Introduction

This volume is the third of four reporting on the archaeological aspect of the work at Mons Claudianus between 1987 and 1993. The first deals with the toponography and quarries, the second with the excavations and the fourth with the textiles. The second volume includes specialists’ reports on various finds other than pottery and related objects or textiles, while the written materials (ostraka and papyri) are being published in a separate series. In an introduction the editors provide a brief summary of the site (with a major and a minor settlement focus and the associated quarry) and the site chronology (from the mid first century to the early third, with particularly intense activity in the Trajanic and Antonine periods).

The volume contains five chapters of unequal length – The Pottery by Roberta Tomber (pp. 1–236), Vessel Stoppers by Ross Thomas with Roberta Tomber (pp. 237–258), Terracotta and Plaster Figures, Sealings and a Stone Group by Donald M. Bailey (pp. 259–285), Ceramic Objects by Roberta Tomber (pp. 287–306), The Pottery Lamps by Kathryn Knowles (pp. 307–426). They are preceded by the editors’ preface and acknowledgements (pp. IX–XIII) and introduction (pp. XV–XXII) and followed by the abbreviations and bibliography for the entire volume (pp. 427–450).

Vessel Stoppers

The chapter on vessel stoppers by Thomas with Tomber deals exclusively with stoppers with sealings and thus suitable for the transport of liquid or semi-liquid goods – some simple ones for domestic use are included in the chapter on ceramic objects. The conditions of preservation at Mons Claudianus and the number found (a total of 273) allow considerations of typology and function that are often impossible elsewhere. By size the stoppers fall into three groups – those over 60 mm in diameter considered to have been used in amphorae and two smaller ones suitable for flagons, costrels and the like. Eleven types of stopper are attested at the site, some derived from the northern Mediterranean tradition and others from the Egyptian. Types 1–3, all occurring in the group used for amphorae and accounting for 30% of the total, are similar, with a plaster seal over a plug – 1: round-cut sherd plug, 2: sherd temper plug, 3: ceramic dish plug – that could be opened by pull strings. They are the only ones to present pitch and pierced holes, indications that they were used in the transport of wine, and also the only ones to be stamped. The fabric of the plugs all point to an Egyptian origin, while differences in diameter hint at the use or reuse of a variety of amphorae, either Egyptian or imported.

Terracotta and Plaster Figures, Sealings and a Stone Group

The connective theme of Bailey’s chapter appears to be figural representations. He is concerned mostly with fragments of terracotta figurines (65 catalogue items) and similar items in unfired clay (three) and plaster (eleven). Bailey believes that the figurines usually had a protective function in houses, although the
Mons Claudianus examples, found mostly in a rubbish heap, offer no light on the question. The unfired objects were probably produced locally, while the others were for the most part imported from the Nile Valley. Bailey’s chapter includes also two sealings (one in unfired clay, the other in plaster) with figurative impressions from sealstones. A small stone group, unfortunately without context, is notable as the only representation of the Laocoon group other than the famous one in the Vatican to survive from antiquity, if it is indeed ancient.

Ceramic Objects

Tomber’s chapter on ceramic objects deals with purpose-made ceramic items, reworked pottery and sherds bearing pictorial graffiti. She intends to illustrate the range of objects recovered rather than to give an exhaustive account.

The few purpose-made objects range from a finger ring to structural elements.

The much more frequent reworked objects consist of stoppers for domestic vessels, address labels, incense burners and miscellaneous items (such as a figurine, roundels, spindle whorls and pieces of difficult interpretation). These objects are mostly derived from the spikes of amphorae in the Nile Valley fabric, the main exception being some stoppers made of faience. Vessels made from reworked pottery is treated in a section in the pottery report.

The 27 graffiti recovered represent a wide range of subjects, for the most part Roman, although a camel and Horus point to Egyptian influence. Almost all the graffiti appear on sherds of Nile silt amphorae. There is practically no discussion of the reason for the graffiti – the phallic ones are considered apotropaic, and a set of possible tally marks would be functional. Many representations are fragmentary, suggesting that they could have been made on vessels before breakage.

