Ceramics report, Tell Timai 2010
Submitted by Nicholas Hudson

During the 2010 field season at Tell Timai 1,963 kg of pottery were processed from 18 trenches. Of this total, 335.5 kg of diagnostic pottery (rim sherds, bases, handles, and diagnostically significant body sherds) were saved after post-processing, which involved sorting, identifying, and registering individual pieces. Diagnostic sherds comprise about 17% (by weight) of all ceramic materials in toto that were processed during the 2010 season.

Of the saved pottery, 254 individual vessels (representing a range of intact vessels, multiple sherds of a single vessels, or individual sherds) were inventoried and catalogued. The selection of vessels for inventory was made based on one of several possible factors: 1) the vessel was an example of a particular type that would be desirable to illustrate the Tell Timai ceramic assemblage; 2) the vessel was preserved to such an extent (intact or near intact) and so provides a useful study example of the type; or 3) the vessel belonged to an important stratigraphic context. The last feature (context) was by far the most common reason for selecting inventoried items.

The following presents a report on the most significant ceramic discoveries from the 2010 excavations at Tell Timai. These include preliminary dates for the earliest use of the kilns in Area O, a tentative dating scheme for the construction of the limestone platform in Area M, a domestic destruction deposit from Area N, and evidence of the linked spatial phasing for Areas N and O. A preliminary chronological phasing for Hellenistic Tell Timai will be presented at the end.

Area O (the kilns)

The earliest stratigraphic features exposed in Area O during the 2010 excavations may be associated with the initial construction and use of the kilns that define the area. Several features produced pottery that is distinctly different from all other excavated features that clearly date to the Hellenistic period. This pottery most likely belongs to the later phases of the Late Period, though detailed analysis will not occur until the 2011 excavation season. While the bulk of the early pottery is of local production, one piece of Attic Red Figure (TM10.0243, O-11-503) provides concrete evidence of the earliest occupation/use of Area O to date. The Attic sherd, probably from a krater, is decorated in a style of Red Figure that dates to the mid-fourth century BC. The sherd preserves a portion of a wing belonging to a Nike, below which is the brow and wispy hair of a male figure with a diadem accented with a series of white dots. The Attic import provides evidence that the kilns in Area O are pre-Ptolemaic.

Figure 1. Attic Red Figure from Area O-11-503.

1 Dating based on similar treatment of wings, decorated diadems, and wispy hair. See Moore 1997, nos. 524, 533, and 1666.
Area N (destruction deposit, figs. 2-8)

Excavations in Area N produced a well-defined deposit of pottery that included intact, whole, and near complete vessels. The deposit was found in trench N7-3 and identified as feature 257. Of the sixty-four vessels or sherds inventoried from feature 257, many were burnt to a degree that suggested the burning event resulted in their deposition in the archaeological record. For this reason, the deposit has been interpreted as a destruction deposit associated with a fire. Further excavation in Area N revealed an extension of the destruction deposit located within the brick-lined well located in the southeast section of N7-1. The uppermost fill of the well (feature 519) yielded a high density of pottery within the fill matrix that included whole and well-preserved vessels. Like the vessels from feature 257, the vessels from the well were all burnt, suggesting they were part of the same destruction event.

Two possibilities exist for the deposition of the vessels in the well: 1) the pots were dumped in the well after the destruction event in an effort to fill the well and put it out of commission; 2) the bowls, jars, and cooking vessels fell into the well during the destruction event. The possibility of the second scenario is strengthened by the recovery of whole vessels, broken into two or three large sherds, found together but with burning inside the breaks. This may indicate a continuation of the fire after the bowls reached their final resting place and broke. However, the deposit was recovered from the upper levels of the well, meaning the well was already filled with debris by the time the vessels entered their final context, presenting an argument for the first scenario.

The character of the destruction deposit recovered from Area N7-3 and the well in N7-1 is domestic, consisting of table vessels (figs. 2.1-18, 3.19-24, 8.60-65), cooking vessels (figs. 5.41-50, 8.66), household utility vessels (figs. 3.25-27, 4.28-40, 6.51-54, 7.55-57), and storage vessels (figs. 7.58-59). While the general typological characteristics of the deposit fit well within the expected parameters of domestic Hellenistic period ceramic assemblages, the richness and diversity of the single destruction deposit provides new and detailed evidence for the Hellenistic ceramic history of the eastern Nile delta specifically and the Lower Egypt in general. With the exceptions of numbers 1-4, all table vessels are of local production, made of local Nile Silt. It is probable that these vessels were produced at Tell Timai. The kilns excavated in Area O by the SCA and mapped by the University of Hawaii mission, may well have produced the bulk of the Tell Timai table vessels, but the absence of a ceramic waster dump makes positive identification so far impossible.

