

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Excavation of an eighteenth-century ship wrecked in the Red Sea provides a tightly-dated assemblage of ceramics intended for the Muslim market that includes imported blue and white Chinese porcelain (Ward 2000, 2001), storage ware and galley ware (Sharma 2003), and a group of containers made of similar fabric and recognized as cargo by their number and position in the vessel. This thesis is concerned with this latter group that consists mostly of water jars called *qulal*, *qulla* singular, in Arabic (Figure 1) and a few miscellaneous shapes in the same fabric. This study provides the first extensive catalog and publication of qulal from the historic period.

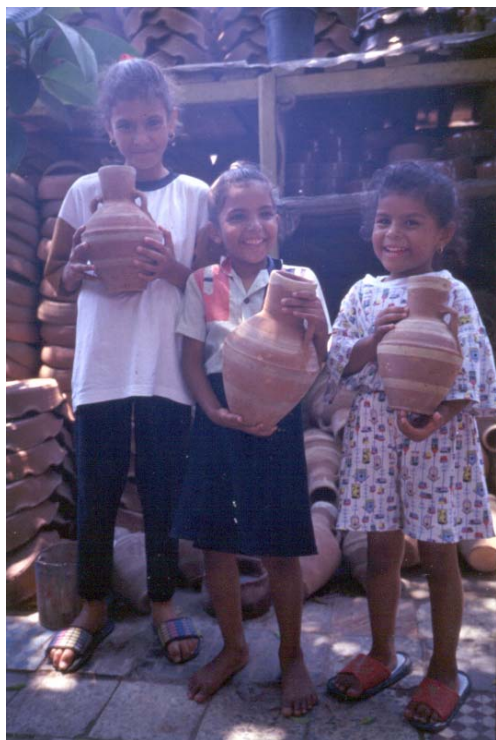


Figure 1. Qulal are used today in Egypt (left), and in the past, as the Sadana Island examples (right) indicate. (Photographs courtesy C. Ward)

The Middle East has drawn the attention of archaeologists and historians for centuries, and the “Cradle of Civilization” was for a long time the sole focus of classical archaeologists and historians. Indeed, European and North American culture, often referred to as the “Western Tradition,” was built on connections to Biblical, Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Roman ideals of art,

law, and philosophy, and, as a result, a large corpus of knowledge exists concerning these civilizations. As the focus of modern archaeology has expanded, cultures and civilizations of the more recent past have become targets of intensive study; examples of this interest may be found by perusing current trends in historical archaeology in the United States and post-medieval archaeology in Europe.

Archaeologists and historians have begun to turn their interest toward the more recent past of the Middle East, especially in Islamic culture. These studies have been hampered by a number of factors. First, the focus of archaeology on the classical past of Greece, Rome and the Biblical cultures, such as Egypt, Assyria, and Mesopotamia, has meant Islamic sites and studies have been literally brushed aside in order to get to the burial chambers, temples, and cultural artifacts of those earlier Classical societies. Further, Western scholars, who study European expansion and globalization occurring during the final centuries of the Empire, look upon the six-hundred-year reign of the Ottoman Empire as a time of decline and decay, while current residents of the Middle East see the Ottoman period as a time of oppression and prefer to forget the near past, and instead look to the ancient past of the Bible for their roots (Baram and Carroll 2000:4-5). As a result, the Islamic culture, especially during the time of Ottoman rule spanning the period between the fourteenth century and the early twentieth century, is not as well understood as the classical cultures it followed (Carroll 2000; Silberman 2000). A six-century-sized piece of history should not be left out of the puzzle that is the modern Middle East. Here, perhaps as never before, the findings of archaeologists may help to forge understanding and offer insights for solving the dangerous and difficult issues currently found among the peoples of the Middle East.

Study of the Sadana Island shipwreck and the cargo it was transporting is an opportunity to add to understanding Ottoman-era shipping in the Red Sea. The Sadana Island shipwreck (Figure 2) was explored by Cheryl Ward during excavation seasons in 1995, 1996, and 1998 with the Institute of Nautical Archaeology Egypt and with the cooperation of the Egyptian authorities (Haldane 1996; Ward 2000, 2001). Four vessels of similar size and with similar cargo complements have been located in the northern Red Sea (Figure 2): one was excavated by Avner Raban at Sharm el-Sheikh (Raban 1971); a wreck near Hurgada consists of porcelain and similar earthenware finds; another similar mixed porcelain and earthenware cargo found north of Jeddah; and the Sadana Island shipwreck (Haldane 1996). Recently a new site located about 100

km north of Yanbo has yielded a similar group of artifacts, but these are not yet available for study (Cheryl Ward, personal communication 2005). Of these, the only accessible site with substantial hull remains is the Sadana Island shipwreck (Ward 2000:187-188).

