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RE: Gutachten (evaluation) of Mr. Piotr Makowski's PhD dissertation

Dear Colleagues,

The doctoral thesis under review, entitled „Life among the ruins: an archaeological assessment of Khirbat al-Dharih and the southern Transjordan during the 10th-12th centuries“, is a study of the final phases of occupation of a single rural site in its larger socio-economic and cultural setting. It offers for the first time in a systematic way an evaluation of the critical period of the transition between the Early and Middle Islamic periods, or the era of the Fatimid caliphate, before the arrival of the Franks. The Fatimid-era horizon is one of the least visible in the cultural history of the Transjordan, and this due to the frequent inability to identify the material culture (and namely pottery) of the period. The result has been the creation of what may be a false gap in the occupational history of the region. The dissertation presented here investigates the settlement history of a small site – Khirbat al-Dhariḥ - problematizing such concepts as „decline“ and „abatement“, through the window of changes in the production and spread of the handmade pottery that dominate the artifact assemblage of the site. While the ceramic study sits at the heart of the work, the author attempts to go beyond the purely formal analysis to explore larger questions of cultural history. The text runs 267 pages, with an additional 77 pages of bibliography, a 20-page pottery catalogue, two appendices, and 64 figures. The thesis has been written in very fluid academic English. It is divided into five chapters in the following manner.

In the opening chapter, the author defines the geographical, temporal, and conceptual limits of his project, arguing that ceramics are the key to understanding the historical and economic development of the region during the final phases of the Early Islamic and beginning of the Middle Islamic periods. The study focuses on the small rural site of Khirbat al-Dhariḥ on the east slope of the Wadi La'bān, a branch of the Wadi al-Hasā, some seven kilometers north of the well-known Nabatean sanctuary at Khirbat al-Tannūr. As the author was not part of the original French-Jordanian expedition of 1983-2017, he has relied on the archived field records of this project (always a challenging task) and the pottery collected by it in storage at Yarmouk University. Chapter One surveys the history of fieldwork at the site and sets out the methods that will be used for this thesis, namely a combination of quantified analysis of the pottery (as was possible for material not collected by him), archaeometric analysis (done by specialists on his behalf), and stratigraphic and spatial analysis. The focus of the study is the household reoccupation of the *temenos* area in strata located some meter to a meter and a half above the ancient remains. This is a brief but adequate introduction to the dissertation.

Chapter Two is devoted to a description, and justification, of the theory and methods adopted in the study, taking on many of the debates in the field of Islamic archaeology

today. It situates the work in a large body of literature on the development of an „Islamic“ ceramic tradition in the region, and the questions of when handmade wares first appeared. On the issue of periodization, the author justifies his preference for the terminology „Later Islamic periods“, which best fits a study of the long-term development of these coarse wares; he does not return to this periodization, however, and continues to use the nomenclature „Middle Islamic“, which has become standard practice in Islamic archaeology in Jordan. The chapter defines the borders of „southern Transjordan“ and, in the process, engages in the academic debates over the regionalisms of material culture; these provide the backdrop for much of the analysis and argumentation in the thesis. Unfortunately, much is missing from his discussion of historiography and Arabic texts. The published work of the Jordanian scholar Basma Hamarneh (now based in Vienna) is highly relevant to this thesis, as are the body of research by historians of the later Mamluk and Ottoman periods, both Jordanian (Ghawanmeh and Bakhit – writing largely in Arabic) and foreign (Walker); the conclusions drawn about social and cultural history of the later periods are quite relevant to those of earlier centuries. The remainder of the chapter surveys a range of theoretical approaches that have been applied at different medieval Islamic sites throughout Jordan, from the Annaliste *longue durée* to resilience theory, food systems, Great and Little Traditions, and political ecology. While the review of such literature could be useful, and references are made to the ways they could be adapted to the study of reoccupation of ruins, he (too quickly) rejects them all, arguing that they are best suited to higher ranked sites than that of Khirbat al-Dhariḥ.

