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POLISH-EGYPTIAN EXCAVATIONS AT TELL ATRIB IN 1991

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The Polish-Egyptian archaeological mission at Tell Atrib, sponsored jointly by the Polish Centre and by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, continued work from 17 July until 17 September 1991.¹

Our activities were concentrated in the western and north-western parts of the area extending latitudinally on the southern side of Kom Sidi Yussuf, i.e., in the sectors surrounding bath structures dating from the reign of Ptolemy VI, unearthed during the two previous campaigns.² The excavations carried out east of these structures, i.e., in squares GG, HH, MM and NN, focused on strata lying below the Byzantine mud-brick walls discovered previously. In consequence, we were able to determine that:

- a) a large deposit of Byzantine period amphorae, lying below the thick wall which constitutes the eastern edge of the

¹ The mission included: Prof. Karol Myśliwiec, director of the mission, Dr. Barbara Ruszczyk, Dr. Aleksandra Krzyżanowska, Dr. Hanna Szymańska-Wasyłewska, Miss Anna Południkiewicz, Mr. Dariusz Niedziółka and Mr. Piotr Mieliwodzki, archaeologists, Mr. Mirosław Czarnocki, architect and Mr. Waldemar Jerke, photographer. The Egyptian Antiquities Organization was represented by Mrs. Somaya Abu Senna, our inspector. We should like to express herewith our thanks to the direction of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization in Cairo and Zagazig for friendly and efficient help in the realization of our tasks.

² K. Myśliwiec, Polish-Egyptian excavations at Tell Atrib in 1989, *PAM I*, 1988-1989, Warsaw 1990, pp. 6-7; id., Polish-Egyptian excavations at Tell Atrib in 1990, *PAM II*, 1989-1990, Warsaw 1991, pp. 28-29; id., Fouilles polono-égyptiennes à Tell Atrib en 1986-1990, *EtTrav XVI* (in print).

quarter, dates the agglomeration of mud-brick structures including the red brick well³ to the Byzantine period as well. Some of the amphorae bear short Greek inscriptions painted or incised on the shoulders;⁴

- b) no further fragments of the monumental early Byzantine building, of which some decorated limestone blocks came to light in 1989,⁵ occurred in the deeper Byzantine strata here. The numismatic material reveals an inverted stratigraphy bearing witness to disturbances in the Late Byzantine period;
- c) the Roman level reveals no traces of structures, but contains some pottery including lamps of various shapes. Particularly significant is the stratigraphic data concerning room 166 neighboring with room 118, in which a limestone sculpture of Roman date (a *togatus* with a *herma*) was found in 1990.⁶ An early Roman lamp which was found in the same layer as the sculpture, immediately above a Ptolemaic wall, confirmed the dating of the sculpture to the 1st century AD. Roman strata in other parts of this area contained some objects of earlier date, e.g. a well preserved Late Dynastic or Ptolemaic faience *ushebti*.⁷

The excavations carried out on the southern side of the mid-Ptolemaic bath structures (i.e., in the western part of squares CC, DD, PP as well as square VV) and those in two new squares (UU and WW; 10 x 10m each) adjoining these structures

³ Id., in *PAM II* (1989-1990), p. 26.

⁴ Their publication is being prepared by Mr. Adam Łajtar.

⁵ E.g. K. Myśliwiec in: *PAM I*, 1988-1989, p. 6, Fig. 1.

⁶ Id., *Fouilles polono-égyptiennes à Tell Atrib en 1986-1990, EtTrav XVI* (in print), Fig. 9a-b. It is being prepared for publication by Prof. Zsolt Kiss.

⁷ Mr. Dariusz Niedziółka has been entrusted with its publication.

on the west, have brought further precision to the stratigraphy, chronology and function of the Ptolemaic structures preserved in this part of Athribis. The rich numismatic material comprising c. 300 coins enabled us to date quite precisely the following three strata, which can be clearly distinguished all over the Ptolemaic quarter:

- a) from the beginning of the Ptolemaic Period (possibly also the second half of the 4th century BC) until the first decades of the 2nd century BC. The coins of Ptolemy IV are the latest ones found in this stratum;
- b) the reign of Ptolemy VI;
- c) the second half of the Ptolemaic Period till the beginning of the 1st century A.D.

