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Arab Lamp-Makers in Jarash, Christian and Muslim

A group of inscribed terra-cotta lamps from Jarash, some of which were described for the first time by C. Clermont-Ganneau a century ago, (1898; 1900a; 1900b) came recently back to attention as a result of the "Jerash International Project".

Almond-shaped and provided with a handle in the form of an animal head, these lamps belong to a type ubiquitous in the Early Islamic layers in Jarash itself and commonly called "*Jerash Lamps*". There is indeed no doubt that examples found elsewhere in Jordan and Palestine came from Jarash or at least imitate closely the products of this city (cf. Day 1942; Kennedy 1963; Bagatti 1970). All inscribed specimens known to me belong to Group V as defined by Scholl; they display a channel between the filling hole and the nozzle, and stand either on a ring base or on a flat almond-shaped foot. This group is dated, on the ample and cross-checked evidence from recent excavations, to the middle of the eighth century AD (Scholl 1986: 165; cf. Kennedy 1963: 87, PL. XXVII type 20, #706-711).

During the life-span of lamps of this class, a habit was developed in Jarash to mark them with inscriptions in Arabic, giving sometimes the names of the potters and, occasionally, dates according to the Hijra reckoning.

Having had the privilege to participate in the Jarash Project, I was in a position to acquire first-hand knowledge of the new lamps as they were discovered, partly in the sector I was responsible for. Comparing them with known examples, I was led in some cases to a reappraisal of readings and to a reassessment of this particular evidence in the light of the recently established facts about the Early Islamic city of Jarash (cf. Gawlikowski 1986: 120-121).

A recent paper by Nabil Khairy and Abdel-Jalil Amr, with an addendum by the latter, contains a catalogue of such inscribed lamps kept in the museums of Jordan, including some recently found in the course of the Jarash Project (Khairy and Amr 1986; Amr 1986). This publication prompted me to put my notes in order and to present my own readings and comments.

The authors have elucidated and completed several readings published earlier, and added some new inscriptions of this group. They concluded, obviously, that the potters responsible for these inscriptions as well as their customers were Arabic speakers, and seem to admit that all concerned were Muslim as well. While this last conclusion is documented by several explicit Islamic formulas, the reality seems to be somewhat more complex.

The work of Abdel-Jalil Amr provided some new potters' names, such as Ḥassān, Abū Ḥassūn, and Ibn Ḥudaij (Amr 1986: 163, FIGS. 1-2, 167, FIGS. 11-12). It is interesting to note that the lower half of a lamp dated by Khairy and Amr to the year 105 H (AD 729/730) is in fact identical (cf. FIG. 1) with a more complete example published by Ronzevalle, who restored, probably incorrectly, the date 125 H, but has read on the upper half the name of Ibn Ḥassān (Khairy and Amr 1986: 145-146, FIG. 3, PL. 38,4; Ronzevalle 1914: 168); this potter could be the son of the maker of one of the recently published lamps.

In the same way, the potter whose name is given as Ibn Ḥudaij (Amr 1986: 163, FIGS. 1-2) could be identical with 'Amr bin Kharaj mentioned on three lamps dis-



1. Lamp Pol. 211 (cf. Ronzevalle 1914; Khairy and Amr 1986: FIG. 4).



2. Lamp Pol. 41 (cf. Khairy and Amr 1986: FIG. 9).

covered in Jarash (FIGS. 2 and 3.1) (Khairy and Amr 1986: 149, FIGS. 8-9, PL. 39.9), if we adopt the reading "Ibn Khurayj", equally possible, as the letters are not dotted. In both cases, admittedly, the link is tenuous and would need some confirmation before we are able to speak of hereditary workshops.

