

Alexandria Kom el-Dikka

Season 2017



Abstract: The 2017 season saw the conclusion of the first phase of the Site Preservation Project at the Kom el-Dikka site. The new visitors' route was officially inaugurated by the Minister of Antiquities of Egypt, Dr. Khaled al-Anany. Archaeological excavations continued to be focused on a huge mound of ashes and urban refuse, located to the south of the Imperial Bath complex in the central part of the Kom el-Dikka site. The mound accumulated over the ages from the 4th to the 7th century AD, covering the ruins of early Roman dwelling houses. The report gives an overview of digging in this area, where a substantial part of a house was cleared. It includes also a summary of conservation work performed on mosaics and monuments of ancient architecture.

Keywords: late antique Alexandria, urban dump, mosaics, Roman houses, conservation

The 2017 season of fieldwork was filled as usual with multiple tasks, covering both archaeological and conservation work. The high point of the year came on 1 April with the official inauguration of the tourist itinerary, constituting the first stage of the Kom el-Dikka Site Presentation Project. Officiating at the well-attended opening ceremony were His Excellency Dr. Khaled al-Anany, Minister of Antiquities of Egypt, accompanied by their Excellencies Mohammed Sultan, Governor of Alexandria, Michał Murkociński, Ambassador of Poland and Prof. Marcin Pałys, Rector of the University of Warsaw (see above, page 30 in this volume). The new itinerary swelled the numbers of visitors over the early summer months, even as the team returned late in the season to a regular schedule of digging and conservation, running all the time a training course for a group of junior SCA staff members. The course focused on basic excavation and conservation techniques and methods including stratigraphic analyses, surveying, pottery processing and drawing.

Grzegorz Majcherek

Polish Centre of
Mediterranean Archaeology
University of Warsaw

Team

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Director: Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek, archaeologist (PCMA UW)

Deputy Director: Renata Kucharczyk, glass specialist (PCMA UW)

SCA representatives: Omar Mahrous Mahmoud Doma, Nermine Sami Abdel Fatah Ahmed, Mohammed Abu Bakr, Mona Mustafa Kamel Ibrahim, Amira Hassan Mohammed Hassan and Karim Mohammed Mohammed Ghoneim

Archaeologist: Emanuela Kulicka (freelance)

Numismatist: Prof. Barbara Lichočka (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences)

Conservators: Ewa Parandowska and Zygmunt Nawrot (both freelance)

Architects: Justyna Romanowska and Szymon Popławski (students, Wrocław University of Science and Technology)

Documentalist: Katarzyna Popławska (freelance)

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EXCAVATIONS

Continued excavation of the central part of the site was the main focus of the archaeological part of the season, particular emphasis being placed on studying the early Roman domestic architecture [Fig. 1]. Previous work in this area had exposed substantial sections of at least four Roman houses (FA, FB, FC and FD) (Majcherek 1995: 14–20; 1996: 13–20; 1997: 19–30; 1998:

25–30; 1999: 35–39; 2010: 35–42; 2011: 38–46). The investigation then focused on their layout, decoration and functional arrangement on the assumption—based on a central location within the city and the sumptuous interior architectural decoration, including mosaic floors—that they represented a middle-class, if not elite status of their inhabitants.

