

Introduction

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This chapter includes both the state of research and highlights the advantages and shortcomings of this publication, as well as pointing out further research directions. It also provides a clear definition of the term *unguentaria*, describes the origin of the papers and provides a rationale for the collection and an explanation of how it fits into the existing literature on *unguentaria*.

Unguentarium as an archaeological term is conventionally applied to a specific series of vessels of clearly defined shapes that were current (though not in a continuous series) from the later Classical to the Late Roman period. In terminology for the Hellenistic and Roman periods, *unguentarium* generally denotes a specific shape: long neck, narrow diameter of rim, rounded body and no handles. A classical Roman *unguentarium* is typically a small narrow-necked glass or terracotta bottle topped with a slender neck and a thin-lipped rim. The base of these vessels can in some cases be rounded or fusiform – in which case they are not self-standing – or flat-bottomed. During the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods the main function of these vessels was to keep perfumed oils and cosmetic lotions fresh.¹ In recent years some chemical analyses done on the inside of these objects yielded the information that *unguentaria* were used to hold scented ‘holy’ oils, unguents and perfumes. Besides this use, they were also utilized for other religious purposes, especially as a votive at tombs. Alongside the common term *unguentarium*, which is a modern invention, this vessel type have also been called ‘balsamare’, ‘ampulle’, ‘flacon’ etc. What these vessels were originally called by the ancient Greeks and Romans is today unknown.

Terracotta *unguentaria* are found in relatively large quantities in most of the areas of the ancient Mediterranean, where they were produced from the Late Classical/Early Hellenistic, i. e. around the mid-fourth century BCE, to the Early Byzantine period, i. e. mid-seventh century CE. While an understanding of the role of *unguentaria* in the context of a specific site or as part of a regional pattern is crucial, the study of the vessel form itself has been overlooked. So far no scholar has attempted to identify specific workshops of *unguentaria* in Asia Minor or elsewhere. In Asia Minor the chronology of *unguentaria* therefore remains contentious and unclear.

The book includes 18 chapters dealing with terracotta and glassware that resulted from various excavation

projects, and some chapters offer an analytical approach. In general, the different topics represent a new addition, as they allow to identify the areas of production or consumption of different vessels, and this contributes to increasing knowledge of the distribution of containers and the nature of their use, whether in domestic, religious or funeral contexts. The volume is based primarily upon unpublished material from excavations and museum research from various areas of the ancient Mediterranean stretching from sites and museums across Portugal, through two sites in Andalusia and Granada in Spain, the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, some Etruscan sites in Italy, the necropolis of Cumae, other sites in Magna Graecia, the Athenian Agora, the British Museum, Thessaloniki, Cetățeni in Dacia, Sardinia, Hierapolis in Phrygia, and rest of western Anatolia, to Syracuse (Fig. 1.1). It sets out a comprehensive model for the study of *unguentaria*, including their typology, chronology, contexts, function, regional characteristics and distribution patterns. The vessel’s form demonstrates a high level of differentiation both between sites and within regions, meaning that a uniform ‘regional’ typology, suggested in some studies (Anderson-Stojanović 1987, 105), cannot be maintained.

During the Late Antique period the form and the function of *unguentaria* changed radically. It became a fusiform flask in shape, with a short tubular mouth marked off from the body by a slight ridge, tapering to a roughly truncated point. Most of these did not have handles. The approximate height of this new Late Antique form is 18–22 cm. The characteristics of these containers, which were first presented in detail by J. W. Hayes (Hayes 1971), are very distinctive: they are wheel-made, hard fired, with a thick, sturdy body and with a well smoothed and quite plain surface. They are also distinguished by prominent interior wheel-marks. At excavations in Asia Minor (Saraçhane in Istanbul, various locations at Ephesus, Tarsus-Gözlükule, Anemurium, Perge, Iasos, Cnidus, Hierapolis and Halicarnassus, among others; for find spots in Turkey see Chapter 18 below by G. Kan Şahin), Greece, Egypt, Jordan and Israel etc. Late Antique terracotta *unguentaria* have emerged in various contexts. A further exotic feature of these vessels is that they occasionally bear a small stamp (generally Early Byzantine monograms) just above the base, the meaning and function of which are not easy to recognize. Similar stamps also appear on amphorae, bricks, lead seals, coins, column capitals and other architectural elements.

