

Intentionally Broken Discus Lamps from Roman Apollonia: A New Interpretation

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The Apollonia-Arsuf Excavations yielded hundreds of Roman discus lamps. The typical pagan and erotic figurative motifs had been intentionally broken off, an act familiar at other sites in Roman Palestine that was often said to be the work of monotheists of either the Samaritan or Jewish faiths. This article surveys the evidence at hand and considers the intentional breaking of Roman discus lamps in Roman Palestine as the work of members of *all* monotheistic faiths. In the case of Roman Apollonia, however, this act was performed by Samaritans or early Christians (or both).

KEYWORDS Roman discus lamps, Intentionally mutilated lamps, Early monotheistic faiths, Apollonia-Arsuf

In the past, this journal treated the subject of Roman discus lamps retrieved from the excavations at Apollonia-Arsuf typologically (by means of decoration) and chronologically (Wexler and Gilboa 1996). That article studied the lamps recovered in Area E (in the southern part of the walled settlement) collected in the 1980–1981 and 1990–1993 seasons of excavations. In general it dated the lamps to the 2nd–3rd centuries CE and suggested that the “missing discusses. . . [are] a result of use or from the pressure of the accumulating layers” (*ibid.*: 127). Since then many other lamps were found in Area E (especially in the 1998 excavation season) and our understanding of the Roman architectural features in the area, as well as the provenance of the intentionally broken discus lamps, has become much clearer. Area E encompasses a *villa maritima* of the late 1st–early 2nd century CE (cf. Roll and Tal 2008) and a garbage dump that accumulated on top of it, dated to the 2nd–4th centuries CE (Fig. 1).

The question of mutilation: contexts and interpretations

Brand aimed at identifying pottery in talmudic terms. As for the lamps, he asserted that the break in the central part of the lamp was a Jewish custom—a ritual of cleansing the



FIGURE 1 A selection of intentionally broken discus lamps from Apollonia.

piece (1953: 352–361; see also 1969: 40). This premise was reinforced when Kahane published such lamps from tombs at Ḥuqoq (Upper Galilee) side by side with crude local ossuaries, which he dated to the second half of the 1st century CE and ascribed to Jews (1961: 129, 142–143). Neidinger expanded the idea of intentional breaking of discus lamps as “such images being offensive to orthodox Jews and probably Christians as well”. He mentioned that Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (*fl* ca. 100–130 CE) “tried to discourage the use of lamps with images by stipulating that the filling hole must be large enough to let a coin pass through (Kelim 32). Since no coin was so small, it was incumbent upon the user to break the discus” (1982: 160). Sussman, following her studies on Samaritan lamps, opposed the Jewish attribution of the intentional breaking of Roman discuses by stating that the Samaritans are considered to have been stricter in their observance of the Second Commandment than the Jews (1983: 71).¹ Other more recent studies have contributed to the growing number of intentionally broken discus lamps and have occasionally agreed with the ideas mentioned above (i.e., their Jewish/

¹ With the publication of the lamps from the cemetery of Ḥorbat Rimmon in the Judean Shephelah, Sussman seemed to change her opinion on the habit of breaking the discus in mould-made lamps, given their frequent appearance side by side with ossuaries and their proximity to a Jewish centre, Ḥorbat Tilla (2004: 110*–111*).

