

## MERON: A LATE ROMAN–OTTOMAN SETTLEMENT

HOWARD SMITHLINE

Merón in the Upper Galilee (Fig. 1) is well known for its long time association with the annual Jewish festival of Lag Ba-'Omer. References to Merón appear in numerous written sources, religious and secular.<sup>1</sup> Excavations and surveys conducted at the site have revealed various phases of its material culture (Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981; Frankel et al. 2001:38, Site 305; Feig 2002). The major excavation conducted by Meyers and Strange exposed seven habitation strata dating from the Hellenistic period through the fourteenth century CE (Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981:xvii). The published excavation report deals primarily with Roman-period finds. Although the importance of Stratum VII, a thirteenth–fourteenth-centuries Mamluk-period settlement was recognized (Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981:5), it received little attention. The most significant remnants of this stratum are a fragmentary Mamluk structure west of the synagogue and Medieval remains to the east

(Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981: Figs. 2.10; 2.13). The present report attempts to fill this lacuna.

### THE EXCAVATION

In November 2000, a limited excavation was undertaken on the middle slope of Mount Merón above Moshav Merón (map ref. 24130–32/76520–22).<sup>2</sup> Three 5 × 5 m squares (Sqs I–III; Plans 1–3) were excavated on a north–south axis along the eastern perimeter of the steep slope, in a relatively recent levelling fill adjacent to a local high school. The excavation area is approximately 70 m to the south of a jutting spur of bedrock, upon which the ruins of the ancient Merón synagogue and adjoining medieval structures are located. Late Roman-period installations and domestic structures were excavated approximately 50 m southwest of the present excavation (Feig 2002:89–90).

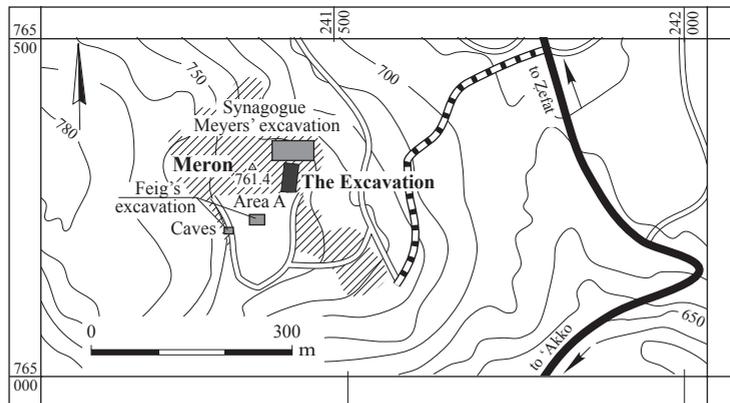
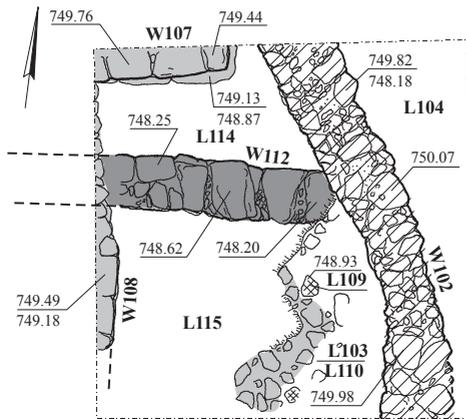
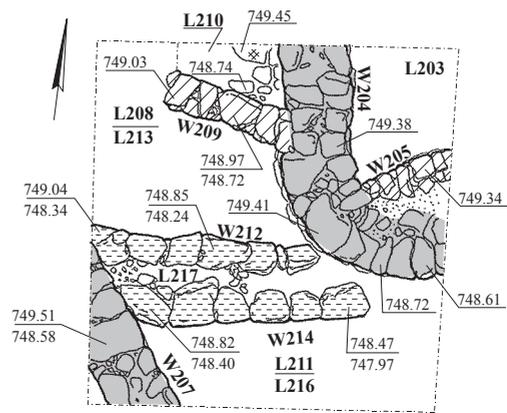


Fig. 1. Location map of Meron and the excavated areas.



Plan 1. Square I.



Plan 2. Square II.

The distance between Sq I in the south and Sq II in the middle was 10 m, and between Sq II and the northernmost Sq III, 8 m. No structural connection was noted between any of these squares, nor between the present and previous excavations.

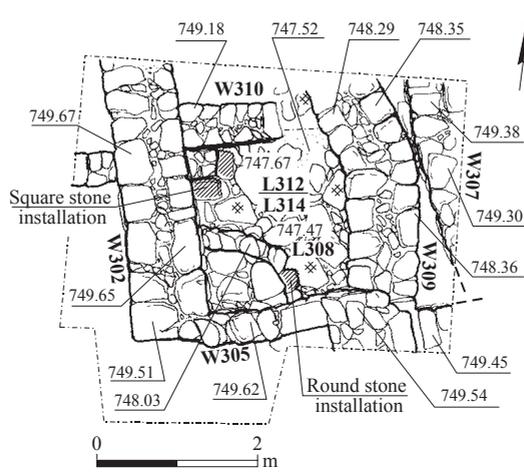
Aside from an Ottoman-period construction in Sq III, the excavation revealed few substantial architectural remains. Bedrock was not attained in any of the excavated squares. Four strata were defined: Stratum 1, from the Late Ottoman period (eighteenth–early twentieth centuries); Stratum 2, dating to the Crusader/Mamluk period; Stratum 3, from the Byzantine period; and Stratum 4, from the Late Roman period.

#### *Stratum 1: Late Ottoman Period*

Remains dating to the Ottoman period were uncovered in each of the squares. Terrace W102, preserved to a height of 1.5–2.0 m, runs along the eastern edge of the slope for the entire length of Sq I. It is a coarsely constructed curving wall of varying width and random stone placement, with no ordered courses (Plan 1).

