

CHAPTER VIII

POTTERY

IMPORTANCE OF POTTERY. CHALCOLITHIC POTTERY. EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE. THE LATE BRONZE PERIOD. EARLY IRON I. ISRAELITISH. HELLENISTIC.

1. Importance of Pottery.---In all parts of the world the making of clay jars and receptacles is one of the earliest arts to be discovered, and Palestine was no exception to the rule. In Palestine such jars were particularly used, as the water for each family had to be carried from the nearest spring to the house. It was natural that, in a country which had so long a history as Palestine, and over which the influences of some many diverse civilizations swept, there should be a considerable variety in the types of pottery in different periods. Indeed, it is now recognized that the differences in these types are so marked that in the absence of other criteria it is possible approximately to date a stratum of the remains of any ancient city by the type of pottery found in it. Since this is so, a brief outline of the different types is not out of place here, although these differences have little or no bearing upon the interpretation of the Bible. Only a brief statement is here attempted. Those who wish to study the subject more fully are referred to more extended works. The ages of culture which are traceable in Palestine by means of artifacts and pottery are as follows:

	Date B.C.
Palaeolithic (Crude stone artifacts)	x to x
Neolithic (Flint artifacts)	x to 3000
Aenolithic or Chalcolithic (handmade painted pottery)	3000 to 2500
Early Bronze (This and each of the following periods is characterized by definite types of pottery)	2500 to 2000

G.M. Fitzgerald, *The Four Canaanite Temples of Beth-Shan* pt. II. *The Pottery* Philadelphia, 1930

Elihu Grant, *Ain Shems, Excavations Haverford, 1931, and Rumeileh 1934*

W.F. Albright, "Tell Beit Mirsim," *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, Vol. 12, 1932

W.M.F. Petrie, *The Pottery of the Beth-Pelet*, London, 1931

G.E. Wright in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 63 (Oct. 1936)

Clarence S. Fisher's forthcoming *Corpus of Palestinian Pottery*, which now (1937)

182

Middle Bronze	2000 to 1500
Late Bronze	1500 to 1200
Early Iron	1200 to 900
Israelite	900 to 600
Persian Period	530 to 330
Hellenistic	330 to 50
Roman	50 B.C. to 300 A.D.
Byzantine	300 to 640
Arabic	650 to 1100
Crusading	1100 to 1200

2. Chalcolithic Pottery. ---There is first, then, the pottery of the cave dwellers of Gezer and that of the same type as from Tell-en-Nasbeh. This pottery is made out of clay that was in no way cleansed or refined. It was made by hand, the larger jars having built up little by little. The vessel, after receiving such ornament as the potter desired, was usually fired, though sometimes simply sun-dried. In firing, the heat was often distributed very irregularly, so that the surface was not all of the same color. The jars were of moderate size, flat on the bottom, globular, conical, or cylindrical in shape. They had concave necks and handles. The handles were of two kinds---“ledge” handles and “loop” handles. A “ledge” handle consists of a piece of clay pinched into a flat projecting ledge and then baked hard. A “loop” handle is one fastened to the jar at both ends, similar to the handle of a pitcher. Bowls or saucers were also sometimes made with ledge” handles. (See Fig. 97.)

The most common ornamentation of the pottery of this period was made by combing the clay with wooden combs notched with teeth of greater or less fineness. Sometimes the marks left by the comb were perpendicular, sometimes horizontal, and sometimes diagonal. One other type of ornament was exhibited in the pottery of the cave-dwellers. That was either an incised representation of a rope or cord, or a moulded imitation of one of these. This ornamentation was probably suggested by the ropes of cords which were bound about the vessel before it was fired, to prevent

(see previous page bibliographical info as Barton frequently repeated such page after page)
Beth-Shemesh, Haverford, 1929

its falling apart. At first the only coloring was a line of brick-red around the rims of jugs and saucers. The most advanced stage is reached in Fig. 96, where a network of red lines cross each other diagonally. The tint of the red varies a good deal, but this may be due to the unequal firing already mentioned.

3. Early and Middle Bronze.---The pottery of the earliest bronze periods, which terminated about 1500 B.C., is of a finer type. The larger pieces were made on a wheel, as were many of the smaller ones. The wheel was rotated with the left hand, while the potter moulded the vessel with the right. The result was a much more shapely type of work than in the previous period. In the Chalcolithic period limestone clays were employed; in this period, sandstone clays. Many of the objects, like those of the preceding period, were of a drab color, though the tints of some ranged from a rich brownish red to orange. The patches of color in these vessels were probably due to unequal heat in firing.

