NORTH SYRIAN MORTARIA

(CLASS 73)

CLAY mortaria, such a typical feature of Roman sites in the West (Gaul, Germany and Britain), are not at all common among the finds from Roman sites in the Eastern Mediterranean. Here they had been widely used in Classical and Hellenistic times, but during the Roman period they seem to have been almost entirely supplanted for culinary purposes by vessels of stone and marble. Despite this general trend, however, there exists one class of clay mortaria which circulated widely in the East during the third and early fourth centuries after Christ; this forms the material for the present article.

Among the catalogued finds from the Athenian Agora excavations are several pieces of large coarse mortaria in a distinctive dark brown ware, clearly not of local manufacture. One of these (P 20013) is preserved in a relatively complete state (Fig. 1, Pl. 73, a-b). All share the same basic form: flat base, high flaring wall, and broad slightly downturned rim (to facilitate handling) furnished with a short shallow spout. The average overall diameter is about 50 cm. On the inside, the floor curves smoothly into the wall; in some cases a small groove is present just below the rim. All are stamped on the rim with the maker’s name or trademark in Greek, generally consisting of two lines of impressed characters within a rectangular frame. In one case the stamp is repeated at intervals round the rim; this may also have been the case on some of the others which are less well preserved. The walls are unusually thick, and the weight of the vessels when complete must have been considerable; that of the best-preserved example may be estimated at ca. 11½ kg. Most are hard-fired, as befits their function, the clay assuming a distinctive deep chocolate brown color. An orange or orange-brown color, with a tendency to a darker core, also occurs. Surfaces appear to have been wet-smoothed. The clay contains some lime, but is

I wish to thank Miss H. Frost and M. H. Seyrig for their invaluable assistance and encouragement in the preparation of this article and for permitting me to make use of the unpublished results of their investigations in the Ras el-Basit area. The staff of the Athenian Agora excavations has, as ever, been most helpful in allowing me to work on their finds and in supplying photographs. I also thank the following, who have at various times provided me with information and photographs, or have permitted me to cite their unpublished finds: Miss J. du Plat Taylor, the Cyprus Museum, the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (Jerusalem), Mr. P. Fraser, Mr. T. Bruce Mitford, Prof. R. L. Scranton, Prof. E. Kunze.

For a typical Hellenistic specimen, see Hesperia, III, 1934, pp. 416, 470, fig. 102, Group E, 124.

Numerous examples of these have been found in the Athenian Agora excavations, with evidence of production on the spot (unpublished).

Hesperia, XXXVI, 4
generally free of mica; it is liberally tempered with white and black grits and particles of what appears to be crushed glass. There is no deliberate gritting of the inside such as is normal on other mortaria.

The Agora pieces form part of a larger class of household vessels bearing Greek stamps of which fragments have been found at various places throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Numerous examples of these are collected by Jalabert and Mouterde in Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie (hereafter referred to as I.G.L.S.). Another large group from the Alexandria region was published many years ago by Breccia. All the published pieces could belong to large mortaria or basins, though fragments have on occasions been mistaken for parts of amphorae or large storage jars (dolia). The fabric of those examples which I have been able to examine elsewhere corresponds in all cases to that of the Agora specimens, and it seems reasonable to assume that all were produced in one region. Most of the examples listed below appear to be of the same form as the Agora piece shown in Figure 1, though none

![Fig. 1. Athenian Agora P 20013 (1:4)](image_url)

is so well preserved. There are, however, a few fragments of basins with steeper walls and shorter, almost square-sectioned rims (Fig. 3, 5-6); I am informed that some of these have vertical handles attached to the rim (cf. Catalogue, No. 75).

The stamps on vessels of this class are generally, as in the case of the Agora examples, large and rectangular, with two lines of impressed letters surrounded by an impressed frame. Occasionally one finds examples where the lettering stands out in relief on a sunken background. Rarely the stamps are of planta pedis type (see Nos. 81, 104). Normally the stamp is impressed across the rim of the vessel, though on some of the larger pieces one finds groups of up to four stamps, impressed both across and along the rim, sometimes in the form of a cross. The stamping is often careless; frequently only a part of the stamp is visible, owing to the curvature or the insufficient width of the rim. The lettering is rather crude, with a tendency to heavy serifs; it is remarkably consistent throughout the whole series. Stylized ivy-leaves, used at the beginnings and ends of lines as fillers, are a very common feature.

