

Roman and Late Antique Pottery of Southern Epirus: Some Results of the Nikopolis Survey Project*

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Two lines of inquiry will be presented here. First, this paper suggests some ways in which the Roman and Late Antique ceramic material collected in southern Epirus by the Nikopolis Project may be used to reconstruct southern Epirote trade with Italy and other parts of the Mediterranean after 31 BC. Second, evidence for change in the production technology of cooking vessels before and after the founda-

tion of Nikopolis is presented. Both lines of discussion relate to a central interpretive issue raised by several other participants at this conference: What was the extent of Roman cultural influence in southern Epirus following the foundation of Nikopolis?

Figure 1 indicates the areas in which the Nikopolis Project recovered the pottery discussed in this paper.² The most im-

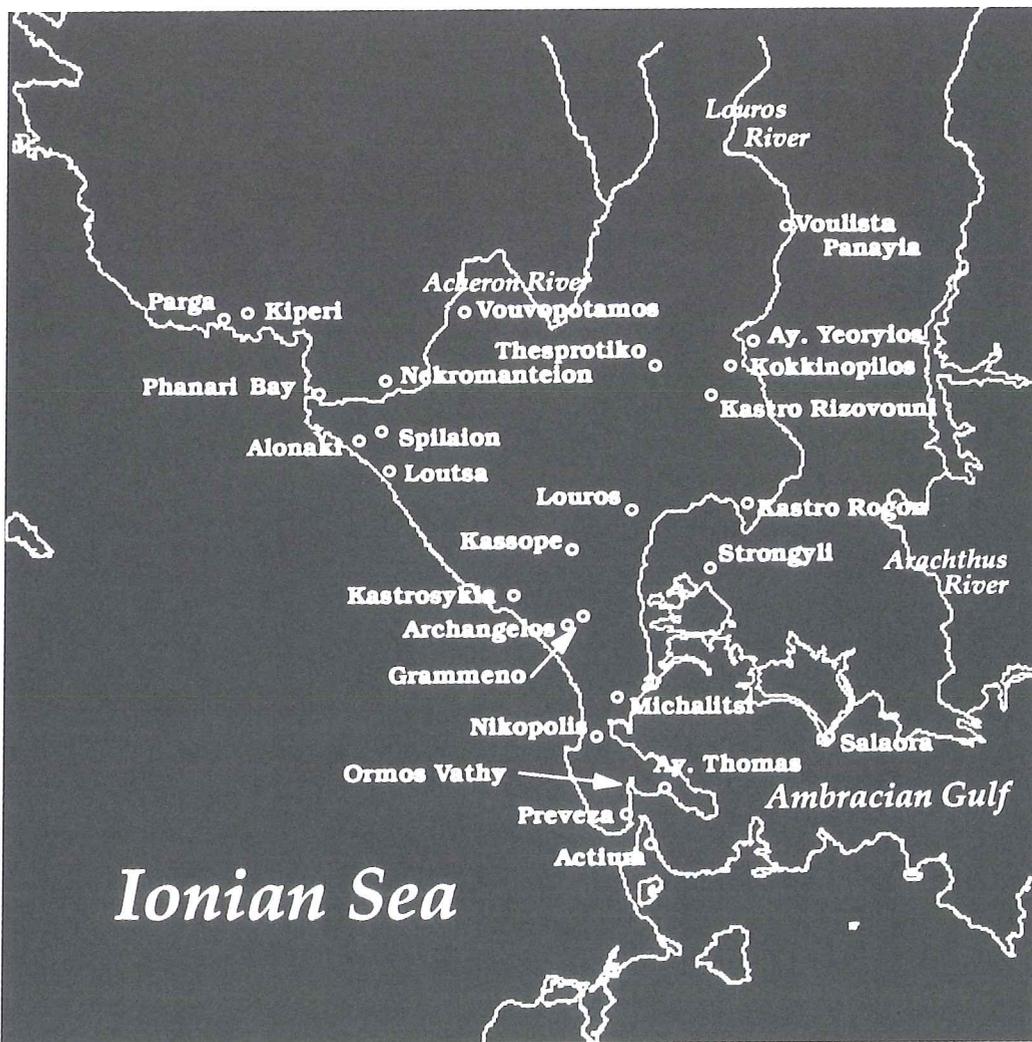


Fig. 1. Map of the Nikopolis Project survey region. (Nikopolis Project)

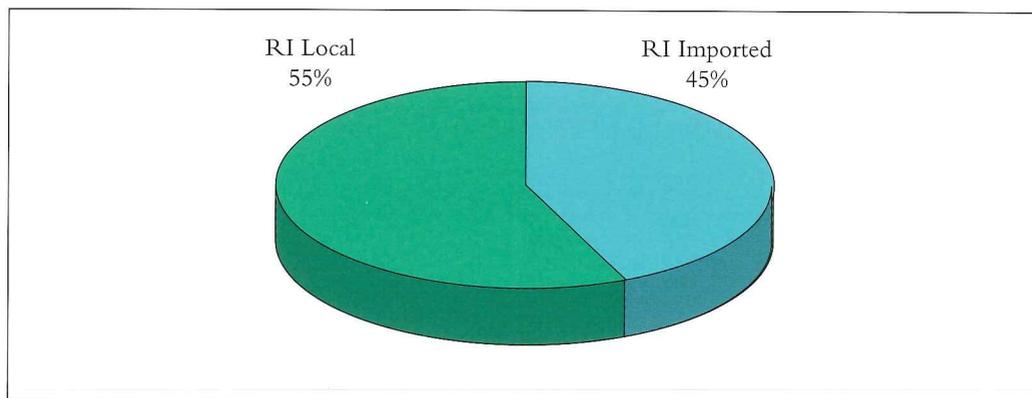


Fig. 2. Relative percentages of imported to regional ceramic products: Roman period.

