonded stones, and took the form of six chambers in two rows, oriented northwest-southeast. The structure was built directly on the *hamra*. The northwestern section of the structure survived to a greater height than the rest, due to the existence of an ash-rich deposit in that area. All the chambers were identical to each other in length and width (ca. 1.0 x 0.5m) but varied in depth. The three southeastern chambers survived to a depth of ca. 0.8m, the northwestern to 0.3m. No access between the chambers was apparent. In each of the three southeastern chambers was found a collecting basin, 0.1m deep and 0.2m in diameter. The chambers were all plastered with a high-quality thin hydraulic plaster, which indicates that the chambers were intended to hold fluids. Beyond that, and an implied industrial association, the function of L52 is not clear. Based on parallels, however (e.g. Arbel 2008: Rabbi Hanina Street, Strata V-VI; Fig. 4), we can say that this was probably a cloth-dyeing facility or a tannery.

#### ***Mosaic Pool (L60)***

Located centrally amongst the area's architectural remains (Square C2), a small pool measuring 1.0 x 1.5m was exposed close to the present-day surface (Fig. 11). This pool was lined with a high-quality hydraulic plaster (ca. 0.01m thick). Its floor was surfaced with a rough white mosaic. In the southeastern corner of the pool was a draining basin, 0.3m in diameter. East of the pool, parts of the plastered walls of an additional, badly-preserved pool or channel were found. West of the pool were uncovered the scant remains of a plastered floor. These remains belong to the later phase of the area, with which the L52 structure is also associated. On the mosaic floor a few sherds of the Early Islamic period were discovered (same type as Fig. 18:7).





Figure 12. General view of the L57 northern pool.



Figure 13. Buckets filled with potsherds from the floor of the L59 cesspit.



Figure 14. Eastern section of the L56 cesspit, showing the domed roof remains.

### *The Northern Pool (L57)*

We uncovered a built feature (L57, Square T2) approximately 10.0m north of L56 and the area's architectural remains concentration (Fig. 12). This consisted chiefly of a plaster-lined pool (1.5 x 0.8 x 0.5m). Covering the walls and floor, the plaster here was here also a high-quality hydraulic type, 0.02m thick. The pool's sides were built from large dressed stones, preserved mainly on the southern and eastern sides. In the southeastern corner of the plastered floor we uncovered a basin for draining fluids. In the pool fill a variety of sherds and Marseilles tiles were found. This installation was very similar to the L60 mosaic-surfaced pool in its design, and is presumably the sole surviving remnant of a larger structure.

### *Cesspits (L56 and L59)*

The remains of a cesspit dug into the sterile *hamra* were discovered in Squares B3 and C3, under the organic-rich black topsoil. The pit measured 2.4 x 1.3m and was lined with small and medium-sized limestones, one course wide. Its base was without stone or plaster seal, simply cut into a 0.2m-deep layer of yellowish sand. The pit was in a good state of preservation, except for its southwestern corner which did not survive. At the bottom of the pit large amounts of sherds had been discarded (Fig. 13). These included large numbers of cooking pots, lids, jars, juglets, and other vessel types (e.g. Fig. 17:3,4,7,11; Fig. 18:1,2,7,8,10) dating to the Early Islamic period (see finds report on facing page).

West of the aforementioned L60 mosaic pool, a second large cesspit was discovered (Fig. 14). It measured 2.8 x 2.3m, and was built under the plastered floor of a non-extant building (two dressed stones from which were re-used in a wall north of the cesspit). As with L59, the base of this cesspit was simply yellowish sand directly overlying the *hamra*. However, unlike L59 all of the L56 stone walls were plastered. They were built from small stones bonded by rough mortar. It appears that this cesspit had a dome-shaped roof, also constructed from small stones. These were discovered in the pit's black, organic and ceramics-scarce fill. The pit's eastern half was excavated down to the *hamra*.