Dating evidence for the deposit points to the first half of the second century BC. This date is derived by comparative typological analysis with ceramic remains from other sites in the Delta region and the eastern Mediterranean in general. The types of vessels that provide dating evidence include table, cooking, and utility vessels.

Table vessels
Local productions

The destruction deposit includes many table vessels typical of Hellenistic table assemblages. The majority of these are of local origin, made of Nile Silt either of local site production or of regional production within the Delta (e.g. the stamped base sherd, no. 4, which is of Nile Silt, but likely was imported to the site from a larger regional ceramic production center, possibly Alexandria or Buto).
Incurved rim bowls (nos. 7-18) make up the most common table vessel type in the deposit. These bowls, typologically descendant from the fourth century Attic form, are common occurrences at Hellenistic sites throughout the eastern Mediterranean. While the form has a long production tradition that spans the entirety of the Hellenistic period (fourth through first century BC), the incurved rim bowl is especially common in Egypt and the southern Levant during the third and second centuries BC (Berlin 2001, 30). Examples of incurved rim bowls were recovered from the 1965-1966 excavations of Tell Timai, where they were recover from a floor dating to the middle of the second century BC (Ochsenschlager 1967, nos. 14-15).

The second most common table vessel shape from the destruction deposit is the everted rim bowl (nos. 5-6, 60-64). The everted rim bowl, also a Hellenistic form originating from Athens, is commonly found alongside the incurved rim bowl in eastern Mediterranean contexts (Berlin 2001, 30). The destruction deposit yielded several varieties of the form, all of which have parallels at other sites dating to the second century BC. At Naukratis the form is most common in third and second century contexts (Berlin 2001, fig. 2.10: 2-4), and at Tell Timai an example of the form nearly identical to those recovered from the well was recovered from a floor dating to the first half of the second century BC (Ochsenschlager 1967, fig. 25).

Two types of saucers are present in the destruction deposit. The most common is the thickened rim saucer (nos. 20-22). The thickened rim saucer is a common Hellenistic form and at Naukratis it is commonly found in contexts dating from the mid-third through the second century BC (Berlin 2001, no. 23).

A single example of a drooping rim saucer was recovered from the destruction deposit (no. 19). The single sherd is small and worn, unlike most of the vessels belonging to the deposit, and may well represent an intrusion to the deposit context. At Naukratis, the drooping rim saucer does not appear in contexts earlier than the late second century BC (Berlin 2001, table 2.1). Considering the example from the destruction deposit is small and worn, it probably should be considered a later intrusion.

Two large thickened rim platters with forms identical to the thickened rim saucer were recovered from the deposit (nos. 23-24). This type is essentially a large version of the thickened rim saucer. The size of the thickened rim platters, with rim diameters between two and three times greater than thickened rim saucers and capacities at least twelve times greater, suggests that they would have been used for service at the table, from which food was distributed to the smaller bowls and saucers.

Imported table vessels

Only three vessels from the destruction deposit can be positively identified as imports (nos. 1-3). A small ring base fragment of a Gnathian kantharos recovered from the destruction fill is likely residual (no. 1). The Gnathian type is generally dated to the first half of the third century BC (Green 1977, 556). Another imported type from the deposit is a ‘Koan-Knidian’ bowl (no. 2). This type is common throughout Hellenistic layers in the eastern Mediterranean. The outward folded rim of the example from the destruction deposit has strong parallels with an example from Naukratis dated to the late third century BC (Berlin 2001, fig. 2.5:11) and from the Athenian Agora from a context dating between ca. 175 and 165 BC (Rotroff 1997, no. 393). The third imported table vessel from the destruction deposit is an example of a middle Hellenistic

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2 See also examples of the ‘Koan-Knidian’ bowl type found at Coptos dated from the early third to the early second century BC (Herbert and Berlin 2003, figs. H2.14-15) and at Paphos from a deposit dated ca. 175-120/100 BC (Hayes 1991, fig. XII.1-3).
base of an incurved rim bowl (no. 3). The bowl is made of a fine/semi fine fabric, which is pale yellow with few visible inclusions and slightly granular, bears a thin dull red slip on the interior surface with spattered drips of the same on the lower portion of the exterior. The fabric and shape of the ring foot are similar to wares and incurved rim bowls produced in the latter half of the second century BC in Cyprus and the southern Levant, which is where our example may come from.\(^3\)

**Important datable plain and cooking wares**

For this preliminary report, only the plain wares from the destruction deposit that provide useful dating evidence will be discussed.

