

Phoenician Bathing in the Hellenistic East: Ashkelon and Beyond

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Excavations of a Hellenistic neighborhood at Ashkelon revealed a suite of heavily plastered rooms, one with a mosaic floor, decorated in Greek Masonry Style. These rooms resemble the bathing suite identified in an elite 2nd-century residence at Tel Anafa and likely reflect a Phoenician style of “cleansing bathing” documented at Phoenician sites from the 4th through 2nd centuries B.C. Such suites differ in character, bathing type, and placement from Greek public and private baths in the Mediterranean and Levant, as well as from ritual baths in the Judean tradition. The bathing suites appear at Phoenician and Phoenician-influenced sites in Israel during the Persian and Hellenistic periods but are presently under-recognized. This article presents a set of criteria by which to understand and identify Phoenician bathing suites and argues that the preference for this bathing style may, in part, explain why immersion bathing—popular in the western Mediterranean—failed to catch on in the Hellenistic East until the era of Roman control.

Keywords: Ashkelon; Hellenistic; Phoenician; Punic; bathing; baths; Hellenization; Persian Levant; Anafa

In 1989, during excavations of a 2nd-century Hellenistic neighborhood, the Leon Levy Expedition uncovered an unusual set of stuccoed rooms built into the northwestern corner of an insula (Building 65). The smallest and most intact of these was originally identified as a private cistern (Stager, Schloen, and Master 2008: 287–91), an unsatisfying explanation given the fact that coastal aquifers supplied the city’s numerous wells so reliably that such cisterns were unnecessary in any period of Ashkelon’s ancient history. The original hypothesis is now further undermined by the proper attribution of numerous painted plaster fragments to the upper walls of these rooms, pieces originally presumed to have collapsed from an upper story. I argue that the stuccoed rooms are best understood as part of a suite, arranged in a recognizable template and indicative of a Phoenician cultural practice that has been often overlooked in the Levant. As such, these spaces have a broader significance for our understanding of the interaction between Phoenician and Hellenizing cultural spheres during the Persian and Hellenistic periods in Israel. The study that follows first offers a new interpretation of these rooms, considering

their immediate archaeological and architectural context, and then presents parallels within and beyond Israel that speak to the establishment of a lasting cultural trend.

Grid 38: The Hellenistic Neighborhood

Grid 38, an area situated on the northern slope of Ashkelon’s southern tell, was one of four Hellenistic neighborhoods excavated at the site (Fig. 1). Each had been constructed on an insular plan established at the beginning of the 5th century B.C., when after nearly a century of abandonment, the city was revitalized under Phoenician control granted by the Persian king. The essential layout and orthogonal axis of these neighborhoods remained unchanged throughout the Persian and Hellenistic periods, although the buildings’ contents and decoration shifted to reflect prevailing trends of the time.

Central to Grid 38 were two insulae: Building 541 and Building 65. Building 65 was a large insula (over 15 × 20 m)¹ oriented to the generally orthogonal axis of the city’s streets; 12 of its rooms were excavated (Fig. 2). It was separated from Building 541 to its north by a narrow east–west street and was flanked on the west by a north–

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¹ Its full parameters are unknown, its eastern (and portions of its southern) rooms having been lost to Roman building activity.

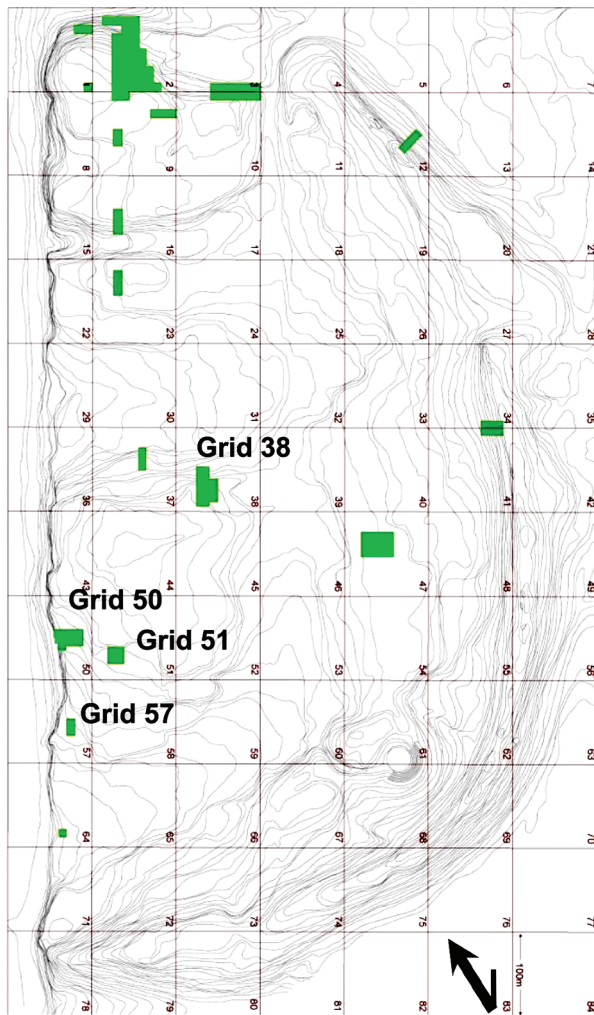


Fig. 1. Ashkelon site plan showing excavated areas, including the four Hellenistic neighborhoods on the south tell (Grids 38, 50, 51, and 57). (Drawing by the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon)

south street of uncertain width. Both insulae were rebuilt in the middle of the 3rd century following a brief period of abandonment and, barring some minor refurbishment, continued unchanged until the third quarter of the 2nd century B.C.² During this phase (site-wide Stratum VIIB), Grid 38 emerged as a relatively wealthy neighborhood, at least in relation to the three other neighborhoods (Grids 50, 51, 57) excavated in the south of the city. In Building 65, thickly plastered or paved surfaces now replaced earlier beaten earth surfaces in many rooms. Decorative

² The chronological horizon is suggested by the presence of Brindisian and Rhodian stamped amphorae dating to the last third of the 2nd century in the backfill of the stuccoed rooms and confirmed by the appearance of coins of Antiochus VII (132/1) in subfloor fills for the subsequent phase.

elements, too—a first for the site—were introduced throughout the residences: Painted plaster fragments and stucco³ fragments with architectural molding were found in fills above the floors in at least six rooms. Despite the addition of paving or painted ornament, however, the essential structure of the insula remained unchanged from the previous phase. The layout of the insula is comparable to Hellenistic insulae known from Dor, Kerkouane and Carthage in Tunisia, and other sites that show marked Phoenician cultural influence (see Birney in press). There are no indications of *pastas*, peristyles, or large-scale architectural elements typical of Greek house construction familiar from Delos or Olynthus.

Beyond these aesthetic additions, Rhodian, Kouriotie, and Brindisian amphorae demonstrate an interest in foreign wine, and finds of jewelry and nearly 50 coins—most of which were concentrated in the decorated rooms of Building 65—mark the neighborhood's relative prosperity. Indeed, over two-thirds of the site's total assemblage of Hellenistic coins were recovered from the Stratum VIIB residences here, and the quantity and diversity of fine imported tablewares and amphorae are likewise unparalleled in each of the three other excavated neighborhoods of the site.⁴

*Building 65 and the Stuccoed Rooms*⁵

Building 65 housed the suite of stuccoed rooms, which are my focus here. The remains of this insula had been damaged by a combination of later Roman and Byzantine construction activities and extensive Fatimid–Crusader-period robbing. With the exception of the northwest

³ I am presuming a distinction here between painted plaster (formed using lime or gypsum as a binder together with sand aggregate), which could be applied in coats to the wall surface, and molded stucco, which would be shaped while wet. While both use lime and sand as their base, stucco includes additional binders for greater structural stability—additives ranging in antiquity from Nile mud to fig juice—which created a better substrate for shaping and molding (Milner 1976: 180–81). From visual inspection, the molded pieces from Building 65 did not appear to contain additives other than sand and lime and are thus not visually distinct from the painted plaster segments, but this was not chemically ascertained.

⁴ For a discussion of coin distribution in neighborhoods across the site, see Birney 2015: fig. 3, and attendant discussion. Tablewares will be discussed in the author's forthcoming Hellenistic site report.

⁵ I note from the outset that the archaeological record here is incomplete, as is so often the case when working through unpublished remains from older excavations. The building itself was heavily damaged by later construction activities, the excavation records often limited, and some original material damaged or lost while in storage. The work makes extensive use of a combination of photographs, registrars' descriptions, and detailed field notebooks. As such, my reconstruction here will be, as always, the best that can be offered on the basis of the available data, with the hope that once made generally available, it will open new avenues for interpretation.

