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HUMAN DEPICTIONS ON A GROUP OF LATE ROMAN RED-SLIPPED WARE FROM WESTERN ASIA MINOR

İclal ÖZELCE, Ergün LAFLI, Maurizio BUORA

*In memoriam Sezer Gök
(4.08.1964–28.8.2024)*

Raffigurazioni umane su un gruppo di oggetti tardoantichi in terra sigillata dell'Asia Minore occidentale

In questo breve articolo trattiamo otto frammenti provenienti da Focea, che sono evidentemente ceramica di Focea con impato rosso e recano raffigurazioni di figure umane e monogrammi a croce. L'articolo è la continuazione del primo sulla ceramica di Focea pubblicato l'anno scorso su questa stessa rivista (ÖZELCE İ., E. LAFLI, M. BUORA 2023) che esaminava motivi completamente nuovi. Tutti questi frammenti provengono da scavi di salvataggio effettuati nel 2001 dalla Direzione del Museo di Izmir.

Parole chiave: Focea, Anatolia occidentale, Turchia, Mediterraneo orientale, ceramica di Focea a ingobbio rosso, ceramica tardo romana C, stampe, ceramica tardo romana-protobizantina.

Abstract

In this brief paper we deal with eight fragments from Phocaea which are obviously Phocaean red-slipped ware and they bear depictions of human figures as well as cross monograms. The paper is a continuation of the first paper on the Phocaean pottery published last year in the same journal (ÖZELCE İ., E. LAFLI, M. BUORA 2023) which examined completely new motifs. All these sherds come from rescue excavations carried out in 2001 by the Directorate of the Museum of Izmir.

Keywords: Phocaea, western Anatolia, Turkey, eastern Mediterranean, Phocaean red-slipped ware, Late Roman C ware, unpublished stamps, Late Roman–Early Byzantine pottery.

1. INTRODUCTION

The eight decorated sherds with human depictions presented here were recovered in 2001 during the rescue excavations in the İsmet Paşa quarter in ancient Phocaea (map 1) and they are typically Phocaean red-slipped ware (PRSW) of Late Roman–Early Byzantine period. The excavated area is located on the Küçükdeniz coastal avenue opposite residences numbered 108 and 106, which is opposite to the Celep Hotel in northern part of Eski Foça. They were found in excavation units 14 (coordinates R:72–71; 1.94–2.14 m below the sea level), 20 (coordinates R:59–58; 1.54 m below the sea level), R.50 (coordinate R:50; 3.00–3.30 m below the sea level), R.59 (coordinate R:59; 3.00–3.50 m below the sea

level) and R.73 (coordinate R:73; 3.00–3.50 m below the sea level). These units and their assemblages were generally dated between the late fifth and mid–sixth century AD. In the unit 14 a terracotta mould fragment, most probably of the fifth century AD, and an inscribed plate were recovered.

Phocaean red-slipped ware is recognizable by its thin reddish slip over a fine fabric, often with occasional white (lime) inclusions. The main period of production is the late fourth century AD into the seventh century, contemporary to the later production of African red-slipped ware as well as Smyranean red-slipped ware. Most of the forms are open forms, i.e., bowls or dishes, and later forms have stamped decoration. In this brief paper, a continuation of the first



Map 1. Phocaea and other main red-slipped production centres in western Anatolia (drawn by F. H. Kaya, 2024).

article on the Phocaean ware published last year in the same journal (ÖZELCE İ., E. LAFLI, M. BUORA 2023), the focus is given again on these stamped decoration.

2. DECORATION

The decorative repertoire of Roman and Late Roman Phocaean red-slipped ware is extensive. As very well known, these decorations generally emulate African red-slipped ware³. On Phocaean ware ornamentations executed using the rouletting technique are present on the external surfaces of vessel rims. Notably, decorations were never applied below the level of the rim band². The external surfaces of vessel rims exhibit incised grooves, rouletting, and impressed channels in single, double, or multiple rows, featuring crescent or geometric motifs. Other decorations executed using the stamping technique include geometric patterns, kantharoi, floral and faunal designs, mythological creatures, various cross types, and human as well as angelic figures. In 2001 six sherds were found which bear human or angel figures and two sherds with a cross monogram for which we do not find any exact parallels. It seems that the Late Roman red-slipped ware from the Agora of Smyrna is showing closest parallels to our pieces in Phocaea in the regards of fabric, typology and decoration. In the following part we describe them in detail:

