

Early Makuria Research Project Remarks on pottery from the recent excavations at el-Zuma

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Abstract: The article presents new material excavated during the last season, discusses production technology and surface treatment. Recently excavated material from el-Zuma throws new light on pottery production and its typology, necessitating thus a reexamination of the already known vessel types. Some types of pottery, discovered in 2017, although known from other tumuli excavated in previous seasons and already published in general reports, still need to be reexamined. New types of vessels have also been identified.

Keywords: el-Zuma, pottery, tumuli, Early Makuria period, surface treatment, pottery typology, wheel-made pottery, imported pottery

In 2017, the archaeological work at the el-Zuma cemetery was focused on the exploration of tunnels in tumuli of type I, T.1 and T.4 (El-Tayeb 2017, in this volume). These burials started to be excavated in earlier seasons (T.1 in 2015 and T.4 in 2013), but the work concentrated on verifying the existence of the tunnels and exploring the external shafts leading to them. Finally, during the last season, the exploration inside the tunnels of tumuli T.1 and T.4 was possible.

Of all the tumuli of type I excavated in previous seasons, tunnel of tumulus 4 was richest in artifacts. More than 250 objects were recorded. Besides pottery, which made for almost half of this assemblage (100 registered items), there were

animal bones, weapons, jewelry and beads (El-Tayeb 2017, in this volume; Then-Obluska 2017, in this volume). The tunnel of tumulus 1, also excavated in 2017, was very poor in objects, and mainly pottery sherds used as digging tools (probably connected with the robbery) were found. Only 38 artifacts were recorded. Other tunnels of tumuli of type I, explored in previous seasons, also yielded few artifacts: 11 in tumulus T.8 (eight pottery sherds, two metal objects and one bead), 20 in T.3 (mainly pottery, a few wood fragments and metal objects) and 58 in T.6 (56 pottery fragments and two stone objects). Tumuli T.2 and T.5 which were explored comprehensively in the 2005 and 2007 seasons, going beyond the tunnels,

produced an assemblage similar in number to that from T.1, that is, about 40 artifacts among which pottery was the most numerous. The quantities of artifacts recorded in the different tumuli may reflect varying

degrees of diligence and time at the robbers' disposal.

The discussion of pottery production presented here is restricted to vessels from tumulus T.4.

REMARKS ON TYPOLOGY

A general pottery typology was established and presented by Edyta Klimaszewska-Drabot after the first excavation seasons on the Zuma site in 2005 and 2007 (Klimaszewska-Drabot 2010: 480–487). The present author, who has undertaken the study of the pottery from el-Zuma since 2016 (Czyżewska-Zalewska 2016), has also started to reexamine the original corpus presented by Klimaszewska-Drabot.

The reexamination has led to the identification of new types and variants in the archaeological material. Two groups are of main interest here:

– Group II, bowls:

Type II.4 (Klimaszewska-Drabot 2010: 481) has already been examined by the author, but needs to be updated, in light of newly identified variants (Czyżewska-Zalewska 2016: 727).

– Group XII, amphorae:

A new group has been created for the amphorae that have not been published yet.

TYPE II.4

Shapes

Bowls of type II.4 are mainly medium-sized and medium deep, the height being 7.0–8.5 cm and the rim diameter 10–13 cm, although a few smaller examples with a rim diameter of 10–11 cm and a height of 6–7 cm have been registered too. The bowls are conical in shape with rounded bases. Walls taper inwards [*Fig. 1:Z4/79*]

or are straight in the upper part [see *Fig. 1:Z4/199*] of the vessel, and some examples have straight outflared walls [see *Fig. 1:Z4/35*]. Grooved decoration was executed on the body, and sometimes painted decoration occurs on top of the rim.

Klimaszewska-Drabot had described type II.4 as bowls with grooves and painted decoration, but new finds have now prompted further subdivision of the type, based on the presence of grooves and painted decoration (Klimaszewska-Drabot 2010: 481; Czyżewska-Zalewska 2016: 728–730).

Variant II.4a [see *Fig. 2*]

Bowls with rounded base, tapered inwards or straight walls in the upper part, and in some cases with straight outflared walls. The rim is pointed or beveled or, sometimes, rounded. The type is decorated with grooves below the rim. In most cases, three or four grooves can be seen, variants with one or two grooves are rare.

