

# Echoes from the past in a colonial encounter? The ceramic evidence of the upper middle Tigris region from the fourth-second century BC

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## *ABSTRACT*

Traditionally, unique and novel ceramic shapes, often connected to ‘fine wares’, have found their way into publications, while more common or traditional shapes are overlooked. This has skewed the publication process, wherein only material comparable with these early publications was regarded worth recording and publishing. In terms of ceramics, the association of the Seleucid period with novelty over continuity leaves this period as an enigma in the *longue durée* history of West Asia. On the interpretative scale, one is left with containers used to present, serve and consume food, but rarely with vessels used to store and prepare what was being served. The quality, quantity and uniformity of material related to this new production horizon is of such ubiquity, its introduction not embedded within a local framework of production and consumption seems unlikely. Integrating ceramic evidence of rural sites into a sequence of preceding material allows a more contextualised understanding of influence, Seleucid political rule over Northern Iraq may have had on a quotidian level.

## *KEYWORDS*

North Mesopotamia, Iraq, Ceramics, Seleucid Empire, Hellenistic, Rural landscape, Colonialism

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This paper aims to re-evaluate the ceramic evidence of the ‘Hellenistic’ period in North Mesopotamia (fig. 1). Instead of focusing on a select set of single ceramic shapes to identify this period, an analysis of the published ceramic assemblages is proposed, to draw a more diverse picture of North Mesopotamia’s settlement history under Seleucid reign. The importance of plain or common wares has been pointed out sufficiently and specifically by those working on this soporific field of study.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Theoretical framework

### 1.1 Research history

Interpreting the political Seleucid landscape of North Mesopotamia, and specifically North Iraq, faces theoretical and methodological shortcomings in its archaeological *Forschungsgeschichte*. The specific environment of colonial analysis in a proposed *terra incognita* setting, amplifies the importance of the discipline’s self-reflexive understanding of its history, and in conjunction with it, the methodology employed, and interpretation proposed. What started in the early twentieth century as a search for European and ‘western’ supremacy, was perpetuated in the World-Systems-Theory’s macroscale investigations of northern and north-eastern Syria. Methodological concerns are addressed in few recent publications of excavations which present broader overviews of excavated materials rather than selected rare pieces. But the interpretation of such sites rarely transcends a ‘pot equals people’ assessment, an approach deeply entrenched within the research history’s sequence of theories. This becomes visible in the material selected for interpretation, both in excavations and surveys.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thank you to the organisers (Marco Iamoni, Costanza Coppini, Katia Gavagnin, Rocco Palermo and Francesca Simi) of the conference for allotting time and space for this contribution and encouraging the conference publication, and the anonymous reviewer for his or her comments.

<sup>2</sup> BERLIN 1997; JACKSON, TIDMARSH 2011, p. 1

<sup>3</sup> ALOE 2008; DORNA METZGER 1996; GERRITSEN 1996; JACKSON, TIDMARSH 2011; KATZY 2015; UR 2010; WILKINSON, TUCKER 1995.

### 1.2 Methodological approach

Marie Louise Stig Sørensen (2015) articulated the loss of typology as an analytic instrument. Although archaeology still relies on typology in many ways, since the exhaustive arguments between 1960-1980, typology has been reduced to a mere classificatory tool. Indeed, the functionality of typology relies on the seemingly banal system of analogy. But this analogy glosses over the underlying reciprocity, wherein lies the principle inherent of «‘what’ produces typologies»: Objects refer to one another, simultaneously citing and being cited.<sup>4</sup> Types in themselves are static and are placed into a framework of relations, forming typologies. Within this framework, degrees of similarity structure and assign places for most types. The addition of time reveals the underlying meaning of similarity. Both changing and unvarying variables can be traced along a timeline, revealing why and how they refer to one another. It is then, that one can interpret these changes, which aspects were given up, of what importance were the ones remaining? While ceramics recovered by archaeologists are static unchanging pieces in themselves, once placed into typological and chronological frameworks, they become materialised evidence of an ongoing negotiation, at the same time ending and starting point of discourse. Analysis of shape, size and composition throughout time identifies important aspects of ceramic productions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> SØRENSEN 2015, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> SØRENSEN 2015, p. 86-91. This general idea must be critically met by the production of ceramics itself. What archaeology defines as type, is a ‘repeat item’ produced by a potter (AS 1984:136). Variations of a type occur partly as a process of production. Therefore, a range of a type represents the production of a ‘repeat item’ closer as it relates to the repeated gestures of potters throughout their work day and includes changing characteristics of the clay during the span of a day. This can be explained through decreasing water ratios and uneven distribution of inclusions in the clay as the day progresses (AS 1984:136). While such variations exist, and should be considered, these are problems related to the rigidity of a typology rather than to typology *per se*. The general idea of type reference and variation through time can make valuable contributions to the questions of influence.

