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POTTERY FROM SCHEDIA NEAR ALEXANDRIA (EGYPT)



Fig. 1. Map of Alexandria and surroundings.

Introduction¹

When Alexandria was founded in 331 BC on a limestone ridge between the Mediterranean and Lake Mareotis, Schedia, built at the same time to the southeast on the then westernmost arm of the Nile, the Canopic branch, represented an element necessary for the existence of the great metropolis (**fig. 1**). A canal was dug between Schedia and Alexandria to bring fresh water to Alexandria and guarantee it access to the Nile Valley. Goods coming downstream had to be transhipped at Schedia in order to travel along the canal. Schedia is also mentioned as the station for the Nile boats belonging to the praefect of Egypt and as a customs station for goods transported up and down the Nile. For the latter purpose a pontoon bridge (*σχεδία*) was installed, which gave its name to the place. According to the sources the city had a large garrison, temples and a synagogue. It was also one of the first towns in Egypt to be Christianised, with its own bishop's seat.

In spite of its importance the site attracted little attention, perhaps also because the Canopic Nile and the canal had vanished and only small parts of the original series of settlement hills remained. In the 19th century it was proposed to identify Schedia in the extensive mounds of ruins between Kom el-Giza and Kom el-Nashwa, and the identification was confirmed by the discovery there of inscriptions with the name of Schedia. Between 1981 and 1992 the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities carried out rescue excavations on the increasingly threatened Kom el-Giza and Kom

el-Hamam. This work established the presence of a number of Roman and late Roman buildings, including a bath complex, a villa and tombs on Kom el-Giza and a large pillared building constructed of bricks on Kom el-Hamam, as well as vats on both sites (at least some of which must have served for wine production). Since 2003 a project under the direction of Prof. Marianne Bergmann of the Universität Göttingen and Prof. Michael Heinzelmann now of the Universität Bern has investigated the site, with geophysical surveying and with excavations designed to complement those carried out by the Egyptian authorities. These new excavations have produced c. 1200 crates of pottery.

Area 5

The pottery processing team decided to make its first objective the preliminary classification of the assemblages found in this trench carried out on Kom el-Hamam, which account for approximately a tenth of the material overall. The reason was that Area 5 promised to give the most complete cross-section of the occupation of the site.

The purpose of this paper is to follow the evolution of the assemblages through the centuries. The analysis considers two major aspects: the composition of the assemblages by functional group (**fig. 2**) and the provenience of the products - whether Egyptian or imported (**figs. 3–5**). The functional groups are transport amphorae, lamps, utilitarian ware (cooking and other coarse wares, which at Schedia present the same range of fabrics) and fine ware. The basis for the statistical elaborations here is the maximum number of vessels, which means the sherd count adjusted for joins.

Phases 1–7

In Phases 1–7 there were various structural activities, particularly rises the floor levels, preceding the construction of a foundation in *opus caementicium*. They gave a maximum of 2047 vessels. The rim fragment found in Phase 1 of an imported amphora, probably from the northern Levant, which belongs to a family of vessels that is common in de-

¹ See www.schedia.de for an overview of the site and the project and the interim reports on the 2003 and 2004 seasons. RE II, A1 (1921) 401–403 s. v. Schedia (KEES) is still useful.

