

INSTITUT DES CULTURES MÉDITERRANÉENNES ET ORIENTALES
DE L'ACADÉMIE POLONAISE DES SCIENCES

ÉTUDES et TRAVAUX
XXV
2012

EWA WIPSZYCKA

Marea and Philoxenite

Where to Locate Them?

The history of this article is complicated. In 2001 I took part in an archaeological mission whose task was to excavate the remains of a city located on the southern shore of Lake Mareotis, a site that is most frequently labelled ‘Marea’ on contemporary maps of the area.¹ The site itself had already been excavated in 1977–1981 by Fawzi al-Fakharani and Mieczysław Rodziewicz.² After a nineteen-year break, the work was resumed in 2000 by Hanna Szymańska and Krzysztof Babraj.³

The site owes its contemporary name ‘Marea’ to Mahmoud al-Falaki, a famous savant and astronomer, the author of the map of Alexandria and its vicinities published 1872. He searched for the remains of this important city guided by information in classical authors (Herodotus, Thucydides, Diodorus Siculus).⁴ His attention was drawn by stone remains on the southern shore of the lake, near the village of Huwwariya (c. 45km from Alexandria), indicating the existence of a city. This was, in fact, the only larger concentration of ruins on this side of the lake. The localisation of the city more or less agreed with information from Ptolemy (Second century AD), which al-Falaki found in Gustave le Père, *Mémoires sur la partie occidentale de la province de al-Baharijja* (Description de l’Égypte, État moderne, II, pp. 34–35). Unfortunately, neither of the archaeological missions managed to find any written material allowing establishing the ancient name of the city.

Al-Falaki’s proposition to identify the site with Marea had remained valid for a long time. It was only in 1983 when Mieczysław Rodziewicz questioned it and put forward his theory.⁵ According to his opinion, the site was a settlement founded at the end of the Fifth century to handle a stream of pilgrims coming by water from Alexandria and heading on for the sanctuary at Abu Mina, located c. 20km south. In hagiographic sources, which inform us about the existence of such a town, it is known as Philoxenite. Rodziewicz’s hypothesis

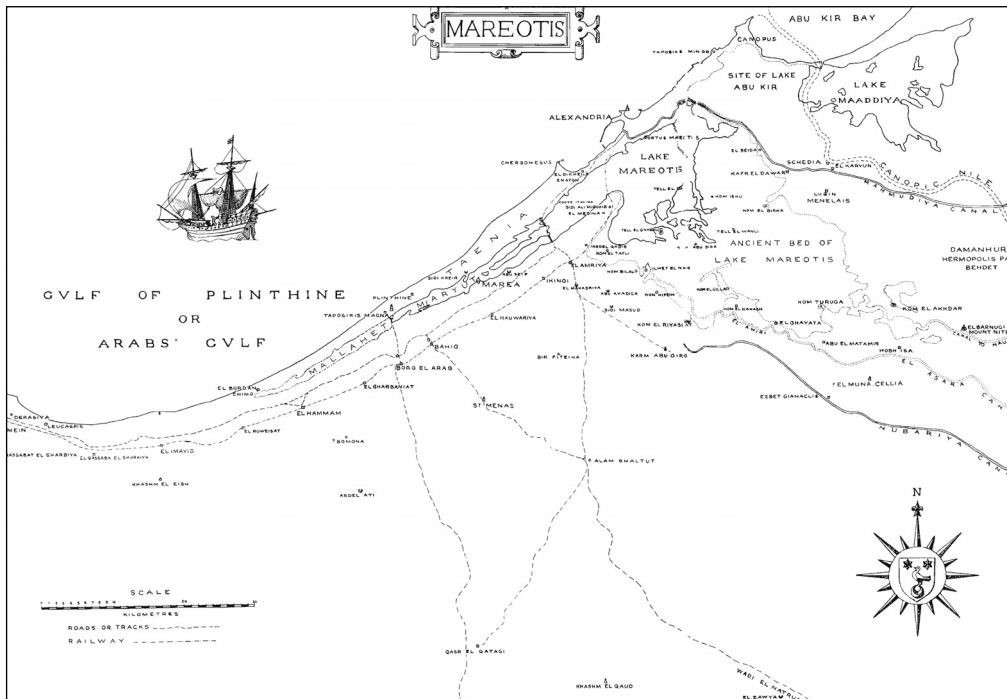
¹ I add quotation marks to distinguish this modern name from the one appearing in ancient Greek sources.

² FAWZI AL-FAKHARANI, Recent Excavations at Marea in Egypt, [in:] *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten*, Mainz 1983, pp. 175–186.

³ The Polish excavations at Marea are co-financed by the Archaeological Museum in Cracow and the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw. Annual reports are published in *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* [= *PAM*], beginning with volume XII. After the untimely death of the late Hanna Szymańska (2010), Krzysztof Babraj from the Archaeological Museum in Cracow became the director of the mission. The latest works collecting data concerning Marea are: H. SZYMAŃSKA, K. BABRAJ, *Marea*, Vol. I. Byzantine Marea. Excavations in 2000–2003 and 2006, *Biblioteka Muzeum Archeologicznego w Krakowie* IV, Kraków 2008, and IDD., *Marea or Philoxenite? Polish Excavations in the Mareotic Region 2000–2007*, [in:] *Lake Mareotis: Reconstructing the Past: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Archaeology of the Mareotic Region Held at Alexandria University, Egypt, 5th–6th April 2008*, *BAR IS 2274*, *University of Southampton Archaeological Series 2*, Oxford 2010 [= *Lake Mareotis*], pp. 75–85.

⁴ M. BEY AL-FALAKI, Mémoire sur l’antique Alexandrie, Copenhagen 1872 [= *Mémoire*] p. 96. All the information on historical Marea were collected by H. KEES [in:] *RE* 28, 1930, s.v. ‘Marea’, ‘Mareotis’ and S. TIMM, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, *TAVO* B.42/Teil 4 (M-P), Wiesbaden 1996, s.v. ‘Maryut’.

