

SOUTH LEVANTINE HARBOR CITIES IN THE HERODIAN PERIOD – EARLY  
ROMAN IMPORTED FINE AND UTILITARIAN WARES FROM ASHDOD AND  
ASHKELON

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**ABSTRACT:** The article presents Ashdod and Ashkelon, two harbor cities from the Herodian period (37 BCE–70 CE), located on the south Levantine's coast. The topic is depicted using the examples of the imported fine and utilitarian wares dated to Early Roman, in specific Herodian, period. Ashdod and Ashkelon were cities located nearby, with very similar history up to the Hellenistic period. After this time their similarities disappeared and the importance in the region changed. This issue is well presented in the pottery assemblage and imports from the whole Mediterranean world.

Key words: Ashdod, Ashkelon, Palestine, harbor, city, Early Roman pottery, Herodian period

### **Introduction**

In the Hellenistic period a commercial network developed on the coast and many Greek colonies were built. Some of them lost their importance quickly whereas the others flourished. In the next years, as a consequence of the Hasmoneans' conquest, the role of the coastal cities decreased. Their significance increased again in the Roman period. At that time, in Palestine there were both bigger harbors like Caesarea, Joppa, Ashkelon, Gaza, probably Dor, and smaller ones, like Apollonia, Jaminton Limen (Javneh-Yam), Azotus Paralius, Antedon, Haifa, Sycaminum (Shikmonah).<sup>1</sup> The development of the cities depended both on local contacts and long-term relationships. Information about their activity was found in many sources that were written later, e.g. Talmud.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this article is to present and analyse the imported fine and utilitarian pottery from Ashdod and Ashkelon, dated to the Herodian period. This is especially important in studies on the economic situation of users of this pottery and cities' trade relations. In conclusion, Ashdod and Ashkelon are compared not only to each other but also to other trade centers in the region (Caesarea and Akko). Such a comparison, expanded by historical sources, is required to obtain the extended view on the connection between the socio-political events and the history of Levantine cities. The results are analysed statistically, dealing with the issues of the frequencies of particular categories, shapes and special features (decoration, inscription, the potter's mark).

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<sup>1</sup> Safrai 1994, 11–14, 125, 144, 164, 223–224, Fig. 53; Patai 1998, 139.

<sup>2</sup> Mishna Nedarim 3,6 (<https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Mishnah> [access: 18.01.2020]); Tosefta Demai 1,11 (<https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Tanaitic/Tosefta> [access: 18.01.2020]); Safrai 1994, 164.

**Political situation in Herodian Judea**

The Hellenistic (332–37 BCE)<sup>3</sup> and Herodian (37 BCE–70 CE)<sup>4</sup> periods were times of many political changes in Palestine. At that time, there were many events that essentially affected the situation in the country: the conquest by Alexander the Great,<sup>5</sup> the Diadochi wars,<sup>6</sup> the Maccabean Revolt (167–143 BCE),<sup>7</sup> the reign of the last Hasmoneans (and the civil war caused by them). The consequences of the end of the Hasmoneans resulted in Herod the Great taking the throne and Judea becoming a Roman province.<sup>8</sup>

In 40 BCE,<sup>9</sup> by decision of the Roman Senate, Herod the Great received the Judean throne.<sup>10</sup> The king ruled until 4 BCE. After his death, the kingdom was divided between his sons: Archelaos (he received the title of Ethnarch and lands: Judea, Idumea and Samaria), Antipas (he obtained the title of Tetrarch and lands: Galilee and Perea) and Philip (he gained the title of Tetrarch and lands: Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanea and Paneas). In his testament he also included his sister, Salome. She received Ashdod, Iamnia, Phasaelis, the king's palace in Ashkelon (together with its income)<sup>11</sup> and 500,000 silver coins.<sup>12</sup> The reign of the heirs did not last long. In 6 CE, Archelaos was removed from his position and his territory passed under Roman rule.<sup>13</sup> In 34 CE, Philip died and his district was attached to the province of Syria. In 38 CE, Agrippa I took the rule over Philip's Tetrarchy, obtaining the king's title from Caligula. Also, as a result of the fights for the throne, Antipas' territory was given to Agrippa I. Soon the king died and Judea became a Roman province again<sup>14</sup>. Under the governors' rule, tensions in the country grew and led to a war in 66 CE. In 70 CE the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed during the battle. The war was officially over after the conquest of Masada by the Romans in 73/74 CE.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hellenistic period in Palestine starts with the conquest by Alexander the Great, see Berlin 1997a, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Herodian period is a part of the Early Roman period dated to 37 BCE – 132 CE. Chronology after Stern 1993, 1529.

<sup>5</sup> Berlin 1997a, 3.

<sup>6</sup> After the Battle of Panium in 200 BCE Palestine was assumed by the Seleucids (earlier it was a part of the Ptolemaic kingdom), see Ciecieląg 2002, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ciecieląg 2002, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ciecieląg 2011, 172–385.

<sup>9</sup> 40–37 BCE when Herod the Great reigned in Judea was a time of battles with Hasmonean prince Antigonus II Mattathias, who also proclaimed himself a king of Judea, see Berlin 2005, 424; Ciecieląg 2011, 310–313.

<sup>10</sup> Since 63 BCE when Pompey intervened in an argument between John Hyrcanos II and Aristobulos II Judea was under Roman control yet it had autonomy, see Ciecieląg 2011, 302–304.

<sup>11</sup> The one given to her by Augustus, see J. *BJ* II 98.

<sup>12</sup> Administratively this area was in Archelaos' lands. After Salome's death, according to her will the lands were given to Augustus' wife, Livia. Next, Tiberius received it. The emperor's official ruled in the city, see J. *AJ.* XVII 189, 321, XVIII 31–32; *BJ* II 167; Dothan, Freedman 1967, 13; Ciecieląg 2002, 70.

<sup>13</sup> *Tac. Ann.* VI 32, 5, XII 60; *J. AJ.* XVIII–XIX; *BJ* II 119–177; Grant 1991, 269–274; Ciecieląg 2011, 349–358.

<sup>14</sup> In 53 CE Agrippa II assumed the rule in Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Batanea and Paneas, see Ciecieląg 2011, 372.

<sup>15</sup> *Tac. Ann.* XII 4, 54; *Hist.* II 79–81, V 10, 1; *J. AJ.* XVII–XX 139–270, 333–456; *BJ* II–IV, VIII 407, 435. The exact date of the fall of Masada has been an issue of academic discussion, see Campbell 1988, 156–158; Grant

### **Ashdod and Ashkelon and the cities-harbors in Palestine**

As Raphael Patai pointed out, Palestine's harbor cities were divided into three types: 1. single centers located in the neighborhood of agricultural areas, 2. single cities with Greco-Roman origin, focusing on trade and 3. double centers, cities located within a distance c. 3 miles from the sea. The last ones developed the daughter-cities system located on the coast. According to researchers, both Ashkelon and Ashdod belonged to the third category.<sup>16</sup> Another division system was presented by Ze'ev Safrai. Describing Hellenistic and Roman periods' cities, he classified Ashdod and Ashkelon as *poleis*. However, Ashdod and Ashkelon differed in size and prestige<sup>17</sup> (the latter was an example of a bigger *polis*, while the first one was smaller).<sup>18</sup> Although the populations of both cities were predominantly pagan, the Jewish presence was noticeable in the societies.<sup>19</sup> In opinion of Jerzy Ciecieląg Ashdod of the Hasmonean and Herodian age was the capital city of a toparchy, probably of Idumea.<sup>20</sup>

