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LATE ROMAN/ EARLY BYZANTINE GLASS FROM THE BASILICA IN MAREA

Renata Kucharczyk

Another season of excavations at the basilica yielded glass fragments in large quantities but of limited variety.¹ They are characteristic of the glassware of the Late Roman/Early Byzantine period, that is, from the 4th to the 7th century, with a concentration coming in the 5th and 6th centuries AD. The record is dominated by closed vessels in the shape of bottles of various types, sizes and volumes. Next in quantity are lamps. Other standard forms of that period, including open forms, like wineglasses and everyday tablewares, are also represented. They are, however, definitely less numerous.

The vast majority of fragments represent free-blown vessels finished with the use of a pontil. Most of them are plain. The ornamentation, if any, is simple and restricted to

applied thread, painted elements or pinched decoration. A few shards bear a pattern executed in a ribbed mould. The recorded fragments were made of either greenish or greenish-blue glass. In many cases the color of the glass is illegible; the shards are heavily weathered, giving a black or milky layer with peacock iridescence. The glass contains bubbles and impurities.

Uniform glass quality, vessel shapes and finishing indicate that the vessels were all manufactured in one region; most probably, they represent local production. The exceptional appearance of fragments of a bottle with elaborate trailed-on ornamentation suggests an import.

Surprisingly enough, there is still no evidence for the use of windowpanes of any kind.

BOTTLES

More than 120 pieces – the largest group this season – were attributed to different-size bottles, jugs and flasks. These containers are represented mostly by their necks and bases [*Fig. 1*]. Prevalent are plain wares either with long or short necks. Among them the most characteristic are funnel-neck bottles [*Fig. 1:1-6*].² A considerable number of the bases and necks is wide, indicating large-

sized vessels [*Fig. 1:13*]. Small containers, such as this one-handled jug, were represented by only a few shards [*Fig. 1:7*].

Although, these ordinary and undoubtedly mass-produced items were usually left undecorated, some pieces bear varied types of ornamentation. The most common consisted of horizontally applied brownish-red and green threads [*Fig. 1:4,6*]. A number of

1 See also report from the previous season: R. Kucharczyk, "Glass finds from the Basilica in Marea, 2004", *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), 55-59.

2 Id., "Marea 2001: Windowpanes and other glass finds", *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 65-71, Fig. 1:1-3.