Samaritan attribution).² Some, however, present contexts that may illuminate their religious use by the presence of other (ethnic) finds or provide discussions that favour a certain attribution. For example, Braun, Dauphin and Hadas published an article on a burial cave at Sajur (Lower Galilee) in which intentionally broken discus lamps were discovered side by side with bronze bells and a signet ring with a motif of a lion (1994: 111–112, Figs. 4: 10, 12; 5: 5, 9). The authors stressed the relations between pagans, Jews and Christians at the site, yet did not assign any of those religions to the burials in the tomb (Fig. 2). An intentionally broken discus lamp was discovered with a bronze bell in another burial cave in Ginnegar (Lower Galilee) (Oshri and Najjar 1997) (Fig. 3). Broken discus lamps were unearthed in a burial cave at Asherat (Lower Galilee), side by side with a signet ring with a motif of a crab (Smithline 1997: 51, Figs. 7; 8: 6) (Fig. 4). Other such lamps were discovered in a burial cave at Mount Gilboa, which due to a discovery of a Samaritan sarcophagus and lamps (Syon 1999: 59*–60*, 68*, Fig. 5: 1), was attributed by the excavator to Samaritans with an affinity to the area of Beth Shean (Scythopolis). Based on the discovery of ossuary fragments and the chronologically limited period of occupation (Barshad 2004: 19, 24, Fig. 3: 5–6), a burial cave with such lamps at Ḥorbat Indur (Lower Galilee), was indirectly associated by the excavator with Jews. Jewish attribution was also suggested for another burial cave at Shoham, where an intentionally broken discus lamp was discovered together with fragments of ossuaries and a bronze bell (Nagorski 2007: 47*, Figs. 2; 3: 9, 12). Jewish attribution was indirectly suggested for yet another burial cave, at Ḥorbat Zikhrin, where intentionally broken discus lamps were discovered together with bronze bells (Haddad 2007: 49–51, 55–56, Figs. 7; 8: 4–5). Recently, Vitto tried to sustain the Jewish attribution of the intentionally

² Intentional breakings on fragments of Roman discus lamps are not always easily discernable. Still, there are many other excavated, intentionally broken (mostly local, Syro-Palestinian, but also imported) discus lamps documented in many excavations, e.g., Prausnitz and Rahmani (1977: 311, Fig. 3) (Kfar Baruch, Jezreel); Zias (1980: 64, Fig. 4: 6) (ʿAraʿra, Nahal ʿIron); Meyers, Strange and Meyers (1981: 151, Pl. 9.16: 1–3) (Meiron); Tzaferis and Yadin (1982: 12–14, Fig. 2: 1) (Beth Shean); Oren and Rappaport (1984: 123, 127, Figs. 14: 6; 17: 3–4, Pls. 14: A, 15: F–G) (Maresha/Beth Guvrin); MacDonnell (1988: Nos. 7–26 *passim*) (Jalame); Barshad (1993: 34, Fig. 31: b) (Naʿura, Galilee); Rosenthal-Heginbottom (1995: 244–245, Type 26, Figs. 5.22: 3, 6–7; 5.23: 1–3) (Dor); Abu ʿUqsa and Najjar (1997) (Kafr Kanna, Galilee); Aviam (1997: 80, Fig. 2: 2) (Shaʿab, Galilee); Baruch (1997: 94, Fig. 4: 8) (el-Kirmil, Mt. Hebron); Gorin-Rosen (1997: 72, Fig. 2) (Kafr Yasif, Galilee); Hizmi (1997a: 87, Fig. 2: 4[?]) (Itamar, Samaria); Hizmi (1997b: 128, Fig. 8: 1) (Shechem); Sagiv, Zissu and Avni (1998: 20*, Figs. 4, 10; 6: 11; 12: 7) (Tel Goded); Kletter and Rapuano (1998: 53, Fig. 5: 1) (Kh. Ibrektas, Sharon); Feig (1999: 51*, Fig. 6: 3–4) (IʿBillin, Galilee); Tal *et al.* (1999: 8*, Fig. 14: 5) (Parod, Galilee); Hadad (2002: Nos. 20, 22–23, 25–29) (Beth Shean); Nahshoni *et al.* (2002: 61, Fig. 9: 1–6) (Ḥorbat Zefiyya, Judean Shephelah); Aviam (2004: 71, 82, Fig. 7.19: 6) (Qeren Naftali, Galilee); Sussman (2004: Figs. 2: 3, 8, 11; 6: 1–4; 7: 4) (Ḥorbat Rimmon, Judean Shephelah); Shurkin (2004: 40*, 47*, Figs. 15: 10; 21: 2) (Jerusalem); Glick (2006: 56–58, Fig. 12: 1–4) (ʿEin ez-Zeituna, Nahal ʿIron); Sussman (2008: Nos. 46[?], 75[?]-76, 79, 83, 86–87, 89, 93–94, 101, 103[?]) (Caesarea); Tatcher and Gal (2009: 14*–15*, Figs. 9: 3; 10: 4–6) (Migdal HaʿEmeq, Galilee). Despite the selective nature of the references mentioned above, concentrations of such lamps seem to be found in the Sharon Plain (and its adjacent valleys), the Galilee (its lower and mountainous parts) and the Judean Shephelah. Intentionally broken discus lamps seem more common in the countryside than in urban centres.

