

# **Cities, Monuments and Objects in the Roman and Byzantine Levant**

**Studies in Honour of Gabi Mazor**

Edited by

**Walid Atrash, Andrew Overman  
and Peter Gendelman**

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## Gabi Mazor: An Appreciation

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It is my honor to represent the hundreds of students of archaeology who have been inspired and trained by Gabi Mazor. I speak with firsthand knowledge. I am one of them. A philologist by trade, I became involved with the archaeological excavations at Omrit, Israel, under the direction of my Macalester colleague Andy Overman. There in the field at Omrit I first encountered Gabi, in the early 2000s. I didn't know much about him, but he cut a dashing figure in his characteristic black t-shirt and black jeans, climbing carefully around the excavation squares and elements, scrutinizing the emerging pattern of physical evidence, rolling pottery sherds between his fingers. What struck me, and intimidated me, was his ability to immediately visualize what the remains were saying. It was something I wanted to sit back and behold. What is this gift? How do I learn from it? So I watched in curiosity, just a neophyte volunteer in archaeology. Little did I know how much Gabi would help me and so many others understand the ancient world.

As Gabi worked with our excavations over the years, one thing became very clear; Gabi thrived on the curiosity of students, of any age. Not only did he advise and train summer excavation volunteers, but in other parts of the year he generously traveled with our Macalester students to ancient sites throughout the Mediterranean. First in Turkey in 2006 and then in Rome in 2010 Gabi joined our classes of 20 students enrolled in courses investigating the ancient remains. Without notes, books, or slides he spontaneously spoke on any site, helping students make sense of what they saw, making correlations with other places they had visited, with the history they had studied. More times than I can count I have watched him explain to a rapt audience of students the significance of free standing city gates in ancient Roman cities, the importance of water systems, the process of installing mosaics. He delighted in challenging students to search for connections, to see the interrelatedness of the Roman world. He asked them to think beyond what they thought they knew, to look for hidden evidence. Students flocked to him for his advice and approval.

Closer to home I have seen him joyfully and carefully lead throngs of students through the beautiful site of Bet She'an, clearly explicating the remains, demonstrating the processes of excavation, reconstruction and restoration. Visits to Bet She'an have been a turning point in understanding archaeology for all students who have experienced his infinite expertise and enthusiasm teaching the site.

That impulse to educate extends far beyond the discipline of archaeology. Gabi routinely provides mentorship to American students seeking curatorial or conservation internships in Israeli museums.

He has countless times opened up his home to American visitors to converse with them about everything Israeli, from history to culture to politics, and all points in between. He distils vast amounts of information for those seeking knowledge about the region, young and old, liberal and conservative. Whether talking to a group of college students or a group of retirees his joy at illuminating the history of Israel is palpable and his knowledge and propensity to synthesize immense.

Gabi has served as not only a disciplined scientist but a willing ambassador of Israeli archaeology and history. Over the years our students have absorbed his infectious joy in investigating new sites, his incisive interpretation of fresh finds emerging from the dirt, his tenacious inquiry, his brilliant synthesis and his sense of privilege to be working with young minds. He deserves our deepest appreciation. In consort with hundreds of students I express my eternal gratitude for the education I received from our beloved Gabi Mazor. Thank you for teaching me the love of archaeology. Thank you for the love of archaeology you have instilled in our students. May there be many more!

# Back to Bet She'an: Results of the 2019–2020 Fieldwork of the German-Israeli Tell Iẓṭabba Excavation Project<sup>1</sup>

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*The renewed excavations at Tell Iẓṭabba by the joint German-Israeli team yielded important new results for increasing our knowledge concerning the settlement history of the site. Despite the partial exposure of pre-Hellenistic remains, our excavations indicate that the site was considerably occupied during the Early Bronze Age III (and possibly in earlier stages of that period). After which, the focus has shifted to Tel Bet She'an. The next substantial occupation of the site occurred only in the second quarter of the 2nd century BC, when Nysa-Scythopolis was founded under Seleucid hegemony. Our excavations suggest that in this part of the mound (Tell Iẓṭabba, East), the Hellenistic settlement occupied the upper part of the mound and did not reach the lower northern terraces. It was founded as a well-planned regular settlement with lavish courtyard houses made of stone and mudbricks adorned (in cases) with painted stucco. This short-lived settlement was violently destroyed by the Hasmoneans by the end of the 2nd century, probably in 108/107 BC. After the Hasmonean destruction, a monumental structure likely dated to the 2nd/3rd century AD was founded. It needs to be investigated further whether the architectural spolia incorporated in W470 of the Byzantine 'Podium Building', originate from the Roman structure whose remains are seen beneath the latter's walls. They also could stem from the Roman civic centre at the foot of Tel Bet She'an. It is now clear that before the construction of the Byzantine city walls of Scythopolis that crossed Tell Iẓṭabba, the site had already been reoccupied in the Roman period, apparently to quite a limited extent that needs to be furtherly explored, as does the function of the 'Podium Building'. Nevertheless, the new results provide a multi-faceted picture of the site's history, especially after its Hasmonean destruction. In the future we hope to uncover remains of public structures dated to the Seleucid occupational stage, which have yet to be found at the site. We are also continuing archaeobotanical and archeozoological analyses in order to better understand the economic sustainability of the inhabitants of this Near Eastern Hellenistic settlement.*

KEYWODS: TELL IZṬABBA; NYSA-SCYTHOPOLIS; BET SHE'AN; EARLY BRONZE AGE; HELLENISTIC SETTLEMENT; DECAPOLIS.

## Introduction

This article deals with the results of the three fieldwork seasons of the German-Israeli Excavation Project at Tell Iẓṭabba, which is the location of the Seleucid-period founded town of Nysa (Scythopolis). The first and second seasons were carried out in the months of February and September 2019, and the third season was carried out during February 2020. During these campaigns, four excavation areas were investigated (A–D) revealing occupation layers dating to the Early Bronze, Hellenistic, and Byzantine periods. The excavations at Tell Iẓṭabba shed new light on the settlement history of the site and the region during the relevant periods.

The site of Bet She'an and the Bet She'an Valley are well known for their long occupational history. Located on a crossroads in the northern Jordan valley, on the banks of Nahal Ḥarod, Bet She'an has demonstrated dense occupation from proto-historical to modern times. Tell Iẓṭabba consists of three hillocks located immediately to

the north of Tel Bet She'an beyond Nahal Harod (Figure 1). Excavations at the site unearthed settlement remains dated to the Early Bronze, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. The Hellenistic settlement at Tell Iẓṭabba, which is the focus of this excavations project, was founded in the beginning of the 2nd century BC, most likely by Antiochos IV (175–164 BC) who refounded the Ptolemaic town of Scythopolis as a Seleucid settlement on Tell Iẓṭabba and renamed it Nysa (Lichtenberger 2008).

