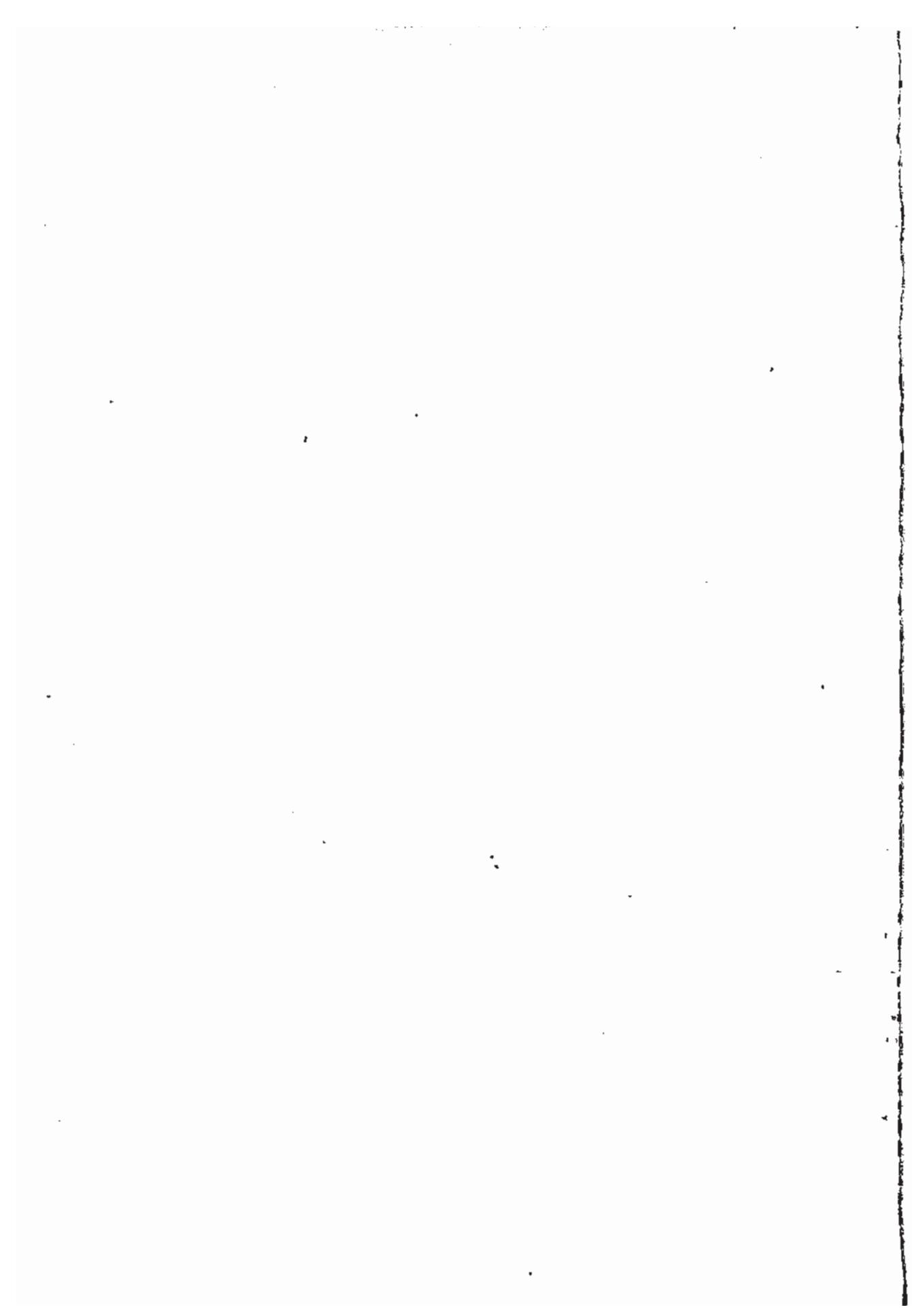


Excavations
on the Government Hospital Site,
Alexandria, Preliminary Report



Archaeological Excavation at Kom-el-Dik

a preliminary report on the Medieval Pottery

by

ARTHUR LANE ⁽¹⁾

I. — This preliminary report is based on my study of the material during my attachment to the University staff between February 1st and March 17th, 1949. In it I attempt to give a provisional classification of the medieval pottery found in excavations conducted by the University under the direction of Professor Alan Wace, in the two seasons 1947 & 1948. The report may be found useful for reference if further excavations are to be made at Kom-el-Dik. If no further excavations are undertaken, the report may be regarded as a first out-line for the more comprehensive study that will be prepared for publication by the University.

