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The Immured Vessels in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Churches of Greece Research Programme: objectives and preliminary results from Crete

ABSTRACT

The study presents the preliminary observations from the “Immured vessels in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine churches of Greece” research programme with a focus on immured vessels in churches on Crete. It refers to the areas where this practice is most widespread, to the most common patterns in which the vessels are placed on church façades, and to the different categories of glazed wares used as *bacini*. Particular interest is paid to the reasons why *bacini* are used and to the importance of their study, not only for this particular aspect of the material culture of Crete, but also for the additional information they provide about the monuments they adorn.

KEYWORDS: Immured vessels, bacini, churches, glazed pottery, Venetian and Early Modern periods, Crete

I. INTRODUCTION – GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Although the practice of embedding glazed open clay vessels in patterns on the exterior walls of – mostly religious – buildings has been noted in various areas (for example: Berti, Tongiorgi, Tongiorgi 1983, 35), the most systematic research conducted to date has been in Italy. The pioneering composite studies conducted by G. Berti and L. Tongiorgi on vessels immured in churches in Pisa are included among the numerous relevant studies¹ (Berti, Tongiorgi 1981; Berti 1992, 133-172).

In the territories of what is now Greece, although this form of decoration was identified very early by scholars of Byzantine architecture, with the earliest references dating from the first half of the 20th c. (Millet 1916, 283; Grabar 1928, 37; Megaw 1931-1932, 90-13; Sotiriou 1942, 411; Megaw 1964-1965, 145-162; Bouras 1965, 73 note 318; Velenis 1984, 194-195, 267, 270), this research was mainly limited to the study of specific churches and focused on the origin and purpose of this type of decoration and the role such immured vessels played as an architectural element on church façades. There are hardly any studies that focus on the immured ceramics themselves. Mention should be made of those by A. H. S. Megaw, G. Nikolakopoulos, H. Philon,

¹ The listing of the numerous studies on Italian *bacini* lies beyond the scope of this study. For some relevant references, see: <http://www.immuredvessels.gr> (access: 20/06/2017). Here, one can mention: Blake 1980, 93-111; Berti, Gelichi 1993, 125-199; Atti 1996.

G. D. R. Sanders and K. Tsouris (Megaw 1931-1932, 90-130, sporadically; 1964-1965, 145-162; Nikolakopoulos 1978; 1979; 1980; 1988, 81-84; 1989, 66-71; Philon 1985, 303-316; Sanders 1989, 189-199; Tsouris 1988, 95-116; 1996, 603-624), though most of these deal with isolated cases of monuments; to date, no composite studies have engaged with the glazed vessels of one or more regions, with the exception of K. Tsouris' research into churches with *bacini* in North-western Greece (Tsouris 1988, 95-116; 1996, 603-624). This is to say that no study has as yet addressed all the issues connected with the ceramic vessels immured in Byzantine churches, namely: ceramic categories; their provenance, spread and use; how and where they were set into the walls; the chronology of the vessels and the monuments; and the issues raised by the vessels themselves as items of pottery production (Yangaki 2010, 827-840).

The research programme "Immured vessels in Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches of Greece: a digital *corpus*" seeks to address this research gap by providing answers to the above through the systematic identification and recording of those churches in Greece which have vessels immured into their façades, with a view to their analytical documentation and the preservation of the related material in an integrated database. The programme was initiated in 2011 by the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation with the permission and collaboration of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports and of the respective Ephorates of Antiquities,² and is still in progress. While the programme was originally limited to the detailed recording of the relevant data from Attica, the Peloponnese and Crete, it has recently been extended to cover other areas as well. The documented churches already exceed 370 in number, with the earliest immured pottery dating from the 11th c. and the latest from the 20th and 21st c., given that vessels which are added to monuments at a later date are also catalogued (<http://www.immuredvessels.gr>).

II. THE EVIDENCE RELATING TO *BACINI* IN CRETE

The detailed documentation made it clear that the most populous sample of churches with immured vessels is located in Crete, where 291 monuments have been located to date (Fig. 1).³

Although the practice seems typical of ecclesiastical buildings on the island, as in mainland Greece, the – for now – isolated case of a secular building at the site of Pyrgos Kavalou, north of Vorroi to the south of the village of Larani in the prefecture of Herakleion, where open glazed

² I would like to thank Emeritus Professor Olga Gratzou and the Honorary Director of the Ephorate of Rethymnon, Michalis Andrianakis, for their support in transforming this idea into a research programme. I would also like to thank Anastasia Tzigounaki, Dr. Vassiliki Sythiakaki, Chryssa Sofianou and Dr. Eleni Papadopoulou, directors of the Ephorates of Antiquities of Rethymnon, Herakleion, Lasithi and Chania respectively, for their support during the course of this research programme.

