

TEMPLE, KILN AND CHURCH – FOURTH INTERIM REPORT ON THE JARASH CATHEDRAL PROJECT (AUTUMN 1997)*

by

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Considering that the main interest of our research project on the Early Christian “Cathedral” of Jarash was always the *process of christianization* in ancient Gerasa, the question of the predeceasing building on the site of the church was, from the beginning, of crucial importance. In 1994 we found about 10 m east of the former entrance façade of the Cathedral the foundation and the base moulding of the western wall of a temple which since the British-American excavations of the 1920’s has frequently mentioned in the literature, but has never been documented in plans or photographs.¹ After having excavated the same features of the adjoining South and North walls in 1996 we were able to trace the outlines of this temple more precisely.²

Nevertheless, the eastern part with the original entrance still remained unclear. The possible eastern edge of the podium of the temple was found in 1996 and seemingly manifested by a huge one-faced wall made of large stones; but the mentioned foundations of the side walls including their base moulding “ignored” this alignment and continued to the east where they disappeared in the eastern profiles of our 1996

trench. We therefore planned for 1997, to dig in the south-eastern angle of the nave of the Cathedral just to clear this point and to get some information on the original layout of the entrance to the temple. Our interest was especially focused on the question whether there was a continuation of the stairs found in the 1920’s by the American team east of the rear wall of the apse.³

Besides this we hoped to get some new evidence for the date and the reason of the abandonment of the temple and the building of the church. We decided to make a sounding in the southern aisle outside the podium of the temple, that is, in an area where we could still expect an undisturbed stratigraphy of the pre-church phase. Some further soundings were made in the so-called glass court, other probes were required for the drawing of the new ground plan of the church and its surroundings.

The Temple

As expected, we found the south-eastern corner of the temple podium just inside the south-eastern angle of the nave of the Cathedral. But the most striking feature in this area was a monumental staircase originally

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as to Dr Hans-Dieter Bienert and his staff of the German Protestant Institute for Archaeology of the Holy Land in Amman.

1. B. Brenk, C. Jäggi and H.R. Meier, The Buildings under the “Cathedral” of Gerasa. Second interim Report on the Jarash Cathedral Project, *ADAJ* 39 (1995): 211-220.
2. C. Jäggi, H.R. Meier and B. Brenk, New Data for the Chronology of the Early Christian Cathedral of Gerasa: The Third Interim Report on the Jarash Cathedral Project, *ADAJ* 41 (1997): 311-320.
3. C.H. Kraeling (ed.), *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*. New Haven 1938:206.

flanked by narrow *antae* (Figs. 1 and 4). While the foundation walls and the base moulding consist of ochre limestone and show many traces of destruction and use, the steps of this staircase are made from pink hardstone and seem hardly used. Are these differences in material and state of preservation an indication of different building phases? Indeed, the ochre limestone of the podium walls was mainly used in early Roman Jarash, and also the fact that the outside of the building was originally plastered and decorated by three-dimensional details in stucco speaks in favour of quite an early date for the main body of the temple. The pink hardstone, however, came in vogue about the middle of the second century and was used in many of the huge building projects of the Antonines (e.g. the Temple of Artemis). In this context we have to remember the fact that in our 1996 campaign we found in the filling between the *antae* a

coin of Alexander Jannaeus Hyrcanus II.⁴ But the pottery found with it dates from the first century BC/AD and the first half of the second century AD⁵ – a gap we were not able to explain then. Today we think that this pottery was filled in with the installation of the staircase around the middle of the second century AD. In this period the colonnades seem also to have undergone some alterations: for the most part the reused capitals and columns in the Cathedral have their origin in this period. The founding of the temple however seems to be much older; it probably dates back to the first century BC. The numerous fragments of Late Hellenistic architectural sculpture found in the fill of the Cathedral might well have belonged to this first building. If this hypothesis is right it would be the same scenario as in the temple of Zeus and the sanctuary of Artemis: the complete remodelling of a much older structure in the second half of the second century AD, which however in the latter cases seem to have been much more far-reaching than in the temple under the cathedral.

