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TWO ARCHITECTURAL TERMS: ΣΚΟΥΤΑΩΣΙΣ AND ΣΤΙΒΑΣ
IN AN INSCRIPTION FROM MARINA/EL-ALAMEIN
(WITH AN APPENDIX: INSCRIPTION ON A FRYING-PAN)*

During the 2000 excavation season of the Polish-Egyptian Preservation Mission at the site of Marina/el-Alamein, some 90 kilometres West of Alexandria,¹ house H21C was excavated. The house lies in the north part of the ancient town in the immediate vicinity of the port, and dates from the Roman Imperial period. Two fragmentarily preserved marble plaques (A and B) with fragments of a Greek inscription were discovered in the filling just above the floor in the Room 2 of the house (cf. Fig. 1). The context of the discovery does not allow one to say whether the plaques belonged to the original equipment of the room or were brought from elsewhere.

Plaque (A) is of light brown marble with bluish flacks. Preserved are two fragments that join together and form larger piece with dimensions: w. 34.5 cm, h. 34 cm, th. 4.8 cm. The plaque is broken away of all sides except for the one that bears the inscription. The inscription is carved on the thin side surface of the plaque. H. of letters: 1.5 cm (*omikron, mu*) – 2.2 cm (*kappa*). Palaeographi-

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¹ For the work of the Polish-Egyptian Preservation Mission at Marina/el-Alamein see preliminary reports published annually in the periodical *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*. The archaeological site of Marina/el-Alamein could be probably identified with the ancient locality called Antiphrai or Antiphra (Strab. XVII 799; *Stad. m. m.* 7; Claud. Ptol. IV 5, 7; Steph. Byz. s.v.; Hierocl. 734, 2), known as bishopric in Late Antiquity (Athanas. *Ad Antioch.* 10).

