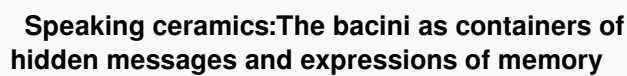


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ΤΟΜΕΑΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ



# BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA

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ANASTASIA G. YANGAKI

‘Speaking’ Ceramics:  
The *Bacini* as Containers of Hidden Messages and  
Expressions of Memory

TOMOΣ 32 VOLUME  
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## INTRODUCTION

Some thirty plus years ago, H. Philon wrote concerning the *bacini* immured in the katholikon of the Vlatadon monastery in Thessaloniki: “Hidden within an arched recess [...] is a fragmentary bowl framed by bricks”<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, in Greece there exist a large number of churches of the middle and late-Byzantine periods, as well as of the early modern era, which bear on their façades glazed open vessels (usually dishes and bowls)<sup>2</sup>. Originally and properly, they were immured in special recesses in the masonry of the monuments<sup>3</sup>. These clay vessels constitute one of the colourful decorative schemes for the façades of the Byzantine churches<sup>4</sup>. They were initially made for everyday purposes, and here have acquired a secondary use. Their employment is focused on their decorative value, simply as glazed vessels,

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\* Part of this paper has been presented as a lecture, entitled: “Hidden in Plain Sight: *Bacini*, their meanings and messages”, at the 57th Public Lecture Series of the Archaeological Research Unit of the University of Cyprus (Spring Semester 2022, 2nd of May). The unpublished version of the study, submitted anonymously, received the “Avrilia Komninou” award of the Academy of Athens, in December 2022.

1. H. PHILON, Thessaloniki, Andalusia and the Golden Horde, *BalkSt* 26 (1985), 303.

2. Typically, for a first catalogue, see: K. TSOURIS, Glazed Bowls in the Late Byzantine Churches of North-Western Greece, *Archeologia Medievale* 23 (1996), 620-621.

3. For the technique and the ways the vessels can be embedded in the churches’ façades: G. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά στὶς ὀψεις τῶν μεσαιωνικῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τουρκοκρατίας ἐκκλησιῶν μας*, I. Εἰσαγωγή, II. Τὰ κεραμεικά τῶν Ἀγίων Θεοδώρων, Athens 1978, 17-19, fig. 7-fig. 11; A. G. YANGAKI, Immured Vessels in Churches on Crete: Preliminary Observations on Material from the Prefecture of Rethymnon, *ΔΧΑΕ* per. Δ’, 34 (2013), 378; A. G. YANGAKI, The Immured Vessels in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine churches of Greece Research Programme: Objectives and Preliminary Results from Crete, in *Proceedings of the 12th International Congress of Cretan Studies, Heraklion, Heraklion 21-25.9.2016*, Herakleion 2019, 8 (Accessible at: <https://12iccs.proceedings.gr/en/proceedings/category/39/36/590> [last accessed: 29.11.2019]).

4. For other forms of external decoration, see: TSOURIS, Glazed Bowls, 603 (with the relevant bibliography).

usually bearing some form of decoration either painted or/and incised, were selected to be immured in the façades of the monuments.

The use of this practice was identified very early on by scholars of Byzantine architecture<sup>5</sup>, but research was mainly concerned with the origin of this type of decoration and with the role of the immured vessels in the façades of the churches, as parts of the architectural ensemble. On the other hand, a very limited number of studies dealt solely with the immured ceramics themselves<sup>6</sup>, and mostly with those occurring in specific monuments<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, in the 1970s G. Nikolakopoulos came up with

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5. G. MILLET, *L'école grecque dans l'architecture byzantine* (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences Religieuses, vingt-sixième volume), Paris 1916, 159, fig. 79, 229, fig. 106, 259, fig. 118, 283; A. GRABAR, *Recherches sur les influences orientales dans l'art balkanique* (Publication de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg Fascicule 43), Paris 1928, 37; A. H. S. MEGAW, The Chronology of Some Middle-Byzantine Churches, *ABSA* 32 (1931-1932), *passim*; C. BOURAS, *Βυζαντινά σταυροθόλια με νευρώσεις* (Υπηρεσία Αρχαιοτήτων και Αναστηλώσεως, Δημοσιεύματα του Αρχαιολογικού Δελτίου 5), Athens 1965, 73, note 318; G. VELENIS, *Ερμηνεία του εξωτερικού διακόσμου στη Βυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική*, Thessaloniki: PhD University of Thessaloniki 1984, 194-195, note 1, 267, 270; K. TSOURIS, *Ο κεραμοπλαστικός διάκοσμος των υστεροβυζαντινών μνημείων της βορειοδυτικής Ελλάδος*, Kavala: PhD University of Thessaloniki 1988, 95-116 (Available at: <https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesisBookReader/id/1146?lang=el#page/1/mode/2up> [last accessed: 20.01.2022]); TSOURIS, Glazed Bowls.

6. A. H. S. MEGAW, Glazed Bowls in Byzantine Churches, *ΔΧΑΕ* per. Δ', 4 (1964-1965), 145-162; NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά, I-II*; G. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά στίς ὄψεις τῶν μεσαιωνικῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τουρκοκρατίας ἐκκλησιῶν μας, III. Τὰ κεραμεικά τῆς Παναγίας τοῦ Μέρμπακα τῆς Ναυπλίας*, Athens 1979; G. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά στίς ὄψεις τῶν μεσαιωνικῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τουρκοκρατίας ἐκκλησιῶν μας, IV. Τὰ κεραμεικά τοῦ Καθολικοῦ τῆς Παναγίας Φανερωμένης τῆς Σαλαμίνας*, Athens 1980; G. A. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, Τα κεραμικά του παρεκκλησίου της Φανερωμένης της Σαλαμίνας, *Αρχαιολογία* 28 (1988), 81-84; PHILON, Thessaloniki, 299-320; G. A. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, Έντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιῶν, *Αρχαιολογία* 33 (1989), 66-71; TSOURIS, *Ο κεραμοπλαστικός*, 95-116; G. D. R. SANDERS, Three Peloponnesian Churches and their importance for the Chronology of Late 13th and Early 14th century pottery in the Eastern Mediterranean, in V. DEROCHÉ – J.-M. SPIESER (eds.), *Recherches sur la céramique byzantine* (BCH suppl. 18), Athens – Paris 1989, 189-199; TSOURIS, Glazed Bowls, 603-624; K. TSOURIS, A Bowl Embedded in the Wall of the Chapel of the Hagioi Anargyroi in Vatopedi Monastery, *BalkSt* 39 (1998), 5-14.

7. The study of K. Tsouris on those churches of northwestern Greece which bear *bacini* remained until recently the single pertinent example (TSOURIS, *Ο κεραμοπλαστικός*,

the observation that two main groups can be recognized: that characterizing the initial phase of the practice covering the period from the 11th up to the 15th c., where the bulk of the evidence resides, and a second group dating to the Ottoman period<sup>8</sup>. Chronological variations are noted as to the period of the first appearance of this practice from area to area and its persistence through time. In Italy, on the other hand, there have been numerous studies and regular publications, mostly from the 1970s onwards<sup>9</sup>, which adopted the term *bacini*<sup>10</sup> to identify these vessels and have led to the systematic

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95-116; TSOURIS, Glazed Bowls, 603-624), while recently a detailed study on the *bacini* from the churches of the regional unit of Chania has been published (A. G. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight: The Bacini of the Churches of Crete. "Reflections" of the Late Medieval and the Early Modern Material Culture of the Island*. Volume I. *The Regional Unit of Chania* [Institute of Historical Research, Research Library 9], Athens 2021).

8. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμικά, I-II.*, 9.

9. Typically, on certain of these publications: G. BERTI – L. TONGIORGI, *I bacini ceramici medievali delle chiese di Pisa* (Quaderni di Cultura Materiale 3), Roma 1981 (for an updated presentation of this material: G. BERTI – M. GIORGIO, *Ceramiche con coperture vetrificate usate come "bacini". Importazioni a Pisa e in altri centri della Toscana tra fine Xe XIII secolo* [Ricerche di archeologia altomedievale e medievale 38], Florence 2011); H. BLAKE, The Bacini of North Italy, in *La céramique médiévale en Méditerranée occidentale, Xe-XVe siècles, Valbonne 11-14 Septembre 1978*, Paris 1980, 93-111; G. BERTI – E. TONGIORGI, Per lo studio dei bacini delle chiese di Pisa: Rassegna di recenti contributi alla storia della ceramica, *Bollettino Storico Pisano* 25 (1983), 37-79 (with reference to various related studies); H. BLAKE, S. NEPOTI, I bacini di San Nicolò di Ravenna e la ceramica graffita medievale nell'Emilia-Romagna, *Faenza* 70 (1984), 354-368; G. BERTI – S. GELICHI, La ceramica bizantina nelle architetture dell'Italia medievale, in S. GELICHI (ed.), *La ceramica nel mondo bizantino tra XIe XV secolo e i suoi rapporti con l'Italia. Atti del Seminario Certosa di Pontignano (Siena), 11-13 marzo 1991*, Florence 1993, 125-199; *Atti. XXVI Convegno Internazionale della Ceramica, "I Bacini murati medievali. Problemi e stato della ricerca"*, Albisola, 28-30 maggio 1993, Florence 1996; S. GELICHI – S. NEPOTI, Le ceramiche architettoniche di Pomposa, in C. DI FRANCESCO – A. SAMARITANI (eds.), *Pomposa. Storia. Arte. Architettura*, Ferrara 1999, 199-223; S. GELICHI – M. FERRI, I "bacini" dell'Abruzzo e del Molise. Un primo censimento, *Azulejos. Rivista di Studi Ceramici* 3 (2006), 175-198; M. HOBART, *Sardinian Medieval Churches and Their Bacini: Architecture Embedded with Archaeology*, New York: PhD New York University 2006; M. HOBART, Merchants, Monks, and Medieval Sardinian Architecture, in J. G. SCHRYVER (ed.), *Studies in Archaeology of the Medieval Mediterranean* (The Medieval Mediterranean Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1500, 86), Leiden – Boston 2010, 93-114.

10. For the first reference to the term, see: BERTI – TONGIORGI, *I bacini ceramici*, 9, note

investigation of the distribution of this decorative approach over wide areas, rather than simply studying individual monuments<sup>11</sup>.

That this “*bacini* phenomenon”<sup>12</sup> had a quite wide distribution within the Mediterranean basin is expressed by various related evidence published not only from Christian churches in south France<sup>13</sup>, in Albania<sup>14</sup>, in Russia<sup>15</sup> and in Cyprus<sup>16</sup>, or from holy, but not Christian, monuments from several parts of Asia Minor and Egypt<sup>17</sup>, but also from further abroad still, as shown from vessels embedded in mosques (in their mihrabs) and pillar-tombs in

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1; BERTI – TONGIORGI, *Per lo studio dei bacini*, 39 (with bibliography).

11. On a synopsis of the research in Italy: GELICHI – FERRI, I “*bacini*” dell’Abruzzo e del Molise, 175-177 (with bibliography).

12. On this term: S. REDFORD, *Ceramics and Society in Medieval Anatolia*, in J. VROOM (ed.), *Medieval and Post-Medieval Ceramics in the Eastern Mediterranean – Fact and Fiction – Proceedings of the First International Conference on Byzantine and Ottoman Archaeology, Amsterdam, 21-23 October 2011* (Medieval and Post-Medieval Mediterranean Archaeology Series 1), Turnhout 2015, 258. See, as well, for this term: GELICHI – FERRI, I “*bacini*” dell’Abruzzo e del Molise, 176.

13. L. VALLAURI – A. NICOLAI, *Bacini du sud de la France: état de la recherche*, in *Atti 1996*, 233-239, fig. 5, 240, fig. 8.

14. S. XHYHERI, I vasi «acustici» ed i bacini della chiesa di S. Giovanni (Shën Jan) a Delvinë (Albania), *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre/BUCEMA* 17.2 (2013), 1-13; S. XHYHERI, Nuovi dati sui ‘bacini’ murati nelle chiese medievali e post-medievali in Albania, *Artium Hortus Medievalium* 21 (2015), 366-384.

15. L. A. BELIAEV, *Bacini: Glazed Household Pottery in Late Byzantine Architecture* [in Russian], *Rossiiskaya arkheologiya* 3 (2007), 133-140.

16. For relevant information: I. HADJIKYRIAKOS, *La Decorazione ceramica degli interni nelle chiese di Cipro*, *RDAC* (2006), 389-405.

17. Y. DEMIRIZ, *Mimari süslemede renk unsuru olarak kullanılan keramik çanaklar*, *Sanat Tarihi Yıllığı* 5 (1972-1973), 175-208; G. BERTI, II. Problematiche relative allo studio dei “Bacini”, in S. GELICHI – G. BERTI – S. NEPOTI, *Relazione introduttiva sui “Bacini”*, in *Atti 1996*, 16, 23-26, fig. 1, fig. 3-fig. 9; REDFORD, *Ceramics and Society in Medieval Anatolia*, 258-260; K. KÜÇÜKKÖROĞLU, *Karamanoğulları dönemi mimarisinde çini süsleme: Ermenek ulu camii örneği* (Tile decorating in Karamanoğulları period architecture: Ermenek Grand Mosque example), in O. KUNDURACHI – A. AYTAÇ (eds.), *XI. Uluslararası Türk Kültürü, Sanatı ve Kültürel Mirası Koruma Sempozyumu/Sanat Etkinlikleri “Türkiye Belarus İlişkileri” – XI. International Turkic Culture, Art and Protection of Cultural Heritage Symposium/Art Activity “Turkey-Belarus Activity”*, 22-27 Ekim 2017, Baranovich – Belarus 2017, 163, fig. 2, 164, figs. 5-7; M. ERDEM, *Yollarbaşı Ulu Camii mihrabındaki figürlü çiniler*, *İdil, Sanat ve Dil Dergisi* 7 (2018), 404, fig. 3.



Oman or in Eastern African Coast (such as in Kenya and in Tanzania)<sup>18</sup>, suggesting its equally successful penetration in different cultures.

The collection of the existent (although limited) bibliography on *bacini* in churches from various areas of Greece and the numerous material that has been recorded specifically from the areas of Attica, the Peloponnese and Crete under the framework of the research programme on the *bacini* in churches of Greece<sup>19</sup> suggested that composite studies dealing with a wide sample of these glazed vessels from several regions could be extremely informative. Such could lead to more in depth information on the various categories of medieval and early modern glazed pottery that were used as *bacini*, on the dating evidence they bring to the monument in which they are immured and on the history of each region and its contacts with other areas as illustrated through the glazed vessels<sup>20</sup>. Further they would illuminate

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18. On Chinese porcelains embedded in Omani mihrabs: M. S. GOFFRILLER – M. HONGJIAO – S. BANDYOPADHYAY – J. HENDERSON, Chinese porcelains and the decorations of Omani mihrabs, *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 45 (2015), 1-16; S. KARAKITSOS, Chinese Porcelains Embedded in Omani Mihrābs. International Trade and Cultural Relations, in Z. FU – A. ZIACA (eds.), *The Silk Roads Between China and Oman. Networks of Communication and Transmission of Ibadi Knowledge* (Studies on Ibadism and Oman 16), Hildesheim – Zurich – New York 2021, 121-144. On Chinese porcelains embedded in mihrabs and pillar-tombs in East African Coast: J. MURRAY, *Cultural Atlas of Africa*, Oxford 1981, 182, top left; A. MONTELLA, Chinese Porcelain as a Symbol of Power on the East African Coast from the 14th Century Onward. Some Reflections on the Funerary Context, *Ming Qing Yanjiu* 20 (2017), 74-93.

19. For details on the programme, run at the Institute of Historical Research in collaboration with the respective Ephorates of Antiquities: “Immured vessels in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine churches of Greece: An online corpus”: <https://www.immuredvessels.gr> (last accessed: 11.06.2021). I would like to thank the former and current directors of the respective Ephorates of Antiquities in the regions of Attica, the Peloponnese and Crete and their colleagues for the collaboration during the research. I would like to thank the former and current directors of the Ephorates of Antiquities of Chania, Herakleion, Lasithi and Rethymnon for the permission to study the respective material.

20. Typically, on relevant matters: MEGAW, Glazed Bowls, 145-162; NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Εντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά, I-II*, 1-2; G. BERTI, *Bacini ceramici e strutture architettoniche medievali. Considerazioni basate su una ricerca in Toscana*, in *Atti del I Colloquio Hispanoitaliano di archeologia medievale (Granada, Aprile 1990)*, Granada 1992, 137; L. CASTELLETTI, L’inserimento di ceramiche nell’architettura. Il caso della chiesa di San Romano a Lucca, *Archeologia Medievale* 21 (1994), 193; BERTI, II. Problematiche, 12-14; TSOURIS, A Bowl, 10-11.

the various aspects of the use of this practice, combining both the role en masse of the clay pots on each and every side of a monument and the type and decoration of each separate item. In fact, through a recent analytical study of the immured vessels in churches of the regional unit of Chania, in Crete, the various facets of their multi-purpose use have been explored<sup>21</sup>. This present paper focuses on the same matter, attempting –by specific case-studies from various areas in Crete and mainland Greece<sup>22</sup> (see below, Tabl. 1)– to decipher their use and to demonstrate that, although they may remain unnoticed, unobserved by the passer-byers, the *bacini* are in fact placed in plain sight, even if their various symbolic contents and various connotations are obscure. Viewed from this perspective, it diverges from a purely archaeological consideration of the aforementioned material<sup>23</sup>, one which is linked to issues of identification of the various pottery types used as *bacini*, of classification, of date, of their relationship to each monument, but rather seeks to examine the *bacini* from the point of view of art history, to highlight their role during the Byzantine, Medieval and Ottoman periods<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, as hopefully will emerge from what follows, from a theoretical perspective it seems that it is the concept of “materiality” –an approach which has been growing in stature from the beginning of the 21st c., under

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21. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 157-171. Concerning the Italian evidence, for some remarks related to the course of the study of the *bacini* and suggestions for future research, see: GELICHI – FERRI, I “bacini” dell’Abruzzo e del Molise, 177.

22. Regarding the Cretan evidence, this paper is partly based on the information provided in YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*. The main categories as to the various uses of the *bacini* developed within this edition have been followed, for convenience, but the text has been enriched with additional evidence for other regions of Crete to which also published information deriving from churches in mainland Greece has been added (see bibliography in Tabl. 1).

23. Although of course this remains a focal aspect for their study and constitutes a prerequisite for approaches such as the one attempted here (for representative related works see the bibliography in notes 3, 6, 7 and 9). On a similar remark, see: GELICHI – FERRI, I “bacini” dell’Abruzzo e del Molise, 177.

24. In the case of Byzantine pottery, see characteristically: E. DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE – H. MAGUIRE, *Other Icons. Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture*, Princeton N.J. 2007, 3; D. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI, Byzantine Glazed Ceramics: Twenty Years After (1999-2019), in P. PETRIDIS – A. G. YANGAKI – N. LIAROS – E.-E. BIA (eds.), *12th AIECM3 Congress on Medieval and Modern Period Mediterranean Ceramics, Proceedings*, v. 1, Athens 2021, 33.

the emergence of the so-called “material turn”<sup>25</sup>, in the humanities and other disciplines– that best describes the approach followed here<sup>26</sup>. Although the concept of “materiality” encompasses a wide range of definitions<sup>27</sup> and comprises several theoretical bases<sup>28</sup>, a general definition such as that

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25. On the emergence of this “material-cultural turn” and its evolvement through time, with the various approaches and theories of object-base studies, see the enlightening study by D. HICKS, *The Material-Cultural Turn: Event and Effect*, in D. HICKS – M. C. BEAUDRY (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, Oxford 2010, 25-98 and especially 52-62, 73-98.

For the first part of the paper’s title, which suggests a rather active role played by these particular objects, following the research track that objects can ‘speak’ and offer new insights on specific past societies, see: J. J. COHEN, Introduction: All Things, in J. J. COHEN (ed.), *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, Washington DC 2012, 6-7; S. GAYK – R. MALO, The Sacred Object, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 44.3 (2014), 460-462. On related characteristic case-studies: CH. FLINT, Speaking Objects: The Circulation of Stories in Eighteenth-Century Prose Fiction, *PMLA* 113 (1998), 212-226; L. DUCKERT, Speaking Stones, John Muir, and a Slower (Non)humanities, in J. J. COHEN (ed.), *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, Washington DC 2012, 277-279; R. ROBERTSON, Speaking Objects: A (Suit)case Study, *Life Writing* 17 (2020), 573-579.

26. Regarding this theoretical framework, see the remark of L. James on earlier approaches followed by Medievalists for the study of works of art in relation to that of “materiality”: L. JAMES, Matters of Materiality in Byzantium. The Archangel Gabriel in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 86 (2017), 145-146.

27. For concise information on these: D. MILLER, *Materiality*, Oxford 2005, 5; E. YALOURI, Υλικός Πολιτισμός. Οι περιπέτειες των πραγμάτων στην ανθρωπολογία, in E. YALOURI (ed.), *Υλικός Πολιτισμός. Η ανθρωπολογία στη χώρα των πραγμάτων*, Athens 2012, 11-74; C. KNAPPETT, Materiality, in I. HODDER (ed.), *Archaeological Theory Today*. Second Edition, Cambridge – Malden 2013, 188-207; A. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ, Υλικός πολιτισμός: θεωρία, μεθοδολογία, αξιοποίηση. Σύντομη επισκόπηση, Athens 2014, 19-90, 131-132; L. OVERHOLTZER – C. ROBIN, The Materiality of Everyday Life: An Introduction, in L. OVERHOLTZER – C. ROBIN (eds.), *The Materiality of Everyday Life, Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 26 (2015), 1-3.

28. A. GELL, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, New York 1998; C. GOSDEN – Y. MARSHALL, The Cultural Biography of Objects, *World Archaeology* 31 (1999), 169-178; B. LATOUR, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford 2005; C. KNAPPETT, *Thinking through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Philadelphia 2005; T. INGOLD, Materials against Materiality, *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007), 1-16; B. OLSEN – M. SHANKS – T. WEBMOOR – C. WITMORE, *Archaeology: The Discipline of Things*, Berkeley 2012.

proposed by L. Overholtzer and C. Robin –defining it as “the mutually constitutive relationships between people and the material world”<sup>29</sup>– seems the most appropriate to describe the various possibilities and is the more convenient theoretical tool employed through this study. Accordingly, leaving aside the canonical focus of materiality on materials and physical properties<sup>30</sup>, emphasis is here given on how these particular artefacts – through their forms and decorative styles– affect the user/viewer in less self-evident ways, sometimes with overlapping meanings and connotations, given that a dialectical relation between humans and objects always exists<sup>31</sup>.

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29. OVERHOLTZER – ROBIN, *The Materiality of Everyday Life*, 1.

30. Thus, “materiality” goes beyond the simple meaning of the word –namely “something that is material” (*Merriam-Webster dictionary*, entry: Materiality, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/materiality> [last accessed: 12.03.2020]), i.e. the physical remains and objects– to touch upon the theoretical framework mentioned above (C. KNAPPETT – I. NIKOLAKOPOULOU, *Inside Out? Materiality and Connectivity in the Aegean Archipelago*, in A. KNAPP – P. VAN DOMMELEN (eds.), *The Cambridge Prehistory of the Bronze and Iron Age Mediterranean*, Cambridge 2015, 25).

31. Regarding Medieval and Byzantine studies, up to present research in these fields has shown interest in exploring this relationship (for characteristic case-studies: I. KALAVREZOU, *Byzantine Icons in Steatite*, Vienna 1985, 79-85; F. BARRY, *Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, *Art Bulletin* 89 (2007), 627-656; A. PAPALEXANDROU, *Memory Tattered and Torn: Spolia in the Heartland of Byzantine Hellenism*, in R. VAN DYKE – S. ALCOCK (eds.), *Archaeologies of Memory*, Massachusetts 2003, 56-80; M. PARANI, *Reconstructing the Realities of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11th-15th centuries)*, Leiden 2003; M. PARANI, *On the Personal Life of Objects in Byzantium*, in A. CUTLER – A. PAPAConstantinou (eds.), *The Material and the Ideal: Essays in Medieval Art and Archaeology in Honour of Jean-Michel Spieser*, Boston 2007, 157-176; A. PENTCHEVA, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*, University Park, PA 2010; K. HARRISON, *Byzantine Carved Gemstones: Their Typology, Dating, Materiality, and Function*, PhD Dissertation: Harvard University 2015, 291-397 (Available at: <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/17463138> [last accessed: 22.01.2022]); JAMES, *Matters of Materiality in Byzantium*, 145-146; A. G. YANGAKI, *Immured vessels in the church of Panagia Eleousa, Kitharida (Crete)*, in S. BOCHAROV – V. FRANÇOIS – A. SITDIKOV (eds.), *Glazed Pottery of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea Region, 10th-18th Centuries*, v. B', Kazan – Kishinev 2017, 135-164). Even so, this is not yet expressed in concrete terms, although the literature does show that such an approach offers the possibility of better framing work on these subjects (M. ROSLER – C. WALKER BYNUM – N. EATON – M. A. HOLLY – A. JONES – M. KELLY – R. KELSEY – A. LAGAMMA – M. WAGNER – O. WATSON – T. WEDDIGEN, *Notes from the Field: Materiality*, *The Art Bulletin* 95 (2013), 10-37; JAMES, *Matters of Materiality in Byzantium*, 145; A. G. YANGAKI, *Τὰ δὲ σκεύη*



## THE USE OF IMMURED VESSELS IN THE CHURCHES OF GREECE: DECORATIVE, FUNCTIONAL AND SYMBOLIC

The various open forms of clay vessels immured in the façades of ecclesiastical buildings were originally manufactured to serve several household needs, mostly utilitarian but also decorative ones, as in the case of *tondini* (large plates mainly for display)<sup>32</sup>. They are recognized as products of specific pottery workshops and form part of well-known typologies established through archaeological research. Through their incorporation in the wall façades they have been put to a different end than the original intent, acquiring a different use<sup>33</sup>, possibly even being reused when the vessels were already in someone's possession prior to their insertion in the monument<sup>34</sup>. The following cases aim to demonstrate that these otherwise utilitarian objects acquired, as *bacini*, several symbolic connotations beyond the merely decorative or functional.

### 1. *Previously expressed views on the purposes of the bacini's use: decorative or/and functional elements of religious spaces*

Concerning the motivation behind this practice, based on the evidence from mainland Greece, it was generally supposed by several researchers<sup>35</sup> that

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πάντα μὴ ὁμοειδῶς ἀλλήλοις διεσχηματίσθω, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πίθος, τὸ δὲ ἀμφορεύς, ἕτερον δὲ πινάκιον...: Κεραμικά και οι χρήσεις τους, in A. G. YANGAKI – A. PANOPOULOU (eds.), *To Byzántio χωρὶς λάμψη. Τα ταπεινά αντικείμενα και οι χρήσεις τους στον καθημερινό βίο των Βυζαντινών* [NHRF / IHR], Athens 2018, 157-159).

32. C. FIOCCO, *La ceramica in Italia dal medioevo al rinascimento*, in C. FIOCCO – G. GHERARDI – M. G. MORGANTI – M. VITALI, *Storia dell'arte ceramica*, Bologna 1986, 97; C. FIOCCO – G. GHERARDI, *Ceramiche Umbre dal medioevo allo Storicismo, Parte Prima. Orvieto e Deruta*, Faenza 1988, 90-99.

33. YANGAKI, Τὰ δὲ σκευή πάντα μὴ ὁμοειδῶς ἀλλήλοις διεσχηματίσθω, 142-143; YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 157.

34. On the various types of pottery reuse, see in detail J. Peña's criteria (J. T. PEÑA, *Roman Pottery in the Archaeological Record*, Cambridge – New York 2007, 10). In the specific case, the vessels' use as *bacini* would constitute an example of type B reuse. See also the analysis below, section no. 6.

35. See characteristically: A. GRABAR, *Sculptures byzantines du Moyen Age*, v. 2, XIe-XIVe siècles (Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques 12), Paris 1976, 118-119; BOURAS, *Βυζαντινά σταυροθόλια*, 73 note 378; VELENIS, *Ερμηναία*, 195, 270; TSOURIS, *Glazed Bowls*, 618.

the vessels were immured for purely decorative reasons, in order to enhance the beautification of the façades of churches which they adorn, given that a pleasant contrast was created to the masonry through the colour variation. In this respect, K. Tsouris noted that, given the curved form of these vessels, “they thus immediately stand out when they interrupt straight horizontal courses of masonry”<sup>36</sup>. Nevertheless, as he also adds, for most of the monuments in mainland Greece this effect was rather limited, as specific compositions using *bacini* are there rather rare: the architectural elements of the churches overpower somehow the ceramics. In addition, the observer from below is not really impressed by the effects of their colours, given the considerable height of their emplacement from the ground surface<sup>37</sup>. G. Velenis, on the other hand, besides their decorative use, suggests that they also had a functional role, based on the vessels’ forms, which were quite suitable for filling various tympana<sup>38</sup>.

## 2. *Bacini as decorative elements of religious spaces*

The churches of mainland Greece, where the practice occurs, are usually monuments with cloisonné masonry and mostly of the various sub-types of the cross-in-square architectural type<sup>39</sup>, widely constructed during the middle and the late-Byzantine periods but also later on. While this style in itself creates a uniformity of appearance, it also offers a rather refreshing prospect to the viewer/s, given how the bricks frame and alternate with the stone blocks<sup>40</sup>. This effect is further accentuated, leading in various

36. TSOURIS, *Glazed Bowls*, 618.

37. TSOURIS, *Glazed Bowls*, 618-619.

38. VELENIS, *Ερμηναία*, 270. See, also: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 157.

39. See as characteristic examples the types to which the 23 monuments isolated in the area of the Mesa Mani belong: A. MEXIA, *Βυζαντινή ναοδομία στην Πελοπόννησο. Η περίπτωση των μεσοβυζαντινών ναών της Μέσα Μάνης*, Athens: PhD Dissertation, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens 2011, *passim* (Available at: <https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesisBookReader/id/28511?lang=el#page/1/mode/2up> [last accessed: 20.02.2022]); A. G. YANGAKI, Short Remarks on Matters of Correlation of the *Bacini* with the Architecture of the Churches of the Mesa Mani (Peloponnese), in P. PETRIDIS – A. G. YANGAKI – N. LIAROS – E.-E. BIA (eds.), *12th AIECM3 Congress on Medieval and Modern Period Mediterranean Ceramics, Proceedings*, v. 2, Athens 2021, tabl. 1.

40. For the cloisonné masonry, see in detail: VELENIS, *Ερμηναία*, *passim*. See as well: TSOURIS, *Ο κεραμοπλαστικός*, *passim*.

ways to a rather bold decorative impression, through the employment of Kufesque brickwork, in a variety in the arrangement of the courses of bricks or of bands of tiles, with the insertion of spolia (in the form of ancient blocks, inscriptions, figural reliefs)<sup>41</sup> or of clay plaques. The incorporation of immured vessels further enhances this decorative setting, although, as noted above, the latter's contribution to this final composition must have been rather limited to an observer.

In other cases (especially the numerous Cretan churches, particularly those of the barrel-vaulted type which are mostly characterized by rubble masonry), the use of colours in the coating plaster, applied to the stone architectural members or visible in coats-of-arms, even in some cases through the mural painting of the lunettes of the discharging arches of the doors<sup>42</sup> all offered to the façades of the monuments distinctive decorative elements. This colourful aspect was further enhanced by the immured ceramics, an effect which, in such cases, was much more heightened and perceivable, given the monuments' more limited physical dimensions and the fact that the *bacini* were usually placed near those parts of the monument (mainly the entrance but also above the apse) which were most seen and at a medium to low height in several cases<sup>43</sup>. A specific concern was to enrich in colour the façades<sup>44</sup>.

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41. Among the numerous churches that form examples of the above, one most characteristic is the church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Merbaka (now Agia Triada) in the Peloponnese (on this church and these elements, see C. BOURAS – L. BOURA, *Ἡ Ἑλλαδική ναοδομία κατὰ τὸν 12ο αἰῶνα*, Athens 2002, 332-333 and, more recently: G. D. R. SANDERS, William of Moerbeke's Church at Merbaka: The Use of Ancient Spolia to Make Personal and Political Statements, *Hesperia* 84.3 (2015), 584, 599, 608, 617, with previous bibliography).

42. O. GRATZIOU, *Ἡ Κρήτη στην Ὑστερή Μεσαιωνικὴ ἐποχὴ. Ἡ μαρτυρία τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς*, Herakleion 2010, 69-71, figs. 88-89, 271, fig. 287.

43. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 21, 157, 159. For some characteristic cases, one can mention the *bacini* compositions at the church of Panagia Chanoutia in Gergeri (Herakleion), at the church of Panagia in Fourfouras (Rethymnon), at the church of Panagia in Alikampos (Chania) (on these comments: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 158-159) and the most characteristic example, that of the church of Panagia in Kitharida (Herakleion) (see for the *bacini* in this church: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 27-39, 135-164).

