

SOME THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS REGARDING THE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF TABLEWARE IN THE LOWER DANUBE AND WEST-PONTIC REGION

Marian MOCANU*

Cuvinte-cheie: spațiul vest-pontic, Dunărea de Jos, ceramică de masă, cronologie, influențe culturale.

Keywords: West-Pontic area, the Lower Danube, tableware, chronology, cultural influences.

Rezumat: În cuprinsul acestui articol este abordată problematica producției și consumului ceramicii de masă cu firnis roșu în zona vest-pontică și la Dunărea de Jos în primele două secole ale stăpânirii romane. Sunt formulate o serie de întrebări referitoare la această problematică și sunt oferite posibile răspunsuri. Începuturile producției ceramicii de masă cu firnis roșu în zona vest-pontică și la Dunărea de Jos este analizată din perspectivă geografică, istorică, cronologică și culturală. De asemenea sunt discutate pe larg principalele asemănări și deosebiri dintre ceramica de masă produsă în Moesia Inferior și cea din Dacia, Moesia Superior și nordul Mării Negre.

Abstract: This article deals with the problem of production and consumption of red slip tableware in the Lower Danube and West-Pontic areas during the first two centuries of Roman occupation. Several questions concerning this topic are formulated, and possible answers are given. The production beginnings of red slip tableware in the Lower Danube and West-Pontic regions are analysed from geographical, historical, chronological and cultural perspectives. Also, a broad discussion regarding the similarities and differences between tableware produced in Lower Moesia and those from Dacia, Upper Moesia and northern Black Sea is provided.

In recent years, more and more articles and books have been published dealing with the production and consumption of tableware in the Pontic area and on the Lower Danube. Among them, the books signed by K. Domžalski and S. Ivanov are worth mentioning¹. The sudden emergence of a large amount of information on red slip tableware in the Black Sea and Lower Danube region raises several new questions about this historical phenomenon and its social and cultural implications.

* Marian MOCANU: The Eco-Museal Research Institute in Tulcea; e-mail: mocanum1984@gmail.com

¹ DOMZALSKI 2021; IVANOV 2022.

In the following lines, one will attempt to formulate some of the questions and search for possible answers. For this article, only the first two centuries of our era will be considered. There are many aspects to the study of red slip tableware from the Pontic and Lower Danube areas. One will start with methodological problems, and the first question that arises is:

Where does the West-Pontic area end and where does the Lower Danube region begin?

It should be underlined from the start that there is no clear demarcation between these two regions and that every researcher interested in these areas uses one term or the other because it suits their research better. It is not uncommon for these terms to be used interchangeably, as at least some of their areas overlap. There are two opposing tendencies in the archaeological literature on these regions. The first, which can be considered minimalist, includes in the Pontic area only the settlements located by the sea, while the second tends to include all Roman provinces around the Black Sea. The same logic can be applied to the area of the Lower Danube. Settlements such as Halmyris or Orgame/Argamum, which lie directly at the mouth of the Danube, can be attributed to the Lower Danube area, but at the same time are to be considered Pontic fortresses. Methodologically, the overlap of these two terms is obvious.

Geographically, the area of the Lower Danube is bounded in the west by the Iron Gates gorge and continues eastwards to the Black Sea. The stretch of land between the Danube in the north and the 'Stara Planina' Mountains in the south, which, more or less, coincides with the province of Moesia Inferior, belongs to the Lower Danube region. North of the Danube, the plains from the historical regions of Oltenia and Wallachia in Romania, and the area from southern Bessarabia also belong to the Lower Danube region. Instead, the West-Pontic area begins at the Dniester's estuary and continues south until the Haemus mountains meet the sea, north of Emona. How far it goes inland is an intricate question one will try to answer in the next paragraph.

In such a geographical context, one will try to find an objective criterion to make at least a small distinction between the terms 'Pontic' and 'Lower Danube'. After careful consideration, a linguistic/cultural criterion was chosen to distinguish the two regions. Long before the establishment of Roman rule, the Pontic area and its surroundings were under Greek cultural influence, as the Black Sea had been an extension of the Aegean since the early Iron Age. This significant Greek presence was continued and even strengthened in Roman times by the settlement of a considerable number of colonists of Anatolian origin. From this point of view, all regions around the Black Sea that were inhabited by a Greek-origin population can be attributed to the Pontic cultural area. Consequently, all Greek settlements from the Lower Danube region can be included in the aforementioned Pontic cultural area. Due to historical circumstances, it is not possible to draw a clear line between the western (Latin-speaking) and the Oriental or Pontic (Greek-speaking) areas in the Lower Danube Region. This historical ambiguity comes into play when one tries to describe the red slip tableware workshops from the Lower Danube Basin as workshops with

Western influences or as Pontic workshops, or even to consider these workshops as a separate category. In summary, the Greek/Oriental culture is the main feature of the Pontic area, which will be considered when discussing the origins and beginnings of the Lower Danube red slip tableware workshops.

How can the red slip ware produced in the West-Pontic/Lower Danube region be defined?

