

AFTER ALEXANDER

The Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods
at Pella in Jordan

John Tidmarsh



SYDNEY UNIVERSITY PRESS

PREFACE

In many ways, students of the history of the southern Levant in antiquity have been well served (Figure 0.1). This state of affairs is largely because the land is central to three of the world's great religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – and as such has always been the focus of intense scholarship. Its central position, lying as it does within the Fertile Crescent and yet bordering the eastern Mediterranean, left it open to a great number of cultural cross-influences that had much to do with the final form of Judaeo-Christianity. But for this, neither the Bible nor, indeed, the Qur'an would exist in their present forms and the same applies to the sphere of Biblical Studies that has done so much to expand our knowledge of those peoples, towns and events mentioned in the Old and New Testaments as well as in other ancient texts.

For the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods,¹ the works of modern scholars of the calibre of Schürer, Tcherikover, Bickerman and Hengel (to name but a few), although primarily concerned with the interaction between Jews and Greeks, provide invaluable material for the last three centuries BC and first centuries AD in Palestine.² In many areas the contribution of these historians along with, of course, the first-century AD Jewish diplomat, soldier and historian Flavius Josephus (Chapman and Rodgers 2016), has been greatly enhanced by that of archaeology, despite the fact that until recently Hellenistic archaeology in particular was a relatively

neglected field. Numerous Palestinian sites including 'Akko-Ptolemais, Ashdod, Gezer, Jerusalem, Marisa, Qumran, Samaria, Sepphoris, Shechem, Tel Anafa and Tel Dor have yielded impressive quantities of Hellenistic and/or Early Roman material, although not always from well-defined stratigraphic contexts. Although much of this material awaits careful analysis and publication, enough has been studied to allow us to form a fairly comprehensive view of what life was like in Palestine under the Ptolemies, Seleucids, Hasmoneans and Romans.³

East of the Jordan River the picture was, until recently, somewhat different (Adams [ed.] 2008; Geraty and Herr 1986: 3–72; Moorey 1991: 167–70). Relatively neglected under Ottoman rule and for many centuries largely populated by nomadic Bedouin, Transjordan did not have the same appeal or ease of access for scholars and Biblical archaeologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Cisjordan; in many ways this was fortunate for, while delaying the onset of serious large-scale excavations, it meant that Transjordanian archaeology was spared the worst excesses of the pre-Kenyon/Wheeler era that have so bedevilled archaeological research in many other parts of the ancient world.

Archaeological exploration east of the Jordan River began in earnest during the period between the two world wars (Adams 2008: 2–3; Geraty and Herr 1986: 6) and has continued apace following the

1 For the chronology of the Persian, Hellenistic, and Early Roman periods I have followed that used by the University of Sydney Pella Project. Thus Persian (539–332 BC); Hellenistic (332–63 BC); Early Roman (63 BC–135 AD).

2 Amongst many works by these scholars, Schürer 1973–1987; Tcherikover 1959; Bickerman 1988; Hengel 1976. Palestine is used in this work to denote the territory covered by the state of modern Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip. See Jacobson (1999) for the use of the term “Palestine” in antiquity.

3 See, for example, Berlin 1997b; Magness 2011, 2013, 2021; Stern 1993–2008.

formation of the modern state of Jordan in 1948. As an example of this explosion in archaeological research, some fifty permits have been granted to foreign excavation teams in most years since at least the 1990s (for example, Green et al. 2018), not to mention the numerous planned and rescue digs carried out by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and university departments, most notably those from the universities of Jordan and Yarmouk. These investigations have cast much light on the history of Transjordan up until the present day (Adams (ed.) 2008; Harding 1967; Homès-Fredericq and Hennessy 1989). This light, however, has been shed unevenly, with the result that while much is known about the Prehistoric, Bronze and Iron ages, as well as later periods such as Late Roman, Byzantine and Islamic, less has been published from the Persian, Hellenistic and Early Roman eras, leaving us in a relative state of ignorance about the Persian and Hellenistic periods in particular.⁴ After forty years of fieldwork conducted by both the College of Wooster, Ohio and the University of Sydney, an impressive quantity of Hellenistic and Early Roman material has been recovered from Pella (modern Tabaqat Fahl) in the north Jordan Valley. Some of this material, from both the Wooster and Sydney excavations, has already been published in *Pella of the Decapolis 1*, *Pella of the Decapolis 2*, *Pella in Jordan 1*, *Pella in Jordan 2*, as well as in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, and other academic and more popular journals.⁵ Undoubtedly, continued work at Pella will unearth further important finds from these periods necessitating a re-evaluation and modification of some of the views and theories put forward in this volume; in the meantime, this work includes a summary of both the College of Wooster and University of Sydney excavations between 1979 and 2019 along with the Hellenistic and Early Roman pottery recovered as

a result.⁶ A further volume, planned to follow, aims to bring together the remaining material recovered during these years, making it readily accessible to those scholars working in the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods in the Levant and beyond.⁷

