

A NEW SIGNED CORINTHIAN *ARYBALLOS*

Katerina Volioti and Maria Papageorgiou*

In this paper we discuss a Corinthian aryballos, which is said to have been found in Thessaly. The presence of a potter's and/or painter's signature on this finely potted and elaborately decorated early sixth-century aryballos potentially added to the socioeconomic value of the pot in ancient times. The name 'Laphilos' could indicate a master painter of quatrefoil aryballoi that perhaps relate to the Liebieghaus Group.

Introduction

Corinthian *aryballoi* are one of the most abundant ceramic find categories of the Archaic period in the Greek mainland and in locations across the Mediterranean basin. Although these closed shapes, featuring a narrow neck aperture and a broad mouthplate, were suited to holding (scented) oil, they could also have been traded, dedicated, and buried as empty containers (Payne 1931, 5 note 3; Parko 2001, 59; Stissi 2003, 78; Kunisch 2006, 193 note 13; Neeft 2006, 105 note 5)¹. In this article, we discuss an unpublished early sixth-century BC² piece that was probably found in Thessaly and is kept today in a private collection in Athens (Ephorate of Private Archaeological Collections ΕΑΙΑΣ 72)³. The *aryballos* bears a common, yet exceptionally detailed, quatrefoil motif and an unparalleled painted inscription by (or on behalf of) its maker (Fig. 1). The likely Thessalian provenance is also of interest, especially because the Archaic period is largely under-represented in Thessaly and a systematic study of Corinthian pottery in Thessaly is lagging behind in the literature.

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¹ For perfumes, see Frère 2008, 210 and Lambrugo 2013, 317-342.

² All subsequent dates are BC.

³ Maria Papageorgiou will publish more Corinthian *aryballoi* from this collection.

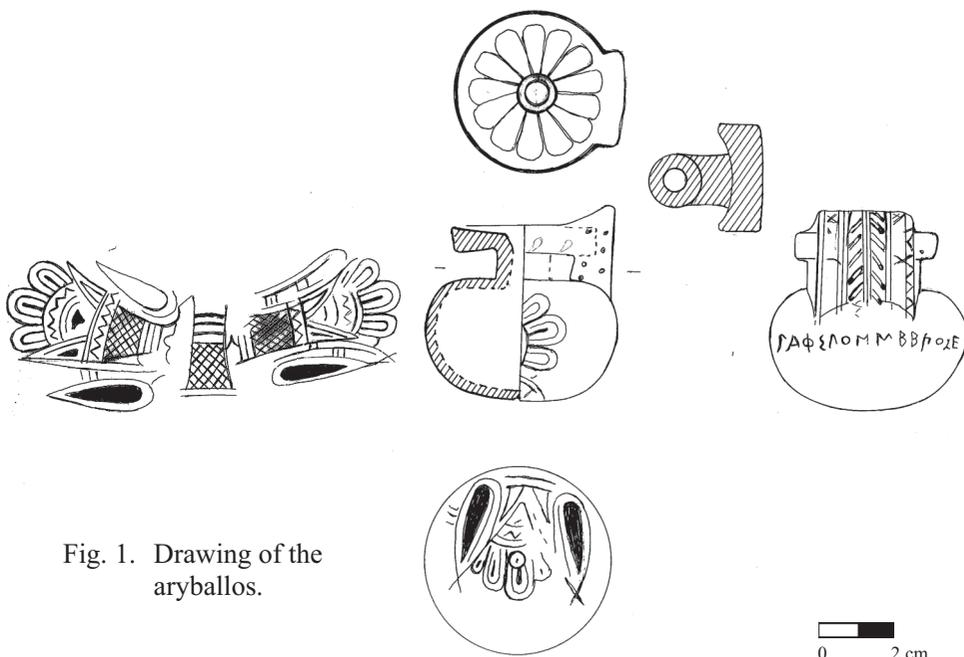


Fig. 1. Drawing of the aryballos.

