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OBSERVATIONS ON ITALIAN SIGILLATA: EPHESOS

Material from consumption sites is most often studied with an eye to dating and patterns of importation. The observation of sherds excavated at consumption sites can, however, provide other information as well. The Italian sigillata (in particular plates and platters) from the Hanghäuser at Ephesos offers one example. The observations concern the fashioning, finishing and firing of vessels.

On platters the potter could obtain the ring-foot by turning the vessel upside down and carving it while turning the vessel on the wheel.[1] This is especially evident where his tool "chattered", leaving a series of cuts (**figs. 1–2**, also **fig. 6**).

In several cases it can be seen that the band of rouletting was made before the grooves flanking it, as the latter cut through the former (**figs. 3–4**).[2]

Vessels were regularly coated by dipping,[3] which can be observed particularly well at the edges of the coating, with possible runs of drops, when part of the vessel was left uncovered. Among the Hanghäuser material this occurs often in the area inside the ring-foot, and also sometimes also around it, on platters with broad ring-feet such as Consp. B 1.1–12 (**figs. 5–7**, also **figs. 1–2**). It has been suggested that the greater thickness of the foot with respect to the body offers a practical reason for not wetting it further in order to avoid problems during drying.[4]

Spacers could be used in loading the vessels into the kiln for firing.[5] Among the Hanghäuser material marks from spacers appear often on platters on the inside surface. Where the entire circumference is preserved, they are three in number (**fig. 8**). They are mostly rather long curved shapes (**figs. 8–10**). Such spacers have been found at the workshop site of Scoppieto, where it is the most frequent type (thought to be without published parallels).[6] Smaller, more nearly square scars are also attested among the Hanghäuser material, perhaps deriving from unfired spacers (**fig. 11**). Scars from spacers appear over the bands of rouletting and once (although lightly) over a radial stamp (**fig. 12**). In one case a clearly defined curved space of thin coating on the underside of the vessel just outside the foot-ring should also be interpreted as the mark of a spacer (**fig. 13**).

Because there was no risk of the coating acting as an adhesive between them, sigillata vessels did not necessarily require spacers in stacking.[7] Smaller plates from the Hanghäuser were stacked without spacers, as a circular scar often appears corresponding to the ring-foot of the vessel above in the stack (**figs. 14–15**, also **fig. 3**).

It is to be noted that the scars of the spacers and ring-feet coincide often with rouletting. This placing may have been intended to help to mask the scars. Quite frequently, however, the scars extend beyond the rouletting, although a more careful positioning could have avoided this.

Traces such as the ones discussed here probably have remained unobserved or at least not systematically mentioned in publications and are more frequent than appears from the literature. Incomplete coating is sometimes recorded,[8] but the phenomenon is not noted, for instance, on some vessels from Ephesos[9] and in the American Academy's Study Collection.[10]

The Hanghäuser material suggests that the observation of traces of production on vessels found at consumption centers can provide information on how potters worked that can be useful for comparison with workshop sites. In the

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1 Cuomo di Caprio 2007, 201–202, deals with this procedure.

2 Ibid. 444–445 and 447–448, discusses incision (including grooves) and rouletting without, however, considering the two together.

3 Ibid. 290–292.

4 Ibid. 292.

5 Ibid. 528–529.

6 M. Bergamini, La manifattura romana di Scoppieto. Elementi fittili funzionali. In: S. Menchelli/M. Pasquinucci (a cura di), Territorio e produzioni ceramiche. Paesaggi, economia e società in età romana: Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Pisa 20–22 ottobre 2005. Instrumenta 2 (Pisa 2006) 293.

7 Cuomo di Caprio 2007, 530.

8 See, for example, V. Mitsopoulos-Leon, Die Basilika am Staatsmarkt in Ephesos. Kleinfunde 1. Teil: Keramik hellenistische und römischer Zeit. Forsch. Ephesos 9/2–3 (Wien 1991) 128 (I 11 – Consp. 18.2) and 130 (I 41 – chalice); E. Schindler Kaudelka/U. Fastner/M. Gruber, Italische Sigillata mit Appliken in Noricum, Österr. Akad. Wiss., Phil.-Hist. Kl. Denkschr. 298 (Wien 2001) 143 (platters belonging to Consp. 20.3; 20.4; 20.5; 21.1; 21.3; 21.3; 21.5).

