

The 1991–1998 Excavations. The Early Periods

with contributions by Andrea M. Berlin, Yael Gorin-Rosen, Nadav Kashtan, Natalya

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IAA Reports 60

Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem 2016

234 pages, ill.

ISBN 978-965-406-620-4

Review by Renate Rosenthal-Heginbottom

To date, there is no comprehensive corpus of Hellenistic imported and local ceramics from the eminent maritime metropolis of 'Akko–Ptolemais¹. Hence, the present publication of substantial ceramic finds presented and discussed by Andrea M. Berlin and Peter J. Stone will serve as an essential compilation and as an indispensable tool for future research, complementing the previous study by Dalit Regev². The ceramic finds originate from two locations, the Courthouse site and the Hospitaller Compound, where excavations were carried out on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority between 1991 and 1998³.

The book is divided into three parts – Excavations at the Courthouse Site (Part I); Excavations in the Hospitaller Compound (Part II); Finds and Studies (Part III), with all three parts divided further into chapters. In Chapter 1, placed before Part I, Nadav Kashtan presents a historical overview until Roman times. The three chapters of Part I comprise a summary of the architectural remains and of the stratigraphic evidence at the Courthouse site (Chapter 2 by Moshe Hartal) and the presentation of glass finds (Chapter 3 by Natalya Katsnelson) and loom-weights and whorls (Chapter 4 by Orit Shamir). The glass vessels retrieved date from the Late Hellenistic period until the 13th century CE and underline the opulence of the prolific glass production in the region. Waste of probably Hellenistic date indicates a production site in the vicinity. Some rare cast bowls among the Hellenistic vessels from the late 2nd–early 1st centuries BCE, if not imported, shed new light on the quality of the local production.

Part II opens with the presentation of the building remains in the Hospitaller Compound (Chapter 5 by Eliezer Stern). Here, the exposed buildings rest directly on bedrock; sealed loci indicate that the area was first settled in the late 3rd–early 2nd centuries BCE, either before or after the Seleucid victory over the Ptolemies in the Battle of Panium (Baneas) in 200 BCE and the subsequent take-over of Palestine and Phoenicia. The impressive residential building unearthed in Unit B, either private or public, was embellished with columns, plastered stairs and coloured stucco panels in ›Masonry Style‹. Chapter 6 by Yael Gorin-Rosen describes the few Hellenistic and Early Roman glass vessels. Outstanding and relatively rare in excavations in Israel is a mosaic glass fragment of the luxury objects class. It is decorated with a spiral pattern which is the most common pattern among the Hellenistic hemispherical glass bowls found at Delos and also dominant on glass bowls from Marisa and Dora from ca. 150–50 BCE. In Chapter 7 Natalie Messika discusses a dozen fragmentary terracotta figurines, by

- 1 For preliminary publications see p. 198 note 1 (contribution by A. M. Berlin and P. Stone).
2 D. Regev, 'Akko–Ptolemais, a Phoenician City: The Hellenistic Pottery, *MedA* 22–23, 2009–2010, 115–191.
3 The publication scheme for the substantial amount of finds is summarized in table 1 with details of already published and forthcoming studies.

fabric characteristics of local manufacture. Dated to the 3rd–2nd centuries BCE the figurines apparently are part of a fill, brought from near one of the temples at 'Akko. Chapter 8 is a short account on 38 ballista balls (Ayelet Tatcher).

Part III contains three chapters. Chapter 9 by Andrea M. Berlin and Peter J. Stone presents a selection of the Hellenistic and Early Roman pottery recovered at both excavation sites, covering the time span from the 3rd century BCE through the early 1st century CE. In their own words the authors are focussed on the presentation of »all apparent imported wares; all diagnostic vessels and fragments from large floor deposits; representative diagnostics from fills; and particularly well-preserved and unusual pieces«. Most significant, the approach is not a merely typological one, but the target is to »offer some observations regarding market networks, the chronology and character of local production, and aspects of the stylistic attitudes and dining habits of 'Akko's Hellenistic residents«⁴. In the reviewer's opinion, for any archaeologist who engages in a scholarly analysis of ceramics such a comprehensive perspective is vital for the assessment of the cultural background and should always be an indispensable requirement for the final presentation of the material. The chapter comprises two sections: a detailed discussion and a pottery catalogue. In the discussion, the authors sum up the evidence that the pottery provides for the city's culture and economy. The catalogue is organized by stratigraphic groups according to the excavation areas and strata outlined in Chapters 2 and 5. Within each group, the pottery is classified by function: vessels for individual drinking and eating, vessels for table service, household tasks, cooking, and storage and transport (figs. 9.1 – 9.26). Figures 9.27 and 9.28 illustrate a number of unstratified, yet well-preserved or unique finds.

