

EXCAVATIONS AT IRAQ EL EMIR

by

Robin M. Brown

With the generous co-operation of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and its former Director General the late Mr. Yaquob Oweis, the American Schools of Oriental Research sponsored a one month excavation at Iraq el Emir in October of 1976. Through the kind assistance of Dr. Ernest Will, this project was coordinated with the current architectural expedition from the Institut d'Archeologie of Beirut. The objectives of the excavation were focused in and around the Qasr el Abd from which it was hoped that the project would be able to obtain greater clarification of the dating of the phasing sequence which was first defined by the late Dr. Paul W. Lapp during his excavations at the site in 1961 and 1962. The excavation staff included: Mr. Mujahid Muhaisin, Inspector for the Department of Antiquities and field archaeologist; Ms. Jane Muhawi, draftswoman and field archaeologist; Dr. James A. Sauer, project advisor and Ms. Robin Brown, field director.

Lapp's excavations in the ancient village site revealed strata dating to the Early Bronze Age, Iron I, Late Hellenistic, Early Roman III-IV and (late) Roman (1963:10). Lapp also excavated within the Qasr which proved to contain a different historical profile including a Hellenistic founding level with which the original walls of the structure are associated, followed by two periods of Byzantine occupation. A clear break in the continuity between these two Byzantine strata was marked by massive structural collapse, pro-

bably the result of the earthquake of A.D.365 (Kallner-Amiran 1950-51:225). During the Byzantine Period the Hellenistic occupation debris and whatever floors existed within the Qasr were thoroughly removed and the interior partition walls were rebuilt, although in many cases along the lines and foundations of the Hellenistic walls. Much of the exterior structure withstood the earthquake but the west wall toppled completely and a Byzantine wall was set along the same wall line as the original. For the most part the Byzantine walls are clearly identifiable by their construction technique which employed small square and rectangular blocks of stone; clearly no attempt was made to duplicate the engineering feats accomplished in the Hellenistic Period.

Among Lapp's squares excavated within the Qasr, Squares II.1 and II.2 are particularly significant. There it was found that the sequence began with an Early Bronze Age fill which had been imported and landscaped into a platform upon which the Qasr had been set. While the Hellenistic wall foundations were evident, (Lapp. 1962: fig. 8) this Stratum III was largely unrepresented and its dating is dependant upon the appearance of Hellenistic sherds in the later Byzantine fills (Lapp. 1963: 24). The Byzantine phases consisted of a series of fills and floors overlying the Early Bronze Age fill. Presented below is a stratigraphic outline of Squares II.1 and II.2, of which the former was located just west of the Qasr interior and the latter lay adjacent to the west and intercepted the

west exterior qasr wall line.

Square II.1

- Str. IA Floor 1 (Above Banded Earth and Stones)
- Str. IB Floor 2 (Inclusive of Banded Earth and Stones below)
- Structural Collapse-Possible Earthquake
- Str. IIA Floor 3 (Above Light Grey)
- Str. IIB Floor 4 (Above Red Earth)

Square II.2

- Str. IA Unrepresented
- Str. IB Floor 2; possibly a temporary pavement (Above Red Earth and Stones and Brown Earth)
- Structural Collapse-Possible Earthquake
- Str. IIA Floor 3; Plaster and Rough Hewn wall (Above Mixed Clay and Earth)
- Str. IIB Floor 4; Plaster Above Mixed Stony)

THE 1976 SOUNDINGS

All references to chronological periodization follow Sauer (1973: 3-4) and where abbreviated in the text they appear as follows: Hellenistic, Hell; Early Roman, ER; Late Roman, LR; Byzantine Byz, Early Byzantine, E. Byz, Ottoman, Ott. Other abbreviations include: Early Bronze, EB; Iron, IR and "undetermined", UD. Although the compass orientation of the long axis of the Qasr el Abd is approximately 18° west of north, for convenience purposes all directionals cited in the text refer to north as

if it were directly along the long axis. Descriptions of the size of geologic inclusions within the loci follow the Wentworth Scale (Lahee 1961: 38-39).

Square AE. 76.1

Square I was a 2.00 m. x 2.00 m. sounding located in the northwest corner of the interior of the Qasr. The north baulk consisted of an east-west wall which formed the south partition of a chamber flanking the front or north entrance portico. The west baulk lay along the north-south exterior qasr wall line, along which a post-earthquake Byzantine wall had been installed.

