

# Roman pottery from the C4 Building in the Qasr al-Bint area at Petra



**Abstract:** The remains of a Nabataean private complex located west of the Roman-period apsidal building in the Qasr al-Bint area of Petra, excavated by the French Archaeological Mission between 2005 and 2008, turned out to be reused by squatters during the Roman period. This occupation phase, one of the latest in this complex, was of a domestic nature, characterized by the installation of ovens (*tawabeen*) and other fireplaces, as well as of a channel in the courtyard. The large assemblage of well preserved, often complete pottery vessels from the corresponding levels was dated by coins and Nabataean pottery, supported by radiocarbon datings, to the second half of the 2nd and the early 3rd century CE. Consequently, the group offers the opportunity to study a homogeneous corpus of ceramic material from a period that is not at all well documented in Petra. The repertoire includes all kinds of vessels, especially cooking pots, small storage jars and drinking vessels. In addition, a set of multi-nozzled lamps was associated with this group.

**Keywords:** Jordan, Petra, Qasr al-Bint, Roman period, pottery, coarse ware, fine ware, multi-nozzled oil lamps

The Qasr al-Bint excavation by the French archaeological team has uncovered an assemblage of *in situ* pottery related to a kitchen area that contributes significantly to a study of Roman pottery in use in Petra between the mid-2nd and early 3rd century CE, filling

**François Renel**

Inrap, UMR 7041 ArScAn Apohr



a gap that still exists in the chronological framework of pottery from southern Jordan from the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. The excavation of the Qasr al-Bint area

[Fig. 1], with its stratigraphic record and absolute dating of the deposits, offers the opportunity for establishing such a framework.



Fig. 1. Plan of Roman occupation in Area C4; location of Area C4 on a general map of the western part of the temenos with structures related to Roman reuse of the Nabataean Western Building (Courtesy MFQB | general plan L. Borel, C. March, F. Renel; plan of the excavation M. Bélarbi/Inrap)



Fig. 2A. Oven C4136; note the pottery used in its construction (Courtesy MFQB | photo F. Renel)

The pottery material comes from homogeneous loci excavated between 2005 and 2008, dated to one of the late occupation phases of a Nabataean private complex located west of the Roman apsidal building in the Qasr al-Bint area. It was reoccupied in Roman times, six rooms continuing to be inhabited in a domestic capacity [see Fig. 1]. The southern extent of habitation in this district is still unknown and it appears to have been a squatter presence rather than reoccupation in the true sense of the word. Uninhabited spaces, like room P7, were blocked off with retaining walls to function as places for dumping rubbish. There is no evidence of roofing in this phase and no specific structures in rooms P12, P13–



Fig. 2B. Oven C4176, top view (Courtesy MFQB | photo F. Renel)

P15. The Nabataean floors were covered with sterile windblown sand layers. Unit P10 served as a corridor leading up to the upper terrace on the south. In the case of rooms P8/P11, several oven (*tawabeen*) and U-shaped fireplace installations unique to this unit suggest its domestic function. Complementing this is a water channel system built on top of the fill of the earlier Nabataean-phase courtyard P12 (loci C4170, 4310, 4311). It runs along the house walls and was intended to protect the building from the flash floods caused by rainwater flowing down the slope of the El Habis hill. Corresponding to the abandonment level is a sandy deposit, 10 cm to 25 cm thick, as well as pots found *in situ*, especially in the fill of ovens C4136 and C4176.

A large assemblage of well preserved pottery was uncovered *in situ*, especially in the kitchen area. Much of this came from the fill of the ovens. The assemblage included a large assortment of vessels, used primarily for storage, cooking and dining. The ovens themselves were constructed of large pottery sherds, e.g., C4136 [Fig. 2A]. In the case of oven C4176, the sherds came from a large storage jar, the builders of the oven obviously taking advantage of the properties of baked ceramics to isolate the fireplace from the rest of the building [Fig. 2B]. Locus C4152 from inside this oven yielded a set of 26 pots, representing essentially coarse ware intended for cooking purposes [Fig. 3]. The finds from other rooms are few and utilitarian in character.



Fig. 3. Selection of pottery from oven C4176 (locus C4152) (Courtesy MFQB | photo F. Renel)

### CHRONOLOGY OF OCCUPATION

The last phase of occupation in this complex, which has all the appearances of squatter habitation, seems to have been terminated rather abruptly leaving all the furnishings in place and undisturbed. The event seems to have taken place sometime in the first half of the 3rd century CE based on stratigraphic data [Fig. 4]. This turned out to be somewhat incompatible with the published dating of 100–150 CE of a number of comparable fine-ware forms identified in the assemblage. The Nabataean painted fine wares from the assemblage, attributed to Dekorphase 3c in Schmid's typo-chronology from ez-Zantur, were of limited use for the dating because of the rather broad and imprecise chronology of this Dekorphase (see Erickson-Gini 2021; Wenner and Parker 2021; both in this volume). Neither is there any reliable comparative material of known date for vessels from this assemblage identified as imported ceramics.

The occupation level was fortuitously dated by two coins, the first one corre-

sponding to the reign of Iulia Domna Augusta (193–211), the second, eroded, still recognizable as an issue from the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century CE. Complementing the numismatic evidence were some radiocarbon dates in the range between 130/140 and 235/240 CE for the occupation layer (loci C4122 and C4128) [see Fig. 4]. Sealing the abandonment sequence is a fill layer dated by a coin of Probus (276–282), Nabataean painted fine ware vessels from Dekorphase 4, Gaza amphorae and an oil lamp of Grawehr Type J.3 (dated 225–300 CE).

Consequently, the pottery assemblage in question is to be dated between the second half of the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd century CE. Only a few sites in Petra, as well as in central Jordan and the Negev, offer good parallels for the Qasr al-Bint assemblage. Among these is Humayma (Erickson-Gini 2010), and some other sites along the Incense Road (see also Erickson-Gini 2021, in this volume).

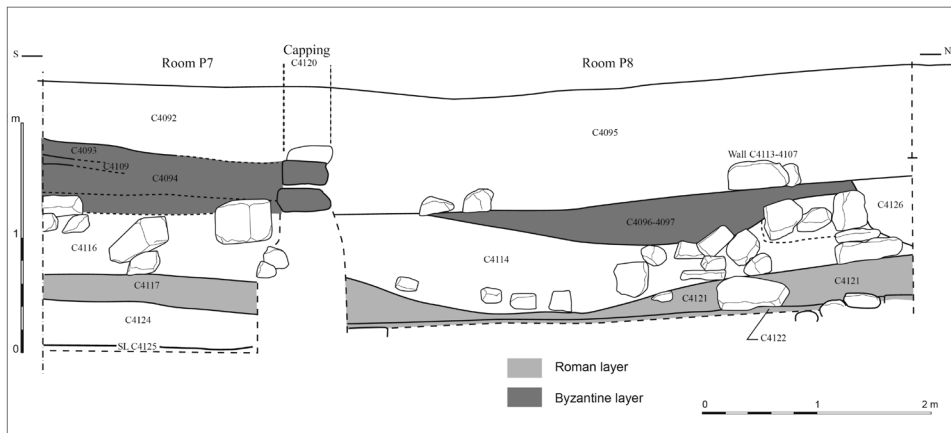


Fig. 4. Stratigraphy of rooms P7/P8 in the studied complex (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel)

### THE POTTERY ASSEMBLAGE

Nearly 50 more or less complete vessels make up the assemblage. The bulk of the material is composed of cooking vessels made in local workshops. The second biggest group is composed of drinking vessels, bowls and cups and plates, also of local production. Imported vessels are few and reflect a regional trade.

The mostly local pottery formed three

groups: painted fine ware, semi-fine ware and coarse ware. The fabric is in the tradition of the “classical” Nabataean period, well levigated, predominantly light red in color, frequently covered with a pale wash, which is darker for the coarser ware. In the case of painted fine ware, the decoration is in black on a reddish-orange slip.

### TABLE WARE: DRINKING VESSELS

#### BOWLS

A small bowl of globular shape stands on a small ring or string-cut base and features a short everted rim [Fig. 5]. It constitutes a later development of “classical” Nabataean forms. It replaces the cups and bowls of Schmid’s Phase 3, which are nearly absent from these contexts.

