

THRACIAN GREY POTTERY IN BULGARIA: PISTIROS AND OTHER SITES

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Abstract: *Thracian grey pottery is a very important feature of the local population that inhabited the territory of nowadays Bulgaria. We focused especially on finds from Pistiros, discussing how Grey Ware developed here from the 5th century B.C. till the 3rd century B.C., when the city was destroyed. An important category of Gray Ware produced at Pistiros during the 4th century B.C. was the so called Silver Ware. Greek imitations were also common in the local production. Other interesting aspects analyzed in this article are: the use of this ceramic type in Dionysian cult and the graffiti technique used on Grey Ware at Pistiros.*

THE ORIGINS OF THE GREY WARE IN THRACE AND ITS VICINITY

The history of the grey pottery in present-day Bulgaria can be traced back to the Early Iron Age, and the early grey pottery may have had some tradition here, as it had in the Troad and Aeolis. More than the Black-Glazed pottery, whose interpretation knows long-running controversy between Michael Vickers and John Boardman, the Grey Ware imitated silverware, popular and much more valued in Thrace as it was the case in other parts of the ancient world as well. Some kind of grey pottery is known from late 7th and 6th century B.C. sites, in the interior Thrace e.g. at Vasil Levski, its predecessors have already been mentioned and partly published from Apollonia Pontica and Koprivlen ¹, so it is not without reason to connect the origins of the Thracian Grey Ware with the Aeolian Grey Ware. But even later Thracian Grey Ware imitated in its colour the silver vases, well known in the area before and during the Persian occupation. Its rise may have been contemporary with another class developed somewhere in the NW part of the Black Sea and distributed even to the Carpathian cauldron.

¹ NIKOV 2001; BOŽKOVA, NIKOV 2009.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTIC AND PROVINCES AS KNOWN NOW

Greek grey pottery is known from the colonization times from Histria and Berezan² and also from Bulgaria; and this class may have inspired also the origins of the Thracian Grey Ware³. While the Grey Ware was originally Aeolian, among the finds in the Black Sea only small part of the corpus of finds are imports from the Aeolian coast of Asia Minor and from Lesbos. Plain Ionian pottery was mainly produced in the Pontic cities, but some part of it was also imported, even from Miletus⁴. Other sites around the Black Sea also yielded some imitations of Greek pottery⁵. They also first respected the indigenous tradition, which was formed earlier, and in which the Aeolian Grey Ware was one of its sources of inspiration. In the *chora* of Histria⁶ and its vicinity, a similar process has been shown at the Prague Black Sea congress in 2005 while analysing the pottery from Beidaud⁷; this shows that a similar situation existed in other parts of Thrace influenced by Greek potters; at Beidaud since the 6th century B.C.

The tradition of Central Thracian Grey Ware continued as shown by finds from Seuthopolis⁸, Babjak⁹ until the Hellenistic period¹⁰.

In Bulgarian Thrace, it was both hand-made and wheel-turned, made in many centres. Some of it had rather crude shapes, as those discussed by E. Moscalu (1983) and I. H. Crişan, (1969), while the basic vocabulary of its more sophisticated varieties was discussed in several articles by M. Čičikova (1963, 1977, 1984, 2004, and already Cončev 1959). The grey pottery known from Late Archaic and Early Classical Thracian tombs in Bulgaria show mainly shapes very similar to those known in Romania. This shows that a general style of Grey Ware existed on large territory of Thrace, but some ateliers developed more sophisticated classes.

One well known centre was at Beidaud¹¹ and another is well-known from our excavations at Pistiros; some others were discussed at this conference by A. Božkova¹². The late Miczyslaw Domaradzki devoted much effort to study the Grey Ware shapes in different parts of the eastern Balkans, but only very small part of his results could be compiled from his notes and sketches after his death¹³. But it was good start and we both are grateful for his introduction to the subject.

It is hard to say why there is much resemblance between Pistiros and Beidaud, while for ex. at Apollonia the local grey and brown pottery of the same

² DUPONT 1983; ALEXANDRESCU 1978.

³ NIKOV 1999, 2001; ALEXANDRESCU 1999, 165f.

