An Archaeological Survey at el-Janab Cave, Central Samaria

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Abstract

El-Janab Cave ('Usarin Cave) is a large karst system located about 11 km south of Shechem (Nablus) in Central Samaria. It comprises a series of large chambers connected by narrow passages that developed as a hypogenic cave in Upper-Cenomanian dolomite. During 2017–2018, we mapped and surveyed the cave, retrieving archaeological finds from various periods, including the Late Chalcolithic, early Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age I, Iron Age II, Persian, early Hellenistic, Early Roman, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. It seems that the cave's geographical and morphological features—its location in an open but settled landscape and its complex structure of passages leading to spacious chambers—attracted distinct human activities in several periods. In some phases, it was used as a refuge in turbulent times. In this paper, we present the archeological assemblages from the cave and discuss their interpretation and association with the history of the area.

Keywords: refuge cave; hypogenic cave; multi-period cave use

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1. Introduction

El-Janab Cave,[1] also known as ʻUsarin Cave, is a large karst system (300 m long) located in the Central Samaria Highlands, ca. 11 km south of Shechem (Nablus) and 1.5 km west of ʻUsarin village (New Israel Grid 228161/669695, 675 m asl; Fig. 1). The cave entrance is located on a moderate, rocky slope at the top of the northern bank of Wadi el-Janab. It is 3 m wide and concealed by its vertical aspect. Access to the cave requires descending a 4 m-deep vertical shaft leading into a series of large chambers and narrow passages (Fig. 2).

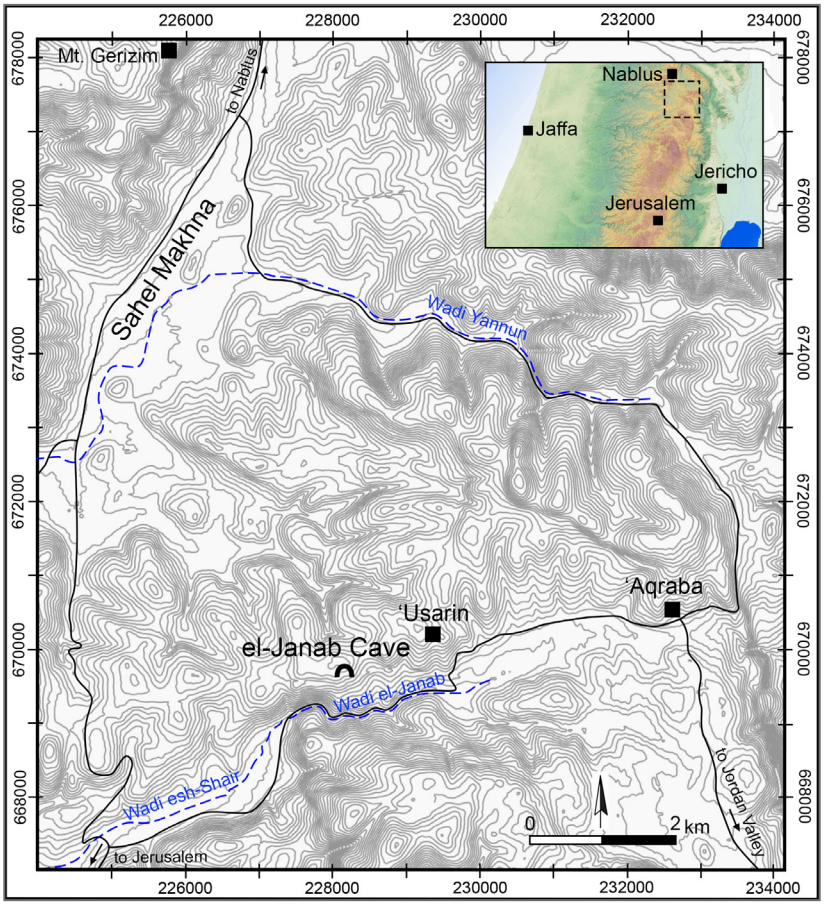

Fig. 1. Location map (Dvir Raviv).

1 The cave's name—el-Janab (الجناب)—derives from the nearby wadi, which appears on the PEF map (sheet XIV) as Wadi el-Jenāb and on the British Mandate Survey of Palestine 1:20,000 Map (Sheet ʻAbud, 15-15) as Wadi el-Janāb. As for the meaning of the name, there are a number of possibilities: الجنب means next to, alongside of, close to, compared with, near, along, at, beside, and by. According to another hypothesis, الجناب is an honorary Islamic title, which means "Sir." The word الجنوب, which means south, is more common in geographic names, but it does not seem to be the one used for the cave and the nearby wadi.

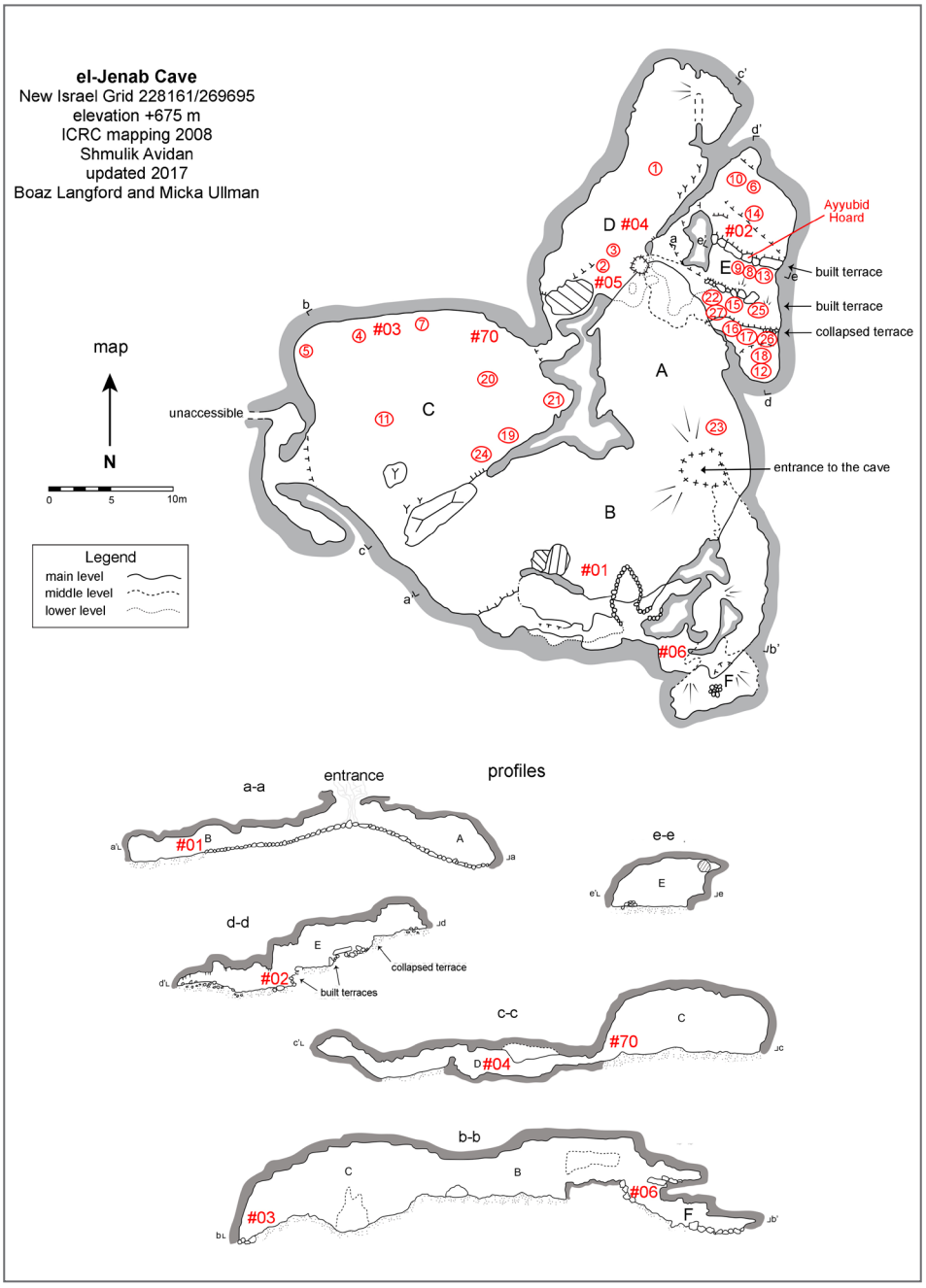

Fig. 2. El-Janab Cave, map and cross-sections (Illustration: Boaz Langford and Micka Ullman).

During 2017–2018, we conducted an archeological survey in the cave that yielded finds from various periods, including the Late Chalcolithic, Early Bronze Age I, Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age I, Iron Age II, Persian, early Hellenistic, Early Roman, Ayyubid, and Mamluk periods. Archaeological assemblages consisting of many potsherds, some stone vessels, and coins were uncovered in most areas of the cave, particularly in the three large internal chambers (Chambers C–E).

Although this paper presents the results of a survey, we consider the nature of the cave, its archaeological record, and our methodology sufficiently robust to warrant a detailed presentation of the finds and the development of an ambitious historical discussion. Most finds were discovered deep inside the cave and far from the entrance, and it is clear that they did not enter the cave through erosive processes but were deposited there by human agencies in antiquity. Although only one vessel was found intact, the discovery of relatively large potsherds in cracks, on bare rock, or covered by a thin layer of sediment at the bottom of the cave allows us to consider them *in situ*. The intensity of our fieldwork is also of note, spanning 10 survey days with five to ten participants that examined all parts of the cave. The discovery of finds from periods that are hardly represented in other similar caves in the region also calls for a detailed presentation of the finds and accompanying discussion.

2. Geology

The cave developed as an isolated karstic chamber under phreatic conditions (i.e., under the water table) in the Upper-Cenomanian dolomite of the Aminadav Formation. The bedrock is moderately bedded (~0.5 m thick), dipping ~25° to the south-southwest. The cave setting is on the backbone of Samaria Highlands, on the crest of el-Fari'ah anticline. Similar phreatic chamber caves are rare in this area and are more common in Western Samaria (Frumkin and Fischhendler 2005). When the water table dropped due to a tectonic uplift of the central mountain backbone, several cycles of collapse occurred, deforming the cave's original chamber-like structure. Simultaneously, calcite speleothems began accumulating in the cave, including stalagmites, stalactites, flowstone, etc. At some point, partial roof collapse and bedrock surface denudation created a small opening at the cave ceiling. The collapsed debris formed a 10 m-high talus inside the cave. These continuous processes produced the cave's current configuration of multiple, irregularly arranged chambers and passages of various sizes. In places, collapses formed separate levels of voids. Several collapses truncated the ancient speleothem fill, indicating multiple stages of karstification. The cave is an active karst system, wet and muddy.

3. Description of the Cave

Today, the 4 m vertical descent into the cave is facilitated by a fig tree that grows on the talus and rises through the entrance shaft. However, in antiquity, it may have been accessible only by rope or a ladder (Fig. 3). The entrance leads to debris-covered slopes north of Chamber A (10 × 15 m) and west of Chamber B (10 × 25 m). While this area is partly lit by sunlight penetrating from the entrance, the inner chambers are utterly dark. At the northeast of Chamber A, a small passage leads to Chamber E, which is spatially subdivided by built stone terraces.

Fig. 3. The cave's entrance, view from chamber B (Photo: Yoram Hofman).

A number of passages through the eastern and southern edges of Chamber B lead to a maze of collapsed blocks and Chamber F, while a speleothem curtain with a few narrow openings in the northwest separates it from Chamber C. Chamber C is the largest in the cave, measuring 17 × 20 m, and up to 11 m high (Figs. 4, 5). The floor is level and covered with dark, damp sediment and rocks of various sizes. The ceiling is smooth with shallow dissolution domes. Narrow passages branch west from Chamber C, while another narrow and low passage in the northeast leads to Chamber D. This chamber is located at the deepest part of the cave; it is lower than Chamber C and spacious, measuring 7 × 22 m wide and 2.5 m high. The ceiling is smooth, and the floor is rocky, sloping westward. It contains numerous speleothems, water drips from its ceiling, and its floor is muddy.

Fig. 4. Chamber C, looking northeast
(Photo: Yoram Hofman).

Fig. 5. Chamber C, looking southeast
(Photo: Yoram Hofman).

A low and narrow horizontal passage leads from the eastern end of Chamber D to Chamber E (5 × 17 m, 3 m high). Three terrace walls built of local stone produced a four-leveled space in this chamber. Presumably, the walls were built in antiquity to accommodate the steeply sloping floor and make it more suitable for use. On the chamber's west side, a narrow, low passage leads back to the entrance area (Chamber A). While in the larger chambers, one can walk upright and comfortably move around, some of the narrowest passages can only be traversed by crouching and crawling.

4. The Archaeological Assemblages

The Archaeological finds produced by the current survey can be divided into eight assemblages, each representing a period of human activity in the cave and spanning the 5th millennium BCE and the early 2nd millennium CE. These assemblages comprise potsherds, stone vessels, a flint blade, and coins. The indicative potsherds of the Chalcolithic period, the Early Bronze Age, and the Iron Age are presented below in full. As for the assemblages of the Middle Bronze Age, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, Ayyubid, and Mamluk periods, a more selective approach is applied, avoiding repeated illustrations of similar specimens.

