

TELL ES-SWEYHAT

Thomas A. Holland

During this academic year, the pottery type series of forms was completed for the Bronze Age and for the Hellenistic and Roman periods of occupation at Tell Es-Sweyhat for inclusion in a forthcoming Oriental Institute Publication report. Although the pottery from the Bronze Age and the Hellenistic period has been previously reported upon in some detail (see *Levant* 8 and 9, 1976, 1977), an assessment of the Roman period remains has not been published.

The Roman occupation at Sweyhat was centered primarily on the lower and flatter surface of the southern side of the main Early Bronze Age mound in the region of the Area I trenches; building foundation stones also were *in situ* in the area to the north of Area I and also in Area XI to the northeast of Area I (see *Levant* 8, fig. 1). During the 1991 and 1992 seasons, a large 10 × 10 m square, labeled Operation 5, was excavated just to the north of Area I, Trench IA2 (see *News & Notes*, no. 134, 1992, fig. 1), which had at least three phases of Roman occupation overlying the mid-third millennium BC building that contained the wall paintings, which have already been discussed in previous annual reports. Even though no complete Roman buildings have thus far been excavated, a great deal of information is now available concerning the material remains and the dating of the Roman occupation at Sweyhat, particularly from the 1970s excavations conducted in Area I, Trenches IA1 and IA2 (fig. 1).

Trenches IA1 and 2 were two 5 × 5 m squares laid out parallel, west and east, to each other in Area I with a one half meter balk between them (fig. 1a–b); both trenches were only excavated to about 1 m in depth, but they revealed four major phases of occupation (see sections, fig. 1c–d) and Trench IA2 contained an Aramaic inscription (fig. 2a) as well as two Roman coins (fig. 2b–c), which offer valuable evidence for the dating of the Roman pottery assemblages at Sweyhat. The earliest phase of occupation, Phase I, represents the initial appearance of the Romans at Sweyhat and is most likely associated with a temporary camp set up before buildings were constructed for a more permanent settlement as the Roman pottery from this phase is mixed with Bronze Age pottery forms dated to the last quarter of the third millennium BC; this early phase of Roman occupation included an oven and re-

