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A RARE STAMP IN THE COLLECTION. A LATE ROMAN AMPHORA 1 STAMP FOUND IN LIMYRA (LYCIA, TURKEY)

A recent program of stratigraphic excavations in the ancient city of Limyra (Lycia, Turkey) brought to light plentiful structural and artefactual remains. Among the rich ceramic evidence, various objects drew particular attention, including a circular monogram stamp on the neck of a Late Roman Amphora 1. The rarity of such stamps in combination with the find context of the specimen from Limyra merited a closer study. This article first presents the archaeological context in which the stamp was found as well as the stamp proper with regard to reading and provenance. It concludes with a discussion concerning the distribution of stamps on Late Roman amphorae, and their significance as markers for organised exchange.

Late Roman Amphora 1 – Amphora Stamps – Limyra – Lycia – Corycos

Introduction

The ancient city of Limyra (ancient Lycia, nowadays Antalya region in Turkey; **fig. 1**) emerged during the Classical period and existed continuously until the Middle Byzantine era. The recent excavation campaigns (2016, 2018-2019, 2022) focused on the lower area of the city and uncovered numerous constructions, contexts, and artefacts (Bes and Dolea 2021: 280-283)¹. One particularly unusual ceramic artefact was documented, namely, a circular stamp placed on the neck of a Late Roman Amphora 1 (LRA 1 hereafter). Both the rarity of such stamps as well as its specific archaeological context merit our present contribution.

The Archaeological Context of the Stamp

The latest excavation campaigns in Limyra focused on clarifying long-term urban development from Hellenistic to Byzantine times particularly regarding the Western City². During the 2016 (Seyer et al. 2017), 2018 (Seyer et al. 2019), and 2019 (Seyer et al. 2020) campaigns, various discoveries were made that help highlighting and understanding the transition from Roman to Byzantine Limyra (for periodisation: Dolea, Bes and Schwarcz 2020: 222). For the present article, the most relevant of these are: a mid-5th to early-7th century public eating house (Forstenpointner 2020: 241) and an early 7th to 9th-century lime kiln of large dimensions (Dolea 2020: 227) (**fig. 2**). The construction of this lime kiln, as well as

its chaîne opératoire, appears to have had a serious impact not only on Limyra's cityscape, but also on everyday life of its inhabitants, which must be understood against a specific chronological/historical background.

That historical background of 7th century Lycia was marked by Persian raids between 602 and 628, and Arab invasions, notably the naval Battle of the Masts in 654/655, which took place some four kilometres south of Limyra (Foss 1994: 2-3). It was in this turbulent context that several Anatolian cities erected more solid fortification walls that encircled only part of the original urban zone (Peschlow 2010; Niewöhner 2010). Although we should acknowledge the role played by local circumstances and conditions, Limyra did more or less follow the same development and massively refortified parts of its existing fortification walls, with the thickness of these walls varying from 1.5 to 3.5-3.8 meters. These refortifications were carried out in particular in those areas that were not protected by either arms of the Limyros River or swamps, namely the north, north-west and north-east parts of the so-called West City. Therefore, evidence for lime kilns, lime pits, and primary (and probably secondary) iron production in this area within the West City might be connected with massive constructions, such as the reinforcement of parts of the fortification wall.

The archaeological context in which the LRA 1 stamp was discovered (**fig. 2**, find context outlined), locus 3009 (**fig. 3**), is particularly interesting because it marks the eating house's abandonment sometime in the first half of the 7th century. In support of this date, we refer to the pottery (cf. *infra*) as well as a copper follis of the emperor Heraclius – found in the same locus as the stamp – that was minted in Constantinople and datable to 635/636 (Hahn 1981: 104, Taf. 11-12, 164)³.

¹ The first author studies the Roman to Early Byzantine pottery from these excavations. This research was funded in whole, or in part, by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [Grant Number Lise Meitner M 3170-G].

² FWF Project P29027-G25, directed by Dr. Martin Seyer (Austrian Archaeological Institute – Austrian Academy of Sciences).

