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TOWARDS A REGIONAL HISTORY

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# Stamped *Terra Sigillata* from Agios Donatos

Janne P. Ikäheimo

## Introduction

This article offers a preliminary insight into a group of pottery finds made by *The Thesprotia Expedition* during the 2005-2007 survey and excavation of the hill fortress of Agios Donatos at Zervochori, located in Thesprotia, northwest Greece.<sup>1</sup> The specific aim is to introduce a group of eleven *planta pedis* (i.e. plantar) stamps in *terra sigillata*.<sup>2</sup> The use of pottery stamps in the production of *terra sigillata* began in Italy. The earliest examples are dated to c. 40-30 BC, and they were frequently equipped with no fewer than five small quadrangular stamps containing the producer's initials. Around 15-10 BC these radially placed stamps were replaced by large rectangular stamps pressed to the centre of the vessel interior.<sup>3</sup> The use of *planta pedis* stamps was closely connected with the workshops located in Arretium (present day Arezzo), Central Italy, where this stamp form was first introduced around AD 15-30. Although some of these workshops had branches in southern France (e.g., in Lyon), where practically identical vessel forms were produced,<sup>4</sup> the use of *planta pedis* stamps was, for unknown reasons, confined to Italy.<sup>5</sup>

The study of *terra sigillata* stamps was begun in the late nineteenth century by German scholars, the most notable of whom were Hans Dragendorff and "the father of Roman *instrumentum domesticum* studies" Heinrich Dressel.<sup>6</sup> The reason for such an early interest is quite obvious; pottery stamps were, and still are, considered as constantly accumulating literary source material on handicrafts in the Roman world. An illustrative example of the rapid accumulation of stamp data is the second edition of *Corpus Vasorum Arretinorum*,<sup>7</sup> a 600-page corpus equipped with practical CD-ROM containing information on 33,087 *sigillata* stamps.

Although the identification and cataloguing of pottery stamps has greatly profited from the modern information age, ideas regarding their interpretation are still manifold.

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<sup>1</sup> The exploration of the hill fortress of Agios Donatos will continue in 2008 and more pottery finds are expected, hence this interim report. For the most recent description of the Agios Donatos hill fortress, see Forsén and Tikkala 2006 as well as Suha, this volume. The author hereby acknowledges his debt to the Academy of Finland, whose support has enabled the preparation of this article. For an earlier version of this article (in Finnish), see Ikäheimo 2006. All illustrations are by the author.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief history of *terra sigillata* pottery, see e.g. Peacock 1982, 114-128; Hayes 1997, 41-64; Tyers 1999, 105-116.

<sup>3</sup> For a brief introduction to the typology of stamp forms, see Fülle 1997, 118.

<sup>4</sup> For this reason the term *italic sigillata* is widely used in publications focusing on Roman pottery. It defines red-slipped fineware production of Italy and southern France, which can usually be distinguished from one another only through chemical analysis.

<sup>5</sup> *Conspectus*, 147-148. *Planta pedis* stamps were also occasionally used in the eastern Mediterranean, but for the most part these stamps are anepigraphic and the few text-bearing stamps are predominantly in Greek, see Hayes 1997, 52-57.

<sup>6</sup> Dragendorff 1895; Dressel 1899.

<sup>7</sup> Henceforth *CVArr*<sup>2</sup>.

As it is quite fruitless to dwell on this argument in this context, it might be reasonable to briefly point out that stamps may have been vehicles to control the quantity of production within a single workshop, to identify proper products after centralised/communal firing, or even a way to promote the products.<sup>8</sup>

Against this background, the rest of this contribution has been structured as follows. First, the eleven *planta pedis* stamps found at Agios Donatos are described and, due to the fragmentary condition of most examples, also deciphered. Thereafter, their significance is evaluated in a wider perspective, first by considering the stamps as evidence on the Agios Donatos hill fortress itself. In this context, additional data regarding the forms and decorations of *terra sigillata* discovered by the survey and excavation of the site will be introduced. Finally, these finds are related to the known distribution of this pottery in northwest Greece and adjacent Roman provinces, and a working hypothesis regarding their significance is formulated to be tested with further studies.

