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# Nabataea, India, Gaul, and Carthage: Reflections on Hellenistic and Roman Gold Vessels and Red-Gloss Pottery

MICHAEL VICKERS

## Abstract

The Nabataeans were as famous in antiquity for their gold as they are today for their pottery. Their gold vessels have disappeared, but their red-on-red painted pottery survives in profusion. Both the forms and decoration of much of this pottery have analogies in extant Parthian silverware. Nabataean gold vessels may lie behind the pottery (which should no longer be called "luxury" ware). The same picture emerges from an examination of the sources relating to India: gold vessels were imported in quantity from the Roman world, but only red-gloss pottery survives to suggest what the range of imported and local goldware might have been. Judging from the evidence relating to Gaul and Carthage, the same model may have applied to Gaulish sigillata and African Red Slip ware, and by extension to red-gloss ceramics throughout the Mediterranean.\*

"The Nabataeans are a sober and acquisitive people," says Strabo in his brief account. "So much so," indeed, "that they publicly fine anyone who has diminished his possessions and also confer honors on anyone who has increased them."<sup>1</sup> The society described by Strabo ("one of the best ancient authorities on the Nabataeans"<sup>2</sup>) was an unusually egalitarian

one, in which there were "but few slaves," and where even in the royal family, "they are mostly served by members of their family, or by one another, or by themselves."

The Nabataeans had only recently become urbanized. Diodorus, whose account was probably based on the observations of Hieronymus of Cardia,<sup>3</sup> describes them nearly three centuries earlier as nomadic desert dwellers, living in tents and pasturing camels and sheep. They were already much richer than their immediate neighbors.<sup>4</sup> In 312 B.C. "much booty" had been taken from the Nabataeans: frankincense and myrrh and 500 talents (13 tons) of silver all loaded on 700 camels.<sup>5</sup> At that time the Nabataeans had stringent laws against engaging in agricultural pursuits, drinking wine, or living in houses.<sup>6</sup> These regulations had clearly been laid aside by Strabo's day (he lived until at least A.D. 21). Archaeological research has shown that the metropolis of the Nabataeans, Petra, "had all the facilities which might be expected of a normal city in which people lived: houses, a water supply, rubbish dumps, a theater, temples, a colonnaded street and city walls."<sup>7</sup> It was during Strabo's

\* Thanks are due to Helen Brown, Kevin Butcher, Michael Crawford, John Curtis, Murray Eiland III, Cornelia Ewigleben, Clive Foss, David Gill, David Graf, Christopher Howgego, Philip Kenrick, Judith McKenzie, Jack Ogden, Andrew Oliver, Jr., Paul Roberts, Andrew Sherratt, and Andrew Topsfield for help and advice. The responsibility for any errors or infelicities rests with the author, not with them.

The following abbreviations are used:

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Begley and De Puma      | V. Begley and R. De Puma eds., <i>Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade</i> (Madison 1991).   |
| Horsfield and Horsfield | G. Horsfield and A. Horsfield, "Sela-Petra, the Rock of Eden and Nabatene IV: The Finds," <i>QDAP</i> 9 (1942) 105–204, pls. 6–49B. |
| Kanakasabhai            | V. Kanakasabhai, <i>The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago</i> <sup>2</sup> (Madras 1956).   |
| McKenzie                | J. McKenzie, <i>The Architecture of Petra</i> (Oxford 1990).  |
| Meile                   | P. Meile, "Les Yavanas dans l'Inde tamoule," <i>Journal asiatique</i> 232 (1940) 85–123.  |

Negev A. Negev, *Nabataean Archaeology Today* (New York 1986).

<sup>1</sup> Strab. 16.4.26. Cf. G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass. 1983) 12–27.

<sup>2</sup> P.J. Parr, "A Sequence of Pottery from Petra," in J.A. Sanders ed., *Essays in Honour of Nelson Glueck: Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century* (New York 1970) 348. Strabo relied on information supplied by one Athenodorus, a "philosopher and a friend": 16.4.21.

<sup>3</sup> On whose fundamental reliability, see J. Hornblower, *Hieronymus of Cardia* (Oxford 1981) 144–53; Negev 1–2.

<sup>4</sup> Diod. 19.94.4–5.

<sup>5</sup> Diod. 2.48, 19.94–100; Plut. *Demetr.* 7.1. There is an interesting symmetry about the quantities of goods involved: a camel can carry 450 lb (202.5 kg) of goods: G. Van Beek, "The Land of Sheba," in J.B. Pritchard ed., *Solomon and Sheba* (London 1974) 56. If the 500 talents of silver (12,930 kg) were carried on 64 camels, the remaining 636 camels would have been laden with nearly 129 tons of frankincense and myrrh.

<sup>6</sup> Diod. 19.94.3–4.

<sup>7</sup> McKenzie 110; for a different view, Negev 33–40 (who believes that urbanized Nabataeans lived in tents).

lifetime that Petra's principal surviving antiquities, the impressive rock-cut tombs, began to be built. It seems that the richest inhabitants embraced the prevailing international style of architecture,<sup>8</sup> a pattern that has been repeated by other wealthy societies.

The Nabataeans owed their wealth to the fact that they acted as middlemen in the trade in aromatics from the lands at the southern end of the Red Sea to the Mediterranean.<sup>9</sup> These goods were carried from Leucê Cômê at the northern end of the Red Sea,<sup>10</sup> overland by caravan via Petra and other Nabataean cities, before they reached the markets of the Levant. The Nabataeans had long been engaged in this trade (Diodorus mentions it in the context of the late fourth century B.C.), but were briefly punished by the Romans for disloyalty during an expedition led by Aelius Gallus, prefect of Egypt, in 25/4 B.C., when the trade route from the Gulf of Aqaba was diverted to the Nile and Alexandria.<sup>11</sup> The Romans had shown an interest in Arabia because its inhabitants (who included the Nabataeans) were "very wealthy" on account of their trade in aromatics, spices, and gemstones. These they sold for "gold and silver," materials that only seemed to go in one direction: into Arabia and never out again. The setback to Nabataean fortunes must have been only temporary,<sup>12</sup> and relations between the Nabataeans and Rome seem to have been friendly throughout the first century A.D.<sup>13</sup> Aretas IV Philopatris presented Germanicus with a "gold crown of great weight" (and Piso with a lighter one) in A.D. 19.<sup>14</sup> The Nabataeans also derived "not a little revenue" from their monopoly of the bitumen supply from the Dead Sea.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>8</sup> McKenzie.

<sup>9</sup> G. Van Beek, "Frankincense and Myrrh," *BiblArch* 23 (1960) 70–95; Van Beek (supra n. 5); N. Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh* (London 1980). For the earlier prehistory of the route, see M. Artzy, "Incense, Camels and Collared Rim Jars: Desert Trade Routes and Maritime Outlets in the 2nd Millennium," *OJA* (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> S.E. Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa 30 B.C.–A.D. 217* (Leiden 1986) 124–26; L. Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Princeton 1989) 143–44.

<sup>11</sup> Strab. 16.4.24; Sidebotham (supra n. 10) 120–30.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. R. Wenning, "Das Nabatäerreich: Seine archäologischen und historischen Hinterlassenschaften," in H.-P. Kuhnen ed., *Palästina in griechisch-römischer Zeit* (Munich 1990) 399.

<sup>13</sup> D.F. Graf, "The Nabataeans and the Decapolis," in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy eds., *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East* (Oxford 1986) 790.

<sup>14</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.57.4.

<sup>15</sup> Diod. 2.48, 19.98–100; P.C. Hammond, "The Nabataean Bitumen Industry at the Dead Sea," *BiblArch* 22 (1959)

## NABATAEAN GOLD

The way of life of the Nabataeans' southerly trading partners, the Sabaeans, in whose hands the production of the costly frankincense and myrrh lay, was described in extravagant terms by contemporaries. In the first century A.D., Pliny estimated that of the 100 million sestertii spent by the Romans each year on exotic luxuries, half of that amount was for Arabian merchandise alone.<sup>16</sup> Even allowing for exaggeration on Pliny's part (he was an outspoken enemy of luxury), the scale of the Romans' trade with the East from the time of Augustus was "staggering."<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of this phase of their wealth, Diodorus describes the Sabaeans as "surpassing not only the neighboring Arabs but also all other men in wealth and in their various luxuries." Not only were their buildings lavishly ornamented, with "halls encircled by large columns, some of them gilded, and others having silver figures on the capitals," but they had "couches and tripods with silver feet" and "embossed goblets of every kind of silver and gold."<sup>18</sup>

The Nabataeans not only shared in the trade that allowed this level of luxury, but judging from Strabo's account, they also enjoyed a way of life that was not dissimilar to that of the Sabaeans. The houses of the Nabataeans were "costly" (*poluteleis*), and we can fill out the picture with the list of commodities that the Nabataeans imported. These included "bronze, iron, embossed articles, paintings, and molded goods." Royal drinking parties retained something of the Nabataeans' traditional sobriety, in that no one drank more than 11 cupfuls of wine (presumably diluted

40–48.

<sup>16</sup> Pliny *HN* 12.41.84, 6.26.101.

<sup>17</sup> C. Howgego, "The Supply and Use of Money in the Roman World 200 B.C. to A.D. 300," *JRS* 82 (1992) 5–6; R.W. Goldsmith, *Premodern Financial Systems: A Historical Comparative Study* (Cambridge 1987) 47 estimates that this represented 0.5% of the empire's national product, "not extraordinarily high" but for the fact that it may have been "approximately equal to . . . gold production within the empire."

<sup>18</sup> Diod. 3.47.5–8; Van Beek (supra n. 9) 88–89. For something of the former splendor of the Sabaeans' metropolis at Märib, see the successive reports by J. Schmitt et al., in *Archäologische Berichte aus dem Yemen* 1 (1982) 1–87; 3 (1986) 1–96; 4 (1987) 97–184; and R. Stucky, "Eine Reise nach Marib, in die Stadt der Königin von Saba," *AntW* 14 (1983) 3–13; J.A. Sauer and J.A. Blakely, "Archaeology along the Spice Route of Yemen," in D. Potts ed., *Araby the Blest: Studies in Arabian Archaeology* (Copenhagen 1988) 101–104.

with water in the prevailing Hellenic manner), but the fact that a different (gold) cup (*chruson ekpoma*) was used each time made for an unusual level of luxury, and justifies Strabo's view that such symposia were conducted "in magnificent style."<sup>19</sup> Since 13 guests were the norm, a royal drinking service would have consisted of 13 × 11 pieces: 143 gold cups in all. If Nabataean society was as egalitarian as Strabo suggests, this dining pattern will have been repeated throughout the upper levels of Nabataean society, and we can probably envisage many more gold vessels on Nabataean tables. There is no reason to doubt the existence of a profusion of gold: the metal was produced locally,<sup>20</sup> and was only seen to come into Arabia and never to go out.<sup>21</sup> And if the amount of extant gold from the Nabataean world is scanty in the extreme, amounting to a few scraps of jewelry,<sup>22</sup> this can be attributed to the fact that Nabataean tombs are characterized by architectural elaboration rather than by deposited wealth.