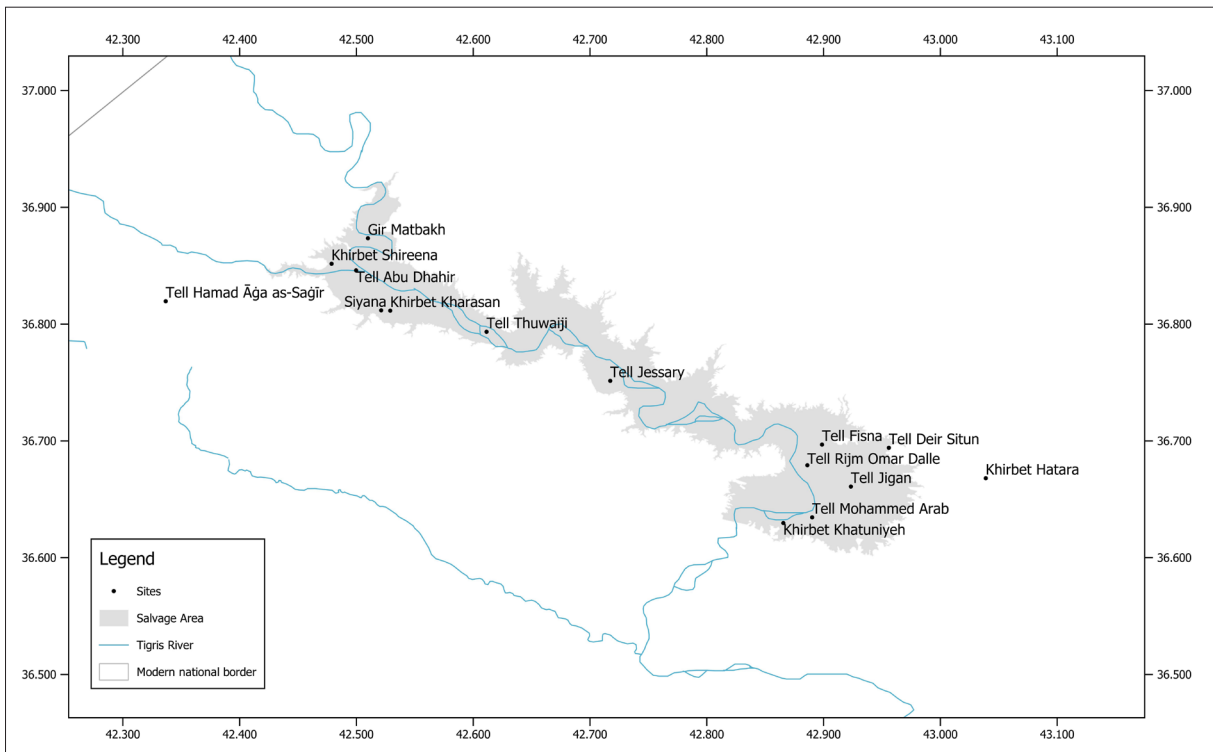


FIGURE 1  
Area of Investigation

## 2. Setting the scene

### 2.1 Publications, a short research history

In North Mesopotamia from the fourth century BC onwards, very limited evidence has been systematically unearthed and published.<sup>6</sup> The major chronological sequence established from Nimrud is based on unique ‘Hellenistic’ ceramics.<sup>7</sup> In course, to allow comparisons, the excavation reports of the British Archaeological Expedition to Iraq (BAEI) and those of the Zammar Region<sup>8</sup> only published

<sup>6</sup> CURTIS 2000, pp. 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> OATES 2005.

<sup>8</sup> As part of the Saddam Dam Salvage Project where the British School of Archaeology in Iraq participated (BALL 1986/1987, 1987, 2003; BALL, GILL 2003; BALL, PAGAN 2003; BLACK, BALL 1987; BLACK, KILLICK 1985; CAMPBELL 2003; GREEN 2003; KILLICK, ROAF 1983; ROAF 2003, p. vii; ROAF, POSTGATE 1981; SIMPSON 1990; TUCKER 2003) and other projects (AL-DABBAGH 1986/1987; BIELINSKI

comparable diagnostic ‘Hellenistic’ repertoires.<sup>9</sup> A tradition traceable to at least Thompson and Hamilton’s publication of late Hellenistic Megarian Bowls from Kuyunjik/Nineveh, this conduct has severely limited our understanding and scope of interpretation of the timespan in question.<sup>10</sup>

Explorations of Seleucid period sites were rarely a main objective, and dedicated efforts often foiled by the nature of sites and exposures to the elements, as immediate sub-surface material causes major problems for excavators as well. Prone to erosion and intrusions by later burials, little material is found *in situ* or undisturbed.<sup>11</sup> This is a trend not unknown in the Tigris region, for which Mühl noted, that it was very much present in the Late

1986/1987, 1992; MAZUROWSKI 1986/1987; SPANOS 1988).

<sup>9</sup> ROAF 1984a.

<sup>10</sup> READE 1998, p. 67; THOMPSON, HAMILTON 1932, Pl. LII.

<sup>11</sup> BALL 2003, pp. 17-18.

Assyrian Period, when changes in building habits forgo settlements on tell sites in favour of flat, small clusters of settlements – a process initially seen in the Middle Assyrian Period.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.2 Seleucid period sites in North Mesopotamia

Across north-east Syria, south-east Anatolia and north Iraq, ‘Hellenistic’ levels are often characterised by pits. Two major types can be identified: bell-shaped storage pits and straight shafts placed on ancient walls.<sup>13</sup> The nature of pits in the region makes a functional identification extremely difficult. While pits are not inherently unstratified, the material retrieved of those in the greater Eski-Mosul region were never of a single period. These fills often included a wide range of material, spanning from the third millennium BC to the late first millennium BC, and sometimes later Islamic material. Therefore, dating was proposed with regards to the largest and latest material group within such pits. The majority of those pits lacked the upper construction levels.<sup>14</sup> Typological correlations of pit morphology are also ambiguous; pits of bell-shaped character are dated into the Seleucid period, despite securely dated evidence, nor type exclusivity.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.3 Dating the contexts

To date Seleucid periods site in Northern Mesopotamia, excavators relied on two methods: numismatic evidence and ceramics. Coins of the Seleucid period were found at two sites, Nimrud and Tell Deir Situn. At Nimrud, they range from Seleucus

