# ΠΕΠΡΑΓΜΕΝΑ
# Η΄ ΔΙΕΘΝΟΥΣ ΚΡΗΤΟΛΟΓΙΚΟΥ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟΥ

ΑΝΑΤΥΠΟ

ΕΤΑΙΡΙΑ ΚΡΗΤΙΚΩΝ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΜΕΛΕΤΩΝ

ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟ 2000

GEORGE W. MALLORY HARRISON

# A ROMAN'S VIEW FROM VROCASTRO: PROSPERITY AND ROMANIZATION OF EASTERN CRETE

The Vrocastro Regional Survey, under the direction of Barbara Hayden and Jennifer Moody,[1] collected material at as close to 100 per cent as possible, which has allowed the ceramic specialists to reflect upon the significance of the data with a large degree of confidence. In terms of pottery the Roman Empire is the second best represented on the site, with 334 catalogued shards, following only but distantly fabrics from prehistory.[2] The *terminus post quem* for Roman era fabrics is represented by a few high quality Arretine and Italian *sigillata* shards and the *terminus ante quem* incorporates all of the African red slip wares, combed wares, and Cypriot *sigillata* reaching into the late seventh and perhaps even into the early eighth centuries A.D.

There are three striking observations whose importance, if imperfectly understood and appreciated, cannot be underestimated. The first observation is that shards in fine ware fabrics are represented at nearly a numerical parity with the various classes of coarse wares, that is, 163 shards as opposed to 171, or 48.8%. Since the Vrocastro Region seems to have been principally a subsistence farming one, the preliminary expectation was that coarse wares would be far more prevalent. There is, however, one *proviso*: the fine ware fabrics, particularly the Candarli and African Red Slip wares, are instantly

---

1. A preliminary report has appeared; cp. "The Vrokastro Survey Project, 1986 - 1989: Research Design and Preliminary Results", *Hesperia*. 61 (1992) 293 - 353.

2. My deepest thanks are owed to Phil. Betancourt for his advice and suggestions. I should like to record my great debt to my two assistants, Mr. Steven Noga and Miss Victoria Russell. A paper protreptic to this one was delivered at the First Colloquium on Post-Minoan Crete at the Institute of Archaeology, London, November, 1995.

recognizable while badly worn coarse wares would be more likely to have gone undetected.

The second observation is that 90.7% of the fine wares are imports (148 shards) with only 9.3% local imitation wares (15 shards), while no shards have been identified which could be classified as truly regional, that is, both local fabric and local shape. These figures should be secure since the local clay beds have been discovered and their fabrics are easily recognized through signature inclusions. Other Cretan fabrics have been discussed and published,[3] which corroborate the findings at Vrocastro. The local imitations of coarse wares are limited to close copies of Coan *amphorae* (6 shards) and thin walled casseroles (5 shards) of a type well known from Corinth[4] and Athens.[5] What scant evidence there is would seem to want to indicate that in the second and third centuries A.D. the popular wares for imitation were cooking and storage ones while in the fifth and sixth centuries the local potters copied fine wares.[6]

The third observation is that fine wares are more or less evenly distributed among the three main elevation zones, that is, littoral, maquis, and hillside. A model for expectations of ceramic distribution might propose that the majority of settlement areas would be at the lowest elevations and thus one would expect the highest frequency of fine wares there. The effects of wash down skew such figures further in favor of the littoral at the expense of the upper elevations. A synthesis of the three observations would suggest that it is time to revisit Rottlander's thesis on provincial pottery during the Roman Empire.

---

3. See, particularly, Antigone Marangou-Lerat, *Le Vin et les amphores de Crète*. Paris, Études crétoises suppl. 30, 1995.

4. See Kathleen Warner Slane, *The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore: The Roman Pottery and Lamps*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990; ASCS, Corinth Volume XVIII, Part II, and also her article, "Corinthian Ceramic Imports: The Changing Pattern of Provincial Trade in the First and Second Centuries A.D.", in Susan Walker and Averil Cameron (edd.) *The Greek Renaissance in the Roman Empire*. London: Institute of Classical Studies, Supplement 55, 219 - 25.

5. See Henry S. Robinson, *Pottery of the Roman Period: Chronology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959; ASCS, Agora Volume V.

