Cypriot Sigillata
from Kom el-Dikka Excavations in Alexandria
Found Before 1986
Early Roman strata have only rarely been reached during earlier years of Polish excavations in Alexandria, mostly in small trial pits with two basic exceptions: remains of an Early Roman Villa of Birds in sector W1 and the sector U (TSU), West of the theatrical portico. Those and the trial pits in the street in front of the so-called theatre and between supporting buttresses of the theatrical building and in the street in front of that structure, the remains of a private bath west of Imperial Baths and two pits between castellon and the Imperial Baths have been before 1986 the only contexts with undisturbed Early Roman finds. Pottery of that period has not been yet published apart from a group of the stamped pieces presented by one of the authors. A rare stamped Cypriot Sigillata bowl base, form P 25(?) was one of them. The present paper shows the other Cypriot Sigillata (CS) finds, their frequency vs other wares in the same contexts and compares the situation in Alexandria to other sites in Egypt. The basic documentation of the material was made by H. Meyza in 1986–1987, verified and extended by M. Więch in 2011.

The pieces best situated in context are those excavated more recently, from sector U (TSU), catalogue Nos 8–10. It seems that strata designations recorded on the context bags correspond to published list of strata, i.e. the lowest were numbered I, while the ash and soot destruction layer is numbered III. In case of cat. 7, the best preserved small deep bowl form P40, unfortunately the find context information is not very precise. It seems that bowl cat. 7, with almost complete section preserved, was found in a dump east and south of auditoria, therefore in a late (sixth–seventh century AD) context. In dumps like that one, earlier material was also found, as in case of numerous fragments of architectural members.

The overall quantity of Cypriot Sigillata from Alexandria is small, and in the catalogue, with only 12 pieces, we have listed only characteristic pieces most probably identified as Cypriot Sigillata. All of these are illustrated in Fig. 1. There are several other body fragments and few pieces, which are not certain, of various degree of similarity to the standard ware. Even in the catalogued group one piece (Fig. 1.3) may in fact belong to Cypriot

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1 W. Kołataj, G. Majcherek, E. Parandowska, Villa of the Birds: the excavation and preservation of the Kom al-Dikka mosaics, American Research Center in Egypt Conservation Series 3, Cairo-New York 2007, pp. 23–26; a number of small pits were excavated below the mosaics but the amount of finds is too small to date the particular stages of development, while the construction can be dated by two coins, see also sections Figs 35, 38, 46, 51, 60.


4 H. Meyza, Stamped Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Fine Wares found at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria before 1987, EtudTrav XX, 2005, p. 127, cat. 8.

5 Rodziewicz, BSAA 44, 1991, p. 85, Fig. 3: layers 1–3.

6 Ibid., p. 86, Fig. 12.
Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WARE</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Grouped</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cypriot Sigillata</td>
<td>CS</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>9.02</td>
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<td>CS?/CRSW?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>CS?/CCW</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cypriot Sigillata Imitation ?</td>
<td>CS?/Imit CS?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<tr>
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<td>CS??</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Sigillata A</td>
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<td>0.26</td>
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<td>Eastern Sigillata A ? (reddish)</td>
<td>ESA? Redd</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Eastern Sigillata B</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>ITS</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10.57</td>
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<td>ITS?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.03</td>
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<td>ITS?/ESB?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaulish Sigillata</td>
<td>Gaul</td>
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<td>Sagalassos Ware</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.77</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>388</td>
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Alexandria Kom el-Dikka
Roman Fine Wares quantity

- CS
- CS?
- CS?/CRSW?
- CS?/CCW
- CS?/Imit CS?
- CS??
- ESA
- ESA?
- ESA, burnt
- ESA? Redd
- ESB
- ESB 1?
- ESB?
- ESC
- ITS
- ITS?
- ITS?/ESB?
- Gaul
- Sagalassos
- Unidentified
Red Slip ware. Less probably belong to Cypriot Sigillata other fragments, e.g. a small bowl base, possibly belonging to form P20, colour of which is unusually bright even for the early series. The find context (layer below the mosaic in the house under the portico of the ‘theatre’, in trial pit M X2) chronologically agrees with typological dating. Another piece is also too lightly fired to be easily accepted as Cypriot Sigillata, though its form (base preserved) fits well the frequently occurring bowl form P28. General proportions of number of identified pieces are presented in Tab. 1 with diagram. The inner circular diagram shows aggregated all occurrences of particular wares, including doubtful pieces, while the outer ring divides both uncertain pieces and transitional ones between two wares. The number of grouped Cypriot fragments reaches 9.02%, which is less than Italian Sigillata (12.11%).