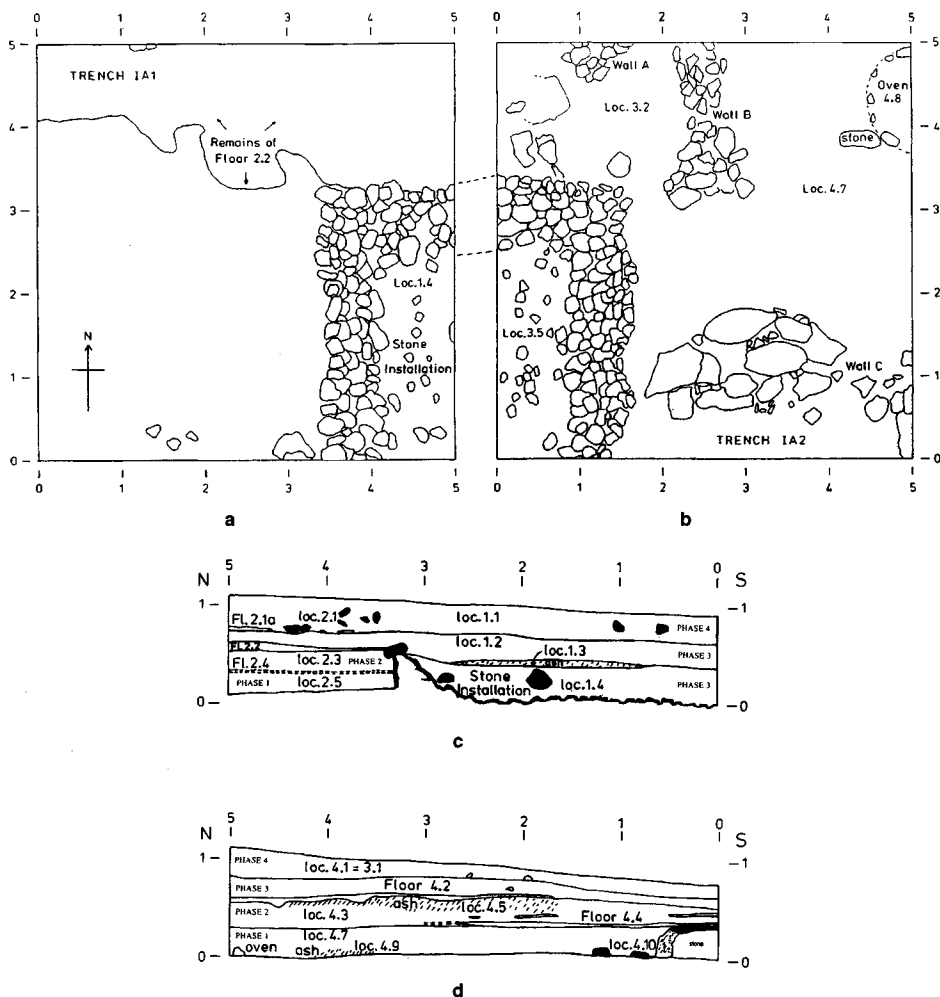


Figure 1. (a–b) Area I, Trenches A1 and A2 plans and (c–d) Trench IA1 east section and Trench IA2 east section. Tell es-Sweyhat. Scale in meters

mains of a rough stone-built Wall C, partially excavated in the northeastern corner of Trench IB and the southeastern quadrant of Trench IA2 (fig. 1b). More permanent occupation was established by Phase 2 with the appearance of plastered floors belonging to unexcavated structures in both Trenches IA1 and 2; they are Floor 2.4, partially excavated in the northeastern corner and west side of Trench IA1 and the remains of Floor 4.4, on the eastern side of Trench IA2 (see sections, fig. 1c–d). During Phase 3, a stone-built, pit-like installation approximately 4×4 m square was constructed for some unknown industrial purpose; it was associated with Floor 2.2 in Trench IA1 and with Floor 4.2 in Trench IA2 (see plan, fig. 1a–b and photograph in *Levant* 8, pl. 4B). Phase 4 had been heavily eroded, due to wash down the southern slope of the mound from the higher accumulation of occupation to the north above the basal Bronze Age mound and the Hellenistic occupation in Area II above

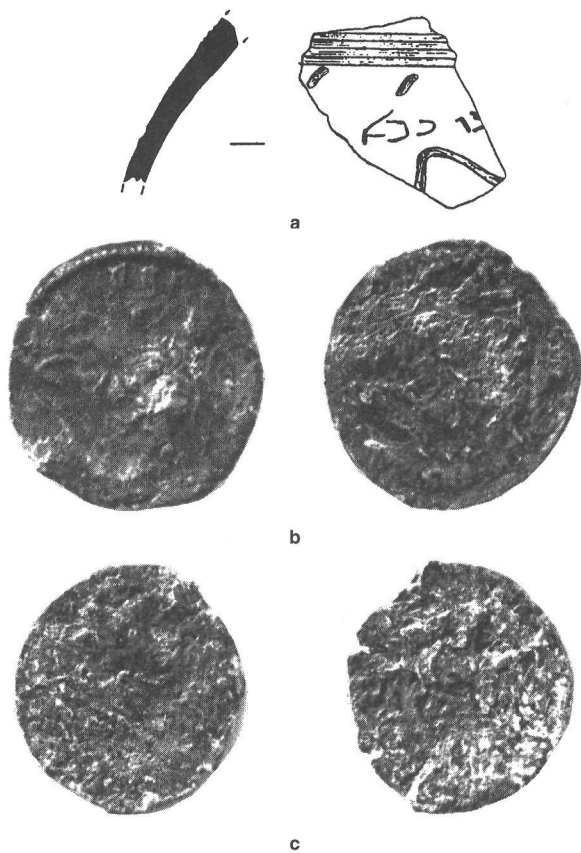


Figure 2. (a) Sherd with Aramaic inscription, scale ca. 2:5, and (b-c) Roman coins, scale ca. 2:1. Tell Es-Sweyhat

the basal mound. However, Phase 4 did contain traces of a plaster floor, Locus 2.1a and a collapse of wall stones, Locus 2.1, in Trench IA1; in Trench IA2, there were remains of stone wall foundations, Walls A and B, in the northern end of the trench (fig. 1b). Both trenches contained a large assemblage of Roman pottery forms belonging to Phase 4.