## Materials

The following paragraphs describe the eleven *planta pedis* stamps<sup>9</sup> from Agios Donatos in a concise manner:

1. Complete, substantially well-preserved stamp on a base fragment from a cup (Fig. 1a). In addition, the bottom of the base preserves an intact MR graffito (in Latin?). Clearly legible stamp: the text reads as CN•ATEI with the letter C reversed and forming a ligature with the letter N. Although this text is well-attested in *CVArr<sup>2</sup>* with 223 stamp forms and 953 entries,<sup>10</sup> none of them bears a reversed letter C. In spite of this oddity, the stamp can be deciphered as Gnaeus Ateius,<sup>11</sup> a large-scale *terra sigillata* producer whose workshop in Pisa (c. 5 BC-AD 40+) was supposedly the only one of his many establishments to use *planta pedis* stamps.

2. Complete, substantially well-preserved stamp on a base fragment from a plate or platter (Fig. 1b). Clearly legible stamp: the text reads as AVILL with an AV ligature. In addition, the bottom of the base shows traces of a fragmentary and illegible graffito. The number of known Avillius stamp forms is nearly 60, and the early date of production, 20 BC-AD 40, is based on the relatively high occurrence of rectangular stamp forms in the output of his workshop.<sup>12</sup>

3. Complete, substantially well-preserved stamp on a base fragment from a plate or platter (Fig. 1c). The text reads as AVILLI with an AV ligature. In addition, the bottom of the base preserves an intact ΚΠΑ graffito. This stamp very likely belongs to the output of the same Avillius discussed in the previous entry.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Fülle 1997, 114-119; cf. *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 10-14.

<sup>9</sup> While all complete stamps, some of which are badly worn, have been included in the analysis, two well-preserved but minute stamp fragments have been excluded from it.

<sup>10</sup> See *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 127-133.

<sup>11</sup> For comparanda, see *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 128-130, nos. 46-47.

<sup>12</sup> *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 152-153, nos. 371.1-58. The name Avillius also occurs in 19 stamps together with the name of another person, commonly interpreted as his slave, see *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 153-156, nos. 372-390.

<sup>13</sup> *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 152-153, nos. 371.38-45.

4. Complete stamp on a base fragment from a small cup or bowl (Fig. 1d). Clearly legible stamp: the first letter, L, is separated from an AV ligature by a dot, hence L•AV. This text is attested in only two stamp forms,<sup>14</sup> and it most likely refers to a producer named Lucius Avillius, as various stamp forms bearing a text L•AVIL(L) are plentiful. While these Avillius stamps have been seen as contemporaneous with Camurius stamps, i.e. AD 30-70,<sup>15</sup> L•AV stamps have been dated roughly to the post-Augustan (AD 15-) period.<sup>16</sup>

5. Partially preserved stamp on a half base of a cup or small bowl (Fig. 1e). In addition, the bottom of the base preserves an intact ΠΑ graffito. The stamp fragment contains only the toe of the foot, the letter L and the vertical arm of the preceding letter, which is almost certainly the letter I.<sup>17</sup> One may also notice that the toe is not separated from the text with a vertical line, which is an endemic feature in *planta pedis* stamps. These criteria can be used to reduce the number of potential producers to four, of which the workshop of Lucius Avillius, introduced above, is the most likely candidate due strong similarities in lettering and letter spacing.<sup>18</sup>

