

TEL IFSHAR (EAST): OIL LAMPS

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Thirty-three oil lamps, some of which are complete, were found in the excavation at Tel Ifshar (Table 1; see Yannai 2021).¹ They were attributed to three strata (IV–II) that represent an uninterrupted occupation during the Roman and Byzantine periods and possibly into the Early Islamic period (second half of the third or the fourth century through the sixth or possibly the seventh century CE). Only one oil lamp was found in Stratum IV, the earliest occupation where the excavation took place; the rest are from Strata III and II. All the lamps show signs of use.

Table 1 breaks down the assemblage according to types or ‘families of types’ and presents these groups in chronological order. The lamps date from the first century to at least the sixth century CE and possibly into the seventh century CE. Most of the lamps belong to ‘Samaritan’ types; these and

Table 1. Frequency of Lamps by Type

Type/Group	Date (CE)	Number of specimens	Fig.	Stratum
Herodian	1st–mid-2nd c.	1	1:1	IV
Provincial	Late 1st–3rd c.	2	1:2	III–II
Late Provincial	Late 3rd–4th c.	2	-	
Samaritan Type 1	Late 3rd–5th c.	13	2:1, 2	II
			2:3	III–II
			2:4–6	III
Samaritan Type 2	Late 3rd–5th c.	3	3:1, 2	II
Caesarea	Late 4th–5th c.	4	3:3, 4	II
Samaritan Types 3, 4	Late Byzantine to the Early Islamic	6	4:1–3	II
Byzantine	7th(?) c.	1	4:4	II
Late Byzantine	Late 6th–7th(?) c.	1	4:5	II
<i>Total</i>		33		

¹ Editorial note: unfortunately, Varda Sussman was not available for consultation when the article was edited. We are grateful to Itamar Taxel for his help in solving some of the remaining problems, but unfortunately many remained unresolved. The drawings were prepared by Marina Shuisky; the photographs were taken by Tsila Sagiv; the article was edited by Smadar Gabrieli.

the other types of lamps are local and well known, except for one Byzantine-period lamp (see Fig. 4:5)—an important contribution to the lamp repertoire of the period.

The Herodian lamps and the ‘Provincial’ disk lamps are types that are rather ubiquitous at sites from the Early Roman period. These groups are later replaced by other products of local industries, such as the ‘Samaritan’ lamps, which are abundant in the area, especially in settlements identified as Samaritan. This process has been documented at other sites of the period, such as Apollonia (Kaplan and Kaplan 1975: Figs. 1, 2; Sussman 1983; Wexler and Gilboa 1996); Kefar Sava and Z̄ur Natan (Roll and Ayalon 1989: Figs. 18; 31; 88; 92; 102:2, 3; 104; Charvit 1994: Figs. 29, 30); Umm Khaled (Netanya; Reich 1982: Figs. 16:6–10; 17, for the early periods); Caesarea (Vine and Hartelius 1986: Figs. 14–17); Lehavot H̄aviva (Sussman 1986); and Samaria itself (Reisner, Fisher and Lyon 1924: Figs. 190; 197; 199; 200:X19, X3a; 201:X4a; Crowfoot, Crowfoot and Kenyon 1957: Figs. 86:2, 3; 88:7–9; 89:2–4, 8; Magen 1982). This observation points to a consistent cultural pattern in the area over six centuries of occupation.

The ‘Caesarea’ oil lamps (Sussman 1980) found in the excavation occasion no surprise either, as Tel Ifshar is not far from Caesarea, and these decorated disk-lamps have a fairly wide distribution along the southern coast of Israel. This type is different from the ‘Samaritan’ lamps, as it targeted the Christian population in this area. They thus may indicate either a cultural change resulting from a mixed population of Samaritans and Christians or the presence of Christian-Samaritans; they may also be simply accidental finds, items left behind by passers-by. The use of the late ‘Samaritan’—Types 3 and 4—throughout the Byzantine period and into the Early Islamic period suggests a stable cultural entity.