⁵ M. RODZIEWICZ, Alexandria and the District of Mareotis’, *Graeco-Arabica* 2, 1983, pp. 199–216; ID., Philoxenite: Pilgrimage Harbour of Abu Mina, *BSAA* 47, 2003, pp. 27–47; ID., On Interpretation of Archaeological Evidence Concerning Marea and Philoxenite’, [in:] *Lake Mareotis*, pp. 67–74. This last volume contains also other articles important for the present study.

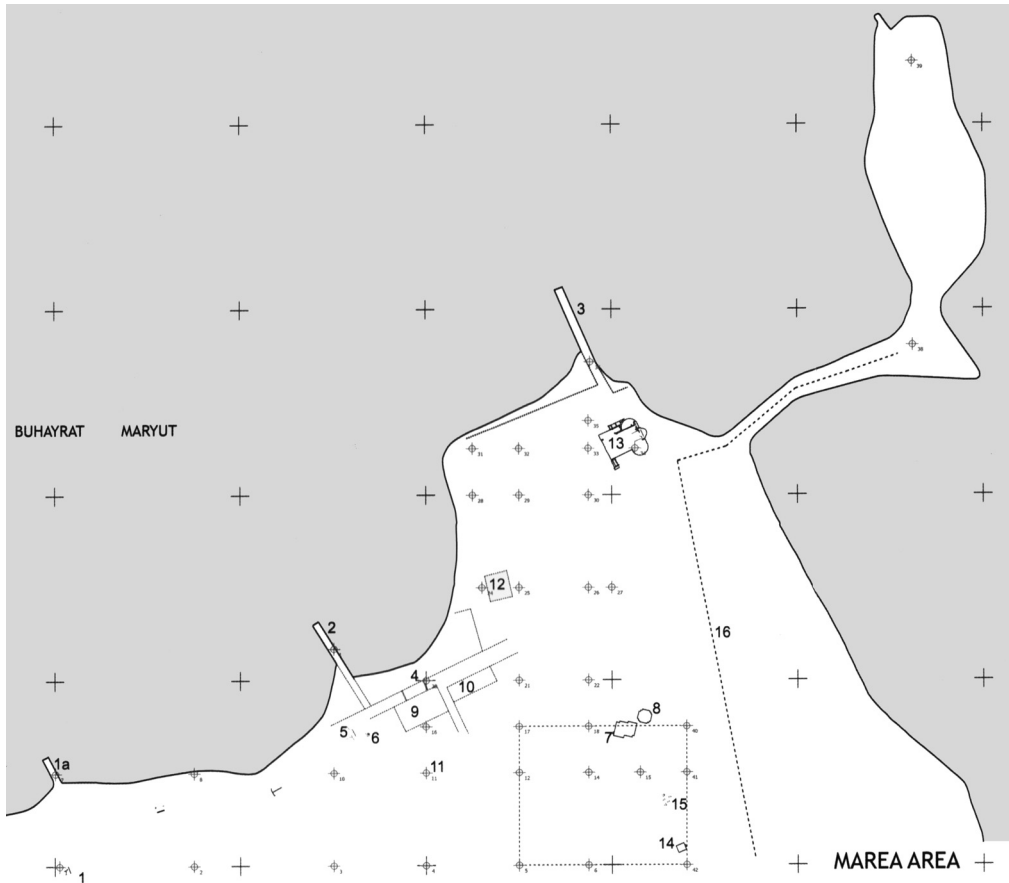


1. Mareotis: map of the region (after A. DE COSSON, *Mareotis*, p. 195).

was enthusiastically accepted by historians of Alexandria (such as Jean Gascou, Christian Décobert, Christopher Haas, and others; thus Philoxenite found its way to maps of the area⁶). This could explain a unisonous and passionate criticism that I met at the third conference *Alexandrie médiévale* in autumn 2002, while delivering a paper defending al-Falaki's theory. Rodziewicz was present during my speech but he did not take part in the debate afterwards. However, in 2003 he published an article in which he sustained his hypothesis. This caused Peter Grossmann, a longtime excavator of Abu Mina, to react:⁷

⁶ In a new, excellent book containing the results of a survey in Mareotis, L.K. Blue and E. Khalil refer to 'Marea' as 'Mareia/Philoxenite', cf. L.K. BLUE, E. KHALIL, *A Multidisciplinary Approach to Alexandria's Economic Past: The Lake Mareotis Research Project* by Lucy Blue and Emad Khalil, *BAR-IS 2285*, *University of Southampton Archaeological Series 5*, Oxford 2011 [= Lake Mareotis Research Project].

⁷ P. GROSSMANN, *Nochmals zu Marea und Philoxenite*, *BSAC* 42, 2003, pp. 13–29 [= *Nochmals zu Marea*]. I also should have reacted then, but, having in mind rigorous deadlines for submitting articles set by the organisers of the conference, I postponed the publishing of a new version of the commentary on Philoxenite, in which I intended to respond to both the criticism during the discussion and the arguments from Rodziewicz's texts – see note 5, above. I set up with Jean-Yves Empeur, one of the conference organisers, that I would return to the topic during the next conference. I was all the more fond of such a solution, since I hoped for new results of the fieldwork. Unfortunately, the next meeting never happened, which I regret, as the level of both the papers and discussion was very high. All of this has led to, I confess, quite an embarrassing situation, in which Rodziewicz in his article discusses with an unpublished text of mine. Nb. *Alexandrie médiévale* 3 appeared in print only six years after the conference; this, however, I was unable to predict.