The final publication will probably be planned on the following lines:

- 1 — A resumé of what information can be found in the writings of Arab and European historians about Alexandria in the late medieval period — 12th to 16th century A.D. (Some work on the Arab Sources has already been done by Dr. Abdel-Aziz Barzouk).
- 2 — A topographical account of the Kom el-Dik site; a statement on the previous excavations undertaken by Hogart and a description of the methods followed in the excavations by Farouk Ist. University. (This section will naturally have to be written by the Director of the excavations or by someone who assisted him on the spot).
- 3 — A classified description of the finds, which mainly consist of pottery and glass. (This section will be an expansion of the present report, illustrated by photographs and by drawings which have still to be made. It will be necessary to make comparisons with material found elsewhere or preserved in Museums, and as the books are not available in Alexandria, I hope to consult them in London after my return to England. I shall send the results of my researches to Dr. Abdel-Aziz Marzouk, who will be able to incorporate them in the final publication. I have prepared copious notes and sketches of the pottery which I am also leaving in his hands).
- 4 — A discussion of the new knowledge that has been gained as a result of the excavations, both about medieval Alexandrian history and trade, and about medieval Islamic art.

(1) Mr. Lane is the Keeper of Ceramics in the Victoria & Albert Museum. He was delegated to examine the finds of Pottery in the University Excavations at Kom el-Dik. During his sejour in Alexandria he gave some lectures on Pottery in this Faculty.

II. — The excavations were begun in the hope of finding important remains of the Hellenistic or Roman periods. Three separate cuts were made in the sides of the hill of Kom el-Dik — on the South East, on the North, and on the West. Fragments of pottery and other debris were found embedded in the earth to the lowest level excavated, and it was not possible to dig down to virgin soil. It is therefore probable that traces of earlier settlement still lie buried under the hill. This appears all the more likely because digging at a fourth point in the level ground away from the hill to the south (the so-called «Garden Site») led down to remains of the Roman period. What is certain, is that Kom el-Dik is not a natural hill but an artificial mound formed by man.

From comparison with material found elsewhere which can be approximately dated, it is clear that the oldest pottery found in the three cuts on the hill can hardly be much earlier than 1200 A.D. Apart from isolated fragments, too few to be significant, the latest pottery found appears to date from the second half of the 15th century A.D. The earlier imported pottery resembles that found on sites in Syria and Palestine occupied by the Crusaders in the 13th century and thereafter abandoned. The style of the lustre-painted pottery imported from Manises in Spain helps to fix the lower date in the 15th century (probably before 1475).

The excavations were scientifically conducted, care being taken to observe the stratification of the material in the ground and to keep the remains from each level separate. The character of the pottery changed from one level to another, types known to be early being found mainly at the lower levels, later types on or near the surface. The hill was therefore not piled up deliberately in a single operation in the second half of the 15th century or later; it grew by gradual stages between about 1200 and 1475 A.D.

There were two possible explanations why the mound grew to such a height above the surrounding ground-level. First, that it was for two centuries the site of human occupation which left succeeding layers of deposit as the years went on, while the ground surrounding the growing hill was comparatively uninhabited. Second, that Kom el-Dik was a vast rubbish heap where generations of the inhabitants of Alexandria deposited their broken pottery and other household or workshop refuse, much of which has decayed beyond recognition through contact with damp soil.

