

The Late Iron II-Persian Ceramic Horizon at Tall al-‘Umayrī

Before the excavations at Tall Ḥisbān, the pottery from the late Iron II and Persian periods in central Transjordan was known only from a few isolated tomb deposits. Dates were given to these assemblages in the Iron II period based on rather weak parallels from western Palestine and on one or two inscribed seals.

James Sauer refined the dating with pottery recovered from the first season of excavation at Tall Ḥisbān. In his 1972 study, co-authored with Lugenbeal, he dated the Ḥisbān assemblage to the seventh and sixth centuries, based on general trends in the pottery of Palestine during the late Iron II period. At the same time, he called attention to the unique Transjordanian forms making up the lion's share of the corpus. His dating has been followed by most researchers since.

However, sometime later, Sauer began to suspect that the pottery forms making up the core of the Ḥisbān corpus were not limited to the late Iron II period, but continued later than the sixth century, perhaps even into the fourth century. This suggestion was made in oral lectures and personal communications. But because his ideas were not published, others working in the region could not take the suggestion very seriously.

The vast majority of bowls were ring burnished. Could ware types and forms datable to the seventh century (based on the palaeography of associated inscriptions) continue through most of the Persian period? How could there be so little change through almost three centuries? Where was the Babylonian disruption suggested by Josephus (*Antiquities*, 10.9:7)?

The Ḥisbān material was, moreover, problematic in that almost all of the corpus came from a massive Hellenistic fill in the Iron II reservoir. No sub-phasing could be established. After the Ḥisbān excavations, the same pottery began to appear in large quantities at other sites in a region roughly corresponding to that of the ancient Ammonites. But groups of pottery, such as that from the ‘Ammān citadel published in Dornemann's synthesis of 1983, came from limited excavations, or were from one-period deposits, or were from tombs for which the length

of use was impossible to discern clearly. They were thus of little help.

Of course, there were hints that this corpus of late Iron II pottery extended slightly longer in time than that of western Palestine. Some of the Aramaic ostraca from Ḥisbān had been dated by Frank Cross on palaeographic grounds to the late sixth century (Cross 1969; 1973). Although we were content to admit that the pottery corpus seemed to continue through most of the sixth century, we were not yet ready to go further (Herr 1989: 311). There was apparently no Babylonian disruption in the Ammonite region, but we could not muster the courage to suggest a longer-lasting corpus.

However, there was no historical reason to explain the disappearance of occupation in Transjordan during the Persian period. We reached for economic explanations, such as stagnation due to the disruption of trade caused by the Babylonian conquest to the west.

Then came our excavations at Tall al-‘Umayrī which, in the first season in 1984, included a detailed surface survey of the site. Two cylinder seals turned up in the survey which Edith Porada suggested were best dated to the sixth to fifth centuries (Porada 1989). In the excavations, a closed lamp was found, ordinarily suggesting a Persian date at the earliest. However, the exterior surface was highly burnished, an Iron II feature (Herr 1989: 345, no. 14). Many of the open lamps, moreover, displayed the shallow form more typical of the Persian period than Iron II (e.g. Herr 1989: 345, nos. 15-16). But because the site did not seem to contain any pottery later than that familiar to us from the Ḥisbān corpus (which we maintained belonged to the seventh and sixth centuries), we suggested that perhaps a date in the late sixth century for these items would be acceptable. After all, typical Persian forms were missing, such as mortaria, necked cooking pots, and sausage jars.

In our 1987 excavations at Tall al-‘Umayrī in Field A, we had removed the floor in one of the rooms of the top phase of our Ammonite Citadel. In the fill beneath the floor was a sherd from an Attic kylix (Herr 1991: 34, no.

31) best dated to the fifth century (Waldbaum 1991). Another Attic sherd, again dated to the fifth century, was found in Field B (Waldbaum 1991; Herr 1991: 64, no. 30).

It was becoming increasingly difficult to retain an end date of 500 BC for the corpus of pottery associated with these finds. I have thus come to the conclusion that Sauer is probably correct that the late Iron II/Persian corpus of pottery seems to have lasted through most of the Persian period. Regional differences between the assemblages in western and eastern Palestine must explain the absence of "typical" Persian forms in Transjordan.

To illustrate this conclusion let us first look at some of the more typical forms in the corpus of the Ammonite region. Although we have found these forms in at least three separate phases at Tall al-'Umayri, we have not yet been able to isolate changes in the ceramic forms from phase to phase.

Pithoi are typically large holemouth storage vessels, often with bulbous rims and ridges, and waves or grooves outside the rim (Herr 1991: 191, nos. 1-6).

Typical necked jars have narrow openings, a triangular rim, and an insloping neck (Herr 1991: 191, nos. 9-14; 42, nos. 3-4). Many times, the neck sports three to five grooves (Herr 1991: 191, nos. 9-14). Similar rims with grooved necks are also found atop upright necks (Herr 1991: 191, nos. 7-8).

Jugs can also carry triangular rims (Herr 1991: 191, nos. 24-26 [nos. 24-25 may be a jar]), but more typical is the thickened, crescent-shaped rim (Herr 1991: 191, nos. 27-31).

