

## Fine Nabataean Ware with Impressed and Rouletted Decorations

The primary aim of this short study is to illustrate the different types of impressed and rouletted decoration on fine Nabataean ware found at Petra, so that they may be recognised elsewhere and particularly on sites where the typical Nabataean painted ware is not present. This is not the place to discuss the history of the Nabataeans or their contribution to civilisation during the last two centuries before and the first two after Christ. Suffice to say that for the latter period, one of their greatest legacies was in the field of ceramics. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the various excavations which have taken place at Petra<sup>1</sup>, which was one of the major centres of the Nabataeans, particularly prior to its annexation by Rome in AD 106.

The pottery from the excavations in Petra presents a very homogeneous picture and slowly we are assembling an accurate picture of the chronology of Nabataean pottery, though there seems to be some controversy about the evolution and sequence of the painted designs. Most people associate Nabataean ceramics with the beautiful painted ware of egg-shell thin-ness, forgetting that much of it is unpainted and can be of equal thin-ness. On the whole, however, the unpainted, both plain, and decorated, (impressed or rouletted) is of greater thickness than the painted ware.

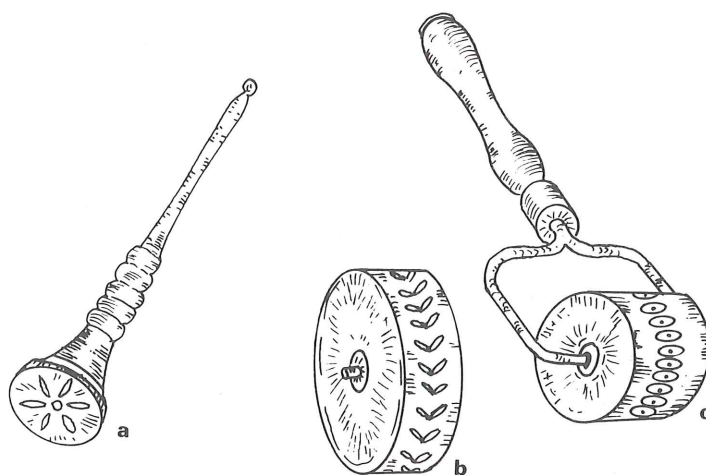
The fine rouletted and impressed wares illustrated in this paper all come from Mr Parr's excavations at Petra during the years 1958–64. An attempt has been made to establish a chronological sequence, but precise stratigraphical evidence is not yet available for this material. By fine ware the virtual absence of grits is meant. In the examples studied, very fine grits, not more than 0.1 mm. in size are nearly always present. This very fine clay enabled the potters to make exceptionally thin ware, especially on a fast wheel.

The abundance of Nabataean pottery to be found at Petra suggests that here might not only have been a distribution centre but also a place of manufacture, though it should be borne in mind that no actual kilns have been found<sup>2</sup>. A clay

belt runs right across the Edomite site at Tawilan, which lies at the foot of the Jebel Heidan, a high hill overlooking from the east the present-day modern village of Elji (popularly known as Wadi Musa). Treatment of the clay in order to make a small statuette, produced a ware very similar to that used for the Nabataean pottery<sup>3</sup>.

In FIG. 1a–c inclusive are shown typical examples of the tools used to give either an impressed or rouletted decoration. For the former, a flat seal stamp, bearing an incised pattern is used. The handle enables the decorator to control the strength of the impression. As the stamp is lifted from the clay with each impression, there is no continuity in or running on of the pattern. The roulette, FIG. 1b and c, on the other hand, gives a continuous line of successive impressions where the motif is often repeated. In essence, the roulette, as its name suggests, is a small wheel with handle or spindle for control and guidance

- 1a Tool for stamping.
- b Rouletting tool.
- c Rouletting tool with handle.



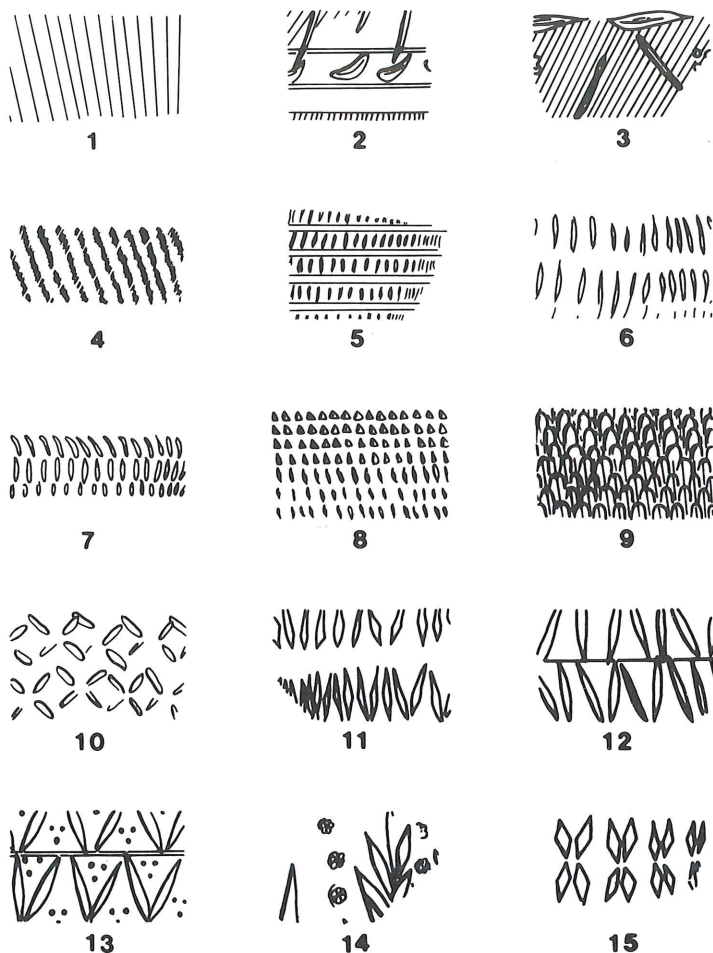
pottery is late, that is of the 3rd and 4th Centuries AD, though some earlier pottery was found in 'wash' levels.

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Mrs Crystal-M. Bennett for this information given verbally, and also for giving me advice regarding this paper.