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Fig. 2. Specimen Stamps (1:1; Numbers refer to the Catalogue)
The maker's name is generally given in the genitive case. The number of manufacturers represented is fairly small; one finds the same few names or trademarks on widely scattered examples. The commonest of these are:

\[\Delta \text{μωνέικου}
\]
\[\Delta \text{ιοφάντου βου}^5\]
\[\Delta \text{όμου}
\]
\[\text{Εϊρηναί ευτύχι}^6\] and \[\text{ευτυχώς Εϊρηνέω}
\]
\[\text{Ερμογένους}
\]
\[\text{Εύκαρπία}
\]
\[\text{Θεών δορήματα}
\]
\[\text{Κασσιανόβ}
\]
\[\text{Λαδάτος}^7\]
\[\text{Τιμοκλήτος}^7\]

With these may be associated two stamps in Latin: C. BELLICI | ZMARAGDI (sometimes rendered as ZMAKAGDI), and ALEXAN | DRILADA (perhaps to be associated with Λαδάτος above). A number of typical examples are shown in Figure 2.

The exact center of manufacture of this group of mortaria can now be identified, thanks to a chance discovery made by Miss Honor Frost during the course of investi-

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Fig. 3. Ras el-Basit, Rim Fragments (1:4)

^5 To be restored as βουλευτοῖ; see I.G.L.S., III, no. 710 for the evidence.
^7 For other examples (from papyri) of these unusual genitive forms, see E. Mayser, Grammatik der griechischen Papyri aus der Ptolemäerzeit, Leipzig, 1906, pp. 252-254, 274.
NORTH SYRIAN MORTARIA

Inquiries along the Syrian coast in the summer of 1964. Among the places visited by Miss Frost was the ancient site at Ras el-Basit, some twenty-five kilometers to the southwest of the mouth of the Orontes, which is generally identified as the site of the ancient Posideion. A considerable number of mortarium stamps of the class here discussed were recovered from here by M. Seyrig and others some years ago, and further investigation led to the discovery of clear traces of production on the spot.

Fig. 4. Distribution of North Syrian Mortaria
In the fields in the vicinity of the ancient site Miss Frost informs me that she encountered numerous further fragments, some with the familiar stamps, which had been turned up by the local farmers in ploughing; in some cases these had been heaped up in piles in order to clear the ground. A significant proportion of these were kilnwasters, in some cases completely vitrified. Clearly these indicate manufacture in the immediate vicinity. Similar concentrations of mortarium fragments of similar type were noted in the coastal region to the north of Ras el el-Basit, extending over a distance of several miles; other factories were presumably located here. In addition, a relatively complete specimen was recovered from an ancient wreck in the vicinity, furnishing direct evidence of how these large and cumbersome vessels were exported. Miss Frost has kindly allowed me to examine some of these pieces; they correspond very closely in fabric and other respects with the Athenian Agora specimens. A sample is illustrated on Figure 3 and Plate 73, c.

The ware had a very wide distribution (Fig. 4). The heaviest concentration of finds, as might be expected, occurs on the Syrian coastline near to the region of manufacture, but the ware is also common in Palestine, Egypt and Cyprus. Further specimens may be cited from sites throughout the Eastern Mediterranean; the Athenian Agora finds are by no means on their own. Occasional vessels found their way further west: two are recorded from Rome (Nos. 158-159 below), and two more (160-161) from yet further afield, in the northwestern provinces of the Roman Empire. The latter two both display the characteristic rim-form and stamps, and the one in Newcastle (which I have examined) is identical in fabric to the pieces from the East. There can be no doubt that they are genuine Syrian products.

**CATALOGUE**

**ATHENS, AGORA EXCAVATIONS**

1. Fig. 1, Pl. 73, a-b. P 20013. D. 0.532. 
Greater part preserved.
Stamp: ΕΡΜΟΓ | ΕΝΟΥΣι (Fig. 2), repeated; two stamps and the edge of a third are preserved; originally probably four, spaced out round rim.

2. P 23494. D. est. 0.45; rim fr.
Stamp as 1.

3. SS 8786. D. est. 0.45; rim fr.
Stamp: ΕΡΜΟΓ | ΕΝΟΥΣι (Fig. 2) retrograde, with letters in relief.

4. P 3473. D. est. 0.50; rim fr.
Stamp: ΕΙΠΗ]ΝΑΙ | [ΕΥΤΥ]ΧΙ" C

5. SS 7954. D. est. 0.50; nearly half of rim.
Wavy line incised on rim.
Stamp: ΙΟΥΛΔ! | ΑΝΟΥ retrograde, repeated; two stamps preserved.

**EGYPT**

6. Abu Mena; Alexandria Museum.

Breccia, *op. cit.*, no. 1.

ALEXAN | DRILADA (retrograde, repeated).

