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Tomasz Górecki

WHAT KIND OF LAMP WAS THE ΣΤΕΦΑΝΟΣ
MENTIONED IN AN OSTRACON OF THE VTH CENTURY A.D.?^{*}

A couple of years ago Dominic Monserrat wrote an article that has met with the well deserved interest of archaeologists and liturgy historians alike.¹ The author published therein an ostrakon containing an inventory of items used for church-illumination. The Greek title of the document could be read in line 1: γνῶσις λυχνίας, i.e. "list of lighting equipment". One can find there, among other lamp-types, πολυκάνδ(ηλα) in line 6, στέφανος in line 13. Line 14 reads as follows: ὁμο(ίως) [[κερ]] κερ(). Ὅμο(ίως) must refer to what was listed in the preceding line, i.e., to another *stephanos*, this time labelled as κερ(). According to the editor κερ() should represent an abbreviation for κερ(άτιον) *vel sim.* rather than for κερ(αμικός).

The commentary to lines 13-14 (Montserrat, pp. 442-443) seems to be of particular interest. The author interprets the term "*stephanos keramikos*" as a kind of lamp in the form of a "circular dish (...) whose shape is remarkably reminiscent of metal *polycandela* (...) or a container for clay lamps" (Montserrat, p. 443). However, the presence of "*polycandela*" in the same document should indicate some dissimilarity in the word significance. *Polycandela* are "objects to take multiple lamps, whether glass oil-lamps or candles, and could take several forms, most notably cruciform and discoid." (Montserrat, p. 441).

Monserrat supplemented the document with a very thorough commentary. Some doubts, however, could be raised with regard to the author's ideas

^{*} A stimulus for writing the present paper and publishing it in a papyrological journal came from the editor of the *JJP*, Tomasz DERDA with whom I also discussed some details of the interpretation suggested below.

¹ D. MONTSERRAT, "Early Byzantine Church Lighting: a New Text", *Orientalia* 64 (1995) 430-444.

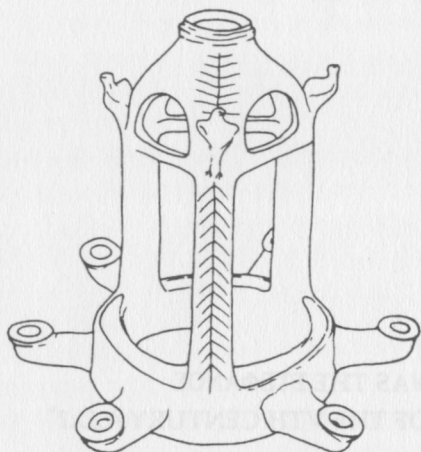


Fig. 1. Multi-nozzle lamp, max. diam. ca. 30 cm (drawing by the author after Parker, *op. cit.* [n. 5], fig. 20)

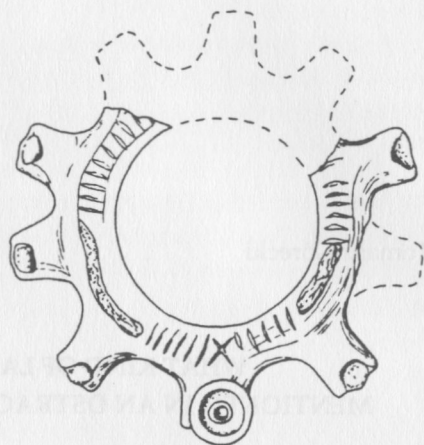


Fig. 2. Multi-nozzle lamp, max. diam. ca. 22 cm (drawing by the author after Sussman, *op. cit.* [n. 5], fig. 6)

on the form of *στέφανος κερ(αμικός)*. In his quite suggestive hypothesis, backed by two photographs (Montserrat, Pl. XLVII), the author suggests that *στέφανος κερ(αμικός)* is a kind of big lamp in shape of a dish with bowl-like cavities to hold small oil-lamps. Hence it could be described as a kind of a container for lamps rather than a fairly multi-nozzle chandelier.² During the excavations in Naqlun many pots like the ones reproduced in pl. XLVII have been found: some of them surviving intact.³ Notwithstanding, their function could not be determined.⁴ Neither has the archaeological context, nor any other items found with this kind of pot, are helpful in ascertaining their purpose. Moreover, there are no signs of smoke and burning on the pot surface. It seems almost certain,

² The principal literature is given by the author on page 443. One may add that these objects can have from 4 to 12 *coupoles*, the earliest items should be dated to the late VIth – mid VIIIth cent.

³ See, among others, T. GÓRECKI, "The Pottery from Naqlun, 1993", *Polish Archaeology in Mediterranean* 5 (1994) 75 and fig.12.

⁴ They seem to have been used as tableware of everyday use. M. ROZEN-AYALON, "Medieval Islamic Compound Vessels", *Eretz-Israel* 11 (1973) 258-262 (in Hebrew), interpreted this dish as a sort of tray.

therefore, that the objects discussed by Monserrat could not have been lamp containers. An additional argument for rejecting the Montserrat's interpretation is that the dish walls in most cases are so sloping as a firm positioning of lamps would have been impossible.

I believe an alternative identification of "*stephanos ker(amikos)*" could be suggested. We know of Byzantine multi-nozzle lamps in the shape of a clay ring from both Syro-Palestine and Egypt (included Naqlun). The rings (of round or irregularly oval section) are empty inside so there is place for oil and nozzles symmetrically disposed (see the drawings).⁵ They could be hung or carried in hand. The association of this lamp form with the ancient meaning of the term στέφανος "that which surrounds or encompasses", hence "crown, wreath etc.", seems self-evident.

Thus, according to my interpretation, *stephanos ker(amikos)* could be a kind of *polycandelon*. Line 6 of the ostrakon would then refer to some other *polycandela*, which the scribe deemed different from the *stephanoi keramikoi* he mentioned later.

It may be added that the term "*polycandelon*" (but not "*stephanos*"!) could also be used to denominate a clay lamp in the shape of big vessel. The four wicks of such a lamp were inserted into clay funnels attached to the container shoulders and connected by holes with the interior (containing up to seven litres of oil): it is what is called an "eternal lamp". The archaeological context of two such artifacts⁶ shows that they were used in the church or monastery interiors. By no means are we certain, however, that the term "*polycandelon keramikon*" was used in Late Antiquity to describe a lamp in the shape of a big vessel.

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⁵ See, among others, V. SUSSMAN, "Burial Cave at Kefar Ara", *Attiqot* 11 (1976) 100 and fig. 6; S. Th. PARKER, "Preliminary Report on the 1985 Season of the *Limes Arabicus* Project", *Preliminary Reports of ASOR-Sponsored Excavations, 1982-85* (= *BASOR Supplement* 25), Baltimore 1988, 148 and fig. 20.

⁶ M. E. EGLOFF, *Kellia III: La poterie copte*, Genf 1977, nr. 322 (Pl. 34,1-2 and 86,1: p. 165) and also some practically identical items from Polish excavation in Tell-Atrib in 1981, as yet unpublished.