DATED JARS OF EARLY IMPERIAL TIMES

(PLATES 79–80)

ATHENIAN wells that were used or filled in the first and second centuries of our era invariably include both fragments and complete examples of an extremely uniform and recognizable type of micaceous jar. The frequency and uniformity of these jars combine with their evident foreignness to make them a peculiarly informative and rewarding object of study.¹

The uniformity of these jars may be seen and understood best against a background of their predecessors and contemporaries, where there is evidence of considerably more variety and development. Some sixteen of the predecessors come from contexts of the first century B.C. and the first century of our era.² Although they show uniformity with respect to their generally ovoid shape, comparatively small neck and foot, and single band handle, there is much variety in clay, relative proportions, size and stage of development. The general uniformity suggests that this type of jar was found convenient and practical; the variety suggests that the type was being made in many places and by many hands. The difference in shape may be seen in Plate 79, a–d;³ the clay of the various specimens ranges from pinkish buff through buff and red, both with and without mica, to a rather coarse brown.

This general ‘predecessor’ group continues into the first century after Christ and at the same time three different types develop within it or are specialized out of it. One of these types (1) uses a dark buff non-micaceous clay and adds to the general characteristics a high-collared ring foot (Pl. 79, e).⁴ In type 2 micaceous buff clay, with or without a buff slip, is used, but the differentiating feature is not the foot but the body, which is wheel-ridged throughout (Pl. 79, f–g).⁵ It is type 3 that has moved

¹ This study was undertaken during the tenure of a fellowship under the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, which made work in Athens possible. Thanks are due also to the American School of Classical Studies, and in particular to the field director and staff of the excavations of the Athenian Agora, both for publication permission and for assistance and facilities of all sorts.

² For the dates of well groups I am indebted not only to the excavation staff of the Agora but also and particularly to Henry S. Robinson, whose forthcoming study of the Roman pottery from the Athenian Agora I have been allowed to consult.

³ The context date appears in the parentheses following the number. a) P 11870 (late Hellenistic: Robinson F 66); b) P 16712 (first century A.D.); c) P 16709 (first century A.D.); d) P 11339 (first century A.D.).

⁴ e) P 14123 (first century A.D.).

⁵ f) P 3149 (first century A.D.); g) P 15309 (first century A.D.).
farthest from the predecessor group, since it uses the high-collared ring foot of type 1, the wheel-ridging of type 2 and clays that differ markedly from the buff of the other two types (Pl. 79, h-i). Type 3, the most numerous, is the one to which our large group of uniform jars with graffiti belongs. Its foreignness, from the Athenian point of view, is sufficiently demonstrated by its clay, either a dull red or brown micaceous which may be fired black, brown or red.

Before the close examination of our type 3, a look at the later development of all three types will clarify their interrelationships. Each of them in the later second and early third centuries has deteriorating descendants. They have in common one chief characteristic of deterioration: the slipping of the greatest diameter down from the shoulder. In type 1 the second century examples have steeply sloping shoulders and a wide belly (Pl. 79, j-l). The later examples of type 2 accentuate the broad shoulders of the original shape at first, but then become simply fusiform (Pl. 79, m-q); these jars all show traces of what seems to have been a thick red or black glaze-like wash, which may be local simulation of type 3. Type 3 shows deterioration from the ovoid to the fusiform, gaining roughly in height what it loses in girth (Pl. 79, r-t). That these deteriorated types are contemporary may be seen in the various well groups where examples of all three are found together. Further development and deterioration may be traced in later centuries, but we have already gone far enough afield from our restricted group.

Twenty-five jars or parts of jars (2-26) make up the group found in the Agora. All of these, insofar as they are complete, have closely similar proportions and dimensions, if we exclude the one specimen (3) which must have been intended as a diplon, since its capacity is double. The variation in four crucial dimensions (height, maximum diameter, mouth diameter and foot diameter) is little more than 10%, which must be allowed when we consider that pots could not be made to exact dimensions, but allowance had to be made for shrinkage. The clay is invariably a dull red or brown micaceous which is affected in different ways by different firings, so that the outer surface may be an almost polished black, a dull or clear red, or a rather dirty brown. The small, high-collared ring foot has the same diameter as the mouth, which has a collared rim flat on top. The ovoid body is wheel-ridged throughout. The broad concave band handle forms a ring from mid-neck to upper shoulder with both ends

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6 h) P 11644 equals 8 below; i) P 17896 equals 20 below.
7 j) P 11201 (second and third centuries A.D.); k) P 11699 (second century A.D.); l) P 15683 (second and early third centuries A.D.).
8 m) P 17897 (second and early third centuries A.D.); n) o) P 18882-18883 (second century A.D.); p) P 14082 (early third century A.D.); q) 16697 (second and third centuries A.D.).
9 r) P 8337 (second century A.D.); s) P 8774 (third century A.D.); t) P 13052 (third century A.D.).
splayed in attachment. Beneath the lower handle attachment of twenty-four (2-25) out of our twenty-five examples is a graffito number. One further item of uniformity must be mentioned before we consider these numbers: the capacity of the measurable specimens averages about two choes (ca. 6,500 liters) with the same exception (8) as was noted above, i.e., the diplon which appears to have held four choes.