III (226-223 BC) to Demetrius II Nicator’s (146-140 BC) first reign.<sup>16</sup> As Oates noted himself, the stratigraphic sequence was quite confused, difficulties during the excavation, unidentified graves and lack of knowledge failed to produce a controlled stratigraphy. Hence, the final dating of the levels was based on a general accordance of the coins in the broader stratigraphic sequence.<sup>17</sup> A bronze issue from Alexander Balas at Tell Deir Situn dates the site into the range of 150-145 BC, therefore roughly equivalent to level 2 at Nimrud.<sup>18</sup> Even though its position was not directly connected to a floor or ceramic deposition, it was retrieved from a phase sealing the major ceramic deposit (level 3).<sup>19</sup>

The general ceramic sequence at Nimrud provided the framework for further material retrieved by the BAEI. Based on ceramic types found at Nimrud, broad timeframes were suggested for each ‘Hellenistic’ level thereafter encountered in the Zammar region. The dating of contexts and levels often relied on a limited set of individual shapes: ‘fish-plates’, carinated bowls and incurving rim bowls.

Ceramics of the Seleucid period in the region are therefore defined by shapes rather than through their stratigraphic contexts. Discontinuous evidence in the region of earlier Iron Age through Seleucid material onwards (in ceramic terms dubbed ‘post-Assyrian’, Neo-Babylonian, Achaemenid), inhibits clear understanding of the range and composition of shapes and wares, their relations to each other and to changes. Naturally, this leads to difficulties in the assessment of single or mixed period assemblages.

<sup>12</sup> MÜHL, SULAIMAN 2011, pp. 383-384.

<sup>13</sup> It seems likely, that primary and secondary functions, and taphonomic processes are distinguishable. In my opinion, bell-shaped pits were primarily storage pits as proposed by Simpson (2007), later used as waste areas. Straight shaft pits, due to their locations on Bronze Age walls, were primarily constructed as mud-brick quarries, with a secondary use as storage pits. It is not unlikely that the natural depression due to difference in soil compactness acted as catchment for later materials (PRUSS 2011).

<sup>14</sup> OATES 1958, p. 122; ROAF 1983, 1984a.

<sup>15</sup> GREEN 1999; cf. SIMPSON 1990, p. 120,

<sup>16</sup> Level 6: Seleucus III (226-223 BC); Level 5: Antiochus III (206-203 BC); Level 4: Aradus (170-169 BC, Alexander Balas 150-145 BC); Level 3: Coin Alexander Balas (not specified); Level 2: Demetrius II Nicator (146-140 BC); Level 1: no legible coins (OATES 2005:63). An overview and detailed discussion of all coins found at Nimrud was published by JENKINS 1958.

<sup>17</sup> JENKINS 1958; OATES 2005, pp. 63-64,

<sup>18</sup> CURTIS, GREEN, KNIGHT 1987, p. 52,

<sup>19</sup> «The coin was found immediately above the floor associated with the latest phase (level 4) of the building» (CURTIS ET AL. 1987, p. 52).

### 3. The ceramic evidence

#### 3.1 Compiling the data

The stratigraphic unreliability and the limited excavated evidence impedes any statistically grounded analysis of ceramics in North Iraq. Yet, on the account of ceramics even the presentation of types, without further quantitative information, allows for a more differentiated picture of ceramics during Seleucid suzerainty.

#### 3.2 Wares

Wares across Seleucid North Mesopotamia appear homogeneous in many regards.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, in technical terms and intra-site ware differentiation, and in comparison, to wares of contemporary sites. This leads to two conclusions: firstly, a common technological idea spread throughout North Mesopotamia, closely connected with functionality of clay compositions. Secondly, both decoration types and colours were results of a conscious choice – in their colour range and appearance.

A finely-levigated clay with fine to medium mineral inclusions and slipped decoration technique was used for making most serving vessels (plates, bowls, cups, jars). A variety of jars and pots were constructed using a variation of this clay, well-levigated with coarser grit and calcite inclusions. On these, decoration was rare and consisted of horizontal bands of blackish or reddish colour. A third ware included a combination of organic temper, coarse grit and calcite mixed into a coarsely levigated clay. Most large jars and large bowls were fashioned using this recipe.

The spread of technical knowledge can best be displayed through the vast evidence of so-called *rim-and-drip* slipped *echinus* bowls. *Echinus* bowls

themselves form a highly-standardised group of vessels. They are wheel-made, well-fired vessels of varying size and are classified by their incurving rims set on a simple bowl. The clay is finely levigated, with fine to medium fine grit inclusions, occasional minute voids sometimes interpreted as chaff remnants. In almost all cases, they are available in plain and slipped versions, whereas the clay body seldom varies. By dipping the vessels into the clay solution once leather hard, a dripping effect could be achieved, depending on how long and to which depth a vessel was submerged in the solution. The colours vary between reddish and buff in most cases, with outliers on both sides of the colour spectrum. This can occur during mass production, during which a tightly stacked kiln produces a range of temperatures and firing atmospheres, creating a variation in production. Since the firing temperatures were likely set slightly above the minimum range for hard fired pottery – in this case referring to the structural change – any deviation can lead to stark contrasts in colour. This result does not lessen the quality *per se* since surface colour is determined by the last thirty minutes of firing.

