

Morphology and Trade: An investigation of African Export Amphoras in the Mid-Roman Empire

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Between the second and fourth centuries C.E., North Africa saw an economic boom that propelled its production and trade of consumer goods (olive oil, salted fish products, wine, fruit, grain, and ceramics) across the western part of the Mediterranean (e.g., Italy, Spain, Tunisia, Libya) during the Roman Empire (cf. Mattingly 1997; Brun 2004; Hobson 2015). Olive oil, wine, fruit and salted fish products were exported via maritime routes in ceramic vessels called amphoras. The importance and popularity of the variously known *Africana Grande* or *Africana II* type of amphoras is evident through its wide distribution across the western Mediterranean. Large scale production and exportation of this vessel type occurred during the mid-second and early-fourth century C.E. (i.e., Keay 1984; Bonifay 2004; Stone et al. 2011; Nacef 2015). Ceramicists recognize this and have attempted to identify meaningful subtypes based on body type and shape size. Currently, the *Africana IIA* (*Afr. IIA*) amphora, a subtype of this series, is recognized as having different rim morphologies but research on the subject is limited with contemporary work focusing on the body of the vessel rather than the rim variations. Additionally, stamps, *dipinti*, and graffiti on this vessel are attested by Mattingly et al. (*JRA* suppl. [2011] 205–271) but only on a small portion of assemblages presumably indicating quality control of select batches during firing. In this paper, I propose that the *Afr. IIA* amphora demonstrates a relationship between rim morphology, distribution mechanisms and centers of consumption. Using information gathered from extensively published excavation reports, I posit with my preliminary results, that the rim variations for this vessel conveys meaning about the producers of these amphoras, the intended consumers (e.g., private individuals vs. military or other state-related bodies), the distribution routes, the sites of consumption and/or are reflective of a chronological sequence.