

جمعية الآثار بالإسكندرية

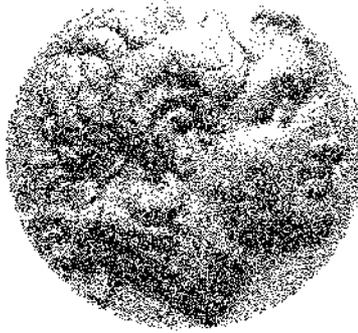
SOCIÉTÉ ARCHÉOLOGIQUE D'ALEXANDRIE

1893 - 2003

110 ans

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**The Archaeological Society
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Contents

Preface	7
List of Illustrations	9
Bangnall, Roger S., Dioskourides: Three Rolls	11
Rodziewicz, M., Philoxenité - Pilgrimage Harbor of Abu Mina	27
Rodziewicz, E., On Alexandrian School of Ivory Carvings in Late Antiquity	47
Murphy, Gladys Frantz, The Reinstitution of Courts in Early Islamic Egypt	71
Bonacasa, N., Aspects and New Problems of Late Alexandrian Sculpture	85
Grossmann, P., Zu dem angeblichen befestigten Kloster über der Südmauer von al-Kâb	113

Preface

The issuing of volume 47 coincides with an auspicious occasion, namely that of our Society's attaining the venerable age of one hundred and ten years, an age undoubtedly worthy of being proud of. On this occasion one necessarily remembers the founding fathers who, led by Geoseppi Botti, most wisely conceived in 1893 the idea of establishing the Archaeological Society of Alexandria and of issuing a regular Bulletin. The course of events over the long span of 110 years has not been without its hazards, which at a certain time, threatened the Society's very existence. It is thanks to the resilience and tenacity of the civic community of Alexandria and their international friends that the Society is still going strong and capable of sustaining the publication of the Bulletin as well as maintaining multiple other cultural activities.

The survival of our Archaeological Society into its second hundred years calls to mind an ancient Egyptian tale, the so-called Westcar papyrus (W.M.Flinders Petrie, *Egyptian Tales*, 1895). It tells of a magician called Dedi who lived to the ripe old age of one hundred and ten years in the reign of King Khufu. Dedi could still eat "500 loaves of bread, a side of beef and drink 100 draughts of beer.... He restores the head that is smitten off; he knows how to cause the lion to follow him trailing his halter on the ground; he knows the designs of the dwelling of Tahuti which King Khufu long sought after that he might make the like of them in his pyramid." In spite of his extreme old age, "Dedi sat blithely in the sun, free of infirmities without the babble of dotage. This is the salutation to worthy age."

This tale is not without its symbolic relevance. Archaeology in a sense, strives to restore "smitten off heads" and continues to seek

to unravel the mysterious designs of the pyramids ! The contributions to the present volume cover a variety of areas : Greek papyri (R.S.Bagnall), Arabic papyri (G. Frantz-Murphy), Roman art and craft (N. Bonacasa & E.Rodziewicz), late Roman archaeology (M. Rodziewicz and P. Grossmann). In a metaphorical / figurative sense and in their own ways, they are restoring "smitten off heads". To them all, I extend my sincere thanks for their continued cooperation.

My special thanks go to the Moharram Press, not only for so generously undertaking the free publication of this volume, but especially for their warm and friendly spirit as represented by the director general, Mr. Mostafa Mahdy and Mr. Mohammed Naguib Salah-el- Din, head of the technical department.

Last but not least, my special thanks go to Prof. Mona Haggag, secretary general of the Society who patiently handled every step in the intricate process of publication with her typical devotion and dedication. She deserves our sincere appreciation and gratitude.

Mostafa El-Abbadi

List of Illustrations

- Fig. 1: Stone of Dioskourides
- Fig. 2: Map of Marcotis till El Alamein. Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.
- Fig. 3: Philoxenité – pilgrimage harbour to Abu Mina (5th-7th cent.AD)
A – Stone piers, B – Causeway, C – Inner port (Kibotos),
D – Cemetery, E – Remains of rural establishments (5th – 7th cent. AD), F – Double peristile building used as a hospice with church and baptistery (6th – beg. of 8th cent. AD), G – Village with two wineries (4th – 8th cent. AD).
Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.
- Fig. 4: Position of harbours at Philoxenité and Taposiris Magna in the western arm of lake Mareotis, seen from the east.
Drawn by M.Rodziewicz.
- Fig. 5: Double peristile building (hospice) in Mareotis (modern Howaryia) with church in the middle and baptistery. (6th – beg. of 8th cent. AD). Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.
- Fig. 6: Opus sectile mosaics in the church at modern Huwaryia (comp. Fig.4). Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.
- Fig. 7: Hypothetical reconstruction of ivory relief from house H at street R4 in Alexandria. Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.
- Fig. 8: Relief on tubular bone from Rhacotis (Graeco-Roman Museum). Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.

Fig. 9: Ivory pyxis from Berlin (Staatliche Museen). Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.

Fig. 10: Ivory plaque from Cenchreai (Isthmia Museum). Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.

Fig. 11: Head of an old man Alexandria Inv. no. 3336.

Fig. 12: The head of Alexandria.

