

In Centro

Collected Papers
Volume I

Motion, Movement and Mobility

Editors:
Guy D. Stiebel
Doron Ben-Ami
Amir Gorzalczany
Yotam Tepper
Ido Koch





Central Region



TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

The Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology

The Jacob M. Alkow Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures

The Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies and Archaeology

The Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities

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Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology
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Contributors and Editors

Amitzur, Yair

Israel Antiquities Authority
yairam@israntique.org.il

Be'eri, Ron

Israel Antiquities Authority
beeri@israntique.org.il

Ben-Ami, Doron

Israel Antiquities Authority
doronb@israntique.org.il

Buxton, Bridget

University of Rhode Island
babuxton@uri.edu

Ein-Mor, Daniel

Israel Antiquities Authority
einmor@israntique.org.il

Elad, Itai

Israel Antiquities Authority
itaie@israntique.org.il

Finkelstein, Israel

University of Haifa
and Tel Aviv University
fink2@tauex.tau.ac.il

Getzov, Nimrod

Israel Antiquities Authority
getzov@israntique.org.il

Gorzalczany, Amir

Israel Antiquities Authority
amir@israntique.org.il

Itach, Gilad

Israel Antiquities Authority
and Bar-Ilan University
giladit@israntique.org.il

Kobrin, Federico

Israel Antiquities Authority
fede@israntique.org.il

Koch, Ido

Tel Aviv University
idokoch@tauex.tau.ac.il

Meiri, Meirav

Tel Aviv University
meirav.meiri@gmail.com

Mermelstein, Michal

Israel Antiquities Authority
michalmr@israntique.org.il

Paz, Yitzhak

Israel Antiquities Authority
yitzhakup@israntique.org.il

Sapir-Hen, Lidar

Tel Aviv University
lidarsap@tauex.tau.ac.il

Sharvit, Jacob

Israel Antiquities Authority
koby@israntique.org.il

Stern, Edna J.

Israel Antiquities Authority
and University of Haifa
stern@israntique.org.il

Stiebel, Guy D.

Tel Aviv University
guystiebel@tauex.tau.ac.il

Tanner, Adrian

Memorial University
of Newfoundland
atanner@mun.ca

Tendler, Avraham S.

Israel Antiquities Authority
avrohomt@israntique.org.il

Tepper, Yotam

Israel Antiquities Authority
yotam@israntique.org.il

Torgë, Hagit

Israel Antiquities Authority
torge@israntique.org.il

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Maritime Activity at Jaffa during the Mamluk and Early Ottoman Periods: The Ceramic Evidence from Ramla

Edna J. Stern | Israel Antiquities Authority and University of Haifa

Introduction

Jaffa was a port of call for merchant ships from across the Mediterranean throughout most of its long history. This port also witnessed armies, explorers and pilgrims passing through on their way to Jerusalem and the Holy Land (Fig. 1). These activities are well attested in the historical record, as well as by numerous archaeological excavations (Peilstöcker and Burke 2011; Burke, Peilstöcker and Burke 2017). However, during the mid-Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods (mid-14th to 17th centuries CE) maritime movement at the Jaffa port diminished considerably and the city appears to have been gradually abandoned. Consequently, only few written sources refer to Jaffa and hardly any archaeological finds dating from this period have been unearthed (Arbel 2013). This paper will examine ceramic evidence from the vicinity of Jaffa, in particular from Ramla, and will show that this evidence indicates the activity of Venetian and perhaps other European merchants in Jaffa during the mid-14th to 17th centuries and illuminates relationships and networks unattested in the written record.

* My thanks are extended to Danny Syon, Yoav Arbel and Robert Kool (Israel Antiquities Authority) for reading the manuscript and providing constructive comments.

Jaffa: The Historical and Archaeological Evidence

Crusader Jaffa was conquered by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars following a short siege in 1268. Written sources note that ships carrying pilgrims arrived in Jaffa even after 1291, the year of the final fall of the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem, suggesting that in 1268 only the walls of the city had been destroyed. Such sources also note the continuous functioning of its markets and the uninterrupted arrival of goods in Jaffa during this period (Burke 2011: 127; Jacoby 2016: 94; Arbel 2017a: 89). As Jaffa diminished in size and its main function became the maritime portal for pilgrims and merchants, its urban area was reduced to the port and its surrounding area (Burke 2011: 128; Arbel 2013: 97). The city was razed to the ground in 1345 by the Mamluk ruler Nasser al-Din Muhammad, who feared yet another Crusade attempting to conquer Jaffa as a bridgehead to Jerusalem. It was at that point in time that Jaffa was abandoned as a city and as an organized port (Nagar and Arbel 2017: 241). Nevertheless, despite its destruction, written sources and historical maps¹ from throughout the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods (mid-14th to late 17th century) suggest that the Venetians exported cotton through the port of Jaffa. Furthermore, pilgrims continued to arrive and were housed in tents or “caves” (in fact the ruined Crusader vaults), and Mamluk and later Ottoman military units were stationed in the towers on Jaffa’s hilltop (Fig. 2; Arbel 2013: 93). Limited settlements in the Jaffa area are mentioned in the written sources: a village of around 100 houses is mentioned at a distance of about a mile to the east in the 15th century, and Ottoman records from the 16th century refer to 27 households in close proximity to the ruined Crusader city (Burke 2011; Arbel 2013; Nagar and Arbel 2017: 241; Sharon 2017: 26–30, 62–66).

