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LATE ROMAN POTTERY FROM THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE ARCHAIC SANCTUARY - COMPLEX OF APOLLO IN DESPOTIKO ISLAND, CYCLADES. PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Despotiko Island is very well known by the excavation of its Archaic sanctuary of Apollo of the 6th century BC. The study of the late Roman/early Byzantine settlement, which flourished upon the remains of the ancient sanctuary, started in the last two years. This paper presents the preliminary results of this research, based mainly on the pottery finds. These first observations, since the relative stratigraphic data is limited, are based mainly on diagnostic finds in order to define the main chronological range of the life of the settlement, as well as of the early Byzantine presence on the island in general.

The pottery found in Despotiko, imported directly or indirectly via Paros, from known production centres such as North Africa, Asia Minor, Cyprus and the Aegean Sea littorals, indicates its well-established place on the Aegean Sea commercial routes.

The Parian amphora material, which contributes to the study of the typology of this category, provides especially strong archaeological evidence into the direction of the connections of late Roman Despotiko, up to the last phase of its life, as a commercial outpost and a 'satellite' island of its 'metropolitan' neighbour early Byzantine Paros.

Despotiko Island – late Roman/early Byzantine – Parian amphoras – 'satellite' and 'metropolitan' – Aegean

1. Introduction

This paper presents the first results concerning the late Roman/early Byzantine pottery from a small uninhabited island in the Aegean Sea, Despotiko (ancient *Prepesinthus*) (fig. 1). It is situated to the southwest of Antiparos and Paros Islands complex, in the Cyclades. With an area of c. 7.7 Km², it is about four times smaller than Antiparos and about twenty-four times smaller than Paros (Kourayos and Daifa 2017: 307-308). On the basis of geological data, there are suggestions of the existence of a land connection between Tsimintiri Islet and Antiparos Island until the Hellenistic period (Draganits 2009: 97).

The archaeological finds have proven the strong connections of Despotiko with Paros and Antiparos. The systematic excavations of the Archaeological Service of Greece on Despotiko Island, have been taking place since 2001 on the north-east coast, in a protected bay named Mandra (fig. 2). The earliest cult activity at the site dates to the Early Iron Age. On top of constructions dated to the late 8th-early 7th century BC, a large Archaic sanctuary dedicated to Apollo flourished during the 6th century BC, with splendid offerings, such as mould-made figurines, terracotta vessels and marble statues of *kouroi* and *korai* (fig. 3, 1-3). The study of these finds indicates a constant Parian presence on Despotiko. In particular, the use of Parian marble for the construction of the most monumental buildings, suggests its ordering, payment and transportation from Paros. Indeed, Paros, the largest island close to Despotiko, became very rich from its marble quarries, while an art school reached its peak after the second half of the 6th century. Thus, it has been suggested that the *polis* of Paros established this sanctuary in the second half of the 6th century BC as a great example of an extra-urban sanctuary. Its decline followed that of Paros after the Persian

Wars even if cult practices continued until the early 2nd century BC (Kourayos and Burns 2017: 327-328; Kourayos and Daifa 2017: 318-319; Kourayos et al. 2012: 124-129; 137-139, 157-163; Kourayos 2012).

Thus, proceeding to trace the late Roman period of this island, we will consider this geographical and historical background of close connections with Paros and Antiparos. As we will see, the first results of our research on the pottery confirm this scheme, that the small late Roman Aegean Sea islands were connected to the closest larger ones. There is an urgent need to unearth, study and publish more ceramic material from these touristic, small Aegean Sea islands and islets, for which the written sources are silent, before all the information is lost by the construction activity of our day. In the case of Despotiko, of course, it has to be noted that it is protected from any construction activity by law, and for that reason the preserved information makes it an important case-study.



Fig. 1. Paros, Antiparos, Despotiko (Google maps).



Fig. 2. Mandra, Despotiko Island.



Fig. 3. 1. Daedalic Statuette (second quarter of 7th century BC); 2. Terracotta Vessel, rooster (6th century BC); 3. Archaic Kouros (557-550 BC).

2. The site and the pottery

This paper presents the first results of our research, which started less than two years ago, on the pottery from this settlement. These first observations, since the relative stratigraphic data is limited and often disturbed, are based mainly on diagnostic finds on a layer and level basis. The aim was to define the main chronological range of the life of the settlement and of the early Byzantine presence on the island in general.

Analytically, a residential settlement was established upon the remains of the sanctuary and its surrounding build-

ings during late antiquity (fig. 4, 1-3). New walls were erected while parts of the Archaic walls were integrated, creating multiple single rooms (fig. 4, 4-5). Moreover, ancient marble architectural elements and fragments of sculptures were used for the new needs (Kourayos et al. 2012: 99, note 25; Kourayos and Burns 2017: 328-329).

