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Εντοιχισμένα αγγεία σε εκκλησίες της Κρήτης: Πρώτες παρατηρήσεις από την καταγραφή του υλικού στην περιοχή του Νομού Ρεθύμνου

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In the territories of what is now Greece, the exterior walls of an important number of churches from the mid- and late Byzantine periods are decorated with immured vessels, the so-called bacini. The study of bacini has already attracted the interest of a number of scholars. In Italy, too, numerous studies are devoted to the study of bacini.

Keywords
Venetian period, Crete, immured vessels/bacini, Prefecture of Rethymnon.

The article presents the preliminary observations deriving from the study of immured vessels in churches of the Prefecture of Rethymnon (Crete). Mention is made of the areas where this practice finds its largest diffusion, of the main forms of distribution of the vessels on the façades of churches, of the different categories of glazed wares used as bacini.
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These studies have brought to light a lot of information on the history of the monuments in question and the areas in which they are located. They have also added to our knowledge of Mediaeval glazed pottery, thus proving the importance of research of this kind.

Turning to the churches on Crete, although a few researchers, first among them G. Gerola, had already by the early 20th century noted the existence of immured vessels in a number of the island’s churches, a systematic and thorough survey had yet to be made. An initial, more systematic cataloguing of these Cretan churches whose decoration includes immured vessels reveals that the practice was especially widespread on the island during the period of Venetian rule. This led to the collaboration of the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation with the 28th and the 13th Ephorates of Byzantine Antiquities on the task of recording the relevant data.

The research programme initially focused on the Prefecture of Rethymnon. References in the current scholarship to churches with this form of decoration were combined with an examination of the photographic archive of the 28th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities and with systematic on-site research carried out by the author in collaboration with colleagues from the Ephorate. As a result, 74 churches (Table 1) were ultimately located with vessels imured in their external wall-faces; there were only fifteen known examples prior to the programme. The identification of an additional 59 churches with immured vessels was also partially the result of restoration work being conducted by the 28th Ephorate. Thus, the removal of plaster from church walls often revealed the existence of immured vessels or empty niches designed for such vessels, which had not previously been visible. Examples of vessels discovered in this way include those found in the katholikon at Chalepa monastery and the neighbouring church of St. Marina, the katholikon of the Asomaton monastery, the church of St. Nicholas in Apostoloi, and the church of St. Nicholas in Labiotes. In other cases, such as the church of Sts Apostles in Petrohori, the vessels themselves had been entirely covered in plaster prior to the restoration work.

Given the size of the area in question, 74 is quite a large number of churches, especially when compared with the number of churches with immured vessels currently known in mainland Greece. While exploring the origins of this form of decoration, the scholars noted its parallel presence in the territories of what is now Greece and on the Italian peninsula. On Crete, the practice has only been associated, to date, with the period of Venetian rule.
and afterwards. One could thus posit that the large number of churches with immured vessels on Crete can be explained by the powerful Italian presence on the island. However, given that the study of vessels immured in churches of the island is still in progress and given the especially large number of churches on Crete, this hypothesis must be made with reservations. The practice makes its first appearance in the area in the 13th century, and is mainly found in churches dating from the 14th and 15th century.

In the Prefecture of Rethymnon, churches with immured vessels are most densely concentrated in the area of the actual municipality of Amari (Table 1). A study of the practice of immuring vessels based on this numerically large sample of churches allows for observations to be made with greater certainty, and confirms the initial data presented in the recent past.8 Thus, this form of decoration is mainly found in barrel-vaulted single-cell churches in the area, less frequently in two-aisled churches,9 and rarely in churches of other architectural types. In the majority of cases (Fig. 1), a group of five (or, more rarely, four) open vessels are found to be arranged in the form of a cross in the western wall above the entrance and usually above the light-holes, if there are any, at the gable. The position of the vessels is inextricably linked with the location of the entrance; thus, when the entrance is found in the southern rather than the western wall, the vessels are also located in the south-facing wall. The second most common position for immured vessels is in a church’s eastern gable, above the apse. In this case, too, the vessels are positioned to form a cross. In roughly 10% of the cases studied, vessels are found similarly arranged on both the eastern and western wall-faces. No vessels have been found immured in a church’s northern facades. We can therefore conclude that the vessels were immured in those sides of the church where they would be visible to the con-