4.1. The Late Chalcolithic Assemblage

The archeological remains indicate that the earliest phase of human occupation of el-Janab Cave should be dated to the Late Chalcolithic period. These finds were found in most sections of the cave, including Chambers B, D, E, and possibly C. They mostly consist of basalt vessel fragments—bowls, pedestalled bowls, and/or chalices—and include one body fragment of a bowl, two pointed rims of undecorated bowls (Fig. 6:1), five fragments of round bases, two legs of pedestalled bowls (Fig. 6:2), and a complete profile of a pedestal's bowl (Fig. 6:3). The latter is ca. 30 cm in diameter and retains on its base remnants of five pedestal legs. Due to a calcified coating, it is impossible to determine whether this bowl has an incised decoration on its outer rim. Identifiable Late Chalcolithic pottery items include a plain ledge handle (Fig. 6:4), a pierced lug handle (Fig. 6:5), and a putative pedestal with rope decoration (Fig. 6:6), which seems to be without parallels in neighboring Late Chalcolithic contexts. A backed sickle blade may also date to this period. It is made on a fine brown flint blank of a complete blade (105 mm long, 25 mm wide, 12 mm thick) and has a thinned percussion bulb and gloss on both sides (Fig. 6:7).

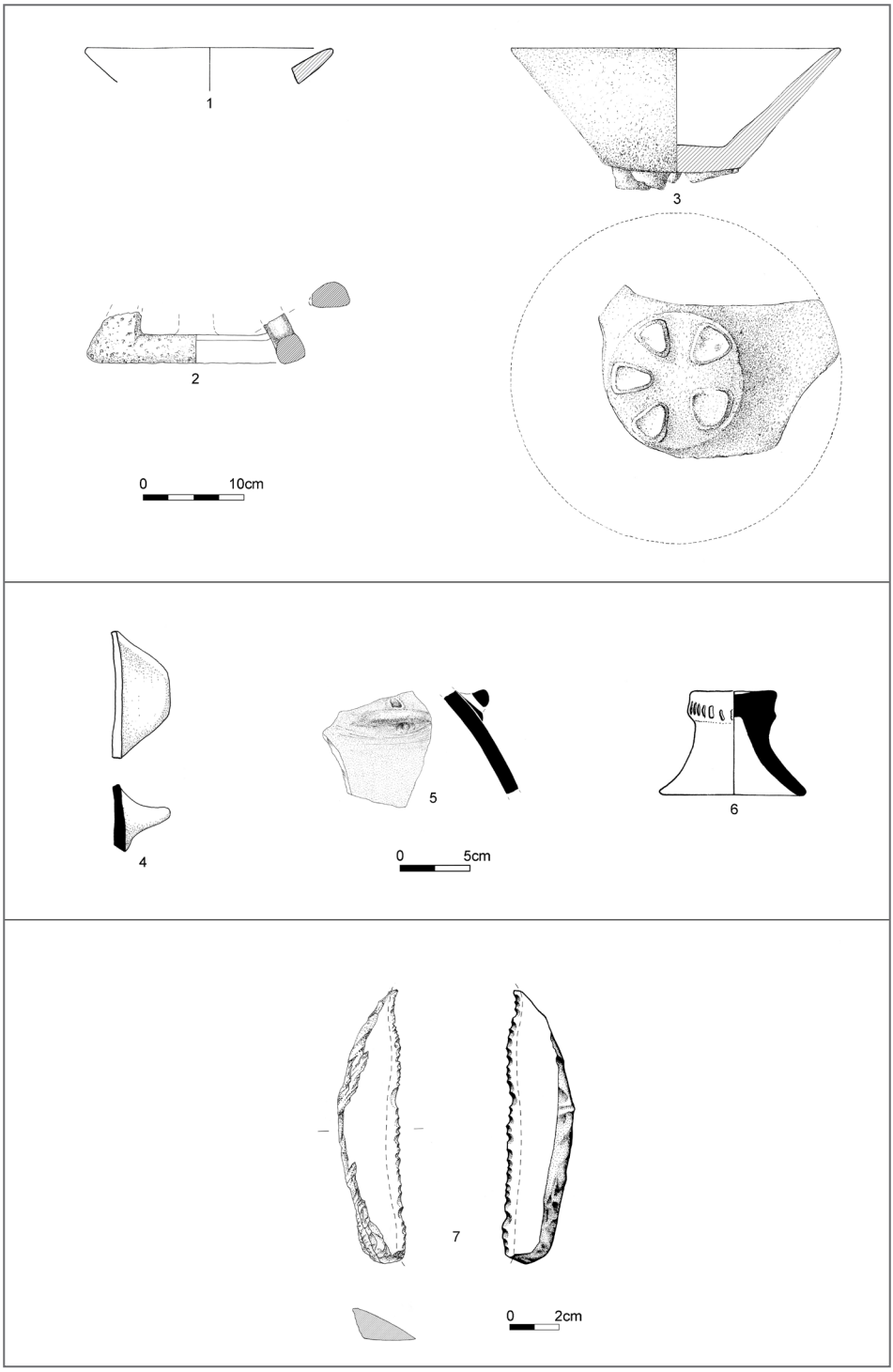

Fig. 6. Late Chalcolithic finds.

No.	Locus	Find	Raw material/ Description of Clay	Parallels
1	02/42	Bowl rim	Compact basalt	Gopher and Tsuk 1996: 110, Fig. 4.14:2, 4–6
2	06/1	Pedestal bowl base	Compact basalt	Gopher and Tsuk 1996: 110, Fig. 4.14:10–11
3	02/5	Pedestal bowl	Compact basalt	Gopher and Tsuk 1996: 112, Fig. 4.16:1, 3
4	01/17	Plain ledge handle	Pink-orange ware, coarse gray and white grits	Bar 2013: 210, Fig. 6.18:2
5	06/2	Pierced handle	Pink ware, coarse gray and white grits	Bar 2013: 210, Fig. 6.18:3, 4
6	01/22	Pedestal base	Orange ware, white grits	———
7	03/20	Backed sickle blade	Fine brown flint	———

4.2. The Early Bronze Age Assemblage

Only two items can be dated to the Early Bronze Age I, both found in Chamber E: a rim of a small holemouth jar (Fig. 7:1) and a folded ledge handle of a large jar (Fig. 7:2).

4.3. The Middle Bronze Age Assemblage

Finds dated to this period are quite abundant, although they comprise a relatively narrow range of pottery vessel types: three shallow bowls (Fig. 7:3–5), one deep bowl (Fig.7:6), one carinated bowl (Fig. 7:7), one goblet (Fig. 7:8), nine large jars with elaborate rim profiles (Fig. 7:9–15), three small jars or jugs (Fig. 7:16–18), and one burnished juglet. These are distributed in most parts of the cave, including Chambers B, C, E, and F.

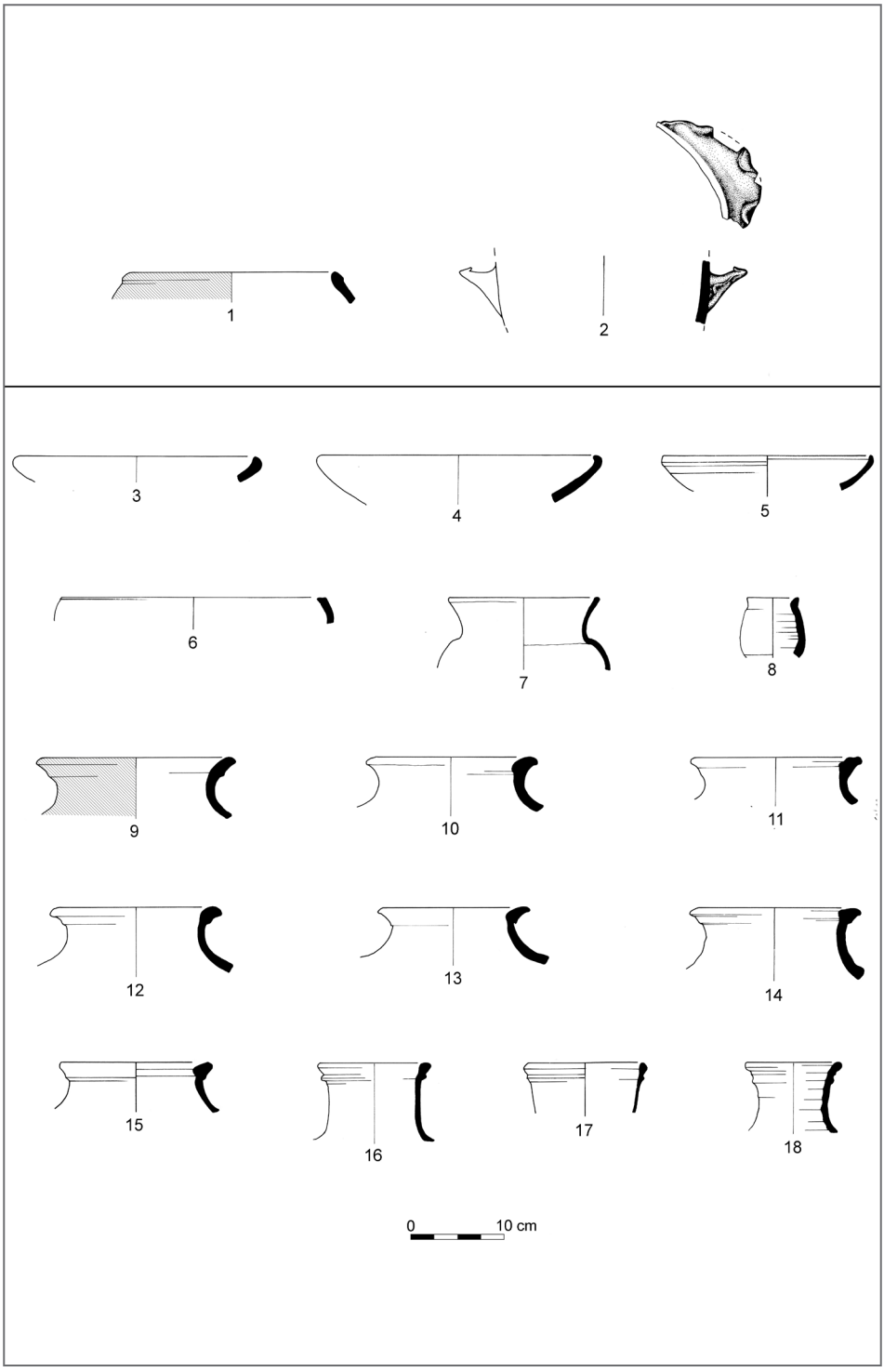

Fig. 7. Early Bronze Age I (top) and Middle Bronze Age pottery (bottom).

No.	Locus	Find	Description of Clay	Date	Parallels
1	02/30	Holemouth jar	Pinkish ware, fine gray grits, light gray core, red-brown slip paint	Early Bronze Age I	Gopher and Tsuk 1996: 132, Fig. 4.31:12
2	02/32	Folded ledge handle	Pinkish-orange ware, white-gray grits, gray core	Early Bronze Age I	de Vaux and Steve 1947: 415, Fig. 5:25–26
3	03/109	Plater bowl (shallow bowl)	Pink-brown ware, white grits, white cladding	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 107, Pl. 4:Bp. 51b, c, d
4	03/118	Plater bowl (shallow bowl)	Dark-gray ware, white grits, orange-brown cladding	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 107, Pl. 4:Bp. 51b,c,d
5	03/145	Plater bowl (shallow bowl)	Pink-buff ware, white grits, gray core, brown cladding	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 103, Pl. 2:Bp. 21b.
6	02/40	Deep bowl	Orange-buff ware, white and gray grits, orange cladding	Middle Bronze Age?	———
7	03/108	Carinated bowl	Orange ware, white grits, gray core, whitish cladding	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 127, Pl. 14:Bn B.2e
8	02/39	Goblet	Orange ware, white grits	Middle Bronze Age?	———
9	01/4	Large jar	Brown-pinkish ware, white grits, gray core, brown-red cladding	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 165, Pl. 33:JI. 23
10	01/13	Large jar	Brown-pinkish ware, white grits, gray core	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 165, Pl. 33:JI. 33
11	03/21	Large jar	Orange-reddish ware, white grits, pale gray core	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 165, Pl. 33:JI. 33
12	01/9	Large jar	Brown-pinkish ware, white grits	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 167, Pl. 34:JI. 41, JU.42
13	02/2	Large jar	Brown-pinkish ware, white grits	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 167, Pl. 34:JI. 41, JU.42
14	03/100	Large jar	Orange-brown ware, white grits, gray core	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 167, Pl. 34:JI. 41, JU.42

No.	Locus	Find	Description of Clay	Date	Parallels
15	03/120	Large jar	Gray-pinkish ware, white grits	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 167, Pl. 34:JI. 41, JU.42
16	01/6	Small jar/jug	Gray ware, white grits, gray core, brown cladding (?)	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 177, Pl. 39:Js; 181, Pl. 41:JJ.21
17	03/119	Small jar/jug	Reddish ware, white grits, grey core, brown cladding (?)	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 177, 181, Pls. 39:Js, 41:JJ.21
18	01/07	Small jar/jug	Orange ware, white grits, gray core	Middle Bronze Age	Cole 1984: 183, Pl. 42:JJ.31

4.4. The Iron Age I Assemblage

Four vessels mark the Iron Age I. Three are common cooking pots with vertical or slightly inverted rims and triangular profiles (Fig. 8:1–3), and one is a jug with a ridged inverted rim (Fig. 8:4), probably of the trefoil rim type characteristic of Shiloh (Bunimovitz and Finkelstein 1993: 157). It appears that the Iron Age I activity in the cave was limited to Chamber E, as sherds from this period were found only there.