An indication that the Nabataeans may have been extremely rich comes from an unexpected quarter: the Nabataeans did not, as far as we can tell, possess a gold coinage.<sup>23</sup> This apparent lack was presumably met in part by Roman coinage and in part by their gold vessels, which, if contemporary practice else-

where is any guide, would have been made to round figures in units of currency. This was the general pattern with both gold and silver vessels of the period; they were made up in round figures in terms of contemporary coinage,<sup>24</sup> and served in effect as large denomination bank notes.<sup>25</sup> This emerges from an examination of both the relevant epigraphic sources and the weights of extant examples. Gold and silver vessels not made to Attic weights in Athenian and Delian lists generally come out in round figures in Persian gold darics and silver sigloi, even after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire.<sup>26</sup> While only three fragmentary gold vessels survive at all from the late Hellenistic-early Roman Imperial period (they were found together in the sea off Knidos in the 1890s,<sup>27</sup> and are inscribed with their original weights), they once weighed 100, 230, and 80 darics, respectively.

It has been noted that the silver content of Nabataean silver coinage went down in the first century B.C., and remained low throughout the first century A.D.<sup>28</sup> This can hardly have been the result of a "change in the fortunes of the Nabataean spice trade,"<sup>29</sup> for the period in question coincides with that in which the whited (as opposed to the "rose-red")<sup>30</sup> sepulchers of Petra's aristocracy were constructed.<sup>31</sup> This was not an age in which the Nabataeans suffered

<sup>19</sup> Strab. 16.4.26.

<sup>20</sup> Strab. 16.4.26.

<sup>21</sup> Strab. 16.4.22.

<sup>22</sup> R. Rosenthal, "Der Goldschmuck von Mampsis und Oboda," in H.J. Kellmer ed., *Ein vergessenes Volk am Toten Meer*, 312 v.-106 n. Chr. *Kataloge der Prähistorischen Staatssammlung München* 13 (Munich 1970) 34-38; Rosenthal, "A Nabataean Nose-ring from 'Ardat (Oboda)," *IEJ* 24 (1974) 95-96; J. Patrich, "Al-'Uzza' Earrings," *IEJ* 34 (1984) 39-46; Negev 94; J. Patrich, *The Formation of Nabataean Art: Prohibition of a Graven Image among the Nabataeans* (Jerusalem 1990) 137-39. An aureus of Tiberius was found in a tomb near the Dead Sea: F. Zayadine, "Une tombe nabatéenne près de Dhat-Râs (Jordanie)," *Syria* 47 (1970) 127, fig. 10. For indications that Nabataeans may have worn gold torques, see N. Glueck, "Nabataean Torques," *BiblArch* 25 (1962) 57-64. The great wealth of their principal temple at Petra is attested to in the Suda, s.v. Theus Ares: a black stone was set on a "base of wrought gold"; "the whole building [was] full of gold, and there [were] many dedications"; cf. Patrich (supra) 50-51.

<sup>23</sup> P.C. Hammond, *The Nabataeans—Their History, Culture and Archaeology* (Gothenburg 1973) 70; Wenning (supra n. 12) 413.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., H.A. Cahn, "Die Gewichte der Goldgefäße," *AntK* 3 (1960) 26-29; D. von Bothmer, "A Gold Libation Bowl," *BMMA* n.s. 1 (1962-1963) 154-66, esp. 155; M. Vickers, "Golden Greece: Relative Values, Minae, and Temple Inventories," *AJA* 94 (1990) 613-25.

<sup>25</sup> Vickers (supra n. 24).

<sup>26</sup> Vickers (supra n. 24); Vickers, "The Metrology of Gold and Silver Plate in Classical Greece," in T. Linders and B. Alroth eds., *The Economics of Cult in the Ancient Greek World* (*Boreas* 21, Uppsala 1993) 53-71. The Persian standard was based on a preexistent Lydian (and ultimately Babylonian) standard.

<sup>27</sup> 1) London, British Museum 1894.6-15.1: F.H. Marshall, *Catalogue of the Jewellery, Greek, Etruscan, and Roman, in the Departments of Antiquities, British Museum* (London 1911) 383, pl. 63 (no. 3168); D.E. Strong, *Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate* (London 1966) 143. 2) "The Harewood Vase": *Catalogue of a Highly Important Roman Gold Vase, the Property of the Right Honourable Earl of Harewood*, Christie's, London (23 June 1965) lot 552. 3) London, private collection: W. Froehner, *Collection de la Comtesse R. de Béarn* (Paris 1905) 3.65-66, pl. 13; *Antiquités et objets d'art: Collection de Martine, Comtesse de Béhague provenant de la succession du Marquis de Ganay*, Sotheby's, Monaco (5 December 1987) lot 53.

<sup>28</sup> Negev 27-28. For refinements to the picture, see K. Schmitt-Korte and M. Cowell, "Nabataean Coinage, Part I. The Silver Content Measured by X-Ray Fluorescence Analysis," *NC* 149 (1989) 33-58: to begin with, the silver content was ca. 95%, but from A.D. 18-21 it comprised ca. 50%.

<sup>29</sup> Negev 28.

<sup>30</sup> McKenzie 33: "the surfaces of the tombs [at Petra] were frequently decorated with paint, or stuccoed."

<sup>31</sup> McKenzie.

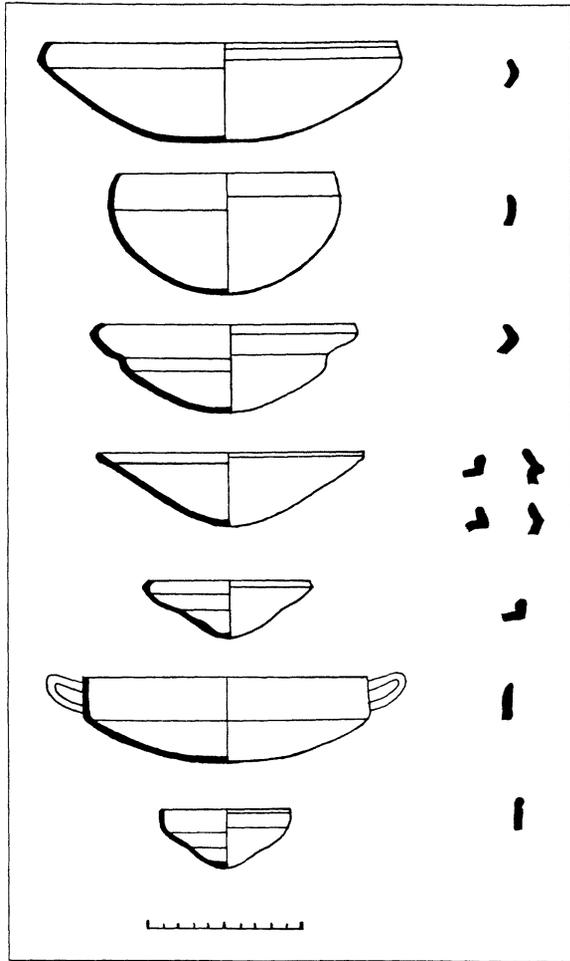


Fig. 1. Characteristic forms of Nabataean pottery. (After K. Schmitt-Korte, in M. Lindner ed., *Petra und das Königreich der Nabatäer*<sup>5</sup> [Munich 1989] 211, fig. 3)

<sup>32</sup> Contrast the way in which only the purest Roman gold and silver coins were exported to India: D.W. MacDowell, "The Export of Roman Republican Denarii to South Asia," *Ancient Ceylon* 8 (1989) 62–74; MacDowell, "Finds of Roman Coins in South Asia: Problems of Interpretation," *Ancient Ceylon* 9 (1990) 49–73; MacDowell, "Indian Imports of Roman Silver Coins," in A.K. Jha ed., *Coinage, Trade and Economy* (Anjaneri 1991) 145–63.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., J.H. Iliffe, "Nabataean Pottery from the Negeb: Its Distribution in Palestine," *QDAP* 3 (1934) 132–35; Horsfield and Horsfield; P.C. Hammond, "Pattern Families in Nabataean Painted Ware," *AJA* 63 (1959) 371–82; Hammond, "The Classification of Nabataean Fine Ware," *AJA* 66 (1962) 169–80; Hammond, "The Physical Nature of Nabataean Pottery," *AJA* 68 (1964) 259–68; K. Schmitt-Korte, "Beitrag zur nabatäischen Keramik," *AA* 1968, 496–519; Parr (supra n. 2) 349–50; D. Homès-Fredericq and H.J. Franken, *Argile: Source de vie: Sept millénaires de céramique en Jordanie* (Brussels 1985); A. Negev, *The Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Pottery of Nabataean Oboda: Final Report* (Jerusalem 1986); K. 'Amr, *The Pottery from Petra: A Neutron Activation Analysis Study* (Oxford 1987); K. Schmitt-Korte,

economic hardship, and another explanation must be sought. Perhaps the debasement of the silver content of their coins was a device to inhibit the export of precious metal,<sup>32</sup> in keeping with the Nabataeans' policy of not diminishing the general wealth of their state.

#### NABATAEAN POTTERY

No ancient source mentions Nabataean pottery, and yet Nabataean ceramics have come to play a prominent role in Nabataean studies.<sup>33</sup> The distinctive painted pottery, thin-walled bowls and plates for the most part (fig. 1),<sup>34</sup> made from the first half of the first century B.C. onward,<sup>35</sup> is mostly found in the southern part of Nabataea: Petra, the Negev, and around the Dead Sea, but considerably less has been found in the north.<sup>36</sup> This may be due to the fact that the Nabataean levels of continuously occupied northern cities such as Amman, Bosra, or Damascus lie rather deeper than those of Petra or Oboda, but comparatively little recognizable Nabataean pottery has been found "north of a line which may be drawn eastward approximately from the north end of the Dead Sea through the Mâdebâ area to the desert,"<sup>37</sup> and the conclusion has been drawn that "the typical Nabataean pottery was produced and used primarily only in the thickly settled, agricultural, part of the Nabataean kingdom in southern Transjordan, whose metropolis was Petra."<sup>38</sup> This "ceramic frontier"—as it has come to be known—is something of a puzzle,<sup>39</sup> but there may be a relatively simple explanation (see below).

Another problem that has received less attention is the acute discrepancy between the circumstances in

"Die bemalte nabatäische Keramik: Verbreitung, Typologie und Chronologie," in M. Lindner ed., *Petra und das Königreich der Nabatäer: Lebensraum, Geschichte und Kultur eines arabischen Volkes der Antike*<sup>5</sup> (Munich 1989) 205–27; Patrich 1990 (supra n. 22) 124–30 (who also [126–27] discusses the similar Jerusalemite pottery).

<sup>34</sup> Schmitt-Korte 1989 (supra n. 33) 211, fig. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Parr (supra n. 2) 370; Negev 22–25.

<sup>36</sup> Hammond (supra n. 23) 89; P.J. Parr, "Pottery, People and Politics," in P.R.S. Moorey and P.J. Parr eds., *Archaeology in the Levant: Essays for Kathleen Kenyon* (Warminster 1978) 204; J.M. Dentzer, "Céramique et environnement naturel: La céramique nabatéenne de Basrà," in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 2 (1989) 149–53.

<sup>37</sup> N. Glueck, "Nabataean Syria," *BASOR* 85 (1942) 3; Philip Kenrick kindly informs me that none was found at Gadara (Umm Qais, north Jordan) in 1992; cf. n. 74 infra.

<sup>38</sup> N. Glueck, "Wâdî Sirhân in North Arabia," *BASOR* 96 (1944) 17; cf. Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* 3 (AASOR 18–19, 1939) 139–42; N. Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* 4 (AASOR 25–28, 1951) 13–18.