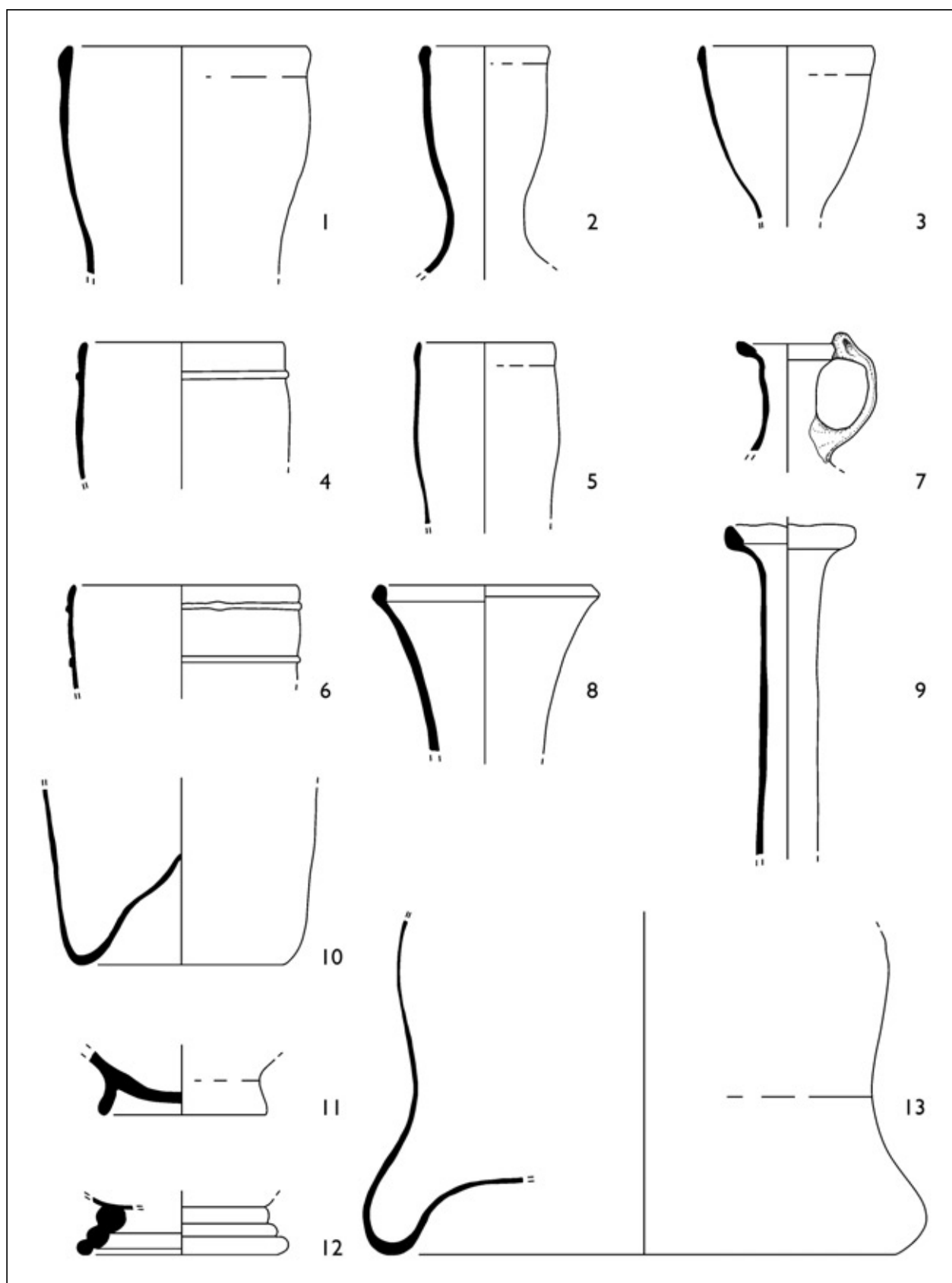


Fig. 1. Bottles
(Drawing R. Kucharczyk, digitizing R. Mahler)

shards bear the brownish-red painted decoration, including patches [Fig. 2:1-2] and lines [Fig. 2:3], that is characteristic of this site.³

Pinching, another typical feature of this period, is also present [Fig. 2:4]. A few fragments belong to a type with mold-blown ribbing [Fig. 2:5-6]. One of the necks represents a fairly common design of close-set spiral-ribbing [Fig. 2:5].

As said above, the bottles are quite simple, but there is one with finely trailing

glass as decoration, standing out in the assemblage from the basilica. Several joining fragments have permitted a reconstruction of the original motif. The cobalt-blue thread ran in a pointed wave-like pattern on the lower part of the globular body and in a horizontal zigzag trailing above [Fig. 2:7]. The neck was probably long and narrow. The almost colorless glass with bluish tinge is heavily weathered, resulting in vivid, flaking iridescence. One shard of similar design was discovered at Kom el-Dikka.

