



DOI. 10.1515/anpm-2017-0031



## A COLLECTION OF AFRICAN RED SLIP WARE IN THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

Vlastimil Vrtal<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** A group of six specimens of Late Roman pottery from the region of North Africa forms part of collections of the Náprstek Museum. The group comprises of vessels from several different functional types, forming a representative sample of the pottery production of the region. The paper discusses the setting of the individual vessels in the North African ceramic production, their dating, and provenance.

**KEY WORDS:** Late Roman pottery – transport amphora – Roman tableware – Roman cookware – African Red Slip Ware

### Introduction

A group of six specimens of Late Roman pottery from the region of North Africa is included among the collections of the Náprstek Museum. The objects were in possession of Oldřich Pospíšil originally and were later donated to the museum by his wife Libuše Pospíšilová. Oldřich Pospíšil was a frequent traveller to Tunisia and apparently an acquaintance of Eugen Strouhal, the then-curator of the Ancient Near East and Africa Department, with whom he shared the field of profession, namely medicine, as well as his interest in ancient history. He was particularly interested in prehistory, as his donations to the museum from 1970s consisting mainly of Mesolithic and Neolithic industry clearly shows.

The set of pottery consists of six vessels: two jugs, two examples of tableware, two examples of cookware, and a transport amphora (Fig. 1, Pl. 1). All vessels had been broken and were reconstructed before their accession to the museum. The origin of the vessels were only generally localised to Tunisia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Contact: Vlastimil Vrtal, National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures; e-mail: [vlastimil\\_vrtal@nm.cz](mailto:vlastimil_vrtal@nm.cz). This work was financially supported by Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic (DKRVO 2017/33, National Museum, 00023272).

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivs 3.0 License

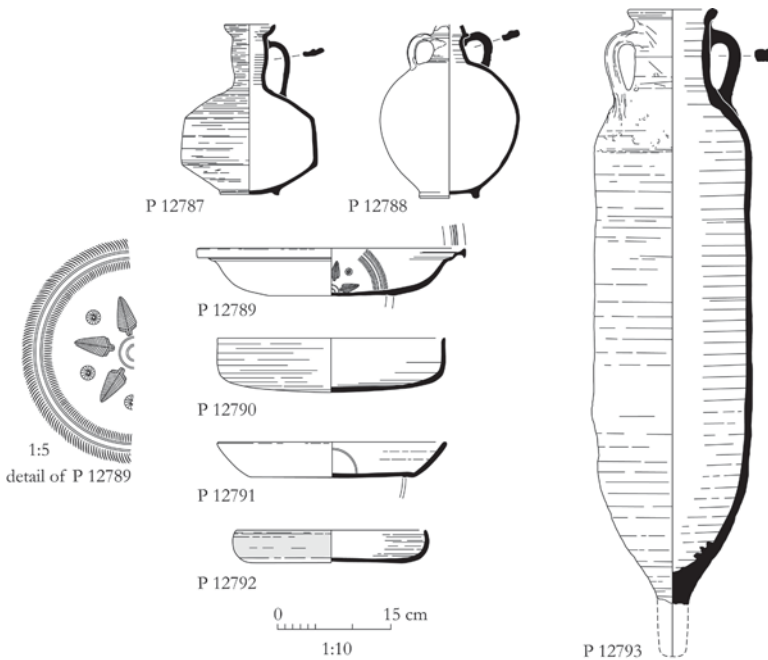


Fig. 1 A collection of Late Roman pottery of North African provenance from the collections of the Náprstek Museum (Drawing: Vlastimil Vrtal).

## Jugs

1. Inv. No. P 12787

Dimensions

h. 22.0 cm  
 dia. (rim) 6.4 cm  
 dia. (mouth) 3.4 cm  
 dia. (body) 17.4 cm  
 dia. (base) 7.6 cm  
 avg. th. 5 mm

Colour

slip: red to pale red (10R 4/8 – 7/4<sup>2</sup>)  
 fabric: light red (10R 7/6)

Fabric

dense paste, smooth lamination  
 inclusions: medium fine quartz

Surface treatment

slipped

<sup>2</sup> Colour codes according to *Munsell Soil Color Charts* 2009.

