

## AN UNFAMILIAR EARLY BYZANTINE CERAMIC OBJECT FROM OLYMPOS: BIRD-FEEDER



### OLYMPOS'TAN ERKEN BİZANS DÖNEMİNE AİT BİLİNMEYEN BİR SERAMİK ESER: KUŞ YEMLİĞİ

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This paper is dedicated to the memory of colleague and friend Sinan Sertel, who had a great effort in the Olympos excavation and left fingerprints of grace on our lives.

#### **Abstract**

The subject of this study is a ceramic bird-feeder has been discovered in Olympos excavation in the 2017. The bird-feeder has been found in the southeast corner of the stylobate, which runs from the front of the pronaos to the east during the excavation works aimed to reveal the cella and pronaos of the temple in 2017. The findspot of the bird feeder is in the east of the viridarium of the Episcopoion, in an Early Byzantine period dump between the southeast corner of the stylobate and the north wall of the Room 20 (M20). The clay of the ceramic bird-feeder resembles to the Late Roman D Ware of red slip ceramics which are mostly considered to be from Cypriot origin. According to the general chronology of the area and the context data, the bird-feeder from Olympos is belonging to the 6th century AD.

**Keywords:** *Lycia, Byzantine, Late Roman D Ware, Red Slip Pottery, Bird-Feeder,*

#### **Öz**

Bu çalışmanın konusunu oluşturan kuş yemliği Olympos kazısı 2017 sezonunda tapınağın pronaosunun önünden doğuya doğru devam eden stylobatın güneydoğu köşesinde bulunmuştur. Bu alanda Piskoposluk Sarayı'nın viridarium (iç bahçe) bölümünün doğusunda, stylobatın güneydoğu köşesi ve stylobatın güneyindeki Mekân 20 (M20) olarak adlandırılan odanın kuzey duvarı arasında Erken Bizans dönemine ait bir çöplük tespit edilmiştir. Kuş yemliğinin hamuru kırmızı-kahverengi renkte, mikalı ve kireç katkılıdır. Hamur üzerinde kırmızı astar kalıntıları mevcuttur. Üzerindeki izler sayesinde hızlı dönen çarkta biçimlendirildiği anlaşılmaktadır. Yan yüzünde bir aletle kesilerek açılmış yarım daire biçiminde beş adet delik bulunmaktadır. Üst kısmında kısa bir boyun biçiminde yapılmış açıklıktan yem koyulmaktadır. Hamur özellikleri bakımından çoğunlukla Kıbrıs'ta üretildiği kabul edilen Late Roman D grubu kırmızı astarlı seramiklerine benzemektedir.

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Seramikten yapılmış kazı buluntuları arasında tanımlanmamış bir obje olması bakımından kuş yemliğinin tanımlanması önemlidir. Kuş yemliğinin işlevinin saptanabilmesi için Roma ve Bizans dönemi mozaiklerindeki betimlemelerden yararlanılmıştır. Olympos'ta bulunan kuş yemliğinin alanın genel kronolojisine ve mevcut kontekst verilere göre M.S. 6. yüzyıla ait olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Likya, Bizans, Geç Roma D, Kırmızı Astarlı Seramik, Kuş Yemliği,*

The archaeological excavations in Olympos city have been ongoing since 2006. The bird-feeder examined in this study has been found in the southeast corner of the stylobate during the excavation works aimed to reveal the cella and pronaos of the temple in 2017<sup>1</sup>. According to the obtained data, the temple and the entire temenos area have been used for new construction activities at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. The religious buildings such as a church and a baptistery, other buildings used for sheltering and gathering have been constructed for reorganizing the entire area as Episcopal Palace (Episcopeion)<sup>2</sup>. The cella of the temple has been included to the complex of the Episcopal Palace and used as a separate space. It is determined that the pronaos and its façade was intact and in visible condition throughout the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The bird feeder has been discovered in the east of the *viridarium* (courtyard) of the Episcopal Palace, in an Early Byzantine period dump between the southeast corner of the stylobate and the north wall of the Room 20 (M20).

