

Luisa Goldammer, M.A.  
Bergische Universität Wuppertal  
Biblich-Archäologisches Institut  
Rainer-Gruenter-Straße 21  
D-42097 Wuppertal, Germany

Luisa Goldammer

## Trade and Cultural Exchange – Late Bronze Age Cypriote Import Ware from Tall Zar‘ā

### Introduction

This paper is focused on Late Bronze Age Cypriote Import Ware from Tall Zar‘ā in north-western Jordan. The archaeological project started with a survey in August 2001 directed by Prof. Dr. Dr. Dr. h.c. D. Vieweger of the Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal. Since 2004 the excavations are conducted by the cooperative project of the Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal and the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology under the direction of Prof. D. Vieweger and Dr. J. Häser. Because of the preparation of the final report excavations ceased in 2011. Volume I of the final report was published in the beginning of 2017: [http://www.tallziraa.de/Endpublikation//1\\_472.html](http://www.tallziraa.de/Endpublikation//1_472.html)

The settlement hill lies in the Wādī al-‘Arab and has been inhabited over 5000 years (Vieweger and Häser 2017: 2). The *wadi* played an important geopolitical role between the Yarmūk Valley in the north and the Wādī Ziqlāb in the south. Because of their steepness and narrowness both could not work as major trade routes, the Wādī al-‘Arab instead served as an about 30km long trade route leading to the Irbid-ar-Ramthā basin, which lies 560m above

sea level. Thus, it connects the Jordan Valley including the Mediterranean coast via the Marj Ibn ‘Amir (Jezreel Valley), Bisan and the Jordanian Highland, and worked as a link between Egypt in the south and the Syrian-Mesopotamian region in the north. Therefore, the settlement is not only part of the trading routes from the Mediterranean coast with direct routes to Damascus in the north, Baghdad in the east and ‘Ammān in the south, but also part of an important trade route between the south and the north in general (Aharoni 1979: 45-54; Astour 1995: 1415; Dorsey 1991: 95-97).

Tall Zar‘ā itself is distinguished by an artesian spring, fertile soil, and the highness of the hill provided protection. These very suitable conditions explain the long-lasting settlement history and the importance in the trade network of the region. During the Late Bronze Age, an extensive trade network arose and goods were traded through the whole Mediterranean region. The famous Late Bronze Age shipwrecks of Uluburun and Cape Gelidonya provide insight into the extensive international trade network during that period (for an overview see Yalcin *et al.* 2005; Bass 1967). In this context,

Cypriote pottery played an important role. It has been distributed to Italy, Sicily and Sardinia, the region of the Black Sea, Egypt, but also to the Southern and Northern Levant (Vagnetti 2001). Especially during the Late Bronze Age, the Levant was flooded with Cypriote imports. Although the vessels can be found in both funeral and non-funeral contexts, the majority of Cypriote imported wares stem from settlement contexts like private houses, public buildings and sanctuaries (Bergoffen 1991: 64-71).

One special Cypriote import were the White Slip Wares (Amiran 1969: 172). According to their decoration scheme they can be divided into three groups: Proto White Slip Ware, White Slip I Ware and White Slip II Ware. They appear in the Middle Bronze Age II B-C to Late Bronze Age IIB.

#### *White Slip Ware*

The vessel types of White Slip Ware consist of jugs and jars, but mainly of bowls. All vessels are handmade with extremely thin walls and were fired at high temperatures that could exceed 1080°C (Karageorghis 2001: 9-11). The dominant shape is a globular hemispherical bowl with the characteristic horizontal wishbone handle, the so-called milk-bowl. The name derives from the open form, which evokes an association of modern milk pans. Whilst earlier publications still use that name, younger ones prefer using the more neutral term hemispherical bowls. Despite of its shape and the involved assumption the bowls were used for cooking milk, it is not convincing that they functioned as cooking pots. It seems more reasonable that they were used as tableware keeping and serving food and beverages. Scientific investigations regarding the use of the vessels, for example which foods they contained, have not been conducted yet.

