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THE RISE OF MIDDLE ISLAMIC HAND-MADE GEOMETRICALLY-PAINTED WARE IN BILĀD AL-SHĀM (11th-13th CENTURIES A.D.)

In the 12th century A.D., the pottery of rural sites in *Bilād al-Shām* underwent a dramatic change.¹ The early Islamic repertoire, which had consisted of fine-bodied, wheel-thrown wares, was rapidly replaced by coarse handmade wares decorated with intricate geometric painted designs (fig. 1). This pottery, which is often referred to as “Ayyūbid-Mamlūk ware”, and is more rarely called “pseudo-prehistoric ware” because of its superficial resemblance to certain Bronze and Iron Age ceramics, is here given the more neutral name of handmade geometrically-painted ware (HMGPW).

Figure 2 compares the production of early Islamic wares with that of HMGPW.² It will be necessary to discuss further some details of HMGPW production below, but first it is important to establish when HMGPW first appeared, for how long it predominated, its geographical range, and its social distribution.

The principal evidence for the appearance of HMGPW is summarized in figure 3: the earliest date reasonably claimed is in the second half of the 12th century.³ An

1. A most important discussion of this change, especially in its later stages, is now Robin M. Brown's Ph. D. dissertation: “Late Islamic ceramic production and distribution in the southern Levant: a socio-economic and political interpretation” (Ph. D. dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1992). The author kindly sent me a copy after I had given an earlier version of this paper to *The Fifth International Conference on the Archaeology and History of Jordan* (Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, 15-20 April 1992).

Dr. Brown's dissertation is a model of scholarship and penetrating analysis and deserves prompt publication; in the meantime, see her: “Ceramics from the Kerak Plateau”, in J.M. Miller (ed.), *Archaeological survey of the Kerak plateau* (American Schools of Oriental Research, Archaeological Reports 1, Atlanta, 1991), 169-280;

“Late Islamic ceramic sequences from el-Lejjun: stratigraphic and historical contexts”, in S.T. Parker (ed.), *The Roman frontier in central Jordan: final report on the Limes Arabica Project 1980-1989* (Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, forthcoming); and “The distribution of southern Levantine glazed wares in Transjordan: 12th-15th-centuries”, in G. Vannini *et al.* (eds.), *Produzione e circolazione delle ceramiche invetriate al tempo delle crociate (secc. XII-XIII)* (Centro Universitario Europeo per i Beni Culturali, Ravello, forthcoming). I am particularly grateful to Dr. Brown for her generous and stimulating collaboration in this and other areas of research. I have learnt much from her, and my views upon the rise of HMGPW have much matured after reading her work.

2. Cf. Brown, 1992: 189-198.

3. Cf. Brown, 1992: 246.

earlier date is unlikely because, despite the comparative boom in the excavation of Islamic sites since the 1970s, HMGPW has nowhere been found in contexts securely dated before the second half of the 12th century.⁴

There is a small but growing body of evidence (summarized in fig. 4) that HMGPW, characterized by *intricate* geometric decoration, was immediately preceded by handmade pottery decorated with *simple* geometric designs in red paint (fig. 5).⁵ While it is tempting to assume that HMGPW evolved from the apparently earlier red-painted handmade pottery, the two decorative styles are quite distinct and it cannot now be demonstrated that one evolved from the other: for the moment, it is prudent to regard the two wares as independent of each other.⁶

The disappearance of HMGPW cannot be dated with any precision. Dothan argued that HMGPW did not survive "after the end of the 13th century", but this is far too early a date.⁷ In the Armenian Garden, Jerusalem, HMGPW characterized Mamlūk occupation, c. 1375 - c. 1400.⁸ At Hisbān, Sauer argued that HMGPW continued in use until the mid 15th century, but "with most of it belonging to the 13th and 14th centuries".⁹ At Ḥamāt, HMGPW predominated until at least the early 15th century: one of the most important groups of this ware came from the sealed cistern G11B, dated by a large number of coins with a heavy concentration in the period 1382-1412.¹⁰ While there can be no doubt that HMGPW continued into the 15th century, very few excavations have produced stratified deposits with secure on-site evidence of absolute date for the 16th-20th centuries.¹¹ Handmade pottery with elaborate geometric painted decoration very similar to middle Islamic HMGPW appears in levels loosely dated to the

4. J.A. Sauer ("Pottery Techniques at Tell Deir 'Alla", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 224 [1976] 91-94) has corrected the 8th-century date given to HMGPW at Tell Abū Qa'dān by H.J. Franken and J. Kalsbeek (*Potters of a medieval village in the Jordan valley* [North Holland Ceramic Studies in Archaeology 3, Amsterdam and Oxford, 1975], 4 and fig. 77), and the 11th-century date proposed by Johns for HMGPW at the Jerusalem citadel is reviewed in an appendix below. G. Ziadeh (« Ottoman ceramics from Ti'innik, Palestine », *Levant* 27 [1995]) claims that HMGPW « became dominant only between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries ».

5. Cf. Brown, 1992: 243-246.

6. Brown, 1992: 245-246.

7. M. Dothan, "The excavations at 'Afūla", *'Atiqot* 1 (1955) 26.

8. A.D. Tushingham, *Excavations in Jerusalem 1961-1967* (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 1985), 150.

9. J.A. Sauer, *Heshbon Pottery 1971. A Preliminary Report on the Pottery from the 1971 Excavations at Tell Heshbān* (Andrews University Monographs 7, Berrien Springs, 1973), 62.

10. P.J. Riis and V. Poulsen, *Ḥamā. Fouilles et Recherches de la Fondation Carlsberg 1931-1938. IV.2. Les Verreries et Poteries Médiévales* (Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, 1957), 271-274, n^{os} 999, 1000, 1011, 1021, 1022, 1034. E. Hammershaimb and R. Thomsen, "Monnaies islamiques" in G. Ploug *et al.*, *Ḥamā. Fouilles et recherches de la Fondation Carlsberg 1931-1938. IV.3: les petits objets médiévaux sauf les verreries et poteries* (Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, 1969), 146-148.

11. R.M. Brown, "Summary report of the 1986 excavations: late Islamic Shobak", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 32 (1988), 240; *idem*, "Excavations in the 14th century A.D. Mamlūk palace at Kerak", *ADAJ* 33 (1989), 287-304, table 2; *idem*, 1991: 242; *idem*, 1992: 321-324. S. Gibson *et al.*, "The Sataf Project

Ottoman period (*i.e.* 16th century and later) at Umm al-Jimāl, Karak, Shawbak, and Ti'innik.¹² Such pottery may be found in association with clay pipes which must postdate the introduction of tobacco-smoking in the first decade of the 17th century.¹³ It follows that geometrically-painted handmade wares continued at least until then; unless all HMGPW found in association with clay pipes is residual.

It seems likely that HMGPW did not so much disappear as gradually evolve into other wares. The repertoire of rural sites in *Bilād al-Shām* continued to be dominated by handmade pottery until the late 19th century. This assumes that the 19th-century date traditionally assigned to "Gaza Ware" is correct, but Steven Rosen and Glenn Goodfriend have recently argued that it was produced as early as *c.* 1700 A.D. ("An early date for Gaza Ware from the northern Negev", *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 125 [1993] 143-148). Some 19th-century village pottery was painted with geometric decoration reminiscent of the designs of HMGPW, and village potters still produce handmade vessels painted with geometric designs.¹⁴ Most observers have interpreted this as a "degeneration" over time in the quality of painted decoration, and have assumed that modern handmade painted pottery is the distant descendant of an unbroken tradition which originates with HMGPW.¹⁵ While the techniques of manufacture and decoration are

of landscape archaeology in the Judaeen Hills: a preliminary report on four seasons of survey and excavation", *Levant* 23 (1991), 43-47.

J. Johns and A.M. McQuitty, "The Fāris Project: preliminary report upon the 1986 and 1988 seasons", *Levant* 21 (1989), 63-95.

A. McQuitty and R. Falkner, "The Fāris Project: preliminary report on the 1989, 1990 and 1991 seasons", *Levant* 25 (1993), 37-61.

12. Brown, 1991: 242. Ziadeh, 1995.

13. St. J. Simpson, "Ottoman clay pipes from Jerusalem and the Levant: a critical review of the published evidence", *Society for Clay Pipe Research Newsletter* 28 (1990), 6-16. McQuitty and Falkner, 1993: 59.

14. B. Mershen, "Recent hand-made pottery from Northern Jordan", *Berytus* 33 (1985), 75-78. J. Mason and L. Taylor, "Village pots; village women", *Jordan Times*, 2 July 1988, 2; *idem*, "Village pottery — dying tradition", *Jordan Times*, 3 July 1988, 2; *idem*, "Pottery reflects village women's creativity", *Jordan Times*, 4 July 1988, 2; *idem*, "Straw gives strength to village pottery", *Jordan Times*, 5 July 1988, 2. G.A. London and M. Sinclair, "An ethnoarchaeological survey of potters in Jordan", in L.G. Herr *et al.* (eds.), *Madaba*

Plains Project 2: the 1987 season at Tell el-'Umeiri and vicinity and subsequent studies (Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, 1991), 420-428.

15. B. Bagatti, *I monumenti di Emmaus el-Qubeibeh e dei dintorni* (Publications of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum 4, Jerusalem, 1947), 132-139. Franken and Kalsbeek, 1975: 199. Brown, 1991: 239, 242. D. Mackensie, "The Excavations at Ain Shems, 1911", *Palestine Exploration Fund Annual* 1 (1911), 57. L. Einsler, "Das Töpferhandwerk bei den Buernfrauen von Ramallah und Umgegend", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Palästina Vereins* 37 (1914), 249-260, pls. XLV-XLVII. S.J. Saller, *Excavations at Bethany (1949-1953)* (Publications of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 12. Jerusalem, 1957), 84. A.E. Glock, "Ceramic ethno-culture", in A. Hadidi (ed.), *Studies in the history and archaeology of Jordan I* (Amman, 1982), 145-151. G.M. Crowfoot, "Pots, ancient and modern", *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, 1932: 179-187. G.J. Wightman, *The Damascus Gate, Jerusalem. Excavations by C.-M. Bennet and J.B. Hennessey at the Damascus Gate, Jerusalem, 1964-1966* (British Archaeological Reports, International Series 519, Oxford, 1989), 63. Brown, 1992: 252-264, 334-336.

roughly comparable, the range of forms and repertoire of decorative motifs is different, and HMGPW and modern handmade painted pottery occupy very different places in the respective material culture assemblages.