Herodian Lamp (Fig. 1:1).— The name ‘Herodian’ is here preferred to the descriptive ‘Knife Pared, Shaved, Spatulated Lamp’ because of its cultural connotation, which links the type both with the

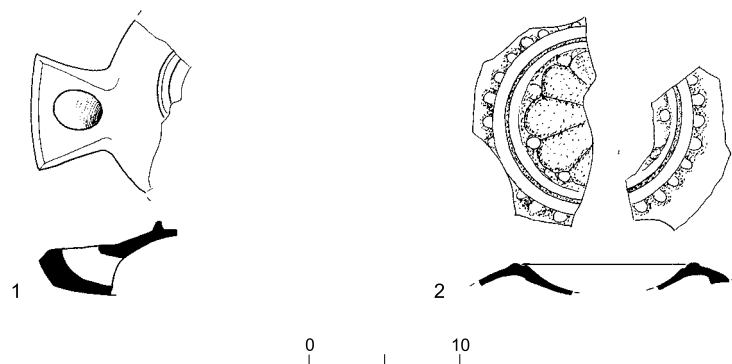


Fig. 1. Herodian (1) and ‘provincial’ (2) lamps.

No.	Stratum	Locus	Reg. No.
1	IV		4184
2	III–II	450	1920

period in which it first appeared and with the subsequent period of cultural plurality that persisted at least until the destruction of the Second Temple, in 70 CE.

The wheel-made Herodian lamps are considered a hallmark of the Jewish population of the period, and they are widely distributed on both sides of the Jordan river, in both settlements and burials. These lamps were extensively discussed in excavation reports and articles (cf. Kahane 1961:135–139, Fig. 3:8; Barag and HersHKovitz 1994:24–58; Sussman 2008). The type was used over an extended period, from the end of the first century BCE, or the beginning of the first century CE, to the mid-second century CE.

Changes through time can be followed by reference to the overall shape, the section and the width of the flange within the filling-hole. The single lamp of this type found in the excavation has rounded walls and a wide flange, suggesting that it is an early form, probably from the early first century CE; the later lamps in this group have straight walls with a minimal flange or no flange at all.

The Herodian lamps were thrown on the wheel, and the nozzle was attached to the finished body, which was then perforated. They were finished by shaving the base of the lamp and the base of the nozzle with a knife. The base was shaved either lengthwise or following a circular line, but only lengthwise strokes were used for the nozzle. The tip of the nozzle was cut to form either a level rim or a spatulated/curved one. The upper surface of the nozzle was often shaved to form a triangular section. This shape of the nozzle is very similar to the earlier Cnidian oil lamps (Bailey 1975: Pls. 48:279; 58:314; 64:335).

'Provincial' Disk Lamps (Fig. 1: 2).— Only two fragments (Fig. 1:2 and Reg. No. 4112 [not illustrated]) were found of this common local type of disk lamps, which was in use throughout Syria-Palestine from the late first century CE to the third century CE (Kahane 1961:134, 141; Figs. 3:21, 4:5, 6; Wexler and Gilboa 1996). The lamps are mold-made and decorated. The fabric differs from lamp to lamp, but is usually well levigated, with the surface covered with a red-brown or red-black vitrified slip. Their distinct features are a rounded body, a biconical section, a short, rounded nozzle and a shallow disk or ring base. The disk is surrounded by a single or double circle, which is surrounded in turn by impressed ovuli or palmettes. Between the circle and the nozzle there is a band of volutes in relief. A common motif, in fact a hallmark of the type, is a double axe in relief at the center of the shoulder. The double axe is rooted in a Cretan cult of the Early Minoan period. It was probably introduced to the Levant by the Phoenicians and continued to be in use, albeit with changes, well into the classical period. The disks of these lamps were decorated in the attractive style of the earlier or contemporary Imperial Roman disk lamps. Most of the patterns were copies of these Roman lamps, along with several new eastern elements.

In most of the lamps the disc was deliberately broken before or during its use. The reason for this custom was discussed at length by Brand (1953:351), who suggested that it was due to the prohibition against graven images. However, the same breakage pattern was found on lamps bearing innocuous motifs, such as the rosette pattern on the lamp in Fig. 1:2, so the custom may have been functional, as a wide filling hole is more convenient.