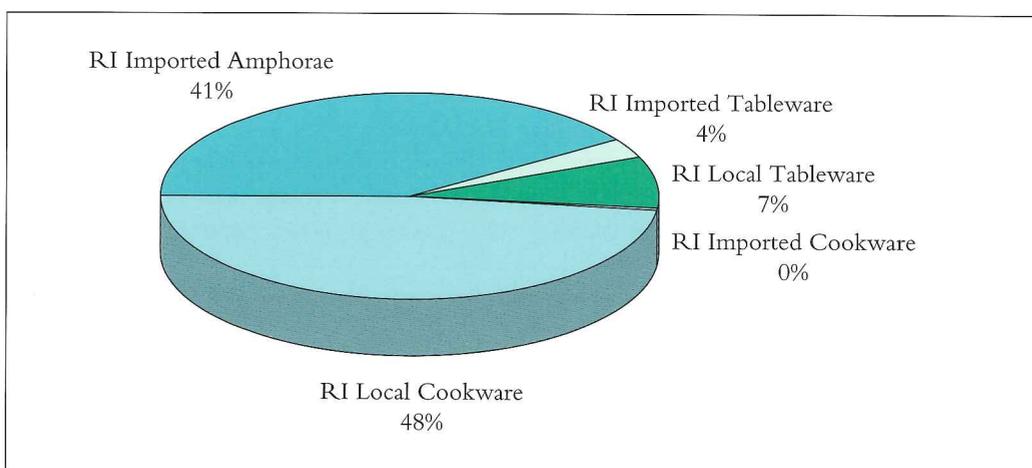


Fig. 3. Relative percentages of Roman-period transport amphorae, tableware, and cookware.

portant areas of the survey region for the purposes of this discussion are – from south to north – the Ayios Thomas peninsula, the Michalitsi hills, Kastro Rogon, Strongyli, the Archangelos plain, the Cheimadhio valley, and the Acheron River valley.

Overview of the Ceramic Evidence

In this section, some of the general features of the Roman and Late Antique pottery recovered by the survey are described, and observations are made concerning the importation, production, and distribution of this material.³ A consideration of the relative percentages of imported vessels and regional products reveals that nearly half of the total number of the ceramics dateable to the Roman period were imported from outside Epirus (Fig. 2). It is informative to compare the extent of importation of three different function-

al classes: transport amphorae, tableware, and cookware (Fig. 3). When the relative percentages of imports and local products are compared, an interesting pattern emerges. The Roman-period amphora fragments all represent imported vessels, and there is no evidence that amphorae were produced in southern Epirus during this period. All of the cookware fragments, on the other hand, represent regional Epirote products. Most of the examples of Roman tableware recovered by the survey were regional products, although some imports were collected as well. Thus, the survey evidence suggests that after the foundation of Nikopolis a local ceramic industry was able to fulfill the need for basic domestic wares. Some luxury items, such as imported tablewares, oils, and wines were also available.

A more detailed consideration of each of the three functional classes is illuminating. The tableware falls into two groups, including, first, fragments of Italian sigillata

Fig. 4. Relative percentages of imported to regional products: Late Antique period.

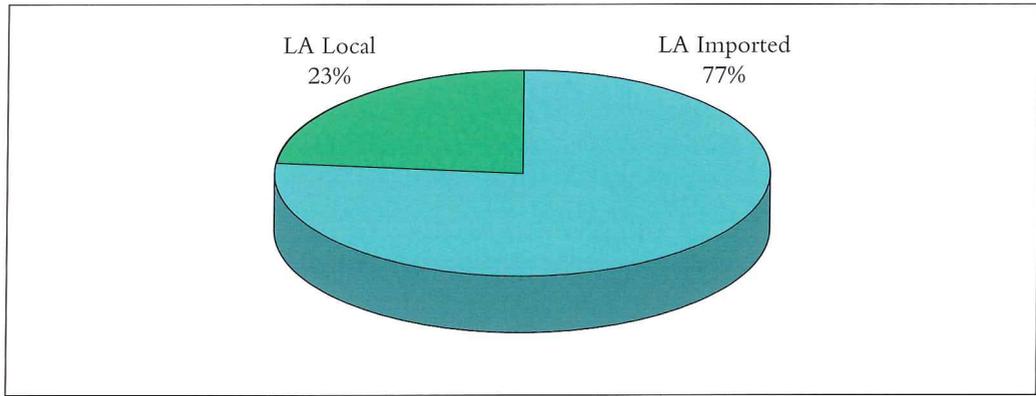
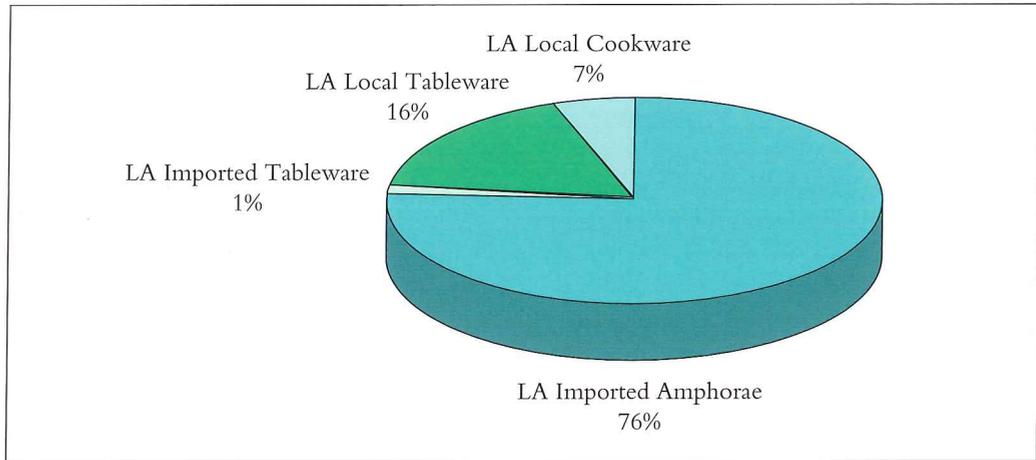