Of the twenty-four graffito numbers, seventeen range from 112 to 188 (PIB-ΡΠΗ); of the other seven, the beginning is not preserved on three, and on four the complete numbers are 41, 42, 49 and 76 (ΜΑ, ΜΒ, ΜΘ, ΟΞ). Such widely variant numbers cannot refer to weight or capacity since the jars are so uniform in these respects. Nor is it at all probable that the numbers are price marks, since the great uniformity of the jars suggests uniform contents which should then have reasonably similar prices. Furthermore, it does not seem likely that the numbers belong to any system of classification, unless it was a very wide one, because the jars and fragments come from all parts of the Agora.

The only other obvious reason why numbers should so consistently appear in a particular place on a particular kind of jar is as dates. Dated jars are of course known to us from the Hellenistic period when the stamps appearing on amphora handles seem to date the jar by one or more magistrate’s names. There are, at the other extreme, many late Roman jars in the Agora collections (as yet unpublished) which have indication dates painted on them. For the early Roman period, many pots dated by the consuls of the year were found at Pompeii 11 and a few such have been identified in the Athenian Agora. The existence of dated pots gives us the right and even perhaps the obligation to try to interpret these graffito numbers as dates. The inscriptions themselves provide some help toward such an interpretation. In front of the number on one of the pots (12) is a symbol (L) which is a recognized abbreviation for ‘year’; 12 on two others (13 and 14) the numbers are preceded by ΝΙ which might be the abbreviation for νίκης or ἐτῶς νίκης. ‘The year of the victory’ refers back to the victory at Actium and is regularly used in dates based on the Actian era. 13 Since the range of graffito numbers is such that they give dates on the Actian era which compare favorably with the context dates of the jars, we are perhaps justified in exploring this interpretation in detail.

Of the twenty-one ‘dates’ where the number is preserved complete, seventeen range from 112 to 188 (PIB-ΡΠΗ). Such a proportion makes it extremely likely that the three incomplete inscriptions (4, 24, 25) had the sign for 100 (P) in front of the

11 C.I.L., IV, 2551-2561; IV Supplement II, 5510-5534.
two remaining numbers. Even the four examples (6, 7, 10, 18) in which the number is complete may simply be abbreviations. They read 41, 42, 49 and 76, but so similar are the jars to examples which read 142, 147 and 178 that the intervention of a hundred years must be thought impossible. Such abbreviation is usual not only in our own numbers (we write ’53-’54 and we say ’fifty-five’) but also in a period much closer to the Actian era: e.g. 964 A.D., which is 6472 from the beginning of the world, is written YOB instead of EYOB; and 1264 A.D. is written ΠE instead of ΣΨΠΕ.14

In this way our twenty-four jars of type 3 give us ‘dates’ ranging from 112 to 189; and as befits pots so similar, the longest and most exceptional gap in the sequence is of 17 years. There is one gap of ten years; the others are all less than six. Neither of the other types provides an example of a date, but one (1) of the general ‘predecessor’ group is incised in the same place and in the same way with a ‘date’ (80-Γ) which sufficiently indicates the different stages in development between the predecessor group and type 3. That is, the gap of 32 years between the one dated predecessor jar and the first of the type 3 examples is what we should expect not only from the development of the vessel’s form but also from the context of each.

The catalogue has been arranged in the chronological order provided by the Actian dates. The beginning of the Actian era may vary from place to place, depending on the local calendar and the relationship of the local year’s opening with the date of the battle,15 but for our purposes it will be sufficient to use 31 B.C. as the point of departure and so subtract 30 from our graffito numbers to get A.D. dates. In the catalogue the context date is given wherever the context is datable. But a few words are necessary here to show generally the relationship between the ‘Actian dates’ and the context dates. The latter are necessarily defined by somewhat broad limits, often including both of the centuries to which our jars belong. It is all the more impressive therefore that the earliest Actian date (1) belongs to the earliest context (first century B.C. to first century A.D.), that of 2 to 14 all but 7 come from contexts of the first century A.D. or of the first and second centuries A.D., and that the later jars (wherever the context is datable) come with material of the second and third centuries A.D.

