Pottery is a material of prime importance for the archaeology of the early Christian period. It can be broken, but its fragments are almost imperishable, and often their original form, date, and place of manufacture can be identified. Pottery is an abundant material on archaeological sites and can provide invaluable evidence for establishing their dates and cultural and economic orientation. This is particularly true in the early Christian period, when coinage becomes rare, and often ceramics (particularly fragments of fine tableware) are the main basis for establishing the chronology. Ceramic vessels provide evidence for the technology, the economy, the practices of daily life, and, of particular relevance here, the artistic culture of early Christianity. The imagery on early Christian pottery provides reflections of cultural currents on the popular level and at times reveals otherwise undocumented iconographic traditions. On occasion individual pieces rise to the level of minor artistic masterpieces.

Shipwrecks have produced the best-preserved ceramics, usually utilitarian amphorae. Well-preserved finer wares come primarily from burials, where ceramics were placed with the deceased to accompany them to the hereafter or as the apparatus of a last meal. Ceramic vessels could form part of a sacrifice and be buried with the victim. Rich finds also come from dumps in abandoned wells or buildings and even from caves used as refuges in times of danger.

Precursors: early Judeo-Christian influence

Long before the reign of Constantine (313–337) and the start of the Christian Roman Empire, the Judeo-Christian tradition had an influence, albeit a small one, on Roman ceramics. In the Severan period (193–235) the potter Florentius produced a fine lamp with the Good Shepherd flanked by Noah and Jonah (Figure 11.1). The shepherd is surrounded by his flock, and Jonah regurgitated from the sea monster and reclining under the gourd vine appear on either side of him. The box-like ark of Noah surmounted by a bird appears above the sea monster, and busts of the sun and moon appear at the top. A shepherd with a lamb over his shoulders was an image that had appeared in non-Christian art, but the presence of the two biblical stories makes it clear that this lamp was intended for a Christian audience. In the same period several other central Italian potters produced a fair number of lamps showing the Good Shepherd alone, but in this case the intended audience is less sharply defined. Menorahs make their appearance as early as the first century and continued to be produced into the fifth century. While they undoubtedly
targeted the Jewish market, Christians apparently used them as well: menorah lamps have been excavated in tombs in Sardinia of the fifth century along with lamps with Christian monograms.\(^5\)

**Late Antiquity, the early Christian period**

Pottery production in the fourth to seventh centuries is essentially a continuation of Roman tradition, with its separate regional branches. Biblical or specifically Christian imagery gradually expands to take a dominant position, but it is a slow and intermittent process. The pottery “industry” itself has a variegated history, with an interplay of failures, survivors, and newcomers throughout a turbulent period both militarily and economically. Its occasional ups and the many downs can often be keyed to the barbarian invasions from the mid-third to the late seventh century, but foreign conquest of a territory did not always lead to the end of pottery production in the Roman manner. The primary focus of attention here will be fine wares: that is, relatively thin-walled, smooth-surfaced, hard-fired clay for lighting, the dining table, or the tomb. Fine wares were traded around the late antique world and reflect areas of economic strength and commercial creativity. They also reflect the fashions of the upper classes by imitating tableware and tokens of status made of silver or ivory. Fine ceramics reveal both the emergence of biblical imagery and its prolonged coexistence with pagan and secular subject matter.

As in presentations of pottery from excavations, the ceramics of the early Christian world will be arranged in approximate order of their refinement: from vessels with the glossiest surface coatings, to the less shiny, to those without any coating at all. Fitted into this scheme will be different kinds of firing: oxidizing conditions (relatively high temperatures), which produced...
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red ceramics, and reducing conditions (lower firing temperature), which produced gray or black ceramics. In general, only types of pottery with some artistic aspirations will be presented here.

Red slip ware/terra sigillata

Potters used a variety of techniques for elite tableware, but the most widespread and artistically important type or “ware” was *terra sigillata* or “red-gloss” or “red slip” pottery (Figures 11.2–11.6). The technique was descended from earlier Roman Imperial times. Vases were coated with slip (liquid clay) made of a highly purified version of the body clay. As in earlier High Imperial *terra sigillata*, the slip might become a lustrous dark red or red-orange when fired in an oxidizing environment, but usually early Christian *sigillata* was lighter in color, more orange or even black.

Figure 11.2 African red slip bowl (*patena*) with biblical subjects (Lazarus, Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, Abraham and Isaac on the way to the sacrifice, Adam and Eve, and a Jonah cycle), 320–360 CE. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2002.131. Museum purchase with funds donated in memory of Emily Townsend Vermeule.

