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## Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery? Remarks on the Origins and Meanings of Some Ceramic Types

ANDREA MANZO

### Introduction

The importance of the study of ceramic production for Ethiopian studies was correctly pointed out by Conti Rossini (1922, 207). Among the problems posed by this study, the question of the origins of the Aksumite ceramic tradition is crucial because of the implications it can have for our understanding of ancient Ethiopia.

The Aksumite ceramic tradition looks very distinctive and quite different from that of the Ethio-Sabean – or Pre-Aksumite – culture (Fattovich 1980, 70–72). Similarities have been noted recently between some Aksumite shapes and decorations of pottery from Hamasien in present Eritrea (Manzo nd.b). Interesting parallels have also been noted between the shape of mid-2<sup>nd</sup> to mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. pottery from the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands and pottery of the Proto-Aksumite<sup>1</sup> phase, dating to the 4<sup>th</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C. (Perlingieri nd.a; Bard, Fattovich, Manzo and Pelingieri nd.a). But even if recent research provides the first information on the origins of the Aksumite pottery tradition, a great part of its development remains unexplained.

It should be noted that the imitation in Aksumite Ethiopia of fine Roman pottery was first suggested at the beginning of the last century when excavations at the port of Adulis unearthed a great deal of red polished ceramics (Paribeni 1908, 407, 552–557). The Deutsche Aksum-Expedition also confirmed similarities suggested by Paribeni between Aksumite pottery

<sup>1</sup> The chronological framework is the one suggested by the excavations at Bieta Giyorgis of the Istituto Universitario Orientale and Boston University Expedition, and presented by R. Fattovich at the 2000 Conference of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists held in Cambridge (“The Chronology of Aksum (Ethiopia): Recent Evidence from the IUO/BU Excavations at Bieta Giyorgis”): Proto-Aksumite ca. 400–150/100 B.C.; Early Aksumite ca. 100/150 B.C.–A.D. 150; Classic Aksumite ca. A.D. 150–400; Middle Aksumite ca. A.D. 400–550; Late Aksumite ca. A.D. 550–700.

and Roman *terra sigillata*, noting that some of the decorations adopted by Aksumite potters could be compared to those of Hellenistic, Parthian and Sassanian moulded and glazed pottery that was influenced by toreutics (Zahn 1913, 211–213).

The possible links of Early Aksumite pottery with Roman and Mediterranean fine wares was later pointed out by Wilding after the recover and study of huge quantities of Aksumite pottery at Aksum (Wilding 1989, 315). More recently, the reproduction of the shape and paste of Roman amphorae by Aksumite potters has also been pointed out, suggesting that imitative phenomena were not limited to the fine pottery (Manzo nd.a).

With regard to the fine red gloss pottery, recent discoveries at the site of Ona Nagast, on Bieta Giyorgis hill at Aksum, pointed out similarities between the shape and the orange fabric of African Red Slip ware (Hayes 1972, 121–124, type 73 A; Carandini 1981, 72–73, Tav. XXI, 2, 3, 5) and Aksumite ceramic types of the late 5<sup>th</sup>-early 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Manzo nd.a; Perlingieri 1998–1999).

Nevertheless, some problems remain: the study of Early Aksumite pottery cannot demonstrate any links in shape and decoration with contemporary Roman fine wares, except for the red slipped and polished surface, i.e., the same general features already noted by Paribeni and Zahn.

So far, a systematic comparison between Early Aksumite pottery and Mediterranean and Middle Eastern metal and glass containers, however, has been neglected. This is not strange if the traditional framework of archaeological analysis is considered: usually excavated artifacts are first separated according to their materials, and, as a consequence, given to different specialists for further analyses. Potsherds are separated from vessels made of glass, metal, stone, bone, wood and ivory. I think that archaeologists should consider that these artifacts were used at the same time by the same people, who most likely considered them as “containers”, but with different variables, of technology, durability, cost, etc. (Calandra 1998, 88–90; Gill 1988, 741; Vickers 1990 b, 460–461). Moreover, the preservation of many potsherds, compared to very few metal vessels and containers in organic materials, contributes to the overestimate of pottery in our archaeological models and to the underestimate of other classes of containers (Gill 1988, 736–738; Vickers 1985, 128, 1994 a, 235). The study of pottery has its pitfalls and its relationship with other artifacts with similar functions should always be considered.

In this paper I will focus on the possible imitation of imported vessels in materials other than ceramics and the significance of this for the origins and development of the Aksumite pottery tradition.

## 1. Bowls

1.1 The widespread Early and Classic Aksumite class of the red ware open bowl with round or ring base and typical corrugated walls (Wilding 1989, 244–247, Fig. 16.73–76, Fig. 16.88–91; Fig. 1, a–b) can be compared to fluted metal vessels from the Roman and Byzantine Mediterranean (La Baume 1964, 9–15, Bild 7–10, Tav. I; Tassinari 1975, 46, n° 73, Pl. XIV; Strong 1966, 158, 175–176, 202, Pl. 43 A, 51 A, 65 A; Fig. 1, c), and to ribbed glass vessels, most likely from the eastern Mediterranean (Hayes 1975, 16–21, Fig. 1, 43, 46–47, Fig. 2, 49–53, Pl. 3, 45–46, Pl. 4; Isings 1957, 17–21, form 3, 1971, 19–20, Fig. 11 n° 50, 74–77, Fig. 18; Scatozza Hörich 1986, 25–31, Tav. XXIV, n° 2341 a, 2881, 153; Fig. 1, e–f), dating from the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This shape and decoration continued to be made in silver up to the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., as suggested by finds at Ballana in Nubia (Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 64, B 3–9). The fluting of external and/or internal walls is derived from the decoration of Achaemenid *phiale* of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Strong 1966, 99) and was widespread in toreutics beginning in Hellenistic times (see e.g., Pfrommer 1987, 3–23). This style was also adopted to decorate the walls of 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. Indian open bowls (Errington and Cribb [ed.] 1992, 97–98), and 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D. Parthian vessels (Gunter and Jett 1992, 27, 83–85; Fig. 1, d). In the 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. it was used in Sassanian toreutics (Gunter and Jett 1992, 27, 131–133, 142–143, 166–168), and continued to be used in the Mediterranean in Byzantine silver bowls (Strong 1966, 204, Pl. 66 A).

Also, the cordons of ovoid rocker punctations, and the typical ovoid punctations of dado panels alternating with the corrugations in wall decorations of Classic Aksumite times (Wilding 1989, 244, 247; Fig. 1, g) can be compared to Roman silver vessels with fluted decoration alternating with other patterns, usually schematised vegetal ones (La Baume 1964, 10, Bild 10; Fig. 1, h). Punched decoration consisting of bands of dots, ovals, lozenges, and floral motifs became fashionable in Roman and Byzantine silver vessels in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., perhaps as imitations of contemporary glassware (Strong 1966, 175, 204, Pl. 50 B).

Some of the Aksumite bowls have a decoration of ovoid bosses on the external wall, which date to the 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Wilding 1989, 247–248, 251, 257, 274, Fig. 16.77–79, Fig. 16.94–98, Fig. 16.117, Fig. 16.259, Fig. 16.171; Fig. 1, i). They might reproduce a typical decoration that was popular on Late Roman metal vessels (sometimes the bosses were inserts of stones or glass) (Strong 1966, 13–14, Pl. 50 C; Fig. 1, l), and is also found on glass vessels from Roman Syria beginning in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (Hayes 1975, 31–34, Pl. 7, 83; Isings 1957, 45–46, form 31; Fig. 1, m).

1.2 Oblique corrugations decorating a bowl from a Classic-Middle Aksumite context at Matara (Anfray 1966, Pl. IX; Fig. 2, a) can be compared to the so-called “vortex pattern”, a decoration on Roman silver vessels dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (Künzl 1979, 215, Fig. 118; Fig. 2, b) and to oblique corrugations on Byzantine bronze vessels dating to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. (Bénazeth 1992, 45, n° E 11703; Fig. 2, c).

1.3 Another Early and Classic Aksumite class which can be compared to Roman metal vessels is the ledge-rim bowl, slipped with a fine reddish-brown clay, decorated with corrugations and bands of zigzag beads, and central medallions (Wilding 1989, 250–251; Fig. 2, d–f). This type of bowl can be compared to Late Roman and Byzantine bowls in bronze and silver (Bénazeth 1992, 37; Tassinari 1975, 20, 46, n° 75, Pl. XV; Strong 1966, 201–202, Pl. 65 B; Fig. 2, g–h).

1.4 Other Classic Aksumite ledge-rim bowls are characterised by applied button-bosses or indentations on the ledge rim (Wilding 1989, 251–252, Fig. 16.119, 16.136, 16.141; Fig. 2, i–l) similar to decorations applied to the ledge rim of Late Roman and Byzantine bronze vessels (Bénazeth 1992, 37; Emery and Kirwan 1938 B 6–1–2, Pl. 70, B 37–1, B 4–7, Pl. 72; Fig. 2, m–n). This type of applied decoration on the rim is also found in Late Hellenistic toreutics (Guzzo 1977–1979, 195, Fig. 4) and Early Roman Egyptian *faience* (Dunham 1963, 194, Fig. 146.1; Török 1988, 146, n° 204).

1.5 Ledge-rim bowls mounted on a flared cylindrical pedestal sometimes with corrugated walls and horizontal arched rod handles, dating to Classic and Middle Aksumite times (Wilding 1989, 254–256, Fig. 16.150–153; de Contenson 1969, Pl. XVIII; Fig. 3, a–c), can be compared to bronze bowls on pedestals dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. (Bénazeth 1992, 34–35, E 11800, a–b; Emery and Kirwan 1938, B 121–15, Pl. 71, B 37–1, B 4–7, Pl. 72; Hayes 1984, 108–111, n° 169–173; Fig. 3, d–f). The tradition of bronze vessels on pedestals goes back at least to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (Oettel 1991, Taf. 1, a–b). These pedestalled bronze bowls were widely exported to Late Meroitic and Post-Meroitic Sudan (Wildung 1997, 380, n° 451; Dunham 1963, 91–93, 118–127, Fig. 70–71, Fig. 88–94; Török 1989, 127–128, 130–131, n° 79, n° 58–59; Dixon 1963, Tav. XLVIII). This shape was also imitated by Meroitic potters in the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D. (Dunham 1963, 133–137, 140–141, 168–176, Fig. 99–100, Fig. 103, Fig. 121–127; Török 1989, 140, 142, n° 143–146, n° 172).

Moreover, the raised horizontal ring on some Aksumite pedestals (Wilding 1989, 256, Fig. 16.157; Fig. 3, c) is similar to those on Late Roman-Byzantine bronze pedestals (Bénazeth 1992, 35, E 11800 B; Fig. 3, d), which were also exported to southern Arabia (Audouin 1997, 212).

**1.6** Tripod or polipod bowls dating to Proto-Aksumite<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 4, a), Early, and Classic Aksumite times (Wilding 1989, 252, Fig. 16.148; Fig. 4, b) can be compared to tripod bowls and pedestals on Mediterranean metal vessels of Roman times (Baratte 1986, 28; Comstock and Vermeule 1971, 322–323, n° 451; Tassinari 1993, vol. I, 114, vol. II, 349, n° 12713, 10026, 1517; Fig. 4, c).

**1.7** The arched rod handles set on the outer edge of Proto-Aksumite<sup>3</sup>, Early, Classic, and Middle Aksumite ledge-rim bowls (Wilding 1989, 238, 256, Fig. 16.154–155, Fig. 16.13; Fig. 4, d) can be compared to handles of Roman Early and Late Imperial bronze bowls (Oettel 1991, Taf. 18, e–h; Emery and Kirwan 1938, B–10, 1, Pl. 70; Tassinari 1993, vol. I, 94, vol. II, 212–218; Fig. 4, e), which were also exported to Yemen (Audouin 1997, 212).

**1.8** The shape of the horizontal arched rod handles on the outer edge of the rim of ledge-rim bowls of Classic and Middle Aksumite times (Wilding 1989, 252–254, Fig. 16.125, 16.148, 16.150; Fig. 5, a) can be compared to the so-called  $\omega$  horizontal handles typical of Early Roman bronze bowls and cups from Campania<sup>4</sup> dating from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. (Oettel 1991, Taf. 18, e–h; Hinz 1969, 402, Bild 10; Tassinari 1993, vol. I 90–97, vol. II, 220–240; Fig. 5, b–c). These bronze vessels were also exported to Meroitic Sudan (Dunham 1957, 149, Fig. 97, Pl. LIV/C–D; Hofmann 1979, 81–82, Figs. 37–38; Török 1988, 144, n° 192) and India (De Puma 1991, 92–94, Fig. 5.16).

**1.9** The horizontal double handles with a central button-boss on the top of ledge-rim bowls or basins of Classic and Middle Aksumite times (de Contenson 1959, Pl. XVIII, Fig. 4, see also Wilding 1989, 256; Fig. 5, d) reproduce the handles of Late Roman-Byzantine bronze basins (Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 75, B 80–18, B 9–36; Fig. 5, e).

**1.10** The horizontal handles shaped like human hands found on Early, Classic, and Middle Aksumite vessels (Anfray 1966, Pl. XXIII, 13; Wilding 1989, 241, Fig. 16.243; Fig. 5, f) can be compared to handles of Roman

<sup>2</sup> Tripod or polipod bowls were discovered in 2001 in Tomb 10 and Tomb 15 at Ona Enda Aboi Zewge on Bieta Giyorgis hill.

<sup>3</sup> These handled bowls were discovered in 2001 in Proto-Aksumite Tomb 10 and Tomb 11, at Ona Enda Aboi Zewge on Bieta Giyorgis hill.

<sup>4</sup> It should be stressed that the possible imitation of these very typical handles represents the only archaeological element suggesting the involvement of Late Republican-Early Imperial Roman Campania in the Red Sea trade with Ethiopia. This involvement was already suggested on the basis of epigraphic and textual evidence, see De Romanis 1996, 241–259.

bronze basins dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (Tassinari 1993, vol. I, 94, vol. II 204, n° 5025, 205, n° 3641, 1728, 8686; Fig. 5, g).