Where more than one ‘dated’ jar comes from the same context, there is a further check. From the stratified well (M 17:1) which was in use from the first through the sixth century come three (8, 14, 17): 8 and 14, dated A.D. 112 and 131 are from Layer II, which is dated to the late first and early second century; 17 comes from Layer IV (dated to the second half of the second century), and if its inscription is correctly interpreted below, it must be A.D. 145. From another well (B 12:1) come five examples (9, 12, 18, 24, 26) ranging in date from A.D. 117 to 159. These jars belong to the upper or dumped fill, which is made up of material of the second and early third centuries A.D.

From the catalogue it will be seen that the jars of type 3 may be divided (in accordance with slight variations in form and in the color of the clay) into two groups: (A) the black or clear red examples with slightly more ovoid bodies, slightly larger feet and mouths, both very neatly turned, and a slightly larger capacity; (B) the dull dark red or brownish red clay with slightly less ovoid bodies, slightly smaller feet and mouths rather carelessly turned, and a slightly smaller capacity. If we had no other information we would suspect that (B) represented an imitation of (A) or a later development. But both context dates and Actian dates show that they are contemporary. The difference in clay perhaps explains why they are both contemporary and different in form; they must come from different sections or perhaps only from different potteries.

Where these jars were manufactured and what they contained when they were shipped to Athens must remain a question until more of this type of Roman material is excavated and published from various sites. The only exact parallels known to me are: a neck fragment from Tarsus,\(^\text{16}\) and a jar of type 3B found in early Roman levels at Curium, Cyprus; below its handle is the graffito ΠΔ (104 or A.D. 74).\(^\text{17}\) The use of the Actian era is too widespread, at least in the eastern Mediterranean, to help in narrowing down the provenience. One possible clue is suggested by the interpretation of MA (see 24 below) which occurs on two of the jars and may be an Egyptian measure of capacity.

Several examples of another type of jar show the same series of numbers, scratched not below the handle but on the neck between the upper and lower handle attachments. These jars, of which no complete example is known to me, must have been of very large size, to judge from the heavy construction and size of the preserved necks, mouths and the handles. Like the micaceous jars, they are made of a non-Athenian clay, a heavy brick red with dark gray core. Our most complete specimens (28, 29, 33) preserve a part of the shoulder, which is marked by shallow wheel-ridging. All nine examples have the same collar rim flat on top set off from the neck below by two very deep grooves (string grooves). The heavy handles, round in section and ridged on top, rise slightly from the neck before turning down to the shoulder.

There is considerable variation in the contexts from which these big red amphorae come. One (31) was found in connection with pottery of the later third and of the fourth century; three (28, 30, 34) appeared in destruction fills dated by the Herulian sack of A.D. 267, and four (29, 32, 33, 35) come from fills of the second or early third century. Although it might be possible for the same jars to be made without any


\(^{17}\) I wish to express my gratitude to the University of Pennsylvania Museum’s Expedition to Curium for permission to mention this jar.
change or development for two hundred years, the general unlikelihood justifies us in examining the extent to which jars made in the second century might turn up in third and fourth century contexts. In the first place, the amphorae are very large and heavy so that they might be expected to have a sedentary and therefore prolonged life. Secondly, the extremely heavy construction of neck and handles at least makes them practically indestructible so that they might be kicked around for a long time. As a matter of fact, two of the examples (30 and 31) found in late contexts are simply sherds and say nothing about the date of the whole jar. And the relatively frequent occurrence of neck fragments of these jars, where all other parts are missing, might suggest that they were used for some purpose, serving perhaps as a large funnel.

Perhaps the strongest reason for dating these jars in the second century A.D. is the similarity of their graffito numbers to those on the micaceous jugs. Although it is within the bounds of possibility that at two different times the Athenians imported two different kinds of jars with the same sort of numbers on them, it is not only unlikely but also it is difficult to point to another era as widespread as the Actian era. In short, it is easier to believe that the large red amphorae, like the smaller micaceous jugs, were imported to Athens as containers of some commodity, and that in their place of origin a date (of contents?) was scratched on either as they were filled or as they were shipped. The size and shape of the two kinds of jars suggest something about their possible contents: the small neck, small size, and large numbers of the micaceous jugs make it likely that their contents were (1) liquid, (2) fairly expensive, but (3) an almost necessary luxury. The large size and wide neck of the big red amphorae suggest a not too expensive commodity that could be bought in some bulk and possibly a dry one; so perhaps a cereal. More certainty in this matter must wait for further information on the provenience of the jars.

