

Two “armed” terracottas from Athribis

Hanna Szymańska

Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences

To an expert and an admirer of the coroplastic arts from Egypt

Terracotta figurines produced in antiquity in ancient Athribis in the Nile Delta (modern district of Tell Atrib in the Egyptian town of Benha) are commendable for their mostly excellent execution, as well as varied subject matter and frequently unique character. Even more importantly, however, the Athribian terracotta assemblage is well stratified. The finds come from regular excavations where strata were dated mainly by coins (*Tell Atrib* 2009) and pottery finds, the latter including many stamped amphora handles (*Tell Atrib* 2000). The fieldwork was carried out in 1985–1995 and 1998–1999 by a Polish-Egyptian mission from the PCMA, headed first by Karol Myśliwiec and subsequently by the present author (for a list of publications, see *Tell Atrib* 2009: 9–11).

The figurines have been dated to a period from the end of the 4th century BC through the Byzantine age. Their astonishing variety reflects foremost the Greek tendency to choose themes not only from the sphere of cult, but also from everyday life. Athribian craftsmen were masters at depicting characteristic human types and processing individual traits into extremely realistic figurines, such as dwarfs and aged drunkards, for example. They imitated models from other craft centers, especially Alexandria, but they were not above original creations which themselves served as models not only for other terracottas, but also perhaps for statuary, as was the case with the Old Drunken Woman (Szymańska 1994; Szymańska 2005: 75–77, Cat. 11, Pl. II). There can be little doubt that these craftsmen were Greeks, either artisans accompanying Alexander the Great's armies or later immigrants (Szymańska 2005: 145–158). Their relatively rapid assimilation is confirmed by numerous figurines from a purely Egyptian repertoire, such as Bes, found even in the earliest layers. This did not eliminate a strong clientele for uncontaminated Greek forms, which continued to be popular for a long time to come, even into the Roman Age (Szymańska 2005: 125–130).

Terracottas drawing stylistic inspiration from art of the Ptolemaic period constitute a separate and important group (Pollit 1986: 250–263; Smith 1995: 19–32). One should count among them two figurines from Athribis, one of Athena and the other of an armed Eros, found in context with coins and stamped amphora handles of the 2nd century BC.¹

¹ Both Athena (TA95/26) and Eros (TA95/42) were discovered in the 1995 season in room 197 in sector XX (which had been excavated in 1993), on the same level as a coin of Ptolemy VI (TA95/22), see

The head which is all that remains of a fairly large figurine of the goddess Athena, is 10 cm high (together with the helmet hump). It is inclined to the left and set on a massive neck. The face is full with rounded cheeks, proper chin, small slightly parted lips, the upper one heart-shaped in outline. Of the nose only the nostrils remain. The eyes are almond-shaped, the lower lid lightly marked, the upper one thick, almost swollen. They are set under prominent and slightly flattened, raised eyebrow ridges. The goddess wears a humped helmet. A raised visor with discernible eyeholes is visible on the forehead. The nosepiece with triangular tip rests on the bridge of the nose and the lateral parts appear as small knobs above the ears of the figure [Fig. 1].

The dating of the piece as well as the artistic environment in which it was created can be determined on the grounds of the helmet type, the shape of the eyes and that of the chin. The helmet appears to be of a Thracian-Phrygian type,² which is recognizable thanks to the spiky hump which projects forward. In a study of Hellenistic helmet



Fig. 1. *Helmeted Athena (TA 95/26) from Tell Atrib, front and lateral view (Photos W. Jerke, PCMA)*

A. Krzyżanowska, in *Tell Atrib* 2009: 135, and three stamped amphora handles (TA95/28, TA95/19p, TA95/34) from the 2nd century BC, see Z. Sztetyło, in *Tell Atrib* 2000, respectively: 86, Cat. 42; 93, Cat. 57; 95, Cat. 63.

