

## POLISH-EGYPTIAN EXCAVATIONS AT TELL ATRIB IN 1989

**Karol Myśliwiec**

The Polish-Egyptian archaeological mission at Tell Atrib, sponsored by the Polish Center for Mediterranean Archaeology, the Egyptian Antiquities Organization and Bank Misr, has worked on the site of Kom Sidi Yousseuf (suburb of Benha) from 10 September until 6 November 1989.<sup>1</sup>

Our activities concentrated on the area adjoining the hill of Kom Sidi Yousseuf from the South. This area has been divided into squares of 10 x 10 m. Some trial pits inside these squares had been made twenty years ago and in 1985, and the south part of this area was excavated in 1987 and 1988. The present campaign had two aims:

a) to enlarge the excavations in the squares in the north and west of the area;

b) to deepen the excavations in some selected places, particularly those in which previously work had to be stopped because of a high water table.

In the north of the area, the excavations included the squares FF-HH and LL-NN (30 by 30 m), while in the western part the squares CC-DD, JJ, PP and QQ have been part of our research. The northern squares have been explored down to the Byzantine level, and their deeper strata should be excavated during the coming season.

A low water table at the beginning of this season enabled us to deepen the excavation in some rooms of the Ptolemaic quarter.

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<sup>1</sup> The mission was composed of the following members: Prof. Dr. Karol Myśliwiec (director of the mission), Dr. Barbara Ruszczyc, Dr. Aleksandra Krzyżanowska, Mr. Adam Łajtar, Miss Anna Południkiewicz and Miss Iwona Zych (archaeologists), Eng. Jarosław Dobrowolski (architect) and Mr. Stefan Sadowski (photographer). The Egyptian Antiquities Organization was represented by Messrs Ibrahim Mohammed Soliman, Hamdy El-Ghazar and Mohammed Hasan Heykal.

These are rooms nos 127, 128, 136 and 155, as well as squares FF, JJ and KK. The large rooms 127 and 128 proved to be used as pottery workshops. Several kilns and lot of prefabricated material have been discovered there. The activity of these kilns may have been connected with the material found in room 127, where lots of unbaked pots and sherds were found stuck together alongside the room's east wall in its lower part. This material contained three coins dating from the time of Ptolemy III placing this intensive local pottery production in the second half of the 3rd century BC. A coin of Ptolemy IV has been found in a similar context at a higher level in the same room.

Particularly interesting were the results of our work in room 159 and in squares JJ-KK which are situated in the northwest of the area. Our excavation in square JJ enlarged a trial pit called "X", in which remains of a red-brick construction (water pit and fragments of a column) had been found in 1984. Under a stratum 2 m deep containing debris with Byzantine and Roman pottery, terracotta fragments and coins, remains of a large building made of red bricks were unearthed during this campaign. This construction differs in every respect from the pottery workshops discovered in the south of the area. It proved to be a bath from the time of Ptolemy VI, constructed of red bricks bonded with a thick layer of excellent, plaster-like, waterproof mortar. Two small semi-circular basins and a slightly larger oval basin are preserved in the southern part of the building. The construction is dated by three coins of Ptolemy VI, found between the bricks and immediately under their level. The bath stratum is particularly important for the stratigraphy of our excavations in general, for it clearly separates the earlier levels, belonging to the 3rd and the first half of the 2nd century BC, from the later ones, connected with the second half of the Ptolemaic period.