Ottoman-period remains were somewhat more substantial in Sq II (Plan 2). Wall 209, of which a single course was preserved, abuts the upper courses of Mamluk installation W204. It appears that it was used as a support for a large *ṭabun* (Fig. 2), the upper part of which was found discarded on the adjacent stone floor (L210). Wall 209 was constructed on a packed gravel matrix (L208), which served as the base for a poorly preserved, Ottoman-period stone floor that extended nearly throughout the square outside the space defined by W204 (Fig. 3). This floor abutted the well-built W207 that bisected the southwestern corner of the square.

The northernmost Sq III (Plan 3), contained remains of several construction phases within the late Late Ottoman period. A core structure, bounded by W302 in the west and W305 in the south, enclosed a small well-paved courtyard (L314). A square stone installation in the northwestern corner of the courtyard and a fragmentary round installation in its southwestern corner, were both constructed on the stone pavement. The entry into the courtyard



Plan 3. Square III.

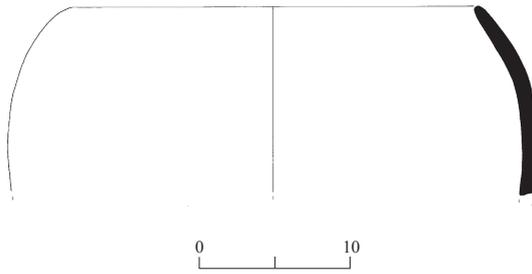


Fig. 2. Upper part of *tabun* (L210).

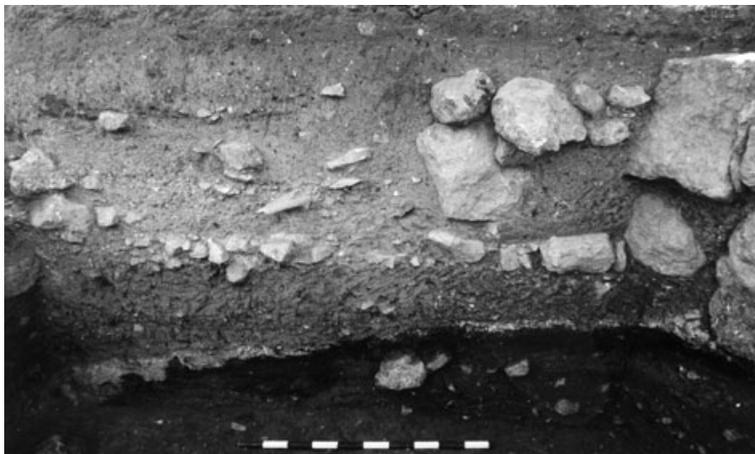


Fig. 3. Ottoman-period stone floor in south section of Sq II, looking south; W207 on the right, black ash accumulation in foreground.



Fig. 4. Square III, W309 (half-meter stick on top) transverses the destroyed arched doorway of W310 and is over floor L314, looking north; W307 is on the right.



Fig. 5. Square III, destroyed arch (W310) abutting W302, looking north; W309 is on the right, lying on 25–30 cm accumulated soil above floor L314.

was through an arched wall in the north (W310), which abutted W302 (Figs. 4, 5). The remains of an additional arch were found in the eastern

end of W305 (Fig. 6), but the two arches were not aligned. A later floor (L312) was less carefully laid 0.25–0.35 m above the earlier one



Fig. 6. Square III, haphazard rebuild of W305 at junction of W305/W309 to the left, looking south; arched doorway on upper left hand corner of square, round installation on floor L312 at intersection of W302 and W305, to the right.

(L314). The entire architectural unit suffered serious structural damage. The arch of W310 collapsed; W305 appears to have collapsed as well, but was haphazardly rebuilt. Wall 309 was constructed after the destructive event, on a level layer of light-colored soil, 0.2–0.3 m deep, and exited Sq III passing directly through the collapsed arched doorway of W310. Wall 309 thus postdates the collapse of the arch and essentially cancels the doorway. The jumble of collapsed stones at the junction between W309 and the rebuilt W305 obliterated the relation between the two walls. Due to excavation limitations, it was impossible to further expose this complex, and to better clarify W309 and its unusual undulating course.

Wall 309 was buried beneath a collapse of stones (L308), within which was a coin that dates to the third quarter of the eighteenth century (see Syon, this volume: No. 13). It may be surmised that some of the damage was a result of the destructive earthquake of 1837.

A small probe beneath floor L314 adjacent to W302, revealed a *tabun* that predated the paved floor.

From the surface level down to paved floor L314, Rashaya el-Fukhar Ware (Fig. 7) dominated the ceramic finds of Sq III. No chronologically identifiable pottery phases were discernible.

*Stratum 2: Crusader/Mamluk Period* (Plans 1, 2) Terrace W102 in Sq I (Plan 1) was constructed upon, and thereby destroyed, a *tabun* (L109), whose fragmentary remains are associated with paved floor L110. Covering the floor was an accumulation of loose gray soil and debris (L103). The same material covered W107, which jutted into the square from the northern balk, and W108, which was visible along the western balk. Three well-constructed courses of large rectangular hewn stones were preserved from W107, with no floor being associated with the wall. Wall 107 was apparently cut in the east by the construction of terrace W102 (Fig. 8). A narrow gap separated W107 from paved floor L114, indicating that the wall postdates the paving (Fig. 9). Wall 108 also penetrated the floor and presumably abutted W107.

