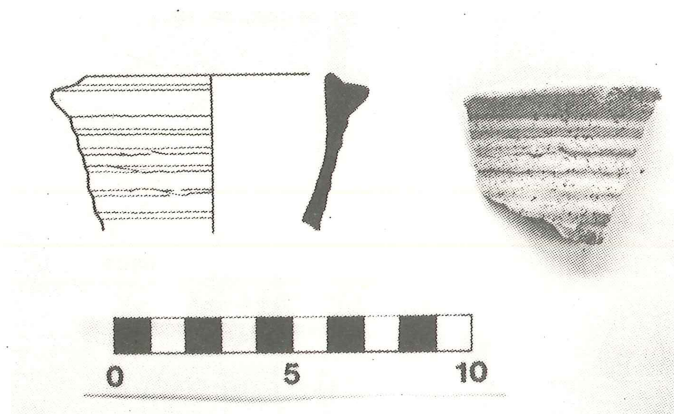


Islamic or Nabataean? The Case of a First to Early Second Century AD Cream Ware

Many of the ideas and theories concerning settlement patterns in the past are based on the results of archaeological surveys, whose results are, in turn, based on the study of non-stratified surface material. FIG. 1 shows a sherd



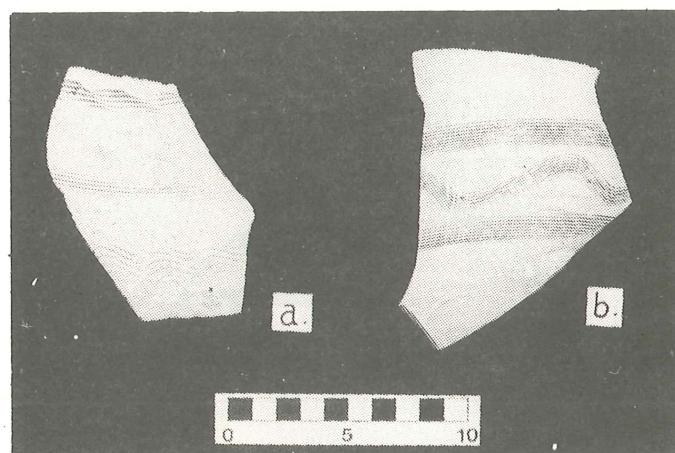
1. A sherd of the "Nabataean" cream ware found at Site 229 of the "Southern Ghors and Northeast 'Araba Archaeological Survey" during the 1986 season.

collected during the 1986 season of the "Southern Ghors and Northeast 'Araba Archaeological Survey" (SGNAS), directed by Burton MacDonald. It is described as:

Ware: 2.5Y 7.5/4 pale yellow. Few small white, grey and rare medium angular light grey grits. Rare mica flecks. Few large (up to 0.4 cm) semiangular voids, some small-medium round-oval voids showing surfaces.

Exterior and interior: 3.2Y 8/2 white. ['Amr in MacDonald (ed), forthcoming].

This sherd should be dated to the first/beginning of the second century AD. It belongs to a class of pottery which is very similar to some early Islamic pottery (opinions have varied between late Umayyad via Abbasid to Fatimid). FIG. 2 shows two sherds from the 1988 season at Khirbet



2. Two sherds excavated during the 1988 season at Khirbet Faris: a. from a "Nabataean" context; b. from an "early Abbasid" context.

Faris (excavations directed by Jeremy Johns and Alison McQuitty). 2a came from a "Nabataean" context while 2b came from an "early Abbasid" context, from the same excavation area. Both sherds are of 'cream' colour, fine fabric and similar decoration. It is the aim of this paper to draw attention to this much neglected "Nabataean" ware that has often been confused with better known "early Islamic" analogues.

Examples of this pottery have been found at several sites in southern Jordan, Palestine and Saudi Arabia (see below, **Distribution**), in first to early second century AD contexts, a period during which South Jordan and the Negeb were "Nabataean", i.e. their material culture belonged to what is generally accepted as the Nabataean tradition. In all the sites known to the author, fine wares in the Classical Nabataean tradition have been found in the same contexts as the cream ware (except maybe for 'Ain az-Zara, where only one painted "Nabataean" sherd was found. However, study of the unpainted wares at the site may provide further evidence). Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, this first-early second century AD southern Jordanian cream

ware will be referred to as "Nabataean".