The most common term used for tableware from the Black Sea region is 'Pontic Sigillata'. This type of red slip pottery was first introduced by S. Loeschcke and H. Dragendorff in the late 19th century. The German scholars used some wares from the Hellenistic and early Roman periods from the northern Black Sea area (most of them were found in Olbia in southern Ukraine), which were then kept in the collections of various European museums². For most of the 20th century, not much was written about red slip ware from the Pontic region, with a few exceptions by Soviet scholars such as T. Knipovici, who published the Olbia³ ware and the pottery discovered in Myrmekion and Tyritake⁴ in the interwar period. The next important contribution came in 1985 when J. W. Hayes published a small chapter on 'Pontic Sigillata' in the second volume of *'Atlante delle forme ceramiche'*⁵. At that time Hayes placed the Pontic Sigillata in the other categories of Eastern Sigillata, beginning with Eastern Sigillata A and ending with Cypriot Sigillata. Although only five forms were inventoried (probably the forms known from Mediterranean sites at the time), Hayes considers Pontic Sigillata to be a completely different ware from that of the Mediterranean workshops. About the place of origin, Hayes does not deviate significantly from Dragendorff's information, who localises them in the northern Black Sea region (today southern Ukraine)⁶. One of the most comprehensive works on Pontic tableware is signed by D. Zhuravlev. The Russian scholar published a series of articles and a book on the subject. According to him, Pontic Sigillata was produced in several workshops or groups of workshops that have not yet been located but are somewhere in the Black Sea basin. He also distinguishes at least three categories of Pontic Sigillata with different characteristics of fabric, slip and wall thickness, which supports the existence of several production centres⁷.

One category of ware produced in the West-Pontic and Lower Danube area, on which this paper focuses, is the so-called 'Moesian Sigillata'. The 'Moesian Sigillata' is associated with the production centres from nearby Nicopolis ad Istrum and other workshops along the Danube Limes, whose existence began in the late first century AD. The main classification of the tableware produced in the Nicopolis ad Istrum workshops was published by B. Sultov in 1985 and recently updated by S. Ivanov. The prevailing view in both Bulgarian and Romanian literature is that this ware is a separate category from Pontic tableware, although the Pontic influence on 'Moesian

² DRAGENDORFF 1980, p. 19–22.

³ KNIPOVICI 1929.

⁴ KNIPOVICI 1952.

⁵ HAYES 1985.

⁶ HAYES 1985, p. 92.

⁷ ZHURAVLEV 2010, p. 40.

Sigillata' is acknowledged. In general, Bulgarian and Romanian archaeologists tend to group the 'Moesian Sigillata' with the 'Dacian Sigillata' This was first done by O. Brukner who, in her account of Roman pottery from the Yugoslav part of the province of Lower Pannonia, grouped the Moesian and Dacian relief sigillata together by comparing the tableware from Butovo (Lower Moesia) with that from Romula (Southern Carpathian Dacia)⁸. Other experts followed this example and considered Moesian and Dacian tableware as one and the same group⁹. Some influences between the workshops for Moesian and Dacian tableware are obvious, especially the oriental influences on the Dacian production complexes, which are most evident in the workshops in present-day Oltenia (e.g. Romula), but are also present in the repertoire of craftsmen from the Inner Carpathian area. Nevertheless, we do not agree with the grouping of Dacian and Moesian tableware. At first glance, the cultural background of the Moesian production complexes differs from that of the Dacian ones, which we will discuss later.

In the archaeological literature, there are other categories of red slip ware produced in the Black Sea during the Roman period, such as the 'Bosporan Sigillata' or the red slip pottery from Chersonesus, but these will not be discussed further as the relevance of these groups to this article is marginal.

Where and when does the production of 'Pontic Sigillata' begin?

So far, no production site for 'Pontic Sigillata' has been found. However, following the pattern for establishing new red slip tableware production complexes in newly acquired territories by the Roman Empire, one can attempt to formulate a hypothesis about the beginnings of the 'Pontic Sigillata' workshops. The most important historical event that stands out and fits into the chronological framework is the end of the Kingdom of Pontus as a puppet state and its incorporation into the Roman Empire in the middle of the first century AD. This event may have been the trigger for potters from Asia Minor and beyond to settle in this southern Pontic area in search of new economic opportunities. Thus, new production centres with strong micro – Asian and Italic cultural influences may have emerged in the Black Sea area. The incorporation of the entire southern Pontic coast into the Roman state in Nero's time coincides with the earliest series of Pontic Sigillata. Combined with the rise of tableware workshops in the Aegean, especially those for ESB, this is a very appealing historical context for the emergence of the new Pontic production centre for red slip tableware. As far as cultural influences are concerned, archaeological literature has long mentioned the role of Italic and Aegean potters in the early phases of Pontic Sigillata production¹⁰. The strong influence of the ESB on the beginnings of Pontic Sigillata is undisputed. Instead, the Italic influences are more intuitive, as it is very difficult to separate the genuine influences from those that came through the ESB. Unfortunately, the lack of large – scale archaeological fieldwork in the southern Pontic area is an important obstacle to clarifying the place of origin of Pontic tableware.

⁸ BRUKNER 1981, p. 177.

⁹ ZHURAVLEV 2010, p. 35–36.

¹⁰ HAYES 1985, p. 92; ZHURAVLEV 2013, p. 683; MOCANU 2021, p. 231.

How does the production of the Lower Danube/West-Pontic tableware begin?

While the beginnings of Pontic Sigillata production can be linked to the rather slow integration of the micro-Asian peninsula into the Roman Empire, the production of Roman – style red slip ware in the West-Pontic and Lower Danube area is directly related to the establishment of the limes. The creation of the limes on the Lower Danube took place towards the end of the first century AD in connection with the struggle between the Romans and the Dacian kingdom led by Decebalus and his predecessors. There are several theories about the exact date of the foundation of the limes, which will not be discussed further here¹¹.