6. Thanks are due to John Hayes who kindly visited the αποθήκη and corroborated identifications. The evidence, nevertheless, remains too slight to be conclusive, although it has been remarked several times (so, e.g., Bowsky in an oral presentation at the 1992 meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America) that the Coan-like *amphorae* were deliberate attempts to market Cretan wine as if it was actually the popular vintage from Cos.

Over two decades ago R.C.A. Rottlander wrote four very intriguing articles about the standardization of pottery in *Archaeometry*.[7] To summarize these articles, one would say that it was his central contention that pottery of the Roman Empire, following Greek precedent, within a range of shapes and within a workshop was made according to one of two modules of measurement and proportion[8] so that the pots could be stacked efficiently in the kiln for firing and packed securely for shipping. He argued that the carination and flanges so typical of imperial pottery were functional surfaces for stacking in the second and third centuries but that these features became merely decorative during the late imperial period and would have been incapable of sustaining the weight of other pots on top.

Rottlander seems to have changed his mind as to who imposed the standardization. Initially, he seemed inclined to attribute it to the Roman bureaucracy. In his middle two articles he thought it was a function of individual workshops, while in his final article, he considered that specifications for supplying the Roman army in the field imposed the need for a certain amount of uniformity.[9] His articles restricted themselves to a few Dragendorf and Gose shapes, all of which were produced in the western half of the Empire and have provenances in Germany and England. If dictated by a central bureaucracy or required by military necessity, however, one would expect to find these modules in the pottery of the Eastern half of the Roman Empire. Thus, his research potentially has important ramifications for the Empire as a whole.[10]

Susan Rotroff has recently said[11] of the pottery of Hellenistic and Roman Athens that "potters marched not to the drum of generals and soldiers but to

---

7. (1) "Is Provincial Roman Pottery Standardized?", 9 (1967) 76 - 91; (2) "Standardization of Roman Provincial Pottery II: Function of the Decorative Collar on Form Drag. 38", 10 (1968) 35 - 45; (3) "Standardization of Roman Provincial Pottery III: The Average Total Shrinkage Rate and the Bills of La Graufenesque", 11 (1969) 159 - 64; and (4) "Standardization of Roman Provincial Pottery IV: The Origin of Standardization", 12 (1970) 189 - 95.

8. The *digitus* was a unit with sixteen divisions, divisible essentially into four hands of four fingers, minus the thumb; the *uncia* was a unit with twelve divisions, reflecting perhaps in linear measurement the duodecimal standard of the *aes* based Roman coinage.

9. This would seem, however, to discount the use of metals, which one would think would be preferred by the quartermaster corps for an army on the march.

10. There is, however, one great limitation to his work: his data might be too limited to be statistically significant.

11. At the International Conference on the Romanization of Athens, Lincoln, Nebraska, 18 - 20 April, 1996.

merchants and customers." It is the last group, the one not considered by Rottlander, to which one might usefully pay attention. That there was a great amount of standardization of the various Eastern export ceramics would seem inescapable from the precision with which Hayes was able to classify the numerous wares of the Late Roman Empire. For coarse transport wares, such as *amphorae* it is clear that supplier, shipper, and seller had storage interests which converged into a limited repertoire of sizes and shapes. For fine wares, one might consider that the willingness and ability of customers to pay had as great an impact on style, design, and standardization as any other factor or series of factors.[12]

One might thus wish to offer a counter proposal that for table wares, as opposed to shipping and storage ones, that standardization of shapes and ubiquity of a select group of export wares was a function of a pan-Aegean homogenization of prosperity which allowed fabrics of considerable durability and grace to penetrate a much broader market than before. In this period in which glass and metals became prevalent among the elite, as one can demonstrate from passages in Pliny the Elder,[13] potters would have found it increasingly necessary to target their better ceramics for a much wider spectrum of society. This would seem to be the best explanation to account for the presence of Candarli, African Red Slip, Phocian Red Slip, and other similar wares in Athens, the Corinthia,[14] the eastern half of the north African littoral, the former Seleucid territories, and Crete, not just in large cities, but in settlements as small as those which dot the Cretan coast between Lato Pros Kamara and Siteia.

One is invited to reconstruct, albeit with serious reservations since the *argumentum* is *ex silentio*, that these exports were inexpensive enough and

12. Rice's (242 - 43) seven factors affecting conservatism and change in pottery production apply equally to the decision-making process of choosing export over local production; cp. Prudence M. Rice, "Change and Conservatism in Pottery-Producing Systems", in Sander E. Van der Leeuw and Alison C. Pritchard (edd.), *The Many Dimensions of Pottery*. Amsterdam: 1984, 231 - 93.