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9 On Crete’s barrel-vaulted single and two-aisled or double churches, see the recent and thorough treatment by O. Gratziou (O. Gratziou, Η Κρήτη στην Ύστερη Μεσαιωνική Εποχή. Η μεταφορά της εκκλησιαστικής τοιχογραφίας, Heraklion 2010, 93-125), which contains the earlier bibliography.
For the rest of Greece, we refer, by way of illustration, to the range of framing modes found in churches in North western Greece (Tsouris, Ο κεραμοπλαστικὸς διάκοσμος, op.cit. (n. 1), 110 111) and the Peloponnese (Velenis, Ερμηνεία, op.cit. (n. 2), 194 195 and note 1 on p. 195). For churches in Italy, see, for instance: Berti, “Baci ni ceramici e strutture architettoniche,” op.cit. (n. 3), 159, fig. 26, 162, fig. 33; O. Mazzucato, “Situazione dei ‘Bacini’ nel Lazio 1993,” Atti. XXVI Convegno Internazionale della Ceramica, op.cit. (n. 3), 162 164, 174 175, figs 2d e G. Berti  F. Gabbrielli  R. Parenti, “Bacini e architettura. Tecniche di inserimento e complesso decorativa,” Atti. XXVI Convegno Internazionale della Ceramica, op.cit. (n. 3), 246 250, 259, fig. 9, 264, fig. 21.

Mainland Greece: Velenis, Ερμηνεία, op.cit. (n. 2), 110 111; Tsouris, “Glazed Bowls,” op.cit. (n. 1), 618; Italy: Mazzucato, op.cit., 174, figs 2d e f, 175, fígs 2g h l m n.

This particular category of pottery is already well documented and continues to attract the attention of researchers. A selection of the core studies would include: A. H. S. Megaw, “Zeuxippus Ware,” BSA 63 (1968), 67 87; id., “Zeuxippus Ware Again,” Recherches sur la céramique byzantine (eds V. Déroche J. M. Spieser), BCH Suppl. 18, 1989, 259 266; G. Berti  S. Gelichi, “La ceramica bizantina nelle architetture dell'Italia medievale,” La ceramica nel mondo bizantino tra XI e XV secolo e i suoi rapporti con l'Italia. Atti del Seminario Certosa di Pontignano (Siena, 11 13 marzo 1993) (ed. S. Gelichi), Firenze 1993, 173 174, fig. 34, 179, no. 263, 181, no. 271, fig. 38, l, 182, no. 288, 183, fig. 39, 185, no. 98, fig. 43, 186, fig. 45; Y. Waksman  V. François, “Vers une redéfinition typologique et analytique des céramiques byzantines du type Zeuxippus Ware,” BCH 128 129 (2004 2005), 629 724.

Turning to the manner in which the vessels are immured, it would seem, based on the close examination of vessels that have been cleaned and have had newer layers of plaster removed, that the vessels were embedded in specially prepared mortar and rested on stones positioned at the requisite angle. In some cases (Fig. 2), the stones have been carved to match the profile of the vessel which is to rest upon them. The vessels' rims are visible; meaning neither have they been embedded into reinforced mortar applied on top of the masonry, nor has the surrounding masonry been carved in such a way that the rim slots into it. As a rule, therefore, it would not appear that especial care was taken with framing these vessels, as was the case, for example, in churches in mainland Greece or in Italy.10 The careful framing of the two vessels (neither of which has survived) in the church of St. Marina in Chalepa is also exceptional in this respect, since they are set in brick circles, which serve to draw attention to them. Frames of this type are found in churches in mainland Greece and in Italy.11

The study of the numerous vessels, which have survived in whole or as fragments, has provided data on the fine, glazed wares found on Crete. Most common of all are small and medium-sized bowls with straight rims. There are also large plates. The vessels imported onto the island include some attributed to Byzantine production centres, and others to workshops in the Iberian peninsula, Italy, Syria and Cyprus. Rare examples of Zeuxippus Ware12 – category II – number among the earliest types of ceramics found to date, along with more numerous examples (Fig. 3) of Late Sgraffito Ware, bearing simple, incised decora-

Fig. 2. Nefs-Amari, church of Sts Theodoroi. Detail showing the way the vessel is immured in the wall.
Monochrome-blue and lustreware pottery (Fig. 5) of the production centres of the Valencia region, in the Iberian peninsula, dating from the late 14th and the 15th centuries, together with Syrian pottery painted in black, blue and turquoise (Fig. 6), dating from mainly after the 14th century.

