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The Vessel Fragment from Faras Cathedral: A Reliquary or a Vessel for Eucharistic Bread?

In the course of the archaeological research conducted in Faras in 1962, an unusual ceramic object was discovered which made its way to the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw in 1975 (**figs 1–2**).[1] It is a spherical lid of a vessel, topped with a Greek cross which apart from being a symbol was also used as a handle. The two horizontal beams of the cross are made of clay cylinders, hollow inside and adjusted to the vertical "beam" of the cross which itself was moulded as a part of the lid's shell. The lateral surfaces of the horizontal arms of the cross are painted black.

The lid has not been preserved as a whole, yet the shard allows for a full reconstruction of its form and decoration (**figs 3–4**). On its external surface, nine triangles are painted whose bottom corners meet. All their bases are lined up above a brown line encircling the bottom edge of the cover. There is a dot painted on top of each triangle. From the peaks of three triangles and from the junction points of the bases of the remaining six triangles, six crosses emerge in an alternating manner: three of them represent the *crux immisa* (the Latin cross), whose horizontal beams have miniature cross-beams depicted as double lines, and three represent the *crux quadrata* (the Greek cross). Since the latter type is drawn in a characteristic style – in one uninterrupted brushstroke – it can be described as a "cross without a beginning or an end," as opposed to the Latin cross, which consists of two perpendicular lines.

The lid used to cover a vessel which had a special purpose, a fact suggested by the symbolism of the carefully painted crosses; their number and rhythmical layout give an impression of a certain "decorative programme." It may imply that the vessel was produced to hold special content, and since it was discovered within the outline of church buildings, we may presume that we have to do with an object employed in the temple, probably during the liturgy.[2]

The uniqueness of the object from the National Museum in Warsaw stems from the fact that the only analogy is provided by the vessel from the church in Wadi es-Sebua in Nubia (**figs 5–6**).[3]

[1] The Collection of Ancient Art of the NMW, inv. no. 234549 MNW (excavation inv. no. F 200/62–63).

[2] On vessels and objects employed in Coptic liturgy see *Coptic Encyclopedia*, Aziz S. Atiya, ed. (New York, 1991), pp. 1064–66 (entry: *Eucharistic vessels and instruments*) and pp. 1469–75 (entry: *Liturgical instruments*); Oswald Hugh Edward Burmester, "Rites and Ceremonies of the Coptic Church (Part I)," *The Eastern Churches Quarterly*, no. 7 (1948), pp. 384–88.

[3] The Nubia Museum in Aswan, Egypt. See Gaballa Ali Gaballa, *Nubia Museum. Catalogue* (Aswan, [n.d.]), fig. p. 63. On the circumstances and context of this discovery, as well as a rather general discussion see Jean Leclant, "Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan," *Orientalia*, no. 34 (1965), p. 192, tab. 34, fig. 17. Only one dimension was given – the height (57 cm), which however suffices to determine the diameter (c. 30–32 cm). It was qualified as a reliquary and dated to the 7th c., which seems rather too early. Other motifs (apart from the rosettes/diagonal crosses) painted on the vessel – arches, arcades or garlands based on single or double lines – are dated much later, to the 10th–14th c. See also William Y. Adams, *Ceramic Industries of Medieval Nubia, Part II* (Kentucky, 1986), fig. 167, H.21-2; fig. 184, K.11-1, K.12-2; fig. 186, E.12-1; fig. 195, K.21-17, 18, 19.

Comparing the two lids, it is evident that the one from Faras was smaller and decorated in a different style, yet they are morphologically identical.[4] Therefore, an analysis of the Wadi es-Sebua vessel is crucial in the reconstruction and discussion of the potential function of the Faras vessel.

