

“Megarian” Bowls from Tell Atrib

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The site of ancient Athribis, a leading urban center in the Nile Delta and capital of the tenth Egyptian nome, is situated in what is today the locality of Tell Atrib on the outskirts of modern Benha. Its location on a major trade route between Africa, Asia and Europe fostered commercial exchange on a large and varied scale. It comes as no surprise therefore that excavations by a Polish-Egyptian archaeological mission (Karol Myśliwiec, in *Tell Atrib* 2000) in a district of the ancient town around Kom Sidi Youssef yielded a rich collection of imported ceramic vessels from various parts of the ancient world.

The pottery material excavated between 1969 and 1999 included a group of 16 vessels which go under the designation of “Megarian” bowls.¹ These small molded bowls with relief decoration constituted a luxury ware of the Hellenistic period that is sometimes referred to today as the “China of Antiquity”. Despite their fragmentary character, the finds from Tell Atrib deserve interest as material for comparative pottery studies.

Hemispherical “Megarian” bowls were produced from the 3rd to the 1st century BC. They were molded and the decorative elements, such as astragalus, cymatium, meander, beads, floral, figural etc. were printed on the inner part of the mold with a die. According to Pollitt (2006: 256), “the earliest types were decorated with floral design — usually a rosette in the form of a medallion at the bottom of the vase and a series of lotus or palm leaves stretching upward from the medallion along the outside of the vessel. Later they came to be decorated with figural scenes illustrating a variety of myths and legends, including episodes from epic poetry”. When the mold was ready, well levigated clay was pressed into it and then turned on the wheel to achieve a smooth inside wall and edge with rim. Once it had dried, the bowl was removed from the mold and slipped (Baur 1941: 245–246). The bowls had no foot, the idea being, according to one theory, to place them upside down once the liquid had been drained, so that the entire decoration was visible (Garbsch 1993). Pollitt (2006: 256), suggests that these bowls derived from well known bowls from Achaemenid Persia, although the prototypes appear to have come from Athens. The earliest dated examples of such bowls came from Athens, but this kind was produced also elsewhere in the Hellenistic world, mainly in the Eastern Mediterranean.

¹ The name is derived from the town of Megara, where this type of vessels was first identified. Other centers have been demonstrated in the meantime to have produced much larger quantities of this particular type of pottery, but the name “Megarian” has remained as a kind of trademark among specialists. Other names, like *hemitomos* (Edwards 1956: 83–84), have not earned recognition. In Greek-language publications the term used is *skypbos*, although, this term is also used for other types of bowls.

The group presented in this article, counting 16 fragments from Polish excavations in Tell Atrib, have been classified as “Megarian” by the shape, which is typical of this category. The rim diameter ranged between 10 and 17 cm, being mostly 13 cm. The decoration largely followed well known patterns. The rim, where preserved, was plain. The two fragments in this group characterized by an everted and decorated rim have been included in this group based on the decoration and the fabric. The decoration on the body comprises a band of ornament below the rim, which can be divided into a number of groups, and the body ornament which in the case of the Tell Atrib bowls brings some interesting variants. It, too, can be subdivided into groups. The material has been grouped according to decoration types, not chronological attribution.

The first three variants of decoration distinguished followed a typical pattern of decoration. Five sherds (catalogue nos 1–5) formed the first variant characterized by a plain rim, a band of egg-and-dart cymatium (in one case, catalogue no. 5, fairly schematic) and a band of floral ornament below. The egg-and-dart motif, which is one of the most frequent on molded relief ceramics, could be observed as a second line of the ornament on catalogue no. 10. The Lesbian cymatium motif (on catalogue no. 6) can also be included in this group.

The second variant (catalogue nos 7–9) differed from the first in that it had a band of swastikas forming a meander instead of the cymatium.

The third variant (comprising catalogue nos 10 and 11) had a row of astragalus setting off the rim from the body, while the body ornament comprised other motifs and imbricated leaves. The astragalus can be observed also on catalogue no. 6, in the lower register. The imbricated leaves emerging from a rosette on the bottom of our catalogue no. 12 place this sherd also in this group.

There is also a single example with zoned decoration (catalogue no. 13), where a scrolling vegetal motif constitutes the first zone of the decoration.

Another singular example is catalogue no. 14, where the main motif of a net and dolphins appears below a set of grooves in the upper part of the bowl body.

The last group is composed of two atypical bowls (catalogue nos 15 and 16), both thrown on the wheel and decorated with a roulette ornament.

Parallels to the presented material suggest an Asia Minor provenance for the assemblage, narrowed down to the region of Ionia. These parallels can be dated to the 2nd century BC, while the Tell Atrib bowls have been recorded from stratigraphically undisturbed layers containing also coins, pottery stamps, ceramics and other finds. Of these, seven fragments (catalogue nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11) come from an archaeological context dated independently to the second half of the 3rd and beginning of 2nd century BC. Three bowls have been placed in the turn of the 2nd / 1st century BC context (catalogue nos 7, 8, 15). The remaining six are traced back to disturbed contexts (catalogue nos 5, 9, 12, 13, 14, 16). It is because of this rich stratigraphic story, coming from rich and undisturbed finds, that the “Megarian” bowls from Tell Atrib constitute such excellent comparative material for finds made elsewhere.

