

ROMAN POTTERY IN THE NEAR EAST.  
LOCAL PRODUCTION AND REGIONAL TRADE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROUND TABLE HELD IN BERLIN,  
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# 'Kefar Hananya Ware' made in Yodefath.

## Pottery production at Yodefath in the first century AD

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*This article presents the evidence from the archaeological excavations of the Second Temple period (1st century BC – 1st century AD) Galilean Jewish town of Yodefath. Among the evidence of the development of the town from the beginning to its destruction in the year AD 67 by the Romans, we discovered four pottery kilns which produced mainly cooking vessels and storage jars. This discovery raises some interesting questions about the conclusions reached and generally accepted formulated by the important research and publication of Adan-Bayewitz on the common ware pottery of Galilee. According to his study, based primarily on archaeometry, as well as the written sources, Kefar Hananya was the main and almost the only supplier of cooking vessels to Galilee from the early Roman to the Byzantine periods.*

KEY WORDS: YODEFATH, KEFAR HANANYA, POTTERY KILN, GALILEE

### Introduction

Yodefath was a Jewish town during the Second Temple period (1st century BC – 1st century AD), established on the remains of a pagan, Hellenistic village from the 3rd -2nd centuries BC. It is located on a small, isolated hill in the mountains of Lower Galilee. It is known in history as the place of the first battle between the Jews and the Roman army at the beginning of the First Jewish Revolt. The town was commanded by Flavius Josephus and this was the place where he fell into Roman hands, prior to becoming a historian.

During seven seasons of excavations from 1992 until 1999 three main layers were discovered (Adan-Bayewitz and Aviam 1995; Aviam 2005). The earliest structures founded on bedrock are dated to the Hellenistic period, in the second to third centuries BC. According to typical finds such as GCW (Galilean Coarse Ware. Aviam 2004:46-48. Leibner 2009:22) pottery sherds and figurative oil lamps, it was associated with a pagan village which existed on top of the hill until the Hasmonaean annexation of the region around 110 BC. The Hellenistic village, occupying only the summit itself, was destroyed by fire. The second phase includes a large wall which was built over the former houses. The wall probably surrounded a new Jewish village or a Hasmonaean military stronghold. During the 1st century BC and 1st century AD, the village grew and spread down to the eastern and southern slopes of the hill as well as to the southern narrow plateau, covering a total area of about 50 dunams (50,000 m<sup>2</sup>) (Figure 1).

Four residential areas were excavated which yielded mostly simple residential units: walls built of field stones, probably plastered with mud-plaster, floors made of packed-soil or smoothed-rock and a water cistern in each house. In two of these simple houses two *miqvaot* (Jewish ritual baths) were found. I believe that these houses belonged to the owners of an oil press found in a cave near the houses, and that these Jewish families produced oil according to religious laws as is the case in many other Jewish sites of that period

(Aviam 2004:89-91). In the north-east corner of the town, a completely different system of housing was discovered. Along this steep slope, three solid terraces were built to support houses which were two or three stories high. In one of these houses a room was discovered with colourful

