



Numismatic finds from Kom el-Dikka (Alexandria), 2008

Author(s): Adam Jegliński

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NUMISMATIC FINDS FROM KOM EL-DIKKA (ALEXANDRIA), 2008

Adam Jegliński

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw

Abstract: A total of 116 bronze coins was found in a layer of ashes and debris associated with the functioning of the late Roman baths in Area F of the Kom el-Dikka site. This layer constituted fill covering kilns used to produce lime for the construction of the baths. The kilns were located on top of residential ruins, the destruction of which has been dated to the end of the 3rd century AD. Identifiable specimens comprised issues of emperors from the Second Tetrarchy period, the Constantine dynasty, Arcadius and the 6th and 7th century, corresponding well with the known dating of the bath complex. Among the coins were 33 tetradrachms struck between the reign of Philip the Arab and Diocletian, in the latter case before the monetary reform of AD 297.

The chronological structure of this set is typical of hoards from the middle of the last decade of the 3rd century AD. Bulk of the pottery uncovered in the same context as the tetradrachms dates back to 4th and even 5th century, which suggests that the hoard was displaced somehow from its original 3rd century location. It is likely that fill from the early Roman houses was used for filling up and levelling the construction site. The hoarded coins may have been moved together with the earth and consequently became dispersed over a small area of a few ares in their secondary deposition context. Coin finds from the early Roman layers included a drachma of Septimius Severus from the fill of the ruins of an early Roman house and coins of Trajan and Hadrian from its occupational levels.

Keywords: Alexandria, Kom el-Dikka, 3rd century AD Roman tetradrachms, Diocletian, Area F

Exploration in 2008 in Area F south of the baths and northwest of the cisterns (for a discussion of the context of this discovery, see excavation report, Majcherek 2011: 37ff., in this volume) produced 116 *aes* coins. The coins came from upper layers of accumulation consisting of ashes, sand and debris, immediately underlying the lower Islamic necropolis and related to the functioning of the baths and possibly also to some unidentified workshops in the area. With rare exceptions, the coins could be dated to the Late Roman period (4th–5th century AD) or even more generally to late antiquity (4th–7th century AD).

LATE ROMAN AND BYZANTINE ISSUES

More than half the coins were illegible or corroded beyond identification. Among the legible ones, Byzantine issues were represented by four 12-*nummia* coins of the 6th century and first half of the 7th century. One was a surface find, two (M2/08, M105/08) originated from the upper layers of ashes. The fourth one (M68/08) had penetrated into the lower layers of ashes. Meriting special attention among the late Roman coins is an issue with a cross figured on the reverse (M4/08, diameter 2–13 mm), considered

characteristic of Emperor Arcadius' CONCORDIA AVGGG type. Another coin of Arcadius (M76/08) occurred in the lower layers of ashes, together with largely illegible coins of late Roman date, single coins from the time of the sons of Constantine the Great (M18/08, M67/08) and one example of the SOLI INVICTO type from the time of the second Tetrarchy (M80/07), struck probably either by Maximinus or Licinius [Table 1]. Taken altogether, the coin finds indicate that the ashes kept accumulating for more than 300 years, from the 4th century (first half?) through the first half of the 7th century AD.

HOARD OF LATE 3RD CENTURY TETRADRACHMS

A large quantity of tetradrachms from the second half of the 3rd century AD was recovered from deposits corresponding to the fill of lime kilns C and D, immediately under the late Roman ashes and below (for the location of the kilns, see Majcherek 2011: 43, in this volume). One of them occurred in the lower layer of ashes, together with an unidentified late antique coin (M15/08), but most of the coins occurred in the underlying layers consisting of brown soil mixed heavily with brick

debris (giving the soil a reddish tint in many places), broken marble slabs, fragments of marble architectural decoration, chunks of lime, slag from kilns C and D, melted pieces of bronze and a great deal of pottery. They were intercalated with a layer of greenish soil (784) with inclusions of brown-orange clay, containing many earthenware amphora plugs, brick debris and pottery sherds. The lowest layers (674–677) in which the tetradrachms occurred were composed of light-brown soil heavily interspersed with fragments of plaster and pottery sherds. In one case a coin of Diocletian and another poorly preserved one but certainly belonging to the same period were found in a layer (773) recorded in the mouth of the firing chamber of kiln D. These layers corresponded to the use of lime kilns C and D as part of a huge public building project and their filling and leveling once the nearby baths had been built [Figs 1, 2]. More soil and debris were dumped into a depression between the mound covering kilns C and D and another mound covering part of the ruined early Roman house FB. This fill produced four coins, of which three were Diocletianic issues and the fourth, poorly preserved, was also a tetradrachm from the last decade of the 3rd century, the