In the discussion the ceramics collected in the five stratigraphic groups are analyzed, followed by the description of sixteen ceramic wares. In each paragraph of the stratigraphic groups the authors contextualize the evidence derived from the evaluation of the functional classes, clarifying consumer behaviour and the customers' dependence on local and eastern Mediterranean markets. The identification of the wares and archaeometric analyses permits two conclusions to be drawn. First, 'Akko participated in the exchange and trade networks on a local, regional and superregional stage; second, the bulk of vessels were produced in workshops along the central and southern Levantine coast, while a relatively small amount of imported wares from the Aegean, Asia Minor and Italy attest to the residents' openness for the life-style of the Greco-Roman koine.

The twenty-eight figures in which the items are illustrated are accompanied by a compact table, specifying vessel shape, ware, and decoration. For each item a respective number of parallels are provided, arranged by geographic regions of the southeastern Mediterranean. The lists begin with Israel, and the sites are enumerated in alphabetical order, including parallels from previous excavations in 'Akko. In the eyes of the reviewer the arrangement is not reader-friendly, and I cannot see a benefit in the separation of the comparanda by modern state borders. Occasionally, references from other regions are given; for the brazier lug in fig. 9.14:1 Athens is mentioned, while the basic research on the finds at Knidos is not included⁵. The early 1st century CE Broneer Type XXIII lamp in fig. 9.26:13 is said to depict »gladiator and lion«. It is suggested here that the motif is a simplified version of the charioteer on a biga, with the charioteer no longer present. It is fine example of the wide-spread practice of copying Roman-type volute lamps and gradually reducing details of the original figure-type, while the

4 Quotations on p. 133.

5 M. Şahin, *Hellenistische Kohlenbecken mit figürlich verzierten Attaschen aus Knidos*, Knidos-Studien 3 (Möhnesee 2003).

imagery attests to the highly connected visual culture in the Roman Empire⁶. Extraordinary is a Hellenistic black-slipped circular lamp with seven nozzles and a clam shell for a handle. Some Hellenistic lamps with seven nozzles are recorded in the Levant⁷, yet to date there is no parallel for the unique specimen from 'Akko.

The visual presentation of the black- and red-gloss wares is an unfortunate detriment of the publication; when a black slip covers the exterior and/or interior surfaces the vessels are coloured in black, while a red slip is indicated by a raster of parallel lines, set diagonally on the vessel. A customary style of ceramic drawings published in the IAA reports, the addition does not improve the drawing, and actually naming the wares and describing the slip is sufficient. Moreover, the practice does not follow the standard norm of Greco-Roman ceramic studies, as a quick glance at the excavation reports of the Athenian Agora will reveal⁸. The reviewer takes it for granted that these publications serve as paradigm for archaeologists researching Greco-Roman ceramics.

In Chapter 10 of Part III Danny Syon presents a concise summary of the approximately 200 coins found in both excavation areas, pointing out that unfortunately the civic issues of 'Akko-Ptolemais are in rather poor state of preservation. The catalogue list 103 coins from the 4th century BCE to the 7th century CE. Chapter 11 by Eliezer Stern on the city's geography is an analysis of the archaeological data, discussing the process of expansion away from Tell 'Akko and the boundaries of the Hellenistic city. In table 11.1 the author compiled a summary of excavated sites with archaeological remains from all periods at 'Akko. It is a most convenient data base for scholars and students.

All in all, the editors and contributors of this volume are to be praised and congratulated for a thorough presentation and discussion of excavated archaeological remains within and outside the Old City of 'Akko, especially enhancing our knowledge of the material culture, of consumption and trade in the Hellenistic and Roman metropolis and in the region.

- 6 For Italian lamps see D. M. Bailey, *A Catalogue of the Lamps in the British Museum*, II. Roman Lamps Made in Italy (London 1980) 57–58 fig. 59; for lamps produced in eastern workshops see D. M. Bailey, *A Catalogue of the Lamps in the British Museum*, III. Roman Provincial Lamps (London 1988) 60 fig. 70, Q 2283 (Nabatean). Q 2388–2389 (Cypriot); J. Marchand, *The Lamps*, in: P. Manor Bikai – W. J. Fulco – J. Marchand, *Tyre: The Shrine of Apollo* (Amman 1996) 59, no. 9 from Tyre.
- 7 R. Rosenthal-Heginbottom, *The Sacred Number Seven – Reflections on the Hellenistic Seven-Nozzled Lamps from Tel Dor*, *Eretz-Israel* 29, Ephraim Stern Volume (Jerusalem 2009) 194*–208*.
- 8 See S. I. Rotroff, *Hellenistic Pottery. Athenian and Imported Wheelmade Table Ware and Related Material*, *Agora* 29 (Princeton NJ 1997); J. W. Hayes, *Roman Pottery. Fineware Imports*, *Agora* 32 (Princeton NJ 2008) 13–56 sigillata and red-gloss wares.