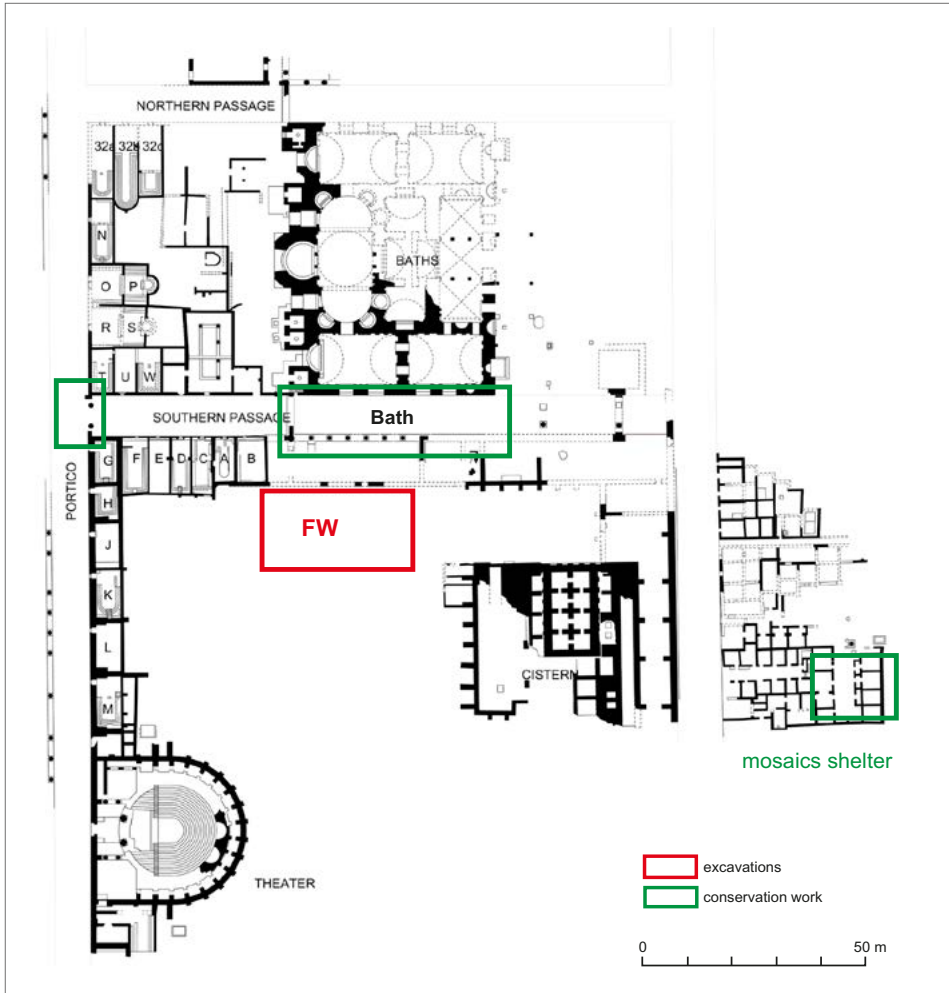


Fig. 1. Kom el-Dikka: areas of excavation and conservation work in the 2017 season (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/drawing W. Kołataj, update D. Tarara)

This season work was limited to the western part of area F, where the trench, investigated first in 2009, was now extended west (FW). Given the time constraints and logistic obstacles (considerable distance from the current excavation dumps), exploration was limited to an approximately 10 m square trench.

EARLY ROMAN PHASE

The targeted early Roman phase in the trench comprised fairly well preserved structures, which may have formed a western extension of the early Roman house FB, partly uncovered already in 1998, or—more likely—were part of yet another house (Majcherek 1999). The two

long walls (w.760 and w.761) closing the excavated areas from the east have no doors linking this area with the previously excavated structures.

A cluster of contiguous rooms (21–27) of various dimensions was cleared, not all of them explored in their entirety [Figs 2–3]. Given their rather modest dimensions, they should be expected to serve purely domestic rather than official function.

This entire wing appears to have been accessible from a side street that is assumed to have run south of the excavated area. Such a street, approximately 4.80–5.00 m wide, was identified already in two trenches, located next to the north-

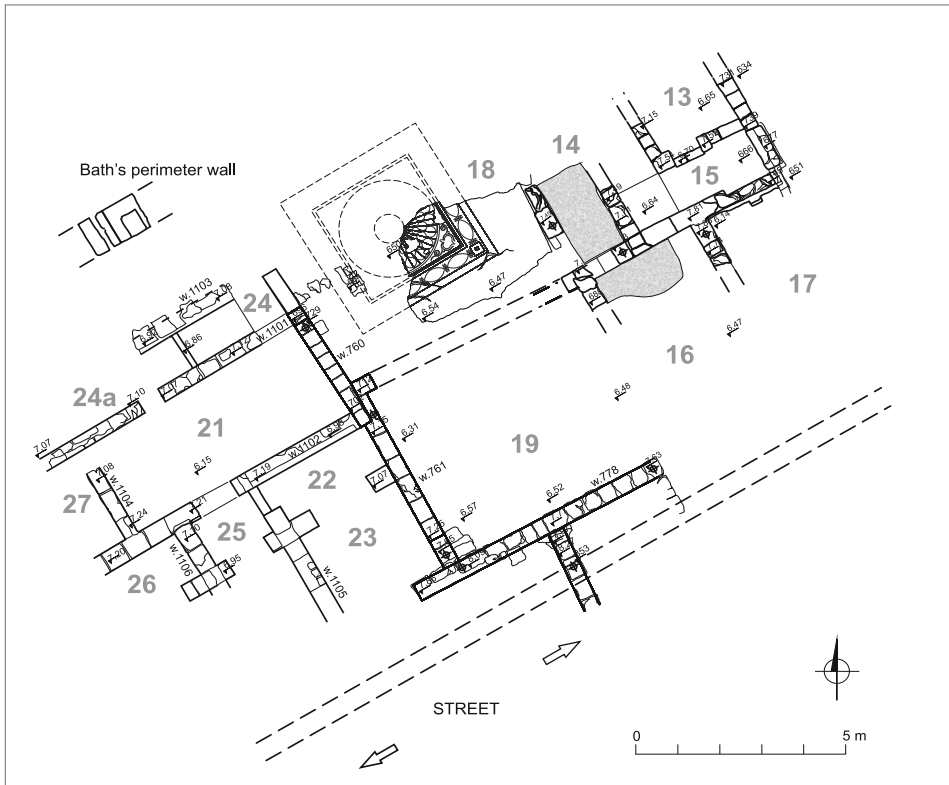


Fig. 2. Early Roman house in Area FW (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/drawing M. Sołtys and G. Majcherek)

ern elevation of the late Roman cistern (Majcherek 2011: 46). In one of these trenches dug close to the northeastern corner of the cistern, a typical stepped entrance (*prothyron*) leading from the street to building FD was cleared (Majcherek 1998: 30–34).

The wing was accessed through a narrow corridor/vestibule (25, approximately 1.65 m wide) flanked by two pilasters. A wide doorway opened from it onto the largest transverse unit (21), measuring 6.00 m by 2.50 m. From there additional doors led to a chamber (24a) and to a small side room (27, unexcavated), located further west. An opening in the wall in the northeastern corner of 21 gave access to a staircase (unit 24), indicative of the existence of a second storey or at least a terraced roof. A basin almost square in shape occupied the adjacent

narrow and elongated room 24a, which was barely wide enough to accommodate its width of 0.95 m. A well-preserved *opus signinum* lining still covers the walls. The structure was obviously used as a waste bin; considerable amounts of food remains, fish bones, shells etc. were found in the fill.

