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Miniature Ointment Vases from the Second Temple Period*

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CONSPICUOUS among the pottery assemblage of the Second Temple period is a group of small vases characterized by their diminutive size, wide mouth, small capacity and stability. They are wheel-made of rather coarse clay with a string-cut base. The exterior is usually covered with reddish paint. Such vessels found in Palestine have been described as miniatures or votive vessels, probably used for perfume. Here I shall propose a different interpretation after a review of the various types discovered in excavations in Palestine.

Miniature vases have been found at Tel Anafa, Beth Yerah, Tel Dor, Tell el-Ful, Jaffa—Nahlat Yehuda, Jerusalem, Masada, Ramat Rahel and Samaria, in contexts ranging from the third century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. Four main types may be distinguished on the basis of their body shape.

Type A has a heavy, elongated pear-shaped body, wide mouth, everted rim and solid disc base; most examples are made of fairly well levigated pink to buff fabric and are covered with brownish-red paint on their upper body. Their height is 3–4 cm. Within the type there are some minor variations in form. This type occurs generally both in lead and pottery; only one example in lead has been found in Palestine, at Tel Anafa, dated to the Hellenistic period (Pl. 8:C).¹ Four similar lead vessels are known from Athens;² another is of unknown provenance.³ The following pottery examples were found in excavations:

* I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. A. Biran for his encouragement and support. I am grateful to the following for permission to use material, photographs and drawings, especially as many of the items referred to in this study have not yet been published: N. Avigad (Jerusalem, Jewish Quarter); E. Stern and Bracha Guz-Zilberstein (Tel Dor); G. Foerster and E. Netzer (Masada); E. Netzer (Jericho); Aaron Herbert and Andrea Berlin (Tel Anafa); A. Eitan, Director of the Department of Antiquities and Museums, and the Bar-Adon family (Beth Yerah). I am indebted to Andrea Berlin for assistance with the English, to Z. Radovan for the photographs and to L. Hershkovitz for the drawings.

The following abbreviations are used throughout: *Anafa* — S.S. Weinberg: Excavations at Tel Anafa, 1973, *Muse* 8 (1974), pp. 14–28; *Dor* — E. Stern: Hellenistic Dor, *Qadmoniot* 14 (1981), pp. 103–110 (Hebrew); *Tell el-Ful* — Nancy L. Lapp: The Third Campaign at Tell el-Ful: The Excavations of 1964, *AASOR* 45 (1981); *Jaffa* — J. Kaplan: *Two Groups of Pottery of the First Century AD from Jaffa and its Vicinity*, Tel Aviv, 1964 (Hebrew); *Jerusalem* — N. Avigad: *Discovering Jerusalem*, Nashville, 1983; *Ramat Rahel* — Y. Aharoni: Excavations at Ramat Rahel, *IEJ* 6 (1956), pp. 137–157; *Samaria* — G.A. Reisner et al.: *Harvard Excavations at Samaria 1908–1910*, Cambridge, Mass., 1924.

¹ *Anafa*, p. 27, Fig. 12:b.

² Dorothy Burr Thompson: *An Ancient Shopping Center* (Agora Picture Book 12), Princeton, 1971, Fig. 50.

1. Tell el-Ful:⁴ a very small vase from Period IVb, dated to the late second century B.C.E.
2. Ramat Rahel:⁵ similar to the above, from Stratum IV, dated from the fifth century B.C.E. to 70 C.E. A similar vessel was found at Tell Halaf and dated to the Hellenistic period.⁶
- 3a. Beth Yerah:⁷ rather cylindrical, with the widest point near the base (Pl. 8:D).
- 3b. Beth Yerah:⁸ widest at the middle of the body, with a high base (Pl. 8:E).
- 4a. Tel Dor:⁹ similar to No. 1 from Tell el-Ful and No. 2 from Ramat Rahel. A parallel was found at Corinth, dating from the third century B.C.E.¹⁰
- 4b. Tel Dor:¹¹ similar to No. 3b from Beth Yerah.
- 4c. Tel Dor:¹² pear-shaped vessel paralleled at Athens in the fifth and third centuries B.C.E., at Corinth in the third century B.C.E. and at Tarsus in the Hellenistic period.¹³
- 4d. Tel Dor:¹⁴ similar to No. 3a from Beth Yerah, though wider near the base, and the vessels found at Tarsus and Corinth, both of the Hellenistic period.¹⁵ The group from Tel Dor is the most varied group of this vessel type found in Palestine. All are of the Hellenistic period.
5. Tel Anafa:¹⁶ similar to No. 4d from Tel Dor, but with a more everted rim (Pl. 9:A).
- 6a. Samaria:¹⁷ similar to No. 1 from Tell el-Ful and No. 4d from Tel Dor.
- 6b. Samaria:¹⁸ similar to No. 5 from Tel Anafa.
- 6c. Samaria:¹⁹ similar to No. 4c from Tel Dor; paralleled at Athens and Corinth and by a second example from Tel Anafa.²¹