During excavations on Jaffa’s mound and the surrounding areas between 1948 and the 1980s, no remains from the Mamluk period were reported, even if

1 For historical maps of Jaffa from the 17th century see <http://historic-cities.huji.ac.il/israel/jaffa/jaffa.html>.

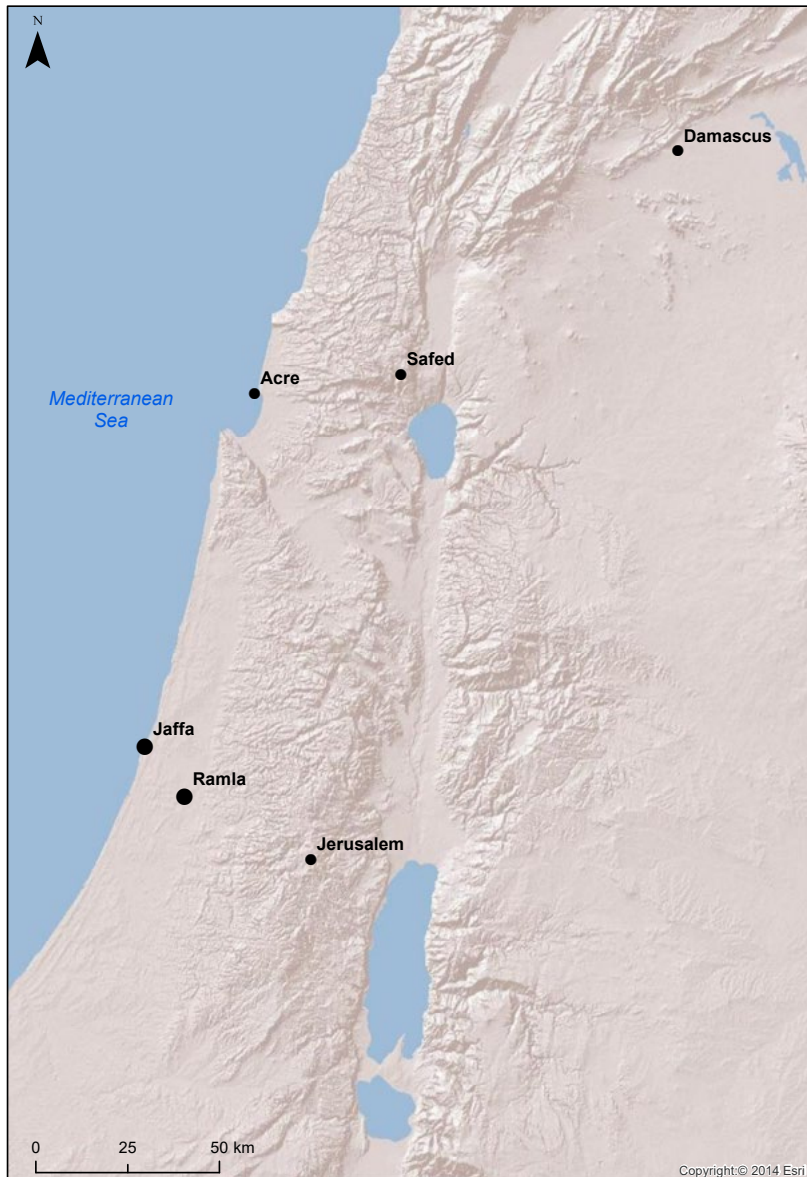


Fig. 1: Map showing selected sites mentioned in this study (prepared by A. Shapiro)



Fig. 2: Depiction of Jaffa, 1487, by Conrad Grünenberg (from Wikimedia Commons, accessed December 31, 2018)

they were exposed. Since the 1990s, Jaffa has undergone numerous systematic salvage excavations, most of which were on the periphery of the mound and in the new quarters to its east. There too, Mamluk and Early Ottoman material remains are either rare or almost completely absent, with remains mostly from the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Crusader and Late Ottoman periods exposed in these excavations. Subsequently, the Mamluk and Early Ottoman period have become known in Jaffa as the “gap period” (Peilstöcker 2011; Arbel 2013; 2017b).

