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**IS 'MAREA' INDEED MAREA?  
ROMAN INDUSTRIAL CENTRE AND BYZANTINE CITY IN THE REGION OF  
MAREOTIS (WEST OF ALEXANDRIA)**

On the southern shore of Lake Mariout, 45 kilometres west of Alexandria, Polish archaeologists have been excavating for several years the ruins of a large Byzantine city. The city, patiently uncovered structure after structure, was built exactly on the spot of an industrial centre and a harbour which functioned until the third century AD. Traditionally, the place was called Marea, following its (uncertain) identification with the most important urban centre in this part of the Mediterranean before the foundation of Alexandria of which we learn from Herodotus and Thucydides.

A great transept basilica built in the end of the fifth century, the second largest church in Egypt (49 x 47 m), is the most magnificent building on the site. Next to the basilica, the archaeologists uncovered two bath complexes, a large house dating to the Late Antique period, warehouses, and latrines. Unfortunately, we still lack knowledge of the spatial layout of the city, the street grid, city squares, or the character of built environment in particular quarters.

Four massive piers (the longest measuring over 120 metres) extending deep into the lake date to the Roman period; they could serve several ships simultaneously. We know that large production workshops manufacturing pottery on a mass scale, as well as glass workshops, were located nearby. The apse of the basilica was constructed right on a pottery kiln which with its diameter of more than eight metres is one of the largest in Egypt. The kiln was used until the beginning of the third century AD, as indicated by the chronology of the last batch of amphorae prepared for firing which was found under the apse. Our neighbours on the site, archaeologists from France, have discovered on the peninsula a warehouse building functionally connected with the harbour. This structure was in use in the Ptolemaic and Early Roman periods. The remains, dated to the first century BC – beginning of the third century AD point to an intensive industrial exploitation of the area. We are in a region that produced wine on a great scale and exported it in amphorae which were also locally manufactured. When we put all the elements together, we obtain a surprisingly coherent image of the functioning of the centre in the Roman period. Large number of amphorae were fired in the great kiln; they were filled with wine from local vineries and transported, together with other goods manufactured in the nearby workshops, to harbour warehouses. Finally, they were loaded on cargo ships served by the impressive harbour infrastructure. The size of the kiln, the proportions of the warehouse, and the sweeping scale of the piers' construction show that "Marea" was at the same time a remarkable industrial centre and a significant harbour. Nothing, however, points to its functioning after the beginning of the third century. Had the area remained abandoned before the large Byzantine urban centre was founded? Was the Late Antique town constructed on the spot of the settlement of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods? And last but not least: was our 'Marea' indeed the Marea of ancient historians? From historical point of view, these are the most important questions we wish to ask in the course of the next few years of our excavations.