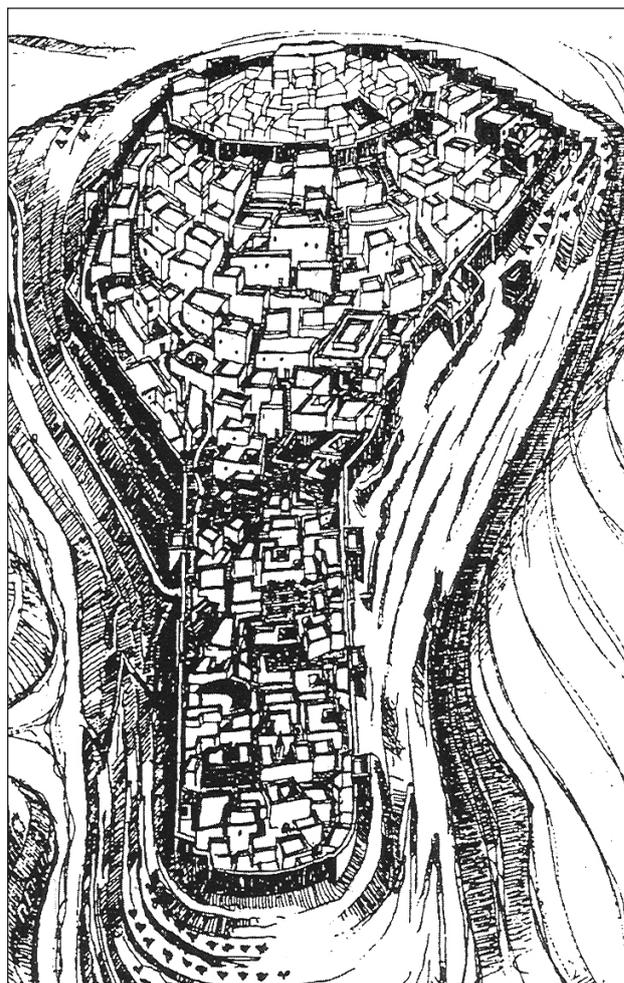


FIGURE 1 YODEFATH'S RECONSTRUCTION AT THE EVE OF THE FIRST JEWISH REVOLT (67 AD)

frescoes of the second Pompeian style on the walls and the floor.

Evidence for home industries such as spinning and weaving was found all over the residential areas. Bearing in mind also the faunal remains, I suggested that grazing sheep as well as agriculture, spinning wool and weaving materials were the main economic base for the inhabitants of the town (Aviam 2005). The identification of the inhabitants as Jews was based on the discovery of the ritual baths, typical stone (chalk)-vessels, Jewish coins and even one *ostrakon* with Jewish script. The town was destroyed in a major battle: all over the excavated areas iron arrow-heads as well as *ballista* stones for catapults were found. On the floors of the houses as well as gathered and buried in the cisterns, there were hundreds of human bones. The latest

coins on the floors of the houses are dated to the time of the emperor Nero and specifically the year 64-65 AD. These attest to the destruction of Yodfat by Roman troops after a long siege as described by Flavius Josephus (Wars III, 145-408).

**The Kilns**

At the southern edge of the town, four pottery kilns were discovered. Two of them, which were found in one building on both sides of a small wall, were poorly preserved and probably belonged to the same potter or the potter's family (Figure 2). A large number of pottery sherds including a few wasters, mostly from cooking pots, were found around the kilns.

The second pair of kilns was discovered at the south-eastern side of the town and they were in a better state of preservation. The larger one is 3.1m in diameter and its wall is 0.5m thick. In its centre there is a round pillar which supported the perforated base built of clay beams with semi-circular holes in each, which created, when bonded together, a hole of 10cm in diameter (Figure 3).

This kiln was dismantled on purpose to create space for the town's defensive wall which was built before the Roman attack (Figure 4). As this was an unusual opportunity not only to date the wall, but also to investigate the situation in Galilee before the war, the kiln was carefully excavated. Around and inside the kiln many pottery sherds were found including wasters of storage jars. This type of storage jar is a common type of the 1st century CE in Galilee, classified by Díez Fernández as his type T 1.4 (Figure 5; Díez Fernández 1983, 187). During the analysis of the Yodfat material I decided to name it 'ribbed neck jar' (Aviam 2005, 113). The wasters proved that this type was manufactured at Yodfat by at least one potter, maybe more.

The careful sounding which was made near the destroyed kiln showed that there is a layer of debris from the kiln which was dumped around it and into this layer a new kiln was dug. This kiln is much smaller and has no central pillar, but its opening to the firing chamber is oriented in the same direction and towards the same courtyard space as the former, larger kiln. In my opinion, this proves that the second kiln was built by the same person who owned the large kiln and that it was built shortly after the destruction of the former kiln. It is interesting to note that the new kiln shows no signs of firing and it could indicate that the potter did not have the time to use it before the Roman army arrived and besieged the town.

