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A REMARKABLE JAR WITH ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION: AN ALMOHAD PRECEDENT?

S. Gilotte¹, Y. Cáceres Gutiérrez², C. Richarté³, J. de Juan Ares⁴ with the collaboration of C. Capelli⁵

(¹CNRS-Ciham UMR 5648; ²UCM; ³INRAP-Ciham UMR 5648; ⁴IRAMAT-UMR 5060; ⁵Univ. Genoa-DISTAV)

Containers in Albalat (m. 12th C.)



Example of another jar found

Large containers are quite common in the later Almoravid context (first half of the 12th century A.D.) in the fortified site of Albalat, Extremadura, Spain. They did not have complex decorations, such as those that would become very successful in later productions (stamped and glazed techniques combined with a covering and dense decoration).

However, the recent discovery of a well-dated jar has allowed us to record the existence of an model previously unknown from the site: it seems to be as a primitive precedent of the later Almohad jars.

Volume: around 150 litres
Height: 0,795 m
Base diameter: 0,27 m
Mouth diameter (inside): 0,27 m

What? Fabric typological features

This storage jar has a ovoid belly, a slightly flared neck finished in a moulded banded lip, a flat base and two small wing-shaped handles (undersized compared to the container's size).

Its decoration combines printed strings and wavy ribbons, protuberances in groups of tree and a frieze of horseshoe-shaped arches, on a background of small printed circles. It was covered with red slip.



Detail of the plastic decoration.

Where? Context of the jar's discovery



Courtyard where the jar was found

This storage vessel was found in the courtyard of a building used as a craftshop, which was probably hastily condemned in a moment of crisis which would have preceded the final assault of 1142.

Doubtless too cumbersome to be taken with the fleeing residents, it was left in place and broken* during the subsequent collapse of the surrounding structures.

How? Technical and clay features

Petrographic approach shows a ferric clay with abundant coarse granitic inclusions, quartz, feldspar and mica.



The coarse fraction was probably added during production. The raw materials are probably from alluvial origin, derived from deposits very close to granite bedrock. This rocky substrate is absent in the site's surroundings, but present and common at local and regional scale.

Like the other storage vessel, it was assembled using a mixed technique and had a single firing, well oxidised, firing.

A writing support



Cursive Arabic inscription, with diacritical points.

The uniqueness of this piece is also highlighted by an Arabic inscription made in the potter's workshop before firing. It is incompletely preserved, but carefully framed at the top by a ribbon and integrated into the composition of the decoration.

It is structured on three lines and currently under study by M. A. Martínez Núñez. Like the other inscriptions on Albalat's containers, it seems related to a commercial deal.

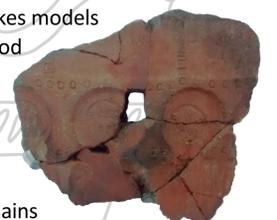
What else?

Ongoing investigations into organic residues (GC-MS analysis by N. Garnier) may provide clues as to its content and the presence of waterproofing substances, which have been detected in all other jars analysed (conifer resin, animal fat, beeswax).

Where does it come from?

The architectural decoration of this jar evokes models widely distributed from the Almohad period (second half of the 12th century A.D.).

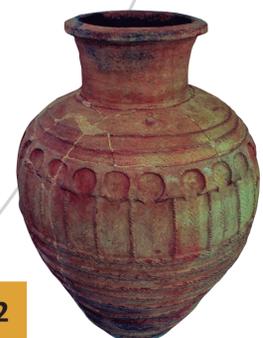
Very few models suggest a chronology as early as that of Albalat, such as a sherd from the Castle Sao Jorge of Lisbon (with stamped motifs) which is perhaps pre-almohade. The container from Albalat is probably part of an aesthetic movement that remains poorly known from this period (because of poor conservation or study bias?). It may correspond to the 1st generation of this type of productions, unless it was a rustic sample? It is still necessary to carry out further research in order to clarify their origin.



Jar sherd from Lisbon Castle (before 1147?)



1



2

1) Prado del Rey, Cádiz, 13th C. (<http://www.museosdeandalucia.es/web/museodecadiz>); 2) Lorca (second half of 12th century).

*Restored by Xoan Moreno Paredes.

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