#### 3.3 Slips, decorations and colours

Surface colours thus produced are considered a feature of Seleucid period ceramics. Often appearing in a deteriorated range from black to red, these have been largely and unambiguously placed into the Seleucid period.<sup>21</sup> Elisabeth Katzy pointed out the chronological significance of colour choice in the Ḥabūr Region. During the early fourth – third century BC slips were predominantly black, while the following centuries witness ubiquitous red slips.<sup>22</sup> The hypothesis that the development of black glossy slips in Athens (Attic Black Gloss tradition) subsequently ‘deteriorated’ to include reddish gradients, has been much discussed in analogy to a technical decline into less elaborate and uncontrolled firing.<sup>23</sup> Accounting for geological and

<sup>20</sup> In general WILKINSON, TUCKER 1995 and KATZY 2015; Hatra (VENCO RICCIARDI 2008); Khirbet Khatuniyeh (MCKENZIE 1997); Khirbet Hatara (VENCO RICCIARDI 1997); Nimrud (OATES 1958, 2005); Tell Deir Situn (CURTIS ET AL. 1987); Tell Mohammed ‘Arab (ROAF 1983, 1984b); Tell Thuwajj (NUMOTO 1996); Tell Fisna (NUMOTO 1986, 1988); Tell Jigan (FUJII 1986/1987a, 1986/1987b); Tell Jessary (EXPEDITION 1986/1987).

<sup>21</sup> DORNA METZGER 1996; KATZY 2015, p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> KATZY 2015, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> JONES 1950, p. 153; KATZY 2015, p. 62; OATES 2005, pp. 122-123; WAAGÉ 1948, p. 15; WINTER 1959, p. 33



physical properties places these developments into a different light – taking regional preference and tradition into account.

The spectrum of colour is closely linked to a tradition set in the Middle Bronze Age, when the application of coloured bands ranging from blacks/dark browns to reds/dark browns are well known from the so called *Habūr-Ware*.<sup>24</sup> A more restricted use of red bands is well attested in the Iron Age during the Neo Assyrian period, occasionally appearing on jars and rhyta.<sup>25</sup>

A second development refers to the colour application and its specific translucent characteristics. As both Jones (1950) and later Dorna-Metzger (1996) suggested, an earlier thick slip made way to a less adhesive and more translucent or ‘deteriorated’ type. This development could relate to clay solutions of the available regional clay (sediments carried by the Tigris) which possesses low adhesive properties.<sup>26</sup> As such, its use was both limited by its physical properties, and these in turn had led to a tradition which took these peculiarities into account.

### 3.4 Assemblages

Although Seleucid period evidence is recorded for a substantial number of excavated sites (fig. 1), ceramics were published for only a select few (tab. 1). In some cases, cross referencing offers a glimpse into the repertoire. Based on these records, three types of assemblages are distinguished: an ‘international style’, ‘local style a’ and ‘local style b’.<sup>27</sup> These are differentiated based on the co-occurrence of different shapes. The ‘international style’<sup>28</sup> includes ca-

<sup>24</sup> FUJII 1986/1987a, p. 38, Fig. 6.71-75, p. 46, Fig. 9.8, 20, 21, 22; p. 65, Fig. 5.A.4, 5, 6, 8; p. 71, Fig. 4.1, 3, 4, 5, 8; GAVAGNIN, IAMONI, PALERMO 2016; PALERMO 2016.

<sup>25</sup> CURTIS, GREEN 1986/1987, p. 75, fig. 3.3, p. 76, pl. 4; 1997; KREPPNER 2006.

<sup>26</sup> DORNA METZGER 1996, p. 363; JONES 1950, p. 153; KATZY 2015, pp. 62, 162.

<sup>27</sup> International Style (IntS) (fig. 2); Local Style A (LS A) (fig. 3); Local Style B (LS B) (fig. 4).

<sup>28</sup> ‘International’ refers to several shapes of this assemblage, which are common in many regions when referring to the Seleucid Empire. It is not an indication of a common consumption horizon, as they vary in size and function within their associated assemblages.

rinated bowls, everted rim bowls and incurving rim bowls, produced with thin walls (0.2-0.4 cm); and folded-rim-jars. ‘Local style a’ assemblages comprise of ‘Neo-Assyrian Style’ carinated bowls and beakers (0.4-0.65 cm), and folded-rim-jars (restricted and wide restricted types; 1cm) as a core; and can include large incurving rim bowls (0.4-0.65 cm). Both quantity and ratio of *rim-and-drip* slips and stamp decoration are minute or inexistent. ‘Local style b’ includes rolled-rim plates, ‘international style’ carinated bowls (0.2-0.4 cm), large incurving rim bowls, hemispherical bowls, ‘Neo Assyrian Style’ beakers (0.4-0.65 cm) and folded-rim-jars (restricted and wide restricted; 1cm).

## 4. Contextualising assemblages

To contextualise the occurrence of different assemblages within the area, four site aspects are investigated: location, type, occupation continuity and dating.

### 4.1 Site locations

Broadly speaking, the area is divided by the Tigris; sites are distributed along both banks mostly communicating within their region, while seasonal communication between the banks is proposed at modern Eski-Mosul.<sup>29</sup> Of these, eleven sites are located on the western bank, eight on the eastern bank (tab. 2). In general, ‘Local Styles’ appear on sites further removed from the Tigris. ‘International style’ is attested at three sites per bank close to the Tigris itself. Sites on the eastern bank have ‘Local Style’ assemblages both type ‘a and b’.

### 4.2 Site type

Three site types are discernible from the excavation data. Economic centres with large silo capacities and wall foundations; domestic/residential sites, often include a *tannur* and wall foundations; and agrarian sites with (storage) pits, often interpreted

<sup>29</sup> CURTIS 2016, pp. 103-104.