Topsoil Modern-Ottoman

The uppermost surface soil, Sediment Layer 1:3 A, consisted of soft powdery earth mixed with cobbles and cut architectural blocks of limestone, vegetation and modern refuse.

POTTERY

Pail Locus Call

1	3A	1 Ott. pipe fragment,
E. Byz,	1	possible LR IV body sherd
Total Save		
75	12	

Interpretation This layer represents post-occupation accumulation of earth and refuse from the Modern-Period and retains no relationships of architectural significance.

Stratum 1 Early Byzantine III-IV

Beneath Topsoil 1:3 A, Green Brown Sediment Layer 1:3-6 covered the square and consisted of compacted soil and clay with inclusions of architectural blocks and rock rubble ranging from pebbles to boulders. Beneath this the Red Brown Sediment Layer 1:7 also extended over the entire square and while differentiated by its deep reddish color it too was character-

rized by a large percentage of rock rubble. Lying beneath Red Brown Sediment Layer 1:7, over Wall 1:9 and across the northern portion of the square was Clay, Limestone and Earth Layer 1:8 A; a layer of loose, granular brown soil mixed with clay and Limestone pebbles. Adjacent to that layer and covering the southern portion of the

square was Grey Soil Layer 1:8 B which also lay beneath Red Brown Sediment layer 1:7. This layer, consisting of loose, grey earth mixed with cobbles and boulders of limestone as well as randomly strewn limestone architectural blocks, met Wall 1:9 to the north and west.

Pottery				
Pail	Locus	Call	TOTAL	Save
2	3	E. Byz III-IV dominant, 1 possible Ir.	90	13
3	4	E. Byz III-IV dominant	110	15
4	4	E. Byz III-IV, few possible E. Byz I-II, 1 possible Byz waster	250	24
5	4	E. Byz III-IV 1 possible Byz waster, 1, possible Ir	100	17
6	5	Body sherds only, E. Byz dominant, few possible LR III-IV, UD	25	15
7	5	E. Byz III-IV dominant, few UD body sherds	24	16
8	4	Body sherds, E. Byz domi- nant, 1 possi- ble Hell	28	13
9	6	E. Byz III-IV, UD	89	23
10	6	Body sherds, E. Byz domi- nant, few po-	25	18

			ssible Hell, few possible EB		
11	7	Probable Byz body sherds		2	2
12	7	E. Byz I-II, UD body she- rds		23	13
13	8 A	E. Byz		3	3
14	8 B	Probable Byz body sherds		2	2
15	8 B	E. Byz I-II dominant, few ER-Hell body sherds		56	23

Interpretation The dominance of Early Byzantine III-IV wares in the uppermost Green Brown Sediment layer 1:3-6 indicate this fill to have been a Str. IA feature which when viewed in terms of Lapp's findings, seems likely to have originally had either an upper pavement or a beaten earth surface .

The lower Red Brown Sediment Layer 1:7, Clay, Limestone and Earth Layer 1:8 A and Grey Soil Layer 1:8 B represent a series of concurrent fills of which 1:8 A and 1:8 B appear to have been set over the rubble resulting from the structural collapse which has been attributed to the earthquake in order to raise a platform for new flooring. Contemporary with these, the Red Brown Sediment Layer 1.7, compacted and containing much less rubble may have

provided a packed earth surface. These layers, reflecting the pattern of rebuilding which characterized Str. IB, consistently date to Early Byzantine I-II, this being the available material for such an operation at the onset of the Early Byzantine III-IV period.

Stratum II Early Byzantine I-II

Constructed of roughly cut boulders of limestone, Wall 1:9 formed a right angle and ran parallel to the north and west baulk walls. Between Wall 1:9 and the baulk walls lay Plaster Pavement 1:10 ; made up of a ground limestone paste in the surface of which were embedded a few flat smooth limestone cobbles. The west baulk wall was dry laid and built of irregularly sized square and rectangular blocks of limestone.

Pail	Locus	Call	Pottery	TOTAL	Save
16	9	Byz.	body sherds	2	2
17	9	1	possible Hell, UD bo- dy sherd	2	2

Interpretation Wall 1.9 appears to have been a secondary support wall which skirted the inner faces of the north and west baulk walls and may be compared to a similar feature in Lapp's Square II.2. The plaster pavement was set subsequent to the west baulk wall and while it may have originally extended across the entire room and been cut back when wall 1.9 was built, it seems more probable that the two are contemporary. Wall 1.9 and the associated Plaster Pavement 1:10 correlate with Lapp's findings and may be assigned to Str. IIA. The west baulk wall which pre-dates these installations belongs to the Str. IIB period, implying that a portion of the original Str. III west Qasr wall collapsed prior to the major destruction.

