

Pottery Candlesticks from the Byzantine Period at Yājūz

Introduction

During the 1996 excavation season at Yājūz, by the Department of Archaeology of the University of Jordan, an intact cemetery was discovered beneath the chapel in Area B.

Two types of burial systems were used: graves A1-A6 were built with dressed stones, while graves B1-B2, C1-C2 and D1-D3 were carved in the rock (FIGS. 1, 2), and about 132 skeletal remains were found. The cemetery is very rich in various types of artifacts such as oil lamps, different types of pottery, a number of glass vessels, copper bracelets, iron nails, various colour beads and other miscellaneous small finds. Thirty complete pottery candlesticks and several fragmentary ones were retrieved from the different burials.

It is noticeable that the occurrence of the candlesticks, in various loculi and graves, is irregular in comparison with the number of skeletons.¹

Description

The "Candlestick Lamp" is a term that was first used by Macalister to describe a pointed oval-shaped carinated lamp. This lamp has a large filling hole, surrounded by two ridges, and is dated to the period between the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Its main characteristic is the decoration on the nozzle-top, which has been explained as seven-branched candlestick representing the menorah.²

The suggestion of the candlestick being a representation of the menorah has been refused, since technically, only the lamps with tripod bases are accurate specifications. Also, the motif element which has given rise to the term varied in the number of branches; there are seven or even five to eleven branches of decoration on nozzle-tops from various lamps.³

The candlestick is an open bowl lamp on a stand, and it

was easily portable by its stem. It consists of the following three main parts:

1- Fuel saucer: a hemispherical bowl-like shape, furnished with flaring out walls of slightly rounded shape. The size of the saucer varies. The diameters of the different saucers measure between 8.5-14.5cms, the depth between 3.5-6cms. This reflects the storage capacity of the saucer which varies between 70-300mls.

The everted flattened rim is the common characteristic of our candlesticks' saucers, it is either plain or decorated with incisions. The rims of the saucers could be classified in three different variants as follows:

I- Simple rim of triangular cross-section with flattened plain top as in nos. 1 and 2 (FIG. 3:1, 2), while it is decorated with incised parallel strokes as in no. 3 (FIG. 3:3).

II- Everted flattened rim with internal circular pronounced ridge as in FIG. 4:6. This type of rim, usually decorated, is the dominant type, since it represents more than 50% of the Yājūz collection.

III- Everted rim with slightly rounded top, as in no. 11 (FIG. 5:11).

2- Candle or wick-socket is drawn up at the internal center of the saucer, noting that its clay must be applied by hand at a later stage of manufacture.

The socket is concave in section, narrowing towards its (rounded and simple) rim to be effective in holding the wick. The diameter of the socket varies between 2-3.7cm, while the heights measure between 2-4cms.

