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CERAMICS IN PLAIN SIGHT:
THE *BACINI* OF THE CHURCHES OF CRETE
“REFLECTIONS” OF THE LATE MEDIEVAL AND THE EARLY
MODERN MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE ISLAND

VOLUME II
THE REGIONAL UNIT OF LASITHI



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FOREWORD

«Καὶ δὲν εἶχα ἀγναντέψει οὔτε μακρόθεν τὸν περικαλλῆ θόλον τοῦ σεμονοῦ ναῖσκου, ὅπου ἀστράπτει εἰς τὸν ἥλιον ὅλος πεποικιλμένος ἀπὸ τὰ ὠραῖα παλαιὰ πινάκια, τὰ ἐγκολλημένα εἰς τὸ κτίριον ὡς ὄστρακα μαργαριτοφόρα» (from: «Πεποικιλμένη», in: *Αλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης, Ἀπαντα*, vol. 4, N. D. Triantafyllopoulos [ed.], Athens 1985, 333) / “And I had not beheld, even from afar, the small church ornate with a variety of exquisite multi-coloured plates embedded in the dome and the walls and fastened to them like shells bearing pearls” (from: “Clothed in the ornate raiment of divine glory”, in: *Selected Short Stories of Alexandros Papadiamandis*, vol. III, D. Harvey, L. Kamperidis [eds], Andrew Louth [trns.] [under publication]).

This constitutes the second volume in this series, derived from the cataloguing of the immured vessels (the so-called *bacini*) in churches of the regional unit of Lasithi, as part of the respective research programme. Resuming the detailed presentation of the general framework of this large undertaking and of the persons, the institutions and the circumstances that contributed to its realization, spelt out in detail in the first volume on the regional unit of Chania, I would like here to add some further details concerning its realization on the eastern part of Crete, that of Lasithi.

In Lasithi, the efforts to produce various forms of corpora, apart from sporadic references in G. Gerola’s general work (Gerola 1908; 1932-1940), are not in evidence – unlike the situation in Chania and in Rethymnon, where several of the monuments bearing the practice were studied earlier in detail (due mainly to their painted decoration; characteristic here being the works by K. Lassithiotakis [1961-1962; 1969a; 1969b; 1970a; 1970b; 1971] and by I. Spatharakis [1999; 2010; 2015], with T. Van Essenber [2012], respectively). Additional studies then built on these pioneering works (on these see volume I). Only a few monuments in Lasithi, either because of particular scenes of their painted decoration or from their architectural sculpture, have formed part of two other general projects active on the island: that recording representations of hell in the wall-paintings of churches (Lymberopoulou, Duits 2020) and that cataloguing members of architectural sculpture in secular and ecclesiastical buildings (Vakondiou, Gratziou 2021). Thus it is hoped that the cataloguing of the evidence here on immured ceramics in churches all around the region of Lasithi will form a starting point for the pulling together of the numerous sources of information extant on the churches of this region. The catalogue includes 71 relevant monuments. Every effort has been made to collect and note the basic literature applicable to each church, and also the relevant bibliographic details concerning the area/village with which it is connected. This data should enable future research on other aspects of these monuments. It should not go unremarked that in Lasithi it is the ceramic objects that lead the way in fashioning the needed catalogue of these ecclesiastical monuments, unlike the case in Chania, and also Rethymnon. Thus for Lasithi, the emphasis is more on a secular aspect of these monuments and not a strictly religious one as with the painted decoration, although as it will emerge through this book the *bacini* may contain a religious element to them as well.

As it will become clear, the *bacini* in the regional unit of Lasithi have their own particularities: one can recognize not only similarities but also differences from what was deduced for the relevant material from



Chania. Important is the testimony from Lasithi about the initial and the last limits of the practice, namely in the first decades of the 13th and during the late 18th – early 19th c., but also on its rare revitalization within the 20th and the early 21st c.

