

A STAMPED ROMAN AMPHORA SIGNED BY ΕΦΗΒΟΣ DISCOVERED AT CIOROIU NOU (DOLJ COUNTY)

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Keywords: *amphora, Greek letters, stamp, producer, Roman time.*

Abstract: *The present paper was made possible thanks to a chance discovery made during the 2021 archaeological excavations at Cioroiu Nou, when a fragment of a stamped amphora handle was found. This piece originates from the Greek world or, in any case, from a Greek-speaking area.*

This paper results from a chance discovery made during the archaeological excavations we carried out in 2021 at Cioroiu Nou, when a fragment of an amphora handle with a stamp on the surface was discovered. The discovery site is found in the western vicinity of the Roman fortress, on the ploughed land from the Eruga stream that flows around it. It is the third discovery of this kind from Cioroiu Nou, after the first two with stamps of the producers *Dionysogenes*¹ and *Quartus*². It is very interesting to note that all three amphora stamps discovered so far at Cioroiu Nou, come from the Greek world, or anyway, from a Greek-speaking area. Meanwhile, some amphora stamps from the same period, from the Olt valley, were also published³.

1. Cioroiu Nou;

DESCRIPTION: Amphora handle made of fine red clay; only a fragment of the piece has been preserved, namely the "shoulder" of the amphora; type Dressel 24 *similis*; on the surface there is a yellowish-white slip and above it, a round stamp with Greek letters, rendered in relief; dimensions: preserved height -

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¹ BONDOC 2011, p. 145–150.

² BONDOC 2021, p. 157–163.

³ PETOLESCU & BONDOC 2019, p. 201–210.

8.5 cm; maximum diameter of the handle - 5 cm; minimum diameter - 4 cm; stamp diameter - 2 cm; letter height: 0.4–0.6 cm (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Stamped amphora handle from Cioroiu Nou.

The paste from which the amphora was made is of very good quality, and the firing process of the vessel was uniform. Assigning the amphora to a specific type of the ones specified by those who deal with these aspects, could be possible, but also risky.

The features of the piece could indicate the Dressel 24 *similis* shape, but without being 100 percent sure. As for the usefulness of the amphora, for storing and transporting wine or oil or other products, this too cannot be precisely indicated. We only know that the amphorae made in this way, with yellowish-white slip on the surface, were usually containers intended for olive oil.

The lecture of this inscription is *ΕΦΗΒΟΥ*⁴. It seems to be the genitive of the proper name Ephebos, identifying probably the producer of the stamped amphora. This is not a very common name although it does appear in a few other locations.

⁴ It was possible after the cleaning and restoration process made by S.V. Gheorghe from the Oltenia Museum Craiova, to whom we thank.

PARALLELS

Ephebos is also attested by other discoveries of the same kind⁵. It is clear that we are dealing with a producer of transport amphorae from the Greek or Greek-speaking world. Referring strictly to the area we know, two similar discoveries are worth noting.

2. *Sucidava-Celei*;

A handle amphora with similar stamp was discovered in the civilian settlement of Sucidava, in the fill of a pit, together with fragments of ceramic vessels from the first half of the 3rd century AD. A stamp with Greek letters has been preserved fragmentarily on the surface of the handle; the reading is the same like above: *EΦH(BOY)*⁶. According to the first publisher, the letters would be 1.2 cm high. Other details were not specified (Fig. 2).

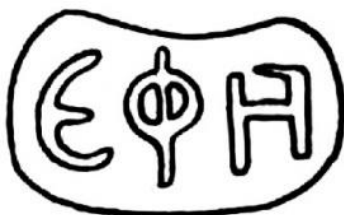


Fig. 2. The stamp on the amphora handle discovered at Sucidava-Celei (after D. Tudor).

3. *Aquincum* / Budapest;

From the *canabae* of the Roman camp Aquincum, a fragment of an amphora handle was found, made of fine red-pink clay, with a yellowish-white slip on the surface. A round stamp⁷, entirely similar to the one from Cioroiu Nou, has been applied to the top of the handle. The reading is the same: *EΦHBOY*. The preserved dimensions: 4.8 x 2.3 cm; thickness - 0.9 cm (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The stamp on the amphora handle from Aquincum.

⁵ <https://el.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%AD%CF%86%CE%B7%CE%B2%CE%BF%CF%82>.

⁶ TUDOR 1966, p. 601, no. 23; TUDOR 1968b, p. 394, no. 8; POPILIAN 1974, p. 140, pl. 3/11; POPILIAN 1976, p. 42; IDR II, p. 134, no. 286; RUSCU 2003, p. 75, no. 128, with the bibliography; ARDEȚ 2006, p. 229, no. 43, fig. 127.