Were the graffiti mere doodles or were they rather part of the phenomenon of reworking vessels into new objects?

Lamps

The chapter on lamps is by length the second most important in the volume. It concerns 815 complete and fragmentary examples. Its objectives, besides presenting the catalogue of the items found, are to establish dates for first to third-century Egyptian pottery lamps, to attempt a new typology and to examine the fabrics petrologically.

For the first objective Mons Claudianus, where lamps could often be associated with well dated contexts, is eminently suited to give the previously lacking chronological framework.

As far as the third objective is concerned, Knowles argues that the lamps were not made in the same workshops as the pottery supplied to Mons Claudianus. The lamps were initially categorized macroscopically in the accepted groups of Nile silt, marl and various Lower Egyptian fabrics. Petrographic analysis, however, distinguished four major groups: A – a fine Nile silt group (which could correspond to the Nile alluvium fabric of the pottery), B – a group with sand-sized inclusions in a fine silt clay matrix (which has no close parallel in the earlier fabric descriptions or among the pottery from Mons Claudianus), C – a group with an isotropic clay matrix with moderate silt-sized quartz grains (which has some similarities to marl fabrics described elsewhere), D – a group with very fine-grained inclusions set in an isotropic clay matrix. All the groups were further subdivided on the basis of color or specific inclusions. Groups A, B and C...
are probably Upper Egyptian: the first because of its frequency at Mons Claudianus; the second because the main type with which it is associated finds parallels between Thebes and Coptos; the third on the basis of some similarities in clay with the area around Qena and Ballas and because of the typological comparanda are mostly from Upper Egypt. Group D, represented by only five examples, is the only one to which a Lower Egyptian provenience can be assigned, and are likely to have been made at Alexandria or in the Delta.

Knowles wished to create a lamp typology based on form to replace earlier ones privileging decoration. Her proposal encompasses six Egyptian categories, one for Egyptian copies of Roman relief lamps and one of miscellaneous items (including imported, wheel-made and faience). The local Egyptian groups are: A – Neohellenistic frog lamps; B – decorated conical nozzle lamps; C – globular lamps; D – lengthened piriform lamps; E – piriform side-lug lamps; F – wide oval-shaped lamps. These are subdivided by decoration, but are not arranged to suggest any chronological development. For Groups A, B and C Mons Claudianus provides evidence for dating rather earlier than was generally considered previously – from the late 1st or 2nd century for the well documented Group A and at least from the second century for Groups B and C. Because of their number Knowles suggests that there was likely a consignment of Group A and C lamps in the Trajanic period. Typologically Group B differs from Group A in the shape of the nozzle – tapering and conical rather than lengthened. It can be decorated with the frog motif but also with others. The case for distinguishing the two groups is strengthened by the differences in the fabric used – Fabric A predominantly for Group A and never for Group B, Fabric C normally for Group B and never for Group A, while Fabric B appears occasionally for both groups. Group C, globular lamps with the nozzle almost completely incorporated in the body, is quite clearly distinguished typologically, although its various decorative schemes include the frog motif. Group C was produced mostly in Fabric C, although some examples in Fabric A are attested. The lengthened piriform lamps in Group D also form a distinct typological group with varied decorative motifs that is fairly well represented at Mon Claudianus. It was made almost exclusively in Fabric B, probably in a single workshop. Groups E and F are not frequent at Mons Claudianus and little can be said about them on the basis of finds there. Group X gathers together all the lamps in the tradition of Roman relief lamps (such as Bailey A–D and O/Loeschke I, III, IV, V and VIII), which could have been produced in Lower Egypt as well as Upper Egypt.