Following the programme's launch in 2011, the cataloguing of the material was carried out by the former 13th and 28th Ephorates of Byzantine Antiquities, responsible for the regional units of Herakleion and Lasithi, and Rethymnon and Chania, respectively. During the cataloguing process, particularly in Lasithi, the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi took over the responsibility. I would like to express my grateful thanks to Dr Vassiliki Sythiakaki-Kritsimalli, initially Director of the former 13th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities and actual Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Herakleion, and Chrysa Sofianou, now former Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi, for their whole-hearted collaboration during the course of this programme. I also express my sincere appreciation to Chrysa Sofianou for the permissions to study the aforementioned material here presented. Communication with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi was very fruitful during the processes of the documentation of the monuments, which took place in two seasons on June 2013 and July 2017, of the compilation of entries related to the monuments in the programme's online database and of the online presentation of some of the material (to access the database: <https://immuredvessels.gr>). The condition of preservation of the vessels recorded corresponds to one of these two periods of field-work, as mentioned in the respective entry in the catalogue. During this cataloguing I was accompanied by Georgia Moschovi, former archaeologist of the 13th Ephorate of Antiquities and later of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi. I whole-heartedly thank her, as, besides her participation in the programme, she contributed in reading this catalogue and she took the time to engage in discussions with me, to explore together the complex architectural history of some of this region's churches. As she has worked for years on the monuments of this region, I do hope this volume will live up to her expectations. With her, I would also like to thank Marianna Katifori, part-time archaeologist at the 13th Ephorate of Antiquities and the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi, for offering me her time and knowledge, when we travelled together as well, to locate and catalogue other parts of the relevant material but also later on. I would also like to heartily thank Vaso Zografaki, archaeologist, and Klio Zervaki, conservator, members of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi, as well as Dafni Chronaki, now former member of the same Ephorate, for their help in the course of the programme. Finally, I must thank Michalis Asariotis, worker in the same Ephorate, for his valuable help – without which it would have been difficult to reach the monuments in the area of Stavros (Kapistri).

I would also like to renew here my sincere appreciation of Eleni Gini-Tsofopoulou (emerita Director of the 1st Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities), who read patiently and even commented upon this second volume, offered me precious observations and in her subtle way supported me to see the work through.

The collaboration with Agapi Ladianou, designer and illustrator, and with Dimitra Tagmatarchi, architect, was crucial for the realization, after relevant permission from the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lasithi, of the schematic drawings of the façades of specific monuments with *bacini* and for the accompanying map of the regional unit of Lasithi and the drawings of selected vessels.

As in the case of volume I, in my efforts to appreciate a modern aspect of the use of ceramics in the façades of buildings during the 20th c., I would like to thank both the anonymous inhabitant of the village of Prina and particularly Dafni Chronaki and Nikolaos Beteinis for their assistance, after I located the large basin immured by the entrance of a house there, to get in contact with the owner, Kostas Pagkalos in Agios Nikolaos. In turn, I thank him for the information he kindly and thoughtfully provided on the basin's history.

My special thanks concerning this later period of use are also expressed this time to Nikos Liaros, for his remarks upon some of the vessels dating from the 19th and the early 20th c. And I also thank Professor



Sauro Gelichi, for his useful remarks, and my friend and colleague Dr Yorgos Brokalakis, for his help. I express my gratitude to Denise Harvey, Papa-Lambros Kamperidis and Andrew Louth for the permission to use the excerpt at the beginning of this foreword, which forms part of their still unpublished translation of Papadiamandis' work and also to Domos Editions and Dimitris Mavropoulos, for the permission to quote the excerpt from the Greek edition.