Variant II.4b [see *Fig. 2*]

Bowls with rounded base, tapered in or straight walls in the upper part. The rim is pointed or beveled, or sometimes rounded. The type is decorated, as in type II.4a, with grooves below the rim. In most cases three to four grooves are visible, variants with one or two grooves are rare. The main difference from type 4a is the occurrence of painted decoration at the top of the rim.

Variant II.4c (new variant) [see Fig. 2]

Bowls with rounded base, tapered in or straight walls in the upper part, in some cases with straight outflared walls. The rim is pointed or beveled, or sometimes rounded. The type is decorated with grooves below the rim and at mid-height. In general, three to four grooves occur below the rim and one or two grooves at mid-height of the body.

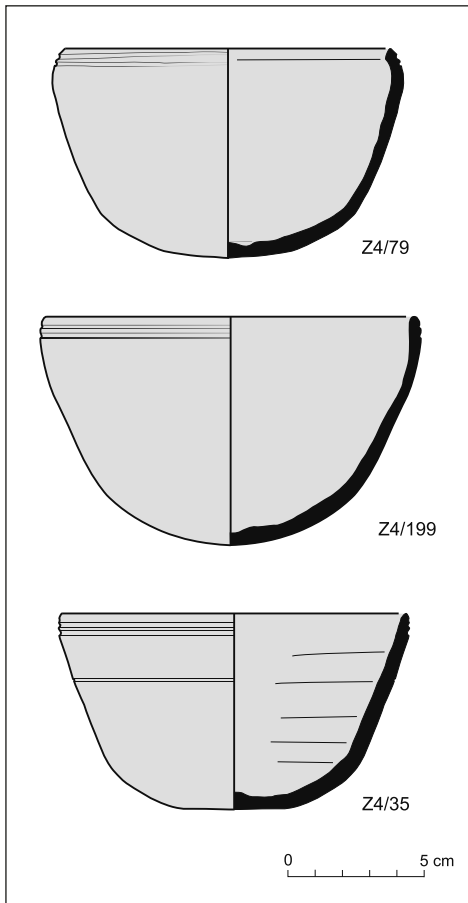


Fig. 1. Type II.4 bowl showing differences of shape (PCMA Early Makuria Research Project/drawing J. Górecka)

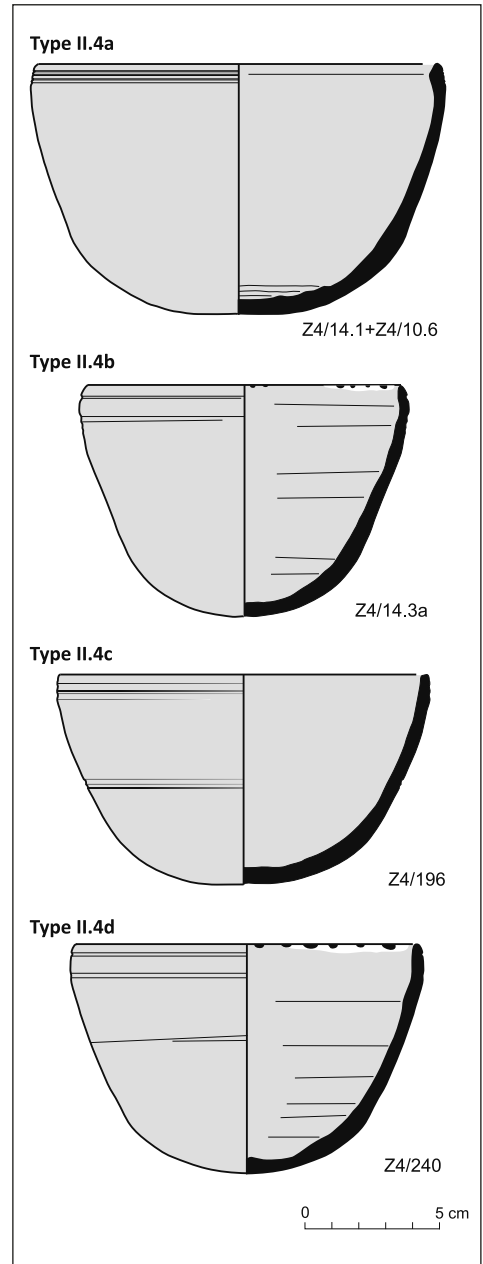


Fig. 2. Type II.4 bowl: all variants (PCMA Early Makuria Research Project/drawing J. Górecka, U. Wicenciak)