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8 Reproduced by kind permission of Miss Frost. A large number of stamped examples, including the pieces here illustrated, are now stored in the Damascus Museum.

9 See note 4 above.
7-32. Alexandria and region; Alexandria Museum.

Breck, op. cit., nos. 3-5, 8-9, 15-35.

C Bellucci | Zmaragdi (three examples; second line of stamp read as Zma-
Cacidi); Δομί | Χνού (two examples, read as Δομί | Χνού); Διονέι [I] | Κού | Χα (one example); Διοφαν | Ντούβο (one); Διοφαν | Τούβο (two); Ερμόγ | Ενωκι (seven); Ευτύχι | Ειφηνέ (four, in one case repeated); Ειφήναι | Ευτυχι (two, one repeated); Κακι | Ανω (two); Καλλαμού | Καλεζαν Δού (two).

33. Athribis.

Adam, Annales du service des antiquités de l'Egypte, LV, 1958, p. 9, a.
Ερμόγ | Ενούκι.

34-35. Cairo, Egyptian Museum, 33012-33013.


Διοφαν | Ντούβο and Τιμο [K] | Λατοκ.

36-37. Cairo, Egyptian Museum (on display).
Ευτυχι | Ειφηνέ [ω] and θεών 


Egypt Exploration Fund, Archaeological Report, 1902-1903, p. 7 (not illustrated).

Αλεξαν | Δρίλαδα and εν | 

40-46. Benachi Collection, from Egypt (Cairo, etc.).

Αλεξαν | Δρίλαδα; Αλεξαν | Δρι-

47. Achmim-Panopolis.

Forrer, Realexicon der prähistorischen klassischen und frühchristlichen Altertümer, 1907, p. 940, fig. 652.

Ειφήναι | Ευτυχι.
Form as Fig. 1.

69. Bethany, B 3274 (as above).
   Fr. of deep vessel as Fig. 3, 6.
   Pattern of impressed dots along top of rim;
   no stamp preserved.

70. Jebel Faradis, near Bethlehem (Palestine Museum, Jerusalem).
   Form as Fig. 1.
   TIMOK | ΛΗΤΟC.

71. Palestine Museum, Jerusalem, I. 4193.
   *Iliffe, Quart. Dept. Antiq. Palestine*, II, 1932,
   p. 124, pl. 45, b, 3.
   ΔΟΜΩΤ | ΝΟΥ.

72. Jerusalem.
   *Echos d' Orient*, 1906, p. 133; *I.G.L.S.*, III,
   cited under no. 709.
   ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΝΟΥ.

73-74. Museum of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum,
   Jerusalem; from Palestine.
   ΚΑΚΚ [I] | ΑΝΟΥ [ε'] (on a rather narrow rim),
   and ΔΙΟΦΑΝ | ΤΟΥΒΟ (Fig. 2; one stamp
   across rim, a second at right-angles to it; probably
   part of a group of stamps).

75-80. Caesarea (in local museum).
   Lifhitz, “Timbres amphoriques trouvés a
   Césarée de Palestine,” *Revue biblique*, LXX,
   Δίοφαν | τουβο (said to be on a handle);
   Ευκα | πτια; Ερμού | Ενου; Κασσ[ι] | ανου;
   Τ]μοκ | [α]γτος; Εντυχο | ειρηνηω. Two other
   stamps in Lifhitz’s list (no. 4—Κονρ | Ενυν or
   | ελλον; no. 23—Εντυχος) may belong to the
   series, though this seems unlikely.

81. Abda (Palestine Museum, Jerusalem).
   Form as Fig. 1.
   ΕΥΤΥΧΩ | | in planta pedis.

82. Tyre.
   *I.G.L.S.*, III, cited under no. 710. Διοφαν | τουβο.

83. Sidon.
   *Mélanges de la faculté orientale* (Université
   Saint Joseph, Beyrouth), I, 1906, pp. 174-175,
   no. 45.
   ALEXAN | DRILADA.

84-86. Deir el-Qal’a, from excavations.
   ΕΥΤΥΧΩ | ΕΙΡΗΝΗΩ (repeated); ΕΡΜΟΥ
   NA1 | ΕΥΤΥΧΙ' Γ '; ΕΡΜΟΓ | ΕΝΟΥ.

87-88. Beirut.
   *I.G.L.S.*, III, cited under nos. 709 and 710.
   Ερμού | Ενου and Διοφαν | τουβο.

