

# Commentary on African Red Slip Ware with appliqués and relief decoration in the Carthage Museum

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## Summary

A collection of appliqué- and relief-decorated African Red Slip Ware from the mid-Imperial period and late antiquity in the Musée National de Carthage was catalogued by M. Armstrong. Despite the lack of precise findspots in Carthage, this material is of particular importance as evidence for the appliqué-decorated north and central Tunisian fine ware of the 3rd c., which turns up rarely in the crates of pottery deriving from the excavations carried out by international teams starting in 1974. Both the older and the succeeding A<sup>1/2</sup> production phase of the appliqué-decorated ARS produced in NE Tunisia during the last third of the 2nd and the first third of the 3rd c. are represented by a total of 24 rim and wall fragments, as well as by two almost completely preserved vessels. The C<sup>1/2</sup> main phase of central Tunisian production at Sidi Marzouk Tounsi, which can be dated from the early to the third quarter of the 3rd c., can also be traced, with 9 vessels and 2 fragments. The C<sup>2</sup> late phase, which can be dated to the last quarter of the 3rd c., is present in two vessels. The fragments probably all derived from settlement rubbish, whereas the more or less completely preserved vessels are more likely to have been used as grave goods in the Roman cemeteries of Carthage. The central Tunisian products probably conquered the Carthage market during or after the decline of the A<sup>1/2</sup> potteries (around A.D. 220/235?). At least in the case of the late-antique appliqué- and relief-decorated ARS, the central Tunisian C<sup>3</sup> and C<sup>4</sup> products retained their dominant market position at Carthage until the middle of the 5th c.<sup>1</sup>

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## Frequently cited works:

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- LRP = J. W. Hayes, *Late Roman pottery* (London 1972).
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- Salomonson, J. W. 1969. "Spätromische rote Tonware mit Reliefverzierung aus nordafrikanischen Werkstätten. Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur reliefgeschmückten Terra Sigillata 'C'," *BABesch* 44, 4-109.
- Salomonson, J. W. 1973. "Kunstgeschichtliche und ikonographische Untersuchungen zu einem Tonfragment der Sammlung Benaki in Athen," *BABesch* 48, 3-74.
- 1 Cf. R. S. Tomber, "Pottery from the 1982-83 excavations," in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *The circus and a Byzantine cemetery at Carthage*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor, MI 1988) 437-529, esp. 448 nos. 16-22, fig. 2; 456, nos. 80-81,

## Introduction

From the early 1960s until around 1980, J. W. Salomonson carried out fundamental research into the history of motifs on N African sigillata decorated with appliqués and mould-made reliefs. The focus was on the depictions of the 'El Aouja group' of the 3rd c. and the late-antique *terra sigillata chiara C* and *D*. The collections of major European and N African museums, including the National Museums of Carthage and Tunis–Le Bardo, were taken into consideration. Expressive multi-figure compositions with sequences of several coordinated motifs or motifs belonging to a mythological narrative on late-antique bowls Hayes 53A and rectangular plates Hayes 56 were seen early on by Salomonson as products of N African workshops; however, at that time the production centres were not yet localised. Ultimately, he was able to work out the connections between the late-antique appliqué- and relief-decorated N African sigillata (*terra sigillata chiara C* and *D*) based on identical motifs.<sup>2</sup>

At around the same time, J. W. Hayes was working on the extensive holdings of African Red Slip Ware (= ARS) resulting from the American excavations in the Athenian Agora<sup>3</sup> and A. Carandini on those from the stratigraphic excavations in Ostia's Terme del Nuotatore.<sup>4</sup> The emphases of these archaeologists were very different: Hayes' study, published in 1972, laid the foundation for the typology, classification and chronology of the plain as well as the relief- and stamp-decorated forms of ARS.<sup>5</sup> He developed the chronological framework primarily based on closed (undisturbed), partially coin-dated pottery deposits from the Athenian Agora. Carandini refined the categorisation based on N. Lamboglia's work and, with S. Tortorella, E. Tortorici and L. Sagui, classified them — taking into account the descriptions of the fabrics by Hayes — in the *Atlante delle forme ceramiche*, vol. I of 1981.<sup>6</sup>

Even if the application of the classification of the fabrics is by no means simple, it seems necessary, when handling the original material, to determine not only the forms (according to Hayes) but also the fabrics (according to *Atlante I*) — i.e., the clay matrix and slip/*engobe*. This should also be the aim with decontextualised material such as the ARS decorated with appliqués and reliefs in the Musée de Carthage that was catalogued by M. Armstrong. In this case, the qualitative execution and style of the appliqués, as well as their arrangement in the form of decorative schemes, which certainly reveal workshop-specific differences, should also be taken into account. However, Armstrong refrained from identifying the fabrics and in her contribution has not provided supportive drawings of the vessel profiles of the 17 mostly complete or largely preserved vessels or the 64 fragments. Obviously, no find contexts have survived, but 16 vessels from the 3rd c. are likely, in light of their good state of preservation, to have served as grave goods in one of the cemeteries of Carthage. The fragments, on the other hand, probably are to be regarded as settlement waste from mid-Imperial to late-antique Carthage.

In the days when Armstrong recorded the material of the appliqué- and relief-decorated ARS, it was not clear where the appliqué- and relief-decorated sigillata of the early 3rd to mid-5th c. had been produced, despite a preliminary report on the British-Tunisian survey conducted in 1984/85 in central Tunisia that was designed to locate the major production centres for sigillata and lamps.<sup>7</sup> In my view, however, the published repertoire of ARS forms and lamps from Sidi Marzouk Tounsi near El Ala,<sup>8</sup> southwest of Kairouan, suggests that production of the late-antique appliqué- and

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fig. 6.