6. Partially preserved stamp on a base fragment from a plate or platter (Fig. 1f). The first two letters, C and A, are clearly discernible, and the latter forms a ligature with a partially preserved letter M. On its right side, one may further recognise the left diagonal arm of the letter V. This combination of letters and its variants – CAMR, CAMRI, CAMVRI, etc. – are attested in c. 80 stamp forms, of which around 90 % belong to the *planta pedis* type.<sup>19</sup> While it is agreed that the text should be read as “Camurius”, it has been interpreted in a variety of ways. The text may refer to a *gentilicium* Camurius, but in some *Camurius*-stamps the letters C and A are separated by a dot (e.g., C•AMVR). On this ground, the name of the workshop owner could also be C. Amurius (Gaius Amurius).<sup>20</sup> Confusion has been further augmented by C•MVR or C•MVRIUS -stamps,<sup>21</sup> which seem to refer to a person named Gaius Murius. However, all these workshop owners were based in Arretium and their output is dated to AD 30-70.<sup>22</sup>

7. Complete, substantially well-preserved stamp on a base fragment from a cup (Fig. 1g). Unfortunately, the die used in stamping was either worn or pressed carelessly against the vessel surface, as only the first letter, an L, can be identified with substantial confidence. However, based on comparanda, the stamp seems to contain the text L•TITI. In this case, it would belong to the output of a workshop owned by Lucius Titius, who was active between 15 BC and AD 30. This identification is not certain, however, because

<sup>14</sup> *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 150, nos. 360.1-2.

<sup>15</sup> *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 158, nos. 403.1-18.

<sup>16</sup> *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 150.

<sup>17</sup> In principle, this fragmentary letter could also be H or M, but queries performed with various combinations of HL and ML in *CVArr<sup>2</sup>* CD-ROM database did not produce any results.

<sup>18</sup> See *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 158, nos. 403.13-14, cf. L. ALBIVS APRILIS, 87, no. 71.1; GELIVS, 234, no. 878.55; ZOILVS, 512, nos. 2544.76, 78.

<sup>19</sup> *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 173-175, nos. 514.1-81.

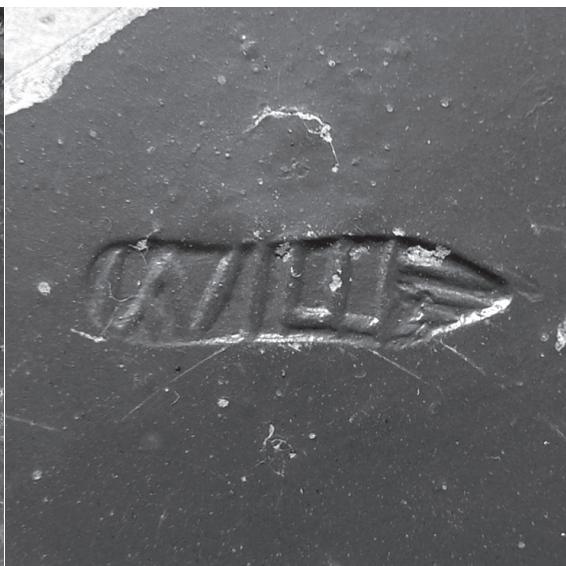
<sup>20</sup> E.g. Warren 1987-1988, 91, 92, fig. 20. This interpretation has been challenged due to a supposedly random occurrence of dots in *Camurius* stamps. Besides dots separating two characters, these stamps occasionally show dots encircling them. At least in the latter case, their sole purpose seems to be decorative, see *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 173.

<sup>21</sup> *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 173, 287, nos. 1198.1-8, nos. 1200.1-7.

<sup>22</sup> *CVArr<sup>2</sup>*, 173. Chemical analyses have confirmed the location of this workshop in Arretium, see Mascione *et al.* 1995, 233-234.



