

Brikena Shkodra-Rrugia

AFRICAN RED SLIP WARE: A CASE STUDY FROM 5TH TO 6TH CENTURY DURRËS

Since the first division of the African Red Slip ware (ARS) into distinctive ‘fabrics’,¹ its study became of prime importance for establishing the chronological contexts of past cultures.² As work around the Mediterranean proceeds, it is not just the chronology of ARS that is continually being modified but also the primary criteria for assessing this ware moved from a mere study of forms and different types of decorations, into the definition of the range of vessel-forms and decorations of the individual late Roman/early Byzantine potteries.³

Accessing the presence of imported ARS pottery in contexts of the 5th and 6th centuries in Albania, and particularly in Durrës, in the current stage of the researches, is actually difficult and almost fragmented. This paper will try to present the preliminary evidence regarding its chronology and distribution but not a full account of its presence in Albania (as the number of excavated sites is small), in order to draw comparisons between different sites. On the other hand, the way in which the pottery has been studied and published was influenced by the approach adopted by the archaeologists to use the pottery as dating evidence for historical phases of excavated sites. Precise details of individual wares or the quantities in which they occur on the sites are unfortunately missing. The lack of numbers is a basic problem which makes it very difficult to draw comparisons between works carried out so far. Only during the last decade, detailed research has been devoted to the whole range of late Roman pottery discovered in Shkodra, Durrës, Byllis, Elbasan and Butrint.⁴

Recent excavations in the city of Durrës produced significant assemblages of imported fine wares, amphorae and coarse wares, promising important new information about the distribution patterns of some widely traded forms. The relevant major sequences of pottery have been recovered in the Macellum-Forum, a substantial public monument in the city centre (**fig. 1**). One of the sequences, dated to the last quarter of the 5th or probably the beginning of the 6th century is unearthed close to the podium,⁵ and the other one, dated to the 6th century, was discovered in the *tabernae* on the perimeter of the monument (rooms D and E).⁶

The 5th-century group is characterized by the presence of both production D from Northern Tunisia and the Central Tunisian production C. A distinctive form of the second half of the 4th and the first half of the 5th century is an example of Hayes 53A (**fig. 2,1**) with appliqué decoration. This high quality ware was undoubtedly made in the mass production

specialized potteries of Sidi Marzouk Tounsi.⁷ Regarding the chronology of such C3 forms with appliqué decoration, Pröttel, during a survey at Djilma in 1991, another Central Tunisian production centre, pointed out the absence of these C3 forms there, thus deciding the mid-5th century as the end date for the fine ware production in this pottery making centre.⁸ A consistent find in the contexts of the first half of the 5th century is the undecorated thin-walled dish of form Hayes 50B (**fig. 2,3–4**). This form was also produced from the mid-4th until the mid-5th century at Sidi Marzouk Tounsi.⁹ A flat-based dish of form Hayes 62 (**fig. 2,2**), with vertical wall and plain rim, is attested in a context of the last quarter of the 5th or the early 6th century.¹⁰ It is in a fine orange-red ware with thin slip on inside. A variant of this form is well represented at Carthage in contexts of the end of the 4th-beginning of the 5th century.¹¹ As for the north Tunisian production of the mid-4th until the mid-5th century, the presence of Hayes form 61A (**fig. 2,5–6**), produced in the potteries of Tebourba region¹² is notable. Its presence is attested in a rescue excavation undertaken near the centre of the modern city of Durrës, in an uncertain context (personal observation). This is a large flat-based dish with slightly incurved rim in a triangular profile. Another significant example of the north Tunisian production is the flanged bowl Hayes form 91A (**fig. 2,7**). This is one of the standard forms of the D2 potteries at Oudhna, of the second half of the 4th and the first half of the 5th century.¹³

The second half of the 5th century until the beginning of the 6th century is dominated by the presence of the North Tunisian production (D1–2). The most significant form of this period is Hayes 61B (**fig. 3,1–2**). This form seems to

¹ The American scholar Waagé was the first who divided the ARS group into ‘Late Roman A and B’: WAAGÉ 1948.

² LAMBOGLIA 1958, 257–330; EAD. 1963, 145–212; SALOMONSON 1968, 108–113; ID. 1969, 4–109; Ostia I, 1–227.

³ PEACOCK ET AL. 1990; MACKENSEN 1993; ID. 1998b; ID./SCHNEIDER 2002; BONIFAY 2004.