## 2. Inv. No. P 12788

Dimensions	h. 22.8 cm dia. (mouth) 5.3 mm dia. (body) 18.4 cm dia. (base) 7.7 cm
Colour	slip: red (7.5R 5/6) fabric: red (10R 5/8)
Fabric	dense paste, smooth lamination inclusions: abundant fine quartz
Surface treatment	slipped (?), covered with salty crust

The collection of pottery objects includes two jugs of African Red Slip Ware. Jug Inv. No. P 12787 has a rounded barrel-shaped body resting on a ring base, a biconical neck and wide mouth with a flaring plain rim. A modelled strap handle with a central ridge is attached under the rim and on the shoulders. The jug was coated with a red matte slip. The other jug, Inv. No. P 12788, has an ovoid body, a ring base, and a tall, strongly modelled neck, which is only preserved to the height of handles. The lower part of the neck is conical and terminates in an offset disc, from which a tall cylindrical and presumably ribbed spout went up. Two ear-shaped strap handles with a central ridge are attached to the lower part of the neck just under the offset disc and on to the shoulders. The vessel is covered with post-depositional coating of thick salty crust and the red matte slip is only visible on the base.

Both jugs belong to the group of domestic wares (cf. Fulford 1984; Fulford 1994; Bonifay 2015: 71–75, 244–301), the production of which seems to be little standardized. Thus the classification of forms and fabrics still requires further study. Based on fabric characteristics (cf. Pl. 2a–c), both vessels can be attributed to the southern production, rather than that of Carthage region (cf. Bonifay 2015: 71). Jug Inv. No. P 12788 belongs to the common form Salomonson X (*Atlante I*: Tav. LXXV, no. 5), Hayes 173 (Hayes 1972: 197), Closed Form 52 (Fulford 1984), or *commune type* 48 (Bonifay 2015: 285, Fig. 157). Domestic jugs of this type clearly imitated ceramic vessels of higher quality (glossy and decorated) as well as vessels made of glass (form Isings 129; Isings 1957), on which ceramic vessels must have been primarily modelled, as the strongly modelled neck indicates. This type was produced over a long period of time, from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. More precise dating could be derived from the form of the neck (cf. Bonifay 2015: 285), which is not preserved in the case of jug Inv. No. P 12788. Based on the shape of the body, the jug seems to fall into the main period of production of this type, i.e. to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. Such jugs were most probably intended for serving wine.

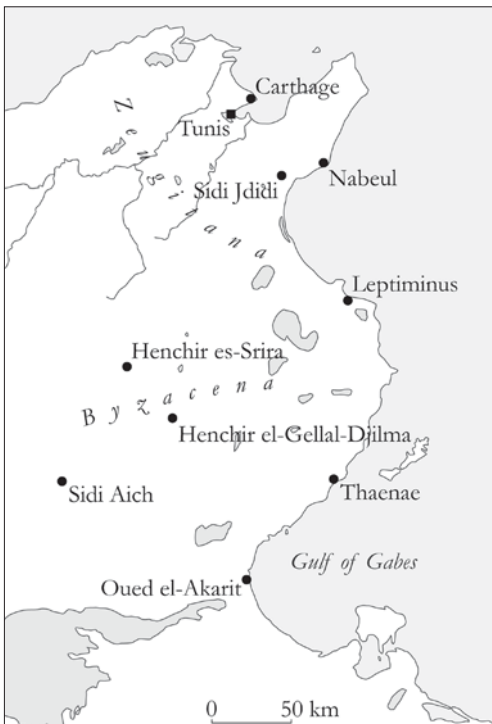
## Tableware

3. Inv. No. P 12789

Dimensions	h. 6.3 cm dia. (rim) 34.8 cm dia. (base) 16.5 cm avg. th. 5 mm
Colour	slip: weak red to red (10R 5/4 – 5/8) fabric: red (10R 5/6)
Fabric	dense paste, smooth lamination inclusions: medium fine quartz
Surface treatment	slipped

