

# Jerusalemite Painted Pottery from the Late Second Temple Period\*

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Painted pottery vessels dating from the reign of Herod the Great to the destruction of the Second Temple and the fall of Masada (between the years 20 BCE and 73 CE) have been discovered in Jerusalem and its surroundings. This thin, delicate, fine-quality tableware comprises mostly bowls, although some jugs, juglets, and kraters have also been found. The clay is light pinkish-brown in color, painted in brown, reddish-brown and black with floral motifs, lines and dots. Such vessels came to light for the first time in the excavations at Masada in the years 1963-1965, yet remained unpublished. In Jerusalem they have been found in the excavations of the Citadel (Amiran and Eitan 1973: Pl. 43); the Temple Mount excavations (Mazar 1969: Pl. 11: B4); the Jewish Quarter (Avigad 1983: 117-118, Figs. 115, 201) and the Armenian Garden (Hayes 1985: Fig. 20:36). Outside of Jerusalem they have been found in the Judean Desert at Herodium (Bar-Nathan 1981: 62-63, Fig. 91, Pl. 7:1-8), Jericho (Bar-Nathan 2002: Pl. 20:335), and one sherd at 'Ein Feshkha (de Vaux 1959: 241, Fig. 2:7). Single fragments were found at the Jewish settlement of Nachlat Yehuda in the Shephela (Kaplan 1964: 13, Fig. 4:13) and at the Nabatean settlement of Oboda (Perlman et al. 1986: 82).

## History of Research

The discovery of the painted vessels took most excavators by surprise, for such vessels were unknown until then. From the Hasmonean period, storage jars, jugs, juglets, unguentaria and alabastra, decorated with bands and splashes of brown-red color, were recorded mainly at Jericho (Bar-Nathan 2002: 122-128), the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem (Geva and Rosenthal-Heginbottom 2003: 185, Pl. 6.2:8, 13 on p. 235; Pl. 6.5:15, 24, 26, 37 on p. 241) and from tombs around Jerusalem (e.g. Weksler-Bdolah 1998: Fig. 37:9, 12; Vitto 2000: Fig. 44:2, 3, 5-7), although this decoration was not always identified as painting.

In shape, fabric and decoration the Jerusalemite bowls are similar to the Nabatean fine ware from the 1st century BCE onwards, found mainly at Petra and the Nabatean towns in the Negev (for example Oboda and Mampsis). This ware is distinguished by its delicate thinness and its distinctive painted design (Gunneweg et al. 1988). It is possible that the Nabatean vessels, especially the bowls, reached the markets of Jerusalem through trade, and perhaps it was a Nabatean potter who

disclosed the secret of production to a colleague in Jerusalem. As a result, local potters were influenced and began to manufacture similar vessels, while changing the patterns and incorporating additional decorations and motifs known to them.

When such vessels were first discovered in the Temple Mount excavations in Jerusalem, B. Mazar named them "pseudo-Nabatean painted ware" (Mazar 1969: 14, Pl. XI:B4). When N. Avigad found them in the Jewish Quarter excavations he proposed the term "Jerusalemite painted bowls" (Avigad 1983: 117, 185-186). Neutron activation analysis conducted on ten pieces, nine from the excavations in Jerusalem and one from Oboda (PW 20822), has proven that all these bowls were manufactured in Jerusalem and that Avigad's attribution was correct (Perlman et al. 1986: 78, 81-82, Fig. 1).

## Description of the Bowls

The majority of the vessels are thin-walled, hemispherical bowls with a diameter of 12, 15 or 17 cm. The rims are either rounded or slightly incurved and the bases are flat or have a low ring base. The painted decoration is applied directly onto the clay on the interior of the bowl with a brush in brown, red-brown or black, mostly free hand, and comprises motifs taken from the local plant repertoire. It is possible that the color of the paint was produced by diluting the clay from which the vessel was formed and adding oxides.

Since the finds from the various sites show a repetition of designs, I have chosen to discuss them as a single group. On the basis of their decoration, the bowls can be divided into two main categories:

- (1) Bowls with a symmetrical composition in the center corresponding to the location of the ring base, comprising a flower surrounded by wreaths, braids, leaves and stems. Other bowls have a geometric design in the center comprising clusters of lines and dots, and below the rim a wreath of leaves (Mazar 1971: Pl. XXXI; Avigad 1983: Figs. 115, 201). A number of finds from the Jewish Quarter excavations have not yet been published and are presented here for the first time (Fig. 68.1: bowl fragment decorated with leaves and twigs).
- (2) Bowls with naturalistic floral designs, freely brush-painted, comprising flowers, leaves, stalks with small leaves and branches.

In the center, corresponding to the base, and on the inner edge, can be seen a variety of designs and stylized elements. There are no anthropomorphic or zoomorphic representations. Among the floral designs, both stylized and free hand, one can identify ivy leaves (Bar-Nathan 1981: Fig. 7:1-2), trefoil-shaped leaves (Bar-Nathan 2002: Pl. 20:335), vine tendrils, as well as olive and almond leaves (Avigad 1983: Fig. 115). The bowl in Fig. 67 from the Jewish Quarter excavations has a design of twigs with leaves, painted in free style.