Most of the late Roman pottery had been unearthed from this central part of the settlement (figs. 2 and 4, 1-3). It was imported directly or indirectly via Paros, from known production centers such as North Africa (African Red Slip ware plates dated from the late 4th until the 6th century), Asia Minor and Cyprus (LRC plates: fig. 5, 1-7; Asia Minor lamp: fig. 6, 3-4;

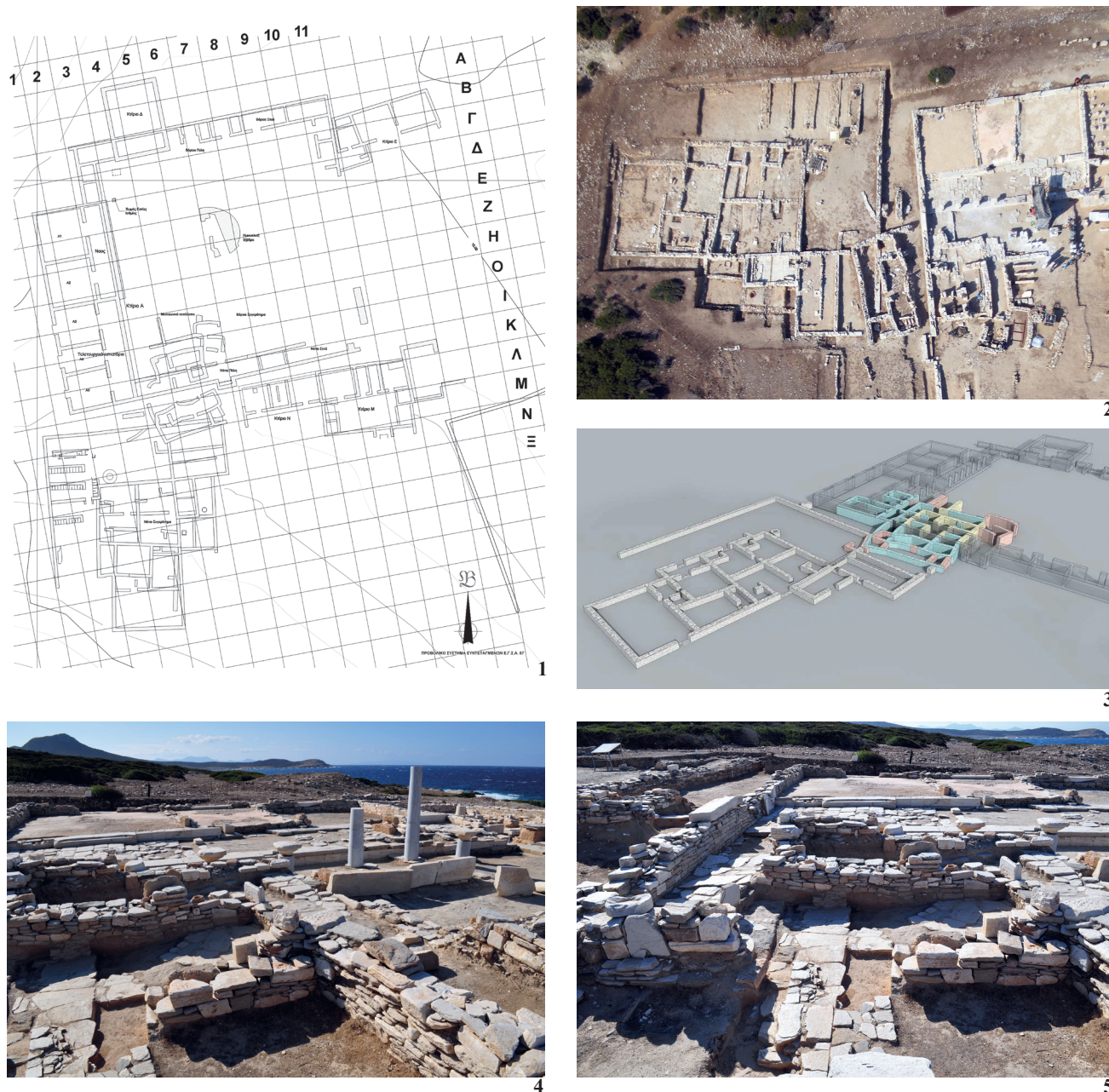


Fig. 4. 1. Topographical plan; 2. Remains of the late Antiquity upon the archaic sanctuary remains; 3. Remains of the late Antiquity upon the archaic sanctuary remains; 4. Late Roman-Early Byzantine Walls (view SE-NW); 5. Late Roman-Early Byzantine Walls (view E-W).

amphoras of type Late Roman 1: **fig. 9, 1-3**) and the Aegean Sea (spherical amphoras of type LR 2, with continuous, straight or wavy, combed decoration: **fig. 9, 4**; ovoid amphoras of type LR 13 with straight combed decoration in groups of the end of the 6th and 7th century: **fig. 9, 4-6**; Parian amphoras: **fig. 10, 1-4**). All this material indicates that Despotiko was well established on the Aegean Sea commercial routes of the 4th-7th century. Several common ware examples, such as cooking pots and basins (**fig. 8, 1-5**) seem to belong to these centuries, the local production or not of which will be discussed in the future, but their numerous presence supports the residential character of the settlement.