Catalogue

1. Bowl fragment

H. 4.5 cm, W. 3.5 cm, Dia. rim 12 cm

Compact clay (5 YR 5/8 yellowish red) speckled thickly with mica. Red/light brown glossy slip.

Plain rim, one groove, two bead lines framing a band of egg-and-dart cymatium. Crack visible, probably owing to careless pressing of the clay into the mold, covered with slip; below vegetal scroll.

Archaeological context: late 3rd/early 2nd century BC: pottery stamps (Z. Sztetyło, in *Tell Atrib I* 2000: nos 6, 42, 63) and coins (A. Krzyżanowska, in *Tell Atrib II* 2009: no. 18).

Parallels: Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1995: 375, Pl. 18,4, and 394, South Syrian/North Palestinian; Grzegorzówka 2010: 2-52, 2-26 from Ephesus, 2nd century BC, and 117-101, 117-282 from Asia Minor, Pergamon, 2nd century BC, acanthus.

2. Bowl fragment

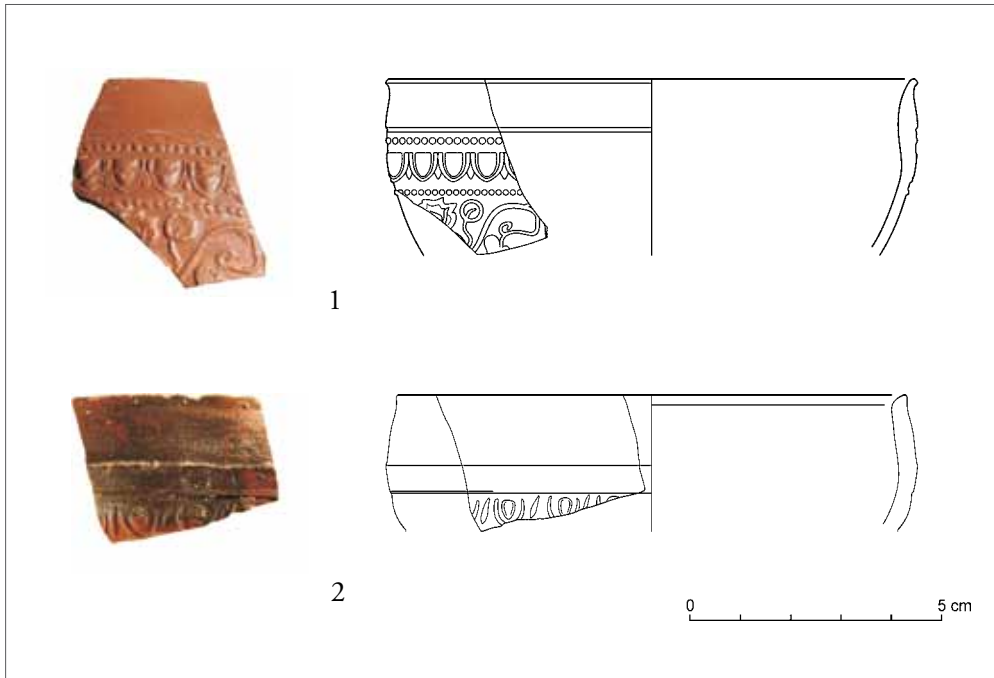
3 x 3.5 cm, Dia. rim 10 cm

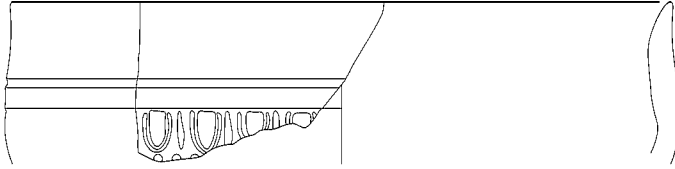
Clay (2,5 YR 5/6 red) with few mica inclusion; slip red-brown on interior, rim edge and exterior with graphite gray marks.

Plain rim with traces of seam joining it to the body; below egg-and-dart cymatium.

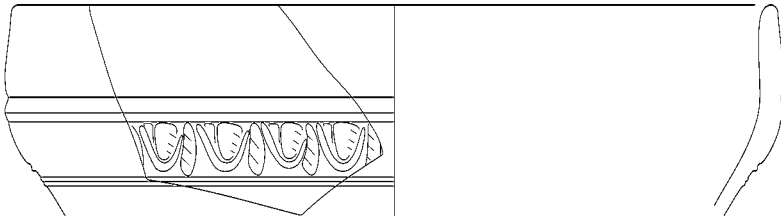
Archaeological context: end of 3rd/first half of 2nd century BC, based on pottery stamps (Z. Sztetyło, in *Tell Atrib I* 2000: nos 20, 70, 98, 105, 106) and coins (A. Krzyżanowska, in *Tell Atrib II* 2009: no. 58).

Parallels: Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1995: 369–371, Ionian origin, 2nd century BC.

