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IMPERIAL STAMPS ON EARLY BYZANTINE AMPHORAS THE ATHENIAN AGORA EXAMPLES

Until now only eight stamps depicting an emperor have been found on Late Roman Amphoras type 2/13 (these globular amphoras probably carried olive oil).¹ Unfortunately, in only two cases do we know their place of manufacture, the late Roman settlement of Halasarna on the Island of Kos. They are published in detail and dated on the basis of excavation data (figs. 1–2).² Others have been found³ in Constantinople (fig. 3)⁴, Pnyka (Athens)⁵ (fig. 4), on the Island of Geronisos⁶ (fig. 5), Alexandria⁷ (fig. 6), Kellia (fig. 7),⁸ and Tocra (fig. 8).⁹ The aim of this paper is to present in more detail the four stamps found in the Athenian Agora (figs. 9; 11; 12; 14), whose existence was noted by Virginia Grace in her publication of the example found in Pnyka¹⁰.

I. No. SS 9295¹¹ (fig. 9). Part of a stamped neck and top of one handle. It shows the bust of a Byzantine emperor and the inscription around it reads +EIII [ITOA]EMEIO[Y] [EII] APXOY¹². An emperor is depicted holding a cross-topped sceptre in his left hand and probably the *mappa* in the other. The sceptre is vertically depicted and is similar to one of the Koan examples (fig. 1) and it is similar to other already published examples (12) of the second half of the 6th century.¹³ The fabric is hard, with a fine texture and well-sorted inclusions, compact with sparse crystalline quartz (0.5mm), and common to abundant angular and sub-rounded white and brownish inclusions (0.5–1 mm). The color is reddish-yellow (7.5YR 7/6–7/8) with a light slip (fig. 10).

II. No. SS 9434. Fragment from the neck. An emperor is depicted holding a cross-topped sceptre in his left hand and probably the *mappa* in the other. The inscription reads E[III] or EΩ[.]. The fabric is similar to SS 9295 suggesting the same origin. According to its context it is dated to the 7th century (fig. 11). However, the stamp is similar to one of the Koan examples (fig. 1) and the published examples with the bust probably belonging to one of the emperors of the late 6th century.

III. No. SS 9085¹⁴. Circular stamp, only partially struck on the handle (fig. 12). The handle is slightly curved, sloping and roughly round in section. The stamp shows a bearded bust of an emperor depicted full front holding a cross-topped sceptre in his left hand with the inscription OY+EIII.N. The inclusions in the fabric are ill-sorted and the fracture varies from irregular to hackly, with rounded grayish inclusions (quartz?), common large white inclusions (limestone?) ranging between 0.5–1.5mm; the colour is light red (2.5YR 6/8) to reddish-yellow (5YR 6/8) (fig. 13). On the basis of the bust, which is similar to the Koan stamp of figure 2, it should be dated to the reign of Phocas (602–610).

IV. No. SS 5654¹⁵. Stamped amphora handle (fig. 14) with a circular stamp. This shows a bust and monogram “B”. An emperor is depicted holding a cross-topped sceptre in his left hand and in the right hand a *mappa*. The fabric is similar to the previous example, suggesting a common workshop (fig. 15). The simple way of depicting the sceptre (like “leaves”) gives the impression of a, comparatively later, simplified example of the 7th century. It is similar to the Koan stamp in figure 2, dated to the reign of Phocas (602–610).

In a previous paper a group of stamped amphoras of the 6th/7th centuries, produced at Halasarna of Kos, was presented¹⁶. There, it was suggested that the stamps, some of which have cross-like monograms at the centre and inscriptions around the edge, were the result of a state-control financial mechanism operated by *kommerkiarioi*. The suggestion was partly based on the observation of similarities with the two other commercial stamping systems of the 6th/7th centuries, the lead seals of *kommerkiarioi* and the stamps on silver vessels.