⁴ KOWAL 2008; for Olbia, KRAPIVINA 2009; BOUZEK 1990, 41, and 2007a, 1226. 1229f., 1232; MOREL 2009.

⁵ MARČENKO *et alii* 2000; TSETSKHLADZE 1999; VICKERS, KAKHIDZE 2004 and 2009, other in NICULIŢĂ *et alii*, (eds.) 2004; SÎRBU *et alii* 2005.

⁶ ALEXANDRESCU 1978, p. 29-33, 93-124; COJA, DUPONT 1983.

⁷ LUNGU, DUPONT, SIMION 2007.

⁸ ČIČIKOVA 1977, 1984, 2004.

⁹ TONKOVA, GOCEV, eds. 2007, there esp. D. VASILJEVA, p.137-144 and M. TONKOVA, p. 95f.

¹⁰ BOŽKOVA 1994, 2008.

¹¹ LUNGU, DUPONT, SIMION 2007.

¹² BOŽKOVA 2008; BOŽKOVA, NIKOV 2009.

¹³ DOMARADZKI 1997; 2002.

date is very different¹⁴, and it seems to be less common than another local class, pottery with red slip; this concerns also other sites discussed by Božkova and Nikov (2009, esp. Čirpan)

As far as the 4th century B.C. pottery from Kabyle is known, it is not far in its style from Apollonia, and still very far from Pistiros. On the other hand, Pistiros pottery has much resemblances with that published so far from Babjak, especially the Grey Ware made in the late phase of the development of the *emporion*. As could be expected, also the Sborjanovo pottery shows only general resemblances with the Pistiros Grey Ware style.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREY WARE AT PISTIROS

The earliest phase known so far more safely at Pistiros, dating from the 3rd quarter of the 5th century BC, yielded only little Grey Ware, mainly of the rural class, but also some fine vessels¹⁵. In the last quarter of the 5th and the first quarter of the 4th century two schools or workshops produced here, one much less competent in potting than the other. Heavy vessels with thick rims and feet were common to both. The leading master had good taste and also imitated craters and other complicated vessels mainly in thick walled shapes, but he or his companion potted also thin-walled cups and bowls. The less advanced potters of the first phase of the *emporion* made mainly simple or otherwise heavy vessels, sometimes the less competent potter made holes into the bottom and had to add another piece of clay to improve his product; in other cases he had to add a second piece of clay for the rim of jugs or amphorae. Even small cups and bowls of the second class are heavier than those of the first workshop. The more sophisticated class liked simple bottoms and simple rims, sometimes reverted, but with rather modest degree of edges in profiles of foot and rim (Fig. 1, 3a-b, 7a). Some shapes, like jugs and *lekythoi*, present a sort of ridge on the neck (Fig. 4-6).

This changed slowly in the second quarter of the 4th century, at the time when thinner pots became common, more sophisticated profiles of jugs with „steps“ developed and also cups and bowls with more complicated profiles. It is also the period in which imitations of Attic Black Glazed and Red-Figured pottery were common: craters, cups with horizontal handles, *skyphoi*, *kantharoi*, flat plates and bowls (among them fish-plates) were translated into the Grey Ware class. Even *louteria* were sometimes produced in the Grey Ware technique.

The Grey Ware amphorae rather followed the Ionian shape than Attic forms (Fig. 2 and 13/1-6), but most other vessels, as far as they followed Greek models, took the inspiration from Attic models also (Fig. 1 followed Attic *pelike*, and crater, Fig. 10, followed Attic RF craters), though not all of them of the finest class; it may be remembered that even Attic and other [perhaps Corinthian (?)] plain pottery yielded some sources of inspiration for the Thracian Grey Ware.

In the advanced second half of the fourth century B.C. (certainly not prior to Philip II conquest) the general tendency was towards a “baroque” style. More plastic bands appeared to divide the earlier soft and fluent profile, incised wavy-line decorated the shoulder of amphorae and jugs; this development reached its

¹⁴ BECHTOLD, DOCTER 2008a, b.