In favour of its being an occupied site is the fact that the strata of broken pottery etc. follow horizontal lines, and in this are markedly different from the strata at obvious dump-sites in Alexandria, such as those by the Government Hospital and by the Faculty of Science (Abbassia Secondary School). At the latter sites the strata run downwards in a slanting direction. The fort of Mohammed Ali on the top, the modern military buildings on the slopes, and the steady encroachment of the modern city have changed the shape of Kom el-Dik and reduced its area. Among the finds in the excavations were misshapen lamps of glass frit, great quantities of semi-vitreous slag, pottery crucibles containing melted glass, and deposits of seaweed and sand — the raw materials used by glass-makers. These make it certain that glass-makers used the work in the neighbourhood, perhaps on the hill itself.

There is no circumstantial evidence that potters too were at work; through some misshapen unglazed earthenware bowls were found, they were usable and could not be regarded as refuse from potters' kilns.

Against the theory of Kom el-Dik having been an occupied site there are two main arguments. First, no traces of buildings were found in the excavations; and though any buildings that might have existed would perhaps be constructed from impermanent materials, these should have included walls of unburnt brick, which leaves easily identified foundations. Second, there is the generally even and undisturbed stratification of the pottery. Sites of Medieval occupation in the Near East are normally honeycombed by vertical shafts sunk near the houses, either as walls or as rubbish-pits. Dense accumulations of pottery are found at the bottom of these shafts, well below the level of the dwellings to which they belonged. And the stratification is further disturbed by the digging of the shafts, which brings to the top fragments of pottery etc. from lower levels of occupation.

Whether Kom el-Dik was a densely populated area surrounded by more or less open ground, or a town rubbish-dump of a kind similar to those at Fostat, its abandonment for either purpose about the end of the 15th century can easily be explained. Alexandria had then declined in size and importance, and the shrunken city became concentrated some way off near the harbour, with other rubbish dumps nearer at hand.

The excavations at Kom el-Dik will offer valuable archaeological evidence of a kind not obtained in excavating the rubbish-heaps at Fostat. For the stratification, carefully observed, will facilitate the dating of many kinds of pottery whose chronology and development has hitherto been obscure.

The finds themselves cast a most interesting light on the commercial and cultural relations of Alexandria during the 12th-15th centuries. There is a great deal of celadon stoneware and white porcelain imported from China, probably via the Red Sea. There are much greater quantities of «Byzantine» incised pottery of a kind widely diffused through the Aegean and perhaps made in the Anatolian Province of the Byzantine Empire. Incised and painted wares of a kind found on Crusader sites in Syria and Palestine are accompanied by painted wares from Rakka in North Syria, all of the 13th century. Painted pottery from the Maghrib and from Spain was imported from the 13th century onwards; it includes a few pieces of the lustre-painted ware from Malaga (14th century) and a great many of the lustre-ware made at Manises near Valencia (15th century). Alexandria was clearly a main gateway of Egyptian trade towards Syria in the north east and Spain and N. Africa to the West.

III. - Classification of pottery found at Kom el-Dik.

A. Far Eastern imports

1. Chinese celadon stoneware, from Lung Chuan. 12th. century onwards.

2. Chinese celadon, from other unidentified factories.
3. Chinese white Ting ware, with relief decoration. 12th-13th centuries.
4. Chinese white porcelain with «ying-ching» shadowy blue glaze. 13th-14th centuries.
5. Chinese white porcelain painted in blue. Late 14th-15th centuries.
6. Chinese coarse grey stoneware jars (martabani) with olive green or brown glaze.

B. East Mediterranean imports

7. «Byzantine» sgraffiato ware with scooped and incised designs, thin potting. 13th century onwards.
8. (?) Byzantine sgraffiato ware with incised borders of pseudo-Arabic writing; thicker pottery. 13th century.
9. «Crusader» coarse sgraffiato ware, as found at Al-Mina near Antioch in Syria. 13th century.
10. Crusader ware of type found at Athlit, painted in purple, blue, brown and red on white glaze. 13th century «Athlit A».
11. Crusader ware of type found at Athlit, painted in purple, green and brown on whitish glaze over red clay. 13th century «Athlit B».
12. Crusader ware of type found at Athlit, painted in purple and pale green on a white glaze, mainly with shields. 13th century «Athlit C».
13. Cypriote sgraffiato ware. 13th-15th centuries.