1.11 Sometimes Classic and Middle Aksumite ledge-rim bowls are also decorated with small applied modelled birds (Wilding 1989, 252, Fig. 16.143–146; Fig. 6, a–b), which are similar to the birds decorating Byzantine bronze incense burners, lamps, and lids dating to the 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. (Bénazeth 1992, 217, 224–229, E 15468, E 25143–E 25145, E 25147–E 25149; Fig. 6, c–d).

1.12 Middle and Late Aksumite red-orange or black-polished ring- or round-base bowls, very often with a ledge rim (Wilding 1989, 294, Fig. 16.365–376; Anfray 1966, Pl. XII, XLII, XLVI; Fig. 7, a–b), can be compared to Late Roman and Byzantine ledge-rim bowls in bronze and silver (Baratte 1981, Pl. XII, c–d, XIII, a–b, n° 22–24; Tassinari 1975, 20, 43–45, Pl. XIII, 59–64, Pl. XIV, 65–66; Strong 1966, 195–197, 201, 203, Pl. 58 A, Pl. 65 B, Pl. 66 B; Fig. 7, d–f). These metal ledge-rim bowls were also exported to Late and Post-Meroitic Sudan (Dunham 1963, 235, Fig. o/7; Török 1988, 122, n° 21; Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 65, B 3–12–13, B 3–29, Pl. 74, B 37–12). The shape of the ledge-rim and ring-base bowl was also reproduced in African Red Slip ware and other red polished or black-grey polished wares (Carandini 1981, 67, 70–73, 88–89, 105–108, 111–112, 121, 139, 162–163, 243, Tav. XXI, XXIX, XXX, XXXVIII, XLVIII, XLIX, LI, LV, LXV, LXXVII, CXXIV; Hayes 1972, 76–78, 112–117, 120–124, 127–128, 140–145, 150–151, 392, 402–407), and in glassware (Isings 1957, 58–59, form 42–43, 1971, 77–78, n° 136–139, Fig. 17; Fig. 7, g) dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.

1.13 The applied moulded and impressed decoration on the ledge rim of the above mentioned Middle and Late Aksumite ledge-rim bowls (Anfray 1966, Pl. XII; Wilding 1989, 293, Fig. 16.358; Fig. 7, c) can be compared to the decoration on ledge rims of glass bowls dating from the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (Isings 1957, 59, form 43; Fig. 7, h). The same type of decoration has also been recorded on African Red Slip ware dating to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Hayes 1972, 121–125, Fig. 21; Carandini 1981, 122–124, Tav. LIX–LX).

1.14 The decoration on Middle and Late Aksumite bowls, characterised by geometric medallions with an *emblema*, very often a cross, surrounded by concentric cordons of beads, or bands of zigzag beads or vegetal patterns, on the internal surface (Wilding 1989, 247–249, 294, Fig. 16.97, Fig. 16.365–376; Anfray 1966, Pl. XII, XLIII–XLVI, XLIX; Fig. 8, a), can be compared to similar decorations on Byzantine vessels, some of which were most likely

used in Christian liturgy (Di Stefano 1991, 6–9, Fig. 6; Bénazeth 1992, 36, n° 894; Strong 1966, 194–204, Pl. 58 A–B, Pl. 59, Pl. 65 A–B; Fig. 8, b–c). The same type of decoration has also been recorded on African Red Slip ware dating to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Hayes 1972, 220–221, 228–229, 277–281, style D and F; Carandini 1981, 122–124, Tav. LIX–LX). It should be noted that this kind of stamp-impressed pattern is also found on Nubian Christian pottery, which has already been compared to Aksumite pots (Chittick 1982, 52–53; de Contenson 1969; Shinnie 1982, 55). In this case, I think that the similarity between the Ethiopian and Nubian pottery can be explained by the imitation of the same prototype, rather than by direct links between the two traditions.

## 2. Jars and bottles

2.1 Small jars with moulded and modelled human heads for necks, dating to Classic Aksumite times (Wilding 1989, 278, Fig. 16.283–292; Fig. 9, a), can be compared to glass vessels, most likely from Syria, (Hayes 1975, 39, Pl. 7, 92, 94; Isings 1957, 93–94, form 78; Scatozza Höricht 1986, 52, n° 2372; Fig. 12, e–f) and Roman vessels of fine pottery (Carandini 1981, 177, 180, 234, Tav. LXXXIX, 1–2, XCII, 1, a–b, CXIX, 1–2, CLI, 1–3; La Baume 1964, 70–74; Fig. 9, d) with the same general shape, dating to the late 1<sup>st</sup> to late 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. These types of pottery and glass most likely imitated metal vessels (Vickers 1986, 148–149; Vickers, Impey, and Allan 1986, Pl. 22–23, 25). A Sudanese ceramic imitation of this kind of Roman containers with modelled human heads has also been discovered in a Post-Meroitic tumulus in the Middle Nile region (Lenoble 1998, 133–134, Fig. 1, 3, Fig. 3).

An Aksumite red ware biconvex pot whose neck is lost but with the shape of the body (Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.293; Fig. 9, b) similar to that of a small African Red Slip jar with a moulded human head for the neck (Carandini 1981, 234, Tav. CXIX, 1; Fig. 9, c) might also be ascribed to this class.

2.2 A ring-base necked pot with twisted cord handles, from an unknown context in the Aksum area (Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994–1995, 277, n° 46; Fig. 10, a), is similar in shape to metal, glass and ceramic *kantharos* produced in the Mediterranean from classical Greek times to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (Vickers, Impey, and Allan 1986, Pl. 5; Hinz 1969, 405, Bild 12 a; La Baume 1964, 47–53, Fig. 38–43; Hayes 1984, 97–99, n° 152; Isings 1957, 32–34, form 15, 1971, 39, Fig. 12, 2; Tassinari 1993, vol. I, 27–28, vol. II, 1–19; Fig. 10, b–d). These were also exported to Meroitic Sudan (Dunham 1963, 89, Fig. 67 f, 22–2–82; Török 1988, 126, n° 50). The imitation of a metal prototype is demonstrated by the twisted cord handles, almost unique in ancient Ethiopian pottery and rare in Mediterranean fine wares, but more



common in Roman metalware from Egypt (Hayes 1984, 86, n° 134), Sudan (Dunham 1963, 89, Fig. 67 c, 22–2–78; Török 1988, 126, n° 51; Hofmann 1979, 79–81), and also Campania (Tassinari 1993, vol. I, 28–29, vol. II, 3–5, n° 18721, 3618, 13982, 3128).

**2.3** A flat-base cylinder-neck pot with an everted lip and vertical bridge-handle between the neck and the sharp shoulder, from an unknown context in the Aksum area (Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994–1995, 294, n° 132; Fig. 11, a), can be compared to the shape of Hellenistic and Roman metal *oinochoe*, dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. (Vickers, Impey, and Allan 1986, Pl. 16; Baratte 1986, 33; Hayes 1984, 96, n° 151; Andronicos 1984, 158, n° 124; Fig. 11, b). It should be stressed that the handles of the Mediterranean *oinochoe* are usually higher than those of the Aksumite ceramic vessel, but this might be explained by differences in the medium used.

**2.4** A ring-base cylinder-neck carinated pot with an everted lip and a vertical handle between the shoulder and neck, from an unknown context in the Aksum area (Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994–1995, 279, n° 50; Fig. 11, c), can be compared to the shape of a Roman metal *oinochoe*, dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. (Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 79, B 95–41; Fig. 11, d).

**2.5** A globular cylinder-neck spouted pot with an everted lip and vertical handle between the shoulder and neck, from an unknown context in the Aksum area (Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994–1995, 276, n° 44; Fig. 12, a), can be compared to Roman bronze and glass vessels dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. (La Baume 1964, 92–94, Fig. 74; Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 80, B 80–67; Isings 1957, 118, form 99; Fig. 12, b–c).

**2.6** A globular cylinder-neck pot with an everted lip and vertical handle between the shoulder and neck, from an unknown context in the Aksum area (Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994–1995, 294–295, n° 133; Fig. 12, d), can be compared to Roman bronze vessels from Egypt dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D. (Hayes 1984, 82, n° 125; Fig. 12, e). Nevertheless, it should be stressed that in this case the shape is very common and not unknown in Aksumite pottery, so that the similarity might be chance.

**2.7** A pot with sagging biconical body, with an everted ledge rim and bifid vertical handle, composed of two strands which separate at the lower ends and merge with tops of two piriform attachments, from a Proto-Aksumite context<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 13, a, a i, a ii), can be compared to the shape of Italian bronze

<sup>5</sup> This jug was discovered in 2001 in Tomb 10 at Ona Enda Aboi Zewge on Bieta Giyorgis hill.

jugs of the mid- to late 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. (Hayes 1984, 75, n° 118; Fig. 13, b). This kind of bronze vessels was also exported to Meroitic Sudan (Dixon 1963, Pl. XLIX, b, A21637), and to Begram, in present Afghanistan (Hackin 1954, 149, Fig. 339). The bifid vertical handle of the Proto-Aksumite pot (Fig. 13 a i) can be compared to Late Hellenistic (2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C.) bronze specimens from Upper Egypt and Nubia (Comstock and Vermeule 1971, 334–335, n° 471; Hayes 1984, 65–66, n° 101–108; Fig. 13, c). Moreover, the Proto-Aksumite vessel has a cross-shaped moulded decoration with incised leaves (Fig. 13, a ii), which can be compared to the concentric vegetal patterns typical of Hellenistic metal vessels from the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. (Pfrommer 1987, 232, Taf. 55, KaBH8; Fig. 13, d).

**2.8** A fragment of body and strap vertical handle of a red ware vessel with a moulded bearded human head with horns at the base of the handle, from a Proto-Aksumite context<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 13, e), is similar to strap handles decorated with a Pan or Satyr head, which are typical of Hellenistic and Roman bronze and silver pitchers or jugs (Comstock and Vermeule 1971, 320, n° 446, 326, n° 458, 327, n° 459; Hinz 1969, 405, Bild 12, b; Strong 1966, 105; Tassinari 1993, vol. I, 214, 218, 222, and also vol. I, 28–29, vol. 2, 3, n° 1874, 5, n° 12323, 12, n° 2677, vol. I, 33, vol. 2, 22, n° 12192, vol. 2, 27, 29, 36, 38, n° 1856, 941, 11467, 3326°, 3169, 13235, vol. 1, 34, vol. 2 42, n° 3947, vol. 2, 46, n° 11468, vol. I, 35, vol. 2, 47, n° 14053, vol. 1, 41, vol. 2, n° 13374; Vickers, Impey, and Allan 1986, Pl. 5, right, Pl. 16; Fig. 13, f–g). Bronze vessels with this kind of decoration were also exported to Meroitic Sudan (Dunham 1963, 188–190, Fig. 135–136; Schiff Giorgini 1967–1968, 263–264, Pl. L d).

### 3. Other shapes

**3.1** A small animal head on a long neck in Red Aksumite Ware (Wilding 1989, 287, Fig. 16.333; Fig. 14, a) can be compared to handles with ram or dog heads of Roman bronze *paterae*, dating to the 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D. (Oettel 1991, 25–26, n° 20–22, Taf. 19, a–b, Taf. 20, b–c, Taf. 21, b–d; Hinz 1969, 394–398, 405, Bild 4–5, Bild 11 b; Tassinari 1993, vol. 1, 59–60, vol. 2, 132–141; Fig. 14, b), and related imitations in Roman fine pottery (La Baume 1964, 27, Fig. 22). Bronze *paterae* of this type have also been discovered at Meroe (Dunham 1957, 151, Fig. 97, 1963, 199, Fig. 138 F, Fig. 145; Török 1988, 145–146, n° 196, n° 202, n° 209; Hofmann 1979, 82–83, Fig. 41–43).

**3.2** A red-polished pot in the form of a bird, from a Middle or Late Aksumite context at Matara (Anfray 1966, Pl. XVIII, I; Fig. 14, c), reproduces

<sup>6</sup> This sherd was discovered in 2001 in Tomb 14 at Ona Enda Aboi Zewge on Bieta Giyorgis hill.

the shape of a widespread type of Early Christian bronze dove vessels, most likely used as lamps which symbolise the Holy Ghost, from Byzantine Egypt dating to ca. 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. (Bénazeth 1992, 138–142, n° E 11652, E 10987, n° 14257, E 21435, E 11690; E 11789; Comstock and Vermeule 1971, 354–355, n° 498; La Baume 1964, 182–184, Fig. 169–170; Hayes 1984, 137–138, n° 213; Fig. 14, d).

#### 4. Final Remarks

4.1 The data seem to suggest that the imitation of the shape and decorations of Mediterranean metalware started in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., when Late Hellenistic and Roman Early Imperial metal and glass vessels were imitated by Aksumite potters. It should be stressed that the imitations and their prototypes are not necessarily contemporary (Calandra 1998, 89). But in this case it seems that they are contemporary, and the adoption of the corrugated decoration imitating the fluted surface of metal and glass vessels in Early Aksumite pottery might confirm a dating of the Early Aksumite phase at least from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.

Indeed, for the last century B.C. and first centuries A.D., Aksumite pottery imitated characteristics of metalware or, perhaps, glass vessels. In fact, for this period there are no imported Mediterranean red gloss fine ceramics imitating metalware or glass vessels, which may have been used as prototypes by Aksumite potters (Manzo nd.a) (Fig. 15). Moreover, it should also be noted that several Early and Classic Aksumite ceramic shapes and decorations related to metalware are completely absent in contemporary Mediterranean red gloss ware.

Nevertheless, starting in the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., a great quantity of Mediterranean red gloss ceramics was imported in Aksumite Ethiopia (Fig. 15), and sometimes their shape and decoration are similar to contemporary Mediterranean metal vessels. Thus, the question should be posed: were metal prototypes or their ceramic copies imitated by Ethiopian potters in the Middle and Late Aksumite phases? This question is also related to another one: was the Mediterranean fine red gloss pottery a desirable and prestigious trade item to be imitated by local potters?

