

CAST BRONZE VESSELS IN THE 6TH-9TH CENTURIES: REMARKS ON AN ASSEMBLAGE OF LITURGICAL IMPLEMENTS FOUND AT MORBELLO (PROV. ALESSANDRIA, PIEDMONT / I)

In 1897, during some work for the construction of a road, a deposit with an ewer, a lamp and an incense burner, all made of cast bronze¹ (fig. 1), was found by a local peasant at Morbello (prov. Alessandria/I), 1 m deep into the ground and protected by two opposed copper vessels. The find has been published and discussed in a recent paper, where can be found all relevant data on its context, a detailed description of the objects and a thorough examination of their vicissitudes before and after they were acquired by the Museo Egizio in Turin². This assemblage has a number of implications for the present-day state of research on early medieval liturgical implements and proofs to be an excellent starting point for the reconsideration of the production, use and dissemination patterns of some types of cast bronze vessels. Only some of these points will be discussed in the present paper – namely, those more closely related to the finds from Morbello – while the remaining ones will be presented in another text, printed in the following issue of this journal³.

A CONSISTENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSEMBLAGE

From a strictly archaeological viewpoint, the most important feature of the Morbello find is its condition of an archaeological assemblage, i. e., as stated in a widely used textbook, a »group of artefacts recurring

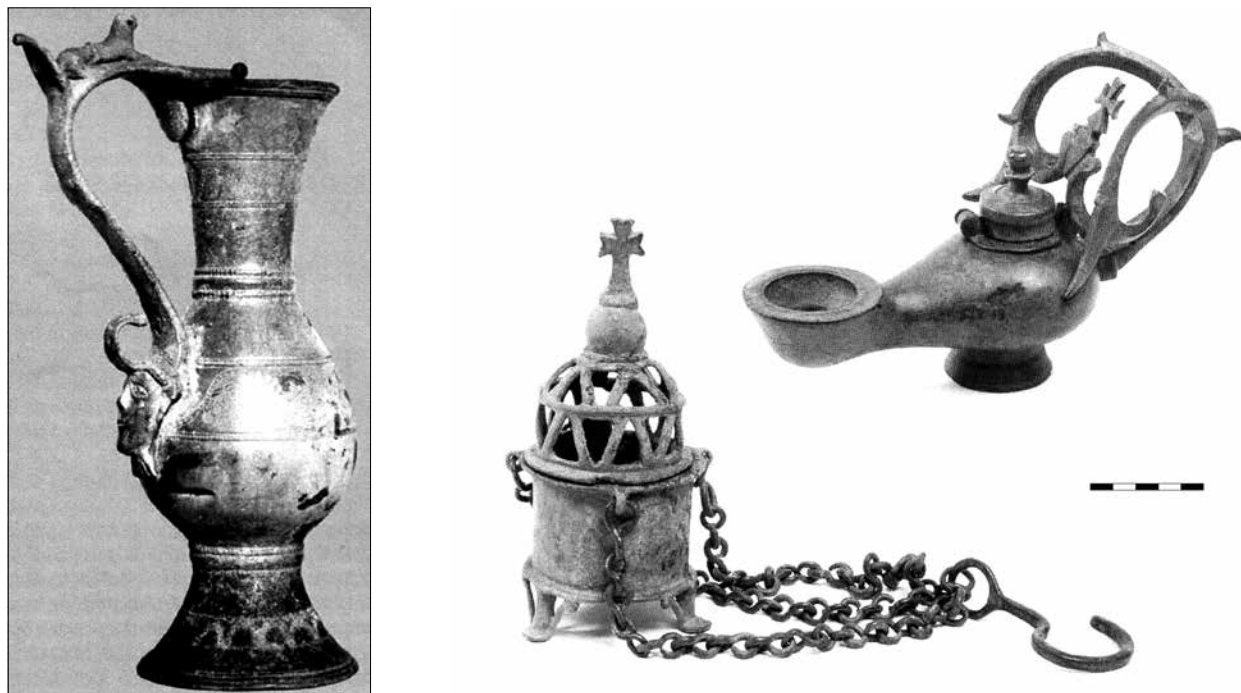


Fig. 1 The ecclesiastical treasure found at Morbello (prov. Alessandria/I). – (After Crosetto 2011, figs 4. 6-7).

together at a particular time and place, and representing the sum of human activities«⁴. An assessed assemblage – one that has not been altered between the moment of its internment into the ground and that of its discovery – is one of the basic units of archaeological research: every attempt to interpret the material remains of the past is lastly based on the reconstruction of their spatial and chronological positions and the mutual relations of these two factors. Thus, assessed assemblages allow to verify which different types of objects have been contemporary to each other in a specific moment, i.e. which types were used together, at least in the exact moment of their deposition – if not also earlier. This fact represents the grounds for studies on chronology, use, and meaning of archaeological artefacts, including statistically based analytical methods. Therefore, the informative potential offered by assemblages is incomparably higher than a single object's: without the possibility of relating items, structures, people, actions and behaviours, archaeology has to limit to sporadic descriptions or to antiquarian-fashioned evaluations of single artefacts.

Although corresponding to a stray find, the items from Morbello qualify as a reliable assemblage: a consistent group of objects deeply buried into the ground within a protective container, certainly a sign of deliberate concealment. In general, jugs, incense burners, and lamps appear to be frequently associated in the Early Middle Ages, but the artefacts from Morbello belong to specific types, which were so far only episodically attested in stratigraphic contexts within the Mediterranean area.

INCENSE, LIGHT, AND WATER

All the objects of the Morbello assemblage can be related to a single milieu and modality of use: Christian liturgy. Early medieval liturgical texts describe the Eucharist as being preceded by the arrival of a procession to the church, headed by the officiant holding a processional cross. Deacons carrying candles, candelabra and a thurible follow the officiant⁵. As the procession approached the altar, the lights were deposited next to or on it – where they remained during the whole service of the Mass⁶ – and blown out after the reading of the Gospels⁷. Just before the Eucharist, the priest had to perform the rite of the washing of hands, requiring an ewer (the water container), a basin (receiving the poured water) and the assistance of a subdeacon⁸. Thus, Alberto Crosetto is completely right in labelling the Morbello assemblage as an »ecclesiastical treasure«⁹.

