



Marea 2008: Pottery from excavations

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MAREA 2008: POTTERY FROM EXCAVATIONS

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Abstract: The report treats on pottery finds from the shops in the southwest part of the basilica and from the nave. These are mostly tableware, including jugs, bowls, cooking pots, lids and amphorae (LRA 1 [=Kellia 164], LRA 4 from Gaza and some rare LRA 7). The ceramic material uncovered this season is diverse, yet in terms of design and materials it is consistent with local production. A few rare ceramics with stamped inscriptions have also been recorded, the more interesting pieces being two vessel fragments: one with an impressed depiction of a cross in the form of *crux gemmata*, and another with a partly preserved representation of Christ holding a cross.

Keywords: Marea, Christian basilica, amphorae, stamped pottery, *crux gemmata*

The ceramic material from excavations in the basilica of Marea in the 2008 season was diverse, but in terms of form and fabric it corresponded to known local production and the 6th to 8th century AD repertoire. All identifications by the present author have been based on Grzegorz Majcherek's published analyses of the pottery discovered at Marea during excavation seasons between 2000 and 2006 (Majcherek 2002; 2008; Szymańska, Babraj 2003: 47; 2004: 62).

Finds from excavations in the south-eastern corner of the basilica comprised many fragments of Egyptian Red Slip Ware, including plates and bowls dated to the mid 6th–7th century AD (Majcherek 2008: 121–122, Figs 1, 14, 18, 31, 32; Egloff 1977: vol. 1, 84–86, vol. 2, Pls 41:5–8, 42:2, 7–11), as well as a small amount of

skilfully made imported African Red Slip Ware fragments (Majcherek 2002: 60–61).

Among local products there were small jugs decorated with incised lines forming a herringbone pattern or horizontal bands (Majcherek 2008: 113–114; Rodziewicz 1998: 248).

Tableware made of Nile silt was light reddish in color owing to firing conditions. Some vessels within this group were coated with cream slip. Pottery of this type often carried painted decoration.

Deep bowls with everted rims, sometimes decorated on the outer rim with a black wavy line pattern and dots, constituted another numerous group (Majcherek 2008: 123, Figs 42, 43, 49).

Plain wares were usually made of Nile silt fired deep red with a thin black core. This category includes jugs, cooking pots,

lids, bowls and strainers. Large storage jars and amphorae are also included here (Egloff 1977: vol. 1, 1, 111, vol. 2, Pl. 22:1, 3, 4, 6, 10; Hayes, Harlaut 2001: 106, 108, Figs 31, 32, 58; Bavay *et alii* 2000: 55, Fig. 20).

Two storage jars were found *in situ*, sunk in the ground by the west wall in room 21, a unit adjacent to the southeastern corner of the basilica [Fig. 1; see also Fig. 12 on page 93]. These thick-walled vessels were made of dark red Nile silt with a black core visible in section (body walls were approximately 2.5 cm thick).

Finds from layers inside the basilica included numerous fragments of LRA 1 amphorae (Kellia 164) dated to the



Fig. 1. Close-up of storage jars sunk in the floor in room 21 (Photo P. Suszek)