¹⁵ BOUZEK 2007a, b.

peak at Pistiros towards the end of the 4th century (Figs. 9a, b, 10), but as shown e.g. at Babjak (Fig. 12) this style probably continued even later in another place. As far as we know, the production of fine Grey Ware at Pistiros ended with the ca. 300 B.C. destruction; the poor last city, destroyed by the Celts at 279/8 B.C., used earlier grey wheel-made vases as far as they were preserved from the earlier city. But some vases dating around 300 B.C. or slightly later, especially the chalices on high foot with a number of rings resembling a similar development in Athens, and made by hand, still continued to take over inspiration from Greek models. These vessels are, however, hand-made and they may represent the last remnants of a long tradition, while some cruder "rural" forms were still used even in the post-urban phase of the city in later 3rd century B.C.

A specific variety of Grey Ware was what we call "silver ware", whose colour is near to real silver (Fig. 11 b, c). This class was produced throughout the 4th century, starting perhaps slightly before the sack of the city by Kotys, as far as we know now, but not much earlier. Towards the end of the century this technique was abandoned at Pistiros. Other varieties of the Grey Ware are in their colour between nearly black and light grey, while a number of vases of the same shape and technique are red, as it sometimes happened also in Attic workshops with the Black Glazed class; the red colour of pottery for everyday use was much more common in eastern Thrace.

The fine grey ware was less valued than Attic and North Greek imports at Pistiros, but it was sometimes also repaired; we found some grey vases repaired like the Attic imports were, by drilling holes and joining fragments by means of cord or wire. While Attic pottery was used for feasts and special occasions, Grey Ware was the fine tableware for everyday use; it outnumbers much the Attic and North Greek imports. In the usual complexes the Grey Ware was quite common but less common than the Kitchen Ware¹⁶.

IMITATION OF GREEK MODELS

Grey Thracian pottery of the Classical period often imitated Greek models - esp. *kantharoi*, *lekanai*, amphorae, pitchers and bowls, with more or less professional level¹⁷. Also *lekanai* were often imitated, but some of them were also imports from larger pottery centres, including Athens¹⁸. This phenomenon has been discussed by Bouzek (2009) and in several articles by A. Božkova and K. Nikov¹⁹; the selection seems to be similar anywhere²⁰.

During the 5th and 4th century Thracian Grey Ware adopted various forms of Attic vases, notably of the Black Glazed class. *Amphorae* and *pelikai* influenced their Thracian relatives, *kantharoi* were imitated frequently; the shape was probably connected with the Dionysiac rites and feasts, popular among the Greeks and the Thracians as well. Greek *lekanai* were also imitated in the Grey and Brown Wares, and these imitations were especially common in the

¹⁶ BOUZEK 2009.

¹⁷ DOMARADZKI 2002, and here below.

¹⁸ For the Northern Black Sea, LEJPUNSKAJA 1980; LÜDORF 2000.

¹⁹ BOŽKOVA 2008; BOŽKOVA, NIKOV 2009.

²⁰ LUNGU, DUPONT, SIMION 2007.

workshops producing for urban centres, like Pistiros and Seuthopolis²¹, though some of their products went into small villages as well. The level of competency of imitating Attic models varied much, e.g. in Pistiros there are several categories of potters producing the Grey Ware, from well experienced to their more modest pupils and imitators. But other classes of pottery were imitated as well, perhaps even some poor Black Glazed Ware, for which no close parallels in Greek cities – as far as known and analyzed – could be identified as yet. The specific imitations appear especially in the coastal sites. Of the eight examples given by A. Božkova (2008), three come from Nesebar, three from Simeonovgrad and one from the Mogilanska Mogila near Vraca, whose jewellery suggest that the deceased was a Greek princess from the south. The remaining two examples are from Malko Tarnovo in Strandža. But Pistiros is in its repertory not behind them.

The majority of Grey Ware shapes were for liquids, mainly for drinks. Greek toilet containers are very rarely imitated. But with the new eating habits in the 4th century B.C. the Thracians willingly adopted various shapes of bowls and plates for their Grey and notably for the wheel-turned Brown Ware, among them the characteristic fish plates. The Brown Ware of Late Classical times was less traditional, and more open to Greek influence, and also more professionally made, with more sophisticated tempering and fired at a higher temperature.