Every functioning church was expected to be furnished with at least one set of liturgical implements, which could be richer or more modest depending on the resources of the church leadership and community. According to the Roman *Liber Pontificalis*, for instance, the churches of the Papal See were endowed with absolutely outstanding liturgical implements and furniture, including a number of renowned early medieval masterpieces of gold and silver work¹⁰. An inventory of liturgical implements belonging to the church of St. Michael on an island in the Staffelsee (Lkr. Garmisch-Partenkirchen/D), dating to c. 810, provides an insight into more modest contexts than Rome. The inventory, included in an imperial capitulary and presented as a model, follows an easily recognizable structure: the first items to be listed correspond to altar furniture and ornaments in gold, silver, and precious stones; the following ones are different types of vessels made of silver, copper, tin, and glass; then the various textiles are described; and thereafter the books kept in the church are mentioned. The objects of the first group (hanging crowns and crosses, *offertoria*, chalices and patens) never left the altar or its close surroundings, whereas the second group includes items that were carried to the altar by the Eucharistic procession: a silver, partially gilt thurible, an »ancient« copper thurible, a copper bottle, a tin bottle, a copper jug with its basin, a glass bowl, and two glass bottles¹¹. A similar structure can be found in another inventory, originally written by Angilbert of St. Riquier in the early 9th century and later transcribed by Hariulfus. The list describes first the altars and other liturgical furnishings; then



1



2



3

Fig. 2 The Stuttgart Psalter (820-830) includes representations of different moments of the celebration of the Mass, and the related items: thuribles, candlesticks, ewers, patens, processional crosses, books, altar clothes, etc. The illuminator reproduced faithfully the formal features of the objects that were actually in use when the codex was produced. – 1 folio 31v. – 2 folio 113r. – 3 folio 118v. – (After Stuttgarter Bilderpsalter 1968).



Fig. 3 Bronze ewers with pear-shaped belly and *nodus*. – **1** Stuttgart Psalter, folio 31v. – **2** Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid (unknown provenance, probably Spain). – **3** Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid (unknown provenance, probably Spain). – **4** Morbello. – (1 after Beghelli/Pinar 2013, fig. 9; 2 after de Palol 1950b, pl. XXXVIII; 3 after Art of medieval Spain 1993, 51; 4 after Crosetto 2011, fig. 6).

the *vasa* and *suppellectiles* in precious metals; then the textiles and books; and finally other small decorations, objects and tools in lead, glass, and marble (inlays in coloured stones?)¹².

The visual appearance of the early medieval liturgical sets as described in the liturgical texts and other written documents can be reconstructed by means of a number of precious iconographic testimonies¹³, chiefly from the renowned Stuttgart Psalter (**fig. 2**), made at Saint-Germain-des-Prés (Paris) between 820 and 830¹⁴. The codex – with its numerous illuminations, where the objects depicted are characterized by extraordinarily realistic details – is an excellent iconographical source for the reconstruction of a number of aspects of the material and everyday life in early medieval Europe¹⁵, including church furniture and equipment¹⁶. One of the ewers depicted in the Psalter (**fig. 3, 1**) is of special relevance for the Morbello find: both artefacts show very similar forms and proportions (tall foot with *nodus* – barely outlined in the Morbello specimen –, globular body and long, thin neck) and a comparable organization of the decorative patterns (engraved bands with plant-scrolls and geometric patterns, and a decorated handle).

A number of archaeological assemblages confirm and refine the data from written and iconographical sources. The liturgical sets recorded within or next to early medieval churches (El Bovalar [Serós, prov. Lleida/E], El Gatillo de Arriba [prov. Cáceres/E], Senise [prov. Potenza/I], Otok [Vukovarsko-srijemska žup./HR], Leptis Magna [Murqub district/LAR], Silistra [obl. Silistra/BG], Eleutherna [p.e. Rethymno/GR], Kôm Ombo [Aswan gov./ET], Samannoud [Gharbia gov./ET]; **fig. 4**) or displaying reliable epigraphic evidence of their liturgical function (Galognano [prov. Siena/I], Kaper Koraon [allegedly Idlib gov./SYR], Attarouthi [Idlib gov./SYR], Luxor [Luxor gov./ET]) are of the uttermost importance¹⁷. Their comparative study enables to outline a general picture of the main types of liturgical items used in an early medieval church: besides ewers, thuribles and lamps, the sets included also patens, basins, chalices, votive crowns, processional crosses and books of gospels among many other objects¹⁸.

The recurrence of specific types of objects in ecclesiastical contexts is an extremely significant phenomenon¹⁹. Together with the textual and iconographical evidence, it enables to suggest a possible original liturgical function to similar combinations of objects found in archaeological contexts other than churches, such as treasures (Morbello itself, Las Pesqueras [prov. Segovia/E], »Segovia«, Villafáfila [prov. Zamora/E])²⁰, shipwrecks (Syracuse-Plemmyrion [prov. Syracuse/I])²¹ or even graves (for example Ittenheim [dép. Bas-



Fig. 4 Assemblages of liturgical implements from early medieval churches. – **A** Eleutherna. – **B** Senise. – **C** El Gatillo de Arriba. – **D** El Bovalar. – **E** Otok. – (A after Stampolidis 2004, 216, 218; B after Beghelli/Pinar 2013, fig. 5; C after Balmaseda/Papí 1997, 158-159; D after Beghelli/Pinar 2013, fig. 1, 1; E after Milošević 1997, 34).

Rhin/F], Ötlingen grave from 1904/05 [Lkr. Lörrach/D], Pfahlheim grave 4 [Lkr. Ostalbkreis/D], Giengen an der Brenz grave 26 [Lkr. Heidenheim/D])²² and other deposits (for instance Calonge »Collet de Sant Antoni« [prov. Girona/E])²³.

REMARKS ON CHRONOLOGY

Convincing parallels for the Morbello ewer from stratigraphic contexts have been recorded in only two cases (fig. 5): a destruction layer following the abandonment of the *castrum* at Sant Julià de Ramis (prov. Girona/E) and a grave found near the basilica of San Pietro di Sorres at Borutta (prov. Sassari/I)²⁴, both belonging to the morphologically related »Las Pesqueras« type²⁵. The destruction layer should be dated to a period subsequent to the abandonment of the *castrum*, probably in the early 8th century. This date is fully compatible with the belt buckle with an U-shaped plate that accompanied the ewer from the grave at Borutta, which should be dated to the late 7th or early 8th century²⁶. A similar chronological background is also suggested by the incense burner from Morbello that finds a good counterpart among the liturgical implements recorded in the destruction layer sealing the last period of use of the church at the settlement of El Bovalar (fig. 4D). This layer covered uniformly the whole settlement and is dated after 710-713/714 because of the coins struck under the Visigothic king Akhila recorded in the residential area²⁷. In addition, an inscription carved on the foot of a similar ewer has been dated with paleographic arguments to the late 7th-early 8th century²⁸.

