Grzegorz Majcherek

Marea 2001 : Note on the Pottery

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 13, 60-64

2002

MAREA 2001: NOTE ON THE POTTERY

Grzegorz Majcherek

This season's pottery finds come either from the topsoil layer or from fill deposits and, consequently, cannot be safely attributed to any undisturbed contexts.[1] Although some rebuilding and changes of the bath plan are easily identified, so far none of the deposits could be associated with these alterations. Some of the finds, therefore, can be either residual or post-dating the destruction of the building. Due to the usual shortcomings of such material, all the observations should be regarded as largely provisional.

The spectrum of pottery forms appears to be broadly similar to that briefly discussed in the previous report.[2] Commonwares apparently prevail in the collected material. All the type-forms are a representative cross-section of the 7th-8th century repertoire. Beside bowls, jugs and basins, recorded forms include also some cooking pots, casseroles, pans and lids that can be readily paralleled in material found on other Egyptian sites. Some of the kitchen vessels were imported from the Nile Valley proper, as evidenced by their conspicuous dark red Nile silt fabric, very often with a black core. Most of the recorded commonware fragments, however, appear to be of local Mareotic production, made either on the site itself or in the surrounding region. Unfortunately, the similarity of regional raw materials excludes specific attribution. The fabric is invariably made of local calcareous marl clay with considerable quantities of calcite inclusions frequently erupting on the surface, and fine sand temper. Very few mica specks are visible occasionally. Color ranges from reddish-yellow (7,5 YR 7/4) through olive gray (5/6 Y 6/2) to yellow (2,5 Y 8/4), and is most likely due to varied firing conditions.[3] The surface is usually unslipped, although very often coated with a light cream self-slip, resulting from salt precipitation during drying. The most numerous regionally produced pottery group consists of deep, footed, carinated bowls, with everted or knobbed rims, displaying a great variety of contours (*Fig. 1*). Some of the examples were painted with faint dark red decoration representing wavy lines or simplified festoons (cf. *Fig. 1:2*), typical of Coptic-period pottery.[4] Of greater interest are several fragments of Mareotic incised ware (*cf. Fig. 3:3*). They represent mostly jugs or pitchers, usually decorated with parallel or diagonal incisions, sometimes forming a triangular

1) For a discussion of the archaeological work on the site, see report by H. Szymańska and K. Babraj in this volume.

2) H. Szymańska, K. Babraj, *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 44-45.

3) On the color variations of Mareotic pottery, cf. M. Rodziewicz, "Experimental identification of local and imported pottery from Mareotis", *BCH Suppl.* 33 (1998), 245-260.

4) For similar, but slightly earlier forms, cf. D. Bailey, Excavations at el-Ashmunein, V (London 1998), 54-55, pl. 31.

or leaf-shaped pattern and covering practically all of the body.[5)]

Amphorae present a more diversified picture (*Fig. 2*). Nonetheless, the bulk of the containers is again made up of locally produced amphorae.[6)] Most of them belong to small bag-shaped vessels (*Fig. 2:1*), (Kellia forms 187-190), usually dated to the mid 7th-mid 8th centuries AD.[7)] The same shapes, however, are also repeated in dark red, hard, metallic Nile silt fabric with considerable straw temper.[8)] Their bigger counterpart (*Fig. 2:2*) (Late Roman 5/6, Kellia form 186), believed to be manufactured in the nearby Abu Mena district, is also present.[9)] All these amphorae were presumably used as wine containers. Wine production in the region was apparently still flourishing in the Late Roman period. This phenomenon is perhaps best evidenced by wineries, a growing number of which is being discovered in the neighboring region.[10)] For the first time this season we came across numerous fragments of a fairly ephemeral class of amphorae (Kellia 167), produced in typical Nile silt fabric, much like that of the bag-shaped amphorae.[11)] Given their characteristic shape, they can be considered an Egyptian version of the widespread

