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## Marea 2008: Pottery from Excavations

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# MAREA 2008: POTTERY FROM EXCAVATIONS

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**Abstract:** The report treats on pottery finds from the shops in the southwest part of the basilica and from the nave. These are mostly tableware, including jugs, bowls, cooking pots, lids and amphorae (LRA 1 [=Kellia 164], LRA 4 from Gaza and some rare LRA 7). The ceramic material uncovered this season is diverse, yet in terms of design and materials it is consistent with local production. A few rare ceramics with stamped inscriptions have also been recorded, the more interesting pieces being two vessel fragments: one with an impressed depiction of a cross in the form of *crux gemmata*, and another with a partly preserved representation of Christ holding a cross.

**Keywords:** Marea, Christian basilica, amphorae, stamped pottery, *crux gemmata*

The ceramic material from excavations in the basilica of Marea in the 2008 season was diverse, but in terms of form and fabric it corresponded to known local production and the 6th to 8th century AD repertoire. All identifications by the present author have been based on Grzegorz Majcherek's published analyses of the pottery discovered at Marea during excavation seasons between 2000 and 2006 (Majcherek 2002; 2008; Szymańska, Babraj 2003: 47; 2004: 62).

Finds from excavations in the south-eastern corner of the basilica comprised many fragments of Egyptian Red Slip Ware, including plates and bowls dated to the mid 6th–7th century AD (Majcherek 2008: 121–122, Figs 1, 14, 18, 31, 32; Eglöff 1977: vol. 1, 84–86, vol. 2, Pls 41:5–8, 42:2, 7–11), as well as a small amount of

skilfully made imported African Red Slip Ware fragments (Majcherek 2002: 60–61).

Among local products there were small jugs decorated with incised lines forming a herringbone pattern or horizontal bands (Majcherek 2008: 113–114; Rodziewicz 1998: 248).

Tableware made of Nile silt was light reddish in color owing to firing conditions. Some vessels within this group were coated with cream slip. Pottery of this type often carried painted decoration.

Deep bowls with everted rims, sometimes decorated on the outer rim with a black wavy line pattern and dots, constituted another numerous group (Majcherek 2008: 123, Figs 42, 43, 49).

Plain wares were usually made of Nile silt fired deep red with a thin black core. This category includes jugs, cooking pots,

lids, bowls and strainers. Large storage jars and amphorae are also included here (Egloff 1977: vol. 1, 1, 111, vol. 2, Pl. 22:1, 3, 4, 6, 10; Hayes, Harlaut 2001: 106, 108, Figs 31, 32, 58; Bavay *et alii* 2000: 55, Fig. 20).

Two storage jars were found *in situ*, sunk in the ground by the west wall in room 21, a unit adjacent to the southeastern corner of the basilica [Fig. 1; see also Fig. 12 on page 93]. These thick-walled vessels were made of dark red Nile silt with a black core visible in section (body walls were approximately 2.5 cm thick).

Finds from layers inside the basilica included numerous fragments of LRA 1 amphorae (Kellia 164) dated to the



Fig. 1. Close-up of storage jars sunk in the floor in room 21 (Photo P. Suszek)

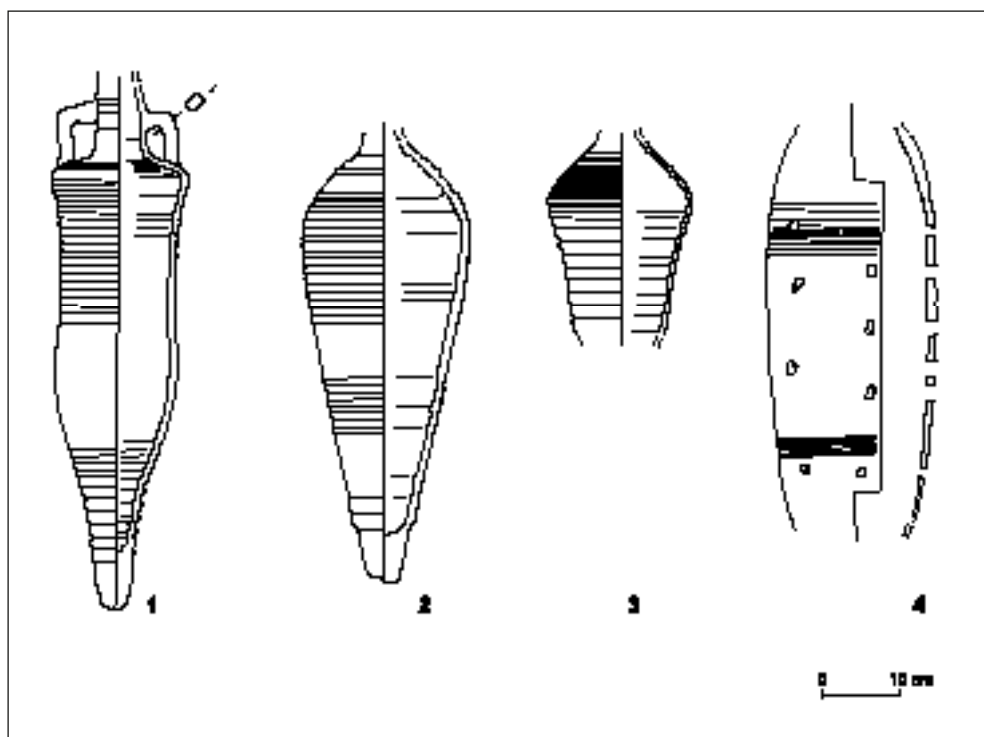


Fig. 2. Amphorae types: LRA 7 – 1, 2, 3; LRA 4 – 4 (Drawing A. Drzymuchowska, J. Michalska)