In size and shape the vessels presented a great variety. There were large jars with flat bottoms, inverted conical bodies, and more or less abruptly rounded shoulders. (See Fig. 100.) The mouth was wide and circular and surrounded by a flat, widely expanding rim. These jars averaged about two feet in height. There were many pitchers made in this period. They were large and small and of a great variety of shapes. Such pitchers present similar characteristics, whether found at Gezer or Megiddo. (See Figs. 98, 99.) Ledge and loop handles were common on the pitchers of this period, but “pillar” and “button” handles were also sometimes found. (See Figs. 105, 106.) The ornamentation of pottery showed some advance over the preceding period. In additions to the rope motifs, decoration formed by combinations of lines was also found. One particularly fine type of pottery belonging to this period was found at Gezer. It was never found in the caves or in the higher strata. Vessels of this ware were usually found in groups, indicating that they were the possessions of the rich. The clay was well cleaned, the shapes distinctive

(see Fig. 104), and the ware was always covered with a cream like coating. Saucers and bowls were common in this period. The comb was still used in ornamenting pottery, though sometimes it produced only a series of dots. All surfaces were usually burnished, though naturally this was much more thoroughly done in the expensive than in the cheaper wares.

During the middle Bronze Age, 2000-1500 B.C., trade was carried on with countries beyond the sea, especially with Cyprus. There was also trade with Egypt. In this period, probably owing to foreign influence, the potter's wheel worked by foot was introduced. This left both hands of the workman free and resulted in a great improvement of the ware. There was in this period a great variety in the material used. The cheaper vessels were made of a rough clay, full of grits of black colored sand or flints, which burned black in the middle of the clay and a reddish or yellowish drab on the surface. At least seven other finer types of ware were found at Gezer. One of these was a ware made of brilliant saffron-yellow clay, which was enriched with painted decoration in bold black lines. This was probably of foreign origin. In this period the jar with pointed bottom, long conical body, well rounded shoulders, short concave neck, continuous circular mouth, with an expanded rim, though much narrower than in the preceding period, in the most common type. Jugs with pointed bottoms also became common, though there was a great variety in the shape of jugs. Ledge handles had almost entirely disappeared in this period. Jars generally had two loop handles, and sometimes four, though occasionally they had none at all. "Button" handles are comparatively uncommon; the loop handle is the style most generally used. "Ear" handles, both vertical and transverse, are also common. (See Figs. 101-103, and 105.)

The most striking feature of the pottery of this period is the increase in the variety of ornamentation and the introduction of the pictures of animals and birds and ornamental motifs. This was due, no doubt, to foreign influence.

All kinds of vessels were made of clay during this period: jars, jugs, pitchers, bowls, saucers, drinking-cups, etc., etc. Many of the potters signed their work with a peculiar mark. This mark was sometimes an impression of the potter's finger, sometimes linear devices of various kinds scratched on the handle, and sometimes impression of an inscribed Egyptian scarab, usually of

the period of the Middle Kingdom or the Hyksos Time. Jar handles marked with scarabs were also found at Jericho. (See Figs. 118, 119.)

4. Late Bronze Period.---The late Bronze Period, 1500 to 1200 B.C., while its wares sometimes differed in form from those of the preceding period, is mainly marked off from the second period by general degeneration in style. No great differences are noticeable in the kinds of clay employed. The jars have as a rule, a less pointed bottom than in preceding period. (See Fig. 110.) The combed decoration is rare, and the burnishing of the jars is both less frequent and less skillful than in the preceding period. There is an increase in the tendency to use painted ornamentation, which frequently consists of zigzag lines. Rough, conventionalized representations of palm trees are also common. Potters' marks continue, but scarabs are less often used in making them in the preceding period. The various kinds of vessels made seem to have been as great as in the preceding in period. (See Figs. 112, 113.) A clay funnel or bottle-filler was also found in this period. (See Fig. 114.) A number of the forms of this period may be studied in Fitzgerald's Four Temples of Beth-Shan, Part II, Pls. XLI, XLVIII.

5. Early Iron I.---In this period, 1200-900 B.C., the method of manufacture remained the same as before, and but little difference can be discerned in the clays employed. There seems, however, to have been a steady decline in excellence. In the early part of the period Cretan

influences are discernible. Doubtless this was due to the invasion of the country by the Philistines. The forms and kinds of vessels found in this period are numerous. Painted ornamentation consists, as a rule, merely of rings around the vessel, though sometimes zigzags made very carelessly are also found. The potters still employed marks. These are of the same general character as in the earlier period, though the scarab stamp entirely disappeared from Gezer and the use of other seals became common. These were most often a simple device of stars, or names written in the old Hebrew script.

6. Israelitish.---The type of Israelite pottery was definitely revealed by the work of Albright and Grant. The forms may be studied best in their works, which have already been cited. An

186

interesting feature of the pottery of the late Israelite period is the jar handles inscribed that was pre-exilic. A series of them was also found at the tells excavated by Bliss and Macalister in the Shephelah, in the years 1898-1900: Es-Safi, Judeideh, and Zakariyeh. (See Fig. 116.) Others were found at Tel Beit Mirsim. These handles, in addition to the impression of a seal, contained the words, "to the king," in Hebrew letters; also the names of the cities, Hebron, Socho, Ziph, and Mamsheth. The first three of these are well-known Judaeans towns; the last was a town in the Negeb, or country to the south of Judaea, not mentioned in the Bible. Sri Charles Warren found some similar stamps near the temple area at Jerusalem. Such stamped jar handles have not been found in north Israelitish sites. It seems that the kings of Judah, after separation of the two kingdoms, established standard jars by royal authority for the determination of standard jars by royal authority for the determination of standard measurements of oil and wine. The four cities named on the handles were the four administrative centers of the kingdom.

