

Cretan Amphorae from Albania (IV – VII Century AD)



Archaeology

Keywords: Cretan amphora, Albanian coastline, exploration, archaeological sites, etc.

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Abstract

Archaeological excavations carried out in the recent decades in many sites of Albania have enriched the repertory of east Mediterranean amphorae dated from 4th – 7th century. The results obtained provided significant evidence on their typology, distribution, chronology and their origin. These discoveries have stressed the importance and the role of our territory during this specific historical period, marked by the initiative of the emperor Justinian I (527 – 565) for the restoration of the lost territories of the empire. The presence of east – Mediterranean amphorae is attested in numerous urban centers and religious building such as the cities of Butrint⁴⁶, Onchesmos⁴⁷, and the monument of 40 Saints, Durres⁴⁸, Shkodra⁴⁹ and Lezhë⁵⁰; also a significant number comes from the contribution of the subaqueous investigations across the Albanian coastline, mainly in the area between the Bay of Vlora and Saranda⁵¹ and the exploration conducted in the Bay of Durrës⁵². A small quantity of this category of amphorae is represented by fragments found during the excavations in other minor archaeological sites. Because of their relatively modest representation in the Mediterranean contexts, different types of east – Mediterranean amphorae, which show a remarkable presence in our territory, have been subject of individual studies, as in the case of the LRA 10 (Adamsheck RC 22)⁵³ and the study devoted to the LRA 8 (Samos Cystern Type).⁵⁴

Similarly in this study we attempt the presentation the Cretan amphora, an exemplar which belongs to the large east – Mediterranean family dated from 4th – 6th century. Its significant presence at the monument of 40 Saints, the unpublished specimens from the city of Onchesmos⁵⁵, its presence although modest in other urban centers such as Butrint⁵⁶, Elbasan⁵⁷ and Durrës, or the results from the subaqueous research in the Bay of Porto Palermo and that of Ragusa, comprise the main impulse to approach these specimens in an individual article, aiming their presentation in a specific context.

⁴⁶ See: K. LAKO, Rezultatet e gërmimeve arkeologjike në Butrint në vitet 1975-76, *Iliria* 1, 1981, f. 93 – 154; P. REYNOLDS, The Roman pottery from the Triconch Palace, Byzantine Butrint: excavations and surveys 1994-1999, Oxford, 2004, f. 224 – 269; P. REYNOLDS, Trade networks of the East, 3rd to 7th centuries: the view from Beirut (Lebanon) and Butrint (Albania) (fine wares, amphorae and kitchen wares), LRCW 3, BAR International Series, Vol. I, 2010, f. 89 – 114; S. BUSHI The Excavation of a Small Church Adjacent to the Entrance of the National Park of Butrint, Albania, TEA. The European Archaeologist. The newsletter of EAA members for EAA members, 36, 2011 – 2012, f. 14 – 17; A. SEBASTIANI, D. GOONEY, J. MITCHELL, P. PAPADOPOULOU, P. REYNOLDS, E. VACCARO, J. VROOM, The medieval church and cemetery at the Well of Junia Rufina, Butrint 4: The Archaeology and Histories of an Ionian Town, Oxford, 2013, f. 215 – 244.

⁴⁷ K. LAKO, Kështjella e Onhezmit, *Iliria* 2, 1984, f. 154 – 205. These fragments were reviewed by Y. Cerova, who determined their typology. See: Y. CEROVA, Kontribut i ri mbi amforat e kështjellës së Onhezmit, *Iliria* 1 – 2, 1992, f. 245 – 255.

⁴⁸ A. HOTI, Ndihmëse për hartën e Arkeologjike të rrethit të Durrësit, *Iliria* 1, 1987, f. 247 – 263; B. SHKODRA, Pottery and trade in the Late Roman Durrës (Durrachium), University of East Anglia (Master Thesis), 2003; A. HOTI, E. METALLA, E. SHEHI, Gërmime arkeologjike; Durrës 2001 – 2003, *Candavia* 1, 2004, f. 139 – 172; SHKODRA, Kontekste me qeramikë të shek. VI nga Macellum - Forum, Durrës, *Candavia* 2, 2005, f. 205 – 238; B. SHKODRA, Enët prej balte të antikitetit të vonë në Durrës (Shek. IV – VII), (Tezë doktorature), Universiteti i Tiranës, 2011. Një repertor i pasur amforash lindore ndodhen të ekspozuara në Muzeun arkeologjik të Durrësit: F. TARTARI, Amforat e muzeut arkeologjik të Durrësit. Përpjekje për një katalog të tyre, *Iliria* 2, 1982, f. 241 – 279.

