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TWO RHODIAN STAMPED AMPHORA HANDLES FROM TELL ES-SUKHNAH (JORDAN): A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

During recent excavations at the archaeological site of Tell Es-Sukhnah in north east Jordan, an in-situ Rhodian amphora was found. The most important thing about that amphora is that both handles are carrying stamps in Greek scripts. The texts contain the name of an eponym, a Rhodian month-name and the fabricant's name. Similar objects in the southern Levant enable dating the stamps to the second century B.C. The imported Amphora at Es-Sukhnah, besides other small finds, highlights the importance of the site during the Hellenistic period.

KEYWORDS: *Amphora stamps; Rhodian; second century B.C; Hellenistic period; Tell Es-Sukhnah; Jordan.*

1. INTRODUCTION

During the Hellenistic period, the trade relationship between the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean was highly emphasized. Several commodities which included items like wine, oil, and grain were shipped over long distances. Liquids were special commodities that were packaged in pottery vessels. Amphoras were an example of such vessels that contained liquids such as wine and were found at different sites in the eastern Mediterranean. Since their use in commercials around the eight century BC, amphoras have had cultural as well as economic significances. Amphoras shape designates place of production such as the island of Rhodes, the island of Thasos, or Asia Minor coastal cities like Knidos (Rotroff, 2007, 141-142). The presence of amphoras outside their place of origin highlights economic data on the trade networks and trade arrangements during the Hellenistic period. Moreover, stamped amphoras shed more light on the political control of production and trade. Besides their economic significance, amphoras provide historical data because the stamped ones carry the name of an eponym and the manufacturer's name. Both historical information can aid in establishing a chronological framework at the site of their discoveries.

In the southern Levant, Amphora carrying stamps were found at different sites. For instance, a number of stamps were discovered at the sites of Samaria- Sebaste (Reisner et al., 1924: 123-129; Crowfoot 1957: 379-388), Marisa (Macalister, 1901: 123-143, 394-396), Gezer (Tell Abu - Shushah) (Macalister 1912: 349-364), Beitshean (Scythopolis) (Fitzgerald 1930: 16; 1931: 44-46), Nessana (Auja al-Hafir) (Grace 1962: 106-127), and Jerusalem (Thomson 1941: 235-248; Ariel 1990: 13-98) in Palestine. In Jordan some stamps were found at important centers such as Pella (Tabaqat Fahl)(McNicoll - Hennessy 1980: 17; McNicoll et al. 1982: 24, 112), Gerasa (Jerash) (Wells 1938: 460-461), Philadelphia (Amman) (Zayadine 1973: 17-35; 1977-78: 20-56) , Petra (Hammond 1977-1978: 82-83), and Gadara (Umm- Qeis) (Atallah, 2003: 485-498). Amphoras with stamps were found at satellite settlements such as Tall Zira'a (Kenkel 2013) and Barsinia (Bader - El-Khoury 2009), both located in north -west Jordan. However, the re-

cent excavations at the archaeological site of Tell Es-Sukhnah uncovered an *in situ* Amphora which carried stamps on both handles. The significance of this Amphora stems from the fact that it sheds light on the Hellenistic occupation at the site, which is situated 22 kms east of the ancient Decapolis-city Gerasa (Jerash), and it can highlight the trade network and arrangements during the same period.

1.1 Tell Es-Sukhnah

The site is situated ca. 25 kms north -east of Amman and about 7 kms to the west of Az-Zarqa city (Fig.1). The Tell measures about 7.5 acres, and ranges in height about 12m. The archaeological site of Tell Es-Sukhnah is located in the Irano- Turanian bioclimatic zone. This area is a transition between the Mediterranean zone to the west and the Sahro-Arabian zone to the east. This zone is characterized by an altitude ranging from 500 to 700 m, and an annual rainfall of 100-300 mm (al-Eisawi, 1985). Tell Es-Sukhnah is part of the cool, arid Mediterranean climate region. The mean minimum annual temperature is 2-5 °C and the mean maximum annual temperature is 15-25°C.