Figure 11.3 African red slip bowl with barbarian attacked by a bear, 350–440 CE. Private collection.
brownish, and less red and shiny than in earlier centuries. Because of this technical shift, there is some ambiguity in the terminology for the early Christian wares, which are called “light terra sigillata” (terra sigillata chiara, sigillée claire) in continental Europe and “red slip ware” or “red gloss pottery” in England.

Figure 11.4  African red slip platter (lanx) with a goatherd and lion hunts, 350–440 CE. Private collection.

Figure 11.5  African red slip platter (lanx) with Peter and Paul flanking a cross; the story of Jonah on the rim, 350–440 CE. Benaki Museum, Athens, 12405, 124–6b, 12431.
Figure 11.6  African red slip plate with stamped figure of Christ, 500–550 ce. Oppidum Sainte-Propice, Velaux. Photo: Service patrimoine Velaux (France).

Early Christian red slip ware was separated into its different regional workshops, and its chronology was established primarily by John W. Hayes. By far the most important centers for the production of *sigillata* were in Tunisia; they can be grouped into two divisions: the Roman province of Africa Proconsularis in the north, with its principal city of Carthage; and the province of Byzacena in central Tunisia, with important cities at Sbeitla (a UNESCO World Heritage site) and El Djem, with its giant and well-preserved amphitheater. The fine pottery from these regions, which has been named African Red Slip Ware (ARS) or *sigillata chiara africana* in Italian, was produced not in the great cities but at numerous small sites in the countryside from the first century onward. Most of the production was dedicated to sturdy open forms (plates and bowls), which tended to have simple rims and minimal feet. Over 100 different vase forms were produced over the centuries, and fragments of them offer the principal means of dating late Roman excavations. In post-Constantinian times, patterns were often stamped into the vases with punches or with rollers ("rouletting"). In the fourth century ARS dominated the market in the western Mediterranean, and in the fifth century its hegemony extended into the Eastern Mediterranean. Exportation of ARS also reached territories north of the Alps. From 350 to 550, figural decoration blossomed on ARS (Figures 11.2–11.5), and other pottery production centers could hardly begin to match its richness.

Two principal types of fabric were used for ARS. Africa Proconsularis in the north produced a heavier more orange-colored ware (the earlier type A and the later type D), and Byzacena in the center produced a redder and thinner-walled ware (type C). From the second quarter of the third century onward, the potters producing ARS type C cast figures in molds and applied
them to wheel-turned jugs and bowls. Around the beginning of the early Christian period, production was reorganized. After about 320, ARS potters seem to have stopped producing closed forms (jugs and jars) and focused their attention on the more easily stacked and shipped open forms (dishes and plates). From about 300 ce onward, in an apparently cost-saving move, both northern and central Tunisian workshops stopped applying slip on the sides and bottoms of dishes. After the first quarter of the fourth century, applied figures proliferated. During the span from about 330 to 440, production of plates, bowls, and occasionally plaques with figures in relief exploded in quantity and richness of subject matter (Figures 11.2–11.5). Biblical subject matter was introduced alongside traditional mythological and secular subjects. Often the figures would be applied at random, but sometimes they could be assembled in coherent narrative compositions, a practice rarely seen since the early Imperial period.

As in earlier terra sigillata, non-Christian imagery continued to play a large role in ARS type C. Animals evoke the pleasures of country life and the excitement of hunts, whether in the amphitheater or in the wild (Figure 11.4). Fish and fishermen allude to the most highly prized food of antiquity. Grasshoppers and baskets of fruit continue still-life traditions known from Pompeian painting. Tales of mythological heroes are popular; the labors of Hercules are particular favorites, with sixteen different episodes represented. Orpheus’ ability to charm animals also had considerable currency. Odysseus makes rare appearances tied to the mast of his boat. Divinities, both Olympian and Eastern, appear, but religious themes are usually treated in a light vein; Bacchus and his retinue of satyrs and maenads engage in happy revelry. Venus is less popular than playful Cupids. Demigods and benign sea monsters turn the sea into a mythological funland. Isis takes a concert cruise in a boatload of musicians. Mithras is something of an exception by appearing in key images of his cult: on one bowl he kills the bull and also drags it away.

Biblical subject matter gradually erodes the position of mythology. The Good Shepherd appears occasionally, but the main biblical themes are stories with happy endings, especially salvation scenes from the Hebrew Bible and some miracles from the New Testament (Figures 11.2 and 11.5). Only three of Jesus’ miracles appear on ARS (Lazarus, the healing of the paralytic and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood). Thecla’s escape from the beasts of the amphitheater adds a salvation story from apocryphal Christian sources. An allegory of a watchman in a tree house adds a theme from North African patristic writing.