² The term derived from a sizable concentration of finds in Thrace, cf. Waurick 1988: 168, Pl. 46.

types, Dintsis referred to this type as “tiara-like”, citing prototypes going back to Hittite Yazilikaya and Karatece, thus suggesting a more Oriental than Thracian provenance (Dintsis 1986: 49).³ The type could have been humped or not, and was in common use in Attica and Thrace from the 5th century BC. Its heyday was in Magna Graecia, Etruria and Rome.⁴ A bronze helmet which is a near parallel for the headgear of the Athribian terracotta was found in a house excavated in the locality of Visa Zagoriou in the Ioannina region of Greece (Vokotopoulou 1982: 503) and dated by the archaeological context to the third quarter of the 4th century.⁵

The best parallel for this helmet is a representation on a funerary stela of a Thessalian cavalryman from Pelinna from the 4th century BC (Sekunda 1984: 188). The warrior is depicted in full Macedonian dress and wears a characteristic Phrygian helmet with cheek pieces and a volute ornament above the ears. A similar (now missing) ornament may have decorated the helmet of the Athena from Athribis.

Helmets of this type can be seen also on infantrymen depicted on the so-called Alexander sarcophagus (cavalrymen wore Boeotian helmets) (Ridgway 1990: Pl. 16). The surface of most of them was painted blue, which was a color characteristic of the infantry. Officers’ helmets were distinguished by an ornament of gilded spikes set alongside the hump (Sekunda 1995: 21, 27). A wall painting from a tomb discovered by K.F. Kinch in Naoussa in Macedonia, depicting a cavalryman or a Persian infantryman with a spear (*sarissa*) (Kinch 1920: 283–288) further confirms the use of such helmets by Macedonian troops. Kinch believed the tomb was built sometime around the reign of Alexander the Great, but Sekunda has moved the date back to the rule of Phillip II, arguing that the rider was bearded, while beards were banned in Alexander’s army, and that he is wearing a Phrygian helmet which was adopted for the infantry only in Alexander’s time. Two similar helmets, one humped and the other not, are shown in a painting from the *loculus* of the burial chamber in the 2nd century BC tomb of Lyson and Kallikles in Macedonia (Miller 1993: Pl. 9, b – burial chamber, north wall). They are both of the Phrygian type, as is the famed iron helmet from the Tomb of Phillip in Vergina (Andronikos 1984: 140–141, 144, Figs 97–98; Dintsis 1986: 40), in spite of Miller’s opinion that these were in both cases a variant of the Attic type (Miller 1993: 53–54, Pl. 9, b, 12, h and Color Plate III, b).

The form of the helmet decorating the head of Athena from Athribis falls within the typology proposed by Dintsis and can be dated to 350–325 BC (Dintsis 1986: Table 2). Egypt is absent from maps showing the distribution of the Phrygian helmet presented by Dintsis (map 3) as well as Waurick (1988: Fig. 4). Thus, the Athribis head appears to be a unique example of the occurrence of the helmet in Egypt, especially as it was never used by the Ptolemaic army (see Sekunda 1995).

³ In a review of this study, C. Rolley (1990: 414) questioned the comparison of the helmet with a tiara.

⁴ One of the finer examples of the type illustrated by Dintsis (1986: Beil. 2.63) is a golden parade helmet that was discovered in a shipwreck found in the Nemi lake.

⁵ Sekunda (1995: 26) dates it to slightly after Alexander’s reign.

Terracotta figurines of Athena found in Egypt are furnished usually with either an Attic helmet (e.g. Fischer 1994: 370–371, Cat. 938–942)⁶ or a Corinthian one with raised visor (e.g. Dunand 1990: 33–34, Cat. 12–29; Szymańska 2005: 119, Cat. 165, 166).⁷ They could have been inspired by a cult statue of the goddess from her temple, which presumably existed in Alexandria, this judging from a terracotta showing the goddess standing in the entrance to a sanctuary.⁸ Attic helmets are considered traditionally part of Athena's image. The visor with eyeholes which the Athribian craftsman represented on the figurine's forehead could reflect an attempt to show a combination of the Corinthian and Phrygian helmets, derived from an "Apullian-Corinthian" variant with attached hump. A parallel for such a representation is provided by images of Greek hoplites in a scene of battle with the Amazons, painted on a sarcophagus from Tarquinia dating from the second half of the 4th century BC (Bottini 2007: 142, Fig. 11). It is also possible that the craftsman in question may have simply worked from memory and imagination, having no particular knowledge of helmet types. This is highly probable with regard to the small-scaled arts.