C. Asiatic imports

14. Persian (Kashan) lustre-painted ware; early 13th century.
15. Syrian (Rakka) lustre-painted ware; 13th century before 1259.
16. Syrian (Rakka) ware painted in black, blue and sometimes a little red. 12th-13th century, before 1259.
(Hard to distinguish from Egyptian Ayyubid painted ware).
17. Syrian wares painted in black and blue. 14th-15th centuries.
(Hard to distinguish from Egyptian wares).
18. Syrian (Damascus) lustre-painted ware; 14th century.

D. West Mediterranean imports

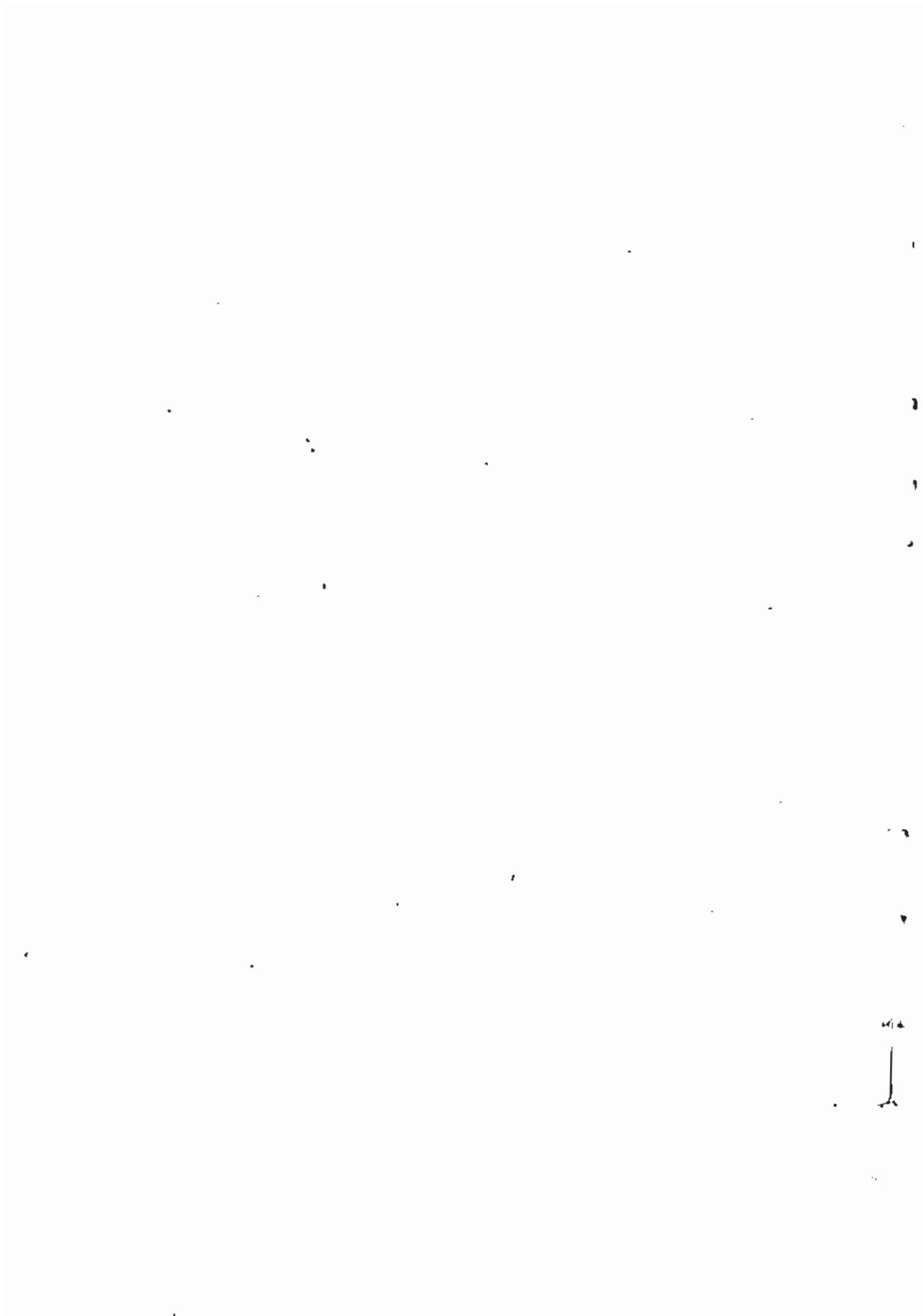
19. Unidentified lustre-painted ware, perhaps made in N. Africa at Bougie. 13th century.