Figure 6 shows the principal sites from which finds of HMGPW have been published, and the location of published regional surveys which have identified large numbers of sites yielding HMGPW.¹⁶ This map does not illustrate the true range of HMGPW, but rather those areas in which archaeological fieldwork has been most intense and where archaeologists have been most assiduous in publishing their research. The blank spaces on the map do not necessarily indicate areas where HMGPW is absent, nor areas where HMGPW has not been found, but rather those areas for which there are no published reports of HMGPW. Even for Palestine and Jordan, figure 6 does not adequately illustrate distribution: wherever there has been intensive regional survey, a far higher density of HMGPW sites is revealed.

Figure 6 thus gives a most misleading impression. HMGPW is *not* peculiar to Palestine and Jordan, with a few stray findspots elsewhere. As Northedge notes, HMGPW has “a wide distribution over the whole Levant, from the north ... to Palestine ... and Jordan”, and Grabar may be excused the exaggeration, when he claims that HMGPW has “been recorded on nearly every medieval site in Syria and Mesopotamia”.¹⁷ Rogers reports sherds of HMGPW “without provenance in the Classical Museum [at Konya] ... predictably classified as ‘Phrygian’”: he has seen HMGPW from Raqqa in the depot of the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul, and has published sherds of HMGPW from the excavations at Apamea.¹⁸ Sherds of HMGPW have been collected from the Aleppo citadel and from al-Arayma, 17 km north of Aleppo.¹⁹ The Danish excavations at Ḥamāt produced vast quantities of HMGPW, and the largest number of whole or nearly whole vessels yet to come from any site.²⁰ Grabar’s excavations at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī yielded a significant amount of HMGPW.²¹ HMGPW is reported along the Euphrates-Tigris zone from Raqqa to Bālis to Wāsiṭ, but these are unconfirmed reports.²²

16. Cf. Brown, 1992: 246-251.

17. A.E. Northedge, “Qal’at ‘Ammān in the Early Islamic Period”. (Ph. D. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1984), 282. O. Grabar *et al.*, *City in the desert. Qaṣr al-Ḥayr East*. (Harvard Middle Eastern Monograph Series, 1978), 201, n. 20.

18. J.M. Rogers, “Apamea. The Medieval Pottery. Preliminary Report”, in J. and J.C. Balty (eds.), *Apamée de Syrie. Bilan des recherches archéologiques 1969-1971. Actes du colloque tenu à Bruxelles les 15, 17 et 18 avril 1972* (fouilles

d’Apamée de Syrie. Miscellanea 7. Centre belge de recherches archéologiques à Apamée de Syrie, Brussels, 1972), 264, n. 1; 263-265, pls. XCIV.2-3, XCV.1-2.

19. J. Matthers *et al.*, “Tell Rifa’at 1977. Preliminary Report of an Archaeological Survey”, *Iraq* 40 (1978), 158.

20. Riis and Poulsen 1957: 270-274.

21. Grabar 1978: I.113, 201, II.164-167.

22. Grabar 1978: 201, n. 20. F. Safar, *Wāsiṭ: the sixth season’s excavations* (Cairo, 1945), 38, fig. 16.33.

In short, HMGPW occurs in *Bilād al-Shām* from Aleppo in the North to Ayla in the South, and from the Mediterranean coast to the Euphrates. There are wide gaps within this distribution, but these may be caused by corresponding gaps in archaeological research and publication.

It remains to consider HMGPW's "social distribution". Pringle remarks that "The composition of an assemblage may often ... be conditioned ... by the nature of the site from which it came (*e.g.* town, castle village, industrial site, *etc.*)", and cites the stables at ʿAthlith, where wheel-thrown pottery was replaced by HMGPW "at a time [post 1291] when the latter had already been produced locally for over a century".²³ In this case, the change in the nature of the site, from the working stables of the Templar castle to a ruin occupied by squatters, determined the shift from wheel-thrown to handmade pottery, and not chronological or geographical variants. Brown makes a similar point, when she compares the ceramic assemblage at the *qalʿa* (Mamlūk palace and castle) at Karak in the 14th-15th centuries with the typical assemblage from contemporary village sites in the *Arḍ al-Karak*. HMGPW predominates in village assemblages, but is rare at the *qalʿa*, and Brown argues that this contrast corresponds to the social distinction between the Mamlūk élite and the local peasantry.²⁴ Whitcomb goes yet further when he suggests that the increase of handmade wares at Ayla, alongside the presence of wheel-thrown pottery and glazed imports, might correspond to "a growing class division, perhaps of rich and poor".²⁵

On the regional scale, HMGPW represents a higher proportion of the middle Islamic ceramic repertoire in Transjordan than in Palestine and Syria. At ʿAmwās al-Qubayba, Bagatti estimates that handmade pottery amounted to no more than one-third of the mid 12th- to early 13th-century assemblage.²⁶ At al-Burj al-Aḥmar, handmade wares never comprise more than 39% of the assemblage, and in all phases plain wheel-thrown wares are the largest class of pottery.²⁷ At Ḥamāt, the phases in which HMGPW (class D. XX) occur are all dominated by wheel-thrown "everyday pottery" (class D. XIX).²⁸

East of the Jordan and south of the Yarmūk, the picture is very different. As Northedge notes for the ʿAmmān citadel: "At the majority of sites in the Levant,

23. D. Pringle, "The Medieval Pottery of Palestine and Transjordan (A.D. 636-1500): an Introduction, Gazetteer and Bibliography", *Medieval Ceramics* 5 (1981), 47. C.N. Johns, "Excavations at Pilgrim's Castle, ʿAtlit (1932-1933); Stables at the South-West of the Suburb", *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine* 5 (1935), 54.

24. Brown, 1989: 297-298; *idem*, 1991: 232-241; *idem*, 1992: 375-379, 455-457. Cf. below.

25. D. Whitcomb, "A Fāṭimid Residence at Aqaba, Jordan", *ADAJ* 32 (1988), 222. Cf. Brown, 1992: 175 and n. 9.

26. Bagatti, 1947: 132-139.

27. D. Pringle, *The Red Tower (al-Burj al-Aḥmar). Settlement in the Plain of Sharon at the Time of the Crusaders and Mamlūks A.D. 1099-1516* (British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem Monographs 1, London, 1986), 139-140.

28. Riis and Poulsen, 1957: 264-269.

‘Pseudo-Prehistoric’ ware [*i.e.* HMGPW] forms one component of the unglazed repertoire, and is balanced by a tradition of good-quality thrown unglazed earthenware. At ‘Ammān however this thrown earthenware tradition disappears ... and ‘Pseudo-Prehistoric’ ware [*i.e.* HMGPW] is the only tradition found’.²⁹ A similar picture comes from Tall Abū Qa’dān, from Ḥisbān, from Khirbat Fāris and other rural villages in the *Arḍ al-Karak*, from Shawbak, and al-Wu’ayra: although, at all of these sites, small proportions of wheelthrown and glazed pottery are associated with HMGPW.³⁰ Having established so far as is practicable the chronological, geographical, and social distribution of HMGPW, it is now possible to discuss the more interesting question of the causes of the rise of HMGPW. Two points demand immediate consideration.

First, while there are some indications of variation in the decorative repertoire from region to region within *Bilād al-Shām*, the forms and designs of HMGPW display a high degree of standardization over its range considered as a whole, so that HMGPW from anywhere in *Bilād al-Shām* may be instantly distinguished from handmade geometrically painted wares from Iran, the Gulf, Nubia, or the Maghrib (for these, see below).³¹

Second, is the speed at which HMGPW rose to predominance. If it is correct that the mature style of intricate geometric decoration developed during the second half of the 12th century, then, within little more than half a century, it was already established throughout its range.

The implications of these two points are considerable. It is extremely unlikely that every village in *Bilād al-Shām* should have begun independently to produce the ware in the same vessel forms and decorated in more or less the same style within a half a century of its first appearance. It is therefore necessary to assume the diffusion of HMGPW. Such a rapid rate of diffusion combined with such a high degree of standardization can be explained only by the movement of either pots or potters. Whichever is preferred, the case is proven for a relatively high degree of specialized production:

29. Northedge, 1984: 283.

30. Franken and Kalsbeek, 1975: 220-221, fig. 77. Sauer, 1973: 53. Johns and McQuitty, 1989a; *idem*, “The Fāris Project: supplementary report on the 1986 and 1988 seasons: the coins and the glass”, *ADAJ* 33 (1989), 245-258. McQuitty and Falkner 1993. R.M. Brown, “Late Islamic Settlement Patterns on the Kerak Plateau, Transjordan” (MA Thesis, Binghamton, New York State University, 1984); *idem*, “A 12th century A.D. sequence from southern

Transjordan. Crusader and Ayyūbid occupation at El-Wu’eira”, *ADAJ* 31 (1987) 277, 284; *idem*, 1988: 237; *idem*, 1991: 232-241; *idem*, 1992: 363-453. For a more detailed discussion of regional variation in the late Islamic ceramic repertoire, see Brown, 1992: 232-242, 304-309.

31. Franken and Kalsbeek, 1975: 167-203. L. Khadija, “Designs on painted Ayyūbid / Mamlūk pottery from Rujm el-Kursi, 1990 season”, *ADAJ* 36 (1992), 345-356.

if it was the potters who moved, then they must have constituted a specialized group of itinerant craftsmen; if it was the pots, then they must have been produced in specialized centres for trade. This is confirmed by the significant place occupied by HMGPW in urban ceramic repertoires: HMGPW was manifestly manufactured for the urban markets of Ḥamāt, Jerusalem, and Karak. In other words, although the production of HMGPW could be seen as a technical regression from the early Islamic wheel-thrown tradition, HMGPW nonetheless constitutes a specialized class of pottery within the middle Islamic repertoire.

Most archaeologists have assumed that HMGPW was a domestic product. They have been led to this conclusion in part by analogy with ethnographic cases from *Bilād al-Shām*, all of which report the production of handmade pottery by women in households.³² This analogy does not bear close inspection, and it is demonstrable that HMGPW production was significantly more specialized than both simple handmade and modern handmade pottery (see fig. 7).

Again, most archaeologists have assumed that what they have perceived as the shift from wheel-thrown production for the market to hand-made production for the household was the response of the villagers of *Bilād al-Shām* to economic and demographic decline, sometimes seen as the migration of the region from the early Islamic core to the middle Islamic periphery. The date of the rise of HMGPW argues strongly against this assumption.