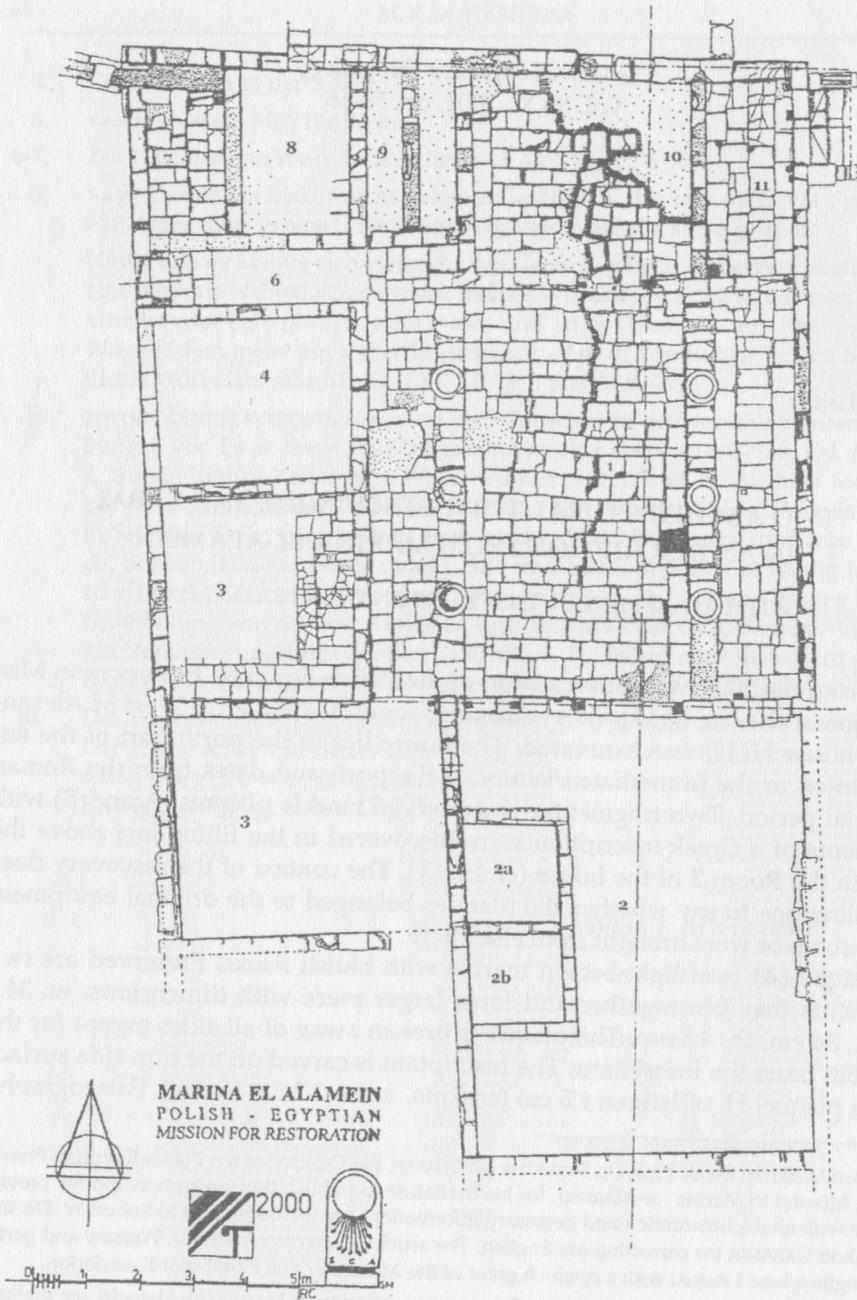


Fig. 1. House 21V at the site of Marina/el-Alamein
(Drawing: Stanisław Medeksza)

cally letters should be designated as round epigraphic majuscules; note very prominent *apices*. Plaque (B) is of gray-bluish marble with brown flacks. What has been preserved, are nine fragments fitting together and forming a larger piece with dimensions: w. 60.5 cm, h. 29.5 cm, th. 4.3 cm. Of the edges of the plaque only this with inscription is still intact. The inscription is carved on the thin side surface of the plaque. H. of letters: 1.6 cm (*omikron*) to 2.2 cm (*delta*). Similarly as in the previous case the letters are round epigraphic majuscules with very prominent *apices*.

There is no doubt that the two plaques described above were parts of one and the same decorative work (Fig. 2) designated in the inscription as σκούτλωσις (cf. commentary below). Consequently, one must assume that both plaques bear two fragments of the same inscription (Fig. 3). The sequence of plaques is (A) – (B). It is ascertained by a sinusoidal sign and a small circle above it that undoubtedly mark the end of the inscription at the end of the plaque (B). It is not known whether the plaque (B) followed immediately the plaque (A). If so, the lacuna between Κομμό[δου and κ]αὶ equals to the lacking part of the plaque (A). However, one can not exclude that there were one or more similar plaques between plaques (A) and (B). In this case, the lacuna in question would have been much larger. In any case, another plaque must have existed, containing the beginning of the inscription and placed before the present plaque (A).

The inscription could be read as follows:

[- - - Μάρκ]ου Ἀντωνείνου Κομμό[δου - - - κ]αὶ τὴν σ[κ]ούτλωσιν τῶν στιβάδων.

[- - -] of Marcus Antoninus Commodus [- - - (has laid or have laid) - - -] and the chequered-work of *stibades*.

What we have before us is an inscription commemorating the completion of some works of architectural-decorative character (cf. the accusative σ[κ]ούτλωσιν preceded by κ]αὶ presupposing another work). In the lacuna between Κομμό[δου and κ]αὶ we should expect, besides the indication of another work, the name(s) of person(s) or institution(s) who were responsible for these works. Since the inscriptions like this one are often dedications, the lacuna could have also contained the name(s) of the addressee(s) of the works in question.

The genitive Μάρκ]ου Ἀντωνείνου Κομμό[δου depends on an introductory ὑπέρ or ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας (or ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας καὶ αἰωνίου διαμονῆς). Another possibility is a dating clause ([ἔτους χ Μάρκ]ου Ἀντωνείνου Κομμό[δου). Although dating clauses normally occur at the end of inscriptions, sometimes they take the initial position.