Two other types of artifacts were found nearby and belonged to the potters who were working in this part of the town, probably the 'potters quarter', which was located at the edge of the town to prevent the smoke from covering the entire residential area. The first is a group of clay stands that were used to support the vessels in the kiln (Arubas and Goldfus 2005, 45, Fig. 11), and the second is half of

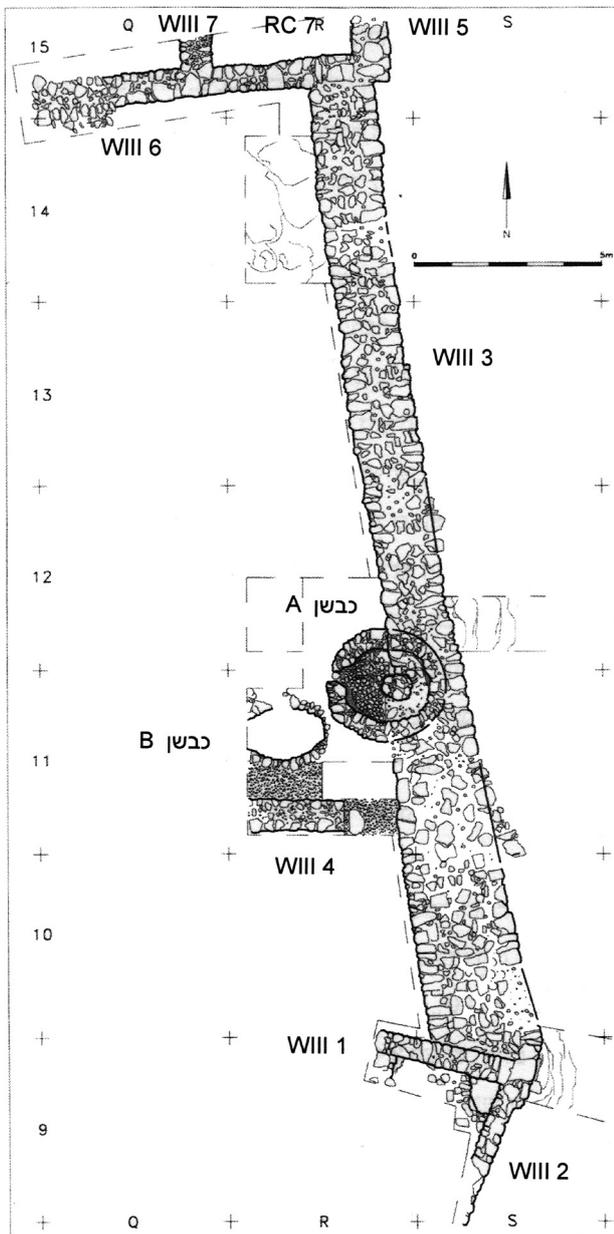


FIGURE 2 THE TWIN KILNS



FIGURE 3 THE WALL BUILT OVER THE KILN

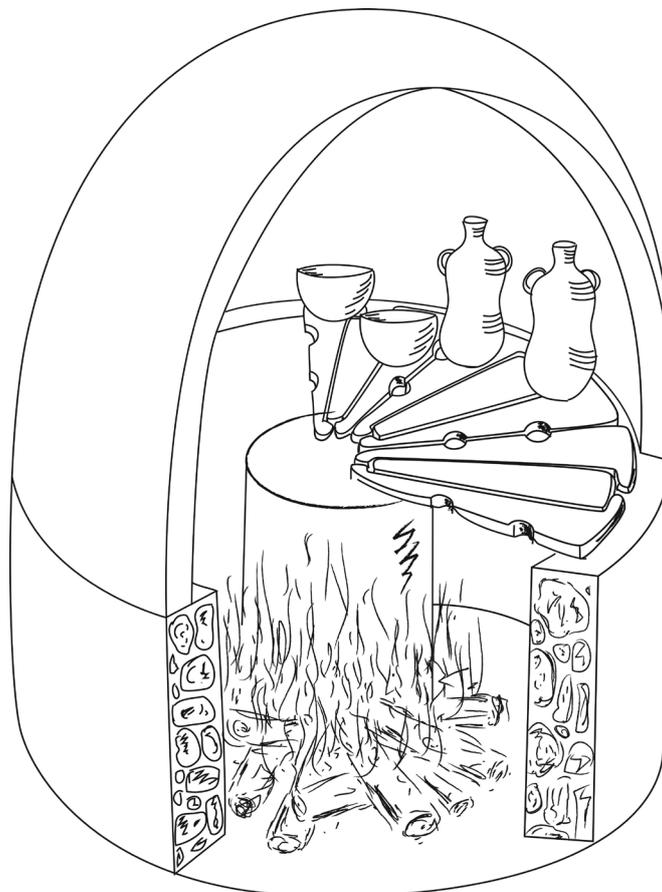


FIGURE 4 RECONSTRUCTION OF THE LARGE KILN

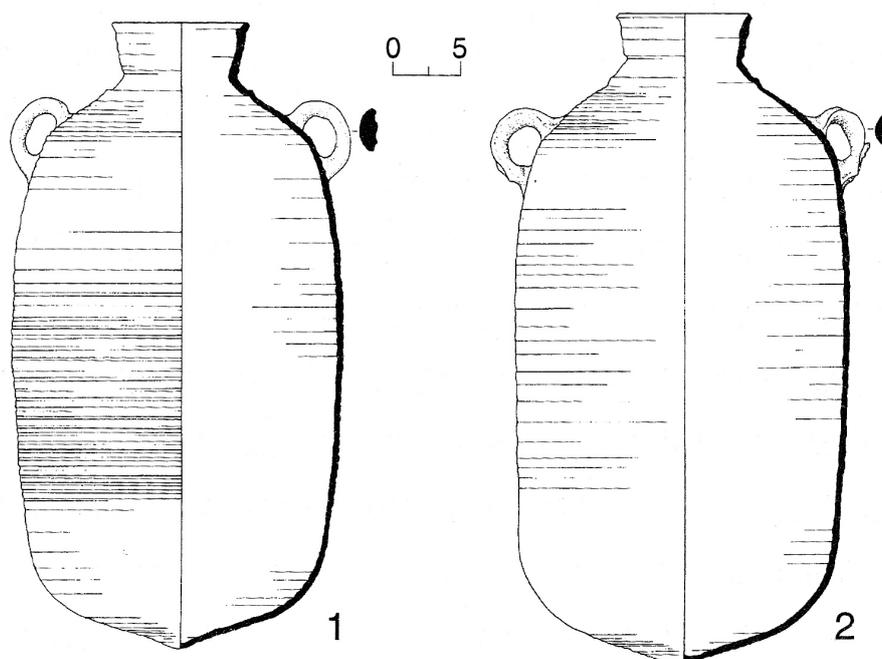


FIGURE 5 TYPE OF STORAGE JARS WHICH WERE PRODUCED AT YODEFAT

the lower part of a potter's wheel made of lime stone. It is 20cm in diameter and it is similar to other potter's wheels from the same period found at other sites (Goldfus and Arubas 2001, 113). The marks on the lower surface of the wheel show that it was intensively used.

#### Kefar Hananya Ware

In 1993 David Adan-Bayewitz published *Common Pottery in Roman Galilee*, based on his PhD thesis (Adan-Bayewitz 1993). He excavated a few squares at the edge of the ancient Jewish village Kefar Hananya (see Figure 6) which is mentioned in the Mishnah and the Talmud as a village of potters. There he discovered a pottery kiln and also large heaps of broken pottery and many wasters. As an important part of his study he sampled the soil of the nearby Hananya Valley as well as some other soil deposits from the area and compared them with the pottery from Kefar Hananya through archaeometry. As a result, 'Kefar Hananya ware' was identified and defined, and its forms classified into a typology (some forms belong to the 'Galilean bowl' type). Adan-Bayewitz continued this research through the archaeometrical study of various assemblages of pottery from excavated and surveyed sites in Galilee and Golan. As a result of these analyses he was able to identify many of these as 'Kefar Hananya ware' on the basis of their shape, fabric and colour. The conclusion of his thorough and important study was that Kefar Hananya was identified as the most important and almost the only pottery production centre in Galilee for cooking ware during a period of 400 years (Adan-Bayewitz 1993). He developed a typology of the common pottery, mainly cooking ware of Kefar Hananya, which was widely accepted by archeologists and by many historians who refer to the socio-economical conclusions from this research.