The Wadi es-Sebua object is a cylindrical, somewhat protuberant lidded pottery jar with a rather wide ringfoot, most probably produced in a workshop near Aswan. The lid's surface is covered with motifs in white paint: a cross, repeated several times, which comes in the form of a floral rosette consisting of four elements. One could also interpret the pattern as a sequence of Greek crosses (*cruces quadratae*). Similar diagonal rosettes are painted on the entire body of the vessel. Each one of them can be interpreted as a *crux decussata*, and this interpretation is substantiated by many other Nubian artefacts, like, for instance, the doorpost from Faras cathedral (**fig. 7**).[5] It features alternatively arranged sculptural *cruces decussatae*: one in the form of a diagonal Greek cross against one in the form of a rosette. Numerous other motifs of this kind, depending on the context, are described in two ways: either as a cross or as a plain floral motif. The lid's handle in the form of a Greek cross as well as the crosses painted on almost the entire surface of the vessel, identify it to a large extent as linked to ecclesiastic rites, though its actual function – and, at the same time, the function of the Faras artefact which has not been preserved as a whole and whose lid is in the collection of the NMW – remains an object of discussion.

A Reliquary?

The discoverers of the Wadi es-Sebua vessel described it as a reliquary, persuaded by the fact that it was closed (not permanently, though!) and distinguished for its uncommon form and "decoration."[6] The place of its discovery also seemed significant – described, rather generally, as "in front of the altar." This last argument could have been the decisive factor for the determination of the function, since the altar and its surroundings are commonly viewed as the places to store relics.[7] However, the size of the vessel indicates that if it was to be used to hold relics, then it must have contained either a *cranium* (a skull)[8] or several smaller containers with relics.

[4] The lid's diameter is 17.5 cm and the height – 12.7 cm. Relying on the proportions of the Wadi es-Sebua vessel, we can roughly estimate that the Faras vessel was c. 18 cm in diameter and c. 25 cm of height.

[5] The doorpost exhibited at the NMW's Faras Gallery (height: 78 cm) was assembled of two parts (bottom: inv. no. 234700 MNW, top: inv. no. 234702 MNW); compare also the "four-leaf" cross scratched in the plaster (a sketch) from Abdallah Nirqi marking the chancel barrier. See Jean Leclant, "Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1964–1965," *Orientalia*, no. 35 (1966), p. 149, fig. 41.

[6] The formal repertoire of Nubian ware includes no such type – see Adams, op. cit., passim.

[7] It does not constitute a rule, however, see Marie-Christine Comte, *Les reliquaires du Proche-Orient et de Chypre à la période protobyzantine (IV^e–VIII^e siècles). Formes, emplacements, fonctions et cultes* (Turnhout, 2012), pp. 492–93 (the author also lists other spots where reliquaries were placed). The note on the discovery of the Wadi es-Sebua vessel does not permit a conclusion that the vessel was buried underneath the floor upon which the altar stood – see Leclant, op. cit., p. 193. It is also worth observing that it was assembled from several pieces glued together, meaning that it must have been damaged sometime in the Middle Ages. Rules existed around withdrawn or damaged liturgical vessels, cf. Wilhelm Riedel, *Die Kirchenrechtsquellen des Patriarchats Alexandrien* (Leipzig, 1900), p. 98 – the Nomocanon of Michael from Damietta, section 7 [68a], which states that the vessel ought to be buried in an important place; how does one handle, according to the normative texts, a broken Eucharistic chalice – it should be buried in a dignified place (e.g., near the altar?). On traces of such practises see Bellarmino Bagatti, *The Church from the Gentiles in Palestine. History and Archaeology* (Jerusalem, 1971), p. 262, fig. 133; Burmester, op. cit., p. 382; Helmut Buschhausen et al., "Ausgrabungen von Dair Abu Fana in Ägypten im Jahr 1990," *Egypt and the Levant*, no. 4 (1994), p. 105; Joseph Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, vol. 1 (München, 1924), p. 438.

[8] The relic of the skull of St Athanasius was mentioned by a pilgrim from Piacenza in the 6th c. – see *Pilgerfahrt ins Heilige Land: die ältesten Berichte christlicher Palästinapilger (4.–7. Jahrhundert)*, Herbert Donner,

This identification of the vessel's function appears doubtful. In the Late Antique or Byzantine period no canonical form of reliquary existed. Any vessel, if only sufficiently decorative, expensive and worthy of its contents, could become a reliquary. Therefore, surprisingly enough, receptacles holding Christian relics often featured mythology-related decoration (i.e., having pagan contents), which indicates that they had been adapted for reliquaries because of their material value or high aesthetic qualities.[9] A formal canon of reliquaries only existed for small stone sarcophagi which contained various smaller receptacles with relics.[10]

In Egypt and Sudan no such artefacts, which are more characteristic for the Byzantine circle in the East (excluding Egypt), have been found. Therefore, in this case, we would be looking at a ceramic reliquary, and these happen to be extremely rare.[11] We can only presume that Nubian reliquaries, similarly as other Late Antique or early medieval ones, could have been produced of various materials. However, not a single one made of clay has been preserved in Nubia.