13. Burials and hoards have funished some physical evidence, too, although the literary record remains the fuller record; cp. Jill Carington Smith, "A Roman Chamber Tomb on the South-East Slopes of Monasteraki Kephala, Knossos"., *BSA* 77 (1982) 255 - 93.

14. See Jeanne Marty, "Three Pottery Deposits and the history of Roman Isthmia", in T.E. Gregory (ed.) *The Corinthia in the Roman Period*. Ann Arbor: Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series VIII (1993) 115 - 29.

available in large enough quantities that it rendered local production unnecessary or uncompetitive except for such coarse wares as did not seem often to travel long distances, such as basins and tubs, and such *instrumenta domestica*[15] as roof tiles, bee hives, and water pipes. Standardization in and of itself does not and cannot make a product dominant in a market. What is required is that the shape and decoration of a product which has been standardized for production, or other reasons, be found aesthetically pleasing to the prospective buyers. In the case of pottery of the Roman Empire, the sharply everted rims and other features which Rottlander discussed are precisely ones which would have echoed the beveling and crisp outlines of metal versions of the same drinking and dining pieces.

Population change, as recognized by Prudence Rice (1984, 255 - 78), affects pottery production and aesthetics, perhaps as much as if not more than quantity and price. Although her data was derived mainly from studies in Belize and Guatemala, the application of her findings to the Roman Empire is apparent. For the Vrocastro region, the ceramic evidence would seem to encourage the interpretation that there has been a redistribution of settlement over the region rather than a net population loss.[16] This could be construed as implicit evidence that Crete had not suffered greatly during the Roman civil wars of the first century B.C. and from the plagues of the late second and early third centuries A.D. since it has been observed that periods of great upheaval are also ones of ceramic conservatism and large scale buying of ceramics.[17]

The willingness and ability of Cretans to buy increasing amounts of imported wares over time confirms the fecundity of the agricultural economy. That those imports were found distributed throughout the Vrocastro Survey Region would seem to argue that clans owned lands within the littoral, maquis, and hillside areas and that families or other groups within the clans stayed in

15. For the definition and discussion of *instrumenta domestica*, see W.V. Harris (ed.), *The Inscribed Economy: Production and Distribution in the Roman empire in the light of 'instrumentum domesticum'*. Ann Arbor, Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series VI, 1993.

16. Extreme care must be taken, however, since the first century A.D. and third century A.D. are very under-represented in the ceramic record, and it is not clear that the low amounts of pottery indicate depopulation.

17. This cannot be construed to infer contrarily that all periods of ceramic stability are periods of upheaval; cp. Rice (1984) 268 - 73, and Rotroff at the conference on the Romanization of Athens.

the up-land areas for significant enough amounts of time that it was deemed worthwhile to acquire decent table wares.[18] A model which would propose that there was different ownership in the different agricultural zones would conclude logically that residents of the coastal areas would have comparatively the most expensive possessions while the shepherds would have the least costly items and the fewest. The distribution in the Vrocastro Survey Region suggests that clans were engaged simultaneously in several kinds of agriculture.

The cause of agricultural diversification is not hard to find. If Pompey the Great had once owned parcels of land throughout Italy in order to insulate himself against bad harvests in any one region, the Roman tax code which assessed *en bloc* by district made it advisable to own plots of land throughout a district in order to distribute the tax burden as much as possible among several landowners.[19] The strategy for economic domination by which one would accumulate all of the best land within a region would have had the effect in the Roman Empire of forcing those on less viable land to abandon it,[20] thereby shifting the entire tax burden on a smaller and smaller number of farmers.

The distribution of fine wares at Vrocastro might also hint at a solution for the apparent decline in the number of cities in Crete during the Roman Empire. Homer's famous 100 Cretan cities had been reduced to forty by the time of Pliny's entry on Crete in his *Historia naturalis*.[21] This decline should not be viewed as a manifestation of depopulation and lesser production; rather, it should be taken as a sign of increased activity in that individual families apparently came to be nucleated in rural sites or farmsteads. Simultaneous to and correlative with a movement from some small- or mid-sized sites to the χώρα is a similar movement from those same kinds of sites to the larger settlements and cities. Thus, if there are fewer cities in Roman Crete, they are

18. This system is clearly not *latifundia*, the evidence for which even in the western Roman empire, other than the cadastres, is coming under criticism.

