

# Krzysztof Babraj, Hanna Szymańska

---

## Marea: First Interim Report, 2000

---

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 12, 35-45

---

2001

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

# MAREA

## FIRST INTERIM REPORT, 2000

Hanna Szymańska, Krzysztof Babraj

*The site of Marea is located c. 45 km southwest of Alexandria, on the southern bank of Lake Maryut (ancient Mareotis) (Fig. 1). The three principal objectives of the first season conducted by a Polish expedition was to map the concession area, record extant architectural remains, and excavate, if possible, one of the structures. The work, which proceeded from October 22 to November 30, 2000, was sponsored by Warsaw University's Center of Archaeology, as well as a number of private institutions and individuals.<sup>1)</sup>*

1) Dr. Hanna Szymańska directed a team, which included: Mr. Krzysztof Babraj and Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek, archaeologists; Prof. Dr. Elżbieta Mycielska-Dowgiałło and Ms. Barbara Woronko, geologists-sedimentologists; Dr. Eng. Mieczysław Niepokólczycki, topographer; Ms. Daria Tarara, architect; Mr. Tomasz Kalarus, photographer; and Ms. Teresa Żurkowska-Mastalerz, restorer. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Mr. Ahmed Arabi, inspector. Our most sincere thanks go to Dr. Wojciech Kołataj for his generous and invaluable suggestions concerning the interpretation of the baths.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Gaballa Ali Gaballa, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and Mr. Abd el-Salam Bakr, General Director of the SCA Egyptian Antiquities Sector for their support and encouragement. Our work would not have been successful without the cooperation of Mr. Adly Roushdy Amir, General Director of the Alexandrian Antiquities Department.

We would like to express our gratitude to the institutions and private donors, without whose financial aid the excavations could hardly have proceeded: ES-System, Firma Mrozek, Austrian Airlines, as well as Teresa Żurkowska-Mastalerz, Daria Tarara and Tomasz Gizbert Studnicki.