Gladiatorial combat was forbidden by Constantine and later emperors, and the subject, which had been popular on earlier pottery, disappears from the repertory of ARS in the fourth century. Criminals or barbarian captives exposed to wild animals in the arena, however, continue to appear (Figure 11.3). The lions or bears often turn their heads aside, thereby seeming to betray ambivalence about performing their grisly roles as executioners, leading some scholars to hesitantly interpret such scenes as martyrdoms. The interpretation seems unlikely since often enough the animals leap upon the unfortunate convict at the stake without turning their head, as they had in a multitude of earlier mosaics and ceramic vases and lamps. Male victims are characterized as barbarians by long hair and beards (Figure 11.3). Biblical figures, on the contrary, spread their arms in prayer and escape harm from the beasts. In pottery as in other branches of early Christian art, martyrdoms seem to have been shunned as subject matter except at cult places dedicated to the martyrs.

Some figure-decorated vases of central Tunisia were entirely mold-made. They take the form of platters (lances or “lanxes”) (Figures 11.4, 11.5). In these outspoken imitations of silver platters of the very wealthy, scenes from mythology or epics frequently occupied the central field, and scenes of country life with tender goatherds and ferocious hunts (Figure 11.4) appear in ways that foreshadow major monuments of secular art, such as the mosaic of the Great Palace in Constantinople. Games or hunts in the arena appear and, like platters in precious materials, some
of them may have been made to commemorate specific public entertainments.\textsuperscript{18} Platters with Christian themes seem to be in the minority. Perhaps in keeping with the high-status pretensions of this genre, the “Christian” pieces usually limit the imagery of the central field to authoritative, dogmatic images: usually a pair of Apostles flanking either Christ or a cross (Figure 11.5).\textsuperscript{19}

The borders of the Christian pieces display Apostles, Jonah, or occasionally Lazarus in his tomb. A puzzling syncretistic image also appears: the Dioscuri occupy the central field of a platter and are accompanied by an inscription of veiled Christian content.\textsuperscript{20} These ARS platters were valuable enough to merit preservation even when broken; an example in Carnuntum on the Danube (Austria) was repaired with bronze wire.\textsuperscript{21}

By far the most important of the kilns producing figure-decorated ARS was an unremarkable site in the interior of central Tunisia now covered by farmland and olive orchards called Sidi Marzouk Tounsi. The kilns were probably attached to a villa owned by ambitious senatorial entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{22}

In the second quarter of the fifth century the rich figural culture of ARS type C suffered a notable setback, probably in connection with the Vandal conquest of Africa Proconsularis, which was completed in 439 with the fall of Carthage. Molded figures were no longer applied to dishes, although molded lamps with figures did to some extent continue the figural tradition. In spite of the disappearance of the elite line of production with figures in relief, the exportation of “smooth” ARS plates and bowls continued unabated.

Starting around 320 Tunisian potters introduced a technique for decorating smooth dishes: that is, without applied figures; decorative motifs were stamped on the interior of ARS of bowls and plates (Figure 11.6).\textsuperscript{23} In a first phase, stamps were stylized palm branches, rosettes, fringed circles, hearts, and cloverleaf patterns. In the fifth century, roughly in correspondence with the Vandal conquest, stamped designs became more varied. Christian monograms and small animals began to be used abundantly, and on occasion tiny human figures appeared. In the first half of the sixth century stamped motifs became larger still, and the repertory expanded to jeweled crosses and large anthropomorphic figures. These figures tend to be uninhibited and innovative iconographically. They include Bacchus as well as saints. Christ holds the cross, trophy of his victory, and unexpectedly wears the sleeveless tunic or \textit{cothurn}, the garment in which he was crucified (Figure 11.6),\textsuperscript{24} as in paintings of the later sixth through the eighth century.

Around the time of the Byzantine conquest of North Africa in 533, production at Sidi Marzouk Tounsi and other central Tunisian sites stopped.\textsuperscript{25} Open forms in ARS, however, continued to pour out of kilns in northern Tunisia until the Arab conquest of Carthage in 698.