A parallel can be drawn between the foundation of workshops at the Rhenish Limes and those on the Lower Danube. In the Western Roman Empire, the foundation of new production sites closely follows the expansion of the empire, and the new workshops represent branches of the already existing ones. The pattern begins with the Arretine workshops, which expanded their establishments to the Italian peninsula, Asia Minor, and southern Gaul in the Julio-Claudian period. A second phase of expansion in tableware production took place in the late first and early second centuries with a newer generation of workshops along the Rhine and Danube. These newer production complexes were founded by colonists from the above – mentioned areas, from Gaul and northern Italy in the case of the Rhenan and Middle Danube workshops and from Asia Minor for the workshops along the Lower Danube and West-Pontic region. Following the logic of this pattern, we can conclude that the workshops from Lower Moesia were founded by Asia Minor colonists in search of new economic opportunities in the historical context of a newly formed province along the Lower Danube and the western Black Sea coast¹². This explains the direct link between the Pontic Sigillata and the tableware produced in Lower Moesia, as well as the great influence of Aegean craftsmen on the West-Pontic tableware.

When does the production of the Lower Danube/West-Pontic tableware begin?

At first glance, the answer to this question seems obvious. If one follows the Bulgarian literature and the contributions of some foreign researchers, such as the team of A. Poulter, it is clear that the production of red slip tableware on the Lower Danube started in the early second century, after the Roman conquest of Dacia. The problem with this assertion is that it is based only on the chronology established by Sultov for the production complexes around Nicopolis ad Istrum. Moesia Inferior, however, is a vast province, and the tableware production cannot

¹¹ In the lower Danube archaeological literature, two main theories about the foundation of the limes are known. Alexandru Suceveanu assumes that the limes was built during the Flavian dynasty in the second half of the first century AD (SUCEVEANU 2001, p. 307), while A. Poulter proposes the end of the first Dacian War at the beginning of the second century AD as the definitive date for the construction of the Lower Danube limes East of Nove (POULTER 1986, p. 519–523).

¹² This historical reality has long been recognised by archaeologists conducting fieldwork at Bulgarian sites. See e.g. SULTOV 1985, p. 107; POULTER 1999, p. 36.

be attributed to a single centre, even if it is the most important. In the case of workshops on the Limes, such as Novae or Durostorum, we can accept the idea that their activity began after the Dacian Wars, but we cannot ignore the possibility that other pottery centres, probably closer to the Black Sea coast, were already producing red slip tableware from the end of the first century AD. However, there is so far little archaeological evidence to support this idea. Some finds suggest that tableware was already being made in the last two decades of the 1st century AD. In 2020, a kantharos decorated using barbotine technique was discovered in a cremation grave in Noviodunum's cemetery. Two coins were also found in the same grave, one of which dates from the early reign of Emperor Domitian¹³. These kantharoi, which have all the characteristics of the tableware crafted in the West Pontic area, can be accounted as prototypes for those produced starting with the 2nd century in the workshops of Nicopolis ad Istrum. Sultov noted regarding the kantharoi produced at Pavlikeni as follows: *'This type was produced only in the ceramic centre near Pavlikeni about the mid–2nd century [....]. Is very often to be found in ancient necropolises, especially in Thrace'*¹⁴. However, the cup found in the Noviodunum cemetery is not the single one in the western Black Sea area. An almost identical cup was discovered by M. Mănuclu-Adameşteanu in the late 1970 during research undertaken in an Early Roman cemetery from Enisala. According to Mănuclu-Adameşteanu that grave dates from the end of the first century AD¹⁵. A. Rădulescu published one kantharos from Mangalia, with chronological framing during the 1st and early 2nd centuries¹⁶. One more cup decorated in barbotine style comes from Tulcea, probably from a settlement on 'Tabară' Hill, not far from ancient Aegyssus, unfortunately with no precise information concerning the spot and context of discovery¹⁷. Another kantharos comes from an Early Roman inhumation grave discovered in Ibida – Slava Rusă. Beside this cup in the same grave was found also one plate with vertical rim (Sigillata Pontica), two small cups Form 30 according to Zhuravlev's typology, and one single-handed jug. The entire deposit was dated to the second half of the 1st century and the first half of the 2nd¹⁸. Nevertheless, for these cups, a circulation pattern in the western Black Sea can be suggested¹⁹. It seems that in the late first century AD in the north-eastern Lower Moesia a kantharos decorated in barbotine style was extensively used as a funerary offering. Unfortunately, one cannot individuate the precise location where this type of cup was produced before the Dacian Wars. The production of such kantharoi in the western Black Sea can be suggested by similar vessels discovered north of the Danube, to the East of the Carpathians Mountains in today's Moldova region²⁰. After the Roman conquest of

¹³ MOCANU, STĂNICĂ, STĂNESCU 2021, p. 228, fig. 3/7.

¹⁴ SULTOV 1985, p. 78, fig. 37, no. 2–3.

¹⁵ MĂNUCLU-ADAMEŞTEANU 1984, p. 33–34, pl. 5/25789.

¹⁶ RĂDULESCU 1975, p. 333, pl. 1/2.

¹⁷ This item can be found in the Collection from the Museum of History and Archaeology in Tulcea, being unpublished today. It's illustrated in the Exhibition Catalogue 'The Romans in the Left Pontus during the Principate'.

¹⁸ PARASCHIV, DOBOŞ, POPESCU 2006, p. 404.

¹⁹ Similar discoveries were made in Crimea, being dated to the second half of the 1st century AD (ZHURAVLEV 2010, p. 63, pl. 30/234–238).

²⁰ URASCHI 1987, p. 117, fig. 11/11; CROITORU 2011, p. 45, no. 470, fig. 15/470.

Dacia, according to Sultov, from the mid – 2nd century, an evolution of these kantharoi took place at the Pavlikeni workshop²¹. The same type of cup is presented by S. Ivanov, who dated it during the 2nd century and assigns it to the workshops at Verbovski Livadi²². Perhaps the origins of this cup should be searched among the series of Asia Minor tableware from the 1st century AD.