Strata a) and b) are separated by a layer of ashes and debris revealing the total destruction of this quarter at a time which must be close to the reign of Ptolemy V. Coins of Ptolemy VI, the most frequent ones in our numismatic material, prevail in the stratum lying immediately above the ashes. The mud-brick and red brick walls preserved in this stratum bear evidence to a reconstruction of the city during this reign.

This chronological frame facilitates the dating of the numerous objects found in these strata. Ceramic materials including pottery, lamps (Fig. 1), terracotta figurines, weights and other small objects predominate in this material. The pottery comprises products of local workshops as well as rich imported material including stamped amphorae handles with Greek and Latin inscriptions and other wares. There are two unique miniature vessels among the imported objects: one phial with a surprisingly thick body and narrow cylindrical interior, and one thin-walled dram. The first bears a rectangular stamp with a Greek inscription on the body and the other one has a stamp on its foot. Several small vessels originating from local work-

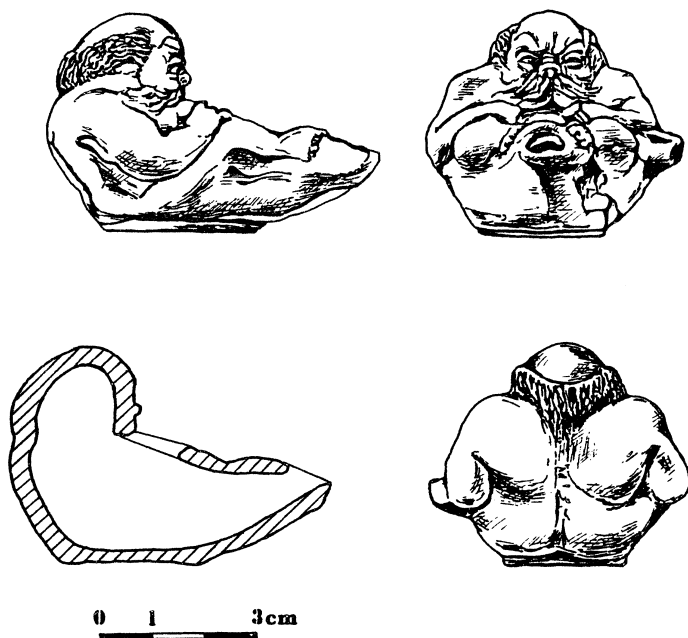


Fig. 1. Terracotta lamp in form of naked dwarf.

shops are decorated with painted or stamped patterns. Among the latter there are floral and figural subjects. Some seals of circular shape with floral patterns modeled in sunk relief on their flat surface – doubtless moulds used for stamping either bread, cakes or the bottom of ceramic plates – add to the series of objects of this type found during previous campaigns.⁸

⁸ E.g. K. Myśliwiec in: *PAM* II, 1989-1990, the picture on the cover and p. 29, Fig. 2; Id., *Fouilles polono-égyptiennes...*, o.c., Fig. 8a. Mrs. Joanna Szczepkowska has been charged with the publication of this group of objects.

Terracotta figurines complete the list of ceramic objects that were probably made in local workshops. Beside various representations of Harpokrates, Isis and Bes, there are figurines showing Greek gods, animals and other subjects as well as portraits of individuals. Some of them reveal a considerable iconographic originality, e.g. a figure of Isis with two sons, the younger one at her breast and the older one at her side. The stratigraphic context of this figurine implies a date in the first half of the 2nd century BC, which allows it to be interpreted as a representation of Cleopatra I with her sons Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII. Another interesting terracotta, found in a later Ptolemaic stratum, shows an elephant with scenes in relief on the animal's sides. On one side a small god Bes is shown dancing between two tall cocks and on the other one there are two naked ithyphallic dancers.

A group of erotic figurines, evidently *ex-vota* connected with the cult of fertility, include both terracotta and small ithyphallic sculptures made of stone or faience. A similar function must be attributed to several small limestone stelae bearing most frequently the representation of a naked goddess standing in a naos which has a triangular top. Their homogeneous, rather rough style betrays a common origin. Their occurrence in the rooms that surround the bath structures dating from the reign of Ptolemy VI seems to define to some extent the function of this unique building.