The ARS did not have a monopoly of the market of \textit{terra sigillata} during the early Christian period. Some producers survived the military crises and reorganizations of Roman society during the second half of the third century.\textsuperscript{26} A few producers in the western Mediterranean managed to preserve a share of their own regional markets through the fourth and into the fifth century by introducing new forms, which often imitated ARS: the hardy survivors included Spanish \textit{sigillata}\textsuperscript{27} and “shiny \textit{sigillata}” (\textit{sigillée luisante}) from Savoy in southeast Gaul.\textsuperscript{28} In the eastern Mediterranean, the potteries at Sagalassos in southwest Asia Minor sustained their robust activity into the seventh century.\textsuperscript{29} New pottery producers also emerged with imitations of ARS and, from the fifth century onward, these newcomers progressively eroded the dominance of ARS in their regions.\textsuperscript{30} Phocaean Red Slip ware (Late Roman C) was produced at Phocaea near Izmir (Smyrna) on the Aegean coast of Turkey. This ware was decorated with stamps similar to those of ARS. Cypriot Red Slip ware (Late Roman D) and Egyptian Red Slip ware (ERS) were also competitors who on occasion made use of stamped ornaments, usually crosses or a meager floral ornament.
In the early Christian period potteries of Asia Minor occasionally produced red-slip ware with figures in relief. A small number of mold-made “pilgrim’s flasks” or costrels in Sagalassos Red Slip ware are decorated with hunts or Bacchic themes, and from ca. 500 onwards biblical themes are occasionally worked in as well. The Christian subjects often seem to put a religious gloss on traditional activities; Daniel and the lions are mixed into a hunting scene, and the Adoration of the Magi includes a tiny bust of Bacchus, which probably alludes to the wine contained in the costrel.31

In northern Europe, important sources of terra sigillata/red slip pottery survived in the Argonne area in northeastern France, and throughout the fourth century they distributed their wares through northern Gaul, the Rhineland, and Britain.32 The Argonne kilns produced a great variety of open forms (plates and bowls), whose exteriors were frequently decorated with bands of pattern impressed with a roller. Unlike ARS, Argonne kilns also produced attractive closed forms, including beakers and pitchers in a variety of traditional Roman shapes, which were often enlivened with linear decoration in white paint. Potters of Trier on the Moselle occasionally took casts of metal (presumably silver) bowls with rich figural decoration and reproduced them in red terra sigillata; a fine but isolated example shows Orpheus enchanting a multitude of animals.33

Gray wares: gray and black terra sigillata and fine gray burnished ware

Ceramics were also fired in a reducing atmosphere to turn them black, gray, or dark brown. Some were coarse cooking pots made with a large admixture of fine gravel, which kept them from cracking when used in kitchen fires. Other dark ceramics were fine tableware, whose glossy surfaces could suggest tarnished silver or pewter (Figures 11.7–11.8). As in red slip ware, their glossy coating was a purified version of the body clay and similar in color to it. Between about 350 and 500, gray sigillata was taken up in two separate areas with similar results. In central and especially southern Gaul it is called sigillée grise, or Narbonne sigillata (Figure 11.7).34 The region centered on the city of Narbonne itself produced both red and gray versions, while the region centered on Marseille and Bordeaux produced almost exclusively gray wares. A similar fine gray pottery called Macedonian gray terra sigillata is found in northern Greece and FYROM (Figure 11.8). The ware was probably produced at Stobi.35 A very similar and contemporary ware (“Thracian Gray Ware”) appears in Thrace and Moesia (Bulgaria).36 The repertory of shapes consisted of open forms, plus the occasional jar or jug.

These gray wares made considerable use of stamped decoration on the exterior of cups and bowls. Wheels were rolled over the exterior to give texture (rouletting) (Figure 11.7). Punches were used to stamp ornaments into the mold for the vase or the vase itself (Figures 11.7–11.8). Stamps were abstract ornaments or else palm branches, wreaths, discs, rosettes, and arches, which give a mildly celebrative effect. Human figures, which had been abundant on cups and bowls in earlier times, were eliminated, and animals were reduced to the occasional rabbit or deer. The popularity of fine gray ware in these various areas has been linked to the arrival and passage of the Visigoths.37 Modest and dry as these stamped wares may seem, they could apparently hold considerable value for their owners; a gray Narbonne ware cup, made in Marseille and excavated in Florence was important enough to its owner to be worth restoring with lead bindings (Figure 11.7).38

North of the Alps fine black ceramics were a long-lived Celtic tradition. Black terra nigra was pre-Roman in origin, but it eventually took on Romanized shapes.39 During the fourth century terra nigra vases along the northern frontiers are decorated with burnished linear decoration organized in bands of cross-hatching and undulating lines. Such vases can be tracked from
Britain through the Rhineland in the fourth century and along the Danube through the fifth. Production sites have been identified on both the Roman and the barbarian sides of the river, and some date after the Hunnic conquest ca. 420. These burnished black pots apparently reflect the movements of barbarians into Roman lands all along the northern frontier, first as settlers then as conquerors.

Figure 11.7 Narbonne sigillata, Rigoir, form 18, 5th–early 6th century. Left: Rigoir 1968; right: example repaired with lead. Florence, S Reparata excavations; photo: Soprintendenza alle Antichità d’Etruria, 22/43/1.

