

THE 7TH-CENTURY CYPRIOT AMPHORA TYPES: REGIONAL OR INTERNATIONAL?

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ABSTRACT

The years between the 4th and 7th centuries AD are considered as one historical period, known under different names (Late Roman, Early Christian or Byzantine period). At the end of this era, during the 7th century, important changes are observed in the Eastern Mediterranean, at least as far as amphora production and trade are concerned. Several amphora types gradually disappeared from the market as a result of the unrest conditions of their area of production. Still, some others remained, although with significant changes in their form, production and distribution. The typological evolution of LRA1 and LRA13, which were among the most common amphora types of the period, is of particular interest, especially if their new production sites are considered. Their presence in the Yassiada cargo also raises several questions on the nature of their trade and distribution patterns. In other words, it is not certain if these types were distributed from the same ports, if they had a different content (wine or olive oil?) or if they represented two different destinations of the same product. Before we could answer these questions, many factors must be examined, such as the product surplus of several regions, the institutional transports or the means of free trade.

In Cyprus, the production of these two types was verified in the 7th-century workshops (Paphos, Amathous and Zygi), whereas only the LR1s are the amphoras traditionally made on the island since the beginning of the Late Roman period. In this paper, the Cypriot 7th-century amphora production will be presented and compared to that of other sites, widespread in the Mediterranean, in an effort to shed light on the new factors that provoked this change in food distribution. It is obvious that in the 7th century we cannot easily connect the amphora shape or content with a particular region anymore, probably because the previously strong local pottery traditions were weakening. The provenance of the new LR1 and LR13 types can vary (from North Africa to the Black Sea), so we should find a strong reason, other than tradition, to explain the beginning of new productions during an era of general decline. Otherwise, we should reconsider the character of “decline” in the different provinces of the Roman Empire.