Understandably, the possibility that the objects from Faras and Wadi es-Sebua are reliquaries cannot be definitely rejected. Nubian liturgical vessels (patens and chalices) discovered so far are also made of clay – so the hypothesis that reliquaries, too, could have been produced of like material, could be justified.[12] Still, the function attribution of the two objects in question appears uncertain and insufficiently documented in the eyes of the author of the present study. And it is not in regards to the material of which they have been produced, but, first of all, their size. The reported circumstances of the discovery of the Wadi es-Sebua vessel appear obscure, too: if it was located (as a reliquary?) within the altar area, then it is rather surprising that no relics were found inside. Maybe it was buried as broken and this is why it was left behind when the church was being abandoned? We

ed. (Stuttgart, 1979), p. 283. In St Mark Cathedral in Alexandria, St Mark's head is preserved – see Otto Meinardus, *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern* (Cairo, 1977), pp. 25–54. Meinardus mentions also the heads of St Andrew in Patras and St Titus in Heraklion (Meinardus, op. cit., p. 25). However, it is hard to imagine a relic of this type – extremely rare even in Byzantium – in provincial Nubia.

[9] See Helmut Buschhausen, *Die spätrömischen Metallscrinia und frühchristlichen Reliquare* (Wien–Köln–Graz, 1971) – e.g., cat. no. A 29, A 39–49, B 13. From more than 200 reliquaries listed here, only 15 of them feature an image of the cross or a Christogram, and only one of them (C 70) is crowned with a cross. Caskets reused as reliquaries – see Ralph F. Hoddinott, *Bulgaria in antiquity: an archaeological introduction* (London, 1975), p. 329, fig. 193; John Duffy, Gary Vikan, "A Small Box in John Moschus," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, no. 24 (2011), pp. 93–99.

[10] The term "reliquary" employed in literature of the subject does not determine the form but only the function of a vessel adapted to contain holy relics. No canonical form of the Late Antique reliquary existed apart from the external receptacle – most often, a stone casket in the form of a sarcophagus (see Comte, op. cit., passim). Inside, it hid cells for another receptacle for relics, which could, in turn, contain yet another smaller casket (*pyxis*), the most precious one, in which relics were directly held. Examples of this kind of reliquaries – see Buschhausen, op. cit., cat. nos B.18–20, C.1, 8, 10, 12, 15, 20, 34, 70 and *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, Kurt Weitzmann, ed., exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1977–1978 (New York, 1979), cat. nos 568–69, 573.

[11] Comte, op. cit., p. 32; Buschhausen, op. cit., C.31, 64, 73.

[12] Liturgical vessels discovered so far in Nubia (chalices and patens) are exclusively made of pottery, see, i.a.: Włodzimierz Godlewski, "The Northern Church in Old Dongola," *Archéologie du Nil Moyen*, no. 4 (1990), pp. 53–54, figs IV a–b, V a, VI a; *Sudan. Ancient Treasures. An Exhibition of Recent Discoveries from the Sudan National Museum*, Derek A. Welsby, Julie R. Anderson, eds, exh. cat., The British Museum (London, 2004), p. 225, cat. nos 193 and 194. No reliquaries from the area of Nubia made of precious metals are known, apart from one, which had been robbed by Blemmyes in Egypt and treated by them as silver scrap metal – see László Török, "An Early Christian Silver Reliquary from Nubia," in *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann gewidmet*, Otto Feld, Urs Peschlow, eds (Bonn, 1986), pp. 59–65, tab. 15–16.

should therefore consider what other function could be attributed to an object distinguished by its unambiguously symbolic decoration and whether or not it may have been employed during liturgical action.

