



Project
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**ENPI
CBCMED**
CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION
IN THE MEDITERRANEAN



MEDINA
PHOENICIAN NABATAEAN
INSCRIPTIONS

MEDINA

MEDITERRANEAN NETWORK FOR THE VALORIZATION AND FRUITION OF INSCRIPTIONS PRESERVED IN MUSEUMS

JULY 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Second Project meeting in Lebanon
Upcoming training on museology in Lebanon and Jordan
Phoenician Religion
Ala Shabib. The innovation of Nabataean Pottery**

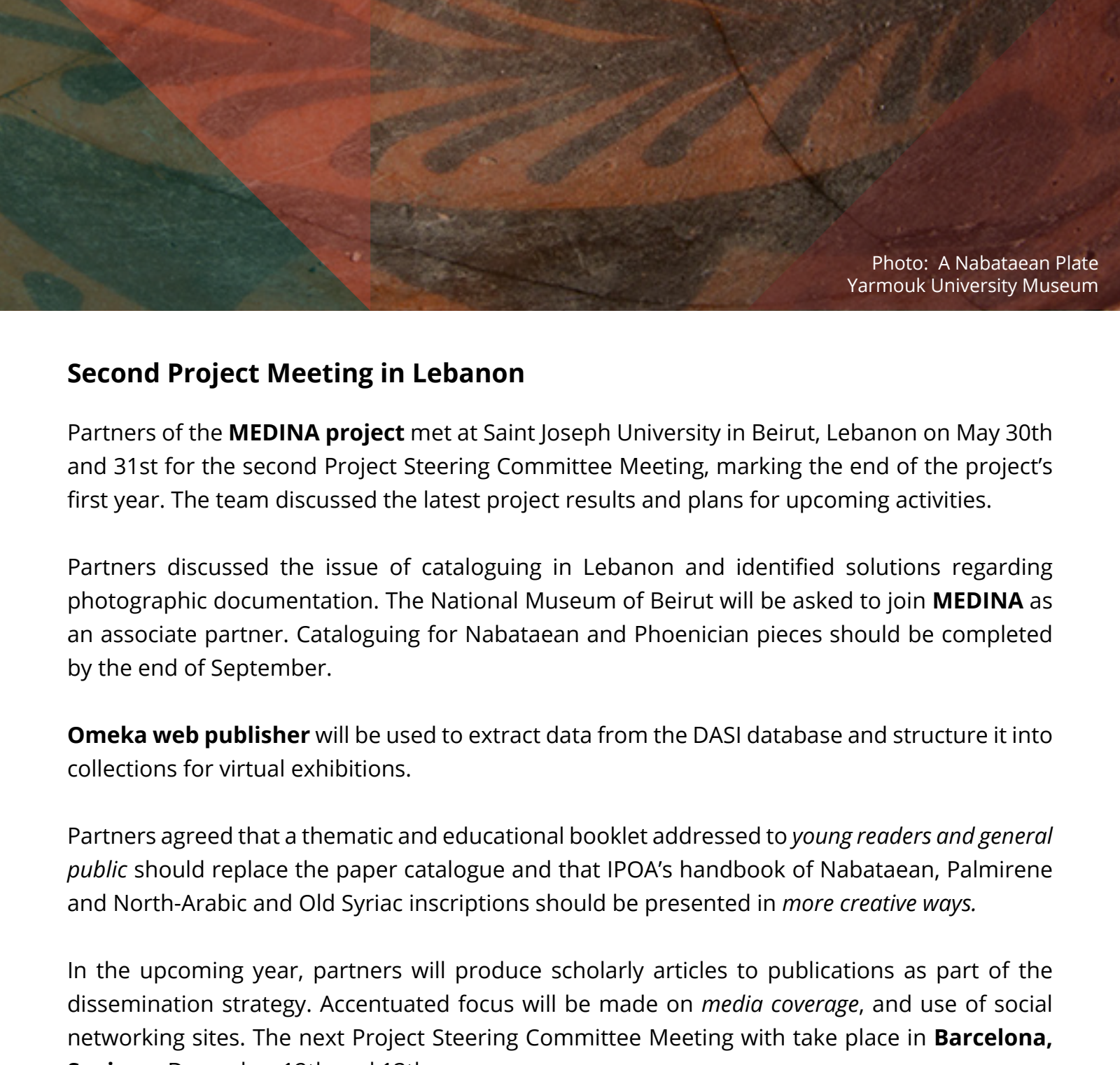


Photo: A Nabataean Plate
Yarmouk University Museum

Second Project Meeting in Lebanon

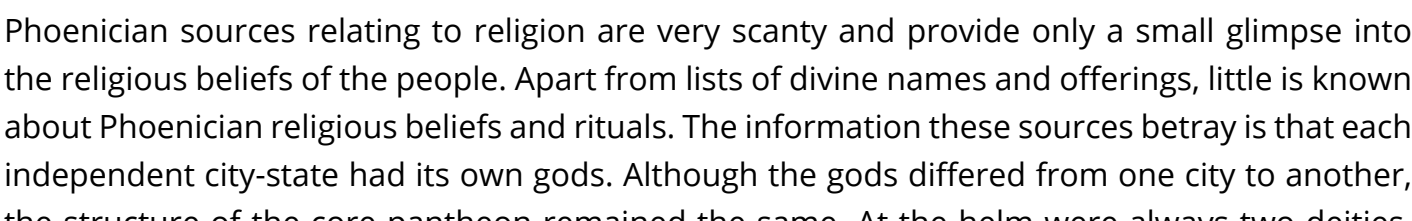
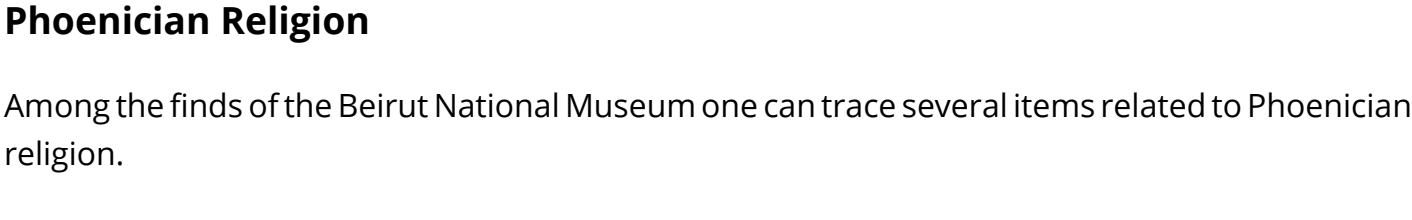
Partners of the **MEDINA project** met at Saint Joseph University in Beirut, Lebanon on May 30th and 31st for the second Project Steering Committee Meeting, marking the end of the project's first year. The team discussed the latest project results and plans for upcoming activities.

Partners discussed the issue of cataloguing in Lebanon and identified solutions regarding photographic documentation. The National Museum of Beirut will be asked to join **MEDINA** as an associate partner. Cataloguing for Nabataean and Phoenician pieces should be completed by the end of September.

Omeka web publisher will be used to extract data from the DASI database and structure it into collections for virtual exhibitions.

Partners agreed that a thematic and educational booklet addressed to *young readers and general public* should replace the paper catalogue and that IPOA's handbook of Nabataean, Palmyrene and North-Arabic and Old Syriac inscriptions should be presented in *more creative ways*.