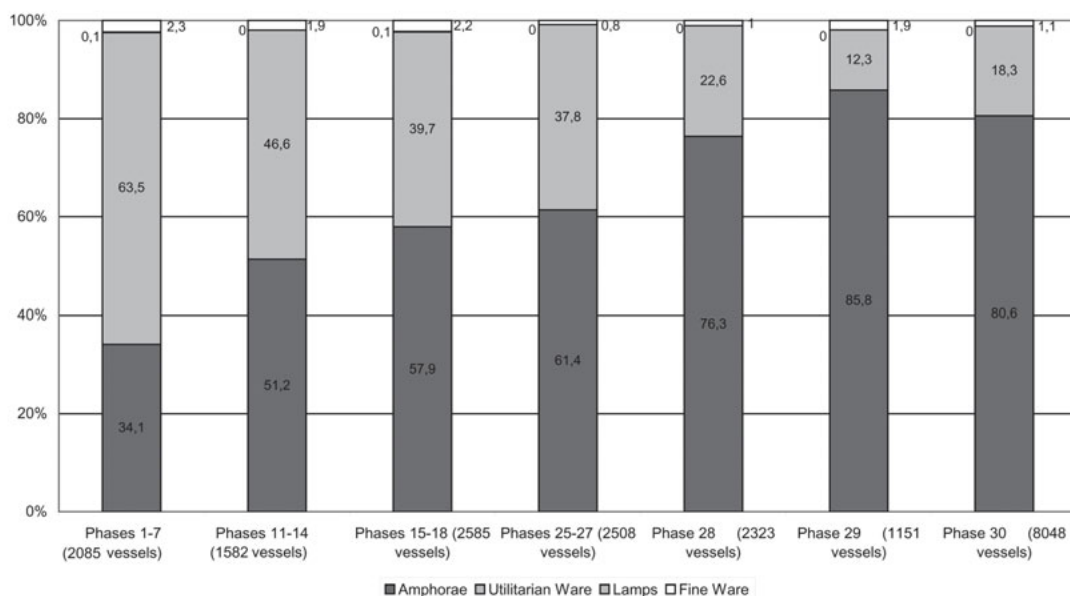


Fig. 2. Composition of the assemblages by functional group.

posits of the 2nd and early 3rd centuries is important for defining the chronology (fig. 6).² There are fragments of Egyptian amphorae that are consonant with such a date – Amphore Egyptienne 3 (early imperial) and Amphore Egyptienne 4 (1st–late 3rd century) – as well as a few of the earlier ones in the series – Amphore Egyptienne 1 and 2.³ Most imports are scrappy pieces, which can be identified as such only because they do not present Egyptian fabrics.

Phases 11–14

Above layers associated with the construction, use and abandonment of a foundation in *opus caementicium* (Phases 8–10), which contained too few sherds to permit any considerations, was found another series of phases concerning the residential use of the area. The assemblage, consisting of a maximum of 1587 vessels, is not as satisfactory as one would wish. There was a two-year pause in excavation, and it appears that the two exposed layers became contaminated in spite of the excavators' attempts to protect them. Thus, five late-antique fragments found in those layers, which stand out as anomalous from the rest of the assemblage, have been eliminated from the calculations. Almost all the pottery comes from Phase 11, the first phase of residential activity. Aside from the pieces considered intrusive, the material presents nothing to distinguish it chronologically from Phases 1–7. The identifiable amphorae belong to the range of Amphores Egyptiennes 1–4, with the exception of a Schöne-Mau V amphora handle from the Levant, which is found from the mid 1st century AD to the mid 2nd.⁴ As before the imports are mostly unidentifiable amphora sherds in Aegean to Levantine fabrics.

Phases 15–19

The layers associated with the erection, use in two phases and abandonment of the pillared brick building already evidenced in the Supreme Council's excavations contained a maximum

of 2585 vessels (not counting 293 from a layer whose stratigraphic interpretation presents problems). Once again the evidence for dating differs little from Periods 1–7 and 11–14. The Egyptian amphorae AE 2–4 dominate. The identifiable imported pieces are an example of the Amphore Crétoise 1/ Agora G197 dating from the mid 1st to the mid 3rd century⁵ and possibly one of Majcherek 1/Zemer 36 from Gaza with a date range from the 1st to the 3rd century.⁶ The situation with the imports remains much as before – mostly a scatter of amphorae presumably from the Aegean and the Levant.

Phases 25–27

After a series of residential activities (Phases 20–24), not considered here because of the discrepancy between the ceramic and the numismatic dates – the pottery resembles the preceding phases with good examples of Amphores Egyptiennes 3 (fig. 7) and 4 (fig. 8), but the numismatic evidence indicates a date at least in the second half of the 4th century⁷ – come phases concerned with the construction, use and destruction of a granary. They gave a maximum of 2508 vessels (2348 from the Phase 25, 160 from Phase 26 and none from Phase 27). The dating evidence comes from amphorae: Egyptian Egloff 172, datable from the late 4th to the mid 6th century;⁸ Egyptian Carthage LRA 7, from the

² REYNOLDS 2005, 567 (Amrit amphora); J. W. HAYES, Paphos III. The Hellenistic and Roman Pottery (Nicosia 1991) 94 (Type IX).