The part of the settlement of late antiquity which is preserved upon the sanctuary remains, according to the initial observations of the excavators, may belong to different construction phases (**fig. 4, 1-3**. Kourayos et al. 2012: 99, 101; Kourayos 2012: 72-73; Kourayos and Daifa 2017: 309). The area of the first construction phase was probably more or less extended into the protected enclosure (*peribolos*) of the Archaic *temenos*. The diagnostic groups from this area include early examples of fine ware plates from all the well-known production centers. It is indicative that African red slip wares of Form 67, dated at 360-470 (Hayes 1972: 116; Vogt 2000: 45-46; Hayes 2008: 226-227) and ARS Form 93B, dated c. 500+

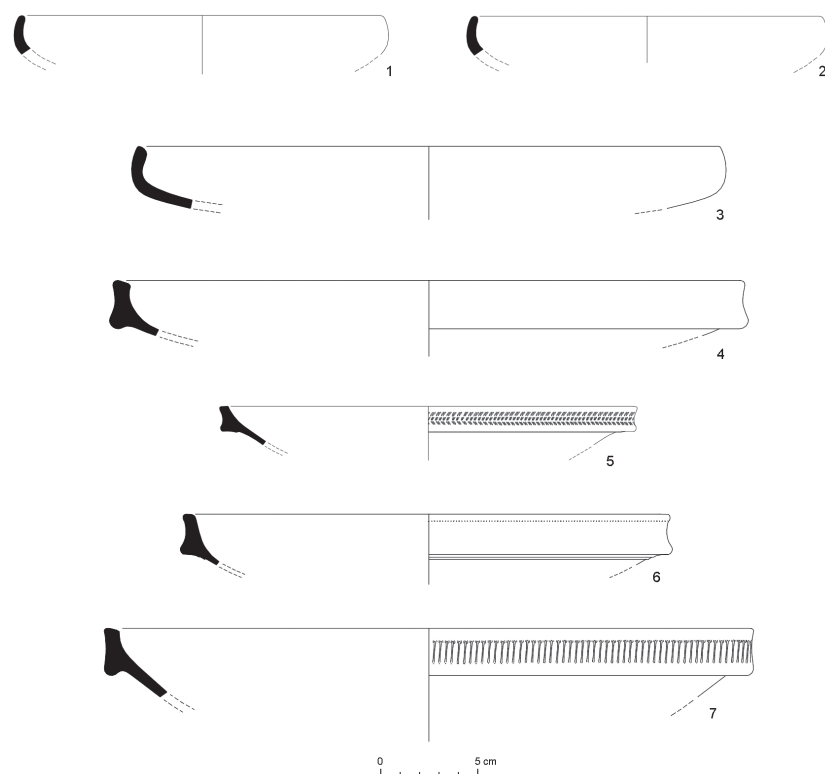


Fig. 5. 1-3. LRC, F 1A (late 4th-early 5th century); 4. LRC, F 3C (460-490); 5. LRC, F 3C (5th century); 6. LRC, F 3B/E (third quarter of the 5th-6th century); 7. LRC, F 3E/H (late 5th-mid 6th century).

