

## NB – UNEDITED CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

### **Pontic personalities: Kirbeis & Co.**

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#### *MMB in the Black Sea region, intro*

We do not know much about the production of mouldmade bowls in the Hellenistic cities of the Pontic region, and the number of moulds attesting to a local production is negligible. I am aware of a mould found in debris of Hellenistic house in Mesembria and from the same city a mould of a pine cone bowl is exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Nessebar. From Istros a mould is referred to by Domaneantu (2000, 144 with references), from Olbia derives a mould fragment with a long petal pattern, which was exhibited in Odessa Archaeological Museum before the museum's recent refurbishment, and a mould with a debased cone pattern from Phanagoreia is also mentioned (Kovalenko 1996, 55). Most widely known and best studied is the production of Demetrios located in the Bosporan Kingdom. Five mould fragments have been found to date, four in Pantikapaion and one in the "suburb" of the Bosporan capital, Myrmekion. Even though they do not preserve the signature, consensus has it that they can be ascribed to Demetrios' production. In addition, mouldmade bowls were imitated in the indigenous cities of the Getes and the number of moulds found at four different localities by far outnumbers those from the Greek cities (overview in Bouzek 1985).

In addition to the above mentioned localities, where finds of moulds attest to a local production, albeit limited, there is one workshop, namely that of Kirbeis, that has been attributed to the Black Sea region because vessels signed by him have been found in considerable quantities in the northwestern part of the region. However, no moulds of his workshop have ever been found, so the identification of the workshop's location is open to debate. Over the past 50 years or so the tendency has been that Black Sea scholars ascribe the production to Asia Minor, first of all because of the vessels' micaceous fabric, whereas most scholars working in the Mediterranean are of the opinion that they were produced in the Black Sea region (e.g. Rogl 2001, 140). I belong to the last-mentioned group and in the following I will argue the case, why the workshop of Kirbeis and his associates is to be located in the Black Sea region.

#### *Kirbeis: the medallion*

First we shall take a glance at the production. I am aware of over 70 vessels (complete or fragmentary) signed by Kirbeis. His signature occurs on a stamp located at the exterior of the base medallion around the representation of a turreted female bust turned towards the right. The somewhat 'barbarian' representation shows a lady with a long drooping nose and a very large eye. Her hair seems to be gathered in a small bun at the back head and one long straight lock hangs over the shoulder. On the head she wears a tall mural crown with three sharp-angled crenelations or towers. Though it cannot be seen, she must have worn a wreath or *tainia* over the crown, because behind the neck is always shown one fluttering end of a ribbon. She is dressed in a high belted sleeveless chiton with a cloak lying over her left shoulder. Her left hand is lifted up in front of the body and it curves around a *tympanon* held from beneath. There can be absolutely no question that Meter Theon (Kybele) is intended. With the exception of one stamp from Pantikapaion, which differs slightly from the rest, it seems likely that all of the other medallions were stamped with one and the same master stamp. At least the stamps I have seen myself (or stamps which have been published with good illustrations) all feature the same error in the stamp leaving the right of the three crenelations somewhat truncated and a continued recess can be seen in front of the B of his

name. The lack of more than one medallion stamp shows that the production was short lived and that the output was not large.

#### *Kirbeis: shape and fabric*

The shape employed by Kirbeis is invariably a deep bowl with a plain, tall, straight or slightly out-turned rim above the moulded part of the body. In general the walls are quite thick and the vessels feel heavy. The rim diameter is relatively large, the majority being between 13 and 14 cm, and the height of the plain rim over the moulded part is normally as tall as 2.5 to 3 cm.

Three amphorae and a peculiar foot-less pitcher signed by Kirbeis have been found in Olbia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. From personal study of two of the vessels, an amphora and the pitcher, I can conclude that they must have moulded off an existing bowl, because the stamps are all of a poor quality and of reduced size as well, and the fabric does not correspond to that of Kirbeis, which is normally relatively fine and micaceous with occasional inclusions of lime normally firing to a light reddish brown colour of the hue 6/6 in the colours 5YR and 7.5YR (c. two thirds of the vessels). In the later part of his production the fabric frequently becomes coarser with more sand and abundant small inclusions of lime. The coat is intended black and comes in various qualities generally worsening with time. It is characteristic that during firing, the top of the reliefs fires reddish.