The few archaeological remains associated with this “gap period” consist of an inscription, burials, two refuse pits and some meager numismatic and ceramic evidence. A foundation inscription of a mosque, dated between 1382 and 1387, during the rule of the Mamluk sultan al-Malik aẓ-Ẓāhir Barqūq, was reused as building material in the Late Ottoman Sabīl al-Mahmudi (Arbel

2017b: 75; Sharon 2017: 62–66). The burials provide a significant source of information as they were found between the Crusader and the Ottoman phases and contained mainly males (Peilstöcker *et al.* 2006; Arbel and Nagar 2017). This led Arbel and Nagar to suggest that these were the graves of Mamluk garrison soldiers, mentioned in the written sources, who had been stationed in the towers and supervised movement in the port (in Fig. 2, as well as Arbel 2017a). Two refuse pits were dated to the Mamluk period. One was exposed in Area E of the French Hospital excavations (Re'em 2010), and another, excavated on Yehuda Ha-Yamit Street (Haddad 2013), was dated by the excavator to the Crusader period as it contained charcoal, nails, an arrowhead, animal bones, a human skeleton and 13th-century glass and pottery vessels. Among the well-known Crusader ceramics, a rim of an Egyptian Mamluk glazed bowl was found there (Stern 2013: Fig. 11:7). This pit should perhaps be dated, in fact, to the Mamluk period, just after the conquest of the city, as its contents clearly relate to this event. Numismatic evidence from Jaffa includes a small percentage of Mamluk and Early Ottoman coins (Robert Kool: personal communication in December, 2018). To the best of my knowledge, only five fragments of ceramics dating from the Mamluk–Early Ottoman periods have been found in all the Jaffa excavations together (see below).

Jaffa: The Ceramic Evidence

Ceramics, among the best preserved and most abundant finds in any archaeological excavation, serve as a straightforward, non-biased documentation of the types of pottery vessels used by the inhabitants of a site. Each fragment tells a story, and it is up to the archaeologist to interpret this information. The information gleaned from the ceramics may be used as a reliable historical source, just like written sources. In this study, the find spots of selected pottery sherds will be examined in conjunction with their place of production, in an effort to improve our knowledge of the maritime activity at the port of Jaffa during the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods.

Decoding information from pottery vessels can be achieved by a typo-chronological study in conjunction with a study of the vessel's fabric. A petrologic or petrographic study that examines the pottery vessels under a polarizing microscope may determine which geological sources were used for the raw materials that comprise the fabric of the vessel (Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019: 129–131).

As mentioned above, only five pottery sherds found in Jaffa from this period were identified as imports.² These include an Egyptian Mamluk sgraffito bowl with incised decoration, dating from the mid-13th–14th centuries, in a refuse pit at Yehuda Ha-Yamit Street that contained other 13th-century pottery (Fig. 3:1; Stern 2013: Fig. 11:7), and a fragment of an imported glaze bowl from northern Italy, dated between the 14th and 16th centuries, found in a fill covering a building that had been demolished in 1936 at Kikar Qedumim, not far from the port (Fig. 3:2; Barkan and Bouchenino 2011: Fig. 3:5).³ Two sherds of a deep glazed ledge-rim bowl, decorated with incisions enhanced by yellow-brown and green brush strokes, were uncovered in soil accumulations with no clear architectural context in the course of a salvage excavation at the Ben Gamliel compound (Rauchberger, in preparation; Stern, in preparation [b]). The fabric clearly indicates that it was imported, possibly a product of the little known 14th-century workshop in Soloi, northern Cyprus.⁴ Finally, a small body sherd found in the soil accumulation above the Mamluk–Early Ottoman pit graves in Area F at the Greek Market salvage excavation (Arbel 2016; Stern, in preparation [a]) bears an incised decoration enhanced by green

2 For more information on the Egyptian and Italian wares, see below.

3 I would like to thank Aviva Bouchenino for showing me this sherd and discussing materials she found at Jaffa. The close proximity of Kikar Qedumim to the port may explain the existence of this sherd there.

4 I am grateful to Anastasia Shapiro, who examined the fabric of these sherds with a magnifying glass (×10). She found that the sherd contains feldspar and has mica inclusions that are not to be found in the local geology. It may have been produced in Soloi, in the area of Morphou, northern Cyprus, where the geology contains acid igneous rocks like granite. With this information, Demetra Papanikola-Bakirtzis was kind enough to try to identify this sherd by means of a photograph I sent her (February 2018). She did not see the actual sherd.