The earliest examples can be found in the Proto White Slip Ware. The bowls are decorated with a wavy-line pattern at the rim and a net pattern on the body. Between the lines are

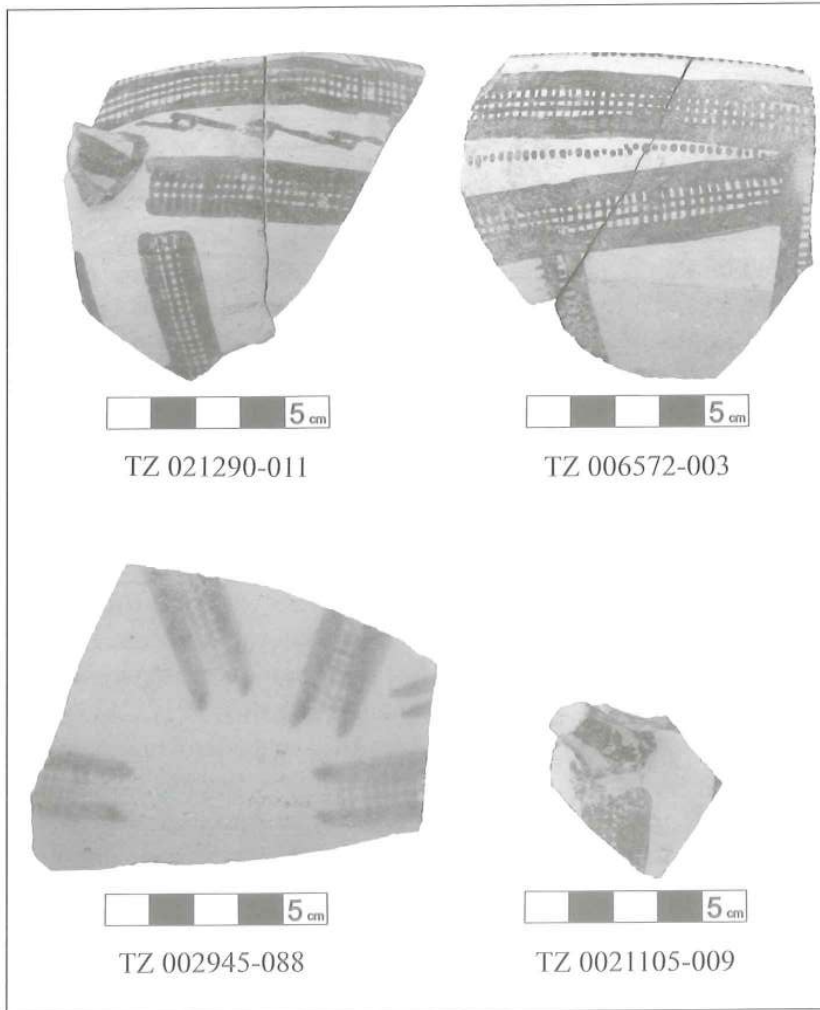
small circles and diamond-shaped grids, sometimes also small triangles. The handle is already wishbone-shaped.

The decoration of White Slip I bowls consists of several horizontal or vertical lines, some of them are framed by small dots. The rim is characterized by a small zigzag pattern. Below the rim appears a horizontal line with small circles. The handle is wishbone-shaped and decorated with short lines. The decoration of White Slip II Ware seems more similar to the one of Proto White Slip and is less slenderly than the decoration of White Slip I. The rim is decorated with small lines. The decoration also consists of horizontal and verticals lines, the so-called ladder pattern. Pearl bands and geometric patterns can be arranged between the ladder pattern. The characteristic wishbone handle is decorated with several thick and thin lines. The majority of hemispherical bowls found in the Northern and Southern Levant belongs to White Slip II Ware (Amiran 1969: 172).