### **Pottery in Early Roman Palestine**

In Palestine, in the Early Roman period, it was local pottery (produced in workshops in Beth Shearim, Kefar Hananya, Jerusalem etc.) that prevailed, despite there being many examples of imported pottery. Their presence was mostly noticed at pagan cultic sites (Samaria-Sebaste, Tel Anafa etc.), administration centers and places inhabited by elites (Masada, Jerusalem, Jericho etc.). Undeniably, fewer examples of this pottery were also known to be coming from small towns and big villages (Gamla, Capernaum etc.).<sup>21</sup>

### **Tel Ashdod**

The ancient city of Ashdod, nowadays known as Tel Ashdod, is located c. 3 km from the modern city, between Yavneh and Ashkelon (see Fig. 1). The river Nahal Lachish flows in the vicinity of the city. In the past, the proximity of the river allowed the inhabitants to communicate well with other cities inside and outside the region.<sup>22</sup> Historical sources indicated that Ashdod must have been divided into two smaller sites: the coastal and the

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1991, 269–280; Ciecieląg 2011, 344–384.

<sup>16</sup> Safrai 1994, 10–14; Patai 1998, 136–137.

<sup>17</sup> Jerzy Ciecieląg suggested that even though Ashkelon wasn't in a Herod's kingdom, it was an important administrative centre in his territory, see Ciecieląg 2002, 238–239.

<sup>18</sup> Safrai 1994, 9–12, 17–19, 36–37, 223–224.

<sup>19</sup> Safrai 1994, 17–19.

<sup>20</sup> Ciecieląg 2002, 22; Ciecieląg 2011, 150–151.

<sup>21</sup> Adan-Bayewitz 1993, 83, 165; Safrai 1994, 115–118; Berlin 2005, 442–448; Gendelman 2006, 119–120.

<sup>22</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967, 5–7; Dothan, Porath 1982, 65; Dothan 1993a, 93.

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inland one. Over the years, the former was called Azotus Paralios (Azotus on-the-Sea), Minat Asdud/Isdud (Harbor of Asdud) or Minat al-Qal'a, whereas the latter one was known as Azotus Mesogaios/Azotos Hippenos (inland Azotus) or Isdud. In the Middle Ages, Mahuz Isdud (District of Ashdod) was the name the Arabic geographers used to call the area surrounding the site.<sup>23</sup> Modern researchers identified these places with Tel Mor and Ashdod-Yam (Ashdod as the city-harbor)<sup>24</sup> and Tel Ashdod (the inland city). During excavations and surveys at the harbors, the researchers did not find any remains from the Herodian period (the youngest ones were from the Hellenistic and Byzantine period).<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the remains from the Bronze Age to Ottoman period were found in Tel Ashdod.<sup>26</sup>

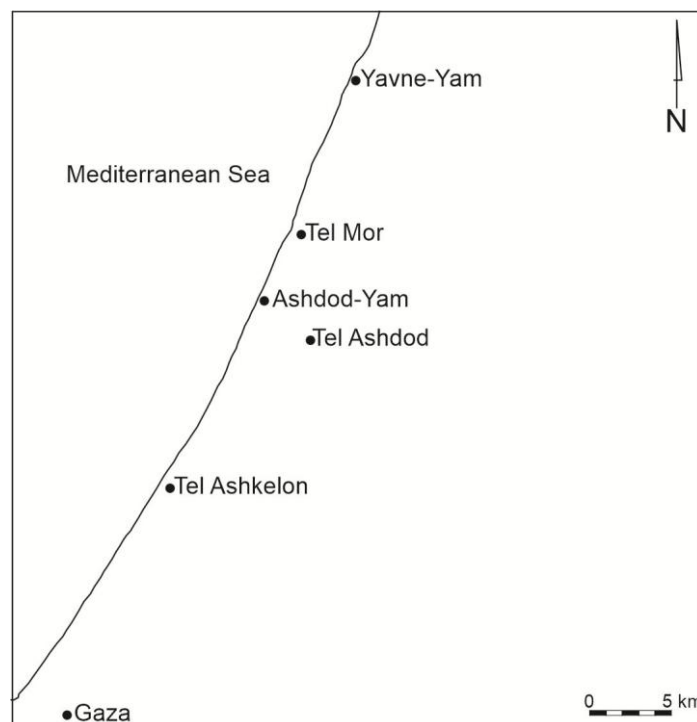


Fig. 1: Map of the sites

While studying Ashdod and its surroundings,<sup>27</sup> researchers found many remains from

<sup>23</sup> Kaplan 1993, 102–103; Safrai 1994, 224; Patai 1998, 145; Barako 2007, 1; Fantalkin 2014, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Tel Mor was the first harbor of Ashdod, known as Ashdod-Yam. The city was built in 2nd millennium BCE. Next in 10th c. BCE it was moved to the new place, today known as later Ashdod-Yam. Then Tel Mor lost its importance and the new Ashdod-Yam became the main harbor of Ashdod, see Dothan 1973, 1–17; Dothan 1993b, 1073.

<sup>25</sup> Kaplan 1993, 102; Barako 2007, 1; Fantalkin 2014, 46.

<sup>26</sup> *The Archeological Survey of Israel* ([http://www.antiquities.org.il/survey/new/default\\_en.aspx](http://www.antiquities.org.il/survey/new/default_en.aspx) [access 12.10.2019]).

<sup>27</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967; Bachi 1971, 86–124; Bachi, Ben-Dov 1971, 86–124; Bahat 1971, 173–180; Dothan 1971a, 17–24; Dothan 1971b, 25–42; Dothan 1971c, 42–44; Dothan 1971d; Fortuna, Wallace, Yevin 1971, 141–145; Kee 1971, 44–63; Dothan 1993b, 1073; Dothan, Ben-Shlomo 2005; Fantalkin 2014, 45–57; *The Archeological Survey of Israel* ([http://www.antiquities.org.il/survey/new/default\\_en.aspx](http://www.antiquities.org.il/survey/new/default_en.aspx) [access 12.10.2019]).

different periods, including the Early Roman period. Nonetheless, these remains were not recognized to the same extent as the ones from the previous periods. Most of them came from the excavations that were conducted in Tel Ashdod between 1962–1972. The Early Roman remains were discovered in seven areas – A, C, D, E, G, K, M (see Fig. 2) and some imported fine and utilitarian wares from that period were found in areas A, D, G, K. The examples of pottery were located in an administrative building, a cult place and a building with a courtyard/merchant's storeroom. Some of them were discovered in numerous remains of unidentified buildings and structures, a kiln and a pit (area A), a kiln, a pit and an unidentified locus (area D), walls and rooms (area G) and in the remains of a building, a street and rooms (area K).<sup>28</sup>