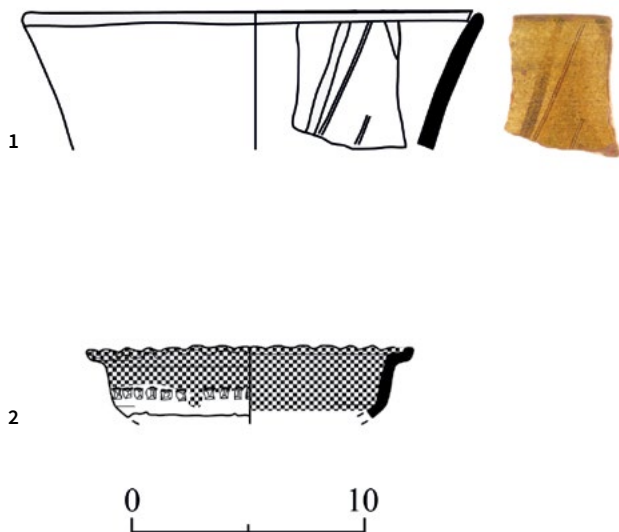


Fig. 3: Imported pottery found at Jaffa: 1) drawing by C. Hersch, photo by C. Amit; 2) drawing by M. Shuiskay, courtesy of IAA)

and dark yellow glaze on the interior and a slip-painted design of a spiral on the exterior. On the basis of its fabric and decoration it is imported, although it clearly does not belong to one of the numerous known imported wares of the Crusader period (Stern 2012: 55–99). It is very likely dated later, to the late 13th, 14th, or 15th century.

In sum, the ceramic evidence from Jaffa itself consists of a few sherds from the Mamluk capital of Cairo in Egypt, and from Italy, perhaps Cyprus or other sources overseas.

To locate ceramics that may have arrived via the port of Jaffa during this period we therefore need to examine sites with urban or rural centers that

contain Mamluk and Early Ottoman archaeological remains, including imported ceramics. The urban centers of Jerusalem and Ramla are two such sites, which apparently were in direct contact with Jaffa's port and its wares. Imported pottery in very small quantities was also found at some rural sites in this region. In this paper we will review the finds from Ramla.

Ramla: The Historical and Archaeological Evidence

Ramla is located at the junction of several major routes: one led travelers from the port of Jaffa to Jerusalem and the other is the postal route (the *barīd*), from Cairo to Damascus. This location dictated its importance during the period under discussion. When the Mamluk Sultan Baybars took Ramla from the Crusaders in 1266, they restored the White Mosque and constructed many new buildings in an effort to revive the prosperous and well-built city of Early Islamic times. In the early 14th century, Abu al-Fida described Ramla as the most populated city in Palestine. Thus, it seems to have regained some of its former role as a commercial center and to be economically prosperous (Petersen 2001: 347; 2005: 95–96). Cotton grown in the rural surroundings and traded in Ramla apparently drew Venetian merchants to settle there (Amar 2003: 155), part of the larger Venetian operation to export raw cotton and its products from the southern Levant that began in the 14th century and intensified during the 15th century (Amitai 2017: 348, 349). Christian travellers described large and rich markets in Ramla, although reduced in size from the former Early Islamic city. Ramla's prosperity seems to have declined following the Ottoman conquest in 1516 (Gat 2003: 298, 305; Petersen 2005: 95–96).

The current Old City of Ramla is located above the area of the Mamluk and Early Ottoman town, as attested by a number of surviving buildings, most of them religious (the Great Mosque, the Abu al-'Awn Mosque, a large 16-century khan and a few tombs). In addition, many Arabic inscriptions from mosques, minarets and tombs point to these demolished Mamluk monuments (Petersen 2001: 347–351; 2005: 96; Cytryn-Silverman 2008).

Archaeological evidence of domestic dwellings is very scant; most of these buildings were apparently made of dry mudbrick, whereas public buildings were of high-quality chiselled stone. The recovery of local and imported pottery in excavations mainly within the Old City but also outside it testifies to dense habitation during the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods (Elisha 2005; 2010; Parnos and Nagar 2008; Toueg 2008; 2011a; 2011b; 2012; Kletter 2009; Cytryn-Silverman 2010; Korenfeld 2010; Talmi 2010; Eshed 2011; Torgè 2011; Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019).

The agricultural hinterland of Ramla, with good farming land, was also prosperous during this period. Archaeological excavations at sites such as Khirbet el-Ni'ana (de Vincenz and Sion 2007), Kafr 'Ana (Gophna and Taxel 2007) and Giv'at Dani (Lazar 1999) revealed remains of Mamluk and Early Ottoman villages. The ceramic finds in some of them include imported ware, like those found at Ramla.

Ramla: The Ceramic Evidence

The Mamluk-period vessels unearthed at Ramla can be divided into groups according to fabric, form and decoration (Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019): 1) local fabrics, originating in a workshop or workshops in Ramla itself or within a range of 10–20 km; 2) inter-regional fabrics, produced within the boundaries of the Mamluk Sultanate, i.e., in Syria, Beirut and Egypt; 3) Mediterranean fabrics of vessels imported from Italy, Cyprus and Spain; and 4) Chinese celadons and porcelains. Of these only the imports from Egypt, Italy, Cyprus, Spain and China will be described here.