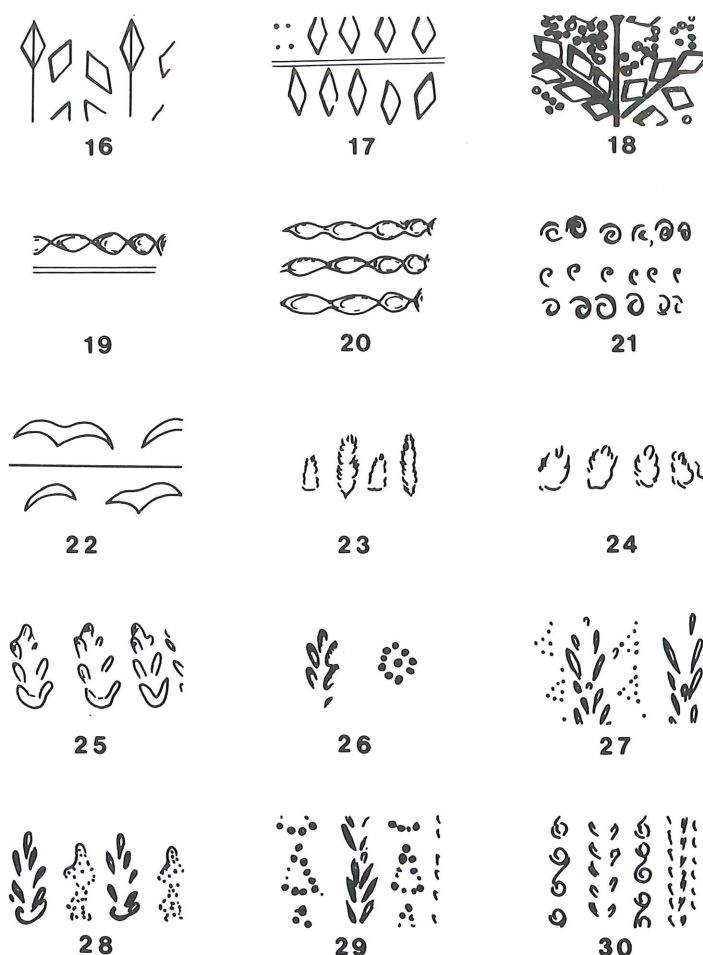
<sup>1</sup> For published reports on excavations at Petra see the appended bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Since this paper was written, kilns have been found on the outskirts of Petra at Umm Sahun, north and west of the modern village of Elji, where a new village is being constructed to house the B'dul from Petra. So far as the writer is aware, the associated

## 2 15 types of rouletting or stamping decoration.



## 3 Another 15 different types.



and is rolled around the vessel. These tools were made easily from stone, bone or pottery.

The same decorative implements could be used on both globular or straight-sided vessels before the clay was completely dry, the potter's wheel turning more slowly when a stamp was being used. As these decorative elements, both impressed and rouletted, were almost always applied to delicate ware of a general thickness of 0.9 mm. to 2.22 mm. and were confined to external surfaces, some kind of support would have had to be given to the inside walls. The different designs in the stamped and rouletted decorations are illustrated in FIGS 2 and 3, Nos. 1-30 inclusive.

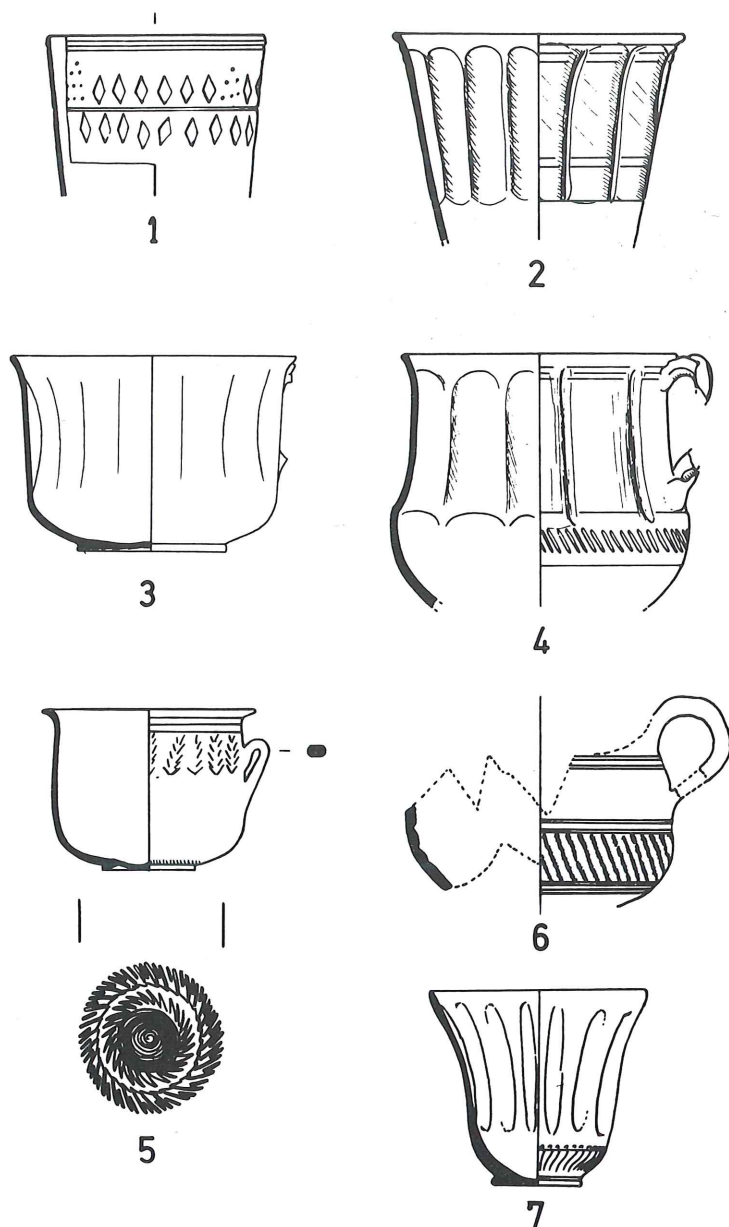
There is a basic uniformity in the Nabataean ware from Petra. Some 90% of the excavated fine ware with impressed or rouletted decoration is of pinkish red clay. The best ware belongs to the time of Aretas IV (9 BC-AD 40), but the most prolific period belongs to the second half of the first century AD and the first half of the second century. The fine ware from Mr Parr's excavations have been broken down into five main classes: cups; beakers; shallow and deep bowls; globular bowls and juglets. These are illustrated on FIGS 4 to 14 inclusive.

Inevitably, the origins of the impressed and rouletted decorations have been discussed. Horsfield says that the technique of embellishing thin delicate ware with stamped and rouletted decorations was adopted from metal prototypes and Moevs comments that the progressive loss of interest in the vase as a painted surface which followed the end of the classical period brought in new ways of decoration and first of all those connected with metal technique. Crowfoot suggests that the rouletted plain pottery found on Nabataean sites has its parentage in Terra Sigillata, being either a local imitation, an extension or a provincial variant of red gloss Terra Sigillata. For a discussion of Terra Sigillata, both imported and what is known as Eastern Sigillata, the dating of which is in line with the introduction of this type of ware in the Nabataean period, the reader should refer to A. Négev, *The Nabataean Potter's Workshop at Oboda*, pp. 34-35 and to K. M. Kenyon in *Samaria-Sebaste*, Vol. III pp. 281-8.