Given its key role in organizing communication within the excavated part of the house, it is quite possible that unit 21 served as a small courtyard. This impression is further supported by a large channel cutting diagonally across the unit and emptying into a sewer noted in room 24.

Room 23 and its annex (22) located in the southeastern part of the trench were somehow separated from the rest of the house. The room acted most likely as a shop accessed directly from the street. Similarly located shops were previously



Fig. 3. Remains of the early Roman house in Area FW, looking south (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo G. Majcherek)

identified in nearby house FA (Majcherek 1996: 16). Units 26–27 remained unexplored and their communication with other parts of the house has yet to be recognized.

Wall construction technique identified in sections explored this season was similar to previously excavated structures of Roman age. Walls, preserved sometimes 1.40–1.60 m above the floor level, were chiefly structured in regular isodomonic technique and did not exceed 0.40–0.45 m in thickness. Some of them showed clear signs of seismic-related deformations: shattered and displaced masonry, deep vertical cracks etc. However, there is no way to ascribe them to any particular earthquakes known from historical records. Floors varied considerably, from tamped earth surfaces in rooms 21 and 23, to remains of pavement in the *opus barbaricum* technique in room 25, the latter being a bichrome mosaic featuring white rhomboids inscribed within black



Fig. 4. Painted plastering in the early Roman house (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/ photo G. Majcherek)

rectangles. Stone collapse, cleared in all the rooms, contained numerous pieces of lime/gypsum plaster with reed mat imprints apparently fallen from a ceiling, which is an indication of a flat roof. The fill produced also a large number of fragments of multicolored plastering, found practically all over the trench. Substantial stretches of plastering were found extant on the walls. In room 24a, decoration consisted of a horizontal black band, painted on white plaster. Another, more developed example of adornment was found on the western pillar in room 22; it featured large plain panels, delineated with alternating green, black and red lines [Fig. 4]. Interestingly, several broken fragments of small cups preserving varied dyes (green, yellow, blue and red) were discovered scattered through the debris. It is quite possible that they had found use in decorating the wall plaster.

At this stage of research the function of particular rooms cannot be identified properly. It is apparent nonetheless that the building was used for a prolonged period and witnessed subsequent transformations and reshaping. In a later period, it served industrial purposes with some rooms apparently turned into workshops. Stone moulds for glass beads were discovered in the fill; some additional furnishings of an industrial nature (stone anvils, benches, supports etc.) were also found in the presumed courtyard (21). In the final phase, the courtyard may have also been used as a kitchen, as evidenced by a thick deposit of soot and ashes, as well as a fair number of kitchen ware fragments, found in associated layers. Noted along a number of Egyptian and imported cooking pots and mortaria was a fine example of

an African large shallow bowl or lid with grey-fired rim (Hayes Form 196), dated to the mid 2nd–mid 3rd century AD [Fig. 6:8].

The most surprising and advanced transformation took place in room 23. A brick-made dome was obviously introduced there. A great number of flat Roman bricks (24 cm by 24 cm) and the keystone were found collapsed on the floor [Fig. 5]. The dome must have been part of the same modification that was previously witnessed in house FA, where two rooms were also found to be covered with well-preserved domes (Majcherek 1996: 19). The purpose of this alteration and of the effectively domed rooms continues to be subject to speculation.

Layers associated with the latest phase of settlement or the final abandonment of the house produced substantial quantities of pottery, some glass as well as lamp fragments, belonging mostly to the 2nd–4th century AD horizon. The repertoire included both Egyptian and imported pottery, and consisted mostly of amphorae and coarse wares, with only a small quantity of fine wares present. Early variants of LRA 4 (Gaza–Ashkelon) amphorae made up the overwhelming majority of the finds [Fig. 6:1]. Among other imported wares one should mention Cilician amphorae (early version of LRA 1 and “pinched-handle” amphorae; Fig. 6:2). Some oil and wine containers, originating from Byzacene (Africana I) and Tripolitania (Tripolitanian III) and Tunisia, were also recorded [Fig. 6:3,4] (Majcherek 2017). Aegean vessels make another distinct group, including among others examples of Cretan amphorae (mostly AC1) and quite a number of cooking pots. The latter, albeit widely traded throughout

the Mediterranean, were until now hardly ever reported from Alexandria and from other Egyptian sites. Globular *kakkabe* were the most common among the several noted shapes [Fig. 6:5,6]. Most vessels were made in standard “Lycian kaolinitic” fabric, although a few sherds of red “ferromagnetic” fabric were also identified (Lemaître et al. 2013). All in all, this is the first indication of large scale importation of Aegean kitchen ware to Egypt, in stark contrast to their extremely low frequency in the late antique period. Regional Egyptian pottery is represented mostly by early-mid Roman amphorae produced in the Nile Valley (Egloff 172 and Egloff 176–179, respectively) and various examples of common wares. There was a marked presence of two-handled water jugs on highly moulded foot as in previous seasons [Fig. 6:7]. The macroscopic characteristics of their Nile silt fabric point to production centers located most probably in the Delta.