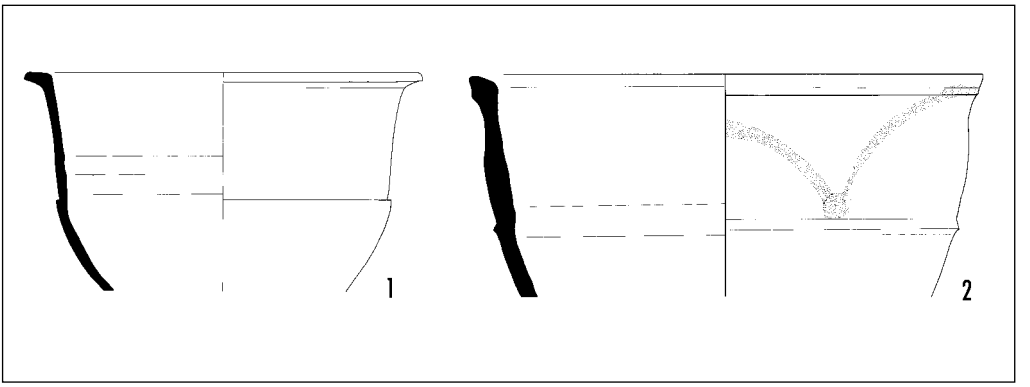

Fig. 1. Mareotic carinated bowls. Scale 1:4 (Drawing G. Majcherek)

5) M. Rodziewicz, "Mareotic incised pottery of Coptic period", in: Le site monastique Copte des Kellia, Actes du Colloque de Genève (Genève 1986), 311-321.

6) On the amphora production in the Mareotic region, cf. J.-Y. Empereur, M. Picon, "Les ateliers d'amphores du Lac Mariut", *BCH Suppl.* 33 (1998), 75-91, listing 28 different sites in the Mareotic region.

7) M. Egloff, Kellia. La poterie Copte (Genève 1977), 115, pl. 22:3-5,11; 61:4-6.

8) Amphorae of the type produced of alluvial clays are common in Egypt, even in the 9th-10th centuries. For a recently discovered kiln, cf. P. Ballet, "Un atelier d'amphores LRA5/6 à Kom Abu Billou", *Chronique d'Égypte* LXIX (1994), 353-365.

9) J. Engemann, "À propos des amphores d'Abou Mina", *CCE* 3 (1992), 153-159.

10) M. Rodziewicz, "Classification of wineries from Mareotis", *BCH Suppl.* 33 (1998), 27-36; F. Ashmawy, "Pottery kiln and wine factory at Burg el Arab", *BCH Suppl.* 33 (1998), 55-64.

11) M. Egloff, op. cit., 113, pl. 57,7. Amphorae of this class in Alexandria are normally associated with the 7th-8th century deposits, cf. G. Majcherek, "The Late Roman ceramics from sector G", *ET* XVI (1992), 81-117. Several examples have been reported also from Fayum, cf. W. Godlewski et all., "Deir el Naqlun, 1988-89, Second preliminary report", *Nubica* III/1 (1994), 232, pl. 21,2-3.

