

The Athenian Agora in India

Professor Elizabeth Lyding Will, (Amherst College), longtime associate of the School, describes here her January visit to India on the trail of Amphora stamps.

As I sat at my desk in the comfortable ashram guest house in January, I realized that this was the most exotic spot in which I had ever worked on Roman amphoras. I had worked on Asteroskopeiou Street in Athens, in the picturesque Turkish house where the offices and storerooms of the Agora Excavations were located before the move to the Stoa of Attalos. I had worked on amphoras in a reconstructed section of Diocletian's palace at Split and in assorted museum basements all over the Mediterranean, even in a former women's prison, now part of the National Museum in Cagliari, Sardinia.

But when I looked up from my desk in the guest house in Pondicherry, my eyes inevitably rested on two large photographs on the wall in front of me. In one of them, Sri Aurobindo, the founder of the ashram, relaxed in an easy chair in front of shelves of books. In the other photograph, the Moter sat in her sari on a bench in a garden, perhaps the lovely garden outside my room. Both figures looked at me in very different ways, he distantly, she smilingly. My presence in their guest home, with catalogues and photos of Roman amphoras, would certainly, I thought, have seemed as exotic to them as the location did to me. Actually, they watched over my work only at night. During the day, I worked on the other side of town at the local headquarters of the Archaeological Survey of India, a building brightly painted in colors and patterns like those that decorated Minoan houses. That place, too, was exotic to my eyes.

Pondicherry is the modern city near Arikamedu, on the southeast coast of India. Arikamedu is probably the ancient Poudouke, a trading center of the wealthy Tamil kings who ruled this area two thousand years ago. These kings imported Greek mercenaries to protect them, and they seem also to have had a taste for Mediterranean wine and even for western olive oil and *garum*, unless the oil and the fish sauce were brought in for the use of Mediterranean traders living at Poudouke and trading western products, especially wine, for the Indian luxuries so much in demand in the West. Certainly very many more amphoras for wine than for other products have been found there. The wine amphoras came mostly from the island of Kos and secondarily from Campania, in southern Italy, where amphoras imitating the shape of Greek Koan amphoras were manufactured as early as the 1st century

BC. They were containers for the pseudo-Koan wine that the Romans were fabricating as early as the 180's BC (Cato the Elder gives us a recipe for it). The Agora collection of amphoras in the Stoa of Attalos provides us with a representative series both of Koan and of pseudo-Koan jars, and on the basis of the careful chronology for Koan amphoras constructed at the Agora by Virginia Grace, the Koan amphoras at Arikamedu seem to date from as early as the 2nd century BC. Italian imitations there go back to the 1st century BC, when pseudo-Koan wine apparently displaced Koan wine. That date is based on typological and epigraphical grounds.

While only one Latin amphora stamp has so far been found in India (far from Arikamedu, at the inland site of Mathura south of Delhi), it is precious chrono-



At Arikamedu, workmen (foreground) and (right rear) Steven Sidebotham, site supervisor, and Peter Francis (left rear), a specialist in ancient beads.

logically. Made of the distinctive clay of the Pompeii area, the handle is very early in shape and parallels a number of stamped examples from the Agora, Delos, and Alexandria. These stamps name known Pompeians and date from as early as the second quarter of the 1st century BC. Typologically identical unstamped handles are found at Arikamedu. Campanian wine continued to be shipped to Arikamedu well into the 1st century AD.

Amphoras were primarily shipping containers, as underwater research has made abundantly clear. They were often reused for storage, but they were equally likely to be reused as building materials in construction or for dozens of other purposes ranging from ballistic missiles to ovens. It is as shipping containers that were broken

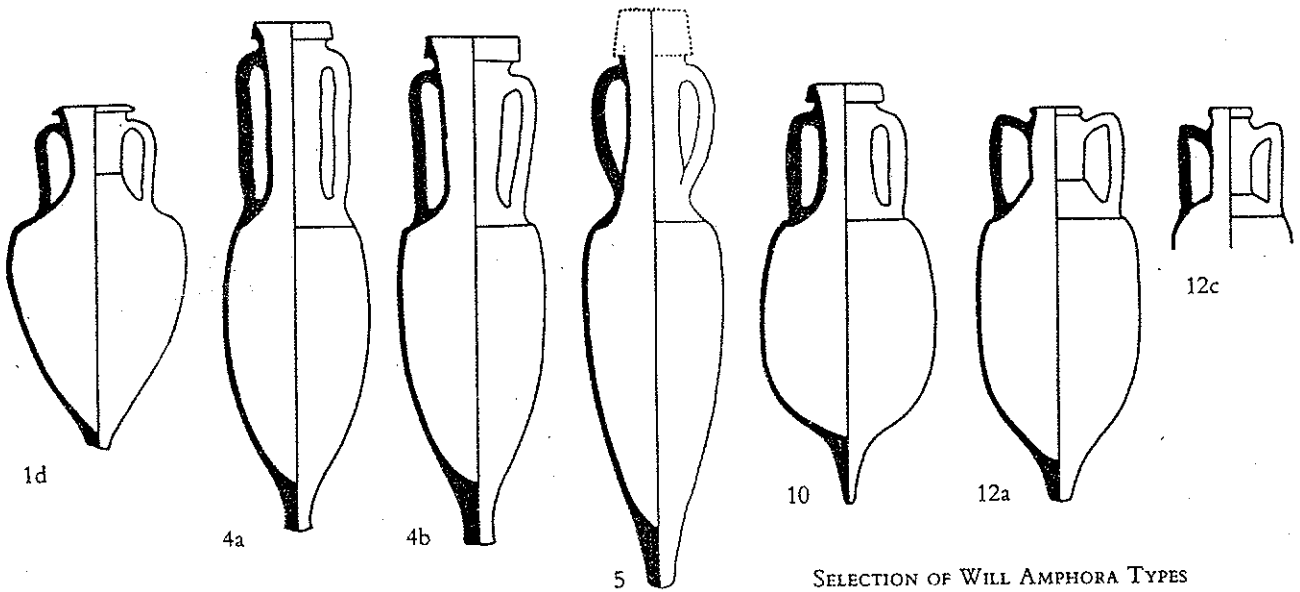
after emptying, apparently for construction, that we see them at Arikamedu. Many fragments, especially of Koan amphoras, are covered with small lumps of cement resembling the pozzolana commonly used by the Romans for underwater structures like docks and harbor walls. Were the Koan fragments at Arikamedu used for harbor installations? It seems probable, but it is too early to be completely sure.

