

In Centro

Collected Papers
Volume II

Memory

Editors:
Guy D. Stiebel
Doron Ben-Ami
Amir Gorzalczany
Yotam Tepper
Ido Koch

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Central Region



TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

The Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology

The Jacob M. Alkow Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures

The Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies and Archaeology

The Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities

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An Inscription from a Byzantine Cemetery in Yafo (Jaffa)

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Introduction

Most burial caves exposed in the complex date to the Persian period. However, some Byzantine tombs were also discovered, including one burial cave containing more than 40 Byzantine-era oil lamps. The lamps are decorated with patterns such as crosses that are characteristic of a Christian population (Dayan and Levy 2012; Dayan, Nagar and Gendelman 2020). A mosaic floor was exposed near the burial caves and contains a Greek inscription.

The Excavations

Archaeological excavations in Jaffa began in the 1940s and, since then, have uncovered remains from the Late Bronze Age to the present (Peilstöcker and Burke 2011: 21). From 2007 to 2009, four seasons of salvage excavations were conducted within the precincts of the St. Louis Hospital in Jaffa prior to the construction of a hotel and luxury residential units (Fig. 1).¹ Directly to the

1 The excavations, undertaken on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and funded by the Yefet 36 Company, were directed by Amit Re'em, Yossi Elisha, Peter Gendelman and Ayelet Dayan. A separate excavation was carried out in 2010 by the Israeli Institute of Archaeology, directed by Meir Edrey, under the scientific auspices of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University.

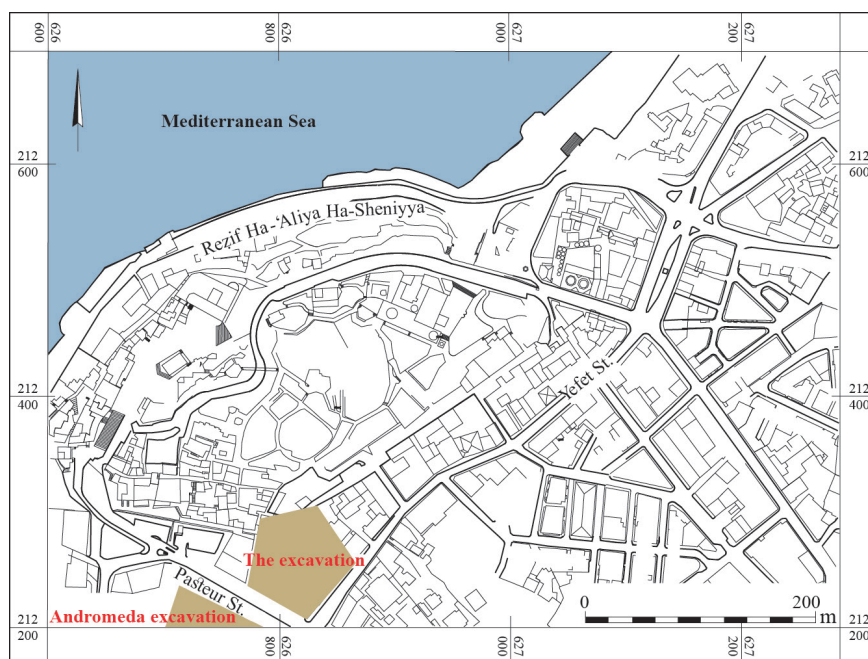


Fig. 1: Location map of the excavation

south, in the Andromeda compound (Avner-Levy 1998), a cemetery dating from the Persian to Byzantine periods was exposed, as well as an infant jar burial from the Middle Bronze Age II (20th–18th centuries BCE). The burial customs and finds from the Andromeda cemetery point to a pagan population.

The Byzantine Period

A burial cave hewn in the *kurkar* bedrock was exposed (Fig. 2). It was accessed via a square vestibule: a large stone decorated with a cross sealed the entrance to the cave. In this room, we found pottery sherds, animal bones, approximately 40 lamps, fragments of glass vessels and an iron nail, all dating to the 6th–7th centuries CE. The burial cave itself was filled with modern concrete that penetrated the cave during nearby construction activity.