In the upcoming year, partners will produce scholarly articles to publications as part of the dissemination strategy. Accentuated focus will be made on *media coverage*, and use of social networking sites. The next Project Steering Committee Meeting will take place in **Barcelona, Spain** on December 12th and 13th.



Second Project Steering Committee Meeting, May 2013

Upcoming training on museology in Lebanon and Jordan

A training session will take place in Lebanon and in Jordan during September/ October 2013. The training will offer museum personnel, students and researchers in universities courses on modern communication and digitization techniques as well as courses on advertising and marketing for the conservation, use and dissemination of epigraphic cultural heritage and promotion of cultural tourism in museums.

Phoenician Religion

Among the finds of the Beirut National Museum one can trace several items related to Phoenician religion.

Phoenician sources relating to religion are very scanty and provide only a small glimpse into the religious beliefs of the people. Apart from lists of divine names and offerings, little is known about Phoenician religious beliefs and rituals. The information these sources betray is that each independent city-state had its own gods. Although the gods differed from one city to another, the structure of the core pantheon remained the same. At the helm were always two deities, a male city god known as Baal=The Lord, whose identity varied according to the city he was associated with, and a female goddess, Astarte, known as Baalat=The Lady, whose attributes included fertility and safeguarding. This divine coupling is attested in three major Phoenician centers: Melqart and Astarte at Tyre; Eshmun and Astarte at Sidon; and Baal and Baalat Gebal at Byblos. Later classical sources, such as Philo of Byblos's Phoenician history and Lucian's *De Dea Syria*, dedicate chapters to Phoenician beliefs and religious feasts, but they are heavily contaminated by Greek and Roman religion.