44. See, also: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 158-159.

In the various forms of the cross-in-square type of church, where the practice was mostly pursued in mainland Greece, the *bacini* were subject to the general architectural elements of the monuments and to the cloisonné masonry, not constituting compositions by themselves but being embedded in a pre-conceived decorative programme. In the cases of simpler architectural forms, such as the single-nave barrel-vaulted churches, individual compositions with immured vessels were created, which assured an additional decorative impact, particularly since often these arrangements constituted the only form of ornament on the façades of the church, apart from the decorative elements comprised in the church's door and window frames. The particular position of the vessels within a composition –mostly that of a cross but also of other formations– which led to an alternation of specific colours, enhanced this effect<sup>45</sup>.

### 3. Bacini as demarcators of sacred spaces

Regarding the *bacini* in Italian monuments, G. Passeri and A. Biancoli writing in the mid 18th c. noted that they caught the sun's rays and diffused them through their glazed interior<sup>46</sup>. These medieval monuments and their bell-towers had an imposing height. In those churches *bacini* are placed rather high up on their walls, sometimes just on the upper part of the apex of the gable, as well as high in the walls of their bell-towers<sup>47</sup>. These glazed vessels by their arrangements probably accentuated the sanctity of these

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45. On the various combinations of these compositions and the role of the ceramics' colours: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 157, 159.

46. See, respectively: G. PASSERI, *Istoria delle pitture in majolica fatte in Pesaro e ne' luoghi circonvicini, con aggiunte importantissime dedicata al nobil uomo signor Marchese Alessandro Baldassini*, Pesaro 1857<sup>2</sup>, 12; A. BIANCOLI, *L' arte della majolica. Poemetto. Con la vita dell' autore, ed illustrazioni del canonico teologo Luigi Balduzzi*, Ravenna 1875, 102. See, also: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά, I-II.*, 5; BERTI – TONGIORGI, *Per lo studio dei bacini*, 39.

47. See, as representative examples: BLAKE, *The Bacini of North Italy*, 99, fig. 9, 100-101, figs. 10-12; H. BLAKE, *I bacini liguri e piemontesi: nuovi dati dal fondo D'Andrade*, *Faenza* 68 (1982), pl. LXXXVII, a; H. BLAKE – S. NEPOTI, *I bacini di San Nicolò di Ravenna e la ceramica graffita medievale nell'Emilia-Romagna*, *Faenza* 70 (1984), 357-358; F. BENENTE – A. GARDINI, *I bacini ceramici della Liguria*, in *Atti 1996*, 77, 98 fig. 24; M. CORTELAZZO – G. PANTÒ, "Bacini" in Piemonte, in *Atti 1996*, 39, 49 fig. 15.

buildings and were considered as a point of identification and of reference to these spaces<sup>48</sup>.

Indeed, by their variety in colour, their placement –in various cases not so high off the ground– the *bacini* make the churches easier to spot and identify in the landscape. This may be even more valid in those cases where the monuments are located in various, not easily accessible spots in the rural hinterland.

Nevertheless, in the majority of the churches of mainland Greece, which are usually domed, mostly of the cross-in-square type, the ceramics, as said above, had a rather complementary role to the general form and decoration of each monument<sup>49</sup> (Fig. 1).

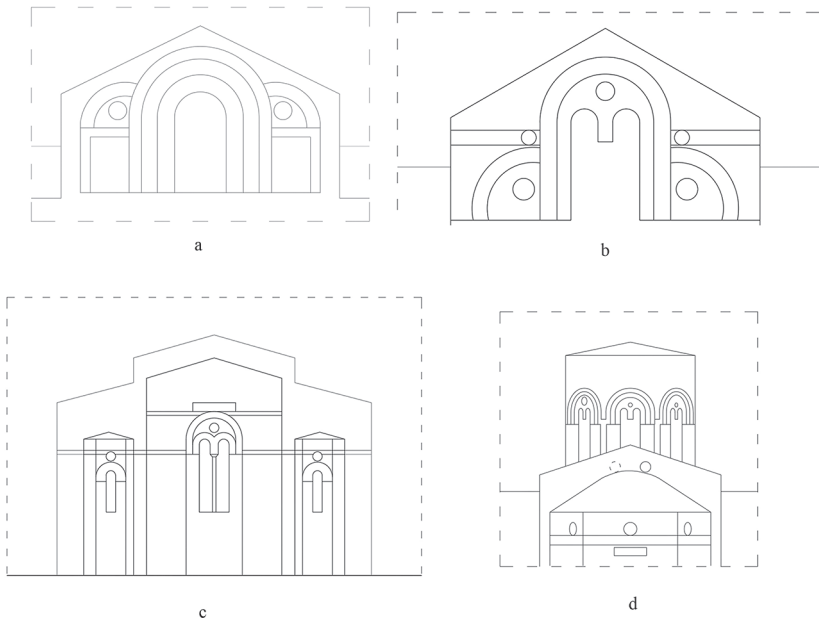


Figure 1: Schematic drawings of the façades of churches of the Mesa Mani (in the Peloponnese) bearing *bacini*: a. South side, detail, Sergius and Bacchus, Kita, b. South side, detail, Agia Varvara in Erimos, c. View of the east side, Agia Varvara in Erimos, d. View of the east side, Taxiarchis at Charouda (drawing: D. Tagmatarchi; not in scale).

48. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 159.

49. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 29.

One or more sides of the dome may bear *bacini* in the lunettes of the blind arches of the dome<sup>50</sup> (Fig. 1), vessels can be immured in the tympanum of windows, mostly double-light ones, framing or crowning single or double-openings<sup>51</sup>, set in the centre of quarter-circles, in or above blind arches, in semi-arches in contact with the surrounding arch of the windows, above the lintel framing or flanking the discharging arch, at the apex of the gable, either alone or in simple compositions but often in a rather dispersed pattern.

It is in churches of the single-nave, barrel-vaulted type, a simple form of building the structure of which does not immediately recall that of a church nor would it be directly recognized from afar as an ecclesiastical building<sup>52</sup>, that individual arrangements tend to occur, with the cruciform arrangement being much favoured, judging not only from the admittedly much more numerous samples from Crete<sup>53</sup>, but also from published examples of monuments of the late-Byzantine period<sup>54</sup> or of the 17th, the 18th and the 19th c. in mainland and insular Greece, such as those in Attica<sup>55</sup>, in Sifnos<sup>56</sup>, in Skopelos<sup>57</sup>. Here these clay objects through their curved shape catch and reflect the sunlight from their vitreous surfaces: this particular form of arrangement may have been deliberate in that it

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50. VELENIS, *Ερμηνεία*, 268, 270-271; MEXIA, *Βυζαντινή ναοδομία*, 231-232.

51. On these observations see the characteristic cases deriving from the study of the material from Mani: MEXIA, *Βυζαντινή ναοδομία*, 230-231; YANGAKI, Short Remarks, 671-680. On similar observations regarding the material from northwestern Greece: TSOURIS, *Glazed Bowls*, 617.

52. For related remarks, in what concerns the churches of Crete bearing *bacini*: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 159.

53. On this numerous sample, see in general: YANGAKI, The Immured Vessels in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine churches, 1-2; on the detailed related evidence from the regional unit of Chania, which constitutes so far a representative published case-study for Crete: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 35-37, 55-57, 159.

54. On related examples: TSOURIS, *Ο κεραμοπλαστικός*, 97, 103; TSOURIS, *Glazed Bowls*, 606, fig. 4, 608-609, fig. 7.

55. C. BOURAS – A. KALOGEROPOULOU – R. ANDREADI, *Έκκλησιές της Άττικής*, Athens 1969, 92, fig. 96, 357, fig. 304.

56. A. G. TROULLOS, *Η Αγγειοπλαστική στο νησί της Σίφνου. Παλαιοί και σύγχρονοι αγγειοπλάστες. Μεταναστεύσεις σ' όλη την Ελλάδα*, Sifnos 1991, fig. at p. 54.

57. A. SAMPSON, *Ναοί και μοναί εις την νήσον Σκόπελον*, Athens 1974, 121-123, 142-143; K. KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, *Τὰ Κεραμεικὰ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Χώρου*, Athens 1995, 76.

enhanced a monument's visibility, particularly if the symbolic content and message of the cross is considered and if it is also taken into account that each monument's façade –where usually the vessels are embedded– constitutes an important element in ensuring its visibility<sup>58</sup>. Furthermore, given that the cruciform arrangement seems to be inextricably linked to this type of ecclesiastical building (single-nave, barrel-vaulted), by its common occurrence there it constitutes a distinctive element of recognizability<sup>59</sup> for such structures. Monuments of this particular form and function contribute each in its own way to the enhancement of the churches' complex role within each community<sup>60</sup>. Particularly so if it is taken into consideration that, as F. Buccellati puts it, a number of common characteristics (among which is to be included the *bacini* use) that may be identified in specific types of buildings lead to the creation of a common and readily identifiable class within the broader typology of such buildings<sup>61</sup>.

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58. On this remark: J. A. CÁMARA SERRANO – F. M. ALCARAZ HERNÁNDEZ – F. MOLINA GONZÁLEZ – A. M. MONTUFO MARTÍN – L. SPANEDDA, Monumentality, Visibility and Routes Control in Southern Iberian Megalithic Sites, in B. SCHULZ PAULSSON – B. GAYDARSKA (eds.), *Neolithic and Copper Age Monuments: Emergence, function and the social construction of the landscape* (BAR Int. Ser. 2625), Oxford 2014, 91. On visibility as one of the main elements that characterize monuments in respect to their location within the settlement or the landscape, linked also to monumentality: F. CRIADO, The Visibility of the Archaeological Record and the Interpretation of Social Reality, in I. HODDER – M. SHANKS – A. ALEXANDRI – V. BUCHLI – J. CARMAN – J. LAST – G. LUCAS (eds.), *Interpreting Archaeology. Finding Meaning in the Past*, London – New York 1995, 194-200; A. GILBERT, *Syro-Hittite Monumental Art and the Archaeology of Performance. The Stone Reliefs at Carchemish and Zincirli in the Earlier First Millennium BCE* (Topoi Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 2), Berlin 2011, 100, note 162; CÁMARA SERRANO et al., Monumentality, 91, 92; F. BUCCELLATI, Monumentality: Research Approaches and Methodology, in F. BUCCELLATI – S. HAGENEUER – S. VAN DER HEYDEN – F. LEVENSON (eds.), *Size Matters – Understanding Monumentality Across Ancient Civilisations*, Bielefeld 2019, 51-53.

59. On this characteristic linked to the study of monuments (and monumentality): BUCCELLATI, Monumentality, 47-48.

60. On the various levels of the character and the role of the churches within specific communities see, in sum: A. K. VIONIS, The Construction of Sacred Landscapes and Maritime Identities in the Post-Medieval Cyclades Islands: The Case of Paros, *Religions* 13 (2022), 9-15 (with previous related bibliography at p. 9).

61. On the details of this: BUCCELLATI, Monumentality, 48.

This purposeful arrangement is best supported in the cases of churches difficult to access, located up the hills and at a high altitude, such as those of Agios Antonios in Platanos (in Rethymnon) or of Panagia and Agios Mamas at the site of Stavros (in Lasithi). There, the vessels are placed in those sides where they are most conspicuous, and so likely to be spotted by someone approaching these churches on foot up slope<sup>62</sup>.

However, the much more numerous domed, mostly of the cross-in-square type, churches of the Middle and the late-Byzantine periods declared by their very form the nature of the building. Thus the *bacini* assemblages did not need to serve such an announcing role.

#### 4. *Bacini as symbolic objects and messengers: a. enhancing religious connotations to the faithful and the passers-by/visitors by the forms of their arrangement and/or their decoration*

The specific choices of the iconography and the particular programme of the painted decoration adopted for the interior of Christian churches are designed to convey particular connotations and messages, under the influence of Biblical or other texts<sup>63</sup>. This is reinforced by the accompanying inscriptions. In addition, the graffiti, even if they can be positioned where they would not be immediately obvious to all<sup>64</sup>, are believed to have been intended by the patron to be read by others<sup>65</sup>. In all these cases a meaning

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62. On this comment: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 159.

63. See, characterically: K. WEITZMANN, *The Origin of the Threnos*, in M. MEISS (ed.), *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* (De artibus opuscula XL), New York 1961, 476-490; H. MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean. The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (Monographs of the Fine Arts 43), University Park – London 1987; H. MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion. Nature in Byzantine Art and Literature*, New York 2012. On the role of textual influence on Byzantine art, see as a characteristic example: H. MAGUIRE, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton, New Jersey 1981. On a recent critical view: V. A. FOSKOLOU, *Telling Stories with Pictures: Narrative in Middle and Late Byzantine Monumental Painting*, *BMGS* 43.2 (2019), 194-218 (with previous bibliography) and in particular p. 195. On the influence of the Bible in Medieval art and literature: B. S. LEVI, *The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and Art* (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies MR87), Binghamton, New York 1992.

64. See, in detail: D. TSOUGARAKIS – H. ANGELOMATIS-TSOUGARAKIS, *Σύνταγμα (corpus) χαραγμάτων ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ μονῶν τῆς Κρήτης*, Athens 2015, 25.

65. For more details upon the creation of the graffiti: TSOUGARAKIS – ANGELOMATIS-TSOUGARAKIS, *Σύνταγμα*, 35-37.



can be deciphered, leading the congregation to a better understanding of the concepts depicted<sup>66</sup>.

Symbols are important in all religions. The Byzantines incorporated symbolism in various aspects of their life<sup>67</sup>. Christian art uses symbols, such as monograms, initials, words, particular figures, in order to transmit meanings and to emphasize specific notions<sup>68</sup>. A symbol is “something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention”<sup>69</sup>. In figurative arts, allegories and symbols played an important role. An allegory is “a symbolic representation”<sup>70</sup> with several attributes usually accompanying the main form and conceived to express the main idea with much precision<sup>71</sup>, while a symbol intends to express each concept at its essence<sup>72</sup>. As Alpatov puts it, “Symbolism, on the other hand, invites him [the spectator] to sink himself in contemplation”<sup>73</sup>. Symbols are polyvalent, containing multi-levelled meanings, both literal and underlying ones<sup>74</sup>,

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66. *ODB III* (1991), entry: Symbolism (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER); TSUGARAKIS – ANGELOMATIS-TSUGARAKIS, *Σύνταγμα*, 25.

67. In general: MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 5-15; *ODB III* (1991), entry: Symbolism (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER); D. APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art, Foreword by Gabriele Finaldi*, London – New York 2020, 3-6.

68. On religious symbolism, see in general: S. J. RENO, Religious Symbolism: A Plea for a Comparative Approach, *Folklore* 88 (1977), 77-78; *ODB III* (1991), entry: Symbolism (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER); A. VACCARO, Symbols and Figurative Sacred Art as a Representative Overview of the Christian East, in A. BARNES – M. SALERNO (eds.), *Symbols and Models in the Mediterranean: Perceiving through Cultures*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2017, 137-138 and 136-159 in general; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 218-219.

69. *Merriam-Wester dictionary*, entry: Symbol (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/symbol> [last accessed: 20.01.2022]).

70. *Merriam-Wester dictionary*, entry: Allegory (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/allegory> [last accessed: 20.01.2022]). On characteristic cases of depictions in Christian art that possibly constitute allegorized descriptions: MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 31-40, 50-55.

71. On the differences between allegory and symbolism: M. V. ALPATOV, trans. S. BRADSHAW, Allegory and Symbolism in Italian Renaissance Painting, *Diogenes* 19 (1971), 2-4; *ODB III* (1991), entry: Symbolism (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER).

72. ALPATOV, Allegory and Symbolism, 2-4; *ODB III* (1991), entry: Symbolism (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER).

73. ALPATOV, Allegory and Symbolism, 4.

74. ALPATOV, Allegory and Symbolism, 3-4, 9. See also: D. FONTANA, *The Secret Language of Symbols. A Visual Key to Symbols and Their Meanings*, London 1993.

actively involving, besides their creator, their viewer in order to decipher the connotations recognizable in them. A symbol differs from a sign, which last may be defined as “something (such as an action or event) which shows that something else exists, is true”<sup>75</sup> and constituting literal version of a given depiction<sup>76</sup>; the former suggests something general and either abstract insights or concrete realities, the latter something present and occurrent<sup>77</sup>. In the case of Byzantine art, based on the analysis of motifs from natural history in early Byzantine mosaics, H. Maguire has argued on their possible double role as both signs and symbols: being oblique expressions of the main theme depicted or carrying additional meanings<sup>78</sup>. And indeed, several commentaries on passages of Biblical texts suggest these forms of interpretation<sup>79</sup>. Based on the above, symbolic depictions naturally had a particular place in religious iconography either in Byzantium or in the West, with specific contexts influencing each symbol’s connotations and narrative<sup>80</sup>.

It should be noted here that on several occasions it has been pointed out that although during the Early Byzantine period additional levels of Christian symbolism are to be sought behind specific decorations of the churches linked to nature-related subjects (as in the ones commented on below), in the post-iconoclastic period, and particularly after the 10th c., not only did the use of related images became much more limited, with an emphasis now on a more schematic rendition instead of the previous naturalism, but also the latter were not viewed as symbols of spiritual concepts<sup>81</sup>. A decisive point of change from earlier attitudes was that, from the late 7th c. and following the 82nd Canon of the Quinisext Council, it

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75. *Merriam-Webster dictionary*, entry: Sign (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sign> [last accessed: 20.01.2022]).

76. MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 6; DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE – MAGUIRE, *Other Icons*, 60-61.

77. RENO, *Religious Symbolism*, 77-78.

78. See: MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, overall and in sum p. 82. See, also: MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 78-79. In addition: M. A. ALEXANDER, *Design and Meaning in the Early Christian Mosaics of Tunisia, Apollo. The International Magazine of Arts* 251 (1983), 8-13.

79. For some characteristic case-studies: MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 6-9, 12; DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE – MAGUIRE, *Other Icons*, 62, 92. See, as well: MAGUIRE, *Art and Eloquence*.

80. R. STEMP, *The Secret Language of the Renaissance. Decoding the Hidden Symbolism of Italian Art*, London 2018<sup>3</sup>, 36, 94.

81. See, in detail: MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 6-13, 83-84; MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 4-10, 166-170; DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE – MAGUIRE, *Other Icons*, 58-62, 90-93.

was determined that a human form should be given when depicting Christ, replacing earlier symbolic representations of Christ as a lamb<sup>82</sup>. With regards in particular to images with violent animal scenes or with fierce animals, their appearance –particularly from the middle-Byzantine period– should either be taken as simple signs (see above), literal representations, or as encompassing a power of their own, suggesting an apotropaic function<sup>83</sup>. Thus any such similar imagery (mostly located on the exterior of churches) had rather a protective role<sup>84</sup>. On the other hand, it has also been pointed out that in particular cases or periods, the most characteristic being that of the 12th c., a more revived interest in depicting in detail the natural world is to be observed<sup>85</sup>.

The study argues that religious connotations referring to the Christian faith were intended to be transferred to the passer-byers and the congregation through the use of *bacini* in the façades of churches from the middle-Byzantine period onwards<sup>86</sup>. As shown in the detailed commentary that follows, the line of reasoning is based on the combination of the following: a) the repeated encountering of *bacini* bearing specific animal motifs placed in repeated and rather salient positions limited to the exterior of monuments; b) the rather tame nature of the depicted animals; c) the rather schematic rendering of the various themes (at least in what concerns the evidence from mainland Greece) where abstraction prevailed at the expense of naturalism<sup>87</sup>; d) the *bacini* of the late 11th and the 12th up to the early 13th c. may convey symbols of spiritual meaning when also a revival in the depiction of motifs from nature occurred<sup>88</sup>; e) the relevant later material comes mainly from Latin-dominated areas (the best example being Crete), where western attitudes that recognized symbolic concepts behind

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82. MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 6, 83-84; MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 4, 6-8, 10.

83. DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE – MAGUIRE, *Other Icons*, 58-60, 65-66, 90-93, 157-160.

84. DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE – MAGUIRE, *Other Icons*, 157-160.

85. MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 168-169, 172.

86. On related remarks from the material in the regional unit of Chania, in Crete: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 160-163.

87. On the use of non realistic images to strengthen a symbolic hue: MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 82.

88. See above and note 85.

specific subjects<sup>89</sup> seem to have had influence; f) the context of each *bacini* assemblage –that is, its position on the monument and the combination of specific motifs in the same group– strongly implies symbolic connotations (indeed, it has been generally acknowledged not only for Byzantine but also for Medieval art that a special interpretation may derive from the analysis of the individual context<sup>90</sup>); and, finally, g) the more active role of specific patrons in the selection process<sup>91</sup>. The last two aspects will prove to be crucial for the symbolic reading of *bacini*.

Based on a comparison of the available published material from mainland or insular Greece taken together with the material under study from Crete (Tabl. 1), it will be stressed that these religious meanings could either be expressed through the vessels' arrangements and/or through the vessels' interior decoration. The material may be divided in two groups: that of the numerous Cretan *bacini*, dating from the Venetian period, that constitute examples of both approaches and that of the churches of mainland Greece, dating from the middle-Byzantine period onwards, that mainly follow the second option, namely messages contained in the selection of the decorative motifs.

As regards the meanings hidden within the vessels' arrangements, for the numerous immured vessels from Crete, it has been suggested that each specific message was pre-planned<sup>92</sup>, organized in the course of the construction phase of each monument –given the fact that the insertion of *bacini* in the walls of those churches at a phase later than its erection is rare<sup>93</sup>. There, the vessels' arrangement take the form of a cross –sometimes

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89. DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE - MAGUIRE, *Other Icons*, 90, 159-160.

90. MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 8, 82; DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE - MAGUIRE, *Other Icons*, 62; S. J. F. STOWELL PHILLIPS, *Animal Visual Culture in the Middle Ages*, Durham: PhD Dissertation, Durham University 2008, 416 (Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3664/> [last accessed: 26.04.2022]).

91. On the role of the patrons, see indicatively: MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 168.

92. YANGAKI, The Immured Vessels 4-5; YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 160.

93. On the observation that the date of the *bacini* generally complies with that of the monument they adorn, see in general for the churches of Crete: YANGAKI, The Immured Vessels, 10-11. This remark is further corroborated by the study of the analytical evidence from the Chania regional unit (YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 146-149, fig. 184).

more than one, either distributed across several façades<sup>94</sup> (Fig. 2, a-e, Fig. 26, Fig. 27) or placed all on one<sup>95</sup> – the message being created and embodied within the particular formation<sup>96</sup>.

AREA	MONUMENTS	DATE OF THE MONUMENTS OR/AND OF THE <i>BACINI</i> *	BIBLIOGRAPHY
<i>Argolid</i>	2 (Areia and Merbaka)	earlier: middle of the 12th c. / later: middle of the 13th c.	MEGAW, <i>The Chronology</i> , 94-95; MEGAW, <i>Glazed Bowls</i> , 147-148, 153-158, 159-161; SANDERS, <i>Three Peloponnesian Churches</i> , 189-195, figs. 2-3; SANDERS, <i>William of Moerbeke's</i> , 617-622, fig. 27 (with earlier bibliography).
<i>Attica</i>	5 (several locations within Athens and further away)	11th c., 13th c., 18th c. (?)	MEGAW, <i>The Chronology</i> , 96-97, 107, 122, 124, 126, 129; NIKOLAKOPOULOS, <i>Εντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά, I-II</i> ; E. GINI-TSOPHOPOULOU, <i>Άγιος Νικόλαος στο νεκροταφείο Καλάμου Αττικής. Νέα στοιχεία, ΔΧΑΕ</i> per. Δ', 11 (1982-1983), 234-235, fig. 8; NIKOLAKOPOULOS, <i>Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών</i> , 66-70, figs. 1-11; KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, <i>Τὰ Κεραμεικά</i> , 70-71, figs. 116-117, 74-75, fig. 129, fig. 131, 76, fig. 132; BOURAS, <i>Βυζαντινή Αθήνα</i> , 129-134, 173-180.
<i>Boeotia, Loukisia</i>	1	second half of the 11th c.	MEGAW, <i>Glazed Bowls</i> , 146-147, 148-149, fig. 1, 158.
<i>Crete**</i>	> 290	13th-21st c.	YANGAKI, <i>Immured Vessels</i> , 375-383; YANGAKI, <i>Πρώτη θεώρηση</i> , 313-337; YANGAKI, <i>Ceramics in Plain Sight</i> ; YANGAKI, <i>Ιστορίες αγγείων</i> , 73-90.
<i>Epirus</i>	5	13th-15th c.	TSOURIS, <i>Ο κεραμοπλαστικός διάκοσμος</i> , 96-101, 104-107, 115; TSOURIS, <i>Glazed Bowls</i> , 603-605, 608-612.

94. Besides the numerous churches that bear *bacini* in the form of a cross in the western and eastern sides, characteristic too is the case of Panagia Chanoutia in Gergeri, with cruciform arrangements not only in the western and eastern façades, but also on the southern.

95. Typical here is the church of Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida (YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*).

96. On the dominant role of the cruciform arrangement: YANGAKI, *The Immured Vessels*, 4-6, fig. 4; YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 35-37, 55-57.

<i>Evrytania</i>	2	13th c. and later	TSOURIS, <i>Ο κεραμοπλαστικός διάκοσμος</i> , 101-103, 114; TSOURIS, <i>Glazed Bowls</i> , 605-607, pl. III.
<i>Hydra</i>	1	post-Byzantine period	ΝΙΚΟΛΑΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, <i>Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών</i> , 70-71, figs. 13-15.
<i>Ilia, Gastouni</i>	1	last quarter of the 13th c.	MEGAW, <i>Glazed Bowls</i> , 147, 149-153, 159; GRITSΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, <i>Η Καθολική</i> , 227-292, <i>passim</i> .
<i>Kythera</i>	1	14th-15th c.	G. INCE – A. BALLANTYNE, <i>Paliochora on Kythera: Survey and Interpretation, Studies in Medieval and Post-Medieval Settlements</i> (BAR Int. Ser. 1704), Oxford 2007, 31, 98, fig. 60.
<i>Lakonia</i>	25 (several locations)	10th-18th c.	SANDERS, <i>Three Peloponnesian Churches</i> , 195-196; PAPAGEORGIOU, <i>Το καθολικό</i> , 658, 666, fig. 1; YANGAKI, <i>The Bacini in Churches</i> , 627-639; YANGAKI, <i>Short Remarks</i> , 671-680.
<i>Leukas</i>	1	middle of the 15th c.	TSOURIS, <i>Ο κεραμοπλαστικός διάκοσμος</i> , 103-104; TSOURIS, <i>Glazed Bowls</i> , 608-609.
<i>Magnesia</i>	3	14th c., 18th, 19th c.	KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, <i>Τὰ Κεραμικά</i> , 75, fig. 130, fig. 131, 76, fig. 132; P. ANDROUDIS, <i>Ο ναός της Κοίμησης της Θεοτόκου στην Επισκοπή Άνω Βόλου και ο εντοιχισμένος γλυπτός του διάκοσμος</i> , ΔΧΑΕ per. Δ', 28 (2007), 98, fig. 8.
<i>Messenia</i>	2	12th c.	N. ΜΠΟΥΖΑ, <i>Παρατηρήσεις στο ναό του Αγίου Πέτρου στην Καστάνια Μεσσηνιακής Μάνης</i> , in <i>Ανταπόδοση, Μελέτες βυζαντινής και μεταβυζαντινής αρχαιολογίας και τέχνης προς τιμήν της καθηγήτριας Ελένης Δεληγιάννη-Δωρή</i> , Athens 2010, 251-254, figs. 10-12; M. ΚΑΡΡΑΣ, <i>Νεότερα για τον ναό του Αϊ Στράτηγου (Ταξιάρχη) παρά την Καστάνια της Μεσσηνιακής Μάνης</i> , ΔΧΑΕ per. Δ' 39 (2018), 211, 216, note 22.

<i>Mount Athos</i>	6 (several locations)	<i>14th-18th c.</i>	CARSWELL, Pottery and Tiles, 78-88; ANDROUDIS – YANGAKI, A Fragment, 51-57; ANDROUDIS, An Unknown, 209-216; VOYADJIS, <i>To Καθολικό</i> , 130-141.
<i>Salamina</i>	2	<i>13th-14th c. / post-Byzantine period, 17th c.</i>	NIKOLAKOPOULOS, <i>Έντοιχισμένα κεραμικά, IV</i> ; G. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, Τα κεραμικά του παρεκκλησίου της Φανερωμένης της Σαλαμίνας, <i>Αρχαιολογία</i> 28 (1988), 81-84; KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, <i>Τὰ Κεραμεικά</i> , 72-74, figs. 119-127.
<i>Sifnos</i>	1		TROULLOS, <i>Η Αγγειοπλαστική</i> , 54.
<i>Skopelos</i>	9 (several locations)	16th, 18th-19th c.	SAMPSON, <i>Ναοὶ καὶ μοναὶ, passim</i> ; KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, <i>Τὰ Κεραμεικά</i> , 76; KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, <i>Τα κεραμεικά Ιξνίκ</i> , figs. 4-6; K. KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, <i>Τα Κεραμεικά του Αιγαίου (1600-1950)</i> , Ministry of Aegean n.d., 139-140, fig. 179d.
<i>Thasos</i>	5 (several locations)	19th-20th c.	S. P. AGGELOUDI-ZARKADA, <i>Η αρχιτεκτονική των μεταβυζαντινών εκκλησιών της Θάσου. Ιστορική, κοινωνική και κατασκευαστική προσέγγιση</i> , Kavala: PhD Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, v. 1, 319, v. 2, 127, fig. 1, fig. 2 (Available at: <a href="https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesisBookReader/id/24673#page/1/mode/2up">https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesisBookReader/id/24673#page/1/mode/2up</a> [last accessed: 20.02.2022]).
<i>Thessaloniki</i>	1	14th c.	PHILON, Thessaloniki, 303-306, 312-313.

Table 1: Concise list of monuments in Greece bearing *bacini*, based on the published evidence (only those monuments are mentioned for which the *bacini* are still preserved and whose publications deal, either briefly or more analytically, with the practice and the immured vessels); \*: Dates given in italics refer to the dates of the *bacini*; otherwise, the dates refer to those of the churches; \*\*: In the case of Crete, besides the 78 monuments analytically published so far from Chania (YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*), information is also taken into consideration deriving from the rest of the numerous churches of the island, briefly summarized in YANGAKI, *The Immured Vessels*, 1-17.

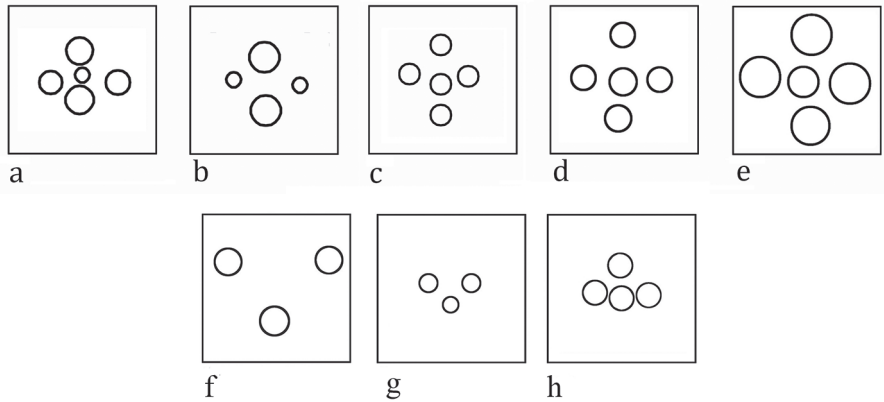


Figure 2: Schematic drawings of characteristic dispositions of the *bacini* in Crete, based on examples from Chania: cruciform (a. Dormition of the Virgin, Vlithias, b. Archangel Michael, Meskla, c. Prophet Ilias, Nisi, d. Agia Paraskevi, Vouvas, e. Archangel Michael, Prines); and triangular (f. Agios Zosimas, Achladakies, g. Agios Georgios, Fres, h. Agios Georgios, Nopigia) (schematic drawings: A. Ladianou).

The cross (Fig. 2, a-e), besides demarcating these sacred spaces, was used to accentuate the sanctity of these spaces. This observation is further corroborated by the published material from the regional unit of Chania. While on western façades of the churches, the cross may occur along with several other decorative options<sup>97</sup>, yet in the eastern wall of the churches, where the apse lies –as the most sanctified part of the church– no such variations or distractions from the core message occur<sup>98</sup>. The very common cruciform arrangement carries a strong and obvious symbolic significance<sup>99</sup> –namely that of the Cross, the principal symbol of the Christian religion

97. Such options comprise: triangular or reverse triangular formations, vessels in form of an arrow or vessels that frame the discharging arch of the entrance.

98. Respective characteristic exceptions constitute, for example, a single vessel in the church of Agios Nikolaos in Maza, three vessels creating a triangle in Agioi Theodoroi in Patima, and even four vessels set close to one another, thus forming a rectangle.

99. A. G. YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in Churches on Crete: Preliminary Observations on Material from the Prefecture of Rethymnon*, *ΔΧΑΕ* per. Δ', 34 (2013), 378; YANGAKI, *The Immured Vessels*, 9.



referencing the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ<sup>100</sup>. Similar suggestions may be formulated for those monuments in mainland and insular Greece with *bacini* following the same forms of arrangement (see above). The regular enough use of triangular arrangements (Fig. 2, f-h), as those of the immured vessels in Crete, either regular or inverted, may also hide a symbolic meaning. The triangle, having three sides and three corners, can carry as a symbol various meanings; given the aforementioned context it is related to the Christian faith, referring to the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>101</sup>. Given that these formations occur above the entrance of Christian churches, their meaning is obvious. Moreover, the additional incorporation of an *oculus* in the cruciform formation may emphasize this symbolic reading, as shown in the cases of the churches of the Panagia in Gra Kera and Agios Georgios in Palaia Roumata. Cruciform and triangular arrangements are found in monuments dating from the late 13th up to the 16th c.; triangular formations occur more often within the 14th and the 15th c.<sup>102</sup>.