Egypt

Egyptian Mamluk sgraffito bowls, similar to the fragment found at Jaffa, have been identified in two excavations at Ramla (Toueg 2011b: Fig. 11:7; Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019: 151, Fig. 8:9–12). The fabric of these bowls is very ferruginous and silty, fired to dark red and reddish-brown colours, and

is attributed to Egypt (Mason and Keall 1990: 180–81, Fig. 13; Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019: 151). The bowls are covered with a thick white slip, into which calligraphic, heraldic, geometric, or floral designs were incised in a standardized decorative program. These designs are sometimes further enhanced by thicker slip or a glaze of a different color. The vessel is usually covered with a yellow or yellow-brown glaze and occasionally with green glaze. The forms and the color of the glaze indicate that the pottery vessels are imitations of metal ones. Egyptian bowls are very common in Egyptian administrative centers and Mamluk military installations, mainly in Cairo, the Mamluk capital, from the mid-13th to the end of the 14th century. They were termed “military style” because of their decorations, which included military inscriptions and heraldic symbols. It has been suggested that these vessels, which reflect the military Mamluk society, were used in ceremonies and were manufactured solely for use in Egypt (Scanlon 2003; Walker 2004: 1–32, Figs. 4, 5, 8, 9, 11; Watson 2004: 408–414; Gayraud 2012: 79–84, Figs. 5–10).

As noted, these bowls have rarely been found beyond the borders of Egypt and have mainly been uncovered at Mamluk administrative centers in Greater Syria: at the Damascus citadel (François 2008: 20 620), at Jerusalem (Avisar 2003: 436, Pl. 19.2:7, Photo 19.1), at Safed (Barbé 2014: 121, Fig. 13:1,2;⁵ Dalali-Amos and Getzov 2019: 76*, Fig. 73:1,2) and at Hisbān Jordan (Bethany Walker, personal communication). However, additional fragments of Egyptian Mamluk sgraffito bowls have been identified at recent excavations in rural sites: at Gan Ha-Darom, to the north of Ashkelon (personal observation),⁶ at Megiddo/Lajjun (Tepper and Stern, forthcoming) and at the Ridwan mills on the outskirts of ʿAkko (Stern 2016: 83–84, Fig. 1:2).

5 Although these sherds were not identified by the author as belonging to the Egyptian Mamluk sgraffito, the fabric description and decoration make it very likely that they belong to this type. Since I unfortunately did not have the opportunity to handle these sherds, this identification should, however, be taken with caution.

6 IAA Permit A-8357/2018. I would like to thank the excavator Ayelet Dayan for inviting me to study the pottery from this excavation.

Cyprus

Four Cypriot bowl fragments were identified at Ramla (Toueg 2012: Fig. 3:8; Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019: 152–155, Fig. 9:1–3). These fragments show different fabrics, suggesting several production centers on the island: Paphos-Lemba, Enkomi, Nicosia, or one of the lesser known workshops (Papanikola-Bakirtzis 1989; von Wartburg 2007: 423; François 2017: 848–851, Figs. 28–31). While glazed ware dating from the 13th century reached the Crusader kingdom in commercial quantities (Stern 2012: 60–65), the later glazed bowls provide evidence for the arrival of a few glazed bowls from Cyprus, also during the 13th century. A fragment of a carinated bowl with monochrome glaze (Toueg 2012: Fig. 3:8)⁷ is similar to monochrome glazed bowls produced at Nicosia in the 14th century (François 2017: 848–51, Fig. 28:1, 2). The small body and base fragments found in another excavation at Ramla are polychrome sgraffito, similar to the various 14th-century Cypriot wares. Designs include guilloche filled with small spirals or a heraldic shield. The glaze colors are green, yellow and brown over a lighter background glaze. In one case there is red slip. Although observation by binocular microscope indicates slight differences in the fabrics, the composition of all suggest a Cypriot origin. The forms, the designs and the presence of red slip also suggest that these bowls were produced in Cyprus, possibly in the 14th century (Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019: 152–155, Fig. 9:1–3).

Italy

Most of the bowls imported to Ramla came from Italy, mainly from the north: from Venice and the Veneto region (five or six types), from Pisa (two types) and perhaps from Montelupo (one type). While some are of well-known types, the others were defined as Italian imports on the basis of fabric observation. Decorations include plain green or brownish-yellow monochrome glaze, sgraffito with either green monochrome or polychrome glaze, with green and

7 There seems to be a mix-up in the identification of the sherds in the article. I have seen this vessel and identified it as a Cypriot import.

yellow glaze enhancements over a light yellow background. Only open forms were recognized, with one basin and mainly bowls, ledged rim, hemispheric, and carinated, occasionally with a rouletted exterior or a ridge at the carination. These bowls usually have a low ring base, and one type has a flat base.