Fig. 5. Relative percentages of Late Antique transport amphorae, tableware, and cookware.



and regional imitations of Italian sigillata,⁴ and, second, early African Red Slip wares and regional imitations of these vessels. The Italian sigillata fragments consist exclusively of large platters of the Haltern 2 type. Most of the fragments of African Red Slip, and of local imitation Red Slip, are from platters and bowls; the diagnostic forms include examples of Hayes forms 8 and 50A, both of which were common in Greece in the 2nd - 3rd centuries AD. The distribution of these tablewares was limited to three areas of the survey region: two possible villa sites, one in the Archangelos plain, one in the Cheimadhio valley and several locations on the Ayios Thomas peninsula near what may have been part of the harbor town of Nikopolis.⁵

The fragments of imported amphorae exhibit a similar distribution pattern. Most examples of Roman-period amphorae were recovered on the Ayios Thomas peninsula and a few were found in two other (inland) parts of the survey area,

Archangelos and Cheimadhio. Of particular interest are fragments of Dressel 2-4 wine amphorae, several classes of North African oil amphorae,⁶ and a few examples of the Anemurium Type A amphora, which may have been used for wine transport.⁷ That these oil and wine transport vessels, all of which have fairly wide Mediterranean distributions, were brought into southern Epirus is not surprising given its location along important East-West shipping routes.

The distribution pattern of Roman-period cookware is different from that of the amphorae and tableware. Cookware fragments were found at a far greater number of sites in the Ayios Thomas peninsula, Archangelos, Cheimadhio, the Michalitsi region, Kastro Rogon, and the Acheron River valley than the number of sites at which examples of amphorae and tableware were collected. Most of the sites where the cookware fragments were found were small, in contrast to the large

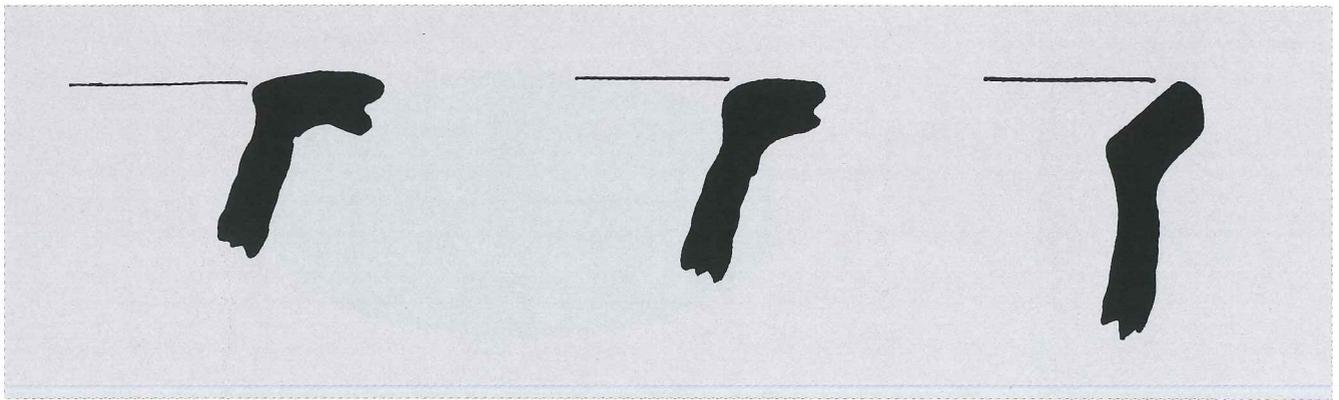


Fig. 6. Profiles of Roman-period cookware rims. Left to right: examples 1, 2, and 3.

villa or harbor-town sites where the majority of amphorae and tableware fragments were found. All of the examples of Roman-period cookware are believed to be regional Epirote products rather than imports. Despite the evidence for importation of Italian wines and Italian tableware, and for imitation of Italian forms in the production of local tableware, there is no evidence to indicate any importation of Italian cooking vessels, or any local imitation of Italian cooking-vessel forms.

During the Late Antique period there was a dramatic increase in the relative proportion of imported to locally produced ceramics (Fig. 4). Closer examination of the Late Antique material reveals that the reason for this change was an increase in the quantity of imported transport amphorae. The proportion of imported tableware decreased in the Late Antique period, reflecting an increased reliance on locally produced tableware (Fig. 5).

Most examples of imported tableware were African Red Slip types. The fragments recovered by the survey were almost exclusively from sites on the Ayios Thomas peninsula. Local imitations of African Red Slip wares, however, were found at a greater number of sites, including sites in the Acheron River valley, the Archangelos plain, Cheimadhio, and Kastro Rogon. In addition, a small number of fragments of Phocaean Red Slip were found on the Ayios Thomas peninsula.

The imported amphorae of the Late Antique period exhibit a distribution similar to that of the imported tableware. The greatest quantities of amphora fragments

were recovered at sites on the Ayios Thomas peninsula. The Carthage Late Roman 2, the Key form 8, and several different varieties of “spirally-grooved” amphorae are among the more common amphora types collected by the survey.