13 For the use of the term Late Sgraffito Ware, see: G. D. R. Sanders, “Excavations at Sparta: The Roman Stoa, 1988 1991. Preliminary Report. Part I (c) Medieval Pottery,” BSA 88 (1993), 257, and J. Vroom, After Antiquity. Ceramics and Society in the Aegean from the 7th to the 20th Century A.C. A Case Study from Boeotia, Central Greece, Leiden 2003, 164; Διδακτική Συλλογή Βυζαντινής και Μεταβυζαντινής Κεραμικής (ed. S. Kalopissi-Verti), Athens 2003, 89. Late Sgraffito Ware comprises mostly pottery bearing characteristics similar to those of the so called sub categories Ib and Ic of Zeuxippus Ware, which recent research does not connect to the prototype production of Zeuxippus Ware (see, in detail: Waksman François, op.cit., 629 724).


1st half of the 14th and from the 15th century, and incised pottery from Cyprus, dated to the 13th-14th centuries, are represented by a limited number of richly decorated vessels. However, the bulk of the ceramics imported into Crete—much of which was incised—were from centres in Italy. The “San Bartolo” type, which is attributed to workshops in Venice and dates from the latter half of the 13th and the 14th centuries, accounts for some of the earliest Italian ceramics found in the area. The examples of Italian “graffita arcaica” (Fig. 7) and the Italian incised polychrome pottery of the Renaissance (“graffita rinascimentale canonica”) (Fig. 8), which


17 For the main centres of pottery production on Cyprus during the Medieval period, and the most characteristic categories of Cypriot glazed pottery, see: D. Papanikola Bakirtzis, Μεσαιωνική Εφυαλωμένη Κεραμική της Κύπρου. Τα Εργαστήρια Πάφου και Λάρνακας, Thessaloniki 1996. For pottery of the 13th century with simple, incised decoration: Papanikola Bakirtzis, Μεσαιωνική Εφυαλωμένη Κεραμική της Κύπρου, op.cit., 70 81.


ΔΧΑΕ ΑΔ’ (2013), 375-384
stands out for its rich and especially well executed decoration, are highly typical of the Italian ceramics found on Crete. Painted Italian pottery is limited to examples of “polychrome glazed pottery” (Fig. 9) with a lead glaze (“RMR Ware”). Other common categories of ceramics include monochrome glazed pottery covered with a dark – usually brown, and particularly glossy – glaze, and vessels whose slip-painted decoration comes in the form of simple, broad, thick bands. This form of decoration is a continuation of that found in a category of pottery which was especially widespread during the mid-Byzantine period, although the later, slip-painted category differs from this earlier category in that its slip is applied to the surface in a deliberately slap-dash way.

Additional processing of the sample in question will clearly contribute to our knowledge of various aspects of bacini practice. For instance, limiting ourselves to a superficial account of two of these, researchers have noted that the study of churches with immured vessels in other areas has provided additional data on the dating of at least the sec-

Fig. 7. Chordaki, church of Panagia Faneromeni. Immured graffita arcaica bowl.

Fig. 8. Platanos, church of St. Antonios. Immured “graffita rinascimentale canonica” bowl.


Proceeds further, it should be possible to create sub-categories of churches which are decorated with the same types of ceramics, and which can probably be grouped together on the basis of their architecture and their architectural painted decoration. The research programme may also shed light on differences in the practices relating to the immuring of vessels in monastic institutions, on the one hand, and in churches not associated with a monastery, on the other. The data that has emerged from the area in question would indicate that this form of decoration is more common in churches unattached to monasteries. However, in those rare cases where katholika were decorated with *bacini*, usually their number was not limited to the usual four or five ceramics, as in churches unattached to monasteries, but the vessels were more numerous and they belonged to high-quality productions. For example, the practice is only encountered in four of the numerous monasteries in the Prefecture of Rethymnon which date from the period of Venetian rule and in two of the four instances – in the church of the Zoodochos Pigi at Prinos and the katholikon of Chalepa monastery - extremely fine, imported ceramics were used as *bacini*. A comparison between these monasteries and monasteries in the Herakleion region – where, once again, only very few of the numerous katholika were adorned with vessels – allows us to conclude that here, too, the immured vessels were, in each case, both of extremely good quality and more numerous than those immured in churches unattached to monasteries. The large number of vessels immured in katholika, the use of ceramics from the Iberian peninsula, Italy and Syria – examples from the first two of which were expensive and have only been found in katholika to date – and the fact that the vessels were not usually arranged in a particular pattern raise questions as to whether the choice of a particular type of ceramics was random or prompted by specific considerations, thus probably serving, a symbolic role in addition to a decorative one.


