

Pottery Workshop: Arabia and the Red Sea after the Turning to the Common Era: Advancing the State of the Art, 15-16-10.2011, Internationales Wissenschaftsforum der Universität Heidelberg

Paul Yule, 26.10.2011 made possible by a generous grant from the Volkswagen Foundation

Since 1998 Heidelberg University has sponsored an interdisciplinary archaeological Expedition to Zafar/Yemen, capital of the ancient Himyarite empire. Traditional and scholarly accounts represent ancient Yemen in 90% of all cases from the vantage point of the kingdom of Saba, which, however, Himyar vanquished politically and militarily in the 2nd century CE. From the 3rd to 6th centuries the 110 hectare large Zafar was an influential metropolis in the Near East from which the Himyar ruled directly and indirectly through allies a region encompassing some 2.500.000 km² – three-quarters the size of western Europe. A stately number of excavated artefacts reveal Zafar to be a surprisingly rich source of information for the empire (c. 270–525) and late/post periods (525–>632) prior to the arrival of Islam.

With regard to Arabia, since the 1970s an informational vacuum has given way to a small informational revolution. What once was considered to be chaotic, illiterate and impoverished now reveals itself to be a late antique culture of full value when Islam emerged. Moreover, it raises the question of what Islam be like without a Himyarite ‘DNA’. There are close historical interconnections between Eastern Africa and Western Arabia, not to forget South Asia – a result of trade. Experts from these three regions have hardly ever discussed intra- and interregional interconnections. A workshop provided a first forum prior to publication of the Zafar pottery.

The workshop took place at the Internationale Forschungsforum Heidelberg in order to introduce a largely unpublished body of early historic pottery from different sites, refocus the attention of scholars on this material and its historic issues and to introduce new talent.

Our idea was to compare and contrast the relatively large amount of recently excavated, unpublished pottery after the year 0 from both flanks of the Red Sea. Diverse sources reveal the historic interaction between the populations on both sides, but no-one has yet seriously compared their newly excavated material cultures.

An informal goal-oriented workshop structure of hands-on experts, including students, was our goal, as opposed to the usual multi-interest conferences in our subfield. The majority of our well-heeled established Arabianist colleagues have little commitment with regard to pottery studies.

The different talks held illuminated the pottery situation in our time frame on both sides of the Red Sea. Departing from the antique and late antique situation which we encounter in our work, the discussion was expanded to include the question of South Asian imports to Arabia and the key site of Hawr Ruri on the southern coast of the Sultanate of Oman. Here Arabian and imported pottery occur. We were largely successful in focussing the range of paper topics chronologically to our emphasis: antiquity after the year 0, especially late antiquity.

The papers held are as follows:

North-eastern Africa

1. Prof Dr Walter Raunig, director (rtrd.) Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde München: *Introduction*
2. Prof Dr Reinhard Stupperich, Univ. Heidelberg, Welcome
3. Prof Rodolpho Fattovich, Univ. Naples, *Pre-Aksumite ceramics of Northern Etiopia/Tigray (northern Ethiopia)*
4. Prof Andrea Manzo, Univ. Naples, *Aksumite Pottery*

5. Prof Ralph Pedersen, Univ. Marburg/Lahn, *The Shipwreck at Black Assarca Island, Eretria*
6. Michaela Gaudiello, MA, Univ. Naples, *Ethiopian Pre- Aksumite pottery (1st millennium BC): a classification and a cultural and social-economic interpretation*

North-western Arabia

7. Francelin Tourtet, BA, Deutsches Archäologisches Inst. Berlin, *Pottery from an early 1st millennium AD residential area at Tayma*
8. Dr Kristoffer Damgaard, Univ. Copenhagen, *Import and export regimes at Early Islamic Aylah: Evidence from the new ceramic typology*
9. Dr Caroline Durand, CNRS, *Hegra/Mada'in Saleh*

South Asia-South Oman

10. Dr Heidrun Schenk, Deutsches Archäologisches Inst. Bonn, *What is „Indian Red Polished Ware“?*
11. Alexia Pavan, MA, Univ. Pisa, *Cosmopolitanism and regionalism in the site of Sumhuram (3rd cent. BC – 5th cent AD)*

Yemenite southern Highlands

12. Prof Dr Paul Yule, Univ. Heidelberg, *Import Ware of Zafar/Yemen*

Mineralogical Analysis

13. Prof Dr Paul Yule, Univ. Heidelberg, *The local pottery of Zafar/Yemen*
14. Janine Zech, MA, Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, *Petrografische Untersuchungen zur Klassifizierung frühhimyarischer Keramik vom Jabal al - 'Awd, Jemen*
15. Prof Dr Michael Raith, Univ. Bonn, *Petrological Study of the pottery from Aqaba and Zafar*

The whole is more than the sum of the parts. Equally as important as the talks were their discussion and that surrounding the pottery shards. In comparison with the original goals, the workshop was successful, but was marred by the non-appearance of the two invited Omani colleagues. In the PI's activity in Oman, he takes his training mission seriously. Also untoward was the untimely illness of Roberta Tomber, an expert on the amphora trade. The pottery from empire period Nagra (Saudi Arabia) was to be contributed by Dr Jérémie Schiettecatte, who unexpectedly began his field work prematurely this season. The non-appearance of the emeritus Dr David Phillipson – a specialist for the late Aksumite pottery also was regrettable.