Chapter Three is the longest of the thesis, at 163 pages. It begins appropriately with an introduction to the site: its location, physical environment, history of occupation during the Nabatean and Byzantine eras, and the reoccupation of the *temenos* area in the Early Islamic period. Addressing many of the on-going debates about Islamization and the function of the so-called „Early Islamic desert castles“, the author suggests that the site functioned in this latter period as a „sedentarization center“ for pastoral nomads (p. 54) and as a center of tax collection (p. 56). Interesting as these suggestions are, they are not explored further in the thesis, and no evidence is provided to support them. Following arguments developed for the Mamluk period in central Jordan, he argues for a phased abandonment of the site over the course of the late 8th and 9th centuries, following a series of earthquakes, on the basis of the presence of cream wares (a chronological marker of the early Abbasid period) and a rare alkaline glazed sherd.

The chapter then proceeds to an assessment of the domestic reoccupation of the *temenos* area in the Middle Islamic I period: the chronology of this reoccupation and the architectural reconfiguration of the site. Focusing on the pottery from the most homogenous layers, from a stratigraphic record complicated by mixed deposits and much residual material, Makowski finds his closest ceramic parallels in the 10th/11th-century site of Gharandal. This chronology is further supported by glass finds and a series of C14 dates, obtained from animal bones, seeds and charcoal, and wood construction beams. The use of C14 dates to help date handmade pottery is quite rare in Jordan and is much to be commended; the chronology of coarsewares, in general, has too long relied on surface design and form and not on criteria independent of the pottery itself. In order to reconstruct the building history of the newly created domestic spaces, Makowski makes admirable use of old black-and-white photos and context cards. The

result is a very rich documentation of building practices that include leaving debris in place and building on top of rubble, minimal construction of new (encroachment, buttressing, and extension) walls, and blockage of old passageways and doors. The author attributes this kind of construction, which he calls „crisis architecture“, to short-term or seasonal reoccupation. Its regular occurrence at rural and urban sites of long-term occupation throughout Transjordan, Palestine, Syria, and Egypt in the Mamluk period, however, suggests otherwise. This introductory section concludes with a survey of the botanical and zooarchaeological records and glass assemblage, in an effort to define the character of the Middle Islamic I phase of occupation. (Metal objects, unfortunately, are not included in this study.) The identification of hulled cereals is, for this reviewer, significant, as they have been associated at other sites with a market-based (and not subsistence) cultivation in the Roman and Mamluk periods.

Section 3.3.5 of this chapter constitutes the heart of the thesis: the analysis of the handmade wares (plain and painted) in the Middle Islamic I assemblage. As most handmade pottery in southern Transjordan is recovered from surface, ephemeral, or dump layers, the stratified remains from Khirbat al-Dhariḥ offers the opportunity to study in detail an assemblage from a limited period of time and to date it. To this goal, the author adopts a quantified approach, and relies on a combination of strategies (stylistic and form, fabric, and archaeometrical analyses) to define the assemblage (and determine site function), find parallels at other sites, and identify workshops. The stylistic analysis focuses on motifs and placement on vessels and description of surface finishing, relying on what have become standard methods for studying handmade wares in southern Bilād al-Shām. The author focuses only on differences in form that are culturally dependent (not merely functional). The section and profile drawings in the Appendices are of high quality.

While a full discussion about the details of the ceramic analysis is expected during the defense, the general contours of Makowski's analysis are noted here. This is a diverse assemblage with a wide range of forms, reflecting varied cooking practices. Particularly notable is the high number of miniature vessels of various form (cups, juglets, bowls, pots, and lamps), the function of which is not clear. The author suggests their small size made them portable, providing further evidence that the community was mobile; this is, however, another example of overreach in interpretation. The miniature vessels, in the author's view, may have been used for serving spices or olives. (The pots, in this reviewer's opinion, could have also been chafing dishes, as known from the Mamluk period.) The plain and painted wares represent different pottery classes, as also documented elsewhere for the Mamluk period. The fabric analyses suggests both local production and intra-regional exchange (as documented, as well, for the Mamluk period by Gabrieli et al). The closest parallels for the assemblage as a whole comes from Gharandal. Makowski goes on to distinguish the Early Painted ware from early HMGP Ware (Grey's „Handmade Painted Coarse Ware“ at Gharandal): they represent different fabrics and surface patterns. As for fabric and inclusions, Makowski notes the widespread inclusions of chaff. In this reviewer's mind, this could be interpreted as evidence, in fact, of access to regional markets. Although the macrobotanical analysis has identified only hulled wheat and barley on site, chaff is textually attested as a marketable commodity in the later Islamic periods.