It is clear that the port area of the site is covered with Mediterranean amphora fragments. Several hundred pieces have been found and identified at the site since the 1940's, when French and later British excavations were undertaken there. The current series of excavations, funded by the Smithsonian Institution and now completing its third season, has been co-directed by Vimala Begley of the University of Pennsylvania Museum and K.V. Raman of the University of Madras. The site supervisor has been Steven Sidebotham of the University of Delaware. Seven trenches were opened this season. The local work force, female and male,

was supervised by advanced students from Indian and American universities under the general direction of Begley, Raman, and Sidebotham. The ASCSA was represented not only by the writer but by Kathleen Warner Slane of the University of Missouri, who was studying the Mediterranean finewares found at Arikamedu and at other Indian sites.

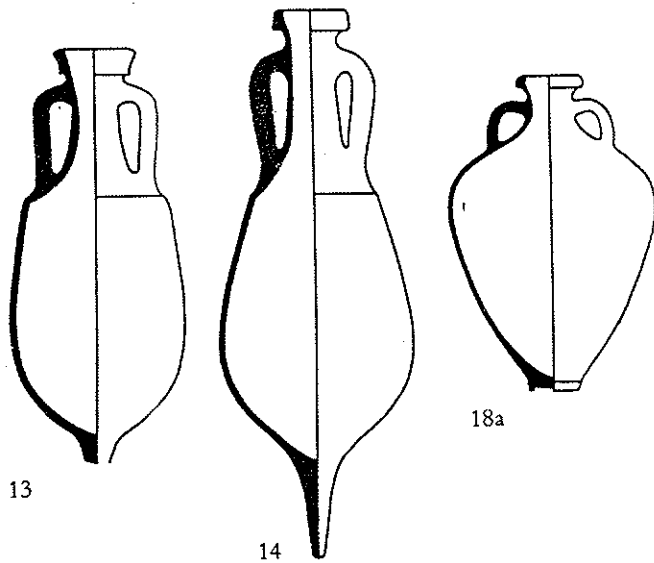
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On the topic of the ancient Mediterranean presence in India, readers may wish to consult *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade*, edited by Vimala Begley and Richard Daniel De Puma and published in late 1991 by the University of Wisconsin Press.



SELECTION OF WILL AMPHORA TYPES
REPRESENTED IN THE PORTUS COSANUS

Types are based on the typology of Roman amphoras in E. L. Will, *Stamped Roman Amphoras in the Eastern Mediterranean*, forthcoming in the *Athenian Agora* series. The authors are grateful to H. A. Thompson, Field Director Emeritus of the Agora Excavations, for permission to reproduce part of the Will typology. For illustrations of shapes not included (Types 1a, 1c, 11c, 12b, 16, 18b, 21c) see figures referred to in the catalogue. Scale 1:15.



- 1d: Ansedonia, private collection, P.H., 0.698 m
- 4a: Agora P 8106. H., 1.05 m
- 4b: Delos TD 6029. H., 1.04 m
- 5: Delos TD 6030. H.(restored), 1.18 m
- 10: Agora SS 7319. H., 0.865 m
- 12a: Agora P 3464. H., 0.805 m
- 12c: Agora SS 10072. P.H., 0.28 m
- 13: Agora SS 9468. P.H., 0.87 m
- 14: Agora P 25734. H., 1.12 m
- 18a: Agora P 18000. H., 0.64 m
- 20: American Academy in Rome. H., 0.79 m
- 21a: Cosa, hill site, C 70.468. P.H., 0.94 m
- 21b: Agora P 14618. H., 1.145 m
- 24a: Albenga shipwreck (Lamboglia 1952, p. 166, fig. 24)