I do not think it was. It should be stressed that the trade in ceramic tableware is not confirmed in the written sources on Aksumite foreign trade (*The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, Cosmas Indicopleustes). Moreover, in general, it seems as if fine pottery was not considered to be a valuable commodity for long-range trade outside the Roman Empire (Fulford 1986, 157; Sidebotham 1986, 26; see also, in general, Gill 1986 a, 10, 1988, 737–740, 1991). It is likely that the fine Red Slip ware found in Aksumite Ethiopia

was originally used as it was in the Mediterranean, as ballast and spacefiller accompanying commodities that were much more prized and appreciated, such as glass and metal artifacts, metal ingots, and wine (Fulford 1987, 59–61, 71–72; Gill 1986 a, 25, 1986 b, 313, 1991, 35–37; Casson [ed.] 1989, 40–41; Carandini 1981, 15). More rarely, it could have been the tableware of merchants or sailors (Sidebotham 1986, 26). The presence of Mediterranean red gloss pottery predominantly in rubbish deposits and settlement areas of Aksumite Ethiopia beginning in the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., and its absence from contemporary elite tombs, seems to confirm that fine Mediterranean ceramics could not be regarded as prestigious items to be imitated by local potters. Most likely, in the 4<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. metal and glass vessels were imitated by Aksumite potters, as they were by their contemporary Mediterranean colleagues.

It is noteworthy that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. the imitation of metal tableware in fine red gloss pottery was a widespread phenomenon in the Mediterranean, Arabia and India (Begley 1991; Vickers 1994 a) (Fig. 16). It has been suggested that the red gloss pottery widely produced in this period from the Mediterranean to India imitated gold vessels, cleansed by fumigation with sulphur, which would have created a reddening of the surface (Gill 1985, 108–112; Vickers 1984, 91, 1994 a, 238–239). Most likely, red gloss pottery also imitated glass vessels (Casagrande 1998; Calandra 1998, 89) and perhaps bronze vessels. These items were a symbol of the rank and prestige of the owners (see also Vickers 1985, 112–117, 1994 a, 241).

I suggested that there was an imitative phenomenon in N Ethiopia of imported metal and glass vessels. This fact might also suggest that metalware and possibly glassware were considered as symbols of rank in Aksumite Ethiopia. Moreover, the fact that Aksumite Ethiopia shared symbols of rank and related imitative processes with the Mediterranean, Arabia and India demonstrates the substantial links between these regions. Significantly, Ethiopia and Arabia were located on the Roman maritime routes between the Mediterranean and India.

**4.2** If we accept the hypothesis that several aspects of ceramic types from Proto-Aksumite, Early, Classic, Middle, and Late Aksumite contexts imitated Mediterranean metalware and glassware, we can use the term “skeuomorphism”, i.e., the manufacture of vessels in one material intended to evoke the appearance of vessels regularly made in another. As noted by V. G. Childe (1956, 13–14), “(it) often gives us a glimpse into productive activities and artistic media of which no direct evidence survives.” Aksumite pottery can give us information about a class of imported luxury items ab-

sent in the archaeological record but present in the documentary sources, which did not escape the melting pot and re-use (Gill 1986, 23, 1988, 741; Fulford 1986; Sidebotham 1986, 18–19; Strong 1966, 17; Vickers 1985, 128, 1990b, 458–459). Anyway, in the Aksumite case, it should be stressed that the imitation of metal and glass Mediterranean vessels was selective and sometimes limited to some specific features of prototypes.

Metalware was certainly widely traded in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, as metal vessels were also used as bullion (Sidebotham 1986, 18–19). According to the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, bronze, silver, and gold vessels were exported to the Eritrean coast, to the South Arabian ports of Muza and Qana, and to India (Casson [ed.] 1989, 53–57, 65–67, 75, 81, § 6, 8, 10, 24, 28, 39, 49) (Fig. 17). Archaeological evidence also demonstrates that metal vessels were exported from the Mediterranean to Meroitic Sudan (Török 1988, 119–122, n° 1A–21, 126–128, n° 49–60, 130–132, n° 76–99, 134, n° 107, 138, n° 130, 142–146, n° 179–209) (Fig. 17). These items were mainly imported for the elite in Aksumite Ethiopia, as stated by the author of the *Periplus*: “for the king – are imported – silverware and goldware”, but large round copper drinking cups (*potéria chalkà strongùla*) were imported as well (Casson [ed.] 1989, § 6, 31, 33–34, 53).

Nevertheless, if the use of metal vessels was widespread along the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade routes, these contacts involved many different societies, not all of which shared the same taste in tableware. From several aspects, the local Aksumite tastes could have been different from those of their Mediterranean and Asiatic commercial partners: the import of items and the adoption of foreign stylistic features is always conditioned by the cultural milieu where the objects are imported, and the styles adopted (Davis 1983; DeBoer 1990; Hodder 1978 a, b; Plog 1980, 120, 136–140, 1990). The anonymous author of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* noted that the silver and gold metalware exported to Ethiopia was “made in the design of the country” (*topikò ruthmò*), i.e., it was for some aspects different from the ones used in the contemporary Mediterranean (Casson [ed.] 1989, § 6, 34, 53).

This selective taste is also reflected in Aksumite ceramic imitations of metalware. We noted that the shape and fluted decoration of some types of Mediterranean glassware and metalware were imitated by Aksumite potters but it should be stressed that some of these types and decorations were not so appreciated in contemporary Mediterranean. It seems that only a few – and very specific – selected prototypes were imitated by Aksumite potters even when they were no more fashionable in the Mediterranean. Usually these prototypes show strong links with Late Hellenistic traditions, rather than with types appreciated in the Roman Mediterranean in the first centuries A.D.

This impression is reinforced by considering imitations of metal vessels in another medium in Classic Aksumite times, i.e., the double-handled cups or bowls with horizontal handles reproduced on the stone bases of some Aksumite stelae, and in a rock-cut basin at Addi Sahafi (Krencker 1913, 13–16, 19–20, 74, Abb. 25, Taf. III, IV; Chittick 1974, 163, Pl. VI a) (Fig. 18). The concentric and radial grooves of the sculptured cups or bowls (Krencker 1913, Taf. III, IV; Chittick 1974 Pl. VI a) suggest that the hollows imitated the fluted surfaces of metal vessels, frequently reproduced in ceramic and glass vessels (see e.g. Vickers, Impey, and Allan 1986, Pl. 2, 8, 11, 17; La Baume 1964, 10–14).

As already noted (Chittick 1974, 163; Munro-Hay 1991, 138), the shape of the hollows on the stone bases of stelae might be identified with the *kylix*, a kind of metal or ceramic Greek cup with horizontal handles (Bianco 1959, 502; Hostetter 1991, 92–94, Fig. 15, 36). This shape survived in metal and ceramic forms up to Hellenistic times (Pfrommer 1987, 7–19). The *kylix* also survived into Roman times, in decorations in sculpture and glass, paintings, mosaics and coins, often imitating Hellenistic artwork and associated with Dionysiac iconography (Pfrommer 1987, 22–23). Nevertheless, vessels with this shape were no longer used in Roman Imperial times (Baratte 1986, 87). If the *kylix* was still in use at Aksum, such as the fluted bowls and cups which were no more appreciated in the Mediterranean, the above quote from the *Periplus* is fully justifiable.

4.3 It seems that almost all of the metal vessels imitated by Early and Classic Aksumite potters were bowls, bottles, and pitchers, i.e., tableware, most likely used for food and wine consumption, and for ablutions before and during the meal (see Tassinari 1993, vol. I, 231–233). Were Mediterranean alimentary habits also adopted with this kind of tableware?

Having the shape of vessels directly linked with alimentary habits, the fragments of imported glass cups, goblets, pitchers, and complete tableware sets discovered in Aksumite Ethiopia in the elite residences and tombs from the first centuries A.D. (Manzo nd.a; Morrison 1989, 189) might suggest that Mediterranean habits, perhaps including the consumption of wine and, possibly, *symposia*, were adopted as a part of the lifestyle (Manzo 1999, nd.a). This cultural adoption is also suggested by the description of Zoskales in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, "... a fine person and well versed in reading and writing Greek" (Casson [ed.] 1989, § 5, 52).

Consumption of wine was also adopted by the elites of neighbour regions, as suggested for South Arabia by the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (Casson [ed.] 1989, § 28, 66, § 24, 65) and Diodorus (§ 3.47.5–8), and for the Nabateans by Strabo (§ 16.4.26), and as demonstrated by archaeological

discoveries in elite funerary contexts of Meroitic Sudan (see Török 1988, 119–122, n° 1A–21, 126–128, n° 49–60, 130–132, n° 76–99, 134, n° 107, 138, n° 130, 142–146, n° 179–209) (Fig. 19). At the same time, a reference can also be made to the customs of Syrian-Palmyrene elites, who were involved in the trade network between the Mediterranean and the East, and possibly had diplomatic relationships with Aksum (Conti Rossini 1928, 124–125). Syrian-Palmyrene elites participated in ritual banquets (Colledge 1976, 29–30, 54–56; Gawlikowski 1990, 2651–2652), and in their funerary reliefs were often represented banqueting with metal tableware and most likely drinking wine (Colledge 1976, 73–77).

In the Mediterranean in classical Greek times, the *symposia* were ceremonies aimed at demonstrating rank (Gill 1986, 10; Vickers 1985, 125, 1990 a), and continued to be such in the Late Hellenistic-Early Roman Imperial periods (Vickers 1994 a, b). In particular, the property of precious metal tableware for *symposia* was intended to show the international leadership of the elites and their military power, as silver and gold vessels were a substantial part of booty after new conquests (for Rome see Fulford 1986, 153, Strong 1966, 123–124; for Greece see also Vickers 1984, 88, 1990 b; in general see Vickers 1985, 119, 121, 1994 a, b). Was the same true for Aksumite elites?

The adoption of a triumphal ideology by the Aksumite elite has already been stressed, based on the presence of weapons and military symbols in elite funerary contexts (Manzo 1998, 49–51), and the evidence of several inscriptions where the king is said to be “son of the unvanquished Mahrem” (Conti Rossini 1928, 111, 133, 141; see e.g. Bernand, Drewes and Schneider 1991, n. 185, 242–243, text I line 2, 18 text II, line 3, 19). Mahrem is also referred to as “my (i.e., of the king) great god” (Wolska-Conus [ed.] 1968, vol. II, 376–377, § 63; Bernand, Drewes and Schneider 1991, 379, n. 277, lines 33–34), and in the Greek version of the same inscriptions he is equated with Ares (Conti Rossini 1928, 111, 133; see e.g. Bernand, Drewes and Schneider 1991, 363–367, n. 270, line 6), i.e., the warrior god *par excellence* of the Greek (Bruneau 1984, 479) and Hellenistic Near Eastern *pantheon* (Augé 1984, 493).

The number of valuable metal vessels at Aksum could have increased with the progressive Aksumite involvement in Roman trade and diplomacy from the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. onward (Strong 1966, 127), and with Aksumite wars in the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D. in the Nile Valley (Conti Rossini 1928, 125–126) and in South Arabia (Robin 1989). Their use could have been an important element in ceremonies which displayed rank.

4.4 The imitation of metalware in less expensive media such as pottery suggests the adoption of the triumphal ideology – which was related to the use of such a kind of vessels – by people of lower status (see also Vickers 1985, 108–109, 1994 a, 242–248; Fulford 1986, 153–155). Most likely, this adopti-

on was not limited to triumphal aspects of the ideology but included its religious background, i.e., the worship of the god Mahrem-Ares. From this point of view, the changes in Aksumite pottery styles outlined for the mid-4<sup>th</sup> to mid-6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. (Middle Aksumite phase) are very interesting. The slow but progressive spread of the cross as decoration on artifacts from coins to pottery (Fattovich 1997, 72), and its coexistence with the pagan symbol of the crescent and disc on some pots (Wilding 1989, 273–274) suggest a long period of transition to Christianity as the new state ideology and its slow adoption by the majority of the population. If the above suggested relationships between certain pottery types imitating metalware and the ideology and religion of the Early and Classic Aksumite phases are accepted, then the decreasing use of typical Early and Classic Aksumite fluted, impressed and moulded decorations in the Middle Aksumite phase, and their disappearance in the Late Aksumite (Perlingieri 1998–1999, 330–331), occurred with the increasing acceptance of Christianity and the gradual end of paganism (Fig. 20). These remarks on the imitation of metalware in pottery and its significance suggest that pottery was already a means of transmission of ideological messages in Early and Classic Aksumite, as it was later in Middle and Late Aksumite times when the cross decorations spread.

As noted above, the imitation of Mediterranean metalware most likely continued in Middle and Late Aksumite times as well, i.e., during the spread of Christianity and when it had become fully accepted throughout the Aksumite kingdom. Nevertheless, at that time the artifact models were completely new: plates and bowls with flaring rims that were decorated with cross *emblema*, and bird-shaped vessels imitating Coptic and Byzantine ones in metal, some of which were most likely intended for use in the Christian liturgy and as furnishings in churches. It is unnecessary to stress again the ideological meanings of the adoption of these new models.

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Andrea Manzo

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#### Summary

This paper deals with the problem of the origins of some Aksumite ceramic types. The possibility that these types were originated by the imitation of shapes and decorations of imported Mediterranean metal and glass vessels is pointed out. Several cases supporting this hypothesis are proposed. Thus, Aksumite pottery can give us information about a class of imported luxury items absent in the archaeological record but present in the documentary sources, which did not escape the melting pot and re-use. As the use of metal vessels by the Aksumite elite might be linked to the adoption of Mediterranean elements in Aksumite pagan ideology, the imitation of metalware in less expensive media such as pottery suggests the adoption of this ideology by people of lower status. Moreover, the changes in ceramic styles in the mid-4<sup>th</sup>–mid-6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. can be related to the progressive adoption of Christianity.

Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery?