<sup>39</sup> See Graf (supra n. 13) 787–89.

which Nabataean pottery is often found and its reception by scholars. The immense size of the rubbish dumps in which Nabataean painted ware is to be found is well known. The Horsfields' work on the Nabataean painted ware from Petra was based upon material found in a series of dumps. At Oboda, A. Negev collected "hundreds of thousands of pottery sherds from a rather small part of the dump."<sup>40</sup> At Elusa, a Nabataean settlement between Petra and Gaza, Woolley and Lawrence observed "the vast size of the rubbish-heaps."<sup>41</sup> And yet, the evident skill with which Nabataean pottery has been made has caused it to be classified as a "luxury" ware "evidently very popular with wealthy Nabataeans at Petra and other towns in the south."<sup>42</sup> It has been maintained—quite correctly—that "the Nabataean potter was a member of a very wealthy and sophisticated society," but it is not enough to adduce as evidence "the repertoire of the locally produced pottery [and] the great quantity of imported wares."<sup>43</sup>

There is clearly a problem that needs to be addressed. This is not the place to discuss the development of the privileged role of ceramics in archaeology.<sup>44</sup> Thanks to its durability, pottery has its undoubted uses as an indication of the cultural status of the occupants of a site, an aid to the understanding of possible trade links, a chronological marker, or a guide to developments in other media, particularly metalwork. But it also has its pitfalls. This is especially the case when modern aesthetic criteria are brought to bear on archaeological finds. Pottery can never have been regarded as anything more than a useful craft product in antiquity; any aesthetic qualities apparent to us seem to have passed the ancients by.

#### SKEUOMORPHISM

Can the gulf between Strabo's picture of a very wealthy society enjoying a level of luxury second only to that of the Sabaeans and the profusion of hard, thin-walled, decorated red pottery be bridged? Only Abram Negev, to my knowledge, has ever brought Strabo's gold vessels into play in the context of Nab-

ataean pottery, but then only to account for the enormous quantities of discarded pottery vessels in cemeteries and sanctuaries: "the unusual quantities of pottery found at Nabataean sites only emphasizes . . . the importance the Nabataeans attached to the solemn meal."<sup>45</sup> It may, however, be possible to go somewhat further than this, and to regard the gold drinking cups as likely sources for Nabataean painted ware.

We may wait forever until a Nabataean gold cup actually turns up, but Strabo's testimony is sufficient to show that such vessels did once exist. These will not have been disposed of lightly, and we know in any case that there were strict regulations discouraging any diminution of personal wealth. They will not therefore have been placed in the tomb, but will have remained above ground for the use of the living, whose need was greater. I suspect that the last of them was used to pay land taxes in the early Muslim period, payments that were exacted in gold.<sup>46</sup> Be that as it may, both the form and decoration of objects that presumably possessed a high status as markers of wealth in Nabataean society may well have influenced the more expendable and cheaper ceramic. Although the expression "trickle-down" has come to be applied to economics, it began as a term to describe the way in which elite fashions can influence taste lower down the social scale.<sup>47</sup> Something similar may have occurred in Nabataea.

The precise date of the origin of Nabataean painted ware is as yet uncertain. P.J. Parr believes it began at some time in the first half of the first century B.C.,<sup>48</sup> and A. Negev that it was first produced ca. 25 B.C.<sup>49</sup> All agree that it falls into two phases, the earlier with "flowing, naturalistic" decoration, and the later bearing another style of painting that is "heavier and more formal."<sup>50</sup> It is also a commonplace to remark on the fact that a fabric of comparative sophistication suddenly began to be made by a people who had hitherto had no need of pottery. Negev claims that the nomadic Nabataeans "preferred the use of unbreakable waterskins and wooden bowls," but this sits ill with their reputation for brigandage and piracy,<sup>51</sup> and with the

<sup>40</sup> Negev 92; Negev (supra n. 33) xxi.

<sup>41</sup> C.L. Woolley and T.E. Lawrence, "The Wilderness of Zin," *PEFA* 1914–1915, 109.

<sup>42</sup> Parr (supra n. 36) 205; cf. Hammond 1962 (supra n. 33) 173.

<sup>43</sup> Negev (supra n. 33) xiv.

<sup>44</sup> On which see, e.g., M. Vickers, "Artful Crafts: The Influence of Metalwork on Athenian Painted Pottery," *JHS* 105 (1985) 108–28; Vickers, "Value and Simplicity: Eighteenth Century Taste and the Study of Greek Vases," *Past and Present* 116 (1987) 98–137; Vickers, "The Impoverishment of the Past: The Case of Classical Greece," *Antiquity*

64 (1989) 455–63; D.W.J. Gill, "Pots and Trade: Spacefillers or *Objets d'art*?" *JHS* 111 (1991) 29–47.

<sup>45</sup> Negev 93.

<sup>46</sup> Negev 129.

<sup>47</sup> L.A. Fallers, "A Note on the 'Trickle Effect,'" in R. Bendix and S.M. Lipset eds., *Class, Status and Power*<sup>2</sup> (London 1967) 402–404.

<sup>48</sup> Parr (supra n. 36).

<sup>49</sup> Negev 29; Negev (supra n. 33).

<sup>50</sup> Parr (supra n. 36) 370.

<sup>51</sup> Negev 30; cf. Diod. 3.43.4.



Fig. 2. Silver gilded bowl. Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe 1969.113. (Courtesy Museum)

fact that even in the fourth century the Nabataeans were richer than their neighbors, when they were relieved of 500 talents of silver. One might guess that they were drinking their dairy products from precious metal already; metal bowls would have been as suitable as wood or skin for nomadic use. Whatever the

precise date for the introduction of the pottery, its earlier phase corresponds with the likely period of construction of the earliest great tomb at Petra, the Khasneh, a recent study of which has concluded that it dates from before the beginning of the first century A.D. This was but one of a series of rich monuments

constructed “during a relatively short period in a land with no prior [architectural] tradition.”<sup>52</sup> In the case of architecture, the Nabataeans clearly adopted styles that were currently fashionable (parallels survive at Alexandria and in Pompeian wall paintings).<sup>53</sup> In the case of pottery, matters are rather more complex, in that there are no obvious immediate ceramic parallels for the distinctive eggshell ware.

J.H. Iliffe saw Nabataean painted ware as “a branch of local sigillata” (by which he meant the kind of red-gloss pottery ubiquitous on Near Eastern sites from the second century B.C. until the Byzantine period).<sup>54</sup> He was surely correct in this, as are those scholars who have seen features in common with “West Slope” wares, Megarian bowls, and Eastern sigillata of one kind or another.<sup>55</sup> The metallic origins of various features of sigillata and of its Hellenistic black (and subsequently red) forerunners have often been remarked upon;<sup>56</sup> and the point was made—albeit in passing—by the Horsfields in the context of Nabataean sigillata.<sup>57</sup> They also compared certain features of painted wares with motifs in both Eastern sigillata and work in precious metal.<sup>58</sup> One parallel that was especially telling was a comparison made between a painted low bowl and “Achaemenid and Parthian silver shapes.”<sup>59</sup> This is a profitable line of investigation

to pursue, for it brings us closer to the gold vessels of which the Nabataeans had at one time so many.

The bowl illustrated in figure 2 is said to have come from Iran, although it may have been made further west and exported there.<sup>60</sup> It is one of several such bowls found in Iran during the 1960s; another is illustrated in figure 3.<sup>61</sup> They are characterized by concentric zones of floral decoration: ivy and vine leaves, grapes, acanthus, flowers, and quatrefoil decorations. The form is not unlike that of the most characteristic shape of Nabataean painted pottery, and the decorative motifs recur in various degrees of stylization,<sup>62</sup> and—to be candid—of debasement (fig. 4). The extant silver examples have (or had) gilded decoration.<sup>63</sup> On a hypothetical gold bowl, any decoration would be in low relief; and on a ceramic version the effect of such a relief might be achieved by means of two shades of red paint. The thin walls of such a ceramic evocation might also owe something to the thinness of the sheet of metal from which originals were made.

If the Nabataean potter did thus skeuomorphically<sup>64</sup> base his wares on Nabataean gold bowls, he will have been behaving as potters of fine wares often did, whether in classical Greece (where, as has been argued elsewhere, the appearance of silver decorated with

<sup>52</sup> McKenzie xv, 40–41.

<sup>53</sup> McKenzie.

<sup>54</sup> J.H. Iliffe, “Sigillata Wares in the Near East: A List of Potters’ Stamps,” *QDAP* 6 (1936–1937) 15.

<sup>55</sup> Horsfield and Horsfield 168, 173; Hammond 1962 (supra n. 33) 173; N. Khairy, “Fine Nabataean Ware with Impressed and Rouletted Decorations,” in A. Hadidi ed., *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 1 (1982) 276.

<sup>56</sup> E.g., C. Robert, “Homerische Becher,” *BWPr* 50 (1890) 5: “die Modelle Originalarbeiten griechischer Toreuten aus Silber waren”; F. Courby, *Les vases grecs à reliefs* (Paris 1922); U. Hausmann, *Hellenistische Reliefbecher* (Stuttgart 1959) 50–51; G. Kopcke, “Golddekorierte attische Schwarzfirniskeramik des vierten Jahrhunderts v. Chr.,” *AM* 79 (1964) 25; J. Ebert, “Ein Homerischer Ilias-Aithiopsis-Becher im Robertinum zu Halle an der Saale,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Halle* 27 (1978) 127; G. Siebert, “Les bols à relief: Une industrie d’art de l’époque hellénistique,” in P. Lévêque and J.-P. Morel eds., *Céramiques hellénistiques et romaines* 1 (Besançon 1980) 55, 74; J.W. Salomonson, “Der hellenistische Töpfer als Toreut,” *BABesch* 57 (1982) 164–73; S.I. Rotroff, *Agora XXII: Hellenistic Pottery: Athenian and Imported Moldmade Bowls* (Princeton 1982) 6; B. Barr-Sharrar, “Macedonian Metal Vases in Perspective: Some Observations on Context and Tradition,” *Studies in the History of Art* 10 (1982) 123; S.S. Weinberg, “A Syro-Palestinian Bowl Type,” *Muse* 22 (1988) 64–74; J.W. Hayes, “Fine Wares in the Hellenistic World,” in T. Rasmussen and N. Spivey eds., *Looking at Greek Vases* (Cambridge 1991) 183–202.

<sup>57</sup> Horsfield and Horsfield 126 (no. 69), 128 (no. 82), 138 (no. 135).

<sup>58</sup> Horsfield and Horsfield 142–43, 168, 173, 181.

<sup>59</sup> Horsfield and Horsfield 142–43, pl. 20, no. 153.

<sup>60</sup> A. Oliver, Jr., *Silver for the Gods* (Toledo 1976) 80–81, no. 44 (= Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe 1969.113). Wt. 420 g; diam. 16 cm.

<sup>61</sup> R.D. Barnett and J.E. Curtis, “A Review of Acquisitions 1963–70 of Western Asiatic Antiquities,” *BMQ* 37 (1973) 126–27, pl. 55; Oliver (supra n. 60) 81 (= British Museum WA 134303). Wt. 115.5 g; diam. 27.9 cm. Most of the 24 decorated silver-gilded bowls in Treasure I in the J. Paul Getty Museum (second–first century B.C., some bearing Aramaic inscriptions) are relevant: M. Pfrommer, *Metalwork from the Hellenized East: Catalogue of the Collections* (Malibu 1993) 21–45, 110–51, 223–28, pls. 1–3.