Another lamp, published long ago by C. Clermont-Ganneau (1900a; cf. Day 1942: PL. 13.2), was made, according to his reading, by "Djayrûn bin Yûsuf in Jerash", in the year 127 or 129 H (FIG. 3.3). A fragmentary specimen from a similar mould, found in the Polish sector (FIGS. 3.2 and 4) bears clearly the same name but a different date, read by Khairy and Amr as 133 H (AD 750), while their reading of the potter's name is Jarwal (Khairy and Amr 1986: 147, FIG. 6, PL. 39.7; cf. Scholl 1986: FIGS. 1, 9). This Jarwal, or Jayrûn, b. Yûsuf was therefore active at least between AD 744 and 750.

Another potter made himself known by signed lamps of which several are on record, but the name nevertheless was not read correctly. On all known copies the date is 125 H (AD 742/3), and the potter's name was read (from a lamp brought from Jarash to Jerusalem, FIG. 3.4) as "Daud bin Barnaba" by Doumeth in 1895, corrected in 1897 by Clermont-Ganneau to "Theodore son of As...y" and changed again in 1947 to "Daud bin Mustafa" by A. Battista, after another yet identical lamp (Clermont-Ganneau 1898: 342; 1900a; *apud* Bagatti 1947: 141, FIG. 34.1). A new specimen of this inscription found in Jarash by the Australian team (FIG. 3.5) attracted my attention as a parallel to the signature of the same potter on a household basin we found in the Umayyad House (FIG. 3.6). While this vessel, and the reading it provides, still awaits a comprehensive publication of pottery from the Polish sector, the new lamp was published by Khairy and Amr (1986: 146-147, FIGS. 4-5, PL. 39.5-6; cf. Kehrberg 1986: 373), together with a fragment of another one. Curiously, these authors did not recognize that they were

dealing with a text presented already by Clermont-Ganneau in a paper they have used otherwise. Their reading of the inscription is "Made by Nudhûr bin Satfan in Jerash"; the date is not preserved in this case.

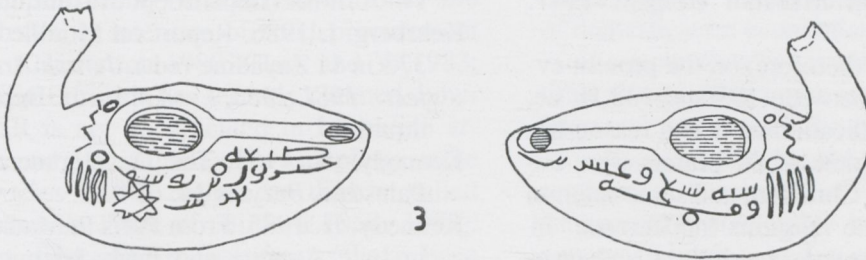
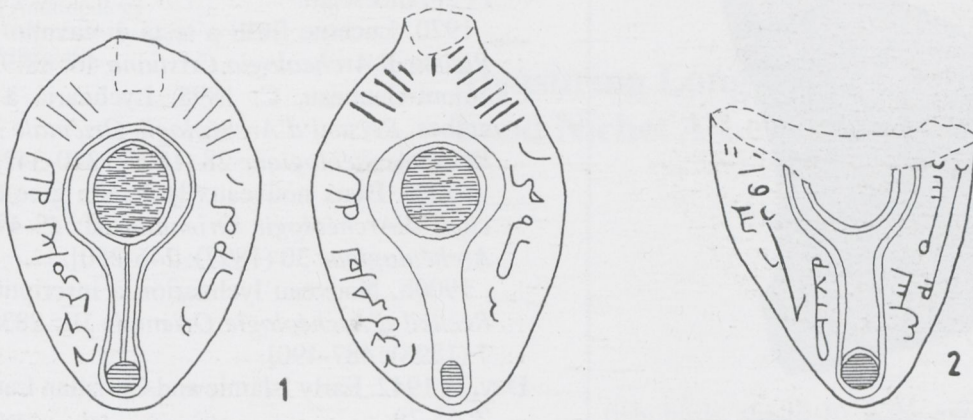
A comparison of all instances of this signature makes it quite clear that the reading of the first name by Clermont-Ganneau as Theodore (*Tôdor*) is correct. The first letter is provided with two dots on the lamp in Jerusalem and on the one from the Australian excavation, while only one dot can be seen on the other lamp published by Khairy and Amr and on the basin from the Umayyad House. The reading proposed in the first place (*li-Da'ud*) cannot be accepted because of the incongruous use of the preposition, not confirmed by other lamp inscriptions.

