



CERAMICS XI. THE ACHAEMENID PERIOD

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xi. The Achaemenid Period

Although information on architecture and sculpture at major Achaemenid sites in Persia is plentiful, knowledge of the pottery of this period is almost totally lacking. Because there are few excavated sites the survey provided here is only tentative. It is possible to distinguish several areas with distinctive pottery in the Achaemenid period, though certain shapes, like carinated bowls, bowls with horizontal rims, and jars with upright spouts, appear more generally (Cattenat and Gardin, pp. 235-40). It is notable that anything that might be defined as luxury ware, comparable to decorated metal vessels, is absent from Achaemenid sites, even the capital cities.

Southwestern Persia. The pottery of Susiana has only recently been identified and has been found in quantity especially at Susa. Two different traditions can be distinguished. On one hand, there is the material from Susa itself (Ghirshman; Miroschedji, 1987; Boucharlat), and, on the other, there is the pottery from Choga Mish (*Čogā Miš*) and several minor sites in northwestern Susiana, on the Deh Luran (Deh Lorān) and Patak plains (Miroschedji, 1981b) and in the Baḳtīārī mountains (Zagarell, pp. 39ff.). At Susa very little pottery was found in the palaces (Boucharlat, 1987, pp. 192-94), but in levels 5-4 of



Ville Royale II, dating from the time of Darius I (r. 521-486 B.C.E.) and after, pottery from the 4th century B.C.E. has been excavated (Miroschedji, 1981a), including significant quantities of buff eggshell and white- or yellow-glazed wares. In this respect it is quite different from the pottery of the preceding Neo-Elamite period and, though locally produced, is more closely related to that of contemporary central and southern Mesopotamia (Miroschedji, 1981a). Common, or coarse, wares of buff or reddish fabric are represented by distinctive bowls with thick everted rims, jars with thick round rims above single ribs on the necks, and cylindrical amphorae with pointed bases. Painted pottery (dark red on buff ware) is known from this period but is very rare (Stronach, 1974, pp. 241-44; Miroschedji, 1981a, pp. 38-39).

At other sites in Susiana the pottery is derived from the Iron Age III tradition of the western Zagros (see x, above) and might even be designated Iron Age IV (Young, 1965; Levine). Eggshell and glazed wares are absent. Reddish or buff fabric occurs primarily in carinated or round-sided bowls with flaring rims and large, deep bowls with horizontal handles. The differences between the two pottery assemblages are not chronological but regional, corresponding to two different traditions and patterns of influence.

Western Persia. Almost no pottery is known from western Persia in the Achaemenid period. The finds from Baba Jan (*Bābā Jān*) I consist primarily of mass-produced utilitarian wares, datable to the 6th and perhaps the 5th century B.C.E. (Goff). Godin (Gowdīn) Tepe II also belongs partly to the Achaemenid period (Young, 1969, pp. 35-36; Young and Levine, pp. 30-31). Among the finds are examples of “festoon ware,” characterized by painted festooned ornament and sometimes birds. Production of this ware probably began in the Achaemenid period and continued until perhaps the 1st century B.C.E.; it seems to have been characteristic of the southern and central parts of western Persia (Stronach, 1974, pp. 241-44; Haerinck, 1983, pp. 98-100) but also occurred in the south and southwest. Painted “triangle ware,” on the other hand, seems to have been more characteristic of the northwestern parts of Persia (Kroll, 1975; Haerinck, 1983, pp. 98-100). Some plain Achaemenid pottery has also been found at Takht-i Sulaiman (Takht-e Solaymān; Schnyder, pp. 181-83) and in Hasanlu (Ḥasanlū) IIIA.

Eastern Azarbaijan. The main pottery group, datable to the 5th/4th-1st centuries B.C.E., consists of painted “Ardabīl ware” (Haerinek, 1978; idem, 1983, pp. 127-31). It is known primarily from clandestine excavations but does occur together with triangle ware at the site of Yanik Tepe, east of Lake Urmia.