³ We kindly thank Dr. Nikolaus Schindel (Austrian Archaeological Institute – Austrian Academy of Sciences) for his scientific input.

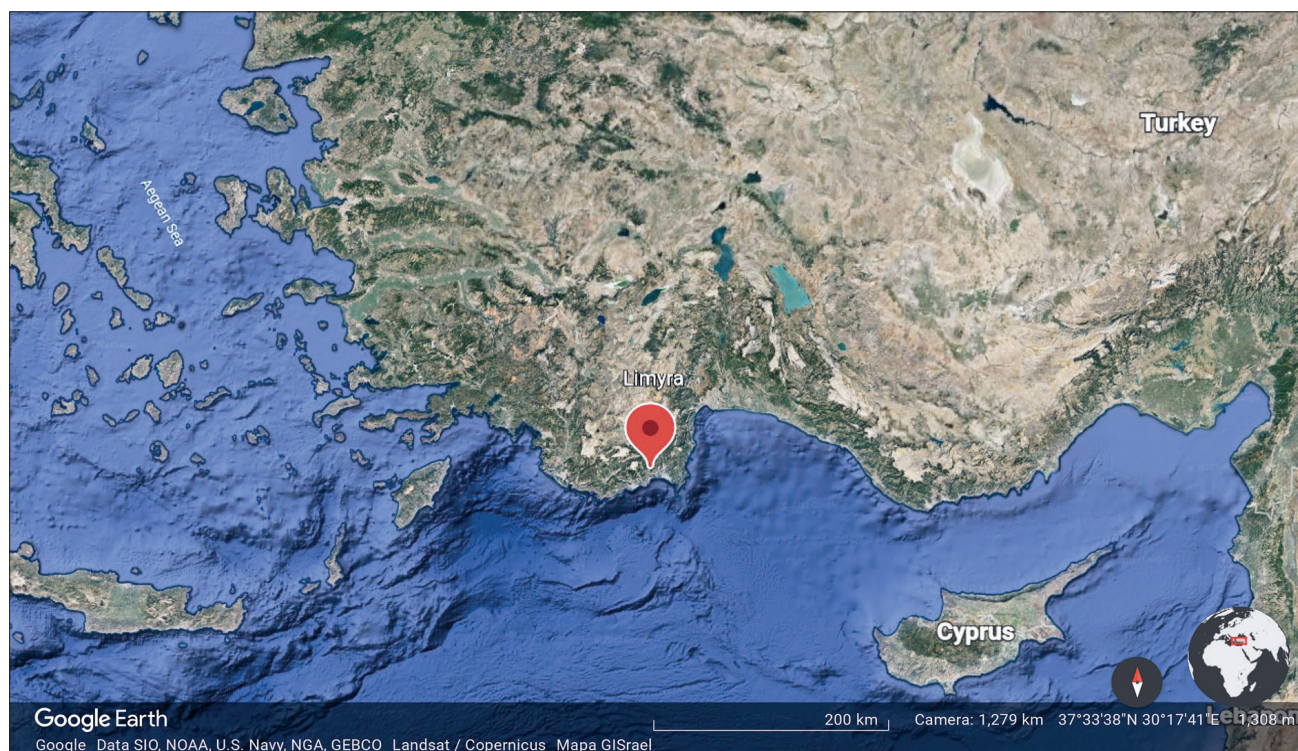


Fig. 1. Map indicating the location of Limyra (© Google Earth, edited by A. Dolea).



Fig. 2. Limyra West City; image taken at the end of the 2018 excavation campaign (outlined in yellow) north to the Cenotaph of Gaius Caesar: an Early Byzantine “public eating space” on the right and, on the left, a Byzantine lime kiln. The find context of the LRA 1 stamp is outlined in red (© ÖAW-ÖAI/A. Dolea, C. Kurtze, N. Gail).

Moreover, this abandonment is associated with the repurposing of the area for artisanal and protoindustrial activities as referred to above, that is, the installation of lime kilns and lime pits, as well as primary (and probably secondary) iron production (Schwarcz 2020: 236).