## Finds

In Area B a vast amount of pottery was found, most of which was in the form of sherds thrown into the cesspits. Regarding these ceramic finds, particularly worthy of note are the large quantities of bowls, jars and cooking pots represented (see below). One complete jar was found (Figs. 15 and 18:11), dating to the Late Ottoman period. This was used to draw water from a nearby *antiliya* well (see Kohn-Tavor 2008). This vessel was found amongst the black topsoil debris, with no architectural context.

A full ceramic report is provided below.

## Area B Summary

In Area B we unearthed the remains of a residential structure and associated built features from the Early Islamic period. The archaeological features preserved were of two main types: cut features, mostly in the form of cesspits, and built features and structures, mainly plaster-lined installations that contained fluids. Of the actual architecture only a number of badly-preserved walls were extant, insufficient for the purposes of reconstructive models. However, we can confidently affirm that the area's main structure (Squares B2-3, C3-3) was built from large dressed stones set on a stone and mortar foundation in the natural *hamra*. These structures fell into disuse in the



Figure 15. A complete jar found in a section of the site's debris.

10<sup>th</sup> century CE. Most of the dressed stones of the buildings were robbed in antiquity for secondary use.

Like the Area A compound, this building was probably a farmhouse in the western outskirts of the Early Islamic village of Sarafand. It appears that the location close to a stream on the periphery of the settlement led to this area later becoming a dumping ground which created a deep layer of black soil over the *hamra*.

## THE FINDS

*Achia Kohn-Tavor*

The ceramic assemblage from Tsrifin (Figs. 16-18) represents domestic activity dating to the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. It seems that most of the vessels fit an early date in this range (probably 8-9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE). All the vessels are common in Ramla and its vicinities. Most are made of coarse wares or Ramla Buff Ware. The assemblage comprises a full domestic repertoire—both simple and finer serving, cooking and storage vessels. Two of the bowls are imported Late Roman wares (Fig. 16:4-5).

Of note are the vessels from L6, a cesspit in Area A (Sq. A3), the green-yellow stains in which indicate organic content. The group of miniature cooking pots and lids (Fig. 17:5-8), which bear no sign of use, are unique—as is a cooking pot with red slip (Fig. 17:3). One jar is an import from Egypt (Fig. 18:8). Similar jars were found at Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010). Later activity is represented by the impressive Late Ottoman *antiliya* vessel (Fig. 18:11)—very common in the Ramla region, used for drawing water from this well type, and apparently discarded due to a hole near its base (the *antiliya* well itself was situated east of the current excavation [see Kohn-Tavor 2008]).