The earlier Roman occupation at Sweyhat, Phases 1 and 2 in Trenches IA1 and 2, is dated on the evidence from a jar sherd found on Floor 4.4, Phase 2, that had the remains of an Aramaic inscription incised on its shoulder (fig. 2a). This inscription was translated and dated by Professor J. B. Segal to about the first century AD and not much later than the second century AD (*Levant* 8, p. 38, photograph, pl. 8A). A selection of Roman pottery forms from Phase 2 in both Trenches IA1 and 2 is presented here in figure 3. This

pottery assemblage partly consisted of one miniature bowl (fig. 3:1), twelve bowls (fig. 3:2-13), two large jars (fig. 3:14-15), two holemouth-type storage jars (fig. 3:16-17), one handled-type jug (fig. 3:18), one cooking pot rim sherd (fig. 3:19), fragments of a bottle and lamp (fig. 3:20-21), and a jar shoulder sherd with incised decoration (fig. 3:22). Unfortunately, most of the bowl and jar forms are of the common ware, local Euphrates, type of vessels, for which there is little published comparable material. However, similar parallels exist for the holemouth jar, the cooking pot, and the lamp (fig. 3:17, 19, 21). The large holemouth-type storage jar from locus 2.3 is similar to a survey example from a site called Ech Chamel, located near the Nahr Sajour river, Site 94, on the upper Euphrates River north of Sweyhat (see de Contenson, fig. 18:14, in P. Sanlaville, ed., *Holocene Settlement in North Syria*, 1985). The brittle ware cooking pot, red-orange ware painted red inside and outside, from locus 4.3 (fig. 3:19), is comparable to examples from the Roman settlement at Ain Sinu in northern Iraq in the Castellum and the Barracks (see D. Oates, *Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq*, 1986, fig. 23:81) and from the site of Samaria in Palestine (see J. B. Hennessy, "Excavations at Samaria-

