

NEW DATA FOR THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CATHEDRAL OF GERASA: THE THIRD INTERIM REPORT ON THE JARASH CATHEDRAL PROJECT*

by

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Since the British-American excavations of the 1920s it seems clear that the Early Christian Cathedral of Jarash had been erected on the site of an ancient temple. John W. Crowfoot and his team uncovered parts of the west wall as well as of the side walls of this temple, but never documented the relevant finds as a whole. The west wall can only be seen on a photograph published 1931 in a preliminary report and is schematically indicated on the ground plan of the cathedral in the renowned publication of 1938.¹ The course of the side walls, however, can be reconstructed on the basis of a reference in the mentioned report of 1931. But what made Crowfoot and his colleagues think that the temple was 25 m long remains a mystery.

Churches succeeding temples are not a rare phenomenon, but in the East of the Roman Empire, the take-over of pagan sites by Christians normally did not take place be-

fore the late fifth or the sixth century.² With a date in the middle of the fourth century the Jarash Cathedral would be a remarkable exemption of this rule, only comparable with Constantine's church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.³ It was just this irritating fact that prompted the beginning of our project. After the soundings in 1993 and 1994 we were able to investigate in 1996 specifically the transition from the pagan to the Christian sanctuary.⁴ Was it really a temple which preceded the cathedral? When and how was it destroyed? Did the Christians take over the site immediately after the destruction of the temple or were they themselves perhaps the destroyers? Or do we have to assume, to the contrary, that they overtook an area covered with debris and that they built the cathedral as part of the revitalization of the Roman city?⁵ Trying to find the answers to some

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1. J.W. Crowfoot, Recent Work round the Fountain Court at Jerash, *PEFQS* 1931: 145f., Pl. II, fig.2; C.H. Kraeling, *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*. New Haven 1938: Pl. . XXXI.

2. F.W. Deichmann, Frühchristliche Kirchen in antiken Heiligtümern, *JDAI* 54 (1939): 105-136; see also J. Vaes, Christliche Wiederverwendung antiker Bauten: Ein Forschungsbericht, *Ancient Society* 15-17 (1984-86): 305-443.

3. B. Brenk, La cristianizzazione della città tarsoantica. *La ciudad en el mundo romano. Actas XIV Congreso Internacional de Arqueología Clásica, Tarragona 1993* (Tarragona 1994): 129-135.

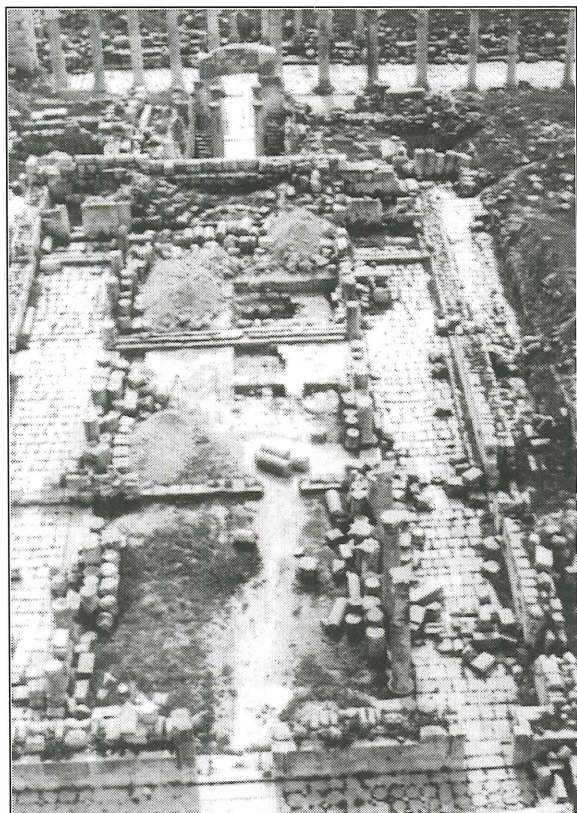
4. Brenk, C. Jäggi and H.R. Meier, The Buildings under the "Cathedral" of Gerasa. The Second interim Report on the Jarash Cathedral Project', *ADAJ* 39 (1995): 211-220.

5. Cf. J. Alchermes, 'Spolia in Roman Cities of the Late Empire: Legislative Rationales and Architectural Reuse, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994): 167-178; H.R. Meier, 'Alte Tempel – neue Kulte: Zum Schutz obsoleter Sakralbauten in der Spätantike und zur Adaption alter Bauten an den christlichen Kult', in B. Brenk(ed.) *Innovation in der Spätantike*. Wiesbaden 1996.

of these questions, we excavated an area surrounding the former position of the ambo, where some slabs of the original churchfloor have survived. Unlike the sounding of 1994, we hoped to find here an undisturbed stratigraphy. A second area was excavated in the east of the adjoining bema steps. Here we expected further information on the date and circumstances of the erection of the cathedral because of the higher floor level in the choir. Finally, we opened a small trench in the angle between the bema steps and the stylobate of the northern colonnade to verify if it corresponds with the finds of the southern part of the nave (Fig. 1).