The cookware of the Late Antique period was, like that of the Roman period, found at a larger number of sites than were amphorae and tableware, including several small sites in the areas of Michalitsi, Kastro Rogon, Rizovouni, and the Acheron River valley. No cookware was imported in this period.

The distribution of imported and regional ceramic products suggests that during the Roman and Late Antique periods there was a gradual expansion in the importation of luxury wines and oils from Italy, Africa, and Asia Minor at a few large or wealthy sites, such as the Nikopolis harbor-town and the villas at Cheimadhio and Archangelos. During the same period, there was an increase in the number of small sites in the survey region – sites for which the cookware fragments are the only evidence for habitation. There is ample evidence for an increase in Epirote participation in the Mediterranean trade networks of the Roman Empire during the Late Antique period, alongside a strong tradition of reliance on local ceramic industries for the production of utilitarian cooking vessels and for tableware that imitated popular imported forms.

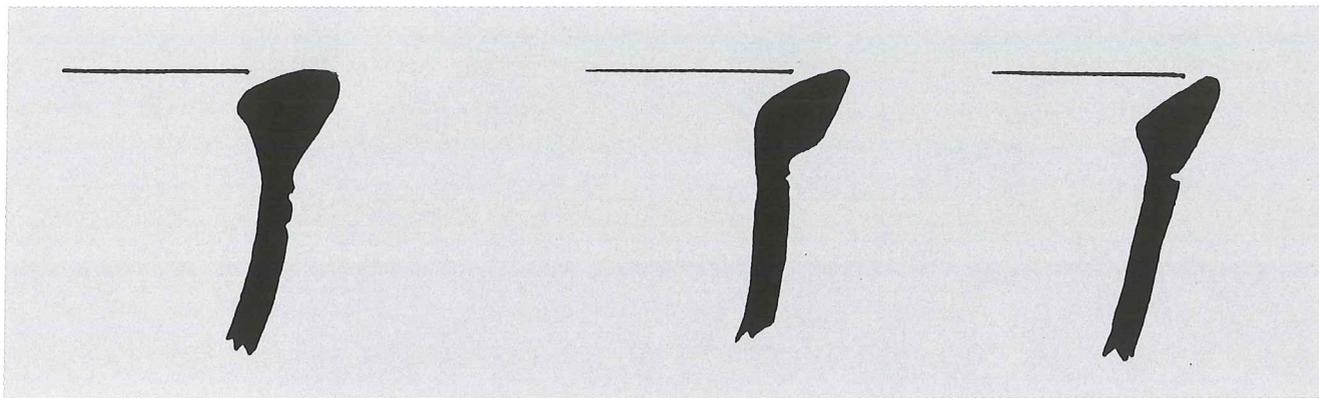


Fig. 7. Profiles of Late Antique cookware rims.

Cookware Production Technology

The production of cooking vessels in southern Epirus underwent several significant transformations in the course of the Roman and Late Antique periods. Prior to the foundation of Nikopolis, cookware produced in southern Epirus had strongly resembled, in form, cookware produced elsewhere in Greece. During the Roman period new forms, similar in shape to certain common Balkan types, were introduced. By the Late Antique period, forms common in both Italy and Greece were part of the Epirote cookware assemblage.

Casseroles (*lopades*) were important components of the Classical and Hellenistic Greek cookware assemblage and are the most common late Hellenistic cookware form recovered by the Nikopolis Project. They were used for broiling, braising, and simmering meat, fish, and vegetables, and their shallow, open form was well-suited to this function. Like many other Greek cooking-vessel types, casseroles were usually round-bottomed rather than flat (a shape that gave them extra stability when propped over a heat source on small, irregularly shaped cooking struts).⁸ They were shallow and wide-bellied and were equipped with distinctively shaped lid seatings.

Casseroles are not generally found on Roman sites in great numbers. In contrast, baking pans and frying pans – two distinctive Republican Italian forms – are not usually found in great numbers on Classical and Hellenistic Greek sites. While

cooking operations requiring boiling or stewing were common to both cultures, it is possible to draw a distinction between the more “Greek” practice of braising or simmering and the more “Italian” practice of frying and baking.⁹ Several examples of casserole rim fragments dateable to the late Hellenistic period were collected by the survey teams, but no examples of Italian baking or frying pans were recovered, suggesting that local cooking practices still followed a “Greek” model after the Roman conquest of Epirus in 167 BC.

The casserole fragments collected by the Nikopolis Survey project are all in a fine-grained orange-red clay fabric with very few visible aplastic inclusions.¹⁰ These vessels had very thin walls, and were fired in an oxidizing atmosphere. Indistinct dark gray cores are very common, indicating that the firing process concluded before the clay was fully oxidized.

In thin-section, this ware is characterized by a high concentration of small, moderately sorted, subangular to subrounded quartz, plagioclase feldspar, and chert grains. Mica grains are also present in small amounts (Pl. 1). Plate 2 is a photomicrograph of a sample of a type of clay (fired in an oxidizing atmosphere to about 750° C) that may have been used to produce Hellenistic cookware vessels. Clays like this one are found in abundance in the Michalitsi and Koukos areas, in the same places where most of the Hellenistic casserole fragments were collected by the survey.