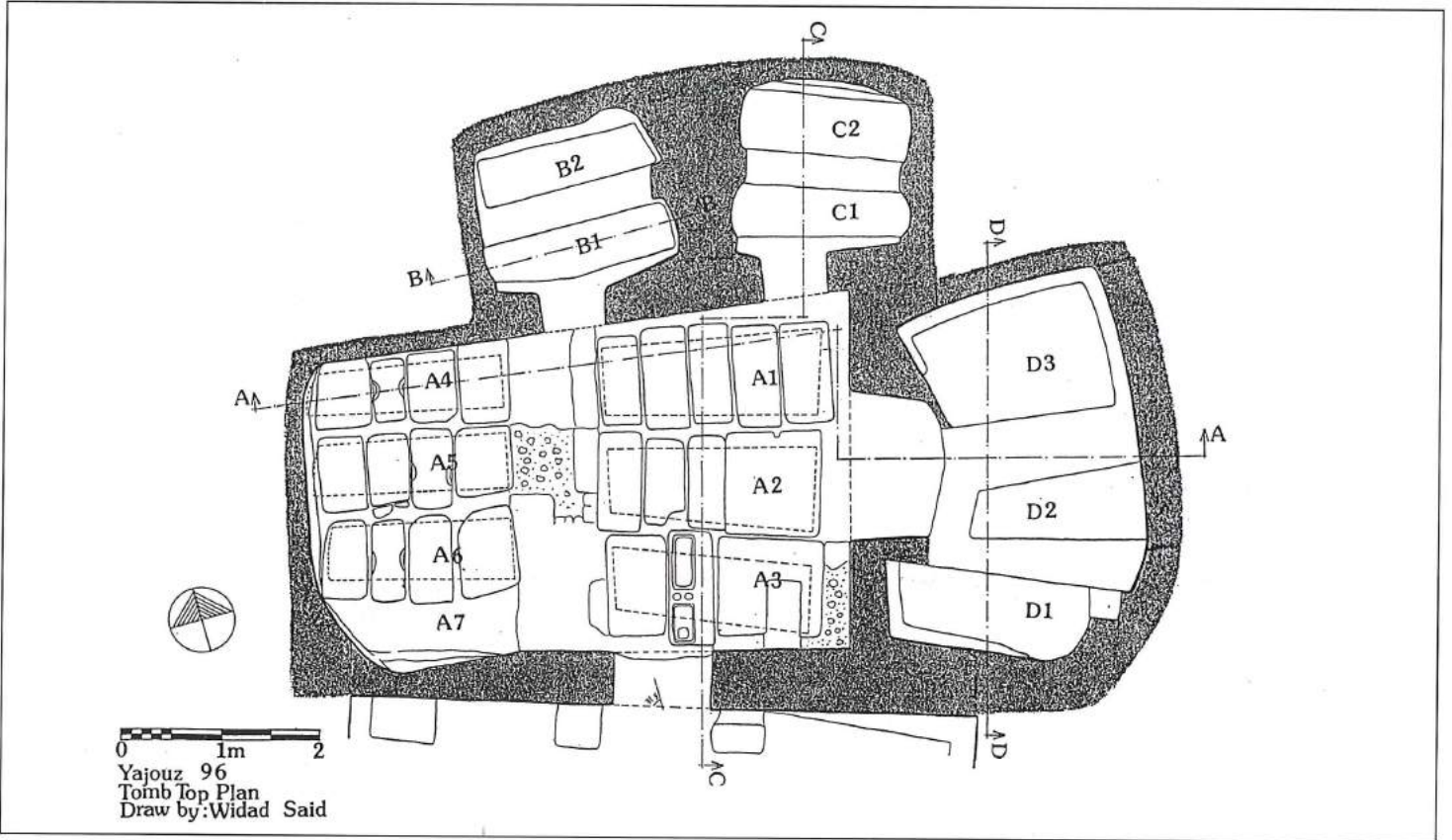
The wick-holder is supplied with three or four vents. They are alongside the socket and the level of the lower part of the vent corresponds with the lower part of the saucer, in order to allow the drainage of the fuel, which is stored in the vessel to feed the wick. A mass of tallow or

¹ L. Khalil (1998), University of Jordan Excavations at Khirbat Yajuz. ADAJ 42: 457-472.