a



b



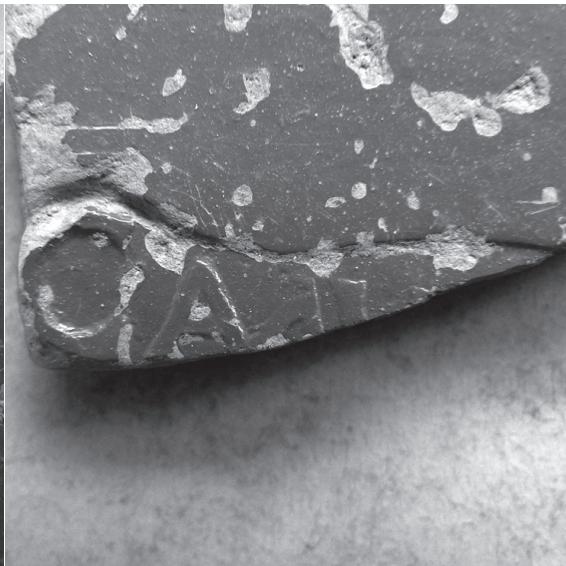
c



d



e



f

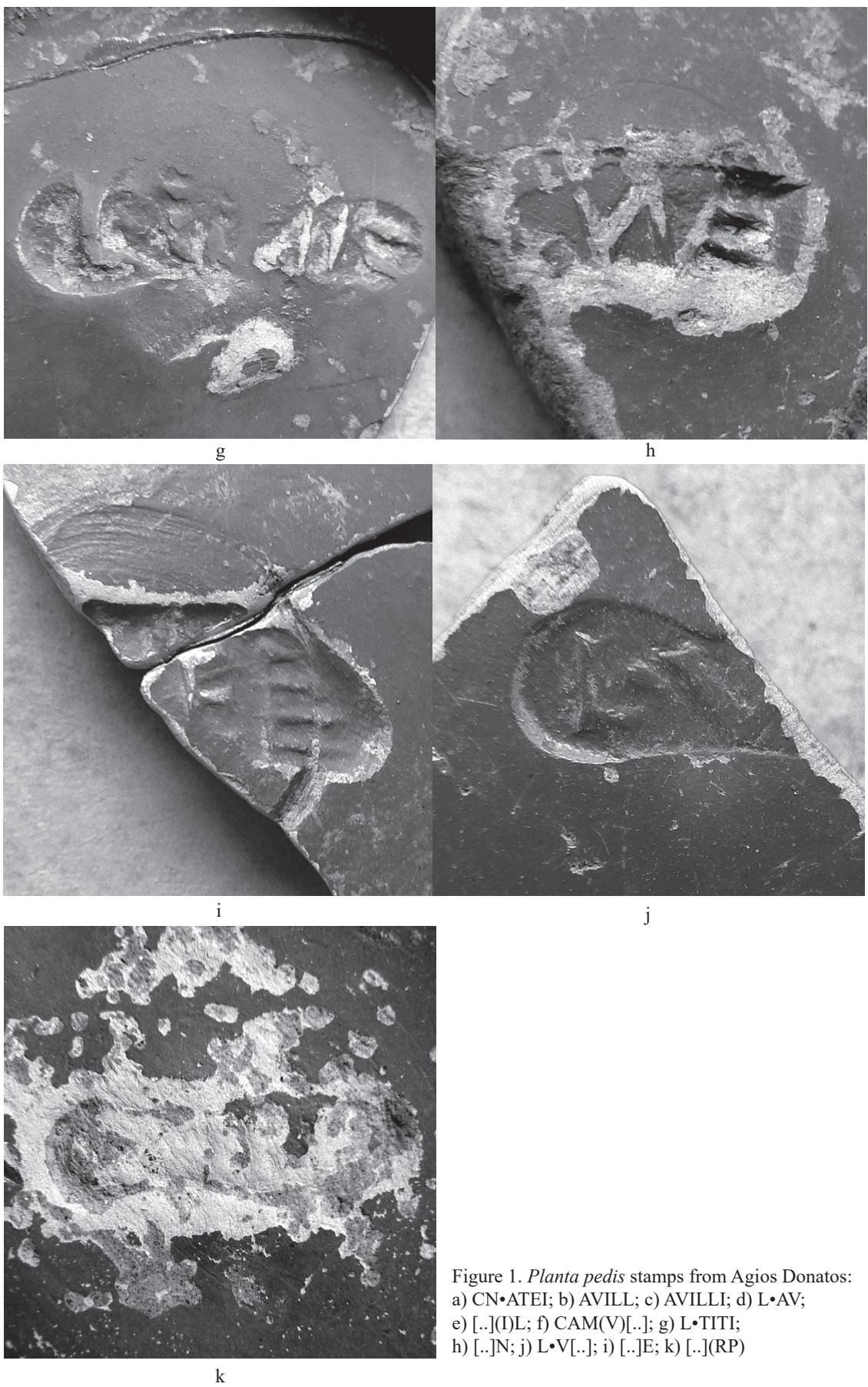


Figure 1. *Planta pedis* stamps from Agios Donatos:  
a) CN•ATEI; b) AVILL; c) AVILLI; d) L•AV;  
e) [..](I)L; f) CAM(V)[..]; g) L•TITI;  
h) [..]N; j) L•V[..]; i) [..]E; k) [..](RP)

most *planta pedis* stamps of the workshop in question are either in the form L•TI or L•TIT. In addition, the shape of the plantar stamp does not match with the known form repertoire of Lucius Titius' workshop.<sup>23</sup>

8. Partially preserved stamp on a base fragment for which the vessel form remains to be determined. The only identifiable letter is a reversed N (Fig. 1h).<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the example under examination belongs to the group of retrograde stamps, which – as witnessed by some fifty known stamp forms – are not exceptional in *terra sigillata*. Two possible interpretations can be put forward. The stamp form may be *planta pedis sinistrorum* with toes to the left and the letter N being the last character of the stamp. Alternatively, the stamp may be more typical *planta pedis dextrorum* with toes to the right and the letter N being the first character of the stamp. As the latter option can be excluded due to the absence of parallels, only two reversed stamps with the letter N as the last character qualify as comparanda due to strong similarity in character forms and spacing: C. CAENIUS and MENO().<sup>25</sup> As these stamps have been assigned a convergent date (AD 15-) and provenance (Central Italy), it is unnecessary and impractical to continue here further with the analysis.

9. Partially preserved stamp on a base fragment from a cup or small bowl (Fig. 1i). In addition, the bottom of the base preserves an illegible graffito. Although the only identifiable letter in the stamp is an E, this information can be combined with the stamp form<sup>26</sup> to exclude all but three producers: CN. ATEIUS, C. M( ) E( ), and A. TERENTIUS.