Late 'Provincial' Lamps (not illustrated).— These lamps comprise a late version of the 'provincial' type, retaining some of its characteristics. These are pear-shaped disk lamps, with a short nozzle without a waist, and they are either decorated with half volutes or left undecorated. The walls are thicker than previously, and although when decorated the patterns are similar, they are crudely stamped or incised around the filling hole. The disk is usually undecorated and broken, as in the earlier lamps, and when decorated, the patterns no longer copy the Roman disk lamps, but are mostly geometric. The surface is either slipped or bare. The type is common in the Samaria region, but known from other sites as well, albeit in small numbers (Neidinger 1982: Pl. 24; Sussman 1986:195–197, Pls.77:3–10; 78; 79; 80:37). The suggested date for these lamps, based mainly on typological considerations, is the late third–fourth centuries CE.

'Samaritan' Lamps Type I (Fig. 2).— This Type, which was defined by Sussman (1976: Fig. 2:2; 1978: Pls. 39–44; 1983:73, Apollonia Type 1; 1986–1987), is commonly dated to the late third century or the fourth–fifth centuries CE, the latter being a more likely date. This type constitutes the largest group of lamps in the assemblage. These lamps have a rounded body, with a nearly rectangular section and a concave side, and an arched nozzle. Their base is either sunk or a ring base. Both the disc and the base were engraved with a compass and retain a compass mark at their center. The handle is usually in the shape of a four-armed star, but may also be wing shaped, albeit rather rarely; in a few cases, the two handle types are superimposed on a single lamp. The lamps were fired closed, and were broken open only before use, thus retaining ritual purity, which was closely guarded by the Samaritans.

All the lamps of this type are decorated with a set design comprising a band of chevrons or parallel dashes—a 'ladder' pattern—framing the nozzle on three sides; indeed, this design is the identifying mark of 'Samaritan' lamps (Sussman 1983: Figs. 3, 4). Within this frame there is a central pattern or a symbol. The vocabulary of these patterns and symbols is rich (Sussman 1978; 1983: Pls. 2–5, Nos. 43–58; 1986–1987). Among the most important are inscriptions of biblical phrases in Samaritan script; symbols common to Jews and Samaritans, such as the nine-branched menorah (Fig. 2:5, and see below); temples; the tabernacle and its instruments; an 'eye' motif (Reg. No. 1789; not illustrated), which is very common on lamps, and may represent protection against the evil eye (Sussman 1978: Pl. 43:26); depictions of daily life, conveyed by agricultural instruments used in the production and trade of grain and wine—the two main occupations of the period; and women's belongings, such as jewelry. The subjects are very similar to the ones represented on the Jewish 'Darom' lamps of the first–second centuries CE (Sussman 1982).

The nine-branched menorah decorating the lamp in Fig. 2:5 has a tall stem ending with three splayed feet, as in the Bet She'an Synagogue (Zori 1967: Pl. 29:5); a bar rests on top of the branches. Below the menorah on the right is an object which may be a *lulav* or a hanging lamp. Above the menorah is an object which is difficult to interpret. It may be reconstructed in part based on a fragment of a lamp published in a sale catalogue (Deutsch 1993: No. 142, far left), depicting a square