4.5. The Iron Age II Assemblage

Two storage jars and four jugs found in Chambers C and E attest to the cave's use during the Iron Age II. One of the jars belongs to the "southern" family and has an inward-inclined short neck (Fig. 8:5), while the other belongs to the "northern" family and has a long ridged neck (Fig. 8:6; Tavger 2018: 375–376). All the jugs have long, upright necks. Two are of the type that continues the Iron Age I tradition of the plain trefoil rim (Fig. 8:7, 8), one is large and wide with a triangular rim (Fig. 8:9), and another has a slightly concave rim (Fig. 8:10). Although a precise date within the Iron Age II could not be attained at this juncture, it is notable that the assemblage's closest parallels in Samaria are dated to the 8th century BCE.

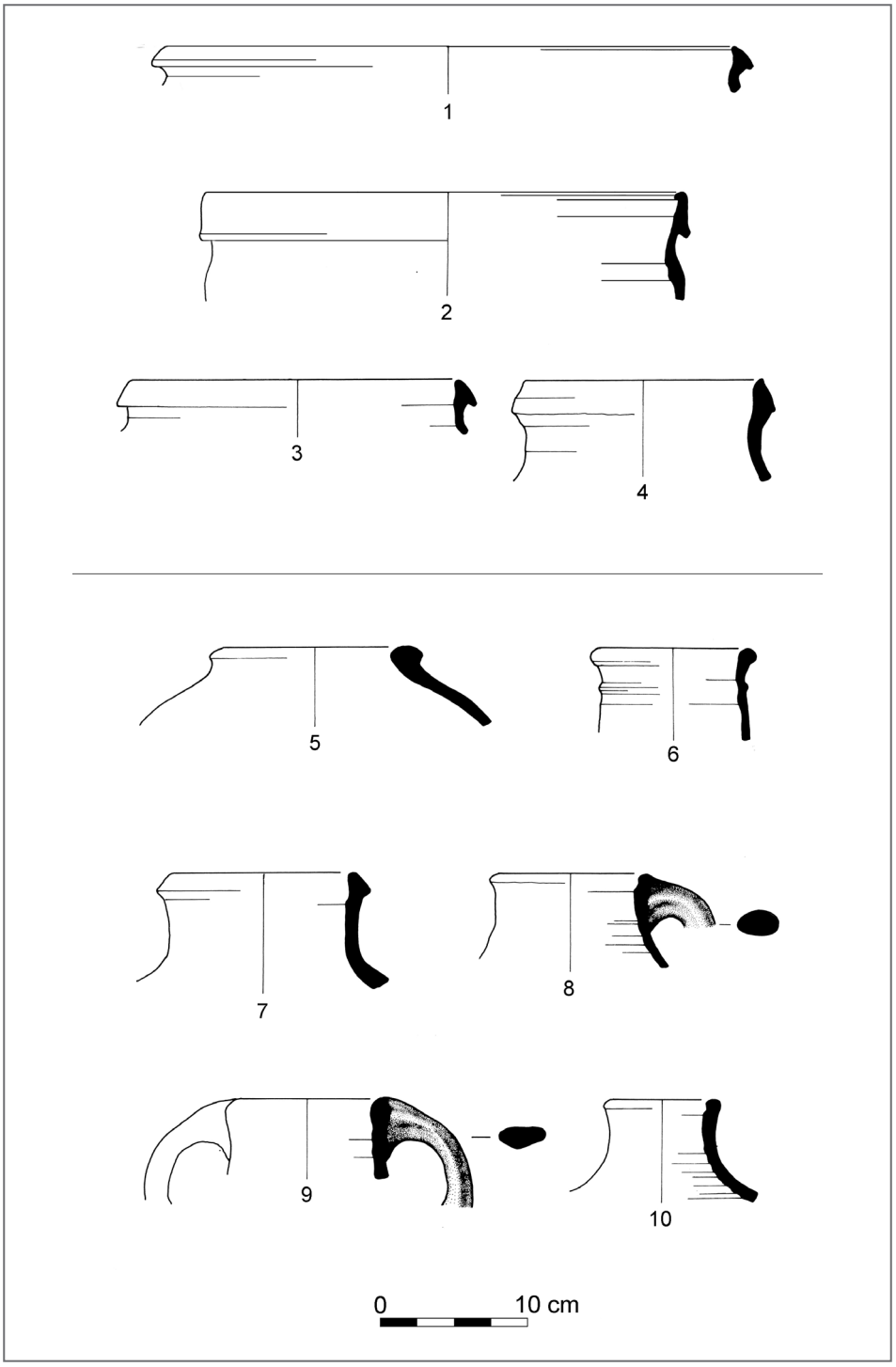

Fig. 8. Iron Age I and II pottery.

No.	Locus	Find	Description of Clay	Date	Parallels
1	02/22	Cooking pot	Dark brown ware, many white and gray grits, dark gray core	Iron I	Arie 2006: Fig. 13.63:15; Zertal 1987: Fig. 16:12; Bunimovitz and Finkelstein 1993: Fig. 6.46:10
2	02/20	Cooking pot	Dark brown ware, many white and gray grits, dark gray core	Iron I	Arie 2006: Fig. 13.51:9
3	02/21	Cooking pot	Dark brown ware, many white and gray grits, dark gray core	Iron I	Arie 2006: Fig. 13.63:11; Zertal 1987: Fig. 14:7
4	2/8	Jug	Orange-brown ware, white grits, dark gray core	Iron I	Bunimovitz and Finkelstein 1993: Fig. 6.53:5, 6.59: 6
5	02/10	Storage jar	Light pinkish brown ware, white and brown grits, brown core	Iron IIB	Mazar 1995: Fig. 21:1
6	02/17 (3/17)	Storage Jar	Light brown ware, a few small black grits	Iron IIB	Riklin 1997: Fig. 11:12
7	1/12	Jug	Light pinkish brown ware, light dark-gray core	Iron IIB	Yezerski and Aizik 2009: Pl. 1:23
8	01/3	Jug	Pinkish ware, many white and brown grits, light gray core	Iron IIB	Zayadine 1968: Fig. 2:4
9	3/110	Jug	Reddish brown ware, pale slip, dark gray core	Iron IIB	Yezerski and Aizik 2009: Pl. 1:16
10	03/105	Jug	Light pinkish brown ware, few brown and gray grits, light brown-gray core	Iron IIB	Zayadine 1968: Fig. 2:4

4.6. The Persian-Early Hellenistic Assemblage

The assemblage of the Persian-early Hellenistic period is the largest in the cave (Fig. 9), consisting of three coins and pottery sherds representing at least 29 vessels, including bowls, cooking pots, jars, jugs, juglets, kraters, and maybe an oil lamp as well. Finds of this period were found in most parts of the cave but particularly in Chambers C, D, and E.

Chronologically, the pottery assemblage is dominated by types typical of the transition between the Persian and Hellenistic periods. It includes a relatively small bowl with slightly carinated walls, an upright rim, and a low ring base (Fig. 9:1). It is similar to the Persian round-sided bowls (Ben-Arieh 2000: 7, Fig. 6:4–8), but its thin walls and sharply incurved rim are typical of the Hellenistic period. The three cooking pots have high concave necks and flaring rims, either simple or slightly thickened and outwardly inclined (Fig. 9:2–4). At least 14 vessels can be classified as storage jars, albeit the similarity of jars' rims and necks to those of jugs and kraters renders this determination uncertain. The jars assemblage comprises most subtypes known of the period: neckless jars with inward turning (Fig. 9:5, 8) or sharply flaring rims (Fig. 9:6, 7), concave-necked jars with everted rims (Fig. 9:9–11), jars with long, straight, vertical (Fig. 9:12, 13, 18–20) or converging necks (Fig. 9:14–17). One item with a long converging neck can be classified as either jar or krater according to the parallels (Fig. 9:21). At least two kraters were found (Fig. 9:22, 23), one of which is whole (Fig. 10). Both have a thickened triangular rim, but while one's neck converges, the other's flares. Four jugs have thick rounded rims and relatively long necks that converge, diverge, or are slightly convex and upright (Fig. 9:24–27). The juglet has a simple rim and a vertical, slightly diverging neck (Fig. 9:28). The flask has a vertical neck and a simple, flaring rim (Fig. 9:29). Additionally, a fragment of an open oil lamp (not illustrated) apparently also belongs to this assemblage.

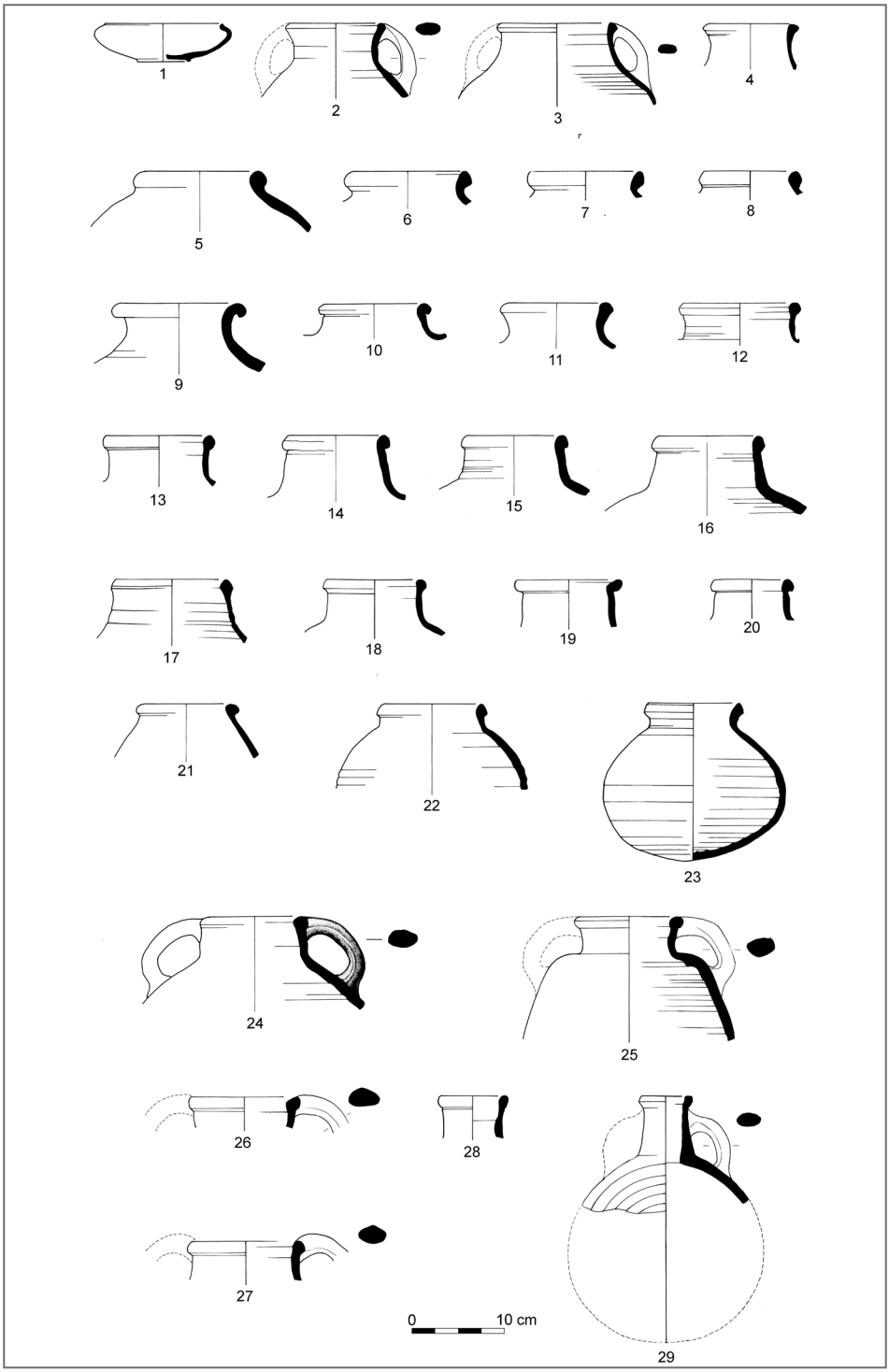

Fig. 9. Persian-early Hellenistic pottery.

