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LATE ROMAN TERRACOTTA LAMPS FROM DRAGONERA (ISTRIA)

Systematic rescue excavations in the year 2003 at Dragonera on the Western Istrian coast (**fig. 1**) have revealed two Roman villas about 300 metres apart. Both villas were settled from the first to the seventh centuries AD. The better-preserved villa Dragonera-South was built in the Flavian period, and replaced by a new building on the same site at about the year 400. It is worth noting that in same period a nearby Roman villa in Dobrika Bay (Islands of Brijuni) was fortified and progressively turned into a Byzantine castrum of great strategic importance¹. Most of the lamps, as well as other archaeological finds, belong to the late Roman villa of Dragonera-South. In it were found 36 late Roman lamps, while in the nearby villa Dragonera-North only eight were discovered.

The earliest group of late Roman lamps consists of seven examples of Type Atlante VIII A1a (nos. 1–6.38; **fig. 2**)². This type represents the first group of North African lamps to have been exported in the Mediterranean area in quantity. The area of their diffusion covers the western Mediterranean, Italy, the Balkans and the Limes. Atlante Type VIII A1a lamps are generally dated about AD 375–500, but in the specific context of layers at villa Dragonera-South their occurrence can be placed more precisely in AD 380–450. This date corresponds to the period of major expansion of Type VIII A1a in Italy, dated to the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century³. Type Atlante VIII A1a was subsequently replaced by the succeeding African Type Atlante X A1a, i.e. the classic African lamp type produced mostly in the Tunisian region of Africa Proconsularis between AD 425–600 and mostly in the fifth century with its apogee about AD 450⁴ (nos. 7–24.36–37.39–43; **fig. 3**). The largest number of oil lamps found on both sites at Dragonera belongs to this type, which was distributed like Type VIII in the western Mediterranean, Italy, the Balkans and the Limes, but also in Egypt and the Aegean. Type Atlante X was especially well attested in fifth- and sixth-century layers in villa Dragonera-South. Some lamps, which can be dated around the middle or in the second half of the fifth century AD, emerge as copies of African originals (“*surmoulages*”: nos. 7.8)⁵. Previous archaeological discoveries in Istria also confirm the presence of numerous Atlante X lamps. Among them, a lamp analogous by fabric and motif to lamp no. 15 (**fig. 3,5**) has been found in Sipar, on the north-west coast of Istria⁶. The third type of African lamp present at Dragonera, Type Atlante XI, is limited to one example only (no. 44, **fig. 4,1**). Type Atlante XI is dated in the period 450–500, is relatively rare and has much the same area of distribution as Type Atlante VIII⁷.

The lamp finds from Late Roman strata testify to a close connection with the strong trade route that connected North Africa with the northern Adriatic region. These African influences seem to appear simultaneously with the major reconstruction of the villa at the end of the fourth or beginning



Fig. 1: The Istrian peninsula, showing the location of Dragonera.

of the fifth century AD and correspond to the division of the Roman Empire into the Eastern and Western Empires. During the 5th to 7th centuries AD the African red slip ware lamps, produced by the large pottery factories which made tablewares in the same period, are greatly predominant. The decorative motifs in relief confirm the strong influence of contemporary stamped wares and their stamps⁸. Relief motifs on the lamps from Dragonera are so diverse that one cannot find two lamps the same.

¹ VIDRIH PERKO/PAVLETIĆ 2000, 263.

² PAVOLINI 1981, 193–195.

³ GRAZIANI ABBIANI 1969, nr. 25–26.74–75.101.111–112.153–154.164–165.172–173.256.258–259.291.300.457. — FROVA 1973, tav. 117,2, CM 257. — *Isola Sacra*, tav. 31 nr. 61,a–b. — *Atlante I*, 196.

⁴ ANSELMINO 1981, 199. — For the production region see SALOMONSON 1969, 82–85.

⁵ I am grateful to K.W. Slane for help in the identification of early “*surmoulages*” of African lamps.

⁶ MARUŠIĆ 1987, 89 fig. 8,6. — Other analogy: VIKIĆ BELANČIĆ 1971, no. 301, t. XVII,5 from *Siscia*.

⁷ *Atlante I*, 199–203. — POHL 1962, 219, Typ 3k.

⁸ HAYES 1972, 346. — BAILEY 1988, 183.