<sup>62</sup> For the motifs on Nabataean pottery, see Horsfield and Horsfield; Hammond 1959 (supra n. 33); Schmitt-Korte 1968 (supra n. 33) 502–504; Schmitt-Korte 1989 (supra n. 33).

<sup>63</sup> The gilding on the British Museum example (fig. 3) is discussed by W.A. Oddy, “A Parthian Bowl: Study of the Gilding Technique,” *MASCAJ* 1 (1978) 5–6.

<sup>64</sup> A term whose archaeological use originated with Sir John Myres: see V.G. Childe, *Piecing Together the Past: The Interpretation of Archaeological Data* (London 1956) 13–14; cf. the section on “skeuomorphism” in R.W. Bagley, *Shang Ritual Bronzes in the Arthur M. Sackler Collections* (Washington, D.C. 1987) 17.

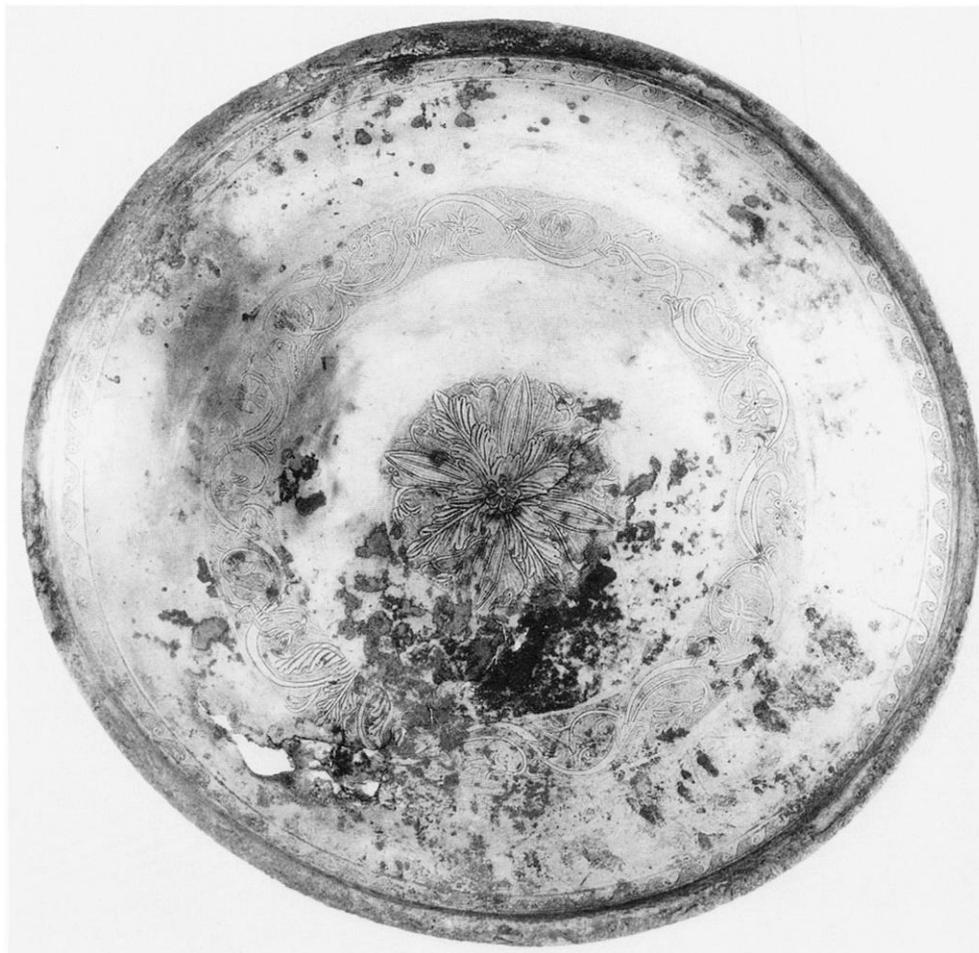


Fig. 3. Silver gilded bowl. London, British Museum WA 134303. (Courtesy Trustees of the British Museum)

gold figures was evoked by potters by means of red-figure decoration),<sup>65</sup> or in China (where silverware was copied in porcelain).<sup>66</sup> The traditional means of

cleansing precious metal vessels by fumigation with sulphur<sup>67</sup> would not only have created a (dark) layer of silver sulphide on silver, but would also have

<sup>65</sup> Vickers 1985, 1987, 1989 (supra n. 44); D.W.J. Gill, "Classical Greek Fictile Imitations of Precious Metal Vases," in M. Vickers ed., *Pots and Pans: Proceedings of the Colloquium on Precious Metal and Ceramics in the Muslim, Chinese and Graeco-Roman Worlds* (Oxford 1986) 9–30; M. Vickers, O. Impey, and J. Allan, *From Silver to Ceramic* (Oxford 1986); D.W.J. Gill and M. Vickers, "Reflected Glory: Pottery and Precious Metal in Classical Greece," *JdI* 105 (1990) 1–30.

<sup>66</sup> J. Rawson, "Tombs or Hoards: The Survival of Chinese Silver of the Tang and Song Periods, Seventh to Thirteenth Centuries A.D.," in Vickers ed. (supra n. 65) 31–56; Rawson, "Chinese Silver and Its Influence on Porcelain Development," in P.E. McGovern and M.D. Notis eds., *Cross-craft and Cross-cultural Interactions in Ceramics* (Westerville, Ohio 1989) 275–300; Rawson, "Central Asian Silver and Its Influence on Chinese Ceramics," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* n.s. 5 (1991) 139–51. For a similar phenomenon in Islamic pot-

tery, see the following articles in Vickers ed. (supra n. 65): J.W. Allan, "The Survival of Precious and Base Metal Objects from the Medieval Islamic World," 57–70; J. Raby, "Looking for Silver in Clay: A New Perspective on Sāmānid Ceramics," 179–203; and O. Watson, "Pottery and Metal Shapes in Persia in the 12th and 13th Centuries," 205–12.

<sup>67</sup> If Homeric precedent was followed (as it seems to have been: R. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* [Oxford 1983] 227–28), both houses and storerooms might be cleansed by burning sulphur: cf. Hom. *Od.* 22.481–82, 493. Sulphur is also used to clean a vessel of precious metal, Hom. *Il.* 16.228. According to the Babylonian Talmud (I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud: Shabbath* [London 1938] 74), one of the activities permitted on the Sabbath was to place sulphur under silver vessels that they might "undergo the process of sulphuring the whole day" (thanks are due to Jack Ogden for this reference).

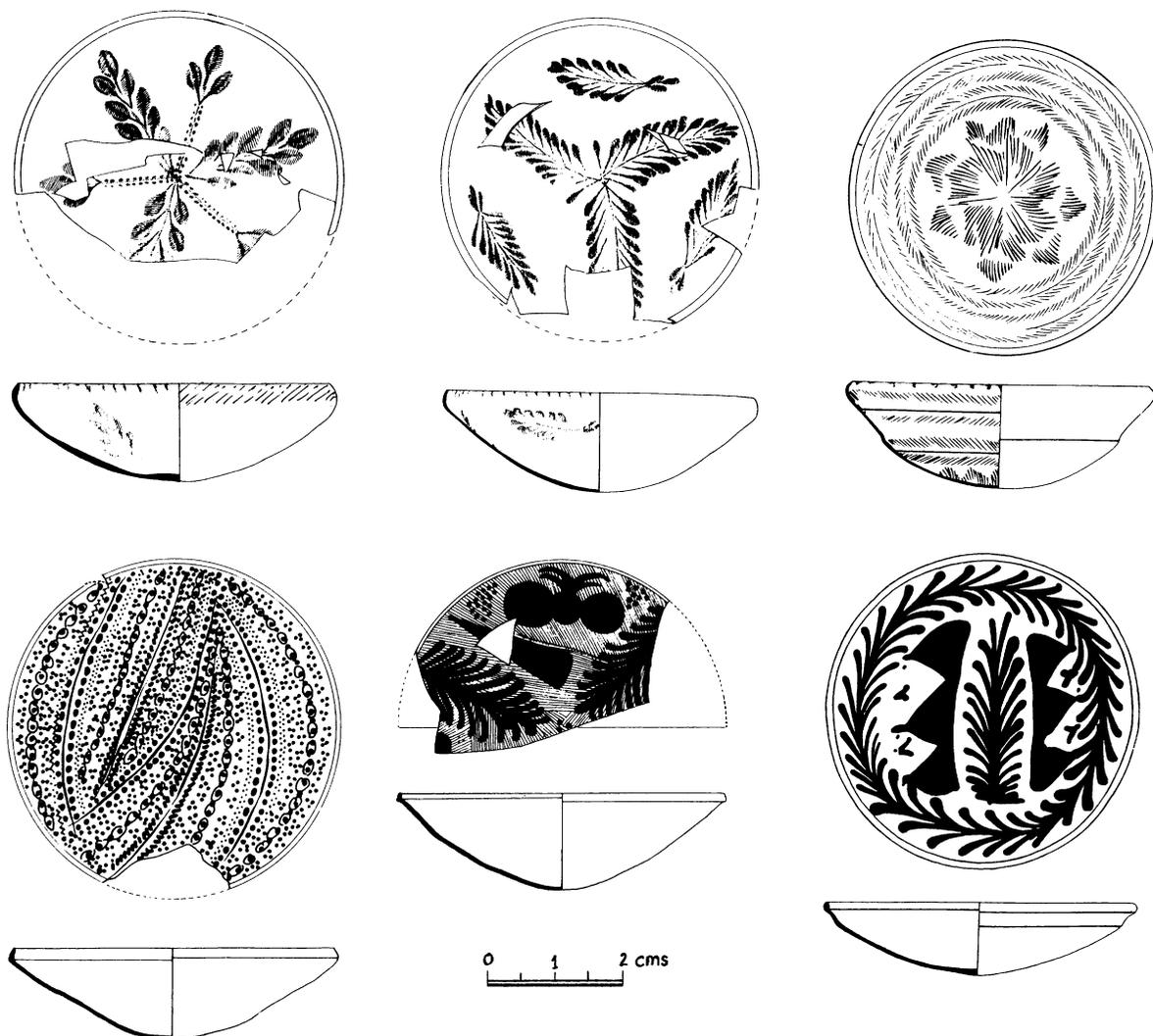


Fig. 4. Characteristic decorative motifs on Nabataean painted pottery. (After P.J. Parr, in P.R.S. Moorey and P.J. Parr eds., *Archaeology in the Levant: Essays for Kathleen Kenyon* [Warminster 1978] 202, fig. 1)

brought about a reddening of the surface of gold.<sup>68</sup> These are the surface effects that Mediterranean potters seem to have had in mind.

Nabataean pottery was first made after the time between 150 and 125 B.C. when black or gray mold-made pottery gave way to red ware in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>69</sup> A similar change took place in Italy in the mid-first century B.C.<sup>70</sup> It has been suggested that the change was "determined by taste rather than technology,"<sup>71</sup> but there may have been elements of

both. In the first place, the change from black to red may have reflected the greater amount of gold available in the eastern Mediterranean as a result of Alexander's conquests, and the Italian transition the sudden arrival of booty in the triumph of Lucullus in 63 B.C., the general who "was the first to introduce luxury to Rome."<sup>72</sup> From the potter's point of view, it was easier and probably cheaper to make red pottery than black, for a black pot would have been fired red first, before being turned black by means of reduc-

<sup>68</sup> Cf. J.H. Frantz and D. Schorsch, "Egyptian Red Gold," *Archeomaterials* 4 (1990) 133, 147-48.