Cat. no. 1 (fig. 1): The venator (hunter) figure is depicted in profile. He is characterized by short hair, an eye, a pointed nose, and an open mouth. The garment indication resembles a wing, represented by long rods forming S-curves. The figure's left hand is raised, with three different hunted animals aligned vertically below it. A palmette motif is positioned behind the animals.

Cat. no. 2 (fig. 2): The decoration features a frontal depiction of a nude winged human or angel figure. The thickness of the figure's legs and the prominence of the muscles suggest it may represent a male. However, the winged depiction also allows

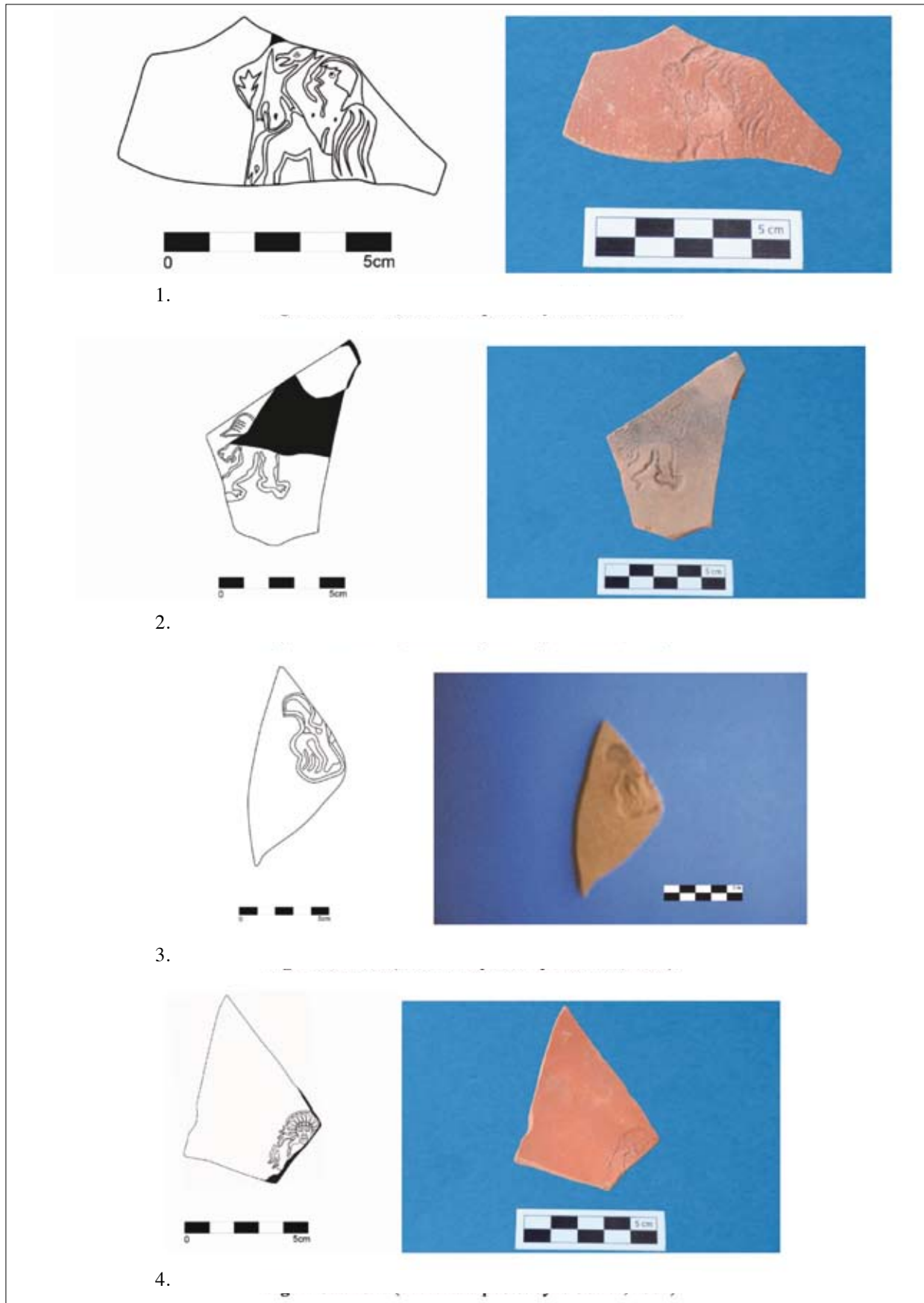
for its interpretation as an angelic figure. The figure is presented frontally, with the legs turned to the left and depicted in a walking pose. Leg muscles and knees are rendered in detail. Feet and hand digits are stylized. The upper part of the body and head are not preserved, and an indented contour surrounds the decoration.