⁴⁹ G. HOXHA, Amfora antike të vona nga qyteti Shkodrës (Shek. V-fillimi i shek. VII), *Iliria* 1 – 2, 1992, f. 209 – 243; G. HOXHA, Scodra dhe Praevalis në antikitetin e vonë, Shkodër, 2003.

⁵⁰ A rich repertory of east – Mediterranean amphorae is also attested from the archaeological excavations undertaken by the Institute of Archaeology in the city of Lissus (Lezhë), led by G. Hoxha.

⁵¹ G. VOLPE, G. DISANTAROSA, D. LEONE, M. TURCHIANO, Porti, approdi e itinerari dell'Albania meridionale dall'Antichità al Medioevo, Il "Progetto Liburnia", Ricerche archeologiche in Albania, 2014, f. 287 – 326.

⁵² These investigations are conducted in the frame of the project "Archaeological subaqueous map of Albanian Coast", an initiative of Institute of Archaeology led by A. Anastasi. Shih: A. ANASTASI, Harta arkeologjike nënujore e bregdetit Shqiptar, *Iliria* XXXVIII, 2014, f. 473.

⁵³ B. SHKODRA – RRUGIA, Një tip amfore i periudhës antike të vonë nga Durrësi, *Iliria* XXXIII (2007 – 2008), 2009, f. 311 – 324.

⁵⁴ S. BUSHI, Amfora e Samosit (LRA 8) në Shqipëri (shek. IV – VII m. Kr), *Candavia* 5, f. 109 – 142.

⁵⁵ Part of the archaeological material of amphorae of Onchesmos is published by the author of the excavation. See: K. LAKO, Kështjella e Onhezmit, *Iliria* 2, 1984, f. 154 – 205; Y. CEROVA, Kontribut i ri mbi amforat e kështjellës së Onhezmit, *Iliria* 1 – 2, 1992, f. 245 – 255. The archaeological material recovered from the investigations in the city of Onchesmos is typologically rich and has been often subject of study of different ceramic categories, which have permit to create a more complete panorama on the historical dynamic of the city during this period. Recently has been published a complete study on *terra sigillata* category of ceramic dated from 4th – 7th century. See: S. MUÇAJ, K. LAKO, S. BUSHI, S. XHYHERI, Sigilata nga qyteti i Onhezëm - Ankiatit (Sarandë), *Candavia* 3, 2011, f. 41 – 103.

⁵⁶ P. REYNOLDS, The Roman pottery from the Triconch Palace, *Byzantine Butrint: excavations and surveys 1994-1999*, Oxford, 2004, f. 226, fig. 13.40-44.

⁵⁷ Y. CEROVA, Qeramikë nga Castrum Scampis (Shek. II – fillimi i shek. VII), *Candavia* 2, 2005, f. 183, Tab. XXI.2.

The earlier presence of this amphora is attested in the archaeological excavations conducted in the '70 in Ostia⁵⁸, while J. Hayes determined from the study of the archaeological material of Knossos, the first type of this exemplar produced during the roman period⁵⁹. The later excavations in Crete determined some of the workshops of the amphorae dated in the roman period, while the complete study of Maragou Lerat brought to light detailed data on its typology, workshops and its distribution⁶⁰. Finally the study of Sazanov on this category of amphorae recovered in the Black Sea region enriched the data concerning their chronology and typology of the amphorae produced and dated mainly in Late Antiquity. The author makes also a summary of the relevant studies concerning to this specific amphora⁶¹. Generally it can be asserted that the Cretan amphora is a broadly distributed type in the territory, although its presence in proportion with the rest of amphorae of east – Mediterranean group is limited, conditioned probably by the fact that this assemblage was used for the transportation of the high quality wine⁶². The employment of this amphora is attested from the Hellenistic period and found a broader distribution during the roman period⁶³, and continuing to be produced during the 6th – 7th century. Its distribution is documented in a broad geographical area which is defined in the Aegean sea, the Continental Greece⁶⁴, the Black Sea coast⁶⁵, and even in Poland⁶⁶ was registered its presence. Concerning the results of archaeological investigations carried out in our territory, the presence and the classification of the amphora is attested in two phases. To the first phase belong the fragments of the roman imperial period, dated in 3^d – 4th century, discovered in the variant AC 1 in Butrint⁶⁷, the Bay of Porto Palermo and that of Ragusa⁶⁸. To the second phase of Cretan imports belong the variants dated in 5th – 7th century. They are represented by the variant AC 2, discovered in the Bay of Ragusa, and dated by the authors of the related archaeological research in 5th – 7th century⁶⁹. The recovering of Africa by Justinian in 534 influenced positively the byzantine economy; besides the African amphorae in large commercial activity were involved also the east – Mediterranean amphorae and the Cretan amphora as well which was part of this family⁷⁰. Precisely to this specific period are dated the fragments discovered in the monument of 40 Martyrs, a suggestion supported also by the accompanying material of *terra sigillata* of African origin and the *sigillata* originated from Phocaea, recovered in the same context.

