
Middle Islamic Jerash (9th Century-15th Century): Archaeology and History of an Ayyubid-Mamluk settlement, by Achim Lichtenberger and Rubina Raja, eds. Jerash Papers 3, Turnhout: Brepols, 2018, 228 pp., €70. ISBN-13: 9782503578125.

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This collected volume grew out of a project workshop held at Aarhus University in 2016. The university led excavations of the previously unexplored Northwest Quarter of Jerash, a former Decapolis city in northern Jordan, from 2011 to 2016. It is the third in a series of project final reports, and the first of three ceramics anthologies. While the contributions in this collection are wide-ranging - covering occupational phasing, architecture, numismatics, and bioarchaeology - the focus throughout is the rural nature of this site (called a “hamlet” by the excavators), an interpretation based largely on a single category of handmade pottery from the Middle Islamic (Mamluk-era) period. The volume takes the form of ten chapters, each authored by project staff or directors of excavations of contemporary sites in the region.

The opening two chapters of the volume, written by the co-editors Achim Lichtenberger and Rubina Raja, provide the background for the volume, surveying the history of Danish excavations in the Northwest Quarter, the occupational history of Jerash as a whole, the location and characteristics of this particular sector of the city, and the contributions of this project to the growing body of scholarship on the Middle Islamic period in Jordan.

The following two chapters deal with the site’s economic history in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. Chapter Three is a brief study of two 16th-century tax registers (of 1562/1563 and 1596/1597 CE), which have been published by the Jordanian Ottomanist Muhammad Adnan al-Bakhit; these are a well known resource for archaeologists working in Jordan. Normally such registers provide important information about the extent of settlement at a site and its taxable revenues. Peterson’s analysis of the texts is flawed, however, by a misunderstanding of the language and nature of the sources. Contrary to his claims, the registers were written in Ottoman Turkish (not Arabic) and are transcribed as such by Bakhit. (Only Bakhit’s introductory chapter of each register, and his tables summarizing the contents of the *defters*, are in Arabic.) The author’s identification of the status of the settlement, the presence of a marketplace, and its relationship with satellite sites (such as the *mazra’a* Khurnubiyya) are based on misreadings of the Turkish text. These problems aside, the inclusion of the registers in this volume is important for documenting the continued settlement (somewhere) at Jerash in the 16th century and its economic viability, even in the absence of archaeological evidence for such in the Northwest Quarter. The following chapter, by the Mamluk economic historian Warren Schultz, is an assessment of the numismatic record from these excavations. The best part of the chapter provides a thorough introduction to Islamic numismatics. The author acknowledges at the start that no Mamluk coins have been identified thus far from the excavations of the Northwest Quarter. He focuses, instead, on the numismatic evidence from the Ayyubid

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period, placing the Jerash assemblage into the larger scholarship on Ayyubid coinage in Syria. What stands out in this assemblage is the predominance of *fulūs* (copper coins that functioned as “small change” for daily transactions) and Syrian mints.

Chapter Five summarizes, in French, the results of French excavations of the Temple of Zeus in the southern sector of Jerash in the 1980s. They provided the first evidence, before the Northwest Quarter project, of reoccupation of Jerash in the Middle Islamic period. The chronological anchor here is provided by the same handmade painted wares (and many complete forms) that sit at the center of this volume. This occupational phase is characterized by domestic reoccupation of Roman structures still standing in the 13th and 14th centuries, and reuse of building material from collapsed structures (likely fallen during the earthquakes of the 8th century). The character of the settlement in this part of Jerash is distinctly rural and domestic, with cooking installations, and stables built in the partially renovated remains of the temple’s corridors and courtyard. A rapidly growing number of excavations throughout Transjordan and Palestine are now bringing to light similar patterns of reoccupation, reuse, and repurposing of Classical, Late Antique, and Early Islamic ruins in the Middle Islamic period. Such a history of occupation suggests a ruralization of southern Bilād al-Shām associated with either demographic growth or migration and accompanied by economic growth. This comparative perspective continues with a contribution placed later in the volume (Chapter 10 by Basem al-Mahamid); this is a very brief report on a salvage excavation north of Amman. Umm Zuwaytinah appears to be a rural site contemporary with that of Jerash’s Northwest Quarter. As Amman continues to expand, a growing number such salvage projects, largely unpublished, are producing rich evidence of the development of the Madaba Plains in the Middle Islamic period.

A particularly interesting and complementary contribution is to be found in Chapter 6, a study by Georg Kalaitzoglou of the architectural development of the three buildings in the Northwest Quarter, constructed on the basis of architectural phasing and radiocarbon dates. The author systematically describes the diverse methods of preparing the ruins at the site for reoccupation, including demolition, backfilling, and construction on fill, as well as demolition to and subsequent construction on bedrock. The same methods have been identified at excavations elsewhere in Jordan and in Israel.

The heart of the volume is to be found in Chapters 7-9, three methodologically different studies of the ceramic assemblage. The first, by Alex Peterson, is based on his recent doctoral dissertation. Chapter 7 is, in many respects, pivotal to the volume, as it provides the stratigraphic and ceramic analysis on which most of the other chapters rely. The ceramic analysis focuses on Handmade Geometrically Painted (HMGP) ware, which has become the ceramic hallmark of the Middle Islamic (Mamluk-era) period in Jordan. For this chapter the author has selected a few vessels from two trenches representing the last phase of occupation at the site. His observations about the assemblage as a whole are revealing. Removing the large number of Early Islamic residual sherds from the mix, HMGP ware constitutes the largest share of the ceramic assemblage, and this in mainly open forms. The recovery of miniature, plain handmade wares from collapse layers is most notable. Jars and jugs and plain handmade wares of all forms are fewer, contrasting with patterns observed at contemporary sites in other parts of the country. Chapter 8 builds on this with a study of chronology and dietary habits. Co-authored by the volume co-editors and Peterson, the first part of the chapter provides evidence for the three

phases of occupation in the Middle Islamic period, repeating, and supporting, many of the same points made in previous chapters. Similar occupational sequences have been identified at other sites in northern and central Jordan, suggesting a regional pattern. The chapter proceeds, then, with a summary of what can be known about dietary practices of the period based on the combined ceramic and bioarchaeological evidence. It concludes with two appended technical reports by Silvia Polla on lipid residue analysis of cookpots, who identified the use of linseed oil in cooking, and faunal analysis by Pernille Bangsgaard, documenting small-scale animal husbandry focused on milk and wool, rather than meat, consumption. Chapter 9 by Heike Möller is likely to be widely cited in the future. This methodologically innovative study demonstrates ways in which sherd size and preservation, combined with joins between sherds and across loci, can be used to reconstruct architectural phasing.

There have been many new field projects launched in Jerash in recent years. The excavations of the Northwest Quarter make an important contribution to our understanding of not only Jerash's later medieval development, but also the reoccupation of long abandoned urban sites throughout Bilād al-Shām. This volume shares some of the common weaknesses of conference volumes: uneven quality of the contributions, repetitiveness, and the reproduction of many figures at too small a scale to read. These minor critiques aside, this is a highly recommended read, and reference, for anyone interested in the lives of small communities in late medieval Syria.