<sup>69</sup> E.g., Weinberg (supra n. 56).

<sup>70</sup> J.-P. Morel, *Céramique à vernis noir du Forum Romain et du Palatin* (Paris 1965); M. Schindler, *Die "schwarze Sig-*

*illata" des Magdalensberges* (Klagenfurt 1967) 64-66.

<sup>71</sup> K. Greene, *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy* (London 1986) 158.

<sup>72</sup> Ath. 6.274f; cf. 12.543a.

tion.<sup>73</sup> If the potter dropped the latter stage, not only might there be economies of fuel, but the manufacturing process could be carried out more quickly, and with fewer risks of misfiring. If so, at some time in the third quarter of the second century B.C., potters in Antioch (or at least somewhere in Syria)<sup>74</sup> began to see the advantages of evoking a nobler material than silver with less outlay of fuel, time, and effort.<sup>75</sup> Nabataean potters fitted into this pattern, and produced their idiosyncratic versions of the goldwares locally in use.

A useful result of the statistical work on Nabataean pottery undertaken by P.C. Hammond is the discovery that there may have been roughly standard diameters clustering in the ranges of 16–17 cm, 17–19 cm, and 19–22 cm. Although the sample was a small one, there is an apparent standardization of sizes. This relative standardization has been attributed to the skill of the potter alone,<sup>76</sup> but it may ultimately be the result of the goldsmith's need to achieve standard weights (and, a fortiori, roughly standard dimensions). The bowl in figure 2 was probably made to weigh 100 drachmas, and happens to have a diameter of 16 cm. The Nabataeans struck silver coins on the Phoenician standard,<sup>77</sup> and they may well have made their gold vessels according to the same standard. Cups of 50 half-shekels apiece would produce a Nabataean royal dinner service of nearly 50 kg, and of 100 half-shekels of nearly 100 kg, and this apart from the mixing bowl, sieve, and ladle that would have been *de rigueur* at the kind of symposium Strabo described.

#### THE "CERAMIC FRONTIER"

If gold vessels underlie Nabataean painted pottery, it may be possible to explain the problem of the paucity of Nabataean painted wares in Nabataean territory north of the Dead Sea. The clue lies in Nelson Glueck's account of Umm el-Jemâl:

This site, as others in this region, came under the control of the Nabataeans, the northern extension of whose

kingdom reached into Haurân and Jebel Drûz, in southern Syria, with Damascus as the seat of government. To judge from the originally predominant Nabataean influence at Umm el-Jemâl, one would have expected to have found large quantities of typical Nabataean pottery there. However, despite repeated visits to the site and the most careful examination of its very considerable pottery remains, not a single scrap of the characteristic, fine, thin, painted Nabataean ware was found there. There were, to be sure, pieces of fine, rouletted ware, and some pieces of fine thin ware baked a buff color all the way through, and others of the same type with a drab core between buff surfaces. If these latter pieces had been found with other unquestionable Nabataean wares, they too might have been considered as being Nabataean. As it is, they can be identified only as belonging to fine types of Roman period pottery of the first two centuries A.D.<sup>78</sup>

Eastern sigillata is usually to be found wherever Nabataean painted ware occurs,<sup>79</sup> and there was perhaps also a locally made version of it.<sup>80</sup> If the hypothesis is correct that painted ware reflected gold vessels in use at the symposia of Nabataean kings and merchants, the same will hold good for other kinds of pottery: the other red wares will have evoked other, less provincial, kinds of gold plate on the tables of the rich at Petra and other Nabataean centers. Damascene plate of the period is beyond reconstruction, but it is likely that it will have been more fashionable, even—perhaps especially—in the eyes of a Nabataean official posted to the big city, than the somewhat monotonous bowls in use back home. Goldsmiths in the more sophisticated centers were presumably producing vessels more in keeping with the international style than the products of craftsmen in the Nabataean homeland.

We might even read the ceramic evidence as an indication that the Nabataeans lived at the point where two overlapping kinds of gold plate existed: vessels made in the Hellenistic style, and those that looked to the Sabaeans for inspiration. The finds not so much of Nabataean pottery but of supposed imitations of Nabataean pottery in the Arabian peninsula

<sup>73</sup> M.S. Tite, M. Bimson, and I.C. Freestone, "An Examination of the High Gloss Surface Finishes on Greek Attic and Roman Samian Wares," *Archaeometry* 24 (1982) 125. Cf. F. Jones, "The Pottery," in H. Goldman ed., *Excavations at Gözlü Kule, Tarsus 1* (Princeton 1950) 154: "The results of an insufficiently reduced oven were known long before the Hellenistic period and red could be produced if desired; at the time when black-glaze was preferred, care was apparently taken to insure a successful blackening."

<sup>74</sup> Cf. the evidence from Gadara, north Jordan: P.M. Kenrick, "Fine Wares from the City Wall Section at Site XLII," *AA* (forthcoming).

<sup>75</sup> See further M. Vickers and D.W.J. Gill, *Artful Crafts: Ancient Greek Silverware and Pottery* (Oxford, forthcoming).

<sup>76</sup> Hammond 1964 (supra n. 33) 207; cf. Hammond 1962 (supra n. 33) 172; Hammond (supra n. 23) 69.

<sup>77</sup> The average weight of the half-shekel is 6.61 g: Y. Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins* (Jerusalem 1975) 18.

<sup>78</sup> Glueck 1951 (supra n. 38) 10–13.

<sup>79</sup> Iliffe (supra n. 33) 134; Negev (supra n. 33).

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Negev (supra n. 33); but disputed by J.W. Hayes in *EAA, Atlante delle forme ceramiche* 2 (1985) 10, s.v. sigillate orientali.

suggest that this may have been the case. "Supposed imitations," because it is widely believed that potters went around influencing potters in antiquity; this, however, is a by-product of the privileged position of the potter and his (or her) products in the eyes of modern students. If instead we can see the real stimulus for ceramic change in work in nobler materials than clay, and view different kinds of red ware as reflections of a goldworking aesthetic, then both Nabataean proper and "imitation Nabataean," such as the bowls from Thaj,<sup>81</sup> Qaryet el-Fa'w,<sup>82</sup> and Kuwait,<sup>83</sup> might all be evocations of locally fashionable gold vessels. Their idiosyncratic pottery may thus help to explain why the Nabataeans fit somewhat awkwardly within the more general picture of Hellenistic civilization:<sup>84</sup> they found themselves at the interface of two dominant cultures, and their surviving artifacts display characteristics of both.

The motifs on Nabataean pottery may be the results of the potters' free invention, but there is no way to be sure that they do not instead reflect designs on Nabataean goldware, themselves considerably debased by comparison with their classical originals. The principle involved can be observed in the way, for example, images on gold "Philips" were copied by Celtic tribes, and became more and more debased, but erratically so with respect to the distance in time and space they were from the original center of production.<sup>85</sup> A similar phenomenon can be observed in the Hellenistic coinage of northeastern Arabia, where the seated divinities on the reverses of imitations of Seleucid coinage become barbarized and geometri-

cally stylized.<sup>86</sup> Nabataean gold vessels, themselves de facto large denomination coins, may have displayed similar signs of graphic debasement. If so, the particular center of which Nabataean goldwork stood on the periphery may well have been the Sabaeen realm. Pottery was not common there, perhaps, as has been suggested, because there was "an abundant supply of fine and costly vessels for use in wealthy households."<sup>87</sup> The perennial links between Nabataea and the Sabaeans are well attested, but it is interesting to see them confirmed by the discovery of Nabataean painted pottery in Marib,<sup>88</sup> and evident stylistic links between the geometric alabaster "face plaques" from Timna,<sup>89</sup> the schematized faces on stelae from Hegra and Dedan (El-Ola) on the caravan route,<sup>90</sup> and the one carved on a plinth in the Lion-Griffin Temple at Petra.<sup>91</sup>

#### SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

While the vast amounts of painted ware found in the rubbish dumps of Petra and elsewhere in Nabataea can no longer serve as direct witnesses to the wealth and sophistication of the Nabataeans, they do have an important indirect bearing on the nature of Nabataean society. The very fact that there were easily available skeuomorphs of precious metal vessels at all is itself significant. To put matters into perspective: high-quality skeuomorphs of vessels of the kind that were made (in gold) for use on the tables of the Persian kings are unusual,<sup>92</sup> whereas our museums are full of evocations of plate made (in silver) at democratic Athens. This ties in nicely with Strabo's

<sup>81</sup> T.G. Bibby, *Preliminary Survey in East Arabia 1968* (Copenhagen 1973) 21, 23, fig. 16, type 3; considered by L. Hannestad, *Ikaros. The Hellenistic Settlements 2.1: The Hellenistic Pottery from Failaka, with a Survey of Hellenistic Pottery in the Near East; 2.2: The Hellenistic Pottery, Catalogue and Plates* (Aarhus 1983) 52 to be "imitations of Nabataean."

<sup>82</sup> Parr (supra n. 36) 209, n. 5; W. Ghoneim, "Qaryat (al-Fa'w)," *AfO* 27 (1980) 324; A.R. al-Ansary, *Qaryat al-Fau: A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilization in Saudi Arabia* (New York 1982) 22, 29, fig. p. 63, nos. 2-5; R. Wenning, *Die Nabatäer—Denkmäler und Geschichte: Eine Bestandsaufnahme des archäologischen Befundes* (Göttingen 1986) 126.

<sup>83</sup> Hannestad (supra n. 81) 51-52: "Nabataean or local imitations of it," pl. 43, nos. 419-26; 'Amr (supra n. 33) 11; D.T. Potts, *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity* (Oxford 1990) 2.169. Examples of real Nabataean pottery have been found at Thaj; Potts, "An Urban Center in Pre-Islamic Arabia," in R. Bouchard and J.-F. Salles eds., *Arabie orientale, Mésopotamie et Iran méridional de l'âge du fer au début de la période islamique* (Paris 1984) 104; Potts 1990 (supra) 199.

<sup>84</sup> P.J. Parr, "The Beginning of Hellenisation at Petra," in *Le rayonnement des civilisations grecques et romaines sur les cultures périphériques* (8<sup>e</sup> Congrès international d'archéologie

classique, Paris 1965) 527.

<sup>85</sup> R. Forrer, *Keltische Numismatik der Rhein- und Donaulande* (Strasbourg 1908) 19-25. For similar debasement in a ceramic context, see, e.g., S.A. Immerwahr, "The Pedigree of an Ancient Pot," *Archaeology* 30 (1977) 179-85.

<sup>86</sup> Potts 1990 (supra n. 83) 58-69, pl. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Van Beek (supra n. 5) 57. For imported Mediterranean pottery at Timna, see H. Comfort, "Imported Pottery and Glass from Timna," in R.L. Bowen and F.P. Albright eds., *Archaeological Discoveries in South Arabia* (Baltimore 1958) 199-212.

<sup>88</sup> Stucky (supra n. 18) 7, figs. 10-11, and 11, fig. 24.

<sup>89</sup> Van Beek (supra n. 5) fig. 20; Patrìch 1990 (supra n. 22) 85, n. 84.