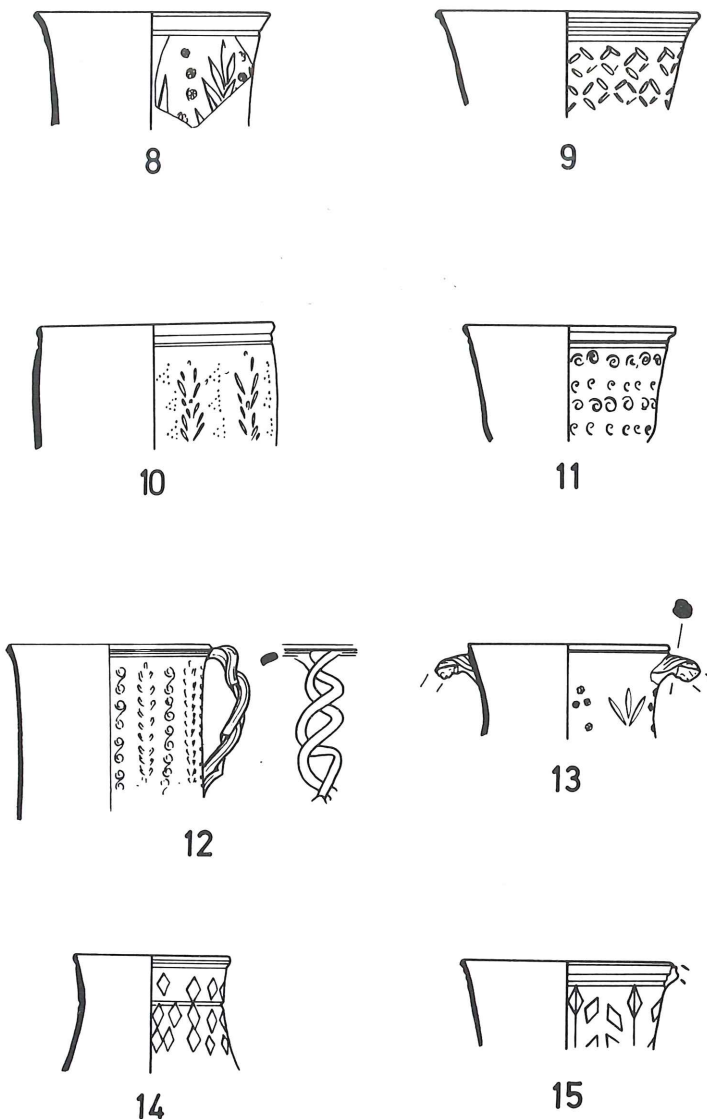
Rouletting itself came into fashion in the second half of the fourth century BC and was Attic in origin. The designs were based on palmettes, rosettae, and rouletted circle motifs. Some of the earliest designs are of stars and rosettae. As time



## 4 Designs on Cups.



## 5 Designs on Beakers.



progressed, the stars get smaller and finally disappear. Later, there is the addition of ivy leaves with berries and more often ovules and palmettes. The latter, of course, came from the impressed decorations on black glazed ware. The designs become very stereotyped and on the 1st century BC sigillata stamped ware, the design has become 2 concentric groups of 2 to 4 rouletted circles. Between these groups may be 5 palmettes or Isis symbols and possibly a rosetta in the centre. The Isis symbol was a very important feature in decoration. (For a discussion of palmettes and Isis symbols see *Samaria-Sebaste* Vol. III, pp. 316–324.)

It is also possible that this decorated ware may have had its beginnings in West Slope Ware, which originated in Athens perhaps at the end of the fourth century BC, and whose

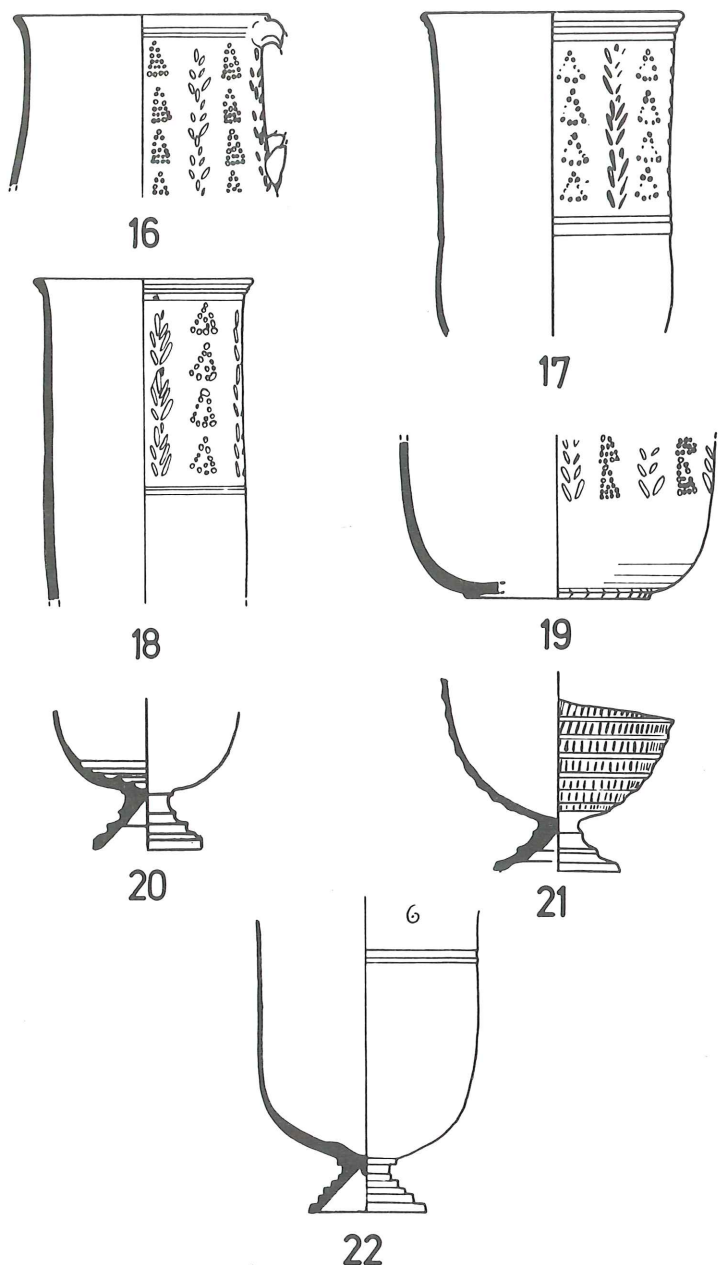
descendants were common in this part of the world during the period covered by the floruit of Nabataean ceramics.