4. Inv. No. P 12791

Dimensions	h. 4.7 cm dia. (rim) 30.3 cm dia. (base) 21.2 cm avg. th. 6 mm
Colour	slip: red (10R 5/8) fabric: light red (10R 6/6)
Fabric	dense paste, smooth lamination inclusions: abundant fine quartz, very rare fine calcite
Surface treatment	slipped



Two examples of Late Roman tableware of African Red Slip Ware are included in the collection. Casserole Inv. No. P 12789 has a flat base with shallow modelling of a foot. The walls are S-shaped and terminate into a sharply modelled rim with a hooked lip and two rows of grooves on a bevelled edge. On the inside, in the centre of the casserole, there is a stamped decoration in the form of five palm branches (Style B, Hayes 1972: Fig. 39, no. 9b) radiating around concentric circles in two rows, alternating with five rosettes (Style A, Hayes 1972: Fig. 44Af). The central motif is surrounded by a double rouletted band. The vessel was coated with a fine glossy slip (Pl. 2d–e).

Fig. 2 Map of Tunisia in the Late Roman period showing sites of pottery workshops (Drawing: Vlastimil Vrtal).

The casserole represents a common form Hayes 68 (Hayes 1972: 116–117, Fig. 20, no. 1), or Antioch 868 (Waagé 1948). Vessels of this type form African Sigillata E group and were produced in a workshop, the location of which is yet unknown; however, it has been tentatively localised to the Gulf of Gabes based on the concentration of this type in the south. A number of workshops imitating the products of the main workshop for local consumption existed as well; for example, at Sidi Aich, Henchir es-Srira, Henchir el-Gellal-Djilma and Sidi Jdidi (Bonifay 2015: 51–52, Fig. 23). Casseroles of form Hayes 68 were dated by Hayes to the period from the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century until the first quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. For the variant Hayes 68, no. 1, which appears to be the closest parallel, dating to 370s CE was suggested (Hayes 1972: 117). The same dating can be suggested based on the type of stamped decoration (Hayes 1972: 219–220).

The casserole Inv. No. P 12791 has a flat base with a low foot close to the edge of the base, and flaring walls terminating in a plain rim. The transition between the base and walls is smooth, the walls are only slightly offset. On the inside, there are two sets of grooves in the centre forming concentric circles. The vessel was coated with a thin, slightly glossy slip (Pl. 2g). The casserole belongs to the form Hayes 27/31 (Hayes 1972: 49–54; cf. particularly the vessel from Corinth in *Atlante I*, Tav. XXIV, no. 6) from a common series produced over a long period of time. Dating into the late 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE can be suggested.

## Cookware

### 5. Inv. No. P 12790

Dimensions	h. 7.1 cm dia. (max.) 30.6 cm dia. (rim) 30.1 cm avg. th. 6 mm
Colour	slip: red (2.5YR 5/6)
Fabric	dense paste, smooth lamination inclusions: abundant fine quartz, frequent fine calcite
Surface treatment	slipped, burnished on the inside; salty patina on surface, burnt at bottom

### 6. Inv. No. P 12792

Dimensions	h. 4.3 cm dia. (max.) 25.7 cm dia. (rim) 24.9 cm dia. (base) 18.5 cm avg. th. 5 mm
Colour	slip: red to light red (10R 5/8 – 6/8) outer surface: light red to reddish brown (2.5YR 6/6 – 4/3)
Fabric	dense paste, fine lamination inclusions: abundant fine quartz, frequent fine calcite
Surface treatment	slipped, burnished on the inside

Cookware is represented by two examples in the collection, which correspond to chronological variants of the same type of vessel. Shallow pan Inv. No. P 12790 has a broad flat base and vertical walls terminating into a plain rim. On the edge of the base there is a shallow microgroove apparent and the base is blackened. The vessel was coated with a thin matte slip of red colour on the inside and outside (Pl. 2h–i). On the whole of the inside face there are burnishing marks. The surface is irregularly covered with patina. The other shallow pan, Inv. No. P 12792, has a broad flat base with quarter-round profile walls and plain, inwards curving rim. On the inside, the pan was covered with a glossy slip and burnished. The upper part of the outer face is reddish brown to black, the slip is absent (Pl. 2j–k).