19. The role of the tax code in causing changes in agriculutural strategies was alluded to by Susan Alcock in her keynote address to the conference on the Romanization of Athens; see also G.W.M. Harrison, *The Romans and Crete* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1994.), chapter 2.

20. As happened in later antiquity; cp. Neil Christie, "Barren fields? Landscapes and settlements in late Roman and post-Roman Italy", in Graham Shipley and John Salmon (edd.) *Human Landscapes in Classical Antiquity* London: Routledge, 1996, 254 - 83.

21. It is, of course, debatable that there were ever 100 cities; for a discussion of the ancient sources on Crete, see G.W.M. Harrison, "Roman Crete: Old (and False) Perceptions Die Hard", *Cretan Studies* 4 (1994) 137 - 48.

on the whole larger, and in many places have shifted location from their Hellenistic precursors. A shift such as Bowsky saw for Lato Pros Kamara and for Ierapetra,[22] and which is also apparent in the Knossos Area Survey,[23] is also observable on a much smaller scale within the Vrocastro region.

The Roman tax code and the methods of its agents in the field would seem to have had two effects, opposite but not mutually exclusive. The assizes, corvees, and collections of taxes were facilitated by encouraging the nucleating of settlements at a pace and in a way different from the Hellenistic period. Such a population movement towards both cities and smaller sites must have had ramifications for the local pottery workshops, One possible suggestion, the one which accounts for the evidence, is that newly enlarged cities became more attractive to exporters at precisely the moment when Italian *sigillata* first appeared in Crete as did the first Eastern *sigillata* wares. Some local clay beds presumably would have been abandoned as the population moved away and other clay beds were discovered, or possibly re-opened, near to the new centers of activity and settlement.

All of these are responses to the organization of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean. Nothing suggests the willing participation of the resident population in these changes even if a strong case can be made that they benefited materially from the changes in governance. '*Romanization*', however, is a chameleon: it seems to have worn different colors in each and every place it traveled and what counts as Romanization seems as much a matter of definition as of observable fact. What can be said is that the effect of Romanization on the Cretan landscape is arguable. Some of the processes over which the Romans administered were ones which were set in train during the Hellenistic period and may well have continued to develop more or less as they did. The changes in pattern of ownership and settlement do not seem to have affected the numbers and kinds of crops and animals raised. Rome merely administered wisely over these changes, perhaps most wisely by declining to administer at all. The microclimates of Crete, such as the agricultural zones around Gortyn, Knossos, Ierapetra, and Siteia are ones which in antiquity were

22. See her articles "Cretan Connections: The Transformation of Hierapytna", *Cretan Studies* 4 (1994) 1 - 44, and "Portrait of a *Polis*: Lato Pros Kamara (Crete) in the Late Second Century B.C.", *Hesperia* 58 (1989) 331 - 47.

23. Sinclair Hood and David Smyth, *Archaeological Survey of the Knossos Area*. London: British School at Athens, 1981, Supplementary Volume 14.

so special in the amount of wind and extremes of temperature, that they proved stronger and more intractable rulers than the Romans.

Issues of '*Romanization*' and prosperity, even if they are often intertwined and partially dependent upon one another, can and must be considered independently. Assimilation was no guarantee of prosperity nor was prosperity proof of '*romanitas*'. Even when the two occur side-by-side, the pace of one can be faster than the other. For Vrocastro, the person viewing the littoral below and the χώρα behind was almost certainly not a Roman If the occupants of the Vrocastro region had bought large amounts of import pottery and other comforts produced within the Roman Empire, they were almost surely strictly and solely consumers of the goods and not the culture. The view from Vrocastro would have shown numerous surface changes in numbers, kinds, and placement of dwellings, and some piped waterworks. Little else was different from the preceding Hellenistic period, and as Rotroff has said of Athens during the Roman Empire "the greatest and most abiding change was merely in the color of the pottery, from black to shades of red."[24]

24. Such a view is confirmed unwittingly by Bowsky in her contribution "Roman Crete: No Provincial Backwater", in Πεπραγμένα του Ζ' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου Ι. 1 (1995) 43 - 65.