⁴ *Tell el-Ful*, p. 103, Fig. 77:12, Pl. 44:3.

⁵ *Ramat Rahel*, p. 138, Fig. 7:6.

⁶ B. Hrouda: *Tell Halaf, IV: Die Kleinfunde aus historischer Zeit*, Berlin, 1962, Pl. 77:58.

⁷ Unpublished; Israel Dept. of Antiquities and Museums (IDAM) No. 50-843. A similar vessel from Be Shean is on display in the Rockefeller Museum's North Gallery.

⁸ Unpublished; IDAM No. 50-844.

⁹ *Dor*, p. 110, photograph on right, top row, second from right.

¹⁰ G.R. Edwards: *Corinth, VII, Part III: Corinthian Hellenistic Pottery*, Princeton, 1975, No. 602, Pl. 20, 58.

¹¹ *Dor*, p. 110, photograph on right; bottom row, second from right.

¹² *Ibid.*, bottom row, second from right.

¹³ Mabel Long: *Socrates in the Agora* (Agora Picture Book 17), Princeton, 1978, Fig. 28 (fifth century B.C.E.); Thompson (above, n. 2) (third century); Edwards (above, n. 10), Nos. 591, 600, Pls. 20, 58; H. Goldman et al.: *Excavations at Gözlü Kule, Tarsus, I: The Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, Princeton, 1950, No. 206, Pl. 133.

¹⁴ *Dor*, p. 110, photograph on right, bottom row, first on right.

¹⁵ Goldman (above, n. 13), No. 207, Pl. 133; Edwards (above, n. 10), No. 596, Pls. 20, 58.

¹⁶ Unpublished; IDAM No. 68-286.

¹⁷ *Samaria*, Fig. 181:17a.

¹⁸ *Samaria*, Fig. 181:17b.

¹⁹ *Samaria*, Fig. 181:17g.

²⁰ Thompson (above, n. 2); Edwards (above, n. 10).

²¹ Unpublished; IDAM No. 71-112.

All three vessels from Samaria are from the Hellenistic levels.

7. Pella:²² similar to No. 5 from Tel Anafa, unpainted(?), from a late Hellenistic context.

8a. Jerusalem, Jewish Quarter:²³ similar to No. 1 from Tell el-Ful and to No. 4a from Tel Dor, but with a more sharply curved neck (Fig. 1:1; Pl. 9:B).

8b. Jerusalem, Jewish Quarter:²⁴ typologically between Nos. 4c and 4d from Tel Dor, but with a high solid base (Fig. 1:2; Pl. 9:C).

Both vessels from the Upper City of Jerusalem come from deposits dating from the end of the first century B.C.E. to 70 C.E.

9. Masada:²⁵ similar to No. 3a from Beth Yerah, but with a more globular body and thicker walls (Fig. 1:3; Pl. 9:D). This vase was found in a room in the southern wall dating from the Zealot period.

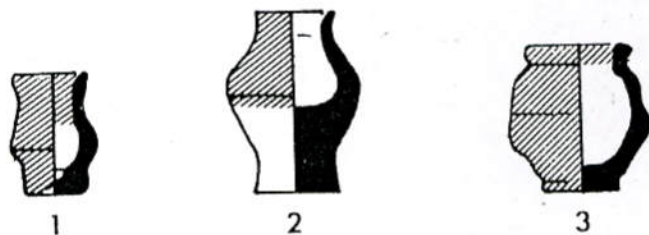


Fig. 1. Type A: Jerusalem, Jewish Quarter (1-2); Masada (3).

