

Yavne in the Hellenistic Period

By Daniel Varga* & Pablo Betzer[‡]

From ancient times to the present day, Yavne has been an important center for several ancient cultures, a fact reflected in numerous archaeological excavations conducted throughout the modern city and its surroundings. Yavne was inhabited and flourished in nearly every period from the Late Chalcolithic to the modern era. This article focuses on the Hellenistic period, combining analysis of ancient sources, historical research, and the results of extensive archaeological excavations in Yavne and its environs conducted in recent years¹.

Background

Archaeological surveys and excavations, mostly salvage operations, have been conducted in and around Tel Yavne since the early 20th century, yielding finds from the Intermediate Bronze through the Ottoman period². Since 2019, following the plans for the construction of a new neighborhood, large-scale excavations at Yavne-East have been underway on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Remains of residential, burial, and industrial zones of the Byzantine and Early Islamic city of Yavne, as well as from the Chalcolithic period, Intermediate Bronze, Middle Bronze, Iron Ages, Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods, are being uncovered. In an extensive area located east and southeast from the Tel in these ongoing excavations.³

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Location

The site is situated in the central part of the Israeli coastal plain, approximately 7 kilometers east of the Mediterranean Sea, 6 kilometers north of Ashdod, adjacent to the Nahal Soreq stream (Fig. 1). The Yavne area (Soreq-Gamliel Valley) is prone to flooding, and the aquifer along its path is shallow (Wieler 2022). The geological structure of the area includes Pleistocene calcareous sandstone (locally known as *Kurkar*), Holocene alluvium, and sand dunes of the Kurkar group (Geological Survey of Israel 2011). The pedological composition is characterized by red sandy soil (locally known as *Hamra*), alluvial brown vertisols (grumusols), and hydromorphic vertisols⁴. The site currently experiences a Mediterranean sub-humid climate⁵, with hot summers and cool, rainy winters. The annual mean temperature is 21–22°C; the mean temperature in January is 13–14°C, and in August, it is 25–26°C (Israel Meteorological Service). The rainy season generally lasts from October to May, with mean annual rainfall ranging from 500 to 550 mm (Israel Meteorological Service). A similar but slightly more humid climate existed during the Chalcolithic period⁶. The site is located within the Mediterranean vegetation belt⁷. Currently, the vegetation is dominated by volunteer crops and ruderal species of annual herbaceous plants typical of disturbed lands due to intensive agricultural development.

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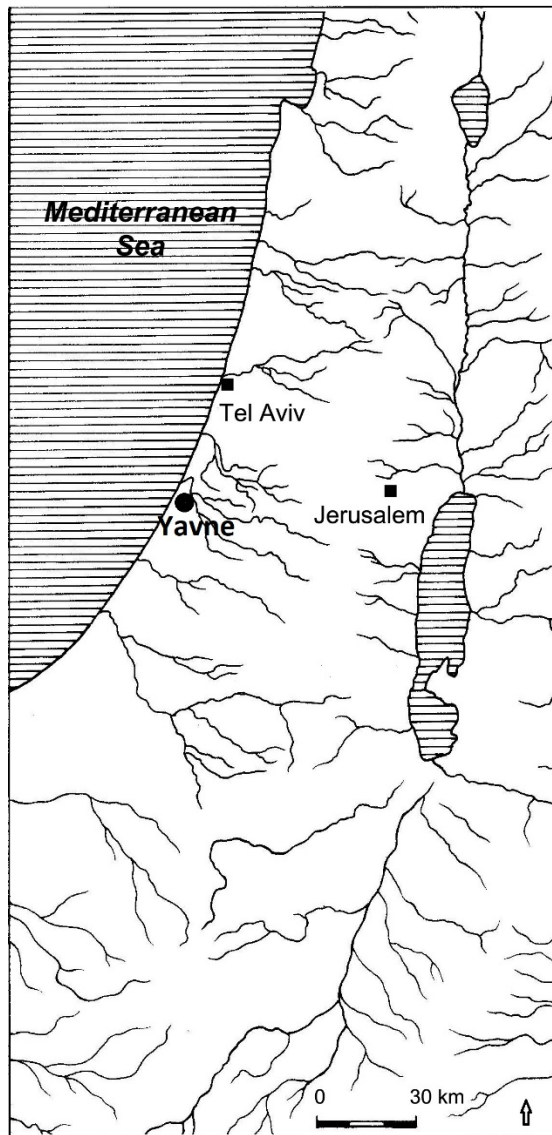


Figure 1. *Location Map*

Yavne at the Hellenistic Period

Yavne appears to have adopted, under the name Iamnia (Ἰάμνια), a mixture of Hellenistic and Canaanite cults⁸ (Kasher 1990: 31–32; Safrai 1980: 16). The name Iamnia seems related to the Ptolemaic dynasty (Seligman forthcoming). Under

8. Kasher A. "Jews and Hellenistic Cities in Eretz Israel: Relations of the Jews in Eretz Israel with the Hellenistic Cities during the Second Temple Period (332 BCE–70 CE)". *Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum* 21. Mohr. Tübingen. 1990.

Safrai Z. "Borders and Rule in Eretz-Israel in the Time of the Mishna and Talmud". *HaKibbutz HaMeuchad*. Tel Aviv. (Hebrew) 1980.

Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-222 BCE) and Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-204 BCE), two Alexandrian women named Iamnia served as priestesses in the Ptolemaic state cult: the first, Iamnia daughter of Hyperbes, was the basket bearer (Kanephoros)⁹ of Arsinoe Philadelphus in 243/2 BCE and of Berenice Euergetis in 196/5 BCE¹⁰. The other, daughter of Prygenes, was the victory prize bearer of Berenice in 211/0 BCE and kanephoros of Arsinoe in 210/209 BCE¹¹. Her father Phrygenes was likely the Ptolemaic admiral at the Battle of Raphia (217 BCE).

