

## A Critical Look at Typologies of Ceramics Produced in the Late Roman Period at Jarash

Late in the second half of the third century AD, the second century hippodrome of Gerasa became a large industrial centre, specialising in the production of masses of ceramic goods (Kehrberg and Ostrasz 1997 and bibliography) which were manufactured there until the end of the Byzantine period in the early seventh century. The evidence comes from kilns and the chambers of the *cavea* where the total of excavated pottery kiln waste dumps, representing about 25% of ceramic production, has amounted to some twelve million discarded pottery sherds and misformed vessels of all kinds.

One of the key dumps filled chamber E2 of the *cavea* and contained not only a complete range of Late Roman pottery types in large quantities but held a significant cluster of coins in the upper half of the dump. The latest coins of the 'hoard' (rather a lost purse, see also *infra*) provides a *terminus post quem* of the first quarter in the fourth century AD for the potter's workshop (Ostrasz 1993). The fact that the hoard was in the upper half of the dump allows some conjecture about its beginning being fairly late in the second half of the third century. In addition, there is no marked typological change from the first layer to the last discarded pottery which is also indicative of a fairly tight chronological sequence, not exceeding the generation of the potter at any rate (for a detailed discussion of the discarded pottery in E2, cf. Kehrberg f.c. a).

IFAPO's excavations in 1997 and 1998 at the contemporary second century Upper Temple Complex of the Sanctuary of Zeus (Braun 1998) brought also to light large quantities of ceramics, again from kiln waste dumps. The dumps should date traditionally to the later third century, according to typological parallels of profiles elsewhere (e.g. Rasson 1986) and the standard chronological typology of Late Roman pottery in Jordan, in particular from northern sites.

However, it became apparent in the preliminary study of the pottery and lamps from the Upper Temple complex excavations that the assemblages differed in many respects from the supposedly contemporary kiln waste material of the hippodrome in chamber E2.<sup>1</sup>

These first observations and subsequent examination brought into focus some of the problems related to orthodox typological classification systems (typological identification, succession and relative positions of variations) and to the dating of ceramic types.

The following outlines some of these basic issues whose problematics are inherent in most standard typologies. The problematics are in fact acknowledged to exist in principle, with little attempt, however, at rectifying the situation. Instead, it is still preferred to follow the 'accepted' norm of traditional comparative studies of individual types—the reasons of which shall not be gone into here. Readings of single parallels of decorative 'styles' (motifs) and profiles, mainly through literary sources, is still the commonly used method of typological identification and the basis for chronological classification of newly excavated ceramic assemblages.

Excavations in the early 20s in Jordan had little resource to quantitative local studies and means of comparisons with ceramics from other parts of the studied Classical world. Today, the situation has changed considerably and there are many sites not only excavated but their ceramics are known, if not much of the pottery is published. This should encourage us to move away from exclusive reliance on reading ceramics based on published parallels of single 'rim forms' or motifs and the 'hypothetical' typological framework established long ago for then poorly known regions and their Classical period sites with their cultural assemblages.

What appears essential to any pottery reading is to sort

<sup>1</sup> One has to recall that the hippodrome and the sanctuary are in close proximity to each other and potters would have been aware of each others products. Jarash was one of the few truly major northern sites of pottery manufacture from the Early Roman period on, possibly

from as early as the first century BC. This must have gradually honed or regulated Gerasian standards of production and provided an overall uniformity within each cultural-historical period.

out 'relative' positions of the entire ceramic assemblages and their contexts before attempting to identify chronological groupings of types. Only after having identified a relative historical position of an artefactual assemblage can one then distinguish individual types that might be considered key types for that assemblage. And only if that key type occurs in a similar ratio to other types in another assemblage can the key type be used with some confidence as parallel for dating.

Publications of isolated diagnostic forms (rims, bases, profiles, etc.) and 'selective' citing of single parallels for dating an assemblage can be misleading. 'Foreign' parallels may point to an origin of a form or decoration but do not necessarily help in identifying the local setting, chronologically and culturally, of a locally produced ware. Inspirations and even copying are too well known a means of interchange of 'styles' and ideas to be doubted in principle but immediate equations need to be carefully examined before they are applied.

Especially in the Greek and Roman-Byzantine Classical world of archaeology with a background of international history and known foreign policies (and politics!), the temptingly easy equation of '*look alike style of decoration equals contemporaneity*' (and broader cultural-historical implications) has become the pitfall for many archaeologists reading the site pottery. Although transmissions of cultural styles, art forms, technical skills, social habits, etc. cannot be denied in 'international' worlds from as early as the Late Bronze Age, it is hardly sufficient to explain site histories and force them into an artificially dated sequence of events, denying chronological lacunae or discrepancies with other sites.