Figure 11.8 Macedonian gray terra sigillata, 4th–early 5th century. Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki.
Lead-glazed ware

Technically outstanding is the fine pottery coated with a vitreous lead-based glaze. These green or brown lead-glazed wares flourished along the Danube in the province of Pannonia (western Hungary and eastern Austria) from the time of Constantine into the first quarter of the fifth century, and well-preserved pieces are found in cemeteries in this area (Figure 11.9). A great variety of traditional Roman shapes and many novelties were produced. In some cases (presumably relatively late pieces), pitchers are strikingly elongated, as in contemporary silverware. Glazed wares like those of Pannonia were found in lesser quantities in the upper Danube, middle Rhineland and northeastern Italy, where they were produced at various sites, including Carlino near Classe (Ravenna). At Rome a few two-handled cups (“sessile canthari”) take up glazing and are distinctive both for their shape and their high relief “pagan” figural decoration (deeds of Hercules, pagan sacrifice). The Roman cups seem to be heavy-handed imitations of Early Imperial silverware. After a long interval, glazed ceramics were revived at Constantinople, Italy, and perhaps Crete in the late sixth and seventh centuries.

Slip decoration: color-coated ware, marbleized ware, and painted ware

Slip was applied to clay vases either by dipping the vase or by painting it on with a brush or some other tool. The slip itself can be highly variable in color and luster. In terra sigillata the slip is a purified version of the body clay and is similar or identical in color to the body. In other kinds of pottery, the body clay is a different or, at any rate, not an identical color, and when the surface is not covered completely with slip, uncovered areas stand out (Figures 11.10–11.12). To distinguish high quality vessels with different colored body and slip from terra sigillata/red slip ware, the term “color-coated ware” is generally used. Much color-coated ware has a relatively matte surface and was used as a low-cost replacement for red slip ware. Some color-coated ware, however, was more ambitious.

In northwestern Europe beakers of color-coated ware were prestige items. They were usually dipped into a glossy black slip and fired in a reducing environment, and the coating often has a luster approaching that of terra sigillata, as on a beaker from Nijmegen on the lower Rhine (Figure 11.10). The most notable producer of such dark-coated light-bodied drinking gear was the vast kiln district at Trier. In the third century, dark-coated Trier ceramics were decorated with white and yellow barbotine (thick liquid clay). In the fourth century the thick
Figure 11.10  Color-coated “motto beaker” with barbotine decoration, inscribed REPLEME (“fill me!”), made in Trier, excavated in a tomb of 300–355. Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen.

Figure 11.11  Fragmentary Coptic painted ware bowl with a woman riding a camel, mid-7th century. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1994.114, gift of Dr and Mrs Jerome M. Eisenberg.
barbotine becomes thin paint, the use of yellow becomes rare, and the glossy, metallic effects tend to diminish. The Trier production ran from about 255 to 355 CE, and throughout this span it made extensive use of white-painted Latin inscriptions, which are primarily injunctions to enjoy life and to drink. Commands on these “motto beakers,” such as “drink everybody” (BIBITE), “give me something to drink” (DA BIBERE) and “mix for me” (MISCEMI), are similar to commands barked out in the contemporary banquet frescoes in the Catacomb of Saints Marcellinus and Peter in Rome. The catacomb paintings, however, have benevolent serving women named Irene (“Peace”) and Agape (“Love”), while the Trier beakers express an apparently unmitigated hedonism. In the case of the motto beaker in Nijmegen, the inscribed command is “fill me” (REPLEME) (Figure 11.10). The popularity of wine served hot probably explains the shape of such motto beakers; its globular belly and narrow neck would have tended to conserve the wine’s heat.

In the fourth century vessels in northwest Gaul and Germany could also be thinly painted with slip to create a mottled effect that could suggest metal or veined marble. “Marbleized ware” of various kinds was produced in an area along the Moselle from Trier to the Rhine. These vessels often have an extra embellishment of vine scrolls in white paint. In Greece color-coated ceramics were sporadically decorated with white vine scrolls or leaves throughout early Christian times.

Coptic Egypt had a particularly colorful tradition of painted pottery stemming from much earlier times. Various kinds of clay slip were applied to create polychrome effects. Jars and plates made of Nile silt were painted in red-brown, black, and occasionally yellow over a beige or white ground (Figure 11.11). During the fourth to sixth century, compositions were
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relatively restrained, and the subject matter is usually braids, stylized vegetation, and peaceful creatures: fish, birds, hares, and gazelles, which are arranged in bands around jars and on the interiors of plates. Arcs, dots, and hatching enliven the schemes. In contrast with most of the Mediterranean area, Coptic painted ceramics blossomed in the late sixth and seventh centuries. Figures (usually busts) with huge eyes stare out. Compositions can be triglyph-and-metope arrangements, or even interlaced medallions. Painters often create an exuberant buzz by packing the backgrounds with dots, spirals, and scribbles. Occasionally novel figural subjects appear: in one especially surprising case, a woman has a rough ride on a camel (Figure 11.11). This image must allude to the Arabs, who could be referred to as “women who ride camels,” and it probably dates after the conquest of Egypt in 641.