In relation to the stamp and its archaeological context there are three loci worth mentioning:

1) Locus 3009/3059⁴: it contains 214 pottery fragments that weigh 2615 gram – 5 fragments (69 gram) are earmarked as residuals – with the fragmentation being indicative that this material is beyond secondary deposition, which warrants some interpretive restraint. Worth mentioning nonetheless are the following (**fig. 4**): not illustrated are an African Red Slip Ware rim of Hayes Form 105 or Bonifay ST57, datable to the late 6th-7th centuries (Hayes 1972: 164, 166-169, figs 31-32; Bonifay 2004: 183-185, fig. 98); a Late Roman D rim of either Hayes Form 9 or 10 (Hayes 1972: 378-383, figs 81-82; Meyza 2007: 64-72) and a cooking pot similis to Cooking Pot 4.1/CATHMA 11 (Reynolds and Waksman 2007: 63, 74, figs 37-45); illustrated are an Egyptian Red Slip Ware rim similis to African Red Slip Ware Hayes Form 105 (**fig. 4**, bottom) in Egyptian 'B' from the Nile Valley or Delta (Hayes 1972: 397-398; for the fabric, also see Taxel and Fantalkin 2011: 90) and a LRA 5 rim (**fig. 4**, top). Two fragments from locus 3009 stand out for being considerably different from what can be considered as representative for 6th-century Limyra: a LRA 2-style or Globular Amphora body sherd with fine combing, and a cooking pot rim in a micaceous fabric. Both fragments are possibly intrusive from an extensive levelling that covered the abandonment phase/event, though not necessarily: a hybrid of 'old' and 'new' ceramic material culture may have coexisted for some time (Bes 2020a: 229-232).

2) Locus 3011/3077 (sherd fragmentation similar to 3009): this contains a non-joining body sherd that should

belong with the Egyptian plate found in locus 3009. Locus 3011 contains 158 fragments – 3 (15 gram) are identified as residual – that weigh 1702 gram, some of which agree with a late phase: a LRA 1B handle (Pieri 2005: 76); a Late Roman D base of Hayes Form 9B; and a Late Roman D base of Hayes Form 9-10. Further, 3009 and 3011 contain three and four fragments respectively of the same amphora. These matching fragments can be explained because 3011 was located partly beneath 3009, i.e., they adjoined. This also suggests that loci 3009 and 3011 may have been contemporary depositions, either using soil being brought in from nearby, or the remnants of existing stratigraphy in the area, both with the intention to level the area. This is arguably clearest for 3011 as it covered the remains of standing walls as well as a small patch of pavement.

3) Locus 3010/3069: this belonged to one of the last phases, if not *the* last phase, of the public eating house. It concerned a mud floor, which agrees with the stronger fragmentation of its pottery in comparison to that from loci 3009 and 3011.

It is not entirely clear if the stamped LRA 1 fragment that is presented here can be connected with the functioning of the public eating house or, rather, with the repurposing of the area; the stratigraphical record simply does not permit to verify the assumption. Its presence is noteworthy nonetheless, as it assists in understanding aspects of economic connections, wine consumption, and eventually signalling a testimony of the *annona (militaris)* in Limyra.

The Stamp

LRA 1, as is well known, is the most produced and most widespread type of Late Roman amphorae across the Byzantine Empire, with findspots stretching from Asia Minor



Fig. 3. A close-up of locus 3009 (© ÖAW-ÖAI/A. Dolea).

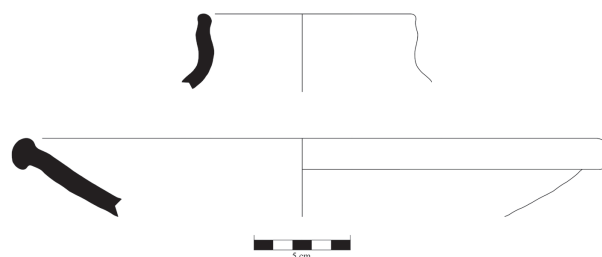


Fig. 4. A selection of pottery fragments from locus 3009/3059 (© ÖAW-ÖAI/Ph. Bes).