⁴ HOXHA 1997; ID. 1992; ID. 2003; SHKODRA, 2003; EAD. 2005; BONIFAY/CEROVA 2002; CEROVA 2005; REYNOLDS 2002; ID. 2004.

⁵ SHKODRA 2006; HOTI/WILKES ET AL. forthcoming.

⁶ SHKODRA 2003; EAD. 2005, 131–155.

⁷ MACKENSEN 1998a, 26–30; MACKENSEN/SCHNEIDER 2002, 132.

⁸ PRÖTTEL 1996, 20.

⁹ MACKENSEN/SCHNEIDER 2002, 132.

¹⁰ SHKODRA 2006 context 7.

¹¹ FULFORD/PEACOCK 1984, 53 fig.13,6.

¹² MACKENSEN/SCHNEIDER 2002, 125.

¹³ Ibid. 128; BONIFAY 2004, 179.

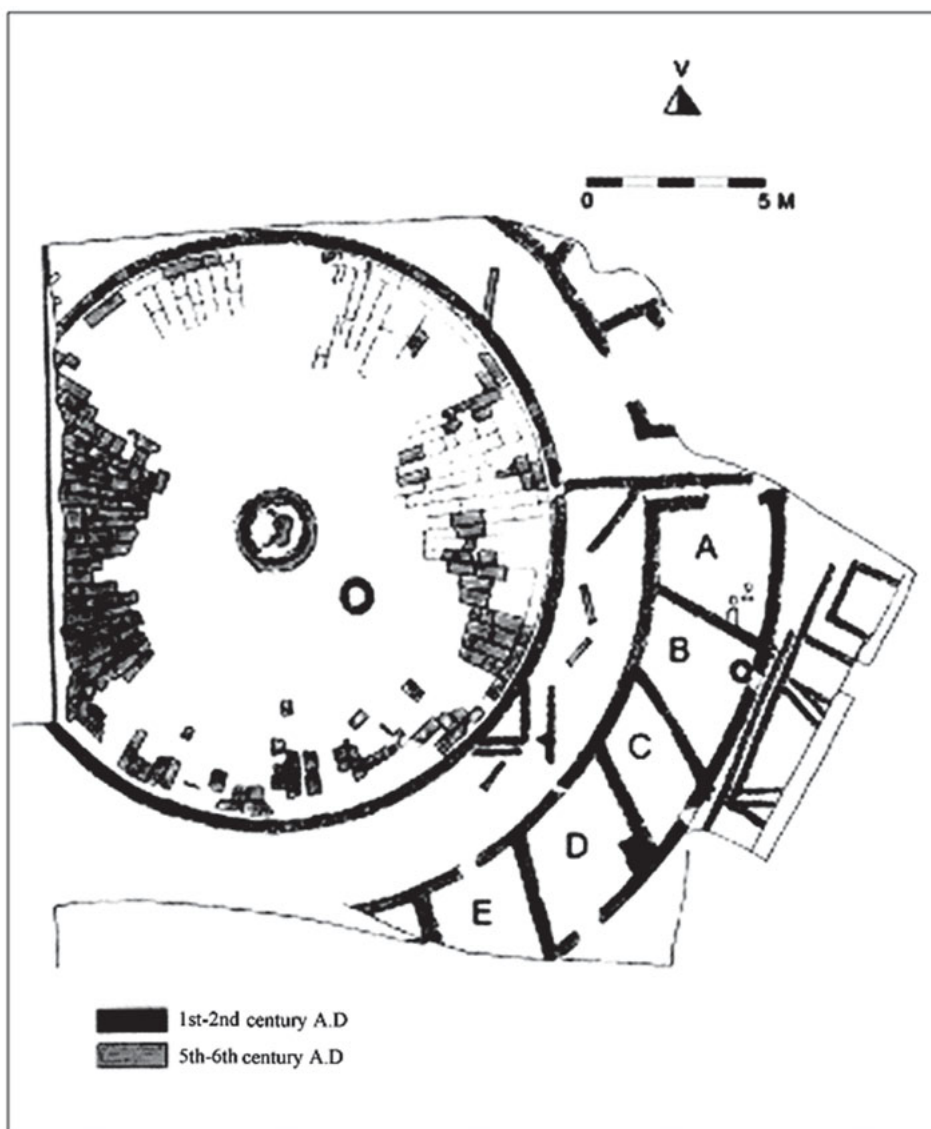


Fig. 1. Macellum-Forum (after HOTI ET AL. 2004).