¹ J. A. RILEY 1979. The coarse pottery from Berenice. In: J. A. Lloyd (ed.), Excavations at Sidi Khrebish, Benghazi (Berenice). Libya Antiqua Suppl. 5, 2 (Tripoli) 217–219; 231–232; we consider that the transition from LRA2 to LRA 13 took place during the second half of the 6th or the first half of the 7th century so it is difficult to be certain on a precise amphora type.

² DIAMANTI 2012; EAD. forthcoming.

³ EAD. 2012, n. 8.

⁴ HAYES 1992, 77 no. 3.BP 340 pl. 13,3.

⁵ GRACE 1949, 184; 188; EAD. 1956, 171.

⁶ CONNELLY/WILSON 2002, 274–275.

⁷ SZTETYLLO/BORKOWSKI 1986.

⁸ BONNET/CATTIN 1999, 538–539 no. 158 fig. 489,158.

⁹ BENTAHER 1994, 231 fig. 13.a; we are in debt to P. Arthur for this reference.

¹⁰ See note 5.

¹¹ Section BB # 501, 33/ΔΘ, sandy fill.

¹² For the appearance of the name of this official in several stamps see DIAMANTI 2012, 1 note 8.

¹³ EAD. forthcoming; EAD. 2012, 1–2.

¹⁴ Section ZZ # 63, 63/KZ, loose late fill.

¹⁵ Section P# 213, 11/ΛΑ, black fill under Byzantine wall.

¹⁶ DIAMANTI 2010 a, 92–115; 209–215; 393–398 figs. 134–139 pls. 16–19; ID. b.



Fig. 1. Bust and inscription [---] XOY+EΠE or EΩE [---], Halasarna-Kos, second half of the 6th century (DIAMANTI forthcoming; DIAMANTI 2012 fig. 1).



Fig. 2. Bust and inscription [---] OY+E [---], Halasarna-Kos, 7th century (DIAMANTI 2012, 1–2 fig. 2–3).



Fig. 3. Bust and inscription ΠΙΠΙΤOC, Saraçhane, Constantinople, ca. 700 (HAYES 1992, 77).



Fig. 4. Bust and inscription ΠITOΛAIMEOY, Pnyca-Athens, first half of the 7th century (GRACE 1949, 184; 188; ID. 1956, 171).



Fig. 5. Bust and inscription ΕΠΙ ΠITOΛΕΜAIOY ΕΠAΡΧOY, Alexandria, 7th century (SZTETYLLO/BORKOWSKI 1986).



Fig. 6. Bust and inscription ΕΠΙ ΠITOΛE[AI]OY, Geronisos Island, Cyprus, 6th–7th century (CONNELLY/WILSON 2002, 274–275).

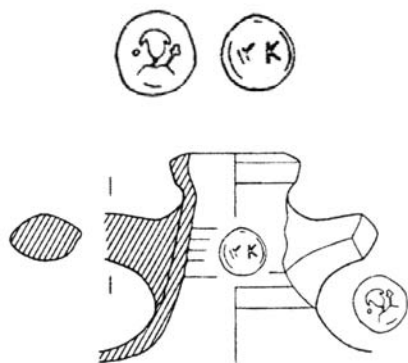


Fig. 7. Bust and monogram- one stamp on each side of the amphora neck, Kellia, Egypt, end of the 6th century (BONNET/CATTIN 1999 fig. 489.158).

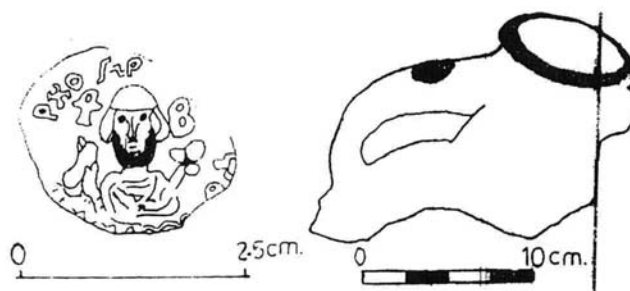


Fig. 8. Bust and inscription [EIIA]PXOY... (Phocas). Tocr, Libya (BENTAHER 1994).