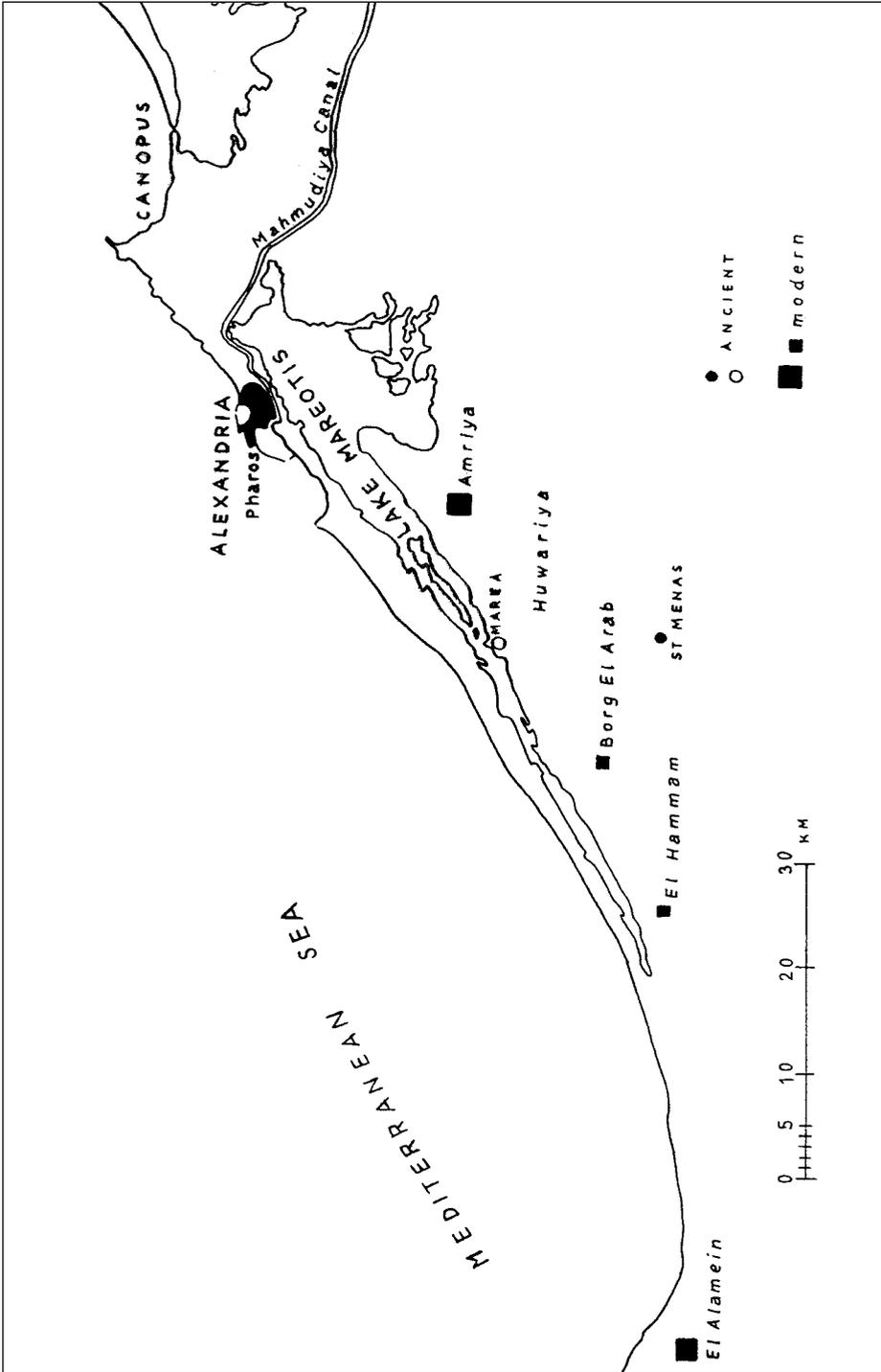


Fig. 1. Map of the Mareotis region (after M. Rodziewicz, "From Alexandria to the West", in: Commerce et artisanat dans l'Alexandrie hellénistique et romaine, Actes du Colloque d'Athènes 11-12 décembre 1988, BCH, suppl. 33 (1998), 94)

## SITE DESCRIPTION

The ruins of stone structures, located on the southern shores of the western branch of Lake Mareotis and now near the village of Hawwariyyah, were investigated in 1977-1981 by Fawzi el-Fakharani from Alexandria University.<sup>2)</sup> The architectural remains were first identified as the ancient port of Marea by Mahmoud-Bey el Falaki in 1866,<sup>3)</sup> but the identification has been contested.<sup>4)</sup> In Graeco-Roman times Marea, once the capital of the Mareotic nome, served as a shipping port for goods brought from further inland and sent overseas via Alexandria to the ports of southern Europe. The origins of the town go back to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty as indicated by tombs<sup>5)</sup> and foremost by the rich literary sources. Records of it in the texts of ancient writers speak of the great importance of the town, not only as a port,

but also as a respected wine-producing center. Several wineries from Hellenistic and Roman times stand in confirmation of this. Finds from the 13th-14th centuries suggest that the port of Marea continued in existence until the Middle Ages.

The piers and quays of the port installations, forming several basins, are spread out over a distance of one and a half kilometer, while architectural remains, covering a much smaller area, are situated along the edge of the lake. They are dated by pottery finds to the 5th-8th centuries. Explorations by scholars from the University of Alexandria led to a partial identification of the town layout. Two streets have been traced, namely the *cardo* and the *decumanus*, along with the ruins of houses, stores, a public bath, an oil mill and a huge basilica.

## BYZANTINE BATH

Of the 81.20 ha covered by the license, an area measuring ca. 168 m<sup>2</sup> was marked out this year for exploration. The spot that was selected is a small kom located 400 m south of the shore of the lake, where some fragments of walls in fired brick had been observed. Remains of a brick structure appeared immediately below the present topsoil (at a depth of 30 cm). The

surviving architecture permitted a partial reconstruction of the plan. While at least two phases of rebuilding are in evidence and changes of layout are easily identified, so far no specific layers could be associated with these alterations.

The building has been identified as a small public bath situated c. 140 m southeast of the *cardo* located by

2) F. el-Fakharani, Recent excavations at Marea in Egypt, Das Römisch-Byzantinische Ägypten. Akten des internationalen Symposions 26.-30. September 1978 in Trier, *Aegyptiaca Treverensia* 2 (1983), 175-186.