Description

Condition. The *aryballos* has survived unbroken and is complete except for a chip of 1 cm in length at the junction of the handle with the mouthplate. The present owner informed us that, nearly a century ago, farmers used to bring ancient pottery they recovered in their fields to her father, who owned a company of agricultural machinery at Volos. The chip, most likely, is a scar caused by a sharp agricultural tool hitting the *aryballos*. A large part of the *aryballos*' surfaces is covered by encrustations. These are solidified light soils (clays), which are common in the fertile Thessalian plains.

Shape. This small round (or ball) *aryballos* measures 5.0 cm in height and 5.1 cm in diameter and is of Payne's shape A (Payne 1931, 287). The globular body of the *aryballos* is not completely spherical but slightly compressed and features a small round indentation at the centre of its flat underside. The *aryballos*, therefore, balances well in upright position.

The flat strap handle, as one would expect for *aryballoi* of this shape, is visually prominent and large (height: 2.8 cm; width: 3.2 cm; and thickness: 1.0 cm). Yet the handle is much heavier than that usually seen on other *aryballoi*, and its upwards sloping part is quite exceptional and constitutes an elaborate element. The mouthplate has a slightly concave top, 3.9 cm in diameter, growing to a depth of 4.3 cm where the heavy handle is added to it, and its side is 0.7 cm high. The aperture of the neck measures 0.9 cm and the external diameter of the neck is 1.3 cm.



Fig. 2. The herringbone pattern on the handle.



Fig. 3. The elaborate quatrefoil motif.

Surface. The surface of the *aryballos* is smooth and largely unscratched, indicating repeated burnishing by the potter and little use by the vase owner(s). The clay fabric is fine, resulting from thorough purification and kneading of the clay, and its yellowish pale ivory colour is typical of Corinthian wares. In addition to the potter, the painter of the *aryballos* - who may have been an individual other than the potter - also invested time in its manufacture by applying the brownish black and added purple clay paint with confident brush strokes. All decoration is in the outline technique without any incisions. Unfortunately, almost all of the paint has flaked off by now.

Decoration. The mouthplate features a rosette with 13 petals bounded by a line at the edge of the rim and another running around the mouth aperture (Fig. 1)⁴. A dense cross-hatching pattern decorates the vertical side of the rim and the surface of the handle at the mouthplate. Each of the narrow sides of the handle shows two vertical rows of short strokes, sloping upwards towards the centre. The rendering of the stripes creates an unpainted area between them. A similar herringbone pattern, bordered by three vertical lines, is drawn at the centre of the handle (Figs. 1 and 2). The decoration of the handle extends onto the globular body, possibly indicating lack of precision on the part of the painter.

⁴ Dirt and encrustation hinder the identification of any paint inside the mouth that would have facilitated the smooth flow of oil.

The main ornament of the *aryballos* appears at the front, opposite the handle, as well as at the sides and base. It is a quatrefoil motif where the spreading quadruple lotus consists of four calyxes with petals and four large ovoid-shaped leaves (Figs. 1, 3, and 4).

Commentary

When emptying its oily contents, the *aryballos* could be held upside down, as shown in Attic vase paintings that date to the late sixth and early fifth century, such as a red-figured *krater* attributed to Euphronios (Berlin F2180, Schöne-Denkinger 2009, pl. 21.2-3; *BAD* 200063)⁵ and a red-figured *kylix* attributed to Makron (Peccioli 244410, Bruni 2009, 235, fig. 3). For our top-heavy flask, the large handle and rim facilitated its handling and manipulation. The user could rest his/her thumb on the upwards slopping upper part of the handle to dispense small amounts of oil.

The lotus motif is reminiscent of the type of quadruple lotuses that came into being under Oriental influence in the Protocorinthian period (Payne 1931, 147 fig. 54B). However, the elongated bracts of the lotuses and the loose circumscribed leaves bear more resemblance to later variants (Payne 1931, 147, fig. 54C and, especially, 54D). All parallels we could find are simpler, as exemplified by those on two *aryballoi* excavated in Caere and Berezan respectively (Zurich 2449, Isler 1973, pl. 4.10-15; St. Petersburg B.78-93, Bukina 2009, pl. 21.5). Apparently, our *aryballos* shows an unusually elaborate motif.