Type B has a biconical body, wide mouth, rim ranging from vertical to everted and a solid disc base; the fabric is pink to buff and well levigated. The upper body and interior of the mouth are covered with brownish-red paint. The height is between 4 and 5 cm. This type is quite distinctive and examples are known from only three excavations.²⁶

1. Tel Dor:²⁷ incised on the shoulder is the name ΑΛΥΠΟΥ (see discussion below). The context suggests a date from the end of the Hellenistic to the beginning of the Roman periods.

A. McNicoll et al.: *Pella in Jordan*, I, Canberra, 1982, Pl. 130:7.

Unpublished; from Locus 1380, No. 04297.

Unpublished; from Locus 1358, No. 04034/1.

Unpublished; from Locus 1113, No. 1828/1.

Another example, slightly larger, is known from the excavations of E. Netzer at Jericho (unpublished).

Dor, p. 110, photograph on the right, bottom row, third from the right.

1. Tell el-Ful:⁴ a very small vase from Period IVb, dated to the B.C.E.
2. Ramat Rahel:⁵ similar to the above, from Stratum IV, dated B.C.E. to 70 C.E. A similar vessel was found at Tell Halaf and the period.⁶
- 3a. Beth Yerah:⁷ rather cylindrical, with the widest point near the top.
- 3b. Beth Yerah:⁸ widest at the middle of the body, with a high rim.
- 4a. Tel Dor:⁹ similar to No. 1 from Tell el-Ful and No. 2 from Tel Dor; parallel was found at Corinth, dating from the third century B.C.E.
- 4b. Tel Dor:¹¹ similar to No. 3b from Beth Yerah.
- 4c. Tel Dor:¹² pear-shaped vessel paralleled at Athens in the fifth century B.C.E., at Corinth in the third century B.C.E. and at Tarsus in the second century B.C.E.
- 4d. Tel Dor:¹⁴ similar to No. 3a from Beth Yerah, though wider than No. 3a; vessels found at Tarsus and Corinth, both of the Hellenistic period. Tel Dor is the most varied group of this vessel type found in the Hellenistic period.
5. Tel Anafa:¹⁶ similar to No. 4d from Tel Dor, but with a different rim (see Fig. 9:A).
- 6a. Samaria:¹⁷ similar to No. 1 from Tell el-Ful and No. 4d from Tel Dor.
- 6b. Samaria:¹⁸ similar to No. 5 from Tel Anafa.
- 6c. Samaria:¹⁹ similar to No. 4c from Tel Dor; paralleled at Tel Dor and by a second example from Tel Anafa.²¹

⁴ Tell el-Ful, p. 103, Fig. 77:12, Pl. 44:3.

⁵ Ramat Rahel, p. 138, Fig. 7:6.

⁶ B. Hrouda: *Tell Halaf, IV: Die Kleinfunde aus historischer Zeit*, Berlin, 1934, p. 10, Fig. 10:1.

⁷ Unpublished; Israel Dept. of Antiquities and Museums (IDAM) No. 50-844. Shean is on display in the Rockefeller Museum's North Gallery.

⁸ Unpublished; IDAM No. 50-844.

⁹ Dor, p. 110, photograph on right, top row, second from right.

¹⁰ G.R. Edwards: *Corinth, VII, Part III: Corinthian Hellenistic Pottery*, p. 20, 58.

¹¹ Dor, p. 110, photograph on right, bottom row, second from right.

¹² *Ibid.*, bottom row, second from right.

¹³ Mabel Long: *Socrates in the Agora* (Agora Picture Book 17), Princeton, 1940, p. 10, Fig. 10:1; Thompson (above, n. 2) (third century); Edwards (above, n. 10), Nos. 10, 11; Goldman *et al.*: *Excavations at Gözlü Kule, Tarsus, I: The Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, 1950, No. 206, Pl. 133.

¹⁴ Dor, p. 110, photograph on right, bottom row, first on right.

¹⁵ Goldman (above, n. 13), No. 207, Pl. 133; Edwards (above, n. 10), No. 5.

¹⁶ Unpublished; IDAM No. 68-286.

