

Ayn Gharandal Archaeology Project

Pottery in A:5-5/6-5 in the 2019 AGAP Dig Season

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Site History

Since 2009, the Ayn Gharandal Archaeological Project (AGAP) has been excavating a Roman military site in the Wadi Arabah in southern Jordan. AGAP has uncovered a fort, bathhouse, early Christian church, and Islamic period burials. The foundation inscription found in the fort gate indicates the fort was founded in the early 4th century CE, and pottery at the site suggests the structures were used throughout the 4th century and then largely abandoned. The site was eventually reused as an Islamic-period burial ground in the 12th century CE. The 2019 season focused on excavating two rooms that were used in the church complex – Squares A:4-3/7-6 and A:5-5/6-5 (Fig. 1). The pottery of A:5-5/6-5 was the focus of the research presented below.

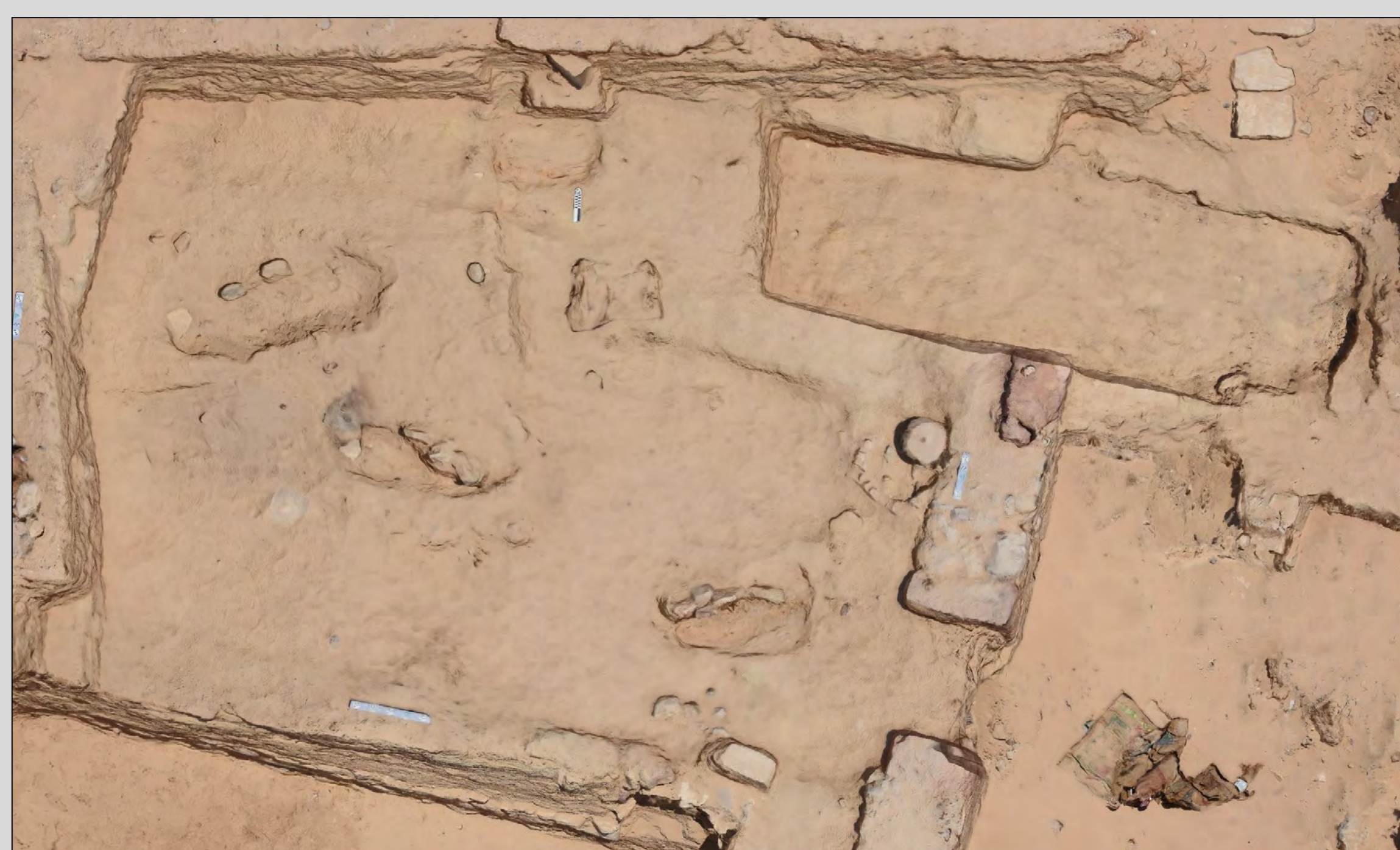


Figure 1 : Photogrammetric orthomosaic of A:5-5/6-5 on 7-23-19, facing North

Goals

AGAP research objectives include:

- Learning about the Roman through early Islamic periods at the site
- Preserving the site and the finds collected from the site for both the people in Wadi Arabah region and for future study
- Analyzing and publishing materials collected from the site

Methods

Pottery collection in square A:5-5/6-5 consisted of excavating a locus and placing pottery into baskets labeled by area, locus, and basket. Pottery was recovered through both excavation and through sifting excavated soil. Once the pottery was collected, it was brought to the AGAP laboratory for analysis to determine its date, fabric, and origin. After this analysis, diagnostic pieces were tagged and kept, while body sherds, or unidentifiable pieces, were generally recorded and returned to the site.