3) Mahmoud Bey el Falaki, Mémoire sur l'antique Alexandrie (Copenhague 1872), 96.

4) Frazer was the first to express doubts about the attribution of this site. He stated that although Marea had a long history, its remains are evidently late (P.M. Fraser, Ptolemaic Alexandria, I (Oxford 1972), 146). The problem is discussed by M. Rodziewicz in "Alexandria and District of Mareotis", in: *Graeco-Arabica* 2. First International Congress on Greek and Arabic Studies (Athens 1983), 199-216. He is inclined to identify this site with ancient Philoxenité rather than Marea, basing this opinion on his personal observations of the stone structures and surface pottery dated to the 5th-7th centuries. Philoxenité was founded by the praetorian prefect of the Emperor Anastasius (491-518) as a resting place for pilgrims on their way to Abu Mena.

5) El-Fakharani, op.cit, 176.

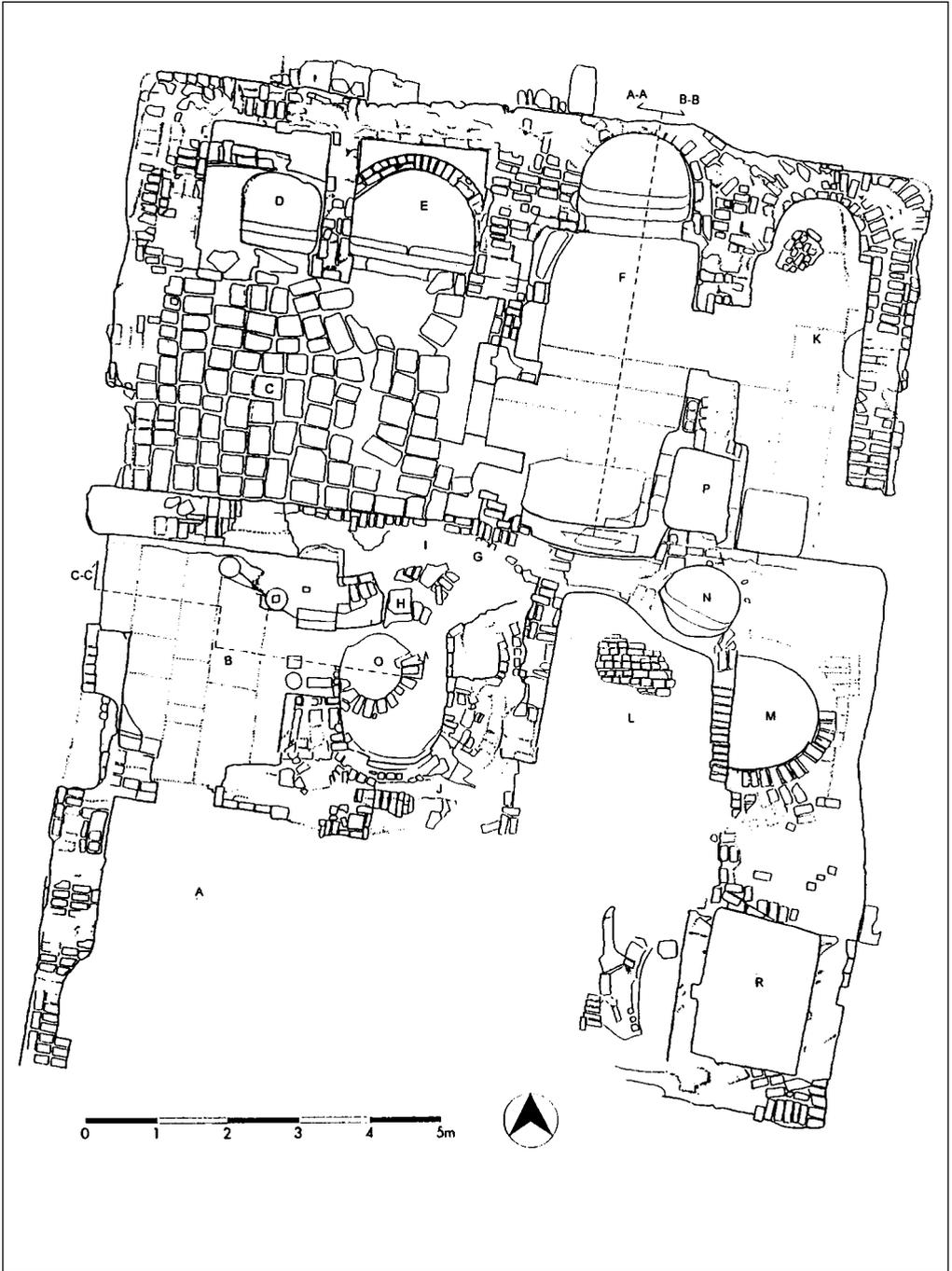


Fig. 2. Plan of the bath  
(Drawing D. Tarara)

Fakharani, probably surrounded by a stone wall, part of which is presently visible to the north of it. Fired bricks (measuring each 24.5 x 11 x 7 cm) were used in its construction, bonded in lime mortar with crushed pottery added, forming very thick layers (up to 11 cm occasionally). Some of the wall plastering has survived intact.

The bath complex is composed of two units (Figs. 2, 3): a bigger one to the south and a smaller one to the north.