Although I have been involved with the Pella excavations from the first University of Sydney excavation season in 1979 – at that time as an undergraduate student – it was only as a result of Anthony McNicoll's tragic death in December 1985 that I became a co-director of the project and undertook to study and publish the Hellenistic and Early Roman material. This volume is presented as part of this undertaking.

John Tidmarsh
July 2023

4 As demonstrated by the chapters on the Persian and the Hellenistic periods east of the Jordan River (Bienkowski; Schmid) in Adams ([ed.] 2008), in many ways the successor to MacDonald et al. (eds) 2001: *The Archaeology of Jordan*. See also Millar (1987) for an overall view of the problems in understanding the Hellenistic period “anywhere west of the Euphrates and south of the Amanus Mountains”.

5 For the results of the earlier seasons, see Tidmarsh (1989).

6 Only the published Hellenistic and Early Roman pottery from the Wooster College excavations will be dealt with here as the author has not had the opportunity to examine the unpublished pottery.

7 The necessity to publish the results obtained so far has been greatly emphasised by the disruption experienced throughout the world as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the profoundly tragic consequences with which we are all familiar, the pandemic has clearly demonstrated how “routine” archaeological work can be unexpectedly curtailed.



Figure 0.1. The southern Levant, showing main sites mentioned in the text.

INTRODUCTION

Ancient Pella, modern Tabaqat Fahl (Plate 1), lies on the lower foothills of the East Jordan Valley, some 28 kilometres south of Lake Tiberias and approximately 5 kilometres east of the Jordan River (coordinates 32°27'N, 35°37'E). Its perennial spring (Plate 2) and position close to two of the major trade routes of the Levant – the north–south route from Damascus to Arabia and the east–west route from the Jordanian plateau to the coast of Palestine via the Jezreel Valley – have made it a site of great antiquity with evidence of human activity in the region dating back to Lower Palaeolithic times (McNicoll et al. 1982: 17–34).¹ Its mention in numerous texts and historical documents from the early second millennium onwards emphasises its continuing importance in the region (Knapp 1993: 39–51; R.H. Smith 1973: 23–82).

While Pella had been visited by the English travellers Charles Leonard Irby and James Mangles in the early nineteenth century (Irby and Mangles 1823: 92–3), identified by Edward Robinson during his visit to the site in 1852 (Robinson 1856: 320–4), and its remains extensively surveyed by the German scholar Gottlieb Schumacher in 1887 (Schumacher 1888), the first archaeological soundings were not carried out until 1958 by the American Schools of Oriental Research under R.W. Funk and H.N. Richardson. These soundings were confined to limited excavations in two squares on the main mound and only a brief

summary of the results was published (Funk and Richardson 1958).²

The first major archaeological excavations at the site were commenced in the spring of 1967 by the College of Wooster under the direction of Robert Smith, who published his results in *Pella of the Decapolis 1* (1973). Unfortunately the excavation program was curtailed in its first season by the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war in June, and work was not resumed until 1979 as a joint project between Wooster and the University of Sydney under the direction of Smith, the late J. Basil Hennessy and the late Anthony McNicoll.³ In 1985 the College of Wooster ceased its involvement with the site, the excavations continuing under the auspices of the University of Sydney, at first under the overall direction of Basil Hennessy and, subsequently, of Stephen Bourke.

Besides the excavation reports in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* and numerous more specialised articles, the results so far have appeared in detail in *Archaeology of Jordan II.2* (Homès-Fredericq and Hennessy 1989), the College of Wooster publications *Pella of the Decapolis 1* (R.H. Smith 1973), *Pella of the Decapolis 2* (R.H. Smith and L.P. Day 1989), the University of Sydney's *Pella in Jordan 1* (McNicoll et al. 1982) and *Pella in Jordan 2* (McNicoll et al. 1992). More recently, the coins from the excavations of 1979–90 have been

1 Since 1999, a Jordanian-German project has diverted the water from the spring, via a pumping station on site, to supply irrigated areas in the Jordan Valley (Margane et al. 2010).