Table 1. Late Roman issues from Area F excavations in 2008

- 1) M18/08, obv. diademed bust of Constantius II to r., DN I CONSTANTIVS C NOB; rev. soldier spearing fallen horseman, holding shield in l. hand, spear in r., [FEL]TEMP REPARATIO; weight 1.29 g, diameter 17 mm.
- 2) M67/08, obv. diademed bust of emperor to r., IMP CONSTANT...; dynasty of Constantine the Great; rev. illegible; weight 2.15 g, diameter 17–18 mm.
- 3) M80/07, obv. wreathed bust of Maximin or Licinius to r., IM[P]...; rev. Sol in *corona radiata*, standing to r., r. hand raised, l. holding globe or head of Sarapis?, S(OLI) V-I-CTORI; weight 1.80 g, diameter 17–18 mm.

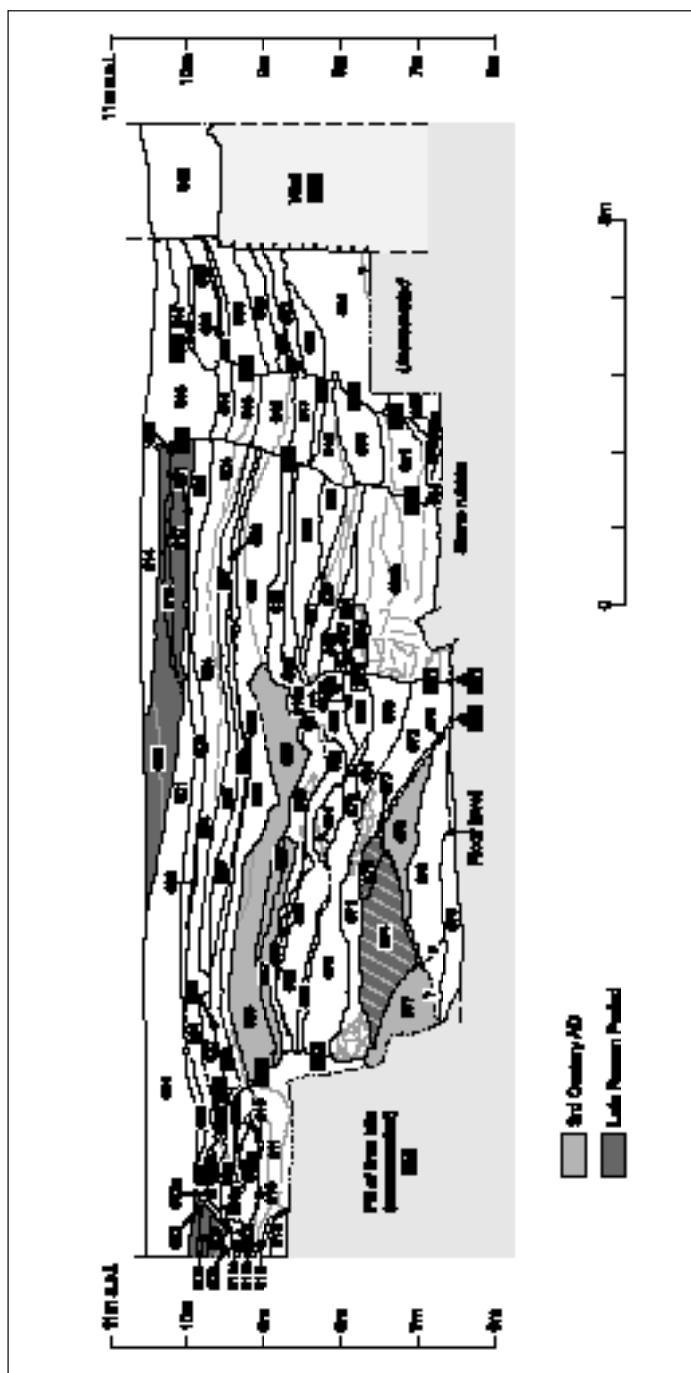


Fig. 1. Stratigraphy of layers corresponding to the building and use of lime kilns in Area F
(Drawing S. Maslak)

reign of most probably either Diocletian or Aurelian. A quarter of the undetermined late Roman coins was found in a layer separating the mound covering the kilns from the fill of the depression.