At a second level, the particular decoration of the *bacini* can offer an additional layer of meaning, one possibly not immediately perceived, containing specific symbolisms, mainly religious ones. Thus, whilst the bulk of the *bacini* consists of various undecorated monochrome glazed wares, numerous examples bear painted or incised decoration either with iconographic themes (animals or humans) or with geometric or plant themes joined with letters or abbreviated inscriptions, which, particularly if the ceramics' positions within the monuments are taken into consideration,

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100. On the symbolism of the Cross, see in general: M. DIDRON, *Iconographie chrétienne. Histoire de Dieu*, Paris 1843, 358-389; [A.] JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, v. 1, New Edition, London 1891, 25; A. BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism. Cultural Icons and the Meanings behind them*, trans. J. HULBERT, New York – London 1994, 82-84; M. BATTISTINI, *Symbols and Allegories in Art*, trans. S. SARTARELLI, Los Angeles 2005<sup>5</sup>, 144.

101. For the triangle: BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 353-354, 355; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 232. For the number 3: *Θρησκευτική και Ήθική Εγκυκλοπαιδεία*, v. 11, entry: Three (G. K. SPYRIDAKIS); K. DENNY-S-BRIAN – N. HODGSON – N. LOCKLEY (eds.), *Signs & Symbols: An Illustrated Guide to Their Origins and Meanings*, London 2008, 294; A. NOZEDAR, *Element Encyclopedia of Secret Signs and Symbols. The Ultimate A-Z Guide from Alchemy to the Zodiac*, Glasgow 2009, entry: Three; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 228.

102. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 161.

may allow us to extract religious connotations from their occurrence<sup>103</sup>. In those cases, the material seems to support the view originally expressed by G. Nikolakopoulos for the *bacini*: that they are serving a purely symbolic purpose, as offerings, in an indirect reference to the Last Supper and to Christ's supreme sacrifice and thus to the specific House of Lord<sup>104</sup>. Relevant examples are to be found mostly within Nikolakopoulos' group I, dating from the 11th up to the 15th c.

The earliest relevant examples were immured in the church of Agioi Theodoroi in Athens. Although the date of the church has been debated<sup>105</sup>

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103. On the use of animals or plants as symbols for hidden significances in the Byzantine world, expressed in the visual arts or in the literature, see in sum: *ODB* I (1991), entry: Animals (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER – A.-M. TALBOT); *ODB* III (1991), entry: Symbolism (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER); APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 176-178, 193-195. On the symbolic properties of animals and plants in the Middle Ages: J. R. BERTON, *The Medieval Menagerie: Animals in the Art of the Middle Ages*, New York 1992; W. TELESKO, *The Wisdom of Nature. The Healing Powers and Symbolism of Plants and Animals in the Middle Ages*, London 2001; STOWELL PHILLIPS, *Animal Visual Culture in the Middle Ages*.

104. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά*, I-II., 6-7.

105. The church was dated by A. H. S. Megaw in the third quarter of the 11th c. based not only on architectural characteristics but mainly on the reading of an inscription, although other researchers opted for a date within the 12th c. (On the whole problematic, with earlier references as well: MEGAW, *The Chronology*, 96-97; A. H. S. MEGAW, *The Date of H. Theodoroi at Athens*, *ABSA* 33 (1932-1933), 163-169; A. XYNGOPOULOS, *Αἱ ἐπιγραφαὶ τοῦ Ναοῦ τῶν Ἀγίων Θεοδώρων ἐν Ἀθήναις*, *ΕΕΒΣ* 10 (1933), 450-453; BOURAS – BOURA, *Ἡ Ἑλλαδικὴ ναοδομία*, 329; Ch. BOURAS, *Βυζαντινὴ Ἀθήνα 10ος-12ος αἰ.*, Athens 2010, 173-179). Recently G. D. R. Sanders (SANDERS, *William of Moerbeke's Church*, 620-621 with note 90), also opted for the latter date of the church, based on the interpretation that a partially preserved bowl very briefly described by Megaw, but not actually preserved, formed part of the Byzantine products which could not date earlier than the second half of the 12th c. or even within the 13th c., a suggestion that led to the observation that also the characteristic Islamic ceramics should be dated later than the mid-11th c. (SANDERS, *William of Moerbeke's Church*, 620-621), with the conclusion that Philon's dates on the Islamic wares from the Benaki Museum, which were based on the date of the Agioi Theodoroi church, should be revised. Nevertheless, one must take also into consideration that, in addition to Philon's work, the two ceramics find close similarities in the large bands of lustre decoration, the rendering of the ivy leaves, the fine foliage and the rendering of the bird with the motifs in jars and bowls from other collections not dated later than the 11th c. (For characteristic examples: O. WATSON, *Ceramics from Islamic Lands*, London 2004, 278-281, Cat. Ja.6, Cat. Ja.7, Cat. Ja.8 [with further bibliography]). And, given that the bowl with the fine incisions is not preserved,

and recently, also, that of the vessels, yet for the two Islamic vessels originally immured a date within the 11th c., as initially suggested, seems probable, given their very close analogies with lustre pottery of the Fatimid period from Egypt<sup>106</sup>. One of the vessels bore the decoration of a bird, possibly an eagle, with its wings open<sup>107</sup> (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: A dish bearing a bird, possibly an eagle, in lustreware, immured originally in Agioi Theodoroi in Athens (photo from: KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, *Tὰ Κεραμεικά*, 70, fig. 117).

At Agia Varvara in Erimos, a bird is depicted (Fig. 4) in the slip-painted technique in the dish that decorates the central apse of the church, having its wings outspread again.

with Megaw only offering some parallels of this “type” (on those parallels, see: MEGAW, *The Date of H. Theodoroi*, 167 with notes 6 and 7), the assignment of the object to the specific Byzantine products according to my view is not self-evident.

106. On this close parallels, see the previous note.

107. MEGAW, *Glazed Bowls*, 146, note 4; NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά, I-II.*, 21-23, figs. 16-18; KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, *Tὰ Κεραμεικά*, 70, fig. 117.



Figure 4: A dish bearing a bird, possibly an eagle, rendered in the slip-painted technique, immured in Agia Varvara in Erimos (Mesa Mani) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *The Bacini in Churches of the Mesa Mani*, 635, fig. 6, I.b).

Even although it has lost its head, it can with most probability be identified as an eagle, given the robust rendering of the main body and the large wings that flank the main body. Parallel representations of eagles occur in middle-Byzantine sgraffito ceramics<sup>108</sup>. A further argument in favour of this interpretation is the particular execution of its lower main body and the wings: they are portrayed in parallel lines of white slip, while the upper part bears a sort of a cross-hatching that recalls scales, a characteristic that finds very close analogies in the similar handling of the body and wings of several eagles on examples of middle-Byzantine sculpture<sup>109</sup>. The eagle had several connotations, being a polyvalent symbol with both secular and sacred meanings. While the theme is a very old one of power and glory, in Christian symbolism, besides representing strength, resurrection and salvation, it

108. D. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI, *Βυζαντινά εφνυαλωμένα κεραμικά. Η τέχνη των εγγράφων*, Athens 1999, 129, no. 141 (A. DINA), 170, no. 197 (I. TZONOU-HERBST).

109. BOURAS – BOURA, *Ἡ Ἑλλαδική ναοδομία*, 563, fig. 556, 565; E. ΚΟΥΝΟΥΠΙΟΤΟΥ-MANOLESSOU, *Μεσοβυζαντινά γλυπτά με ζώα από τη συλλογή γλυπτών στο Τζαμί της Χαλκίδας*, ΔΧΑΕ per. Δ', 29 (2008), 2008, 223, no. 2, fig. 2, 225, no. 5, fig. 5.



could also refer to Christ himself or to His believers, the Christians, or to John the Evangelist<sup>110</sup>. In the case of the dish at Erimos, its position on the tympanum of the double-type window of the central apse of the church cannot be considered as arbitrary, given the aforementioned connotations. H. Maguire, based on an early Byzantine example, has shown “the polyvalent character of the symbolism” of the eagle and has convincingly argued for a “wide range of potential references that they might evoke in viewers”<sup>111</sup>. A second bird on a *bacino* of Islamic lustreware was originally embedded in Agia Varvara’s south gable<sup>112</sup>.



Figure 5: Dish bearing an incised bird, immured in Panagia in Gastouni (drawing: MEGAW, *Glazed Bowls*, 150, fig. 2).

110. G. FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art. With Illustrations from Paintings of the Renaissance*, London – Oxford – New York 1961, 17; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 108-109; ODB I (1991), entry: Eagles (A. CUTLER); H. MAGUIRE, An Early Christian Marble Relief at Kavala, ΔΧΑΕ per. Δ', 16 (1991-1992), 290-294; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 190.

111. MAGUIRE, An Early Christian, 294. See also: DAUTERMAN – MAGUIRE MAGUIRE, *Other Icons*, 60-64.

112. H. MEGAW, Byzantine Architecture in Mani, ABSA 33 (1932-1933), 148; N. DRANDAKIS, Σημειώσεις κυρίως για την τοιχοδομία και την αρχιτεκτονική βυζαντινῶν ναῶν τῆς Μέσα Μάνης, ΛΣ 15 (1998), 309, fig. 18.

A bird looking right is immured in Panagia in Gastouni<sup>113</sup> (Fig. 5) and the partial representation of what originally must have been a bird is preserved on one of the vessels immured in Panagia in Mandoforos (Mesa Mani)<sup>114</sup> (Fig. 6).



Figure 6: Part of a vessel bearing the depiction of a bird, immured in Panagia in Mandoforos (Mesa Mani) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *The Bacini in Churches of the Mesa Mani*, 635, fig. 6, IV.a).

113. MEGAW, *Glazed Bowls*, 149-150, fig. 2. On the church of Panagia Katholiki in Gastouni: MEGAW, *Glazed Bowls*, 147, 149-153, 159; T. A. GRITSOPOULOS, Ἡ Καθολικὴ τῆς Γαστούνης, *Πελοποννησιακά ΚΓ'* (1998-1999), 227-292; D. C. ATHANASOULIS, Η αναχρονολόγηση του ναού της Παναγίας Καθολικῆς στη Γαστούνη, *ΔΧΑΕ* per. Δ' 24 (2003), 63-78; D. C. ATHANASOULIS, *Η ναοδομία στην Επισκοπή Ωλένης κατά την Μέση και την Ὑστερὴ Βυζαντινὴ Περίοδο*, Thessaloniki: PhD Dissertation, University of Thessaloniki 2006, 257-285 and *passim*.

114. A. G. YANGAKI, *The Bacini in Churches of the Mesa Mani (Peloponnese)*, in P. PETRIDIS – A. G. YANGAKI – N. LIAROS – E.-E. BIA (eds.), *12th AIECM3 Congress on Medieval and Modern Period Mediterranean Ceramics, Proceedings*, v. I, Athens 2021, 628, tabl. I, 631.

The last finds similarities with several related examples<sup>115</sup> of the production of the Palaiologan period in the late 13th-14th centuries<sup>116</sup>, as Mexia has already noted<sup>117</sup>. In the case of Cretan examples of the Venetian period, the decision to place such vessels with various bird-types –e.g. above the apse of Agios Ioannis Theologos in Stylos (Fig. 7), of Agios Nikolaos in Samaria, of Panagia in Aimonas, and above the entrance at Agios Nikolaos in Maza (Fig. 8), at Agios Georgios at Axos, at Panagia in Prinos, at Agioi Apostoloi in Tsachiana, at Archangel Michael in Vlachiana (Fig. 9)– may also not be random acts occasioned only by a desire for decoration.



Figure 7: Large dish bearing an incised bird, immured in Agios Ioannis Theologos in Stylos (Apokoronas, Chania) (photo: by the author; published: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 64, fig. 15).

115. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI, Βυζαντινά εφραλωμένα κεραμικά, 191-193, nos. 216-218 (I. MOTSIANOS), 205, no. 234 (P. KAMBANIS), no. 235 (Th. PAZARAS), 210, no. 241 (P. KAMBANIS).

116. For the whole problem on the attribution of vessels with similar characteristics to the products of the workshops of Thessaloniki or of Constantinople, see: A. G. YANGAKI, *Εφραλωμένη κεραμική από την Ακροναυπλία (11ος-17ος αι. μ.Χ.)* (Ινστιτούτο Ιστορικών Ερευνών / Ερευνητική Βιβλιοθήκη 7), Athens 2012, 62-65; D. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI – S. Y. WAKSMAN, Thessaloniki Ware Reconsidered, in J. VROOM (ed.), *Medieval and Post-Medieval Ceramics in the Eastern Mediterranean. Fact and Fiction. Proceedings of the First International Conference on Byzantine and Ottoman Archaeology*, Turnhout 2015, 227-235.

117. MEXIA, *Βυζαντινή ναοδομία*, 138 with note 45.





Figure 8: Bowl bearing the depiction of a bird, immured in Agios Nikolaos in Maza (Apokoronas, Chania) (photo: by the author; published: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 94, fig. 73).



Figure 9: Dish bearing the depiction of a bird, immured in Michael Archangel in Vlachiana (Herakleion, Crete) (photo: by the author).



In the case of the church of Archangel Michael in Vlachiana, the bowl bearing a bird, belonging to the blue and lustreware from the Iberian peninsula<sup>118</sup> (Fig. 9), is immured above the north entrance to the church, located in its extension towards the west, linked to the nave which –according to the tradition– was dedicated to the Holy Spirit. Similarly, two large vessels decorated with birds are placed near the entrance located on the narthex, in the church of the Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida (Figs. 10-11)<sup>119</sup>.



Figure 10: Large lustreware plate bearing in the centre a bird and the inscription “Ave Maria gra[tia] plena”, immured in Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida (Crete) (photo: by the author; published: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 147, fig. 12).

118. On the various categories of the production of the Iberian peninsula, see representative bibliography in notes 141 and 143.

119. YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 146, 157.



Figure 11: Large lustreware plate with a representation of a bird, immured in Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida (Crete) (photo: by the author; published: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 147, fig. 11).

These depictions could be identified as possible representations of either cranes or pelicans<sup>120</sup> (they might also be herons). Cranes are symbols of vigilance, loyalty and the good monastic life<sup>121</sup>, while pelicans symbolize Christ's sacrifice on the Cross<sup>122</sup>. Thus, these selections may

120. L. M. LLUBIÀ, *Cerámica medieval española*, Barcelona 1967, 153, fig. 241, left; J. ROSE-ALBRECHT, Aragon et Catalogne, in J. ROSE-ALBRECHT (ed.), *Le calife, le prince et le potier, les faïences à reflets métalliques*, Lyon, musée des Beaux-Arts 2 mars-22 mai 2002, Paris 2002, 141-142; L. TILLIARD, La collection du musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, in J. ROSE-ALBRECHT (ed.), *Le calife, le prince et le potier*, 255, inv. E 538-27.

121. FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 14-15; S. COHEN, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 169, Brill's Studies on Art, Art History and Intellectual History 2), Leiden 2008, 64-65; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 189.

122. FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 23; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 192.

reflect a religious message, referring to the Passion (and Crucifixion) of the Christ and to Atonement and aimed at preparing the entrance to the House of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the *katholikon* of a monastic complex<sup>123</sup>. In the church of the Dormition of the Virgin in the monastery of Molyvdoskepastos (in Ioannina) among the *bacini* assemblage<sup>124</sup> three vessels bear representations of birds or fish painted in dark brown, green, red or bluish-green<sup>125</sup>. Birds imply symbolically and in general something spiritual<sup>126</sup>, the “human desire to break free of gravity and to attain higher spheres”<sup>127</sup>, while according to the Christian doctrine the dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit, represented in the themes of the Trinity, the Baptism and the Annunciation of the Virgin<sup>128</sup>. Thus the choice to place birds mostly above the churches’ apses could be aimed at further emphasizing the sanctity of the place, since sacred settings were commonly adorned with birds<sup>129</sup>. The representation of fish could refer to Christ, since it is His symbol as employed by the early church<sup>130</sup>.

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123. YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 157.

124. TSOURIS, *Glazed Bowls*, 610, pl. VII, 1, 2, 4. On the date of this particular part of the monument, see, more recently: A. KARAMPERIDI, Μολυβδοσκεπάστος. Η μονή της Κοίμησης της Θεοτόκου, in V. N. PAPADOPOULOU – A. KARAMPERIDI, *Τα βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου*, Athens 2008, 182.

125. Of the originally six vessels, the other two bear aniconic decoration, comprising various geometric incisions; on the vessels: TSOURIS, *Ο κεραμοπλαστικός*, 104-107; TSOURIS, *Glazed Bowls*, 608-612, pl. VI, fig. 10, pl. VII; KARAMPERIDI, *Η μονή*, 182.

126. FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 12-13; ODB I (1991), entry: Birds (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER – A.-M. TALBOT); BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 39.

127. BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 39.

128. DIDRON, *Iconographie chrétienne*, 425-433, 438-449; JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 32; F. E. HULME, *The History, Principles and Practice of Symbolism in Christian Art*, London 1892, 184-189; FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 15-16; ODB II (1991), entry: Holy Spirit (K.-H. UTHEMANN); BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 101; VACCARO, *Symbols*, 150; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 189-190.

129. ODB I (1991), entry: Birds (J. SCARBOROUGH – A. CUTLER). In the cases of the ceramics in Agios Nikolaos in Maza and Agios Nikolaos in Samaria the two rather short and plump birds could easily be recognized as pigeons, the most well-known incarnation of the dove; however, on the vessels in Stylos the long neck and the long legs of the creature could have been intended to represent a crane or even a heron or a pelican (on these remarks: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 162).

130. JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 24; FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 18.





Figure 12: A dish bearing the depictions of mammals, rendered in the slip-painted technique, immured in Agia Varvara in Erimos (Mesa Mani) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *The Bacini in Churches of the Mesa Mani*, 635, fig. 6, 1a).

In the north apse of the Agia Varvara in Erimos (Mani) is still preserved a dish where four types of mammals of different sizes are rendered in the slip-painted technique (Fig. 12): the largest possibly being identified as a cheetah finds similarities with other carnivores depicted on middle-Byzantine pottery<sup>131</sup>. Megaw sees it as a leopard surrounded by hounds<sup>132</sup>. In either case they both are members of the cat family, *Felidae*, to which also the lion, emblem of strength, of courage, fortitude and symbol of Christ and of imperial power<sup>133</sup>, belongs and at which the dish's representation may hint.

Images that recall lambs, such as the one in Kitharida (Fig. 13), may refer to the Lamb of God, the Agnus Dei<sup>134</sup> and as such reference Jesus Christ.

131. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI, *Βυζαντινά εφνυαλωμένα κεραμικά*, 26, no. 2 (E. BAKOUREOU), 28, no. 4 (Ch. KOILAKOU), 123, no. 134 (A. DINA), 185, no. 212 (I. TZONOU-HERBST).

132. MEGAW, *Byzantine Architecture in Mani*, 148.

133. FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 21; HULME, *The History*, 171-172; *ODB I* (1991), entry: Animals (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER – A.-M. TALBOT); *ODB II* (1991), entry: Lions (A. KARPOZILOS – A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER); BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 209; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 178, 185.

134. DIDRON, *Iconographie chrétienne*, 22, fig. 13, 44, fig. 23; JAMESON, *Sacred*



Figure 13: Lead glazed polychrome pottery ("RMR Ware") plate, immured in the church of Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida (Herakleion, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 143, fig. 7).

The mammal in the *bacino* in Agios Georgios in Fournes (Fig. 14) is in a bad state of preservation and the animal's tail is perhaps rather long to belong to a sheep or a goat. Nevertheless, considering that it is common for



Figure 14: Lead glazed polychrome pottery ("RMR Ware") dish, immured in the church of Agios Georgios in Fournes (Chania, Crete) (photo: by the author; published: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 78, fig. 48).

and *Legendary Art*, 25; HULME, *The History*, 167-168; FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 20-21; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 201; MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 78-79; DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE – MAGUIRE, *Other Icons*, 59, 93; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 178, 184. On a similar representation figured in a *bacino* immured in S. Francesco in Bologna: S. NEPOTI, *I bacini in maiolica arcaica della chiesa di S. Francesco in Bologna*, *Faenza* 54 (1973), 49-50, pl. XXI, no. 12.

various human or animal themes not to be rendered in extreme detail in this particular group of late medieval pottery<sup>135</sup> and that this representation is selected to be placed at the centre of the composition, the rest comprising vegetal and geometric themes, perhaps in the eye of the donor this representation did refer both to the pastoral life of the Cretan hinterland and at a deeper level to Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, Jesus being referred to as the Lamb of God in the Gospel according to John<sup>136</sup>. A bowl immured in the church of Michael Archangel in Vlachiana bears in its centre a representation of a rabbit or a hare, animals known to represent fertility, chastity or/and love and in Venetian Renaissance used as symbols of the Virgin birth<sup>137</sup>. In addition, the representation of the bust of a figure turned towards its right, dressed in white and with characteristic yellow (referencing blond) wavy hair flowing onto its shoulder, depicted in a *graffita rinascimentale canonica* bowl of the last quarter of the 15th c. immured in Agios Antonios Platanos (Fig. 15), finds exact parallels in depictions say to portray Angels<sup>138</sup>, the ministers and messengers of God<sup>139</sup>.

135. For a selection of the respective representations: V. VALENZANO, *Il bestiario del vasaio. Decorazioni zoomorfe nel Nord della Puglia*, in A. GRAVINA (ed.), *33o Convegno Nazionale sulla Preistoria, Protostoria, Storia della Daunia. San Severo, 11-12 novembre 2012*, Atti, San Severo 2013, 51-53.

136. MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 78-79; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 184; see as well: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 143 (with additional bibliography).

137. COHEN, *Animals as Disguised Symbols*, 82-83.

138. On this attribution: A. G. YANGAKI, *Πρώτη θεώρηση των εντοιχισμένων αγγείων σε ναούς της επαρχίας Αμαρίου*, in S. MANOURAS (ed.), *Πρακτικά του Διεθνούς Επιστημονικού Συνεδρίου Η επαρχία Αμαρίου από την αρχαιότητα ως σήμερα. Δήμοι Κουρητών και Συβρίτου 27-31 Αυγούστου 2010, τόμος πρώτος*, Athens 2014, 323, fig. 6. On similar examples, recognized as Angels: L. CONTON, *Le antiche ceramiche veneziane scoperte nella laguna. Antique Venetian Ceramics Discovered in the Lagoon*, Venezia, Venice n.d., figs. at p. 72-73, 79-80; F. COZZA, *La produzione ceramica veneta dal basso medioevo al rinascimento. Classi ceramiche, tipologie degli ornati e aspetti di cultura materiale*, *Manufatti* 1 (1989), 51-52, fig. 60; M. MUNARINI – D. BANZATO (eds.), *Ceramiche rinascimentali dei Musei Civici di Padova. Padova, Museo Civico di piazza del Santo, 11 dicembre 1993 – 30 aprile 1994*, Milan 1993, 156, no. 62. On the depictions of angels see, as well: APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 165.

139. HULME, *The History*, 105-106; E. A. CHRYSAFI, *Οι Άγγελοι ως μέλη της ουράνιας Αυλής στην τέχνη της πρώιμης και μέσης βυζαντινής περιόδου*, Thessaloniki: PhD





Figure 15: Bowl, immured in Agios Antonios, in Platanos (Rethymnon, Crete), *graffita rinascimentale canonica* (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, Πρώτη Θεώρηση, 523, fig. 6).

Its placement framing the entrance to this cave-church, to the left of the entrance, suggests that the pre-planned selection sought to awaken such a meaning in visitors and the congregation. As for the depictions of human figures (Fig. 16, Fig. 25), these –based on their rendering– might be linked to the laity, referencing the various persons responsible for such decorations<sup>140</sup>.



Figure 16: Dish, immured in Agios Antonios, in Platanos (Rethymnon, Crete), *graffita rinascimentale canonica* (photo: by the author).

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Dissertation, University of Thessaloniki 2014, 55-58, 86-92 (Available at: [http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/135170/files/CHRYSAFI\\_PHD\\_TEXT.pdf](http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/135170/files/CHRYSAFI_PHD_TEXT.pdf) [last accessed: 20.01.2022]).

140. On more related details, see the next section.

Turning to the identification of ornamental epigraphical themes on some of the *bacini* these include pots with abbreviated forms of sacred names or phrases<sup>141</sup> or at times more elaborate inscriptions. Two subgroups can be distinguished, both with painted inscriptions: the first using the Arabic script, the second bearing Gothic lettering.



Figure 17: Bowl, lustreware from the Iberian peninsula, immured in Panagia in Prinos (Rethymnon, Crete) (photo: by the author).

Examples of the first constitute a bowl at Panagia in Prinos in Crete (Fig. 17), two bowls in the Odigitria in Apolpena in Leukas, dating from the first half of the 15th c.<sup>142</sup>, and a dish at Panagia in Galipe in Crete, where the “al-afiya” theme runs in bands around the inside of the body below the rim. The examples of the blue and lustreware production of the Iberian peninsula bear the inscription “al-afiya” (meaning “mercy”, “happiness”, “good health”, etc.)<sup>143</sup>, which was quite common on these vessels. The latter

141. D. CARRU, Importations hispaniques à décor bleu et/ou lustré, in D. CARRU (ed.), *De l'Orient à la table du Pape. L'importation des céramiques dans la région d'Avignon au Moyen Age tardif (XIVe-XVIe siècles)* (Dossiers d'archéologie Vauclusienne), Cavaillon 1995, 55, 73, nos. 167-168; M. A. CASANOVAS, Ceramics in Domestic Life in Spain, in G. R. FARWELL – D. PIERCE – A. PLEGUEZUELO (eds.), trans. K. FITZGERALD, *Cerámica y Cultura, The Story of Spanish and Mexican Mayólica*, Albuquerque – New Mexico 2003, 56, fig. 2.8; X. DECTOT, Valence et ses environs, in *Reflets d'or. D'Orient en Occident. La céramique lustrée IXe-XVe siècle*, Paris 2008, 95, no. 65.

142. On these bowls: TSOURIS, *Ο κεραμοπλαστικός*, 103-104; TSOURIS, Glazed Bowls, 608-608, fig. 8, pl. V.

143. On “al-afiya,” see B. MARTÍNEZ CAVIRÓ, *La loza dorada*, Madrid 1982, 112; A. RAY, *Spanish Pottery 1248-1898 with a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London 2000, 401; J. ROSE ALBRECHT, Valence, in J. ROSE-ALBRECHT (ed.), *Le calife*,



two examples belong to the later form of the motif in use during the 15th c., in which the theme is rendered in a more condensed form<sup>144</sup>. Inscriptions with Gothic lettering are more common. In the case of Panagia in Gra Kera, part of a monastic complex, examples of the so-called “RMR Ware” bear in their centre the letter “n”, which could well be an indirect reference to the “Nativitas”, the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, given the church’s dedication to the Nativity of the Virgin Mary<sup>145</sup>. Moreover, a bowl immured in the katholikon of the monastery in Korakies<sup>146</sup> (Fig. 18), two dishes immured at the church of Kardiotissa and one large dish immured at the church of Zoodochos Pigi in Prina all bear the monogram “JHS”, an abbreviation of the Latin inscription: “J(esus) H(ominum) S(alvator)”, a common Christogram symbol for the Christian West, referencing Jesus<sup>147</sup>.



Figure 18: Bowl, lustreware from the Iberian peninsula, immured in the katholikon of the monastery in Korakies (Chania, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 104, fig. 91).

*le prince et le potier*, 80-81, inv. E 610, 100; L. TILLIARD, *La collection du musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon*, in J. ROSE-ALBRECHT (ed.), *Le calife le prince et le potier*, 266, inv. E 610.

144. For the later condensed form of this type of motif, see: A. DAULATLI, *Céramiques andalouses à reflets métalliques découvertes à la Kasbah de Tunis*, in *La céramique médiévale en Méditerranée occidentale, Xe-XVe siècles, Valbonne 11-14 Septembre 1978*, Paris 1980, 351 no. 35, pl. IV, 35; ROSE ALBRECHT, *Valence*, 80-81, inv. E 610; TILLIARD, *La collection*, 266, inv. E 610.

145. On this remark: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 80.

146. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 105.

147. On this symbol, see: HULME, *The History*, 51-52; *Post-Byzantium: The Greek Renaissance. 15th-18th Century Treasure from the Byzantine & Christian Museum*, Athens, Athens 2002, 84-85, no. 7 (K.-Ph. KALAFATI); M. BORBOUDAKIS (ed.), *Εικόνες της Κρητικής Τέχνης (Από τὸν Χάνδακα ὡς τὴν Μόσχα καὶ τὴν Ἁγία Πετρούπολη). Εἰσαγωγή Μανόλης Χατζηδάκης*, Herakleion 2004, 556-557, no. 206 (M. ACHEIMASTOU-POTAMIANOU); K.-Ph. KALAFATI, 171. JHS Icon, in A. DRANDAKI – D. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI – A. TOURTA (eds.), *Heaven & Earth. Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections*, Athens 2013, 322-324; VACCARO, *Symbols*, 143.

Placed above the entrance to these churches, although –given their rather limited size in comparison to the monuments’ dimensions– they could not be easily seen from below by the visitors, it can be suggested that they were selected on purpose by the patrons influenced by the inscriptions’ meaning and to mark the entrance to the House of the Lord. A bowl immured at the church of Panagia in the Arkoudia<sup>148</sup> cave belonging to the polychrome maiolica category and bearing in the centre stylized letters connected with a big cross that create the monogram of S. Bernardino of Siena<sup>149</sup>, probably also belongs to this group<sup>150</sup>.

Besides these abbreviated epigraphic elements, two large plates of the 15th c. immured in the church of Panagia Eleousa at Kitharida (Fig. 10) bear on the rim the longer inscription: “ave/ma/ria/gra<tia>/ple/na” [Hail Mary, full of grace] painted in blue in the Gothic script between frames covered with stylized vegetal motifs rendered in lustre. These are related to the “Ave Maria group” and form part of the repertory of Spanish lustreware<sup>151</sup>. The verse “Ave Maria gra<tia> plena” forms the beginning of the most common Catholic prayer to the Virgin Mary<sup>152</sup>. As has already been noted<sup>153</sup>, together with the “Pater Noster”, these two most popular Catholic prayers were and are included in many rosary books<sup>154</sup>; also, since the “Ave Maria group” of ceramics is linked with religious environments, perhaps these verses, which

148. On this bowl: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 83-84, fig. 57.

149. FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 109.

150. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 83-84, fig. 57, 204, no. CH.14.4.

151. E. CAMPS CAZORLA, *Cerámica Española (Nuevas Instalaciones)*, Madrid 1936, 32; RAY, *Spanish Pottery*, 316-317; ROSE-ALBRECHT, Valence, 88-89; TILLIARD, La collection, 236-237, inv. D 171-D 172.

152. U. BERLIÈRE, Angélique (Salutation), in A. VACANT – E. MANGENOT – E. AMANN (eds.), *DTC*, v. 1 (1), *Aaron – Angelus*, Paris 1923, 1273-1277; A. JANSSENS, Ave Maria, in A. BAUDRILLART – A. DE MEYER – E. VAN CAUWENBERGH (eds.), *DHGE*, v. 5, *Athéisme – Azzon*, Paris 1931, 995-996; S. J., H. THURSTON, Ave Maria, in M. VILLER – F. CAVALLERA – S. J., J. DE GUIBERT (eds.), *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique, Doctrine et Histoire*, v. 1, *AA – Byzance*, Paris 1937, 1161-1165; H. HENNIG, Ave Maria, in J. R. STRAYER (ed.), *DMA*, v. 2, *Augustinus Triumphus – Byzantine Literature*, New York 1983, 13-14.

153. A. G. YANGAKI, Ave Maria Gra[tia] Plena: A Spanish Lustreware Plate from the Church of Panagia Eleousa in Crete, *Θρησκευτικά* 38 (2008), 219-220.

154. BERLIÈRE, Angélique, 1274; THURSTON, Ave Maria, 1163-1164; HENNIG, Ave Maria, 13; R. E. REYNOLDS, Rosary, in J. R. STRAYER (ed.), *DMA*, v. 10, *Polemics-Scandinavia*, New York 1989, 530-531.

formed part of the well-known salutation and prayer, maintained on these ceramics their sacred meaning for most of their owners<sup>155</sup>. As a further argument that reinforces this view is the observation that a small bowl of the same ware bears the inscription “ma/ria” and is immured above the apse on the south nave at the church of Michael Archangel in Vlachiana (Fig. 19), signaling on the exterior the location which was normally in the interior dedicated to the representation of the Holy Virgin, i.e. in the conch of the apse.



Figure 19: Bowl, lustreware from the Iberian peninsula, immured in Michael Archangel, in Vlachiana (Herakleion, Crete), (photo: by the author).