The earliest historical mention of Yavne appears in the second book of Chronicles, generally assigned to the Persian and early Hellenistic periods in its later Septuagint version¹².

The major historical source for Yavne during this period is the Book of Maccabees, which describes the conflict between the Seleucid dynasty and the Jews, particularly the battles between Gorgias the Seleucid and Judas Maccabaeus, and later between Apollonius, former governor of Coele-Syria, and Jonathan the Hasmonean. During the revolt, Yavne became a significant target of Hasmonean military actions. Another possibility is that the city of Iamnia was named after Iamnia, daughter of Phrygenes, the notable Ptolemaic admiral, or another prominent Ptolemaic figure, although such honorific naming was typically reserved for royal women¹³.

In 165 BCE, Gorgias, the governor of Idumea and commander of the Seleucid forces, fled to Yavne and other towns in the Shephelah and coastal plain after being defeated by Judas Maccabaeus at the Battle of Emmaus: "And all those in the rear fell by the sword. They pursued them to Gazara, and to the plains of Idumea, and to Azotus and Jamnia; and three thousands of them fell" (1 Mac. 4:15). It appears that Judas also destroyed the harbor and burned its ships¹⁴. Despite this victory, Gorgias continued to reside in Yavne, possibly maintaining a unit of Thracian cavalry there (reference). Two years later, in 163 BCE, a battle between the Seleucid army under Gorgias and the Jewish forces led by Joseph Ben Zechariah and Azariah occurred in Yavne, resulted in a Seleucid victory with 2,000 Jewish casualties. Later Apollonius, who had encamped his forces at Yavne, was defeated by Jonathan, who outflanked Yavne from the west and used this opportunity to attack Jaffa

9. A position of honor given to young unmarried women in ancient Greece, which included the right to lead the procession to the sacrifice at festivals; The highest honor was to lead the pomp (πομπή) at the Panathenaic festival.

10. Thompson H. "Eponymous Priests under the Ptolemies". In S.R.K. Glanville ed. *Studies Presented to F. Ll. Griffith*. London. Pp. 16–37, 1932.

Glanville S.R.K. and Skeat T.C. "Eponymous Priesthoods of Alexandria from 211 B.C". *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 40 (1954):45–58.

11. *Ibid*, 46.

12. Farhi Y. and Bahar R.: Iamneia (by the Sea?): "A Newly Discovered Mint in First Century BCE Provincia Syria". D. T. Ariel (editor), *Israel Numismatic Research* Vol. 15 (2020), 111-126, Tel Aviv.

13. *Ibid*.

14. Tcherikover A. "Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews". *Athenaeum*. New York, 94, 1974.

and Ashdod¹⁵. Between 139 and 137 BCE, Yavne again became a frontline in the conflict between Simon and the Hasmonean's army and Cendebaeus, the new commander appointed by Antiochus VII Sidetes. Cendebaeus established a stronghold at Kidron, about 6 km southeast of Yavne, with Yavne serving as a rear base and strategic center for his headquarters. (1 Mac. 4:15¹; 1 Mac. 5:55–60²; 1 Mac. 10:69–84³; 2 Mac. 12:8–9⁴).

An important external epigraphical source is a 2nd-century BCE dedicatory inscription set in a sanctuary on Delos by three men from Yavne, referring dedication to the Greek god Heracles and the Canaanite god Hauronas (Houaron)¹⁶. This indicates Phoenician religious practice in Hellenized Iamnia, where these two gods were divine patrons¹⁷. Several episodes of warfare in and around Iamnia during the second century BCE involved conflicts between local pagans and Jews. The announcement of imminent victory by the city's patron gods on sling bullets (see below) may have occurred during such inter-religious conflicts.

This warfare episodes were further verified by the excavation of a pit containing Hellenistic pottery in area H (Fig. 2). In 122 BCE, John Hyrcanus captured Yavne, which remained in Hasmonean hands when Pompeius and the Roman legions entered Judea in the first half of the 1st century BCE¹⁸.

¹"The pursuit continued as far as Gezer and the plains of Idumaea, Azotus and Jamnia, and the enemy lost about three thousand men."

²..." So, they issued orders to the men under their command and marched on Jamnia."

...

15. Fischer, M. and Taxel, I. "Ancient Yavneh. Its History and Archeology", Tel Aviv 34 (2007): 204–284.

16. Plassart A. "Exploration Archéologique de Délos. Fascicule XI. Les Sanctuaires et les Cultes du Mont Cynthe". Boccard. Paris. 1928.

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17. Kasher A. "A Second-Century BCE Greek Inscription from Iamnia". *Cathedra* 63 (1992): 14-15.

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18. AJ - Josephus, "Jewish Antiquities". Thackeray H. St. J., Marcus R. and Feldman L.H. Trans. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA., 13:296, 1998.

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³"Demetrius confirmed Apollonius as governor of Coele-Syria; the latter assembled a large force, encamped at Jamnia and sent the following message to Jonathan the high priest:"

⁴"...But hearing that the people of Jamnia were planning to treat their resident Jews in the same way,

he made a night attack on the Jamnites and fired the port [presumably of Yavne-Yam] with its fleet; the glow of the flames was seen as far off as Jerusalem, thirty miles away....."