The imperial titulature is that of Commodus. Besides the names of emperor it could have contained also other elements such as: Αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ (very

probable), Κύριος, and victorious titles (possible but not necessary). According to Paul Bureth² the nomenclature Μάρκος Ἀντωνίνος Κόμμοδος denominating Commodus in the present inscription has not been evidenced until now in Greek sources from Egypt. Although there are no Egyptian parallels to this nomenclature, it is both quite regular and informative.³ It is known that to the lifetime of his father Marcus Aurelius, Commodus bore officially the names Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus. Only after the death of Marcus Aurelius in March 180 A.D., he assumed the cognomen of his father — Antoninus — and, in exchange for the gentilicium Aurelius, also father's praenomen Marcus that he used instead of his own praenomen Lucius. Thus, from A.D. 180 onwards, the official name of Commodus was: Marcus Aurelius Commodus Antoninus. However, Commodus did not regard highly the gentilicium Aurelius. In the inscriptions on coins this gentilicium occurs only in years 183 and 184 A.D. More regularly, he was named on coins from the period 180-191 A.D. Marcus Commodus Antoninus, and on those from the earliest years of his sole reign (180-183 A.D.) also Marcus Antoninus Commodus. Towards the end of his reign (after A.D. 191), following his autocratic aspirations, Commodus came back to his original names Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus. The double change of Commodus' nomenclature (in A.D. 180 and 191) allows us to date our inscription quite certainly to the period 180-191 A.D. and most probably to the years 180-183 A.D.

The substantive σκούτλωσις, and the related verb σκουτλώω, derive from σκούτλα which transcribes the Latin *scutula*. The term σκούτλωσις means "chequered-work". In Greek literature, it is attested only in Hero *Mechanicus, Geometrica* 23, 3 (in plural). On the other hand, the substantive σκούτλωσις (and the related verb σκουτλώω) occurs quite often in Greek inscriptions of Roman Imperial period.⁴ It is normally applied to a decorative work consisting of plaques made of marbles of different colours and laid, either on a floor or on a wall to form a chequered surface. A σκούτλωσις could have adorned public buildings: cult-places, basilicae, stoaes, theatres, parts of gymnasia (porticos, aleipteria, exedrae), baths etc. We hear nothing about a σκούτλωσις in private houses, but this architectural feature will have been used there as well. The lack of information in this matter depends only on the character of epigraphical sources. The present inscription yields the first attestation of the term σκούτλωσις for Graeco-Roman Egypt.

² P. BURETH, *Les Titulatures impériales dans les papyrus, les ostraca et les inscriptions d'Égypte (30 a.C. - 284 p.C.)* (= *Papyrologica Bruxellensia* 2), Bruxelles 1964, 87-92.

³ For Commodus' nomenclature see P. VON ROHDEN, *RE* II [1896], col. 2469, s.v. "Aurelius 89".

⁴ For references see L. ROBERT, *Études anatoliennes*, Paris 1937, p. 410, note 3; L. & J. ROBERT, *La Carie* II, Paris 1955, 324; L. ROBERT, *REG* 1957, 362, note 1; IDEM, *Nouvelles inscriptions de Sardes*, Paris 1964, 47-52; some new attestations: A. BALLAND, *Inscriptions d'époque impériale du Létôon* (= *Fouilles de Xanthos* 7), Paris 1981, no. 67; *SEG* XXVI 1220; XXXVI 1099; XXXVIII 1321; XLVI 1304.

The word στιβάς denoted originally a couch made of leaves or foliage strewn over the ground or stuffed into a mattress or cushions serving as a rule for sleeping but also for eating.⁵ The dining aspect became more and more important with time and στιβάς came to denote, among other things, a couch or bed on which one lays at meal times and a room for eating. The notion of dining is exclusive for the diminutive of στιβάς — στιβάδ(ε)ιον, which was used to translate the Latin *sigma*.⁶ Στιβάς as a dining couch or a dining room is attested in inscriptions. A dedication of A.D. 184 found north of Tripolis in Lebanon near ruins of a temple from Roman times informs that a certain Diogenes son of Khoregios together with his wife Diodota erected τὴν βαίτην τὴν σὺν ἐν αὐτῇ στιβάδι καὶ τῇ πρὸς ταύτην κειμένην στοᾶ καὶ τῷ λάκκῳ and adds that all these constructions were hewn in solid rock extending to the precinct walls of the temple.⁷ According to J.-P. Rey-Cocquais this βαίτη was a hostel for pilgrims and στιβάς a dining room within it. A honorary decree of the association of landowners from Psenemphaia south-east of Alexandria for their president, Apollonios son of Theon, dated to the 3rd of May, 5 B.C., mentions among the merits of the honoured the reconstruction of a dining room (οἶκος) with numerous beds for dining (στιβάδες), ll. 25-27:⁸ αὐτὸς ἐκ τοῦ ἰδίου ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ καὶ τὸν οἶκον ἀνωικοδόμησε καὶ τὰ χρηστήρια πάντα, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἐκονίασε τὸν οἶκον ἀξιολόγως καὶ ἔστρωσε στιβάσι διαφόροις.