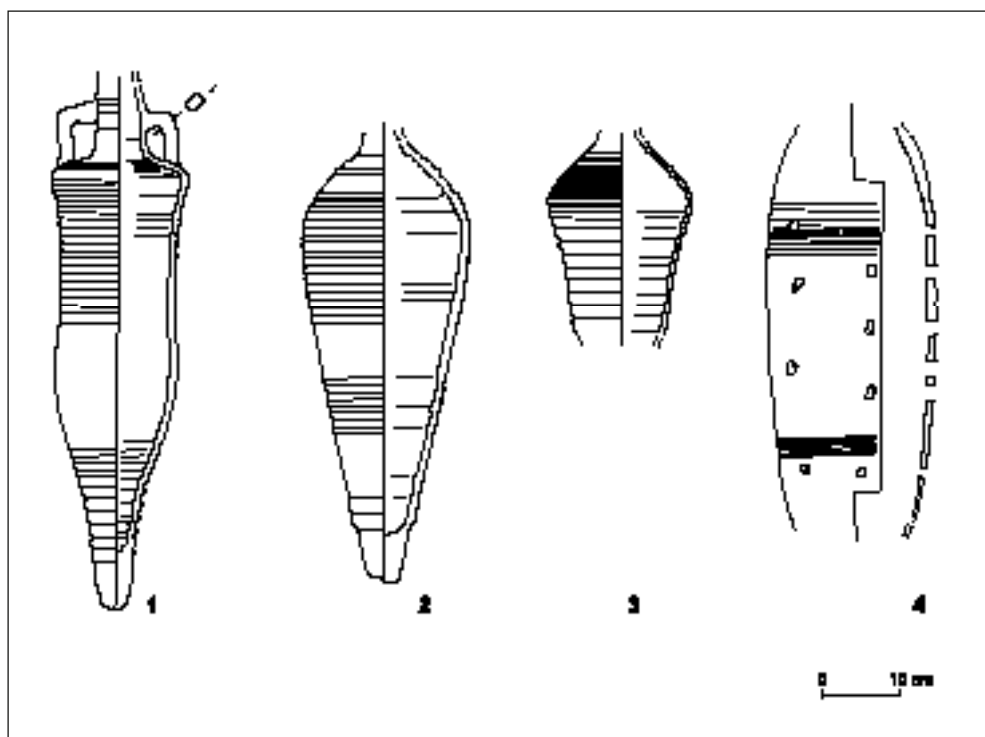


Fig. 2. Amphorae types: LRA 7 – 1, 2, 3; LRA 4 – 4 (Drawing A. Drzymuchowska, J. Michalska)

6th–7th centuries. However, the dominant amphora class is locally produced LRA 5/6 (Kellia, types 186, 187–190) and Kellia 167, dated to the 7th–8th centuries (Majcherek 2008: 116–119, 126–127, Figs 76–78, 86, 88, 89; Majcherek 1992: 101–113; Bavay *et alii* 2000: 57–60, Figs 25–28; Pieri 2007: 625, Fig. 15). Also frequent were the following amphora classes: LRA 4 and LRA 7 (Kellia, types 173–177), dated to the 6th–8th centuries AD (Egloff 1977: vol. 1, 113–116, vol. 2, Pls 58:6–8, 60:3; Bavay *et alii* 2000: 57–60, Figs 27, 28). Three specimens of LRA 7 (including one almost completely preserved) were found on the grate of a small bread oven in room 18, outside the southwestern corner of the basilica [Figs 2:1, 2:3].

Also noteworthy is a preserved part of the body of a LRA 4 amphora, with small, irregularly spaced holes drilled in it after

firing, found near a limestone block in unit 22, adjacent to the southeastern part of the church [Fig. 2:4]. It was probably used as a vessel for drying herbs.

Pottery from the nave of the basilica mostly consisted of LRA 1 amphorae (corresponding to Kellia 164), as well as LRA 4 from Gaza and some rare LRA 7, all of which chronologically corresponded to the period of the most intensive use of the basilica in the 6th–8th centuries. Deep bowls, unguentaria, jugs and rare fragments of ERSW tableware were also present.

Pottery fragments with painted decoration or stamped inscriptions were not common. Unique pieces included two fragments of Late Roman B type vessels: one with an impressed depiction of a cross in the form of a *crux gemmata* [Fig. 3:1], and another (floor) fragment with a partly preserved representation of Christ holding