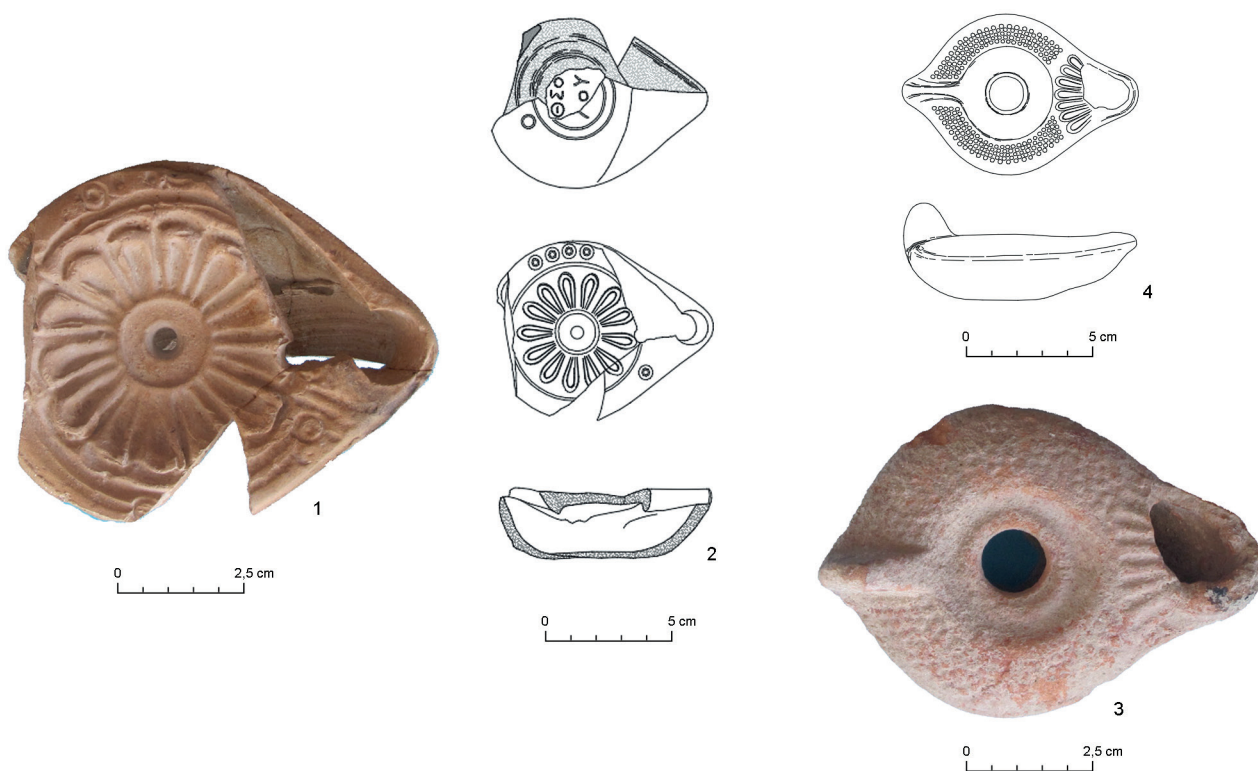


Fig. 6. 1-2. Attic type lamp (first half of the 5th century); 3-4. Asia Minor type lamp (late 6th-7th century).