A Receptacle for the *Antidoron*

The liturgy of the Eastern Churches included a custom of distributing, after the Eucharistic Liturgy was concluded, the blessed bread (eulogia) among lay worshippers who had not received Holy Communion. Its quantity was not precisely determined. It may have only been merely leftovers of eulogiae, portions of which had been earlier taken for consecration. The cut off and unconsecrated pieces of bread had to be stored until the end of the Mass in a receptacle located in the *pastophorium*, i.e., the room where the preparation (*proskomidia*) of the Gifts – bread and wine – took place. The blessed bread was named *antidoron* ('[bread] instead of gifts') and was a substitute of the Holy Communion.[13] The faithful consumed it before leaving the church. Modern and contemporary Coptic liturgy mentions giving away bread in baskets.[14] We cannot be certain whether in the past the bread was also brought from the *prothesis* in baskets or perhaps in dedicated ware (bowls, trays?). We have no early data on the organization of the distribution of the bread – was it brought from the *prothesis* to the border of the sanctuary, which the laity could not trespass,[15] or farther, to the nave?

It proves difficult to link the function of the Faras and Wadi es-Sebua vessels with the distribution of *antidoron*. It would be more practical to give them away from a shallow, open vessel – for instance, a bowl. The Wadi es-Sebua vessel was large and deep enough and could have contained many eulogiae,[16] yet the need to cover and open it all the time would have complicated the process of distribution. People were offered the entire batch of bread prepared earlier and there was no need of covering it. Potentially, the lid could have been employed before the vessel was taken away from the *prothesis* as it stood there for some time and it would likely have been covered then.[17]

[13] The term *antidoron* was reportedly known since the 9th c. as referring to distributed bread (Henry George Lidell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford, 1996], p. 181), whereas Alfred Stuiber believes that it is only to be found since the 12th c. onwards (Alfred Stuiber, *Eulogia* in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, col. 922). See also Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), p. 153. On the subject of the *antidoron* see Thomas F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (London, 1971), p. 172; George Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy. The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (London, 1970), pp. 64, 111, 113, 183; Henryk Paprocki, *Misterium Eucharystii* (Krakow, 2010), pp. 263, 291–292.

[14] Clemens Kopp, *Glaube und Sakramente der koptischen Kirche* (Rome, 1932), p. 137; Burmester, op. cit., p. 386; *Liturgical instruments* in *Coptic Encyclopedia*, op. cit., p. 1473.

[15] Mathews, op. cit., p. 172.

[16] Knowing the size of eulogiae or prosphora based on the size of the preserved bread stamps (see Galavaris, op. cit., passim), I estimated that the Faras vessel could have contained 20–25 eulogiae inside, while the Wadi es-Sebua vessel even three or four times as many.

[17] The particular efforts of the clergy should be emphasized who struggled to protect the Eucharistic forms (bread and wine) against dust, insects or mice (or other animals), as well as against reception by unauthorized individuals. See Otto Nussbaum, *Die Aufbewahrung der Eucharistie* (Bonn, 1979), pp. 26, 106; Joseph Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1924), p. 584; Walter Till, Johannes Leipoldt, *Der koptische Text der Kirchenordnung Hippolyts* (Berlin, 1954), p. 33 (canon 59); Riedel, op. cit., pp. 23, 108, 219, 275.

A Vessel for the Eucharist Stored in the Church for the Sick and Dying

The early Church developed a custom of leaving aside some quantity of consecrated bread (prosphora) for unexpected circumstances. At the very beginning, this practice was assuredly justified by the necessity of giving the Eucharist to persons who were unable to participate in the Eucharistic liturgy – the sick, the dying, prisoners and other people who could not attend the church for well-grounded reasons.[18] Since the 4th century, a certain amount of prosphora was stored (in a receptacle in *prothesis*?) and so with these reserves available, diacons were then able to distribute the Eucharist outside the church. We do not know if it was a dedicated or definite type of vessel or just any lidded pyxis or whether the Faras and Wadi es-Sebua vessels could be employed in this function. We do not know either if prosphora were brought outside in these vessels or if they were rather transferred to some other ware.

As for the time of storing them after the consecration, sources speak either of one day, one night, three days or even an entire week, yet only during Easter,[19] although a belief was also common that the Eucharist stored until the next day loses its validity.[20] The limitations concerning the storage did not stem from dogmatic reasons, but rather from the misgivings about the potential sacrilege in regards to the bread that was left.[21] In private devotion, despite the fact that storing the Eucharist was banned at homes of the laity, worshippers chose various ways: some took home the consecrated bread from the Communion,[22] while others – the blessed *antidoron*, in order to receive it later in an appropriate moment.

