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THE LATE ROMAN SETTLEMENT AT YSTERNI ON THE ISLAND OF PAROS AND THE PARIAN PRODUCTION OF ‘AEGEAN’ TYPE LAMPS - PRELIMINARY RESULTS

This paper presents the first results of our research concerning the excavations of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Cyclades at the site of Ysterni on the island of Paros (Greece). These excavations revealed a settlement of the Late Antique period with three kilns, an oil or wine press and many other workshop facilities which produced, among others, lamps. Through this mass production of Parian lamps, the island of Paros emerges as a large and the only, yet, known center of the previously so-called 'Aegean lamp' type, offering important new typological and chronological information.

Paros – Ysterni site – kilns – Late Roman Parian lamps – “Aegean” type lamps

The present paper deals with a new production center of Late Roman pottery, which was excavated at the site of Ysterni on the island of Paros (fig. 1)¹. One type of product from its workshops were mass-produced lamps, the study of which offers an answer to a mystery that until now concerned the so-called “Aegean” type lamps.

Paros, located in the central Aegean, is the largest of a group of islands to its west, Antiparos and Despotiko. The image of wealth of the island during the Late Roman/Early Byzantine period and the transition to the medieval period (Diamanti 2015; 2016: 691; Dellaporta and Diamanti 2021) is strengthened by recent excavations of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Cyclades at several coastal settlements of the island, which are dated from the 6th to the end of the 7th century or the beginning of the 8th century. A very important discovery were two large and well-preserved ceramic kilns at Lageri, in Naousa (Diamanti 2015; 2016), where two types of amphorae were produced, Parian type 1 and Parian type 2. This mass production of Parian amphorae offers archaeological evidence for the economic wealth of the island and its importance to the Byzantine state: as a member, at that time, of the *quaestura exercitus*, Paros was an important supplier of agricultural goods to the state (Diamanti 2015). These workshops were abandoned after the 7th or early 8th century, which is a common pattern often attested in the Cycladic islands, even if the dates or the scale differ from one case to another, depending on the different effects of historical events

such as the Arab invasions: several seaside settlements were gradually reduced or abandoned during the second half of the 7th/early 8th century, and gave place to Middle Byzantine inland settlements with a more fortified character, while retaining active harbors and maritime activities (Diamanti 2023: 289, 291, notes 68, 69; Diamanti, Lamprakis and



Fig. 1. Map showing Byzantine sites on the island of Paros.

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Hilditch forthcoming). Such examples from the Cyclades are, for instance, Despotiko (Diamanti et al. 2020: 514-515), Thera (Sakellakou and Diamanti forthcoming), Naxos and Schinoussa (Chatzilazarou 2018: 202-203). Here, we refer particularly to Despotiko, where the Parian amphorae found among the pottery are strong archaeological evidence that until its last phase, around the beginning of the 8th century, Despotiko was a commercial outpost that belonged to the neighboring, wealthy “metropolitan” island of Paros.

The wealth of Paros during the last centuries of Late Antiquity and up to its transition to medieval times (end of the 7th - beginning of the 8th century) is confirmed by the most recent research on the island, with the large Late Roman production center revealed at the site of Ysterni, on the eastern part of the island. These excavations revealed three kilns, a press and many other workshop facilities wherein, among others (namely amphorae and probably coarse pottery), lamps were produced that are datable to the second half of the 6th and the 7th century. The workshops were built on a gentle slope and at a short distance from the coast. Two kilns came to light to the north of the excavation site (**fig. 2**). Both kilns, one with a rectangular plan (max. length c. 3,52 m. and max width c. 3,58 m.), the other with an oval (max. length c. 6 m. and max width c. 3,50 m.), belong to the two-storey anodic firing type, and had their walls being made of stones, clay mud and bricks (Hasaki and Raptis 2016: 216-217; Raptis 2001: 157-159). A third kiln, also with an oval plan (**fig. 3**) was located to the south of the two kilns mentioned above. This kiln (max. length c. 4,10 m. and max width c. 2,95 m.)

was also of the two-story anodic type, and was built with stones and clay mud and surrounded by a complex of auxiliary rooms. To the east of the excavation a second complex of rooms came to light, which was generally rectangular in plan. The remains of an olive or wine press excavated (Raptis 2001: 261-279, 283-296; Dodd 2020: 104-105) to the southeast of this complex indicate that it was probably associated not only with the activities of the workshops but also with the growing and processing of agricultural produce at the site (**fig. 4**). Among the remains of the press a square marble press was found, placed on a solid stone structure. This press’ upper surface had a circular carved groove which ended in an outflow nozzle. A short distance away there was a second structure on which a large storage “pithos” had been permanently placed.