Whatever their contents may have been, these two groups of jars give us two bits of information about commercial practices in the early imperial period: that jars of standard capacity were used as shipping containers; and that for some reason the contents were dated; dating of the jar itself, as with amphora handles, would most probably be done before firing.

CATALOGUE

1. Upper part of micaceous jar.
   P 7965. P. H. 0.198 m. Restored to lowest point preserved. Red micaceous clay. General predecessor type.
   Incised below handle: Π (80), i. e., A.D. 50.
   Context: R 13: 1, well. Dumped filling of first century B.C. to first century A.D.

2. Handle fragment. Pl. 80.
   P 18244. Max. dim. 0.10 m. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Incised below handle: PIB (112), i. e., A.D. 82.
   Context: C 18. Early Roman fill, probably first century A.D.
3. Double-sized micaceous jar.
   P 2945. H. 0.47 m.; diam. 0.27 m. Restored.
   Clear red micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Capacity: something over 12 liters.
   Incised on shoulder handle: PI 15 (116), i.e., A.D. 86.
   The location of the graffito is unique among our examples, but cf. 17.

4. Sherd.
   P 19485. Max. dim. 0.037. Red micaceous clay. Probably from below the handle of a jar
   of type 3 A.
   Incised: Φ(119), i.e., A.D. 89.
   Context: C 18. Early Roman fill, probably first century A.D.

   P 17114. P. H. 0.111 m. Dark red micaceous clay. Type 3 B.
   Incised below handle: ΡΑ(136), i.e., A.D. 106.
   Context: B 20:1, well. Use fill is first and second centuries A.D.

6. Handle fragment.
   P 12981. P. H. 0.085 m. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Incised: MA(41), i.e., A.D. 111.

   P 22774. P. H. 0.09 m. Dark red micaceous clay. Type 3 B.
   Incised: M B(42), i.e., A.D. 112.

8. Micaceous jar. Pl. 79, h.
   P 11644. P. H. 0.44 m.; diam. 0.22 m.
   Mouth missing, restored. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Capacity: 6.500 liters.
   Incised below handle: PMB (142), i.e., A.D. 112.
   Context: M 17:1, well. Layer II fill of late first, early second century.

9. Upper part of micaceous jar.
   P 8255. P. H. 0.241 m. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Incised below handle: PM Z (147), i.e., A.D. 117.

10. Micaceous jar.
    P 11127. P. H. 0.44 m.; diam. 0.222 m.
    Clear red micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
    Capacity: 6.750 liters.
    Incised below handle: ΜΘ(49), i.e., A.D. 119.
    Context: B 14:2, well. Use fill of late first century and second century A.D.

11. Upper part of micaceous jar. Pl. 80.
    P 20058. P. H. 0.16 m. Clear red micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
    Incised below handle: MA(150), i.e., A.D. 120.
    Context: B 17:1, well. Late first and early second centuries A.D.
    The graffiti are very faint, but the above reading is fairly sure. For the MA above the
    ‘date,’ see 24 below.

    P 8253. P. H. 0.425 m.; diam. 0.213 m.
    Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
    Incised below handle: L P N[ (year 150+), i.e., A.D. 120+.
    Context: B 12:1, well. Dumped fill of second and early third centuries A.D.

    P 17885. Max. dim. 0.055 m. Brownish black micaceous clay. Fabric of type 3 A.
    Incised: NI P N[ (year of victory 150+), i.e., A.D. 120+.
    Context: D 17. Early Roman fill at least as late as first century A.D.
    For NI abbreviation see 14 below.

    P 11643. P. H. 0.17 m. Dark red micaceous clay. Type 3 B.
Incised below handle: NI PΞA (year of victory 161), i.e., A.D. 131.

Context: M 17: 1, well. Layer II fill of late first and early second centuries A.D.

The abbreviation here taken as νι(κῆς ἔτους) is not completely certain, because the two occurrences (13 and 14) both make the iota slant as if it might make a M out of the N, although it is not joined to the N at all. If it should be taken as a M, I would suggest that the interpretation given to the MA found on 11 and 24 (see 24) might also be applied here.

15. Fragment.
   P 14858. Max. dim. 0.05 m. Dark red micaceous clay. Fabric of type 3 B.
   Incised: POA (171), i.e., A.D. 141.
   Context: D 17. Disturbed Roman fill.

16. Upper part of micaceous jar.
   P 19824. P. H. 0.13 m. Reddish-brown micaceous clay. Type 3 B.
   Incised below handle: POE (175), i.e., A.D. 145.