The first systematic exploration of Tell Iẓṭabba was carried out by Nehemiah Tzori in the 1950s. He reported Hellenistic period remains, including buildings, cisterns, architectural decoration and imported pottery vessels, such as Rhodian Amphorae (Tzori 1962: 152, Pls. 15, 2–4, 16, 1). A small rescue excavation was undertaken in 1977 in two squares close to the mound's southeastern edge by Vassilios Tzaferis. His excavation revealed Roman and Byzantine period architectural remains, which made use of earlier architectural decoration, as well as Hellenistic period building remains that yielded a considerable

<sup>1</sup> It is our pleasure to dedicate this paper to the Gaby Mazor as a token of our appreciation to his academic endeavor and continuant study of greater Bet She'an. The German-Israeli Tell Iẓṭabba Excavation Project discussed in this paper forms part of a German-Israeli research project 'Tell Iẓṭabba (Nysa-Scythopolis): High-resolution Hellenistic Settlement Archaeology and the Reassessment of the Formation of the Decapolis', mainly funded by the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (GIF Regular Program [grant I-150-108.7-2017]), to which we are grateful. The project was licensed by the Israel Antiquities Authority (G-70/2019; G-17/2020) and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (A-014/19; A-020/20).

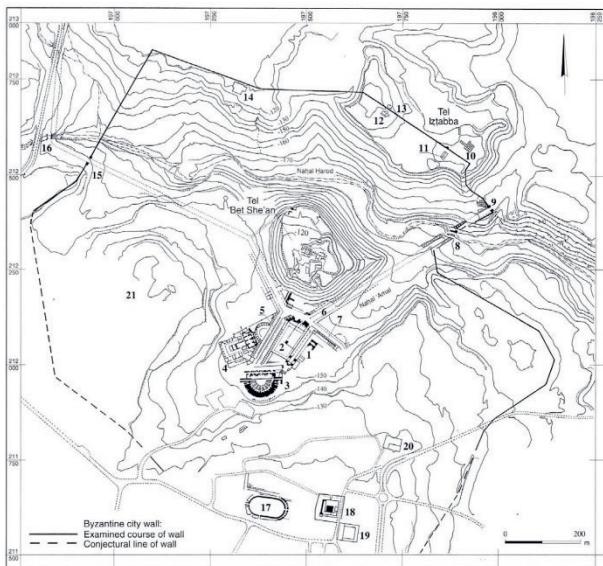


Figure 1. Map of ancient Beth She'an (Israel Antiquities Authority, 1998).

number of stamped Rhodian Amphorae dated to the 2nd century BC (Landau and Tzaferis 1979). During the 1980s and 1990s, large scale excavations took place at the site directed by Rachel Bar-Nathan and Gabriel Mazor on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) as part of the 'Bet She'an Excavation Project'. Substantial Hellenistic period remains were uncovered mainly in Areas W and Z on the easternmost spur of Tell Iztabba

(East), while further to the west and north such remains were also found, either less well-preserved due to erosion (Area H) or underneath later building remains (Areas M and T). Area W revealed parts of a Hellenistic residential quarter, intersected by two streets, with two phases of pavement. The houses were of the courtyard type, with rooms arranged around an open court and built of mudbrick walls decorated with colored and molded stucco on a foundation of basalt fieldstones. Interior floors were of beaten earth. The entire quarter was destroyed in a huge conflagration that, based on the finds, was dated to the end of the 2nd century BC, probably in 108–107 BC in the context of John Hyrcanus' campaign against pagan cities (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13: 280). The quarter was not resettled until the Roman period (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993: 51; Mazor and Atrash 2017: 86–87; 2018: 3–5; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33–34). Area Z was opened close to Tzaferis' previous excavation (Landau and Tzaferis 1979). Parts of a Hellenistic structure were unearthed, dated to the 2nd century BC, with two architectural phases. The walls were constructed of basalt fieldstone, large mudbrick, and *nari*-limestone orthostates. The spolia used in the walls of the later-period construction were initially attributed to this Hellenistic period structure. The characteristics and the interpretation of this Hellenistic period structure as the source for the architectural decoration led to the conclusion that it was a monumental public building from the Hellenistic period (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993, 50–51; Mazor and Atrash



Figure 2. Interpreted map of geodetic data (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

2017: 88; 2018: 6; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33). All these excavations have been published in a preliminary form.<sup>2</sup>

The aims of the current excavation project are to better understand the settlement history, urban fabric and material culture of a 2nd century BC Seleucid-founded town in the Near East and understanding its sustainability and economic background. By doing so, we hope to gain

thoughtful insights on the formative stages of the cities of the Decapolis and the Seleucid settlement dynamics in the Decapolis region.

### The Results of the 2019–2020 Seasons

The first campaign carried out in February 2019 was dedicated to a survey and a geophysical prospection of the site. While the survey yielded pottery of the Early Bronze Age, Hellenistic and Byzantine periods, the geo-magnetic



Figure 3. Plan of Area D (German-Israeli Tell Iż-Tabba Excavation Project).

<sup>2</sup> One of the houses discovered in the IAA's Area W excavation was the subject of an MA. thesis; see Sandhaus 2014; see also Mazor 2008.

survey showed that Tell Iztabba is covered with structures that were laid out according to a regular plan (Figure 2). The regularity however fits into the natural topography. It has been previously assumed that the plan of the Hellenistic settlement followed an orthogonal grid. Our investigations showed however that this is only partly true, and that the natural topography has a considerable impact on the towns' infrastructural layout (Lichtenberger, Meyer and Tal 2020). This kind of urban planning stands in a local tradition and underlines that not a thoroughly orthogonal plan was implemented upon the foundation.

Following these surveys, soundings began in four excavation areas; A – C, and later D, unearthing settlement remains dating from the Early Bronze Age I–III, the Hellenistic period, the Roman period, and the Byzantine period (Ebeling *et al.* 2020; 2021).

### The Early Bronze Age

Occupation layers dated to the Early Bronze Age were unearthed in Areas C and D and appear to be the earliest settlement remains at Tell Iztabba. In Area C, a single stone-built curved wall was encountered immediately below the remains of a Hellenistic structure (see below). Wall 330 consists of two rows of small, medium, and large fieldstones, built along a N–S axis. No floor level was noticed; however, the fill around it (L328, L329) contained many pottery sherds consisting mainly of holemouth jars and other storage vessels, including red burnished and Bet Yerah (Khirbet Kerak) ware, typical of the Early Bronze Age III (cf., e.g., Amiran 1970).