2. Marea Area. Map drawn on the basis of results of archaeological works before 2008

1. Tholos bath; 1a–3. Piers; 4. Harbour facilities; 5. Unidentified structure – drydock (?); 6. Steps belonging to another unidentified structure; 7. Byzantine bath (Polish excavations); 8. Well operated with *sakiya* (Polish excavations); 9. Double baths (F. Fakharani’s excavations); 10. *Decumanus* along the shops (cleared by F. Fakharani); 11. Remains of *sakiya*; 12. Granary (uncovered by F. Fakharani); 13. Basilica (Polish excavations); 14. Funerary chapel (Polish excavations); 15. Tombs carved in the rock; 16. Remains of the ancient road leading to the island (after H. SZYMANSKA, K. BABRAJ, *Marea* vol. 1: Byzantine Marea. Excavations in 2000–2003 and 2006, Kraków 2008, Pl. after p. 10).

he argued that Philoxenite should be located somewhere else, in the village of Bahig, and that ‘Marea’ was indeed ancient Marea. However, Grossmann failed to notice that in 2002 Décobert proposed yet another localisation of Marea, namely on a peninsula in the central part of Lake Mareotis (‘Corne du Maryût’). In the time of al-Falaki, extensive ruins (c. 25ha large) were visible on its rounded end; they were called ‘Îkinj Maryût’.⁸

I think that not all the arguments in the discussion about the identification of ‘Marea’ have been considered so far. The resuming of the subject seems all the more justified, since

⁸ CH. DÉCOBERT, *Mareotide médiévale. Des béduins et des chrétiens*, [in:] *Alexandrie médiévale* 2 (éd. Ch. Décobert), *Etud.Alex* 8 (éd. J.Y. Empereur.), Le Caire 2002 [= *Mareotide médiévale*], pp. 148–160, especially p. 156.

archaeological work, especially the survey carried out on the shore of Lake Mareotis by a team directed by L.K. Blue and E. Khalil,⁹ has brought new data.

In order to avoid complications resulting from ‘three levels’ of the polemic, I will follow the sources and not the opinions expressed in the discussion.

HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE ENCOMIUM

In rejecting al-Falaki’s identification of ‘Marea’, Rodziewicz used the text of the encomium of St Menas, which narrates the history of the sanctuary of St Menas. I should quote here the most important passages of this text so that we could properly judge its credibility. This is crucial in further discussion, because the so-far analyses took only one passage into consideration, which is methodically incorrect and lead to, as we shall see, false conclusions:

And so they built over a tomb a small oratory like a tetrapylon. They hung a lamp in its midst like the one at first. The lamp remained burning, without ever going out, day and night. And all who took away (some) of the oil of the lamp to distant lands received healing; so that a great concourse gathered there as well as countless multitudes from every land coming thither at all times unceasingly.

And they suffered distress because the place was a desert and they lacked (?) water and the benefit of the Holy Mysteries. Accordingly, the chief citizens of Alexandria and those of Mariotes and all the archons of Egypt besought the holy Athanasius, the archbishop, to build a wondrous memorial-church to the glory of God and the holy Apa Mena and the joy and gladness of all the peoples who came to it. And the holy Athanasius was unable because of the trials caused by the impious Arians persecuting him. But God confounded the (vile faith) of the heretics. He raised up the just and the pious king Jovian. The Church took honour again in his days. Then the holy Athanasius undertook the carrying-out of the people’s request to the glory of God and His blessed martyr. And when the God-loving king, Jovian, heard, he wrote to the stratelates of Alexandria that he should help him with money for the building of the church (in the name of) the blessed martyr. And so he gave orders with great power. He brought it to completion in all beauty, adorning it with precious marbles glistening like gold.

In the days of the just kings, Valens and Valentinus, his brother, the sons of the king Jovian of happy memory, they wrote to the augustal of Alexandria, Tatian. He proclaimed to all the bishops of Egypt the combat (?) of the holy Apa Mena. And so the bishops came together and deposited the remains of the holy Apa Mena in the crypt which had been made for them. (...)

And when some time had passed until the days of Theodosius the Great, with Arcadius and Honorius, his sons, in the days of Theophilus, the archbishop, there being great peace and prosperity in their reign, (it befell that) when the feast of the blessed martyr came round, on the fifteenth of Hathôr, many great multitudes assembled. And they suffered

⁹ Cf. *supra*, note 6.

distress because the church could not hold the multitudes but they were standing outside in the desert. And the blessed archbishop, Apa Theophilus, was there. At the sight of the people's distress he wrote to Arcadius, the king. And the king ordered the building of a spacious memorial-church. (...)

And it befell in the days of Timotheus, the confessor-archbishop, in the days of Zeno, the God-loving king, that the blessed king heard of the wonders and miracles and cures that took place at the shrine of the holy Apa Mena. (...) Then the archbishop, Timotheus, told the king, Zeno, about the barbarians who came over Mariotes, afflicting the shrine and all the churches in Mariotes. Then the king ordered all those of senatorial rank in the kingdom to build each of them a palace there. He also wrote to the archons of Alexandria and those of Egypt, that each of them throughout the land should build himself a house there until they made it a city. And so it was built and given the name Martyroupolis. Multitudes gathered to it from every land and resided in it. And the king Zeno established, also, a garrison of 1200 soldiers to guard that place against the inroads of the barbarian horde. (...)

And again in the time of Anastasius, the king, pious zeal inspired the heart of the Praetorian Prefect since he too heard of the wonders and miracles wrought by the holy Apa Mena. And furthermore he saw the hardships suffered by the many multitudes coming to the shrine. For, when they left the lake and entered upon the desert there, they found no place of lodgment or water till they reached the holy shrine. And the prefect built hospices by the lake and rest-houses for the multitudes to stay at. And he had the market-place established among them in order that the multitudes might find and buy all their needs. He had spacious depositories constructed where the multitudes could leave their clothes and baggage and everything which they brought to the shrine. When he had completed everything he called it Philoxenité after himself. He also set up porticoes at different places where the people might rest. And he established watering-places along the roads, leaving at them water-jars, from the hospices as far as the church, at ten-mile intervals between one watering-place and another, for the refreshment of the people bringing gifts to the church.