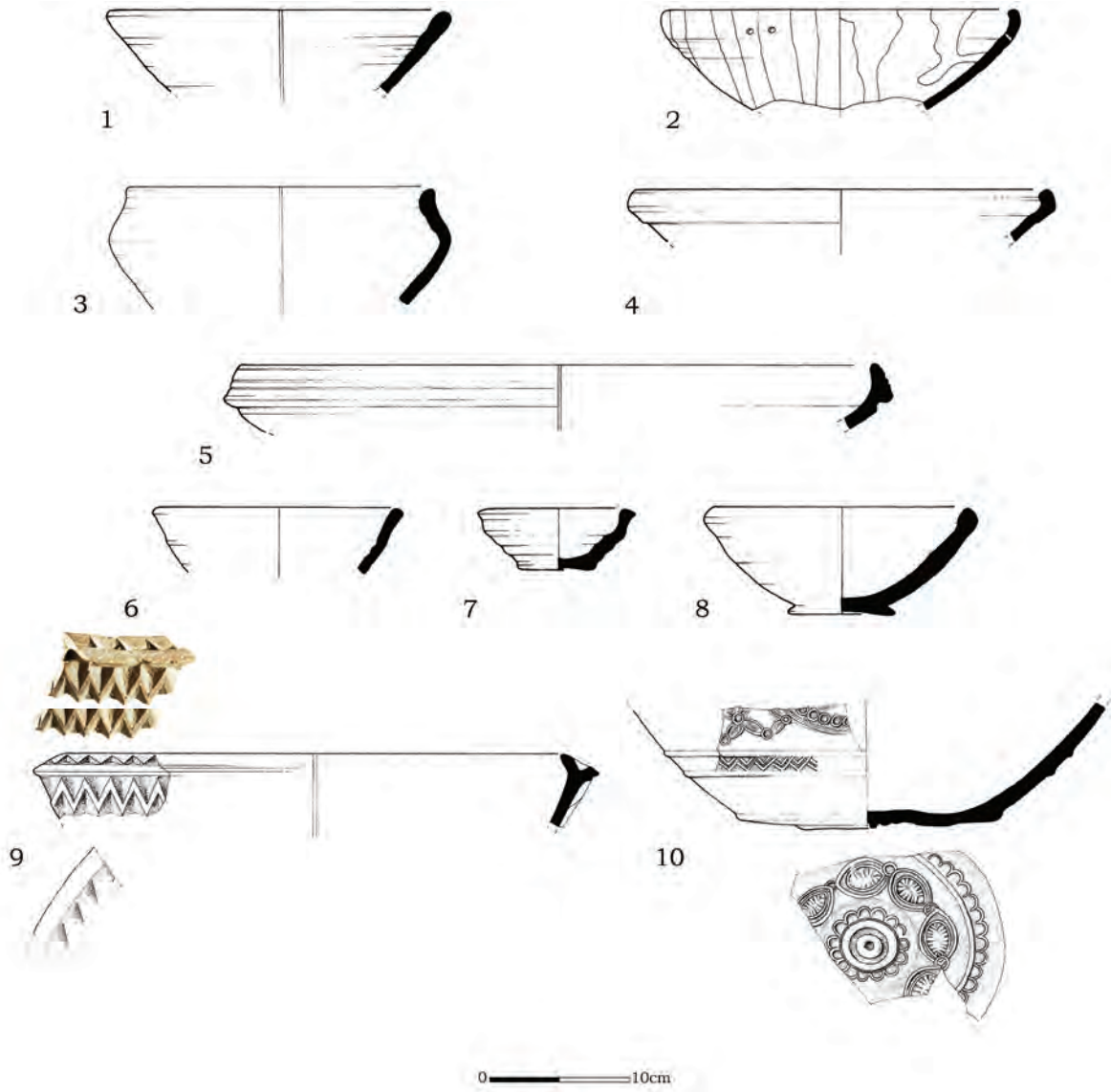


Figure 16. Bowls.

Figure 16.

No.	Object	Reg. no.	Locus	Description	Date	Parallels
1	Bowl	136	6	Gray clay, orange exterior, large white grits; green-yellow stains.		Magness 1993: Rouletted Bowl 4
2	Bowl	136	6	Polychrome glazed splashed and modeled; orange clay, black & white grits; green-yellow stains.	11-12 <sup>th</sup> CE	Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.8: 17)
3	Bowl	136	6	Orange clay, large white grits; green-yellow stains.		
4	Bowl	136	6	Thin red clay.	Late 6 <sup>th</sup> CE	Hayes 1972: LRC 10a
5	Bowl	136	6	Thin red clay.	Late 6-7 <sup>th</sup> CE	Hayes 1972: CRS 10
6	Bowl	136	6	Buff Ware; white clay, black grits.		Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.28: 5, 10)
7	Bowl	137	10	Buff Ware; white clay, mica.		Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.5: 4)
8	Bowl	149	29	Orange clay, white grits; degraded surface.		Magness 1993: Rouletted Bowl 4
9	Bowl	101	2	<i>Kerbschnitt</i> Ware; gray clay.	Early Islamic	
10	Bowl	136	6	Buff Ware; molded.	Early Islamic	Khirbat al-Mafjar (Baramki 1944: Fig. 13:5-9)