³ The paper formed part of the workshop "Movements of objects, dissemination of practices through the study of the immured vessels in churches of Venetian Crete" led by the author in the context of the 12th International Congress of Cretan Studies. I would like to thank Anastasia Fiolitaki, Kostas Giapitsoglou, Athina Fraidaki and Nikoletta Pyrrou; Eleni Kanaki and Georgios Katsalis; and Georgia Moschovi, from the Ephorates of Antiquities of Rethymnon, Herakleion and Lasithi respectively, as well as the archaeologists Petroula Varthalitou, Nikolaos Vasilakis and Marianna Katifori, for their collaboration not only during the programme but also for their enthusiasm and stimulating discussions on the occasion of the *bacini* workshop (see also the papers relating directly to the workshop). All photos are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

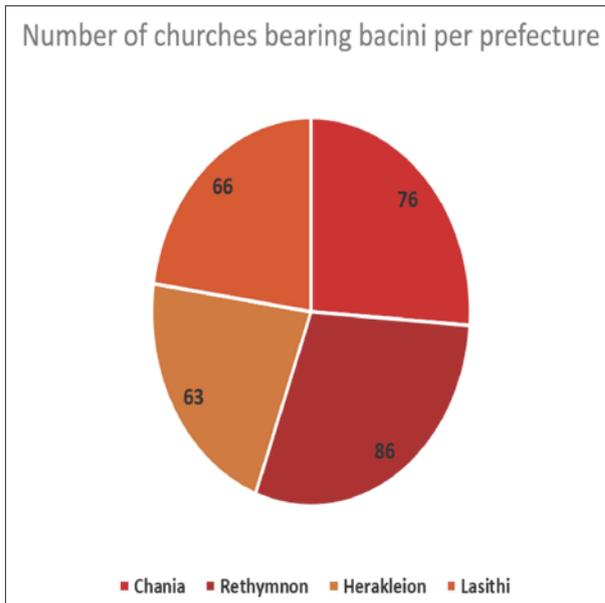


Fig. 1. Number of churches bearing immured vessels per prefecture.

vessels are still preserved in the exterior walls, suggests that the practice may have been more widespread during the period of Venetian rule.⁴ Similar decoration also occurs in secular buildings in Italy and southern France.⁵

The detailed recording of Crete's ecclesiastical monuments bearing immured vessels includes the indexing of references in the current bibliography, the consultation of the photographic

archives of the respective Ephorates of Antiquities, systematic field research carried out with the cooperation of colleagues from the Ephorates, and restoration work carried out in other contexts by the Ephorates of Antiquities in various churches, which also revealed the existence of immured vessels or empty recesses which may once have contained them. This process has increased the number of monuments that have been identified in given prefectures from one or two dozen to many times that number, with the largest sample concentrated in the prefecture of Rethymnon, where 86 monuments have been found so far.

Though immured vessels are found in churches on or near the coast in both the north and the south of the island, the majority are in the hinterland. These are often located in extremely inaccessible places, and it is noteworthy that even in these cases high quality, imported ceramics have been used. While the practice of ceramic decoration was widespread on the island, in most cases only a few of the churches in any one area are adorned with immured vessels. Nevertheless, churches with immured vessels are more densely concentrated in some areas than in others. For example, in the settlement of Kritsa (Lasithi) and its immediate periphery, 45.9% of the churches bear witness to this practice. This constitutes a unique case, however, since it is the only settlement in which so many monuments with *bacini* have been located. In the former provinces of Amari and Selino (the present-day municipalities of Amari and Kandalos-Selino), 27 and 25 churches respectively have immured vessels, making these the areas with the highest concentration of *bacini* in Crete. In the case of western Crete, the highest concentration is found in the southern regions of Rethymnon and Chania, not in the western parts of the two prefectures.

⁴ On this point, I would like to thank Kostas Giapitsoglou for bringing this information to my attention and providing me with the relevant photographs.

⁵ For characteristic examples, see: De Crescenzo 1996, 207-209, 224, fig. 14, fig. 15; Mazzucato 1996, 170, 180, fig. 12; Vallauri, Nicolai 1996, 232-234, 238, fig. 4, 240, fig. 8; <http://www.surrentum.com/2008/06/palazzo-veniero/> (accessed: 20.09.2016); <http://www.sorrentotourism.com/en/old-town-centre.php> (accessed: 20.09.2016).