As to the patronym, the final *nûn* is quite clear on both lamps illustrated by Khairy and Amr, who did not see, however, the incipient *alif* on one of their specimens (broken away on the other), mistaking it for one more stroke on the shoulder of the lamp. This *alif* is distinct whenever preserved and thus excludes the reading of "Mustafa" favoured by Bagatti (1970: 91), in spite of the rather uncommon form of the final letter on the Jerusalem lamp. The name is thus to be read *Işţifan*, being a transcription of a common Christian name considered already, but finally rejected, by Clermont-Ganneau.

The potter called *Tôdor bin Işţifan* or, putting the names back in the original Greek, *Theodoros Stephanou*, was obviously a Christian, and equally obviously Arabized, not only in his use of Arabic but also of the Hijri reckoning.

It is puzzling to find two names very similar (while apparently different) to *Işţifan*, on a four-nozzled lamp published by Khairy and Amr (1986: 150-151, FIG. 11, PL. 40.12), on which they read: "Aşţûra and son of Aşţân". There is no need, it seems, to consider these potters as distinct in any way from other members of their profession active in Jarash about the middle of the eighth century AD.

Finally, a lamp with a very corrupt Greek inscription around the base and a slightly better preserved Arabic text on the top half gives still another potter's name. Read as "Bishr bin Şâmid in Jerash", it is introduced by the Muslim *bismala* and followed by a date which, according to Khairy and Amr, is 211 H (1986: 150, FIG. 12, PL. 40.11). The same date was read on a similar lamp where the name of the potter was not preserved (Amr 1986: 163, FIG. 4). However, the published drawings do not quite confirm the date reading, which is anyway highly improbable: 211 H corresponds to AD 826, that is much too late for lamps otherwise similar in every respect to those safely dated about AD 750. Islamic lamps of the ninth century, while seemingly not represented in Jarash, are well known from other places and quite different in form. As far as I can see, the lamp of Bishr b.



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3. 1: Pol. 153; 2: Pol. 159; 3: Clermont-Ganneau 1900a; 4: Clermont-Ganneau, 1900a; 5: Aus. 346/J. 393; 6: Pol. 142.



4. Lamp Pol. 159 (cf. Khairy and Amr 1986: FIG. 6).

Șamid can be dated in 111 H (AD 729/30), as it was indeed dated by A. Battista already in 1947 after a copy in the Palestine Archaeological Museum (Bagatti 1947: 141).

The inscribed lamps date therefore, on the present evidence, from a short period between 105 and 133 H, i.e. AD 730-750. There is no indication as to the reason behind this short-lived habit. Some of the potters were evidently Muslim, some others Christian, and some seem to have displayed “a remarkable religious indifference” in using both Muslim and Christian inscriptions and symbols for the two halves of the same lamp moulds (cf. Day 1942: 78, PL. 14.1).

As I had the occasion to say elsewhere, partly on the evidence of these inscribed lamps, the society of the seventh and eighth centuries in Jarash went through a process of mutation, changing from Byzantine into Islamic (Gawlikowski 1992). In the course of this transformation, which concerned naturally the whole of the Syrian area as well, the *polis* of Gerasa became an Arab *madina* called Jarash. There is no need here to remind of the enlightening remarks of Hugh Kennedy on this subject, or the recently acquired archaeological evidence supporting his views (Kennedy 1985; Piccirillo 1992; Walmsley 1992). Our lamps provide anyway the most eloquent illustration of this passage from one civilisation to another.

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