



## Glass lighting goblets from Ancient synagogue complexes in Israel from the Byzantine period and the Early Muslim Period - Initial synthesis

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### Abstract

To date, few syntheses have been formulated addressing glass finds in general and glass lamp-cups in particular that have been discovered from the Land of Israel across different periods. The isolation of artifacts, along with their typological characterization, contributes significantly to the ability to reconstruct behavioral models that illuminate patterns of activity and the consolidation of cognitive processes in the functional context of vessels within defined architectural complexes. This research aims to present a preliminary report of glass lamp-cups discovered in ancient synagogues in Israel, through a comparative perspective based on the behavioral analysis strategy: regional behavioural typo-morphology.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Glasslighting goblets; Artifacts; Complexes; Ancient synagogues

### The Byzantine Period

The known synagogue complexes throughout the Land of Israel dating to the Byzantine period are divided into three main geographical areas: The first area, from which most of the complexes are known, is the Galilee region which constitutes part of the northern expanse of the country; the second geographical region from which synagogue structures are known is the southern area; and the third region is the eastern part of the country.<sup>1,2</sup> In all complexes, without geographical distinction, the pattern of discovery of glass lamp-goblets indicates the practice of “focused illumination”: according to this practice, a limited collection of lamp-goblets was discovered in a defined location within the building (in this case, the synagogue), aimed at illuminating a single area, focused within the building space that constituted the center of the religious ceremony which took place in

that ritual structure.<sup>1,3,4</sup> In four of these complexes: at Eshtemoa,<sup>5</sup> Maoz Haim,<sup>6</sup> Capernaum,<sup>7,8</sup> and Sumaqa,<sup>9,10</sup> the goblets were discovered in the area of the main hall; in a single case, in the synagogue building at Gush Halav,<sup>11</sup> the lamp-goblets were found concentrated in one of the hall’s colonnades, while in another case, in the southern synagogue at Maon-Nirim,<sup>12,13</sup> the goblets were discovered in the area of the apse wall. This may provide evidence for the location of the synagogue platform, or alternatively, evidence for the ritual focus that took place in this Jewish religious architectural space. Based on this assumption, it is evident that there was no uniformity in the spatial management of the religious ceremony, and it is possible that we see the consolidation of diverse local traditions according to different regions and sources of environmental influence. In two other cases: Kfar Misr and Beith She’an, the goblets were discovered in the storage room for synagogue

accessories adjacent to the apse, and therefore these do not constitute part of the behavioral discussion.<sup>1</sup>

In most synagogues from both the northern and southern regions, the use of “stationary illumination” is prominent, expressed by the discovery of assemblages composed solely of suspended lighting goblets.<sup>1,3,4</sup> Examples of this can be seen in the synagogues at Kfar Misr, Gush Halav<sup>14</sup> and Kfar Nachum,<sup>7,8</sup> these used only two types of polycandela goblets: Hanging goblets, characterized by various beaded bases or those with conical bases. Additionally, as part of the stationary illumination approach, mixed lighting assemblages are known, composed of polycandela cups and cups lamp (of the common type characterized by three angled suspension handles) as in the synagogue at Beith She'an,<sup>15,16</sup> Maoz Haim, and Sumaqa (Table 1).<sup>1</sup>

Placed lamp-cups indicating portable illumination are known only from the southern and eastern regions, as in the synagogue discovered at Eshtemoa,<sup>5</sup> from

which only a pair of placed lamp-cups are known, which may attest to the nature of the ceremony based on the cup assemblage data, which sought to focus the congregation's eyes on the function that managed the ceremony. This was done by maintaining darkness in the synagogue space where the congregation sat, thereby drawing the eyes of the worshipers to the focal point managing the prayer, on one hand; on the other hand, it is possible that the religious activity that took part in this custom occurred only during daylight hours, and the discovery of the lamp-cups constitutes evidence for the ongoing management of the place. In the synagogue at Maon-Nirim,<sup>12,13</sup> a mixed assemblage was discovered including polycandela cups of the conical type and a single placed lamp-cup. Similarly, in the Samaritan synagogue at Beit She'an,<sup>15,16</sup> the composition of the known lamp-cup assemblage differs in the variety of its cups (Table 2) relative to the Jewish synagogue assemblages, which may attest to the mutual separation of these two ethnic groups.