<sup>90</sup> F. Zayadine, "Die Götter der Nabatäer," in Lindner (supra n. 33) 120, fig. 9; Patrìch 1990 (supra n. 22) 84, fig. 28.

<sup>91</sup> Zayadine (supra n. 90) 120.

<sup>92</sup> For some examples, see, e.g., D. Stronach, *Pasargadae* (Oxford 1978) 242-43, fig. 106, no. 11, 258-59, fig. 114, no. 6; P.R.S. Moorey, in *Cambridge History of Iran* 2 (1985) 860-61.

picture of the Nabataeans as rather more egalitarian than most in the ancient Near East, with few slaves, and even the kings normally serving each other at meals. What the finds of pottery tell us is that it was a society that included a sufficiently large number of people who wanted to imitate the drinking patterns of the richest in town. It was a society whose equivalents of our throwaway paper cups were made to resemble the luxury objects we hear about in Strabo. The immense quantity of broken pots do attest to the wealth of the Nabataeans, but only indirectly.

#### THE INDIAN DIMENSION

"The Indians . . . have an enormous amount of gold," according to Pausanias the Periegete, writing in the second century A.D.<sup>93</sup> They had local supplies, but a major source was the Roman Empire. While half of the money expended on Oriental luxuries by the Romans may have remained in Arabia, the rest went to India,<sup>94</sup> a land that has been said to possess "an almost magical capacity to soak up precious metals."<sup>95</sup> The drain on Roman resources was remarked upon by Tiberius in a speech to the Senate in A.D. 22.<sup>96</sup> Across the Indian Ocean, the Tamil poet Nakkirar made a fulsome address to the Pandyan prince Nan-maran: "Spend thy days joyously drinking daily of cool and fragrant wine brought by the Yavanas in their good ships which thy handmaidens, who wear shining bracelets on their arms, present to thee in handsome cups of gold."<sup>97</sup> Yavana was a word applied exclusively to Greeks and Romans,<sup>98</sup> and we even know which types of wine were imported: "Italian [was] preferred, but also Laodicean and Arabian."<sup>99</sup>

This information occurs in the context of the north-west Indian port of Barygaza, whose very name, "Heavy with Treasure," is redolent of wealth. Here the Roman merchants paid for spices, gems, ivory, and cloth with an assortment of goods that included "gold and silver coin, on which there is a profit when exchanged for the money of the country." They would present to the king "very costly vessels of silver." The coins were traded as bullion, as is indicated by the fact that the issues actually found in India do not form a cross section of Roman gold and silver coinage, but appear to have been carefully selected with respect to the purity of the metal.<sup>100</sup> Any plate, however, presumably attracted a premium beyond its bullion value; Pliny's remark that "we have made gold and silver dearer by the art of engraving"<sup>101</sup> suggests that artistry might have enhanced the value of traded goods.<sup>102</sup> It was probably for this reason that "vessels of gold and polished silver" and "wrought gold and silver plate" were presented to the kings of Muza and Cana in South Arabia as part of the Romans' Indian Ocean trading pattern.<sup>103</sup> Goods from Barbaricum at the mouth of the Indus were also paid for with "silver and gold plate."<sup>104</sup>

The picture can sometimes be corroborated by early Tamil literary sources.<sup>105</sup> The *Periplus* describes Muziris, at the mouth of the Periyar River in southwest India, as "abounding in ships sent there with cargoes from Arabia, and by the Greeks."<sup>106</sup> A Tamil poet calls it "the thriving town of Muziris, where the beautiful large ships of the Yavanas bringing gold, come splashing the white foam on the waters of the Periyar . . . and return laden with pepper."<sup>107</sup> Another de-

<sup>93</sup> Paus. 3.12.4.

<sup>94</sup> Pliny *HN* 12.41.84, 6.26.101.

<sup>95</sup> N.J. Mayhew, "How Far Can Coins Provide Evidence of Bullion Flows? A Review of the European Evidence from c. 1000 A.D. with Methodological and Historical Implications for India," in P.L. Gupta and A.K. Jha eds., *Numismatics and Archaeology* (Second International Colloquium of the Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies, Delhi 1987) 20–26; K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge 1985) 184–85.

<sup>96</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.53. Cf. M.G. Raschke, "New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East," *ANRW* 9:2 (1978) 622–37.

<sup>97</sup> Kanakasabhai 87; he notes, however (p. 37), that an old commentator interprets the relevant line as "brought by Yavanas in bottles," rather than "ships." If so, perhaps the allusion is to clay amphoras; cf. those discussed by E.L. Will, "The Mediterranean Shipping Amphoras from Arikamedu," and K.W. Slane, "Observations on Mediterranean

Amphoras and Tablewares Found in India," in Begley and De Puma, 151–56 and 204–205, respectively. Meile 105–106 suggests there may have been a pun.

<sup>98</sup> Meile 99–102; Sidebotham (supra n. 10) 92–93.

<sup>99</sup> *Peripl. M. Rubr.* 49; cf. 56.

<sup>100</sup> P.J. Turner, *Roman Coins from India* (London 1989); MacDowell 1989, 1990, 1991 (supra n. 32). They must have come directly from the Roman mint: M. Crawford, "Economia imperiale e commercio estero," in *Tecnologia economia e società nel mondo romano* (Atti del Convegno di Como 1979 [1980]) 207–17.

<sup>101</sup> Pliny *HN* 33.1.4–5.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Vickers and Gill (supra n. 75).

<sup>103</sup> *Peripl. M. Rubr.* 28.

<sup>104</sup> *Peripl. M. Rubr.* 39.

<sup>105</sup> Investigated in depth by Meile, who considers them (p. 123) to be "dignes de foi."

<sup>106</sup> *Peripl. M. Rubr.* 54.

<sup>107</sup> Kanakasabhai 16; cf. Meile 90–92.

scribes how “sacks of pepper are brought from the houses to the market; the gold received from the ships, in exchange for articles sold, is brought to shore in barges, at Muziris, where the music of the surging sea never ceases, and where Kudduvan [the king] presents to visitors the rare products of the seas and mountains.”<sup>108</sup> It was in the hinterland of Muziris that Nan-Maran was enjoined to drink his (presumably) Italian wine daily from golden cups.<sup>109</sup>

There are other indications in local Indian sources that the account of Roman trade with the subcontinent in the *Periplus* (probably written in the second half of the first century A.D.)<sup>110</sup> is not exaggerated. “Singing boys and beautiful maidens for the harem” are among the presents made to the ruler of Barygaza; further south, Tamil sources describe Yavana soldiers “whose stern looks strike terror into every beholder” employed as bodyguards,<sup>111</sup> (although these may be mercenaries from eastern Hellenistic cities).<sup>112</sup> Yavana carpenters were employed in the construction of a palace for a Chola king,<sup>113</sup> and “Yavana vases and Yavana lamps with the figure of a swan on top of each, or lamps in the shape of a female statue in a standing posture, holding with both hands the receptacle for oil and wick appear to have been common in Tamil country.”<sup>114</sup> A few Roman bronze articles survive in India,<sup>115</sup> but the only precious metal is in

the form of coins<sup>116</sup> and jewelry.<sup>117</sup> Given the emphasis in contemporary Indian texts on gold, silver, and precious stones,<sup>118</sup> as well as the references in the *Periplus* to gifts of plate, many of such Yavana vases and lamps were probably of gold.

An indication that such may have been the case is provided by a recently published papyrus fragment that discusses the insurance and customs dues relating to a consignment of nard, ivory, and textiles sent from Muziris to Alexandria.<sup>119</sup> It has been estimated that not only would the total value (some 131 talents) have been enough to buy almost 2,400 acres of Egypt’s best farmland, but that judging from the likely size of the ships that undertook the voyage to India, there were probably 150 such consignments in each vessel.<sup>120</sup>

No gold vessels survive from this period, but it would not be surprising if they figured as large in the dining arrangements of the Romans’ Indian trading partners as they did on those of the Sabaeans—or of the Nabataeans. And just as with the Nabataeans, all that remains are evocations in ceramic that are usually red in color. The closest to classical metalwork are the red moldmade wares of northwest India, and it has been well observed that the fact that they are made in two-piece molds might be because they were originally taken from metal vessels.<sup>121</sup> Analogies have been made with silver vessels of so-called “Achae-

<sup>108</sup> Kanakasabhai 16; cf. Meile 93–95.

<sup>109</sup> In ca. A.D. 95, the Chola king Karikal possessed maid-servants who “poured out in golden cups intoxicating wine”; according to the poet, he would “clothe thee with silk, and give thee to drink of wine in cups of gold”: Kanakasabhai 70–71. The conceit of a ruler drinking wine daily from golden cups served by “handmaidens wearing brilliant jewels” became a poetical *topos* (cf. the praise of Nedunj-Chelivan II [A.D. 90–128] in similar terms: Kanakasabhai 85) but this need not mean that it was not true.

<sup>110</sup> Casson (supra n. 10) 6–7. The Tamil poems were probably written in the second or third century A.D.: G. Hart, “Ancient Tamil Literature: Its Scholarly Past and Future,” in B. Stein ed., *Essays on South India (Asian Studies at Hawaii)* 15, 1975) 41.

<sup>111</sup> Kanakasabhai 37–38; Meile 107–10.

<sup>112</sup> Meile 111–12.

<sup>113</sup> Meile 115–16.

<sup>114</sup> Kanakasabhai 37; Meile 114.

<sup>115</sup> R. De Puma, “The Roman Bronzes from Kolhapur,” in Begley and De Puma 82–112.

<sup>116</sup> MacDowell 1989, 1990, 1991 (supra n. 32).

<sup>117</sup> V. Begley, “Introduction,” in Begley and De Puma 7. Two fragmentary Roman silver cups (exhibition catalogue, *Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol* [Cambridge 1992] nos. 97–98) are said to come from Gandhara.

<sup>118</sup> “Only valuable metals and stones were deemed worthy of being given and enshrined [in early Buddhist *stupas*]; copper is [only exceptionally] alluded to”: G. Fussmann, “Coin Deposits in North-Western India: Stupas and Their Meaning for the Archaeologist,” in Gupta and Jha (supra n. 95) 13, citing A. Bareaux, “La construction et la culte des Stupa d’après les Vinayapitika,” *BEFEO* 51 (1962) 232. Cf. *Crossroads* (supra n. 117) nos. 186–92 (a *stupa* deposit from Bimaran, Afghanistan).

<sup>119</sup> H. Harrauer and P.J. Sijpesteijn, “Ein neues Dokument zu Roms Indienhandel,” *AnzWien* 122 (1985) 124–55; L. Casson, “P Vindob G 40822 and the Shipping of Goods from India,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 23 (1986) 73–79; G. Thür, “Hypotheken-Urkunde eines Seedarlehens für eine Reise nach Muziris und Apographe für die Tetarte in Alexandria (zu P.Vindob.G. 40.822),” *Tyche* 2 (1987) 229–45; Casson (supra n. 10); Casson, “Ancient Naval Technology and the Route to India,” in Begley and De Puma 8–11.

<sup>120</sup> Casson, in Begley and De Puma (supra n. 119) 10; cf. Casson, “New Light on Maritime Loans: P. Vindob G 40822,” *ZPE* 84 (1990) 205, n. 29 (an equally telling comparison).