2 For a full discussion of the early exploration of Pella by Western travellers and archaeologists, see R.H. Smith 1973: 10–14.

3 See R.H. Smith 1973: 20–2, for a vivid account of the problems faced by the expedition, which was in the field at the outbreak of the 1967 war.

published (Sheedy et al. 2001), as have the results of excavations at the Natufian site of Wadi al-Hammeh, a westward-flowing tributary of the Jordan River located some 2 kilometres to the north of the *tell* (Edwards 1992, 2007; Edwards [ed.] 2013; McNicoll et al. 1982: 17–27). Numerous Palaeolithic, Kebaran and Natufian artefacts have also been unearthed from scattered sites on the interfluvial ridge and terrace sections adjacent to the wadi and close to the shores of the ancestral Lake Lisan (Macumber 1992).

Excavations at Pella itself have demonstrated that the main mound (Khirbet Fahl) was settled by at least Pre-Pottery Neolithic times (Bourke 1997: 96–7, 2008, 2015/16) with relatively few gaps – most notably the Late Iron IIB/C (c. 730–540 BC) and Persian (539–332 BC) periods – in its occupation sequence until modern times when, in 1967, the small village of Tabaqat Fahl was moved from the *tell* to a more westerly position. Work on Tell Husn – the largely natural hill immediately to the south of the Wadi Jirm al-Moz separating it from the main mound – has indicated intermittent occupation since the Chalcolithic period (Bourke 2014; Bourke et al. 1999; Watson and Tidmarsh 1996).

Hellenistic (332–63 BC) architectural remains and artefacts have now been unearthed from many of the plots on the main mound (Figure 1.1) in Areas III, IV, VIII, XXIII, XXVIII, XXXII; in the Wadi Jirm al-Moz (Area IX) and on Tell Husn (Areas XI, XXXIV). Furthermore, two fortresses from this period have been located on nearby Jebel Sartaba (Area XIII) and Jebel Hammeh (Area XXX). The fort on Sartaba has been planned and investigated by limited soundings by the College of Wooster inside the structure (McNicoll et al. 1982: 65–7) while the defensive wall on Jebel Hammeh has been partially traced by a University of Sydney team but no excavations undertaken (McNicoll et al. 1992: 103–5).

Whereas Hellenistic artefacts have been recovered from numerous plots on the main mound and

elsewhere, Early Roman (63 BC–135AD) material, represented chiefly by “Roman” forms of Eastern Sigillata A (ESA), is found only in small quantities and in disturbed deposits on the main mound in plots IIIP, IIIQ and IVL (Table 1.1). The structure(s) associated with this latter material were, however, completely obliterated by later Byzantine and early Islamic (mainly Ummayyad) overbuilding. Thus, architectural evidence for the Early Roman period is essentially restricted to the Civic Complex in the Wadi Jirm al-Moz (Area IX), Tell Husn (Areas XI and XXXIV) and the tombs of Areas VI and VII. From Area VI to the south-west of Husn, an unlooted tomb (Tomb 54) dating to the late first or early second century AD was cleared in 1983 (McNicoll et al. 1992: 124–33). Much of the organic material from this tomb – including cedar beams, pine planking and a pair of leather soles – was well preserved with many intact glass vessels also recovered. The tomb contained little in the way of pottery, although worth noting was the presence of a wheelmade knife-pared (“Herodian”) lamp (McNicoll et al. 1992: pl. 87.4) and three fragments of a “Galilean” bowl of Kfar Hananya Form 1B (Adan-Bayewitz 1993: 91–7).⁴ A further tomb (Tomb 40) from the same area of late first century BC or early first century AD was also explored (McNicoll et al. 1982: 87–8). Five other tombs of Early Roman date (first to second centuries AD), of which at least four had been robbed, were unearthed by the Wooster team in the South Cemetery (Area VII) in 1979 (McNicoll et al. 1980: 75–6).⁵

4 With the exception of Areas VIII, IX, and XIII (College of Wooster), the other areas from which Hellenistic and Early Roman material has been recovered were excavated by University of Sydney teams. The results of the College of Wooster excavations in these three areas are dealt with briefly in this volume for the sake of completion but for a fuller description (although much remains unpublished) see the relevant sections in R.H. Smith (1973), R.H. Smith and Day (1989) and McNicoll et al. (1982, 1992), as well as the excavation reports in *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, and *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*.

