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Title: Pots for monks : ceramics and life in the Old Monastery of Baramus (Wadi al-Natron, Egypt) 4th - 9th c.

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ENGLISH SUMMARY⁹³

From 1994 until the present, a team from Leiden University under the direction of Dr. Karel Innemée has been conducting archaeological fieldwork at a site located north of the present Monastery of the Virgin Mary of Baramūs in the Wādī al-Naṭrūn. The site was known as Deir Anba Mussa al Aswad (Monastery of Saint Moses the Black). Peter Grossmann and Gawdat Gabra argued that it must be identified with the Old Monastery of Baramūs. The argumentation of the two scholars is quite convincing. Therefore, it seems that we are dealing with one of the oldest monastic settlements in the Wādī al-Naṭrūn, founded around the year 384.

The nucleus of the excavated monastic site is the church, which has been remodelled in five different phases. At the south-eastern corner of the site a square-shaped building was uncovered; it has been considered to have been a defence tower, dating back to the fourth century, namely the earlier period of the settlement. Then in the western part of the complex, as well as at the north-eastern corner, parts of the living quarters or cells of the monks have been discovered. The pottery finds suggest that these cells were not inhabited before the late sixth to seventh centuries. Throughout the site a destruction level is evident. It has been related to the fifth sack of Sketis by the Berbers in 817. This monastic complex was in existence until the sixteenth century.

The present volume deals with the main ceramic types that occur in layers dating from the fourth to the ninth century, with the aim of a better understanding of the monastic community's early history. The pottery discussed was found in ten significant contexts, which represent all parts of the excavated site.

The monks would have served their meals in various table wares; the earlier in date being made in the renowned pottery production centres of the Mediterranean. A number of red slipped bowls and dishes reached the Old Monastery of Baramūs from Africa Byzacene, Cyprus and the region of Phocaea in Asia Minor. Wares from Africa and Cyprus were imported for a long period, from the fourth to the seventh century, while only scarce sixth-century examples represent the production of Phocaea.

From the sixth century, red and white slipped bowls and dishes, as well as closed vessels of Egyptian manufacture gradually replaced the respective imported wares. Two are the known chief and general categories of Egyptian slipped wares are present and are distinguishable by their fabrics, which indicate certain production zones. The commonest and finer category was made of the characteristic Aswān pink kaolinitic fabric, while a second category that presents several variations was made of the fabric known as Nile silt, extracted from the Nile valley and the Delta. Both categories include a wide range of forms. They date from around the late fifth century and are mainly inspired by African products. Many of these ceramics continue in existence until the Abbasid period.

Apart from the aforementioned wares, a small number of bowls and dishes that have been excavated bear painted decoration, while even less dishes bear a distinctive gouged decoration. Several open vessels bear no decoration at all.

The meals would be accompanied by liquids served in jugs bearing painted decoration. Unfortunately, only mouth-, body- and base-sherds have been found in

⁹³ It is here cited, as summary of our study, part of the article: Konstantinidou A., *Potsherds Narrate History. The Old Monastery of the Romans (Baramūs) in the Wādī al-Naṭrūn from its Foundation until the Early Arab Period (4th – 9th c)*, submitted for publication in the *Acts of the 9th International Congress of Coptic Studies* (Cairo, September 14-20, 2008).

the excavation site. These beautifully decorated closed vessels are made in Egypt and it is the Nile silt fabric that was used for their manufacture. The painted decoration, in black and red colours, is applied on a layer of yellowish or pinkish slip, more or less dense. Various motifs, mainly geometric (concentric lines and bands, wavy lines, dots, cross-hatching, etc.), floral (leaves) and less often animal (birds, fishes), are represented. Examples of such vessels present in the site of the Old Monastery of Baramūs date from the late fourth century to the eighth century.

Undecorated jugs, the majority of which are made of calcareous fabrics also occur. They can be divided into two major categories according to the shape of their upper part: cup-mouthed, or trefoil-mouthed jugs.

Food would be heated in a variety of cooking wares. Most of the types found in the excavation site are made of Nile silt fabric. They date as early as the fifth century and continued to be in use at least until the eighth – often until the tenth century – without any significant morphological changes. The most frequently occurring type is a hemispherical casserole with horizontal handles. Frying pans with flaring walls, knobbed rim and low-placed carination are also rather often attested. Other cooking-pots found in the site of the Old Monastery of Baramūs present a striking morphological variety, from plain-rimmed spherical pots with horizontal handles to necked pots with concave or plain rims and vertical handles. A number of cooking jars are also present; the most striking examples are two almost identical recipients that date to the ninth / early tenth century and bear a sketchy painted decoration consisting of yellowish strokes forming successive arches.