³ EMPEREUR/PICON 1998.

⁴ REYNOLDS 2005, 565.

⁵ ST. MARKOULAKI/J.-Y. EMPEREUR/A. MARANGOU, Recherches sur les centres de fabrication d'amphores de Crète occidentale. Bull. Corr. Hellenique 113, 1989, 556.

⁶ MAJCHEREK 1995, 166.

⁷ For the numismatic evidence for this and other phases of Area 5 I am grateful to Hans-Christoph Nöske (Frankfurt am Main), who is preparing the coins for publication.

⁸ PEACOCK/WILLIAMS 1986, 207.

late 4th to the 6th/7th century;⁹ Carthage LRA 1 from Cilicia, from the 4th to the 7th century.¹⁰ No standardized late-antique fine ware was found, and there are still numerous examples of the Egyptian amphorae that dominate the earlier phases. The provenience of the products is very largely Egyptian. Among the amphorae, where imports are most significant, there are only a few examples of the imported vessels that become more numerous in later phases in the midst of the sort of mix of attestations found in the earlier phases.

Phase 28

A maximum of 2428 vessels was found in the spoliation phase of the granary. The best chronological indications come from a sherd of African Red-Slip Ware Hayes 104.15 (**fig. 9**), which dates to 570–600,¹¹ and another of Hayes 99.18, 2-23 (**fig. 10**), which dates to 560/580-620. They are supported by the presence of fragments of amphorae belonging to Majcherek's type 4 of the Gazan Carthage LRA 4 (**fig. 11**), which is common in the late 6th to 7th centuries.¹² Many fragments of fine ware and imported and Egyptian amphorae are consonant with this date. For the first time there are significant quantities of standardized Egyptian fine wares – Group K/Egyptian Red-Slip Ware B, vessels from Lower Egypt whose production began in the late 4th or early 5th century and lasted at least into the 7th;¹³ Group O/Egyptian Red-Slip Ware A, from Upper Egypt whose production also began in the late 4th century and lasted at least into the 7th century.¹⁴

Phase 29

The layer concerning a late-antique/early Coptic settlement established above the ruins of the granary gave a maximum of 1151 vessels. The best chronological evidence for the phase comes from a coin minted between AD 602 and 608, guaranteeing a date no earlier than the 7th century. The ceramic assemblage is consonant with such a date, especially for the numerous examples of Egyptian and imported amphorae whose date ranges reach into the 7th centuries. The fine ware is Egyptian (Groups K and O), with two examples of Cypriot Red-Slip Ware Hayes 2 (small version), which dates to the late 5th and the first half of the 6th.¹⁵ Imports are much more important in this phase as far as amphorae are concerned. This reflects significant numbers of Carthage LRA 1 and 4.

Phase 30

This phase regarding the end of the settlement contained a maximum of 8048 vessels. The best chronological indication comes from the 7th-century coin found in the underlying Phase 29. The datable pottery is consonant with the date.

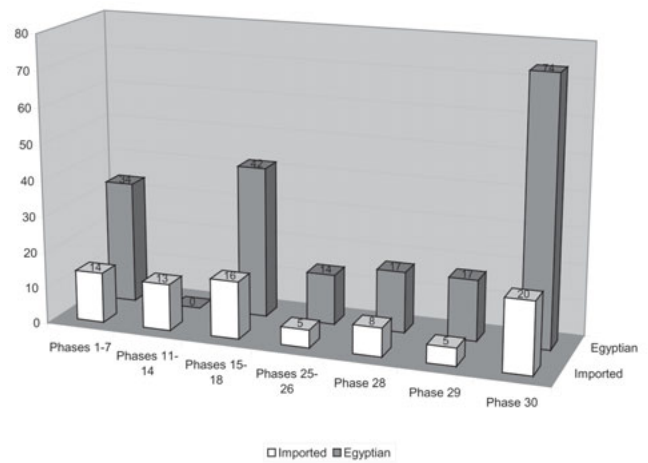


Fig. 3. Provenience of the fine ware.