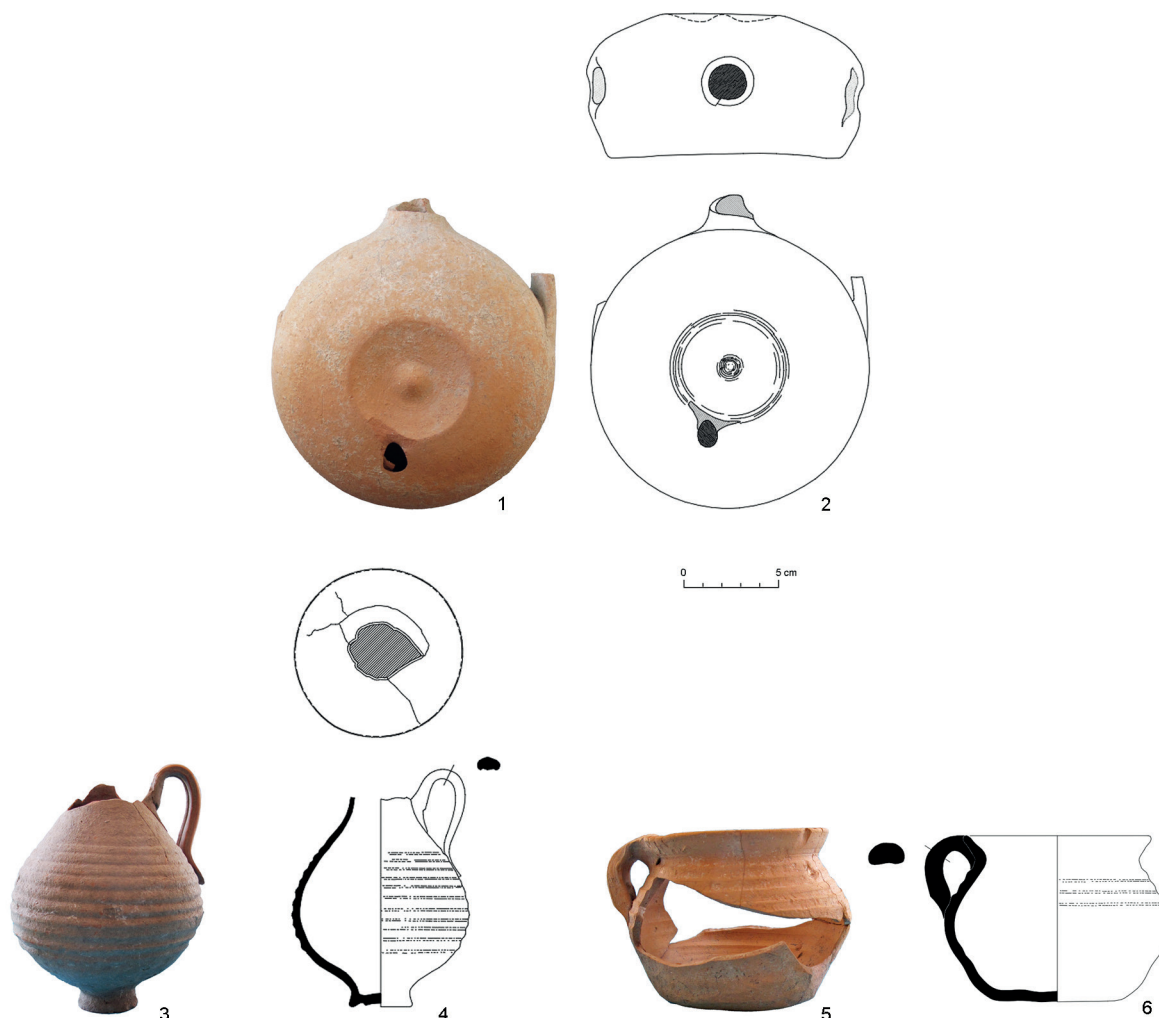


Fig. 7. 1-2. Flask (650-8th century); 3-4. Jar (4th-first quarter of the 5th century); 5-6. Mug (5th- 7th century).

(Hayes 1972: 148; Vogt 2000: 49; Hayes 2008: 231), co-exist with examples of Late Roman D Form 2, dated from the late 5th to the early 6th century (Hayes 1972: 375; Hayes 2008: 249; Meyza 2007: 51-53; Reynolds 2011: 57-61).¹

However, the largest number of red slip fine wares belongs to Late Roman C ware. The examples of Form 1 are dated as early as the late 4th- 5th century (fig. 5, 1-3. Hayes 1972: 327; Hayes 2008: 237).² There are as well examples of Form 3, type C, of the 5th c. (fig. 5, 4-5. Hayes 1972: 337; Hayes 2008: 240-241)³ and Type B/E, dated around the third quarter of the 5th-first half of the 6th century (fig. 5, 6. Hayes 1972: 337-338; Hayes 2008: 239-241).⁴ Continuity of activity into the *peribolos* constructions is affirmed by finds dated into the 6th century, such as examples of LRC Form 3, E/H of c. late 5th-mid 6th century (fig. 5, 7. Hayes 1972: 338; Hayes 2008: 241-243).⁵

Moreover, the discovery of large fragments of amphoras of type LR 1 (fig. 9, 2-3. Riley 1979: 212-216; Hayes 1992, 62-64, type 5; Diamanti 2010a: 49-72),⁶ LR 2 (fig. 9, 4. Riley 1979: 217-219; Hayes 1992, 66, type 9; Diamanti 2010a: 73-80) together with LR 13 (fig. 9, 4-6. Riley 1979, 231-232; Hayes 1992, 66, 71, type 10, 29; Diamanti 2010a, 80-88)⁷ and especially the Parian amphoras (fig. 10, 1-4. Diamanti 2015; Diamanti 2016)⁸ indicates that the core of the late Roman/early Byzantine settlement was functioning, at least, until the end of the 7th/beginning of the 8th century.

In particular, in the case of the ovoid amphoras of type LR 13, it is interesting to note that there are several fragmentary examples, with groupings of combed decoration enough to indicate quite a stable connection between Despotiko with their production centre. In fact, on the basis of the macroscopic examination of their fabric, and their distinctive combed decoration of thin, straight lines, arranged in groups, we could suppose their origin to be Cos. This observation is supported

¹ H5, layer 2, level 1.

² I4, layer 1, level 1; I5, layer 1, level 1; I6, layer 6, level 1.

³ I4, layer 2, level 2. K4, layer 12, level 1.

⁴ I4, layer 1, level 1. It was found together with the cooking pot of Fig. 8, 1.

⁵ K6, layer 5, level 1.

⁶ I6, layer 2, level 1.

⁷ K6, layer 5, level 1; I5, layer 5, level 1; K6, layer 5, level 1.

⁸ K4, layer 2, level 1-level 2; K6, layer 2, level 1.