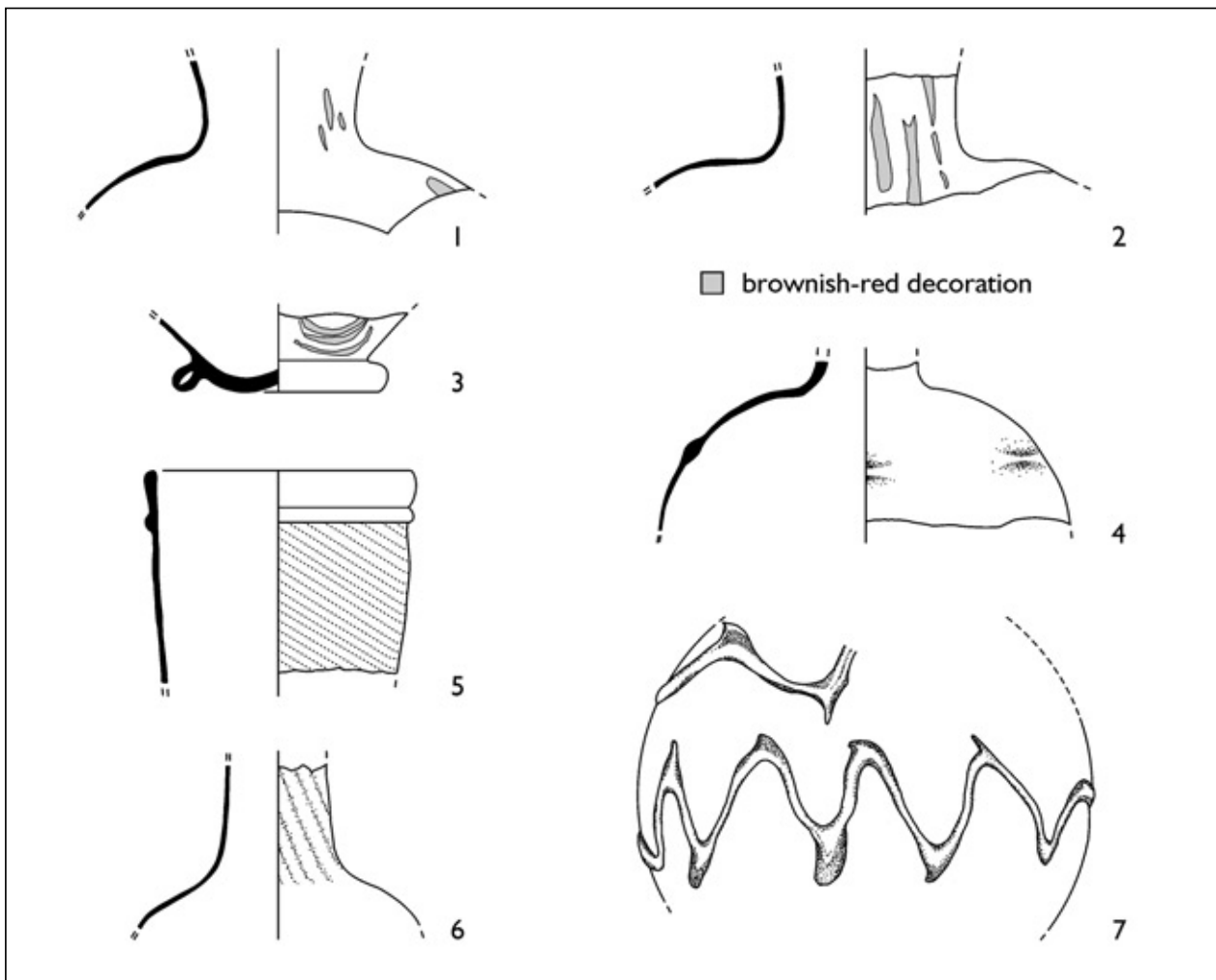


Fig. 2. *Decorated bottles*
(Drawing E. Kulicka, digitizing R. Mabler)

3 Id., "Glass finds from the bath in Marea" (forthcoming). Brownish-red decoration occurs on many fragments from Kom el-Dikka, see: id., "Islamic Glass from the auditoria on Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria", *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), 31-34, Fig. 2:3-5.