Some less spectacular Coptic painted ware was exported to Athens, and it could have had an influence on some of the various slip-painted wares that appear sporadically elsewhere around the Mediterranean. Arched patterns and rows of dots are common in slip painted wares, whether in Egypt (Figure 11.11) or on the northern shores of the Mediterranean (Figure 11.12). An early manifestation of slip-painted pottery is in Sardinia, where jugs of the fourth century are painted in red and brown slip with a band of ornament, which usually includes hatched medallions or fish; both recall common motifs of Coptic pottery. Central Greek ware, which was probably produced in Nea Anchialos during the sixth century, is rich in bowls and plates with precisely painted decoration, often based on a central cross or rosette. Particularly exuberant is the slip-painted ware produced at Crecchio on the Adriatic coast of Italy ca. 550–700 (Figure 11.12).

During the devastating wars of the sixth century, painted wares took a turn toward the chaotic in some hard-hit Mediterranean regions; in Naples and the surrounding region of Campania, the few surviving professional potters painted their wares with broad lines of red-brown slip scribbled erratically across the surface. In a cave used as a refuge in the Peloponnesus, this kind of uninhibited, unstructured painting mixed spiraling bands and scribbled knots.

Gouged and champlevé decoration on color-coated ware
Throughout the Mediterranean area color-coated jugs could be decorated with grooves gouged with a stylus, recalling chasing or fluting on bronze and silver pitchers. In a small group of plates or bowls in Asia Minor, decoration is incised through the red slip and the background is cut away, a technique often referred to as “champlevé”. The best-preserved piece is a plate with a large cross enclosed in an ovulo molding.

Smooth and coarse wares: amphorae, cooking pots, and jugs
Most ancient pottery was made for entirely utilitarian purposes. Vessels of coarse ware were manufactured for cooking, storage, and transportation of agricultural products. The distribution of transport amphorae and other no-nonsense pots around the early Christian world provides important evidence for commercial exchange among different parts of Roman Empire and later the barbarian kingdoms. Amphorae, whose primary contents were olive oil, wine, and fish sauce (garum), are a particularly vivid source of economic information, and their contrasting shapes may have served as identifiers for commercial purposes. Finds in Rome, for example, have shown that amphorae came from one end of the Mediterranean to the other (Figure 11.13). The city’s wide-ranging trade continued throughout Late Antiquity until it was sharply limited by the Arab conquest of the Maghreb at the end of the seventh century.
In the late sixth and seventh centuries, the custom of placing a jug in tombs seems to have taken on strength in the Mediterranean area. The jugs are normally without surface coating, but at times reflect a decorative impulse; in Athens pedestal feet and funnel mouths create a graceful profile, and the tall Classical oil bottle (lekythos) is revived, although without the traditional foot. In some places in Greece, tombs can contain poorly made jugs, which were probably used only for the burial ceremony.64

**Lamps**

Pottery producers in Tunisia came to dominate the market for lamps as they did the market for tableware in the Early Christian period. In the early fourth century some potters in Tunisia began to make lamps of the fine red clay used for *terra sigillata africana* (ARS), usually in kilns that also produced tableware, and this line of production went on to greater success in the fifth and sixth centuries (Figure 11.14). A popular variety of these red clay “African lamps” had a rather amorphous pear-shape; a channel connects the decorated disk to the relatively small spout, and the convex shoulder was usually decorated with a palm branch or striations (Figure 11.14, left). Such lamps, classified as Hayes 1972, type I or *Atlante I*, type VIII, could ride on the wave of North African exports of agricultural products and ARS dishes throughout the Mediterranean.65 From about 420 ce, a newer, finer, and more influential type of lamp emerged, designated Hayes African lamp type IIA; *Atlante I*, type X (Figure 11.14, right). It had a flat shoulder, which was usually decorated with rosettes or jewel-like ornaments, and the central disc could be decorated with emblems, such as crosses or menorahs, or figural or ornamental designs. Usually the disc held a single figure, but some type IIA lamps produced at Sidi Marzouk Tounsi had multi-figural compositions with narrative biblical subjects. For example, Daniel in Oriental costume

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Figure 11.13  Containers for food imports of late antique Rome: amphorae from (left to right) Spain, Tunisia, south Italy, Egypt, Cyprus, Syria, Aegean area/Asia Minor, Palestine. Display in Museo Nazionale Romano Crypta Balbi, Rome.
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Figure 11.14 Left: African lamp Hayes type I, with reaper, late 4th–early 5th century. Right: African lamp Hayes type IIA with Daniel in the lions’ den, 460–530. Private collection.