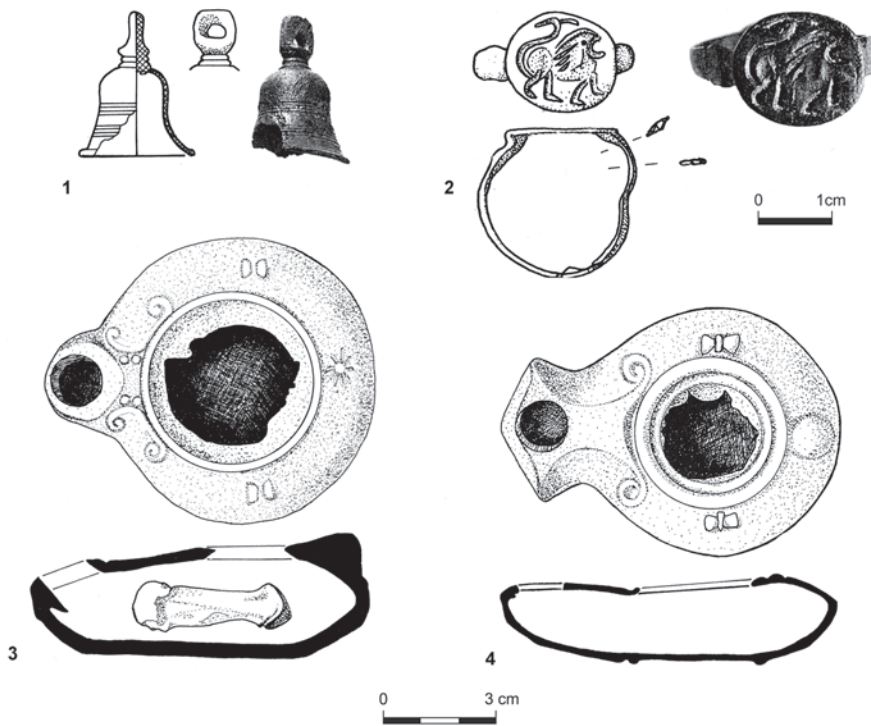


FIGURE 2 Intentionally broken discus lamps, bell and ring from Sajur (modified after Braun, Dauphin and Hadas 1994: Figs. 4: 10, 12; 5: 5, 9). (Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.)



FIGURE 3 Intentionally broken discus lamp and bell from Ginnegar. (Modified after Oshri and Najjar 1997: Fig. 54: a–b). (Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.)

broken discus lamps by mentioning the Mosaic prohibition against graven images (Exod 20:4–5; Avodah Zarah 3:3; endorsed by the purification rituals of the period, i.e., Betzah 4:4 and Kelim 2:8; 3:2), and claiming that such lamps are mostly found in Jewish contexts, while those with an intact discus are discovered at sites inhabited primarily by pagans (2011: 51*–52*).³ That said, it is clear that intentionally broken discus lamps are found in both Jewish and Samaritan concentrations. Their appearance in Jerusalem on the one hand (cf. Hershkovitz 1987: 319,

³ One may add that the intentionally broken discus lamps found in clear Jewish contexts in the hiding complexes of the Judean Shephelah and in the refuge caves of the Judean Desert from the time of the Second Jewish War (Bar Kokhba Revolt, 132–135 CE) lend support to this attribution (cf., e.g., Kloner and Tepper 1987: 348, Pl. 4, Fig. 163: 7 [H. Gedur {Kh. Judur}]; Eshel and Porat 2009: 83, Pl. 4: 2[?][Caves of the Spear]; 419, Pl. 3: 12 [Teomim {Twin} Cave]).