⁵⁸ C. PANELLA, Appunti su un gruppo di anfore della prima, media e tarda imperiale, *Ostia III*, Roma, 1973, f. 467 – 477, 623, 631; D. MANACORDA, Le anfore, *Ostia IV*, Roma, 1977, f. 225 – 226, Tab. XXXVI.

⁵⁹ J. W. HAYES, The Villa Dionysos Excavations, Knossos: The Pottery, *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 78, 1983, f. 141 – 145.

⁶⁰ A. MARANGOU LERAT, *Le vin et les amphores de Crète: de l'époque classique à l'époque impériale*, Ecole française d'Athènes, Athènes, 1995.

⁶¹ A. SAZANOV, Cretan amphorae from northern Black Sea region: contexts, chronology, typology, *LRCW 4, BAR International Series 2616*, Vol. I, 2014, f. 399 – 409.

⁶² Concerning the typology, chronology and the distribution of the Cretan origin amphora during the classical and imperial period referee to: A. MARANGOU LERAT, *Le vin et les amphores de Crète: de l'époque classique à l'époque impériale*, Ecole française d'Athènes, Athènes, 1995.

⁶³ G. A. YANGAKI, Amphores crétoises de forme globulaire: remarques préliminaires, *LRCW 2, BAR International Series, 1662, Vol. 2*, 2007, f. 767.

⁶⁴ This exemplar is also attested in the province of Epirus Vetus, P. REYNOLDS, E. PAVLIDIS, Nicopolis (Epirus Vetus): an early 7th century pottery assemblage from the 'Bishop's House' (Greece), *LRCW 4, BAR International Series 2616*, Vol. I, 2014, f. 453, fig. 11.6; Greqi, N. POULOU PAPADIMITRIOU, E. NODAROU, La céramique protobyzantine de Pseira: la production locale et les importations, étude typologique et pétrographique, *LRCW 2, BAR International Series 1662, Vol. 2*, 2007, f. 758, fig. 6.14; Itali, P. RENDINI, Anfore di produzione locale e di importazione a Gortina nel periodo tardo-romano e protobizantino, *Amphores romaines et histoire économique. Dix ans de recherche. Actes du colloque de Sienne (22-24 mai 1986)*, 1989, f. 648 – 649; D. MALFITANA, Roman Sicily Project. Ceramics and Trade. A multidisciplinary approach to the study of material culture assemblages. First overview. The transport amphorae evidence, *Facta. A Journal of Roman material culture studies*, 2008, f. 134.

⁶⁵ A. SAZANOV, Cretan amphorae from northern Black Sea region: contexts, chronology, typology, *LRCW 4, BAR International Series 2616, Vol. I*, 2014, f. 399 – 409.

⁶⁶ G. MAJCHEREK, I. ZYCH, The evidence for Cretan presence in the ancient town of Marina el-Alamein. Nö: *Essays Presented to Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski on his 75th Birthday, Classica Orientalia*, 2011, f. 357 – 378.

⁶⁷ P. REYNOLDS, The Roman pottery from the Triconch Palace, *Byzantine Butrint: excavations and surveys 1994-1999*, Oxford, 2004, f. 226, fig. 13.40-44.

⁶⁸ G. VOLPE, G. DISANTAROSA, D. LEONE, M. TURCHIANO, Porti, approdi e itinerari dell'Albania meridionale dall'Antichità al Medioevo, Il "Progetto Liburnia", *Ricerche archeologiche in Albania*, 2014, f. 323.

⁶⁹ G. VOLPE, G. DISANTAROSA, D. LEONE, M. TURCHIANO, Porti, approdi e itinerari dell'Albania meridionale dall'Antichità al Medioevo, Il "Progetto Liburnia", *Ricerche archeologiche in Albania*, 2014, f. 324.

