

GHASSUL'S NEW-FOUND JAR-INCISION

The only strikingly new feature of chalcolithic pottery revealed by the 1960 campaign at Ghassul was the incised drawing of an animal (Fig. 1 Pl. XXVI). This discovery was so unexpected, and so unparalleled in the whole range of Ghassulian wares from a hundred sites, that it seems needful to devote to it a special inquiry.

Proximate occasion for this inquiry was the acquisition of another Ghassul sherd containing what also could be called an incised drawing (Fig. 2 Pl. XXVI). The circumstances of this acquisition were as follows. At a biblical convention in St. Louis at the end of 1961, the writer met Prof. E. Willard Hamrick of Winston-Salem, with whom he had shared a tent in Miss Kathleen M. Kenyon's 1952 excavation of Jericho. Prof. Hamrick expressed interest in the Ghassul digging and requested details. The description of the unusual "incised animal", immediately recalled to him a sherd which he had casually picked up on the surface at Ghassul in visiting the site several years before.

Prof. Hamrick expressed himself fully prepared to give up this sherd to the Jordan Antiquities Administration if it turned out to be of any value. Meanwhile he graciously offered to send it as a permanent loan to the Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome, responsible for the excavation of Ghassul, pending research and eventual publication. It has seemed only fair that publication of this find should take place in the Department's Annual, together with related topics on which a report had been graciously requested by the Editor.

In an accompanying letter of January 18, 1962, Prof. Hamrick specifies that the sherd had been picked up on October 24, 1951, in the presence of Professors William Reed and Victor Gold of the American Schools of Oriental Research of Jerusalem. They had been guided to the site from Sunat Nimrin on the (Old) Jericho-Amman highway, by a former worker of the Ghassul expedition. No further details of the find were forthcoming.

The décor consists of two elements. One is a "drag-incision" of two nearly-parallel lines. A twig whose uneven edge left firm trace in the ware, was sunk deeply enough in the clay to require dragging, though not deeply enough to raise any notable ridge on either side, for the most part. The jerks of the reed's progress in drawing the line are clearly recorded in barely-perceptible changes of direction (Fig. 3 Pl. XXVII).

Such drag-incisions, if already attested at Ghassul, must be considered very exceptional.¹ A striking sample is the 1960 sherd numbered 8442 and published in photograph.² It is a groove about twice as deep as Hamrick's, running roughly parallel to a bowl-rim, about one centimetre below. The report notes only that the ware is "gray", which in the gamut of

¹ A. Mallon, *Teleilat Ghassul I* (Rome 1936); R. Koepfel, *Teleilat Ghassul II* (Rome 1940), give no examples.

² R. North, *Ghassul 1960 Excavation Report* (*Analecta Biblica* 14, Rome 1961), Plate IX.

Ghassulian-ware colors might include also a pallid pink with white grits.¹ But there is no trace of any further ornamental motif in connection with this "dragged line".

In the Hamrick sherd, however, each of the two lines terminates, or begins, with a sort of rosette. Only one has fully survived. It has an oval crater of 5mm diameter, barely deeper than the line incision. From the crater radiate twenty fine lines 3-4mm in length. The first impression is that of a centipede plaqued on the outer surface of the jar-in-formation, and leaving its imprint behind after removal. This impression is quickly revealed to be erroneous, because the lines are perceptibly traced with some instrument finer and sharper than a twig, very likely a finger-nail.

It is not excluded, however, and indeed seems highly probable that the décor took its origin from the removal of some foreign body from the crater. The resulting disfigurement would have been transformed by the rays into a beauty-spot reminiscent of the stars on sculptured animal bodies at Beisan and other sites recently studied.² To this the dragged-line would have been added as a further touch of fantasy; though it is also possible that the line was being grooved first and encountered the crater as an obstacle in its path.

The second line terminates in a minimal rosette, an imitation or rather mere suggestion of the other. Though partly cut off by the break in the sherd, it clearly consists of only four fingernail rays, and instead of a crater it has a similar fingernail-semicircle of 3mm diameter.

All this décor might seem too trivial to waste time describing in such detail, except that it will help us to understand how radically different our Sherd 8521 must be Judged. Moreover the motifs of the Hamrick sherd involve in part an undeniable uniqueness, and in part an instructive parallel with the very rarest features of the Ghassulian repertoire.

The "Giraffe"

It is now time to describe more in detail our still-unique Sherd 8521. It is from the belly of a vessel whose shape is completely indeterminate. The sherd is about 3x3 cm and some 8 mm thick, fire-blackened from use. The incision was unmistakably made before firing as was unhesitatingly declared by distinguished excavators visiting our workroom.