The clay of the bird feeder is red-brown colored (Mun. 2.5YR6/6), micaceous and has lime particles (Fig. 2). The traces of red slip can be seen on a dense, non-porous surface. The bird-feeder is 18.6 cm wide and 13.8 cm tall. There are five semi-circular openings on the side which have been cut by a tool. The elongated upper part that has diameter of 7.7 cm. and has a ring-shaped opening at the top (Fig. 3, 5). This part has been used to put in grain or pellet. It is likely that the ring-shaped opening has been used to be covered with a wooden or ceramic stopper to prevent birds from getting stuck. The bottom was irregularly shaped on a fast rotating wheel and marks indicate that it has been separated off from the wheel by a wire or string (Fig. 4).

Another archaeological find which is very similar to the bird-feeder from Olympos has been discovered during the excavation in Emporio in the south of Khios (Fig. 6). It has been described as brazier due to its shape and findspot and dated to 7<sup>th</sup>

1 For the excavation in 2017, see Olcay Uçkan & Öztaşkın, 2018: 82-86.

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2 For the architecture of the Episcopal Palace, see Öztaşkın, G.K., 2017.

century AD.<sup>3</sup> In contrast with its coarse appearance, there is no burning mark on the object. It is still on exhibition in the building known as the Justinianus Palace on the island of Khios. It is not always easy to determine the function of a ceramic object according to its shape, since bird feeders made of ceramic are not well-known among archaeological finds. Due to its similarity with the finding in Olympos it is possible to mention that the ceramic find from Emporio probably has been used as a bird-feeder.

Historical sources dating to the Roman and Byzantine periods inform us about many kinds of birds that were fed for both consumption as meat and also for their beautiful appearance and sounds. Birds that were kept as poultry are mostly turtle-dove, pigeon, duck, goose, guineafowl, pheasant, partridge, quail, thrush, wood grouse and hen<sup>4</sup>. Among them, pigeons were particularly popular because of their kindness and loyalty. Therefore, pigeons have always been kept by people because they are easy to breed and they can learn to carry messages. In the Greek and Roman periods, the historical sources indicate that pigeons were fed by all classes of society, not only elite families<sup>5</sup>. This was not only because pigeon eggs and meat were seen as easy-food, but also because pigeon droppings used as fertilizer which gives very good results in arid lands.

The distinction between pigeon and turtle-dove is not clear in the historical sources from Byzantine period. However, in the agricultural handbook *Geponika* compiled in the middle of the 10th century AD, it is mentioned that pigeon manure is a high quality fertilizer and it is especially recommended for growth of seeds and the early maturation of the grapes<sup>6</sup>. For this reason, it is known that there were large sized tower-shaped pigeon-houses made of terracotta and reeds, not only in villas with large lands but also around the houses where small horticultural works were carried out. Varro describes in detail how pigeon-houses should be built concerning with farming activities in his *Re Rustica* which belongs to the 1st century BC<sup>7</sup>. According to Varro a pigeon-house called as *columbarium* is a small vaulted space with niches<sup>8</sup>. It must have a single entrance and this entrance must be high enough to stop predators. Columella, who lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, stated that bird-houses should be smoothly plastered and the interiors should be painted in white<sup>9</sup>. Without doubt, the construction technique varies according to local materials and needs. Among the archaeological finds, pigeon-houses made of limestone have been determined in Israel and also brick work ones in Egypt and rock-cut ones in Cappadocia have been documented<sup>10</sup>.

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3 Ballance, et al., 1989, lev. 26/279.

4 Dalby, 2004: 64, 127.

5 Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones, 2018: 729, 754.

6 *Geponika* II, 21; V, 26.

7 Varro, R. R. III, VII, 3.

8 This architectural term is also used for describing funerary spaces in the Roman period. Gr. *peristereon/περιστέρειων* or *peristerostrophion/περιστεροτροφείον*.