Variant II.4d (new variant) [see *Fig. 2*]

Bowls with rounded base, tapered in or straight walls in the upper part. The rim is pointed or beveled, or sometimes rounded. Decorated as in type II.4c, with grooves below the rim and at mid-height of the vessel. In most cases, three to four grooves appear below the rim and one or two grooves at mid-height. The difference from type II.4c is the painted decoration, as in variant II.4b, at the top of the rim.

Production technology

The bowls were wheel-made. After throwing the vessels, some were probably turned upside down on the wheel and the base was scraped by hand with some tool. Scratches from this on the external surface of the vessel can be observed at the base. In these specimens, there is an evident angle between walls and base [*Fig. 3*].

Surface treatment

The bowls were slipped and polished after throwing on the wheel. The slip is clearly visible, mostly medium-shiny, at times very lustrous [*Fig. 4*].

The external surface was better finished than the internal one, probably because of easier access to this area. Polishing and slipping could be executed carelessly, and left traces visible on the surface [*Fig. 5 left*]. Bowls were probably slipped by dipping the vessel in the slip. There are no traces indicative of the typical wiping, as found in type II.5 (Czyżewska-Zalewska 2016: 734) and the slip fills the grooves as well, which would be difficult to achieve by wiping. Most bowls of this type were well smoothed on the external surface, without any technological traces visible on the external surface [see *Fig. 5 right*].

The internal surface was less carefully executed and wheel-marks are often visible. Well finished interior surfaces, without any traces of throwing, occur very rarely [*Fig. 6 bottom*]. Usually, the walls are better smoothed in the upper part and below the rim, and the wheel-marks are visible at the bottom [see *Fig. 6 center*]. Sometimes the surface was well smoothed and only delicate lines are visible inside the vessels [see *Fig. 6 top*].



*Fig. 3. Bowl of type II.4 (Z4/79) with scratches on the base of the vessel
(All photos: PCMA Early Makuria Research Project/photo A. Kamrowski)*

Internal polishing was not so lustrous as that on the exterior. If the surface was badly polished, the polishing is visible only on the wheel marks, on the rim and directly below the rim. If polishing was well executed, then it is visible on the whole surface. However, there are exceptions, in which the surface was well smoothed and the polishing was badly executed [Fig. 7 top] and vice versa [see Fig. 7 bottom].

Painted decoration

Painted decoration is rare. It was applied only on the top of the rim and consisted of dark dots on a white background [Fig. 8 top] or dark and white alternating dots [see Fig. 8 bottom]. The decoration did not cover the whole rim, but was arranged in four sets of four to five or sometimes six dots each.

