

# A Ceramic Note on the Arabic "Ostrakon" from Tell Siran

by  
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Among the objects found during the 1972 excavations at Tell Siran was an Arabic "ostrakon" (potter's mark?)<sup>1</sup> (Plate III, 2). The "ostrakon," measuring ca. .08 x .11 m., is the body sherd of a jar, as its thickness, curvature, and shoulder ridge would indicate. The sherd is smooth and unribbed, and while it is buff-white colored on the exterior, it is light pink colored on the interior. "To Selim" or "To Suleiman" was painted in pointed Arabic on the exterior surface of the sherd (jar), prior to kiln firing, and thus it is not a true ostrakon. The color of the fired paint is reddish-brown.

The "ostrakon" came from Locus A.2:6, a shallow bedrock hole (ca. .32—.38 m. deep, .47 m. wide, .65 m. long) which was filled with reddish soil.<sup>2</sup> Locus A.2:6 produced none of the site's Ay-yubid/Mamluk pottery. Instead, it contained an essentially homogeneous assemblage of a distinctive red-painted pottery. This pottery, well attested at other sites, is usually of well-fired white, buff, or pink unribbed ware, and it frequently carries red- or brown-painted loops, spirals, wavy lines, or crossed lines.

Such red-painted pottery has been published from sites in Syria, Transjordan,

the Jordan Valley, and the hill country of the West Bank, but it has seldom been properly evaluated. The Tell Siran "ostrakon" can now be cited as another piece of evidence for dating it to the Umayyad period.

When the pottery was first published in the Jericho report of 1913, it was dated to the Byzantine Period,<sup>3</sup> and in some reports this Byzantine dating has been perpetuated down to the present day.<sup>4</sup> In the 1950 publication of the Mt. Nebo pottery, however, the pottery was dated to the late Byzantine—early Arabic (ca. 6th-8th century A.D.) period,<sup>5</sup> and this Byzantine-Arabic dating has likewise been maintained in subsequent publications.<sup>6</sup>

There is, however, no substantive evidence for dating the pottery to the Byzantine (A.D. 324-640), or to the Late Byzantine (A.D. 491-640) period. The pottery from Jericho clearly could not be dated as early as the 4th-5th century A.D., but it could be dated by the unstratified Umayyad coins from the site.<sup>7</sup> The pottery from Mt. Nebo was not present in the site's sealed and coin-dated Late Byzantine contexts, but it was well attested in the "open" contexts, which

(1) The "ostrakon" is now at the Amman Museum.

(2) Cf. H. O. Thompson, "The Excavation of Tell Siran," in this issue of *ADAJ*; cf. also A. Hadidi, "The Pottery from Tell Siran," forthcoming in the University of Jordan *Faculty of Arts Journal*.

(3) E. Sellin and C. Watzinger, *Jericho* (Leipzig, 1913), pp. 90-92, 160-168.

(4) E.g., B. Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth* (Jerusalem, 1969), p. 276; N. Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp. 164-165; B. Bagatti, *The Church from the Gentiles in Palestine* (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 351-352; A. D. Tushingham, *The Excavations at Dibon (Dhibān) in Moab*, AASOR, Vol. 40 (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), pp. 76-77.

(5) H. Schneider, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo, Part 3: The Pottery* (Jerusalem, 1950), pp. 25-26, 43-49, *passim*.

(6) E.g., J. L. Kelso and D. C. Baramki, *Excavations at New Testament Jericho and Khirbet en-Nitla*, AASOR, Vols. 29-30 (New Haven, Conn., 1955), pp. 23, 32, 35; S. J. Saller, *Excavations at Bethany* (Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 214, 229, 272; M. Avi-Yonah, "Review of A Byzantine Church at Khirbat al-Karak," *IEJ*, 13 (1963), 346; F. Winnett and W. L. Reed, *The Excavations at Dibon (Dhibān) in Moab*, AASOR, Vols. 36-37 (New Haven, Conn., 1964), p. 56; H. J. Franken, "Palestijnse Archeologie," *Phoenix*, 17 (1971), 49.

(7) Sellin and Watzinger, *Jericho*, p. 169. Cf. J. A. Sauer, *Heshbon Pottery 1971* (Berrien Springs, Mich., 1973), p. 46.

could be dated by the site's Umayyad coins and Arabic inscriptions.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the pottery has not appeared in controlled Late Byzantine contexts at other sites.<sup>9</sup>

While there is as yet no definite evidence for dating the pottery to the Pre-Umayyad ( A.D. 630 - 661 ) period,<sup>10</sup> there is virtually conclusive evidence for dating it to the Umayyad ( A.D. 661-750 ), and especially to the late Umayyad ( ca. A.D. 696-750 ) period. The pottery from the Amman Citadel "main house" would postdate slightly the Arab-Byzantine coin and the two early Umayyad coins which came from the filling for the house, and it could be dated by the ( A.D. 696 ff. ? ) Umayyad coin which came from the floor of Room J.<sup>11</sup> The pottery from Usais could be dated by that site's A.D. 696 ff. Umayyad coins and A.D. 711/12, 718/19, 726 / 27, 731 / 32, 737 Arabic inscriptions.<sup>12</sup> The pottery from Heshbon was associated with two Arabic "ostraca," and it could probably be dated by the site's A.D. 674-81 "Byzantine" coin and A.D. 696 ff. Umayyad coins.<sup>13</sup> Finally, the Tell Siran

(8) S. J. Saller, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo, Part 1: The Text* (Jerusalem, 1941), pp. 117-208, 275-276 278-285; Schneider, *ibid.*, Part 3: *The Pottery*, pp. 1-3, 43-49, *passim*. Cf. Sauer, *Heshbon Pottery 1971*, pp. 36-39, 45, 47.