Stratum III Late Hellenistic

The north baulk wall consisted of a single huge rectangular cut limestone block, only a portion of the face of which was exposed during excavation. This enormous

block is typical of the Hellenistic construction and while not dated directly during the 1976 excavations it is associated with Hellenistic pottery mixed in the later Byzantine fills which Lapp discovered in the Qasr (1963 : 24).

Square AE. 76.2

Square 2 was a probe which measured 1.00 m. north-south x 2.00 m. east-west, the south baulk of which was located against the outer face of the northern arm of the retaining wall surrounding the terrace upon which the Qasr had been built. Above that section of the retaining wall against which Square 2 was opened, stood a Late Ottoman-Modern Period house, whose foundations were provided by the retaining wall.

Topsoil Modern-Ottoman

The topsoil which covered the probe included compacted clay, granular brown soil, dung and rock rubble.

			Pottery	
Pail	Locus	Call	TOTAL	Save
1	2	1 Ott, 7 E. Byz, 1 Ir, body sherd	75	9
2	2	Body sherds, 1 possible Byz, 3 probable Hell, 1 possible Ir. I	5	66
3	3	Body sherds, E. Byz dominant, few possible Hell, 1 probable Ir. I	45	10

Interpretation The relatively recently deposited material of this layer contained a wide range of ceramic types

including Ottoman, which has been attested throughout the site but from a small number of sherds, and Iron I sherds which

correlate with the occupation pattern within the village.

Strata I-II Early Byzantine I-IV

Clay and Sediment Layer 2:4-6 covered the whole probe area and was characterized by a tightly compacted matrix dominated by clay. Also included in the matrix were pebbles, cobbles and boulders of limestone as well as fossils. Adjacent

to this layer were the first course of the south baulk wall and its foundation courses; the latter, while exposed, were not unearthed to their fullest extent. The wall proper consisted of roughly squared blocks while the foundation stones were small boulders and large cobbles in their natural form.

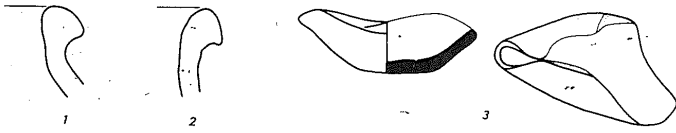
			Pottery	
Pail	Locus	Call	TOTAL	Save
4	4	Body sherds, 2 E. Byz/LR, 1 possible Hell, 2 possible EB	9	5
5	4	Body sherds, 4 probable E. Byz, Hell, UD	17	9
6	5	Body sherds, 1 Byz, 2 probable Hell, 1 EB, UD	10	6
7	6	2 E. Byz body sherds	2	2
8	6	2 E. Byz body sherds, 1 UD, 1 possible EB	4	4
9	6	1 probable E. Byz, 2 UD body sherds	3	3
10	6	No Pottery		
11	6	Body sherds, 4 E. Byz, 2 possible Hell, 1 EB	7	7

Interpretation The moist and tightly compacted layering of clay which dominates Strata I-II is indicative of water laid deposition; a situation that confirms that

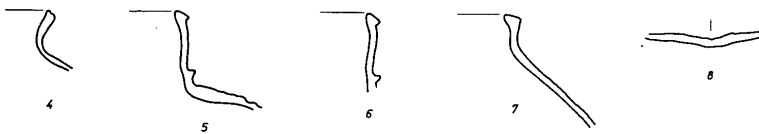
the retaining wall around the platform upon which the Qasr was built, served to protect the Qasr from a surrounding body of water. The ceramic repertoire includes