The Temple

Both east and west of the bema steps we found in all our trenches on the level of ca.



1. Jarash. General view from the crane towards the cathedral during excavations.

588.55 m, that is 20-30 cm under the actual church floor, a compact fill of huge stones (layer 221) ending immediately inside the stylobate of the church colonnades with a base moulding of ochre limestone (Fig. 2). The blocks of this moulding are in varying states of conservation; on some there are still remains of fine plaster. The stone itself, profile and level do not leave any doubt that this moulding was part of the same building excavated in 1994 about 10 m east of the west wall of the church.⁶ Therefore, the position of the west, north and south wall of this building are now certain. Moreover, 2 m east of the bema steps we excavated a one-headed wall (106) consisting of huge pebbles slightly smoothed on one side and marking the eastern boundary of the above-mentioned fill (Fig.3). The fact, though, that the moulded south wall runs further east indicates that there were two *antae* as we can see at the nearby Temple of Artemis. Whether the space between these *antae* was raised in form of a platform or took up a large staircase is not yet clear.

There is no doubt, that these structures were part of a temple, as suggested by Crowfoot and Kraeling. It must have been a temple consisting of a cella on a podium like the 'Gerasene Artemision', but clearly smaller: the width of the podium was only 9.3 m, its length up to the edge, that is without the *antae*, about 16.6 m. Originally the walls of the temple were covered with white plaster, while the interior of the cella seems to have been painted.⁷ The entrance to the cella must have faced east where the Americans had found an older flight of steps under the staircase leading from the cardo to the cathedral.⁸ But only further investigations will show how these steps and the staircase to the cella were connected.

Since the excavated level 221 had been sealed in antiquity by the upper part of the

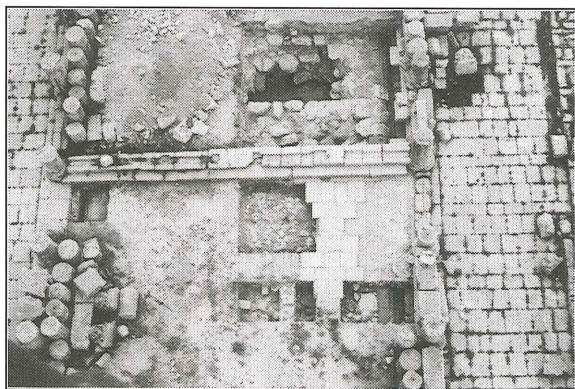
6. Brenk *et al.* AD AJ 39: fig. 4 (wall 3).

7. This is indicated by painted wall-plaster found in

layer 220.

8. Kraeling 1938: 206, pl. XXX.

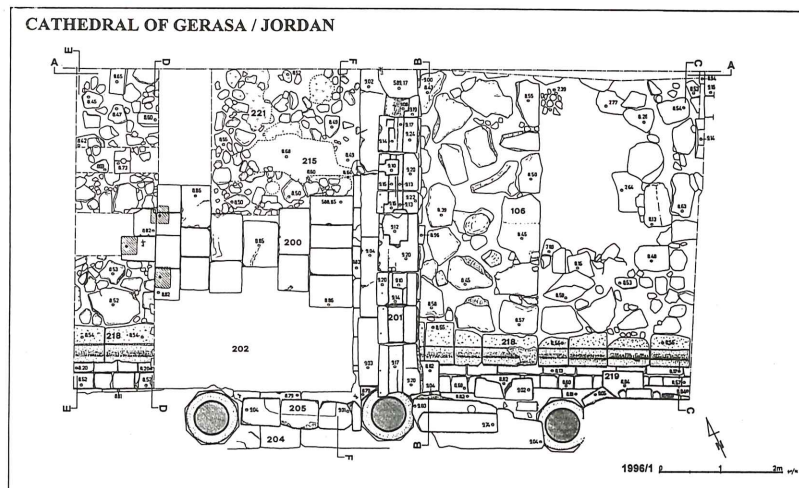
podium, the finds from this layer help us to date the temple (Figs. 4-7). Both in the earth between the pebbles of the podium (105) and in the fill east of the one-headed wall 106 (111/113) the latest pottery dates mostly to the first century BC and AD with a



2. Jarash Cathedral, top view of the trenches.



3. Jarash Cathedral, east wall 106 of the temple podium and south colonnade of the cathedral seen from the north. On the right hand the bema steps.



4. Jarash Cathedral, top plan.

few examples from the earlier second century AD (I. Kehrberg, below), as well as a coin from the period between 103 and 40 BC.⁹ This indicates clearly that "our" temple is older than the nearby Artemis complex. To whom it was dedicated, however, remains still open.