In Area D, the Early Bronze Age remains consisted of mudbrick walls which may have belonged to a single structure (Figure 3). However, their preservation and irregular alignment prohibits the reconstruction of a coherent plan. Nevertheless, irregular structures are not uncommon in Early Bronze Age sites in the region (cf., Braun 1989; Prag 1991). Wall 463 was built of two rows of mudbricks, *c.* 50cm thick, along an E–W axis. This curvilinear wall was preserved to a length of *c.* 3.7m and exposed three courses high (-135.07/-135.38m). In the eastern part of its northern face, the wall is abutted by two mudbricks, which seem to represent a bench. Wall 463 adjoins W469 from the west. The latter was built of two rows of mudbricks, *c.* 50m thick, along a NW–SE axis. It was exposed to a length of *c.* 2.5m, two courses high (-135.49/-135.66m). This wall is abutted by W487, another mudbrick wall, whose southern face is cut by W471 (see below). Wall 487 also seems to have been constructed of two rows of mudbricks, *c.* 60m thick, along a NE–SW axis; however, its original thickness might have been greater. The wall was exposed to a length of 1.5m, one course high (-135.49/-135.66m). The pottery associated with these architectural remains dates from the Early Bronze Age Ib–III; therefore, it is possible that W463, and W469 and W487 belong to two different architectural phases.



Figure 4. Photo of the L465, looking west (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

Some 4m south-east of W463, a simple shallow pit burial (-135.35/-135.56m) was found containing the articulated remains of a female aged *c.* 15–20 years old (T465).<sup>3</sup> The individual was laid in an extended supine position on an E–W axis (head in the west, Figure 4). No burial offerings were found in the grave; however, a single mudbrick, similar to those used in the above-mentioned walls, had been placed over the pelvic area suggesting the grave should be dated to the Early Bronze Age (Ebeling *et al.* 2021). A burial cave, which may be dated to the Early Bronze Age was partly exposed in Area A. A corridor, hewn in the bedrock, 3.5m long and 60cm wide, was uncovered. This corridor is most likely the *dromos* of a Bronze Age burial cave which seems to have been robbed as the *dromos* (L106) was found filled with material from later periods and the burial chamber does not appear to be sealed. Similar breached burial caves were noted in the immediate vicinity, as well as in other areas of the tell (Horowitz and Atrash 2016; Oren 1973).

### The Hellenistic Period

Domestic architectural remains dated to the 2nd century BC were unearthed in Areas B, C, and D. In Area B, part of a residential structure, or structures, consisting of four rooms and a courtyard were unearthed (Figure 5). Three rooms separated by an adjoining wall (W204) running NW–SW were found in the northern part of the excavation area. W204 (-137.86/-138.62m) was exposed to a length of

<sup>3</sup> Skeletal remains were studied by Yossi Nagar (IAA) to whom we are indebted.

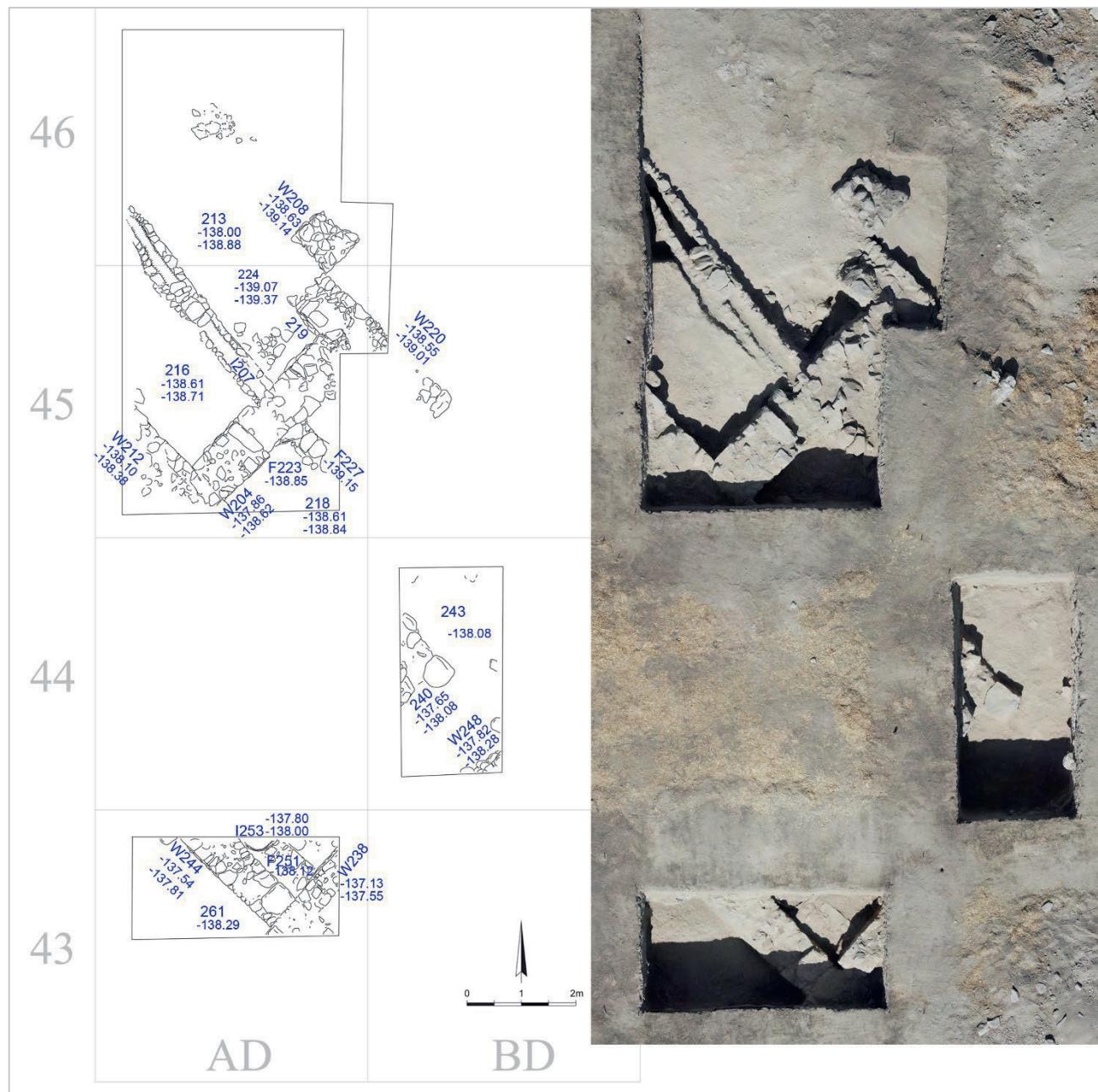


Figure 5. Plan and Orthophoto of Area B (German-Israeli Tell Iż-Tabba Excavation Project).