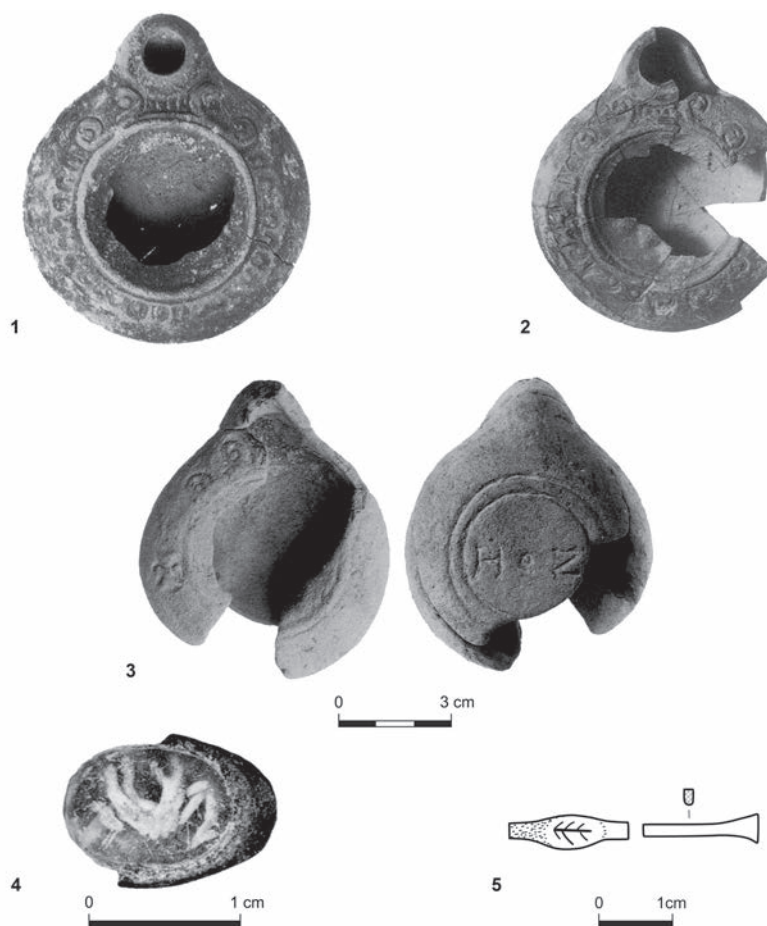


FIGURE 4 Intentionally broken discus lamps and rings from Asherat, modified after Smithline 1997: Figs. 7; 8: 6–7. (Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.)

Figs. 11: 5; 13) and in Shechem on the other (cf. Magen 2009: 181, 217, 266, Pls. 34: 1, 5, 7; 49: 1; 57: 2–3), as well as in both Jewish (Judah) and Samaritan (Samaria) regions (above notes 2–3) strongly support this claim.

The Apollonia context: early Christians?

The site of Apollonia makes its first appearance in the written sources in Roman times, in the writings of Josephus (War I.8.4 [166], I.21.5 [409]; Ant. XIII.15.4 [395], XIV.5.3 [88]), Pliny (Nat. His. V.13.69) and Ptolemy (Geo. V.15.2). The depiction of Apollonia on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, on the coastal highway between Joppa and Caesarea and at a distance of 22 miles from the latter, is of great importance, indicating that it served as an official leg on the country's imperial road network. Moreover, 22 miles corresponds to the actual distance between the two ancient sites of Caesarea and Arsuf (some 34 km), thus providing proof for the identification of Apollonia with Arsuf (Roll 1999: 7, n. 8).