For example, 'Kefar Hananya Ware' is thus described by Andrea Berlin in the final report of the pottery of Gamla: 'The ware is distinctive and easy to recognize. It has a smooth, almost silky surface texture and a fine grained break. It is very clean, with occasional very fine rounded white and small black inclusions, generally fired fully through and is bright orange-red in color' (Berlin 2006, 18).

But this is also the exact description of the Yodefata cooking ware. It is so similar that Adan-Bayewitz was not able to distinguish between the two when he was sorting the pottery during the Yodefata excavations, and all cooking vessels were 'made at Kefar Hananya'.

Twenty years later, in 2003, he published a long article 'On the Chronology of the Common Pottery of Northern Roman Judea/Palestine' (Adan-Bayewitz 2003) in which he added more information and reissued his former conclusions. The central conclusion in his publications is: 'The potters of Kefar Hananya were the principal suppliers of cooking ware to the Lower and Upper Galilee, to both villages and cities, from [the ] Early Roman through the Early Byzantine period'. (did you quote this correctly?)

#### Pottery production centre or pottery production centres?

My discussion here will challenge, or better, will question Adan-Bayewitz's conclusions concerning only the early Roman period, but, as a result, it will put a question mark on the later periods as well concerning the identification of Kefar Hananya as 'the only center' for the production of cooking vessels in Galilee.

I do not have the knowledge or the tools to argue against the chemical results of the laboratories and the archaeometric scientists, as my evidence comes directly from the

