

Decorative Elements on the Excavated Neolithic Pottery at 'Ayn Ghazāl

Around 5500 BC, the people of Jordan started to manufacture and use vessels made of clay for their daily life. However, as has already been reported, pottery sherds or clay pots were excavated in the earlier Aceramic levels at two major Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites in Jordan: 'Ayn Ghazāl (Rollefson and Simmons 1986: 148) and Baṣṭa (Nissen *et al.* 1987: 109).

As in other countries in the Near East, archaeological excavations at Neolithic Pottery sites in Jordan have yielded two major types of decorative elements on the pottery of that period: the painted and the incised, but the chronological sequence of these two traditions remains uncertain. At Munḥaṭa in Palestine, incised Yarmoukian pottery sherds were found in Stratum 2B2, considered to be earlier than Stratum 2B1, which yielded red painted sherds (Perrot 1968). During the Late Neolithic Culture (c. 5500-4000/3750 BC) several traditions have been identified: the Yarmoukian, Pottery Neolithic A, Ghrubba, Wādī Rabāḥ, and the Pottery Neolithic B (Kafafi 1987: 34-38; 1990: 149-163 Arabic). In addition, based on the excavations at the site of 'Ayn Ghazāl, subdivision within the Yarmoukian Culture is possible (Kafafi *et al.* 1990: 14). These facts should be discussed after the decorative elements visible on the excavated pottery sherds from the site of 'Ayn Ghazāl have been studied, because this site, added to the site of Wādī Shu'ayb, produced well stratified pottery sherds representing most, if not all, of the above mentioned cultural traditions. Although a parallel study of the pottery excavated in 1984 and 1989 at 'Ayn Ghazāl has already been published (Kafafi 1990), a comprehensive analytical study of the decorative elements combined with stratigraphic sequence is still badly needed, especially since the 1988 and 1989 seasons produced variants and a large quantity of several types of decorations. Other Pottery Neolithic sites in Jordan, e.g. 'Ayn ar-Rāḥūb (Kafafi 1989), Abū Thawwāb (Kafafi 1988), Dhūrā' (Bennett 1980) and Khirbat adh-Dhariḥ (Bossut *et al.* 1988) yielded either a single or two occupational phases.

In 1984, during the third season of excavations at

'Ayn Ghazāl, an assemblage of pottery sherds was encountered that was confined to undisturbed contexts in the South and Central Fields (Rollefson and Simmons 1985: 12, 18-19). The same kind of pottery continued to be excavated during the following seasons and was assigned to the so-called Yarmoukian Culture. In addition to the Neolithic pottery, Early Bronze Age, Roman, Byzantine, and Umayyad pottery collections were retrieved either at the site itself or in the vicinity (Simmons and Kafafi 1988).

Three stratigraphic architectural subphases were recognized within the Yarmoukian levels at 'Ayn Ghazāl. The first, which may represent the latest phase of the Yarmoukian Culture, is represented by what could be a large dwelling-pit dug into the earliest Yarmoukian levels in the South Field (Rollefson and Simmons 1985). The second phase is represented by a rectangular house consisting of either two rooms or a room and a courtyard. The house was built of boulders directly over the PPNC buildings. An apsidal structure excavated in the Central Field may be contemporary with this building. The reuse of the large wall and pits dug into the floor of a ramada-like structure (Sq. 3677) may represent the third and earliest phase of the Yarmoukian Culture at 'Ayn Ghazāl. The pottery sherds excavated in the earliest phase are somehow different from those of the other two phases. Below we present a discussion of all the decorative elements recognized on the pottery assemblages uncovered in strata belonging to those three phases.

Decorative Elements

Three decorative elements – incised, punctated, and painted motives – were identifiable on the pottery assemblages excavated in 1984 and 1985 at 'Ayn Ghazāl, as has already been reported (Kafafi 1990: 15-19). However, as mentioned above, more decorative elements were recognized when the pottery assemblages excavated in 1988 and 1989 were studied (Kafafi *et al.* 1990: 16). This presentation aims at discussing in more detail the previously studied collections and adding more in-

formation derived from the unpublished assemblages. Also included is a study of the decorated pottery sherds in combination with their stratigraphic sequence.

Painted Decoration

Based on J. Perrot's study of the Munḥaṭa Neolithic pottery, it was thought that the incised ware recovered from Stratum 2B2 is earlier than the painted ware encountered in Stratum 2B1 (Perrot 1968: col. 415). This view should be restricted to Munḥaṭa only and not other Pottery Neolithic sites in Bilād ash-Shām, based on the results of the recent excavations at the sites of 'Ayn Ghazāl and Wādī Shu'ayb in Jordan, where well-stratified pottery assemblages were found. However, we agree with Perrot that two decorative traditions should be separated. This is because incised pottery collections not accompanied by the so-called Pottery Neolithic A or B traditions were found at several sites in Jordan, among them 'Ayn ar-Rāḥūb (Kafafi 1989: 5) and Abū Thawwāb (Kafafi 1988: 455). Other sites such as Dhrā' (Bennett 1980) and Khirbat adh-Dhariḥ (Bossut *et al.* 1988) produced painted pottery without having any incised ware.