The impressive Roman style *villa maritima* uncovered in Area E provides tangible proof for the cultural presence of Rome at the site (Roll and Tal 2008). Elsewhere one of us suggested that this *villa maritima* is practically a *mansio* built in ca. 70 CE along the Jaffa–Caesarea Road, that was probably established in the contexts of the First Jewish War (Roll and Tal in press). It is therefore likely that the Roman villa at Apollonia was occupied (at least in its first stage, Stratum Roman 2A) by pagan inhabitants who may have acted as formal representatives of the empire (for the stratigraphy of the villa, see Roll and Tal 2008). The entire complex suffered sudden and violent destruction following a devastating earthquake that is dated to either 113/114 or 126/127 CE (Roll and Tal 2008: 144–146). Afterwards, the structure was not rebuilt, and because it was partially underground and at a lower level than the surrounding area, the ruined site became a garbage dump. The refuse discarded here included huge quantities of pottery (from which some 80% of our intentionally broken lamps were retrieved), which seem to come from surrounding buildings that still await excavation. The few Roman coins found in the refuse of Stratum Roman 1 corroborate the suggested dating. These are municipal and imperial coins, which post-date the second and the third decade of the 2nd century CE.

To date, approximately 600 intentionally broken discus lamps are recorded at the site. Of these, 393 came from Area E in the villa and the fills above it. Thirty-three of the latter were found in full profile. Their stratigraphic distribution is as follows: 0.51% originated in the foundation layer of the villa and seem to be intrusive given their small size (Stratum Roman 2A); 7.63% originated in the second phase of the Roman villa (Stratum Roman 2B). The bulk of the material, however, came from the villa's post-occupation layer (Roman 1) (79.14%) and from the Byzantine occupation layer above it (12.72%). The fragments that came from Stratum Roman 2B are distributed throughout the eastern part of the villa in the rooms that correspond to Loci 1928, 1937, 1342, 1313, 1777 and 1817 and on the long corridor that runs through the building in Loci 1851 and 1768 (Fig. 5).⁴ It is worth noting that in Stratum Roman 2B the villa underwent significant constructional alterations that may attest to a change in the building's function and inhabitants (Roll and Tal 2008: 142–144).

We have no direct written evidence for the existence of Jewish or Christian communities in Roman Apollonia. However, considering the fact that large communities of both faiths were present in Roman times in both Caesarea and Joppa, and even closer, in the southern

⁴ Calculations are based on M. Teixeira Bastos' MA thesis, *Early Christianization in Roman Palestine: The Case of Apollonia-Arsuf* (University of São Paulo 2011) which was co-supervised by M.I. D'Agostino Fleming and O. Tal.

