

## NB – UNEDITED CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

### **Dining In State: The Tablewares from the Hellenistic Administrative Building at Kedesh** by *Andrea M. Berlin, University of Minnesota*

When the Macedonian general Ptolemy seized Egypt upon the death of Alexander the Great, he moved quickly also to secure a region that Egyptian rulers had coveted and, on and off, actually controlled for three millenia: the Levantine coast. This highly strategic link provided an efficient route from the Sinai peninsula to Syria, a series of excellent harbors, and an array of fertile agricultural landscapes supporting the cultivation of olives, grapes, and grain.

These same advantages attracted the attention of Ptolemy's fellow general and rival, Seleucus, with the result that the two claimants battled for control of the entire coast and its narrow but fertile interior hinterland over the course of 20 years. In 301 B.C.E., at the battle of Raphia, they decided to split the difference, with Seleucus taking the northern half and Ptolemy the southern. The dividing line was the Litani River, just north of the city of Tyre.

In winning control of the southern Levant, Ptolemy also inherited an already established imperial administrative structure built when this entire region was part of the Achaemenid Persian empire. The Persians had subdivided the huge satrapy of "Beyond the River," carefully distributing new administrative posts in between smaller, locally managed centers.

They established one of these new centers at the site of Kedesh, located on the edge of a highland plateau extending 35 km east from the city of Tyre. Kedesh is an enormous double mound, with an upper and lower tel that together stretch 900 meters north to south. In the later second millennium B.C.E. it was a major Canaanite city whose ruler joined a coalition against the Israelites. In the time of the kingdom of Israel, it was a biblical "city of refuge," where criminals could seek asylum. But it had lain deserted since the Assyrian conquest of this region in the eighth century B.C.E.

Since 1997, the Universities of Michigan and Minnesota have been excavating an area at the far southern end of the lower mound, where we are uncovering a huge building, 2400 meters square. We have found evidence that the building was constructed in the early fifth century B.C.E., on a plan that appears to be – admittedly based on as-yet scanty evidence – a smaller version of a standard Neo-Assyrian palatial plan. The rectangular structure seems to have been conceived in two halves, with a large courtyard dominating one side and a series of smaller rooms and narrow hallways on the other.

We'd like to know a lot more about the internal arrangements and especially the associated finds of this first phase of the building, but both are difficult to recover. That's because the building continued to be used and also to be heavily modified under the next two imperial regimes to control this territory: the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. It is their usage, and the detritus of their activities, that I turn to now.

When the dust settled after the battle of Raphia, Ptolemy had a few decisions to make regarding the administration of this eastern appendage to his realm. It is not possible at this point in our excavation or our study of the material to determine if the building was, for a time, abandoned, or precisely when in the first half of the third century B.C.E. the Ptolemies chose to utilize this structure. But we do know that by the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the administrative building at Kedesh was back in business.

Conclusive evidence for this comes from two papyri that form part of the Zenon archive, a body of over 2000 fragments discovered in the Egyptian town of Philadelphia (modern Darb el-Gerza) in 1914. In 259 B.C.E. Zenon travelled to the territory of Palestine on behalf of Ptolemy II and like all good travellers, he saved his receipts. In them he notes two visits to Kedesh.

Once he picked up two artabas of flour to tide him over until his next stop, and another time he stayed long enough to enjoy a bath.

Before our excavations at Kedesh, nobody knew the character of the site in Zenon's day, and it wasn't necessarily obvious from the fact that he visited. The papyrus recording flour receipts reveals that Zenon stopped at many places for supplies, and they vary in character from small towns, such as Strato's Tower, to large, long established cities such as Jerusalem. Now that we have about half of this large building excavated, however, we have discovered that the Ptolemies and their Seleucid successors re-occupied the Persian-period building and re-purposed it as a provincial administrative center. They chose to maintain the essential character of the Persian plan, with its large courtyard on the west side, but they made substantial re-arrangements to the space around it. Their remodelling now accommodated the large-scale collection and storage of grain and, eventually, a records office.