#### *Kirbeis: decoration*

The workshop of Kirbeis is ambitious and creative in its usage of bold decoration with strong, baroque stamps. He had access to a lot of different stamps – I have counted more than 100 – which he combines in many different ways. Because he uses so many different stamps, many occur only a few times. In the following I will provide an overview over his decoration types based on the signed specimens – evidently we cannot go into detail with single stamps.

In general Kirbeis' bowls are composed in one register alone, but there are some exceptions to this rule. The bowl, which I consider the earliest, comes from Olbia. It is unique with its intricate design featuring a sacro-idyllic setting with tightly draped female statues on a tall garlanded altar functioning here as statue base between which myrtle garlands are suspended. Erotes move between the statues. Between the statues are placed various precious vessels, kraters and kantharoi; birds sit on the vessels. Over the garlands are heraldic dolphins flanking a rosette. The rim frieze is a single frieze of a heart bud, which is a characteristic Kirbeis stamp. All of the individual elements will be encountered on later bowls in different combinations, but never in the same abundance as on this bowl. Moreover, the bowl combines elements of the two subsequent groups: bowls with suspended garlands and bowls with Erotes among vegetation.

Bowls with suspended garlands occur throughout the existence of the workshop. A few of them are closely similar to the just mentioned bowl with detailed garlands of oak, vine or myrtle suspended between statues, bukrania or tainia tied in bows. Most are bound garland suspended mostly between tainia tied in bows. Popular is also the motif of suspended wreaths again tied with tainia with a broad bow.

Most of the bowls are based on a vegetal design with a calyx or isolated vegetal elements dominating. In the early part of the production Erotes and human figures as well as animals, especially birds but also dolphins and inanimate objects such as vases, statues, columns etc. are placed as spacers between and over the vegetal elements. Probably midway in the production the motif of an Erot freeing a bird turns up, the single motif occurring most frequently. Probably contemporary in the sequence are vegetal bowls with boldly looped stalks with a bud or a flower as filler.

Apart from the mentioned designs based on vegetal elements, a few pieces with linear decoration belong to Kirbeis' production too, such as a base with Long-petal design from Tyras and a base with jewelled net-pattern from Abdera. A wall fragment probably of a concentric semicircle bowl from Olbia NGS can with much probability be ascribed to Kirbeis too because of its fabric, coat and the double incised grooves employed as rim pattern. These three fragments show that even though Kirbeis had his own style, he was open to other influences as well.

#### *Kirbeis: rim decoration*

Normally Kirbeis employed only one frieze of rim ornament, and the number of stamps employed is small. Most common is the heart guilloche (either turned right or left, those turned right being the earliest). This is made with a bold, almost organic stamp. In popularity this is followed by a frieze of deep grooves as well as the heart bud, which comes in a number of variants. It is basically based on a heart ornament furnished with a bud growing out of a more or well-defined vegetal element. We see it on the earliest vessel and they occur on the very latest vessels of Kirbeis' production too. Some of them appear very stylised, almost as a pair of scissors, and in the latest version it has turned almost into a butterfly. This ornament is extremely rare among other workshops. Among the almost 6,000 MMB published by Laumonier from Delos the heart bud occur on only eight vessels, and a related ornament can be found in the workshops of Pergamon and Sardis. Only in the Levant do we find it used in similar quantities, where it is considered a particularly 'Levantine' hallmark by Rosenthal-Heginbottom (1995). Surely, the Levantine parallels are striking, but since I find it hard to believe that there was a direct connection between the Kirbeis workshop and the Levantine ones, there must have been a common source of inspiration to both of them (can anyone provide that?).

The Ionian kyma was foremost popular in the later phases of the workshop. Double or even triple rim friezes belongs to the later part of the production.

#### *Other members of the workshop?*

From working with the workshop of Kirbeis it has become clear to me that three more persons are somehow to be connected with this workshop. The most productive of these signs *Possidos*, a genitive of *Possis*, in all likelihood a hypocharistic form of a longer name, such as *Poseidonios* or *Poseidippos*. I know of 20 vessels signed by him. He employs the same bowl shape as Kirbeis as well as a number of his stamps, but in contrast to the homogeneous picture provided by the Kirbeis medallions, the medallions signed by *Possis* show considerable variation. As was the case with Kirbeis, he also uses a turreted female bust turned towards the right. The bust is, though, much smaller and cut above the shoulders, and the face is much more 'classical' than the goddess on Kirbeis' bowls. Some of the medallions are right out crude. In addition, the signature is placed in different ways in relation to the bust. On one bowl in Bruxelles of unknown provenience the bust is turned to the left, the crown is lower and without the rounded towers.