It is the first time that a Late Antique lamp production center has been found in the Cyclades - to the best of our knowledge. This vast production of Parian lamps included molds and lamps that imitated of North African and Asia Minor types; these artefacts will be presented on another occasion. Here we pay special attention to the Parian lamps that belong to the previously so-called “Aegean” type, which constitute the majority of the lamp finds. They were found elsewhere in Paros, namely in the Laggeri Parian amphorae workshops excavation (Diamanti 2015; 2016), and in an old excavation of the basilica of Treis Ekklissies, just outside Paroikia (Orlandos 1966: 253-254, fig. 8).

The term “Aegean-type” lamp was first attributed to a group of lamps found in Perissa, on the island of Thera.



Fig. 2. Kiln 1 (rectangular) and kiln 2 (oval) (Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades and Charikleia Diamanti archive).

They were called “Aegean-type” lamp because until now no production center of such lamps had been identified, though specimens were found at several sites in the Aegean (Gerousi 2003: 515; 2010: 225; Gerousi-Bendermacher 2013: 149-165). Indeed, they are found on several islands, for example Naxos (Bournias 2014: 790-791), Schinoussa (Chatzilazarou 2018: 199, 216, fig. 28), Delos (Bruneau 1965: 142-143,

pl. 34.4724-4732), Thasos (Abadie-Reynal and Sodini 1992: 78, no. L59b, fig. 33, pl. 11), Rhodes (Katsioti 2017: 482-497; 2021: 158-163), Cos (Roumeliotis 2001: 257-259, pl. 3.8-3.9), as well as in Athens (Perlzweig 1961: 103, no. 374, pl. 11), Euboea (Dafi and Skartis 2015: 709, 716, fig. 1), and Thessaloniki (Akrivopoulou, Slampeas and Leventeli 2019: 67-68, fig. 4).



Fig. 3. Complex of rooms and kiln 3 (Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades and Charikleia Diamanti archive).



Fig. 4. Remains of an olive or wine press (Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades and Charikleia Diamanti archives).

Thus, this mass production of “Aegean type” (figs. 5-6) lamps on Paros is the first of its kind to be found. Among the thousands of pottery sherds collected during the excavation, tens of hundreds of lamp fragments corresponding to more than 130 unique lamps (either intact or fragments preserving their handles) and dozens of intact or fragments of lamp molds have been recorded and identified. A significant number of burnt lamps have also been discovered. All of the above material was found in the workshop complex area, with several of them located in or around the kilns.

This lamp types usually almond-shaped (the same is observed for the material found in Thera; Gerousi 2003: 514). Their length ranges from 9 to 12 cm, they are about 5-7 cm wide and up to 5 cm in height. The handle is usually solid and grooved, and the underside can have up to three vertical lines (fig. 5; fig. 6a, c, d, i.). The discus, which sometimes is connected to the nozzle by a channel, can be narrow and plain or larger and ornate, with the filling hole framed by a raised or double raised ring. The underside is characterized by bases that usually have one or two rather thick embossed rings. Two parallel grooves flank the underside of the nozzle. Macroscopically (with the naked eye), the fabric is brown/orange-brown in color, with some medium to fine sized white inclusions and is in fact not so different from the Parian fabric associated with the pottery production centers of Laggeri (Diamanti, Lamprakis and Hilditch forthcoming). The ongoing petrographic analysis will give more information in the future.

It has rightly been argued that lamps of this type combine decorative motifs from other well-known types of the period, such as Asia Minor, North African, and Palestinian lamps (Gerousi 2003: 514-515; 2010: 225; 2013: 180), which resulted in a unique style.

The Parian examples studied so far offer a truly rich repertoire of motifs. The decoration of the discus and sloping shoulder is characterized by geometric and floral motifs, symbols such as crosses, birds, animals, and possibly human figures as well. The vast variety of motifs and morphological characteristics is being systematically examined in an ongoing study, but some of the most characteristic variations can be already mentioned here.

