

Medieval Pottery in South Jordan: The Case-Study of HMPW in ash-Shawbak Castle

Introduction (EP, RR)

Our ICHAJ 13 presentation has fallen on the thirtieth anniversary of the archaeological mission of the University of Florence of which both of the authors of this paper are members. The ‘Medieval’ Petra Archaeological Mission. Archaeology of Crusader-Ayyubid settlement in Transjordan, is the archaeological mission of Florence University directed by Guido Vannini, in Petra and ash-Shawbak (running from 1986 to present – Vannini 2011). The main aim of this work is to present the recent acquisitions regarding pottery consumption in ash-Shawbak Castle (Ma‘ān, Jordan) during the Crusader-Ayyubid period. ash-Shawbak is one of the best preserved medieval castle in Jordan and it is very significant for the time-span that it covers, starting from pre-Crusader phases until at least the Ottoman time. This site allows us to clarify the material culture turning phases between the Crusader/Ayyubid period and the Ayyubid/Mamluk

period. The special focus of this paper will be the topic of HMPW¹ and its periodization and we also offer some reflections about the interconnection of its production and the local, semi-nomadic population. It must be emphasized that this research is based on all stratigraphical data of ash-Shawbak pottery assemblages. To analyze this subject, some concepts from anthropological archaeology appeared to be very stimulating, especially O. La Bianca’s works concerning Great and Little Traditions (La Bianca 2007). It must be emphasized that the research needs more stratigraphical data from other sites to compare these preliminary reflections on ash-Shawbak pottery assemblages² (FIG. 1).

Stratigraphic Context (EP)

Our analyses couple archaeological-excitation, following the stratigraphic method, and non-destructive ‘light archaeology’ methodology³, in a comparative approach to the study of

1. HMPW (Hand Made Painted Ware) is a very common typology in all the Syro-Palestinian area. It is widespread in Jordan starting from XII century to all the Mamluk period and maybe over. This pottery can be without painted decoration or the decoration can be obtained with simple lines (dark or red) or with geometric pattern (also in this case dark or red). It interested many authors, for example, Sinibaldi 2013 and 2016; Walker 2012; Gabrieli 2015; Pruno 2016.

2. The most important amount of stratigraphic data is from Ḥisbān Project (Walker 2012, where the author discusses also the previous studies concerning the pottery remains of Ḥisbān, particularly HMPW).

3. To examine the principal guidelines of the Light Archaeological methodology see Vannini 2013.



1. The frontier of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (from Vannini 2007: 13).

4. The medieval frontier is a very important topic, well studied for the Trans-Jordanian area: see Vannini, Nucciotti 2012.

5. Vannini, Vanni Desideri 1995; Vannini, Tonghini 1997; Tonghini, Vanni Desideri 1998; just now our team is working for publishing all the work concerning the medieval Petra Valley (al-Wu'ayra, al-Ḥabīs, Corinthian tomb).

6. Vannini, Nucciotti 2009, 2012.

7. During the 2015 campaign a new excavation area has been opened in front of the Corinthian tomb in order to clarify presence and nature of a potential 'new' medieval site in Petra. The existence of a potential medieval structure in this area was highlighted with

material records. Our main goal is to better understand political and economic conditions under which a new settling system was promoted in this peculiar area of medieval Transjordan: from the defensive system of Petra to the 12th and 13th centuries Islamic frontier, of which ash-Shawbak was a very important node⁴. The Italian mission decided to proceed with excavations at first in al-Wu'ayra, in order to better understand the forms of the first resettlement of Petra valley⁵. Only years later, after the identification of al-Wu'ayra and al-Ḥabīs as fundamental elements in the Latin settlement for the control of the routes between Syria and Egypt, the excavation of ash-Shawbak castle was started.

We were able to analyze the transformation of a castle in an Islamic city, thanks to the will of Saladin⁶. Finally, only last year we came back to Petra, opening the excavation in front of the Corinthian tomb to verify our interpretations of the post-classical setting of the valley⁷ (FIG. 2).

As we said, our excavation-analyses utilize the stratigraphic methodology. In every investigated area we completed the stratigraphic column, from modern levels to the bedrock, with the collection of the entire fragments assemblage for each layer. After the excavation activities we elaborate the Harris Matrix to identify a first, necessary, relative chronology. Then, following the Harris Matrix relationships, we examine the different material culture contexts.