The original στιβάδες of leaves or foliage were sometimes used in cult ceremonies, particularly those of Dionysos,⁹ and in consequence στιβάς started to designate a festival of Dionysos as well as an association of Dionysos worshippers and a meeting place of such an association. The cultic meaning of the term στιβάς is attested in the famous Athenian inscription of Iobakchoi of A.D. 178,¹⁰ in an inscription from Istros in Moesia¹¹ and possibly also in an inscription from Smyrna.¹²

The original form of στιβάς — a mattress or a cushion — gave rise to another semantic development of the word. Στιβάς became with time an architectural term denoting a structure in form of bed serving different purposes.

⁵ Cf. F. POLAND, *RE* III A [1929], col. 2482-4, s.v. στιβάς.

⁶ Cf. e.g. K. M. D. DUNBABIN, "Triclinium and Stibadium" [in:] W. J. SLATER (ed.), *Dining in a Classical Context*, Ann Arbor 1991, 121-148

⁷ J.-P. REY-COQUAIS, *MUSJ* 47 (1972), 87-105 (*SEG* XXVI 1652).

⁸ O. GUÉRAUD, *BSAA* 32 (1938) 21-40 (*SB* V 8267). A. BERNAND, *I. Delta* III, 899-913 (A. BERNAND, *I. Prose*, no. 49).

⁹ Cf. R. MERKELBACH, *Die Hirten des Dionysos. Die Dionysos-Mysterien der römischen Kaiserzeit und der bukolische Roman des Longos*, Stuttgart 1988, 62-63.

¹⁰ *IG* II-III² 1368 = *SIG*³ 1109 = F. SOKOLOWSKI, *Lois sacrées* III, *Suppl.* 1109; cf. L. DEUBNER, *Attische Feste*, Darmstadt 1956, p. 104.

¹¹ *I. Scyth. Min.* I 167.

¹² *I.K.* 24, 1 [Smyrna], 722.

Thus, in funerary inscriptions from Western Caria and the neighbouring islands as well as from Cilicia, *στιβάς* designates part of a tomb.¹³ A tomb could have had one to three *στιβάδες* belonging to different persons. An inscription of the 2nd cent. AD. originating from Lindos commemorates the erection of a *βομός* with *στιβάδες* reposing on it, dedicated to Hera Basileia.¹⁴ One gets the impression that these *στιβάδες* were not simple beds or mattresses stuffed with foliage, but solid constructions of stone or another material.

The question arises what exactly *στιβάς* means in our inscription from Marina/el-Alamein. The plural *τῶν στιβάδων* seems to exclude the second meaning of the three presented above. It is difficult to imagine that in a small locality like the one unearthed in Marina/el-Alamein there were at the same time at least two meeting places belonging to an association of Dionysos' worshippers which, again at the same time, were decorated with *σκούτλωσις*. The very mention of numerous *στιβάδες* suggests that they were elevated structures in shape of beds undoubtedly standing near each other in an enclosure or a room. What was decorated with *σκούτλωσις* were surely their upper surfaces. One should note that the inscription is carved on the thin side-surfaces of plaques, to the right angles of the surface of the *σκούτλωσις* itself, so that it could have been read only by a person standing in front of or near by *στιβάδες*. *Σκούτλωσις* could have also adorned the external side-walls of *στιβάδες*; we have, however, no direct proof for that.