9 R. Meriç, Späthellenistich-römische Keramik und Kleinfunde aus einem Schachtbrunnen am Staatsmarkt in Ephesos. Forsch. Ephesos 9/3 (Wien 2002) 45–46 (K 153, K 163c and K 167 – the second a relatively small vessel with a beveled ring-foot, almost completely coated but with two small bare spots on the inner face of the ring-foot).

10 H. Comfort, De collectione praecipue epigraphica vasculorum Arretinorum apud Academiam Americanum Conservata, Mem. Am. Acad. Rome 7, 1929, 190 (plate inv. n. 8935.21), 194 (cup inv. n. 8935.45), 194–195 (Consp. B 1.9 inv. n. 8935.47), 197 (plate inv. n. 8935.63), 215 (Consp. B 1.12 inv. n. 8935.161), and 218 (cup inv. n. 8935.182).

case of Italian sigillata, it remains to be seen whether the practices revealed by these traces are common to all the potters producing the forms in question or will prove to be particular to certain groups.

It is also worth noting that these vessels show a certain tolerance, at least on occasion, for blemishes in the appearance of Italian sigillata vessels on the part of their producers, distributors and purchasers. If this is a widespread phenomenon, it has implications for what was an acceptable standard of quality for the class. This must be borne in mind, for instance, in any attempt to distinguish "seconds" and a market for them. More specifically, the positioning of a spacer over a stamp must indicate a lack of concern about its legibility. If this proves to be common rather than an isolated case of sloppiness, it should make us wonder about how important stamps were, at least on the fired vessels.

Thus, this rather neglected aspect of the study of pottery on consumption sites raises the prospect of fruitful lines of inquiry both for production technology and for wider concerns.

Bibliography

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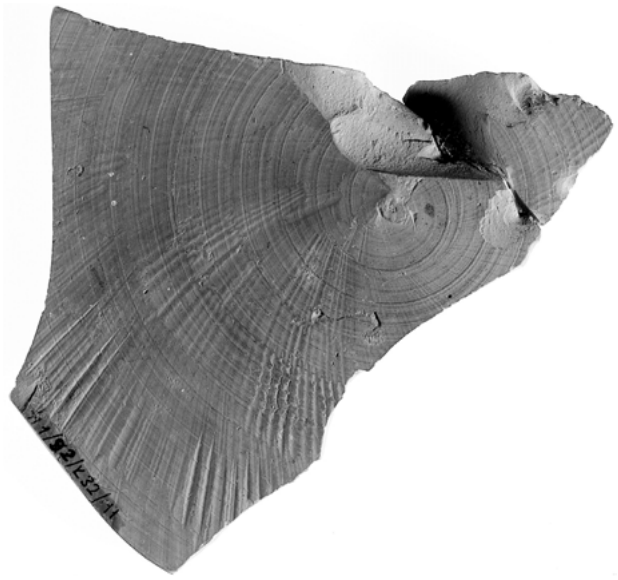

Fig. 1. Underside of unidentifiable platter stamped by L. Gellius: OCK 879 (layer 92/32).

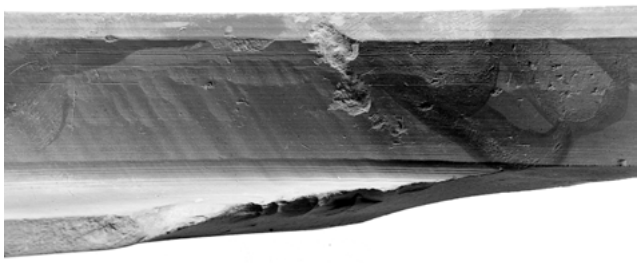

Fig. 2. Underside of Consp. 20.3 platter (layers 90/57+91/62+92/34+92/73+92/76, 90/58+92/9+92/76, 92/16, 92/32).

Fig. 3. Interior of Consp. B 2.8 plate (layer 92/31).