No.	Locus	Vessel Find	Description of Clay	Date	Parallels
1	01/16	Bowl	Light brown-orange ware, colorful girts, gray core	Late 4th–3rd century BCE	Lapp 2008: 293, Pl. 3.28:13; Stern 1995: 345, Fig. 6.1:10
2	03/35	Cooking pot	Dark pinkish brown ware, small white grits	Late 4th–3rd century BCE	Lapp 2008: 323, Pl. 3.38:15, 16
3	03/125	Cooking pot	Dark pinkish brown ware, small white grits	4th–3rd century BCE	Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 23:3; Geva 2003: 167, Pl. 5.6:32 (variant)
4	02/26	Cooking pot	Brown-to-dark reddish ware, white girts, gray core	Late 4th–3rd century BCE	Lapp 2008: 323, Pl. 3.38:5; De Groot and Bernick-Greenberg 2012: Fig. 2.1:4
5	02/9	Jar	Light pinkish brown ware, white girts, gray core	5th–4th century BCE	Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 20:5; Raviv et al. 2021: 153, Pl. 2:2
6	03/3	Jar	Light orange ware, large white girts, light gray core	5th–3rd century BCE	Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 18:1; Stern 1995: 384, Fig. 6.35:9
7	03/135	Jar	Light brown-orange ware, colorful girts, grey core	5th–3rd century BCE	Stern 1995: Fig. 6.35:10; Raviv et al. 2021: 153, Pl. 2:6
8	03/132	Jar	Yellowish gray ware, white girts	5th–4th century BCE	Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 20:6; Shadman 2020: 32, Fig. 3.17:2 (variant)
9	02/1	Jar	Light brown-orange ware, colorful girts, gray core	4th–3rd century BCE	Lapp 2008: 245, Pl. 3.8:9 (variant)
10	02/13	Jar	Brown ware, white girts, gray core	4th–3rd century BCE	Haddad et al. 2015: 60, Fig. 9:16
11	03/23	Jar	Light yellowish brown ware, colorful girts, gray core	4th–3rd century BCE	Ben-Arieh 2000: 17, Fig. 16:1; Lapp 2008: 227, Pl. 3.2:15 (variant)
12	04/5	Jar	Gray-orange ware, colorful girts, grey core	4th–3rd century BCE	Stern 1995: 385, Fig. 6.36:11
13	03/129	Jar	Pinkish ware, white girts, gray core	4th–3rd century BCE	Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 21:2; Ben-Arieh 2000: 17, Fig. 15:4; Shadman 2020: 32, Fig. 3.17:10

No.	Locus	Vessel Find	Description of Clay	Date	Parallels
14	02/5	Jar	Light yellowish brown ware, black girts, gray core	5th–4th century BCE	Zinger-Avitz 1989: 134, Fig. 9.12:4; Lapp 2008: 261, Pl. 3.15:7
15	02/6	Jar	Light yellowish brown ware, colorful girts, gray and orange core	5th–4th century BCE	Zinger-Avitz 1989: 134, Fig. 9.12:4; Lapp 2008: 261, Pl. 3.15:7 (variant)
16	02/7	Jar	Light reddish brown ware, colorful girts, grey core	5th–4th century BCE	Ben-Arieh 2000: 17, Fig. 16:9, 10; Haddad et al. 2015: 60, Fig. 9:13; Mazar and Wachtel 2014: Fig 9:9
17	02/36	Jar/krater	Light pinkish brown ware, white and brown grits, brown core	5th–4th century BCE	Stern 1980: Fig. 6:9; Ben-Arieh 2000: 17, Fig. 16:18
18	03/128	Jar	Pinkish ware, white girts, gray core	5th–3rd century BCE	Stern 1995: 385, Fig. 6.36:10
19	04/4	Jar	Light brown-orange ware, colorful girts, gray core	5th–3rd century BCE	Zinger-Avitz 1989: 134, Fig. 9.12:9; Dadon 1997: 71, Fig. 10:7
20	03/130	Jar	Yellowish ware, tulip girts, light grey core	4th–3rd century BCE	Lapp 2008: 261, Pl. 3.15:14
21	02/18	Jar/krater	Light yellowish brown ware, colorful girts, gray core	5th–3rd century BCE	Lamon and Shipton 1939: Pl. 9:32; Ben-Arieh 2000: 17, Fig. 15:7
22	02/11	Jar/krater	Light reddish brown ware, colorful girts, gray core	5th–4th century BCE	Stern 1995: 91, Fig. 2.37:17; Lapp 2008: 227, Pl. 3.2:10
23	05/101	Krater	Light brown-orange ware, white girts	5th–4th century BCE	Lapp 2008: 261, Pl. 3.15:6
24	02/33	Krater/jug	Light yellowish brown ware, white girts	5th–4th century BCE	Zinger-Avitz 1989: 131, Fig. 9.10:1
25	04/2	Krater/jug	Yellowish gray ware, colorful girts, gray core	5th–4th century BCE	Zinger-Avitz 1989: 117, Fig. 9.1:9
26	04/6	Krater/jug	Yellowish ware, colorful girts, gray core	5th–4th century BCE	Lapp 2008: 273, Pl. 3.19:6

No.	Locus	Vessel Find	Description of Clay	Date	Parallels
27	03/127	Krater/jug	Light pink ware, white grits, yellowish gray core	5th–4th century BCE	Lapp 2008: 265, Pl. 3.16:1; Monnickendam-Givon 2011: Pl. 4:17-18
28	03/7	Juglet	Pinkish-yellowish ware, colorful girts, gray core	5th–4th century BCE	Lapp 2008: 261, Pl. 3.15:4
29	03/124	Flask	Pinkish ware, white grits, brown core	5th–4th century BCE	Geva 2003:171, Pl. 5.8:22; Lapp 2008: 281, Pl. 3.23:3; Shalev 2015: Fig. 4.4 5

Fig 10. A late Persian-early Hellenistic krater found in el-Janab Cave, Chamber D (Photo: Shlomi Amami)

Most of the parallels were found at sites in Samaria and the Sharon Plain dated to the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods. Most notably, these sites include Shechem (Tell Balata, Strata II–IV), Wadi ed-Daliyeh, Wadi el-Bureid (Rosh Haʿayin), and Tel Michal (XI–VI). Based on these parallels, we date the assemblage to the second half of the 4th century BCE. However, due to the presence of pottery types that definitively date to the Persian period proper, the possibility of a separate assemblage representing the early Persian period should not be ruled out.

Three coins and a bronze fibula may also be included in this Persian-early Hellenistic assemblage. One bronze and two silver coins dating from the 4th century BCE—a Phoenician half sheqel and two *drachms* bearing the name of Alexander the Great— were found in Chamber D. The half sheqel was minted in Sidon and joins other numismatic evidence from Samaria indicating a strong Sidonean influence on coin circulation (Johananoff 2021). The *drachms* were minted in the east, and at least one can be traced to Babylon. They may have arrived in Samaria through markets in Phoenicia (for discussion on these three coins, see Raviv et al., 2022). The fibula found in Chamber E is of Pedde's C1.4 type, which is usually dated to the second half of the 5th century or the 4th century BCE (for parallels, see Pedde 2000; 2001: 494).

4.7. The Early Roman Assemblage

The Roman-period assemblage includes two coins and pottery sherds of at least 23 vessels. All were found in Chamber C, except one sherd that was found in Chamber E.

The pottery assemblage includes fragments of a bowl, a cooking casserole, cooking pots, storage jars, a jug, and two oil lamps. The bowl has a simple rim, thin walls, and delicate wheel-made ridges on the outer surface of the lower body (Fig. 11:1). This type was common in Iudaea from the 1st century BCE to the first half of the 2nd century CE. The casserole has a straight shoulder, no neck, and a thickened ledge rim with an inner groove, probably to support a lid (Fig. 11:2). This type was common in Iudaea during the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.

The cooking pots are closed but morphologically diverse (Fig. 11:3–9). Three have a relatively short convex neck and a flat, everted rim (Fig. 11:3, 4, 6). This type is uncommon in Roman-period Iudaea.[2] Nevertheless, it was found in both Early Roman I (63 BCE–70 CE) and Early Roman II (70–136 CE) assemblages.[3]

2 In the context of the Roman period, we use *Iudaea* to refer to the province and the *Land of Judea* to indicate the more limited geographical region.

3 It is similar to the Early Roman Kefar Ḥananya Type 4A cooking pot (Adan-Bayewitz 1993: 124–126), but its rim is thicker and lacks the groove inside just below the cusp. Parallels from the Early Roman II period were found at ʿAraq Batin e-Jamia Cave (Raviv 2018a: 266, Pl. 12:5), Selaʿ Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: 191, Pl. 1:16), Gane Tal (de Vincenz 2021: 214, Fig. 2:5, 6), and Masada (Bar-Nathan 2006: 159). Some

The remaining cooking pots are of common Early Roman types (Fig. 11:5, 7–9): Pot No. 5 has a slightly flaring neck and a grooved triangular rim; No. 7 has a short flaring neck, a grooved triangular rim, and a carinated shoulder; No. 8 has a short vertical neck, a slightly thickened rim with a triangular section, and a smooth transition from neck to body; lastly, No. 9 has a flaring neck, a simple everted rim, and a smooth transition from neck to body.

The storage jars are morphologically and typologically diverse (Fig. 11:10–15). Jar No. 10 has a vertical neck that slightly thickens near its base and a thickened everted rim; this type is uncommon, and close parallels have been reported from Early Roman I and II contexts. Jar No. 11 has a flaring neck and a ledge rim with a rounded profile, whereas No. 12 has a slightly flaring neck and a thickened, roughly square-profiled rim; both Nos. 11 and 12 are common between the mid-1st century and early 2nd century CE. Jar No. 13 has a concave neck, a low ridge above the shoulder, and an everted, round-sectioned rim; the best parallel for this vessel was reported from Khirbat Umm el-ʿUmdan (Rapuano 2013: 75, Fig. 7:134) and was dated to the period between the revolts. Other close, Late Roman-period parallels have been found at Meẓad ʿArugot, albeit with a pronounced ridge at the base of the neck and a triangular-sectioned rim (Hirschfeld and Stern 2007: 451, Pl. 8:110–118) and at Caesarea, albeit with a pronounced ridge and a flaring rim (Patrich 2008: Nos. 997, 1005, 1007, 1008, 1112, 1121, 1125–1127). Accordingly, this type of jar seems to date from the 2nd century CE onward. Jar No. 14 has a flaring neck and a simple rim with a shallow groove at the cusp, while No. 15 has a vertical neck, flaring toward the top, a ridge above the shoulder, and a flaring, triangular-profiled rim. Parallels for both Nos. 14 and 15 are found in the Early Roman II assemblage of Tel Shiloh (Raviv 2018b: 37, Pls. 3:9, 38, 4:65). However, close Early Roman parallels from Yannun (Kagan and Eisenstadt 2009: 109, Pl. 3:11) suggest that these types date to both the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.

The jug (Fig. 11:16) has a short convex neck, a thickened flaring rim with a flat top, and a smooth transition between neck and body. While no exact parallels have been found for this vessel, the general form is typical of both the Early Roman I and II periods. Item Nos. 17 and 18 are fragments of wheel-made, knife-pared lamps, also known as *Herodian lamps* (see Barag and Hershkovitz 1994: 24–53; Sussman 2012: 77–91). No. 17 is a nozzle and body fragment. Its walls are thick, and a thin line is incised across the nozzle; its top is flat, and a ridge circles the filling hole, whose rim is broad and flat. A finer variant of this lamp, without the incised line,

close parallels were also found in assemblages of the Late Roman period at Shechem (Magen 2005: 374, Pl. 5:4), Yannun (Kagan and Eisenstadt 2009: 109, Pl. 3:17), Jerusalem (Magness 2014: 236–237, Pls. 6.1:16, 6.2:2), and Caesarea (Patrich 2008: 165, no. 780). A similar cooking pot was found at site 18-17/02/02, ca. 3.5 km north-east of el-Janab Cave (Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1997: 810, Fig. 8.329:9), and classified by the authors as Type 17cw05, which presumably dates to the 3rd–4th centuries CE (ibid., 35).

was found in Neapolis (Magen 2005: 478, Pl. 63:15). No. 18 is a fragment of a thin, rounded body and a filling-hole rim. Such lamps were widespread in Iudaea from the end of the 1st century BCE to the first half of the 2nd century CE.

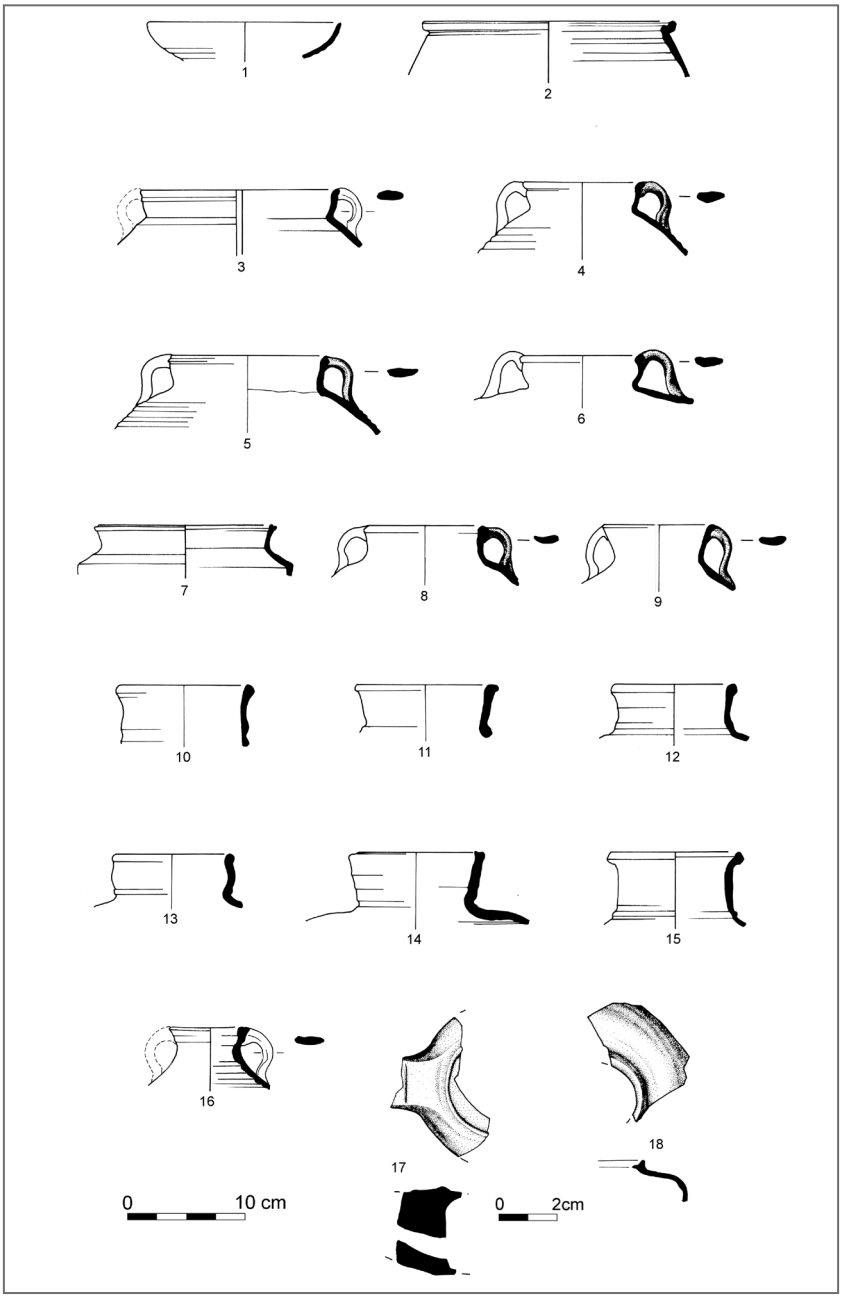

Fig. 11. Early Roman pottery.