Abandonment of the Temple

The sounding in the south aisle provided important information for the abandonment of the temple on the site of the later Cathedral (Fig. 2). About 1.8 m below the floor of the church we found the remains of a circular kiln (Fig. 3) which was once used for bronze smelting as we found some fragments of crucibles in part still with traces of malachite. From the stratigraphical context it is clear that the kiln had been constructed when the podium wall of the temple was still upright. Even if it is not completely impossible that the kiln was implanted in the ambulatory of the temple when the temple, was still used for its original sacred function, we tend to see in this bronze kiln a testimony for an intermediate phase between

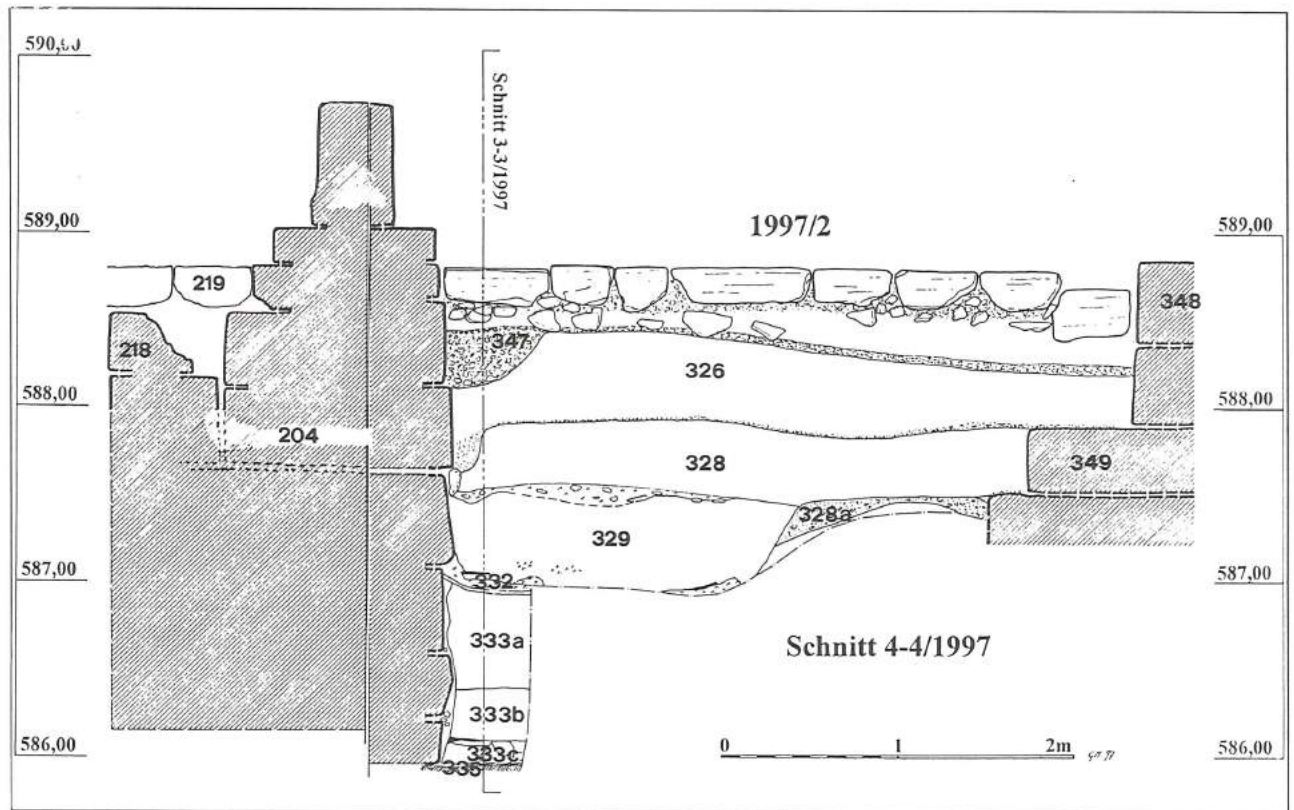


1. Jarash. Top view from the crane onto the apse of the cathedral with the excavated steps of the temple.

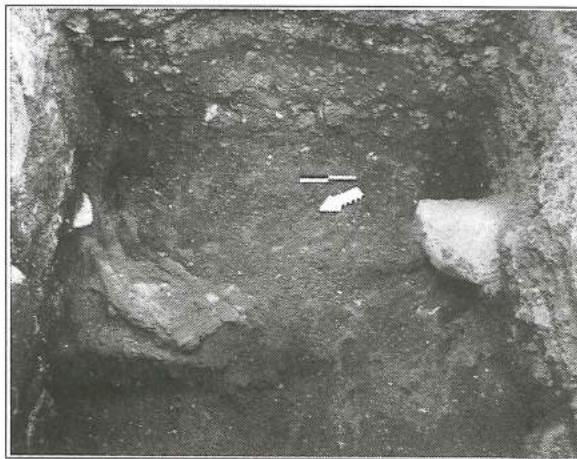
4. No. 96.113.1. For the classification of the coins we are grateful to Markus Peter as we are for their

conservation to Christine Pugin.

5. Cf. I. Kehrberg, in Jäggi *et al.*, *ADAJ* 41: 316-319.



2. Jarash Cathedral. South aisle Section North-South (east-profile). 326: Building level of the church 328a: Used level of the temple 329: layer with fragments of the kiln 332: Remains of the kiln *in situ*.



3. Jarash Cathedral: Rests of the kiln *in situ*.

the abandonment of the temple and the construction of the church. It would, therefore, not have been hostile intervention by Christians against the pagan cult which caused