⁵For more details: (Kasher 1990: 84; Schürer 1973: 159–160, 165; Fischer and Taxel 2007: 219–221; Safrai 2022)

The Archaeological Remains

Remains from the Hellenistic period were uncovered in several areas of the extensive excavations conducted in recent years (Fig. 2). In areas T2 and Q, Domestic areas were uncovered, in area A (excavated by the previous expedition) were uncover an installation and a kiln, while area R revealed a cemetery, and area H yielded a deposition pit.

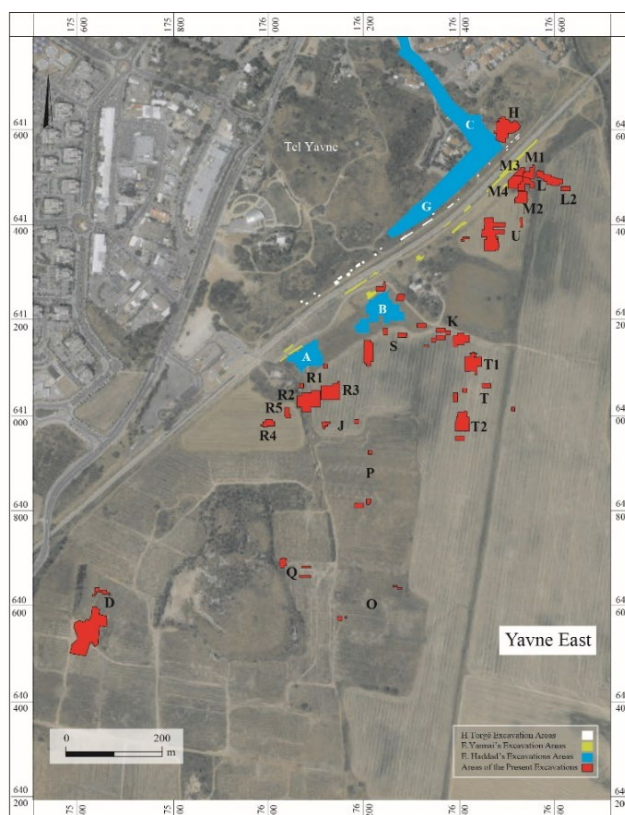


Figure 2. *The Site and the Excavated Areas*

The Domestic Complexes

Two domestic complexes excavated in areas Q and T2 are the primary evidence of daily life in Yavne during the Hellenistic period (Fig. 3).

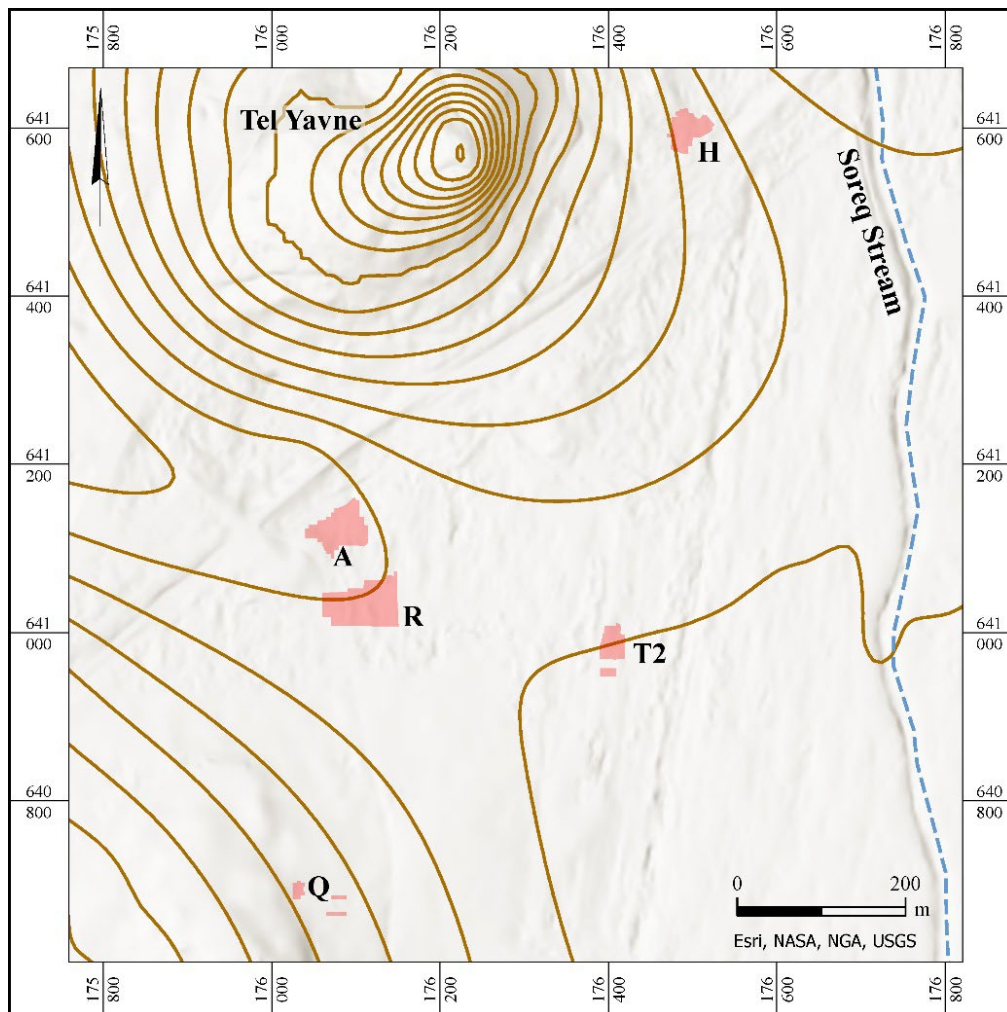


Figure 3. *The Areas with Remains from the Hellenistic Periods*

Area Q

Located on the eastern slope of a kurkar hill, approximately 650 meters south of Tel-Yavne, this area was excavated over 350 square meters, revealing parts of a Hellenistic domestic complex alongside remains from the Bronze, Iron, Byzantine, and Ottoman periods. The Hellenistic complex, measuring at least 18 x 10 meters, includes at least five rooms, a central courtyard, and six ovens of various sizes (Fig. 4). The walls, mostly preserved at the foundation level, are constructed from small and medium-sized kurkar stones (average size: 0.35 x 0.40 x 0.45 meters).