⁷⁰ P. RENDINI, Anfore di produzione locale e di importazione a Gortina nel periodo tardo-romano e protobizantino, *Amphores romaines et histoire économique. Dix ans de recherche. Actes du colloque de Sienne (22-24 mai 1986)*, 1989, f. 648-649.

The African forms are represented by Hayes 104B (first half of 5th century – second half of 6th century); Hayes 99B (dated in the second quarter of 6th century – 7th century)⁷¹, while Phocian *terra sigillata* is represented by the forms LRC 3F and LRC 3G, dated in the second quarter of 6th century⁷². As *terminus post quem* based also in numismatic evidence deposited in the same context with Cretan specimens, this study suggests the year 551⁷³. Summing up the above mentioned estimation, we suggest that this second phase of import of the amphora in the monument of 40 Martyrs may be placed in the chronological interval between 525/534 – 551. Concerning the type MRC 2a/TRC 2, this exemplar is attested in Onchesmos (Fig. 1. 1) and the monument of 40 Martyrs (Fig. 1. 2-3) in the Mediterranean contexts dated in the second half of 6th century – end of 6th century⁷⁴. Another variant of this exemplar, the amphora TRC 4 is attested in two sub – variants; the sub – variant TRC 4.1.2 is registered in the city of Durres (Fig. 1. 4)⁷⁵ and the city of Onchesmos (Fig. 1. 5-9). Fragments of the same exemplar are also attested in the region of Black Sea in the same context together with coins issued by Justinian I (527 – 565)⁷⁶. Concerning the other sub variant of this exemplar TRC 4.2.2, it is registered in a single fragment in the monument of 40 Martyrs (Fig. 2. 10). This variant in the region of Black Sea is attested in archaeological context of the first quarter of 6th century, and continued until the beginning of 7th century⁷⁷. Other fragments from this amphora, belonging to the sub variant TRC 5.2 (variant TRC 5) derive from the excavations conducted in the upper level of the monument of 40 Martyrs (Fig. 2. 11-16)⁷⁸. Finally, the amphorae discovered from the excavations are characterized by a light brown and red fabric (MUNSELL 5YR 7/6). Generally have a fine clay, with mica, containing quartz particles and calcareous inclusions.

Conclusion

Generally it can be asserted that the chronology of circulation of Cretan origin amphorae in the territory of Albania is evidenced since the imperial period. This phase is represented by the variant AC 1, dated in 3^d – 4th century. Fragments of this variant were attested in the city of Butrint and in the Bays of Porto Palermo and Ragusa. We suggest that this phase of imports from the East, as evidenced from archaeological and historical sources is interrupted as result of the Gothic invasions which were responsible for the collapse and the cease of life in many cities⁷⁹. The second period of imports from the East belongs to 5th – 7th century. After the interruption of the first wave of invasions, our territory was involved in the fortifying campaign, undertaken during the reign of Theodosius II, whose activity of fortification construction is reported in historical sources, and continued until the mid 6th century with emperor Justinian I (527 – 565). The strengthening of the religious

⁷¹ For the dating of African origin *terra sigillata* see: M. BONIFAY, *Etudes sur la céramique romaine tardive d'Afrique*, BAR International Series 1301, 2004.

⁷² For the dating of Focea origin *terra sigillata*, see: J. W. HAYES, *Late Roman Pottery*. Londres, British School at Rome, 1972.

⁷³ The ceramic can be divided in two different periods; the first period belong to the phase of the destruction caused by the Goths of Totila in 551, supported also by the numismatic evidence; the second period dates from the late 6th century and early 7th century, time when the monument was used by the tribes of slaves. This ceramic or the so called Slavic ceramic is represented mainly by fragments of cooking wares. See for the archaeological investigations conducted in this monument and the category of cultural material: S. MUÇAJ, *Manastiri i 40 Shenjtorëve, Sarandë, Iliria XXXVI* (2012), 2013, f. 447 – 449; K. LAKO, S. MUÇAJ, S. BUSHI, S. XHYHERI, *Onhezmi në shekujt V-VII: qytet, qendër pelegrinazhi dhe port, në International Congress of Albanian Archaeological Studies. 65th Anniversary of Albanian Archaeology*, 21-22 nëntor 2013, Tiranë 2014, f. 613-624; S. MUÇAJ, K. LAKO, S. BUSHI, S. XHYHERI, *Monumenti i 40 Shenjtorëve-2102, Iliria, XXXVII* (2013), 2015, f. 379 – 386; S. MUÇAJ, K. LAKO, S. BUSHI, S. XHYHERI, *Monumenti i 40 Shenjtorëve, Iliria, XXXVIII* (2014), 2015, f. 321 – 326.