From the Temple to the Church

After having decided on this spot, the Christians must have cleared away the then existing structures up to the base of the podium. It is not yet known in which condition the temple was at that time; if there had been huge masses of debris we would only find them outside the podium where the former ground level was clearly lower than the church floor, that is east of the platform or the staircase between the *antae* and especially in the aisles. In the area of the podium, however, the church builders removed all that was above the planned church floor. They put aside the ashlar for reuse, cleaned the place and began to lay out the foundations of the church. The blocks for the stylobate of the colonnades came to rest immediately outside the side walls of the temple podium; in the lower sections there can even be detected an overlapping of the respective parallel structures (see Fig. 4). For the new floor large slabs of white limestone were laid directly on the re-

4. For a first reading of the coins we are grateful to Markus Peter, Augst/Basel.

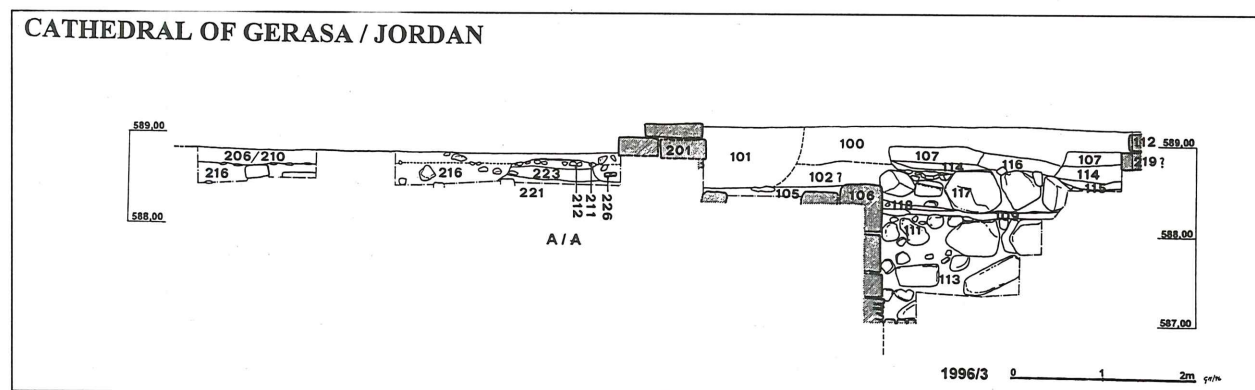
mains of the podium while outside the former structures, especially in the aisles, it was necessary to fill in huge masses of debris and earth. All this can be easily deduced from the finds. Only the situation east of the one-headed wall 106 is not very clear. Here a massive stratum of big stones (117) was brought in, which seem to form a sort of step of about 18 cm (Fig. 5). Do we have to presume that the floor of the presbyterium was slightly higher than the floor of the nave? Or did the builders of the church level the mentioned difference by using slabs of different depth? Till now it is only certain that the actual shape of the bema dates from a later building phase and not from the original church plan (see below). It is also clear that the nave pavement originally lay on both sides of the actual bema steps on the same level of about 588.8 m, at least in the area immediately adjoining the stylobate. On the other hand, the inner border of the stylobate is conspicuously different on both sides of the bema: while there is a strict edge in the western part, further east the uppermost slabs of the stylobate were evidently meshed with those of the nave floor (Figs. 2-4). This shows that in the first church building the nave was divided on

the line of the later bema, perhaps by railings and not by a step. A further proof for that is the L-shaped slab under the southernmost block of the bema steps.

Concerning the date, it is widely accepted that the church was erected in the middle of the fourth century, since a text written about 375 by bishop Epiphanius of Salamis mentions a miraculous fountain which is often identified with the one in the atrium of the cathedral.¹⁰ As already mentioned, this early dating for a church replacing a temple in such a central urban position left us wondering, but until now neither Crowfoot nor we had any archaeological data. Having found some coins in the thin bedding (104) under the original church-floor and from the foundation trench of the stylobate we can now give at least a *terminus post quem* of 378 (Fig. 6).¹¹

Later Transformations

For the continued use of the cathedral we discovered during the 1996 campaign some interesting finds which are, however, not so easy to interpret as those of the "temple" and the construction phase of the church. A tentative scenario can be outlined as follows: In the first change, the floor slabs of