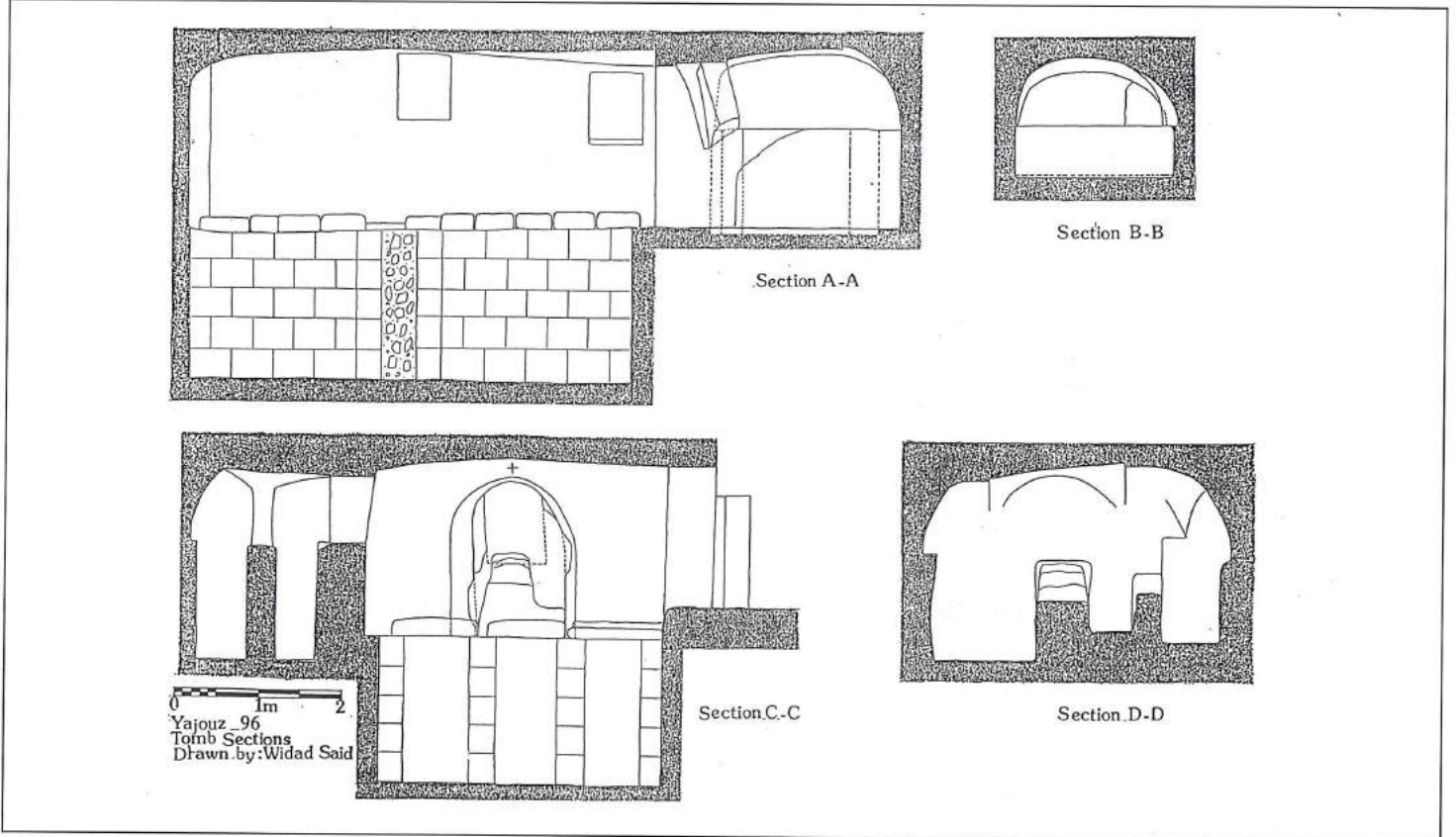
² Macalister (1912), *The Excavations of Gezer*. London: 318; and O. R. Sellters (1951), *The Candlestick Decoration on Byzantine Lamps*.

BASOR 122: 42-45.

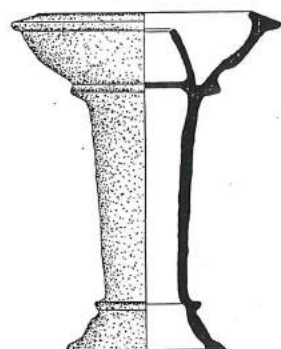
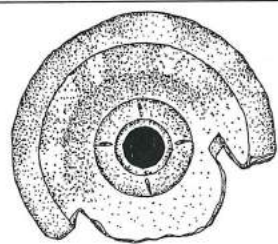
³ R. Rosenthal and R. Sivan (1978), *Ancient Lamps in the Schloessinger Collection, Qedem* 8, Jerusalem: 116.



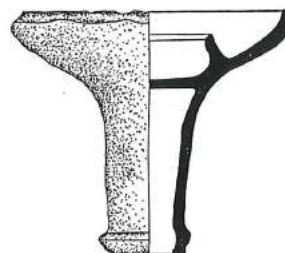
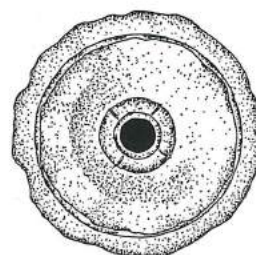
1. Plan of loculi and built graves in the cemetery.



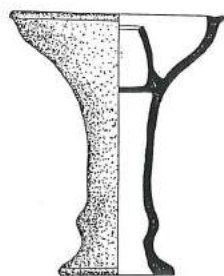
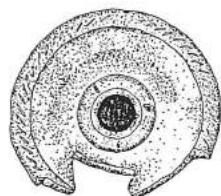
2. Sections of the two types of burial systems in the cemetery.