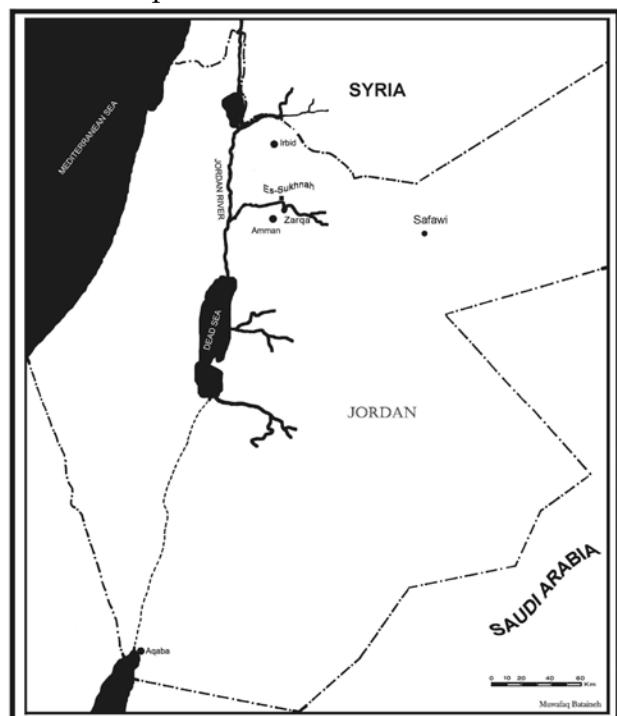


Fig. 1. The location of Tell Es-Sukhnah.

Excavations at the site revealed human occupations during the Late Hellenistic through the Roman and Byzantine periods. Evidence of Islamic occupation has been also uncovered. The

late Hellenistic and Roman horizons at Es-Sukhnah are well represented either in terms of domestic buildings, or economic installations such as an olive press. However, studying the economic role of the site during the late Hellenistic and Roman periods is of special interest, taking into account that the site is located ca. 22 kms east of Gerasa. Moreover, the location of the site by the Az-Zarqa River made the west-east trade connection with the Decapolis world more accessible.

1.2 Amphora description

The Es-Sukhnah amphora was exposed during the 2013 season of excavations in square JB21.loc. 5 (Fig.2). It was found on a compacted earthen floor, south west of the olive press architecture complex (Ali, 2014). However, the Amphora was found in the last days of the fourth season of excavations. Therefore, it was not possible to identify its associated context. But it can be assumed that there was a direct relationship between the amphora and the olive press complex.



Fig. 2. Location where the amphora was found in Tell ES-Sukhnah.

The typological examination of the amphora at Tell Es-Sukhnah shows similarities with other Rhodian amphoras in the southern Levant (Fig. 3). It shows similarity in the profile type which was dominated from the middle of the third to the end of the second century BCE (Ariel - Finkielstztein 2003). The amphora consisted of a long cylindrical neck with an outward rolled rim, an ovoid body with rounded shoulders. The toe was missing. The handles are attached under the rim and on the shoulder. The handles are elongated and have an oval section. Significantly for dating is the profile of the bend of the

handles. The bend is angular (Fig. 3), a dominant profile in the second century BCE (Ariel and Finkielstztein 2003: 138).

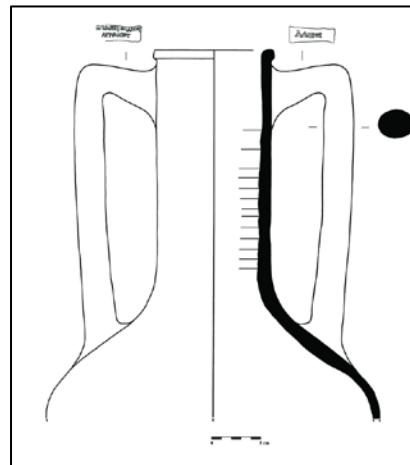


Fig. 3 drawing of the amphora.

According to the Munsell Soil color Chart, the amphora has a reddish yellow fabric (7.5 YR 7\6), with a very pale brown (10YR 8\3) slip. The fabric is very well levigated and fired, with almost no grits. The color of the amphora is typical of the Rhodian ones.