6th–7th centuries. However, the dominant amphora class is locally produced LRA 5/6 (Kellia, types 186, 187–190) and Kellia 167, dated to the 7th–8th centuries (Majcherek 2008: 116–119, 126–127, Figs 76–78, 86, 88, 89; Majcherek 1992: 101–113; Bavay *et alii* 2000: 57–60, Figs 25–28; Pieri 2007: 625, Fig. 15). Also frequent were the following amphora classes: LRA 4 and LRA 7 (Kellia, types 173–177), dated to the 6th–8th centuries AD (Egloff 1977: vol. 1, 113–116, vol. 2, Pls 58:6–8, 60:3; Bavay *et alii* 2000: 57–60, Figs 27, 28). Three specimens of LRA 7 (including one almost completely preserved) were found on the grate of a small bread oven in room 18, outside the southwestern corner of the basilica [Figs 2:1, 2:3].

Also noteworthy is a preserved part of the body of a LRA 4 amphora, with small, irregularly spaced holes drilled in it after

firing, found near a limestone block in unit 22, adjacent to the southeastern part of the church [Fig. 2:4]. It was probably used as a vessel for drying herbs.

Pottery from the nave of the basilica mostly consisted of LRA 1 amphorae (corresponding to Kellia 164), as well as LRA 4 from Gaza and some rare LRA 7, all of which chronologically corresponded to the period of the most intensive use of the basilica in the 6th–8th centuries. Deep bowls, unguentaria, jugs and rare fragments of ERSW tableware were also present.

Pottery fragments with painted decoration or stamped inscriptions were not common. Unique pieces included two fragments of Late Roman B type vessels: one with an impressed depiction of a cross in the form of a *crux gemmata* [Fig. 3:1], and another (floor) fragment with a partly preserved representation of Christ holding

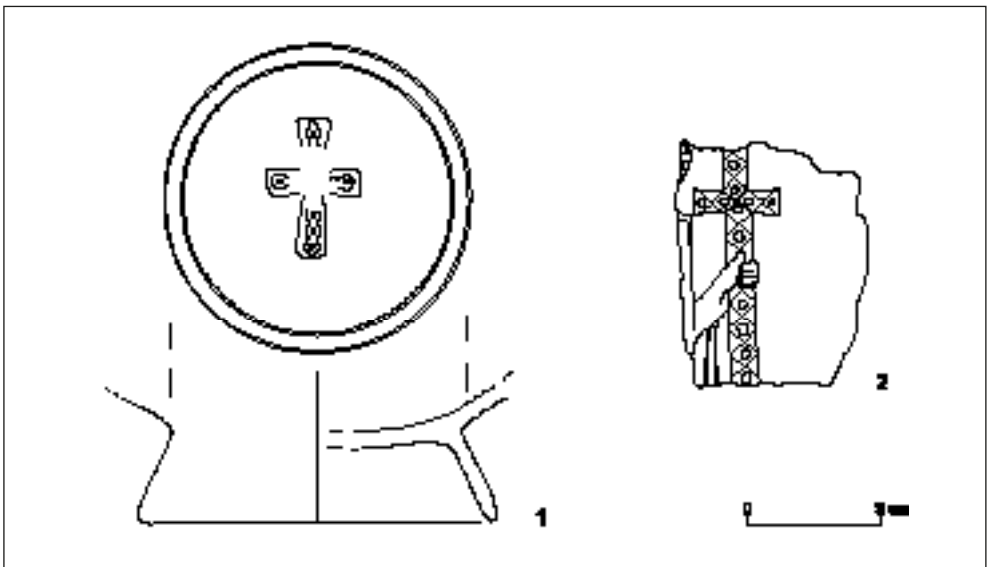


Fig. 3. Late Roman B plates with stamped floor decoration  
(Drawing A. Drzymuchowska, J. Babraj)

a cross, the latter also in the form of a *crux gemmata* [Fig. 3:2; see also Fig. 15 on page 95] (Egloff 1977: vol. 1, 73–74; vol. 2, Pl. 13:9; *crux gemmata*, see e.g. Dinkler 1967: 55–76; Hayes 1972: 266, Fig. 51). In the first case, the arms of the cross widen at the ends and the cross is decorated with jewels enclosed in a guilloche pattern. In the second, the ends of the horizontal bar of the cross (*patibulum*) are also slightly broader, which suggests that the upper and lower ends of the vertical bar (*staticulum*) were similar in form. In turn, on this cross the jewels are enclosed in squares that touch at the corners. The form of the *patibulum* and *staticulum* points to a 5th century dating (K. Babraj, personal communication). The discussed artifacts are made of Nile clay, their surfaces are polished and they are skilfully executed. Similar decoration in the form of Greek crosses and herringbone patterns is present not only on

Late Roman B pottery, but also on African Red Slip Ware. It is distinguished by its high quality, characteristic red color of the clay and carefully polished surface.

Ceramic material from the basilica features also a wide repertoire of vessel types common in the Mediterranean region. Besides the ubiquitous local products, there are fragments of imported pottery: African Red Slip Ware and rare sherds of amphorae produced on Cyprus, in Antioch and Cilicia (LRA 1), as well as in Gaza (LRA 4). Another assemblage worthy of separate discussion is a large group of early Byzantine painted wares, with rich anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and geometrical decoration.

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