

CYLINDRICAL GLASS BOTTLES FROM NORTHERN GREECE

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ABSTRACT

The note presents an unpublished glass bottle that was yielded from the Byzantine shipwreck of Pelagونيسos and four similar fragmented bottles from Chalkidiki, two from Veria and two from Simantra, from contexts dated to the late twelfth century CE.

THE PELAGONNESOS SHIPWRECK

The Byzantine shipwreck off Pelagونيسos (or Pelagos) near Alonnesos Island in the Aegean Sea was investigated by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture in 1970.¹ The project was aiming to salvage the shipwreck, which had been known for some time and had attracted the attention of looters. The wreck was studied, and eventually a large part of the cargo was recovered. It consisted predominantly of tableware pottery, mostly glazed plates and bowls engraved with fine sgraffito-technique decoration, and transportation clay vessels, amphorae, pithoi, amphoriskoi, and larger jars, or lagenae.² In addition, six large millstones, fragments of a bronze cauldron, and two glass vessels were recorded. On the basis of the shape and the decoration of pottery, the shipwreck is dated to the middle or second half of the twelfth century CE.

The glass vessel

The glass bottle is free blown, made of translucent bluish-green glass (total H. 15 cm; Diam. [rim] 2 cm; Diam. [max. at shoulders] 5 cm) (**Fig. 1**).³ The interior retains an iridescent layer of weathering, which gives a metallic hue to the vessel overall. Many elongated pinprick bubbles are visible along the entire vessel (largest: L. 0.2 cm, W. 0.01 cm). The rim is vertical, mildly uneven, and fire polished. The neck is short, cylindrical, and slightly wider toward the rim. The shoulders are curved, and the elongated, cylindrical body is wider at its upper part. The resting surface is mildly

1 Kritzas 1971.

2 Megaw and Jones 1983, 251–252, cat. nos. 1–20, fig. 8, pl. 26:4; Papanikola-Bakirtzi 1999, 122–142, nos. 134–163; Ioannidaki-Dostoglou 1989.

3 I thank the Ephorate of Antiquities of Volos for the permission to study this vessel. During my visit to Anchialos, I had the chance to study only one of the vessels mentioned in the excavation report. It is kept at the archaeological storerooms of Nea Anchialos, under accession number N.A. 1986.

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FIG 1. Bottle from Pelagonesos shipwreck. Second half of the twelfth century CE. (Photo: the author; Drawing: Chrysoula Mallia / © Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Ephorate of Antiquities of Volos)



concave, and an annular pontil mark (Diam. 0.8 cm, Th. 0.1 cm) is visible at the center. Close inspection with a magnifying glass showed no traces of decoration along the body. The usually easily visible ghost of silver stain or gilded decoration is not present on any part of the vessel, nor are any traces of scratching.

THE VERIA/VRYA CASTLE

The modern site of Veria, on the west coast of the Chalkidiki peninsula, has been identified with a synonymous ancient Greek site that continued to exist through the Middle Ages, known as Castle of Vrya or Vryon. According to written sources, it was active between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, abandoned later than 1259 and before 1302.⁴

The glass vessels

The upper part of a cylindrical, free-blown bottle made of translucent bluish-green glass (**Fig. 2**) was unearthed in the destruction layer of a house that was used between

⁴ Pazaras and Tsanana 1990, 353–356.

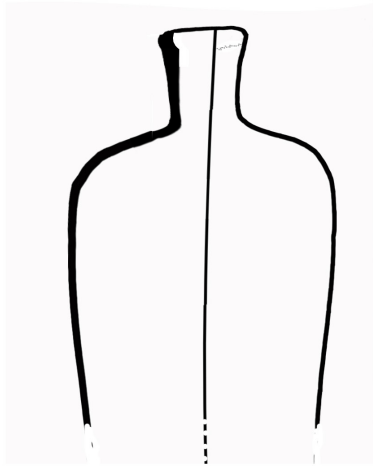


FIG 2. Bottle from Veria, Konstantilaki plot, reg. no. 286. Late twelfth century CE. (Photo: the author; Drawing: Chrysoula Mallia / © Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Agion Oros)

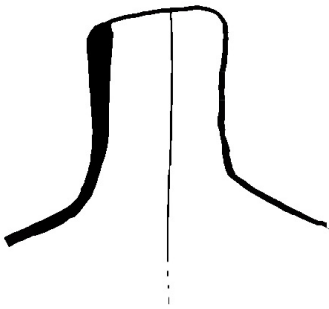


FIG 3. Bottle from Veria, Lazaridis plot. Late twelfth century CE. (Photo: the author; Drawing: Chrysoula Mallia / © Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Agion Oros)

the eleventh and late twelfth centuries according to the pottery and the numismatic evidence (present H. 9 cm; Diam. [rim] 3 cm; Diam. [max. at shoulders] 6.5 cm).⁵ The rim is vertical, mildly uneven, and fire polished. The neck is short, cylindrical, and slightly wider toward the rim. The shoulders are mildly slopping, and the cylindrical body tapers toward its lower part. On the preserved section of the vessel there are no traces of decoration. The lower part is missing and thus the pontil mark is not preserved.