Many of them are undecorated, while some finer fabrics are decorated with

black-painted motifs, classified as Dekor-phase 3c in Schmid’s typo-chronology from ez-Zantur. The decor, which appears on the upper part of the body, consists of a continuous palmette in the upper register and a large pin-like pattern in the lower one. The emergence of this type seems to have been dated too early in earlier excavations, as in the case of Khirbet edh-Dharih, where it appears in contexts

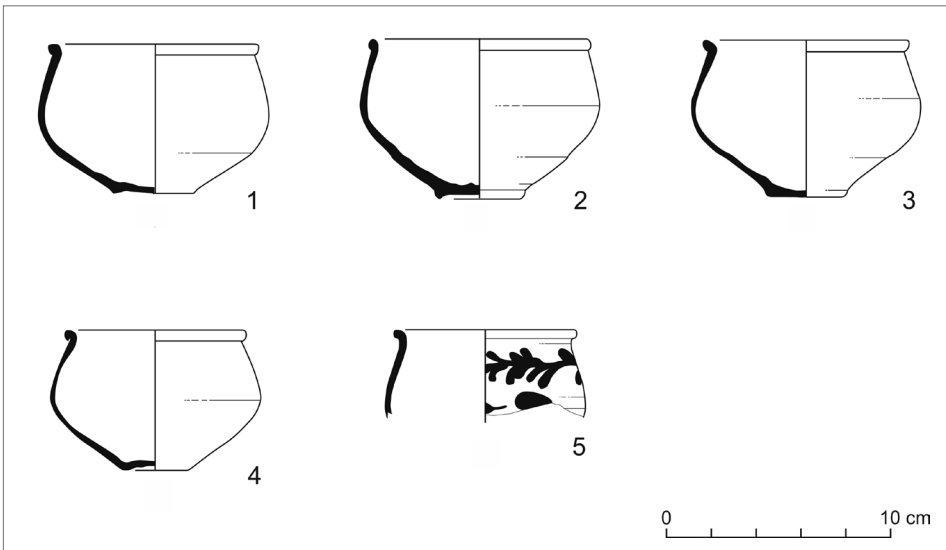


Fig. 5. Bowls in unpainted and painted semi-fine ware (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel, S. Eliès)

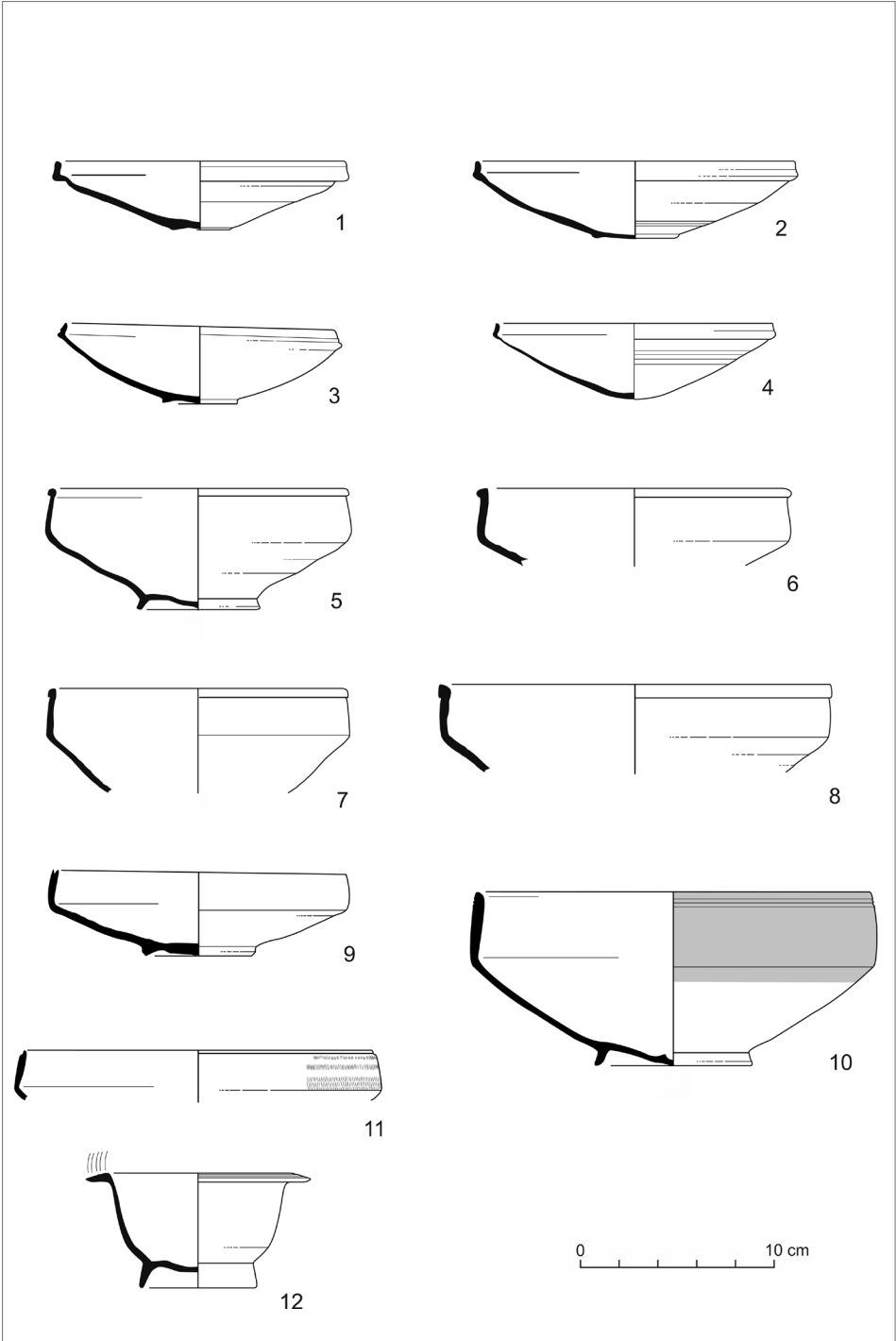


Fig. 6. Selection of cups from various loci (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel)

dated between 100 and 150 CE (Villeneuve 1990: Pl. II.2). Still, the form was found in kiln VII at Zurraba, dated between the 3rd and 4th century CE (‘Amr and al-Momani 1999: Fig. 13:6), the Mampsis Necropolis in 3rd century contexts (Dolinka 2003: Fig. 24) and Mezaad Hazeva in early 3rd century CE assemblages (Erickson-Gini 2010: Fig. 2.24).

**CUPS**

Nabataean plain fine ware and semi-fine ware cups appear in a variety of forms and sizes. The form of some of these illustrates an uninterrupted tradition from the 1st century CE [Fig. 6:1–4]. Also included are carinated bowls with slightly everted rims [Fig. 6:5–8]. A subvariant with square rim section [Fig. 6:8] finds

parallels in 2nd and 3rd century contexts from the Petra Church (Gerber 2001b: Fig. 1:23).

Two cups in Nabataean fine ware from the end of the Nabataean period were uncovered in the fill of the water channel. One is carinated with moulded lip and rouletted decoration [Fig. 6:11], corresponding to Schmid’s Phase 3, found in late 1st and 2nd century CE contexts.

A single complete example of a cup with hemispherical body on a ring base and with a grooved rim was found in the fill of oven C4176 [Fig. 6:12].

**BEAKERS**

Five beakers in Nabataean painted fine ware fabric were attributed to Schmid’s Dekorphases 3c/4 [Fig. 7]. The fabric is

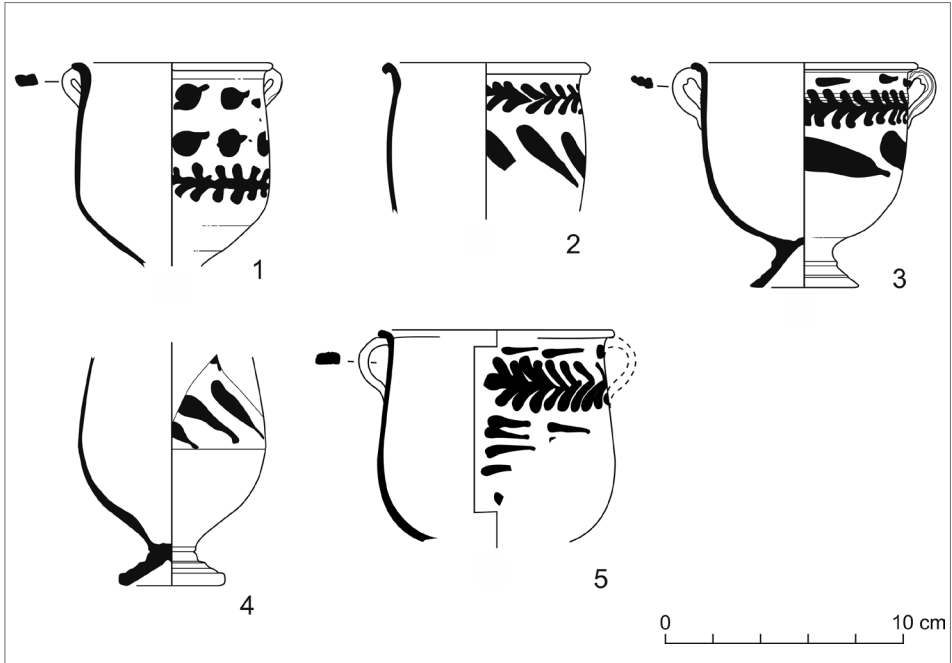


Fig. 7. Beaker in Nabataean painted fine ware, representing Schmid’s Dekorphases 3c/4 (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel, S. Eliès)