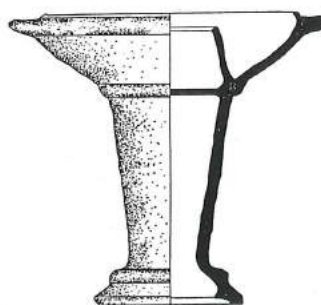
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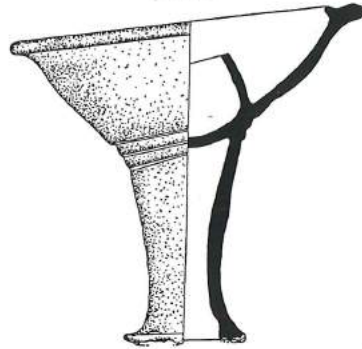
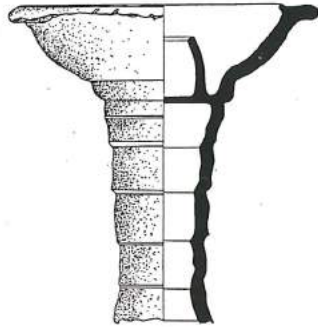
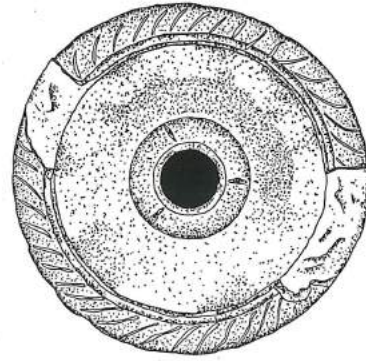
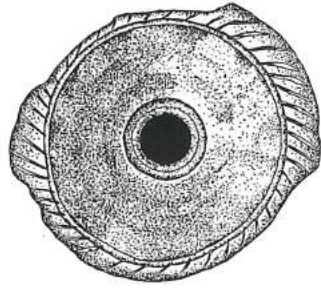


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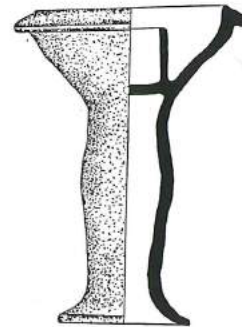
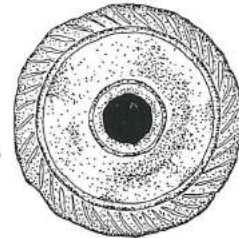
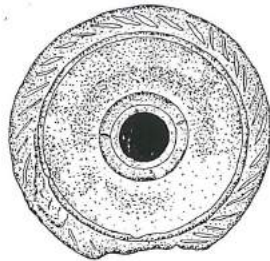
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3. Plain flattened rims (nos. 1-2), and incised slashes in clock-wise direction (nos. 3-4).



5

6



7

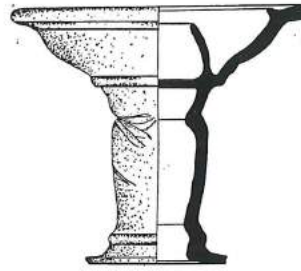
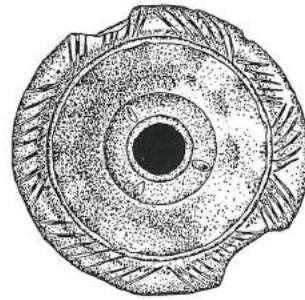
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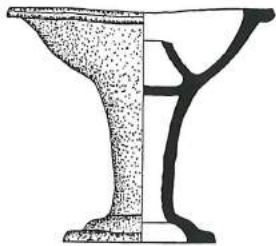
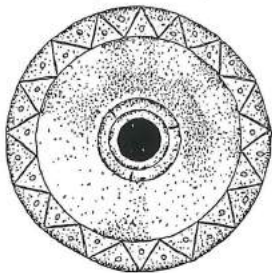
4. Incised slashes in clock-wise direction (nos. 5-6), and in anti clock-wise direction (nos. 7-8).



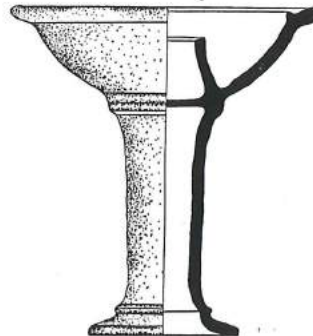
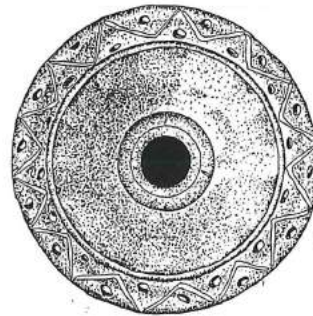
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10



11



12



5. Irregular incised slashes (nos. 9-10), and incised zig-zag pattern with notches (nos. 11-12).

olive oil could be used as fuel.

3- *Stand*: consists of two parts; the stem and the pedestal base.