<sup>27</sup> While Ateius had relocated his workshop from Arezzo to in Pisa by the time the use of *planta pedis* stamps had begun, A. Terentius was one of the producers active in the Po valley, and the location of the workshop using C. M( ) E( ) stamps is not known. Therefore, this unprovenanced stamp can be dated only roughly to AD 15-50.

10. Partially preserved stamp on a base fragment from a plate or platter (Fig. 1j). Clearly legible stamp showing a dot separating the letter L from a partial letter V, hence L•V[...]. As the right arm of the letter V has not been preserved, it is impossible to determine whether the text continues with a VM ligature. This feature could have been used for more precise stamp identification, since at least eight producers used the combination L•V[...] on their *planta pedis*-stamps (Fig. 2).<sup>28</sup>

11. Complete, heavily worn stamp on a base fragment from a cup (Fig. 1k). Although the last two letters may be R and P, the stamp is practically illegible and this prevents its further identification. In addition, the bottom of the base preserves an intact IΘ graffito.

<sup>23</sup> *CVArr*<sup>2</sup>, 444-446, nos. 2203.1-44 (*planta pedis* 2203.25-36). The name Titius also occurs in 34 stamps together with another personal name, commonly interpreted as his slave, see *CVArr*<sup>2</sup>, 446-451, nos. 2204-2238.

<sup>24</sup> On the left hand side of the letter N one might also notice traces of another character, possibly a letter C, but it should equally be a mirror image. See also note 26.

<sup>25</sup> See *CVArr*<sup>2</sup>, 168, no. 480.8 (C. CAENIVS); 283, no. 1164.4 (MENO[ ]). One, although a somewhat far-fetched possibility is that this example is a previously unknown C.N-stamp. In this case, the shape of the stamp would be identical to *CVArr*<sup>2</sup>, 294, no. 1222.5, excluding the reflected letter N.