The eclectic and selective material elements of local communities shaped by their own needs, conception of the 'import' (whether object, style or idea), local ambitions and social cannons, has to be given careful attention before applying across the board equations of strict chronological and cultural contemporaneity, or indeed assimilation.

Scant artefactual finds and small scale excavations make it often very difficult, to allow for definite statements about the collective local historical conscience and the material culture of the site. Mostly, even in well-known historical periods, one has to rely on almost random finds of single or only a small number of artefacts (often found in secondary contexts like a fill of a foundation trench, etc.) to study and interpret local communities and their successive phases, be it on religious, domestic, secular or commercial grounds.

It is fortunate, therefore, that years-long permanent ex-

cavations as at Jarash have provided a generous quantity and variety of artefacts—especially pottery—to re-examine in detail the accepted chronological types. Illustrations of some known types from the Late Roman repertoire of Jarash will serve to highlight what should be two of the main concerns of any typology or their system of classification.

### 1. Rim Forms and Profiles and their Variations

FIG. 1 shows seven pottery forms from the same context. The site is the Upper Temple Complex of the Sanctuary of Zeus, the context an extensive homogeneous layer of pottery kiln waste covering most of the temenos and adjacent areas, in other words a potter's (or several potters') dump site. Each illustration (a-f) with multiple range of rim and body profiles per object does not show the variation of rims for each type of vessel. It shows a number of fragments which are joins of the same vessel. The caption lists the varying degrees of colours and diameters, due to misfiring.

It is important to note, that none of the fragments in themselves reveal the warped form of the vessel, nor the 'discolouring'. It has only become evident when mending that one deals, in each separate case, with the same vessel. The variations are not due to a different workshop or a different hand, nor to site or regional variations of a proto-type, nor do the variations represent a chronological evolution of a rim form.

The problems are manifest here. They begin when publishing only one of the profiles because it is only one profile that has either been found or identified as belonging to that vessel. Often, time to look for joins is here a major factor, the lack being a main drawback in ceramic studies. This has led to the assumption that one profile can be 'representative' and will each time be 'replaced' for the site typology by a better, more complete, example. Variants as shown here are classed as sub-types or derivatives and explained in the manner mentioned above. Finally each is registered and given a reference number and classified.<sup>2</sup>

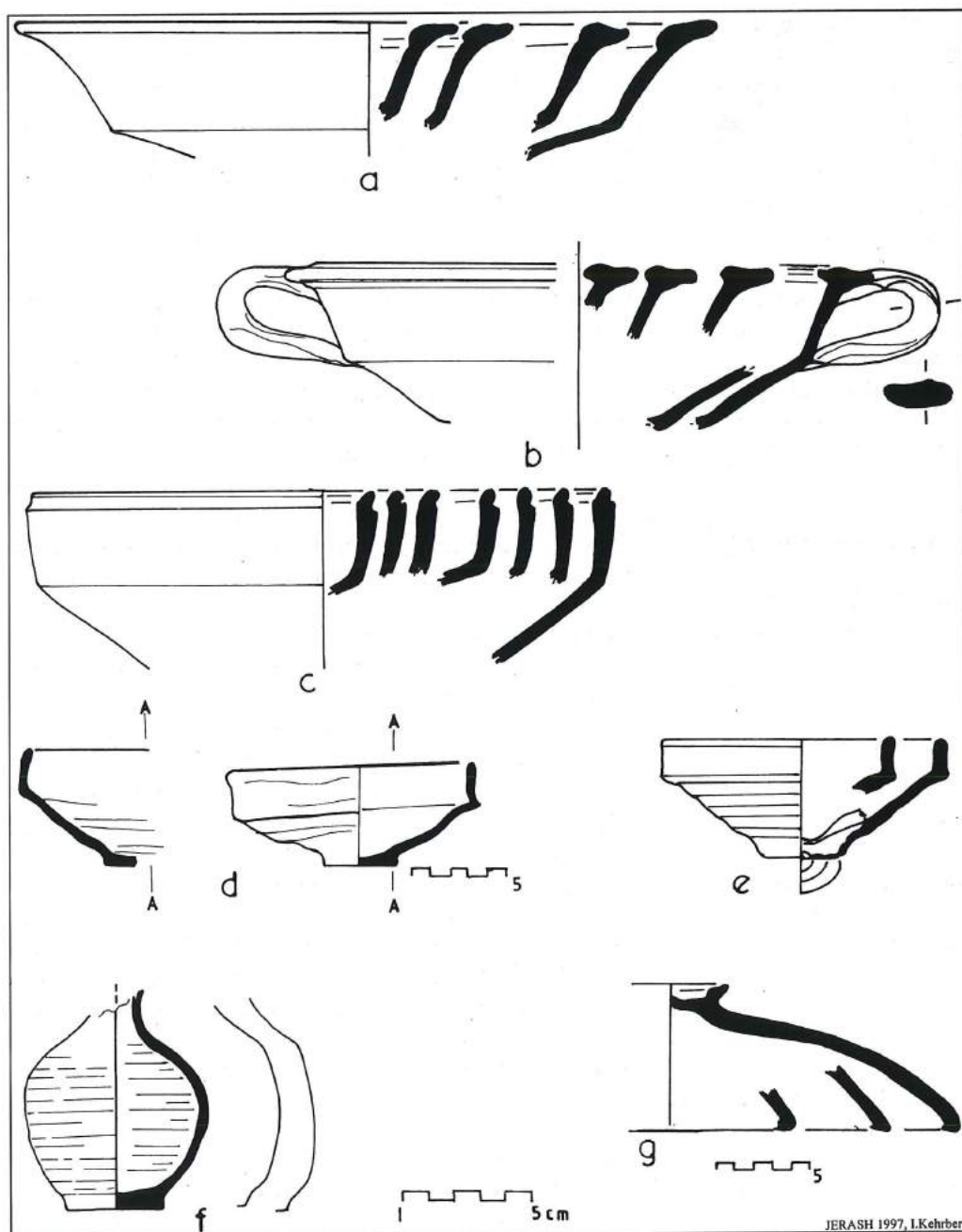
If a fragment with one of the profiles (of one vessel) was found in another context or site, which is not only possible but highly likely, this 'variant' might be classified as a 'new' subtype. The explanation would depend on the context and a variety of classifications could be offered (*supra*).

