Gabriel Mazor, Walid Atrash & Gerald Finkielsztejn, Bet She'an IV. Hellenistic Nysa-Scythopolis. The amphora stamps and sealings from Tel Iztabba

with a contribution by Anastasia Shapiro IAA Reports 62 Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem 2018 181 pages, ill. ISBN 978-965-406-680-8

Review by Marek Palaczyk

The Hellenistic city of Nysa-Scythopolis was first founded as a fortress and administrative centre on the southern hill Tel Bet She'an by Ptolemy II Philadelphus and re-founded on the northern hill Tel Iztabba by Antiochus IV around 175–170 BCE. A conflagration during the Hasmonean war of 108/107 BCE destroyed the whole area. The Roman city was constructed 57–55 BCE in some distance south-east of the Hellenistic remains, so Tel Iztabba offers the precise terminus ante quem of 108/107 BCE for all finds. The conquest of the city is an important boundary within the chronology of Rhodian amphora stamps (end of period V/beginning of period VI) basic for absolute dating in Hellenistic times. The importance of the full publication of the stamps from this context is eminent¹, given that even a considerable number of excavations between 1940 and 2015 have uncovered a mere 5 % of the city area.

The volume is divided in four chapters supplemented by appendices of loci and baskets. Chapter 1, the introduction, presents a short history of the excavations, followed by a very summary description of archaeological remains in areas W and Z^2 .

The main part – chapter 2 – gives a picture of the amphora stamps from the site. The short introductory section (pp. 13–20) summarises clearly all the important aspects of the class. Graphs and tables show at a glance the chronological and quantitative distribution of Rhodian stamps at the site. The following catalogue is organised according to the different excavations – making matters unnecessarily confusing³. After this, in a first section Rhodian amphorae are listed in chronological order, followed by small groups of stamps from other proveniences. 368 inventory numbers (mainly stamps, but also graffiti and whole amphorae) are specified: 95,42 % are Rhodian stamps, 312 of which are readable and datable. Around 80 % belong to the second half of the 2nd c. BCE. Seven Cnidian, six Coan, two Thasian und two unidentified stamps complete the collection. Along with the stamps an exceptional high

- Fifty-one stamps found on Telel Husn (Bet She'an) are discussed by D. T. Ariel, Stamped Amphora Handles from Bet–She'an: Evidence for the Urban Development of the City in the Hellenistic Period, in: J. Eiring J. Lund (eds.), Transport Amphorae and Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean. Acts of the International Colloquium at the Danish Institute at Athens, September 26—29, 2002, Monographs of the Danish Institute at Athens 5 (Athens 2004) and idem, The Stamped Amphora Handles, in: A. Mazor, Excavations at Tel Beth-She'an 1989–1996 I. From the Late Bronze Age IIB to the Medieval Period (Jerusalem 2006) 594–606.
- A slightly longer presentation of the excavations was published recently in this journal by G. Mazor W- Atrash, Nysa-Scythopolis: The Hellenistic Polis, JHP 2, 2017, 82–101. The final publication is in preparation.
- 3 For instance, the stamps of the eponym Andronikos appear under catalogue-nos. 73–74. 200 and 269.

quantity of graffiti (45) are listed. The descriptions of individual specimens are restricted to the most significant information. In some cases of badly preserved inscriptions a reference to the exact parallel, based on which the reading is reconstructed (for instance nos. 100 and 300), would be elucidating. For some readings one must trust in the great experience of the author alone, because either almost nothing can be seen on the stamp itself (nos. 5. 29. 167), or the preserved fragment is very small (nos. 199. 249). All but four names of eponyms known from period V are represented. And many of the dies used here are lacking in the Alexandria database⁴, so the collection from Tell Iztabba is a welcome addition to it. Few hitherto unknown or very rare connections between eponym and fabricant are documented: Aristakos with Aphrodisios and Nikias I (nos. 265–266), Kallikrates III with Glaukias (no. 274), Teisamenos with Aphrodisios (no. 298) and possibly Teisamenos with Philotas (no. 295). The sequence of officials appearing on the stamps is based on the former works of the author and corresponds exactly to Cancardes-Şenol⁵.