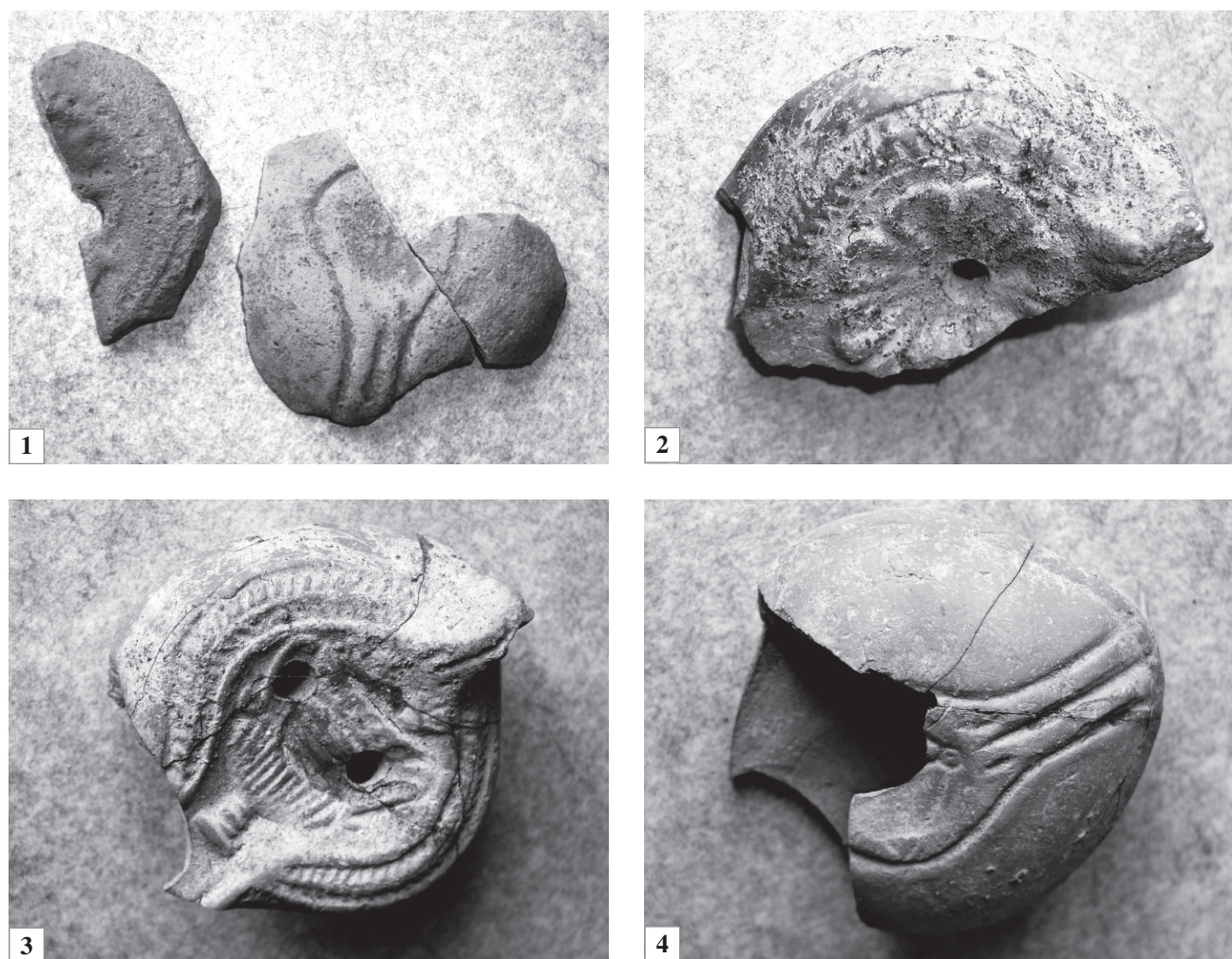


Fig. 2: Type Atlante VIII A 1: 1 no. 3. — 2 no. 4. — 3, 4 no. 5.