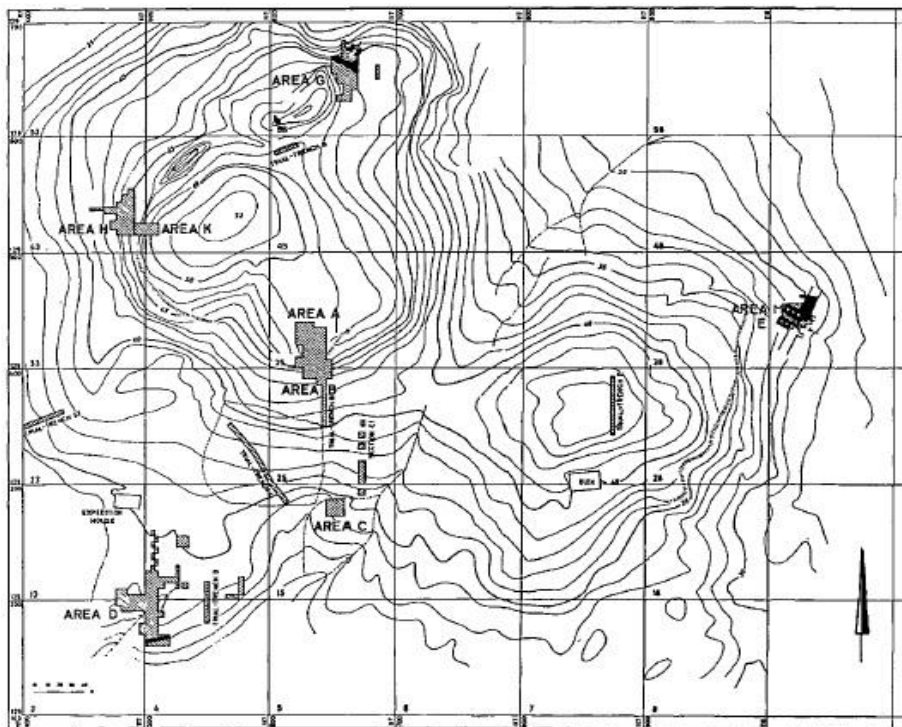


Fig. 2: Map of the areas excavated in Tel Ashdod (source: Dothan, Porath 1982, 4, Plan 1 after Finkelstein, Singer-Avitz 2001, 232)

### Early Roman imported fine and utilitarian ware from Tel Ashdod<sup>29</sup>

During the excavations in 1962–1972 archaeologists found many pieces of the imported fine and utilitarian ware dated to the Herodian period. Among them were 88 pieces that were published in the excavations' reports. The remains were presented in publications edited by:

<sup>28</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967; Bachi 1971, 86–124; Bachi, Ben-Dov 1971, 86–124; Bahat 1971, 173–180; Dothan 1971a, 17–24; Dothan 1971b, 25–42; Dothan 1971c, 42–44; Dothan 1971d; Fortuna, Wallace, Yevin 1971, 141–145; Kee 1971, 44–63; Dothan, Ben-Shlomo 2005.

<sup>29</sup> A part of pottery categories described here are dated to Late Hellenistic – Early Roman period.

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Moshe Dothan and David Noel Freedman (area A),<sup>30</sup> the former researcher (areas A, D, G, K)<sup>31</sup> and in Dothan's cooperation with David Ben-Shlomo (area K).<sup>32</sup>

The dominant wares that were discovered were bowls (see Fig. 3) and plates (see Fig. 4). There were also many cups (see Fig. 5) that were found. The given picture was similar to other Early Roman Mediterranean sites.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, a small amount of pottery fragments was connected with the closed forms: pitchers and jugs, *lagynoi* (see Fig. 6) and unguentaries (see Fig. 7).<sup>34</sup>

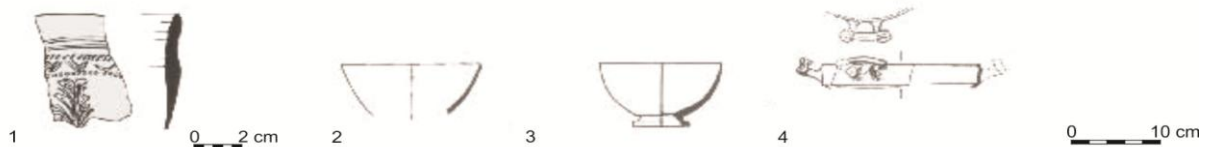


Fig. 3: Bowls, 1. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus 14, 2. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus 52, 3. Eastern sigillata A, area G, locus 4004, 4. Knidian Gray Ware, area G, locus O/11–12 (source: 1. Dothan, Freedman 1967, 50–51, Fig. 5:9; Hayes 1985, 24–25; 2. Dothan 1971d, 46–46, Fig. 16:11; Gendelman 2006, 91; 3. Dothan 1971d, 166–167, Fig. 78:4; Hayes 1985, 23–24; 4. Dothan 1971d, 166, Fig. 78:15; Gendelman 2006, 104)

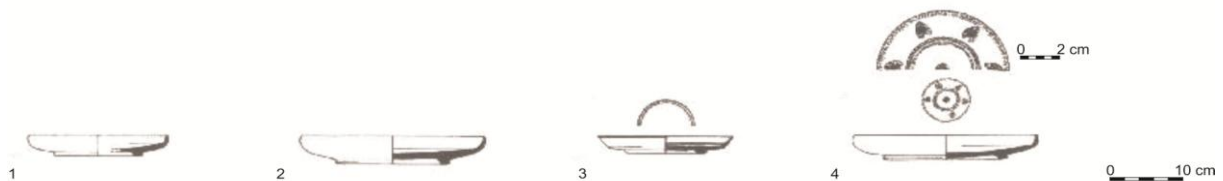


Fig. 4: Plates, 1. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus 16, 2. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus 31, 3. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus 46, 4. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus 18; (source: Dothan 1971d, 34–35, Fig. 10:5; Hayes 1985, 15–16; 2. Dothan 1971d, 44–45, Fig. 15:11; Hayes 1985, 44; 3. Dothan 1971d, 44–45, Fig. 15:17; Hayes 1985, 27; 4. Dothan 1971d, 34–35, Fig. 10:18; Hayes 1985, 15–16)

<sup>30</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967, 17–73.

<sup>31</sup> Bachi 1971, 115–118; Bachi, Ben-Dov 1971, 115–117; Bahat 1971, 173–180; Dothan 1971b, 32–42; Dothan 1971c, 42–44; Dothan 1971d, 30–37, 42–53, 60–63, 130–131, 166–169, 206–209; Fortuna, Wallace, Yevin 1971, 141–145; Kee 1971, 44–63.

<sup>32</sup> Dothan, Ben-Shlomo 2005, 239–240.

<sup>33</sup> Slane 1997, 283–300, 347–381; Gendelman 2006, 171–180.

<sup>34</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967, 18–35, 44–73, Fig. 2:4, 11–12, 4:2–3, 5:9, 11–14, 6:1–2, 9:1, 10:6–19, 11:10, 15, Pl. VII:2, 8–10, VIII:6–7, IX:13, X:1, 3–5, 7–8, 13; Bachi 1971, 115–118; Bachi, Ben-Dov 1971, 115–117; Bahat 1971, 173–180; Dothan 1971b, 32–42; Dothan 1971c, 42–44; Dothan 1971d, 30–37, 42–53, 60–63, 130–131, 166–169, 206–209, Fig. 9:16–17, 10:5, 18–19, 11:3, 15:9, 11–19, 16:11–16, 19–23, 27–28, 17:4, 9, 15, 19:10–11, 23:3, 5, 8–9, 60:32–34, 78:1, 4, 15, 79:12, 98:19, 21, 99:14, 18–26, Pl. XIV:12, XVI:2, 4–5, 8, XVII:6–7, XVIII:6, LXXI:1, 5, XC:2–4; Fortuna, Wallace, Yevin 1971, 141–145; Kee 1971, 44–63; Dothan, Porath 1982, 239–240, Fig. 3.113.6; Berlin 1997b, 83.