It seems that the most convincing interpretation of this type of vessel's function should be now considered. In Eastern churches, possibly since the 8th and certainly since the 10th century, a vessel called *artophorion* was employed, which, as the Greek name indicates, served to transport bread.[23] The Church did not allow taking prosphora outside the temple.[24] This ban must have been a reaction to the breaking of ecclesiastical rules by members of the congregation. Some of them considered prosphora as a particular type of amulet so they took it home or for a journey.[25] By way of exception, it was permitted to bring prosphora outside the church to distribute it to the faithful who were unable to take part in the Eucharistic liturgy. Ecclesiastic regulations (normative texts) appear inconsistent in this point. Some of them cite a ban on taking prosphora outside the church, while others discuss the necessity of

[18] Kopp, op. cit., p. 143; Braun, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 597; Galavaris, op. cit., p. 42.

[19] Kopp, op. cit., p. 139; Nussbaum, op. cit., pp. 243–44.

[20] Nussbaum, op. cit., p. 23; Riedel, op. cit., pp. 54, 275.

[21] See n. 17.

[22] Franz Joseph Dölger, "Die Eucharistie als Reiseschutz. Die Eucharistie in den Händen der Laien," *Antike und Christentum*, no. 5 (1936), pp. 232–47; on the ban against taking it to and storing at homes – see Nussbaum, op. cit., pp. 278–82. The custom of putting the Eucharistic bread on the worshipper's hand must have provoked such behaviour (during almost the entire 1st Millennium) – on this topic see Mathews, op. cit., p. 172.

[23] Demetrios Demetrakos, *Mega Lexicon tēs Hellēnikēs Glōssēs* (Athens, 1936–50), p. 1002; Charles Du Cange, *Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediae et Infimae Graecitatis* (Lugduni [Lyon], 1688) (reprint: Graz, 1958), p. 128; Evangelius A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)* (New York, 1887), p. 255; Lidell, Scott, op. cit., p. 250; Nussbaum, op. cit., pp. 310–11. The same function was performed by the *panarion* (Lat. *panarium*) – see Hans Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (Berlin–New York, 2002), p. 604.

[24] On this proscription see Nussbaum, op. cit., pp. 278–82; Kopp, op. cit., p. 143, n. 4.

[25] Dölger, op. cit., pp. 236, 240–47.

delivering them to the sick. Perhaps the first ones, considering the need of bringing the Holy Communion to the sick as obvious, introduced a ban on taking prosphora outside the temple for other purposes, for instance to private homes where they would function informally (as a protective object or for private reception of the Holy Communion). The priest took away prosphora placed in a special vessel which must have been covered, as he visited the members of the congregation, to protect the contents against dirt or insects. The Canon of Hippolytus mentions a clay vessel in the context of transporting prosphora.[26] Nowhere else, however, do we find more detailed information about this practice or descriptions of this kind of vessel. By reason of the significance of their contents, no accidental vessels could be used, and, what is crucial, they had to comply with purity regulations – prosphora had to be somehow protected or covered,[27] or transported in a lidded vessel. If in Byzantium the *artophorion* was the – often very ornate[28] – vessel destined to store prosphora in the *prothesis* and associated with the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, then did this term also apply to a vessel in which prosphora were transported outside the church? Unfortunately, the name of the vessel containing prosphora for the sick remains unknown. Ascribing this function to the vessel defined as an *artophorion* results from the literal translation of this word. Did this vessel, used to store and bring the Eucharist outside, have the same name as the vessel in which the Eucharist was stored in the church? This question cannot be answered yet and the issue remains open for the time being.