TABLE 1  
Excavated Sites with Seleucid levels in Northern Iraq

'International Style'	'Local Style A'	'Local Style B'	Unknown ceramics
Khirbet Karhasan	Siyana Ulya	Tell Deir Situn	Khirbet Shireena
Tell Abu Dhahir	Tell Shelgiyya	Khirbet Khatuniyeh	Gir Matbakh
Grai Darki	Tell Fisna		Tell Hamad Āga as-Saġir
Tell Jelluqeh	Khirbet Hatara		Tell Rijm Omar Dalle
Tell Thuwaiji	Hatra		Tell Jigan
Tell Mohammed 'Arab			Tell Jessary

TABLE 2  
Distribution of Seleucid sites along the Tigris River

West Bank	Site Type	East Bank	Site Type
Siyana Ulya	N/A	Tell Deir Situn	Economic
Tell Shelgiyya	Domestic	Tell Mohammed 'Arab	Agrarian
Khirbet Shireena	Domestic	Grai Darki	Agrarian
Gir Matbakh	Domestic	Khirbet Khatuniyeh	Domestic
Khirbet Kharhasan	N/A	Tell Fisna	Domestic/Agrarian
Tell Abu Dhahir	Economic	Tell Jigan	Domestic/Agrarian
Tell Hamad Āga as-Saġir	N/A	Tell Jelluqeh	N/A
Tell Rijm Omar Dalle	Cemetery	Khirbet Hatara	Economic
Tell Jessary	Domestic		
Tell Thuwaiji	Agrarian		
Hatra	Economic		

as grain silos. The general theme of a rural landscape of farmsteads distributed across the fertile areas of the region was suggested.<sup>30</sup>

*Economic centres:* Both banks of the Tigris revealed economic centres with structures capable of storing large quantities of produce, Tell Abu Dhahir on the western bank, and Tell Deir Situn on the eastern bank. Accounts of the ceramics at Tell Abu Dhahir assist its evaluation as international style assemblage, despite lack of publication; while Tell Deir Situn belongs to the 'Local Style B', based on the available fine wares.

*Domestic sites:* Wall footings and *tannur* installations, indicators of domestic sites, were excavated at Khirbet Hatara, Khirbet Khatuniyeh, Tell Fisna, Tell Jigan, Tell Jessary, Tell Shelgiyya, Tell Shireena and Gir Matbakh. Of these, ceramics were published from Khirbet Hatara, Khirbet Khatuniyeh and Tell Fisna; their assemblages were of 'Local Style a and b'.

*Agrarian sites:* Pits as sole or dominant architectural features on sites are classified as agrarian, this separates them from domestic sites that also feature pits in addition to stone foundations. These include Tell Thuwaiji, Tell Mohammed 'Arab and Grai Darki; all sites have 'International Style' assemblages.

<sup>30</sup> GREEN 1999; SIMPSON 2007, p. 98.

Based on this differentiation, site types matched specific assemblages: ‘International Style’ assemblages occur at economic centres and agrarian sites; ‘Local Style’ assemblages are predominantly found at mixed domestic/agrarian sites.

#### 4.3 Site Continuity

Among 19 Seleucid period sites, new foundations, successive occupation, and re-occupation following a hiatus can be distinguished (tab. 3, 4). New foundations are rare in the region, continuous settlement is particularly evident on the western Tigris bank, and re-occupation was common on both river banks.

*New foundations:* Three sites were newly occupied in the second century BC. Hatra (LS A) in the Jezirah; Tell Deir Situn (LS B) and Grai Darki (IntS) inland of the Tigris’ east bank. Each assemblage type is represented.

*Successive occupation:* Eight sites were already occupied during the Iron Age and either Neo-Assyrian or ‘post-Assyrian’ ceramics and building remains were found. Continuous occupation is predominantly attested on the western Tigris bank at both larger and smaller IA sites. On the eastern Tigris bank, successive occupation occurred only on larger IA sites. Ceramic assemblages of all sites on the western bank are of ‘International Style’. East bank sites have both types of ‘Local Style’ assemblages.

*Re-occupation:* Eight sites were re-occupied predominantly revisiting MBA sites. Records only attest occupation without further information in nearly all cases. The remaining sites have ‘International Style’ and ‘Local Style A’ assemblages. The only known eastern bank assemblage is of the latter type.

Occupation type based on location partly impacted the assemblage type. Assemblages on new occupations within the eastern bank region featured internationalised assemblages, while re-

note Hatra remained local. Among successively occupied sites the Tigris bank formed a division of ‘Local Style’ eastern sites, and ‘International Style’ western sites.

#### 4.4 Site Dating

Considering assemblage compositions and the available numismatic evidence a broad chronological division is proposed. The *temenos* trench at Hatra is contemporary with Nimrud Level 6 broadly around 240 BC. This lowers the date from the fourth century BC, drawn from an Attic import; but based on the assemblage composition and ratio of bowls to jars, it fits between Kharabeh Shattani and Khirbet Hatara.<sup>31</sup> The absence of slip wares, which are introduced at Nimrud in Level 5 (ca. 220 BC), mark the lower dating threshold. Nimrud Level 4 (ca. 180 BC), Khirbet Hatara Level 9c, Tell Deir Situn ‘Phase 3’, Tell Mohammed ‘Arab and Khirbet Khatuniyeh are proposed as contemporary. Their assemblages represent all three types; this indicates no direct chronological differentiation of these assemblages as a rule. Nimrud Level 3 was interpreted as a continuation of Level 4 and not encountered in all areas at Nimrud; but Tell Deir Situn ‘Phase 4’ is possibly contemporary. A significant shift in the assemblage composition is visible between Nimrud Level 4-3 and Level 2, where an inverse ratio of open and closed vessels types is noticeable. Nimrud Level 2 (ca. 145 BC) should correspond to the ‘Hellenistic Pits’ at Tell Thuwajji, Level 2 at Tell Fisna and Khirbet Hatara Level 9b.

Should this chronological order prove to be correct, different types of assemblages co-occur during the Seleucid period within the region based on available published data. This in turn suggests that the assemblages are not chronologically distinctive.

<sup>31</sup> VENCO RICCIARDI 2008, p. 148.