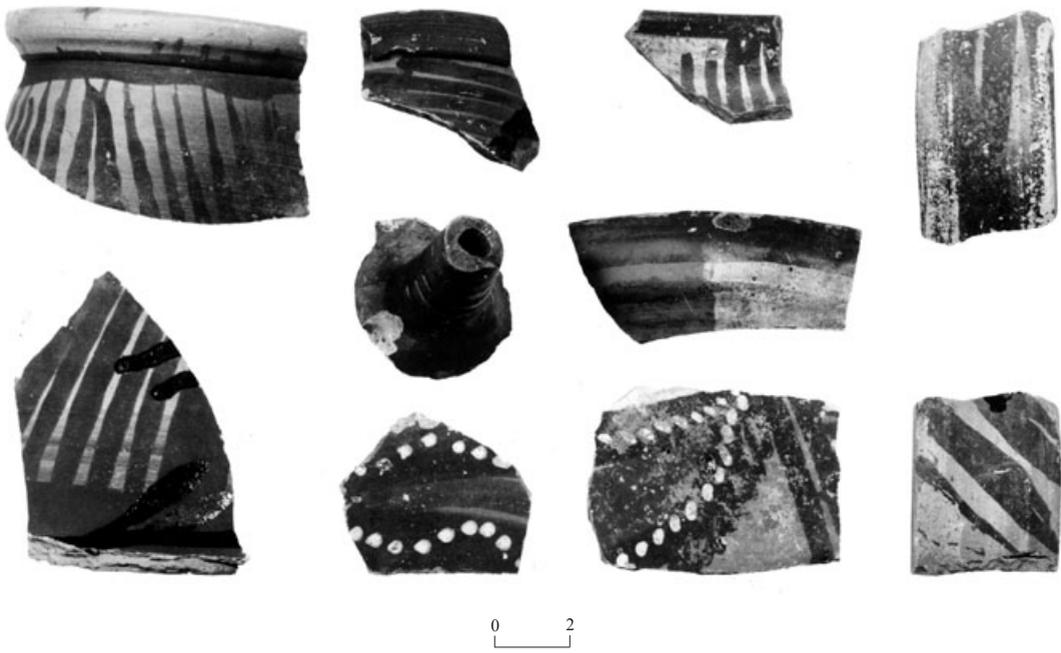


Fig. 7. Selection of Rashaya el-Fuhar Ware sherds.



Fig. 8. Square I, W107 cut by terrace W102 on the right, looking north; in the foreground, Floor 110.

Curved W204, in the northeastern quadrant of Sq II (Plan 2), appears to be part of an installation—a kiln or an oven. A layer of ash, more than 1.5 m deep, accumulated

inside the installation (L203), attesting to its intensive use. Wall 204 was constructed during the Mamluk period, but its southern end appears to have collapsed and to have



Fig. 9. Square I, Floor 110 cut by W107 on the left, looking east; terrace W102 in background.



Fig. 10. Square II, black ash accumulation below W207, looking southwest; vertical-standing boulder W214 on the right.

been subsequently replaced by W205 during the Ottoman period.

In an extensive ash accumulation (L211, L213) below the Ottoman floor, a large quantity

of Mamluk-period sherds had collected against the outer face of W204 (Fig. 10). The ash accumulation perhaps derives from periodic cleaning of the installation.



Fig. 11. Square II, upright boulders W212 and W214, disturbed by construction of W204, looking east.

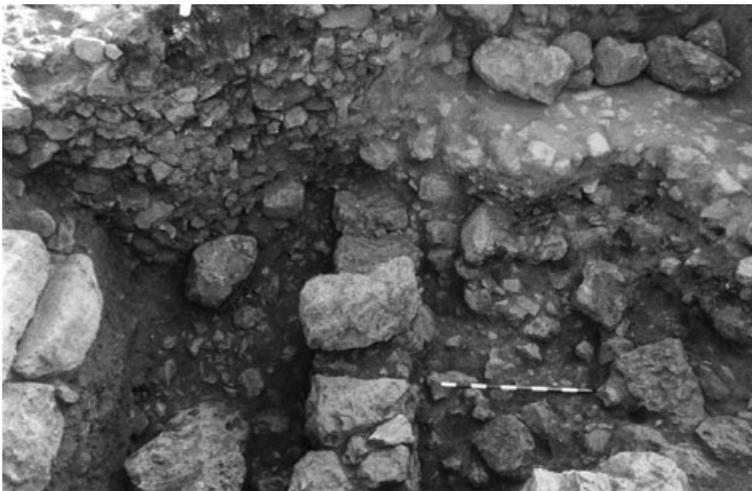


Fig. 12. Square I, W112 in center, terrace W102 is in the background and W107 is to the left, looking east.

#### *Stratum 3: Byzantine Period*

The only evidence of Byzantine-period activity was uncovered in Sq II (Plan 2). Underlying W204 and the ash accumulation (L211, L213) is a level of reddish brown soil (L216) that yielded Byzantine ceramic finds, attesting to an unexcavated Byzantine presence below. Two unusual, parallel, sloping walls (W212, W214) constructed of upright boulders, are assigned to this stratum. They ran beneath W207 and were cut by the construction of W204 (Fig. 11).

#### *Stratum 4: Late Roman Period*

Remains of the Late Roman period were uncovered in Square I only. Below the Stratum 2 floor (L110) was a stone and earth fill that covered W112, a wall dated to the Late Roman period by associated ceramic evidence (see Table 1). Constructed of large, hammer-dressed boulders (Fig. 12), W112 is contemporaneous with the Late-Roman occupation level excavated by both Meyers and Feig.

## CRUSADER/MAMLUK CERAMIC FINDS

The ceramic finds discussed here, with only a few exceptions, date from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries CE. The exceptions include the Rashaya el-Fukhar Ware (Fig. 7) and a nearly complete cooking pot (Fig. 13)—with a red surface and fabric, and white and brown inclusions—of a type dated by Adan-Bayewitz (1993: Type 4D) from the late third or early fourth centuries to the early fifth century CE.

*Bowls*

Among the bowls, the most common vessel type, two groups were discerned: glazed and unglazed. The majority of the unglazed bowls were coarse and handmade.

*Glazed Monochrome Bowls* (Fig. 14:1–3).— Green glazed monochrome bowls were especially common. The glaze was applied over a layer of white slip, which covered the inner surface and extended outside, over the rim to the upper body. The glaze is usually a rich dark green, and the fabric, dark reddish brown, although lighter material also occurs. Bowl shapes vary from hemispherical with a simple rim (Fig. 14:1), to shallow vessels with a slanted rim (Fig. 14:2) and carinated with a modeled rim (Fig. 14:3). Although monochrome bowls appear in the thirteenth century CE, this specific type is predominant during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Avisar 1996:96).