I am very grateful to the Director of the Institute of Historical Research, Professor Nikolaos Papazarkadas, for his encouragement to take the last steps in the writing of this book, the second of the relevant series; his support was important, given the additional duties that my work at the Institute has demanded of me during these last few years. I thank the members of the editorial committee of the Section of Byzantine Research of the Institute: Eleftherios Despotakis, Charalambos Gasparis and Zissis Melissakis, who accepted this volume in the edited series of the Section and for their help during various phases of its preparation. And once again, I thank Angeliki Panopoulou, my colleague, who has patiently over these last years listened to my anxieties about finally finishing this part and has shared my thoughts on parts of this book. Sofia Saroglidou and Eirini Kalogridou from the editorial department of the Institute were again my co-travelers during the whole editorial procedure and I thank them for their help. The book's actual form is owed much to the editor of the English text, Dr Don Evely, who has followed this series and the whole *bacini* project almost since its beginning.

Finally, to my family I express my warmest appreciation, for their patience during my absence in search of the material on sites in Lasithi, but also in various libraries in Athens and abroad to add relevant literature and throughout the demanding editorial preparation of this volume. My daughters grew up together with this project, listening to conversations on pots and buildings. I hope that when they come of age they will show special attention to and appreciation of the various humble objects that quietly accompany us in our everyday life – and not only those of clay that have silently faded away in our modern reality – in an understanding that the ordinary items of yesteryear are true reflections not only of a person's, a group's, a community's routines and practices but also of their outlook on life. As hopefully the reader of this series of books will also have become aware of. Although the material was collected some time ago, it has taken four years after volume I for volume II to appear. Large works like these require concentration and dedication over a long period of time and this has not been possible for several periods in recent years. Finally, the end of the summer of 2024 saw the completion of the last of the synthetic chapters. I do hope that it was worth the wait.

This time, during my research in Lasithi, together with my fellow travelers Georgia Moschovi and Marianna Katifori, but also Michalis Asariotis, I had the chance to mark more closely the changes in the landscape from areas easily accessible to areas hard to reach. On looking at the map they would initially seem close to accessible coasts, like the case of Romanou, though isolated ones, as in the area above Stavros (Kapistri) for example, were discernible too. I was impressed by the rare penetration of the practice in the very east part of the island, with examples located mostly in areas such as Lastros, Lithines and Sfaka. The general impression gained was one of a non-populous area, even if in places like Kavousi, Kentri, Anatoli, Metaxochori, Ano Symi and Lithines, the churches involved lie in the core of each settlement. We did not meet many people in these villages. There seemed little difference between these and other churches like those in Agios Georgios in the site of Loutra (Malles), the numerous monuments in the area of Stavros (Kapistri) or in Agios Georgios at the site of Assari, which do not lie inside the territory of settlements or in actual living ones today. The only exceptions were the large settlements of Kritsa and Fourni, where the visitor could sense a vibrant community, could discuss and interact with the locals – as we did sometimes. Nevertheless, in all the cases the churches were in good preservation, most of them having been recently whitewashed on their façades, with clear traces that they were being still visited



and venerated. Altogether though this has been a rather silent and not so adventurous a journeying, compared with that in Chania, but rather one more recalling that of a pilgrim – one in search of churches linked by their common use of ceramics on their façades. Perhaps this feeling was also due to the fact that the traveling was made smoother under the care and the watchful eye of the aforementioned colleagues. Whatever the case, the opportunity was given in searching for these churches with their immured ceramics, to catch a glimpse too of specific and unusual sites chosen for the construction of churches: that of Agios Panteleimon, on the homonymous shore, in the general area of Kalo Chorio, that of Agio Pnevma just before the Cha gorge, the various churches on the hill above the village of Stavros with a stunning view towards Kentri and Ierapetra. One's eyes were blinded by the "valley" of greenhouses, the wealth-producing power of this southern side of the island; all silent landmarks of active human activity in the late medieval, modern and contemporary times.

Editorial Note

The same norms as to the transliteration of Greek names and place names have been followed as those in volume I (ELOT-743 system), again with the exception of specific common names when, due to their generalized anglicized form, the latter has been followed here as well. In addition, the same norms as in volume I have been followed in the bibliography concerning the rendering of the names of the authors and the titles of works published in Greek.