The pans belong to Roman North African cookwares of the form Hayes 181 (Hayes 1972: 200–201, fig. 35, no. 12), Lamboglia 9A (Lamboglia 1958), or *culinaire type 5* (Bonifay 2015). Pan Inv. No. P 12792 is a late variant of the form, dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE (*variante C*; Bonifay 2015: 214, Fig. 114), which evolved into the final form (*variante D*), represented by pan Inv. No. P 12790, in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE (cf. Riley 1981: Fig. 1, no. 9, from deposit dated to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century CE). The blackened outer face typical for vessels of form Hayes 181 produced in the Byzacena workshops were the result of irregular firing conditions, or more precisely the absence of cassettes in the kiln (Bonifay 2015: 69). Pan Inv. No. P 12790 lacks the blackened outer face, the matte slip however indicates that the southern origin of the vessel is more probable as well (cf. *culinaire A*, *culinaire B*, Bonifay 2015: 211–214). The production of these vessels was often associated with workshops producing amphorae, which have been attested at Oued el-Akarit, Thaenae and particularly Leptiminius (Bonifay 2015: 69).

Vessels of this form were omnipresent in the provinces of North Africa and can be found at most of the Late Roman sites in the region. Due to their qualities in terms of thermal shock resistance, they became very popular throughout the Mediterranean, and were widely exported along the North African amphorae trade networks (Leitch 2013).

## Transport amphora

7. Inv. No. P 12793

Dimensions	h. (without foot) 78.5 cm dia. (body) 21 cm dia. (rim) 11.5 cm avg. th. 13 mm (rim)
Colour	coating: white (2.5Y 8/1 – 7.5YR 8/1) fabric: light red (2.5YR 6/6)
Fabric	NAF AM 2 dense paste, fine lamination inclusions: abundant fine quartz, rare fine calcite
Surface treatment	smoothed, white salty coating from saline water

The transport amphora has a cylindrical body typical of amphorae from the Africana group. On the surface, traces of horizontal ribbing are apparent. Above the base the

body appears slightly deformed, perhaps from leaning against a bench during the drying stage. The shoulders are well-marked and divided from the body by a distinct groove. The neck is slightly conical and relatively short, and terminates in a mouth with a pronounced, everted rim (with the outer diameter of 11.5 cm). Handles are ear-shaped, bifid and attached to the neck just under the rim. The foot in the form of a solid spike was chipped off and is not preserved, except for a modern tentative reconstruction. In its present state of preservation, i.e. without the foot, the amphora is 78.5 cm high. However, an original height of ca 90 cm may be suggested.

The surface is covered with a white salty coating resulting from the use of saline water (Pl. 2l). Breaks are rarely visible; however, the paste is light red, dense, seems finely laminated, and includes only a small amount of inclusions, namely calcite, besides fine quartz. The fabric can be identified as the North African lime-poor amphorae fabric.

The morphology of the amphora is somewhat puzzling. The slender cylindrical body, rather vertical, only slightly conical neck and short ear-shaped handles falling from the neck on the shoulders would suggest its classification as type *Africana* III or Keay XXV (Keay 1984). Attribution to a specific variant of the type is problematic, however, as a direct parallel is missing. The rim was commonly pronounced on amphorae of this type, a plain rounded everted rim is less frequent. Amphorae with such a rim type were classified by Keay as sub-type XXVQ and XXVR (Keay 1984: 188, Fig. 82, 83; “rounded lip-flange rim”), and by Bonifay as amphora type 28 (Bonifay 2015: 119, Fig. 64). The neck of these amphorae is often not biconical as with some other, more common sub-types. However, it is generally taller and more slender (Bonifay 2015: 119) than in the case of the amphora Inv. No. P 12793. Handles are often attached to the neck just under the rim (cf. particularly Bonifay 2015: 120, fig 64, no. 9).