c. 5m and is abutted by W220 at the north-eastern end, and by W212 at its south-western end. North of the corner of W220, a small 'pier' of medium-sized basalt fieldstones (W208) was preserved. Its connection to the structure is yet unclear. The northern limits of this room were eroded down the slope, however to the south-east, the continuation of W212 was found together with an opening in the south-western part of W204, giving access from one room to another. The walls were constructed of medium-sized roughly dressed basalt fieldstones, intersected at times by massive rectangular limestone and mudbrick orthostates, often set vertically next to openings (cf., Atrash 2016; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33). In both rooms, remains of mudbrick detritus were noted, suggesting a mudbrick superstructure. Some of the building's walls were probably covered by red, yellow and black colored stucco, as is evident from many fragments

we have found. These can be assigned to the 'first Pompeian' or 'Masonry' style, typical of the Hellenistic period and the Hellenistic East (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993: 51; Ling 1991: 12–99; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33; and for nearby comparanda Cohen 2013: 9 and esp., Tal and Reshef 2017: 28–30, Pl. I). In addition to that, a patch of mortar (stucco base?) covered the southern face of W204 close to the entrance. In both rooms, no floor was preserved, but the dense accumulation of pottery in Loci 216 and 223 suggests walk-on levels of earthen floors. Patches of fallen mudbricks and charcoal indicate a violent destruction. A channel constructed of small fieldstones set in mud and coated with thin lime plaster was found underneath the area's occupation level and the opening between the rooms (Figure 6). Its cover stones were only partially preserved, and it was found filled with earth. Given its level and construction, it served as part of the



Figure 6. Photo of sewage channel (I207) in Area B, from north-west (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

sewage system of the building (or insula), draining sewer downhill along the slope.<sup>4</sup> During the investigation of the wall foundations, another structure of medium-sized basalt fieldstones was encountered underneath the channel. Its function remains unclear. The fill underneath the floor of the sewage channel (L219) included colored stucco fragments and Hellenistic pottery.

To the south of these remains (see Figure 5), two similarly constructed walls (W238 and W244) forming two more rooms were unearthed, presumably belonging to the same structure. An entrance was set into W244 next to W238's abutment. Patches of fallen mudbrick and charcoal seem to indicate a similar violent end. In the south-western room, no floor could be discerned, but a dense concentration of pottery, bones and snail shells (L261) suggests a living surface (-138.29m). The bones in particular suggest that the room's function was related to food production. The floor on the northern side of the entrance was paved with smoothed basalt slabs (F251). On this pavement, an oven (I253) was set, close to the northern face of W244.<sup>5</sup> The oven is round and built of clay fired at a low temperature. It was found filled with ashes. Both the paved floor and the oven (as well as the absence of plaster

and stucco fragments from L245), indicate an unroofed space, probably an inner courtyard.

Another part of a large domestic structure consisting of at least four rooms was unearthed in Area C (Figure 7). It was built on terraces along the area's natural slope that descend towards the west. The structure's eastern and perhaps also southern parts were severely eroded. In the western part of the excavation area, what may have been the closing exterior wall of the structure was unearthed. This wall, W307, measured 60cm thick and was built along a NW-SE axis of roughly cut small- to medium and large-sized basalt fieldstones and ashlar-like sun-dried light mudbrick blocks, which were wrongfully interpreted as limestones set on both sides of doorways (Figures 7–8; cf., Atrash 2016; Mazor and Atrash 2017). Wall 307 was preserved c. 2.5m high, of which c. 1.5m constitutes its foundations. Mudbrick detritus found around the walls of the structure indicates that the upper courses of (at least some of) the structure's walls were constructed of sundried mudbricks. The wall was exposed to a length of some 13.5m, and it extends further north beyond the excavated area. At least three rooms are bounded by this wall. The northernmost unit, i.e., Room 1, was only partially preserved as its northern part seems to have been robbed in antiquity. A line of sherds found on an earth floor (L342) seems to indicate the robbers' trench of W307. The room is bounded from the south-east by W317, which abuts W307 from the north-west. Wall 317 was exposed to a length of c. 2.75m and may extend further north at a greater depth. The upper courses of this wall were robbed, evident by a robber's trench appearing in the section above it. To the south-east of Rooms 1, 2 was unearthed representing the best-preserved unit in the complex. Besides W307 and W317, Room 2 is also bounded by W318 from the northeast and by W308 from the southeast, the latter adjoining W307. Inside the room, a debris layer (L314) filled with broken ceramic vessels, ashes, and pieces of colored and molded stucco was unearthed indicating the violent destruction of the structure (cf. Ashkenazi *et al.* 2021). Traces of this destruction layer were also noted beyond the limits of Room 2 to the southwest and perhaps also to the north and north-east (L354). Wall 308 also served as a partition wall with another smaller room found further south-east, Room 3. This unit is also bounded by W340 from the south-east, which may represent the southernmost exterior wall of the structure. Unlike Rooms 1 and 2, Room 3 seems to have been built at a higher elevation, c. 1m above the floor of the previous units. The higher elevation of this room, whose floor was not preserved, is indicated by the fact that the lowest elevation of W340 is at least 50cm above that of W308. Furthermore, immediately below W340, W330, dated to the Early Bronze Age was found (see above). The elevation of the latter is equivalent with that of W308. From the north-west, this room is also bounded by W318, which also served as the south-western wall of Room 4.

<sup>4</sup> A similar channel was found in previous excavations in Area W (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33).

<sup>5</sup> Similar paved areas with built ovens were also unearthed in the domestic buildings in Area W of the previous excavations (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993: 51; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33).