Turning to the various geometrical motifs, several *bacini* exist which depict in their interior crosses, either covering the central part of the vessel, or placed in smaller medallions all around it. Characteristic cases are the bowls and large dishes embedded in the churches of Panagia in Kitharida (Fig. 20), of Panagia in Galipe, of Panagia at Gergeri, of Panagia at Arkoudia<sup>156</sup>, all in Crete. The cross is the main sign of the Christian faith and is dominant within the Byzantine culture and civilization<sup>157</sup>. This sign –so well-known and placed so boldly on the façades of these Cretan churches, here through the medium of clay vessels– certainly signified and declared the House of the Lord.

155. YANGAKI, Immured vessels in the church of Panagia Eleousa, 146.

156. On this published example: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 105-106, fig. 94.

157. On the general importance of the sign: HULME, *The History*, 73-75; A. FRUTIGER, *Signs and Symbols. Their Design and Meaning*, trans. A. BLUHM, New York – Scarborough 1989, 49-51; on its importance within the Byzantine sphere: VACCARO, *Symbols*, 143-144.



Figure 20: Large plate, lustreware from the Iberian peninsula, immured in Panagia Eleousa, in Kitharida (Herakleion, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 147, fig. 11).

In addition, in some of the immured examples various versions of a star are presented, either with six, seven or eight points (Fig. 21).



Figure 21: Bowl from South Crimea, immured in the church of Agios Nikolaos, in Lampiotes (Rethymnon, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *New Evidence on Imported Ceramics in the Aegean*, 436, fig. 16).



The star as a symbol implies the light, points out to both good and bad destinies. Various notions are enclosed in the star as a Christian symbol, since it either refers to the Holy Will or to Jesus, suggests divine guidance or favour, while it also represents the star of Bethlehem<sup>158</sup>. Stars in various forms decorate vessels in Agios Nikolaos in Lampiotes, Agia Kyriaki in Mesi, Panagia in Prinos (in Rethymnon), Panagia at Gergeri, Zoodochos Pigi in Chrysopigi monastery in Pyrgou, Panagia Kardiotissa, Panagia in Galipe (in Herakleion), Panagia at Arkoudia, Agia Paraskevi in Chora Sfakion, Agios Ioannis Prodromos in Palaia Roumata (in Chania), all in Crete<sup>159</sup>, and in the Dormition of the Virgin in Molyvdoskepastos in northwestern Greece<sup>160</sup>. These stars are mostly incised but some are also painted. In the first case they are either rendered by simple incised lines or with pairs of similar incisions that create angular motifs; these combine to form schematic stars; they may be made by the superimposition of two triangles. In the last form of the star, the theme of the hexagram can be recognized, which is a reference to the six-days of the Creation, also the connection between Earth and Sky<sup>161</sup>. In the case of the seven-pointed star, this may well indicate

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158. *La Grande Encyclopédie. Inventaire raisonné des sciences, des lettres et des arts*, v. 16, *Eole - Fanucci*, 676 (H. GOURDON DE GENOUILLAC); *Μεγάλη Ἑλληνική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία* v. 5 *Ἄντοχύρωσις - Ἀσυντόνιστος* (1928), entry: Ἀστέρες (P. I. BRATSIOTIS); *Θρησκευτική καὶ Χριστιανική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, v. 2, *Ἀπόστολος - Δῶρον* (1937), entry: Ἀστήρ; *Θρησκευτική καὶ Ἠθική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, v. 3, *Ἀπροσωποληψία - Βυζάντιον* (1963), entry: Ἀστήρ (M. Ch. GITAKOS); *Πάπυρος-Λαρούς. Γενική Παγκόσμιος Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, v. 9 (1963), entry: Ἀστήρ and v. 17 (1963), entry: Ἐξάγραμμα; Ὑδρία. *Ἑλληνική καὶ Παγκόσμια Μεγάλη Γενική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, v. 11, *Ἀρριδαῖος - Ἀττικῆς* (1980), entry: Ἀστήρ (I. RIZOPOULOS); Ὑδρία. *Ἑλληνική καὶ Παγκόσμια Μεγάλη Γενική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, v. 2, *Ἐλεάτις - Ἐπίδαυρος* (1987), entry: Ἐξάγραμμα (N. G. STATHOPOULOS); FRUTIGER, *Signs and Symbols*, 74-75; *ODB III* (1991), entry: Star (A. KAZHDAN - A. CUTLER); BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 173-174, 321-322; DENNYS-BRIAN - HODGSON - LOCKLEY, *Signs & Symbols*, 22, 288; NOZEDAR, *Element Encyclopedia*, entry: Star.

On related first remarks: A. G. YANGAKI, *New Evidence on Imported Ceramics in the Aegean: Islamic Pottery in the Byzantine Mesa Mani, Pottery from the Crimea in Venetian Crete*, *ΔΧΑΕ* per. Δ', 41 (2020), 439-440.

159. On these forms of incised stars and relevant details: YANGAKI, *New Evidence on Imported Ceramics in the Aegean*, 437-440.

160. TSOURIS, *Glazed Bowls*, 613, pl. VII, 3.

161. *Πάπυρος-Λαρούς. Γενική Παγκόσμιος Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, v. 17, entry: Ἐξάγραμμα; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 228 (on the symbolism of number

the “seven stars”, repeated in John’s Book of Revelation and considered as suggesting the bishops of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor<sup>162</sup>, or the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit<sup>163</sup>, while the eight-pointed star may symbolise purification, regeneration, with eight referencing Christ’s Resurrection<sup>164</sup>. Given that in almost all the cases the vessels adorn the main entrance to the church, the selection of the particular objects can hardly have been random but were possibly aimed at engendering the above connotations. Possibly related to the above symbolism are also the examples of vessels immured in Panagia in Prinos, Michael Archangel in Vlachiana, Panagia in Galipe and Panagia in Kitharida, all dating from the 15th c., where in the centre of the vessels are painted five, six or eight-petalled schematic rosettes (Fig. 27, left). Besides the particular symbolism attending the specific numbers, the eight-petalled rose refers to regeneration<sup>165</sup>, while the rose itself, depending on its colour, is a symbol of life and of death, of victory and of martyrdom<sup>166</sup>.

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six). On the *Hexaemeron* and the various commentaries and sermons: MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 4, 8, 51-53, 58, 66, 69, 93.

162. See particularly: *Μεγάλη Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, v. 5, *Ἀντοχύρωσις – Ἀσυντόνιστος*, entry: Ἀστέρες (P. I. BRATSIOTIS); *Θρησκευτικὴ καὶ Ἠθικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, v. 3, *Ἀπροσωποληψία – Βυζάντιον*, entry: Ἀστήρ (M. Ch. GITAKOS). On the Seven Churches of Asia, see, characteristically: W. M. RAMSAY, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse*, London 1904; C. J. HEMER, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting, with a new forward by D. E. Aune* (Eerdmans Biblical Resources Series), Michigan – Cambridge 2001<sup>3</sup>.

163. BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 101, 303; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 228.

164. APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 229.

165. According to the first chapter of the Gospel of *Luke* in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, it was on the eighth day that the neighbours and relatives visited Elizabeth, who miraculously gave birth at an old age, to see to the circumcision of her child: Luke 1, 57-59 (*The Holy Bible, New International Version* ®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide); on the five-petalled rose and the rose in general: FRUTIGER, *Signs and Symbols*, 254, no. 3; on the link with the eight-petalled rose: R. DE PINEDO, *El simbolismo en la escultura medieval Española, con 76 grabados en el texto, primera edición*, Madrid – Barcelona 1930, 30-31.

166. On the various connotations of the rose, which if red refers to the blood of Jesus: FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 37; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 289; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 200.

In addition, the motif of three interlocking circles, incised in the main part of a ceramic of the 15th c. immured in Panagia in Prinos (Fig. 22, Fig. 23, a), known as the “Borromean rings”<sup>167</sup>, could have meant for those responsible an indirect reference to the Holy Trinity, that is, to the three divine “Persons” of God, to the Trinitarian doctrine<sup>168</sup>.



Figure 22: Large dish, immured in Panagia in Prinos (Rethymnon, Crete) (photo: by the author).

167. R. J. SCHOECK, Mathematics and the Languages of Literary Criticism, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26, 3 (1968), 370-371; NOZEDAR, *Element Encyclopedia*, entry: Tripod of Life. On the immured vessels in the church of Panagia in Prinos, see in detail: A. G. YANGAKI, Τα εντοιχισμένα αγγεία στον ναό της Παναγίας στον Πρίνο Μυλοποτάμου (Κρήτη), in T. KIOUSOPOULOU – V. FOSKOLOU (eds.), *Μελέτες προς τιμή της καθηγήτριας Όλγας Γκράτζιου* (under publication, School of Philosophy, University of Crete and Crete University Press).

168. NOZEDAR, *Element Encyclopedia*, entry: Tripod of Life. For the Holy Trinity: Θρησκευτική καὶ Ἠθική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία, v. 11, *Σβάϊτσερ – Φυλακτήριον* (1967), entry: Τριῶς, Ἁγία (G. D. METALLINOS); DMA 12 *Thaddeus Legend – Zwact'Noc'* (1989), entry: Trinity (K. B. OSBORNE); ODB III (1991), entry: Trinity (K.-H. UTHERMANN); *The Encyclopedia of Christianity 5 Si-Z* (2008), entry: Trinity (P. A. ROLNICK – J. F. HOFFMEYER); S. J. BAWULSKI – S. R. HOLMES, *Christian Theology. The Classics*. Oxon – New York 2014, 54-60, 279; *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, v. 15, entry: The Blessed Trinity (G. JOYCE) (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15047a.htm> [last accessed: 02.04.2019]).

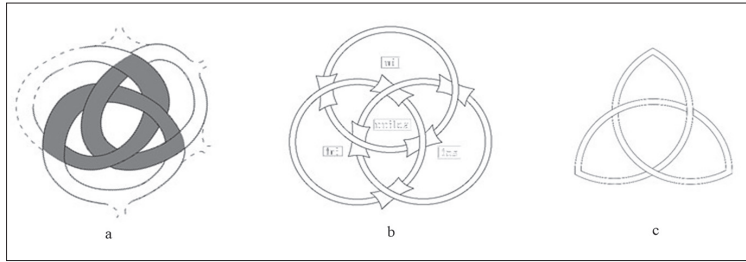


Figure 23: a. Schematic drawing of the central incised motif of the vessel in figure 22 (drawing: D. Tagmatarchi); b. Schematic rendering of the theme of the three interlocking circles referencing the Holy Trinity (based on: Didron, *Christian Iconography*, 46, fig. 139; schematic drawing from the prototype D. Tagmatarchi); c. Schematic drawing of the *triquetra* theme (drawing: D. Tagmatarchi).

The motif is considered as a sign of God, anyway<sup>169</sup>. This symbol appears earlier in the same form, in a medieval manuscript, where it is accompanied with the word “TRI-NI-TAS” (Fig. 23, b), a syllable placed in each one of the circles and with the word “UNITAS” at the intersection of the three circles<sup>170</sup>. The words “PATER”, “FILIUS”, “SPIRITUS SANCTUS” in connection with the symbol *Scutum Fidei* may also appear within these circles instead of the previous words. In these cases, the phrase “VITA DEUS” occurs in the central part of the formation, recalling the Triune God<sup>171</sup>, referring to the Holy Trinity<sup>172</sup>. In the Catholic Church the trope *Trinitas, unitas, deitas* forms part of the mass<sup>173</sup>. Within the same representation, one may even remark that a second symbol arises from the intersection of these circles, namely that of the *triquetra* (Fig. 23, c), an equilateral triangular formation

169. FRUTIGER, *Signs and Symbols*, 47-49.

170. DIDRON, *Iconographie chrétienne*, 544-545, fig. 139; A. N. DIDRON, *Christian Iconography; or, The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, trans. M. STOKES, London 1907, 45-46, fig. 139.

171. DIDRON, *Iconographie chrétienne*, 545; Didron, *Christian Iconography*, 46; DENNIS-BRIAN – HODGSON – LOCKLEY, *Signs & Symbols*, 285.

172. DIDRON, *Iconographie chrétienne*, 544-545; DIDRON, *Christian Iconography*, 45-46; NOZEDAR, *Element Encyclopedia*, entry: Tripod of Life.

173. K. SCHLAGER, *Trinitas, Unitas, Deitas – A Trope For the Sanctus of Mass*, *Journal of the Plainsong and Mediaeval Music Society* 6 (1983), 8-14; D. HILEY, *Western Plainchant. A Handbook*, Oxford – New York 1993, 209; M. NORTON, *Liturgical Drama and the Reimagining of Medieval Theater*. Kalamazoo 2017, 30, 48, note 57.



with curved double sides, constituting also a Christian symbol referencing the Holy Trinity<sup>174</sup>. Furthermore, both in Agioi Theodoroi in Athens, in the 11th c., and in the katholikon of Chalepa, in the 15th c., the main interior of two vessels is covered (either painted in lustre or incised) with three main petals that intersect, filled in with schematic foliage<sup>175</sup>. It cannot remain unnoticed that here too the main formation recalls the previous formation, the Trinitarian knot<sup>176</sup>, referring to the Holy Trinity.

Ceramics with the previous representations incorporated in the walls of churches should be interpreted as communicating messages to the viewer. From this perspective, even other simpler geometric forms, such as a series of concentric circles, found in the so-called “Late Sgraffito Ware/Sgraffito with Concentric Circles” and commonly immured during the 13th and the 14th c. in churches of the Peloponnese and of Crete, may be making an indirect reference to heaven, the circle being well-known for this symbolism<sup>177</sup>, the circle being considered as God’s emblem, representing God’s original creation, the heavenly sphere, and also referring to eternity (a circle having no end) and perfection<sup>178</sup>.

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174. On more related details: NOZEDAR, *Element Encyclopedia*, entry: Triquetra and entry: Triskele; F. KIZAKIS, *Sacred Symbols. Religious Symbolology*, n.p. 2017, 14-15; <http://symboldictionary.net/?p=159> (last accessed: 30.03.2019). On the number 3: *Θρησκευτική καὶ Ἡθική Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια*, v. 11, *Σβάϊτσερ – Φυλακτήριο* (1967), entry: Τρεῖς (G. K. SPYRIDAKIS); DENNY-S-BRIAN – HODGSON – LOCKLEY, *Signs & Symbols*, 294; NOZEDAR, *Element Encyclopedia*, entry: Three. On the depiction of an equilateral triangular formation with curved double sides incised in Italian ceramics of the 16th c. see: O. MAZZUCATO, Una particolare ceramica veneziana cinquecentesca, *Bolletino d’Arte* 83 (1994), 49, 51, fig. 12, pl. II, d.

175. MEGAW, *Glazed Bowls*, 146, note 4; NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Ἐντοιχισμένα κεραμικά, I-II.*, 21-23, figs. 13-15; KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, *Τὰ Κεραμικά*, 70, fig. 116.

176. On this symbol, see in detail above, note 174.

177. VACCARO, *Symbols*, 144.

178. DIDRON, *Iconographie chrétienne*, 203, 544, also referencing the globe; MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 12; FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 153; FRUTIGER, *Signs and Symbols*, 47-49; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 70-71; STEMPEL, *The Secret Language*, 137, 213; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 230. It is of significance also to note, as Maguire stresses, that according to John of Gaza (6th c. AD) the three concentric circles depicted on a painting of his city should be viewed as representing the Trinity (MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 12).

Finally, besides these geometric motifs appears also rich vegetal and floral decoration, again mostly in vessels dating from the 14th c. onwards. Scrolling floral designs or stylized vegetal motifs occur quite often on the *bacini* in Crete. They mostly characterize the richly decorated vessels with painted designs, either Italian maiolica or lustrewares from the Iberian peninsula. In the former they may constitute the central form of decoration while in the latter they usually form the background to other main motifs. The multi-faceted aspects of botanical symbolism have been generally acknowledged and characterize several cultures<sup>179</sup>. Some floral or plant forms have a distinctive Christian character, such as the vine or the ivy<sup>180</sup>. In Renaissance paintings floral, plant and vegetable themes enclosed specific and quite characteristic symbolisms, in some cases referring to passages from the Scriptures<sup>181</sup>. When depicted in churches, nature-derived imagery tends to have several symbolisms<sup>182</sup>. In fact similar depictions were to be found in the interior decoration of the ecclesiastical monuments, placed around the main painted iconographic programme<sup>183</sup>. But what about the building's exterior? In a few cases, plaques carved with vines around a doorframe may decorate their exterior, such as in the case of Panagia in Merbaka, of the 13th c.<sup>184</sup>. But this is not often so and the brickwork decoration usually

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179. See characteristically, with an emphasis in Byzantine culture: MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, sporadically; ODB III (1991), entry: Symbols (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER); MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*; Ch. LOCKWOOD, Sacred Tree, Fruit of Immortality. A Brief Introduction to Religious Floral Symbolism / Pema e Shenjtë, Fryti i Pavdekësisë. Një Hyrje e Shpejtë në Simbolikën Florale Fetare, in K. GIAKOURIS (ed.), *Flora in Arts and Artefacts of the Korça Region (Twelfth Century B.C. to Twentieth Century A.D.) / Bimësia në arte dhe artefakte të rajonit të Korçës (Shek. XII para Kr. - Shek. XX p.Kr.)*, Tirana 2018, 21-38; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 193-195.

180. On the symbolism of the vine or the ivy: FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 33, 39; MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 35-36; NOZEDAR, *Element Encyclopedia*, entry: Ivy; ODB III (1991), entry: Vineyard (J. W. NESBITT – A. KAZHDAN); BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 186-187; LOCKWOOD, Sacred Tree, 28-30; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 205-206.

181. See, in detail: M. LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Garden of the Renaissance. Botanical Symbolism in Italian Painting* (Arte e Archeologia, Studi e Documenti 10), Florence 1977, *passim*.

182. MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 4, 11-173, sporadically; LOCKWOOD, Sacred Tree, 39.

183. See the previous note and particularly, regarding the posticonoclastic decoration of the churches: MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 4, 88-92, 98-105, 120-133.

184. For the related example: BOURAS - BOURA, *Ἡ Ἑλλαδικὴ ναοδομία*, 334, fig. 387.

consists of geometric designs. Could it be then that in the incorporation of richly decorated clay vessels with vegetal or floral decoration one should see the intention by those responsible for these compositions to create a similar effect as that usually found in the church's interior? Even if such decorations, being so commonly present and in a subordinate role, would almost go unnoticed by the congregation, given the much more importance assigned to the religious iconography of the wall-paintings. As said, in the vessels usually this decoration is subordinate too to other themes which form the main subject of the decoration. Various symbolisms may be looked for in the latter, as previously analysed. In few cases vegetal decoration forms the sole theme on a vessel. In such cases I believe that the selection of the vessels was deliberate: the ceramics being seen as a medium, as a canvas if you like, through which not only the main theme but also ancillary ones were depicted to transfer a message to those approaching such monuments. A transference was achieved: the exterior expressing in a condensed vocabulary some of the religious messages deployed in more detail in the church's interior. Richly painted fern leaves, as such depicted in some of the vessels immured in Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida<sup>185</sup>, symbolize the Salvation, referring to humility and sincerity<sup>186</sup>. Ivy leaves refer to death and immortality, being symbols of fidelity and eternal life<sup>187</sup>. The representation of parsley leaves on vessels from the Iberian peninsula (Fig. 24) –parsley being a symbol of victory– may well be confused as to their rendering with vine leaves, the vine symbolizing the True Vine, the Cross of Christ and the Virgin Mary, being also a symbolic icon of the Church, expressing the relation between God and His people<sup>188</sup>.

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185. On these vessels: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 146-147, fig. 11, fig. 12.

186. FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 30; LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Garden of the Renaissance*, 133-134; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 205.

187. FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 33; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 186-187; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 205.

188. Μεγάλη Ελληνική Εγκυκλοπαιδεία, v. 4, Άλλοδαπός - Άντοχή, entry: Άμπελος, 341; MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 35-36; FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 39-40; LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Garden of the Renaissance*, 392-397; ODB III (1991), entry: Vineyard (J. W. NESBITT - A. KAZHDAN); MAGUIRE, *Nectar and Illusion*, 100; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 206.



Figure 24: Dish, lustreware from the Iberian peninsula with vegetal decoration, immured in Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida (Herakleion, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 148, fig. 13).

Various flowers and blossoms refer to young life, are symbols of vitality over death<sup>189</sup>: indeed numerous flowers do decorate the vessels' interiors, mostly in products of the Iberian peninsula but also in those from Italy. And in some of the vessels bearing incised decoration and dating from the 15th c., like the dish immured in the church of Christ the Saviour in Georgitsi, at Chora Sfakion, the bowl immured in Agios Nikolaos in Maza and the two bowls immured in the katholikon of the Chalepa monastery (Fig. 25), all located in Crete, the main medallion has its background filled with a schematic representation of the so-called "*hortus conclusus*"<sup>190</sup>, the enclosed garden, framed with a fence, as seen depicted in various other forms of art<sup>191</sup>.

189. BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 135; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 196-200.

190. On the representation of the enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*) in pottery, see: CONTON, *Le antiche*, 78; C. RAVANELLI-GUIDOTTI, *Musei Civici de Imola. Le Ceramiche. Catalogo delle raccolte*, Imola 1991, 106, 162; MAZZUCATO, *Una particolare ceramica veneziana cinquecentesca*, 48-49; M. MICHAÏLIDOU, *Ανδρικές και γυναικείες μορφές σε μεσαιωνικά αγγεία της Ρόδου*, ΑΔ 49-50 Α (1994-1995), 202-203 (with bibliography); YANGAKI, *Εφυσιασμένη κεραμική*, 124 with note 56 (with bibliography); on the examples from Georgitsi and Maza: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 94-95, fig. 73, fig. 75, 280, no. 13; on the one example from Chalepa: N. PYRROU – K. GIAPITSOGLOU, *Ναοί με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία στον νομό Ρεθύμνου[ν]*, in *Proceedings of the 12th International Congress of Cretan Studies, Heraklion 21-25.9.2016*, Herakleion, 3-4 (Accessible at: <https://12iccs.proceedings.gr/en/proceedings/category/39/36/870> [last accessed: 29.11.2019]); YANGAKI, *The Immured Vessels*, 11, fig. 16.

191. For one of the numerous examples: STEMP, *The Secret Language*, 80-81.



Figure 25: Bowl, immured in the katholikon of Chalepa monastery (Rethymnon, Crete), *graffita rinascimentale canonica* (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *The Immured Vessels*, 11, fig. 16).

That depiction, popular from the early medieval period, refers to the Virgin Mary<sup>192</sup> and recalls the Garden of Eden, as presented in the Book of Genesis, and is drawn as enclosed by walls with rich vegetation and water within, all symbolizing virginity, a state of perfection<sup>193</sup>. It has been suggested that this motif may even reference the monastic garden, through the connotations it carries, thus becoming an allegory of the monastery or the church itself<sup>194</sup>. When placed so boldly on the churches walls, these depictions, combined with the human figures that constitute one of the main themes of such vessels<sup>195</sup>, are not simply selected for the richness of their decoration, but rather speak of specific choices aimed at transmitting multi-layered messages.

Even the very colours of the vessels selected to be immured in the churches may carry significance. While the earliest vessels of the 11th c. are brightly coloured polychrome wares in combinations of green and

192. APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 196.

193. LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Garden of the Renaissance*, 176-178, 382; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 149; BATTISTINI, *Symbols and allegories in art*, 248, 252-253; V. LARSON, A Rose Blooms in the Winter: The Tradition of the *Hortus Conclusus* and its Significance as a Devotional Emblem, *Dialog, A Journal of Theology* 52 (2013), 303-312.

194. On this view: LARSON, A Rose Blooms in the Winter, 305-306, 309.

195. On the human figures and a possible interpretation, see below, section no. 5.



yellowish-brown, during the 12th and the 13th c., given the preferred use of Byzantine ceramics, it is green and yellow that prevail, combined with incised decoration. From the 13th c. onwards, with the influx of various wares from western Mediterranean (mainly the Italian but also the Iberian peninsula) as well as from the Golden Horde area and the Near East, red, orange, different tones of green and blue, lustre and white (as expressed through the white background of the main decoration, more intense in Italian maiolica) enter the scene. When different wares were used in the same monument, through their variety of colours they created a rather bold effect. By careful observation of these choices, it seems, however, that a pattern emerges for the *bacini* decorations in Crete. There, three groups stand out: in several monuments of the late 14th c. or the early 15th c. a preference for the decoration through the incorporation of vessels of the “RMR Ware” (“Lead Glazed Polychrome Ware”) is clear<sup>196</sup>. Among their various examples, the most characteristic group consists of bowls painted in red, green and brown-black on a whitish-yellowish background, having as main motif that of coloured concentric circles (Fig. 26). Within the 15th c. a



Figure 26: *Bacini* assemblage consisting of bowls of the polychrome glazed pottery (“RMR Ware”), immured in Agios Antonios, in Angeliana (Rethymnon, Crete) (photo: by the author).

196. On the first identification of this group: A. G. YANGAKI – N. PYRROU, Εντοιχισμένα αγγεία και εργαστήρια ζωγράφων: Μία περίπτωση αμφίδρομης σχέσης, in 12ο Διεθνές Κρητολογικό Συνέδριο, Ηράκλειο 21-25.9.2016. Τεύχος περιλήψεων, Herakleion 2016, 414.

number of other monuments, mostly but not exclusively in the regional unit of Herakleion, are decorated with Spanish lustreware, where rich blue and lustre decoration covers a white background. Next, in the 15th and the 16th c. occur Italian maiolica with rich blue or polychrome decoration on a white background.

In the case of *bacini* of the “Lead Glazed Polychrome Ware” with the specific geometric decoration, they are usually placed on the east or the west side of the monuments. Besides rare cases where they form part of an assemblage consisting of a variety of wares, emphasis is here given to those five assemblages where either the former are embedded in arrangements of their own or usually in combination with monochrome vessels<sup>197</sup>. In these cases, they are not combined with other imported wares, such as those from the Iberian peninsula<sup>198</sup>, and preference for the concentric circles (which is linked to the so-called “motif of Taranto”)<sup>199</sup>, holds good.

In addition, in monuments mostly of the first half of the 15th c. the *bacini* assemblage –when comprising vessels with decoration and not monochrome glazed waves– either consists only of wares from the Iberian peninsula or comprises their combination with several other imported wares. As a rule it is the former that triumphs and in all cases they bear rich decoration. One may explain the latter selection only in terms of the intention to create a more intense visual impact on the viewer. The cost of such quality products also played a role: donors preferred such ‘precious’ clay objects to embellish these significant monuments<sup>200</sup>. There may be yet an additional avenue to be

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197. Vessels of the “RMR Ware” with this specific decoration in arrangements of their own or in combination with monochrome vessels are found in five monuments: Agios Athanasios in Kefali in Chania (there embedded with an additional vessel of the same ware but bearing different decoration), Dormition of the Virgin in Garipas, Agios Antonios in Angeliana, Agios Georgios in Fourfouras in Rethymnon and Panagia in Anatoli in Lasithi.

198. Two examples of “RMR Ware” –however not decorated with concentric circles, but bearing different motifs– immured together with numerous Spanish lustrewares in Panagia in Kitharida in Crete, constitute an exception; on their association with the lustrewares, see: YANGAKI, Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa, 142-159.

199. On this motif, see in detail: D. DUFOURNIER – A.-M. FLAMBARD – G. NOYÉ, À propos de céramique ‘RMR’: problèmes de définition et de classement, problèmes de répartition, in *La ceramica medievale nel mediterraneo occidentale, Siena 8-12 ottobre 1984, Faenza 13 ottobre 1984*, Florence 1986, 265, fig. 5, 1 – TM. 2 – S. 3 – TM. 4 – TM, 272.

200. See for representative examples: G. D. R. SANDERS, New Relative and Absolute

explored, particularly remembering there were also other imported wares circulating on the island in the 14th and the 15th c. but that these are not used commonly as *bacini* either in grouped compositions or comprising several examples within a single assemblage.

The symbolism of colours is not a new concept, since colours have long conveyed meanings in various cultures. In the case of the Christian tradition, colours expressed symbolically a number of qualities; in monumental painting in particular several related conventions were followed<sup>201</sup>, with the dictates of Byzantine art putting emphasis on the role of colours in defining specific forms<sup>202</sup>. On the other hand, in Byzantium colours were linked both to “aspects of Byzantine political and religious ideology”<sup>203</sup>. Here, as it will be shown, and based on the coloured vessels’ religious context, emphasis is given to the colours’ possible spiritual/sacred connotations. White is considered as the colour that combines all virtues, either with reference to innocence or purity and truth: as such the Holy Spirit is represented as a white dove<sup>204</sup>.

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Chronologies for 9th to 13th Century Glazed Wares at Corinth: Methodology and Social Conclusions, in K. BELKE – F. HILD – J. KODER – P. SOUSTAL (eds.), *Byzanz als Raum. Zu Methoden und Inhalten der historischen Geographie des östlichen Mittelmeerraumes* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für die Tabula Imperii Byzantini 7), Vienna 2000, 167-168, 170-173; M. SPALLANZANI, *Maioliche Hispano-moresche a Firenze nel Rinascimento*, Florence 2006, 151-166.

201. JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 35; O. DEMUS, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration. Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium*, London 1948, 37 and p. 90 with note 61; O. J. LINDSAY, Some Remarks on the colour system of Medieval Byzantine Painting, *JÖB* 32 (1982), 85-91; *ODB* I (1991), entry: Color (A. CUTLER); L. JAMES, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art*, Oxford 1996, 62-68, 91-109; STEMPEL, *The Secret Language*, 44; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 219. On the recognition of hidden symbolism in the choice of colours in today’s Greek-Orthodox Church, see as an example: G. PAPANTONIOU – A. K. VIONIS, Popular Religion and Material Responses to Pandemic: The Christian Cult of the Epitaphios during the COVID-19 Crisis in Greece and Cyprus, *Ethnoarchaeology, Journal of Archaeological, Ethnographic and Experimental Studies* 12 (2020), 94.

202. JAMES, *Light and Colour*, 101-102 (with bibliography).

203. E. PANOU, The Colours Sylvester Syropoulos Saw: The Ideological Function of Colour in Byzantine Historiography and Chronicles (Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centuries), in F. KONDYLI – V. ANDRIOPOULOU – E. PANOU – M. B. CUNNINGHAM (eds.), *Sylvester Syropoulos on Politics and Culture in the Fifteenth-Century Mediterranean. Themes and Problems in the Memoirs, Section IV* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies 16), Surrey – Burlington 2014, 175.

204. DIDRON, *Iconographie chrétienne*, 449; JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 35;



Gold (yellow)<sup>205</sup>, as the primary precious substance that never loses its lustre and its linkage with the sun, references the divine and pure light, embodies the spiritual world, while it also symbolizes dignity, worldly wealth and generosity in heraldry<sup>206</sup>. Blue refers to heaven, the truth and the eternity of God, spiritual love, a symbol of human immortality<sup>207</sup>. Red expresses, besides imperial authority and power, divine and unconditional love, is the colour of martyrdom, and represents charity<sup>208</sup>. Green is the colour of hope and of victory, of the expectation of resurrection<sup>209</sup>. For the Byzantines, it has been suggested, based on the information from the written sources, that an ideological meaning is to be sought behind specific colour choices<sup>210</sup>. Although it has been stated that in Byzantium symbolism in colour did not however have the organized form it does in the medieval West<sup>211</sup>, yet for

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ODB II (1991), entry: Holy Spirit (K.-H. UTHEMANN); BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 380; JAMES, *Light and Colour* 123; R. OSBORNE, *Renaissance Colour Symbolism*, North Carolina 2019, 21-22, 65, 89, 102, 213; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 189-190, 221.

205. On the substitution, sometimes, of gold with yellow, see: JAMES, *Light and Colour*, 107.

206. G. CLARK, *Symbols of excellence. Precious materials as expressions of status*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne 1986, 50-52; see also: JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 36; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 154-155; JAMES, *Light and Colour*, 107; OSBORNE, *Renaissance Colour Symbolism*, 89, 191, 213; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 220.

207. JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 36; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 44; JAMES, *Light and Colour*, 104-105; OSBORNE, *Renaissance Colour Symbolism*, 70, 213; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 220.

208. JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 35-36; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 281-282; JAMES, *Light and Colour*, 104-105; PANOU, The Colours Sylvester Syropoulos Saw, 176-179 (for red) (see also for scarlet and purple at p. 179-181); OSBORNE, *Renaissance Colour Symbolism*, 67, 89, 213; Ei. PANOU, Colour in Byzantine Historiography (13th-15th Centuries), *ByzSym* 29 (2019), 199-203 and 203-209 (for related words); APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 220.

209. JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 36; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 158; OSBORNE, *Renaissance Colour Symbolism*, 68, 213; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 220.