Many authors have supported the idea that Late Antique terracotta *unguentaria* may well have functioned as

¹ For a theoretical study illuminating the function of terracotta *unguentaria* and social dimensions of their function, see Hübner 2006, 27ff.

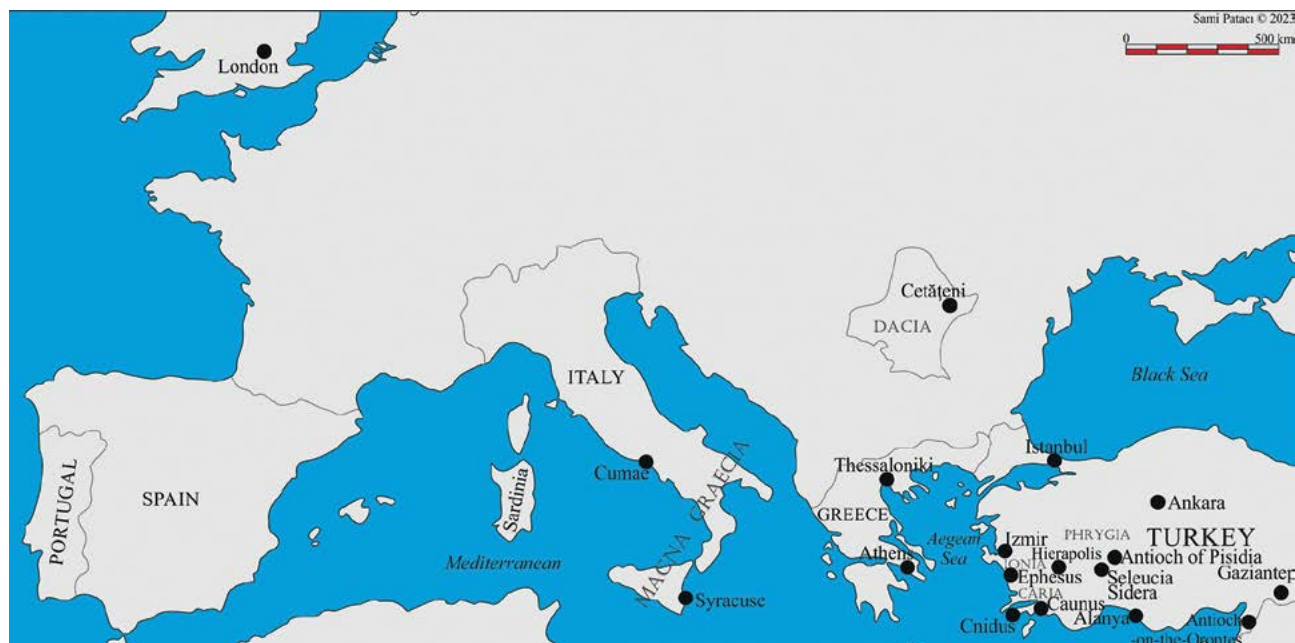


Figure 1.1: Main places in the Mediterranean referred to in this book (by S. Patacı, 2023).

religious objects used to carry pilgrim or baptism-related substances, like so-called Early Christian rounded *ampullae*. It is, however, difficult to judge at present which religious context, baptism or pilgrimage, applies. The archaeological contexts suggest that in many cases they accumulate in association with religious buildings or domestic areas. They are very rare finds in burial contexts, and curiously solely in Cilicia on the southern coast of Asia Minor. From this picture one could come to the conclusion that the Classical use of earlier *unguentaria* as a votive at tombs also existed during Late Antiquity.

The distribution of this vessel type is very important in understanding its function as well as related socio-economic trends of the Late Antique Mediterranean. In the western part of the Late Antique Mediterranean this type is much less common than in the east. In addition, the fact that this vessel is not found at every Early Byzantine site is not easy to interpret. The major production centre(s) of this very distinctive bottle type, possibly in south-western Anatolia, are not yet known, and one cannot judge at present if this typologically very heterogeneous group was produced at one single workshop. According to Hayes, however, they were produced at one workshop, located in Jordan or Palestine. Nevertheless, recent investigations show that most of the examples were found in southern and western Turkey rather than anywhere else.