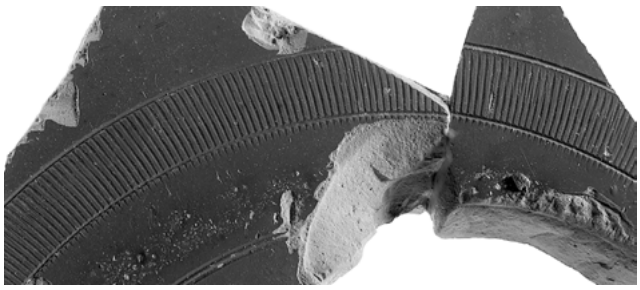

Fig. 4. Interior of Consp. B 1.11 platter (layer 91/51).

Fig. 5. Underside of Consp. 18.2 platter (layers 91/66+91/69+91/76).

Fig. 6. Underside of Consp. B 1.7 platter (layer 80/14).

Fig. 7. Underside of Consp. B 1.9 platter (layers 90/58, 90/62).

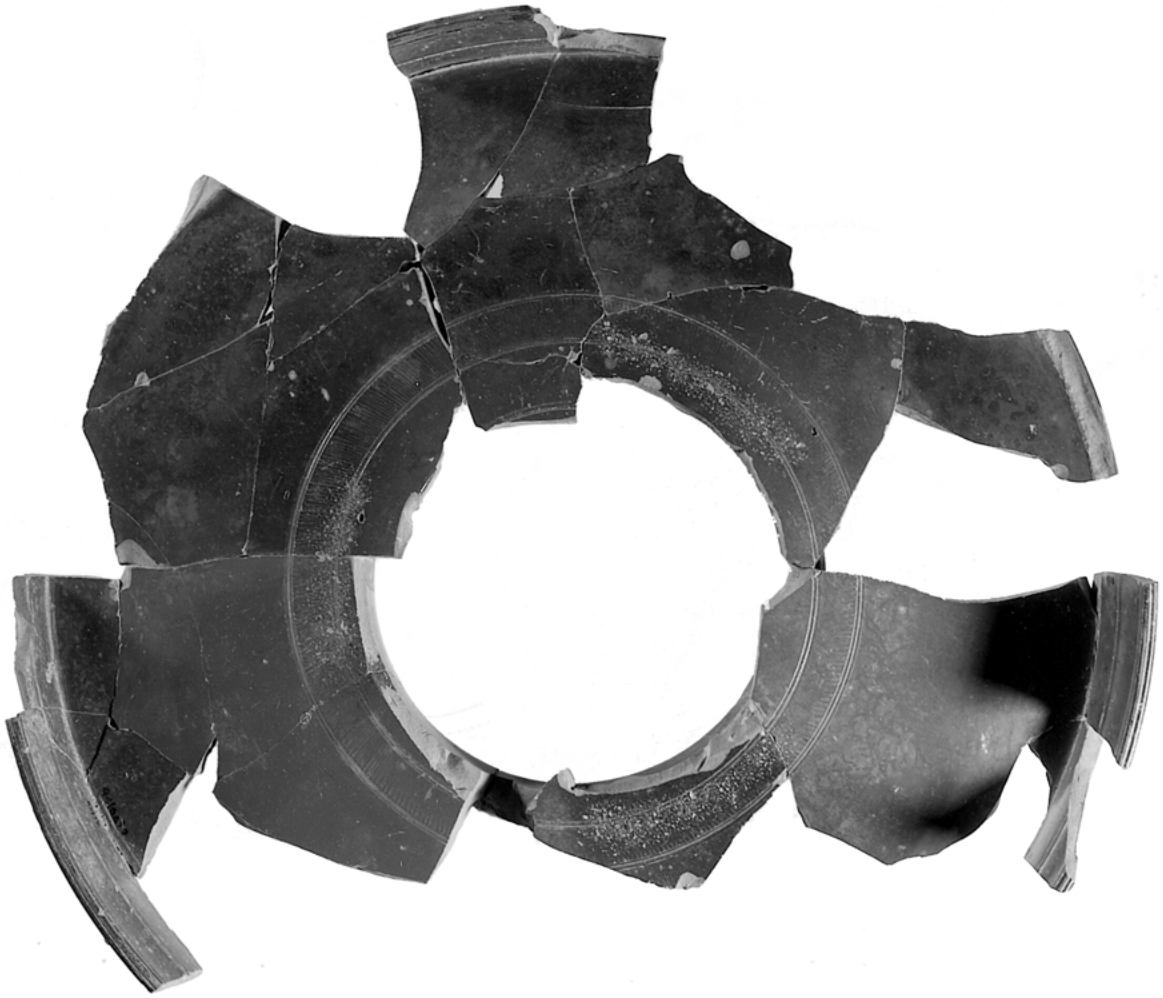

Fig. 8. Interior of Consp. 18.2 platter (layers 91/64+91/66+91/77).

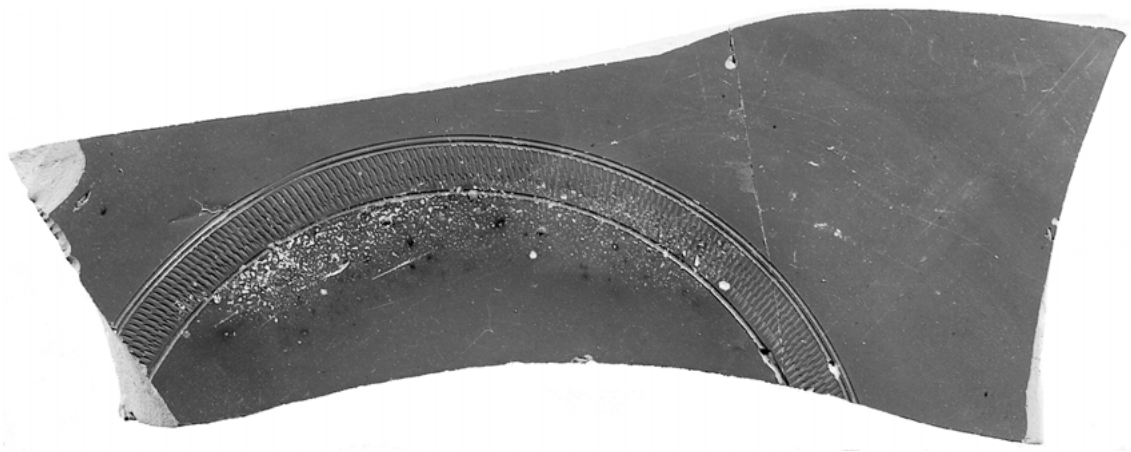

Fig. 9. Interior of Consp. B 1.7 plate (layer 91/71).