More analytically: A fairly large group of examples is characterized by richly-dotted tongues or with small lines that cover the entire space of the shoulder, as well as a discus which is sometimes connected to the nozzle (fig. 5a-b; fig. 6g, i). These also have a solid, grooved handle. Similar examples have been found, for example, in Naxos (Bournias 2014: 798, pl. 4.19), Thera (Gerousi 2013: 162, no. 232; Sakellakou and Diamanti forthcoming), Rhodes (Katsioti 2017: 485, no. Ae1-4), Cos (Roumeliotis 2001: 272, pl. 3.8), etc., with much variation.

A second group of Parian lamps and molds is decorated by series of concentric circles and angles or triangles on the shoulder, either alternating or in rows (fig. 5c; fig. 6a, d, e, j). Handles are always grooved. Another motif which was combined with circles and triangles or angles are small embossed stars. Very similar examples of this common motif can be seen on published lamps found in Thera (Gerousi 2003:

515, fig. 2, right; 2013: 165, no. 238) and Rhodes (Katsioti 2021: 168, fig. 5, IIX 1934), again with many creative and rich variations.

There are also several Parian lamps and molds with a cross on the discus (fig. 5c-d; fig. 6g). Most of these crosses have splayed ends or the Maltese cross (fig. 5c; fig. 6g), combined with many variations of the motifs mentioned above (dotted tongues, plain or concentric circles, triangles or otherwise angled motifs). There are also floral and wavy patterns covering the shoulders. One or two filling holes are present in the center or between two arms of a cross. Another subtype has a Latin cross on the discus and embossed rosettes on the shoulder (fig. 5d). Several similar examples with crosses on the discus are found in Thera (Ancient Oia and Thera; Sakellakou and Diamanti forthcoming), Rhodes (Katsioti 2021: 160, 169, fig. 9, IIX 2843), and elsewhere.

Some examples of molds and lamps have round embossed rosettes on the shoulder as well as four-petal rosettes on the discus (fig. 5e; fig. 6h) (for a probably similar example found in Rhodes, see Katsioti 2017: 489, no. Ae11). Sometimes, the shoulders of the examples with the four-petal rosettes on the discus are covered by stars and dots in rounded groups or wavy lines (fig. 5f) (for similar examples, see Perlzweig 1961: 103, no 374, p1. 11 (Athens); Gerousi 2013: 154, no. 215 (Thera); Akrivopoulou, Slampeas and Leventeli 2019: 68, fig. 4 (Thessaloniki)).

Finally, we mention some lamps with a star motif on the discus and floral or geometrical embossed motifs alternating on the shoulder (fig. 6b-c).

The theories so far about the origin of this type of lamp, were two: the one was that “Aegean-type” lamps have a Cretan provenance (Gerousi 2003: 515; 2010: 225; Gerousi-Bendermacher 2013: 180) and the other a Rhodian one (Katsioti 2021: 159), though archaeological evidence hardly supported these suggestions.

Thanks to the Ysterni workshops, we are not only certain of the provenance of the finds, but we have also acquired a vast array of molds, a wide variety of subtypes as well as decorative motifs. Furthermore, this was all found in a datable “context” of an excavation that thus offers new information for the dating of this type of lamps as well.

Thus, even if there was the opinion that they are dated mainly to the 6th century, before Asia Minor products conquered the market for lamps on the islands (Katsioti 2017: 483-484; Katsioti 2021: 163), it now seems logical that these products could and should be dated even later since they are the hybrid product combining different aspects of various widespread lamp types (Gerousi 2003: 515; Gerousi-Bendermacher 2013: 180).

The Ysterni Parian lamp production center provides important clues regarding the question of their date range, which is based on other diagnostic ceramic finds. Especially the red slip wares, such as examples of LRC forms 10A and 10C (Hayes 1972: 343-346) which can be dated at least until the first half of the 7th century, show that while the main production of the Parian lamps may have taken place in the second half of the 6th century, their production continued well into the 7th century.