The kantharos decorated with barbotine is not the single type of cup discovered in archaeological deposits dating from the late 1st century AD. Some variants of small or medium-sized globular-shaped cups and some types of pots were also unearthed in deposits dating from the same chronological frame²³. All this pottery which originates especially from well – dated funerary contexts it may be evidence of tableware production activity on the Lower Danube before the Dacians Wars from the first decade of the 2nd century.

In the West-Pontic area, there is an important tradition of crafting pottery preceding the expansion of Roman rule around the Black Sea. For example, at Histria there is significant evidence of tableware production during the Hellenistic period²⁴. Even for workshops from Butovo, Pavlikeni and Hotnica, Sultov recognized the existence of local, Thracian production centres before the establishment of the Roman ones in the early 2nd century²⁵. Returning to the Black Sea coast, the earliest Roman tableware workshop from Histria was dated according to archaeological evidence during Emperor's Trajan reign²⁶. If one takes into consideration the repertoire of tableware forms ascribed to local production, it can be noticed that at least the kantharoi belonging to Form XXIII (following Suceveanu's typology) are specific to the second half of the 1st century AD. Suceveanu's suggestion that this type of cup had its origins in the northern Black Sea can be misleading²⁷. These could have been produced in the southern Black Sea as well, similar cups being crafted in the earliest phase of Çandarlı workshops²⁸.

At a general glance, one can consider that is enough plausible archaeological evidence to suggest the beginning of tableware production in the West-Pontic and Lower Danube area towards the end of the 1st century AD after the Roman state organised the Limes on the Lower Danube and the north-eastern part of Lower Moesia (today's Dobruja) was legally integrated into the Empire. At the same time, is obvious that the apex of tableware production in this area was reached in the 2nd century, after the conquest of Dacia and securing the northern border. An earlier tableware production can also be indicated by the permanent deployment of Roman troops and veterans settling in the north-eastern Lower Moesia towards the end of the 1st century AD²⁹. As a consequence, following the pattern for the establishment of new tableware production workshops in newly acquired territories, described

²¹ SULTOV 1985, p. 78.

²² IVANOV 2022, p. 45–47, fig. 17/types IV, V and VI.

²³ OȚA 2013, p. 194.

²⁴ ILIESCU, BOTIȘ 2018, p. 195.

²⁵ SULTOV 1985, p. 100.

²⁶ ILIESCU, BOTIȘ 2018, p. 195.

²⁷ SUCEVEANU 2000, p. 84–85, pl. 33–34.

²⁸ HAYES 1985, p. 74, tav. 16/11.

²⁹ MATEI-POPESCU 2010, p. 239–240.

above, it seems probable that the beginning of tableware crafted in Roman style on the Lower Danube and West-Pontic area can be dated in the late 1st century AD.

What are the origins of the Lower Danube/West-Pontic tableware?

To better understand the origins of tableware produced in the West-Pontic and Lower Danube area, one will use some technical features concerning the production and decoration of these wares. In the latest classification of tableware produced in workshops located between the Balkan Mountains and the Danube, S. Ivanov individuates non less than fifteen types of plates, twenty types of bowls, three types of trays, twenty types of cups, eight types of jugs, four types of the so-called 'table amphorae', which are in essence a type of jugs with two handles, and three types of what he called 'krateroid vessels'³⁰. This is the most complete classification of tableware produced in the Lower Danube and West-Pontic area so far. The large variety of tableware forms testifies to an intensive production rate for the Lower Danube workshops, spanning at least over one and a half centuries. Unfortunately, Ivanov's classification lacks a quantitative perspective on the production of tableware in this region, which makes it difficult to guess what the most popular types are and what those produced less. Thus, an important tool in establishing the main origins of tableware is missing. For this reason, one will rely on indirect evidence that can indicate the main origins and other lesser influences on tableware crafted in Lower Moesia.

A first comparison between the tableware originating from Lower Moesia and that discovered in the northern Black Sea (especially Crimea) shows a great similarity of forms present in both areas. If one takes a look over the plates catalogued by Zhuravlev, it can be ascertained that all main forms in Crimea have a correspondent in the production centres from the Lower Danube. Only the chronological frame differs, those from the northern Black Sea being dated earlier. The same can be stated regarding all other forms of tableware (bowls, jugs, cups, etc.) analysed by Zhuravlev and Ivanov. What is almost lacking from Crimea is the tableware decorated with barbotine and stamping, but a definitive statement concerning this cannot be formulated because of insufficient information (especially from a quantitative point of view). In their work, neither Zhuravlev nor Ivanov make any analysis from a quantitative standpoint. Thus, one does not have any ratio between the imported tableware and the locally crafted, or a ratio between the main production centres that exported tableware into the Pontic and Lower Danube area.

However, the main reason for this uncertainty in studying Pontic tableware is the almost total lack of information regarding the south-Pontic area, of which very few groups have been published so far. A decade ago, Zhuravlev published a small fine ware assemblage discovered in Pompeiopolis after the research undertaken between 2006 and 2010. According to the information presented in that paper one can see that the tableware from the southern Black Sea has many similar features to those from the western and northern Black Sea, which means that the tableware from these three regions shares common roots³¹. These commonalities should be

³⁰ IVANOV 2022.

³¹ ZHURAVLEV 2011, p. 149–153, pl. 1–6. Zhuravlev recognised, also the resemblance of the tableware from Pompeiopolis to that from the northern Black Sea (ZHURAVLEV 2011, p. 154).

investigated in-depth by multidisciplinary methods to find concrete evidence and may be to pinpoint at least some of the locations where Pontic tableware was produced. In their absence, only theoretical discussion can be made concerning the production, chronology, and consumption of such wares around the Black Sea.