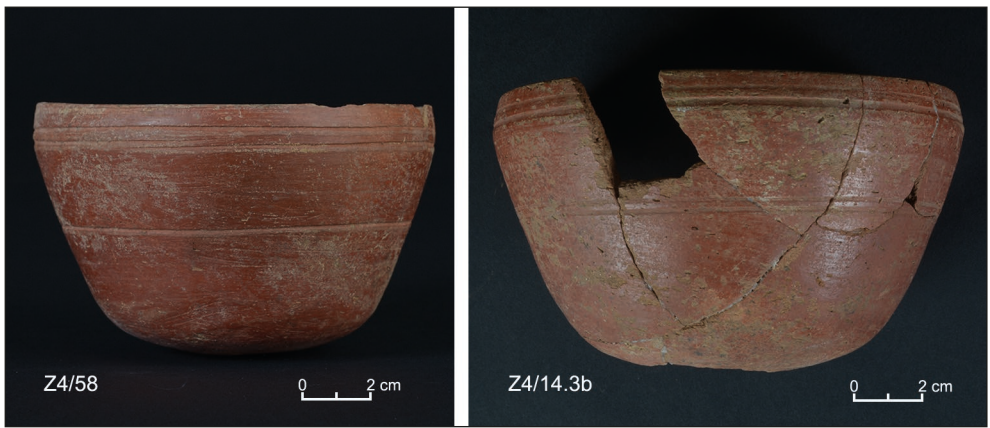


Fig. 4. Bowl of type II.4 showing the slip: left, medium-shiny, and right, shiny

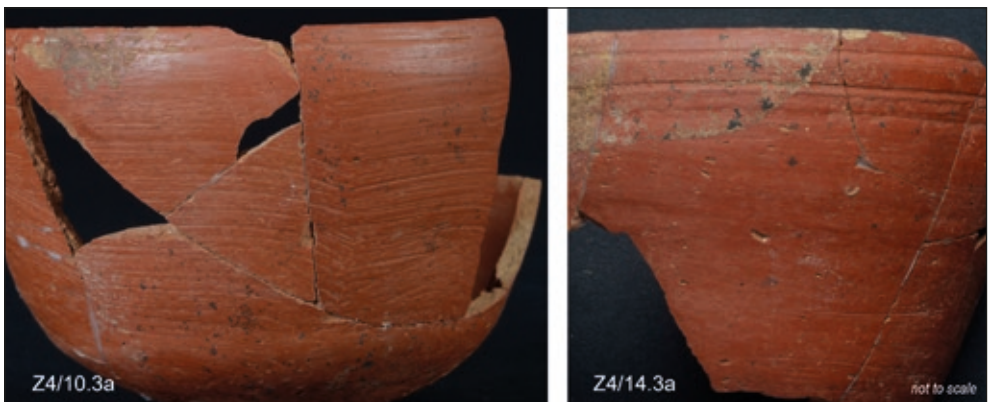


Fig. 5. Bowl of type II.4 showing smoothing and polishing of the external surface: left, badly, and right, well done



Fig. 6. Bowl of type II.4, showing differences in smoothing of the internal surface of the vessel



Fig. 7. Bowl of type II.4, showing polishing of the internal surface: top, badly, and bottom, well executed

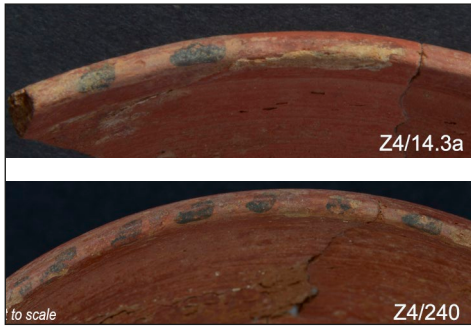


Fig. 8. Bowl of type II.4 with painted decoration on the rim

TYPE XII

A new group of vessels, selected by the author, consists of wheel-made transport amphorae. Amphorae are generally rare at Zuma. Some examples of small table amphorae were discovered in previous seasons, but they need a more detailed study, falling thus outside the scope of this paper (Klimaszewska-Drabot 2010: 485; El-Tayeb 2012: 9, 102–103). The group consists mainly of imported vessels.

Only two types of transport amphorae, Type XII.1 and XII.2, are discussed in this article.