Subsequent chronological phases could be studied particularly well in building no. 159, which definitely differs from the small

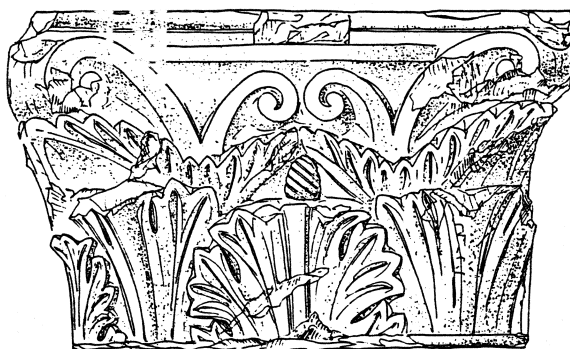
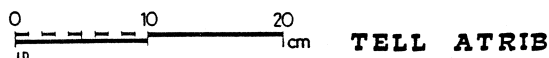
workshop rooms in the southern part of the Ptolemaic quarter. It is much larger than those rooms, and its walls are decorated with painted plaster. This place was excavated down to the ground-water table and five subsequent phases have been distinguished in its stratigraphy. The building with the painted decoration on the walls belongs to the fourth phase and corresponds chronologically to the first half of the 2nd century BC. The inner faces of the walls are divided into squares (each c. 1 m to the side), the surfaces of which appear raised in relation to the sunk frames surrounding them. In the lower register of this decoration, the surface of the squares was painted white and that of the frames had a celadon color. Large fragments of painted plaster belonging to the upper-register squares have been found inside and outside the building. They show that squares in the upper register were purple red and the frames between them white.

The archaeological context of this stratum was particularly rich in finds. Large quantities of pottery included several intact vessels and many sherds of broken pots which could be reconstructed. Most of them represent a local production comprising the same shapes and fabric that are known from the unbaked pieces found in the industrial quarter. The most popular types are bowls with incurved rim and globular pots without handles, having a ring foot and a vertical rim. Many of them bear painted decoration, some particularly fine samples preserving parts of stamped patterns in relief. The painted vessels usually have a white slip band in the upper part of their body, on which brownish-lilac and red stripes are painted horizontally. Larger vessels usually bear some floral patterns, most frequently sequences of garlands with pending endings. Many fragments of imported amphorae, some of which with stamped handles, as well as characteristic types of early- and middle-Hellenistic oil lamps have been found in this context as well.

The northeast sectors (EE-FF-GG and LL-HH-HN) of the area besides Kom Sidi Youssouf were excavated down to a level

corresponding to the Byzantine period. The upper stratum in these sectors contains pottery, red bricks and other objects dating from the three periods represented in our excavations: the Byzantine, Roman and Ptolemaic ones. Among the objects found in this stratum there are many coins dating from the late 3rd/early 4th century AD and terracottas, e.g. the upper part of a statuette representing an early Ptolemaic ruler wearing the ancient Egyptian nemes-headcloth and the "double crown".

A purely Byzantine level begins at a depth of c. 0.80 m below the present surface. This stratum could be reached in two rooms during this campaign (nos 169 and 171). Several large-size amphorae and other vessels that are typical of the period came to light in association with architectural fragments. Some of them are decorated limestone blocks which must have belonged to a monumental building, perhaps an early Byzantine church (Fig. 1). These blocks occur in a secondary position, while the amphorae and jars are sometimes still standing vertically in their original positions.



*Fig. 1. Limestone capital found in the Byzantine stratum  
Drawing J. Dobrowolski*

Our investigations during this campaign concentrated on Ptolemaic Athribis, and comprised also an extensive exploration of surface layers where excavations will be continued during the next season. The Ptolemaic strata, not disturbed by later inclusions, preserve a clear stratigraphy which displays several phases of industrial and architectural activities during the three last centuries BC. Particularly important is the stratum dating from the time of Ptolemy VI. It divides our stratigraphy into two principal phases (first and second part of the Ptolemaic Period). The first phase is characterized by an intense production of pottery in the local workshops. Comparing the vessels that were found unbaked and the final products, one can state what kind of pottery was produced in this part of Athribis during the first 150 years of the Ptolemaic Period. These conclusions may help other excavators to date precisely the archaeological material, and subsequently strata found on other sites in the Delta.

This campaign could be organized and the work accomplished thanks to the support and help of Dr. Ali Hassan in Cairo, Mr. Mohammed Abdelhaq and Mr. Mahmoud Yassin in Zagazig, to whom we wish to express our thanks.