Up in the northwest corner, a large storeroom with a plaster floor was constructed in the third century B.C.E. Here we discovered fourteen huge grain jars – 1.8 m tall – leaning against the walls. Two more such storerooms were built along the western side of the building; here you see the broken debris from several of the jars lying across the floor.

Remodeling south of the courtyard created a room with a thick plaster floor and four sturdy plastered bins of different shapes and sizes. Our current theory is that these bins served as receptacles for agricultural goods – grain, grapes or olives – brought as taxation in kind. Partition walls seem to have isolated this corner of the building; at least we have not yet found any means of access from this complex into the courtyard.

And yet the new occupants retained and continued to use the large courtyard. At some point in the later third or early second century B.C.E. a beautifully decorated three room entry complex for the courtyard was contrived, with two rectangular rooms flanking a small central space with steps to the court. The intact floors of the middle and southern rooms consist of small flattened stone chips embedded in a heavy plaster matrix, similar to terazzo. The walls were covered with stucco, here molded and painted here plain white, and here embellished with an egg and dart frieze. These modifications obviously suggest reception and entertainment activities – and that impression is confirmed by our discoveries, in and around the courtyard, of a disproportionate amount of tableware.

Before I turn to discussion of that tableware, however, I need to fill in the rest of the building's history, and especially the evidence for its demise, since this is the other bookend that allows us to situate the pottery chronologically.

When we first came to excavate at Kedesh, we had no idea that this enormous administrative structure existed. No ancient author mentions it, and there were no epigraphic or literary references to it. We assumed that throughout the classical period the tel held just a small settlement. Thus we wanted to do a magnetometric survey of the lower tel before beginning to dig, in order to find the densest concentration of houses. To that end, we spent a couple of weeks in 1997 putting in two small probes, simply to determine if the site's geomorphological profile would allow for magnetometry.

In one of those probes, we came upon debris on the floor of a room. Within a space only two by three meters, we found a flask, a small cooking pot, five juglets, a stone mortar and many pestles, several stoppers, and three mud-brick loomweights. So many intact vessels and objects suggested that the owners had left in a hurry. Naturally we started looking for mention of battles that had occurred in this vicinity. We quickly found a likely one in the book of 1 Maccabees.

“Jonathan heard that the generals of Demetrius had come with a strong force to Kedesh in Galilee. So he went to meet them ... in the plain of Hazor ... The army of the foreigners ... made an ambush ... and all of Jonathan's men fled. Jonathan

rent his garments ... and prayed. [He] turned them again to battle and they fought. They pursued their enemies to Kedesh. 3000 of the foreign troops fell. And Jonathan returned to Jerusalem” (1 Macc. 11:63-67).

The date of the battle described in 1 Macc. is 144 or 143 B.C.E. The author bracketed his description between two other events that are datable by internal evidence to 145 and 142 B.C.E., so it must have occurred within that narrow window. I know what you’re thinking: it sounds suspiciously circumstantial to hook up this small abandoned room with the after effects of that battle. And if this was all the evidence to hand, I would agree. But it’s not.

The room in which we found the abandoned pottery lay just to the west of the Administrative Building, whose presence we were unaware of until we spotted it on the magnetometric survey map that we made the following year. Since we began excavating the building in 1999, we have found evidence for sudden and wholesale abandonment throughout the complex, along with a satisfying quantity of coins and especially stamped amphoras laying on floors by which we can precisely date that abandonment.

Here is a chart detailing the evidence of the amphoras from final usage and abandonment deposits within the Administrative Building. There is a dramatic concentration of Rhodian jars dating right down to, but not beyond, 145 B.C.E. The amphora evidence, along with the clearly debris-strewn character of these final deposits, strongly encourage us to connect the building’s final days with the battle described in 1 Maccabees. Thus the assemblage of pottery found in the building’s Hellenistic deposits must fall within the century or so between Zenon’s visit in 259 B.C.E. and the abrupt appearance of Jonathan and his forces in 144 or 143 B.C.E. Of course that’s still a pretty long period. Fortunately I can narrow it even further.