Cat. no. 3 (fig. 3): Due to poor impression quality, the human figure decoration appears almost in silhouettes. The figure, standing in profile, is stylized with an indistinct body and arms, and separated legs. The head is slightly inclined forward from the right side, and a thick double-grooved contour surrounds the figure.

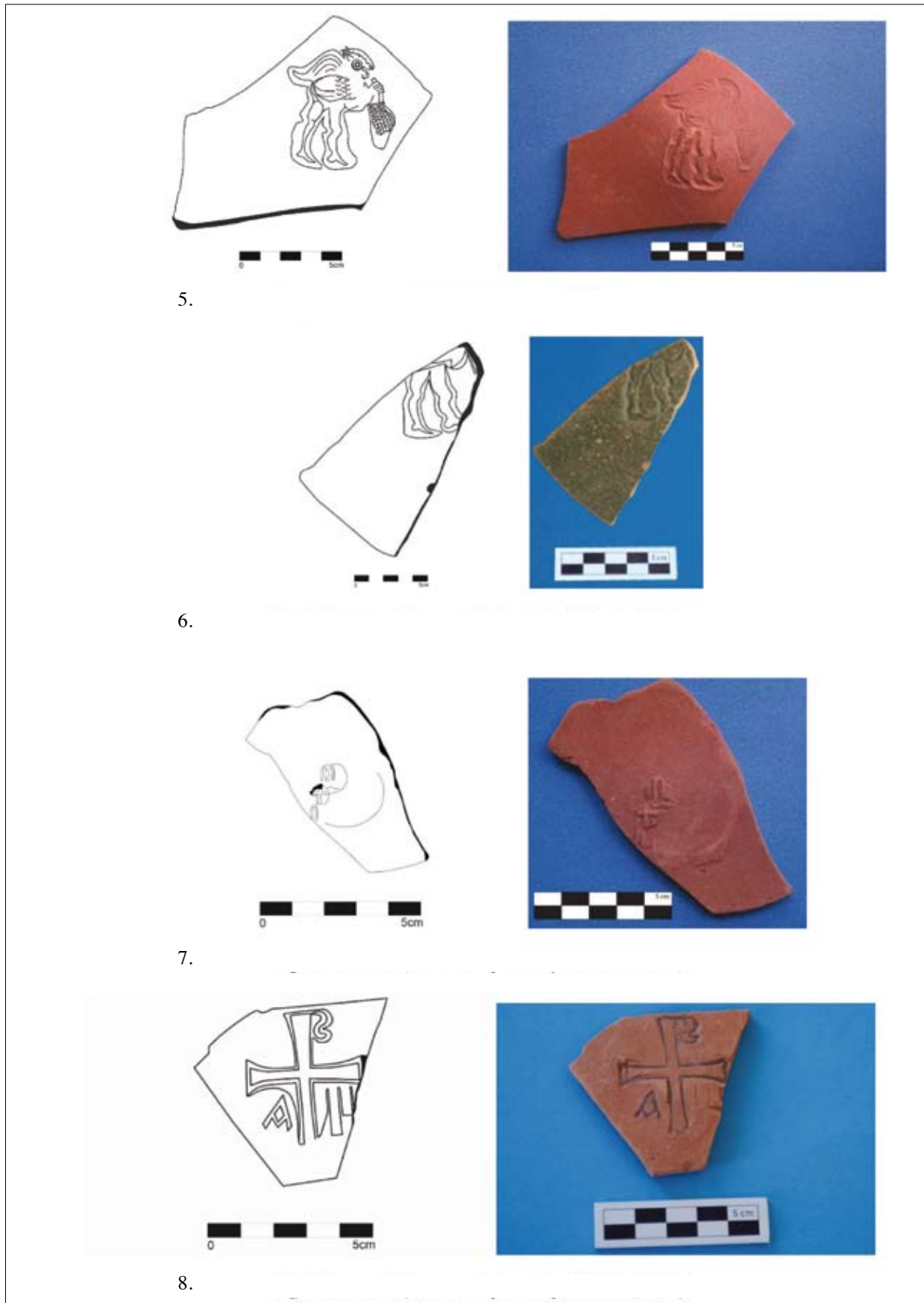
Cat. no. 4 (fig. 4): The frontal figure evokes the impression of a man. The preserved portion includes the figure's head and one shoulder. Pointed quadrilateral shapes, which can be interpreted as hair or long feathers, are depicted surrounding the entire head. The eyes are large and concentric, round, with small square shapes covering the entire forehead, possibly representing hair. The nose is straight, large, and quadrilateral. The upper and lower lips are depicted as thick and parted. Wing-like protrusions on the right shoulder suggest the possibility of an angelic figure.