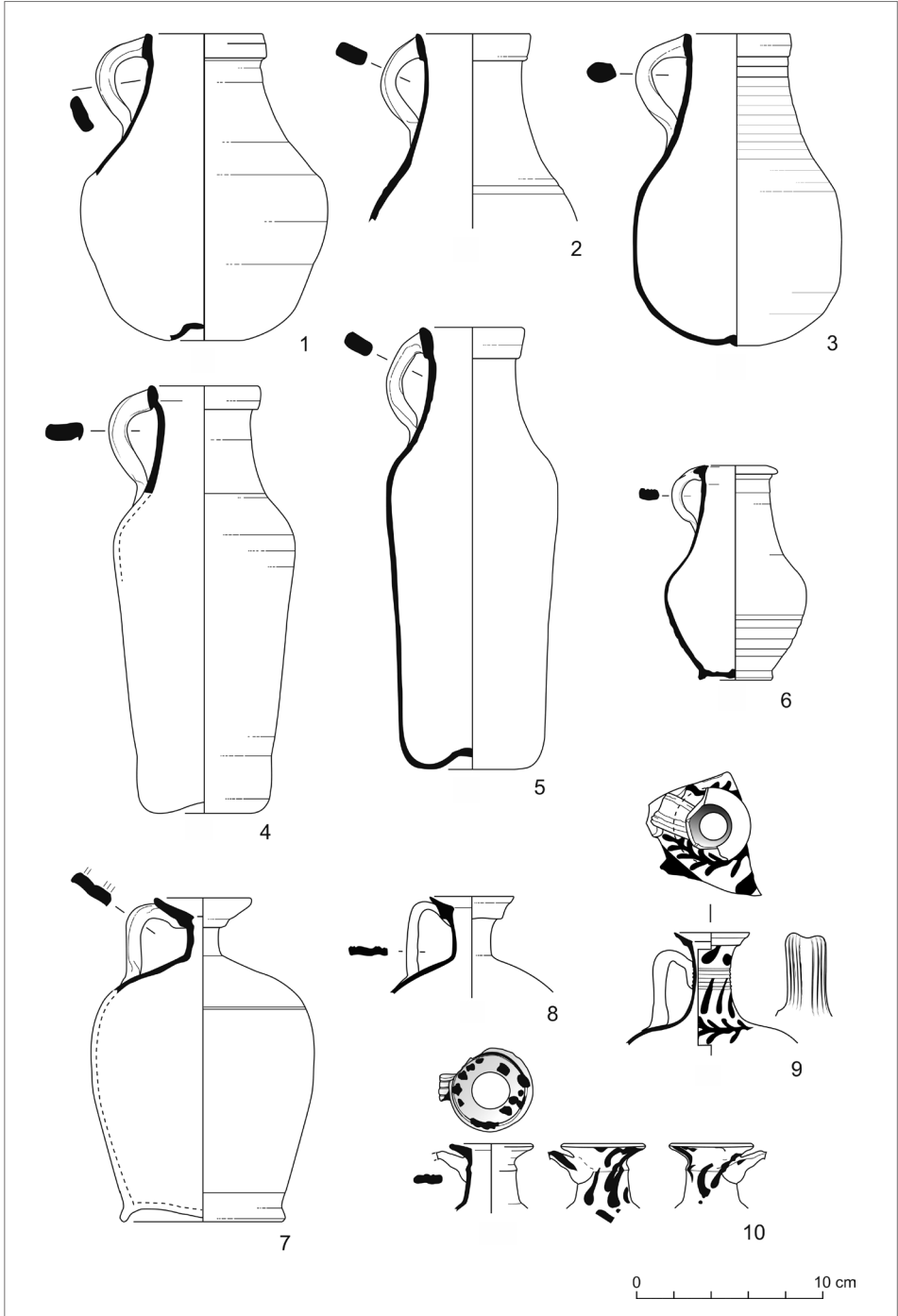


Fig. 8. Collared-rim jugs with bag-shaped body (1-3) or ovoid body (4-5); juglet with globular body (6); and jugs with everted collared rims (7-10) (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel, S. Eliès)

fine tempered with some grit inclusions. The form evolved from stamped beakers of the end of the Nabataean period. Produced in a coarser fabric, the beakers find parallels at 100/150 CE Khirbet edh-Dharih (Villeneuve 1990: Pl. III.5), Mezzad Hazeva in an early 3rd century context (Erickson-Gini 2010: Fig. 2.23) and Zurraba, where kiln VII is filled with waste of 3rd–4th century CE date (‘Amr and al-Momani 1999: Fig. 13:5).

### JUGS AND JUGLETS

Plain-ware jugs and juglets of various forms, represented by at least six different types, came from the 2nd and 3rd century layers. The most numerous group was formed of collared-rim jugs [Fig. 8:1–5]. One variant of this type has a bag-shaped body with a flat base, furnished with an omphalos, and a straight collared rim [Fig. 8:1–3]. Another variant has the same straight collared rim but a narrow body with flat shoulder [Fig. 8:4–5]. Forms of this kind are found in the Petra Church excavation, in 2nd/3rd century CE contexts (Gerber 2001b: Fig. 1:24).

The second type is made up of semi-fine ware jugs with ovoid body, resting on a large ring-base with a short vertical neck and an everted collared rim [Fig. 8:7–10]. Jugs of this kind could be decorated with a motif of palmettes painted in black.

Jugs of the third type were produced in semi-fine ware in a variety of sizes. They were nearly cylindrical in shape, furnished with a small ring-base and a short neck with a high collared rim [Fig. 9:1–3]. The smallest example of a juglet of this type was found in an early

3rd century context at Mezzad Hazeva (Erickson-Gini 2010: Fig. 2.34).

Other jugs in semi-fine ware are represented by single examples: a juglet with horizontally everted rim, flattened vertical handle and globular body with a ring-base [Fig. 8:6] and a bag-shaped jug with ring-base and a narrow, high, ribbed neck [Fig. 9:4].

The last type of jugs is in a semi-coarse fabric [Fig. 9:5–8]. The body shape is generally globular or nearly spherical, with a rounded base and a medium straight neck with straight or everted rim. One of these jugs is uniquely ribbed on the shoulder. All of them have a thick vertical handle fixed to the rim. Sets of grooves are often observed on the upper part of the neck, and in some cases there is a trefoil rim. The type is attested among the products from kiln VII at Zurraba (‘Amr and al-Momani 1999: Fig. 7:6).

### LAGYNOS AND DECANTER

The Nabataean lagynos is well represented in contexts from Building C4 [Fig. 11]. The general shape of the form is still the same, but the fabric is coarser than that of the Nabataean prototype. In general, the morphology of this form consists of a carinated body and a high tubular neck with a triangular rim. One molded vertical handle is fixed on the neck and the shoulder. Generally, the upper part of the neck bears an incised comb design.

Lagynoi of this form were found in kiln VII at Zurraba, dated between the 3rd and 4th centuries CE (‘Amr and al-Momani 1999: Fig. 13:4). The most complete lagynos [Fig. 11:3] has late

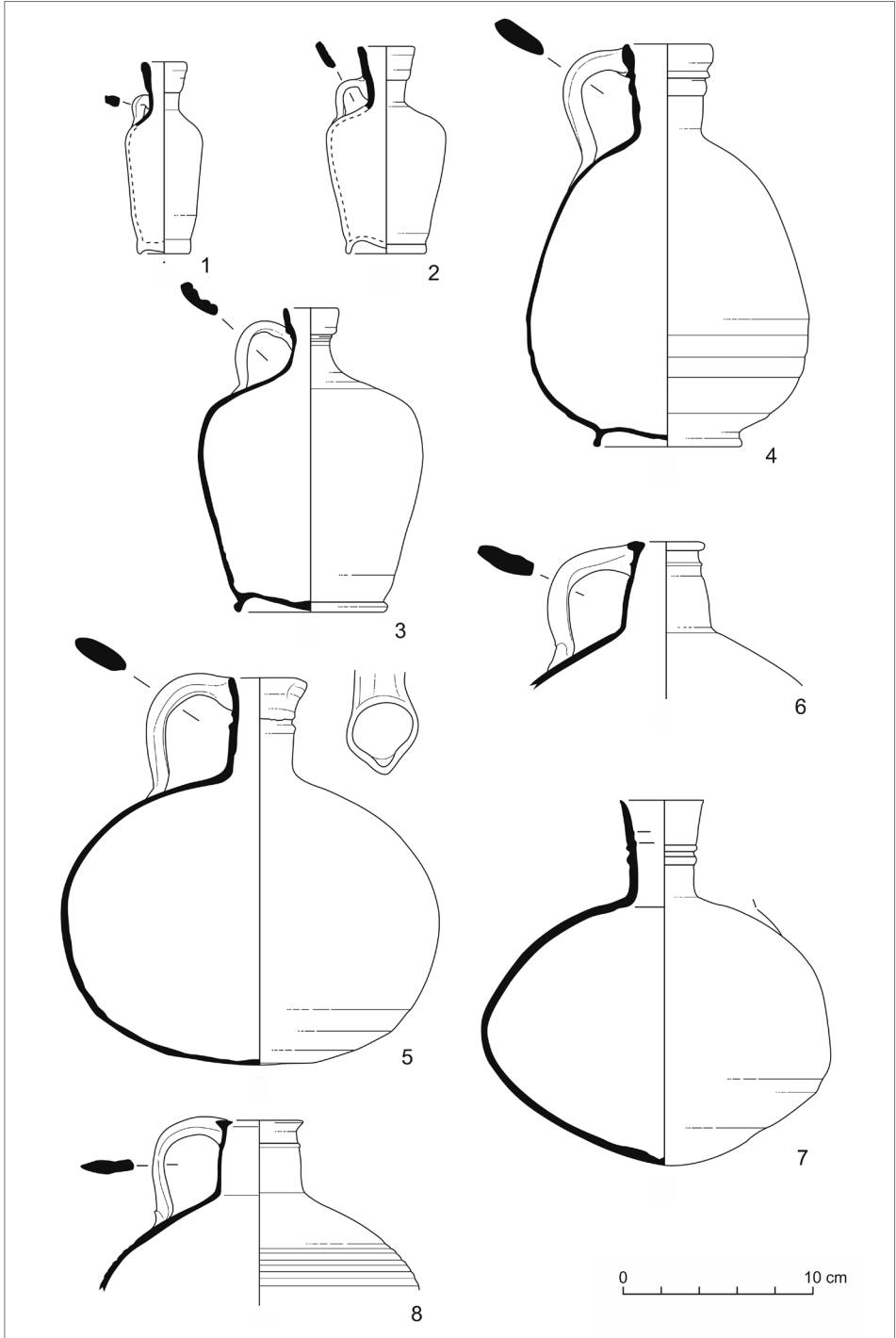


Fig. 9. Jugs of nearly cylindrical shape (1–3); bag-shaped jug (4); and jugs with globular body (5–8) (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel)

decoration corresponding to Schmid's Dekorphase 4. A painted lagynos of the same fabric was published by Peter Parr (1978: 202).