No.	Locus	Vessel Find	Description of Clay	Date	Parallels
1	03/115	Bowl	Pinkish Orange ware, tiny white grits, yellowish cladding outside	Late 1st century BCE–early 2nd century CE	Bar-Nathan 2006: 149, Pl. 25: 41; Rapuano 2013: 67, Fig. 3:37
2	03/136	Cooking casserole	Sandy light reddish brown ware, white girts, gray core	Mid-1st–2nd century CE	Zissu et al. 2009: 497, Pl. 2:3
3	03/137	Cooking pot	Brown-dark orange ware, white girts, gray core, dark cladding outside	1st–2nd century CE	Magen 2005: 374, Pl. 5:4; Raviv 2018a: 266, Pl. 12:5
4	03/12	Cooking pot	Dark orange ware, light gray cladding	Mid-1st –2nd century CE	Magen 2005: 374, Pl. 5:4; Raviv 2018a: 266, Pl. 12:5 (variant)
5	03/24	Cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, white girts, gray core	Mid-1st–2nd century CE	Rapuano 2013: 69, Fig. 4:55; Raviv 2018b: 48, Pl. 5:7
6	03/14	Cooking pot	Reddish Brown ware, white girts, gray core	Mid-1st–2nd century CE	Raviv 2018b: 48, Pl. 5:17
7	03/141	Cooking pot	Brown-orange ware, dark reddish cladding	Mid-1st–2nd century CE	Killebrew 1999: 122, Fig. III. 59:8
8	03/13	Cooking pot	Reddish orange ware, black and white girts	late 1st century BCE–early 2nd century CE	Bar-Nathan 2006: 177, Pl. 27: 7; Raviv 2018a: 86, Pl. 16:2
9	02/31	Cooking pot	Brown-orange ware, white girts, dark cladding outside (?)	1st century BCE–1st century CE	Bar-Nathan 2006: 178, Pl. 28:28
10	03/8	Jar	Reddish brown ware, black and white girts, black cladding	1st–early 2nd century CE	Bar-Nathan and Eisenstadt 2013: 57, Pl. 1.2:569; Rapuano 2013: 75, Fig. 7:117
11	03/9	Jar	Pinkish orange ware, white grits	1st–early 2nd century CE	Kloner 1987: 346, Fig. 162:1; Kagan and Eisenstadt 2009: Pl. 3:10

No.	Locus	Vessel Find	Description of Clay	Date	Parallels
12	03/134	Jar	Orange ware, colorful grits, gray core	Mid-1st–early 2nd century CE	Kloner and Tepper 1987: 352, Fig. 166:13; Bar-Nathan 2006: 93, Pl. 16:100
13	03/133	Jar	Black ware, white girts, brown core	2nd–4th century CE	Hirschfeld and Stern 2007: 451, Pl. 8:118; Rapuano 2013: 75, Fig. 7:134
14	03/6	Jar	Pinkish orange ware, white grits, black cladding outside	1st–early 2nd century CE	Raviv 2018b: 38, Pl. 4:65
15	03/143	Jar	Orange ware, white girts, light brown cladding on the rim and outside	Mid-1st–early 2nd century CE	Kagan and Eisenstadt 2009: 109, Pl. 3:11; Raviv 2018b: 37, Pl. 3:9
16	01/20	Jug	Dark orange ware, white girts, reddish cladding outside	Late 1st century BCE–early 2nd century CE	Bar-Nathan 2006: 120, Pl. 19:31; Geva and Hershkovitz 2006: 125, Pl. 4.4:7; Zissu et al. 2009: 497, Pl. 2:20
17	03/26	Herodian lamp	Orange ware, colorful grits, light cladding outside	Late 1st century BCE–early 2nd century CE	Barag and Hershkovitz 1994: 24–53; Sussman 2012: 77–91
18	03/25	Herodian lamp	Pinkish orange ware, tiny white grits	Late 1st century BCE – first third of 2nd century CE	Barag and Hershkovitz 1994: 24–53; Sussman 2012: 77–91

To conclude, except for No. 13, which probably dates from the 2nd century CE onward, none of the specimens in this assemblage can be dated exclusively to the Early Roman II period. Instead, they represent the period between the mid-1st century (including pre-70 CE) and the first third of the 2nd century CE. However, the scarcity of well-dated Early Roman II assemblages from sites in Central Samaria complicates dating assemblages from this region to specific phases in the Roman period.

Two bronze coins also belong to the Roman assemblage; both were found in Chamber C. One dates from the reign of Claudius (41–54 CE) and was minted in Caesarea Maritima by Agrippa II or by one of the Roman governors (Burnett,

Amandy, and Ripollès 1992: No. 4858; Meshorer 2001: No. 178).[4] This coin is rare and the first to be recovered by archaeologists (for discussion on this coin, see Raviv et al., 2022). The second is a Jerusalem issue of a Roman governor under Nero, dated to 58/9 CE.

4.8. The Ayyubid and Mamluk Assemblage

More than a dozen potsherds typical of the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, 18 Ayyubid and three Mamluk coins, and a bronze object attest to a late occupation at el-Janab Cave. These were found throughout most of the cave, including Chambers B, C, and E and the entrance to Chamber D.

All pottery finds were of locally produced types common in rural domestic contexts of the highland region. The assemblage is dominated by the Crusader-Mamluk geometrically-painted handmade vessels, also known in the literature as *Hand Made Geometrically Painted Ware* (HMGPW; Fig. 12:2–6; Avissar 1996: Type 28; Avissar and Stern 2005: Type II.4.4). This ware emerged in the 12th century CE and became very popular during the Mamluk period when its patterns attained their highest level of delicacy and elaboration. The types in el-Janab Cave are typical of the late 12th–14th centuries CE (Avissar and Stern 2005: 113; Stern 2012: 49). Other types of vessels include: (1) a slip-painted bowl with a yellow decoration under a transparent glaze (Fig. 12:1; see Avissar 1996: 96–97, Fig. XIII.32, Type 44; Avissar and Stern 2005: 19–20, Fig. 7.8:type 1.1.6), (2) a plain, pale brown slipped jug with a wide, slightly flaring neck and a simple ridged rim (Fig. 12:7), which is usually dated to the late 12th–mid-13th centuries CE, (3) a jug's spout with a swollen neck (Fig. 12:8), dated to the late 13th–15th centuries CE, (4) a horizontal, pointed, pulled-up loop handle of a handmade cooking pot (Fig. 12:9), which is found in contexts dated from the mid-13th century CE to the end of the 15th century CE, finally, (5) a crude molded oil lamp (Fig. 12:10) of the type found in Caesarea (Arnon 2008: 226–227, Fig. 39.182–185, Type MP), Ashqelon (Hoffman 2019: 502–503, Figs. 85–86, Type 10) and the 12th-centurey CE levels of the Red Tower (al-Burj al-Aḥmar; Pringle 1986: 145, Fig. 47.33).

4 We wish to thank Dr. Yoav Farhi for identifying this coin and discussing it.

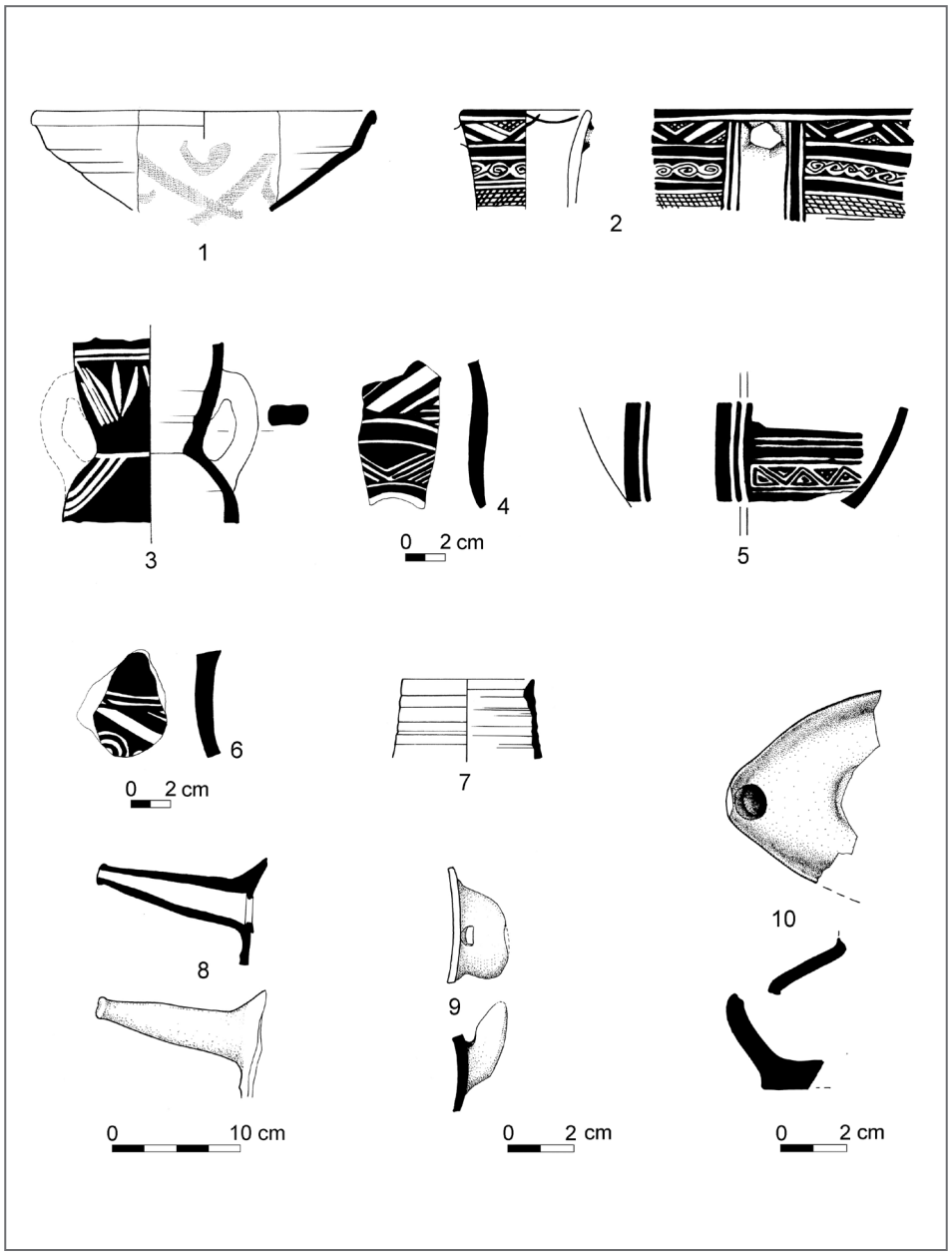

Fig. 12. Ayyubid-Mamluk pottery

No.	Locus	Find	Raw material	Date	Parallels
1	02/43	Yellow glazed slip-painted bowl	Orange-brown ware, inside slip-painted decoration under yellow transparent glaze	Mid-12th–14th century CE	Avissar 1996: 96–97, Fig. XIII.32, Type 44; Avissar and Stern 2005: 19–20, Fig. 7.8, Type 1.1.6
2	02/34	Handmade jug with painted geometric decoration	Orange-brown ware, white and black grits, beige slip on both surfaces, red-painted decoration over burnish on the exterior and the inner side of the rim	Late 12th–14th century CE	Avissar 1996: 168–170, Fig. XIII.154, Type 28; Avissar and Stern 2005: 113–116, Fig. 47.6; Getzov et al. 2009: 132–133, Fig. 3.20.5–6
3	05/27	Handmade jug with painted geometric decoration	Light brown ware, white and black grits, beige slip on the exterior, dark brown-painted decoration over burnish	Late 12th–14th century CE	Avissar 1996: 168–170, Fig. XIII.154, Type 28; Avissar and Stern 2005: 113–116, Fig. 47.2–5, Type II.4.4
4	01/24	Handmade vessel with painted geometric decoration	Light brown ware, white and black grits, beige slip on the exterior, dark brown-painted decoration over burnish	Late 12th–14th century CE	Avissar 1996: 168–170, Fig. XIII.154, Type 28; Avissar and Stern 2005: 113–116, Fig. 47.1–5, Type II.4.4
5	01/19	Handmade vessel with painted geometric decoration	Light brown ware, white and black grits, beige slip on the exterior, red-painted decoration over burnish on the exterior	Late 12th–14th century CE	Avissar 1996: 168–170, Fig. XIII.154, Type 28; Avissar and Stern 2005: 113–116, Fig. 47.1, 4, Type II.4.4
6	01/23	Handmade vessel with painted geometric decoration	Light brown ware, white and black grits, beige slip on the exterior and gray slip on the interior, red-painted decoration over burnish on the exterior	Late 12th–14th century CE	Avissar 1996: 168–170, Fig. XIII.154, Type 28; Avissar and Stern 2005: 113–116, Fig. 47.1, 4, Type II.4.4
7	03/117	Plain jug	Orange-brown ware, a few white grits, light brown slip on the exterior	Late 12th–mid-13th century CE	Avissar 1996: 168, Fig. XIII.153, Type 27; Avissar and Stern 2005: 108–110, Fig. 45.1–3, Type II.4.1