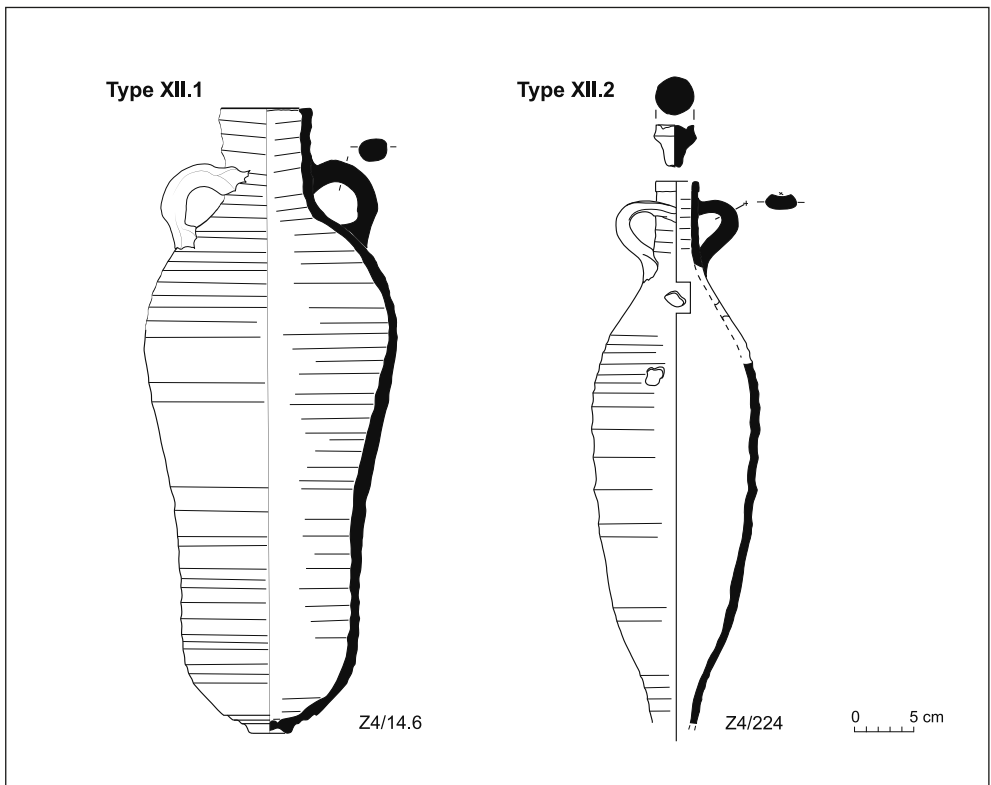


Fig. 9. Amphorae of type XII
(PCMA Early Makuria Research Project/drawing J. Górecka, E. Czyżewska-Zalewska)

TYPE XII.1 [Fig. 9]

Shapes

Type XII.1 comprises a Late Roman “Dongola” amphora (Pluskota type A). This type of amphora is about 50–55 cm in height with slightly concave walls and a medium broad neck. The rim is flat and incurved (internal ledge-rimmed), the handles run from the neck and shoulders, the bottom has a round and navel-shaped foot.

Production technology

Amphorae were thrown on a wheel in two separate parts. The two parts were then joined together, traces of which are visible on the internal surface. The handles were handmade and attached to the vessel probably at the leather-hard stage. On the external surface, on the neck and on the lower part of the body, ribbing is visible [see Fig. 9] (Adams 1986: 193)



Fig. 10. LRA 3 amphora: top right, perhaps used as a lampshade; bottom right, lower part and toe; above, close-up on handles and bung



Surface treatment

There are no traces of slip or additional surface treatment beside the ribbing on the external surface.

TYPE XII.2 [*Figs 9–10*]**Shapes**

Type XII.2 comprises a Late Roman 3 amphora, with slender body and narrow neck. The rim is straight and flat. The handles are small and overlap to form a heart-shaped outline. The bung was executed from the same fabric as the whole vessel and fired [*Fig. 10*]. The preserved height is about 47 cm. There is no trace of resination on the internal surface.

Production technology

The amphora was thrown on the wheel. Handmade handles were attached to the vessel probably at the leather-hard stage. A stopper was executed from the same clay and thrown on the wheel, too.

Surface treatment

Traces of delicate ribbing are visible on the whole external surface [see *Figs 9, 10*]. Handles were attached to the vessel using a kind of a tool, and delicate lines are visible on the handles [see *Fig. 10*]. The internal surface is smoother than the external one.

RECAPITULATION

Bowls of type II.4 were found in earlier excavations of tumuli of type I and type II. When found in tombs of type II, their number was limited, for example only one in T.12, five in T.23, only three fragments in T.25 and three in T.26. Type II.4 bowls, however, were more numerous in some burials of type I. In tumulus T.2, explored completely in 2007, 34 bowls were found. In tunnel of tumulus T.7, more than 20 bowls were found, and in tomb T.4, there were 43 bowls inside the tunnel alone. But in some tunnels of this tomb type, like T.3 and T.6, only a few examples were recorded, and T.8 lacked this type altogether. At this moment we cannot assess the quantity of this type of bowls in tumuli of type I, until exploration of burial chambers will be possible. It seems that bowls with grooved decoration were considered luxurious and as such were not as common as cups of type I, bowls of type II.2 or jars, all of which have already been presented by the author