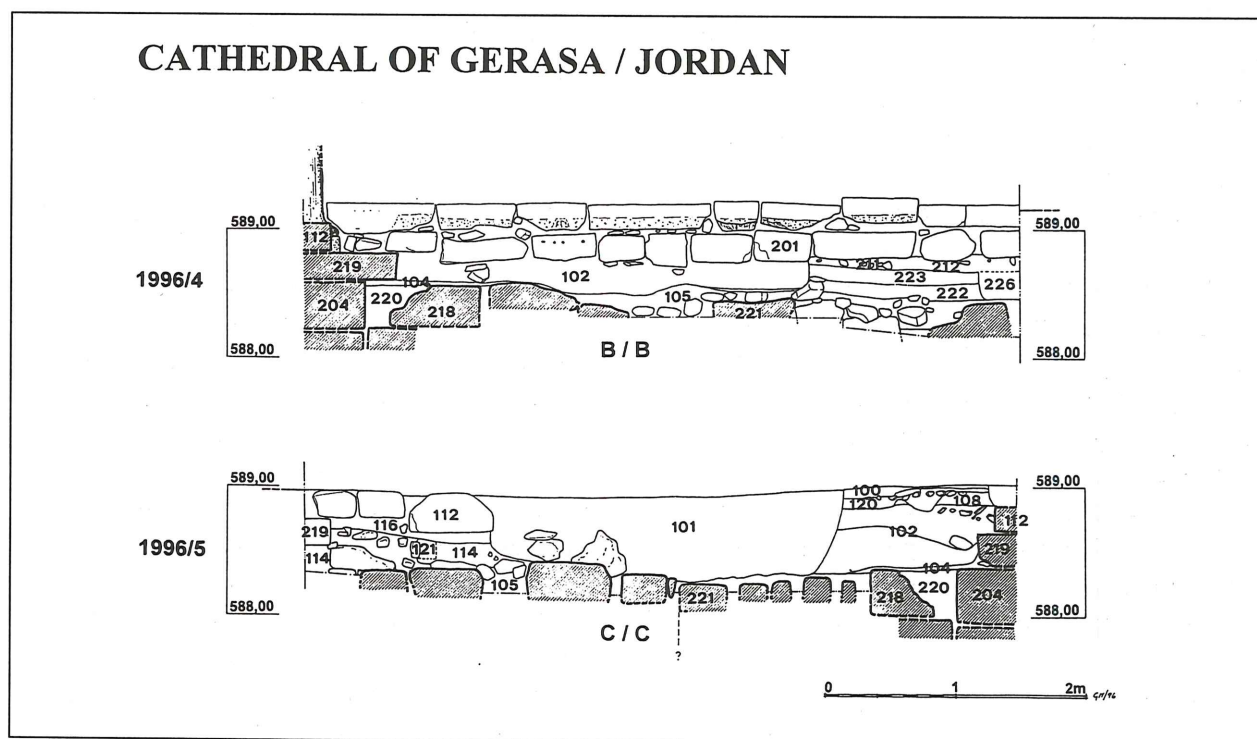


5. Jarash Cathedral, section A-A (middle axis; north profile).

10. *Panarion*, Haer. 51, 30, 1-2, Holl (ed.), GCS vol. 31 (1922): 301; cf. B. Brenk, C. Jäggi and H.R. Meier, 'The Fountain Court of Jarash Cathedral reconsidered: The First Report of a New Swiss Research Project', *ADAJ* 38 (1994): 351-357.

11. Because these small copper-coins are quite well preserved, a long period of circulation seems un-

likely. Possibly the temple was destroyed during the earthquake of 363 AD and given some decades later as a ruin to the Christians, who filled the ugly gap in the city centre with the new church. For the earthquake see K.W. Russell, 'The Earthquake of May 19, A.D. 363', *BASOR* 238, 1980: 47-64.



6. Jarash Cathedral, sections B-B (profile towards west), C-C (profile towards east).

the whole nave were removed so that the old construction level of the cathedral was again uncovered. Only the slabs in the area of the ambo remained in their original position. This proves that at this time an ambo stood at this position or at least was planned in view of the new bema. For the new floor, earth was brought in and covered with a layer of rubble (208/211) to form a bedding for a mortar floor (203/207; Fig. 5). This ballast served also as "foundation" for the bema steps (if the former floor slabs were not used for this purpose as in the south-west). With the new bema the floor level in the choir was raised by about 30 cm by filling it with rubble (102), among which were thousands of glass tesserae and glass mosaic fragments still in their original mortar bed. It seems that the new pavement in the choir consisted again of huge slabs (112), this time reused material, which were again removed in a later time.

