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NEW THOUGHTS ON ‘DUAL STAMPS’ ON THE LRA 2B-C (LRA 13)

The study presented here examines a group of stamps on the Late Roman Amphorae 2 (LRA 2). In this group (-A.1-), named “dual stamps”, two circular stamps with different contents are found on the same type of amphora. These stamps appear on both the neck and/or the handle(s). The stamps in the first subgroup (-A.1a-) are generally in wider diameter than the other subgroup (-A.1b-) and have a bust with a surrounding line of inscription. Although a standard inscription formula has been known, the examples have some letter and diphthong variations. The second subgroup (-A.1b-) has a ligature and a letter in a standard form. Considering the contents of this group of stamps, the forms of the amphorae, and the destinations of the examples are examined, some conclusions can be drawn about the production characteristics of the amphorae and the function of this group of stamps.

Amphora – stamp – dual stamps – Eastern Roman Empire – official control

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the discovery of new Late Roman Amphorae 2 (LRA 2B-C) stamps has provided important insights into the function of LRA 2 and their stamps (Diamanti 2012: 1-5; Opait and Diamanti 2014: 55-61; Kara 2015: 243-250; Kara 2019: 188-225). As a consequence of these recent discoveries, research activities that have used, among other things, the method of comparison and matching of the forms of the amphorae with the stamps on them have been able to come up with several new results concerning morphology, chronology, and paleography. This very study aims to present and discuss some of these research results.¹ By doing so, special attention is dedicated to double stamp groups, which can be found in various examples on LRA 2. In analyzing these groups, particular focus is placed on the question of the introduction of double stamp groups, on their chronology, morphology, and function.

2. Classification of the stamps

Most of the stamps that have been investigated during recent research on LRA 2 so far can be put in one of three major groups, which are conventionally known as groups A, B, and C (Kara 2019: 86-104). Among these three groups, -A- stands out as the one that includes a bust and has been divided into four subgroups. The main subject of this paper is the subgroup

-A.1-.² All artefacts in this subgroup are double-stamped and called *dual stamps* (fig. 1, 1-3).³ In what follows, each of the *dual stamps* is referred to as a small letter, -a- and -b-, in the subgroup. These stamps are different from each other.

Outside of subgroup -A.1-, there are only two artefacts that prove the stamp -a- can appear alone on an amphora; these artefacts are included in the aforementioned the subgroup -A.2-. In contrast, there is no evidence to prove that stamp -b- would also have imprinted alone during the same period. In theory, this might have been the case if one assumes that some amphorae were broken or missing. However, this study assumes that the prevalent method in the stamping tradition involved the impression of *dual stamps*. The reason for holding up this assumption is the statistical preponderance of doubly impressed amphorae: Whereas only two amphorae that have a single stamp were found in the material (i.e., the two amphorae arranged as subgroup -A.2-), there is a total of 43 stamps on the 29 amphorae in the subgroup -A.1-.⁴

The stamps seen in the group -A.1- ascertain several interesting features. Firstly, diameter measurements of the stamps

¹ This paper presents the results of a Ph.D. thesis which is “Dipinti, Graffiti, and Stamps on Commercial Amphorae Produced in the Eastern Mediterranean in Late Antiquity -4th-7th century AD- (in Turkish)” by Ülkü Kara. Kara has reached and examined 70 stamps on 54 examples of the LRA 2 during the thesis research.

² The stamps of the whole -A- group show the frontal busts. The other subgroups of the group -A- are as follows: A.2: This group comprises amphorae that have once been stamped without having the second stamp. A.3: In this group, only two amphorae bear a stamp. These two amphorae have only a single stamp. The existence of an original second stamp on either of them remains unknown. A.4: Four stamps can be found, including this subgroup. There is a bust and an inscription, with a similar “EIII” formula, surrounding the bust. There are four partially legible stamps.

³ For the of the *dual stamps* -in Turkish- see Kara 2015: 246; Kara 2019: 88.

⁴ Given the limited text length, all the examples mentioned in the paper could not have taken place in a list or given their sources. Therefore, they are referenced in the text by their catalogue numbers of the thesis. All detailed information and sources will be provided in a further publication.