5 I am grateful to Sandra Gordon (pers. com.) for further information regarding the Early Roman tombs from Areas VI and VII. For the later reuse of an Early Roman sarcophagus in the West Church complex (Area I), see R.H. Smith 1973: 143–9.

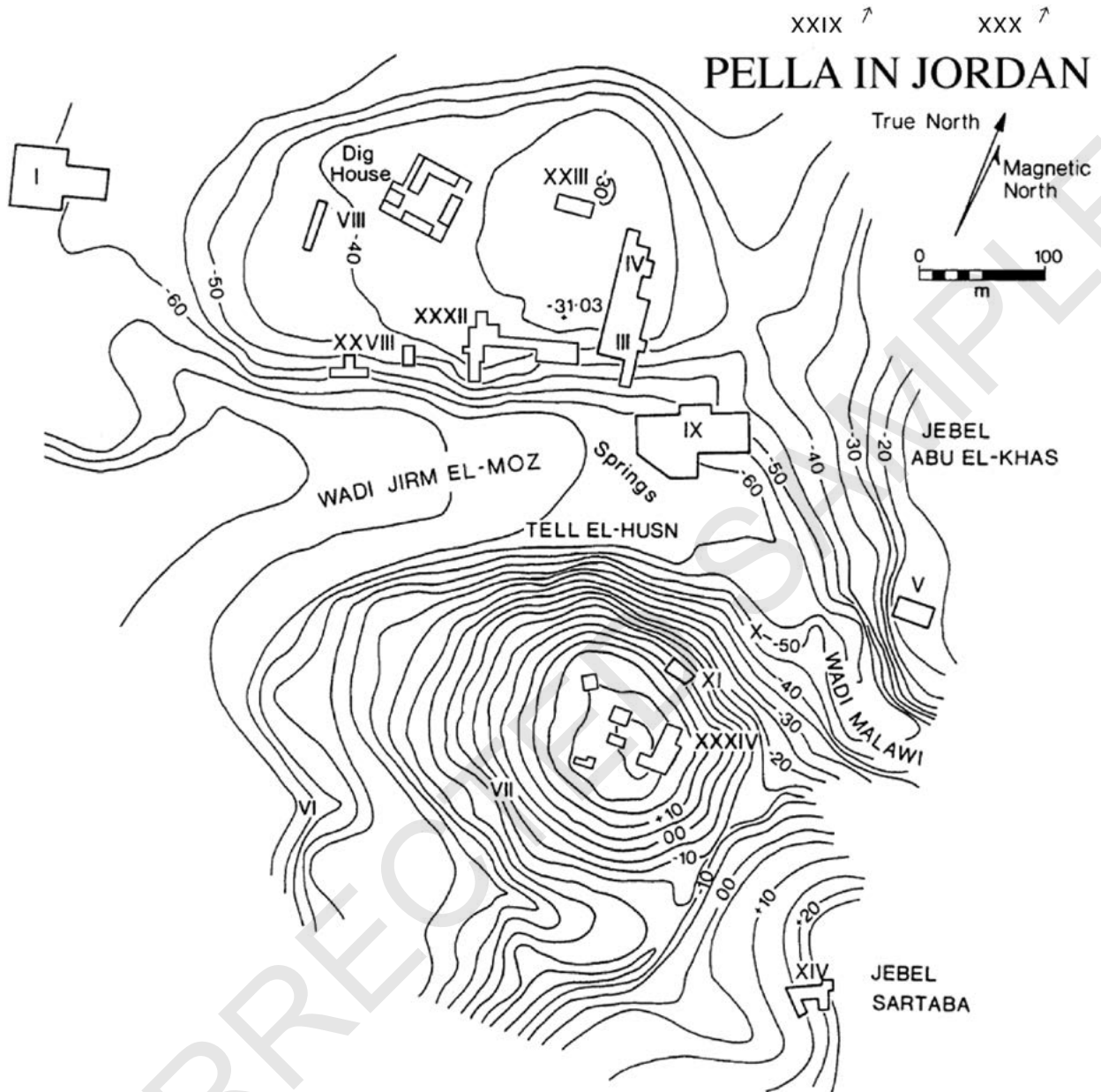


Figure 1.1. Pella. Excavation areas.