Certainly all these measures (with the exception of the last mentioned) were part of

one big transformation. Some burned tesserae in layer 102 could be an indication for a fire which made a large scale reaching restoration necessary. The mosaics were obviously so heavily damaged, that the remaining sections were removed. It seems that the persons responsible for the restoration took this occasion for some changes in the disposition of the bema and the ground-floor and, it seems apparent, also the cutting-off of five bays in this context.¹²

When did this disaster occur? In the concerning layers there was a lot of pottery and glass sherds of the sixth century. Near the stylobate of the south colonnade west of the bema we found, immediately above the construction trench of the church (120), a coin of Justin I which must have got into the earth after removing the original floors slabs but still before the filling of the mortar, floor bedding. So the described restoration could not have taken place earlier than the second quarter of the sixth century. We tend to date these changes to the later sixth or early sev-

12. Cf., however, Crowfoot, *PEFQS* (1931): 145.

enth century (see I. Kehrberg, below) and not only to the eighth century as Crowfoot proposed.¹³

Summary

The indisputable highlight of our 1996 campaign was the proof of a preceding temple on the site of the cathedral. Since the excavations of the 1920s this temple has always been mentioned in the literature, but has never been proved archaeologically. It seems to have been a temple on a podium with an eastern staircase flanked by *antae*. From the typological point of view it must have been similar to the neighbouring Temple of Artemis,¹⁴ but considerably smaller and most probably some decades earlier. In the late fourth or early fifth century, in any case after 378 AD, this temple was dismantled down to the base of its podium by Christians, who erected on this site a huge church, probably the Cathedral of Gerasa. The proportions of the new building were insofar predetermined by the pagan predecessor as the stylobate for the colonnades of the nave were set immediately outside the sidewalls of the podium. But the temple served not only as a base (in the strictest sense of the word) for the width but also for the floor level of the whole church since the floor slabs in the nave lay more or less directly on the remains of the podium. Only in the aisles and in the east and west of the podium huge fillings were necessary. Yet from the beginning there was a choir screen on the line of the later bema steps but still with-

out a difference in the floor level between the choir and the nave. The walls and certainly the apse of the cathedral were, at least in their upper sections, decorated with mosaics. A fragment with conspicuously small and incarnadine tesserae of natural stone proves even figurative pictures. This decoration seems to have been heavily damaged by a fire in the late sixth or seventh century. During the succeeding repairs the workers removed the stone pavement of the nave, shortened the church by building a new west wall on the line of the fifth pair of column and (from there) recovered the remaining mosaics. They replaced the existing choir screen by two bema steps and reached the new floor level in the choir by filling in masses of debris. In the new nave a mortar floor was brought in. Several disturbances in these layers are evidence of other, yet later activities in this area. The most recent of these holes (101; Figs. 5 and 6) is a deep sounding east of the bema steps which seem – according to a piece of a modern bottle – to have been made by archaeologists in the 1920s, even if Crowfoot explicitly denied any finds of tesserae.¹⁵ In the light of all this, it is very likely that further campaigns would yield more information on the history of the site.

The Pottery and other Finds¹⁶ (Ina Kehrberg)

The Temple Phase (Fig. 7:1-16)

The assemblages are from loci 221, 106,

13. Cf. Brenk *et al.*, ADAJ 39: 220. Yet the findings in our trench of 1994 indicate this dating for the reduction of the church nave.

14. Fundamentally C.S. Fisher, in Kraeling 1938: 133-138.

15. J.W. Crowfoot, *Early Churches in Palestine. The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1937* (London 1941): 62, 111.

16. For basic information and ceramic parallels see F. Zayadine (ed.), *Jerash Archaeological Project*, vols I: 1981-1983 (1986) and II: 1984-1988 (1989). Amman: Department of Antiquities;

Homès-Fredericq D. and Franken, H. (eds), *Argile source de vie. Sept millénaires de céramique en Jordanie*. Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels 1985: s.v. périodes romaines et byzantines / Jérash; and (of course) Kraeling, C.H., *Gerasa. City of the Decapolis*. New Haven 1938: Yale University. For general comparison see e.g. Bignasa, A. *et al.*, *Petra. Ez Zantur I, Terra Archaeologica II*, 1997. Mainz: P. von Zabern; for the Late Byzantine period see also Uscatescu, A., *La ceramica del Macellum de Gerasa*. Madrid 1996: Inst. Del Patr. Hit. Espanol.

105, 222, 113, 110, 105, 109 (see *supra*, Figs. 5 and 6). The deposits are generally of poor quantity and quality, consisting of ceramics with a few fragments of Early Roman glass and animal bones.

The nature of the assemblages from all loci is similar to deposits of foundation trenches from other Roman buildings of Gerasa dated to the second century AD (e.g. the Temple of Artemis, esp. the great altar on the temenos; the hippodrome, the North-Theatre, both decumani and most recently the Upper Temple of Zeus, publ. forthcoming). The pottery is very fragmented and eclectic in types; body sherds dominate the samples which makes dating more dependent on ware than form. The majority of wares are of the first century BC/AD variety with only a small amount belonging to the second century AD, some Late Hellenistic types (especially of the 'grey ware' variety) and isolated Iron Age fragments. Imported pottery consists of Eastern Terra Sigillata. 'Classical' Gerasa Lamps of the later second century AD are not present.

Due to the make-up of the deposits and the high percentage of first rather than second century wares and forms, the deposits should probably be dated to the early second century AD rather than later, possibly even to the very beginning of the second century AD.