Fig. 1. An example of LRA 2 (rim diam: 8,2 cm; height: 16,5 cm) with dual stamps on the handles. (left: A.1a- (diam: 2,8 cm); right -A.1b- (diam: 2,2 cm) (Kara 2019: Fig. 57, Kat. No. 50a-b)).

visible on the amphorae of the subgroup -A.1- show that the two stamps (-A.1a- and -A.1b-) are varied. Generally, the -A.1a- stamp is wider than -A.1b-. Secondly, both the A.1a and A.1b stamps are seen either on the neck and/or the handle(s). On some examples, one can observe that both stamps were imprinted on the same handle. On other amphorae, they were impressed either on both sides of the neck or both handles. It is understood that on some amphorae the *dual stamps* (a and b) were partly overlapped during imprinting (fig. 2, 2-upper and below-). This seems to indicate that the places where stamps a and b were impressed on the amphorae in the subgroup -A.1- are not indicative of any form of impression tradition.

2.1. Subgroup A1a

The catalogue of LRA 2 shows that there are 26 examples representing the group -A.1a-, and they can be found on 26 amphorae (Kara 2019: 89-94; Kat. No. 47, 48, 49a, 50a, 51a, 52a, 53a, 54a, 55a, 56, 57a, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63 (?), 64a, 65a, 66a, 67a, 68, 69, 70a, 71, 72a and 73). Some are complete and legible (one of them), while others are only partly legible (seventeen). The rest are illegible (one), or their legibility status is unknown (seven). Nevertheless, by comparing the appearance of all these stamps with each other, most of their similarities and differences can be detected. As a rule, the stamps of the whole -A.1a- subgroup show the frontal bust. One of the characteristic features of these stamps is a single peripheral inscription line surrounding the bust. The beginning of the inscription is marked by a cross, with the text running down from the top of the stamp and over the head of the bust; it goes from the left to the right. The cross is close to an equal-armed one, and the inscription ends by joining up with it (Kara 2019: 89-90; Sztetyło and Borkowski 1986: 650). The legible and complete examples show that the stamp design is full of detail: The bust holds a *mappa* in his right hand, and a *sceptrum* in his left hand. Although some stamps are incomplete and/or eroded, variations including the style and size of the beard and hair, the *mappa*, and the *sceptrum* are discernible (fig. 1, 1 and 3, 1-3).

Although the form of the *mappa* does not display any noticeable variants, the *sceptrum* does. Its variants include a three-cornered and a leafed one. The bust is mostly bearded, and the beard and hair are variform (fig. 1, 1; 2, 1-2 and 3, 2-3).

The inscription usually begins with an equal-armed cross. In only one example, it has been observed that the cross is preceded by an “eight-armed star” symbol (fig. 2, 2). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Greek letter “B” (beta) could appear either on the left of the bust or above or next to the *sceptrum*. Although the place of this letter varies, it can mostly be found on the left side of the bust (fig. 1, 1 and 3, 1-3). As some stamps are broken and illegible, it is impossible to determine the exact number of stamps bearing the letter “B” (beta). In sum, there are at least six stamps that bear it. However, there are also very clear examples of stamps that do not bear the letter “B” (fig. 1, 1).



Fig. 2. Some examples of the hair and beard version of the figure (bust) (left-to-right: diam: 2,9 cm and c. 2 cm; Kara 2019: Fig. 55, Kat. No. 51a and 57a)

The one-line inscription surrounding the bust constituted a kind of formula, typically structured as: “Ἐπὶ [name] Ἐπάρχου” (Sztetyło and Borkowski 1986: 650). The different



Fig. 3. Examples of the letter “B” (beta) standing over or below the sceptrum (left-to-right: 3, 3 cm and other two are unknown; Kara 2019, Fig. 56, Kat. No. 49a, 60 and 68; Opait and Diamanti 2014: Fig. 14; Papanikolaou 2014: Euk. 1β)

spellings and letter or ligature forms, can be seen in the inscriptions, reflect the letter alterations of the period. The inscription reads as follows in its regular written and read form (Kara 2019: 91):