The available data agree to place the deposition of these types of objects after the beginning of the 8th century. In this context, some of the features of the Morbello ewer can shed some additional light to the chron-

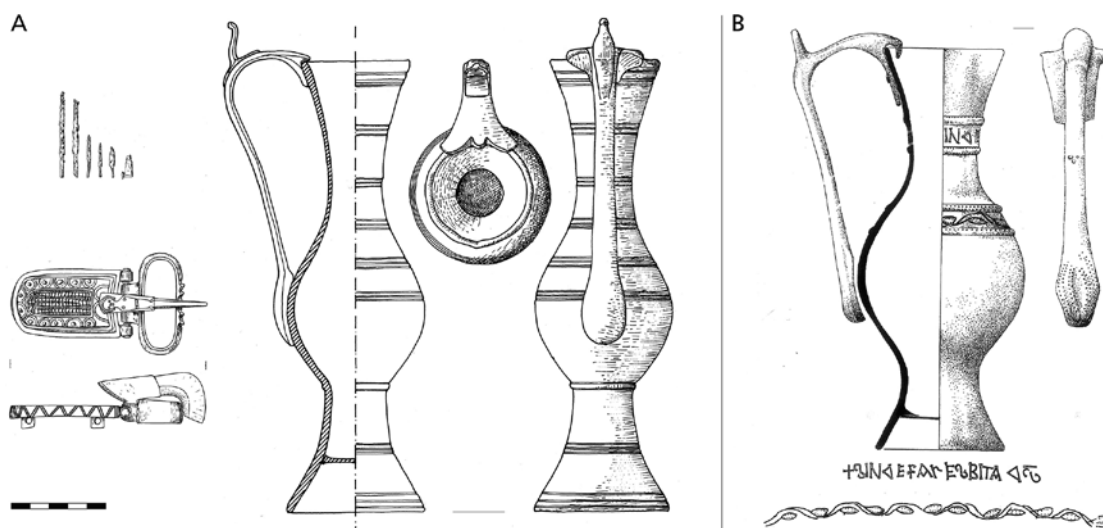


Fig. 5 Bronze ewers of »Las Pesqueras« type from dated contexts. – **A** Borutta. – **B** Sant Julià de Ramis. – (A after Maetzke 1966, figs 2. 4-5; B after Burch et al. 2006, fig. 99).

ological issues: the presence of both a (pseudo-)*nodus* surrounded by a double filigree-pearled string and the decorative patterns of engraved arches are of the uttermost relevance, as they bring the ewer close to 8th-century productions, such as one of the ewers from the Vrap treasure (Qark Tirana/AL), deposited after 700, and the Tassilo chalice, manufactured between 768/769 and 788 (**fig. 6**)²⁹. Thus, the available evidence indicates consistently that the Morbello assemblage was in all likelihood concealed during the 8th century – and therefore used until this date – or possibly even later: as said, the Stuttgart Psalter is a convincing testimony of the use of this type of ewers still in the early 9th-century churches (**fig. 3, 1**). Morphologically related vessels, displaying *nodus* in their feet and pear-shaped bellies, are also represented in the Stuttgart Psalter and in a decorated marble slab found at the cathedral of Albenga (prov. Savona/I)³⁰, dating from the late 8th or early 9th century (**fig. 7**).

This chronological background fits well with the morphological features of the oil lamp. Although it belongs to a well-attested type that circulated throughout the Mediterranean Basin, no counterpart has been recorded in a stratigraphic context yet. This type of lamp is usually dated between the 5th and 6th centuries on typological-stylistic grounds³¹. Being the only available dating context known so far, the Morbello assemblage could potentially delay the chronology of these productions, at least to the 7th-8th centuries. Alternatively, though, one can assume that the example from Morbello had been in use during a very long time span. Actually, it is widely acknowledged that liturgical implements and, generally speaking, church furniture and equipment could be used during prolonged periods of time: the instance of some present-day churches, keeping objects dating from the Renaissance or the Baroque ages, is eloquent enough, but there are even more »extreme« cases, like the 6th-century candelabra still used in the 1950s at the monastery of St. Anthony on the mount Kolzim (Red Sea gov. /ET)³². Early medieval contexts were certainly no exception to this rule: archaeological, iconographic and written sources agree in conveying an image of a »multi-layered« composition of the liturgical items which happened to meet at the same time in a church, the periods of production of the objects stretching over hundreds of years³³. For instance, as seen above, the type of ewer recorded in the Morbello assemblage is iconographically attested in the Stuttgart Psalter, about one century after the latest archaeological deposition contexts (**fig. 3**); moreover, the abovementioned



Fig. 6 Selected ornamental elements in 8th-century bronze and silver ware. – **1** Morbello. – **2** unknown provenance, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid. – **3** Kremsmünster, Tassilo chalice. – **4** Vrap treasure. – (1 after Crosetto 2011, fig. 6; 2-4 after Beghelli/Pinar 2013, fig. 11; drawings M. Beghelli).



Fig. 7 Early medieval representations of pear or oval-shaped vessels with *nodus*. – **1** Albenga, cathedral. – **2** Stuttgart Psalter, folio 107v. – (1 after Frondoni 1987, fig. 28; 2 after Stuttgarter Bilderpsalter 1968).

inventory from the Staffelsee includes a *turabulum cuprinum antiquum* among the church possessions³⁴. It is interesting to stress that lamps and other lighting devices have often proven to be the oldest components of the early medieval liturgical sets, the Stuttgart Psalter itself conveying a number of remarkable examples³⁵. It is likely that the longevity of these objects was related to their minor exposition to wearing out in



Fig. 8 Cylindrical-based thuribles with three feet and decorated openwork cover. – **1** El Bovalar. – **2** »Almeria«. – **3-4** Rome (?). – **5** Morbello. – **6** unknown provenance, University of Toronto. – **7** Volubilis. – **8** unknown provenance, Musée de Cluny. – (1 after Del Romà al Romànic 1999, 319; 2 after Art of medieval Spain 1993; 3 after Arena et al. 2001, 423; 4 after Frühchristliche Kunst 1962, 144; 5 after Crosetto 2011, fig. 7; 6 after Campbell 1985, 83; 7 after De l'empire aux villes 1990, 371; 8 after Caillet 1985, 215).

comparison to other items such as ewers, calices, patens, and basins, more subjected to frequent handling.

(WESTERN-) MEDITERRANEAN CONNECTIONS

Thus, a number of elements occurring in the Morbello assemblage find convincing counterparts in other territories of the Western Mediterranean area. The incense burner also belongs to a type mainly recorded in the West in the 7th-8th century (**figs 8. 11**): comparable pensile cylindrical-based thuribles (with three feet and a decorated openwork cover, crowned by a cross or a bird) have been so far recovered at El Bovalar in Spain, Volubilis in Morocco and Rome³⁶; two examples lacking precise provenance are kept in the Musée de Cluny (Paris) and in the University of Toronto³⁷. A find from the present-day province of Almeria in Spain shares its main features with this group of thuribles; its decoration, on the contrary, suggests a later chronology³⁸. To a similar type of incense burner, but octagonal-based – a form most often recorded in the



Fig. 9 Lamps with handle shaped as a double looped branch of foliage and central cross found in the Western Mediterranean. – **1** Morbello. – **2** unknown provenance, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Cagliari. – **3** Cordoba, Guadalquivir river. – **4** Timgad. – (1 after Crosetto 2011, fig. 4; 2 after Pani Ermini/Marinone 1981, 81; 3 after Bronces romanos 1990, 226; 4 after Ballu 1911, pl. between 166 and 167).