Dates for these wares established in different locations in Asia Minor show that these vessels were produced and in use primarily between the fifth and seventh centuries CE. It has been suggested that this form was forgotten after the 650s CE because of historical events, such as Perso-Arabian invasion. However, stratigraphical data from Saraçhane and Perge shows that they were still in use up to the eighth and ninth centuries CE.

Unguentaria are patchy, unsuccessfully documented and generally not well known in detail in Mediterranean countries, such as Turkey, Syria, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt. The number of studies is fewer in the eastern Mediterranean than in Italy and Greece, even though there are several hundreds of excavations, museums and surveys across these countries with thousands of *unguentarium* finds of almost all periods. Most of the previous literature on Greek, Roman and Early Byzantine *unguentaria* from the eastern Mediterranean is based only on excavation reports, and so far there are very few books that are wholly dedicated to vessels for perfumed oil or of the *unguentarium* form. Archaeometric research on finds from these landscapes have been undertaken since the 1980s, but there is still a need for research concerning production, the main typologies, distribution, chronology etc., which have been neglected.

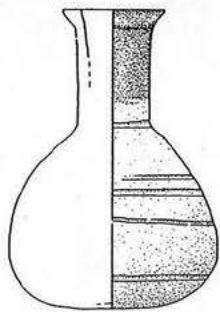
A symposium on terracotta *unguentaria* was held on 17–18 May 2018 at the Rectorate Building of Dokuz Eylül University in Izmir, Turkey, with an excursion to Lesbos, Greece on 19–21 May, which was one of the first efforts to bring together the various ceramicological scholars working on this topic (Fig. 1.2 and 1.3). The present book is composed of 11 selected papers originally presented at this symposium in Izmir. Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 15, 16 and 18 did not originate from this conference.

In this work papers treat Hellenistic, Roman Imperial and Late Antique/Early Byzantine terracotta *unguentaria* from West to East, from Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Romania and Turkey (Fig. 1.1), which gives a comprehensive and total view of this vessel type between 350 BCE and 650 CE, with all of its principal aspects, such as typology, production, distribution, contextual information, chronology, function, regional characteristics, stamps etc.

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Logo illustration: A terracotta *unguentarium* in bulbous form from Kuşaklı Höyük-Sivas in central Anatolia (kindly provided by Prof. Andreas Müller Karpe in 2001).

Figure 1.2: Poster for the symposium on terracotta *unguentaria*, held on 17–18 May 2018 in Izmir, Turkey (by E. Lafli, 2018).



Figure 1.3: Participants in the symposium on terracotta *unguentaria* (by A. Özgen, 2018).

The 18 papers of this book, with their generous bibliographies, offer also a partial overview of some previous studies having ceramic finds and *unguentaria* as their primary focus.² ‘Related vessels’ are discussed in Chapters 2–4 and 7; these include *pelikai*, small *oinochoai* and *alabastra*, as well as a variety of small oil vessels. The authors cover a wide variety of topics: technological, typological, chronological and functional. Several chapters (especially Chapters 5 and 8–10) present new typologies of local collections of *unguentaria* or offer revisions to earlier ones, which will be of use to scholars working in those areas. The book adds very significantly to our knowledge of this special category of vessels, both the form and function of which have not yet been fully explored. There is discussion of the contents of the vessels, the nature of trade in these contents, and the ways in which the vessels and their contents were integrated into the lives of the people of the time. It is invaluable to bring together such a variety of studies that cover different parts of the Mediterranean over a very large time span. As noted above, the geographical areas across the entire Mediterranean represented in the book almost equivalently covered the whole ancient Classical world. Some studies already provide distribution maps of discoveries in certain regions, such as Spain and Portugal, and several studies provide important explanations about the function of these small bottles and the ancient rituals and customs associated with them. The book covers the following periods: the Classical period, the Hellenistic period, the Roman period and the Early Byzantine period. Generally the book highlights the continuity of function of these vessels and how their form

evolved. Although our focus in this book is on the Greek, Roman and Early Byzantine periods, the first (Chapter 2) deals with Etruscan *alabastra*. *Unguentaria* in glass, bronze, marble or other materials are generally excluded from this book; but in some cases the juxtaposition of terracotta *unguentaria* with other related vessels (of terracotta and glass) have partially been discussed. The publication of these materials provides an opportunity for future researchers to compare the materials in museum collections and from excavations with what is published here. Also, the studies included in this book will provide many models for comparison and information on utensils of the same type, as well as help to trace their circulation over a wide geographical area extending from Turkey to Portugal.