**Kraters.** The most common type of krater found in the deposit is an overhanging rim type (nos. 25-27). At Naukratis, this krater is found in contexts datable to the second century BC (Berlin 2001, figs. 2.44-45).

**Stew Pots.** Several large fragments from a single large stew pot were recovered from the burnt well deposit in N7-1 (no. 66). The form and rim treatment are similar to “ledge/folded lip” stew pots found at Naukratis in contexts that date no earlier than the early/mid-second century BC (Berlin 2001, fig. 2.19:2).

**Casseroles.** Two examples of what Berlin calls an “inset rim casserole” at Naukratis are present in the destruction deposit (nos. 46-47). At Naukratis, the type dates to the late second century BC, but Berlin notes that the same type is observed at Coptos in contexts dated to the late third century (Berlin 2001, 34, fig. 2.24).

**Proposed dates**

The preponderance of dating evidence in the form of ceramic parallels from the destruction deposit in N7-3 and N7-1 suggest a general second century date for the destruction event. This date can be narrowed to the first half of the second century when we consider forms such as the imported ‘Koan-Knidian’ bowl (no. 2), the semi-fine bowl (no. 3), the local everted rim bowls (nos. 5-6, 60-64), and the stew pot (no. 66). Materials from N7-1, feature 238 (figs. 11-13), which has not yet been firmly linked to the destruction deposit, but likely represents the last phase of domestic occupation in Area N7, includes ceramic types that can push for a narrower date range.\(^4\) A working hypothesis is that the destruction event occurred in the second quarter of the second century BC (ca. 175-150 BC).

**Areas N and O**

One of the most significant contributions of the ceramic field analysis of summer 2010 was linking the last domestic phase of Areas N with the cessation of industrial activities in Area O. A single large rim fragment from a large storage jar found in O6-18, feature 344 joins several large fragments of the same storage jar found in N7-1, feature 238 (fig. 9). Upon further examination of the two contexts it was determined that the two were very similar in composition, consisting of high quantities of locally produced Hellenistic table vessels (incurved rim bowls and thickened rim saucers) and Hellenistic cooking vessels (cook pots, stew pots, and casseroles). Though another join between the two features could not be identified, it was evident

\(^3\) For a Cypriot comparison from a context of similar date, see Berlin and Pilacinski 2003, especially number 43.

\(^4\) This includes an Aegean imitation of an Athenian ‘Black Glaze’ thickened rim saucer of a type dated by Rotroff between 175 and 150 BC (Rotroff 1997, nos. 680-681).
that there were non-joining fragments of the same vessels shared between the two. Examination of the stratigraphy in O6-18 revealed that feature 344 was a small section of a remaining lens left unexcavated from previous SCA excavations. The stratigraphy indicates that this lens should be associated with the fill that covered the kilns located in Area O. That the larger fragments of the storage jar that joins Areas N and O was found in Area N suggests that its primary context was in N7-1. Thus, it appears that material from Area N was used to cover the kilns, putting them out of use. Our working hypothesis is that the destruction event that produced the destruction deposit in Area N7-3 and 1 led to a leveling of the damaged/destroyed domestic structures in the Area N. The structures, along with their contents were leveled off and much of the debris was used to cover the kilns located in Area O, ending the industrial use of the area. This clearance may well be connected to the construction of the mudbrick platform in Area M, the predecessor to the limestone platform built at the end of the Ptolemaic period. If this is the case, it is possible that the destruction event heralds a transformation of this portion of Hellenistic Tell Timai from an industrial (Area O) and domestic zone (area N) to a larger public space that leveled over the houses and covered up the industrial kilns, marked by the construction of a monumental mudbrick platform.