On the other hand, these no-shows were compensated for by the coming of Prof Alexander Sedov, who has excavated and studied pottery in Arabia at two key sites.

The summary contribution of Heidrun Schenk restated and cleared up the pottery definitions which she made in previous publications regarding Indian Red Polished Ware (RPW). She also reaffirmed her dating of the RPW on the strength of finds from Tissamaharama/Sri Lanka. This is most important for the pottery from early historic Hawr Ruri, at least half of which is of South Asian origin.

This workshop re-focussed Old South Arabian archaeology for different reasons. First, despite stated themes, in practice most conferences on Arabian archaeology offer a platform for diverse interests and topics. In our case, we focussed on one topic narrowly. The original intention was to rectify the meagre research by means of an interchange which focussed attention on the pottery of the Himyarite and neighbouring late pre-Islamic periods. Till now little of this pottery has been excavated, and that that has been is

published in such a way that it cannot readily be compared. There is, for example, no classification of the fabric for example, at Hawr Ruri, only individual shard descriptions. Successful was that experts from different subfields comments on and criticize the different lectures. Even excavators from the same site have limited discussion opportunities with each other.

The workshop provided on the one hand the opportunity to contextualise the pottery from Zafar with that of neighbouring sites. The pottery from al-ʿAwd belongs in the preceding early Himyarite period. Strangely, it contrasted largely, although the site lay only 25 km away. The pottery was most similar to that of al-Adhla of the same period-with differences which now must be discussed. In addition, the definition of the import pottery from Aqaba became clearer: It derives clearly exclusively from that place. Another point of interest is that the pseudo-prehistoric ware found at Zafar derives probably from Ethiopia (not Iran) and is of early medieval date: It belongs to the rare archaeological evidence for Aksumite presence in Zafar. On closer inspection, the pottery from the early historic Black Assarca shipwreck is certainly all of Aqaba type and originates from that site.

To the insights amongst the participants belong numerous points of information with regard to the consistency of the Nabataean pottery of Madain Saleh and Hegra. The influence sphere of the pottery types known from Tayma shows a still isolated centre- no doubt an artefact of our state of knowledge.

The natural science studies of the local and import pottery contributed by Janine Zech and Michael Raith resonated well among the participants. Several asked questions and expressed an interest in using such methods themselves. The discussion proved useful in order to immerse Raith in the archaeological information regarding pottery – he is a mineralogist. Vice versa, certainly our success in the provenance studies of the Aqaba ware gave a clear signal to all that such can yield good results.

The results enable the PI to finish his study of the pottery excavated from Zafar with considerably more certainty in his conclusions than otherwise would have been possible: P. Yule, *Late Antique Arabia Zafar, Capital of Himyar, Rehabilitation of a 'Decadent' Society, Excavations of the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg 1998–2010 in the Highlands of the Yemen* (in press).

The classification system of J. Zech was well-received in our workshop and offered her to use this same system in a project planned for Oman. As a result of our workshop, her MA thesis was reworked and accepted for publication: *Die Keramik der befestigten Höhsiedlung des al-ʿAwd im nordjemenitischen Hochland frühhimyarischer Zeit, wissenschaftliche Arbeit zur Erlangung des Grades eines Magister Artium am Fachbereich Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften der Freien Universität Berlin und am Institut für Prähistorische Archäologie...*

The core of the workshop is the illumination of the Himyarite period pottery from the Yemeni highlands. To this end, the undersigned made his pottery study from Zafar available to the participants prior to publication. The growth of the data and lack of a forum to conduct such discussions in the field of Arabian archaeology and the amount of research reached a crescendo which developed into a fertile ground for a workshop on pottery. Also, concrete individual pieces of useful unpublished information turned up in the talks and by means of the exhibited pottery. For example, a painted pseudo-prehistoric pottery came to light in northern Ethiopia and also Zafar.

Important is our workshop's attempt to influence the direction of Arabian archaeological studies, which serve a privileged few with fixed incomes. The status quo shows little consideration for students and beginners. In terms of attracting talent, Arabian archaeology suffers from limited and inbred 'gene pools'.

In the context of the open access movement, the PI distributed his pottery drawings prior to publication to the participants for comment. He also offered all of his pottery documentation to any interested participant.