The aim of this presentation is to describe ash-Shawbak's medieval contexts, especially the Crusader-Ayyubid ones, and then to focus on the specific production of the HMPW, analysing the materials of the Area 35000, the so-

the survey of 2012 and 2013 (FR 2012, FR 2013, Pp. 27-30). Evidence consist of three converging elements observed on the façade of the Corinthian tomb and in its immediate surroundings. They were: arrow-slits-like windows cut on the eastern side of the façade of the Corinthian tomb; remains of a masonry structure presenting technologic analogies with Crusader-Ayyubid buildings from Petra (al-Wu'ayra and al-Ḥabīs) and ash-Shawbak castle; retrieval of fragments of Medieval hand-made pottery shards consistent with Crusader-Ayyubid assemblages from al-Wu'ayra, Wādī Farāsa and ash-Shawbak castle. The excavation finished in December 2016, now all the documentation is being studied.



2. ash-Shawbak (a), Wu‘ayra (b) and corinthian tomb area (c, 3D Plan).

called Crusader Palace⁸.

Area 35000 is a substantial vaulted structure located in the “monumental” area of the castle (*i.e.* the northern half of the inner enceinte), almost adjacent to the audience hall of the Ayyubid Palace and laying on the inner ring wall of the Crusader epoch (indeed its west wall also coincides with a sector of the inner enceinte). This Area is a North-South oriented building with roughly an elongated rectangular plan (FIG. 3). The structure’s masonries show building techniques of the Crusader period on the East and West walls, while the North side is blocked by a wall-plug, showing typical Ayyubid masonry patterns. This Area is therefore most likely to be a monumental building of the Crusader epoch which was also reused in the Ayyubid period, possibly within the Ayyubid palace. A “monumental” door in the East wall was opened in a second phase of the building’s life. Though it is quite difficult to assess to which period it belongs, due to the extensive reuse of older ashlar in the jambs, the first hypothesis would be to include it in one of the Crusader phases. Such a possibility is based on comparisons between the jambs’ masonry and that of CF5 (the fortified gate of the Crusader second ring-wall), as well as on the lack of specifically Ayyubid dressing tool marks in the jambs’ ashlar. What is indeed clear is that the very same door was reused (or readapted) in the Ayyubid epoch, when the entrance was

connected to a beautifully built stairway with concentric semicircular steps, showing extensive tool marks of a small pointed chisel, very similar to the one used for the dressing of the ashlar of the Ayyubid palace’s audience hall⁹.

The excavation area was widened to include almost all the Crusader Vaulted Room and one of the main excavation’s goals was the understanding of relationships between the main occupation phases, also as regards the building’s original function and its changes over time (the last phases of occupation relates to the late Ottoman period).

Because the main goal of this paper is the discussion of the Crusader-Ayyubid HMPW, we present all the excavation contexts in order to better understand the occupation phases of the period predating the building of the stairway and also the occupation phases connected to the stairway life.



3. Plan of ash-Shawbak with excavation areas the (including area 35000).

8. In ash-Shawbak Castle since 2003 we opened seven excavation areas (FIG 3): three of them (Area 4000, 6000 and 24000) are opened to examine the burgus , between the second and the third enceinte; Area 10000 and 39000 was opened to clarify the pre-exis-

tence of the Crusader second enceinte and the 34000 was useful to check the stratigraphic deposit of the Ayyubid Palace.

9. For the ash-Shawbak Ayyubid Palace see Rugiadi 2009; Nucciotti 2012; Fragai 2014; Nucciotti, Pruno 2016.

Pottery Assemblage (RR)

