

SOME FEATURES OF THE EARLY MEDIEVAL POTTERY IN ALBANIA (7th-11th CENTURIES)

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ: Μεγάλη ποσότητα μεσαιωνικής κεραμικής συγκεντρώθηκε σε ανασκαφές που πραγματοποιήθηκαν σε οικισμούς και νεκροταφεία της πρώιμης μεσαιωνικής περιόδου στην Αλβανία (Δυρράχιο, Σκόδρα, Λίσσος, Κρόια, Πουλχεριόπολις, Πισκόβ, Κάνινα, Βουθρωτόν). Οι ανασκαφές στο Δυρράχιο αποκάλυψαν ενσφραγιστες πλίνθους, μεταξύ των οποίων ορισμένες με μονογράμματα των αυτοκρατόρων Μαυρικίου Τιβερίου (582-602) και Ηράκλειου (610-641). Ως προς τα δοχεία μεταφοράς παρατηρήθηκε ότι μετά το α΄ μισό του 7ου αιώνα ο τύπος Egloff 164, LRA2 και οι αμφορείς τύπου Γάζας εξακολουθούν να κυκλοφορούν, αλλά αργότερα αντικαθίστανται από σφαιρικούς αμφορείς με ελαφρώς υπερωψωμένες τις λαβές. Τα μικρότερα αγγεία καθημερινής χρήσης αντιπροσωπεύονται από κανάτια διαφόρων τύπων και μικρά αποθηκευτικά αγγεία καθημερινής χρήσης. Τα περισσότερα από αυτά τα αγγεία φέρουν είτε εγχάρακτο είτε γραπτό διάκοσμο. Κάποια από αυτά (εικ. 1.1-10, 2.3, 7, 16-18) παράγονταν στην πρώτη φάση της μεσαιωνικής περιόδου (7ος-8ος αιώνας), ενώ άλλα (εικ. 1.11-13, 2.1-2, 4-6, 8-15) στη διάρκεια της δεύτερης φάσης της ίδιας περιόδου (9ος-11ος αιώνας).

From the archaeological excavations that have been carried out so far in settlements and tumuli of the Early Middle Ages in Albania, apart from different finds, there has been discovered a limited quantity of pottery.

From the 7th century onwards, the production of building material in certain Medieval cities (Dyrrhachion, Lissus, Pulcheriopolis, Kanina etc.) was not merely confined to the repair needs of older structures but was also extended to the construction of new ones (Komata 1991: fig. 37-44; Spahiu 1990: 160; Hoti 1996: 178-179).

Among the objects that testify to such a production are also monogram bricks of the Byzantine emperors Maurice Tiberi (582-602) (Anamali 1993: 451) and Heraclius (610-641) (Hoti 1996: 179) both found in Dyrrhachion. The recent discovery of a pottery workshop next to the Byzantine Forum in this city highlights the fact that there a state workshop for producing pottery was fully run during the first decades of the Middle Ages (Hoti 1996: 178-180). It seems most likely that its products might have been among the most wanted articles in both Arkondia and Them's markets of Dyrrhachion. During the first half of the 7th century there is observed a drastic reduction in imported pottery. Except for amphoras from Gaza (Egloff 164, variant 2, Carthage LRA 2) or any other vessel that had a constant circulation until the turn of the 7th century (Hoxha 1992: 212-217; Cerova 1992: 246-248), the Mediterranean types were not produced or reproduced in any of the pottery workshops that were run in the territory of Albania (Arbanoi).

Pottery of the Early Middle Ages discovered so far in Albania is represented by vessels of various types. Water-jugs, jars, water-bottles and bowls seem to prevail, whereas amphoras, amphora-pitchers and oinochoes are rather

fewer in numbers. Pottery workshops of this period kept on putting in circulation new types of vessels but they did not stop reproducing some very traditional vessels like bowls, water-bottles etc. that date back to Late Antiquity.

Borrowings from the Roman provincial potteries of a few special types of vessels during the Early Middle Ages can hardly be called a mere imitation, because there appears a creative tendency whereby every now and then pottery workshops turned out quite new patterns that are most characteristic of the Byzantine region of the Southern Adriatic and Ionian basin.

Amongst the most typical vessels that have new elements not only in their typological treatment but also in their decoration are the amphoras. After they had been put in circulation, the Mediterranean amphoras of Late Antiquity gradually went out of use.

Two kinds of techniques appear to have been used in decorating vessels during the Early Middle Ages, namely:

1. by scratching
2. by painting.

The first technique produced a pattern of parallel, straight and wavy incisions. This technique, known from earlier times, was widely used in the decoration of water-pots, vases (pots) and oinochoes.