The late 12th to late 13th century, when HMGPW established itself, was a period of demographic and economic revival in the Syrian countryside, and the reunification of Syria and Egypt after 1187 led to the reincorporation of most of the region with the centre of economic and political power. The historical arguments to this effect do not need rehearsing here, and archaeological evidence points in the same direction.³³

Most spectacular is the evidence of the number of rural settlements identified by regional surveys in Jordan, summarized in figure 8. The 13th- to 14th-century peak in settlement numbers is evident, and corresponds to HMGPW sites. Surface survey and what little excavation there has been of middle Islamic settlements suggest that the 12th and 13th centuries were characterized by fairly intense construction and reconstruction in rural villages, a phenomenon which, if verified, would sustain the argument for rural prosperity and demographic expansion. Also in support of this argument is the evidence from the Jordan valley for massive expansion in the cultivation

32. Cf. Brown, 1992: 178-186, 324-334, 455. Einsler, 1914. Mason and Taylor, 1988a-d. Mershen, 1985. London and Sinclair 1991: 421.
33. For the *Ard al-Karak*, see J. Johns, "Settlement in the Ard al-Karak in the Islamic Period", in M. Zaghoul and K. 'Amr (eds.), *Studies in the history and archaeology of Jordan IV*

(Amman, 1992), 363-368; *idem*, « The *Longue durée*: state and settlement strategies in southern Transjordan across the Islamic centuries » in E. L. Rogan and T. Tell (eds), *Village, steppe and state: the social origins of modern Jordan*, London, 1994, 1-31.

and processing of sugar cane at exactly the period in which HMGPW established itself.³⁴

It would seem that the current orthodoxy, according to which HMGPW was a non-specialized domestic product taken up by villagers throughout *Bilād al-Shām* during a period of economic and demographic decline, cannot be sustained. On the contrary, HMGPW was a specialized product, rapidly diffused through *Bilād al-Shām* during a period of economic and demographic revival. This point will be developed below.

It was remarked a moment ago that the rapid spread of HMGPW can only be explained by the movement of either pots or potters. Which is the more likely?

The case for or against trade in HMGPW will remain undecided until there is more information about the sites of production and the petrographical and chemical composition of HMGPW. As Brown notes, the diversity of fabrics and firing techniques visible to the naked eye suggests that HMGPW was produced in many centres.³⁵ In the meantime, most archaeologists have assumed that HMGPW was of too poor quality to have been traded outside the immediate neighbourhood in which it was produced. This is a dangerous line of reasoning: what makes a class of pottery an "export ware" is the fact that it was exported, not some intrinsic quality. There are many well-attested instances of long-distance trade in coarse handmade pottery in the historical and ethnographic record, such as the "black pots" of Jutland, or the late Roman cookingpots from Pantelleria, which seem to have travelled upon the back of the African *annona* fleet.³⁶ In this context, it may be significant that undecorated handmade bowls from the latest phase at Ayla, nicknamed "Tupperware", were made in a range of sizes which could be "nested" into each other, a common feature of pottery made for export.³⁷ There can be no doubt that HMGPW was traded locally, for only the market can account for the presence of large quantities of HMGPW in urban contexts. However, the weight and fragility of the thick-walled, low-fired ware, the difficulty of communications through the rugged terrain of much of the region, and the low price that the ware would have fetched in the market relative to the wheel-thrown products of urban centres, are all factors which combine to make significant long-distance trade in HMGPW most improbable.

The alternative to trade in pots is that it was the potters who moved, carrying their specialized skills from village to village, using materials locally available. At this point, it will be helpful to consider a potential analogy.

34. S. al-Hamarnah, "Zirā'āt qaṣab al-sukkar wa-ṣinā'atu-hu 'ind al-'Arab wa'l-muslimin", *ADAJ* 22 (1977-1978), 12-19. Brown, 1992: 285-289.

35. Brown, 1991: 240; *idem*, 1992: 196-197.

36. A. Steensberg, "Hand-made pottery in Jutland", *Antiquity* 14 (1940), 148-153.

M.G. Fulford and D.P.S. Peacock, *Excavations at Carthage: the British mission* I.2 (Sheffield,

1984), 8-10, 157-159. D.P.S. Peacock, *Pottery in the Roman World: an ethnoarchaeological approach* (London, 1989), 79-80. E. Fentress and P. Perkins, "Counting African Red Slip Ware", *L'Africa romana. Atti del V convegno di studio, Sassari 11-13 dicembre 1987*, (Ozieri, 1988), 205-214.

37. Whitcomb, 1988: 212.

In late medieval Nubia, a similar shift from wheel-thrown to handmade pottery occurs. Adams argues that Nubian handmade wares were produced “by members of a special endogamous caste, whose members guarded the secret of the potter’s art”. Adams cites a modern ethnographic case from Dār Fūr, where potters are the wives of blacksmiths, and both occupations are stigmatized by the local population, so that the blacksmith-potters constitute a distinct endogamous group. This discrete social group does not possess its own material culture, and so would be archaeologically invisible.³⁸ Distinct endogamous groups of specialist craftsmen are found in *Bilād al-Shām*, such as the Khazāy ironsmiths and Gipsy goldsmiths, but none now makes pottery, and neither they nor the Arab tribes alongside which they live preserve any memory of them having done so.³⁹ Modern itinerant potters are well documented elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁰

Such an endogamous group of itinerant potters, with a material culture either identical to that of the indigenous population or so ephemeral as to be as yet unperceived in the archaeological record, *could* certainly have been responsible for the rapid spread of HMGPW throughout *Bilād al-Shām*. This is not, of course, the same as saying that such a group *was* responsible but, given the obstacles to the only obvious alternative — long-distance trade in HMGPW — it is certainly a hypothesis which deserves further investigation.

If HMGPW was originally spread by itinerant potters, whence did they come? The shift from wheel-thrown to handmade production during the middle Islamic period was not exclusive to *Bilād al-Shām*, nor was the decoration of handmade pottery with intricate geometric painted designs. The phenomenon occurred over a vast region, including southern Iran and the Arabian Gulf, southern and western Arabia, the trading ports of the East African littoral, Nubia, and the Berber cultures of the Maghreb from Siwa oasis to Morocco.

38. W.Y. Adams, *Ceramic industries of medieval Nubia* (Memoirs of UNESCO archaeological survey of Sudanese Nubia 1, 2 vols, Lexington, 1986), I: 40. R. Haaland, “Ethnographical observations of pottery-making in Darfur, western Sudan, with some reflections on archaeological interpretation”, in K. Kristiansen and C. Paludan-Müller (eds.), *New directions in Scandinavian archaeology (Studies in Scandinavian prehistory and early history I*, Odense, 1978), 47-61. Smith-potters, of course, occur elsewhere in northern Africa, cf. J. Sterner and N. David, “Gender and caste in the Mandara Highlands: north-eastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon”, *Ethnology* 30 (1991), 335-369; E.W. Herbert.

Iron, gender and power. Rituals of transformation in African societies (Indiana University Press, 1993).

39. A. Musil, *The manners and customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (American Geographical Society, Oriental Exploration Studies 6, New York, 1928), 181-182. P. Gubser, *Politics and change on al-Karak, Jordan. A study of a small Arab town and its district* (London, 1973), 68-69.

40. G.A. London, “On fig leaves, itinerant potters, and pottery-production locations in Cyprus”, in P.E. McGovern (ed.), *Cross-craft and cross-cultural interactions in ceramics (Ceramics and civilizations IV*, Westerville, Ohio, 1989), 71-72.

It is the Maghreb which has been most insistently proposed as the origin of the HMGPW potters. Warren noted that the geometric designs of HMGPW “strongly resemble those seen on the pottery of the aboriginal Kabyle Mountaineers of Algeria, and on that of the ... Riff People of the Empire of Morocco”, but Franken first suggested that HMGPW was introduced from North Africa. He argued that, before the mid 8th century, most pottery was produced in large urban factories. The mid 8th century earthquake and the transfer of the caliphal capital from Damascus to Baghdad caused the towns of Palestine and Jordan to decline. The decay of towns was responsible for the collapse of both urban ceramic factories and the market for factory-produced wheel-thrown pottery. These changes coincided with growing prosperity in the countryside, derived from intensive sugar production. Growing rural prosperity attracted new inhabitants to the land: “Many of them may have been soldiers of the armies that conquered North Africa who returned with their families to the Near East. They brought with them a completely new ceramic product, which strongly suggests African influence: completely handmade pottery with an overall painted decoration. It has become known as Mamlūk pottery after the first find spots which date from Crusader times, but it came to the country hundreds of years earlier”.⁴¹

The first major weakness in Franken’s argument is historical: the shift from wheel-thrown to handmade pottery did not begin as early as the mid 8th century but much later, in the 12th century. At Tall Abū Qa’dān, Franken dated the appearance of HMGPW to the 8th century A.D., but Sauer’s critical reappraisal of the stratigraphy demonstrates that HMGPW was in use only from the 12th or 13th century onwards, and that the few sherds of HMGPW found in earlier levels must have been intrusive: a conclusion supported by subsequent excavation (fig. 3).⁴² Thus the historical context in which Franken seeks to place the appearance of HMGPW is some 300 years too early.

Next, Franken’s suggestion that the victorious conquerors of the Maghreb flooded back to Syria and settled in rural villages with Berber wives, who unpacked a new ceramic tradition, is *a priori* most improbable. Why should the victors have abandoned their rich spoils in Ifriqiyya and al-Andalus, and rushed back to toil in the fields of Syria? Small surprise that there is absolutely no evidence that they did so, whether in the 8th century or in the 12th.

Finally, none of this would matter if a dynamic relationship between HMGPW and Berber pottery could be demonstrated. In Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya

41. C.W. Wilson and C. Warren, *The recovery of Jerusalem. A narrative of exploration and discovery in the city and the Holy Land* (London, 1871), 844. D. Homès-Fredericq and Franken (eds.), *Argile — source de vie. Sept millénaires de céramique en Jordanie* (documents du Proche-Orient ancien — Expositions temporaires 3

— Musées royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, Brussels, 1985), 241; *idem*, *Pottery and potters — past and present. 7000 years of ceramic art in Jordan* (Tübingen, 1986), 244.

42. Franken and Kalsbeek, 1875: 4, fig. 77 Sauer, 1976.

as far east as Siwā oasis, Berber villagers make handmade painted pottery.⁴³ The techniques of manufacture and production are in many respects similar to those recorded by the Syrian ethnographers, and described by Franken and Kalsbeek. The painted decoration is predominantly, but not exclusively, geometric, and some of the individual Berber geometric elements closely resemble the Syrian. But here the similarities end. The repertoire of forms is strikingly different, and Berber forms occasionally attain a baroque vulgarity which is never approached in Syria. Each region has its own style, combining a common repertoire of small geometric designs into distinctive larger patterns. In the Rif, there is considerable variation in form and decoration from village to village.