The motifs found are geometric, symbolic, vegetal, animal, and possibly human (no. 44; **fig. 4,1**). The geometric motifs are represented by dots (nos. 28.32–34; **fig. 5,1.3–4**), radiate ridges (no. 30), S-scroll (no. 18), concentric circles (nos. 7.10–11.19.36–37.39.41.43; **fig. 3,1.7–8**), “horseshoe” (no. 42), squares (no. 7; **fig. 3,1**) and triangles (nos. 11–13.16.37.40.43–44; **fig. 3,3–4**). The various vegetal motifs include rosettes (nos. 1.3–4.18.36; **fig. 2,1–2**; **fig. 3,8**), palmettes (nos. 7.19; **fig. 3,1.7**), leaves (nos. 8.15.17.22–24; **fig. 3,2.5–6**; **fig. 4,2**), almonds (no. 12; **fig. 3,3**), plants (nos. 10–11.13.43; **fig. 3,4**) and wreaths (nos. 1–5.; **fig. 2,1–3**). Symbolic Christian motifs, such as the cross (nos. 3.15.17.28; **figs. 2,1**; **3,5–6**; **5,1**), chi-rho-monogram (no. 8; **fig. 3,2**) or *cantharus* (nos. 5.8; **figs. 2,3**; **3,2**) are well represented also. Animal motifs are comparatively rare: the only animal attested is a lion (nos. 7.13; **fig. 3,1.4**). Some lamps bear a maker’s mark within the base. Circle marks were produced in the mould (nos. 7.10–11.39), as also an arrow pattern (nos. 5–6; **fig. 2,4**). A few lamps show a maker’s mark incised before firing within the base, in the form of a cross (nos. 3.15; **fig. 2,1**). The figural motifs disappear from lamps found at Dragonera around AD 600.

Imported African lamps appear at both villas at Dragonera by the end of the fourth and at the beginning the fifth century, contemporaneously with the major reconstruction

of the building, and continue to be used as the only kind of lamp until the end of the sixth century. Thereafter their use declines in favour of imitations of African lamps and other imported lamps, primarily Sicilian. The lamps nos. 15, 22, 23 characterized by a coarse orange or brownish-buff clay and degenerate decoration in relief, belong to the layers of the later sixth and to the ultimate layers of the seventh century (**fig. 4,2**). These lamps differ clearly from earlier fifth- and sixth-century African lamps in fabric and quality of clay, and can be described as imitations of African lamps. The lamps nos. 21, 26–29, 31–35, made of light buff clay, explicitly predominate in the latest occupation levels, which date to the end of the sixth and in the seventh century AD (**fig. 5**). Villa Dragonera-South was finally abandoned in the late seventh century, two or three generations after the first Avar-Slav invasions in Istria in AD 599–611. It may be noted that in the late sixth century African red slip ware lamps at Dragonera are gradually replaced by their imitations (**fig. 4,2**). Later still, by the end of the sixth and in the seventh century AD, these in turn are replaced by Sicilian light buff lamps with carinated body, undecorated narrow shoulder and flat discus, sometimes decorated with one or two bands of dots, and their Italic imitations (**fig. 5**)⁹. Similar oil lamps

⁹ BAILEY 1988, 208–210 Q 1869. — PERLZWEIG 1961, pl. 46,2935.

