

**Cristina Tonghini, *Qal'at Ja'bar Pottery: a study of a Syrian fortified site of the late 11th to 14th centuries***, British Academy Monographs in Archaeology No. 11. Published for The Council for British Research in the Levant by Oxford University Press, 1999. 132 pp., 155 figures and 103 black and white plates. ISBN 0 19 727010 7. Price: £75 hardback.

This large monograph originated from Cristina Tonghini's PhD thesis and as a result makes for very intense reading. The research unites three forms of source material — historical texts, the excavation of two sondages, and a study of previously excavated ceramics — in order to build a picture of Qal'at Ja'bar, a fortress in the middle Euphrates valley, from its origins to its abandonment.

In building this picture, Tonghini is making the most of what appears to be fairly unpromising material. From the late 1960s the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities had excavated at Qal'at Ja'bar. Unfortunately the excavations were never completed and so the results remained unpublished. Furthermore, all records of the excavations were lost in 1982, and so a considerable amount of excavated pottery became 'unstratified material'. However, as Tonghini's account of the historical sources shows, Qal'at Ja'bar was an important site in the Euphrates valley from the late 11th to the 14th century, and the sources provide a chronological framework in which to fit any material remains. The author's two new sondages, dug in 1992, provide the link between this framework and the considerable and specialised pottery production at the site, maximising all available sources. The success of Tonghini's approach has implications for the study of Islamic ceramics in general, for many museum collections are rich in assemblages of unstratified material, drawers and cupboards labelled 'Fustat' or 'Raqqqa' often the product of an art-historical approach to the discipline. The author herself hopes that the work will be perceived as a model to be treated as a 'working hypothesis in the course of future research'.

Following an account drawn from the historical sources, Tonghini describes the two sondages she excavated, the results of which will go on to form the 'control group' for the unstratified material. With this aim in mind, it is of course vitally important to describe and record as accurately and in as much detail as possible, and indeed Tonghini's classification of the pottery makes for concentrated reading. The pottery is classified into wares which are described from a technical viewpoint, largely reliant on macroscopic examination, but supported by laboratory analysis in the case of fritware. Wares are subdivided by type — specifically shapes — since the sondages did not allow for a great deal of discussion of function, and each ware is described and discussed with regard to technical characteristics, decorative techniques, shape (and function when possible), identification in the ceramics literature (or problems of identification), chronological evaluation, production centres and distribution.

Once the typology was in place, the assemblage illustrated changes in local pottery production and Tonghini goes on to discuss this in the light of distribution of the various wares at other sites. This useful discussion helps the reader gain insights into the meaning and significance of production at Qal'at Ja'bar; for instance, the fact that manufacture of the highly specialised fritware was so plentiful on the site during the 12th and 13th centuries meant that wares common on other sites, such as turquoise-glazed ware, were not produced in such quantities as might have been expected.

This exercise also tries to find links between major changes in pottery production and historical events or transformations where appropriate.

As well as providing a model for considering assemblages of stratified material alongside typological sequences, Tonghini also shows how such a detailed study can trace developments in pottery production, notably the five major phases she differentiates in fritware. Although the origin of fritware has been (and remains) a subject of great debate, phases in development such as these are usually not distinguished in such detail and, as Tonghini points out, are often lumped generally under the title 'Raqqqa ware'. The dense text is followed by a useful bibliography, the pottery catalogue and a variety of appendices. Every stratigraphic unit of the sondages is described; pottery and other finds (excavated and unstratified) are analysed quantitatively; the results of laboratory analyses are shown in tabular form, and the following reports are reproduced: *Technological report on the pottery from Qa'lat Ja'bar* by H. J. Franken, H. J. de Haas, and J. Kalsbeek, Leiden, May 1976, and *Qa'lat Ja'bar: the study of the walls and the excavation* by A. Zaquq (the original excavator).

All the finds listed in the catalogue are drawn and some are illustrated by black and white photographs. It is indeed a pity that there are no colour photographs. It would have been very useful to have some, for those who do not like to rely on Munsell numbers, but this is a small criticism of a substantial work, and one whose detailed descriptions will provide a very useful reference for those wishing to familiarise themselves with Syrian pottery, or who are studying assemblages from the medieval Mediterranean or Islamic world. The concentrated nature of this monograph makes it likely that it will be seen as a reference work to dip in and out of, rather than as a history of this very interesting pottery production centre and important fortress.

Carolyn Perry

**Sauro Gelichi and Sergio Nepoti (eds), *Quadri di Pietra. Laterizi rivestiti nelle architetture dell'Italia medioevale***. Edizioni All'Insegna del Giglio, Via R. Giuliani 152r, Firenze, 1999. 160pp; 101 colour and 68 black and white illustrations, 21 tables, 3 charts, bibliographies. ISBN 88 7814 160 7. Price: Lire 50,000 paperback.

This attractive catalogue has been produced to provide background documentation for the exhibition of the same name which was held last year at the Centro Museale della Ceramica, Castello di Spezzano, Fiorano, near Modena in northern Italy. The subject of the exhibition was glazed architectural ceramics, specifically those which developed from the traditions of architectural decoration in the Arab and Byzantine cultural spheres of the 9th century AD. They range from plain, glazed tiles and bricks in brilliant blues and greens, turquoise, white and black to tiles with geometric and figurative decoration, and include the beautifully decorated 'bacini' or plates which enhance the façades of so many Italian churches. The spread of these ceramic traditions to Spain, Italy and France in the medieval period led to the development of the maiolica tile industry of the Renaissance, from which the tin-glazed tile industries of Northern Europe are directly descended.

The book's text, which is in Italian, has a slightly unusual structure. It is in two main parts, the first of which consists of five papers by Italian specialists, Graziella Berti, Francesca