20. Spanish (Malaga) lustre-painted ware. 14th century.
21. Spanish (Manises) lustre-painted ware. 15th century.
22. Spanish (Paterna) ware painted in green and purple. 14th-15th centuries.
23. North African or Spanish ware painted in blue and purple or purple alone on yellowish glaze. 13th-15th centuries.
24. (?) Catalan Ware (made at Manresa near Barcelona); 14th century.
25. Spanish ware decorated in relief under a green glaze.

E. Egyptian wares

26. Fatimid lustre-painted ware.
27. Colour-glazed ware, mainly green, imitating Chinese celadon.
28. Wares painted in blue, black and sometimes a little red. Ay-yubid period; 13th century, (Hard to distinguish from Rakka ware).
29. Wares painted in black and blue, or one colour only.
30. Red ware painted in white slip under yellowish glaze. Ay-yubid period.
31. Early Mamluk sgraffiato ware
32. Later Mamluk sgraffiato ware with added painting in white and brown slip.
33. Coarse ware painted in purple under yellowish or greenish glaze. 13th-15th centuries.
34. Unglazed wares of various types. 13th-15th centuries.

Arthur Lane.



Excavations on the Government Hospital Site, Alexandria: Preliminary Report

In 1944 and 1945 the Faculty of Arts made extensive trial excavations in the southeast section of the area of the Government Hospital, since the University was about to construct new buildings on this site for the Medical Faculty. The site has always been considered an important one, because it lies well within the area of ancient Alexandria. The topographers place the ancient theatre somewhere in this area which is raised considerably above the level of surrounding parts of the city. The only previous excavations (1) in this area were those of the German expedition in 1898 which worked in the southwest part of the Hospital site, and Botti records some finds made in this very region, the southeastern part, by Schiess Pasha when he was building the Government Hospital about the same time. The area in question lies outside the old walls of Alexandria which followed the line of the gardens on the north side of the Boulevard Sultan Hussein.

In the northern part of the area tested there rises a mound on which the Queen Victoria column stands. This mound on investigation proved to be one of the old forts of Alexandria, now completely dismantled and ruined. Here on this hill the French under Kleber built a fort, probably merely an earthwork, when they took up position within Alexandria after the battle of 1801. On account of its position not very far from the obelisks known as «Cleopatra's Needles», which stood on the site of the modern Ramleh tram station, it was called Fort Cleopatra. Some writers wrongly call it Fort Crétin which is really the French name of the Fort Kom ed Dik. It is marked on Nugent's map of the forts of Alexandria in 1840 which shows the forts built or reconstructed by Mohammed Ali. About that time the top of the mound was revetted with a strong wall of masonry. The remains of this masonry found in the excavations strongly resemble that of the forts of Abukir which were also built by Mohammed Ali. The masonry of the fort and the adjoining parts of the ancient walls of Alexandria were destroyed by Schiess Pasha in order to obtain stone and other material for building the Government Hospital. The Arabic name of the fort was Fort Yaoud, or el Yaboudieh or Tabiat el Yahoudi and this name is sometimes given in lists of the forts of Alexandria as Tabyit Koubour el Yajoud el Kadima (2). This name is due to the fact that the fort adjoined the Old Jewish Cemetery. In fact during the excavations an abandoned part of this old Jewish cemetery was found to the south of the fort in the southeast corner of the Government Hospital area. This is directly to the west of Champollion Street on the other side of which still lies the main part of the old Jewish Cemetery. It is obvious that this cemetery lay outside the walls and that the existing part east of Champollion Street was once all one with the now abandoned

part west of the street in the southeast corner of the Government Hospital area.