Returning to tableware production in the Lower Danube area, besides overwhelming similar features with Pontic Sigillata, some influences from Western workshops can also be noticed. By tradition, in Romanian archaeological literature, the wares crafted in Lower Moesia (especially those from the workshops nearby Nicopolis ad Istrum) were considered Western imports, while the tableware found in coastal cities was included into Eastern types of tableware. A very thick line was drawn between fortresses situated on the Limes (considered under Western influences) and the Greek cities on the Black Sea which remained in the Greco – Oriental cultural area³². As time and more recent research have proven, this theory was far from being right.

There are only two genuine shapes of Western origins when studying the forms classifications made by Zhuravlev and Ivanov. Ivanov framed the first one as bowl Type 1 and this form is not found among the tableware from Crimea. Its production began in the early 2nd century and was unanimously considered an imitation of the Dragendorff 35/36 form. It remains in production during the 2nd century³³. The second form is represented by the trays with relief decoration. These were widely spread in the Black Sea area and the Lower Danube. In terms of their origins, they were generally considered imitations of Dragendorff 39 form; however, there are some recent opinions that their production was inspired by silver and bronze vessels³⁴. In Lower Moesia, the production of relief-decorated trays was certified for workshops from Durostorum³⁵ and those from the Nicopolis ad Istrum area³⁶. In terms of chronological framework, the production has begun in the first decades of the 2nd century and continued in the 3rd and perhaps 4th century.

What are the main characteristics of the Lower Danube/West-Pontic tableware?

As in the case of the Pontic sigillata, the tableware from the Lower Danube can be divided into several categories. Three years ago, six types of wares produced in this geographical region were identified³⁷. The first type consists of high-quality plates and bowls with the same shape and decoration as the Pontic sigillata found in the Crimea. These vessels were produced in the workshops around Nicopolis ad Istrum from the early 2nd century³⁸. Similar forms were also produced in other workshops from the Lower Danube, especially in those near the Black Sea coast³⁹.

In the Lower Danube region, there is a specific kind of tableware made of

³² BOUNEGRU 1988–1989, p. 108–109.

³³ IVANOV 2022, p. 29.

³⁴ ZHURAVLEV 2022, p. 123.

³⁵ BĂLTĂC 2018, p. 216–217.

³⁶ IVANOV 2022, p. 39–44.

³⁷ MOCANU 2021, p. 88–142.

³⁸ IVANOV 2022, platestype V and bowltypes II and III among others.

³⁹ ILIESCU, BOTIȘ 2018, p. 199–201, fig. 4–5.

white-grey fabric with a kaolin component. This kind of pottery was manufactured in the Durostorum workshops⁴⁰. There are three types of this pottery identified up to date: plates, bowls and cups made of this clay and covered with a red-brown slip of medium quality (known as Durostorum Red Slip ware), lead-glaze plates and trays (particularly Dragendorff 39 trays with relief decoration), and tableware with marbled slip. All these have in common the same type of fabric, being produced in the same workshop by the same potters. Unlike previous ware identical to Pontic sigillata, those with a kaolin component are hard to find in the Lower Danube settlements, being most probably a small batch of tableware imitating Western techniques and shapes.

Another type of pottery found in the Lower Danube region is characterized by its lower quality. It has thicker walls and a mediocre slip. This type of tableware was also produced in the areas west of the Iron Gates or north of the Danube, in the Provinces of Upper Moesia and Dacia. It represents the tableware that was widely manufactured in this region from the 2nd century until the end of the 4th century. A decade ago, this type was given the name "Early Pontic Red Slip" due to its possible connection with the category of late pottery named by K. Domžalski 'Pontic Red Slip'⁴¹. However, this topic will be discussed at length in a future article. Generally, these wares do not bear any decoration, and their shapes imitate both Eastern and Western workshops.

Local influences on ceramic production in the Lower Danube workshops, similar to other regions in the Roman Empire, are evident. Grey tableware that imitates both specific Roman forms and decorative methods (barbotine) reflect this trend. Despite being a significant part of the local pre-Roman tradition, grey slip tableware has been neglected in the literature, with relatively few references to this category to date. The way in which the ceramics of the pre-Roman tradition adapted to the new trends in the 2nd century is proof of the Romanization of the material culture of the West-Pontic region and the Lower Danube.

The tableware crafted in the Lower Danube and West Pontic region includes undecorated and decorated vessels. The main types of decoration are the ones realised in the barbotine technique, the stamped decoration, and the mould relief decoration. The most common form of decoration is the one in the barbotine technique, which can be found on various types of bowls, cups, and pots. The vegetal motifs inspire the barbotine decorative motifs. Stamped decoration is less common and typically features geometric figures or *planta pedis* – type stamps. It appears mainly on plates and bowls and sometimes in combination with incised lines by rouletting. The relief decoration is commonly found on trays representing imitations of the Dragendorff 39 shape. The Lower Danube and the western Black Sea area is likely the region of the Roman Empire where the decoration made in the barbotine technique is most commonly used which gives to the local production centres an element of authenticity.

⁴⁰ This type of fabric was identified and described for the first time by Crișan Mușețeanu (MUȘEȚEANU 2003, p. 35).

⁴¹ MOCANU 2014, p. 71–72.

Is there any difference between tableware production in the Lower Danube/West Pontic area and that in the Western Roman Provinces?

Upon examining the tableware produced in the Middle Danube, Lower Danube, and West Pontic areas, it is evident that there are similarities between them. These similarities relate to the influence of potters from the Western and Eastern Roman Empire over the Danube basin workshops. However, an element can be found that sets the tableware from the Lower Danube apart and suggests a stronger influence from oriental workshops. A study of the tableware pottery forms produced in Lower Moesia in the 2nd century showed that none of the workshops in this area produced hemispherical bowls with moulded decoration specific to the Dragendorff 37 form. The Dragendorff 37 bowls are the most commonly found moulded tableware in all Roman settlements from the 2nd century, not only on the Rhine, but also on the Danube. They were produced exclusively in the western workshops and those of the Middle Danube basin (provinces of Pannonia, Upper Moesia, and Dacia), and are therefore considered to be an exclusive marker of the western tableware potters.