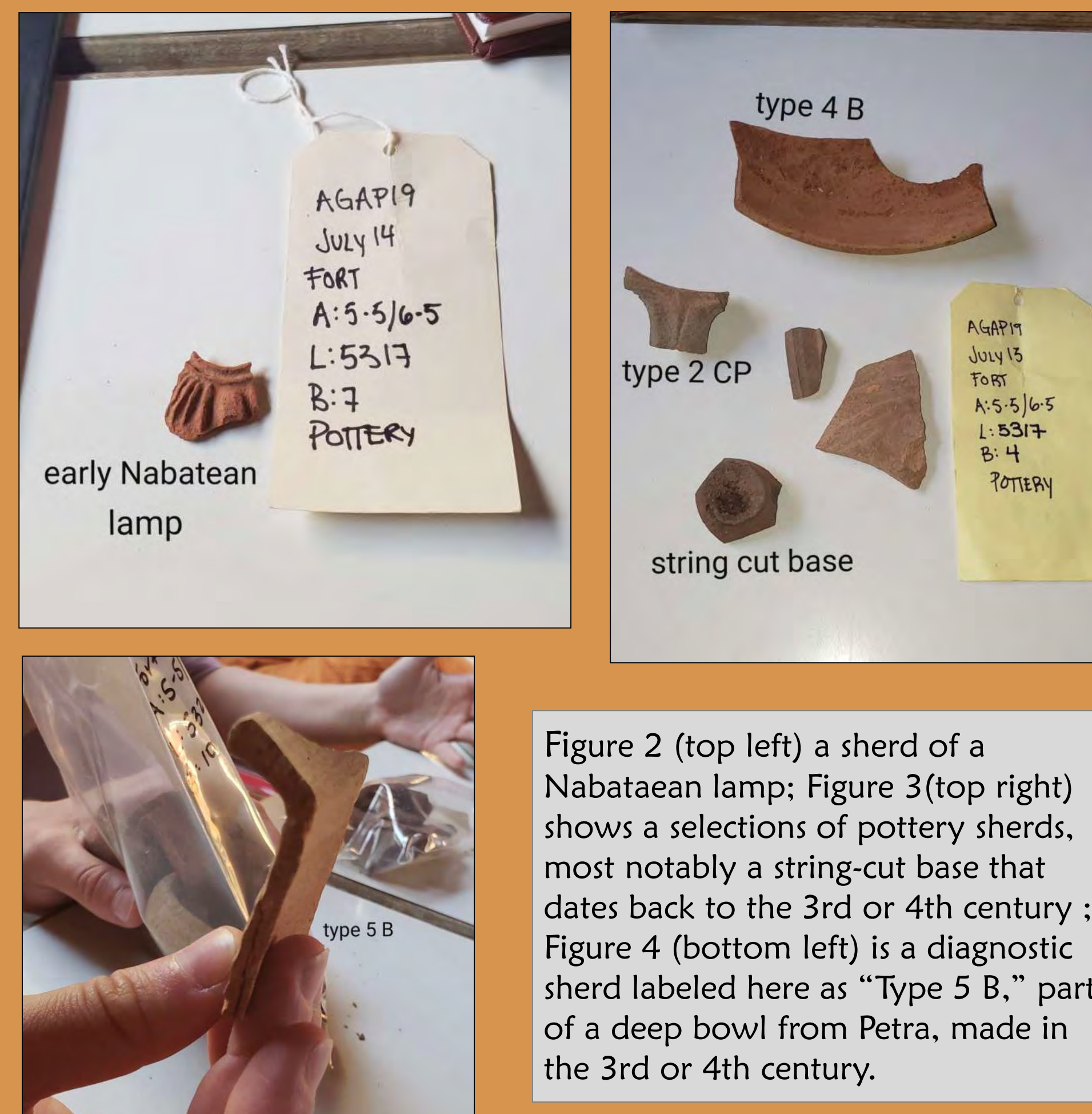


Figure 2 (top left) a sherd of a Nabataean lamp; Figure 3 (top right) shows a selection of pottery sherds, most notably a string-cut base that dates back to the 3rd or 4th century; Figure 4 (bottom left) is a diagnostic sherd labeled here as "Type 5 B," part of a deep bowl from Petra, made in the 3rd or 4th century.

Results

Pottery Statistics for A:5-5/6-5 in the 2019 dig season (Figs 2-4):

- 514 total sherds found
- 306 saved sherds
- 441 coarse wares from Aila, Petra, Karak
- 12 Nabataean fine wares
- 117 sherds from Aila
- 325 sherds from Petra
- 35 amphorae sherds (13 Gaza, 9 Egyptian)

Analysis

Date: The majority of pottery at the site dates to the 4th century with some earlier pieces present. Even loci at relatively high elevations tend to contain 4th century pottery. For example, Locus 5321 was a mudbrick collapse. Within this locus, there was a significant amount of Gaza sherds and 4th century ribbed amphora. Because this locus resulted from mudbrick collapse of the fort's walls, it is likely that the pottery originated with the construction of the mudbrick walls and reflects the period during which the fort was built rather than the period of its collapse.

Typology: Other loci contained interesting finds as well, including an ash pit filled with Egyptian amphorae and a locus containing a 3rd-4th century amphorae handle. Excavation this season also produced a number of oil lamp fragments (ex., Fig. 2) as well as fragments of bricks and tubuli.

Trade: Pottery at the site demonstrates that 'Ayn Gharandal was connected via overland trade with other important centers in the region and trade routes, like the N-S trade route originating at Aila on the Red Sea and the E-W route between Petra (Fig. 4), in the highlands to the E of 'Ayn Gharandal, and Gaza, which lies on the Mediterranean coast (Fig 3).

Conclusions

The pottery in A:5-5/6-5 supports some preliminary conclusions. First, the pieces date anywhere between the 1st and 4th centuries CE. Because the Roman fort was not founded until the 4th century, this means that either some older pieces were still in use centuries later or they washed into the square afterward. Second, the pottery continues to date the primary period of occupation in the church to the 4th century. Third, the pottery also confirms that there were established and well-used trade routes from Petra to the Aila area, as well as trade with Egypt and Gaza.