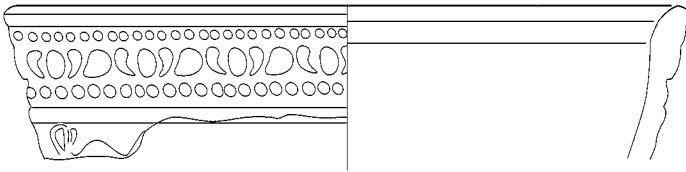




3



4



5

0 5 cm



3



4

3. Bowl fragment

H. 3 cm, L. 5 cm, rim dia 13 cm.

Clay dense, 2,5 YR 6/4 light reddish-brown, very fine. Black glossy slip on outer surface, inside mat. Clay with tiny lime particles, mica and a little black particles.

Plain rim, two grooves, an egg-and-dart cymatium to right and bead line below it.

Archaeological context: late 3rd/early 2nd century BC, based on pottery stamps (Z. Sztetyło, in *Tell Atrib I* 2000: nos 6, 42, 63) and coins (A. Krzyżanowska, in *Tell Atrib II* 2009: no. 18).

Parallels: Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1995: 369–371, probably Ionian in origin, 2nd century BC.

4. Bowl fragment

Dia. rim 14.8 cm

Compact clay (5 YR 6/3 light reddish brown), slight mica and lime particles, evenly fired. Exterior bright light red, slightly glossy.

Straight plain rim, below egg-and-dart cymatium between doubled relief lines.

Archaeological context: late 3rd and 2nd century BC, based on pottery stamps (Z. Sztetyło, in *Tell Atrib* 2000: nos 28, 35, 47, 89, 139, 169) and coins (A. Krzyżanowska, in *Tell Atrib* 2009: nos 39, 58, chiefly coins of Ptolemy VI).

Parallels: Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1995: 369–371, Ionian origin, 2nd century BC.

5. Bowl fragment

Dia. rim 13 cm

Fine-grained clay, slightly porous, fired beige, occasional larger grains of muscovite and biotite. Interior dull red, slip worn. Yellowish slip on exterior.

Slightly flaring plain rim; below egg-and-dart cymatium, simple and schematic in form, between bead lines, relief line separating this band from a band of presumed floral ornament below.

Archaeological context: mixed surface layer.

6. Bowl fragment

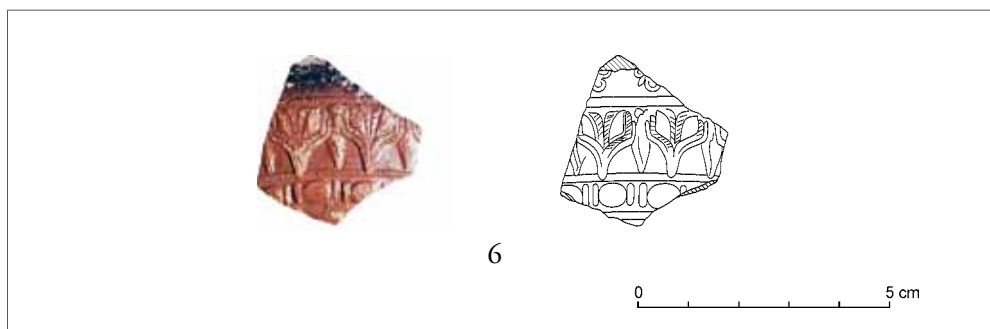
3.3 x 3.3 cm

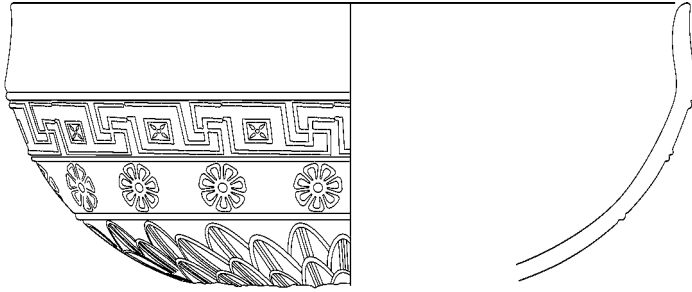
Cream-pinkish clay, surface light brown-reddish, slightly glossy.

Fragment. Body sherd with a band of rosettes, Lesbian cymatium and astragalus, separated by grooves.

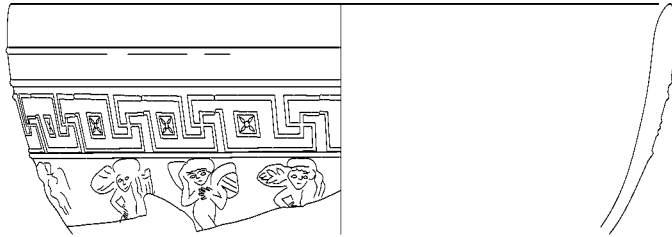
Archaeological context: from mid 3rd to mid 2nd century BC, based on pottery stamps (Z. Sztetyło, in *Tell Atrib* 2000: nos 31, 46, 86, 109, 130) and coins (A. Krzyżanowska, in *Tell Atrib* 2009: nos 88, 41, 42, 39, 43, 59).

Parallels: Bowl, Ionia, 2nd century BC, without astragalus (Grzegorzówka 2010: 56, no. 29, figure on 263).





7



8

0 5 cm



7



8

7. Bowl fragment

6.2 x 9.2 cm, rim dia. 13 cm

Fine-grained clay, mica, tiny lime particles, compact, dense, well fired; break red on the exterior, brown inside (5 YR 6/3 light reddish brown). Black slip on the upper part, going inside 1 cm, dark orange slip on the lower part outside (leaves) and inside. Slip worn off the edge of the rim. Crack between two rosettes formed before slip was applied.