During the excavations of 'Ayn Ghazāl, it was noticed that the painted pottery came from levels earlier than the levels that produced incised decorations. This was recognized in both the Central and the South Fields.

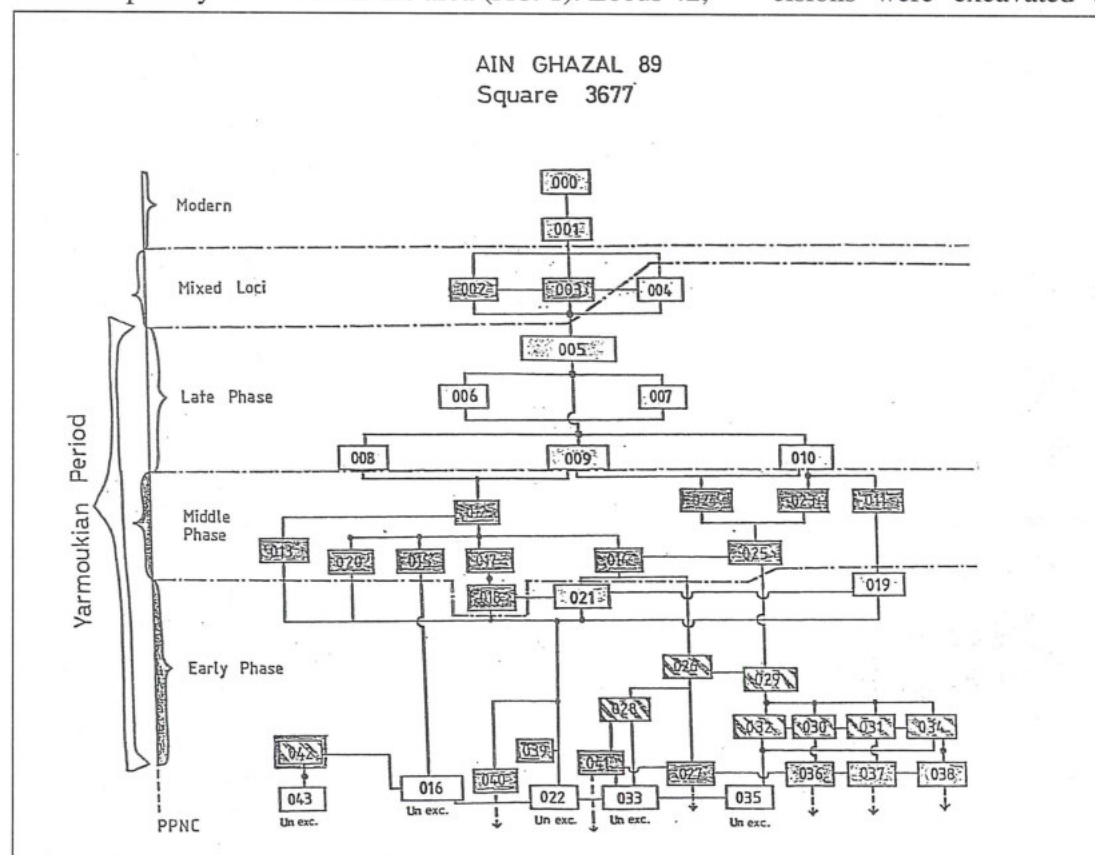
Square 3677 in the Central Field yielded the best stratified pottery collection in the area (FIG. 1). Locus 42,

a pit fill, produced dark red pottery sherds. The pit (locus 43) in which the pottery was found is dug into PPNC levels. In the same square, however, red painted pottery was encountered in the upper levels.