### 2. Quantitative Relationship of 'Types' Found in an Assemblage

As said, the vessels in FIGS. 1-3 have been found in the

<sup>2</sup> It is rare that archaeological contexts provide large quantities of homogeneous artefact assemblages and rarer still to have evidence from the manufacturing site. The house floor, a cistern, a drain, multiple-periods tombs, a road fill or foundation trench are the most common urban contexts in the Classical periods and pottery frag-

ments are often amassed from different periods and with many typological gaps in the repertoire. Households, funerary and other contexts are eclectic or selective and seldom provide the necessary material to 'correct' misread profiles.



# 1. (JTZ97):-

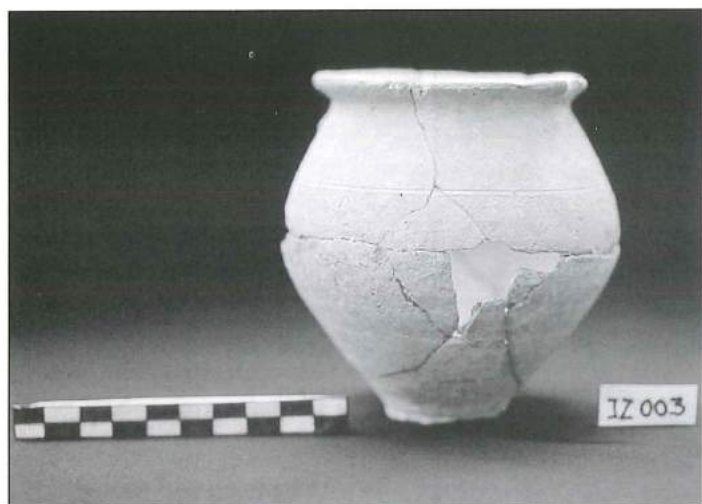
- a: **JZ103** (diam 28cm) and JZ104 (diam 27cm); context 2; large bowl; red ware, joins;
  - b: **JZ085** (diam ca 23cm, warped profiles); context 2; large bowl; buff ware fired red to brown, joins;
  - c: **JZ107a-g** (diam 21-22cm); context 2; carinated bowl; pink to pale brown, cream slip, joins;
  - d: **JZ006** (diam ca 13cm, warped profiles); carinated bowl; context 2; red ware fired to grey and brown;
  - e: **JZ088** (diam 11cm, slightly warped profile); carinated bowl; context 2; red ware, red to pink slip;
  - f: **JZ086** (3 complete profiles); context 2; juglet, red ware fired orange to grey, red slip; FIG. 3;
  - g: **JZ025** (diam 32cm, warped profiles), A17/04-6; lid, red ware fired orange to brown, incised decorated.
- Colour Charts have not been used for the description of the waste material, since none of the colours can with any certainty be regarded as the 'true' colour. The point here is the change of colours.

