

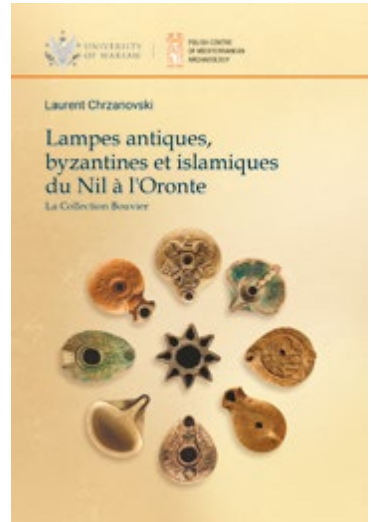
Book review

Laurent Chrzanovski, *Lampes antiques, byzantines et islamiques du Nil à l'Oronte. La Collection Bouvier*; Warsaw: PCMA, University of Warsaw Press, 2019; ISBN 978-83-235-4058-8 (print); ISBN 978-83-235-4066-3 (online); 478 pages color + 238 plates B&W; Soft cover; 159,20 zł

Maurice Bouvier was an esteemed professor of law at the University of Alexandria, and in this capacity, resided in Egypt for over 30 years where he acquired several hundred ancient oil lamps – the Bouvier Collection. Laurent Chrzanovski has expertly analyzed, identified, and assembled these lighting vessels in this handsome volume. Honestly, it is one of the largest and finest collections of Egyptian and Near Eastern lamps I have encountered, and made accessible and affordable through Chrzanovski's publication.

The volume presents 795 oil lamps molded or wheel-thrown in clay, cast in bronze, and carved in stone. The lamps were manufactured in various workshops and production centers located in Egypt, Tripolitania, Tunisia, Cyprus, Palestine, Greece, and Asia Minor. The collection's lamp groups reflect a wide chronological range as well: the Pre-Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic periods. Plastic-figurine lamps, lamp parts (e.g., handles and triangular reflector shields), multi-nozzle rectangular candelabra, and lanterns are also included. Each lamp catalogue entry includes a thorough macroscopic description, provenance, date, and parallels.

Chrzanovski's catalogue substantially expands the global corpus of published collections of ancient lamps and our knowledge of the various types, especially the Egyptian lamps originating from Alexandria and the Fayum. One exciting aspect of this assemblage is the rare and sometimes never-before-seen lamps and lamp scenes. The "frog" lamp portraying a barbarian man



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(p. 330, No. 567) and two additional frog lamps with faces of a grotesque and female head (p. 330, Nos 566 and 568, respectively), at least for me, demonstrate the wider repertoire of images found on this group which, in general, tends to represent various frog styles: natural (p. 305, No. 502), geometric (p. 299, No. 485), and symbolic (p. 303, No. 497). Images interpreted as human fetuses are pictured on three other rare frog lamps located in the British Museum, which I suggest may have been intended for use as photoamulets: the lamps may have been placed in burials of miscarried fetuses to “radiate” symbolic light to protect them from darkness where impure demons lurk. I was delighted to discover that a frog lamp decorated with Christian crosses is also found in the Bouvier Collection (pp. 50–51, 328–329, No. 565). These are rather uncommon and reflect the early Christian appropriation of the millennia-old Egyptian association of this slimy amphibian with rebirth, renewal, and resurrection as Chrzanowski points out on the basis of similar examples from Karanis (p. 51).

As a fellow lychnologist, I greatly appreciate Chrzanowski’s decision to publish large photographs of the lamps, and not only the upper part of the lighting vessels, but also their respective bases. Much information can be gleaned from the inscriptions, initials, and lamp-maker marks found on a lamp base, as Chrzanowski’s helpful dictionary of lamp-epigraphy in the volume shows. Medallion-like photographs of discus scenes with accompanying discussion is another helpful feature of the publication. The lamps’ clay fabric colors pictured in the

respective photographs appear accurate and the resolution of the black-and-white images is particularly superb. The combined effect is as if I were examining The Bouvier Collection in person! The inclusion of Prof. Bouvier’s lamp drawings intermittently throughout the volume is a thoughtful touch and pays tribute to his fascination with ancient lamps.

Chrzanowski’s attention to detail and superb scholarship is evidenced in his correct identifications and dating of the lamps in the tome, a sizable accomplishment given the large number of lamps from many different provenances. Take, for example, the Syrian discus lamp entry (p. 281, No. 427). In Roman times, numerous regional versions of the widely popular discus or “picture” lamps (*Bildlampen*) were manufactured. Phoenicia, Syria, and Palestine were no different. It has become standard practice among lychnologists, including myself, to identify the latter regions as the origin for the discus lamp group produced in the Levant. That said, no archaeological evidence—such as an actual workshop, molds, and wasters—has been found to confirm this type’s location of manufacture. Two possible clay sources may have been quarried for the manufacture of this group, as the findings of a combined petrographic and trace-element analysis of lamp samples from multiple sites in Israel and Jordan suggest. But whether these sources were limited to locations in Phoenicia, Syria, and/or were actually located in Palestina Tertia, at or in the vicinity of the Decapolis city of Scythopolis/Beth Shean, still must be determined. Another sourcing study has identified Abila as a location for picture lamp production, but the version made

there differs from the Palestinian discus type in that its fabric is a brick red and the lamp walls tend to be thick. There simply may have been several workshops and even multiple production centers for the Levantine versions of the picture lamp group given the widespread distribution and concentrations found at sites in the region. So, I was impressed that Chrzanovski distinguished the Syrian discus lamp from the very similar provincial Palestinian discus lamp form that is typically characterized by two double-ax motifs on its shoulder and a hard-fired thin wall, among other distinguishing features.