This chapter is certainly a significant contribution to the study of lamps in Egypt. The chronological evidence in a field where well dated finds were scarce is particularly helpful. The discussion of fabrics is also important. Will similar research elsewhere confirm Knowles’ argument about the lack of equivalence between the fabrics for lamps and pottery vessels or will it bear out the impression of earlier scholars that there is some correspondence? It seems unlikely that pottery and lamp production were completely separate, although it could well be that there were both general regional similarities and specific differences reflecting varying sources and processing of clay. It is obviously sound to create a typology first of all on the form of the lamps and it is sensible to distinguish between the lamps of Egyptian and Roman derivation, but it remains to be seen
whether the Mons Claudianus typology, based on material from a single site with a supply prevalently originating in Upper Egypt and with a limited date range, will prove attractive and useful elsewhere.

**Pottery**

Pottery, published by Roberta Tomber, takes up by far the greatest part of the volume. In her introduction, she states that the intention was to make a dated typology with supporting quantitative evidence. Most of the chapter in fact, 178 pages, consists of the typological catalogue. This part is followed by a shorter discussion of trends in pottery supply at Mons Claudianus on the basis of the quantitative data.

Before the catalogue there is a presentation of Egyptian pottery fabrics, which gives a useful synthesis of the state of the question. Tomber distinguishes four major groups. Three have been commonly recognized for some time: Nile alluvium or silt fabrics, marl fabrics from the desert along the Nile and Aswan fabrics. The fourth, North-West coastal fabrics, has become well known through more recent studies. Aside from descriptions of the composition of the various fabrics, there are helpful comments on technological matters.

The material is presented in eleven sections – imported red-slipped wares; thin-walled wares; Egyptian faience; flagons, beakers and mugs; jars, cooking pots and kegs; bowls, dishes and casserole; lids; miscellaneous vessels; amphorae; quelques dipinti amphoriques (written by Hélène Cuvigny); reworked vessels. As Tomber herself points out, the bases for distinguishing them differ – mostly form but fabric for imported red-slipped wares and faience and technology for reworked vessels. Obviously, the accent in this presentation is placed on wares and typologies rather than contexts. Except for the imported red-slip wares, Tomber has created new typologies for each section, with the numbering beginning anew each time from Type 1, which is cumbersome for the user of the work who wants to refer to a specific type. For each type, there is a description, a list of the fabric(s) attested, an indication of its frequency (from rare at 1–10 rim sherds to dominant at 50±) and the dating evidence.

The imported red-slip wares are presented according to the standard typologies. The wares represented are Eastern Sigillata A (the largest group), Eastern Sigillata B, Cypriot sigillata, African Red-Slip Ware and Pontic sigillata. The African Red-Slip Ware classified without reference to the system of fabrics (A, A/D, C and D) first devised by Lamboglia and elaborated in the ‘Atlante delle forme ceramiche I’. Hayes 99 belongs to Production D and Hayes 32 to Production A/D, while the attribution of the piece assigned either to Hayes 17 (Production A) or Hayes 31 (Production A/D) could probably have been settled on the basis of the fabric.

Tomber’s conception of thin-walled wares is broader than what has come to be current elsewhere, which limits the group to drinking vessels (beakers and cups). This section consists of table ware of Aswan production, distinguished in four fabrics. The material is divided into flagons and jars, beakers, mugs, bowls, lids. The 56 forms do not for the most part have published parallels.

Faience is not properly pottery, as Tomber ably explains, but rather a substance derived from a quartz base. Its types are, however, related to ceramic wares, sigillata in particular.
The following sections present the range of domestic pottery not treated under imported red-slip wares, thin-walled pottery and faience – from flagons, beakers and mugs through to lids and miscellaneous vessels. Here fabric plays no role. Disconcertingly, coarse-ware vessels in silt and marl fabrics appear together with Aswan ware, Egyptian Red Slip ware and occasionally imported items, sometimes under the same type. Why imported red-slip wares should be treated separately but Egyptian ones mingled with other wares is not obvious. Nor is the reason clear for the treatment of Aswan ware partly in the dedicated thin-walled section and partly in the sections for functional groups. Nevertheless, this is an important assemblage of well dated pieces. Indeed, the early Roman section in Anna Wodzińska’s ‘A Manual of Egyptian Pottery 4: Ptolemaic Period – Modern’ consists almost entirely of a re-working of the Mons Claudianus material with a new numbering system.