Direct imitations of Greek models in the hand-made pottery are rare, but they also do exist, already since the end of the 5th century B.C. This mainly concerns the *kantharoi*, made perhaps for religious purposes, footed cups with plastic rings (**Fig. 11a**) and some pitchers²².

It may be concluded that at Pistiros shapes imitating Greek models primarily are known in the Grey Pottery mainly, less so in the similar Red Ware and in the Brown Ware. Several examples may be shown here, in addition the previous article²³.

The Grey Ware amphorae (**Fig. 1, 2 and 13/1-6**) imitate some shapes of the Common Ware class in Greece²⁴, but they probably derived from earlier Ionic or Aeolic and Ionian amphorae of Late Archaic times²⁵. Some other parallels becomes from Athenian Agora²⁶.

The shape of *kantharos* was imitated in Grey Ware and also, in the late period of the city, in hand-made polished ware (**Fig. 14/1**). Imitations of *kantharoi* in Grey Ware are rather common; they mainly date from the 4th century but also have earlier predecessor²⁷, the fragments, come from deposits dated in the second half of the 4th century²⁸. *Kantharoi* were sometimes imitated also in the hand-made

²¹ ČIČIKOVA 1984.

²² From Pistiros, DOMARADZKI 2002; BOUZEK 2009.

²³ BOUZEK 2009.

²⁴ Agora XII, p. 187-188 and pl. 60-61, nos. 1441-1468, the majority belongs to the 5th century B.C.

²⁵ COOK, DUPONT 1998, p. 84-85, figs 10, nos. 6-8, and p. 133, fig. 19, no. 1.

²⁶ Agora XII, p. 189-190 and pl. 62, esp. no. 1479.

²⁷ BOUZEK 2003, fig. 3.12: 5, and here **Fig. 11a**.

²⁸ For the shape, see Agora XII, p. 286-287, pl. 29 and fig. 7, nos. 697-690, 700-720; most of the Attic models date from the 4th century B.C., mainly from the second part.

wares²⁹.

Some local *skyphoi* resemble the Attic Kitchen Ware rather than the Black Glazed shapes³⁰ and with the vases with flutes³¹, but the similarity may, of course, be accidental. One-handed cup (**Fig. 14/4**) resembles the shape of Athenian Agora³². Another *skyphos* (**Fig. 14/5**) is well comparable with Attic *skyphoi* of late 5th century B.C.³³

Some imitations of Attic cups are also known³⁴; its 5th century B.C. parallels are too early, so the result is probably a contamination of several different models of the mid 5th century B.C.³⁵

Fish plates are common, attesting a change in dining habits in the 4th century B.C., but in the majority made in Brown Wheel-Turned Ware, only rarely in the Grey Ware³⁶.

Imitations of Greek *lekanai* are quite common among the finds from Pistiros (**Fig. 8 a, b**)³⁷, with some parallels between the finds of Athenian Agora³⁸, as are the one-handed cups.

Louteria made locally are of shapes related to Attic models; they are known from the houses inside the city, and in the extra-mural houses of Adjijjska Vodenica as well³⁹.

Mortaria were also produced frequently at Pistiros, both in Grey Ware and in Red Ware⁴⁰.

Some local vases made at Pistiros or in its vicinity⁴¹, also resemble to Attic *lopas*⁴².

It should be remembered that many shapes show some genetic resemblance with the Aeolic Grey Ware and Archaic Ionian shapes (**Fig. 2** and **13/1-6**) than with later Attic products.

USE OF GREY (AND RED) WARE IN DIONYSIAC CULT

Especially interesting is a group of pitchers decorated with imprints of gems, with Dionysiac motifs. They are discussed more in detail in another place⁴³. Two complete *oenochoi* and three fragmentary items have been found with imprints of gems from the Dionysiac circle (**Fig. 15 a-d** and **16 a-b**). One bears a satyr's mask, the other is decorated with imprints of gems on which a satyr is represented abducting maenad, a subject well known from Thasian coins and also from their

²⁹ BOUZEK 2007b, p. 218 and fig. 7, no. 4.

³⁰ DOMARADZKI 2002, fig. 8: 9; Agora XII, p. 190-191.

