PALACE WARE IN THE UNINCORPORATED TERRITORIES

The transmission of Neo-Assyrian culture throughout the greater Mediterranean is a well-known albeit largely unanalysed phenomenon. Geometric polychrome stone paved floors, associated with Neo-Assyrian palace and administrative complexes in Turkey and Syria, for example, are reported in 8th and 7th century BCE levels as far away as Portugal and Spain (Bláquez Martínez and Valiente Malla 1982). Phoenician trade is the hypothesised mechanism for the transmission of Assyrian material culture and technology (cf. Aubet 2001). Despite the widespread dissemination of Assyrian architecture and material culture throughout the Mediterranean, Palace Ware appears to be a localised phenomenon occurring only in proper Assyrian provinces and adjacent areas.

Although Palace Ware appears to be a Neo-Assyrian phenomenon, Palace Ware or Palace Ware style vessels are recovered from non-Assyrian or at least not properly Assyrian contexts such as the site of Tel Jemmeh (Petrie 1928). Jemmeh is adjacent to the Ashdod province, annexed by Sargon II (711 BCE) in order to prevent its allegiance with Egypt, however Jemmeh itself remained outside the official imperial administrative structure (Radner 2006). We selected Tel Jemmeh for inclusion in this study because of the importance of the anthropological questions surrounding ‘Assyrian presence’ at this site and the availability of material for scientific analysis.

Palace Ware vessels were identified by both Petrie (1928) and van Beek (1973) at Tel Jemmeh. Unfortunately, none of the ‘eggshell’ ware from Petrie’s excavation has been found in the Petrie Palestinian Collection at UCL Institute of Archaeology and so we are unable to include it in this study. Van Beek used the field classification ‘Palace Ware’ to refer to all Assyrian-style ceramics at Jemmeh, incorporating both the thicker tableware and ‘eggshell’ thin Palace Ware under this term. We used our Palace Ware typology generated by analysis of Palace Ware vessels from the Central Polity to identify basic Palace Ware shapes and styles in this mixed assemblage and separate out potential Palace Ware vessels for morphometric analysis.

The potential Palace Ware population from Tel Jemmeh, like all archaeological ceramic assemblages, is composed of both complete and fragmentary vessels. This means that not every measurement or observation is possible for each vessel. The number of samples in a given typological or morphometric analysis reflects the total number of vessels in the population for which the observation/measurement is available and may vary from the total number of vessels in that population.
Tel Jemmeh

Tel Jemmeh, also referred to in modern Hebrew as Tel Re‘im or by its Biblical name Yurza, has no known Assyrian toponym. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was considerable debate about whether Jemmeh was the Akkadian ‘Arṣa’ from Middle Assyrian texts, and Wadi Besor, adjacent to Jemmeh, the “Brook of Egypt” mentioned in Neo-Assyrian royal annals (cf. Na‘aman 1979; Aharoni 1979). Although complete agreement on this matter was never reached, most scholars believe the “Brook of Egypt” refers to Wadi el-Arish on the Mediterranean coast in the Sinai, which would place Arṣa significantly south and west of Tel Jemmeh (cf. Rainey 1982; Tadmor 1958).

The site of Tel Jemmeh is 4.9 hectares and located 10 km southeast of Gaza. Jemmeh was first excavated in 1927 by Sir W. M. Flindres Petrie, Edwards Professor of Egyptian Archaeology and Philology at UCL (Petrie 1928). The site was excavated on and off from 1970–1983 by Augustus van Beek, Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History. Van Beek’s excavation of Jemmeh is, to date, unpublished. In 2009, the Smithsonian Institution hired a contract archaeologist to complete and publish van Beek’s excavation report. At the time of writing, these reports are in progress and will not be completed in time for inclusion in the present study. However, we were able to fully examine van Beek’s notes and relevant material culture, for which my grateful thanks go to Melinda Zeder, Curator of Old World Archaeology, Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History.

Understanding the nature of the relationship between Jemmeh and the Neo-Assyrian empire, and/or even if there was one, is complicated. Both Petrie and van Beek believed there was an Assyrian occupation of Jemmeh during the Late Assyrian period. Petrie (1928) argued that a series of structures in stratum EF were Assyrian in design and van Beek identified a large building of similar style as Assyrian based on architectural features and the presence at both locations of Palace Ware. As we discuss below and in chapter 6, the pottery at Tel Jemmeh is not Palace Ware and is only very generally Assyrian in style indicating that it was not produced or consumed by an Assyrian population in residence at Jemmeh. Likewise, the ‘Assyrian’ architecture at Jemmeh is only vaguely similar to Neo-Assyrian residential and administrative structures in the Neo-Assyrian Central Polity and Annexed Provinces (figure 5.1) (for discussion of Neo-Assyrian architecture and its adoption/adaptation throughout the empire see i.a. Castel 1992 and Manuelli 2009).

Palace Ware included in this study comes from van Beek’s excavation of Jemmeh courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History. The 22 vessels available for destructive and non-destructive analysis come from well-defined occupation contexts, primarily building collapse and fill.