First assessment of relationships between various Early Roman sigillata wares in Alexandria has been made by S. Elaigne using the finds from rescue excavations at the site of Theatre ‘Diana’. Among these finds of sigillata wares Cypriot Sigillata constituted 22% of the fragments (number of pieces) and only 10% if minimum number of vessels (NMI) was calculated. There were only 6 forms catalogued, including two not classified by Hayes: the medium wide necked jug known also from Marina el-Alamein and an inkwell. Elaigne made a remark, valid also for our excavations, that in comparing frequency of Eastern Sigillata A with most of other fine wares it must be remembered that a large part of ESA belongs to Late Hellenistic period and that late, imperial types constitute section of the whole of that ware. In any case it is surprising, that in a very large collection, mainly from the Greco-Roman Museum published by E.Z.H. Kadous, there is not a single piece of Cypriot Sigillata though his (and collectors) concentration on stamped sherds explains partly this absence.

The interesting point in relative low frequency and limited repertoires of Cypriot Sigillata versus Eastern Sigillata A and even Italian Sigillata in Alexandria is that in Late Roman times the Late Roman D, so-called ‘Cypriot Red Slip’ ware belongs to the most frequently occurring classes of fine wares, at similar numbers to African Red Slip and clearly outnumbering Phocaean Red Slip ware. Forms of Cypriot Sigillata represented at Kom el-Dikka belong mostly to first–second century AD series, with possible one exception, Fig. 1.10, which may be earlier, particularly if this is a small in-turned rim bowl P20.

10 H. MEYZA, Cypriot Red Slip Ware: studies on a Late Roman Levantine fine ware, Nea Paphos V, Warsaw 2008 [= Cypriot Red Slip Ware], pp. 100–103.
Another point of interest is that in various Roman contexts in Alexandria the Cypriot Sigillata pieces are superseded by imitations of form P40 made in local ware, first noted already by H. Thiersch but correctly identified by P. Ballet and Th. von der Way in 1993. These imitations are not only practically confined to one form of CS, but also their size is smaller than most of the original examples. The developed version of CS deep bowl P40 and similar forms: P41–42 are often over 35cm in diameter and the imitated vessels are often just over 10cm (below 15cm). The original CS of that size are rare, more frequent are middle range pieces 19–22cm. This is the size most frequently occurring among ones found at Kom el-Dikka as well as those found at Marina el-Alamein (Fig. 2.4–6).

The latter site, just 100km west from Alexandria yielded large number of Cypriot Sigillata, clearly dominating there over other Eastern Sigillata wares. The present paper supplements the collection of published finds of Cypriot Sigillata from that site with other examples of most popular types: P11 and P40. The finds, as was the case with most of the pieces published until present, were found as surface finds. W.A. Daszewski counted the number of forms present at Marina at seventeen, though classification of some pieces is doubtful and in one case (Pl. 5.5) probably the fragment belongs to Cypriot Red Slip ware and is a rim and neck of a jug, form K8 (P57B), not a bowl. A review of the remaining pieces shows that there were in fact even without the jug rim at least 19 forms. This contrasts with relative typological poverty of Alexandrian repertoire, which, together with finds from other excavations, includes not more than 12 forms.

Pieces presented from Marina should, however be in several cases classified otherwise, which influences dating of this assemblage and makes it similar in date and therefore more comparable with Alexandria finds. Perhaps apart from grey-bodied plate illustrated in Acts of the II Nieborów Pottery Workshop, Pl.1.2, which may belong to late first century BC, the remaining belong to first–second century AD. Deep plate rim, Pl. 1.1 should rather be classified as form P30A, and therefore later in series, small hemispherical bowl Pl. 1.4 belongs rather with late variant of form ‘d’ from the House of Dionysos. A similar vessel

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13 MEYZA, Cypriot Red Slip Ware, p. 81, Pl. 15.

14 J.W. HAYES, Paphos III. The Hellenistic and Roman Pottery, Nicosia 1991 [= Paphos], pp. 44, 49, Fig. 19: 30.1.
with entire section preserved has been found in Paphos. The unusual complete strainer Pl. 7.2 may in fact be the form of at least some of the rims classed by J.W. Hayes and W.A. Daszewski as form 31.