9 Columella, R. R. VIII, VIII, 4.

10 Germanidou, 2015: 40-48.

Although rare, it is possible to see depictions of bird-houses in mosaic pavements. In Palestra (Egypt) black pigeons are seen on a terra-cotta bird-house in a depiction of a Nile landscape on a mosaic pavement which is dated between 120-110 BC<sup>11</sup>. This mosaic panel shows the human life around the Nile and the different species of living creatures belonging to the habitat in detail. In the mosaic representations of the Roman and Byzantine periods, mosaics rarely depict the rural life so realistically with all its elements. Generally, the main theme of mosaics with nature scenes was to reveal the wealth of landowners. Their wealth usually included servants, large gardens, grown crops, prey animals, exotic animals and feasts that including one or more of these elements. Therefore, bird-houses which have been mentioned by historical sources that they were used widespread, have been rarely included in these aristocratic themes just as a complementary detail.

A mosaic panel known as the 'Dominus Julius Mosaic' which is exhibited in the Bardo Museum in Tunisia belonging to a villa in Carthage is dated between 380-400 AD<sup>12</sup>. In this mosaic panel Julius and his family are shown in a large rural landscape with their house depicted at the center. Many servants carry newly harvested products and animals to the members of this elite family. In the upper part of the mosaic, a woman who is possibly a member of the family sits on a kind of furniture between trees. Under the furniture, a bird-house is depicted with a single entrance and there are seven small birds feed around it (Fig. 7). It can be thought that the bird-house was made of wicker because of the yellow cross bands that cover the body. According to the historical sources, portable cages in various forms made with wooden and wicker were used for small birds. The most popular of these cages were the round shaped and domed ones as depicted in the mosaic in Carthage. It has been even indicated that there were luxurious ones made of silver and ivory<sup>13</sup>.

In the Roman and Byzantine period floor pavements and wall paintings depicting natural scenery with aristocratic messages, bird figures appear in two different forms. Firstly, birds were depicted as part of beautiful garden views, as in the Dominus Julius Mosaic. These birds that are fed in the garden were tamed or their wings were pinioned to prevent them from flying away. Among them it is possible to also see birds kept as poultry or fed for their appealing looks and songs. Among these birds there are singing birds such as the pigeon, dove, blackbird, thrush, golden oriole, goldfinch, flycatcher, nightingale, bunting and larger birds such as the peacock, pheasant, partridge, heron, ibis and crane<sup>14</sup>. In these scenes, different species of birds are usually depicted in their natural state or while drinking water, as a component of the nature. Secondly, from the Roman period until the end of the Byzantine period, many bird figures can be seen as a part of ceremonial feasts and religious scenes. These depictions generally reflect the eating habits in daily life and

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11 Meyboom, 1995: fig. 27.

12 Nevett, 2010: 120-121, lev. 6.1.

13 Bowe, 2004: 53.

14 Bowe, 2004: 52; Hachlili, 1998.

bird figures can be seen as a part of kitchen during food preparation or as already has been cooked and ready for consumption on the table. These are the turtle-dove, duck, goose, guinea fowl, pheasant, partridge, quail, thrush, wood grouse and hen. Regardless of whether the depiction is related with a garden landscape or dining, the compositions which include bird depictions tend to show the aristocratic lifestyle. The reason for this is to emphasize land owners and people who eat at feast tables. These representations reflect the idealized country life of the Late Antiquity and the aristocratic ideology, prosperity and abundance. In addition, bird figures appear in the depictions as symbols official authority and religious elements such as eagle (sovereignty) and dove (Holy Spirit). Also, bird figures are represented quite frequently in their natural environment in the Byzantine period, in paradise depictions or mosaic pavements in religious buildings<sup>15</sup>.

The most important data that enables the identification of the ceramic bird-feeder found in Olympos is a mosaic pavement with such a symbolic religious depiction. This mosaic floor pavement has been discovered during excavations at Sinop Balatlar Church in 2018<sup>16</sup>. The mosaic pavement dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD was placed on a grave. The rhombus located in the middle of the mosaic contains a bird-house with pigeons around it (Fig. 8). The bird-feeder depicted in the mosaic has a red-brown color. Therefore, the material may be defined as ceramic, similar to the bird-feeder discovered in Olympos. Also the shape of the bird-feeder which has been represented in this mosaic resembles to the ceramic bird-feeder found in Olympos from many aspects.