Prays in the lions’ den, and the angel brings Habakkuk carrying food, as in Daniel 6:16–22 and 14:32–38. Several different kiln sites in Tunisia produced lamps of Hayes type IIA, but the finest came from Sidi Marzouk Tounsi. Around the time of the Byzantine conquest of Tunisia in 530 and after a century of intense activity, production ceased at Sidi Marzouk. Lamps of the same general design but poorer in quality (Hayes type IIB) continued to be produced and exported from northern Tunisia until the end of the seventh century.

In general, early Christian and early Byzantine lamp-makers around the Mediterranean continued to produce ceramic lamps in their local tradition, or else they imitated imported African lamps. A widely scattered group of more spectacular lamps, however, poses an authenticity problem. These lamps have the form of a fish with a Christian monogram on its side and come in two sizes, the larger of which is quite naturalistic. Examples of both types are on display in museums in Athens and Zagreb. An example of the large type in Seville lacks the Christian monogram. Examples of the large type in the British Museum and the Catacomb of Ottavia at Rome have been considered forgeries. Suspicions seem justified since the fine technique used to produce these lamps is unusual, and no fragmentary examples seem to be known from excavations.

Smooth and coarse wares: architectural decoration

Terracotta plaques with relief decoration and normally without a decorative surface coating flourished in Spain and the Maghreb. The plaques presented Christian monograms, biblical scenes, or stylized floral ornaments and could be used in ceilings or as closure slabs for tombs.
Smooth and coarse wares: tokens of pilgrimage

From the fifth century onwards mementos of pilgrimage (eulogiae or “blessings”) were frequently made of plain ceramics. Often the eulogiae took the form of small flasks: two-handled bottles with a flattened cylindrical body (a “pilgrim’s flask,” ampulla, or costrel), which were intended to contain oil or water consecrated at the shrine of a saint. No color coating was applied to these ampullae. The most widespread are “Menas flasks,” whose principal decoration is a roundel with St Menas of Alexandria praying in the orans position adored by two kneeling camels (Figure 11.15). An example in Paris presents Saint Menas in a relatively classical contrapposto pose and with relatively soft modeling (Figure 11.15).73 His halo of hair, like that of Anastasius, consul of 517, probably indicates the approximate date of the flask. Later works are flatter and more symmetrical and enclose the saint’s image within a circular frame embellished with an inscription, a wreath, or a string of pearls.

Small clay ampullae have been found in Asia Minor, and Ephesus seems to have been the main producer.74 Some of the Ephesian ampullae show evangelists holding books; they may have been made to commemorate visits to the tomb of the Evangelist John at Ephesus (Figure 11.16).75 Other Ephesian flasks show Christian scenes with no special connection to the city. Ampullae with evangelists or crosses also appear in significant numbers in Nea Anchialos in central Greece and could have been produced there.76

Ceramic “eulogiae” could be even simpler: small clay discs stamped with a holy image. Some show the column-sitting saints Simeon Stylites and Simeon the Wonderworker and must have been produced at their shrines near Antioch.77 Others show images connected with the venerated sites in Palestine: the Annunciation, the Adoration of the Magi, and a symbolic image of Solomon.

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Figure 11.15 Pilgrim’s flask with St Menas adored by camels, Alexandria, ca. 520. Louvre, Legs Weill 1950, E 2445, AF 7035, © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.
Statuettes

Figurines of soldiers, women, and animals, some brightly painted, rank as perhaps the most unexpected ceramic productions in these times of aversion to idols and idolatry. To some extent the ceramic statuettes of early Christian times could have been directed at a pagan clientele, but the ritual use of statuettes was clearly integrated into Christian religious culture. Sagalassos produced soldiers, who occasionally are marked with crosses. In Coptic Egypt, female figures appear at a multitude of sites, including the pilgrimage shrine of St Menas. The statuettes are usually emphatically maternal, ranging from nursing mothers and orantes, to fleshy nudes. David Frankfurter has conjectured that they were endowed with flexible identities, which could include Mary, Isis, ritual supplicants at shrines, saints on a domestic altar, or figures of communication in a family member’s tomb.

Further reading

Writing about early Christian ceramics as art tends to focus on iconographic issues and African Red Slip ware (ARS). The pioneering works of Jan Willem Salomonson are particularly rich and comprehensive from this point of view; he first anatomized the chronological development of ARS and extensively explored the iconography of its applied figural reliefs. Works by Jochen Garbsch and Bernhard Overbeck explore issues of competition between religions and cultures. Meg Armstrong compiled a treasury of motives of all types while Sophie zu Löwenstein has done a vast and analytic study of the mythological subjects on ARS. Peter Talloen writes on the evolution of iconography on early Christian ceramics at Sagalassos. Paul Corby Finney contextualizes the early Good Shepherd lamps.