Fig. 10 Ewer handles with four-footed animal. – **1** Morbello (detail from fig. 1). – **2** unknown provenance, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Cagliari. – **3** Burguillo. – **4** Budakalász. – (1 after Crosetto 2011, fig. 6; 2 after Pani Ermini/Marinone 1981, fig. 130; 3 after Balmaseda/Papí 1997, figs 46-47; 4 after Vida 2006, fig. 1).

Eastern Mediterranean –, belongs a renowned example from Klapavice-Crkvina (Splitsko-dalmatinska žup./HR)³⁹.

These »Western-Mediterranean connections« are compatible with the distribution of the closest counterparts to the oil lamp (figs 9. 11): despite the type is mainly attested in the Eastern Mediterranean⁴⁰, a number of finds have been recorded in the West, as shown by the examples from Timgad in Algeria, Cordoba in Spain (found on the banks of the Guadalquivir, in front of the ancient Monasterio de los Mártires) and the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Cagliari on Sardinia (and probably found in Sardinia)⁴¹. This last artefact



Fig. 11 Distribution of the types of cast bronze items attested at Morbello (prov. Alessandria/I). – ■ ewers; ● oil lamps; ▲ thuribles. – Empty icons: unknown provenance; empty icons with a dot: uncertain provenance. – The list of finds can be found at the bottom of the text. – (Map M. Beghelli / J. Pinar Gil).

reveals Greek letters engraved on its surface, in all likelihood referable to the words »light and life«⁴²: while the inscription indicates most probably a production in the East, the distribution of the examples of the same type suggests that they were commonly circulating in the Western Mediterranean, thus its presence in the Morbello liturgical set is not to be considered as exceptional.

The ewer is perhaps the artefact that emphasizes the most the Western connections of the Morbello assemblage, as its closest counterparts are all to be found in the Iberian Peninsula. As said, two ovoid-bodied ewers with *nodus* from Spain (uncertain locations) – the same type displayed by the Stuttgart Psalter – are the most convincing parallel finds identified so far (figs 3, 11): not only the form of their bodies and handles but also their decorations – both the plant-scroll and arch-shaped ornaments – correspond exactly to those of the Morbello ewer. Other decorative details bear witness of relations with the Iberian Peninsula, for instance, the presence of human heads on the lower end of its handle – occurring on three ewers preserved at the Museo Arqueológico Nacional of Madrid⁴³ – or the four-footed animal on the handle's opposite end, occurring at Burguillo (prov. Segovia/E), where it is also associated to a human or animal protome on the lower end (fig. 10, 3)⁴⁴. Such an element can also be observed on the lower ends of two handles from Sardinia. One of them (fig. 10, 2) is a remarkably exact parallel for the Morbello handle: it is, besides Morbello, the only example in which the animal lies on its belly⁴⁵.

These Spanish and Sardinian connections must not be accidental because they fit, as we shall see, into a network of contacts and influences clearly outlined by other types of cast bronze wares (see below). Thus, the available evidence enables to hypothesize that the Morbello ewer was produced in a Spanish workshop. Such an origin is also suggested by one of the ewers found at El Gatillo de Arriba (prov. Cáceres/E), belong-

ing to an indubitably autochthonous Spanish type. It displays a sort of faintly outlined *nodus* on its foot that finds, again, an exact counterpart in Morbello (fig. 4C)⁴⁶.

Many pieces of evidence show that the liturgical sets appeared to be, in many cases, heterogeneous groupings of objects as for their provenance and chronology⁴⁷. The analysis of the dissemination patterns of the Morbello objects reveals, on the contrary, a remarkable consistency, all of them belonging to types, which were commonly circulating in the Western Mediterranean (fig. 11). However, this does not mean that all three objects were manufactured by a single workshop as components of an original liturgical set. In any case, a production in the West of at least some of the items is not to be considered as exceptional: as we shall see in this and in the next part of this study⁴⁸, many of the cast bronze vessels related to liturgical contexts, used from the 7th century onwards, might have been manufactured in the Western Mediterranean and distributed exclusively in the neighbouring territories.

PRODUCTION CENTRES AND DISTRIBUTION PATTERNS: ON THE SO-CALLED COPTIC BRONZE VESSELS

Any attempt to identify the production centres of bronze vessels in the early medieval Mediterranean leads inevitably to the issue of the so-called Coptic productions, which will be inquired in more detail in the second part of this study. This group of cast bronze objects – jugs, basins, pans, etc. – has been the core of a long-lasting debate in the European archaeology of the last two thirds of the 20th century. The pioneer studies of Joachim Werner⁴⁹, Kurt Erdmann⁵⁰, Wilhelm Holmqvist⁵¹ and Pere de Palol⁵² attributed them to some 6th-7th century Egyptian workshops. Later surveys proposed alternative origins: Hermann Dannheimer argued that they were not necessarily produced in Egypt⁵³, and Maria Carmela Carretta reached similar conclusions in her study of Italian vessels⁵⁴. Other scholars hypothesized alternative provenances within the Mediterranean Basin: Jacques Schwartz favoured a Balkan origin⁵⁵, whereas Patrick Périn suggested that at least some of these artefacts might have been produced in Italian workshops⁵⁶, a viewpoint that was to be shared by Mechthild Schulze-Dörrlamm and Gilbert-Robert Delahaye⁵⁷. Also, Peter Richards expressed caution towards the »Coptic« label: he rather preferred the more general term »Byzantine«⁵⁸. Analogous opinions have been expressed by Marlia Mundell Mango, who listed possible production centres in the Levant⁵⁹, and Jörg Drauschke, who attributed a »southern origin« to the vessels recorded in Central Europe⁶⁰.