same context at the Upper Temple of Zeus. The same forms can be identified in the kiln dump at the Hippodrome in chamber E2. It would be easiest to date the Upper Zeus Temple material the same as that at the hippodrome, that is to the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century (*supra*). Some forms could also be compared to the pottery from the late third century olive

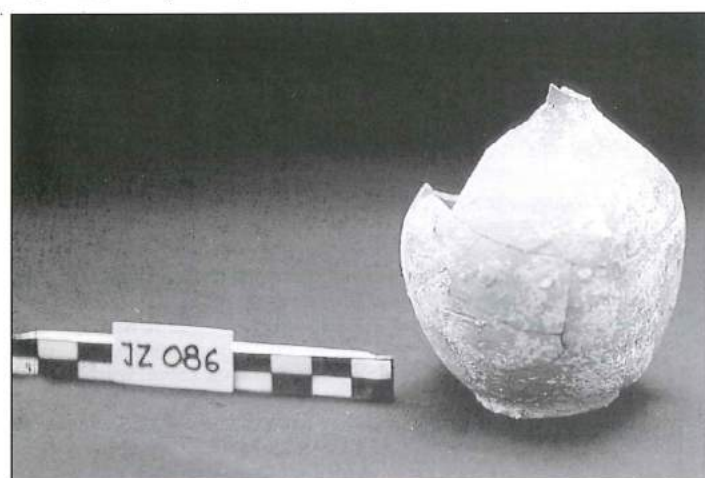
press found at the lower sanctuary (Rasson 1986). And this is how the reading of newly excavated pottery usually proceeds, and also usually, ends there. The context—often no other data is available for dating—is dated by the ceramic parallels of single forms sighted elsewhere which in turn may have relied on data from another context, and so on.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The writer is responsible for the study and publication of the Hippodrome industries (excavations 1985-1996 directed by A. Ostrasz and sponsored by the Department of Antiquities), the finds, in the main being ceramics, and the ceramic corpus of the Upper Temple of Zeus excavations 1996-2000, directed by J.-P. Braun - IFAPO. One of the reasons that not much has been published so far, is the

huge quantity of material and the completion of comparative studies of ceramic corpora from other sites of Jarash, which is nearing its end. It is however anticipated that Antoni Ostrasz's book on the Hippodrome of Jarash will be ready for publication by the end of 2002; the present writer's book on the Jarash ceramics, referred to above, is foreseen for 2003.



2. JZ003, small jar/vase; context 2; red ware.



3. JZ086, juglet (FIG. 1f); context 2.

Even without any 'hard' evidence for dating (both cases at the Upper Temple and the Hippodrome are fortunate in having coin hoards, see below), one can often arrive at a better classification of the assemblage and at least a relative chronological identification. The ceramic assemblage as a whole of chamber E2 (Hippodrome) and 'JUTZ' (Jarash Upper Temple of Zeus) differ in some essentially simple factors which provide the key to their relative dates. To give an example:

- The JUTZ carinated bowl type, FIG. 1c, is regarded as a typical (and therefore common) example of third century or Late Roman pottery in Jordan, its dating being favoured in the latter half of the third century in north Jordan. This form was also found at the hippodrome and its traditional dating is true for chamber E2, especially in two aspects. First, the coin hoard confirms the dating to be late third-early fourth; secondly, this particular bowl (with its true variants) occurred in large numbers *in comparison with the other forms* of the same dump, thus agreeing with the general 'consensus' of its 'type

date' for the north of Jordan.

- In contrast, JUTZ carinated bowl type, FIG. 1d, seen generally as a late second to early third form, was only scarcely represented at chamber E2, its ratio to the other vessel forms being negligible. Here again as for each ratio estimate, variations of any rim forms have been taken into consideration and checked, both for JUTZ and chamber E2 assemblages, not to represent another fragment of the same pot. The relative number *in comparison with other forms* is again an affirmative of the 'typical' date for this bowl type, at Jarash.