The section about *Firmalampen* ("factory lamps") reminds me of the rarity of this type in the Levant as compared to the substantial quantities produced in Italy and in the northern provinces of the empire. Several Levantine examples have been excavated at Jerusalem, Caesarea Maritima, Masada, Byblos, and Aqaba. A theater mask is depicted on a standard factory lamp from Italy included in the catalogue (p. 252, No. 346; cf. to a face interpreted as Jupiter Ammon's, depicted on another *Firmalampe* unearthed at Gerulata in the Roman province of Pannonia). Additionally, three versions of this lamp type are found in the catalogue (p. 253, Nos 348–350) and, as suggested by Chrzanovski, may originate from Egypt or the Near East. Some lychnologists identify lamps belonging to this version as the "Northern Group" or "Northern Stamped" form, which was likely manufactured in Galilee or somewhere farther north, as distribution maps suggest.

One topic Chrzanovski confronts is the interpretation of façades on lamps as Christian and Jewish motifs (pp. 405–

407). He identifies four stylistic variants of a façade motif depicted on lamps. The shrine image portrayed on the lamp example from Chersonesos appears to have been made in the same mold as that from Miletus (Variant A, middle bottom, p. 406). The Miletus example has been identified as representing a Torah Shrine based on similar depictions pictured on synagogue mosaics in Israel (e.g., Sepphoris, Beth Alpha, and Hammath-Tiberias), shown in the frescoes of the Jewish catacombs of Torlonia and Monteverde in Rome, and those portrayed on gold glasses and on other clay lamps. Torah Shrine images on lamps are rare, though. One example from Ostia shows open doors with scrolls represented inside. Another shrine is pictured with a drawn curtain or parochet and was unearthed at Tel Mevorakh near Caesarea Maritima. Further examples exhibit closed paneled doors (i.e., Miletus and Kalymnos). The few façades portrayed on lamps from Sepphoris may represent possible Torah Shrines, but unfortunately are incomplete as they occur on fragments. Crosses typically distinguish Christian shrines represented on lamps, including one found on a lamp from Caesarea Maritima, and another interpreted as the Edicule of the Holy Sepulcher on a lamp located in the Münster Museum.

In his introduction on the economic contribution of Egypt and the Levant regarding oil lamps (pp. 37–53), and his most captivating section, Chrzanovski takes his lamp catalogue a critical step further, advancing the field of lychnology by addressing wider matters involving the commercial culture behind lamp production and usage. His discussion on the var-

ious types of oil-fuels and wick materials used in lamps are treated in light of Egyptian hieroglyphs in addition to Hebrew and Arabic religious texts. (Incidentally, petrographic evidence for the diffusion of burning wick vapors through the clay fabric of an early Byzantine lamp has been identified in a recent study as meandering hairline vapor veins.) Chrzanovski's analysis and inclusion of a papyrological fragment belonging to the Zenon corpus listing various hand-lamps and oil-fuels (pp. 44–47) is further welcomed. Papyrological texts “cut to the chase” and take us directly to daily life activities and rituals involving lamp usage.

I appreciate that Chrzanovski mentions the occurrence of finger imprints on lamps in this section as well (p. 49). Finger impressions are an important diagnostic feature of some lamp types, including, for example, the Classic Nabataean group dating to the early Roman period and likely manufactured in the area of Petra, Jordan. As a recent study reports, a lamp-maker's thumb-impression was extracted from a Classic Nabataean lamp fragment excavated at Roman Aqaba us-

ing 2D-laser scanning methods. Lamps belonging to the Beit Nattif type made in one or more workshops in the Judaeen Shephelah, too, characteristically exhibit finger imprints, as indicated in the image provided in the catalogue (p. 49).

Additionally, Chrzanovski draws our attention to the modern manufacture and ritualistic usage of clay lamps for the Hindu festival of lights (Diwali) which is especially intriguing as the lighting vessels are similar to ancient saucer lamps and demonstrate how this tradition has survived for millennia. Another example where Chrzanovski takes that additional leap forward is his acute identification and comparison of the multi-pointed star motif carved into the façade of the Al-Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem to the same-shaped stone lamps from the Arabian Peninsula, probably Yemen, in the collection (pp. 476–477, Nos 794–795). This symbolic connection between sacred space and material culture is fully plausible. All said, Chrzanovski's exquisite scholarly publication of *The Bouvier Collection* has readily found itself on bookshelves worldwide as a lychnological classic.