A Vessel to Store the Eucharist for the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

We are familiar with the name and function of the vessel used to store the so-called Eucharistic reserve in the late Byzantium. The Byzantine *Euchologion* (collection of prayers) saved these names for us and through a comparison with the slightly later Western vessels used for this

[26] See Wilhelm Riedel, Walter Ewing Crum, *The Canons of Athanasius of Alexandria. The Arabic and Coptic Versions* (London, 1904). In the introduction (p. XXIII), the text of the 24th canon of the Cannons of Hippolytus is mentioned, in which a clay vessel is named in the context of assisting the sick. In my view, it is not a reference to delivering food, but rather eulogiae or even prosphora. A different opinion can be found with: Ric Barrett-Lennard, "The Canons of Hippolytus and Christian Concern with Illness, Health, and Healing," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, no. 13 (2005), pp. 159–60.

[27] On eulogiae wrapped in a cloth see Braun, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 635.

[28] On objects made of precious metals described as *artophoria* and problems with their relevant identification see William B.R. Saunders, "The Aachen Reliquary of Eustathius Maleinus, 969–970," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, no. 36 (1982), pp. 216, 219; Jannic Durand, *Le trésor de Saint-Marc de Venise* (Milan, 1984), pp. 237, 242, figs 32a, 32b (an *artophorion* or an incensory?); *Byzantium 330–1453*, Robin Cormack, Maria Vassilaki, eds, exh. cat., Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2008–9 (London, 2008), cat. no. 176 (the incensory from San Marco, the late 12th c., which could have originally been used as an *artophorion* and later adapted for a reliquary); Slobodan Ćurčić, Evangelia Hadjitryphonos, *Architecture as Icon. Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art* (New Haven, 2010), cat. nos 75, 76 and 194 (18th c.). Undeniably, objects used to store the Eucharist existed, so the complete lack of them (under this name) in Byzantine inventories from the 8th–15th c. listing a great number of liturgical objects is surprising, at least. See *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, John Thomas, Angela Constantinides Hero, eds (Washington, D.C., 2000). They are also missing in sources related with Egypt – see Georg Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger im spätantiken Ägypten nach den Aussagen der griechischen und koptischen Papyri und Ostraka* (Leipzig, 2002). In the contemporary Coptic Church, vessels employed to store the Eucharistic reserve are called *artophorion* – see Burmester, op. cit., p. 386; *Eucharistic vessels and instruments* in *Coptic Encyclopedia*, op. cit., pp. 1064–65. For a better understanding of problems of scholars who identify vessels and objects employed in liturgy – see Béatrice Caseau, *Objects in Churches: the Testimony of Inventories* in *Objects in Context, Objects in Use. Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity*, Luke Lavan et al., eds (Leiden–Boston, 2007), pp. 552–53. The author explains reasons for problematic matching of the names of liturgical vessels occurring in written sources to archaeological finds or objects in church treasuries.

purpose, defined their role in their liturgy.[29] The name *artophorion* (Lat. *panarium* = Gr. *panarion*; Lat. *ciborium* = Gr. *kiborion*) signifies vessels employed not only to store prosphora for the faithful, yet, first of all, lidded vessels or objects used in the precisely defined context of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts – for the Eucharistic reserve for a large number of participants in the Mass. These were the Gifts consecrated during the last Eucharist and stored to be given away during the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts – which provided the Holy Communion mainly during the Lent (on Wednesdays and Fridays).[30] This liturgy enabled worshippers to receive the Holy Communion on the day when the Mass was not celebrated. What in the Latin Church was deposited in the ciborium[31] placed in the tabernacle, was stored in the East until the consummation time in similar, dedicated vessels brought from the *prothesis* to the sanctuary before the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. Unfortunately, the sources mention only the custom of storing, transporting and distributing prosphora, omitting both the method of performing these actions and the vessels in use. Undoubtedly, in accordance with the practice of protecting the Eucharistic particles, the vessel containing the bread for the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts must have been closed.

Did Christian Nubia know the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, which requires, if not constant, then at least temporary storage of the Eucharistic reserve? Recently, the researchers of Nubian Christianity have been of opinion that in Nubia, the Alexandrian-Egyptian liturgy of Saint Mark[32] was celebrated, just as in the Coptic Church. It is substantiated by the liturgical texts preserved on the walls of the *prothesis* in Faras cathedral which suggest that this liturgy, which involves the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts,[33] was performed in Faras. Undoubtedly, it is connected with the painting depicting Christ blessing the chalice with wine.[34] Gifts from the faithful were collected in the *prothesis* to be blessed, prepared for the consecration (only bread and wine) and taken away to the sanctuary.[35] A portion of prosphora was stored in the *prothesis* as the Eucharistic reserve and this required a covered vessel, from which prosphora for the sick and for the Eucharist on aliturgical days, most of all in Lent, was taken. This precise