Mapping the moulds for the Dragendorff 37 bowl known so far, one can see none in Lower Moesia. The most eastern tableware production centres where hemispherical mould-decorated bowls were crafted can be found in the provinces of Upper Moesia and Dacia. Up to date several places are known in Dacia where moulds for Dragendorff 37 bowls have been discovered. The most important seems to be the production centre from Micăsasa, located in the heart of Transylvania, on the valley of the river Târnava Mare⁴². Dragendorff 37 was not the only type of mould-decorated vessel produced in Dacia. A fragmentary mould for crafting Dragendorff bowls of form 30 is known from the settlement of Războieni-Cetate⁴³. Even in extra-Carpathian Dacia mould fragments for Dragendorff 37 were discovered in the past century⁴⁴. Several workshops in Moesia Superior are suitable to produce mould-decorated Dragendorff 37 bowls, such as Viminacium-Margum and Singidunum. As we have seen above, the production centres from Upper Moesia exerted their influence on the making of various terra sigillata in Dacia. A small amount of tableware made in Moesia Superior also reached settlements on the Lower Danube and in the western Black Sea area⁴⁵.

Currently, the production of Dragendorff 37 bowls in Lower Moesia cannot be completely ruled out, even if there is no evidence to support it. Nevertheless, a large number of Dragendorff 39 trays were produced at least in the workshops around Nicopolis ad Istrum and Durostorum. It is difficult to explain why the potters on the Lower Danube only produced trays decorated in relief and left the moulded hemispherical bowls aside. Perhaps their choice is related to their cultural background in the eastern Mediterranean, where Dragendorff 37 bowls were never produced.

⁴² RUSU-BOLINDEȚ 2016, p. 386–387, pl. 15/6. According to the cited paper, the production of the Dragendorff 37 bowls from Micăsasa was influenced by the potters from Viminacium-Margum in Upper Moesia.

⁴³ BOTIȘ 2018, p. 145–148, fig. 3/2.

⁴⁴ POPILIAN 1976, p. 59, pl. 23/258.

⁴⁵ MOCANU 2021, p. 82–87.

What is the place of the Lower Danube/West-Pontic workshops among the tableware production in the Roman Empire?

A definitive and comprehensive answer is impossible due to the subjectivity of modern researchers. With this caveat, one will attempt to answer at least partially this question. On a broader scale, the red slip tableware produced in the Lower Danube/West Pontic workshops in Roman times can be counted among the series on Eastern tableware. The strongest argument for this framing comes from the many similarities, both in shape and decoration techniques with the tableware discovered in the Northern Black Sea and Anatolia. These similarities represented the main argument for including the tableware produced in Lower Moesia in the larger group of Pontic Tableware in the published version of my PhD thesis⁴⁶. In a recent paper, D. Zhuravlev considered as a possible origin place for the relief decorated trays present in Crimea the North-Western Black Sea area, more precisely the territory of Romania⁴⁷. He presents as evidence a relief decorated tray coming from Potaissa, in inner Carpathian Dacia. In my opinion, Zhuravlev's example from Potaissa can be misleading. The main area where relief decorated trays were produced (without excluding Dacia) starting with the 2nd century is the Lower Danube. There is plenty of evidence for this, especially regarding the production centres around Nicopolis ad Istrum and Durostorum. What remains to be clarified in the future is a presumable connection between the relief decorated trays from Lower Moesia and those discovered in Crimea. Moreover, by adding the other similarities between the tableware produced in Moesia Inferior and the Pontic sigillata found in the Northern Black Sea, we may be able to answer at least partially the long-asked question regarding the production places for Pontic sigillata.

The tableware production of the Lower Danube/West-Pontic area is defined by its geography. This region is linked with Anatolia and the Eastern Mediterranean via the Black Sea. Instead, the connection with Central and Western Europe is made along the Danube Valley. Thus, the Eastern and Western cultural areas converge on the Lower Danube and West-Pontic coast, creating a complex and genuine material culture. Concerning tableware production, the vessels crafted in Lower Moesia can be considered the most Western among the Eastern series of red slip pottery, not only by geographical meanings but also by many Western cultural influences. In the same fashion, the tableware production in Dacia can be considered the most Eastern among the Western Sigillata series.

Conclusions

Summing up the information of this paper one can see that the beginning of red slip tableware production in the Lower Danube/West-Pontic area can be placed towards the end of the 1st century AD, when the first generation of colonists was settled in the area. The production peak was reached during the following century, in the aftermath of the Dacian wars and continued at a steady pace until the mid-3rd century. The geographical feature of the area favoured both Eastern and Western

⁴⁶ MOCANU 2021, p. 88–142.

⁴⁷ ZHURAVLEV 2024, p. 141.

cultural influences over tableware production. From these, the Eastern influences prevailed on the Lower Danube/West-Pontic potters, especially over the workshops closer to the Black Sea coastline. Eastern cultural influences were facilitated by the long – standing ties with Anatolian and other Aegean centres, which preceded the expansion of Roman rule around the Black Sea. Thereby, in my opinion, a great deal of the tableware production from the Lower Danube/West-Pontic area can be ascribed to the larger group of Pontic tableware. A possible connection between the tableware crafted in Lower Moesia and the Pontic sigillata present in Crimea and other North-Pontic settlements must be verified in the future by employing interdisciplinary research. Also, the publication of additional tableware groups will help to establish a more accurate typo-chronology for the production centres in this geographical region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BÂLTÂC 2018 – A. Bâltac, *The pottery workshops at Ostrov (Durostorum), Farm no. 4 spot, Constanța County*, in: V. Rusu-Bolindeț, C-A. Roman, M. Gui, I-Al. Iliescu, F.-Ovidiu Botiș, S. Mustață, D. Petruț (eds.), *Atlas of Roman Pottery Workshops from the Provinces Dacia and Lower Moesia/Scythia Minor (1st–7th centuries AD) (I)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2018, p. 211–223.