Plain rim, band of meander composed of alternating swastika motifs and small squares, below a band of seven-petaled rosettes. Body below the ornamental bands decorated with imbricated leaves featuring a relief spine line. All registers separated by relief lines.

Archaeological context: 2nd–1st century BC, based on coins (A. Krzyżanowska, in *Tell Atrib* 2009: nos 71, 22).

Parallels: Grzegorzówka 2010: 54-70, 54-269, Ionia, 2nd century BC, 74-81, 74-274, Ionia, 2nd century BC.

Publication: Myśliwiec, Południkiewicz 2003: Color plate 9.12.

8. Bowl fragment

4.4 x 11 cm, Dia. rim 13 cm

Beige clay, homogeneous break, well levigated. Brown glossy slip, slightly paler in color and dulled on the inside, unevenly darker on the outside.

Bowl fragment with wide straight rim, separated from body by two relief lines; below a band of geometrical ornament in the form of an apparent meander with swastika motifs separated by small squares with marked diagonals. Decoration on the body comprising a row of Erotes and boys running to right, with their heads in frontal position. All wear a kind of flat hat. The Erotes have their right hand on the hip, while the alternating boys wield a club upright in the right hand and hold what looks like a shield in the left.

Archaeological context: 2nd–1st century BC, based on pottery stamps (Z. Sztetyło, in *Tell Atrib* 2000: nos 27, 214, 215) and coins from the rule of Ptolemy VI, 2nd century BC (A. Krzyżanowska, in *Tell Atrib* 2009: no. 58).

Parallels: Laumonier 1977: Pls 119:1359+9302, 120:3331. A similar motif of running Erotes on bowls from Delos, probably from the 3rd century BC; Baur 1941: 236, No. 203, Fig. 4, Pl. XI, 1913–203.

Publication: K. Myśliwiec, in *Tell Atrib* 2009: Pl. XXIV,5.

9. Bowl fragment

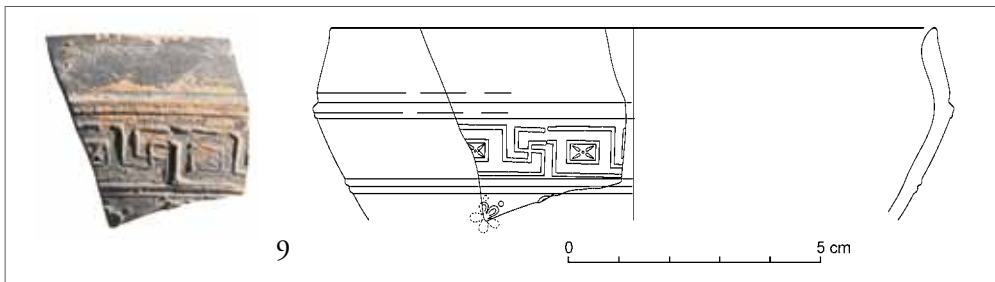
H. 3.8 cm, W. 3.6 cm, rim dia 12 cm.

Clay (2,5 YR 6/4 light reddish-brown), some vegetal inclusions, lime particles; black slip both sides, mat. Fabric similar to catalogue no. 1.

Fragment. Everted plain rim, band of swastika meander with squares, lower band of rosettes.

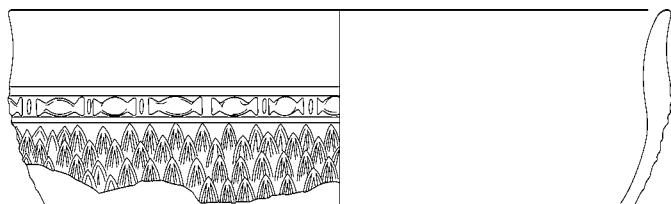
Archaeological context: mixed surface layer.

Parallels: Grzegorzówka 2010: 54-70, 54-269, Ionia, 2nd century BC; 74-81, 74-274 Ionia, 2nd century BC.

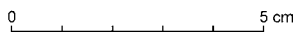




10



11



10. Bowl fragment

H. 5.4 m, W. 6.5 m

Fine clay tempered with mica, clean, red-brown with brownish staining.

Plain rim separated from the body by profiling; below it, three bands of decoration, the first comprising oval elements (astragalus) to right, the second a cymatium egg-and-dart and the third a row of eight-petaled rosettes with rhomboid petals inscribed into a square. Bands of decoration separated by relief lines.

Archaeological context: late 3rd–first half of 2nd century BC, based on pottery stamps (Z. Sztetyło, in *Tell Atrib* 2000, nos 20, 70, 98, 105, 106) and coins (A. Krzyżanowska, in *Tell Atrib* 2009: no. 58). Parallels: Grzegorzówka 2010: 155–118, 155–292, Ionia, 2nd century BC.

11. Bowl fragment

3.5 x 6.5 cm, Dia. rim 13 cm

Fine-grained clay, large quantities of mica, quartz sand and lime particles; homogeneous break (2.5 YR 6/8–5/8 light red–red); an exterior slip red-brown, interior dark red/orangish.