No.	Locus	Find	Raw material	Date	Parallels
8	03/18	Spout of a jug with a swollen neck	Orange-brown ware, a few white grits, brown slip on the exterior	Late 13th–15th century CE	Avissar and Stern 2005: 108–110, Fig. 45.4, 5, Type II.4.2; Getzov et al. 2009: 134–135 Fig. 3.21.8–10
9	03/4	Horizontal pulled-up pointed ear handle of a handmade cooking pot	Reddish brown ware, white grits	Mid-13th–late 15th century CE	Avissar and Stern 2005: 94–96, Fig. 40.5, Type II.2.2; Dolinka 2018: 198, Fig. 3:8, 9
10	03/19	Crude molded oil lamp	Reddish brown clay, white grits	12th–13th century CE	Pringle 1986: 145, Fig. 47:33; Arnon 2008: 226–227, Fig. 39. 182–185; Hoffman 2019: 502–503, Figs. 85, 86, Type 10

The Medieval numismatic assemblage comprises 22 Islamic coins: one silver and 21 bronze. Sixteen were found in Chamber E, five in Chamber C, and one under the cave's entrance. At least four coins date from the first half of the 13th century CE—i.e., late in the Ayyubid rule—and three date from the early Mamluk period. Three coins were found together under a pottery sherd near a terrace wall in the center of Chamber E, and they seem to have been deposited there intentionally. One of these coins was heavily worn and could not be identified beyond a possible attribution to the Ayyubid period. The other two were fused so that only one face of each was visible; one was attributed to the reign of al-Nasir Yusuf (under the Caliph al-Musta'sim) between 1242 and 1259 CE. Three Mamluk coins from the Dimashq and al-Qahira mints were found in Chamber C; two are of al-Ashraf Nasir al-Din Sha'aban II, and the latest was minted in al-Qahira in 1368/9 CE (for further discussion on these coins, see Raviv et al., 2022).

The bronze object seems to have been a piece of furniture decoration from the Ayyubid, Mamluk, or Ottoman periods (for a close parallel, see Taxel 2007: 94, 98, Fig. 6.7).

5. Discussion

Our interpretation of human activity in the cave is based on an analysis of its physical characteristics, geographical setting, and the nature of the archeological assemblages. The historical circumstances will also be considered whenever possible.

The cave's morphological features, especially its vertical entrance, the difficult access to its internal dark chambers, and the paucity of built elements, indicate that it is unlikely to have been used for regular habitation. An examination of the distribution of artifacts in the cave indicates that human activity in all the periods primarily occurred in the internal chambers, which are spacious and relatively favorable for human stay, although some are hard to access and require crouching and crawling (Fig. 2).

Analysis of the ceramic assemblages indicates the dominance of closed portable vessels (Table 1). In the Middle Bronze and Iron Ages, they included jugs and cooking pots (but not huge, largely immovable pithoi); in the Roman period, jars and cooking pots; and in the Hellenistic and Ayyubid-Mamluk periods, jars, jugs, and cooking pots.

Most assemblages of the early periods, including the Late Chalcolithic, Early Bronze Age I, Iron Age I, and Iron Age II, are relatively small and do not facilitate a discussion of their nature. Some of these will be discussed in more detail elsewhere.

Conversely, the Middle Bronze Age, Persian-early Hellenistic, Early Roman, and Ayyubid-Mamluk assemblages are relatively large and diverse. However, while the type of human activity in the cave in the Middle Bronze Age is indeterminate, the three later assemblages consist of pottery, coins, and other finds that facilitate relatively accurate dating and allow us to tie the use of el-Janab Cave with specific historical circumstances. Moreover, by comparing el-Janab with other complex karst caves in the Samaria Highlands and elsewhere, we can suggest that, during these periods, el-Janab Cave served as a place of refuge. In this context, it should be noted that the only artificial modifications to the cave were the retaining walls built in Chamber E. Spaces that are utilized without prior design characterize conflicts that erupt suddenly or lack well-organized leadership.

The phenomenon of refuge caves in Palestine is well-known from the Persian-early Hellenistic and Roman periods (see below) but hardly known from the other periods discussed in this paper (see Davidovich 2015: 23–36; Raviv 2018a: 242–278). As we shall demonstrate below, literary sources from the three later periods represented at el-Janab Cave enable us to suggest a specific conflict (or conflicts) or instance of regional instability that prompted the cave's use for refuge. The settlement history in Samaria and several biblical accounts indicate that the cave may have also been used for refuge during the Iron Age, a phenomenon that is likely to have gone archaeologically unnoticed due to the rarity of similar caves.

Table 1. A typological and periodic breakdown of the indicative pottery and stone vessels from el-Janab Cave.

Period	Storage jar	Jug or small jar	Juglet	Cooking pot or casserole	Bowl	Lamp	Other	Total
Late Chalcolithic	1				3		1 chalice	5
Early Bronze Age I	1						1 holemouth jar	2
Middle Bronze Age	9	3	1		5		1 goblet	19
Iron Age I		1		3				4
Iron Age II	2	4						6
Persian-early Hellenistic	14	4	1	3	1	1	1 flask, 2 kraters	27
Early Roman	10	1		8	1	2	1 cooking casserole	23
Late Ayyubid-early Mamluk		7		1	1	1		10
Unidentified	1	1			1		1	4
Total	**38**	**21**	**2**	**15**	**14**	**4**	**6**	**100**

5.1. Early Periods of Occupation

Late Chalcolithic utilization of the subsurface was widespread (e.g., Rowan and Golden 2009). Several complex karst caves from the Samaria Highlands are known to have Late Chalcolithic remains, including Naḥal Qanah (Gopher and Tsuk 1996), ʻAbud (Zissu et al. 2009: 479), and Zarda Caves (Freikman 2017: 85–90) (Fig. 13). In Naḥal Qanah Cave, the Late Chalcolithic occupation is associated with burials (MNI=23) and the placement of grave goods (Gopher and Tsuk 1996: 218). However, in el-Janab Cave, the small number of Late Chalcolithic finds renders it difficult to identify the type of activity performed. Nevertheless, the relative abundance of elaborate basalt bowls and chalices may hint at a symbolic or cultic function (see van den Brink, Rowan, and Braun 1999). On this issue, it is worth noting that no human remains were documented in the cave. The spatial distribution of the Late Chalcolithic finds demonstrates that most segments of the cave were reached and used during this time. A similarly expansive spatial distribution of finds was also documented in other large caves, such as ʻAbud and Naḥal Qanah (Zissu et al. 2009; Gopher and Tsuk 1996).

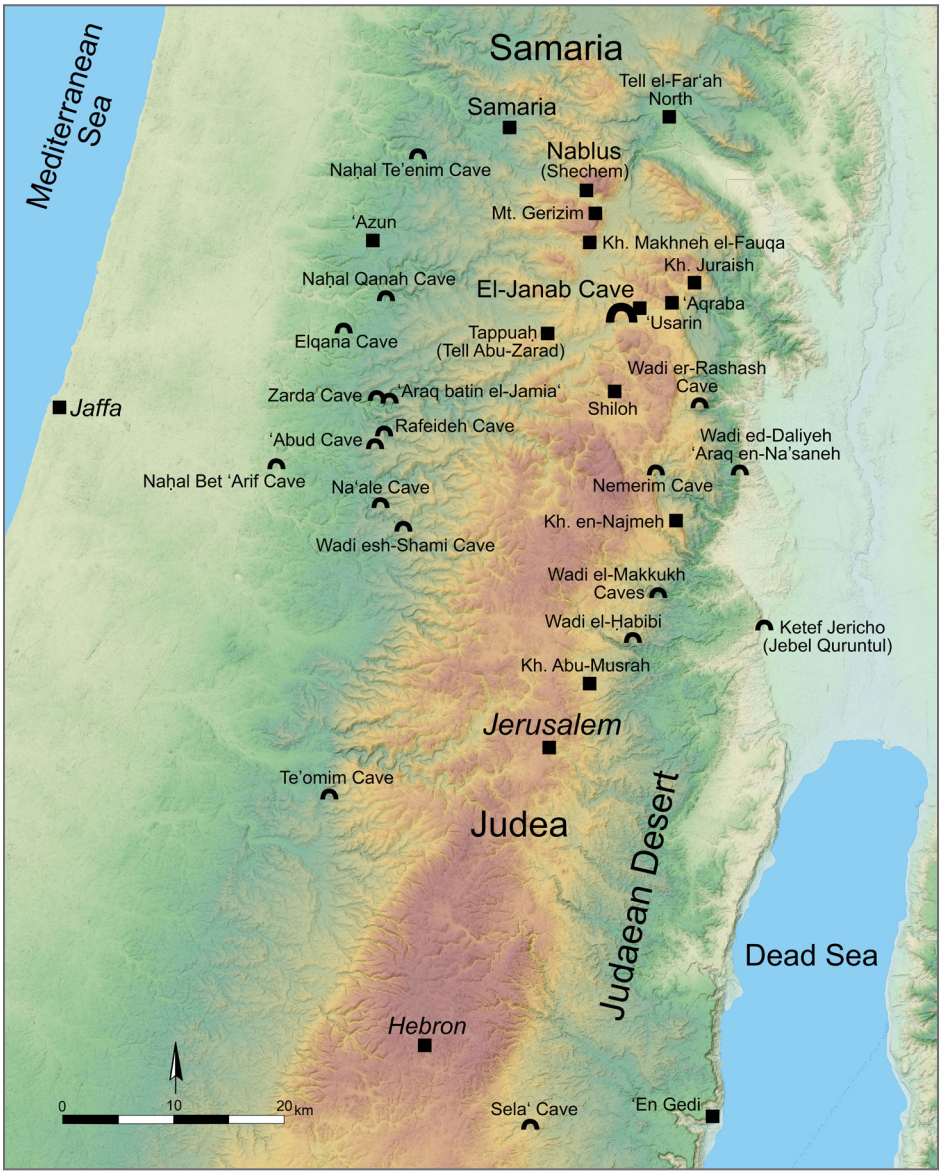

Fig. 13. Map showing settlement and cave sites mentioned in the text (Dvir Raviv).

Finds dated to the EB I are notably few, retrieved only from Chamber E. Thus, it seems that the cave was only used sporadically at this time. Other complex karst caves that were used during the EB I are Naḥal Qanah (Gopher and Tsuk 1996), Rafeideh (Raviv 2018a: 265), and Te'omim (Zissu et al. 2017). Tel el-Far'ah (North) (de Vaux and Steve 1947) and Khirbat Makhneh el-Fauqa (Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimoviz 1997: 694–697) are the nearest prominent settlement sites of this period (Fig. 13).

As for the Middle Bronze Age, the pottery assemblage is dominated by small to medium-sized closed vessels retrieved from most parts of the cave. A few settlements of this period have been recorded near el-Janab Cave, including Tell Balata (Shechem) (Cole 1984), Tel Shiloh (Finkelstein, Bunimoviz, and Lederman 1993), and Khirbat Juraish (Bar and Zertal 2016: 202). Middle Bronze Age finds have also been reported from large karst caves in the highlands such as ʻAraq en-Naʻsaneh (Lapp and Lapp 1974) and Te'omim (Zissu et al. 2017) (Fig. 13). In ʻAraq en-Naʻsaneh Cave only isolated Middle Bronze Age finds were documented. In Te'omim Cave, on the other hand, the Middle Bronze Age is one of the major periods of activity, as indicated by the abundance of pottery sherds in the main hall and the calcite-alabaster quarry that operated at that time in the eastern part of the cave (Lapp and Lapp 1974; Frumkin et al. 2014; 2018).

5.2. The Iron Age I

During the Iron Age I, settlement in the central and eastern regions of Samaria grew (e.g., Finkelstein 1994; Zertal 1994). It is commonly assumed that the inhabitants of the Samarian countryside during this period were Israelites (Faust 2006: 33–107, 227–234 and references therein).[5] The large sites in the area of el-Janab Cave were Shiloh (7 km south), Tappuaḥ (Tel abu-Zarad, 7 km west), and Schechem (Tel Balata, 10 km north) (Fig. 13), but several smaller rural sites were also recorded in the vicinity (see Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1997: 949).[6] The closest site to the cave is located on a commanding hill (713 m asl), only 600 m to the east. According to a previous survey, it was inhabited only during Iron Age I and II (Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1997: 709–710).