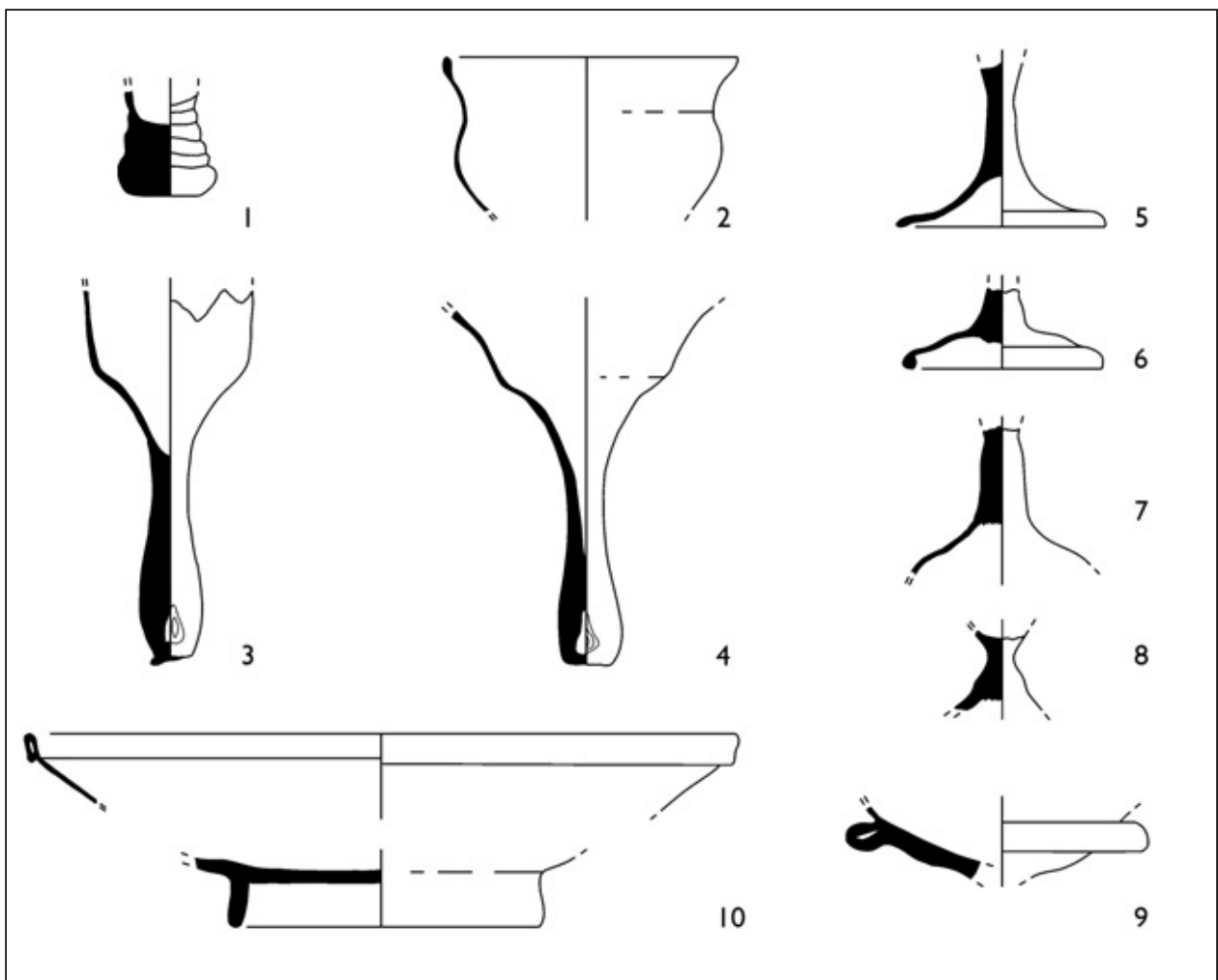
Vessels with this kind of decoration were a characteristic output of Syro-Palestinian glasshouses of the 4th century AD.⁴ A coil-wound base, which usually occurs on the

bottles, has also been recorded [cf. *Fig. 1:12*]. Another small base has the characteristic inner ridge. This type can be used also on jars and flasks [*Fig. 1:11*].

