

The pottery production of Punic Carthage

Babette Bechtold, version 21.5.2010

The archaeological research conducted over the last thirty years has given clear evidence for the existence of a local pottery production at Carthage from its earliest occupation period onwards, that is to say from the second half of the 8th century BC.¹ As an excellent example of the presence of high percentages of locally produced ceramics (Handmade Ware, Plain Ware, Red Slip-and Bichrome Ware and amphorae) already in deposits of the second half of the 8th century BC one might mention a stratified archaeological sequence yielded by the recent excavations of the University of Ghent/INP in trench 4 of Bir Messaouda.²

As a part of the 'industrial belt' of Early Punic Carthage, the pottery quarter has been identified in the southern edges of the settlement, near the ancient coast line and below the Roman *cardo* IX3, while kilns active during the Late Punic period have been excavated at Carthage-Dermech and Carthage-Douimès.⁴

Consequently, it can be considered as a matter of a fact that the overwhelming majority of the impressive volumes of pottery which characterise the whole of the settlement deposits of Punic Carthage has been produced by local workshops. This holds for almost all ceramic classes attested to within the large span of time from the second half of the 8th to the middle of the 2nd century BC:

1. The table wares, that is to say the Red Slip- Bichrome and Smoothened Wares⁵ of the Early Punic and Early Punic/Middle Punic period (760-480 BC)⁶, the Painted Ware⁷ of the Middle Punic period (480-300 BC) and the Black Glaze Ware⁸ of the Late Punic period (300-146 BC).
2. The Plain Wares of the whole Punic period.⁹
3. The Transport Amphorae of the whole Punic period.¹⁰
4. The Handmade Pottery¹¹

¹ Archaeological levels dating to the second half of the 8th-early 7th century have been identified in several areas of the ancient settlement, for a recent overview see Docter 2007b, 43-49, contexts 1-79.

² Docter *et alii* 2008.

³ For the localization of this area in respect to the rest of the settlement see Docter 2007b, 38, fig. 1, no. 2. Rakob 1989, 164-166, 190-192, fig. 5 A9.15.18.19. For the pottery dump related to the activities of one of the kilns of the ceramic quarter see Vegas 1990.

⁴ Vegas 1990, 34 with references.

⁵ For a detailed description of the macroscopic characteristics of the local fabrics and the morphological repertoire of the Carthaginian series see ultimately C. Briese, A. Peserico in: Niemeyer *et alii* 2007, 271-272, Peserico 2002, Peserico 2007 and Briese 2007 with earlier references.

⁶ For the revised period system developed from the deposits excavated on the Bir Messaouda see now Bechtold 2010, 4-6.

⁷ For a recent discussion of the class and previous references see Bechtold 2007a, esp. 328-332. Ultimately see Bechtold 2010, §§ 2.3, 2.6.

⁸ For a detailed description of the macroscopic characteristics of the presumably local fabrics and references to the excavation of the 'dépotoir' of La Rabta, near Carthage, consisting in misfired Black Glaze ware, see ultimately B. Bechtold 2007, 561-566, 575-586. For a recent discussion of the morphological repertoire of the local Black Glaze series see Bechtold 2010, §§ 3.1.1., 3.2.1 and Bechtold forthcoming, § 4.

⁹ For a detailed description of the macroscopic characteristics of the local fabrics and the typological occurrence of this class see Bechtold 2007a with earlier references; Bechtold 2010, §§ 2.3, 2.6., 3.1.2, 3.2.3.

¹⁰ For the Early Punic and Early Punic/Middle Punic period see Docter 1997 and Docter 2007a. For the Middle Punic period see Bechtold 2008, for the Late Punic period see Bechtold 2010, §§ 3.1.5, 3.2.6, all with earlier references.

¹¹ Mansel 2007 with further references.

Nevertheless, archaeometric analysis suggesting a local origin¹² are available only for some of these classes basically of the Early Punic period, and more specifically for the amphorae¹³ and the Red Slip- and Bichrome Ware¹⁴.