The similar content and common context of these layers testifies to the relatively short duration of the time during which they were formed. Sealing the set of layers was the thick accumulation of ashes associated already with the operation of the public bath complex.

About half of the presented coins is illegible. Judging by their size, appearance and metal texture, one can merely say that they came from a period of about 30 years before Diocletian's reform of coinage, which took place in Egypt slightly later than in the rest of the empire, the last tetradrachms being struck in the Alexandria

mint in AD 295/6. Of the 17 coins that have been identified [Table 2], 12 are pieces of Diocletian struck before the reform. As already mentioned, not one can be referred to after the reform. Diocletian's issues thus make up 75% of the identified coins. The oldest one dates to the reign of Philip the Arab (struck in the name of his wife Otacilia Severa), most probably in AD 248/9. It stands out from the rest of the pieces due to its bigger weight and diameter, and the higher quality of the alloy used. The remaining three tetradrachms were struck within the last 10 years preceding Diocletian's reign.

The sole late Roman coin from the 4th century AD at first glance appears to be a "stray" find. On the other hand, when one considers the almost exclusive occurrence of coins from the last decade

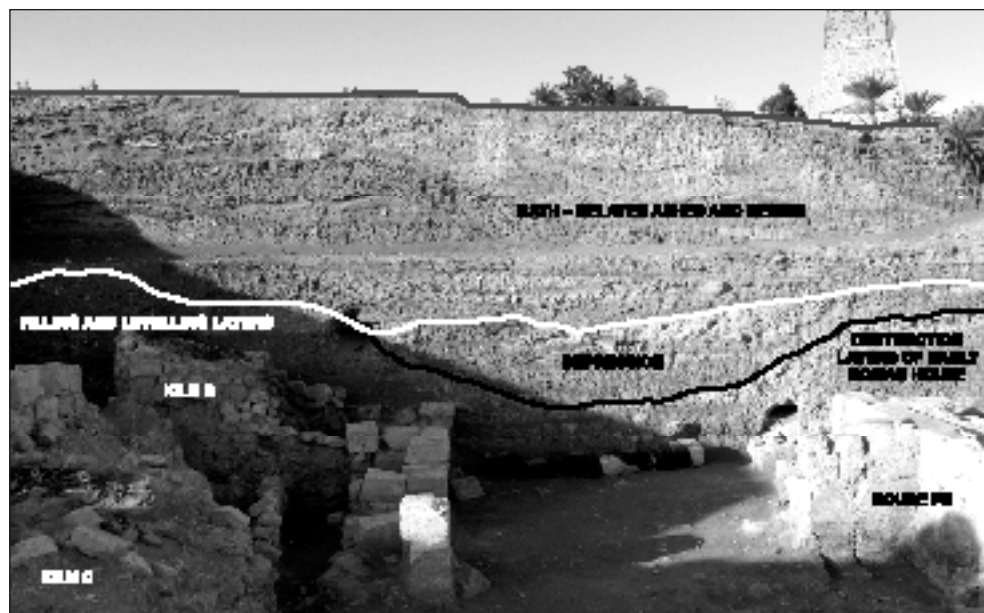


Fig. 2. Cross section through fill west of kilns C and D
(Photo A. Jegliński)

of the 3rd century and the vicinity of a late Roman ditch (layers 665, 668, 669, 672, 673), the coincidence seems telling; it suggests plausibly that the 4th century coin could have come from that ditch, which yielded also a small coin of Arcadius (M76/08), *CONCORDIA AVGGG* type with a cross on the reverse. Prudence is commended before arriving at conclusions, the more so that a quarter of another late Roman coin was found between the layers covering the kilns and the fill of the nearby cavity. The pottery evidence, mainly amphoras and tableware, is contradictory, dating the layers from which the tetradrachms were recovered to the 4th and early 5th century (G. Majcherek, personal comment). Pottery from the 3rd century occurred only in one layer, located in the lower part of the mound covering kilns C and D. The dating indicated by the pottery is corroborated by a few monetary finds and pottery from layers covering lime kilns A and B, which are contemporary to kilns C and D and which probably served the same purpose, that is, they were operated as part of the bath construction site. The latest two coins found there date respectively to the 4th century and to the late Roman period, the pottery to the 4th and even 5th century (Majcherek 1999: 37).

Finding as many as 33 coins dating from the second half of the 3rd century within a fairly limited space of roughly 60 sq. m, in layers covering kilns C and D from the late 4th century, is puzzling at the very least. Only one late 3rd century coin, a tetradrachm of Maximinus struck before the reform, had been found in layers covering kilns A and B. The 16 legible coins in this set make for a sufficiently numerous sample to be representative with regard to the set as a whole.