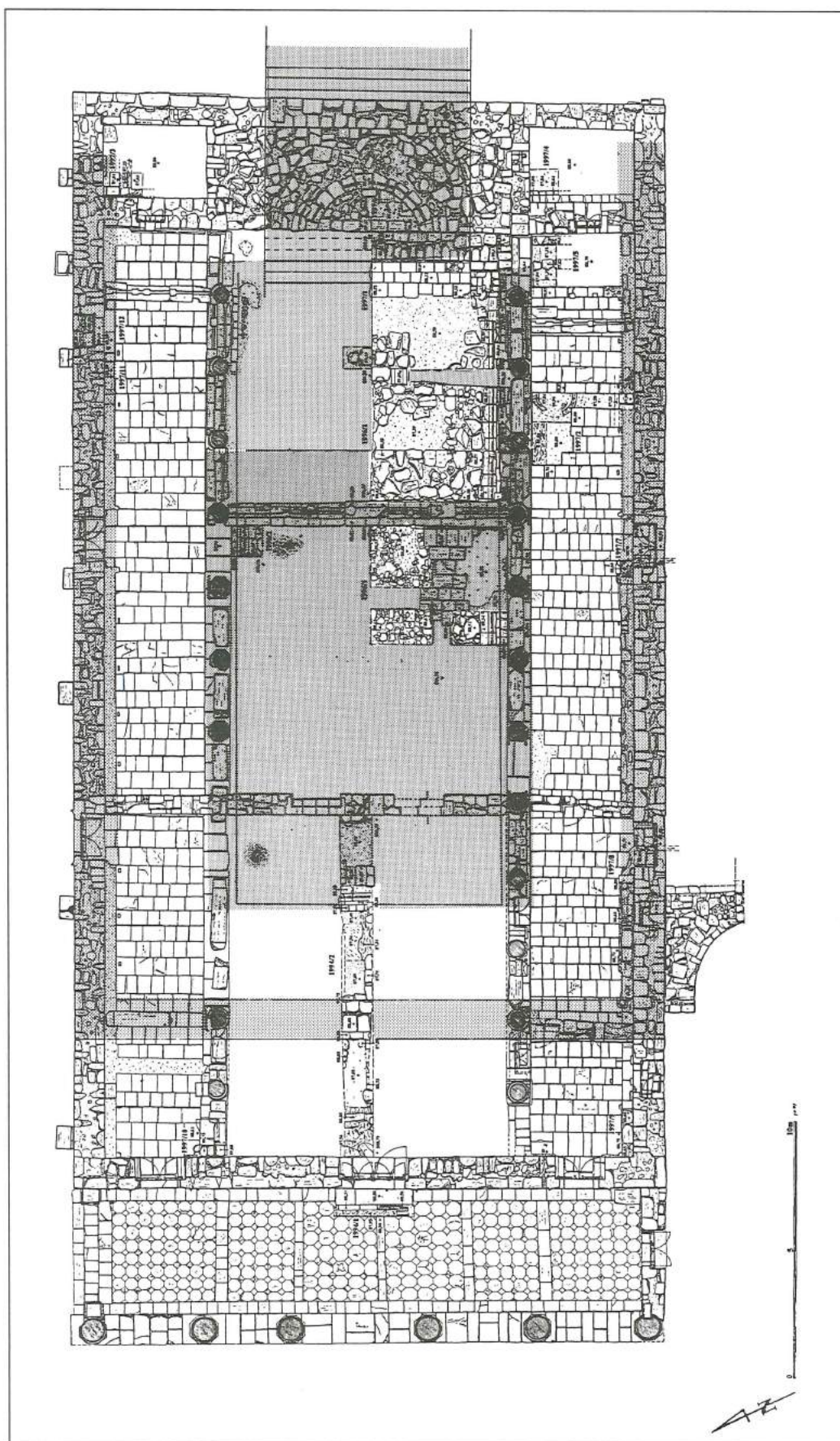
the destruction of the temple but rather other reasons which led to its demise. Perhaps the deity to which the temple was dedicated lost gradually its attraction and its followers in favour of the main gods of the city, that is Artemis and Zeus.⁶

The Construction of the Church

Even if the temple was no longer intact when the Christian community took over the site and caused a kind of urban revitalisation, the earlier building determined nevertheless the size of the Cathedral (Fig. 4): the width of the nave and the aisles was predetermined by the width of the podium of the temple (218) and its ambulatory (349). As we were already able to state in our 1994 campaign, also the western façade

6. Cf. in this context the Hypothesis of Crowfoot and Kraeling (1938: 37; 63-64) that the temple under the Cathedral was dedicated to local gods ("theos arabikos"). To the crisis of the third century see recently K. Strobel, *Das Imperium Romanum im*

3. Jahrhundert. Modell einer historischen Krise? Zur Frage mentaler Strukturen breiter Bevölkerungsschichten in der Zeit von Marc Aurel bis zum Ausgang des 3. Jh. n. Chr. Stuttgart 1993.



4. Jarash Cathedral. Top plan of the church with the excavated parts of the temple and (in half-tone) its schematic reconstruction.

of the Cathedral is constructed on an older wall.⁷ In the 1997 campaign we found that the eastern wall must have been constructed on a small terrace in between the flight of steps leading up from the *Cardo*. Despite this careful reuse of existing structures there must have been shortly after some static problems in the area of the presbytery. The actual masonry of the apse and its flanking rooms date from a comparatively late date and seem to be the product of remodelling after at least two destructions of this eastern part. These destructions might have been caused by earthquakes but the basic reason was the fact that only the apse was founded sufficiently well on the preexisting stairs while the flanking rooms rested on new and poorly built foundations. Together with the second of these reconstructions, the floor of the bema was raised and later still the nave and aisles were shortened by dividing walls as mentioned in earlier reports.⁸