2 Salomonson 1962, 53-95; Salomonson 1969, 4-109; Salomonson 1973, 3-74.

3 J. W. Hayes, *Roman pottery: fine ware imports. The Athenian Agora XXXII* (Princeton, NJ 2008) 67-82.

4 A. Carandini, "Sigillata chiara," in id. *et al.* (edd.), *Ostia I. Le Terme del Nuotatore* (StMisc 13, 1968) 28-36.

5 *LRP* 13-309.

6 *Atlante* 1981, 19-183.

7 Peacock *et al.* 1990.

8 *Ibid.* 66-74, figs. 5-9.

relief-decorated ARS also took place there.<sup>9</sup> I visited the extensive production centre in the autumns of 1994 and 1997 and could confirm the production of appliqué-, relief- and stamp-decorated ARS based on surface finds.<sup>10</sup>

At the suggestion of the editor of this volume, an attempt will be made here — unfortunately without the necessary autopsy of the pieces — to identify the fabrics and forms of the appliqué- and relief-decorated ARS catalogued by Armstrong and to specify the production of various pottery production centres, as well as to refine the dating, if possible. This is the prerequisite for the first steps in any assessment of the supply of appliqué- and relief-decorated ARS to Carthage by the leading fineware potteries and production centres. On the other hand, no further investigation of the iconographic motifs — and in particular of the mythological depictions, by taking into account the literature of the last 30 years<sup>11</sup> — will be undertaken here.

### **African Red Slip Ware with appliqué decoration in fabric A<sup>1/2</sup> (NE Tunisia) and C<sup>1/2</sup> (central Tunisia)**

Over the last three decades, the state of knowledge of the production of the central Tunisian appliqué-decorated sigillata of the 3rd c., the ‘El Aouja group’ or A/C (= C<sup>1/2</sup>) sigillata, has improved considerably, not least due to chemical analyses (WD-XRF)<sup>12</sup> which make it possible to attribute a large part of the forms and motifs (fabric C<sup>1/2</sup>) to Sidi Marzouk Tounsi.<sup>13</sup> Only a small production of a few forms (fabric C/E), easily identifiable due to the dull maroon to deep brownish-red colour of the clay and slip, can be attributed to the central Tunisian production centre of Henchir el-Guellal near Djilma.<sup>14</sup>

The assessment of a second group of appliqué-decorated sigillata from the last third of the 2nd c. and the early 3rd c., of which Salomonson recognised several forms (id. 1968, table II: forms XV, XXII-XXIV, XXVIII) as a stylistically independent group and identified them as *sigillée claire A*,<sup>15</sup> is considerably more complicated. This fabric corresponds to fabric A<sup>1/2</sup> defined in *Atlante I*.<sup>16</sup> Both fabric A<sup>1/2</sup> and the pottery-specific repertoire of forms compiled by S. Tortorella characterise this group,<sup>17</sup> although in the same work E. Tortorici assigned forms XV, XVIII, XXIII and XXVIII to the C<sup>1</sup> and C<sup>2</sup> sigillata.<sup>18</sup> There was therefore no clarity, above all due to the lack of a stylistic analysis of the appliqué motifs and the decorative schemes — i.e., the arrangement of the appliqués on the vessels according to predetermined patterns.<sup>19</sup> M. Bonifay dealt with only a selection of appliqué-decorated plates and bowls of the *sigillée africaine A* (his sig. types 14C, 14D, 15, 19-23)

9 Cf. *ibid.* 68; they mentioned the investigation of the decorated ARS, which was then in preparation by F. Bejaoui.

10 Mackensen 1998, 358-61, figs. 4-5; Mackensen and Schneider 2002, 131-32, fig. 5.

11 Cf. J. J. Herrmann Jr. and A. van den Hoek, *Light from the age of Augustine. Late antique ceramics from North Africa (Tunisia). Catalogue Harvard Divinity School* (Cambridge, MA 2002); S. Costa, “Nuovi frammenti di terra sigillata africana dalla collezione Benaki, forme Hayes 56 e Hayes 89A: contribute allo studio dell’immaginario di età tardoantica,” *Studi Classici e Orientali* 54 (2008) 281-346; A. van den Hoek and J. J. Herrmann Jr., *Pottery, pavements and paradise. Iconographical and textual studies on late antiquity* (Suppl. Vig. Christ. 122; Leiden 2013); S. zu Löwenstein, “Mythologische Darstellungen auf Gebrauchsgegenständen der Spätantike. Die appliken- und reliefverzierte Sigillata C<sup>3</sup>/C<sup>4</sup>,” *KölnJb* 48 (2015) 397-823; Mackensen 2019; M. Flecker (ed.), *Zwischen Dionysos und Christus. Bild und Tafelgeschirr im römischen Nordafrika* (Kiel 2022).

12 Mackensen and Schneider 2002, 131-34, fig. 5; 141 Table 6; 151-54 fig. 22; Mackensen and Schneider 2006. Recently, Mackensen 2019, 358 f., Table 1.

13 Mackensen 2019, 55 f., fig. 20.

14 Cf. Salomonson 1968, 103 with n.68, for the plain form A10 (= Form XXIII with appliqué decoration [Table II]).

16 *Atlante* 1981, 19 f. and 144-47.

17 *Ibid.* 144-47, pl. 72.1-8.

18 *Ibid.* 147-56, pls. 73.1, 6 and 10; 75.8.

19 Cf. Mackensen and Schneider 2006, 168-70, figs. 3-4.