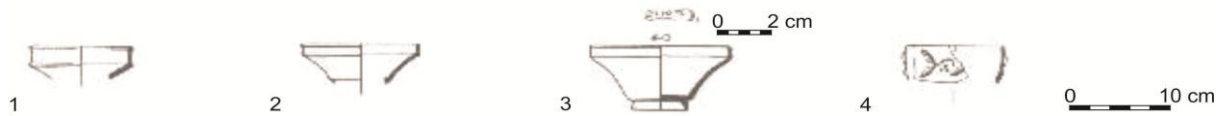


Fig. 5: Cups, 1. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus 39, 2. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus E/8, 3. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus E/8, 4. Western relief ware, area A, locus 54; (source: 1. Dothan 1971d, 46–47, Fig. 16:12; Gendelman 2006, 91; 2. Dothan 1971d, 46–47, Fig. 16:20; Hayes 1985, 35; 3. Dothan 1971d, 46–47, Fig. 16:21; Hayes 1985, 35; 4. Dothan 1971d, 46–47, Fig. 16:23; Kee 1971, 56)

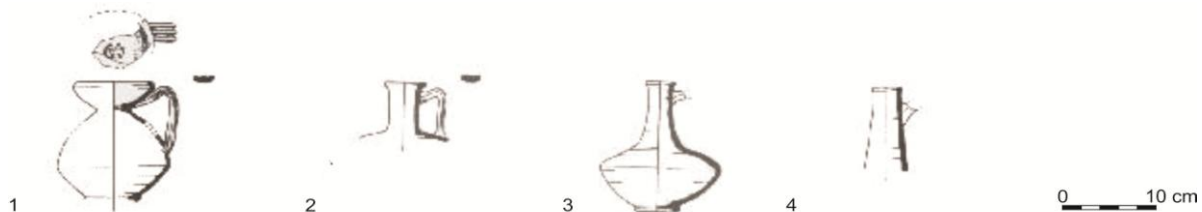


Fig. 6: Jugs and *lagynoi*, 1. Cypriot sigillata, area A, locus G/3, 2. Eastern sigillata A, area A, locus 57, 3. Phoenician Semi-Fine Ware, area A, locus 18, 4. Phoenician Semi-Fine Ware, area A, locus 53; (source: 1. Dothan 1971d, 60–61, Fig. 23:9; Hayes 1985, 90; 2. Dothan 1971d, 46–47, Fig. 16:28; Hayes 1985, 43–44; 3. Dothan 1971d, 36–37, Fig. 11:3; Berlin 1997b, 44, 47; 4. Dothan 1971d, 60–61, Fig. 23:5; Berlin 1997b, 45)



Fig. 7: Unguentaria, 1–3. area K, locus T/5; 4. area K, locus 6033; (source: 1–3. Dothan 1971d, 208–209, Fig. 99:22, 99:25–26; 4. Dothan 1971d, 208–209, Fig. 99:23)

Among the pottery categories, the most popular in Tel Ashdod was the ware called *Terra sigillata*, especially Eastern sigillata A (see Fig. 8). As Peter Gendelman<sup>35</sup> suggested, this category was the most common fine ware in the region (probably because it was cheaper than the other ones). Its popularity at the site should be connected with the intense trade relationships between Ashdod and the Syrian coast. The Phoenician Semi-Fine Ware<sup>36</sup> category was also very frequent at the site. The excavators didn't find many examples of Cypriot sigillata, the pottery from Asia Minor, Egypt or the western Mediterranean. Knidian Gray Ware, relief bowls, the Egyptian faience bowl or western relief ware appeared at the site in single examples.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Gendelman 2006, 171–172, 175.

<sup>36</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967, 32–44; Dothan 1971d, 60, 168–169; Berlin 1997b, 45–53.

<sup>37</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967, 18–35, 44–73, Fig. 2:4, 11–12, 4:2–3, 5:9, 11–14, 6:1–2, 9:1, 10:6–19, 11:10, 15, Pl. VII:2, 8–10, VIII:6–7, IX:13, X:1, 3–5, 7–8, 13; Bachi 1971, 115–118; Bachi, Ben-Dov 1971, 115–117; Bahat 1971, 173–180; Dothan 1971b, 32–42; Dothan 1971c, 42–44; Dothan 1971d, 30–37, 42–53, 60–63, 130–131, 166–169, 206–209, Fig. 9:16–17, 10:5, 18–19, 11:3, 15:9, 11–19, 16:11–16, 19–23, 27–28, 17:4, 9, 15, 19:10–11, 23:3, 5, 8–9, 60:32–34, 78:1, 4, 15, 79:12, 98:19, 21, 99:14, 18–26, Pl. XIV:12, XVI:2, 4–5, 8, XVII:6–7,

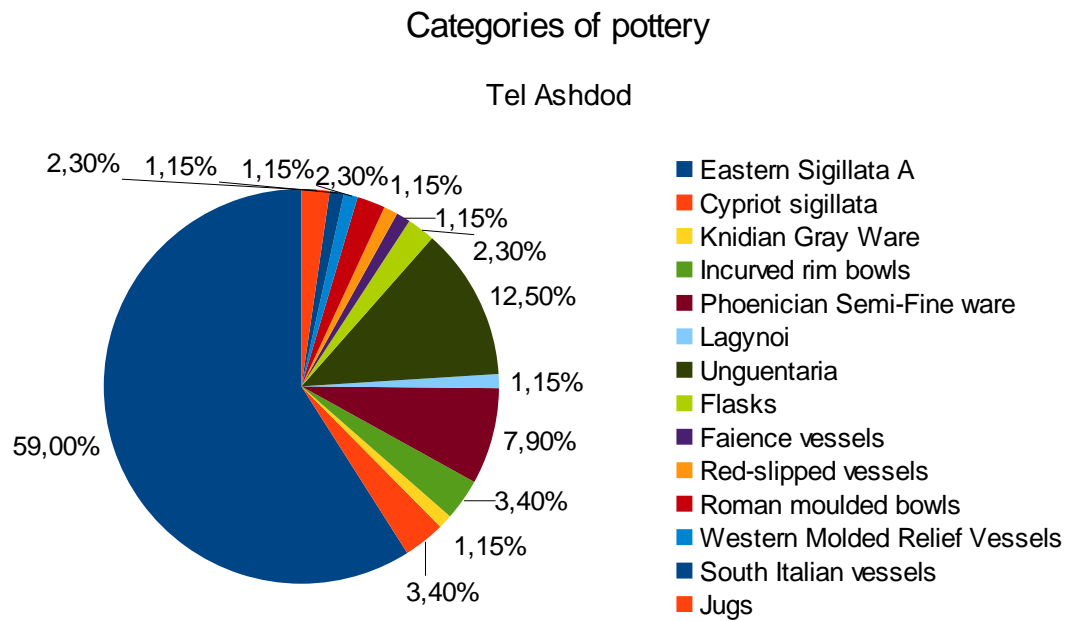


Fig. 8: Statistical analysis of imported fine and utilitarian ware categories in Tel Ashdod

Almost 40% of all fragments had special features: decoration (see Fig. 9), decoration and inscription (see Fig. 10), inscription (see Fig. 11) or potter's mark (see Fig. 12). The most common feature was a decoration (the ornament patterns were dominated by rouletting and stamps). This group included 29 pieces. Moreover, there were a huge amount of vessels with inscriptions. Their presence at the site may have pointed to what their value was to the owner. The inscriptions were written in Greek, which suggests that the owners were connected with the Greek culture (they were Greek or used the language). Rectangle and *planta pedis* potter's marks<sup>38</sup> were also found on the vessels.