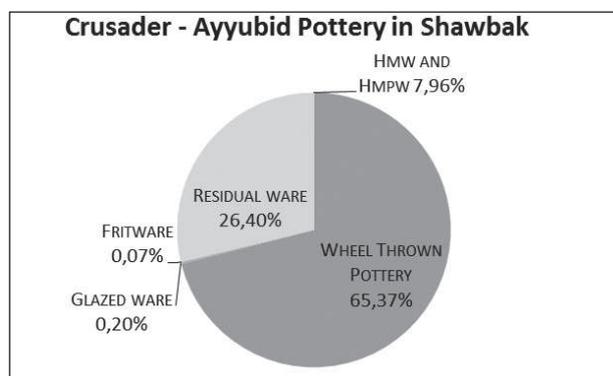
The pottery evidence that we examine comes from a context included between 3 chronological landmarks: the stairway of the Ayyubid period, the western wall of the crusader period, and the pre-crusader small wall (US 35632), set on the bedrock. We have identified 3 main assemblages: the first one is connected to the phases of construction and use of the stairway (phases IIIA and IIIB); the second one refers to a crusader phase of building (phase II); the third one is related to the pre-crusader period (phase I). Here we are going to deal with the medieval phases II, IIIA and IIIB.

The ceramic findings from these contexts were classified according to their macroscopic technological characteristics, then according to their morphology and decoration. Concerning the quantification process we calculated the percent-

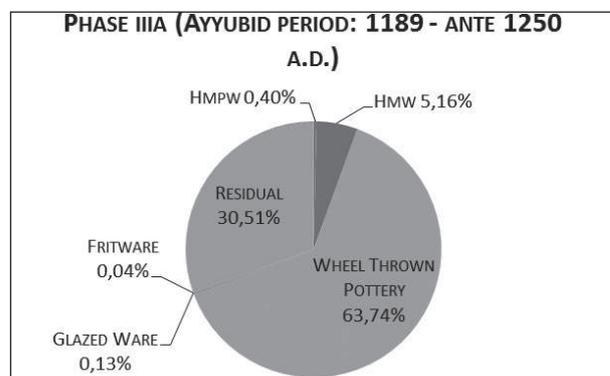
ages taking into account the minimum number of vessels (MNV)¹⁰. So, the finds from the crusader-ayyubid phases here considered consist of 215 (7,96%) minimum number of vessels of HMW (including HMPW), 5 (0,2%) of glazed ware, 2 (0,07%) of stone-paste ware (fritware) and 2476 (65,37%+26,4%)¹¹ of wheel thrown pottery¹². In the follow pie charts we can also see the percentages of fragments subdivided into the single phases stratigraphically recognized (FIGS. 4-7).

We can easily notice the significant presence of wheel thrown pottery (both medieval and pre-Crusader): the majority of fragments is represented by closed shapes, like in other excavation areas of the castle, mostly cooking and storage wares (and also table ware).

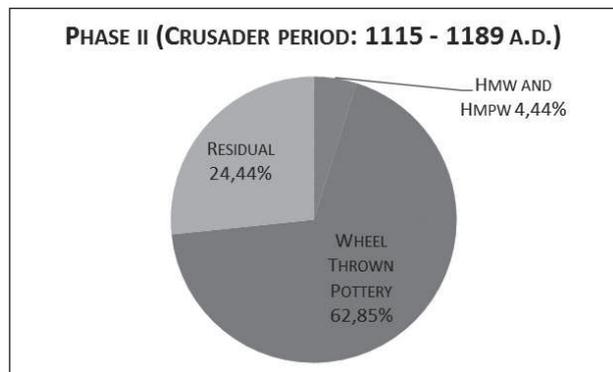
Many of these forms are comparable with other forms from other excavation areas of ash-Shawbak related to the same phases¹³.



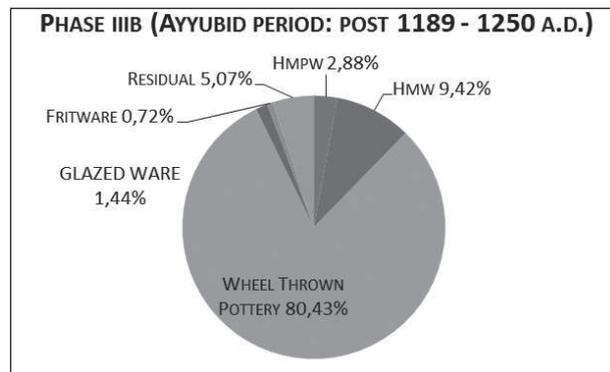
4. Crusader-Ayyubid Pottery in ash-Shawbak.