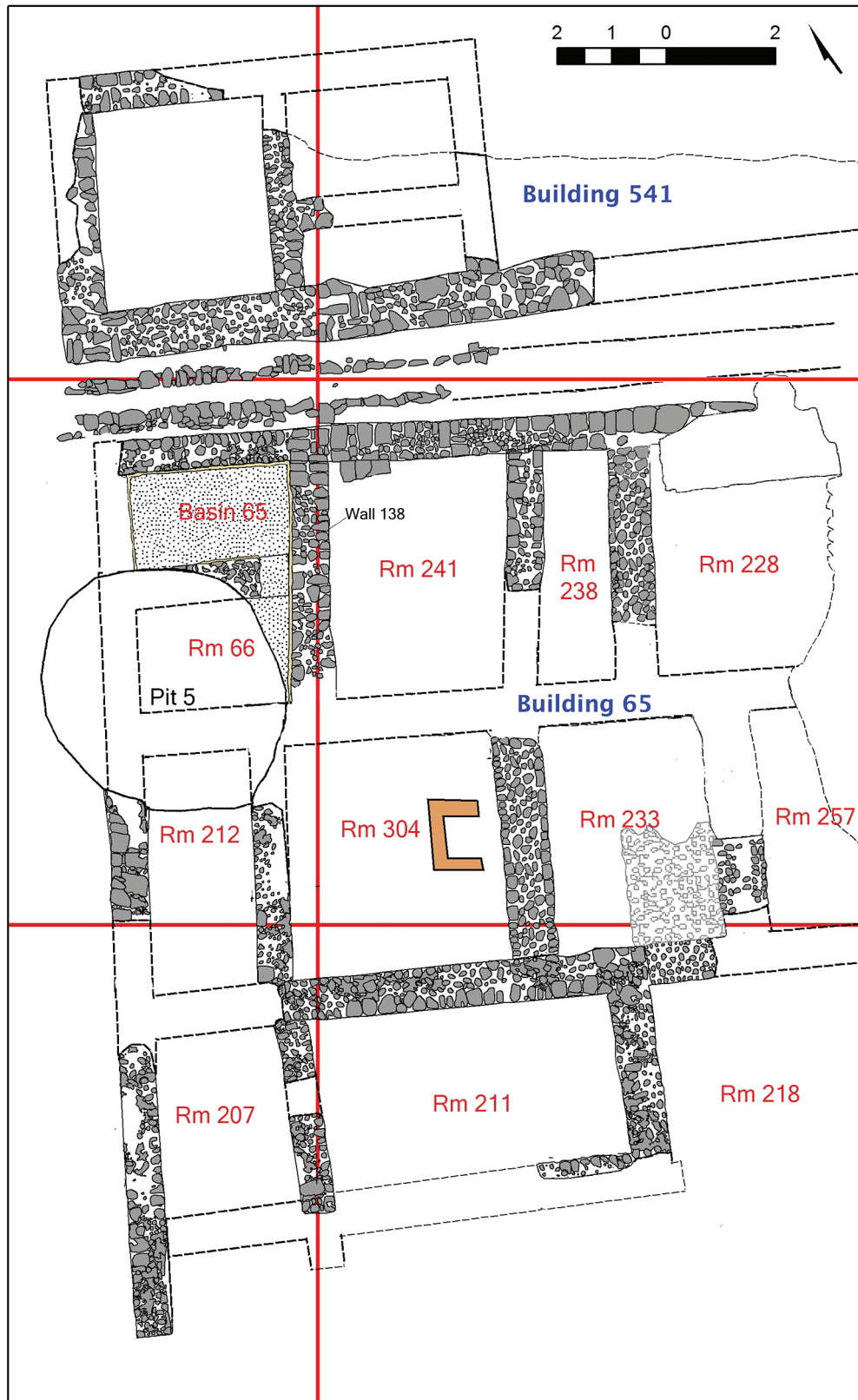


Fig. 2. Building 65 in Grid 38, Phase 9, at Ashkelon. (Drawing by J. Finley; courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon)



Fig. 3. Basin 65 and the northeast corner of Room 66, view to the north. (Photo by T. Smith)

corner, no superstructure was preserved; as such, communication between rooms was difficult to discern except in a few instances. These limitations notwithstanding, it is possible to reconstruct the general layout of the building and the position of the stuccoed rooms in relation to its larger syntax.

The entrance to Building 65 was on the north side through Room 241, where two stone steps marked the position of the door. Room 241 was originally paved with flagstones and gave access to a small open area or courtyard (Room 304) with a square hearth. This small courtyard may have functioned together with Room 212 to its west as a kitchen, as both contained a number of cooking vessels, and also in conjunction with a paved Room 233 to the east. The northeast corner of the building was occupied by a group of three rooms with painted decoration (Rooms 228, 238, 257),⁶ each of which also preserved trace evidence of thinly plastered floors. Few remains were recovered from the southernmost row of rooms (Rooms 207, 211, 218), although the presence of two complete storage amphorae suggests the possibility of a more utilitarian function.

The stuccoed rooms were built along the northwest edge of the building. A long plastered room 3.3 m wide

and at least 4 m long occupied the corner and had been separated into two areas by a plastered east–west partition wall, most of which had been robbed out by a massive Fatimid-period pit (Pit 5). Only a few rows of cobble foundation remained on the eastern end of this partition wall, and the plaster that had lined its northern face remained standing, unsupported, nearly 40 cm high—even with the wall behind it having been robbed away. The resulting division separated the space into a heavily plastered basin 3.3 m wide × 1.75 m long on the north side (Basin 65), and a second plastered room (Room 66) of equal width and at least 3 m long—and likely longer—north–south.⁷ The two spaces were connected by a doorway 70 cm wide, which was spanned by a plastered curb 20–30 cm wide (Figs. 2, 3). The floor of Basin 65 sloped down from northeast to southwest to a shallow settling point some 20 cm lower on its western end. This may originally have been connected to a drainage feature now missing due to the cut of the Fatimid pit, or could simply have drained into the adjacent street to the west.

Far from a superficial coating, the plaster lining on the bottom of Basin 65 was substantially supported by a series of bedding layers: first an original layer of fine-grained plaster, followed by a layer of fist-sized cobbles, over which several centimeters of grittier white plaster, dense with sand and especially shell inclusions, was set down. This gritty, shell-tempered plaster was preserved also on three

⁶ Field notes describe fragments of painted plaster recovered from above the floors in these rooms and also mention faint traces of plaster along the interior walls suggestive of original placement. The pieces included red- and white-painted fragments and at least one architectural fragment of an arch molding painted pink and yellow. Unfortunately, none was preserved for later study.

⁷ Room 66 must have been at least twice as long as the basin room, given that the standing plaster on the western face of Wall 138 continued for at least 3 m to the south.



Fig. 4. Painted stucco fragments from inside Basin 65 (reg. no. 25516). (Photo by T. Smith)

of the four standing walls of the basin; on the northern wall it was preserved up to 1.3 m in height. The application of such shell-dense plaster to the floor as well as to the lower portions of the basin walls suggests a hydraulic, rather than merely decorative, function. Above these, the uppermost layer was a fine coat of smooth, fine-grained plaster, which was preserved only partially around the edges of the basin and on the lower walls.

In the adjacent Room 66 to the south, only a small section of subflooring was preserved in the northeastern corner of the room. It sloped south away from the plastered threshold in the doorway connected to Basin 65. What remained was only cursorily described in the field notebooks, but the subflooring appears to have consisted of several centimeters of dense, gritty plaster with an upper layer of fine plaster.⁸ A clump of white mosaic tesserae, still adhering to this gritty plaster backing, was discovered in the fill immediately above this floor and suggests that Room 66 had originally been paved with a simple mosaic. It is possible that Basin 65 also had mosaic flooring, which might explain why its upper surface had been cut away.

At the end of Phase VIIB, Basin 65 was backfilled with nearly a meter of rock-filled debris. While the extant plaster preserved on the lowest portions of the wall in Room 66 showed no clear signs of being painted, nearly 400 fragments of painted plaster were recovered from the debris layers, most of which clustered in the lowest level of the fill at the bottom of the plaster-lined basin (and some directly face-down on the basin flooring). These were brightly painted in reds and yellows, and a few molded stucco fragments showing incised curved lines were found among them (Fig. 4; Table 1; see below). That

TABLE 1. Description of the Painted Fragments from the Ashkelon Excavation Records

<i>Reg. No.</i>	<i>Description</i>
25922	10 pieces, with yellow and red paint, red band (unpainted pieces discarded)
25850	Corner section
26016	8 pieces, 1 pink, 5 yellow, 1 with red line
25579	Wall plaster in quantity, some pieces with red paint and carved line molding
25494	20 pieces, medium grain, shell-rich finished surface with ocher paint, red line with panel molding
24592	21 pieces, medium grain, finished surface with white and dark yellow paint, panel molding, fragment of line drawing
25753	1 piece, orange-yellow
25547	Medium grain, panel molding with yellow paint, red painted band (3 joining pieces)
25532	11 pieces, large flat piece, light orange paint, panel molding with red line
25493	95 pieces, fine grain, yellow and dark red paint, panel molding with red lines, corner piece with curved surface
25489	75 pieces, medium grain, shell-rich, yellow with red lines, panel molding
25583	Wall plaster in quantity, red paint and line designs
25582	Wall plaster in quantity, red paint and line designs
25581	Wall plaster in quantity, some red paint, carved line design designs
25580	Wall plaster in quantity, some pieces with red paint and panel molding
25577	Wall plaster in quantity, pieces with carved line molding
25516*	5 large pieces, 4 with red paint, 1 with white paint, medium grain on sandstone matrix
25347*	Plaster wall section, 2 pieces with red paint
25488	50+ pieces; medium grain; yellow, red, and green paint; panel molding
25494	Corner of smooth-surfaced plaster, light ocher paint, 1.5 cm thick
25490	35 pieces, medium grain, yellow and orange paint, panel molding
25258	3 pieces, 2 with red and white paint, 1 of which has carved line, 1 with red paint

* Starred entries are those that were photographed.

the painted fragments were recovered only from the lowest portions of the fill layer—in some cases on the floor of the basin itself—speaks against their having fallen from an upper story of the building. It seems instead that the walls above the basin were well decorated. The resulting picture is that of a heavily waterproofed basin with richly decorated walls and an adjacent mosaic-tiled anteroom.

