

From Sha'ar Hagolan to Shaaraim Essays in Honor of Prof. Yosef Garfinkel

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Essays in Honor of Prof. Yosef Garfinkel
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‘Yarmukian’ Figurines of the Neolithic Period at Lod

ELI YANNAI

Israel Antiquities Authority

Abstract

Pottery Neolithic remains from the ‘Yarmukian’ culture were exposed during rescue excavations at Tel Lod in 1994. The remains were found in Area C, in virgin soil on the eastern side of a long trench. Seven strata of the Pottery Neolithic period were exposed, along with two Middle Bronze Age tombs that had penetrated the Neolithic levels. Four fragments of ceramic figurines were found alongside typical Yarmukian-style decorated pottery sherds. These were the first remains from the Yarmukian culture to be found at Lod, and indicate the presence of a Yarmukian settlement that was distinct from the better-known Jericho IX/Lodian settlement, remains of which have been found in all previous excavations.

Remains of the ‘Yarmukian’ culture, dating to the Pottery Neolithic period, were exposed during rescue excavations at Tel Lod in 1994. The remains were uncovered in virgin soil on the eastern side of a long trench that was divided into three sub-areas (A–C) from east to west. Area C was located in the eastern part of Tel Lod, which at 57.53 m above sea level was the highest elevation in the excavation area, ca. 4 m higher than Area B. Seven strata of the Pottery Neolithic period were exposed, as well as two Middle Bronze Age tombs that penetrated the Neolithic levels. Overlying the Middle Bronze Age tombs and the Neolithic strata were Late Bronze Age occupation levels, and above them were the building foundations of the Mandate period. Area C evidently lay outside the city limits of Diospolis during the Roman period.

Among the pottery sherds, stones, and bones from Area C were four pieces of ceramic figurines (Figs. 1, 2), which were found in a Pottery Neolithic stratum.

1. *Head and Body Fragment (L3028)*

The maximum dimensions of this item are 5×2.5 cm. Its bottom and sides are broken. The item includes the following features:

- a. Elongated head (the top of which is broken).
- b. Protruding nose.
- c. Incised slanted eyes. Each eye is fashioned from a strip of clay that was first affixed to the head before a thin groove was incised along its entire length. These types of eye were very common in the Neolithic period in general, and in the Yarmukian culture of Israel in particular, and are often called 'cowrie eyes' (Garfinkel, Ben-Shlomo and Korn 2010).