Fine wares were definitely less numerous. A few examples of Egyptian imitations of ubiquitous Cypriot Sigil-

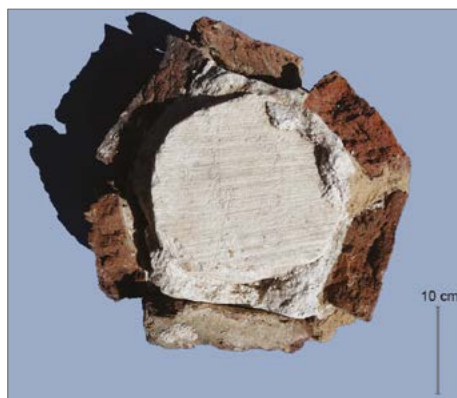


Fig. 5. Keystone from the collapsed brick dome (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo G. Majcherek)



Fig. 6. Selection of early Roman pottery: 1 – Gazan amphora (LRA4); 2 – Cilician LRA 1 amphora (early version); 3 – Africana I amphora; 4 – Tripolitanian III amphora; 5, 6 – Aegean cooking pots; 7 – Egyptian (Nile silt fabric) water jug; 8 – African Red Slip bowl/lid, form 196; 9 – Egyptian imitation (Nile silt fabric) of Cypriot Sigillata form P40 (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/drawing K. Pawłowska)

lata form P40 were recorded [Fig. 6:9].¹ Of note is a thin-walled cup imported from the Aegean, bearing a partly preserved painted inscription in Greek: $\pi\epsilon\acute{\iota}[\nu]\epsilon$ $\epsilon\upsilon\phi\rho\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu[\omega\nu]$, i.e., “drink with joy” (reading by A. Łukaszewicz) [Fig. 8]. Similar exhortations proliferated particularly in later antiquity, being found on glass vessels (Auth 1996), although never before attested in Alexandria. Several examples of 2nd century AD Egyptian-made lamps complete the repertory of ceramic objects, among them a couple of handles of the *Isis lactans* figurine type [Fig. 7].

The excavations produced also some glass fragments representing mostly tableware characteristic of the 1st to the 3rd century AD. Vessel shape and glass color and quality are paralleled by contemporary glass from earlier excavations in the area and also by material from Marina

el-Alamein (Kucharczyk 2005; 2010b: 125–127; 2016a: 88). The assemblage comprises bottles and flagons of various shape, often equipped with solid ring bases, shallow



Fig. 7. Egyptian oil-lamp handle (Inv. No. 1084.1.17) (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo K. Pawłowska)

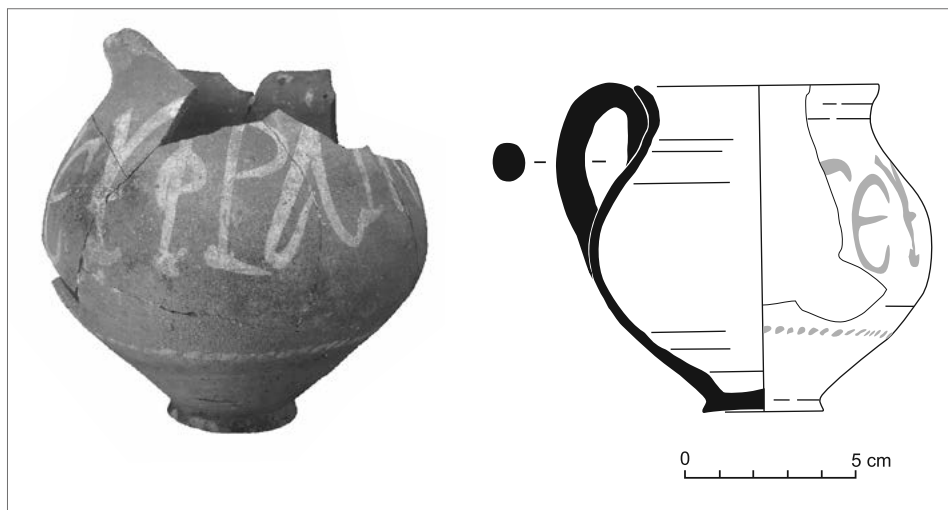


Fig. 8. Thin-walled cup, an Aegean import, with a painted Greek inscription “drink with joy” (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo and drawing K. Pawłowska)

- 1 Egyptian imitations of this form were first identified in Alexandria in 1991 (Majcherek 1991: 2). They have been reported frequently from other Egyptian sites ever since (Ballet and von der Way 1993: 19–20).

plates, deep bowls, cups and beakers, including cylindrical specimens with thick bases decorated with thin, horizontally applied threads, as well as with irregularly spaced deep elongated indents, all made

of colorless free-blown glass [Fig. 9:1–7]. A limited number of vessels, including an unguentarium, was made of green glass. A small hemispherical cast mosaic bowl with a very fragmentary polychrome or-