TABLE 3  
Settlement continuity on the Tigris (east bank)

Site name	Neo Assyrian	Post-Assyrian	Seleucid
Khribet Khatuniyeh	X	X	X
Qasrij Cliff	X		
Khirbet Qasrij		X	
Rownak	X	X	
Khirbet Aqar Babira	X		
Khirbet Hatara	X		X
Tell Jigan/Tell Jikan	X		X
Tell Baqaq 2	X		
Faida	X		
Satu Qala		X	
Tell Jelluqeh			X
Tell Fisna			X
Tell Mohammed 'Arab			X
Grai Darki			X
Tell Deir Situn			X

TABLE 4  
Settlement continuity on the Tigris (west bank)

Site name	Neo Assyrian	Post-Assyrian	Seleucid
Tell Rijm Omar Dalle	X	(X)	X
Tell Selal	X		
Tell Dhuwajj/Thuwajj	X		X
Tell Sheikh Homsy	X		
Khirbet Karhasan	X		X
Tell Abu Dhahir	X		X
Khirbet Shireena	X		X
Gir Marbakh			X
Siyana Ulya			X
Tell Shelgiyya	X		X
Tell Hamad Āga as-Saġir			X
Hatra			X
Tell Jessary			X

## 5. Tying the strings

### 5.1 A Dynamic Landscape

Following the investigation of the four parameters, a few patterns become visible:

- a) the impact of local traditions increases in areas further removed from the Tigris, and generally towards the east;
- b) site types are closely connected with assemblage types: 'International Style' assemblages appear at economic centres and agrarian sites; 'Local Styles' relate to domestic/agrarian mixed sites;
- c) successive occupation on eastern bank sites impact assemblages, promoting 'Local Style';
- d) the different assemblage groups are not chronologically significant.

The earliest settled Seleucid period sites known in North Iraq are Hatra and Nimrud, both outside the investigated area. Despite a likely new foundation during the period, ceramics at Hatra are 'Local Style A', showing strong ties to Iron Age shapes; Neo Assyrian and Achaemenid. At Nimrud, a possibly impoverished settlement occupies the vestiges of a former Neo Assyrian capital, continuous but much reduced.<sup>32</sup> The development of the ceramic assemblages during the Seleucid period, suggest integration of new vessel types to derivatives of Iron Age types.<sup>33</sup> The Numismatic evidence suggests an inclusion into a monetary network prior to any impact via commodity exchange (e.g. small finds). Two new types, a carinated bowl and the incurving rim bowl are included into an existing ceramic assemblage. Incurving rim bowls apparently functionally replace many of the Neo-Assyrian bowl variations, carinated bowls possibly replace cups as vessels for liquids, and unrestricted bowl types. This may be emphasised by the assemblage at Hatra, where drinking vessels and hemispherical bowls co-occur with restricted and semi-restricted jars.

<sup>32</sup> LINES 1954; OATES 2005, 1959; PALERMO 2016, p. 277

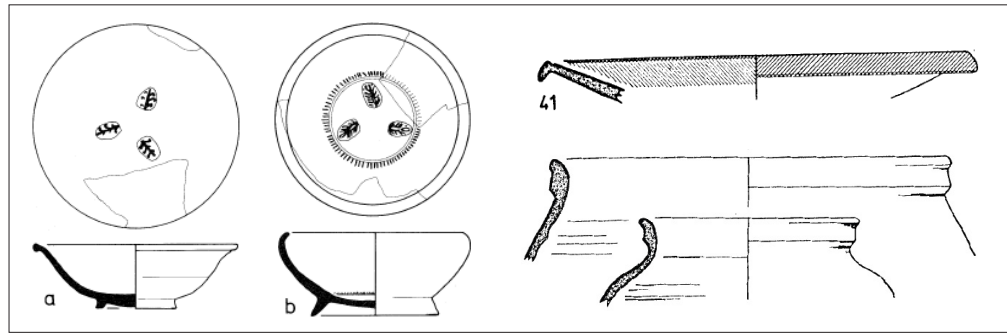
<sup>33</sup> OATES 2005.

Khirbet Khatuniyeh represents a domestic/agrarian site of continuous occupation on the eastern Tigris bank, where the entire ceramic corpus was published. Of the 77 sherds, only six pieces are known 'international style' pieces (7.78%): one incurving rim bowl, two carinated rim bowls, and three double-folded-rim jars; two more pieces are regional versions of a Seleucid period deep rolled rim plate (10,38%). The predominance of Iron Age styled bowls and beakers far exceeds any of the 'new types', which supplement the general assemblage. Two bowls and two beakers have painted horizontal stripes; the rolled rim plate is slipped. Storage jars range in their restrictions (11-14 cm; 18-24 cm) and appear balanced at 13 vessels per size range. Medium and large sized bowls are around ten per size range; and five beakers complete the assemblage. In comparison to the much larger Neo-Assyrian assemblage, less diversity in bowl and beaker types, and quantity, and larger diameters of storage vessels are discernible, yet direct links remain visible in all vessel types.

Likewise, at Khirbet Hatara the Level 9c assemblage remains indistinct to 'international shapes'; the following Level 9b incorporates incurved rim bowls of medium and large sizes, which replace restricted carinated bowl types. This becomes clear in Level 9a, where Iron Age type beaked rim bowls reappear and replace incurving rim bowls. At the same time, large sized storage jars increase in numbers and are accompanied by the introduction of large basins in Levels 9a-b.