While the rouletting technique is fairly evident in the 1st century AD, it becomes much more common on red gloss late Roman pottery during the second and third centuries AD though this does not apply to the truly indigenous fine Nabataean ware.

From the parallels quoted below, it is clear that the different types of the Petra fine ware with their impressed and rouletted decorations are not commonly found outside Nabataean sites. Occasionally, the body forms of the examples studied bear a strong resemblance to their parallels, but there seems to be a striking difference in the quality of the ware and decoration, the ware of the parallel examples being thicker than that of the pottery from the Nabataean sites.

The elegant decorations which are carefully impressed or rouletted on the Petra examples are almost entirely restricted

## 6 Designs on Beakers.

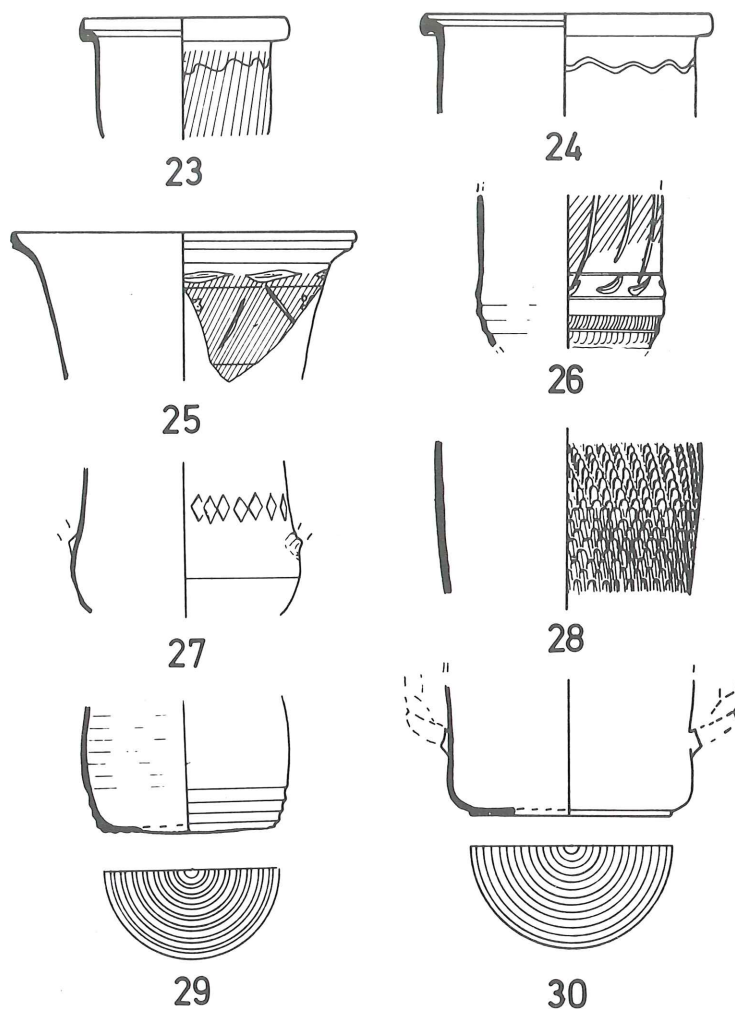


to the Nabataean sites and from the quoted parallels it would seem that the richest period for the Petra fine unpainted ware was from about the second half of the first century BC until shortly after the Roman annexation in AD 106, though the traditions continue on in debased forms until and into the third century AD.

#### Appendix 1: The decorative motifs which occur on fine Nabataean ware

FIGS 4–14 inclusive are all from P. J. Parr's *Excavations at Petra*. Unfortunately scales have been omitted inadvertently on all the figures.

## 7 Designs on Beakers.



1. Parallel lines of shallow, long, oblique rouletting, often covering the entire body outside from below rim to just above the base (FIG. 7: 23).
2. Horizontal bands of stabbed patterns accompanied with parallel lines of shallow, long, oblique rouletting (FIG. 7: 26).
3. Assymetrical stabbed patterns accompanied with parallel lines of shallow, long oblique rouletting (FIG. 7: 25).
4. Diagonal columns of shallow small rouletting arranged in a horizontal band around the lower part of the body, e.g. (FIG. 4: 6).
5. Narrow horizontal bands of dotted astragal-shaped motifs, deeply rouletted; each line is separated from the other by a groove. This decorative motif covers the whole body outside, e.g. (FIG. 6: 21).
6. Horizontal bands of vertical needle-like rouletting. Such decoration covers the whole body outside, e.g. (FIG. 8: 37).
7. Horizontal band of irregular, short, deep rouletting, around the lower part of globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 12: 63).
8. Horizontal bands of triangular rouletted indentations, around the widest part of globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 11: 60).
9. Overlapped feather-like rouletting covering the entire body of beaker, e.g. (FIG. 7: 28).
10. Impressed rosettae, each consists of four petals in simple outlines, without circle at centre. Such elaborate decoration covers the whole body of beaker, e.g. (FIG. 5:9).

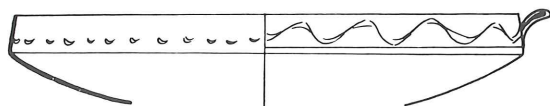
## 8 Designs on Shallow and Deep Bowls.