Reconstructing the Painted Stucco

Of the more than 400 painted fragments found in the backfill of the basin, virtually all have, unfortunately, been

⁸ The nature of the binding agent (sand or shell) was not specified.

lost.⁹ Only two photos—representing five pieces—were taken, and these photographs are of fragments recovered not from the basin floor but rather from the upper levels of the fill above (see **Fig. 4**). Hope is not lost, however. Textual descriptions of both individual painted pieces and groups of fragments were recorded by the registrars, which, when coupled with the highly detailed excavation notes and few photographs, allow for a meaningful reconstruction (see **Table 1**). From this limited data set, we can establish the following patterns:

1. The paint was applied to fine-grained plaster that was itself a coating over a denser base layer tempered with either shell or sand. The field notes specify that the plaster preserved on the lower walls of the basin was tempered with shell, perhaps to enhance its hydraulic qualities. Thus, fragments characterized as painted on “medium-grain shell-rich” plaster were likely from lower down on the wall within the basin, while those painted on plaster described as “medium grain on sandstone matrix” may have come from higher up on the wall.¹⁰
2. The painted fragments depict large, monochromatic, rectangular or square panels in red, yellow, and white, variously demarcated by painted lines or molded features to make each panel visually distinct from the ones adjacent. White and yellow panels were framed by painted red lines. Other panels (usually red or yellow) are described as having “paneled moldings.”¹¹ Molded beveled panel edges are also visible among the extant fragments.
3. A number of red pieces show signs of rubbing or bur-nishing.
4. There were a number of molded stucco fragments described with carved line moldings, including one corner piece. The descriptions suggest architectural moldings, even conceivably part of a base or cornice molding.
5. A handful of fragments were painted with pink, orange, or green paint. At least one had a “fragment of a line drawing.” The use of the term “line drawing” here may indicate something more detailed than the simple borders between panels, such as a decorative

frieze, although whether figural or geometric we cannot say.

From these descriptions, we can reconstruct that the fragments recovered from the collapse in Basin 65 were painted in a manner recognizable as Masonry Style, a Greek¹² decorative scheme of painted rectangular panels that mimics construction of drafted stone, best known from Delos and Alexandria but also well attested in the Levant.¹³ Such schemes were characterized by a lower plinth, often painted red, above which was a row of tall orthostats. A narrow banded frieze then followed,¹⁴ often flanked by string courses with geometric motifs, and was superseded by alternating rows of rectangular panels, horizontally arranged (Westgate 2000: 402–4). Some friezes were also designed with metopes, the panels of which were distinguished by different color-painted backgrounds, either with or without a painted margin in between.¹⁵ Incised lines or modeled relief bands separated the panels to create the impression of drafted blocks, and margins in between were occasionally painted different colors.

Applying the conventions of Masonry Style painting as a guide, we can reconstruct the following limited picture of the wall painting in Basin 65, beginning from the bottom of the walls. There was no plinth and no clear evidence for orthostats; the wall plaster continued down to floor level, though with shell-tempered hydraulic plaster. This hydraulic plaster may have been left completely white; however, hints of reddish coloring are visible in one of the photos beginning roughly 20 cm above the floor level (see **Fig. 3**). Rather than compromising the hydraulic plaster with molded ridges, it is possible that the upper portion of the basin may have simply been painted directly with alternating red and white painted panels.¹⁶ Above the level of the hydraulic plaster (which, from the extant standing plaster, continued to at least 1.3 m in height), the upper walls of the basin room were likely painted with alternating rows of red, white, and

⁹ The material was stored in the excavation’s warehouse but was destroyed in a violent break-in that resulted in the theft and damage of a number of objects.

¹⁰ The use of sand-rich plaster as a binding agent in preparation for the smoother painted coat is familiar from Vitruvius’s treatise (*De Arch.* 7.2–3) but is also documented in Hellenistic contexts and seems to be a convenient local stand-in for the marble dust or crushed terra-cotta often used in hydraulic plasters (Kakoulli 2002: 59).

¹¹ It is unclear whether this describes a raised rectangle within a larger rectangle or raised molded edges, in which case these edges may also have been painted.

¹² It is interesting to note that fragments of First Style wall painting were apparently recovered from sealed late 4th-century contexts at Carthage (Tang 2005: 199). It may be that the presumption of a “Greek” origin for Masonry Style wall painting is worth reexamining.

¹³ See discussion below and n. 38.

¹⁴ Alternatively, the frieze can also appear above the rectangular panels.

¹⁵ Similar to, e.g., examples from the frieze of the actors from La Maison des Comédiens (Bruno 1985: 22–23, pls. IV, V).

¹⁶ Note, e.g., on the right side of the northern wall, an area roughly 20 cm above the floor that appears to show a (very faded) red horizontal band several centimeters wide, mimicking a raised paneled edge. This practice has parallels at Delos, where the lower walls of baths and latrines were lined with thick plaster made with crushed ceramic aggregate and were often painted red (Westgate 2007: 314).

yellow rectangular panels, often using red lines as a painted border. Some of these panels had molded edges or molded raised centers, and some were burnished with irregularly placed parallel lines. This burnishing might simply indicate a systematic smoothing of the paint when the panel had been completed (but before it had dried); however, so-called Alexandrian variants of Masonry Style panels sought to imitate marble or valuable stone through stippling or “veining” (Rozenberger 2009: 250; see also Eristov 2005; 2015). From our few photographs, the lines on the Ashkelon panels are not detailed enough to convey an intent to imitate specific stone types, but the process served to add visual texture to the otherwise monochromatic surfaces and should likely be seen in the same vein.¹⁷

The small minority of fragments decorated with green and pink paint and those with “linear designs” may reflect a narrow decorative frieze or part of the geometric “string courses” which often flanked such friezes. Unlike red and yellow paint, which could be produced cheaply and applied easily (produced from iron oxides which were readily obtainable and could be mixed while on site), pinks and especially greens required more care in preparation. Green pigment, in particular, was rarer and could be very expensive if produced from malachite, although cheaper alternatives, such as green chalk, celadonite, or copper oxide, could also be substituted (Kidd 1999–2001: 9; 2015: 84). Because of its greater cost, green paint tended to be used in more limited quantities and in smaller areas of decoration, as its more limited applications at Delos and Olynthus suggest.¹⁸ While their precise position on the wall could vary, frieze courses tended to run between the rectangular panels and the orthostats. At the top, the few pieces with molded carved lines were likely architectural stucco, perhaps of the sort that could have decorated a cornice.

Function

The two plaster-lined spaces (Basin 65 and Room 66) were identified by the original excavators as a cistern, an interpretation that is problematic for a number of reasons. First, in 30 years of excavation, no private cis-

terns have ever been excavated at Ashkelon. The coastal aquifer made potable water easily accessible through numerous wells, which are attested in every period in virtually every area of the site (Koucky 2008: 13–15; Lass 2008). These included both large public wells—situated in open areas or along streets—and smaller private wells set into house courtyards. While the availability of fresh water does not preclude the possibility of private water storage, particularly in elite houses, there are no parallels for lined cisterns within a residence in any period at the site. The only cistern ever excavated at Ashkelon is a large bell-shaped public/neighborhood cistern from Grid 47, built during the Fatimid period. William of Tyre, writing in the 12th century A.D., described Ashkelon as a well-watered city (i.e., watered by wells) and explains that public cisterns built for the collection of rainwater were only a backup system for the otherwise plentiful supply from wells.¹⁹ A second obvious difficulty with the identification of these two conjoined rooms as a cistern lies in the size of the connecting doorway which is at least 70 cm wide. Small channels might reasonably serve to connect chambers of differing elevations to facilitate drainage from a source into a collecting pool, but a large channel such as this would offer no obvious benefit and would actually make the water level lower and less accessible for residents.

I propose instead that these adjoining rooms were part of a private bathing suite of at least two rooms, consisting here of a mosaic-tiled dressing space (Room 66) and an adjacent basin (Basin 65) for washing, which itself may originally have been tiled by mosaics. Indeed, this precise arrangement of partially open bathing area with conjoined anteroom has a close and contemporary parallel in a lavish residential complex at Tel Anafa (East Wing, Rooms 15–17 [Herbert 1994: 62–70] [Fig. 5]).