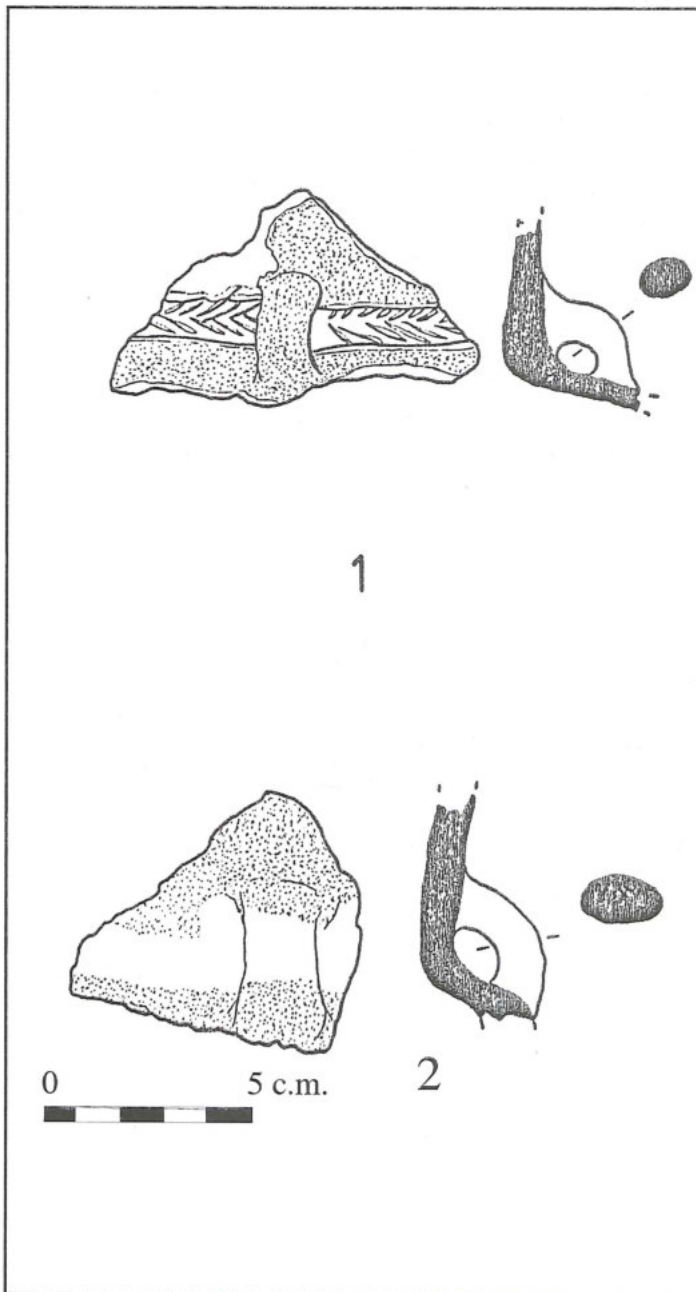
In the South Field, Square 4554, very crude red painted sherds were excavated in Locus 18, a floor of a house. Moreover, red painted pottery was also found in the same field in levels considered to represent the earliest phase of the Pottery Neolithic Culture at 'Ayn Ghazāl. This does not mean that no painted pottery was found in levels that produced incised ware.

Generally speaking, three major types of painted decorations are attested on the Neolithic pottery at 'Ayn Ghazāl. The earliest (FIG. 2:2) is represented by dark red painted bands on a creamy slip. This type was excavated at the sites of Jericho PNA (Ben-Dor 1936: PL. 31; Kenyon and Holland 1982: FIGS. 1-2; 1983: FIGS. 2,4; 5,8) and Tall Abū Zuraiq Hazorea (Anati *et al.* 1973: PLS. 28-29) in Palestine, and Wādī Shu'ayb (Simmons *et al.* 1989: 33, FIG. 3), Dhrā' (Bennett 1980: FIGS. 7-8), and Khirbat adh-Dhariḥ (Bossut *et al.* 1988: FIG. 3) in Jordan. Red painted sherds on a red slip were also excavated. In both cases, the ware is very crude and coarse.

The second type is formed with red painted fields having zigzags, triangles, and bands delineated with either herring bone incisions or only parallel incised lines (FIG. 3). Similar painted sherds accompanied with incisions were excavated at Sha'ar HaGolan (Stekelis



1. Stratigraphic analysis of Square 3677 at 'Ayn Ghazāl.



2. 1. Incised and red painted decoration; 2. red paint on a creamy slip.

1950-1951: PL. 1:9), Munḥaṭa 2B2 and 2B1 (Perrot 1968: FIG. 845), Abū Thawwāb (Kafafi 1988: FIGS. 2-4), 'Ayn Ghazāl (Rollefson and Simmons 1986: FIG. 3), Jericho VIII (Ben-Dor 1936; Droop 1935), Teleilat Batashi IVa-III (Kaplan 1958), and Wādī Rabāḥ/Neolithic Levels (Kaplan 1958b: FIG. 4:3).