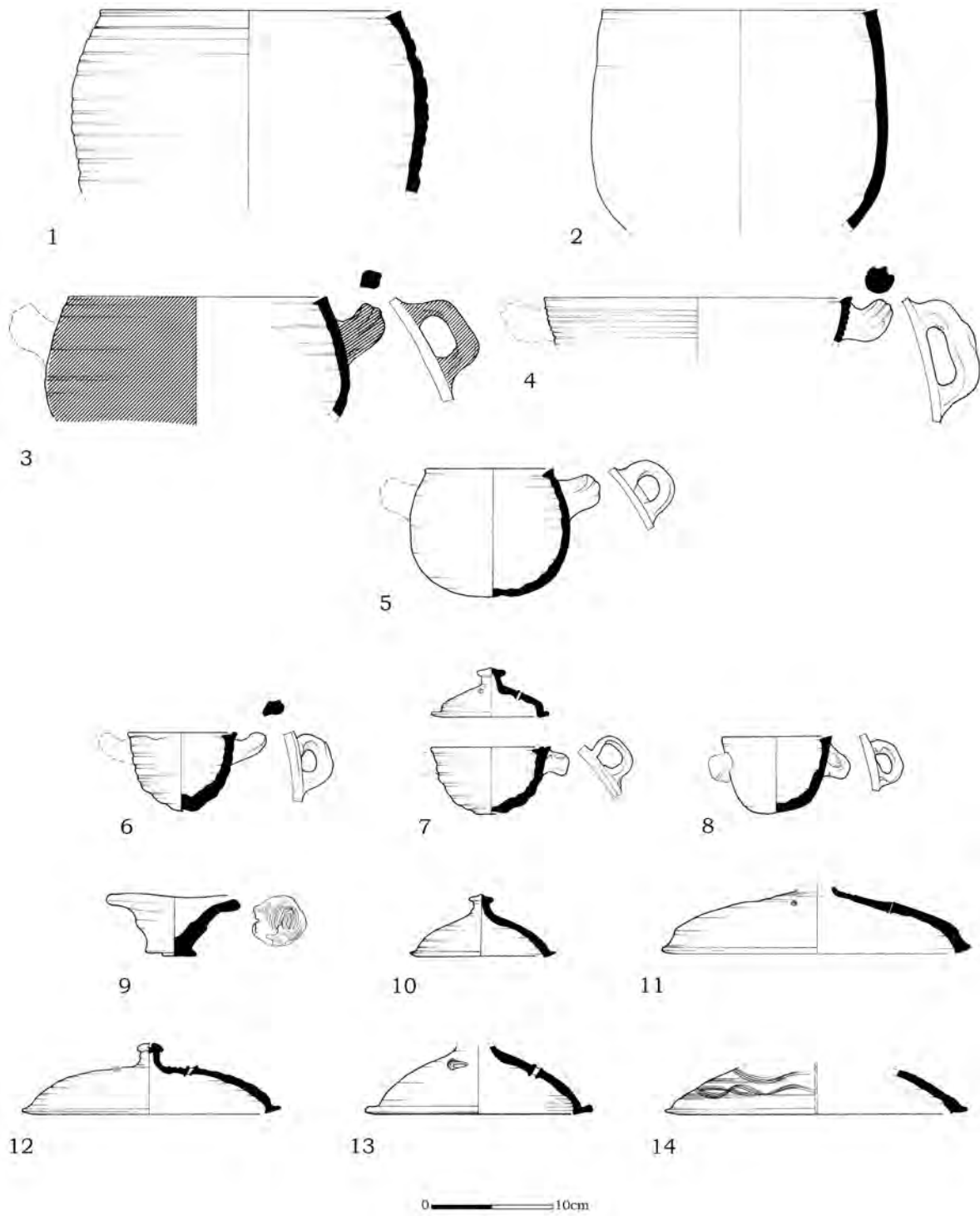


Figure 17. Cooking pots and lids.



Figure 17.