At Anafa, an anteroom off of the court (Room 17) paved with an *opus tessellatum* mosaic led into the main bathing room (Room 16) tiled with a black-and-white *opus signinum* mosaic.²⁰ Here, a heavily plastered basin measuring 3.2 × 2 m had been built against the south wall and separated from the *opus signinum* floor by a low, plastered partition wall. As at Ashkelon, the thick plaster that served as the basin floor was multilayered, with

¹⁷ Burnishing as a method of texturizing painted plaster has been recognized at other Hellenistic sites, such as Kallithea Kastro. (This has not yet been fully published, but photographs and descriptions of the plaster appear in an excavation blog [https://ualbertaclassics.wordpress.com/2014/06/13/wall-plaster-in-hellenistic-thessaly]).

¹⁸ Green paint was apparently used in larger quantities in geometric decoration in the 2nd century at Tel Anafa (to paint a series of lozenges and also the cyma over stuccoed columns); however, Benton Kidd’s analysis showed that this green pigment was produced using the less expensive copper oxide (1999–2001: 9).

¹⁹ “Wells, both without and within the city, furnish an abundant supply of fresh water fit for drinking. As a further precaution, the citizens had constructed within the town cisterns to receive the rain water” (William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea* 17.24; translation from Babcock and Krey 1943: 282).

²⁰ *Opus tessellatum*: a tessellated surface that can be made of regular or oblong tesserae, generally averaging more than 0.4 cm in size. *Opus signinum*: a surface created by the setting of crushed terra-cotta pieces set into a cement or plaster matrix (Tang 2005; Bruneau 1972: 32; Tsakirgis 1990: 425).

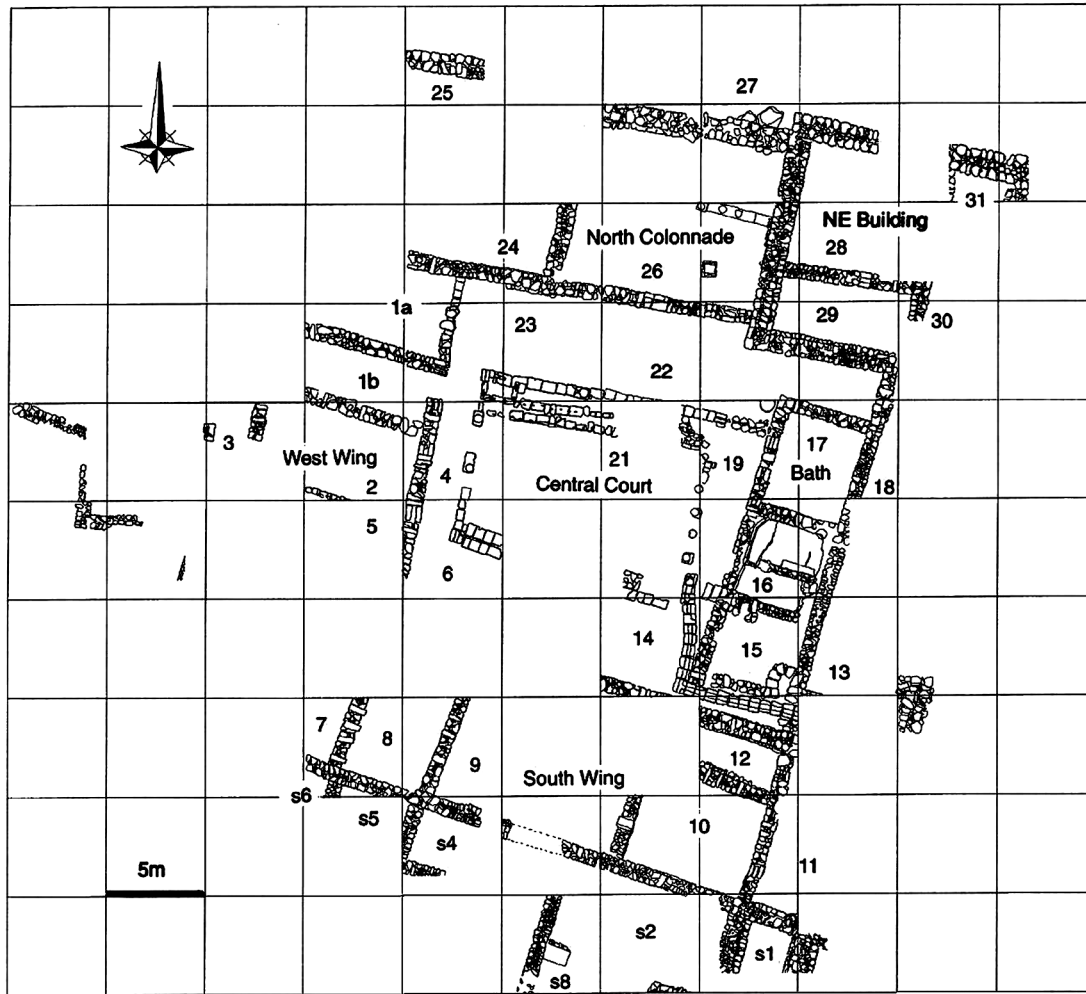


Fig. 5. Late 2nd- to 1st-century B.C. elite residence with bath complex at Tel Anafa. The basin is Room 16, with connected anteroom to the north (Herbert 1994: fig. 2.6).

a smooth plaster at the top, a coarser plaster tempered with brick chunks and pebbles underneath, set over a bed of cobbles, which itself was set on a base layer of smooth plaster. A similar pattern of layered plaster was used to bed the adjacent mosaic floor, with the exception that here the coarse layer of plaster was also described as sandy (Herbert 1994: 67). Painted decoration in the Masonry Style and molded stucco architectural details (including engaged Corinthian capitals and engaged columns) adorned the upper walls of both the basin and adjoining anteroom (Kidd 1999–2001) (Fig. 6).

The size of the basin room and the materials used to create the crude form of hydraulic plastering described at Anafa are virtually identical to those of the basin at Ashkelon (Herbert 1994: 68). Painted decoration adorning the walls above and the presence of mosaic just outside

the basin, perhaps as a dressing area, also underscore the similarities between these spaces. At Anafa, a drain was set into the lower level of the basin, and a drainage channel—which Sharon Herbert notes may have been added later—ran alongside the long edge of the basin. At Ashkelon, the sloping of the floors clearly indicates that drainage—even if the most rudimentary sort—was a concern for the builders. The tremendous density of the plaster on the basin floor at both sites was obviously designed to accommodate liquid and most probably to facilitate the use of these basins as spaces for a standing “cleansing bath,” as initially suggested by Herbert for Anafa.

Ashkelon diverges from Anafa in the absence of a hypocaust system: Herbert describes “rudimentary hypocausts” formed by cutting channels into mud-brick

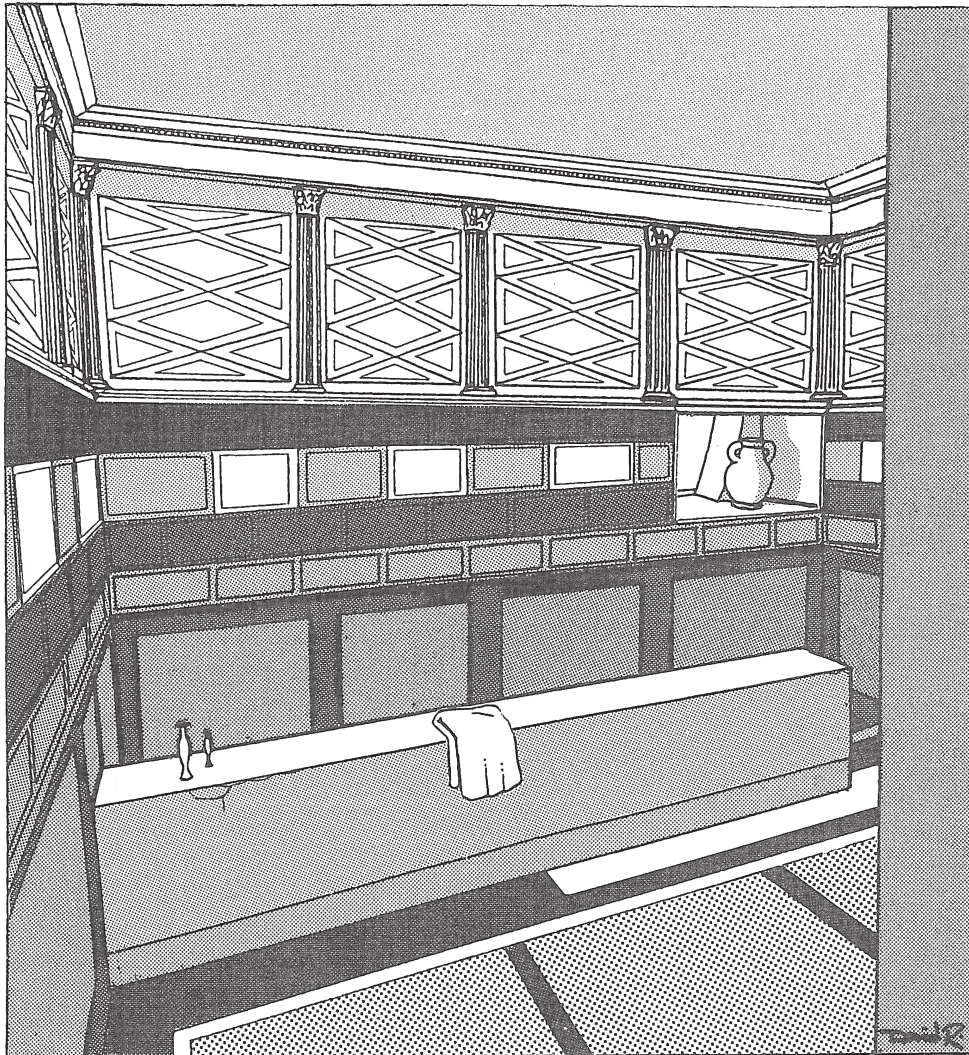


Fig. 6. Reconstruction of the basin room at Tel Anafa, based on Robert Gordon's restoration (Herbert 1994: fig. 2.14).