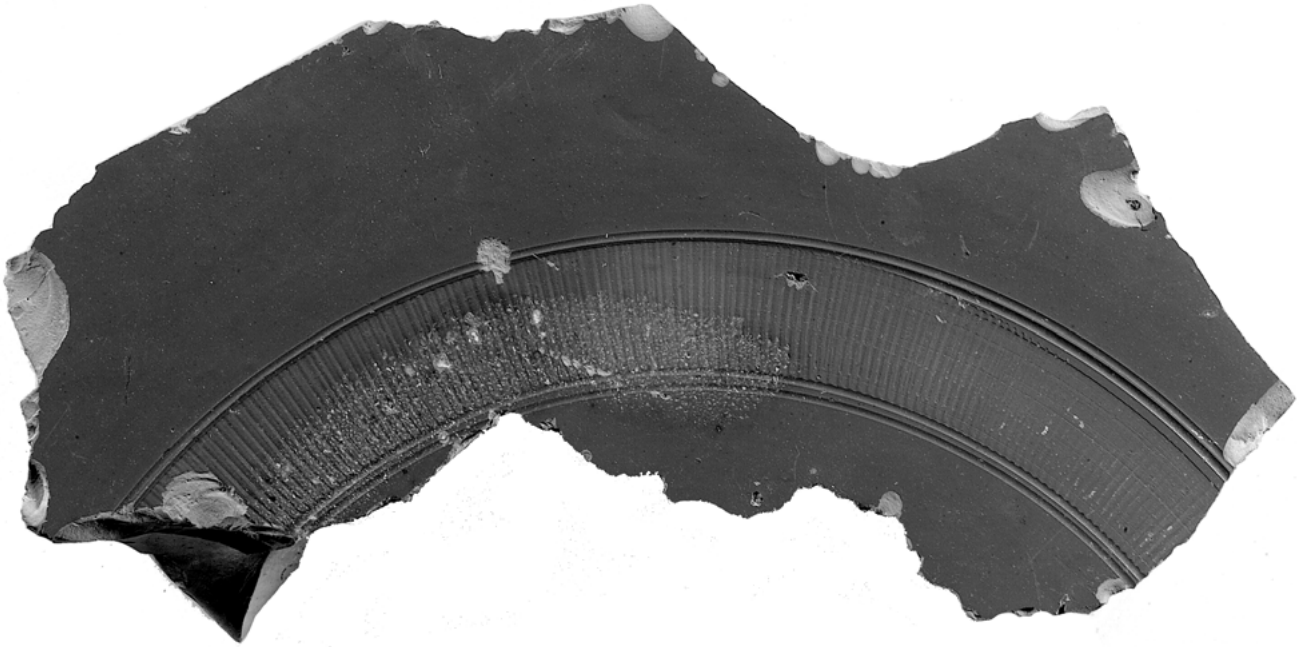

Fig. 10. Interior of Consp. B 1.7 platter (layer 80/14).

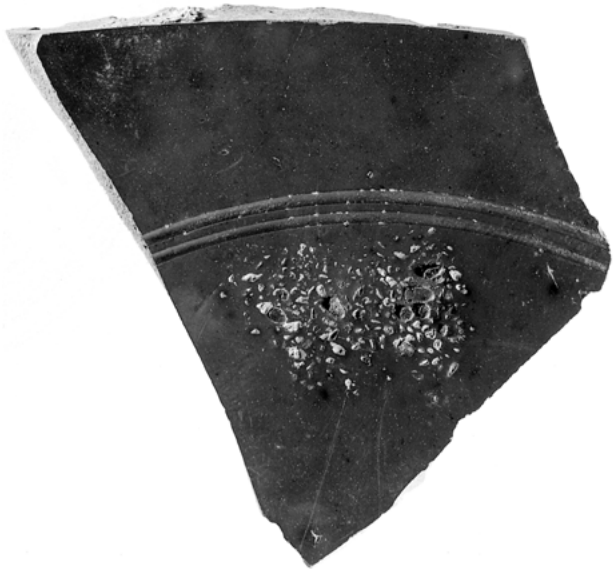

Fig. 11. Interior of unidentifiable platter (layer 00/80).

Fig. 12. Interior of Consp. B 1.3 platter stamped by A. Sestius' slave Priamus: OCK 1942 (layer 90/62).

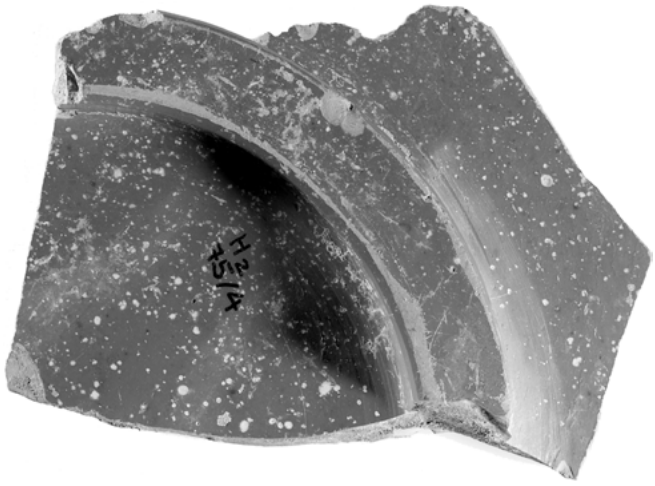

Fig. 13. Underside of Consp. B 1.6 platter stamped by Vibius' slave Romanus: OCK 2386 (layer 75/4).

Fig. 14. Interior of Consp. 21.2 plate stamped by Camurius: OCK 514 (layers 91/3+91/19+91/26).

Fig. 15. Interior of Consp. B 2.8 plate (layer 92/31).