ARAB EL EMIR 1976 SURFACE SURVEY

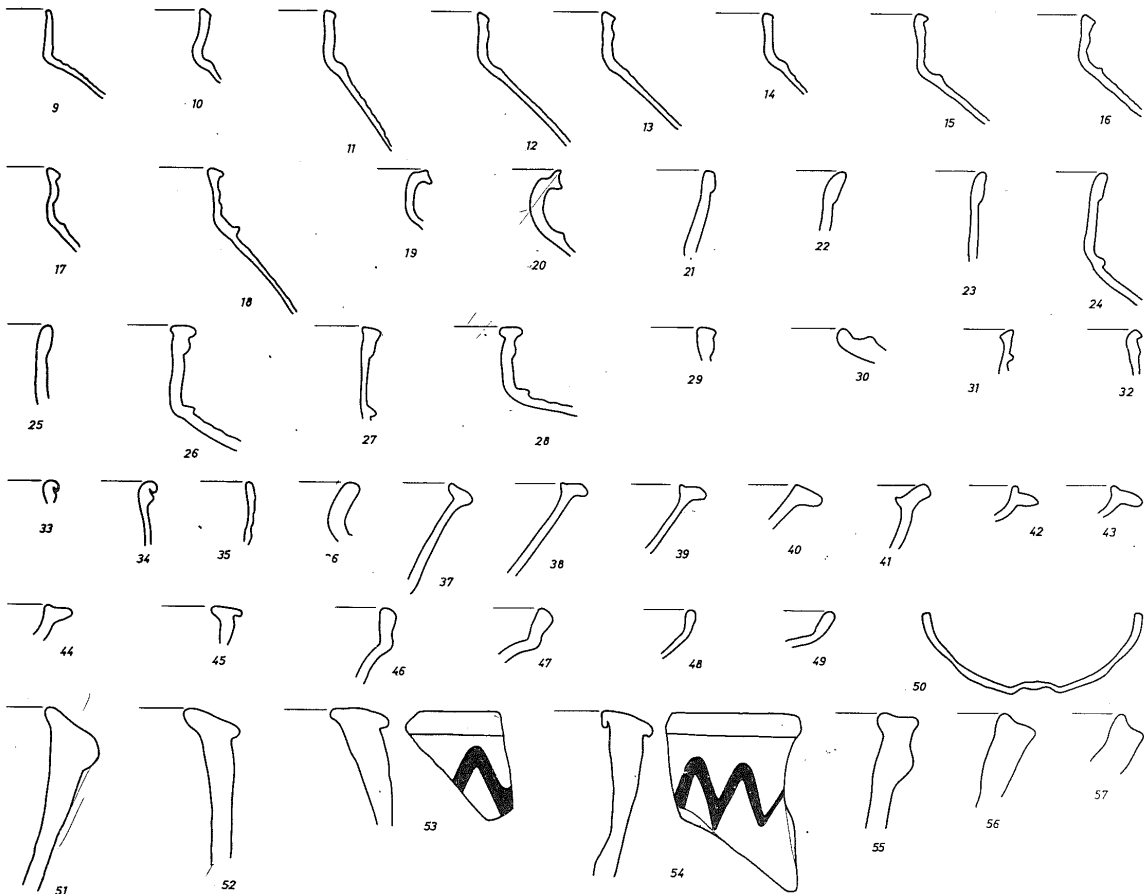
HELLENISTIC



EARLY ROMAN



BYZANTINE



SUPERVISOR - MUHAMMAD MUHAMMAD
DRAFTSMAN - ARAZIQ YOUSSEF
SCALE 1:4

Fig. 1

wares from several periods but distributed consistently throughout the loci were Byzantine sherds. It appears that during the Byzantine occupation water, either on a permanent or seasonal basis, surrounded the Qasr and it is probable that the same situation prevailed during the Hellenistic Period.

CERAMIC ANALYSIS

Presented below in Nos. 1-98 is a group of sherds collected from the surface of the Qasr and its immediate environs. Sherds Nos. 99-158 represent the assemblages from Squares AE. 76.1 and 2.

Survey Sherds

Hellenistic (fig. 1) Sherd Nos. 1-2 are thick hooked rims from large bag-shaped storage jars. No. 1 has been quickly fired which resulted in a thick dark core which was mixed with coarse, blue and white inclusions and No. 2 exhibits a well fired orange ware throughout and a buff slipped exterior.

Lamp No. 3 is a saucer type with a flat base and folded over sides which have been pinched together.

Early Roman (fig. 1) Represented in No. 4 is the rim of a closed globular cooking pot which features a short incurved neck with a groove upon the edge of its out-turned rim and a brick red fabric.

Nos. 5-6 belong to a genre of large bag-shaped storage jars which are characterized by a narrow cylindrical neck, hooked rim and ridge at the base of the neck.

Possibly from a cooking pot, No. 7 is an unusual form characterized by shallow ribbing and light red ware.