Because of the poverty of the textual sources, scholars have to rely more on archaeological evidence as an aid in reconstructing the religious practices of the Phoenicians.

First are items representing or symbolizing gods and goddesses. The most common representation of the female goddess was the bronze or terracotta figurine. The latter tended to focus on health, fertility, and the life-giving and nourishing aspect of the goddess, as attested by the significant number of *dea gravida* and naked figurines holding their breasts (Figure 1). These figurines were not restricted to temples and sanctuaries alone, but were also found in dwellings, indicating the presence of a private domestic cult. In temples, figurines were placed on benches and when discarded were placed in trenches known as *favissee*.

Deities were often represented in Phoenicia by an empty throne (Fig. 2), known as 'Astarte Thrones', believed to have been the focal point of most Phoenician sanctuaries in the later Iron Age. These thrones often have a *betyl* (standing stone) or a religious symbol (moon crescent, sun disc) to represent the particular deity. Libation scenes are also represented on these thrones.



Figure 1: dea gravida terracotta figurine

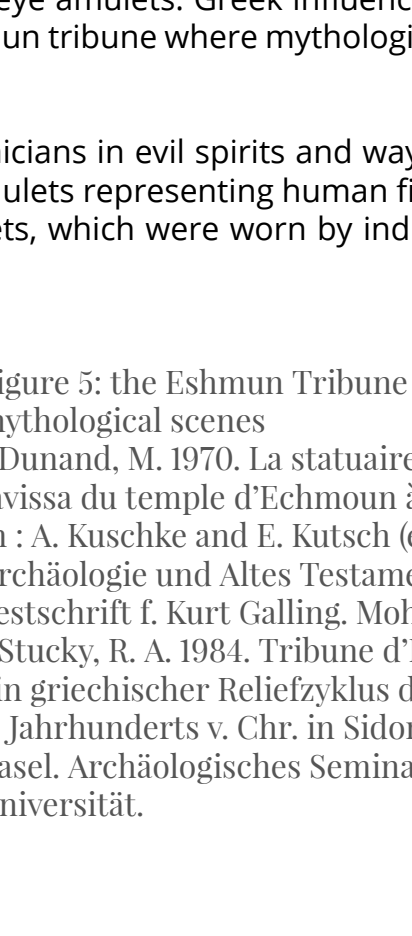


Figure 2: Astarte Throne
• Doumet-Serhal, C. 1998. *Pierres et croyances: 100 objets sculptés des antiquités du Liban*, Beirut: Direction Générale des Antiquités: p. 30, 167.
• Sartre, M. 1998. "La conquête macédonienne et l'hellénisme. L'ouverture au monde Grec" In *Liban, l'autre rive*. Flammarion: p.159.

Music seems to have been also an integral part of the religious rituals as attested by terracotta statuettes depicting musicians performing at religious ceremonies by playing the lyre, the tambourine (Fig. 3) and the double-pipe.

Some items indicate that people offered the gods all sorts of ex-votos to ask them for a favor or to thank them for granting one. This is the case of the statues representing temple boys retrieved in the Eshmun temple (Fig. 4).

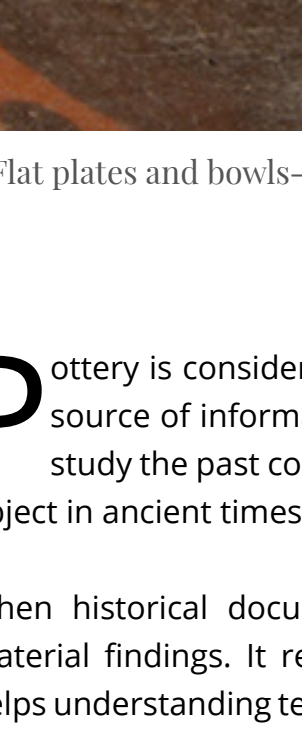


Figure 3: female figurine holding a disk, possibly a tambourine
• Doumet-Serhal, C. 1998. "L'artisanat et les matières précieuses" In *Liban, l'autre rive*. Flammarion: p.155
• La Méditerranée des Phéniciens: de Tyr à Carthage 2007. Institut du Monde Arabe: p.354.