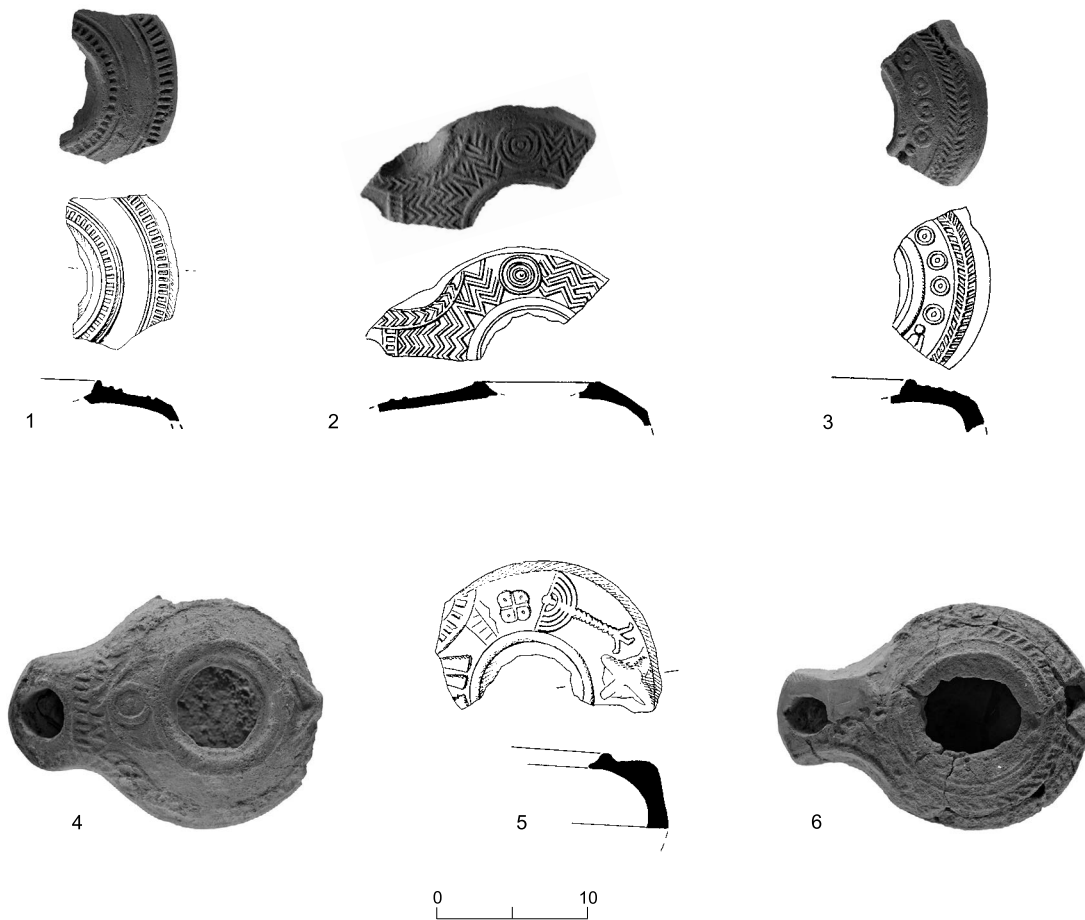


Fig. 2. 'Samaritan' Type 1 lamps.

No.	Stratum	Locus	Reg. No.
1	II	404	1558
2	II	436	1732
3	III-II	494	1973
4	III	525	4168
5	III	470	1857
6	III	448	1736

offering table with a reticulated pattern, supported by two wide feet and surmounted by an arch and a gabled roof. Similar feet also support large basins. The space above the altar is wider on the lamp from Tel Ifshar, and it may have been used to portray additional motifs. At the base of the nozzle, which is broken off, it may be possible to identify three of four bases of twisted columns of a shrine or a temple—a very common decorative motif on 'Samaritan' Type 1 lamps (Sussman 1986–1987: Figs. 1–3).

This group of lamps exhibits two half-circles covered with geometrical patterns on the shoulder—one on the front part of the disk, and the other below the handle (Sussman 1983: Fig. 2). The 'ladder'

pattern sometime surrounds the body and the disk (Fig. 2:1, 4, 6), and various patterns can be found in the space between the two. These patterns may include branches and/or concentric circles (Fig. 2:2), or a row of dotted circles (Fig. 2:3), which at times support an arch, representing scales (Fig. 2:4). When elaborately decorated, elongated volutes and other patterns are found along the base of the nozzle (Sussman 1978: Nos. 9, 20, 21, 29). Occasionally, a narrow branch replaces the ‘ladder’ along the sides of the nozzle or around the shoulder (Fig. 2:2, 3), and the principal motif is often repeated on the shoulder (Fig. 2:5). Some of these geometric patterns are common on other types of contemporary lamps as well.

