

APPENDIX 3 COSMETIC PALETTES OF STONE

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DESCRIPTION OF THE COSMETIC PALETTES

Cosmetic palettes from Tell Abu al-Kharaz were found in Phases XII–XIV (Fig. 465). These saucer-like objects are usually made of polished limestone but there is an example from the site which is made of semi-translucent alabaster (Fig. 465:2). All of them are decorated with drilled or incised patterns.

The cosmetic palettes of stone from Tell Abu al-Kharaz are represented by three types, which will be depicted chronologically:

Type 1 (N1110, Fig. 465:1; see also Figs. 156, 453:8; find position in plan Fig. 147): polished limestone, fairly shallow centrally placed depression, drilled decoration on the flat side in the shape of outer rings surrounding central dots which are arranged radially in six pairs; an intense blue paste was found in some of the drilled circular depressions; dimensions (cm): d. 9.5, H 2.0, d. of central depression 6.5; Wt 337 g. This is the oldest cosmetic palette from Phase XII, Area 7.

Type 2 (N1314, Fig. 465:2; see also Figs. 179:1, 453:9; find position in plan Fig. 158): polished alabaster, fairly deep centrally placed depression, drilled decoration on the flat side in the shape of outer rings surrounding central dots which are arranged radially in six pairs, one centrally placed dot at the bottom of the depression; it still contained pigments of two colours: one is of intense light-blue in the drilled decorations on the flat side, and the other of lilac colour in the drilled decoration in the centre of the depression; dimensions (cm): d. 7.0, H 2.7, d. of central depression 3.8. This item is from Phase XIII, Area 7.

Type 3 (N954, Fig. 465:3; see also Figs. 39:3, 453:10; find position in plan Fig. 26): polished limestone, small ledge handles in the shape of two double trumpets, the flat side is decorated with a geometrical pattern displaying from the outer perimeter a plain band, followed by an engraved rope pattern, a plain concentric circle, two concentric circles with 15 plain and 15 cross-hatched patterns (each showing 3×4 square fields) between them, a plain band flanked by two concentric circles and another rope decoration; dimensions (cm): d. 7.8, H 2.2, d. of central depression 4.5. This item is from Phase XIV, Area 1.

DISCUSSION

Parallels to these objects can be found almost everywhere in the Levant. THOMPSON (1971 and 1972) collected most of the evidence from Cis- and Transjordan which was available at that time. They are usually dated to Iron Age II, i.e. they are most common in contexts from the 9th and 8th centuries BCE but earlier (and later) examples are recorded, too.

Selected references from Transjordanian sites which produced such finds include Tawilan, Amman, Tell el-Mazar, Dhiban and Tell Deir 'Alla (see refs. in BIENKOWSKI 1995: 85–86, 304, fig. 9.15:2–7, 305, fig. 9.16:1; parallels to our Type 3: fig. 9.15:3). More recent material is reported from Tell Johfiyeh (LAMPRICHS 2007: 547, pl. 1,01; similar to our Type 3 but without ledge handles). In addition to material from older excavations in Cisjordan (THOMPSON 1971 and 1972: *passim*), more recent material comes, *inter alia*, from Hazor (BEN-TOR 2012: 580–583; parallels to our Types 1 and 2 in fig. 15.2:2–4; to Type 3: fig. 15.3:1–3), and Beth-Shean (YAHALOM-MACK and MAZAR 2006: 491–492; parallel to our Type 2 of alabaster in fig. 13.8:2 and Photo 13.31 which is probably from P7, 8th century BCE). Palettes from the upper and lower time range which are similar to our Type 3 are from a fill from Hazor Stratum IX (around 900 BCE, BEN-TOR 2012: 581, fig. 15.3:1) and two others from Hazor Strata Vb and IV (8th–7th centuries BCE, *ibid.* fig. 15.3:2 and 3; the latter obviously with ledge handles). Another, plain, palette from the upper time range is from Keisan Level 8–7 (980–850 BC, BRIEND and HUMBERT 1980: pl. 83:9).

The majority of scholars are now in agreement that the function of these objects was that of mixing cosmetics. Nevertheless one should not exclude the possibility that they were used to grind medicines. The most commonly used material for the production of these objects has been limestone. More rarely used natural materials were alabaster, sandstone, marble, basalt and flint. Man-made materials include glass and faience (cf. THOMPSON 1971 and 1972).

Our Types 1 and 2 have remains of an intense blue substance in the circular incisions. This is also reported from other sites, mainly blue and green coloured sub-