Cat. no. 5 (fig. 5): A nude male or angelic figure holding a bunch of grapes is depicted in profile. The presence of wings allows for its interpretation as an angelic figure. The figure's feet are apart, depicted walking towards the right, with the right leg thinner than the left. Leg muscles, calves, knees, feet, and hand digits are rendered in detail. While the legs and fingers resemble human features, the head shape, the large quadrilateral nose, ears, large eyes, and horns suggest an animal-like depiction. A wide, indented, and stepped contour surrounds the figure holding a bunch of grapes by its stem.

Cat. no. 6 (fig. 6): The preserved portion of the ceramic shows two legs of a figure. These legs are identical to those in cat. no. 5.



Figs 1-4. Illustrations and photos of cat. nos. 1-4 (drawn and photo. by İ. Özelce, 2001).



Figs 5-8. Illustrations and photos of cat. nos. 5-8 (drawn and photo. by İ. Özelce, 2001).

3. CROSS MONOGRAMS

Only two sherds bear cross monograms which are made under the influence of African red-slipped ware¹. As in the rest of the Anatolian workshops of red-slipped ware, such as, e.g., Smyrna, Ephesus, Pitane, Cnidus, Pergamum and Tralles, Phocaeon workshop is one of the first which used cross as a decoration symbol among its stamps.

Cat. no. 7 (fig. 7): Monogram with an omega and alpha, sized similarly to the central small cross, are positioned respectively above and below a very small cross decoration. A groove immediately surrounding the decoration and another groove encircling the tondo are not clearly visible.

Cat. no. 8 (fig. 8): The arms of the monogrammed and hooked (open rho) Greek cross are of equal length, slightly widening towards the ends and terminating with sharp, straight corners. The hook, i.e., an open rho, attached to the right corner from our perspective of the upper vertical cross arm terminates in an outward spiral. Monograms, interpreted as alpha in the left corner and a comb-like omega in the right corner from our perspective, are depicted in the corners below the cross's lateral arms. The cross decoration is surrounded by an indented contour.

4. CATALOGUE

SHERDS WITH HUMAN-ANGEL FIGURES

Cat. no. 1. Amorphous base fragment with a venator-hunter figure (fig. 1).
Find-spot. Unit 20 R 59.
Diam. 70 mm, p. H. 38 mm.
Clay 10 R 6/8 light red, slip on exterior surface 10 R 5/8 red.
Sparse secondary calcite, very sparse fine-grained sand, very sparse rock fragments, low porosity, hard.
Iconographically no parallel is known to the authors.
AD 470–580.

Cat. no. 2. Amorphous base fragment with a nude man or angel figure (fig. 2).
Find-spot. Unit 20 R 59.