The chronology of this group of vessels is now far better known. Since when J. Werner and the other »pioneers« were writing, a number of objects have been discovered in well-dated contexts, whether graves or securely dated layers in settlements, churches, and so forth. It is important to stress that these chronologies – which indicate the periods of circulation, use and deposition of the artefacts, not directly the time when they were manufactured – are to be considered as sorts of »fixed points« every further consideration should be based upon. Therefore, these are the data we will use as »raw material« in this study, trying to avoid to prematurely assume chronologies of production resulting only from guesswork. The most recent research on the grave finds in South-West Germany shows that the deposition of cast bronze vessels as grave good was booming in the mid-7th century and in the early 8th century⁶¹. This »late« chronology is consistent with the rare stratigraphic contexts where similar vessels have been recorded in the Mediterranean area: this applies to the aforementioned ewers from El Bovalar and Sant Julià de Ramis (see above), as well as the treasure from La Grassa (prov. Tarragona/E: *terminus post quem* 649)⁶², a settlement find from Pella (Irbid gov./JOR)⁶³, and the grave 1 at the Biskupija »Crkvina« (Šibensko-kninska žup./HR) cemetery⁶⁴. All these contexts place the deposition of well-known types of jugs, pans, and basins into the late 7th-early 9th century.

These improvements in the study of the chronology of use and deposition of cast bronze vessels have not been accompanied by any substantial progress in identifying the workshops that manufactured them. In general terms, the location of a workshop can be determined in a number of ways. In the best-case scenario, the workshop itself can be found during an archaeological excavation, thus possibly conveying relevant data not only on its position but also on its technological, spatial and architectonic features and on the organization of labour, supplies, and deliveries. Other »lucky« circumstances are those in which the workshop's location is mentioned by some inscriptions or any other type of written source. In most cases, however, a manufacturing centre can be hypothetically placed on a map analyzing only the geographical distribution of the artefacts.

There are many criteria that can help to connect different objects to a given production centre or production area. In some occasions, the use of specific raw materials, techniques or tools proves to be relevant; in some others, a number of formal or stylistic features shared by the artefacts is all that we have. Whether we rely on archaeometrical, technological or typological criteria, the location of a workshop because of objects' distribution derives ultimately from basic principles of spatial analysis, such as Waldo Tobler's renowned first law of geography, stating that everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things⁶⁵. As this principle – and also the common sense – suggests, objects tend to cluster around their original production centres: especially before the Industrial Revolution, dispatching an artefact implied time, appropriate resources and organizational efforts, besides entailing exposure to random circumstances, as incidents, thefts, and diverse delivery problems. Centuries afterwards, this principle is still mirrored by the archaeological record: even products that are widely known for their circulation throughout the Mediterranean and beyond – such as African late red slip ware, some Byzantine hammered bronze flasks or architectural items in Proconnesian marble – are abundantly documented in their regions of provenance⁶⁶. Obviously, the more objects are mapped – and the better they are characterized and classified –, the more exact and reliable will be the location of the workshop: sometimes we are talking about a precise city or village, some other times we can only pinpoint large territories, stretching over hundreds or even thousands of kilometres.

This method has been successfully applied to a wide range of chronological, geographical and material contexts⁶⁷. Also, it is commonly accepted for the bulk of early medieval metal artefacts, and yet it apparently – and mysteriously – does not apply when examining the evidence on »Coptic« vessels: although they are attested almost exclusively in Central and Western Europe, the scholarship has systematically related them to Egyptian or, more generally, to Eastern-Mediterranean or Byzantine production centres. The main explanation for this is probably that traditional interpretations attribute particular qualitative importance to the easternmost finds, thus labelling the westernmost finds as »eastern imports«⁶⁸. Perhaps, this argument may be acceptable for South-Western Germany, where the so-called Coptic vessels occur frequently as grave goods, and one can go with the classic explanation »you find many of them in the West because people in the East were not accustomed to bury these objects in graves«⁶⁹. However, this is hardly the case in territories such as Spain, Southern France and many areas of Italy, where cast bronze vessels occur more often in settlements or churches, just like in the East. Moreover, despite grave goods were a widespread component of 7th-century burials in Northern and Eastern France and Northern Italy, »Coptic« vessels are not more common here than in other regions of the West. All in all, it appears that the alleged »distorting factors« – like the presence or absence of the practice of offering grave goods in a certain area – are not »strong« enough to shape the interpretation of a distribution map of archaeological finds, to the extent they did in the case of the »Coptic« vessels. Other types of objects, such as the aforementioned Byzantine hammered flasks, ended up in graves, too, from Italy up to nowadays United Kingdom: and still, they are not more numerous in Western Europe than in the Byzantine territories, where they clearly cluster⁷⁰. No one would assume that these flasks were produced precisely where they are never or very seldom attested (for

instance, the British Islands): in the same way, we should not presume that all types of cast so-called Coptic bronze vessels originated outside Western Europe. As we shall see in the second part of this study, while an »eastern« production may be envisaged for a few types of »Coptic« vessels, for some others this seems to be an extremely unlikely hypothesis⁷¹.

The persistence of the contradiction between geographical data and archaeological interpretation depends indeed on the fact that the »Coptic« vessels are regarded as a homogeneous and consistent ensemble, probably because of the still considerable influence of J. Werner's first research. In his studies, the scholar mapped together all the cast bronze vessels known at that time, i. e. objects with different chronologies and typologies. J. Werner himself modified substantially his first ideas over time⁷²: nonetheless, even the most recent typological surveys keep on considering the »Coptic« bronze vessels from Central Europe as a group that can be separated from parallel finds in the same material and technique – cast bronze – from other European and Mediterranean areas⁷³.

On the contrary, more than ten years ago, P. Périn pointed out that every single type and sub-type defined by J. Werner and included in the category of »Coptic vessels« has a distinct distribution pattern⁷⁴. This becomes even more visible after improving the typological classification of the objects and updating the distribution maps.

In this regard, the finds from Morbello are very significant: as we have seen, the ewer has its best counterparts among Iberian products, and the thurible can be generally ascribed to Western-Mediterranean workshops, thus suggesting for these types a production in the West and a distribution over medium distances (fig. 11). This, as we will try to show in the next part of this study⁷⁵, is true for a number of other types of cast bronze items traditionally ascribed to the »Coptic« group. The lamp from the Morbello assemblage was probably manufactured in the Eastern Mediterranean, but at the time of its concealment into the ground it was an »antique piece«: thus, its transport from the East over long distances had in all likelihood occurred earlier, and, by the Early Middle Ages, these objects could also have circulated over medium distances within the Western Mediterranean.