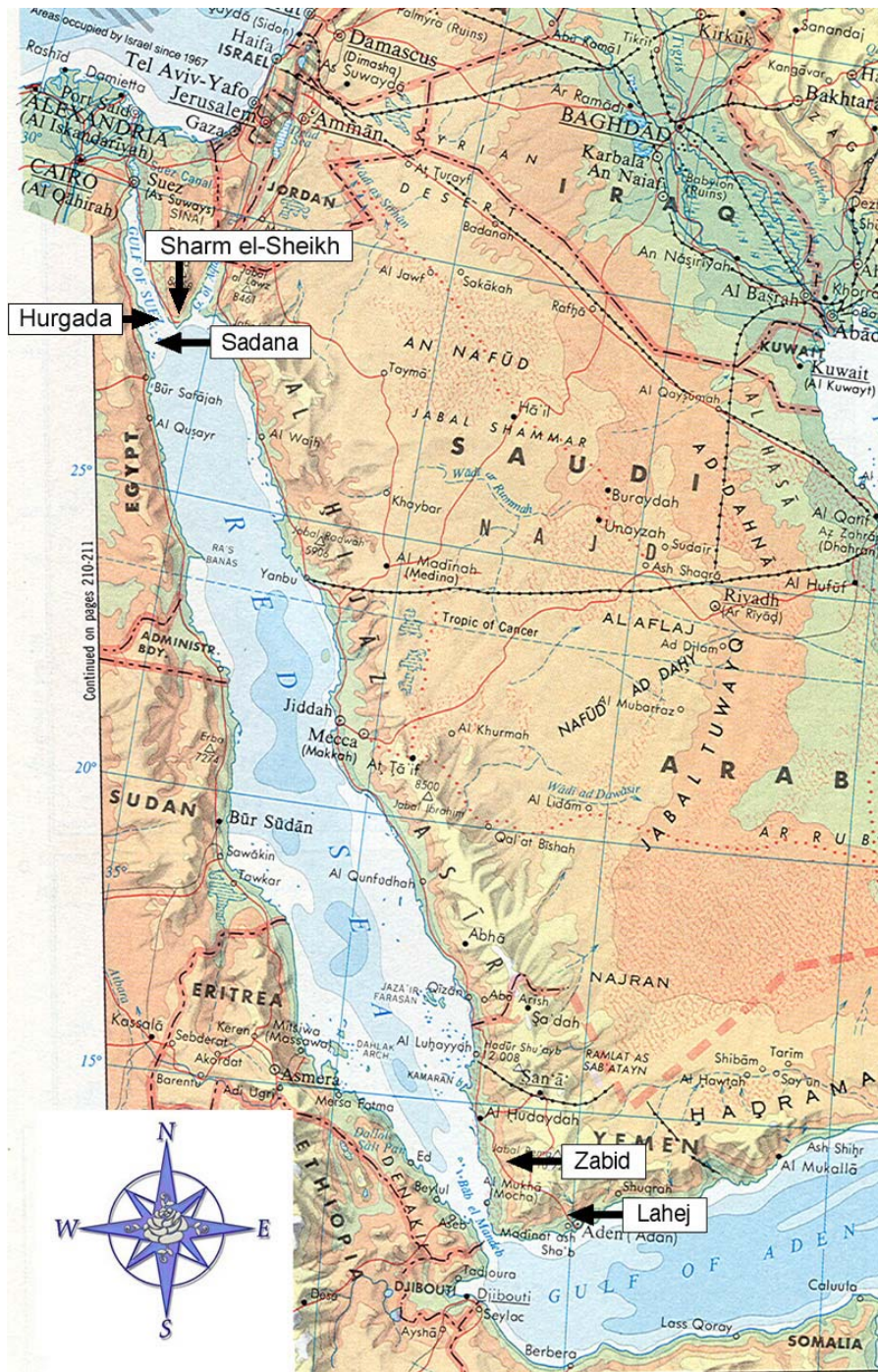


Figure 2. A map of the Red Sea indicating ports and sites. (Rand McNally 1995:182)