Painted decoration was obtained by brown brushstrokes and less by red ones. The most preferred style seems to be the one with either straight ribbons and capillaries or oblique, wavy and pliable ones; horse-shoe patterns, amorphous spots and at times vegetal motifs.

This painting technique was widely and mostly used on transport or everyday vessels like water-jugs, oinochoes, water-bottles, jars etc. (Fig. 1.1-10).

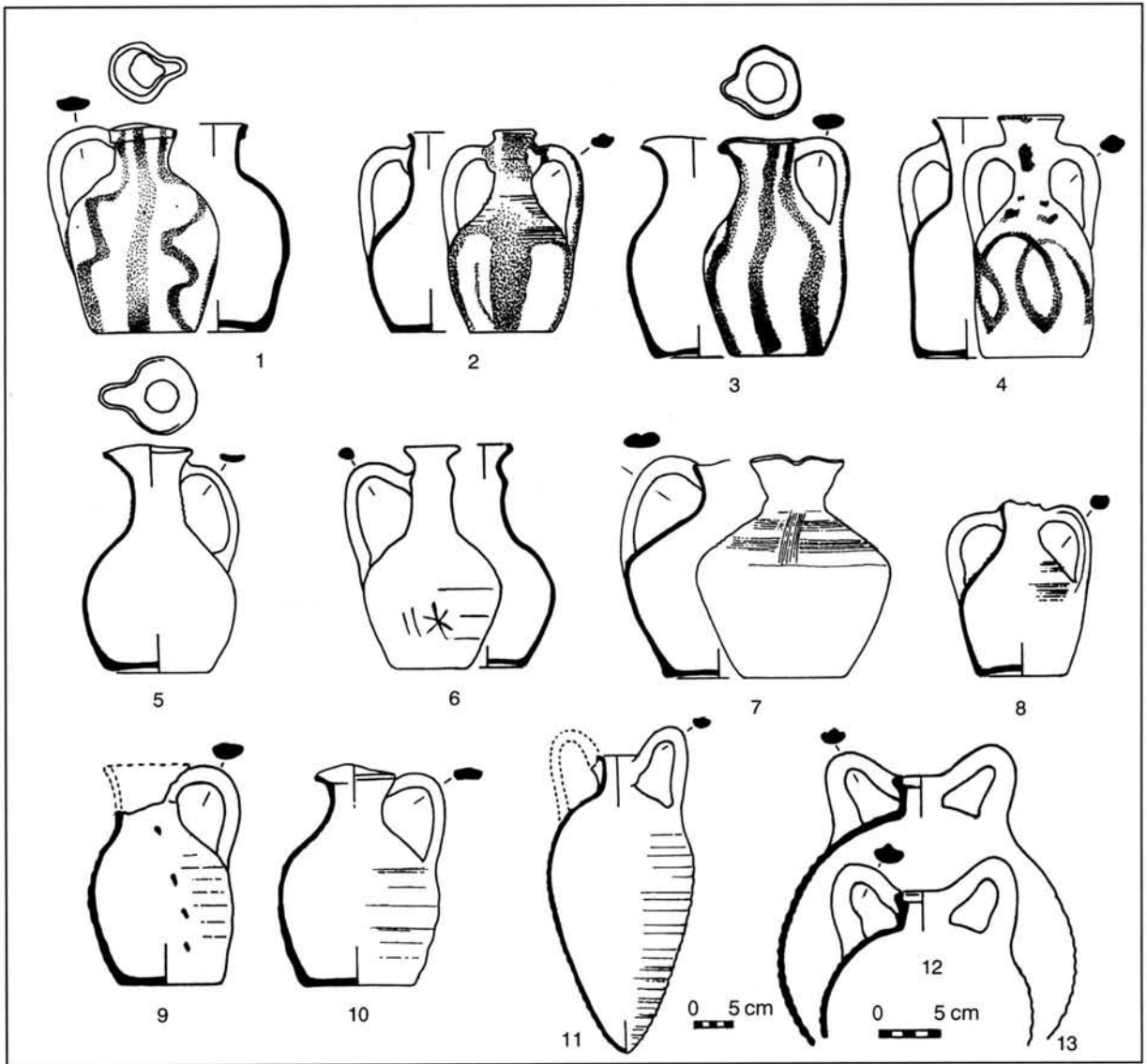


Fig. 1. *Dyrrhachion* (2, 8, 11-13); *Kroia* (1, 3, 5-7, 9-10); *Piskove* (4).

The style of decoration with ribbons and capillaries does not express the continuity of such a technique, but is a Christian decorative motif. Showing continuously a cultural particularity, vessels with this motif never ceased to be placed as authentic objects of inventory in Christian tombs from the time of Constantine to the end of the 11th century. Motifs with capillary lines that appear to have been widespread in the Mediterranean world and from what has come out to light so far have their own stylistic characteristics (Hodges 1986: 13-26; Retuerce 1986: 70-74; Peduto 1986: 555-558; Patterson 1992: 105-109, fig. 6.6 (476-482), fig. 6.7 (483-492).