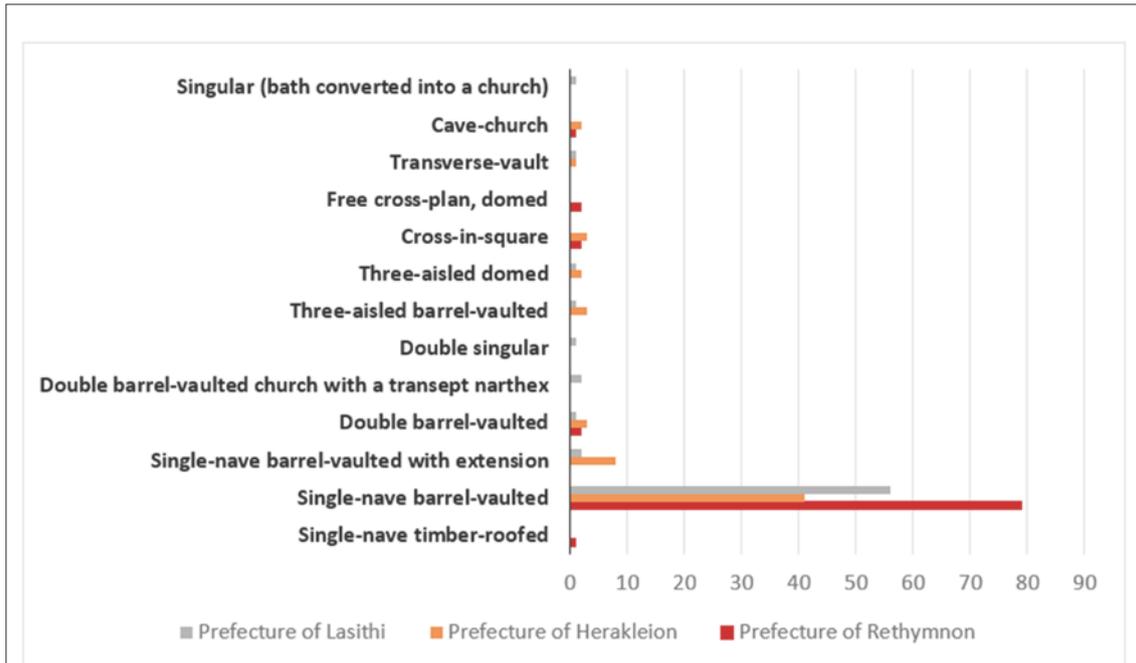


Fig. 2. Architectural types of churches bearing immured vessels, according to specific prefectures.

A study of the practice of immuring vessels based on this numerically large sample of churches allows observations to be made with greater certainty, and confirms the first data presented in the recent past (Yangaki 2010, 827-840; 2013, 375-384). We can thus now say that, on Crete, this form of decoration is mainly found in barrel-vaulted single-nave churches, less frequently in twin-naved churches, and rarely in churches of other architectural types (Fig. 2, Fig. 3). In the majority of cases, a group of five (or, more rarely, four) open vessels are arranged to form a cross in the western wall (Fig. 4) above the entrance and usually above the light-holes, if there are any, in the gable end. While this arrangement has been widely adopted on Crete, it is found only sporadically in mainland Greece and Italy.⁶ The high incidence of this arrangement indicates that this particular composition was formed

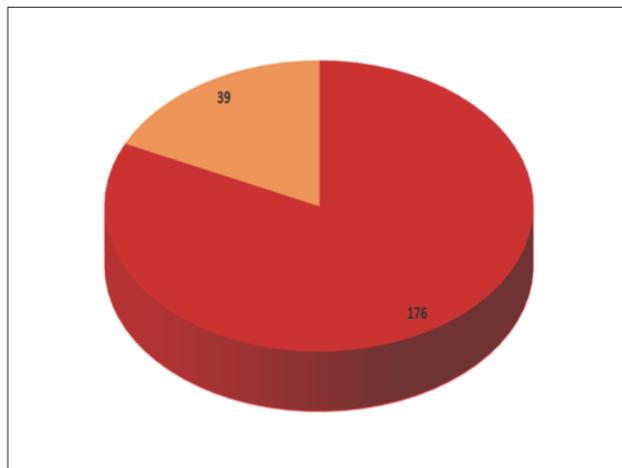


Fig. 3. Percentage of barrel-vaulted single-nave churches bearing *bacini* in comparison to that of other types of churches, according to the evidence from the prefectures of Rethymnon, Herakleion and Lasithi.

⁶ For an example from Greece, see: Tsouris 1988, 103; Tsouris 1996, 605-606 fig. 5, pl. II,2. For some examples from Italy, see: Cortelazzo, Pantò 1996, 39, 49, fig. 15; De Crescenzo 1996, 211-215, 225, fig. 17; [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_di_San_Bernardino_da_Siena_\(Amantea\)#/media/File:SanBernardino_crocefacciata.JPG](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_di_San_Bernardino_da_Siena_(Amantea)#/media/File:SanBernardino_crocefacciata.JPG) (20.09.2016).