## **BIJAN (IRAQ)**

### **Maria Krogulska**

In the late 1970s, the Iraqi government decided to build a large water reservoir some 93 km long on the middle Euphrates. The dam was to be built 7 km north of the city of Haditha. Before being flooded, the area became the object of intensive archaeological research, known as the Qadissiya Dam Project. In the years 1979-1983 several Iraqi and foreign teams were asked by the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and Heritage to participate in investigating thoroughly this previously little known area. The Polish Archaeological Mission under Prof. M. Gawlikowski was among the first to begin archaeological research in 1979. The mission worked at Bijan, an island site on the middle Euphrates, until 1983; eight field seasons were accomplished during this period. The first three campaigns were directed by Prof. M. Gawlikowski, the following five by Dr. M. Krogulska.

Bijan is one of a series of three islands containing archaeological sites, all three on the middle Euphrates. Excavations have shown it to have been a Neo-Assyrian fortress built from water level. With time an elongated sandbar was created along the western wall and specially along the southern wall, which closed off the stronghold; in modern times this sandbar was overgrown with bushes and partly planted with date palm trees.

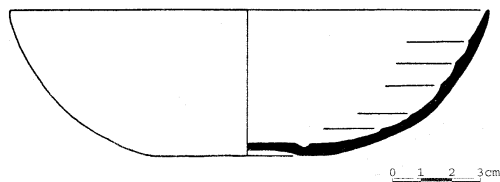
The head of the island consisted of a platform 25 m wide, extended south with walls 5 to 6 m thick. The platform and walls were built on large limestone blocks to a height of up to 6 m above water level. The area enclosed by the walls was filled in to the top of the stone walls with earth brought in from elsewhere. In this way an artificial island was created on the Euphrates. The quay and gate leading into the island-fortress were located in its southeastern end. The first Assyrian stronghold was built in two phases and, finally, measured 185 m in length and 75 m in width. The upper

parts of the fortress, built on a stone platform, were of mud brick which has not survived to modern times. The fortress was destroyed already in antiquity. The small finds from these layers are mainly potsherds dated to the 9th-7th century BC.

Overlying the destroyed Assyrian fortress there was a Parthian layer, separated from the former occupation by a hiatus of some 500 years. From the Parthian period we have burials, some traces of buildings and a rich repertory of pottery with a few terracottas as well. Among the Parthian ceramics we may distinguish storage vessels caulked with bitumen inside, locally made cooking pots and glazed vessels. The latter constitute mainly imports, i.e., small bowls known also from Seleucia-on-Tigris, Dura-Europos, 'Ain Sinu, Shahr-i Qumis and Ana (an island some 25 km distant from Bijan to the north, also presently underwater).

Directly on the top of the Parthian layer there was a Roman one. Two phases could be distinguished. The first comprised a reoccupation of existing Parthian buildings by the newcomers, the second – a rebuilding of the fortress. At this time new fortifications were constructed on top of the Assyrian walls and a new gate leading to the fortified interior was built in the southeastern part of the island. Inside the stronghold new buildings were built on a completely new plan, comprising an official area and a storage and domestic section. It would appear that a Roman military detachment was stationed there in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD. Its presence is confirmed by the finds of pottery, lamps and coins. In the period in question the island would have been one of the southernmost Roman military posts.

The finds from this period included a large store of pithoi, so-called "torpedo jars", made watertight with bitumen inside, Brittle Ware cooking pottery comprising chiefly two-handle pots and pans, although some more rare forms, such as plates are also to be encountered. There were also some glazed Parthian vessels (Fig. 1).