The dimensions of the *σκούτλωσις*-plaques allow us to make inferences concerning the dimensions of the *στιβάδες*. The plaques measured at least ca. 65 centimetres (cf. above). We have already seen that the inscription was carved at least on three plaques. If the inscription extended only on one side of a *στιβάς*, the length of this side was at least 200 cm, however, it could well have been much longer. If the inscription extended around a *στιβάς*, its sides might have measured less than 200 cm. As for the height of *στιβάδες* no indications are available.

What purposes did the *στιβάδες* from Marina/el-Alamein serve? Apparently they were not funerary beds, for this meaning of the term *στιβάς* seems to be exclusive for Asia Minor and neighbouring islands. Most probably they were dining beds similarly to the *στιβάδες* from the honorary decree for Apollonios from Psenemphaia. The luxurious marble revetment of these beds presupposing a solid construction make them hardly expectable in a private house. They rather adorned a dining room belonging to the city or, more

¹³ For this meaning of the word *στιβάς*, see J. KUBIŃSKA, *Les monuments funéraires dans les inscriptions grecques de l'Asie Mineure* (= *Travaux du Centre d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences* 5), Warszawa 1968, 111-112 with reference to L. ROBERT, *BCH* 59 (1935) 469 (= *Op. Min.* I, 528); further occurrences of the word *στιβάς* in funerary inscriptions collected in commentary to I. K. 34 [Mylasa], 440.

¹⁴ IG XII 1, 786, 20-21.

probably, to an association of cultic or professional character.¹⁵ It is very well known that one of main activities of Egyptian associations of the Ptolemaic and Roman times were meetings of their members on certain occasions to perform common religious rites, which were usually followed by a banquet.¹⁶ In the Ptolemaic period members of associations met as a rule in public buildings, mainly in secondary rooms of temples; the associations of Roman times owned their own houses with dining-rooms.¹⁷ If the find-spot of the inscribed σκούτλωσις-plaques is that where they were originally set up, we could assume that the House 21C on the site of Marina/el-Alamein was such a club-house of an association.

APPENDIX:
INSCRIPTION ON A FRYING-PAN

During the same 2000 season of work at Marina/el-Alamein a frying-pan was found in house H10a together with a large deposit of pottery consisting mainly of amphoras. The room in which all this pottery had been deposited was possibly a kitchen accompanied by a store.

The frying-pan (Fig. 4) is made of clay. It has the usual form of a round flat pan with a socket for setting of a (wooden) handle to the rim. The diameter of the pan at the top is 25 cm and at the bottom 18 cm. In the middle of the bottom there are two concentric circles with the letters ΓΡ inside them. Beneath the circles, to the left of the main axis of the frying-pan indicated by the socket and obliquely to it, the inscription ΕΡΜΙΠΠΟΥ is to be seen. Both the letters ΓΡ and the inscription ΕΡΜΙΠΠΟΥ are retrograde which means that they were done by stamping in moist clay before firing. Further on, it should be noted that both these elements are written in lines parallel to each other. Hence one may suppose that the potter most probably had at his disposal only one stamp containing both the letters ΓΡ encircled by a double line and the inscription ΕΡΜΙΠΠΟΥ and not two separate stamps. Consequently, both elements should be considered parts of one and the same inscription. In the light of the above reasoning the inscription can be read as follows:

¹⁵ For associations in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt see generally M. SAN NICOLÒ, *Ägyptisches Vereinswesen zur Zeit der Ptolemäer und Römer*, I-II, 2. ed. (= *Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und Antiken Rechtsgeschichte* 2), München 1972; F. DE CÉNIVAL, *Les associations religieuses en Égypte d'après les documents démotiques* (= *Bibliothèque d'Étude* 46), Le Caire 1972.

¹⁶ For social activities of Egyptian associations see F. DE CÉNIVAL, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 177-190.

¹⁷ For meeting places of Egyptian associations in Ptolemaic and Roman times see generally C. ROBERTS, T. C. SKEAT & A. D. NOCK, *HTHR* 29 (1936) 75-78; SAN NICOLÒ, *op. cit.* (n. 15), II, 144-151; F. DE CÉNIVAL, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 177-178.

γρ()
Ἑρμίππου

“(Something) of Hermippos.”