The base of a closed cooking pot, No. 8 is unribbed, slightly curving and comes to a faint point.

Byzantine (figs. 1-2) Presented in

Nos. 9-18 is a group of globular closed cooking pots. Distinct from the rest of the group, the neck of No. 9 narrows into a thin, almost pointed rim and lacks carination where it joins with the shoulder. The others are generally slightly concave on the interior of the neck, convex or bulging on the exterior, have hooked rims and are marked by carination at the junction of the shoulder and neck.

The open cooking pot rims pictured in Nos. 19-20 feature incurved necks and splayed hooked rims.

The homogenous group of jar rims presented in Nos. 21-25 belong to high, collared storage jars. These rims are thickened, folded over and flattened on their exterior face. The neck is plain and cylindrical and, in the instance of No. 24, marked at the base by a ridge.

The storage jar rims shown in Nos. 26-29 are knob thickened and profiled at the top and retain a ridge at the base of the neck. This form appears in a variety of ware colors ranging from pink to black.

The grooved, hole mouth jar rim, No. 30 is distinct from most of the rest of the corpus for its light grey ware.

No. 31, a small decanter rim, is characterized by a pronounced ridge around the neck and grey brown slipped orange ware. Other small forms are represented by rolled rim juglets Nos. 32-34, which share an orange fabric. A thin ribbed neck sherd from a small jug is shown in No. 35, its orange ware is red-orange slipped on the exterior. An enigmatic and possibly unique form, No. 36 is thick, slightly splayed, rounded at the top and has an apparent convex curving of the neck and bright orange fabric.