Figure 4. *The Farm in Area Q – Aerial Photo*

In this area two construction phases were identified. The early phase uncovered a building with at least one room (2.6 x 2 meters) with a thin chalk floor. The later phase saw the construction of a new building (3.5 x 7.76 meters) atop the earlier one, featuring a central courtyard (7.72 x 8.47 meters) surrounded by five rooms (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5). Room R1 was probably expanded and raised, with its floor not preserved. Room R2 (4.85 x 3.46 meters) contained a complete pot and a square device (36 x 36 cm), made of cut kurkar stone with a round socket in the center. In the northwest corner of Room R2, the remains of two round taboos (diameter 40-45 cm) were uncovered. North of Room R2, an unhewn stone foundation with two installations (1-2) was exposed. Installation 1, completely made of clay, was partially preserved and may have been a pit-like vessel. Installation 2, also made of clay, is smaller and might indicate an open courtyard. South of Rooms R1 and R2, another courtyard (at least 5 x 5.5 meters) was uncovered, with walls made of large and medium-sized limestone (0.45 x 0.45 x 0.55 meters).

Rooms R3 (3.42 x 2.89 meters), R4 (at least 1.05 x 2.19 meters), and R5 (at least 1.1 x 1.45 meters) were located south of the courtyard. It is possible that additional rooms exist to the south, but the building has not been fully excavated. To the east of the courtyard, a facility with two cells was uncovered, both with floor foundations made of medium unhewn stones. The western cell is bound by two walls and features a floor made of field stones, with two round, smooth stones found in the

southeast corner. The eastern cell is also bounded by two walls, with a floor foundation made of field stones.

Walls and floors in a bad state of preservation, indicating the existence of another structure, were found c.40 m southeast of the building. The pottery uncovered dated the remains to the Intermediate Bronze Age. In addition, four cist graves were partially uncovered c.80 m east from the main building (see below).

Area T2

Located in a flat area approximately 400 meters southeast of the Tel (Fig. 5), this complex is less well-preserved due to extensive agricultural activity during the late Ottoman period (19th - early 20th centuries AD). The building, approximately 22.76 x 19.91 meters, comprises three rectangular wings (northern, eastern and southern) and a paved courtyard. It is assumed there was originally an additional wing on the western side, which did not survive.



Figure 5. *The Farm in Area T2 – Plan*

The floors in this complex are poorly preserved, primarily consisting of cobblestones. Many stones were about 9 cm in size, rounded but not hewn. Stone walls built of kurkar stones of various sizes with earth between them formed elongated

rectangular wings. The exposed walls were mostly preserved to a height of two courses, unplastered, and without bonding material. The floors were not levelled or flat, and in many places, the outer wall stones were missing, leaving only small white kurkar stones. Some rectangular, flat, crushed floor stones were exposed, possibly remnants of a floor. Two circular baking ovens were uncovered at the southern area of the farm.

A kiln for ceramic production, approximately 1.2 meters in diameter, was exposed at the northern end of the complex. It was likely used for making small ceramic vessels like bowls, juglets, or lamps. A group of small bowl sherds, probably produced in the kiln, was uncovered a few meters south of it (Fig. 6). The kiln's outline is round, built of burnt bricks. Inside, debris of small and large bricks with black burn marks were found. Although no feed opening to the combustion chamber was exposed, burnt brown soil on the western side suggests fire activity. The kiln's center contained three large rectangular bricks standing on an arch made of material. Given the kiln's size, the floor for vessels may have been constructed from long bricks extending from the side to the center.

In addition, evidence of another kiln, probably a bigger one according to the spreading of burnt clay pieces, was uncovered in the southern end of the building.



Figure 6. Pottery Kiln in Area T2

Area A

The area is located approximately 200 meters south of the Tel. An installation and a pottery kiln dated from the Hellenistic period were found along with remains from other periods. The installation consists of a square pool (2.82×2.82 m) with walls made of small field stones bonded with mortar and soil. Its eastern wall is poorly preserved (Haddad 2021). The walls are coated inside and out with white plaster and were built on a foundation of closely placed small field stones resting on brown soil.

A step was discovered in the southeast corner of the pool and a level surface of small field stones approaches the pool from the east. The exact use of these remains is unknown, as excavation was halted due to flooding in winter.

The pottery kiln continues the pottery production tradition in the area after three pottery kilns from the late Persian period. It measures 2.2 m in diameter and depth 2 m in depth. The kiln, which was dug into the soil and lined with dark red mudbricks, was found full of burnt bricks. A trench excavated between the kiln and the pool revealed an occupation layer, which, based on the large quantity of pottery vessels found within it, should be dated to the early and Middle Hellenistic period (late 4th to early 2nd centuries BCE).

