

E.L. Will Book Review of
Late Roman Amphorae in the Western Mediterranean. A
Typology and Economic Study: The Catalan Evidence

By S.J. Keay.

(BAR International Series 196 [i], [ii].) Vols. 2, pp.xxvi + 738, figs. 216 Oxford 1984

The focus of this two-volume book is on the late Roman shipping amphoras found in northeastern Spain, for the most part at Tarragona, Barcelona, and Ampurias. Some of the finds had previously been published by Beltrán, Almagro and others, but much of the material is new. The author presents a typology of over 90 varieties of amphoras dating from the late second to the late sixth centuries A.C. The greater number of types, and the majority of finds, date from the fourth to the sixth centuries. About three-quarters of the amphoras and fragments examined are African. They were used to carry olive oil to northeastern Spain from Tripolitania (Libya), Africa Proconsularis (Tunisia), and Mauretania (Algeria). Other oil jars came from southern Spain, and a surprising number of amphoras from the eastern Mediterranean apparently carried wine to an area that had once, during the late Republic and early Empire, been a major wine-producing region. The book, then, helps to fill a gap in our knowledge, since the interest of amphorists and historians has in the past has been centered on the (earlier) exports of Roman Catalonia, rather than on the (later) imports.

There are very real problems with this book, but, to consider first its positive qualities, it exemplifies the current encouraging trend in amphora studies toward, as Keay puts it, “objective, mathematical” analysis of amphoras, in place of the “traditional and subjective” approaches of past scholars who often paid more attention to shape than to dimensions and fabric. Keay gives us, accordingly, detailed measurements and clay-analyses for the 2500-odd objects discussed. The total number of pieces treated is not cited by the author but can be computed by counting the objects for which measurements are listed in the 131-page Appendix IIC. Of these pieces, however, only about three-fifths seem to be identified in the catalogue, according to this reviewer’s count. In an effort to estimate how many whole amphoras are represented by the often fragmentary finds, the author “quantifies” them in Appendix III, arriving (p. 400) at a total of 469 amphoras, although this reviewer’s addition of the author’s figures gave a total of 736. Whatever the size of the body of material studied, the author uses “quantification” in order to estimate the actual amount of importation of oil and wine into Catalonia in the late Empire. He there-by exemplifies another trend in modern amphora studies: amphoras are increasingly used as evidence in the current controversy over whether or not trade took place in antiquity. From his own material, Keay concludes that “Institutionalized trade” was of little practiced in northeastern Spain during the late Empire until the middle of the fifth century A.C., when more opportunities for private profit-making arose. Before that time, state-controlled exchange, Keay feels, prevailed. He thus aligns himself with the Finley school of economic historians, which questions the existence of profit-oriented trade in Greco-Roman antiquity. That reasoning is clearly faulty as far as the Roman

Republic and early Empire are concerned. What the situation was in the late Empire is as yet uncertain, in spite of Keay's assertions.

The book is, then, up-to-date in its general approach, and the pieces discussed are illustrated by clear, well-executed drawings by the author. Unquestionably, his presentation of the rich Spanish finds of several late amphora types helps to clarify their chief characteristics and their evolution. Also very useful is Appendix I, where 35 types of fabrics are analyzed according to color, harness, fracture, inclusions, and (where possible) origin. What, then, are the problems mentioned above? In brief, the book is marred throughout by signs of hasty composition and lack of attention to detail. Appendix IV is a case in point. An easy-to-read list of published or known parallels at other sites to the amphora types discussed in the book, it at first seems to be more usable than, for example, the tight paragraphs of parallels cited in Panella's *Ostia III*. But Keay makes errors such as listing Italian sites as Portuguese (p.641), and the appendix, like the catalogue-discussions of parallels, contains curious omissions, some of them sites included in works listed in the bibliography as "consulted." To note just a few examples, Kapitan's publication in *SicArch* 34 (1977), fig. 9.9263, of a large fragment (found off Filicudi) of Beltra'n's Form 59 is, with the parallels mentioned, ignored by Keay both in Appendix IV and in his catalogue discussion of Type LXII, his chief type (515 examples described); yet Kapitan's article is listed in Keay's bibliography. So is Adamsheck's *Kenchraei* IV (misspelled as Adamsneck, *Kenchrae*), where examples of at least two of Keay's types (XII and LXV) are described (nos. RC 11 and RC 14). Keay, however, does not include them in his list of parallels. In a related instance, Crowfoot's *Samaria-Sebaste III*, which lists examples of Keay's Type XVI, is not referred to in the latter's bibliography, although Keay notes parallels at Samaria, citing *Ostia III*, where the Crowfoot reference occurs. Had Keay checked Crowfoot, he would have found a discussion of the type, and several additional parallels from sites other than Samaria for his Appendix IV. Catalogue-discussions are also marred by omissions, and some of them lead Keay to draw conclusions that are untenable.

To turn to details of format, the book seems not to have been edited, or thoroughly proofread. Typographical errors and misspellings abound. There are misplaced, repeated and unnumbered pages. Types (LXXII, LXXXIII, LXXXVII) are missing from the catalogue. Type-numbers are omitted from the plates of profiles (figs. 20.6, 22.1, 23.8, 27.4), making it nearly impossible to identify the objects pictured, since there is no numerical concordance of objects and types. Type-illustrations are numbered incorrectly (Type IV in fig. 43 is called Type V, and Type V in fig. 44 is called Type IV). The photographs on the hastily executed plates are of poor quality, and scales of illustrations are mentioned (inconspicuously) only on pp. x and xv at the beginning of the first volume. Distressing, too, in a work of this length, is the lack of an index. This book was not written or designed with the reader in mind, and its flaws do scant justice to the years of work that went into the author's collection of the material. The importance of that material is such, however, that readers who need to make efficient use of it will be motivated to insert the necessary corrections and additions.

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