In particular, the detailed study of this latter class undertaken by A. Peserico has shown that almost 90% of the 1750 fragments selected for this research, based on a macroscopic examination of the pottery, belong to a fabric labelled 'K', the remaining 10% is splitted over more five fabrics.¹⁵ Fabric 'K' is characterised by a reddish yellow or yellowish red clay (5 YR 6/6 – 5/6), tempered with numerous rounded grains of quartz, less common white particles, clay inclusions (chamotte), varying in size, in addition to regularly sorted voids of round shape. This kind of fabric corresponds to what for the Hamburg excavations below the Decumanus Maximus has been defined as 'KTS', that is to say 'Karthago Ton Struktur'.¹⁶ The strong macroscopic similarity between the archaeometrically investigated Early Punic fabrics and the ones of the Middle and Late Punic series indicate, however, a great continuity of pottery tradition.

The archaeometric analyses undertaken by Amadori and Fabbri (1998) on selected Red Slip samples of presumably local fabric have identified two different clays, L1 and L2, distinguished on the basis of the granulometry of the inclusions. The authors suggest to explain this result with a change of the raw material which seems to have taken place during the second half of the 7th century BC, given that the samples defining the finer clay L2 seem to date generally to within the late 8th and the middle of the 7th century BC, while group L1 is composed by items dating from 650 BC onwards c.¹⁷

Very recently B. Maraoui Telmini¹⁸ has made a first effort to localise some of the possible ancient sources of the raw materials used for the Carthaginian pottery production. Consequently, samples from the natural clay deposits of 1. the area called 'Amilcar', situated on the slopes of the Sidi Bou Said hill; 2. the area called 'Ghar Ettfal' near El Maalga; and 3. the mountain called 'Jebel El Khaoui' at Gamarth were collected and submitted to analysis (XRF and XRD) which remain, however, still unpublished. The archaeometric analysis undertaken by the Tunisian team focus also on the differences between the pottery production of Carthage and the c. 40 km. distant Punic Utica on the northern coast of Tunisia.

In conclusion, up to now the pottery production of Early Punic Carthage has been sufficiently characterised by archaeometric analyses, which are still outstanding, however, for the Middle and Late Punic series. Notwithstanding this handicap, the exhaustive documentation, within the FACEM database, of nearly 80 samples dating from the Early Punic II (7th-6th century BC) period to the Late Punic II (2nd century BC), but mainly to the Middle Punic period (5th-

¹² Archaeometric analyses of some Late Punic amphorae and Black Glaze Wares found on the island of Pantelleria suggest a Carthaginian origin, see Amadori *et alii* 2002 (for the amphorae) and Amadori *et alii* 2006 (for the Black Glaze Ware). For the forthcoming results of the analyses of pottery samples from Middle and Late Punic deposits of Carthage see also note 18.

¹³ See G.H.J.M. Blessing in: Docter 1997, 191. For another assemblage of samples referring presumably to amphorae of Carthaginian fabric see Botto *et alii* 2005, group E, 65, tab. 6, 73-75, 84, 90, 94, 102.

¹⁴ For the open forms only see more specifically Peserico 2002, 16-17. Amadori, Fabbri 1998.

¹⁵ Peserico 2002, 11-16, for the fabric description of fabric 'K' see p. 12

¹⁶ C. Briese, A. Peserico in: Niemeyer *et alii* 2007, 269 with earlier references.

¹⁷ For a critical comment on the selection of the samples and the interpretation of the results see Botto 2001, 163-166.

¹⁸ Maraoui Telmini *et alii* forthcoming. In addition to the soil samples, pottery samples from Carthage (from a closed deposited dated to within 360-340 BC, excavated in trench 7 of Bir Messaouda in 2004 and from the Late Punic kiln of Carthage-Dermech) and Utica (various provenances) have been taken for archaeometric analyses.

4th century BC) gives clear evidence for the very homogeneous appearance of the Carthaginian series all over nearly six centuries.

References

Amadori M.L., Fabbri B., Indagini archeometriche su ceramica fenicia da mensa proveniente da Cartagine (VIII-VI sec. a.C.), in: Acquaro E., Fabbri B. (eds.), *Produzione e circolazione della ceramica fenicia e punica nel mediterraneo: il contributo delle analisi archeometriche* (Ravenna 1998), Bologna, 43-55.

Amadori *et alii* 2002, Amadori M.L., Baldassari R., Lanza S., Maione M., Penna A., Acquaro E., Archaeometric Study of Punic Amphorae from the Underwater Recoveries of Pantelleria Island (Sicily), *Revue d'Archéometrie* 26, 79-91.

