CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY OF THE CERAMIC EVIDENCE

This short chapter presents a summary of the findings in chapters 6 and 7. Two main issues are addressed: first, the identification of the major distribution patterns for pottery wares in the Karak assemblage; and second, the isolation of phases in the history of the site where there exist peaks in the consumption of imported glazed and unglazed ceramics. In other words, the chapter locates the larger patterns of spatial and chronological distribution that may be correlated with data gathered in the historical analysis (chapters 2–4), and summarised in chapter 5.

A few preliminary comments should be made about the characteristics of the ceramics from Karak. The shard assemblages from areas A–F can be divided into seven broad categories.1 The statistical breakdown of the Karak assemblages according to these categories is as follows (see tables 1 and 2 in appendix 1): handmade = 6%; unglazed wheelthrown = 60%; relief-moulded unglazed = >1%; lead-glazed = 23%; alkaline-glazed = 11%; and Chinese imports = >1% (all percentages given in this chapter are rounded to the nearest integer). Clearly, shard counting alone should not be taken as an exact calculation for numbers of original vessels in each group, but these data are useful in providing a general profile of the assemblage.2 The same basic profile outlined above is to be found in the breakdown of ceramic groups in the dump sites, areas A and F. The field survey areas around the town and castle reveal some variations in this general pattern. Handmade undecorated wares are rare in areas B–E but, unlike areas A and F, plain lead-glazed wares outnumber the unglazed wheelthrown wares. The lower densities of unglazed wheelthrown wares may be because unglazed body shards were not always collected as diagnostic Middle Islamic pottery on the Miller survey. Of the survey areas, area D (the east slope of Karak castle) contains the largest concentration of glazed

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1 The small numbers of diagnostic Roman-Byzantine wares and modern glazed pottery are ignored in the following discussion.
2 On different methods of vessel estimation from shard assemblages, see Rice (1987), pp. 290–93.
pottery, including both decorated wares (lead-glazed and alkaline-glazed) and Chinese celadon (green ware) shards. Area E (the south slope of the castle) reports the largest concentration of handmade types and the lowest percentage of glazed wares found in the survey areas.

The profiles from areas A–F can also be compared with the excavation of the ‘reception hall’ in Karak (table 3 in appendix 1). The ceramics from this site comprised: handmade = 16%; wheelthrown unglazed = 76%; glazed = 6%; and imported glazed = 2%. Isolating the ceramics from phase I, the phase associated with the Mamluk period, provides lower percentages for handmade wares and marginally higher ones for the glazed wares: handmade = 5%; wheelthrown unglazed = 86%; glazed = 6%; imported glazed = 3%. While the categories employed in Brown’s reports are different to those used in this study, it is interesting to note the similarities and divergences between the finds from the ‘reception hall’ and areas A–F. While unglazed wheelthrown wares are dominant in both, and the percentages of handmade wares in the excavation phase I are very close to those of areas A–F, the excavation recovered significantly lower numbers of glazed wares (9% in phase I and 8% of the total assemblage). The surprisingly low quantities of imported glazed ware should not, however, be seen as an indication that the occupants of this area in the fourteenth century were not from the Mamluk elite. In addition to the ceramics, the excavation also recovered artefacts in other media including fragments of marble flagstones and wall-facings, moulded and painted plaster, carved steatite and limestone, iron and copper artefacts, and numerous shards from blown and moulded glass vessels.

If we move to a comparison between finds from the castle and those collected in other settlements of the Karak plateau it is possible to see clear areas of difference, but also some important continuities. While handmade wares are present in low numbers in Karak areas A and F (and in somewhat greater numbers in areas B–E and the ‘reception hall’), these wares are the dominant ceramic in the rural settlements on the plateau. This disparity evidently reflects the presence of elite groups in the castle, but it is important to avoid making simplistic generalisations. The excavations at Khirbat Fāris have found higher

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3 The following information is taken from Brown (1989 and unpublished).

4 Details given in Brown (unpublished), appendix II: inventories. The metal finds included on copper fals, that has been dated to the fourteenth century. Glass and carved plaster were also located in area A.