I have two internal stratigraphic points that may be plausibly linked to an historical event. We have established that the Ptolemies, probably Ptolemy II, repurposed this building, turning it into a grain collection and storage site. The basis for this conclusion is the stratigraphy of the storerooms and the bin complex, which all have a single floor. In two other rooms, however, there were two floor levels. You’re looking here at the upper floor level in one of those rooms, immediately west of the bin room. This room contained a series of ovens – tanurs – and so functioned as a sort of kitchen. Stuck underneath one of the bedding cobbles of this upper floor was a coin of Antiochus III or IV, thus providing a *terminus post quem* of the early second century B.C.E. But the most interesting point about this later floor is how it was made: using hundreds of fragments of small saucers and bowls almost like tesserae, embedded within a plaster matrix.

Here you see the sherds from the floor of the second room. Petrographic analysis by Anastasia Shapiro of the Israel Antiquities Authority indicates that this fabric comes from the coastal plain south of the Carmel mountains. This area, extending from the ancient sites of Dor to Jaffa, was quite well populated during the Hellenistic period, with cities, villages, and farmsteads attested through excavation and survey. We call this fabric, simply, “local fine,” since we do not know the precise production locale – and anyway there was likely to have been more than one.

The room for which these sherds provided flooring is in the northwest corner of the building, right next to the large storeroom with the plaster floor. The space may have been made into a room during the third century though we don’t know either the date or the purpose of its initial Hellenistic phase. In its second, pottery-tesselated-floor phase, however, we know precisely what use this room was put to, because in it we found over 2000 small clay sealings that had served to bind the twine around papyrus documents. Thus we can say with assurance that the room’s final usage was as an archive.

Most of the sealings seem not to have been official; they are small and carry images of personal interest. Of the few imperial sealings, all come from the Seleucid court: Antiochus III; a diademed prince, quite likely Antiochus IV, and this anchor, which was an official symbol of the

Seleucid dynasty. The archive, then, seems likely to have been a Seleucid-period addition to the building – and the historical circumstance behind that is easily identified. In the year 199 B.C.E. Antiochus III defeated Ptolemy V at a battle just up the road from Kedesh, near a small rural sanctuary to Pan located at the springs of the River Jordan just below Mt. Hermon. His victory brought Kedesh, along with the entirety of the southern Levant, under the control of the Seleucid empire.

Like the Ptolemies, the Seleucids apparently decided to retain but slightly repurpose the building. The new administration continued collecting and storing grain, but they also added a local records office. The character of official life at this posting seems to have changed as well. The red-slipped saucers and bowl flooring fragments likely comprised the common tableware used by the officials who lived at Kedesh in the third century B.C.E. Although it's probable that at least some of the officials also had fancier cups and bowls in metal or glass, we have not found any evidence of such. Of course it's not too surprising that we haven't found much metal, considering that the building remained in continuous use and was briefly occupied by enemy forces. But we also have found only a few fragments of cast glass and barely any fragments of other fine table wares of the third century B.C.E., even eastern Mediterranean productions regularly found elsewhere along the Levantine coast such as these examples from Dor and Tarsus. Either life in the Ptolemaic era was exceptionally lavish and we're missing some high quality goodies, or it was a poorly supplied backwater posting for low-level functionaries.

That seems to have changed after the Seleucid takeover. We have found an array of different ceramic table wares from the building's abandonment phase. While stratigraphically we can date this phase to the first half of the second century B.C.E., in practical terms the pottery that we found must all have been available and in use at the time of Jonathan's attack in 144 or 143 B.C.E. The array thus provides a remarkable snapshot of the contents of the pantry shelves of a provincial Seleucid outpost precisely in the middle of the second century. Based on the variations of fabric and surface treatment, it appears that those shelves held serving vessels, platters, saucers, and bowls from three or four distinct manufacturing centers.