In addition to the stamps the graffiti on the Rhodian amphorae, all of them scratched in after firing, are presented as well. In many cases, they consist in names or abbreviations. Of special interest is a group found at the same spot showing Π and P: in four cases P intersects Π in the middle (nos. 225. 287. 306. 320), in one case (no. 305) the letters follow each other. The reading proposed by Finkielsztejn: Π P O T Γ I, in one case (no. 305) Π P O T Γ E I, is hardly convincing. By contrast H and P in ligature (no. 315) or following each other (no. 270) are read as H and P! The chronological interval between the oldest and the youngest amphora featuring Π intersected by P is 40 years, which means that some vessels have been in use for such a long period of time.

A number of regrettable small editorial errors have occurred. Several photographs are upside down (nos. 164. 167. 207. 247. 253b), at no. 152 the stamps of eponym and fabricant are reversed. Some transliterations are incomplete or erroneous: no. 5: $\Sigma \pi \lambda$ was overlooked; no. 69: on the stamp a Σ and not a Σ can be seen; at no. 98 the brackets in $\Sigma \pi \lambda \times \lambda \times \lambda$ are unnecessary – $\Sigma \times \lambda \times \lambda$ is well preserved; at no. 288b the brackets are facing wrong directions: $\Delta \times \lambda \times \lambda$ instead of $\Delta \times \lambda$ (the same at no. 282b), and so on. The reference to no. 185 made at no. 300 is wrong and no. 301 cannot be from the same die as no. 102, because the herm looks once to the left and once to the right. At no. 82 the eponym Timotheos is dated to 130–128 BCE, at no. 281 to 128 BCE; the same for Aristogenes: once to 130–128 BCE (no. 84) and later to 129 BCE (no. 278). The terminus fabricant – the role of the person in the Rhodian stamping system is still a subject of ongoing discussion⁶ – is not being used consistently: at no. 208 it is said »secondary stamp used by the fabricant Midas«, but at no. 356 »secondary stamp (understood to be that of the potter that made the vessel)«.

The second part of the book deals with sealings found in the city, a very common category of material during antiquity, but rarely preserved in archaeological contexts. Chapter 3 presents 99 sealings, all of them with excellent pictures and exact descriptions, chapter 4 the petrological analysis of the bullae. The archive is precisely dated by stamps at 128 – 108/107 BCE and interpreted by the authors as a »private« one⁷. The impressions were made with signet rings on clumps of clay that were evidently used to seal papyrus rolls. The rolls must have been burnt, the clay being baked and the sealings preserved in the process. More than half of the images on the *bullae* show Greek mythological characters, first of all Athena (nos. 1–20),

- 4 www.amphoralex.org.
- 5 G. Cancardeş-Şenol, Lexicon of Eponym Dies on Rhodian Amphora Stamps 4 (Alexandria 2017) 215–218.
- 6 At last C. Börker, Der ΕΡΓΑΣΤΗΡΙΑΡΧΗΣ und die rhodischen Amphorenstempel, ZPE 209, 2019, 78–90.
- The remark that the Kallipolis archive was a private one runs contrary to the opinion of the excavator P. Themelis, Ausgrabungen in Kallipolis (Ost-Aeolien) 1977–1978, AAA 12/2, 1979, 245–273. Themelis calls it »zweifellos das offizielle Stadtarchiv« (p. 265).



followed by Tyche. But also, the local divinity Nysa with infant Dionysos is represented in five examples (nos. 21–25). Another group presents male portrait busts (nos. 53–72), some of them possibly of official nature, but none can be identified⁸. Only two sealings are considered to have an official character without doubt (nos. 87 and 75). Petrological analysis of the fabrics used for the *bullae* reveals that more than a half of the sealings are of local origin, a quarter come from the region and only few have travelled greater distances, viz. from Greece or Cyprus. So the sealings help to differentiate and enrich the picture of the contacts of the city as it has been given by the amphorae.

This refreshing compact volume is an important contribution not only to local history, but also to Hellenistic life in the Eastern Mediterranean in general. Its large collection of eponym and fabricant names and their connections within period V of Rhodian chronology allows new thoughts about the fine tuning of their sequence. The work benefits from the authors' great experience and knowledge of the local situation and the complexity of international networks during Hellenistic times.

152 JHP 4 – 2019

⁸ Cf. the most recent publication on official Hellenistic portraits on bullae: H. Kyrieleis, Hellenistische Herrscherporträts auf den Siegelabdrücken aus Paphos (Paphos IV B), AF 34 (Wiesbaden 2015).