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

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Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

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*, and their study 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.

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**Immured Vessels in Churches on Crete: Preliminary Observations on Material from the 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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3 There are numerous related studies. Illustrative examples would include: G. Berti  L. Tongiorgi, *I bacini ceramici medievali delle chiese di Pisa*, Roma 1981; G. Berti  E. Tongiorgi, “Per lo studio dei bacini delle chiese di Pisa: Rassegna di recenti contributi alla storia della ceramica,” *Le ceramiche medievali delle chiese di Pisa. Contributo per una migliore comprensione delle loro caratteristiche del loro signi-
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 Medieval 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 those 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 im-

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6 The data relating to Crete forms part of a major research programme entitled “Immured vessels in churches of Greece: en eletronicus corpus,” which seeks to record the bacini in Greece, and which was initiated by the author at the Institute of Historical Research with the collaboration of the respective Ephorates of Byzantine Antiquities. For now, the programme is focused on areas of Attica, the Peloponnese and Crete. Regarding the Prefectures of Rethymnon and Chania, I would like to thank Michalis Andrianakis, now honorary director of the 28th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, for his willingness to participate in the specific research programme, for granting permission to study the specific practice in respect of churches in both Prefectures, and for his unreserved support throughout the programme. I would also like to thank my colleagues from the 28th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities: Natassa Fiolitaki, Athina Fraidaki, Kostas Giapitsoglou, Nikoletta Pyrrou and Petroula Varthalitou for their collaboration and help during the course of the programme.

7 Millet, op.cit. (n. 2), 183, fig. 106, fig. 108; Bouros, Βεβαιωτικά σταυρόβρυλα, op.cit. (n. 2), 73, note 318.
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-

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 μαρτυρία της εκκλησιαστικής αρχιτεκτονικής, Herakleion 2010, 93 125), which contains the earlier bibliography.

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. 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.

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 Ware—a category II—in 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-


11 Mainland Greece: Velenis, *Eρμηνεία*, op. cit. (n. 2), 110–111; Tsouris, “Glazed Bowls,” op. cit. (n. 1), 618; Italy: Mazzucato, op. cit., 174, figs 2d ε 1, 175, figs 2g–h 1 m n.
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,15 together with Syrian pottery painted in black, blue and turquoise (Fig. 6), dating from mainly after the

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).


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 Λαπήθου*, Thessalonike 1996. For pottery of the 13th century with simple, incised decoration: Papanikola Bakirtzis, *Μεσαιωνική Εφυαλωμένη Κεραμική της Κύπρου*, op.cit., 70 81.


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

Fig. 5. Katholikon of the monastery at Chalepa. Immured lustreware bowl.

Fig. 6. Prinos, church of Zoodochos Pigi. Immured large plate from Syria, painted in black and blue.
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”).21 Other common categories of ceramics include monochrome glazed pottery covered with a dark – usually brown, and particularly glossy – glaze,22 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,23 although the later, slip-painted category24 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-


tion of wall in which they were immured,\textsuperscript{25} if not the monument as a whole.\textsuperscript{26} This appears to largely hold true on Crete, too, since churches in the Prefecture of Rethymnon built in different periods are indeed adorned with different categories of ceramics, while similar types of ceramics are encountered in churches built during much the same period. For example, in the Amari region, examples of Late Sgraffito Ware (see above) have been found in the churches of St. Georgios in Opsigias, Afentis Christos in Voliones, and Sts Theodoroi in Amari itself, all of which date from the 13th or 14th century. Furthermore, in the Mylopotamos area, four churches built between the mid-14th and early 15th century are adorned with examples of RMR Ware. As the systematic recording of the data 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 and 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.

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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>

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γράμματος, το Ινστιτούτο Ιστορικών Ερευνών σε συνεργασία με την 28η και τη 13η Εφορεία Βυζαντινών Αρχαιοτήτων αρχίσει την καταγραφή και τεκμηρίωση των εντοιχισμένων σε ναούς αγγείων.

Με βάση την πορεία αυτής της καταγραφής, η οποία αρχίζει επικεντρωθεί στο Νομό Ρεθύμνου, και σε συνεργασία με το προσωπικό της 28ης Εφορείας Βυζαντινών Αρχαιοτήτων, εντοπίστηκαν 74 ναοί με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία στις 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 ηπειρωτική Ελλάδα. Ειδικά σε τοις αιώνα στην Κρήτη, η πρακτική αυτή μέχρι σημείος εμφανίζεται από το 13ο αιώνα και μετά, και είναι σε ναούς που χρονολογούνται στο 14ο και 15ο αιώνα, παρατήρηση που ενισχύει την υπόθεση ότι ο μεγάλος αριθμός ναών με εντοιχισμένα αγγεία στη νοτιοανατολική πλευρά των ναών, πάνω από την αψίδα τους.

Ως προς τον τρόπο εντοιχισμού των αγγείων, προκύπτει ότι τα αγγεία εντοιχίζονται πάνω στο ειδικά προετοιμασμένο κονίαμα εδάφους του τοίχου και αφού προηγουμένως οι λίθοι, πάνω στους οποίους εδράζονται τα αγγεία, έχουν τοποθετηθεί με την απαιτούμενη κλίση. Σε κάποιες μάλιστα περιστάσεις οι λίθοι είχαν καταλήγει σαμιλένθη, ώστε να ακολουθήσουν την καμπύλη του κάθε αγγείου. Κατά κανόνα δεν παρατηρείται ιδιαίτερη μέριμνα για την πλασίωση των αγγείων.

Βάσει της προαναφερθείσας μελέτης των πολυάριθμων αγγείων των ναών συμβαίνει σε περιοχές που αρχεία ή θραυματικά, προκύπτουν στοιχεία για την εφαρμογή κεραμικής που εντοπίζεται στο νησί της Κρήτης, καθώς εκτός από αγγεία που αποδίδεται σε εργαστήρια παραγωγής, εντοπίζονται τόσο ορισμένα που αποδίδεται σε βυζαντινά κέντρα παραγωγής όσο και άλλα, που αποδίδεται σε εργαστήρια της Βηθουσίας χερσονήσου, της Ιταλίας, της Συρίας και της Κύπρου.

Η περαιτέρω επεξεργασία των δεδομένων είναι βέβαιο όταν θα συνδράμει στη διερεύνηση επιπρόσθετου συναισθήματος των εντοιχισμένων αγγείων στη δυτική πλευρά, πάνω και από την καθεδρική καταγραφή της περιοχής. Τόσο οι ναοί που αναφέρονται σε βασικές περιοχές, τόσο οι περιοχές που δεν απελευθερώνονται, καθώς και άλλες εντοιχισμένες αγγεία στη νοτιοανατολική πλευρά των ναών, πάνω από την αψίδα τους.

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