‘Samaritan’ Type 2 (Fig. 3:1, 2).— Three exemplars were found of this type, which was defined by Sussman (1976:89, Group B; 1978: Pls. 44:42, 43; 46:44, 46; 1983:73, 78, Figs. 7:4, 5, 8, Type 2) and is contemporary with ‘Samaritan’ Type 1 (fourth–fifth centuries CE). The shapes of the individual lamps vary: some are elongated, others pear-shaped. A straight or arched channel runs along the nozzle to the disk. The treatment and the shape of the disk is the same as in ‘Samaritan’ Type 1. The handle is wing- or star-shaped (Sussman 1978: Pl. 46:44). Most of the decoration designs consist of geometric patterns, following the same style as that of Type 1, with the ‘ladder’ pattern and half circles. Only a few depict figurative subjects. Two daggers are a frequent motif, usually hidden within the geometrical patterns (Sussman 1988: No. 35). The motif of two daggers is found in other media as well—at times as two knives—such as in Christian sacrifice scenes of the Byzantine period (Goodenough 1964: No. 71, the Sacrifice of Isaac) and in decorated Samaritan manuscripts (Purvis 1994: Figs. 1, 2).

‘Caesarea’ type (Fig. 3:3, 4).— These decorated disk lamps date from the sixth–seventh centuries CE. They were found in association with molds in various excavations at Caesarea, hence the name (Sussman 1980; Holum et al. 1988:167, Fig. 117, first on the right). The type has elements in common with lamps produced at other Palestinian workshops of the period, such as the Beit Naṭṭif and the Samaritan ones. The lamps are rounded, with a wide ring base, sometimes smoothed, and are trapezoidal in section. They have narrow, sloping shoulders with an incised decoration of leaves. The disk is wide and concave, surrounded by a ridge, and usually with a decoration in relief, which differs from those found on Roman-period lamps and on the Samaritan and Beit-Naṭṭif lamps. The handle is in the shape of a triangular pyramid, and the short, blunt and narrow nozzle is framed by a double line; the wick hole is small. Lamps of this type were found also in the vicinity of Caesarea (Siegelmann 1992: Fig. 4) and along the southern coast of Israel. In northern Israel, similar oil lamps had a large filling hole (Adan-Bayevitz 1995).

The frequent use of the cross to decorate the disk of both the northern and southern ‘Caesarea’ lamps led to the suggestion that they were associated with the Christian community. The appearance of this type was attributed to the mid-fourth century CE on typological grounds as well as on the assumption that a common use of the cross would occur only after Christianity gained recognition as