Humfry Payne dated *aryballoi* with elaborate quatrefoils, his type NC 485A, to the Middle Corinthian (MC) period (*ca.* 600-575)⁶, a chronology generally accepted by other scholars. The ‘degenerate’ type of quatrefoil *aryballoi* (NC 1263), which already begins in the MC period, encompasses innumerable mass-produced pieces (Payne 1931, 321; Ure 1934, 43; Amyx 1988, 443). The particularly elaborate pattern of our *aryballos* gives rise to two possibilities. First, the principle that the motif deteriorates with time could imply that the *aryballos* is early in the sequence. Second, this particular *aryballos* may have served as a showpiece for a painter and/or workshop owner who also practised and/or coordinated the contemporary less laborious execution of quatrefoils on other *aryballoi*. For Attic figured pottery, for which the scholarly identification of painters’ hands is in general more advanced than for Corinthian wares, the same painter could embrace a refined and a cursory drawing style for different vases (Smith 2014, 144). Thus, we would date the *aryballos* early in the sixth century only tentatively.

⁵ In the database of the Beazley Archive <<http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk>> *BAD* refers to the vase number.

⁶ For a lower date of MC wares, based on assemblages of Corinthian and Attic pottery from graves at Sindos, see Tiverios 1985-86, 80. We are grateful to Stefanos Gimatzidis for this reference.



Fig. 4. The motif on the underside of the *aryballos*.

Is it possible to assign our *aryballos* to a painter or group? Some MC quatrefoil *aryballoi* show a female's head facing left on the backside of the handle and either a star or a wheel on the body below the handle. A quatrefoil *aryballos* from Italy, for example, is similar to our piece in terms of the decoration on the mouthplate and the side of the rim, yet shows a woman's head on the handle and a wheel below it (Rennes D.863.1.7, Laurens/Touchefeu 1979, pl. 9.3-4; Touchefeu-Meynier 2004). Darrell Amyx classified *aryballoi* with these characteristics under the Liebieghaus Group (Amyx/Lawrence 1975, 32; Amyx 1988, 164-165; Neeft 1991, 49-50). He observed, however, that for some *aryballoi* the drawing is of a high standard and/or the compositions are distinct, and hence he posited that these pieces relate only remotely to this group. In actual fact, *aryballoi* of the Liebieghaus Group are not the only types of elaborate quatrefoil *aryballoi* (NC 484-485A): Kees Neeft has isolated three distinct hands and two groups, one of them being the Group of Zürich 2449, but it remains unclear whether all of these belong to one workshop⁷.

The absence of the typical characteristics of the Liebieghaus Group on our piece could reflect a painter's willingness to mix and match familiar and less familiar visual elements. As such, the reserved rosette and cross-hatching pattern on the rim generated the impression of a visually standardised quatrefoil *aryballos*. The elaborate quadruple lotus motif, the herringbone, and the inscription, however, all communicated to prospective vase buyers that this *aryballos* was unusual. Unique MC *aryballoi* include a recently published find from Isthmia, which bears a cinquefoil and a figural scene (Isthmia IP 2429, Arafat 2008, fig. A.1). A further unparalleled *aryballos*, excavated at Corinth, shows a swan with raised

⁷ K. Neeft, personal communication.

wings, the drawing of which undoubtedly takes cues from a quatrefoil motif (Corinth CP-1972, Amyx 1996, pl. 20.76). Clearly, *aryballoi* of shape A, regardless of whether or not they belong to the Liebieghaus Group, exhibit more varied decoration than Payne postulated (see Arafat 2008, 56). Whether our *aryballos* then relates to the Liebieghaus Group remains unresolved. We now turn to an examination of the *aryballos*' inscription, which suggests a piece with a special purpose.

