

IOULIA VOKOTPOULOU – ANASTASIOS-PHOEBUS CHRISTIDIS

A CYPRIOT GRAFFITO ON AN SOS AMPHORA FROM MENDE, CHALCIDICE

For Natia Charalambidou

The SOS amphora (no. 18050, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki – Pl. 1) was found in 1989 in the seaside cemetery of ancient Mende¹ in the peninsula of Kassandra, Chalcidice. It contained the remains of a baby (ἐγγυτρισμός)². Apart from the bones, the jar contained a one-handled cup (no. 12676)³. The burial jars of the cemetery of Mende were found at a relatively shallow depth and many had been partly destroyed by the action of the waves. Only half of the SOS amphora 18050 has been reconstructed. The missing parts include 2/3 of the body, 1/3 of the neck and one handle. The surviving height is 0.58 cm. Neck height = 0.105 cm. Lip diam. = 0.17 cm. Body diam. = 0.44 cm. The clay is buff, pale red at the section. It contains inclusions of white limestone and of brown red minerals. On the outside, in the middle of the jar there are two irregular horizontal groovings from the potter's wheel.

The black slip that covered originally the biggest part of the amphora survives in small areas in the lip, shoulder and lower part of

¹ Vokotopoulou – Moschonisioti 1990. In the same cemetery two other burial SOS amphorae were found (see Vokotopoulou – Moschonisioti 1990, 420).

² No. of burial 165. It was found at a depth of 0.90 cm. At this level there was a concentration of burials of young individuals, infants and babies. These burials can be dated at the end of the 8th/7th century B.C.

³ Height: 0.065 cm. Lip diam.: 0.10 cm. Base diam.: 0.042 cm. Its interior and exterior are covered with a slip, brown in the exterior (one can discern the use of a brush), brown red on the inside. The cup is complete. The surface of the interior appears worn. Its walls are very thin. The clay is yellow brown and micaceous. This feature leads us to believe that it is a locally-made ware imitating a typical subgeometric Euboean cup, like those found at Lefkandi (Popham, M. R. – Sackett, L. H. – Themelis, P. G. Lefkandi I, London 1980, pl. 265g) or in Chalkis (A. Andriomenou, BCH 109, 1985).

the body. It is dark brown and its poor state of preservation betrays poor workmanship. Traces in the handle indicate that the slip extended uniformly over the body and the sides. Only the internal side of the lip was covered with slip. At the lower part of the neck there are three thin horizontal lines. Between these lines and the plastic ring one can see the typical decoration to which these amphorae owe their name: three concentric circles framed by two groups of three wavy vertical lines. The rest of the jar was covered by the slip, with the exception of a zone 0.045 cm. in width in the upper part of the body, which is decorated with three parallel bands.

The study by Johnston – Jones 1978, whose conclusions have been further corroborated by Boardman 1986, leads us to believe that the SOS amphora from Mende is Attic in origin. The quality of the clay, the form of the lip and of the handles and, secondarily, the decoration, all point to Attica. The petrographic analysis carried out (see Appendix) confirms this hypothesis.

The amphora belongs to the early SOS group and one could plausibly argue for a date in the last quarter of the 8th century B.C. Such a date is supported by the three horizontal bands at the lower part of the neck (of the same type as those of the Pithecoussae amphorae of the last quarter of the 8th century B.C.)⁴, the triple concentric circles and the length of the wavy lines (Johnston – Jones 1978, 136–137). The comparison, on the other hand, of our SOS amphora with the Attic SOS amphora from a grave in Phaleron, Attica⁵, dated in the beginning of the 7th century B.C. on the basis of the proto-Corinthian pottery that forms part of its context, argues in favour of an earlier date for the former.

According to recent research, SOS amphorae will have to be placed in the context of the olive oil commerce of Attica from the end of the 8th century B.C. until the first half of the 6th century B.C.⁶. They are found in various parts of the Mediterranean, unlike their Euboean counterparts which do not seem to have been exported in any numbers.

⁴ N. di Sandro, *Le anfore arcaiche dallo scarico Gosetti, Pithecusa*. Cahiers du Centre J. Bérard XII, Naples 1986, pls. 1, 3–4.

⁵ S. Pelekidis, “Anaskafe Falirou”, *Archeologikon Deltion* 2, 1916, 19–64, fig. 11.

⁶ Johnston – Jones 1978, 133, 140. See also J. Vallet, *Hommages à A. Grenier*, 1560–61, quoted in Johnston – Jones 1978, 140. On the inscribed SOS amphorae found at Salamis (Cyprus) see V. Karageorghis – O. Masson, “Quelques vases inscrits de Salamine de Chypre”, *Kadmos* 4, 1965, 146–153.