After the foundation of Nikopolis, changes in the shape and production of

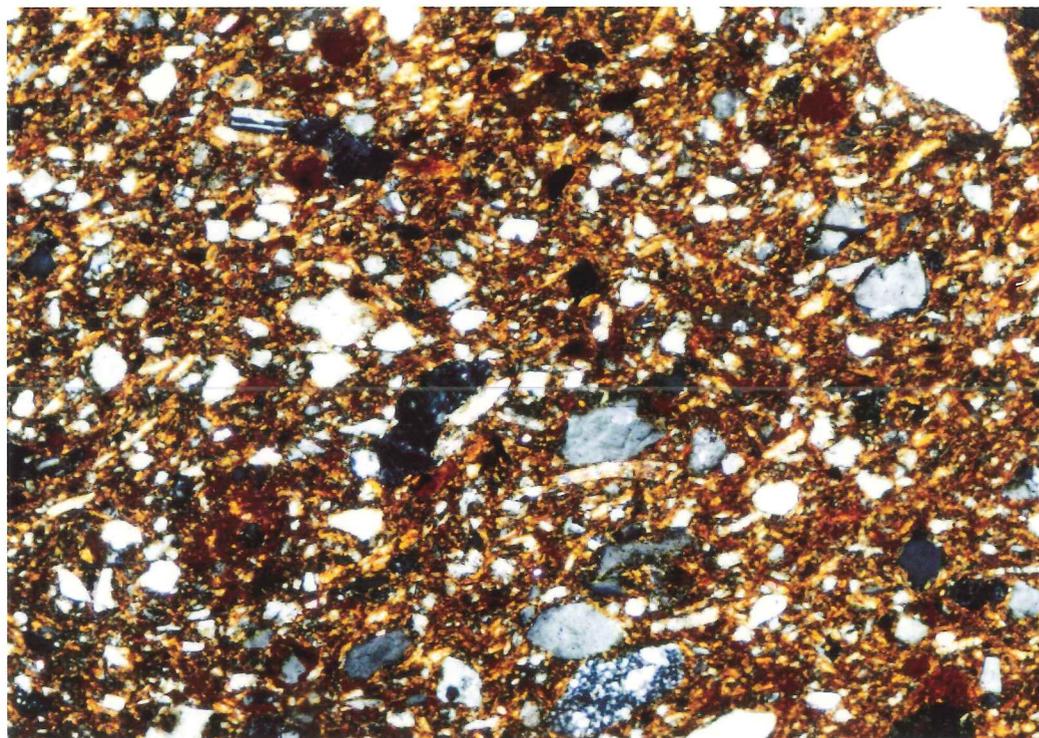


Plate 1. Photomicrograph of late Hellenistic cookware in thin-section. Magnification 25x. Crossed-polarized light.

cooking vessels may be noted. Many of the Roman-period cookware fragments collected by the survey are from deep, round-bottomed vessels – used for stewing and boiling – with a distinctive deep grooving around the outer edge of a wide, flat rim (Fig. 6. 1–2). The distinctive rim bears a strong resemblance to published examples of cooking vessels from Roman levels at Butrint and other early Roman sites in the Balkans, rather than contemporary vessels from sites in Greece or Italy.¹¹ Other fragments do resemble, in shape, vessels found in Corinth, Isthmia, Athens, and other Roman sites in the Mediterranean (Fig. 6. 3).

All of the Roman-period cookware fragments belong to a different ware group than that of the Hellenistic-period cooking vessels. The new ware group is characterized by the presence of very large, sharp aplastic inclusions; like the Hellenistic wares, however, the Roman cookware was fired in an oxidizing atmosphere. Plate 3 illustrates the appearance of a Roman-period cooking vessel in thin-section. The clay is characterized by the presence of large, poorly sorted, angular chert, quartz, and feldspar grains, and is

easily distinguished in both thin-section and hand-specimen from the clay used the Hellenistic-period cooking vessels.¹² Plate 4 is a photomicrograph of a clay sample collected on the Ayios Thomas peninsula, fired in an oxidizing atmosphere to about 900° C; this type of clay is a good mineralogical match to the Roman-period cooking vessels. Clays of this general type are available throughout the survey region, and further study will be required in order to address the question of a specific production location (or the possibility of multiple production locations) for vessels made from this kind of clay.

A new set of firing practices had been adopted by the beginning of the Late Antique period. The Late Antique cooking vessels recovered by the survey are dark-gray to black in color, and contain large, sharp, aplastic inclusions. Plate 5 illustrates the appearance of the Late Antique cookware vessels in thin-section. The mineralogical composition and texture of these vessels is the same as that of the Roman-period vessels, but the fabric has been blackened throughout, possibly a result of firing in a reducing atmosphere. These cooking vessels probably resembled, in

Plate 2. Photomicrograph of clay sample from the Koukos region, in thin-section. Magnification 25x. Crossed-polarized light.