The influence of site function on ceramic assemblages can be demonstrated at Tell Fisna. Although it is considered a large domestic/agrarian mixed type site, the only published material comes from the Japanese excavations of storage pits. The approximately 46 published fragments fall into only two major categories: incurving rim bowls and double-folded-rim jars. Deep plates (4), beakers (4) and large bowls (3) complement the assemblage. Tell Fisna suggests, that essential to agrarian sites are medium to large incurving rim bowls and medium to large storage jars, while it includes, what is possibly a standard second century assemblage: beaker, deep plate, bowl, basin and storage jar.

FIGURE 2  
International Style



1	Red ware; white grit	D: 11 cm	ROAF 1984a, fig. 3a
2	Red ware; white grit	D: 13.5 cm	ROAF 1984a, fig. 3b
3	Orange ware; white grit; some mica	D: 22 cm	ROAF 1983, fig. 6.41
4	Red ware; fine white grit temper	D: 24 cm	ROAF 1983, fig. 6.33
5	Reddish ware; very fine white grit temper	D: 14 cm	ROAF 1983, fig. 6.26

I have proposed Tell Deir Situn as an economic centre on the eastern bank. It is a new foundation with a partly excavated large scale building. The phase 3 common ware included «jars, bowls and so-called “fish-plates”». <sup>34</sup> The published fine wares show that rolled rim plates were considered fish plates, which at this point must be refuted. As an economic hub, and possible extraction or collection point of agricultural resources, both bowls and jars reaffirm the findings at Tell Fisna, and apart from rolled rim plates, the assemblages are identical.

To summarise, Seleucid period assemblages can be broken down into a set of four parts: a beaker, bowl, basin, and storage jar. Together they form a functionally coherent unit but are not reliant on specific shapes. Some functions referring to beakers or basin can be fulfilled by other vessel types, often by hemispherical or incurving rim bowls, which range in size from 16-26 cm in diameter.

## 5.2 State production

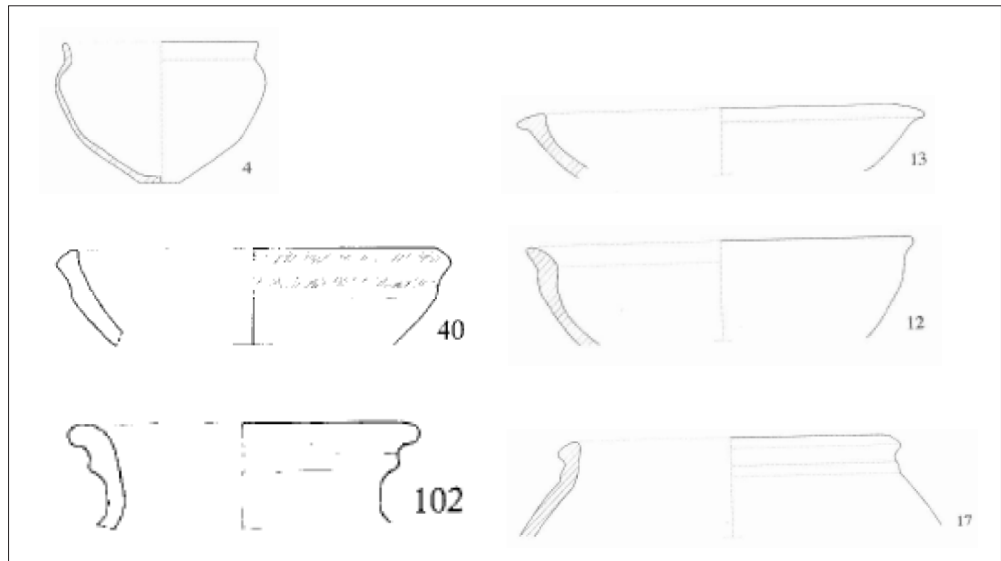
Little is known of the preceding Achaemenid reign over North Mesopotamia. <sup>35</sup> This lacuna makes no exemption in terms of material culture. Identifying Achaemenid ceramics proves more difficult in this region – sprouting both theories explaining lack of settlements and theories of ceramic continuity with subtle changes. <sup>36</sup> Going further back in time does not necessarily allow a better assessment of this ‘hiatus’ but instead offers a clearer picture of an established ceramic tradition. During the Early Iron Age, the development and expansion of the Neo Assyrian empire was accompanied by a strong standardisation of ceramic containers that penetrated multiple social strata. While an absolute uniformity of technology and shape was primarily achieved in the state’s capitals and provincial administrative

<sup>34</sup> CURTIS ET AL. 1987, p. 52.

<sup>35</sup> CHIOCCHETTI 2008; CURTIS 2003, 2005, 2016; KREPPNER 2008; KUHR T 1995; LINES 1954; OATES 1959; ZEVIT 2009.

<sup>36</sup> HANNESTAD 1983; WILKINSON, TUCKER 1995.

FIGURE 3  
Local Style A



1	Light grey-green ware; fine sand	D: 10.4 cm	VENCO RICCIARDI 2008, fig. 6a.4
2	Pink ware; medium sand	D: 22 cm	VENCO RICCIARDI 2008, fig. 6b.13
3	Reddish brown ware; medium fine organic	D: 17cm	VENCO RICCIARDI 1997, fig. 3.40
4	Pink ware; medium sand	D: 20 cm	VENCO RICCIARDI 2008, fig. 6b.12
5	Reddish brown ware; medium fine mineral	D: 13,5 cm	VENCO RICCIARDI 1997, fig. 8.102
6	Brown ware; medium sand	D: 21 cm	VENCO RICCIARDI 2008, fig. 6b.17

centres, subtle alterations were visible among those places likely more removed from the strongholds of ‘state agency’.<sup>37</sup> Visibility of these alterations may vary, most can be detected in technological (surface treatment, firing temperature and clay composition) or morphological (vessel shapes) terms. Although deportation strategies employed by the Neo Assyrian kings following military campaigns to the Levant led to a mixed population in the Assyrian heartland, these alterations might represent broader regional differences rather than significant cultural differentiation, but could also be events of a

manual vote or sign of resistance.<sup>38</sup> But a simplistic impregnation of any cultural individuation or unique cultural trait should be rejected as these ceramics were most likely connected to a phenomenon one could term *ikeanisation*,<sup>39</sup> both in production intensity and distribution.<sup>40</sup> The distribution of these ceramic vessels more likely represents the extent to which the Neo Assyrian state or ideology spread or permeated consumption habits in the quotidian sphere. In