A small juglet found in the occupation level of room P13 has a globular body set on a ring-base, and a high everted neck with pinched spout [Fig. 10]. It could be identified as a decanter thanks to a strainer placed inside the neck at the junction with the body. Parallels include jugs of the same shape used as oil strainers or infusion pots.

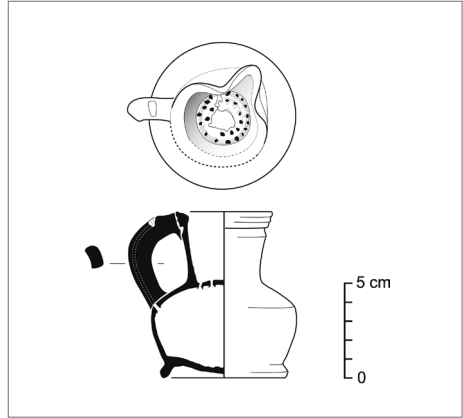


Fig. 10. Decanter (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel, S. Elies)

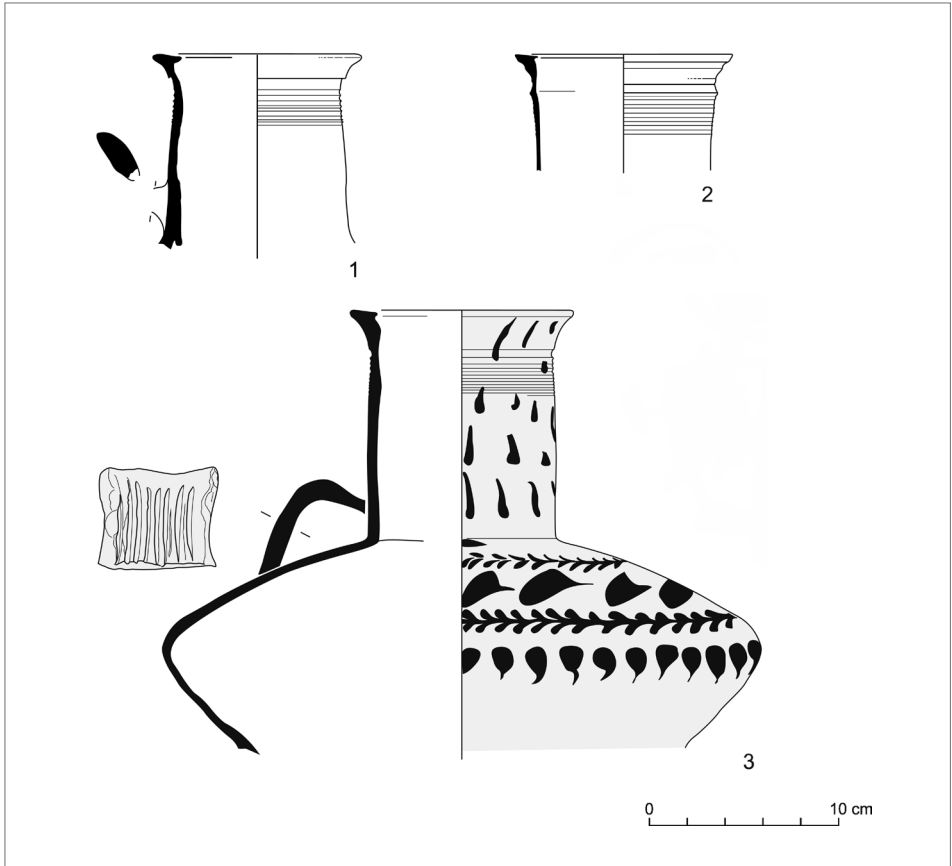


Fig. 11. Lagynoi: 1, 2 – coarse-ware vessels; 3 – painted lagynos, Schmid's Dekorphase 4 (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel, S. Eliès)

**PLATES**

The group is well attested and comes in both semi-fine ware and Nabataean painted fine ware (NPFW). Frequently, the same form is produced in both wares.

Three almost complete plates and fragments of others bear floral decoration corresponding to Dekorphases 3c/4 in Schmid's typo-chronology [Fig. 12].

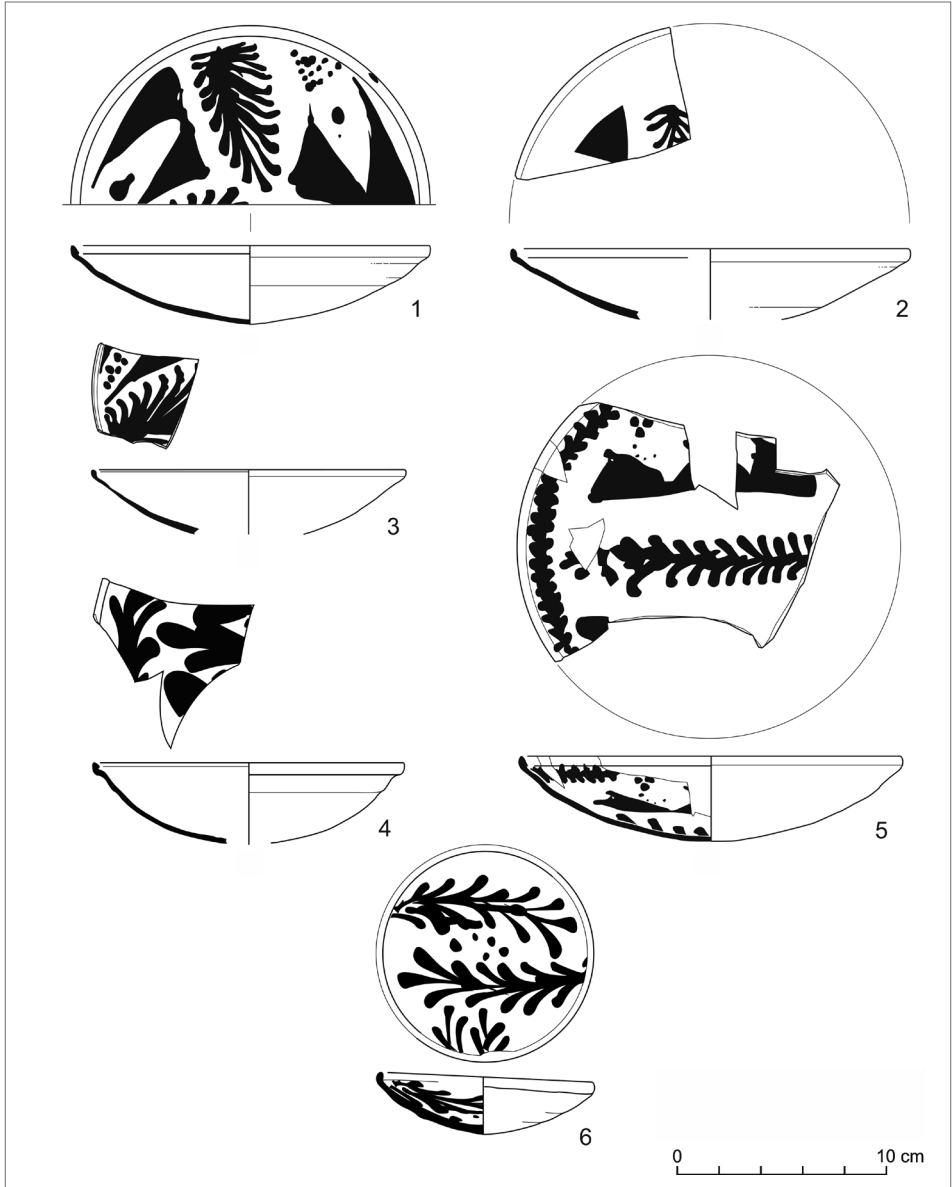


Fig. 12. Nabataean painted fine ware plates of Schmid's Dekorphases 3c/4 (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel, S. Eliès)

### KITCHEN WARE

All the kitchen ware from the site is locally made. The fabric of this coarse ware is characterized by a homogeneous sandy

matrix, ranging from buff to orange, and well fired. The clay texture is rather finer than the predecessor from the Nabataean