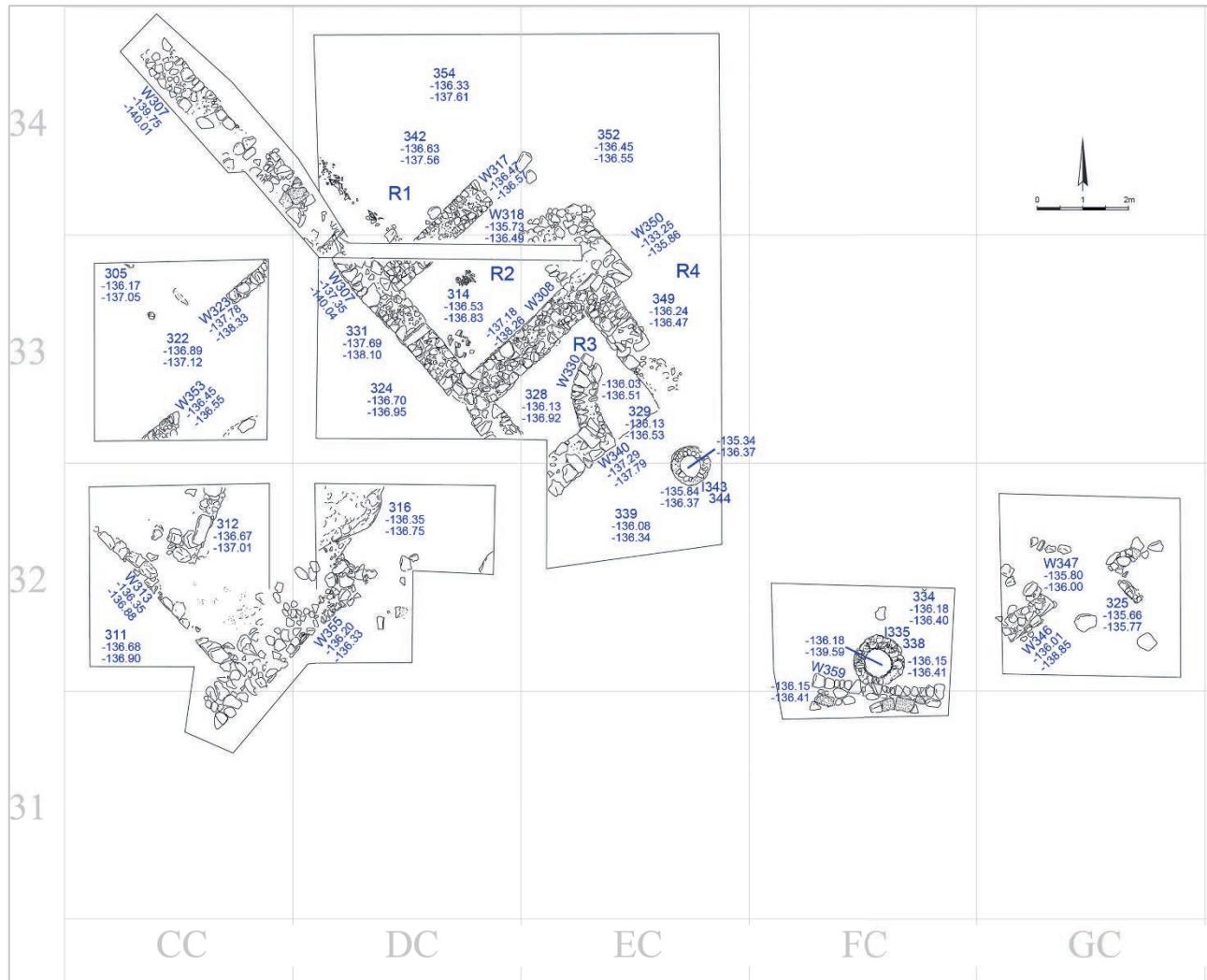


Figure 7. Plan of Area C (German-Israeli Tell Iżtabba Excavation Project).



Figure 8. Photo of W307, from east, with intersecting mudbrick to the right (German-Israeli Tell Iżtabba Excavation Project).

The latter, from which only a small corner was preserved, seems to have also been constructed at the same elevation of Room 3. Room 4 was bounded from the north-west by W350, which collapsed and is represented by only a few stones.

The area west of W307 seems to have served as an open courtyard, as evidenced by one complete amphora and

numerous flat laying pottery sherds (L322). A small wall (W323), consisting of a single row of small to medium-sized fieldstones was found, which may have abutted W307 from the north-east. It could belong to an installation which was only partially preserved. Another small fragmentary wall (W353) was found to the southwest whose function is also unclear. It seems that further south, the area was filled and raised in order to create a flat platform, as indicated by W313, which consists of a single row of stones whose south-western face was flat while the north-eastern face was unworked. In the fill used to erect the platform, a hewn stone slab was found bearing a fragmentary Greek inscription. The platform could have belonged to another structure represented by a single fragmentary wall, W355, which was exposed to a length of c. 5m, preserved two courses high. Nevertheless, it is also possible that W353 was constructed as part of this platform.

To the south-east of the structure, two circular installations were unearthed, I335 and I343. These seem to have served as bins for storage. They were constructed of small fieldstones. Neither their inner nor exterior faces were coated with plaster, and it seems they were held together by mud. Inside these installations, Hellenistic period sherds were unearthed, indicating they were contemporary

with the structure. Installation 343 was excavated to its bottom, which consisted of mudbrick material, and was found to be *c.* 1m deep (L344). Installation 335, on the other hand, was significantly deeper. It was excavated to a depth of *c.* 3.5m (L338), and its bottom was not reached. Excavation had to be stopped due to safety reasons. Access to its bottom was facilitated by parallel recesses built into its inner walls. The top three meters of the shaft were completely vertical, while the bottom was slightly wider, perhaps indicating that further down, the shaft became bell-shaped. It is possible this installation was initially built as a shaft leading to an underground installation, whose function is yet to be clarified. Archaeobotanical material was retrieved and analyzed from both installations (Orendi, Lichtenberger and Tal 2021). This material provides important evidence for the botanical diet of the Hellenistic inhabitants of the settlement. The plant remains indicate that the settlers consumed similar crops as were traditionally used in the region. This observation suggests a locally well embedded Hellenistic settlement that shared agricultural knowledge with other local groups.

Installation 335 was built against a wall (W359) constructed of two rows of small- to medium-sized fieldstones, with a mudbrick superstructure, found south of the installation. The wall was built of two rows of small to medium sized fieldstones, measuring *c.* 70cm in width, with a mudbrick superstructure which was only partly preserved. It was exposed to a length of *c.* 2.9m and preserved 2–3 courses high. Wall 359 was exposed to a length of *c.* 2.9m, measured *c.* 70cm wide and was E–W oriented, which may suggest it was not an integral part of the structure. Further east of I335, two small adjoining walls were unearthed. Wall 346 was exposed to a length of *c.* 1.2m. It was constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones set in two rows, along a NE–SW axis and is *c.* 50cm thick. Its north-eastern edge formed a corner with W347, which was poorly preserved. No floor was found related to these walls and the fill around them contained many Early Bronze Age sherds. However, their similar orientation to that of the structure and their straight alignments support a Hellenistic date.

In Area D, the remains of at least two large, but also extremely damaged, domestic structures were unearthed. These remains adjoin the remains previously unearthed in Area Z (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993: 50–51; Mazor and Atrash 2017: 88; 2018: 6; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33), allowing for a new reconstruction of the residential quarter.

The main architectural feature found in the area is W422 (see Figure 3). This wall, which likely is part of a foundation, is constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones and large over-lapping sundried mudbricks, each measuring *c.* 30 × 70cm, producing a total width of *c.* 1.2m. The wall was unearthed in two separate segments measuring together some 16m on a NE–SW axis. Its mid-section was cut by the 'Podium Building' (see below) and its stones must have been thoroughly robbed in antiquity, most likely in order to construct the 'Podium Building' (see below) and perhaps also the nearby Byzantine city

wall. The only visible remains of the north-eastern section of the wall are its massive mudbricks which were unsuitable for later building activities. The south-western section of W422 was also found in a poor state of preservation, although small segments were preserved up to three courses high (-134.79/-135.07m; see Figure 3). This wall was constructed in the same orientation of the Hellenistic structure unearthed in Area C and it seems to have adjoined the Hellenistic walls found during previous excavations at the site, creating a monumental structure.