They bear images of the emperor,¹⁷ which were also part of a mechanism concerning the acquisition of income for the state. Later, two amphora stamps were presented, produced and found at Halasarna of Kos, which depict the effigy of an emperor¹⁸. These stamps, which on the basis of stratigraphy and contexts date from the last quarter of the 6th century to the first quarter of the 7th century confirm the similarity of the Halasarnian stamped amphoras with the stamps of the *kommerkiarioi* and the emperor stamps on silver vessels. On the basis of iconographic comparisons with stamped silver plates and coins, the one bust of a beardless man wearing a crown with pendants was identified as the Emperor Tiberius II (578–582) or Maurice Tiberius (582–602), and the second bust of a short-haired man with a pointed beard with Phocas (602–610)¹⁹. The same date, as noted above, can be assigned to the four stamps discovered in the Athenian Agora and presented here, two of them (figs. 9; 11) with Tiberius II or Maurice Tiberius and the other (figs. 12; 14) with Phocas.

Another working theory offered at the RCRF congress in Catania,²⁰ is that the use of such stamps may concern a revival of the old practice of guaranteeing the quality of a product and of the correct amphora capacity and solidity, by stamping with official emblems, either of the city or of the emperor²¹. During the early Roman period, the practice of stamping amphoras was used on a few wine amphora types



Fig. 9. Bust and inscription +E[III] [IITOΛ]EMEIO[Y] [EΠ]APXOY. SS 9295, Agora-Athens, second half of the 6th century.



Fig. 10. Close up picture of SS 9295.

¹⁷ DIAMANTI 2010 b, 3–4; N. OIKONOMIDES, Silk trade and production in Byzantium from the sixth to the ninth century: The seals of *kommerkiarioi*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 40 (Washington D.C. 1986) 36–37; E. C. DODD, Byzantine silver stamps. *Dumbarton Oaks Stud.* 7 (Washington D.C.), 5–18.

¹⁸ DIAMANTI forthcoming; EAD. 2012.

¹⁹ Ibid. 2.

²⁰ The study of these amphora stamps in the *Stoa of Attalos* by A. Opaît has been facilitated by a Kress Fellowship. His participation in the RCRF congress (Catania 2012) and the drafting on this text was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS-UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0054. The authors are in debt to P. Arthur and D. Williams who read the manuscript and made useful suggestions.

²¹ MANACORDA 1993, 38–39; 51–52; PEACOCK/WILLIAMS 1986, 9–10.



Fig. 11. Bust and inscription E[III] or EΩ[. SS 9085, Agora-Athens, second half of the 6th century.



Fig. 12. Bust and inscription [YOY+EIII. N, Agora-Athens, 7th century.



Fig. 13. Close up picture of SS 9085.

such as Dressel 30,²² Gauloise 1 *similis*,²³ and Dressel 2/4 which carried wine produced on an imperial estate in Italy²⁴. However, the stamping was more customary on certain olive oil amphoras manufactured in areas such as Spain,²⁵ North Africa,²⁶ the north Adriatic²⁷ and the Aegean²⁸. This is also a time when we witness an increase of imperial *latifundia*-²⁹ which, in some instances, guaranteed the products of the estate carried by amphoras with imperial names, as was the case with Dressel 20,³⁰ Dressel 6B,³¹ and Dressel 2/4³² amphora types. Gradually, after the mid third century AD, the stamps of imperial names, or the names of landowners, cities, or *officinatores*, disappeared³³ reflecting perhaps the decline of epigraphic habit³⁴ with its probable reoccurrence at the end of the 6th century.