[29] It should be noted here that (debatable) sources cite this name in the late 8th c. at the earliest, based on the dating of the oldest *euchologion*: Jacobus Goar lists in his commentary Greek and Latin names of objects (vessels?) employed to store the Eucharistic reserve. See Jacobus Goar, *Euchologion sive rituale Graecorum, Editio secunda* (Venice, 1730) (reprint: Graz, 1960), pp. 12, 177, 207.

[30] Nussbaum, op. cit., passim (pp. 25–26 on the practice of Eucharistic reserve in the Coptic Church); Marek Błaza, "Dogmatyczne i praktyczne znaczenie Liturgii Uprzednio Poświęconych Darów (Missa Praesanctificatorum)," *Studia Bobolanum*, no. 4 (2003), pp. 29–56.

[31] Piotr Skubiszewski, "Romańskie cyboria w kształcie czary z nakrywą. Problem genezy," *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, no. 5 (1965), pp. 7–46 (the author's commentaries on the missing precision in the terminology and difficulties with the identification of vessels for the Eucharistic reserve remain accurate and up-to-date, pp. 7–8). See also n. 28.

[32] On the topic of the liturgy of St Mark see Paprocki, op. cit., pp. 31–32, 89–91; see also Adam Łajtar, Dobrochna Zielińska, *The Northern Pastophorium of Nubian Churches: Ideology and Function (On the Basis of Inscriptions and Paintings)* in *Aegyptus et Nubia Christiana. The Włodzimierz Godlewski Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, Adam Łajtar, Artur Obłuski, Iwona Zych, eds (Warsaw, 2016), pp. 446, 448–49.

[33] Łajtar, Zielińska, *The Northern Pastophorium...*, op. cit., pp. 448–52.

[34] See Kazimierz Michałowski, *Faras, die Kathedrale aus dem Wüstensand* (Zürich–Köln, 1967), fig. 11.

[35] In the author's opinion, the place to store a receptacle for consecrated bread could have been one of the two niches in the eastern wall of the *prothesis* of Faras cathedral: either the niche in the separated southern part, closed behind wooden door, or the niche behind the altar – see Michałowski, op. cit., p. 97 (the plan of the cathedral with the *prothesis* in the north-eastern corner) and fig. 11.

purpose could have been the function of vessels like the ones found in the churches in Wadi es-Sebua and Faras, which, apparently, fulfilled all conditions demanded from vessels for the Eucharistic reserve: they were covered and could contain many prosphora. The symbolism of painted crosses underlined their special purpose.

The lack of comparative evidence is the reason why the vessel cover from Faras is extremely difficult to date. Since it was discovered next to the cathedral, in secondary layers, there are no satisfying stratigraphic indications which would help to establish the chronology. Moreover, the decorative motifs are not characteristic enough to serve as a proper criterion, either. As much as the Wadi es-Sebua vessel can be, on the basis of its painted motifs, rather roughly dated to the 10th–14th century, the incomplete artefact from Faras needs to be bracketed much wider – as produced between the second half of the 7th to mid-14th century. The early dating is suggested by the Greek cross painted in one brushstroke.[36] However, a later dating (9th–11th century?) appears more probable, regarding that, i.a., William Adams dates the spatial distribution of Greek crosses (be it that of different type) emerging from the zigzag's corners and the crosses with arms finished with a cross-beam to the 11th – mid-14th century.[37] As it is in case of the identification and terminology of objects serving a similar function and known from the area of Eastern Christianity, the dating involves no definitive statements.[38]

Translated by Karolina Koriat

[36] See Adams, op. cit., fig. 235.23 (mid-7th–9th c.); Mieczysław Rodziewicz, *Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie à la lumière des fouilles polonaises à Kôm el-Dikka* (Warsaw, 1984), pl. 39, no. 151 (mid-7th c.).

[37] Adams, op. cit., fig. 184, K.11-2, fig. 194, G.11-4, H.5-2.

[38] See n. 28, 29, 31.