⁷⁴ E. PORTALE, I. ROMEO, *Contentitori da trasporto, në: A. Di Vita, Gortina V.3. Lo scavo del Pretorio (1989-1995), I. I materiali*, Padova, 2001, Tav. XLII.d (Gortina, gjysma e shek. VI – fundi i shek. VI).

⁷⁵ *Raport vjetor, Agjensia e Shërbimit Arkeologjik*, f. 39.

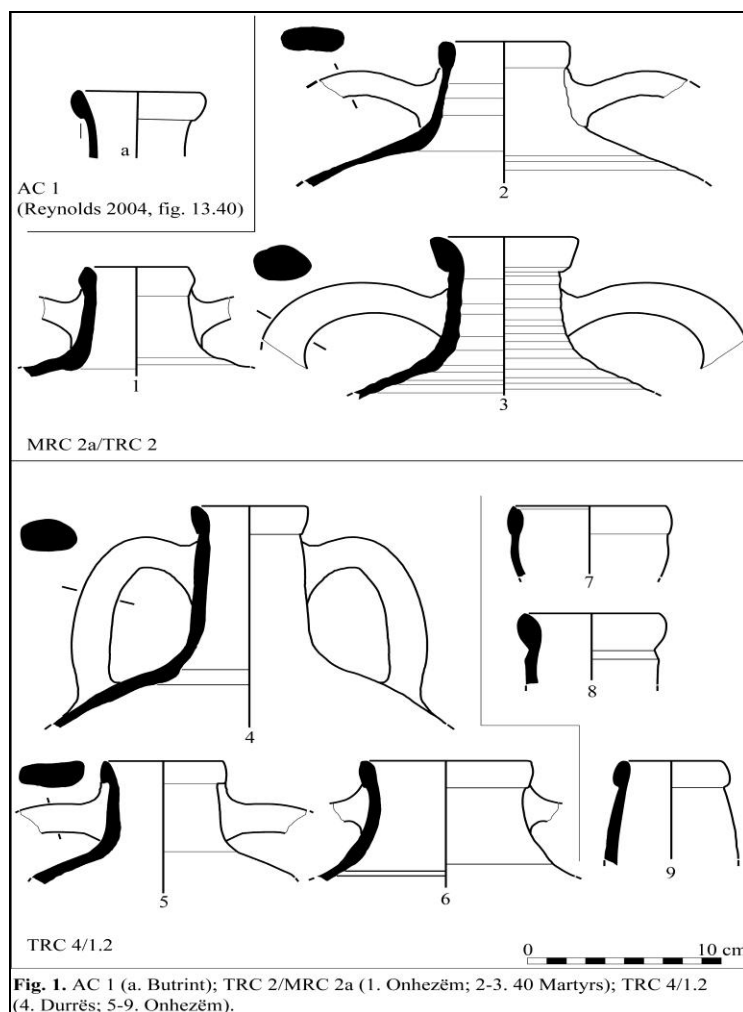
⁷⁶ A. SAZANOV, *Cretan amphorae from northern Black Sea region: contexts, chronology, typology, LRCW 4, BAR International Series 2616, Vol. I, 2014, f. 401.*

⁷⁷ A. SAZANOV, *Cretan amphorae from northern Black Sea region: contexts, chronology, typology, LRCW 4, BAR International Series 2616, Vol. I, 2014, f. 402.*

⁷⁸ In Mediterranean and Black Sea region contexts this sub variant is dated mainly in the first half of 6th century and in the late 6th century - early 7th century. See: A. SAZANOV, *Cretan amphorae from northern Black Sea region: contexts, chronology, typology, LRCW 4, BAR International Series 2616, Vol. I, 2014, f. 403.*

⁷⁹ S. MUÇAJ, *Një panoramë e shkurtër arkeologjike në territoret e Shqipërisë nga shek. IV deri në gjysmën e I të shek. VII, In memoriam, Aleks Buda, Tiranë, 2010, f. 321.*