A- The stem: hollow and circular, measure between 7.5 and 14.4 cm. A pronounced ridge indicates the join of the fuel saucer with the stem. This ridge is present in most types of the Yājūz candlestick collection. A crescent nail design is also applied to one of the ridges (no. 16, FIGS. 6:16 and 7).

Another sharp defined ridge is visible at the junction between the lower part of the stem and the pedestal base.

One could observe the following main variants of stem in the Yājūz collection:

I- Bulging stems which are heavy at the middle, and tapered upward towards the oil saucer, and downward towards the pedestal base, as in no. 8 (FIG. 8).

II- Stems which are heavy at the top and slightly tapered towards the base; this type of stem is very common in our collection, as in no. 12. Spiral patterns are sometimes present on this variant, as in nos. 7, 9.

III- Stems which consist of fine stepped cylinders, overlapping each other from top to bottom, as in no. 5 (FIG. 9).

IV- Warped stem, as a result of a faulty technique. This is well represented in no. 10 (FIG. 10).

B- The pedestal: trumped bases are furnished with all the objects. These bases are decorative except for no. 13, which is simple without any type of decoration. The decoration of the pedestal base consists of an alternation of scotia and the molding of torus directly above the base. This motive marks the junction of the cylindrical stem and the pedestal base.

The base is heavy at the bottom, to provide proper standing balance, since there is a comparatively heavy fuel saucer on top. The diameter of the base is almost half the diameter of the upper saucer, for the same function.

Such a base is accompanied with an accurately flattened lower surface, to stand firmly without any kind of tilting. This flat base is accomplished with a sharp knife-like tool. In rare cases, this flattened surface is warped, and as a result the whole object is not perfectly standing, as in no. 9.

Classification (FIGS. 3-6)

All the pottery candlesticks discovered at Yājūz share the characters of the combined three features mentioned above. It has been possible, however, to classify the candlesticks according to two main components: first, by the decoration on the flattened rim of the fuel saucer; and second, by the differences in the sizes of the candlesticks.

First: One may classify our collection according to the rim decoration as follows:

A- Candlesticks with plain rims, as in nos. 1 and 2.

B- Candlesticks with decorated flattened rims. This is the dominant type since it represents about 90% of the Yājūz collection.

The common element of decoration is the incised slashes on the rim. These slashes are cut in various shapes, numbers and directions, to fashion different patterns of decoration. Punctured notches are used in some cases in relation with the incised slashes.

Three main incised patterns of decoration are furnished on top of the rims, they are as follows:

I- Incised slashes forming a ray-like design. This is the most common type of decoration, since 21 candlesticks from Yājūz were decorated with this design. The slashes were incised, sometimes regularly in one direction, either in counter clock-wise direction as in nos. 3, 4, 5 and 6, or anti-clock wise direction as in no. 8. In some cases, the slashes were cut irregularly as in no. 9 (FIG. 10).

II- Incised zigzag pattern, alternating with punctured notches. These notches are punctured in triangular form. Five example from Yājūz are decorated with this pattern. The combination of both elements of decoration is sometimes regular as in no. 11 (FIG. 11), and sometimes the punctured notches occur irregularly as in no. 13. A candlestick from Mount Nebo (Şiyāgha) has a rim decorated with incised zigzag pattern, but without punctured notches.⁴

III- Incised chevron-like pattern, as in no. 14 (FIG. 12), which is the only candlestick with this type of decoration on its flattened rim. Its stem is also decorated with a unique stylized floral pattern represented (FIG. 13). This pattern may represent an inverted palm leaf. Palm trees frequently occur in the surrounding areas. The palm tree decoration is well represented on mosaic floors of the Byzantine period in Jordan.⁵

Second: The size may be considered a factor for the classification of the candlestick collection. There are differences in the measurements of the candlestick heights and of the fuel saucers. The size of the fuel saucer means its capacity to hold fuel, and this depends on the measurements of both its diameter and its depth.

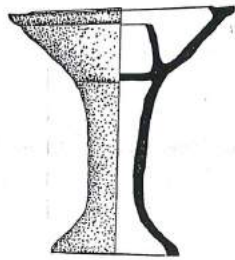
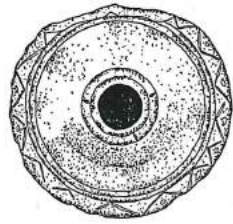
The Yājūz collection can be classified, according to size, into the following three main groups:

A- **Small**: The candlesticks with heights of less than 13cms are considered small in this study. Also, the diameters of the fuel saucers are relatively small, measuring between 8.2-12.2cms, and the average capacity of the fuel saucer is 70mls, as in no. 13.

