

Phase in the Salento District, Southern Italy (3rd-1st century BC), in «Bull. Ant. Beschaving» 81 (2006), pp. 91-133.

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RIASSUNTO

Questo lavoro è incentrato su un nucleo di frammenti di vasi a vernice nera con decorazione sopradipinta e/o incisa prodotti nella prima metà del II sec. a.C. nell'officina ceramica di Jesi-Aesis. Nella produzione locale d'impronta centro-italica questi vasi si connotano come una presenza estranea di tradizione artigianale ellenistica. Elementi innovativi sono talune forme vascolari e, soprattutto, la particolare tecnica decorativa. Quasi tutti i frammenti si riferiscono alla forma della coppa apoda Morel 2150 con decorazione sulla parete interna. Tali coppe sembrano riproporre modelli morfologici e decorativi eterogenei riferibili a tradizioni artigianali sia di area "Gnathia" sia di area "West Slope". Si può pensare che questo apporto innovativo sia dovuto a ceramisti giunti da fuori, con esperienze e abilità tecniche diverse. L'evento documentato appartiene a un periodo (fine III - prima metà del II secolo) particolarmente complesso per molte regioni del bacino ionico-adriatico, con conseguenti diaspore in cui gli artigiani avevano una componente importante. Per costoro una delle mete prescelte doveva essere la parte settentrionale dell'Italia adriatica. Il carattere di episodicità di questa produzione ceramica, apparentemente realizzata per non più di qualche anno, ci suggerisce che tale apporto giunse in un contesto culturale e sociale impreparato ad accogliere e apprezzare una simile novità.

Adriatico (mare), ceramica a vernice nera, ceramica sopradipinta, ceramisti migranti, officina di Jesi, ellenistico-romano (periodo)

ABSTRACT

This study centres on the analysis of a group of black glaze vase fragments with over-painted and/or incised decoration produced during the first half of the 2nd century B.C. in the workshop at Jesi-Aesis. This workshop was set-up in about the mid 3rd century B.C. in order to provide for the needs of the colonists who, following the Roman conquest of the *ager Gallicus* (284/3 B.C.), were settling in the territory. Within the local black glaze ware production, which from the earliest phases presented Etruscan-Latial characteristics, the group of fragments examined here appears as an extraneous presence, bringer of a Hellenistic tradition. It introduced innovative elements, such as some vessel forms and, above all, a particular decorative technique. These new elements, together with the episodic nature of its production, apparently limited to few years or a little longer, suggested the undertaking of an in depth analysis of this ceramic group, with the aim of gaining a more precise understanding of its characteristics and identifying its most likely models of reference.

The majority of the fragments under examination were found in two "sealed" contexts close to each other: the fill of a demolished kiln that was not rebuilt (F2/US6) and that of a small cavity (E94/US56). Both contexts were in a sector of the workshop that was active between the late 3rd and about the mid 2nd centuries B.C.

The decorated fragments belong to just over 60 vases that were discarded, because of firing defects or other accidents, and then put to one side and finally recycled. Almost all the fragments relate to just one form, the bowl without a real foot Morel 2150, borrowed in the West from the Hellenistic East from the late 3rd century B.C. onwards. It seems to have been produced with a range of profiles and proportions with two main types: "type 1", deep bowl with incised lines half way up the inner wall; "type 2a-b", shallower bowl, with smooth walls, with or without a groove below the rim on the interior.

The decoration is positioned on the upper part of the inner wall, but on some fragments, it also extends to the lower part. The main decorative motif (bordered by painted lines and dots) is incised, often with the addition of painted details (leaves, fruit, dots) made using diluted clay coloured white and light red with pink and orange tones.

The repertory of motifs is quite varied but the ivy tendril, which is the commonest on overpainted Hellenistic ceramics, both in the "Gnathian" style and the "West Slope" style, is predominant. Diversely, other vegetal motifs, particularly the ear of wheat, and other geometric patterns seem to be typical of the "West Slope" ceramics. Moreover, the particular rendering of the vegetal tendril and the constant use of incised technique are typical of the latter style.

The thinness of the walls, the bowl profile and, above all, the typical grooves present on the type 1 bowls have made it possible to identify the most likely typological model on which they were based; bowls, sometimes with summarily rendered decoration, produced in southern Apulia and at Herakleia in Lucania between the late 3rd and the 2nd centuries B.C. The type 2a-b bowls can be generically referred to examples from these regions and others on the eastern coast of the Ionian Sea, types that do not present the toreutic taste that distinguishes type 1. To conclude, the bowls produced in the workshop at Jesi-Aesis appear to re-propose various morphological and decorative models that refer to diverse craft-working traditions, both in the "Gnathian" area and the "West Slope" area.

Therefore, it seems unlikely that such an innovation was due to the initiative of local potters who worked following a traditional repertoire. Rather, it is more likely that the new elements were the work of potters who came from elsewhere, bringing with them the particular knowledge and technical experience that was indispensable for the creation of this type of pottery. It is impossible to judge the ability of the immigrant artisans and the quality of the artefacts they produced from the material documenting this event. However, the typological variety, range of decorative motifs used, and the different way of making the vases suggest not only a certain diversity among the immigrant artisans, but also a difference in professional level both between the latter and between the local assistants and apprentices.

The event documented in the pottery workshop at Aesis belongs to a historical phase (late 3rd-first half of the 2nd century B.C.) that was particularly complex and traumatic for many regions in the Adriatic-Ionian basin. Firstly, the end of the Second Punic War, and then the fall of the Macedonian kingdom, had heavy political, economic, and social repercussions for the populations of south-eastern Italy and north-western Greece. These military events led to a diaspora among which there must have been artisans. They were a privileged category of refugees, as their personal patrimony consisted of particular technical knowledge. It may be presumed that one of their chosen destinations was the northern part of Adriatic Italy, where the consolidation and increase in the colonial presence of Rome offered stability, new opportunities and prospects for the development of one's own activity.

The episodic nature of this ceramic production, which continued for no more than a few years and was apparently without a market beyond the local one, is of particular interest.

This suggests its success was modest. However, we must consider that the population of possible buyers was almost exclusively constituted by old and new central Italian colonists, who, by culture and economic activities leaned towards traditional consumption, and therefore were not very inclined towards using “exotic” vases. Further, considering that it was only from the second half of the 2nd century B.C. onwards that the territory of what is now the Marches region began to accept the various manifestations of Hellenistic culture, thanks to Roman mediation, it could be suggested that not only did our immigrant potters arrive “out of place” but also “out of time” for imposing pottery of Hellenistic taste on a cultural and social context that was not ready to accept and appreciate such a novelty.

Adriatic (sea), Black Glaze Ware, Overpainted Ware, Migrant Potters, Jesi Workshop, Hellenistic-Roman (period).