³¹ Agora XII, pl. 14, no. 311.

³² Agora XII, pl. 30, nos. 728 and 765

³³ Esp. Agora XII, pl. 15, nos. 319 and 321.

³⁴ DOMARADZKI 2002, p. 203 and fig. 8: 8.

³⁵ Agora XII, p. 267 and pl. 23, no. 484.

³⁶ BOUZEK 2003, fig. 11: 1.

³⁷ DOMARADZKI 2002, fig. 8: 6.

³⁸ Agora XII, pl. 85-89.

³⁹ Agora XII, pl. 88.

⁴⁰ also BOUZEK 2003, pl. 36: 8-9; for Attic shapes Agora XII, pl. 91-92.

⁴¹ BOUZEK 2003, fig. 34: 11.

⁴² Agora XII, pl. 95.

⁴³ BOUZEK, DOMARADZKA 2008.

Thracian imitations. The third motif imprinted is floral palmette; it was apparently inspired by stamped Attic pottery with similar motifs. These stamps were first published by M. Domaradzki⁴⁴.

Dionysus was one of the most popular deities also in Thasos and Maroneia, the cities from which most of the *emporitai* of Pistiros came⁴⁵. Most of the Thracian *toreutics* was connected with Dionysiac feasts, drinking and libations connected with the festivals and feasts of Thracian aristocracy. The famous treaty between the *emporion* of Pistiros and Kotys was closed under the protection of Dionysus, worshipped by the Greeks and Thracians alike. The pitchers on which the stamps are imprinted were used for libations and/or feasts; wine was poured from them in the *phiale* and *calyces*. The pitchers with such stamps were probably marked as belonging to the deity, resp. to the *Paraphernalia* of its cult. Perhaps not accidentally only slightly later we encounter pitchers with the representation of divinized Arsinoe II, a queen living in her first two marriages in Thrace, a country from which inspiration for their worshipping ritual, after she pronounced herself to be goddess, may well take the inspiration.

GRAFFITI ON GREY WARE AND ON THE BROWN WARE RELATED TO THE GREY WARE

The graffiti found in Pistiros (**Fig. 17 a-c**) have been published by L. Domaradzka in *Pistiros I* and *Pistiros III*⁴⁶. Apparently there are more Thracian names against Greek names on the Grey and Brown Wares⁴⁷ in proportion than on fine Attic pottery, on which Greek names prevail, and also more of simple entries giving the numbers. They show advanced level of literacy also among the Thracian part of population of Pistiros. The analysis of loom-weights has shown that among the females living in Pistiros Thracian women prevailed⁴⁸, and the Thracian names on graffiti show that also some Thracian men were among the inhabitants of the *emporion*, probably of higher social class, as the names written on the sherds are those known from Thracian aristocracy. This resembles the situation in many Pontic Greek *apoikias*.

CONCLUSIONS

The examples illustrated here and mentioned as illustrated in other publications of Pistiros are interesting for understanding how and why the Thracians and the Greeks living in the *emporion* in inner Thrace adapted and translated Greek models into their own vocabulary. Most of the so-called imitations are not too close to Greek models, and Pistiros is an exceptional site as the Greek *emporitai* there were independent self-governing body and led a way of life similar to those of North Aegean colonies in many respects. But they lived in inner Thrace; they had to find a tolerable way of co-existence with their mightier Thracian neighbours. They also took in many cases Thracian wives and accepted

⁴⁴ DOMARADZKI 1997, p. 68 and fig. 2-3.

⁴⁵ DOMARADZKA 2002, p. 209-210.

⁴⁶ DOMARADZKA 2002; 2007a, 2007b.

⁴⁷ DOMARADZKA 2007a, p. 223.

⁴⁸ BOUZEK 1996.

some role of their Thracian neighbours in their own affairs. Most other potters producing the Grey Ware in Thrace were less close to Greek models (**Fig. 18**), and their products are cruder, less sophisticated, and with less experience with a finer potter's wheel, sometimes even hand-made. But in some *emporia*, like at Pistiros, at Čirpan and Beidaud, the potters producing the Grey Ware reached sometimes very good level of craftsmanship, satisfying even more demanding customers.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1-2 - Examples of Grey Ware from Pistiros: 1-2, amphorae.