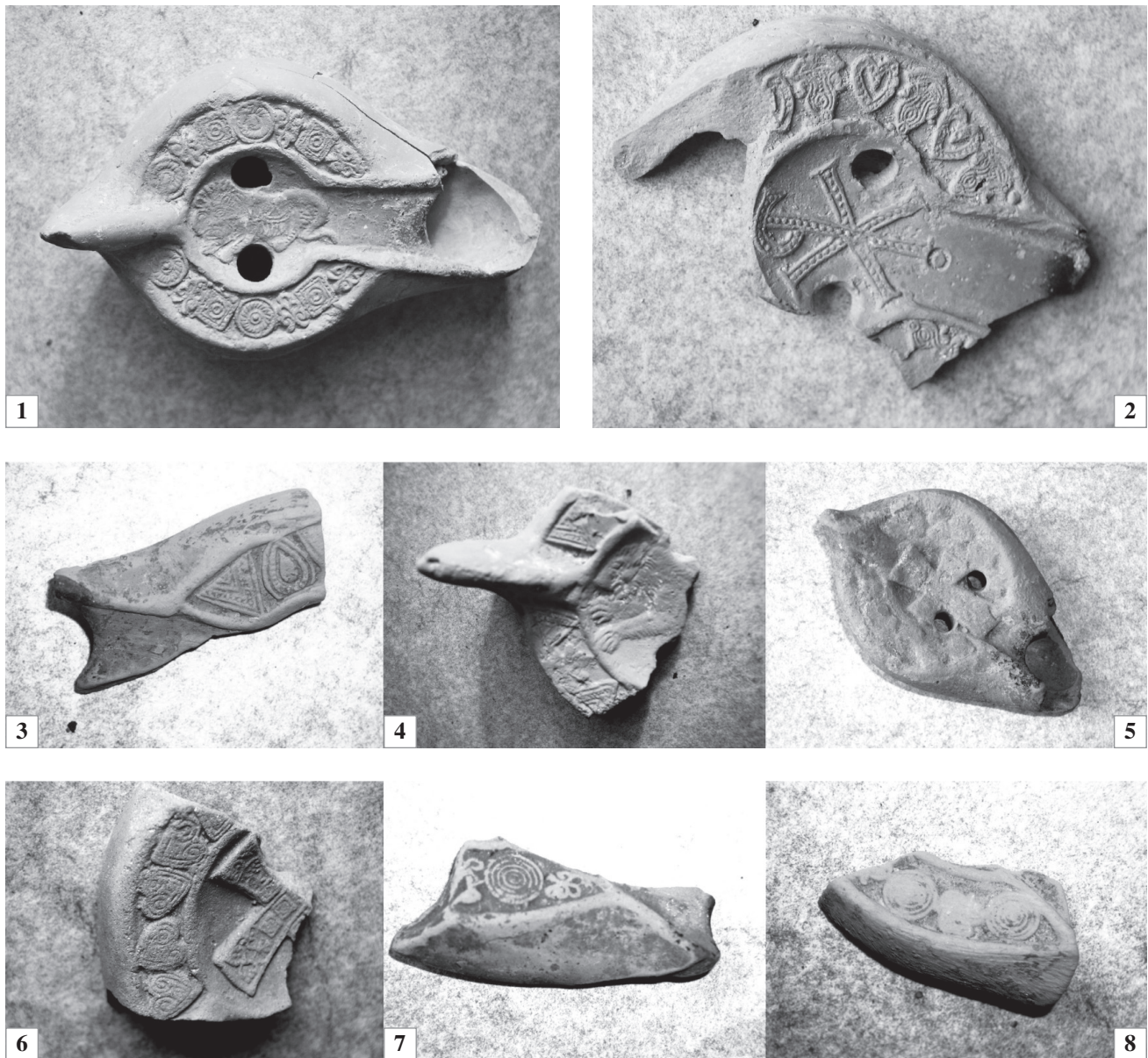


Fig. 3: Type Atlante X A 1 a.: **1** no. 7. — **2** no. 8. — **3** no. 12. — **4** no. 13. — **5** no. 15. — **6** no. 17. — **7** no. 19. — **8** no. 36.

are rarely documented in Istria. One example with similar basic characteristics has been found in the smaller Roman theatre in Pula¹⁰, and a second example has been found in Koper, in the Slovenian part of northern Istria¹¹. The initial place of the origin of these lamps is Sicily¹². They are widespread especially in Sicily, Italy, North Africa and elsewhere in the western Mediterranean. Certain lamps are similar in shape to those of Sicilian origin, but differ from them in the quality of material and manufacture (nos. 26–27.31; **fig. 5,2**). There exists the possibility that throughout the seventh century the Italic imitations of Sicilian lamps “*a rosario*” supplanted their precursors in the patterns of trade along the Istrian coasts. In the seventh-century layers, lamps generally show a tendency towards simplification of form and decoration¹³. The cross-motif appears to be the longest-lived among figural motifs; it has been attested in a layer of the end of the sixth or early seventh century (no. 28; **fig. 5,1**).

No local production of lamps can be identified. The importation of African red slip ware lamps, which started contemporaneously with the fundamental restoration of villa Dragonera–South, was sufficient to fulfil household needs. Beside simple floral or pointed decoration, the frequency of Early Christian symbols deserves special attention. At villa Dragonera–South the Christian motifs were not just a modern fashion or casually imported trend ware: the fifth-century mosaics decorated with crosses testify the deep religious affection of the owner of the complex. In conclusion, it can be said that the Type Atlante VIII A1 was undoubtedly the earliest type of African lamp imported to Dragonera (and

¹⁰ MARUŠIĆ 1982–1983, 63 t. XII,1.

¹¹ CUNJA 1996, 107 t. 20,242.

¹² GARCEA 1987, 547. — CECI 1992, 749. — PAVOLINI 1994, 454–464 fig.566.

¹³ GUIDONI 1994, 413.