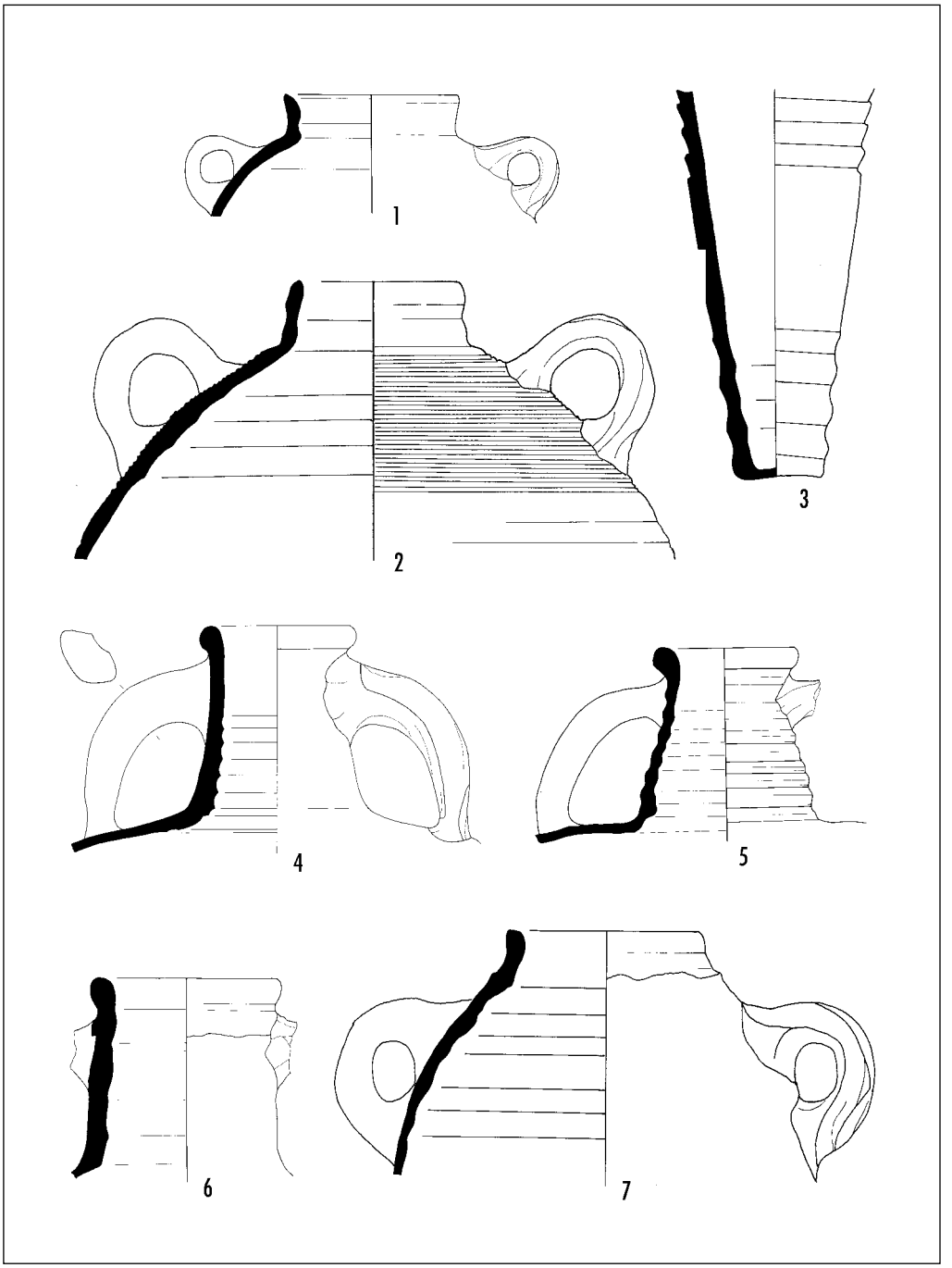

Fig. 2. Amphorae types: 2:1,2 – LRA 5/6; 2:3 – LRA 7; 2:4,5 – Kellia 167; 2:6 – LRA 1; 2:7 – LRA 4. Scale 1:4 (Drawing G. Majcherek)

Aegean Late Roman 2 amphora (*Fig. 2:4,5*). Fragments of ubiquitous "chocolate" amphorae (Late Roman 7, Kellia types 173-178) complete the repertoire of Egyptian containers. They all belong to the late, shoulder-edged version (*Fig. 2:3*). The imported amphorae comprise the same range of types as that found at other sites of Late Roman-Byzantine age. This group includes mostly fragmentary examples of LRA 4 (Gazan)[12] and LRA 1 type, produced in Cyprus, Cilicia and in the Antioch region. Both classes belong to the typical 6th-7th century AD series. Western