I do not know how the abbreviated word γρ() should be expanded. The words beginning with γρ() are most often derivatives of the verb γράφω. This suggests the reading: γρ(άμμο) Ἑρμίππου or γρ(αφή) Ἑρμίππου = “Inscription of Hermippos”. Another possibility would be to read: γρ(αμμοατέως) Ἑρμίππου¹⁸ = “(Frying-pan made in the workshop) of the scribe Hermippos” or “(Stamp) of the scribe Hermippos”. In the second case it might have been a stamp of an official who was in charge of controlling the activity of private workshops.¹⁹ The reading “Frying-pan (made in the workshop) of Hermippos” would be the most appropriate but I could not find any suitable word beginning with γρ() .

Theoretically, one can also take into consideration the possibility of reading:

γρ()·
Ἑρμίππου

“(Something). (This frying-pan is a product) of Hermippos.”

With this reading, the abbreviated word γρ() is syntactically not connected with the following name and may cover a variety of meanings.

The letter forms suggest that the inscription (and the frying-pan itself) are from the Roman Imperial period.

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¹⁸ Cf. stamps with the inscription Διονείκου βου(λεντοῦ) occurring on the so-called North-Syrian mortaria of the IIIrd/IVth century A.D.; J. W. HAYES, “North Syrian Mortaria”, *Hesperia* 36 (1967) 337-347.

¹⁹ This could be compared to a certain degree, with the role played by stamps with names of eponymous officials of Greek cities occurring on amphoras from Hellenistic period.

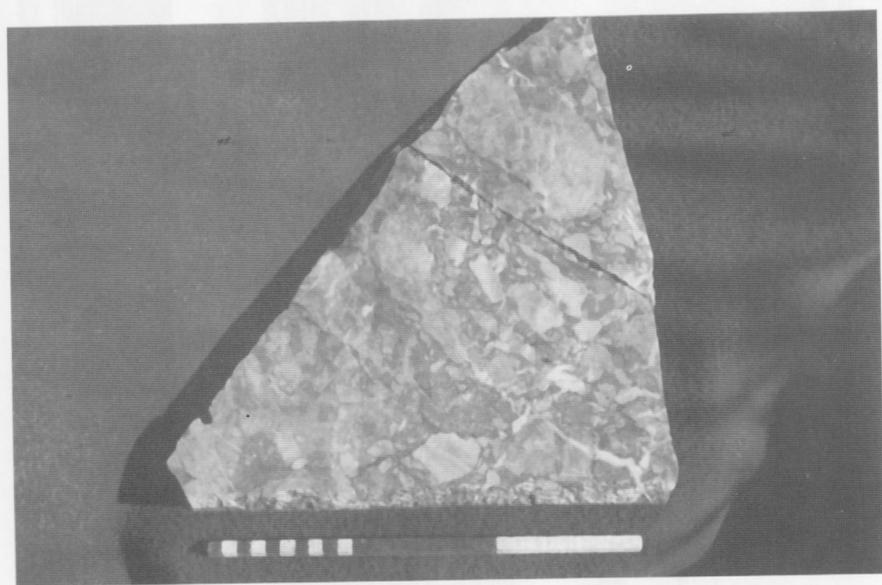
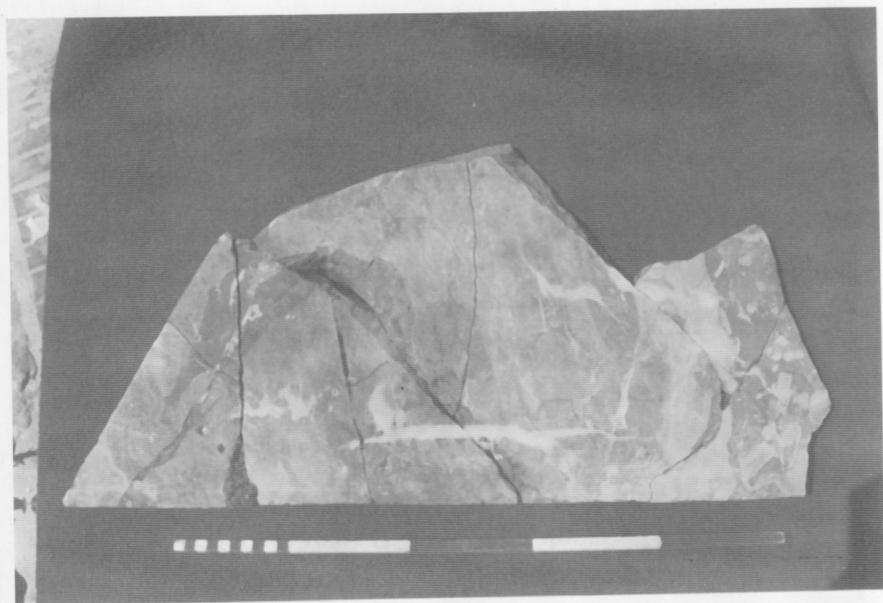
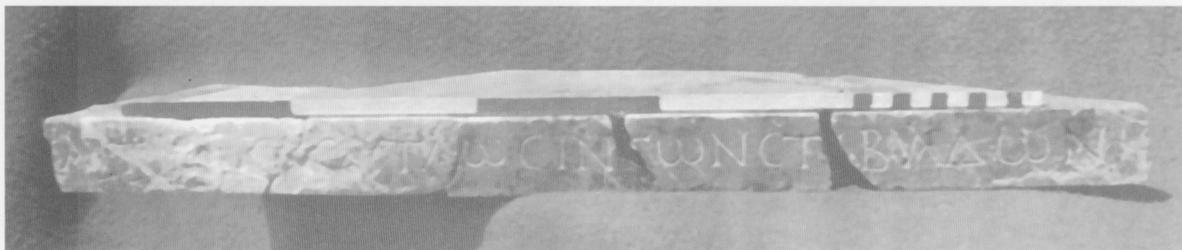
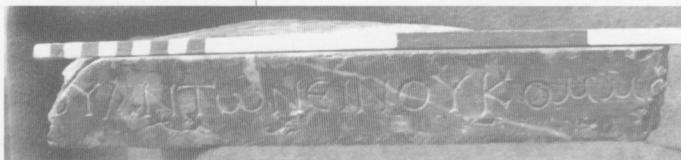