In addition to the turreted female in the medallion I know of a bowl signed by *Possis* around a comical theatre mask, namely a bowl fragment from Chersonesos. A complete bowl excavated by Farmakovskij in Olbia in 1901 employing the same vegetal stamps and the same medallion stamp. It can therefore, though without signature, be ascribed *Possis* too. These bowls are key pieces to inform us about *Possis*' early career. The mask medallion, which also occurs on one further *Possis* bowl, but as filler over the vegetation, was very popular in the Aiolian and North Ionian region, where it is known from two moulds in Sardis (as we know from Rotroff's Sardis publication from 2003) and from a mould in Kyme. It is profusely found on Sardian bowls, as well in Kyme and it is also attested in Pergamon.

The bowls signed by *Possis* are closely related to those of Kirbeis, but his output was considerably smaller and it may have started slightly later. By and large his decoration follows the

development of Kirbeis, but he works exclusively in one register. We see a not very successful attempt to copy Kirbeis' suspended garland, and we likewise find examples of an Erot made with a Kirbeis stamp in vegetation as well as an Amazonomachy bowl and a full-body vegetal scroll, which is even worse than Kirbeis' bowls with the same decoration. His best bowls are the simplest based on a vegetal pattern. None of Kirbeis' repeatedly occurring motives such as the Erot freeing a bird or the vegetal bowl with looped stalks seems to have left any impression on Possis.

#### *Possis: rim decoration*

As far as we can gather from the few complete bowls made by Possis he only employed a single rim frieze, almost exclusively a small, somewhat cramped heart guilloche turned left, which is quite characteristic, because the lower curve protrudes slightly in front of the upper one. There is no instance of the heart bud frieze ubiquitous in Kirbeis' design (even though we find a few examples, where it occurs as filler), and neither do we find his characteristic grooves.

Whereas the Kirbeis production has been repeatedly discussed in previous research the same attention has not been paid to Possis, probably because vessels with his signature are much rarer, and there is much confusion in the literature concerning the POSSIDOS stamp. I have already mentioned that further two mould-makers can be added to this group: Zenodotos and Zenodoules both of which also employ a turreted female in the base medallion.

#### *Zenodotos*

I am aware of only two complete bowls and two medallions signed by Zenodotos. In the medallion we find a female head turned towards the left. She has a big nose and pronounced double chin. Her hair is gathered in the neck in a bun and beneath this bun three spiral locks hang down the neck. On the head she wears a low mural crown where only slight incisions indicate the crenelation (four or more). In addition to the four signed pieces I unreservedly ascribe three body fragments from Olbia NGS to this workshop because of their fabric, type and quality of coat as well as decoration. The preserved vessels are decorated exclusively with vegetal design. The only rim patterns that can be distinguished are a heart guilloche right and an Ionian kyma.

#### *Zenodoules*

Only one vessel stamped by Zenodoules is known to me. It shows a debased version of a turreted female turned towards the right. The published image is difficult to read, but it seems likely that it is the 'classic' Possis bust that is here imitated because of the square features of the face as well as the crown with space between the towers. The bowl is disposed in two friezes: an upper frieze with a completely stylised scroll and a lower frieze with an indiscernible design, the two friezes being separated by a frieze of dots.

#### *Base medallion: the signatures and the persons behind them*

The proud signing of the moulds is a common characteristic of the four groups of vessels. With the exception of Zenodoules (signing ZHNOΔΟΥΛΗΣ in nominative), the other three names are given in the genitive: KIPBEI, ΠΟΣΣΙΔΟΣ, and ZHNOΔΟΤΟΥ. It seems likely that all vessels produced in the Meter Medallion workshop were signed. At least, with the exception of one Possis bowl already mentioned, which may have been made before he arrived in the Black Sea region, I do not know of a single instance where a bowl with an unsigned base shows Kirbeis' stamps. Moreover, I find it likely that the inscriptions refer to the person crafting the mould rather than the workshop owner. Surely, the mould maker could be the potter too, but the mechanical throwing of bowls in

the moulds could also have been done by other, anonymous members of the workshop also. This we cannot know.