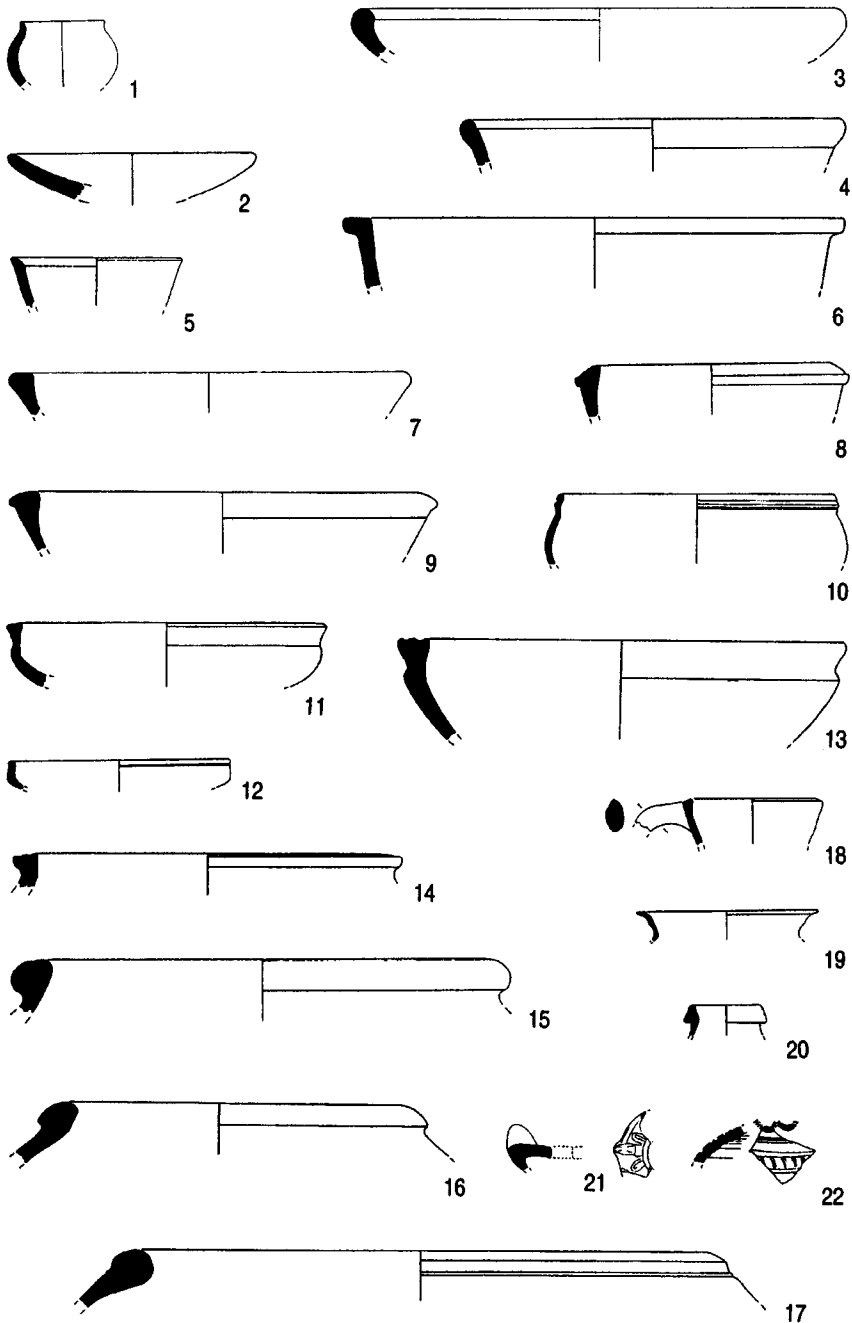


Figure 3. Phase 2 pottery. Tell Es-Sweyhat. Scale 1:5

Sebaste, 1968," *Levant* 2 [1970]:1-21, fig. 8:4). The lamp fragment (fig. 3:21) is a well known type known throughout the Roman Near East and compares, for example, to similar types at Tell Abou Danne in Syria (see R. Tefnin, "Les niveaux superieurs du Tell Abou Danne," *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 3/3 [1980]:109-68,

ARCHAEOLOGY

fig. 17:12) and to those found in the Mount of Olives Cemetery in Jerusalem (see P. B. Bagatti and J. T. Milik, *Gli Scavi del "Dominus Flevit" [Monte Oliveto — Gerusalemme] Parte I: La Necropoli del Periodo Romano*, 1958, fig. 25:17).

The later part of the Roman occupation at Sweyhat, Phases 3 and 4 in Trenches IA1 and 2, is dated on the epigraphic evidence provided by the two Roman coins that were found in the eastern side of the Phase 3 stone installation from Locus 3.3 (fig. 2b–c). The dating of these coins by Dr. Colin Kraay of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford University, was published in *Levant* 8 (1976), p. 38; his description of the coins was: "Coin SW.235 [fig. 2b here] is of Constans or Constantius II, minted ca. AD 350, and has the inscription 'Ry Fel Temp Reparatio (fallen horseman). Coin SW. 236 [fig. 2c here] seems to be Roman Imperial of the mid or later fourth century AD to judge from the head on the obverse. The reverse type is obscure."

A selection of pottery from Phase 3 is given in fig. 4, which includes another miniature bowl (fig. 4:1), two small shallow bowls (fig. 4:2–3), two wide bowls (fig. 4:4–5), three fairly high-necked storage jars (fig. 4:6–8), two holemouth jars (fig. 4:9–10), seven handled-type jugs (fig. 4:11–17), one cooking pot (fig. 4:18), and one example each of a bottle, lid, and base (fig. 4:19–21). The bowls and jugs are the best-known forms in the Phase 3 pottery assemblage. The simple shallow bowl with a slightly curved upright wall, locus 3.3 (fig. 4:3) is painted red inside and outside and is a successor to the Hellenistic red-slipped bowls, which are found in the