6. Pottery from the first Ayyubid Period (Phase IIIA).



5. Pottery from the Crusader Phase (Phase II).



7. Pottery from the second Ayyubid Period (Phase IIIB).

10. The assemblages in question consist of 2698 minimum number of vessels (out of a total of 7506 fragments).

11. As above mentioned, we are going to analyze in detail all the findings that can be related to production of crusader and ayyubid periods. About residual pottery, we just mention the minum number of vessels that seem most likely comparable to pre-crusader produc-

tions, without presenting here a specific typological study, that is still in progress: they represent the 26,4% of the total.

12. With Wheel Thrown Pottery we specifically refer to wheel made ware without glaze or any impermeable surface cover.

13. See Ranieri 2016, in particular chapter 4.1.3 and Pruno Ranieri 2017.

Concerning wheel thrown pottery (at least for the 12th and 13th centuries in Southern Transjordan) we have also to highlight that pottery studies have often neglected it, always (or almost always) identified as residual so the state of the research is still insufficient to have a clear picture of the chronological distribution of the typologies¹⁴. Glazed and stone-paste wares were found only in the stratigraphic contexts related to the ayyubid period. They represent a very low percentage and they seem comparable with Syrian production (see for instance some findings from Qal‘at Jabar, identified by Cristina Tonghini as type intermediate and type 2)¹⁵, related to the last quarter of the 12th century and the middle of the 13th century.

The HMW and the HMPW of ash-Shawbak (EP)

As we said, the main topic of this paper is the HMW and the HMPW of ash-Shawbak in the Crusader-Ayyubid time-span. Hand made pottery in *Bilād ash-Shām*, especially in Jordan, is a very important topic because it is present in almost all the sites archaeologically investigated (Sinibaldi 2013; Walker 2013). Despite this, the knowledge of HMW, both painted and not painted, is not yet sufficiently detailed: first of all, in our opinion, it is correct to analyze the HMW and the HMPW separately (Sinibaldi 2013). In fact, in our experience it seems that they are both present in medieval phases (at least in ash-Shawbak), but with different percentage. Concerning the HMPW, it seems possible also to try to distinguish between linear and geometric pattern in order to better classify these pottery productions though, in our assemblages, the small size of the collected fragments does not always allow this. Regarding the chronology, it is very difficult until now to define the first appearance of both of these wares (HMW and HMPW) and also the end of their production and consumption¹⁶. In this paper we

take into consideration just the assemblages of the Crusader-Ayyubid period, leaving to other publications the materials of the preceding and following phases.

As pointed out by Sinibaldi (Sinibaldi 2013) it is important to describe the main distinctive features of these productions: fabric, manufacture, firing, surface treatment, decoration and form. None of these, considered alone, can be exhaustive, but their sum is very important to detect the different productions. In fact, in addition to the chronology, a second, still unresolved, problem is the definition of the main characteristics of these materials production. That is, if they come from an industrial production or a household one (Gabrieli 2015) and if they are regional or local manufacture. In this paper we try to add some data to this debate.

The Crusader-Ayyubid assemblages of Area 35000 considered, like we saw before, present a very low percentage of handmade ware (7,96%) in the total minimum numbers of vessels (only 158 in 6698). We classified these fragments as HMPW (geometrically or not), HMW with slip and HMW without slip: we have 15 MNV of HMPW, 74 of slipped HMW and 69 of HMW without slip. Therefore HMPW is a narrow percentage of the total of HMW (9,5%), with 15 MNV. Just one sherd (NI 9805, US 35491) is decorated with red and brown paint, one with brown paint (NI 12785) and the others with red paint (more or less dark). The difference between dark red and brown is often not easy to detect: it may be due to the firing and not to the potter's will. Few fragments show an evident decoration with geometric patterns, but many have just linear decorations. Morphologically we find both closed and open shapes. The HMW (with and without slip) is present in a higher amount than the HMPW: 143 against 15 MNV and is evenly distributed throughout the stratigraphic column. The two-thirds of HMW are represented by slipped fragments (internal