ON THE FUNCTION(S) OF CAST BRONZE VESSELS AND THEIR ASSOCIATED IMPLEMENTS

A number of studies published in the 1980s and 1990s raised an intense debate on the »sacred« or »profane« use of bronze vessels⁷⁶. This discussion, though, proves to be rather redundant in strictly archaeological terms. More than a century ago, the renowned sociologist and anthropologist Émile Durkheim warned that the only absolute feature of the »sacred« and the »profane« was the heterogeneity shared by both categories⁷⁷. Drawing a sharp line between the sacred and the profane becomes even more deceptive when dealing with material remains from the past, as it is clear that the depositional contexts relate exclusively to the latest function of the objects, e. g. liturgical use when found near the altar of a church, grave offer when found in a burial, household goods when found in a domestic context in a settlement, and so forth. In other words, archaeology offers no secure tools to trace back every possible use that an item might have had during its »life«. Not even the examples preserving epigraphic evidence, however, can settle the matter, as the interpretation of the inscriptions themselves is frequently disputed⁷⁸. Also, there is often no certain way to determine the exact use of an object in the moment in which it was engraved. For instance, was the inscribed (in all likelihood originally liturgical) ewer found in the cemetery at Thierhaupten-Oberbaar (Lkr. Augsburg/D; fig. 6, 1)⁷⁹ still used in a church just before its deposition, or had it long lost its religious context and had been used over a certain number of years, say, in someone's house to pour beer?

What archaeology can say for sure to this regard – and this is a very relevant point – is that no degree of interdependence between the typological features of the bronze vessels and their archaeological background can be observed: the items found in graves, in concealed deposits or in church contexts are often just alike, belonging to the same typologies⁸⁰.

As for the study of the liturgical implements used in the early medieval churches, the purpose should rather be to ascertain which were their material and visual features (i. e., to find out which types of objects could be used in a liturgical context) and to define which are the suitable sources to do so⁸¹. As seen in this part of the study, this issue can be addressed using three main categories of sources: 1. liturgical texts, church inventories and descriptions; 2. iconographical sources; 3. archaeological sources, mainly: assemblages of implements either physically or spatially connected to a church; or concealed in »treasures« and buried in graves, but clearly relatable to a liturgical use (at least at a certain point of the objects' life, e. g. by means of inscriptions and/or association with items like a processional cross). In most cases, generations of philologists, historians, liturgists, and art historians have patiently authenticated, dated and assessed the reliability of the first two categories of sources. Instead, there is no comparable, universally accepted critical apparatus related to the archaeological assemblages and contexts.

The evaluation of an archaeological context can be performed in many ways. At times, the assessment can be focused on a critical approach to the excavation reports in order to ascertain their reliability, just as a historian would do with any kind of written source: was everything recorded in a sufficiently accurate manner, how much was the author competent, is there any reason why he/she would lie to us? In the specific case we are dealing with, archaeological interpretations can be deeply divergent from one scholar to another, and have completely different practical approaches. Thus, in hypercritical evaluations of church assemblages is usually argued that the fact that one object was found amid a church's equipment or belongings is not necessarily proof of a liturgical use⁸²; similar remarks often concern the fact that some artefacts – or even a combination of different objects – are found in »profane« backgrounds at least as often as in »sacred« ones⁸³. Besides not considering that items of the same type could be used both as liturgical implements and as domestic items (as just mentioned, an object's type is not necessarily linked to its function), this kind of approach incurs in a common mistake, that of dealing inaccurately with contextual data: archaeological contexts are sources by themselves, and as such they should be addressed, discussed and verified.

In any case, we think that the most important consideration is to acknowledge to which extent the »church context« source tends to be rare and therefore should be given a particular value beyond strictly quantitative considerations. The more limited number of bronze vessels found in ecclesiastical contexts – in comparison to their counterparts belonging to the same type discovered in other kinds of contexts – might be plainly explained when reflecting upon some practical aspects. Let us consider an ideal middle-sized, waterside settlement of the Early Middle Ages, consisting of residential and productive structures, dump areas, cemeteries, a small harbour, and a church. Let us assume that a workshop in the settlement was specialized in manufacturing bronze vessels that a part of its production was sold to the local wealthiest residents (laymen and clergymen alike) and another was sent to a different marketplace by sea. Lastly, let us imagine that the local priest used some of these vessels in the regular liturgical service and kept them in the church's treasure. As archaeologists, we should ask ourselves which were the circumstances favouring the creation of a deposit containing liturgical implements, and how often did they occur. The average early medieval church building underwent a routine existence for centuries before it collapsed out of a natural disaster or simply poor maintenance. Historical events such as intentional ravaging, destruction or abandonment were of course not happening on a daily basis. The episodes in which the church possessions were abandoned together with the church and never retrieved – the »typical« circumstances that can lead to the discovery, in the occasion of archaeological excavations, of liturgical implements – must have been even more unusual. In our ideal

early medieval settlement, during the time span required to accumulate a church treasure with different types of items, and during the time span in which the implements were used (let us hypothesize a couple of centuries), the production and employ of metal vessels went on in the rest of the town: dozens or even hundreds of items were manufactured, repaired and recycled by local craftsmen, many were broken and dumped, while a few ships transporting metal ware sunk into the sea after a storm, and many people died and were buried together with their grave goods (including a number of local metal vessels). This simple theoretical exercise shows that the chances to find metal vessels outside church contexts are a priori much higher than within them. Therefore, the deposits and objects stratigraphically related to churches do have a particular qualitative importance and should have an above-average weight in the interpretation of the archaeological finds. In sum, within the same type of bronze vessel, the examples found in church contexts are less numerous than the examples found in other contexts: however, this does not mean that a given type of object was generally used as a »secular« item, and only rarely as a liturgical implement. For all we know, both contexts might have occurred just as often, or the situation might have been exactly the opposite: certain types of ewers, thuribles, and pans – attested by the iconographical, archaeological and written evidence alike – could have been mainly used in the religious ceremonies (if not produced for this purpose, something that in most cases cannot currently be proven) and only seldom – or at a later date in the objects' life – as household goods.

LIST OF FINDS

Types of objects attested in the liturgical set from Morbello: examples found or preserved in Europe and the Mediterranean region (see fig. 11)

The objects with completely unknown provenance have been mapped according to the location where they are preserved (e.g. a museum), and are marked with an empty circle, or square, or triangle. Most of the objects with uncertain provenance (e.g. »Spain«) have been conventionally mapped at the position of the current capital of each country/region (e.g. Madrid for »Spain«), and their symbols consist in an empty circle, or square, or triangle, with a dot in the centre.

- Ewer: Italy: Morbello. – Spain: Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid (unknown provenance, probably Spain); Instituto Valencia de Don Juan Madrid (unknown provenance, probably Spain).
- Oil lamp: Algeria: Timgad. – Italy: Cagliari, Morbello. – Egypt: uncertain location, Coptic Museum Cairo (unknown provenance). – Germany: Munich (private collection, unknown provenance). – Greece: Museum Benaki Athens (unknown provenance); Museum Hérakleion (2 objects, unknown provenance); Private collection Lastis, Athens (unknown provenance). – Spain: Cordoba. – Turkey: Museum Mersin (unknown provenance); Museum Adana (unknown provenance); Turkey (uncertain location).
- Thurible: France: Musée de Cluny, Paris (unknown provenance). – Italy: Morbello; Rome (2 objects, uncertain location). – Morocco: Volubilis. – Spain: El Bovalar; Almeria province (uncertain location).