One of the few examples of Athena depicted with a Phrygian helmet originates from Tarent (end of 5th century BC) and is now in the collection of the Museum in Baracco (Laubscher 1980: 229–230, Fig. 49, 1–3). Laubscher believes the Phrygian helmet to have been in use in the 5th and 4th centuries BC everywhere from Asia Minor to southern Italy. Apparently it never gained this kind of popularity in Egypt.

The almond-shaped eyes of the Athena terracotta from Athribis constitute another diagnostic feature. The upper lid is characteristically well crafted, while the lower lid is barely marked. Modeling of this kind was adopted in Ptolemaic Lagid art from official Athenian portraiture of the 4th century BC. Examples of eyes of similar shape include a marble image of Queen Arsinoe II (316–269 BC) from Alexandria (e.g. Pollit 1993: 251, Fig. 266, see note 2). The style is also present in royal portraits of the 1st century BC, e.g. an image of Cleopatra VII (69–30 BC) from Berlin (Pollit 1993: 253, Fig. 272). Eyes of this type occur also on terracottas from Athribis depicting Greek and Hellenized Egyptian deities from the 2nd century BC on (Szymańska 2005: 132). Moreover, the head of Athena presents features, such as cheeks and a thick chin, typical of images of Ptolemaic queens on faience *oinochoae*, an observation already made by D. Burr Thompson (1973: 86, Pl. XXII, 68; XXV, 75).

The head of Athena from Athribis may be presumed to be a unique representation of the goddess crafted in a local workshop, out of local clay, by a craftsman inspired in this by the physiognomy of currently reigning queens. The 2nd century date for this figurine is confirmed by the archaeological context in which it was found (Myśliwiec, Bakr Said 1999: 190).

⁶ For a typology of Attic helmets, see Dintsis 1986: 105–112.

⁷ For a typology of Corinthian helmets, see Dintsis 1986: 87–95.

⁸ Török 1995: 31, lamp from the Fouquet collection, see Perdrizet 1921: 69, Pl. LIX, Alexandrian temple with columns fluted from the middle of their height up.

The other Athribian figurine, which draws inspiration from Hellenic art, is an image of Eros, unfortunately missing the head [Fig. 2]. The figurine depicts a youth in a pose suggesting defense, stepping forward with the left foot, shielding his left side and holding most likely a sword in the right hand, the arm being bent at the elbow. He is wearing a muscle cuirass which covered the nape and the arm, and reached down to the groin (although it could not have actually reached further down than the waist, if freedom of movement were to be assured). The upper thighs are shielded by a short tunic emerging from under the cuirass. Large wings (largely missing) rise from behind the shoulders. Long locks of hair fall onto the god's right shoulder. The figure stands on a low triangular base.

Images of armed Erotes were extremely popular in the Hellenistic age (Hermayr 1986, 912, nos 723ff.) and were frequently reproduced in the terracotta art of the Mediterranean, especially Myrina. Numerous examples are known from Egypt (Fischer 1994: Pl. 69, No. 670; Török 1995: Pl. 29, No. 37, 45–46).

The muscle cuirass was in widespread use in the Greek world⁹ and it was a favorite element of armor among Macedonian troops. It can be observed on both the infantrymen and the cavalrymen represented on Alexander's sarcophagus (Ridgway 1990: Pl. 11),¹⁰ as well as on Alexander himself on the mosaic from Pompeii (Green 1970: 180,



Fig. 2. *Armed Eros (TA 95/42) from Tell Atrib (Photo W. Jerke, PCMA)*

⁹ See Pergamon trophy reliefs (Jaekel 1965: 94–72). Athenian soldiers borrowed this type of cuirass from the Macedonians after the battle of Chersonessus. See also a soldier on a stela from Eleusis (338–317 BC), now in the National Museum in Athens, also wearing a Phrygian helmet, see Sekunda 1984: 32.

¹⁰ For a discussion of troop formations wearing metal vs. leather cuirasses, see Miller 1993: 53, note 101. Sekunda (1995: 27) comes to the conclusion, based upon an analysis of ancient written sources, that only part of the Macedonian infantry wore cuirasses, which were in any case mostly made of leather.