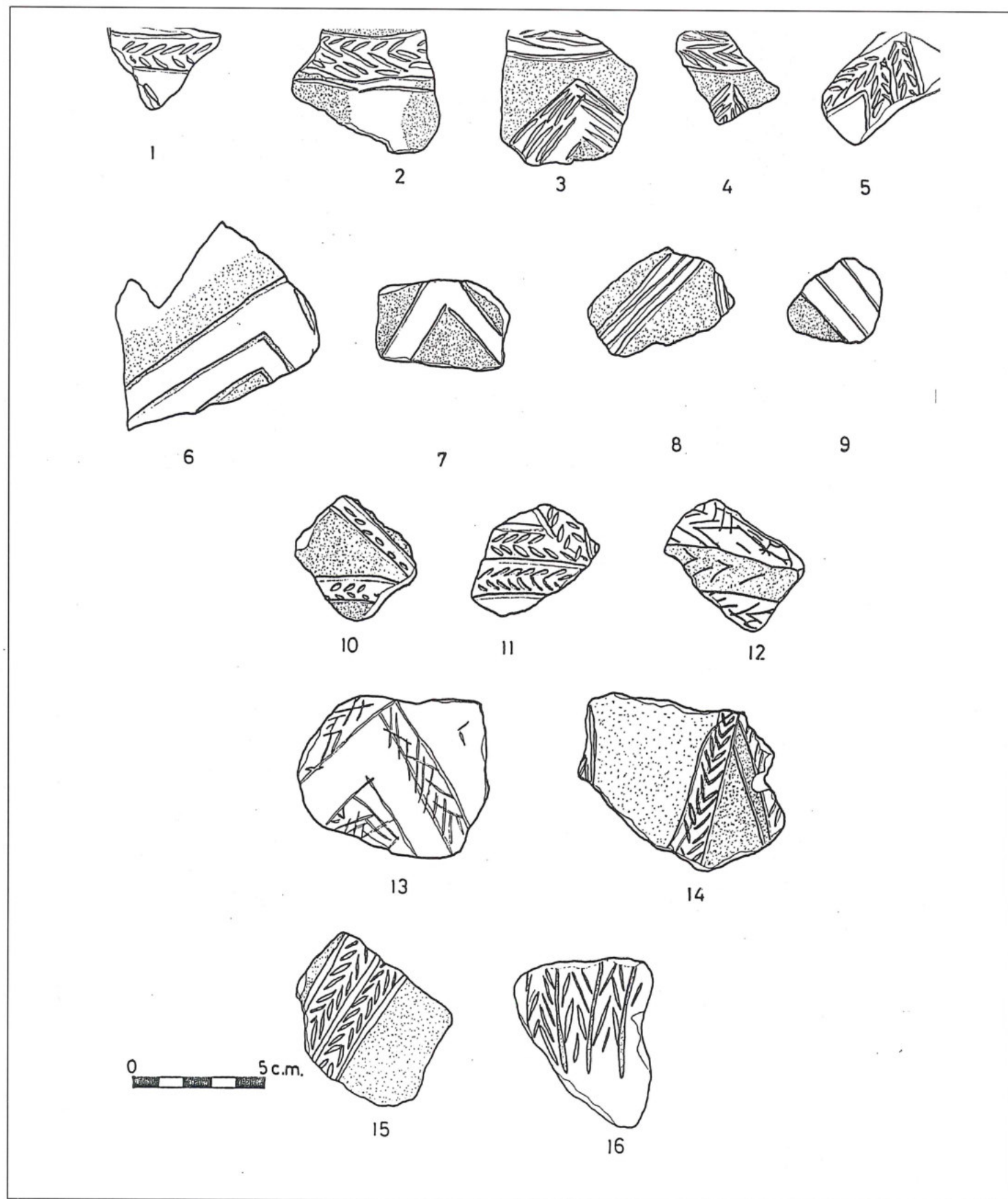
The third type consists of red painted parallel lines on a very highly burnished fine ware (FIG. 4: 5-8). Only very few sherds of this type were found in the upper stratigraphic levels and ought to be dated to a later period than the first type. No parallels for the very highly burnished fire ware are known in Jordan, thus, they may be imports.

Incised Decoration

The incised decorations were probably made with a sharp instrument while the clay was leather hard. Some of the incised motives were irregular while others were very regular and neat. This suggests that the former were hand-made and the latter were perhaps rolled.