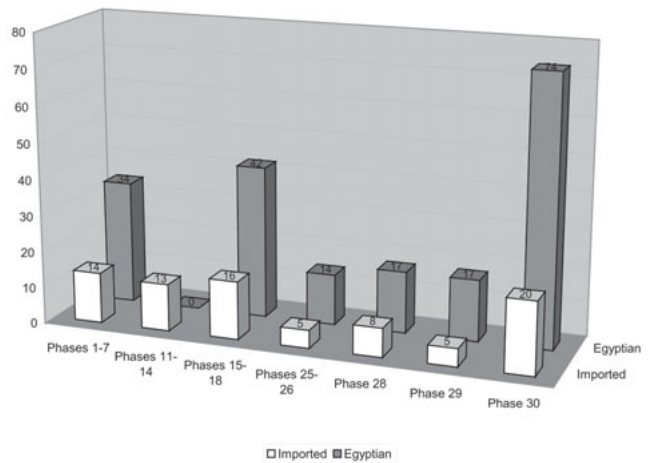


Fig. 4. Provenience of the utilitarian ware.

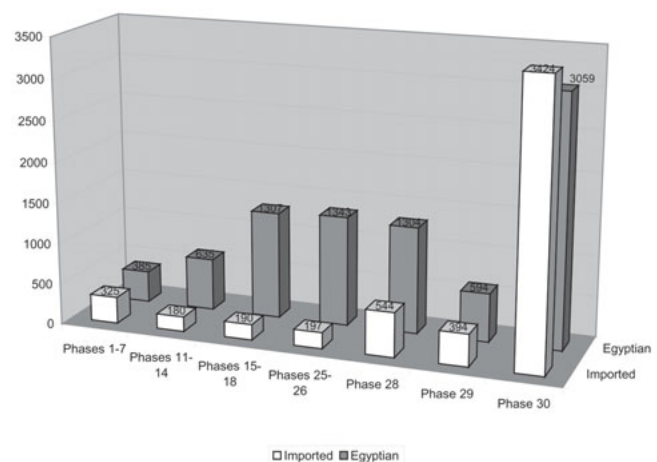


Fig. 5. Provenience of the amphorae.

⁹ Ibid. 204; SCIALLANO/SIBELLA 1991, 102.

¹⁰ REYNOLDS 2005, 565.

¹¹ HAYES 1972, 166.

¹² MAJCHEREK 1995, 169.

¹³ RODZIEWICZ 1976, 50–53; HAYES 1972, 397–399; ID. 1980, 530.

¹⁴ RODZIEWICZ 1976, 54–60; HAYES 1972, 387–397; ID. 1980, 530.

¹⁵ ID. 1972, 375–376.

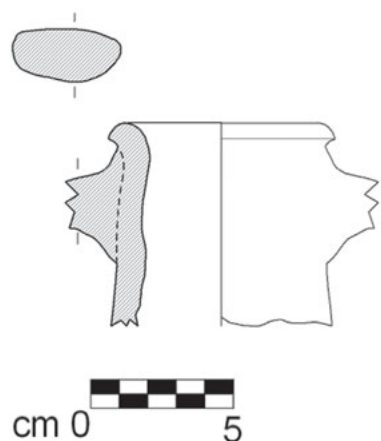


Fig. 6. Amphora from the northern Levant.

Cypriot Red-Slip Ware is attested by Hayes 1 (dated from the late 4th century to the third quarter of the 5th),¹⁶ Hayes 2 (**fig. 12**) (of the late 5th and first half of the 6th century) and possibly Hayes 8 (perhaps to date to the 6th century).¹⁷ The fine ware includes an example of Phocaeian Red-Slip Ware Hayes 3F (**fig. 13**), the developed 6th-century form.¹⁸ There is also a rim fragment of African Red-Slip Ware Hayes 99 (**fig. 14**), which is dated between 500 and 580.¹⁹ Among the imported amphorae there are numerous Carthage LRA 4/ Majcherek 4 of the late 6th–7th centuries, which dominate the imports along with the earlier Gazan variants and the Cilician Carthage LRA 1 (**fig. 15**). The Egyptian amphorae include examples of Egloff 172 (**fig. 16**).