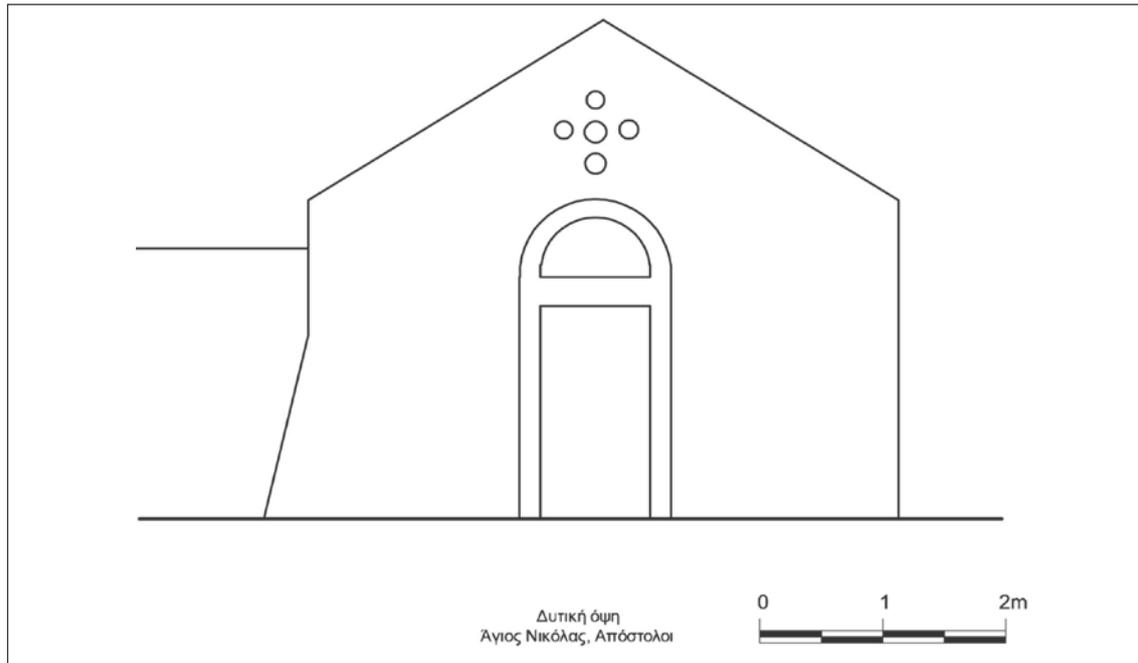


Fig. 4. Schematic drawing of the western façade of Agios Nikolaos in Apostoloi (prefecture of Rethymnon), with the cruciform arrangement of the vessels (drawing: G. Lioudaki).

intentionally as an independent decorative group. The position of the vessels is inextricably linked to the siting of the entrance; thus, when the entrance is found in the southern rather than the western wall, so are the vessels. The second most common position for immured vessels is in a church's eastern gable, above the apse (Fig. 5). In this case, too, the vessels are positioned to form a cross. We can therefore conclude that the vessels were immured in those parts of the church where they would be visible to the congregation and other visitors, which is to say primarily in the western wall, where most churches have their entrance; sometimes on the southern aspect, usually to heighten the decorative effect of the façade when the entrance is situated on this side; or on the eastern aspect for decorative reasons, but perhaps also to



Fig. 5. Part of the eastern façade of Panagia in Prasses (prefecture of Rethymnon), with the cruciform arrangement of the vessels.



Fig. 6. South façade of Agios Georgios in Vistagi, where vessels are immured in rows.

accentuate the sanctity of this part of the church. In the churches of western Crete, it is common for the vessels to be located very close either to the upper part of the discharging arch or to the sanctuary apse. In contrast, in the monuments of central and eastern Crete, the vessels are usually located higher up, just below the gable on the western or eastern side. The churches in the prefectures of Rethymnon and Chania mainly have ceramics immured in their western façade, while the eastern wall/aspect is more commonly decorated with *bacini* in churches in Herakleion and Lasithi. While it was previously suggested, on the basis of the existing evidence from the prefecture of Rethymnon,⁷ that no vessels occur on churches' northern façades, additional examples in that prefecture and information from central and eastern Crete suggest that vessels were on occasion immured in that façade too, either individually or in combination with vessels on other sides of the monument. In some cases, vessels are positioned above the doorframe of the church, usually framing the discharging arch or decorating the lunette. Occasionally, the vessels are arranged in a row along the length of the wall (Fig. 6). In the majority of cases, the four or five vessels arranged in the shape of the cross are the only ones in the church, and in most churches there are no more than five vessels. Those rare churches with more than five immured vessels include the katholika of Chalepa and Valsamonero monasteries, and the churches of the Panagia Eleousa at Kitharida (Fig. 7), Agios