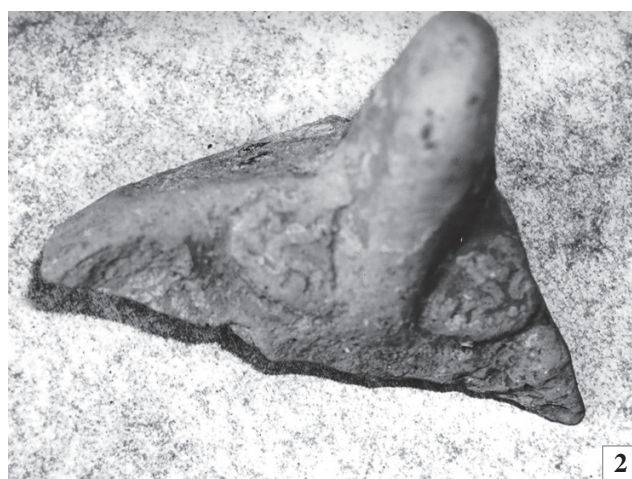
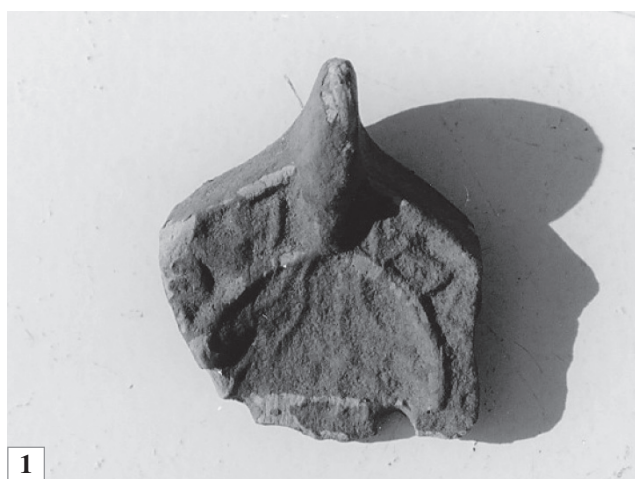


Fig. 4: 1 Type Atlante XI, no. 44. — 2 Type Atlante X A1a, no. 23.

generally in Istria). Type Atlante X A1a was the most long-standing among the attested lamps. Light buff lamps with carinated body, undecorated narrow shoulder and flat discus of Sicilian origin and their imitations appear relatively later, in the last phase of occupation, which dates to the end of the sixth and in the seventh century.

Catalogue

Dragonera South

1. Lamp. Only handle with small part of shoulder and discus preserved. Orange clay, dull red slip. Groove along the handle, wreath on the shoulder, rosette on the discus. Layer: 3 / P 15. Inv. no. A 27647. About AD 380–450.
2. Only handle with small part of shoulder preserved. Orange clay, dull red slip; body partially fired. Simplified wreath on the shoulder. Layer: 2 / P 15 a. Inv. no. A 27648. About AD 380–450.
3. Fragmentary; handle, nozzle and part of body missing. Coarse orange clay, dull red slip, rather worn. Shoulder: schematic wreath. Discus: rosette (?) in relief, much worn. Base flat, encircled by groove; traces of a cross incised before firing. Three parallel grooves extending across the lower part of the body to the handle. Layer: 4 / P 2. Inv. no. A 27649. About AD 380–450. **Fig. 2,1.**
4. W. 7.8; H. 2.4; H. handle 4 cm. Nozzle, base and part of body missing. Coarse orange clay, dull red slip. Shoulder: schematic wreath. Discus: eight-leaved rosette in relief. One central filling hole. Base flat, encircled by groove; three parallel grooves extending across the lower part of the body to the handle. One groove along the handle. Layer: 3 / P 24. Inv. no. A 27650. About AD 380–450. **Fig. 2,2.**
5. L. 8.5; W. 7.8; H. 3.3; H. handle 5 cm. Nozzle and part of base missing. Coarse orange clay, dull red slip. Shoulder: schematic wreath. Discus: *cantharus* in relief. Two filling holes. Base flat, encircled by groove; schematic arrow pattern made in the mould. Three parallel grooves extending across the lower part of the body to the handle. One groove along the handle. Layer: 3 / P 24. Inv. no. A 27651. About AD 380–450. **Fig. 2,3–4.**
6. Part of base and body preserved. Orange gritty clay, dull red slip. Base flat, encircled by groove; schematic arrow pattern made in the mould. Layer: 2 / P 39 a. Inv. no. A 27652. About AD 380–450.
7. L. 11.2; W. 6.6; H. 2.5; H. handle 4 cm. Tip of nozzle missing. Reddish clay, no trace of slip remains; nozzle scorched. Shoulder: palmettes alternating with cabled circles and squares. Discus: crouching lion in relief. Two filling holes. Ring-base decorated with two concentric grooves. Layer: 2 / P 24. Inv. no. A 27653. About AD 450–500. **Fig. 3,1.**
8. L. 9.3; W. 7.6 cm. Handle, lower part of body and nozzle missing. Reddish clay, no trace of slip remains; nozzle scorched. Shoulder: heart-shaped forms alternating with *canthari*. Discus: chi-rho-monogram reversed, with narrow border, filled with fine dots in relief. Two filling holes. Layer: 3 / P 11. Inv. no. A 27654. About AD 450–500. **Fig. 3,2.**
9. Two fragments of body and ring-base. Reddish clay, dull red slip. Layer: 4 / P 2. Inv. no. A 27655.
10. Handle and much of body missing. Reddish clay, dull red slip; nozzle scorched. Shoulder: pattern of fir-tree preserved. Discus decorated in relief. Ring-base decorated with two concentric grooves. Layer: 3 / P 24. Inv. no. A 27656.
11. W. 7.8; H. 3.8; H. handle 6 cm. Part of body and handle preserved. Fine light orange clay, dull red slip, rather worn; shoulder blackened by fire. Shoulder: five-leaved plants alternating with triangular shapes. Ring-base decorated with two concentric grooves. Layer: 2 / P 2. Inv. no. A 27657.
12. Handle, discus, base and much of body missing. Soft orange clay, dull red slip; nozzle scorched. Shoulder: almond shapes alternating with triangular shapes. Layer: 2 / P 2. Inv. no. A 27658. **Fig. 3,3.**
13. Nozzle, base and much of body missing. Reddish clay, dull red slip, much worn. Shoulder: triangular forms al-