flooring which ran underneath these rooms. These channels connected to a furnace in the kitchen area (Room 15) adjacent to the basin and were used to carry heat under the floors of both the mosaic-tiled room and the mosaic-tiled anteroom (Room 17) (Herbert 1994: 70). Although extremely shallow, the Anafa basin may have been heated by both the hypocaust channels and the tannur that was built into the opposite side of the basin wall in the adjacent kitchen. By contrast, the basin at Ashkelon was cut down into earlier floors, and no channels were noted.²¹ It is clear that here the owner simply adapted an existing *insula* structure—including making use of standing

²¹ In any event, such a system under Room 66 would largely have been removed by the digging of Pit 5.

walls—to accommodate the bathing spaces. Under such conditions, the construction of either an elaborate drainage or hypocaust system would have been very difficult. As Monika Trümper notes with regard to building practices at Delos, “[i]n some cases richly decorated rooms were installed wherever possible, following the maxim ‘better an unfavourably positioned luxurious room than none at all’” (2007: 330).

It should be stressed, however, that while the heated space must have made for a pleasant bathing experience, the basin at Anafa was not an immersion tub but rather a place “for the bather to stand and have water poured” (Herbert 1994: 68). There, as at Ashkelon, the facilities were designed for cleansing bathing or “standing washes” in which (presumably heated) water was brought to the

rooms, rather than prolonged immersion, which was the Greek custom (see below). For cleansing bathing, the presence of heating elements is therefore a nicety but not essential to the practice.

Phoenician Parallels

Parallels and precedents for cleansing bathing suites, such as those at Ashkelon and Anafa, can be found at Phoenician sites, although they occur also in sites with strong Phoenician influence or likely Phoenician occupation. Some of the earliest and most numerous parallels occur in late 4th/early 3rd-century houses at Kerkouane on the Tunisian coast (Fantar 1984).²² They are regular features in 4th- to 2nd-century houses in the Phoenicio-Punic settlements at Selunte and Motya²³ and occur also in 5th- and 2nd-century houses at Carthage (Telmini et al. 2014: 123; Tang 2005).²⁴ As a full and detailed survey lies beyond the scope of this article, in the limited space available, I focus on the Tunisian examples, as they offer some of the earliest and best examples of the practice.

Some 96% of private houses at Kerkouane were equipped with cleansing baths (Trümper 2010: 545). These occurred both in elaborate houses as well as in small residential buildings of more limited means, as in the four-room “linear house” at No. 9 Rue de l’Apotropaion. Most of the bathing suites were small rooms readily accessible from the front entrance of

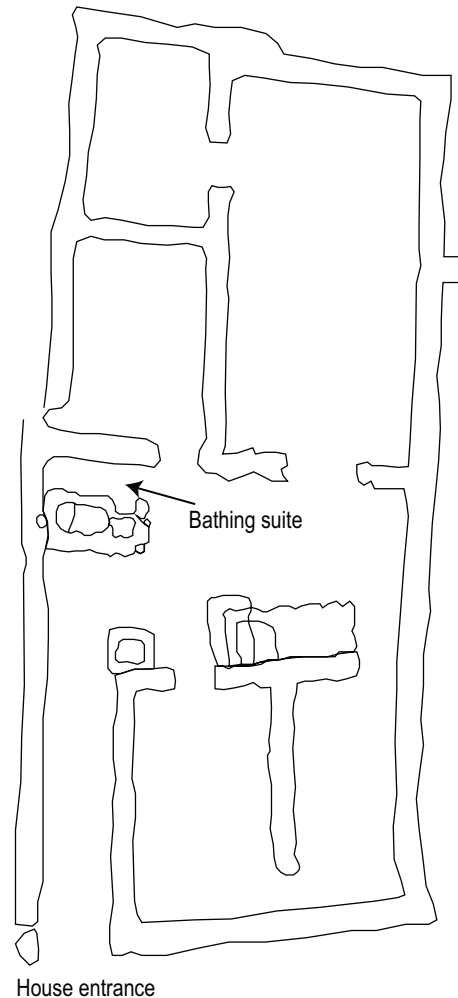


Fig. 7. The bathing suite opposite the entrance in a house at Kerkouane, No. 4 Rue de l’Apotropaion (after Fantar 1998: 40, plan 1).

²² Kerkouane: M’hamed Fantar suggests that these buildings belong to the window between the invasion of Agathocles in 310 and the destruction of the city in the mid-3rd century B.C. (1984: 69). Carthage: The best preserved examples are from Insulae C and E, constructed at the beginning of the 2nd century (Tang 2005: 75).

²³ For a discussion of the Sicilian examples, see Ortega 2007: 109–11.

²⁴ In addition to the Kerkouane parallels, Herbert (1994: 68) also pointed to private baths at Monte Iato (Room 21 in the Punic Peristyl Haus 1) and at Ai Khanoum (Bernard 1972; 1974: 283–84; 1976: 312) as possible parallels for the Anafa baths. While these do share some common features of the type established here, they differ in essential ways. The bath at Monte Iato, e.g., is designed for heated immersion bathing typical of western Mediterranean practice rather than the cleansing bathing described here (Trümper 2010: 551; Isler 1990: 57). The mid-late 2nd-century baths at Ai Khanoum actually reflect at least two different types of bathing. The room identified as a bath in the private house northwest of the main sanctuary (2.14–2.16) was fitted out in a manner similar to heated baths at Delos. It was third in a connected row of rooms, a paved space “equipped with a bath and a fireplace,” set adjacent to multipurpose/functional rooms, rather than to reception spaces (Martinez-Sève 2014: figs. 5, 11). The placement and design of the bathing suite in the palace and the Extramural Residence, by contrast, are consistent with elements of the Anafa complex: two paved rooms with drainage, decorated with red stucco, with adjacent dressing room, in association with the reception space (Bernard 1974: 283–87). The latter suite has been—I believe erroneously—described as “Greek” (Martinez-Sève 2014: 276).

the house and adjacent to courtyard space. The suites consisted of a basin or tub averaging 1.2 × 2 m (a size equivalent to that of the Anafa and Ashkelon basins) and small dressing or changing space immediately adjacent. Tubs could be carved from stone (e.g., Habitation 12), but more common were built-up basins constructed by setting plastered walls down onto a water-tight floor. One such example is evident in Habitation 4 on the Rue de l’Apotropaion (Fig. 7), where a small plastered basin with a seat was constructed inside a room accessed from the courtyard, opposite the building entrance. The basin was constructed over an *opus signinum*-style floor (Fantar 1984: 100–101), thus separating the room into bathing and paved dressing areas. There was no clear system to drain water from the tub, although there was a lead pipe that could be used to fill it from an adjacent sink raised

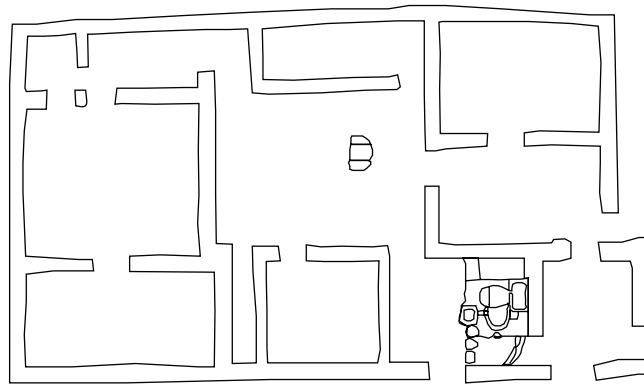


Fig. 8. House with bathing suite adjacent to entrance at Kerkouane: Habitation 1, Rue du Sphinx (after Fantar 1987: fig. 84).

above the level of the tub. Despite occasional variations (including rudimentary drainage channels and the rare two-seater basins),²⁵ the core elements of the Kerkouane suites—unheated and plastered basins with adjacent dressing spaces in proximity to entrances and courtyards—remained constant.