Fig. 13: Portrait from Delos.

Fig. 14: Republican portrait in the Roman National Museum.

Fig. 15: Portrait head in the Regional Archaeological Museum in Syracuse.

Fig. 16: Portrait of a priestess from Alexandria.

Fig. 17: the head of a Libyan or Egyptian in Syracuse.

Fig. 18: The same head of fig. 17.

Fig. 19: Al-Kâb.

On Alexandrian School of Ivory Carving in Late Antiquity

Elzbieta Rodziewicz

The Alexandrian soil-bound conditions of finding well preserved ivory objects (which are more fragile than those made of bone) in regular or casual excavations carried out in the city, are rather modest. Plentiful of bone reliefs (and daily use objects) and at the same time lack of visible ivory artifacts in the Graeco-Roman Museum at Alexandria, as well as other collections formed in, and around the city (Benachi Museum in Athens, Gustav Mustachi collection in London etc.) developed skepticism among historians of ancient art., and disbelieve in correctness of old attributions to Alexandria some top quality ivory reliefs from Mediterranean countries⁽¹⁾. The fundamental work on bone and ivory carvings of J. Strzygowski "Hellenistische und Koptische Kunst in Alexandria" published a hundred years ago (Bulletin de la Société Archéologique d' Alexandrie No 5, 1902) initiated an intense research on the subject. Yet, for the lack of ivories with unquestionably Alexandrian provenance, objects found elsewhere and attributed by many scholars to Alexandrian school had often been criticized, and shifted to another production centers in Syria.

(1) R. D. Barnett, *Ancient Ivories in the Middle East*, London 1982 p. 69: "At Alexandria there is little evidence of a particularly thriving market in ivory"; B.J. Beckwith, *Coptic Sculpture 300-1300*, London 1963 p. 8: "If Alexandria contributed at all to the artistic heritage of which Constantinople, after the sack of Rome in 410 and 455, was to become the principal guardian, it is arguable that her role as a metropolis of creative Christian art. had been played out long before the fifth century". Throughout the last century we could observe development of two radically different opinions on the existence of ivory school in late Roman and Byzantine Alexandria.

Palestine or Constantinople⁽²⁾. Actually the best ivory reliefs of Late Roman and Byzantine periods preserved around the world, such as consular diptychs, pyxides, book-covers, chests, caskets, large thrones adorned with carved ivories etc. were found mostly outside of Egypt, but many scholars suspected among them products of Alexandrian workshops. Luckily, the intensive archaeological research of the last few decades in Alexandria, allowed us to gather more evidence on existing in Late Roman and Byzantine periods the unquestionably ivories ateliers, thanks to the unearthed wasters, workshop material, half-products, and also finished pieces of highest quality, carved not only in bone, but also in ivory⁽³⁾.

The oldest from Kom el Dikka excavation ivory figure of high artistic quality has been unearthed in trench M XVI,1

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- (2) K. Weitzmann, *Loca Sancta*, DOP 28, 1974, p. 31 ff and 46 ff.; K. Wessel, *Koptische Kunst. Die Spätantike in Ägypten*, Recklinghausen 1963; *ibid.* *La cattedra di Massimiano e la sua scuola*, in: *Corsi di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 1958, p. 111 ff.; *ibid.* *Hellenismus in Frühbyzantinischen Alexandrien*, *Alessandria e il mondo ellenistico-romano. Studi in onore A. Adriani 2*, Roma 1984 pp. 396-399; E.B. Smith, *The Alexandrian Origin of the Chair of Maximianus*, *AJA* 21, 1917, p. 228 sq.; K. Elderkin, *An Alexandrian Carved Casket of the Fourth Century*, *AJA* 30, 1926, p sq.; Ch. R. Morey, *The Early Christian Ivories of the Eastern Empire*, *Oaks Papers I*, 1941, p. 41 sq.; J. Kolwitz, *Alexandrinische Elfenbeine* in: *Christentum am Nil*, *Villa Hügel* 1963, pp. 277 sq.; W. V. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des Frühen Mittelalters*, Mainz/Rhein 1976
- (3) E. Rodziewicz, *Late Antique Ivory and Bone Plaquettes in the National Museum in Warsaw*, *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie*, Vol.VII, 1966, 2, pp. 33-37; *id.* *Reliefs figurés en os des fouilles à Kom el-Dikka*, *ET. X*, Varsovie 1978, pp. 318-336; *Remarks on Chryselephantine Statue from Alexandria* in: *Roma e l'Egitto Nell'Antichità Classica*, Roma 1992 pp. 317-328; *id.* *Archaeological Evidence of Bone and Ivory Carvings in Alexandria* in: *BCH, Suppl.33*, Athens 1998 pp. 135-158; *id.* *Bone and Ivory Carvings in Early Christian Alexandria* in: *Alexandrie médiévale* 3, IFAO, Le Caire (in print).

(MXVII) in late 1960s, at the so called theatre street⁽⁴⁾. It represents a standing female figure, clad in richly draped peplos delicately carved in high relief, on a very thick ivory plaque. Although unearthed in the late 6th early 7th cent. archaeological context, it was obviously sculpted much earlier, and according to its iconographical and stylistic properties can be dated to late Hellenistic – early Roman period⁽⁵⁾.