210. On the use of colour in Byzantium see: JAMES, *Light and Colour*, in toto and also at p. 122-123.

211. JAMES, *Light and Colour*, 102-105, 122-123.

the late-Byzantine period cases from Byzantine historiography suggest that additional layers of messages were embedded into colours and their words, to be deciphered by an intellectually nimble audience<sup>212</sup>. In the West, as early as the 12th c. the hierarchy of armorial tinctures has been established, since colours were thought to convey meanings and symbolic interpretations<sup>213</sup>. This approach was analysed in detail later in the work of Jean Courtois in the early 15th c., and further developed and commented by others later on<sup>214</sup>. All the previous mentioned colours form part of the seven armorial tinctures which during the Renaissance were considered to correspond to what is known as the seven virtues. The latter comprise the four virtues of mind and character as expressed in Christian theology, with the three theological virtues associated with salvation: Thomas Aquinas offered the philosophical and theological underpinning for these categorizations of virtue<sup>215</sup>. Of these seven principal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude,

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212. On the whole evidence and argumentation, see in detail: PANOU, *The Colours* Sylvester Syropoulos Saw, 175-184; PANOU, *Colour in Byzantine Historiography*, 195-230 with p. 227-229.

213. E. C. ELLIOTT, *On the Understanding of Color in Painting*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16 (1958), 453-454; J. S. ACKERMAN, *On Early Renaissance Color Theory and Practice*, *Studies in Italian Art History 1: Studies in Italian Art and Architecture 15th through 18th Centuries*, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 35 (1980), 23; STEMP, *The Secret Language*, 44, 46; OSBORNE, *Renaissance Colour Symbolism*, 1-5, 84.

214. On the whole evidence, see: OSBORNE, *Renaissance Colour Symbolism*, 1-10, 76, 84.

215. On the 'cardinal' and the 'theological' virtues see in general: R. E. HOUSER, *The Cardinal Virtues: Aquinas, Albert and Philip the Chancellor*, Toronto 2004; W. C. MATTISON III, *Thomas's Categorizations of Virtue: Historical Background and Contemporary Significance*, *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 74 (2010), 189, note 2, 190 with note 4, 191 with note 5, 196-198, 205-210, 212-213 with note 75, 215-217 (with relevant bibliography); STEMP, *The Secret Language*, 44, 110-111; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 229. Regarding the theological virtues, although the predecessors of Thomas Aquinas offered the base for the three main categorizations of virtue, it was his work that offered a synthesis of these categorizations; in general: R. J. STAUDT, *Religion as Virtue: Thomas Aquinas on Worship through Justice, Law and Charity*, Ave Maria University 2008; MATTISON, *Thomas's Categorizations of Virtue*, 189-235 and particularly 213-229; Ch. ROBERTSON, *Seventeenth-Century Catholic Reception outside the De Auxiliis controversy*, in M. LEVERING – M. PLESTED (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, Oxford 2021, 288.

temperance and faith, hope and charity, respectively), gold corresponds to faith, white or silver to hope, red to charity, blue to justice, green to fortitude and black to prudence<sup>216</sup>. According to the selection of each patron, several virtues could be depicted in Italian monuments of the Renaissance, among which funerary ones<sup>217</sup>. From the previous perspective, and referencing monuments in Venetian Crete, a place where at that period the Latins (Venetians) interacted with the local population<sup>218</sup>, bowls with bands of red, green and brownish-black on a yellowish background (Fig. 26, Fig. 28), especially since their main theme are circles (see above), makes one wonder if behind their choice lay such symbolism, referencing here faith, charity, fortitude and prudence. And the particular choice of the glazed fine wares from the Iberian peninsula decorated on a fine white background with dark blue themes and motifs rendered in lustre which, by its nature and colour references gold, may also –and particularly if one takes into consideration the specific motifs rendered in these colours (see above)– connote faith, hope and justice. The selection of lustrewares to be embedded into the façades of Christian monuments occurred as early as the third quarter of the 11th and the 12th c., based on examples from Agioi Theodoroi in Athens and Agia Varvara in Erimos. The selection of these vessels that through their colour and reflections recall that of gold may be linked to the symbolism that the gold colour had for the Byzantine artist, its use in mosaics being the most characteristic<sup>219</sup>.

Further, the scenography created in some of the Cretan churches of the 15th c. –not merely through specific arrangements but and mostly through the combined use of the selected motifs and their colours– conveys multi-levelled messages on the part of their patrons. In those monuments, the exterior walls formed sort of a background, where specific pre-planned

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216. On all the above and the relevant correspondence to colours, see in detail: OSBORNE, *Renaissance Colour Symbolism* 85-86 (Table), 175-176, 213.

217. On this argumentation and respective examples, see representatively: STEMPEL, *The Secret Language*, 110-112 with figures.

218. See also below, with note 253, too.

219. For the various related views, see, in a condensed way, the remarks in A. ΙΟΑΝΝΙΔΗΣ, Ο συμβολισμός του χρυσού φόντου στα βυζαντινά ψηφιδωτά, *Αρχαιολογία* 1 (1981), 41-45; JAMES, *Light and Colour*, 107; A. ΛΟΥΚΑΚΙ, *Μεσογειακή Πολιτιστική Γεωγραφία και Αισθητική της Ανάπτυξης, Η Περίπτωση του Ρεθύμνου*, Athens 2009, 71-75.

ceramic decoration was inserted, echoing the iconographic programme achieved in the monuments' interior and painted decoration. They were intended to attract the attention of the alert and devout visitor. Besides the first two non-utilitarian types of "use" (the decorative and the symbolic), a third type operated, conveying to them in an original form a polyvalent message, involving theological meanings. Two very illustrative examples of the last point are the *bacini* decorations of the narthex in the church of Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida<sup>220</sup> and that on the façades of the church of Archangel Michael in Vlachiana, both dating around the middle of the 15th c.<sup>221</sup>.

In the first case, there exists a religious symbolic meaning referring to the Passion (and Crucifixion) of the Christ and to the Atonement, as expressed from verses from the Catholic prayer "Ave Maria", that is intended, in combination with the representations of two birds and a possible reference to the *Agnus Dei*, to prepare the visitor on entering the House of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The two vessels with the coat-of-arms and the woman linked to the cupbearer theme denote ownership and pride on the

220. For details, see: YANGAKI, Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa.

221. On the church in Vlachiana: G. GEROLA, *Monumenti Veneti nell' isola di Creta*, v. IV, Venice 1932-1940, 505, no. 11; G. GEROLA (trans. K. LASSITHIOTAKIS), *Τοπογραφικός κατάλογος τῶν τοιχογραφημένων ἐκκλησιῶν τῆς Κρήτης*, Herakleion 1961, 71, no. 436; E. BORBOUDAKIS, *Η τέχνη κατά τη Βενετοκρατία*, in N. PANAGIOTAKES (†) (ed.), *Κρήτη Ιστορία και Πολιτισμός*, v. B', Crete 1988, 258; G. GEROLA (trans. St. SPANAKIS), *Βενετικά Μνημεία της Κρήτης (Εκκλησίες)*, Herakleion 1993, 200, note 412, 203, note 419, 255, note 479, 273, 280-281, note 489, 283, note 493, 300, note 507, 307, note 519; A. MYLOPOTAMITAKI, *Βυζαντινά & Μεταβυζαντινά Μνημεία της επαρχίας Μαλεβιζίου*, in N. PSILAKIS (ed.), *Το Μαλεβίζι από τα προϊστορικά χρόνια ως σήμερα*, n.p. 1998, 139; E. BORBOUDAKIS, *Θυρώματα και παράθυρα σε εκκλησίες της Κρήτης (τέλος 14ου-μέσα 15ου αιώνα)*, in O. GRATZIOU (ed.), *Γλυπτική και Λιθοξοική στη Λατινική Ανατολή 13ος - 17ος αιώνας*, Herakleion 2007, 84-86, figs. 39-42; GRATZIOU, *Η Κρήτη*, 150, 172-173, fig. 57, 78, 122, 181-182; M. ANDRIANAKIS - K. GIAPITSOGLU, *Χριστιανικά μνημεία της Κρήτης*, Rethymnon 2012, 95; *Εκκλησία του Μιχαήλ Αρχαγγέλου κοντά στην Αυγενική*: <https://explore.cure-project.gr/routes/view/609925ec7958c9001862d715/point/60991b187958c9001862d6ab> (last accessed: 13.01.2022). A third characteristic example is the *bacini* assemblage immured in the church of Panagia in Prinos, in Rethymon; on this assemblage, see in detail: YANGAKI, *Τα εντοιχισμένα αγγεία στον ναό της Παναγίας στον Πρίνο Μυλοποτάμου*.

part of a specific elite, a noble class<sup>222</sup>, members of which may lay behind the selection of this particular decoration. The combination of both has led to the suggestion that at a third and more subliminal level they may carry a hidden theological message, reflecting their patron's support for the newly-established unity –the Union of the Churches– under which a new vision was being promulgated for a new era in the relations between the two main competing Christian denominations on Crete<sup>223</sup>.

In the case of the church in Vlachiana, next to the original (north) nave a south nave and an extension to the west were added. The renovation is mentioned in an inscription of 1447, where the donors, a priest and members of his family, are mentioned<sup>224</sup>. Several vessels of the Spanish lustreware decorate the north (Fig. 27), the west and the east façades of the monument.



Figure 27: *Bacini* assemblage, immured above the north entrance, Michael Archangel, in Vlachiana (Herakleion, Crete) (photo: by the author).

222. On these depictions, see in detail below.

223. For more details upon this view: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 158-159.

224. On this donor and the inscription: GEROLA, *Monumenti Veneti*, IV, 504-505, no. 11; Εκκλησία του Μιχαήλ Αρχαγγέλου κοντά στην Αυγενική [as in p. 221].

It cannot be coincidental that above the north entrance, on the extension to the initial nave, allegedly dedicated to the Holy Spirit, one remarks a vessel bearing the depiction of a bird turned towards its right (Fig. 9, Fig. 27, top). Neither can it be random chance that led to the selection to immure lustrewares bearing the schematic theme of crowns (Fig. 27, top and bottom), given the symbolisms contained in the latter. In Christian iconography the crown is associated with the Lord and His majesty, symbolizes immortality and eternity, marks victory and is attributed to the Virgin Mary or the martyrs, who attained the highest level of existence<sup>225</sup>. In the terms of the theological scheme of ideas, a Scholastic distinction was made between the *corona aureola* and the *corona aurea*: the latter corresponds to the traditional circular nimbus, the head halo, given to all saints, while the former was an exceptional distinction, a “celestial crown” awarded to the souls of virgins, martyrs and doctors<sup>226</sup>. In late medieval and early Renaissance art the effort was made to distinguish both in a pictorial form<sup>227</sup>, with the first (*corona aureola*) resembling generally in form with the crown schematically depicted on those vessels. These crowns most probably refer here not only to the kingdom of heaven but also possibly

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225. JAMESON, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 28-29; NOZEDAR, *Element Encyclopedia*, entry: The crown; FERGUSON, *Signs & Symbols*, 166; BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 84-85; VACCARO, *Symbols*, 151; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 214. On characteristic representations of Christ as the Great High Priest bearing the prelate mitre (crown), see: *Post-Byzantium: The Greek Renaissance*, 100-101, no. 14 (A. LAZARIDOU); M. BORBOUDAKIS (ed.), *Εἰκόνες τῆς Κρητικῆς Τέχνης* [as in n. 147], 516-517, no. 162 (M. BORBOUDAKIS). On images of crowned Virgin Mary: V. PACE, *Μεταξύ Ανατολῆς καὶ Δύσης*, in M. VASSILAKI (ed.), *Μήτηρ Θεοῦ. Απεικονίσεις τῆς Παναγίας στὴ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη*, Athens – Milan 2000, 425-432 with fig. 216, fig. 220, fig. 221. On two examples of a crowned Virgin Mary, of the end of the 17th-beginning of the 18th c., see: M. ACHEIMASTOU-POTAMIANOU, *Εἰκόνες τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ Μουσείου Ἀθηνῶν*, Athens 1998, 274-275, no. 92; K. KALAMARTZI-KATSAROU, *Εἰκόνες 16ου-18ου αἰώνα*, in *Εἰκόνες Μονῆς Παντοκράτορος*, Mount Athos 1998, 256-257, no. 139. On the depiction of a jeweled diadem above the head of Saint Prokopios, depicted on an icon of ca 1280s, see: H. C. EVANS (ed.), *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, New York 2004, 355-356, no. 214 (J. FOLDA).

226. See in detail the relevant analysis by E. HALL – H. UHR, *Aureola super Auream: Crowns and Related Symbols of Special Distinction for Saints in Late Gothic and Renaissance Iconography*, *The Art Bulletin* 67 (1985), 567.

227. See in detail the relevant analysis by HALL – UHR, *Aureola super Auream*, 567-603.



to the Archangel Michael (to whom the church is dedicated), the leader of the angelic hosts, mentioned as prince in the Holy Bible<sup>228</sup>, who on several occasions appears in the western iconography crowned<sup>229</sup>. It is to be noted that similar in form crowns, rendered in more detail, are depicted above the heads of Saint George and Saint Demetrios represented on a pair of sanctuary doors of the second half of the 15th c. from Crete<sup>230</sup>. Furthermore, there appear vessels with six-petal rosettes, incisions recalling schematically the cross, and a bowl with the inscription “ma-ria” (Fig. 19), an example of the “Ave Maria group” of ceramics. This last contains verses of the most common Catholic prayer to the Virgin Mary and could possibly be related too to Orthodox hymn dedicated to the Virgin Mary as mentioned in an inscription of the interior of the church<sup>231</sup>. Everything again points to a careful pre-selection of the vessels to be used as *bacini* and meticulous thinking upon their placement, probably on the part of the church’s donor, an Orthodox priest. Here too a climate of unity between the two Christian denominations may be recognized.

Furthermore, the fact that care has been taken to immure vessels of the Spanish lustreware production, painted on white background in blue and lustre, in all the three façades of the church (Fig. 19, Fig. 27), those which

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228. *The Holy Bible, New International Version* ®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide, Daniel 10.13 and 12.1.

229. On the various depictions of the Archangel Michael, see: J. DUHR, Anges, in M. VILLER – S. J., F. CAVALLERA – S. J., J. DE GUIBERT (eds.), *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique, Doctrine et Histoire*, v. 1, Aa – Byzance, Paris 1937, 620-622; CHRYSAFI, *Οι Άγγελοι*, 134-154, 163-166; APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA, *A Guide to Christian Art*, 167-168. Characteristic depiction is the statue of Saint Michael at the entrance of the Sanctuary of Saint Michael on Mount Gargano in Italy. On images of Christ as the Great High Priest, crowned: BORBOUDAKIS, *Εικόνες της Κορητικῆς Τέχνης*, 516-517, no. 162 (M. BORDOUDAKIS). On icons of the Virgin Mary crowned: KALAMARTZI-KATSAROU, *Εικόνες 16ου-18ου αιώνα*, 256-257, fig. 139; M. BACCI, Byzantium and the West, in R. CORMACK – M. VASSILAKI (eds.), *Byzantium 330 – 1453, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 25 October 2008 – 22 March 2009*, London 2008, 277, fig. 41.

230. On these, see: H. C. EVANS (ed.), *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, New York 2004, 206-207, no. 125 (Ch. PENNAS).

231. On this view see: Εκκλησία του Μιχαήλ Αρχαγγέλου κοντά στην Αυγενική [as in n. 221].

either provided the entrances to the church or the apses<sup>232</sup>, according to my opinion and based on what has been previously commented on the choice of the colours, not only aims at creating a common aesthetically-pleasing visual impact but also suggests theological notions such as faith, hope and justice. From this viewpoint the specific vessels, that also contain representations of crowns, may reference verses from the Scriptures such as the second letter of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day –and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing”<sup>233</sup>. In this way, the ceramics are used as a medium to meditate on passages of Scriptures, in a rather original form of communication, one which is exhibited widely on the exterior of such churches and coexists with the far more easily perceptible inscriptions accompanying the interior decoration of the monuments. In cases such as these, well-educated persons could with most probability read what lay behind these ceramic decorations.

That interpretations such as the above may indeed be perfectly feasible can be supported if we recall that a relatively high standard education was provided in Crete in the 14th and the 15th c. either through classes within monasteries or through private tutors in the towns, who taught Greek but also Latin, which education led to a number of important literary products of early Cretan literature, in particular within the 15th c.<sup>234</sup>. In the sphere of Byzantine art, it has been already pointed out that literary works may have influenced both the way educated patrons designed or guided specific artistic creations and the work of the artists themselves<sup>235</sup>. Besides works

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232. In the current state of the monument, no vessels are immured in the north side. Though this shows works of restoration, it was however not directly visible to the viewer from afar.

233. *The Holy Bible, New International Version* ®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide, 2 Timothy 4.7-8.

234. See, characteristically: N. M. PANAGIOTAKES, *The Italian Background of Early Cretan Literature, Symposium on Byzantium and the Italians, 13th-15th Centuries*, DOP 49 (1995), 281, 288-293.

235. For characteristic examples, see: WEITZMANN, *The Origin of the Threnos*, 476-490; MAGUIRE, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, in toto and in particular p. 7-12; FOSKOLOU, *Telling Stories*, 206-218 and 194-197 (on earlier bibliography).

of Byzantine literature<sup>236</sup>, among the works of Italian literature which influenced the Cretan oeuvres, it seems, for example, that Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* was read and gave inspiration to the poets of the island; although initially possibly known only among the Italians on the island, his work also reached the indigenous population<sup>237</sup>. Its manuscript, along with those of other important Italian writers, circulated within 15th c. Crete<sup>238</sup>. It is to be noticed that in the first part of his epic poem, Hell is depicted as nine concentric circles located within the Earth; in the second part (Purgatory) in Canto VIII emphasis is given to the green colour<sup>239</sup>; in Canto XXIX, a complex allegory is described where three women in a circle are dressed in red, green and white with four other women dressed in purple; the first three are considered to represent the three theological virtues and the other four the four cardinal virtues, thus referencing both sets<sup>240</sup>. Let us not forget that numerous depictions of scenes from Hell form part of the painted decoration of the Cretan churches<sup>241</sup>. On the other hand, Aquinas' doctrine, with its critical commentary or not, also reached Crete during the late 14th and the 15th c.<sup>242</sup>. In fact Andreas Sklentzas translated into Greek a prayer of Thomas Aquinas<sup>243</sup>. Referring back to the previous

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236. On the use of animal symbolism in Byzantine literature, see in general: ODB I (1991), entry: Animals (A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER – A.-M. TALBOT).

237. PANAGIOTAKES, The Italian Background, 305-311; M. SGOURIDOU, *Η επίδραση του Δάντη στην Νεοελληνική Λογοτεχνία*, Thessaloniki: PhD University of Thessaloniki 1998, 15-17, 21-27 (Available at: <https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesisBookReader/id/10499?lang=el#page/1/mode/2up> [last accessed: 20.01.2022]).

238. PANAGIOTAKES, The Italian Background, 307-308; SGOURIDOU, *Η επίδραση*, 17-18; F. KONSTANTINOU, *Όψεις θανάτου στην κρητική λογοτεχνία (15ος-17ος αι.). Διπλωματική εργασία*, Nicosia: University of Cyprus 2018, 14-15.

239. *Dante Alighieri Divine Comedy*, v. II, transl. H. WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, Boston 1867, Canto VIII.28-30 (p. 46, p. 259).

240. *Dante Alighieri Divine Comedy*, Canto XXIX.121-132 (p. 190, p. 346).

241. A. LYMBEROPOULOU – R. DUTS, *Hell in the Byzantine World. A History of Art and Religion in Venetian Crete and the Eastern Mediterranean*, v. 2, *A Catalogue of the Cretan Material*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – New Delhi – Singapore 2020.

242. On the oration of Maximos Chrysoberges in 1399-1400 and a subsequent response: P. GOLITSIS, Fifteenth-Century Eastern Reception of Aquinas, in M. LEVERING – M. PLESTED (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, Oxford 2021, 84.

243. N. PANAGIOTAKES, Ἀντιγραφεῖς καὶ κείμενα τοῦ κώδικα Marcianus Graecus IX.17,

analysis, in Italy the colours of green, red and white seem to have been preferred by several important families, to decorate buildings and works of art during the Renaissance<sup>244</sup>. And the artists in Venice held colour in prominent position in respect to their works and in contrast to the role of the line<sup>245</sup>. Under this argumentation, the common occurrence as *bacini* in Crete of examples of the “RMR Ware” bearing mostly concentric circles in red, green and brownish-black on a yellowish background (Fig. 26, Fig. 28) could constitute –besides other possible explanations of this choice<sup>246</sup> and in addition to the remark mentioned previously about this selection –a deliberate choice mirroring also possibly the effect of Dante’s work on specific patrons.



Figure 28: Bowl of the polychrome glazed pottery (“RMR Ware”), immured in Panagia, in Anatoli (Lasithi, Crete) (photo: by the author).

Ἀνδρέας Σκλέντζας, *Αγιάδην 2* (1984), 99; PANAGIOTAKES, *The Italian Background*, 286, no. 35, 318.

244. STEMPEL, *The Secret Language*, 44, 46.

245. STEMPEL, *The Secret Language*, 44.

246. On a related view: YANGAKI – PYRROU, *Εντοιχισμένα αγγεία και εργαστήρια ζωγράφων*, 414 and YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 140-141.

A reinforcing argument is the observation, previously expressed, that among the Cretan material it is the only group of glazed pottery with which specific churches are either only decorated or it is combined with simple monochrome wares. The second similar group is the ceramics from the Iberian peninsula. Following the previous reasoning, even the use of 'humble' completely white maiolica bowls immured in Agios Antonios in Platanos, that at first sight seem rather awkward, as they do not contribute to the chromatic symmetry, especially when compared to the richly decorated figured examples of *graffita rinascimentale canonica* placed around them, may also stand as symbolizing all virtues or innocence or the state of purity<sup>247</sup>. This reasoning is further enhanced since one of the figures depicted in the latter examples is directly relatable to others recognized as Angels (see above).

Thus, these decorations serve to enlighten us on the elevated intellectual background of their patrons, whether they were members of the higher social strata, noblemen, members of the local elite or of the clergy, since coded messages such as the above could neither be conceived nor perceived by someone uneducated or, even worse, illiterate. In the latter case the average visitor would just 'stumble' upon similar and repeating decorations, which would definitely have captured his eyes. So, the creation of such decorative programmes through clay vessels implies an effort and concern on the part of those who devised the conscious collection and deliberate placement of the vessels, selecting those which were considered as the best candidates to convey the specific message: it all rather speaks of 'intended symbolism'<sup>248</sup>.

Care was expended on the exterior of these monuments as well as more obviously on the interior. In the case of Early Byzantine mosaic decorations, the final compositions may express a divergence from the original design, as perceived either by the artists or by the patrons themselves, depending on the skills of the craftsmen responsible for their execution as well as on the degree of the patrons' involvement in the whole project<sup>249</sup>. In the case of the *bacini*, given their ready-made nature –since, as shown from the material from mainland and insular Greece, they were not specifically commissioned

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247. On the symbolism of the white colour, see above p. 64.

248. MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 13-14.

249. MAGUIRE, *Earth and Ocean*, 14-15.



to this end<sup>250</sup> but constituted commodities mainly acquired from the market<sup>251</sup>— suggest that those responsible for each assemblage, namely the patrons, definitely had a more active role on the selection of specific objects (and possibly also to the design of their careful disposition to give the desired result). This rather enhances the view expressed above that indeed various levels of significances are hidden within the display. It seems that sculpture and brickwork also participated in this effort to express various symbolisms or religious or political statements, although the matter remains to be more fully studied and understood<sup>252</sup>. Under the Venetian Domination, Venetian settlers among whom were feudal lords moved to the island as early as the 13th c. This new political identity touched upon the native inhabitants' identities, mainly the middle and upper social classes of the local society, from which originated the Veneto-Cretans<sup>253</sup>, whose influence in turn affected the production in art and architecture. The broader population too came into contact with the cultural movement of the Italian Renaissance, as expressed not only in Cretan literature but also in various forms of art, leading to the

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250. On two rare cases of possible commissions in Italian monuments, see below with note 258.

251. On other cases, such as objects constituting heirlooms, see below section no. 6.

252. To state only some characteristic cases dating for the late-Byzantine period: SANDERS, William of Moerbeke's Church at Merbaka, 583-626; J. ĆIRIĆ, The Symbolism of the Knotted Column in the Architecture of King Milutin, *The Legends Journal of European History Studies* 1 (2020), 81-100; J. ĆIRIĆ, Materijalnost i opeka: ornament na fasadama carigradskih crkava bizantske obitelji Paleolog, *Materijalnost Umjetničkog Djela, Zbornik Danâ Cvita Fiskovića* 8 (2021), 95-102; J. ĆIRIĆ, Solar Discs in the Architecture of Byzantine Constantinople: Examples and Parallels, in *Διεθνές Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο προς τιμήν του ομότιμου καθηγητή Γεωργίου Βελένη. Θεσσαλονίκη, Αμφιθέατρο Αρχαίας Αγοράς 4-7 Οκτωβρίου 2017. Πρακτικά*, Athens 2021, 583-597.

253. On the middle and upper social strata and the local elite, see, indicatively: C. GASPARIS, *Catastici Feudorum Crete. Catasticum Chanee 1314-1396* (National Hellenic Research Foundation / Institute for Byzantine Research, Sources 9), Athens 2008, 20-21, 27-32, 36-40; E. STAMOULOU, *Candia and the Venetian Oltremare: Identity and Visual Culture in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean*, Manchester: PhD University of Manchester 2011, and particularly 22, 27-40, 83-85 (Available at: [https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/54507923/FULL\\_TEXT.PDF](https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/54507923/FULL_TEXT.PDF) [last accessed: 20.01.2022]); K. LAMBRINOS, Identity and Socio-Economic Mobility in Venetian Crete: The Evolution of a Citizen Family (Sixteenth Century), *Mediterranean Historical Review* 29 (2014), 57-70; K. LAMBRINOS, *Οι cittadini στη βενετική Κρήτη. Κοινωνικο-πολιτική και γραφειοκρατική εξέλιξη (15ος-17ος αι.)*, Athens 2014, 57-59.

'Cretan Renaissance', a term that defines the Cretan culture during this long period<sup>254</sup>. During the Renaissance, hidden messages, such as the above, were often encoded by artists into symbols, and expressed in various mediums<sup>255</sup>. Religious symbolism was used to represent specific concepts within the Christian faith<sup>256</sup>. It seems that in Venetian Crete in the course of the 15th c., and mostly its first half, through the continuing use of an 'old' practice established from the 13th c., the motifs on the clay objects were treated as multilayered<sup>257</sup>, concealing religious symbolism and expressing an original form of creativity on behalf of the persons behind such compositions<sup>258</sup>. This phenomenon reached its peak within the 15th c. and seems to have slightly faded away in the 16th c., when extremely colourful and highly decorated compositions do occur (the third group mentioned previously), but do not seem to contain similar symbolic scenographies<sup>259</sup>.

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254. On the Cretan Renaissance and its various forms, only but a few studies are gleaned here: I. DIMAKOPOULOS, 'Ο Sebastiano Serlio στὰ μοναστήρια τῆς Κρήτης, ΔΧΑΕ per. Δ', 6 (1970-1972), 233-245; I. E. DIMAKOPOULOS, 'Η ἐκκλησία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ρόγκου στὰ Χανιά, in *Ἐκκλησίες στὴν Ἑλλάδα μετὰ τὴν Ἄλωση*, v. 1, Athens 1979, 257-267; K. FATOUREOU-ISCHAKI (†), 'Η Κρητικὴ Ἀναγέννηση καὶ τὰ Ἰταλικά πρότυπα τῆς ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς της, *Αἰδιάδνη* 1 (1983), 103-138; D. HOLTON, The Cretan Renaissance, in D. HOLTON (ed.), *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, Cambridge 1991, 1-16; N. M. PANAGIOTAKES (†) – S. KAKLAMANIS – G. MAVROMATIS (eds.), *Κρητικὴ Αναγέννηση. Μελετήματα γιὰ τὸν Βιντσέντζο Κορνάρο*, Athens 2002; S. KAKLAMANIS, *Ἡ κρητικὴ ποίηση στὰ χρόνια τῆς Ἀναγέννησης (14ος-17ος αἰ.)*, v. Α'. *Εἰσαγωγὴ, Μορφωτικὸ Ἰδρυμα Εθνικῆς Τραπέζης*, Athens 2019.

255. See characteristically: ALPATOV, *Allegory and Symbolism*, 1-25; STEMPEL, *The Secret*, 35-39, 94, 98.

256. On religious symbolism see in general: S. K. LANGER, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*, Cambridge – Massachusetts, 1963; RENO, *Religious Symbolism*, 76-78.

257. O. GRABAR, *The Mediation of Ornament*, Princeton, New Jersey 1992, *passim*.

258. With respect to Italian monuments, the numerous examples of preserved *bacini* immured in S. Francesco in Bologna, dating from the middle of the 13th c. (NEPOTI, I *bacini* in maiolica arcaica, 45-54 [on these motifs see also further below]) and some *bacini* immured in S. Giacomo Maggiore in Bologna, dated to 1315 or slightly after 1322 (S. GELICHI, I "bacini" di San Giacomo Maggiore a Bologna, in S. GELICHI – S. NEPOTI (eds.), *Quadri di pietra. Laterizi rivestiti nelle architetture dell'Italia medioevale*, Florence 1999, 72-77), constitute two rare but eloquent earlier counterparts which suggest, based on their specific motifs, that they were even specifically commissioned to decorate these monuments.

259. On the characteristics of the *bacini* in Crete dating from the middle of the 15th c. and within the 16th c. see: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 171-172.

When comparing the evidence from mainland Greece with that from Crete, it is clear that the two sets of material differ from one another. While in Crete the earliest occurrence of a representation to which a symbolic reading is here suggested dates to the late 13th c. and is located in Chania, the bulk of the previous evidence derives from vessels dating mainly from the 15th with a few even within the 16th c., embedded in monuments of similar dates and widespread in all four regional units of the island. The zenith of the practice in the selection of vessels according to their representations is to be found around the middle of the 15th c. with the *bacini* decoration of the church of Panagia in Kitharida<sup>260</sup>, to which other examples of nearly the same excellence may be appended, such as that of Archangel Michael in Vlachiana or of Panagia in Prinos.

In mainland Greece, select choices such as that in Athens, in Erimos (Fig. 4, Fig. 12), in Gastouni (Fig. 5), in Molyvdoskepastos or in Leukas remain relatively isolated examples –at least based on what has until now been preserved and published. Here exists a scheme wherein monochromatic groups or ceramics with simple linear or schematic painted or incised decoration prevail (Tabl. 1). However, in those examples where iconographic themes do exist, it seems that particular connotations are contained within. The predominance of bird representations should not be underestimated, the dove being the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Cases such as that in Erimos further enhance this suggestion. There, two (Fig. 4, Fig. 12) of the originally three *bacini* placed over each one of the three windows of the apses depict an eagle and a cheetah or a leopard, both members of the cat family *Felidae*, to which also the lion belongs and at which the dish's representation may hint. The eagle and the lion, being the attributes of the Evangelists John and Mark respectively<sup>261</sup>, and in combination with the rather emphasised position of the respective vessels, namely on the three apses, rather leads one to think that possibly indeed these dishes, besides offering a particular 'touch' to the façade's decoration, also originally contained sacred meanings referencing the Christian doctrine. Particularly so since they are placed on the exterior of the church's sanctuary, where within the Divine Liturgy takes place and the Gospels are read. In these rare cases perhaps one

260. On the detailed presentation of the specific *bacini* assemblage and its interpretation, see: YANGAKI, Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa.

261. STEMPEL, *The Secret Language*, 102.

should attribute these choices to the preferences of the particular patrons behind the erection of the monuments, given that, for example, the church of the Dormition of the Virgin, the katholikon of the Molyvdoskepastos monastery, was renovated during the first two decades of the 14th c. by Andronikos Komnenos and Megas Doukas Palaiologos –according to the dedicatory inscription– who possibly should be identified either with the Byzantine emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328) or with another Andronikos, commander of Veratio<sup>262</sup>. Similarly Iakovos and Zampia are mentioned in a dedicatory inscription as patrons for the erection of the Monastery of Odigitria in Apolpena in Leukas during the middle of the 15th c.<sup>263</sup>. It has been suggested that Iakovos should be identified as Dominus Jacobo Rosso, confidant of Carlo II Tocco, Duke of Leukas<sup>264</sup>. On the other hand, the extensive study of the church of Panagia in Merbaka (modern Agia Triada, in the Argolid) provides an example where although its exterior decoration infers several messages, the *bacini* seem not to have

262. On these identifications: D. NICOL, *The Churches of Molyvdoskepastos*, *ABSA* 48 (1953), 141-146, 152-153; TSOURIS, *Ο κεραμοπλαστικός*, 188-189, 203, 329 (for additional bibliography); KARAMPERIDI, *Μολυβδοσκεπάστος*, 178; see as well: V. N. PAPADOPOULOU – A. KARAMPERIDI, *Τα βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου*, Athens 2008, 281 (for additional bibliography).