The date of the JUTZ pottery assemblage has been proposed by the writer to be late in the second to early third century, based on the pottery reading and the numerical representation of types. The ratios of 'early types', i.e. second century origin, was far higher to the number of later types, i.e. second-third dates. For example, the type FIG. 1c was hardly represented whilst the type FIG. 1d was well represented together with other forms dated to late second-third. A proposed tentative date for the entire deposit of either end of second or transitional/ beginning of third century has since been confirmed by a coin hoard, in fact a lost purse, whose latest coin out of 155 coins dates to AD 209. The bulk of the coins, that is over 80%, consist of Gerasa Decapolis coins dating to the Hadrianic era, and some are even earlier (cf. Augé 1998).

In both cases, the dumps of JUTZ and chamber E2, there are coin hoards to substantiate the dating based initially on the quantitative interrelationship of pottery forms. The fact that there was a vast number of a complete range of types and variants (and accidents), dealing with kiln waste from one period kilns (even one generation), helped enormously in the re-examination of type classifications. It has provided the chance to revise old typologies, their dating criteria and classification methods.

However, if any one context only holds a rim form of one type and little else to relate it to other ceramics, the dating will have to be very 'flexible' because the key of the date lies in the type's quantitative position within its local assemblage. For instance, at Khirbat adh-Dharih, our FIG. 1c form is dated to the second century (cf. Villeneuve 1990: 371, PL. V:1 and p. 375). Apart from the dangers of comparing profile drawings or photos in general, the pieces look so identical that one could be tempted to think of either one of them as being 'imported' from one or the other site, the dating having been sufficiently vague at that point for the adh-Dharih example (including Villeneuve's southern Syria reference on p. 372). With a traditional ceramic reading by consulting published parallels elsewhere, and judging by our two dated deposits, a second century date parallel, if sought, would not seem out of place for the JUTZ assemblage. All one could really say, however, is that this form began to appear at Jarash late in the second century and was most popular in

the second half of the third century. The adh-Dharih example by itself cannot be used to confirm either Jarash deposit, nor do the more precise Jarash examples help pinpoint adh-Dharih's dating.

A last point to make is about the small jar or vase in FIG. 3. The base is traditionally dated to the third century and as the photo shows, was separately found from the upper fragments. The rim can be dated to either the late second or the early third: like the base, it has been found in both the JUTZ and chamber E2 assemblages, their quantitative position pointing to the florid period in the early third, not late, at Jarash.

In conclusion, one might say that none of the finer dating and variations mattered greatly, as long as one dealt within one cultural and/or historical period. Generalities always have a ring of truth about them but, more often than not, they do not help explain the local history of the site. It seems of some importance to know that the Upper Temple of the Zeus sanctuary was littered extensively with kiln dumps before AD 209, the purse having been found, well stratified, on top of the layer of the spread waste in the north temenos, not within, nor below. This leads to questions of the use (or reuse?) of the site which cannot be answered here. The same applies to the hippodrome. The accumulated kiln waste began in the later third century, it is the only evidence that racing had ceased and the function of the building changed. Surely, whether it occurred in the third or fourth, or early or late in either century, is relevant to the history—social, polit-

ical and economical—of Gerasa, and beyond its gates.

There are many gaps in our understanding and factual knowledge of the history of the town. Some may and can be remedied by correcting the date of certain cultural contexts, their 'misplacing' and 'misinterpretation' in time having led to greater misconceptions of the effects greater historical events had on a town like Jarash.

### Bibliography

- Augé, C. 1998. *Le Monde de la Bible*; s.v. La Jordanie/ Gerasa. December issue. Paris.
- Braun, J-P. 1998. Gerasa, Sanctuary of Zeus. Pp. 597-598 in *Archaeology of Jordan*. AJA 102/3.
- Kehrberg, I. f.c. a. The Waste Products of a Late Roman Kiln at the Hippodrome of Gerasa: Chamber E2 of the *cavea*.  
— f.c. b. Ceramic finds in their Context from the Upper Temple Complex of the Sanctuary of Zeus at Jerash.
- Kehrberg, I. and Ostrasz, A.A. 1997. A History of Occupational Changes at the Site of the Hippodrome of Gerasa. Pp.167-174 in *SHAJ* VI. Amman: Department of Antiquities.
- Ostrasz, A.A. 1993. Gerasa, Hippodrome. A summary report of excavations from 1985-1992. Pp. 498-500 in *Archaeology of Jordan*. AJA 97/3.
- Rasson, A-M. 1986. Matériel céramique de la deuxième moitié du III<sup>e</sup> siècle ap. J.-C. Pp. 67-70 in *JAP* I. Amman: Department of Antiquities.
- Villeneuve, F. 1990. The Oil-factory at Khirbet adh-Dharih. *ARAM* 2/1 and 2: 367-384.