Vessels from Venice and the Veneto region are dated roughly to the 14th–16th centuries and include: a basin with square rim, straight walls and dark green monochrome glaze on both surfaces (Avisar and Stern 2005: 74, Type I.9.7, Fig. 31:9,10; Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019: 155, Fig. 9:4); a monochrome carinated bowl with a ridge extending from the shoulder can be found in brownish-yellow monochrome glaze without slip (Fig. 4:1; Cytryn-Silverman 2010: 128, Pl. 9.32:1; Toueg and Stern 2016: Fig. 5:4,5) or in shiny green glaze, with a thick white slip (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: 128, Pl. 9.32:2), with an example also found at Giv'at Dani (Lazar 1999: 128*, Fig. 2:7);⁸ monochrome sgraffito bowls—green glazed bowls with thin incisions carelessly executed on the interior (Elisha 2005: Fig. 2:4; Cytryn-Silverman 2010: 129, Pl. 9.25:1–2, Photos 9.38–9.41; Toueg 2011a: Fig. 6:9; 2012: Fig. 3:6; Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019: 155, Fig. 9:5), examples of which were also found at Khirbat el-Ni'ana (de Vincenz and Sion 2007: 32, Fig. 7:7,8);⁹ a carinated bowl with a rouletted decoration on the outer wall, occasionally with shiny green monochrome glaze on the interior (Fig. 4:2; Toueg and Stern 2016: Fig. 3:3), occasionally with thin incised decorations on the interior with green (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: 129, Pl. 9.25:1,2), and rarely with dark yellow glaze (Toueg and Stern 2016: Fig. 6:5). Examples were also found at Khirbat el-Ni'ana (de Vincenz and Sion 2007: 32, Fig. 7:5,6). There are also some examples with polychrome glaze (Cytryn-Silverman 2010: 129, Pl. 9.32:3). Finally, a large variety of “Graffita Arcaica” polychrome sgraffito bowls were found, made of slightly different fabric types, suggestive of different workshops. Their decoration includes incised floral and rarely geometric designs, a transparent glaze over a white slip and enhancement of the design with green

8 It was not identified as an import by Lazar.

9 These were not identified as imports in the article.

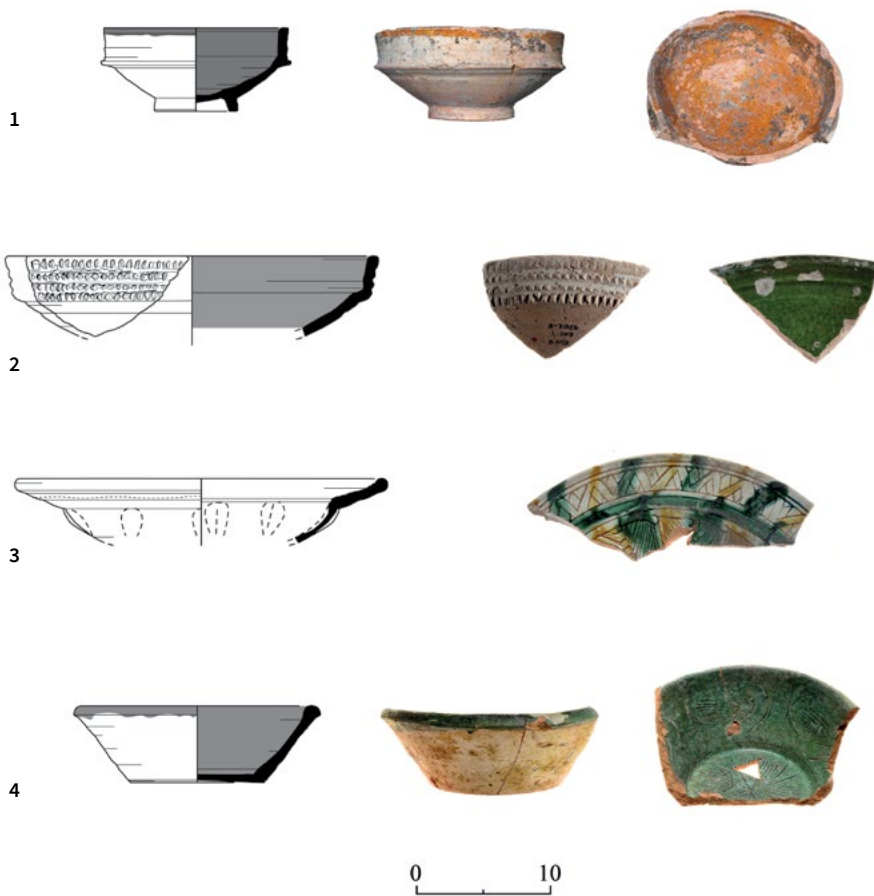


Fig. 4: Imported pottery found at Ramla (drawings by M. Shuiskaya, photos by C. Amit, courtesy of IAA)