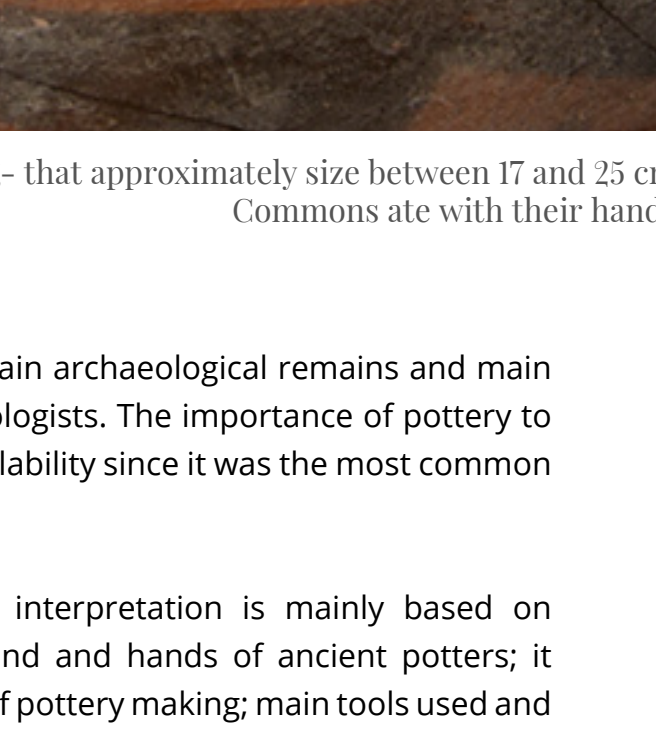


Figure 4: statue of a "Temple Boy" from the Eshmun sanctuary
• Dunand, M. 1970. *La statue de la favissa du temple d'Echmoun à Sidon*. In : A. Kuschke and E. Kutsch (ed.), *Archäologie und Altes Testament: Festschrift f. Kurt Galling*. Mohr Siebeck: p. 63ff; pl. 1a
• Stucky, R. A. 1993. *Die Skulpturen aus dem Eshmun-Heiligtum bei Sidon*. Griechische, römische, kyprische und phönizische Statuen und Reliefs des 6. Jahrhunderts vor Chr. bis zum 3. Jahrhundert nach Chr. Antk suppl 17. Basel.

There are also items indicating foreign influence on Phoenician religion, most notably Egyptian, as attested by the presence of Bes figurines and Horus-eye amulets. Greek influence starts to be prominent in the late Iron Age as attested by the Eshmun tribune where mythological scenes representing Greek gods are depicted (Fig. 5).

Finally there are items indicating the belief of the Phoenicians in evil spirits and ways to repel them. This is the case of the small apotropaic colored amulets representing human figures and stones representing an eye, as well as the wadjet amulets, which were worn by individuals to repel the evil eye.