The amphora section consists of 76 types, presented by geographical origin, with Egyptian and imported types accounting for about half each. The former are mostly in the Nile silt fabric but include containers from as far afield as Aswan and the northwestern coastal area. For the Egyptian types more parallels or concordance with existing systems in use in Egypt would have been welcome – for example, a large part of her Egyptian series falls generally within the range of the Amphore Egyptienne. The imported amphorae include types from the West (Spain, Gaul, Italy and North Africa). Unsurprisingly, however, types from the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean predominate. As Tomber says, most of the imported types are well known, requiring little comment. Nevertheless, there are interesting discussions throughout: for example of her Type 55, a Cilician version of Dressel 2–4, in which she proposes to recognize a container for northern Syrian wine called Ladikena on ostraka, or of her Type 59, the origin of which remains unknown. In such cases the Mons Claudianus types may come into general use, but yet another type series for the non-Egyptian amphorae, most of which already have multiple names, was not required.

The section on dipinti on amphorae presents nine dipinti, all written on the shoulders or necks of Amphores Egyptiennes. Eight are in Greek and one in Latin. For the most part, they mention an owner’s name and the content. The study of the dipinti from Mons Claudianus remains to be done, and, as the author states, this sample is not necessarily representative.

The section on reworked vessels consists of those vessels reworked into new vessels rather than other items (dealt with in the later chapter on ceramic objects). The raw material is usually the spike of a Nile silt amphora. The vessels obtained are most frequently mugs or beakers but also bowls, dishes and funnels. The mugs and beakers in particular can bear elaborate decoration. Reworking of vessels appears to be a speciality of the Eastern Desert of Egypt. How many will be reported in Egypt and elsewhere now that attention has been drawn to the phenomenon remains to be seen, however.

Quantification was more of an interest at Mons Claudianus than had often been the case on earlier projects in Egypt. The method employed there on selected contexts consisted of counting and weighing rim, base and handle sherds, as well as fine-ware or otherwise unusual body sherds. A trial involving the collection and recording of all the sherds from one assemblage was considered to
show that the extra work provided essentially no further information. An appendix (‘Raw Data’) gives the data from the selected quantified contexts grouped together by period (First Century, Trajanic, Trajanic+, Hadrianic, Antonine, Severan), i.e. without allowing one to go back to the level of the context or stratigraphic unit. Therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible, for example, to correlate the pottery data with those for other finds, such as lamps, and anyone wishing to use the data to elaborate new statistics with some other question in mind will have to be content with data aggregated by period.

There is, of course, no universally accepted way to quantify ceramic assemblages. Nevertheless, the claim that complete recording produces nothing more than partial recording can arouse some skepticism. A reverse trial on a stratigraphic sequence at a site in the Egyptian Delta (Schedia) suggests the contrary. There, where we strive for the complete recording by sherd count, sherd weight, EVEs on the basis of the percentage of rim preserved and the maximum vessel count after the joining of sherds, a comparison was carried out between the existing quantified data and a data set produced by eliminating the body sherds that would have been disregarded at Mons Claudianus. In assessing the composition of the assemblages by fine wares, utilitarian wares and amphorae, fine wares were predictably overestimated (by a factor of up to six times), while amphorae were often decidedly underestimated. The percentages for imports and Egyptian products differ considerably at times, once again with the amphorae in particular.