All of the serving vessels –table amphoras, jugs, and dipper juglets – are in a clean pale peach-brown fabric that I call Phoenician semi fine. I first identified this fabric in my study of the late Hellenistic pottery at Tel Anafa, just down the road from Kedesh. Shell inclusions discovered via petrographic analysis strongly suggested that semi fine came from a coastal manufacturer; aspects of distribution and especially the overwhelming quantities of this ware found at Tyre pointed to that city as a source.

At Kedesh, we think we have two versions of semi fine. One is quite soft, almost chalky, and with only occasional very small inclusions. The second is fired a bit harder and has perceptible small angular grits embedded in the fabric – as this table amphora, jug, and dipper juglet. Slip adheres better to this variant. The repertoire of serving vessels occurs in both but we find small perfume and oil containers mostly in one or the other version. Amphoriskoi and unguentaria come in the first softer version while juglets with a cupped flanged rim – of which we have many – occur only in the second, harder, slightly more gritty version. Our current theory is that the first type of semi fine comes from Tyre while the second may come from the city of Akko-Ptolemais, just north of the Carmel mountains. To test this, we've sent samples of both to Anastasia for further petrographic analysis.

Next are dishes in various sizes from small saucers to large platters, all in a clean golden brown fabric with few visible inclusions and covered in a thin orange-red slip fired matte to faintly shiny. These appear to be slightly better version of the local fine saucers and bowls that were used for the early second century B.C.E. pottery-tesselated floors. I believe that these are the equivalent of what John Hayes identified in his study of the pottery from the Armenian Garden

excavations in Jeruslaem as Palestinian red slip. We have continued to identify these mid-second century B.C.E. examples as “local fine,” although I am beginning to suspect that they actually come from north of the Carmel range, rather than south.

Third are examples of saucers and small bowls in a much better quality fabric. This fabric is quite clean, very hard, and covered wholly or partially with a well-adhering, slightly lustrous orange-red slip. When we find body sherds of this fabric, it is very difficult to distinguish it from Eastern Sigillata A – and indeed when I first came across it I called it “proto-ESA.” Why isn’t it ESA? Three reasons. One, the shapes are those of middle Hellenistic table vessels, most of which do not occur in what we have come to think of as the standard ESA typology. Second, vessels are covered by slip that was brushed on rather than having been dipped, which is the standard practice for ESA. Third, most of the vessels are only partially slipped, instead of fully covered as is “standard ESA.”

Perhaps these reasons sound like special pleading. Why not simply expand the definition of ESA to include these “proto-ESA” saucers and bowls? I think that depends on two things: what we want ESA to mean, and what we think it meant in antiquity.

Beginning with the second point: what was ESA in antiquity? At first ESA vessels were simply better versions of some table shapes that had been around for a while, as we can tell from the fact that the earliest ESA shapes are identical to some middle Hellenistic shapes, such as the large dropping rim dish with recessed center. In antiquity the first ESA vessels were likely to have been thought of as improvements of existing products. In that sense, the most important point about ESA in antiquity was where it came from.

In this regard, our “proto-ESA” is very interesting, because it appears to be the product of a workshop that went on to make ESA. So of course we would like to know where it comes from. Saucers and bowls of this fabric don’t appear in the Ptolemaic-period fills at Kedesh; they only show up in the building’s Seleucid phases. The vessel shapes and especially the quality of the fabric and slip are uncannily similar to the middle Hellenistic tablewares found at Kinet Höyük, in Cilicia – which I know of thanks to a visit there and the gracious hospitality of Marie-Henriette Gates and her crew. I think that the Kedesh “proto-ESA” is likely contemporary with, and in fact the northern equivalent of, “local fine,” both being Levantine productions of the first half of the second century B.C.E. The difference in quality is attributable simply to the northern region having superior clay sources for table ware production.

As for the first question: what do we modern scholars want the category ESA to mean, I think this is connected with an aspect that matters a great deal to us, and that is chronology. I have explained about the abandonment of the administrative building and why we have dated it to 144 or 143 B.C.E. What I haven’t told you, however, is that this was not actually the very last use of the building. Here and there inside some of the rooms we have found a few makeshift walls, the occasional reworked floor surface, and some installations – primarily large ovens – all the work of a small group of people who lived here for a brief time after the battle and the abandonment. Associated coins and stamped amphoras allow us to fix the date of their sketchy occupation to the third quarter of the second century. And in the debris that these people left behind, we have found quite a bit of actual, no-fooling-around, canonical ESA.