In short, while there is a superficial, generic similarity between modern Berber hand-made painted wares and middle Islamic Syrian HMGPW, there is no good reason to

43. D. Randall-Maciver and A. Wilkin, *Libyan Notes* (London, 1901). D. Randall-Maciver, "On a rare fabric of Kabyle pottery", *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 32 (1902), 245-247. J.L. Myres, "Notes on the history of the Kabyle pottery", *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 32 (1902), 248-262. A. Van Gennep, *Études d'ethnographie algérienne*, 2 vols. (Leroux, 1911); *idem*, "Recherches sur les poteries peintes de l'Afrique du Nord française (Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc)", *Harvard African Studies* 2 (1918), 235-297. L. Bertholon and E. Chantre, *Recherches anthropologiques dans la Berbérie orientale: Tripolitaine, Tunisie, Algérie*, 2 vols. (Lyons, 1912-1913). O. Bates, "Siwan pottery", *Harvard African Studies* 2 (1918), 299-304. P. Ricard, "Poteries berbères à décor de personnages", *Hespéris* 1 (1921) 421-433. J. Herber, "Technique des poteries rifaines de Zerhan", *Hespéris* 2 (1922), 241-253; *idem*, "Technique des potiers Beni Mitir et Beni Mgild", in *Mémorial Henri Basset. Nouvelles études nord-africaines et orientales* (Institut des hautes-études marocaines 17, 2 vols., Paris, 1928), 1.313-337; *idem*, "Contribution à l'étude des poteries Zaër (poteries à la tournette, poterie au moule)", *Hespéris* 13 (1931), 1-34; *idem*, "Les potiers de Mazagan", *Hespéris* 17 (1933) 49-57. E.G. Gobert, "Les poteries modelées du paysan tunisien", *Revue tunisienne* 43-44 (1940), 119-193. G. Camps, "Recherches sur l'antiquité de la céramique modelée et peinte en Afrique du Nord", *Libyca*

(série d'anthropologie et de l'archéologie préhistorique) 3 (1955), 345-390. H. Balfet, "Ethnographical observations in North Africa and archaeological interpretation: the pottery of the Maghreb", in F. Matson (ed.), *Ceramics and man* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 161-177. D. Gruner, *Die Berber-Keramik: am Beispiel der Orte Afir, Merkalla, Taher, Tiberquient und Roknia* (Wiesbaden, 1973); *idem*, *Die Berber Keramik* (Katalog Frobenius Institut Frankfurt, 1976). A. Boukobza, *Poteries et céramiques marocaines* (Casablanca, 1974). R. Vossen, "Towards building models of traditional trade in ceramics: case studies from Spain and Morocco", in S.E. van der Leeuw and A.C. Pritchard (eds.), *The many dimensions of pottery. Ceramics in archaeology and anthropology* (Albert Egges Van Giffen Instituut voor Prae- en Protohistorie, University of Amsterdam, Cingula VII. Amsterdam, 1984), 339-406. R. Vossen and W. Elbert, *Marokkanische Töpferei: Töpferorte und -zentren; eine Landesaufnahme* (1980), (Hamburg, 1986). B. Hakenjos, *Marokkanische Keramik* (Hetjens-Museum Düsseldorf, 1988). F. de Santos Moro, *Cerámica berber en el Museo Nacional de Etnología* (Facultad de Geografía e Historia, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 1983); *idem*, *Cerámica de Marruecos* (Museo Nacional de Etnología, Madrid, 1991). V. Fayolle, *La poterie modelée du Maghrib oriental de ses origines au XX^e siècle: technologie, morphologie, fonction* (Paris, 1992).

assume a connection between the two traditions. Berber handmade geometrically-painted pottery seems to have developed later than HMGPW, and Poinssot and Revault even suggest that Berber geometric patterns were carried to the Maghreb on textiles by Arab camel nomads from Syria: a sort of reversal of Franken's thesis. Franken and Kalsbeek themselves note the similarity between HMGPW designs and the patterns of traditional south Levantine textiles.⁴⁴ Further east, early and middle Islamic sites in Libya, Egypt, and Nubia have yielded nothing which closely resembles HMGPW, although the late medieval Nubian repertoire is also dominated by handmade pottery. It seems clear that HMGPW does not derive from an imported African tradition.

There is a somewhat more plausible alternative. At Sirāf in the Arabian Gulf, from approximately the 13th century onwards, handmade painted pottery replaces the richly varied early Islamic repertoire. Two main traditions may be distinguished.

The first bears only a generic resemblance to HMGPW. It is best known by the characteristic bridge-spouted jar, Bibby's "coffee-pot" (an *ibriq*).⁴⁵ The decoration consists mostly of broad vertical and horizontal stripes, vertical "ladders", and dribbles of paint. Similar vessels have been found at Kilwa in East Africa, and near 'Adan in Yemen.⁴⁶ Similar handmade painted pottery occurs in the earliest, 14th-century levels at Julfār, and was locally made until at least 1969.⁴⁷ De Cardi christened this "Julfār-ware" and reported it in the northern Trucial States and North Oman.⁴⁸ Bridge-spouted jars comparable to those found at Sirāf, Baḥrayn, and Kilwa appear at Julfār in the 17th century, and similar handmade painted pottery is said to have been found in Kuwait City.⁴⁹

The second tradition much more closely resembles Syrian HMGPW. The best-known examples come from Sirāf and are 13th-century and later, but similar material has been found over a wide area of southern Iran.⁵⁰ It looks so strikingly similar to HMGPW that it is tempting to link the two traditions, despite the significant differences. The decoration of the Sirāf pottery is typically more delicate and more fussy than the

44. L. Poinssot and J. Revault, *Tapis Tunisiens*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1937), I.9-10. Cf. Gobert, 1940: 171, 183. Franken and Kalsbeek, 1975: 172-173.

45. G. Bibby, *Looking for Dilmun. The search for a lost civilization* (Harmondsworth, 1972), 108, fig. 3.

46. N. Chittick, *Kilwa. An Islamic trading city on the East African coast* (British Institute in East Africa Memoirs 5, 2 vols., Nairobi, 1974), II.331, fig. 143a.

47. Derek Kennet, personal communication.

48. B. De Cardi, "Archaeological survey in the northern Trucial States", *East and West* 21 (1971), 269-270; *idem*, "Archaeological survey in North Oman, 1972", *East and West* 25 (1975), 75.

49. J. Hansman, *Julfār, an Arabian port. Its*

settlement and Far Eastern ceramic trade from the 14th to the 18th centuries (Royal Asiatic Society Prize Publication Fund 22, London, 1985), 61-75, pls. 16-17. Dr. Fahad al-Wahaybi, personal communication to Derek Kennet.

50. D. Whitehouse, "Excavations at Sirāf; Second Interim Report", *Iran* 7 (1969), pl. VI f, and M. Tampoe, *Maritime Trade between China and the West. An Archaeological Study of the Ceramics from Sirāf (Persian Gulf), 8th to 15th Centuries A.D.* (British Archaeological Reports, International Series 555, Oxford, 1989), fig. 40 (now on display in the British Museum). Don Whitcomb, personal communication. Personal observation, study collection, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

bold, confident geometric designs of HMGPW. The body of the Sirāf pottery is soft, chalky in texture and cream in colour, quite unlike the hard, brittle, red and grey fabrics of Syria.⁵¹ Nonetheless, these dissimilarities do not seem to rule out a possible connection between the two wares: both may descend from a common ancestor, and the variations may be caused primarily by different local materials.

An alternative hypothesis to the introduction of a new, foreign ceramic tradition is that the HMGPW potters followed or reactivated an ancient, local tradition. This idea was most vividly put by Crowfoot, who published a photograph of a 9th- or 8th-century "Israelite" footbath from Sabustiyya next to that of an early 20th-century footbath from Sinjil as evidence for an unbroken tradition.⁵²

The assumption is that forms and decorative styles have "survived thousands of years" as part of an unbroken tradition. The assumed continuity was illustrated by examples taken from the two extremes of the imagined chronological range, but examples from the middle of the range were not available: no more are they today. There is no evidence for the production of handmade geometrically-painted pottery in *Bilād al-Shām* during a long period from the Iron Age until the 12th century A.D. Although absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence, this is an extremely long absence of evidence. The assumption of continuity seems to originate in the inability to conceive of a shift from wheel-thrown to handmade production: as the young Myres wrote "There is no instance known of a handmade pottery fabric coming into existence in an area where wheelmade fabric has once become familiar".⁵³

It may well be significant that handmade pottery continued to be made for large storage jars, ovens and other similar vessels throughout the period when geometrically-painted pottery was absent. These handmade vessels were not painted: wheel-thrown wares sometimes were, but not with intricate geometric designs. While there is no evidence for a continuous decorative tradition of painted geometric decoration, the techniques of forming pottery by hand and of painting pottery never died out.⁵⁴ What disappears is intricate geometrically-painted decoration. If not from a foreign source, whence did the HMGPW potters derive this style?

One hypothesis is that they imitated the decoration of ancient wares. Macalister and Duncan wrote of HMGPW that "Some of the designs so closely resemble the

51. Personal observation, study collection, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

52. Crowfoot, 1932: pl. I, figs. 1-2. Cf. W.F. Petrie, *Ancient Gaza* (British School of Archaeology in Egypt, 5 vols., London, 1931-1952), V. 8, pl. 42.