+ΕΠΙ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΕΠΑΡΧΟΥ / +ἐπὶ Πτολεμαίου
ἐπάρχου
(« The period of Eparkhos Ptolemaios »)

As a rule, the inscription mentions the name of an administrator (eparchos), called Πτολεμαῖος (Ptolemaios). In a comprehensive analysis of all the findings, some letter alterations in the words “Πτολεμαίου” and “ἐπάρχου” and the ligature χ (omicron-epsilon) can be identified. Variations of the inscription, which are underlined in the transcription below, are quite numerous (Kara 2019: 92). They are believed to indicate that the stamp dies were prepared or produced by different people or at different times:

+ΕΠΙ ΠΤΟΛΑΙΜΑΙΟΥ ΕΠΑΡΧχ(?) / ἐπὶ Πτολαιμαίου
ἐπάρχου
+ΕΠΙ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΕΟΥ ΕΠΑΡΧΟΥ / ἐπὶ Πτολεμέου
ἐπάρχου
+ΕΠΙ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΕΠΑΡΧχ / ἐπὶ Πτολεμαίου
ἐπάρχου
+ΕΠΙ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΟΥ ΕΠΑΡΧχ / ἐπὶ Πτολεμάου
ἐπάρχου
+ΕΠΙ ΠΤΟΛΑΙΜΕΟΥ ΕΠΑΡΧΟΥ / ἐπὶ Πτολαιμέου
ἐπάρχου
+ΕΠΙ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΟΥ ΕΠΑΡΧΟΥ / ἐπὶ Πτολεμάου
ἐπάρχου
+ΕΠΙ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ Υ ΕΠΑΡΧχ / ἐπὶ Πτολεμαίου
ἐπάρχου
+ΕΠΙ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΟΥ ΕΠΑΡΧχ / ἐπὶ Πτολεμάου
ἐπάρχου

As the inscription on the stamps indicates, it must represent an official in charge. Nevertheless, in the light of the present findings, there is no evidence to prove the existence of an eparch named Ptolemaios (Πτολεμαῖος) who served in Constantinople or elsewhere (Papanikolaou 2014: 186). According to the results of the presented study, no clear

conclusions could be reached about the title of this official. However, some suggestions point to the *kommerkiarioi* (Opait and Diamanti 2014: 55-56; Sztetyło and Borkowski 1986: 650-652).⁵ There are also suggestions that the busts represent some emperors.⁶ The idea of their presenting emperors has been still open to consideration. However, this suggestion still contains essential questions on the quantitative inconsistency between few in the number of stamps compared to the total amount of known examples and the variety of the type of stamps (die types). In other words, more evidence is needed to ascertain that stamps were prepared and imprinted during the reign of more than one emperor and over a relatively long time. On the other hand, the fact that some of the finds have contextual and stratigraphic information pointing to the early – middle 7th c. AD also implies that the stamps were imprinted/used during the reign of the emperor Heraclius (?) (Kara 2021: 75; Vassi 2010: 68).

2.2. Subgroup A1b

The content of the amphora stamp -A.1b- as it can be seen on a total of 17 amphorae does not vary (Kara 2019: table 9, Kat. No. 49b, 50b, 51b, 52b, 53b, 54b, 55b, 56b, 57b, 61, 64b, 65b, 66b, 69b, 70b, 72b, 74). The second stamp of the *dual stamps* has a circular shape and bears the letters χK (the ligature of omicron-epsilon and kappa) (**fig. 1, 3; 2, 2 below**). Mostly a frame surrounds the letters, in the preserved stamps of -A.1b-. There is at least one -A.1b- stamp that evidently does not have a frame (Kara 2019: Kat. No. 49b). Also based on the extant drawing, one might furthermore assume that it did not have any frame (Kara 2019: Kat. No. 70b), either. Another stamp was damaged during the process of stamping, so it is not known whether it is framed or not (Kara 2019: Kat. No. 57b). However, one can see that the ligature χ on this

⁵ The monograms on the stamps have been assumed to belong to the *kommerkiarioi*, and the bust depicting the emperor of the time (Diamanti 2012: 1).

