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FROM THE KITCHEN TO THE TABLE: SOUTHERN ILLYRIAN POTTERY PRODUCTION IN THE ADRIATICO-IONIAN COMMERCE (1ST–3RD CENTURY AD)¹

The study on the pottery discovered recently at the southern Illyrian sites, has given new informations on the local production of several categories, like cooking ware, fine ware, table ware, relief decorated bowls and others. The purpose of this presentation will be to take into account all of them and try to understand their position within the large economic relationship in the Adriatico-Ionian region. Knowing that several local products from this region have been exported to the four directions, it will be interesting to understand why and how different categories of production have been accepted and preferred within Illyrian and non-Illyrian communities.

The knowledge about Albanian archaeology has been limited till two decades ago, as a result of the modern history of this country². For such reasons, even the analysis of different topics connected to the pottery studies, have been quite limited. Following the recent changes after 1990, the archaeology too opened towards the foreign community. Even though the resources are still limited, there are several publications with pretty interesting results. Here I will try to offer a summary of the recently acquired results. We shall meet several categories, such as cooking wares, table wares and fine wares. We will try to offer certain ideas about their correlations with social features. But the presentation has not the intention to give answers to many questions. On the contrary, several questions will arise and hopefully attract more researchers to study such topics.

Cooking ware

Till the 1st century AD it seems that the main local production maintained the traditional forms of the last two centuries, as seen in some finds in the necropolis³. But, from the 1st century AD onwards, and more evidently in the 2nd century, several new types started to be widely produced.

Better identified and well studied is the so-called “Illyrian Cooking Ware”, as baptized by C. De Mitri⁴. Even though the author may have changed his opinion about the name, the high quantities found recently in Apollonia and Durres, suggest that his first intuition was the right one.

The main production has a typical clay composition that makes it distinguishable at the first sight. We have identified

seven specific types⁵, of which the best-known is the first one. As we have already published, it is highly probable that this type has an origin in the Urban Illyrian period⁶. A similar evolution should be expected for the second type too.

The types 3 and 7 show morphological features of Aegean productions. I am keen to see them as a result of imitation. For the other types (4, 5 and 6) actually we cannot give any indication of their origin.

Dating evidences indicate a starting point in the 1st century AD, a wide distribution between the 2nd and the 4th centuries, and with some morphological changes they are present until the 5th century AD.

Therefore, on one side we have clear indications of an old local production that is fading, and on the other side a whole new perspective opens with the evolution of certain new types.

This production was spotted in several sites in Albania (**fig. 1**). Other finds have been identified on the eastern Adriatic coast and the Ionian one (**fig. 1**). But, the main market for such productions seems to have been southern Italy. The find spots represented by De Mitri are much more numerous than those in Southern *Illyria* itself⁷.

Table wares

Slowly, but significantly, the studies of the table wares are testifying the existence of a considerable local market. For the moment we are sure about the local production of lagynoi, jars, jugs and hydriae, in *Apollonia* and Durres⁸. But actually we cannot identify distinctive features that may help us to

¹ I would like to thanks Britney Kyle and Susanne Zabehlicky for improving considerably the English text of this presentation

² BEJKO 1998, 195–208; Veseli 2006, 323–330.

³ TARTARI 2004 tab. XVIII, v.65,5 tab.XLV,129.135.

⁴ DE MITRI 2010, 681–686.

⁵ SHEHI 2016 fig.1–2.

⁶ SHEHI 2016, 209–221.

⁷ DE MITRI 2010 fig. 7.

⁸ SHEHI 2004, 3–45; FIEDLER ET AL. 2011, 139–140. New finds will be represented in the forthcoming publication about the theatre of *Apollonia*.

recognize a possible regional export. Furthermore, the chemical analyses are still not developed. Therefore we have to wait for other studies, based on clay analysis, to try to tackle the probable regional exports.

The table ware productions followed two main lines: evolution of the traditional production and imitation of the internationally best-known shapes.

The traditional productions served as a good base to fulfil the local demands. We have identified several types showing the same morphological concepts as versions of the 3rd–1st century BC.

In the same time several types were influenced by imported ones. They represent, if we may call it as such, “the globalisation face” of that production, contrary to the “traditional face” that follows the old morphological concepts.

The large typological range the local production offered, with a quite good quality, covered all the kinds of use a household needed. Thus, the local market was in a good position toward the importations of the same categories. This clearly answers the question why the southern Illyrian market of table ware is dominated by the local production.

Red Slip Ware

Another category of vessels is the fine ware production, that we have called “Illyrian Red-Slip Ware” (IRS). The Illyrian potters were aware of the technologies needed to manufacture a red slip at least since the 3rd century BC but it is not yet clear if the first intentional production took place as an innate evolution, or under the influences of ESA imports⁹. For the moment we know that the first ESA types are found in the same layers with those of local production, dating to the second half of the 2nd century BC.¹⁰ With the increase of the imports, the local production gained a significant augmentation too.

