

WINE

Units B.I.15 and B.I.36 in the “Palace of Ioannes” were most probably depositories of palace latrines located on the upper floor. They yielded a huge amount of amphorae, both imported and locally produced, as well as local tableware. Similar material of even greater interest came from a small trench excavated in the northwestern corner of room B.I.37, below floor level. It consisted of several hundred fragments of amphorae from Egypt and Palestine, among which the best represented were amphorae from the vicinity of Aswan, from Middle Egypt (LR 7) and the Mareotic region (Danys-Lasek 2012: 322–327).

In Dongola it was the first such large ensemble of imported amphorae and mud stoppers with inscribed seal impressions, dated to the second half of the 6th and the

7th centuries. The presence of only pitched amphorae in deposits from units B.I.15 and B.I.36 suggested that the inhabitants of building (B.I) were fond of wine of Palestinian and Egyptian origin. The material has also given a better understanding of the political and economic relations of Makuria with the Byzantine administration in the 6th/7th century and with the Arab administration in the 7th century.

A count of amphora toes indicated that the material from this trench contained at least 17 Aswan jars and 20 Middle Egyptian ones. At least four separate Mareotic amphorae were counted in the set, although the quantity of sherds suggested a greater number. There were also two amphorae from Gaza and the region of Syria and Palestine, but these seem to have been isolated speci-



Amphora from the Mareotis region in Egypt, bearing a Greek inscription

mens. A small number of sherds was identified as local vessels, produced in Dongola.

Accompanying the amphorae were mud stoppers, two still attached to the rims of Aswan amphorae. One was made of lime mortar, three others of marl clay with the stamped surfaces concealed under a layer of mud and stamped again. The lime stopper had a *gamma* written on it in red ink. Several similar lime-mortar stoppers were found in the fill of units B.I.37 and B.I.42. The stoppers made of lime mortar and of marl clay may have been used with Mareotic amphorae. Of utmost interest are the stamped stoppers with mud cap, which appear to be unparalleled in the Nubian material published to date. This may have exemplified double marking of wine amphorae — by the producer and by the warehouse — when wine was transported over long distances and at least two customs checkpoints had to be crossed when entering and exiting a territory.

An initial study of the amphorae and stoppers from the “Palace of Ioannes” has led to the conclusion that the wine imported from the north must have been a luxury beverage for the royal retinue. The habit proved so compelling that vine saplings were adapted to local climatic conditions and wine started to be produced locally.



The sudden rise in the manufacture of local amphorae on the spot in Dongola, dated to the 7th century, may thus be a reflection of this new industry.

This change of tastes certainly had to do with the establishment of close relations with the Byzantine world, especially with Egypt, in the second half of the 6th century. The journey of royal envoys of the king of Makuria bringing a giraffe and a leopard to the court of Justin II in Constantinople in 572, as described by John of Biclar, indicates Makuria’s already lively relations with the Byzantine world. These contacts must have been associated with the Christianization of the royal court of Makuria by an imperial



Double-cap mud stopper sealing an amphora

mission in the 540s, indirectly mentioned by John of Ephesus. Egyptian wine, and presumably also Palestinian wine, much less common in the Dongolan palace, certainly came directly from Egypt.

Wine from Egypt and Palestine was transported across the lands of the kingdom of Nobadia, which, until the end of the 570s, in the time of the journey of bishop Longinus of Nobadia to Soba, did not have friendly relations with Makuria, as it is implied by John of Ephesus in his account of Longinus's trip. The bishop had to travel along the Red Sea coast. The Dongolan discovery of stoppers made of lime and of marl clay smeared with a layer of mud with new seal impressions may have to do with the transport of wine from Egypt to Dongola through Nobadian territory. At this point it is worth emphasising that goods known to have come from Nobadia, especially pottery, were not found upriver from the Third Cataract in the 5th and early 6th century, in early Makuria. This is an indication of there being no trade between the emerging kingdoms of Nobadia and Makuria, and most probably also political rivalry between these two states, which had emerged on the ruins of Meroe.

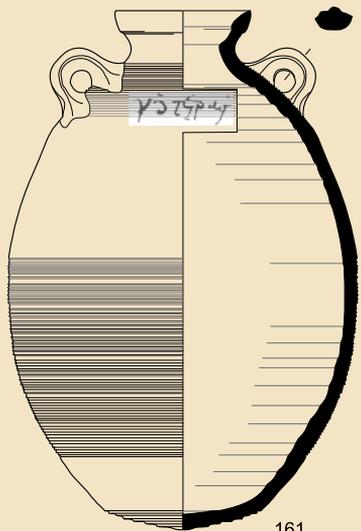
Clearly, trade between Makuria and Egypt was not limited to wine. In the trench below the floor of room B.I.37 there were glass and metal objects, most probably of Egyptian

origin as well. Knowledge of Makurian goods exported to Egypt is not sufficient. We can suspect, however, that the political and economic agreement signed in the mid-7th century by 'Abdallah b. Abī Sarh, the Arab governor of Egypt, and Qalidurut, King of Makuria, was a continuation of Makuria's earlier trade relations with Byzantium and it may have concerned a similar selection of so-called African goods and slaves (Godlewski 2013b).

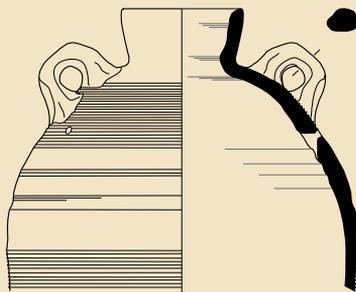
The import of wine from Egypt (and from the entire territory ruled by the early caliphs) was included in the political and economic treaty signed in the mid-seventh century (*baqt*) and material proof of its implementation is found in Dongola in the form of numerous Egyptian amphorae (Mareotis, Middle Egypt) and a few amphorae from Palestine found in the deposits filling the palace, dated to the second half of the seventh century. However, the plentitude of local amphorae also indicates that wine production was already thriving in the gardens of the Letti Basin, the economic hinterland of Dongola. The wines from Egypt and Palestine must have tasted better and been more appreciated at the royal table and were therefore mentioned in the *baqt*.



Stamped amphora mud stoppers from the palace store rooms



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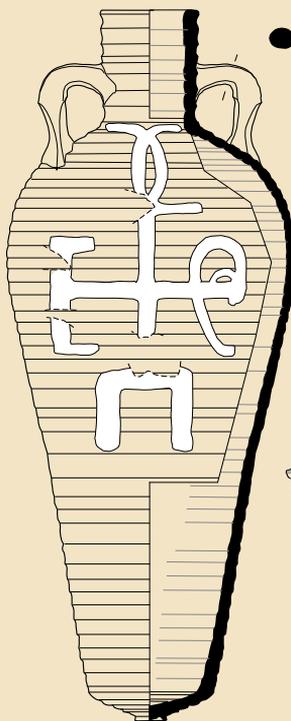
Mareotic LR 5/6



Palestinian

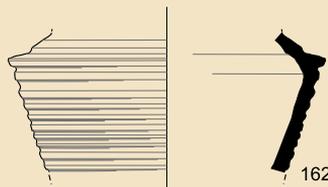


Aswan



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Middle Egypt LR 7



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