89. Tell ‘Atar, near Beirut.
   Ερμου | Ενυχι.

90. Heldua Ilaldé, near Beirut.
   Τιμοκ | ιτος.

91-94. Byblos.
   Dunand, *Fouilles de Byblos*, I (1926-32),
   Paris, 1939, pp. 22-23, fig. 8, no. 1081; nos.
   1178, 1235 and 1236 are stated to bear the
   same stamp.
   ΕΙΡΗΝΗΛ | ΕΥΤΥΧΙ' Γ '.

95. Hama.
   Ingholt, *Rapport préliminaire sur sept campa-
   gnes de fouilles à Hama en Syrie (1932-
   1938)*, Copenhagen, 1940, pp. 125-126; *I.G.
   Published reading BSLLI | CMARAGDI;
   presumably to be read as [C.]BELLI[CI] | ΖMARAGDI.

96. Mo‘arret en-No‘man.
   *I.G.L.S.*, IV, no. 1551.
   ALEXAN | DRILADA (retrorgrade, with
   lettering in relief).

97-113. Ras el-Basit (Posideion?). Fig. 3; Pl. 73, c.
   *I.G.L.S.*, III, no. 1242 (references only).
   Readings of pieces found in 1935 and 1937
   supplied by M. Henri Seyrig. Further ex-
   amples collected by Miss Honor Frost in 1964. The
   following stamps occur:
ALEXAN | DRILADA (Fig. 2; both in normal form and retrograde with lettering in relief).

C. BELLICI | ZMARAGDI (the letter R in the second line is sometimes rendered as K).

ΔΙΟΝΕΙ | ΚΟΥΟΣ (Fig. 2)
[Δ]ΙΟΦΑ | ΝΤΕΒΗ
ΔΟΜ | ΡΟΥ
ΕΙΡΗΝΑΙ | ΕΥΤΥΧΙ
ΕΥΤΥΧΙΩ | ΠΛΑΝΤΑ ΠΕΔΗ (under the branch a line with a hook at the left end)
ΕΙΣΙΔΩ | ΡΟΓΟΥΣ
ΕΡΜΟΓ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ,
ΕΥΚΑ | ΠΠΙΑ
ΘΕΩΝΑΙ | ΠΗΜΑΤΑ
ΚΑΤΙ | ΑΝΟΥ [Ω]
ΛΑΔΑ | ΤΟΧ
ΤΙΜ]ΟΚ | [ΛΗΤ]ΟΚ

Also: ΑΛΕΞ [Α] | ΝΑΠΟΥ (?), retrograde.
ΔΟΣ | ΡΟΥ (?), retrograde.

114-120. El-Aga, near Ras el-Basit.


ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ; C. BELLICI | ZMARAGDI;
ΔΙΟΦΑ [ΦΑΥ] | ΤΟΥ [Υ]; ΕΥΚΑ | ΡΠΙΑ; ΚΑΣΟΤ | ΑΝΟΥ [Ω];
ΔΙΟΥΕ | ΚΑΟΥ [Ο].

No. 1241, read as ΤΟΕ [ ] [ΚΛΒΙΑΙΚ], in all probability belongs to the same group, considering its findspot.

121. Mt. Cassius (Université Saint Joseph, Beirut).

I.G.L.S., III, no. 1227.

Published as Ζ PELLICI | [ ]ARAGDI; presumably to be read as Ζ. BELLICI | [ΖΜ]ARAGDI.


All rim frs. as Fig. 1.
316: Very large size; ΕΥΚΑ | ΠΠΙΑ (Fig. 2; final alpha lacks crossbar).
317: ΛΑΔΑ | ΤΟΧ.
318: ΚΑΣΙ [1] | ΑΝΟΥ [Ω] (Fig. 2).

125-129. Seleucia Pieria and environs.

Mélanges de la faculté orientale, V, i, 1911, pp. 331-2; I.G.L.S., III, nos. 1205-1208.
1205: published as CoPELLIO | ZMARA-GDV; presumably to be read as C. BELLICI | ZMARAGDI.

1206 a: ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ
1206 b: ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ
1207: ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ
1208: ΛΔΑ | ΤΟΥ

130-132. Daphne, near Antioch.


ΤΗΜΟΚ | [Λ]ΥΤΟΣ; ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ
(2 examples)
ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ
ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ
ΔΙΟΦΑ | ΤΟΥ

133. Antioch (formerly in bazaar).

I.G.L.S., III, no. 1057.

ΔΙΟΦΑ | ΤΟΥ.

134-138. Myriand (r)os.

I.G.L.S., III, nos. 708 a-c, 709-710.

ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ
ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ
ΕΡΜΟΥ | ΕΡΝΟΥΗ
ΔΙΟΦΑ | ΤΟΥ

Cyprus

139. Ayios Phelon; from excavations by Miss du Plat Taylor, unpublished.

ΚΑΣΙ [1] | ΑΝΟΥ [Ω].