Handles are the most problematic feature of the amphora Inv. No. P 12793. Handles of amphorae of the type *Africana* are generally oval or elliptical in section, while amphora Inv. No. P 12793 clearly has bifid handles. Exemptions to this handle type are rare in the case of *Africana* group (cf. Keay 1984: Fig. 94, no. 4) and the bifid-like modelling never seems to be accentuated, but rather a result of technological process. Nevertheless, bifid handles were particularly typical for amphorae of the popular type Dressel 2–4, as well as type *Schöne-Mau* XXV, imitations of which were also produced in North African workshops (cf. Bonifay 2015, amphora types 56–58), probably alongside those of *Africana* type. The presence of bifid handles on the amphora Inv. No. P 12793 may thus be explained as a result of interference of the two types during parallel production process.

The amphora adheres to general typological characteristics of amphorae of the type Keay XXV; however, the unusual specific features such as the shape of the neck, the type of handles, as well as its slightly smaller dimensions (cf. Keay 1984: Appendix IIA) mark it as an example of a rare type, possibly from a smaller workshop, or from a less standardized series. Given the uncertainty concerning its origins and the relative completeness of the vessel (save for the foot and minor parts of the base), one must also always bear in mind the possibility that the amphora might represent a convincing modern copy, which was deliberately broken (and glued) to imitate an antiquity.

Amphorae of the type Keay XXV, sub-type 3, were produced in a number of workshops in Roman provinces of Zeugitana (e.g. at Nabeul) and Byzacena (e.g. at Ouad el-Akarit). Due to the absence of complete breaks showing, attribution to a specific workshop is difficult. Based on the attributes of the fabric (cf. Bonifay 2015: Pl. I, no. 19) and the surface

(cf. Bonifay 2015: 37) of the amphora Inv. No. P 12793, workshops at Nabeul-Sidi Aoun may nevertheless be suggested as the possible place of origin.

The amphorae of the type Keay XXV are present in archaeological contexts from the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century to the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE (Bonifay 2015: 122; Peacock *et al.* 1989: 191, 194; Williams – Carreras 1995: 250, no. 11). A fragment of a similar amphora from Nabeul was dated to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE (Bonifay 2015: 122, Fig. 64, no. 9). The amphorae of type Keay XXV were often pitched and although olive oil was the commonest product of the North African provinces intended for export, wine has been suggested as the content of these medium-sized amphorae (Bonifay 2015: 122). Contents based on salted fish or *garum* are also a viable possibility in case of the sub-type 3 (Keay 1984: 193; Woodworth *et al.* 2015: 94). No traces of pitch lining are visible on the inner face of amphora Inv. No. P 12793.

## Conclusion

The group of Late Roman pottery from the collections of the Náprstek Museum forms a small, but representative sample of the main types of vessels pertaining to ceramic production of North African workshops of the period in question. Examples of utility vessels (transport amphora, cookware, and domestic ware) as well as finer tableware were included. In this respect, the collection can be assessed as well balanced, and we might speculate that it was formed as such either by Oldřich Pospíšil himself, or more probably by someone well-acquainted with this sort of archaeological material.

No detailed information on the provenance of the objects exists, the majority of the objects, nevertheless, seem to be connected with the southern production centres, i.e. those of the province of Byzacena. Although any reliable conclusion cannot be inferred from the following evidence, a couple of locations noted for the finds of lithics donated to the Náprstek Museum indeed concentrate in the area to the west of the Gulf of Gabes, thus confirming the assumption that the objects might come from this region. The specific character of the collection as well as relatively uniform dating of individual vessels (spanning predominantly the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) might further indicate that the objects originated from a single site.