The 'Cathedral', First Phase (Fig. 8:17-26)

The assemblages are from loci 104, 217, 220, 215 (see *supra*, Figs. 5 and 6) and are composed in similar manner as the preceding deposits. A new addition are fragments of white plaster and painted wall plaster (al fresco) plus roof tiles. The predominant pottery types and glass are from the Late Roman period, that is from the third to early fourth centuries AD, mixed with some earlier types - a common feature at Jarash for any deposit which comes from a reused 'building site'. The coins found with the pottery (*supra*) indicate a date not earlier than in the late third century.

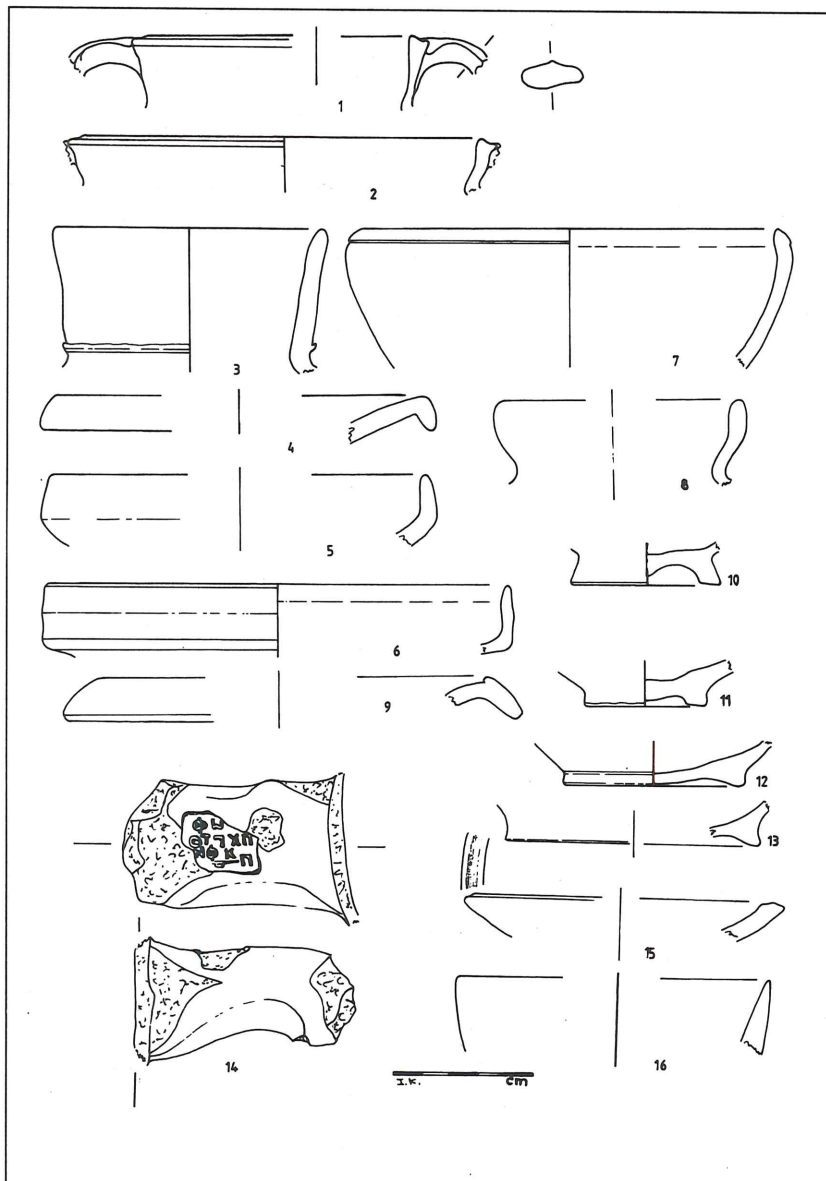
The Restored Church (Fig. 7:27-36)

The assemblages are from loci 102, 103, 100/108, 107, 212, 209, 210, 210/206, 213, 214 (see *supra*, Figs. 5 and 6). The deposits are composed of an eclectic number of pottery types (wares and forms), some Late Byzantine glass, medium-sized white stone tesserae, roof tiles, fragments of marble cladding and waste from pottery kilns. As with the first two cultural assemblages, the quality and quantity of the deposits are poor. They represent levels or areas of working activity rather than accumulation of material due to domestic occupation. Judging by the pottery types, the deposits belong to the later sixth-early seventh century AD, bearing all the hallmarks of that period including the 'recycling' aspect typical for this time at Jarash.