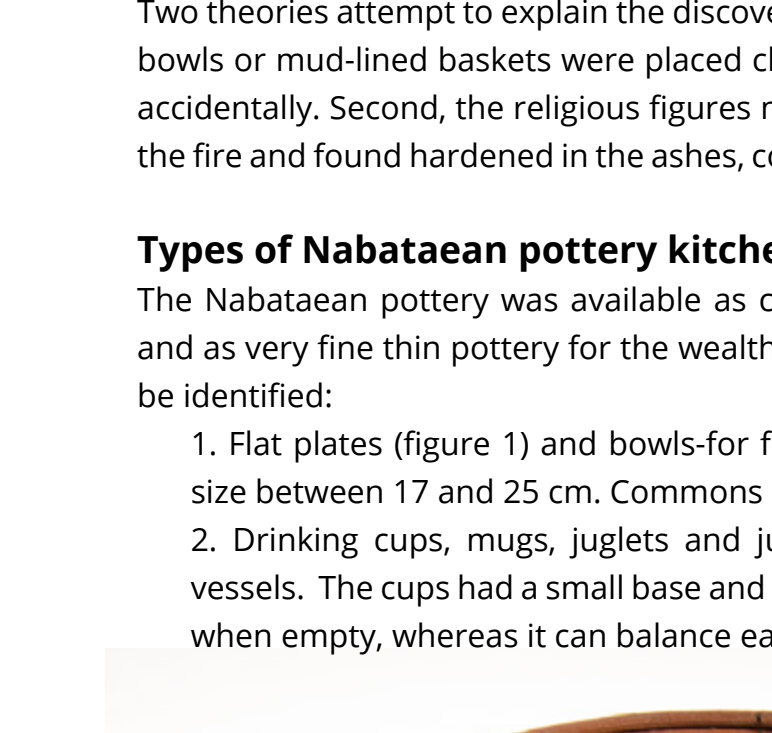


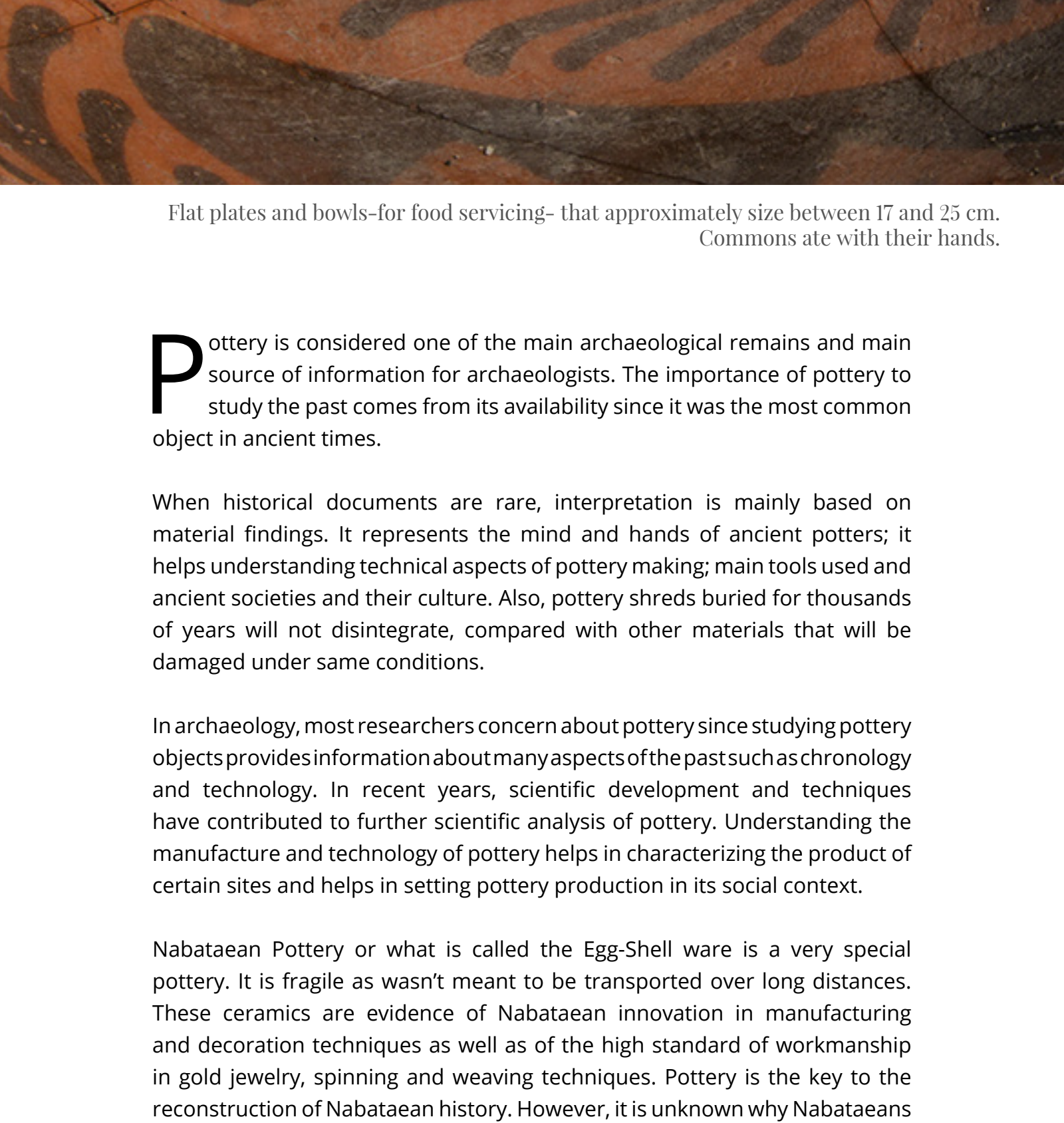
Figure 5: the Eshmun Tribune depicting mythological scenes
• Dunand, M. 1970. *La statue de la favissa du temple d'Echmoun à Sidon*. In : A. Kuschke and E. Kutsch (ed.), *Archäologie und Altes Testament: Festschrift f. Kurt Galling*. Mohr Siebeck: p. 63ff; pl. 1a
• Stucky, R. A. 1993. *Die Skulpturen aus dem Eshmun-Heiligtum bei Sidon*. Griechische, römische, kyprische und phönizische Statuen und Reliefs des 6. Jahrhunderts vor Chr. bis zum 3. Jahrhundert nach Chr. Antk suppl 17. Basel. Archäologisches Seminar der Universität.