The incised motives recorded from 'Ayn Ghazāl are typical of the so-called Yarmoukian Culture and can be dated to a period ranging between c. 5500 and 4500 BC. After studying the published incised collections from Bilād ash-Shām and Mesopotamia, we may suggest that in general six types of incised decoration are present (FIG. 5):

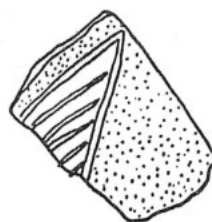
1. A horizontal line of incised chevrons just under the rims of cups, jars, and bowls (FIG. 5:1). This type may be assigned to the latest phase of the Neolithic Pottery period. It has the characteristic that the herring-bone incisions are not delineated by two parallel lines. This kind of decoration was attested at Jericho PNB (Kenyon and Holland 1982: FIG. 33:7), Teleilat Batashi III (Kaplan 1958: PL. 10: 11, 14), 'Ayn Al-Jarba (Kaplan 1969: FIG. 8: 2), and was dominant at Byblos E. N. R. (Dunand 1973: FIGS. 156-158). A similar type was also noticed at Hassuna II-VI in Mesopotamia (Lloyd and Safar 1945: FIGS. 4:7; 10).
2. Horizontal incised chevrons between two parallel lines (FIG. 5:2). This is the most dominant decorative element related to the Yarmoukian Culture. Located just below the rim of the vessel, it was used to decorate cups and bowls. It was also dominant at the sites of Sha'ar HaGolan (Stekelis 1972: PLS. 40-44), Munḥaṭa 2B2 (Perrot 1968: FIG. 845), Abū Thawwāb (Kafafi 1988: FIG. 2); and existed at Munḥaṭa 2B1 (Perrot 1968: FIG. 845), 'Ayn Ghazāl (Rollefson and Simmons 1986: FIGS. 3-4; Rollefson *et al.* 1990: 6-4), 'Ayn ar-Rāḥūb (Kafafi 1989: FIG. 5), Jericho PNA (Kenyon and Holland 1982: FIG. 25), Jericho PNB /VIII (Kenyon and Holland 1982: FIGS. 25, 32; Ben-Dor 1936: PL. 33; Droop 1935: PL. 44: 1-3), Megiddo XX (Loud 1948: PL. 2. 40-42), Teleilat Batashi IVa-III (Kaplan 1958a: PL. 9. 13), Wādī Rabāḥ/Neolithic (Kaplan 1958b: FIG. 4:3), Byblos/Néolithique Ancien (Dunand 1973: FIGS. 17, 18) and at Ṭabbat al-Ḥammām (Hole 1959: FIG. 2: 27-29).
3. This type is represented by many lines of incised chevrons in a wavy pattern with no parallel incised lines (FIG. 5:3). This decorative element was found on pottery vessels excavated at Munḥaṭa 2A (Perrot 1968: FIG. 846), Jericho VIII (Ben-Dor 1936: PL. 33), Teleilat Batashi III (Kaplan 1958a: PLS. 10. 17. 11. 12), Wādī Rabāḥ Phase (Kaplan 1958b: FIG. 6:2), 'Ayn al-Jarba (Kaplan 1969: FIG. 8:3), Hassuna II-VI (Lloyd and Safar 1945: FIG. 13), and it was dom-



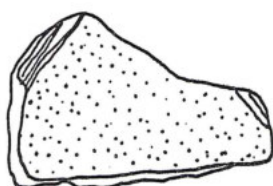
3. Several types of incised and painted decorations.