Small bowls Nos. 37-39 feature slop-

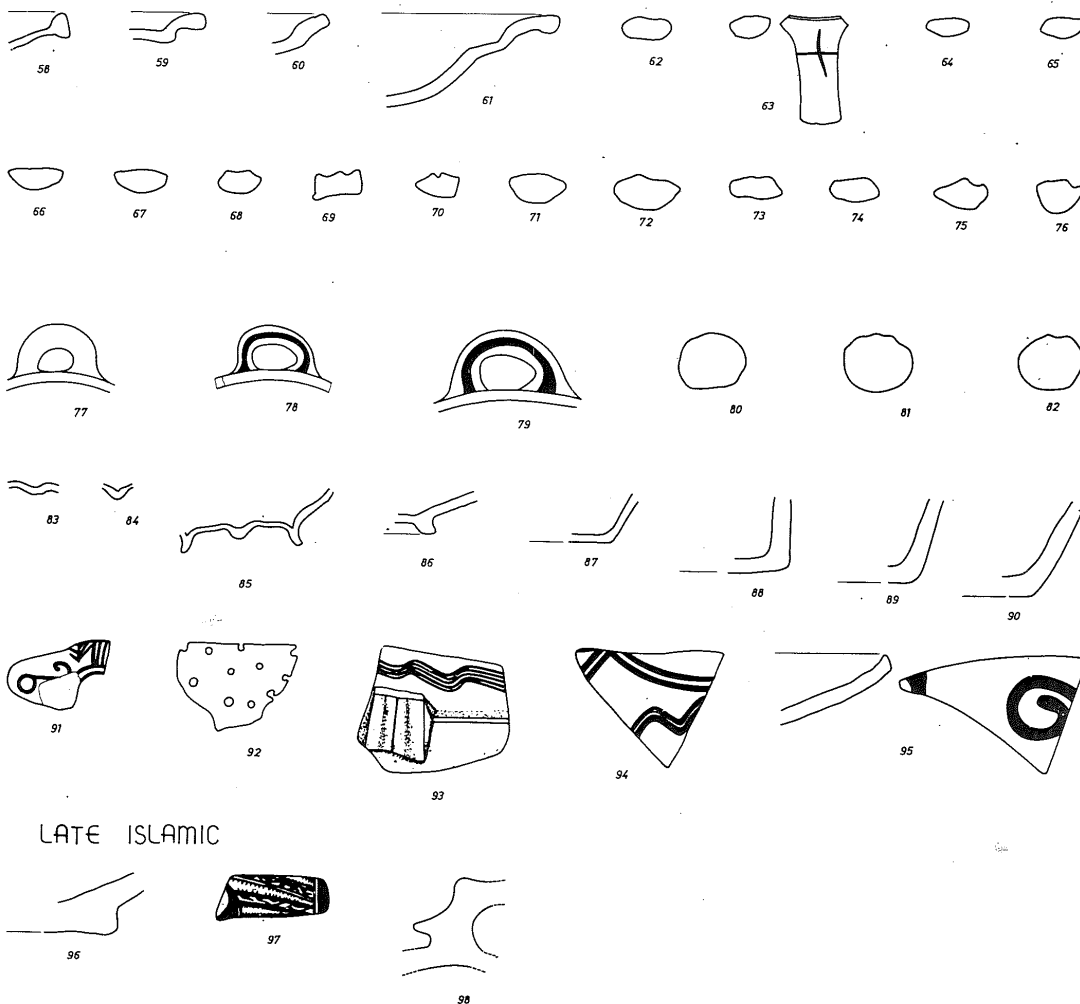


Fig. 2

ing sides and hooked rims pointing both outward, as illustrated by Nos. 38-39, and inward, as shown by No. 37. The latter has a dark grey brown slipped exterior and red slipped interior while the former two are of an orange-pink ware and grey brown exterior slip.

The rim from a large bowl form, No. 40 is characterized by a thick flaring lip and light red-orange ware covered on the exterior with a shiny red slip.

A group of small bowl types is presented in Nos. 41-49. No. 41 displays a high upward projecting blunt lipped rim which is peaked toward the interior. Its ware is pink-orange and covered with a grey brown slip on both the interior and the exterior. Two other small bowls, Nos. 42-43, have rims with peaked tops and outward flaring lips. The gentle curves of the necks indicate these to have been shallow, wide mouthed dishes. The wares are orange and red-orange slipped upon both the interior and exterior faces. Small bowl No. 44 also reflected the blunt out-flaring lip and peaked rim but is less exaggerated than Nos. 42-43. The ware is the same as the above. Flat topped and flaring both inward and outward, bowl rim No. 45 consists of a grey brown slipped pink-orange ware. Carinated bowls Nos. 46-47 share similar features, including a thick rounded rim, pink-orange ware and red-orange slip. Smaller bowls of the same fabric are represented in Nos. 48-49.

Vessel No. 50, a small open bowl, is marked by an umbellicus base and indented exterior side walls.

Presented in Nos. 51-57 is a corpus of basin rims. These thick, heavy handmade vessels reflect two different rim types. Nos. 51-54 have thickened rims which are

flat, sloping and projected and Nos. 55-57 are thickened, squared and grooved at the top.

The group of plates shown in Nos. 58-60 represent locally manufactured vessels in the style of red ware pottery. No. 58 has a thickened triangular knobbed rim and Nos. 59-60 are splayed rims from step sided dishes.

Red ware plate No. 61 shows the profile of a deep step sided dish with a thickened horizontal rim.

Three types of cooking pot handles are shown in Nos. 62-68. Belonging to an open cooking casserole, No. 62 is a straight horizontal handle which probably terminated with a loop turned up and over upon itself. Vertical cooking pot handles Nos. 63-65 are small and ovoid in section. The remainder of the vertical handles. Nos. 66-68 are larger and either flattened on the top face or multi-faceted.

Jar handles Nos. 69-76 exhibit a multiplicity of shapes, all are grooved across the top and most retain vestiges of a buff slip.