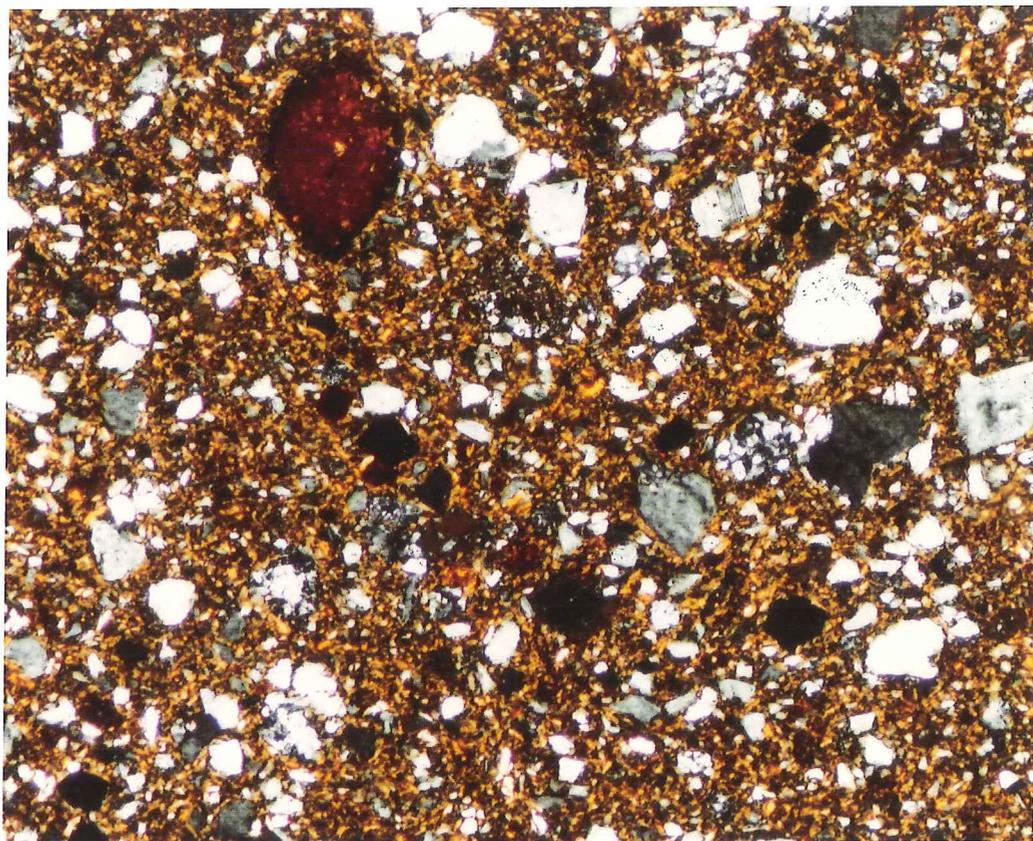
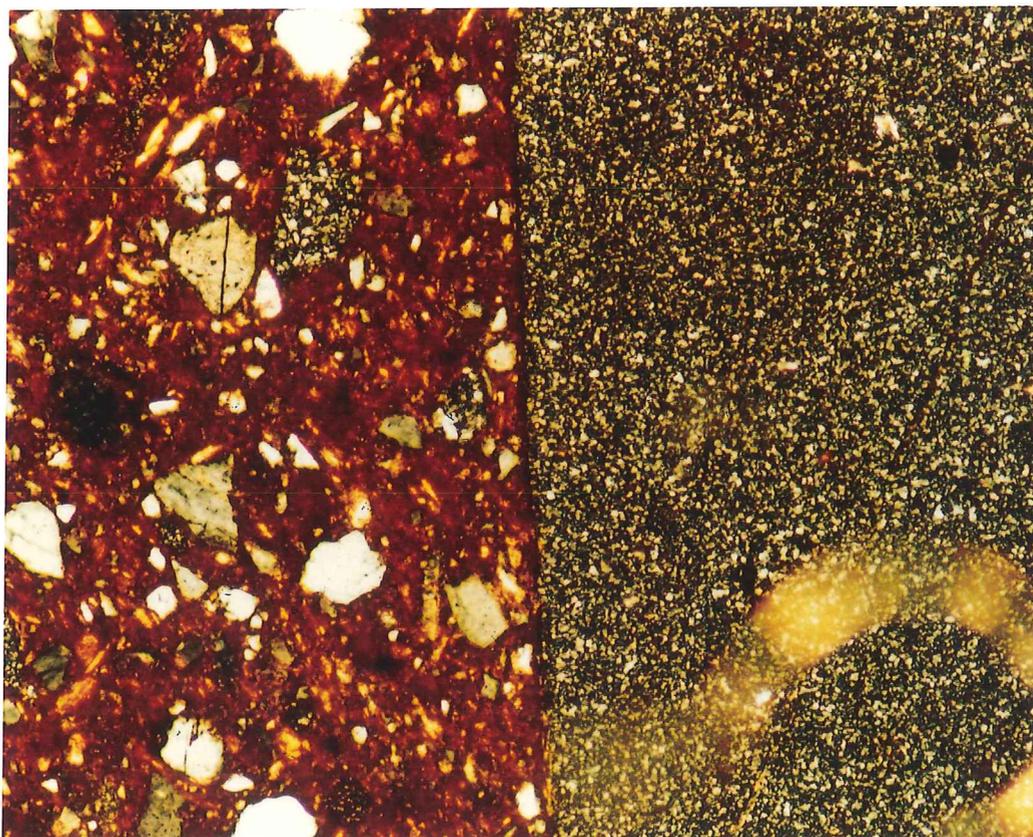


Plate 3. Photomicrograph of Roman-period cookware in thin-section. Magnification 25x. Crossed-polarized light.



shape, the deep, round-bottomed forms found on many sites in southern Greece in the same period (Fig. 7).

In summary, preliminary analyses of the coarsewares collected by the Nikopolis Project indicate that there were significant changes in the production of southern Epirote cooking-vessels during the Roman and Late Antique periods. The first such change took place shortly after the foundation of Nikopolis. New cookware forms were introduced, including forms common at southern Greek sites during this period as well as a different form found throughout Epirus and the southern Balkans. Shortly after the synoecism, new kinds of clay were used to produce southern Epirote cookware. A new firing practice for cookware was adopted by the early 4th century AD. During the Late Antique period, too, the shapes of the cooking vessels appear to have resembled contemporary southern Greek forms.