BOTIȘ 2018 – F-O. Botiș, *The pottery workshops at Războieni-Cetate*, in: V. Rusu-Bolindeț, C-A. Roman, M. Gui, I-Al. Iliescu, F.-Ovidiu Botiș, S. Mustață, D. Petruț (eds.), *Atlas of Roman Pottery Workshops from the Provinces Dacia and Lower Moesia/Scythia Minor (1st–7th centuries AD) (I)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2018, p. 143–156.

BOUNEGRU 1988–1989 – O. Bounegru, *Contribuții privind răspândirea și cronologia ceramicii decorate în tehnica barbotinei din Dobrogea Romană, Pontica 21–22 (1988–1989)*, p. 99–111.

BRUKNER 1981 – O. Brukner, *Rimskakeramika u Jugoslovenskom delu provincije Donje Panonije*, Beograd, 1981.

CROITORU 2011 – C. Croitoru, *Roman discoveries in the East Carpathian Barbaricum (1st century BC–5th century AD)*, Brăila, 2011.

DOMŽALSKI 2021 – K. Domzalski, *Pontic Red Slip Ware. Typology, chronology and distribution of a major group of Late Roman fine pottery in the Black Sea region*, *Bibliotheca Antiqua XXV* (2021).

DRAGENDORFF 1980 – H. Dragendorff, *La Sigillée. Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire de la céramique grecque et romain*, *Revue Archéologique Sites 7* (1980).

FALKNER 1999 – R. K. Falkner, *The Pottery*, in: A. G Poulter (ed.), *Nicopolis ad Istrum: A Roman to Early Byzantine City. The Pottery and Glass*, Leicester, 1999, p. 55–296.

HAYES 1985 – J. W. Hayes, *Sigillate Orientali*, in: G. P. Carratelli (ed), *Enciclopedia dell'arte antica classica e orientale. Atlante delle forme ceramiche*, vol. II, Roma, 1985, p. 1–95.

ILIESCU, BOTIȘ 2018 – I-A. Iliescu, F-O. Botiș, *The pottery workshops from Histria*, in: V. Rusu-Bolindeț, C-A. Roman, M. Gui, I-Al. Iliescu, F.-Ovidiu Botiș, S. Mustață, D. Petruț (eds.), *Atlas of Roman Pottery Workshops from the Provinces Dacia and Lower Moesia/Scythia Minor (1st–7th centuries AD) (I)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2018, p. 193–209.

IVANOV 2022 – S. D. Ivanov, *Typology and Chronology of Red Slip Ware from the Production Complexes between the Danube and the Balkan Mountain Range (2nd–3rd c. AD)*, *Archaeologia Bulgarica Supplements 3* (2022).

KNIPOVICI 1929 – T. N. Knipovici, *Die Keramikrömischer Zeit aus Olbia in der Sammlung der Ermitage*, *MRK 4* (1929).

KNIPOVICI 1952 – T. N. Knipovici, *Krasnolakovija keramika pervoyh vekov n. e. Izraskopok Bospor skoiekspedicii 1935–1940 gg*, *MIA 25* (1952), p. 289–326.

LUND 2005 – J. Lund, *An Economy of Consumption: The Eastern Sigillata a Industry in the late Hellenistic period*, in: Z. H. Archibald, J. K. Davis, V. Gabrielsen (eds.), *The New World of Ancient Economies, 321–31 BC*, Oxford, 2005, p. 233–251.

MATEI-POPESCU 2010 – F. Matei-Popescu, *The Roman Army in Moesia Inferior*, Bucharest, 2010.

MICHAŁ 2015 – D. Michał, *The Impact of Roman Army on Trade and Production in Lower Moesia (Moesia Inferior)*, *Studia Europaea Gnesnensia* 11 (2015), p. 235–260.

MOCANU 2014 – M. Mocanu, *Fine Ware*, in: G. Nuțu, S. Stanc, D. Paraschiv, with contributions from M. Mocanu, M. Luca, Ș. Honcu, M. Iacob, *Niculitel. A roman rural settlement in North-East Moesia Inferior*, Kaiserslautern/Mehlingen, 2014, p. 65–81, plates 16–23.

MOCANU 2021 – M. Mocanu, *Ceramica de masă din spațiul vest-pontic în epoca romană. Secolele I–VII p. Chr.*, Cluj-Napoca, 2021.

MOCANU, STĂNICĂ, STĂNESCU 2021 – M. Mocanu, A-D. Stănică, R-O. Stănescu, *Cercetări arheologice recente în necropolele de la Noviodunum*, in: S-C. Ailincăi, G. Nuțu, C. Micu, M. Mocanu, A. D. Stănică (eds.), *Studii de arheologie și istorie antică în onoarea lui Victor Henrich Baumann cu ocazia celei de a 80-a aniversări*, Biblioteca Istro-Pontică, Seria Arheologie, 21, Cluj-Napoca, 2021, p. 221–232.

MUȘEȚEANU 2003 – C. Mușețeanu, *Ateliere ceramice romane de la Durostorum*, București, 2003.