Graeco-Roman levels on many other Near Eastern sites. The wide deep bowl with a slight ledge below the outside tip of the pointed rim, locus 1.3 (fig. 4:4) is a form known from Samaria (see G. M. Crowfoot, "Late Roman A, B, and C Ware," pp. 357–64 in J. W. Crowfoot, G. M. Crowfoot, and K. M. Kenyon, *The Objects from Samaria*, 1957, fig. 84:15) and also from Hammat Gader in Palestine (see R. Ben-Arieh, "The Roman, Byzantine and Umayyad Pottery," pp. 347–81 in Y. Hirschfeld et al., *The Roman Baths at Hammat Gader*, pl. 7:8). The jugs generally have two vertically-positioned loop handles, but in most excavated examples, only a portion of the jug neck was recovered with a portion of one handle extant; however, these jugs have good parallels at other sites. The jug with an upright neck and with its extant one handle situated well below the rim on the neck, locus 1.3 (fig. 4:11) is comparable to a two-handled example from Tell Bi'a, near modern day Raqqa south of Sweyhat on the Euphrates River (see S. Herbordt et al., "Ausgrabungen in Tall Bi'a 1981," *MDOG* 114 [1982]:79–101, fig. 5, bottom left). The jug with a concave ledge just below the inside lip of the rim, probably for the placement of a lid, from locus 3.4 inside the stone installation (fig. 4:12) is comparable to a Roman period 2a example from Samaria (see K. M. Kenyon, "Pottery: Hellenistic & Later," pp. 217–357 in *The Objects from Samaria*, 1957, fig. 70:3). The jug with a flat top rim thickened on the inside, locus 3.4 (fig. 4:16) is comparable to an example from the very large Hellenistic/Roman site of Dibsi Faraj, south of Sweyhat on the Euphrates (see R. P. Harper, "Athsi — Neocaesarea — Qasrin — Dibsi Faraj," pp. 327–48 in J.-Cl. Margueron, ed., *Le Moyen Euphrate, Zone de contacts et d'échanges*, 1980, fig. E:69). The tall-necked jug with a V-shaped groove on top of the rim, for securing a lid, from locus 1.2 (fig. 4:17) is a well-known form that occurs at Busra (see J. Wilson and M. Sa'd, "The Domestic Material Culture of Nabataean to Umayyad Period Busra," *Berytus* 32 (1984):35–147, no. 140), Hammat Gader (see Ben-Arieh