53. Myres, 1902: 248.

54. Brown, 1991: 240; *idem* 1992: 173. The late Byzantine and early Islamic repertoire contained some handmade wares, apart from

the large vessels mentioned above: see P.M. Watson, "Change in foreign and regional economic links with Pella in the seventh-century A.D.: the ceramic evidence", in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds.), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VII^e-VIII^e siècles* (Institut français de Damas, 1992); Dr. Steve Rosen of Ben Gurion University has found plain handmade bowls on nomadic sites in the Negev dating from the early Islamic period (personal communication).

decorative devices of pottery of the Canaanite period ... that we were sometimes tempted to suspect that the artists who developed the Arab style had accidentally dug up early pottery, perhaps in robbing tombs, and had set themselves to imitate it as a model".⁵⁵ De Vaux poured scorn on this suggestion: "One cannot accept ... that Arab potters imitated ancient vases found by chance ... The similar geometric motifs do not imply any relationship between the two types. It is nothing but one of those coincidences (*rencontres*), of which the history of art and especially of ceramics offers so many examples".⁵⁶ Similarly, Riis describes HMGPW as "a rustic pottery of great charm, such has been made in many different times and all over the world".⁵⁷

De Vaux and Riis are probably right, but neither they nor Macalister and Duncan were aware that contemporary Palestinian potters used pulverized sherds as temper, and preferred ancient sherds. In northern Jordan women collect sherds from ancient sites: "Most women claim that the sherds have to be antique, and that the sherds of recent ceramics — especially those of their own production — cannot be used as temper ... those which are thin and smooth are preferred. The quality is tested by striking two sherds against each other. 'Good sherds' have to produce a ringing sound". Women appear to favour sherds of hard, thin, wheel-thrown pottery which is more likely to be Hellenistic to early Islamic than Bronze or Iron Age, but the curiosity may merit further ethnographic investigation.⁵⁸

Another possibility is that, although intricate geometric designs disappeared from pottery, they survived upon other media. Mackenzie remarked that HMGPW have "elaborate geometric designs reminiscent of woven patterns".⁵⁹ Whitcomb has suggested informally that woven baskets may have been the medium through which ancient geometric motifs were transmitted down to the middle Islamic period. It is intriguing that the intricate geometric designs of Berber painted pottery occur in all media — body painting and tattoos, woven textiles, woven baskets, decorated leather work, and relief and painted decoration on plaster — and that the decoration of Berber handmade painted wares from Siwā "clearly derived from originals of stitched leather".⁶⁰

The origins of the decorative style of HMGPW must for the present remain undecided. There are two main alternative hypotheses. If HMGPW was diffused throughout *Bilād al-Shām* by itinerant potters, then it perhaps follows that they are most likely to have been immigrants who introduced a foreign tradition and decorative

55. R.A.S. Macalister and J.G. Duncan, *Excavations on the Hill of Ophel, Jerusalem, 1923-1925* (London, 1926), 197.

56. R. de Vaux and A.-M. Steve, *Fouilles à Qaryat el-'Enab, Abu Gosh, Palestine* (École biblique et archéologique française, études archéologiques, Paris, 1950), 136, n. 2.

57. Riis and Poulsen, 1957: 270.

58. Mershen, 1985: 79. Einsler, 1914: 253.

S. Mittmann, *Beiträge zur Siedlungs- und Territorialgeschichte des nördlichen Ostjordanlandes* (Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästinavereins, Wiesbaden, 1970), 80-81. London and Sinclair, 1991: 421.

59. Mackenzie, 1911: 57.

60. Poinssot and Revault, 1937: I.9-10. Gobert, 1940: 171, 183. Bates, 1918: 301.

style. If HMGPW was spread by trade, then either the survival of an ancient, indigenous decorative style in other media and its subsequent transfer to pottery, or the spontaneous development of an independent decorative style, would perhaps be the most likely origin of its decoration. Of course, it is by no means impossible that immigrant potters should have taken up a local tradition of decoration, or that an imported ceramic tradition should have been spread by trade. A better understanding of the relationship between handmade pottery with simple geometric red-painted decoration and HMGPW may one day point towards a solution to the problem.

It has been argued above that HMGPW was a specialized product which established itself rapidly in urban and rural contexts during a period of relative political stability and economic prosperity. What, then, were the forces which caused the rise of HMGPW?

The social distribution of HMGPW may offer a key to the problem. The example of Karak will illustrate this point. Brown compared the ceramic assemblage from the *qal'a* at Karak with the typical assemblage from contemporary village sites in the *Arḍ al-Karak* in the 13th to 15th centuries. On the one hand, village assemblages were dominated by handmade pottery, including HMGPW, with a few locally produced monochrome glazed wares, and very rare examples of wheel-thrown cream-bodied ware. On the other hand, in the *qal'a*, locally-made wheel-thrown cream-bodied wares predominated, while local monochrome glazed wares and handmade pottery were comparatively scarce. Imported glazed wares were conspicuous in the *qal'a*, and included not only Palestinian mould-cast lead-glazed ware and Syrian fritwares but also luxury long-distance imports such as Chinese celadon and porcelain. There was very little overlap between the two ceramic traditions: not more than 10% of the *qal'a* assemblage consisted of HMGPW, and an even smaller percentage of rural assemblages was made up of local glazed and plain cream-bodied wares, and very rare imports. Brown argued that the contrast between the ceramic assemblages of the *qal'a* and the villages reflected the social distinction between the Mamlūk élite and the local peasantry. The Mamlūk élite had their own repertoire of "palace pottery", which contrasted sharply with the predominantly handmade ceramic assemblage of the surrounding villages.⁶¹

The example of Karak demonstrates, first and foremost, that HMGPW came to predominate in the villages of the *Arḍ al-Karak* at a time when wheel-thrown wares were still produced in Karak town, and when both regional and long-distance imports were still traded in Karak's markets. Local wheel-thrown ceramics and imported pottery were available in the villages of the *Arḍ al-Karak*, but uncommon there: HMGPW was available to the inhabitants of the *qal'a* at Karak, but was uncommon there. It follows that the rise of HMGPW cannot be attributed primarily to the decline of wheel-thrown production, nor to the collapse of trade in wheel-thrown pottery.⁶²

61. Brown, 1991: 240-241; *idem*, 1992: 375-379, 455-457; *idem*, forthcoming a. See now, M. Milwright, «Trade and patronage in Middle

Islamic Jordan. The ceramics of Karak castle », unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1998.

62. Cf. Brown, 1992: 175, 455.

There is no need to account for the Mamlūk élite's preference for fine, wheel-thrown plain wares, glazed pottery, and exotic imports: that villagers should have preferred HMGPW is more difficult to explain, but it seems *a priori* likely that they could afford nothing else.

The only apparent intrinsic quality of HMGPW is its decoration. If the designs of HMGPW reproduced the decoration used upon other household media, this might help to account for the ware's popularity. Some vessels display a high degree of artisanal skill and aspire to strict aesthetic standards, and such vessels may have been intrinsically valuable. It would be difficult to say the same of the simple red-painted ware which preceded mature HMGPW. It may be that the intrinsic value of painted handmade wares was low when they entered the ceramic repertoire, and only became significant with the appearance of HMGPW proper.

It seems more likely that HMGPW succeeded principally because it offered villagers better value than the wheel-thrown wares which it replaced. This may seem like nonsense — of course, technological specialization tends to reduce the unit cost of the manufactured article — but actually makes sense if it is asked which technology was most appropriate to the social and economic circumstances of village life. Assuming that HMGPW was produced in villages either by itinerant potters or in village workshops, the variables involved in the production of HMGPW and of wheel-thrown pottery may be compared (cf. fig. 7). Minimum time and labour was involved in gathering and preparing the raw materials, and the tasks involved in pottery-making could be accommodated to the agricultural cycle so that they did not detract from other more profitable activities; forming and decoration required no elaborate workshop or complicated tools; firing needed no kiln, and used dung, the cheapest of fuels; there were no transport costs, no middle men; and even small local trade or exchange in the ware would have constituted a useful source of income.

If it is correct that HMGPW replaced wheel-thrown products in rural villages because handmade technology was more appropriate to their economic and social circumstances, it would seem to follow that those circumstances must have changed since the early Islamic period when wheel-thrown products still dominated the rural ceramic repertoire. It is suggestive that ethnographic reports of specialized handmade ceramic production in areas where the potter's wheel had once been known link the phenomenon to severe rural poverty.⁶³ And yet both archaeological and historical evidence suggest that HMGPW established itself during a period of rural economic prosperity and demographic growth. This apparent paradox lies at the heart of the problem: although it cannot now be satisfactorily resolved, it is perhaps possible dimly to perceive its roots.

63. D.E. Arnold, "Ceramic variability, environment and culture history among the Pokom in the valley of Guatemala", in I. Hodder (ed.),

Spatial organization of culture (London, 1970), 58. Peacock, 1982: 23-24.

First, change in ceramic production may occur long after the events which appear to have provoked it.⁶⁴ It is therefore possible that the causes of the rise of HMGPW in the 12th century should be sought during the preceding period of comparative rural decay and demographic stagnation. Why there so often appears to be a time-lag between cause and change in ceramic production remains obscure, and so this is not at present a particularly promising line of inquiry; no more, in fact, than a possibility that should be born in mind.

Second, precious little is yet known of rural settlement in *Bilād al-Shām* during the early Islamic period, especially *c.* 750-*c.* 1150. Regional surveys suggest a sharp drop in the number of rural settlements *c.* 550-*c.* 650, followed by an even steeper fall after *c.* 750 (fig. 8). Such research, however, appears to underestimate the number of early Islamic settlements, largely because archaeologists have been slow to recognize and to date correctly early Islamic pottery. If the early Islamic decline in rural settlement was not as sharp as the regional surveys suggest, then it would seem to follow that nor can the middle Islamic recovery cannot have been so steep.⁶⁵

Third, the dramatic increase in the number of settlements recorded by regional surveys after *c.* 1150 may not indicate a corresponding increase in population, and such a demographic increase need not necessarily indicate increased prosperity. This possibility certainly needs closer investigation by the excavation of more rural settlements.

Fourth, it may be that, although the countryside of *Bilād al-Shām* was more densely settled and more productive overall in the mid 12th to mid 13th centuries than it had been in the mid 8th to mid 12th centuries, the economic gulf between town and country widened so that, in relative terms, the towns grew richer and the villages grew poorer. This hypothesis seems to offer a particularly promising line of inquiry.⁶⁶

To persist with the example of Karak according to this model, most of the surplus derived from increased rural settlement and increased agricultural production in the *Ard al-Karak* from the mid 12th century onwards would have been diverted to Karak town. There is certainly evidence of large scale investment in Karak from *c.* 1115, with the reconstruction of the town walls, the development of the town and the foundation of a cathedral, the construction of the Crusader castle in 1142, the development of the Dead Sea port at al-Mīna, and other extraurban structures. This intense investment was apparently sustained and even surpassed under Ayyūbid rule (1187-1263) with four major refortifications of the castle reported, the conversion of the Crusader cathedral into a mosque, the foundation of an important suburban mosque, the construction of a palace within the *qalʿa*, the reorganization of the pilgrimage road through the region, and the development of the nearby religious sanctuary of Muʿta. The chronicles and inscriptions suggest that public building continued in Karak under the early Mamlūks until at least the end of the 14th century.⁶⁷ There is no way of

64. P.M. Rice, "Change and conservatism in pottery producing systems", in van der Leeuw and Pritchard, 274-275.

65. Brown, 1992. Johns, 1992; *idem*, 1994, 3-9.

66. Cf. Brown, 1992: 175.

67. Johns, 1992; *idem*, 1994, 7-19.

calculating the extent to which this building was financed by the agricultural surplus of the *Arḍ al-Karak*, but the written sources do suggest that the region continued to export agricultural produce throughout this period. There is at least a strong *prima facie* case that increased rural settlement and agricultural production did finance the development of Karak as a major regional centre under Crusader, Ayyūbid and Mamlūk rule. If so, then it may be that so high a proportion of agricultural surplus was drawn off from the villages of the *Arḍ al-Karak* that they grew relatively poorer whilst Karak prospered. In ceramic terms, this might explain how it was that the occupants of the *qal'a* could support a thriving urban wheel-thrown ceramic industry, afford imported fritwares and even Chinese porcelain and celadon, leaving the villagers of the *Arḍ al-Karak* with sufficient surplus to afford only cheap HMGPW, with very few wheel-thrown and imported vessels.