259, 126–127). One of the Ptolemaic officers depicted on the mosaic from Palestrina has a cuirass of this kind made of metal (Meyboom 1995: 268, note 162). Macedonian cuirasses, however, were fitted with shoulder straps pinning together the two pieces, back and front, of the cuirass, as well as shoulder shields made of metal straps and *pteryges*. The cuirass found in the tomb of Phillip II has all these elements (Andronikos 1984: 138ff.). Even terracottas show soldiers in typically Macedonian armor: muscle cuirass with shoulder straps and simple skirt (Weber 1914: Col. 32, Nos 339–341).

The muscle cuirass of the Eros from Athribis evidently has neither joining straps nor shoulder shields. The only example of this kind of muscle cuirass found in Egypt occurs in a wall painting from a tomb at Mustapha Pasha in Alexandria, where cavalrymen are depicted making libations on an altar (Sekunda 1995: 75–76, 108, 109). The mural, placed above the entrance of the main burial chamber, is dated to the early 3rd century BC. Cuirasses of this type are characteristic of Italic armor, e.g. bronze cuirass from Etruria from the second–third quarter of the 4th century (Hansen [ed.] 2009: 267, Cat. 65) and examples of two kinds of cuirasses depicted on an Apulian voluted crater from Canosa by the Darius Painter, dated to approx. 340–330 BC (Bottini 1988: 109, Pl. 2).

The Eros from Athribis holds in his left hand an oval Gaulish shield called *thureos*. Such shields were made of wood and mounted with leather, divided into two parts by the *spina* and furnished with an *umbo* in the middle. More importantly, they were standard equipment for Ptolemaic troops (Sekunda 1995: 22, 23, 29). A clay figurine from Myrina shows a bearded warrior leaning on just such a shield and dressed in the same kind of muscle cuirass as the Eros from Athribis with a short tunic emerging from underneath (Burr 1934: 76, Cat. 112, Pl. XLI).

Elements of Gaulish armor, including oval shields (θυρεός) and horns, started being added to figurines of so-called armed Erotes already in the 3rd century BC (Hausmann 1992: 283–295); in the hands of these childlike figures they belittled the warriors' belligerence, imbuing them with a grotesque air instead.

The attitude of the Eros figurine is characteristic of a warrior defending himself with a shield. The same pose is repeated by a figurine of a naked Gaulish mercenary holding a shield and drawing a sword from his belt. The head, which is shown leaning back, appears to be dodging an attack by the enemy (Bailey 2008: 147, No. 3552, Pl. 102).

The two figurines presented here — the iconographically unique Athena in an “Apulian-Corinthian” helmet and Eros in an “Italic” cuirass — once again confirm the exceptional character of the production of the Athribian terracotta ateliers.

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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