have been produced in great quantities from the mid-4th until the mid-5th century, mainly in the D2 potteries at Sidi Khalifa; however a variant corresponding to this form was produced also at Bord el Djerbi.¹⁴ Recently, Michel Bonifay distinguished three principal variants on the basis of rim-profile as well as the dimensions of vases. At Durrës are documented both variants B2 and B3 of Bonifay's classification, respectively common during the first half of the 5th and by the middle of the 5th century, however late variants of B3 are documented up to the end of 5th century.¹⁵ The fragment illustrated here is found in an abandonment context of the last quarter of the 5th century or the beginning of the 6th century in the Macellum-Forum,¹⁶ but it is also commonly attested at other sites within the city of Durrës (personal observation). The form Hayes 91B (**fig. 3,3**), suggested to have been produced since the first decades of the 5th century or even the end of 4th, is documented up to the middle of the 6th century.¹⁷ Bonifay proposed the middle of the 5th century as the principal date for this variant.¹⁸ Hayes 67 is another well-documented form in the city of Durrës (**fig.**

3,4). The diversity of variants has led to the suggestion that this form was produced not only by the workshop of El Mahrine but probably be another unidentified pottery-making centre as well.¹⁹ The Durrës example, a two-part-rim bowl with rolled lip, is similar to variant C of Bonifay's classification.²⁰ The absence of Central Tunisian forms of this period in Durrës is noteworthy. The distinctive forms of the period following the middle of the 5th century, the dish and plate forms Hayes 82, 83 and particularly 84, with one or two bands of feather-rouletting on the outside, Hayes 82, 83 and particularly 84, certainly produced until the first quarter of the 6th century,²¹ are not documented so far in Durrës.

¹⁴ MACKENSEN 1993, 32–33; MACKENSEN/SCHNEIDER 2002, 126.

¹⁵ BONIFAY 2004, 171.

¹⁶ SHKODRA 2006 context 7.

¹⁷ TORTORELLA 1998, 43; HAYES 1980, 516; ID. 1978, 68 fig.20; PRÖTTEL 1996, 50–51; 113.

¹⁸ BONIFAY 2004, 179.

¹⁹ HAYES 1972, 115; BONIFAY 2004, 171.

²⁰ ID. 2004, Type 41 var. C fig.172,8.

²¹ TORTORELLA 1998, 41.

In the 6th-century group, D ware, imported mainly from El Mahrine and Oudhna, is the only African ware attested in Durrës. Many of the forms present in the 6th century group originate in the late 5th century. These are dishes and bowls of small and medium dimensions, particularly forms Hayes 87B, 87C and 99A (fig. 4), which forms appear by the second half of the 5th century and seem to have been produced up to the first quarter of the 6th.²² Among the principal forms of the 6th century are encountered Hayes 99B (fig. 4,2), a form which appears in the second quarter of the 6th century and which seems to be characteristic of the late 6th and probably the beginning of the 7th century at Marseille and Carthage as well as at Koper.²³ The flange bowl Hayes 91C (fig. 4,3) decorated with short combed multiple-line patterns on the floor, is a common form of the middle of the 6th century.²⁴ In the Durrës 6th-century group there are also examples of post-AD 550 exports (fig. 5), Hayes 99C(?), 87/109, 105, 108, Atlante XLIX,10 (fig. 6), Hayes 104C(?), corresponding to the period ca.575–670/end of 7th century.²⁵ The hemispherical bowl Hayes 99C is firstly attested by the end of the 6th and is common throughout the 7th century (fig. 5,3).²⁶ Some late intermediate variants 87/109 are fairly common at Durrës (fig. 5,6). This last is dated by the end of the 6th century based on the evidence from Marseille.²⁷ New forms completed the typological range of the late phase of ARS production such as the appearance of Hayes 109 (not illustrated), dated from 580–680/700. This is a granular ware, covered with thin burnished bands forming ‘spiral burnishing’ on the surface.

The second half of the 4th century and the first half of the 5th century correspond to the period of the economic pre-eminence of the African products.²⁸ A distribution map of the stamped decoration of El Mahrine demonstrates the presence of production D throughout the western and eastern Mediterranean.²⁹ Late variants of production C are still in circulation during this period together with the first appearance of production E. During the period of the Vandal occupation of Africa, ARS still constitutes the main table ware present in western Mediterranean contexts. Stefano Tortorella observes a reorganization of the production centres of ARS during this period.³⁰ By the late Vandal period and the first half of the 6th century, productions C and E have only a regional importance and the main production still being distributed up to the 7th century is production D northern Tunisian sites.