Makowski's quantification of ware and form has revealed important patterns regarding the ceramic assemblage, which may, indeed, reflect site function. The plain handmade ware(s) heavily dominate the assemblage (at 93%); Makowski astutely emphasizes that the literature on handmade pottery of the Islamic centuries too often privileges painted wares over the painted ones. The most common form at the site is the cooking pot (at 35% of the assemblage), in a range of forms. Here Makowski, as has become traditional practice in the field, emphasizes dimensions, handle and rim form, and the presence of lids. At 19% of the assemblage, basins and bowls also represent an important component of the household effects; these are of standardized size and form, and several fit into one another, „tupperware style“. Jars and storage vessels are surprisingly few, leading the author to argue, again, for a mobile population. The reviewer would, again, emphasize that much is to be learned from the later Islamic periods, where there are numerous examples of off-site storage of large jars, serving the needs of fully settled agrarian communities.

The concluding section of Chapter 3, entitled „Life Among the Ruins“, attempts to define the communal identity of the settlers of the site in this period on the basis of (richly varied) culinary traditions (reflected in the ceramic and bioarchaeological records) and site function. While the author is to be commended for taking on this difficult task, the conclusions he jumps to cannot be sustained on the basis of the evidence he cites. The small size of cook pots, for him, reflects a smaller family size and a diet of gruel, rather than stews. (Without residue or use-wear analysis, determining this is impossible.) The high meat consumption, suggested by the zooarchaeological remains and globular cook pot form, is cited as evidence that peasants were starving and killed off their livestock when crops failed. (The literature cited is broadly ethnographic, there is no evidence of wide-scale crop failure, and the diet appears to have been diversified.) A low number of storage wares, limited architectural alterations (makeshift wall repairs, no construction of floors, hearths), the abandonment of the ancient water systems, and the nature of the bioarchaeological and ceramic assemblages, the author suggests, points to an isolated and self-sufficient community, with some sporadic contact with markets and an economy based on barter. He proposes here that either the period of occupation was a single moment of time (and lasted for only a few years), or that this was a community of mobile peasants (he argues for semi-nomads elsewhere in the thesis) who lived there only seasonally. The evidence for this is limited, however. Once again, reference to a large body of literature on Mamluk and Ottoman Jordan and Palestine would have revealed patterns of occupation, and site types relevant to the study of Khirbat al-Dharīḥ. The Palestinian *khirbah*, otherwise known as an *e'zbah* (in local dialect), is a highland version of peasants' seasonal settlement, and takes a very different form from this site. Closest comparison may be with the settlements associated with the *mazra'a* of the Ottoman tax registers. Chapter Three closes with a discussion of the Late Islamic (Ottoman-era) phase of reoccupation, participating, in the process, in current debates on bedouin burial practices and the material culture of the Ottoman period, as well as pulling on very relevant ethnographic literature on ruins and reuse.

The following chapter places the post-Abbasid reoccupation of Khirbat al-Dharīḥ in a larger regional context, providing a historical overview (placed, surprisingly, rather late in the thesis), an assessment of survey and excavation projects in the region, and a state-of-the-field evaluation of the evolution of handmade wares during the Early and

Middle Islamic periods. The archaeological, historical, and ceramic approaches center on the question of settlement change or continuity. The chapter opens with a survey of contemporary textual sources on the region and period; the author seems to rely on secondary studies, but does not make this clear. In spite of the comparative paucity of written sources for this period – in comparison with the Mamluk and Ottoman eras – the author makes best use of what is available in terms of chronicles (Ibn Khurradādhbih, al-Yaʿqūbī), geographies (al-Istakhrī, al-Muqaddasī), travelers' accounts (Nāṣir al-Khusraw, al-Idrīsī), documentary (namely the letters of the Geniza archive in Cairo), and Frankish sources (William of Tyre) for the general region. On the basis of these sources, and a wide range of secondary sources, the author describes southern Transjordan in the period before the arrival of the Franks as thoroughly rural, with its economic center in Zughar and with changing district capitals. Its political and cultural history is molded by the rise of tribal sheikhs and dynasties (such as the Jarrāhids).