Among numerous bone and ivory pieces such as partly worked, unfinished objects, workshop material, off-cuts and chunks of unworked ivory found recently in Alexandria, the most precious ivory relief has been found in the area of ancient Caesareum (winter 2002) datable to late 4th – 5th century AD. It is comparable to the best ivory reliefs from the whole Mediterranean of the late Roman and Byzantine periods⁽⁶⁾. It represents a young male figure clad in chlamys and tight tunica. There is fragmentally preserved horse standing at his left side, and allegorical figure flying over his head. Although the relief was found badly fractured and incomplete, it was clear from the very beginning that it constitutes a part of probably larger frieze with apparently historical scene, comparable to the famous one from Ephesus⁽⁷⁾.

(4) M. Rodziewicz, *Stratigraphie du sondage M XVI, I dans la partie Sud de Kôm el-Dikka*, ET. III, 1969 pp.133-145; id. *Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie*, Alexandria III, Varsovie 1984, figs 2 a-b, 6.

(5) E. Rodziewicz, *Reliefs figurés en os des fouilles à Kôm el-Dikka*, ET X, 1978 p. 317-336, fig. 1; *Remarks on Chryzelephantine Statue from Alexandria* op. cit. fig. 10; id. *Archaeological Evidence of Bone and Ivory Carvings in Alexandria* op. cit. fig. 39.

(6) E. Rodziewicz, *Bone and Ivory Carvings in Early Christian Alexandria*, op. cit.

(7) E. Lessing and W. Oberleitner, *Ephesos, Weltstadt der Antike*, Vienna-Heidelberg 1978 Pl. 9; F. Eichler, *Ephesos, Grabungsbericht 1968*, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1969, pp. 12 ff; H. Wetters, *Ephesos, Vorläufiger Grabungsbericht*, 1969; *ibid.* 1970, p.16, n.67, Pl. VII a-c; P.G. Dawid, *Restaurierungsarbeiten von 1965-1970*, *Österreichische Jahreshefte* 50 (1972-75, Beiblatt, pp. 542-550; R.D. Barnett, *Ancient Ivories in the Middle East*, London 1982, Pl. 72.

The figure of *chlamydatos* with horse found in Alexandrian Caesareum, belongs to the class of highest quality late Roman-early Byzantine reliefs known hitherto. Chronologically parallel to this piece is another ivory relief from Alexandria, excavated in late 1980s at the street R4, house H, room 3, Kom el Dikka⁽⁸⁾. This place is located north of more completely preserved houses A – D, where also numerous bone, and few ivory reliefs of late Roman/Byzantine period have been unearthed⁽⁹⁾. This very interesting ivory relief from house H, represents a thick applique with arched edge over a young male's bust. Unfortunately the facial features are split off⁽¹⁰⁾. Its valuable contribution to the long lasting discussion on Alexandrian ivory carvings was not underlined in mentioned publication. The dispute on the subject was obviously not followed by the author⁽¹¹⁾. Relief was described in a very short way, and insufficient. Its important place in largely discussed problem on Alexandrian school of ivory carvings in late Roman and Byzantine period was not picked up, although the object gives us valuable archaeological evidence to the local production, and helps to fill an apparent vacuum in a chain of archaeological evidence supporting the production of high quality ivory reliefs in the city.

(8) J. Jablonowska-Taracha, Bone Objects from Polish Excavations at Kom el Dikka, Alexandria (1988-1990), *Archeologia* LI, 2000, p. 57, Pl. XII.2

(9) M. Rodziewicz, Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie. *Alexandrie III*, Varsovie 1984, p. 149, fig. 169, p. 173, figs. 198-199, pp. 244-245, figs. 267-268; E. Rodziewicz, Bone Carvings Discovered at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria in 1967, *ET.III*, 1966, pp. 147-152; id. Relief figurés en os des fouilles de Kom el-Dikka op.cit.; id. Remarks on Chryselephantine Statue from Alexandria,, op.cit.; On Stylistical and Technical Components of the Roman Coloured Bone Appliques from Egypt, *Alessandria e il Mondo Ellenistico-Romano*, Roma 1995, pp. 405-411 Tav. LXXV; id. Archaeological Evidence of Bone and Ivory Carvings in Alexandria, *BCH*, suppl. 33, p. 135-158.

(10) Jablonowska-Taracha op.cit. p. 59, pl. XII.2

(11) Jablonowska-Taracha op.cit. p.57.