<sup>26</sup> *CVArr*<sup>2</sup>, 534, frame no. 606.

<sup>27</sup> See *CVArr*<sup>2</sup>, 128-130, no. 276.65 (CN. ATEIUS); 265, nos. 1064.2-3 (C. M[ ] E[ ]); 421, no. 2066.18 (A. TERENTIVS)

<sup>28</sup> See *CVArr*<sup>2</sup>, 459, nos. 2278.1-4 (L. V[ ] FI[ ]); 464, nos. 2311.1-3 (L. VALERIUS); 471, no. 2357.1 (L. VET[TIUS?]); 484, nos. 2425.1-2 (L. VIC[ ]); 491-492, nos. 2452.19-35 (L. VMBRICIVS); 494-495, nos. 2470.1-11 (L. VMBRICIVUS H[ ]); 499, nos. 2494.1-4 (L. VMBRICIVUS SEX[TIO?]); 499, nos. 2495, nos. 2495.1-3 (L. VOL).

Stamp	Producer(s)	Provenance	Date	Stamps
CN•ATEI	Gnaeus Ateius	Pisa	AD 15-40	271
AVILL	Avill(ius)	?	AD 15-40	168
AVILLI	Avilli(us)	-	AD 15-40	168
L•AV	L(ucius) Av(illius)	?	AD 15+	2
[..](I)L	Lucius Avillius	?	AD 15+	168
CAM(V)[..]	Camu(rius)	Arretium	AD 30-70	368
L•TITI	L(ucius) Titi(us)	Arretium	AD 15-30	153
[..]E	Gnaeus Ateius	Pisa	AD 15-40	271
	C. M( ) E( )	?	AD 15+	4
	Aulus Terentius	Po valley	AD 15/30-50	194
[..]N	Gaius Caenius	Arretium	AD 15+	13
	Meno( )	Central Italy		7
L•V[..]	L. V( ) FI( )	?	AD 30+	16
	Lucius Valerius	?	AD 15+	3
	Lucius Vet(tius?)	?	AD 15+	2
	L. Vic( )	Po valley	AD 50+	2
	Lucius Umbricius	Arezzo	AD 15-50+	94
	Lucius Umbricius H( )	Torrita di Siena	AD 50+	45
	Lucius Umbricius Sex ( )	?	AD 15+	10
	Lucius Vol ( )	?	AD 15+	6
[..](RP)	?	?	?	?

Fig. 2. Summary of *planta pedis* stamps found at the hill fortress of Agios Donatos. All dates have been adjusted by setting the terminus post quem to AD 15, which is the introduction date for *planta pedis* stamps. Absolute number of stamps known according to *CVArr*<sup>2</sup>.

## Discussion

When the stamp finds of Agios Donatos are examined together (Fig. 2), they all seem share the same date – first century AD – and provenance, Central Italy. This notion is supported by the preliminary examination of the vessel forms and decorations. To date, all of some thirty finds identified on the basis of vessel form or decoration belong to (Central) Italian production, and the majority can be dated to the first half of the first century AD. As regards forms, the two common shapes attested in the assemblage are plates (or platters) and cups (see Fig. 3),<sup>29</sup> which were often exported together as a service; this is also hinted by their fairly even distribution in the assemblage.

The assemblage also includes several fragments of vases decorated with appliqués, the use of which became more common during the Tiberian era; previously, plastic decorations in *terra sigillata* had been limited to hand-formed double spirals.<sup>30</sup> Workshops using applied decorations were often repeating a certain array of motifs, but combined them differently. One combination related to the workshop of Lucius Avillius consists of

<sup>29</sup> *Conspectus* forms: 6.2.1, 17.2.1, 18.3.1, 19.2.1, 20.4.1, 20.4.3 (or 21.5.1), 20.4.4 (or 21.3.1), 20.5.2, 22.1.3, 26.1.2 (or 26.2.1), 33 and 37.1.

<sup>30</sup> *Conspectus*, 149.