So far, no examples of wicker bird-houses as shown in the mosaic of Dominus Julius have been discovered. The similarity between the bird-feeder found in Olympos and the bird-house made with wicker in the mosaic pavement in Carthage, gives us an idea that the potters used this type of bird-houses as a model when designing the ceramic bird-feeder. The bird-house made with wicker has a single opening. But the ceramic bird-feeder from Olympos and the one depicted on the mosaic in Sinop have many small holes on sides so that birds can eat easily. Both of the finds from Olympos and Emporio have five windows each. In mosaic depictions, the number of openings on side is a guideline for distinguishing whether the depicted object is a bird-house or a bird-feeder. Ceramic bird-feeders have not yet been fully identified because of finds are in small quantities and due to the difficulty their shape presents for identification. Although there are only few depictions of this kind of bird-feeder in the Roman and Byzantine period, it must have been a frequently used object in the gardens of residences according to the historical sources.

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15 Talgam, 2014: 214, 81-256. Different kinds of bird names are mentioned in both testaments. Scenes from the Old Testament that include birds are Genesis (1:20), Adam Naming the Animals (Genesis 2: 19-20), Noah's Ark (Genesis 7: 8-9), Manna and Quail (Exodus 16). It is possible to see bird figures in New Testament scenes, such as The Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:16, Mark 1: 9, Luke 3: 21-22, John 1:32).

16 I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Gülgün Köroğlu and Doç.Dr. Emine Tok for sharing their knowledge and great opinions.

The clay of the ceramic bird-feeder found in Olympos resembles the Late Roman D group of red slip ceramics which are mostly considered to be of Cypriot origin. It has been found in a context defined as dump in the east of the viridarium (courtyard) of the Episkopeion, between the southeast corner of the stylobate and the north wall of the Room 20 (M20). A large number of glass, iron nails and pottery fragments have been also found in this context. Pottery finds that provide dating are table wares, amphorae and kitchen wares used in daily life. Among these there are table ware such as Hayes Late Roman D Ware Form 8, Form 9, Form 11 and African Red Slip Ware Form 105 which have been previously identified in the studies conducted in the Eastern Mediterranean. Also commercial amphorae such as LRA 1, LRA 3, and LRA 4 and fusiform unguentarium fragments were found in the same context<sup>17</sup>. According to the general chronology of the area and the context data, the bird-feeder from Olympos is should be dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.

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17 Öztaşkın, 2017, çiz. 1, 3; for Afrika Form 105 see Hayes, 1972, 166-168.

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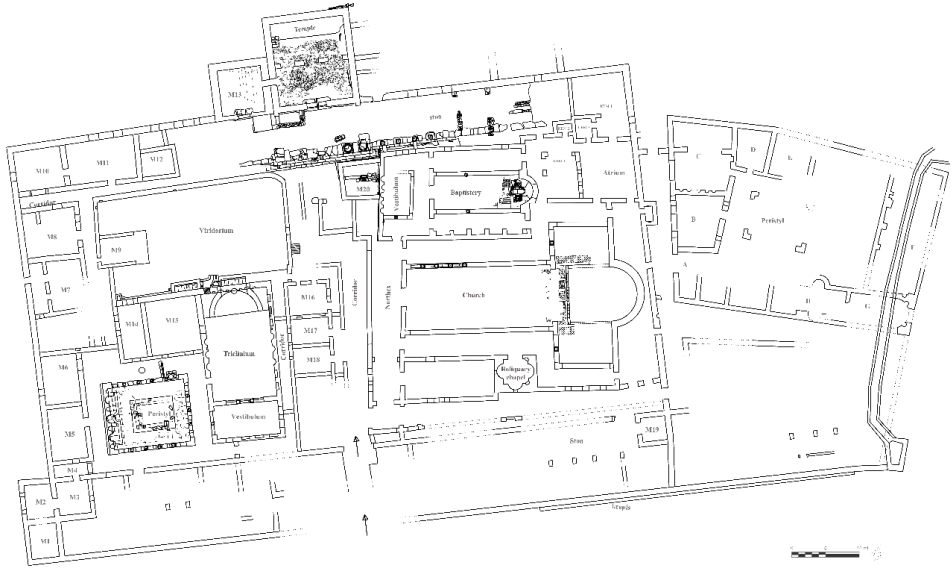