*Slip-Painted Bowls* (Fig. 14:4–6).— Slip-painted bowls were found with either green or, less frequently, yellow glaze. The dark green glaze appears nearly black, while the yellow glaze imparts a reddish hue to the unpainted background. The fabric is dark to brick red. Common to these bowls are linear and geometric decorations. Slip-painted bowls date to the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries CE and are found in both Crusader and Mamluk assemblages. At Yoqne'am, the carinated slip-painted bowls (as Fig. 14:5) and yellow glazed

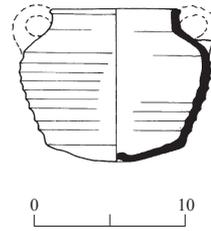


Fig. 13. Cooking pot (L111, B1048).

bowls (as Fig. 14:6) are more common in the Mamluk assemblages (Avisar 1996:96, Types 44–46).

*Gritty Ware* (Fig. 14:7).— Gritty ware is so named for its coarse, gritty glazed surface. It is dated to the twelfth–thirteenth centuries CE, and is found predominantly, but not exclusively, in Crusader contexts (Avisar 1996:91, Type 36). This type is one of the indicators for the existence of a thirteenth, or possibly twelfth, century CE settlement at Meron.

*Gouged Ware* (Fig. 14:8).— The illustrated bowl has a crazed green and yellow glaze over a delicate, gouged decoration. In contrast to the previously discussed twelfth–thirteenth centuries Gritty Ware, these bowls postdate the Crusader kingdom and represent Mamluk assemblages of the late thirteenth to early fifteenth centuries CE (Stern 1999:125–126).

*Imported Crusader-Period Bowls* (Fig. 14:9, 10).— Figure 14:9 illustrates a thick-rimmed Aegean Ware bowl. Bowls of this type are diagnostic of the first half of the thirteenth century CE (Avisar 1996:110–111, Type 72; Stern 1997:58). The fabric of another sherd, with a white slip, pale yellow glaze and shallow incisions (Fig. 14:10) appears to be related to a Zeuxippus derivative subtype, as found at 'Akko and Ḥorbat 'Uza (for a discussion, see Stern 1997:54). These imported bowls reiterate the presence of a thirteenth-century settlement at the site.

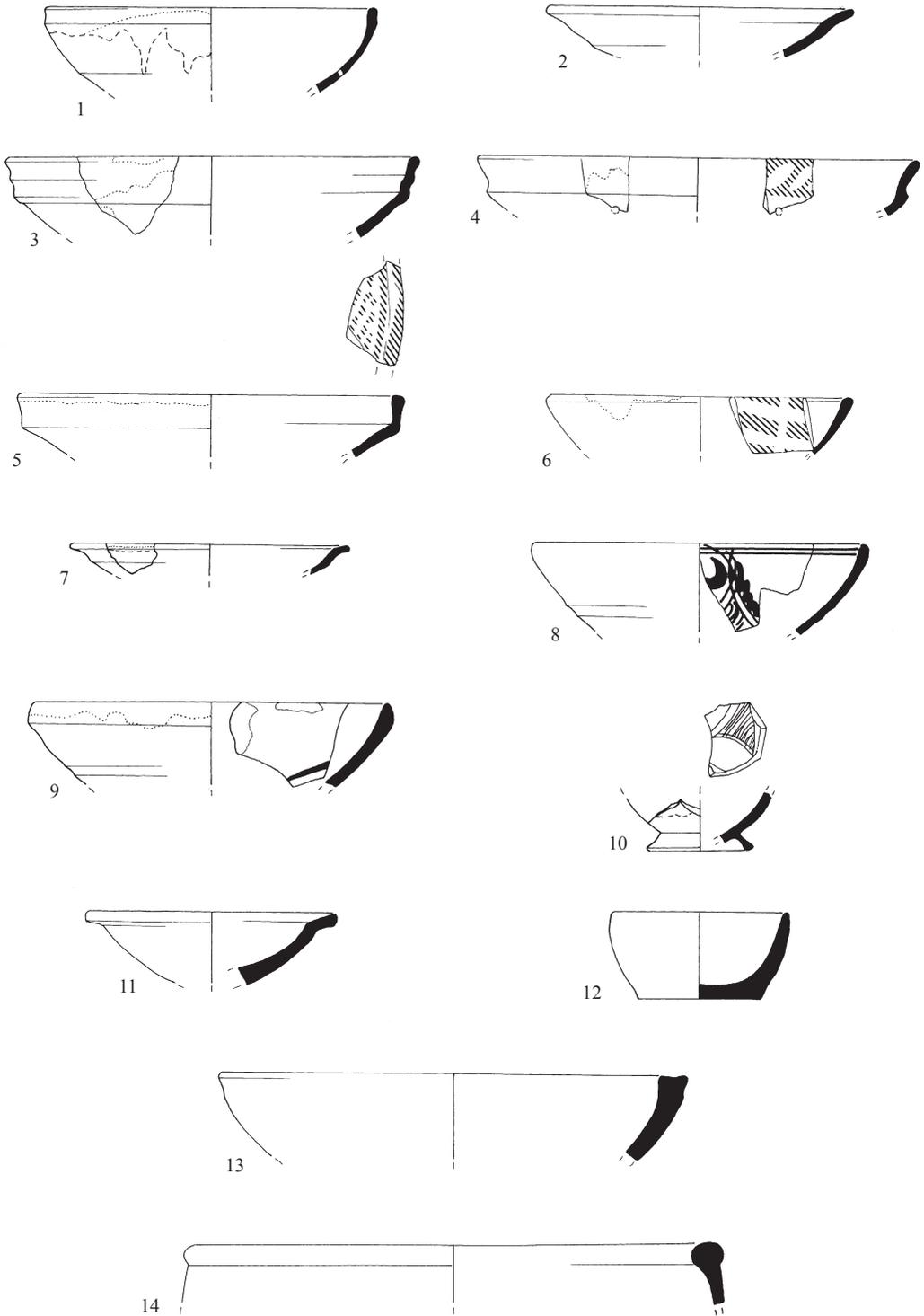


Fig. 14. Glazed and unglazed bowls.