Pottery: Catalogue

The Temple Phase, (Fig. 7:1-16)

1. J.Ca. 96.113. Rim/handle of jar. Orange-brown, self-slurry, burnt; well tempered with small white inclusions. Diam. 17.4cm.
2. J.Ca.96.221. Rim of jar (with handles, cf. Cat.no.1). Reddish-brown with dark grey core, dark red slip or wash outside, brown inside; well levigated with tiny white inclusions. Diam. 15.4cm.
3. J.Ca.96.221. Rim/neck of amphora/ storage jar. Red, pinkish-cream slip outside; well levigated with fine to small white and black inclusions. Diam. 10cm.
4. J.Ca.96.113. Rim of platter. Buff, brown slip inside and out; well levigated with tiny white, black and red inclusions. Diam. 22cm.
5. J.Ca.96.221. Rim of bowl. Buff, red slip inside and out, well levigated with tiny black and white inclusions. Diam. ca 21 cm.
6. J.Ca.96.105. Rim of bowl/cup. Red, red slip inside and out, well levigated with tiny red, white and black inclusions. Diam. ca 17cm.

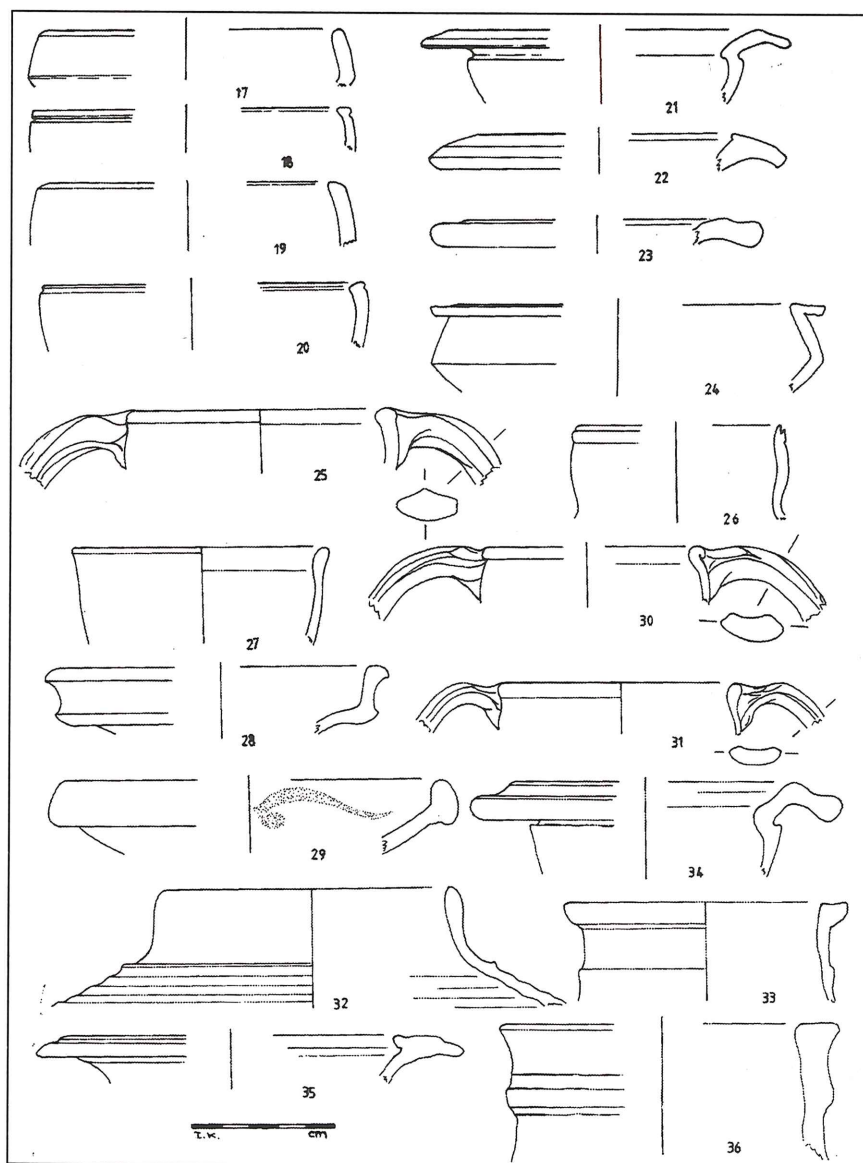


7. Pottery from the Temple Phase.

7. J.Ca.96.113 Rim/body of bowl/cup. Buff, metallic red slip inside with grey upper and red lower outside; well levigated with small red, black and white inclusions. Diam. 16cm.
8. J.Ca.96.113. Rim of jar/vase. Red, slightly darker red slip inside and out; well levigated, gritty with small black and white inclusions. Uncertain Diam.
9. J.Ca.96.221. Rim of bowl/dish. Red with darker red slip inside and out; well levigated, gritty with small to medium white inclusions. Diam. ca 26cm.
10. J.Ca.96.113. Ringfoot base of bowl/cup. Light red, slurried and lightly bur-

nished, red slip/wash, well levigated with fine black and medium to fine white inclusions. Diam 5cm.

