

CHARIKLEIA DIAMANTI, *Late Antique Stamped Amphorae as Evidence for Imperial Policy. The Halasarna Workshop, Cos Island.* Oxfordshire: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd. 2024. V, 128 S. – ISBN 978-1-80327-857-8, 978-1-80327-858-2 (e-Pdf)

• MICHAEL GRÜNBART, University of Münster  
(gruenbart@uni-muenster.de)

In this study, CHARIKLEIA DIAMANTI undertakes a synthesis of the results of her research on amphorae stamps conducted over the past fifteen years.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with the finds from Halasarna (modern Kardamaina) on the island of Kos, the author seeks to reconstruct patterns of trade and the organization of administrative structures from the fourth to the seventh century CE. Halasarna, located on the southern coast of Kos, functioned as the centre of the antique *demos* Halasarna. Owing to its strategic position, the island remained, even in the Early Byzantine period, a crucial commercial hub between the Eastern Mediterranean, Constantinople, and Asia Minor. A decisive turning point for the island formed the earthquake and the tsunami of 554 CE, which caused extensive devastation. This catastrophe appears to have been accompanied by a restructuring of production facilities and of the organization of trade and distribution. At the same time, however, the island was vulnerable to raids, particularly those associated with the Arab expansion of the 630s. Administratively, Kos belonged to the Eparchy of the Islands (p. 28) and constituted an episcopal see already in Late Antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

D. emphasizes that previous scholarship has treated stamped amphorae only in isolation, through the publication and discussion of individual finds, without undertaking a comprehensive, diachronic analysis of the material as a whole. Her monograph, which assembles the evidence in considerable detail and establishes a relative chronology, is organized into five chapters.

1. E.g. CHARIKLEIA DIAMANTI, *Stamped Late Roman/Proto-Byzantine amphoras from Halasarna of Kos.* *Rei Cretariae Romanae Fautorum Acta* 41 (2010) pp. 1–8 [online](#).

2. See JOHN NESBITT – NICOLAS OIKONOMIDES (eds), *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art. Volume 2. South of the Balkans, the Islands, South of Asia Minor.* Washington, D.C. 1994, S. 138–139 (49. Kos).

At the outset, it must be stressed that the study focuses primarily on amphorae of types Late Roman Amphora 1 (LRA 1) and Late Roman Amphora 13 (LRA 13) (**Fig. 1**).

LRA 1 amphorae, attested until the mid-sixth century, are comparatively less prominent in the Koan assemblages; from the later sixth century onwards, LRA 13 predominates until the mid-seventh century.

According to D.'s interpretation, this typological shift corresponds to a transition from regional to interregional modes of distribution. The two amphora classes also exhibit distinct patterns of stamping: the earlier LRA 1 group commonly bears the names of cities, such as Korykos or (Elaiousa) Sebaste in Cilicia, while the later LRA 13 stamps attest the authority of administrative officials, notably the eparch and the emperor himself as the supreme guarantor of control. In the late 7th century, Korykos continued to serve as an important harbour within the naval theme of the Kibyrriaioi. The names of the two sites—according to prevailing interpretation—were applied in space-saving form as monograms.

The name Korykos appears either as a cross-monogram (**Fig. 2a** [not reproduced in the publication]<sup>3</sup>; cf. pp. 18—20 and the catalogue of LRA 1 city amphora stamps)<sup>4</sup> or as a monogram based on the carrier letter Kappa (**Fig. 2b**; cf. Plate 1, ill. 2 [No. 7]).