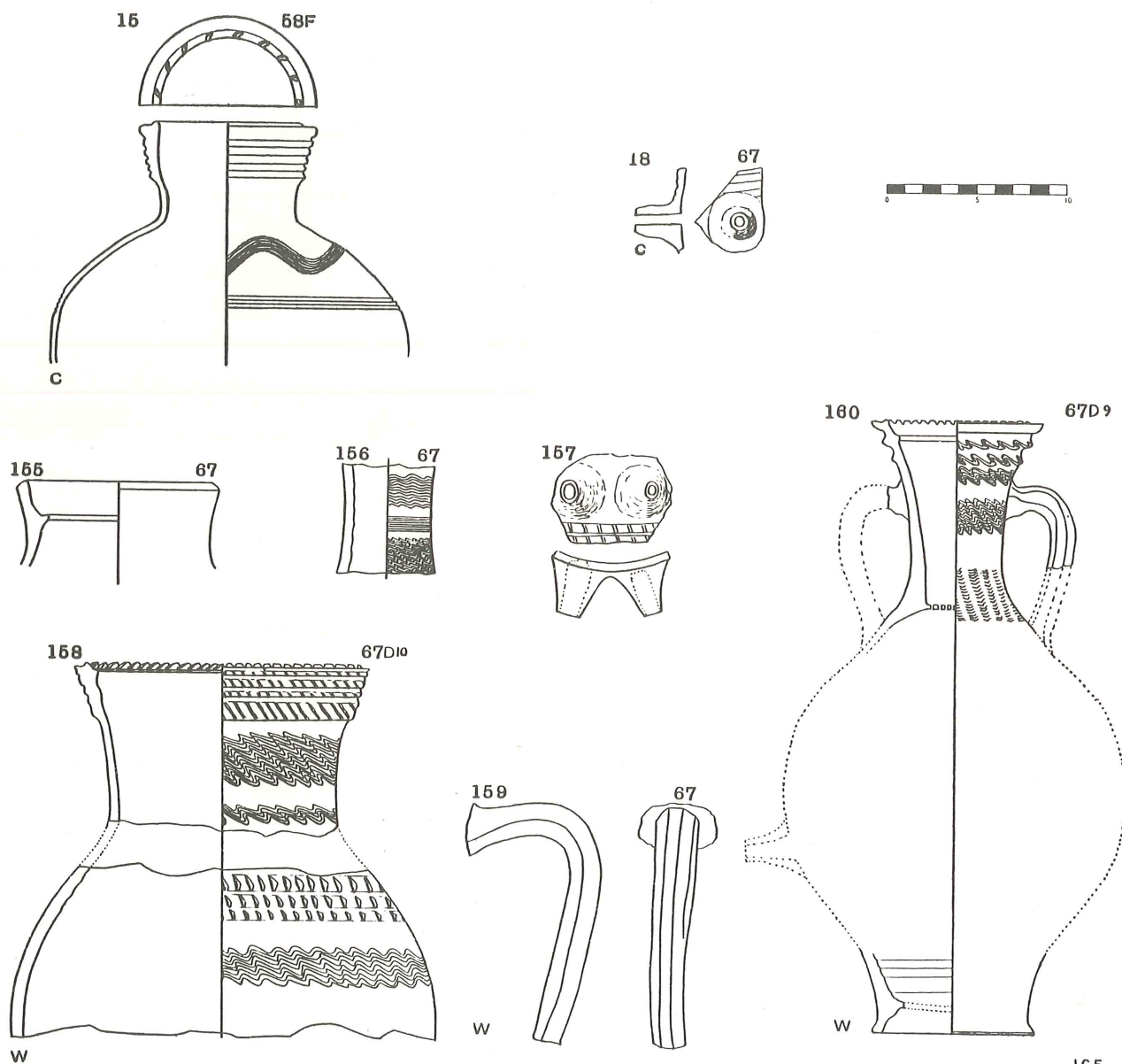
Description and Manufacture of the Nabataean Cream Ware

Murray and Ellis published several examples of Nabataean cream ware from Petra in their "*A Street in Petra*" back in 1940 (FIG. 3). Of the ware they said:

"..(It) seems to have been made expressly for the storage and supply of cooled drinks. For this reason the material of which they are made is a soft porous clay, which, when lightly fired, produces a pale green exterior to the vessel, while the inside of the body is a pale greenish buff. The contents are cooled by the evaporation of liquid sweating through the porous body

to the outside, a principle which is commonly used throughout the East to-day in the manufacture of similar wares..." (p. 20).