Figure 3a



Figure 3b

Fig. 3 a-b - Examples of Grey Ware from Pistiros: jugs.

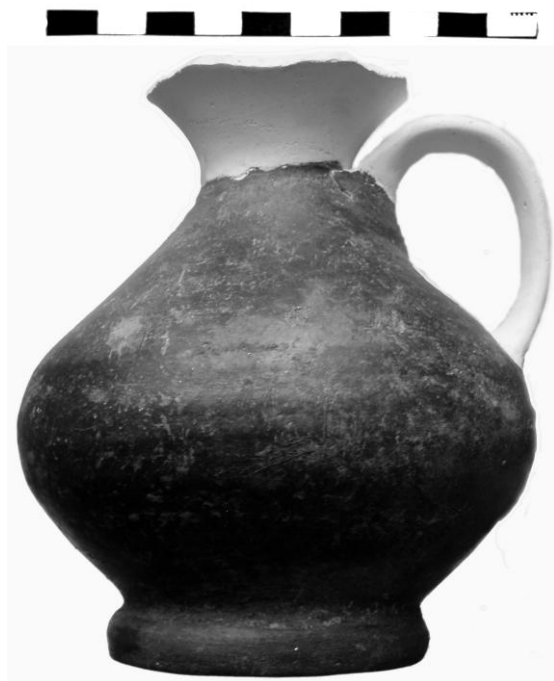


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Fig. 4 - 5 - Examples of Grey Ware from Pistiros: lekythos and jug.



Fig. 6 - Examples of Grey Ware from Pistiros: lekythos.



Fig. 7a



Fig. 7b

Fig. 7 a-b - Examples of Grey Ware from Pistiros: bowls.



Fig. 8a



Fig. 8b

Fig. 8 a-b - Examples of Grey Ware from Pistiros: cups.



Figure 9a



Figure 9b

Fig. 9 a-b - Examples of Grey Ware from Pistiros: craters.



Figure 10

Fig. 10 - Example of Grey Ware from Pistiros: crater.



Figure 11a



Figure 11b

Figure 11c

**Fig. 11 a-c - Examples of Grey Ware from Pistiros:
stem fragment with plastic rings, sherds with plastic decoration and silverware bottom.**