A number of these amphorae have incised names in the genitive, often followed by the verb εἶμι. These names probably identify the merchant who bought the oil.⁷

IOULIA VOKOTOPOULOU

The Graffito

The graffito is found on the shoulder of the amphora (Pl. 2 and Fig. 1). It is incomplete, as a substantial part of the body is missing. The part that has survived consists of five signs, engraved after firing⁸. The incision is relatively regular and fairly deep. The size of the signs ranges from 1.5 x 1.0 cm. to 1.0 x 1.0 cm. The text (or rather what remains of it) is organized in three groups of signs. The right-hand group (fragmentary) is separated from what follows by an intentional space and a mark of separation (dot) situated at the bottom of the line. The second group is separated from the final sign by a vertical stroke starting at – approximately – mid height and ending at the bottom of the line.

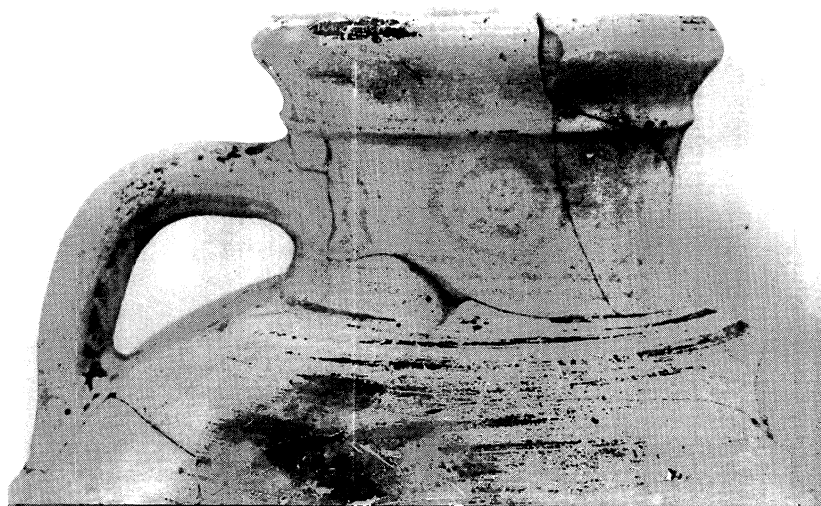
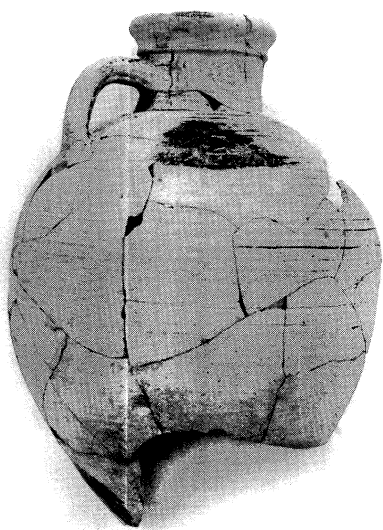
The alphabetic transliteration is quite straightforward. The first sign (starting from the left) is a *se*.

The second is a *mi*, the third a *te*. The fifth sign seems almost certainly to be a *la*, although the horizontal hasta at the base of the V is no longer there as its site is damaged. The signs belong to the common syllabary and they have a clearly archaic look. All the hastae appear “connected”. The sign *si* (cf. ICS² 212a; see also Masson, BCH 90, 1966, 355; Masson, Kadmos 23, 1984, 86; Pugliese Carratelli 1971) is similar to that of the archaic Paphian tradition.

The sign *se* has a leftward stance. But this does not establish a leftward direction for the text as a whole. As is often the case, the

⁷ Johnston – Jones 1978, 128–129. This hypothesis – and the complementary one according to which the merchant and the captain of the ship carrying the amphorae might have been the same person – was first put forward by L. Jeffery, BSA 50, 1955, 67–69.

⁸ The incision cuts through the matt black slip. The top hasta of the right-hand sign shows the typical slipping off-track that occurs very often when one is trying to inscribe hard clay. On the question of incised marks (post-firing) see N. Hirschfeld, “Incised Marks (Post-Firing) on Aegean Wares”, in: C. Zerner – P. Zerner and J. Winder, Proceedings of the International Conference “Wace and Blegen”, Pottery as Evidence for Trade in the Aegean Bronze Age 1939–1989, Held at the American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Dec. 2–3 1989, Amsterdam 1993, 315.