◀ Fig. 14

No.	Vessel	Locus	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Bowl: Monochrome	215	2030	Green glaze over white slip on int. and on rim; dark reddish brown ext.; reddish brown gritty fabric; very fine white inclusions	Yoqne‘am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.36:4
2	Bowl: Monochrome	103	1018/1	Dark green glaze over white slip on int.; reddish yellow gritty fabric; red and white inclusions	Red Tower (Burj al-Aḥmar): Pringle 1986: Fig. 49:56
3	Bowl: Monochrome	208	2015	Green glaze over white slip on int. and over rim to upper ext.; reddish yellow sandy fabric; very fine white inclusions	Yoqne‘am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.36:12
4	Bowl: Slip-Painted	213	2025B	Green glaze over white slip-painted lines on int. and over rim; red fabric; very small white and quartz inclusions	
5	Bowl: Slip-Painted	215	2030/2	Green glaze over white slip-painted lines on int. and over rim; brick red fabric; very small white and quartz inclusions; mica	Yoqne‘am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.32:4 Red Tower (Burj al-Aḥmar): Pringle 1986: Fig. 50:68. Caesarea: Brosh 1986: Fig. 3:17
6	Bowl: Slip-Painted	111	1043/2	Brick-red gritty fabric; yellow glaze; slip-painted	Yoqne‘am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.32:1 Giv‘at Yasaf (Tell er-Ras): Stern 1999: Fig. 1:12 Red Tower (Burj al-Aḥmar): Pringle 1986: Fig. 50:69
7	Bowl: Gritty Ware	213	2036	Coarse yellow glaze on int. and over rim; red fabric; very fine white inclusions	Yoqne‘am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.22:3 Caesarea: Pringle 1985: Fig. 3:13
8	Bowl: Gouged Ware	111	1038	Burnt; crazed glaze; white slip; yellowish red gritty fabric	Giv‘at Yasaf (Tell er-Ras): Stern 1999: Fig. 1:6
9	Bowl: Aegean Ware	217	2037	Light yellow glaze over white slip on int. and over rim; white wash on ext.; reddish brown fabric	Yoqne‘am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.56:3 ‘Akko: Stern 1997: Fig. 13:101
10	Bowl: Zeuxippus	206	2011	Light yellow glaze over white slip on int.; partial white slip on ext.; yellowish red fabric; mica	‘Akko: Stern 1997: Fig. 11
11	Bowl: Acre Ware	210	2021	Red surface; red and tiny white inclusions	‘Akko: Stern 1997: Fig. 4:1–3
12	Bowl	111	1040/2	Yellowish red surface; black core; white and straw inclusions; handmade	Yoqne‘am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.86:3
13	Bowl	111	1042	Buff surface; burnished int.; black core; white and straw inclusions; handmade	Yoqne‘am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.86:2
14	Large plain bowl	110	1036	Dark reddish brown surface; dark brown fabric; gray, brown and white inclusions	Yoqne‘am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.85:2

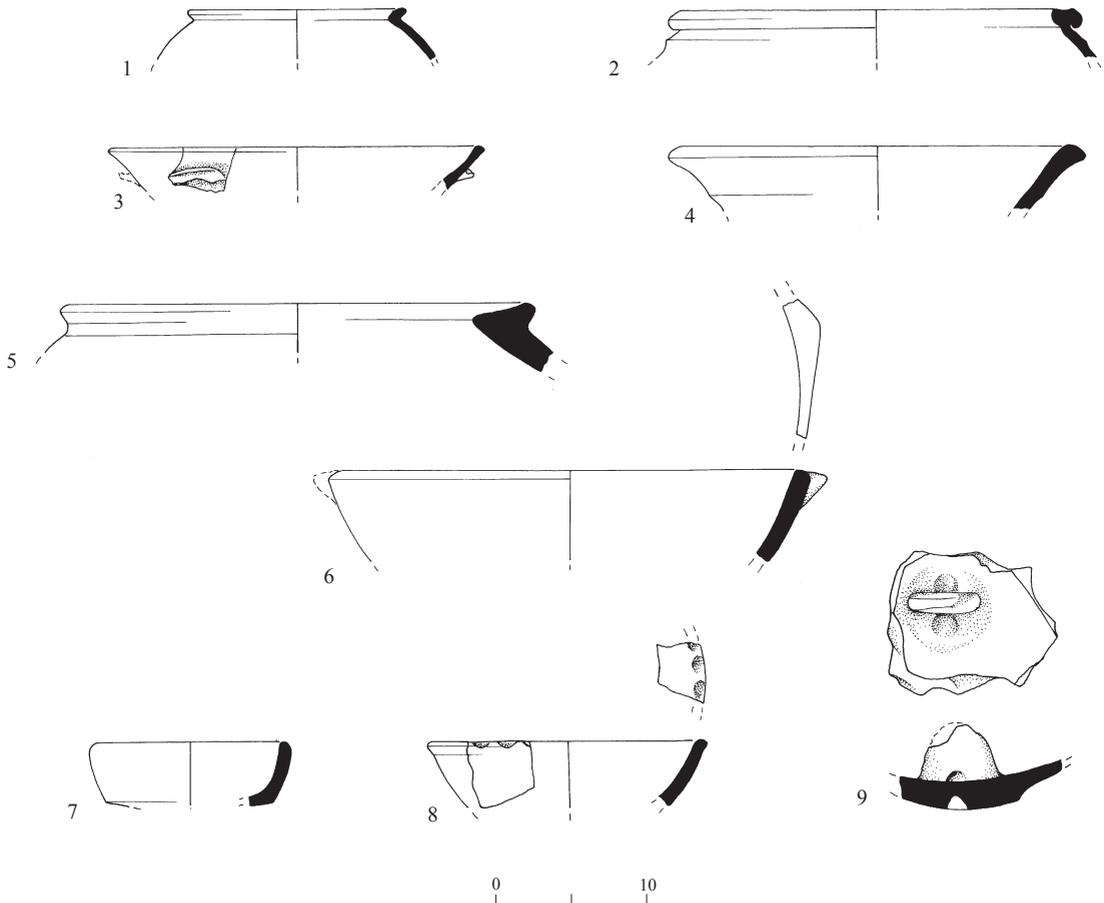


Fig. 15. Cooking wares.