The author of the above mentioned publication writes: "As regards the type, however, it undoubtedly derives from the funerary portraits in Late Roman sculpture and is reminiscent of some portrait stelae found in Oxyrhynchos, dated to the late 3rd and 4th centuries A. D."⁽¹²⁾ It is presented as one of many other second-rate objects, although its value is much exceeding all the other pieces presented in this article. Even its shape deserves a special consideration because it also may suggest Alexandrian school. Undertaken efforts to define original form of applique, its eventual frame, and setting in unpreserved background, would facilitate the identification of iconography and style, and locate it in one of many categories of reliefs known from that time. Judging from the published photo, the ivory may present a fragment of an upper (arched part) of a longer applique with straight cut bottom, and straight side edges. Indirect parallels can be detected in the ivory appliques decorating a wooden chest found in Meroitic burial of Northern Nubia, influenced by Alexandrian atelier⁽¹³⁾. F. Poulsen has seen in them reflection of rich Alexandrian architectural decorative motifs⁽¹⁴⁾. Similarly shaped ivory inlays can be observed on early Christian caskets

(12) Jablonowska-Taracha op.cit. p. 57. This so important relief is presented without basic knowledge on comparable material within this same category.

(13) C.L. Woolley-D.Randall-Maciver, *Karanog, the Romano-Nubian Cemetery*, Philadelphia 1910, pls. 21, 22, 24, 25; W.B. Emery, *Egypt in Nubia*, London 1965, pl. XXI; S. Wenig, *Africa in Antiquity II, The Catalogue*, Brooklyn 1978, p.104 ff. Fig. 80; L. Török, *Late Antique Nubia*, Budapest 1988, p.98 ff. pl. 38-39; N. B. Millet, *Gebel Adda Expedition. Preliminary Report 1963-1964*, JARCE 3, 1964, p. 7-13, Pl. IV/9,10; E. Seguenny, *L' influence de l'Égypte Greco-Romaine sur la religion Meroitique: Temoignage des objets d'art. mineur*, *Nubische Studien*, Mainz am Rhein 1986, pp. 171-177; E. Rodziewicz, *On Stylistical and Technical Components of the Roman Coloured Bone Appliques from Egypt* op. cit. p. 408 ff.

(14) F. Poulsen, *Gab' es eine alexandrienische Kunst ?*, *Collections of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek* 2, 1938, pp. 52 ff.

from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo⁽¹⁵⁾. Although the plaquettes from mentioned above wooden chests and caskets are flat, incised and painted (not sculpted in relief) their form seem to be analogous. Figures sculpted, or engraved on such plaquettes, were very often framed with carved and painted architectural elements, such as columns (also cut in ivory or bone) at both sides, supporting an arch above, suggesting a rich interior, or edifice in the background. Thus the plaque from the house H at street R4, could have been one of the first ivory piece which served as a prototype of the architectural type of decorative appliques, known from the wooden late Antique chests in Nubia. Usually figural representations shown in architectural environs are sculpted on rectangular plaques. However, because of the poor state of preservation we can not exclude a circular form of relief with male bust found at Kom el Dikka. For this may speak its rounded/arched top, suggesting small medallion similar to those from catacombs in Rome with representations of Christ and Apostle Peter, both dated to 4th century AD⁽¹⁶⁾. On one of them is represented Christ with halo and Egyptian ankh type cross. Yet, both representations are rendered in linear manner, and belong to a very specific category of Alexandrian appliques, coloured with wax paste of red, black and blue/green colours⁽¹⁷⁾. However on the famous so called Brescia casket also dated to the 4th century AD, we have series of small medallions with busts of Christ and

(15) J. Strzygowski, *Koptische Kunst*, CGC, Cairo-Vienna 1904, pp. 172 ff; *The Walters Art. Gallery. Early Christian and Byzantine Art.*, Baltimore 1947, p. 53, no. 181.

(16) W.V. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des Frühen Mittelalters*, Mainz/Rhein, Taf. 100, 209-210.

(17) E. Rodziewicz, *On Stylistical and Technical Components of the Roman Coloured Bone Appliques from Egypt*, op.cit. p. 405 ff. Tav. LXXV; id. *Late Antique Ivory and Bone Plaquettes in the National Museum in Warsaw*, *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie* VII, 1966 No.2 pp. 33-37, fig.3.

Apostles carved in relief⁽¹⁸⁾. Their form refers to Ptolemaic medallions depicting rulers, and also to their later representations carved on invented in Alexandria (of early Roman period) decorative ivory and bone game counters, cut in form of discs with relief busts on one side⁽¹⁹⁾.

Judging from the fragmentally preserved edge of the relief from house H at street R 4, it seems that it was not applied to the flat background, but rather put into a socket, cut out according to relief outline. Taking into account the typical for this kind of objects proportions and their dimensions, it could have been a rectangular plaque with rounded top, on which was enough space to carve a seated person. If it was a rounded medallion there could have been only space for a bust. Yet, the first suggestion of elongated plaque seems to be more feasible. Preserved on the plaque a youthful, beardless face with high voluminous hairdo covering the ears, is typical in the 4th century for representations of young teaching Jesus, which is suggested by the pointing gesture of his right hand fingers. There are numerous such representation attributed to Alexandria, but we would concentrate only on few

(18) J. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art.*, London 1970, p. 20, fig. 36; W.F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des Frühen Mittelalters*, Mainz/Rhein 1976, Taf.57.

