

## SURVEY AND EXCAVATION: MONS CLAUDIANUS 1987–1993. VOL. 3, CERAMIC VESSELS AND RELATED OBJECTS

BY ROBERTA TOMBER, KATHRYN KNOWLES, DONALD BAILEY, AND ROSS THOMAS, WITH A CONTRIBUTION BY HÉLÈNE CUVIGNY. PP. XXII + 450, FIGS. 207. INSTITUT FRANÇAIS D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE, CAIRO 2006. \$70. ISBN 2-7247-0428-2 (PAPER).

This volume is the third to appear covering the excavations at Mons Claudianus in the Eastern Desert of Egypt in seven seasons between 1987 and 1993. It complements the ever growing archaeological and documentary evidence coming from this region, covering ceramic vessels and other objects—lamps, ceramic and terracotta artifacts, and vessel stoppers. While Mons Claudianus is a hugely important site in its own right, and is arguably the most impressive and highest yielding in terms of evidence for Roman Egypt, it must be viewed in concert with other sites in the region that have been worked on since 1983: Mons Porphyrites, Koptos, Quseir al-Qadim (the site of Myos Hormos), and the infrastructures of the Via Hadriana and the other principal routes through the desert from Koptos to Myos Hormos and Berenike. This allows for an understanding of the dynamics of the region as a whole rather than just of individual sites.

The volume is divided into five main chapters, following a brief introduction by the principal editors. The first and most substantial chapter by Tomber covers pottery. It provides a typology and quantitative evidence for the period of occupation (mid first to early third centuries C.E.). An important feature of the pottery at Mons Claudianus is its dating, which cannot be achieved only through phase groups and stratigraphy but also by comparison with dated ostraca—an important example of where archaeology and papyrology can come together. The chapter includes an extensive catalogue of types with clear illustrations, along with

a subsection by Cuvigny on amphoras with *dipinti* and a section on reworked vessels. The chapter closes with a useful discussion, but common to many archaeological reports, this is a little thin and more could have been done to set the material in a wider context.

Chapter 2 considers vessel stoppers. Again, the evidence is exhaustively studied, but conclusions are slim. We are told that the evidence “augments information on transport and supply” (250), but only a few sentences follow. Chapter 3, by Bailey, covers terracotta and plaster figurines and other items. A useful but brief survey of terracotta figurines in Graeco-Roman Egypt is given, followed by a catalogue of finds. The chapter is weakened, however, by two factors. First, there is no conclusion setting the finds in context; second, the finds have been studied by photograph only. Chapter 4 describes ceramic objects. Of these, by far the most interesting are graffiti, which have distinctly Roman themes: a cavalry horse and rider and a *retiarius* and *venator*; and also Egyptian motifs: Horus and a camel. The final chapter concerns terracotta lamps. The Mons Claudianus material provides exciting opportunities for the dating of lamps, previously difficult but now made considerably more secure due to find contexts and dated ostraca. Despite the limitations imposed by the remoteness of the site and its chronological span, which preclude a comprehensive typology (for not all types of lamps will be present), the chapter does address and move beyond previous work, because dating problems, imprecise

find contexts, and lack of fabric analysis all can be remedied.

There is much of interest in the volume, and it offers an important contribution to the study of ceramics and related objects in Roman Egypt. Extensive catalogues provide a wealth of information on type, phase, and chronology, especially the use of amphoras, stoppers, and lamps. As such, it will certainly be an important work of reference for archaeologists with interests in ceramics and material culture. However, longer interpretative essays would certainly have increased the value of the volume, for unfortunately little attention is paid to conclusions that might be drawn from the evidence. Mons Claudianus is arguably a unique site in that it offers the opportunity to

bring together archaeological and documentary evidence. In archaeological reports there should be more room given to interpretation, even if it is too much to expect full coverage in a site report. Above all, we need a single interpretative volume for Mons Claudianus, bringing together all of the evidence and setting it in the context of the Eastern Desert as a whole.

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