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# GLASS FINDS FROM THE BASILICA IN MAREA, 2004

Renata Kucharczyk

In the 2004 season, the excavations in the Basilica area yielded a considerable assemblage of glass fragments, representing essentially the same repertory of recorded shapes as on many other church sites. Lamps continued to predominate, the most plentiful being bowl-shaped lamps with stems for insertion in *polycandela*. By contrast, lamps with handles for suspension were less numerous. Some wineglass feet, as well as fragments of bottles of different kind and size also appeared in the assemblage, as did fragments of window glass. Nearly all the glass is of bluish-green fabric, which is characteristic of the Alexandrian region in Byzantine and Early Islamic times. Other colors include greenish-yellow, light blue, light green, light amber. The glass was found very poorly preserved, often covered with a thick, black

weathering layer. The quantity of glass sherds, their quality and workmanship lead to the assumption that they were made on the spot, as they are unlikely to have been traded far. This hypothesis seems to be further upheld by a malformed fragment of hollow-stem lamp.

The vessels were free blown, except for one fragment of small toilet bottle blown in a mold. The pontil scar, visible on the bases of the solid stem lamps and wineglasses, is sometimes prominent and shows that the rims were reworked. Very few pieces are decorated. Relief ornamentation is usually simple, consisting of applied wound trails of a darker green than the vessel, pinched protrusions, a pattern executed in honeycomb mold, holes and grooves on the lamp stems. The material ranges in date from the 6th to the 7th century AD.

## LAMPS

Lamps used to illuminate the altars and icons were again well represented among the finds. The similarity in their appearance is so striking that it might even suggest manufacture not only by the same workshops, but even by the same hand. Poor fabric and careless fashioning is distinctive. In the manufacture of purely utilitarian items, such as lamps, no special care was deemed necessary. A significant number of

fragments was found in a room close to the southwestern corner of the basilica together with a large amount of coins which may suggest shop stock.<sup>1</sup> More than 30 solid and hollowed stems, together with numerous fragments of the rims attached to thin side-walls, were recovered from the dig. Of special note are lamps with solid stems, which predominate in the material from the Basilica [*Fig. 1:1-7*].<sup>2</sup> They differ from

1 For the archaeological report, see H. Szymańska, K. Babraj in this volume

2 Identified already in the past season, cf. R. Kucharczyk, "The glass finds from the Basilica in Marea, 2003 Season", *PAM XV, Reports 2003* (2004), 63-64 and Fig. 1.