The cultural commonality of the region, however, becomes most visible, in the astute assessment of the author, through its handmade wares. The sites to which he returns time and again for ceramic parallels – Gharandal, Ruwāth, Khirbat Shaykh 'Iṣā, Tawāhīn al-Sukkar, and Ṭafilah – „mark the boundaries of a relatively unified region ... with its own material culture“ (p. 209). For Makowski, the area of southern Transjordan between the Wadis al-Hasa and Musa functioned as a „social network for the exchange of goods“ (p. 49), reinforcing this regional cultural identity. The region is, otherwise, difficult to define archaeologically, as there are no glazed imports, no evidence of local kilns, no coins, and a poor stratigraphic record obscured by destruction or leveling phases. The author proceeds to a systematic and thorough review of survey and excavation reports, in an effort to identify Fatimid levels and the corresponding ceramic markers. In the process he critiques traditional notions about settlement decline and gaps in occupation based on the ceramic record, as understood at the time. The chapter proceeds to a brief discussion of climate and environmental collapse, which is not well incorporated into the arguments about the period.

As is the case with the thesis as a whole, Makowski's analysis is at its best regarding the pottery itself. The author's assessment that the post-Abbasid occupational phases of most sites in the region are characterised more by „deterioration“ and „decrease“ of occupation, rather than „decline“ and collapse, and that at Khirbat al-Dharīḥ is specifically one of dispersal, contraction, and spatial reconfigurations, is based on a careful and nuanced study of patterns of production, consumption, and distribution of these wares. In one of the most valuable sections of the thesis, the author offers the first clear statements about the chronological development of Islamic handmade wares. Combining stylistic and petrographic analysis with XRF and XRD (though, inexplicably, not in the same chapter) – and building on a previous study in this manner of Mamluk-era wares by Gabrieli et al - Mr. Makowski demonstrates the activity of different workshops and the contemporaneity of the linear painted style with the geometric one. The various wares reach their full development, and standardization, in the 14th-century Mamluk plain handmade and painted wares widely recognizable in Transjordan and Palestine. (I should note, however, that in emphasizing the standardization of forms in this period – namely the medium-sized jars with bulging or out-turned necks – he overlooks a wide range of lesser known and quite interesting specialized forms that seems to be experiments of the period, such as boxes, incense burners, and candlesticks. Many of

these have never been published but are on display at the Madaba Museum.) Among the most important, and original, conclusions made by the author is that Islamic handmade wares originated in southern Transjordan in the 10th-12th centuries and spread north from there. (The map in Fig. 61, p. 233, is exceptional and beautifully illustrates this process.) He reminds us that plain handmade wares in this region were more heavily represented in the ceramic assemblage of rural sites than painted wares in this period. The handmade pottery of this region at this time consisted of smaller cook pots and bowls, large oval basins, and relatively few storejars. As for what all of this means in terms of cultural history, the author suggests that there was a breakdown in the large economic system and markets, perhaps an influx of nomads, and a kind of local exceptionalism. These concluding (unsubstantiated) remarks do not do justice to what is otherwise a brilliant distillation of his most salient observations regarding the appearance, development, and spread of these wares.