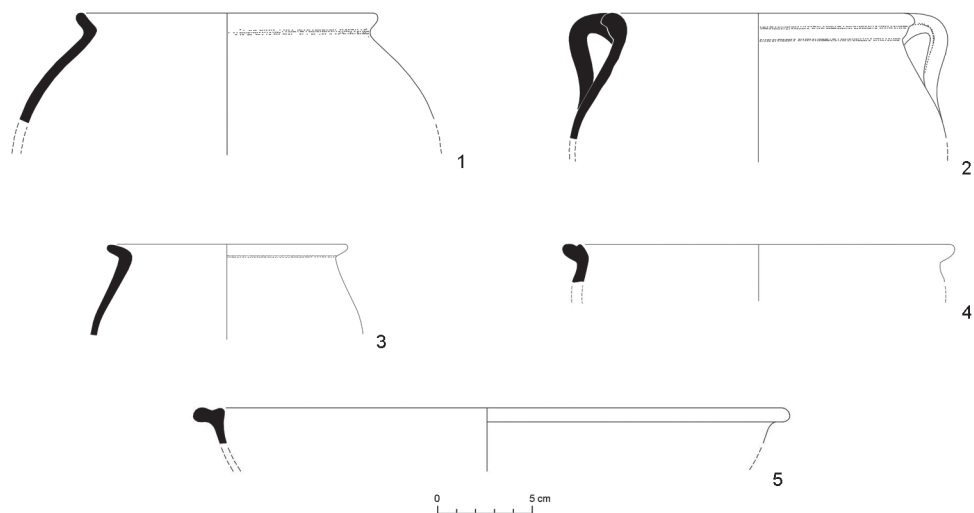


Fig. 8. 1-3. Cooking pot; 4-5. Basin.

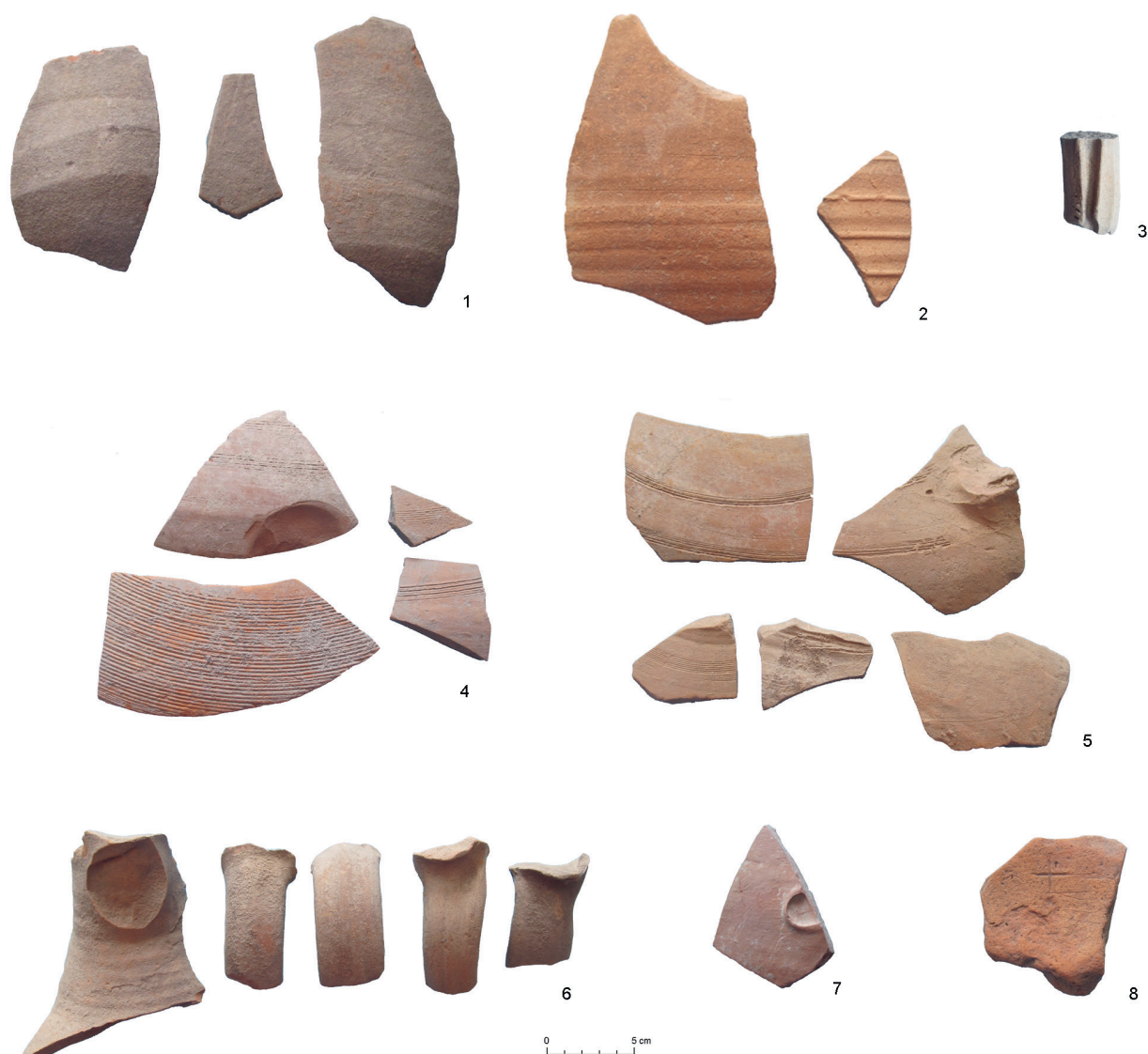


Fig. 9. 1-3. LRA 1 (5th-7th century); 4. LRA 2 (5th- 6th century) and LRA 13 (end of the 6th-7th century); 5-6. LRA 13 (end of the 6th-7th century); 7. Stamp (?); 8. Incised Cross.