Discussion

In examining ceramic assemblages too little attention is paid in general to the overall composition by functional groups. At Schedia the percentage of amphorae ranges from 34% in Phases 1–7 to 86% in Phase 29. The percentages, although increasing gradually from Phases 1–7 to Phases 25–27, remain below 2/3 well into the 4th century. In the 6th and 7th centuries they are consistently above 3/4. The fine ware remains constant at 1–2%, and there are ever only a few examples of lamps. The variation in the percentage of utilitarian ware makes up the difference. If, however, we look at the percentages of the pottery strictly connected with the domestic sphere (i.e. if we leave the amphorae out of the calculations), then we see that there is much less variation – the utilitarian ware remains above 94% (with the exception of Phase 29, the smallest and therefore least reliable assemblage, where it falls to 86.5%), with fine ware essentially making up the rest. That the percentage of amphorae increases with respect to a constant demand for other functional groups suggests that more amphorae were being brought to Schedia in the later phases.

The percentages of the functional groups can reflect the relationship of the site with regard to the network of maritime commerce, with of amphorae being especially sensitive.²⁰ One should normally expect attestations of amphorae at 2/3

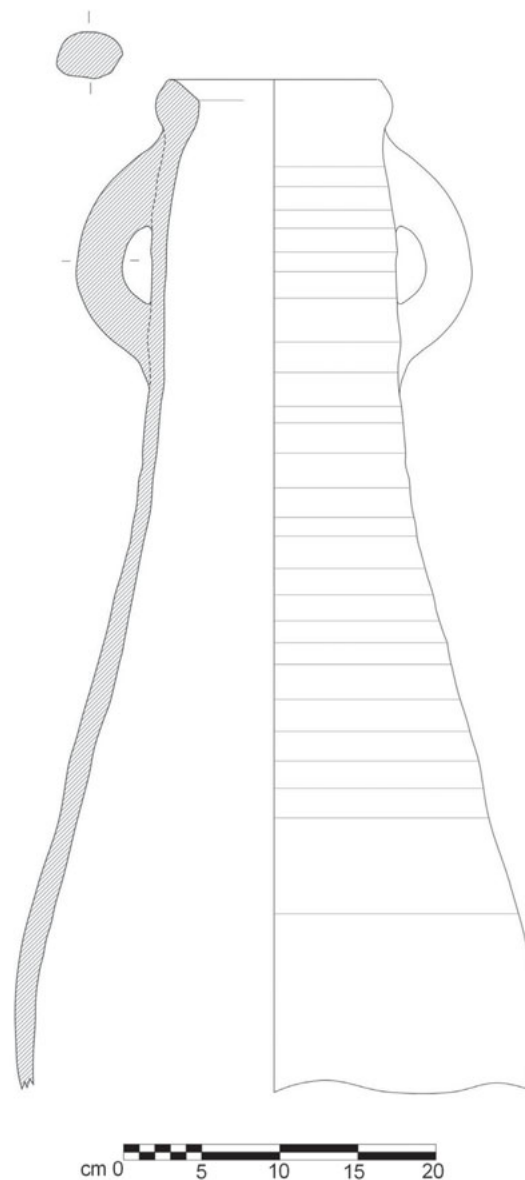


Fig. 7. Amphore Egyptienne 3.

to 3/4 or more on Roman sites around the coasts of the Mediterranean, while about 1/3 appears to be typical of sites that are connected only at a remove to the maritime trade routes, as was the case at a site 100 km up the Tiber from Rome. Thus, until late antiquity we have the picture of a site that is connected with the network of maritime commerce but not fully integrated into it.

¹⁶ Ibid. 373.

¹⁷ Ibid. 379.

¹⁸ Ibid. 338.

¹⁹ M. MACKENSEN, *Die spätantiken Sigillata- und Lampentöpfereien von El Mahrine (Nordtunesien). Studien zur nordafrikanischen Feinkeramik des 4. bis 7. Jahrhunderts.* Münchner Beitr. Vor- u. Frühgesch. 50 (München 1993) 417.