As we have shown above, there are known only 12 stamps depicting Byzantine emperors. In addition to these stamps, other stamps in the form of monograms and/or inscriptions, occurring on the same amphora type have been found: at least five at Halasarna in Kos,³⁵ probably two at Constantinople,³⁶ one on the Yassi Ada wreck,³⁷ and one at Kellia³⁸. The fact

²² LAPORTE 1976–78; C. PANELLA, Appunti su un gruppo di anfore della prima, media e tarda età Imperiale. Ostia III: Le terme del Nuotatore: scavo dell'ambiente V et di un saggio dell'area. Studi Miscellanei 21, 1973, 600–605; PONS PUJOL 2001; BONIFAY 2004, 148–151.

²³ R. P. SYMONDS, Romano-British amphorae. Journal Roman Pottery Stud. 10, 2003, 50–59.

²⁴ Seven amphora stamps were thoroughly discussed by MANACORDA 2007, 276–291.

²⁵ R. J. REMESAL, Los sellos. In: J. M. Blázquez Martínez/J. Remesal Rodríguez (eds.), Estudios sobre el Monte Testaccio (Roma) II (Barcelona 2001) 260–262.

²⁶ BONIFAY 2004, 9–18.

²⁷ T. BEZECZY, The Laecanius Amphora Stamps and the Villas of Brijuni (Wien 1998); S. MARTIN-KILCHER, Les Laecanii et les amphores à huile d'Istrie. Journal Roman Arch. 13, 2000, 506–509; F. TASSAUX, Les importations de l'Adriatique et de l'Italie du nord vers les provinces danubiennes de César aux Sévères. In: G. Urso (ed.), D'Adriatico al Danubio. L'Illirico nell'età greca e romana. Atti del convegno internazionale Cividale del Friuli, 25–27 settembre 2003 (Pisa 2004) 167–205.

²⁸ A. OPAIT/A. TSARAVOPOULOS, Amphorae of Dressel 24 similis type in the central Aegean area (Chios–Erythrai–Kyme). Annu. British School Athens 106, 2011, 275–323; another early Roman variant of Dr 24 *similis* discovered at Kalos Limen is stamped *Caesari*, cf. V. V. UZHENTSEV/V. YU. YUROCHKIN, Amfory s voronkovidnymgorlomizprich ernomor'ya. Khersoneskiy Sbornik 9, 1998, 100–109.

²⁹ D. J. CRAWFORD, Imperial estates. In: M. I. Finley (ed.), Studies in Roman Property (Cambridge 1976) 35–70.

³⁰ F. MAYET, Les *Figlinae* dans les marques d'amphores Dressel 20 de Bétique. Rev. Études Anciennes 88, 1986, 285–305.

³¹ TASSAUX 2007, 49–64; A. BUONOPANE/S. PESSAVENTO MATTIOLI, Puntualizzazioni epigrafiche e tipologiche sulle anfore prodotte nei possedimenti imperiali dell'Istria. In: Pupillo 2007, 293–310.

³² MANACORDA 2007.

³³ TASSAUX 2007; Bonifay 2004; D. STONE/D. J. MATTINGLY/A. OPAIT, Stamped amphoras. In: D. L. Stone/D. J. Mattingly/N. Ben Lazreg, Leptiminius (Lamta). Report No. 3. The field survey, Journal Roman arch. Suppl. 87 (Portsmouth, Rhode Island 2011) 353–386.

³⁴ R. MACMULLEN, The epigraphic habit in the Roman Empire. Am. Journal Philol. 103, 1982, 233–246.

³⁵ DIAMANTI 2010 a, 94; 210–211.

³⁶ HAYES 1992, 69–71; 77 no.1 (monogram on neck [ΘΕΜΙΣΤΟΥ?]); no.2 (monogram on handle, possibly also belonging to this amphora type).

³⁷ F. H. VAN DOORNINCK JR., The cargo amphorae on the 7th century Yassi Ada and 11th century Serçe Limani shipwrecks: Two examples of a reuse of Byzantine amphorae as transport jars. In: V. Deroche/M. Spieser (eds.), Recherches sur la céramique byzantine. Bull. Corr. Hellenique Suppl. 18 (Paris/Athènes 1989) 250 fig. 1, 2.