The chronological structure of the set is typical of monetary circulation in conditions of high inflation. Most numerous are the most recent coins of low quality, which superseded in circulation the older and better coins. Out of the 33 pieces only one is older and of better quality, that of Otacilia Severa. The latest of the coins bears a date in the 7th year of Diocletian. Their condition is very good and indicates minimum wear in circulation. Since coins of Diocletian from the period after the reform do not occur, the set must have probably been formed shortly before the reform. Lack of clear traces of wear on several tetradrachms of Diocletian and his predecessors exceptionally spared by corrosion testifies to brief circulation. The predominance of Diocletian's coins in the set indicates that it was probably

Table 2. Tetradrachms from Area F excavations in 2008

Otacilia Severa: 1

- 1) M37/08, obv. bust of empress to r., ...*CEOVEPA CE M CTP*; rev. Eusebeia veiled, standing to l., raising her hand over the altar, L Δ ; weight 10.25 g, diameter 22–23 mm (Geissen IV, 2770).



Aurelian: 1

- 2) M47/08, obv. wreathed bust of emperor to r., ...ΚΛ ΔΟΜ ΑΥΡΗΑΙΑΝΟC CE; rev. eagle with wreath in beak, holding a palm branch, [L] Ϛ; weight 6.33 g, diameter 20–21 mm (Geissen IV, 3095).



Probus: 1

- 3) M85/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., ΑΥΤ ΠΡΟΒΟC CEB; rev. eagle standing to l., with a wreath in beak, L S; weight 7.48 g, diameter 20–21 mm, reverse very well preserved



Numerian: 1

- 4) M34/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., ...[NV]ΜΕΡΙΑ[ΝΟC]...; rev. illegible; weight 6.02 g, diameter 19 mm



Diocletian: 12

- 5) M36/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., ...[ΔΙΟΚΛ]ΗΤΙΑ[ΝΟC]...; rev. standing figure (Alexandria, Elpis, Sarapis?) holds in r. hand undetermined object, L E; weight 6.75 g, diameter 20–21 mm.



- 6) M39/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., ...Ο[Υ]Α ΔΙΟΚΛΗΤΙΑΝ[ΟC]...; rev. Dikaio-syne stands to l. holding scales in r. hand and cornucopia in l., [L] E(?); weight 8.23 g, diameter 20 mm.



- 7) M40/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., ...OVA ΔIO[K]ΛH[TIANOC]...; rev. Tyche stands to l., holding cornucopia in l. hand, rudder in r. hand, date illegible, weight 5.39 g, diam. 18–19 mm.



- 8) M43/08, obv. [A K] Γ OV(?)... laureated bust of emperor to r., [Δ]IO[K]Λ[HTIANOC CEB]; rev. eagle standing to r., holding wreath in beak, ETOYC Γ; weight 4.70 g, diameter 18–19 mm (Geissen IV, 3223).



- 9) M44/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., ...[ΔIOK]ΛHTI[ANOC]...; rev. Nike pacing to r., holding wreath in r. hand, carrying palm branch on l. arm, L A(?); weight 6.67 g, diameter 18–20 mm.



- 10) M45/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., A K Γ OVA ΔIOKΛHTIANOC CEB; rev. eagle standing to r. between standards, holding wreath in beak, star to l., L A; weight 9.51 g, diameter 19 mm (no reference in Geissen).



- 11) M74/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., [A K Γ OVA]Λ ΔIOKΛHTIAN[OC CEB]; rev. eagle standing to r., holding wreath in beak and palm branch under l. wing, star under r. wing, L E; weight 7.57 g, diameter 18–19 mm (Geissen IV, 3241).



- 12) M75/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., ΔΙΟΚΛΗΤΙΑΝΟC CE; rev. Zeus seated on throne, holding patera in r. hand, scepter in l., at his feet eagle, L Z; weight 7.29 g, diameter 19–20 mm (Geissen IV, 3252).



- 13) M81/08, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., A K Γ OVA ΔΙΟΚΛΗΤΙΑ[NOC CEB]; rev. Tyche stands to l., holding cornucopia in l. hand, rudder in r., L Γ; weight 6.63 g, diameter 19–20 mm (Geissen IV, 3230).



- 14) M133/09, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., ...[ΔΙΟ]ΚΛΗΤΙ[ANOC CEB]; rev. Zeus in *himation*, standing to l., holding patera in l. hand and scepter in r. hand, at his feet eagle, L Z; weight 7.81 g, diameter 21 mm (Geissen IV, 3251).