Similar features were evident at Carthage nearly a century later.²⁶ Here, bathing spaces were identified in several houses, the best preserved of which were in the Hannibal Quarter, a neighborhood of residential *insulae* constructed in the 2nd century B.C. on the southeast slope of the Byrsa. The Carthage baths tended to be small tiled rooms rather than built basins, but their design and placement in proximity to the building entrances were consistent with those at Kerkouane. The paved “shower bath” in CarH8 sat immediately opposite the entrance hallway (Fig. 9) and was proximate to the courtyard. The bathing room itself was roughly 1.3×1.9 m (Fantar 1987: 138, fig. 95), with plastered walls and paved in *opus tessellatum*, and was separated from the entrance corridor by a threshold paved with *opus figlinum* (Fig. 10).²⁷ A slightly smaller basin (roughly 1.6×1.1 m) was placed immediately next to the vestibule of CarH13. Both spaces were described as having drains and vertical supply pipes. Two additional bathing suites, each consisting of equally sized mosaic-tiled bathing rooms and anteroom (ca. 2.2

$\times 1.2$ m each),²⁸ were noted in houses to the southeast of the Hannibal Quarter in Car4 and Car5 (Fig. 11), again immediately accessible from the entrance and courtyard (Tang 2005: 82).

Although they exhibit some variations in construction, the bathing suites at Kerkouane and Carthage express a common practice. It is notable that none had hypocausts, and only the rare few had heating systems in association with the baths. This, coupled with the rudimentary drainage systems, demonstrates that these were facilities for cleansing bathing (shower baths or poured baths) rather than “relaxing” immersion baths.²⁹ As such, they would have relied either upon a steady supply of water fetched by servants (who might have stood in the adjacent changing space to pour fresh water over bathers) or small quantities of water provided through the vertical piping, as attested at Carthage.

Their most essential shared feature, and that which most influences our understanding of their function, is their placement. The Carthage and Kerkouane bathing areas are meaningfully placed in close proximity to entrances and courtyard spaces, a pattern that suggests that cleansing bathing was a standard part of the reception practice in these Phoenician cities. The mosaic floors (including *opus tessellatum*) and artfully constructed mosaic thresholds of the bathing rooms likewise suggest spaces that were designed to be appreciated by entering visitors and clearly differentiate the bathing suites from the more prosaic utility spaces of the house.³⁰ It is important to

²⁵ See, e.g., Habitations 10 and 12 on the Rue de l'Apotropaion, and Habitation 1 (with a two-seater tub!) on the Rue du Sphinx (Fantar 1987: 100, 126–28, 148, 152) (Fig. 8).

²⁶ A poorly preserved basin with a bench, both plastered with gray hydraulic mortar, was documented in a late 5th-century house in an elite neighborhood in the Bir Massouda (Chelbi, Maraoui Telmini, and Docter 2006: 217). The 2nd-century examples from Carthage are better preserved and offer clearer parallels for the Ashkelon bath and are the focus here.

²⁷ *Opus figlinum*: a tessellated surface made using terra-cotta tesserae (Tang 2005).

²⁸ Dimensions extrapolated from the building plan presented in Tang 2005: 78, fig. 5.

²⁹ Cf. Trümper 2010: 532, also supported in Tang 2005: 8.

³⁰ In a spatial analysis of all pavement types from the Carthage *insulae*, Birgit Tang concluded that *opus tessellatum* was “the pavement of prestige” (2005: 96). We can say little of the decoration of the upper walls of these rooms, unfortunately. Fragments of wall decoration,

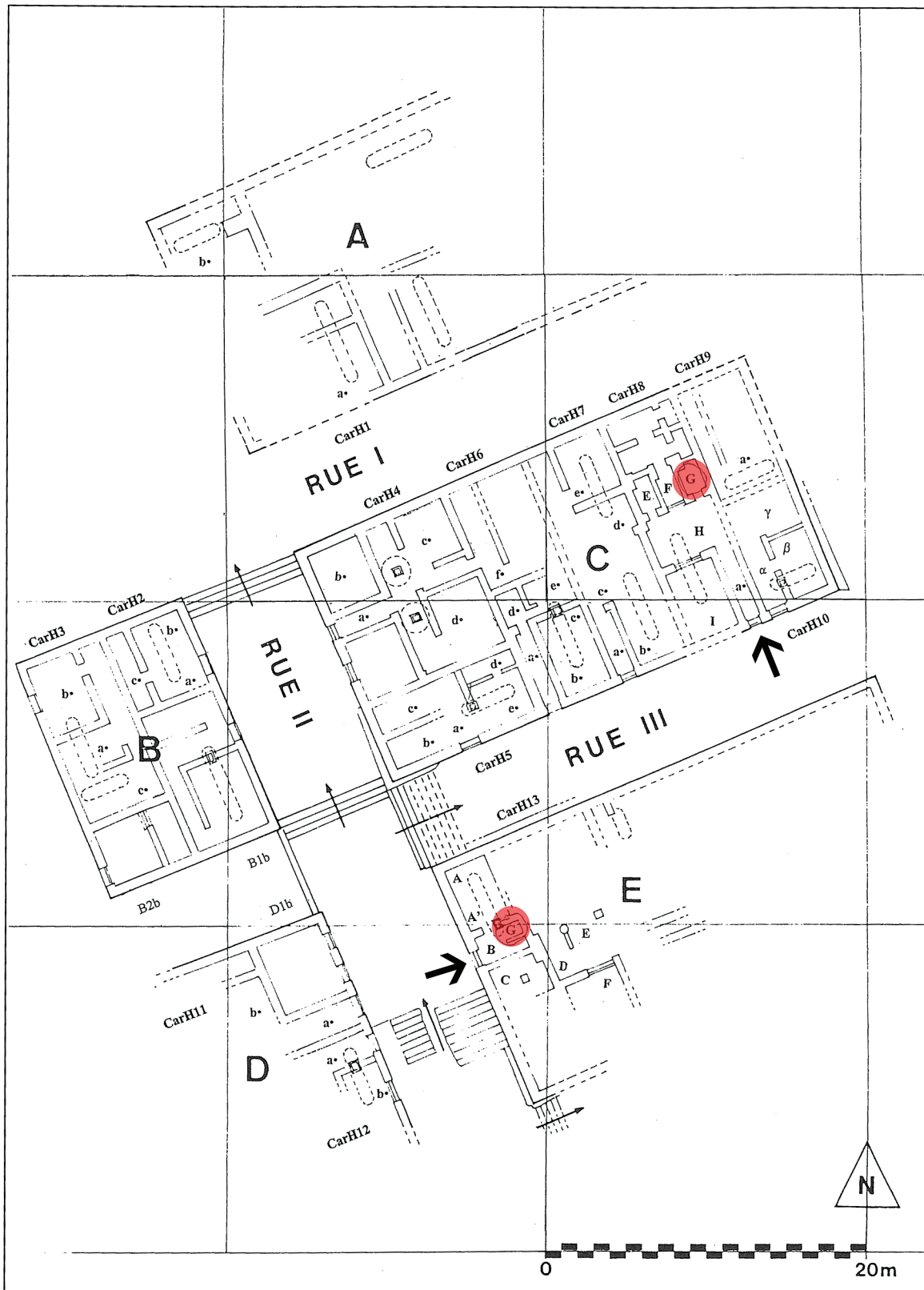


Fig. 9. Placement of baths in Carthage CarH8 (Insula C) and H13 (Insula E). Baths are Room G in both units; entrances are marked with arrows (modified from Tang 2005: 74, fig. 3).



Fig. 10. Mosaic-tiled and plastered basin in CarH8 (from Tang 2005: 91, fig. 6 [no scale was provided in the original publication]).

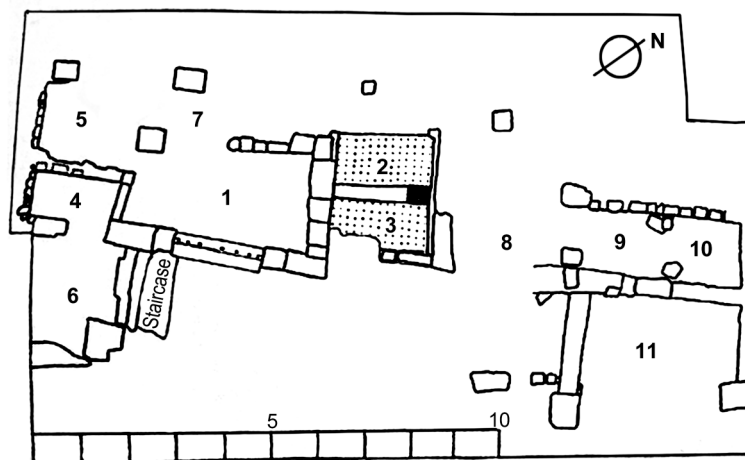


Fig. 11. Plan of Carthage House Car5, showing plastered tiled basin and anteroom (Rooms 2, 3) (from Tang 2005: 78, fig. 5).

note that this arrangement differs markedly from bathing spaces known in Greek cities, such as at Delos, Olynthus, or Pella, or in the western Mediterranean, where hip bathtubs designed for prolonged immersion were placed either in multifunctional or service rooms (often next to kitchens) or in waterproofed rooms deliberately set apart from public spaces (Trümper 2010: 531). A particular concern for privacy is especially evident in western Mediterranean homes where immersion-style relaxing tubs were located close to private quarters, as at Morgantina.³¹ This impression is supported by spatial analysis carried out by Iván Fumadó Ortega (2007), who, in assessing the placement of baths at a range of western Mediterranean sites, demonstrated that Greek private baths were set at the deepest level of private space, far removed from normal circulation patterns, in a manner distinct from that seen in Phoenician houses.³² Thus, while it seems the Phoenician baths were tied to reception practices, the heated immersion tubs tended to be shielded from public view and were a feature of the private sphere.