**Area M (the limestone platform)**

The 2010 excavations in Area M produced dating evidence for the construction of the limestone platform exposed in 2009. While no ceramic remains from sealed contexts associated with the construction of the platform provide clear, absolute dating evidence, much of what was recovered has characteristics that can be qualified as Late Hellenistic/Early Roman. Feature M6-6-282, a foundation trench for the platform, produced a plainware bowl (fig.10.1), an Aswan ware jug (?) base (fig.10.2), and a white-slipped jar (fig.10.3). The plainware bowl (fig.10.1) does not follow typical Hellenistic forms, but is reminiscent of standard Late Hellenistic/Early Roman productions, especially in the eastern sigillata tradition. The rounded, thickened rim is similar to Eastern Sigillata A (ESA) *Atlante* form 12 (ca. 40 BC-AD 10) and to Cypriot Sigillata *Atlante* form 10 (generally 1st century AD).5

Excavations from the 2009 season that exposed the limestone platform yielded sealed contexts from the packing material within the casemates of the structure. While little ceramic material was recovered, two pieces are identified as probable late 1st century BC types. A small rim sherd of a semi-fine ware small bowl (fig.10.4) is reminiscent of Early Roman ceramic forms from the Italian sigillata tradition.6 The fabric of the sherd from the casemate packing is not obviously Italian or of the general western sigillata tradition, but its production is not local, being of finer quality than the usual Nile silt productions in the Tell Timai region. However, its material characteristics are such that it may be a finer Egyptian imitation of the western form.

The other Late Hellenistic/Early Roman diagnostic sherd from the 2009 excavations of the limestone structure is an Amphore Égyptienne Bitronconique 3 – also referred to as Amphore Égyptienne 3, or AE 3 (fig.10.5) – which is generally dated no earlier than the late 1st century BC (the end of the Ptolemaic/beginning of the Roman periods).7 The presence of AE 3 within the casemate packing of the limestone platform in Area M provides dating evidence for the construction of the casemates of no earlier than the very end of the Ptolemaic period, or perhaps the beginning of the Roman period.

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5 ESA *Atlante* form 12 (Hayes 1985: 20, Tav.II.10); Cypriot Sigillata *Atlante* form 10 (Hayes 1985: 82, Tav.19.1).
6 The form is similar to Haltern 7 (ca. 20 BC-AD15/20).
7 This type of amphora is also called an Amphore Égyptienne 3 (AE3). See Empereur and Picon 1998, 77.
While the individual datable diagnostic sherds are not as clear-cut as we would like, the common general characteristics shared by sherds from the foundation trench and the casemate packing makes it possible to suggest that the limestone platform in Area M was built near the end of the first century BC.

**Preliminary phasing sequence for the University of Hawaii excavations 2009-2010**

The dated contexts presented in this report provide the framework for a preliminary phasing sequence of activities in the areas excavated at Tell Timai by the University of Hawaii from 2009-2010. The sequence begins with the earliest recorded activities in the industrial zone in Area O, followed by the domestic occupation in Area N, then the clearance and covering up of both the industrial and domestic zones to make room for an open publics space, and ending with the construction of a large limestone platform at the end of the Ptolemaic/beginning of the Roman period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I</td>
<td>4th-3rd c. BC</td>
<td>Area O</td>
<td>Industrial installations built. <em>Terminus post quem</em> = mid-4th c BC (Attic RF sherd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II</td>
<td>3rd-mid-2nd c. BC</td>
<td>Area N</td>
<td>Domestic occupation. Earliest materials associated with domestic spaces include Gnathian Kantharoi of the mid-3rd century BC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III</td>
<td>mid-2nd c. BC</td>
<td>Area N</td>
<td>Destruction of domestic area and covering up of industrial zone. Destruction deposit provides dating evidence and material evidence for activities at the end of Phase II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase IV</td>
<td>Late 1st c BC</td>
<td>Area M</td>
<td>Construction of the limestone platform.</td>
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Works cited


N7-3-257
Destruction deposit - fine wares

Figure 2. Destruction deposit. Table vessels.
N7-3-257

Destruction deposit - table vessels

Figure 3. Destruction deposit. Table vessels.
Figure 4. Destruction deposit. Plain wares.
N7-3-257
Destruction deposit - cooking vessels

Figure 5. Destruction deposit. Cooking vessels.
N7-3-257
Destruction deposit - basins

Figure 6. Destruction deposit. Basins.
Figure 7. Destruction deposit. Utility and storage vessels.
Figure 8. Destruction deposit from well.
Figure 9. Joining amphora sherds from Area N and Area O.
Figure 10. Area M. Materials from foundation deposit (nos. 1-3) and casemate packing (nos. 4-5).
N7-1-238
Probable last phase of domestic area, contemporary with destruction event

Figure 11. Area N7-1, feature 238.
N7-1-238
Probable last phase of domestic area, contemporary with destruction event

Figure 12. Area N7-1, feature 238.
N7-1-238
Probable last phase of domestic area, contemporary with destruction event

Figure 13. Area N7-1, feature 238.