Some of the chapters publish vessels that have not been previously published, either as individual vessels or as examples within a typology, and most of the chapters move the field forward in a modest way: the vessels in Chapter 2 are not typical *unguentaria*, but rather an earlier form, the *alabastron* (except Fig. 2.2), with the same purpose. Chapter 3 is primarily a history of the *pelike*, a form of amphora, thought by some to have usually contained oil, and its uses. The main focus of Chapter 4 is the Athenian *alabastra* of Archaic and Classical (and even earlier) periods, which also contains a catalogue. Much of this chapter, like Chapter 2, deals with iconography. Chapter 5 is on *unguentaria* from the eastern cemetery at Thessaloniki, Chapter 6 is a corpus of a group of *unguentaria* and amphora stoppers in the British Museum, and Chapter 12 is on *unguentaria* from various sites in Portugal. Chapter 8 provides an overview of *unguentaria* in the Iberian peninsula and is unique in providing a very thoughtful and well-organized introduction to both the

² Among others, for our previous studies on terracotta *unguentaria* in Asia Minor, cf. Lafli 2002a, b and c; Lafli 2003a, b, c and d; Lafli 2005a, 2005b and 2012; Lafli and Kan Şahin 2013; and Lafli and Buora 2022.

state of research and the material that has been found in the region; the chapter provides a wonderful orientation to the material in that understudied area. The technological analysis of Chapter 9 is useful, especially on the formation of the vessels, and the authors have addressed interesting technological aspects that are usually overlooked in *unguentarium* studies. Chapter 11 is a presentation of the state of research supplemented by new finds from Cetățeni in Romania, which gives an excellent account of the surprising discovery of an *unguentarium* in a pre-Roman Dacian context. Chapters 10 and 14 publish results of new technological analyses, whereas Chapter 10 also includes a typochronology. Chapter 11 publishes an important Dacian context for an *unguentarium*. Chapter 14 provides the results of chemical analysis of Late Roman *unguentaria* from Hierapolis in Phrygia, with important new information about their ancient contents. Chapters 15–16 include accounts of previously unknown Late Roman *unguentaria* (15) and stamps (16) from various sites and museums, mostly in the western part of Turkey, which contain valuable information.

The data presented is largely objective, as the authors determined the origins of the artefacts that they studied as far as possible. Sometimes they have presented maps and plans of the discovery area, and in other cases, they were satisfied with mentioning the area and the conditions of the excavations that were carried out, which were often old excavations that were carried out during the 1980s and 1990s. As for the link between the data and the subject of the book, it is notable that all the materials included orbit around oil and cosmetics preservation bottles and their uses, which form the subject of the book. The authors used the usual methods and techniques for data collection, processing and presentation, which relied on a descriptive analytical approach in most of the studies, and the necessary comparisons were made with similar models from similar sites and regions.

As mentioned above, some chapters deal with pictorial themes on artefacts from museum collections, such as Chapter 4, but they are also discussed for this purpose for the first time. These iconographic studies are valuable, and the results enable us not only to see these vessels as objects, but to determine what their role was in antiquity.

The editorial preparation of this book spanned from July 2018 to November 2023, with long interruptions because of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 as well as major earthquakes in Turkey in February 2023.

Unfortunately one of our contributing authors, Professor Larissa Bonfante, passed away during the editorial phase of this book in August 2019. Larissa was born in 1931 in Naples, Italy and was an Italian-American classicist, Professor of Classics *emerita* at New York University and an authority on Etruscan language and culture.

Finally, we would like to thank the following persons for various help (in alphabetical order): Dr Maurizio Buora

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