### The Designs

Two designs are outstanding:

(1) A floral pattern made up of three long, thin, open flower petals, seen from the side (Mazar 1971: Pl. XXXI: 2; 1973: Pl. 3; Avigad 1983: Fig. 201). The author suggests identifying this flower as a lily (*lilium*). The lily is quite common in Jewish state art, appearing on coins as well as monumental and sepulchral art (see below). The fragmentary bowls in Fig. 68, 2, from the Jewish Quarter excavations, show the lily close to the rim and in the center of the bowl together with ivy leaves.

(2) A floral pattern made up of circles and dots, formed by a central circle surrounded by 6, 8 or 12 solid painted circles. Flowers are arranged in a concentric circle in the center, enclosed within square or lozenge-shaped frames, or aligned in a row below the rim of the bowl. In the author's opinion this floral pattern is a stylized rendering of the rose, or rosette, the symbol of the sun and of life. It could also be a simplified version of the mallow (*malva*), a wild plant well-known in Jerusalem which adorns the gray molded, decorated lamps (see below). The rosette was much in favor in the Second Temple period and is seen on architectural monuments, facades of burial caves, coffins and ossuaries. Bowls decorated with rosettes have come to light in the Temple Mount excavations (Mazar 1971: Pl. XXXI: 6; 1973: Pl. 3 below left) and the Citadel excavations (Amiran and Eitan 1973: Pl. 43:2). In the Jewish Quarter excavations bowls with rosettes and lilies were discovered (Avigad 1983: Fig. 201 on the right). Another specimen from the same site is published here for the first time (Figs. 68.3, 72). An additional bowl was found in the Armenian Garden excavations (Hayes 1985: Pl. 20:36). Unpublished bowls from the Western Palace at Masada are decorated with rosettes and lilies in combination with branches and leaves.

### Description of Jugs, Juglets, and Kraters

Alongside the bowls, jugs, juglets and kraters have also been

uncovered, decorated with flowers, stalks, branches, entwining tendrils and clusters of grapes. Some designs are painted in a naturalistic manner, others are simplified designs of lines and dots. Such vessels were found mainly in the excavations of the Temple Mount (E. Mazar 2002: 42), the Jewish Quarter and Masada (unpublished). From the Jewish Quarter excavations come fragments of juglets and bowls decorated with clusters of adjoining solid circles, possibly a stylistic rendering of a string of dried figs (Figs. 68.4-5). At Masada a rather unique piriform jug (Fig. 69) with a ring base was discovered, its rim and neck damaged. At the joint of the neck and shoulder is a strainer, and on the shoulder on the same side as the handle is a spout. On the pinkish-brown exterior of the jug, tendrils with leaves and a lily are painted in a free-hand style (Fig. 69.1). On the shoulder (fig. 69.2) is a rosette set within a circular frame of ivy and lilies. In shape the vessel is related to the green-cream ware, found on Nabatean sites and thought to originate from Parthia (Schneider 1996: 138–139). However, the jug type and decoration are firmly rooted in the traditions of Jerusalem (Fig. 69.2). Similarly adorned jugs were uncovered at Masada.

Another vessel type decorated with floral designs is a three ring-legged krater (Bar-Nathan 1981: 61) from the Temple Mount excavations (E. Mazar 2002: 42) and the Jewish Quarter excavations (Avigad 1983: Figs. 201, 213-214). At Jericho flat-based kraters decorated with red-painted floral motifs were found (Hachlili and Killebrew 1999: 117, Figs. III.57: 4, 6).

Painted vessels are seldom found in tombs and only two bowls are known from tombs in Jerusalem. The first bowl, decorated with rosettes and simple clusters of grapes was uncovered in Cave A on the western slope of Mount Scopus together with ceramics from the time of Herod the Great (Abu Raya and Zissu 2000: Fig. 4:14). The second example, with a stylized floral pattern, comes from a burial in the same area dating to the same period (Vitto 2000: Fig. 40:1). Tomb K 23 at Jericho contained two bowls and a krater, and two bowls decorated with a lily and leaves came to light in a pool in the area of the tombs (Bennett 1965: Pls. 267:6-7; 277:4-5). In the Jewish cemetery of Jericho two kraters and a spouted jug with a painted decoration of branches and leaves were found (Hachlili and Killebrew 1999: Figs. III.57:4, 6; III.61:14).

### Decorated Lamps

A development analogous to the painted pottery can be seen in the gray molded lamps, also called "Citadel lamps". These

lamps are decorated on the shoulder with floral designs in relief (Amiran and Eitan 1973: Pl. 43:1). The designs comprise rosettes, lilies, myrtle and olive leaves, and wreaths (Barag and Hershkovitz 1994: 58–70, rosette: Pls. 19:114; 20:120; lily: Pl. 20:122–123; myrtle: Pl. 20:119; olive: Pl. 18:107; wreath: Pl. 18: 105, 108). A substantial number of such lamps were unearthed in the excavations at Masada.

