

# A Hellenistic Household Ceramic Assemblage from Tell el-Timai (Thmuis), Egypt: A Contextual View

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*Large deposits of domestic pottery from primary contexts in Ptolemaic Lower Egypt are uncommon and seldom presented in their entirety. This article presents four primary deposits from the destruction level of a late third/early second-century structure at Tell el-Timai in the Nile Delta (ancient Thmuis). The architectural setting for the deposits is presented, followed by presentations of each deposit in its entirety, organized by functional classifications. Analyses of the deposits are then used to suggest behavioral possibilities, with particular attention to bread baking and drinking activities. This is followed by a discussion of the nature of the total assemblage within the context of Egyptian pottery studies and an explication of how the assemblage can be understood as part of the broader region of the Levant during the Hellenistic period.*

**Keywords:** Hellenistic pottery; Hellenistic Egypt; Thmuis/Tell el-Timai; household assemblages; taverns; Nile Delta; Egyptian bread production

During the course of the 2010, 2011, and 2013 seasons at Tell el-Timai in the central delta of Egypt, the remains of a large mud-brick building were uncovered in the extant northern spur of the tell, in Area N of the excavation grid (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Four primary deposits of pottery dating to the end of the third or beginning of the second century B.C.E. were recovered from four different rooms in the building. Evidence of burning was present in two of the rooms, possibly indicating that the deposits had resulted from an event that caused the destruction of the building as a whole. In all cases, the deposits yielded intact and wholly mendable vessels along with others that were less well preserved (87 total, plus 4 lamps). This report presents the deposits within their archaeological context, beginning with the architectural evidence and associated non-ceramic artifacts, of which there are few. The weight of the report, however, is given over to the presentation and analysis

of the pottery from the four deposits, a focus chosen because of the rarity of primary Ptolemaic deposits from the delta region. The discovery of this pottery offers an opportunity to explore in situ floor deposits from multiple rooms in a single building from a particular moment in time. Because of the exceptional nature of the contexts and the good preservation of the floor deposits, they are put forth here in their entirety. Each deposit is presented within its architectural context following an overview of the stratigraphic and architectural setting. We conclude with a discussion of how best to contextualize the material and the nature of the building in which it was found.

## Stratigraphy of the Architecture

Any discussion related to the architecture must begin with a qualification. Other authors are developing a full description of the architecture, with analysis and phasing for the Hellenistic Building. As such, readers looking for specificity in the description of the architectural remains and features will note lacunae. This presentation of the architecture is intended only to provide necessary contextual information for the ceramic deposits. The building plan (Fig. 2) is restored from field notebooks and forms, and

<sup>1</sup> The building spanned Grid Units N6-10, N6-5, N7-3, N7-9, N7-7, and N7-8.

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