This model may begin to explain how HMGPW came to supplant wheel-thrown pottery in the countryside during a period of increased population and agricultural production, when production of and trade in wheel-thrown ceramics still functioned.⁶⁸ But the rise of HMGPW in the mid 12th to mid 13th century was only the first stage in the switch from wheel-thrown to handmade pottery, which culminated sometime after the 15th century with the virtual disappearance of wheel-thrown pottery from the ceramic repertoire. Brown has sketched out a plausible three-pronged explanation for the triumph of handmade pottery. First, “constraints on the production of wheel-thrown vessels”, amongst which she includes the economic isolation of the region and the decrease in sedentarism, may have “encouraged greater household self-sufficiency with respect to subsistence and production of basic material items”. Second, the demographic decline which some authorities have inferred from the Ottoman tax records may have led to “a decrease in consumer demand”. And, third, “a breakdown of distribution and or marketing institutions” caused by “internal political circumstances ... would discourage overland transport of ceramics”.⁶⁹

Brown seeks explanations in socioeconomic events which are themselves notoriously difficult to observe in the available sources, and still harder to locate precisely in space and in time, but, until further archaeological evidence is forthcoming, her model is the best that can be built. Here, it is important only to note that none of Brown's three causal factors — decline in wheel-thrown production, demographic decrease, and collapse of the market economy — are attested as early as the mid 12th to mid 13th centuries when HMGPW first established itself.

68. Cf. Brown, 1992: 458-459.

69. Brown, 1991: 243-244; *idem*, 1992: 310-324. Brown takes up Adams' suggestion that “a ruinous tax on potters' wheels or on the pottery trade was to blame” (W.Y. Adams, “On the argument from ceramics to history: a challenge

based on evidence from medieval Nubia”, *Current Anthropology* 20 [1979] 732). There is no evidence for the imposition of such a tax in Jordan nor, for that matter, in Nubia. Adams seems to have inferred its existence from the decline of the Nubian wheel-thrown tradition.

In conclusion, it may be helpful to suggest a possible reconstruction of the whole shift from wheel-thrown to handmade production and back again.

In the early Islamic period, undecorated handmade pottery occupied a small and highly specialized niche in the ceramic repertoire. In the mid 12th to mid 13th century, HMGPW spread rapidly amongst the recently resettled rural villages of *Bilād al-Shām*, possibly through the agency of itinerant potters. HMGPW soon came to occupy most of the ceramic repertoire of rural sites, relegating wheel-thrown pottery to an almost insignificant place. The causes of the rise of HMGPW are obscure, but may have included a widening economic gulf between town and countryside, as towns consumed an increasing proportion of agricultural surplus, leaving villages in relative poverty. The production of HMGPW would have been subsequently taken up by village and household workshops throughout the region, as villagers took over from itinerant potters. Until after the 15th century, this rural handmade production existed side-by-side with the urban wheel-thrown industry. So long as the market economy survived, HMGPW would have remained a more or less specialized product, and was manufactured in rural centres for sale to the towns. Later, during the economic and demographic decline which occurred after the 15th century, village workshops would have dwindled and have been replaced by limited household production. It is probably from this time that the "degeneration" of the painted decoration occurs, ultimately resulting in the marked regional variation observed in contemporary village pottery. Later still, with the importation of Palestinian factory-made wares from the mid to late 19th century, handmade pottery was rapidly squeezed out of the main ceramic repertoire into the very specialized niche that it occupies today.

This should be regarded as a hypothesis which is certain to be at least considerably modified, and perhaps totally falsified by current and future research. If, in the meantime, it plays a small part in directing the attention of Islamic archaeologists away from external factors, such as political upheaval, invasion, and the dramatic dislocation of the pattern of settlement and land-use, towards the detailed study of rural economy and society through its material remains, then it will have served one useful purpose.

The various parts of the main hypothesis summarized in the preceding paragraphs can be tested by excavation and analysis. There is an urgent need for information about the petrographical and chemical composition of HMGPW to be collected from a suitable sample of sites throughout the range. It is hoped that this study will help to promote such fundamental research upon what is perhaps the most numerous, but least well-known family of pottery in Greater Syria during the middle Islamic period.

Only when writing this paper, did the extent to which the rise of HMGPW impinges upon the broad subject of change in pottery become apparent.⁷⁰ Relatively little has been published upon this question, although it is central to the use which most archaeologists make of ceramics, and much of what has been written deals with specialization

70. E.g. Adams, 1979. Rice, 1984.

within the context of unilineal technological progress. And yet, there are many well-documented examples of change in ceramic production in what might be seen as the other direction, of what might be called despecialization or regression, but there seem to exist neither detailed case studies, nor comparative discussions of this sort of change.

In this paper, it has been suggested that HMGPW represents a specialized production at the beginning of the much broader shift from wheel-thrown to handmade pottery throughout *Bilād al-Shām* in the later middle Islamic period. This itself is manifestly a phenomenon of potentially the greatest significance for the social and economic history of the region. But the shift from wheel-thrown to handmade production was not confined to Syria, and has been observed in Iran, the Arabian Gulf, Nubia, and the Maghreb. It is extraordinary that such a widespread change in material culture has not attracted the attention of Islamic archaeologists, and it is perhaps time that they turned their attention away from the luxury glazed wares which comprise less than 5% of the ceramic repertoire, towards the vast uncharted seas of everyday wares.

APPENDIX

THE DATE OF THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF HMGPW AT THE CITADEL, JERUSALEM

In 1939, C.N. Johns described HMGPW as “current in Ayyūbid and Mamlūk times”, and added, “From recent finds at the Citadel, Jerusalem, still to be published, I think it may have come in a century or two before that”.⁷¹

Johns here refers to excavations in the courtyard in front of the north-east tower (“Tower of David”) at the Citadel, begun in 1934, and finally published in 1950.⁷² He reports finding HMGPW in levels covered by the Crusader extension to the fortifications, which yielded imported ceramics no later in date than the 11th century.⁷³ A critical re-examination of Johns’ report reveals difficulties which, while they do not wholly disqualify his interpretation, at least render it insecure.

First, the HMGPW from the Citadel excavations are not illustrated, and it cannot be ascertained that the “unglazed ware painted matt in dark brown on buff” was

71. E. Grant and G.E. Wright, *Ain Shems excavations (Palestine). Part IV: pottery and Part V: text.* (Biblical and Kindred Studies 8, Haverford College, Pennsylvania, 1938-1939), V.148.

72. C.N. Johns, “Excavations at the Citadel,

Jerusalem. *Interim Report*, 1935”, *QDAP* 5 (1935), 127-131; *idem*, “The Citadel, Jerusalem”, *QDAP* 14 (1950), 121-190; cf. *idem*, C.N. Johns, “Excavations at the Citadel, Jerusalem 1934-1939”, *PEFQ*, 1940: 36-56.

73. Johns, 1950: 160-161.

indeed HMGPW.⁷⁴ Next, the exact context in which this material was found is difficult to determine. Johns reports that it came from “the intermediate levels” between Umayyad and Crusader, and especially from “the massive foundations [of the north-east tower] marked ‘Islamic’ in the section”.⁷⁵ But the only contexts in which Johns explicitly states that painted ware was found were “the overlying deposits, particularly a cindery rubbish heap next above the part intersected by the main trench”. This vague and ambiguous description would seem to refer to an ash-tip on the surface which was not even part of the stratigraphic excavation.

Third, the excavations lay in an area which had been immediately outside the city walls until enclosed by the north-west curtain wall during the 12th century. This outer court and, indeed, the whole area, was subject to extensive alteration in the 13th and 14th centuries: the old city wall, which separated the inner from the outer court, was demolished and the two courts were levelled. Such major works must inevitably have disturbed earlier levels in the outer court.

Finally, the drawing of the north-east section suggests that Johns was excavating confused deposits much disturbed by later pits. In the north-west of the court, against the curtain wall, a deep “Mamlūk” pit cut through what appear to be Crusader, Islamic, and Byzantine levels, but these are shown as a series of tips, sloping downwards from the base of the north-east tower. In fact, what the section shows is not archaeological strata, but reconstructed phases between which the draughtsman deliberately left vague the divisions, so that Crusader, Islamic, and Byzantine all merge into one.⁷⁶

In short, the published evidence is insufficient to prove that HMGPW were present at the Citadel before the 13th or 14th centuries.

74. It is likely that it was, because of a reference a plate illustrating HMGPW from 'Athlith: Johns, 1935a: pl. XXVIII.

75. Johns, 1950, fig. 11, facing p. 140: for the

location of this section, roughly north-south, about 5 m west of the north-east tower, see fig. 25, p. 168.