## Literature:

*Atlante I:*

**Carandini, Andrea – Anselmino, Lucilla – Pavolini, Carlo – Saguì, Lucia – Tortorella, Stefano – Tortorici, Edoardo**

1981 *Atlante delle forme ceramiche. Vol. I. Ceramica fine romana nel Bacino mediterraneo (medio e tardo impero)*. Enciclopedia dell'arte antica. Rome;

**Bonifay, Michel**

2015 *Etudes sur la céramique romaine tardive d'Afrique*. Oxford;

**Fulford, Michael Gordon**

1984 "The Coarse (kitchen and domestic) and Painted Wares", in: Fulford, Michael Gordon – Peacock, David P. S. (eds.): *Excavations at Carthage: The British Mission, Vol. I, 2: The avenue du Président Habib Bourguiba, Salambo: The Pottery and other Ceramic Objects from the site*. Sheffield, pp. 155–231;

1994 "The Cooking and Domestic Wares", in: Fulford, Michael Gordon – Peacock, David P. S. (eds.): *Excavations at Carthage. Vol. II, 2: The circular Harbour, North side, The pottery*. Oxford, pp. 53–75;

**Hayes, John W.**

1972 *Late Roman Pottery*. Londres;

**Isings, Clasina**

1957 *Roman glass from dated finds*. Archaeologica Traiectina 2. Groningen;

**Keay, Simon J.**

1984 *Late roman amphorae in the Western Mediterranean, A typology and economic study: the Catalan evidence*. British Archaeological Reports 196. Oxford;

**Lamboglia, Nino**

1958 "Nuove osservazioni sulla « terra sigillata chiara » (Tipi A e B)", in: *Rivista di studi liguri* XXIV, pp. 257–330;

**Leitch, Victoria**

2013 "Reconstructing history through pottery: the contribution of Roman N African cookwares", in: *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 26, pp. 281–306;

**Peacock, David P. S. – Bejaoui, Fathi – Beazreg, Nejib**

1989 "Roman Amphora Production in the Sahel Region of Tunisia", in: *Amphores romaines et histoire économique. Dix ans de recherché. Actes du colloque de Sienne (22–24 mai 1986)*. Rome, pp. 179–222;

**Riley, John A.**

1981 "The pottery from the cisterns 1977.1, 1977.2 and 1977.3", in: Humphrey, John H. (ed.): *Excavations at Carthage conducted by the University of Michigan VI*. Ann Arbor, pp. 85–124;

**Waagé, Frederick Oswin**

1948 "Hellenistic and Roman Tableware of North Syria", in: *Antioch-on-the-Orontes IV*, 1. *Ceramics and Islamic Coins*, pp. 1–60;