²⁰ A. MARTIN, *Variation in Ceramic Assemblages as an Indicator of Openness to Trade.* In: J. Pollini (ed.), *Terra Marique. Studies in Art History and Marine Archaeology in Honor of Anna Marguerite McCann on Receipt of the Gold Medal of the Archaeological Institute of America* (Oxford 2005) 61–76, presents a case study to show this.

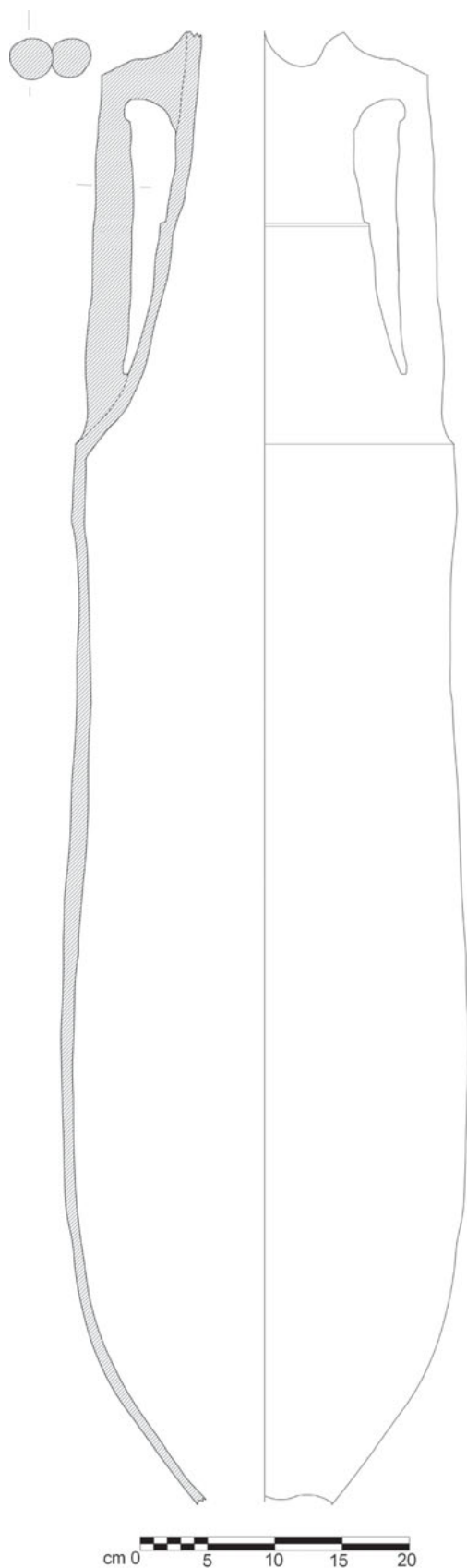


Fig. 8. Amphore Egyptienne 4.

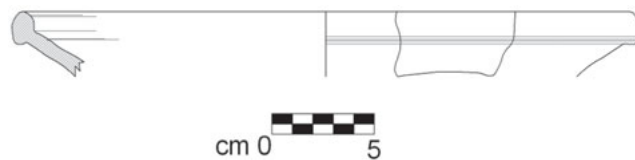


Fig. 9. African Red-Slip Ware Hayes 104.15.

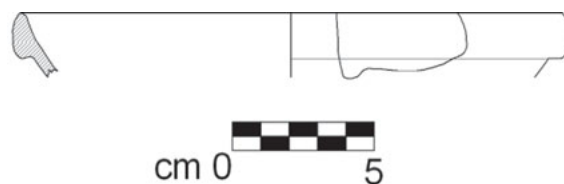


Fig. 10. African Red-Slip Ware Hayes 99,18, 2-23.

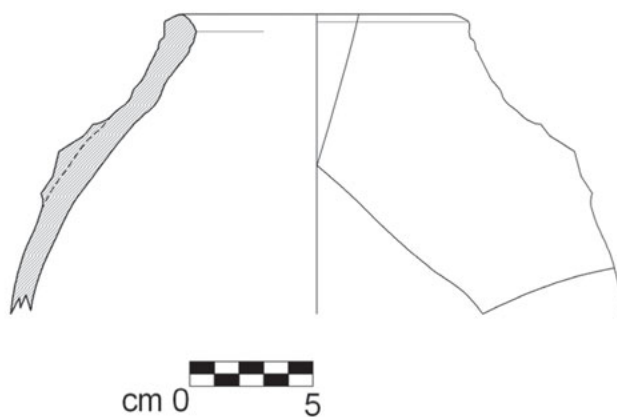


Fig. 11. Carthage Late Roman Amphora 4.