This reference to the similarity between the "ancient" and modern wares underlines a probable similarity in manufacture. In the modern (Hebron tradition) pottery, the main temper is fine sand, the white surface colour is obtained by the addition of commercial table salt to the clay mixture prior to throwing the vessels (see 'Amr 1987: 43, 95-96 and references cited). In the Nabataean cream ware, the major inclusions are fine sand particles. A common effect of salt addition on the colour of an otherwise red firing clay, as observed in sections of modern Hebron tradition pottery sherds, is that most of the ware would be of a cream colour. Areas of red can sometimes be



3. Examples of Nabataean cream ware from Petra. (From Murray and Ellis 1940: PLATES XXV, XXXIII).

Table 1 Colours represented by Nabataean cream ware sherds from Khirbet adh-Dharih and 'Ain az-Zara.

Spl.	Thickness	Exterior	Interior	Ware
DH1	0.55-0.92cm	2.5Y 8/2 white fading 0.09cm	10YR 8/2 white	10YR 8/3.5 v. pale brown
DH2	0.44-0.63cm	10YR 8/2.5 white/v. pale brown fading 0.08cm	10YR 7/5 v. pale brown/yellow	7.5YR 7/5 pink/ reddish yellow
DH3	0.56-0.70cm	2.5Y 8/2 white fading 0.18cm	5YR 7/4 pink fading 0.15cm	2.5YR 7/6 lt red
DH4	0.45-0.70cm	5Y 8/2 white fading 0.12-0.40cm	2.5Y 8/4 pale yellow fading 0.08cm	10YR 8/3 v. pale brown
DH5	0.38-0.65cm	5Y 8/3 pale yellow fading 0.10cm	5Y 8/2 white fading 0.05cm	2.5Y 8/4 pale yellow
AZ2	0.74-0.88cm	5Y 8/2 white	5Y 8/2.5 white/ pale yellow	5Y 7.5/3 pale yellow to ~0.3cm ext. - 5Y 7.5/2 white/pale gray int.
AZ4	0.35-0.37cm	2.5Y 8/2 white fading 0.05cm	5YR 7/4 pink fading 0.08cm	2.5YR 6/6 lt red
AZ5	0.38-0.42cm	2.5Y 8/3 white/pale yellow fading 0.03cm	10YR 8/3 v. pale brown fading 0.03cm	5YR 7/5 pink/ reddish yellow
AZ6	0.50-0.69cm	10YR 8/3 v. pale brown fading 0.07cm	10YR 8/3.5 v. pale brown	10YR 8/3.5 v. pale brown
AZ7	0.54-0.62cm	2.5Y 8/2 white fading 0.09cm	10YR 8/2 white	10YR 8/4 v. pale brown

seen with the cream towards the surfaces, more so towards the exterior. The clay is originally red firing. The cream colour is due to the salt, which when in solution within the fabric may migrate to the surfaces while the pot is drying, leaving a red "core" which has a smaller concentration of salt. Extreme cases may have interior red exterior cream colours. This phenomenon has been noticed on some Nabataean cream sherds (see TABLE 1: DH2, 3; AZ2, 4, 5).

More typically, the ware would be a slightly darker cream colour than the surfaces. TABLE 1 shows examples of the colours represented by some Nabataean cream ware sherds. The technique of using salt to obtain light-coloured pottery was employed during the early Islamic periods as well (Franken 1986: 241). Physical tests will be carried out on samples of the Nabataean cream in order to determine their method of manufacture and provenance.