In order to better recognise their morphological-typo-

logical traits, we would like to briefly describe here the main types of vessels of the Early Middle Ages.

1. *Amphoras* (*Dyrrhachion*, *Lissus*, *Scodra*) (Fig. 1.11).

They are in brown or reddish and at times light pink shades. Their structure is often decorated with wide or narrow grooves. H. 42-52 cm.

A great quantity of such amphoras were in circulation in the Adriatic-Ionian basin during the 7th-12th centuries (Hoti 1990: pl. II-IV).

A significant number also from the painted fragments in brown, grey or red ribbons (Hoti 1990: pl. VI). They have motifs with irregular lines or arcs and spirals that are

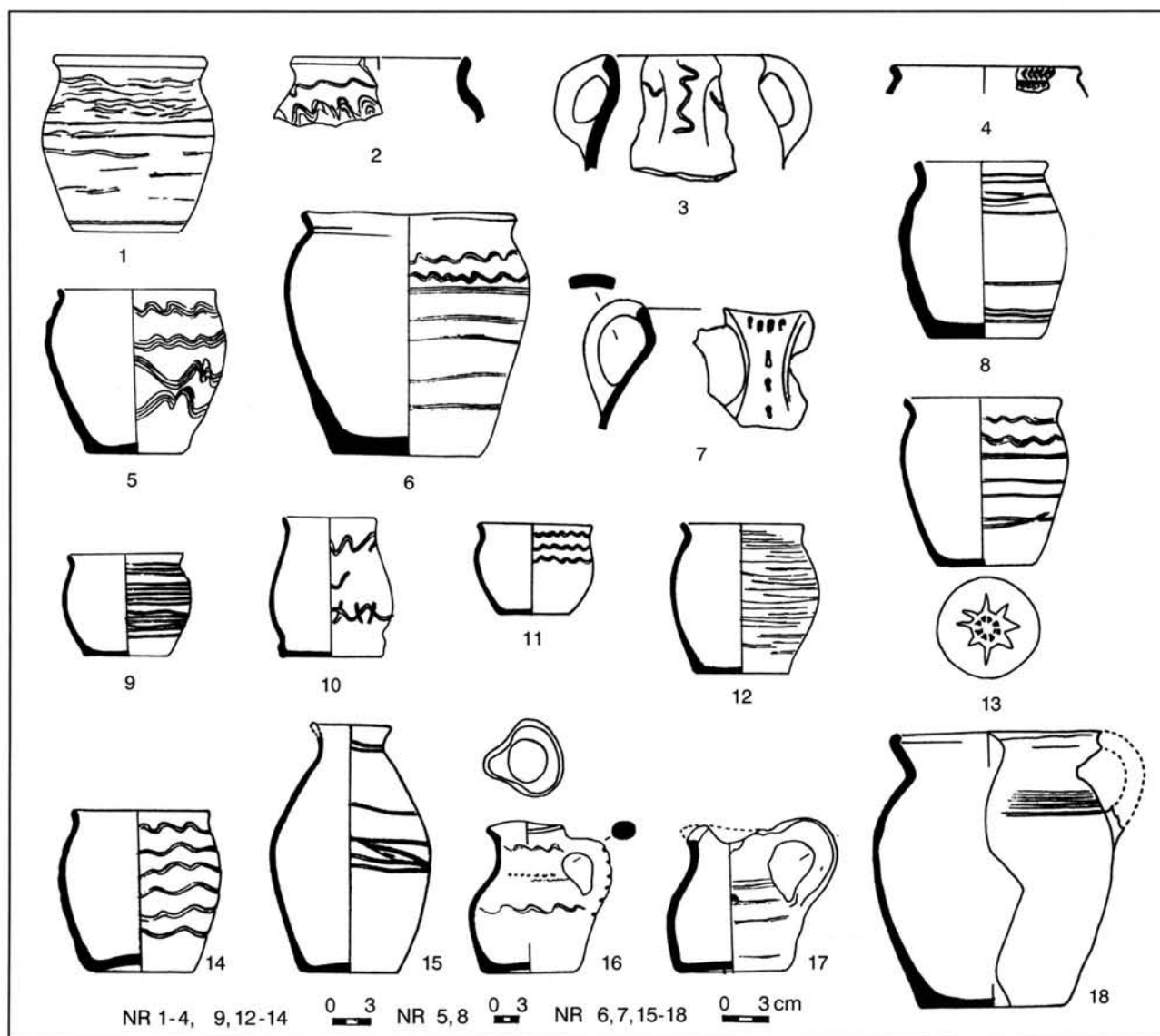


Fig. 2. Dyrrhachion (3, 4); Kroia (18); Ballsh (16); Symize (1-2); Rehove (5, 8-15); Grazhdan (7).

mostly found in Dyrrhachion, Kroia, Lissus, Përmet, Gjiro-kastër, etc. However, these fragments date back to the 8th-11th centuries (Anamali 1980: 57-58, V, 1-4; Prendi 1980: 139, XXIV, 3; Bodinaku 1983: 249, I, 14; Komata 1988: 175, III, 10-27).