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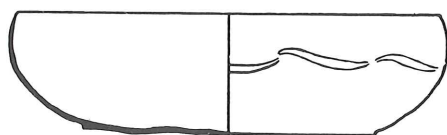
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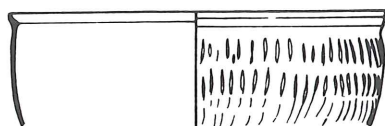
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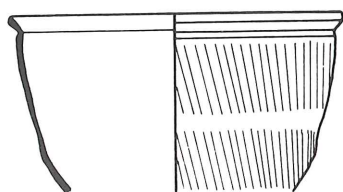
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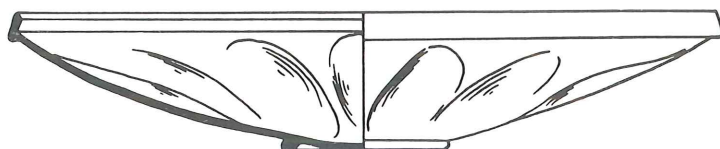
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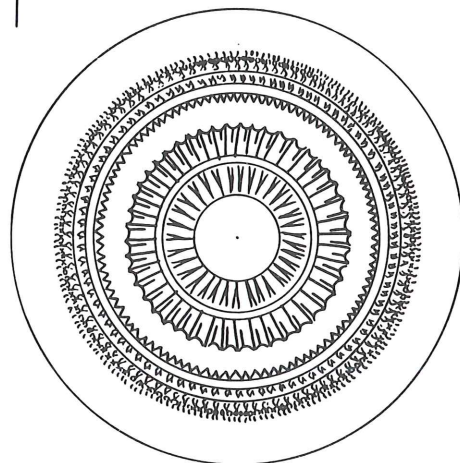
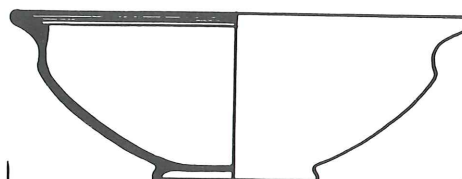
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11. Horizontal bands of impressed narrow lozenges, which represent floral leaves. These motifs cover the body of globular bowls (FIG. 11: 59).
12. Horizontal bands of impressed narrow, long lozenges, similar to those of No. 11, separated by a horizontal incised line, covering the widest part of globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 11: 55).
13. Horizontal bands of impressed narrow lozenges; each two lozenges represent a double (bifid) leaf, which alternates with three impressed dots, covering the upper half of globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 11: 56).
14. Vertical bands of impressed narrow lozenges, arranged in branch-like patterns, each alternating with small six-petalled rosettae, mainly occurring on fine beakers, e.g. (FIG. 5: 8).
15. Horizontal bands of impressed wide, short lozenges, forming four petalled rosettae without circle at centre, around the neck of globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 12: 65).

## 9 Designs on Shallow and Deep Bowls.



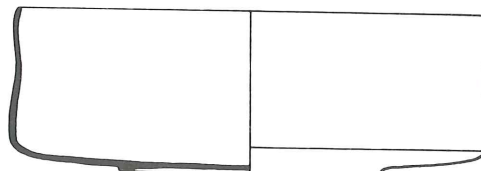
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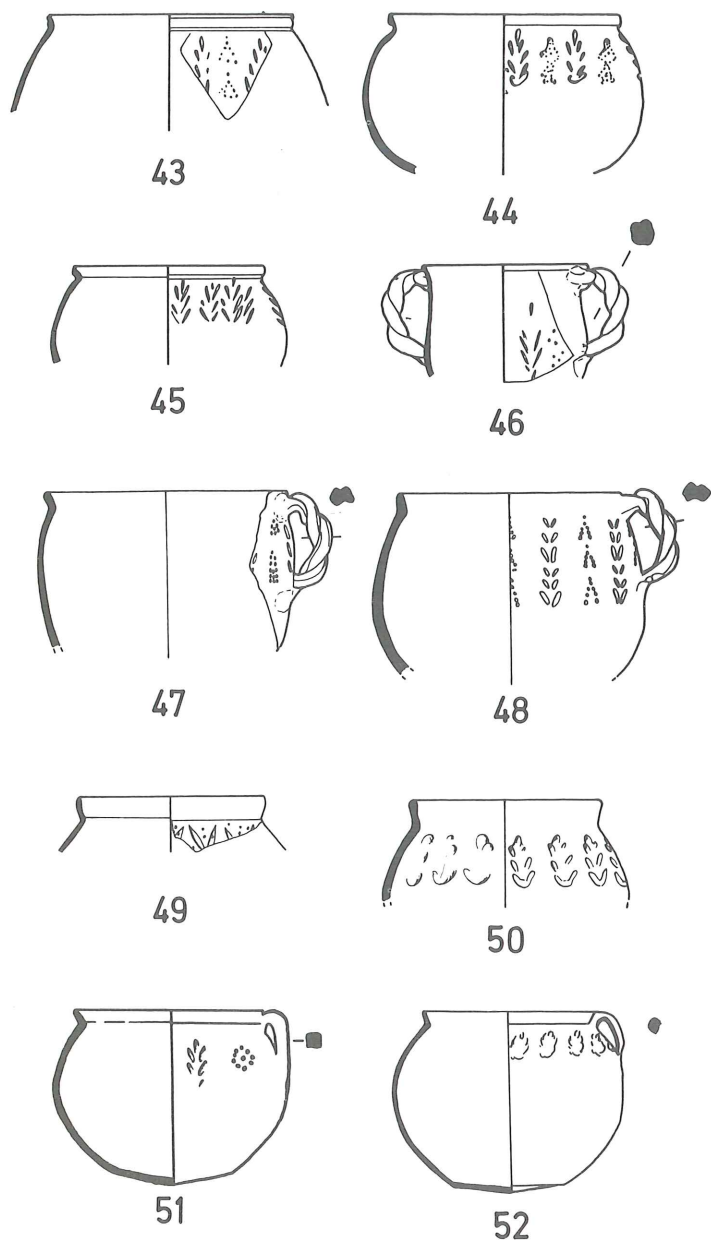


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16. Impressed lozenges representing leaves with or without stems, most common on fine beakers, e.g. (FIG. 5: 15).
17. Horizontal bands of impressed lozenges: each two bands are separated by a shallow groove, mainly occurring on the upper part of fine cups or beakers, e.g. (FIG. 4: 1).