Some caution is in order, therefore, in accepting the statistics presented in the discussion. Nevertheless, they are useful. For instance, a mere catalogue may have given the impression that imported fine wares and amphorae are more important than is actually the case, while it is clear from the statistics that the Nile Valley supplied almost everything required at Mons Claudianus and other sources a minimal part. Some comparisons, furthermore, are less sensitive to any bias introduced by the partial recording. For example, in assessing the changing frequency over time of various forms within a single class, which was a major concern at Mons Claudianus, the inclusion of unidentified body sherds in the calculations would be of no consequence. This is also undoubtedly the case with the frequency of amphora fabrics, overwhelmingly dominated by the Nile silt group. In light of the evidence from the trial on the Schedia material that the method of quantification used at Mons Claudianus might underestimate the role of amphorae in the composition of the assemblages, it is interesting to note the percentages of amphorae in the Trajanic to Severan horizons, approximately 2/3 to 3/4. In the Roman imperial period those are figures characteristic of sites well integrated into trade networks, as I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere. Tomber provides a useful discussion of how Mons Claudianus may have been supplied, integrating the archaeological evidence with that from ostraka, dipinti and other written sources.

Tomber has succeeded well in the aim of making a dated typology, which is already beginning to make an impact in the field. Her work will undoubtedly remain a point of reference for some time. The evidence of the quantification represents a step forward in a sector of pottery study that has seen more development elsewhere in the Roman world than in Egypt.
Conclusion

This volume presents a much wider range of material than is usually the case with the pottery report from an excavation project. The pottery and lamp chapters offer pioneering work under various aspects for the study of these wares in Egypt. The nature of the site allowed the preservation of items that normally perish, such as stoppers or labels. It is also the venue for the creation of a range of reworked pottery not documented in other places. Mons Claudianus III will be referred to for many reasons for years to come.

Roma

Martin Archer


The volume under review is the second commentary on a book of the Iliad released by the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics series. Its predecessor, Colin Macleod’s justly acclaimed Iliad XXIV, was published as early as 1982, and a mere juxtaposition of the two neatly reflects the changes that Homeric scholarship has undergone in the last thirty years. Graziosi and Haubold treat Iliad 6 in a markedly up-to-date manner, high sensitivity to such matters as gender, space, visuality, narratological aspects, reception, and the scholia being the hallmark feature of their approach. The ensuing result is a predominantly literary commentary which firmly places Iliad 6 within the context of the 21st-century theoretical discourse.

The Introduction (1–58) falls into six parts which cover both general topics and those specific to Book 6: (1) The Poet and the Muses; (2) The composition of Homeric epic (the hexameter; formulae and their meaning; traditional narrative patterns; language; grammar; vividness); (3) Book VI in the structure of the Iliad (the gods; men and women; the city of Troy); (4) Difficult encounters (Glaucus and Diomedes; Hector and Hecuba; Hector, Paris, and Helen; Hector and Andromache); (5) The encounter between Hector and Andromache through time; (6) The text. In the present reviewer’s opinion, the sections that deal with the ‘cinematic’ and spatial aspects of Homer’s narrative (23–24, 32–34) are especially commendable (it is a pity that J. S. Clay’s ‘Homer’s Trojan Theater: Space, Vision, and Memory in the Iliad’ [Cambridge 2011], whose 39–41 cover much of the same ground, appeared too late to be taken into account). The chapter on reception, which concentrates on the reception of the Hector-Andromache encounter in both literature and visual arts from antiquity to the present (47–56), is both thoughtful and illuminating (I would have only added the quotation, in the original Greek, of δακρυόεν γελάσασα at v. 484 in the last chapter of Thackeray’s ‘Vanity Fair’).

As distinct from these, the parts of the Introduction dealing with more traditional topics, such as metre, formulae, type scenes, or Kunstsprache offer a somewhat less stimulating reading: it is sometimes difficult to avoid the impression that the reason why these topics are being discussed at all is simply that they have to be there. There are also some significant omissions. Thus, although the essentials of Homer’s traditional referentiality, a concept introduced by J. M. Foley, are being competently discussed (15–16), the authors fail to name either the concept itself or its author. Even more importantly, I find it hard to explain why the reader of a book whose target audience, to quote the text on the back cover, are «undergraduates at all levels, and students in the upper forms of schools», should look elsewhere for a reference to