⁴ The second number – e.g., 3059 here – designates the inventory number of the pottery from this locus.

to Great Britain and from the Istro-Pontic area to the South Sinai. While since the mid-4th century its first and main production centres were located in East Cilicia (emerging from/continuing a long-standing regional tradition of amphorae manufacture and distribution), over time LRA 1-style amphora began to be manufactured in workshops in e.g. Cyprus, Rhodes, Cos, Paros, and Sinope, with general production petering out during the late 7th and early 8th century (Riley 1979: 212-216; Hayes 1992: 63-64; Pieri 2005: 69-70; Reynolds 2005: 565-567; Pieri 2007: 613-614; Diamanti 2010a: 49-55; Pieri 2012: 32-34; Demesticha 2014: 600-601; Diamanti 2016: 691; Fantuzzi, Cau Ontiveros and Reynolds 2017: 104-106; Kassab Tezgör 2020: 40-43). In Limyra, LRA 1 maintains a strong presence in loci that are dated from the 4th until the first half of the 7th century (Bes 2020b: 386-387, 403, 406-407, Tables 1, 3), and such is the case elsewhere in Lycia, e.g., at Patara (Şen 2017: 249, 261-264, Chart 14).

The wealth of published evidence for LRA 1 contrasts greatly with the rarity of stamped examples (Diamanti forthcoming a, b), which is but one motivation to present the example from Limyra. It is in fact done for two further reasons: the stamp proper is noteworthy for the arrangement of its letters. Also, it was found in a stratigraphically controlled excavation, the finds from which are associated with changes in the urban fabric of Limyra that can be set against major historical changes.

The fragment (**fig. 5**) belonged to the neck of a LRA 1 with a diameter of ca. 9 cm, with the lower end of the folded rim just preserved at the top of the fragment. Both its fabric and its rather rough morphological details indicate it originated from a source in Asia Minor, presumably East Cilicia. On its upper half it bears a monogram stamp that is surrounded by a thick border (**fig. 6**). This monogram is read as ΚΩΡΥΚΟΥ, the genitive of Corycos, a city in the eastern part of Cilicia Tracheia, or Rough Cilicia. Similar examples with the name of this city and in a similar fabric have been published from Sucidava in modern-day Romania (three specimens, see Gherghe and Amon 2011: 24, fig. 1.B, 2, dated to the 4th-6th centuries; Toropu and Tatulea 1987: fig. 41.8-9; Opaîţ 2017: 596), Histria, also in Romania (one specimen, see Popescu 1976: 170, no. 151; Opaîţ 2004: 295, fig. 4; Opaîţ 2017: 596) and from the Theodosian Port at Yenikapı in Istanbul (one specimen, see Kara 2015: 248, fig. 6, dated to the 5th-6th centuries). The particularity of the stamp found at Limyra is that the letters of its monogram are not cross-shaped, which is the case with the published examples that are referred to above: the specimen from Limyra has the Greek “Y”, “P” and “K”, and the “ω” at the bottom, ligatured, and thus appears to be a new stamp-type within this small corpus.

Three further published stamps on LRA 1 are associated with Elaiussa Sebaste – a coastal city in Cilicia at a stone’s throw northeast from Corycos – that engaged in the manufacture of LRA 1 (Iacomi 2010). Two of these stamps were found, again, in Sucidava (Popescu 1976: 313, no. 306 (right and left) and which were read as ΣΑΒΕΙΝΟΥ; Toropu and Tatulea 1987: fig. 41.7; Opaîţ 2017: 596) and one at Yenikapı (Kara 2015: 247, fig. 5, dated to the 5th-6th centuries). Finally, single specimens of an LRA 1 stamp depicting the

Maltese-type cross were found in Antinoopolis (Egypt) and at Yenikapı, which could indicate that the workshops where these were manufactured belonged to church properties (Pieri 2012: 46, fig. 2.13 (end of the 6th century); Kara 2015: 248, fig. 7 (5th-6th centuries)).