Phoenician Bathing in Israel in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods

I suggest that the design of the bathing suites at Kerkouane and Carthage, coupled with their placement in proximity to reception space, offer a unique architectural and behavioral template for a bathing practice that we may safely construe as culturally Phoenician. If distilled, the common elements can be defined as follows:

- tub or small constructed basin room, plastered;
- adjacent anteroom with paved or decorated flooring;
- simple drainage;
- often decorated (mosaic floors, painted plaster);

including painted moldings and First Style wall paintings, were recovered from each of the houses with bathing areas (Car4, Car5, CarH8, CarH13) and attributed to second-story collapse. While the upper stories of these buildings were doubtless decorated, one wonders whether the attribution of all such fragments to upper-story decoration may have, in part, been colored by the expectations that the bathrooms were undecorated spaces, despite the elaborate paving exhibited in some (Tang 2005: 88–89).

³¹ Delos: Trümper 1998: 64–67; Olynthus: Robinson and Graham 1938: 198–204; Pella (House of Dionysos): Hoepfner 1999: 401; Morgantina: Tsakirgis 1984: 125–51; see also Ginouvès's foundational study (1962).

³² “En ellos podemos comprobar cómo el espacio dedicado al baño depende directamente del *oikos* ocupando el nivel más profundo de la casa y configurándose como una de las habitaciones más segregadas del conjunto de la estructura. La cantidad y frecuencia de circulación de personas que tuvo lugar en las inmediaciones del cuarto de baño de la casa Helena fue radicalmente distinto en el caso púnico” (Fumadó Ortega 2007: 110).

- proximity to entrance and/or courtyard (association with entrance/reception spaces); and
- suitable for cleansing bathing (no required heating systems, no immersion).

If the analysis above holds true, then it would appear that cleansing bathing was part of the Phoenician cultural repertoire at least by the 4th century B.C. (as attested at Kerkouane) and persisted throughout the Hellenistic period.

With these criteria and considerations, and bearing in mind the parallels offered by Anafa and Ashkelon, we can identify now a third bathing installation of this type in Israel at the coastal site of Tel Ya'oz. Here, excavations carried out in Area D uncovered five rooms of a building dating to the Persian period (Fischer, Roll, and Tall 2008). The building was described as a “private dwelling of the open courtyard type” (Fischer, Roll, and Tall 2008: 133), with walls constructed in the Phoenician ashlar pier-and-rubble technique. The entrance to the building was in the southeast corner (Fig. 12). One entered from the south into a paved vestibule, which turned sharply to the west and allowed access to the central courtyard up a short set of stairs. Immediately to the east of this vestibule was a room measuring roughly 1.5×1.75 m³³ and heavily and uniformly plastered on all surfaces: floors, walls, and shelves (Fig. 13). A low step or stool 22 cm high was set in the northeastern corner. This room was identified by the excavators as a plastered pantry, although it is unclear why such painstaking plastering would be necessary in a mere storage space. The Tunisian examples instead suggest that the room is more likely to have been a space designed for cleansing bathing. This would better explain the uniform coating of all surfaces—even the small stool—with white hydraulic plaster. Moreover, its placement echoes almost exactly the position both of the Ashkelon bath and the bath in Habitation 1 Rue du Sphinx in Kerkouane (see Fig. 8), seemingly situated for the convenience of entering guests before accessing the courtyard.

It should come as no surprise that each of the three examples of bathing suites should appear in Israel in a Phoenician-controlled city or one subject to marked Phoenician influence. Tel Ya'oz was part of the broader coastal region assigned to Phoenician control from the 5th century onward. The excavators of Tel Anafa described the 2nd-century complex as a residence for an elite family of “Hellenized Phoenicians from Tyre”

³³ Dimensions extrapolated from the building plan in Fischer, Roll, and Tall 2008: 131, fig. 7.

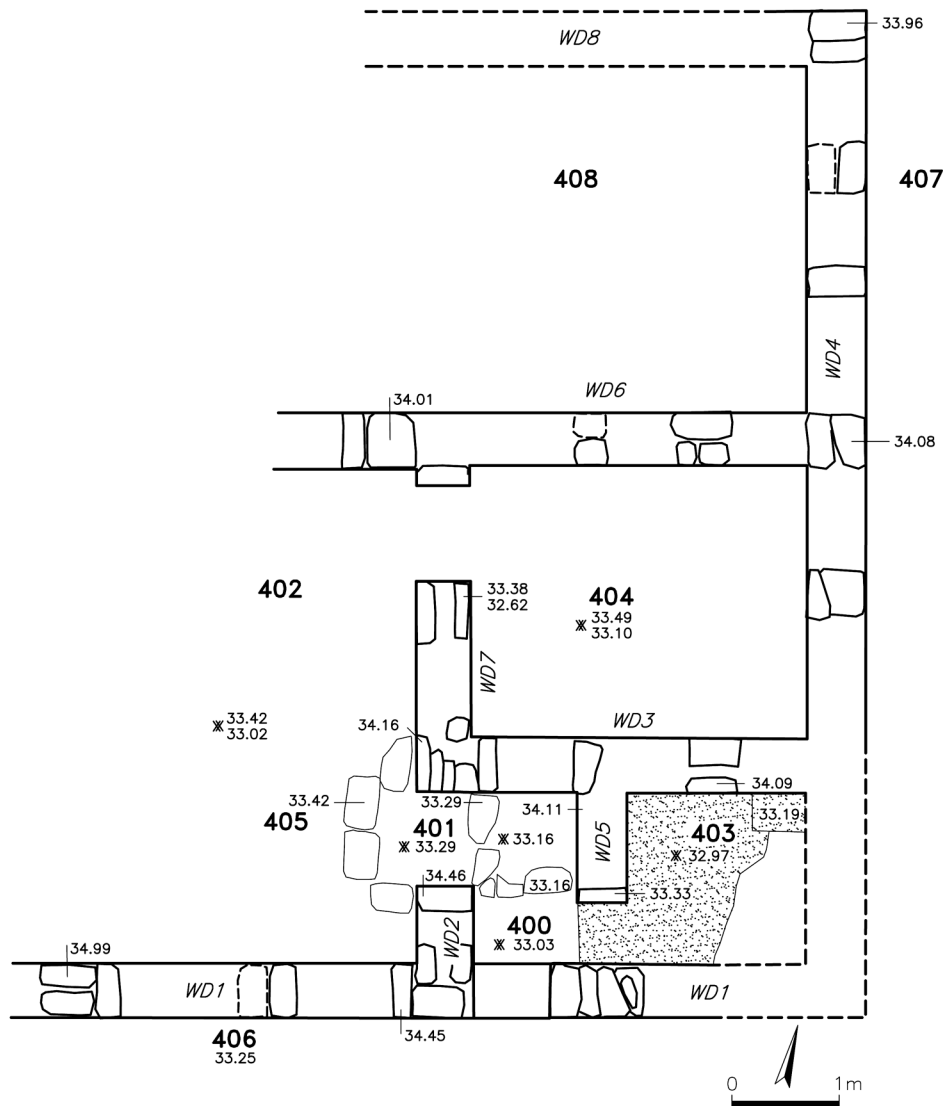


Fig. 12. Persian courtyard house with bath (Room 403) adjacent to entrance at Tel Ya'oz (from Fischer, Roll, and Tal 2008: fig. 7).

(Herbert 1994: 18).³⁴ Ashkelon, too, should be classified in this vein, having been refounded in the 5th century B.C. by Phoenicians who had been granted control over the city by the Persian king. The new city was distinctly

³⁴ The possible exception here is Ai Khanoum (see also above, n. 24), which has no clear Phoenician cultural connection. Being outside of Israel, Ai Khanoum is somewhat beyond the scope of this discussion. It may be, however, that the implementation of these bathing suites in reception spaces so far removed from the Phoenician (or Phoenician-controlled) heartland is itself a significant marker of the degree to which the practice had, by the end of the 2nd century B.C., become part of the vernacular of the Hellenistic East.