⁵ Elongated pinprick bubbles are visible along the vessel. The bottle was found at the Konstantilaki plot during the 1988 excavations. See Pazaras and Tsanana 1990, 360. I express my sincere thanks to the Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Agion Oros, as well as to Mrs. Aikaterini Tsanana, the site's excavator, for allowing me to examine the find.

The rim of a similar, greenish bottle (Fig. 3) was found where middle-Byzantine buildings were uncovered, which were identified as part of an extended complex of warehouses, workshops, and stables that were destroyed at the end of the twelfth or at the very beginning of the thirteenth century (present H. 2.5 cm; Diam. [rim] 1.8 cm; present Diam. [max.] 3.5 cm).⁶ In the same context, several dark-blue, middle-Byzantine, band-shaped glass bracelets, most of them painted and gilded, were found as well.

SIMANTRA/KAMPOUDI

On the site of modern village of Simantra, in the hinterland north of the Chalkidiki peninsula, excavations have revealed parts of a settlement, identified with the Byzantine village of Karkara or Karkarea. The excavated parts of it are dated to the thirteenth and up to the early fourteenth centuries CE. Four kilometers to the east a small agricultural settlement was excavated, which was active between the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries CE.⁷

The glass vessels

In two relatively close spots, fragments of cylindrical, free-blown bottles made of translucent bluish-green glass (Fig. 4) were unearthed in the destruction layer of the site. They may belong to the same vessel, or to two examples very similar in size.

The first find is a single shoulder and upper-body fragment (A.E. 4924; present H. [max.] 3 cm; Diam. [body] 4.5–5 cm) (Fig. 5) It has a sloping shoulder and cylindrical body tapering toward the bottom.

The second find comprises one bottom and one lower-body fragment (A.E. 4538a, b; present H. [max.] 3.5 cm; Diam. [body] 4.5 cm) (Fig. 6). The resting surface is flat, mildly concave, and an annular pontil mark (est. Diam. 1.0–1.1 cm; Th. about 0.25 cm) is visible at the center.

FIG 4. Bottles from Simantra/Kampoudi, reg. nos. A E. 4538 and 4924. Late twelfth century CE. (Photo: the author; Drawing: Chrysoula Mallia / © Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Agion Oros)



⁶ Several pinprick bubbles are visible on the fragment. The vessel was found at the Lazaridis' plot in 1992. Pazaras and Tsanana 1992, 518–519.

⁷ Toska, Tsanana, and Bitzikopoulos, in preparation. The excavation was briefly discussed in an oral presentation at the Archaeological Work in Macedonia and Thrace 21st annual conference, March 13–15, 2008.

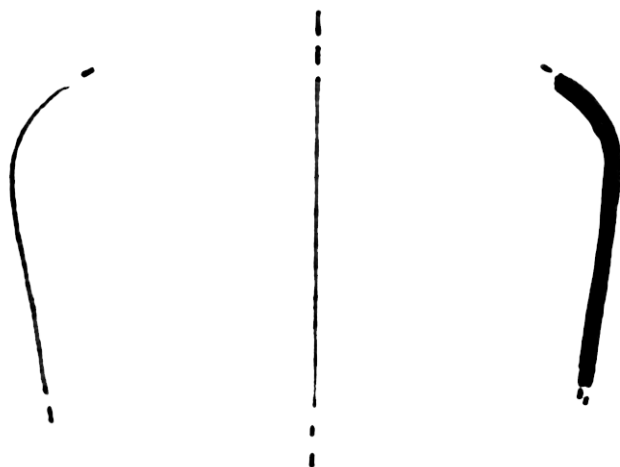


FIG 5. Bottle from Simantra/Kampoudi, reg. no. A.E. 4924. Late twelfth century CE. (Drawing: Chrysoula Mallia / © Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Agion Oros)

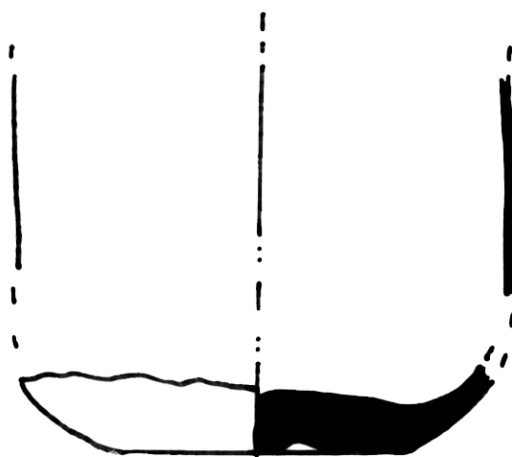


FIG 6. Bottle from Simantra/Kampoudi, reg. no. A.E. 4538. Late twelfth century CE. (Drawing: Chrysoula Mallia / © Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Agion Oros)