The most characteristic forms of Ardabīl ware are shallow plates with everted rims, bowls with carinated or slightly carinated profiles, jugs with vertical handles and upright trefoil spouts, single- or double-spouted amphorae, and theriomorphic vessels (Haerinck, 1980). Decorative motifs are often quite crudely painted and are largely restricted to simple geometric designs, though stylized representations of animals do occur. Other pottery types, some with painted stripes on the rims, have been found in the Meškīnšahr and Marand areas (Ingraham and Summers, pp. 80-86; Kroll, 1984, pp. 25-28).

Northern Persia. In Gīlān pottery of the Achaemenid period has been found at Ghalekuti (Qaḷ'akūti). Two major categories can be distinguished. The body of the first is red to red-ocher, which may reflect continuity with the local Iron Age III tradition (see x, above). That of the second is grayish or blackish brown, perhaps already anticipating the wares of the Parthian period (see xii, below). Some vessels have been burnished; others have simply been smoothed (Haerinck, 1989, pp. 457-58).

Northeastern Persia. The only two well-documented Achaemenid sites in northeastern Persia are Tureng (Tūrang) Tepe and Yarim Tepe; the latter remains unpublished, however. Level VA at Tureng Tepe yielded a small amount of pottery (Deshayes; Cleuziou). The fabric is reddish brown, in contrast to the buff ware of the preceding Iron Age III, but the types are very similar, including bowls and plates with flaring rims. On the whole, Achaemenid pottery in this region seems to have continued the local Iron Age tradition, which did not differ significantly from that in western Persia (Cleuziou) and was related to production on the Persian plateau, in contrast to the ceramics of both the preceding and following periods, which were closely related to those of Central Asia. Farther east, in the Atrak valley, which is linked geographically with southern Central Asia, this relationship may not have been interrupted (Cornelio; cf. Cattenat and Gardin).

Eastern Persia. Information on eastern Persian ceramics of the Achaemenid period comes from Dahan-i Ghulaman (Dahan-e Ġolāmān) in Sīstān, where a considerable variety of wares and shapes have been excavated. Beside common ware, characterized by flat-rimmed bowls and jars with “trumpet bases,” there is also a burnished ware; painting is not attested (Scerrato, 1962; idem, 1966; cf. Dittman).

Southern and southeastern Persia. Level II at Tepe Yahya (Yaḥyā) in Kermān is supposed to date from the Achaemenid period and later (see xii, below) and to



succeed an Iron Age level (III). The dating is based upon parallels from Pasargadae. In Fārs the main excavated Achaemenid sites are Pasargadae, Persepolis, and Malyan (Malīān). The pottery from the two former sites was originally dated to the late Achaemenid period by Eric Schmidt and David Stronach (1974; idem, 1978), but it has recently been suggested (Sumner) that pottery changed little between the 6th century and the late 4th century B.C.E. Nevertheless, many of the ceramics recovered from Pasargadae clearly date from the post-Achaemenid period (Stronach, 1978), which supports the later Achaemenid dating by Schmidt and Stronach. The ware, which ranges in color from pale buff to brown or gray, is usually wet-smoothed and sometimes slipped or washed with red or buff. Distinctive forms include shallow carinated bowls, deep bowls with rounded sides and flaring rims, and bowls with thick rims. Painted festoon ware is known at Pasargadae from the late and post-Achaemenid periods. The occurrence of these types, as well as the absence of glazed wares, suggests that the ceramics of Fārs were more closely related to those of the western Zagros than to those of Susiana.

Despite limited amounts of evidence, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish at least three main ceramic traditions in Achaemenid Persia. First, there is the Persian group, which ranges from Gorgān through the western Zagros to Fārs and encompasses many regional differences; it is characterized by the carinated bowl with flaring rim and often with rounded sides and includes no glazed pottery. Second is the Susiana-Mesopotamian group, in which glazed and eggshell wares are well represented. The less well-attested eastern and southeastern group, to which the finds from Dahan-i Ghulaman belong, has yet to be precisely defined.

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