The Cemeteries

Traces of two different cemeteries dated to the Hellenistic period were uncovered in the vicinity of the Tel, one next to the Area Q buildings and the other in Area R (fig. 3). The graves were used for primary and singular interment. Four types of graves were used:

Type A: Rectangular cist graves ($1.97\text{--}2.6 \times 0.6\text{--}1.12$ and $0.46\text{--}0.6$ m high exterior dimensions) lined and topped by large, roughly cut *kurkar* rectangular blocks ($0.6\text{--}0.85 \times 0.36\text{--}0.6 \times 0.10\text{--}0.23$ m).

Type B: Relatively deep cist graves ($2.38\text{--}2.74 \times 1.12\text{--}1.25$ and $0.9\text{--}1.04$ m high exterior dimensions). The walls of this type were built using rectangular *kurkar* blocks ($0.40\text{--}0.5 \times 0.28\text{--}0.4 \times 0.1\text{--}0.15$) set as 'headers' and 'stretchers' with no specific order (Fig. 7).¹⁹ Interestingly, all the 'header' stones protrude from the outer face of the walls, indicating that the shaft on which the grave built was wider than in a regular cist grave, at least $1.5\text{--}1.8$ m.

19. Header is a square or rectangular ashlar stone laid in a wall with its end towards the face of the wall. Stretcher is the same kind of stone but laid with its length parallel to the face of a wall. During the Hellenistic period headers and stretchers were widely used in public structures and fortifications, and are known locally from such sites as Akko, Dor, Samaria-Sebaste, Mount Gerizim and Maresha. For a brief survey of this construction technique in the Land of Israel, see Tal 2006: 33–37, Table 3a and further references therein.



Figure 7. The Cemetery in Area R

Type C: Simple, unlined cist graves (2.00-2.17 x 0.7-0.92 x 0.2-0.4 m high exterior dimensions), dug in the ground as rectangular troughs and covered by *kurkar* blocks, similar in dimensions to those of type A.

All the graves from these three groups were oriented east-west, and in almost all cases the deceased was laid with the head in the east side.

Type D: simple, unlined cist graves, covered by earth. Graves of this type were oriented to the east-west or north-south (Fig. 8).

Area Q

Four graves, including three lined cists (type A) and a simple unlined grave (type D) were discovered and documented and re-covered during archaeological trial trenching, performed on the valley east of Area Q. The dug grave (Fig. 8) was covered (and probably also filled) by grayish fill. A bronze mirror (Fig. 9), almost identical to another one found over a tomb from area R, was intentionally placed on top of its eastern side (probably above the deceased head). The graves were dated to the 2nd century BCE by two unguentaria found on top of two of them.



Figure 8. *Tomb in Area Q*

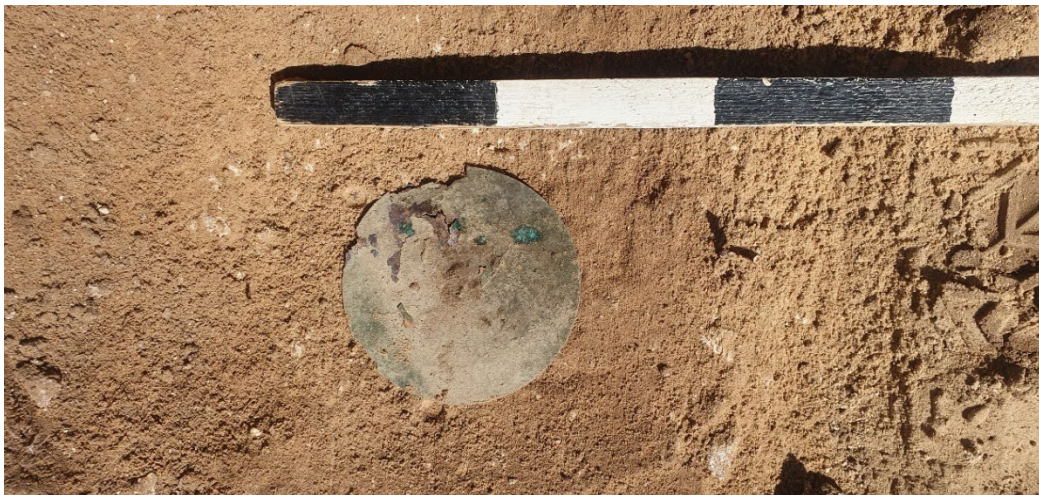


Figure 9. *A Bronze Mirror*

Area R

24 graves dated to the Hellenistic period were uncovered in an area situated c.270 m south of the Tel. This cemetery can be divided into three sectors: North, southeast and southwest. In the north sector, the most crowded of them, 19 graves were found, eight of them belonging to type A, three to type B, six to type C and two graves were identified as type D. Several graves of the four types were opened and their content documented before they were closed again. All the deceased were laid supine, and with the exception of one type B grave, in all cases with the head in the east. A few unguentaria and one amphoriskos (Fig. 15: 4), characteristic of the 2nd century BCE, were found both inside and above some of the graves of the four types in this sector. Furthermore, a round bronze mirror was discovered above the western end of grave TR12 (Fig. 7, the tomb on the right).

In the southwestern section three type D graves were discovered. Two of the graves were oriented east-west, the deceased inside them being laid with the head on the west side and on the east. The third grave was oriented north-south, and the deceased was laid with his head on the north side.

Finally, in the southeast sector only one type A and one type C were uncovered. The skeletons found inside these graves were placed with the heads on the east side.

The Hellenistic Pit in Area H

The pit, located in the southeastern part of a building from the Early to Middle Roman period (second to third centuries AD) excavated in Area H, was dug into clay soil northeast of the base of the Tel (Fig. 10). Measuring approximately 1.5 meters in diameter and 0.70 meters in depth, the pit yielded a small quantity of fragmented Hellenistic pottery, primarily jars (90% of the assemblage), along with jugs, juglets, bowls, and a few animal bones and shells.