This phase is the first at Kedesh where we find unmistakable ESA. We have not found a single fragment of a standard, by-the-book ESA vessel in any of the living contexts of the Administrative Building. If we retain the definition of ESA to be vessels of the typological series long identified, decorated on all surfaces by being dipped in vats of slip, then the tight stratigraphy and historical chronology at Kedesh combine to help us pinpoint the first appearance of ESA in this part of the southern Levant to the decade of the 130’s B.C.E. And that leads me to a consideration of the third fine table ware that the last Seleucid administrators at Kedesh were using.

These vessels are in the ware that Kathleen Slane has named BSP, which stands for the Black Slipped Predecessor of ESA. Kathleen postulated that ESA was the chronologically immediate and geographically proximate successor to BSP for good reasons: the fabrics are chemically identical; and most of the early shapes of ESA appear also in BSP, including several that occur in no other eastern Mediterranean fine ware – such as the large plate with offset rim, seen here.

While it may well have been that ESA was first developed in BSP workshops, I would like to point out a few facts and offer another idea. First, while it is true that the two wares are chemically identical, it is also the case that Phoenician semi fine – the softer cleaner variant from Tyre – is chemically identical as well. This renders the scientific argument less conclusive. Further, as Kathleen Slane has determined by careful analytical study, BSP and ESA were actually made by two different firing processes. BSP vessels were made via a two-stage firing with an initial reduction firing followed by at least partial oxidation, whereas ESA vessels were made via a single stage oxidizing firing. Slip application differed as well; finger marks show that workers held BSP vessels by the foot and dipped them straight into a vat while ESA vessels were generally double dipped from the rim.

While hard numbers are generally lacking, it is beginning to look as if distribution patterns and quantities of BSP and the earliest ESA are not as similar as one would expect if they had the exact same source. ESA appears in exceptionally large quantities in and around the area of Antioch, whereas BSP is currently better attested further south, from Tyre to Akko and inland to northern Jordan. Moreover, there is intriguing evidence that suggests a chronological discrepancy for the earliest appearance of ESA between the northern and southern Levant. At Jebel Khalid, a Seleucid administrative outpost on the Euphrates, ESA likely appears at the site by c. 150 B.C.E. – whereas, as I have argued here, the excavations at Kedesh strongly suggest that it was not available in southern Phoenicia until the 130's.

These points make me wonder anew about the origin of BSP. We have seen that the Seleucid-period officials at Kedesh acquired fine ceramic table vessels from various locales along the Levantine coast: red-slipped “proto-ESA” saucers and bowls probably from northern Phoenicia; semi fine serving and also perfume vessels from Tyre and probably also Akko; and red-slipped platters and plates either from here or a bit further south. From where did the site's BSP come from?

I wonder if we might not consider one of the large, wealthy central or southern Phoenician cities such as Berytus, Sidon, or Tyre. Such an origin would explain the ware's popularity in this precise region as well as the slight discrepancies of distribution and chronology between BSP and ESA. It would also fill in what is otherwise an odd gap in the buying habits of the officials living at Kedesh. On present evidence they acquired platters, plates, saucers, and bowls from coastal suppliers to the south and quite far north, but not from anywhere in between.

Despite the fact that a posting at Kedesh meant being sent to the boondocks of southern Phoenicia, the table wares we have found reveal that officials were not cut off from Mediterranean society and its pleasures. This is especially clear when we take a step back and look at the building and its finds in a regional context. Survey and excavation in the surrounding area have found very few settlements contemporary with the site's Seleucid-period occupation. The entire area, which is today almost completely rural, seems to have been that way in the early-mid second century B.C.E. as well. The administrative building clearly exerted a pull on suppliers. That circumstance made life better for its ancient inhabitants – and quite helpful for its modern investigators as well.