Slightly everted plain rim, thickened slightly below the edge relative to vessel wall; below ornamental band comprising oval elements bulging in the middle and narrowing at the ends (astragalus), separated by relief lines on either side, deformed slightly, perhaps while attaching the rim; body walls decorated with a pattern of imbricated leaves with spine lines.

Archaeological context: late 3rd–first half of 2nd century BC, based on pottery stamps (Z. Sztetyło in *Tell Atrib* 2000, nos 26, 49) and coins (A. Krzyżanowska in *Tell Atrib* 2009: nos 6, 58).

12. Bowl fragment

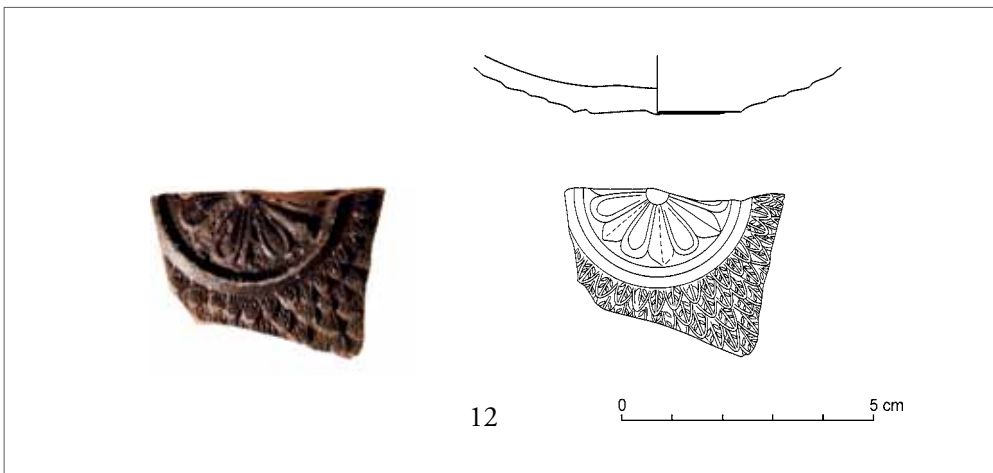
L. 4.5 cm, W. 3 cm, Dia. Ring base 3.4 cm

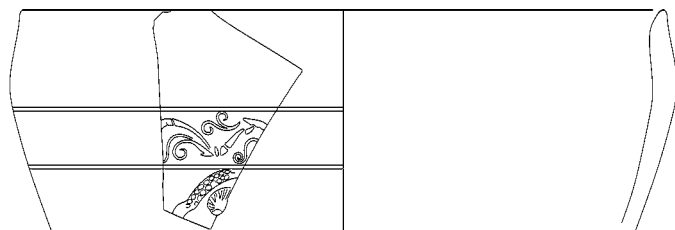
Clay (5 YR 5/4 reddish brown) compact; black slip.

Bottom of bowl decorated with a central rosette composed of alternately rounded and lanceolate petals, set inside a relief ring, in the form of a medallion. Lower part of body adorned with imbricated leaves, each one with a spine lines.

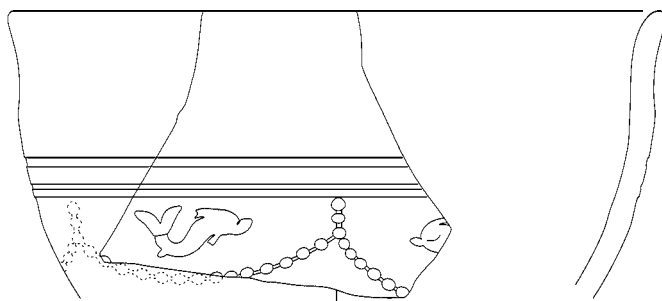
Archaeological context: mixed surface layer.

Parallels: Grzegorzówka 2010: 3–36, 3–243, Ephesus, 2nd century BC; 8,9–40, 8,9–248,249, Ionia, second half of 2nd century BC.





13



14

0 5 cm



13



14

13. Bowl fragment

4.5 x 3 cm, Dia. rim 12 cm

Clay (2,5 YR 5/6–5 YR 6/4 red and light reddish brown) with large quantities of mica; exterior and rim edge on both sides fired black, interior pale brown.

Plain rim, band of floral decoration with a fine scroll and below it fragmentarily preserved ornament, possibly a human figure (Eros?).

Archaeological context: mixed surface layer.

Parallels: Grzegorzówka 2010: 41–62, 41–266, Ionia, 2nd century BC, vine and voluted tendrils; 285–176, 285–320, Ionia, 2nd century BC, 286–177, 286–320, Ionia, 2nd century BC.

14. Bowl fragment

6 x 7 cm, Dia. rim 13 cm

Fine-grained clay (5YR 6/4 light reddish brown); graphite black slip.

Plain rim, slightly everted, below three grooves and a net pattern composed of dots with connecting lines (perhaps guilloche? chain?). In the left loop of net motif, image of a dolphin to right, in right loop, dolphin to left. There should have been six to seven images of dolphins set around the circumference of the bowl.

Archaeological context: mixed surface layer.