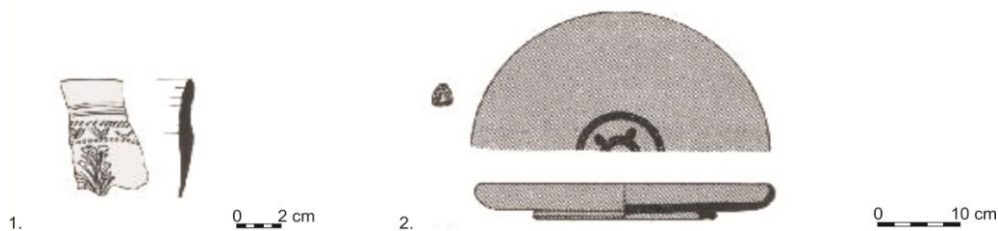


Fig. 9: Examples of the decoration; (source: 1. Dothan, Freedman 1967, 51, Fig. 5:9; 2. Dothan, Freedman 1967, 51, Fig. 5:13)

XVIII:6, LXXI:1, 5, XC:2-4; Fortuna, Wallace, Yevin 1971, 141-145; Kee 1971, 44-63; Dothan, Porath 1982, 239-240, Fig. 3.113.6; Slane 1997, 285-331, 368-369.

<sup>38</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967, 18-35, 44-73, Fig. 2:4, 11-12, 4:2-3, 5:9, 11-14, 6:1-2, 9:1, 10:6-19, 11:10, 15, Pl. VII:2, 8-10, VIII:6-7, IX:13, X:1, 3-5, 7-8, 13; Dothan 1971d, 30-37, 42-53, 60-63, 130-131, 166-169, 206-209, Fig. 9:16-17, 10:5, 18-19, 11:3, 15:9, 11-19, 16:11-16, 19-23, 27-28, 17:4, 9, 15, 19:10-11, 23:3, 5, 8-9, 60:32-34, 78:1, 4, 15, 79:12, 98:19, 21, 99:14, 18-26, Pl. XIV:12, XVI:2, 4-5, 8, XVII:6-7, XVIII:6, LXXI:1, 5, XC:2-4.



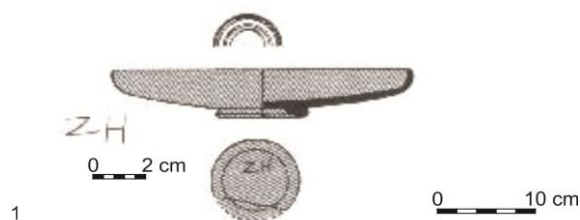


Fig. 10: An example of a vessel with decoration and inscription; (source: Dothan, Freedman 1967, 53, Fig. 6:1)

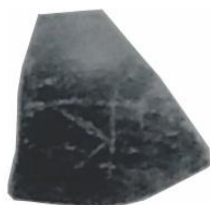


Fig. 11: The example of the pottery fragment with inscription; (source: Dothan, Freedman 1967, 60, Pl. X:7)

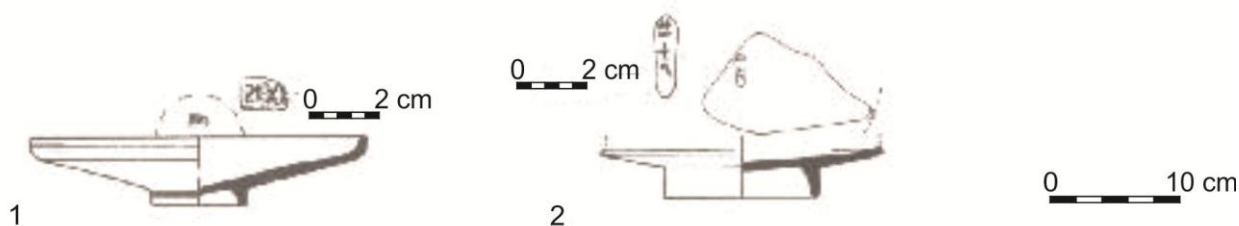


Fig. 12: Examples of the potter's marks; (source: 1. Dothan, Freedman 1967, 45, Fig. 15:9; 2. Dothan, Freedman 1967, 45, Fig. 15:18)

Most of the fragments were discovered in area A (68 examples). The largest amount was excavated in locus 15, identified as a street (six pieces), in locus 21, described as a pit (six fragments) and in locus 16, distinguished as a court (five pieces). In locus 18, interpreted as a room, four pieces of fine and utilitarian ware were found. Moreover, in area K, trench T/5, five pottery pieces were found, whereas four more fragments were located in T/4. In the rest of the *loci*, excavators discovered fewer pieces.<sup>39</sup>

When it comes to the imported fine and utilitarian wares found at the site, the examples from the eastern Mediterranean prevailed. Their presence underlined the preferences in

<sup>39</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967, 18–35, 44–73, Fig. 2:4, 11–12, 4:2–3, 5:9, 11–14, 6:1–2, 9:1, 10:6–19, 11:10, 15, Pl. VII:2, 8–10, VIII:6–7, IX:13, X:1, 3–5, 7–8, 13; Bachi 1971, 115–118; Bachi, Ben-Dov 1971, 115–117; Bahat 1971, 173–180; Dothan 1971b, 32–42; Dothan 1971c, 42–44; Dothan, 1971d, 30–37, 42–53, 60–63, 130–131, 166–169, 206–209, Fig. 9:16–17, 10:5, 18–19, 11:3, 15:9, 11–19, 16:11–16, 19–23, 27–28, 17:4, 9, 15, 19:10–11, 23:3, 5, 8–9, 60:32–34, 78:1, 4, 15, 79:12, 98:19, 21, 99:14, 18–26, Pl. XIV:12, XVI:2, 4–5, 8, XVII:6–7, XVIII:6, LXXI:1, 5, XC:2–4; Fortuna, Wallace, Yevin 1971, 141–145; Kee 1971, 44–63; Dothan, Porath 1982, 239–240, Fig. 3.113.6.

Ashdodian trade relationships. *Loci* in which pottery was found, showed their continuity that lasted since the Hellenistic period.<sup>40</sup> Because of the small diversity and lack of more expensive categories, like Italian sigillata,<sup>41</sup> in the assemblage it seems that the society mainly consisted of the middle-class with some elite exceptions. It can be ascertained that a further analysis of Herodian *loci* will broaden the picture.