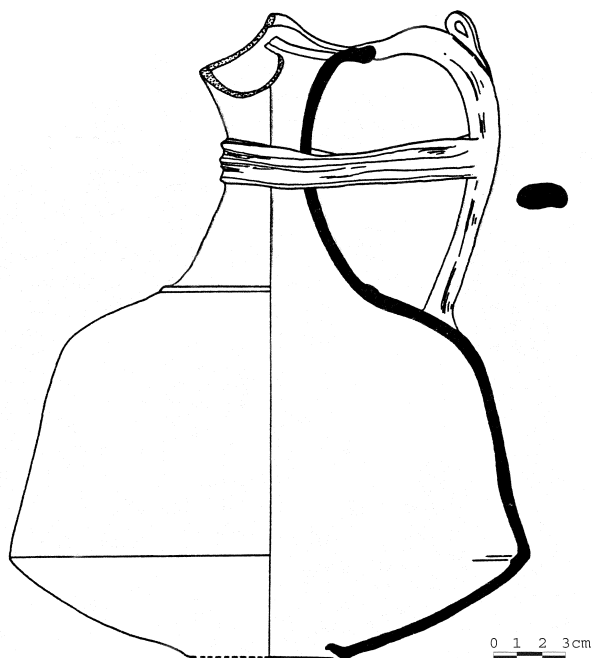


*Fig. 1. Glazed bowl, Parthian period.*

Among the terracotta oil lamps it is possible to distinguish lamps of western origin connected with Palmyra – the known Syrian imitations of "Bildlampen" with figural decoration, lamps of the Euphrates type known from Dura-Europos and one mold-made lamp decorated with appliqué and incised ornament, which has no parallels. A second group of lamps is formed by lamps recalling Eastern traditions. These are wheel-made lamps with elongated nozzles added onto the body of a type known as Mesopotamian. All the coins found in this layer came, from towns located on the Syrian coast.

After another 600-year period of abandonment a new occupation began on the island, in the Abbasid period which could be separated into two phases as well. The first phase coincides with Samarra pottery lasting till the end of the 9th century AD, the second is dated to the 10th century AD. The dating of the two phases was made possible by numerous finds of pottery, which included the doubtless imported glazed ware, a luxury item, known also as Samarra ware, a white ware decorated with incised and chiseled ornament known also from Samarra and many other Iraqi sites, pottery decorated in relief form, be it barbotine or molded, glazed multi-colour bowls accompanying the regular household glazed pottery, some interesting types of Brittle Ware (Fig. 2) and local cooking pots as wessells storage vessels and the so-called *quq* or vessels for drawing water from river or with the aid of a *na'ura*. The list ends with terracotta oil lamps.





*Fig. 2. Jug, Brittle Ware, Early Abbasid period.*

Apart from the pottery, the finds included numerous glass vessels and metal tools. Among the more interesting finds there are lamps and fragments of a vessel of grey soapstone, which were doubtless imported to the island.

It would appear that twice in its history the island served as a border stronghold; in the Neo-Assyrian and in the Roman period. After both periods of occupation it was abandoned, both times for long stretches of time. On the levelled surface of the island, when the island was no longer a frontier post, settlements or even trade factories were installed. There seems to be no, other way to explain the presence of luxurious imported pottery on the site.

## OLD DONGOLA 1988-1989 HOUSE PCH.1

**Włodzimierz Godlewski**

The excavations in Old Dongola, conducted by a team from the Polish Centre of Archaeology in Cairo, have been concentrated until now mainly upon sacral architecture, a fact which is reflected in the ten churches and commemorative buildings that have been uncovered.

During the last two seasons covered in this report, House PCH.1 with its courtyards was cleared and investigated.<sup>1</sup> The house in question covers an area of 215 m<sup>2</sup>, comprising the dwelling proper (135 m<sup>2</sup>) and two courtyards adjoining the complex on the north and west. The house was built in an open area, free of structures of any kind, and so constituted presumably a freestanding building on the northern border of the city agglomeration.