**Table 1** The composition of the inclusion goblets and the candle goblets from the synagogue complexes in Israel from the Byzantine period

The Site	Eshtemoa	Maon-Nirim	Kafr Misr	Beit She'an	Maoz Haim	Gush Halav	Kfar Nachum	Sumaqa	Total
Goblet Type									
Shallow beaded							1		1
Prominent beaded				1	1		1	1	4
Edge bead			2	3					5
Conical		3		1	2				6
Button						4			4
Total hanging goblets 20									
A hanging candle cup with three hanging handles from a corner				1	5			2	8
Handle less candle cup								1	1
A candle holding wick tube cup				1					1
Concave	1	1		1					3
Flat	1								1
Total candle cups: 14									
Total	2	4	2	8	8	4	2	4	34

**Table 2** The composition of the inclusion cups and the candle cups from the synagogue complexes in Israel from the Muslim period

The Site			
	Merom	Hamat Tveria	Total
Goblet Type			
Shallow beaded		3	3
Prominent beaded		8	8
Edge bead		5	5
sack base	1		1
Conical	1	6	7
elongated base	1		1
concave		1	
flat		1	
Total	3	23	26

### The early muslim period

From the early Muslim period, two synagogue complexes are known to date, located in the northern area of Israel: the synagogue discovered at Meron<sup>17</sup> and the one known from Hammat Tiberias. In both complexes, the use of stationary illumination is prominent through the primary use of suspended lamp-cups. It is also notable that the Meron synagogue continues the known practice from the previous period of focused illumination using a limited

number of lamp-cups. Unlike the previous period, no polycandela cups with various types of beaded bases were discovered at Meron.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, the glass lamp-cup assemblage known from the synagogue at Hammat Tiberias<sup>18,19</sup> represents a “dispersed illumination” approach, one that uses an extensive number of lamp-cups (Table 3). Additionally, similar to the Samaritan synagogue assemblage from Beit She’an from the Byzantine period<sup>15,16</sup> and spatially proximate to it, a mixed assemblage was discovered in the Hammat Tiberias synagogue, composed mostly (22 items out of 23) of hanging goblets and a single placed cup (Table 3). It also emerges that, in the Hammat Tiberias synagogue, extensive and primary use was made, as in the Byzantine period, of hanging cups characterized by various beaded bases. It is possible that the glass lamp-cup assemblage known from Hammat Tiberias constitutes evidence for a conceptual religious change concerning the nature of the Jewish ceremony that took place in this geographic area, and perhaps it was influenced by its surroundings and by the decline in the extent of synagogue buildings in the Galilee area with the Muslim conquest and the “diffusion” of Jewish religious tension which stemmed from the extensive Christian presence in the Byzantine period in this geographical region.<sup>1,20</sup>

**Table 3** The lightning Goblets from the Synagogue assamblag






























Sumaqa	Kfar Nachum	Gush Halav	Maoz Haim	Beit She'an	KfarMisr	MaonNirim	Eshtemoa
							
							
							
							
							
							
							

Table Continued							
Sumaqa	Kfar Nachum	Gush Halav	Maoz Haim	Beit She'an	KfarMisr	MaonNirim	Eshtemoa
Hirschfeld, 1977. Pl. II:399., fig.1:1, 11:25, 51:55	Bagatti, 1964. Fig. 4:10 – 11:268, 5:270. Bagatti, 1970. LA XX. Fig.1.	Meyers et al, 1990 . Fig.3:23, 15:66, 18:76,, foto.34:75., pl.c:16-19:162.	Tzaferis, 1982. fig. 1:216, 5:220, 12:241. pl. 36,B.	Tzori, 1967 19fig. Tzori, 9199. Fig. 11; pl. 32.	Onn, . 1994. Fig.1:117, 17:130. plan.1:118.	Rahmani, 1961. Fig.2:.,84Pl. 16: 9.	Yavin, 2005. fig. 59:1, 61:2.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen that the discovery of glass goblets of light discovered in synagogues dating to the Byzantine and early Muslim periods sheds light on behavioral aspects that are capable of providing an additional explanation of the spatial reference to the structure of the synagogue, to the conduct of the religious ceremony and the manner in which light was used as part of the religious concept in this Jewish context.

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Conflicts of interests

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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