The site offers an opportunity to study an area of trade less well known than that of the Mediterranean to the north or the Arabian Sea to the south (Faroqhi 1984, 1986, 2000; Chittick 1984; Das Gupta 1967, 1994). The ship is dated to the mid-eighteenth century by a series of Arabic inscriptions on copper galley ware with the latest dates equivalent to 1764 CE (Ward 2000:186). Ward's study of associated artifacts, including Chinese export porcelain, Indian pepper, coconuts, spices, coffee, and incense, suggests that the ship was northbound, returning from a port south of the wreck site, a trade pattern documented for centuries (Raymond 1973, 2000). A lack of cannon and armament may imply that the ship was confined to routes in the Red Sea north of Jeddah, where the waters were relatively peaceful and free of pirates due to Ottoman control in the area. A study of personal effects recovered from the site suggests a Muslim crew (Ward 2000:187), as does another ceramic assemblage from the site. Other earthenware artifacts including storage ware, galley ware, and personal items were included in Mini Sharma's 2003 thesis entitled *Utilitarian Ceramic Ware from the Sadana Island Shipwreck, Egypt*. The ship itself is unusually constructed and has no documented comparable example, which hints that there is a missing link in our understanding of trade and shipping in the area (Ward 2000:185-188).

A sizable component of the cargo of the Sadana Island Shipwreck is a consignment of earthenware *qulal* (*qulla* singular) or water jars packed in horizontal layers in the ship's hold. More than 800 *qulal*, along with examples of knobbed lids that fit many of the *qulal*, were raised from the site and are now stored in the Alexandria Laboratory for Submerged Antiquities, Alexandria, Egypt (Ward 2000:185), while at least twice that many and, perhaps, many more, remain submerged *in situ*. The *qulal* are manufactured of similar fabric, gray-brown when wet and yellow-brown when dry, with many inclusions and fired to a relatively high temperature. The *qulal* are defined by a restricted orifice or opening of the vessel body. The restriction controls the rate of pouring and prevents unintentional sloshing. It is created by a long, thin neck topped with a small mouth or by the insertion of a perforated disk at the body/neck join. Most of the *qulal* are decorated with incised lines and applied plastic clay features (Ward 2000:193-195). The *qulal* were divided in the field into some 17 types designated by shape, size and decoration with dimensions consistent within types. Decoration spans a range from nearly plain or unadorned earthenware to extremely fanciful examples sporting numerous bands of differing incision patterns and applied plastic dots, points, and scallops.

Examples of qulal have been recovered from the c. 1740 Sharm el-Sheikh shipwreck (Raban 1971), the medieval site of Fustat in Egypt (Scanlon 1986), the late seventeenth-century Mombasa shipwreck off the coast of Kenya (Piercy 1981), and the new site north of Yanbo (Cheryl Ward, personal communication 2005), but there are no published typologies or focused studies of qulal as of yet.

The most thorough publication to date of artifacts similar to the Sadana Island qulal is Scanlon's 1986 catalog of perforated disks, which Scanlon calls 'filters,' from Fustat. Dating from c. A.D. 700 - 1500, 200 filters are included in the catalog. The word 'filter' was chosen by the Fustat excavators because they assumed the feature was intended to keep insects and debris out of the liquid in the jar. In my opinion, the perforations are too large to effectively prevent intrusion by small insects and particles of debris, while the discovery of lids in close association to the qulal recovered at Sadana Island suggests a much more effective way of protecting the contents of the vessels. Rather, I believe the purpose of the perforated disks is to restrict the orifice of the vessel in order to regulate the flow and spillage of liquid. The term 'perforated disk' describes the feature, not an ascribed role. The Fustat examples are intricately and often delicately carved, some with floral and animal motifs. Scanlon's focus is on the decorative aspects of the perforated disks and not on the function or form of the water jars from which they came. Perforated disks from qulal at Sadana Island are not as decorative for the most part, and are more roughly executed, perhaps because of degradation in technique over the centuries, mass production for trade, or a shift in cultural importance of qulal. Both the Fustat filters and the Sadana Island perforated disks are components of a common and everyday utility ware, qulal. It is unfortunate that the focus of the Fustat report on the decorative aspects of the filters inadvertently has the effect of separating them from their place inside water vessels that were, and are today, commonly used by households throughout the area.