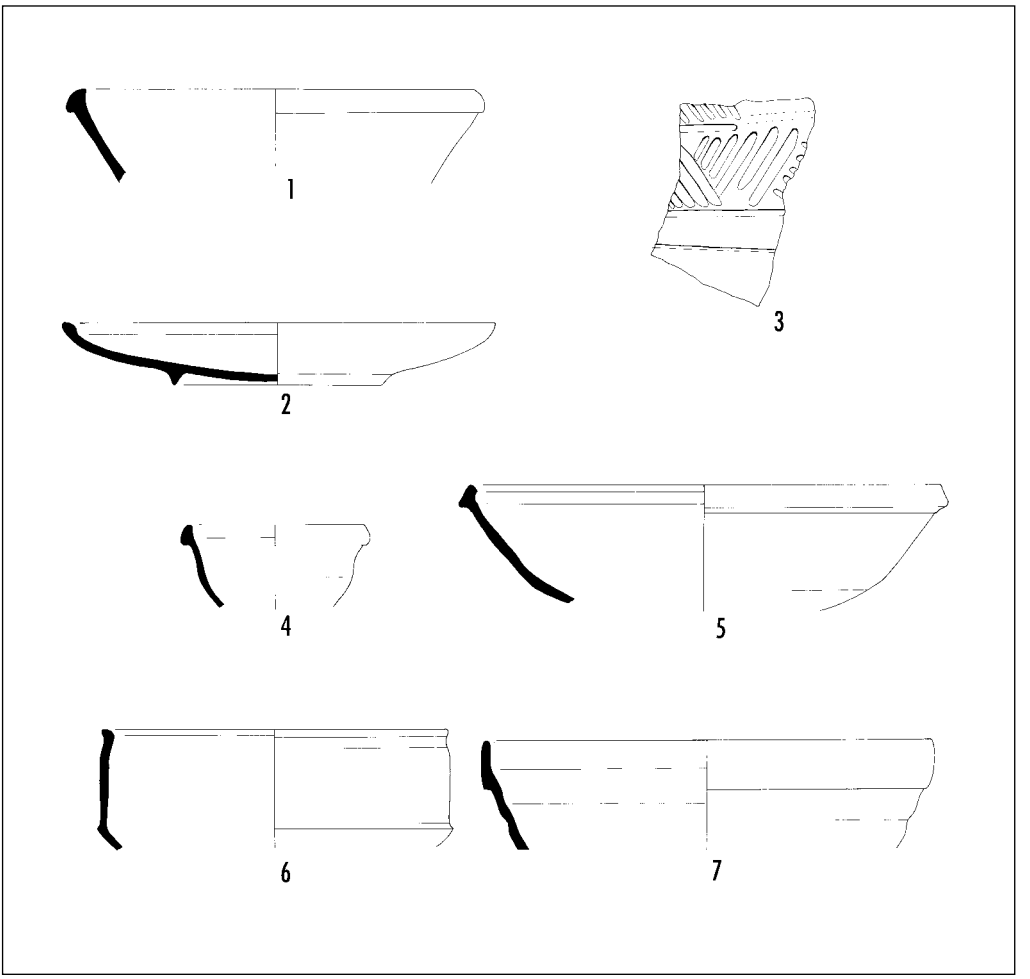

Fig. 3. Tablewares: 3:1 – Cypriot Red Slip; 3:2,4-7 – Egyptian Red Slip A; 3:3 – Mareotic incised ware. Scale 1:4 (Drawing G. Majcherek)

12) All the recorded fragments belong to the later form in the series, dated to the late 6th-early 7th century, cf. G. Majcherek, "Gazan Amphorae: Typology Reconsidered", in: Hellenistic and Roman Pottery in the Eastern Mediterranean (Advances in Scientific Studies), The Second Nieborów Workshop (Warsaw 1995), 163-178.

production centers are represented by several fragments of *spatheia* of North African origin.

The low representation of imported Late Roman tablewares was noted previously, particularly the notable absence of common trans-Mediterranean ware-groups, like African Red Slip or Phocaean Red Ware, usually quite frequent in the not so distant Alexandria.[13] Only occasional sherds of 7th-century Cypriot Red Slip Ware (LRP form 9) were identified in the collected assemblage (*Fig. 3:1*). Egyptian Red Slip A Ware (Aswan) is represented by some dozen or so pieces: mostly plates (Elephantine forms: T273, T279) (*Fig. 3:2*), and bowls (Elephantine forms: T324, T344, T367, T370) (Fig. *3:4-6*), invariably dated to the same period.[14] Some fragments of the white-slip variety of bowls and plates (Elephantine forms: T357b, T255) were also noted (*Fig. 3:7*). Although most of the relevant pottery provides only summary datings, it is clear that the excavated material as a whole should be attributed to a chronological horizon ranging from the late 6th to the end of the 7th century AD, with some forms continuing well into the 8th century.

Other finds, including numerous glass fragments and lamps typical to that period, largely corroborate the overall chronological picture. The coins found in the bath are still awaiting proper identification, but most of them could be tentatively attributed to the 7th century; a few might be even later post-reform *fils*. In any case, not a single sherd of glazed pottery has been recorded – a fact which may be viewed as tangible proof that the baths were abandoned sometime in the early 8th century at the latest, before the early lead-glazed pottery had been introduced on a larger scale.[15]

13) G. Majcherek, "The Late Roman Ceramics…", op. cit., 91-92.

14) R. Gempeler, Elephantine X. Die Keramik römischer bis früharabischer Zeit (Mainz 1992), 86-87, 96, 101, 108-110.

15) For a discussion of the beginning of glazing in Islamic Egypt, cf. particularly G.T. Scanlon, "Slip-Painted Lead-Glazed Wares From Fustat: A Dilemma of Nomenclature", in: Colloque international d'archéologie islamique, ed. R.-P. Gayraud (Cairo 1998), 21-53; id., "Early Lead Glazed Wares in Egypt: An Imported Wrinkle", in: Quest for Understanding: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Malcolm H. Kerr, eds. S. Seikaly et al., (Beirut 1991), 253-262; Scanlon argues convincingly that the glazing technique in Egypt commenced around AD 700. For early glazed ware in Abu Mena, cf. J. Engemann, "Das Ende der Wallfahrten nach Abu Mina und die Datierung früher islamischer glasierter Keramik in Ägypten", *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 32 (1989), 161-177.