And this continued from the time of Heraclius, the king, till the Saracens took the land; and all the people rejoiced and were glad and took gifts to his shrine because of the wonders which were wrought there and the healing favours received through him. For most true is the word which Our Saviour spake, 'I shall glorify him that glorifieth me'.¹⁰

The encomium has been preserved in one of the Hamouli codices and today belongs to the Pierpont Morgan collection (M 590). According to the colophon, the production of the manuscript is dated to AD 892/3. The colophon also informs us that the author of the encomium was John, bishop of Alexandria. Two patriarchs by this name should be taken into account: John III (677–686) and John IV (775–789), both directly connected with Abu Mina. James Drescher, the editor of the encomium, considered the latter more probable.

¹⁰ *Apa Mena. A Selection of Coptic Texts Relating to St Menas* (J. Drescher Ed.), Cairo 1946 [= *Apa Mena*], pp. 35–72 (text), 126–149 (translation), with quoted passages on pp. 66–71 (text), 144–148 (translation).

The text suggests that Abu Mina owed the first great construction investments to subsequent pairs of patriarch and emperors: Athanasius and Jovian and his sons, Valens and Valentinian, Theophilus and Arcadius. Then the author omits slightly over half a century and mentions only the activity of Timotheos Ailouros and Emperor Zeno, who is said to have established both a regular subvention for Abu Mina and a garrison of 1200 men for protecting the sanctuary from Berber raids. By ordering the senators to build their palaces in Abu Mina, Zeno is also pictured as a true founder of the city. As a result, a city called Martyroupolis (or Zenonoupolis, according to an Ethiopic translation) came to existence. Emperor Anastasius, Zeno's successor, did nothing special for the growth of the sanctuary, but it was during his reign that the construction of Philoxenite is mentioned to have been ordered by Philoxenos.

The choice of the personages is significant: the greatest holy patriarchs (Athanasius, Theophilus, Timotheus Ailouros) and the emperors highly esteemed by the Monophysites (Jovian, Arcadius, son of Theodosius, Zeno, and Anastasius) are enumerated. The mention of Valens is an evident misunderstanding, showing that the author did not know that the emperor was an Arian. Also information that Valentinian and Valens were the sons of Jovian is incorrect. Jovian, who reigned only eight months in AD 363/4, appears in the text only because the author needed an emperor to be paired with Athanasius. He could take neither of Jovian's predecessors (Constantius was an Arian, Julian was a pagan); moreover Jovian allowed Athanasius to return from exile, with which he earned a good memory among the Copts. It is also astonishing that the text mentions Heraclius at the end, for whom the Monophysites usually harboured well-deserved hatred. Could it be that he was present in some chronicles stored in the archives at Abu Mina, which in the Byzantine period was Chalcedonian, not Monophysite? This seems to be indicated by the fact that the author used the emperor's name only as a dating reference and had no further knowledge about his reign. For obvious reasons the text does not mention Justinian, whose reign was a period of intensive building activity in Abu Mina.¹¹

The facts concerning the activity of the first, Fourth-century patriarch-emperor pair given in the encomium are totally made-up: first churches in Abu Mina are dated to the Fifth century. Also the story about Emperor Zeno ordering the senators of the whole empire to build palaces around the sanctuary belongs to the same category of literary facts, in which Constantinopolitan overtones can be traced.¹² It is possible that there was a settlement that bore the name of Martyroupolis in some period, but it is impossible to prove.

¹¹ This is the opinion of archaeologists, based on the dating of artefacts and their stylistic analysis. Abu Mina does not appear in Procopius' *De Aedificiis*, but it cannot be excluded that the information he gives concerning Taposiris Magna should be connected to St Menas' sanctuary. See P. GROSSMANN, Prokopios zu Taposiris Magna – eine Verwechslung mit Abu Mina?, *Antiquité tardive* 8, 2000, pp. 165–168.

¹² See: Sozomenos, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II.3, about Constantine's actions for the new capital: *He also erected magnificent dwelling houses southward through the regions. Since he was aware that the former population was insufficient for so great a city, he peopled it with men of rank and their households, whom he summoned hither from the elder Rome and from other countries. He imposed taxes to cover the expenses of building and adorning the city, and of supplying its inhabitants with food, and providing the city with all the other requisites. He adorned it sumptuously with a hippodrome, fountains, porticos, and other structures.* (transl. Ch.D. Hartranft, Church History. Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers II.2, New York 1890).

While writing the encomium, the author had at his disposal a sizeable archive belonging to the sanctuary. This archive must have also contained homilies, which were written down by preachers and related the life of the martyr, his miracles, and the construction of the churches in the first place. It was them that preserved the knowledge about the history of the pilgrimage centre. And this history was written down according to tendencies of the patriarchal centre that currently exerted its power over Abu Mina.

Drescher was convinced that, essentially, the encomium is a reliable source. His opinion has been quoted universally ever since: *It is unusual to find in a Coptic encomium on a saint a formal, sober history of his shrine such as we have here.*¹³ However, Drescher's knowledge about the period was meagre: he was an editor of texts not a historian. Moreover, he was unable to conduct a necessary critical analysis of a hagiographic text: this skill was never taught to adepts of Egyptology in his times, which resulted in thinking that each hagiographic text was considered 'good', unless it narrated miracles; manipulating the facts was not limited to the miracles, however. Nevertheless, everyone believed him uncritically and it never occurred to anyone to check the whole narration about the history of the sanctuary.