<sup>121</sup> V. Begley, “Ceramic Evidence for pre-*Periplus* Trade on the Indian Coasts,” in Begley and De Puma 169; Slane (supra n. 97) 209.

menid" shape known from the fourth- or third-century B.C. Mediterranean.<sup>122</sup> Ptolemaic Egypt<sup>123</sup> may have played a role in the transmission of such shapes, or alternatively the less well documented, but equally certain<sup>124</sup> trading links with the Gulf may have done so. Red "rouletted ware" from the southeastern coast of India and the interior of Tamil Nadu<sup>125</sup> shares its most notable decorative feature, tondos of "chattered" circles, with Mediterranean black and red pottery of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, much of which, however, is easy to see as an evocation in clay of silver and gold shapes. "Rouletting" was a quick and easy way to achieve the effect that would be more laboriously, and usually more carefully, achieved in metal by means of punched decoration.

It is not even necessary to postulate a widespread taste for Western vessel shapes in gold; there will have been strong local traditions of work in precious metal. Techniques of pottery manufacture may have been adopted from further west, but shapes and decorative motifs were unaffected.<sup>126</sup> This will help to resolve the problem of Red-Polished ware, which bears a slip similar to that of many sigillata wares, but whose forms seem not to have been influenced by contact with Roman traders calling at Barygaza.<sup>127</sup> The sigillata of Mediterranean origin found at Arikamedu, the principal Roman trading station on the Coromandel coast,<sup>128</sup> may by contrast reflect a taste for Roman shapes on the tables of the expatriate community. The skeuomorphic status of sigillata is in any case clear from the existence of marbled wares—made to look like vessels carved from marble. Fragments of marbled sigillata have been found at Arikamedu,<sup>129</sup> and in the west are found side-by-side with the ordinary red version.<sup>130</sup>

Some Indian moldmade ware may have been made in imitation of yet another exotic material, and one that the Romans came to India to buy. A white version of red moldmade ware made from kaolin<sup>131</sup> may have

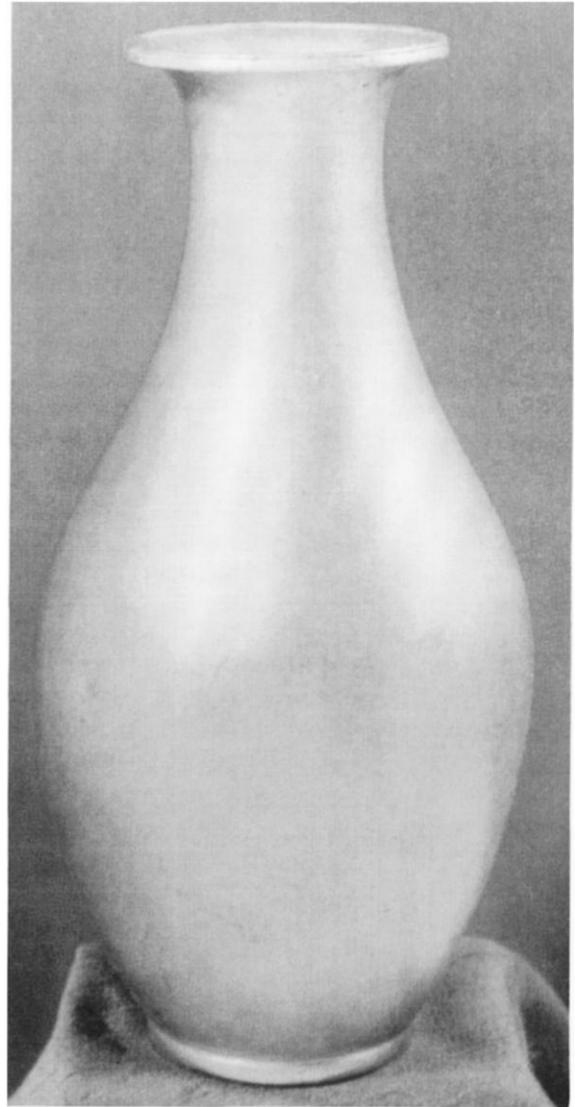


Fig. 5. The gold "Harewood Vase." (After *Catalogue of a Highly Important Roman Gold Vase, the Property of the Right Honourable Earl of Harewood*, Christie's, London, 23 June 1965)

<sup>122</sup> Begley (supra n. 121) 167, 191, n. 36.

<sup>123</sup> See M. Pfrommer, *Studien zu alexandrinischer in gross-griechischer Toreutik frühellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin 1987) for possible forerunners. The wealth of gold and silver in Ptolemaic Egypt is discussed by E. Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Oxford 1983).

<sup>124</sup> D. Whitehouse, "Epilogue: Roman Trade in Perspective," in Begley and De Puma 216–18; cf. Potts 1990 (supra n. 83) 292 (on Indian Red-Polished ware found at Sohar in Oman, where a "great number" of gold coins of Tiberius were found in 1601).

<sup>125</sup> Begley (supra n. 121) 176–82.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. the Red-Polished ware fragment from Mantai, Sri Lanka with a monkey sitting on a crocodile's back, an early rendition of a folktale well known in the medieval Middle East: J. Raby, "Between Sogdia and the Mamluks: A Note on the Earliest Illustrations to Kalila wa Dimna," *Oriental*

*Art* 33 (1987–1988) 391–92, 394, fig. 21; J. Carswell, "The Port of Mantai, Sri Lanka," in Begley and De Puma 202, fig. 11.3. The "sprinkler bottle" from which it came probably had 12 such panels, perhaps with a whole narrative cycle (Raby [supra] 392).

<sup>127</sup> N.P. Orton, "Red Polished Ware in Gujarat: A Catalogue of Twelve Sites," in Begley and De Puma 47.

<sup>128</sup> H. Comfort, "Terra Sigillata at Arikamedu," in Begley and De Puma 134–50; Sidebotham (supra n. 10) 26.

<sup>129</sup> R.E.M. Wheeler, A.K. Ghosh and S. Krishna Deva, "An Indo-Roman Trading-Station at Arikamedu (Pondicherry)," *Ancient India* 2 (1946) 17–124, nos. 10 and 14; Comfort (supra n. 128) 139.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Comfort (supra n. 128) 139, citing examples from Mainz and southern Gaul.

<sup>131</sup> Begley (supra n. 121) 157.



Fig. 6. Sigillata amphora from Cyprus. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum AN R.338. (Courtesy Museum)

been intended to evoke ivory, and the fact that the same medium was also used for figurines tends to confirm this hypothesis. If so, it both recalls the way Athenian potters used a white slip to evoke the ap-

pearance of ivory lekythoi,<sup>132</sup> and anticipates the use of *blanc de Chine* for vessels as a means for making inexpensive, down-market versions of Foukien ivory carvings.<sup>133</sup> The black and gray wares that also occur probably evoked silver.

#### THE ROMAN DIMENSION

The essential unity of Roman-period red wares is a commonplace. Whether they are called Arretine, Samian, terra sigillata, North African Slip ware, or Color-coated ware, such pottery was widespread throughout the Mediterranean and beyond from the first century B.C. to the Byzantine period. "However diverse, all varieties were loosely bound together by a tradition of red surface called *Glanztonfilm* [and] by two leading techniques of molded exterior decoration or of wheel-made tableware."<sup>134</sup> Nabataean painted pottery ("by Sigillata out of Hellenistic Painted Wares")<sup>135</sup> and the various Indian moldmade, rouletted, and Red-Polished wares share many of the same characteristics.<sup>136</sup> The last-mentioned, as we have seen, were developed in societies whose aristocracies had their "best plate" in gold. It is also probably the case that the red pottery that was the source of much of the gold that found its way to Nabataea and India was made as an evocation of the goldwares available within the Roman Empire itself.

As with Nabataea, ancient texts attest to the widespread existence of gold, whereas all that survives in practical terms is a vast quantity of pottery. Again, the case to be made is circumstantial, but there is a distinct overlap between the occurrence of gold at certain levels of Roman society and the production of red ceramics. The surviving gold from the late Hellenistic-early Roman period has parallels in pottery, as a comparison of the fragmentary (the handles are missing) gold "Harewood Vase" (fig. 5)<sup>137</sup> and a sigillata vessel from Cyprus now in Oxford (fig. 6)<sup>138</sup> shows. Even the moldings on the undersides of the feet are close, and the pottery version includes an evocation of the central punch mark of the kind regularly made by workers in precious metal (figs. 7-8).<sup>139</sup>

<sup>132</sup> M. Vickers, "The Influence of Exotic Materials on Attic White-Ground Pottery," *Proceedings of the Symposium "Ancient Greek and Related Pottery," Amsterdam 1984* (Amsterdam 1985) 88-97.

<sup>133</sup> D. Gilman, in exhibition catalogue, *Chinese Ivories from the Shang to the Qing* (London 1984).

<sup>134</sup> Comfort (supra n. 128) 134; Greene (supra n. 71) 158. For bibliographies, see EAA, *Atlante delle forme ceramiche 1 and 2* (Rome 1981 and 1985).

<sup>135</sup> Iliffe (supra n. 54) 15; cf. Parr (supra n. 36) 205: "obviously correct."

<sup>136</sup> Slane (supra n. 97) has an excellent discussion of the difficulties involved in distinguishing imported from local fabrics. Cf. K.V. Raman, "Further Evidence of Roman Trade

from Coastal Sites in Tamil Nadu," in Begley and De Puma 128.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. supra n. 27. Ht. 28 cm; diam. of base 7.7 cm.

<sup>138</sup> Ht. 35.2 cm; diam. of base 10.9 cm.

<sup>139</sup> Such punch marks result from the preliminary measurement of a sheet of metal used for hammer-raised silver: "The point at which the lines cross . . . is then marked with a centre punch and a hammer. The point . . . is left on the *outside, bottom* of the finished piece. Leaving this mark intact is a tradition among holloware craftsmen" (O. Untracht, *Metal Techniques for Craftsmen: A Basic Manual for Craftsmen on the Methods of Forming and Decorating Metals* [Garden City, N.Y. 1968] 240).