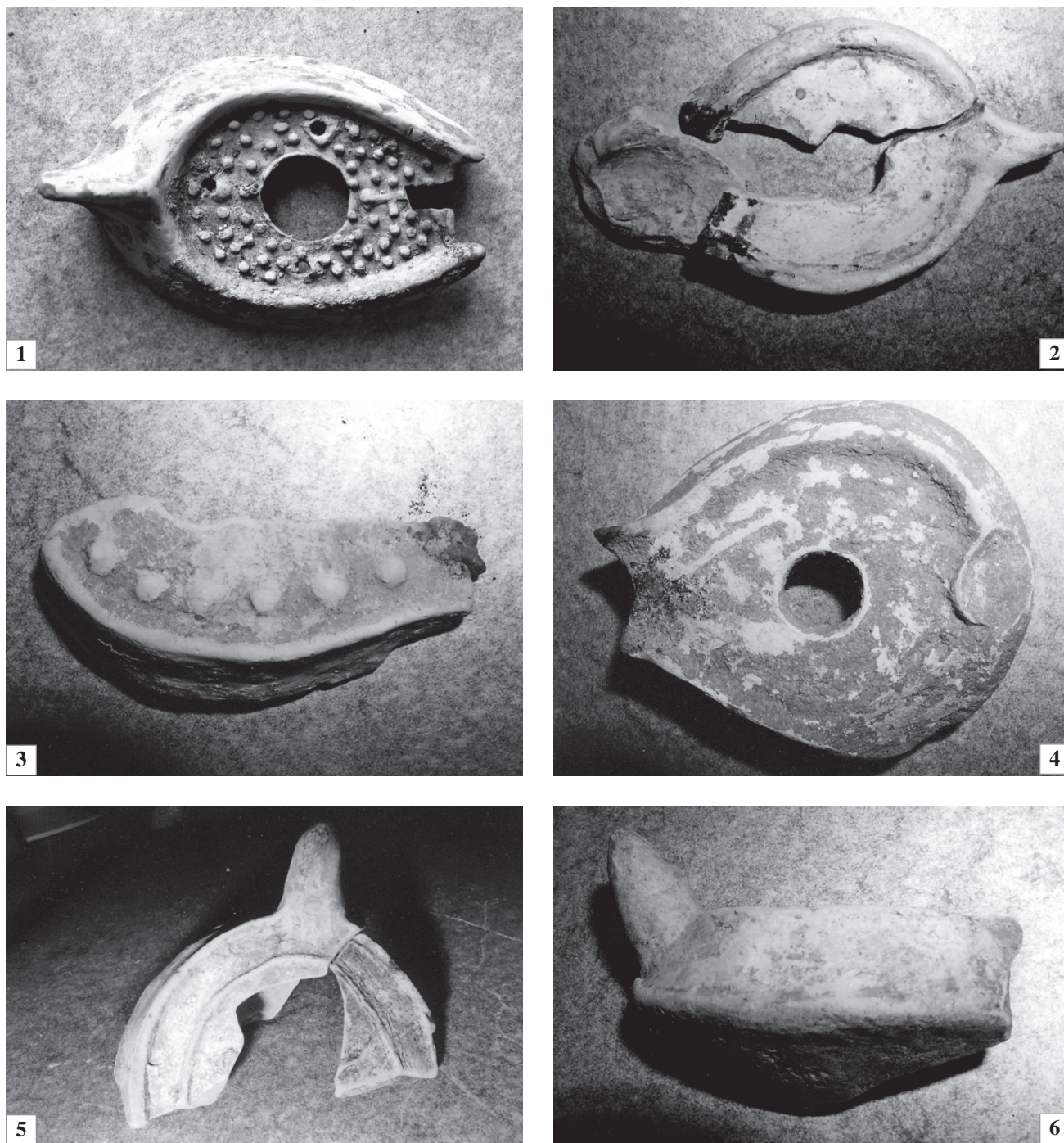


Fig. 5: Light buff lamps with carinated body and undecorated narrow shoulder. **1** no. 28. — **2** no. 31. — **3** no. 33. — **4** no. 34. — **5, 6** no. 35.

ternating with five-leaved plants. Discus: coursing lion in relief. Layer: 2 / P 2. Inv. no. A 27659. About AD 425–500. **Fig. 3,4.**

14. Fragment of body and base. Fine orange clay, dull red slip. Ring-base. Layer: 1 / P 2. Inv. no. A 27660.

15. L. 11.8; W. 6.5; H. 2.6; H. handle 3.6 cm. Tip of nozzle missing. Coarse orange clay, dull red slip, much worn; nozzle scorched. Shoulder: heart-shaped leaves. Discus: cross, decorated but very worn. Two filling holes. Ring-base; traces of a cross incised before firing. Layer: 2 / P 21. Inv. no. A 27661. About AD 500–600. **Fig. 3,5.**

16. H. 4 cm; H. handle 5.3 cm. Part of body and handle preserved. Light orange clay, slip worn off. Shoulder: triangular shapes. Ring-base, undecorated. Layer: 2 / P 32. Inv. no. A 27662. About AD 440–550.

17. W. 6.6 cm. Fragment of discus with shoulder preserved. Coarse orange clay, dull red slip, rather worn. Shoulder: paired heart-shaped leaves. Discus: cross with narrow border, decorated in the interior. Layer: 2 / P 36. Inv. no. A 27663. About AD 440–550. **Fig. 3,6.**