(9) Sauer, *Heshbon Pottery 1971*, pp. 47-48 (cf. also Tushingham, *Excavations at Dibon (Dhibān)*, pp. 75-76).

(10) Cf. J. W. Crowfoot and G. M. Fitzgerald, *Excavations in the Tyropoeon Valley, Jerusalem*, PEFA, Vol. 5 (London, 1929), pp. 52-58, 81-84, 119-120; R. W. Hamilton, "Excavations Against the North Wall of Jerusalem," *QDAP*, 10 (1940-42), 11-19.

(11) G. L. Harding, "Excavations on the Citadel, Amman," *ADAJ*, 1 (1951), 7-16.

(12) K. Brisch, "Das omayyadische Schloss in Usais," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo*, 19 (1963), 165-168, 181-182; *ibid.*, 20 (1965), 159, 163-172.

(13) Sauer, *Heshbon Pottery 1971*, pp. 43-44 (cf. Errata). Cf. M. Rosen-Ayalon, "Heshbon Ostrakon III," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 11 (1973), 132; A. Terian, "Coins from the 1968 Excavations at Heshbon," *AUSS*, 9 (1971), 153-154, Nos. 20-27; A. Terian, "Coins from the 1971 Excavations at Heshbon," *AUSS*, forthcoming, Nos. 65-67, 181.

(14) The calligraphy of the "ostrakon" will be discussed elsewhere. It should be noted here, however, that several other dated Umayyad inscriptions attest pointed letters.

"ostrakon" was not only found together with an assemblage of red-painted pottery, but it would even seem to be a piece of the pottery itself, with paint in pointed Arabic.<sup>14</sup>

Since there is no evidence for dating the pottery to the Early Abbasid ff. ( A.D. 750 ff. ) periods,<sup>15</sup> it could be argued that a rather sharp break in ceramic traditions accompanied the A.D. 750 Abbasid takeover in Syria-Palestine. This Umayyad-Abbasid break was noted in the 1944 publication of the Kh. el Mefjer pottery, but it was obscured by the typological format and the "eighth century" terminology of that publication.<sup>16</sup> The break also has been overlooked in several recent reports, where pottery types and assemblages from the Early Abbasid ff. ( A.D. 750 ff. ) periods have been dated to the Umayyad period or to the 8th century A.D.<sup>17</sup>

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(15) Cf. F. Sarre, *Die Keramik von Samarra* (Berlin, 1925); R. Koechlin, *Les céramiques musulmanes de Suse* (Paris, 1928); D. T. Rice, "The Oxford Excavations at Hira," *Ars Islamica*, 1 (1934), 52, 54, 65-70; A. Lane, "Medieval Finds at Al Mina in North Syria," *Archaeologia*, 87 (1937), 20-21, 28-42.

Cf. Crowfoot and Fitzgerald, *Excavations in the Tyropoeon Valley, Jerusalem*, pp. 56-58, 84-86, 120; G. M. Fitzgerald, *Beth-shan Excavations, The Arab and Byzantine Levels* (Philadelphia, 1931), pp. 36-37, 48; D. C. Baramki, "The Pottery from Kh. el Mefjer," *QDAP*, 10 (1940-42), 65-104; R. de Vaux and A.-M. Steve, *Fouilles à Qaryet el'Enab Abu Gôsh* (Paris, 1950), pp. 79-80, 119-132; C. N. Johns, "The Citadel, Jerusalem," *QDAP*, 14 (1950), 160-162; J. Kaplan, "Excavations at the White Mosque in Ramla," *'Atiqot (Eng.)*, 2 (1959), 111-113.

(16) Baramki, "Pottery from Mefjer," *QDAP*, 10 (1940-42), 65-104.

(17) F. E. Day, "Islamic Glazed Wares," in *A Byzantine Church at Khirbat al-Karak*, by P. Delougaz and R. C. Haines (Chicago, 1960), pp. 40-48; M. Rosen-Ayalon and A. Eitan, *Ramla Excavations* (Jerusalem, 1969); B. Mazar, *The Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 19-20; M. Ben-Dov, *The Umayyad Structures Near the Temple Mount* (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 37; M. Rosen-Ayalon, "Islamic Pottery from Susa," *Archaeology*, 24 (1971), 205-208; E. D. Oren, "Early Islamic Material from Ganei-Hamat (Tiberias)," *Archaeology*, 24 (1971), 274-277.