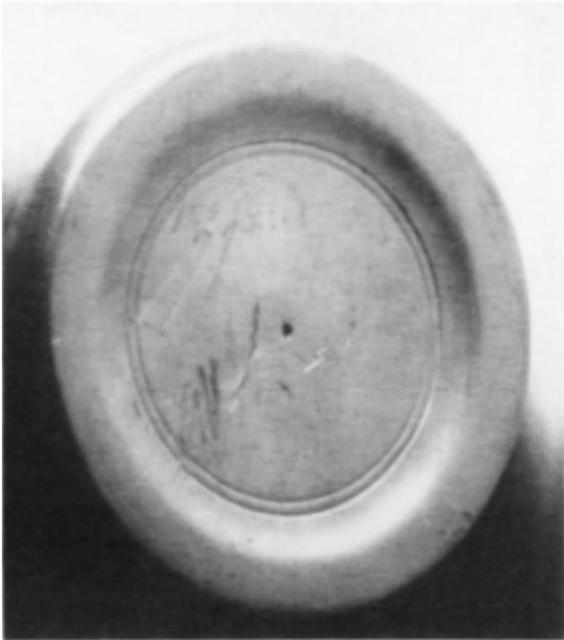


Fig. 7. The underside of the "Harewood Vase" shown in figure 5

The principal Western centers of red-gloss pottery were Italy, Gaul, and North Africa. We have already noted how the change from black Arretine to red took place shortly after Lucullus's triumphal return from the East laden with rich booty. It may be relevant to note that extremely large examples of so-called "Pompeian-red" ware were made in Italy and widely exported in the Augustan and Tiberian periods,<sup>140</sup> the very time at which great quantities of gold were being sent to the East. The inhabitants of Gaul were famous for their gold during the pre-Roman period,<sup>141</sup> and Julius Caesar doubtless won not a little as the result of his campaign.<sup>142</sup> It is an interesting fact that the principal gold-bearing regions in Gaul in Roman times were the "Cévennes/Rhône" area in southern Gaul, the "central Plateau" in central Gaul, and the

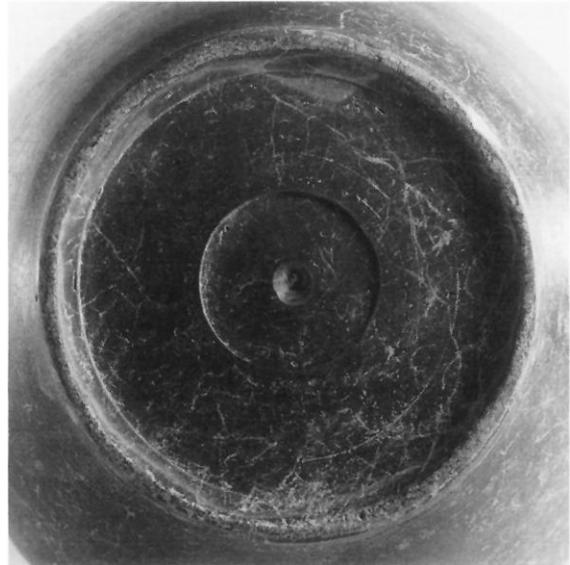


Fig. 8. The underside of the amphora shown in figure 6

"Rheingold" area in eastern Gaul,<sup>143</sup> and that the principal production centers of sigillata ware at La Graufesenque, Lezoux, Vichy, Clermont-Ferrand, and Martes de Veyre lay within the first two, with Lubié close to the "central Plateau," and that Luxeuil, Chémery, Blickweiler, and Trier were not far away from the "Rheingold" area (fig. 9).<sup>144</sup>

It will, however, have been the existence of the major urban centers at Marseilles, Arles, Nîmes, Narbonne, Vienne, Lyons, Metz, and Trier (fig. 9), and the consequent need for inexpensive but respectable tableware, that generated such production. The export of surplus pottery will always have been "parasitic" upon trade in more valuable commodities.<sup>145</sup> The general commercial success of Carthage, now known to have been a major production center of African Red Slip ware,<sup>146</sup> rather than the entrepreneurial skills of its potters alone, led to "enormous quantities of ARS being shipped to Mediterranean

<sup>140</sup> J.W. Hayes, "Hellenistic to Byzantine Fine Wares and Derivatives in the Jerusalem Corpus," in A.D. Tushingham ed., *Excavations in Jerusalem 1961–1967 I* (Toronto 1985) 185, who notes that the examples now in the Rockefeller Museum illustrated by K. Kenyon (in J.W. Crowfoot, G.M. Crowfoot, and K.M. Kenyon, *The Objects from Samaria: Samaria-Sebaste* 3 [London 1957] 297, fig. 68.10–11) are reproduced at a scale of 1:6, rather than 1:3 as the accompanying scale suggests.

<sup>141</sup> Diod. 5.27; Strab. 4.191.

<sup>142</sup> See Dio Cass. 43.19; App. *BCiv* 2.101 for Caesar's Gallic triumph.

<sup>143</sup> H. Quiring, *Geschichte des Goldes* (Stuttgart 1948) 114–19, esp. 115, fig. 56 (on which fig. 9 is partially based).

<sup>144</sup> Cf. J.A. Stanfield and G. Simpson, *Les potiers de la Gaule*

*centrale* (Revue archéologique Sites 1990) fig. 1 (on which fig. 9 is partially based).

<sup>145</sup> As in the case of Campana A ware, discussed by M. Frederiksen, *Campania* (London 1984) 343; cf. M. Finley, *Ancient History: Evidence and Models* (London 1985) 23; M. Fulford, "Economic Interdependence among Urban Communities of the Roman Mediterranean," *WorldArch* 19:1 (1987) 69; Vickers and Gill (supra n. 75).

<sup>146</sup> J.B. Gallagher, "African Red Slip: Chemical Composition, Production Techniques and Provenience," *AJA* 93 (1989) 251–52 (abstract). See too S. Tortorella, "La ceramica africana: un riesame della problematica," in P. Lévêque and J.-P. Morel eds., *Céramiques hellénistiques et romaines* 2 (Besançon 1987) 279–327.



Fig. 9. Map showing the relationship between areas producing gold and red-gloss pottery in Roman Gaul. (After H. Quiring, *Geschichte des Goldes* [Stuttgart 1948] 115, fig. 56; and J.A. Stanfield and G. Simpson, *Les potiers de la Gaule centrale* [1990] fig. 1)

markets and beyond.”<sup>147</sup> One result of the recent excavations at Carthage has been the discovery of “a whole range of ARS shapes, apparently belonging to the Vandal period, which do not fit neatly into [existing typologies], and which were rarely exported.”<sup>148</sup> It so happens that we are comparatively well informed regarding the wealth of the city during this period, and gold figures large in the relevant testimonia.

The Vandals arrived in Africa in A.D. 430 and took Carthage in 439. They found it a wealthy city, “in the African context, the equivalent of Rome,”<sup>149</sup> and enjoyed its amenities until they were overthrown by Belisarius in 534.<sup>150</sup> The Vandals were unpopular with orthodox Christians, not least because soon after their arrival, they tried to make the clergy “give up any gold or silver belonging to themselves or the

<sup>147</sup> A. Caradini, “Produzione agricola e produzione ceramica nell’Africa di età imperiale,” *StMisc* 15 (1969–1970) 97–119, believes there is a correlation between the production of ARS and the export of olive oil; cf. M. Fulford, “The Avenue du Président Habib Bourgiba, Salammbô: The Pottery and Other Ceramic Objects from the Site,” in M. Fulford and D.S. Peacock, *Excavations at Carthage: The British Mission* 1.2 (Sheffield 1984) 256.

<sup>148</sup> J.W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery, Supplement* (London 1980) 516–17; Fulford and Peacock (supra n. 147).

<sup>149</sup> Salvian 7.67.

<sup>150</sup> M. Rosenblum, *Luxorius: A Latin Poet among the Vandals* (New York 1961) 3–24; J.H. Humphrey, “Vandal and Byzantine Carthage: Some New Archaeological Evidence,” in J. Pedley ed., *New Light on Ancient Carthage* (Ann Arbor 1980) 85–120; F. Clover, “Carthage and the Vandals,” in *Carthage VII: Excavations at Carthage Conducted by the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor 1982) 1–22; L. Casson, “Belisarius’ Expedition against Carthage,” in *Carthage VII*, 23–28.

churches,"<sup>151</sup> and on taking Carthage, their king "published a decree that each person was to bring forward whatever gold, silver, gems, and items of costly clothing he had" so that the king "was able . . . to carry away property that had been handed down from fathers and grandfathers."<sup>152</sup> Even then there must have been a lot of gold left in private hands, judging by the fines of "10 pounds of gold" for those involved in the ordination of priests,<sup>153</sup> or the penalties for other transgressions: 50 pounds of gold for *illustres*, 40 pounds of gold for *spectabiles*, 30 pounds of gold for senators, 20 pounds of gold for "leading men," 30 pounds of gold for priests, and five pounds of gold for decurions, merchants, and "common people."<sup>154</sup> While such fines must have been punitive, their very existence on the statute book suggests that gold might once have found a place on the tables of some, at least, of the indigenous population.

The Vandals themselves, however, were not content with the riches they had seized from their North African subjects, but in A.D. 455 captured "an exceedingly great amount of gold and other imperial treasure" from the palace at Rome, as well as the "exceedingly thick" layer of gold from the bronze tiles on the roof of the Capitol.<sup>155</sup> Thanks to Procopius's account of Belisarius's victory procession in 534, we are well informed concerning the use to which this gold was put: the booty included "whatever articles are customarily set apart for the imperial service—thrones of gold and carriages in which the emperor's wife is wont to ride, and much jewelry made of precious stones, and gold drinking vessels, and everything else that is useful for the imperial banquet." This was in addition to "silver weighing many thousand talents."<sup>156</sup>

None of this gold has survived, at least in its original form, but gold vessels are once again present on the tables of a trendsetting elite.<sup>157</sup> All that survives is a reflection in the shape of the distinctive version of African Red Slip ware made during the period of Vandal occupation. While gold vessels appear in ancient accounts of holdings of precious metal,<sup>158</sup> they rarely occur in hoards; but this is only to be expected in that silver was less valuable and rather more cumbersome.<sup>159</sup> Silver does, however, provide a useful bridge between Roman gold and Roman red-gloss pottery, in that if there are similar extant forms in both silver and ceramic, a gold prototype for the latter can be safely postulated. Moreover, the apparent fact that "ARS did not evolve directly from the red-gloss tradition elaborated in Europe by Roman potters making Samian ware"<sup>160</sup> supports the view that similarities between one fabric and another might best be seen not so much as the result of interplay between potters, but rather as a reflection of prevailing fashions in different places and at different times of wares made of gold. What holds good for the red pottery of Nabataea, India, Italy, Gaul, and North Africa probably applies to other kinds of sigillata around the Mediterranean: all were made in the shadow of urban elite dining practices that involved the use of gold vessels. The hierarchy of crafts was thus in step with the hierarchy of materials.

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<sup>151</sup> Victor of Vita 1.5.

<sup>152</sup> Victor of Vita 1.12, trans. J. Moorhead, *Victor of Vita* (Liverpool 1992) 7; Carthage had traditionally been a Mediterranean outlet for West African gold: Hdt. 4.196; G.K. Jenkins and R.S. Lewis, *Carthaginian Gold and Electrum Coins* (London 1963). It is interesting that there is no physical evidence for gold production in West Africa before the medieval period: D. Grébénart, *Les premiers métallurgistes en Afrique occidentale* (Abidjan 1990) 257. For trans-Saharan trade routes in antiquity, see D.W. Phillipson, *African Archaeology* (Cambridge 1985) 150–51, fig. 7.3.

<sup>153</sup> Victor of Vita 3.8.

<sup>154</sup> Victor of Vita 3.10.

<sup>155</sup> Procop. *Vand.* 1.4.5.1–5. The gilding of the Capitol had

cost Domitian 12,000 talents: Plut. *Publ.* 15.3.

<sup>156</sup> Procop. *Vand.* 2.4.4.

<sup>157</sup> Rosenblum (supra n. 150) 27: "The Vandals had become soft and yielded to the charms of a more refined life: Carthage seemed to live again."

<sup>158</sup> Vickers (supra n. 26) (Hellenistic); M. Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium: The Kaper Karaon and Related Treasures* (Baltimore 1986) 264 (fourth-century A.D. Numidia); J. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien* 2 (Paris 1899–1924) 380, 390 (sixth-century A.D. Syria).

<sup>159</sup> For silver in perspective, see A. Cameron, "Observations on the Distribution and Ownership of Late Roman Silver Plate," *JRA* 5 (1992) 178–85.

<sup>160</sup> Gallagher (supra n. 146) 251.