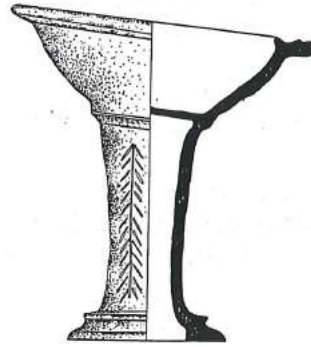
B- **Medium**: The heights of the candlesticks in this group

⁴ B. Bagatti (1985), *Nuova Ceramica del Monte Nebo (Siyāgha)*. LA 25: 249-279; fig. 9:4a and 4b; foto 4.

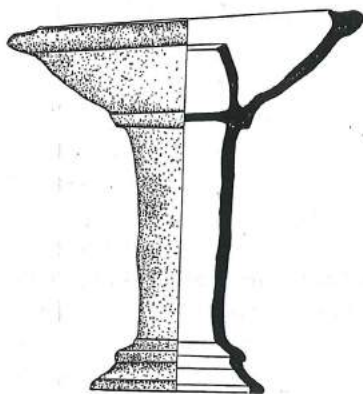
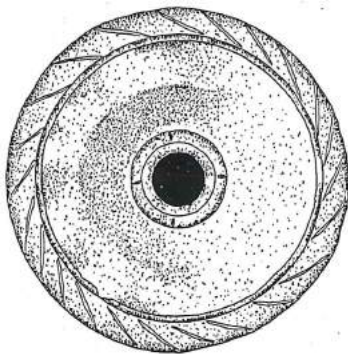
⁵ M. Piccirillo (1993), *The Mosaics of Jordan*, Amman: 28, 129, 242.



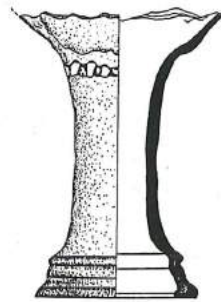
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14



15



16



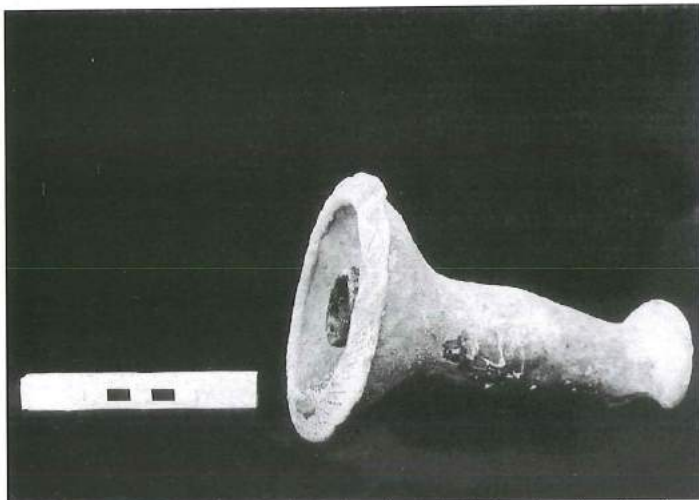
6. Irregular zig-zag (no. 13), chevron-like (no. 14), large candlestick (no. 15), and stem with crescent nail design on ridge (no. 16).



7. Stem with crescent nail design on ridge (no. 16).



10. Warped stem and irregularly incised slashes (no. 10).



8. Bulging stem and incised slashes in anti clock-wise direction (no. 8).



11. Incised zig-zag pattern with punctured notches (no. 11).



9. Stepped cylinder stem and incised slashes in clock-wise direction (no. 5).



12. Chevron-like pattern and spiral belly (no. 14).

are between 13-15.9cms, while the measurements of the diameters of their fuel saucers are between 9.6-13.2cms and the approximate capacity of the fuel is

210mls, as in no. 5.

C- Large: The candlesticks with heights of more than 16cm are considered large. The diameters of the fuel



13. Stylised floral pattern on stem (no. 14).

saucers of this group are over 10cms, except for no. 8, where it is 9cms. The average capacity of fuel saucer is 300mls. The largest candlestick in the collection is no. 15. Its height is 19cms and the diameter of its fuel saucer is 14.4cms.

Technique of Production and Ware

As mentioned above, the candlesticks consist of three main elements: the fuel saucer, the wick-socket and the stand (stem and pedestal base).