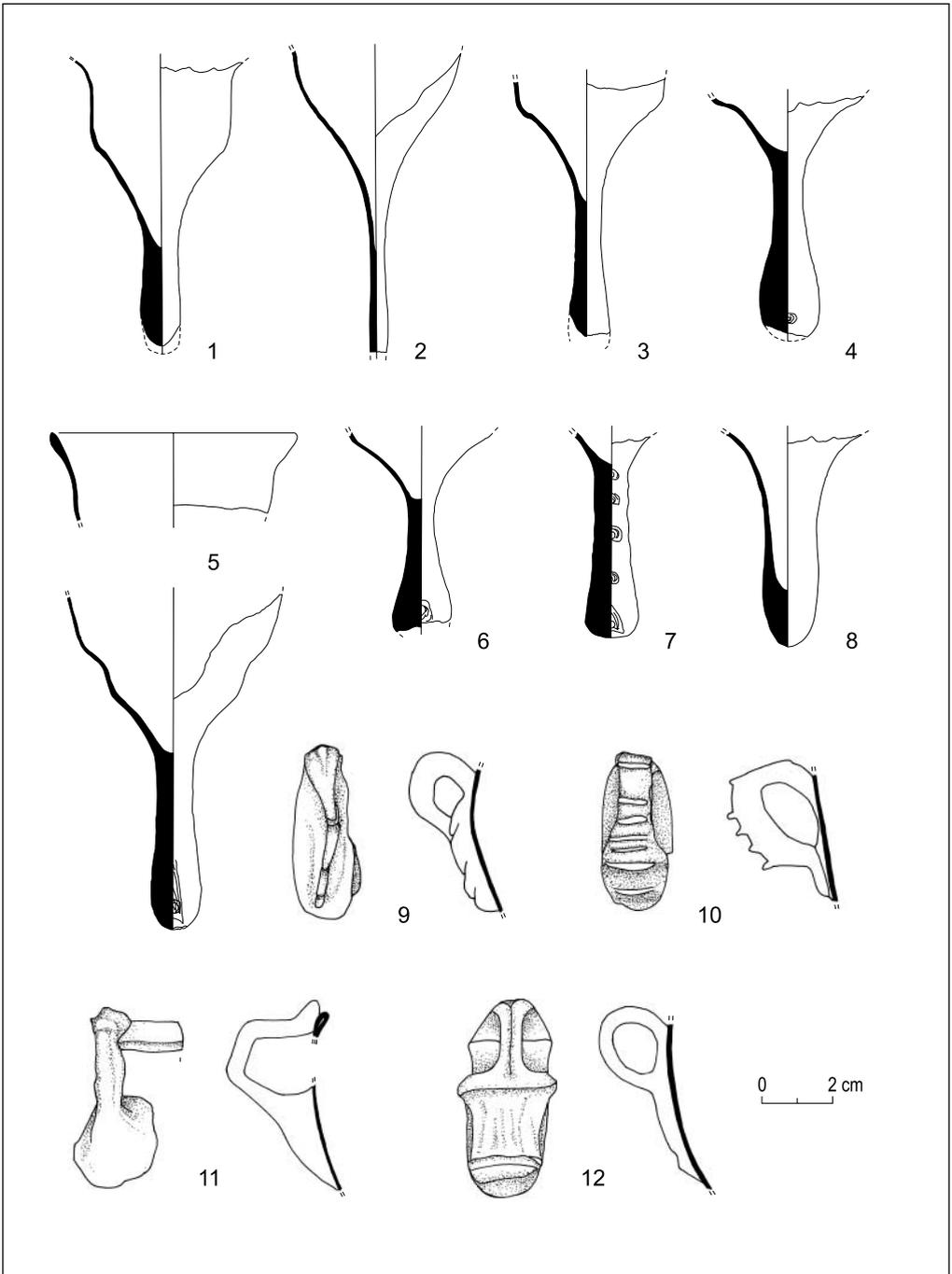


Fig. 1. Byzantine glass lamps  
(Drawing R. Mahler after R. Kucharczyk)

the well known solid stem type in having holes or grooves impressed with a tool on one side. Most of the stems are unevenly flattened, at the bottom, probably by a pontil. The quantities of fragmentary lamps of this type yielded in excavations of sites in the vicinity of Alexandria makes it reasonable to speak of not just local production, but of perhaps a regional (Alexandrian ?) 'trade-mark'!

Another type found in the Basilica is a tumbler-shaped lamp with slightly flaring wall, folding-out rim and short loop handles, attached at the top of a rim at three apices of an imaginary triangle inscribed into the

circle of the rim [*Fig. 1:11*]. This type of hanging lamp occurs with or without a wick holder, although no wick-holders have been found so far. The handled lamps could have been placed on a flat surface or suspended. Examples of such lamps are especially common in the eastern Mediterranean; they have been identified at Kom el-Dikka<sup>3</sup> and at the church in Medinet Madi (Fayum).<sup>4</sup>

The loop handles with indented tails found in the fill originate presumably from yet another type of suspended lamp [*Fig. 1:9, 10, 12*]. These handles are either on the edge of the rim or on the body, but no rims and bases could be attributed to them so far.<sup>5</sup>

## WINEGLASSES

One of the commonest vessels found on church sites are wineglasses and it is believed that they could have served as lighting devices. The same can be said likewise of the vessels from our Basilica. The finds consist of feet with solid stems. Each stem displays the remains of a pontil mark. Three fragments recovered this season [*Fig. 2:1-3*]

are remarkably similar to examples recorded at Kom el-Dikka.<sup>6</sup> The fragile bowls do not survive as a rule, but it is evident that they were made separately and fused on. One of the items is of particular interest, as it combines two glass colors: a bowl made of light blue glass supported on a light greenish foot [*Fig. 2:2*].