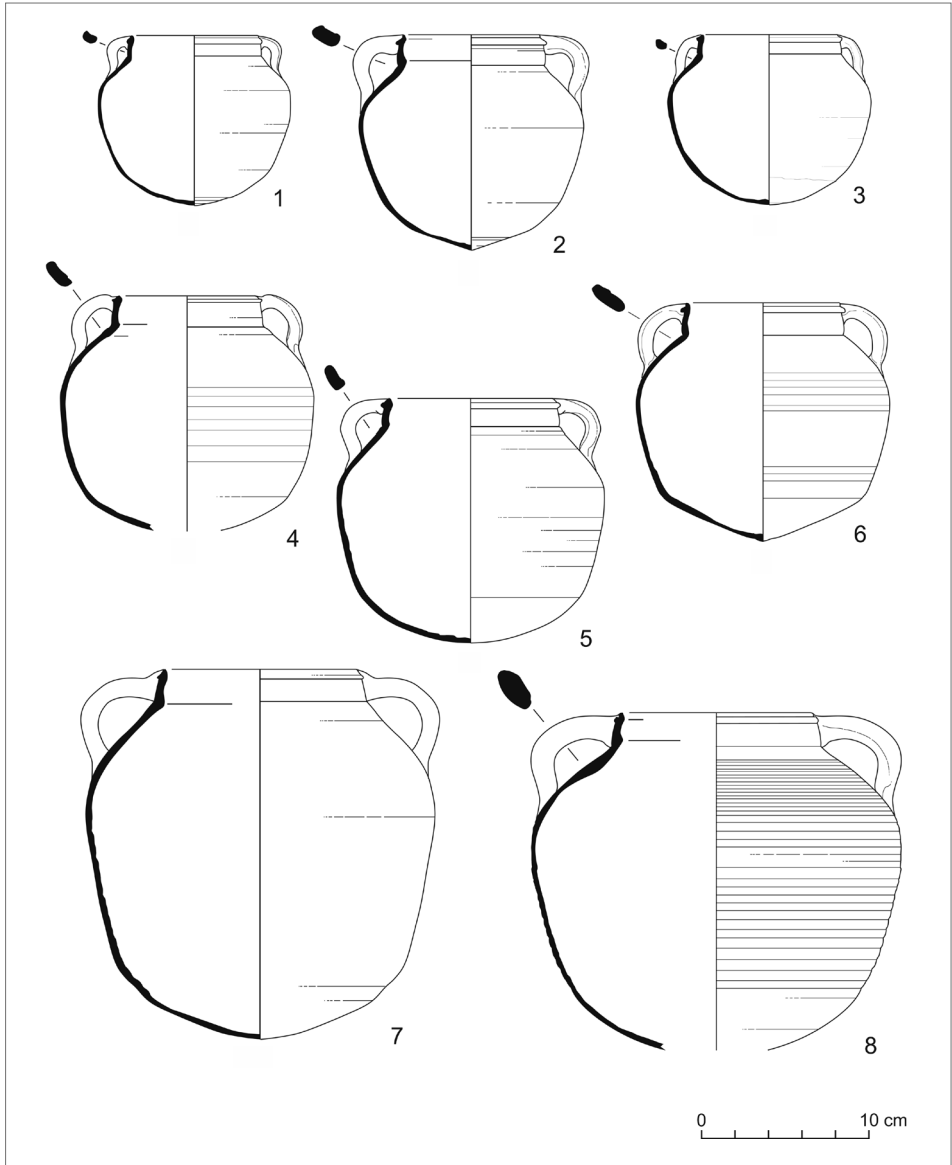


Fig. 13. Selection of cooking pots found in the kitchen area of Building C4 (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel)

period. Several types of open and closed forms exist, mostly designed for cooking, some of them for preparing food.

**COOKING POTS**

Cooking pots are the most frequent category in the studied assemblage. They all belong to the coarse ware category with a reddish-to-brown fabric, coated or not

with a pale wash. The general shape is not so different from the type of the end of the 1st–beginning of the 2nd century CE. It is globular with a rounded base, short, upright neck, and two handles fixed to the rim [Fig. 13:1–7]. The larger variant has a globular ribbed body [Fig. 13:8]. This type with triangular rim constitutes the most common cooking pot from the late

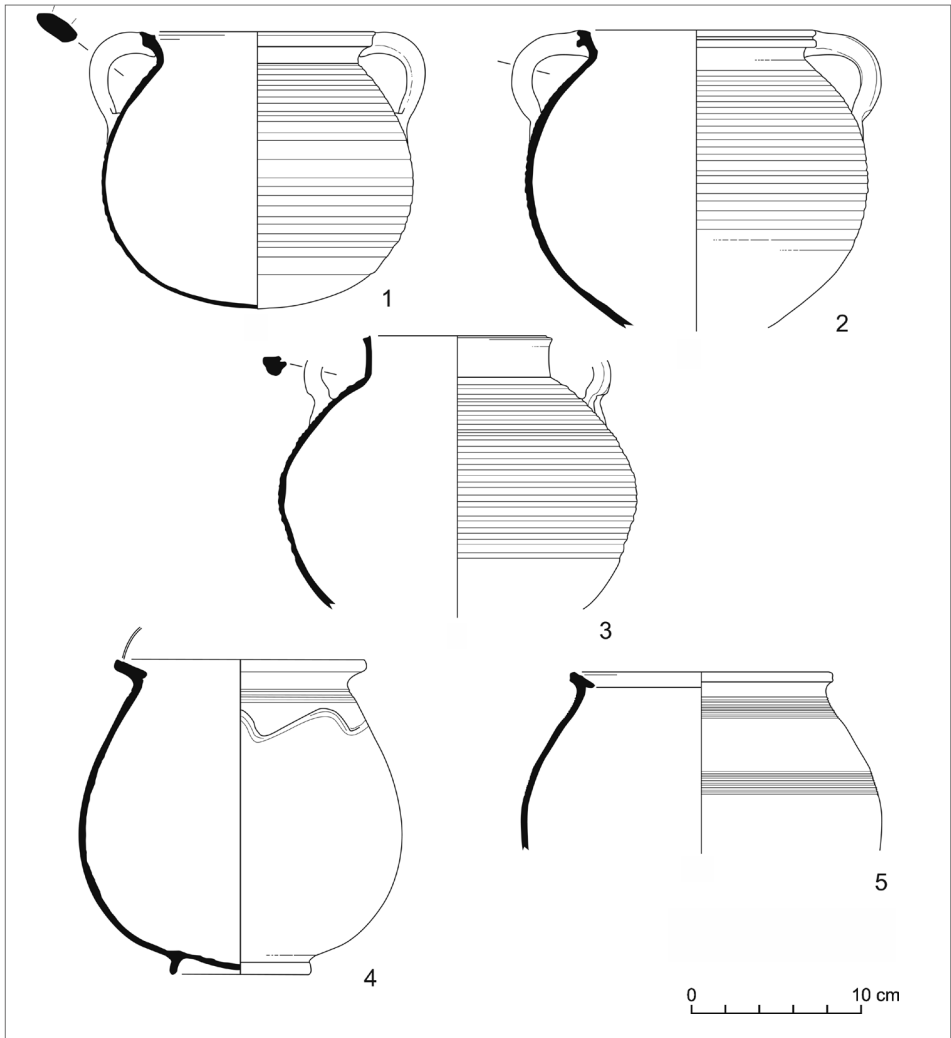


Fig. 14. Selection of kitchen ware from various loci: 1–3 – cooking pots; 4–5 – kraters (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel)

1st century until the end of the 3rd century CE.

Some cooking pots with ribbed body and rounded base have a profiled rim [Fig. 14:1–2]. They are made of a grey, sandy fabric with a whitish wash. Some parallels from 2nd/3rd century CE contexts come from ez-Zantur (Gerber 2005: Fig. 3:6), the Petra Church (Gerber 2001b: Fig. 1:18) and the site of Humayma (Gerber in Oleson et al. 2008: Fig. 23:25).

One cooking pot [Fig. 14:3] could possibly be a south Syrian product as attested by the strongly ribbed thin-walled body, which is a diagnostic feature of these workshops (Renel 2012: Fig. 123:1), or else a north Galilean cooking pot from the 3rd–4th centuries CE (Hartal, Hudson, and Berlin 2008: 134).

A specific type of pot could be considered as either a krater or a cooking pot [Fig. 14:4–5]. They could have been used for a combination of food preparation and cooking as suggested by the firing marks on the lower part of the body. The general shape is globular, without handles and with a ring base. An internal ledge

on the rim acted as a lid fold. The upper part of the body bears incised, wavy or horizontal comb decoration.

**CASSEROLES**

The most frequent open shapes are carinated casseroles with straight side walls, everted rim and rounded base [Fig. 15:2–4]. All are made of local coarse wares. Close parallels come from ez-Zantur in Petra, from a context dated to the end of the 1st/beginning of the 2nd century CE (Gerber 1997: 410, Fig. 8).

Completing this set is a single casserole with an inward-slanting rim and two vertical handles [Fig. 15:1].