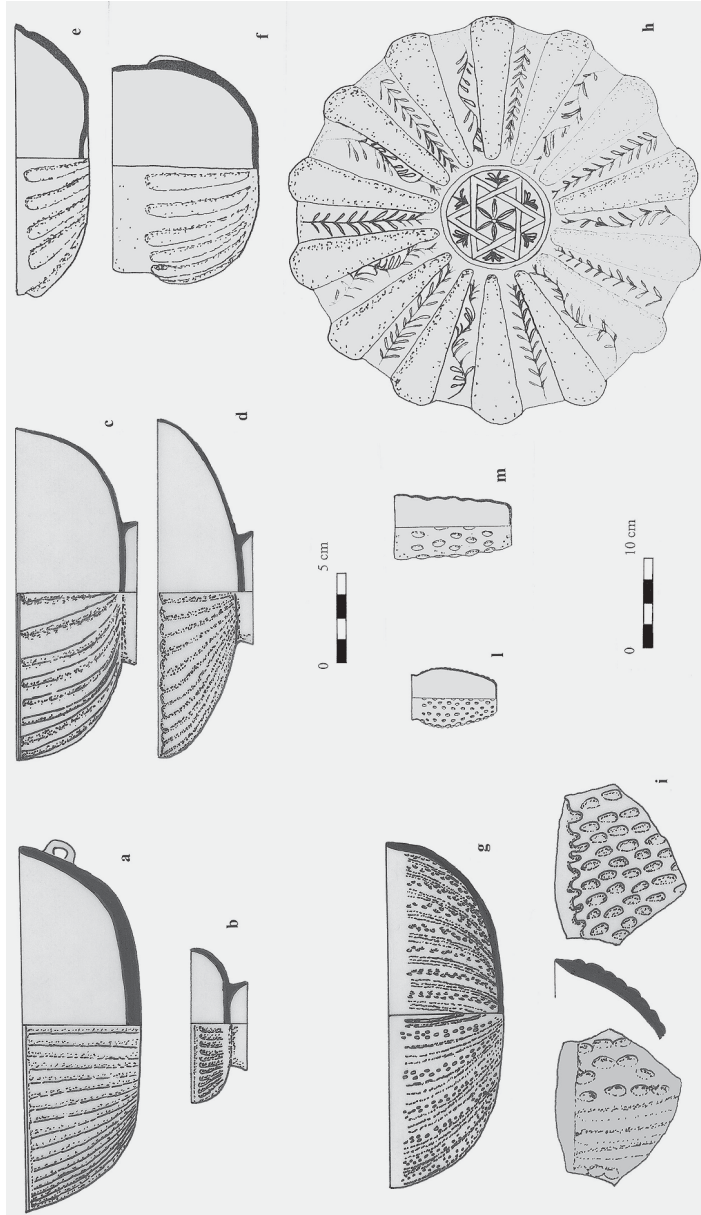


Fig.1. 1.1: Early and Classic Aksumite red ware bowls with typical corrugated walls (a from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.74, b from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.91); Roman bronze bowl with fluted surface (c from Tassinari 1975, Pl. XIV, n° 73); Parthian silver bowl (d from Gunter and Jett 1992, 132); Roman glass bowls (e and f from Isings 1957, 18-19); Classic Aksumite red ware bowl with decoration of ovoid punctuations alternating with corrugations (g from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.75); Roman silver vessel with fluted decoration alternating with vegetative pattern (h from La Baume 1969, Bild 9); rim sherd of a Classic Aksumite bowl with a decoration of ovoid bosses (i from Wilding, 1989, Fig. 16.77); Roman silver (l from Strong 1966, Pl. 50 c) and glass (m from Isings 1957, 45) goblets with decoration of ovoid bosses.

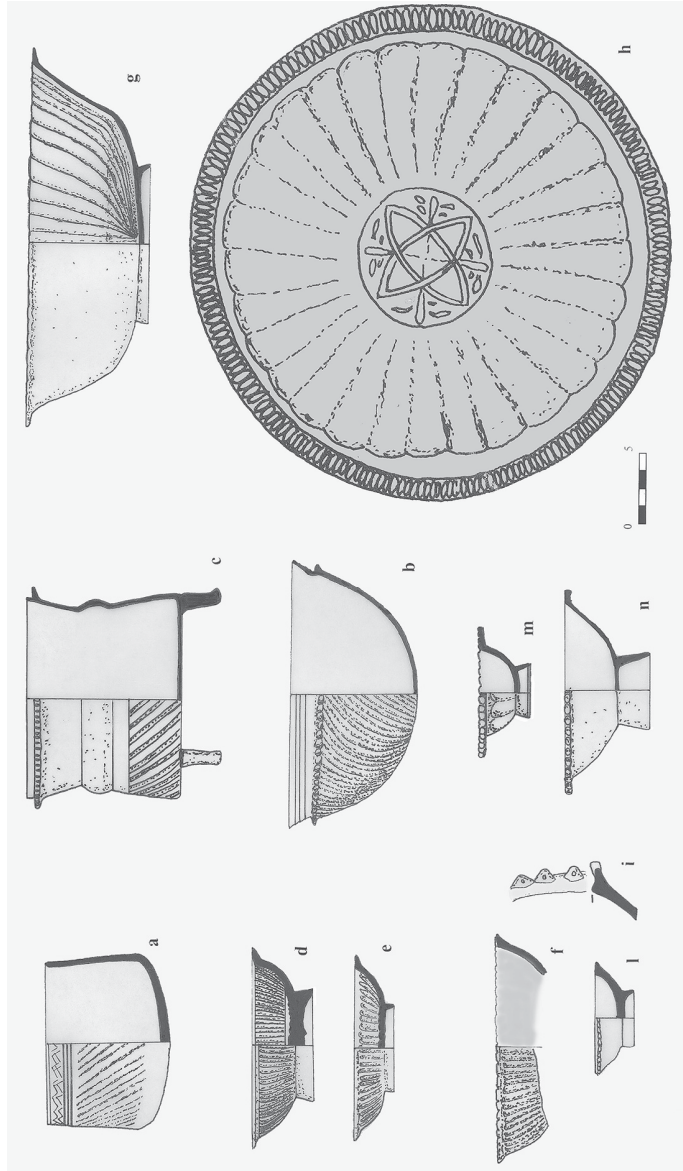


Fig. 2. 1.2: Classic-Middle (?) Aksumite bowl with oblique corrugations (a from Anfray 1966, Pl. IX); silver Roman (b from Künzl 1979, Fig. 118) and bronze Roman-Byzantine (c from Bénazeth 1992, 45, E 11703) vessels with oblique corrugations. 1.3: Early and Classic Aksumite ledge-rim bowls decorated with corrugations (d-f from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.113, Fig. 16.112, and Fig. 16.141); Roman bronze (g from Tassinari 1975, Pl. XV, n° 75) and silver (h from Strong 1966, Pl. 65 B) ledge-rim bowls. 1.4: Classic Aksumite ledge-rim bowls with applied bosses or indentations on the rim (i and l from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.119 and Fig. 16.136 respectively); Late Roman and Byzantine bronze ledge-rim bowls with indentations on the rim (m from Bénazeth 1992, 37, E 25494 and n from Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 70, B 6-2).

Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery?

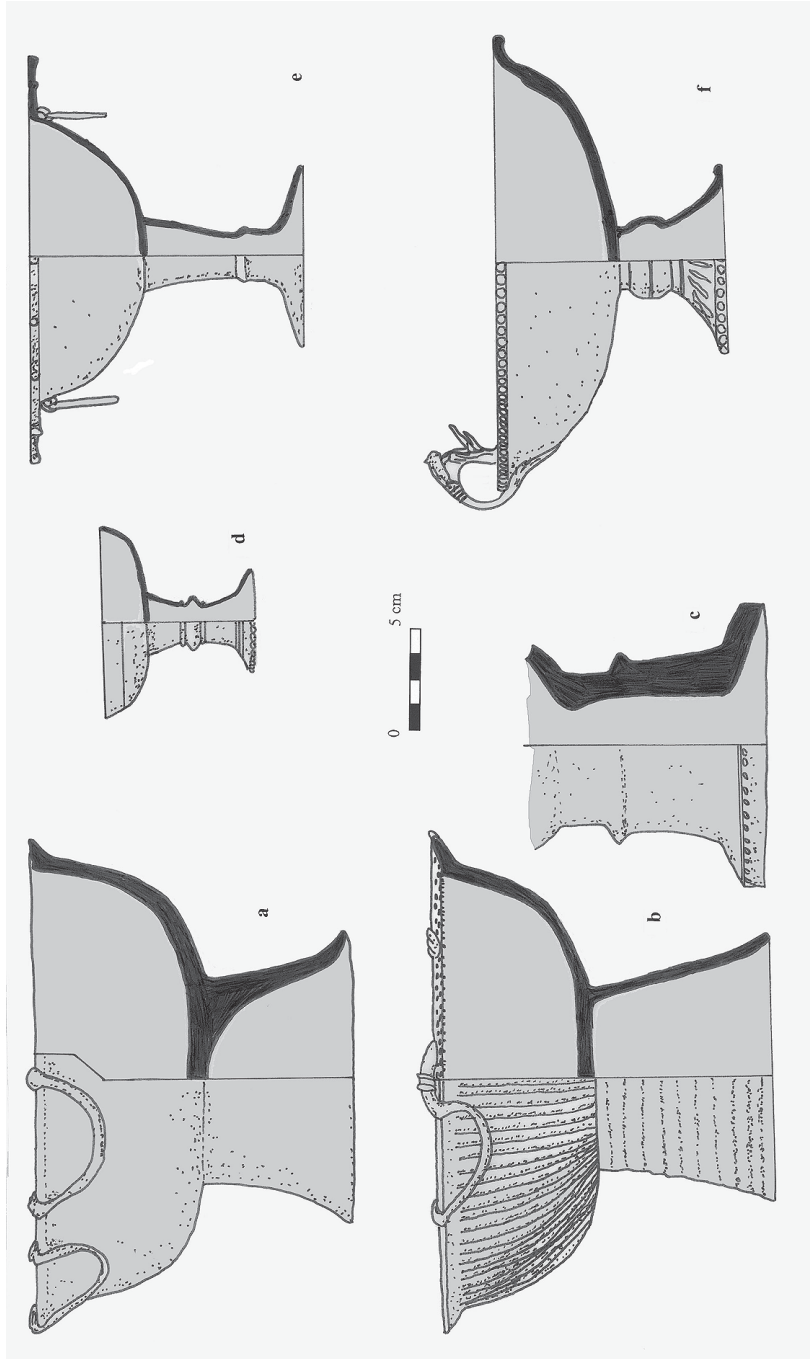


Fig. 3. 1.5: Classic and Middle Aksumite ledge-rim bowls on a flared cylindrical pedestal (a-c from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.153, Fig. 16.150, and Fig. 16.157); Late Roman-Byzantine bronze bowls on pedestals (d from Bénazeth 1992, 34-35, E 11800, a-b, e-f from Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 71, B 121-15, and Pl. 72, B 37-1 respectively).



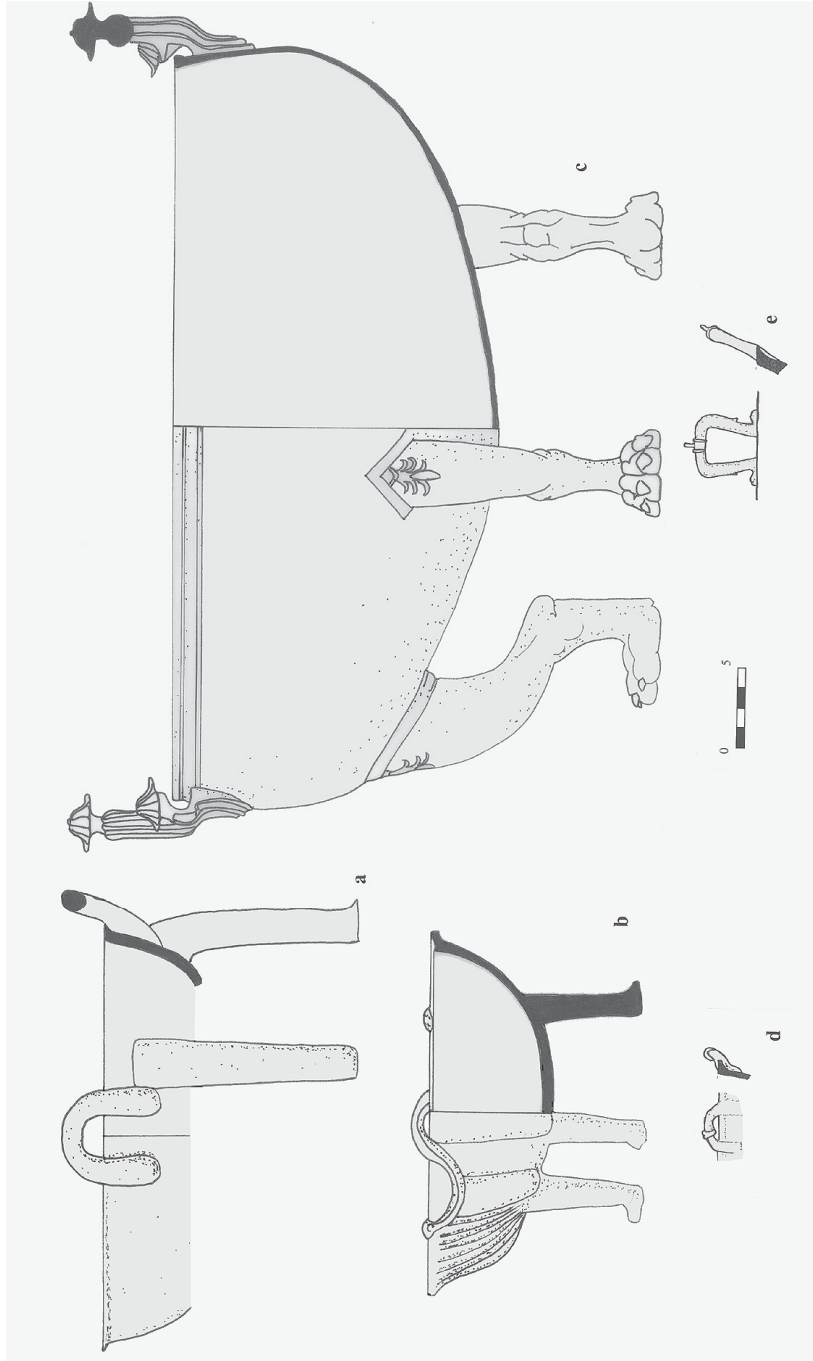


Fig. 4. 1.6: Proto-Aksumite, Early and Classic Aksumite polipod bowls (a from Ona Enda Aboi Zewge Tomb 10 SU 6 2001, b from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.148); Roman tripod bronze basin (c from Tassinari 1993, vol. II, n° 3665). 1.7: Aksumite arched rod handles on the rim of ledge-rim bowls (d from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.154); handle of a Roman bronze vessel (e from Tassinari 1975, Pl. XV, n° 77).