The inscription

The same brownish black paint has been used for the inscription as for the quatrefoil and other ornaments, thus suggesting that the writer was also the painter of this *aryballos*. This contention is strengthened by the comparable thickness of the brushstrokes for the inscription and for most of the lines of the quadruple lotus. Although the paint for the letters has faded (Figs. 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7), the inscription is legible and reads 'Laphilos made me' (ΛΑΦΙΛΟΣ ΜΕ ΕΠΟΙΕ). The height of the letters ranges from 2 mm for the *omicrons* to 6 mm for the *phi*. For most letters, the height is 4 or 5 mm (4 mm: the *alpha*, the *san*, the *mu*, the first two *epsilons*, and the second *iota*; 5 mm: the *lambdas*, the first *iota*, the *pi*, and the last *epsilon*). The inscription appears at 0.3-0.4 cm below the handle and runs horizontally from left to right. This direction was common for Early Corinthian (EC) inscriptions (Jeffery 1990, 117), suggesting a date early in the MC period for our *aryballos*. The quatrefoil motif was probably completed before painting the inscription. The gap between the lotus petals and the beginning of the inscription on the left is 0.8 cm. On the right, however, only 0.1 cm separates the last letter from the lotus petals. Despite the thoughtful drawing of inscriptions on Archaic pottery in general (Osborne/Pappas 2007), the artisan in this case ran out of space and wrote with some haste.

The letter forms are typical of Corinthian script (Jeffery 1990, 114), implying that the writer was a Corinthian and not a foreigner living in Corinth. In particular, the two *iotas* are of the early four-stroke form (Amyx 1988, 549; Jeffery 1990, 115; Wachter 2001, 228), the first two *epsilons* are of the sharply angled *beta*-looking type (Jeffery's type ε2 and ε1, in the order they appear), and the last *epsilon* (Jeffery's type ε3) is the distinct type Corinthian script used for the long e-vowel (Arena 1967, 127-128; Lorber 1979, 96-97; Jeffery 1990, 114-115; Wachter 2001, 243). Furthermore, the *alpha* is Jeffery's type α3, which occurs before 550, and the two *omicrons* are small, as one would expect for Corinthian inscriptions (Jeffery 1990, 116). The two *lambdas*, the *phi*, and the *mu* are all of an early date, and specifically Jeffery's types λ1, φ1, and μ1. The *pi* need not be discussed, since the Corinthians used just one type. Finally, the 90° clock-wise 'Σ' is the *san*, which gave way to *sigma* only in the early fifth century (Jeffery 1990, 116).

Although the letters are neat, they are more cursive and smaller than those in vase inscriptions of the EC period (see Jeffery 1990, 126). The letter forms



Fig. 5. Part of the inscription reading 'ΛΑΦΙΛΟΣ'.

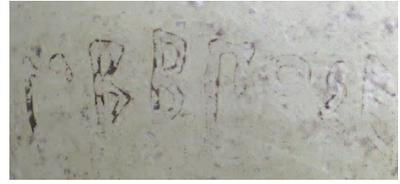


Fig. 6. Part of the inscription reading 'ΜΕΠΠΟΙΕ'.



Fig. 7. The three dots below the *san* of the inscription.

resemble those in a dedicatory inscription, which is yet to be read with certainty, on a Late EC/Early MC round *aryballos* imitating a Corinthian prototype from the Delian sanctuary on Paros (Paros 4; Rubensohn 1962, 121-124; Detoratu 2003-09, note 205, fig. 191). Even more so, the letters of our inscription, and their size in relation to that of the *aryballos*, are comparable to those appearing on a bespoke MC *aryballos* of similar dimensions that shows a dance performance and a swirling long inscription (Corinth C-54-1, Roebuck/Roebuck 1955, pl. 63). As for this bespoke *aryballos* (see Osborne/Pappas 2007, 145-146), the presence of writing on our piece was integral to the visual impact of the vase. While most Corinthian vase inscriptions date from 580-550 (Wachter 2001, 34), our inscription is earlier and as a rare feature it may have contributed to the prestige of this *aryballos*. How could we interpret the inscription?