*Unglazed Bowls*

'Acre Bowls' (Fig. 14:11).— An unexpected type at Meron, these bowls of coarse and gritty fabric are prevalent in 'Akko, particularly in the thirteenth-century Hospitaller complex (Stern 1997:37, Fig. 4:1–3). This is one of the very few occurrences of Acre Bowls found outside 'Akko.

*Handmade Bowls* (Fig. 14:12, 13).— Many fragments of handmade bowls of varying size were found. These are coarsely shaped and undecorated other than by an occasional burnish; a large quantity of straw tempering characterizes the fabric. The bowls are found in both Crusader and Mamluk contexts of the

thirteenth–fifteenth centuries CE (cf. Avissar 1996:128, Type 33; Getzov 2000:87\*).

*Large Plain Bowls* (Fig. 14:14).— Large bowls are found in Mamluk contexts. They are of well-fired, reddish brown fabric. A nearly identical vessel was found at Yoqne'am (Avissar 1996:128, Type 32, Fig. XIII.85).

*Cooking Vessels*

The excavation yielded a large variety of cooking vessels, ranging from closed cooking pots to open baking dishes.

*Cooking Pots* (Fig. 15:1, 2).— These are either thin-walled vessels with a narrow everted

◀ Fig. 15

No.	Vessel	Locus	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Cooking pot	111	1043/3	Traces of glaze on int. and rim; brown ext.; dark reddish brown fabric; small white inclusions	'Akko: Stern 1997: Fig. 5:22 Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.94:2, 3 Red Tower (Burj al-Aḥmar): Pringle 1986: Fig. 48:39–42
2	Cooking pot	110	1028	Burnt ext.; brick-red fabric	'Akko: Stern 1997: Fig. 5:27–30
3	Baking dish	211	2025	Dark brown glaze on int.; dark brown fabric; very small white and quartz inclusions	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.102:2 Caesarea: Pringle 1985: Fig. 3:9
4	Baking dish	110	1049	Reddish brown glaze on int.; orange fabric; small white and quartz inclusions	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.105:2
5	Cooking pot	208	2019	Reddish gray ext.; white and straw inclusions; handmade	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.98:1
6	Cooking bowl	103	1019	High burnish on ext., rim and upper int.; dark brown ext.; white and brown inclusions; handmade	
7	Cooking bowl	103	1018/3	Burnished ext. and int.; reddish brown ext. and fabric; white, gray and brown inclusions; handmade	Emmaus: Bagatti 1993: Fig. 32:11–16 Bet Zeneta: Getzov 2000: Fig. 20:1
8	Bowl (cooking?)	211	2032/1	Poorly burnished ext. and int.; reddish brown surface; white and straw inclusions; handmade	
9	Lid	211	2032/2	Burnished upper ext.; reddish brown ext.; white and straw inclusions; handmade	Bet Zeneta: Getzov 2000: Fig. 21:7 Emmaus: Bagatti 1993: Fig. 32:4

rim (Fig. 15:1), indicating twelfth–thirteenth-centuries manufacture (cf. Red Tower—Pringle 1986:146, Fig. 48:39–42; Yoqne'am—Avissar 1996:135, Type 7, Fig. XIII.94:3; 'Akko—Stern 1997:40–41, Fig. 22), or thicker-walled with a larger, folded, everted rim (Fig. 15:2); the latter appear in fourteenth–fifteenth-centuries Mamluk contexts (Stern 1999:132, Fig. 3:37). Note that the rim of Fig. 15:2 has a shallow groove, possibly to accommodate a lid.

*Baking Dishes* (Fig. 15:3, 4).— Baking dishes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE are often coated with a thick, rich dark brown glaze on the inner surface (Fig. 15:3) and have a pair of small ledge handles (Avissar 1996:142, Type 13, Fig. XIII.102:1, 2). Later, thirteenth–fifteenth-centuries Mamluk baking dishes (Fig. 15:4) are characterized by a lighter-colored fabric and lighter glaze (Avissar 1996:142).

*Handmade Cooking Vessels* (Fig. 15:5–9).— A large handmade holemouth cooking pot with a thick triangular rim was made of a very coarse fabric (Fig. 15:5). Comparable vessels were found at Yoqne'am (Avissar 1996:138–139, Type 11).

Other handmade cooking vessels were open (Fig. 15:6–8). They are often identical in shape to the handmade bowls referred to above (Fig. 14:13). The cooking vessels, however, are more frequently burnished than are the bowls. The cooking bowl in Fig. 15:7 has an extremely glossy burnish on its outer surface, while inside it has a more subtle, burnished finish.

*Lid* (Fig. 15:9).— Although the lid is handmade of very coarse fabric, suggesting Mamluk manufacture, similar lids have also been found in thirteenth-century Frankish contexts, such as at Ḥorbat Bet Zeneta (Getzov 2000: Fig. 20:1).