A gray molded lamp from Aroer bears two rosettes with a palm frond between them (Hershkovitz 1992: Pl. 7:7). Most likely the painted vessels and the lamps were manufactured in the same potters' workshops in Jerusalem and the potters were familiar with the floral designs and made use of them in both relief and painted decorations.

### **Contemporary Jewish Art**

The present review has shown that the shape of the Jerusalemite painted bowls was inspired by Nabatean prototypes. But what of the designs and the decorations? From where did the potters draw their inspiration? It is evident that the ornamentation of the vessels belongs to the repertoire of Jewish art from the Second Temple period. The artisans painted what they saw, what they were familiar with and what they absorbed from the surroundings in which they lived and worked.

#### **(1) State Art – The Coins**

The motif of the lily appears on coins of the Hasmonean kings. Compare the motif of the lily on the bowl with that on the coins of Alexander Jannaeus (Fig. 70; Meshorer 1998: 61, Nos. 134–137). The wreath (Fig. 71) is very common on coins from the Hasmonean period until the Bar Kochba Revolt (Meshorer 1982: 62–64, Pl. 10: Ea 21; 1998 passim: 136, No. 5, 38).

#### **(2) Monumental Art**

A number of architectural fragments display the well-known plant repertoire, especially lilies, rosettes and wreaths. Such fragments have been found in the Temple Mount excavations (Mazar 1971: Pl. XXIV; 1973: 76–77; E. Mazar 2002: 30–31; 43), the Jewish Quarter excavations (Avigad 1983: Fig. 106) and at Masada (Yadin 1966: 71, 83).

#### **(3) Sepulchral Art**

The carved facades of burial caves reveal an ostentatious diversity of floral designs, to mention only the Tomb of the Kings (Cohen 1947: Pl. 7) or the Nicanor Tomb (Avigad 1967: 119–125). Decorations on coffins and ossuaries are remarkable, and as the finds are numerous, only a few will be mentioned. The sarcophagus from the burial vault of a Nazirite family is adorned

with two clusters of grapes, rosettes, and scrolls. In the authors' opinion there is a lily in the center (Avigad 1971: Pls. 39–40; 1975: 67). This is an eminent example of motifs familiar to the people of the time executed with a high technical standard of workmanship. A beautiful, simply-carved lily together with rosettes among leaves, on the show side of an ossuary from Mount Scopus (Reich and Geva 1973: 11; 1975: 69) is only one example of the numerous decorated ossuaries from Jerusalem (Bagatti and Milik 1958: Pls. 14:29–30; 18: 38–39; Rahmani 1994: Figs. 7:49c; 59:410; 84:587).

An unusual decoration was found on an ossuary from a burial cave on Mount Scopus. In the center are two carved lilies, to their left within an incised circle is a square design with a rosette in the middle; four additional rosettes are distributed over the surface (Weksler-Bdolah 1998: Fig. 25). It is possible that this design (Fig. 73) is the prototype of the various painted patterns on the bowls (Fig. 72). The carving of tomb facades and ossuaries demands precision and symmetry, typical of stone cutting, while free-hand painting on ceramics with a brush presents the opportunity to express floral designs in an artistic and ornate manner.

#### **(4) Private Dwellings**

The frescoes and mosaics found at Jerusalem and Masada reveal that motifs such as the lily, the rosette and other plants like almond, olive, ivy, and clover were popular in private dwellings. The lily occurs on wall painting fragments from the Jewish Quarter excavations (Rozenberg 2003: Pl. 11.7:31, 35, 40–41), the rosette on a fragment from Masada (Yadin 1966: 82) and the wreath on a wall from Mount Zion (Broshi 1976: 18, Pl. 19: C).

A simplified version of the rosette occurs on mosaic floors in bathhouses from the Western Palace at Masada (Yadin 1966: 129) and the Jewish Quarter excavations (Avigad 1983: Fig. 162). In the Jewish Quarter the lily, the rosette, and the wreath formed part of the carved decoration on the rims of stone tables (ibid: Fig. 185:1, 3–4) and on bowls (Fig. 72).

### **Summary**

The Jerusalemite painted pottery – bowls, juglets, jugs, and kraters – represents a special tableware used in daily life, perhaps only for meals on Sabbath and the High Holidays. The shape of the bowls and the jugs, as well as the style of painting, suggest a Nabatean influence. However, the potters in Jerusalem, while copying the form, adapted the painted motifs to the requirements of the Jewish community, drawing inspiration from state and monumental art in Jerusalem as well as Jewish sepulchral art. The

artists and artisans created both free and stylized compositions within a well-known and accepted scheme of decoration, executing it with a high artistic standard. The painted bowls and the gray molded lamps are the popular expression of the material culture in Jerusalem and Judea at the close of the Second Temple period. The vessels appear to have been manufactured towards the end of Herod the Great's reign and were common in the 1st century CE. Production apparently ceased with the destruction of the temple. However, this style of folk art continued to appear on the so-called "Southern" or "Judean" lamps during the period between the First and Second Revolts.

\*The vessels presented in the figures are published for the first time courtesy of Hillel Geva, Eilat Mazar and Rachel Bar-Nathan; the photos are by Gabi Laron; I was assisted by Rachel Ben-Dov and Ora Sinai.