Figure 10. Area H Aerial Photo with the Location of the Hellenistic Pit

Notably, the pit contained a lead slingshot. This bullet, measuring 4.4 cm in length and 1.8 cm in width, weighs 61.79 grams. It was cast in a mold and bears a Greek inscription: Νίκη Ἡρακλέους καὶ Αὐθρώνᾱ (the victory of Heracles and Hau-ronas) (Fig. 11). The inscription reflects the veneration of these two gods in Iamnia, as evidenced by a Hellenistic dedication set in a sanctuary on Delos by three men

from Iamnia (see discussion below). This lead slingshot may have been used to announce the imminent victory of these patron gods in the context of inter-religious conflicts during the second century BCE²⁰.

Additionally, the pit contained a stamped handle of a Rhodian amphora. The handle stamped twice—once near the lower edge of the top—features a rosebud and a name, possibly indicating a Rhodian fabricant named Dorion: Δω[ρ]ίου, ‘of Dorion’ (Börker and Burow 1998: 46, No. 442, pl. 17; Palaczyk 2016: 124, fig. 3).



Figure 11. *The Sling Bullet*

Findings

Coins bearing a Laureate head of Antiochus III (222–187 BCE) from Antioch and of Antioch IV (175–164 BCE) from Akko (Fig. 12: 1) unearthed in each of the areas, and coins of Alexander II Zebina (128–122 BCE) from Apamea in area Q (Fig. 12:2) and of Antiochus VIII (125–121 BCE) from Antioch in area T2 (Fig. 12: 3) mark the lifespan of the two farmhouses. The ceramic assemblages found on floors and living surface in both buildings reflect the daily life in the area in the second century BC. These included mainly bowls (13: 1-6, 14: 1-5), plates (14: 6) and jars (13: 7-11, 14: 8) were found. Most of the vessels are local and some of them, a Megarian bowl for example (15: 4, 16: 1), are imported vessels. In addition, a few unguentaria (14: 12), and a flask (14: 13) were found. Several unguentaria and amphoriskos (Fig. 15:4) were exposed in some of the graves from both studied cemeteries. Additional

20. Ustinova Y., Betzer P., and Varga D. “A New Inscribed Sling Bullet from Iamnia (Yavne)”. *IEJ* 72 (2023): 198.

vessels, some of them complete like bowls (15: 1-2) and oil lamps (15: 3), were found in different contexts.

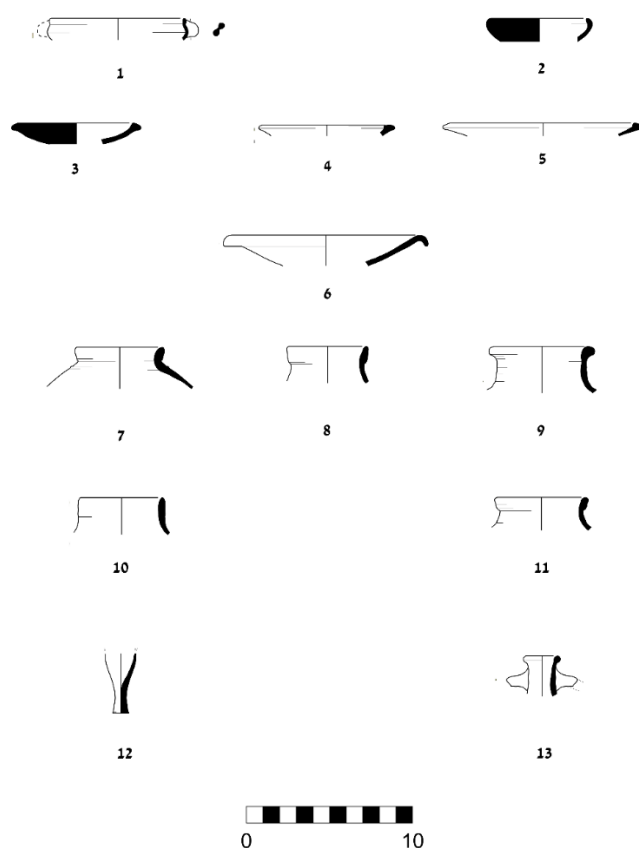


Figure 12. *Hellenistic Coins*

Cat. No.	Locus	Basket	Weight (g)	Diam. (mm)	Obverse	Reverse	Date (BCE)	Mint	Reference	IAA No.
Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE)										
1	53094	530484	1.97	15	Radiate, diademed head of Antiochus IV r., fillet border	ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ-ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ Veiled goddess stg. facing, holding long scepter or torch, dotted border	173/2–168	Akko	SC 2/1:91/2, No. 1479	191451
Alexander II Zebina (128–122 BCE)										
2	53196	531109	5.26	19	Head of young Dionysus r., dotted border	[ΒΑ]ΣΙΛ[ΕΩΣ-ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ] Winged Tyche stg. l., calathus on head, holding ships' tiller and cornucopia	125–122	Apamea?	SC 2/1:159, No. 2242	191455
Cleopatra Thea and Antiochus VIII (125–121 BCE)										
3	26042	203077	5.74	20	Radiate, diademed head of Antiochus VIII r., one diadem end waving behind, the other falling forward over shoulder, dotted border	ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΣΗΣ / ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑΣ – ΚΑΙ / ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ / ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ Owl stg. facing on fallen amphora In exergue: Α □ □	123/2	Antioch?	SC 2/1:475, No. 2263	191456