A wide range of other utilitarian wares were employed for the preparation, storage or containment of provisions and various other substances. Large and medium-sized jars with painted, gouged, or even relief decoration, medium-sized jugs, only a few *sāqiya-pots*, and a diversity of medium-sized bowls are some examples of such wares.

Provisions were distributed and stored within transport amphorae. From the fourth to the seventh century most of the amphorae that reached the Old Monastery of Baramūs would have carried commodities produced in the main centres of the Mediterranean Sea. Oil or wine would come from Cilicia, the Gulf of Alexandretta and Cyprus in the so-called *Late Roman Amphorae 1*, as well as in the *Late Roman Amphorae 2* from the Aegean. Wine would arrive from Syria and Palestine in the torpedo-shaped *Late Roman Amphora 4* and the bag-shaped *Late Roman Amphora 5*. Other still unidentified supplies would be imported from the Aegean in the *Late Roman Amphorae 3*. The Monastery of Baramūs would also turn westwards, to Africa, for extra oil and wine, as attested by a number of African amphorae that date to the period between the sixth and the seventh century.

After a certain moment in the seventh century, the majority of the supplies which reached the Old Monastery of Baramūs, were produced in Egypt as manifested by the almost exclusive presence of Egyptian amphorae. The *Egyptian amphorae 7*, which are considered to have been carried wine, were produced by a multitude of workshops in the Nile valley. Wine would be also contained in the so-called *bitroncoconical amphorae*. However, in the excavation site, it is the type of *Egyptian bag-shaped amphora* that predominates. Such amphorae would be produced since the fifth century either in the workshops of Abu Mena and the Mareotic region or in the Delta. In the Delta region at a site in Kūm Abū Billū (ancient Terenuthis) a workshop producing ovoid-shaped amphorae was functioning until the tenth or even the eleventh century.

The excavations in the Old Monastery of Baramūs have brought to light three very interesting amphora-types (*Egyptian Early Arab Amphorae 1, 2, 3*) that date between the Umayyad (658-750) and the Tulūnid (868-905) periods. They are all made of Nile silt fabric and manifestly derive from specific Late Roman types. Complete examples of the above described Egyptian types are found in the Monastery of Saint Macarius, also in the Wādī al-Naṭrūn.

Apart from the wares that served for the transportation, storage, preparation, cooking and serving of the foodstuffs, various other wares were found in the site of the Old Monastery of Baramūs. A number of seventh century flagons from the pilgrimage centre of Saint Mena (Abū Mīnā), made of calcareous fabric would probably contain sacred water or oil from the lamp that burnt before the tomb of the Saint. Another case of wares possibly containing a holy substance is related to the Monastery of Saint Macarius in the Wādī al-Naṭrūn. Three unknown types of flagons made of calcareous fabrics were found in the Old Monastery of Baramūs chiefly in ninth-century layers. During a survey in the environs of the Monastery of Saint Macarius, it was discovered that these types would have been manufactured there, maybe so as to be used in the preparation and the Consecration of the Holy Oils that used to take place in that Monastery.

Finally, most of the lamps found in the Old Monastery of Baramūs are wheel-made. Re-worked objects were found in considerable quantities, providing additional information about the re-using and re-cycling of certain wares. Mainly amphora-spikes and jug-bases would have been used as lids or stoppers, in some cases as incense burners or lamps. Detached amphora-tops were also found and were presumably used as funnels.

All the above ceramic types are examined inside their functional context so as to better understand the purpose and character of each structure of the excavation site. They are then viewed in their chronological context, so that a first draft of the site's history is automatically sketched in. In an effort to understand the orientation of the Old Monastery of Baramūs and its actual place in the Mediterranean world, some brief comparisons between the situation of our site and that of other regions in the Mediterranean, are attempted.

After the presentation and discussion of the ceramic evidence, the textual evidence is examined. Stories where *pots* are mentioned are queried in the sources, so as to conduct a list of pot-names and learn about their function. Furthermore, stories about the *monks*, those who actually once used these pots, are collected. Aspects of their lives, such as their origin and identity, their dietary practices and their contacts with the outer world are emphasised.

In the brief conclusions of this study, ceramics and texts are confronted in an effort to understand the weaknesses of each in the information that they bear. Finally, the future prospects in the region of the Wādī al-Naṭrūn are described and the necessity to take action against the deterioration of sites at risk is highlighted.