Figure 1. The plan of the Episcopal Palace in Olympos (Olympos Excavation archive)

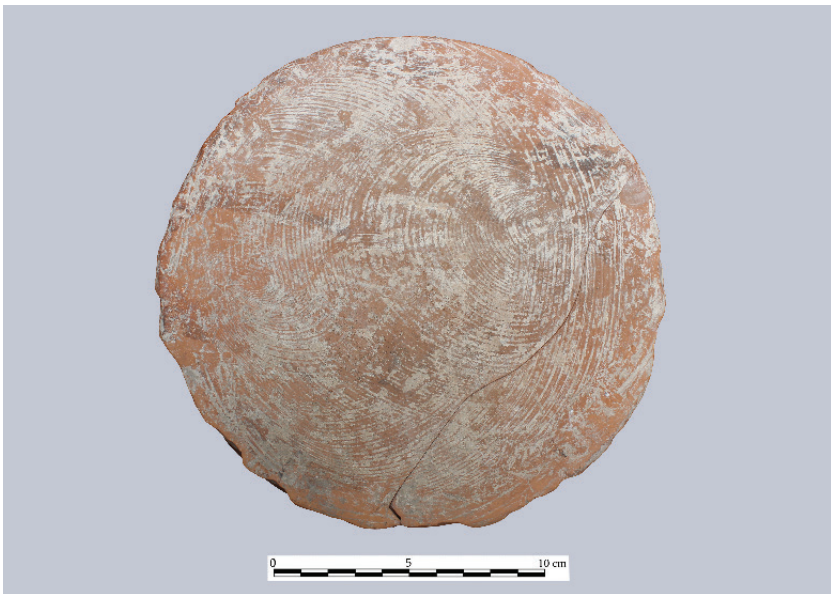


Figure 2. The ceramic bird-feeder found in Olympos

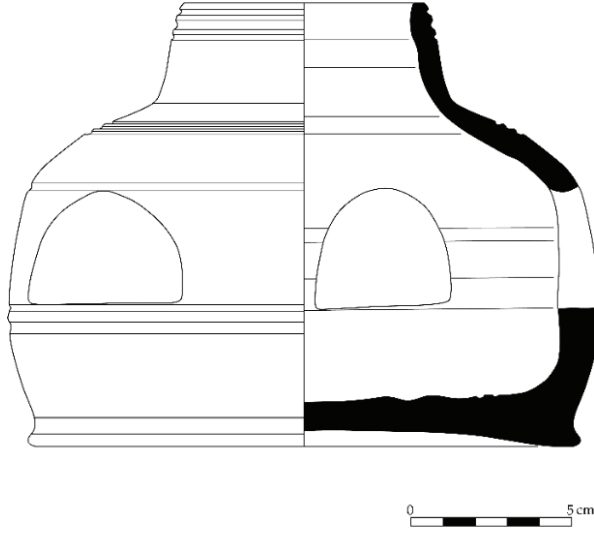




**Figure 3.** View from top the ceramic bird-feeder found in Olympos



**Figure 4.** The base of the ceramic bird-feeder found in Olympos



**Figure 5.** The drawing of the ceramic bird-feeder found in Olympos



**Figure 6.** The ceramic object found in Emporio (Ballance, 1989, pl.26/279)



**Figure 7.** Detail from the ‘Dominus Julius Mosaic’ from Carthage (The National Bardo Museum)



**Figure 8.** The mosaic pavement has been found at Sinop Balatlar Church  
(Sinop Balatlar Church Excavation archive)



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