18. W. 6.6 cm. Fragment of shoulder and discus. Light orange clay, slip worn off. Shoulder: four-leaved rosettes and S-

- scroll. Discus decorated in relief, but much of the figure is missing. Layer: 2 / P 2. Inv. no. A 27664.
19. Fragment of nozzle and shoulder. Light orange clay, dull red slip; nozzle scorched. Shoulder: palmette and circle with concentric grooves preserved. Inv. no. A 27665. **Fig. 3,7.**
 20. L. 9.0; W. 6.6; H. 2.2 cm. Lower part of body preserved, tip of nozzle missing. Light buff clay, much worn dull reddish slip. Ring-base, undecorated. Layer: 3 / P 11. Inv. no. A 27666. About AD 500–600.
 21. Fragment of body and base. Coarse light buff clay, no trace of slip remains. Ring-base. Layer: 2 / P 21. Inv. no. A 27667.
 22. W. 7.2; H. 3.8 cm. Part of body with shoulder preserved. Coarse orange clay, slip worn off; shoulder blackened by fire. Shoulder: heart-shaped leaf preserved. Layer: 2 / P 21. Inv. no. A 27668.
 23. Handle with small part of shoulder preserved. Brownish buff clay, dull red slip, rather worn. Shoulder decorated with heart-shaped leaves. Layer: 2 / P 45. Inv. no. A 27669. **Fig. 4,2.**
 24. H. 2.4 cm. Handle, nozzle, discus and much of body missing. Coarse brownish clay, no trace of slip remains. Shoulder: heart shape preserved, much worn. Base concave, undecorated. Layer: 2 / P 39 a. Inv. no. A 27670.
 25. H. 3.4; H. handle 4.8 cm. Handle and part of body preserved. Orange coarse gritty clay, slip worn off. Handle undecorated. Layer: 2 / P 42. Inv. no. A 27671.
 26. W. handle 1.7 cm, H. handle 3.5 cm. Handle with small part of shoulder preserved. Light orange-buff clay, no trace of slip remains. Handle vertical, shoulder raised and undecorated. Layer: 2 / P 14. Inv. no. A 27672. About AD 600–700.
 27. W. handle 1.7 cm, H. handle 5 cm. Handle only preserved. Light buff clay, no trace of slip remains. Layer: 2 / P 22. Inv. no. A 27673. About AD 600–700.
 28. L. 9.6; W. 6.2; H. handle 3.4 cm. Lower part of body and nozzle missing. Soft, light buff clay, no trace of slip remains; nozzle scorched. Shoulder sharply raised and undecorated. Discus: leaf-shaped, flat, decorated with fine dots and small cross in relief. Large central hole surrounded by three smaller holes. Layer: 2 / P 35. Inv. no. A 27674. About AD 580–620. **Fig. 5,1.**
 29. Handle, shoulder, discus and nozzle missing. Light buff clay, no trace of slip remains. Base flat. Layer: 2 / P 31. Inv. no. A 27675. About AD 600–700.
 30. Part of shoulder and part of nozzle preserved. Light buff clay, dull brownish slip, rather worn; nozzle scorched. Shoulder: pattern of radiate ridges. Layer: 3 / P 28. Inv. no. A 27676.
 31. L. 13.6; W. 8.0; H. 4.5; H. handle 5.8 cm. Lower part of body and tip of nozzle missing. Soft, light buff clay, no trace of slip remains; nozzle scorched. Narrow shoulder, raised and undecorated. Discus: flat, undecorated, with large central hole. Base flat. Layer: 2 / P 23. Inv. no. A 27677. About AD 600–700. **Fig. 5,2.**