Parallels: Romano 1994: 64, Pl. 14,2, c. 160–c. 120 BC; Gürlér 2003: 9–16, Pls IX–XVI, 14, Pl. XV, C18, C19. For dolphin motifs on bowls found in Kerch, see Grzegorzówka 2010: 1-35, 1-241, Ephesian product, middle to second half of 2nd century BC; 68-51, Asia Minor, Pergamon product, 2nd century BC.

15. Bowl fragments

6.5 x 7.5 cm, Dia. rim 17 cm

Clay (5 YR 6/3 light reddish brown), greyish on the inside, compact, well levigated, lime particles as temper. Dull black slip. Rim fired brown (7 mm on inside and 15–20 mm on outside). Worn slip on exterior of rim.

Three fragments, thrown on the wheel. Slightly everted rim, below it two spiral grooves, rouletted decoration in four rows, above the lowest two more grooves.

Archaeological context: 2nd–1st century BC, based on coins (A. Krzyzanowska in *Tell Atrib* 2009: nos 71, 22).

Parallels: Kern 1909: perhaps Asia Minor fabric: 14ff., Figs 1–4; Baur 1941: Hellenistic because of shape: 245, No. 206, Fig. 15, Pl. XI, 1913.206).

Publication: Myśliwiec, Południkiewicz 2003: Color plate 9.12.

16. Bowl fragment

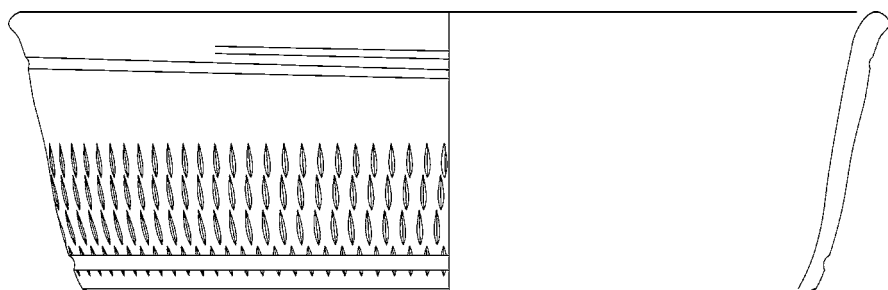
4 x 4 cm, rim dia. 13 cm

Clay (5 YR 5/3 reddish brown), pale brown slip with staining at the rim (1.5 cm on outside, 0.8 cm on inside), below gray-black both inside and outside owing to vessels being placed one inside another during firing.

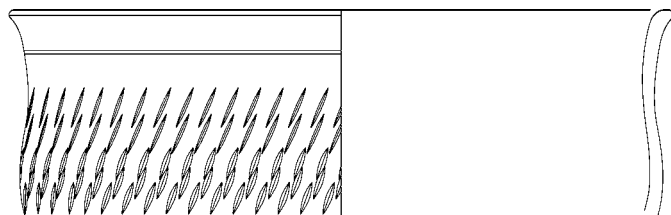
Thrown on the wheel. Plain rim, faint groove separating from the body, below on body rouletted decoration in five rows. Motif of roulette of different size and depth.

Archaeological context: mixed surface layer.

Parallels: Baur 1941: 245, No. 207, Fig. 16, Pl. XI, 1913.207. Asia Minor fabric, 2nd century BC.



15



16

0 5 cm



15



16

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the following who have assisted me in completing the documentation of this group of finds from Tell Atrib: for the drawings Jarosław Dobrowolski, Edyta Knapik, Piotr Mieliwodzki, Marta Momot, Marek Puzskarski, and for the photos Waldemar Jerke, Monika Dolińska and Karol Myśliwiec. The illustrations for publication have benefited greatly from Marta Momot’s incredible drawing talents.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i> , Berlin
AAAS	<i>Annales archéologiques arabes de Syrie</i> , Damas
ABSA	<i>Annual of the British School of Athens</i> , London
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i> , New York
APF	<i>Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete</i> , Leipzig, Stuttgart
ASAE	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i> , Le Caire
BAAL	<i>Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaises</i> , Beirut
BABesch	<i>Bulletin antieke Beschaving</i> , Louvain
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i> , Paris
BdÉ	<i>Bibliothèque d'étude</i> , Le Caire
BEFAR	<i>Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome</i> , Rome, Paris
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> , Le Caire
BSFE	<i>Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie</i> , Paris
CCE	<i>Cahiers de la céramique égyptienne</i> , Le Caire
CCEC	<i>Cahiers du Centre d'études chypriotes</i> , Nanterre
CdÉ	<i>Chronique d'Égypte</i> , Bruxelles
CRAI	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres</i> , Paris
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna
EtTrav	<i>Études et travaux</i> , Varsovie
GM	<i>Göttinger Miscellen</i> , Göttingen
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i> , Durham, NC
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i> , Jerusalem
JbAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i> , London
JGS	<i>Journal of Glass Studies</i> , New York
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i> , London
JJP	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i> , Warsaw
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i> , Ann Arbor, MI
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i> , London
KHKM	<i>Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej</i> , Warszawa
LIMC	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> , Zurich
MDAIA	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung</i> , Berlin
MDAIK	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i> , Wiesbaden
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité</i> , Paris
MIFAO	<i>Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> , Le Caire
NC	<i>Numismatic Chronicle</i> , London
NumAntCl	<i>Numismatica e antichità classiche</i> , Logano
OLA	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta</i> , Louvain
PAM	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i> , Warsaw
RACrist	<i>Rivista di archeologia cristiana</i> , Cité du Vatican
RBK	<i>Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst</i> , Stuttgart