We can distinguish two main groups in the local production, the plain and the relief decorated one.

The first group shows certain tendencies in the production:

- A continuity in the morphology of shapes;
- An imitation of the best-known imported shapes;
- A tentative introduction of new shapes.

The shapes that prove the continuity within the IRS follow mostly those produced in black slip. Their presence is documented at least till the 1st century AD.

The imitations are based on the ESA, Italic, ESB and African imports. There are cases when the shapes are clearly inspired by the imports but shaped as a personal interpretation of local potters.

The forms having imitated the ESA productions are: Atlante 4A, 30, 34 and 58. All of them are plates with a chronology starting from the end of the 2nd cent. BC. till the middle of the 1st cent. AD.

The Italic sigillata provided many prototypes of all shapes: cups (Conspectus 22, 23, 27, 33, 34, 36), bowls (Conspectus 37), plates (Conspectus 3, 7, 18, 20), beakers (Conspectus 50.3.1 and 3.2). There are several shapes of

calices, inspired by the Italic productions, but shaped in a personal interpretation of the local potters.

The types that clearly have imitated the ESB productions are, at least till now, Atlante 60, 75, 76 and 80, with a chronological range between the Flavian period and mid 2nd century AD.¹¹

The prototypes in ARS production that have been imitated are the plates Hayes 5A, 8A and 9A, dating from the Flavian period till the second half of the 2nd century, belonging to the “A1” production.

Several other productions could be considered inspired from two different productions, such as Italic and ESB (Bowls: Conspectus 14/ESB 34; Pucci1985, type XIV, V.1/ ESB 80. Plates: Conspectus 4.6/ESB 53; Conspectus 2.1/ ESB 63); Italic and ESA (plates: ESA 3/Conspectus 6; ESA 6/Conspectus 10); Italic and ARS (plates: Conspectus 40/ Hayes 6c; Conspectus 42, 44 / Hayes 6).

Relief decorated wares

The information about a distinctive local production of relief-decorated ware is growing every year. It seems that such finds may be divided in two main groups, for everyday use and for ritual use.

We have already published few examples of such productions, dating from the mid 1st century BC to the Roman imperial period¹². In another publication we analysed a mould for “Corinthian relief ware”¹³. The chemical analysis of the mould has revealed that the clay did not derive from the traditional sources in the northern hills of Durrës. But we don’t know yet other sources of clay near the town. Several iconographical features of the mould helped us to identify some cups which derived from it and were discovered in Durrës.

There are other finds that at least till now don’t seem to derive from imported concepts but were local inventions. Such is the case of two fragmented large bowls discovered in Shkodra and Lezha¹⁴.

The first bowl¹⁵ is covered with an orange-red slip, nearly identical with the local sigillata. The only entirely preserved relief composition represents the sacrifice of an animal by two males, connecting it to ritual use¹⁶.

The second bowl¹⁷ represents just one frieze in relief, with fish and an aquatic bird. In this case there is no reason to believe in a ritual use of it.

Recently few finds connected to the relief decorated pottery have been published from Durrës¹⁸. At least two of them, a fragmented bowl and a partially preserved mould

¹¹ HAYES 1985, 69–70; ABADIE-REYNAL 2007, 104–105.

¹² SHEHI 2014, 134–135; 142 tab. 97; 140–142 tab. 98; 143–144 tab. 111; 1394–1395.

¹³ SHEHI, GALATY 2013, 190–193 fig. 6.

¹⁴ HOXHA 2012, 63–83.

¹⁵ HOXHA 2012, 65 note 16: height 4,5 cm, rim diameter 19,6 cm.

¹⁶ HOXHA 2012, 63–83.

¹⁷ HOXHA 2012, 71 note 63: height 3,3 cm, rim diameter 15,3 cm.

¹⁸ FRASHERI 2015, 354–357; 457–460 Taf. 21,2; 22,1–6, 23,1–7. Except of a general description of the finds, a tentative of interpretation in the pages 354–357 is a mere repetition of the catalogue description (pages 457–460), using the ideas given by HOXHA 2012. The dating evidences given by the author based on the stratigraphy must be taken with precautions.

⁹ SHEHI 2014, 272.

¹⁰ SHEHI 2014, 238–240.



Fig. 1. Distribution of cooking ware, type 1.

for bowls have some compositional features connected to the Shkodra fragment. But they are far from being identical. The concept is similar, and could have been created with the same purpose, but not with the same mould.

Unfortunately we can't say anything for the origin of the fragmented mould, whether it was imported or locally produced.

Probable exports of the Illyrian red-slip ware actually are mentioned only in South Italy, with few shapes¹⁹. But it can be expected that the numbers will grow significantly in the

coming years. A great help for identifications hopefully will come from the Albanian publications and the identification of chemical features.

What does the imitation mean?

Here we come to one of the main questions for this topic: what was the intention behind the imitations?