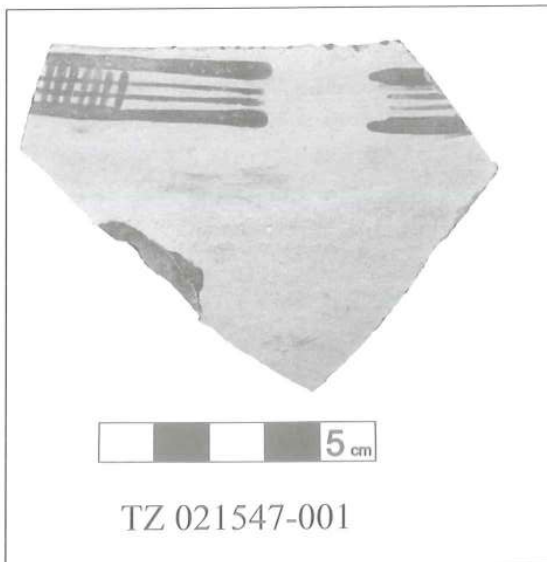
#### *The White Slip II Ware from Tall Zar 'ā*

During the campaigns carried out between 2003 and 2011, 64 sherds of White Slip II Ware have been found (FIGS. 1 and 2). Proto White Slip or White Slip I Ware have not been identified yet. The sherds stem from Area I, which was inhabited from the Early Bronze Age to the Ottoman Period. The sherds came to light in strata 14 to 10, which date from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age II C. The Late Bronze Age stratum 14 shows several houses of different sizes, remains of a casemate city wall, which fortified the northwestern part of the settlement, a tower with a sanctuary in the west and a temple in the north. Radiocarbon results date the destruction of the casemate wall before 1500BC (Vieweger and Häser 2017: 249-250).

Three courtyard houses have been identified so far. Before 1500BC a landslide, perhaps caused by an earthquake, destroyed huge parts of the settlement. Only the northern part in the excavated Area I was not affected. After the



1. Examples of White Slip II Ware from Tall Zar'ā.



2. Example of feasible imitation of White Slip II Ware from Tall Zar'ā.

catastrophe, the inhabitants reconstructed the damaged hill side with more than seven layers of soil and stones elaborately. The White Slip II Ware was found in the so-called complex O and in the courtyard-houses G and P.

It is noteworthy, that all sherds have been found in private buildings. Because of the decoration the pottery can be identified easily as White Slip II Ware. Due to the different soils where the pottery has been deposited, the decoration of the sherds are differently preserved so that the slip is sometimes faded and has a white to greyish colour. The painted decoration is reddish-brown to black. The diameter of the opening of the bowls is 16 to 18cm on average. The wall thickness is 0,3 to 0,5cm. The rim tapers upwards to 0,2cm. The clay is fine

with small particles of limestone, calcite and quartz and has a greyish-brown colour. Unfortunately, no intact bowls were excavated at Tall Zar‘ā, but several joining sherds, rim and body sherds as well as two bottom sherds and ten handles are preserved. The exact number of vessels cannot be determined, counting the handles there must be at least ten White Slip II Ware vessels. Although the question of imitation is generally still under discussion, five of the found sherds are probably imitations (TZ 003915-008, TZ 004035-017, TZ 004590-001, TZ 006749-009, TZ 21547-001), because they differ significantly from the ones mentioned above. The clay has a reddish colour, also with small particles of limestone, calcite and quartz. The painted decoration is light brown, the slip is faded. The diameter of the rim sherds with 16 cm (TZ 004590-001) and 18cm (TZ 021547-001) is comparable with the already mentioned ones above. Especially because of the different colour of the clay and the painted decoration these five sherds are perhaps imitations. For clarification further investigations like pottery analyses are necessary. Imitations of Cypriote White Slip II Ware were also found in ancient Ugarit, modern Ras Shamra, in Tomb 4253 (after Courtois 1969: fig. 6 D). If they were produced from local clay is still under discussion (Yon 2001: 118-120; Artzy *et al.* 1981: 35-47). Several pottery workshops have been identified on Cyprus. Clay analyses correspond with clay deposits in the Troodos Mountains in Cyprus. One example is a Late Bronze Age site, which lies in Moutti tou Ayiou Serkou near the village Sanidha at the foot of the Troodos Mountains. Unfortunately, no remains of kilns have been found, but extensive manufacturing waste, misfirings and pottery sherds may indicate a manufacturing site (Todd and Pilides 2001). There are probably also manufacturing sites at Kalavassos, Enkomi and Amathous. But for a definite clarification more analyses are necessary (van der Does 2012: 29; Christou 1992: 813-815, 1993: 735-738).