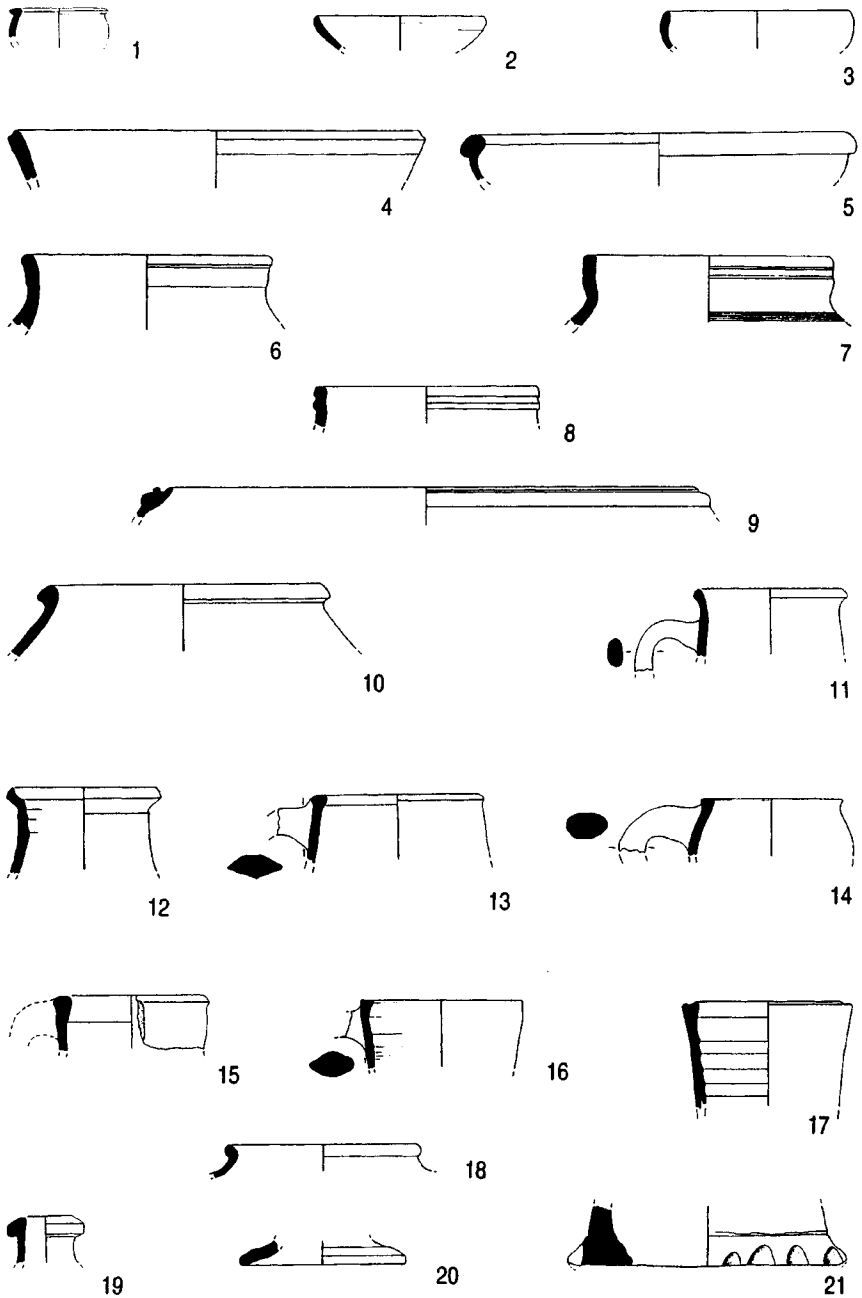


Figure 4. Phase 3 pottery. Tell Es-Sweyhat. Scale 1:5

1997 listed above, pl. 14:24), and in Turkey at Humeyli Höyük (see G. Algaze, R. Breuninger, and J. Knudstad, "The Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance Project: Final Report of the Birecik and Carchemish Dam Survey Areas," *Anatolica* 20 [1994]:1-96, fig. 31:J).