Fig. 10. Parian Amphora of Type 2 (end of the 6th-end of the 7th century/beginning of the 8th century).

by their comparison with late 6th-first half of the 7th century examples from the Halasarna workshops on Cos. In addition, two examples of probable amphora stamps were found in Despotiko⁹ (fig. 9, 7) besides various incised symbols and inscriptions (fig. 9, 8). These stamps (?) are reminiscent of the round stamps of the Coan LR 13 amphoras, which appear on both sides of the neck, depicting the busts of emperors or cross-like monograms and inscriptions related to officials (Diamanti 2010a: 88-107, 168-169, 209-223. Diamanti 2010b; Diamanti 2012; Opař and Diamanti 2014: 59-60; Diamanti forthcoming). Only the location of more examples in the future could confirm the re-distribution of stamped amphoras, even to small islands such as Despotiko.

In addition, the Parian amphoras (the petrographic analysis is pending) found in Despotiko, add important information to our study of their typology and their distribution. So far, we have suggested two types of Parian amphoras, mainly on the basis of the kilns and deposit finds in Laggeri of Naousa, on Paros, as well as on the excavated finds from other places on the island. The Parian amphoras of type 1 have a more cylindrical neck and body, while these of Parian type 2 have a more

conical neck and a more oval body. We have identified that the Parian type 2 amphoras, include a group of late LRA 13 derivative versions, which extend the date of these kilns until the end of the 7th century/beginning of the 8th century. The two large examples from Despotiko belong to the Parian Type 2, with maximum dimensions of height c. 40 cm, body diameter of 24 cm, and an external rim diameter of c. 6 cm (for a typological analysis see Diamanti 2015; Diamanti 2016; Diamanti forthcoming. For petrographic analysis see Diamanti, Lamprakis and Hilditch, forthcoming).

During the late construction phases the buildings of the settlement were extended outside the area of *peribolos* (fig. 4, 2-3). As it is indicated by the diagnostic pottery recovered, such as the amphora sherds of type LR 2 (although, these as we noted above, 'co-exist' with LRA 13),¹⁰ this architectural expansion should not have taken place much later than the first half of the 6th century. Finds of LR1 amphora are also present in this construction area (fig. 9, 1).¹¹

Moreover, the pottery confirms the use of the area outside the *peribolos* already by the 4th century. Among the lamps found, there is an Athenian lamp, which preserves, at its base,

⁹ One at Θ4, layer 5, level 1.

¹⁰ Observed as well in Λ4, layer 1 and Λ5, layer 1, level 1.

¹¹ Θ1, layer 3, level 6.

the inscription ΘΕΟ[ΔΟΥ]ΑΟΥ, the trade name of the workshop (fig. 6, 1-2).¹² It is decorated with a rosette with thirteen concave petals, stamped circles on the rim, and a framing ring around the filling-hole. It is dated around the late 4th to the first half of the 5th century (Karivieri 1996: 106; 197-198, no. 121 pl.10; 231, no. 230, pl. 32; 249, no. 280, pl.27). In addition, outside the core area of the late Roman architectural remains, late Roman pottery was found in a tomb inside the Building B, which was situated on a route that led from the harbour up to the settlement (Kourayos et al. 2012: 99). An almost complete jar was revealed (fig. 7, 3-4)¹³ from the burial, with a truncated cone base, grooved spherical body and hook-shaped handle, dated at the end of the 3rd or 4th until the first quarter of the 5th century (for an example see Graekos 2010: 432, 441, fig.1; Nalpantis 2003: 120, pl. 35; Robinson 1959: 109 (M295), Pl. 30; Tzanavari 2010: 450, 464, fig. 9). Also, a well preserved example of a mug (fig. 7, 5-6) is similar to examples dated from the 5th to the 7th century (Vogt 2000, 69).¹⁴