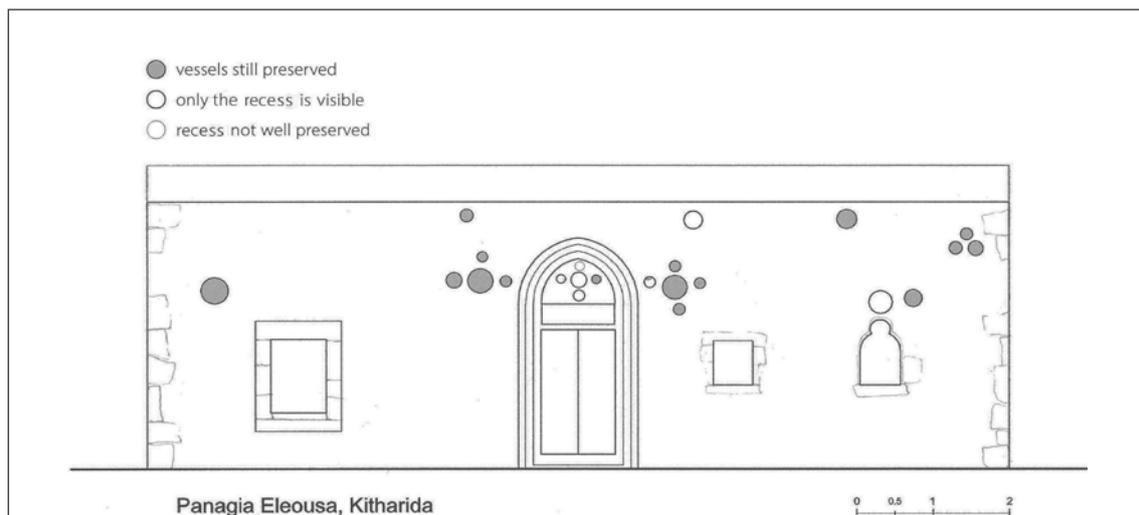


Fig. 7. Schematic drawing of the façade of the narthex of Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida, with the positions of immured vessels or empty recesses (drawing from: Yangaki 2017, fig. 2).

⁷ Yangaki 2013, 377.



Fig. 8. A detail from the south side of the apse of the church of Panagia in Lambini.



Fig. 9. Coloured empty recesses, Agia Paraskevi and Soter in Vouvas.

Georgios in Vistagi (Pistagi), Agios Georgios in Opsigias, and the Panagia at Lithines. There is a greater variety in the arrangements of *bacini* in the prefectures of Rethymnon and Chania than elsewhere on the island.

In Crete, the incidence of the practice has been linked, until now, with the period of Venetian rule. However, it appears from the large sample of monuments that has now been assembled from this on-going research that the practice may have been introduced to the island in the late 12th c. This date is suggested by the data from the church of the Panagia in Lambini (prefecture of Rethymnon) (Fig. 8), which is the earliest example of a monument with immured vessels. The practice became more common from the 13th c. onwards, but it clearly witnessed its greatest diffusion in monuments of the first period of Venetian rule, and from the 14th and 15th c. in particular. The earliest monuments with immured vessels are located in the prefecture of Rethymnon, dating from the late 12th c. and the 13th c., and in the prefectures of Chania and Lasithi, dating from the 13th c. The examples from the prefecture of Herakleion date from the 14th c. onwards. The latest examples – which are located mostly in the prefecture of Lasithi, with a few vessels in the prefecture of Chania as well (Yangaki 2012a, 361-370) – date from the 16th and 17th c.⁸ Furthermore, most of the vessels from the 19th, 20th and 21st c. are located within the prefecture of Lasithi, with a few examples in the prefectures of Herakleion and Chania. These have either been used to replace original vessels which did not survive, or to serve as a reminder of the practice. However, in most cases where the original ceramics were lost, particularly in western Crete, the recesses would remain empty, or their cavities would be smoothed over during restoration work or replastering in order to preserve the information on the original existence of vessels. Usually, these empty recesses are coloured, generally a dark reddish-brown which recalls the colour of the clay and creates a contrast with the surrounding – usually white – plaster (Fig. 9). The round pieces of coloured glass used in the church of Agia Marina in the Almyros gorge, which were embedded at a later stage

⁸ For characteristic examples from Chania, see: Yangaki 2012a, 361-370.



Fig. 10. Pieces of coloured glass immured in Agia Marina in the Almyros gorge.

instead of the clay vessels usually used to create the impression of the existence of the practice, are currently a unique case (Fig. 10).

In the majority of cases, the masonry around the vessels is covered with plaster, rendering any observations

on the way the latter have been embedded in the wall impossible. However, in certain cases, the presence of plaster is proving to be extremely useful, since noting the different depths in which the ceramics have been immured and combining these observations with the characteristics of each ceramic category provides us with evidence on the different phases during which the vessels may have been immured (this is the case, for example, in the churches of the Archangel Michael in Aradena and the Panagia in Lithines). Concerning the manner with which the vessels are immured, based on the examination of those that have been cleaned and had later layers of plaster removed, it would seem that the vessels were immured on top of a specially prepared mortar and supported by stones positioned at the requisite angle. In some cases, the stones have been carved to match the profile of the vessel which rests upon them. The vessels' rims are visible, which means they have not been embedded into the reinforced mortar applied on top of the masonry and that the surrounding masonry has not been carved to allow the rims to slot into it. As a rule, therefore, it would not appear that special care was taken to frame these vessels, as was the case, for example, in churches in mainland Greece or Italy.⁹ The careful framing with bricks of the vessels in the churches of Agia Marina in Chalepa in the prefecture of Rethymnon and Agios Georgios at Stavros (Kapistri), in the prefecture of Lasithi are exceptional in this regard (Fig. 11).