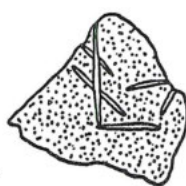
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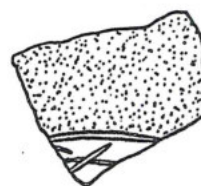
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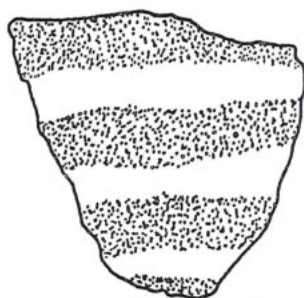
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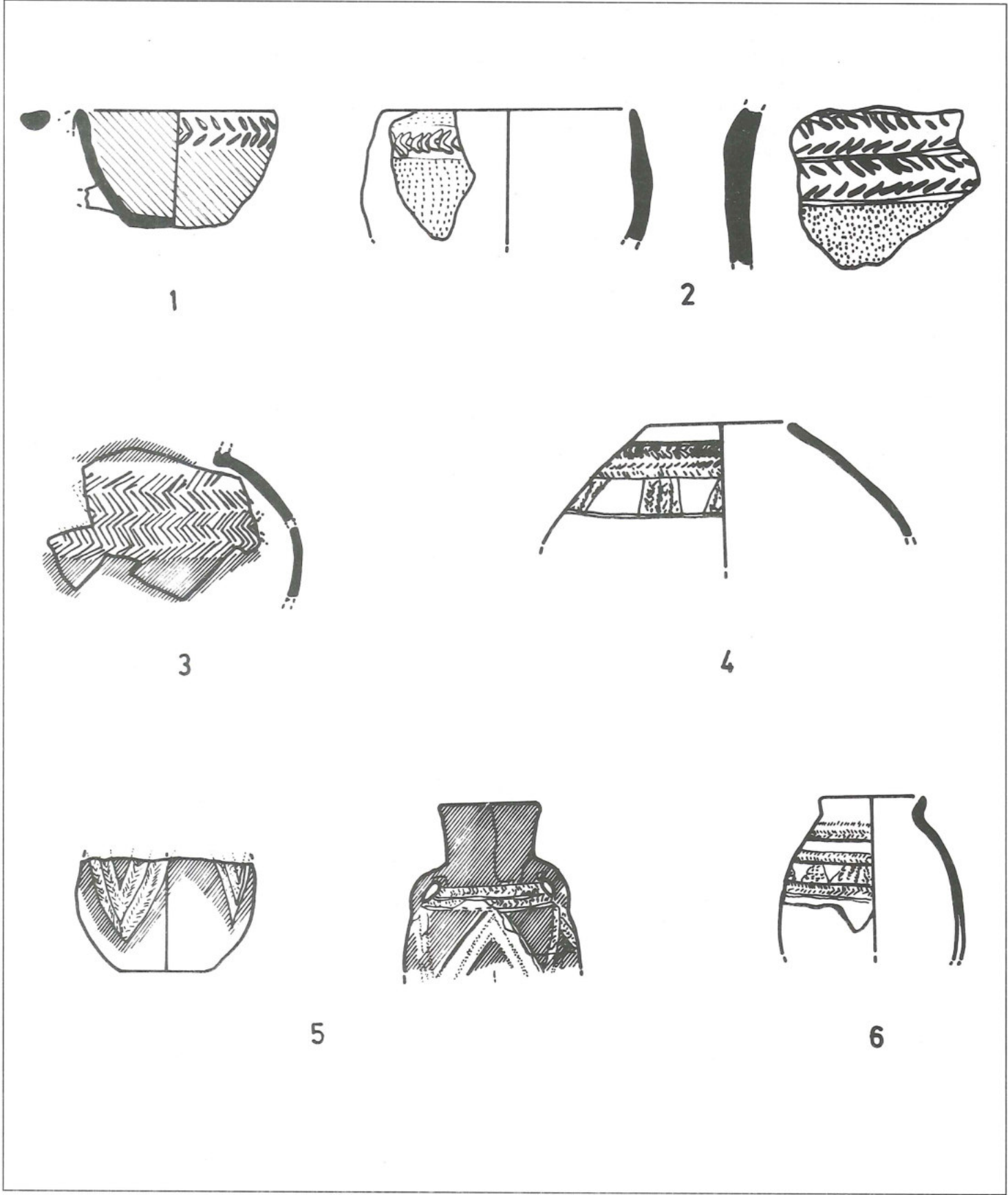


8

0 5 c.m.

 A scale bar with a black and white alternating pattern, marked with '0' at the left end and '5 c.m.' at the right end.

4. 1-5. Several types of red painted and incised decorations; 6-8. red painted decorations.



5. Types of incised decorations from the Levant (after H. Wada).

- inant at Byblos/E. N. R. (Dunand 1973: FIG. 158).
4. Type four (FIG. 5:4) is characterized by having several incised horizontal lines connected with other vertical ones, leaving undecorated spaces on the shoulders of the vessels, which are usually jars. This kind of decoration was attested only at Byblos/Néolithique Ancien (Dunand 1973: 56 FIG. 25. 26954).
 5. This type is made of either triangular or zig-zag shaped incised fields covering most of the body of the vessel (FIG. 5:5). This element was found on the decorated small jars at Sha'ar HaGolan (Stekelis 1972: PLS. 41-43), Munḥaṭa 2B2 (Perrot 1968: FIG. 845), Munḥaṭa 2B1 (Perrot 1966: FIG. 6.2), Abū Thawwāb (Kafafi 1988: FIG. 3.4), 'Ayn Ghazāl (Rollefson *et al.* 1990: FIG. 6.5), Jericho VIII (Ben-Dor 1936: PL. 33:15), Megiddo XX (Loud 1948: PL. 2.42), Teleilat Batashi IVa-III (Kaplan 1958a: PL. 9.12), and Wādī Rabāḥ/Neolithic Phase (Kaplan 1958b).
 6. The last type (FIG. 5:6) is a combination of types 2 and 5. This decorative element was used to decorate jars. Similar types were excavated at Jericho PNA (Kenyon and Holland 1982:) and at Byblos Néolithique Ancien (Dunand 1973: 50, h FIG. 18. 26274).