Regarding the Albanian sites, the distribution of ARS is attested only at the excavated and published sites, which are at present few, while the absence of ARS identification in the majority of sites (except for the few well-stratified assemblages mentioned in the following paragraph) is probably due to the small number of publications in this field (fig. 8). African red slip wares from Shkodra, in particular,

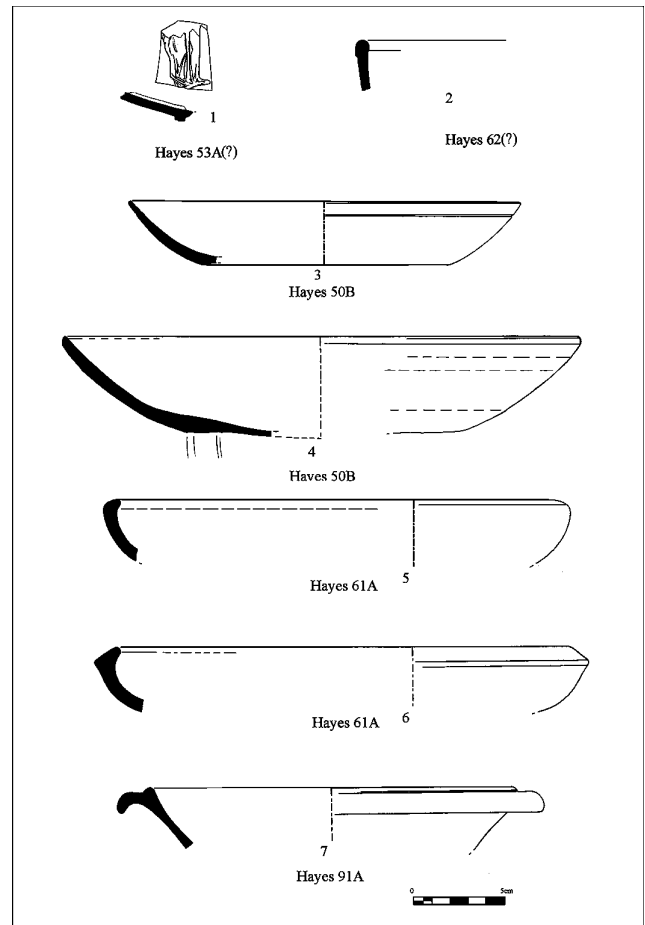


Fig. 2. The 5th century group of ARS from Durrës.

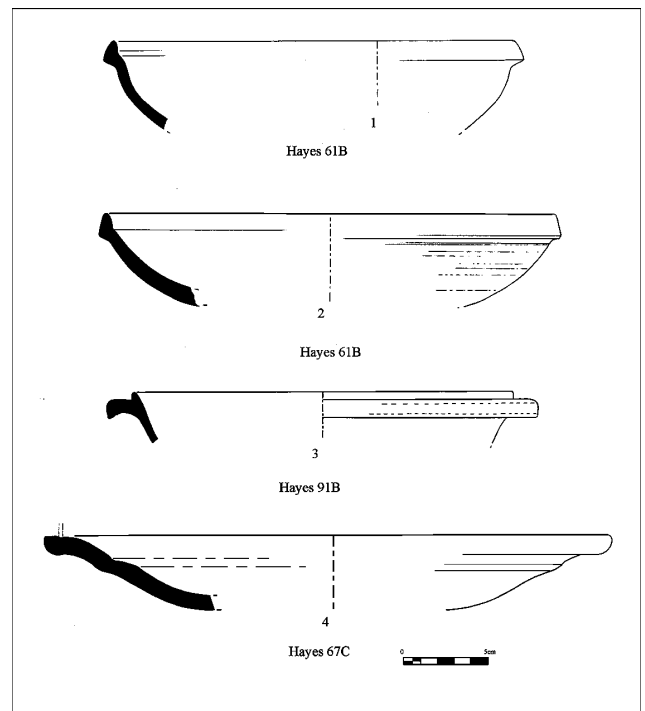


Fig. 3. The second half of the 5th century ARS group from Durrës.

²² BARRAUD ET AL. 1998, 148; 417 context no.28.

²³ BONIFAY 2004; ID. ET AL. 1998, context no.8; RILEY 1981, 102 fig. 5,10.1.,13; PRÖTTEL 1996, 55 Gruppe 6 Abb. 62.