14. A PhD thesis is going to be written by one of the author.

15. Tonghini 1998.

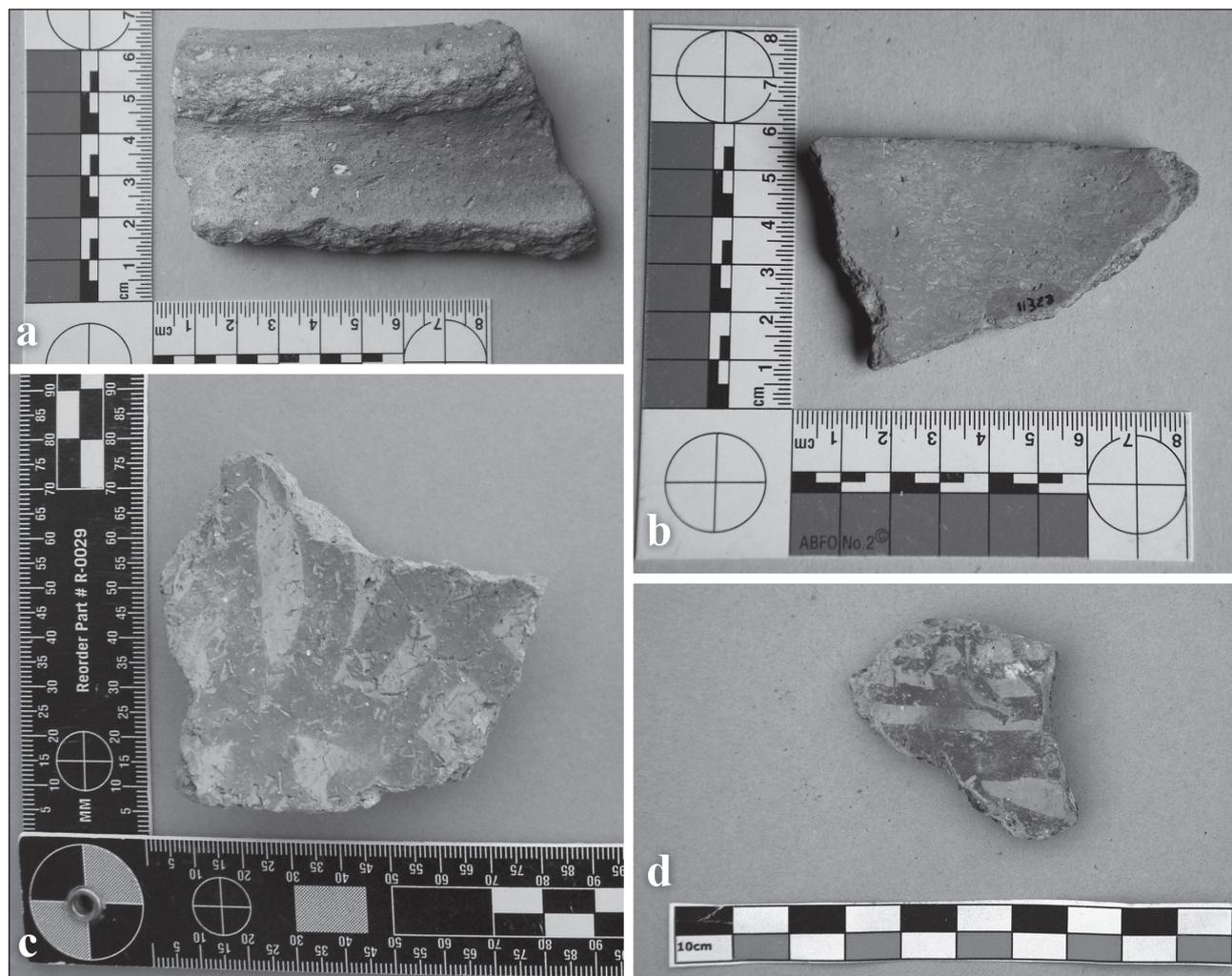
16. Somebody says that the life of the HMPW is the 11th century

until the second half of the 20th century (see bibliography in Sinibaldi 2013).

and/or external, with various colours, specially from white to red): the 25% are closed forms, 13% open, the rest, due to the high level of fragmentation, are not recognisable forms. The proportions observed for HMW without slip are mostly the same (FIGS. 8: a-d).

