‘Gnathia’ Lekanai from Tell Atrib
The luxurious Hellenistic ‘Gnathia’ tableware continues to be the object of numerous studies. It is a black-glazed pottery with ribbing and painted decoration, where the design is usually overpainted with cream and yellow, and occasionally red or blue paint. Ribbing is usually found on the lower part of the body and is sometimes separated from the upper section of ribbing by a register with painted decoration on a smooth surface.

This kind of pottery was first identified in Italian Apulia. The name comes from the town of Gnathia where a large deposit of this pottery was found. Another large deposit of similar ware was found on the west slope of the Acropolis in Athens and was dubbed the ‘West Slope Ware’. Both names refer in fact to the same kind of tableware which was produced in the fourth and third centuries BC in different places, including Asia Minor (e.g. Pergamon, Ephesus), Palestine and others. The only way of ascertaining where a specific vessel was made is by examining the fabric and decoration, because on the face of it the pottery is very similar.

Professor Karol Myśliwiec, the director of excavations in Tell Atrib (Nile Delta) from 1985 to 1995, first drew my attention to this pottery. The site produced an assemblage of more than 80 fragmentarily preserved vessels, which is a large group by any standards. The present article is but a sample of the finds, a complete study being now in preparation for publication in a volume on the Hellenistic and Roman ceramics from Tell Atrib.

Skyphoi constituted the most numerous group of Gnathia ware from the excavations, altogether 35 vessels, followed by large and small vases – 21, plates – 10, and a few unguentaria, bowls and other forms. An examination of the clay and the decoration left no doubt that the ceramics came from different production centres. In this paper, however, I would like to concentrate on just one kind of vessels, namely:

3. I dedicate this work to Professor Myśliwiec in gratitude for his generous support and inspiring mentorship over the years.
The *lekane* is a broad shallow bowl with wide out-turned rim.\(^4\) The rim is slightly everted, and the body of the bowl is almost hemispherical, with plain walls. It has a flaring ogee ring base. Two horizontal handles are attached under the rim, either arched or shaped like an upside-down U. True to the ware, it is coated with black glaze. The decoration consists of a band on the rim, painted between either one or two grooves, both inside and outside of the bowl. Our examples also have a two-coloured rosette, also surrounded by a groove. The grooves are not painted, but incised, revealing the colour of the clay.

1. Lekane (Fig. 1)

Dia. rim 30cm, H. 13cm, Dia. ring base 12cm.

Fragmentary preserved, clay light olive brown (2.5YR5/4). The fabric in the break is compact, the glaze a dull black. Tiny mica pieces and rare lime particles are present. Under the glaze, the colour of the clay is a light reddish brown 2.5YR6/4. The painted decoration is in light reddish brown (2.5YR6/3) and light pink (7.5R8/2). On the bottom of the bowl there is a rosette with twelve petals, painted alternately beige and cream. This rosette is encircled by a double groove. On the rim, in the space between the first double groove and the second one, there is a schematic laurel wreath. The stem is painted in beige and

\(^4\) For the Greek names of diverse pottery forms, see G.M.A. Richter, M.J. Milne, Shapes and names of Athenian vases, New York 1935, pp. 23–24, Figs 149–150.
there are small perpendicular leaves of the same colour across the stem, while the parallel leaves are creamy in color. In one place the artisan missed a pair of perpendicular leaves.

Archaeological context: end of the third – first half of the second century BC, as indicated by pottery stamps, coins, terracottas, and terracotta oil lamps.


2. LEKANE (Fig. 2)

Dia. rim 32cm, Dia. ring base 14cm.

Fragmentary preserved, clay compact, light red (2.5YR5/6), with tiny particles of mica, rare lime particles. Black metallic glaze; some brown spots only on the rim border.

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7 H. Szymańska, Terres cuites d’Aithribis, MRE 12, Turnhout 2005 [Terrres cuites], Nos 4, 14, 144, 229.
Several fragments of rim, bowl and foot. Trace of a handle, probably similar in shape to the one in the bowl described above, observed under the rim. The bottom of the bowl was decorated with a six-petalled rosette, the petals being alternately beige and white, the ornament surrounded by a single groove. The decoration of the rim consisted of alternately light brown (7.5YR6/4) and white spots, separated by a double groove. A single groove ran along the edge of the rim. Traces of white paint can be observed on these fragments.

Archaeological context: end of the third – first half of the second century BC, as indicated by pottery stamps,9 coins,10 terracotta oil lamps.11


3. Lekane (Fig. 3)

Dia. rim: 32 cm.

Clay reddish yellow (5YR7/6), compact, well fired, with some mica. Black glaze with some brown spots under the rim (7.5R4/6).

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9 SZTETYLLO, Pottery stamps, Nos 46, 86, 109, 130.
10 KRZYZANOWSKA, Les monnaies, Nos 26, 39, 41, 43 (Ptolemy IV), (Ptolemy VI, 3 coins).
11 MŁYNARCZYK, Terracotta Oil Lamps, Nos 28, 121, 336.
Rim decorated with an incised, schematic band of decoration featuring ivy scroll; at the end of each tendril there is a painted leaf (the paint is no longer visible: only a negative impression remains).

Archaeological context: second century BC, as indicated by pottery stamps, coins, terracotta oil lamps.


* Vessels of Gnathia ware found in Tell Atrib did not originate from one production centre and the sherds discussed in this article demonstrate characteristics of products made in Asia Minor (fragments 1 and 2) and perhaps Italy (fragment 3). The ware constitutes therefore important evidence of commercial exchange between ancient Athribis and other regions around the Mediterranean Sea in the third and second centuries BC.

These luxurious products are indicative of a lifestyle of the inhabitants of Athribis reflecting their social status and ethnic structure. The relations between the specific demographical structure of the Athribians and their commercial exchange have already been discussed by H. Szymańska.

The Gnathia ware assemblage from Tell Atrib testifies to a fondness for luxury within a particular group of its inhabitants. This group may have been made up of Greeks arriving in numbers at a certain time, carrying with them cultural traditions from the Classical world. One should keep in mind the Greek colonization of Athribis and the role in it of veterans from the army of Alexander the Great. This could have stimulated the production of local imitations of Greek pottery, abundantly exemplified by finds from the site.

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12 SZTETYŁLO, Pottery stamps, Nos 8, 34, 48.
13 KRYZANOWSKA, Les monnaies, (Ptolemy VI, 5 coins).
14 MLYNARCZYK, Terracotta Oil Lamps, Nos 5, 6, 21, 80, 101, 104, 147, 169, 188.
15 H. Szymańska, Terres cuites, pp. 15, 145–158.
Since the presence of Gnathia type pottery is an important element in the determination of the character of colonization in any studied region, it is worth pointing out that the presence of Gnathia ware in Egypt has been noted in Alexandria,18 Buto19 and Tebtynis (not published).

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