THE INNOVATION OF NABATAEAN POTTERY

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Flat plates and bowls-for food servicing- that approximately size between 17 and 25 cm. Commons ate with their hands.

Pottery is considered one of the main archaeological remains and main source of information for archaeologists. The importance of pottery to study the past comes from its availability since it was the most common object in ancient times.

When historical documents are rare, interpretation is mainly based on material findings. It represents the mind and hands of ancient potters; it helps understanding technical aspects of pottery making; buried tools used and ancient societies and their culture. Also, pottery shreds buried for thousands of years will not disintegrate, compared with other materials that will be damaged under same conditions.

In archaeology, most researchers concern about pottery since studying pottery objects provides information about many aspects of the past such as chronology and technology. In recent years, scientific development and techniques have contributed to further scientific analysis of pottery. Understanding the manufacture and technology of pottery helps in characterizing the product of certain sites and helps in setting pottery production in its social context.

Nabataean Pottery or what is called the Egg-Shell ware is a very special pottery. It is fragile as wasn't meant to be transported over long distances. These ceramics are evidence of Nabataean innovation in manufacturing and decoration techniques as well as of the high standard of workmanship in gold jewelry, spinning and weaving techniques. Pottery is the key to the reconstruction of Nabataean history. However, it is unknown why Nabataeans developed extra ordinary eggshell thin ceramic ware with a thinness of only one to four millimeters.

The Nabataean pottery is unique and one of its kinds. It is decorated with figures of ancient mythology, flowering vines, flowers and even birds with bright plumage. It is thin but doesn't break easily. It was shaped and manufactured in huge quantities. Large mounds of broken Nabataean pottery can be found in Petra today. The Nabataean style survived 200 years, whereas the Roman-Nabataean mixed style - in 106 AD after the Roman takeover of Petra- survived up to 400 years. Nabataean pottery vanished in Byzantine times (300 AD).

History of Nabataean pottery discovery

Two theories attempt to explain the discovery of pottery- clay firing. First, clay bowls or mud-lined baskets were placed close to the cooking fire and baked accidentally. Second, the religious figures made of clay, that were left over in the fire and found hardened in the ashes, could have tipped-off early peoples.

Types of Nabataean pottery kitchen ware

The Nabataean pottery was available as common pottery for everyday use and as very fine thin pottery for the wealthy. Two types of kitchen wares can be identified:

1. Flat plates (figure 1) and bowls-for food servicing- that approximately size between 17 and 25 cm. Commons ate with their hands.
2. Drinking cups, mugs, juglets and jugs, pitchers and bigger drinking vessels. The cups had a small base and couldn't be rested on a flat surface when empty, whereas it can balance easier when full.