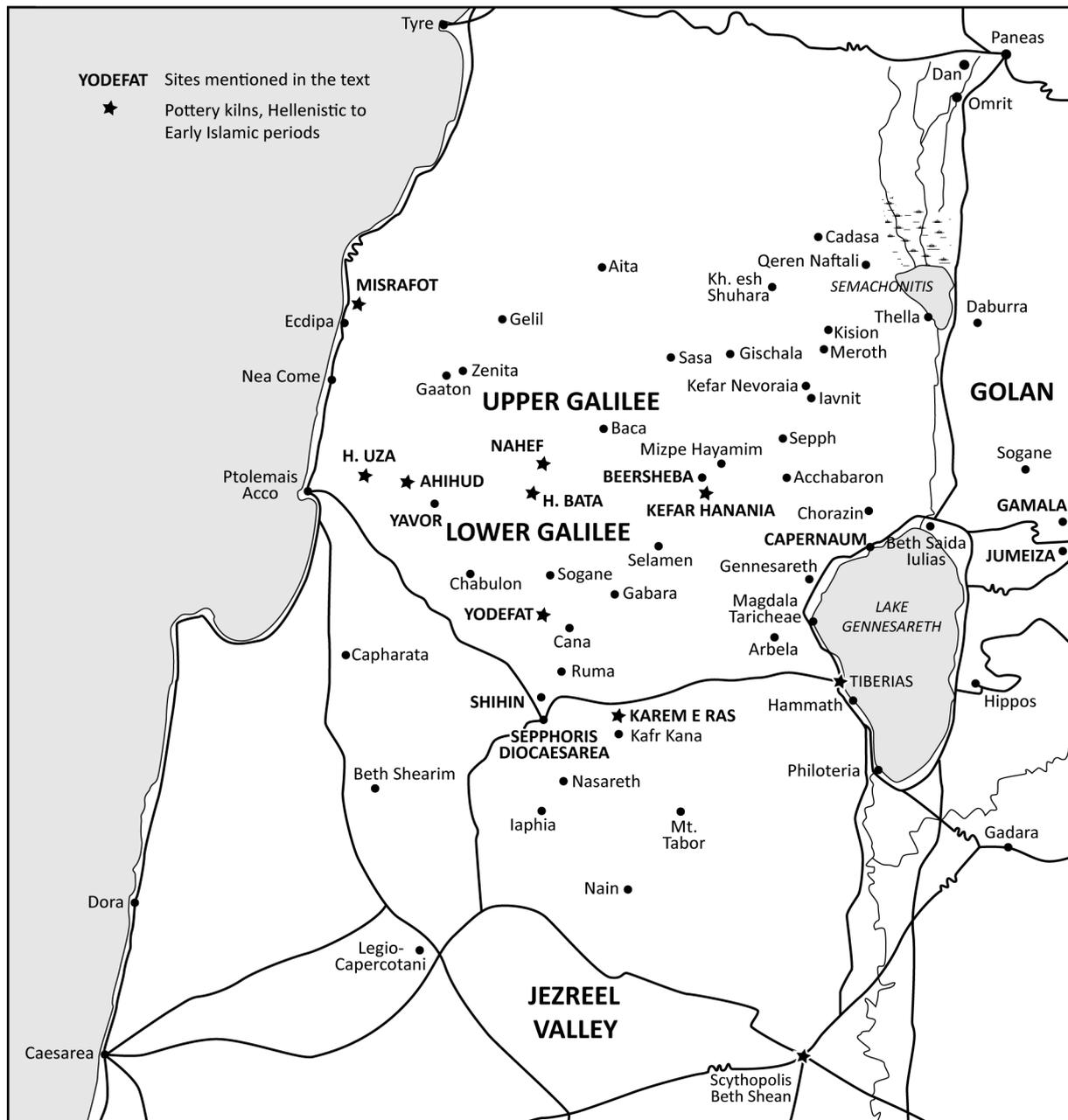


FIGURE 6 MAP OF PLACES NAMED IN THE TEXT

excavations and evidence at Yodefat. As co-directors of the first three seasons at Yodefat, Adan-Bayewitz and I used the name 'Kefar Hananya ware' for all cooking pots discovered at the site. The possibility of local production was not discussed even after the first kilns were discovered during the second and third seasons of excavations. It was only during the seventh season,<sup>1</sup> after the other kilns were uncovered and especially during the study and processing of the finds towards the preparations of the final report that I started asking the questions. How can one distinguish between cooking pots from Yodefat and those from Kefar Hananya macroscopically if they have exactly the same

shape, fabric, and colour? How can it be that all of the cooking pots from Yodefat which were checked by Adan-Bayewitz (during the dig and until very recently) were manufactured at Kefar Hananya when there are pottery kilns at Yodefat surrounded by thousands of pottery sherds as well as wasters? Does it make any sense for the people of Yodefat to buy cooking pots manufactured 16km away as the crow flies or 25km walking distance from their town when they have skilled potters who produce the same types of cooking ware on the spot? Who was the first to start manufacturing?

As Adan-Bayewitz stated, there are no architectural remains at his excavations at Kefar Hananya which were dated to the late Hellenistic or even the early Roman

<sup>1</sup> Adan-Bayewitz was co-director of the Yodefat excavations during the first three seasons 1992-1994.

periods. The site existed in the early Roman period, but was it the centre for the production of 1st century cooking vessels at this early stage?<sup>2</sup>

The only kiln found at the site is from the early Byzantine period. There is no clear stratigraphy at the site and only a preliminary report was published. On the other hand, Yodefath revealed a very clear stratigraphy from its late Hellenistic layers to the early Roman structures and its enlargement towards the south including the four kilns during the 1st century AD.

The petrographic study of the pottery from the kilns at Yodefath identified local soil for the clay including some ingredients from a site 9km to the east.<sup>3</sup> Yodefath is located on a hill with only one accessible side to the north and steep slopes from all other directions. All the other kilns identified to date in Galilee, from the Hellenistic to Arab periods, are built at the bottom of hills (Kefar Hananya, Ahihud), near the valley (Khorvat Uza, Misrafot, Kefar Hananya, Ahihud, Tiberias), or in the village on a low hill (Nahef and Khorvat Bata, Karem a Ras) above the valley (see figure 6). The potters of Yodefath had to carry up the hill all the raw materials such as clay and wood, as well as use water from cisterns and pools, as Yodefath had no running water from springs or an aqueduct.