Notes on Some Remarkable Finds and on the Date of the Cathedral

As in our earlier campaigns the excavated layers contained a lot of pottery sherds,⁹ fragments of window-glass and glass vessels, and amounts of mosaic tesserae fragments partly stuck in their original mortar bed and numerous fragments of Hellenistic and Roman architectural sculpture. The most outstanding piece among these is probably the fragment of a second century marble head of a male figure (Apollo?), which seems to have once been part of a relief.¹⁰ But even more important in view of our special interest are the more than 150 copper coins we found during our 1997 campaign,

mostly in stratigraphical context. Quite a lot of them were imbedded in the layers brought in for the original floor of the Cathedral. One of them gives us a *terminus post quem* for the church in the year 404, but we have to await the final report on the coins to get more detailed information in answer to this crucial question.¹¹

The Pottery and other Finds

(Ina Kehrberg)

In general, the material reflects the findings of the 1996 campaign: three phases of occupation can be clearly identified by the finds, that is (1) the construction phase and "repair" of the temple, (2) the reoccupation of the temple space after the temple's abandonment and (3) the construction of the cathedral and later rebuilding. Chronologically the same picture emerged (see Kehrberg in Jäggi *et al.* 1997:316-320).

However, unlike previous campaigns, the 1997 season revealed rich material and artefacts which can be associated with various manufacturing activities during the Late Roman and Late Byzantine occupation of the site (*infra*).

Description of Assemblages in Chronological Context

The Temple (Figs. 1, 2, 5a and b)

The Temple phase: The pottery shown in Figure 5 is representative of types common at Jarash and other contemporary sites in northern Jordan during the first centuries AD. It was not possible to clearly isolate the Early Roman assemblages from those of Late Roman sequences due to the series of

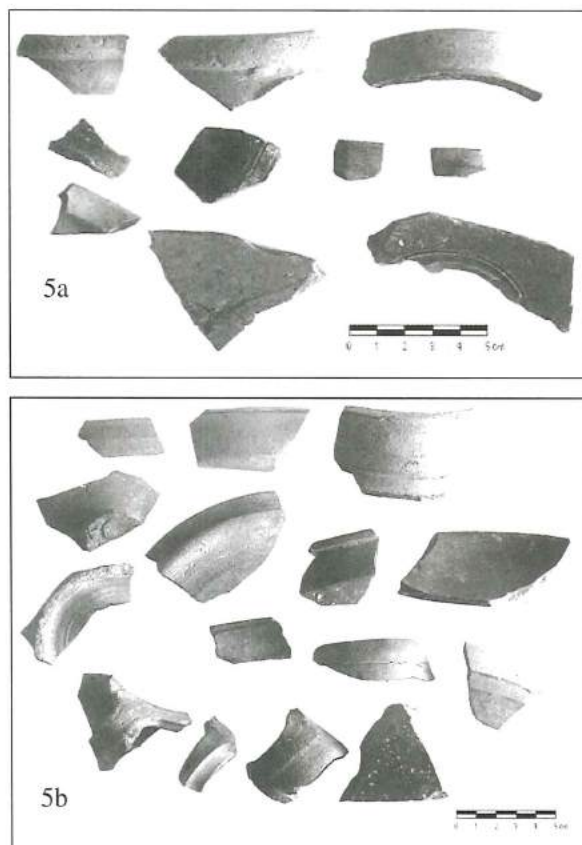
7. Brenk *et al.*, *ADAJ* 39: 212-214; B. Brenk, C. Jäggi and H.R. Meier, *Neue Forschungen zur Kathedrale von Gerasa: Probleme der Chronologie und der Vorgängerbauten*, in: *ZDPV* 112/2 (1996): 142-143.

8. Cf. Brenk *et al.*, *ADAJ* 39: 218-220; Jäggi *et al.*, *ADAJ* 41: 315-316; see also J.W. Crowfoot, *Recent Work round the Fountain Court at Jerash*, *PEQ* 1931: 145.