### **Tel Ashkelon**

Ashkelon (Tel Ashkelon, in written sources also known as Ascalon) was a harbor city located on two hills (tells) in the southern part of Palestine's coast, between Gaza and Ashdod (see Fig. 1). At a distance of 5 km from the site's borders there was an ancient road that ran from Egypt to Mesopotamia.<sup>42</sup> Nowadays, the exact location of Ashkelon's ancient harbor is unknown. Researchers suggested that before the Hellenistic period the area between the tells was covered by water, which made it possible for ships to come into the city. In other periods, the unloading of the ships to smaller boats took place on the sea.<sup>43</sup>

During many excavations in Tel Ashkelon, the remains dated from the Middle Bronze Age (it's possible that the site was occupied before) to the Ottoman period were found.<sup>44</sup> Between 1985 and 2016, The Leon Levy Expedition was conducted at the site by Lawrence E. Stager (1985–2016) and Daniel M. Master (2007–2016). The research was complex and focused on the southern and northern tells and the valley between them.<sup>45</sup>

During the excavations, Early Roman pottery was found on both tells. Many fragments discovered on the northern tell were found in mixed contexts: the Late Hellenistic–Early Roman fill of the rampart from the same period, Late Roman *loci* and pits.<sup>46</sup> On the southern tell the excavators discovered the remains of the Late Hellenistic fortifications that were also used in the Early Roman period. The villa, pits mixed contexts: Early Roman floor, Late Roman and Islamic *loci*, pits and robbery trenches<sup>47</sup> and unstratified pottery pieces<sup>48</sup> were also

<sup>40</sup> Dothan, Freedman 1967, 18–35, 44–73; Bachi 1971, 115–118; Bachi, Ben-Dov 1971, 115–117; Bahat 1971, 173–180; Dothan 1971b, 32–42; Dothan 1971c, 42–44; Fortuna, Wallace, Yevin 1971, 141–145; Kee 1971, 44–63; Dothan, Porath 1982, 239–240.

<sup>41</sup> Gendelman 2006, 171–175.

<sup>42</sup> Stager 1993, 103; Raban, Tur-Caspa 2008, 67–96; Stager, Schloen 2008a, 3–4.

<sup>43</sup> Raban, Tur-Caspa 2008, 67.

<sup>44</sup> Allen 2008, 21–57; Carmi *et al.* 2008, 127–130; Kislev 2008, 131–137; Koucky 2008a, 11–15; Koucky 2008b, 17–20; Lass 2008, 107–126; Nir 2008, 105–106; Raban, Tur-Caspa 2008, 67–96; Rosen 2008, 101–104; Stager 2008, 137–140; Stager, Schloen 2008a, 3–10; Schloen 2008a, 143–152; Schloen 2008b, 153–163; Wachsmann 2008, 97–100.

<sup>45</sup> Stager, Schloen *et al.* 2008, 215–326.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson 2008, 213.

<sup>47</sup> Stager, Schloen *et al.* 2008, 240–250; Johnson 2008, 214–215.

<sup>48</sup> Their presence showed that this area was exploited in the Herodian period, but the remains were removed

discovered. The archaeologists paid special attention to the structure found in the center of the site in the 1920s. It was primarily identified as an Early Roman peristyle with bouleuterion/odeon. After a re-examination, it was interpreted as a two-phased basilica-style building, dated to the Early Roman period (first phase) and the Severan dynasty (second phase). Pottery, inscriptions etc. were also found inside the building.<sup>49</sup>

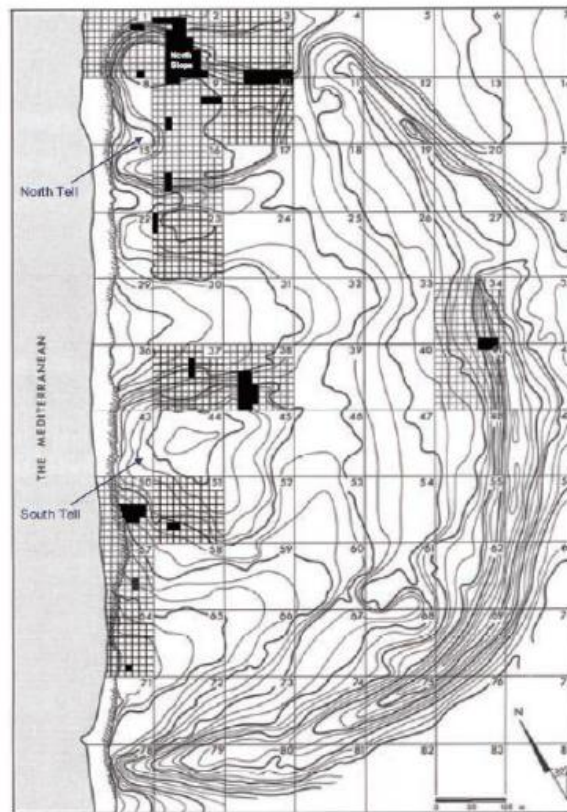


Fig. 13: Map of the excavated areas during *The Leon Levy Expedition of Ashkelon* at Tel Ashkelon; (source: Stager, Schloen 2008, 6, Fig. 1.4)

### Early Roman imported fine and utilitarian ware from Tel Ashkelon

During excavations in 1985–1988 and 2008–2012, pieces of Early Roman imported fine and utilitarian wares were found in Tel Ashkelon. Until now, 110 fragments were published in Barbara Johnson's<sup>50</sup> publication about Roman pottery from the site and in Ryan Boehm, Daniel M. Master and Robyn Le Blanc's article regarding the bouleuterion/odeon.<sup>51</sup>

Among the pottery found during the excavations, bowls (see Fig. 14) and plates were

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in the subsequent periods.

<sup>49</sup> Garstang 1922, 113; Le Blanc 2010; Boehm, Master, Le Blanc 2016, 271–285.

<sup>50</sup> Johnson 2008, 5–34, 105–108.

<sup>51</sup> Boehm, Master, Le Blanc 2016, 303–304.

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predominant (see Fig. 15). Apart from that, the explorers discovered many cups (see Fig. 16) in a variety of forms (cups, *skyphoi*) and other unidentified open vessels. Closed vessels (see Fig. 17) were represented by jugs (12 examples). Utilitarian ware fragments were absent from the publications.<sup>52</sup>

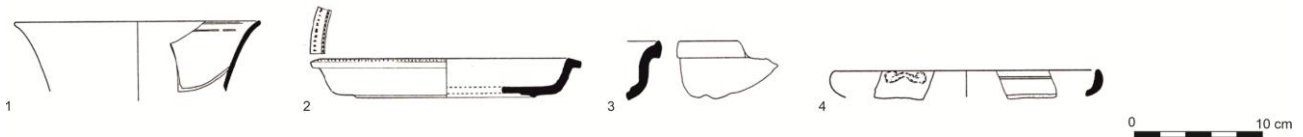


Fig. 14: Bowls, 1. Eastern sigillata B, area 41.7, layer/feature L23, 2. Cypriot sigillata, area 64.97, layer/feature F4, 3. Italian sigillata, area 2.72, locus L29, 4. Italian sigillata, area 50.59, layer/feature L15; (source: 1. Johnson 2008, 30; 2. Johnson 2008, 34; 3. Johnson 2008, 27; 4. Johnson 2008, 27)