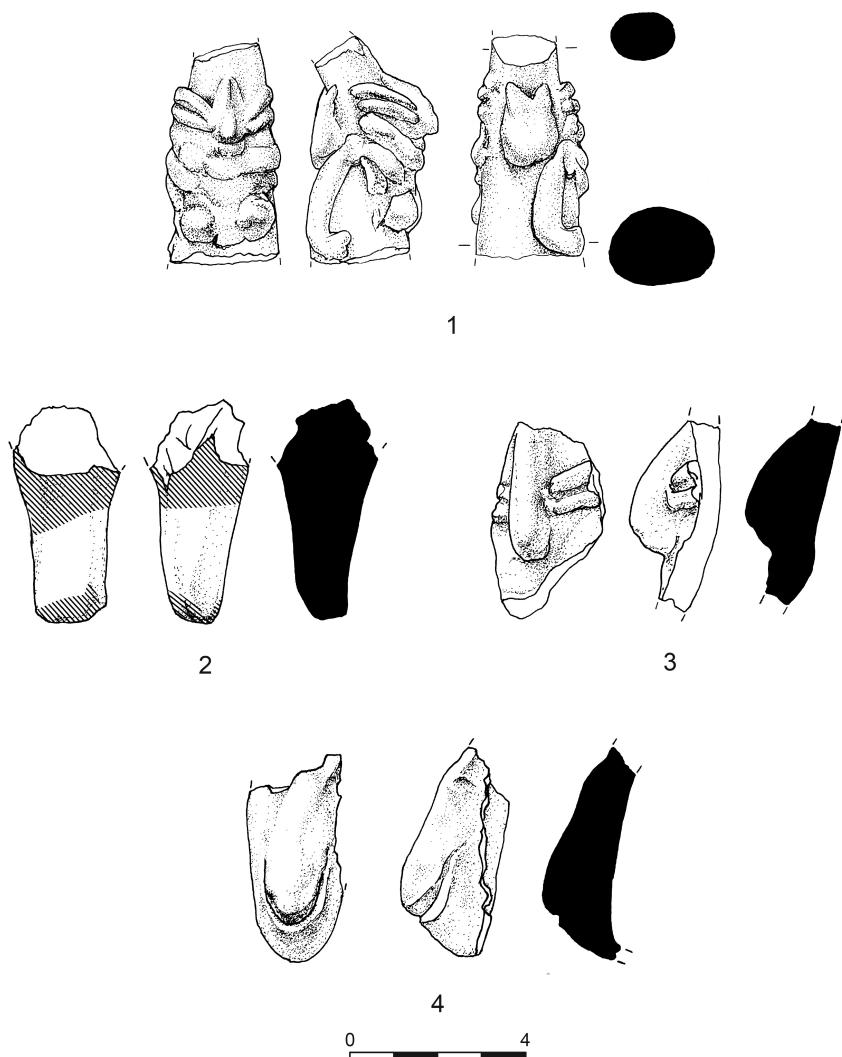


Fig. 1 'Yarmukian' figurines uncovered in Area C at Tel Lod

- d. A small mouth positioned next to the nose. It was made in a similar fashion to the eyes, having been formed from a strip of clay that was first affixed to the head before a thin groove was incised.
- e. On the nape of the figurine is a curved, draped coil that may symbolize a hairstyle.
- f. A garment made of a thin strip of clay is below the mouth and passes around the head. Other items from Sha'ar Hagolan (Stekelis 1972: Pl. 49:3; Garfinkel, Ben-Shlomo and Korn 2010: Nos. B1–B15), Megiddo (Loud 1948: Pl. 241:1), and Munhata (Garfinkel 1995: Fig. 26:5) are adorned with similar features.
- g. Breasts. These indicate that the figurine is female.
- h. Robe. Draped between the breasts, and across the shoulders and back of the object, is a robe that is characteristic of this type of figurine.

2. Leg Fragment (L3019)

Fragment of a single leg (maximum dimensions 5×2.5 cm). The item consists of a thick thigh, the upper part of which is slipped light red, and at the end of which is a schematic representation of a foot. This is the most common type of fragment associated with Yarmukian figurines, and numerous examples have been found at Munhata (Garfinkel 1995: Figs. 27:7; 28:2–3; 29:1) and Sha'ar Hagolan (Stekelis 1972: Pl. 59:6, 8–10; Garfinkel, Ben-Shlomo and Korn 2010: Nos. B77–B115).

3. Fragment from the Neck of a Vessel (or of a Hollow Figurine) (L3028)

The item is 4.5 cm long and broken on all sides. It has a typical elongated nose (4×0.8 cm) and two broken diagonal 'cowrie eyes' that are made of two parallel strips of attached clay. The wall of the figurine is 7–8 mm thick and the bottom part, below the nose, protrudes slightly to the front. No parallels of this type of hollow figurine have been found at Sha'ar Hagolan or Munhata, where only solid figurines were discovered.

The decoration of pottery vessels with a human head, with attached 'cowrie eyes', can be seen in various vessels from Mesopotamia. The earliest examples are quite rare and have been reported from Umm Dabaghiyah (Kirkbride 1971: Pl. 11:1–2). This motif later become quite common at Hassuna (Lloyd and Safar 1945: Pl. xvii:2) and Tell es-Sawwan (Abu al-Soof 1968: Pl. xiii; Ippoliti 1970–71: Fig. P:10).



Fig. 2 Head and Body Fragment (L3028)

4. *Fragment of an Unidentified Figurine (L3028)*

Discussion

The figurine fragments from Lod are similar to figurines and figurine fragments from Munhata, Sha'ar Hagolan and numerous other Yarmukian sites, and together with the ten decorated pottery sherds found with them should be regarded as an assemblage of the Yarmukian culture (Yannai forthcoming).

Three of the fragments were found in locus L3028 and one was discovered in L3019, along with most of the decorated Yarmukian sherds. This suggests a very high proportion of figurines, both in the excavated area and in relation to decorated pottery. In the renewed Sha'ar Hagolan excavations, 93 clay figurines of this type were uncovered compared to 88,488 pottery sherds. At Munhata, 29 such clay figurines were discovered among 15,890 pottery sherds (Garfinkel, Ben-Shlomo and Korn 2010:30). It is unclear why so many figurines were found in this specific context at Lod, while the other characteristic element of Yarmukian material culture, pottery sherds, were rarely found.

From a geographical perspective, most Yarmukian figurines have been found in the northern parts of Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon, including at Byblos (Dunand 1973: Pl. CXIII:21160), Sha'ar Hagolan (Stekelis 1972; Garfinkel, Ben-Shlomo and Korn 2010), Munhata (Garfinkel 1995), Megiddo (Loud 1948), and Naḥal Zehora II (Gopher and Eyal 2012). Only a few examples have been reported

from the southern parts of Israel and Jordan: a few fragments from Habashan Street in Tel Aviv (Kaplan 1959), and a head fragment from 'Ain Ghazal (Kafafi 1993: Fig. 4). The four items from Lod have doubled the number of Yarmukian figurines found in the southern part of Israel.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the excavation in Area C and elsewhere, Tel Lod was continuously settled from the beginning of the Pottery Neolithic period (Gopher and Blockman 2004) through the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Ages (Paz, Rosenberg, and Nativ 2005). Remains of the Pottery Neolithic period at Lod have been found in six different excavations over an area that extends ca. 400 m from north to south. Kaplan (1977) and Yannai and Marder (2000) directed the northernmost excavations, while Khalaily and Gopher (1997) excavated some 40 m to south, and Gopher conducted an excavation another 200 m further south (Blockman 1997; Gopher and Blockman 2004). These excavations were carried out close to the surface and parallel to the riverbed, ca. 300 m from the present day Nahal Ayalon riverbed.

The figurines are very important in understanding the essence of the other sherds of the Yarmukian culture in Lod. Until now, no evidence was found of remains from the Yarmukian culture in the excavations at Lod. The figurines that were found together indicate that in the vicinity of Area C, probably a bit west of the excavated area, there was a settlement of the Yarmukian culture. This settlement is distinct from the settlement of the Jericho IX/Lodian culture. The remains of these two cultures were found in all of the excavations, over the entire area of the site and no Yarmukian sherds or figurines were found. In contrast, the remains of the Yarmukian culture were only found in the excavation at Neveh Yaraq and in a very limited area.

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