At this point some considerations are necessary about HMW (painted or not), which has been discussed by many researchers such as, for example, Brown, Johns, Walker, Sinibaldi and Gabrieli. In ash-Shawbak at this stage of the research, it seems impossible to individuate a chrono-typological seriation of HMPW founded on the presence of color or on different colors, and on the decoration patterns at least for Crusader-Ayyubid phases. Analyzing the published materials it is clear that this produc-

tion started to have a large diffusion in the 12th century (though the first phase of its production was not clearly defined up until now). But evidence of productive activity and of production debris is still yet to be found, so it is very difficult to propose its place/places of production. It seems likely that it was very popular in the south of Jordan and in many areas of the *Bilād ash-Shām*. Southern Jordan (especially ash-Shawbak Castle) was a very important frontier of the medieval Mediterranean and represents an extraordinary osmotic environment for the transmission and processing of technical knowledge and production strategies, both among its various political ‘super-powers’ (or Imperial/Great Traditions)¹⁷, as well as (most importantly for our point here) between those and (subject)



8. HMW (a, b), and HMPW (c, d) from ash-Shawbak (Area 35000).

17. Oystein La Bianca's Great and Little traditions' methods (originally developed for the interpretation of the multimillennial archae-

ological site of Ḥisbān).

local communities, whose daily life appears to have been heavily conditioned, in the *longue durée*, by what O. La Bianca called “indigenous hardiness structures” or Little Traditions. In fact, the main actors of technical- knowledge transmission in the 12th and 13th centuries, as well as before, were not exclusively exponents of the imperial Great Traditions; prominent actors were, indeed, the historical residents of the region: semi-sedentary shepherds or farmers on one side and nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples. This approach involves interaction between elite cultural traditions and local level village communities (folk), especially in the long term (So it seems very interesting concerning the HMW). At this point of our research in fact we can only stress that HMW was a widespread production (both in space and time), with many similarities in different places (for example al-Wu‘ayra, in Petra), but without a real standardization. It could be possible to postulate that these productions belong to a Little Traditions (concerning the choice of raw materials and water) handed down for generations.

Conclusion (EP, RR)

The preliminary results of the Italian excavations at ash-Shawbak from the point of view of the Crusader-Ayyubid hand-made pottery seem to stress some impacts of medieval ‘Little Traditions’ on its technical environment. If in the 12th-13th centuries there were some productions, like fritwares, coming from Syria and Egypt, HMW was a long-life pottery very present and widespread. It is difficult indeed to identify differences during the time. What kind of ceramic productive tradition was present in the 12th century ash-Shawbak and what happened with the Ayyubid rulers? At this point of our research it is almost clear that there is certain homogeneity in the productive tradition of the HMW (including HMPW, already present in these contexts). If it cannot therefore speak for the period between both the Crusaders and the Ayyubids of different pottery contexts, we

need to understand if it is possible to notice some differences on the production and market level: “Hand-made pottery is commonly considered by archaeologists to be the product of non-specialized potters, usually rural, highly conservative and consumed in close proximity to its place of manufacture. To a considerable extent the equation of hand forming with non-specialized production and restricted distribution is a ‘common-sense’ approach, particularly for periods and places in which hand-made industries coexist with centralized workshops using the fast-wheel. Manufacture on the fast wheel allows mass production in minimum time and high level of standardization. It also represents investment in equipment, and therefore stability. All of the above denote organized workshops, operated by specialized craftsmen. Their absence by implication, would represent the opposite.” (Gabrieli 2017: 131). Gabrieli introduces a very interesting approach to study the two different coarse handmade pottery from Cyprus and from the Bilad al Sham. Concerning the Levantine production, she analyzes the HMPW of the Mamluk period and proposes the presence of a high level of standardization, large scale manufacture, and wide distribution. They don’t mean of course the presence of a single industry, but the presence of a large production quite similar and well realized. For the Crusader-Ayyubid period, in ash-Shawbak, we note the absence of standardization. Concerning a large scale manufacture and wide distribution it will be very important to realize petrographic analyses of ash-Shawbak assemblages and, at least, the same period pottery of al Wu‘ayra. This is the research line that we could follow in the future.

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