Fig. 15: Plates, 1. Eastern sigillata A, area 50.59, layer/feature L36, 2. Italian sigillata, area 38.84, layer/feature L176, 3. Italian sigillata, area 64.96, layer/feature F4, 4. Italian sigillata, area 38.63, layer/feature L510.F510; (source: 1. Johnson 2008, 8; 2. Johnson 2008, 26; 3. Johnson 2008, 27; 4. Johnson 2008, 26)

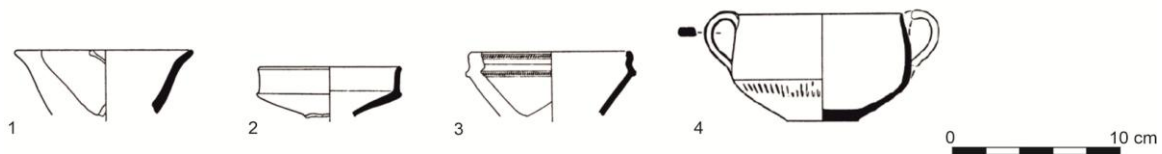


Fig. 16: Cups, 1. Eastern sigillata A, area 38.74, layer/feature L124, 2. Eastern sigillata A, area 2.73, layer/feature L5, 3. Italian sigillata, area 64.96, layer/feature F4, 4. Cup with rouletted decoration, area 2.83, layer/feature L2; (source: 1. Johnson 2008, 11; 2. Johnson 2008, 12; 3. Johnson 2008, 25; 4. Johnson 2008, 23)

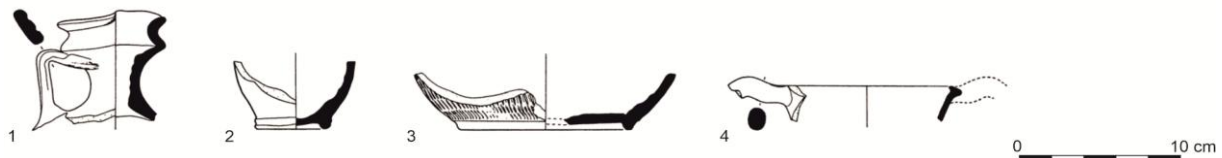


Fig. 17: Jugs, 1. Eastern sigillata A, area 2.73, layer/feature L7, 2. Eastern sigillata A, area 37.46, layer/feature L35, 3. Eastern sigillata A, area 38.83, layer/feature L163, 4. Cypriot sigillata, area 38.83, layer/feature L163; (source: 1. Johnson 2008, 17; 2. Johnson 2008, 17; 3. Johnson 2008, 18; 4. Johnson 2008, 40)

The most common category was Eastern sigillata A (42 examples). Others included Cypriot and Italian sigillata (of which 16 examples were dated to the Early Roman period). In the conclusion of her publication, Johnson remarked that the Italian Sigillata was most likely the property of individuals who traveled to the city rather than evidence of direct trade with Italy.<sup>53</sup> However, it is worth mentioning that large amounts of Italian sigillata pointed to the possibility of the existence of trade contacts (the number of vessels in this category corresponded to the amount of Cypriot forms interpreted by Johnson as a manifestation of the trade contacts). Very few examples were identified as Eastern sigillata B, Sagalassos Red Slip

<sup>52</sup> Johnson 2008, 5–34, 105–108.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson 2008, 197–198.

Ware, Gray Ware, Bowls with Gouged Decoration, *skyphoi* or a cup with rouletted decoration.<sup>54</sup> As Johnson said, the first two of the recalled categories were most likely the property of visitors.<sup>55</sup> However, I think the possibility of broad contacts between Ashkelon and Eastern centers should not be excluded. The small amount of the thin-walled ware pieces, as Johnson's mentioned,<sup>56</sup> might have been connected with the location picked by excavators and may not represent the exact state. The presence of the Unclassified Red Slip Vessels category is difficult to interpret.<sup>57</sup> Its appearance on the site showed the variety of pottery categories used by Ashkelonites (see Fig. 18). Moreover, Johnson<sup>58</sup> mentioned the existence of Nabatean pottery at the site. However, the examples of it were not included in the published study.

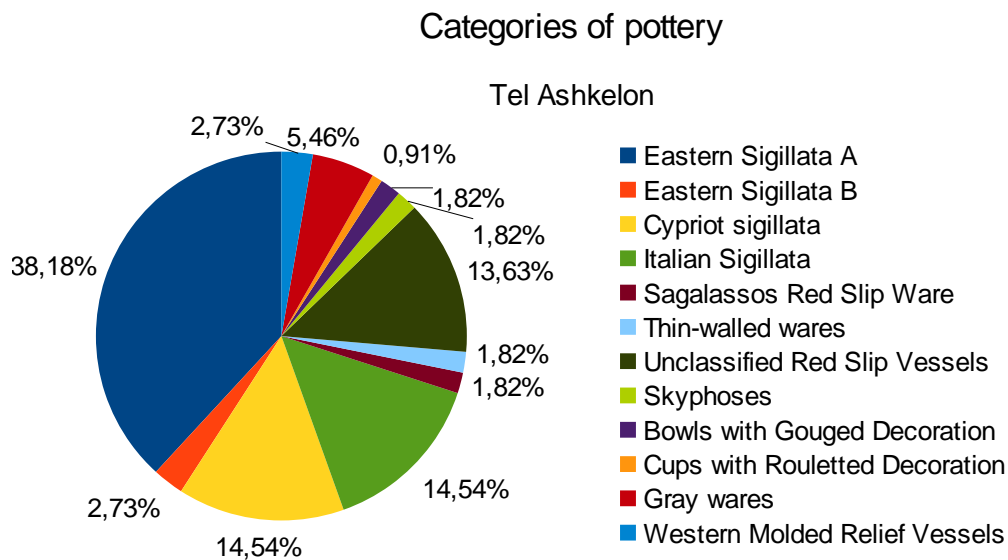


Fig. 18: Statistical analysis of imported fine and utilitarian ware categories in Tel Ashkelon

Nearly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the discovered pieces had some special feature. There were 24 examples of the decorated ones (see Fig. 19) which was dominant. Moreover, there were rouletted and impressed ornaments, and the fragments also had relief decorations (floral, geometric etc.). In terms of the Ashkelon potters' marks (see Fig. 20), *planta pedis* and rectangle were found. The fragments did not have inscriptions.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Johnson 2008,19–24, 30–31.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson 2008,197–198.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson 2008, 105–108, 197–198.

<sup>57</sup> Name proposed by Johnson, see Johnson 2008, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson 2008,105.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson 2008, 5–40, 105–108.