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West. Distribution, Reception and Functionality (5th-9th centuries)«. – On the part of J. Pinar Gil, the preparation of this paper was supported by a visiting professorship provided by the Philosophical Faculty of the Univerzita Hradec Králové in Summer term 2019.

Notes

- 1) The term »bronze« is used to mean a wide range of different copper alloys, where the percentage of copper generally equals to a minimum of 70 %. Throughout the Middle Ages, and until about the 15th century, a clear differentiation between bronze (copper + tin) and brass (copper + zinc) did not exist. Both the alloys were generically called *aes*, *cuprum* or *metallum*. Besides the two main components, almost always the alloy included small percentages of other metals (e. g. lead, iron, nickel, silver). In general, see: Bernardini 1992. – Xanthopoulou 2010, 75.
- 2) Crosetto 2011.
- 3) Beghelli/Pinar in prep.
- 4) Renfrew/Bahn 2008, 578.
- 5) Ecl. Off. Miss., coll. 1316-1320. – A similar procession accompanied the pope's entry into the church in the 8th-century Rome: Ord. Rom. I 45-46, 125. – de Blaauw 1994, 75.
- 6) Ecl. Off. Miss., coll. 1321-1322. – de Blaauw 1994, 84-85.
- 7) Ecl. Off. Miss., col. 1323.
- 8) Kötting 1986, with further reading. See also Puertas Tricas 1975, 252 no. 250. – Balmaseda/Papí 1997, 168-169.
- 9) Crosetto 2011.
- 10) See most recently Beghelli 2017, with further reading.
- 11) Cap. Carol. 128.2-6.
- 12) Chron. Centulense II, 10.
- 13) Beghelli/Pinar 2013, with further reading.
- 14) Stuttgarter Bilderpsalter 1968. – Bierbrauer 2005.
- 15) Bierbrauer 2005.
- 16) Beghelli/Pinar 2013, 752-762.
- 17) Pita/de Palol 1972. – Caballero/Galera/Garralda 1991. – Balmaseda/Papí 1997, 158-159. – Corrado 2001. – Milošević 1997, 34. – Caputo 1984-1985, 223-232. – Atanasov 2006, 349-354. – Stampolidis 2004. – Bénazeth 2001, 391-397. 405-410. – von Hessen/Kurze/Mastrelli 1977. – Mundell Mango 1986. – Frazer 1988. – Strzygowski 1904, 340-347.
- 18) Beghelli/Pinar 2013. On the liturgical implements of late antique and early medieval churches see also Braun 1932. – Martorelli 2001. – Pitarakis 2009.
- 19) See Beghelli/Pinar in prep.
- 20) Bronces romanos 1990, 228-229 no. 123. – Balmaseda/Papí 1997, 156-157. – Zamora Canellada 2007. – Fernández González 1990. – Hispania Gothorum 2007, 555.
- 21) Kapitän/Fallico 1967.
- 22) Veeck 1931, 165. 329 pl. 20. – Paulsen/Schach-Döriges 1978, 135-139 pls 2-11.
- 23) de Palol 1948-1949; 1953.
- 24) Burch et al. 2006, 115-122. – Maetzke 1966.
- 25) See Beghelli/Pinar in prep.
- 26) Schulze-Dörrlamm 2002, 107-129.
- 27) Pita/de Palol 1972, 394-396. – de Palol 1989. – Del Romà al Romànic 1999, 145-146. Jean-Pierre Caillet (1985, 215) reports that a similar incense burner (see below, »[Western-] Mediterranean connections«) would have been found in Volubilis (Meknès/MA) next to a group of coins struck in the period 772-788: apparently, he misunderstood Christiane Boube-Piccot in the latter's publication of a distinct thurible cover from Volubilis (Boube-Piccot 1966, 346-347). James W. Allan (1986, 27) suggested, on stylistic grounds, »an early Islamic date« for that object.
- 28) de Palol 1950b, 72.
- 29) Vrap: Strzygowski 1917, 14-21. – Werner 1986. – Bálint 2000. – Garam 2000. – Daim 2000, 94-107. 183-184. – Tassilo chalice: Stollenmayer 1949. – Haseloff 1951. – Bierbrauer 1988, 330-333. – Fried 1994, 118-119 no. V/2. – Bierbrauer 2001. – Žvanut 2002.
- 30) Frondoni 1987, 44.
- 31) Xanthopoulou 2010, 12. 150-153.
- 32) Ibidem 66. 295. 309-310 nos LU 4.014 and LU 6.
- 33) For a more detailed discussion on these points, see Beghelli/Pinar 2013.
- 34) Cap. Carol. 128.3.
- 35) Beghelli/Pinar 2013, 727-735.
- 36) Pita/de Palol 1972, 394-396. – Del Romà al Romànic 1999, 145-146. – Bronces romanos 1990, 151. 228 no. 122. – Art of medieval Spain 1993, 52-53 no. 11. – De l'empire aux villes 1990, 371 no. 219. – Arena et al. 2001, 423-424 nos 1022. 1024. – Frühchristliche Kunst 1962, 144 no. 264.
- 37) Caillet 1985, 215 no. 150. – Campbell 1985, 83.
- 38) de Palol 1950a, 10-11 pl. V. – Gómez Moreno 1951, 335. – Allan 1986, 27-28. – Art of medieval Spain 1993, 100 no. 48.
- 39) de Palol 1950a, 10 fig. 5, 1. – Salona 1994, 311.
- 40) Xanthopoulou 2010, 150-153 nos LA 3.227-232, LA 3.236, LA 3.238-239 and LA 3.243-244. – Lafli/Buora 2014, 443-445 (Turkey, probably Mersin).
- 41) Ballu 1911, 166-167. – Pani Ermini/Marinone 1981, 81 no. 124. – Bronces romanos 1990, 226 no. 118.
- 42) Pani Ermini/Marinone 1981, 81 no. 124.
- 43) Balmaseda/Papí 1997, 162-164 nos 17-18. 21.
- 44) Ibidem 164-165 no. 22.
- 45) Pani Ermini/Marinone 1981, 86-88 nos 128. 130. – Earlier ewers found at Ballana (Aswan gouv./ET) and Budakalász (Kom. Pest/H) host protomes of similar quadrupeds: Emery 1938, pl. 78C. – Vida 2006. – On the typological attribution of those ewers, see Beghelli/Pinar in prep.
- 46) Caballero/Galera/Garralda 1991, fig. 7, 14.
- 47) Beghelli/Pinar 2013, 742-744. – See also the next paragraph and Beghelli/Pinar in prep.
- 48) Beghelli/Pinar in prep.
- 49) Werner 1938; 1952; 1954-1957; 1961.
- 50) Erdmann 1938/1939.
- 51) Holmqvist 1939.