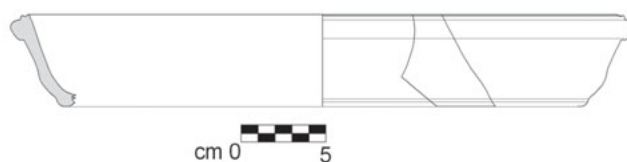


Fig. 12. Cypriot Red-Slip Ware Hayes 2.

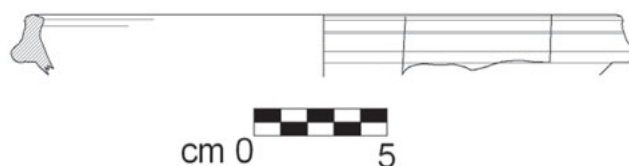


Fig. 13. Phocaean Red-Slip Ware Hayes 3F.

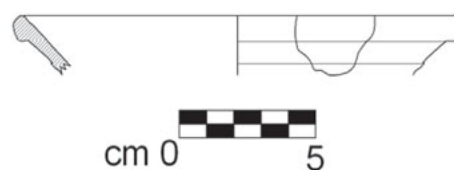


Fig. 14. African Red-Slip Ware Hayes 99,1.7-8.12.

The constant 1–2% attestation of fine ware hides an important difference between the phases up to Phase 27 and the last three. In the later phases fine ware consists essentially of standardized wares – Egyptian Groups K and O and imported Cypriot Red-Slip Ware in particular and occasionally African and Phocaean Red-Slip Ware. In the earlier phases, where standardized wares are to large extent lacking, anything that seemed to stand out from the ordinary run of utilitarian wares has been counted, perhaps over-generously, as fine ware in the preliminary classification, resulting in a hodgepodge including black-gloss fragments in alluvial Egyptian fabrics and various color-coated sherds. Standardized Roman-style wares account for very little, only a few pieces of Eastern Sigillata A. It appears that the site did not participate in the Augustan tableware boom, a moment of integration in which many parts of the empire adopted a typical Roman concept of technology and design embodied in Italian sigillata and then went on to develop their own versions of it.²¹ Only in the 5th–6th century can it be said that Schedia began to use similar tableware to that found elsewhere around the Mediterranean.

The situation with regard to imports is somewhat less clear-cut than with the functional groups. Among amphorae Phases 1–7 show a high percentage of imports (45.77%), although in a smaller and perhaps less representative assemblage than others. Otherwise the phases up to 25–27 have values close to or above 80% for Egyptian amphorae. In Phase 28 nearly 30% of the amphorae are imported, in Phase 29 almost 40% and in Phase 30 more than half (52.82%). This change corresponds to one in the nature of the imports. In the earlier phases the imported amphorae appear to be mostly Aegean and Levantine, with no type dominant. In the later phases two types prevail very decidedly – Carthage LRA 1 from Cilicia and 4 from Gaza. It seems that, as imports increased in the 5th–6th century and afterwards, they also become more focused.

Conclusions

How typical are the results of Area 5? A first examination of the material from other trenches in our excavations suggests that Area 5 is typical for the site. The mix of the functional groups is similar. Nor are there any significant imports not already seen in Area 5. Among fine wares no layer has produced more than a few Eastern Sigillata A fragments or the very occasional sherd of Italian sigillata or Eastern Sigillata B; the overwhelming majority has no sigillata; and many contained no fine ware at all, even by our inclusive defini-

tion. It is interesting to note that we have not identified any example of Cypriot sigillata, although there are some cases of coarse-ware imitations. The imported amphorae in the earlier layers are always a scatter of mostly Aegean to Levantine fragments, and the later layers present mostly Carthage LRA 1 and 4. Beyond Schedia, it remains to be seen how the site compares on the one hand with Alexandria and on the other with the interior of the province, between which Schedia stands as an intermediary.