Turning to the purposes this practice served, it is generally supposed to have been primarily decorative, with the colour variation creating a pleasant contrast to the masonry. Though the



Fig. 11. Vessel framed with bricks, Agios Georgios at Stavros (Kapistri).

⁹ By way of illustration: Velenis 1984, 194-195; Tsouris 1988, 110-111 (for the rest of Greece); Berti 1992, 159, fig. 26, 162, fig. 33; Mazzucato 1996, 162-164, 174-175, fig. 2d-o.

numerous barrel-vaulted single-nave Cretan churches generally have unadorned masonry, they were not colourless, bearing coloured plasters, painted architectural members or coats of arms and, in some cases, wall paintings in the lunettes (Gratziou 2010, 67-71, figs 88-89, 271, fig. 287). This colourfulness was further enhanced by the immured ceramics, which were often colourful. At the same time, however, apart from their decorative role, their variety in colour, their position (not too high, given the medium-sized dimensions of Cretan churches), which renders them visible even from a distance; the concavity of the vessels, which favours the reflection of sunlight off their vitreous surfaces; and their common cruciform arrangement, which is seemingly underlain by symbolic content, all help to better identify the structures – which are usually located in inaccessible, inland locations – as churches. As a reinforcing element of this view, it has been observed that in the case of churches located high up in the hills, such as churches of the Panagia and Agios Mamas at Stavros (Kapistri) in the prefecture of Lasithi, the position of the vessels, although not deviating from the norm, is nonetheless directly related to their being as visible as possible to someone approaching the churches on foot.

As for using information gleaned from a study of the vessels to date the monuments in which they are embedded, although such hypotheses cannot be conclusive, since the vessels can only be dated approximately, this date does not generally contradict the date suggested for the erection of the given church on the basis of stylistic criteria or the study of its painted decoration. Thus, it would appear that the date of immured *bacini* can be used as a solid basis for dating even those churches for which, given poor preservation, there are no other dating criteria, or at least for dating the part of the church they adorn. This observation is further enhanced by the fact that groups of churches built in the same period also share the same categories of ceramics; thus, the *bacini* in a group of Cretan churches from the late 14th or early 15th c. are from a particular category of Italian ceramics or from categories that can be dated to the same period. There are a few cases in which either the vessels do not date from a monument's initial phase but coincide, instead, with a phase in which the church was repaired or extended, or some of the immured vessels are older than the part of the monument in which they have been embedded. The vessels immured in the church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Diblochori (Agios Vasilios, prefecture of Rethymnon) are indicative of the former case; some of those in the church of Agios Nikolaos in Elenes (Amari, prefecture of Rethymnon) of the latter.

The study of the numerous vessels which have been preserved has provided data on the fine glazed wares found on Crete in the Late Medieval period.¹⁰ Most common are small and medium-sized bowls with straight rims. Also numerous are large dishes or plates. Of the categories of fine glazed pottery found immured in Cretan churches, those that were imported have been attributed to Byzantine production centres and workshops in Italy, the Iberian peninsula, Syria, Cyprus and other areas. Rare examples of Zeuxippus Ware – category II – number among the earliest ceramics found to date, along with more numerous examples of Late Sgraffito Ware – once considered to be related to the Zeuxippus Ware Family – with simple incised circles and a dark orange

¹⁰ The author undertook the study of the immured vessels in churches on Crete in the context of the specific research programme and their detailed publication is under preparation. I would like to thank the Directors of the respective Ephorates of Antiquities for providing me with the necessary permission for publication.



Fig. 12. "Late-Sgraffito Ware" immured in the church of Afentis Christos, Volionas.