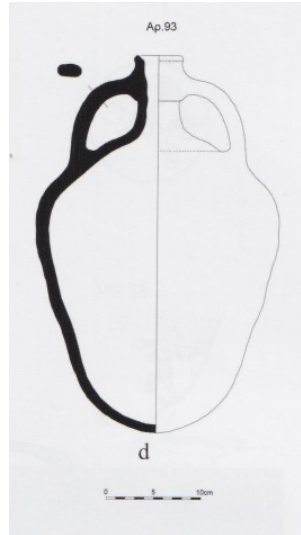


Fig. 1. Late Roman Amphora LRA 13  
(DIAMANTI, op. cit., p. 84, fig. 12)

3. ÜLKÜ KARA, Yenikapı Limanı'nda Ele Geçen Damgalı Amphoralar. In: ADNAN DILER – AHMET KAAAN ŞENOL – ÜMIT AYDINOĞLU (eds), *Antikçağ'da Doğu Akdeniz'de zeytinyağı ve şarap üretimi = Olive oil and wine production in Eastern Mediterranean during Antiquity*. İzmir 2015, pp. 243–250.

4. See MICHAEL GRÜNBART, Das Kreuz mit den Monogrammen – und eine vernetzte Lösungsstrategie. In: THOMAS FINKENAUER – ALFRED NORDHEIM (eds), *LIBER AMICORUM. Claus Pelling zum 90. Geburtstag*. Tübingen 2022, pp. 71–80; the monogram of Korykos can be broken down according to their alphabetical and spatial position in K2 O1 P4 Y1 Ω3 | O1 Y1 K2 Ω3 P4.

Having made these preliminary remarks, it is now appropriate to return to the organization of the book.

Chapter 1 offers a survey of earlier publications concerning stamped amphorae (pp. 1–7), followed by a concise discussion of the excavations on Kos (pp. 7–9), including detailed excavation plans and figures (pp. 85–100).

Chapter 2 (LR 1 City Amphora Stamps, pp. 12–20) examines the Late Roman administrative amphora stamps, which are associated with the *annona* system (catalogue pp. 18–20, 13 nos.). Certain Cilician cities, moreover, enjoyed particular trading privileges, a fact that can be traced through the stamped amphorae. Finally, the chapter addresses the role of the *navicularii*, shipowners attested epigraphically in Korykos, who emerge as key entrepreneurs in long-distance transport.

Chapter 3 (LR 13 State Amphora Stamps: From Production to Distribution, pp. 21–

50) turns to the imperial stamps, which occur primarily on the newly introduced amphora type LRA 13 from the second half of the sixth century onwards. These stamps frequently depict imperial busts. In addition, chronological markers in the form of indiction years, monograms, and other Greek inscriptions appear. A figure referred to as the *aparchos* is mentioned repeatedly, most plausibly to be identified with the *eparchos* (*ton nēson*) (Eparch of the Islands), who would have been responsible for the oversight and distribution of these goods (pp. 28–30, 37–50; catalogue). In this chapter, the author systematically evaluates all written sources.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter 4 (Halasarna Stamped Amphorae in Space and Time; pp. 51–59) revisits the site of Halasarna, emphasizing its role as a significant centre of production under direct imperial control.

The volume concludes with Chapter 5 (From City to State Amphora Stamps:



Fig. 2a: Korykos: Cross monogram (KARA, Yenikapı Limanı'nda, p. 248, fig. 6b)



(a)

Fig. 2b: Korykos: Letters attached to K(appa) (DIAMANTI, op. cit., p. 101, pl. 2)

5. MICHAEL MCCORMICK, *Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900*. Cambridge 2001 should be added.

Present Results to Future Research; pp. 60–65), while an appendix provides the results of archaeometric investigations (Petrographical Analysis of Coan LR 13 Stamped Amphorae from Halasarna, Kos; pp. 66–74).

The evidence allows for a classification of amphora stamps into two principal categories (p. 2):

1. Impressions of religious content or symbolism, which point to the involvement of ecclesiastical hierarchies within commercial networks.
2. Impressions of civic-administrative authority, attested on amphorae of types LRA 1 and LRA 13. While LRA 1 amphorae bear monograms of Asia Minor cities, the LRA 13 series is characterized by imperial portraits, together with titulature and names of officials, and occasionally references to weight units. D. focuses her analysis on the LRA 13 material, highlighting the transition from municipal to explicitly imperial (“state”) stampings.