The content, 'Laphilos made me', would suggest a signature by the potter and/or painter. Signatures, however, are rare on Corinthian ceramics (Lorber 1979, 125-126), where inscriptions generally label the individuals, animals, and other creatures of the figural scene (Amyx 1988, 548). Based on Fritz Lorber's seminal study, signatures appear on only 5 Corinthian pots and *pinakes* (Lorber 1979, 109)⁸. Another early MC quatrefoil *aryballos* shows, on the broad surface of the handle, a female head, perhaps a hetaira's⁹, near whose mouth we find the words

⁸ A potter's signature also appears on a Protocorinthian candlestick excavated in Ithaca and bearing an inscription in non-Corinthian script (Robertson 1948, 89; Lorber 1979, 12.7).

⁹ Such busts could relate to maturation rites for young women of status (Klinger 2009).

‘I am Aineta’, whilst below the handle appear 9 names of men, in all probability Aineta’s admirers (Wachter 2001, 47-48.COR 18, 280; Gerleigner 2012, 99). Furthermore, four Late Corinthian (LC) quatrefoil *aryballoi*, all made in the same workshop and bearing simpler quatrefoils than our specimen, feature short inscriptions with individuals’ names (Pottier 1929, pl. 5.3-4; Arena 1967, 90-91.37-40, pl. 10-11.1-2; Wachter 2001, 66-67.COR 47-50). These inscriptions are dedications produced to order, rather than signatures (Wachter 2001, 281). On present evidence, a parallel to our signed quatrefoil *aryballos* is missing.

The name ‘Laphilos’ is unknown amongst Attic and non-Attic vase inscriptions, yet it occurs in epigraphic evidence from Argolis, Lakonia, Boiotia, and Phokis (Fraser/Matthews 1997, 269; 2000, 256, *s.v.* Λάφιλος)¹⁰. The cognate name in Attic/Ionic script would be ‘Leophilos’, which is also uncommon¹¹. Thucydides mentions a certain Laphilos, who is otherwise unheard of, as one of the Spartan signatories of peace treaties with Athens in the tenth year of the Peloponnesian War (*Thuc.* 5.19.2; Gomme 1956, 679). Amyx refrained from identifying painters’ hands within the Liebieghaus Group. On this piece, nonetheless, we could have the name of a painter, and possibly master, for a sequence of quatrefoil *aryballoi*. The second word, the direct object ‘με’ refers to the *aryballos* itself and, unsurprisingly for Corinthian vase inscriptions, there is no elision between ‘ME’ and ‘ΕΠΟΙΕ’ (see Wachter 2001, 246).

Concerning the third word, the verb ‘ποιέω’ (to create) is unusual for Corinthian vase inscriptions (see Lorber 1979, 131; Amyx 1988, 661; Wachter 2001, 367). The exact reading of ‘ΕΠΟΙΕ’ gives rise to different possible interpretations of the inscription¹². On the one hand, the lack of available space could have forced the writer to omit the ending ‘-ΣΕ’ from ‘ΕΠΟΙΕΣΕ’ in the aorist¹³. On the other hand, as we mentioned above, the last ‘E’ of the inscription (Jeffery’s type ε3) differs from the preceding two (Jeffery’s types ε2 and ε1 respectively). Evidently, the last *epsilon* here stands for the diphthong *epsilon iota* so that the third word would be in the imperfect tense ‘ΕΠΟΙΕΙ’. In this case, the inscription is complete and the writer intentionally chose the imperfect. The ending ‘-ΕΙ’ can be seen in a sixth-century engraved inscription in Corinthian script reading ‘ΠΙΛΟΣ Μ ΕΠΟΙΕΙ’¹⁴ in retrograde on a roof tile that was found in a house at Arta, north-western Greece (Pliakou/Kontogianni 1997, 568, pl. 210a; Whitley 2002-03, 57-58, fig. 99)¹⁵.