- 52) de Palol 1950b.
 53) Dannheimer 1979.
 54) Carretta 1982.
 55) Schwartz 1950/1957.
 56) Périn 1992; 2005.
 57) Schulze-Dörrlamm 2010, 250-253. – Delahaye 2015, 48.
 58) Richards 1980.
 59) Mundell Mango 2001, 93-95; 2009, 230-231.
 60) Drauschke 2011, 135.
 61) Ibidem 125-135.
 62) Zeiss 1934, 146 pl. 29, 10.
 63) Walmsley 2002, 144 fig. 221.
 64) Milošević 2000, 209-211. – Petrinc 2009, 66. 218-219.
 65) Tobler 1970, 234-240.
 66) Bonifay 2004. – Musteață 2010. – Marano 2008; 2016. – Sodini 2000; 2002; 2008. – Before modern times, the rare examples of objects produced almost exclusively to circulate over long distances were connected to imperial or royal initiatives, like diplomatic gifts or insignia of political power.
 67) The classical Hodder/Orton 1976, 98-197 provides a number of illustrative examples.
 68) For example Périn 1992, 44. 50.
 69) Werner 1938, 76. – P. Périn (2005, 95) approaches critically this assumption.
 70) Pitarakis 2005. – Musteață 2010. – Beghelli/Drauschke 2017, 20-24.
 71) Some important remarks in this direction are to be found already in Périn 2005, 95-96.
 72) Werner 1938; 1943; 1954-1957. – A detailed historiographic analysis in Périn 2005.
 73) For example Werz 2005, which includes no Western or Eastern Mediterranean cast bronze vessels in her study.
 74) Périn 2005, 95-96.
 75) See Beghelli/Pinar in prep.
 76) Carretta 1982, 13. – Taft 1996, 213-216. – Zagari 2005, 109. – Beghelli/Pinar 2013, 699-701.
 77) Durkheim 1912, 49-58.
 78) For example: de Palol 1950b, 155-157. – Davidson 1952, 74. – Paulsen/Schach-Döriges 1978, 52. – Marjanović-Vujović 1987, 136. 138. – Trier 1992. – Müller 2006, 69-70. – Baldini 2008, 411. – Colussa 2010. – A recently published ewer from Bobadela (distr. Lisboa/P) displays an inscription suggesting an ecclesiastic ownership; that may be the first evidence connecting the ewers of Mañaria type to liturgical uses: In tempore sueborum 2017, 188-189. On the Mañaria type, see Beghelli/Pinar in prep.
 79) Trier 1992.
 80) In general on these points see Beghelli/Pinar 2013.
 81) Beghelli/Pinar 2013. – See also above, »Incense, light, and water«.
 82) Taft 1996, 213-216.
 83) Carretta 1982, 13.

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Zusammenfassung / Summary / Résumé

Gegossene Bronzegefäße des 6.-9. Jahrhunderts.

Bemerkungen zu einem Fundensemble liturgischer Geräte aus Morbello (prov. Alessandria, Piemont/I)

Ensemble liturgischer Geräte sind selten im frühmittelalterlichen Europa. Nur ein kleiner Teil von ihnen ist stratigraphisch oder räumlich mit frühen Kirchen in Verbindung zu bringen, und der überwiegenden Mehrheit fehlt jeglicher archäologische Kontext. Vor diesem Hintergrund bieten die Objekte, die 1897 in Morbello gefunden wurden – eine Kanne, eine Lampe und ein Weihrauchgefäß aus gegossener Bronze – wichtige Informationen zur Zusammensetzung, Chronologie und Funktion solcher Fundensembles. Die Stücke aus Morbello – untersucht hier nicht nur im Vergleich zu anderen archäologischen Funden, sondern auch zu Schriftquellen und bildlichen Darstellungen – versorgen uns mit neuen Details zu Zirkulation und Gebrauch liturgischer Geräte im Westen während des 6.-9. Jahrhunderts. Gleichzeitig stellt der Fundkomplex einen exzellenten Ausgangspunkt dar, um andere wichtige Themen anzusprechen, die allgemeiner mit Toreutik und den sogenannten koptischen Bronzen in Verbindung stehen.

Übersetzung: M. Struck

Cast Bronze Vessels in the 6th-9th Centuries.

Remarks on an Assemblage of Liturgical Implements Found at Morbello (prov. Alessandria, Piedmont/I)

The assemblages of liturgical implements are rare in Early Medieval Europe. Only a small part of them is stratigraphically or spatially related to early churches, and the overwhelming majority lacks completely any archaeological context. Against this background, the objects discovered in 1897 at Morbello – an ewer, a lamp and a thurible in cast bronze – convey relevant data on the composition, the chronology and the function of such assemblages. The items from Morbello – studied here in comparison not only to other archaeological finds, but also to written and iconographic sources – provide new data on the circulation and use of liturgical implements in the West during the 6th-9th centuries. At the same time, the assemblage represents an excellent starting point for addressing other prominent issues, more generally related to cast bronze items and the so-called Coptic vessels.

Vaisselle de bronze coulé des 6^e-9^e siècles.

Remarques sur un assemblage d'instruments liturgiques trouvé à Morbello (prov. Alessandria, Piémont/I)

Les assemblages d'instruments liturgiques sont rares dans l'Europe alto-médiévale. Seule une petite partie d'entre peut-être mise en relation stratigraphiquement ou spatialement aux églises primitives, et l'écrasante majorité d'entre elles n'a aucun contexte archéologique. Dans ce cadre, les objets découverts en 1897 à Morbello – une aiguière, une lampe et un encensoir en bronze coulé – fournissent des données pertinentes sur la composition, la chronologie et la fonction de ces assemblages. Les objets de Morbello – étudiés ici par comparaison non seulement avec d'autres découvertes archéologiques, mais aussi avec des sources écrites et iconographiques – fournissent de nouvelles données sur la circulation et l'utilisation des instruments liturgiques en Occident aux 6^e-9^e siècles. En même temps, l'assemblage représente un excellent point de départ pour aborder d'autres questions importantes, plus généralement liées aux objets en bronze coulé et aux récipients dits coptes.

Traduction: L. Bernard

Schlüsselwörter / Keywords / Mots clés

Italien / Frühes Mittelalter / gegossene Bronzegefäße / Metallbearbeitung / liturgische Geräte / Handel / Verbreitung

Italy / Early Middle Ages / cast bronze vessels / metalwork / liturgical implements / trade / circulation

Italie / Haut Moyen Âge / vaisselle de bronze coulé / travail du métal / instruments liturgiques / commerce / circulation

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