The various Late Roman red-slip wares have been securely distinguished and classified by John Hayes. He has established their chronologies and compiled and organized the vast array of stamped ornaments.
on ARS and other late red-slip wares. R.P. Symonds has described the life cycle of dark colored Rhenish wares, probably the most attractive aspect of late Roman pottery in northwestern Europe. Refinements of chronology, distinction of workshops, and tracking of the distribution of these wares continues to the present and on into the foreseeable future. Chris Wickham incorporates ceramic evidence into a major economic history.

Notes


2 For Mediterranean sites with outstanding finds of pottery, see Paul Reynolds, Michel Bonifay and Miguel Ángel Cau, “Key contexts for the dating of late Roman Mediterranean fine wares: a preliminary review and ‘seriation,’” in Cau et al., *LRFW 1: Late Roman Fine Wares: Solving Problems of Typology and Chronology* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), 15–32.


11 Salomonson, J.W., “Spätromische rote Tonware mit Reliefverzierung aus nordafrikanischen Werkstätten, entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur reliefgeschmückten Terra Sigillata Chiara ‘C’,”
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18 For the iconography of lauces, see J.W. Salomonson, “Late Roman Earthenware with Relief Decoration Found in Northern-Africa and Egypt,” *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* 43 (1962), 53–95; *Atlante I*, 163–165 (E. Tortorici), pls 78–80; Garbsch and Overbeck, *Späantike zwischen Heidentum und Christentum*.


23 For comprehensive catalogues, see Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, 217–287; *Atlante I*, 122–130 (Tortorella), pls 56–64.


27 *Atlante II*, 110–111 (Mezquirit), pls. 25,11–14; 29,1–2; 47,1–5; 49,3–5; 50,1.


32 Brulet in Brulet et al., 2010, 216–253.
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44 Tomb B387.1: Steures 2011, 102, 648, 732.
48 Brulet in Brulet et al. 2010, 381–386; Steures 2011, 295.
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52 Sahih Bukhari, Book 4, Vol. 55, Hadith 643; Sahih Muslim, 6140.
53 Hayes, Roman Pottery: Fine-Ware Imports, 92–93, 253–254, pl. 71.
59 Hayes, Roman Pottery: Fine-Ware Imports, 93, 254–255, pl. 72; Salvi 2010; Salvi 2012, 173, fig. 14.
60 Hayes, Late Roman Pottery, 409, pl. 23a; Cahill 2010, cat. no. 220.
61 For an effective use of ceramic evidence in a general history see Chris Wickham, Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. “Methodological Issues,” 7 ff. For bibliography and a synthetic approach to the issue, see Stefano Costa, “The Late Antique Economy: Ceramics and Trade,” Late Antique Archaeology, 10 (2013): 91–130.
63 Sagui, Ricci and Romei in Arena et al., Roma dall’antichità al medioevo, 266–306.
65 For recent comprehensive studies, see Jean Bussière, J., Lampes antiques d’Algérie II: Lampes tardives et lampes chrétiennes (Montagnac: International Lychnological Association, 2007); Michel Bonifay, “Advances in the study of African Late Roman pottery (3rd–7th c.)” in Papanikola-Bakirzi and Kousoulakou 2010, 37–64. For African lamps along the Danube, see Hárshegyi and Ottomány 2013, 480–481.
66 Van den Hoek and Herrmann, Light from the Age of Augustine, cat. no. 25; van den Hoek and Herrmann, Pottery, Pavements, and Paradise, 71–72, 221, 494, pl. 8b, 28b.
67 For Algerian imitations, see Bussière 2007. For Greece, see Antonis Tsakalos, in Lazaridou, Transition to Christianity, cat. nos 121–127.
75 Metzger, Les ampoules à eulogie du Musée du Louvre.
78 Elizabeth Murphy and Jereon Poblome, “Situating Coroplastic and Moulded-Ware Productions in Late Antique Sagalassos (SW Turkey),” Newsletter of the Coroplastic Studies Interest Group 7 (2012), 2–3.
80 Frankfurter, “Female Figurines in Early Christian Egypt.”
81 Garbsch and Overbeck, Spätantike zwischen Heidentum und Christentum.
86 Hayes, Late Roman Pottery.
87 Symonds, Rhenish Wares.
88 Cau, Reynolds and Bonifay, LRFW 1: Late Roman Fine Wares.
89 Wickham, Framing the Early Middle Ages, esp. pp. 72–108.