Fig. 13. Late-Byzantine painted-sgraffito bowl from Thessalonike, immured in the church of Agia Trapeza, Kalantare.

or green glaze (Fig. 12) (Megaw 1968, 62-88; Megaw 1989, 259-266; Sanders 1993, 257; Waksman, François 2004-2005, 629-724; Yangaki 2013, note 13). Late-Byzantine ceramic workshops are represented by a few examples of incised vessels, some of which could be attributed to the production of workshops in Thessalonike (Fig. 13) (Bakirtzis, Papanikola-Bakirtzis 1981, 434-436; Papanikola-Bakirtzis 1983, 377-387). Late 14th- and 15th-century monochrome-blue and lustreware pottery from production centres in the Valencia region in the Iberian peninsula (Fig. 14) (Martínez Cavió 1982, 101-103, 111-169; Ray 2000, 41-102), together with Syrian pottery painted in black, blue and turquoise (Fig. 15) (Lane 1957, 15-20, 29-30; Soustiel 1985, 223-224) dating mainly from the latter half of the 14th and the 15th c., and incised pottery from Cyprus (Papanikola-Bakirtzi 1996), are all represented by either a limited or extremely limited number of richly decorated vessels. However, the bulk of the ceramics imported into Crete – much of it incised – came from centres in Italy. Several ceramics, being either monochrome or



Fig. 14. Lustreware dish from the region of Valencia, immured in Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida (Yangaki 2017, fig. 13).



Fig. 15. Painted bowl from Syria, immured in the church of Panagia Eleousa in Kitharida (Yangaki 2017, fig. 19).



Fig. 16. Italian incised polychrome pottery of the Renaissance immured in the Katholikon of Chalepa monastery.



Fig. 17. Sgraffito plate of the "graffita tarda" type immured in Agios Georgios, Theriso (Yangaki 2012b, 362 fig. 4).

bearing incised decoration, have been attributed to Italian workshops of the 13th-14th c., and mostly to the Veneto area (for Italian examples showing some similarities: Gelichi 1984, 52, 54-55; Saccardo 1993, 214-232). Examples of Italian "graffita arcaica padana" and Italian incised polychrome pottery of the Renaissance ("graffita rinascimentale canonica") (Fig. 16) are typical of the Italian ceramics found on Crete (Blake 1986, 316-348; Munarini 1990a, 32-41; Munarini 1990b, 78-79; Munarini 1993, 28-32, 34-35). Painted Italian pottery is limited to examples of "Proto-Maiolica" and "polychrome glazed pottery" with a lead glaze ("RMR Ware") (Whitehouse 1980, 77-89; Dufournier, Flambard, Noyé 1986, 250-277). In limited cases, vessels dating from the late Venetian period, and especially the 16th c., have also been found. The predominance of Italian ceramics in this period is still evident, either in the form of the late phase of Italian incised pottery, the so-called "graffita tarda" (Fig. 17), or in examples of polychrome maiolica or of maiolica "a berrettino", maiolica "alla porcellana", or istoriated maiolica (Munarini 1990c, 145-

148; Munarini 1990d, 192; Munarini 1990e, 209-213; *Majolique*). In the few cases where, based on their date, vessels seem to have been used to replace those that were originally immured, apparently due to the deterioration of the latter, the later examples often come from workshops in mainland Greece, Asia Minor and Europe and date from between the late 18th and the 21st c. In the first case, vessels have been identified as belonging to the production of North-western Greece in the late 18th c. (Tsouris 1982, 267-281; Korre-Zografou 1995, fig. 200). In the second case, some vessels have been recognized as products of the workshops of Çanakkale (Fig. 18), whose



Figure 18: Çanakkale ware dish immured in Agios Ionnis Theologos, Kritsa.



Fig. 19. Dish, "transfer-printed" ware, immured in the church of Agia Varvara, Fourni.



Fig. 20. Modern dish with incised decoration, made by Ch. Sklavenitis and immured in Agia Sophia, Keramoutsi.

production was widely diffused throughout the Mediterranean area in the 18th and 19th c. (Lane 1957, 64-66; Korre-Zografou 1995, 155-165). Finally, rare examples from European centres are also present in the form of "transfer-printed" wares (Vroom 2005, 188-189; Skartsis 2012, 82, with additional bibliography) (Fig. 19). There are isolated cases of replacements during the late 20th and early 21st c., most commonly in Lasithi; during restoration work on two monuments, 21st-century ceramics were immured to fill the empty recesses next to the original vessels. In addition, dishes made by Christoforos Sklavenitis from western Crete in the early 21st c. now adorn Agia Sophia in Keramoutsi (Herakleion) (Fig. 20).¹¹

The study of the immured vessels also provides important data on plain glazed pottery dating mainly from the early and late Venetian periods. Examples include monochrome glazed pottery covered with a dark – usually brown – glaze, and vessels with slip-painted decoration in the form of simple broad thick bands or with more elaborate decoration consisting of green and brown strips and sometimes also incised decoration. Most of this material should probably be linked to local Cretan production.