76. Johns, 1950: fig. 11.

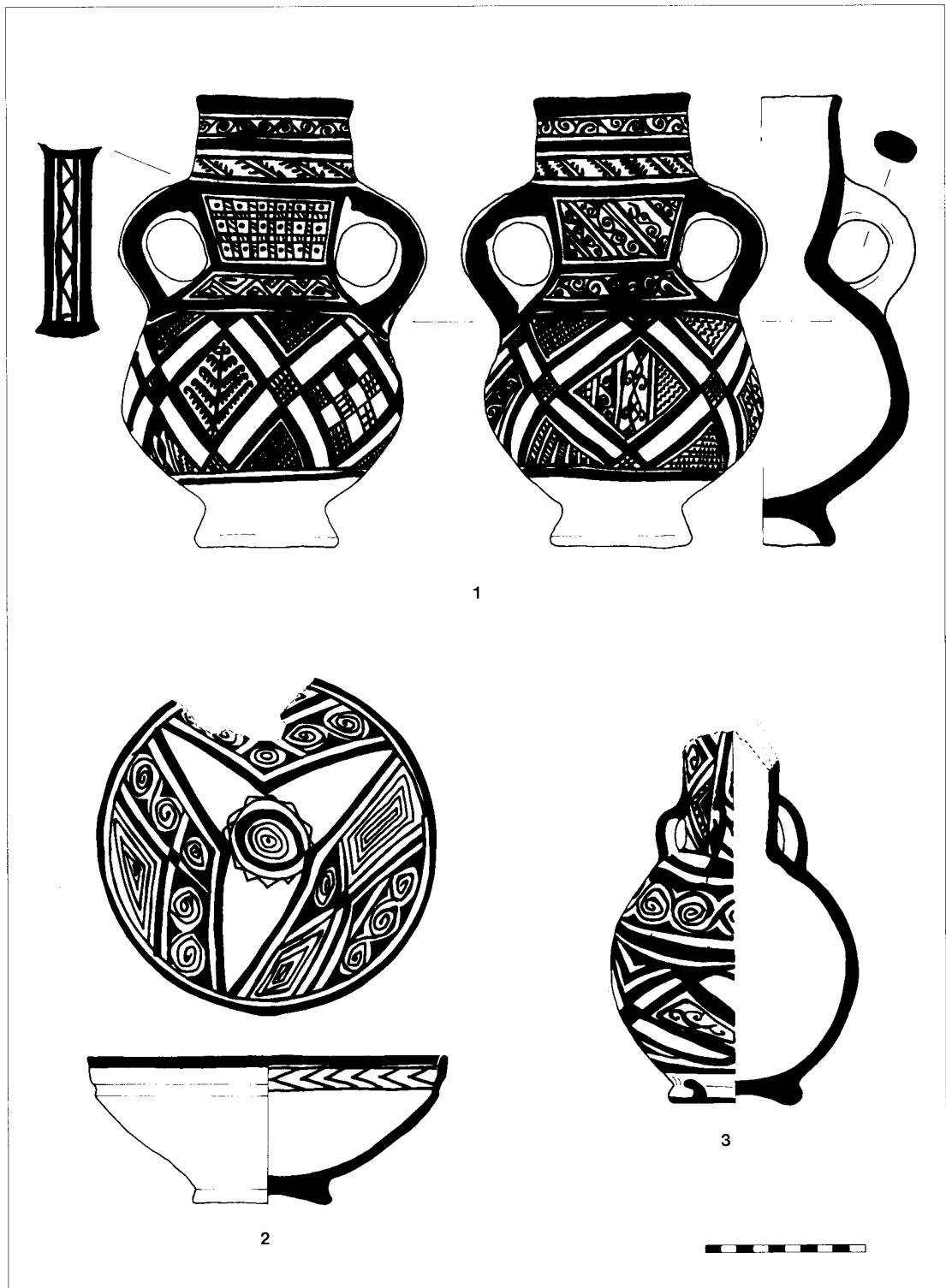


Fig. 1. Examples of hand-made geometrically-painted ware.

1. Pella (after Smith 1973, pl. 73, 24).

2. Tall Abū Šarbūṭ (after de Haas *et al.* 1992, fig. 9).

3. Tall Abū Šarbūṭ (after de Haas *et al.* 1992, fig. 2).

	Early Islamic Wares	HMGPW
B O D Y	clean, dense well-levigated few, small inclusions	coarse, open not levigated many, large inorganic inclusions (ground sherds, basalt, quartzite, etc.), frequent traces of organic temper chaff, straw etc.); grog rare
F O R M I N G	thrown on the fast wheel (except a very few specialized forms e.g. ovens, beehives, chicken coops, large water jars)	not wheel-thrown, slow rotating device very occasionally used – open forms and lower portions of closed forms often moulded – open forms and upper portions of small to medium sized closed forms often coil-built – large forms possibly slab-built – moulding cloth often used
V E S S E L S	wide variety of open and closed forms comprising entire repertoire (except a few specialized forms e.g. ovens, beehives, chicken coops, large water jars)	relatively few vessel-forms, mostly bowls and jugs (N.B. the middle Islamic village repertoire may also include small percentages of wheel-thrown plain and glazed wares)
S U R F A C E	smooth rarely slipped some wares glazed	rough outer surface of closed forms and both surfaces of open forms may be covered by slip or wash of varying quality – brown, cream or red never glazed
D E C O R A T I O N	some unglazed wares bear painted geometric designs (e.g. red-on-white and white-on-grey wares) but restricted to loops, stars, wavy lines, intersecting arches, cross-hatches figural representation on Jerash bowls	intricate, complicated geometric designs, which combine a range of motifs in a tightly packed, lively pattern, arranged in vertical bands or horizontal belts – colours usually red and black, brown and cream are common, blue is attested at Hamat only representation of humans, animals, and plants is very rare, except at Hamat
F I R I N G	kiln-fired at high temperature	low-fired, often unevenly fired, marked by fire-clouds, cracked, dented – probably fired in open fires or clamps, some rare examples may have been kiln-fired

Fig. 2. Table comparing the production of early Islamic wares with hand-made geometrically-painted wares.

Site	Date
Abu Ghawsh (de Vaux 1946: 30)	after c. 1141
‘Amman Citadel (Northedge 1992: 161)	late 12th to early 13th century
‘Amwas al-Qubayba (Bagatti 1947: 132-139 figs 32-33, pls 55, 58-59)	second half 12th century to first half of 13th century
‘Athlit (Johns 1935a, 54)	after c. 1291
Al-Burj al-Ahmar (Pringle 1986: 135, 139-41)	after 1265
Busra (Berthier 1985: 14-15, pl. 4.41, 94-110)	late 12th to early 13th century
Hasban (Sauer 1973: 62)	c. 1200 – c. 1260
Jerusalem: Armenian Garden (Tushingham 1985, 145-147, figs 38.21, 32)	1212/1214 – 1219/1227
Jerusalem: Citadel (Johns 1950, 160-161; cf. Appendix 1, below)	(before 1099) revised date: 13th/14th century
Jerusalem: Damascus Gate (Wightman 1989: 58-64 cf. Sauer 1976)	(12th century or earlier) revised date: after 13th century destruction
Tall Abû Qa’dân (Franken and Kalsbeek 1975, 4, fig. 77; cf. Sauer 1976)	(8th century) revised date: 12th/13th century
Al-Wu‘ayra (Brown 1987, 284)	Late 12th to early 13th century

Fig. 3. Table summarizing the principal evidence for the appearance of hand-made geometrically-painted ware.

Site	Date	Description
Ayla Pavilion building (Whitcomb 1988, 212, fig. 5 a-b)	late 10th / early 11th to early 12th century	“small hand-made bowls with irregular decorations in red paint”
Khirbat Faris (Johns <i>et al.</i> 1989 figs 25.57 & 57; McQuitty and Falkner 1993, fig. 21.46, 47)	before HMGPW appears	hand-made pottery with linear and simple geometric designs executed in red paint on a thick cream slip
Pella (Smith and Day 1989, pl. 63.7)	unstratified	bowl painted with bright red spots in concentric circles on cream slip
Shawbak (Brown 1988, 232, 237)	1197-1218	“hand-made coarse-wares... painted in the linear style”, “hand-made coarse-wares decorated with linear designs and dots in red paint”
Al-Wu‘ayra Wadi Musa (Brown 1987, 284)	c. 1108/1116 to c. 1188	hand-made vessels with “linear red-painted decorative repertoire”

Fig. 4. Table summarizing the principal evidence for the appearance of simple geometrically red-painted ware.

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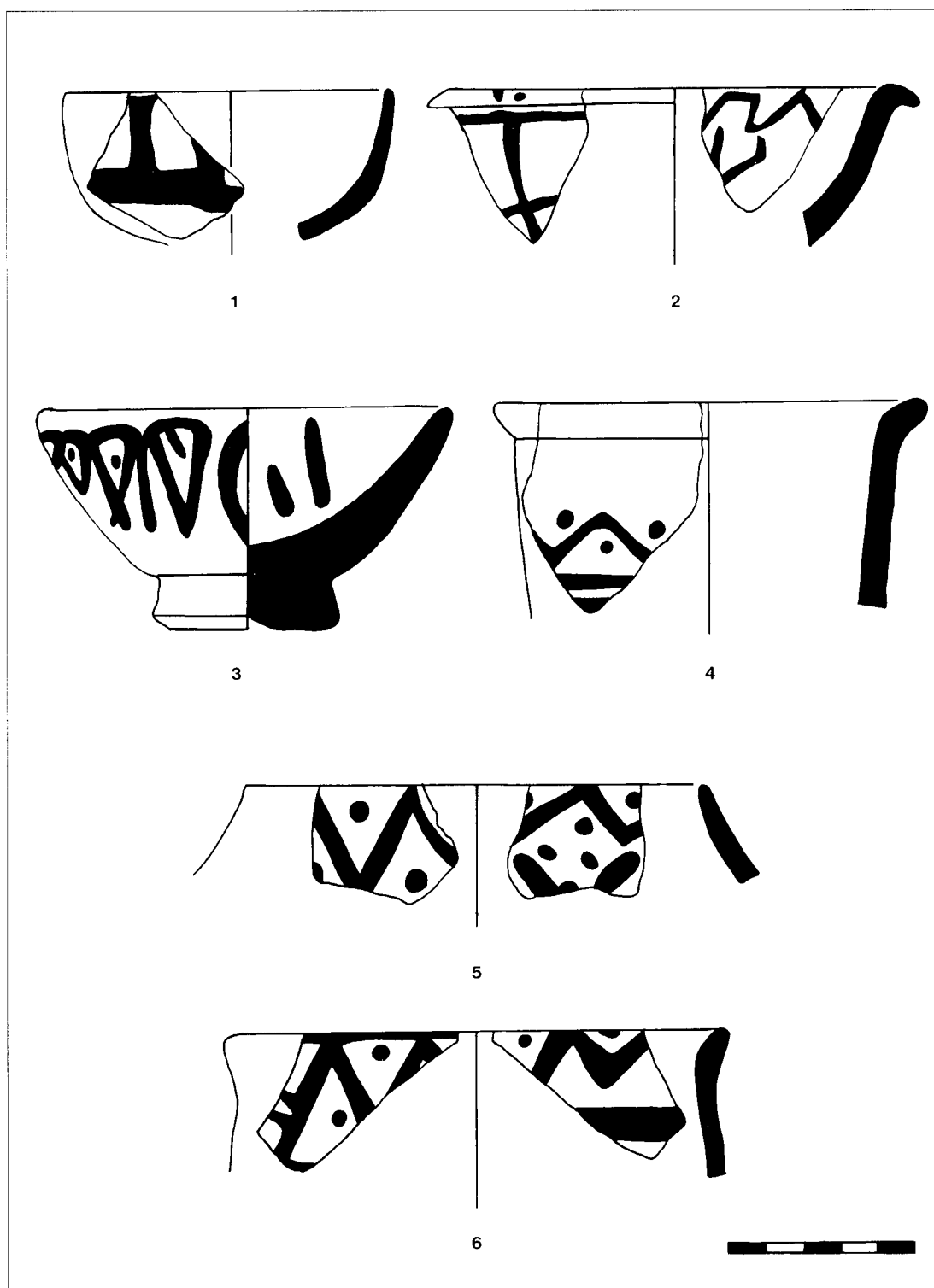


Fig. 5. Examples of simple geometrically red-painted ware.