OȚA 2013 – L. Oța, *Lumea funerară în Moesia Inferior (secolele I–III p. Chr)*, Brăila, 2013.

PARASCHIV, DOBOȘ, POPESCU 2006 – D. Paraschiv, A. Doboș, G. Popescu, *Un mormânt de epocă romană timpurie descoperit la (L)Ibida*, in: L. Mihăilescu-Bîrliba, O. Bounegru (eds.), *Studia historiae et religionis daco-romanae. In honorem Silvii Sanie, Honoraria*, 3, București, 2006, p. 401–408.

POPILIAN 1976 – Gh. Popilian, *Ceramica romană din Oltenia, Craiova*, 1976.

POULTER 1986 – A. G. Poulter, *The Lower Moesian Limes and the Dacian Wars of Trajan*, in: *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms III*, 13. Internationaler Limeskongress, Aalen 1983, Stuttgart, 1986, p. 519–528.

POULTER 1999 – A. G. Poulter, *Nicopolis ad Istrum: A Roman to Early Byzantine City*, Leicester, 1999.

RĂDULESCU 1975 – A. Rădulescu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea ceramicii romane de uz comun din Dobrogea, Pontica* 8 (1975), p. 331–360.

RUSU-BOLINDEȚ 2016 – V. Rusu-Bolindeț, *Supply and Consumption of Terra Sigillata in Roman Dacia during the Severian Dynasty*, in: A. Panaite, R. Cîrjan, C. Căpiță (eds.), *Moesica et Christiana. Studies in Honour of Professor Alexandru Barnea*, Brăila, 2016, p. 379–409.

SUCEVEANU 2000 – Al. Suceveanu, *Histria X. La céramique romaine des I^{er}-III^e siècles ap. J.-C.*, Bucarest, 2000.

SUCEVEANU 2001 – Al. Suceveanu, *Populația și organizarea administrativă*, in: D. Protașe, Al. Suceveanu (coord.), *Istoria românilor. Vol. II. Daco-romani, romanici, alogeni*, București, 2001, p. 307–322.

SULTOV 1985 – B. Sultov, *Ceramic production on the territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum (2nd-4th century)*, *Terra Antiqua Balcanica* 1, Sofia, 1985.

URSACHI 1987 – V. Uraschi, *Cetatea dacică de la Brad*, *Thraco-Dacica* 8/1–2 (1987), p. 100–126.

ZHURAVLEV 2009 – D. Zhuravlev, *Pontic Sigillata Plates with a Vertical Rim from the Belbek IV Necropolis in the South-Western Crimea*, *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 15 (2009), p. 25–94.

ZHURAVLEV 2010 – D. Zhuravlev, *Krasnolakovaijakeramikayugo-zapadnogo Krîma I–III vv. n.e.*, Simferopol, 2010.

ZHURAVLEV 2011 – D. Zhuravlev, *Early Roman Fine Ware from Pompeiopolis*, in: F. Bertermes, A. Furtwängler, L. Summerer (eds.), *Pompeiopolis I. Eine zwischenbilanz aus der metropole*

Phaplagoniens nach fünf kampagnen (2006–2010), Schriften des Zentrums für Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte des Schwarzmeerraumes 21 (2011), p. 149–162.

ZHURAVLEV 2013 – D. Zhuravlev, *Pontiiskaja sigillata: regionalinii fenomen v Pricernomore*, in: М. Ю. Вахтина, Е. В. Грицик, Н. К. Жижина, С. В. Катаев, Н. А. Павличенко, О. Ю. Соколова, В. А. Хршановски (eds.), *The Bosporan phenomenon: Greeks and Barbarians on the crossroads of Eurasia. Proceedings of the International Conference, Sankt-Petersburg, 2013*, p. 676–685.

ZHURAVLEV 2022 – D. Zhuravlev, *O pontiiskih krasnola kovih blyudah s reliefmdecorom*, in: S. B. Lančov, N. V. Kukleva (eds.), *Zapadnaia Tavrida v istorii i kul'ture drevnego i srednevekovogo Sredizemnomor'ia*, materialy nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, Western Taurida in the History and Culture of the Ancient and Medieval Mediterranean, Materials of the Scientific and Practical Conference, Simferopol, 2022, p. 123–142.

ZHURAVLEV 2024 – D. Zhuravlev, *Pontic red slip trays with relief decoration*, *Prähistorische Archäologie in Südosteuropa* 33 (2024), p. 137–155.



Fig. 1. The Lower Danube/West-Pontic area.

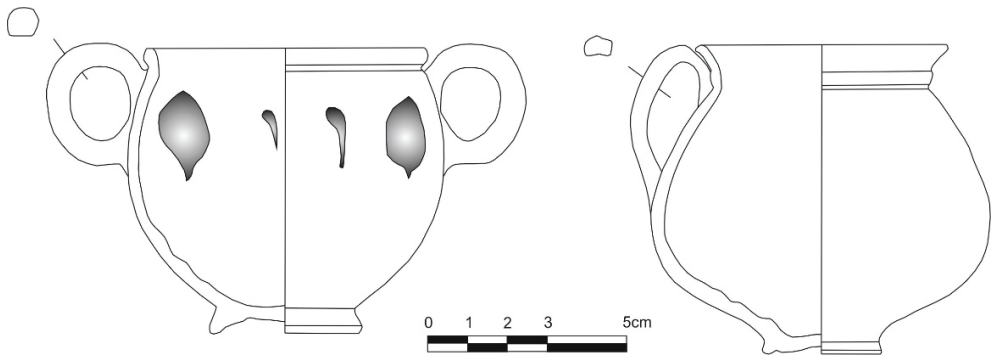


Fig. 2. Kantharos and globular cup discovered in a cremation grave from late first century AD.