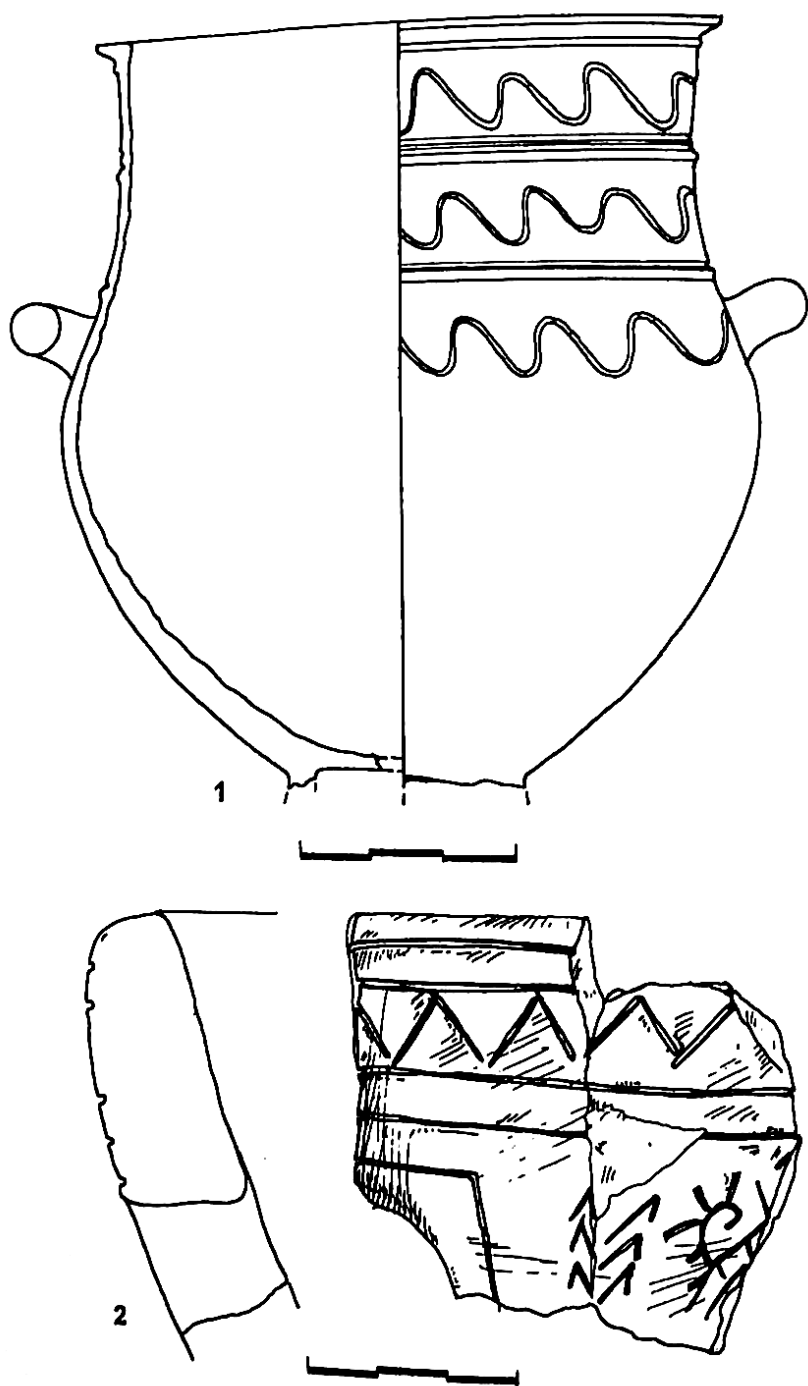


Fig. 12 - 1. Crater; 2. Bowl rim from Babjak (after Tonkova-Gocev 2007).

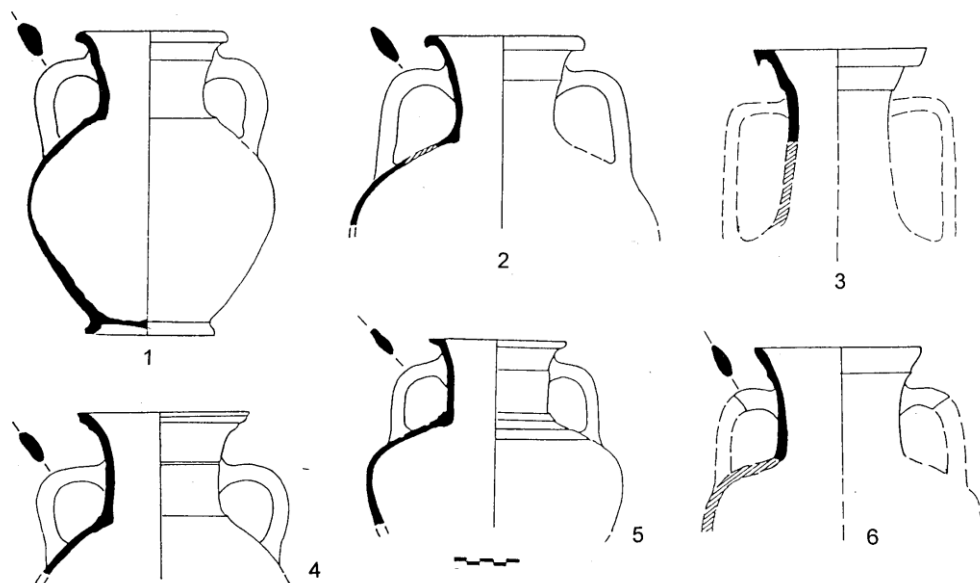


Fig. 13 - Pistiros, amphorae: 1. inv. 1.1647; 2. B'7, spit III, K/401; 3. A19, spit III, K/6; 4. B'2, spit III, K/330; 5. B'2, spit IX, Inv. 1.885. 6. B22, spit III, K/100.

