

Amphorae at Taxiarchis Hill, Didyma: Economy and Cult of an Archaic Sanctuary in Light of its Assemblage of Transport Jars

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Taxiarchis Hill is situated about 200 m northwest of the temple of Apollon Didymeus next to the Sacred Way that connects the extra-urban sanctuary at Didyma to the *polis* of Miletos. The site proved to be of great importance for the assessment of Didyma in the Archaic period.

The paper builds upon a now completed study of finds from the excavations on Taxiarchis Hill, which were carried out under the direction of H. Bumke (MLU Halle-Wittenberg) between 2000 and 2009 with the support of the German Archaeological Institute and the Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Künste.¹ The excavations revealed a stratigraphic sequence that yields four phases of Archaic activity on the upper terrace of the hill. This sequence was sealed by a final feature in the Hellenistic period, thus largely protecting the Archaic contexts from disturbance by later building activities on the site. The closed character of the deposits on Taxiarchis Hill permits us to contextualise the rich findings with regard to cult activities, especially of the late Archaic period, in a very reliable way.

Despite the wide range of different finds, the plain and banded local common ware pottery makes up the lion's share in the deposits on Taxiarchis Hill. While the majority of vessels can be related to ritual feasting and dining,² the high amount of amphorae is noteworthy. The local amphorae of Milesian type – both the plain transport amphorae and the slightly smaller banded amphorae – comprise about 12% in the common ware assemblage. Amphorae are hence the second-largest group of vessels, only outnumbered by the Milesian band bowls that are the most prominent shape amongst the local table service. The frequency of shapes that belong to the set of ritual table service at Taxiarchis Hill is similar to that attested from other sanctuaries (e.g. Samos, Ephesos), whereas the sheer quantity of amphorae comes as a surprise.

More than 50% of the amphorae were found in the latest Archaic layers of ca. 500 BC. This confirms a high demand for supply that can be narrowed down to a very short time span, and thus indicates a large number of people taking part in the ritual celebrations at the sanctuary. The material record on Taxiarchis Hill seems to coincide with evidence from other find spots at Didyma and on Zeytintepe at Miletos, where a remarkable number of amphorae has been mentioned for the 6th century BC³. Apparently, a large quantity of amphorae did not become a typical feature in the assemblages of Milesian sanctuaries before then, given the contrary situation in the archaeological assemblage of the 7th century BC at Assesos.⁴ The amphora record might therefore be of further consequence for the diachronic assessment of ritual behaviours in the Archaic period.