 32. L. pres. 7.3; W. 6.6 cm. Handle, tip of nozzle and much of body missing. Soft, light buff clay, dull brownish slip, much worn; nozzle scorched. Narrow shoulder, raised and undecorated. Discus: flat, decorated with two bands of dots separated by one concentric ridge, large central hole. Layer: 2 / P 45. Inv. no. A 27678. About AD 600–700.
 33. L. pres. 9.0; W. 6.6 cm. Handle, tip of nozzle and much of body missing. Soft, light buff clay, dull brownish slip, much worn; nozzle scorched. Narrow shoulder, raised and undecorated. Discus: flat, decorated with one band of dots, large central hole. Layer: 2 / P 38. Inv. no. A 27679. About AD 600–700. **Fig. 5,3.**
 34. L. pres. 9.0; W. 7.4 cm; H. 2.5 cm. Handle, tip of nozzle and lower part of body missing. Soft, light buff clay, dull brownish slip, much worn; nozzle scorched. Narrow shoulder, raised and undecorated. Discus: flat, decorated with two bands of dots separated by one concentric ridge. Large central hole. Base flat. Layer: 2 / P 38. Inv. no. A 27680. About AD 600–700. **Fig. 5,4.**
 35. L. pres. 7.0; H. 2.8; H. handle 2.4 cm. Fragmentary: nozzle, base and part of carinated body missing. Light pinkish buff clay, slip worn off; discus blackened by fire. Handle angular, undecorated. Discus: flat, decorated with one concentric ridge; figural relief in the middle (?). Layer: 4 / P 42. Inv. no. A 27681. About AD 600–700. **Fig. 5,5–6.**
 36. Part of shoulder preserved. Soft orange clay, dull red slip, much worn. Shoulder: circles with concentric grooves alternating with rosettes. Layer: 2 / 5 2. Inv. no. A 27682. **Fig. 3,8.**

Dragonera North

37. Part of shoulder preserved. Orange clay, dull red slip, much worn. Shoulder: circles with concentric grooves alternating with triangular shapes. Layer: 9 / North 1. Inv. no. A 27683.
38. Only handle with small part of shoulder and discus preserved. Orange clay, no trace of slip remains. Groove along handle, wreath on shoulder, missing figure in relief on discus. Layer: 9 / North 1. Inv. no. A 27684. About AD 380–450.
39. Fragment of body and ring-base decorated with two concentric grooves. Greyish buff clay, dull red slip. Layer: 1 / North 2. Inv. no. A 27685.
40. Part of shoulder and handle preserved. Light orange clay, slip worn off. Shoulder: triangular shape preserved. Layer: 9 / North 1. Inv. no. A 27686.
41. Handle with small part of shoulder. Orange clay, dull red slip, much worn. Shoulder: circle with concentric grooves preserved. Layer: 1 / North 2. Inv. no. A 27687.
42. Handle with small part of shoulder. Orange clay, dull red slip, much worn. Shoulder: horseshoe form preserved. Layer: 1 c / P 14–16 a / North 2. Inv. no. A 27688.
43. Part of shoulder preserved. Gritty orange clay, slip worn off. Shoulder: five-leaved plants alternating with circles and triangular forms. Layer: 9 / North 1. Inv. no. A 27689.

44. Handle and part of shoulder and discus preserved. Soft, light buff clay, no trace of slip remains. Shoulder: triangular shapes. Discus: human figure (?), much worn.

Layer: 5 / North 1. Inv. no. A 27690. About AD 450–500. **Fig. 4,1.**

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