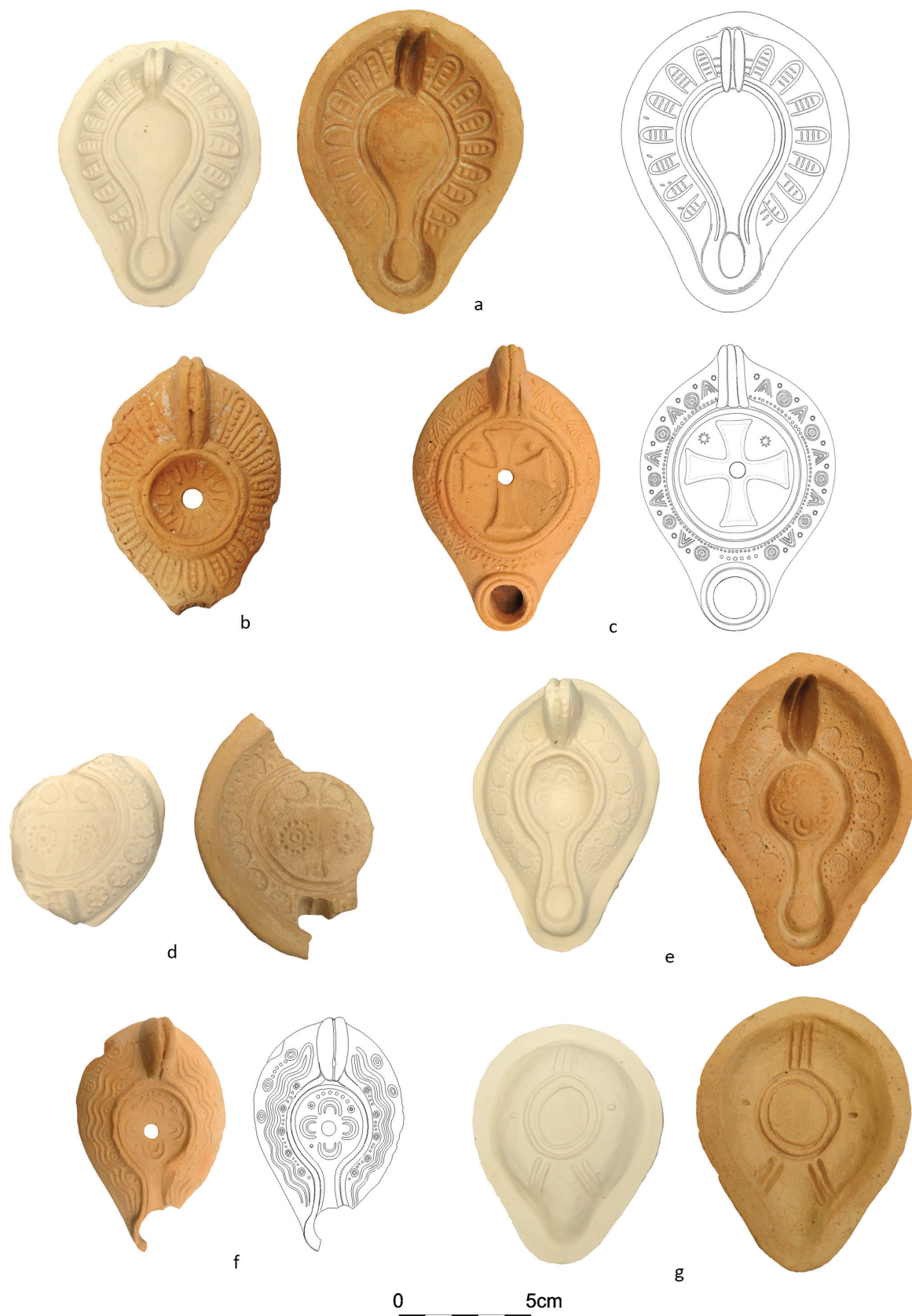


Fig. 5. a. Lamp mold found at Ysterni with tongues decoration, filled in with three to five short strokes. Imprint made of modeling clay; b. Parian lamp with dotted tongues decoration; c. Parian lamp with cross decoration; d. Lamp mold found at Ysterni with cross decoration. Imprint made of modeling clay; e. Parian lamp mold with a rosette on the disc, as well as dots and floral motifs on the shoulder. Imprint made of modeling clay; f. Parian lamp with wavy decoration on the shoulder and a rosette on the disc; g. Lower part of a Parian lamp mold. Imprint made of modeling clay (Ephorate of Antiquities of Cyclades and Charikleia Diamanti archives; Drawings by Nikolaos Tsouris).