Several Jewish graves were found in this area and to judge by two Turkish coins found in two graves all date from about the sixteenth century. One complete Hebrew grave inscription and a fragment from another were found. The complete inscription mentions the name Tashtiel a name which is said not now to occur in the Jewish community of Alexandria. At all events the existence of this cemetery justifies the Arabic name of the fort.

The mound of the fort which consists of débris of the late Roman period was found to cover the ruins of an extensive late Roman building of brick and stone and marble which may have been a baths. It was impossible to examine this building in detail because one of the houses of the hospital stands directly above it. The floor of the building is about twelve or thirteen metres below the surface of the mound. On the east were two small rooms which certainly appeared to have been bathrooms. In one the floor was of blue veined marble with a bench of the same material along the walls. In the other room the floor was formed of mosaic of coloured marbles and red porphyry set in mortar on limestone slabs. To the north of these two rooms were two brick built limekilns which indicate what had happened to the marble and stone from this building. Directly to the west of these two rooms are the ruins of lofty vaults of brick once faced with stone and marble. These are in a state of partial collapse but were probably some of the great halls of the baths or else vaulted substructures for some building above. The former is the more probable. Nothing was found in these ruins to indicate their date or purpose. They are clearly of the Roman period probably about the third century A.D. They were most likely wrecked in one of the frequent revolts which occurred in Alexandria during the Roman Empire. Nothing Islamic was discovered either in the ruined baths or in the débris piled above them. So presumably the building must have been long in ruins and filled with rubbish some considerable time before the Arab Conquest. The mound at the level of the floor of the baths has been tunnelled into in later times by persons seeking for cut stone and other suitable building material.

At the southern foot of the mound of the fort is the grave of Schiuss Pasha (3) by the side of which stand two granite columns with Corinthian capitals said to have been taken from the Church of St. Theonas, the Mosque of the Thousand Columns. In testing the ground immediately to the south of the grave a curious system of tunnels lined with masonry was explored. The whole of the mound here is composed of débris and rubbish piled up in a great dump. The sloping strata show that the mound was built up in the same way as other dumps of rubbish on the outskirts of Alexandria and Cairo. Once a small mound of rubbish had accumulated the dump was added to by taking fresh débris to the top of the mound and then pouring it down the sides. The same method can be seen in use to-day round Alexandria. This débris contained all manner of rubbish, broken brick and stone, broken pottery, bones, and all kinds of refuse thrown away as useless. In it, as will be seen below, several interesting small finds were made.

The principal tunnel begins on the eastern side of Champollion Street on the edge of the mound and runs directly westwards. At its west end there is on the south a deep shaft covered with a brick vault and lined with masonry. This goes right down to the water level to a depth of about seventeen and a half metres. The purpose of this shaft is not obvious. It can hardly have been intended as a well for there is no proper opening at the top to draw up water and it has no cement or other suitable lining. A short northern branch of this western tunnel ends in a cul de sac. About half way between the entrance to the tunnels from Champollion Street and the deep shaft another branch turns off at right angles southwards for some distance and then it turns again at right angles westwards for about thirteen metres till it is blocked by a fall. Here it turned southwards on a curve, but does not seem to have ever been completed because it would have passed close under a mass of heavy blocks of masonry which have partly collapsed into the unfinished tunnel. Owing to the depth it was impossible to explore this mass of large blocks of heavy masonry. The purpose of the tunnels is unknown. They can hardly have been intended to hold water for they have no lining of any kind and there are no signs even of any preparation in the floor for a water channel. In two places there are pivot holes for doors and there are niches in the walls to hold lamps for lighting. The method of construction however is clear. A plain tunnel of greater height than was needed was dug horizontally through the mound. Then the side walls were lined with stone work up to the height required. The masonry was built section by section. First at regular intervals thick solid piers of roughly squared limestone were built and then the space between each pair of piers was filled in with a walling of rough stone or rubble. Finally the whole was roofed with pairs of large slabs placed so as to form an inverted V. Above this inverted V an open space was of necessity left and this apparently gradually filled up with earth falling from above. The entrance to the tunnels at the side of Champollion Street consists of a circular structure of brick into which a small flight of stone steps seems to have led from the east. The tunnel commences on the west directly opposite the steps. The tunnels had been discovered by stone robbers who had burrowed into the mound in search of stone and building material, because the masonry from the sides and from the roof has been removed for a considerable distance. Also just above the entrance in Champollion Street other tunnels were found at a higher level dug into the side of the mound by stone robbers who had clearly tunnelled at random into the mound following up any groups or piles of cut stone they might find.