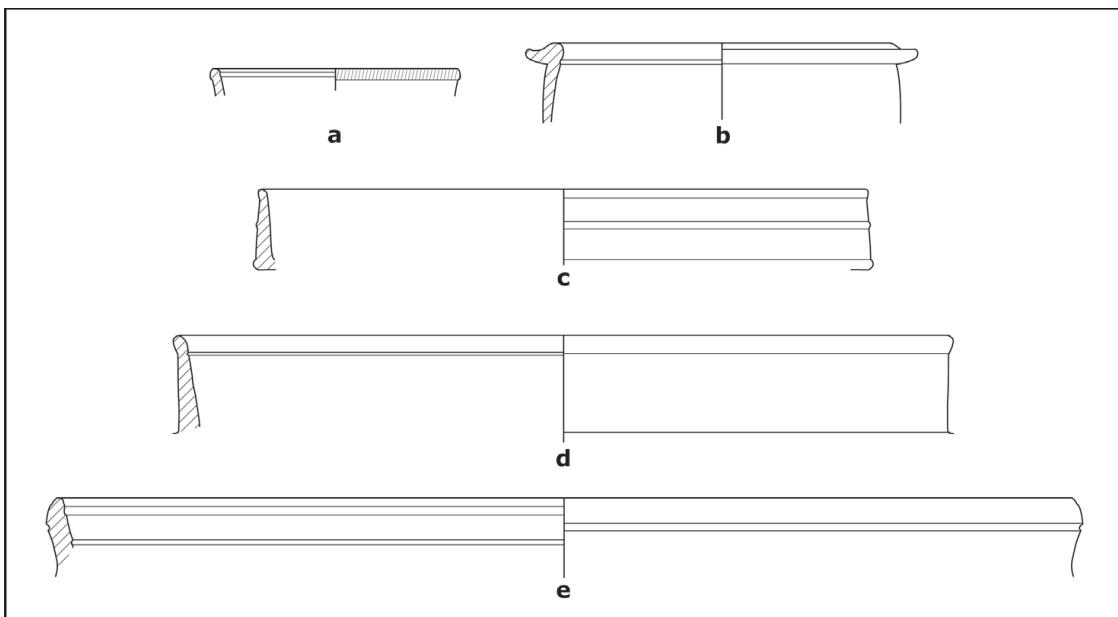


Figure 3. A selection of terra sigillata rim forms from Agios Donatos: a-b) cups, c-e) platters or plates. Scale 1:2.

a dolphin, Cupid, and Eros with a bow.<sup>31</sup> All these three motifs have been found in the excavations at Agios Donatos (Fig. 4), and underscore the presence of this workshop's products in its *sigillata* assemblage.

As the archaeological exploration of Agios Donatos will be continued in the near future, it is perhaps somewhat premature to discuss the presence of Roman red-slipped wares other than Central Italian *sigillata*. However, thus far, the pottery assemblage of Agios Donatos does not include any readily identifiable examples of North Italian *sigillata*, which, based on various archaeological contexts, was intensively produced in the Po river valley from the late first century AD onwards.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, African red-slipped ware, which was the subject of intensive exportation from the Flavian period onwards, and which, according to Hayes,<sup>33</sup> dominates tableware assemblages in the Adriatic Sea as of the late second century, is represented in the assemblage only by a few sporadic sherds.

Finally, it is useful to review in brief the distribution of stamps attested at Agios Donatos.<sup>34</sup> Based on the number of known examples, stamps of active middle-sized producers,<sup>35</sup> such as Camurius, L. Avillius, Avillius and L. Titius, are relatively abundant in the eastern Mediterranean, for example in Corinth, Alexandria and Athens. On the other hand, when the finds of Agios Donatos are compared with the distribution of Italic *terra sigillata* stamps in the Ionian and Adriatic Sea, the first observation emerging relates to the scantiness of finds in this area. The most concrete proof of this is that, unlike

<sup>31</sup> Schindler Kaudelka *et al.* 2001, 115, Abb. 75.