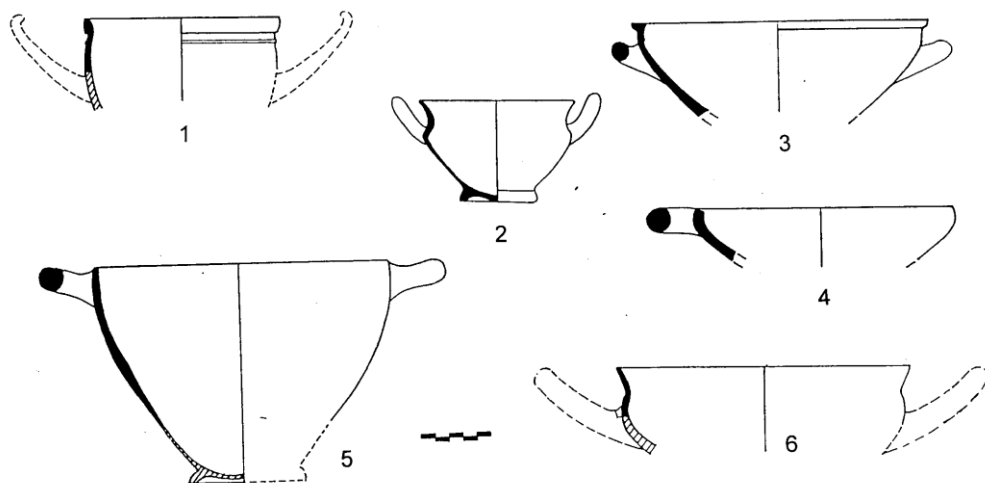


Fig. 14 - Pistiros, *skyphoi* et cups, Grey Ware: 1. A10, spi I, K/17; 2, parallel from Mitino - Tofilica; 3. A14, spit III, K/224; 4. A 14, spit III, K/225; 5. B'2, spit IV, K/108; 6. A 10, spit II, K/38.



Fig. 15a

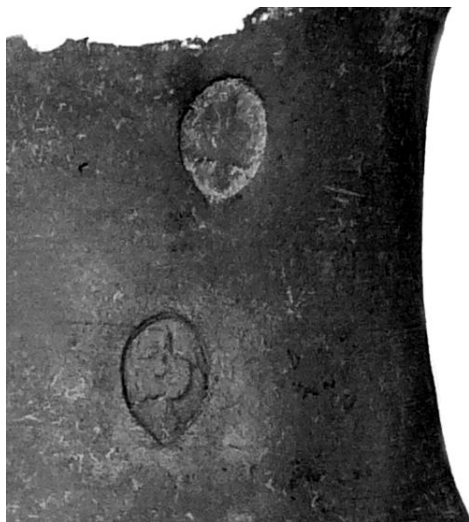


Fig. 15b



Fig. 15c

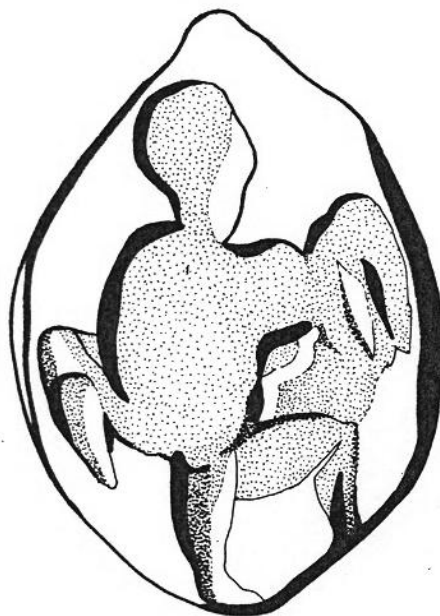


Fig. 15d

Fig. 15 a-d - Jugs with Dionysiac stamps.



Fig. 16a



Fig. 16b

Fig. 16 - Jug with Dionysiac stamp.



Fig. 17a



Fig. 17b



Fig. 17c

Fig.17 a-c - Examples of Grey Ware with *graffiti*.



Fig. 18 - Later Grey Ware cup from the Septemvri region.

*Fig. 1-11, 13-18, photographs and drawings Mus. Septemvri, made by *Pistiros project*.