## DOMESTIC GLASSWARE

All the other forms of glass found during this campaign belong to various categories of domestic glassware [*Fig. 2:4-11*]: beakers and thick-walled bowls, wide-bodied storage jars, funnel-neck bottles and simple flasks of different size used also for storing holy oils.<sup>7</sup> One fragment of bottle, presumably of globular shape, merits special attention. The body is extremely thin, pale

green, with three uneven, green wavy trails wound around the body and a pinch between the horizontal trails [*Fig. 2:10*]. Such protrusions may have formed a row (rows?) around the circumference. Pinched ornamentation, characteristic of the late Byzantine period, is observed chiefly on closed vessels, such as bottles and flasks. Examples have been recorded at Kom el-Dikka,

3 M. Rodziewicz, *Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie, Alexandrie III* (Warsaw 1984), 241, 438, Pl. 73:381.

4 F. Silvano, *Vetri Bizantici dall'Egitto, Medinet Madi 1988* (Pisa 1999), 23-26, nos. 11-16.

5 G. M. Crowfoot and D. B. Harden, "Early Byzantine and later glass lamps", *JEA* 17 (1931), 205, Pl. XXX:47.

6 Rodziewicz, *op. cit.*, 240-241, Fig. 262, 438, Pl. 73:372, 376-379.

7 Already recorded at the Marea excavations, cf. R. Kucharczyk, "Marea 2001 : Windowpanes and other glass finds", *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 65-66, Fig.1:1-6.