The conclusion from the above part of my discussion is clear: we are dealing here with a regular hagiographic text, created according to the principles of this genre. We must not treat all the information contained in it as reliable without first analysing it. This also pertains to the description of Philoxenite, so important for our discussion. The author described the city as if it were his ideal image of a service centre for the pilgrimage movement and not a real settlement, which he saw with his own eyes. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that we should consider all the information fictitious, but we have to be ready to approach it critically.

As for the passage concerning Philoxenite, it may raise some concerns already at the first reading (it was pointed out by some of the disputants at the *Alexandrie médiévale* conference). When a historian comes across a pious philanthropist in a hagiographic text, a person who takes care of the pilgrims and bears the meaningful name of Philoxenos ('the one who loves strangers', 'hospitable'), he automatically suspects that this is a fictional character. This is not the case, however, as we are able to identify this devout founder: this is Philoxenus 8 from *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* vol. II, more precisely Flavius Theodoros Philoxenos Soterichos, the consul of AD 525. He is known from four consular diptychs, a mention in John Malalas' *Chronicle* (AD 511), and *Chronicon Paschale* under year 519.¹⁴ He owed his career to Emperor Anastasius, during whose reign he was a *magister militum per Thracias*. In AD 519 he was exiled for unknown reasons. In AD 525 he was recalled by Justin and awarded the consulate. His title, *vir illustris*, and functions, *comes domesticorum* and *magister militum per Thraciam*, appear in two of the four diptychs. It is surprising, however, that in those diptychs he is titled *comes*

¹³ *Apa Mena* (Drescher Ed.), p. 127.

¹⁴ *PLRE* II, pp. 879–880; R.S. BAGNALL, A. CAMERON, S.R. SCHWARTZ, K.A. WORP, *The Consuls of the Later Roman Empire*, Atlanta 1987, p. 585.

domesticorum instead of the usual *ex comite domesticorum* (he fulfilled the latter function in the time of Anastasius, long before his consulate). The author of the article in the *PLRE* assumes that this was an honorific function awarded to him by the emperor in order to rank him among *viri illustres*, which gave access to the senate (we know similar cases). From among the sources mentioning Philoxenos only the encomium testifies to his holding the dignity of *praefectus praetorio*. That the diptychs are silent in this respect should not concern us, as it was customary for this kind of documents not to present the whole *cursus honorum* of a given person, only the function that entitled him to become *vir illustris* (in our case this is the title of *comes domesticorum*).¹⁵ The author of the encomium could not have given Philoxenos the function of the *praefectus praetorio* on his own initiative. In his times (second half of the Eighth century) no one in Egypt had any knowledge about the Byzantine titlature of the Fifth–Sixth century. Thus, this information must have come from an older source.

There is one plain conclusion from the above prosopographical examination: both Philoxenos and Philoxenite cannot be rejected as part of literary fiction. Of course, this does not mean that all the elements of the description of the city are historical facts. For example, the information about watering-stations located every 10 miles, providing fresh water for pilgrims on their way to Abu Mina, does not have to be treated seriously. However, Drescher, Rodziewicz, and Grossmann tried to identify Philoxenite with places located at least two such stations away from Abu Mina. Drescher located Philoxenite in the central part of the southern shore of Lake Mareotis, thus elongating the way to Abu Mina to c. 30–35km. The account of the watering-stations should not be employed to establish the location of Philoxenite, however. The author of the encomium could not have based this fragment on his own experience, as in his time the reality was completely different. In the second half of the Eighth century the situation of Mareotis was highly unstable: Bedouin tribes, transplanted from the Arab Peninsula to the borderlands of the western Delta by the Arab government, waged constant wars between one another and plundered everything, which eventually put a stop to the development of the flourishing Alexandrian hinterland, once full of vineyards and orchards.¹⁶ Thus, we are most certainly dealing here with a literary *topos*, a conventional element of the literary framework, in which the author of the encomium placed his account. A long way through the desert, the lack of water, and other dangers waiting for the pilgrims serve to dramatize the situation, thus augmenting the merits of Philoxenos.

Grossmann regarded the ‘depositories’ for clothes and baggage in Philoxenite mentioned in the encomium as a peculiar idea. Indeed, what we have here is another literary concept, although a quite unique, as I have been unable to find any analogies in other texts.

Philoxenite occurs in other Coptic hagiographic texts originating from Abu Mina mainly as the name of a port: *And he found a ship and sailed till he came to the harbour*

¹⁵ GROSSMANN, *Nochmals zu Marea*, p. 13, n. 9, is wrong in this respect.

¹⁶ This is mentioned by DÉCOBERT, *Mareotide médiévale*, p. 158.

of Philoxenite where he should take a road;¹⁷ and finding a boat ready to go to Philoxenite the woman said to the skipper;¹⁸ and, somewhat differently: there was also a rich woman in Philoxenite;¹⁹ and when they landed at the port of Philoxenite, they put up for the night with a man who kept lodgings.²⁰ These fragments do not give new information, however.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS ABOUT 'MAREA'

There can be no doubt that in the discussion on the identification of Marea archaeologists have a weighty voice, having at their disposal, as I have already said, the results of many years of excavations.

A basic argument presented by Rodziewicz against al-Falaki's hypothesis was also of archaeological nature: he argued that there were no archaeological remains on the spot of 'Marea' earlier than the Fifth century, which should be expected in the case of a city with a long-lasting tradition, even if this city was in a deep recession in the Roman period. A poor condition of Marea is attested by Athenaeus (33d), who, while mentioning wine from Mareotis, writes that its name is derived from a lake and a city that once was large and now has a size of a village.²¹

Rodziewicz was also convinced – and this was his second argument – that the character of architecture in 'Marea' did not show any features of an administrative and military centre. He pointed to the lack of 'remarkable defensive walls', large storerooms for agricultural products, 'educational and cultural institutions', 'sports facilities'; he viewed 'Marea' as *rather a small city with very sophisticated and extensive harbour, able to receive a large number of travellers*, with a big church standing on a high shore and visible from afar. In his opinion the city uncovered in the excavations showed no signs of development, as if all the buildings were constructed at the same time.²²

From the methodological point of view, Rodziewicz should have never put forward this second argument. 'Marea' has been excavated for many years but unhurriedly, and only small part of the city has so far been uncovered. On the one hand, traces of buildings

¹⁷ A codex from the Pierpont Morgan collection attributes the authorship of its content, Coptic *miracula*, to Patriarch Theophilus. This seems improbable, as mentions about Philoxenite alone allow moving the date of these texts forward, although it is hard to say how much forward. *Apa Mena* (Drescher Ed.), pp. 13 (text), 112 (translation).