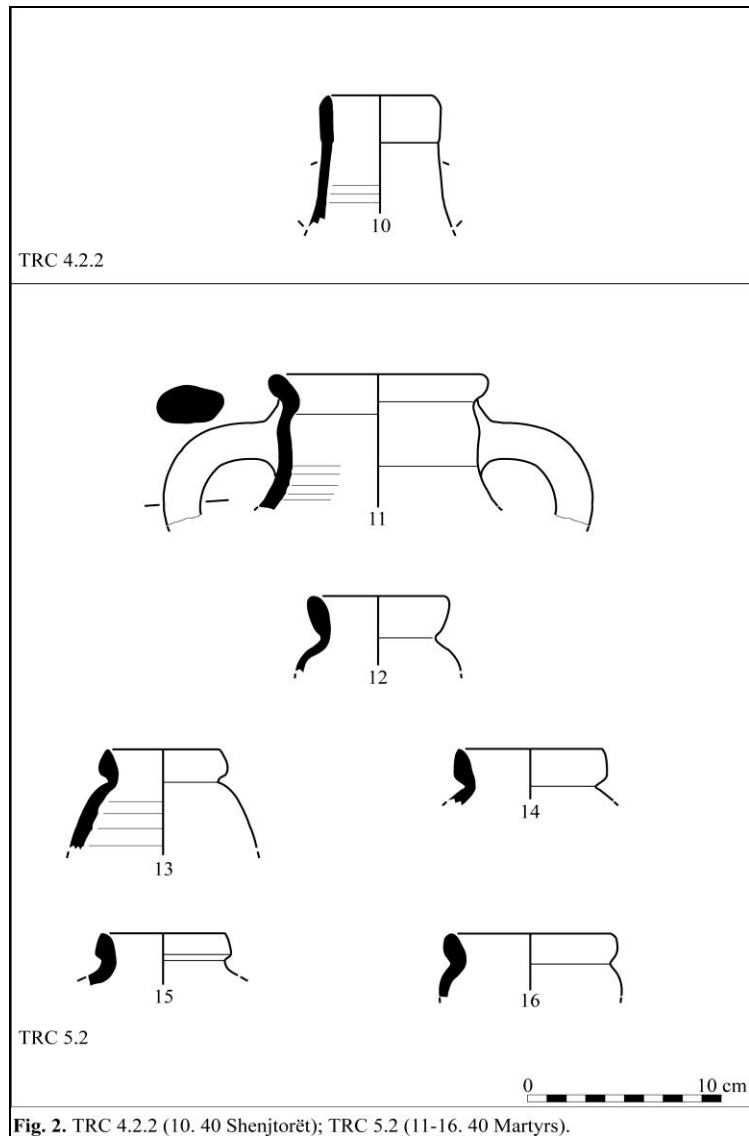
element also contributed to the revival and the erection of a number of edifices for worship purposes⁸⁰. These campaigns combined with the military activity, an important factor for the enterprise of Justinian toward the restoration of lost territories, contributed to the intensification of commerce, for the fulfillment of the exigencies of the army and the population with foodstuff, and the needs of the clergy as well. The Cretan amphora was used as a container for the popular wine, produced in the island of Crete, and having an international reputation, at least from 4th century. Based on historical sources, this wine was considered a high quality product (*vinum optimum*) of the time, besides the wines originating from Gaza (LRA 4), Samos (LRA 8) or Cyprus, reserved for the upper classes of the society⁸¹. This container the Cretan amphora, is attested in our territory in its variant TRC 2/MRC 2a in Onchesmos and the monument of 40 Saints; in its variant TRC 4 (TRC 4.1.2; TRC 4.2.2) in Onchesmos, Durrës and the monument of 40 Saints; in its variant TRC 5 (TRC 5.2) in the monument of 40 Saints. Based on the fact that its presence is more intensive in the monument of 40 Saints and the function of the monastery as an important pilgrimage center of the Mediterranean in 6th century, as determined by the archaeological excavations, we believe that the wine of Crete was reserved for the numerous pilgrims which visited the monastery⁸², an activity attributed mainly to the upper classes of society.



⁸⁰ S. MUÇAJ, Një panoramë e shkurtër arkeologjike ..., *In memoriam, Aleks Buda*, Tiranë, 2010, f. 326.

⁸¹ The historical sources referring to the high quality wine and for its destination to the upper classes of society and the clergy, see: D. PIERI, *Le commerce du vin oriental à l'époque byzantine (Ve-VIIIe siècles): Le témoignage des amphores en Gaule*, Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient, Beyrouth, 2005, f. 110 – 114.

⁸² S. MUÇAJ, Vendet e shenja të pelegrinazhit në Shqipëri, *Candavia* 4, 2014, f. 14.



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