- 15) M134/09, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., [A K Γ O]V[A] ΔΙ[OK]ΛΗ[T]I[ANOC CEB]; rev. Tyche standing to l., holding rudder in r. hand, cornucopia in l. hand, [ETOV]C Γ, over Γ star; weight 6.90 g, diameter 20 mm (Geissen IV, 3233).



- 16) M135/09, obv. laureated bust of emperor to r., [A K Γ O]VA Δ[IO]ΚΛΗΤΙΑΝ[OC CEB]; rev. Dikaiosyne standing to l., holding scale in r. hand, cornucopia in l., date illegible; weight 6.08 g, diameter 18–20 mm.



formed in the middle of his reign. The chronological structure of the set is very typical of coin hoards in Egypt formed in AD 295–296 (Christiansen 1985: 82–83, Table IB). Thus, the tetradrachms from the 3rd century must have been displaced in effect of some secondary event. These facts indicate that all the coins may have originated from the same place and the similarity between the chronological structure of this set and of coin hoards registered elsewhere in Egypt is not accidental.

A clue to solving this riddle comes from a reconsideration of a number of facts. One of the layers covering kilns C and D contained pottery from the 3rd century. The destruction layer of the early Roman houses is dated to the end of 3rd century (Kołątaj 1992: 47; Majcherek 1998: 28–29). Construction ditches for the baths were dug into ruins of early Roman houses.

Also kilns A, B, C and D were built partly into and partly on top of the ruins of early Roman houses. This explains why in one of the lower layers covering kilns C and D, some 3rd century sherds were found. The soil, debris and rubbish used to cover the kilns were taken from the construction site, presumably for reasons of practical economy. That is why the archeological material found in these layers is partly mixed. In my opinion, the most probable explanation for the puzzle of the tetradrachms is that they had formed a hoard buried at the end of the 3rd century, probably at the time of destruction of the early Roman houses or shortly before it. The soil and debris used to cover the kilns were scooped from the destruction layer of the early Roman houses together with the coins. The short portage distance would have contributed to limited dispersion of the coins.

Table 3. Other 3rd and 4th century coins from the same general context

- 1) M90/08, obv. diademed bust of emperor to r., ...NS...; dynasty of Constantine the Great.; rev. illegible; weight 1.66 g, diameter 18 mm.
- 2) M98/08, obv. bust of Septimius Severus to r., ...C[E]OYHPOC...; rev. undetermined personage stands at altar, holding patera in r. hand, cornucopia in l.; weight 13.91 g, diameter 25 mm.
- 3) M99/08, obv. illegible ...ΓΑ(?); rev. undetermined personage seated on throne to l., holding cornucopia in l. hand(?), L ...; weight 14.58 g, diameter 25–26 mm.

Table 4. Coins of Trajan and Hadrian from Area F excavations in 2008

- 1) M72/08, obv. bust of Hadrian to r., ...AVT KAI... ΑΔΡΙΑΝ CEB; rev. falcon-headed deity of nome standing to l., holding scepter in l. hand, undetermined object in r., [L] I (?); weight 5.39 g, diameter 19–20 mm.
- 2) M73/08, obv. bust of Trajan to r., [AVT ΤΡΑΙΑΝ] CEB [ΓΕΡΜ ΔΑΚΙΚ]; rev. Dikaioyne standing, holding scales in r. hand and cornucopia in l.; weight 11.92 g, diameter 32–33 mm.

OTHER FINDS

Other finds this season included two tetradrachms: one of Septimius Severus (M98/08), the other illegible (M99/08), probably also from the turn of the 3rd century AD. There were also several heavily corroded, unidentified coins as well as one from the 4th century AD (M90/08), found lower, which were found north of kilns C and D, in the fill of the ruins of house FB from the early Roman period [Table 3]. Did the latter really penetrate there from layers of ashes, soil and debris overlying the fill of the house? In view of

the fact that too many coins from the fill were illegible, the formation time of the fill on numismatic grounds was not possible with a high degree of plausibility.

COINS FROM EARLY ROMAN
HOUSES IN AREA F

A coin of Hadrian (M72/08) found in layer 4033, featured the image of a nome deity as yet unidentified. Close to the floor of room 18 of this house, a heavily worn drachm of Trajan was unearthed, bearing a representation of Dikaiosyne on the reverse (M73/08) [Table 4].

Adam Jegliński
e-mail: aspokowodza@op.pl

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