Nothing was found in the tunnels to indicate their date. They were presumably constructed before the Islamic period because nothing Islamic was found in them. On the other hand since they were dug in a mound composed of débris and refuse of the Roman period they must have been made during the Roman period, but certainly not early in that period because the mound of débris must have taken some time to accumulate. To judge by the pottery found in the excavations the débris itself probably accumulated by the fourth century A.D., certainly by the fifth century, for all the débris appears to be pre-Christian. Thus the tunnels may have been constructed during the fifth or sixth century A.D.

The mound of débris extends for some distance to the south of the tunnels into the corner of the area of the Government Hospital. Here the formation of the mound was the same and here too were found tunnels burrowed through the débris by stone robbers searching for building material. In this part of the site immediately below the level of the Jewish graves was a trodden white layer. In and just below this some lamps with Christian symbols came to light whereas in the lower layers nothing Christian appeared. We might therefore conclude that the accumulation of débris in this area came to an end about the beginning of the Christian period, or about the beginning of the fifth century A.D.

Owing to various difficulties it was not possible to reach virgin soil and the water level except in one place, and here late Ptolemaic pottery was found close to the soft sandy rock and well below the level of the mounds of refuse. It would seem then that there had been some occupation of this area in Ptolemaic times, but that apparently no important buildings stood on it. Under the Roman Empire the area must have been derelict early in that period and thus was naturally used for dumping refuse of all kinds, exactly as is done on vacant areas in Alexandria to-day. It is remarkable that an area so near the centre of the city should have become derelict so soon and that a site so near the centre of the city should not have been occupied by buildings in the Ptolemaic age. It is possible, however, that when Alexandria was laid out the area enclosed by its walls was too large for the population and that there were parts of the city which were not occupied by buildings. Even in the Hellenistic period it seems that the areas enclosed by the walls of a city were too large for the population and consequently that in many places there were open, unoccupied spaces. In the Roman period from the time of Caracalla onwards Alexandria was often the scene of prolonged and destructive fighting and riots in which large parts of the city were laid waste. Even under Trajan during the great Jewish revolt a considerable part of the city was apparently laid in ruins. Under Aurelian towards the end of the third century the Brucheion quarter in which the Government Hospital probably lay was, we are told, almost completely destroyed.

In any case these excavations have shown that the theatre did not exist on any part of the Government Hospital site. It stood according to Caesar near the Palace. The Palace is generally supposed by the topographers of Alexandria to have lain in the northeastern part of the city. It would thus have stood somewhere between the Government Hospital hill and the sea probably in the Mazarita region where some fine Ionic capitals and some interesting sculptures, now in the Greco-Roman Museum, have been found (14). Perhaps the theatre stood on the northern slope of the Government Hospital hill where there is a tall apartment building now part of the Faculty of Medicine, on the south side of the road by the Ramleh tram line. On the east side of this building are some massive substructures of Ptolemaic masonry. Other constructions have lately been found on the west of the building. It is perhaps then in this region, the northwest part of the Government Hospital site and the adjoining British Consulate that we should now look for the theatre. In the erection of the Government Hospital radiological

department in the northwest corner of the site many parts of columns and marbles are said to have been discovered.