⁶ For a detailed suggestion based on the iconographic approach for identification, see also Opait and Diamanti 2014: 57.

example is made in a more angular shape than its equivalents on other findings.

Assuming that the stamp die was reused more than once and any mistakes (if it would have been retrograde by mistake) on the dies might have been corrected by creating new ones, it might be appropriate to interpret the abbreviation as OUK, as in the original version, rather than KOY / κοῦ. For the transcription of ξK, it should most probably be read as OY(I)K / ου(ι)κ.

Adding to what has already been said, one may state that so far no amphora has been found in which the stamp -A.1b- was applied alone (i.e. without the stamp -A.1a-). Therefore, it is likely that the examples of -A.1b- were not stamped without -A.1a- at all. However, even though there is no evidence in this aspect so far, the other possibilities and offers might be taken for that the stamp -A.1b- might indicate a production center, a monastery, a fabricant, a (religious) official, the abbreviation of a proper name or a city, etc. (Gendelman 2010: 4; Vassi 2010: 68).

As to the Οὐκάριος / βικάριος⁷ (Ouikarios/Bikarios) on the -A.1b- stamp, the most likely assumption seems to be that it points to the title of the governor of the diocese, or Οὐκάρια (βικάρια)⁸ (Ouikaria/Bikaria). This would mean it represents this office or position, rather than a proper name. Some support for this assumption seems to come from the range of morphological variations of the amphorae with stamps A.1b: there is no significant change in the content of these stamps, which are thought to have possibly been stamped on amphorae (in different subgroups) in different production centres and at intermittent times. Moreover, the fact that the contents of the first stamps (A.1a) are not always precisely the same should suggest that they were subject to the control of another administrator and were controlled and stamped either by the same person or by two different administrators simultaneously.

3. Die assessment

Although no die tool (presumably made of metal) has been found, certain observations and results have emerged. Carrying out die assessment for the subgroup A.1a has established that the number of patterns could not be clearly determined. But the presence of more than one type of die is distinctly evident. As far as can be determined, there are at least three

stamp die types (A, B, and C): eight stamps with circular frames are included in the -A- die group (Kara 2019: Kat. No. 50b, 51b, 52b, 53b, 55b, 61, 72 and 74), while two stamps made without frames or thought to be frameless are included in the -B- die group (Kara 2019: 102-103, Kat. No. 49b and 70b).

4. Conclusions

Although it is too early to conclude and clarify the feature, function, or chronology of the subgroups A.2, A.3, and A.4, it is possible to evaluate A.1. Recent research seems to provide some basic results that are connected with the type of amphorae and the characteristic features of the *dual stamps* and stamping tradition of the LRA 2. Summarizing these results in terms of specific topics that need to be dealt with under different headings, it is possible to mention some basic conclusions from the economic, administrative, amphora type development, imprinting tradition, and paleographic points of view:

-It is obvious that all the stamps of the LRA 2 (including the LRA 2C) were applied on the neck and handle.

-It is understood that only the LRA 2B and LRA 2C forms were stamped so far.

-It should be considered that the amphora types LRA 2 and LRA 13 should be renamed/reconstituted (i.e., as D. Pieri has suggested; LRA 2A, LRA 2B, and LRA 2C; Pieri 2005: 87, fig. 45), since the type of the amphora bearing the same stamps has more than one subformed rim and neck. It is thought that most of the LRA 2B-C with different morphological features should have been produced in different workshops but not at different times.

-A clear paleographic outcome is that using different letters for the same phoneme points to transitions in the use of letters in this period (Kara 2019: 190-191).

Acknowledgments

I owe thanks to E. Altınanıt-Biçer, G. Cankardeş-Şenol, E. Doksanaltı, T. Ekmekçi-Littlefield, H. Gonzales-Cesteros, C. Negrelli, C. Pulak, and O. Vassi for their help and information sharing.

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⁷ See also for the Vicarius (lat.). Also, the other possible officials are *vicarius praefectorum*, and *vicarius urbis*.

⁸ Vicaria (lat.)

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