Conclusions

Some interesting conclusions emerge from this preliminary study of southern Epirote pottery. Southern Epirus maintained throughout its history a reliance on local production of coarse cooking-vessels, although the technology used to produce these vessels changed considerably during the Roman and Late Antique periods. Local production of tableware was important in both periods, but many local tablewares were produced as imitations of popular forms imported from Italy, Asia Minor, and North Africa. The survey recovered no evidence of amphora production in southern Epirus; all dateable amphorae fragments represent imported vessels that brought luxury foodstuffs such as wine and olive oil to Epirus from other parts of the Roman world, such as Italy and North Africa. The quantities of these amphorae in southern Epirus, though always rather small, did increase significantly from the 1st through 5th centuries AD, reflecting an increased participation in the pan-Mediterranean trade networks that developed over the course of this period.

The social impact of the Roman presence in southern Epirus is indicated to some extent by the uneven distribution of different vessel classes within the survey area. During both the Roman and Late Antique periods, the distribution pattern of imported amphorae and tablewares was significantly different from that of locally produced coarsewares, with the imported goods having a far more restricted distribution. The imported wares were recovered at large villa sites and an urban harbor area near Nikopolis itself, whereas the local cookware products are more evenly distributed across the landscape, even in areas (such as Michalitsi) where the primary period of occupation was previously thought to have ended with the Nikopolitan synoecism. Perhaps in the course of the 1st through 4th centuries AD there was a gradual resettlement of the land around the new Augustan city.

The social impact of the Roman presence in southern Epirus manifested itself in other ways as well. Disruptions of the regional social order, triggered perhaps by the synoecism process in the late first century BC, were severe enough to have caused change in the regional ceramic industry. Shifts in the selection of clay resources in the 1st century AD, for example, may have resulted from change in access to clay resources following the political reorganization of the region. The adoption of new firing processes by the 4th century AD may also reflect a reorganization of the ceramic industry in the aftermath of repeated invasions by Gothic and Slavic groups.

Further research will be necessary in order to address more fully the impact of the Roman conquest on ceramic usage in southern Epirus. Ongoing analyses of the material collected by the Nikopolis Survey Project will, it is hoped, refine these preliminary results. In the future, a full integration of survey and excavation data for this region would play an important role in the development of a more complete understanding of the Roman and Late Antique pottery of southern Epirus.

Plate 4. Photomicrograph of clay sample from the Ayios Thomas peninsula, in thin-section. Magnification 25x. Crossed-polarized light.

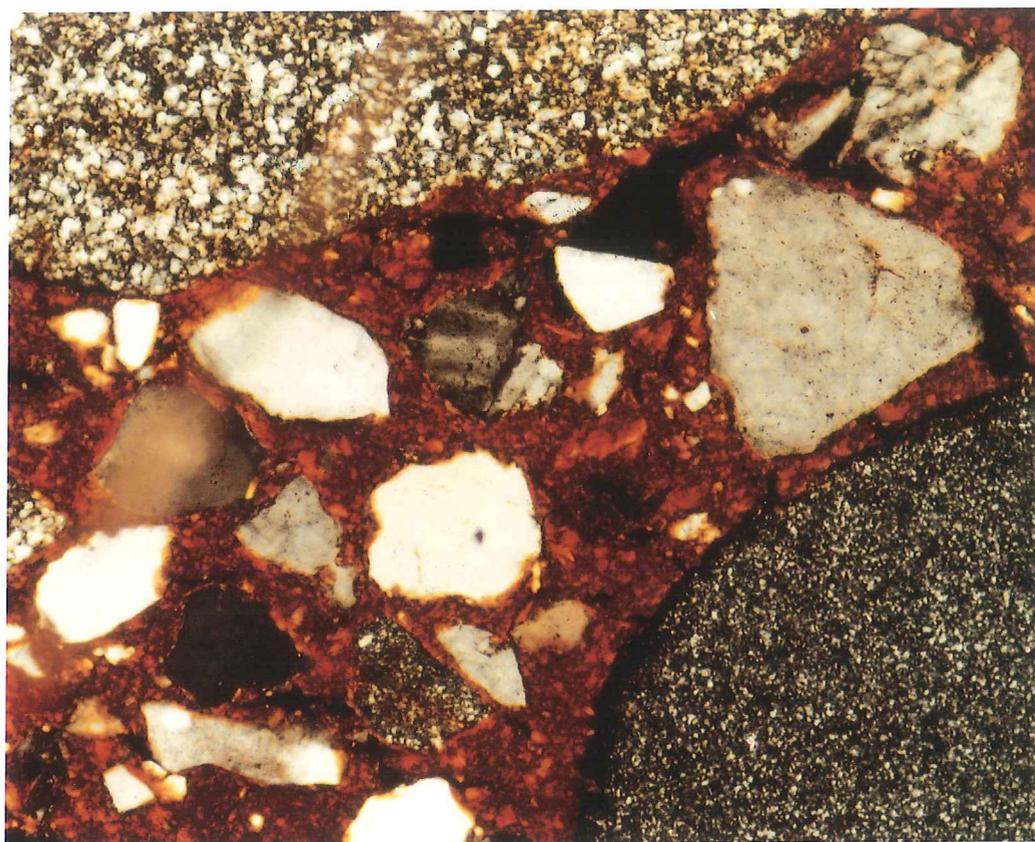
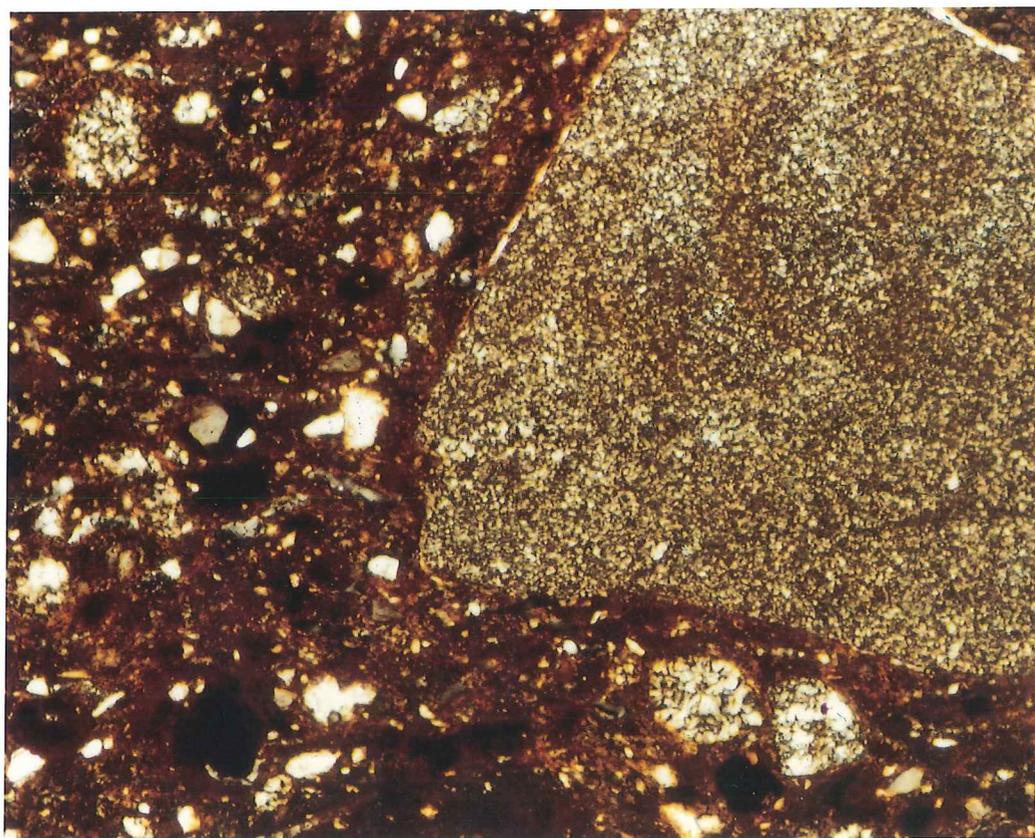