Amphorae at Taxiarchis Hill, Didyma: n=171

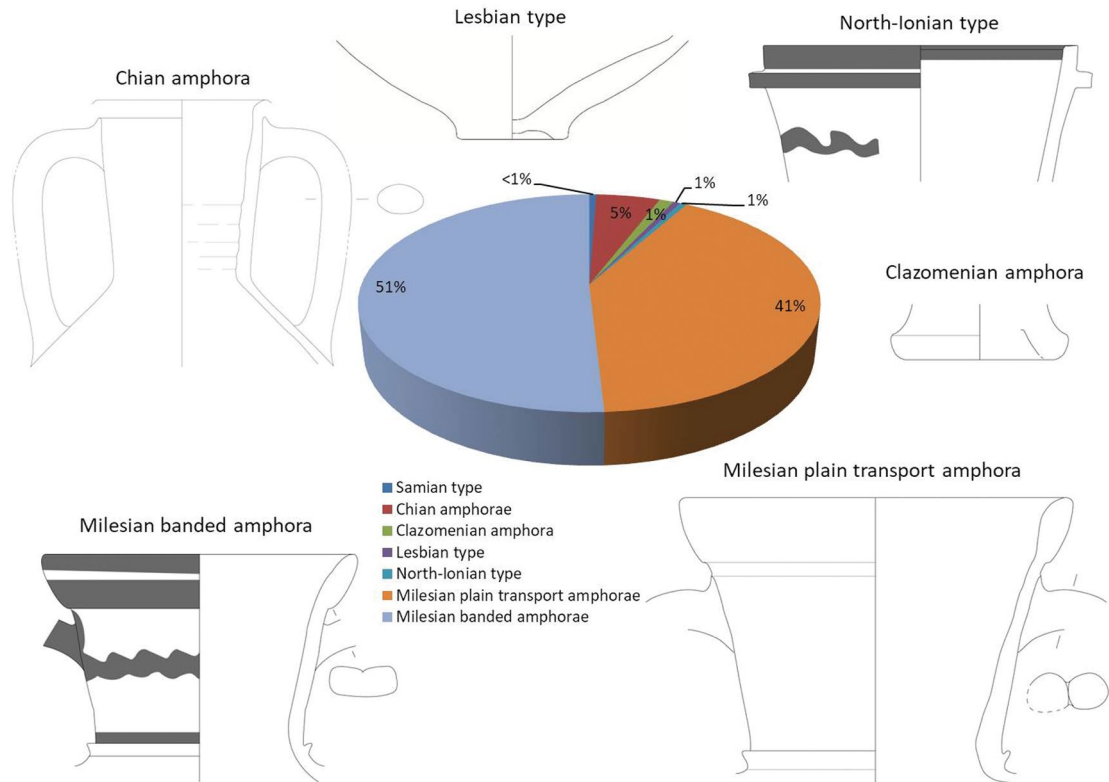


Fig. 1: Overview of the amphorae from the Archaic deposits on Taxiarchis Hill, Didyma.

According to the amphorae from Taxiarchis Hill, the supply of the sanctuary was provided almost exclusively by the surrounding Milesian region (fig. 1). The small number of imported amphorae with an emphasis on Chian vessels is a feature that again matches the evidence published so far from other places in the Milesian region.⁵ The considerable amount of imports other than amphorae from both inside and outside Ionia in the deposits on Taxiarchis Hill however confirms the scarcity of amphora imports as being the result of a very deliberate choice. The microregional nature of supply is further underlined by the high portion of the banded amphorae, which are thought to have served mainly for local and regional trade and transport.⁶

Two shoulder fragments show *dipinti*, and although they are not well enough preserved to be sure, comparable finds from contemporary sanctuaries⁷ give reason to believe that these jars were intended for the sanctuary already during the production process. Two other amphorae with *graffiti* were probably dedications to the sanctuary.

Both the high demands for goods as well as the presumed specific amphora production imply some kind of supervised organisation of supply at Late Archaic Didyma. Given the sanctuary's strong connection to the *polis* of Miletos at that time⁸, the maintenance of Didyma by the central *polis* is very likely.

There is little evidence of a ritual use of amphorae: Three vessels show an intentional perforation through the centre of their bases. That they might have been broken in order to reuse them for ceremonial activity, e.g. by integrating them into libation rituals, is one of the possible explanations, yet other models of reuse for these amphorae-bottoms, e.g. as a tool, are equally possible.

Notes

¹Bumke – Röver 2002; Bumke 2009; Bumke 2013; Bumke 2015; Bumke forthcoming.

²Bentz – Bumke 2013; Bumke 2013.

³Schattner 2007; Bîrzescu 2009.

⁴Kalaitzoglou 2008.

⁵Kalabaktepe: Naso 2005; Assesos: Kalaitzoglou 2008; Didyma: Schattner 2007.

⁶Bîrzescu 2009; Bîrzescu 2012.

⁷Zeytintepe: Bîrzescu 2009; Samos: Furtwängler 1980, 186; Kron 1984; Kron 1988; Furtwängler – Kienast 1989, 92–94.

⁸Herda 2006; Herda 2008; Herda 2011; Herda 2016.

Image Credits

Fig. 1: chart by author; pottery drawings by Ch. Kolb, author, Struber-İlhan.

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