No.	Object	Reg. no.	Locus	Description	Date	Parallels
1	Cooking pot	136	6	Light gray clay, black grits; green-yellow stains.	Late 7 <sup>th</sup> / early 8 <sup>th</sup> -9/10 <sup>th</sup> CE	Magness 1993: Casserole 3; Jerash (Zayadine 1983: 436, Fig. 13:1,2; Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.6: 10); Khirbat al-Mafjar (Baramki 1944: Fig. 13:5-9)
2	Cooking pot	136	6	Gray clay, small white grits; green-yellow stains.	Abbasid	
3	Cooking pot	136	6	Orange-gray clay, large black and white grits, mica; red slip.	Abbasid	Khirbat al-Mafjar (Baramki 1944: Fig. 13: 5-9)
4	Cooking pot	136	6		7-8 <sup>th</sup> CE	Magness 1993: Casserole 1: 4,5
5	Cooking pot	136	6	Dark clay, white grits.	Late 7 <sup>th</sup> / early 8 <sup>th</sup> -9/10 <sup>th</sup> CE	Magness 1993: Casserole 3; Jerash (Zayadine 1983: 436, Fig. 13:1,2); Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.6:10); Khirbat al-Mafjar (Baramki 1944: Fig. 13: 5-9)
6	Cooking pot	136	6	Miniature; light gray clay, orange exterior, large white grits; green-yellow stains.		
7	Cooking pot	136	6	Miniature; orange clay, large white grits; green-yellow stains.		Lid: Magness 1993: Lid 1
8	Cooking pot	136	6	Miniature; dark clay, orange exterior, large white grits; green-yellow stains.		
9	Lid	525	58	Buff Ware; light clay, large orange grits.		Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.20:4)
10	Lid	136	6	Fine orange clay; green-yellow stains.		
11	Lid	136	6	Orange-gray clay; green-yellow stains.	6 <sup>th</sup> -mid-8 <sup>th</sup> CE	Magness 1993: Lid 1; Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.6:7; 9.9: 18)
12	Lid	136	6	Gray clay; green-yellow stains.	6 <sup>th</sup> -mid-8 <sup>th</sup> CE	Magness 1993: Lid 1; Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.15: 9)
13	Lid	136	6	Orange clay, black grits; green-yellow stains.	6 <sup>th</sup> -mid-8 <sup>th</sup> CE	Magness 1993: Lid 1
14	Lid	136	6	Dark gray clay; green-yellow stains.	6 <sup>th</sup> -mid-8 <sup>th</sup> CE	Magness 1993: Lid 1; Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.6:6)