LAMPS

While huge quantities of solid-stemmed lamps were excavated this season, there is also evidence of yet another type. The coiled

knob base belongs to conical lamps with characteristic cracked-off rims, usually dated to the 4th-5th century AD [*Fig. 3:1*].⁵



*Fig. 3. Lamps (1-4), wineglasses (5-9) and bowl/plate (10)
(Drawing R. Kucharczyk, digitizing R. Mahler)*

4 For a close 4th century AD parallel, cf. V. Arveiller-Dulong and M.-D. Nenna, *Les verres antiques du Musée du Louvre*, II (Paris 2005), 358, 381: 1016-1018.

5 R. Kucharczyk, "Late Roman/Early Byzantine glass from the auditoria on Kom el-Dikka", Figs 2:4-6, in this volume; M. Mossakowska-Gaubert, "La verrerie utilisée par des anachoretés: L'ermitage no 44 à Naqlun (Fayyoum)", in: M. Immerzeel and J. van der Vliet (eds), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium* (Leuven 2004), 1451-1452, Fig. 4, cat. VI,3 and Fig. 14.

Solid-stemmed lamps with rounded or elongated hollows at the bottom of the stems are amply represented. The bowls are deep with thin concave walls and fire-rounded and slightly thickened rims [Fig. 3:2-4]. This type, previously attested at the Marea site,⁶ is one of the easiest shapes to recognize. Tooling marks on the stems, features not noted elsewhere, could be considered perhaps a sign of regional differences. In many cases, stems are unevenly flattened. Sometimes they have traces of glass from the pontil adhering to the bottom. In most of the cases, the color

is discernible. The surface is heavily weathered resulting in a distinctive black, flaky layer, occasionally coated by peacock iridescence. In some cases, it is not possible to determine the original thickness of either lamp stems or bowls. The lamps have a marked similarity in many ways. They share an uniformity of workmanship, the same characteristics of measurement and quality of glass. These mass-produced vessels are carelessly worked. All of these features, but especially a severe malformed hollow-lamp stem, argue strongly in favor of local manufacture.

STEMMED GOBLETS/WINEGLASSES

One of the main products of the Byzantine glass industry – the stemmed goblet or wineglass – is represented by five examples. Three slender solidstemmed goblets had concave circular bases with reworked edges and marked pontil mark [Fig. 3:5]. One base has a hooked-in edge

[Fig. 3:6]. A thick waist, already attested at the Marea bath,⁷ may have belonged to the goblet [Fig. 3:8]. The best parallels are offered by examples from Esna⁸ and Jerash.⁹ A fragment with tubular flange may have also belonged to a wineglass [Fig. 3:9].¹⁰

OTHER OPEN FORMS

Only one fragment of a ring base belonging to a plate or shallow bowl was recorded in this year's assemblage. A piece

of sidewall without folded hollow rim came from the same type of open vessel [Fig. 3:10].

6 R. Kucharczyk, "The glass finds from the Basilica in Marea, 2003", *PAM XV, Reports 2003* (2004), 63-66, Fig. 1:1-4, and also *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), 55-57, Fig. 1:5-7.

7 Id., *PAM XVI*, loc. cit., and forthcoming.

8 H. Jacquet-Gordon, *Les ermitages chrétiens du désert d' Esna, III. Céramiques et objets* (IFAO: Le Caire 1972), 96, Pl. CCXXXIII: 12-13.

9 C. Meyer, "Glass from the North Theater Byzantine Church, and Soundings at Jerash, Jordan, 1982-1983", *BASOR*, Suppl. 25 (1987), 200-201, Fig. 9: M dated to the late Byzantine/Umayyad period.

10 For a comparable piece dated to the 7th century, see J. Hayes, "Late Roman and Byzantine glass", in: *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul*, vol. 2. The Pottery (Princeton 1992), 400, 402, Fig. 150:24.