²⁴ BONIFAY 2004, 179.

²⁵ MACKENSEN 1998a, 33–39.

²⁶ BONIFAY 2004, 181.

²⁷ Ibid. 187–189.

²⁸ PANELLA 1993, 640.

²⁹ MACKENSEN 1993, 657 fig.128.

³⁰ TORTORELLA 1998, 50.

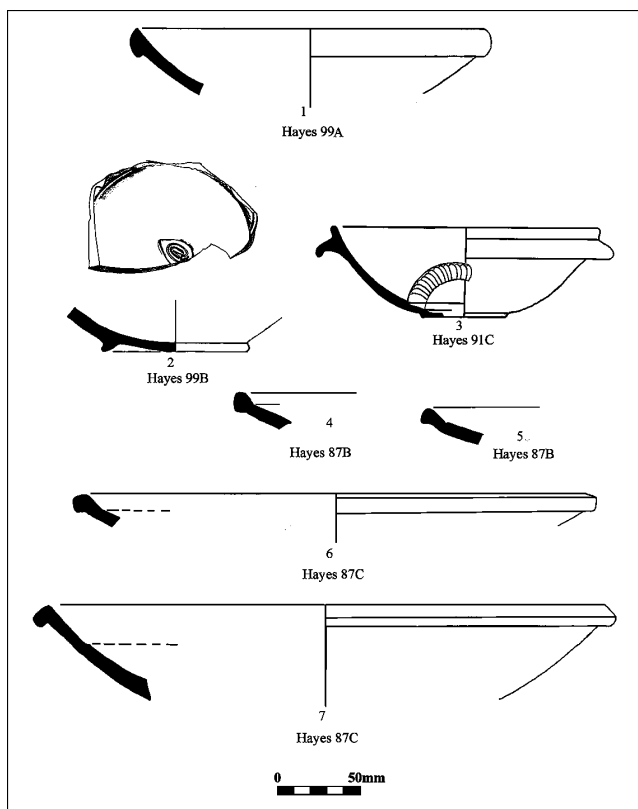


Fig. 4. The 6th century group of ARS from Durres.

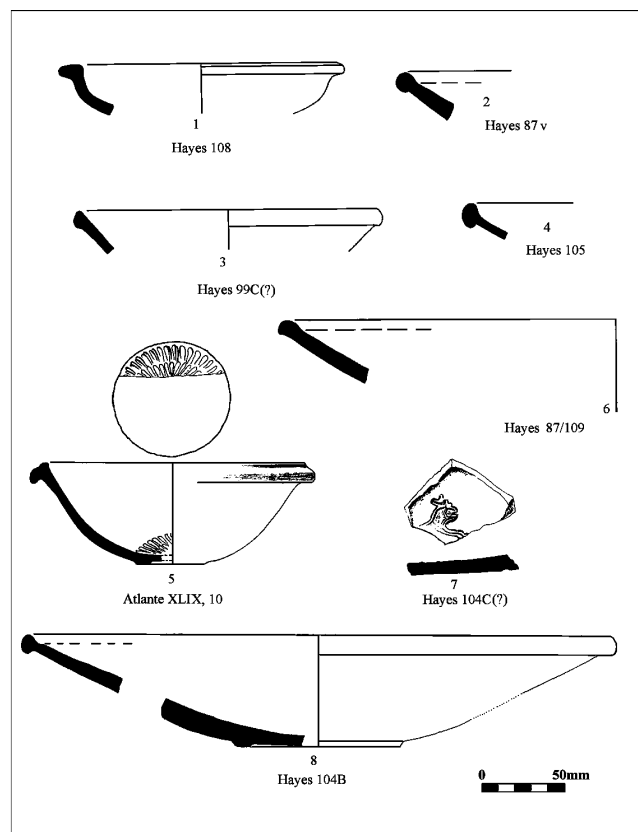


Fig. 5. The 6th century group of ARS from Durres.