One may notice that the three parts were made separately and then joined together at a later stage. The joining is a secondary manufacturing process, usually carried out when the clay is adequately plastic. Besides, it is necessary to be carried out when the clay has dried completely, in order to handle the parts easily, without causing any kind of distortion or tilting. Also, before the clay has completely dried out, the parts will not adhere together properly.⁶

The fuel saucer is a hemispherical bowl-like form, and riling lines of the pottery-wheel are present on the external body of many candlestick saucers from Yajuz. Also, a spiral belly is visible in the middle of the fuel saucer of no. 14, where the wick-socket is not present (FIG. 12).

The wick-socket was made by hand, a ball of clay was rolled out and added to the internal center of the saucer. The joint between the two parts was formed by pressing them together and smoothed a soft, wet cloth. The socket was stabbed with a sharp tool, like a knife, from the external surface, with coarse attachment occurring internally. This process is made to equip the socket with three or four vents, necessary for fuel drainage to the wick.

The hollow circular stem of the candlestick can be made from a lump of clay on a wheel-head. The lump can

be thrown to the required shape of the stem. The grooves, running in a corkscrew spiral up the inside of the stem, are the result of bringing up the sides of the stem quickly, as in no. 9 (FIG. 14).

The potter added the upper fuel saucer to the stand at the right time. With the help of a soft soaked cloth, he smoothed the joint in order to bond the two parts together, later on, this joint was fixed with the help of potter's thumb. Consequently, a pronounced ridge has been furnished below the saucer to strengthen the joint (FIGS. 7 and 15).

The potter held the stem in a vertical position and pressed its lower part on a flat surface to furnish the pedestal base, then with his thumb, he accomplished the upper tours (ridge).

The variation in the thickness of the stand's different parts, and the clay weight of the whole candlestick caused the sagging of the stem to one side. This is well repre-



14. Grooves forming a "corkscrew spiral" on stem (no. 9).



15. Broken candlestick showing fuel saucer on top of stand (no. 2).

⁶ H. Hodges (1976), *Artifacts, An Introduction to Early Materials and Technology*, London: 30.

sented in the Yājūz collection (nos.6 and 9). This situation most probably happened during the manufacturing, and especially at the end of the drying process.

One could classify the ware of our candlestick collection in three main variants:

I- Light- red ware with a small amount of limestone grits, and the occurrence of some porosity. This type of ware is the dominant one, since it represents the majority of samples.

II- Dull creamy ware, also occurring frequently. This type is considerably well-levigated since very few grits and other impurities are present.

III- Gray ware, even black in rare cases. This type contains small medium and few large white limestone grits. It is noticeable that almost every object is coated with a thick slip of a different colour. Besides, the centre engobo also occurred during the process of firing. These objects are evenly fired since the whole thickness of the ware is of the same colour.

One might observe different levels of colouring on the external surfaces of the various candlesticks. This is due to the different conditions of the firing process, which allow more oxidization on some parts of a specific object, while leaving the other parts less exposed to oxidization.⁷

Conclusion

A number of candlesticks were recovered during the course of various excavations in Jordan. They were found in burials such as at Jabal al-Jawfah ash-Sharqī (one),⁸ ar-Rajīb tombs I and II (two in fragments),⁹ tomb F.18 at Ḥisbān (one),¹⁰ Ṣiyāgha (one),¹¹ Umm al-Ḥirān - Mārkā (one),¹² Jil'ad tomb (thirteen)¹³ and Jarash cave (one).¹⁴ Additionally, a few candlesticks displayed in museums in Jordan were purchased.

Since all the discovered candlesticks were found in tombs, it may be confirmed that they were part of religious offerings, to enlighten the second life of the people buried in the tombs. The candlesticks from Yājūz were intensively used, since a thick coat of soot can be observed on the upper parts of the internal wick sockets.

Two burning candlesticks are illustrated on the mosaic floor of the Priest John Chapel at Mukhayyat (Mount Nebo).¹⁵

Pottery chalices or pedestals were vessels used for cultic purposes as early as the Chalcolithic period in Palestine and Jordan. Also, chalices with inner cups are dated to the MBII.¹⁶

A two-storey lamp, from a tomb at 'Ayn Smiyah near Ramallah in Palestine dated to the ninth century BC, has a "ritual character". A Phoenician-Western Mediterranean origin is suggested.¹⁷

One wheel-made wick lamp on stand, in the Vancouver Museum, has an open bowl on a high circular stand. It is dated to the Greek-Hellenistic periods.¹⁸ This type of lamp could be considered as a proto-type for the candlestick.