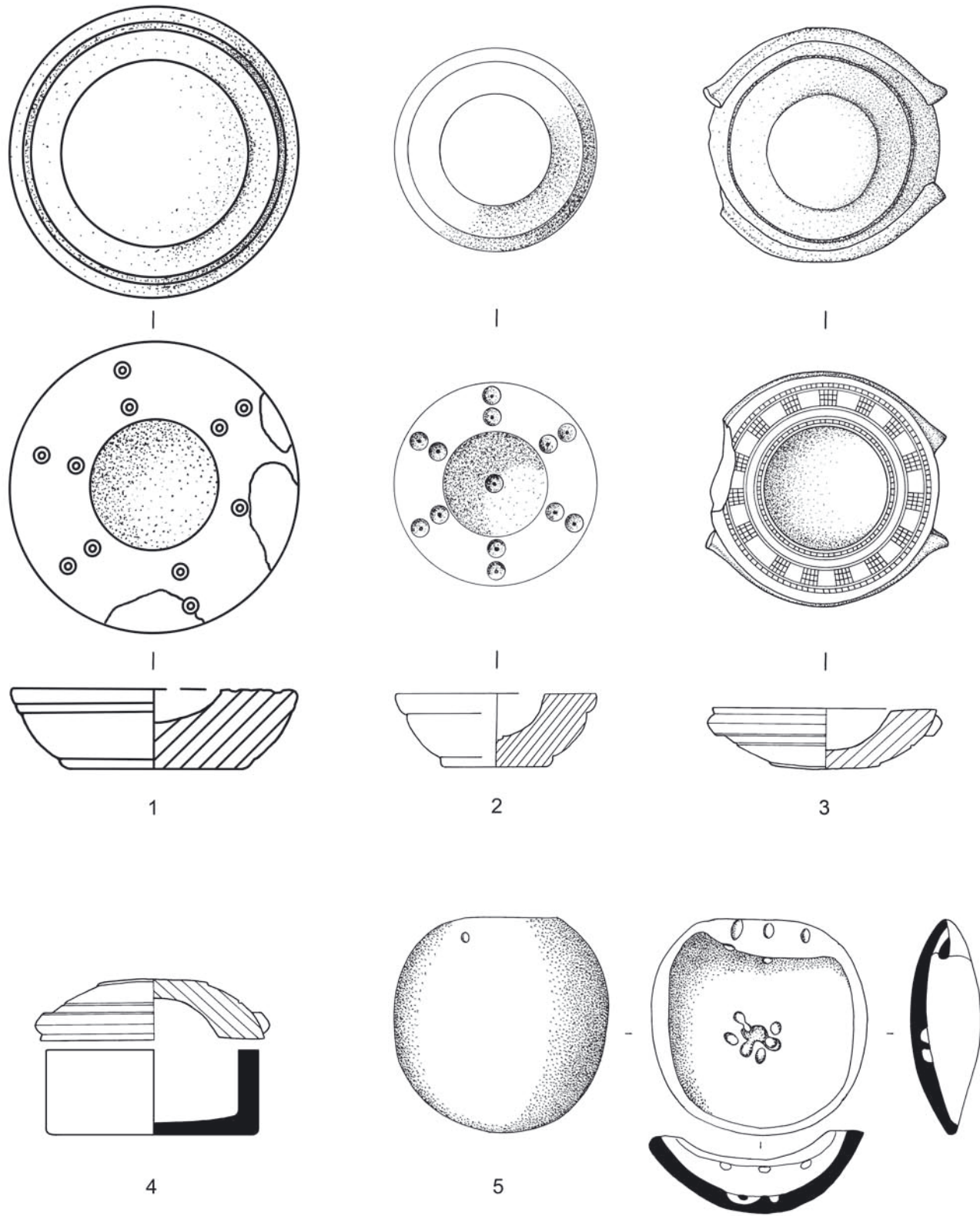


Fig. 465 The cosmetic palettes from Tell Abu al-Kharaz

stances (cf. Beth-Shean, YAHALOM-MACK and MAZAR 2006: 491; see also THOMPSON 1971: 64). One can interpret this phenomenon in two different ways: firstly, that it is a decorative inlay, and secondly that it represents the actual cosmetic paste. As far as our Type 2 is concerned, which depicts two colours, blue and lilac, it seems to make more sense that it is de facto a decorative element. Nevertheless, it cannot be excluded that these coloured substances are leftovers from the cosmetics used.

Where were they produced? Based on the fact that they are quite uniform as far as the general design and decoration is concerned the author suggests just a few production centres, maybe even just one or two (see the drilled decoration contra the incised decoration which represent two differing decoration techniques).

Who were the consumers? There is no proof that these items were only used by females, who are frequently mentioned in the literature as the likely consumers. It is the strong belief of the author that both genders used cosmetics (which is supported, for instance, by sex-related tomb material from various sites in Cyprus; see FISCHER 1986b: 28–43). The high level of workmanship certainly indicates that these objects were used by an upper class clientele (cf. BARAG 1985: 73). All our cosmetic palettes were found in domestic contexts in connection with rich find assemblages which would support this statement.

How were they used? The smaller flat surfaces of these cosmetic palettes are usually described as

“bases”. Considering the undeniable fact that these “bases” are very well worked, i.e. polished to a high lustre and sometimes even decorated (see e.g. a cosmetic palette from Tell el-Qudeirat which is decorated with a rosette; GERA 2007: 225, fig. 13.4.1; dating from the second half of the 8th century), the author suggests that the palettes had a double function: Firstly, they were used as lids on containers which hold the cosmetics (or medicines); and secondly, after removing the lids from the containers they were turned upside-down and used to mix or grind various substances (see suggested reconstruction in Fig. 465:4). The ledge handles of the refined cosmetic palettes made it easier to grip the lid. To the best of the author’s knowledge containers are unknown but this does not exclude containers of perishable materials, for instance, wood/bark or leather.

Another object, a worked shell from a Phase XIV context, is here included in the discussion on cosmetic palettes (N67, Fig. 39:4, 465:5; find position close to W2 in Fig. 26). Its dimensions (cm) are: L 7.6, W 7.4, H 2.7. The almost circular, yellowish-white, alabaster-like shell was highly polished and has three holes on one side, several pattern-drilled depressions at the bottom of the concave part and one small drilled depression on the convex side. The shell may have been used as a “budget version” of the cosmetic palettes of stone.