As the land around the town is a very rocky terrain and there is a serious shortage of arable land, the inhabitants of Yodefath had to initiate other economic solutions to make their daily living rather than large areas of field for farming. I suggested that they probably raised sheep in order to manufacture woolen materials or they produced pottery. It was suggested that pottery production is, in many cases, a profession exercised by people who had no other choice as there was no space for agriculture (Arnold 1985, 171-201). The small mountainous town of Yodefath rapidly developed during the end of the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD, and finally covered the entire hill. It flourished because its inhabitants were creative entrepreneurs: they exploited the rocky terrain for grazing sheep and produced wool materials as well as sifting the valley's soil, carrying it up the hill, quarrying chalk from a distance and then manufacturing good, strong cooking pots, jars and probably also jugs, oil lamps and other forms. The cooking pots looked identical to those

manufactured at Kefar Hananya but that should not surprise us too much. Adan-Bayewitz already pointed out that there were six more production centres in the Golan. The cooking pots were similar in shape but their colour was different as they were all made of Golan basaltic clay.

I believe that pottery production has its logical economic and functional foundations. If there are six production centres for cooking pots in the villages of Golan, there is no reason for only one centre in Galilee. When Adan-Bayewitz published his book there was one production centre for cooking pots in Galilee, at Kefar Hananya, and one production centre for storage jars at Shihin, near *Sepphoris*. In 1994 another production centre for cooking vessels was discovered at Yodefath. In 1995 another production centre for storage jars was identified in a survey at Yavor, Western Galilee. In 2010 another production centre was discovered at Karem e-Ras at the fringes of Kafar Kana, north of Nazareth. This proves, I believe, that as archaeological research continues in the field, we shall have more and more pottery production centres.<sup>4</sup>

Only recently Adan-Bayewitz published, in lectures only,<sup>5</sup> the first analysis of the Yodefath group. According to his results shown on the screen, the Yodefath ware seems to belong to a completely different group of clay even though the same shapes were produced. According to him, all the fragments he sampled from *Sepphoris* are from the Kefar Hananya group and none from Yodefath. This conclusion is, surely, undoubtedly peculiar.

What is the reason for the Sepphoreans to buy cooking pots only from Kefar Hananya? The vessels from Kefar Hananya are similar to those of Yodefath in colour, shape, quality and capacity and they are available at the same period of time so it seems unlikely that all pots bought in *Sepphoris* were should have come from one remote site? Yodefath potters had at least one advantage over their colleagues and competitors from Kefar Hananya: they were much closer to the lively markets of *Sepphoris*, one of the two capitals of Jewish Galilee. The walking distance from Yodefath to *Sepphoris* is 12km, while from Kefar Hananya it is 25km.

These are the words of Adan-Bayewitz from his book, quoting from D. E. Arnold: '... Other factors, namely an inadequate agricultural base relative to population [as I discussed earlier concerning Yodefath, M.A.], and the existence of a suitable market (demand) [underlining is mine, M.A.] were probably important factors stimulating ceramic specialization and the development of the distribution network to market...' (Adan-Bayewitz 1993, 235). If this is Arnold's understanding of the relationship between producers and market, adopted by Bayewitz, what

<sup>2</sup> It is important, however, to note that very close to Kefar Hananya on the western side of the dry river-bed atop a high hill are the remains of one of Flavius Josephus' fortified towns by the name of Barsaba (Beer Sheba in Galilee). I believe that Barsaba was the main Jewish village in the Eastern Bet Kerem Valley and that its potter's quarter, in contrast to that at Yodefath, was located at the bottom of the hill, near the running water and the raw material. It was only after the revolt, when Josephus' fortified towns were destroyed or punished, that Barsaba lost its priority to the small developing potters quarter which was called Kefar Hananya. A support for this view can be found in the use of these two names as borders between Upper and Lower Galilee. In his book 'The Jewish War', describing Galilee during the 60s of the 1st century AD, Josephus (Wars, III:39) says that the border between Upper and Lower Galilee is Barsaba while the sages of the Mishnah (second half of the 2nd century AD, (Mishnah, Arachin 9:2) say that the border is at Kefar Hananya.

<sup>3</sup> Aviam 2005, 194, footnote 74.

<sup>4</sup> Recently an American team led by James R. Strange assisted by D. Fiensy and M. Aviam started a dig at Shihin. The very preliminary results show that the potters of Shihin produced not only Jars but many other types of clay vessels.

<sup>5</sup> Annual meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research, Atlanta, 2010.

is the explanation of the lack of Yodefata, the closer site, products and the existence of Kefar Hananya, the far site, products at one of the two central markets of 1st century Jewish Galilee?