The design consists of lines traced with some sharp instrument. It is conceivable that they are merely geometrical or fantastic. Four parallel lines of 3 cm length run along at 1.3 mm interval. These lines are broken in the middle by a 4 mm square at an angle, beneath which is a sort of W of double bars 1 cm long. At the extremity farthest from the "W",

¹ *Seen in section, the Hamrick sherd is clearly a more "grayish" Pink toward its outer surface than towards the inner. But paradoxically, on the inner surface are more traces of a genuine gray than on the outer. The section is 11 cm thick. No inference can be drawn as to the size or scope of the vessel. The inner surface is perceptibly ridged by the impression of the modeller's fingers left during the turning of the slow wheel. There is no trace of slip within or without.*

² *Helene Kantor, "The Shoulder Ornament of Near Eastern Lions" Journal of Near Eastern Studies 6/4 (Oct. 1947) 250-274.*

the four lines terminate in a chevron.

The immediate impression, if looked at from the direction of our cut, is that of the neck of some living thing. It may well be a bird perched on a twig. The tail would fit quite convincingly.

It is hard to describe why there seems to be question rather of a long-necked quadruped such as a giraffe. There are undoubtedly **four** legs where the legs should be, but it is equally undoubted that two of these do not connect with the body, and the other two connect in the middle! Again, if we compare this creature with the "Bird" of an earlier-known Ghassul fresco (Fig. 4 Pl. XXVII), we note that the frescoed bird is more compact and bushy, in short more as a bird impresses the viewer. There are birds and birds, of course. But if we assume that in primitive art the most **salient** trait of the object is grasped and expressed, we will agree that a long neck is more characteristic of some quadruped like a giraffe than of any bird. The ostrich or flamingo would do nicely from the neck up, but not as perched on a twig.

Sherd 8521 was discovered in the first recorded "level" of E 1. It was in the undisturbed earth which lay beneath the ever-abundant surface-sherds and also beneath an initial few inches of earth containing sherds along with occasional traces of intrusion or vegetation, which we recorded as "Subsurface". E 1 was a designation given at first to the earth falling away northeastward all the way from the "house" to the opposite (northeast) end of our 20-metre trench. Only after we had penetrated more deeply were we able to determine that this apparently-horizontal fill had really been laid in successive strips slanting more sharply downward, to which we gave the letters 1-k, 1-t etc., but without being able to trace more exactly the strip from which our sherd had come. The "house" in question was really only the very solid stone foundation (almost exposed at surface) and floor, under which (again almost at surface level) were two infant jar-burials and two large saturation-striped sherds of a pithos (8469 and 8470 of Plate IX and Fig. 15, p. 28).

Ghassulian Parallels

As a specific style-achievement, we feel a reasonable assurance in maintaining that this piece 8521 is unique in the whole Ghassulian world, though of course we invite dissent of researchers like Perrot and Glueck whose experience is wider. Meanwhile we must consider the relation of this design, both in technique and in representative content, first to the other known Ghassulian pottery decor, and secondly to fresco art.

Incision holds a very large place in chalcolithic ceramics. Rather than decor, it has been very convincingly analyzed by Mallon into a sort of conservative holdover or even we might say "imitative magic".¹ Pottery was at first invented to replace receptacles made of skins or rushes, which had to be held together and lifted by cords. Presumably the earlier jars had ropes bound about them to keep them too, as was imagined, from bursting open. Gradually these "ropes" came to be made of twisted strips of mud, stuck on to the wall of the unfired vessel and fired with it. The next natural step was to apply the mud bands untwisted and **indent** on their surface the ropetraits. Meanwhile it gradually came to be forgotten

¹ Mallon, *Teleilat Ghassul I*, p. 121-2.

or ignored just why rope-bound appearance is inseparable from liquid-receptacles. Thus next came the procedure of squeezing a band up from the side or rim of the vessel itself; incisions made on this raised band served just as well as applique ropes for whatever practical or magical scope may have been envisioned. The last step in the development was simply to indent along the side and rim of the vessel long lines of thumbnail incisions which sufficiently resembled and took the place of actual ropes, except for the functions of lifting which had now been taken over by "lugs" or cleats, which in turn gradually came to be perforated and thus evolved into handles.