House PCH.1 is relatively well preserved with mud-brick walls reaching a height of about 2.5 m. However, numerous alterations and the continued use of the ruined building as a dwelling in the last phases have destroyed much of the ground floor and induced various changes and much dismantling. All this was hardly helpful in establishing the initial plan of the structure. Three phases were distinguished. The first two are periods of habitation, the last one reflected the use of the largely ruined structure by squatters. In the first phase, the house was rectangular, measuring 14.6 by 9.2 m. (Fig. 1) The layout was well designed. The entrance led into a spacious rectangular vestibule which served as a major passageway inside the building composed of five rectangular rooms and a staircase in the northwest corner. The presence of an upper

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<sup>1</sup> W. Godlewski, Old Dongola 1988-1989. The House PCH.1, *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 4, in press.

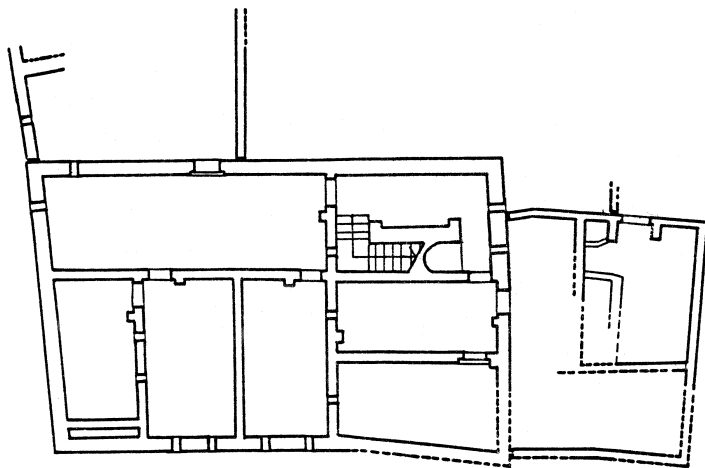


Fig. 1. Plan of House PCH.1.  
Drawing J. Dobrowolski.

floor appears more than probable, although there is no direct evidence.

Among various finds from House PCH.1 (pottery, lamps, glass) attention is drawn by two stelae inscribed in Greek, found in the Northern courtyard.<sup>2</sup> The one belonging to Petros, eparch of the land of the Nobadians, is dated to AD 798. The eparch Petros is mentioned here for the first time. According to a Coptic document from lower Nubia<sup>3</sup> dated to about AD 750, under king Kyriakos one Paulos-Kolla was eparch of Nobadia and one Petros *domesticos* of Nobadia. We have no means of telling whether he was the same Petros named in the stela from House PCH.1, but it is not impossible for a *domesticos* of Nobadia to have been named eparch

<sup>2</sup> A. Łajtar, Two Greek funerary stelae from Polish excavations in Old Dongola, *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 4, in press.

<sup>3</sup> F.Ll. Griffith, Christian documents from Nubia, *Proceedings of the British Academy* XIV, 1928, 1-29.

after the death of Paulos-Kolla. Petros, the future eparch, may have also been the king's emissary to conduct talks with Husa ibn Ka'b, governor of Egypt in AD 758, mentioned in a letter from Qasr Ibrim,<sup>4</sup> addressed to the king of Nubia. Most probably one Kyriakos mentioned in documents<sup>5</sup> of 804-813 was the direct successor of Petros as eparch after the latter's death in 798. In this way, the stela from House PCH.1 in Old Dongola contributes to the series of known administrators of Nobadia.

The other funerary stela, belonging probably to Zacharias and dated to 824, does not add any significant historical data in its present, fragmentary state.

The dating of House PCH.1 is not precise, but it came into being most probably at the end of the 8th century.

The duration of phase I is undetermined, but considering the evidence it could not have lasted longer than one generation. In phase II, the house was altered in a significant and interesting fashion. The house was clearly divided into three separate units with autonomous entries from the west, presumably intended for three families, possibly the descendants of the first owner.

The pottery of phase III belongs exclusively to the Postclassical Period, determining the 12th century as the chronological horizon of this phase.

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<sup>4</sup> J.H. Plumley, An eight-century Arabic letter to the king of Nubia, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 61, 1975, 241-245.

<sup>5</sup> Griffith, op. cit.