A type of vessel rare outside our region are basins with flat bases, relatively straight walls, and everted rims (Herr 1991: 209, nos. 18, 20-23).

Holemouth kraters, with curving sidewalls and turned-over, holemouth rims, are ubiquitous (Herr 1991: 191, nos. 37-40).

There are many kinds of bowls distinctive to our corpus. The most prolific vessel at both Hisbān and Tall al-'Umayri is the bowl with off-set rim (Herr 1991: 42, nos. 15-21). Another type has an upright wall with a simple rim and a small ridge below the rim (Herr 1991: 42, nos. 22-23). Extremely frequent are forms with a 90-degree inturned rim (Herr 1991: 28, nos. 15, 17-27) and bowls with rounded, grooved sidewalls and an everted rim (Herr 1991: 215, nos. 16-19) with a few ungrooved variants (Herr 1991: 215, no. 20). Less frequent are shallow bowls with carinated or rounded sidewalls and widened, flat-topped rims (Herr 1991: 31, nos. 1-5, 7).

Cooking pots also come in more than one common form. The normal late Iron II cooking pot with a thickened and ridged rim is very frequent (Herr 1991: 34, nos. 10-12; 219, no. 7), but most distinctive are the forms with bulbous rim, sometimes pointed at the top (Herr

1991: 34, nos. 23-24; 219, nos. 9-12; 205, nos. 23-25).

A type of vessel rare elsewhere, but quite common in our region is the mortar (Herr 1991: 34, no. 28; 219, nos. 3-5). They are usually made to look like basalt mortars with thick, gray ware.

Tripod cups are not frequent, but are distinctive to our region (Herr 1991: 205, nos. 16-17).

The question of the beginning date of this corpus is not clear, but it would seem to have begun by the seventh century, based on a black-burnished bowl of typical "Ammonite" ware and form discovered at Tall Batash in western Palestine (Kelm and Mazar 1985: 110, no.4). I have examined this bowl myself and have confirmed that it is identical to the black-burnished ware we find so frequently in the Ammonite region. A precise parallel to this rim form in black-burnished ware was found at Tall al-'Umayri in 1984 (Herr 1989: 329, no. 25).

However, more important to this paper is how late the corpus of pottery outlined above goes. I will illustrate several forms found together with this corpus which appear to have Persian parallels, based especially on the work of Stern (1982) and, more recently, the results from Tall al-Ḥiṣi (Bennett and Blakely 1989) and Gezer (Gitin 1990).

Triangular jar rims on a variety of forms are reminiscent of Persian rims (Herr 1989: 321, nos. 9-17, 22-24).

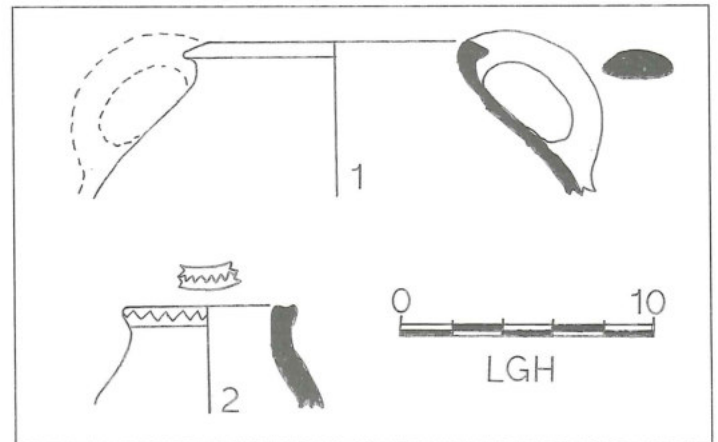
One jug has a triangular rim similar to early Hellenistic forms (Herr 1989: 323, no. 19).

One of our rare necked kraters is also similar to Persian forms (Herr 1989: 325, no. 11).

Some bowl forms also appear more Persian than Iron II (Herr 1991: 42, nos. 24-25; 31, nos. 22-27).

Although Persian necked cooking pots have not yet been found, one form from Tall al-'Umayri is close (FIG. 1.1).

Chevron decoration also occurs on a few vessels (FIG. 1.2), and lamps are very frequently made in the flat style



1. Vessels from Tall al-'Umayri, 1989, Field A; to appear in *Madaba Plains Project 3*. 1. Persian cooking pot; 2. Persian juglet.

noted above. We should also again note the two Attic sherds found in 1987.

Much more work needs to be done in the future on this corpus of late Iron II and Persian pottery in the Ammonite region of Transjordan, but it seems to me that many of the forms lasted virtually unchanged through most of the Persian period. This includes Iron II characteristics like wheel burnishing.

Totally absent from the corpus are Persian standbys, such as sausage jars, high-necked cooking pots, and amphoras. Very rare are mortaria and shallow rounded bowls.

In conclusion, not only was there a regional corpus of pottery in the Ammonite region of the central Transjordan plateau during the Persian period, but the separation between the Iron II and Persian periods that has been classically stated for western Palestine, does not apply to eastern Palestine, where the late Iron II corpus seems to flourish right through the Babylonian period and continue well into the Persian period with no discernible break in the corpus.

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