Fig. 6. Form Atlante XLIX,10.

between the 4th and the 6th century are fully studied and published.³¹ The wide range of forms, in productions A/D, C, D and E, is dominated by production D which is mostly found in contexts dated from the second half of the 4th century up to the beginning of the 7th century. During the first half of the 5th century the distribution of this ware achieves its peak, while it becomes rarer during the second half of the 5th and the first half of the 6th century. This reduced use of ARS wares in Shkodra seems to have been substituted by the importation of Phocian red slip ware (PRS) which becomes increasingly present during the period ca. 450-550 (fig. 7).³² The Illyrian fortified centre of Rosujë, north of Albania, possibly documents the presence of the African fine wares. There is a dish fragment of Hayes 50A found in the contexts related with the 4th period of inhabitation of the site, dated between the 4th-5th centuries.³³ Based on the fabric characteristics, described by the authors as fine red fabric with quartz inclusions, slipped on the surface, we can surely relate it to an African production. The archaeological excavations in the south-western part of the castle of Elbasan (*castrum Scampis*) revealed a considerable amount of African red slip ware.³⁴ In the first stratigraphic context, dated between the end of the 2nd and the end of the 4th century, the presence of productions A, A/D of North Tunisia and C of central Tunisia is notable;³⁵ while, the archaeological material of the second stratigraphic context, dated from the 5th to the beginning of the 7th century, is characterized by a reduced number of ARS in respect to the previous period.³⁶ The material from this period offers some fragments of production D of Northern Tunisia.³⁷ The presence of ARS is also attested in the 4th-century contexts at Selca e Poshtme (eastern Albania). The drawing of a dish-fragment is somehow confusing to be related to the form Atlante XLIX, 10; however the author describes it with the characteristics of the African productions.³⁸

³¹ HOXHA 1997, 269-284

³² ID. 1995, 260; ID. 1997, 278 fig. 1,2.

³³ JUBANI/CEKA 1971, 59 tab.VII,7.

³⁴ CEROVA 2005, 147-204.

³⁵ Ibid. 149 tab. II-IV.

³⁶ Ibid. 149.

³⁷ Ibid. 184-187 tab. XXII.

³⁸ CEKA 1985, 136 tab. LXXXV,5.

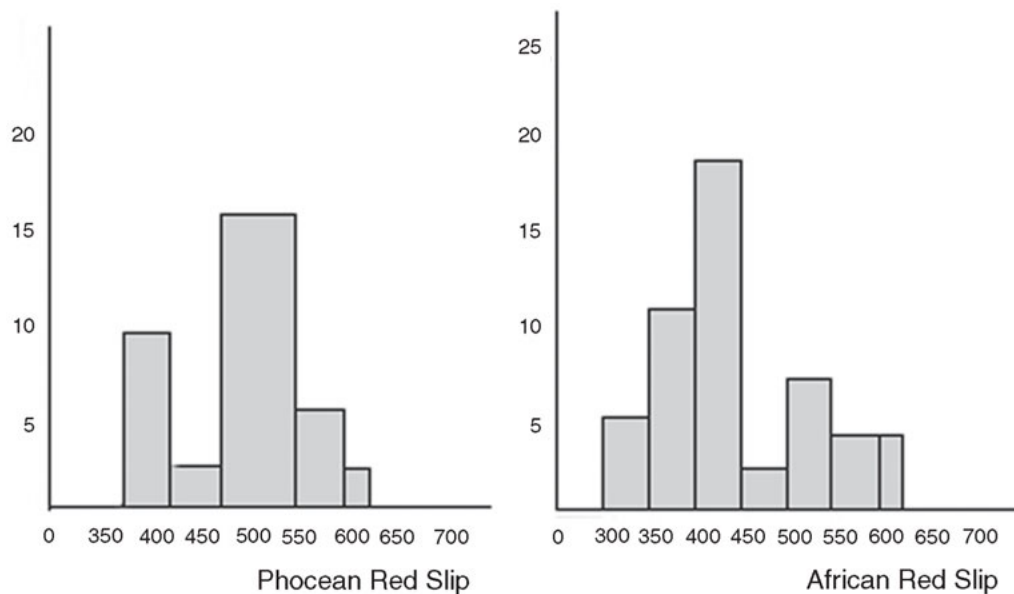


Fig. 7. The quantity of ARS and PRS wares from Skhodra (after HOXHA 1997).