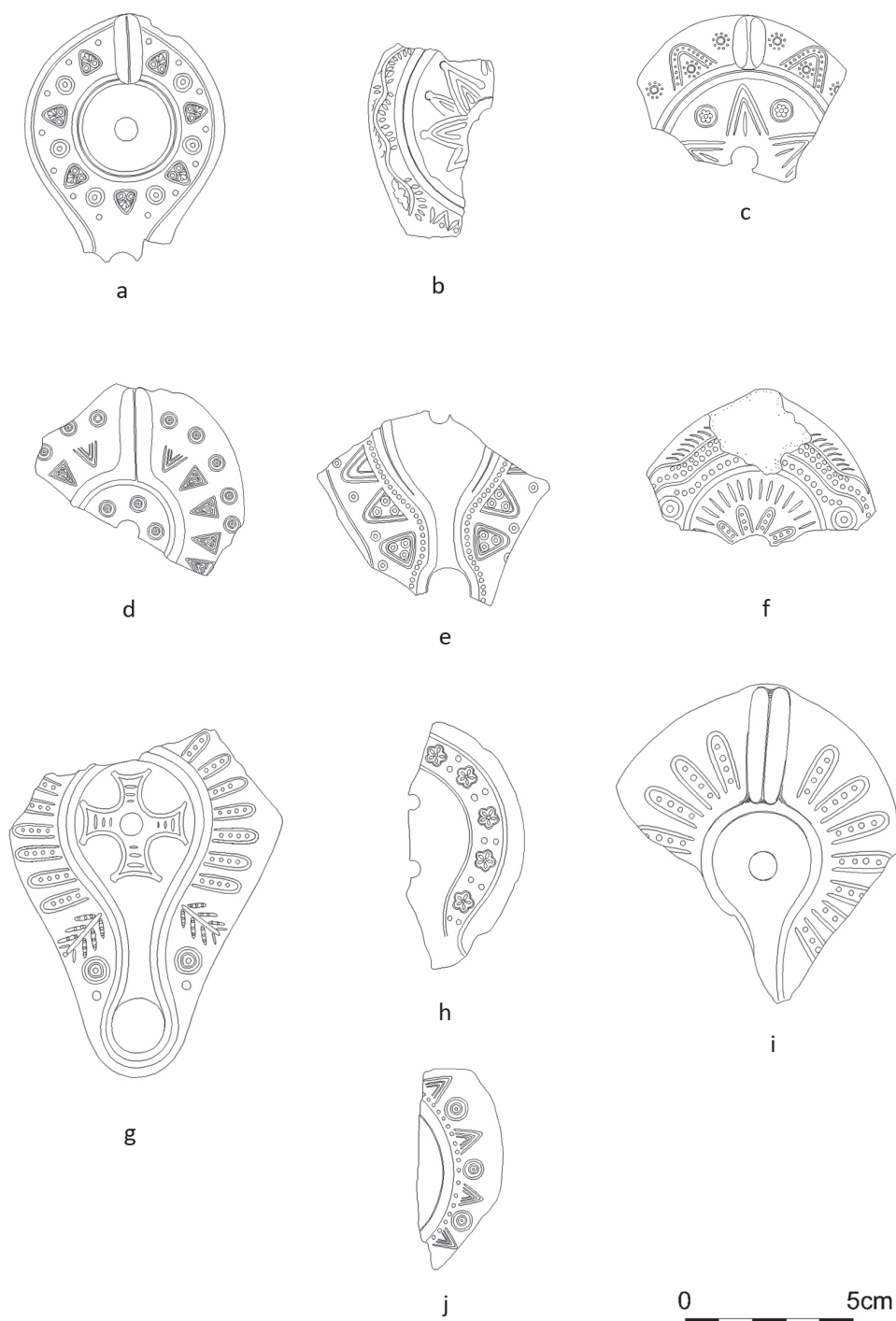


Fig. 6. Parian lamps fragments with various decorative motifs (Drawings by Nikolaos Tsouris).

The ongoing architectural and pottery study of this important Parian production center at Ysterni will provide even more detailed and systematic information in the future about the layout of its workshops as well as the characteristics and the distribution of the, hitherto, so-called “Aegean” type, Parian lamps. Last, the study of the production of other types of lamps as well as other kinds of ceramics in these workshops, will allow us to gain a richer picture of the impressive mass production of pottery in Paros during Late Antiquity.

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