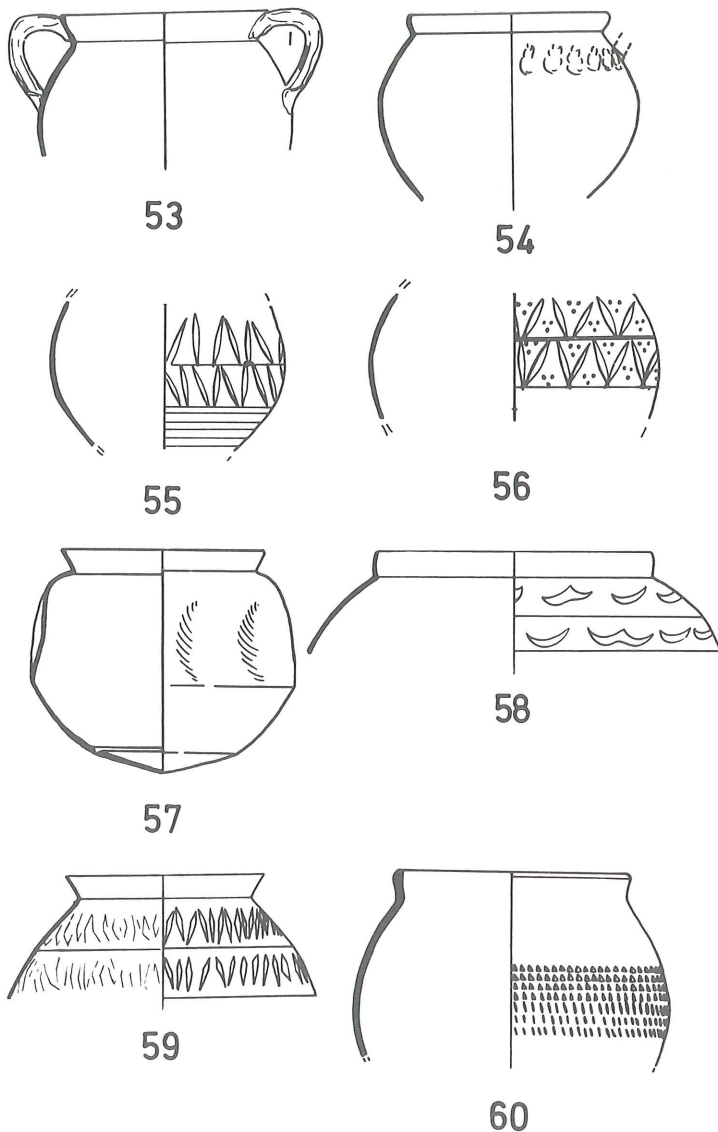


10 Designs on Globular Bowls.



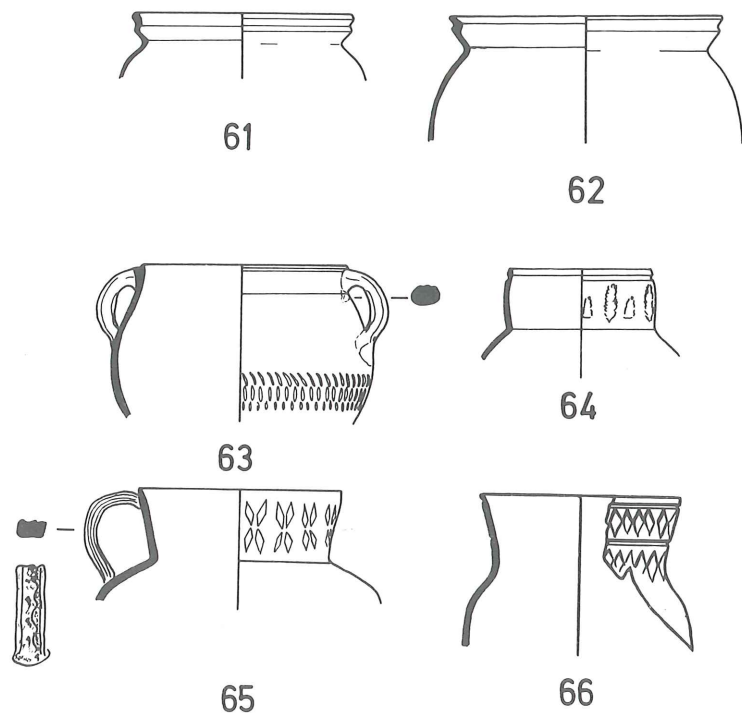
18. Impressed lozenges and small circles, arranged in fruited tree-like patterns. Such motifs cover the flattened handle of fine jug, (FIG. 13: 73).
19. A horizontal band of relief cable-pattern with a shallow horizontal groove below, which is furnished below the rim of fine jug, e.g. (FIG. 13: 67).
20. Three horizontal bands of relief cable-pattern, very similar to those of No. 19. These motifs are below rim of fine jug, e.g. (FIG. 13: 68).
21. Horizontal bands of impressed loop tendrils or winding scrolls, which cover the body of the fine cups, e.g. (FIG. 5: 11).
22. Two horizontal bands of stabbed bird-like patterns, separated by a very shallow horizontal groove, occurring around the shoulders of fine globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 11: 58).
23. A horizontal band consisting of impressed palm fronds in vertical position; every small frond alternating with a bigger

11 Designs on Globular Bowls.



- one. Such decorations mainly cover the necks of globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 12: 64).
24. A horizontal band of impressed palm fronds, in askew position, wider than those of No. 23. This band usually occurs on the shoulders of globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 10: 52).
25. A horizontal band of impressed palm fronds, in askew position; every frond consists of seven leaves but without central stem. This band usually occurs around the shoulders of globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 10: 50).
26. A horizontal band of impressed palm fronds, each frond alternating with a nine-beaded rosette. This band usually covers the shoulders of globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 10: 51).
27. Vertical bands of impressed palm fronds, alternating with triangles of dots which probably represent grape clusters, similar to the motif used on the painted bowls (FIG. 10: 43, 48).
28. Impressed decorations are very similar to those of No. 27, but the patterns here are clearer and more elegant. The bunches of grapes always lack vine leaves. Such decorative elements usually occur on the upper part of many of the Petra fine globular bowls, e.g. (FIG. 10: 44).

## 12 Designs on Globular Bowls.



29. Another variant of impressed palm fronds and triangles of dots, similar to the motif shown in No. 28. Such motifs mainly occur on fine beakers, e.g. (FIG. 6: 16–19).
30. Vertical bands of impressed bifid leaves, each alternating with a vertical band of impressed double spiral scrolls. Such elegant decorations are usually found on fine beakers, e.g. (FIG. 5: 12).

## Appendix II: Parallel examples

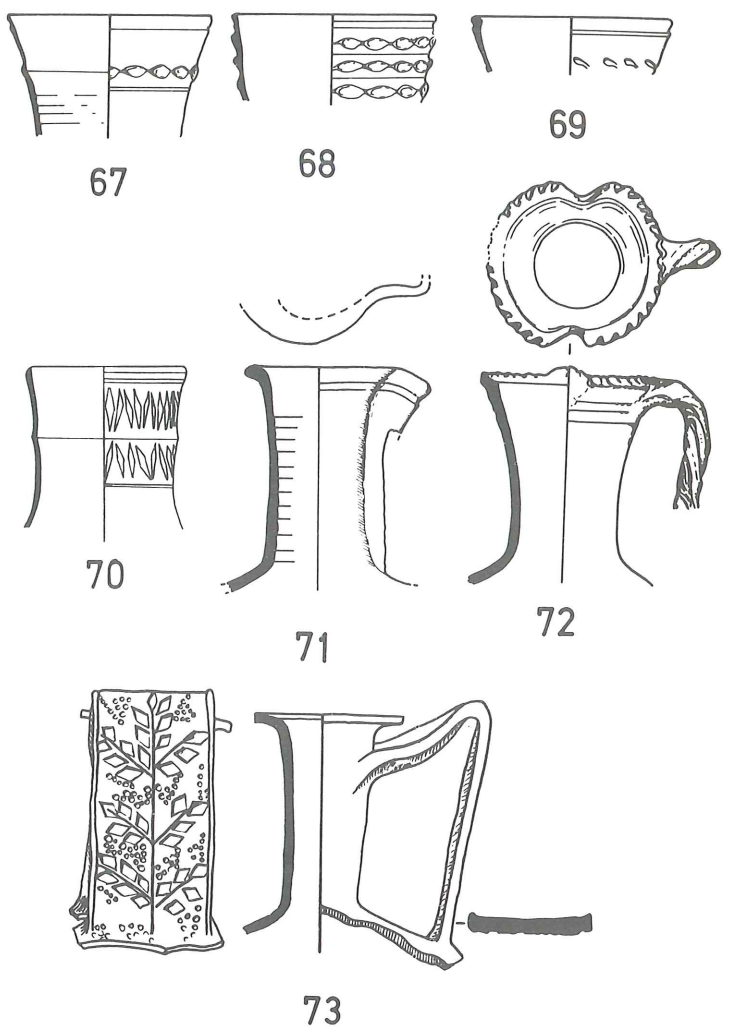
### I Fine Cups:

Cup No. 1 has no parallels, but its decoration appeared on a globular pot (Murray and Ellis, 1940: 14, PL. XI: 14). Cup No. 4 has very close parallels from Petra (Bennett, 1973: 131–133, FIG. 1: 1) 'the early post-Augustan period'. From the non-Nabataean sites Cup No. 4 may also be compared with those vessels which have a metallic glaze ware of Augustan times (Moevs, 1973: 132, PL. 22: 215–216). Another example comes from the Ticino necropolis of Minusio (Simonett, 1941: 142, No. 4, FIG. 122: 4, PL. 15: 1), which is dated to 5–20 AD. Further parallels come from the Athens Agora (Robinson, 1959: 27, PL. 4: G43, G79), from Layer II, which is dated to the 'first half of first century AD'. The latter examples are furnished with two handles. Petra offers the only published parallel to Cup No. 5 (Murray and Ellis, 1940: 14, PL. XI: 1), undated.

### II Fine Beakers:

Fine beaker No. 8 finds a possibly comparable form in Schmitt-Korte (1970: 41–47, PL. 29: C67). This example has a tubular body with a low ring base and a simple loop handle on the middle of the body outside. The seven beaded, or petalled rosetta was very common and used by most Trajanic potters, with only slight variations in size (Detsicas, 1963: 29, FIG. 2: 5). The decoration of fine beaker No. 9 appeared on globular bowl in Murray and Ellis (1940: 14, PL. XI: 13). Fine beaker No. 12 is exactly paralleled by Horsfield (1942: 138, PL. XIX: 135), '1st cent. BC–AD'. The double spiral decoration could be compared to a similar design of a stucco cornice in the Cosa

## 13 Designs on Juglets.



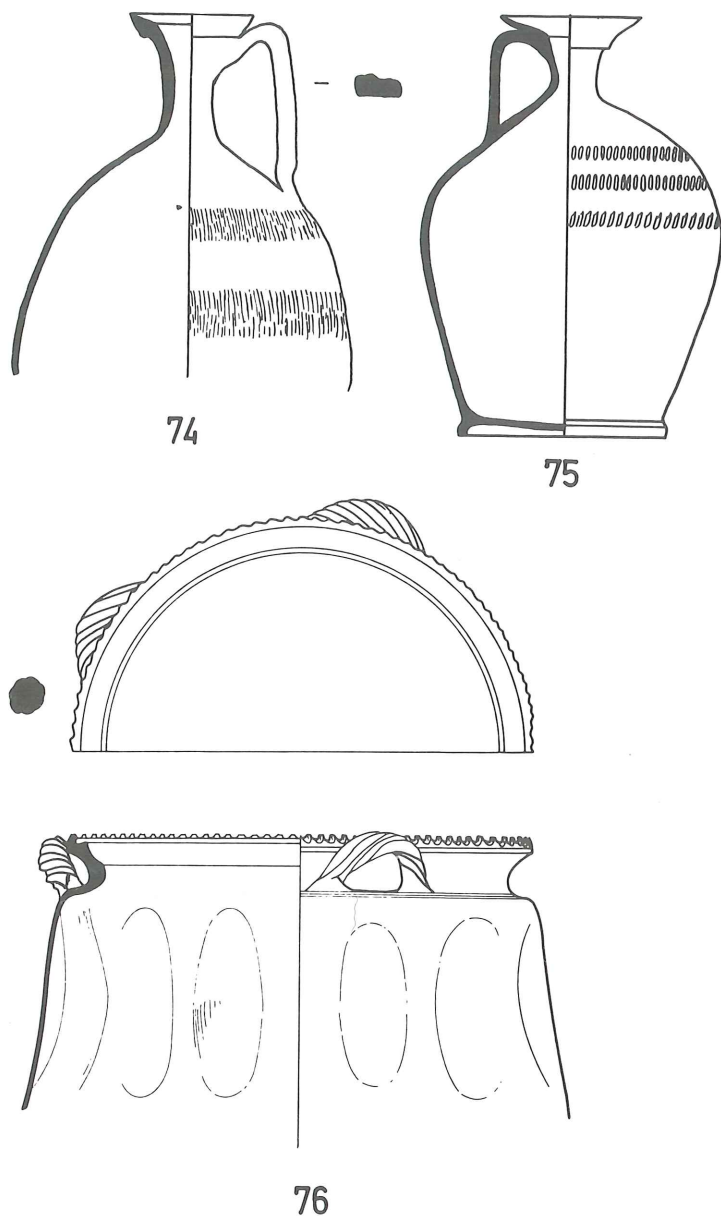
di Lucrezia Frontone, Pompeii (Van Buren, 1924: PLS. XX–XXI). Fine beakers similar to No. 14 have only occurred on Nabataean sites and are exemplified by Murray and Ellis (1940: 22, PL. XXXIII: 145), undated; and by Negev (1970: 48–51, PL. 33: 3), 'first half of first century AD'. Fine beaker No. 17 is closely related to Murray and Ellis (1940: 22, PL. XXXIII: 146), undated. Pedestal bases Nos. 20–22 find parallels in Colin-Baly (1962: PL. 19: 22–25); Kenyon in Crowfoot *et al.* (1957: 343–344, FIG. 83: 7) 'Late Augustan period'; Robinson (1959: 6, PL. 63, G45) 'first half of first century AD'; and in Murray and Ellis (1940: 14, PL. XI: 21), 'Nabataean'. The best parallel for fine beakers Nos. 23–24 would seem to be Schmitt-Korte (1970: 41–47, PL. 29, C70). The latter example is broken and mended but complete, and is furnished with a flat base. No. 28 has fairly published parallel examples in Horsfield (1942: 155, PL. XXVII: 212); Robinson (1959: 13, PL. I: F.20–22), 'last three quarters of 1st century BC'; Carettoni (1957: 180, No. 162 h), which is dated to the 'Republican-early Augustan period'. A flat base marked by concentric grooves such as Nos. 29–30 was known on a similar example from Cosa (Moevs, 1973: 106, PL. 18: 183), which is dated to 'the early Imperial period'.