In his succinct concluding chapter, the author offers his final assessment of the handmade ceramic assemblage at the site, and its ultimate meaning for site function and the organization of production and distribution of handmade wares from the „Middle Islamic I“ period (citing the periodization of Whitcomb). The author suggests that occupation of Khirbat al-Dharīḥ was non-intensive and seasonal in this period. Ceramic production was local, without official interference and organization and without professional workshops. Distribution of these products was in local hands and followed the 50-kilometer exchange associated with agricultural goods in ethnographic studies. These constituted the exchange network of the period that can be associated with communal networks and identity. In this way, the southern Transjordan becomes a sociocultural buffer in the period between Egypt and Bilād al-Shām. These are attractive and, at first glance, very compelling proposals. However, as throughout the thesis, the quasi-nomadic and seasonal occupation at the site is more assumed than demonstrated. Neither the botanical record (as presented in the dissertation) nor the nature of the archaeological record necessarily proves or disproves seasonality of occupation or the semi-nomadic identity of the occupants. „Ephemeral“ (architecture, occupation) remains an ambiguous term in the literature of our field today. As for craft specialization, the author is right that workshops need not be organized by state institutions. Recent archaeo-ethnographic research on the Gaza Ware industry has documented how family workshops functioned and the important role of intermarriage and migration of family members (and units) in the spread of this ware beyond southern Palestine. This literature should be cited in this regard.

In all, Mr. Makoswki's thesis is a careful and systematic ceramic study, which attempts to define the cultural identity of a little-known region of southern Syria. He has done an exhaustive survey of the published literature on this early period and included quite relevant scholarship from anthropology and ethnography. The author arrives at some very fine intuitive and convincing conclusions, particularly regarding Fatimid-era settlement, which has until been largely a „black hole“ in the archaeological scholarship of the region. The most important contribution of the work, beyond the study of a single site in its latest phases of occupation, is the important implications it offers for (re)dating pottery from regional surveys and, ultimately, reassessing the „Mamluk peak“ that has long dominated our understanding of settlement cycles during the Islamic periods. As a result, we may have to rethink our long-held notions about gaps in

settlement after the Abbasid period and the extent to which there is sudden demographic growth in the Mamuk era, at least in this region of the Transjordan.

As for weaknesses, several sections are inconclusive (3.6, 4.1.6, 4.2.7) and add little to the thesis overall. Many of the assumptions repeated throughout the work have either not been demonstrated or cannot be sustained, such as assertions that the economy was based on barter (scrap metal, tokens, and reused coinage were in circulation in the 10th-12th centuries in northern Syria, and even in the most remote regions the economy was heavily monetarized in the later Islamic periods), that occupation at Khirbat al-Dharīḥ was seasonal, and that the residents of the houses in the *temenos* area were semi-nomads. The assemblages of all artifacts at the site, in fact, seem to argue against the site being settled by nomads or even used seasonally. There is a surprisingly wide variety of forms among the handmade pottery, the glass finds and bioarchaeological record point to access to more urban markets and wider distribution networks; even the tupperware-style handmade bowls may have been sold as sets of tablewares at markets further afield. Storage of goods off-site in caves, as documented by the hinterland survey, has parallels for more urbanized (and later) sites, such as Tall Ḥisbān. Such spatial separation argues for a site more connected to markets and transport networks than a seasonal settlement of semi-nomads would have been.

Reference to a rapidly growing literature on southern Syria in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods could have refined (or corrected) these conclusions, particularly as regards the use of contemporary Arabic and Ottoman Turkish sources. Some of the figures are illegible, having been reproduced at too small a scale (namely the XRD charts). As for historical analysis, it is not clear whether the author consulted the original Arabic sources he cites in Chapter 4, or whether he relies on secondary studies of them. (This is an important point for historical interpretation.) Finally, the transliteration of Arabic names is inconsistent throughout the thesis.

These critiques, however, do not diminish the value of this highly original thesis. Mr. Makowski's work is a beautifully written, thoroughly researched, and logically argued study of a single rural community during a period of political and cultural transition and in its larger social and cultural world. It offers the most comprehensive study to date of the Islamic-era handmade wares of southern Bilād al-Shām, and in the process opens up new lines of inquiry into what life was like in small-scale communities during this poorly known period of political and cultural history. On that basis, I consider the thesis submitted by Mr. Piotr Makowski as fulfilling all the formal and content-related criteria imposed by the international regulations, as well as the Polish law. Mr. Makowski should, therefore, be admitted to the final stage of the procedure for granting of the PhD degree, which are the exams and final defense.

With sincere regards,

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