Finds from this period are known from three other karst caves in Southern Samaria: ʻAraq en-Naʻsaneh (18 km southeast; Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pls. 16:5–7, 17:1–4), ʻAraq batin el-Jamiaʻ (23 km west-southwest; Raviv 2018a: 266), Nemerim Cave (15 km south-southeast; Raviv et al. 2021: 150–151) (Fig. 13).[7] In each cave, however, only very few items dated to this period were found and, therefore, the phenomenon was not discussed further, and this is the first attempt to consider it in any detail. These caves are located in deep ravines and rugged

5 Dever (2003) called them Proto-Israelites.

6 In the cave's vicinity, surveys retrieved Iron Age I finds at the villages of Qabalan (2 km southwest; Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1997: 656), Musalla esh-Seikh Hatim (2 km southeast; ibid., 668), Jurish (3 km southeast; ibid., 759), Khirbat Rujan (2.5 km northeast; ibid., 714), and Khirbat el-ʻUrma (3.5 km northeast; ibid., 805).

7 Finds from the Iron Age I were also found in two caves in Upper Wadi el-Makkukh located at the south-eastern edge of Samaria, in terms of the Iron Age II – Cave II/3 (Sass 2002: 21–33) and another one whose exact location is unclear (Raviv 2018b: 107, Pl. 24:4). Iron Age finds (without classification to Iron Age I or Iron Age II) were also reported from ʻAbud Cave (Zissu et al. 2009: 479), and Zarda Cave (Freikman 2017: 85).

terrain, at a considerable distance from the main settlements of the period. The Iron Age I finds were retrieved from the cave's inner, often difficult-to-access parts. This could support the hypothesis that they were used for refuge during times of trouble rather than for regular or daily functions (e.g., seasonal habitation or shelters for flocks). Notably, these caves are unlike the many others associated with settlement sites, which were easily accessible, sometimes expanded by quarrying, and had large openings, sometimes with door-like designs. Such caves were used for habitation, storage, and sheltering livestock (Peleg 2012: 26–28, and references therein).

It is worth noting that during the Iron Age I, there was no central rule in the hill country of Palestine, and raids were always imminent, especially by nomads lacking pasture.[8] So, it would appear that el-Janab Cave and maybe also the other caves mentioned above were inhabited by people escaping a raid or an invasion. This scenario has a biblical parallel: "… and because of Midian the Israelites provided for themselves hiding places in the mountains, caves and strongholds" (Judg 6:2, NRSV; מִפְּנֵי מִדְיָן עָשׂוּ לָהֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַמְּנָהָרוֹת אֲשֶׁר בֶּהָרִים וְאֶת הַמְּעָרוֹת וְאֶת הַמְּצָדוֹת). Furthermore, the same account indicates that the Midianites's raids occured in central Samaria: "Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites" (Judg 6:11, NRSV; וַיָּבֹא מַלְאַךְ ה' וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחַת הָאֵלָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעָפְרָה אֲשֶׁר לְיוֹאָשׁ אֲבִי הָעֶזְרִי וְגִדְעוֹן בְּנוֹ חֹבֵט חִטִּים בַּגַּת לְהָנִיס מִפְּנֵי מִדְיָן).[9] While the historical circumstances behind these passages are obscure, it is entirely reasonable, given the lack of central rule at the time and the use of caves for refuge in all periods, that the Iron Age I experienced the type of raids described there.[10]

Given the above, we suggest that Iron Age I archeological remains from el-Janab Cave and maybe also the other caves in Samaria should be interpreted as evidence of Israelite refugees, local inhabitants who fled in the wake of a war or a raid, the likes of which prevailed in the Samaria Highlands during the 12th–11th centuries BCE.

8 Many periods of weak or no central rule saw many parts of the country, particularly the Galilee and Samaria, suffer from repeated raids (On the war between 'the desert and the sown' in the Land of Israel see, e.g., Reifenberg 1950; Spanier 1999; Ben Ari 2022).

9 In all probability, Ophrah of the Abiezrite was located on the slopes of Mount Gerizim in central Samaria (Raviv and Zanton 2012, and references therein). Another possible reference to central Samaria in the same account of the Midianites' raids can be found in Judges 6:4 (NRSV): "They would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the land, as far as the neighborhood of Gaza" (וַיַּחֲנוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְיִשְׁחֲיתוּ אֶת יְבוּל הָאָרֶץ עַד בּוֹאֲךָ עַזָּה). According to Demsky (1998: 29), Gaza here should be identified with the village of ʿAzun in west Samaria.

10 This interpretation is based on the assumption that the text preserves a genuine historical memory from the Iron Age I. For the suggestion that the Gideon tale preserves memories of the 10th century BCE or later, see Finkelstein and Lipschits (2017: 17, and references therein). For a new approach claiming that the Gideon tale is part of the polemics over kingship in Israel, see Sharon (2021). Additional biblical passages attributed to the end of this period and concerning refuge caves are 1 Sam 13:6; 14:11; 14:22.

5.3. The Iron Age II

All Iron Age I sites in the cave's proximity mentioned above persisted into the Iron Age II and were accompanied by at least seven more sites: the village of Yatma (3 km southwest; Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1997: 639), Khirbat ʿAfrit (2.5 km southwest; ibid., 648), Khirbat ʿAfrata (2 km west; ibid., 649), Khirbat Abu Taqiya (3.5 km north; ibid., 705), the village of Beita et-Taḥta (2 km northwest; ibid., 703), the village of ʿUsarin (1.5 km east; ibid., 713), and a nearby unnamed site (1 km northeast; ibid., 711). Furthermore, as indicated above, the Iron Age II finds from el-Janab Cave are assigned to the 8th century BCE, the peak of Iron Age settlement in the region, when the landscape of central and southern Samaria was dotted by hundreds of rural sites (Finkelstein, Lederman, and Bunimovitz 1997: 951; Tavger 2018: 391–393).

Four other natural caves with Iron Age II remains are known in southern Samaria: ʿAraq en-Naʿsaneh Cave (18 km southeast; Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 17:5–8), Nemerim Cave (15 km south-southeast; Raviv et al. 2021: 151), Wadi er-Rashash Cave (11 km southeast; unpublished; for the description of the cave, see Raviv 2021b), and Naʿale Cave (28 km southwest; Tavger 2018: 82–83) (Fig. 13).[11] Notably, approximately twenty more caves have been recorded in the center of the Judean Desert, between ʿEn Gedi and Ketef Jericho (Davidovich 2014: 182–221; 2015: 31). However, unlike the caves in Samaria that represent only the 8th century BCE, the Judean Desert caves feature a relatively wide time span of activity, stretching across the late 8th or early 7th century BCE and the early 6th century BCE.

Significantly, some of these caves were difficult to access and featured internal dark chambers, which rendered them suitable for shelter in times of distress. This applies to ʿAraq en-Naʿsaneh, Nemerim Cave, and el-Janab Cave. In this context, it should be noted that these caves differ from the well-known dwelling caves in the central hill country, such as the caves at Khibat en-Najmeh and Khirbat Abu-Musrah (Peleg 2012) (Fig. 13).

Insofar as el-Janab and other caves in Samaria were indeed used as places of refuge during the 8th century BCE, the historical context was most probably that of the 720 BCE Assyrian conquest of Samaria (for the settlement and political processes involved, see Tavger 2020). On the other hand, however, due to the lack of more accurate chronological data, we cannot rule out the possibility that the caves were used for refuge during the decades of political instability that preceded the Assyrian conquest (2 Kgs 15:10–31; Isa 9:18–20; Hos 7:4–7, 10:7; seeking refuge in caves during the Iron Age II is also mentioned in 1 Kgs 18:4, Isa 2:19–21, and Ezek 33:27).

Another possible historical context for using refuge caves in Samaria, albeit less likely in light of the proposed dating, is the Aramean invasion of the Kingdom of

11 To these may be added the Iron Age finds mentioned above.

Israel. It transpired in the days of Jehoahaz, the late 9th century BCE (842–805, or possibly even a little later), and is considered the most severe attack on the Northern Kingdom (2 Kgs 10:32; 13:3–7).[12]

Thus, we suggest that Israelite refugees were responsible for the Iron Age II finds in el-Janab Cave and maybe also the other caves in Samaria. These were residents of the area who fled their homes in the wake of war or political instability that prevailed in the Samaria Highlands during the 8th century BCE.

5.4. The Persian-Early Hellenistic Period

The Persian-early Hellenistic period is the most conspicuous period in the cave in terms of artifact quantity and distribution, discovered in all parts of the cave, including the deepest chamber—Chamber D. However, the presence of pottery types that date to the Persian period proper implies that there may have been more than one episode of use during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods.

El-Janab cave joins a series of karst caves in the Samaria Highlands and the northern Judean Hills, where late 4th-century BCE assemblages were discovered. These caves include Elqana Cave (Zissu et al. 2015: 146–154), Wadi el-'Uja (Raviv 2018a: 252), Naḥal Te'enim (Raviv 2018a: 270), Nemerim Cave (Raviv et al. 2021), Wadi Shiban Cave (Zissu et al. 2016), and Wadi er-Rashash Cave (Raviv 2021b) (Fig. 13). These caves were classified as refuge caves due to their location and relative inaccessibility. Although their historical background is obscure, they should be viewed in the context of the overall political instability in the region at the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Pertinent to this context are the Samaria Hoard deposited around 352 BCE or later (Meshorer and Qedar 1991: 65–81) and the Nablus Hoard deposited after 333/2 BCE (Gitler and Tal 2019: 5–7). Presumably, these hoards, which were discovered in illicit excavations and reached the antiquities market, also speak for armed conflicts in central Samaria during the second half of the 4th century BCE.[13]

In light of the physical features of el-Janab Cave and the well-known phenomenon of refuge caves in Samaria during the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods, it

12 Destruction layers, sudden settlement reduction, and settlement abandonments were recorded at several sites in the northern valleys and the Lower Galilee, presumably corresponding with the late 9th century BCE Aramean raids (Gyllenberg 2019: 331–332). However, to date, no evidence of the Aramean invasion has been found in central Samaria.

13 It is interesting to note that Spaer, the owner of the Nablus Hoard, claimed that one of the merchants from whom he purchased the hoard told him that it was found in a site near the village of Kuzra (Gitler and Tal 2019: 5). This village is located about 5 km southeast of el-Janab Cave. In view of this information and the dating of the Nablus Hoard to the second half of the 4th century BCE, it is possible to entertain the thought that the origin of the Nablus Hoard was el-Janab Cave or a nearby site to which more of the region's population fled under similar historical circumstances.

can be assumed that the cave was used by refugees seeking shelter in the wake of violent conflict during the second half of the 4th century BCE. During this period, two conflicts can be pointed out: the Samaritan Revolt against Alexander the Great in 331 BCE (see Eshel 2002: 192–209; Mor 2003: 69–149) and the Diadochi Wars in 312–301 BCE.[14]

Assuming that by the end of the Persian period, some finds had already been deposited in the cave (e.g., the Sidonian half-shekel), the Samaritan Revolt of 331 BCE is the most likely event to have driven the cave's use as a refuge. In this context, el-Janab Cave's proximity to the road linking the city of Samaria with Wadi ed-Daliyeh is notable. In this wadi, a large cave was excavated and found to contain numerous finds brought there by the people of the city of Samaria during the revolt (ʻAraq en-Naʻsaneh Cave; see Lapp and Lapp 1974).

However, the dating of the drachms to 325 BCE at the earliest (one of them may even have been minted after the death of Alexander) implies that at least some of the finds were deposited in the cave after the Samaritan Revolt. The suppression of the revolt and the hardships that consequently befell the area's residents, possibly even including land expropriation (Applebaum 1986: 259), may have led the inhabitants to seek refuge in the cave.

Finally, a later episode during the Diadochi Wars, 312–301 BCE, is another possibility. The archaeological evidence of these conflicts includes a series of hoards dated to 311 BCE and found throughout the region in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Palestine (for a comprehensive bibliography, see Ariel 2006: 80).[15] Josephus' description of the extensive conscription by Ptolemy I in Palestine's central hill country, apparently in 312 BCE, merits special mention,

> Now Ptolemy, after taking many captives both from the hill country of Judaea and the district round Jerusalem and from Samaria and those on Garizein (Γαριζειν), brought them all to Egypt and settled them there (Josephus, *Ant* 7.7).[16]

The abovementioned dates and el-Janab Cave's location in central Samaria, ca. 9 km south of Mount Gerizim, suggest that those who fled to it in 312–311 BCE were inhabitants of the Nablus region.

14 This war, which led to the fragmentation of the Macedonian Empire and the beginning of the Ptolemaic period in Palestine, involved armed conflicts, mainly along the coastal plain, between Ptolemy I, on the one hand, and Demetrius Poliorcetes and his father Antigonus Monophthalmus, on the other (Stern 1976: 169–170, 174–176).

15 Additionally, one should include in this list Ketef Jericho in the northern Judean Desert (Eshel and Zissu 1998: 146, note 29), Kamun Cave in the Galilee (Klein and Meadows 2017), and an early 3rd-century BCE hoard from Syria (Zlotnik 2010).

16 See also the Letter of Aristeas (12.13–14, 12.36–37) and Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* 1.186–187, 1.209–211). For a summary of the surmises regarding the historical background to this episode, see Kasher (2002: 158–160, and references therein).