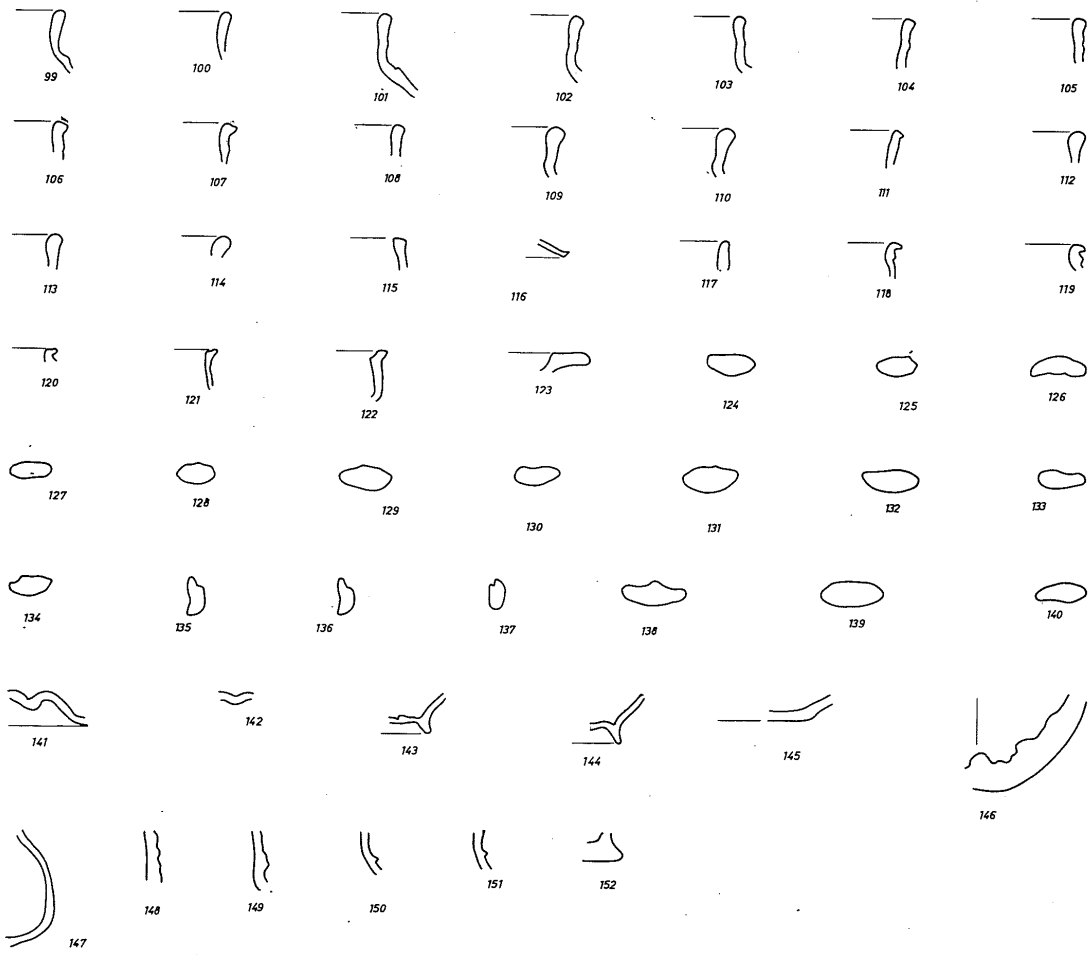
Horizontal handles Nos. 77-79 represent the open lidded cooking casserole, a form which varies in depth but usually is characterized by body ribbing and the bonding of the handles just beneath the rim.

The thick, heavy spherical jar handles pictured in Nos. 80-82 are marked by single or multiple grooves across their upper surfaces and a pink-orange ware.

Appearing frequently upon jars, Nos. 83-85 are ring bases which have a small center omphalos and orange ware with a grey brown exterior slip.

Represented in No. 86 is a ring base of grey buff ware belonging to a bowl or

ARAO EL EMIR 1976 SQUARE I



SQUARE II



SUPERVISOR-ROBIN BROWN
DRAFTSMAN-A/RAZIQ YOUSEF
SCALE 1:4

Fig. 3

similar open form.

The thin flat base pictured in No. 87 may be a fragment from a lantern.

Base sherds Nos. 88-90 are associated with the hand made basin forms whose rims are seen above in Nos. 50-56.

Sherd No. 91 consists of the upper portion of a mold pressed lamp which preserves a portion of the nozzle and part of the body around the filling hole. The raised molded decorative motifs include a volute, which curves from the nozzle's wick hole and a schematized olive branch or tree followed by a straight ray lines.

A section of a strainer is presented in No. 92. Wheel thrown and slightly concave, this thin disc of clay is marked by frequent perforations and an unslipped bright orange ware.

Sherd No. 93, the handle section of which is shown in No. 69, has a sharply ridged shoulder beneath which is a handle stump broken at its lower point of attachment. The concavity of the sherd, which lends it a biconical profile and the wide attachment angle of the handle indicate that it belongs to a jug form.

Illustrated in No. 94 is a thick body sherd from a large handmade vessel. The surface is marked by three bands of double line grooving running at right and oblique angles to one another.

The simple bowl rim which is depicted in No. 95 has red painted orange fabric decorated on the interior with a clockwise spiral and cross bands upon the face of the rim.

Late Islamic (fig.2) The handmade, undecorated base represented in No. 96 consists of a pink, poorly fired fabric with a rounded heel and a faintly concave underside. This type of base is associated

with a variety of wheel thrown and handmade forms including bowls, jugs, craters and storage jars.