### III Fine shallow and deep bowls:

The best parallels for the fine bowl No. 31 would seem to be Winnett and Reed (1964: 73, PL. 68.5), which is identified as 'Nabataean-



## 14 Designs on Juglets.



Roman'; and Murray and Ellis (1940: 18, PL. xxxi: 114–116). The above-mentioned parallel examples are not furnished with rouletted decoration.

Fine bowl No. 34 can be compared with Kraeling (1938: 569, FIGS. 45: 65, 46: 37) from Tombs 11 and 12 respectively; and Hamilton (1942: 45, 51, FIG. 20: 10), 'first half of the first century AD'.

Petra provides close parallels to fine bowl No. 36 in Murray and Ellis (1940: 18, PL. xxxi: 114–115).

Parallels for the particular hemispherical bowl with the rim bevelled internally of the Petra fine bowl No. 37 are Robinson (1959: 13, PL. 1F.22), 'the last three quarters of first century BC'; and Thompson (1934: 467, FIG. 121: C73–C75), 'Hellenistic'.

A fragment of rim and shoulder of similar form and surface treatment to fine bowl No. 38, comes from Cosa (Moevs, 1973: 106, PL. 17: 179). This example has very fine clay, delicate body, and decorated with parallel bands of very shallow rouletting which

presumably covered the entire surface of the vessel and is dated to 'the Augustan period'.

Fine bowl No. 39 is of a type well documented at Nabataean sites and is exemplified in Crowfoot (1936: 20, PL. IV: 6), 'Nabataean'; Murray and Ellis (1940: 21, PL. xxvii: 6), undated; Horsfield (1942: 142, PL. xx: 152), 'Nabataean, first century BC'; Cleveland (1960: 70, FIG. 7.5), 'first or second century AD'; Colin-Baly (1962, PL. 8, Group 32A1a); Hammond (1962: 167–177, Types 12(b).4, 13(b).1, 4), 'Nabataean'; Hammond (1973: 46, Nos. 83–84), 'Nabataean'; Winnett and Reed (1964: 73, PLS. 68.3, 70.11), 'Nabataean'; and Tushingham (1972: 126, FIG. 3.7), 'Nabataean'. The above-mentioned parallels are similar in form and ware to fine bowl No. 39, but do not have fluted bodies.

The form (not ware and decoration) of fine bowl No. 40 would seem to be paralleled in De Vaux (1956: 558–559, FIG. 4: 11), which belongs to Period II 'AD 50–68'. This example from Qumran is classified by P. Lapp as Corpus 45. 2C (Lapp, 1961: 170). Other parallels for the fine bowl No. 40 are from Jerash (Kraeling, 1938: 567, FIG. 45.6), from Tomb 11, undated; Jericho (Kelso and Baramki, 1955: 24, PL. 22.A469; Bennett, 1965: 525–526, FIG. 267: 8). The latter example is dated to 'the late first century AD'.

A fairly close parallel to fine bowl No. 42 comes from Petra (Hammond, 1962: 178, Type 112 (c).5), 'Nabataean'.

#### iv Globular Bowls:

The Petra globular bowls Nos. 43–44 are exactly paralleled by those published by Murray and Ellis (1940: 14, PL. xi: 15); Horsfield (1942: 150, PL. xxv: 1184), 'Nabataean'; and Negev (1970: 48–51, PL. 33: 2). The latter example is dated to the 'first half of first century AD'.

Fine globular bowls Nos. 45–52 have fairly close parallels in Murray and Ellis (1940: 14, 18–19, PLS. x: 21, xi: 1, xxviii: 72, xxxix: 97), 'undated'; and Colin-Baly (1962: PL. 10, Group 69).

Fine bowl No. 53 finds possibly comparable forms (but not in ware) in Kelso and Baramki (1955: 25, PL. 23, x76, x108), 'Roman'; and De Vaux (1954: 222–223, FIG. 4: 16), from Period II, 'AD 50–68'. Other comparable examples could be Horsfield (1942: 138–139, PL. xix: 132, 136), 'Nabataean'.

Petra offers a similar profile for the fine globular bowl No. 57 in Murray and Ellis (1940: 13–14, PL. ix: 9), the latter example has two loop handles and a ring base. Murray and Ellis (1940: 13) think that 'such vertical depressions on the sides are characteristic of the Roman period and it was an imported piece and not of Nabataean origin' (Bennett, 1973: 132).

On the other hand, bowl No. 57 is well documented at non-Nabataean sites and is exemplified in Loeschke (1909: 222–223, PLS. xi, xxi: 4); Maiuri 1933: 361, Nos. 25–26, FIG. 140); Ettlinger and Simonett (1952: 67, No. 320), which is dated to 'the second half of the first century AD'. Further parallels could be Hayes (1972: 180, Form 135.5, PL. IIIC); Holwerda (1936: No. 677, FIG. 19), 'end first to early second century AD'; and Moevs (1973: 86, PL. 12: 132). Published parallels that could be cited for No. 60 are Horsfield (1942: 155, PL. xxvii: 214) '2nd century AD'; and Moevs (1973: 204, PL. 42: 390).

#### v Fine Juglets:

Fine juglet No. 74 is of a type known at other sites, and could be compared with Kraeling (1938: 561–571, FIG. 47: x69, x70) from Tomb 12; Murray and Ellis (1940: 21–22, PLS. ix: 45, xxxii: 139); Horsfield (1942: 150, PL. xxv: 181), 'Nabataean, first century AD'; and Schmitt-Korte (1970: 41–47, PL. 28, C35).

Fine Juglet No. 75 is frequently attested in the literature and is exemplified by Reisner *et al.* (1924: FIG. 185: 14a), from Vault Cistern 2, 'Late Hellenistic, 75–25 BC'; Crowfoot (1936: 22, PL. IV: 4); Horsfield (1942: 136, PLS. xviii: 122, xxviii: 224), which are



classified as 'Nabataean'; Kraeling (1938: 568–571, FIG. 47: 101); Goldman *et al.*, (1950: No. 296, FIG. 189.A), from 'the Hellenistic-Roman Unit'; Harding (1951: 30–33, FIG. 1: 50). The context of the Amman Roman tomb is well dated by coins of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius to 'the late second century AD'; Kenyon in Crowfoot *et al.* (1957: 340, FIG. 82: 1–2, From 25). Kenyon deduces that 'these examples are probably of the same date as the jug from Vault Cistern 2, Pre 30 BC'; Winnett and Reed (1964: 72–75, PL. 69: 10–11), Dhiban two examples are identified as 'Nabataean-Roman'; and Thompson (1934: 377, D.30), 'first century BC–AD'.

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