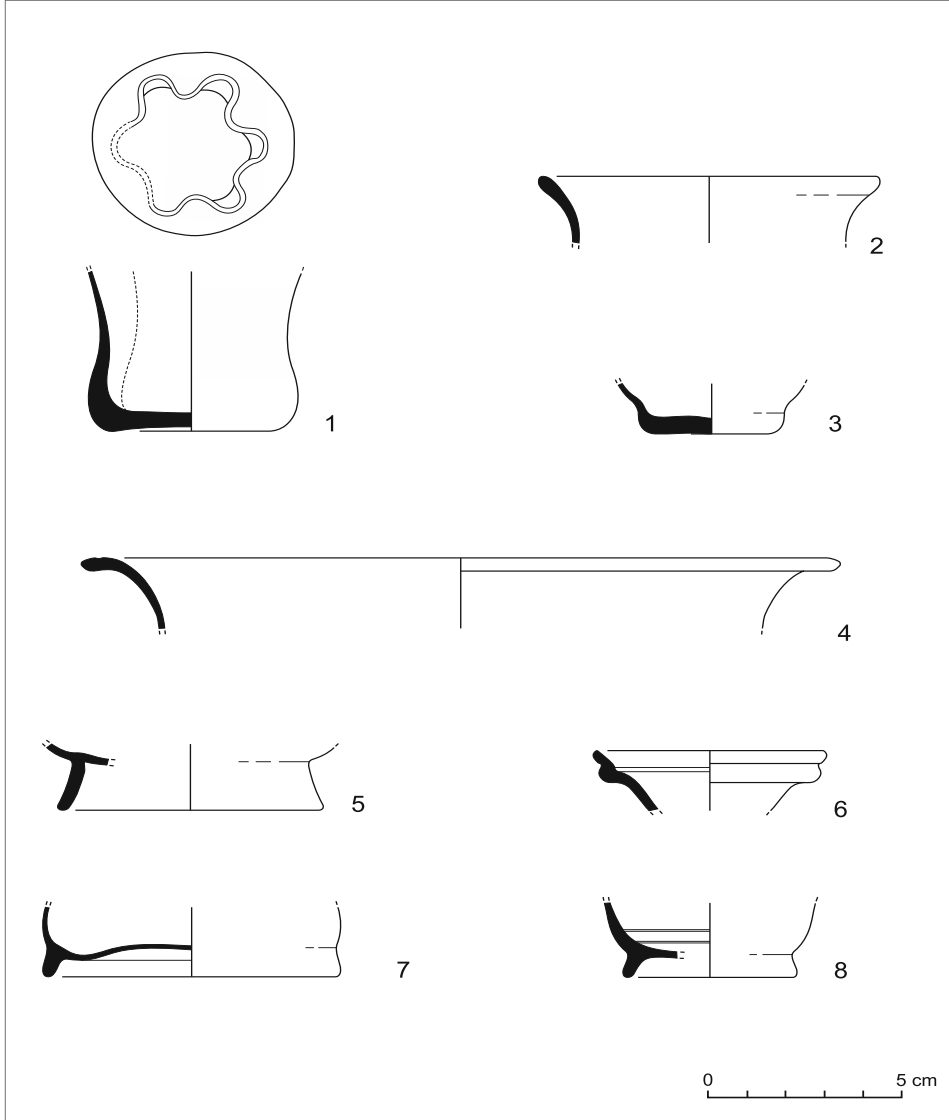


Fig. 9. Selection of early Roman glass: 1 – indented beaker; 2, 3 – beaker on solid base; 4 – deep bowl; 5 – high ring base of bottle or bowl; 6 – bottle neck with internal fold; 7 – base of cylindrical bottle; 8 – cast mosaic bowl base (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/drawing E. Kulicka, M. Momot, K. Pawłowska)

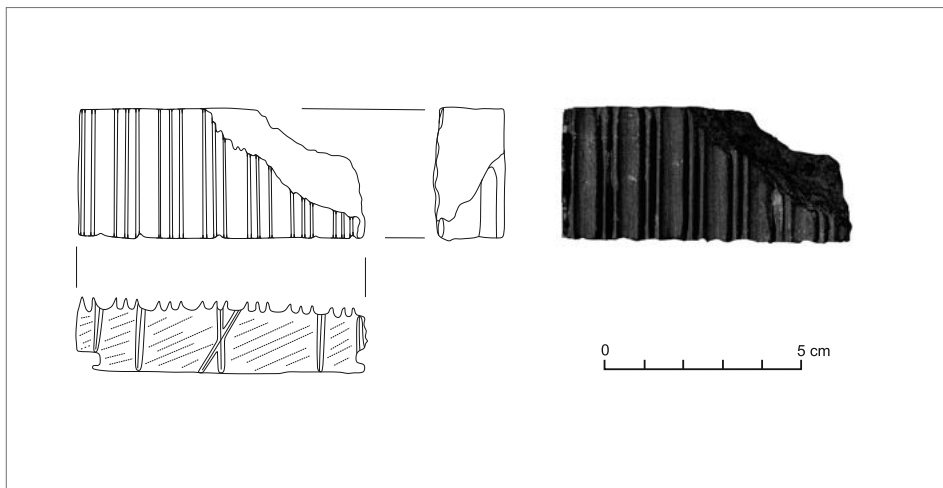


Fig. 10. Schist mould for shaping glass beads
(PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo and drawing K. Pawłowska)



Fig. 11. Gold-in-glass beads and production wasters
(PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo K. Pawłowska)

nament on the outside wall is noteworthy [Fig. 9:8], considering that the archaeological evidence for mosaic glass from regular excavations in Alexandria is still very limited and somewhat disappointing (Kucharczyk 2016b). Glass other than vessels is represented by game counters, small balls and a stirring rod.

One of the most surprising aspects of the glass assemblage coming from this area is the ample evidence of bead-making. Several stone moulds for shaping beads were recovered from the fill of room 26 [Fig. 10]. Similar moulds have already been reported from the area (Kucharczyk 2011: 64–65, Fig. 8:1). Proof of the manufacture of luxury gold-in-glass beads, in the form of not just the beads of different shape, but also colorless glass tubes and some wasters [Fig. 11], came from rooms 14 and 16, which had been investigated to some extent already in 2007 (Majcherek 2011: 44–45). The evidence as a whole is unique not only in Alexandria, but also in Egypt. It also corroborates the view, based on other archaeological material, that the final phase of occupation of the building was organized around an artisanal production.

A provisional chronology of the building indicates the 1st century AD as the most probable date of construction. The end of occupation should be linked most likely to the destruction of the city center, inflicted successively by Aurelian in AD 272 and by Diocletian a quarter of a century later. This preliminary assessment will be tested in the upcoming season.