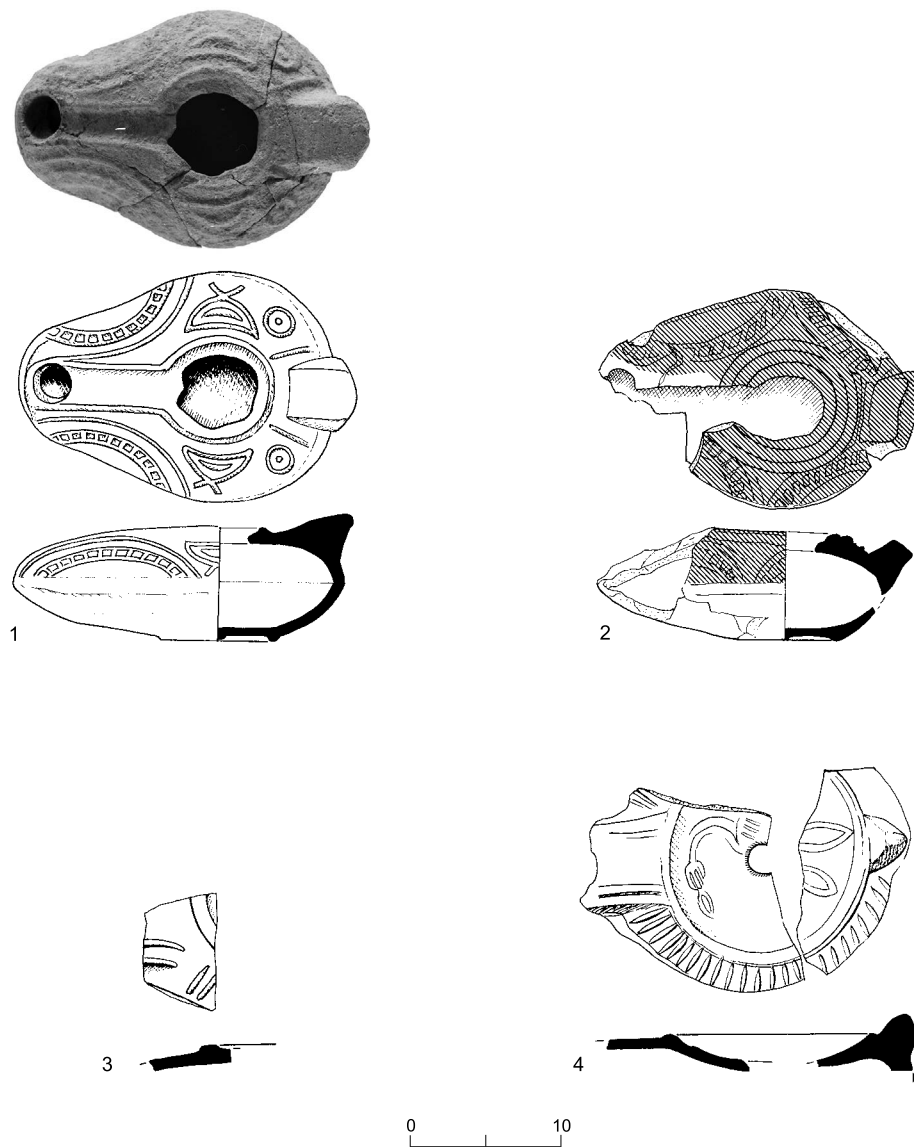


Fig. 3. 'Samaritan' Type 2 lamps (1, 2) and 'Caesarea' lamps (3, 4).

No.	Stratum	Locus	Reg. No.
1	II	186	1519
2	II	525	4183
3	II	134	1214
4	II	449	1850

a formal religion. The type flourished during the fifth and possibly even into the sixth century CE. The lamp in Fig. 3:4 is decorated with a heron, a bird commonly depicted in Christian art.

'Samaritan' Types 3 and 4 (Fig. 4:1–3).— These types date from the late Byzantine to the Early Islamic period. The two types cannot always be differentiated in fragmented form. Fig. 4:1 is