in the previous season report (Czyżewska-Zalewska 2016: 725–740). These bowls were placed mainly in tumuli of type I, the largest type. Only the tunnel area of these large tumuli has been excavated so far. Therefore, until a full repertoire of pottery from the burial chambers in the largest graves is known, no comparisons with vessels from other tumuli is feasible. Material from the fully explored tumuli of types II (middle-sized tumuli with L-shaped or U-shaped shafts and three to five burial chambers) provides evidence for a sporadic occurrence of type II.4 bowls there. In tumuli of type III (small tumuli with rectangular shafts and one burial chamber), this type has not been found at all.

Such bowls occur at other sites dated to the Early Makuria (post-Meroitic) period. They have been found at Gaddar, in a grave with a rectangular shaft and one burial chamber (Żurawski 1991: 463–464, 483), Hammur (Phillips and El-Tayeb 2003:

458–459, 461) and Kassinger Bahri, there in a grave with a central rectangular shaft and two niches/burial chambers (El-Tayeb and Kołosowska 2007: 37–38, 43, Kołosowska and El-Tayeb 2007: 9, 12–13). Pottery analysis from Kassinger dates this type to AD 350–540 (Daszkiewicz and Goedicke 2007: 124). Large tumuli like type I at el-Zuma do not occur on either of the above-mentioned sites.

The Late Roman “Dongola” amphora (Pluskota type A) (Pluskota 2001: Fig. 9; Danys 2015: 118) has an incurved rim, and its base has a round and navel-shaped foot. Willam Y. Adams published it as Class Z (Adams 1986: 1 and 2:177). Its fabric is similar to the dongolan fabric ALF 1 (Danys 2015: 118).

Six examples of Dongolan amphorae have been found in the material excavated at el-Zuma. Four of them can be assigned to LRA “Dongola”, Pluskota A, two, however, are too fragmentary for a type to be determined. Only one amphora derived from a tumulus of type II, the others being found in tumulus T.4. This type is the earliest of the Dongola amphorae. The earliest use of the Dongola pottery workshop took place about AD 600–950 (Danys 2015: 118).

The LRA 3 amphora is a unique example. The type probably comes from Asia Minor, although the main production center is not known (Riley 1975: 31–32). The earliest examples of this type have only one handle. One-handed amphorae occur in the Mediterranean region from the 1st to the 5th century AD. Two-handed amphorae appeared for the first time in the late 4th century in Rome, and probably were in use from the end of the 4th to the 6th century (Peacock and Williams

1986: 188–189). These amphorae can be found in Berytus, where they are dated to the 6th century AD (Pieri 2007: 113); in Egypt, in Kellia, they are dated to the 4th–5th century AD (Egloff 1977: 110), and in the Athenian Agora they are dated to the 6th century AD (Robinson 1959: 119). In Nubia, this imported ware, U18, was described and dated by Adams to the period from the Meroitic to Christian (Adams 1986: 107, 178). An example of this type was found in the royal tombs at Ballaña and Qustul and was dated to the 4th–6th century AD (Emery and Kirwan 1938: 390, 398–399).

The LRA 3 amphora from tumulus T.4 in el-Zuma was reused [see *Fig. 10*]. This vessel was found in two pieces. In its upper part large holes (1–2 cm in diameter) were executed, while the internal surface was smoked, which may lead to the assumption that maybe the grave robbers could have used amphorae as lampshades protecting the flame when plundering the grave. The bottom part of the vessel is broken off (the join spot is too small to reconstruct the vessel), but the interior of the base is clean without any traces of smoke. No parallel for the reuse of an amphora as a lampshade has been attested. It should be noted that four oil lamps were also found in the tunnel of T.4.

The pottery assemblage from tumulus T.4 is interesting and a better understanding of it will be gained once a comprehensive exploration of the burial chambers is completed. Hurried and careless robbery is probably why the tunnel is so rich in artifacts. Further exploration of tomb chambers in tumuli of type I should yield more finds to throw new light on the pottery from the largest graves.

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