LATE ROMAN PHASE

Thick layers of deposits related to lime-kiln operation covered the destruction

stratum. They consisted almost entirely of lime refuse, ashes and slag, with heavy concentrations of marble detritus, some of it partly burned or half-melted, apparently raw material for lime production. Prominent among them were broken elements of architectural decoration: pavement slabs, crustae, cornices, capital fragments etc. carved in decorative stones brought in from all over the Mediterranean. Apart from the omnipresent Proconessian marble, fragments of *cipollino verde* and *rosso, giallo antico, greco scritto, africano, breccia di settebasi* and *pavonazetto*, Egyptian alabaster, porphyry and other stones were also noted [Fig. 13].

The most spectacular, and given the material, the most unexpected find, was undoubtedly a well preserved, masterful portrait head, sculptured in red Aswan granite [Fig. 12]. The head, most probably of 2nd–1st century BC date, shares stylistic features with a large and well known group of sculptures of Ptolemaic age made of hard stone (Z. Kiss, personal communication). Remains of a back pillar leave no doubt as to its original form of a near to life-size standing statue. As such it is paralleled by other granodiorite or basalt heads previously found at the site (Kiss 1995; 2014), as well as other examples of the so-called “Greco-Egyptian” sculpture found in various museum collections (Adriani 1970; Kaiser 1999).

This thick accumulation, reaching 0.50 m in places and rising to the north, actually signaled extensive and prolonged building activity, most probably linked to the bath and/or cistern construction in the 4th century. It was turned into a huge dumping ground and gradually filled with urban refuse and ashes from the nearby

bathroom (Majcherek 2007: 16). Towards the end of antiquity, it had risen several meters above the pavement of the bath and the theater portico. Mounds of this kind were quite an ordinary phenomenon in urban landscapes of late antiquity (Liebeschuetz 2000; Ballet 2003), and the appearance of similar rubbish dumps (*kopriai*) was nothing strange in the topography of ancient Alexandria. More than a dozen have been identified, some located in close vicinity of the site (Rodziewicz 1984: 25–31, 252–256).

The ashes and urban refuse deposits yielded a particularly rich set of finds: above all ceramics, but also some glass fragments. This small assemblage comprised a limited range of vessel types, representing free-blown, simply shaped vessels: small bottles, wineglasses, hemispherical bowls and conical lamps with

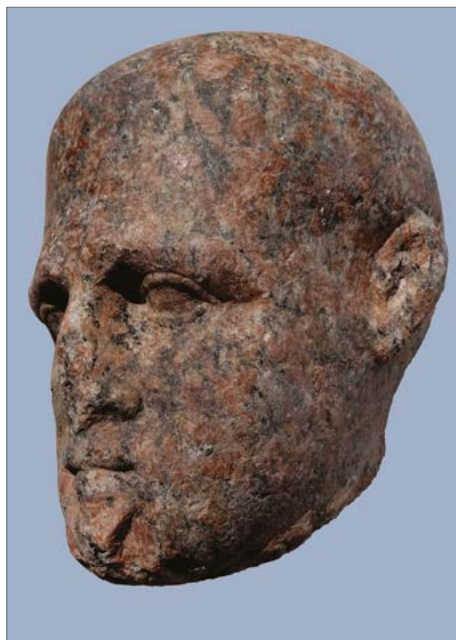


Fig. 12. Late Ptolemaic portrait head of Aswan red granite (Inv. No. 1055.1.17) (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo G. Majcherek)



Fig. 13. Selection of decorative stone fragments: top row from left, *cipollino rosso*, porphyry and *giallo antico*; bottom row from left, *lapis basanites*, *breccia di settebasi*, *pavonazzetto* and Proconnessian marble (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo G. Majcherek)

cracked-off rim (R. Kucharczyk, personal communication). There is no doubt that these entirely utilitarian objects, often carelessly manufactured, of yellowish-green and green glass, without any artistic aspirations, were made and used locally. Glass other than vessels is represented by fragments of mosaic plaques with sections of opaque yellow canes, randomly encased in a green matrix, a kind of decoration usually considered as an imitation of *serpentino verde*. In the light of the evidence from Kom el-Dikka, there is no doubt that not only plaques, but also vessels and small objects, like game counters and balls with this pattern, were manu-

factured in Alexandria during the early Roman and particularly during the late Roman period (Kucharczyk 2010a: 67, Fig. 7:2; 2011: 66–67, Fig. 9:3; 2016a: 94). Excavations have also produced tangible evidence of glass production, representing both primary and secondary glassmaking stages (large chunks of a dismantled glass furnace, glass production debris, raw glass, moulds, wasters and semi-products, including mosaic bars). Typical of late Roman contexts are several fragments of flat windowpanes made of yellowish-green glass in the cylinder-blown method.