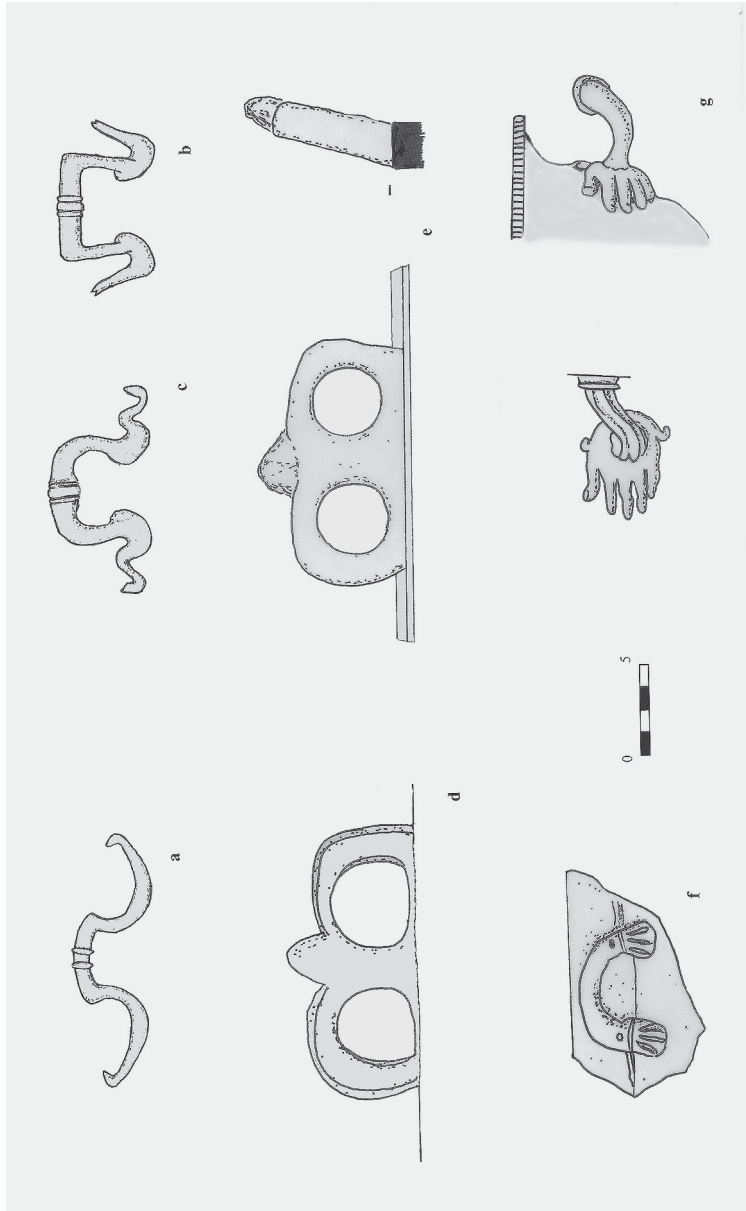


Fig. 5. 1.8: Aksumite horizontal rod handle (a from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.150);  $\Omega$  shaped handles of Roman bronze bowls (b from Hinz 1969, Bild 10, and c from Tassinari 1993, vol. II, 2200, 18998, S 400). 1.9: Aksumite double handle with central button-boss (d from de Contenson 1959, Pl. XVIII, Fig. 4); double handle with central button-boss of a Late Roman-Byzantine bronze basin (e from Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 75, B 80-118, B 9-36). 1.10: Aksumite handle shaped like human hand (f from Anfray 1966, Pl. XXXIII, 13); handle shaped like human hand of a Roman bronze basin (g from Tassinari 1993, vol. II, 5025).

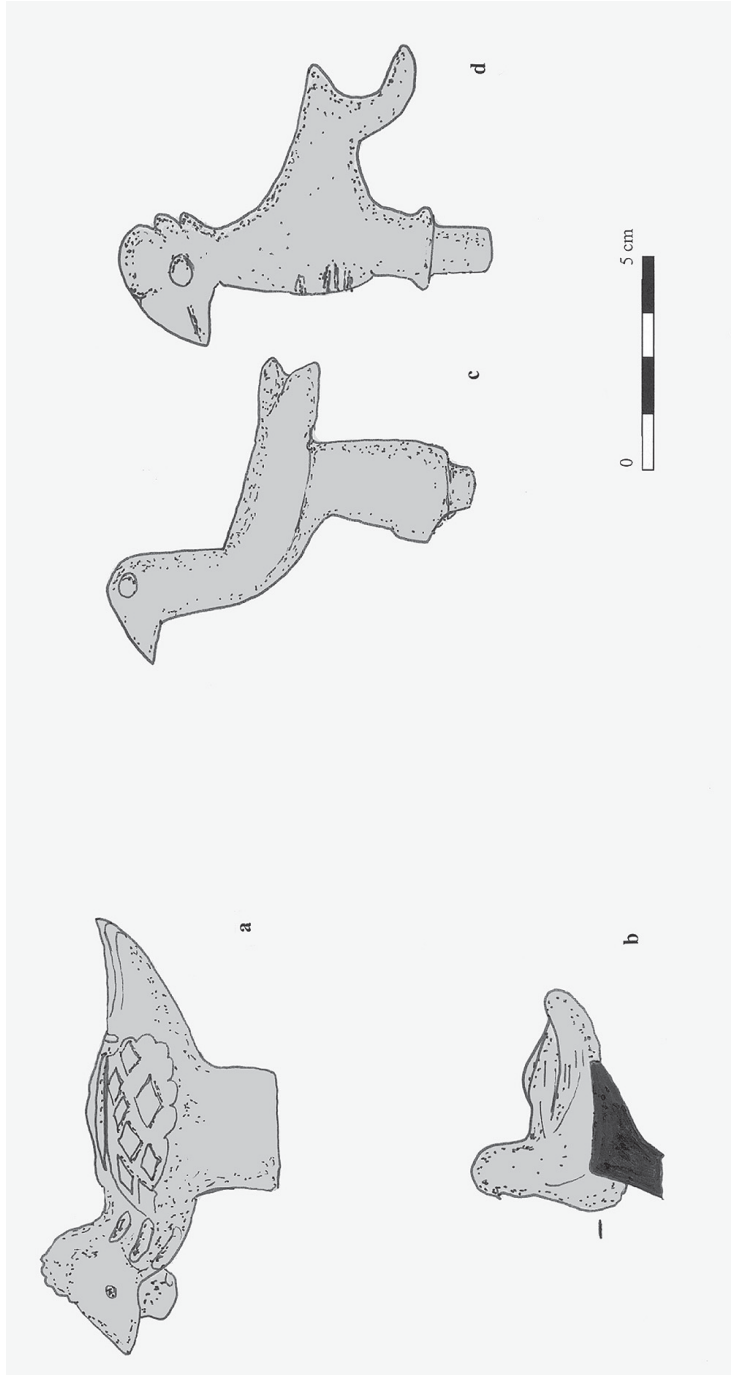


Fig. 6. 1.11: Aksumite small applied modelled birds decorating ledge-rim bowls (a and b from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.143 and Fig. 16.145 respectively); birds decorating Byzantine bronze vessels (c and d from Bénazeth 1992, 225, E 25147, and 227, E 25143 respectively).

Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery?

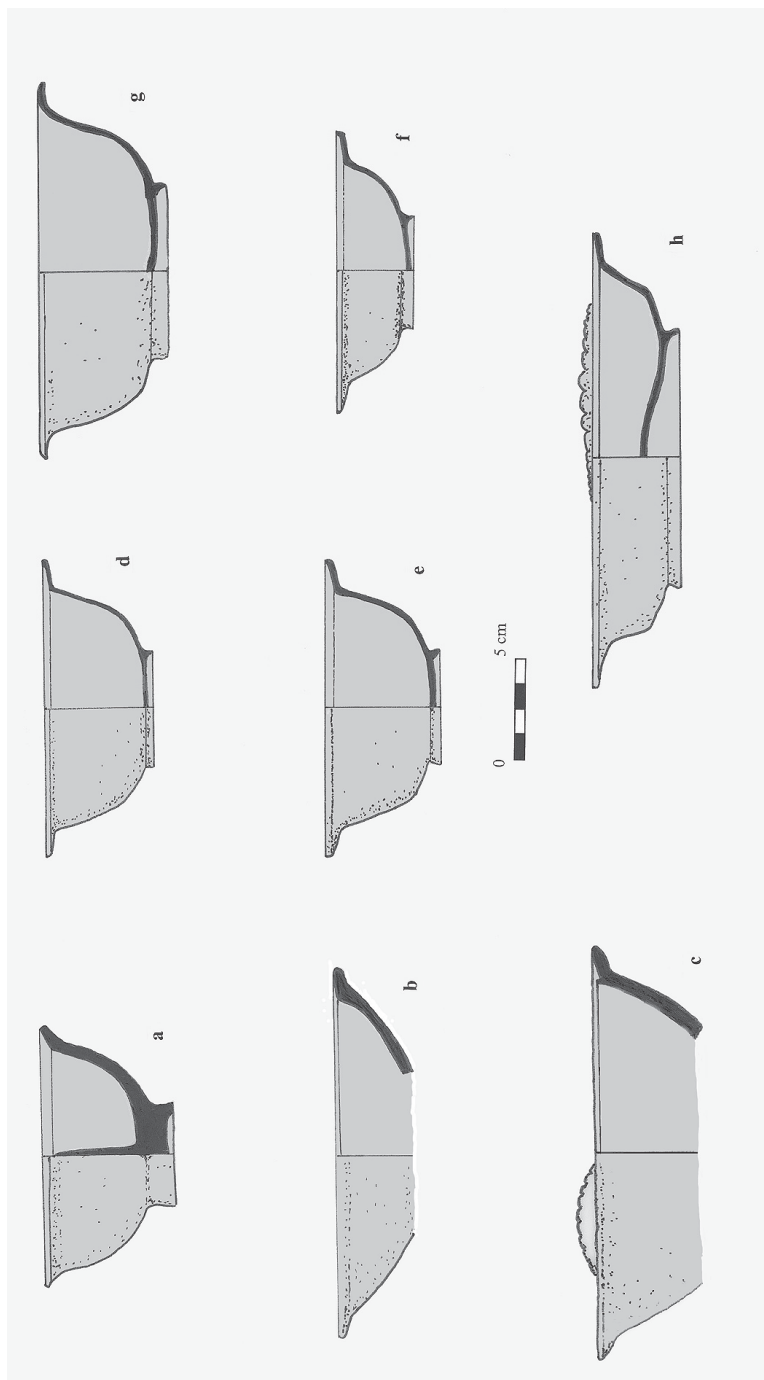


Fig. 7. 1.12: Middle and Late Aksumite ring or round base ledge-rim bowls (a from Anfray 1966, Pl. XII, JE 3639, b from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.147); Roman bronze (d-f from Tassianri 1975, Pl. XIII, 63, 59 and 64 respectively) and glass ledge-rim bowls (g from Isings 1957, 58). 1.13: Middle Aksumite ledge-rim bowl with moulded and impressed decoration (e found at Ona Nagast IV SU 4 1996); Roman ledge-rim glass bowl with moulded and impressed decoration (h from Isings 1957, 59).

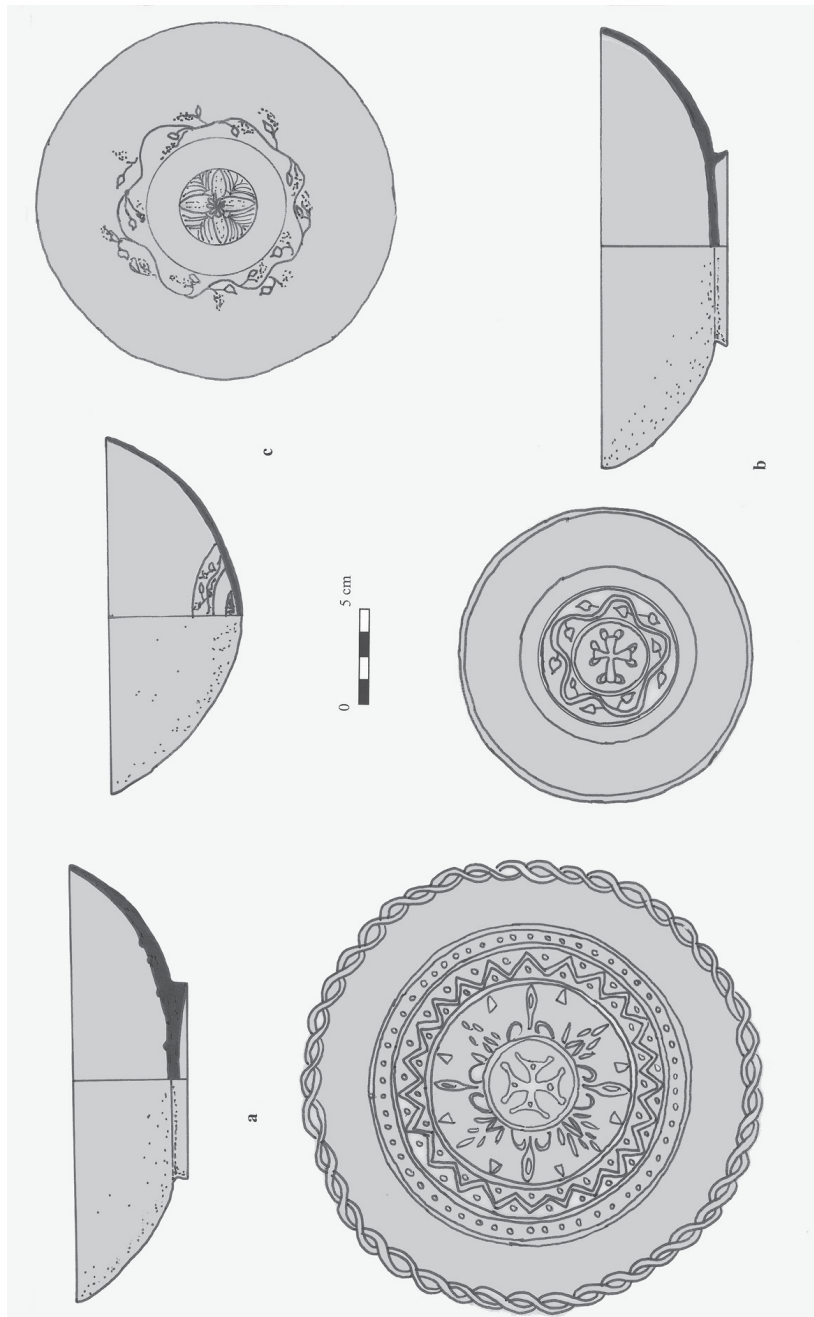


Fig. 8. 1.14: Late Aksumite bowl decorated with a cross surrounded by concentric cordons on the internal surface (a from Anfray 1966, Pl. XLVI, JE 3165); Byzantine silver (b from Di Stefano 1991, Fig. 5-6) and bronze vessels (c from Bénazeth 1992, 36, N 894) decorated with cross patterns surrounded by concentric bands on the internal surface.

Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery?

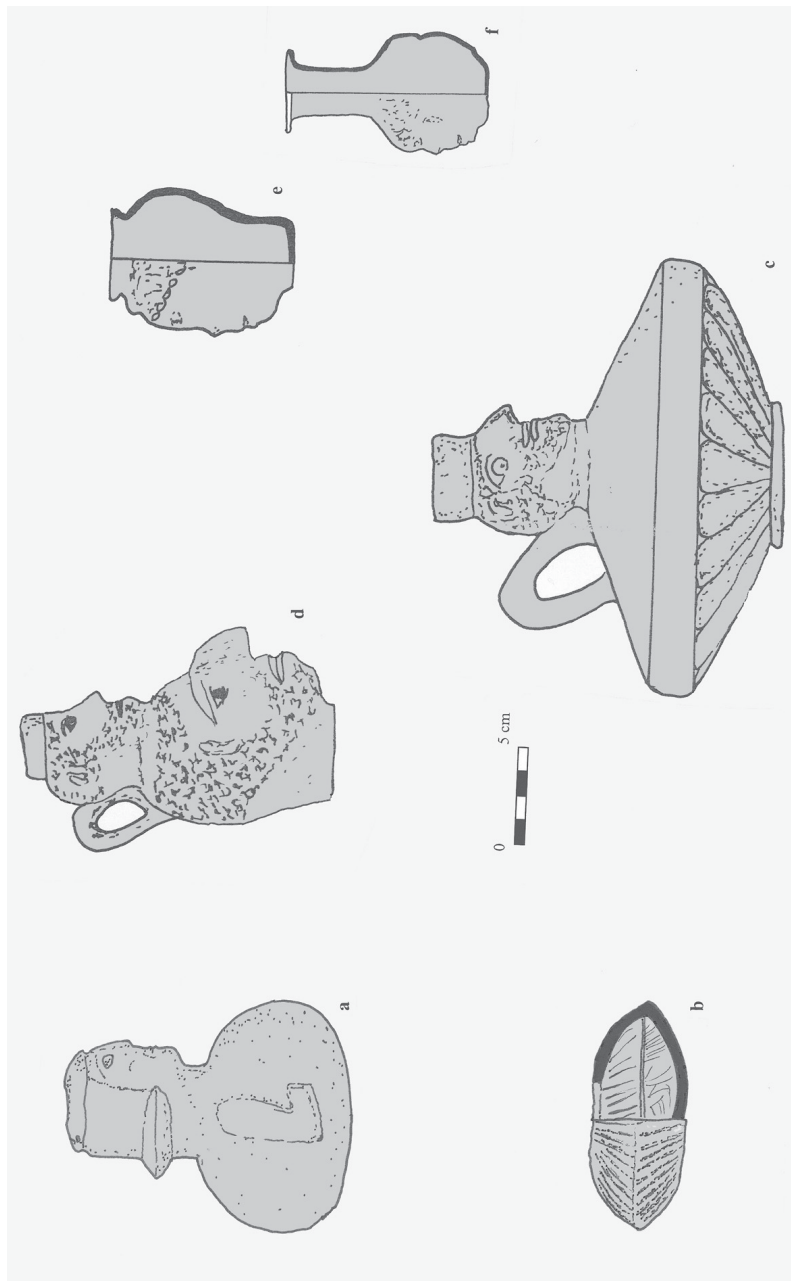


Fig. 9. 2.1: small Aksumite bottle with moulded and modelled human head for neck (a from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.287); Roman red slip ceramic (d from Carandini 1981, Tav. CXIX, 1) and glass vessels (e and f from Isings 1957, 93) with moulded and modelled human heads; Aksumite red ware biconvex pot (b from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.293); Roman red slip biconvex ceramic vessel (c from Carandini 1981, Tav. CXIX, 2).

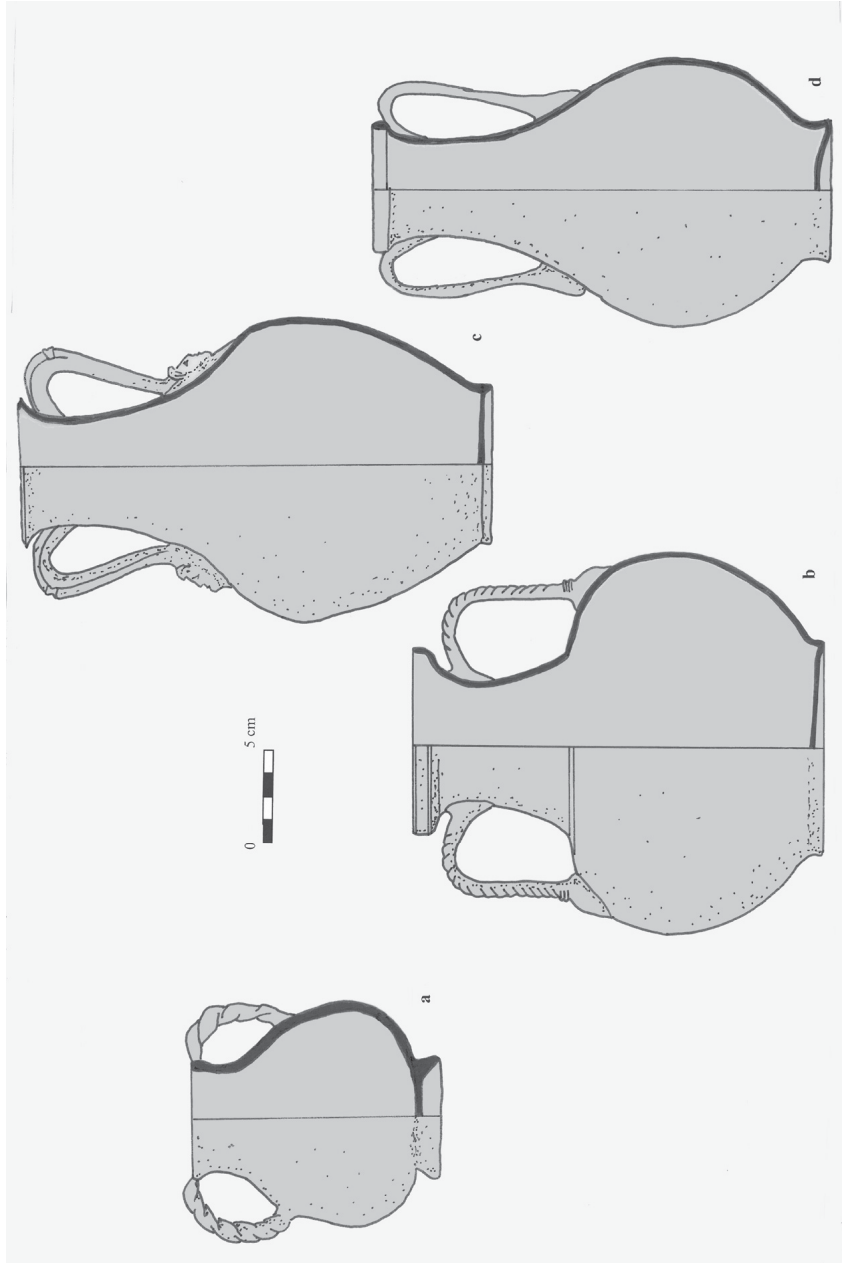


Fig. 10. 2.2: Aksumite ring-base necked pot with twisted cord handles (a from Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994-1995, 277, n° 46); Roman bronze (b from Hayes 1984, 96, n° 152, c from Hinz 1969, Bild 12 a) and glass *kantbaros* (d from Isings 1957, 32-34).

Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery?

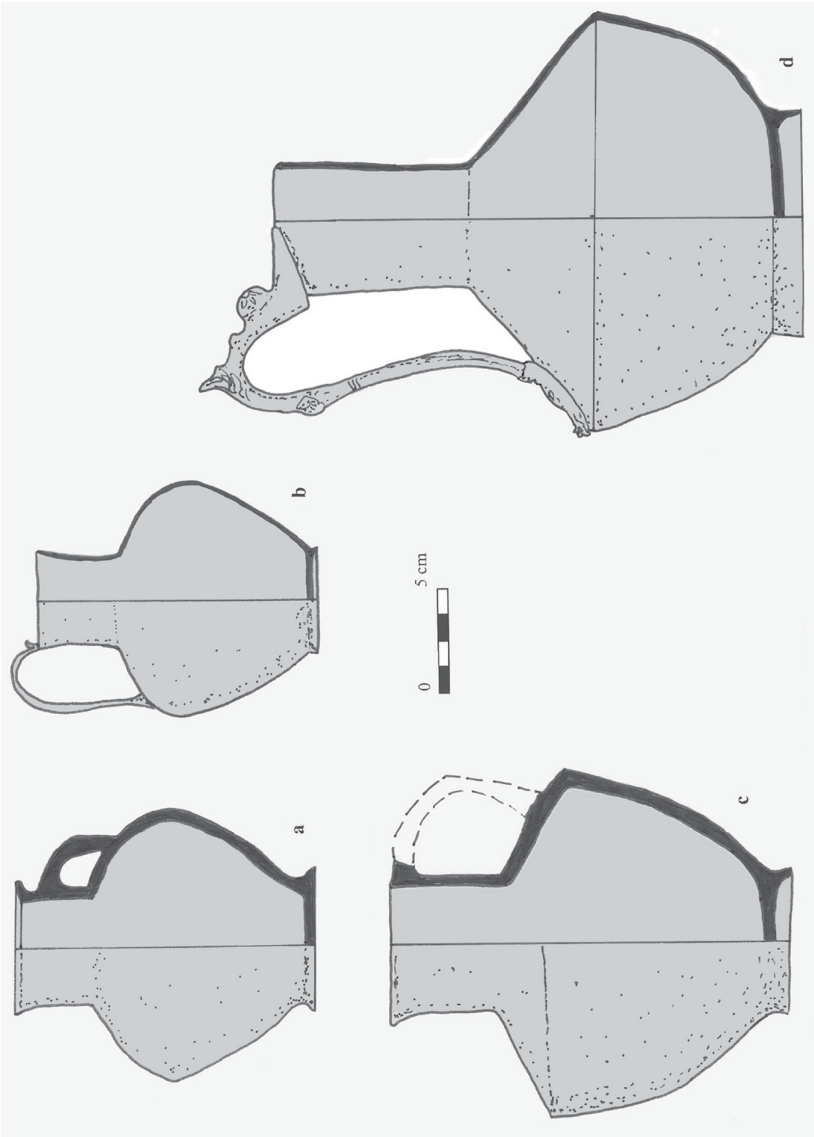


Fig. 11. 2.3: Aksumite flat-base cylinder-neck pot with sharp shoulder (a from Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994-1995, 279, n° 132); bronze Roman *oinochoe* (b from Hayes 1984, 96, n° 151). 2.4: Aksumite ring-base cylinder-neck carinated pot (c from Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994-1995, 279, n° 50); Late Roman bronze ring-base cylinder-neck carinated vessel (d from Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 79, B 95-41).



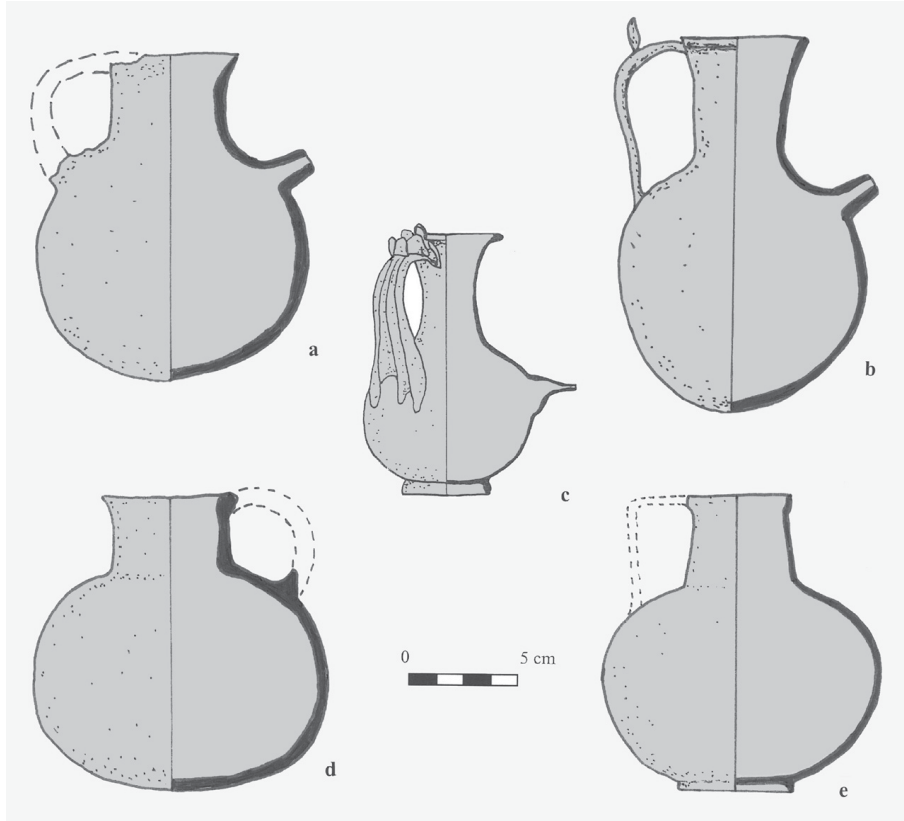


Fig. 12. 2.5: Aksumite globular cylinder-neck spouted pot (a from Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994-1995, 276, n° 44); Roman bronze (b from Emery and Kirwan 1938, Pl. 80, B 80-67) and glass cylinder neck spouted pots (c from Isings 1957, 118). 2.6: Aksumite cylinder-neck pot (d from Munro-Hay and Tringali 1994-1995, 294, n° 133); Roman cylinder-neck spouted vessel (e from Hayes 1984, 82, n° 125).

Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery?

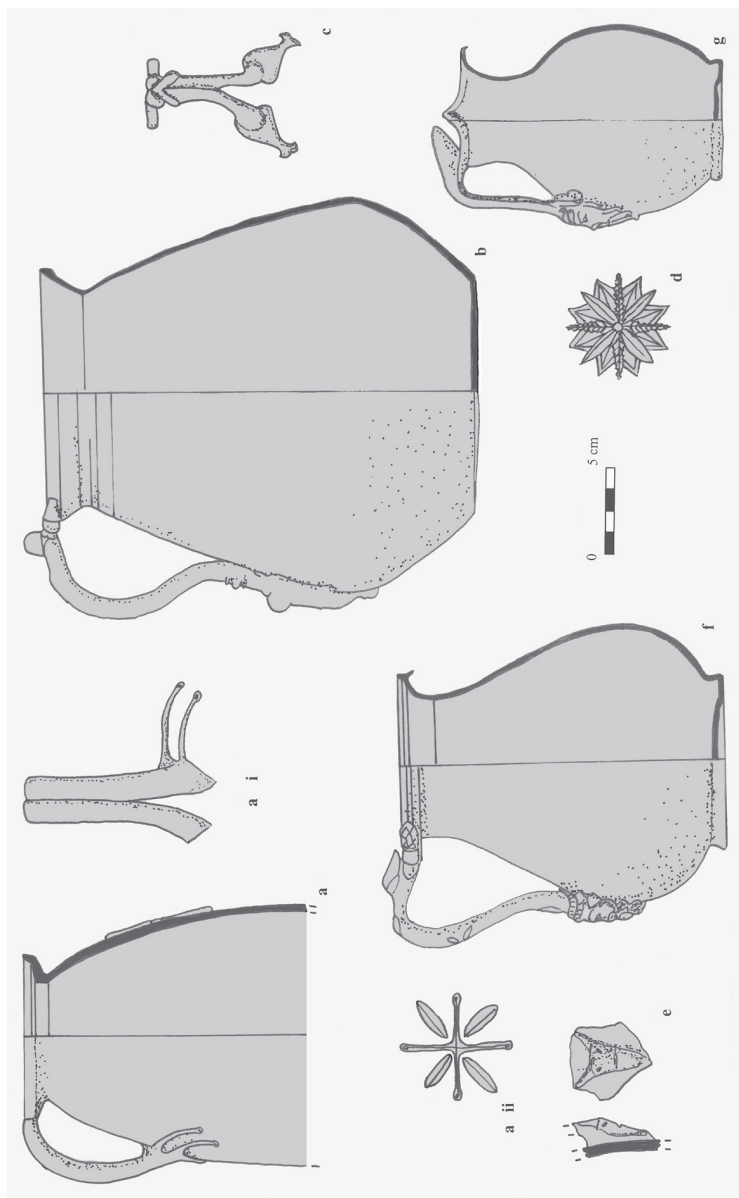


Fig. 13. 2.7: Proto-Aksumite pot with sagging biconical body, bifid vertical handle, and a concentric moulded decoration with incised leaves (a, a i-ii from Ona Enda Aboi Zewge Tomb 10 2001); Roman biconical bronze vessel (b from Hayes 1984, 75, n° 118); bifid handle of a Late Hellenistic bronze vessel (c from Hayes 1984, 65, n° 102); concentric decorative vegetal pattern of an Hellenistic bronze vessel (d from Pfommer 1987, Taf. 55, KaBH8). 2.8: fragment of strap vertical handle with a moulded bearded human head with horns at the base of the handle from a Proto-Aksumite vessel (e from Ona Enda Aboi Zewge Tomb 14 2001); Roman bronze vessels with a Satyr or Pan head on the handle (f and g from Tassinari 1993, vol. II, 1520f and 14053).

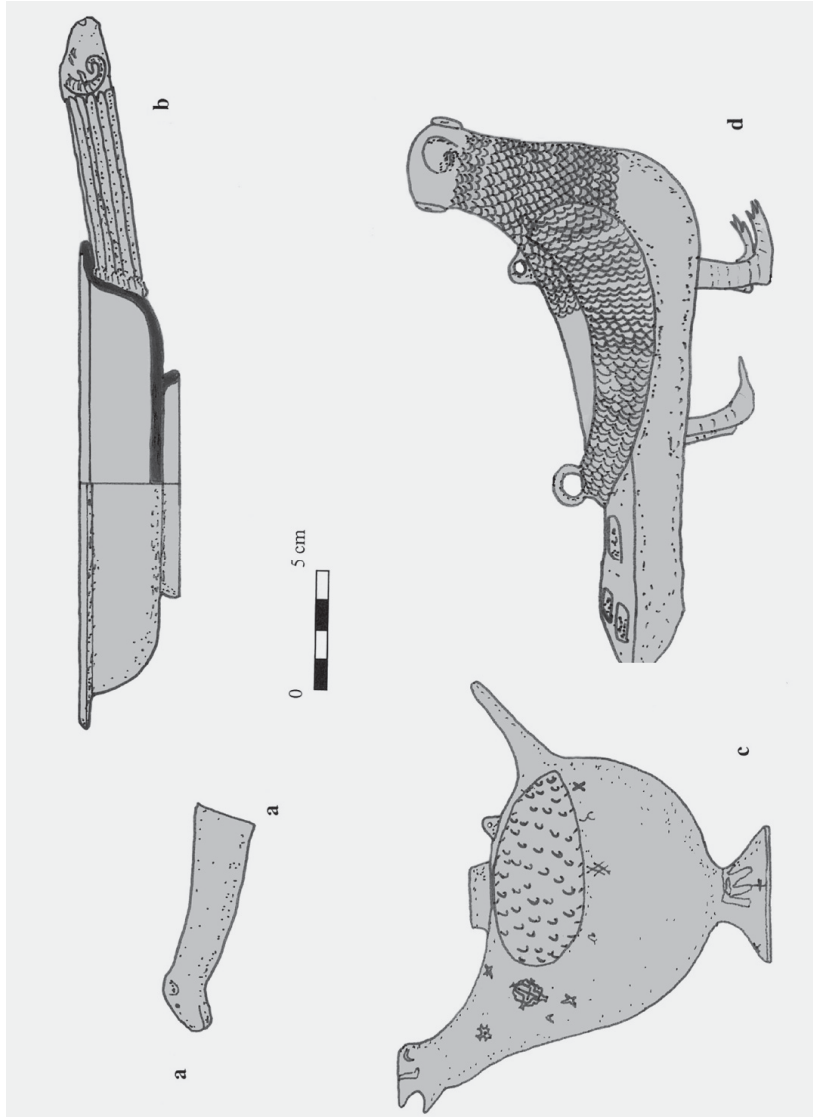


Fig. 14. 3.1: Aksumite small animal head on a long neck (a from Wilding 1989, Fig. 16.333); Roman bronze vessel with animal head on the handle (b from Hinz 1969, Bild 4). 3.2: Middle or Late Aksumite pot in the form of a bird (c from Anfray 1966, Pl. XVIII, JE 3622); Byzantine bronze lamp in the form of a bird (d from Hayes 1984, 137-138, n° 213).

Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery?

|          |                |                         |   |   |
|----------|----------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| Period 1 | Proto-Aksumite |                         | ca. 4 <sup>th</sup> – 2 <sup>nd</sup> cent. BC              |   |
| Period 2 | Aksumite 1     | <i>Early Aksumite</i>   | ca. 1 <sup>st</sup> cent. BC – mid-2 <sup>nd</sup> cent. AD | ? |
|          | Aksumite 2     | <i>Classic Aksumite</i> | ca. mid-2 <sup>nd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD          | ↓ |
|          | Aksumite 3     | <i>Middle Aksumite</i>  | ca. 5 <sup>th</sup> – mid-6 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD          | ↓ |
|          | Aksumite 4     | <i>Late Aksumite</i>    | ca. mid-6 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD          | ↓ |
| Period 3 | Post-Aksumite  |                         | From 8 <sup>th</sup> cent. AD                               |   |

Fig. 15. Chart showing the phases of the Aksumite culture and the periods when Mediterranean metal vessels were imitated (→), Mediterranean red gloss pottery (→), and glass imported (→).

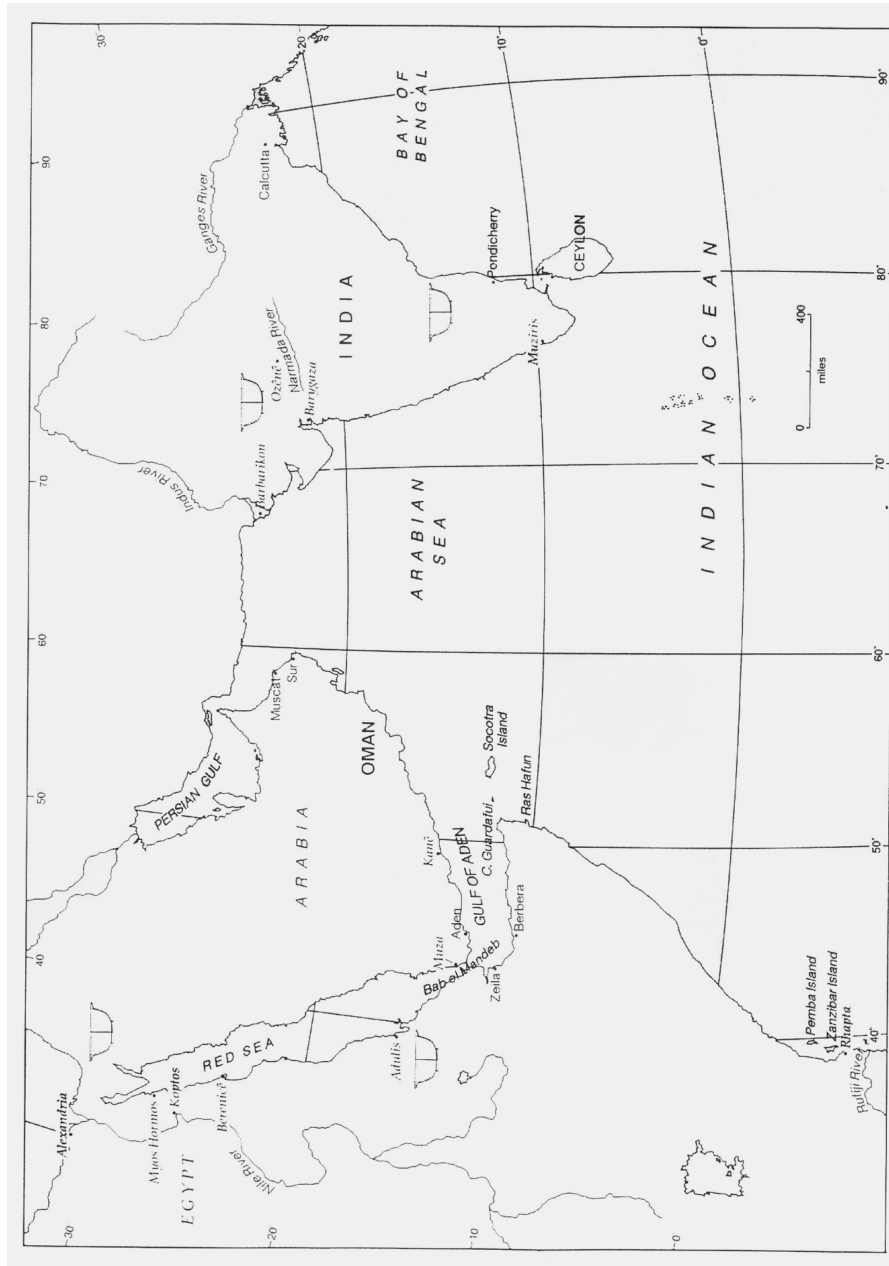


Fig. 16. The imitation of metal tableware in fine red gloss pottery in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean regions, last centuries BC-early centuries AD.

Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery?