Plate 5. Photomicrograph of Late Antique cookware in thin-section. Magnification 25x. Crossed-polarized light.



Notes

NOTE 1*

I would like to acknowledge, with thanks, the assistance and kindness of the Danish Institute at Athens – especially of Drs. Signe and Jacob Isager – both during the conference at which this paper was first presented and in the subsequent preparation of the manuscript for publication. I am grateful to Virginia Anderson-Stojanovic' for generously sharing with me her expertise in the study of Roman pottery; any inaccuracies that appear in this paper are, of course, my own. William Morison provided invaluable editorial assistance and support. The assistance of the Greek Archaeological Service and the Wiener Laboratory of the American School of Classical Studies are also gratefully acknowledged.

NOTE 2

See J. Wiseman, this volume, and Wiseman and Zachos (in press) for a full discussion of survey methodology and the topography of the survey region.

NOTE 3

The Roman period is defined for the purposes of this paper as beginning in 31 BC and extending through the late 3rd century AD. The Late Antique period is here defined as the 4th to 6th centuries AD.

NOTE 4

I am grateful to Dr. K. Gravani for sharing with me her expert views on the identification of southern Epirote sigillatas.

NOTE 5

C. Stein, in this volume, presents the Ayios Thomas data in more detail.

NOTE 6

The most common forms represented are early "Africana Grande" and "Africana Piccolo" (Riley MR amphora 16, 17) and Riley MR amphora 14.

NOTE 7

See Williams 1989, 92-3 for discussion of this amphora type and its production in Cilicia.

NOTE 8

For a useful general discussion of Greek cooking practice, see Sparkes 1962; Bats 1988 is an important discussion of the differences between the Greek and Roman cookware assemblage. Berlin 1997, 121-122 is a useful summary of the Greek use of cooking struts and of the differences in Greek and Roman use of heat sources in cooking.

NOTE 9

It should be noted, of course, that typically "Italian" vessels do appear in ever increasing quantities in Greece following the consolidation of Roman hegemony in Greece after 146 BC. Even after the Roman conquest of Greece, however, most cookware forms were not *supplanted*, but were, rather, *supplemented* by the introduction of standard Roman cookware forms such as the flat

baking dish (*patina/patella*). It is also interesting to note that *lopades* appear only very rarely in the Latin literary sources for cooking practices, in which baking vessels such as *patinae* and *patellae* and frying vessels such as the *patera* receive the greatest attention. Greek literature, on the other hand (specifically, Old and New Comedy), abounds in references to the use of *lopades*.

NOTE 10

The dating of cookware sherds based on clay fabric is a problematic practice. The same clay fabric appears to have been in use in southern Epirus at least as early as the Archaic period, and, therefore, cannot serve as the sole criterion for dating this material. The casserole sherds discussed here have been dated to the late Hellenistic period on the basis of shape rather than fabric class.

NOTE 11

See, for example, Baçe 1981. Like the Albanian vessels, the fragments collected by the survey have deeply grooved, broad horizontal rims and two vertical handles extending from either the upper or lower edge of the rim. Parallels to these vessels elsewhere in the Mediterranean are rare.

NOTE 12

Ongoing textural analyses suggest that these are differences in clay resource selection, and not in tempering practice.

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