HCECR-MAIKI Joint Study of the Ceramic Materials from the Erbil Citadel

By

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In 2015 the High Commission For Erbil Citadel Revitalization (HCECR) and the Italian Archaeological Mission In Iraqi Kurdistan of Sapienza University of Rome (MAIKI) signed and agreement for a joint study of the ceramic material from the Erbil Citadel Excavation.
The Erbil Citadel is an archaeological site located in the centre of the modern city of Erbil, capital of the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq.

The site, inscribed in June 2014 in the UNESCO World Heritage list, consists in a *tell* about 32 meter high with a top surface of almost 15 hectares and an archaeological stratigraphy of almost 24 meters.

The buildings visible on the top of the Citadel are mostly dated to the Ottoman period but the data collected so far seem to confirm an anthropic occupation of this area at least from the 4th millennium BC.
In 2015 the High Commission For Erbil Citadel Revitalization and the Italian Archaeological Mission In Iraqi Kurdistan signed an agreement for a Joint study of the ceramic material from the Erbil Citadel Excavation.
From December 2015 to August 2017 four campaign of the HCECR – MAIKI joint study of the ceramic materials have been carried out.

During the project four members of MAIKI, Dr. Luca Colliva, co-director of MAIKI, Marco Galuppi, Serenella Mancini and Aila Santi, worked together with the HCECR staff members Sangar Mohammed Abdullah, Chinar Faris Mohammed and Hezha Zayar Mohammed with the supervision of Dara al-Yaqoobi, Head of the HCECR.
The Ceramic material was collected during four excavation campaigns carried out by HCECR with the supervising of John MacGinnis and Mary Shepperson.

The stratigraphic data, provided by HCECR, were compared with those obtained from the study of the ceramic material in order to verify and update, when needed, the chronology proposed for the identified phases.

The study of the ceramic material also gave the possibility of investigate commercial connections, suggested by the presence in the corpus of some wares from both the Iranian plateau and the Syrian territories.

At the same time we had the possibility to identify some interesting local productions.
We present a survey of the materials from area E, near the north gate of the Citadel.

In this sector, the excavations brought to light the remains of an imposing multi phase perimeter wall.
On the basis of the material and stratigraphic data, we identified eight different phases, almost coincident with the phases proposed by John McGinnis and the HCECR team at the end of the excavation.

Here we present the main stratigraphic units for each phase and the most significant materials up to now identified.
## Phase 8 and Phase 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7</th>
<th><strong>Arsacid Period? (with some Islamic Intruder)</strong></th>
<th>SU 161</th>
<th>Siliceous paste&lt;br&gt;Monochrome glazed ware</th>
<th><strong>12th-13th century AD</strong>&lt;br&gt;Arsacid Period?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td></td>
<td>SSU 145</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8b</td>
<td></td>
<td>SSU 164</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SSU 155</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In Phase 8b we have only two mud brick walls corresponding to the oldest identified remains of the perimeter wall of the Citadel. No material is associated with these layers and we have no direct data for its chronological attribution.

Phase 8a, corresponds for us to a repair or reconstruction of the Perimeter wall. Also for Phase 8a we have no material associated with this layer.
On the contrary, the accumulation layer assigned to Phase 7 yielded some interesting materials.

A fragment of siliceous paste with monochrome turquoise glaze visibly altered, provisionally dated between the 12th and the 13th century AD, is most likely an intruder, probably connected with a pit.