263. The initial hypothesis on the erection of the church by Helena Palaiologina, a Byzantine princess that became through marriage Despotess of Serbia (K. G. MACHAIRAS, *Ναοὶ καὶ Μοναὶ τῆς Λευκάδος*, Athens 1957, 284-285; A. STAVROPOULOU, *Ιάκωβος, ο χορηγός του Ναού της Οδηγήτριας στην Απόλπενα Λευκάδας*, in D. Ch. SKLAVENTIS – T. E. SKLAVENTIS (eds.), *Πρακτικά Γ' Συμποσίου Ἡ Χριστιανικὴ Τέχνη στη Λευκάδα 15ος-19ος αιώνας, Πνευματικὸ Κέντρο Δήμου Λευκάδας, Γιορτὲς Λόγου καὶ Τέχνης, Λευκάδα 8-9 Αυγούστου 1998*, Athens 2000, 21-26 on the previous bibliography), cannot be strongly supported (STAVROPOULOU, *Ιάκωβος*, 27-36; P. L. VOCOTOPOULOS – P. DIMITRAKOPOULOU – D. RIGAKOU – D. D. TRIANTAFYLLOPOULOS – I. P. CHOULIARAS, *Εὔρετήριον τῶν Βυζαντινῶν Τοιχογραφιῶν τῆς Ἑλλάδος ὑπὸ τὴν διεύθυνση τοῦ ἀκαδημαϊκοῦ Παναγιώτου Λ. Βοκοτόπουλου*, Athens 2018, 139, no 11, fig. 4, 150-151, with the previous bibliography [D. D. TRIANTAFYLLOPOULOS]). On the architecture of this monument, which had an original phase dating to the 11th c., before the main phase of the 15th c., see: A. KATSELAKI, *Ἡ ἱστορία καὶ ἡ ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ*, in *Ζωγραφικὴς ἐγκώμιον. Τοιχογραφίες ἀπὸ το καθολικὸ τῆς μονῆς Παναγίας Οδηγήτριας στὴν Απόλπενα Λευκάδας (20 Δεκεμβρίου 2000-28 Φεβρουαρίου 2001)* [ex. cat.], Athens 2000, 36-41; VOCOTOPOULOS et al., *Εὔρετήριον τῶν Βυζαντινῶν Τοιχογραφιῶν τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, 139-142 (D. D. TRIANTAFYLLOPOULOS).

264. On this suggestion, which is still debated: STAVROPOULOU, *Ιάκωβος*, 27-36 (on the original suggestion and the argumentation). See in addition: VOCOTOPOULOS et al., *Εὔρετήριον τῶν Βυζαντινῶν Τοιχογραφιῶν τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, 139.

contained any specific messages hidden within their decoration, since this is either monochromatic or strictly stylized geometric, but rather it is the act itself (of immuring ceramics of Italian and Byzantine origin in an Orthodox church) that is significant<sup>265</sup>.

Thus, although this preference for decorated *bacini* which may infer religious symbolism is found in mainland Greece from the early occurrences of this practice, namely the 11th c., yet most of the *bacini* evidence there belongs to the middle and the late-Byzantine period, from the 11th up to the late 14th-early 15th c. It is not common within the 15th c. and later, the exact time when, as I have commented, the bulk of the relevant evidence dates from Crete. In order to try to explain this difference, it is crucial to take into consideration the different historical conditions that characterize the two areas concerned. In mainland Greece the practice originated in the middle-Byzantine period and continued within the late-Byzantine, but after the middle of the 15th c. most of the mainland regions enter into the long period of Ottoman rule, with only some remaining under Latin domination. On the other hand, in Crete, where the practice is linked with the Venetian domination, the latter continued up until the middle of the 17th c., with the population being ceaselessly in contact with Venice and the Italian Renaissance. It is thus likely that the differences in the expression of this practice may best be understood, since from the middle of the 15th c. onwards mainland Greece was more focused eastwards than westwards, even though the cultural movement of the Renaissance spread from its Italian origins into the rest of the Europe particularly during the 15th and the 16th c. In contrast –if the interpretation I put forward regarding the meaningful use of the *bacini* in Crete holds true– the spirit of the age in the West seems to have had a lot to do with various expressions of the material culture of that period, even the otherwise ‘humble’ clay vessels.

The change in political and historical conditions that occurred in mainland Greece after the middle of the 15th c. surely also explains the situation of the later evidence covering the Ottoman period in Greece (Tabl. 1), namely that contained in Nikolakopoulos’ second group<sup>266</sup>.

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265. On the original publication of these *bacini*: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά, I-II*; on their recent presentation: SANDERS, William of Moerbeke’s Church, 610.

266. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμεικά, I-II*, 12-13.





Figure 29: Iznik ware with floral decoration, immured in Panagia Faneromeni, in Salamina (Attica) (photo from: KORRE-ZOΓRAFOY, *Τὰ Κεραμεικά*, 73, fig. 124).



Figure 30: Iznik ware with floral decoration, immured in Panagia Faneromeni, in Salamina (Attica) (photo from: KORRE-ZOΓRAFOY, *Τὰ Κεραμεικά*, 73, fig. 121).

Although it must be admitted that the material has not –up to now– been studied in detail and the observations rely on publications presenting briefly any related *bacini*, yet no concern to convey similar messages through a preselection of vessels with particular representations seems to have generally existed. In churches such as Panagia Faneromeni in Salamina (Attica) (Fig. 29, Fig. 30), but also at Prophet Ilias in Dafni (Geraki area, in

the Peloponnese), Agia Triada in Agia Roumeli (Fig. 31) and Agios Georgios in Drakona (Chania region), Agios Ioannis Chrysostomos in Kritsa and Agios Panteleimon in Kalo Chorio (Lasithi region)<sup>267</sup> (Fig. 32), vessels with purely vegetal themes, mostly densely covering the interior surface, tend to prevail<sup>268</sup>.



Figure 31: Painted Ware from northwestern Greece, immured in Agia Triada, in Agia Roumeli (Chania, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 111, fig. 103).

267. On these *bacini*: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Έντοιχισμένα κεραμικά*, IV; KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, *Τὰ Κεραμικά*, 72-74, figs. 119-127; J. PAPAGEORGIOU, *Το καθολικό της Μονής του Προφήτη Ηλία στη Δάφνη Γερακίου Λακωνίας: παρατηρήσεις στην αρχιτεκτονική και τον κεραμικό και γραπτό διάκοσμο*, in M. XANTHOPOULOU - A. BANOU - E. ZYMI - E. GIANNOULI - A. V. KARAPANAGIOTOU - A. KOUMOUSI (eds.), *Πανεπιστήμιο Πελοποννήσου, Σχολή Ανθρωπιστικών Επιστημών και Πολιτισμικών Σπουδών, Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στην Πελοπόννησο 2 (ΑΕΠΕΛ2). Πρακτικά της Β' Επιστημονικής Συνάντησης Καλαμάτα, 1-4 Νοεμβρίου 2017*, Kalamata 2020, 658, 666, fig. 1; YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 206-207, 262-269; A. G. YANGAKI, *Ιστορίες αγγείων της περιόδου της οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας και της νεότερης εποχής στην Κρήτη με βάση τα εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά: Ενδεικτικές μελέτες περίπτωσης από το Λασιθί*, in A. PAPADIA-LALA - M. D. EFTHYMIU - P. KONORTAS - D. M. KONTOGEORGIS - K. KONSTANTINIDOU - I. MANTOUVALOS - V. SEIRINIDIOU (eds.), *Ο Νέος Ελληνισμός: οι κόσμοι του και ο Κόσμος / Αφιέρωμα στην Καθηγήτρια Όλγα Κατσαορδή-Hering*, Athens 2021, 73-86.

268. See, as well: J. CARSWELL, *Pottery and Tiles on Mount Athos*, *Ars Orientalis* 6 (1966), 78.



Figure 32: Dish, Çanakkale Ware, immured in Agios Panteleimon, in Kalo Chorio (Lasithi, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Ιστορίες αγγείων*, 89, fig. 5).

Given that usually they are not accompanied with vessels carrying other forms of decorations (such as the more figurative ones mentioned above), and even although these floral or vegetal forms may enclose Christian symbolisms, these later examples do not seem to convey any complex theological message but rather are selected to embellish the exterior façades of the monuments, offering a pleasant but not informative sight to the visitors and the congregation. During the Ottoman period and particularly during the 16th and the 17th c., in the selection of the *bacini* it rather seems that the practice follows that of the ceramic tiles, used to decorate the interior of post-Byzantine churches –namely Iznik tiles with vegetal or geometric decoration<sup>269</sup>. Viewed from the point of

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269. To mention few characteristic case-studies of complex related tile decoration: CARSWELL, *Pottery and Tiles*, 78-88; K. KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, *Τα κεραμεικά Ιζνίκ της Μονής Παναχράντου Άνδρου*, Andros 2004; S. VOYADJIS, *Το Καθολικό της Ιεράς Μονής Μεγίστης Λαύρας στο Άγιον Όρος. Ιστορία και Αρχιτεκτονική. Συνεργασία: Βασιλική Συνθιακάκη-Κριτσιμάλλη, Ο γλυπτός διάκοσμος του καθολικού της Μονής Μεγίστης Λαύρας*, Athens 2019, 130-141, figs. 161-174.

Islamic tradition and influence, this reflects the expected dominance of the schematic vegetal and geometric arabesques over the incorporation of human or animal representations<sup>270</sup>. The latter do seem to reappear on *bacini* in post-Byzantine churches, but mainly during the 18th and the 19th c.<sup>271</sup>. As for the ceramics with their rich floral decoration, the practice recalls somewhat the way even nowadays the faithful tend to embellish the various icons of Saints on the day of their celebration or decorate the *Epitaphios* on Good Friday, by offering bouquets of flowers in beautiful arrangements<sup>272</sup>. An old practice continues to be followed, but the additional levels of reference and communication as developed during the late 14th and mostly the 15th c. seem to have passed, and now go unnoticed, not only for mainland Greece but also for Crete.

To sum up, in addition to the two previously mentioned functions –the purely decorative and that linked to the demarcation of sacred space and the enhancement of accessibility– the additional level of symbolism is quite evident, as a way of obliquely passing on religious messages. To understand all these planes of connotation on the part of the viewer, a degree of observation and perception is needed<sup>273</sup>. The habit acted as an additional layer of communication to accentuate the entrance of the faithful to each particular House of the Lord.

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270. On the prevalence of rather complicated arabesque decoration in Islamic art, see, in general: A. BALLIAN, Εισαγωγικό σημείωμα για την ισλαμική τέχνη, in A. BALLIAN (ed.), *Μουσείο Μπενάκη. Οδηγός του Μουσείου Ισλαμικής Τέχνης*, Athens 2006, 34-40.

271. These remarks derive from the material taken into consideration and presented in Tabl. 1. For two characteristic examples, see those presented by Korre-Zografou: KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, *Τὰ Κεραμεικά*, 75, fig. 130, 76, fig. 132.

272. On the characteristic use of flowers for the decoration of the *Epitaphios*, see recently: PAPANTONIOU - VIONIS, *Popular Religion*, 90, 93, 94.

273. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 163.



### 5. *Bacini as symbolic objects and messengers: b. on their original owners and donors*

Above are discussed the sorts of connotations and messages that could be extracted from the deliberate selection of the *bacini*'s decoration, to be perceived by those visiting the churches. What about the people behind the choice to immure these specific ceramics? Can we detect some information on their concepts and their desires?

Written sources, as well as the dedicatory inscriptions found in several of these churches, show that the local landowners and/or members of the Byzantine or Latin aristocratic families, members of the local communities, the Church or members of the clergy could have engaged, as patrons, in the erection of several of the churches of the Middle and the late-Byzantine period in mainland Greece or of the Venetian period in Crete<sup>274</sup>.

Observing the assemblages' composition and the monuments they adorn –especially the particular characteristics and condition of

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274. On the importance of the dedicatory inscriptions, see, in general: S. KALOPISSI-VERTI, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Denkschriften 226, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für die Tabula Imperii Byzantini 5), Vienna 1992, 23-94, 103-110. See, indicatively, for characteristic cases of patrons in Greece, with an emphasis on those in Mesa Mani and in Crete: N. DRANDAKIS, *Βυζαντινά τοιχογραφία της Μέσα Μάνης*, Athens 1964, 115-117; M. CHAIRETI, 'Η ἀπογραφή τῶν ναῶν καὶ τῶν μονῶν τῆς περιοχῆς Χανίων τοῦ ἔτους 1637', *ΕΕΒΣ* 36 (1968), 338-339; S. KALOPISSI-VERTI, *Epigraphic Evidence in Middle-Byzantine Churches of the Mani. Patronage and Art Production*, in M. ASPRA-VARDAKAKI (gen. ed.), *Λαμπηδών. Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη της Ντούλας Μουρίκη*, v. 1, Athens 2003, 339-354; S. KALOPISSI-VERTI, *Δωρητές και τεχνίτες στη Μάνη κατά τους βυζαντινούς και μεταβυζαντινούς χρόνους*, in P. KALAMARA (ed.), *Ιστορίες θρησκευτικής πίστης στη Μάνη, Δίκτυο Μουσείων Μάνης 2. Κατάλογος μόνιμης έκθεσης*, Athens 2005, 99-108; GRATZIOU, *Η Κρήτη*, 114-123; MEXIA, *Βυζαντινή ναοδομία*, 349-351, with additional bibliography; TSUGARAKIS – ANGELOMATIS-TSUGARAKIS, *Σύνταγμα*, 140-142; A. LYMBEROPOULOU, *Representations of Donors in the Monumental Art of Venetian Crete*, in V. TSAMAKDA – N. ZIEMMERMANN (eds.), *Privatporträt. Die Darstellung realer Personen in der spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst. Akten des Internationalen Workshops an der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien 14.-15. Februar 2013* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse Denkschriften 522. Archäologische Forschungen 30), Vienna 2020, 209-213.



preservation of the ceramics– it is concluded that the churches bear as *bacini* either only one category of pottery or vessels of varied provenance but usually dating closely together, their date coinciding with that of the erection of the church<sup>275</sup>. In addition, they follow clear compositional ‘rules’ as to their arrangements. In most of the cases the ceramics are embedded in the masonry during the erection of the specific part of the structure into which they are intended to fit and are of a date close to the one attributed to the monument, on other criteria<sup>276</sup>. This all suggests that the ceramics were specifically gathered or acquired for that very purpose; they could well have been in someone’s possession as utilitarian objects before they were transformed into *bacini*.

Based on the above, by combining the provided –when known– information on the patrons of a church with the respective assemblage of the vessels, one may argue that the latter reflect a choice of the former. For example, although, up to now, no specific source provides information on the person whose patronage was responsible for the arrangement of the richly decorated *bacini* assemblage immured in the narthex of the church of Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida and dated to the period between the first decades of the 15th c. and its middle (Fig. 33), the decipherment of the arrangement and the decoration which contained various symbolic and religious connotations suggests that a particular programme lay behind the selection.

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275. On this conclusion, see the argumentation in YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 145-153, fig. 184; YANGAKI, *Ιστορίες αγγείων*, 76-84.

276. For more details on the synchronicity of the immured vessels with the respective monuments, based on the study of a substantial sample: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 146-153; YANGAKI, *Short Remarks*, 671-679. On the various other possibilities: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 146-150, fig. 184.



Figure 33: View of the southern part of the façade of the narthex, Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida (Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 153, fig. 21).

The evidence points to a well-educated and cultivated Venetian or Cretan person who would have had a position of authority: one may extrapolate from this to other similar cases<sup>277</sup>. The presbyter Theodoros and his wife Kali, responsible for the erection of the church of Agioi Theodoroi in Vamvaka (the Mani), could have been involved in the selection of the richly decorated imported Islamic ceramics that embellish the church. The imported ceramics immured in the katholika of the Molyvdoskepastos monastery and of the Odigitria monastery in Leukas may also be linked to the rather distinguished patrons who were responsible for their renovation in the 14th and in the 15th c., respectively, as mentioned above<sup>278</sup>. Bishop Chrysanthos of Elos was responsible for the erection and the wall-painted decoration of

277. On the whole argumentation and on the meanings of this assemblage: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in the Church of Panagia Eleousa*, 156-159 and 136 (for the bibliography on the church). On information from the written sources, regarding the monastery of Kitharida, based on documents of 1418, see: E. G. PAPADAKI (ed.), *Johannes Dono, Νοτάριος Χάνδακα (1416-1422)* (Βενετικές Πηγές της Κρητικής Ιστορίας 13), Herakleion 2018, 157-162, no. 40.

278. On these donors, see above and the respective bibliography.

the second half of the 17th c. in the katholikon in Dafni<sup>279</sup>. Similarly, the fine glazed ceramics immured in Agios Georgios in Theriso (Chania) and in the katholikon of the Kardamoutza monastery (Lasithi) may relate to the donors of each church, who were, respectively, members of the Fournis family, a notable family of Crete, with members holding privileged positions in the local administration<sup>280</sup>, and members of the important family of Katzaras, among which are numbered priests, the monastery lying in their fief<sup>281</sup>. And the list could be continued. In all these cases, it is *imported* ceramics that are immured in the churches; particularly with the examples of the 15th and the 16th c., it is mainly the richly decorated and quality ceramics that are used as *bacini*; pricey secular objects that experienced a transformation when embedded in the ecclesiastical sphere. Behind the selection of these imported fine ceramics of a rather high worth that decorate the façades of monuments (that are not always related to a monastic complex or to one of acknowledged special symbolic concern) may, thus, lie members of the higher social strata, who acted as patrons for this type of decoration.

In contrast to the above, the various categories of ceramics forming part of numerous insertions, not constituting imported fine wares and not characterized by symmetrical dispositions in form and colour, can be linked to the various inhabitants of a community of the middle and even the lower social strata; they could have collaborated to acquire the vessels to be used as *bacini* in the church's masonry<sup>282</sup>. In the case of the church of Christ the Saviour at Vliethias (Fig. 35) besides members of the families of Partzalis and Charkomatas, two nuns and yet others were the patrons for the founding of the church<sup>283</sup>. In the cases of the churches of Christ the Saviour in Agia

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279. PAPAGEORGIOU, Το καθολικό, 657-659, 663.

280. A. G. YANGAKI, Immured Vessels in the Church of Agios Georgios at Theriso (Crete), *Archeologia Medievale* 39 (2012), 366-367.

281. On the Katzaras family and particularly on Manasis, priestmonk, owner and prior of the monastery, see: K. ILIAKIS (ed.) †, *παπα-Ιωάννης Κατζαράς Νοτάριος Καστελίου Φουρνής. Κατάστιχο 43 (1607-1635)*, eds. G. K. MAVROMATIS – G. GEORGAKOPOULOS (Βενετικές Πηγές Κρητικής Ιστορίας 9), Herakleion 2008, ιδ'-ιε', 787, 11.6-8, 12.3, 37, 54.2-4, 185.2-3, 186.5-6, 298.2-3.

282. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 165.

283. GEROLA, *Monumenti Veneti*, IV, 438-439, no. 10; I. SPATHARAKIS, *Dated Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete*, Leiden 2001, 106-107; S. E. J. GERSTEL, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in*

Eirini, Agios Georgios in Koustogerako, Agios Ioannis in Kalamos and Agios Konstantinos in Voukolies (Nebros), in Chania, several members of various families were responsible for their foundation<sup>284</sup>.

And what about those cases where no specific information exists on a church's patron/s? If we extrapolate from the previous remarks, then one must conclude that some important members of the society lay behind those cases where quite 'luxurious', finely decorated imported wares are used as *bacini*. In addition, there are some rare cases where *bacini* are decorated with a schematic representation of a coat-of-arms, a western attribute of nobility originally; examples occur in Crete. These might constitute an additional indirect reference to a specific elite, the noble class, whose members may have been involved in the process of the incorporation of *bacini*. Characteristic cases constitute the representations of a coat-of-arms in vessels in Agios Athanasios in Kefali (Fig. 34), in Agios Georgios in Nopigia, in Agios Georgios in Agia Roumeli, in Christ the Saviour in Chora Sfakion, in the katholikon of Chalepa monastery, and in Panagia in Kitharida.



Figure 34: Dish bearing a coat-of-arms, immured in Agios Athanasios, in Kefali (Chania, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 76, fig. 42).

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*Late Byzantium. Art, Archaeology and Ethnography*, New York – Cambridge 2015, 147. For additional evidence see, as an example: LYMBEROPOULOU, *Representations of Donors*, 209-218.

284. GEROLA, *Monumenti Veneti*, IV, 414, no. 10, 445-446, no. 18, 465, no. 45, 470-471, no. 54.

Although it is difficult to achieve a secure attribution of the coat-of-arms to a specific family, such as those of Kallergi or of Musuro, as suggested by G. Gerola<sup>285</sup> for some of these depictions, given the present limitations to identifying the colours originally used for their rendering, the selections of these particular vessels with coat-of-arms should not be assumed to be random events. Moreover, specific representations, such as rider on a horse, as preserved in Agios Stefanos in Drakona and recalling a knight, could refer to the Venetian horsemen (*milites*), who became feudal lords, after the land was distributed to them<sup>286</sup>. Such may constitute a reference to the concept of chivalry, knighthood<sup>287</sup>. In other cases, such as in Agios Antonios in Platanos or in the katholikon of Chalepa, we see busts of male or female figures turned towards their right, the former shown with their characteristic biretta and upper part of robe and the latter with their impressive hairstyles and part of a robe<sup>288</sup> and so representing costumes that denote social standing and origin. These find similarities in Venetian paintings<sup>289</sup>, like the so-called “Belle donne”<sup>290</sup>; they may be taken as indirectly portraying the original patrons of those monuments<sup>291</sup>. The same can probably be said

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285. GEROLA, *Monumenti Veneti*, IV, 238, no. 256, 242, no. 278, no. 280.

286. GASPARIS, *Catastici Feudorum Crete*, 28-29, 37-39.

287. BIEDERMANN, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, 196-197.

288. On similar figures in ceramics: M. MUNARINI, Caratteri generali. Il Veneto centrale e Concordia Sagittaria, in G. ERICANI – P. MARINI (eds.), *La ceramica nel Veneto, La Terraferma dal XIII al XVIII secolo*, Verona 1990, 98-99; M. MUNARINI, La raccolta di ceramiche rinascimentali dei Musei Civici di Padova, in M. MUNARINI – D. BANZATO (eds.), *Ceramiche Rinascimentali dei Musei Civici di Padova, Padova, Museo Civico di piazza del Santo, 11 dicembre 1993 - 30 aprile 1994*, Milan 1993, 28-32, 34-35.

289. On characteristic paintings of Vittore Carpaccio, where similarly dressed men and women are depicted: MAZZUCATO, Una particolare ceramica veneziana cinquecentesca, 51-54.

290. On these depictions, the extent of their relation with particular personalities and the particular “amatory” category of ceramics, see: S. NEPOTI, *Ceramiche graffite della donazione Donini Baer*, Faenza 1991, 109-110, fig. 36, 119-123; C. RAVANELLI-GUIDOTTI, *Musei Civici de Imola. Le Ceramiche. Catalogo delle raccolte*, Imola 1991, 106, no. 16, 162; T. WILSON - E. P. SANI, *Le maioliche rinascimentali nelle collezioni della Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia*, II, Perugia 2007, 218-220, no. 129.

291. See, as well, below. For the clothing in Crete, that from the 15th c. followed mainly the Venetian fashion, see: D. Er. VLASSI, Η καθημερινή ζωή, in Ch. MALTEZOU (sc. dir.), *Βενετοκρατούμενη Ελλάδα. Προσεγγίζοντας την ιστορία της*, v. I (Ελληνικό Ινστιτούτο



for the representation of a woman linked to the cupbearer theme shown on a bowl in Kitharida; there the stylized lady with a cup is dressed in a full-length garment with a belt, a long veil hangs behind her and sort of napkin, kerchief or scarf from her left elbow<sup>292</sup>. One can easily deduce that she belongs to a specific social class –an elite. The first examples of these date to the last part of the 15th c., while the last –although of a slightly earlier date– forms part of an assemblage put in place around the middle of the 15th c. Thus they form an additional argument in favour of what has been previously deduced about the employment of the ceramics as a means to deploy complex messages, under the influence of the Renaissance on the Cretan culture.

To conclude, these media are being deployed as an indirect way of evoking members of a local elite who possibly, if not as patrons for these monuments, at least –if the suggestion of O. Gratziou is taken into consideration– were present in the specific area and indirectly involved in the functioning of these churches during the 15th c.<sup>293</sup>.

The *bacini* in three Italian monuments offer, perhaps, a counterpart to the much more numerous evidence from Crete. Thus, with the original *bacini* of the middle of the 13th c. in S. Francesco in Bologna, some examples bear various animal themes which S. Nepoti tentatively assigned to the names of the Società delle Armi of the quarter of Porta Stiera in Bologna<sup>294</sup>. In

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Βυζαντινών και Μεταβυζαντινών Σπουδών Βενετίας Βιβλιοθήκη αρ. 30), Athens – Venice 2010, 362; T. MARKAKI, *Objects and identities. Dowry and material culture in Venetian Crete in regional and European context (1600-1645)*, Amsterdam: PhD University of Amsterdam 2018, 57-58, 139, 141, 166, 167 (Available at: [https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/25219125/Thesis\\_complete\\_.pdf](https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/25219125/Thesis_complete_.pdf) [last accessed: 21.01.2022]).

292. On this bowl: YANGAKI, *Immured vessels in the church of Panagia Eleousa*, 140-142 (with bibliography).

293. GRATZIOU, *Η Κρήτη*, 120. See also: C. GASPARIS, *Venetian Crete. The Historical Context*, in A. LYMBERPOULOU (ed.), *Hell in the Byzantine World. A History of Art and Religion in Venetian Crete and the Eastern Mediterranean*, v. 1, *Essays*, Cambridge - New York - Melbourne - New Delhi - Singapore 2020, 83-87. See, as well, the remarks upon the procedure of the erection of the churches: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 41-44.

294. On this relation: NEPOTI, *I bacini in maiolica arcaica*, 54. On the various societies of the citizens of Bologna in the medieval period: S. R. BLANSHEI, *Politics and Justice in Late Medieval Bologna* (Medieval Law and its Practice 7), Leiden 2010, 15, 18-20, 25-26, 28, 46, 49, 65, 77, 114, 117-118, 122, 148, 180, 234, 267.



S. Giacomo Maggiore in Bologna, among the group of the original *bacini* assemblage, S. Gelichi studying the decoration of two particular vessels demonstrated that they referred directly to the specific convent and to a friar who was probably actively involved in the monument's erection during the first quarter of the 14th c.<sup>295</sup> In both these rare cases the ceramics have been interpreted as specifically commissioned and manufactured by a local workshop in order to decorate these monuments, commemorating those argued to have been involved to the monument's erection<sup>296</sup>. Concerning the third group of *bacini* of S. Agostino in Grottammare (Ascoli Piceno) richly decorated with various themes and dating from the first quarter of the 16th c., S. Gelichi put forward the hypothesis, based on the specific decorative motifs, that the selection was intentional and could probably be related to the factions or families who acted as donors for the monument's construction<sup>297</sup>.

6. *Bacini as symbolic objects and messengers: c. from secular to religious context, from everyday use to eternal display, between the private and the public spheres: offerings, heirlooms and relics*

A more intimate connection may exist between the “donor/s” of *bacini* and the objects themselves. Careful observation of the various ceramic assemblages supports their interpretation as personal offerings. Two characteristic pointers in the assemblages argue for this: a. assemblages consisting of various categories of vessels and displaying no particular interest in creating chromatic or morphological consistencies (Fig. 35) and/or b. assemblages including some vessels which can be dated earlier than the majority of the ceramics<sup>298</sup>.

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295. For more details on this unique set of *bacini*: GELICHI, I “bacini” di San Giacomo Maggiore, 71-77, fig.19, fig. 20, pl. 21, pl. 22.

296. NEPOTI, I bacini in maiolica arcaica, 54; GELICHI, I “bacini” di San Giacomo, 71, 75, 77.

297. On the whole evidence and the argumentation: S. GELICHI, I “bacini” ceramici della chiesa di Sant’Agostino a Grottammare (AP), in C. LAMBRUGO (ed.) with the contribution of A. BERTAIOLA – M. E. ERBA – I. FRONTORI – A. PACE, *Στην υγειά μας. Studi in omaggio a Giorgio Bejor*, Sesto Fiorentino 2020, 79-88. I would like at this point to thank the reviewers of this study for their comments and their suggestions during the editing process.

298. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 166.



Figure 35: *Bacini* arrangement, Christ the Saviour, in Vlithias (Chania, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 259, fig. 283).

Characteristic examples of the first criterion could be the vessels immured in the churches of Christ the Saviour in Vlithias (Fig. 35), of the Transfiguration of the Saviour in Plemeniana (Chania) and of Panagia in Lithines (Lasithi), located in Crete. In the first two cases, among the numerous vessels displayed no one is exactly like any other in the composition and there is no interest shown in striving for chromatic symmetry. In the first case, a preserved inscription<sup>299</sup> mentions several patrons, so it could be that the variety of vessels is an expression of the various patrons' choice. In the third case, the numerous vessels immured in rows seem to have been placed there not all at one and the same time, but on diverse occasions; this remark derives from the observation of differences in the thickness of the framing plaster<sup>300</sup>. This suggests that they were inserted subsequently, over time; they could, thus, constitute offerings by the congregation<sup>301</sup>.

Examples from mainland or insular Greece that meet the second criterion are on the whole rare. In cases of *bacini* quite a bit older than the

299. G. GEROLA, *Monumenti Veneti nell'isola di Creta*, v. II, Venice 1908, 300; GEROLA, *Monumenti Veneti*, IV, 438-439, no. 10; GERSTEL, *Rural Lives*, 147, 149.

300. YANGAKI, *The Immured Vessels*, 8; G. MOSCHOVI – M. KATIFORI, Ναοί με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία στον νομό Λασιθίου, in *Proceedings of the 12th International Congress of Cretan Studies*, Heraklion 21-25.9.2016, Herakleion 2019, 9 (<https://12iccs.proceedings.gr/el/proceedings/category/39/36/464> [last accessed: 29.11.2019]); YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 166.

301. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 166.

date of the main bulk of the same assemblage, the concepts of ‘antique’ and of ‘heirloom’ may come into play. For the term ‘antique’, A. Crowe<sup>302</sup> states that this may be used to describe an object which was simply made some time earlier than the rest of its context. Indeed, as V. Antoniadis notes, this term may best render the Greek term *keimelion* than the English term ‘heirloom’<sup>303</sup>, since the latter term defines an object that constitutes an inheritance within kin over several generations, as K. T. Lillios puts it<sup>304</sup>. In archaeology the subject of heirlooms, i.e. ‘antique’ objects passing between generations and so older than the bulk of the material in a given context, has been recently studied from various perspectives which accentuate their social purpose and value<sup>305</sup>. Such ‘antique’ objects, located among a specific *bacini* assemblage<sup>306</sup>, could have been designated –to employ a neutral term– as ‘residual’, by analogy to ‘residuals’ identified within an excavated context.

Nevertheless, it is not so easy or self-evident to securely label a *bacino* as ‘antique’, i.e. older than the date ascribed to the monument or/and to the bulk of the respective assemblage, since several years, indeed decades, could cover the timespan of production and circulation of the ceramics and

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302. A. CROWE, Old Things, New Contexts: Bronze Age Objects in Early Iron Age Burials at Knossos, in E. BORGNA – I. CALOI – F. CARINCI – R. LAFFINEUR (eds.), *Mneme. Past and Memory in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 17th International Aegean Conference, University of Udine, Department of Humanities and Cultural Heritage, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, Department of Humanities, 17-21 April 2018* (Aegaeum 43), Leuven – Liège 2019, 481-486.

303. On the Greek term *keimelion*, see: I. STAMATAKOS, Λεξικὸν τῆς Νέας Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης, Καθαρευούσης καὶ Δημοτικῆς ἐκ τῆς Νέας Ἑλληνικῆς εἰς τὴν Ἀρχαίαν, v. 2 (1952), entry: Κεμήλιον. On the whole argument with additional views by other scholars, see the analysis in V. V. ANTONIADIS, Heirloom or Antique? Import or Imitation? Objects with Fictive “Biographies” in Early Iron Age Knossos, *Τεκμήρια* 15 (2019-2020), 73-76.

304. K. T. LILLIOS, Objects of Memory: The Ethnography and Archaeology of Heirlooms, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 6 (1999), 241.

305. For a summary of the various approaches: LILLIOS, Objects of Memory, 236-258; R. GILCHRIST, The Materiality of Medieval Heirlooms: From Biographical to Sacred Objects, in H. P. HAHN – H. WEIS (eds.), *Mobility, Meaning and Transformations of Things: Shifting Contexts of Material Culture through Time and Space*, Oxford 2013, 170-175, 179 (with respective bibliography). See as well: S. PEARCE, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, Washington DC 1993, *passim*; ROBERTSON, Speaking Objects, 575-576, 578-579. For characteristic case-studies: GILCHRIST, The Materiality, 175-182.

306. For this line of argument see: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 146.

of their 'life-time' in use, based on excavated evidence<sup>307</sup>. Furthermore, the study of the material on the whole has shown that each assemblage of vessels is of a date close to the one attributed to the monument on other criteria, or it could be somewhat earlier in date. Either way, "synchronicity" of the *bacini* assemblages to the monuments best describes both possibilities<sup>308</sup>. Two somewhat safer criteria to argue that a vessel could rightly be considered as 'antique' are: a. its dating more than 50 years earlier than the latest *bacino* of each assemblage (the latest categories are used to determine a *terminus ante quem* for the constitution of the whole assemblage)<sup>309</sup> and b. the existence of rather extensive damage on its surface, such as abrasion of the glaze, surface wear and tear, and an overall poorer or partial condition of preservation in comparison to the rest of the vessels.

To illustrate the previous analysis, a characteristic case is provided by one of the vessels published by Nikolakopoulos and immured in the church of Panagia Mesosporitissa in Attica<sup>310</sup> (Fig. 36).