1-2. *Aqaba* (after Whitcomb 1988, fig. 5 a-b).

3-6. *Khirbat Fāris* (after Johns and McQuitty 1989, fig. 18, 46-47 and McQuitty and Falkner 1993, fig. 27, 55 and 57).

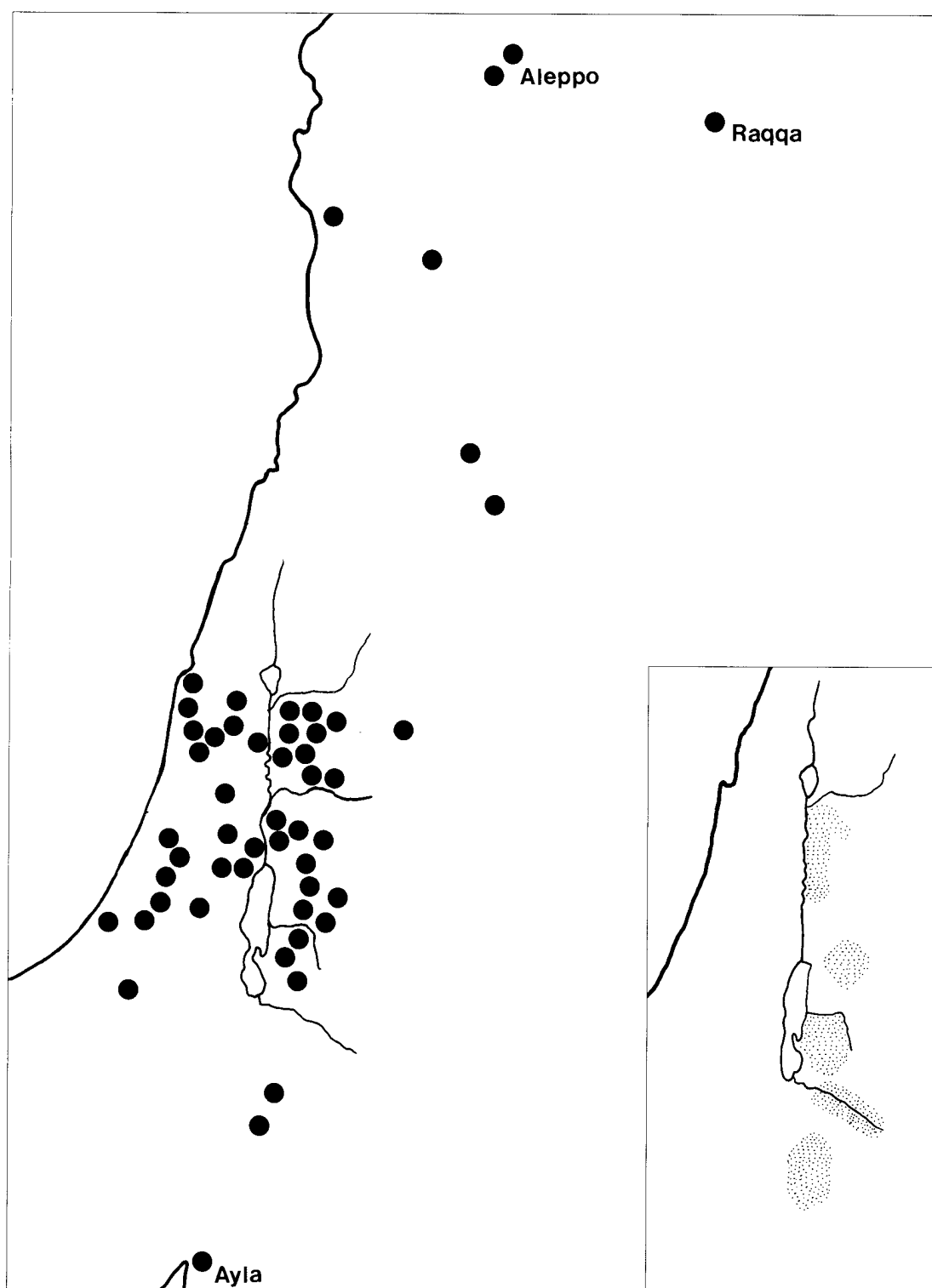


Fig. 6. Map showing the principal sites for which hand-made geometrically-painted wares have been published, with an inset showing regional surveys in Jordan which have yielded large numbers of sites with hand-made geometrically painted wares.

Variables	Simple hand-made pottery	Hand-made geometrically painted wares in the ethnographic reports (G. Syria)	Highly complex pottery
clays	aselect	careful selection	select
clay preparation	none	careful cleaning and mixing	levigation, rotting, mixing
temper selection	organic/inorganic fine/large	careful selection and preparation : grinding sherds, basalt, quartzite ; adding organic temper to give plasticity	physico-chemical properties grain size distribution
proportion of temper	"handful" etc.	proportions measured approximately but according to traditional recipe	exact dry weight
number of distinguishable actions taken	few	a fairly high number of complicated and well-differentiated actions	many
standardization of vessel form	low	a fairly high degree of standardization within limits imposed by technique and materials	high
number of products	few	about 12 common products	many
number of functions per type of vessel	many	probably quite high, but some vessels are specialized	few
complexity of tools	low : mould, open fire	low : mould, simple turning device, moulding-cloth ; clamp-fired	high : kickwheel complex kiln
number of potters per workshop	one usually a woman	one to a few women from extended family or neighbourhood group	several to many usually men
hierarchical organization	none	"natural", i.e. by age, ability, and experience	strict : boy, apprentice, master
task specialization	none	"natural", according to age, ability, and experience	narrow : preparation, body, handles, feet ; decoration ; firing ; trade
marketing area	narrow	predominantly for household or neighbourhood needs, some vessels travel farther in exchange or as gifts	wide
number of copies made per product	few	no information available from the reports	many

Fig. 7. Table comparing the production of simple hand-made pottery and of modern hand-made pottery with that of hand-made geometrically-painted wares.

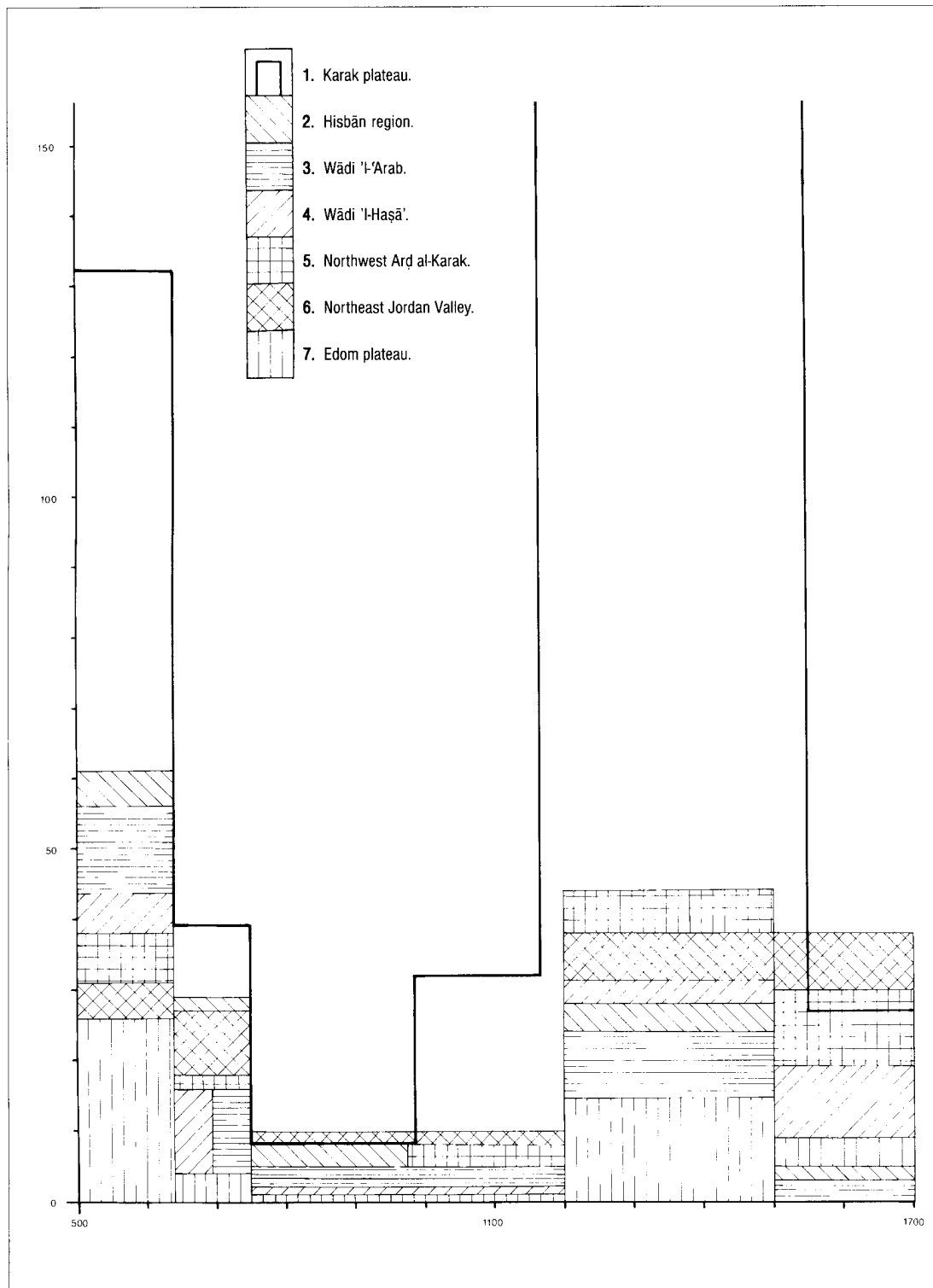


Fig. 8. Histogram representing variation over time (500-1700 A.D.) in the number of sites located by seven regional surveys in Jordan.