11. J.Ca.96.105. Ringfoot base of bowl, cf. Cat. no. 10. Overfired to brownish grey-red with grey to red slip/wash inside; well levigated with small to fine white and black inclusions. Diam 4.5cm.
12. J.Ca.96.113. Base with off-set foot of jar/closed vessel. Buff fired pale grey in patches inside and pinkish-brown outside; small to medium red, white and black inclusions. Diam. 6.5cm.
13. J.Ca.96.113. Base with off-set foot of jar, or pross. open vessel, cf. cat no. 12.



8. Pottery from the Cathedral and Church Phases.

Brownish red with dark grey slip inside and out; well levigated with fine to small black and white inclusions. Diam. 13cm.

14. J.Ca.96.113. Stamped amphora handle/import. Buff, cream slip.
15. J.Ca.96.113. Rim of platter, Eastern Terra Sigillata/ import. Diam. ca 32cm.
16. J.Ca.96.105. Rim of bowl, Eastern Terra Sigillata/ import. Diam. ca 20cm.

The 'Cathedral', First Phase (Fig. 8:17-26)

17. J.Ca.96.220. Rim of bowl. Pale brownish red with same slurried slip inside and out; well levigated with small black
- and small to medium white inclusions. Diam. ca 20cm.
18. J.Ca.96.220. Rim of bowl. Red with thin red slip inside and out, well levigated with fine to small white, black and red inclusions. Diam. ca 17cm.
19. J.Ca.96.220. Rim of bowl. Dark buff with greyish brown thin slip inside and out; well levigated with fine white and black inclusions. Diam. ca 16cm.
20. J.Ca.96.220. Rim of bowl. Pale red with thin red slip inside and out; well levigated with small white and red inclusions. Diam. ca 17cm.
21. J.Ca.96.220. Rim of larger bowl/dish.

Red with thin red slip inside and out; well levigated, gritty with small to medium white and brown inclusions. Diam. ca 26cm.

22. J.Ca.96.220. Rim of large bowl/dish. Brownish red with same colour slip inside and out, slightly burnished; well levigated with mostly medium white, black and brown inclusions. Diam. 26 cm.
23. J.Ca.96.220. Rim of small basin. Reddish brown with grey core and greyish brown slip inside and out; levigated, gritty with medium white and black inclusions. Diam. ca 30cm.
24. J.Ca.96.220. Rim of bowl/casserol. Brown with grey core, pastel brown slip inside and brownish grey out; levigated, gritty with mostly white inclusions, some brown and tiny bits of mica. Diam. 18cm.
25. J.Ca.96.220. handle/rim of jar ('cooking pot'). Brown with grey slip inside and out; levigated with medium white and black inclusions and few bits of mica, same ware as Cat. no. 24. Inner Diam. 8cm.
26. J.Ca.96.220. Rim of jar (with handles; 'cooking pot'). Same ware as Cat. no. 25. Diam. ca 10cm.

The Restored Church (Fig. 8:27-36)

27. J.Ca.96.212. Rim of cup. Pale red, self-slurry; levigated with medium white and small black inclusions. Diam. 9cm.
28. J.Ca.96.212. Rim of bowl platter. Pale red, self-slurry; levigated with medium white and small black inclusions, cf. Cat.no. 27 for same ware. Diam. ca 20cm.
29. J.Ca. 96.212. Rim of "Jerash Bowl". Red ware, same as Cat. nos 27 and 28 but with thin red slip and whited painted decoration (trace only). Diam. 30cm.
30. J.Ca.96.210. Handle/rim of jar ('cooking pot'). Brownish red with pinkish cream

slip; levigated with small to medium black and white inclusions. Inner Diam. ca 10cm.

31. J.Ca.96.212. Handle/rim of jar ('cooking pot'). Brownish red with pale brown slip and cream streaky coating; levigated, gritty with small to medium white and brown inclusions, tiny bits of mica. Inner Diam. 8cm.
32. J.Ca.96.210. Rim of large storage jar. Pale brownish buff with cream slip outside; well levigated with medium black and white inclusions and few bits of mica. Diam. 10cm.
33. J.Ca.96.212. Rim of Storage jar. Grey with pale grey slip inside and out; levigated, gritty with small to medium white and black inclusions. Diam. 10cm.
34. J.Ca.96.212. Rim of basin. Red with thin creamy slip inside; levigated, gritty with small, medium and large white, red and black inclusions and tiny bits of mica. Diam. ca 36cm.
35. J.Ca.96.212. Rim of basin. Grey with pale grey slip inside and out; levigated with fine black and white inclusions and bits of mica. Diam. 34cm.
36. J.Ca.96.212. Rim of krater. Handmade, grey self-slurried; levigated with small black and white inclusions and some mica. Diam. between 36 and 50 cm.

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