¹⁸ G.M. BROWNE, Griffith's Miracle of St. Menas, *BASP* 20, 1983, p. 27.

¹⁹ *Apa Mena* (Drescher Ed.), pp. 22 (text), 116 (translation).

²⁰ *Apa Mena* (Drescher Ed.), pp. 27 (text), 120 (translation).

²¹ Athenaeus wrote *Deipnosophistai* ('The Learned Banquet') around AD 200. He came from Naukratis, hence he could have known the Mareotis region. In other fragments we usually have no guarantee that 'now' refers to his times, as the work is a collection of excerpts from other authors, but this note is undoubtedly his own commentary.

²² RODZIEWICZ, Philoxenite: Pilgrimage Harbour, pp. 27–29.

visible on the surface as well as surface finds of pottery show that the city covered a large area, and on the other, there is nothing to prove any settlement activity after the city had been abandoned in Late Antiquity. No one knows what the unexcavated parts of the site can yield. I have no idea what Rodziewicz had in mind while writing about ‘education and cultural institutions’: a theatre? a gymnasium? Many Egyptian small towns did not have either of these, but we still have to remember that ‘Marea’ has not been sufficiently excavated. The lack of the ‘remarkable defensive walls’ is also unsurprising for a historian of Egyptian architecture; after all, they are lacking everywhere.

Rodziewicz’s first argument, on the other hand, is significant, but only under the condition that we can precisely date archaeological finds; they should be dated to the end of the Fifth century at the earliest, when Philoxenos lived and worked. This is not unproblematic, however: the pottery from ‘Marea’, the best dating material, is generally dated to the Fifth century, but to which part of this century, we are unable to establish. The case is even worse with architecture, which can be dated only most generally to Late Antiquity. We should note here Grossmann’s opinion that the baths discovered by Fakhrani should be dated to the beginning of the fifth or the end of the Fourth century.²³

When I visited ‘Marea’ for the first time, I was impressed by remarkably well-preserved port facilities, namely piers made of large stone blocks, measuring respectively 41, 111, 125, and 35m in length (presumably only partly preserved on land). One should also mention a separate arm, created artificially by connecting a small island with the mainland by means of a dyke. It was possible for barges to moor to these piers even with a low level of water in the lake and winds blowing from different directions. The construction of these facilities must have been very expensive and time-consuming. It seems that such a large investment could not have been prompted by the movement of the pilgrims; after all, it was not so intensive to construct as many as three docks. Of course, they could have been used by the pilgrims as well, but they were primarily designed to handle the conveyance of very heavy goods, transported on numerous barges from ‘Marea’, and to protect both the cargoes and the vessels against bad weather.

It is crucial to establish when the piers were built. A wide variety of stone blocks and their dimensions suggests that the constructions originate from different periods. The technique used in the construction was to build two parallel single or double breadth piers of limestone and fill the space with rubble. Thus, the pottery found in this rubble could be used as the dating material. Rodziewicz was initially silent about the dating of the piers, but in his 2010 article (p. 72) he stated that the lowermost strata of the rubble contained numerous fragments of amphorae of the Late Roman I type, which is dated to the Byzantine period. He also recalled that he made these observations in the period from the mid-70’s until the mid-90’s, when the level of the water in the lake was lower than it has been recently.

²³ H. SZYMAŃSKA, K. BABRAJ, Fouilles archéologiques de Marea en Égypte, saisons 2002–2003, *Archeologia (V)* 55, 2004, pp. 126–129; IDD., Polish Excavations in the Basilica at Marea, *BSAC* 45, 2006, pp. 107–117.

Ceramologists belonging to the Greek-Egyptian underwater archaeological mission directed by Nikos Lianos, which studied the bottom of Lake Mareotis, expressed a different opinion about the pottery from the piers. They dated it to the Early Roman period.²⁴

Grossmann, on the other hand, drew attention to a specific construction technique of the piers, characteristic for the ‘guter klassischen Bauweise’. It seems worthwhile to quote his description *in extenso*: *Hier zeigt sich ein sauberer Verband mit einem regelmäßigen Wechsel von Läufer und Binderschichten aus kubisch zugeschlagenen und äußerst dicht aneinander gesetzten Quadern, die an einigen Stellen (nur an der 3. Mole zu beobachten) sogar noch die Einarbeitungen für die ehemals hölzernen und größer als sonst ausgeführten Schwalbenschwanzklammern enthalten, eine Bauweise die spätestens mit der Aufgabe der Quaderbauweise in antoninischer Zeit außer Übung kam und dann natürlich auch schnell in Vergessenheit geriet.*²⁵ He adds that we are possibly dealing here with even older constructions (especially in the case of two bigger piers from the west). Grzegorz Majcherek, with whom I have recently spoken about the port facilities of ‘Marea’, thinks that, generally speaking, Grossmann’s reasoning is probable but it cannot guarantee such an early dating: Majcherek himself knows Late Antique buildings from Alexandria, constructed with dovetail joints.