The reason of limited presence of Cypriot Sigillata in Alexandria as compared to relatively minor town at Marina el-Alamein is not obvious. The presence of other pottery products imported, supposedly at least partly Cypriot product: the pinched handle amphora indicates that the town at Marina had rather special relations with Cyprus, more probably than a result of particular exclusion of Cypriot imports at Alexandria. If occurrence of Cypriot Sigillata in Pelusium, another coastal town on Egyptian Mediterranean littoral is compared, the number and variety of this ware in Alexandria no longer seems so small.

CATALOGUE
ALEXANDRIA (Fig. 1)
1. No provenance, CS plate P5; rim diam. 24cm, metallic slip: 10R–2.5YR 4/8, break: 2.5YR 5/6.
2. Sector W-1, found on 24. May 1973, probably in the fill of one of the Early Roman rooms, CS P4/5 or CRS H1?, base diam. 19.5cm, slip: 1.3 YR 5/6, break: 3.7YR 5/6.
3. Sector W-1, rim of CS P12 or CRSW H1B, rim diam. 19.5cm, break: 3YR 4.8/6.
5. No provenance, form P22B, rim diam. 15cm, break: 3.8YR 6/6.
7. Sector AW, east from auditorium (bld. 32), N from the ‘palaeoarabic’ wall, 6.11.82, CS medium-sized P40, rim diam. 18cm, with lower body unslipped, some streaks.
8. Sector TSU I layer III, bedding of mortar and ash(?), rim and body of deep bowl P40, rim diam. c. 19cm, light matt slip: 2.5–5YR 6/6, double roulette on belly.
9. Sector TSU I str. 2, eastern limit, trench connecting the sector with S negative to the old large Mamluq fill (1982.05), CS foot of P40?, base diam. 8.5cm, partly slipped, 4.5–5YR 5/4, with streaks.

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15 This is a rare Cypriot Sigillata copy of Eastern Sigillata A form 22, with an earlier variant Hayes, Paphos, pp. 41–42, Fig. 18 ‘d’; close counterpart was mentioned by Meyza in unpublished paper presented at IV Congress of Cypriot Studies, from a first century AD context under Villa of Theseus room 23, found with e.g. Arretine base ConsP B1. 7.

16 Hayes, Paphos, p. 44, Fig. 19:31.2-3; Daszewski, [in:] Nieborów, p. 30, Pls 3.3 and 7.2.


10. Sector TSU IV layer 1, May 82 – rim of in-turned rim bowl P20 or filter bowl of spouted jug P 47, rim diam. 10cm, clear burnish outside, light slip 2.5YR 4/8, smooth, lustrous, firm, slight streaks outside, section (2.5YR 5/8).

11. Sector L, d.1, S-E part, provenance uncertain, 197(8?)/06/(2?)7, neck of jug CS, break 5YR 6/7; slip 2.5YR 5.5/6.

12. Trial pit 1/70 under (paving?), in the area of later sector W1, probably below Late Roman floor, lower body and base of bottle P49, base diam. 7cm, section 5YR 5/6, matt slip 3YR 4.5/5, dark area: 10YR 3/2, inside unslipped.

MARINA EL-ALAMEIN (Fig. 2)

1. (Marina M 5/93) area of building 14; plate P11, chipped rim, rim diam. c. 16cm (internal), slightly lustrous slip, metallic, inside streaks, burnish inside and outside on bottom.

2. (Marina M 17/93), area of sea front; plate P11, no bottom, rim diam. 18cm.

3. (Marina M 12/93), area of tomb 10A, West; bowl P28? base, diam. 4cm, inside burnish, outside slip matt, good quality, red fired.

4. (Marina M 11/93) on bulldozer dump east of structure 5; rim and belly of small deep bowl P40, rim diam. 19cm, 2–3 bands burnished inside, surface: 2.5 YR 6/6, wide roulette on belly.

5. (Marina M 9/93) area of building 14; lower part of belly and base of deep bowl P40?, base diam. 9cm, break 3.5–4YR 6.5/4, metallic slip 7.5YR 4/2, inside burnish.

6. (Marina M 8/93) area of building 12; rim and belly of large deep bowl P40/41?, rim diam. 37cm, break 5YR 5/4, on rim streaks of slip, discoloured rim, inside burnish.

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2. Samples of Cypriot Sigillata from Marina el-Alamein (Drawing: H. Meyza, M. Wiech).