Phoenician in character: set on an orthogonal insular plan and employing spatial arrangements, construction patterns, and drainage systems identical to contemporary insulae known both from the Phoenician heartland and Phoenician-controlled Tel Dor to the north (Martin 2007; Nitschke, Martin, and Shalev 2011; Shalev and Martin 2012). The city suffered no disruption with the passage of Alexander but instead retained and actively maintained its original Phoenician plan until the 1st century B.C. Indeed, its urban character in the Hellenistic period resembled the Phoenician colonies of the western Mediterranean far more than it echoed either Ashkelon's



Fig. 13. Plastered Room 403 at Tel Yafoz (from Fischer, Roll, and Tal 2008: 11).

own Canaanite past or the Hellenistic Greek cities of the Mediterranean.³⁵ Literary and epigraphic examples, too—including 2nd-century evidence of Phoenician names for Ashkelonian dedicants at Delos and Athens, and also for a city official during this period³⁶—support the assumption that some part of the population was certainly culturally, if not ethnically, Phoenician.³⁷ The practice of cleansing bathing both at Ashkelon and beyond is likely a reflection of this cultural influence.

The use of Masonry Style painting to decorate both the bathing space and the anterooms at Anafa and Ashkelon suggests that by the late 2nd century, this decoration—at least in Israel—had become an integral part both of the bathing experience and the host's expression of luxurious hospitality. Masonry Style painting is best known from its widespread use in Hellenistic houses, es-

pecially at Delos (e.g., Maison du Trident, Rooms J and K [Bulard 1908: pl. 6Ab; Chamonard 1922: pl. 49a]). However, this was also the preferred style of decoration used both in elite houses and public buildings in the Levant during the Hellenistic period, as at Beirut, Akko, Anafa, and Jebel Khalid, among others.³⁸ The decoration of the baths at Anafa and Ashkelon was therefore completely in keeping with aesthetic norms of the 2nd century B.C. and may reflect a Hellenistic articulation of the long-standing Phoenician practice.

Cleansing Bathing in the Hellenistic East

In a recent survey of Hellenistic bathing in the Mediterranean, Trümper noted a lacuna in our understanding of bathing practices in the East. While the western Mediterranean readily adopted the newly introduced Hellenistic forms of “relaxing” bathing in heated immersion tubs (heated variously by stoves, braziers, or hypocausts), there appears to have been an aversion to these trends in the eastern Mediterranean, both to the idea of collective bathing in public facilities and to heated immersion tubs in private homes (Trümper 2010: 532).³⁹ Indeed, the

³⁵ A detailed discussion of the architecture and the Phoenician character of Persian–Hellenistic-period Ashkelon appears in two Hellenistic-period studies (Birney in press and the author's forthcoming Hellenistic site report) as well as in preliminary excavation reports for Grid 51 (for 2012, 2013, and 2014), currently available online at <https://ashkelon.site.wesleyan.edu/ongoing-research-publication-projects/>.

³⁶ The most famous of these is, of course, Herodotus's description of the construction of the Temple of Aphrodite at Paphos, built by “Phoenicians from Ashkelon” (1.105.23); see also Plassart 1928: 285–89 and Stager 2004: 145). For Strato the *astynomos*, see Gitler and Finkielstejn 2015.

³⁷ The Phoenician character of the city, from its urban plan down to the interior insular syntax, appears in the author's forthcoming Hellenistic site report; as such, I note only a few elements here. A similar case was made for the Phoenician character of Tel Dor during these periods (see Martin 2007: 51).

³⁸ Beirut: Aubert 2001–2002; Aubert and Eristov 2001; Eristov 2015; Anafa: Weinberg 1971; Herbert 1994; Akko: Beeri 2008: 202; Rozenberger 2009: 250; Jebel Khalid: Jackson 2009.

³⁹ Collective bathing prior to the Herodian period is only attested in military facilities—e.g., the *Sitzbaden* collective baths at Gezer (Macalister 1912: 223–38) and Beth Zur (Sellers 1933: 16–19), built in relation to the fortresses and likely designed to serve troops or commanders garrisoned there. Military facilities offer poor comparanda

only examples of heated immersion tubs in Israel come from 1st-century B.C. contexts, most as part of late Hasmonaean or Herodian palatial bathing programs. Where they occur, they do not appear in isolation but as part of facilities that feature a variety of bathing styles, including *miqva'ot*, and are built using Roman construction techniques such as *opus reticulatum* or *suspensura* floors (Small 1987: 69).⁴⁰ As the heated immersion tubs appear concurrently with the arrival of Roman cultural influence, they cannot even clearly be said to reflect Hellenistic—or “Hellenizing”—interests.⁴¹

A preference for Phoenician-style “cleansing” bathing carried out in a decorated reception suite may, in part, help to explain local reluctance to adopt the newer bathing forms, particularly in the coastal and cosmopolitan environments that had long since adopted Phoenician tastes. Also significant is the fact that the Phoenician suite seems to be scalable: The examples presented above reflect three levels of luxury in a range of settings: private residences built into urban insulae (Kerkouane, Carthage, Ashkelon), a courtyard residence (Tel Ya'oz), and an elite villa (Tel Anafa).⁴² These demonstrate that such bathing suites were seen as suitable for a range of social classes and settings, which may explain the longevity of the practice.

However, at non-Phoenician sites in Judaea, Samaria, and Idumaea—areas that came under Hasmonaean control—a different pattern emerges, although the data set is still limited. Stefanie Hoss, in a 2004 survey, has suggested that tub-based bathing in a removed space close to the kitchen area of the house should be considered characteristic of Hellenistic practice in Israel (2005: 38).⁴³ While two-thirds of her examples date to the Herodian period, her catalog supports the prevalence of this prac-

tice at least by the 2nd century B.C., if not before. At Beth Yerah (Khirbet el-Kerak), for example, a single bathtub was placed against the wall of a larger, undecorated rectangular room in a poorly preserved courtyard house dated broadly to the Ptolemaic period (Maisler, Stekelis, and Avi-Yonah 1952: 165–73, fig. 1; see also *NEAEHL* 1: 258). Although accessible from a courtyard, the bathroom was far removed from the main street entrance, which ran along the opposite end of the building. At Mount Gerizim (House A, in the southern quarter), a bathtub and stepped basin were placed in an undecorated room on the far end of the courtyard, opposite the entrance of the north wing of the building (Magen 1990: fig. 114; see also Magen 2000: 83–84). Far removed from the main street entrance, the bathing room was instead placed immediately next to the kitchen and service rooms, at the deepest level of privacy possible within the house. No heating systems were evident at either site; thus, these tubs were also likely used for a form of seated cleansing bathing, facilitated by servants who fetched hot water. Seated cleansing baths also appear in the underground rock-cut rooms beneath Hellenistic houses at Maresha, fed by channels or funnels and accessible by staircases from the rooms above (Kloner and Zissu 2013: 56–57).⁴⁴

The baths at Beth Yerah, Mount Gerizim, and Maresha are truly “private” spaces; they are hidden from building entrances and are reflective of personal behaviors rather than public rituals. Designed for private cleansing bathing, these spaces are more similar in concept to Greek domestic baths of the archaic and classical periods (Trümper 2010: 531) or to *miqva'ot* than they are to contemporary baths in Hellenistic Greek houses. They are thus markedly distinct in both design and placement from the Phoenician suites, which are public-facing. The recognition of Phoenician-style reception bathing alongside the tub-based facilities more characteristic of inland sites now invites us to consider the presence of two separate and parallel cleansing traditions which reflect different cultural and regional trends.

Whether public or private, cleansing bathing seems to have become a feature of the Persian–Hellenistic vernacular of coastal Levantine sites, which may explain why Western immersion bathing practices were slow to gain popularity. By the early 1st century B.C., Hasmonaean elites were experimenting with combined bathing suites, coupling facilities for cleansing bathing with immersion tubs and *miqva'ot*, for example, as in the Twin Palaces at Jericho (Netzer 2001: 157–71). Yet it was only with the

for private bathing practices, but it is interesting that all such examples occur in areas that were under Hasmonaean control.

⁴⁰ E.g., Herod's palace at Masada, the Western Palace at Masada in the first Herodian building phase, and the palaces of Hyrcanus I and Salome at Jericho (Netzer 1991: 15–171; 2004: 251–63). For further discussion, see Hoss 2012.

⁴¹ As Trümper notes, “[o]nly from the late 1st c. B.C. onwards, after the new bathing standards had been well established and tested in the West were they also exported to the East” (2010: 542). Herodian influence upon the material expressions of luxury flaunted by Jerusalem's elites during the 1st century B.C. has been well documented (see, most recently, Berlin 2014) and may well have been a factor in the adoption and adaptation of these bathing suites.

⁴² The palatial setting of Ai Khanoum may reflect a fourth possible level, though this is both late and outside of Israel.

⁴³ Hoss's extensive survey employs a somewhat non-traditional and more Judaeic-centric range of 150 to 37 B.C. for the Hellenistic period in Israel, an approach that, on the front end, omits a substantial period of Ptolemaic control and, on the back end, overlooks the transfer of much of the region to Roman control under Pompey several decades prior to Herod (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.4.4).

⁴⁴ These baths predate Hyrcanus's conquest and therefore Hasmonaean control over the city. Amos Kloner suggests that these may have been early Idumaeic examples of ritual bathing or *miqva'ot* (Kloner and Zissu 2013: 57; for the larger context, see Kloner 2003).

rise of Roman political and cultural influence in the later 1st century B.C. that Romanized “relaxing” and commu-

nal bathing practices came broadly to Syria-Palestine and brought about the end of the cleansing reception suite.

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