9. See below, Ina Kehrberg.

10. The publication of this piece, by Rudolf Känel, is in preparation.

11. See n. 4. The final analysis of the coins of the 1996 campaign has changed the *terminus post quem* given in the third report (Jäggi *et al.*, *ADAJ* 41: 314): the latest coin from the foundation trench of the stylobates dates from 404-435.



5. Roman period: a. JCP 97. 328/329; b. JCP 97. F3.

rebuilding / 'reparation' and subsequent occupation/use of the temple site. Most of the 'classical' forms can be compared with the profiles shown in the last report (see Kehrberg, in Jäggi *et al.* 1997: Fig.7, p. 318) pertaining to the temple phase and dating to the first and second centuries. Although eastern sigillata A and B have been found this cannot be used as reliable parallels for the dating of local material since original contexts had been disturbed by subsequent activities (see *supra*, "Temple phase"): it is thus one finds the intrusive pottery types usually associated with the Late Roman period (third to fourth century AD).

Other artefacts are glass and lamp fragments (too small to be illustrated) which date to the first and second century at Jarash. Local imitations of the imported pot-

tery (for the first century BC/AD, see Braemer 1989)¹² occurs together with later versions common in the second century.

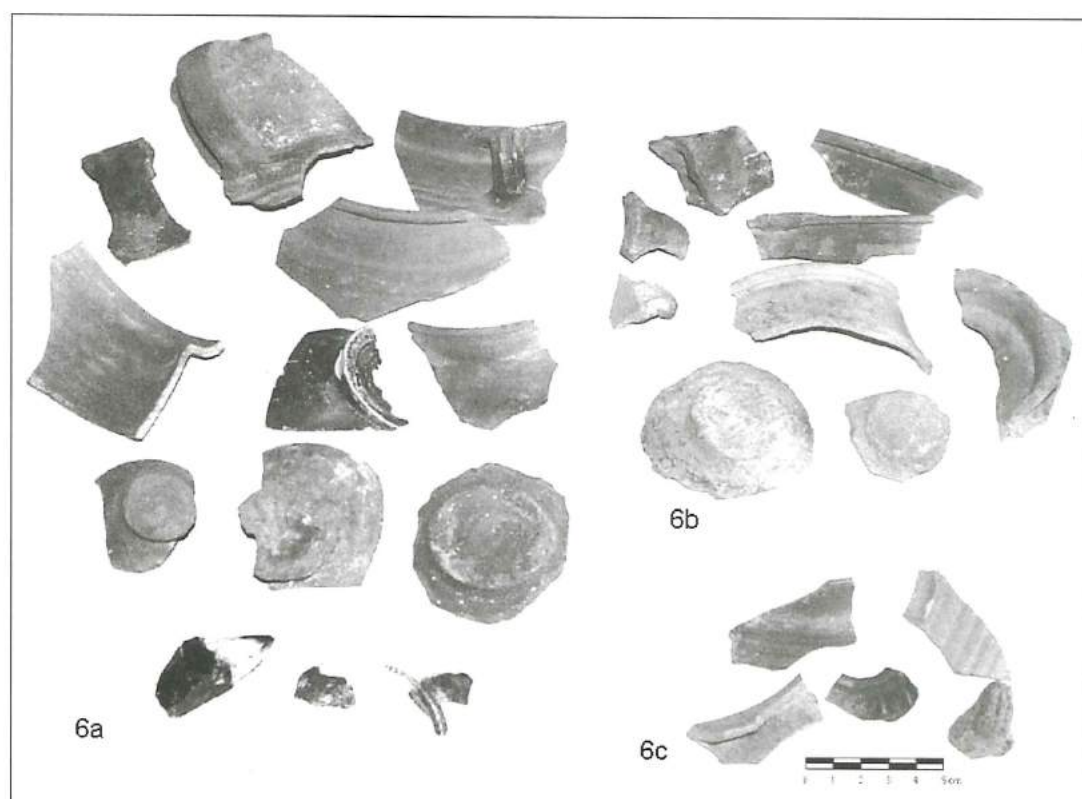
The Third/ Fourth Centuries (Fig. 6a-c)