The smaller complex includes a *tepidarium* (K) that is accessible from the east. The next chamber (F) was flanked on both west and east by passageways, respectively 80 cm and 102 cm wide. A semicircular pool by the north wall, 180 cm deep, was provided with a draining channel and two narrow steps, which were used also as benches for the bathers (Fig. 4). A small bench of marble slabs, now destroyed, was found to the



Fig. 3. General view of the northern part of the bath from the east  
(Photo T. Kalarus)

south. Imprints of the marble flagstones survive in the mortar bedding of the floor; some fragments of broken slabs were also excavated in the debris. Of special interest is the hypocaust cellar under the floor, which was not fully explored in this campaign for lack of time. The cellar is vaulted and cut by a longitudinal brick wall that replaces the pillars commonly found in installations of this type. The mud-bonded hypocaust walls were com-

pletely covered with a thick layer of soot. The only find in this chamber was an oil lamp dated to c. AD 500-650 (*Fig. 5*).<sup>6)</sup> The heating system was also equipped with two *tubulatio* for heating the eastern wall and with four smoke flues in the opposite one. The *tubuli*, measuring 14 by 14 cm, were located in the thickness of the brick wall, three in each one (*Fig. 6*). Some of them were locally produced, others could have been made elsewhere.



*Fig. 4. Pool in room F*  
(*Photo T. Kalarus*)

6) D. M. Bailey, *A Catalogue of the Lamps in the British Museum. III. Roman Provincial Lamps* (London 1988), 269, Q 2228, pl. 53, 144, fig. 141.



Fig. 5. Oil lamp found in the hypocaust cellar of the bath (Photo T. Kalarus)



Fig. 6. Tubulatio in the western wall of room A (Photo T. Kalarus)