The Forms

This section will not attempt to give a detailed account of the forms encountered in the Nabataean cream ware. Detailed studies are underway of the pottery from 'Ain az-Zara and Khirbet adh-Dharih, two sites which have produced large amounts of the ware (Christa Clamer and François Villeneuve, pers. comm.). Therefore the following will only be a general description of some of the forms, which seem to be limited in variation.

The most commonly encountered form is of a slender

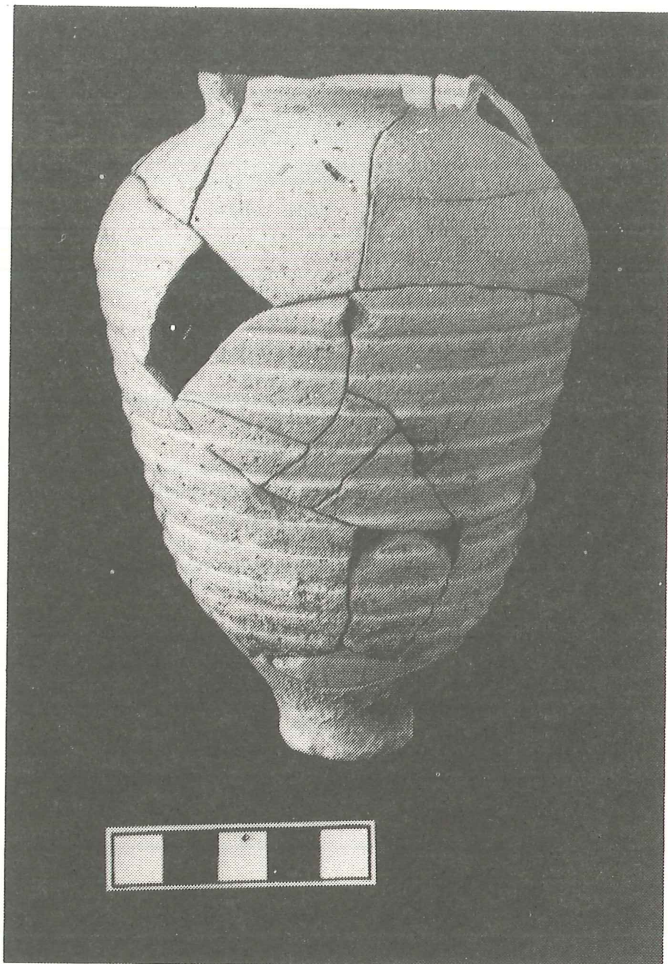
necked jar or "amphora", characterised by wavy line combing on the neck and shoulder and short triangular-section spouts, both characteristic of the early Islamic periods as well and the source of much of the confusion in dating (FIG. 3 no.'s 18, 156-160, the reconstruction of the position of the spout in no. 160 is incorrect; see also Negev 1986: 71 no. 538; 72 no. 539-545 and Parker 1987: FIGS. 90:6; 91:15). This form tends to have a strainer at the bottom of the neck.

Another form is the small jar with ribbed neck, to which the survey example on FIG. 1 belongs (FIG. 3 no. 15 is a more complete form). The sherd of FIG. 2a belongs to the body of such a jar.

Many of the sherds found of this ware are ribbed. These usually belong to small jars, similar in shape to cooking pots of the period (see Negev 1986: 72 no. 552-553). A related ribbed bodied form is that of a small delicate jar (FIG. 4). Another form with thick sharply ribbed body is of a small, plain rimmed juglet (Negev 1986: 72 no. 546-547).

Other reported closed forms of the ware include a narrow mouthed jar with everted rim (Negev 1986: 72 no. 550-551) and a simple immed jar with interior ledge (FIG. 3 155).

The only open forms seem to be of shallow bowls. FIG. 5 shows a rare example of a cream ware bowl having a typical "Classical Nabataean" form (see also Parker 1987: FIG. 92:23).