Numerous sites in southern Albania document the vitality of the African supply. Here are mostly notable the coastal sites as well as some internal centres constituting the presence of ARS wares. At the castle of Qafë a plate-fragment with heavy knobbed rim of Hayes form 105 has been identified.³⁹ The ARS presence at *Byllis*, a southern Illyrian site, is pretty common. There have been identified a fragment of production A of northern Tunisia, Hayes 35, as well as a fragment of Hayes 99B.⁴⁰ This last was found in a context of the end of the 6th and probably the beginning of the 7th century at Basilica C.⁴¹ Some ARS fragments attested at Berat demonstrate the distribution of this ware further inland. A possible fragment of Hayes 61B and a likely Hayes 101 rim fragment imply the continuation of ARS distribution there from the 5th up to the end of the 6th and probably the beginning of 7th century.⁴² In the late Roman contexts of phase II at Kanina, dated between the 4th–6th centuries, the circulation of ARS ware is significant.⁴³ The contexts of the late Roman fortress at Zharrës, west of the city of Tepelena, probably have yielded a variant of Hayes 61A, included by the author in the group of table wares made in a reddish fabric.⁴⁴ At the castle of Paleocastra appears a bowl fragment with broad flat rim of Hayes 70var, with two lines of broad rouletting and two grooves on the rim, as well as another fragment of Hayes 67.⁴⁵ The quantified group from the excavation of the triconch palace at Butrint is a rare exception in the study of Albanian Late Roman pottery.⁴⁶ Here, the quantity of Tunisian ARS of ca. 500–550 rose in respect to the quantities imported during the 5th century.⁴⁷ The majority of the ARS present is north Tunisian, demonstrating a common source of supply with Durrës and Shkodra. ARS bowl forms 91 and 99 at the triconch palace at Butrint are far less common than they are at Durrës. As regarding the supply of ARS compared to the supply of PRS, the 6th-century deposit (1152) at Butrint contained more ARS than PRS sharing the same pattern of supply with Durrës, whereas at Shkodra the quantity of PRS for the period ca. 500–600 is dominant compared to the ARS present.⁴⁸

What appears to be the case is that the coastal sites as well as cities located near the important roads of antiquity, such as the *Via Egnatia*, document a consistent presence of ARS ware. African red slip ware appears as far east as Selca e Poshtme as well as at inland sites such as Elbasan, *Ad Quintum*, Berat or Paleokastër which is particularly due to their location near the *Via Egnatia* or other secondary roads. The quantity of ARS as well as the variety of types present seems to be much more intensive in coastal than in inland sites. However, the quantity in which it occurs still needs to be re-evaluated. On the other hand, the blank spaces on the Albanian map do not necessarily imply the absence of ARS. Future excavations as well as the publication of the excavated material will probably further extend the information on ARS distributional trends in Albania. Consequently, it is clear that this paper does not provide a full coverage of this field, but nevertheless it is hoped to have demonstrated some of the possibilities and problems, and to encourage further research.

³⁹ CEROVA 1987, 171 tab. IX,16.

⁴⁰ BONIFAY 2004, 162; 181. fig. 87,5.

⁴¹ Ibid. 181.

⁴² SPAHIU 1975, 484; ID. 1976, 357; ID. 1990 tab. XI,10–14.

⁴³ A considerable amount of African fine ware has been recovered there. Only a fragment of Hayes 99 B is identifiable from the publication: KOMATA 1991, 116 tab. XIII,3.

⁴⁴ ID. 1976 tab. IV,14.

⁴⁵ BAÇE 1976, 203 fig. XVI,8–9.

⁴⁶ BOWDEN ET AL. 2002, 199–229; REYNOLDS 2002, 221–227; ID. 2004, 224–397.

⁴⁷ REYNOLDS 2004.

⁴⁸ See fig. 7.