The post-Temple phase: Pottery and glass sherds, marble, bits of red and yellow painted plaster, roof tile fragments, glass tesserae; lead piping, mammalian bones and lamp fragments make up the assemblages of this level throughout the excavated areas of the Cathedral, confirming the date and typology of the previous seasons. As is usual in ancient Gerasa, where little is homogeneously sealed off, Early Roman (and earlier) artefacts are found in third and fourth century contexts, the reverse as found in the underlying levels. Assemblages of the Late Roman contexts of the 1997 excavations identified loci associated with manufacturing activities, the foremost find having been the remains of a metal kiln (*supra*, Figs. 2 and 3 and text).

In the same context, and together with Late Roman pottery and glass fragments, were found fragments of a crudely made crucible with a long 'pouring rod' for hot flowing metal: the coarse ware is deeply burnt around the circumference of the twin closed 'channels' from the heat of the liquid metal which indicates repeated use. Little slag has been found which is, probably, rather due to the restricted area of excavation than representative of intensity of production. The repeated finds of overfired ceramics (*infra*) reinforce the Late Roman history of industrial reuse, mirroring on a modest scale the changes that took place at other Roman public sites of Gerasa. The glass fragment seen in Figure 6a may be linked with one or the other of these industrial activities as it has been deliberately flaked for use as a tool (Kehrberg 1995; see also tool in Fig. 7a).¹³

12. F. Braemer, 1989: Une fabrique (locale?) de céramique fine à Jerash au tournant de l'ère. Pp. 153-168 in Jerash Archaeological Project 1984-

1988, II. Special series Syria 66. Amman/ Paris: Department of Antiquities/ IFAPO.



6. Third-fourth century: a. JCP 97. F4; b. JCP 97. 325/6; c. JCP 97.326.

The Church (Fig. 7a-d)

The ceramic repertoire and the glass which are from loci of levels pertaining to 1) the construction of the church and 2) its second phase of repair falls neatly into two chronological and cultural groups of assemblages: the former is mostly made up of types still belonging to the Late Roman period of the third and fourth centuries (cf. Fig. 6 and Kehrberg, in Jäggi *et al.* 1997: Fig. 8, p.319), positing a *terminus post quem* which is supported by fourth - fifth century AD coins from the same contexts (cf. n.11). This season held no surprises with regard to ceramics pertaining to this period but assemblages from contexts of the second phase of the church complex (Fig. 7a-d) revealed interesting information. In Figure 7a and b are shown sherds which are thickly coated with a mixture of undercoat wall plaster covered in red (7a) and yellow