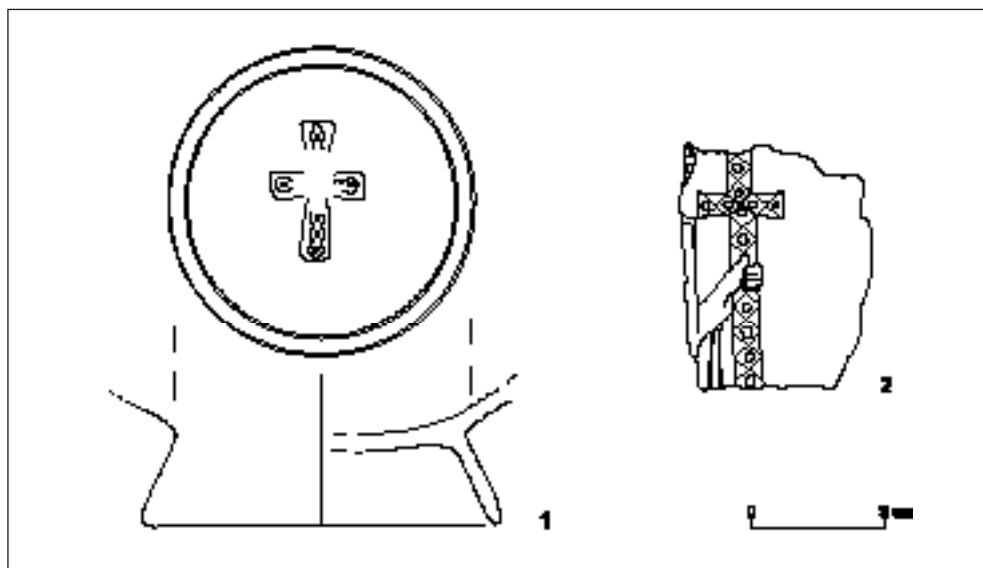


Fig. 3. Late Roman B plates with stamped floor decoration
(Drawing A. Drzymuchowska, J. Babraj)

a cross, the latter also in the form of a *crux gemmata* [Fig. 3:2; see also Fig. 15 on page 95] (Egloff 1977: vol. 1, 73–74; vol. 2, Pl. 13:9; *crux gemmata*, see e.g. Dinkler 1967: 55–76; Hayes 1972: 266, Fig. 51). In the first case, the arms of the cross widen at the ends and the cross is decorated with jewels enclosed in a guilloche pattern. In the second, the ends of the horizontal bar of the cross (*patibulum*) are also slightly broader, which suggests that the upper and lower ends of the vertical bar (*staticulum*) were similar in form. In turn, on this cross the jewels are enclosed in squares that touch at the corners. The form of the *patibulum* and *staticulum* points to a 5th century dating (K. Babraj, personal communication). The discussed artifacts are made of Nile clay, their surfaces are polished and they are skilfully executed. Similar decoration in the form of Greek crosses and herringbone patterns is present not only on

Late Roman B pottery, but also on African Red Slip Ware. It is distinguished by its high quality, characteristic red color of the clay and carefully polished surface.

Ceramic material from the basilica features also a wide repertoire of vessel types common in the Mediterranean region. Besides the ubiquitous local products, there are fragments of imported pottery: African Red Slip Ware and rare sherds of amphorae produced on Cyprus, in Antioch and Cilicia (LRA 1), as well as in Gaza (LRA 4). Another assemblage worthy of separate discussion is a large group of early Byzantine painted wares, with rich anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and geometrical decoration.

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS

<i>PAM RESEARCH</i> — NEW FORMULA: NOTE FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD...	11
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	13
OBITUARIES	
<i>Stanisław Medeksza</i>	15
<i>Eliza Szpakowska</i>	17
<i>Hanna Szymańska</i>	19
ABBREVIATIONS AND STANDARD REFERENCES	21

PAM REPORTS

PCMA FIELD MISSIONS AND PROJECTS IN 2008 (WITH MAP)	25
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EGYPT

ALEXANDRIA

ALEXANDRIA: KOM EL-DIKKA EXCAVATIONS AND PRESERVATION WORK. PRELIMINARY REPORT 2007/2008	
<i>Grzegorz Majcherek</i>	35
THE ISLAMIC GRAVEYARD ON KOM EL-DIKKA IN ALEXANDRIA. EXCAVATION SEASON 2007/2008	
<i>Emanuela Kulicka</i>	52
GLASS FROM AREA F ON KOM EL-DIKKA (ALEXANDRIA). EXCAVATIONS 2008	
<i>Renata Kucharczyk</i>	56
NUMISMATIC FINDS FROM KOM EL-DIKKA (ALEXANDRIA), 2008	
<i>Adam Jegliński</i>	70