**BAKING DISH**

The so-called baking dish is a flat-based cooking pan with incurved rim [Fig. 16]. The fabric is coarser than in the casseroles. The interior does not show any burnishing or stripping effect. In some cases, however, this form could be slipped and painted with motifs representing Schmid’s Dekorphase 4 (3rd–6th century CE) [Fig. 16:3–4]. A similar type was found at Humayma,

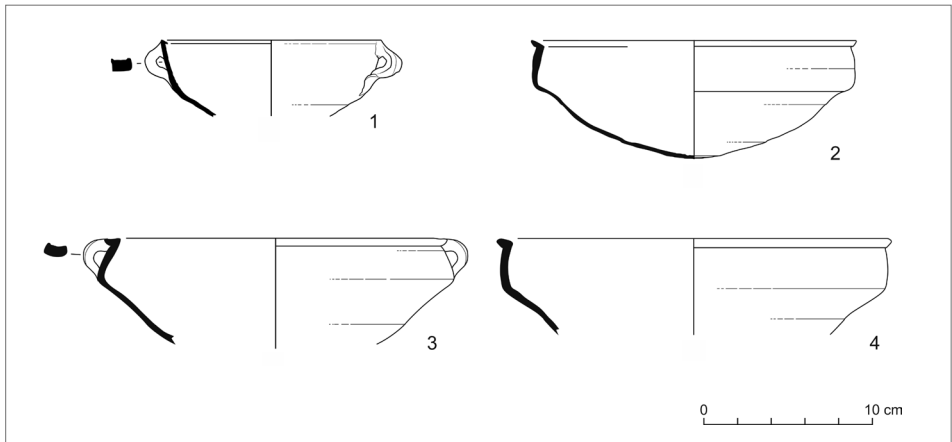


Fig. 15. Coarse ware open shapes: 1–4 – carinated casseroles (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel)

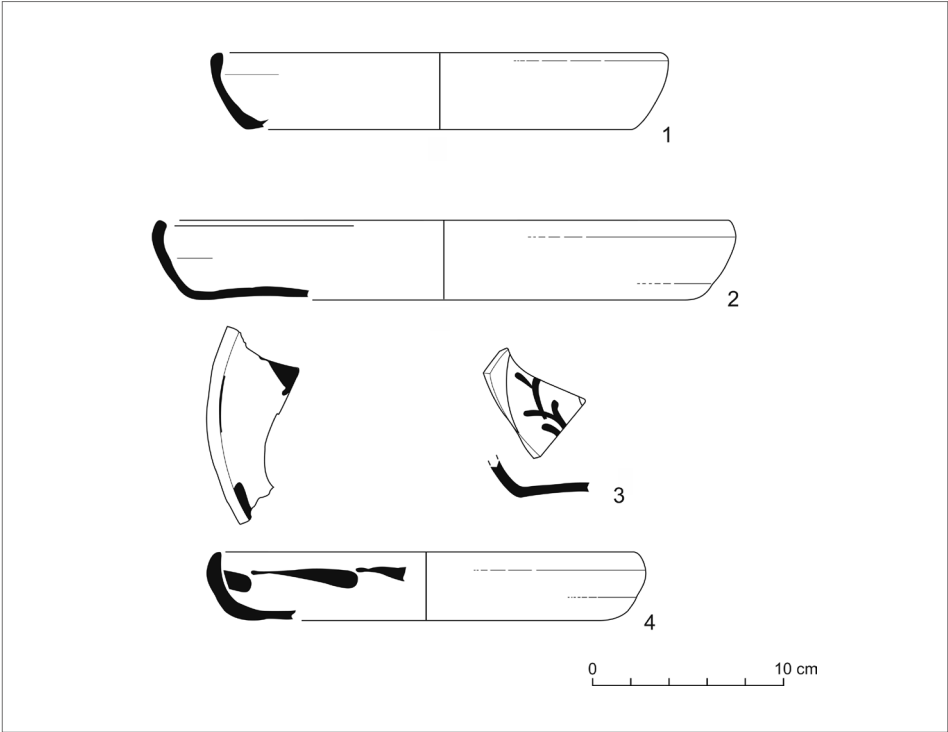


Fig. 16. Cooking pan and subvariant in painted ware (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel, S. Eliès)

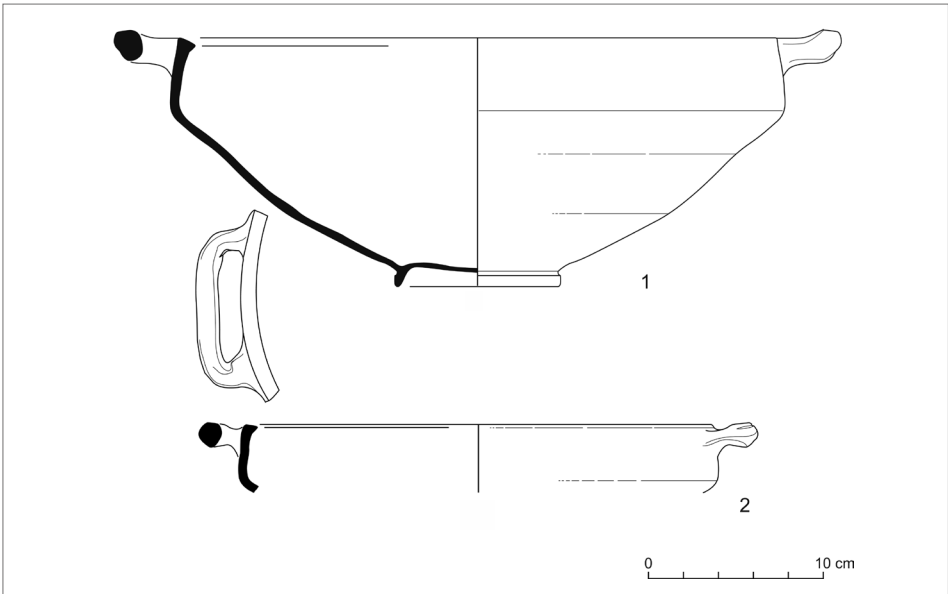


Fig. 17. Coarse ware basins (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel)

in a 2nd/3rd century CE context (Gerber in Oleson et al. 2008: Fig. 23:29) and in a contemporary context at Qasr al-Bint in ez-Zantur (Gerber 2005: Fig. 2.5).

### BASINS

A variety of carinated basins on a ring-base, quite similar in shape, furnished with horizontal handles, was found in

oven C4176 [Fig. 17]. The shape suggests varied uses for food preparation or cooking. One double-handled basin intended for food preparation was found in the construction of oven C4176 [see below, Fig. 19:1]. It is similar to the Rilled Rim Basins from Jerusalem, dated to the end of the 3rd through the beginning of the 4th century CE (Magness 1993: 203).

## STORAGE AND TRANSPORT

Storage jars were few in this assemblage, possibly because of the specific function of this room. The so called Ribbed Neck Jar, corresponding to Gerber Type A.20a (Gerber in Lindner et al. 2007: 252, Figs. 54–55), is a typical local jar in use during the 1st to 3rd/4th centuries CE in Petra [Fig. 18:1–3]. The shape and capacity of the jar suggests its use for transport in the local trade or storage. Both the fabric and the morphology of the heavily ribbed body show evolution, the fabric becoming coarser during the Roman period. An example of this type was found in Aqaba, in a context dated to the late 1st century CE (Dolinka 2003: J2, Figs 20, 21). The closest parallel comes from an early 3rd century CE context in Mezad Hazeva (Erickson-Gini 2010: 105, Fig. 2.53).

The second type is a larger-size vessel [Fig. 18:4–5] corresponding to the four-handled collared neck jar, characterized by a deep groove under the rim, which is nearly quadrangular in section. Some of these vessels have a rib between neck and shoulder. This storage jar is again an evolution of a classical Nabataean prototype (Gerber in Stucky et al. 1994: 179, Fig. 16:D; Gerber 2001a: 11, Fig. 2:L–N). The form is attested in kiln VI at Zurraba (ʿAmr and

al-Momani 1999: Fig. 12:25) and in Mezad Hazeva, in an early 3rd century CE context (Erickson-Gini 2010: Fig. 2.53). A cylinder jar with four thick handles, ribbed on the upper part of the body, was found reused in the structure of kiln C4136 [Fig. 19:1]. A fragment, albeit without the rim, could have been part of a large jar [see Fig. 19:2]; it is to be reconstructed to a height of more or less one meter. Such storage jars were in use from the second half of the 1st century CE. A jar with finger-impressed plastic decoration [Fig. 18:6] is another type of fragmentary storage jars found in the same context.

Found in the same context was an amphoriskos of fusiform shape, on a short ring-base with a high neck and two thick handles fixed to it [Fig. 18:7]. The fabric is not local, even if it could be seen as a variant of the cream ware of Nabataean times. The clay is a very pale brown to greenish color with a slipped exterior. No parallels are known.

An imported bag-shaped jar of moderate size was found reused as part of the oven wall structure [Fig. 18:8]. Produced in a micaceous fabric, this vessel is characterized by a short vertical neck, thickened rounded rim, and two vertical handles

fixed on a ribbed body. An example from Mezad Hazeva resembles this one closely in shape, but not the fabric (Erickson-Gini 2010: 105, Fig. 2.50).

A single amphora handle from context C4338, which constitutes the floor

level of room P15, corresponds to a Kapitän II Aegean amphora (Hollow Foot). This form started to be produced at the very end of the 2nd century CE and remained in production until the 4th century CE.