(19) M. Rostovtsef, *Interprétation des tessères en os*, RA 5, 1905, pp. 110-124; H. Riad, *Une collection de terrères au musée gréco-romain d' Alexandrie*, Mélanges K. Michalowski, Warsaw 1966, pp.157-166; E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum, *The Finger-Calculus in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, *Studies on Roman Game Counters I*, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 5, 1971, 1-9; id. *Ruler Portraits on Roman Game Counters from Alexandria*, *Studies on Roman Game Counters III* op. cit. pp. 29-38; id. *Alexandriaca*, *Studies on Roman Game Counters IV*, *Chiron* 6, 1976, p. 237 ff; id. *Chiron* 3, 1973, pp. 123 ff.; L. Marangou, *Ptolemäische Fingerring aus Bein*, AM 86, 1971, pp. 165-171; id. *Bone Carvings from Egypt*, Tübingen 1976, pl. 71; Ev. Breccia, *Monuments de L'Égypte Gréco-Romaine I*, Bergamo 1926, Tav. LXIV, 4.

examples of indisputably Alexandrian origin. Within the frame of existing early Christian iconography of proven Alexandrian provenience, the enthroned young Jesus is widely known from the wall painting in Wescher's tomb (Kom el Shuggafa necropolis)⁽²⁰⁾. He appears there as universal sovereign and also miracle maker⁽²¹⁾.

Young, beardless Jesus carved in relief on a bone cylinder, exhibited in Room 1 of Graeco-Roman Museum at Alexandria seems to be the best parallel to piece from house H at street R 4⁽²²⁾. The object from Museum (Inv. No. 13296) was found in Rhacotis at the end of 19th century (1890-1895) and since then constantly exhibited in room I (vitrine No. 5). Its unique value is slightly diminished by the poor state of preservation. It was found broken into three pieces, now joined, but there is missing an important part of sculpted surface at the top, and a whole lower part of tubular bone, which denies the calculation of its whole high, which at present measures 9,5 cm., while the width is 3 – 4 cm. Large cylindrical bone, ovoid in section, has carefully removed marrow inside, while the whole outer surface is covered with high, strongly polished relief. Most protruding fragments of sculpted surface are worn out, by extensive usage in antiquity. It could have served as a stand, container, handle etc. The importance of this object lies first of all in its iconography and style.

(20) A. Adriani, *Repertorio d'arte dell'Egitto greco-romano*, Serie C. I-II. Palermo 1963-1966, p. 184 ff, No. 128, Tav. 103, 348-350, Tav. 104, 351; G.B. De Rossi, *Bull.Arch.Christ.* II, 1864, p. 88; J.-Y. Empereur, *Alexandrie, Hier et demain*, Gallimard 2001, p. 54.

(21) A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography. A Study of its Origin*. Bollingen Series XXXV.10. New York 1968, fig. 109.

(22) G. Botti, *Catalogue des monuments exposés au Gréco-Romain d' Alexandrie*, 1900, Salle I, No 2025, pp. 69 ff.: "os et ivoires provenant des collines à tessons d' Alexandrie". I wish to thank Mr. Ahmed Abd El- Fattah, the Director General of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, who facilitated my work on bone relief Inv. No. 13296, and Dr. Merwat Seif El-Din for all her valuable information, and help during my study in the Graeco-Roman Museum.

In the center of multifigural scene on bone cylinder from Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, there is presented frontally in high relief a young seated man, clad in chiton and himation, with his right hand at his chest in the same gesture as on the relief from house H at street R 4. Similar composition appears on numerous ivory plaques and pyxides found elsewhere, therefore we suspect that the scene was copied on tubular bone from ivory object⁽²³⁾. Ivory plaques dated to 4th century AD, with seated young man (Christ or Philosopher ?) and typical for Alexandrian school of bone and ivory carvings architectural elements in the background, were also found in Corinth (Cenchreai)⁽²⁴⁾. They were undoubtedly produced in Alexandria, since nearly identically carved columns and arches can be observed on the bone plaquette of highest artistic quality representing Satyr playing flute, with facial features of Ptolemy XII Auletes, excavated recently in Alexandria, Inv. No. DI 96.3256.5.7 (110).

The whole composition of multifigural relief from the Museum in Alexandria is centered toward the figure sitting above the five frontally depicted steps, beside which stands a basket with round shaped loafs of bread. There are eight draped figures shown aside in two ranks, on both sides of seated person. To the right and left of steps are located two figures in half kneeling position, one in left, the other in his right profile. One has his head depicted frontally, the other in his left profile. On the same level there are rendered two more persons (behind the kneeling ones) with the proportions of sitting figures. They both hold in their hands ovoid object probably bread. The central figure above the steps is shown in very similar manner to Jesus on Alexandrian wall painting from Kom el Shugafa

(23) Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike* op.cit. nos. 65, 125, 132, 133, 148, 161, 165, 166, 176.

(24) N. Papahatzis, *Ancient Corinth*, Athens 1984, figs. 38-39.