Figure 36: *Bacino*, immured in Panagia Mesosporitissa (Attica) (photo from: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών*, 68, fig. 8).

307. For related suggestions on the fine red-slipped wares of the late Roman period: PEÑA, *Roman Pottery*, 29-30, 58-60.

308. For further details upon this reasoning: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 146-148, fig. 184.

309. For considering a group of *bacini* as an assemblage and an analysis of the complex relations that may characterize both the correlation of these assemblages with the monuments and the internal relation of the vessels in each assemblage (synchronous, partially synchronous, asynchronous), see in detail: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 146-153, fig. 184.

310. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών*, 68-69, fig. 8.

It constitutes an example of the Ligurian *scenografia barocca* with scenes from the country life and landscapes that were produced from the first half of the 17th c. up until the first half of the 18th c.<sup>311</sup>. Based on the rendition of its landscape scene, which is framed by schematic vegetal decoration, its details and the characteristic decoration of bands of light blue all around, the vessel finds close similarities with ceramics from Savona, dating from the middle of the 17th c.<sup>312</sup>. If the middle of the 18th c., mentioned in an inscription on the templon applies to the erection of the church<sup>313</sup>, it can be deduced that the vessel predates the construction date by more than half a century<sup>314</sup>. Similarly, one of the vessels of the assemblages immured in the churches of Agios Nikolaos at Elenes and Panagia in Prinós (Rethymnon)<sup>315</sup>, in Christ the Saviour in Vavouledo (Chania), in Panagia in Metaxochori (Lasithi), two of the vessels immured in the katholikon of the monastery of Korakies (Chania)<sup>316</sup> (Fig. 18) and at least two of the vessels immured in Agios Panteleimon in Kalo Chorio (Lasithi) date rather earlier than the rest<sup>317</sup>. In almost all these cases their condition of preservation is either fragmentary or their interior surface is extremely worn, in comparison to the rest of the objects which are in a quite good state. In the first three cases

311. G. FARRIS, *Per una storia della ceramica torinese del'600*, Faenza 90 (2004), 80; J. BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA BERCERO – N. MIRÓ I ALAIX, *The Ceramics Trade in Barcelona in the 16th-17th Centuries: Italy, France, Portugal, the Workshops of the Rhine and China*, Barcelona 2010, 46 (with bibliography), 121, pl. 39, 123, pl. 40.

312. For respective examples: C. CHILOSI – E. MATTIAUDA, *Bianco-blu. Cinque secoli di grande ceramica in Liguria*, Milano 2004, 100-101 (where extremely similar in terms of the rendering of decoration ceramics are shown).

313. On this inscription: BOURAS – KALOGEROPOULOU – ANDREADI, *Ἐκκλησίες*, 92; NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών*, 68. However, according to Bouras, Kalogeropoulou and Andreadi (BOURAS – KALOGEROPOULOU – ANDREADI, *Ἐκκλησίες*, 92) the church may be earlier than the templon.

314. Based on its current state of immuration, it cannot be clear if it was originally embedded in a complete condition or not.

315. On the vessel at Elenes: YANGAKI, *Immured Vessels in Churches on Crete*, 378; for a short presentation of this view: YANGAKI, *The Immured Vessels*, 9; PYRROU – GIAPITSOGLOU, *Ναοί με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία*, 10. On the vessel in Prinós: YANGAKI, *Τα εντοιχισμένα αγγεία στον ναό της Παναγίας στον Πρίνο Μυλοποτάμιου*, tabl. 1.

316. On these vessels: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 166.

317. On the vessels in Agios Panteleimon, see; YANGAKI, *Ιστορίες αγγείων*, 77-83.



a time lapse of more than 30 years is to be observed. The vessel in Panagia in Metaxochori and those in Kalo Chorio are more than 50 years older than the rest, in the latter case reaching up to a century. Further, the three vessels immured in the cave-church of Panagia in Arkoudia (Chania) cover a quite considerable time-frame (up to a century) although embedded at the same moment on this monument<sup>318</sup> (Fig. 37).



Figure 37: *Bacini* arrangement, Panagia, in Arkoudia (Chania, Crete) (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 203, fig. 213).

One is led to conclude that in these particular offerings, the considerably older objects constitute antiquarian items of particular importance to their owners, and as such were offered to the church<sup>319</sup>. Since the dates ascribed to the churches themselves match that of the other and majority of vessels or at least that of the latest *bacino*, the observation seems even more probable. All the previous assemblages are set exactly at the same level in the façade of the wall, thus implying that they were all placed in the buildings at the same time<sup>320</sup>.

318. On this assemblage, see in detail: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 162-163, 167.

319. For the role of heirlooms, see below.

320. For similar thoughts in respect to the church of Agios Nikolaos in Elenes: PYRROU – GIAPITSOGLOU, *Ναοί με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία*, 10.



But although at first one may characterize such objects as ‘antiques’, in these cases, as it has also been argued elsewhere, the term ‘heirloom’ may best describe them and why they were selected as *bacini*<sup>321</sup>. Objects which constitute heirlooms are usually physically affected by the time they have existed for and they generally enjoy a particular relation with their original owners, being ‘loved’ or respected<sup>322</sup>. Thus, they can be considered as a peculiar form of ‘valuable’, whose identification and interpretation can offer interesting insights to a group’s *collective memory*<sup>323</sup>.

So thinking and discerning that in the above mentioned *bacini* cases it is rather worn ceramics that were chosen to decorate an otherwise newly-erected church –some indeed were simple monochromatic glazed vessels, not quality products in any way– then their identification as ‘heirlooms’ rather than as simple ‘antiques’ seems to be more apposite. As such, within the “subject-object relation”<sup>324</sup>, they may had a particular significance for their owner/s, forming containers of a person’s, a family’s, a generation’s memory, constituting statements of identity<sup>325</sup>. And as such, they were chosen to be offered as embellishments of a façade of an ecclesiastical building.

On medieval heirlooms in particular, R. Gilchrist argued that specific objects –linked to particular sacraments (such as baptism or marriage)– when offered by their owners to the parish church, became *consecrated* and acquired a ‘sacred’ character<sup>326</sup>. In the same way, if the *bacini*, originally utilitarian and personal things, were offered to the church to be incorporated in the exterior part of a holy space and on public view, they became imbued with a particular form of sacred value<sup>327</sup>. Although one cannot claim that they were impregnated with divine virtue, they, nonetheless, functioned as

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321. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 106-108.

322. PEARCE, *Museums*, passim; GILCHRIST, *The Materiality*, 170-171; ROBERTSON, *Speaking Objects*, 578.

323. GILCHRIST, *The Materiality*, 171.

324. B. BROWN, How to Do Things with Things (a Toy Story), *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1998), 939.

325. ROBERTSON, *Speaking Objects*, 578.

326. GILCHRIST, *The Materiality*, 179-180.

327. On the multi-leveled notion of the sacred object, see: GAYK - MALO, *The Sacred Object*, 457-464. On this argument regarding some of the *bacini* in Chania: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 167.

communicators of hidden qualities<sup>328</sup>. As I have argued elsewhere, building thus upon Gilchrist's observation that: "biographical objects ... gifted to the church achieved the status of public relics"<sup>329</sup>, the incorporation of the three heirloom-*bacini* in the cave-church in Arkoudia (Chania) (Fig. 37) or the vessels' relocation in the churches in Plemeniana and in Temenia (Chania) may offer a glimpse into the function of *bacini* as relics<sup>330</sup>. Not in the sense of objects sanctified because of their association with a saint or martyr, the common notion of relics in Christianity<sup>331</sup>, but as remains, a 'remnant left after decay'<sup>332</sup>, by whose incorporation in a consecrated building were imbued with some 'sacred' nuance themselves.

Because of its location, the cave-church of Panagia in Arkoudia forms an important landmark in and for the collective memory of the community frequenting it, largely pastoralists<sup>333</sup> (Fig. 37). The quality of a 'public relic' that these *bacini* enjoy becomes significant for the holy space, since it accentuates the concern of the people for the specific monument and indeed possibly explains the reason for which their original owners made their donation. Regarding the other two monuments (Transfiguration of the Saviour in Plemeniana and Christ the Saviour in Temenia), during additional work to their west façades the original clay vessels were removed, but were not dissociated from the monument. Rather they were preserved and relocated in a row high up on their south wall, which explains their rather awkward, asymmetrical positioning. In these cases, the *bacini* were considered as forming an inseparable part of the 'life' and fabric of each

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328. On the observation that objects can speak for themselves and are not only "that which is perceived" and on the role of the sacred objects: GAYK - MALO, *The Sacred Object*, 460-462. See also above, note 25.

329. GILCHRIST, *The Materiality*, 181.

330. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 167.

331. See, indicatively: ODB III (1991), entry: Relics (F. R. TROMBLEY - A. KAZHDAN).

332. *Merriam-Wester dictionary*, entry: Relic (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/relic> [last accessed: 20.01.2022]).

333. On the whole presentation of the particular sacred character of this cave, see in detail: LOUKAKI, *Μεσογειακή Πολιτιστική Γεωγραφία*, 205-206; ΕΙ. Ε. ΓΑΥΡΙΛΑΚΙ, *Η διαχρονική χρήση των σπηλαίων της δυτικής Κρήτης από τη Νεολιθική περίοδο έως σήμερα. Η περίπτωση του σπηλαίου Μελιδονίου*, Athens: PhD, University of Athens 2017, 172, 179-183, 253, 264 (Available at: <https://freader.ekt.gr/eadd/index.php?doc=44663&lang=el> [last accessed: 21.01.2022]); YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 163 (with bibliography).

monument, and thus they were preserved, so acquiring the attribution of relics of a lost earlier reality<sup>334</sup>. In the first case of the cave-church, a sacred landmark of particular character is deemed to incorporate quality ceramics imbued with important qualities for a kin-group<sup>335</sup>; to the original value (heirloom) of a secular character there was added an extra value (as relic) of a sacred character. In contrast, in the latter two cases the otherwise mundane objects were considered by the community as being part of the original monument, and as such had acquired an added value with a sacred nuance which needed to be respected in a rebuild.

In the cases of ceramics with these characteristics, alongside a significance acquired by virtue of their earlier ownership, they added the value of sacred symbolism<sup>336</sup>.

*7. Bacini as symbolic objects and messengers: d. as markers of an intercultural osmosis, between the native and the external, between the Christian and the Other World, the Muslim world, and between two Christian denominations*

For churches in present-day Greece that demonstrate this practice, the study of the so far published material makes clear that it is mostly the ceramics considered imported to any one area that are used as *bacini* in order to embellish a church's façade. This remark is mainly valid for the published evidence from mainland Greece and dating to the middle and the late-Byzantine period, but also can be seen to apply to the Ottoman period. It is to an important degree true too both for the scant evidence published from insular Greece and for the majority of the evidence in Crete, particularly for the 14th, 15th and the 16th c.<sup>337</sup>. Reviewing the several sets of evidence, some interesting suggestions can be made.

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334. See in detail: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 52-53, 149, 155, 167-168.

335. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 163.

336. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 168.

337. Based on the sample from the Chania regional unit, it has already been commented that, with the exception of the evidence dated from the late 13th and the 14th c. which provides mainly information on various monochrome glazed wares attributed to local productions, it is imported ceramics that prevail from the late 14th, the 15th and the 16th c.: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 139-142.

The prevalence of the occurrence of imported ceramics from Muslim lands, such as those from Egypt and Ifrīqiya, during mainly the 11th c. in several churches of the southern Peloponnese, in the Mani peninsula, should be viewed as an expression of trade (Fig. 38). For example, Venetian merchants participated in the region's trade from at least the end of the 11th c. and were encountered in Sparta<sup>338</sup>. Besides other merchants, they most probably played a decisive role in the arrival of these wares<sup>339</sup>. In Crete, the numerous *bacini* involve wares from various areas of the Mediterranean, not only Italy, particularly in the 14th-16th c. This pattern also suggests intense trade relations, in which of course Venetian merchants held a dominant role<sup>340</sup>. Even in the case of the restricted number of *bacini* produced in the Iberian peninsula or in the Khanate of the Golden Horde<sup>341</sup>, dating from the second half or the late 14th c. and located in monuments of Thessaloniki and of Mount Athos, it has been suggested that they reflect the commercial activities undertaken by various merchants operating in the port of

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338. R.-J. LILIE, *Handel und Politik zwischen dem byzantinischen Reich und den italienischen Kommunen Venedig, Pisa und Genua in der Epoche der Komnenen und der Angeloi (1081-1204)*, Amsterdam 1984, 55-57; M. GEROLYMATOU, *Αγορές, έμποροι και εμπόριο στο Βυζάντιο (9ος-12ος αι.)* (EIE / IBE Μονογραφίες), Athens 2008, 168, 253; P. ARMSTRONG, *Merchants of Venice at Sparta in the 12th century*, in W. G. CAVANAGH – C. GALLOU – M. GEORGIADIS (eds.), *Sparta and Laconia from Prehistory to Pre-Modern. Proceedings of the Conference held in Sparta, Organised by the British School at Athens, the University of Nottingham, the 5th Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the 5th Ephoreia of Byzantine Antiquities 17-20 March 2005. Organised by A. Bakourou, W. G. Cavanagh and A. Panagiotopoulou*, Athens 2009, 313-320; Ch. STAVRAKOS, *Byzantine Lead Seals and other Minor Objects from Mystras: New Historical Evidence for the Region of Byzantine Lakedaimon*, *BZ* 103 (2010), 129-144.

339. On these remarks: YANGAKI, *The Bacini in Churches of the Mesa Mani*, 634.

340. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 170.

341. Vessels from these two areas have been found in the Transfiguration of the Saviour and Christ Pantocrator of the Vlatadon Monastery, in Thessaloniki (PHILON, *Thessaloniki*, 303-305, 316, fig. 1) and in the katholikon of Hilandari monastery (P. ANDROUDIS – A. G. YANGAKI, *A Fragment of the "Pula Type" of Lustreware Immured at the Exonarthex of the Katholikon of the Monastery of Hilandari (Mount Athos Peninsula)*, *Зборник Материјалне српске за ликовне уметности/Matica Srpska Journal for Fine Arts* 42 (2014), 51-57) and in the chapel of Agioi Anargyroi at the Vatopedi Monastery (P. ANDROUDIS, *An Unknown 14th Century Golden Horde Bowl (piyala) from the Monastery of Vatopedi, Mount Athos, Greece*, *Niš i Vizantija* 15 (2017), 209-216), in Mount Athos.

Thessaloniki<sup>342</sup>. Even so, for some of the latter examples, whose position on the monuments is somewhat awkward and/or whose condition was already fragmentary prior to their insertion, it is their rather emblematic use that is stressed, implying that interpretations that they were votive offerings or objects with symbolic meaning should be taken seriously<sup>343</sup>. Indeed, for all the above, it is their rather 'exotic' nature that is paramount. Only rarely do ceramics from Byzantine workshops decorate middle or late-Byzantine monuments. And on Crete it is mainly one particular time frame that sees local Cretan products decorating the relevant churches<sup>344</sup>. The bulk of the evidence offers a selection of the glazed wares widely produced in various areas around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Each monument reveals its own selection from what was on offer.

G. Liverani noted that the Italian *bacini* either served as votive objects or were trophies from warfare or travel souvenirs<sup>345</sup>. M. Hobart, in studying the *bacini* phenomenon in churches of Sardinia, supposed that the incorporation of the ceramics could constitute an expression of the power of the Pisan merchant families in Sardinia<sup>346</sup>. This suggestion was made considering not only the support of the local authority for the religious expansion of the Roman Catholic Church but also the donations and concessions to the Pisan settlers of Sardinia, in combination with the observation that the use of immured vessels in the Sardinian ecclesiastical buildings was introduced from the 11th c. onwards as were several Pisan characteristics<sup>347</sup>. It was an expression of the growing expansion of the Pisan republic<sup>348</sup>. K. Mathews argued, on the other hand, that the *bacini* from Muslim lands embedded from the 11th to the 12th c. in the façades of Pisan churches constituted a mark of the maritime supremacy of the city's inhabitants<sup>349</sup>, impacting on

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342. PHILON, Thessaloniki, 303-306, 312-314; ANDROUDIS – YANGAKI, A Fragment, 55; ANDROUDIS, An Unknown, 215-216.

343. ANDROUDIS – YANGAKI, A Fragment, 56-57.

344. See the comment in note 337 (with bibliography).

345. G. LIVERANI, *La maiolica italiana*, Milan 1971, 9.

346. See, in detail: HOBART, Merchants, 106, 109, 112-113.

347. On a reference to this view: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 168-169.

348. HOBART, Merchants, 107-108, 110.

349. On the whole argument, see in detail: K. MATHEWS, Other Peoples' Dishes: Islamic Bacini on Eleventh-Century Churches in Pisa, *Gesta* 53 (2014), 9-20.

the city's identity, as well<sup>350</sup>. G. Sanders suggested, concerning the *bacini* in the church of Merbaka (that combined southern Italian and Byzantine wares), that the choice referenced the Union between the two Christian denominations and could also echo the two power's (Italian and Byzantine) interests for supremacy in the area of the eastern Mediterranean<sup>351</sup>. On the other hand, according to the same scholar, the Islamic ceramics adorning the church at Agia Moni, "could be construed as a reference to the Second Council's resolution to mount a crusade against the Saracens"<sup>352</sup>. In both cases, a symbolic political meaning is to be sought –at least by those visitors who were alert and well-enough informed to decipher it, one containing messages expressed also in other media used on the exterior walls of these monuments<sup>353</sup>.

Taking this last comment with the two interpretations provided above by Hobart and Mathews regarding the use of Muslim products in Christian monuments, it is reasonable to suggest that the almost exclusive use of ceramics deriving from Muslim lands and embedded in Byzantine churches of the southern Peloponnese during mainly the 11th c., at the very beginning of the appearance of this practice in ecclesiastical monuments of Greece, should not only be seen as a mere reflection of trade with these lands, possibly under the intermediary of Italian merchants<sup>354</sup>, nor even as expression of artistic contacts with the Arab world, from which emerged a preference for Islamic works of art<sup>355</sup>. Given the earlier intense conflicts of the Byzantine empire with the Muslim Arabs after the latter's emergence in the 7th c., as characterized by several Arab conquests of or raids on Byzantine territory, with both parties competing for supremacy<sup>356</sup>, one might indeed

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350. MATHEWS, *Other Peoples' Dishes*, 18. See also: K. MATHEWS, *Recycling for Eternity. The Reuse of Ancient Sarcophagi by Pisan Merchants, 1200-1400*, in A. LEADER (ed.), *Memorializing the Middle Classes in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Culture 60), Kalamazoo 2018, 40.

351. SANDERS, *William of Moerbeke's Church*, 610, 616.

352. SANDERS, *William of Moerbeke's Church*, 621-622.

353. SANDERS, *William of Moerbeke's Church*, 604-616.

354. YANGAKI, *The Bacini in Churches of the Mesa Mani*, 634.

355. On the whole context: O. GRABAR, *Islamic Art and Byzantium*, *DOP* 18 (1964), 69-88 and particularly 70-71.

356. For the Arab-Byzantine relations see, in general: W. FELIX, *Byzanz und die*



view the presence of these products from the Muslim world as indicative of Byzantine claims of victory and dominance. Based on the number of Islamic wares found in each monument, it is hard to consider them as being trophies from warfare rather than traded goods. From the more assertive angle, the Mani *bacini* would constitute an innovative manifestation of “power” by the native population in response to the earlier external Arabic threats: whereby fragile clay objects from Muslim lands (Fig. 38) are subdued and absorbed into the impressively strong and durable Christian monuments<sup>357</sup>.



Figure 38: Egyptian polychrome dish of the so-called “Classic Fayyumi Ware”, immured at Taxiarches at Glezou (Peloponnese), 11th c. (photo: by the author; published in: YANGAKI, *The Bacini in Churches of the Mesa Mani*, 632, fig. 4, II.a).

*islamische Welt im früheren 11. Jahrhundert, Geschichte der politischen Beziehungen von 1001 bis 1055* (Byzantina Vindobonensia 14), Vienna 1981; M. BONNER, *Arab-Byzantine Relations in Early Islamic Times* (The Formation of the Classical Islamic World 8), Aldershot 2004; N. KOUTRAKOU, The Image of the Arabs in Middle-Byzantine Politics. A Study in the Enemy Principle (8th-10th Centuries), *Graeco-Arabica* 5 (1993), 213-224; N. KOUTRAKOU, The Arabs through Byzantine eyes (11th-12th centuries): A change in perception?, in J. P. MONFERRER-SALA – V. CHRISTIDES – Th. PAPADOPOULLOS (eds.), *East and West: Essays on Byzantine and Arab Worlds in the Middle Ages* (Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 15), Piscataway, NJ 2009, 27-54; J. SYPIAŃSKI, Arabo-Byzantine Relations in the 9th and 10th Centuries as an Area of Cultural Rivalry, in A. KRALIDES – A. GKOUTZIOUKOSTAS (eds.), *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συμποσίου Βυζάντιο και Αραβικός Κόσμος. Συνάντηση Πολιτισμών* (Θεσσαλονίκη, 16-18 Δεκεμβρίου 2011) / *Proceedings of the International Symposium Byzantium and the Arab World. Encounters of Civilizations* (Thessaloniki, 16-18 December 2011), Thessaloniki 2013, 465-478.

357. This interpretation takes into consideration those Islamic *bacini* deriving from Egypt, Ifriqiya and Sicily and dating from the late 10th and mostly the whole 11th c.

The interpretation of the *bacini* of Crete lends itself to a similar deconstruction, albeit one with a different impact. Venice, with its powerful mercantile class, was a growing maritime republic. The bulk of the *bacini* evidence in Crete dates from the first Venetian period, mostly within the 14th and the 15th c. (Fig. 26, Fig. 27, Fig. 33). It looks rather as if the practice was not disseminated during the previous middle-Byzantine period. That being so, this form of decoration has in Crete a different symbolism, being an original manifestation of “power” by the new settlers. The device was exploited to keep fixed in their minds their origin, to advertise the new administrative, historical and cultural reality of the island, as well as to accommodate a profitable relationship with the local communities. All this engendered an entangled network of relations and new identities, referencing the middle and upper social classes of the local society<sup>358</sup>, the Veneto-Cretans and their socio-economic characteristics<sup>359</sup>. The *bacini* here serve as symbols of cross-cultural relations: an Italian practice in Catholic churches that was adopted by the local inhabitants, as shown in the numerous *bacini* assemblages embedded in the local Cretan churches<sup>360</sup>. This conclusion is further corroborated by two observations: the greatest diversity in the forms of the assemblages expressed in simple monochromatic wares, as practised during the 13th and the 14th c. (Fig. 35), is succeeded in the course of the 15th and the 16th c. by a prevalence of monotonous cruciform arrangements, articulated though with the greatest variety in colours and motifs on the vessels<sup>361</sup> (Fig. 27). In the first period the practice carries a more general message referring to the new political identity as expressed by the Venetian domination; in the second period the message becomes more specific, conveying insights mostly about the inhabitants’ identities, as hidden behind specific choices<sup>362</sup>.

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358. In this case, the remarks from the study of the immured vessels in Fournes, Theriso and Vatolakkos are indicative.

359. On these middle and upper social classes and the local elite, see, typically: STAMOULOU, *Candia and the Venetian Oltremare*, and particularly 22, 27-40, 83-85; LAMBRINOS, *Oi cittadini*, 57-59; LAMBRINOS, *Identity*, 57-70.

360. On this argumentation: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 169.

361. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 170.

362. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 171.

And what about the latest evidence of the use of *bacini* in mainland Greece, dating from the Ottoman period? Although the related information has not yet been studied in detail, yet based on published examples such as those in Attica, Hydra, Lakonia, Crete, but also elsewhere (Tabl. 1), then too the immured vessels are of imported wares. Broadly speaking two main subdivisions exist: those ceramics found in monuments of the 16th and the 17th c., where Iznik products prevail (Fig. 29, Fig. 30) but where one may also encounter various Italian or other wares, and those located in churches of the 18th and the 19th c. where heterogeneous wares from some centres of production in either the West or the East occur, among which Çannakale (Fig. 32), Kütahya, Didymoteicho (Fig. 39) or northwestern Greece products (Fig. 31) are generally the most common<sup>363</sup>.



Figure 39: *Bacino*, immured in Panagia Mesosporitissa (Attica) (photo from: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών*, 68, fig. 7).

363. For similar general remarks: CARSWELL, *Pottery and Tiles*, 78; it is particularly in Athonite monasteries that a greater variety of wares occurs (CARSWELL, *Pottery and Tiles*, 78).

The selection of these widespread imported wares was probably a means to provide the church with objects deemed more “precious” and valuable. Among these categories, it is to be noted that in monuments of the 16th and the 17th c. the incorporation of various Iznik examples is the rule (Fig. 29, Fig. 30), a characteristic example being the church of Panagia in Salamina. During the late 18th and the 19th c. vessels from the Çannakale production tend to dominate. The frequency of their use merely reflects the wide diffusion these two products of the Ottoman period had in the eastern Mediterranean, but also, with the Çannakale ware, further abroad<sup>364</sup>. It could also be interpreted as expressing the existence of aesthetic appreciation held in common and which transcended the various religious and ethnic communities under the Ottoman empire. S. Voyadjis has recently expressed this to explain the extensive use of Iznik tiles for the interior decoration of part of the katholikon of the Monastery of Megisti Lavra on Mount Athos<sup>365</sup>. This shared aesthetic could carry in addition a symbolic connotation, with the vessels being an expression of a cultural osmosis between the Ottomans and the Christian population. In this way, some products of an originally secular use and manufactured in areas of the Ottoman empire were used without a qualm to embellish the façades of Orthodox churches, some of which constituted katholika of important monasteries.

Thus, all the above imply the existence of an additional aspect of symbolism, with each of the three groups characterizing a specific period and area, linking two different cultures: Arab Muslims and Christians, Catholics and Orthodox, Ottoman Muslims and Christians. As such it provides evidence for the appropriation of the practice as a means to convey political meanings. In the case of the selected evidence from mainland Greece both of the middle and the late-Byzantine periods and from the Ottoman period, the point was to reflect the patrons’ economic and mental/moral powers. Their economic capacity is implied, in that most of these wares are

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364. On this diffusion: G. ÖNEY, Çanakkale Ceramics, in *Sadberk Hanım Museum*, T. ARTAN (trans.), Istanbul 1991, 108; KORRE-ZOGRAFOU, *Tà Kεραμεικά*, 156, 160; B. PSAROPOULOU (gen. ed.), Eι. GAVRILAKI (ed.), *Τσανάκκαλε. Το Κάστρο των Αγγείων. Κατάλογος Περιοδικής Έκθεσης. Κέντρο Μελέτης Νεώτερης Κεραμεικής*, Rethymnon 2006.

365. On this view, see in detail: VOYADJIS, *To Καθολικό*, 141.

considered as valuable, expensive objects<sup>366</sup>; when several examples of the same ware are located in the same monument a deliberate order or purchase is likely. Their intellectual ability is suggested in that the incorporation of Islamic wares in Orthodox monuments may express a cultural osmosis as much as a political one, as well as very obliquely hinting at the sovereignty of Christianity achieved through the subordination of Islamic products in a Christian monument. Thus, it is interesting to note that Ch. Merantzias, studying the use of motifs on Ottoman silk fabrics in the narrative painted decoration of post-Byzantine monuments, suggested that the incorporation of similar themes may also express a form of cultural osmosis between the two cultures<sup>367</sup>. In the case of the Cretan evidence, though, the introduction of *bacini* could be seen initially as a symbolic expression of the sovereignty of the Venetian conquerors. In the course of the development of the practice on the island, however, its wide propagation suggests that this western attribute was fast culturally appropriated<sup>368</sup> leading to a cultural osmosis<sup>369</sup>.

#### 8. *Bacini as expressions of memory: substitutions or original insertions and the awakening of memory during the Ottoman and the modern periods*

Based on the evidence so far published, ceramics continued to be immured in Orthodox churches of mainland or insular Greece during the Ottoman period. Concerning mainland Greece and part of the Aegean, their number is restricted in comparison to earlier examples, and constitutes of a handful of cases per specific area, for example in Attica, in Lakonia, in Skopelos

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366. On the rather valuable character of the Iznik pottery: W. B. DENNY, *Iznik. The Artistry of Ottoman Ceramics*, London 2004, 155; on the various western wares which were considered quality products and more expensive than other types of pottery: SANDERS, *New Relative*, 167-168, 170-173; SPALLANZANI, *Maioliche*, 151-166.

367. On this interpretation: Ch. MERANTZAS, Ottoman Textiles within an Ecclesiastical Context: Cultural Osmoses in Mainland Greece, in S. BABAIE – M. GIBSON (eds.), *The Mercantile Effect. Art and Exchange in the Islamicate World during the 17th and 18th Centuries*, London 2017, 102-105, 110-111; on the whole argumentation and the polyvalent character of such choices: MERANTZAS, Ottoman Textiles, 111.

368. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 186.

369. On the Greek-Venetian osmosis, see: A. PAPADIA-LALA, Antiquity and the Cultural Environment in the Greek-Venetian East (15th-18th Centuries), *Θησαυροίσματα* 45 (2015), 362 with note 4 for related bibliography.

(Tabl. 1). Since earlier examples of the practice are seen in these areas, the practice has not been halted and is noticed either in monuments of the 16th-17th c. or/and in monuments of the 18th-19th c. Rather it accompanied the occasion of the erection or renovation of numerous ecclesiastical monuments (mainly monasteries) that characterized especially the period of the 16th and the 17th c.<sup>370</sup>. In contrast, given that no evidence on *bacini* exists for the 17th and the larger part of the 18th c. on Crete, that is during the first part of the Ottoman rule on the island, it seems that here the practice was indeed halted then. This negative evidence seems to further enhance the view that the practice as earlier witnessed was tightly connected with the Latin incomers, namely the Venetians that settled on the island. However, a “re-appearance” of the practice occurred on Crete during the late 18th c. and the first half of the 19th c., either in the form of new insertions or of substitutions. Extremely rare examples of modern churches dating from the 20th c. bearing *bacini*, such as two examples located in Athens and in Herakleion<sup>371</sup>, according to my opinion: “constitute two examples of continuity through the long-term survival of a facet of communal values and meaning, since these two emblematic cases were intended to reflect past realities”<sup>372</sup>.

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370. On this propulsion of the propagation of the development of the ecclesiastical buildings (mostly monasteries) in the Ottoman period, see indicatively: Ph. KOTZAGEORGIS, Τα μοναστήρια ως οθωμανικές τοπικές ελίτ, in E. KOLOVOS (ed.), *Μοναστήρια, Οικονομία και Πολιτική. Από τους μεσαιωνικούς στους νεότερους χρόνους*, Herakleion 2012, 163-190 and in particular 163-164, 169-174, 179-183, 185 with note 64; D. CHARALAMBOUS, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του καθολικού της Μονής Ζερμπίτσας Λακωνίας (1669). Συμβολή στη μελέτη της μεταβυζαντινής ζωγραφικής της Πελοποννήσου*, v. 1, Athens: PhD, University of Athens 2014, 14-16 (with additional bibliography) (Available at: <https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesisBookReader/id/35556?lang=el#page/1/mode/2up> [last accessed: 21.01.2022]). See, as well: D. Z. SOFIANOS, Ὁ Ἅγιος Βησσαρίων Μητροπολίτης Λαρίσης (1527-1540) καὶ κτίτορας τῆς Μονῆς Δουσίου. Ἀνέκδοτα ἀγιολογικὰ καὶ ἄλλα κείμενα, *Μεσαιωνικά καὶ Νέα Ἑλληνικά* 4 (1992), 199; D. DIMITROPOULOS, Χριστιανικές μονές και περιφερειακές οθωμανικές αρχές. Ὁψεις των τοπικών σχέσεων προστασίας, in E. KOLOVOS (ed.), *Μοναστήρια, Οικονομία και Πολιτική*, 191-205 (on later evidence on the relations of monasteries with the Ottoman administration). On Christian patrons who were responsible for the ceramic decoration of katholika in Mount Athos, see: CARSWELL, *Pottery and Tiles*, 78.

371. See, in detail: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 176-178.

372. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 182.



For the evidence from Italy, Berti, observing a similar renewal of the practice there during mainly the 19th c., suggested that these changes in the practice were bound up with fashions<sup>373</sup>, while the numerous substitutions of *bacini* in monuments of the area of Abruzzo are thought to express an intent to preserve this particular characteristic<sup>374</sup>.

In mainland and insular Greece, the expression of the continuation of the practice, besides their incorporation during the erection of new monuments in the course of the 16th and mostly the 17th c., was of two sorts during the 18th, the 19th and the early 20th c.: substitutions of lost vessels in earlier monuments and original insertions of new vessels in newly erected churches.

The respective published evidence from mainland Greece is, for the time, quite scarce. However, I think that the three isolated cases commented upon here do reflect a more generalized trend, to which hopefully more examples will be added in the future. In Panagia Mesosporitissa in Attica and in Agios Nikolaos in Hydra it is clear that, besides *bacini* dating to the 18th and the 16th c.<sup>375</sup>, one may also observe dishes that date within the 19th and the 18th c., respectively. In the first case, there are involved two examples of the early modern expression of the old slip-painted technique, the so-called “drip-painted” technique<sup>376</sup> (Fig. 39), bearing large splashes of white slip that run from the rim towards the centre below a dark green or yellow glaze; they constitute examples of the Didymoteicho production and by their form and decoration a date from the late 18th to the mid-19th c. has been suggested<sup>377</sup>.