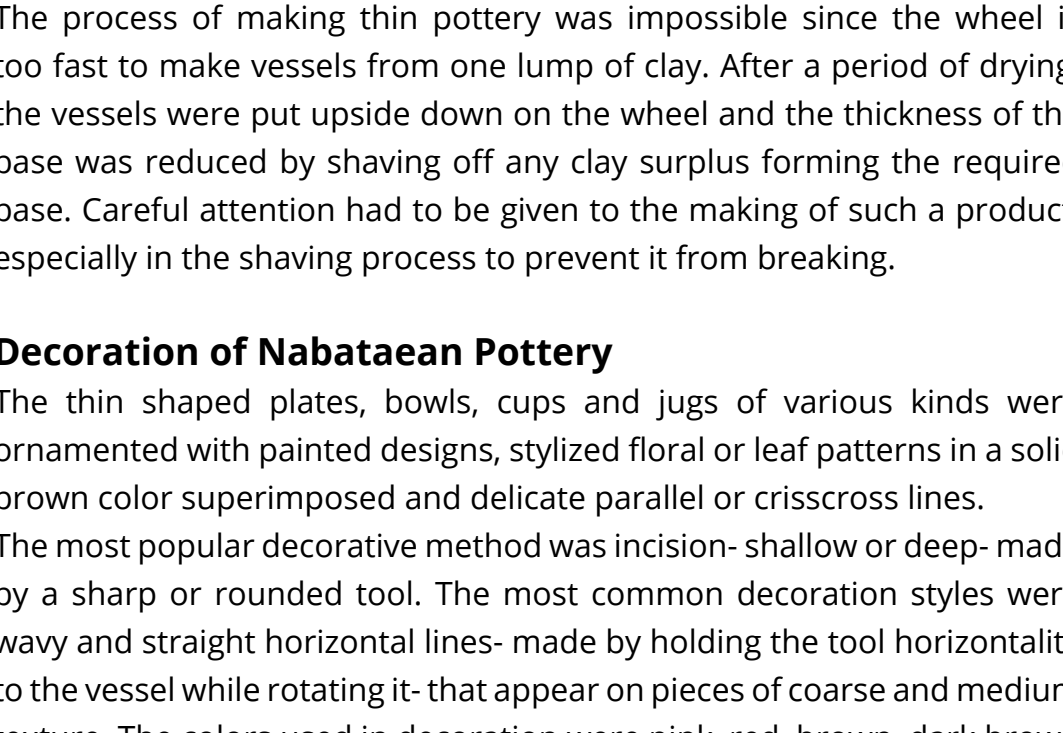


Figure 1-A Nabataean Plate, Yarmouk University Museum



Figure 2-A Nabataean Oil lamp Influenced by Roman style, Yarmouk University Museum

Used Materials

Objects were made of local red clay fired at a temperature between 700-800 ° c. Clay was accessible by river banks or dug up close to the humans' earliest resources. It was easily worked up by hand or with the most basic of tools. Forms were quickly molded and dried in the sun, before the firing of clay was discovered.

Among other used materials, coarser particles decreased the shrinkage of the ware during cooling and reduce the risk of thermal stress and cracking. Iron gave the clay its' bright red color that distinguishes the Nabataean pottery. Similar to high quality crystal, these objects produce a metallic sound when snapped with a fingernail.

Characteristics of Nabataean Pottery

Nabataean pottery is recognized by the thinness of its walls- about 1.5 mm thick- it has a pinkish red color and is decorated by hand with dark brown flower and leaf designs. The painted ware has an interior decoration based on simple burning.

The egg-shell pottery was mostly shallow open bowls very difficult to produce on the potter's wheel, extremely fragile and durable. By time, pottery became coarser and the designs became more stylish.

Manufacturing Techniques

The manufacture of pottery may be a skill the nomadic Nabataeans had learned from the Edomite. All Nabataean pottery were wheel produced and hand modeled over a core mould using local red clay, their quality was rivaling those of Greco Roman decent. It was made with smooth rounded bottoms because sharp angles might crack. Nabataean used techniques such as stamping and rolling on designs. They developed specific Nabataean characteristics with hand painted floral and geometric patterns.

The process of making thin pottery was impossible since the wheel is too fast to make vessels from one lump of clay. After a period of drying, the vessels were put upside down on the wheel and the thickness of the base was reduced by shaving off any clay surplus forming the required base. Careful attention had to be given to the making of such a product, especially in the shaving process to prevent it from breaking.

Decoration of Nabataean Pottery

The thin shaped plates, bowls, cups and jugs of various kinds were ornamented with painted designs, stylized floral or leaf patterns in a solid brown color superimposed and delicate parallel or crisscross lines.

The most popular decorative method was incision- shallow or deep- made by a sharp or rounded tool. The most common decoration styles were wavy and straight horizontal lines- made by holding the tool horizontally to the vessel while rotating it- that appear on pieces of coarse and medium texture. The colors used in decoration were pink, red, brown, dark brown and black.