Wescher's hypogeum⁽²⁵⁾. But there the whole scene is presented on one level, while sitting Jesus shown on the bone cylinder is surrounded by four figures located in the upper row, with their legs covered by persons of lower row. They are all depicted frontally, yet, they are composed in Hellenistic manner. Their heads are bent slightly to the sides, and their facial features are treated individually, and quite variously. Details (now partly damaged) were carved very professionally in high relief, by very skilled hand. It is a quick, but high quality work of an experienced carver, who produced probably the same scene both in ivory and also in much cheaper bone, therefore the objects in bone were not finished to the degree observed in ivory pieces, such as the bust from House H. at street R4, peplos figure from trench M XVI at Kom el Dikka, and chlamydatus with horse from Caesareum. All figures around Jesus are crowded, covering each other to various degree, forming realistic assemblage without free background. Free space appears only between the heads of the upper row of figures up to the ring-rim of sculpted object. Unfortunately we can not identify the figure located on the tube at the back side of seated Jesus. Only small part of right hand is preserved, while rest of the figure is broken out.

Sketchily carved, but very vividly assembled group of nine figures clad in Greek way, was sculpted in late Hellenistic/early Roman illusionistic style, like many other late Roman bone carvings and paintings from Alexandria⁽²⁶⁾. Yet, there is depicted

(25) Adriani, Repertorio op.cit.; G.B. De Rossi op.cit.

(26) Especially the relief with dancing Satyr (piper), excavated in western part of ancient Basilea in 1996. See: E. Rodziewicz, Bone and Ivory Carvings in Early Christian Alexandria, IFAO, Alexandrie médiévale III (being printed). Comp also late Roman and early Byzantine Alexandrian wall paintings, especially the one with water-wheel (saqiya) excavated in Western necropolis – Wardian in 1960. See M. Rodziewicz, On Alexandrian Landscape Paintings, Roma E L'Egitto Nell'Antichità Classica, . Atti del I Congresso Internazionale Italo-Egiziano, Roma 1992, pp.329-337, figs. 4-5.

clearly a Christian scene of Jesus-teacher with his disciples, or enthroned universal-sovereign, like in Wescher's tomb⁽²⁷⁾. The scene may be also associated with miraculous multiplication of bread, since the basket with bread is also present in front of a seated person, at the lower part of steps. Assemblage of such a group, turned toward the central figure, may repeat one of the local scenes with disciples gathered around their teacher in meeting place, or public lecture hall, similar to those uncovered at the late Roman bath, south of the theatre at Kom el Dikka, in early 1980s⁽²⁸⁾. Depiction of steps in front of seated Jesus on relief from Rhacotis, repeats exactly the steps, and even their total number in the meeting hall No. 2 at the ancient theatre street in Alexandria⁽²⁹⁾. Three rows of stone seats are located along three walls of auditorium, while additional row of smaller steps is built on the axis of the hall, and they are leading upwards to the central, most honorable seat in front of the entrance. It is exactly the situation which we can see on the bone relief from Rhacotis. This may suggest that the relief was based, and composed on the situation observed in the city, by artist with the local life experience, or copied from the other relief or even painting.

Representation of Jesus as a teacher (philosopher), surrounded by his disciples was common in late Antiquity – early

(27) Adriani, *Repertorio op.cit* ; De Rossi *op.cit.* ; J.-Y. Empereus *op.cit.*

(28) M. Rodziewicz, *Excavations at Kom el-Dikka in 1980-1981. Sector AW - West of the Roman Bath, BSAA No 44, Alexandria 1991, pp. 73-75, 91-98, fig. 5, p. 83, 98*; E. Rodziewicz, *Late Roman Auditoria in Alexandria in the Light of Ivory Carvings, BSAA No. 45, Alexandria 1993, pp.269-279, pl. XLVIII-LI.*

(29) M. Rodziewicz, *Excavations at Kom el-Dikka in 1980-81 op.cit., fig. 5*; E. Rodziewicz, *Late Roman Auditoria in Alexandria op. cit. Pl. XLIX. Comp also other apses with short central steps leading up: A. Terry, The Opus Sectile in the Eufrasius Cathedral at Poreč, DOP 40, 1986, pp. 147-164, figs. 26-27.*

Byzantine period. One of them appears on the highest quality ivory pyxis from Staatliche Museen in Berlin (Kaiser Friedrich Museum)⁽³⁰⁾. This particular pyxis is considered by experts as one of the most beautiful among early Christian pyxides from the whole Mediterranean. Here Jesus is seated on elaborated throne with high back, and footstool. He is placed below the arch supported by two pillars. Surrounding him Apostles are located also in two rows, from which two frontal persons, on both sides of throne are positioned on a low stools. Figures in the second row are standing on both sides of enthroned Jesus. Yet, both rows of depicted persons are standing on the same level. Although the general arrangement of the scene is similar to the piece from Graeco-Roman Museum, the architectural environment is modeled on another place, such as a peristyle of a private house. Depiction of Jesus with an arch above his head appears as a parallel to relief with Jesus from house H at the street R4 in Alexandria. On the other side of pyxis from Berlin, there is carved scene of sacrifice of Abraham⁽³¹⁾. In the background of the scene is shown an old type of altar, well known from Alexandrian necropolises of Ptolemaic and Roman periods⁽³²⁾. The Altar is located on a high podium with 12 steps. These steps were considered by K. Weitzmann as very crucial for attribution the pyxis from Berlin to Palestinian atelier⁽³³⁾. Strzygowski thought of Syrian school (Antiochia) which according to him, could have had

(30) J. Natanson, *Early Christian Ivories*, London 1953, pl. 28; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike* op.cit. No. 161. P. 104, Taf. 82

(31) Natanson, *Early Christian Ivories* op. cit. pl. 28; Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten* op.cit. Taf. 82.

