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A synagogue at Carthage? Menorah-lamps from the Danish excavations

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present and discuss a group of terracotta lamps with representations of nine-, seven- and five-branched candlesticks found during the Danish excavations in Carthage. The work, which was carried out between 1975 and 1984 under the auspices of the UNESCO-project 'Pour Sauver Carthage', centred on a coastal site in the NE part of the area of the ancient city, to the south of the Plage d'Amilcar.¹

Although the terracotta lamps of Carthage have been well documented by several authorities,² the specimens published below are of considerable interest because of their motif. Furthermore, some of the examples were found in contexts providing new chronological evidence, and one of the sub-types has not previously been defined. In a wider perspective, the importance of the find lies in the fact that it may give us the first clue to the location of a synagogue in ancient Carthage.

The final publication of the stratigraphy and the architectural remains unearthed in the Danish sector is currently being prepared by S. Dietz and E. Andersen. What is said concerning these matters below may therefore be open to revision in the future.

Catalogue

An African lamp of Hayes type I B - a sub-type with "rope" motifs on shoulder³

No. 1 (fig. 1)

From trench 30/45 layer 1,0 (the lower part) and the drain CO (the upper part)

L. 6.2 cm.; w. 6.1 cm.; h. 4.2 cm.

A carinated, oval body and a rounded nozzle which is not set off from the sides. Discus: a nine-branched candlestick resting on a five-branched foot; a filling hole on either side of the stem. Shoulder: a rope-pattern between the two low ridges. An open channel connects the discus with the nozzle hole. The central part of the base is slightly sunk and carries a manufacturer's mark, a circle in low relief.

Hard-fired, reddish yellow clay (5YR 6/6) with a

few white, black and grey inclusions as well as light-reflecting particles. The surface in the vicinity of the (missing) nozzle has been burnt to a grayish-black colour. A fingerprint is preserved on the underside of one of the fragments.

Reconstructed from two joining sherds.

Two near-identical specimens have been found in Carthage and Luni respectively,⁴ and a number of less close parallels are also known.⁵

1 Ennabli (ed.) 1992; Dietz 1992 with bibliography; the location of the Danish excavation sector is seen on p. 144.

2 See for instance Ponsich 1960; Deneauve 1969; Ennabli 1976; Sidebotham 1978; Anselmino 1983; Chapman 1984; Davies 1984.

3 Hayes 1972, 310-11 and 313-14. For the sub-type see Pohl 1962, 225 fig. 1 Typ 2 h; Pavolini 1981, 194 Forma VIII Tipo A2 a and b; Davies 1984, 238-39: Form 2 Class B with "rope" motif on shoulder; Mackensen 1993, 512.

4 Bailey 1988, 34 fig. 38 and 192 no. Q 1740 MLA from Carthage; Zaccaria 1973, 500 no. CM 1383 pl. 117.6 from Luni.

5 See Korol 1990, 96-97 pl. 19.1-3 from Cimitile, perhaps an imitation of the type; id. 1991, 51-52 pl. 6.a-c from Augsburg. For lamps of the same sub-type but with an angular candle-stick see du La Blanchère and Gauckler 1897, 201 no. 589 pl. 36 and perhaps also no. 590 from Carthage; Avneri 1962, 466-68 from Aquileia; Goodenough II 1953, 102 n. 7 and id. III 1953, fig. 931 from Alexandria. For the maker's mark see Bailey 1988, 192-93 no. Q 1742 MLA fig. 143 pl. 18. A lamp which seems to belong to the same general type but with 2 five-branched candlesticks was found in a tomb at Cittadella not far from Syracuse, cf. Orsi 1942, 35 fig. 19.