Stamps on Late Roman Amphorae

Amphorae, representing the main seaborne pottery, offer important archaeological evidence concerning the production and distribution of agricultural goods in the context of free commerce (or market exchange), but also that of tax in kind/the *annona* as guided by the state. The state’s requirements for wine and oil in order to supply its army as well as the capital, especially amphorae that were produced in Asia Minor and along the Aegean Sea, which were found at Danubian fortresses and stations as well as Constantinople, could have been the containers representing the shipment of such *annona*-borne goods. Stamps in particular, which are otherwise rarely found, offer valuable information in this direction: they were placed before firing, and provide strong indications for a well-organised control mechanism of production and distribution. Such a framework is suggested for the unique workshop at Halasarna on Cos, where Late Roman Amphora 1 and 13 were produced in large numbers. At this workshop, which was in operation during the late 6th and 7th centuries, stamps on LRA 13 carried the effigy of the emperor himself, which has been interpreted to represent a mechanism for the distribution of *annona* goods, thus propagandising the imperial economic policy. On the basis of their shape, the stamps can be grouped into oblong and round stamps which were placed on handles or on necks of amphorae. Furthermore, there are stamps depicting the busts of emperors or monograms of officials(?), sometimes encircled by inscriptions of the titles of officials, or stamps with the monogram of cities (e.g., the stamped LRA 1 from Limyra), or, finally, stamps with religious symbols (Diamanti 2010a: 92-107, 209-215; Diamanti 2010b; Diamanti 2012: 1-2; Diamanti forthcoming a, b).

Catharine Abadie-Reynal has argued that the presence of LRA 1 in the Aegean and along the shores of Asia Minor is related to the *annona* and Constantinople’s need for agricultural goods (Abadie-Reynal 1989: 52, 54-56, esp. 56). Also, Dominique Pieri entertains the idea that the manufacture of LRA 1 in numerous provinces generally indicates common economic interests of scale (Pieri 2007: 613). Especially for Cilicia, this hypothesis can be supported by an inscription that was found at Abydos (on the Hellespont), and which has been dated to the very end of the 5th century (both 492 and 498 have been proposed; Iacomi 2010: 28, n. 49), an important centre for controlling economic activities to and from Constantinople. This so-called Abydos Tariff contains specifications of the tolls which either *naucreroi* or merchants trading in wine, oil, grain and other “*annona*-related” products should pay. Interestingly, Cilicians are singled out regarding the amount of the toll that was due, and seemed to have enjoyed certain privileges. Realising that East Cilicia remained an important production zone of LRA 1 for the

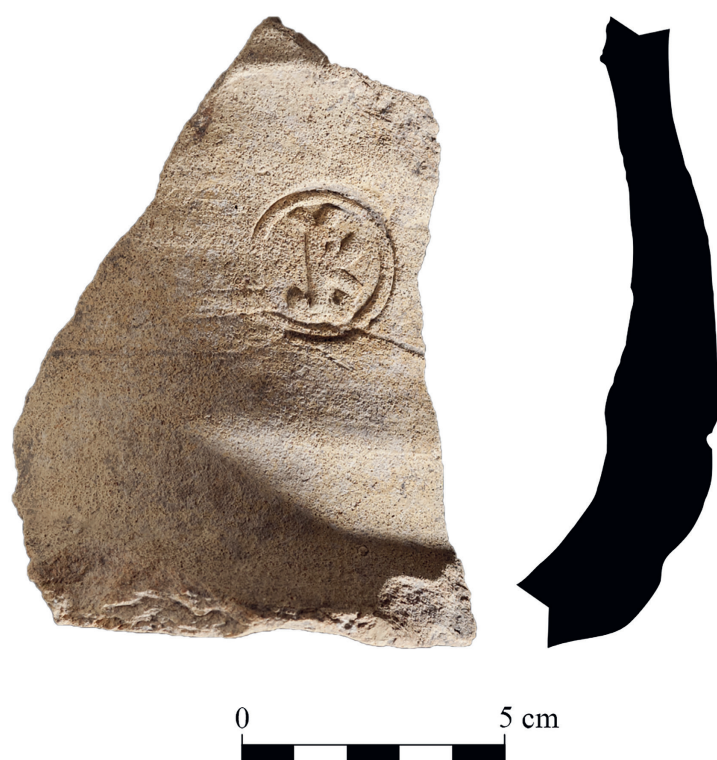


Fig. 5. Profile drawing and photograph of the stamped LRA 1 fragment (© ÖAW-ÖAI/Ph. Bes/R. Hügli).