A poorly preserved wall (W510) was found adjoining from the west to the south-western end of W422. This wall, constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones and mudbricks, was exposed to a length of *c.* 2m in a single course (-135.19/-135.26m). Parallel to W422, another wall, W421, was found some 3.5m to the north-west. This wall, which was found in two segments, was constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones, measuring *c.* 80cm along a NE–SW axis. It was exposed to a length of some 4.5m and seems to extend beyond the excavation limits to the south-west. In the western section of Sq. JC33, a robber's trench was found suggesting the stones of its north-eastern part were robbed in antiquity (Figure 9, Section A-A). Unlike W422, W421 was preserved to a considerable height of *c.* 1.2m (-134.55/-135.75m). Although the construction technique is unlike those of the other walls dated to the Hellenistic period, the orientation of the wall suggests it too should be dated to the same period but likely belongs to a different phase or structure. It is possible that this wall served as an exterior retaining wall similar to W307 in Area C, whose foundations were dug to a depth of *c.* 2m below floor level. North of W421, a round shallow installation constructed of mudbricks and fieldstones was unearthed (I444) whose function is yet to be determined. Further fragmentary walls and floors were unearthed in the north-eastern part of the excavation area; however, these were too poorly preserved to form a coherent plan.

One of the notable Hellenistic discoveries from Area D is a hoard of ten copper-alloyed coins of Alexander II Zabinas (129/8–124/3 BC), wrapped in a white-colored linen (Lichtenberger and Tal 2020; Shamir, Lichtenberger and Tal, in press; for the other coins, see Lichtenberger and Tal 2021).

Our new excavation of Hellenistic remains in Areas B, C and D encountered similar courtyard houses as previous excavations unearthed in the site's Hellenistic occupation as is also apparent in many other sites in Palestine and the Hellenistic southern Levant (Tal 2017: 97–115). The combination with the magnetic data (Lichtenberger, Meyer and Tal 2020) however, questions a strong overall orthogonal plan of the town and emphasizes local

traditions of town planning oriented also on the natural topography. Furthermore, archaeobotanic analysis and the new textile finds (Orendi, Lichtenberger and Tal 2021; Shamir, Lichtenberger and Tal, in press) underlines that the Hellenistic settlement was participating in local

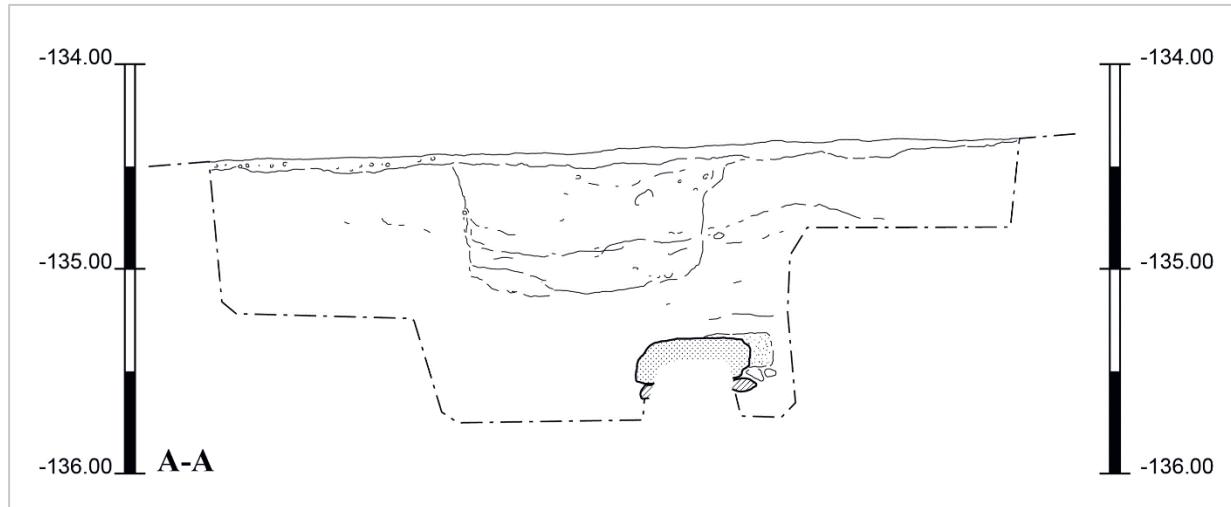


Figure 9. Area D: drawing of section A-A (German-Israeli Tell Iżtabba Excavation Project).