¹⁰ The name ‘Λάφιλος’ is not attested in any volumes of the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*. Compare to John D. Beazley’s comment about Sophilos’ name (Beazley 1956, 37).

¹¹ A. W. Johnston, personal communication.

¹² For interpreting the third word, special thanks are due to Georg Gerleigner.

¹³ For the absence of *nu ephelkystikon* in non-Ionic script, see Wachter 2001, 234.

¹⁴ Our reading, based on the image in Whitley 2002-03, 58, fig. 99.

¹⁵ We are grateful to Alan W. Johnston and Georgia Pliakou for these references.

According to some scholars, including Amyx and Lorber, the verb in a signature by Timonidas on a MC flask is also in the imperfect and reads ‘ΕΓΡΑΦΕ’ (Athens 277; Lorber 1979, 37-38-40; Amyx 1988, 564). Rudolf Wachter, however, considers the badly preserved second letter from the end a *psi*, so that the verb reads ‘ΕΓΡΑΨΕ’ in the aorist (Wachter 2001, 56). Apparently, the imperfect in our inscription is rare for Corinthian wares. It is more frequent on Attic vases, yet these date to a later period than our *aryballos* and comparisons may not be appropriate¹⁶.

Three vertical dots appear below the *san* of the inscription (Fig. 7). The dots have been drawn carefully and cannot be accidental splashes of wet clay paint. They could be yet another decorative element, perhaps directing a vase viewer’s attention to the presence of writing. Alternatively, the three dots could be punctuation, even though punctuation is exceptionally rare amongst Corinthian inscriptions (Jeffery 1990, 116). Furthermore, it is uncommon to have punctuation below a vase inscription¹⁷. Punctuation consisting of three painted dots appears in the abecedarium of a LC(?) *aryballos* at Athens (Canellopoulos 1319; Amyx 1988, 568.51; Wachter 2001, 68.COR 51) and in a dedicatory inscription on a fragment from a large vase (Corinth C-70-352; Amyx 1988, 593.127).

Unlike the large-scale production of specific decorative schemas, such as that of the quatrefoil motif, painted inscriptions were neither devised nor copied *en masse*. Even by copying the inscription the writer would have aimed to create a show piece, perhaps advertising his drawing and writing skills as the proprietor of a large workshop specialising in the manufacture of quatrefoil *aryballoi*. If so, the signature would have raised the monetary value of the *aryballos* and thus its marketability in foreign places. It is with a Thessalian audience in mind that we examine below the occurrence of this Corinthian flask in Thessaly.

Corinthian pottery in Thessaly

As with all items in private collections, caution about findspots is pertinent. A

¹⁶ In Henry Immerwahr’s *Corpus of Attic Vase Inscriptions* (CAVI), there are 10 vases, all from the later sixth century, where ‘ΕΠΟΙΕΙ’ appears in a non-fragmentary form (CAVI nos. 950, 2067a, 2351, 3253, 3621, 4590, 5301, 6379, 6760, and 8162). The word ‘[E]ΓΡΑΦΕ(N)’ is shown on another 8 Attic vases, ranging in date from *ca.* 525 to the end of the fifth century (CAVI nos. 60, 207, 1288, 2050, 2387, 2579, 2689, and 4420). In addition, a late sixth-century red-figured *alabastron* bears two incised inscriptions reading ‘ηλινος εποιε’ and ‘Φσιαχς εγραφε’ (CAVI no. 5790). CAVI version of January 2009, accessed 26 November 2012, available from <<http://avi.unibas.ch/home.html>>.

¹⁷ R. Osborne, personal communication.

¹⁸ In the earliest twentieth century, Konstantinos Glavanis, a person with the same surname as the collector, helped with the financing of trial excavations at Pagasai (Demetrias), the protection of antiquities, and the publication of a book about the archaeological museum of Volos (Arvanitopoulos 1909, 9-10).

