

GREEK AND ROMAN DEPARTMENT

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

~~UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO~~



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M5S 2C6

Mr. N. Chittick,  
British Institute in Eastern Africa,  
Nairobi.

Dear Mr. Chittick,

Dick Nicholls at the Fitzwilliam kindly forwarded to me for comment the photograph of our Aksum glass which you sent him back at the end of May. I am sorry not to have got an opinion on it through to you earlier, but found the letter on my desk when I returned from three months' field-work at the beginning of this month.

Of the two vessels from the tomb-group shown, the slender beaker or goblet on the left looks as if it might be rather later than 3rd century, where Donald Harden put it. All depends on the fabric and the treatment of the foot. It could be 3rd century Egyptian if the foot is of  profile, with a cut and ground lower edge, and if the fabric is good-quality, more or less colourless and of appreciable thickness; Harden probably had in mind his fragments, Harden, Roman Glass from Karanis nos. 420-425, pp. 151-2, pl. XVI, which are of this variety. However, I strongly suspect from the photo that the goblet may have a folded foot, thus:  If so, it is not going to be much earlier than the 5th century, when this type of foot appears on 'wine-glasses' - a very common Early Christian shape. The trailed decoration would fit well in the 4th-early 5th centuries as well as the 3rd, and if it is of a different colour from the glass of the body would almost certainly be 4th century plus. The particular pattern is not one with which I'm particularly familiar, however. Whether it could be South Egyptian I wouldn't know - glass finds from there are pretty scarce, unless Donald Harden has knowledge of new ones from recent work in Nubia. The body-shape, collar below the rim, treatment of foot (and perhaps the decoration) seem to me as likely to be Syro-Palestinian as anything (though I can't parallel the combination of all on one vessel. If fabric and foot-treatment are not of the Egyptian variety I mentioned above, I would be quite in favour of having it come to Aksum straight down the Red Sea (as probably did the Roman fine red wares which you sent photos of last year). As to date, I would plump for something like mid 4th-early 5th century; the body-shape would seem to belong in that bracket.

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I have nothing to offer on the beaker(?) on the right. I would have had it as earlier Roman but for the snail-like projection on the right, which I take to be a small handle for suspension - were there originally three? If so, it begins to look like a relative of a whole lot of Early Christian hanging lamps, and would hardly be earlier than the 4th century, and very likely somewhat later. The source is anyone's guess at the moment.

Was the late 4th-early 5th century (plus) the great period of importation, I

P.T.O.

~~WONDER~~ wonder? And if so, why? But that's your problem ...

If you agree, I think I might send the photo on to Dan Barag in Jerusalem, who might have a worthwhile comment on the pieces if they come from the Palestinian end. An intriguing puzzle!

My best wishes for your next season. Any more tit-bits would be welcome. I shall be in England for two or three weeks over Christmas if any of your team should happen to be around then. Here is my address (Parents) for possible contact: 51 Kenley Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, KT1 3RP (tel. 01-942-8463).

Yours sincerely,

John Hayes

(Dr. J.W. Hayes)