Perhaps more significant are two small fragments of glazed monochrome ware. The presence of these two fragments, together with the dating of the materials found in the subsequent Phase, allow us to tentatively propose for Phase 7 an Arsacid period chronology.
Siliceous paste
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **6a**  | **SASANIAN OR ISLAMIC PERIOD (?)** | **SU 143** | Moulded ware  
Monochrome glazed ware  
Impressed ware  
Fishplate with red slip | 10th-13th century AD  
“Sasanian period” ??  
4th-1st century BC |
|         | **SU 141** | Underglazed painted ware | 12th-14th century AD? |
|         | **SU 153** | Opaque Monochrome glazed ware | 11th-13th century AD |
| **6b**  | **ARSACID OR SASANIAN PERIOD? (WITH SOME ISLAMIC INTRUDER)** | **SU 142** | Siliceous paste  
Monochrome glazed ware  
Semicircular grip  
Egg shell | 12th-13th century AD  
-  
4th-9th century AD |
|         | **SU 160** | Fishplate  
Slip ware | 4th-1st century BC |
|         | **SU 162** |  |  |
|         | **SSU 148** |  |  |
|         | **SSU 147** |  |  |
|         | **SU 154** | Monochrome glazed ware  
Basin with two grooves on the rim  
Brittle ware  
Fishplate  
Lachrymatory  
Phiale | -  
Hellenist or Arsacid  
1st-10th century AD  
4th-1st century BC  
4th-1st century BC  
4th-1st century BC |
Ceramic material from phase 6b, suggests a dating to the Arsacid or Sasanian period, as indicated by fishplates, monochrome glazed ware, *lachrymatory*, *phiale* and fragments with Semicircular grip.
Semicircular grip
## Phase 6

### 6a  
**SASANIAN OR ISLAMIC PERIOD (?)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SU</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| SU 143 | Moulded ware  
Monochrome glazed ware  
Impressed ware  
Fishplate with red slip | 10th-13th century AD -  
"Sasanian period" ??  
4th-1st century BC |
| SU 141 | Underglazed painted ware | 12th-14th century AD? |
| SU 153 | Opaque Monochrome glazed ware | 11th-13th century AD |

### 6b  
**ARSACID OR SASANIAN PERIOD ?  
(WITH SOME ISLAMIC INTRUDER)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SU</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| SU 142 | Siliceous paste  
Monochrome glazed ware  
Semicircular grip  
Egg shell | 12th-13th century AD -  
4th-9th century AD |
| SU 160 | Fishplate  
Slip ware | 4th-1st century BC |
| SU 162 | | |
| SSU 148 | | |
| SSU 147 | | |
| SU 154 | Monochrome glazed ware  
Basin with two grooves on the rim  
Brittle ware  
Fishplate  
Lachrymatory  
Phiale | -  
Hellenist or Arsacid  
1st-10th century AD  
4th-1st century BC |

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Phase 6a, on the contrary, is quite problematic and appears to be connected to a late Sasanian or Islamic horizon.

We know that the C14 analysis made on samples from layer SU 141-153, a layer of ash possibly connected with a destruction or large fire and spread over the entire area outside the perimeter wall, gave a dating around the 1st century AD, but the presence of sasanian sherds and the increasing number of Islamic sherds and monochrome turquoise glazed wares, even opaque, suggest a later dating.

Noteworthy is the underglazed painted earthenware sherd. This production appears to be an imitation of underglazed painted ware in siliceous paste and we can suggest for it a dating between 13th-14th centuries.
Opaque Monochrome glazed ware
Underglazed painted ware
Starting from these layers, the corpus includes an increasing number of relief moulded wares with different decorations.

They are all dated between the 10th and the 13th century AD.
Moulded ware
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>TERMINUS POST QUEM: 12TH-13TH CENTURY AD</th>
<th>SSU 119</th>
<th>Moulded ware</th>
<th>10th-13th century AD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SSU 150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SSU 158?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SU 152</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SU 136</td>
<td>Siliceous paste Sgraffiato monochrome ware Monochrome Turquoise</td>
<td>12th-13th century AD 12th-13th century AD “Early Islamic”?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The presence of siliceous paste, moulded ware and Sgraffiato monochrome ware suggests for Phase 5 a dating between the 12th and 13th century AD.

No layers connected with the early Islamic period has been clearly identified and we cannot exclude that these layers have been completely removed, at least in this area, perhaps due to levelling actions.
Siliceous paste handle
Sgraffiato monochrome ware
Moulded ware
# Phase 4 and Phase 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4a</th>
<th>TERMINUS POST QUEM: 12TH-13TH CENTURY AD</th>
<th>SSU 018?</th>
<th>SSU 163?</th>
<th>SSU 017?</th>
<th>SSU 132</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4b</th>
<th>TERMINUS POST QUEM: 12TH-13TH CENTURY AD</th>
<th>SSU 133</th>
<th>SSU 134</th>
<th>SSU 137</th>
<th>SU 135</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Phase 4 is a structural phase that includes some minor structures, in detail the remains of a stairway against the wall 119.