The three-aisle basilica in ‘Marea’, partly explored by the Polish team, is astonishing for various reasons. This is a huge building, measuring 49 x 47m (second largest in Egypt after the Great Basilica in Abu Mina). It has a transept, an unusual feature in Egyptian churches, and three large apses, but it lacks a narthex. It was erected on an escarpment, which made it visible from afar. The splendour of its furnishings (including marble columns, mosaics, an *opus sectile* made of marble and porphyry plaques), although only fragmentarily preserved, still impresses the viewer. This was a parish church; there were no bishoprics in the Mareotic region. The basilica is dated to the Fifth–Sixth century. Owing to the lack of written sources, the question of the founding of this extraordinary building can only be answered in the most general terms of church architecture in Late Antiquity. Even if we accepted Rodziewicz’s thesis, it would be unimaginable that Philoxenos erected the basilica on his own initiative; apart from the emperor, no one was wealthy enough to found such a huge church from his own resources. The emperor was certainly not interested in sinking money into building a basilica in a small town; if he had wanted to found a church outside Alexandria, he would have most certainly chosen Abu Mina, so that every visitor to the sanctuary could witness the emperor’s piety. Also the Church as an institution could rarely afford, despite its wealth, erecting churches on its own. Bishops were usually initiators and coordinators of the construction works, making use of the resources given to them by the wealthy faithful. Churches were built slowly, sometimes even through several genera-

²⁴ We can find this information in the article by SZYMAŃSKA and BABRAJ, *Marea or Philoxenite?*, p. 77. This information must have come directly from the members of the Greek-Egyptian mission, as the authors do not cite any publication.

²⁵ GROSSMANN, *Nochmals zu Marea*, pp. 15–16.

tions.²⁶ This was most probably the case also in Mareotis, where the intensive viticulture and a large-scale wine trade enabled the development of large fortunes. The church in ‘Marea’ is a living proof of the prosperity and religious zeal of the local elite.

The excavation in the central apse brought an unexpected result. At a depth of 1.80m below the preserved top of walls the Polish archaeologists discovered well-preserved remains of a large amphora kiln: it has 8m in diameter and its firing grid is *c.* 0.50m thick. Amphorae found inside should be dated to the Second–Third century. According to Grossmann, the kiln is a proof for *eine nicht unbedeutende ältere Siedlungstradition am Ort*.²⁷ This opinion is incorrect, however, as pottery kilns were located outside habitation areas, owing to fire hazard, smoke production, and, last but not least, a large space necessary in preliminary phases of the production of vessels for both drying amphorae before firing and storing them afterwards. A few dozen of pottery kilns have been discovered so far on the shores of Lake Mareotis, pointing to the volume of wine production in the area. Contrary to Grossmann’s opinion, the presence of the kiln in ‘Marea’ rather indicates that there was no settlement in its immediate vicinity.

Since 2003 a French archaeological mission has been working in ‘Marea’, directed by Valery Pichot from Centre d’Études Alexandrines. Its main objective was to examine the above-mentioned artificial peninsula formed by a small island connected to the mainland with a dyke. The French archaeologists conducted a topographic reconnaissance, a survey, geophysical research, and, finally, excavations. The most important results of their work are as follows. Pottery found in sector I of their excavations is dated to the First–Third century. In the northern part of the peninsula a building was discovered constructed of large stone blocks, measuring *c.* 100m in length. Rooms are arranged around a central courtyard, which suggests that it was a kind of a storehouse, but a residential character of the building cannot be completely excluded. In the central part of the peninsula the Frenchmen uncovered workshops dated to the Hellenistic period. The presence of slag points to the existence of metallurgical workshops, manufacturing and repairing small items of various metals. The remains of some forty hearths of different size, dated mainly to the First century BC – First century AD, allow supposing that two to four hearths could have been functioning at the same time. Magnetic anomalies registered during the research could suggest the existence of chalk furnaces on the peninsula. This workshop area was also functioning in a later period.

The French team also discovered a building, probably two-storeyed, measuring 10.35 x 11.75m. They put forward two hypotheses about its function: it was either a tower-like

²⁶ For the social aspect of the building of churches, see the most extensive and the best synthesis of the history of the Church in Antiquity, L. PIETRI (Ed.), *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours III. Les Églises d’Orient et d’Occident*, Paris 1998. The following chapters I found to be particularly useful: B. FLUSIN, *Évêques et patriarches. Les structures de l’Église impériale (V^e et VI^e siècles)*, pp. 485–543; ID., *Le christianisme impérial et ses expressions*, pp. 609–657; F. MONFRIN, *L’établissement matériel de l’Église aux V^e et VI^e siècles*, pp. 959–1014.

²⁷ GROSSMANN, *Nochmals zu Marea*, p. 15.

structure, well-known from depictions on Nilotic mosaics, or a cult building. As is suggested by archaeological context, it most probably stopped being used at the end of the Third century BC, owing to the development of the nearby workshops.

It is hard to explain the relationship between the settlement on the peninsula and the city on the shore. The former could have existed for a long time and have served neighbouring settlements as a centre for craft and trade. Of course, it is possible that a large and important port existed at the same time at ‘Marea’, but the results of the French excavations do not prove it. Locating the demanding and hazardous production that used open fire on the isolated peninsula was very convenient. On the other hand, the peninsula lacks any resources necessary for metallurgists, which had to be brought in barges from other places.

CONCLUSION

The above-presented arguments are, in my opinion, sufficient to refute Rodziewicz’s thesis about the identification of Philoxenite with the city called ‘Marea’ by al-Falaki.

Two questions remain unsolved:

1. what was the ancient name and function of ‘Marea’, and
2. where did Philoxenos found Philoxenite?

As for the latter one, even if we assume that the story from the encomium contains some elements of literary fiction, the historicity of Philoxenos guarantees that he indeed made some efforts to create a foundation for the pilgrims.