and yellow glaze; they generally have ledge rims, although other forms exist (Fig. 4:3; Cytryn-Silverman 2010: 128–129, Pl. 9.25:4–6; Toueg and Stern 2016: Fig. 6:6,7). Related to this ware, two intact bowls of a slightly different form with a plain curved rim, an inward-sloping wall and a broad flat base, but decorated in a similar manner with either monochrome and polychrome sgraffito, may have originated from yet another workshop in northern Italy (Fig. 4:4; Cytryn-Silverman 2010: 128–129, Pl. 9.25:3; Toueg and Stern 2016: Fig. 5:6,7).

Less common are bowls that on the basis of their fabric and forms were imported from Pisa. These include a monochrome bowl the interior and exterior of which are covered with a transparent glaze and no slip, and a body fragment of a “Graffita policroma tarda” or “Pisan Sgraffito Ware” bowl, with light-yellow glaze, an incised decoration and a dab of green glaze (Stern, Toueg and Shapiro 2019: 155, 156, Fig. 9:6,7).

Most of these types of Italian bowls have also been recorded in Safed, Jerusalem and Damascus, as well as in other rural sites (Tushingham 1985: 341, Fig. 45:21; Avissar and Stern 2005: 72–75: Types I.9.4–7, Fig. 31; François 2008: 20 710; Prag 2017: 30, 95, 102, 103, Pls. 9:3, 26:5, 31:78–83, 33; Dalali-Amos and Getzov 2019: 74*, Fig. 71; Stern 2014: 143–146, Figs. 1:1–4, 2:1–4; forthcoming).

Spain

Bowls with a pale brown porous fabric, entirely covered with white opacified white glaze, with dots, floral, or vegetal designs painted in gold luster and sometimes in blue, have been reported from two excavations in Ramla (Fig. 5:1; Cytryn-Silverman 2010: 127–128, Pl. 9.32:6, Photo 9.36:2; Toueg and Stern 2016: Fig. 5:3). These bowl fragments are comparable to forms produced in Valencia between the late 14th and late 15th century, belonging to the “Classic Valencian” style (Gutiérrez 2000: 28–39, Figs. 2.15:3, 2.18). Valencia luster bowls were found at Jerusalem (Johns 1950: 189, Pl. 63:2) and at Safed (Stern 2014: 147, Fig. 1:11; forthcoming; Dalili-Amos and Getzov 2019: 76*, 77*, Fig. 73:3), indicating presence in other Mamluk administrative centers. They have also reached other sites in Syria, the citadel in Damascus and Hama (Poulsen 1957:

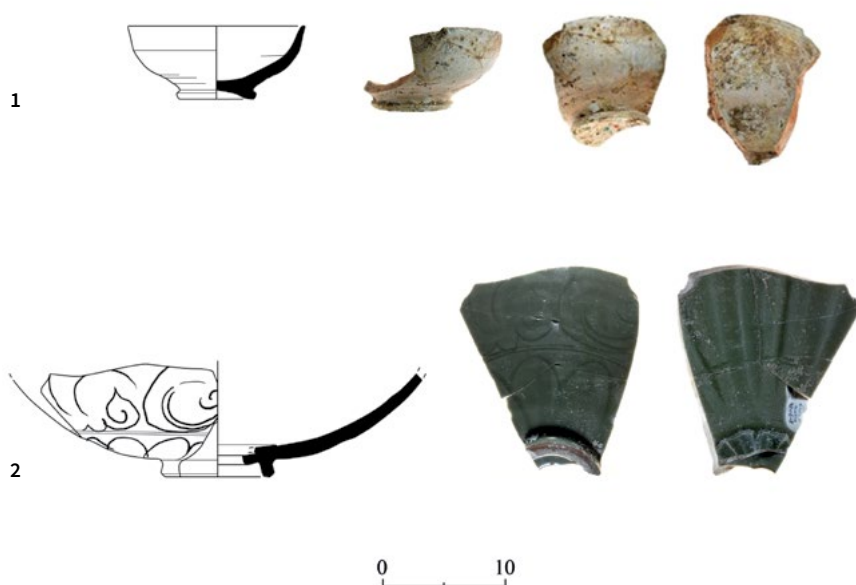


Fig. 5: Imported pottery found at Ramla (drawings by M. Shuiskaya, photos by C. Amit, courtesy of IAA)

132–133, Figs. 405, 406; François 2008: 20 700), and the Mamluk capital in Egypt (Rosser-Owen 2013: 250–252).