Murphy has examined the reasons for maintaining that the numerous crescent-shaped incisions were made by the potter's finger-nail.¹ Whatever be the validity of rejecting this explanation in specific cases, our own experience has been that we can clearly distinguish a large number of fingernail-incisions from another large category of twig incisions. But only a genuine point of needle-fineness would seem to account for the 22-some separate lines of our "giraffe". Hardly any example of such genuine pinpoint line-drawing among the Ghassul sherds comes to mind, but there are numerous cases where such origin could not be excluded.²

The rope-mouldings from the very beginning and in the nature of things bore a weird and gruesomely attractive resemblance to snakes. This resemblance was in some cases accentuated by the free play of fantasy. A twig-indentation was often substituted for the fingernail-slashes on the "rope" to represent the mottlings on a snake's body. A series of earlier Ghassul finds affords ground for seeing here a possible origin of the amulets of detached sculpture, first of snakes and then gradually of other animals not suggested by jar-ropes. In some cases such plastic motifs unconnected with ropes are found plaqued onto the side of the vessel after the fashion of snakier ones.

A most illuminating document on this development is the sherd 8000, the first to be noticed and recorded in the 1960 harvest (Fig. 5 Pl. XXVIII). In the report it is both drawn and photographed in close proximity to Sherd 8521 on Fig. 13 and Plate X. It was found at the northernmost surface of our digging, A 1, above the (? medieval) cemetery. The rim of a bowl some 18 cm in diameter (the width of this page), has peering up over it a sinuous snake. The head is not fashioned; the same reedpunctures which mark mottling on the body also serve for eyes at the top of the head. But its elevation over the edge of the rim gives a strong and artistic impression of the inquisitive reptile. Here, however, and generally in proportion as the developments of rope moulding become more fanciful and zoomorphic, we recede from the fingernail-crescent type of incision which must form our point of departure for "the Genesis of the Giraffe".

As the raised-or-rope moulding proved to be less and less indispensable as a substrate for fingernail-incisions, one would have expected "scratching" to become gradually the medium

¹ J. Murphy in R. Koepfel, *Teleilat Ghassul II*, p. 69.

² *The Oriental Institute Museum of Chicago University displays two "Incised Slabs of Chalcolithic Period" from Megiddo Stratum XIX, with scratched representations. One has a human figure bearing weapons. The other is a sort of long thick-necked goat or ibex with floating horns. Each fills a space some 8-10 in. square.*

of an autonomus decorative genre. Strangely, there are hardly any hints of such a development, if we except the rare and dissimilar grooving of the Hamrick and 8442 sherds. The scratched animal seems to spring full-blown, but it would be more prudent and plausible to maintain that we just do not possess the intervening stages. The first tentative efforts to a new florescence simply tend to disappear because of their imperfection, according to Teilhard's "Suppression of Peduncles" law! It is not beyond hope, however, that further samples may yet be picked up by tourists at Ghassul, or discovered in the collections or memories of early visitors to this or cognate sites.

Fresco-Motif Similarities

Let us turn now to the more remote parallels in the fresco-repertoire which strangely is still attested only at this single one out of a hundred known Ghassulian sites! We have already indicated our hesitation about seeing "a bird in the sherd", when the famous Ghassulian "Bird" is so much bushier and presents an altogether different appearance.

Skilfulness of the geometric technique in the betterknown "Star" fresco (Fig. 6 Pl. XXVIII) indeed invites us to consider more reflectively whether the lines of Sherd 8521 are purely geometric. This possibility must now be contemplated in the light of the 1960 E-3 "Geometric" wall-fresco from Tulayl I (Fig. 7 Pl. XXIX). This exhibits a technique altogether inferior to the "Star". To begin with, the plastering of the wall is a dull cementy gray quite unlike the brilliant whiteness of Tulayl 3 and even of E 1 Brick Wall 13. The only color used is a red, also dull in comparison with Tulayl 3. There are patches of a brighter red more like orange in the E 3 fresco, though these are (in some cases at least) on a previous surfacing of the wall.

The chief feature of E 3 is some broad rectangular lines which end up absent-mindedly nowhere. Also notable are some starpoint-or-chevron festoons. There are two "hands" with spread-out fingers, and some concentrations of wavy lines which might be "tresses" streaming from a head, or an octopus, or even a modern impression of two quivering belly-dancers. For the most part, though, these lines are simply fanciful waves. Both the bands and the waves are closely paralleled in Ghassulian vase-painting. They seem to shed no light whatever on our "Giraffe".

The complex inner structure of the "Star", and its supplementary wraiths, spooks, snails, and disembodied hands, exhibit a fineness of line more suggestive of our sherd-incision. But no specific representational resemblance can be singled out.