‘Marea’ cannot be historical Marea. It has been sufficiently proven by Décobert in his article on Mareotis in Middle Ages.²⁸ Fragments from medieval Arab writers quoted by him show that Marea existed until the beginning of the Mameluk period (mid-Thirteenth century), while the finds from ‘Marea’ do not postdate the beginning of the Eighth century. It is probable that Marea changed its localisation, as was sometimes the case with cities in Antiquity. The city lay in a geographically unstable region, where the settlement network depended on the size of the lake. This could explain why no older remains have been discovered at the site: when the surface of the water lowered in early Middle Ages, Marea could have been moved to ‘the Horn of Mareotis’, as Décobert dubbed the ruins described by al-Falaki.²⁹ However, this hypothesis fails to find confirmation in the sources, both literary and archaeological.

I understand that it is far from satisfactory for my Polish colleagues to work in an anonymous city. We may hope to find the ancient name of the site in ostraka discovered near the church during the 2011 season of excavation. Judging by the so-far deciphered texts, we are dealing here with a collection of accounts for various construction works, which were disposed of after the completion of the basilica. But documents of this type never contain the name of the place to which they refer. Therefore, if I am right and if we reject

²⁸ DÉCOBERT, *Mareotide médiévale*, pp. 148–160.

²⁹ AL-FALAKI, *Mémoire*, pp. 93–96.

the hypothesis on the changing of the location of Marea, we should agree to the following solution: some time at the end of the Fourth century a settlement was founded on the shore of the lake, a settlement that developed rapidly and quickly became an important and large urban centre. The period of the fourth to the Sixth century was prosperous for both Mareotis and Alexandria, the latter being served by ‘Marea’.³⁰ The anonymity (for us, of course, not for the ancients) of a big settlement in this region is nothing unusual. Our present knowledge about the settlement network on the southern shore of Lake Mareotis, though imperfect, shows that numerous archaeological sites are still to be excavated and identified.³¹ Although ‘Marea’ was formed in a usual process of the urban development characteristic for wealthy regions, it is obvious that Abu Mina had large impact on its formation. This impressive pilgrimage centre, visited by thousands of people (at least at the time of three great feasts of St Menas), must have had important role in generating the region’s prosperity. Construction works on large scale employing numerous craftsmen and workers, the need to maintain a fleet of barges and innumerable beasts of burden (used in land transport of the pilgrims), a marketplace with foodstuffs; they all stimulated the economics of Mareotis.

Having rejected the identification of Philoxenite with ‘Marea’ and treating the narration of the encomium seriously, Grossmann, who has expertise in Mareotis, has proposed another localisation. In his opinion, the only possibility is the site of Zawiyat al-‘Asayla, on the outskirts of the village of Bahig, where remains of a settlement have been found.

The site lies opposite Taposiris Magna, some 40km from Alexandria and 4km from the present-day shore of Lake Mareotis, in the vicinity of large quarries, which were exploited by the builders of Abu Mina and other nearby settlements. This is how Bahig looked like in the 1930’s, described by De Cosson: *Proceeding eastwards one comes to the pretty little village of Bahig, with its great artificial mounds, trees, and windmill. The road to the right by the police outpost leads to Abu Menas. A little farther a track leads over the ridge on the left and takes one down to lake level. Here will be found the long town site so clearly shown on Sheet 37 of the ‘Atlas Géographique of the Description de l’Égypte’, but omitted from modern maps. This town was built on an island close to the southern shore. Many buildings can be traced, and at the eastern end the circular stone platform and oblong well of an ancient sakia will be found. Stone channels are traceable leading from this sakia to*

³⁰ Rodziewicz was certainly wrong in his assessment of the situation in Mareotis, which he based on a common opinion that the late period was characterised by the decline of cities. This is generally true, but not everywhere and not for all cities. I also have the impression that he assumed the lowering of the water level in the lake earlier than the above-mentioned survey has shown.

³¹ See: BLUE, KHALIL, Lake Mareotis Research Project – cf. *supra*, note 2; available also online (accessed in July 2011). The shores of the lake are being investigated by the Centre for Maritime Archaeology of the University of Southampton in collaboration with the Underwater Antiquities of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities. Blue and Khalil, the co-directors of the project, declare: *The pilot survey that we carried out in 2004 along the shores of Lake Mareotis western arm revealed that there are numerous archaeological sites in the region which have not been systematically studied.* The sites have been very carefully described in the book, cf. *op. cit.*

*the cisterns of the town. To the south of this are the remains of two very interesting pottery kilns with a large heap of broken pottery thrown there as it was 'scrapped' from them. North of the sakia there is a long jetty running into the lake from which ferry-boats once plied. It was not a causeway reaching to the northern shore as shown in the French map, but a jetty running down into the deep water. Quantities of small coins have been picked up from the crevices in the pavement of the jetty, and one can only suppose that they were dropped in the course of hundreds of years of handing small change to the watermen. These coins became exposed by the weathering and disintegration of the masonry.*³²

This was the place where, according to Grossmann, the centre serving the pilgrims, that is Philoxenite, was founded. The distance between Bahig and Abu Mina is 3km shorter than between 'Marea' and Abu Mina. In 2007 Grossman and Kościuk carried out excavation in Zawiyat al-'Asayla, uncovering the remains of a small church and several houses.³³ Pottery from Bahig can be dated to the second half of the Fifth century.

I think that Grossmann may be right. However, the definite identification of the place calls for textual evidence. Unfortunately, written material is hard to find in this region. Attempts at identifying places only on the basis of silent archaeological artefacts are very rarely successful.

Ewa Wipszycka
Zakład Papirologii,
Instytut Archeologii UW
Warszawa
e.wipszycka@uw.edu.pl

³² A. DE COSSON, *Mareotis. Being a Short Account of the History and Ancient Monuments of North-Western Desert of Egypt and the Lake of Mareotis*, London 1935, p. 130.

³³ P. GROSSMANN, J. KOŚCIUK, *Excavations at Bahig: Zawiyat al-'Asayla*, *BSAC* 46, 2007, pp. 9–29.