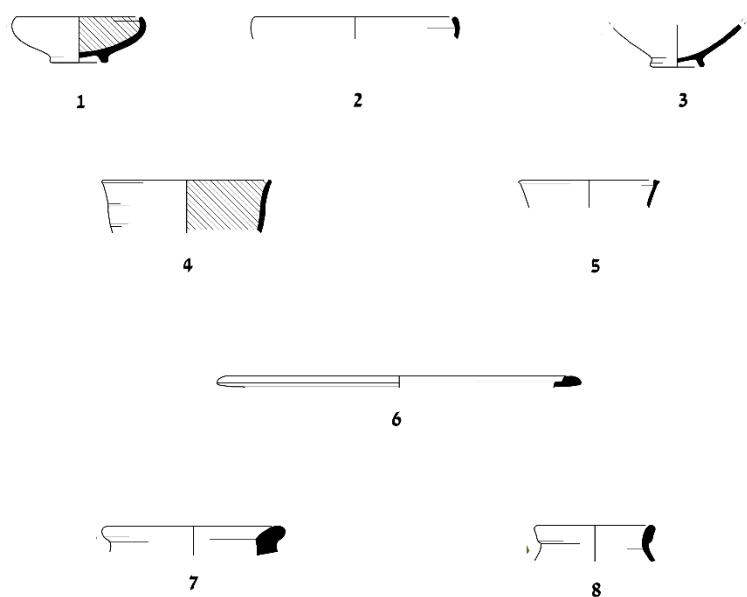
Ceramic Tables

AREA Q (Fig. 13)



	LOCUS	BASKET	TYPE
1	23098	203528-4	Bowl
2	23045	203751-1	plate
3	23045	203791-7	bowl
4	23045	203729-10	bowl
5	23045	203729-10	bowl
6	23098	203512-17	bowl
7	23098	203512-16	Jar
8	23045	203791-6	Jar
9	23045	203791-3	jar
10	23045	203218-2	Jar
11	23045	203218-5	jar
12	23100	203563-14	Flask
13	23100	203563-12	unguentarium

AREA T2 (Fig. 14)



	LOCUS	BASKET	TYPE
1	53149	530977-4	bowl
2	53149	530977-2	bowl
3	53125	530703	bowl
4	53201	530981	Megarian bowl
5	53149	530977-3	bowl
6	53101	530354-2	plate
7	53125	530684	jar
8	53101	530544-1	jar

Miscellaneous (Fig. 15)



	LOCUS	BASKET	TYPE
1	23114	203553	Megarian bowl
2	23093	203658	bowl
3	23072	203239	Oil lamp
4	90041	900273	Amphoriskos

Discussion

The new excavation at Yavne is being conducted east and south of the Tel, rather than within the mound itself. For this reason, the domestic and public buildings of the city have not been exposed. Nonetheless, the excavation of the outer ring of the

city provides significant insights into the different aspects of the city's functioning and spatial distribution that those that could be obtained by excavating Tel itself.

In recent decades, several remains found in a large area surrounding Yavne have been identified, with varying degrees of certainty, as part of the hinterland of cities from the Hellenistic period. Approximately 2.3 km from the modern coastline in the northeast corner of Ashkelon and c.23 km from Yavne, fragmentary architectural remains, along with pottery from the Hellenistic period were uncovered, mixed with finds from the Early Roman and Byzantine periods²¹. A layer of ash contained a small number of Hellenistic potsherds, including bowls, a casserole, a juglet, and storage jars. The fill covering the walls included a mixed assortment of potsherds from the Hellenistic, Early Roman, and Byzantine periods. Hellenistic pottery, as well as a few coins (Antiochus IV, 175-164 BCE), dated to the second century BCE. Although the remains are too limited to provide comprehensive information on settlement during this time, they can be identified as part of a farm in the agricultural hinterland of Ashkelon²².

In Gan Sorek, in the sand dunes of Rishon LeZion, about 10 km northwest of Yavne, a large 'courtyard' type building (22 x 40 m) was uncovered²³. The plan is incomplete due to damage to its western part and some walls extending beyond the excavation limits. Most walls are constructed of mud bricks, while a few of them were made of stones, some without foundations and others, especially in the southern part, founded directly on the kurkar rock. The stone walls, some preserved to nearly one meter high, were built of small to medium-sized field stones bound with dark mortar.

At a site uncovered in the dunes west to the modern city of Yavne and 6 km from the Tel, approximately 6.5 km southwest of Livnat, buildings from the Persian and Hellenistic periods were discovered, likely belonging to a farm that existed there²⁴. The excavation revealed several walls, possibly part of a single building, preserved to a height of several courses. On a poorly preserved floor, pottery from the Persian and Hellenistic periods was found. The remains from another floor included cobblestones of various sizes. On this floor, many Persian-period pots were found, including jugs, a mortar, and an imported Attic oil lamp. West of the building, two well-preserved clay ovens (0.4-0.5 m diameter, 4-6 cm wall thickness) were uncovered, along with ash, animal bones, and pottery from the Persian and Early Hellenistic periods. A coin, struck in Sidon and dating to 370-350 BCE, was retrieved from the fill covering the ovens. Occupation levels and other ovens were exposed in the western part of the area, which also yielded a bronze coin from

21. Israel Y. and Erickson-Gini T. "Remains from the Hellenistic through the Byzantine periods at the 'Third Mile Estate', Ashqelon". *Atiqot* 74 (2013): 169-170.

22. *Ibid*, 170.

23. Ad U. and Dagot A. "Gan Soreq (South)" HHA-ESI 118, 2006.

24. Gorzalczyk A., Barkan D. "Yavne, Holot" HA-ESI 118 (2006).

Alexandria related Ptolemy II (285–246 BCE), two similar coins, and another one probably minted in Cyprus dating to the fourth–third centuries BCE²⁵.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that archeological excavations at Yavne Yam (Yavne on the Sea), the nearby city port that shares the name with Yavne, yielded so far very few remains from the Hellenistic period.