As already stated above during the excavations many interesting small objects and other finds came to light. The site was most prolific in pottery which was mainly of the Roman period. Only below the accumulation of the mound of débris was late Ptolemaic ware discovered, though naturally stray pieces appeared here and there. The bulk of the Roman pottery is coarse ware of a domestic or commercial type. Large wine or water jars predominate and other large coarse vessels for kitchen use. Finer wares are rarer. In the lower layers a certain amount of *terra sigillata* was found. This belongs mostly to the eastern types, the so-called Samian or Pergamene, but there are a few pieces which may actually be Arretine. Interesting are a number of fragments of mortaria and potters' stamps. These seem to divide into two classes, one of coarse red ware with stamps in Greek which is probably local and the other of pinkish pebbly clay with stamps in Latin which would seem to be imported. In the upper levels was found a considerable quantity of Late A and B ware. This bears decoration in relief of fish, animals and human figures, or else the usual stamp, d, slashed, or rouletted ornament. There are some pieces of ware similar to Late B ware with painted ornament which may be a transitional class between the Late A Ware and the painted, so-called Coptic ware, several fragments of which were also found. Egypt seems to have been almost certainly one of the countries where Late A and its kindred wares were made, though it may have been made also in North Africa, Tunis, Algeria, and Morocco. It has been found on sites in Upper Egypt, Antinoe, Abydos, Aswan and the clay appears to be akin to Upper Egyptian clay. A number of amphora handles with stamped inscriptions in Greek were found and these come from wine jars imported in Ptolemaic times from Rhodes, Cnidus, and Thasos. Many lamps mostly fragmentary were found, and some of these are of local fabric, but many are obviously imports. Many fragments of cut and carved animal bones were found. Some of the carved pieces are unfinished. They belong to a class of carved bones often found in Egypt, which were made for the decoration of wooden caskets, jewel boxes, and handles of small knives, and are called by archaeologists alexandrian (5) but hitherto they have been generally supposed that such carved bones were made in Alexandria. From the finding of partially cut bones, cores of bone from which slices have been cut, and other worked pieces of bone clearly the waste from workshops proves definitely that the cutting and carving of bones for decorative purposes was extensively practised in Alexandria. There are also many bone pins, and in addition long unworked or partially worked strips of bone for making into pins which again prove that such pins were made in Alexandria. The finest carved bone is a knife handle with on each side a design of birds in a wavy scroll. One scene seems to depict the battle of the cranes and pigmies. This design resembles those which often occur on the tapestry woven textiles of Egypt of the third and fourth centuries A.D. There are many fragments of glass of good quality and many pieces of lapis Lacedaemonius, a green porphyry which was imported from Greece where it is found only at a site near Sparta. The quarries were worked in the Mycenaean Age, but not in the classical period. This porphyry, however, became popular in the Roman period and

was then exported freely to Italy and to the countries of the Near East. It was used for decorative work in floors and on walls. A fragment of wall painting found at this same site imitates lapis *Lacedaemonius*. It was apparently never imported into Egypt in Pharaonic times, but in the Roman period was freely used. An exceptional find is a bronze brooch or fibula with engraved ornament which was covered with gold leaf. Lastly must be mentioned the discovery of a number of ostraca or fragments of pottery bearing inscriptions incised in fine Greek characters. These have not yet been read, but appear to be of a religious character, perhaps dedications at a shrine.

From a study of the remains of the walls of Alexandria, now unfortunately almost completely destroyed and from the illustrations of them in the *Description de l'Égypte* it would appear that they were in all probability the Late Roman or Early Byzantine walls of the city. So far as can be told there is a distinct resemblance between them and the surviving part of the Roman fortress of Babylon now incorporated in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. The walls of Alexandria, however, must have been often repaired and strengthened in the Islamic period and the latest changes would have been those of Mohammed Ali to whom perhaps the outworks were due.

1. See Noack, *Ath. Mitt.* 1900, p. 215 ff. and Botti, *Bull. Soc. Arch. Alex.* No. 1, p. 56 ff.

2. For information about the forts of Alexandria I have to thank Colonel Abdel Rahman Zaki, Director of the Military Museum, Cairo, and M. Etienne Combe. See also Prince Omar Toussoun, *Bull. Soc. Arch. Alex.* No. 34, p. 23 ff., no. 11.

3. Dutih, *Bull. Soc. Arch. Alex.* No. 7, fig. 10, p. 55 ff.

4. Breccia, *Alexandria of Aegyptus*, p. 90, fig. 35; Adriani, *Sculture Monumentali del Museo Greco-Romano di Alessandria*.

5. Szzygowski, *Bull. Soc. Arch. Alex.* No. 5, p. 3 ff.

Alan J.B. Wace.