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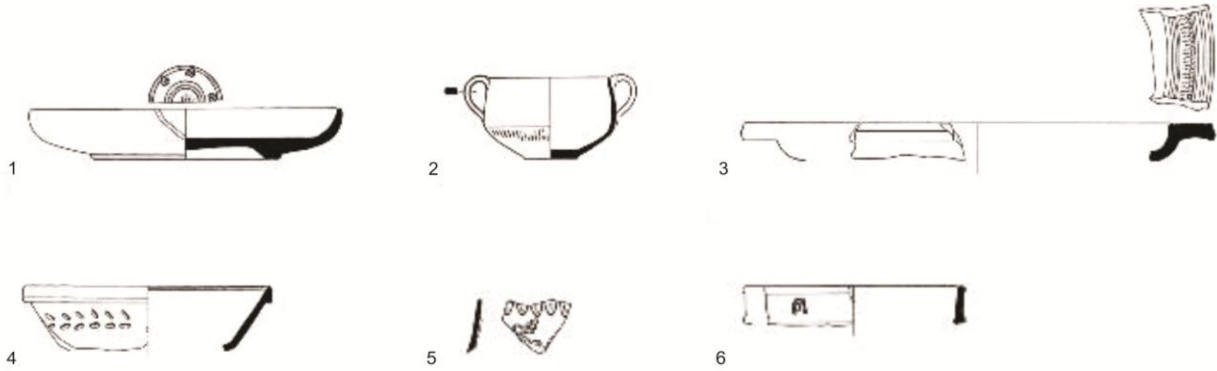


Fig. 19: Examples of decoration; (source: 1. Johnson 2008, 6; 2. Johnson 2008, 23; 3. Johnson 2008, 32; 4. Johnson 2008, 23; 5. Johnson 2008, 29; 6. Johnson 2008, 26)



Fig. 20: Examples of potter's marks; (source: 1. Johnson 2008, 20; 2. Johnson 2008, 28)

Most pottery fragments were found on the southern tell – area 64.96 (12 examples) in the Early Roman well. The ones discovered in the adjacent areas – 38.63, 38.83 and 38.84 – were connected with five phases of their usage: Phase 1: middle phase of villa (1st century BCE), Phase 2: later phase of villa (1st century CE), Phase 3: earlier phase of bathhouse (2<sup>nd</sup>–3rd century CE), Phase 4: later phase of bathhouse (4<sup>th</sup>–5th century CE), Phase 5: apsidal building (5<sup>th</sup>–6th century CE). In area 38.84, the excavators discovered 11 examples in Early and Late Roman fills and Middle and Late Roman floors. Relatively many examples (10 artifacts) were discovered during the exploration of area 38.83: Middle, Late Roman and Islamic fills and Early Roman building foundations. In area 38.63, 9 examples were found in contexts: the Early Roman floor, Late Roman fill, and Islamic robber trench. The excavators identified fewer imported fine wares in other contexts.<sup>60</sup>

The vessels from the eastern Mediterranean (more than half of all examples) were the most popular ones at the site. However, the big number of cases from the western Mediterranean suggests intensive long-distance trade of the Ashkelonites.

<sup>60</sup> Johnson 2008, 5–40, 105–108, 213–226.

## Conclusion

In the Herodian period, Ashdod continued its earlier exchange contacts, which was confirmed by the Early Roman pottery found at the site. It seemed that the reign of Herod the Great and the wars waged by him did not influence much the trade contacts of Ashdod. However, the Jews' habitation was very significant. Their activities induced conflicts in the city, which had caused its destruction (in the Hellenistic period and during the First Jewish Revolt). Although Ashdod was rebuilt, its importance decreased. However, as the examples of the pottery showed, it was still a significant center in the region. The pieces discovered during the excavations presented a picture of middle class society. The occurrence of the Phoenician Semi-Fine Ware and Eastern sigillata A showed the inhabitants mostly kept connections with the Phoenician world and Syrian coast. Although the frequency of other categories was lower, this may not provide a wholly accurate picture of all trade relationships. The number of pottery categories may have been connected to a choice of the certain research area and I assume the picture of the trade contacts may be expanded. The city probably had kept trade relationships with Cyprus, Asia Minor and Egypt. Further analysis would give the information that is necessary to complete the picture of all Ashdod's trade contacts.

In the Early Roman period, Ashkelon was the important, highly developed city in the region. Even before, in the Hellenistic period, the city had resisted Hasmonean attacks, which probably affected its subsequent history (unlike Ashdod, Ashkelon wasn't destroyed). Moreover, the city was autonomous throughout the whole Herodian period, what is confirmed by the existence of the mint. Historical sources described Ashkelon as a flourishing city, in which many monuments were donated by Herod and which was managed very similarly to Greek *poleis*.<sup>61</sup> Though it was attacked by Jews (during the First Jewish Revolt etc.), it strongly resisted.

Ashkelon's importance in the region was confirmed by the pottery evidence from the site. The diversity of the imported wares and the presence of prestigious examples showed broad trade contacts and the inhabitants' wealth. Among them, there were many well educated individuals who were members of the elite. Many of them were known in the Greek and Roman cities. The pottery found during excavations showed that Ashkelon kept contacts with the Syrian coast, Cyprus, Asia Minor's centers and Italy.<sup>62</sup>

The situation within the cities may be compared to other sites at the Levantine coast. The

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<sup>61</sup> Jerzy Ciecieląg quoted the historical sources, describing Herod's descent. According one of these versions his family was from Ashkelon, see Ciecieląg 2002, 26–33.

<sup>62</sup> Patai 1998, 144; Ciecieląg 2002, 243; Stager, Schloen 2008a, 9.

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fine and utilitarian pottery from Caesarea, described by Gendelman, showed the great quantity of diverse categories of imported pottery. They included: Eastern sigillata A and B, Cypriot sigillata, Italian sigillata, Knidian Gray Ware, Asia Minor Gray Ware, Asia Minor Relief *Skyphoi*, Egyptian Faience, different types of Thin-Walled Wares (Gendelman has suggested types A-R, with Aco Ware and Knidian Barbotine Ware as types A and N), Nabatean Painted Fine Ware, Jerusalem Painted Ware and many household/utilitarian wares e.g. lagynoi, jugs, juglets, kraters, semi-fine table amphoriskoi, perfume bottles, unguentaria and pilgrim flasks.<sup>63</sup> The assemblage from Caesarea, compared to the ones from Ashdod and Ashkelon, shows a huge variety of pottery categories used by inhabitants of Judea in the Herodian period, which may be connected with its position as the main harbor of Judea.

The other example from the Levantine coast is the harbor located in the north, Akko-Ptolemais. In her report, Andrea Berlin recognized categories that were slightly different than the ones observed in Ashdod or Ashkelon: Aegean/Asia Minor Fine Ware, Black Slipped Predecessor, Central Coastal Fine Ware, Eastern sigillata A, Ephesian Gray Ware, Knidian Gray Ware, Semi-Fine Ware, Terra Nigra and Unguentaria. Also, the Dalit Regev's report shows the dominance of pottery of Eastern origin (Eastern sigillata A, pottery from Asia Minor and Cyprus). These assemblages show Akko's, which was an autonomous city (during Nero's rule it became a Roman colony),<sup>64</sup> close trade relations with Eastern and Phoenician centers.

To sum up, Ashdod and Ashkelon were cities with very similar history until the Hellenistic period. In the Late Hellenistic period, and, consequently, in the Herodian period, their situation had changed. Ashkelon had long-term relationships with the centers in the Mediterranean world, including the western ones, whereas Ashdod focused on regional trade, mostly with Phoenician cities. This condition might have been connected with the status of both cities in the Herodian period (Ashdod had been a part of Herod's state), however, the excavations did not answer this issue yet. Certainly, further analysis of the region and both Ashdod and Ashkelon would help explore the knowledge about their past, inhabitants and trade relationships.

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<sup>63</sup> Gendelman 2006, 87–135.

<sup>64</sup> Dothan, Goldman 1993, 17.



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