Unfortunately, the available information does not allow a secure identification of the ethnic affiliation of the group that took refuge in the cave. Nevertheless, the historical and archaeological evidence points to a mixed population of Samaritans and Idumaeans who lived in the region of Acrabat (a Hellenistic regional administrative center, in whose territory the cave was located; Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green 1994: 56–57; Di Segni and Tsafrir 2017: 70–81) in the late 4th–3rd centuries BCE (see Raviv 2021a).[17] Comparatively, this part of Samaria was only mildly damaged at the end of the Iron Age and was densely populated during the Persian period (Tavger 2012: 47–49). A flight of the population to el-Janab cave due to a military conflict also accords with the data of regional surveys that testify to a settlement crisis during the Persian-Hellenistic periods' transition (Tavger 2012: 54–57).[18]

5.5. The Early Roman Period

El-Janab cave is located at the heart of the Acrabat district, the northernmost toparchy of the Land of Judea during the Early Roman period.[19] The cave was approximately 4 km west of ʿAqraba village, the regional administrative center (see Klein 2009; Raviv 2018a: 74–91).[20] It can be assumed that the cave was used by Jewish refugees who lived in the district.[21]

Numerous studies discuss the phenomenon of Roman-period refuge caves, especially in the days of the Second Revolt (e.g., Eshel and Amit 1998; Eshel and Porat 2009; Eshel and Zissu 2020).[22] Although in Judea, this phenomenon reached its zenith during the Second Revolt (i.e., the Bar Kokhba Revolt), the finds in el-Janab Cave do not offer a clear indication as to whether the cave was inhabited during the First, Second, or both Revolts.

17 A Persian-period ostracon is particularly notable. While its exact origin is unknown, it probably originated from the area of Idumaea (Yardeni 2016: 488). The ostracon mentions men from ʿAqraba, to whom two chores of flour should be supplied, and the formulaic language indicates that the author was a representative of the Persian administration. Ada Yardeni (2016) suggested that the reference is to an unknown city within the boundary of Idumaea. However, in light of the evidence of an Idumaean population in Samaria at this time, the reference may be to Acrabat in Samaria.

18 This settlement crisis, which expresses governance instability during the transition from the Persian to the Hellenistic periods, is also manifested in damage sustained by Persian administrative centers throughout Palestine (Kreimerman and Sandhous 2021).

19 Early Roman here refers to 63 BCE–136 CE.

20 The continuous function of the village of Acrabat as a Jewish administrative center in the period between the revolts is reflected in Murabbaʿat Document 115 (Benoit 1961: 243–254).

21 The cave dwellers' local identity transpires from the ceramic vessels' morphology and the typical dark hue of the Early Roman Acrabat pottery (Raviv 2018b: 95–96).

22 On refuge caves from the time of the First Jewish Revolt, see Porat and Eshel (2008). For a description of the Roman-period refuge caves documented in the northern Judean Hills, see Raviv (2018a: 243–271, and references therein).

Several violent conflicts occurred in the Acrabat toparchy during the First Revolt (i.e., the Great Revolt) and may have prompted refugees and rebels to use the cave (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.235, 2.652; 4.503–513, 551). However, as noted, the cave may have served as a refuge during both revolts. The coins of Claudius and Nero, which are dated to the mid-1st century CE, do not help resolve the issue since coins minted toward the end of the Second Temple period remained in circulation also during the early 2nd century CE, as can be seen, for example, from their presence in hoards from the time of the Second Jewish Revolt (e.g., Bijovsky 2004; Farhi and Melamed 2014).

All in all, the finds from the Roman period in el-Janab Cave render it the northernmost refuge cave in the Land of Judea, attributed to the revolts against Rome. These finds reinforce existing historical and archaeological evidence that points to the active participation of Acrabat's population in the revolts against the Romans and the damage they consequently suffered.[23]

5.6. The Late Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Periods

The ceramic and numismatic finds from el-Janab Cave testify to activity during the 12th–14th centuries CE. However, the available information does not allow us to determine whether the medieval assemblage represents one long episode of activity or several short ones. El-Janab Cave joins six natural caves in southern Samaria and the northern Judean Desert where medieval finds were discovered: ʻAraq en-Naʻsaneh (Lapp and Lapp 1974: Pl. 30:4–6), Nemerim Cave (Raviv et al. 2021: 150), Naʻale Cave (Raviv 2018a: 261–262), Wadi esh-Shami Cave (Raviv 2018a: 260), Cave 4 in Wadi el-Ḥabibi (unpublished; for the description of the cave, see Patrich, Arubas, and Naor 1986: 46–47) , and Naḥal Bet ʼArif Cave (Raviv et al., forthcoming) (Fig. 13). No coins or other finds that facilitate absolute dating were found in these caves. The discovery of medieval finds in the far reaches of the caves suggests that they were used as shelters in times of distress. However, the paucity of these finds renders this hypothesis indecisive, and other purposes, such as cultic use or illegal activity, should also be considered. Notably, natural caves with Ayyubid-Crusader-Mamluk-period artifacts were also reported from the eastern Galilee. Usually, these caves were also used as Cliff Shelters during the Early Roman

23 On the toparchy of Acrabat during the First Revolt, see Eshel and Erlich (1988: 23–24); for a summary of the historical and archaeological evidence for Jewish presence in the northern Judean Highlands, including the Acrabat area, during the Second Revolt, see Raviv (2018a: 98–123). Acrabat's absence from the list of Judean toparchies described by Claudius Ptolemy also speaks for the extensive damage suffered by the Jewish settlement in the toparchy during the Second Revolt, reflecting the administrative reality in Palestine in the mid-2nd century CE (Safrai 1981: 281). Similarly, evidence that Acrabat became Samaritan after the Second Revolt points in the same direction (Safrai 1984: 188).

period (Tepper, Dar'in, and Tepper 2000: 112; Frankel et al. 2001: 16, 20, 21, 42, 43; Leibner 2004: 110, 155; 2009: 145; Shivti'el 2019: 59, 83, 84, 92).[24]

El-Janab Cave's physical properties and the substantial presence of medieval finds in its dark inner chambers suggest that in this period, too, the cave served as a place of refuge. Assuming that the medieval assemblage represents two episodes, we may suggest that one took place around 1260 CE and the other during the second half of the 14th century CE. This hypothesis is supported by the Islamic coins' distribution. While all but one of the Ayyubid coins were found in Chamber E, the three Mamluk coins were found in Chamber C, possibly indicating that different episodes of activity unfolded in different parts of the cave.

While concerning the 14th century, we can only indicate general circumstances of political instability, for the 13th century, there is abundant evidence for specific conflicts in the central hill country and Samaria, in particular. Historical documents speak of an unstable regime and a host of religious, cultural, and territorial struggles throughout the country during the second half of the 13th century CE (Prawer 1970: 378; Jackson 1980). By this time, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem had entered its final death throes (that ended with the fall of the kingdom in the summer of 1291 CE) and had practically no influence outside the coastal cities' walls, over which it still maintained control. Concomitantly, Ayyubid control inland also weakened due to governmental neglect and ruinous measures to prevent the renewal of the Frankish settlement (e.g., the deliberate destruction of property and the application of a burnt-earth policy).

Furthermore, the fall of the Khwarazmian Empire and the Mongol advance west exerted additional pressure on the already tenuous Levantine geopolitics (Prawer 1970: 378–379; Jackson 1980: 481; Amitai-Preiss 1995: 26–27). This conflict came to an end on September 3, 1260 CE, with the Muslim's victory over the Mongol expeditionary force under Kitbuqa in the battle of 'Ain Jalut (Jackson 1980: 481; Masson-Smith 1984; Amitai-Preiss 1995: 39–45). While the Latin population welcomed (at times with messianic fervor) the Asian invaders, many of whom had converted to Christianity, the Muslim population was extremely anxious, and many fled to Egypt or sought shelter in areas under Frankish control (Prawer 1970: 428–430).[25]

24 On Cliff Shelters, see Shivti'el (2019: 47–49). However, the discovery of Fatimid-period finds in two caves in the Mount Nitai cliffs (Sabar et al. 2018: 295) and an early Ottoman coin in a cliff shelter in Naḥal Namer (Shivti'el, Syon, and Berlin 2021: 79) may indicate that at least some of the medieval finds reported from other caves in Galilee represent events that preceded or postdated the Ayyubid-Crusader-Mamluk periods.

25 It is interesting to note that the Ayyubid ruler of Damascus and Aleppo, al-Malik al-Nasir Yusuf, also fled with his army to Gaza after Aleppo's fall. He stopped in Nablus on the way and left part of his army there (Amitai 1987: 237).

Among the literary sources that describe these events, Abū Shāma of Damascus' account is particularly noteworthy. This historian noted that by the end of March–beginning of April 1260 CE, the Mongol forces that left Damascus raided the Hauran and arrived in the area of Nablus, which was a central point of passage for their raids. From Nablus, the Mongols advanced along two routes: one southbound, towards Hebron, Bet Guvrin, and Gaza, and the other eastbound, to as-Salt in Transjordan, and from there south, towards Kerak. Abū Shāma added that as they advanced, the Mongols killed the men (as was their custom), took the children and women captive, and carried large amounts of loot back to Damascus (Abū Shāma 1974: 204; Amitai 1987: 237). An Ayyubid military force left in Nablus by al-Nasir Yusuf—the ruler of Damascus and Aleppo fleeing to Gaza—was annihilated by the Mongols at the end of March 1260 CE in the olive groves around the city (see also Ibn Wāṣil, fol. 150b, 152b; Amitai 1987: 238, n. 20). Latin documents also indicate that the movement of Muslim refugees from Syria and Palestine was significant and that many of the Muslims who fled the Mongol army chose to go through Jenin and Nablus on their way to Egypt (Prawer 1970: 428–430; *MGH* SS 23: 554–555; *ROL* 2 [1894]: 213).

An interesting reference to the use of refuge caves in Palestine following the Mongol activity in the area is provided by Rabbi Nissim, son of Rabbi Moshe of Marseilles (early 14th century): "And once every fifty years, at least, the King of the Tatar ventures with many people and a great host to hold Jerusalem. And then all the inhabitants of the Land of Israel run to the very sound of them, hiding in the caves and in the clefts of the rock, until the passing of this great host" (Massilitani 2000: 397; Ohana-Arom, in press).[26] The fact that the pottery found in the cave is typical of a rural or mountainous population and that Muslims and Samaritans constituted the area's main population reinforces the possibility that the refugees in the cave were local.[27]

The Ayyubid finds from el-Janab Cave are the first instance of archaeological evidence of refugees that can be associated with either the Khwarazmian conquest or the Mongol threat to the Muslim population in Palestine. However, much remains to be learned about refugees in the days of the Ayyubid and Latin kingdoms, both historically (Burgtorf 2021) and archaeologically.

26 We are grateful to Dr. N. Ohana-Arom for these references.

27 This picture of ethnically-affiliated settlement distribution existed already during the Frankish rule in the area, which came to an end after the battle of Hattin (Ellenblum 1998: 228–229, Map 4; Kedar 1990: 135–143, 148).

6. Summary and Conclusions

At least eight periods of human activity are represented in el-Janab Cave's assemblages: the Late Chalcolithic, Early Bronze Age I, Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age I, Iron Age II, Persian-early Hellenistic, Early Roman, and Ayyubid-Mamluk periods. In this capacity, it is part of a group of large karst caves in the southern Levant used during numerous periods, including Te'omim, Naḥal Qanah, and 'Abud caves. Three of the periods represented in el-Janab Cave—Iron Age I, Iron Age II, and the Ayyubid-Mamluk period—are hardly known from karst caves in the central hill country, and the present discussion is the first to consider the circumstances leading to their occupation at these times.

The location of el-Janab Cave, at the heart of an area that has been intensely settled since the dawn of history, renders it attractive to human activity. However, its comparative remoteness, concealed entrance, relative inaccessibility, and many internal obstructions—narrow and low passages and pitch-dark segments—suggest that the cave was not regularly used for mundane residential purposes (e.g., dwelling, shelters for shepherds, or storage) but render it highly suitable for refuge in times of trouble.

The nature and circumstances of the cave's use during the early periods (the Late Chalcolithic period to the Iron Age) cannot be determined at this point. As for the latest periods of the site's occupation (the Persian-early Hellenistic to the Mamluk periods), the data is more reliable; the assemblages are more robust and diverse, and interpretations have recourse to historical events. Considering the data from el-Janab Cave in conjunction with other complex karst caves in Samaria and other parts of the central hill country, we suggest that during these periods, it served as a place of refuge in turbulent times. Indeed, the cave offers significant advantages for those seeking to hide: Its location in a settled region offers relatively convenient access to food and other supplies and allows for a relatively quick return (within a few hours and sometimes even less) to the settlement when the danger has passed; it has large, ventilated, spaces with even horizontal floors and high ceilings, and the water dripping inside it could supply drinking water.

Relatively large-scale historical events that had a broad impact on the population of Palestine in these periods are the Samaritan Revolt against Alexander the Great (331 BCE), the Diadochi Wars (312–301 BCE), the Great Revolt (66–70 CE), the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–136 CE), the Khwarazmian invasion (1244 CE), and the Mongol raids (ca. 1260 and 1299 CE). However, local events cannot be ruled out as possible causes of flight to the cave. The Iron Age I and Iron Age II assemblages may also represent refugees' activity in light of the history of the settlement and biblical descriptions that indicate governmental instability in Samaria in the 11th–12th centuries BCE and the 8th century BCE.

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