Jug spout No. 97 was handmade from a coarse pink ware and decorated on the exterior with a finely executed close bichrome pattern which repeats the same basic design alternating in red and black paint.

No. 98 features a cup and portion of a handle (shift stance 90° right) which had been affixed to the shoulder of a large bag-shaped storage jar. This appendage, resting between the neck and one of the shoulder loop handles of the jar, probably held a small rounded dipper juglet.

Sounding I

Cooking pot rims Nos. 99-100 constitute one of three types of cooking pots represented in the soundings. They are thickened and rounded at the top, taper downward and are thinned at the base of the neck. At the junction where the neck and shoulder meet, the body of the vessel is ribbed on both the interior and the exterior.

The group of cooking pots illustrated in Nos. 101-114 are simple rims which vary individually but most are rounded and thickened at the top while a few are flattened and hooked.

No. 115 represents a third category of cooking pots differentiated from the other examples by both its squared rim and white slipped white ware.

The thin straight lid with up-turned edge shown in No. 116 is from an open cooking casserole.

Jar rim No. 177 is of the same form and ware type discussed above under Nos. 22 - 23.

Juglet rims Nos. 118-120 are bulbous and ware type discussed above under

Nos. 22-23.

Juglet rims Nos. 118-129 are bulbous with hooked rims and share an orange ware and dark grey brown slip.

No. 121 features a widely grooved jug rim, ribbed neck and light orange ware covered with a darker burnt orange slip.

The rim from a small bowl, No. 122 reflects heavy notching on the interior and a flaring of the exterior of the rim profile.

Plate rim No. 123 preserves a flatly horizontal lip which is slightly ridged along the edge which faces the interior of the vessel.

Two classes of cooking pot handles are represented within this sounding and the first of these includes Nos. 124-128 which are similar to Nos. 63-65, above, in that they reflect a relative smallness of size in aspects of length, breadth and width. The second group of handles, Nos. 129-133 are larger in size and their upper surfaces have three flattened faces.

Jug handle No. 134 consists of a poorly fired orange fabric and has three flattened faces upon its upper surface.

Presented in Nos. 135-137 are horizontal handles from cooking casseroles of the same form as pictured in Nos. 77-69.

Of the omphalos jar bases which are shown in Nos. 141-142 the former is pink in both ware and slip and the latter is orange with a brown exterior slip.

Sherd Nos. 143-144 are ring bases with a center omphalos identical to those illustrated in Nos. 83-85.

Belonging to a bowl or large platter, No. 145 is a flat base with an orange ware.

The thick rounded base shown in No. 146 is associated with the large zir rim sherds Nos. 1-2. The poorly fired orange ware exhibits a thick core speckled

with large bluish and white inclusions and the exterior is white slipped.

Illustrated in No. 147 is a portion of a juglet with a deep red-orange ware and black exterior slip. This form is possibly related to rim Nos. 118-120.

Sherd No. 148 shows the ribbed neck of a jug.

The body sherd No. 149 encompasses the neck and shoulder junction of a cooking pot whose form, deep orange ware and darker exterior slip are identical to those of Nos. 101-114.

Neck fragments from those jars whose rims are pictured in Nos. 22-24 are shown in Nos. 150-151.

Characterized by a dark reddish fabric and a shiny black slip, No. 152 is the molded base of a pipe bowl. Across the bottom of the bowl are two lines of tiny hatch marks and incised triangles.

Sounding 2

Pictured in Nos. 153-154 are two bowl rims, the former of grey ware and the latter of orange ware.

The wheel turned bowl which appears in No. 155 is distinctive for its cut out decoration which completely covers the exterior surface of the sherd with triangular incisions.

Handle Nos. 156-158 are from cooking pots and all have orange wares.

Summary

The presence of sherds from the Iron Age and Roman Period in Sounding 2 correlate with strata within the village site excavated by Lapp. The few Hellenistic sherds are significant for their contribution to the otherwise poorly represented Str. III but do not add to the picture of Hellenistic culture at Iraq, el Amir. More representative is the Byzantine group which reflects

a pattern of homogeneity, particularly in ware type and surface treatment. This consistency and the presence of possible wasters suggests a local workshop very close to the site. The forms themselves suggest a 4th - 5th century A.D. date which correlates with the Early Byzantine stratification of the Qasr.

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