Because those six decorative styles belong to a long time span (c. 5500-4000/3750 BC) the possibility of arranging the styles in a chronological order will be based on three factors:

1. A detailed study of the incised decorations from well stratified contexts, e.g. 'Ayn Ghazāl. This is presented below.
2. Clusters of C14 dates, which are still mostly lacking from sites that produced incised wares. They should be obtained for the well stratified incised ware collections, such as those from 'Ayn Ghazāl and Wādī Shu'ayb, in addition to the collections from single occupation sites, e.g. 'Ayn ar-Rāḥūb (Muheisen *et al.* 1988: 498).
3. A parallel study between all the excavated and well stratified incised ware assemblages. This is yet to be done.

To answer the first condition, a detailed study of the incised decorations from the site of 'Ayn Ghazāl was done. The incised patterns recorded are as follows (FIGS. 2:1; 3:1-16; 4:1-2, 4-5):

1. One line of incised chevrons delineated by two parallel lines. This kind of decorations is mostly used to decorate small vessels, especially cups, bowls, and small jars.
2. Irregular incisions between two parallel lines.
3. Two rows of incised patterns on decorated necks of jars. One row is situated just below the rim and the other on the attachment area connecting the neck with

the body. The lowest line usually goes through the opening of the handle(s).

4. Two or more rows of incised chevrons between two parallel lines.
5. Triangular-shaped decorative motives made of incised lines of herring-bone incisions.
6. Irregular and regular incised patterns or only lines without the herring-bone incisions accompanied with red painted decorations.

In order to arrange those incised decorative elements, we tried to correlate them with stratigraphic contexts. The best examples were taken from the Central Field, Square 3677 and the South Field Squares 4654 and 4655 at 'Ayn Ghazāl. Based on the study of the stratigraphy of Square 3677, we recognized three different Yarmoukian Phases: Early, Middle, and Late (FIG. 1). The excavated loci in Square 3677 that belong to the Early Phase are 019, 021, 026, and 027-045; to the Middle Phase are 011, 012, 013, 014, 015, 017, 020, 023, 024 and 025; and those belonging to the Late Phase are 004-010. In addition, Loci 002-003 are mixed and 000-001 are modern.

Locus 043 is a pit and 042 is the excavated fill of the pit. They represent the earliest Neolithic Pottery loci from the Square. Only red or dark red painted pottery sherds were encountered in this fill and no incised ware was recovered. The first appearance of the incised decorations in the square was in Locus 035. The incised motives on the sherds from this locus consisted either of incised chevrons or more than one incised panel of a zig-zag shape. In both cases the incisions were accompanied by red painted decorations. However, the excavated incised sherds from the Early Phase were few in number compared with those from the other two phases.

The decorative incised elements of the Middle Phase were more developed than those from the Early Phase. A large quantity of incised sherds were excavated in the loci belonging to this phase in Square 3677, but they were mostly concentrated in Loci 01, a pit fill, 012, a pebbly layer, 014, a mudfloor, and 015, a pitfill.

The incised decorative elements belonging to the Middle Phase are very regular and variant. They consist, sometimes, of one row of a herring-bone incised pattern on the rim of a jar accompanied with red painted fields on the shoulder. In a few cases, the triangular painted fields are delineated by a row of irregular incised patterns. Thus, we may conclude that the incised decorative elements of the Middle Phase are mostly accompanied with red or brown painted designs, which are either parallel or have triangular and zig-zag shapes.

The Late Phase is represented by the pottery excavated either in pit fills (Loci 006, 008, and 010) or pebbly layers (Loci 004, 005, and 009). New decorative elements are recognizable in this phase. These are very high red burnishing on very fine ware, criss-cross or hatched

incisions, and several types of incisions accompanied with red painted motives thought to have developed from the Middle Phase. Among these incised forms are zig-zag patterns made of two parallel lines with no incisions in between and accompanied by red painted motives. Also horizontal incised panels over a triangle formed by incised lines separating triangular red painted fields are found.

To conclude, several types of incised patterns are recognizable on the excavated Neolithic pottery assemblages at 'Ayn Ghazāl. The patterns can be arranged in a chronological order based on the stratigraphic sequence, although local development is noticed from one phase to another.

Applied Decoration

This kind of decoration was first noticed in knob handles (FIG. 6:2). Such a decorative element, if it is so, is common at most of the Pottery Neolithic sites. Nevertheless, new styles of applications were noted from the Late Yarmoukian Phase at 'Ayn Ghazāl. One style consists of two elongated knob handles with a space in between, attached to the middle of the body of a large jar. This could be functional, meaning that the space was left for holding a piece of rope to help in carrying the jar.