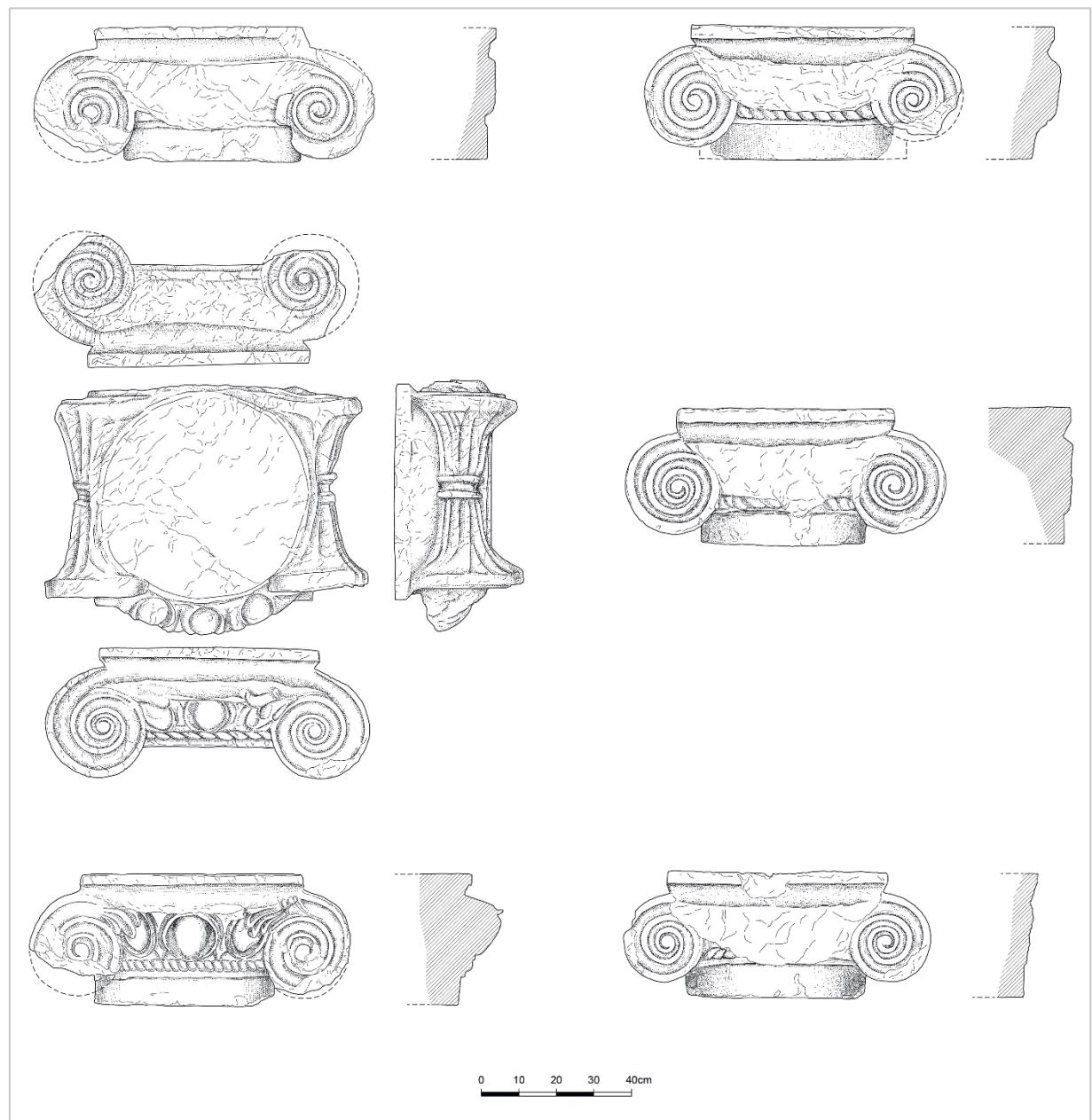


Figure 10. Area D: drawing of six Ionic capitals in W470 (German-Israeli Tell Iżtabba Excavation Project).

knowledge. This suggests that the newly founded Hellenistic settlement was not separated from its surroundings but was embedded and well-connected in the region as is evidenced by the faience and glass finds (see Jackson-Tal, Lichtenberger and Tal 2021). This observation provides a more nuanced picture of how the settlers were interacting in the region and adapting the local environment vis-à-vis their consumption of imported products as is evident by the numerous Aegean amphorae recovered.

### The Roman Period

Roman period architectural remains were found in Area D underneath the 'Podium Building' (see Figure 3). These consist of a wall fragment and stone foundations that were partly reused by the founders of the Byzantine 'Podium Building' (see below). It cannot be excluded that the capitals and column shafts which were incorporated in W470 as spolia originate from these Roman period remains. The architectural elements, which share a similar scheme, appear to originate from a single 2nd/3rd century AD structure. Six Ionic capitals were found (Figure 10), all of which are roughly of the same dimensions and type (height c. 35cm, width c. 85cm). Although these were interpreted in the past as Hellenistic (Landau and Tzaferis 1979: 152, Pl. 20A; Mazor and Atrash 2017: 88; Peleg-Barkat 2017: 145), they should be dated to the 2nd/3rd centuries AD based on their formal design and style (cf., Arubas 2019: 52–53; Atrash *et al.* in press; Ebeling *et al.* 2021; Fischer and Tal 2003:27). This is also corroborated by the ceramic evidence found in previous excavations, although we hardly encountered stratified Roman material.<sup>6</sup> Wall 472 was found under W512 (see below) and was used as the foundations of the south-eastern face of the 'Podium Building'. However, this wall extends well beyond the limits of the latter and seems to be slightly askew with W512. Nevertheless, it is possible that parts of

the upper courses of W472 within the limits of the 'Podium Building' belong to the subsequent stratum. Wall 472 is c. 1.2m thick and was constructed of large roughly cut fieldstones and a rubble fill laid above a foundation of small to medium-sized fieldstones measuring c. 1.3m thick. It was constructed along a NE–SW axis and exposed to a length of c. 14.5m. A small segment of the original wall seems to have been preserved in the inner north-eastern corner of W470 and W512 (see Figure 3). Its south-western part, which extends beyond the 'Podium Building' (Figure 11; Section B-B) was far better preserved, measuring c. 1.3m high in seven courses (-135.00/-136.27m). The north-western end of W472 abuts another wall (W475) whose foundations were found under W470. This wall was built of small-large fieldstones along a NW–SE axis. It was partly exposed to a length of c. 8.5m, and its width could not be determined. The south-eastern part of W472 seems to be abutted by another smaller wall (W516) constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones, which was also only partly exposed.

In total, the Roman *in situ* remains are comparably faint and the origin of the architectural decoration of the Ionic order remains unknown. The spolia not necessarily stem from Tell Iztabba (East) and might have been brought here from the civic center of the Roman town.

### The Byzantine Period

In the Byzantine period, Tell Iztabba is integrated into the walled city of Scythopolis, and the newly constructed walls cross the Tell E–W. In its western part, ecclesiastical structures and the Samaritan synagogue were erected during this period. The most impressive remains unearthed in Area D date to the Byzantine period and consist of a monumental rectangular structure we named the 'Podium Building' (see Figure 3). This structure measures c. 10.5 × 17m and consists of long walls in its eastern section and a

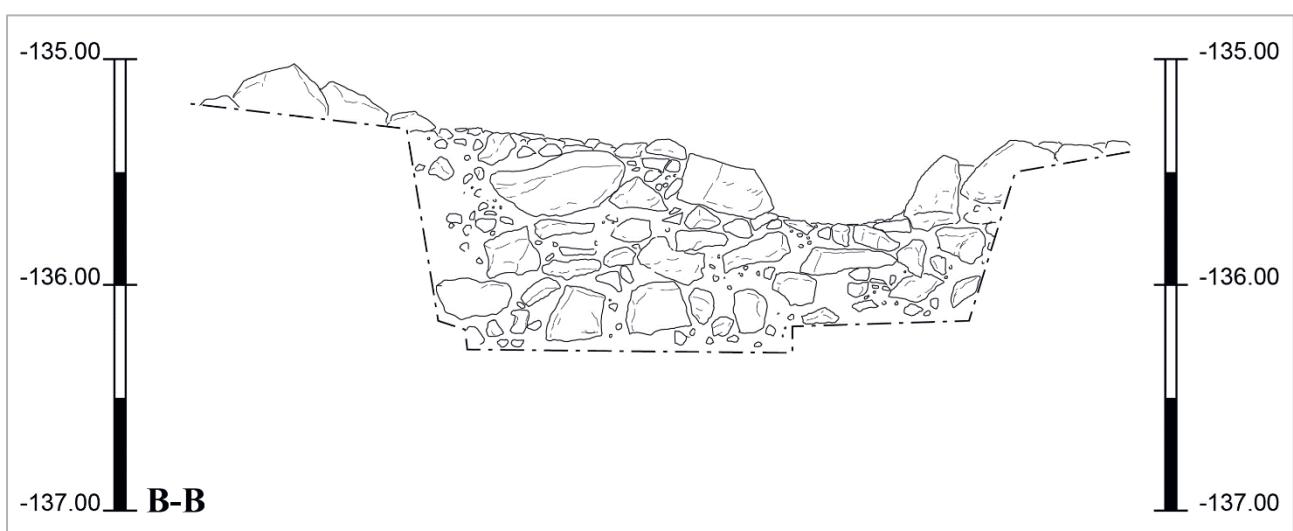


Figure 11. Area D: drawing of section B-B (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication of W. Atrash and G. Mazor. It may be added that our excavations in the area yielded a few Roman pottery finds in mixed fills; hence, the stratigraphic situation described here is more

conjectural than physical. These Ionic capitals need to be studied against the other Ionic capitals of Roman date found in greater Scythopolis.