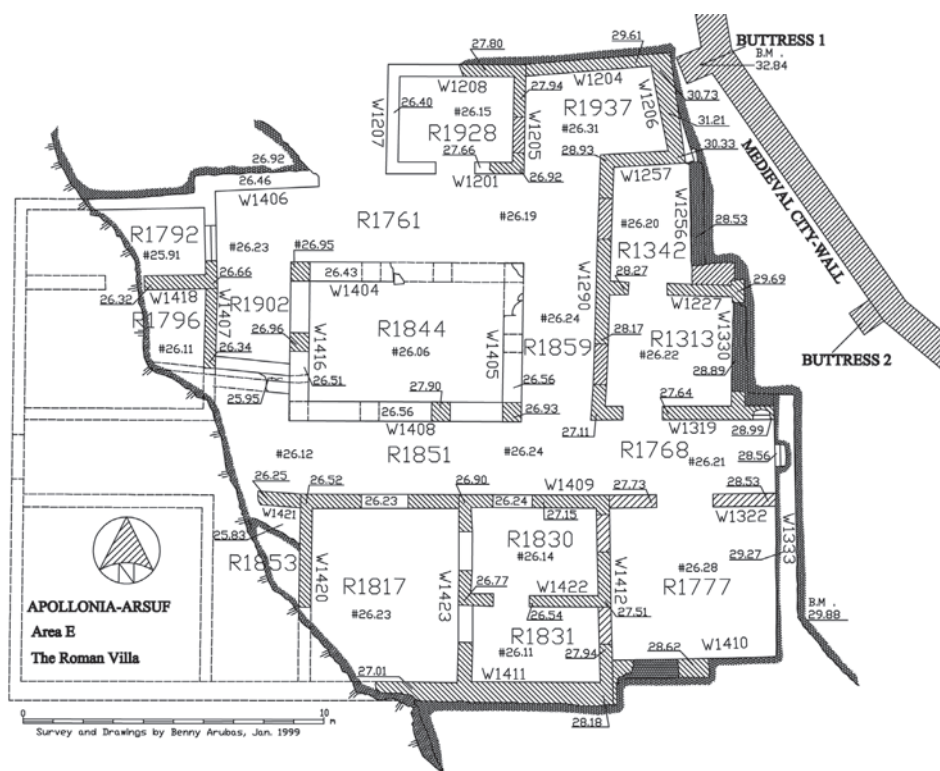


FIGURE 5 Apollonia: Plan of the Roman *villa maritima*.

Sharon hinterland, we may assume their presence in Apollonia as well.⁵ With the lack of sources on the site's religious orientation in Roman times,⁶ one is left to rely upon Byzantine sources and Roman material evidence in order to understand the widespread appearance of intentionally broken discus lamps at the site.

⁵ Strabo (XVI, 2, 28 [759]) attests to a dense Jewish population in the woodlands ($\Delta\rho\rho\mu\omicron\varsigma$) of the Coastal Plain, a term that is used in the Septuagint (Isa 65:10) to translate the geographical region Sharon. The early stage of Christianization of the southern Sharon Plain, in and around "Lydda and Sharon", is attested to in the New Testament (Acts 9:35). Another testimony (Acts 10:1–9) on the men sent by the centurion Cornelius from Caesarea to Joppa to bring Peter, should also be mentioned. The men had to travel for more than one day and the most appropriate place for them to spend the night seems to have been Apollonia—a one-day journey from Caesarea (Hengel 1983: 169–173). To this we may add the suggestion of Heid (1956: 209, n. 43), concerning the identification of a place north of Joppa called Aya Petrie by the 16th century CE Turkish writer Piri Re'is. Heid identifies the place with Arsuf, and suggests that a sign of veneration of St. Peter be recognized in its name (see also Bagatti 1979: 183).

⁶ In this context one should mention the appearance of a place named Apollonia in the so-called work of Hippolytus, *On the 70 Apostles*, where under number 56 we find "Mark, cousin to Barnabas, bishop of Apollonia" (Patrologia Graeca 10, coll. 953–957; cf. Schaff 2001: 464). This composition according to the *communis opinio* is not an authentic work of the 3rd century CE, and even if it is there is no necessity in identifying this Apollonia with 'Apollonia Palaestina' as the list is not arranged according to regions and is not confined to Palestine alone.

Apollonia does not appear in early ecclesiastical lists. Two 19th century scholars, Stark and Clermont-Ganneau, assumed that the reason for its absence derived from the fact that Apollonia's name had been changed to Sozousa—a common change for cities named after Apollo Sōter in Byzantine times. Later texts and critical editions of texts, which recount the Persian-Sassanian capture of Jerusalem, record the death of the patriarch Modestus in a city named Sozos: Sozousa in Georgian texts and Arsuf in Arabic texts. Official documents of the synod of Ephesus held in 449 indicate that in the mid-5th century CE Sozousa was a city in the Byzantine province of Palaestina Prima and that its Christian community was headed by a bishop. Bishops of Sozousa appear again in the records of two 6th-century ecclesiastical meetings. They may have served in the church with an inscribed mosaic floor that was uncovered at Apollonia in 1962 (see Tal 2009: 320–321, notes 7–10; for other listings of the site in Byzantine sources, see notes 5–6 and 11–14). The importance of Sozousa in Byzantine Palestine seems to have been enhanced by the Samaritan community that resided at the site, as is evident from the archaeological finds, notably Samaritan inscriptions (Roll 1999: 22–23; Tal 2009: 322–323), which can be dated as early as the 4th–5th centuries CE, and lamps (Sussman 1983: 85–87), which can be dated as early as the 3rd–4th centuries CE.⁷