Fig. 16 ▶

No.	Vessel	Locus	Basket	Description	Parallels
1	Baking disk	103	1021	Reddish buff ext.; white and straw inclusions	Avitsur 1976: Fig. 284
2	Baking disk	103	1022	Buff ext.; white, brown and straw inclusions	
3	Jug	111	1040/3	White slip on ext. and int.; red and gray (black?) geometric decoration; black core; white and gray inclusions; handmade	
4	Handle	206	2012	White slip; red painted geometric decoration; white, gray and straw inclusions; handmade	Emmaus: Bagatti 1993: Fig. 33:2 Red Tower (Burj al-Aḥmar): Pringle 1986: Fig. 42
5	Jar	113	1056	Red ext. and fabric; white and brown inclusions	Giv'at Yasaf (Tell er-Ras): Stern 1999: Fig. 4:50 Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.121:2
6	Jar	110	1037	Red ext.; tan core; white, gray and brown inclusions	Giv'at Yasaf (Tell er-Ras): Stern 1999: Fig. 4:51
7	Jar	111	1040/2	White slip; gritty surface; red fabric; white inclusions	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XIII.120:1–5
8	Lamp	213	2027	Buff ext.; red fabric; white and gray inclusions	Yoqne'am: Avissar 1996: Fig. XV.38:42
9	Lamp	206	2008	Green glaze on int.; white slip on int. rim; brown ext. with glaze trickles; brownish red fabric; white inclusions; mat impression on base	Giv'at Yasaf (Tell er-Ras): Stern 1999: Fig. 4:55

*Baking Disks* (Fig. 16:1, 2).— Among the finds in the debris of L103 were fragments of at least three long-handled baking disks (Arabic: *zantu'a*), made of unfired clay. The extremely brittle disk was placed in the oven or heated directly in a fire; the long handle enabled handling while keeping distance from the heat source. The dough was baked on the hot disk by absorbing its heat (Avitsur 1976:106, Fig. 284).

#### *Storage Wares*

*Jugs* (Fig. 16:3, 4).— Few Mamluk Handmade Geometrically Painted (HMGP) jugs were unearthed. The neck of one (Fig. 16:3) was decorated with a red and gray design applied over a thick white slip. Traces of burnish remained on the surface. The painted strap handle (Fig. 16:4), probably of a large jug as well, was crudely produced and poorly fired. It has a thin white brittle slip. Handmade

Geometrically Painted wares are common from the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries CE (Avissar 1996:168–169, Type 28; Stern 1999:134).

*Jars* (Fig. 16:5–7).— The jars are wheel-thrown, and the majority are of a single type, made of red fabric, with a flat rim and a ridge surrounding the neck (Fig. 16:5, 6). Jars of this type are characteristic of the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries CE (Avissar 1996:153, Type 14; Stern 1999: Fig. 4:49–51). Several jars with a long outfolded modeled rim and a greenish white slip were found (Fig. 16:7). This type appears in both Crusader and Mamluk assemblages (Avissar 1996:151–153, Type 13).

#### *Lamps* (Fig. 16:8, 9)

The saucer lamp with a low disk base (Fig. 16:8) is typical of the late twelfth–early

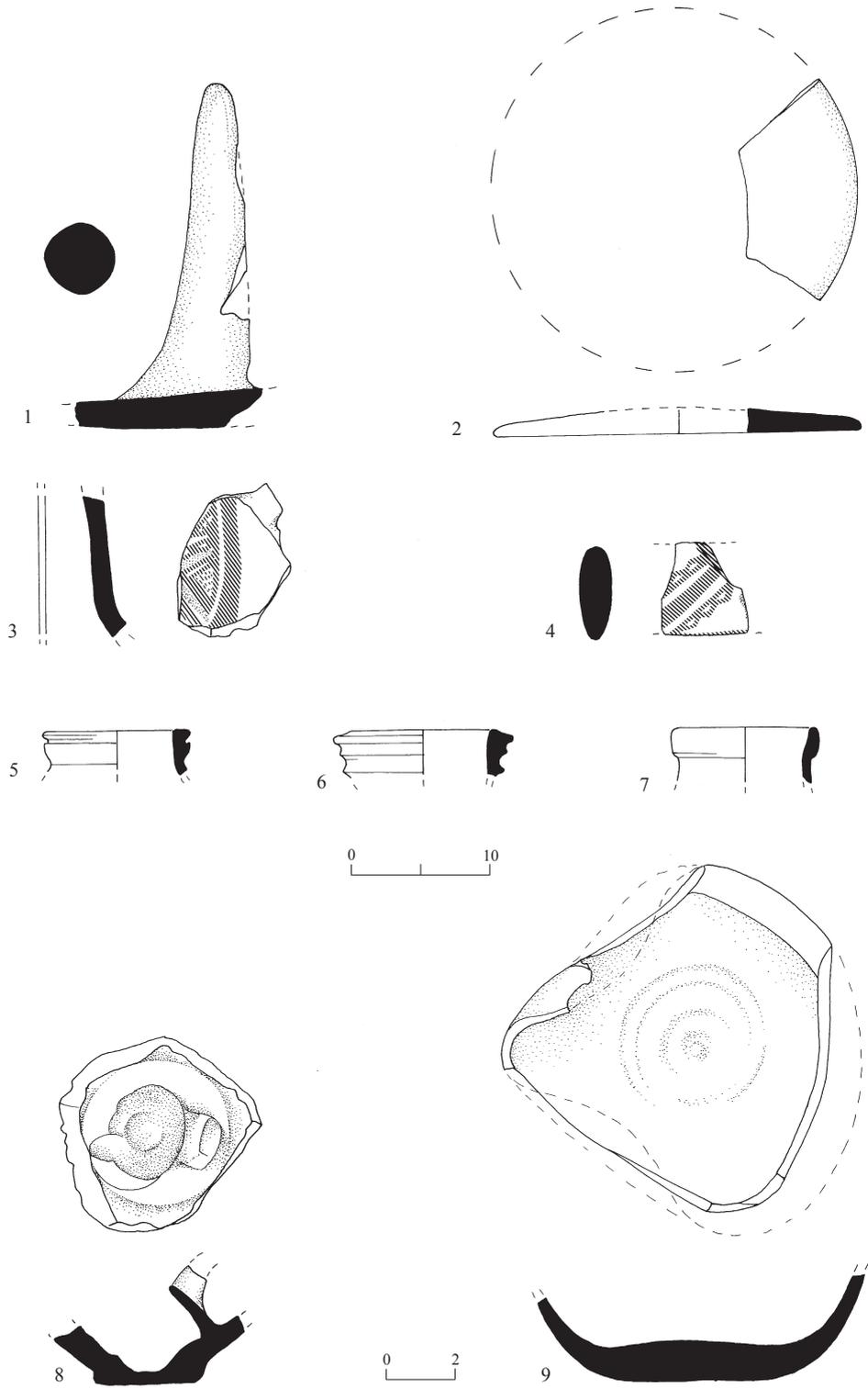


Fig. 16. Baking discs (1, 2), storage ware (3–7) and lamps (8, 9).