Up to now no dating material has been identified in these layers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th><strong>UNCERTAIN TERMINUS POST QUEM:</strong> <strong>END OF THE 12TH-14TH CENTURY AD</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **SU 122** | Siliceous paste  
Sgraffiato monochrome ware  
Moulded ware | 11th-14th century AD  
12th-13th century AD  
10th-13th century AD |
| SSU 056? | Sgraffiato monochrome ware  
Moulded ware  
Splashed ware | 12th-13th century AD  
10th-13th century AD  
9th-10th century AD |
| **SU 126** | Siliceous paste  
Sgraffiato monochrome ware  
Moulded ware  
Splashed ware | 11th-14th century AD  
12th-13th century AD  
10th-13th century AD  
9th-10th century AD |
| **SU 127** | Siliceous paste  
Sgraffiato monochrome ware  
Moulded ware  
Splashed ware | 11th-14th century AD  
12th-13th century AD  
10th-13th century AD  
9th-10th century AD |
| SSU 093 | Ottoman pipe  
Champlevé  
Moulded ware  
Fishplate | Ottoman period  
12th-13th century AD  
10th-13th century AD  
4th-1st century BC |
| **SSU 016** | Lustre ware  
Siliceous paste  
Sgraffiato splashed ware  
Moulded ware | 12th-14th century AD  
11th-14th century AD  
11th-13th century AD  
10th-13th century AD |
| **SU 128** | Lustre ware  
Siliceous paste  
Unglazed earthenware with applied decoration  
Sgraffiato monochrome ware  
Sgraffiato splashed ware  
Moulded ware  
Splashed ware  
Semicircular grip  
Brittle ware | 12th-14th century AD  
11th-14th century AD  
13 th-14th cent. AD  
12th-13th century AD  
11th-13th century AD  
10th-13th century AD  
9th-10th century AD  
4th-9th century AD  
1st-10th century AD |
Phase 3 is much more rich and the ceramic materials suggest for this Phase a dating between the end of the 12th and the 14th century AD.
Lustre
Unglazed ware with applied decorations
# Phase 2 and Phase 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TERNMINUS POST QUEM: 12TH-14TH CENTURY AD</th>
<th>SU 115</th>
<th>SU 120</th>
<th>SSU 094</th>
<th>SSU 095</th>
<th>SU 121</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moulded ware</td>
<td>10th-13th century AD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bowl with inturned rim</td>
<td>4th-1st century BC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fritware</td>
<td>11th-14th century AD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moulded ware</td>
<td>10th-13th century AD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Splashed ware</td>
<td>9th-10th century AD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unglazed earthenware with applied decoration</td>
<td>13th-14th cent. AD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Splashed ware</td>
<td>9th-10th century AD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 2 and Phase 1 mostly show materials in secondary deposition, probably caused by levelling actions.

In particular for Phase 1, equivalent to Phase 3 identified by John MacGinnis, we support the dating from the 18th century AD he proposed. This dating is also confirmed by the presence of a large number of ottoman ceramic pipes.

The collection of ceramic pipes found on the Citadel is quite interesting and deserves a dedicated study that we hope to schedule for the next future.
In Phase 1, the presence in the same layers of Raqqa ware, dated to 12th-13th century AD, together with ottoman pipes; fishplates and bowl with inturned rims together with splashed ware and sgraffiato wares, both monochrome and Splashed; sasanian stamp ware together with Ottoman pipe, moulded wares and splashed ware confirm the secondary deposition of most of the material and the levelling activities already identified by MacGinnis.
Raqqa ware

Sasanian stamp ware
The presence in the layers of Phase 1 of a kiln peg and trivets used as spacers suggest the existence of a local production on the Citadel, but unfortunately, the nature of the layers do not permit any dating.
Trivet and Kiln peg
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- HCECR - High Commission For The Erbil Citadel Revitalization
- MAIKI - Missione Archeologica Italiana nel Kurdistan Iracheno
- Department of Classics, Sapienza University of Rome
- Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Development Cooperation
- Italian Embassy in Baghdad
- Italian Consulate of Erbil
- Istituto Internazionale di Cultura Kurda di Roma
- Dipartimento di Scienze, Sezione di Scienze Geologiche, Università degli Studi Roma Tre
- ASOR