It is thus clear that there are many additional aspects of *bacini* to be studied relating to the history of the area and the architecture of the churches in which they are found, and to the types of ceramics immured. One of the more interesting aspects of *bacini* relates to the study of Mediaeval pottery on the island. As we now know, most of the *bacini* on Crete were imported from various Mediterranean regions, and most commonly from Italy. Since only a limited number of publications have concerned themselves with these categories of pottery found on the island, 27 studying *bacini* could enhance our knowledge of Mediaeval glazed pottery.

### Table 1. Distribution of churches with immured vessels in the Prefecture of Rethymnon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Number of Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rethymnon</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mylopotamos</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anogeia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amari</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Vasilios</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 We mention, for example, the publications of pottery from Chania
γράμματος, το Ινστιτούτο Ιστορικού Ερευνών σε συνεργασία με την 28η και τη 13η Εφορεία Βυζαντινών Αρχαιοτήτων άρχισε την καταγραφή και τεκμηρίωση των εντοιχισμένων σε ναούς αγγείων.

Με βάση την πορεία αυτής της καταγραφής, η οποία αρχικά επικεντρώθηκε στοΝομό Ρεθύμνου, και σε συνεργασία με το προσωπικό της 28ης Εφορείας Βυζαντινών Αρχαιοτήτων, εντοπίστηκαν 74 ναοί με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία σε εξωτερικές πλευρές, οι περισσότεροι εκ των οποίων βρίσκονται στην περιοχή του Δήμου Αμαρίου. Ο αριθμός ναών που εντοπίστηκαν είναι αρκετά μεγάλος, σε σχέση με τους ναούς που έχουν εντοπιστεί στην περιφερειακή Ελλάδα. Ειδικά σε τοις αιγοφόρο στην Κρήτη, η πρακτική αυτή μέχρι σήμερα εμφανίστηκε από το 13ο αιώνα και μετά και ιδίως σε ναούς που χρονολογούνται στο 14ο και 15ο αιώνα, παρατηρήθηκε πως ενημερώνει το φαινόμενο ότι ο μεγάλος αριθμός ναών με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία στο νησί μπορεί, πιθανότατα, να εξηγηθεί από την αισθητική της πολιτισμικής παράδοσης.

Η μελέτη της πρακτικής εντοιχισμού αγγείων στον αυτό το μεγάλο, αριθμητικά, δείχνει ναούς που επικρατεί τη μεγαλύτερη διατύπωση παρατηρήσεις αναφορικά με αυτή καθετιστή την πρακτική και επιβεβαιώνει τα πρώτα σχετικά στοιχεία που έχουν παρουσιαστεί κατά το πρόσφατο παρελθόν. Ειδικότερα, αυτή η μορφή διακόσμησης απαντά κατεξοχήν στους μονόχωρους κατά το πρόσφατο παρελθόν, ειδικά στην περιοχή της Κρήτης, καθώς εκτός από αγγεία που αφορούν τους ναούς της Ιβηρικής χερσονήσου, της Ιταλίας, της Συρίας και της Κύπρου.

Η περαιτέρω επεξεργασία των δεδομένων είναι βέβαια ότι θα συνδέσει στη διερευνήση επιπλέον πτυχών του θέματος. Ενδεικτικά, η μελέτη των εντοιχισμένων αγγείων σε ναούς στην Κρήτη παρέχει ειδικευτικές πληροφορίες που σχετίζονται με την καταγραφή και την τεκμηρίωση των αρχαιοτήτων και του πολιτισμού της Κρήτης κατά τη βενετοκρατία.

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