³⁸ BONNET/CATTIN 1999, 538–539 no. 158 fig. 489, 158.

that at least two examples discovered at Halasarna³⁹ and one at Kellia⁴⁰ (fig. 7) are stamped either on both sides of the neck or on the neck and the handle, while other examples are fragmentary⁴¹ confirms, as it has already been suggested elsewhere,⁴² that this was the usual practice of stamping these special amphoras: one stamp bore a depiction of the emperor, whilst the other represented a monogram of an official; sometimes both stamps are surrounded by the name and the title of an official in the way of the contemporary late 6th century seals, of the *Kommerkiarioi*, which bear images of emperors and were used for the stamping of commercial packages.⁴³

If for the Greek and early Roman periods the circumstances of stamping are more or less clarified, for the early Byzantine period the situation is less clear. This may be due to its rarity rather than to the actual state of our research, as this period has been quite intensively studied. It is also true that these worn stamps are usually found on the broken necks of amphoras and are not easily seen, with the thousands of amphora fragments coming from excavations. They can also be overlooked because of their faint application on the clay.

Concluding, a stamp is a factor of warranty, but in discussing stamps, the type of material (ceramics, metals, glass) and the objects on which they were applied are particularly important. However, summarizing the two theories suggested in this paper, it is proposed that it attests:

1. either a kind of warranty and license of circulation of the stamped commodities attesting to a financial mechanism operated by *Eparchs* and *Kommerkiarioi*⁴⁴, or
2. a high quality of the product and, in the amphora case, of the container and of the agricultural product carried in it⁴⁵.

In some cases in earlier times both qualities were guaranteed by separate stamps⁴⁶. For the early Byzantine period we know that the city of Korikos stamped amphoras of LRA 1 type⁴⁷.

³⁹ DIAMANTI 2012, 2 n. 15 fig. 5a–b.

⁴⁰ BONNET/CATTIN 1999, 538–539 no. 158 fig. 489,158.

⁴¹ See figs. 4–6; 8; 9; 11; 12; 14.

⁴² DIAMANTI 2010 a, 211; EAD. 2012, 2.

⁴³ See note 16.

⁴⁴ See notes 12; 16.

⁴⁵ See note 20.

⁴⁶ For early Roman times see: MANACORDA 1993, 38–39; 51–52; PEACOCK/WILLIAMS 1986, 9–10; TASSAUX 2007, 51, where the same *offinator* Clymenes stamps amphora first with C. Laecanius Bassus, and later with the new owner, the emperor Vespasian; see also the amphoras from Mauretania Caesariensis stamped by the *offinator*, by the city name Tubusuctu, and the name of the province, cf. LAPORTE 1980; PONS PUJOL, 2001. Regarding the obligation that the potter/seller must deliver a product in a good container, without a “fundamental defect”, i. e. that cannot hold liquids in contrast to containers of size or weight deviating from the seller’s warranty, the Roman legislation was very clear, cf. ULPIAN, D.19.1, 6, 4, cited and discussed by B. W. FRIER, Roman Law and the wine trade: the problem of “vinegar sold as wine”. Zeischr. Savigny-Stiftung Rechtsgesch. 1983, 286 and note 114.

⁴⁷ A. OPAIT, Local and Imported Ceramics in the Roman Province of Scythia (4th–6th centuries AD). BAR Internat. Ser. 1274 (Oxford 2004) 8–9; it will be interesting to find out if these potteries belonged to cities that had the same obligation as in Hellenistic times to provide the wine growers with amphoras for paying their taxes in kind, cf. V. GRACE/J.-Y. EMPEREUR, Un groupe amphores ptolémaïques estampillées. Bull. Inst. Français Arch. Orientale Suppl. 81 (Paris 1981) 421–422 note 12. For the city of Korikos as a very important and active port see Ch. DIAMANTI, The importance of the Asia Minor coastline in the production and distribution of the Late Roman proto-Byzantine Amphora 1 (LRA 1) – Archaeological evidence and epigraphic contribution. Bull. Centre Asia Minor Stud. 15, 2008, 11–37; EAD. 2010 a, 171–173; 224–225.