The significant of Es-Sukhnah amphora is that it is one classes of amphora bearing stamps in Greek scripts on both handles, which is important to record associations.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE AMPHORA TWO STAMPS

In the following pages a detailed description of the two stamps is presented.

The first stamp (Fig. 4)

Dimensions

A rectangular stamp measuring 4.7 X 1.8 cm.

Reading

Two lines written in ancient Greek:

ΕΠΙΑΡΙΣΤΟΜΑΧΟΥ

ΑΓΡΙΑΝΙΟΥ

We should note that the first letter and the left part of the second letter in the first line are missing.

Stamp in small letters:

JEpi; Αριστομαχου Αγριάνιου

Date accompanying the stamp:

The month of Αγριάνιου

Meaning:

During the time of Aristomachos
(in the month of) Agrianios

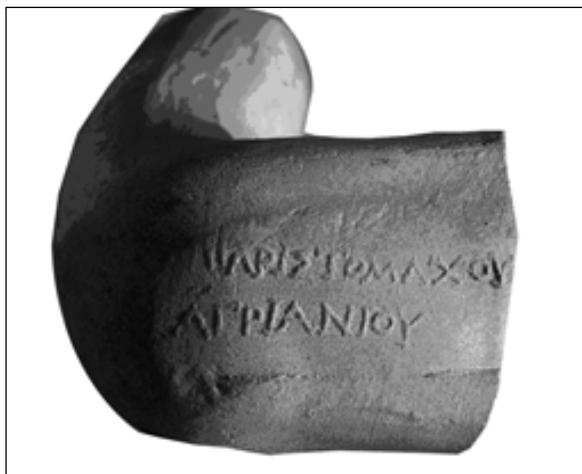


Fig 4. Picture of the amphora handle carrying the stamp.

Description

Upper part of a Rhodian Amphora handles carrying a stamp with two lines written in ancient Greek (Fig. 4). We can read in the first line the prefixed preposition JEpi; followed by the name of the eponym Αριστοραχου. In the second line, we find the name of the Rhodian month Άγριάνιος.

The aim of this stamp is to inform users of the amphora or of the contents of the amphora that it was made during the time of the eponym Αριστοραχος in the month of Άγριάνιος.

The eponym is an honorary title, given according to M. Sartre to those magistrates who give their names to the year of their reign because they hold a high honorary position (yearly priest of the chief god Helios) (Sartre 1991, 509). For her part, Virginea Grace described the eponym as the magistrate whose name dated the Year (Grace 1963, 83).

The Second stamp (Fig. 5)

Dimensions

A rectangular stamp of 4,7 X 1,8 cm.

Reading

One line of Greek script in a rectangular frame, we can see

--ΛΑΝΙΟΥ :we note that the beginning of the inscription is missing.

Stamp in small letters:

--- λανιος

Meaning:

These writings form a part of the fabricant's name.



Fig. 5. The second amphora handles carrying the stamp.

Description

Upper part of a handle of the same Rhodian Amphora, mentioned above, carrying a stamp with one line written in ancient Greek alphabets (Fig.5); we can see that the writing is a part of the personal name of the fabricant of the Amphora.

The aim of the stamp is to inform users of the amphora or of the contents of the amphora that it was made by a person called --- λανιος , owner of the workshop.

4. COMMENTS

Rhodian amphoras differ from other amphoras by their type and their stamps. These amphoras are usually carrying stamps on both handles. One handle carries the name of the eponym during whose reign the amphora was made, as well as the month, while the second handle carries the name of the fabricant. Rarely can we match the name of the Eponym with the name of the fabricant because it is almost impossible to find a complete amphora. Virginea Grace and Petropoulakou described in 1970 a complete Amphora, a deposit of the National museum in Athens (museum no: 2405). The first handle of the Amphora was stamped with the name of the eponym Peisistratou ,while the other handle was stamped with the name of the fabricant Marsuaç. This means that the fabricant Marsuas made the Amphora during the reign of Peisistratoç.

5. CHRONOLOGY

As mentioned before, the stamp can be dated to the year when the eponym was in power.