¹⁷ Samaria, Fig. 181:17a.

¹⁸ Samaria, Fig. 181:17b.

¹⁹ Samaria, Fig. 181:17g.

²⁰ Thompson (above, n. 2); Edwards (above, n. 10).

²¹ Unpublished; IDAM No. 71-112.

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- 3a. Beth Yerah:⁷ rather cylindrical, with the widest point near the base (Pl. 8:D).
- 3b. Beth Yerah:⁸ widest at the middle of the body, with a high base (Pl. 8:E).
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- 4c. Tel Dor:¹² pear-shaped vessel paralleled at Athens in the fifth and third cent B.C.E., at Corinth in the third century B.C.E. and at Tarsus in the Hellenistic period.
- 4d. Tel Dor:¹⁴ similar to No. 3a from Beth Yerah, though wider near the base, and vessels found at Tarsus and Corinth, both of the Hellenistic period.¹⁵ The group from Tel Dor is the most varied group of this vessel type found in Palestine. All are of Hellenistic period.
5. Tel Anafa:¹⁶ similar to No. 4d from Tel Dor, but with a more everted rim (Pl. 9:A).
- 6a. Samaria:¹⁷ similar to No. 1 from Tell el-Ful and No. 4d from Tel Dor.
- 6b. Samaria:¹⁸ similar to No. 5 from Tel Anafa.
- 6c. Samaria:¹⁹ similar to No. 4c from Tel Dor; paralleled at Athens and Corinth and by a second example from Tel Anafa.²¹

⁴ Tell el-Ful, p. 103, Fig. 77:12, Pl. 44:3.

⁵ Ramat Raḥel, p. 138, Fig. 7:6.

⁶ B. Hrouda: *Tell Halaf, IV: Die Kleinfunde aus historischer Zeit*, Berlin, 1962, Pl. 77:58.

⁷ Unpublished; Israel Dept. of Antiquities and Museums (IDAM) No. 50-843. A similar vessel from Shean is on display in the Rockefeller Museum's North Gallery.

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¹⁷ Samaria, Fig. 181:17a.

¹⁸ Samaria, Fig. 181:17b.

¹⁹ Samaria, Fig. 181:17g.

²⁰ Thompson (above, n. 2); Edwards (above, n. 10).

²¹ Unpublished; IDAM No. 71-112.

2. Jerusalem: five examples were found in the excavations of the Jewish Quarter.²⁸ They are of the same form as No. 1 from Tel Dor and are dated from the late first century B.C.E. to 70 C.E. (Fig. 2:1-2; Pl. 9:E-F).

3. Masada:²⁹ a similar vessel found in a room in the southern wall dating from the Zealot period (Fig. 2:3; Pl. 9:G).

Outside Palestine only one example of Type B has been published, from the Hellenistic-Roman unit at Tarsus.³⁰

Types A and B differ from contemporary local wares in both shape and fabric and appear to belong to the eastern Mediterranean Hellenistic tradition. It would seem that both were imported during the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. The differences in their shapes may be accounted for by the tendency, seen in contemporary fine ware and especially in Eastern Sigillata, towards increasing angularity.³¹

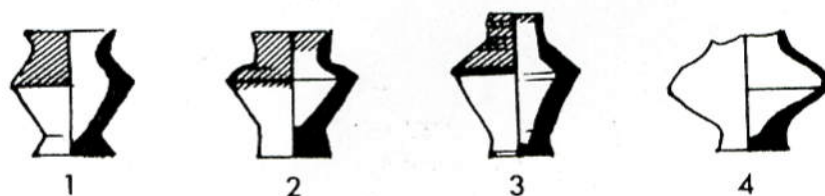


Fig. 2. Type B: Jerusalem, Jewish Quarter (1-2); Masada (3); Type C: Jerusalem, Jewish Quarter (4).

Type C is a variant of Type B, with a wider and more rounded biconical body. The fabric is buff, fairly coarse and without paint. The height is between 5 and 6 cm. The vessels are probably locally manufactured.

1. Tel Anafa:³² from an Early Roman fill (Pl. 10:A).

2. Jerusalem, Jewish Quarter:³³ similar to No. 1 from Tel Anafa and dated from late first century B.C.E. to 70 C.E. (Fig. 2:4).