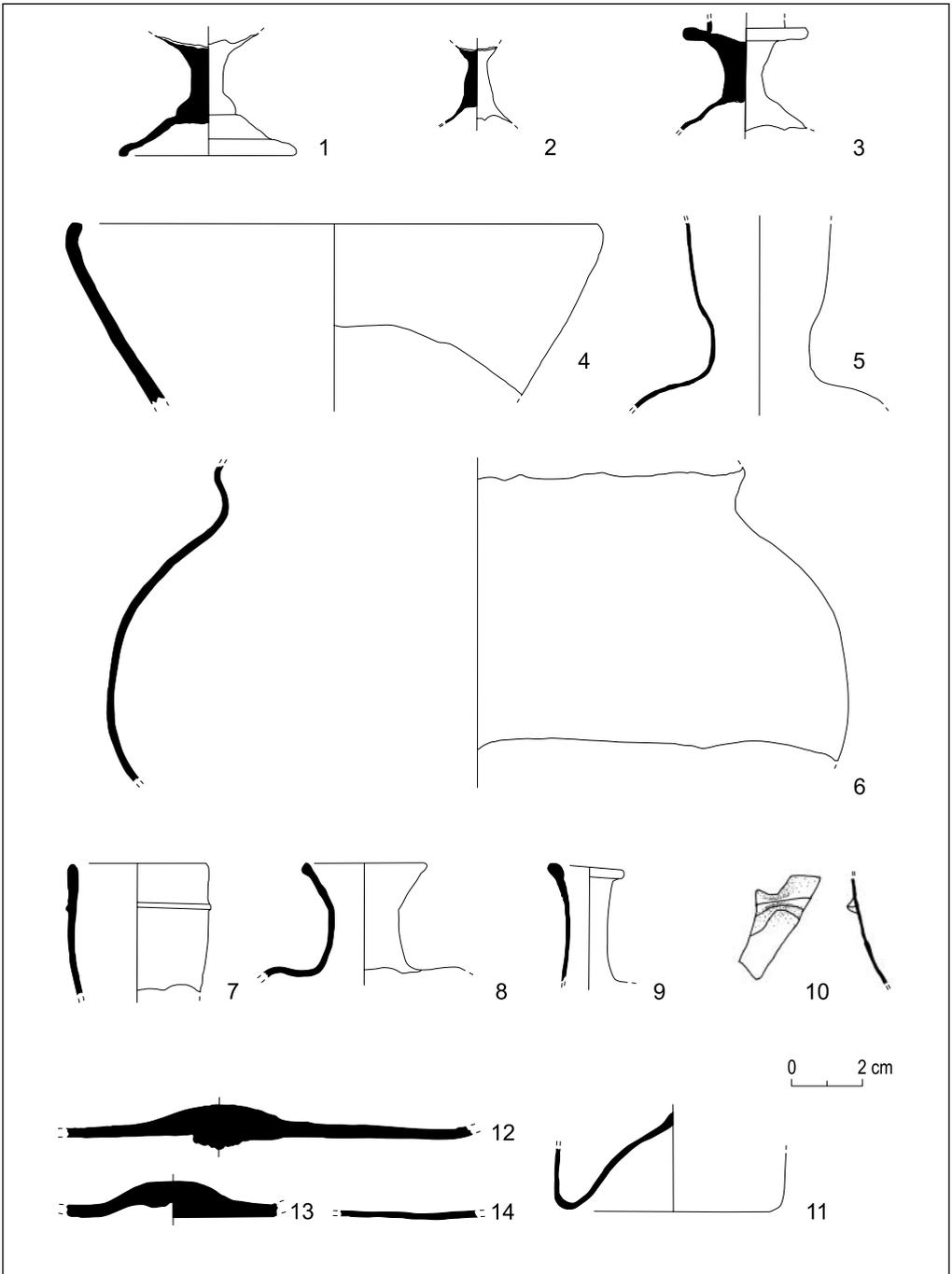


Fig. 2. Wineglasses (1-2), domestic glassware (4-11) and windowpanes (12-14)  
(Drawing R. Mahler after R. Kucbarczyk)

Marea,<sup>8</sup> Fustat,<sup>9</sup> and in the Kellia glass assemblages.<sup>10</sup> One should note that this

ornamentation occurs also on the open forms, such as bowls<sup>11</sup> and lamps.<sup>12</sup>

## WINDOWPANES

Windowpanes, one of the most common and numerous finds in the Byzantine churches and monasteries, have also been noted at the Basilica site. Windows allowed not only for lighting the interior, but they were necessary as protection against climatic conditions. Bluish-green, heavily corroded and weathered circular panes, referred to as "bull's eye" disks (three fragments found, reconstructed rim diameters of up to 18 and 20 cm), featuring very thick centers and

tapering to looped-out rims [*Fig. 2:12-13*], were made by the crown method. Crude pontil marks are observed in the middle of the panes. So far, no remains of window frames have come to light at the Basilica site. One sherd of windowpane appears to be cast, possibly roller-molded [*Fig. 2:14*], but it is too small and decomposed for technique identification not to raise any doubts. The blackish, weathered surface bears obvious signs of tooling.

8 See above, 58 and Fig. 2:10.

9 D. Foy, "L'heritage antique et byzantin dans la verrerie islamique: exemples d'Istabl 'Antar-Fostat", *AnnIsl* 34 (2000), 161-162, Fig. 13:3-8.

10 P. Ballet, N. Bosson, M. Rassart-Debergh, Kellia, II/2. L'ermitage copte QR 195, *Le Verre*, no. 5.

11 Y. Gorin-Rozen, "Glass from Monasteries and Chapels in South Sinai" in *IAA Reports* 9 (Jerusalem 2000), 235-237, Fig. 2:1.

12 G.T. Scanlon and R. Pinder-Wilson, *Fustat Glass* (London 2001), 64-66, Pl. 32h-i.