Figure 12. Photo of L416, the 'Podium' of the 'Podium'-Building, seen from the North. To the right of the L416, runs W422 in a NW-SW direction. (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

massive 5m thick podium in its western section. This 'Podium Building' (L416) was constructed of four walls (W408, W470, W471 and possibly W472) and was found filled in its western section with fieldstone rubble. All its walls were *c.* 1.2m thick and constructed of large roughly cut fieldstones with a rubble fill in between. Below W408, a foundation layer of flat cobbles was unearthed along the same orientation as this wall. This foundation was constructed as part of the podium's west wall and not reused from earlier periods. The podium is preserved to a height of *c.* 80cm (-134.74/-135.55m) in four courses. The eastern face of the podium was severely damaged by leveling activities using heavy machinery. The same activities are likely responsible for the levelled preservation height of the structure and must have also damaged the building's southern long wall (W471). Its western part was well preserved while in its eastern part, only the foundations remain abutting W472.

Parallel to W471 stands Wall 470, which is far better preserved. This wall was constructed using the above-mentioned capitals and column shafts which were robbed from a Roman period structure and combined into its masonry as spolia. Closing this structure from the east is a relatively small wall segment (W512) which was constructed in the same way as W470 including a column shaft in secondary use. Wall 512 is 2.6m long and may represent the structure's façade, abutting its doorway which would have been *c.* 3m wide.

The function of this structure is not clear; however, it is possible it served as a defensive fort or a tower that was constructed on top of the podium (Figure 12). The building's location inside the Byzantine city wall, in close proximity (*c.* 24m) and parallel to it, overlooking the valley to the south, seems to fit such an interpretation. However, no associated floors were found in or around the structure. Its floor/living surface seems to be indicated by a step in the inner part of W470 at an elevation of *c.* -135.20m (see Figure 3). The dating of this structure to the

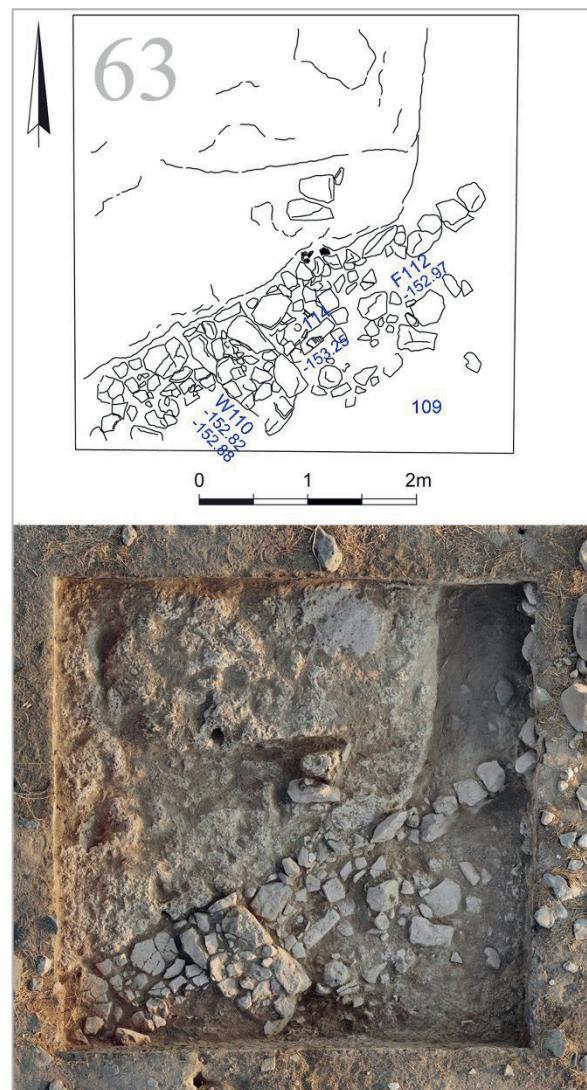


Figure 13. Plan and Orthophoto of Area A1 (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).



Figure 14. Plan and Orthophoto of Area A2 (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

Byzantine period is based on ceramic evidence collected from a probe inside the podium. The integration of Roman spolia speaks for a late antique date.

Scanty Byzantine period remains were also unearthed in Area A, where part of a domestic structure and other installations were found. The domestic structure, of which only a small segment was exposed, consisted of a wall (W110) and two floors (F112 and L109) (Figure 13). Wall 110 was constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones along a NW–SE axis. It was exposed to a length of c. 1.5m, 40cm wide, and preserved two courses founded directly on the bedrock. The wall abuts a higher segment of the bedrock from the south that seems to have been artificially flattened and used as an integral part of the structure. Floor 112, which abuts W110 from its south-west, seems to have been an interior floor built of flat stone slabs set over beaten earth at the same elevation of the flattened bedrock. To the east of W110, a layer of collapsed debris was exposed (L109) over a beaten earth floor, which may have also been paved with stone slabs. This floor/occupational surface was strewn with pottery sherds in between large, medium, and small fieldstones. A small rectangular stone compartment (a chest) was found (L114) containing Byzantine period glass bottles that may be interpreted as a foundation deposit (cf., Ahipaz and Leibner 2021; Weksler-Bdolah 2014:47). The glass vessels as well as the pottery sherds found in this structure date it to the Late Byzantine period.

Some 22m to the east of the structure, the remains of a large wall and a water channel were unearthed (Figure 14). The wall (W113), built along a N–S axis, was exposed to a length of 5m and it likely extends further beyond the excavation area. It was constructed of two rows of medium to large-sized fieldstones set on the bedrock and was c. 80cm thick. The wall preserved two courses and it may have served as a terrace or a retaining wall, as it was built on the upper part of a natural slope. It abuts a parallel plastered channel (I105) built of small fieldstones and is

founded on the bedrock. These remains are likely dated to the Byzantine period based on sherds found in their foundations. It is possible that W113 was used to funnel water via the plastered channel into the above mentioned Early Bronze Age burial cave which may have been reused as a water cistern.

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