MAREA

MAREA: EXCAVATIONS 2008	
<i>Hanna Szymańska</i> , <i>Krzysztof Babraj</i>	81
MAREA 2008: POTTERY FROM EXCAVATIONS	
<i>Anna Drzymuchowska</i>	97

CONTENTS

MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

MARINA EL-ALAMEIN. POLISH–EGYPTIAN RESTORATION MISSION:
CONSERVATION WORK IN 2008

Stanisław Medeksza, Rafał Czerner 103

TELL EL-RETABA

TELL EL-RETABA 2008: EXCAVATIONS AND GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

Sławomir Rzepka, Jozef Hudec, Tomasz Herbich 129

TELL EL-RETABA 2008: THE POTTERY

Anna Wodzińska 146

TELL EL-FARKHA

TELL EL-FARKHA (GHAZALA), 2008

Marek Chłotnicki, Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz 153

GOLD FROM TELL EL-FARKHA. CONSERVATION PROJECT AT THE EGYPTIAN
MUSEUM IN CAIRO

Anna Longa, Władysław Weker 171

TELL EL-MURRA

TELL EL-MURRA (NORTHEASTERN NILE DELTA SURVEY), SEASON 2008

Mariusz A. Jucha, Artur Buszek 177

SAQQARA

SAQQARA 2008: INSCRIBED MATERIAL

Kamil O. Kuraszkiewicz 183

DEIR EL-BAHARI

TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT AT DEIR EL-BAHARI, SEASON 2007/2008

Zbigniew E. Szafrński 193

BUILDING *DIPINTI* IN THE TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT. DOCUMENTATION WORK,
SEASON 2007/2008

Dawid F. Wiczorek 203

TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT: POTTERY FROM EXCAVATIONS IN THE ROYAL
MORTUARY CULT COMPLEX, SEASONS 2004–2008

Ewa Czyżewska 212

SHEIKH ABD EL-GURNA (WEST THEBES)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE HERMITAGE IN TOMB 1152
IN SHEIKH ABD EL-GURNA (WEST THEBES)

Tomasz Górecki 225

DAKHLEH OASIS

DAKHLEH OASIS PROJECT. PETROGLYPH UNIT, ROCK ART RESEARCH, 2008

Ewa Kuciewicz, Michał Kobusiewicz 237

CONTENTS

SUDAN

OLD DONGOLA

- THE 12 NUMMLA COIN FROM OLD DONGOLA
Barbara Lichocka 245

BANGANARTI

- BANGANARTI AND SELIB: TWO FIELD SEASONS IN 2008
Bogdan T. Żurawski 251
- APPENDIX 1: REVITALIZATION PROJECT AT BANGANARTI
Bogdan T. Żurawski 261
- APPENDIX 2: BANGANARTI CONSERVATION REPORT
(JANUARY–FEBRUARY AND NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2008)
Dorota Moryto-Naumiuk, Bogdan T. Żurawski 262
- APPENDIX 3: OVERVIEW OF CERAMIC STUDIES AT BANGANARTI IN 2008
Dobiesława Bagińska 264
- INSCRIPTION WITH LITURGICAL HYMN FROM THE LOWER CHURCH
IN BANGANARTI
Agata Deptuła 267
- BANGANARTI FORTIFICATIONS IN THE 2008 SEASON
Mariusz Drzewiecki 273