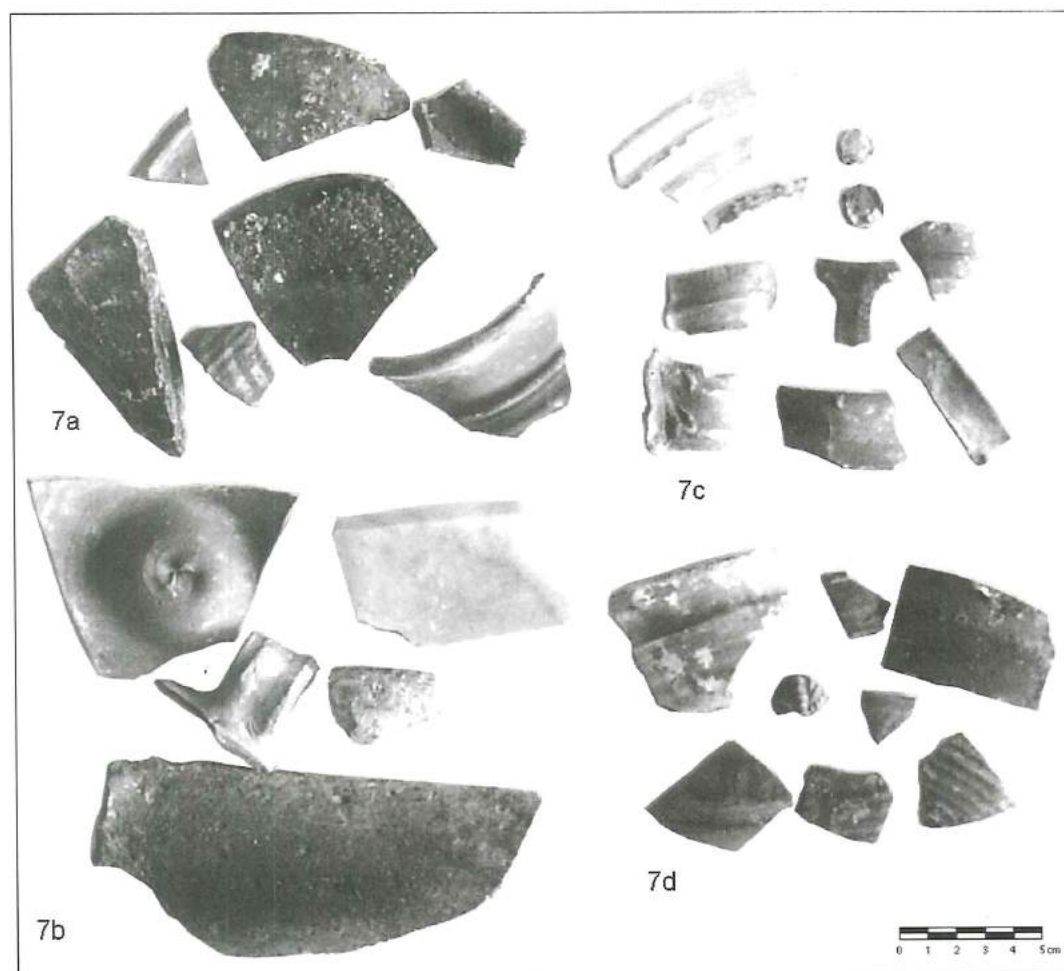
(7b) paint.

The contexts of the artefacts shown in Figure 7 are securely dated to the latter half of the sixth century AD by the bulk of the pottery. The glass (Fig. 7c), which includes other fragments of window panes and lamp fragments not shown here, is 'classical' for the Late Byzantine period and found at other church sites at Jarash. Small finds include typical medium -large white tesserae, roof tile fragments, recycled marble, iron nails, and of course coins fitting within the fourth to sixth century AD.

The two bowls, or large bowl fragments, containing the plaster base and paints clearly served as a palette and it is interesting to note that the actual bowl type belongs to the fourth century category – rejected ware of potters who occupied the site during the fourth century? With it were found simple tools, again made of unconventional material like the slate 'knife' in Figure 7a. In the

13. I. Kehrberg, 1995: Jerash/Gerasa, hippodrome. Second Report on pottery and glass sherd tools.

AJA 99/3 (Archaeology in Jordan): 525-528.



7. Late Byzantine period: a. JCP 97. 308/OK312; b. JCP 97. 311/312; c. JCP 97. 312; d. JCP 97. 318/319.

late Byzantine deposits, too, were found misfired (malformed) ceramic and slag which attest to a kiln nearby. The palettes seem, however, to be best associated with ancient restoration work on the church building (cf. *supra* p. 5). In all, the best stratified material comes from contexts of the sixth century, with a rich repertoire of artefacts accumulated due to building, reparation and occupation activities like those of potters in the same quarter.

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