Fig. 6. A drawing of the stamp shown in fig. 5 (© ÖAW-ÖAI/Ph. Bes)

shipment of wine that was exported to Constantinople, we can presume a connection between the favourable *annona* toll regime and the significance and frequency of this relationship between Cilicia and the capital. What makes Corycos such a specific and interesting case, besides (or in relation to it?) having been an important port city, is its epigraphic record. This rich record encompasses a collection of 400 funerary inscriptions that date to the 5th-7th centuries, and which mention a variety of professions that concern the construction, repair, ownership, and recruitment of ships, the transport and commerce of oil and wine, as well as the transport of products to or from the warehouses where commodities could be inspected (Keil and Wilhelm 1931). Furthermore, there are 25 inscriptions which refer to “κεραμέων”, i.e., potters. As has been supposed, it is likely that among these there are the names of Cilician potters who produced what we now know as LRA 1 (sometimes stamped with the name of the city) and in which the famous Cilician wine from Corycus was exported – a similar model may have functioned at Elaiussa Sebaste. These amphorae, within a context of market or *annona* exchange systems, travelled along the shores of southern Asia Minor and, after passing the Abydos control, arrived in Constantinople, and on to military sites along the Danube, such as Sucidava where most stamps on LRA 1 have been found (cf. supra; Durliat and Guillou 1984: 590; Decker 2005; Diamanti 2008: 20-30; Diamanti 2010a: 164-165, 171-173, 221, 224-225; Diamanti forthcoming b).

Summary Thoughts and Observations

The general rarity of stamps on Late Roman amphora merits to present the LRA 1 stamp that was found in Limyra in 2016. This is in fact the second such stamp known from Limyra: the neck of a LRA 13 that carries a circular stamp on its neck, which generally date to the 6th and early 7th centuries, was presented at the LRCW7 conference in 2019 (Yener-Marksteiner, Diamanti and González Cesteros forthcoming). Whereas having two stamps from one site is certainly of interest, again not only considering their rarity but also in presumably representing officially organised exchange, various questions remain. Indeed, in consideration of the hypothesis that such stamps were linked to an official framework of production and (re)distribution, the primary question is why these stamps arrived at Limyra in the first place? Was the city important enough to be included in ‘official businesses’ related to the *annona*? If so, why? Was it its location – as has been suggested – which during the 7th century intermittently found itself in a frontier region rather than being at the heart of the Eastern Mediterranean as was the case during the 6th century? It is within such a context that we should also place the lime kiln (one of several, in fact, in the same area), the primary (and probably secondary) iron working, as well as the refortification?

Unfortunately, thus far there are no further clues about the presence of such stamps along Asia Minor’s south coast that could help to better understand their distribution: for that there are simply too few at present. Hence it is hoped that

more stamps found in stratigraphically controlled excavations will be published. It is nonetheless interesting that, thus far, Limyra is one of the very few places where two stamped Late Roman amphorae have been found, originating from two areas. Whilst the LRA 1 stamp presented here is thought to have come from Corycos (i.e. east of Limyra) and thought to represent large-scale export of Cilician LRA 1 during the (later) 6th century, the LRA 13 stamp originated from someplace in the Maeander Valley (i.e. west of Limyra), as has

been proposed. It need not follow, however, that Limyra was supplied directly with agricultural produce coming from two different directions within a strictly state-organised supply system: one or both stamps (i.e., amphorae) may have circulated in a more complex system of redistribution. Indeed, Limyra may very well have participated in such activities towards/at the end of antiquity, as a node in the redistribution of annona-borne agricultural goods from production centres in southern Asia Minor and the eastern Aegean.

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