

Claude Doumet-Serhal

SIDON: A JAR WITH FISH OR DOLPHIN DECORATION

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Five sherds belonging to a local made jar (S/ 1785) were found at Sidon in burial 7 (fig. 1-2). This held multiple burials

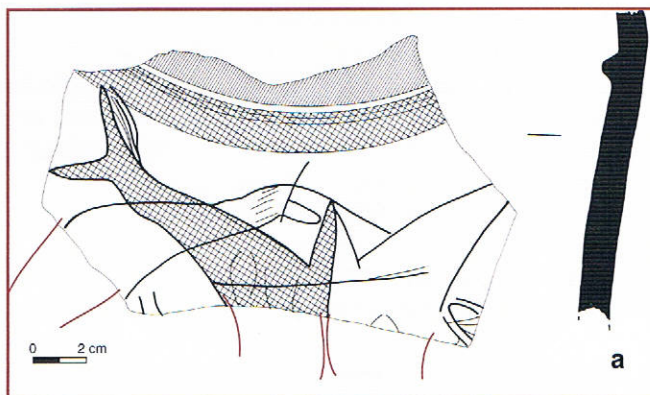
in an unlined pit containing material mainly from the end of the Middle Bronze Age but also some earlier MB I/MBIIA pottery¹. There is evidence of three individuals: two adults, one of whom was certainly male, and a child approximately 7 to 8 years old² as well as animal bones mainly goats and butchered bovid³ crushed and mixed in a compact black sandy soil. Skeletal remains of previous burials were pushed up to make room for the newer occupants, a practice observed at many other sites in the Near East where successive burials took place in the same grave. Most of the vessels in this grave were found inverted or lying on their sides.

Sherds from the jar were made of a local red fabric (10R 5/8)⁴ and have painted red, white and black horizontal bands applied to the surface. Incised lines outline the bodies of nine fish painted in black (S/1785 a, fig. 3 & drawings a-e) on the surface of the vessel. Some representations of fish are very fragmentary but others are distinctive with their plunging bodies and dorsal fins. Heads are missing.

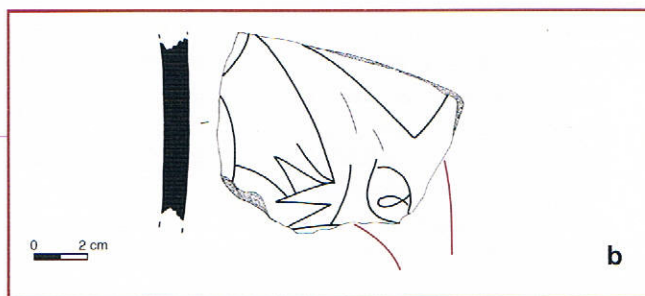
DESCRIPTION

S/1785

a: a sherd with a ridge painted with a horizontal white and black band. Three plunging fish are outlined (fig. 3). Two are facing each other: The one on the left is painted black with a dorsal fin; the body intersects with another fish depicted in a much cruder way plunging in the opposite direction. The tails are forked.



b: a sherd with the outline of one fish with one dorsal fin and two pectoral fins pointed at the tips. There are diagonal incisions on the body and on the sherd.



1 C. Doumet-Serhal, (forthcoming in *Levant*).

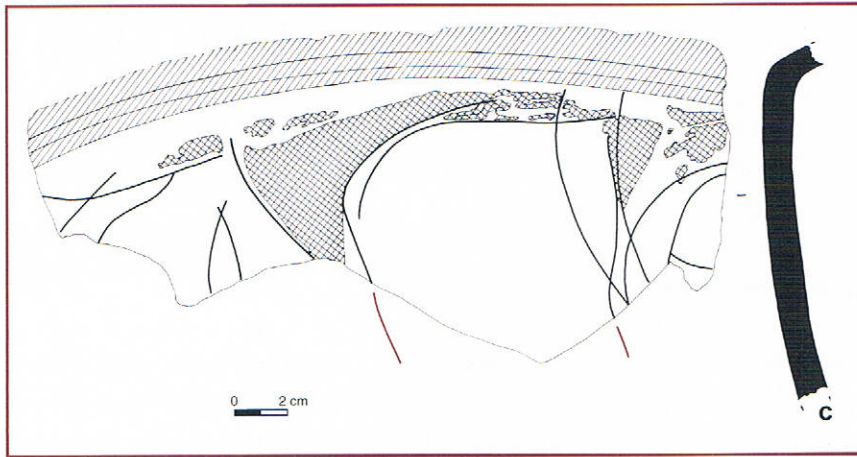
2 A. Ogden & H. Schutkowski, (forthcoming in *Levant*).