Pl. 1 Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki 18050
SOS amphora from Mende, Chalcidice



Pl. 2 Cypriot graffito



Pl. 3 Incised lines on the handle of the jar

followed by an abbreviated patronymic (*te-mi*) and an abbreviated ethnic (*Se*).

At this point one should bring into the discussion a highly relevant epigraphic document: the graffito on a burial amphora from the Policoro cemetery (Pugliese Carratelli 1971, Masson 1983, 422). This graffito (Fig. 2) is (almost) identical in content with our graffito, very similar epigraphically and (almost) contemporary with it. (Pugliese Carratelli 1971, 591 gives a date in the first half of the 7th century B.C. on the basis of the archaeological context – a date which, as he points out, agrees with the epigraphy of the graffito.) The graffito reads from right to left:

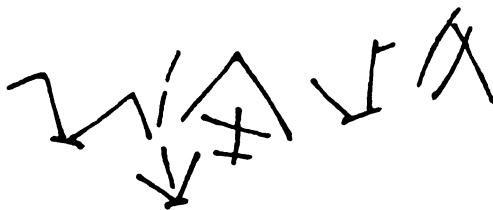


Fig. 2. * (?)*-la-si-te-mi*[-?]

This reading is based on the assumption (Pugliese Carratelli 1971, 590) that the vertical stroke which separates *si* and *mi* indicates the site of the sign *te*. The scribe, according to Pugliese Carratelli, omitted, by mistake, the sign *te* and then corrected his mistake by adding the sign *te* below the line, using the divider as an indicator of the correct position of the sign *te*.

This is an unnecessarily complicated explanation. Pugliese Carratelli is right in explaining the lower line *te* as due to an omission by the scribe. But there is no need to interpret the vertical stroke as anything else but a normal divider, separating the sequence *-la-si-* from the sequence *te-mi*, in the same way that the intentional space and the dot separate the identical sequences in our graffito. The correct transliteration should be, therefore, as follows:

(?)*-la-si | te-mi*[-?]

This revision makes the Policoro graffito identical with the Mende graffito. The lacuna after the sequence *te-mi* (whose obvious connection with the Θέμυς-series of names is pointed out by Pugliese

Carratelli 1971, 590) probably conceals the same ethnic adjective that appears in the Mende graffito (Σε[λαμίνιος]).

A few comments, now, on the (fragmentary) sequence *-la-si*, which in both graffiti seems to stand for the name of the trader or owner (followed by a patronymic and ethnic). Pugliese Carratelli (1971, 591) suspects that the missing sign before *la* might be an *a* and this leads him to suggest a compound Ἀλασίθεμις (on the basis of the attested Ἀλασιώτας, epithet of Apollo at Tamassos). He also, very cautiously, suggests other possibilities like *Φολασίθεμις (on the basis of the Hesychian gloss γόλησις = κακοδαιμονία), *Κολασίθεμις, *Συλασίθεμις.

I cannot offer any better suggestions with respect to the sequence *-la-si*. It is clear, however, that it is not compounded with *te-mi*. Our revision of the transliteration indicates that *-la-si* is a separate name divided from *te-mi*. If it is in the nominative case (the genitive, however, cannot be ruled out), one would expect *-la-si-se* rather than *-la-si*. This is not, however, an insurmountable difficulty. One could interpret *-la-si* as an abbreviated *-la-si-se* or as an instance of the phenomenon of the omission of final *-s*, due to its phonetic “fragility” in Cypriot. This phenomenon is amply documented (Masson 1983, 70–72; Mitford 1961, 14; Masson 1989, 163; Masson – Mitford 1986, 16) in the epigraphic sources. We have, therefore, a name in *-ις*, not at all uncommon in Cypriot onomastics, as names like Ὀνάσις (ICS² 11), Ἀγιστις (ICS² 11, commentary), or Στάσις (ICS² 15) demonstrate.

On the surviving handle of the jar (Pl. 3) one can see three incised parallel horizontal lines. Lines of this type are very common on Cypriot pottery (see, for example, Karageorghis – Demas 1985, pl. CXIX, nos. 86, 15, 16; Catling 1988, no. 15). They probably indicate capacity, each line standing for 10 (Masson 1983, 80, E. Masson 1974, 22).

The inscription we have examined – (almost) identical with the Policoro one – appears to be one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of those found outside Cyprus. Inscribed on an Attic SOS amphora, it completed its “full and complex life” (Johnston – Jones 1978, 31, commenting on the adventures of an SOS jar found at Pithecoussae) in Mende, as a burial jar. Its Salaminian connection gains in probability if one takes into consideration the fact that Salamis exhibits the heaviest (so far) concentration (in Cyprus) of SOS amphorae (Karageorghis – Masson 1965 [n. 6], Johnston – Jones 1978, 114).