China

Chinese celadon was highly valued in the Muslim world, owned by the upper echelons of society, such as sultans, emirs and wealthy merchants. These vessels were used for serving food and drink at banquets and ceremonies in the Mamluk and Ottoman courts and became a highly valued gift in the Islamic world, given, for example, by Mamluk rulers to Europeans (Kahle 1956: 332–50; Milwright 1999: 513–516; Pierson 2013: 39–41). It is not surprising, therefore, to find Chinese Longquan celadon in Mamluk and Early Ottoman Ramla (Fig. 5:2; Korenfeld 2010: Fig. 6:10; Toueg and Stern 2016: Fig. 3:2). The fabric of the celadon is light grey, compact and vitrified, and the vessels are completely covered with a shiny green-grey glaze, except for the foot of the low base. Decoration consists of either

incised vegetal motifs or a fluted pattern on the exterior. Produced in Longquan, southern China, under the Sung Dynasty, celadon was manufactured for everyday use in China, as well as for maritime export, from the late 12th to mid-14th centuries (Medley 1989: 145–146; Vainker 1991: 108–109). Chinese Longquan celadon has been found at the other Mamluk administrative centers, at Jerusalem (Tushingham 1985: 151, 337, Fig. 41:23; Avissar, personal communication) and Safed (Avissar and Stern 2005: 78, Type I.12.1, Fig. 34:4, Pl. XXIV:7; Dalali-Amos and Getzov 2019: 74*, Fig. 72:1–4; Stern, forthcoming), but has also been identified in Mamluk-period contexts at two rural sites, one in the Sharon Plain, at Khirbet Burin (Kletter and Stern 2006: 194–196, Fig. 21:8), and at Bene Darom (Barkan 2006: Fig. 4:3). As expected, Chinese celadon was also available on the markets of Cairo (Scanlon 1970) and Hama in Syria (Poulsen 1957: 118, Figs. 353–360).

Discussion

Written documents point to some maritime activity at Jaffa over the four centuries of the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods. Archaeological evidence for this activity, however, is scarce. The ceramic evidence from Ramla and its rural environs may fill this lacuna, as it constitutes tangible data through which the activities of the Venetian merchants can be identified and dated. Although the rich ceramic finds from Ramla, which include a range of imported glazed bowls, may reflect the high socio-economic status of some of the city's residents, it may also shed light upon a less known chapter in the commercial and economic history of this region at the end of the Mamluk and beginning of the Ottoman period. These imported ceramics, from Cyprus, Italy, Spain and China, clearly arrived by sea. The ships on which they were transported most likely did not sail to the Levant in order to distribute these ceramic wares, but arrived at the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean in order to purchase high-quality low-price goods and to bring pilgrims.. As mentioned above, it was the highly prized cotton for the developing textile industry in Europe that attracted Venetian merchants.

Later, 18th-century, written evidence concerning French merchants who traded through the port of Jaffa reveals that they resided in Ramla, from where they managed their affairs, because of the unsafe conditions in Jaffa (Cohen 1985: 165–166). It is possible that the Venetian and other European merchants who traded through Jaffa in the 14th–17th centuries also preferred to live in Ramla, as Jaffa was unfortified and subject to raids by pirates.

The fragments of the Egyptian Mamluk sgraffito bowls attest to a strong connection with the Mamluk center in Egypt and possibly even to the presence of Egyptian officials in Ramla. In Jaffa, they might suggest the presence of the garrison stationed in the towers. The Cypriot bowls clearly attest to the maritime route that the ships took. The ones from northern Italy seem to point to the ports from which the ships sailed—Venice and later also Pisa—and to the identity of the merchants. The Italian maritime communes were active in trade with Valencia, and they may have been responsible for the distribution of the luster bowls originating there. The Chinese Longquan celadon that may have arrived via the Red Sea and Egypt, were most likely redistributed in the Mediterranean by them as well.

This pottery may have bearing upon perishable goods that did not survive in the archaeological record, but could have been used on these ships as ballast. In any case, they clearly reflect the role of Italian merchants in the circulation of goods throughout the Mediterranean and reveal information regarding the maritime commercial activity that took place in the port of Jaffa during this period.

Interestingly, a similar discrepancy was observed at Acre, whereby despite the recovery of only few archaeological remains from the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods, the city's maritime activity is discernable in the presence of imported ceramic types of the same origins and types found at the new district capital at Safed and in rural villages in the Galilee (Stern 2014; Dalali-Amos and Getzov 2019).

In sum, the pottery from Ramla tells the story of a crowded city and of the Venetian merchants who lived there and offers material evidence of maritime trade activities at the Jaffa port in the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods, evidence that was sorely lacking from the port of Jaffa itself.

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