A series of late diagnostic finds just inside and outside the frame of *peribolos* area confirms its functioning until the end of the 7th/beginning of the 8th century. The almost intact lamp (fig. 6, 3-4)¹⁵ of a type from Asia Minor, decorated with four lines of dots around a sunken filling hole and seven grooves just behind the wick-hole, is dated to the second half of the 6th century (Hayes 1992: 80, pl. 18 no. 6; Karivieri 1996: 207 (159), Pl. 51). An even later dated flask indicates the use of the area at least until the second half of the 7th century (fig. 7, 1-2).¹⁶ These personal, portable water transport containers are mentioned in the Byzantine historical sources, as a necessary complement to military requirements, made of leather. There were also clay or metallic versions, as well. Furthermore, the decoration of the vase, with a knot accompanied by a concentric circle, probably imitates metal examples. The Despotiko example is similar to ones dated after the middle of the 7th century and beyond (Bakirtzis 1989: 100-105, pl. 27, 1-2, pl. 28.2). These late finds together with the LR 13 and especially the Parian amphoras, as mentioned above, confirm the habitation of the late Roman settlement remains inside and outside of the *peribolos* of the Archaic sanctuary until the end of the 7th/beginning of the 8th century. This pottery is a valuable archaeological tool which chronologically defines the abandonment of the site and probably the end of late antiquity for the island. Thus, Despotiko follows the general pattern of the late Roman sea-shore settlements of Paros which are abandoned around this period (Diamanti 2015: 541, 544; Diamanti 2016; Athanasoulis and Diamanti 2019: 79; Diamanti, Lamprakis and Hilditch forthcoming).

3. Final remarks

These parallel fates of Despotiko and Paros are a historical recurrence of what we saw happening, with the archaic Parian



Fig. 11. Paros – Naxos (Google maps).

‘extra-urban’ sanctuary of Apollo in Despotiko and its abandonment following the decline of Paros (Kourayos and Daifa 2017: 315-319).

In the same way, we suggest that the coastal late Roman settlement of Despotiko was not an independent settlement, but a quite busy commercial outpost of Paros, ‘founded’ in the west for regional, ‘coasting’ trade, but also as a crossing point of longer distance commerce as well. In other words, Despotiko was probably a ‘satellite island’ of Paros. With the term ‘satellite island’, we don’t necessarily imply the idea of subordination, but of being part of the Parian administrative and cultural sphere of influence and economic dependence. There is a pattern of dependence of the small islands on the larger ones close to them, which we could suggest occurred in other cases as well (such as between Keros or Schinoussa of the Small Cyclades Islands and Naxos (fig. 11). For an example, see Dellaporta et al. forthcoming; Chatzilazarou 2018).

Specifically, Paros, which was an episcopal seat since the 4th century, belonged to the *provincia insularum* and later to the *quaestura Iustiniani exercitus*. In fact, as we mentioned elsewhere, the mass amphora production of Paros is indeed connected with the shipment of agricultural goods to the capital and the army camps. In addition, the splendid early Byzantine complex of Ekatontapiliani basilica, founded probably on Imperial donations, as well as the Parian Byzantine marble artefacts are also proof of the island’s wealth and power (Diamanti 2015: 541; Diamanti forthcoming; Athanasoulis and Diamanti 2019). Thus, the historical and archaeological facts about late Roman Paros accord with the theory that the island could be the regional power leading the small islands to its west. In this case, Despotiko’s commercial imports from well-known production centers covering a wide geographical range, extending from the North Africa to the Asia Minor and the Aegean Sea, can be more easily interpreted as a result of its integration into the commercial network of its ‘metropolis’, Paros Island.

In a period in which ‘insularity’ was not the equivalent of isolation, each Aegean island cannot be seen only as an individual capsule of ceramic information, but has always to be examined under the common denominator of a centralized state, and the commercial network of the Aegean Archipelagos. Furthermore, the study of the ceramic material of small ‘satellite’ islands, such as Despotiko, in comparison with

¹² Section Ξ, layer 2, level 3.

¹³ Building B, room B5, layer 2, level 1.

¹⁴ M2-N2, level 2 (inside its structure).

¹⁵ Θ3, layer 1, level 1.

¹⁶ Λ4-M4, layer 2, level 2. It was founded to the space between the walls T34, T35, T36, T38.

the pottery contexts of their 'metropolitan' islands, such as Paros in our case, will cast light to the different shadings of the Aegean Sea map, sketching many, unknown until now, secondary sea routes and nodes.¹⁷

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¹⁷ After a long period of abandonment, Despotiko was re-inhabited during the late and post Byzantine period. In the 13th century, it followed, once more, as a part of the Paros-Antiparos complex their history under the administration of the Venetians (a Venetian lead seal found recently on the island of Doge Jacopo Contarini is dated at the 1275-1280; Papamichelakis forthcoming) until the mid-16th century and after that under the Ottomans. On the basis of data offered by maps of the 15th-17th century, Despotiko was referred as *Sigilo*, and there was a small castle at the north side of the island. In the mid of the 17th century the island was abandoned after a disastrous attack by French pirates in 1675. In 1756 the island was sold to the Myconian Georgi Bao and to the Parian *Despot* Petros Mavrogenis. Therefore, it is possible that the contemporary name *Despotiko* is due to these lords who were called *Despots*. The island since then remains uninhabited (Kourayos and Daifa 2017: 307-309; Kourayos 2012: 11).

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