

BATHS AT KOM EL-DIKKA IN ALEXANDRIA AS A FOUNDATION OF CONSTANTINE THE GREAT?
A RECONSIDERATION OF STONEMARKS ΦΛ ANT WITH THE NAME OF FLAVIUS ANTONIUS THEODORUS, PREFECT OF EGYPT (?)

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INTRODUCTION

In the late 1960s, in the northern part of a late Roman baths at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria was found an Ionic capital with an abbreviated inscription ΦΛ ANT (Fig. 1, A. Łukaszewicz and Fig. 2, G. Majcherek), which was interpreted by the first editor, as a name, Φλ(άουϊος) Αντ(ωνίνος) or Φλ(άουϊος) Αντ(ώνιος). It is worth mentioning that another very similar Ionic capital was found in the area of the baths without any inscription (Fig. 3, E. Kulicka), and a half of a Ionic capital (Fig. 4, K. Kamiński) probably with a fragment of a mark like on the first capital, although only one letter Φ is preserved. These first two Ionic capitals was dated to between the 1st and the early 2nd c. CE and interpreted as a Microasiatic imports reused in the baths.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF THE BATHS

As for the chronology of the baths at Kom el-Dikka, the moment of their foundation is uncertain. During excavations, no relevant inscription has been found which would help date the construction or identify its founder, because none of the sources describing Alexandria's baths contain sufficient details to permit a definite identification with the baths at Kom el-Dikka. The insula L1-L'2-R5-R4 of the baths was formerly a residential quarter which were destroyed at the end of the 3rd c. Later, the whole urban block was completely reorganized with the villas overbuilt by a public complex including the imperial baths (see reconstruction of the 6th century baths Fig. 5, D. Tarara). According to Wojciech Kołtąj, who excavated the baths, the first decision about their construction could be plausibly attributed to Gratian, and such hypothesis was put forward on the basis of a coin found in a trial pit located adjacent to a preserved relic of the baths' southern exterior wall and within a layer with fragmented findings of pottery, including terra sigillata and lamps dated to between the 2nd and 4th c. CE. This layer was interpreted as concurrent with the first phase of the construction of the public buildings and it formed the levelling fill of the early Roman urban villas. Kołtąj proposed to link the decision about construction of the baths with the tsunami of 365. However, it remains possible that the construction of public buildings in this area could have been underway already in the first half of the 4th c.

In favor of this hypothesis, in the north-eastern corner of the baths complex a huge limestone block was found (Fig. 6, A. Łukaszewicz) with remnants of two extremely big letters TA, which suggest that it was a monumental inscription for a public building. A review of imperial names for a reconstruction of this huge inscription pointed to Constantine, Constantius, or Constans as the only possibilities, and therefore either the Constantinian or post-Constantinian Period could be considered a viable beginning of the baths.

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The figures by courtesy of the Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology and the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the Polish Academy of Science.



IMPERIAL BATHS

Everything seems to indicate that construction of the baths must have been funded by an emperor. This would be suggested by its size and symmetrical design, as well as the authority needed for reorganization of the site and overbuilding the houses. An analyze of regional baths models of Egypt has proved that the architectural characteristics and monumental scale of the baths at Kom el-Dikka allow to assigne them to a separate group – the so-called Imperial baths which reproduced, or attempted to reproduce, the gigantic baths built in Rome during the Imperial Period and were most probably built on the initiative or with the financial support of the imperial power.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE STONEMARKS ΦΛ ANT

An important indication for identification of the inscription ΦΛ ANT is the name Flavius, which from the beginning of the 4rd c. CE onwards, as a consequence of Constantine's victory over Licinius in 324, the name Flavius, which was Emperor's gentilicium, was often assumed by provincial governors, members of their officia, and officials of prominent dignitaries.

The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire attests only one person, who is worth a further consideration here. It means **Flavius Antonius Theodorus, Prefect of Egypt**, who held this post between 337 and 338. His name engraved on the column capitals could be seen as an evidence for the prefect's involvement in imperial construction activity within the frame of his duties.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE DATING OF THE BATHS BUILDING

The interpretation of the mark ΦΛ ANT as that of Prefect of Egypt Flavius Antonius Theodorus would have very important implications for the dating of the baths, and the hypothesis already proposed by Adam Łukaszewicz on the basis of the archaeological evidence and two preserved letters TA of the monumental inscription (Fig. 6, A. Łukaszewicz) – that the construction of the baths at Kom el-Dikka was initiated upon the order of Constantine – becomes all the more convincing. From this perspective, the construction of the baths would have started before his death and during the prefecture of Flavius Antonius Theodorus, which would mean it was already underway in the first half of 337 CE.



EXAMPLES OF SIMILAR MARKS

One of the arguments for the prefect's name on the Ionic capitals constitute examples of marks, which seems to be adequately similar state interventions in different parts of the empire, for example: the marks PAT DECI found in Rome (linked to Caecina Pavortius Basilius Decius, praefectus urbi and consul in 486), the marks DNGF FLSTL found in Ostia (linked to Emperor Gratian and Flavius Stilicho, twice consul prior to 400 and 405), the mark τοῦ ἐπάρχου on a column found in Constantinople (indicating that a column was commissioned by an urban prefect), and finally the marks found in Aphrodisias: AABIN (linked to Albinos, sponsor of the West Stoa), ANΠE (linked to Flavius Ampelios known as a supervisor of various building activities) and KQ (linked to Governor Flavius Constantius who built late-antique city walls).