140. Ayios Phelon, chance find; Cyprus Museum, 1964/X-5/1.

Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, 1965, pp. 121-122, pl. 17, no. 11.

141. Lythrangomi (near Leonarisso); Cyprus Museum, 1939/IV-18/2.

Unpublished.

142. Salamis, from recent excavations.

Several frs. of mortaria of this class; no stamps preserved.

143. Enkomi.

J.H.S., XII, 1891, p. 174, no. 11.

ΔΙΟΦΑ | ΤΟΥ
144. Curium.
   Form as Fig. 1.
   ALEXANDRIDA.

   Report of the Department of Antiquities,
   Cyprus, 1963, p. 28, fig. 8, pl. III, top right.
   TIMOK | ATHOC.

146. Cyprus Museum, uncatalogued; no provenance.
   EYTYXWC | EIPHNEW.

147. Paphos Museum, uncatalogued; no provenance.
   AOEIA.

TURKEY

148-149. Tarsus.
   Tarsus, I, p. 277, pls. 166, 209, nos. 823-824. Form of both as Fig. 1.
   823: TIMOK | ATHOC (impressed three times, along and across rim).
   824: OEWNAW | PHMAT.

150. Side.
   Bean, Side Agorasi ve Civarmdaki Binalar: 1948 Yili kasalarına dair rapor,
   Ankara, 1956, p. 96, no. 71, with fig. in text.
   AOM | ANOY.

GREECE

For examples from the Athenian Agora, see Nos. 1-5 above.

151. Karpathos.
   I.G., XII, i, no. 989.
   EPMOG | ENOYCI retrograde.

152. Tenos.
   Demoulin, B.C.H., XXVI, 1902, p. 438, no. 46.
   EPMOG | ENOYCI (triple impression).

153. Kenchreai, from recent excavations, cat.
   no. P 54.
   Rim as Fig. 3, 5; est. D. ca. 0.50.
   AION | E1 | KOY [r].

154. Olympia.
   Unpublished. Rim as Fig. 1; est. D. ca. 0.33 only.
   EPMOG | ENUYCI.

ITALY

155. Rome; formerly in University collection (?).
   C.I.L., XV, i, 2418.
   C. BELLICI | ZMARAGDI.

159. Rome; formerly in Museo Kircheriano.
   C.I.L., XV, i, 2522.
   TIMOK | ATHOC.

WESTERN EMPIRE

160. Strasbourg (Argentorate); found in the city, 1882.
   Siebourg, Bonn. Jahrb., CXVI, 1907, pp. 1 ff., figs. 1, 3, with bibliography cited.
   EPHNAI | EYTYX.

   Ephemeris Epigraphica, VII, no. 1179, with bibliography cited; Siebourg, Bonn. Jahrb.,
   CXVI, 1907, pp. 2 ff., figs. 2, 4.
   EPHNALI | EYTYXI [r] (Fig. 2).

PROVENANCE UNKNOWN

162-163. In Stuttgart and Tübingen (?).
   GEMEA | ANOY (originally published as
   GEMEA | AINCY and AION {| COY [r] (published as AIONEI | KOY)).
The dating evidence for this class of mortaria is scanty, but sufficient to enable us to assign them to the latter part of the third and the earlier part of the fourth century. Of the Athenian Agora pieces, No. 1 was found in a well in association with local pottery of early fourth-century types; 5 comes from a layer of debris from the Herulian destruction of A.D. 267; 3 and 4 are from late Roman contexts. 67, from Beit Nattif, was associated with coins of Decius (249-251) and Salonina (253-268). The relatively small number of manufacturers known and the lack of major change in the vessel-types and the lettering of the stamps suggest that the industry was not particularly long-lived; one may allow it probably no more than a century. During this period, however, it clearly catered for a very widespread demand for cheap sturdy household ware; hence the wide distribution of its products.

In conclusion, one may be tempted to ask how the Syrian industry came into being. Here one may perhaps find an answer in the presence of two Latin stamps in the group, a phenomenon hardly to be expected in the heart of the Greek East. Has one here evidence of the migration or transplantation of a group of potters from the West or the establishment of a successful branch factory by some firm of mortarium-makers in the West? The evidence of both vessel-forms and stamp-types seems to point in this direction.

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a. Athenian Agora P 20013

b. Athenian Agora P 20013, Stamps

c. Fragments from Ras el-Basit (scale indicated by cigarette packet)

J. W. Hayes: North Syrian Mortaria