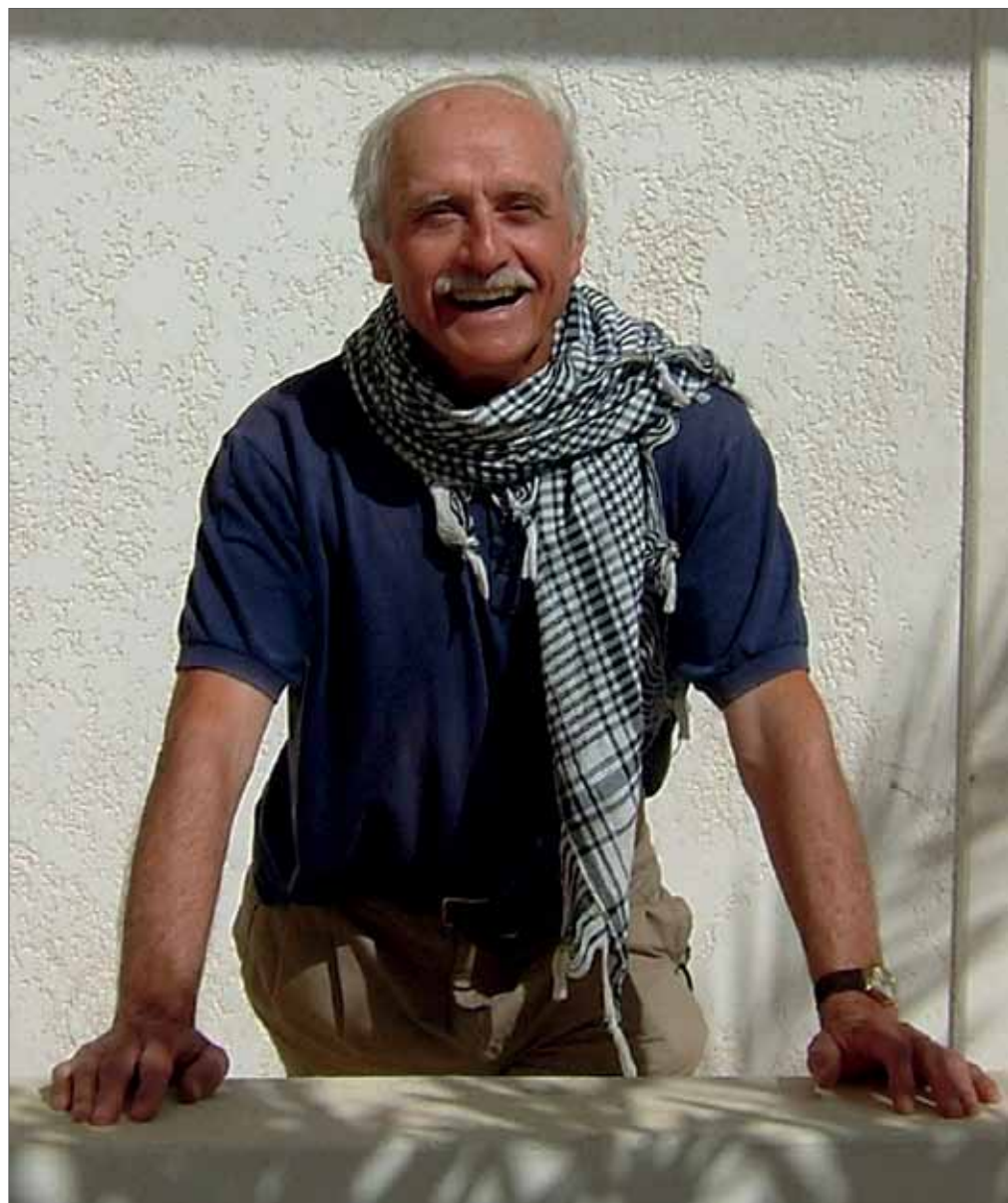
Abbreviations

<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>

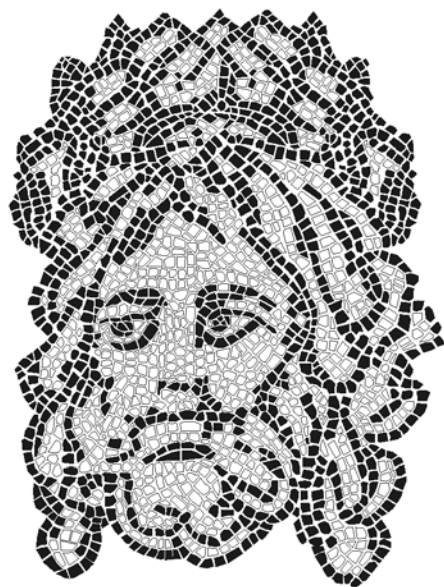
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<i>DACL</i>	F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq, <i>Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie</i> , Paris, 1907–1953
<i>LCI</i>	E. Kirschbaum, W. Braunfels (eds), <i>Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie</i> , Rom: Herder, 1968–1976
<i>RealEnc</i>	A.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

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Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw
ul. Nowy Świat 4, 00-497 Warszawa, Poland, e-mail: pcma@uw.edu.pl
www.pcma.uw.edu.pl

Wydawnictwo DiG, 01-524 Warszawa, al. Wojska Polskiego 4, Poland,
tel./fax: (0-22) 839 08 38, e-mail: biuro@dig.pl; <http://www.dig.pl>

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TABULA GRATULATORIA

Ahmed Abd El-Fattah
Andreas Ataliotis
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