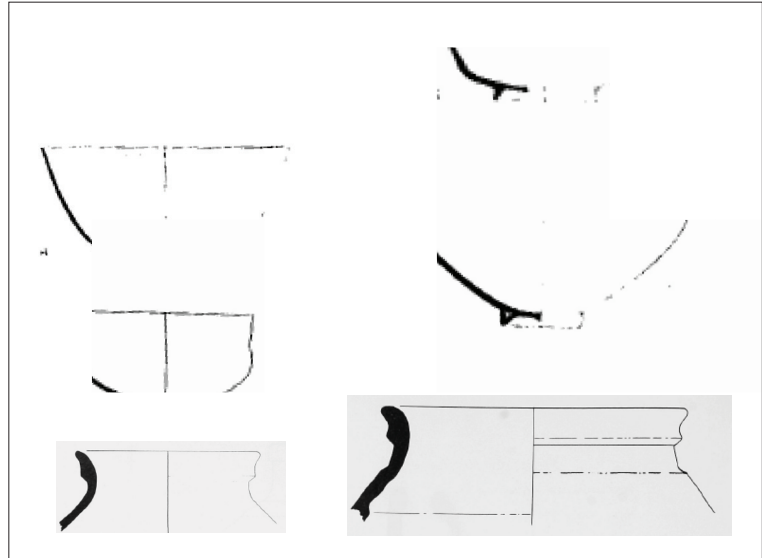
<sup>38</sup> SCOTT 1990, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> I suggest ‘ikeanisation’ as analogy to the widespread impact of IKEA products in western everyday life both meeting and producing demand of a developing aesthetic of product and price, transcending national boundaries and individual identities.

<sup>40</sup> KREPPNER 2015.

<sup>37</sup> RADNER ET AL. 2016; RADNER, KREPPNER, SQUITIERI 2016.

FIGURE 4  
Local Style B



1	Grit temper	D: 22 cm	CURTIS, GREEN AND KNIGHT 1987, fig. 3.5
2	Grit temper	D: 12 cm	CURTIS, GREEN AND KNIGHT 1987, fig. 3.9
3	Grit temper	D: 20 cm	CURTIS, GREEN AND KNIGHT 1987, fig. 3.14
4	Grit temper	D: 18.5 cm	CURTIS, GREEN AND KNIGHT 1987, fig. 3.13
5	Grit temper	D: 12 cm	CURTIS, GREEN AND KNIGHT 1987, fig. 3.1
6	Reddish yellow ware; fine calcareous	D: 13 cm	CURTIS AND GREEN 1997, fig. 63.450
7	Light red ware; sandy	D: 18 cm	CURTIS AND GREEN 1997, fig. 63.452

this sense, the development of a ceramic corpus transitioning from a state production into a regional tradition during the succeeding Achaemenid period is met by a different, supra-regional production horizon at latest in the Seleucid period.

### 5.3 A colonial encounter?

The identification of three different assemblage compositions allows a differentiated assessment of Seleucid political impact on the region in economic terms. Based on the numismatic evidence and cross-correlation of technological features and assemblage compositions a regional chronologic development is

proposed. A primary chronological differentiation leads to a more sequential site development, with settlements in the early second century BC, perhaps connected with interests of Antiochus III (222-187 BC) in the east, and a burst of settlements established around the mid-second century BC, prior to the region falling under Arsacid suzerainty.<sup>41</sup> These settlements were integrated into different economic systems, the western bank and immediate Tigris regions implementing ‘international style’ vessels, possibly through established trade routes also enabling continuous site use, while the eastern bank relied on local production networks as part of an increas-

<sup>41</sup> CURTIS 2000, p. 11; HAUSER 1994, p. 477; OATES 1958, p. 137.



ing self-reliance. On the eastern banks of the Tigris, populations were forced to move with decreasing exploitability of former well irrigated semi-artificial farmland. The irrigation systems installed under the Neo-Assyrian Empire were no longer pursued and the dependency of the former agricultural prosperity on this system impacted the available arable areas.<sup>42</sup> The parallel development of these two regions already started during the Iron Age, when two isolated settlement systems developed on the banks of the Tigris, each side vested with an economic centre, industrial centre, and farmsteads or smaller agrarian villages. As such, the model superficially continued to exist into the Seleucid period, the drastic changes in the landscape led to a decentralised, semi-autonomous region of likely small farmsteads and villages.

And while the Seleucid empire left its marks, it likely did not colonise the region. I would argue, the degree of change in consumption of the area to have been low. Lacking a strong base for the development of new practice is reflected in the limited evidence of ceramic forms attested. The emulation of foreign shapes into known and adequate container sizes, and the small sizes of hubs wherein a concentration of 'non-local' cultural material accumulated, hints at a limited integration of the region into the Seleucid Empire – in terms of exchange networks and consumption habits. Instead it may have indirectly structured it through permeating technological changes and the extraction of agrarian products, perhaps to the south via the Tigris or west using the road network.

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<sup>42</sup> BONACOSSO 2016, 2018a, 2018b; FALES, DEL FABBRO 2014.

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