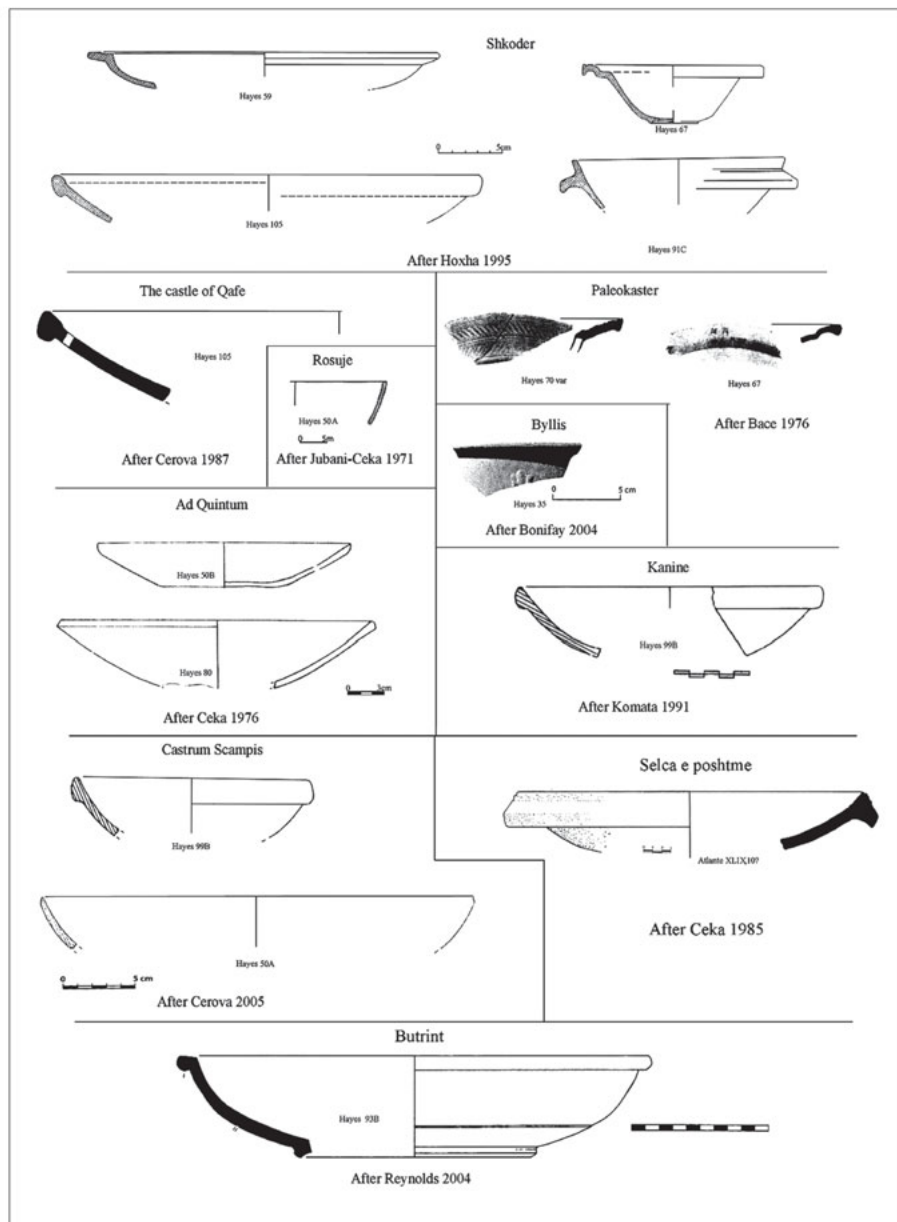


Fig. 8. Attested forms of ARS ware at Albanian sites.

Attested forms of ARS ware in Albania (fig. 9)

1. **Shkodra:** Atlante XXV, 9; H 45; H 49; H 50A/B; 57; H 58B; Atlante XXVII, 7; H 59B; H 61A, H 61B; H 65; H 76; H 67; H 73A; H 81; H 87A, B, C; H 91C, D; H 93B; H 99A; H 99B; H 104B, C; H 105; H 60; H 62A, B; H 66.
2. **Rosujë:** H 50A (?).
3. **Lezha:** H 50 A; H 99 A, B;
4. **Durrës:** H 8; H 27; H 33; H 44; H 50A, B; H 53A; H 57; H 63; H 61A, B; H 67; H 79/93; H 87B, B/C, C; H 91A, B; H 87bv/104bv; H 87bv/109bv; Atlante XLIX, 10; H 91C; H 93A; H 99B, C; H 104A, B; H 105; H 108; H 109.
5. **Ad Quintum:** H 9; H 50B; H 80.
6. **Elbasan:** H 6C; H 9 A, B; H 14 A, B; H 18; H 50A; Atlante LXIX, 27; Atlante LXXIV, 7; H 59; H 61B; H 99B; H 99C.
7. **Byllis:** H 35; H 99B.
8. **Selca e poshtme:** Atlante XLIX, 10(?).
9. The castle of **Qafë:** H 61A(?).
10. **Kaninë:** H 99
11. **Berat:** H 61B?; H 101?
12. **Paleokastër:** H 70var (?); H 67 (?)
13. **Sarandë:** H 91D; H 104B
14. The church of 40 martyrs (**Sarandë**): H 104A; H 87c/109.
15. **Butrint:** H 14/16; H 27; H 31; H 44; H 45; H 50; H 58A; H 67; H 79/93; H 87B; H 87b/109; H 87C; H 90; H 91B/C; H 91D; Fulford 40.1; H 93B; H 94B; H 97; H 99A; H 104B; H 103/104.



Fig. 9. Distribution of ARS in Albania.

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