The imitated shapes were well known and very popular on the market. The choice of shapes to be imitated followed the evolution of the preferred foreign productions. That means

¹⁹ KENRICK 2014 fig. 9,13–14.

easy sales and attests the economical intentions of the potters to produce imitations.

But what lays behind the clients' intentions?

In a recent study about the imitations of African productions, M. Bonifay submits three concepts: *integration*; *prestige*; *substitute of imports*²⁰.

To imitate the best-known shapes, of course relies on a *prestige* of the original productions. But such a *prestige* changed according to the market's fluctuations, inevitably connected with the evolution of the production centres. A similar *prestige*, previous to the ARS, had the ESB, the Italic sigillata and the ESA.

The *substitute of imports* is quite important too. Although stratigraphic studies in Albania are still rare and cannot offer clear answers to this topic, the presence of African productions is quite significant. Therefore that reason might not be the main one behind the local imitations in southern Illyria.

The *integration* of the Mediterranean society is a good reason too. But the southern Illyrian potters have imitated all categories of imports with simultaneous consideration of producing traditional shapes.

Therefore we wonder if Bonifay's three concepts could explain the exports of imitations too? The same shapes that could have been exported from southern Illyria (especially Hayes 8A and 9A) are quite common forms within the ARS in Puglia²¹. This means that their *prestige* was quite considerable. But did the inhabitants of Puglia receive only few quantities of the original ones and therefore needed to accept the *imported substitutes*?

The ARS and ACW have arrived in the southern Illyrian harbours via the southern Italian ones. This means that the merchandise had to fulfil firstly the regional demands in southern Italy, with only the surplus being transported further to southern Illyria.

Similarly we may consider the cooking ware productions and their exportations. The Illyrian cooking ware presence in Ionian coast came from the opposite direction compared with the Aegean productions. Even more, the ICW 1 was not an imitation of the well known Aegean shapes²². In this case we can't even mention the *prestige*.

As for now, the main reason for a reversed movement of the merchandises might be Bonifay's "*communauté consommériste*". The distances the merchandise had to travel from North Africa or Aegean sites to Puglia was much longer than the journey departing from southern Illyria and without intermediate stops, and so the price could have been considerably lower. With their quite good quality, the southern Illyrian productions offered an excellent optional choice.

The different qualities of the mentioned categories, produced of various clays, confirm the presence of several workshops, installed in different Illyrian settlements. But these productions have been mutually influenced and have reacted in similar ways towards the market developments.

Noticing that several productions, especially of cooking ware, from southern Illyria have been exported, it will be interesting to understand why and how different categories of vessels have been accepted and preferred within Illyrian and not Illyrian communities.

We are not surprised to find such productions in Dalmatia and Epirus. But why the Illyrian productions were accepted within ethnically different regions? Are there any Illyrian roots surviving within the former Messapi and Iapigi population²³? Or are we facing only commercial interests?

With seven types, as identified up to now, the ICW covered nearly all needs required for food preparation. The best-known and widely exported type was the type ICW 1, whereas the types ICW 2 and ICW 3 were only rarely exported.

Should we believe that the first and second ICW types respond to a specific use and therefore have been widely exported?

The types ICW 3 and 7 seem to be imitations of Aegean models, but only ICW 3 is present in few Puglian sites²⁴. Therefore the theory that exported imitations had a special use seems corroborated.

Here we come to another question: what kind of cargo such exports have been? It is hard to believe that cooking and fine wares were the only cargo of the ships leaving southern Illyrian harbours. For the moment there are not yet any traces of a local alimentary production that needed to be transported together with the pottery. Exports from the Illyrian territories mentioned by the ancient writers are mainly raw materials or cereals²⁵. There are known several cases when was transported pottery as a complementary part of similar cargos²⁶. But I believe that we should expect, or search for, other categories of productions that may have filled the main cargo, such as refined food or liquids.

Finally: imitation *versus* inner evolution of traditional models. Such contradictory conceptions of shape modelling shed light on two different realities:

- 1 Adaptation of a general Mediterranean social context.
- 2 A desire to continue the local tradition.

The local production could be considered as an indicator of a mixed feeling amongst the southern Illyrians. We don't know yet how conscious they were of the cultural meaning of each of such tendencies. But the pottery productions could be an indicator for the presence of an indigene culture under the influence of contemporary fashions, probably creating an illyro-roman custom.

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²⁰ BONIFAY 2014, 88.

²¹ DE MITRI, 2004, 1132.

²² SHEHI 2016, 209–221.

²³ D'ANDRIA 1986, 43–47.

²⁴ SMALL/SMALL 2007 fig. 15, P774.

²⁵ For a general analysis see SHPUZA 2009–2010, 91–110.

²⁶ For a comprehensive list of such cargos see the Oxford Roman Economy Project website: http://oxrep.classics.ox.ac.uk/databases/shipwrecks_database

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