4. A small Nabataean cream ware jar from the 1987 season at Khirbet adh-Dharih.

Distribution

Petra and Vicinity

As mentioned above, Murray and Ellis (1940) distinguished and reported the ware from Petra. The Horsfields published a combed white coloured jar neck from Petra (Horsfield and Horsfield 1942: PLATE 27:222), however it was described as Byzantine, of the sixth century. "Marl' combed ware" sherds from the theatre in Petra have been reported (Garcia in Hammond 1965: 79; PLATE LII,2). The sherds are from a sealed context, of Hammond's Theater Period Ic, dated to "after AD 106 and probably by c. AD 150" (Hammond 1965, especially: 65). However the parallel cited (for the combing) belongs to the late Byzantine red wares.

Khairy (1975) in a study of unpainted pottery from Petra concentrated on forms rather than wares. At least one of his examples, a "miscellaneous cooking pot" from Parr's excavations III.103.32 (analysed as PCP85 in 'Amr 1987), belongs to the Nabataean cream ware.



5. A small Nabataean cream ware bowl from the 1985 season at Khirbet adh-Dharih.

Lindner (1986: 172-173), has reported finding sherds of the ware while exploring the area from Šabra to Wadi 'Arabah. Fawzi Zayadine (pers. comm.), has mentioned an abundance of the ware at Ra's Naqab ar-Ruba'i on the route to Wadi 'Arabah.

The Southern Jordanian Plateau

Examples were found from soundings done at Rujm Bani Yaser (c. 1km east of al-Lajjun) dated to the first century BC and AD with a possible extension into early second century AD (Parker 1987: FIGS. 90:6; 91:15). Khirbet adh-Dharih, on Wadi al-La'ban north of at-Tafileh, produced substantial amounts of this ware from strata dated by coins to the late first/early second century AD (François Villeneuve, pers. comm.). A few sherds were unearthed at Khirbet Faris, near al-Qaṣr, in strata containing fine Nabataean ware of the Classical tradition (Robin Falkner, pers. comm.).

The South Ghor/Wadi 'Arabah

The sherd in FIG. 1 comes from the SGNAS Site 229, Khirbet al-Ḥassiya (North), "probably a Nabataean caravanserai" (MacDonald 1986: 104; forthcoming).

A large amount of the pottery was excavated at 'Ain az-Zara, on the eastern Dead Sea coast, in first century AD contexts (Christa Clamer, pers. comm.; see also Clamer 1989: 221). The ware was also found at Qumran on the western coast of the Dead Sea (Jean-Baptiste Humbert, pers. comm.).

The Negeb

The only site reported to have produced the ware in the Negeb is 'Abda, where Negev (1986: 71-72) calls it "Green Ware".

The Arabian Peninsula

The ware has been found in a variety of forms and fabrics

at Qaryat al-Fau, in southwestern Saudi Arabia, during excavations carried out by a team from King Saud University. The excavator recognized its variance from local wares and postulated a "Nabataean" origin (Asem Barghouti, pers. comm.). Qaryat al-Fau has already produced large amounts of pottery generally accepted as belonging to the Classical Nabataean tradition (al-Ansary 1982: 22, 63).

Conclusions

Our present knowledge of the Nabataean pottery tradition is somewhat limited. This fact is only one aspect of the limitation of our knowledge of the pottery, and settlement patterns, in the south of Jordan during all periods. The past few years have seen increasing archaeological work in that geographical area. The evidence collected through this work points to material cultural differences between North and South Jordan through long periods of time. These differences require that we approach the data from the South with an open mind, free of preconceptions based on established material cultural sequences from other regions. This concluding statement may seem too obvious to be mentioned, however practical experience has shown it should be stressed whenever possible. The case of the "Islamic/Nabataean" cream ware is only one small example. Since it was reported from Petra by Murray and Ellis in 1940, there was a long silent period during which the pottery "disappeared" from the literature, with only rare sporadic references to sherds from a few excavated sites. I suspect that it was misinterpreted during surveys, most of which tended to report only minimal data concerning their dating evidence (if at all), and ignored when found in stratified deposits during excavations.

A major importance as an index fossil of the Nabataean cream ware comes from close inspection of unpublished material from excavated sites, dated to overlapping but not identical time periods. The ware shows variations in both forms and fabrics, therefore I feel that further study of the evidence will make it a strong dating tool for the first two centuries AD in South Jordan, Arabia and the Negeb.

Acknowledgements

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