7. Hellenistic Period.---In the time after the Exile there is not much change in the character of the pottery until after the conquest of Alexander the Great. The influx of influences from the Graeco-Macedonian world affected the whole life of the land, and was reflected also in its pottery. As in the middle and late Bronze Periods, there were importations of pottery from abroad, though at this time importations were from regions affected by Greek art. The Palestinian potters of this period had, therefore, the best models. The use of the potters' wheel was all but universal, and the wares were burned hard. A pile of these potsherds, when struck with a stick, emits a distinct musical "clink," which is not the case potsherds from the earlier periods. The clay employed was the finest and most homogeneous of any used in Palestinian pottery, and there is a general tendency, especially in the cities near the coast, to follow classical models. (See Figs. 122, 125.)

Jars have rounded or bluntly pointed bases, vertical sides, flattened or oblique shoulders, and round mouths. There are two loop handles just under the shoulders. Another form, probably suggested by Rhodian amphorae, has a long, tapering base. (See Fig. 120.)

It is impossible in the space that can be devoted to this topic

187

to enumerate all the kinds of vessels that were made in this period, or the variety of their forms. Only a few characteristic features can be noted. The cooking pots of this time have a very distinctive form. They have a globular base, globular body, short, wide neck, and a rounded continuous mouth. (See Fig. 122.) The body of the vessel is often ribbed with horizontal flutings. Small jugs and vases were very common; some of them had very characteristic forms.

Jugs of this period found at Jericho had a funnel at the side through which liquid could be poured into them.

As in the preceding period, jar handles were frequently stamped with the mark of the potter. These were now often Greek Letters, though those so stamped were apparently imported from foreign countries. At Jericho ten jar handles were found stamped with the name "Jah," and three stamped with the name "Jahu." Both "Jah" (See Psa. 68:4.) and "Jahu" are abbreviations of the name Jehova, and probably are so to be understood here. They often formed part of a personal name--thus Elijah. "My God is Jah." (In modern English the J has a G sound, in Olde English the J had a Y or an I sound thus Jah was once spoken as Yah. DQH)

From the middle Bronze Age onward, filters were made by piercing the bottom of a jug with holes. These became more common in the late Bronze Period, but this sort of device reached its full development in the Hellenistic Period, which we are now considering. Various forms of strainers were found, as shown in Fig. 123, and one very elaborate filter. (See Fig. 121.)

With the coming of the Romans, in 63 B.C., new influences were introduced into the civilization of Palestine. In times these influences modified the pottery, but it is doubtful whether they had influences modified the pottery, but it is doubtful whether they had an appreciable effect until the New Testament Times. Pots from the Roman Period found at Gezer (See Fig 124.) differ from those of the Hellenistic Period chiefly in having bottoms that are more nearly flat. By the time of the Emperor Constantine a change can be noted, so that pottery of the Byzantine Period (325-637 A.D.) had characteristics of its own. That period, however, lies beyond the range of Biblical history.

In the study of pottery one of the most interesting topics is the evolution of the lamp. The earliest lamps were simply sticks stuck into a saucer of oil and ignited. Of course, the wick would easily fall down into the oil and the light would be extinguished. The earliest device to prevent this was to make the saucer of irregularly shape, with a slight notch in one side in which the wick

could lie. (See the right-hand lamp in Fig. 127.) As time went on this resting place for the wick developed more and more into a spout. (See Fig. 126, and the left-hand lamp in Fig. 127.)

This form of lamp was known as early as the first Bronze Period, and persisted with slight development down through the Israelitish time. (See Fig. 128.) Its development was not, however, everywhere uniform. Middle Bronze lamps found at Jericho appear to be simply saucers with two or more indentations in the rim. (See Fig. 132.) Perhaps in these more than one wick was used. In the Hellenistic Period two improvements in the making of lamps occurred. The first consisted in a still further development of the spout until its sides almost met and formed nearly a closed vessel. The second improvement was, perhaps, due to outside influences. It consisted in making the saucer small and covered. In the middle of the cover was a small round hole in to which the oil was poured; at one side a spout protruded and the wick came out through this. (See Fig. 131.) The top of such lamps was ornamented with various designs.

In the Byzantine and Arabic Periods the same general style of lamp was used, but the shape of ornamentation on the lamp was used, but the shape and ornamentation of each period were different, so that they can easily be distinguished. (See Fig. 129.) After the country became Christian, the ornamentation on the lamps was often made with Greek letters. These were made in ornamental forms and usually expressed some Christian sentiment. One of the most popular legends for these Christian lamps was: "the light of Christ shines for all." (See Fig 130.)

It was lamps such as these, probably of the Hellenistic type, to which Christ alluded in the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. (Matt. 25:1-12.) Such a lamp would not contain oil

enough to burn all night, so that to carry it to a prolonged wedding feast with a supply of oil was a striking example of improvidence.