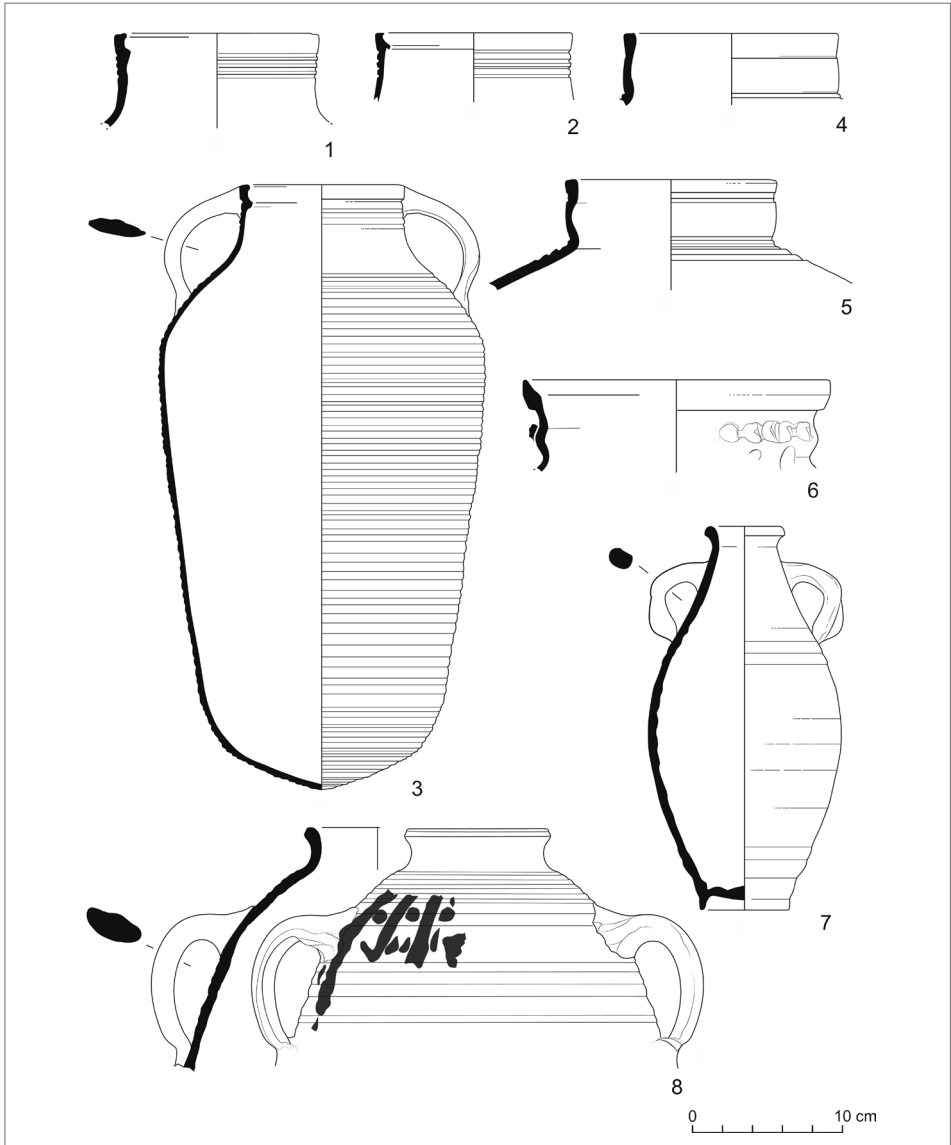


Fig. 18. Storage jars from various loci (1-7) and a cream-ware amphoriskos (8) (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel, S. Eliès)

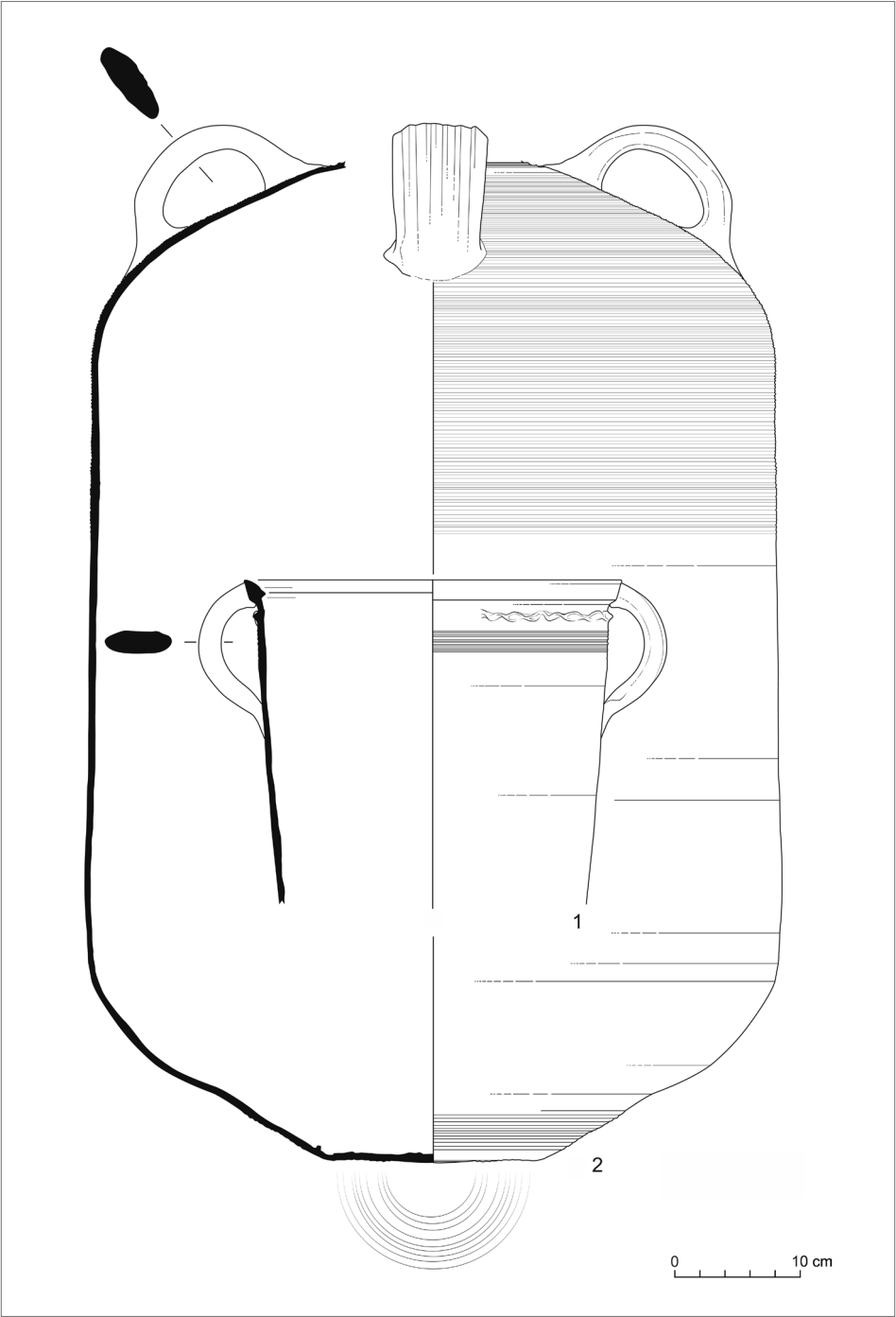


Fig. 19. Rilled-rim basin (1) and four-handled storage jar (2) found in the structure of oven C4136 (Courtesy MFQB | drawing F. Renel)

### OIL LAMPS

Six nearly complete oil lamps were found in the post-occupation fill of the complex and two others came from the excavation of the water channel C4310–4311. These

circular lamps with a central discus in the Roman provincial tradition were made locally. They represent Grawehr types I.1, I.9, I.11 and J.2 [Fig. 20], dated respectively