2. Pitcher-amphoras (Dyrrhachion) (Fig. 1.12-13).

These consist of complete vessels while the rest have a lot of fragments. They are in light brown or ochre with some pink shades. Their faces are decorated by wide grooves. These vessels have been discovered in stratigraphic contexts that date back to the 9th-11th centuries (Hoti 1990: 29). H. 35-40 cm.

Some other fragments from pitcher-amphoras have been found in cultural levels that date back to the 7th-8th

centuries (Hoti 1990: 30). There are also some others that have been found together with coins that date back to the end of the 10th or the beginning of the 11th century (Hoti 1990: 29-30).

3. Water-jugs (Dyrrhachion, Lissus) (Fig. 1.1, 9-10).

These are of fine clay, fired in both dark brown or ochre. Water-jugs surfaces are decorated with parallel belt incisions with irregular thicknesses. H. 9.8-12.5 cm. They date back to the 7th-9th centuries (Prendi 1980: 139-140; Hoti 1990: 40-41).

4. Oinochoes (Dyrrhachion, Kroia, Lissus) (Fig. 1.3, 5, 7).

They are in ochre with some pink shades. H. 13-22.5 cm. The ones found in Kroia date back to the 6th-8th cen-

turies (Anamali 1980: 98, VI, 4), while the Lissus one has a "Corinthian" type clasp (640/680 to the end of the 9th century) (Prendi 1980: 151, V, 11).

5. *Jars* (Dyrrhachion, Kroia, Lissus, Piskove) (Fig. 1.2, 4, 6, 8).

These are vessels that are mostly found in necropolis, and very rarely in settlements. They are in brown-yellow. Surfaces often appear to be lustrous and decorated with irregular ribbons or scratched motifs. H. 14-21 cm. They date back to the 7th-9th centuries (Hoti 1990: 34; Anamali 1980: 78-79, 98, VI, 1-2; Komata 1982: 230, II, 1-2; Prendi 1980: 139; Bodinaku 1983: 249, I, 14). The jar found in the Christian necropolis of Dyrrhachion also has a "Corinthian" type clasp that dates back to 640/680 and continues up to the 9th century (Tartari 1984: 247, II; Prendi 1980: 151, V, 11).

6. *Bowls* (Dyrrhachion).

These are in light brown. The inner face is painted with ribbons in brown and has a horse-shoe form while the upper lip is full of ribbons. H. 6.5 cm.; Diam. 20.4 cm. This bowl has been discovered in the amphitheatre's ossuary, together with a coin of Basil II (976-1025) (Bllaca 1987: 262-263).

7. *Vases (pots)* (Dyrrhachion, Piskove, Rehove) (Fig. 2.1-18).

These have been produced by hammer technique or by handicraft.

Some of them have one or more handles while the rest that can be dated back to the Early Middle Ages are without any (Hoti 1990: 47-48; Bodinaku 1983: 242-244, I, 13; Aliu 1986: 230, III, 47, 52-53, II, 23, VI, 95-100, VII, 112-117).

The repertory of the Early Middle Ages' vessels in Albania in the morphological aspect is represented by a bulk of new forms. While the typological aspect of pottery advanced considerably, its stylistic-decorative changes were simply slow and partial.

Besides, the decorative techniques of Medieval vessels preserved motifs characteristic of Late Antiquity for a fairly long time.

The greater part of amphoras, jars, water-jugs, water-bottles and oinochoes was discovered in settlements like Kroia, Lissus, Pulcheriopolis, Byllis etc. that historically speaking were included in the cultural administrative district of Arkondia (Aechontai), and later in the theme of Dyrrhachion (Ferluga 1986: 73-75); hence it seems most likely that all these vessels should be the property of this city, which was considered during the 7th-10th century as a workshop of a genuine Byzantine nature, one of the most important in Albanian territory.

A few stylistic details of the decoration turn out to be among the most characteristic motifs in relation to the Byzantine decor in Albanian area. In parallel with the local products, some types of Bulgarian pottery were also introduced, due to a series of conquests of this region (Aliu 1986: VII, 114) (Fig. 2. 4, 13).

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