Fig. 2 a-b. The σκούτλωσις-plaques. top and bottom, found in the house 21c in Marina el-Alamein. An overhead view showing the difference of the stone structure (photo: St. Medeksza)



ΔΥΑΝΤΩΝΕΙΝΟΥΚΟΜΜΕ

ΑΙΤΙ- ΙΣ ΟΥΤΛΩCΙΝ ΤΩΝCΤ ΒΑΔΩΝ

Fig. 3 a-c. Inscription on the side-surface of the σκούτλωσις-plaques
(photo: St. Medeksza, drawing: A. Biernacki, St. Medeksza)

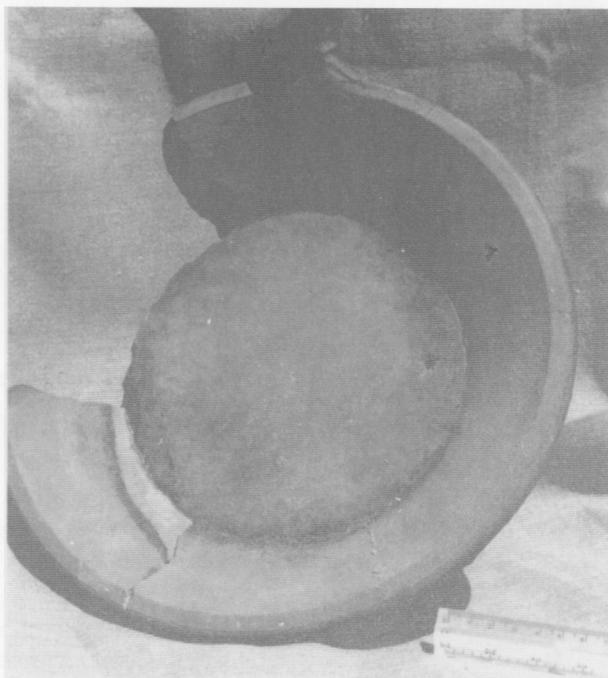


Fig. 4 a-b. Inscribed frying-pan found in the house 10a
in Marina el-Alamein (photo: St. Medeksza)