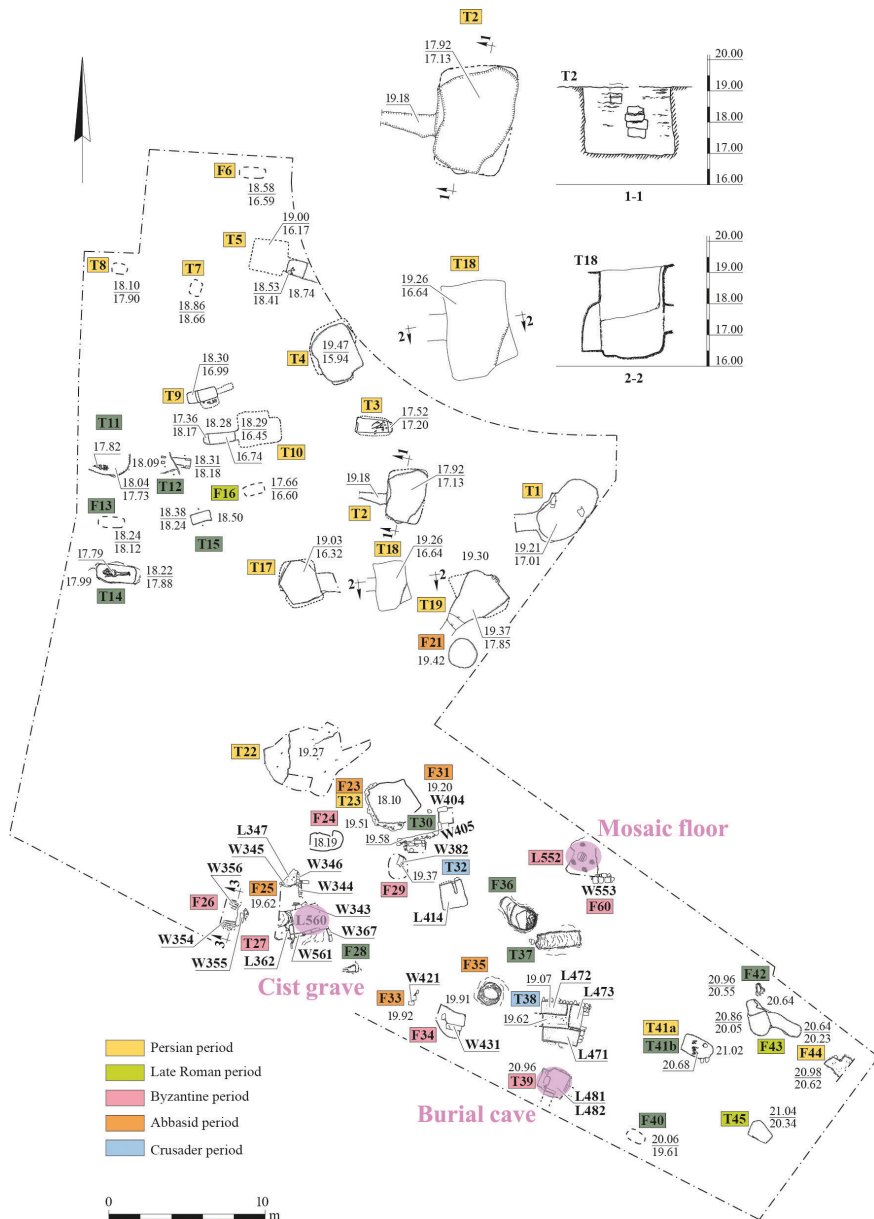


Fig. 2: Plan of the excavation (courtesy of the IAA)



Fig. 3: The mosaic floor (photo by Niki Davidov, IAA)

Between the mosaic floor (see below) and the cave described above, another cave was found that was filled with broken bones and some pottery from the Crusader period. The bones may have been relocated into this one cave by the Crusaders after construction of a glacis destroyed some of the burials. On one of the burial benches was a fragment of Byzantine lamp, possibly an indication that this chamber was also used in the Byzantine period. This cave is also very close to the mosaic.

The Mosaic Floor and the Inscription

The excavations exposed the remains of a mosaic floor. In the center of the mosaic is a round medallion measuring 76 cm in diameter and containing a three-line inscription traced in black tesserae, with a decorative ivy leaf underneath. The inscription reads: Εὐψυχ[ε]ίτωσαν πάντες | οἱ ὧδε ταῦτα, “Be of good courage, all who (are buried) here. This (is it)!” (Fig. 3). The text makes use of two formulae, “Be of good courage” and “This (is it),” both of which are in funerary style, common in pagan epitaphs of the Late Roman period as well as in early Christian epitaphs (Dahari and Di Segni 2009: 126*–127*; Di Segni 2020). The use of these particular formulae, the shape of the letters and the lack of a cross all point to a date in the 4th or early 5th century.

Conclusion

The wording of the inscription indicates that it belonged to a mausoleum, to a chapel or to the cemetery itself. While it was addressed to the dead, it also served to remind visitors of their own mortality. Similarly, literary inscriptions are more common in pagan than in Christian contexts and in the 4th century more than the 5th century CE. In the present case, it is impossible to establish with certainty whether the inscription was dictated by and addressed to Christians or others.

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