The chronology of the names on stamps was built by V. Grace, who arranged them in seven

periods (Grace 1985: 42). Other scholars such as Empreur and Hesnard (1987), and Finkelsztein (1993) have refined the chronology proposed by Grace. Especially important here is the chronological refinement made by Finkelsztein (1993: 230-258) on period IV (from ca. 160-ca. 146 BCE contra to Grace's date from ca.174- ca.146). He identified a gap of eponym names ascribed to this period, leading to a shorting of the period by about 11 years. Following Finkelsztein (2001: 196-197) period IV can be divided into two subgroups: IVa from ca. 160-153BCE, and subgroup IVb from ca. 152-ca.146 BCE.

There are two eponyms who have the name Aristomachos. However, Aristomachos I seems to have been in power during period IVa, from 160-153 BCE, while Aristomachos II was in power during period IVb, from 152-146 BCE. Finkelsztein places the eponym Aristomachos I, in the brief period between 159 and 152 BCE (Finkelsztein 2001:193).

In this case, we can say that the fabricant --- λανιος made this amphora during the month Αγριάνιο~ in which the eponym Αριστομαχο~ was governing , at about 159-152 BCE. The association of the fabricant's name Nanius is synchronically under the reign of Aristomachos I, as also attested from the House of Dionysos (Nicolau 2005: 436, Nr. 134)

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The significance of the amphora carrying two stamps at Tell Es-Sukhnah is that it was found *in situ*. Moreover, it is the first time Tell Es-Sukhnah has delivered a stamp dating to the second century BCE. In the southern Levant, stamped Rhodian amphoras handles dating to the second century BCE have been found at sites such as Gadara (Atallah 2003; Weber 1986); Abila (Wineland 2001), Pella (Smith), Gerasa (Welles 1938) and Philadelphia (Mansour 2004). Furthermore, Rhodian amphoras with stamps have been found at Tall Mada-ba, Tall Hesban (Cox 1976), Tall Zira'a (Kenkel 2013) and Barsinia (Bader - El-Khoury 2009). Of special interest the Rhodian amphoras found at Maresha (Ariel - Finkelsztein 2003) and Giv'ti Parking Lot (Ariel 2013). It has been suggested that Rhodian amphoras were found more fre-

quently than other imported amphoras in the Eastern Mediterranean. They dominated the amphoras assemblages from the Levant and Alexandria. The Hellenizing process of Antiochus IV (175-164 BCE) has been assumed to have caused the high proportion of Rhodian imports to the Levant, especially wine (Finkelsztein 1999).

Despite the fact that several stamped Rhodian amphoras were uncovered in the southern Levant, the eponym Aristomachos was not well attested. Aristomachos I was reported in 33 matrices from Alexandria (http://www.amphoralex.org/timbres/eponmes/accueil_epon/affiche_liste_RE_periode.php). He is also reported from Jerusalem (Ariel 2013, 330). This discovery at Tell Es-Sukhnah would aid in finer understanding of the trade between Rhodes and eastern Mediterranean, during period IV. Moreover, it provides new data on the association between eponym Aristomachos and the fabricant name Nanius.

However, the historical information derived from both stamps from Es-Sukhnah showed that the trade with Rhodes was still active during the eponym of Aristomachos I (ca. 159- 152 BCE). These two stamps are direct epigraphic ceramic evidence of Late Hellenistic occupation at the site; this phenomenon is a new evidence of the Hellenistic presence in the north east of Jordan. Moreover, the amphora at the site increases our understanding of the trade managements during the period of eponym of Aristomachos, when Rhodes was an important trade partner of the southern Levant. Another economic hint is the fact that Es-Sukhnah was a significant Hellenistic site outside the Decapolis area in Jordan.

We can point out, as Halpern-Zylberstein concluded, that "les timbres amphoriques témoignent de la présences et de la pénétration d'une population grecque qui ne se satisfaisait pas de la production viticole locale de moindre qualité" (Halpern-Zylberstein 1980), which implies that a trade was going on between Tell Es-Sukhnah in north east Jordan and some other parts of the Old World such as the Island of Rhodes.

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