Thessalian provenance for this *aryballos*, nonetheless, seems likely, given the collector's testimony about farmers bringing antiquities to her father in Volos¹⁸. The fine preservation of the *aryballos* suggests that it was found in a grave, rather than a deposit containing cleared domestic or dedicatory pottery. The exact Thessalian findspot remains unknown. A future scientific analysis of the encrustation and dirt, and comparisons with the chemical and geological composition of local soils, could assist in determining, albeit only in broad terms, a region in Thessaly as the potential findspot.

How does our *aryballos* fare within the context of other Corinthian pottery found in Thessaly? Archaic evidence in Thessaly is generally scarce and/or not well preserved (for example, see Stissi 2004, 116; Frussu 2008, 77; Pikoulas, 2009). In addition, there exist no comprehensive studies about the distribution of Corinthian wares in Thessaly. Despite these limitations, brief excavation reports mention Corinthian *aryballoi* and other Corinthian shapes in various Thessalian locations. In eastern Thessaly, these include:

- Nea Ionia, Volos (Rontiri 1993a, pl. 77; Volos K 731, Batziou-Efstathiou 2004, 136)
- Spartias-Latomeion, 9 kilometres west of Volos (Stamelou/Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2010, 166, 177, fig. 15.a-c)
- Pherai (Arvanitopoulos 1926, 108; Morgan 2003, 92, 95; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2008, 241)
- Larisa and its wider ambit (Tziafalias 1975; 1984, 150; Galles 1972; Hanschmann 1981, 120; Volos K 2997, Batziou-Efstathiou 2004, 135)
- Phthiotic Thebes (Arvanitopoulos 1908, 180)
- Almyros (Malakasioti 1992, 233, pl. 70a)
- Pharsalos (Verdelis 1952, 202-203)

In western Thessaly, which has received less investigation and publication, Corinthian pottery is reported, for example, at:

- Ktouri (Morgan 2003, 89, with references)
- Orphana (Rontiri, 1993b)
- Kedros Karditsas (Kastanis' collection, Entry Book of the Archaeological Museum of Volos)¹⁹

Notwithstanding its visual uniqueness, our *aryballos* was one of numerous Corinthian ceramics reaching Thessaly in ancient times. Contrary to notions of isolation in traditional scholarship, the people living in Thessaly were integrated

¹⁹ We would like to thank Aimilia Kalogianni and Charalambos Intzesiloglou for this information.

with far-reaching trade networks that supplied imported pottery to Greek, Aegean, and Mediterranean destinations (see Volioti, *forthcoming*). Quatrefoil *aryballoi*, in particular, were distributed widely and in all directions of maritime travel emanating from Corinth (Martelli 1972, 23-24, with references) and it is not surprising to find them in Thessaly.

Concluding remarks

Within the large corpus of MC quatrefoil *aryballoi*, our flask is significant for its elaborate and finely executed decoration, its rare potter's and/or painter's signature, and its probable Thessalian provenance. Scholars of Corinthian and Attic pottery have traditionally paid more attention to pieces showing figural scenes than those bearing patterned decoration. The deterioration of quatrefoils on sixth-century round *aryballoi* (Payne 1931, 147-148, 320-321; Ure 1934, 43-45) reflects painters' tendency towards increasing haste in decoration. Despite this trend, some time in the early sixth century a Corinthian vase painter decided to write his, or another individual's, name on a quatrefoil rather than a figured *aryballos*. In all likelihood, the painter's decision was not random. Inscriptions on figured *aryballoi* would normally appear in the area of the figural scene. For quatrefoil *aryballoi*, by contrast, writing could occupy its own designated space below the handle. In this manner, the painter could advertise more successfully the name 'Laphilos' whilst communicating to the vase viewer the decorative effects of writing as distinct from those of ornamental patterns.

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Katerina Volioti
University of Roehampton
Department of Humanities
London, SW15 5PH
United Kingdom
katertina.volioti@roehampton.ac.uk

Maria Papageorgiou
14th Ephorate of Prehistoric and
Classical Antiquities
Castle of Lamia, TK 351 00, Lamia
Greece
mrpapageorgioy@yahoo.gr