Diam. 51 mm, p. H. 90 mm.
Clay 2.5 YR 6/4 light reddish brown, slip on exterior surface 10 R 5/6 red.
Sparse secondary calcite, very sparse rock fragments, low porosity, hard.
Comparandum. EROL 2011, p. 534, cat. no. 633.
Second half of the fifth century–first quarter of the sixth century AD.

Cat. no. 3. Amorphous base fragment with a walking human figure (fig. 3).
Find-spot. Unit 20 R 59.
Diam. 50 mm, p. H. 120 mm.
Clay 2.5 YR 5/8 red, slip on interior surface 2.5 YR 5/8 red, exterior surface 10 R 5/6 red.
Very sparse secondary calcite, sparse fine-grained sand, sparse fine-grained lime, low porosity, hard.
Comparandum. HAYES 1972, p. 362, fig. 77, 53/J; EROL 2011, pp. 535–536, cat. no. 635, 638.
AD 470–580.

Cat. no. 4. Amorphous base fragment with a frontal man's head or angel figure (fig. 4).
Find-spot. Unit 14 R 73.
Diam. 57 mm, p. H. 78 mm.
Clay 5 YR 6/6 reddish yellow, slip on exterior surface 5 YR 7/8 reddish yellow.
Sparse secondary calcite, sparse rock fragments, very sparse fine-grained lime, low porosity, hard.
Comparandum. EROL 2011, p. 442, cat. no. 413.
AD 470–580.

Cat. no. 5. Amorphous base fragment with a nude man or angel figure holding a bunch of grapes (fig. 5).
Find-spot. Unit 20 R 59.
Diam. 120 mm, p. H. 92 mm.
Clay 7.5 YR 5/6 strong brown, slip on exterior surface 5 YR 6/6 reddish yellow.
Dominant secondary calcite filler, sparse rock fragments, low porosity, hard.
Comparandum. HAYES 1972, p. 360, fig. 77,55/L.
AD 470–580.

Cat. no. 6. Amorphous base fragment with a nude man or angel figure (fig. 6).
Find-spot. Unit 20 R 59.
Diam. 96 mm, p. H. 150 mm.
Clay 2.5 YR 5/6 red, slip on interior surface 10 YR 3/1 very dark gray, exterior surface 2.5

YR 4/6 red.

Dominant secondary calcite filler, very sparse rock fragments, very sparse mica inclusions, low porosity, hard.

Comparandum. HAYES 1972, p. 360, fig. 77,55/L.

AD 470–580.

Cat. no. 7. Amorphous base fragment with a cross monogram (fig. 7).

Find-spot. Unit 59.

Diam. 41 mm, p. H. 58 mm.

Clay 2.5 YR 5/6 red, slip on interior surface 2.5 YR 6/8 light red, exterior surface 5 YR 5/8 red.

Very sparse secondary calcite, abundant fine-grained sand, sparse rock fragments, low porosity, hard.

Iconographically no parallel is known to the authors.

Cat. no. 8. Amorphous base fragment with a cross monogram (fig. 8).

Find-spot. Unit R50

Diam. 64 mm, p. H. 55 mm.

Clay 10 YR 5/6 red, slip on interior surface varying from 5 YR 4/2 dark reddish gray to 7.5 YR 5/4 brown, exterior surface 2.5 YR 4/8 red.

Very fine-grained sand, sparse rock fragments, very sparse fine-grained lime, low porosity, hard.

Comparanda. HAYES 1972, p. 364, fig. 78,66/H; ADAMSHECK 1979, pl. 24, no. 35/R; ADAK-ADIBELLİ 2006, p. 210, cat. no. 324, pl. 28; EROL 2011, p. 432, cat. no. 393.

This type of cross belongs to Hayes type 66. Late fifth century AD.

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All the illustrations were drawn and photographs were made by İ. Özelce in 2001.

Map 1 is included by arrangement with Dr Fatih Hakan Kaya (Dokuz Eylül University, Izmir) in 2024 to whom we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation.

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NOTE

¹ SCHRUNK 1984, p. 353.

² HAYES 1972, p. 324.

³ HAYES 1972, pp. 348–349.

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