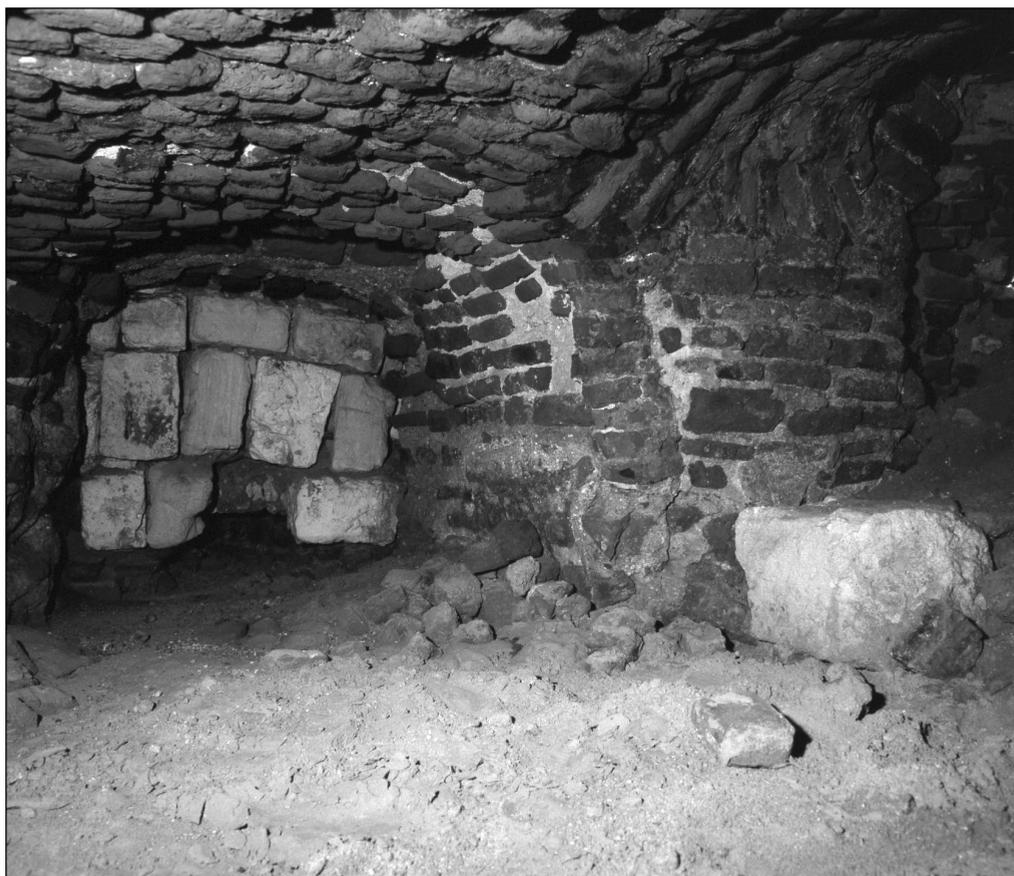


Fig. 7. Pools in rooms D and E. View from the north (Photo T. Kalarus)

The described chamber is connected with two others (D and E) by the passageway already mentioned above. While the interpretation of this part of the complex will have to wait for the investigation of this area to be completed, it was possible during this campaign to identify two structural phases in the northern section of the walls. Two semicircular pools were set into the floor, which was discovered at a depth of 40 cm below the surviving northern wall. The pools, 180 cm deep each, are constructed in similarity to the pools in chamber F;

both are provided with two benches each and a draining channel (*Fig. 7*). The pavement consists of big stone blocks covering completely chamber C, laid apparently when the building was already in ruins. From the adjoining chamber J a thick layer of debris containing bricks, mortar and pieces of painted plastering, as well as broken pieces of *tubulatio*, was removed.

The larger unit was cleared sufficiently to reveal a furnace (O) used for heating water in autonomic boilers. The furnace, the top of which measured 75 cm across,



*Fig. 8. Cellar under room B  
(Photo T. Kalarus)*

was encircled by a well-preserved casing wall, built in brick with some set-offs, presumably meant to support one or two boilers. Four deep smoke flues radiated from this wall in four directions. The approach to the furnace led from a cellar discovered under chamber B (Fig. 8). The brick-built vaulted cellar had been blocked with big stone blocks on the north and south.

The entrance to chamber B is situated in the west wall; it was used probably to service the boilers. A small marble block found in the threshold features a circular

hole, which must have been used for mounting the door pivot. A second passageway connected chambers B and A. The latter, still unexplored, could have been a second *tepidarium*. *Tubulatio* with three ceramic tubuli was noted in the west wall.

The floor of chamber B was originally laid with marble slabs (Fig. 9). Imprints of these are still visible in the plaster bedding and fragments of the slabs have been found in the debris. A basalt *labrum* foot (H. 64 cm; Dia. 32 cm), obviously repaired in antiquity, was found against



Fig. 9. Room B. View from the west  
(Photo T. Kalarus)

the wall in the northeastern corner of this chamber (Fig. 10). The *labrum* seems to be positioned on top of what looks like the arm rest of a marble seat or an Ionic capital (only one side is visible); it appears to have been plastered to keep it in place (having possibly been broken?) and the surface was subsequently painted red. A ceramic pipe, 7 cm in diameter, inserted into the northern wall, close to the *labrum*, brought hot water from the boiler directly to the basin. A fallen marble column was found in front of the *labrum*. A plaster imprint marks its place on the floor. Its diameter of 23 cm may represent the module applied in this structure: The same diameter is featured by a marble column base found close to a fallen arch in the space designated as A on the plan.