Things To Look For

We will conclude by inviting researchers of chalcolithic areas in the Holy Land to reexamine all their available data in search of a parallel or "forerunner" of this remarkable incision. In order to make this search more enticing, we may note here some other 1960 discoveries which seemed "unique" and would call for special attention.

8655, Plate XI. A fairly-preserved bowl which would be classed as "undecorated". However, it has faint horizontal grooves running spirally about its outer surface, which

give it a pleasing and un-Ghassulian appearance. Its diameter is 18 cm and height about 10. It came from the lower levels of B 3, Tulayl 3. (The reference to "Fig. 14" in the published report should be rather "Fig. 5", the vertical section of Trench B on P. 9, on which the depth of Level 20 c is recorded.)

8670, Plate XI (Level 26 c, again Fig. 5, not Fig. 14; diameter 12 cm., height 10). A smaller bowl, also "undecorated" except for vertical petal-like pressures running up its outer surface.

8728, Fig. 15 and Plate X. Hindquarters of an animal figurine, rump measuring some 6 cm across. The interior is sedulously hollowed out, when it would have been much easier to leave it solid. One is led to assume, therefore, that the object in its completeness must have been intended as a **receptacle**. In calling it a "piggy-bank" there is no necessary implication of coins, nor of blood either; any precious or useful or pleasing commodity could have been stored inside.

8652, Plate IX. By an oversight there seems to be no description of this piece on p. 24. It is one of the objects chosen for the Amman Museum: a graceful tiny jar of some 4x4 cm, with rimless mouth almost as wide as its belly, tapering to a slightly pointed base. It has two tiny eyelet-handles. It might be a baby's milk-cup or have some less romantic storage-purpose. Though it could hardly be called discordant or even unusual in the Ghassul repertoire, it does merit notice and further observation.

8732, Plate IX. From Level 31 of Trench B 3, as recorded on Fig. 5 (not 14!), p. 9 of the Report. On the very last day of the campaign emerged three fragments of thin-to-metallic blackish and blackened ware. Barely perceptible were the broken edges of openings made in the ware before firing, which prove it to have been a rare pottery imitation of our many graceful basalt pedestal-vases like S 8022. The measurement indicated for S 8022 on Plate X is faulty; the 10 cm base and 25 cm height should be doubled, as can be seen from Plate VIII, lower middle. The diameter base of the pottery-imitation 8732 was reconstructed with diameter 16 cm., so the height should have been about 40 cm.

8671, Plate IX. An unusual oval-base, whose originality suggests that the upper part of the vessel may have been strikingly graceful, though the ware is coarse. Provenance B 2, Level 26 c, as on Fig. 5 (not Fig. 14), p. 9 of the Report.

8558 is described as "A sherd utterly unique in several respects. What is here indicated as the interior tip of the rim, if it is that, has been deliberately defaced to appear as if some inward extension had been broken off. It may indeed have been a base. There is an unusual décor along the side (running in an irregular dotted line beneath and roughly parallel to the rim): incisions (or rather punctures) made by a sharp instrument like a sixpenny nail. A similar line of incisions runs along the groove in the top of the rim. No diameter whatever can be inferred from the sherd, which is perfectly straight; either it is a freak irregularity in a huge round lip, or more likely it was intended to have rectangular corners. No clue as to its vertical measurement. Ware Yellow. From C 2, Level 5."

The unusual features presented by seven pieces in the general genre of incision-décor, are not really worth comparing with the unique "Giraffe" or even with the Hamrick rosettes. Still, any excavator knows that in searching for parallels it is practically as easy to look for nine types at one time. And it might even be that these minor novelties cast some light on the development of the technique emerging so astonishingly in Sherd 8521.

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Descriptions of Illustrations

- Fig. 1 (P. B. I. Archive) Sherd 8521 "Giraffe", Ghassul 1960 E 1 subsurface level, Tulayl 1.
- Fig. 2 (Photo R. Steinhoff) Hamrick "rosette" sherd found 1951 on Ghassul surface, photo... and drawing.
- Fig. 3
- Fig. 4 (from TGI, Pl. 57) Ghassul 1932 "Bird" fresco, Tulayl 3.
- Fig. 5 (from Gh 1960 8521 of Figg. 13 and Plate X) Sherd 8521 "snake", Ghassul 1960 A 1 surface.
- Fig. 6 (from Albright's *Penguin Archaeology of Palestine* p. 67) Ghassul 1931 "Star" fresco, Tulayl 3.
- Fig. 7 (P. B. I. Archive) Ghassul 1960 E 3 "Geometric" fresco, Tulayl 1.