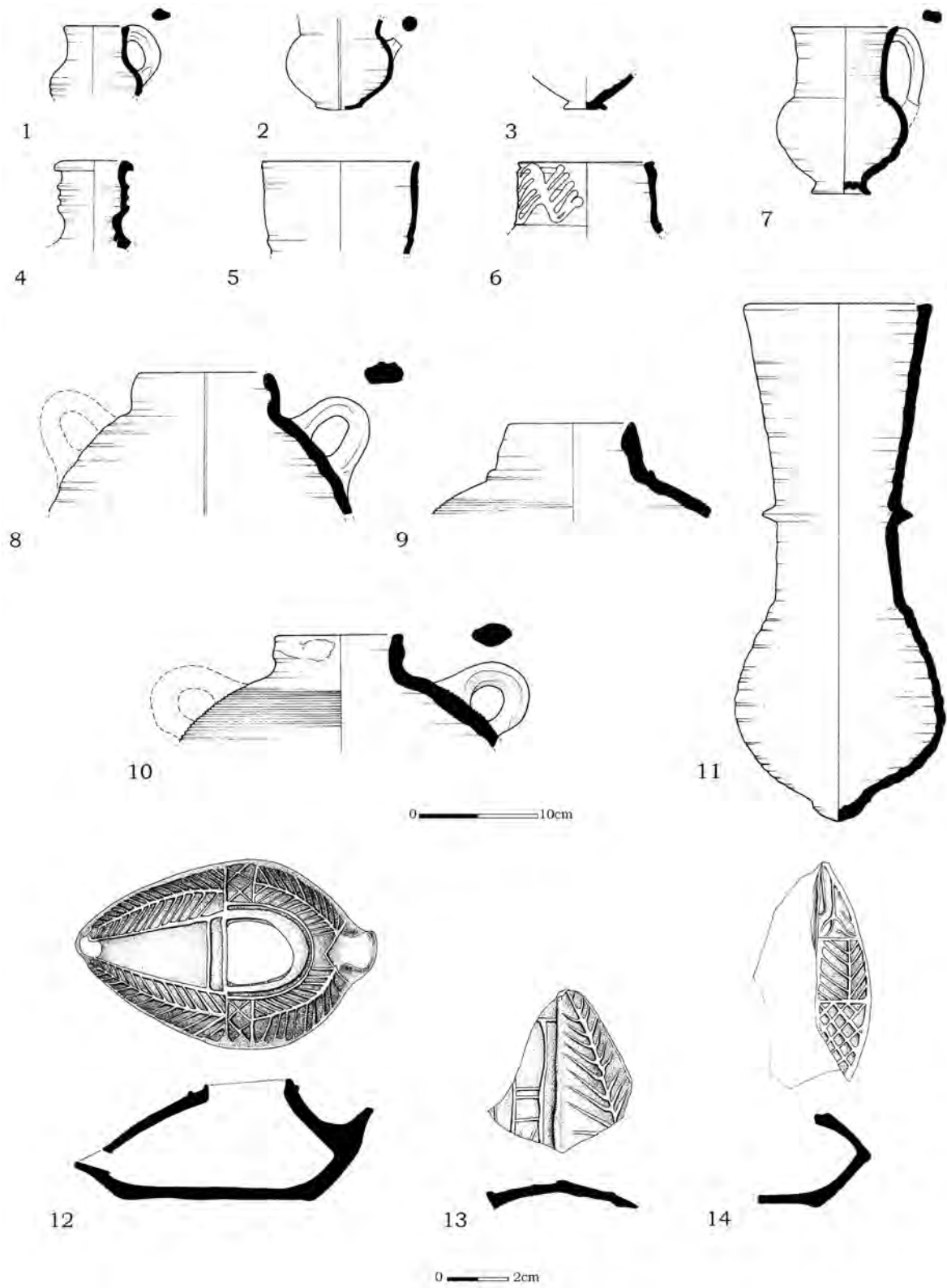


Figure 18. Storage vessels and lamps.

Figure 18.

No.	Object	Reg. no.	Locus	Description	Date	Parallels
1	Juglet	129	5	Orange clay, gray core, white grits.		Khirbat al-Mafjar (Baramki 1944: Fig. 14:10)
2	Jug	113/1	6	Buff Ware; fine white clay.		
3	Base	136	6	Buff Ware; fine white clay, small black grits.		Khirbat al-Mafjar (Baramki 1944: Fig. 15: 29)
4	Flask	129	5	Pink clay, small grits.		Khirbat al-Mafjar (Baramki 1944: Fig. 5:10)
5	Jug	136	6	Buff Ware; white clay, large white grits.		Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.4:3,6,9)
6	Krater	530	61	White painted ware; orange clay, small white grits.	First half of 8 <sup>th</sup> CE	Jerash (Zayadine 1983: Pl. XIV:27)
7	Jug	530/1	61	Fine orange clay, white grits.	Umayyad	Jerash (Zayadine 1983: Pl. XVII:1)
8	Jar	525	58	Dark clay, red exterior.	Early 8 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> CE	Egyptian-made (Watson 2006: Fig. 9: 3)
9	Jar	136	6	Dark red clay.	Late 7 <sup>th</sup> -9/10 <sup>th</sup> CE	Magness 1993: Storage Jar 7; Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.18:1)
10	Jar	136	6	Dark red clay.	Late 6 <sup>th</sup> -7/8 <sup>th</sup> CE	Magness 1993: Storage Jar 6B; Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.1:10)
11	<i>Antiliya</i> vessel	518	54	Orange clay, large black grits.	Late Ottoman	Ayalon 2000: 224-225
12	Oil lamp	136	4	Dark clay, orange exterior, large white grits.	Umayyad	Hadad 2000: Type 32-2; Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.21:1)
13	Oil lamp	113	6	Orange clay, large white grits.	Umayyad	Hadad 2000: Type 32-2; Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.21:1)
14	Oil lamp	526	9	Orange clay, large white grits; green-yellow stains.	Umayyad	Hadad 2000: Type 32-2; Ramla (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: Fig. 9.21:1)



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