THE RECORDING TECHNIQUES USED AT PELLA: AN OUTLINE OF TERMINOLOGY AND ABBREVIATIONS

For a full outline see McNicoll (1992: xvi–xvii). The terms relevant to this volume are outlined here.

Provenance/field terminology

Area

The first part of identification. Shown by Roman numerals and allotted to zones within the Pella district excavated by the Joint Expedition. Thus, for example,

Area VIII (College of Wooster) signifies that plots in this area were excavated by the College of Wooster whereas Area XXIII (University of Sydney) signifies that plots in this area were excavated by the University of Sydney.

Plot

The second part of identification. An alphabetical letter (A, seq.) is given to each trench termed a Plot, excavated within an Area.

Locus

The third part of identification. During the course of the excavation each plot is divided into loci

defined by baulks established by the excavator or by archaeological remains (for example, walls) or by a combination of the two.

Level

The final part of identification. Levels are the stratified deposits resulting from human or natural activity. Thus XXIII A 3.6 = Area XXIII, Plot A, Locus 3, Level 6.

Feature (F)

A term used to refer to any fixed archaeological object (for example, a pit, oven, bench) planned and recorded individually. Thus, F36 may be an oven recorded as Feature 36.

Walls

Numbered sequentially in each plot.

House terminology

Inventory Number (CN)

Each ceramic (or the uncommon chalkstone) specimen, when inducted into the pottery series, was originally allocated an inventory number (CN).

Registration Number (RN)

Each museum or study object allocated to Jordan, Australia or the USA by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, is given a registration number. More recently, these objects have all been allocated to Jordan.

After Alexander



Plate 15. Plot XXIIID. Cobbled courtyard 11.4-6 with ESA plate FW 204 on its surface. Wall 16 to the south, below the courtyard.



Plate 16. Plot XXIIID. FW 204 in situ.

earlier first century BC. In the Jannaeus Destruction levels especially, the high proportion of plain ware fishplates in Coarse Light Brown fabric points to a continuing strong local demand for the form. **FW 6**, **FW 8** and the base **FW 29** are the only certain examples of imported Athenian (Ware 1) fishplates at Pella with by far the greatest number of black-gloss fishplates being of Ware 2.

While only **FW 6** has the sharply down-turned rim and thick wall seen in the late fourth- and early third-century examples from Athens (Rotroff 1983: fig. 53), there is a tendency for those fishplates with the more acutely-angled rims (for example, **FW 1–3**) to come from earlier, second-century levels with those with more drooping rims seen in the Jannaeus Destruction levels. **FW 5–7** are from Early Roman strata on Tell Husn and clearly residual. The absence of a base on most of the black-gloss examples makes it impossible to ascertain whether the interior central depression would have been surrounded by a ridge, seen in many of the plain ware fishplates, and suggested to be “typical of the second century BCE” (Guz-Zilberstein 1995: 291). Among Athenian black-gloss fishplates, this feature is seen in some examples produced after the mid-third century BC (Rotroff 1997b: 148); at Pella it occurs in both Pre-Jannaeus Destruction (**FW 28**) and Jannaeus Destruction (**FW 21**) contexts.

Fishplate **FW 30**, along with two very small uncatalogued body sherds from closed vessels (in Mixed Contexts: both very pale brown clay 10YR 8/3, greenish-grey glaze 6/1), are our only examples of “Parthian” glazed ware (Debevoise 1934; Haerinck 1983; Jackson 2011b; Oates and Oates 1958; Toll 1943) – a ware that is rare in the southern Levant (Berlin 1997a: 169–71; Rosenthal-Heginbottom 2015b: 685) notwithstanding the incursion of the Parthians as far south as Jerusalem and Marisa in 40 BC (Josephus *Ant. Jud.* XIV.330–373, *BJ* I.248–273).¹¹

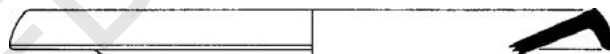
FW 1. CN 7446.

XXVIII B 13.7. Hellenistic 3A.

Part of wall, rim. PH 0.02; D rim (est.) 0.19. Yellowish-red clay 5YR 5/8. Grey core.