ANASTASIOS-PHOEBUS CHRISTIDIS

Bibliography

- Boardman, J., 1986. "Provenance Studies of Greek Pottery of the Historic Period: SOS Amphorae", in: R. Jones ed., *Greek and Cypriot Pottery. A Review of Scientific Studies*, Athens, 706–712
- Catling, H., 1988. Unpublished Finds from Cyprus: (I) Graffiti in the Late Cypriot Script, (II) Imported Greek Pottery at Chytroi. Report of the Dept. of Antiquities of Cyprus 1988,1
- Egetmeyer, M., 1992. *Wörterbuch zu den Inschriften im kyprischen Syllabar*, Berlin – New York
- Hintze, A., 1993. *A Lexicon to the Cyprian Syllabic Inscriptions*, Hamburg
- Johnston, A. – Jones, R., 1978. "The SOS Amphora", *BSA* 73, 103–141
- Karageorghis, V., 1966. "Chronique des fouilles en Chypre 1965", *BCH* 90, 355
- Karageorghis, V. – Demas, M., 1985. *Excavations at Maa-Palaeokastro 1979–1986*, Nicosia
- Masson, E., 1974. *Cyprominoica*, Göteborg
- Masson, O., 1980. "Le dialecte chypriote de Salamine", in: *Salamine de Chypre: Histoire et Archéologie, Colloques Internationaux du CNRS*, Lyon 13–17 Mars 1978, Paris
- 1983. *Les inscriptions chypriotes syllabiques, réimpression augmentée (= ICS²)*, Paris
- 1989. "Les inscriptions syllabiques chypriotes de Golgoi. Fouilles 1969–72", *Kadmos* 28, 156–167
- Masson, O. – Mitford, T. B., 1986. *Les inscriptions syllabiques de Kouklia-Paphos*, Konstanz
- Mitford, T. B., 1961. *Studies in the Signaries of South-Western Cyprus*. BICS Suppl. 10, Univ. of London, Institute of Classical Studies
- Pugliese Carratelli, G., 1971. "L'epigrafe cipriota di Policoro", *Rendic. Accad. Naz. dei Lincei* 26, 589–591
- Vokotopoulou, I. – Moschonisioti, S., 1990. "To paralio nekrotafio tis Mendis", *AEMΘ* 4, 411–423.

Appendix: Analysis of the 18050 SOS Amphora from Mende

Chemical analysis of the SOS amphora, Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki 18050, was carried out in the chemical laboratory of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki by Atomic Absorption Spectrometry in order to obtain information about its place of manufacture.

A small piece of sherd (approx. 0.5 g) was carefully ground in an agate mortar, after removing and discarding the surface layer, and the sample was dried at 110° C for 1 h. Dissolution of the sample (approx. 50 mg) was accomplished by the method of lithium meta-

borate fusion (Liddy, 1989) and the concentration of 10 elements (Al, Ca, Mg, Fe, Ti, Na, K, Mn, Cr, Ni) was measured in oxide form using a Perkin Elmer 1100 B flame atomic absorption spectrometer. The results are given in Table 1.

Al ₂ O ₃	CaO	MgO	Fe ₂ O ₃	TiO ₂	Na ₂ O	K ₂ O	MnO	Cr ₂ O ₃	NiO
16,33	5,16	4,96	8,02	0,91	1,12	2,81	0,106	0,096	0,048

Table 1. Analytical results (%) of the SOS amphora 18050

The inspection of the pottery sherd under the stereoscope (X8) revealed that the amphora was made of fine pale red clay with white and brown red inclusions of diameter 0.1 mm. and 0.15 mm. max. respectively.

On the basis of the analytical results and particularly with respect to Mg, Cr and Ni content the sample falls within the concentration ranges of the Attic SOS amphorae control group according to Johnston – Jones 1978 classification. Besides, the typical white and brown red inclusions found in the majority of the Attic amphorae (Johnston – Jones 1978) are also present in our sample.

ERIFILI MIRTSSOU

Bibliography

- Jones, R. E. 1986. "Greek and Cypriot Pottery", The British School at Athens, Fitch Laboratory Occasional Paper 1, 706–712
- Liddy, D. J. 1989. "A Provenance Study of Decorated Pottery from an Iron Age Cemetery at Knossos, Crete", in: Y. Maniatis ed., *Archaeometry*, Amsterdam, 559–570.