CYPRUS

NEA PAPHOS

- NEA PAPHOS: SEASON 2008
Henryk Meyza 283

LEBANON

ESHMOUN

- ESHMOUN VALLEY: PRELIMINARY REPORT AFTER THE THIRD SEASON
OF THE POLISH-LEBANESE SURVEY
Krzysztof Jakubiak 295

SYRIA

TELL ARBID

- TELL ARBID: ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY EXCAVATIONS IN SECTOR P,
SPRING SEASON OF 2008
Rafał Koliński 303

CONTENTS

TELL QARAMEL

TELL QARAMEL: EXCAVATIONS 2008

Ryszard F. Mazurowski 321

PAM STUDIES

INTRODUCTION 345

ENTRE LA II^E ET III^E CATARACTE: SEDEINGA, UNE ÉTAPE SUR LA RIVE
OCCIDENTALE DU NIL

Catherine Berger-el Naggar 349

FOOD AND FUNERALS. SUSTAINING THE DEAD FOR ETERNITY

Salima Ikram 361

SYMBOLIC FAUNAL REMAINS FROM GRAVES IN TELL EL-FARKHA (EGYPT)

Renata Abłamowicz 373

THE NECROPOLIS AT TELL EDFU: AN OVERVIEW

Joanna Aksamit 379

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD CEMETERY IN THE HATSHEPSUT TEMPLE
AT DEIR EL-BAHARI. RECENT RESEARCH

Miroslaw Barwik 387

ENIGMATIC BUILDING FROM TELL EL-FARKHA. PRELIMINARY STUDY

Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz 399

FUNERARY TEXTILES FROM THE MEDIEVAL CEMETERY OF NAQLUN

Barbara Czaja-Szewczak 413

GRAECO-ROMAN TOWN AND NECROPOLIS IN MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski 421

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AS REFLECTED BY BURIAL
RITES OBSERVED IN THE PROTODYNASTIC PART OF THE CEMETERY
IN TELL EL-FARKHA

Joanna Dębowska-Ludwin 457

IN THE SHADE OF THE NEKLONI MONASTERY (DEIR MALAK GUBRAIL, FAYUM)

Włodzimierz Godlewski 467

REMARKS ON THE TYPOLOGY OF ISLAMIC GRAVES FROM THE CEMETERIES
ON KOM EL-DIKKA IN ALEXANDRIA

Emanuela Kulicka 483

BEADS AND WARRIORS. THE CEMETERY AT HAGAR EL-BEIDA 2 (SUDAN)

Anna Longa 499

CONTENTS

MATS AND BASKETS FROM CEMETERY A AT NAQLUN IN FAYUM OASIS <i>Anetta Łyżwa-Piber</i>	509
TOMB BUILDING TRADITION IN LOWER NUBIA FROM THE MEROITIC AGE TO AFTER CHRISTIANIZATION <i>Artur Obłuski</i>	525
ANIMAL REMAINS IN POST-MEROITIC BURIALS IN SUDAN <i>Marta Osypińska</i>	541
CEMETERY A IN NAQLUN: ANTHROPOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE BURIALS <i>Karol Piasecki</i>	549
ORNAMENTS ON FUNERARY STELAE OF THE 9TH–12TH CENTURIES FROM EGYPT — JOSEF STRYGOWSKI’S PUBLICATION ANEW <i>Małgorzata Redlak</i>	561
NON OMNIS MORIAR. REFLECTION ON “RITE DE PASSAGE” IN THE OLD KINGDOM <i>Teodozja I. Rzeuska</i>	575
BURIALS IN THE COMPLEX OF THE GREAT AMIR QURQUMAS (No. 162) IN CAIRO’S “NORTHERN NECROPOLIS” <i>Maciej G. Witkowski</i>	587
BURIAL CUSTOMS AT TELL ARBID (SYRIA) IN THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE. CULTURAL INTERRELATIONS WITH THE NILE DELTA AND THE LEVANT <i>Zuzanna Wygnańska</i>	605
GIFTS FOR THE AFTERLIFE: EVIDENCE OF MORTUARY PRACTICES FROM THE NECROPOLIS IN MARINA EL-ALAMEIN <i>Iwona Zych</i>	619
INDEX OF SITES	633