Pottery presents an equally elaborate picture. Apart from the usual array of

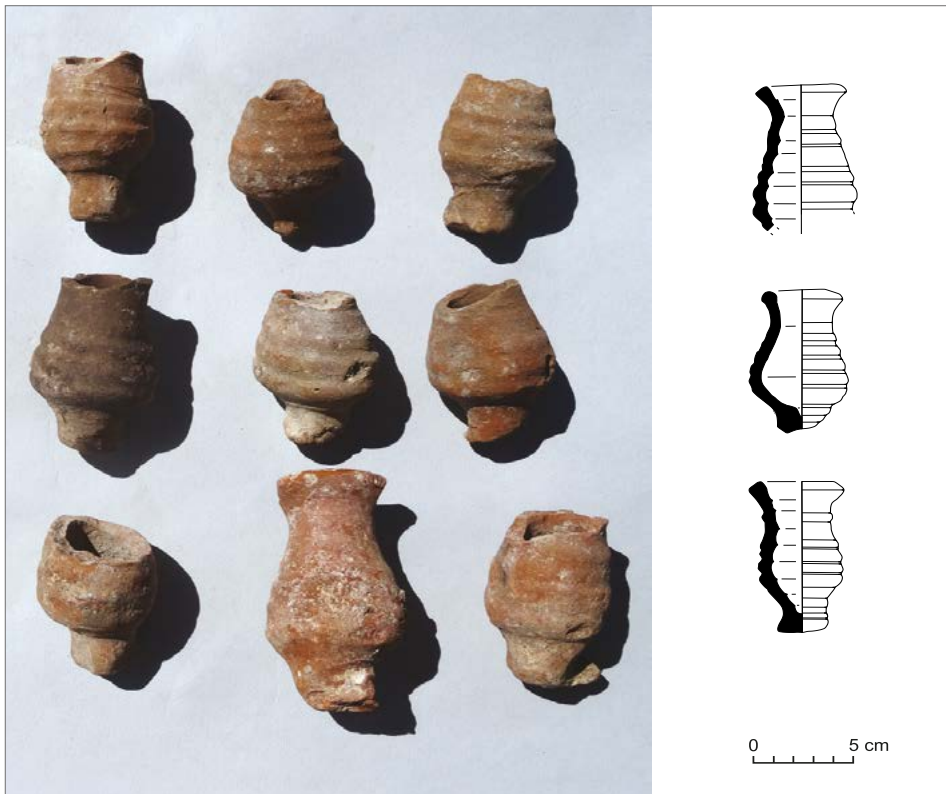


Fig. 14. Miniature flask-like vessels of Egyptian manufacture (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo G. Majcherek; drawing K. Pawłowska)

vessels typical of the 4th–5th century AD horizon (early versions of the LRA1, LRA3, LRA4, and LRA7, a few examples of ARS forms 50 and 62, as well as kitchen wares, mostly locally made), the accumulation was marked by the presence of an extremely large deposit (over 7000 fragments!) of miniature flask-like vessels of Egyptian manufacture [Fig. 14]. They were all made of typical Nile silt fabric, medium coarse with considerable lime and organic inclusions, relatively soft and porous. All recorded vessels showed a tedious uniformity of shapes: actually only two basic forms were identified. The overwhelming majority featured a spindle-shaped, slightly bulging body tapering to a pinched base. The other and definitely less frequent form had a bulbous body with splayed rim and flat string-cut base. Both types were covered with deep, spiral wheel-ridging. The exact function of these vessels is still unclear. They were thought to be small oil containers used for bathing, but as the pinched pointed bases preclude standing, they may as well have been used as amphorae stoppers. Similar vessels referred to as *koilopoma* were supposed to serve as stoppers, while at the same time intended to contain a sample of wine, thus allowing a customer to inspect product quality without having to open an amphora (Denecker and Vandorpe 2007: Notes 21 and 93). Albeit plausible, this idea would do well to have further confirmation. While their function as amphorae stoppers has been suggested by some researchers (Rodríguez Almeida 1974),

it was rejected, or at least treated with reserve by others (Callender 1965: Fig. 19, Nos 25–27; Peacock and Williams 1986: 51). It should be emphasized, however, that the accompanying ceramic assemblages did not produce a corresponding number of amphorae finds to pair with. On the contrary, the amount of wine or oil containers recorded in the explored contexts was relatively meager, hardly justifying such an enormous quantity of assumed “stoppers”.

The excavated area was bordered on the north by a wide robber trench truncating the entire accumulation. It obviously resulted from the demolition of the huge southern perimeter wall of the nearby late Roman bath complex. It does appear, however, that the dismantling of this wall was a complicated and recurrent process. Evidence of rather late activity (Ayyubid Underglaze Painted and Mamluk Sgraff and Slip Painted pottery) has been found along parts of this feature, but in other sections (the 2017 trench included), the data have pointed to a much earlier date. One should admit the possibility that some sections of the original perimeter wall of the baths were dismantled already in the 6th century AD, and could be related to destruction resulting from earthquakes in the middle of that century (Badawy 1999; Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina 1994: 337–338). It also appears that the wall was later rebuilt along the same line, but on much higher level, making use of some extant ruins and dislocated blocks as foundations.

CONSERVATION

Conservation and landscaping work was prioritized in the first part of the season, focusing on areas essential to the conclusion of the present stage of the Site Presentation Project [see *Fig. 1*].

BATHS

One of the major operations undertaken in the bath complex was routine repair and conservation of the southern elevation of the bath [*Fig. 15*]. Wall facing there was treated and thoroughly restored in the 2003 and 2004 seasons (Majcherek 2005: 27–29). Nevertheless, after more than a decade, inevitable damage and losses, caused either by environmental factors or

human activity (an undesired byproduct of the increasing number of tourist), called for a quick response to contain further degradation.

Some badly eroded modern and apparently substandard bricks used in the past restoration were now replaced with new ones. Decayed bricks were carefully extracted and new bricks cut to required size were mounted in place using a lime-based mortar, with a measured addition of crushed bricks in order to emulate original mortar and in accordance with the ancient formula. Such treatment was applied to all threatened areas identified along the 60 m of the elevation.