Should further research bear out our results, what can be the explanation? One would normally expect a picture such as the earlier phases present for a site in a secondary position in the network of international exchanges and that for the latest phases for a well integrated one. Historical sources do not support the idea that Schedia was a much less important port in Roman times than in late antiquity. Therefore, there must be another explanation. Perhaps Schedia was indeed less well integrated into the system of international exchange in the Roman period, not because it was an unimportant port but rather because the imperial authorities were able to obtain the goods they wanted from Egypt without giving much in return. The province was in effect a separate domain with its own monetary system; grain was owed as tribute; the granite and porphyry quarries were in imperial hands. The generally low percentage of amphorae and the lack of Roman-style tableware until late antiquity could reflect Roman Egypt's detached position. The much more normal picture for late-antique Egypt, when it was a province among others, is a further suggestion that Egypt was in a special position in earlier times.²²

²¹ J. POBLOME/R. BRULET/O. BOUNEGRU, The Concept of Sigillata. Regionalism or Integration. *RCRF Acta* 36, 2000, 279–283, in particular 282; J. POBLOME/M. ZELLE, The table ware boom. A socio-economic perspective from western Asia Minor. In: Chr. Berns/H. von Hesberg/L. Vandeput/M. Waelkens (eds.), *Patris und Imperium. Kulturelle und politische Identität in den Städten der römischen Provinzen Kleinasien in der frühen Kaiserzeit. Kolloquium Köln*, November 1998. *Bull. Ant. Beschaving Suppl.* 8 (2002) 275–287; J. Poblome, Italian Sigillata in the Eastern Mediterranean. In: POBLOME/TALLOEN/BRULET/WAELEKENS 2004, 17–30; J. POBLOME/P. TALLOEN, The Eastern Roman Empire. In: POBLOME/TALLOEN/BRULET/WAELEKENS 2004, XII–XIV.

²² R. S. BAGNALL, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 321–322, uses other evidence to indicate that Egypt reaches its maturity as a constituent of the Hellenism of the eastern Roman empire in the 4th century in contrast to its earlier separateness.

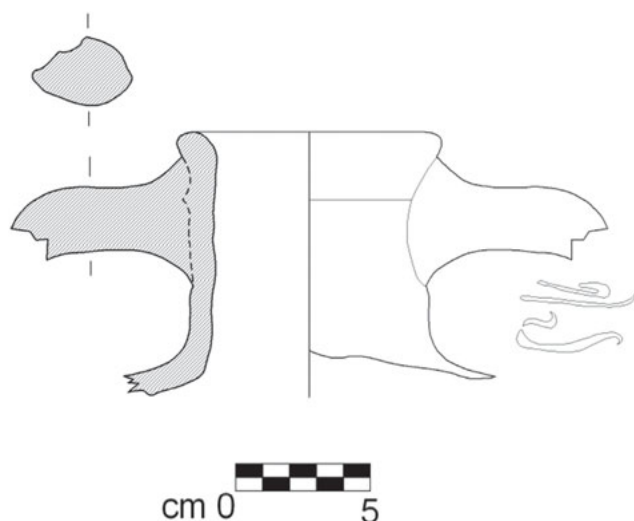


Fig. 15. Carthage Late Roman Amphora 1.

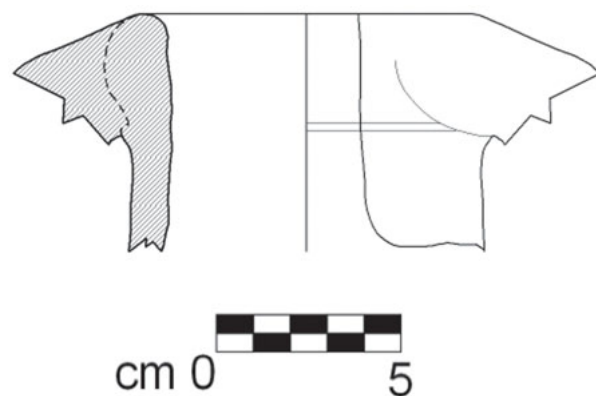


Fig. 16. Amphora Egloff 172.

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