Fig. 14. Bust and monogram B. SS 5654, Agora-Athens, 7th century.



Fig. 15. Close up picture of SS 5654.

However, although stamps on LRA 2/13 amphoras lack the express indication of *ex figlin(is) Caesaris*, they refer to officials, to *Eparchs* and maybe to the *Kommerkiarioi*, who are called in their stamps “EXCEEDINGLY GLORIOUS”, as in the inscription of an amphora stamp from Halasarna and they depict the bust of the emperor, a straightforward and powerful image that suggests by itself a special practice such as:

1. the production, taxation and distribution of *annona* products from the agricultural centres, so the state could support the civil populations (mainly in Constantinople) and the army. Those tax-paying areas must be sought in the amphora production centres of the eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea such as Cilicia, Cyprus and Kos⁴⁸ or
2. a product carried in these containers and manufactured on an imperial domain.

⁴⁸ DIAMANTI 2010 a, 104; 212–215; 222; EAD. 2010 b, 4; EAD. 2012, 2–4.

Accordingly, the second stamp, represented by a monogram, maybe belongs to a *Kommerkiarios* of a wider region or a *curator* of an imperial land, or to an *officinator* in charge of the amphora workshop.

In addition to the rarity of these stamps we should emphasize their place of discovery⁴⁹: more than twenty on the island of Kos⁵⁰, where one of the manufacturing sites was located, three in the Imperial palace of Constantinople, five in Athens, one (probably on a reused amphora) on the Yassi Ada shipwreck, one in a dump deposit at Kameriye Ada on the Turkish coast, north of the island of Rhodes⁵¹, one on the island of Geronisos, one in Tocra, one in Alexandria, and another from a monastery close to Alexandria. These places of production and distribution can be similar to another pattern suggested by D. Manacorda for the distribution of Dressel 2/4 amphoras manufactured on an imperial estate, to contain gifts of olive oil made by the emperor to certain persons of high rank⁵². Still, according to the theory that stamped amphoras were part of a state-control financial mechanism operated by *Eparchs* and *Kommerkiarioi*, this distribution in the eastern

Mediterranean and especially the *annona* maritime routes of Asia Minor and the Aegean, (most of them belong to the type LRA 2/LRA13, which was produced *par excellence* in the Aegean) might also suggest that these amphoras carried products to serve the needs of the citizens and the army⁵³.

Regarding the fabrics of the Agora examples, they suggest the existence of at least two other amphora workshops in addition to that at Kos⁵⁴. It is also not excluded that one of the fabrics found in the Athenian Agora might have a Koan origin, although only petrographic studies will prove the issue.

Finally, the collation of these stamps has helped to shed new light on the organization of a segment of the early Byzantine economy, a challenging topic of a lesser known period. Although the publication of these stamps far from solves the problems of origin and distribution of these special amphoras, the addition of the examples found in the Agora of Athens to the catalogue of already studied similar stamps, offers a better picture of this group which should be enriched by future research.

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⁴⁹ EAD. 2010 a, 222; EAD. 2010 b, 6; EAD. 2012, 2.

⁵⁰ For the three types of the stamps found at Halasarna see: DIAMANTI forthcoming; EAD. 2012, 1 note 1. An early Roman amphora production on this island was indicated by P. ARTHUR, *Eastern Mediterranean Amphorae and Italy between 500 and 700*. In: L. Sagui (ed.), *Ceramica in Italia: VI–VII secolo* (Florence 1998) 166 fig. 6.

⁵¹ J. P. ROSLOFF, *INA 's 1980 Turkish underwater Survey*. *Internat. Journal Nautical Arch.* 10, 1981, 284, fig.14.

⁵² MANACORDA 2007.

⁵³ DIAMANTI 2010b, 4.

⁵⁴ For the results of the petrographic examination and chemical analysis on examples of the Late Roman Koan Amphoras production see DIAMANTI 2010a, 137–152; 218–219.

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