Fig. 15. Preservation work on the southern elevation of the late Roman Baths (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo G. Majcherek)

Moreover, a brick-lined water channel running along the southern elevation was also repaired, removing marks of visitors trespassing in an effort to reach the out-of-bounds parts of the archaeological site. Large sections of the channel walls, crushed and trampled by unauthorized entry, had to be restored in modern brick.

In the southeastern corner of the baths (restored in 2003), there was need for replacing damaged bricks as well as securing large sections of original plastering with new edging. Sections of supporting walls, bordering the modern stairway (next to the southeastern corner of the bath), were also repaired. Losses in joints were completed with a new lime–cement mortar.

THEATER PORTICO

The gate leading from the portico to the bath complex was subjected to limited conservation. Last year, restoration was completed of the large steps located in the entrance [Fig. 16]. This season, an additional drum was installed on the southern Doric style column (two drums preserved to a height of 1.05 m). The partly preserved drum (1/3 of the original circumference) was found in the debris, associated with the late antique dismantling of the northern section of the theater portico (Majcherek and Kucharczyk 2014: 25–26). It was decided to use it for restoration in order to cap and protect the existing drums as well as to make the gate more attractive visually.



Fig. 16. Restored western entrance to the bath complex (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/ photo G. Majcherek)

MOSAIC CONSERVATION

Beside maintenance work on the mosaic shelter, where broken windows had to be glazed and loose or damaged railings fixed, conservation of the Dionysus mosaic (MC-1) was the most important task. Ewa Parandowska and her team concluded the conservation of the mosaic which had been found next to the theater (Majcherek 2004: 33–34; Lis 2004), and transferred to the “Villa of the Birds” in 2016 [Fig. 17]. The mosaic was given a final protective coating of Paraloid B-72 diluted in acetone. Other mosaics exhibited in the “Villa of the Birds” underwent routine inspection. Wherever necessary, loose tesserae were reinforced and the protective edging was repaired.

A black-and-white *triclinium* mosaic featuring a shield of interchanging scales, excavated in 2009 in the Roman house FB (room 18) and temporarily protected by a thick layer of earth and a polyethylene sheet (Majcherek 2012: 30–32), was uncovered and cleaned. Loose tesserae were fixed and a new protective edging of lime–sand mortar (ratio 1:1) was introduced. Reburial is still commonly accepted as the simplest and most effective mosaic protection measure. In our case, it was enclosed in a wooden frame and covered with geotextile and sand. It was additionally enveloped in polyethylene sheets and backfilled.

Small extant patches of other mosaic pavements in rooms F9 and F17 of



Fig. 17. The Dionysus mosaic after conservation, on display in the “Villa of the Birds” Mosaic Shelter (PCMA Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photo G. Majcherek)

house F, made of rather crude irregular tesserae, were cleaned mechanically and prepared for further treatment in

the upcoming season. Loose cubes were collected and protective edging introduced.

LANDSCAPING AND SITE PRESENTATION

Routine site management consisted of the standard time-consuming operation of cleaning the site of growing plants following a wet rainy season in winter. Vegetation not only tends to obscure ancient architectural monuments from view, but it affects the integrity of the ancient architectural substance. Given the size of the site (4 hectares), weeding becomes a demanding operation: uprooting, stacking and ultimate removal. Collecting the rubbish of the past six months that had accumulated all over the site was another equally pressing matter before the planned inauguration of the Site Presentation Project.

The first stage of the Project was successfully concluded this year. The visitors' itinerary was specially designed to allow public access to the most important architectural monuments preserved on the site. The route follows gravel paths that start at the main gate with a large information panel including a situational plan of the Kom el-Dikka site, a brief note on the history and description of all the major monuments. The trail then winds around the entire central part of the site, secured with barriers at once protecting antiquities and minimizing any risk to the more inquisitive visitors. A less obtrusive form of steel cable railing

mounted on steel pipes was used, screening off the ancient fabric without eliminating direct contact. In other words, both a visual and physical contact with a large group of monuments was maintained.

Long-term preservation should be made not only sustainable but also meaningful (Mason and Avrami 2002: 13). Presentation and interpretation of the site are important components of the conservation process. In order to enable visitors to grasp the whole historical potential of a site, proper on-site signage is essential. Information panels were thus installed in chosen locations, next to all the key monuments: theater, auditoria, bath, cisterns, residential quarter and the mosaic shelter. These panels are large (0.70 m by 0.50 m) acrylic sheet boards on stands of welded steel pipes set in a concrete foundation. The information on the panels is in Arabic and English, and includes a short text describing the function and history of the monuments, complete with orientation maps and relevant plans [see *Fig. 18*]. The Project also produced a bilingual leaflet for distribution to visitors. The Embassy of Poland in Cairo provided funding for both the panels and leaflet as part of a state program to aid in safeguarding and promoting ancient cultural heritage.

Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek

ORCID 0000-0002-9413-1962

University of Warsaw,

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology

00-497 Warszawa, Poland, ul. Nowy Świat 4

g.majcherek@uw.edu.pl

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Fig. 18. The Site Presentation Project opening ceremony: top left, Alexandria Mission Director Dr. Grzegorz Majcherek with the Minister of Antiquities Dr. Khaled al-Anany on a tour of the newly designed visitor's trail; top right and bottom left, examples of bilingual information panels; bottom right, with the Rector of the University of Warsaw Prof. Marcin Pałys visiting one of the auditoria (PCMA UW Alexandria Kom el-Dikka Project/photos G. Majcherek, R. Kucharczyk)

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