It is striking, however, that the author gives no consideration to the other side of the medal: the instruments used to produce such impressions.<sup>6</sup> In practice, metal and wooden dies must have been essential. Metal dies are frequently catalogued as “bread stamps”, yet recent research has made it clear that such tools were also (and mainly) deployed in commerce—for instance, in sealing and marking amphorae and amphora stoppers. Brickstamps, by contrast, were likely produced with wooden dies.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most salient observations concerns the consistent appearance of the emperor himself, or his designated representatives such as the eparch, as the issuing authorities of the stamps. D. undertakes a comparative analysis of the imperial busts impressed on amphorae with those represented on contemporary silver vessels, coinage, glassweights and the lead seals of the *kommerkiarioi*. This comparison reveals that emperors such as Tiberios II, Maurikios, Phokas, and Herakleios are depicted as the ultimate agents of

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6. An exploration of combining metal stamps and their impressions can be found in MICHAEL GRÜNBART – SUSANNE LOCHNER-METAXAS, *Stempel(n) in Byzanz*. In: WOLFRAM HÖRANDNER – JOHANNES KODER – MARIA A. STASSINOPOULOU (eds), *Wiener Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik (Byzantina et Neograeca Vindobonensia 24)*. Vienna 2004, pp. 177–189; on stamping and imperial control, see MICHAEL GRÜNBART, *Multiplying Inscriptions: The Cultural Context of Byzantine Metal Stamps*. In: CHRISTOS STAVRAKOS (ed.), *Inscriptions in the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine History and History of Art Proceedings of the International Symposium “Inscriptions: Their Contribution to the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine History and History of Art”* (Ioannina, June 26–27, 2015). Wiesbaden 2016, pp. 405–414.

7. See JONATHAN BARDILL, *Brickstamps of Constantinople* (Oxford Monographs on Classical Archaeology). Oxford 2004.

control (p. 27).<sup>8</sup> Certain amphorae even preserve multiple stampings—for instance, a combination of an imperial device with a secondary mark indicating the measure “Ϝ K” (= 20 uncia ≈ 540 g). The precise function of this notation remains obscure: the number is too slight to denote the weight of the amphora’s contents, yet excessive to indicate a monetary denomination in gold (p. 32). It therefore seems most plausible to regard these ceramic containers as components of a strictly regulated system of exchange, whether in the form of grain distribution e.g. for cities like Constantinople) or in the allocation of supplies to the military. Such administrative markings were indispensable to the organization of transport (e.g. on ships) and provisioning.

In summary, the significance of this case study lies in its ability to assemble an impressive body of material and, through its focus on a single site, render the complexities of trade and economic history more accessible. The volume stands out for its fine visual presentation and will remain an indispensable point of reference for future research on the economic, commercial, and transport history of the early Byzantine Empire. Moreover, the study makes an important contribution to an interdisciplinary approach to the intricate interconnections characteristic of the Mediterranean world. However, the tradition of amphora stamping continued well beyond the chronological scope of this investigation and warrants further research.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Keywords**

amphorae; stamps; economic history; Early Byzantium; Kos

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8. WOLFGANG HAHN’s *Moneta Imperii Byzantini* should be used in the English and updated version: MICHAEL METLICH – WOLFGANG HAHN, *Money of the Incipient Empire: Anastasius I – Justinian I, 491–565* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Numismatik 15). Vienna 2013.

9. See the intriguing case of amphorae findings north of the Black Sea, E.A. PARSHINA, Клейменная византийская амфора X в. из Ласпи (Stamped Byzantine amphora of X century A.D. from Laspi). In: *Морська торгівля в северному причерномор’ї* (= Sea Trade in North Black Sea Region, the collection of scientific articles). Kiev 2001, pp. 104–117.