(32) A. Adriani, *Annuario del Museo Greco-Romano 1935-1939*, Alexandrie 1940, p. 89, 120, 123, fig. 57, pl. XLV,7.

(33) K. Weitzmann, *Loca Sancta and the Representational Art. of Palestine*, DOP 28, 1974, p. 31, 34 ff.

a great influence on Alexandrian ivory and bone carvers⁽³⁴⁾. This theory he tried to support by a fragment of bone relief with representation of nearly identically carved figure of Abraham with Issak, bought hundred years ago in Alexandria, which said to be obtained by sebbahin diggers on one of the city "Koms" (Strzygowski, *Hellenistische Kunst* p. 9). Because there were not in Alexandria of that time ivory object comparable to pyxis from Berlin, but only its resemblance in bone, Strzygowski was convinced that Alexandrian carvers could only repeat in cheap material patterns from outside. Yet other scholars such as K. Wessel saw in pyxis from Berlin an Alexandrian product, we agree with him, and support with presented above material⁽³⁵⁾. There is also a question on the origin of Lesbian Kymation which is framing the upper zone of figural frieze of Berlin pyxis. It is very rare among ivory pyxides known hitherto, but in the collection of ivory and bone carvings from Alexandrian excavations, the bone stripes with Lesbian Kymations carved identically are common. Such Kymation as a framing band between bunch of grapes and theatrical mask is carved on bone figural applique found in late 1960s at Kom el Dikka (Inv.No. SM 1015/67, E. Rodziewicz *Reliefs figurés* op.cit. fig. 4-5)

Having to our disposal ivory reliefs recently obtained in Alexandria, old antiquarian pieces bought in Alexandria (now in

(34) J. Strzygowski, *Hellenistische und Koptische Kunst in Alexandria* op.cit. p. 9 ff., fig. 4; J. Natanson, *Early Christian Ivories*, London 1953. Natanson ascribes the pyxis from Berlin as a piece of highest quality art. of East Mediterranean, dated to about 400 C.E. He writes: "The carver obviously copied the Sacrifice of Abraham from some image which he could not entirely understand, and therefore the pile of wood and the altar built by Abraham have become an elaborated building" p. 29.

(35) K. Wessel, *Die Grosse Berliner Pyxis*, RA Crist. 1960, [[.265 ff.; id. *Hellenismus in Frühbyzantinischen Alexandrien* op.cit.

many collections around the world) and a carved bone tube from Rhacotis (Graeco-Roman Museum) where the composition of the whole scene, stylistic and iconographical elements such as typical Alexandrian altar are locally proven, we are convinced that the highest quality pyxis from Berlin – one of the most representative pieces of early Christian art., is of Alexandrian origin. Tubular bone from Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, carved on all external surfaces with multifigural scene, extending repertoire of iconographical components related directly to both scenes on ivory pyxis from Berlin. On the existence in Egypt highly specialized workshops producing pyxides from Ptolemaic period onwards, for the local market, and probably for the export, scholars speculated since a long time⁽³⁶⁾. For the early Christian period situation seemed to be more complicated, but still such experts as W.F. Volbach try to prove that Alexandrian ateliers produced high quality pyxides during the Late Antiquity⁽³⁷⁾. With all material from recent excavations in, and around Alexandria, we have no more doubts about it⁽³⁸⁾. Discussed above reliefs substantiate highly sophisticated ivory and bone objects, created by Alexandrian artists of Late Antiquity, which were available not only on the local market, but also abroad. Written record saying that Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria sent an ivory chair as a gift to the Patriarch of Constantinople about 432-433, proves that the ivory industry in Alexandria of that time was at its height⁽³⁹⁾.

(36) L. Marangou, *Bone Carvings from Egypt*, op. cit. p.76; A. Cutler, *Five Lessons in the Late Roman Ivory*, JRA, 5, 1993, p. 178.

(37) W.F. Volbach, *Zur Lokalisierung frühchristlicher Pyxiden*, in: *Festschrift Gerke*, 1962, pp. 81 ff.

(38) See E. Rodziewicz, *Bone and Ivory Carvings in Early Christian Alexandria*, *Alexandrie médiévale*, op.cit; J.-Y. Empereur, *Alexandria Rediscovered*, London 1998, p. 61; J. Engemann, *Elfenbeinfunde aus Abu Mena/Ägypten*, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 30, 1987, pp.132-186, Taf. 16-26.

(39) J. Beckwith, *Coptic Sculpture 300 – 1300*, London 1963, p. 11.