⁷ KELEMEN 1993, p. 46, no. 2 and fig. 1/5.

These are the amphorae of the producer Ephebos, known to this day in our region (Fig. 4). In all known cases, the stamp was applied to the curve of the amphora handle. It is possible that there are other discoveries of this type, unpublished or inaccessible to us.

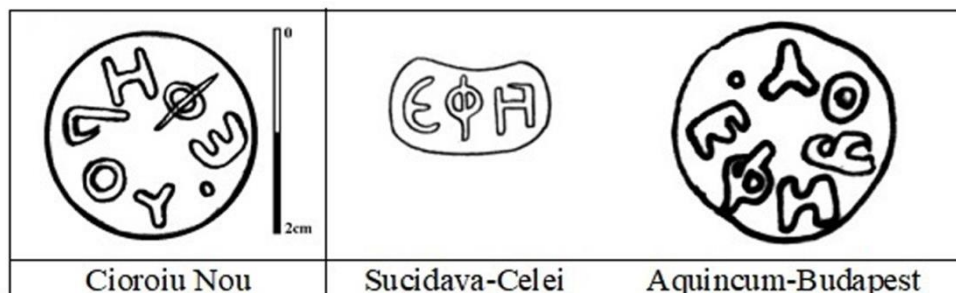


Fig. 4. Stamps on the amphorae belonging to the producer Ephebos.

We proceeded to map⁸ the three locations where amphorae with the Ephebos producer's stamps were discovered (Fig. 5). It can be easily deduced that the route on which they were brought started from the Aegean Sea basin to the western coast of the Black Sea, after which they were transported up the Danube.

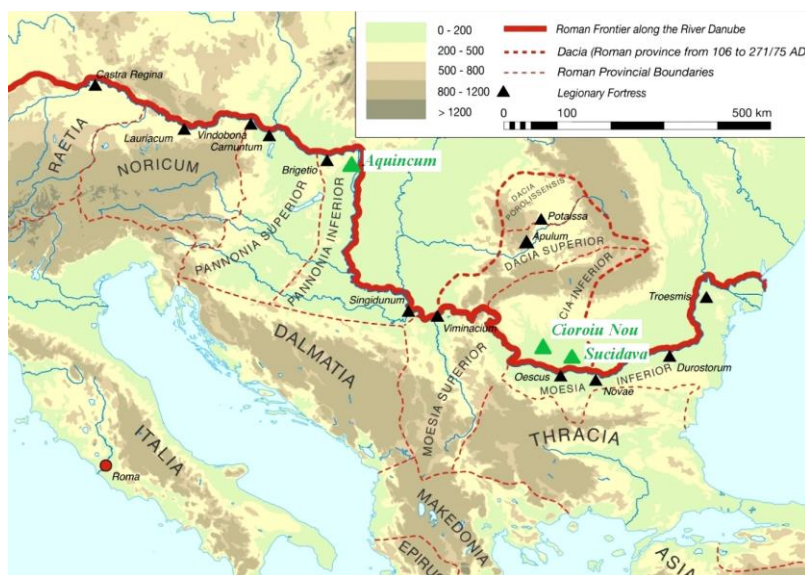


Fig. 5. Map with the three locations where amphorae of producer Ephebos were discovered.

⁸ https://i0.wp.com/followinghadrian.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DanubeLimes02Roman_ProvincesPhysicalMap.jpg?zoom=2&resize=880%2C312&ssl=1

The Roman amphorae with Greek stamps discovered in Oltenia were dated by Dumitru Tudor to the 3rd century AD⁹, more precisely in the first half of that century¹⁰. Further, Gheorghe Popilian nuanced this chronology, preferring to widen this period starting from the end of the 2nd century AD¹¹.

As for the dating of the amphorae of Ephebos, the most precise clues were provided by the piece from Aquincum, dated very broadly between 140–260 AD¹².

Until now, several discoveries of stamped Greek amphorae from the Roman time are known in Oltenia. Similar discoveries were also made in Transylvania, even if not in such a large number. All this suggest the intensity of commercial exchanges between the Roman province Dacia and the Greek world in the Aegean Sea basin.

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⁹ TUDOR 1968a, p. 519, no. 300; see also ARDEȚ 2006, p. 229, no. 43.

¹⁰ TUDOR 1968b, p. 398.

¹¹ POPILIAN 1976, p. 44.

¹² KELEMEN 1993, p. 47.