### **Tall Zar‘ā and its Role in the Trading Network**

In general, the Late Bronze Age at Tall Zar‘ā is distinguished by exceptional finds, which show the wealth of the city on one hand, and its involvement in the trading network on the other hand. The sherds of White Slip II Ware represent examples of these trading connections to the Mediterranean region. Other examples are two scarabs, one with the name of the Hyksos ruler Apophis (1590-1550BC), the other of Amenophis III, glazed faience cylinder seals (14th - 13th BC) in the so-called Common Style of Mitanni glyptic, and imported Egyptian faience wares (Vieweger and Häser 2008: 512; Häser *et al.* 2016).

The majority of cities with Late Bronze Age imported pottery are known from cuneiform inscriptions, like the Ugaritic cuneiform tablets or the Amarna tablets (Dietrich *et al.* 2013; Moran 1992). According to the written sources the cities were connected by trading links which is also confirmed by archaeological evidence. Concerning the pottery distribution one can see a focus on coastal cities and ports. Occasionally there are cities in the inland too, but those are usually connected with the coastal cities via trading routes (Cline 1994, 91-93 map 4). In these cities, the pottery has been found both in private and public-religious contexts, but especially in private graves. While the White Slip finds occurred mainly in habitation contexts, other Cypriote imports, for example Bichrome Ware, were most common in funeral contexts (Gittlen 1984: 510-512; Gittlen 1981: 52). The hemispherical bowls can be identified as the most popular pottery type of White Slip II Ware, whereas vessels like jars or jugs are rare (Amiran 1969: 172). However, Cypriote imports can not only be found at Tall Zar‘ā, but also at several settlement hills in the Jordan Valley, which – like Tall Zar‘ā – lay at a trading route connecting the Jordan Valley with the Jordanian Highland, as well as south of another route starting at the Mediterranean coast and

passing the Marj Ibn 'Āmir (Jezreel Valley), and Bisan, e.g. Tall Abū al-Kharaz, Tall Dayr 'Alla, Pella and Katarit as-Samrā. Petrographic analyses have shown that the pottery found at Tall Abū al-Kharaz originated from the Troodos mountains in Cyprus (Amiran 1969: 172; Fischer 2001; Fischer 2006: 283-285) Furthermore, Cypriote imports were found in settlements farther to the west of Tall Zar'ā, e.g. in Tall al-'Ajjul, Bisan, Tall al-Mutasallim, Tall Qamūn, Tall 'Akka, Tall Abu Ḥawwam and Tall al-Qudah. Here again the sherds have been found in private contexts, just parts of White Slip II Ware from Tall al-Qudah stem from a temple context (Amiran 1969: 172; Bergoffen 2001; Artzy 2001; Gittlen 1981; Hesse 2008: 38-41. 65. 112. 144-146. 159-161. 201-203. 208-210).

### Summary

This brief overview of White Slip II Ware from Tall Zar'ā can be summarized as follows. Firstly, the amount of pottery sherds of this ware excavated on Tall Zar'ā is relatively high. Due to the position of the settlement hill in the Wādī al-'Arab, its fertile soil and guaranteed water supply by the artesian spring, the strong fortification and massive architecture, as well as the high amount of Cypriote imports, Tall Zar'ā seems to be a satellite city or even a city state itself in the Late Bronze Age. Together with the exceptional finds mentioned above, the settlement hill seems to be part of the international trade network during that period.

Secondly, the White Slip II sherds were found in private contexts similar to most finding contexts on other sites. On one hand, this may suggest the pottery was affordable even for poorer people, not only for the elite, and on the other hand, this reflects the integration of the pottery in the trading network of the Mediterranean region during the Late Bronze Age. Due to better archaeological evidence, most studies concerning Late Bronze Age trade have just focused on maritime and coastal trade. Though a

stronger focus on the role of trading routes in the hinterland seems to be necessary. Thirdly, the pottery sherds, which may be an imitation of White Slip II Ware, illustrate the popularity of this ware type. While the topic about imitations is still under discussion, additional researches like extensive pottery analyses should clarify the question about the origin and potential production sites. Therefore, all archaeological evidences should be re-examined critically.

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