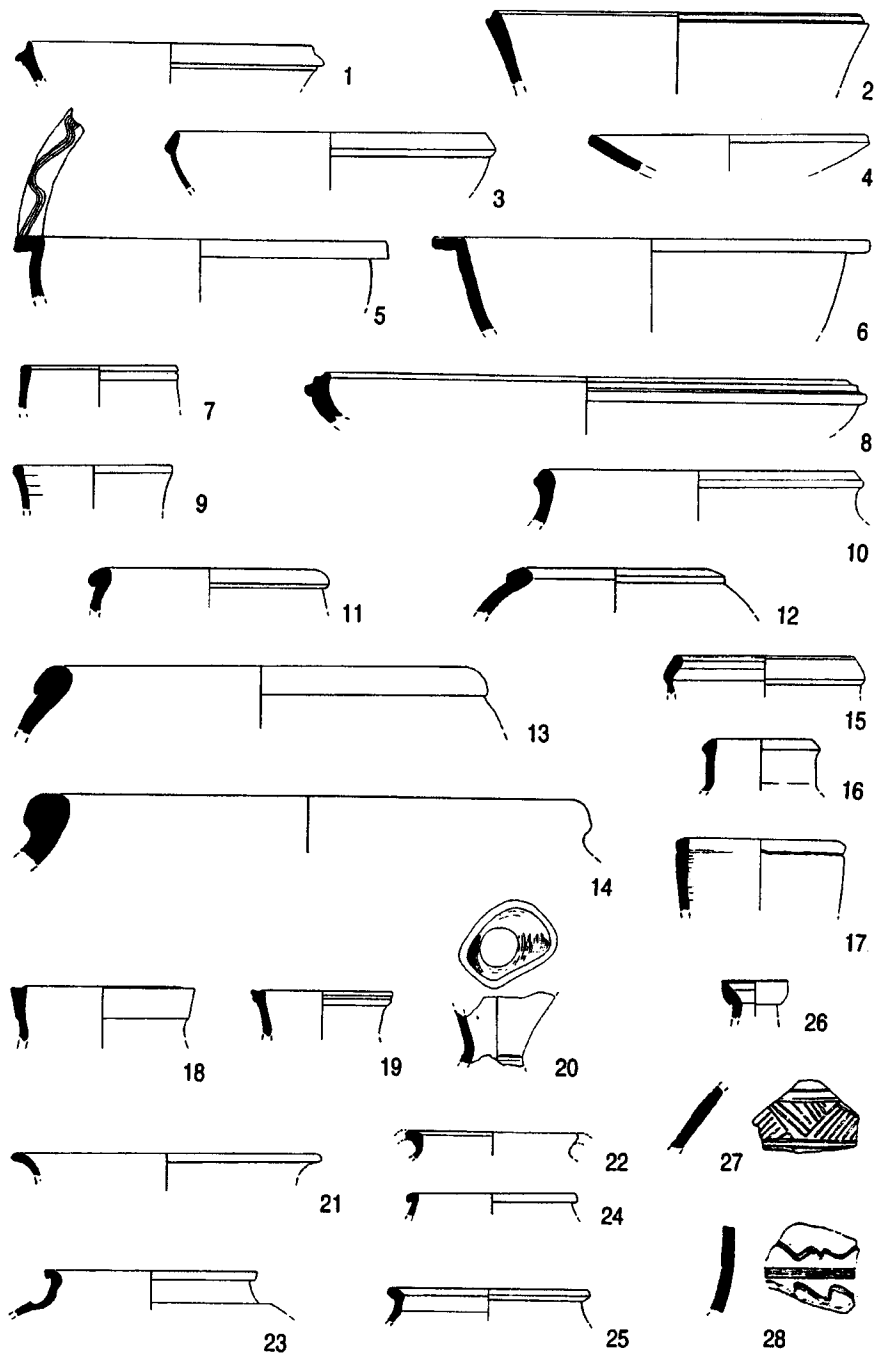


Figure 5. Phase 4. pottery. Tell Es-Sweyhat. Scale 1:5

The latest Roman pottery forms from Phase 4 in Trenches IA1 and 2 are illustrated in figure 5. The selection of Phase 4 pottery presented here includes eight bowls (fig. 5:1-8), two upright neck jars (fig. 5:9-10), three holemouth-type jars

(fig. 5:11–13), one large storage-type jar (fig. 5:14), six jugs (fig. 5:15–20), five cooking pots (fig. 5:21–25), one bottle (fig. 5:26), and two incised jar sherds (fig. 5:27–28). The deep bowl with a ledge below the outside of the rim from locus 3.1 (fig. 5:2) is similar to the example from Phase 3 (fig. 4:4); a variant of this bowl with a vertically-positioned wall was found in Jerusalem with the upper portion of a strap handle attached to the wall just below the rim (see A. D. Tushingham, *Excavations in Jerusalem 1961–1967* [1985], fig. 49:14). The fairly deep bowl with an inturned collar-type rim with red slip on its outside wall from locus 2.1 (fig. 5:3) is similar to examples from Jerusalem Site T and Hammat Gadar (see Tushingham 1985, cited above, fig. 81:41 and Ben-Arieh 1997, cited above, pl. 7:14). The wide and deep bowls with their rims folded horizontally on the outside are decorated on the flattened top of the rim with either a combed wavy line pattern (fig. 5:5) or with parallel circular lines (fig. 5:6). The bowl with the parallel circular line decoration on top of the rim from locus 4.1 (fig. 5:6) is Hayes' Form 58, Type B (see J. W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, 1972, fig. 14, 90:b); it is very similar to an example from Hama which has a fairly high pedestal-type base (see A. P. Christensen, R. Thomsen, and G. Ploug, *Hama Fouilles et Recherches 1931–1938, III 3. The Graeco-Roman Objects of Clay, The Coins and the Necropolis*, 1978, fig. 4:j). The wide bowl with a diagonally positioned ribbed collar-like rim from locus 3.2 (fig. 5:8) is similar in form to a Cypriot Red Slip Ware bowl from Jerusalem (see Tushingham 1985, cited above, fig. 65:2). The holemouth jar with a thick flat collar-type rim from locus 4.1 (fig. 5:12) is similar to a more complete example from a Roman phase in Sweyhat Trench IB, which has one extant broad vertical loop handle at the base of the shoulder with a deep U-shaped groove manufactured on the outside middle of the oval-shaped handle; these handled holemouth jars compare with an example found in the Balikh Valley Survey (see F. A. Gerritsen, "Hellenistic and Roman-Parthian Pottery from the Balikh Valley, Northern Syria," pp. 93–108 in *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen Uit Het Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden Te Leiden* 76 [1996], fig. 7:73). The jug with the rim turned diagonally inside of the neck from locus 3.1 (fig. 5:15) has a parallel in Period II at Kurban Höyük in Turkey (see G. Algaze, ed., *Town and Country in Southeastern Anatolia, Vol. II: The Stratigraphic Sequence at Kurban Höyük* [1990], pl. 141:B).

The only small finds associated with the Roman pottery assemblages in Trenches IA1 and 2 were one iron pin fragment from locus 4.3, Phase 2 in Trench IA2 and two iron nail fragments from loci 2.3 and 2.4a, Phase 2 in Trench IA1. A large amount of Roman pottery was recovered from the upper three phases in Operation 5 as well as from the other unpublished trenches in Area I, along with more numerous small finds, which will be published at a later time.

At the present time, we may conclude that there were at least four phases of Roman occupation at Tell Sweyhat, which are divided into an earlier period (Phases 1–2) and a somewhat later period (Phases 3–4) on the epigraphic evidence provided by the Aramaic inscription on the pottery jar sherd and the two Roman coins that are discussed above. The earlier period would, therefore, apparently date to first or second century AD and the later period to between about AD 350 to 400. Further study of the remaining unpublished Roman strata from the other Area I trenches may help in providing more information on the Roman pottery assemblages at Sweyhat.