**Williams, David – Carreras, César**

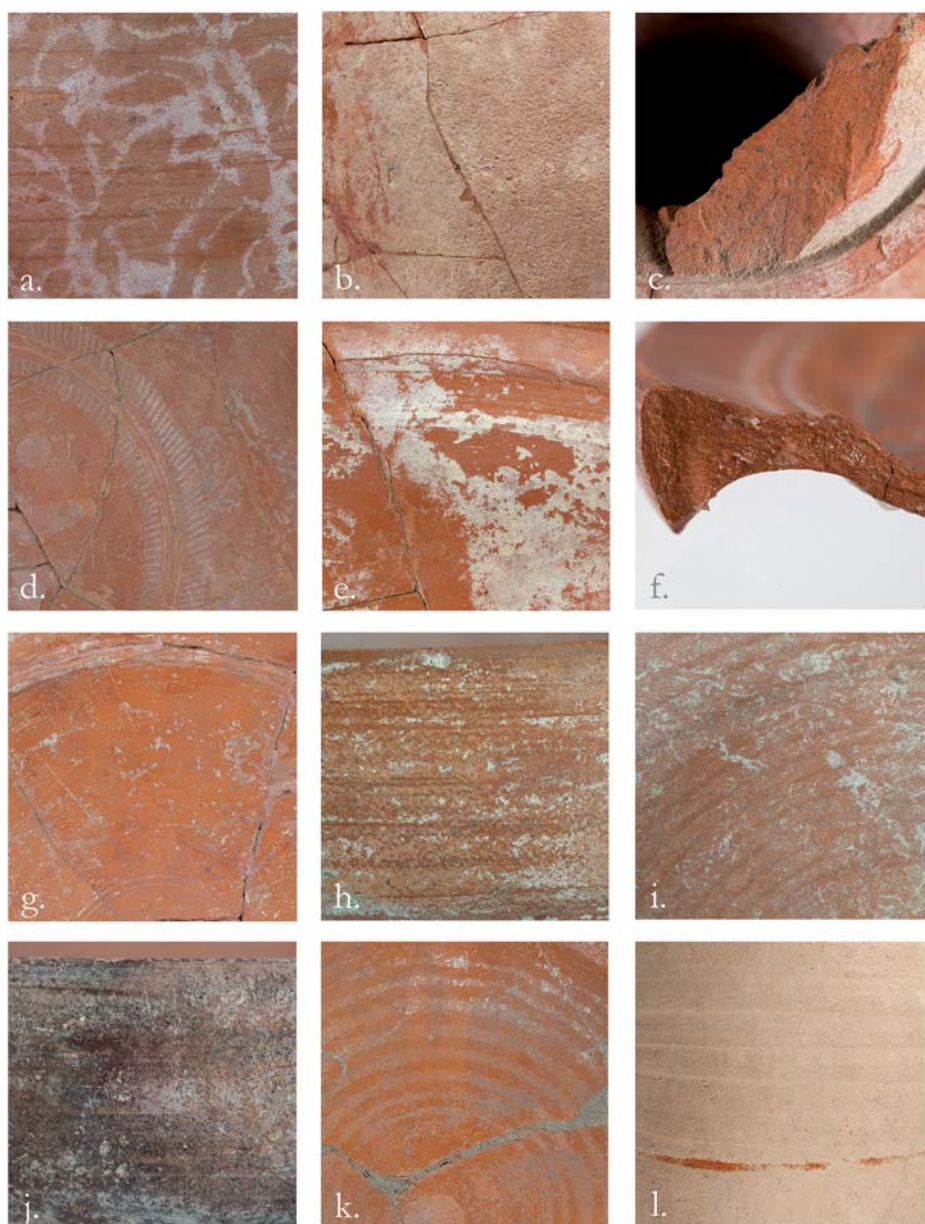
1995 "North African Amphorae in Roman Britain: A Re-Appraisal", in: *Britannia* 26, 1995, pp. 231–252;

**Woodworth, Marshall – Bernal, Dario – Bonifay, Michel – De Vos, Dirk – Garnier, Nicolas – Keay, Simon – Pecci, Alessandra – Poblome, Jeroen – Pollard, Mark – Richez, Florence – Wilson, Andrew**

2015 "The Content of African Keay 25 / Africana 3 Amphorae: Initial Results of the CORONAM Project", in: Oliveira, Cesar – Morais, Rui – Morillo, Angel (eds.): *Archaeoanalytics. Chromatography and DNA analysis in archaeology. International Symposium "Archeoanalytics. Chromatography & DNA analysis in archaeology"*. Porto, pp. 41–57.



Pl. 1 A collection of Late Roman pottery of North African provenance from the collections of the Náprstek Museum (Photo: Jiří Vaněk).



Pl. 2 A close-up view of the individual vessels from the collection: a. jug, Inv. No. P 12787, outer surface; b. jug, Inv. No. P 12788, outer surface; c. jug, Inv. No. P 12788, break; d. tableware, Inv. No. P 12789, inner surface; e. tableware, Inv. No. P 12789, outer surface; f. tableware, Inv. No. P 12789, break; g. tableware, Inv. No. P 12791, inner surface; h. cookware, Inv. No. P 12790, outer surface; i. cookware, Inv. No. P 12790, inner surface; j. cookware, Inv. No. P 12792, outer surface; k. cookware, Inv. No. P 12792, inner surface; l. transport amphora, Inv. No. P 12793, outer surface (Photo: Jiří Vaněk).