3 E. Vila, (forthcoming in *Levant*).

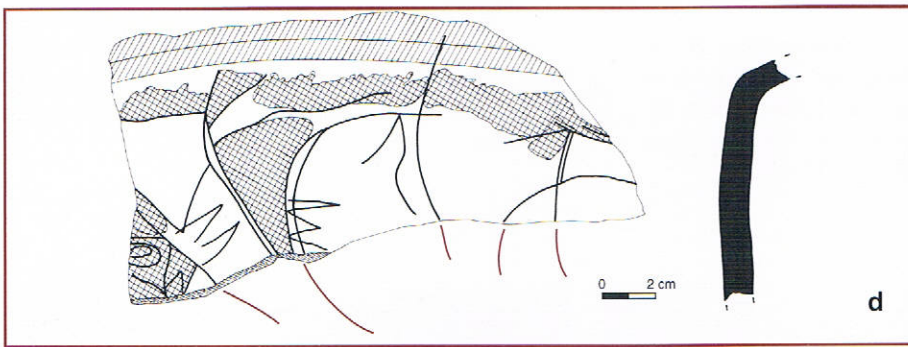
4 See D. Griffiths, p. 110.

5 R. B. Seager, 1916, pl. VIII-IX (pithos IX a) and pl. XIV (pithos XIIb); see also, P. Warren & V. Hankey, 1989, p. 136, pithos XIIb, dark ground with dolphins in outline white paint, is datable to MMIII, possibly IIIA.

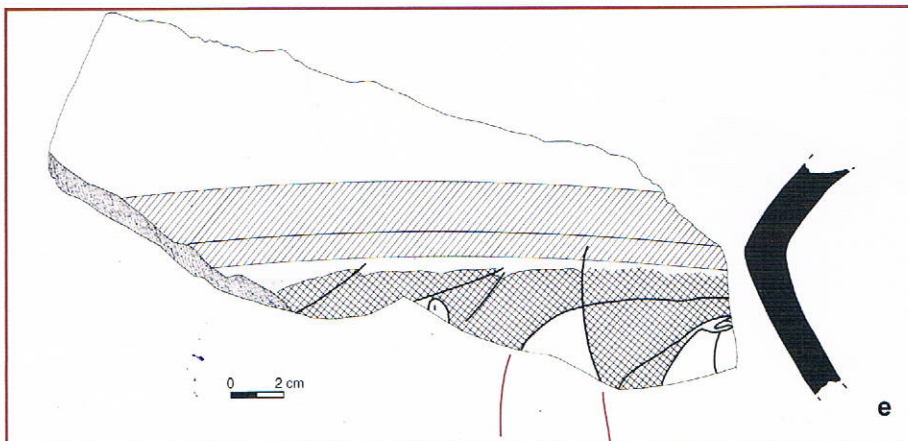
6 P. E. McGovern, J. Bourriau, G. Harbottle, S. J. Allen, 1994, p. 31-43.



c: Sherd with a sharp carination covered with a large horizontal red painted band and one horizontal white line. Plunging body of one fish very crudely incised with a forked tail in the shape of an X. Black paint is found on top of the tails in a horizontal band. There are other incised lines on the sherd.



d: Plunging bodies of three fish: the first (from left to right) with two dorsal fins and a broken tail. The other two are very crudely designed with tails in the shape of a forked X. There is black paint on the body of the first creature and outside the bodies of the others. There are other



crude incisions on the sherd as well as a large horizontal band of red paint.

e: Plunging body of one fish with a tail in the shape of a forked X. There are other incised lines on the sherd. Black paint is found around the body of the fish as well as large horizontal band of red paint.

DISCUSSION

Fish or dolphins on these sherds are shown in an unnatural way. None are scientifically accurate and they are only sketchy. Heads are missing, and more emphasis is put mainly on the fins, the body

and the tail. Most of the creatures shown are crude illustrations. This could be due to an unfamiliarity with the subject which is probably meant to be dolphins, copying from bad models or re-copying aided by imagination. The unfamiliarity with the subject is further observed by other artistic considerations, such as the

filling of the field with black paint reminiscent of the dark ground in examples from Pachyammos⁵ in Crete (fig. 4-5) or the incised bodies of the dolphin imitating the white dolphin outlines on Minoan examples. Similarly the colour bandings

indicating on Minoan examples the motion of waves or the background of the dolphins were not understood on the Sidon jar as they were replaced instead with crude incisions.

This type of decoration was also found on the "Dolphin Vase" from el Lisht in Egypt dated ca. 1750-1700 BC⁶ (fig. 6). This vase, so named

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because of its naturalistic depiction of dolphins, appears to be Minoan in style but belongs, because of its shape and manufacture, to the southern Palestinian region.

The motif of the dolphins found in Egypt on a jug of Levantine inspiration and now at Sidon on a locally manufactured jar, illustrates the complexity of iconographical transfers ⁷.

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1-2 Burial 7 at Sidon.

3 Sherd S/1785 a from Sidon.

4-5 Jars from Pachyammos, Crete, in R. B. Seager, 1916, pl. VIII, IX a, pl. IX, MM III-LMI periods, pl. XIV, XII-b, MM III period.

6 The Dolphin vase from el-Lisht, 1700-1550 BC, in P. E. McGovern, J. Bourriau, G. Harbottle & S. Allen, 1994, p. 33.