17. Micaceous jar.
   P 11616. H. 0.49 m.; diam. 0.21 m. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Capacity: 6.600 liters.
   Incised under handle: P —, on shoulder OE (175), i.e., A.D. 145.
   Context: M 17: 1, well. Layer IV fill of second half of second century A.D.

   The writer seems to have started writing under the handle, been interrupted and returned to finish the date on the shoulder. Cf. 3.

18. Fragmentary micaceous jar.
   P 8256. P. H. 0.375 m.; diam. 0.227 m. Restored. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Incised below handle: ΩΕ (76), i.e., A.D. 146.

   P 17591. P. H. 0.095 m. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Incised: POH (178), i.e., A.D. 148.

20. Micaceous jar. Pl. 79, i.
   P 17896. H. 0.468 m.; diam. 0.192 m. Dark red micaceous clay. Type 3 B.
   Capacity: 6.250 liters.
   Incised under handle: POΘ (179), i.e., A.D. 149.
   Context: C 20: 1, well. Use fill of second and early third centuries A.D.

21. Upper part of micaceous jar.
   P 18432. P. H. 0.14 m. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Incised below handle: PΠ (180), i.e., A.D. 150.
   Context: C 18: 2, well. Lower use fill of first to third centuries A.D.

22. Micaceous jar.
   P 11080. H. 0.435 m.; diam. 0.21 m. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Incised below handle: PΠE (185), i.e., A.D. 155.
   Context: D 15: 1, well. Use fill of second century.

   P 10958. Max. dim. 0.115 m. Reddish brown micaceous clay. Type 3 B.
   Incised below handle: PΠH (188), i.e., A.D. 158.
   Context: C 14: 5, cistern. Turkish fill.

24. Upper part of micaceous jar. Pl. 80.
   P 8254. P. H. 0.109 m. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Incised below handle: ΠΘ (89), i.e., A.D. 159.
   Context: B 12: 1, well. Dumped filling of second and early third centuries A.D.

   The MA here and probably also in 11 may
with some conviction be interpreted as the abbreviation for μάριον, an Egyptian measure.

25. Fragment. Pl. 80.
   P 11754. P. H. 0.093 m. Black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Incised under handle: ] ΤΕΠΑΓΩ ΘΛΑΣΑΣ (’89), i. e., A.D. 159.
   Context: K 18: 3, cistern. Lower fill of mixed Roman.

   P 7671. H. 0.41 m.; diam. 0.22 m. Brownish black micaceous clay. Type 3 A.
   Capacity: 6.500 liters.
   No graffito.
   Context: B 12: 1, well. Dumped filling of second and early third centuries A.D.

27. Neck fragment.
   P 2414. P. H. 0.20 m. Lower part of neck preserved.
   Incised: ΡΚΗ (128), i. e., A.D. 98.
   Other graffiti are present but too fragmentary.

28. Upper part of amphora. Pl. 80.
   P 18366. P. H. 0.28 m. Preserved down to shoulder.
   Incised: ΡΑΕ (135), i. e., A.D. 105.

29. Upper part of amphora. Pl. 80.
   P 21330. P. H. 0.310 m. Preserved down to shoulder.
   Incised: ΡΑΕ (136), i. e., A.D. 106.
   Context: I 12. Fill of early third century A.D.
   This was found in the drain, wedged against two stones; it would be hard to say how many years it may have stayed there.

30. Sherd. Pl. 80.
   P 17892. Max. dim. 0.155 m. Neck piece from under a handle.
   Incised: ΡΝΑ (151), i.e., A.D. 121.

31. Sherd.
   P 3247. Max. dim. 0.126 m. Fragment of the neck.
   Incised: ΤΝΕ (155), i. e., A.D. 125.
   Context: K 13. Late Roman fill.
   The graffito interpreted as date is not, like the others, vertical to the jar.

   P 17880. P. H. 0.233 m. Mouth, neck and parts of handles preserved.
   Incised: ΡΞΖ (167), i.e., A.D. 137.
   Context: D 18. Fill of second and early third centuries A.D.

33. Upper part of amphora.
   P 18252. P. H. 0.36 m. Preserved, with gaps, down to shoulder.
   Incised under rim: χ \( \bigcirc \) \( \bigcirc \) \( \bigcirc \). This is not the same as the other graffiti.
   Context: D 18. Fill of second and early third centuries A.D.

34. Neck fragment.
   P 18368. P. H. 0.14 m. Half of upper neck with part of a handle.
   Incised under rim: ΠΑΥ This is not a date graffito.

35. Neck fragment.
   P 21636. P. H. 0.11 m. Part of upper neck and part of handle.
   Not incised.
   Context: U 22. Fill of the second century A.D.

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