The Jewish–Roman wars (66–73 and 132–135 CE) almost extinguished the Jewish community in Judea and the Coastal Plain (Jews remained a majority only in parts of the Galilee and the Golan). It seems that Samaritans (and less profoundly early Christians) filled the vacuum left by the Jews in the southern Levant, leading to the demographic and economic prosperity of the Samaritan settlement. Following the withdrawal of most of the Roman legions from Palestine, Samaritan territorial expansion outside Samaria began (Magen 2008). Some scholars tend to ascribe this initiative to the High Priest Baba Rabbah, known from later Samaritan sources as a religious reformer, who had good connections with the Roman authorities and was active in the late 3rd and 4th centuries CE (Cohen 1981). It seems, however, that Samaritan territorial expansion outside Samaria began earlier and may have been formally reorganized under this historical figure, who is said to have divided Samaritan territories into districts and appointed local rulers from the aristocratic Samaritan families.

It is apparent that by the 5th century CE Christians and Samaritans co-resided at the site. However, based on the result of 20 seasons of excavations it is evident that the site had a limited occupation in Roman times (late 1st–early 4th centuries CE), which based on the excavations alone was confined to Area E and its immediate surroundings. During that period the site was neither a city nor a town but rather an administrative centre (a road station—a *mansio*), most probably inhabited by pagans (late 1st–early 2nd century CE), which later on became a settlement.⁸ Given the evidence available, we can argue

⁷ Although some recent studies suggest that Samaritan lamps may also have been used by other ethnic/religious groups (Magen 2002: 243; Sussman 2002: 339), it is commonly accepted that early types were more confined to Samaritans, and can be used as a cultural indicator of the Samaritans.

⁸ The fact that no coin was ever minted in Roman Apollonia underscores its marginal status in the province.

that both Christians and Samaritans inhabited the site at some stage in the Roman period. Which group came first and joined the site's pagan inhabitants is difficult to determine.

Conclusions

The act of intentionally breaking or mutilating pagan or pagan-style (i.e., floral) motifs can be understood as a means of collective identity and a triumph of monotheistic beliefs over paganism. In this paper, we have surveyed the evidence available on intentionally broken Roman discus lamps and their appearance at Roman Apollonia (Palaestina) against its historical and archeological data. The widespread appearance of intentionally broken Roman discus lamps in Palestine and their distribution suggest that the act was a common practice shared by the three monotheistic religions of Roman Palestine: Jews, Samaritans and Christians. The intentional breaking was apparently not merely a religious act but also an act used to promulgate the desired victory of the Lord over His pagan counterparts. In the case of Apollonia, given our conclusions on the religious groups inhabiting the site during Roman times, it can be suggested that intentionally broken Roman discus lamps were the work of believers of either the Samaritan or Christian faith, performed as a means of self-definition. Although it might be more appealing to identify the lamps with the Christian community, the frequent appearance of Samaritan lamps that replaced the Roman discus lamps makes identification with the Samaritan community the preferred option. However, this latter option can also be preferred based on the fact that some of the intentionally broken lamps are found in tombs together with bronze bells and signet rings with animal motifs. While (votive) bells are found in later Byzantine Christian tombs,⁹ signet rings with animal motifs are normally absent from Jewish and Samaritan tombs of the period. Still, the current state of research cannot offer a definitive answer nor can it deny use of intentionally broken Roman discus lamps by both the Samaritan and Christian communities in Roman Apollonia.

⁹ The connection between bells and Christianity is also evident in the New Testament and in Christian iconography, cf., e.g., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* 2, s.v. Glocke (162). On other mainly later European uses and manifestations, see *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2, s.v. Bells (259–263); and also the online version of *Catholic Encyclopedia* (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02418b.htm> [s.v. Bells]).

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