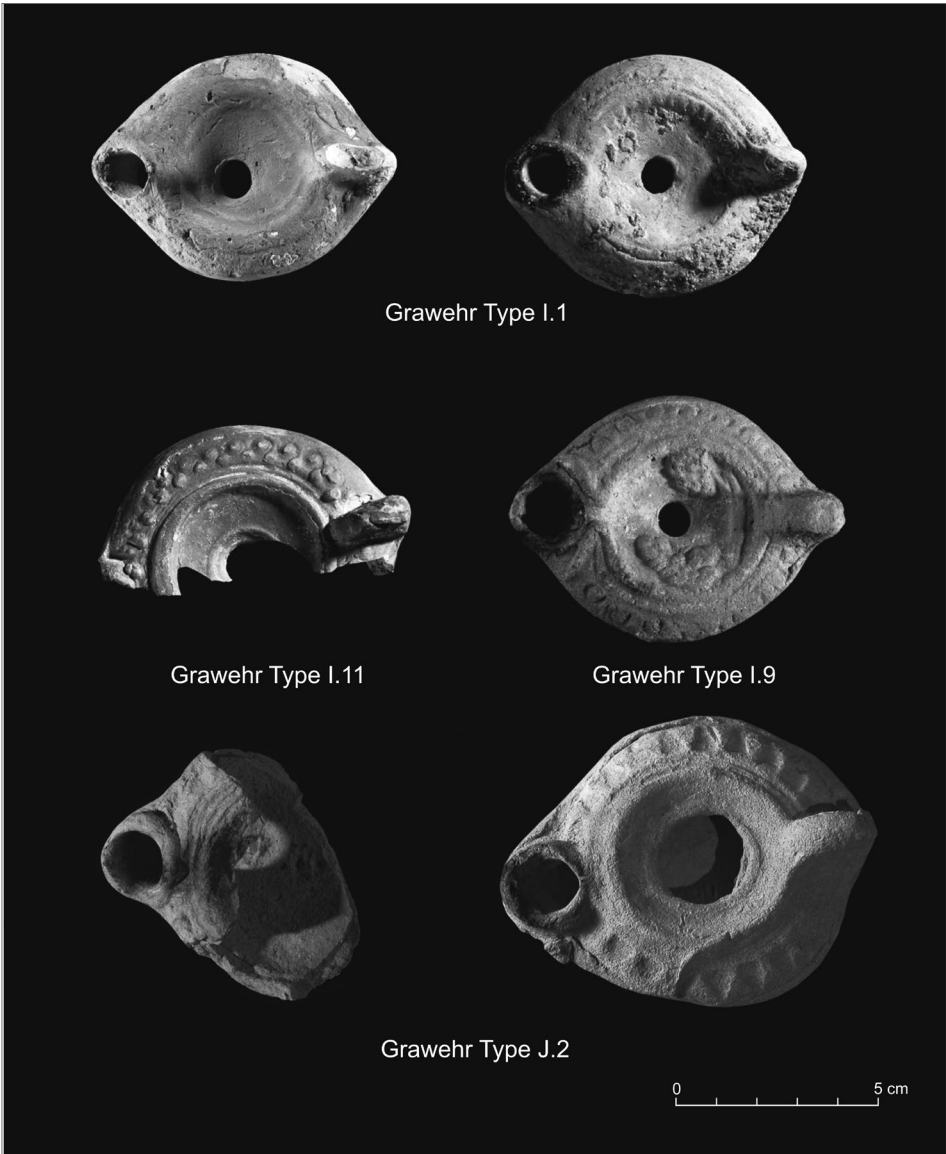


Fig. 20. Oil lamps of Grawehr Types I.1, I.9, I.11, and J.2 (Courtesy CNRS/MFQB | photos A. Pelle)

to the 3rd century CE, between 200–250 and 225–300.

The fill of oven C4136 also yielded a *polycandelon* [Fig. 21], that is, a multi-

nozzled, rather monumental lamp, designed to stand on the foot, as suggested by the discovery of flat bases of the same kind in other loci [Fig. 21]. The nozzles are

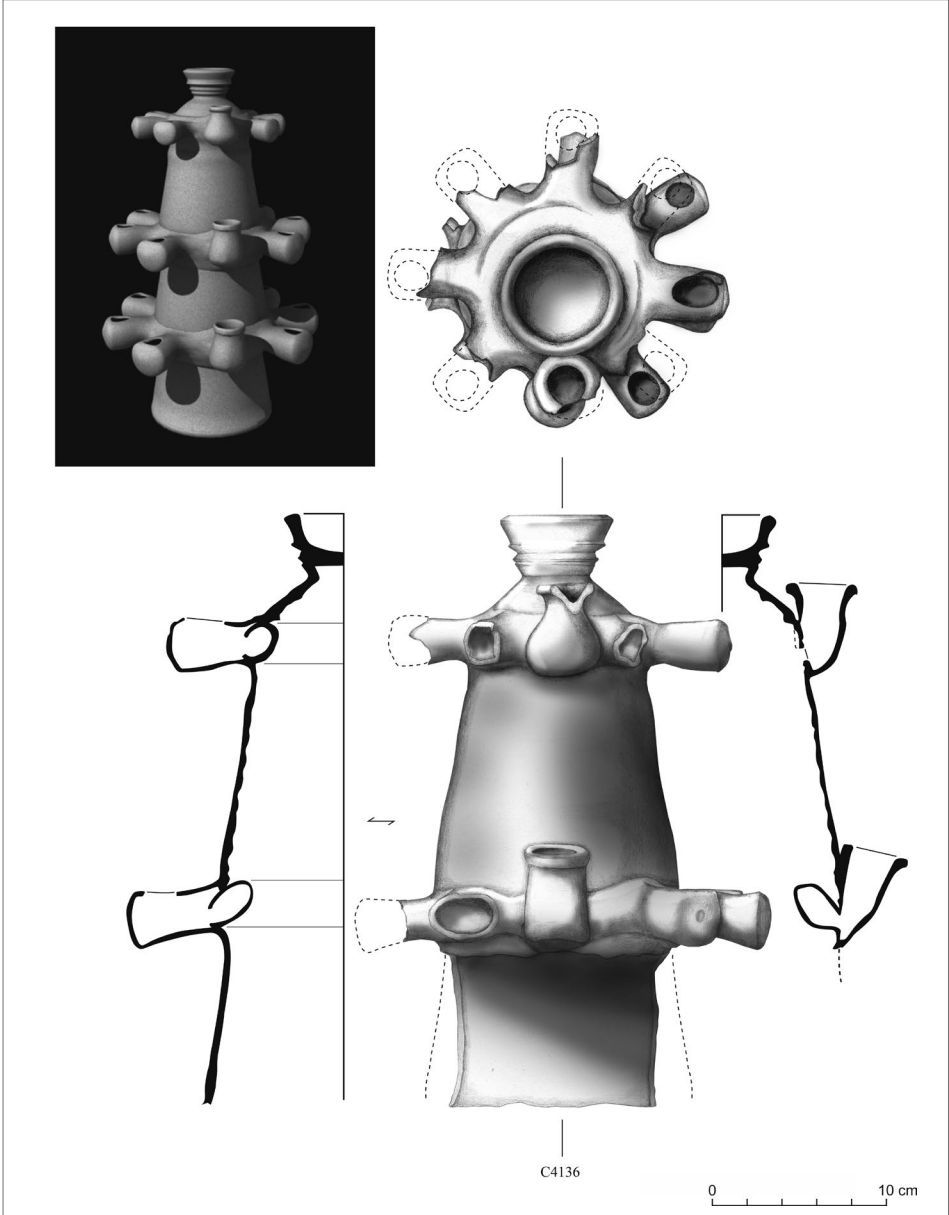


Fig. 21. *Polycandelon* from the fill of oven C4136 (Courtesy Inrap | drawing M. Zambello, 3D reconstruction N. Saulière)

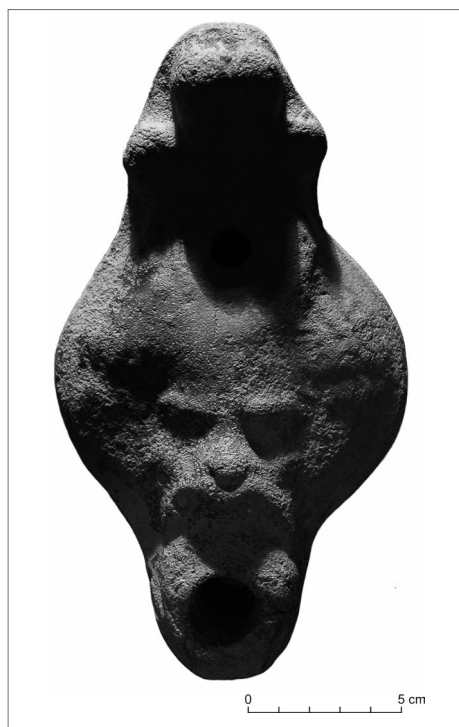


Fig. 22 Anthropomorphic lamp (Courtesy MFQR | photo F. Renel)

arranged in three tiers and were supplied with oil from an internal channel. Each tier has a filler for pouring the oil into the channel. There are seven nozzles in each tier, radiating from a central cylinder. This translates into at least 21, if not 28 nozzles in a complete example. A bowl at the top was intended probably for incense burning. No parallel for this is known from Nabataean contexts. Its function may have been to ensure lighting for ceremonies related to religious activities.

Completing this assemblage is a fully preserved oil lamp, moulded in low relief, apparently depicting a human head, possibly a Silenus, a figure from Greek mythology (Dolinka 2003: 133, Fig. 29) [Fig. 22]. An exact parallel was found in Aqaba/Aila, in a context dated to the late 1st/early 2nd century CE (Dolinka 2003: L1, 133, Fig. 29).

## CONCLUSION

There is a gap comprising the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE in the post-annexation period chronology in Petra, which comes across as some kind of “Dark Ages”, without inscriptions, coins and well-stratified deposits. A potential reason is the “phasing out” of the published part of the ez-Zantur typo-chronology in the first half of the 2nd century CE, essentially based on the dating of the Nabataean painted fine ware, and the absence of imported vessels. The proposed dating for the Qasr al-Bint assemblages is corroborated by discoveries made on the Incense Road and fits well with the early 3rd century contexts established for the different

forts excavated at Moyat ‘Awad and Sha’ar Ramon (see Erickson-Gini 2021, in this volume). The pottery assemblage presented here could thus be considered as one of the first well stratified deposits from Petra for the close of the Roman period. Moreover, it presents a good range of vessels in use during this phase, covering all the functional categories.

There are no clear differences between the ceramic repertoire of the Nabataean and Roman periods, the latter clearly being part of the same tradition. As noted by Yvonne Gerber (2014: 196), “the jars and cooking pots from the mid 2nd/early 3rd century AD show a further

development from the late 1st/early 2nd century forms". The fabric, as well as most of the forms, remain in the tradition of the earlier phase. The main change occurs in the table ware assemblage where

new forms are introduced. Thus, this late 2nd/3rd-century period, the "Dark Ages" described above, should be seen as one of both change and continuity as far as the ceramics are concerned.

#### Dr. François Renel

Director, French Archaeological Excavation at Petra–Qasr al-Bint  
Inrap, UMR 7041 ArScAn Apohr  
francois.renel@inrap.fr

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