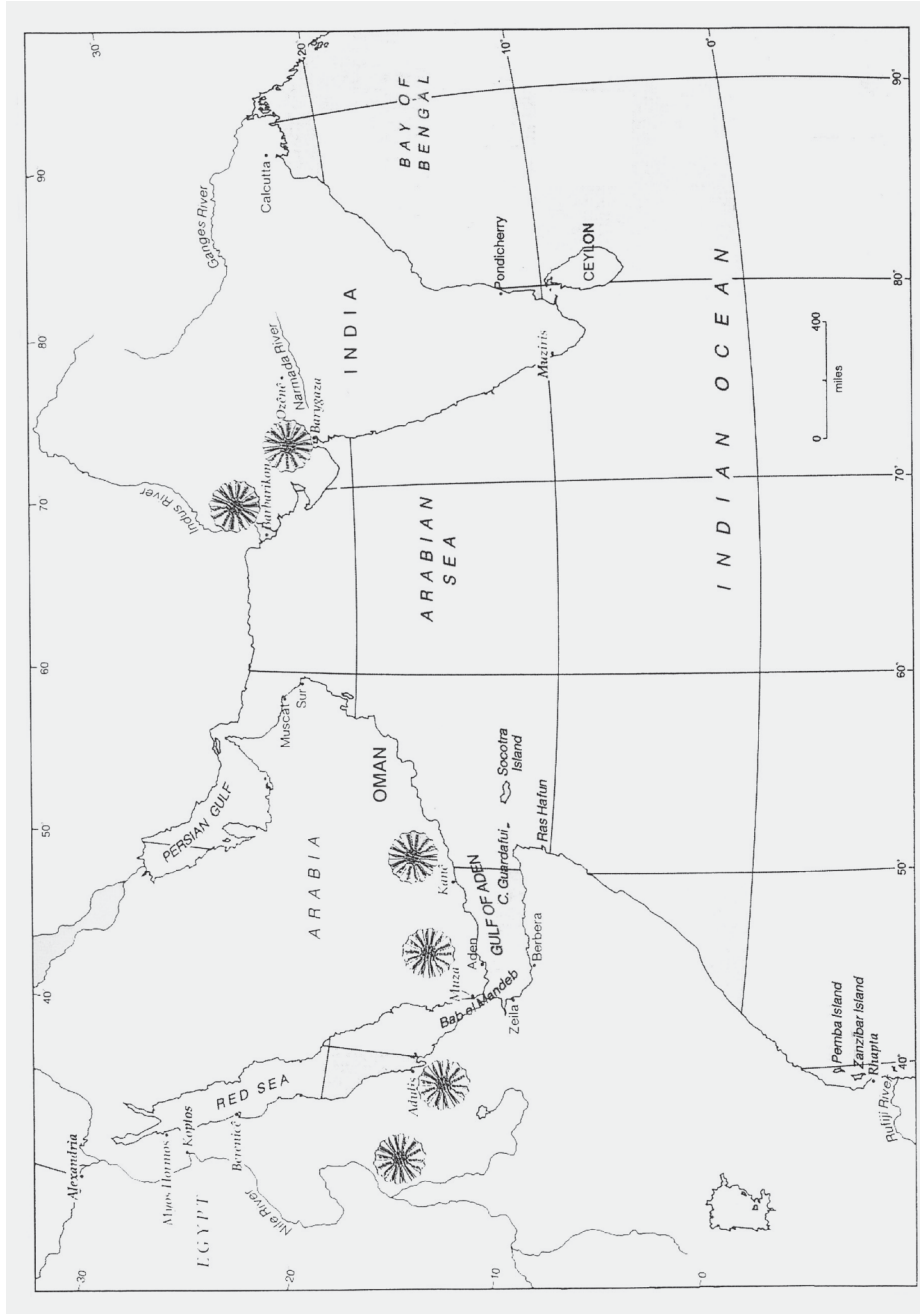


Fig. 17. The export of Roman metalware in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, based on the archaeological and textual evidence.

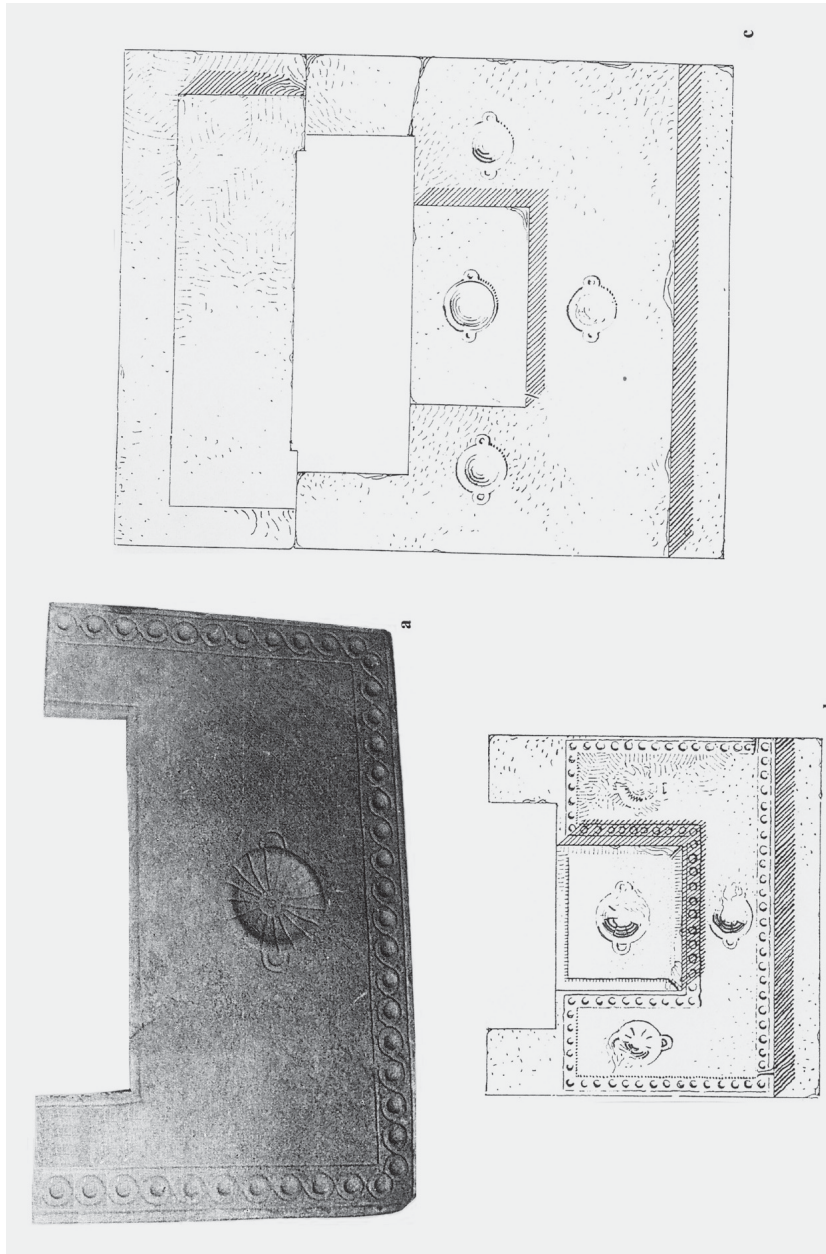


Fig. 18. The double-handled cups or bowls reproduced on the stone bases of some Aksumite stelae (a from Chittick 1974, Pl. VIa, b and c from Krencker 1913, Taf. II and IV).

Skeuomorphism in Aksumite Pottery?

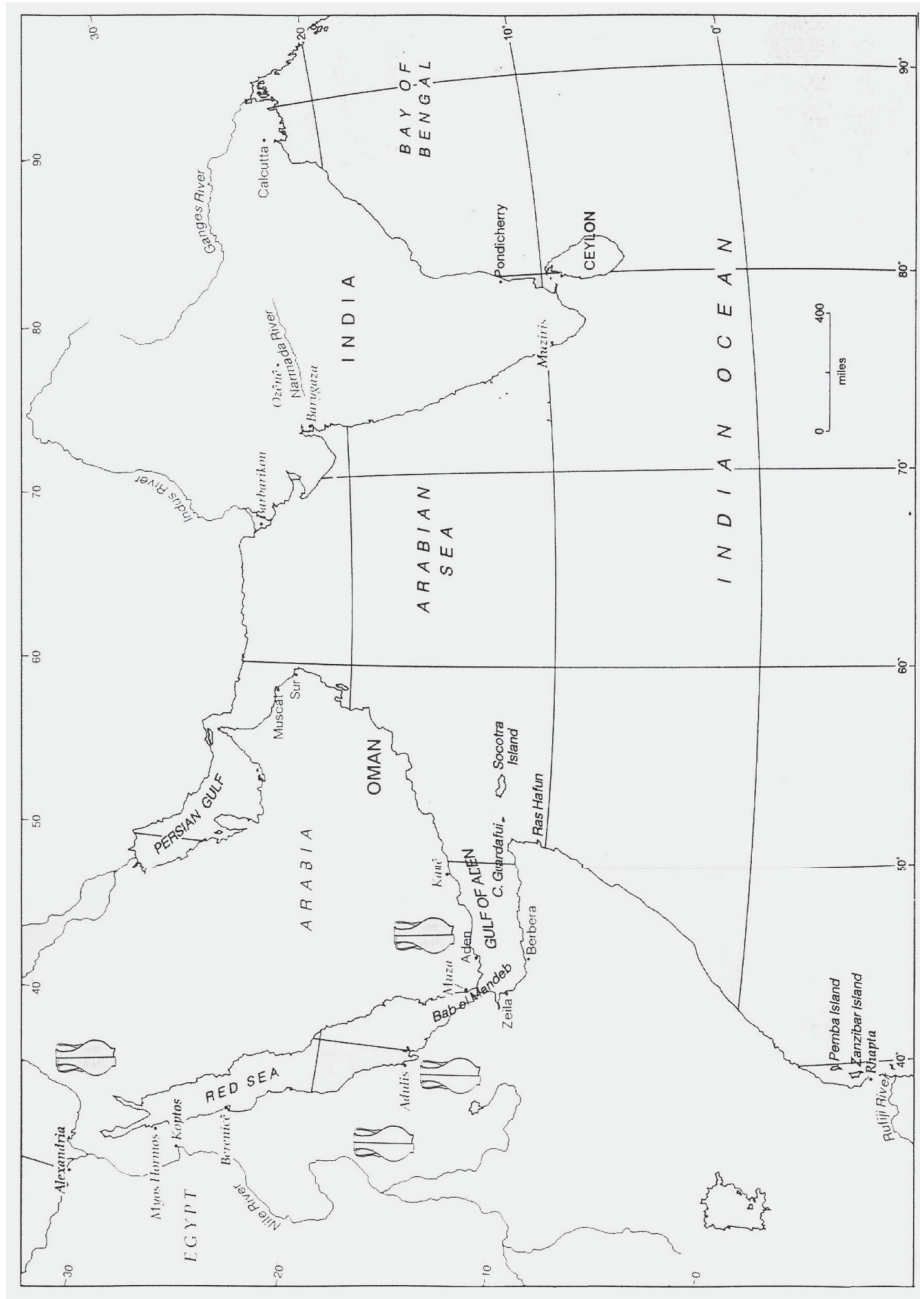


Fig. 19. The import and consumption of Mediterranean wine in the Red Sea regions, based on the archaeological and textual evidence.



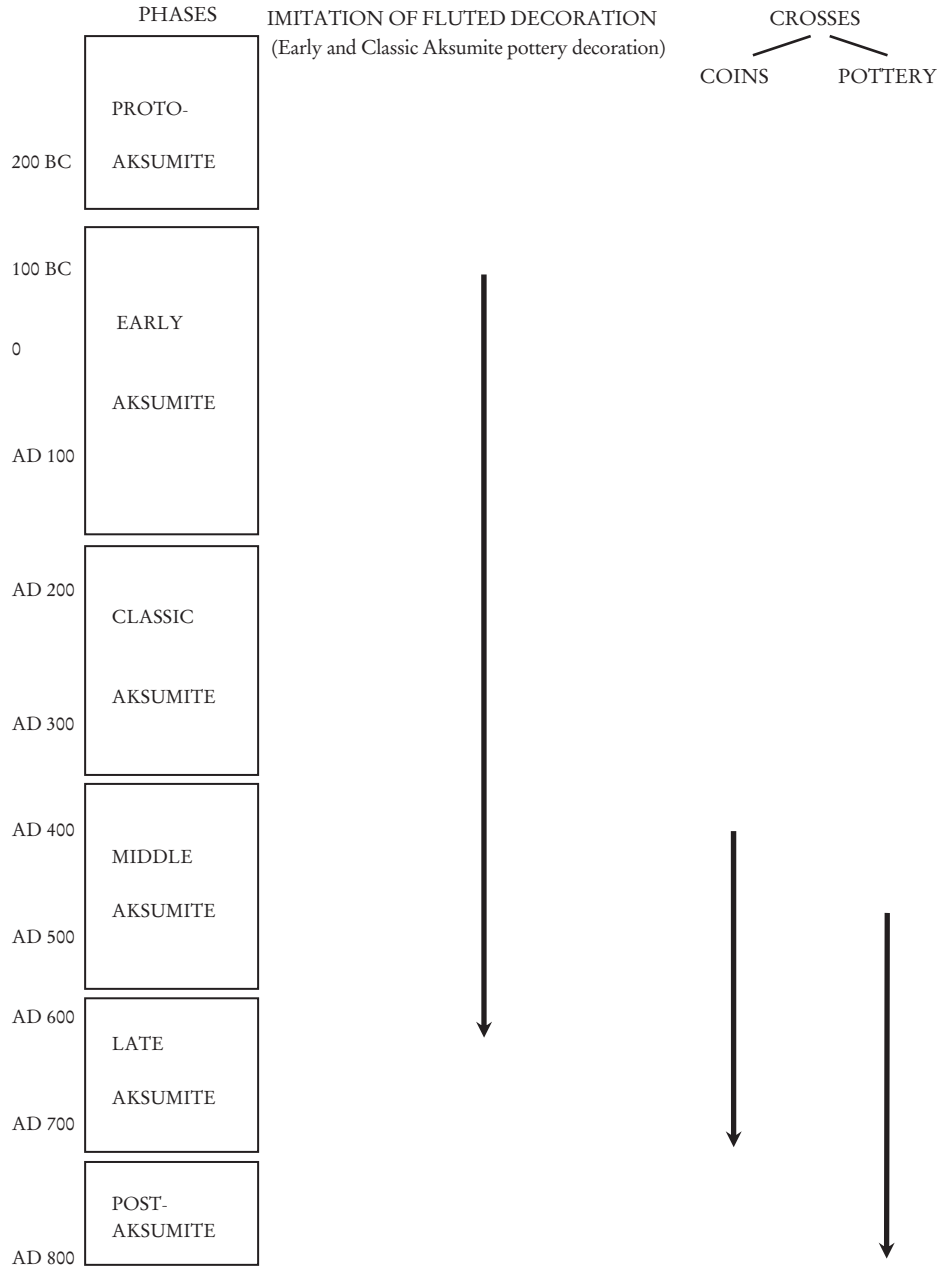


Fig. 20. Chart showing the adoption of fluted decoration from metalware in Aksumite pottery, and the adoption of crosses in the decoration of Aksumite coins and pottery.