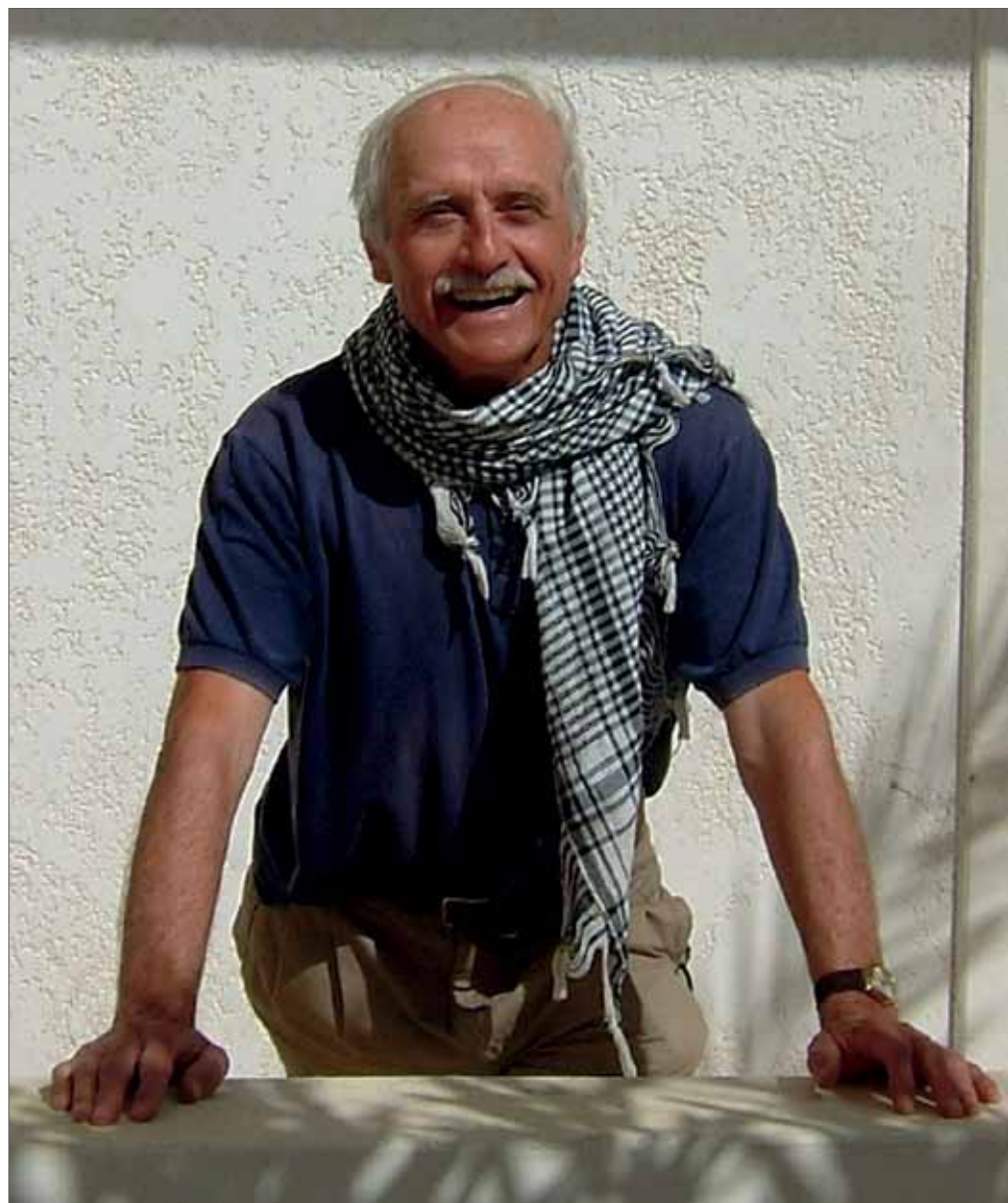
Abbreviations

<i>RDAC</i>	<i>Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, Nicosia</i>
<i>RdÉ</i>	<i>Revue d'égyptologie, Paris, Louvain</i>
<i>REPPAL</i>	<i>Revue du centre d'études de la civilisation phénicienne-punique et des antiquités libyques</i>
<i>RMNW</i>	<i>Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie, Warszawa</i>
<i>RSO</i>	<i>Rivista degli studi orientali, Roma</i>
<i>RTAM</i>	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, Gembloux</i>
<i>RTAM</i>	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, Gembloux, Louvain</i>
<i>SAAC</i>	<i>Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization, Kraków</i>
<i>VetChr</i>	<i>Vetera christianorum, Bari</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik, Bonn</i>