<sup>32</sup> On *terra sigillata* production in the Po-valley, see e.g. Mazzeo Saracino 1985; Rosetti Tella 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Hayes 1990, 113.

<sup>34</sup> The information is based on various *CVArr<sup>2</sup>* CD-ROM database queries.

<sup>35</sup> At least *Gnaeus Ateius* (over 1,000 stamps) and *Lucius Rasinius Pisanus* (circa 500 stamps) can be defined as large-scale producers.

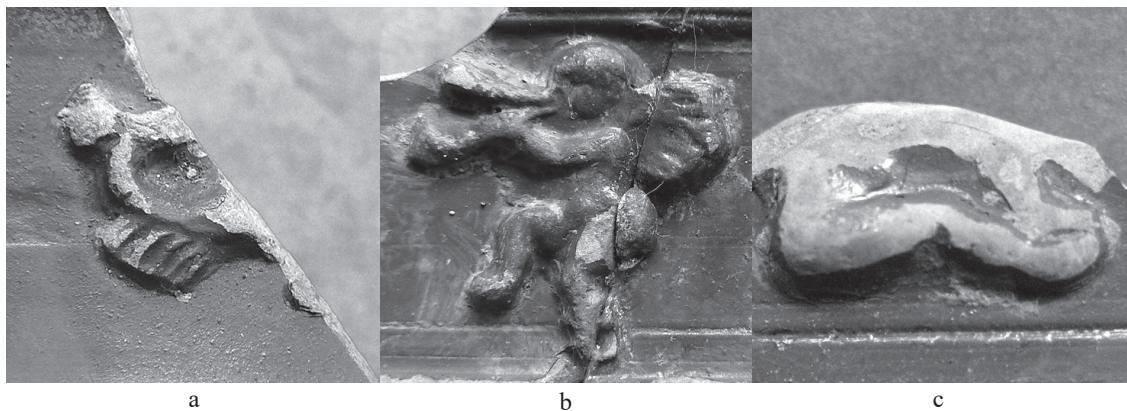


Figure 4. Some clay appliqués used by the workshop of Lucius Avillius found at Agios Donatos: a) dolphin (tail), b) Cupid playing aulos and c) Eros and a bow (fragment).

other Roman provinces, Epirus has been excluded as a search term from the *CVArr<sup>2</sup>* CD-ROM.

Previously, stamped *sigillata* of Arretian origin found within the area of Epirus has been published only from Cassope,<sup>36</sup> which is located some 40 kilometres south-southeast of Agios Donatos. Other occurrences worth mentioning are five stamps which were found in Corfu. For the sake of comparison, at the turn of the millennium the total number of *terra sigillata* stamps known from the province of Macedonia was only 14, while the province of Achaia had yielded no fewer than 1,028 examples.<sup>37</sup> Approximately 70% of the Achaian stamps also originate in Arretium, a feature underlining the close contacts of this area with the heartland of the Empire. The closest point of reference north from Thesprotia is Salona (Split), where a little over half of the 16 recognised stamps originate in the production centres of the Po river valley. In the province of Dalmatia, the proportion of stamps belonging to the workshops of Po river valley is as high as 70%, although this figure is based on only 71 stamps.

Based on this somewhat superficial comparison, it seems that the area of Thesprotia, at least in the light of the find assemblage from the hill fortress of Agios Donatos, seems to have had more intense contacts to the south (and west) than to the north or east. This suggestion regarding the contacts of this area with the rest of the Roman world is bound to be changed or become more focused by future research at Agios Donatos and elsewhere in Epirus, but until then it may constitute a decent working hypothesis. To sum up, it is evident that these eleven *terra sigillata* stamps found at Agios Donatos will not set the world of Roman pottery studies on fire, and while the dot in the future distribution maps of Italic *terra sigillata* may be the smallest of the kind, it will be there.

<sup>36</sup> Gravani 1986, 132, Abb. 133.6.

<sup>37</sup> The high total is to a certain extent explained by the existence of densely populated centres, especially Athens (186 stamps) or Corinth (689 stamps), in this area.

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