It would, of course, be interesting to check whether the Sepphoreans did use jars from Yodefata as well. Did they buy jars from neighboring Karem e-Ras potters or only from nearby Shihin?

We have no way today to decide who was the first to launch the pottery industry. All these arguments gained strong support when very recently another pottery production centre was discovered at Karem e-Ras, north of the centre of the Arab village of Kefar Kana southeast of Yodefata, unknown from former surveys or visits, and only 6km from *Sepphoris*. Two large kilns, almost identical to those from Yodefata, were uncovered and according to the finds inside and around them, they produced storage jars of the same type as those made at Yodefata – the Ribbed-Neck Jars. They were abandoned or destroyed in the 1st century AD.

My conclusion is that there were potters in different villages who produced similar or identical products in Galilee (and probably everywhere else) during the early Roman period.

I cannot argue for the later periods. If Adan-Bayewitz is right in his assumption that during the later Roman and Byzantine periods Kefar Hananya was the only production centre for cooking pots and no other production centres are discovered in the coming years, this could provide very challenging research for the study of historical economy. It could then be interpreted as one of the consequences of the First Jewish Revolt and the battles in Galilee during the year AD 67. That, of course, should be studied in depth, but it is evident that the potter's quarter at Yodefata was destroyed and has never been rebuilt, the production centre at Karem e-Ras was destroyed at the same time, and Gamla (where there is a possibility of identifying another Golan production centre) was also destroyed and abandoned.

The clear, unshakable archaeological evidence of a 'potter's quarter' uncovered at the southern edge of Yodefata where cooking pots and storage jars were produced (and it should be remembered that only four squares, five by five meters, were excavated in what may be a large area of workshops and kilns), and a similar storage jar production centre at Karem e-Ras, 6km east of the markets of *Sepphoris*, should lead us to a completely different track in analyzing 1st century economy, trade and socio-economic conditions in this region.

We have to wait for the publication of Adan-Bayewitz's article on the chemical analysis of the Kefar Hananya and Yodefata ware from *Sepphoris*, but if what we have seen at the ASOR annual meeting in Atlanta in 2010 is true and all cooking ware at *Sepphoris* in the 1st century AD comes from Kefar Hananya, we have here two quite controversial concepts. The first is based on natural sciences and

analyses in hi-tech laboratories. The second is the result of surveys and very careful excavations during the last twenty years or more.

## Conclusion

The role of political borders in the distribution of cooking vessels (and maybe even storage jars) in Golan and Galilee needs to be considered.<sup>6</sup> Galilee was not surveyed as intensively as the neighbouring regions, therefore our answers about the cooking ware production centres cannot be as decisive as Adan-Bayewitz suggests, in spite of the use of physical and chemical analysis. It was pointed out that a high percentage of Golan cooking ware was locally made and was not brought from Galilee. The distance from Kefar Hananya to Gamla is about 35km – not very different from the distance from Kefar Hananya to *Sepphoris*. Was there a different model of cooking vessel production in the Golan and Galilee? In that case it seems unlikely that the Golan model had many production centres, whereas the Galilean model had only a single production centre. I think the discovery of the Yodefata production centre proves the fragile foundation of such a model. In short, so far we have at least two production centres of cooking wares in Galilee in the 1st century AD.

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<sup>6</sup> Moshe Hartal (2005:263-273) made a similar suggestion for the Golan in the late Roman period. He argued that one can identify the borders between the provinces of Phoenicia and Palaestina according to the distribution of the pottery types and that this was due to the impact of taxation and customs at the borders. If he is right, then this could apply to Galilee and the Golan in the early Roman period, when the Golan with its four to six production centres was in the territory of King Herod Phillip and Galilee with its two (or more) production centres was in the territory of King Herod Antipas. There is little doubt that there were tax stations along the border and one of them is even mentioned in the New Testament with reference to the tax (customs) collector who lived at Kefar Nahum (Capernaum), as well as the army officer who lived there (Matthew, 9:9; 8:5). It reflects the location of the village as the easternmost settlement in Antipas' kingdom near the crossing of the Jordan to Phillip's kingdom.

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