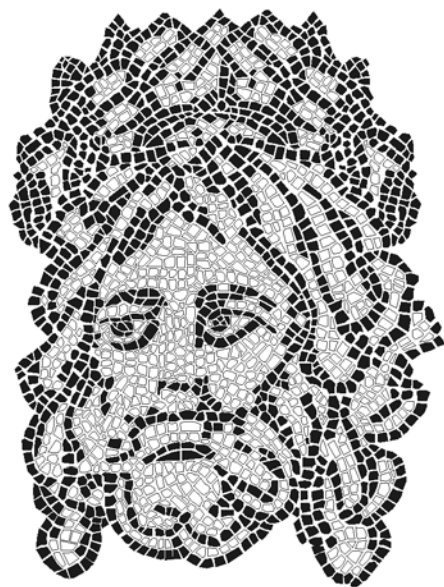
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<i>DACL</i>	F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq, <i>Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie</i> , Paris, 1907–1953
<i>LCI</i>	E. Kirschbaum, W. Braunfels (eds), <i>Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie</i> , Rom: Herder, 1968–1976
<i>RealEnc</i>	A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, K. Mittelhaus, <i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , Stuttgart–Münich, 1893–1980

CLASSICA ORIENTALIA



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Essays Presented to
Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski
on his 75th Birthday

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology
University of Warsaw
Wydawnictwo DiG

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology University of Warsaw

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Photo on page 2: Artur Błaszczak

Cover: Head of the god Aion from a Roman mosaic from Nea Paphos, 4th century AD

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(www.ifao.egnet.net)

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ISBN 978-83-7181-721-2

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CONTENTS

Abbreviations.....	9
Foreword.....	11
Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski: Essay presented on his 75th birthday anniversary.....	13
Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski: List of publications.....	31
KRZYSZTOF BABRAJ	
Interprétation de la lettre τω̄ sur le vêtement du Christ et du geste de l'ogdoade sur la mosaïque absidiale de l'église Santa Pudenziana à Rome.....	43
JANINE BALTŲ	
Le rinceau d'acanthé à fond noir dans la mosaïque syrienne : l'exemple de Mariamin.....	73
JEAN-CHARLES BALTŲ	
Une « nouvelle » dédicace apaméenne à Cn. Marcius Rustius Rufinus.....	89
GRAŻYNA BĄKOWSKA-CZERNER	
Aphrodite in Egypt. Images of the goddess from Marina el-Alamein.....	97
GIUSEPPINA CAPRIOTTI-VITTOZZI	
Un gruppo scultoreo da Dendera al Museo del Cairo: due fanciulli divini e i due luminari.....	115
RAFAŁ CZERNER	
The peristyle of House H1 in the ancient town at Marina el-Alamein.....	129
KRZYSZTOF DOMŻAŁSKI	
Roman fine pottery from a cellar under Oil-press E.I at Chhim (Lebanon).....	147
PIOTR DYCZEK	
From the history on ancient Rhizon/Risinium: Why the Illyrian King Agron and Queen Teuta came to a bad end and who was Ballaios?.....	157
PAVLOS FLOURENTZOS	
New evidence of the aniconic iconography of Astarte-Aphrodite in Cyprus.....	175
MICHAŁ GAWLIKOWSKI	
Bagatelles épigraphiques.....	183
WŁODZIMIERZ GODLEWSKI	
Mosaic floor from the sanctuary of the EC.II cathedral in Dongola.....	193
TOMASZ GÓRECKI	
Roman ceramic <i>thymiaterion</i> from a Coptic hermitage in Thebes.....	199

TOMASZ HERBICH, HARALD VAN DER OSTEN, IWONA ZYCH Geophysi EC.II cs applied to the investigation of Graeco-Roman coastal towns west of Alexandria: the case of Marina el-Alamein.....	209
MARIA KACZMAREK Human remains from Marina el-Alamein.....	233
ZSOLT KISS Deux fragments de portraits funéraires romains de Deir el-Bahari.....	259
JERZY KOLENDO Zita, une ville oubliée de Tripolitaine.....	267
RENATA KUCHARCZYK Glass medallion in the shape of a lion's head mask.....	277
BARBARA LICHOCKA <i>Delta-epsilon</i> issues of Elagabalus and Severus Alexander.....	287
JOHN LUND Head vases of the Magenta Group from Cyprus.....	325
ADAM ŁAJTAR <i>Divus Probus</i> (?) in a fragmentary building(?) inscription in Latin found in Kato (Nea) Paphos, Cyprus.....	341
ADAM ŁUKASZEWICZ A fish from the sea.....	353
GRZEGORZ MAJCHEREK, IWONA ZYCH The Cretan presence in Marina el-Alamein.....	357
HENRYK MEYZA A mask of ἡγεμῶν θεράπων with ὄγκος(?) from Paphos.....	379
KAROL MYŚLIWIEC L'acquis des fouilles de Tell Atrib pour la connaissance de l'époque ptolémaïque.....	387
JANUSZ A. OSTROWSKI Najwcześniejsza polska wzmianka o sycylijskich <i>antiquitates</i> (with summary in English).....	399
EWDOKSIA PAPUCI-WŁADYKA The contribution of Kraków archaeologists to excavating Nea Paphos, the ancient capital of Cyprus.....	413
ANNA POŁUDNIKIEWICZ “Megarian” bowls from Tell Atrib.....	425
ZOFIA SZTETYŁO Amphoras on Knidian amphoras.....	441
HANNA SZYMAŃSKA Two “armed” terracottas from Athribis.....	451