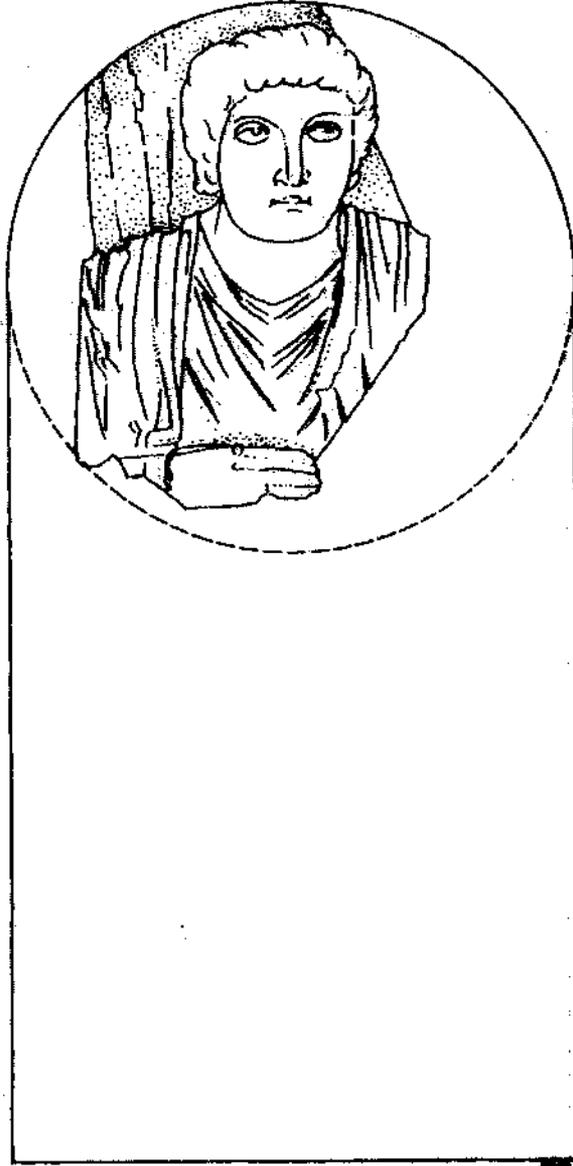


Fig. 7

Hypothetical reconstruction of ivory relief from house H at street R4 in Alexandria. Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.

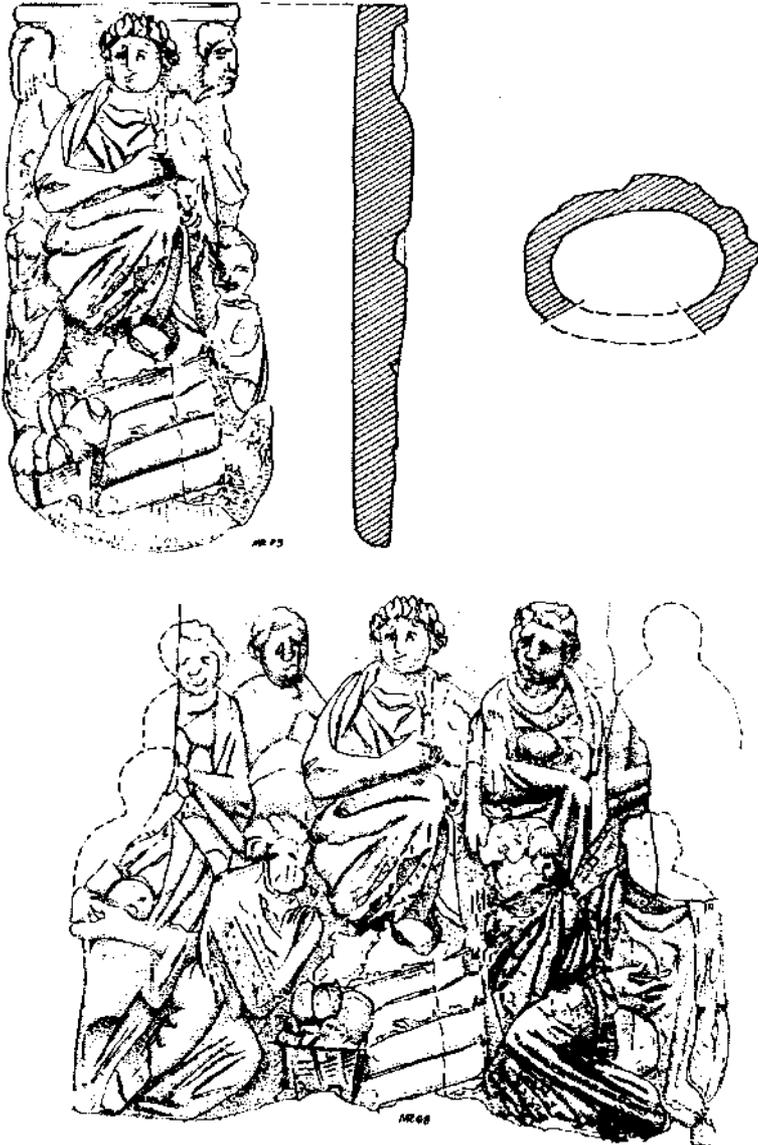


Fig. 8
Relief on tubular bone from Rhacotis (Graeco-Roman Museum). Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.



Fig. 9
Ivory pyxis from Berlin (Staatliche Museen). Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.



Fig. 10
Ivory plaque from Cenchreai (Isthmia Museum). Drawn by M. Rodziewicz.