The excavation, located outside the city's urban boundaries, did not reveal the remains of the Hellenistic city itself, such as neighborhoods or public buildings, which seems to be located in the mound itself and perhaps in its northern and western slopes, where Hellenistic sherds were also found²⁶, but rather remains from its outer belt. In our opinion the remains uncovered in areas Q and T2 belong to farmhouses or agricultural estates and not to the city's residential areas. This pattern is somewhat similar to the Roman and Byzantine periods at the site. The Roman period remains are predominantly cemeteries, with the exception of one structure in area H, near the mound's base to the northeast. In the Byzantine period, extensive industrial areas, primarily, but not exclusively, related to the wine industry, were uncovered at the east and northeast foot of the mound.

Most of the graves uncovered in both cemeteries reflect the typical types of the Hellenistic period of the coastal plain of Israel²⁷. The mixture of different types of cist graves in the same cemetery is also typical of Hellenistic cemeteries in this region. An interesting new type is the 'headers and stretchers' cist grave (type B), found solely in area R. All these three graves, uncovered in the same sector of the cemetery, share the same building technique, including the header stones protruding out of the walls. Although at least two of these graves (the third was not opened) were significantly deeper than regular cist graves, they were used, like all the other Hellenistic graves, for singular interment. This fact and the much higher quality of the ashlar may point to a higher socio-economic level of the owner of these three graves, even though this presumption cannot be corroborated by the finds—unguentaria and even a bronze mirror was found in connection to other, much "poorer" graves (see above). Graves similar to our type B but dated to the early Roman period (1st–2nd centuries CE.), were lately uncovered in a salvage excavation in the city of Gaza.²⁸ No other examples of this type are currently known. The rarity of type B tombs and the fact that until present they only appeared in the southern coastal plain may point to an ethnic affiliation, but

25. Gorzalczy A., Barkan D. "Yavne, Holot" HA-ESI 118 (2006).

26. Kaplan J. "Archaeological Survey of the Jibne" District. *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society* 21 (1957): 201.

Fischer, M. and Taxel, I. "Ancient Yavneh. Its History and Archeology", *Tel Aviv* 34 (2007): 221.

27. Tal O. "The Archaeology of Hellenistic Palestine: Between Tradition and Renewal". *Jerusalem (Hebrew)*, 2006, 249–253.

28. For a preliminary publication see <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/roman-era-cemetery-tombs-gaza-180982634/>.

unfortunately no clues of this affiliation were found inside the graves. Comparative research is currently under preparation.

Based on numismatic and pottery finds, it appears that occupation in areas Q and T2 began in the early Hellenistic period, around the late fourth century BCE. Remains from the fourth and third centuries BCE, mainly in area Q but also in area T2, are sparse and not related to architectural features, making it difficult to ascertain the settlement's nature during this time. By the late third century BCE, two farmhouses were established in these areas, likely continuing until the late second century BCE. The unguentaria found in cist graves in area R are also dated to the second century BCE, suggesting that this cemetery may have served the farms uncovered in our excavation, and possibly additional farms in the region yet to be discovered. It is important to note that, according to our estimation, about 10% of the Hellenistic remains in area Q have been uncovered, therefore, the picture of the settlement there may not be completely accurate.

It is difficult to determine the size of Yavne in the Hellenistic period, not only because the settlement itself has not been excavated, only part of the outer ring has been explored, but also due to the relative scarcity of finds. These include two farms, several cemeteries, and a dump pit, which do not provide sufficient information about the settlement's size or wealth.

A comparison with nearby Ashkelon, which has been extensively researched, is helpful. In Ashkelon, the finds from the Hellenistic period outside the Tel are also quite poor compared to those from the Roman and Byzantine periods. However, impressive remains from the Hellenistic period have been uncovered within the Tel itself. It is likely that many remains from the Hellenistic period in both cities were destroyed during the Roman and especially the Byzantine periods. Therefore, only archaeological excavations at the Tel could adequately address the question of the settlement's size in the Hellenistic period.

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Abbreviation List

AJ - *Jewish Antiquities*

BASOR – Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research

HA-ESI - Hadashot Arkheologiot online.

IAA - Israel Antiquities Authorities

IEJ - Israel Exploration Journal

Captions

Fig. 1 location map. Daniel Varga IAA

Fig. 2 The site and the excavated areas. Naama Leitner IAA

Fig. 3 The areas with remains from the Hellenistic periods. Yael Widiker IAA

Fig. 4 The farm in area Q – aerial photo, view to south. Assaf Peretz IAA

Fig. 5 The farm in area T2 – plan. Naama Leitner

Fig. 6 Pottery kiln in area T2. Assaf Peretz

Fig. 7 The cemetery in area R. Assaf Peretz

Fig. 8 Tomb in area Q. Pablo Betzer IAA

Fig. 9 A Bronze mirror - area Q. Daniel Varga

Fig. 10 Area H aerial photo with the location of the Hellenistic pit. Assaf Peretz IAA

Fig. 11 The sling bullet from area H. Dafna Gazit IAA

Fig. 12 Hellenistic Coins. Lior Sandberg and Daniel Varga

Fig. 13 ceramic plate area Q. Revital Golding -Meir IAA and Daniel Varga

Fig. 14 ceramic plate area T2. Revital Golding -Meir and Daniel Varga

Fig. 15 ceramic plate miscellaneous. Revital Golding -Meir and Daniel Varga