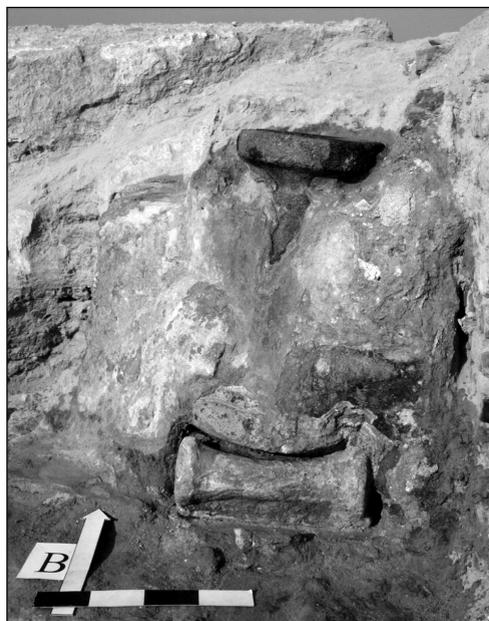


Fig. 10. The *labrum* in room B with evidence of ancient repairs (Photo T. Kalarus)

A small rectangular bench was discovered in the southwestern corner. The second layer in this chamber (at a depth of about 40 cm) yielded a Coptic terracotta figurine covered with a cream slip bearing fragmentarily preserved painted decoration.

In the eastern part of this section, two semicircular pools (M and N, 50 cm and 180 cm deep respectively) were cleared. A channel joins pool N with the rectangular pool P that abuts chamber F on the east.

The destruction of the bath may have been caused by an earthquake, as suggested by four fallen brick arches from the vault (in chambers A, L and K). It is tempting to link the destruction to the raid by the Persians under Chosroes II in AD 618.

Several phases of painted decoration are to be observed on recovered fragments of painted plaster. The oldest layer seems to have been a plain red with black ornament.

The collection of pottery finds from the bath is fairly modest.<sup>7)</sup> Almost all of the recorded sherds were found scattered in the fill that accumulated in the building after its abandonment, excluding their use for a detailed periodization. On the other hand, the assemblage seems to be fairly homogenous in terms of the chronology, with few residual fragments being recorded. There are unfortunately no finds that could be assigned to any stratigraphical context from the original construction phase.

Local Mareotic pottery constitutes an overwhelming majority of the recorded ceramics. The principal matrix is a local marly clay with considerable quantities of lime inclusions and some sand temper, plus occasional mica specks. The pottery

7) Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek contributed the section of the report on the pottery finds.

shows extensive color variation, ranging from olive-green to red, most probably as a result of varied firing conditions. The surface of the vessels is usually left unslipped, although it very often features a pale cream surface (self-slip), most probably resulting from salt precipitation in clay during drying or firing.

Locally produced amphorae form undoubtedly the largest group. They are represented both by fragments of large bag-shaped containers produced in Abu Mena (Late Roman Amphorae 5/6; Kellia form 186), as well as by a smaller version manufactured in many workshops identified on the southern shores of Lake Maryut (Kellia 187-190). Typical tableware is practically absent in the fill, except for some jugs and large carinated bowls on a low ring base. The latter occasionally feature painted decoration made in very faint red paint – usually schematically rendered festoons and garlands, both motifs that are encountered frequently on Coptic pottery.

Apart from the pottery of local manufacture, a small number of sherds

produced in the Nile Valley were also identified. These include several fragments of typical Nile silt “chocolate” amphorae (Kellia 173-177, Late Roman 7), cooking pots, as well as some fragments of Aswan tableware (Egyptian Red Slip A ware).

Foreign made pottery is even less numerous. It includes a few fragments of Late Roman 1 amphorae produced either in Cyprus or Cilicia, and Late Roman 4 amphorae originating from Gaza.

The general chronological horizon of the structures, as well as the evidence of the oil-lamp found in the hypocaust chamber of the bath and the pottery suggest a 6th-7th century date for the bath complex. There is an unexpected – as far as this period is concerned – absence of the typical Late Roman tableware series, which is usually quite common on Egyptian sites and particularly well attested in Alexandria (African, Cypriot and Phocaeen). No recorded fragment could be dated safely to later than the mid 8th century AD, which is the most plausible date for the final abandonment of the area.