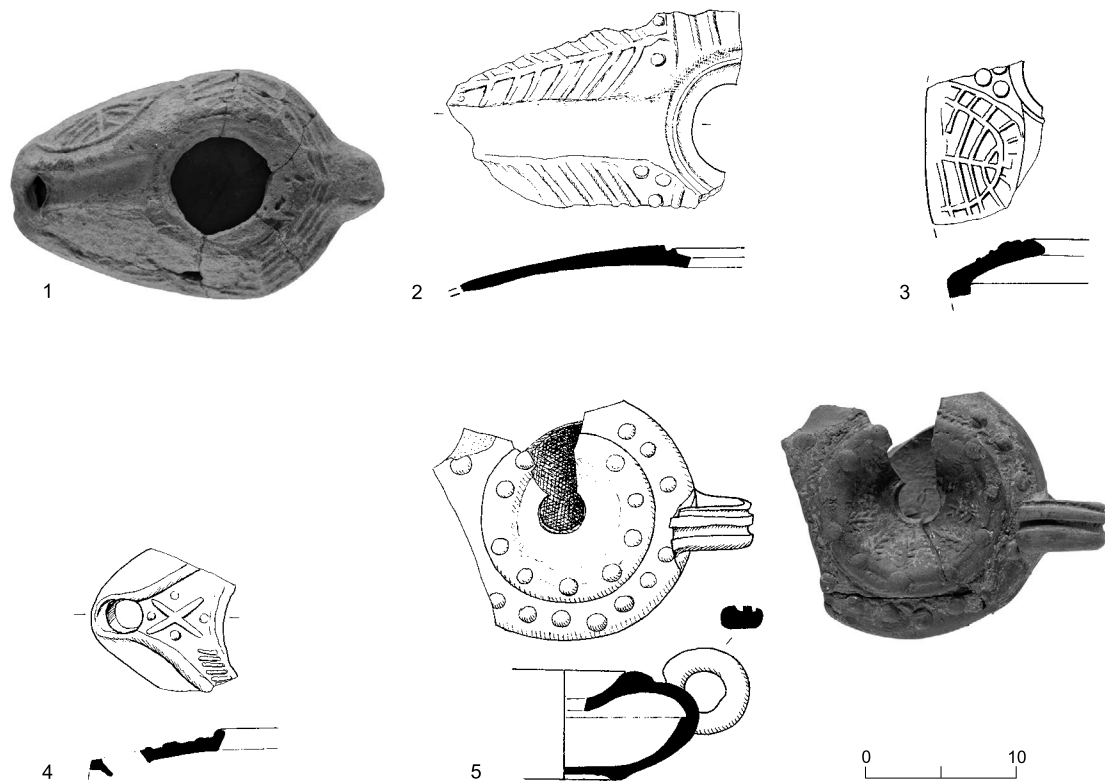


Fig. 4. 'Samaritan' Types 3 and 4 lamps (1–3); Byzantine (4) and Late Byzantine (5) lamps.

No.	Stratum	Locus	Reg. No.
1	II	402	1551
2	II	134	1172
3	II	136	1196
4	II	517	4063
5	II	521	4132

identified as Type 3, Fig. 4:2 as Type 4, and Fig. 4:3 remains unattributed. Type 4 appeared later than type 3, and remained in use later, but there is a certain overlap between the two. In shape and manufacturing details they are like the 'Samaritan' Type 2 (Sussman 1976:98–99, Groups C and D; Sussman 1983:80, Types 3, 4, Fig. 9:2, 3, Pl. 12): they are elongated, with a wide and deep channel along the nozzle, which later become shallow.

The flat disk of the Type 3 lamps was broken prior to its use, as in the 'Samaritan' Types 1 and 2 lamps. The later, Type 4 lamps had a wide-open filling hole, encircled by a single or double circle. In the latter case, the outer circle crossed the base of the channel, separating it from the disk. These lamps have a trapezoidal section. The handle is always winged, either horizontally or slanting upward. The decoration consists mainly of geometric patterns that are deeply incised into the mold. The design runs in parallel lines across the sloping wide shoulders. The motifs of branches inside

half-circles and free-standing branches continued to be in fashion (Fig. 4:1, 3), as were the wide disks (No. 1962; not illustrated). An arch motif that came into fashion during this period is found on Islamic oil lamps as well (e.g., Hammat Gader; Cohen-Uzzielli 1997: Fig. 13, top).

'Byzantine' (Fig. 4:4).— Only one fragment of this type of lamp was found. It is unslipped, and has a shallow, arched channel decorated with an equal-armed cross with dots between the arms. As a wide, shallow channel is usually found in lamps of the late Byzantine period, we tentatively date this lamp to the seventh century CE.

'Late Byzantine' (Fig. 4:5).— This fragment belongs to a rare, imported oil lamp. It has elements that could associate it with either Asia Minor or Egypt. These include the low ring base, the conical section and the ridged-loop handle attached to the mold-made lamp, as well as the dark hue of the ware, the dark slip and other manufacturing details: the concave disk and the small central filling hole with a distinct rim. The nozzle, which may have provided an indication of the origin, is missing. The disk is decorated in linear relief, depicting branches pointing to the center. Two circles of small, raised disks surround the rim and the shoulder.

No parallel was found for this lamp, which must be an import. Similar decorated oil lamps with a loop ribbon handle and a channel along the nozzle are known from Saraçhane in Istanbul and are dated by Hayes to the late sixth–seventh centuries CE (Type 15; Hayes 1992: Fig. 25:125–131). Hayes suggests a southern origin for this type: Aswan (Hayes 1980:80, Pl. 56:481 [fifth–sixth centuries CE], Pl. 58:521 [sixth–seventh centuries CE]). However, while the lamps from Aswan do have a similar decoration within the disk, their shape and handle are nevertheless different.

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