²⁸ I shall refer here only to two. One example (Locus 710, No. 7127/1) was published with a group of pottery from Area E; *Jerusalem*, p. 128, Fig. 124. The second is unpublished; from Locus 1304, No. 03075/1. Another example comes from a private collection and was identified as an inkwell; L. Aarons, 'Goldie Feinsilver: A Jerusalem Couple Excavates under Newly-built Home in Search of their Roots', *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8 (1982), p. 47, n. 2.

²⁹ Unpublished; Locus 1110, No. 1526/1.

³⁰ Goldman (above, n. 13), p. 219, No. 93, Pl. 123.

³¹ J.W. Crowfoot et al.: *The Objects from Samaria*, London, 1957; compare Figs. 38, 48, 49, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 73, 77, 79.

³² Unpublished; IDAM No. 71-112.

³³ Unpublished; from Locus 2555, No. 05489. It should be noted that in the excavations of the Upper City of Jerusalem a locally made miniature vessel was found together with imported ones.

3. Samaria:³⁴ similar to the above but rather smaller.

4. Jaffa-Nahlat Yehudah:³⁵ with an unusually flat shoulder, from a context dated to the first century C.E.

Type D is a miniature cup with flaring rim, squat globular body, high flat base and thin vertical handle from rim to mid-point of body. The fabric is buff to pink and most have brownish-red paint around the rim and shoulder. The height is between 3 and 5 cm.

1. Jerusalem: four examples from the Jewish Quarter.³⁶ Two have moulded rims, the third has a vertical rim and the fourth has a flaring rim (Fig. 3:1-3; Pl. 10:B-D). All are fairly thin-walled. They were found in a deposit dating from the late first century B.C.E. to 70 C.E.

2. Masada:³⁷ five examples similar to the third from Jerusalem, but some of coarser fabric (Fig. 3:4-5; Pl. 10:E-F). All are from contexts dated to the first century C.E.

Similar cups have been found at Samaria, Marissa and Knossos, all from the late Hellenistic period.³⁸

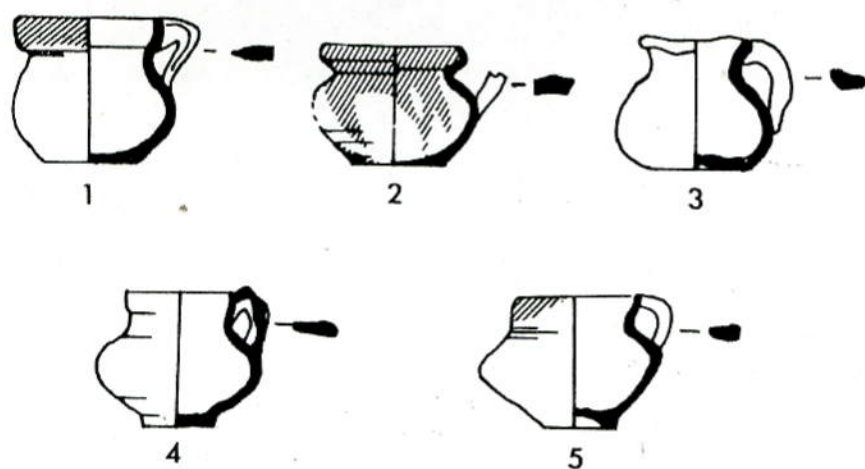


Fig. 3. Type D: Jerusalem, Jewish Quarter (1-3); Masada (4-5).

³⁴ Samaria, Fig. 181, No. 17f.

³⁵ Jaffa, Fig. 4:7, Pl. 3:4.

³⁶ Unpublished; Locus 1369, No. 4062/2; Locus 707, No. 7460/1; Locus 712, No. 7224/3; Locus 114, No. 2052/1; see Jerusalem, p. 128, Fig. 124.

³⁷ Unpublished; Locus 1092, No. 4062/2; Locus 523, No. 463/3; Locus 336, No. 6011; Locus 1245, No. 621/1; Locus 1054, No. 773/1.