Amadori *et alii* 2006, Amadori M.L., Del Vais C., Ercolani P., Raffaelli G., Studio archeometrico sulle ceramiche puniche a vernice nera, in: Acquaro E., Cerasetti B. (eds.), *Pantelleria punica. Saggi critici sui dati archeologici e riflessioni storiche per una nuova generazione di ricerca*, Bologna, 208-237.

Bechtold B., 2007a, Die phönizisch-punische Gebrauchskeramik der archaischen bis spätpunischen Zeit, in: Niemeyer *et alii* 2007, 327-431.

Bechtold B., 2007b, Die importierte und lokale Schwarzfirnisware, in: Niemeyer *et alii* 2007, 492-587.

Bechtold B., 2008, Observations on the Amphora Repertoire of Middle Punic Carthage, *Carthage Studies* 2, 1-146.

Bechtold B., 2010, The Pottery Repertoire from Late 6th-Mid 2nd Century BC Carthage: Observations based on the Bir Messaouda Excavations, *Carthage Studies* 4, Ghent.

Bechtold B., forthcoming, Le imitazioni locali di forme ceramiche alogene a Cartagine (V-II sec. a.C.), in: *The problem of 'imitations' throughout the protohistory and classic period in the central and occidental Mediterranean: between the concept and the example* (Iberia Archaeologica series).

Botto M., 2001, Indagini archeometriche sulla ceramica fenicia e punica del Mediterraneo centro-occidentale, *Rivista di Studi Fenici* XXIX,2, 159-181.

Botto *et alii* 2005, Botto M., Deriu A., Negri D., Oddone M., Segnan R., Trojsi G., Caratterizzazione di anfore fenicie e puniche mediante analisi archeometriche, *Mediterranea. Quaderni annuali dell'Istituto di studi sulle civiltà italiche e del Mediterraneo antico del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche già "Quaderni di Archeologia Etrusco-Italica"* (Pisa 2006) 57-106.

Briese Ch., 2007, Red Slip-Glattwandige und Bichrome Ware archaischer Zeit: Geschlossene Formen, in: Niemeyer *et alii* 2007, 305-327.

Docter R.F., 1997, Archaische Amphoren aus Karthago und Toscanos. Fundspektrum und Formenentwicklung. Ein Beitrag zur phönizischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Dissertation Amsterdam.

Docter R.F., 2007a, Archaische Transportamphoren, in: Niemeyer *et alii* 2007, 616-662.

Docter R.F., 2007b, Published Settlement Contexts of Punic Carthage, *Carthage Studies* 1, 37-76.

Docter *et alii* 2008, Docter R.F., Chelbi F., Maraoui Telmini B., Nijboer A.J., van der Plicht J., Van Neer W., Mansel K., Garsallah S., New radiocarbon dates from Carthage: Bridging the gap between history and archaeology? in: Sagona C. (ed.), *Beyond the Homeland: Markers in Phoenician Chronology*, Leuven, Paris, Dudley, 379-422.

Mansel K., 2007, Handgemachte Ware und Schwerkeramik, in: Niemeyer *et alii* 2007, 432-448.

Maraoui Temini *et alii* forthcoming, Maraoui Telmini B., Bouhleb S., Abdelwahed H., Hosni F., Observations on Clay Characteristics of Local Punic Plain Ware from Carthage and Utica, in: Sagona C. (ed.), *Ceramics of the Phoenician-Punic world: a workshop* (Malta 2007), Leuven.

Niemeyer *et alii* 2007, Niemeyer H.G., Docter R.F., Schmidt K., Bechtold B. *et alii*, 2006, Karthago. *Die Ergebnisse der Hamburger Grabung unter dem Decumanus Maximus* (Hamburger Forschungen zur Archäologie 2), Mainz a.R.

Peserico A., 2002, Die offenen Formen der Red Slip Ware aus Karthago. Untersuchungen zur phönizischen Keramik im westlichen Mittelmeerraum, *Hamburger Werkstattreihe zur Archäologie* 5.

Peserico A., 2007, Red Slip-Glattwandige und Bichrome Ware archaischer Zeit: Offene Formen, in: Niemeyer *et alii* 2007, 271-305.

Rakob F., 1989, Karthago. Die frühe Siedlung, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*, 96, 155-208.

Vegas M., 1990, Archaische Töpferöfen in Karthago, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*, 97, 33-56.