DISCUSSION

The bottles belong to a group of Byzantine painted vessels that comprises a few cylindrical bottles in addition to tall conical beakers, hemispherical bowls, and close-shaped flasks. Most of them are made of translucent dark-blue or purple glass, and occasionally of blue-green, white, pale-blue, or yellowish glass. Typically, they bear polychrome and gold painted decoration, the latter applied with the liquid gilding technique.⁸ The decoration generally consists of animal representations set in medallions or rectangular fields, combined with geometric and floral ornaments, and only rarely the human form. Examples have been unearthed in controlled excavations in different parts of the world.⁹ The vessels of this form circulated in the Byzantine world and were traded well beyond it, with finds along the western sea route from Constantinople to Northern Greece, Corinth, Dalmatia, and Italy; along the Levantine sea route, Cyprus to Egypt; and the northern route to Crimea and Armenia; and at commercial hubs along the fluvial transportation routes in the land of Rus' and up to Scandinavia, Sweden, Poland, and Germany.¹⁰ This group is dated to the second half of the twelfth and the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Vessels of the same form decorated with marvered white trails, occasionally with similar gilded decor, are also known, and they have been ascribed to the Islamic word, dated to the twelfth to thirteenth century.¹¹

There are three features that differentiate the bottles of the Pelagonesos shipwreck, Veria, and Simantra from the majority of the aforementioned parallels. First, they are made of bluish-green glass and not of the typical dark-blue or purple glass used for most of the published examples. For instance, among the relevant finds from Corinth, nine examples are made of dark-blue glass, as are five with marvered festooned trails.¹² However, there is one unpublished bottle from Corinth (MF 13694), decorated with gilding, that shows a green tinge, especially noticeable when set against light, which is quite similar to the one from the shipwreck.¹³ The second feature that is distinctive to the bottles from Pelagonesos and Simantra is the shape of the pontil mark on the bottom, indicating a differentiation in the production technique. The scars of these bottles are annular, about 1 cm wide, unlike on all Corinthian finds, including the slightly greenish one (MF 13694), which are also 1 cm wide but are solid. Apparently, the solid scar of the gilt and painted examples was created while they were held for the reheating during the application of the decoration, and possibly under that is hiding the scar of the original pontil that could have been annular. The

8 Whitehouse 1998, 2002. For a description of the technique, see Gudenrath 2001.

9 Davidson 1952, 115, no. 750; Megaw 1959; Shelkovnikov 1966, 101–109, figs. 14–18, 23, 24; Megaw 1968; Whitehouse 1998; Whitehouse 2002; Križanac 2001; Gurevich, Janp'oladyan, and Malevskaia 1968, 16–22; Shchapova 2008, *passim* and esp. 189–205; Antonaras 2010, 395–397, wherein relevant bibliography; Antonaras 2019, 153, no. 184.

10 Ristovska 2009, where the finds are presented and their distribution pattern is discussed in detail.

11 Carboni 2001, 312–313, no. 84; Križanac 2001, form I/1c; Antonaras 2010, 400–401; Whitehouse 2014, 221–223, nos. 1000, 1002.

12 Plain, dark-blue vessels: MF 6450, MF 6772, MF 7461, MF 7462, MF 7463, MF 7479, MF 7480, MF 13695, MF 14184; dark-blue vessels with marvered festooned threads: MF 6577, MF 10221a–b, MF 10110, MF 1991-17, MF 1991-9. See Davidson 1940, 317, 320, figs. 19–21; Davidson 1952, 115–116, nos. 750–756; Davidson Weinberg 1975, 131–132; Williams and Zervos 1992, 161, nos. 26–28.

13 The vessel (MF 13694) was unearthed at the southwest corner of the cryptoporticus of the South Basilica. For the excavation, see Morgan 1937, 540.

lower part of neither of the two vessels from Veria is preserved, and thus the pontil mark is not preserved either. The third distinction is that the bottle from Pelagونيسos is undecorated, being the only example of this type of vessel that does not bear gilding and polychrome painted decor. Neither of the partly preserved bottles from Veria and Simantra retains any visible traces of decor on its weathered surface.

Notwithstanding the noted differences, the bottles clearly belong to the type of gilt and painted bottles discussed above, even if they present less typical examples. Despite the relatively localized nature of this subgroup that could indicate a different regional production site, such as Thessaloniki, we will reject this tempting hypothesis because of their striking resemblance to the decorated examples with which they share the same body and neck dimensions and proportions, as well as the shaping of the rim, shoulder, and resting surface. So, we propose that this newly identified subgroup can be ascribed to the same workshop or a different workshop of the same production center as the decorated ones, a hypothesis that might be confirmed by future chemical analyses. If so, they provide two new points, Chalkidiki and Sporades, on the sea route along which the bottles were distributed, probably from Constantinople to Italy. Given that Constantinople was the only center that could distribute its products along all three of the principal maritime routes—to the west (Italy), to the Levant (Egypt), and to the north (Crimea)—it has long been considered as the only suitable candidate for the production site of these vessels.

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