³⁸ Samaria, No. 25d, Fig. 183, Pl. 679; F.J. Bliss and R.A.S. Macalister: *Excavations in Palestine during the Years 1890-1900*, London, 1912, Pl. 60:12, 23; J. Hayes: *Villa Dionysos Excavations, Knossos*, *Annual of the British School at Athens* 78 (1983), pp. 11-12, Fig. 18, Nos. 236, 237; Pl. 6, No. 58.

The four types of miniature vessels reviewed above have previously been identified as votive vessels or perfume bottles. It is now appropriate to consider what was the precise function of these unique vessels. A group of similar miniature vessels was excavated at Morgantina in Sicily.³⁹ Fifty-four examples of this vessel type were found, all in contexts of the third and second centuries B.C.E. Some were stamped or inscribed with the word ΛΥΚΙΟΝ. Lykion was a well-known ointment in the ancient world; it is mentioned by Dioscurides, Pliny and Galen. The ointment was used as a remedy for inflammations and infections, especially of the eye, and also for various aches and pains. Lykion is a plant of the *Rhamnus* species which grows wild in the Mediterranean basin, and especially in Lycia, Cappadocia,⁴⁰ Greece and Italy.⁴¹ In Israel the plant is one of the members of the *atad* family. The 'Lycian' ointment was also known in India as late as the nineteenth century. It was popular and very precious, and was therefore sold in small quantities necessitating the use of miniature vessels.

Some of the vessels from Morgantina, Priene and Athens had the name of the pharmacist stamped on them, either in addition to their contents, or alone, as a personal guarantee.⁴² The vessel cited above from Dor (Type B:1) with ΑΛΥΠΙΟΥ incised on the shoulder may possibly bear the name of a pharmacist. A sherd incised in Greek ΑΡΙΣΤΟΝ = ARIST was recovered from fills near the synagogue of Gush Halav, and was dated to the first centuries B.C.E.–C.E.⁴³ In my opinion, this sherd belongs to a vase similar to the ones from Dor (Type B:1) and Masada (Type B:3), and the name is identical to the name Aristreas incised on a vase from Priene.⁴⁴ Two miniature jars inscribed ΛΥΚΙΟΝ were found at Tel Dor.⁴⁵

In the light of the examples from Morgantina and Priene we may conclude that our miniature vessels served as containers for an ointment, either lykion or something similar. It appears that we have here a special functional group of vases, whose distinctive shape was known and indicated that they contained a medical ointment.

It is noteworthy that all these vessels come from occupational strata, indicating that they were in household use. They are mostly from sites with Hellenistic–Greek connections.

³⁹ Sjöqvist (above, n. 3).

⁴⁰ A substantial number of miniature jars stamped ΛΥΚΙΟΝ have been found at Priene; T. Wiegand and H. Schrader: *Priene*, Berlin, 1904, p. 54, Fig. 542.

⁴¹ Sjöqvist (above, n. 3), p. 82.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ E.M. Meyers: Preliminary Report on the 1977 and 1978 Seasons at Gush Halav (el-Jish), *BASOR* (1979), p. 56, Fig. 21b IDAM No. 80–411.

⁴⁴ Wiegand and Schrader (above, n. 40), Fig. 543:96.

⁴⁵ These unpublished vessels are different in shape from those under discussion here. They may be an oriental variant of the lykion jar, similar to one found in Beirut; Y. Calvet: *Pharmacopée: un pot de Lykion de Beyrouth*, in *Archéologie au Levant, Recueil R. Saldah*, Lyon, 1982, pp. 281–286, Fig. 10. Wiegand and Schrader (above, n. 40), Figs. 543, 547.

MINIATURE OINTMENT VASES

The vessels were probably imported from the third century B.C.E. on, continuing into the first century C.E. It is possible that a centre of manufacture was in Lycia, perhaps at Tarsus. Local imitations were apparently manufactured at Samaria, Tel Anafa and Jaffa.⁴⁶ The small cups (Type D) are probably also to be explained in this way, and may have served as containers for a local ointment, possibly balsam.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Neutron activation analysis may be able to confirm this hypothesis.

⁴⁷ The existence of locally produced balsam ointment is attested by the Talmud; *Shabbat Berakhot*, 43a. In the second half of the first century B.C.E. miniature bottles occur with the miniature discussed here. These bottles with long, narrow cylindrical necks, which have been found at many Second Temple period sites, are perfume containers.