Thin dull black gloss on interior; dull red gloss on exterior. Flaring upper wall separated on interior by shallow groove from down-turned rim.

Parallels: ‘Akko-Ptolemais (Dothan 1976: fig. 30.1); Hippos-Sussita (Osband and Eisenberg 2018: pl. 2.2.17); Jerusalem (Hayes 1985b: fig. 46.6); Samaria (Crowfoot et al. 1957: fig. 54.2 upper profile).

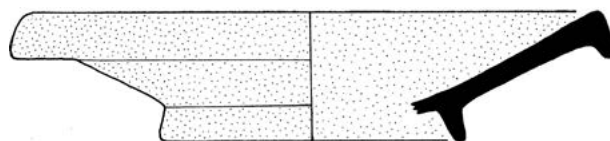


FW 2. CN 7781.

XXIII D 11.16. Hellenistic 3B.

Fragment of rim, wall, base. H 0.04; PL 0.13; D rim (est.) 0.22; D base (est.) 0.10. Reddish-yellow clay 7.5YR 7/6. Ware 2.

Good black gloss on interior, exterior. Ring base. Flaring wall. Rim overhanging exterior.



¹¹ See also Schmid (1997: 419) for relations between Nabateans and Parthians during the latter half of the first century BC. Not surprisingly, therefore, a small number of Parthian sherds has turned up at Petra (Horsfield and Horsfield 1941: no. 264b; Schneider 1996: 138, 142, nos. 579–591). Fragments of three Parthian amphorae were also recovered in 1978 from a tomb near Rajib about 8 kilometres south-east of Amman (Sauer 1979).

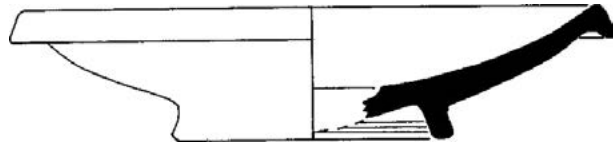
FW 3. CN 7142.

XXXIVF 6.1. Hellenistic 2B.

Part of rim, wall, base. H 0.04; PL 0.11; D rim (est.) 0.11. Yellowish-red clay 5YR 5/6. Occasional coarse white inclusions. Ware 4.

Thick dark brown gloss on interior, exterior. Ring base. Central depression. Slightly curving wall; sharply angled rim.

Parallels: Samaria (Crowfoot et al. 1957: fig. 54.4); Tel Dor (Guz-Zilberstein 1995: fig. 6.3:7, 275–225 BC).



FW 4. CN 0228.

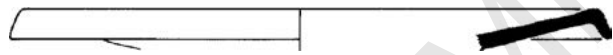
IIIB/C 1.7. Mixed Context.

Part of wall, rim. PH 0.02; D rim (est.) 0.26.

Irregularly fired clay. Reddish-yellow 7.5YR 7/6 to light yellowish-brown 10YR 6/4. Occasional mica. Ware 2.

Worn thin black gloss on interior, exterior. Straight flaring wall; markedly down-turned rim.

Parallels: Jerusalem (Geva 2003: pl. 5.10.39).



FW 5. CN 7170.

XXXIVG 6.10. Early Roman (residual).

Part of wall, rim. PH 0.02; PL 0.04; D rim (est.) 0.21.

Red clay 2.5YR 6/8.

Black gloss on interior, exterior. Flaring wall. Almost vertical down-turned rim.

Parallels: Jaffa (Tsuf 2018: fig. 9.47.794); Tel Mevorakh (Rosenthal 1978: fig. 3.14).



FW 6. CN 3002.

XIA/B 2.1/2. Early Roman (residual).

Part of wall, rim. PH 0.025; D rim (est.) 0.21. Red clay 2.5YR 6/6. Ware 1.

Shiny black gloss on interior, exterior. Vertical down-turned rim.

Parallels: Scythopolis/Beth-Shean (B.L. Johnson 2006: fig. 15.1.9).



FW 7. CN 2954.

XIA/B 1.5. Early Roman (residual).

Part of wall, rim. PH 0.03; D rim (est.) 0.37. Very pale brown clay 10YR 7/3. Ware 3.

Thin black gloss on exterior; red gloss interior. Flaring straight upper wall; down-turned rim.

Parallels: Amman/Philadelphia (Zayadine 1977–78: fig. 14.141).