373. BERTI, II. Problematiche, 12. On a characteristic case of substitutions of *bacini* for the church of S. Francesco in Bologna at the end of the 19th-early 20th c. see: NEPOTI, I *bacini* in maiolica arcaica, 45-46, 48, 51-53.

374. On this view and more details on these substitutions: GELICHI – FERRI, I “*bacini*” dell’Abruzzo e del Molise, 195-197.

375. On these ceramics and the monuments: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών, 67-69, 70-71, respectively. On Agios Nikolaos, in Hydra: G. N. SACHINIS, *Εκκλησιάκια, ἐκκλησιές, ἐρημοεκκλησία Ὑδρας*, Piraeus 1972, 89-90, no. 98.

376. J. VROOM, *Byzantine to Modern Pottery in the Aegean – 7th to 20th Century*, Utrecht 2005, 187.

377. On the original publication of these wares by Nikolakopoulos and their attribution to other ceramic categories: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών, 68-69, nos. 2-3. On the production of Didymoteicho and particularly vessels of this form and decoration, see recently: N. LIAROS, Late Ottoman Tableware from Didymoteicho and Some Notes on

The later insertion of the two vessels is further corroborated by their better state of preservation, since they are almost complete, and the fact that their rims lie at the same level with the surrounding wall which bears several layers of whitewash. In the second case, the example of the Çanakkale ware (Fig. 40) which bears characteristic schematic floral decoration in dark brown with added red small blobs suggests a date around the early 19th c.<sup>378</sup>.



Figure 40: *Bacino*, immured in Agios Nikolaos (Hydra) (photo from: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών*, 71, fig. 15).

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Pots' Form, Function and Identity, in F. YENİŞEHİRLİOĞLU (ed.), *XIth Congress AIECM3 on Medieval and Modern Period Mediterranean Ceramics Proceedings, 19-24 October 2015 Antalya*, v. 1, Ankara 2018, 203-216 (with all previous bibliography), particularly p. 211, pl. IV, 4 with additional argumentation in p. 213, note 9.

378. On the original publication of this vessel by Nikolakopoulos and its attribution to a different ceramic category: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών*, 71, no. 3. On similarly decorated vessels to the above, as to the decoration in the medallion: B. PSAROPOULOU (gen. ed.), E. GAVRILAKI (ed.), *Τσανάκκαλε*, 80-81; YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 113-114, figs. 112-113, 206, no. 1, 207, no. 5.

In addition, the vessels now immured in the church of Agia Aikaterini in the Plaka area (Athens), a monument of the second quarter of the 11th c.<sup>379</sup>, date from the early 20th c.: they are Greek products that follow the prototypes of Iznik ware<sup>380</sup>. Thus, if not inserted in the monument during works of restauration during the first decades of the 20th c., as Nikolakopoulos had noted<sup>381</sup>, they were certainly embedded only slightly later<sup>382</sup>. In all three cases the substitutions took place either in the period following the Greek War of Independence and the liberation of Greece or later, during the first part of the 20th c. Although the published evidence does not yet provide additional relevant examples, the former indicate some interest remaining in the practice and thus the preservation of its memory. In the case of Agia Aikaterini this suggestion of course is moderated by the fact that these substitutions most probably took place during official works of restoration.

On the other hand, it seems that the data from Crete are more eloquent on the preservation of the memory of this practice. Its renewal, either in the form of substitutions or in the form of new insertions, is observed from the late 18th c. and during the 19th c., where examples from the regional units of Chania and Lasithi are noted. In Chania the numerous substitutions immured during the late 18th c. in the church of Agia Triada

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379. On the monument's date, see: MEGAW, *The Chronology*, 107, 122, 124, 126, 129; I. KARANI, *Οικοδομικές επεμβάσεις στον ναό της Αγίας Αικατερίνης στην Πλάκα κατά τον 19ο και τις αρχές του 20ου αι., ΔΧΑΕ* per. Δ', 28 (2007), 147-156; BOURAS, *Βυζαντινή Αθήνα*, 129-134 (with all the previous bibliography).

380. On the publication of these vessels by Nikolakopoulos and their original attribution to the Iznik pottery: NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών*, 66-66. These vessels more likely constitute examples of the pottery factory of Rhodes (for similar ceramics: Y. IOANNIDIS, *ICARO - IKAPOS, Το εργοστάσιο κεραμικών της Ρόδου, The Pottery Factory of Rhodes, 1928-1988*, Athens 2017, 45, 172, ph. 246).

381. NIKOLAKOPOULOS, *Εντοιχισμένα κεραμικά εκκλησιών*, 67; KARANI, *Οικοδομικές επεμβάσεις*, 153-155.

382. According to the information provided by I. Karani, those works of restoration concerned the church's dome and were realized between 1917 and 1927 (KARANI, *Οικοδομικές επεμβάσεις*, 153-155). Taking into consideration that the Icaro, the pottery factory of Rhodes, officially started operating in 1928 (IOANNIDIS, *ICARO - IKAPOS*, 17, 31-34), these vessels -if they indeed constitute examples of its production- should be immured in the monument slightly later. On some later works related to this monument, see: BOURAS, *Βυζαντινή Αθήνα*, 129 with note 2 (and bibliography).

in Agia Roumeli (Sfakia) (Fig. 31) suggest a renewed concern in restoring elements of the monument's façade which were not well preserved. It has been suggested, based on the date of the *bacini* assemblage, that these later substitutions could have been realized after the Daskalogianni Revolt<sup>383</sup>. The latter began in Anopoli in 1770 and one of its consequences was the destruction of the village of Agia Roumeli<sup>384</sup>. In the case of the church of Agios Georgios in Drakona (Kydonia)<sup>385</sup>, the ceramics of the *bacini* assemblage date from the 18th and the early 19th c.<sup>386</sup> and the date "1833" is inscribed above the monument's entrance<sup>387</sup>. Given the period deriving from both sets, this evidence, as already suggested<sup>388</sup>, points to the short period of the Egyptian rule (1830-1840) in Crete, during which various public works were executed<sup>389</sup>. In Lasithi, in the church of Christ the Saviour in Christos a vessel of the Kütahya ware of the late 18th c. and two monochrome glazed dishes of the 19th c.<sup>390</sup> constitute original insertions in the nave dated to the 19th c.<sup>391</sup>. Çanakale ware dishes of the first half of the 19th c. replaced the original ones at the church of Agios Ioannis Chrysostomos in Kritsa, an action that took place possibly in 1835, when works of restoration took

383. On this view: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 173.

384. R. PASHLEY, *Travels in Crete*, v. II, Cambridge – London 1837, 263; V. RAULIN, *Description physique et naturelle de l'île de Crète*, v. 1, Paris 1869, 88; S. SPANAKIS, *Κρήτη, Β', Δυτική Κρήτη. Τουρισμός – Ιστορία – Αρχαιολογία. 4 χάρτες – 125 σχεδιαγράμματα και πίνακες. Πρόλογος Στυλιανού Αλεξίου*, Εφόρου Αρχαιοτήτων, Herakleion n.d., 52-54, 332; T. DETORAKIS, *Σφραγίδες Κρητικής Ελευθερίας (1821-1898). Προλογίζει Στυλιανός Αλεξίου*, Herakleion 1998, 13; L. NIXON, *Making a Landscape Sacred: Outlying Churches and Icon Stands in Sfakia, Southwestern Crete*, Oxford 2006, 74 with note 96; A. CHANIOTAKI-SMYRLAKI, The Role of Samaria Gorge in History, in E. PAPAVALSILEIOU (ed.), *The Gorge of Samaria, Shelter for Life, Den of Freedom*, Chania 2008, 130-131. For the role of Agia Roumeli in the struggle of the Cretans: SPANAKIS, *Κρήτη, Β'*, 32-34.

385. On the village: SPANAKIS, *Κρήτη, Β'*, 155-156.

386. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 173-174, 206-207.

387. On the monument's date: p. M. VLAVOGILAKIS, *Ναοί Μητροπόλεως Κυδωνίας και Αποκορώνου* (Accessible at: <https://www.imka.gr/g-nai/> [last accessed: 02.10.2019]). An inscription provides the date "1833" (YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 173).

388. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 174.

389. Th. DETORAKIS, *Ιστορία της Κρήτης*, second edition, Herakleion 1990, 351-352; DETORAKIS, *Σφραγίδες*, 20.

390. On these vessels see in detail: YANGAKI, *Ιστορίες αγγείων*, 75-81.

391. MOSCHOVI – KATIFORI, *Ναοί με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία*, 7, 14.

place on the monument, as mentioned in an inscription on the church<sup>392</sup>. An additional case of substitutions involves the assemblage of *bacini* immured in the church of Agios Panteleimon in Kalo Chorio: examples of Çanakkale ware (Fig. 32) of the 19th c., identical to the previous, are visible, together with a dish bearing splashes of slip under intense yellow glaze being a later product possibly of the same manufacturing centre and dating to the early 20th c.; the last ascribe the date for the event of the whole insertion<sup>393</sup>.

The timing of the immurations in Agia Triada, Agios Georgios, Christ the Saviour and Agios Ioannis Chrysostomos should not be considered accidental or random events. It is to be noted that Crete was involved in the War for Independence through successive uprisings against the Ottomans<sup>394</sup>, among which the first started in 1821 from the region of Sfakia, an area

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392. On more details on these vessels: YANGAKI, *Ιστορίες αγγείων*, 77-80. On more information on the monument and its restoration: G. MOSCHOVI, Διερεύνηση της πολεοδομικής εξέλιξης του οικισμού της Κριτσάς Μεραμπέλλου κατά την περίοδο της βενετοκρατίας, in C. LOUKOS – O. GRATZIOU (eds.), *Ψηφίδες. Μελέτες Ιστορίας, Αρχαιολογίας και Τέχνης στη μνήμη της Στέλλας Παπαδάκη-Oekland*, Herakleion 2009, 196, 197, fig. 6; MOSCHOVI – KATIFORI, *Ναοί με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία*, 13.

393. On the whole argument: YANGAKI, *Ιστορίες αγγείων*, 75-86.

394. W. J. STILLMAN, *Articles and Dispatches from Crete. Edited with Introduction and Notes by Georgios Georgiades Arnakis*, Austin – Texas 1976, 128-133, Appendix A-E; G. I. PANAGIOTAKIS, Το μνημόσυνο για τους νεκρούς και τα θύματα της μάχης του Λασιθιού το Μάη του 1867, *Αμάθεια* 50-51 (1982), 65-78; Th. DETORAKIS, Ἡ Τουρκοκρατία στην Κρήτη (1669-1898), in N. M. PANAGIOTAKES (†) (ed.), *Κρήτη: Ἱστορία καὶ Πολιτισμός*, v. 2, *Δεύτερη Ἔκδοση*, Herakleion 1988<sup>2</sup>, 382-387, 392-404; DETORAKIS, *Ιστορία της Κρήτης*, 321-328, 342-349, 356, 360-377; M. G. ANDRIANAKIS, *Το Φραγκακάστελλο των Σφακίων*, Athens 1998, 14; DETORAKIS, *Σφραγίδες*, 12-40; D. TSUGARAKIS – H. ANGELOMATIS-TSUGARAKIS, A Province under Byzantine-Venetian, and Ottoman Rule, AD 400-1898, in L. V. WATROUS – D. HADZI-VALLIANOU (eds.), *The Plain of Phaistos, Cycles of Social Complexity in the Mesara Region of Crete*, Los Angeles 2004, 363; N. F. TOMPROS, *Νεώτερη Ελληνική Ιστορία στο ανεξάρτητο Ελληνικό Κράτος (1453-1832)*, Athens 2013, 190-192; G. KORNARAKIS, Η συμβολή της Κεντρικο-ανατολικής Πεδιάδας στους Αγώνες της Κρήτης για την Ένωση με τον Εθνικό κορμό (1866-1913), in M. G. ANDROULIDAKIS (ed.), *Το Ηράκλειο και η Κρήτη από την τελευταία περίοδο της οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας ως την Ένωση με την Ελλάδα (1866-1913), Πρακτικά Επιστημονικού Συνεδρίου. Ηράκλειο, 23-26 Οκτωβρίου 2013, Βασιλική Αγ. Μάρκου*, Herakleion 2017, 347-357.

which the Ottomans repeatedly tried to control<sup>395</sup>, albeit not successfully<sup>396</sup>, while the first important Cretan victory occurred in 1821 at Loulos, in Kydonia, not far away from Drakona<sup>397</sup>. In addition, in 1823 a fierce battle took place in the area of Kritsa, while the chiefs of the area of Mirabello, where the area of Kalo Chorio lies, actively participated in the successive uprisings against the Ottomans, as in the revolution of 1866-1869<sup>398</sup>. Thus,

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395. For characteristic cases: N. V. TOMADAKIS, *Ιστορία της Εκκλησίας Κρήτης επί Τουρκοκρατίας (1645-1898)*, v. 1, *Αί Πηγαί (Άνθολογία άνεκδότων καί έκδεδομένων κειμένων, ίστορικών έγγραφων, ένθιμήσεων κλπ. μετ' είσαγωγής, βιβλιογραφίας καί πινάκων)* («Αθηνά» Σύγγραμμα Περιοδικόν της Εν Αθήναις Επιστημονικής Εταιρείας, Σειρά Διατριβών και Μελετημάτων 18), Athens 1974, 161; CHANIOTAKI-SMYRLAKI, The Role of Samaria Gorge, 133-134; A. KLADOU-BLETSΑ, Through the Years of Turkish Rule (1645-1898), in E. PΑPΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΥ (ed.), *The Gorge of Samaria*, 90; E. PΑPΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΥ, Permanent Habitation in Modern Times, in E. PΑPΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΥ (ed.), *The Gorge of Samaria*, 98. For additional information regarding the areas of Selino and Sfakia: RAULIN, *Description physique*, I, 292.26-292.28; STILLMAN, *Articles and Dispatches*, 131-133, Appendix C, E. See, additionally: W. J. STILLMAN, *The Cretan Insurrection of 1866-7-8*, New York 1874, 130-135; DETORAKIS, *Σφραγίδες*, 12-40.

396. RAULIN, *Description physique*, I, 88; SPANAKIS, *Κρήτη, Β'*, 28; M. G. ANDRIANAKIS, Εκκλησιαστικά Μνημεία, in *Σφακιά. Μύθος και ιστορία, Επτά Ημέρες, Η Καθημερινή*, 4 Αυγούστου 1996, Athens 1996, 21; ANDRIANAKIS, *Το Φραγκοκάστελο*, 6; M. ANDRIANAKIS, From the Early Christian Period until Venetian Rule, in E. PΑPΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΥ (ed.), *The Gorge of Samaria*, 81; KLADOU-BLETSΑ, Through the years of Turkish rule, 89.

397. SPANAKIS, *Κρήτη, Β'*, 172-173, 218-219, 333; ANDRIANAKIS, Εκκλησιαστικά Μνημεία, 21; DETORAKIS, *Σφραγίδες*, 13; NIXON, *Making a Landscape Sacred*, 74-76; CHANIOTAKI-SMYRLAKI, The Role of Samaria Gorge, 131; TOMPROS, *Νεώτερη Ελληνική Ιστορία*, 190-191.

398. PANAGIOTAKIS, Το μνημόσυνο, 65-78; DETORAKIS, *Ιστορία της Κρήτης*, 360-377; DETORAKIS, Η Τουρκοκρατία στην Κρήτη (1669-1898), 392-404; DETORAKIS, *Σφραγίδες*, 23-27; L. KALLIVRETAKIS, Η Κρήτη 1829-1869. Μεταξύ δύο επαναστάσεων, in V. PANAGIOTOPOULOS (ed.), *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού 1770-2000*, v. 4, *Το ελληνικό κράτος 1833-1871. Η εθνική εστία και ο ελληνισμός της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας*, Athens 2003, 377-385; TSUGARAKIS - ANGELOMATIS-TSUGARAKIS, A Province, 363; M. KLONTZAS, Νεότεροι Χρόνοι, in V. APOSTOLAKOU - M. ARAKADAKI - M. D. DERMITZAKIS - C. DRINIA - M. KLONTZAS - G. MOSCHOVI - M. SOROU, *Ο Άγιος Νικόλαος και η περιοχή του. Δημοτικά Διαμερίσματα: Βρουχάς, Ελούντα, Ζένια, Καλό Χωριό, Κριτσά, Κρούστας, Μέσα και Έξω Λακκωνία, Λίμνες, Λούμας, Ποτάμοι, Πρίνα, Σκινιάς. Περιήγηση στο χώρο και στο χρόνο*, Agios Nikolaos 2010, 95-96; M. SOROU, Από την οθωμανική κατοχή, in *Ο Άγιος Νικόλαος*, 209-210, 217-224.



it could be suggested that the events related to the *bacini* practice occurred as a reflection of these general conditions of strife and revolt. They should be interpreted as particular indications<sup>399</sup> of the general concern of the local Christian population to demarcate its own character which discerned it from the Ottomans<sup>400</sup>. The substitutions in the church of Agios Panteleimon may also be a reflection of vigour displayed in the early years of the 20th c., as observed above.

Furthermore, it is apparent that during the late 18th and during the first half of the 19th c., based on the respective examples of *bacini* in the regional units of Chania and Lasithi, there was some interest not only in preserving this earlier practice but also in safeguarding its memory<sup>401</sup>. This renewal, since it occurred from the late 18th c. on into the 19th c., at a period when national self-consciousness rose leading to the birth of the Greek national idea and the Greek War of Independence declared in 1821<sup>402</sup>, could constitute a particular form of its cultural expression; particularly if considering that the Modern Greek Enlightenment, which showed a deep interest in Greek Antiquity, flourished at that period<sup>403</sup>. Within the context of local cultural

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399. On this reasoning: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 173.

400. See L. KALLIVRETAKIS, *H Κρήτη 1829-1869*, 374-376.

401. On this interpretation, see in detail: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 172-173.

402. E. SKOPETEA, *Το «Πρότυπο Βασίλειο» και η Μεγάλη Ιδέα. Όψεις του εθνικού προβλήματος στην Ελλάδα (1830-1880)*, Thessaloniki: PhD University of Thessaloniki 1984, 77-80; L. DROULIA, *Ελληνική αυτοσυνειδησία. Μια πορεία γεμάτη λέξεις και σημασίες*, in V. PANAGIOTOPOULOS (ed.), *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού 1770-2000*, v. 2, *Η οθωμανική κυριαρχία, 1770-1821. Διαφωτισμός - Ιστορία της Παιδείας - Θεσμοί και Δίκαιο*, Athens 2003, 39-54; P. KITROMILIDES, *Η πολιτική σκέψη του νεοελληνικού Διαφωτισμού*, in V. PANAGIOTOPOULOS (ed.), *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού 1770-2000*, v. 2, *Η οθωμανική κυριαρχία, 1770-1821. Διαφωτισμός - Ιστορία της Παιδείας - Θεσμοί και Δίκαιο*, Athens 2003, 27-38; G. TOLIAS, *Η κατάσταση των Ελλήνων. Α. Η συγκρότηση του ελληνικού χώρου 1770-1821*, in V. PANAGIOTOPOULOS (ed.), *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού 1770-2000*, v. 1, *Η οθωμανική κυριαρχία, 1770-1821. Πολιτική πραγματικότητα - Οικονομική και κοινωνική οργάνωση*, Athens 2003, 61-64; L. DROULIA, *Towards Modern Greek Consciousness, The Historical Review/La Revue Historique* 1 (2004), 52-55, 60-61, 64-66; TOMPROS, *Νεώτερη Ελληνική Ιστορία*, 102-105, 168-178, 244-257.

403. On this topic, see recently: O. KATSIARDI-HERING, *The Role of Archaeology in Forming Greek National Identity and its Embodiment in European Identity*, *European Review* 28 (2020), 448-458 (containing a rich bibliography).

memory, the revived use of the *bacini* practice can indirectly be linked to each individual community and its collective perceptions of the past passing on into the present<sup>404</sup>. In addition, from an individual's perspective, the original beholdres and donors of these vessels may have valued these objects, investing them with particular connotations<sup>405</sup>. Given that the previously mentioned monuments are important landmarks for each area, the two previous sets may, as I have argued elsewhere<sup>406</sup>, refer, respectively, to the *collective* and the *individual* level<sup>407</sup> at which, according to A. Erll, culture and memory operate, revealing the existence and preservation of collective identity<sup>408</sup>. In Crete the inhabitants, conscious of this widespread practice during the Venetian domination, actively engaged to preserve it in the Christian monuments whether by replacements of the original vessels or by new insertions, in the need to communicate their identity<sup>409</sup>. Thus they made reference to the past and kept it fresh<sup>410</sup>, preserving a long tradition<sup>411</sup>.

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404. On the notion of memory and the interest for its study, in the framework of the social sciences and the humanities, and that of "collective memory", see: M. S. RUSU, *History and Collective Memory: The Succeeding Incarnations of an Evolving Relationship*, *Philobiblon* 18 (2013), 260-282 (with bibliography); see, as well: S. GENSBURGER, *Halbwachs' studies in collective memory: A founding text for contemporary 'memory studies'?*, *Journal of Classical Sociology* 16 (2016), 396-407.

405. On the whole argumentation: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 172-173.

406. See: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 174-175; YANGAKI, *Ιστορίες αγγείων*, 84.

407. See in detail: A. ERLI, *Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction*, in A. ERLI - A. NÜNNING (eds.), in collaboration with S. B. YOUNG, *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin, New York, 2008, 4-5.

408. J. ASSMANN, *Stein und Zeit. Das 'monumentale' Gedächtnis der altägyptischen Kultur*, in J. ASSMANN - T. HÖLSCHER (eds.), *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, Frankfurt 1988, 90-100; A. ASSMANN, *Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument*, in A. ASSMANN - D. HARTH (eds.), *Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument*, Frankfurt 1991, 13-18; see also: C. J. HOLTORF, *Towards a Chronology of Megaliths: Understanding Monumental Time and Cultural Memory*, *Journal of European Archaeology* 4 (1996), 120-126.

409. On cultural memory and the role of identity: J. ASSMANN, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*, transl. J. CZAPLICKA, *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 130; J. ASSMANN, *Communicative and Cultural Memory*, in A. ERLI - A. NÜNNING (eds.) in collaboration with S. B. YOUNG, *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin 2008, 113-114.

410. HOLTORF, *Towards a Chronology*, 125-128.

411. On cultural memory and tradition: J. ASSMANN, *Religion and Cultural Memory*:

Similarly, the rare examples from mainland Greece, dating from the period around the Greek War of Independence or just afterwards, also suggest an analogous concern in preserving the memory of a rather common earlier and Byzantine practice, at least as is witnessed in the examples of the Byzantine churches of the region of Attica that preserve this trait<sup>412</sup>.

No similar efforts seem to have taken place after the Greek independence and during the 20th c.<sup>413</sup> Only at times in the 20th c. in mainland Greece or at the end of the 20th c. and the early 21st c. in Crete during works of restoration on monuments, made by the Ephorates of Antiquities, are some substitutions made, but only aiming simply to preserve the existing practice at a particular locale<sup>414</sup>. The local population, apart from rare cases<sup>415</sup>, does not seem, however, to have shown any particular interest in the practice<sup>416</sup>. In those cases of the 20th c. in Crete where the empty recesses are covered with various pigments, mainly in minium (red lead)<sup>417</sup>, the desire to offer a bolder decorative effect is obvious. That the emphasis here is put on the original vessels' positions and not on the clay objects themselves may imply that the process of cultural memory is in vigour<sup>418</sup>. But much more often in Greece the overall whitewashing of the church façades was favoured<sup>419</sup>, covering up the empty recesses (Fig. 35, Fig. 37) or even the preserved objects as well. In those cases where the original *bacini* were not preserved, either the recesses would remain empty or would be consolidated in the course of restoration

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*Ten Studies*, transl. R. LIVINGSTONE, Stanford, CA 2005, 8 and A. VELICU, Cultural memory between the national and the transnational, *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 3.1 (2011), 1-4.

412. Hopefully, additional respective examples will come forth in the near future from other regions of Greece.

413. For more details on this remark: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 175-176.

414. A few respective characteristic cases are located in Lasithi and Rethymnon. For related comments: YANGAKI, *The Immured Vessels*, 7, 12; YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 175.

415. For one characteristic exception, see: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 176-183.

416. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 175.

417. On this pigment: J. HAND, How to Pick the Right Metal Finishes, *Popular Science* 187,2 (1965), 142-144; YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 49 with note 214, 176.

418. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 176.

419. On the practice of whitewashing secular and ecclesiastical buildings from the early modern and the modern period and the reasons behind this adoption, see in detail: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 25-28, 172-175 (with detailed bibliography).

work<sup>420</sup>. Similar treatments in the course of the 20th and the 21st c. rather enhance the previous argumentation on the reasons behind the renewal of the practice, developed during the Venetian period, in Ottoman Crete of the 18th and the 19th c.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In contrast to the views expressed on the mainly decorative and functional use of immured vessels in churches of mainland and insular Greece, the previous presentation has argued for their symbolic use that at times dictated specific choices. The vessels used in Cretan monuments besides their decorative purpose propound this symbolic function most clearly and widely. And in certain cases, more than one of the *bacini* involved may be imbued with more than one symbolism, religious or mundane, all of which were deliberately designed.

The intentional incorporation of otherwise everyday utilitarian vessels into the façades of ecclesiastical monuments, removing them out of their original secular context to permanently merge them with the fabric of churches, is in stark contrast to how the other parts of each monument were mainly conceived and manufactured specifically to a purpose<sup>421</sup>. This makes the *bacini* an original expression, merging the sacred with the profane; as such it further suggests that readings such as the above were feasible and intended<sup>422</sup>.

As shown through the analysis of the vessels' decoration, in both groups a particular emphasis was given to specific themes (i.e. birds) noticed as early as the middle-Byzantine period (late 11th and 12th c. in Athens and in the Mesa Mani, respectively) for the first group and from the late 13th c. onwards for Crete. It is mainly within the 14th and specifically the 15th c. when several elaborately decorated wares are in manufacture and circulation,

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420. YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 175.

421. With the exception of *spolia*, which are derived however from other buildings. None were utilitarian objects directly involved in common everyday household activities of people, in the way ceramics were.

422. See also: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 157.

being examples of the richly decorated pottery of the Renaissance, that these are used as *bacini*<sup>423</sup>.

Thus, it seems that the concern for the *bacini* to actively participate in the general synthesis of the façades of the ecclesiastical monuments in form and decoration, supporting the related sculpture, was developed early, with the very incorporation of the practice. In contrast, in monuments in Italy or in Sardinia, at least for the earliest occurrence of the practice, in the churches of Pisa but also elsewhere<sup>424</sup>, aniconic and schematic decoration prevails. However, as shown through the particularly characteristic cases of specific Cretan assemblages of the 15th c., it is only there that the population not only incorporated an Italian practice into the local churches, but fully embraced it, investing it with significance and, under the influence of the Renaissance art, where polyvalent meanings were unfolded through the selection of the depiction of specific figures and things<sup>425</sup>, developing a decorative vocabulary of its own to express the patrons' creative sensibilities. This new element was picked up and used in ways that were uniquely their own. No similar examples developed in the 15th c. in areas of mainland Greece, which from the middle of that century was placed under the Ottoman rule. For Crete, the study of *bacini* expresses the cultural processes by which the local society, the Veneto-Cretans, absorbed foreign practice and made it their own.

In stark contrast, the rather generalized practice followed in the last century of whitewashing the empty recesses and/or the *bacini* themselves constitutes an undeniable manifestation that an appreciation of the original ideas and the beliefs behind the disposition of these ceramics unfortunately has not been generally retained by the modern local communities<sup>426</sup>.

More than half a century ago, A. H. S. Megaw noted in respect to these particular objects that "Their humble character will not, I hope, discourage

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423. On some remarks on the decoration of *bacini* in northern Italy: BLAKE, *The Bacini*, 97.

424. To mention characteristic examples in Italy: BERTI – TONGIORGI, *I bacini*; BLAKE, *The Bacini*, 96; Atti 1996, see the various studies contained. On few exceptions regarding the material from Pisa: G. BERTI – F. GABBRIELLI – R. PARENTI, "Bacini" e architettura. Tecniche di inserimento e complesso decorativo, in Atti 1996, 259, fig. 10, 264, fig. 22. For Sardinia: M. HOBART – F. PORCELLA, *Bacini ceramici in Sardegna*, in Atti 1996, 139-160.

425. STEMP, *The Secret Language*, 15.

426. On specific cases that differ from this norm, see: YANGAKI, *Ceramics in Plain Sight*, 172-182.

others from examining such as exist in other churches"<sup>427</sup>. As shown in this essay, even if the evidence is fragmented and scattered, only partly preserved, there are indeed various avenues of research and enquiry for the alert and persistent visitor (and researcher) to explore. Within this perspective, the various pathways that these otherwise everyday utilitarian clay vessels have followed during their itinerary which led to their incorporation as *bacini* to the façades of churches have been explored and reconstructed<sup>428</sup>. Emphasis has been put on those avenues related to the connotations of the *bacini*'s use: the *bacini* may be in plain sight, but to understand them one must decipher the meanings hidden behind each particular choice. In the last decades, object-based studies have put emphasis on this very aspect, developing various approaches and theories to frame this particular field of research<sup>429</sup>. Among these, emphasis has been given to the objects *per se* and for themselves, on the exploration of the meanings they possessed or of their interaction with persons and social groups, under the concept of materiality<sup>430</sup>. So, it has been suggested that things may 'speak', transmitting thus their own multi-layered information<sup>431</sup>. Based on the previous detailed development of the topic, the *bacini* do indeed constitute an excellent example of a set of originally secular objects that can and may 'speak', not only of and for themselves, but also of their agents, both mundane (humans, secular) and supernatural (nonhuman, religious).

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427. MEGAW, *Glazed Bowls*, 146.

428. On the notion of an itinerary to best embrace an object's complex world and on the shortcomings of the biographical perspective and that of travelling objects, see: H. P. HAHN – H. WEISS, Introduction: Biographies, travels and itineraries of things, in H. P. HAHN – H. WEISS (eds.), in *Mobility, Meaning & Transformations of Things. Shifting contexts of material culture through time and space*, Oxford 2013, 2-12.

429. The related bibliography is quite rich (see also above, notes 25, 27). To state only some characteristic cases, which also develop the various directions and theories: T. BONNOTT, *La vie des objets: D'ustensiles banals à objets de collection*, Paris 2002; J. BENNETT, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durrham 2010; YALOURI, *Υλικός Πολιτισμός*, 11-74 (with analytical bibliography); KNAPPETT, *Materiality*, 188-207; ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ, *Υλικός πολιτισμός*, 19-90, 131-132.

430. On materiality, see above and note 27.

431. On the loquacious quality of objects: COHEN, Introduction: All Things, 6-7; GAYK - MALO, *The Secret Object*, 460-463. See, also, the respective bibliography on speaking objects in note 25.



‘ΟΜΙΛΟΥΝΤΑ’ ΚΕΡΑΜΙΚΑ:  
ΤΑ ΕΝΤΟΙΧΙΣΜΕΝΑ ΚΕΡΑΜΙΚΑ ΩΣ ΔΟΧΕΙΑ ΚΡΥΜΜΕΝΩΝ ΜΗΝΥΜΑΤΩΝ  
ΚΑΙ ΕΚΦΡΑΣΕΩΝ ΜΝΗΜΗΣ

Τα αγγεία που έχουν εντοιχιστεί σε ναούς του ελλαδικού χώρου έχουν ήδη από τη δεκαετία του 1970 αποτελέσει αντικείμενο έρευνας. Την τελευταία δεκαετία η σχετική έρευνα συστηματοποιήθηκε, στο πλαίσιο ειδικού ερευνητικού προγράμματος. Με βάση τόσο δημοσιευμένο υλικό από την ηπειρωτική Ελλάδα όσο και δημοσιευμένο αλλά και αδημοσίευτο υλικό από την Κρήτη η μελέτη επικεντρώνεται στις διαφορετικές πτυχές της χρήσης των εφυαλωμένων κεραμικών στις όψεις των ναών. Ειδικότερα, εκτός από τον καθαρά διακοσμητικό ή και λειτουργικό ρόλο της χρήσης των *bacini* στα εκκλησιαστικά μνημεία, επιχειρείται να αναδειχθεί η σημασία τους ως αντικείμενα που: α) εμπεριέχουν συμβολισμούς μέσω των οποίων δηλώνονται κυρίως θρησκευτικά νοήματα, β) παρέχουν έμμεσες πληροφορίες για τους αρχικούς ιδιοκτήτες τους ή/και τους δωρητές, γ) αποτελούν αφιερώματα, κειμήλια ή και «λείψανα», δ) είναι δείκτες διαπολιτισμικής όσμωσης μεταξύ του «εγχώριου» και του «ξένου», του χριστιανικού και του μουσουλμανικού κόσμου, δύο χριστιανικών δογμάτων, ε) εκφράζουν την πολιτισμική μνήμη στη διάρκεια της οθωμανικής και της νεότερης εποχής.