This short presentation of the variety of the immured vessels reveals the diffusion of ceramics from many production centres of the eastern and western Mediterranean, both coastal and inland, as well as highlighting the movement of ceramics and Crete's importance as a transit hub for the transport and redistribution of products in various regions of the Mediterranean in both the early and late Venetian periods. Given that our information on the range of fine and coarse pottery – local or imported – present on the island from the second Byzantine period on remains fragmentary, the study of these vessels can be used to gain insights into the wealth of this aspect of the island's material culture from the Venetian era on. That said, it should be borne in mind that they provide only a small sample, given the hundreds of villages attested to in Venetian sources (Tsougarakis 1991, 591-619) such as the *Catasticum Sexterii Dorsoduri*

¹¹ For more information on Christoforos Sklavenitis and his work see: Sklavenitis-Charalabis 2002, flap text.

and the *Catasticum Chanee* of the 13th, the 14th c. and the early 15th c. (Gasparis 2004, vol. A, 151-169; Gasparis 2008, 18-20, 171-212), which would have exemplified exceptional richness in objects of everyday material culture. The penetration of imported ceramics into even relatively remote areas – Stavros (Kapistri), in Lasithi, for example – is especially interesting and raises questions about the ceramic categories that circulated in the hinterland, their cost and their owners, but also about the criteria used to select particular ceramics for immuring in the monuments. It is interesting that it is mainly the products of the Italian workshops that achieved the greatest penetration and diffusion, with earlier examples being mostly located in western Crete and later examples in central and eastern parts of the island. Given that the imported pottery, which can be dated with some precision, has been embedded together with other categories, usually plain glazed pottery, the study of the former can also provide clearer data with which to date the latter, which is less studied, given the paucity of the relevant data from excavations (Yangaki 2012b, 14-15).

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above presentation makes it clear that the evidence from Crete and mainland Greece differs both in terms of the architectural types in which *bacini* are immured and in the most common positions and arrangements of such vessels. The vessels were used in accordance with a specific plan and, in the case of Crete, their location was not dictated by architectural considerations; rather, the clay vessels created compositions in their own right. Based on the examples known to date, the research revealed that the earliest case of immured vessels is found in the prefecture of Rethymnon, where the greatest variety of arrangements is also encountered, with some rather early examples located in the prefecture of Chania, as well. Especially in central and eastern Crete, it seems that from the 14th c. on, when fixed practices had been established in the immuring of *bacini*, the choice of cruciform arrangements came to dominate, with few further experiments or initiatives. It is also noted that within a specific geographical area, multiple monuments tend to have similar arrangements of *bacini*, when these are not cruciform¹². It remains to be confirmed whether the practice spread from the west of the island to the centre and the east once it had become codified; new evidence is likely to emerge in the near future, given that even during the preparations for this workshop, the number of relevant monuments has continued to increase.

The practice of immuring vessels is widespread on the island – one could say it was rooted on Crete. We can only assume that it was far more widespread than we have as yet been able to identify, and that it was not limited to ecclesiastical buildings. A century on from Gerola's first observations on Cretan *bacini*, in the light of our more in-depth involvement both in *bacini* and in the search for them, we can be sure that many of the objects that had been preserved until then have now been lost. Indeed, several of the churches we have identified through Gerola's monumental work or other more recent studies no longer retain any trace of the practice. Moreover, the collective memory of the use of ceramics in the façades of buildings, as evidenced by the rare 20th-century examples

¹² For example, one can mention several villages in the Selino area.



Fig. 21. Detail of the façade of a house from Episkopi (Rethymnon) (early 20th c.) (photo: N. Pyrrou).

in Rethymnon (Fig. 21) and Lasithi, suggests in itself how popular the practice must have been. Additional processing of the sample in question will clearly contribute to our knowledge of various aspects of *bacini* practice, as the material is now available for interpretative approaches.

The “Immured vessels in Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches of Greece: a digital *corpus*” programme and the analytical study of these objects will ensure they are assigned the place they deserve among the other evidence of Crete’s material culture. In the future, it could be possible to design proposals to raise awareness of Crete’s *bacini* through the organization of local “cultural routes” focused on the specific theme of religious monuments with immured vessels. This would be done in cooperation with the competent public-sector organizations (in particular with the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports) and bodies involved in tourism, and involving the local community. The abundant material will create a kind of open-air Cretan museum of Medieval and Early Modern glazed pottery.

IV. INSTEAD OF AN EPILOGUE

The research programme led us on a journey through beautiful Crete and a rich natural and anthropogenic environment, with its fair share of obstacles as we sought to access inaccessible places. It would not have been possible to conduct and complete this research without the active support of the respective Ephorates of Antiquities, their directors and fellow archaeologists, and without the help of the local people, too, the inhabitants of more or less isolated villages who helped us identify individual churches. Thus, I would like to thank all of those people, some anonymous some not, who offered us their help in tracking down the churches in their region, offering us some water, a coffee, or a treat. Everyone contributed in their own way to documenting as exhaustive a selection as possible of this large and representative sample of material, with the aim of recording all the churches known to have *bacini*, even if we ultimately found ourselves faced with empty or whitewashed recesses. Finally, I would like to thank my family, tireless companions in the quest for *bacini*.

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