The modern use of qulal include a wide range of examples, including this photograph of Moroccan tribesmen wrapping a large qulal in reeds to be stowed aboard Thor Heyerdahl's Ra II, an experimental reed boat (Figure 3). Today, a qulla costs about \$1.00 (Figure 4) and most families actively use at least five qulal at any one time. I assume that the relative cost of qulal during the eighteenth century would have been similar. The inclusion of such a large number of ordinary and relatively inexpensive vessels among a cargo containing luxury items such as Chinese porcelain, spices, and coffee is intriguing. While coffee was the main cargo of this

vessel, perhaps these jars were another basic cargo for this voyage: a ‘meat and potatoes’ commodity that could be counted on as a solid investment.



Figure 3. “Helpers wrap ceramic jars in reed jackets to prevent breakage on the voyage” [of Ra II]. (Heyerdahl 1971:47)



Figure 4. A collection of modern qulal with other vessel types at an open-air market. (Photograph courtesy C. Ward)

Archaeologists often identify coarseware and earthenware as local industries intended to meet the demands of local residents because of pottery's fragility and bulky nature. An exception to this is a popular ceramic known as Haysi ware, mass-produced for trade in the Red Sea area in the early twentieth century. Manufactured at Lahej near Aden, Yemen, and traded across the Red Sea to Djibouti and Berbera (Posey 1994:31), Haysi ware provides a modern example of long distance trade in low-cost, large volume ceramics that seems to reflect the same strategy as that used by the Sadana Island ship merchants.

While the trade in Hasi wares occurred nearly 200 years later than the Sadana Island shipwreck, it was nevertheless during a time before modern transportation and western influence had substantially altered the traditional trade routes and distribution methods of the area. This trade pattern for inexpensive earthenware jars may reflect past practice, and Yemen's historic ceramic industry, may, in fact, be closely linked to the Sadana Island shipwreck.

Niebuhr (1994) and Raymond (1984, 2000) describe historic evidence showing transport of coffee and imported wares from Yemen to Jeddah where they were transported to ships on the Suez route. I believe we should also consider whether another cargo should be added to the list of goods: qulal. Historically, several pottery workshop sites were located in Yemen near the coast of the Red Sea. Mason and Keall (1988) have established that Zabid, located north of the seaport of Mukha, was an active kiln site and home to several pottery workshops during the medieval era. Furthermore, Posey (1994:19) asserts that thriving Zabidi potters fanned out throughout Yemen and she points to examples of Zabidi-style pots made in Lahej, located near the seaport and trading center of Aden at the southern mouth of the Red Sea, to show the spread of pottery manufacture.

Next, Brouwer (1997:383-401) documents ports of call between Mukha and the northern Red Sea. He includes specific mention of the ports of Jeddah, Misr (an ancient word for Egypt), Cairo, Suez, and Alexandria as well as the broad category of "Above in the Red Sea" in an appendix, titled 'Shipping Movements,' to his book, *Al-Mukha: Profile of a Yemeni Seaport as Sketched by Servants of the Dutch East India Company (VOC)*. In a reproduction of the port records kept by the Dutch East India Company between 1614 and 1640, there are 22 instances of non-European ships listing Red Sea ports of call other than Aden and al-Mukha. Of these 22 entries only three list ports of call outside of the Red Sea, suggesting that ships did not as a rule ply both the Red Sea and the East Asian routes. Instead, a transfer of cargo occurred at ports at

or near the entrance to the Red Sea, such as Aden and al-Mukha, where travelers describe ports filled with ships from all corners of the Indian Ocean (Ward 2000:188). Local ships transported porcelain, coffee, fabrics, and spices further north. The range of cargo on the Sadana Island ship reflects the same trade patterns in effect more than a century later. The Sadana Island shipwreck may be logically considered a link in the trading network between India and the Far East, the Red Sea, and the eastern Mediterranean.

This thesis is devoted to examining, cataloguing, and explaining the qulal and miscellaneous vessels made from qulal fabric in the Sadana Island artifact assemblage. Chapter 2 explains the methods I employed to study the earthenware, including dividing the assemblage into categories based on form; reasons for considering the assemblage as a single unit; and how the earthenware relates to the shipwreck and society of the time. Chapter 3 describes the manufacture, form, and function of the artifacts. Chapter 4 presents the typology, based on form and function, and the analysis, including the basis for assigning individual artifacts to types, basic descriptions of Category types, pictures of individual type specimens, and tables summarizing type data. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a summary of the artifact analysis and attempts to draw conclusions about the assemblage based upon that analysis.