Furthermore, a number of candlesticks were found at various archaeological sites in England. They demonstrate the development in the typology of the candlesticks during the period between the second half of the first century AD, or the first half of the second century AD, to the fourth century AD.¹⁹

The candlesticks from various archaeological sites in Jordan, share the main characters of shape and decoration. There are slight variations in size and decoration on the flattened rims of the fuel saucers. Nevertheless, they have been dated to a large range of time, such as at Jarash (first-second century AD), ar-Rajīb (second-third century AD), Jabal al-Jawfah ash-Sharqī (late third-fourth century AD) and Jil'ad (fourth-fifth century AD). The above-mentioned dates were given in correspondence to pottery oil lamps and other associated material.

The Yājūz collection is part of the pottery assemblage from the cemetery. These candlesticks were associated with types of pottery vessels which were common in the sixth and seventh centuries AD. For example, the grey kraters with comb decoration incised on the rim are well represented in the cemetery. This type is common at Jarash²⁰ and Pella²¹ during the sixth century and early seventh centuries AD.

⁷ *Ibid.*: 40.

⁸ G. Bisheh (1972), A Cave Burial Tomb from Jabal Jofeh El-Sharqi in Amman. *ADAJ* 17: pl. III: fig 3-4 and pl. VI: fig. 2; 81-83.

⁹ G. Bisheh (1973), Rock-Cut Tombs at Rajib. *ADAJ* 18: 63-67.

¹⁰ R. Boraas and S. Horn (1975), *Heshbon 1973*: pl. XV; 211.

¹¹ B. Bagatti, *op. cit.*

¹² Unpublished. It is on display at the Jordan Archaeological Museum (JAM), Amman, Reg. No. J13315, the information is from the registration card. With handle on the stand, discovered at a Roman tomb.

¹³ Khirbat Jil'ad is at 30kms northeast of as-Salt. A rescue excavation took place there between 19/5-17/6/1973, directed by H. Qandil of the Department of Antiquities. Pottery oil lamps, glass vessels and 13 candlesticks were retrieved from one tomb. The finds were dated between the fourth and fifth centuries AD. This information is from the unpublished report of the excavation (in Arabic), and is kept at the Registration Centre of the Department of Antiquities in Amman.

¹⁴ Unpublished. On display at JAM, registration no.J2434; as from Jarash cave dated to the Roman period (first-second century AD).

¹⁵ M. Piccirillo, *op. cit.*: 35, photo 228.

¹⁶ R. Amiran (1969), *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land*, Jerusalem.

¹⁷ S. S. Weinberg (1979), A Two-Storey Lamp from Palestine. *IEJ* 29, No. 3-4: 143-147.

¹⁸ J. Russell (1973), Ancient Lamps in Vancouver. *Levant* 5: 93.

¹⁹ D. M. Bailey (1988), *A Catalogue of Lamps in the British Museum, Vol. III; Roman Provincial Lamps*, London: 172-174.

²⁰ J. Schaefer and R. Falkner (1986), An Umayyad Potters Complex in the North Theatre, Jerash. In F. Zayadine (ed.), *Jerash Archaeological Project 1981-1983*, Vol. I, Amman: 427; Fig. 8:8.

²¹ P. Watson (1992), Change in Foreign and Regional Economic Links. In P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds.), *La Syrie de Byzance a L'Islam VII-VIII siecles*: 237, Fig. 6:45, and pers. com. with Dr. Pamela Watson.

The date suggested above is contemporary to the foundation date of the chapel (ca. AD 508). This date is obtained from the dedication inscription represented in the mosaic floor of the chapel.

Archaeological excavations at important sites of the Byzantine period in Jordan, such as Pella and Gadara, have not revealed any candlesticks. Only one object has been reported from the excavation of 1933 at Jarash. The geographical distribution of the candlesticks is mainly located in 'Ammān, Jil'ad and Mādabā. However, it is hard to accept this limitation, knowing that trade routes and communication were well established during this era. In addition, Yājūz was an important city on the main road between 'Ammān and Jarash.

Depending on the technique of production of the candlesticks, one might suggest that the potter of Yājūz was highly trained, and mastered his skill to reach such a kind of technology. Also, these utilitarian artifacts were made during the Byzantine period to fill a special need or interest, and they disappeared in later periods.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Nabil Khairy of the Department of Archaeology-University of Jordan for his help and assistance. Also, I must thank Mr. Mohamad Quteshat for drawing the candlesticks from Yājūz, and many thanks are due to the employees of the Archaeological Museum at the University of Jordan for their full cooperation.