The other style consists of two applied curved motives that were added near the lower attachment of the loop-handle on the neck of a jar (FIG. 6:1). This style, to our knowledge, is recorded for the first time from the Neolithic Culture in Jordan, though it was found before at 'Ayn al-Jarba in Palestine (Kaplan 1969: FIG. 7). Parallels were also excavated at the site of Sotto in Iraq (Badr 1989: 176 - 177, FIGS. 62 - 63).

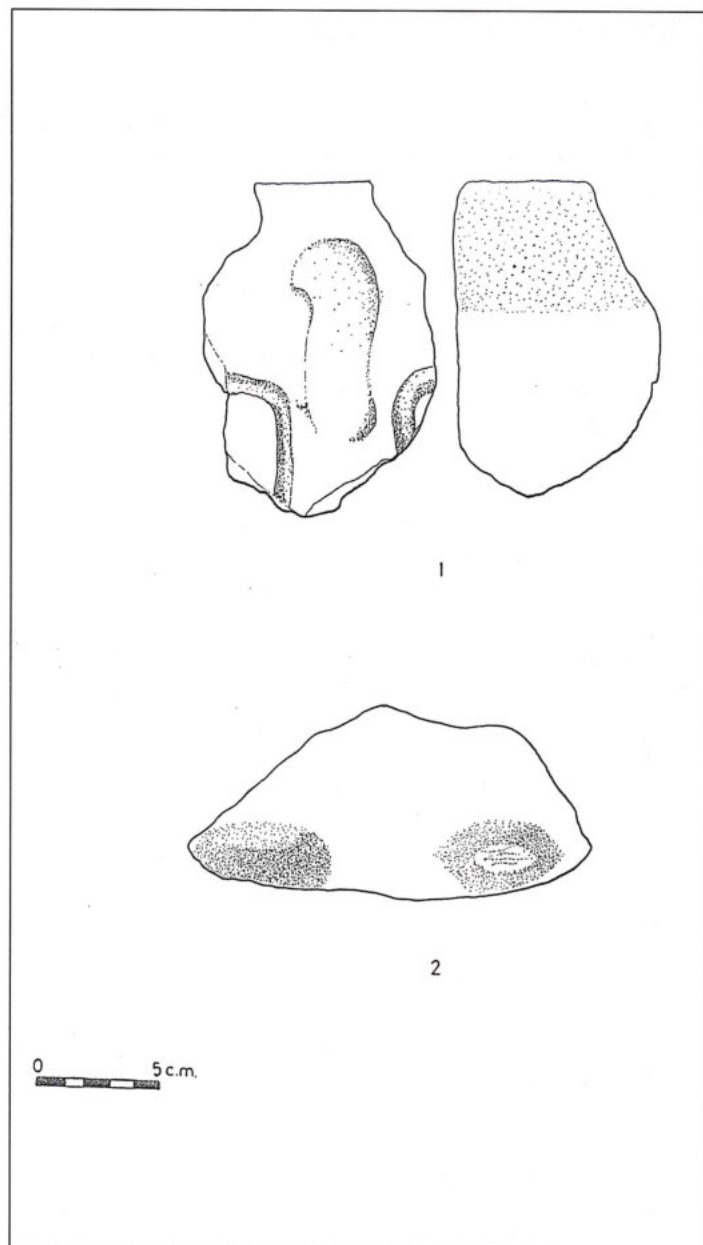
Such applied decorative elements, based on the stratigraphic sequence of the site of 'Ayn Ghazāl, most probably belong to the latest phase of the Yarmoukian Culture.

Punctate Decoration

Punctuate designs were found on a few sherds belonging either to jars or to a spoon. In the first case, the punctate decoration was made in rows on the body of the jar, while in the second, two punctations were made near the handle of the spoon and the saucer. The punctations were created by a very pointed tool while the clay was leather hard. This rare decorative element was also recognized at the site of Jabal Abū Thawwāb (Kafafi 1986: 62).

Burnishing

As a result of the study of the excavated pottery assemblages at 'Ayn Ghazāl, it was noticed that burnished ware made its first appearance during the Middle Phase, and became dominant during the Late Phase. A small collection of very highly burnished red ware was ex-



6. Applied decorations.

cavated in Loci 009 and 005 in Square 3677 in the Central Field. The burnished sherds were thin, hard, and well fired. Due to the small quantity of sherds in this collection, they may have been imported. The burnished sherds were decorated by a very glossy red paint and several styles of incisions, such as herring-bone, zig-zags, and criss-crosses.

To sum up, based on the results from the excavated areas at 'Ayn Ghazāl and their stratigraphy, the painted decorations represent the earliest decorative motives at the site. It is probable that future excavations will change this conclusion. Also, it is very clear now that the incised decorations accompanied by red paint were the most common decorative style during the Middle and Late

Phase of the Yarmoukian Culture at the site.

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