**Table 1. Kefar Ḥananya Pottery-Types found in Meron**

Vessel	Type	Date (CE)	Fig.	Reference
Bowl	Kefar Ḥananya 1A	End 1st–3rd c.		Adan-Bayewitz 1993:91
Bowl	Kefar Ḥananya 1B	Late 1st/early 2nd to mid-4th c.		Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981: Pl. 8.11:10 Adan-Bayewitz 1993:109
Bowl	Kefar Ḥananya 1E	Mid-3rd–early 5th c.		Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981: Pl. 8.1 Adan-Bayewitz 1993:109
Cooking pot	Kefar Ḥananya 4D	Latter part of 3rd/early 4th–early 5th c.	13	Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981: Pl. 8.1 Adan-Bayewitz 1993:132
Cooking pot	Kefar Ḥananya C4A	Mid-4th–early 5th c.		Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981: Pl. 8.14:18 Adan-Bayewitz 1993:159–162

thirteenth centuries CE (Avisar 1996:197, Fig. XV.35:42), and is found predominantly at Frankish sites (Avisar 1996:196).

Later, thirteenth–fifteenth centuries Mamluk-period lamps are often open with a pinched nozzle (Fig. 16:9), frequently with a green glaze over a white slip. Identical lamps were found at Giv'at Yasaf, north of 'Akko (Stern 1999:134, Fig. 4:54, 55).

### Summary

The ceramic evidence alludes to a settlement of the late twelfth–early thirteenth centuries CE that continued through the fifteenth century. Certain ceramic types are characteristic of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries CE and do not appear in post-Crusader Mamluk contexts: Aegean Ware, Zeuxippus derivatives, Gritty Ware, saucer lamps, 'Akko Bowls and various cooking vessels. On the other hand, there are types that are characteristic of the late thirteenth–fifteenth centuries Mamluk settlement as well: gouged ware, Handmade Geometrically Painted vessels, ridge-neck jars and the open lamps may be cited as examples of the later types.

### CONCLUSIONS

The excavation at Meron yielded additional information regarding the Roman and Byzantine settlements there, showing them to

have extended farther to the southeast than had previously been known. The limited nature of the excavation and the depth of the remains of these periods preclude an assessment of the character of this settlement.

Meron was an important Jewish pilgrimage destination in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE, as is amply evidenced by the itineraries of Jewish pilgrims and travelers (Prawer 1988:55, 182, 185, 196, 211, 223, 231, 242).

A reference to Meron by a non-Jewish commentator, Dimashqi, in 1300 CE, seems to conclude its mention during the Mamluk period.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, in 1522, Rabbi Moshe Basola relates that he found no Jewish community there (Ben-Zvi 1938:46, Lines 21–22). Meron is again cited by Gerson de Scarmela in 1561 (Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981:5–6).

'Maron', a site mentioned several times in Crusader documents as being located in the mountains of Tyre in the vicinity of Toron (Tibnin in Lebanon), is apparently the present-day Lebanese village of Maroun e-Ras. Two of the documents, however, do possibly refer to the Galilean Meron and shed some light on its history under Crusader rule. Both documents—*RRH* 625 and *RRH* 1120, dated 1183 and 1244 respectively—discuss land transactions, but fail to provide specific geographical landmarks that would assist in an accurate identification of their location. The earlier document places

Maron in the possession of the prominent land owner and count, Joscelin I, while the later document concerns an attempt of his heirs to have this property restituted to them. The proximity of Meron to the territory owned by Joscelin, which extended to the village of Bet Jann on the Mt. Meron massif (Frankel 1988:265), suggests that the Maron mentioned in these two documents is to be identified with present day Meron.

It seems safe to surmise that Meron served as one of the important pilgrimage sites on the itineraries of Jewish travelers and pilgrims, and was not of major interest to the Crusader rulers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The twelfth–thirteenth centuries CE finds do, however, allude to either a short-lived Frankish presence in Meron, which would have ceased with the fall of nearby Safed to Baybars in 1266, or to a settlement that maintained relations with the Frankish administration and populace. Taking into account its rural location, it is not likely that Meron seriously

suffered during the rule of the Crusaders. As Prawer (2001:243) opines, “Crusader battles and conquests centered around cities and the rural areas were not directly affected”. With the demise of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, it appears that the local material culture became more insular and localized, as evidenced by the cessation of imported wares. This is also apparent at thirteenth–fifteenth centuries CE sites such as Yoqne‘am and Giv‘at Yasaf.

This excavation at Meron appears to have exposed the southern limits of the Crusader and Mamluk settlements. Feig’s excavation to the southwest yielded only pottery as evidence of the Mamluk period (Feig 2002:101).

The excavated area remained abandoned from the end of the Mamluk period until the establishment of a Late Ottoman settlement, probably in the eighteenth century. The structure uncovered in Sq III and the orientation of the well-built wall in Sq II (W207) indicate an intensive Ottoman presence that continued through the early twentieth century.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a brief review, cf. Meyers, Strange and Meyers 1981:5–7.

<sup>2</sup> The excavation (Permit No. A-3316) was directed by Howard Smithline, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, and financed by the Rashbi Development Project of Meron. Assistance was provided by IAA staff: Avi Hajian and Elizabeth Belashov (surveying and drafting), Leea Porat (pottery restoration),

Hagit Tahan (drawing), Ella Altmark and the IAA metals laboratory (coin preservation), Danny Syon (numismatics), Edna Stern (pottery identification) and workers from Kafr Manda.

<sup>3</sup> Vilnay (1977:4368), in his encyclopedia, gives two additional unaccredited references to Meron: one from the early fourteenth century CE, and the other from 1495, late in the Mamluk period.

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