Already V.V. Latyšev discussed the particular formation of the name Kirbeis with genitive in –ei as characteristic of Hellenised ‘barbarian’ names of the Black Sea region particularly of Thrace (Latyšev 1902; repeated by Zahn 1908, 49). With the search machine of *LPGN* available on-line (<http://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/database/lgpn.php>), this can easily be checked – thus, we can base our analysis on a much larger corpus of Black Sea and comparative Mediterranean material than what was available to Latyšev. A search fully confirms his conclusion, namely the existence of a large number of personal male names ending on –eis (in addition to that of Kirbeis) in the Pontic cities of which none are known from the Mediterranean and it also reveals that the name of Kirbeis is a *hapax*.

Possis is very uncommon. In *LPGN* vol. 4 the name occurs five times, all from Odessos. Three are from the Roman period, and two are from the years immediately preceding the turn to our era. Possis the mould-maker is not included in *LPGN*. As a name, Zenodotos is quite common, whereas Zenodoules, as Kirbeis, is a *hapax*. It is difficult not to consider a connection between Zenodoules and Zenodotos (Zenon’s slave and Zenon’s gift, respectively). Returning to Possis, the earliest inscription records a Posseis, son of Zenon (IGB I2 a; 12 BC). Though the inscription is much later than the bowls, naming praxis was conservative, so it may be suggested that the bowls signed by Possis, Zenodotos and Zenodoules somehow were connected with the same *oikos*. In addition, considering the decoration of bowls including their medallions, there can hardly be any doubt that there was a close relation between Kirbeis and Possis as already shown. It seems likely that Possis came from somewhere in the Aiolian or North Ionian area and joined Kirbeis at an early stage of his production. Possis certainly had access to Kirbeis’ tool box, but he did not have the same skill in combining the stamps, even though he certainly had a better ‘logo-maker’. Did he try to establish his own business with the help of two slaves? And did the new medallion type with the head turned left mark this? This is of course pure speculation, but nevertheless an attractive idea.

#### *The Meter Medallion Group in context: style*

The workshop of the Meter Medallion Group, though highly personal, did not exist in a vacuum. I have already mentioned the experiments with linear motifs better known from other production places. Kirbeis was inspired by the Athenian workshops, first of all by their deep bowls and the intended black colour of the coat, and the principle guiding the composition of the bowl with one register with a calyx below in combination with figural elements, but also in iconographical details such as the heart guilloche and the frequent presence of birds rare elsewhere (cf. Rotroff 1982, 18, cat. nos. 93-98). This is, however, in all likelihood an effect of the time when the moulds were made, namely before the characteristic Ephesian workshops with their thin-walled, shallower and often bi-coloured bowls with short in-turned rim came to dominate the market from the mid-2nd century BC. When considering the rim patterns it is perhaps interesting to note that such a popular Ephesian rim pattern as the box-maeander, which we see in profusion among the early Ephesian bowls, was *not* used in the Meter Medallion Group. In contrast to this, I have already mentioned the negligible occurrence in Ephesos of the heart bud ornament, which is diagnostic of Kirbeis’ production.

When considering Kirbeis’ style more in detail, we must conclude that he is a great eclectic: there are elements he may have picked up in Ephesos (or from Ephesian vessels), such as the myrtle garland employed as frieze motif, the full-body acanthus-vine scroll, and the pendent semi circle motif. And even an Amazon stamp may be a copied or shared stamp. But the closest source of inspiration seems to come from the Aiolian and North Ionian region as best exemplified

by the workshops of Kyme, where we find the frequent crude double grooving at the transition between rim and figural design (Bouzek & Jansová 1974, 49), very similar type of acanthus with bold double stalk, and also the stamp of the so-called Paniskos, a winged Eros-Pan sitting cross-legged playing a syrinx as well as the abundant presence of birds, which virtually became a trademark of the Kyme workshops (Bouzek & Jansová 1974, 44-45). However, the Meter Medallion Group is not just a filial of the Kyme workshops, because there are many differences too. In contrast to the Meter Medallion Group, the Kyme bowls are normally composed in two superposed friezes. And the heart bud ornament so characteristic of the Meter Medallion Group is not at all found on the Kymean vessels. In Pergamon we find the garlanded altar, and here garlands combined with tainia in bows and/or bukrania are common enough.

Thus, there was some kind of osmosis between the Kyme workshops and the Meter Medallion workshop. It is therefore not so surprising that Kymean vessels have been found in the northern Black Sea region in Olbia, Istros, and in Myrmekion, and in Kyme a single vase signed by Kirbeis has, in fact, been found too. The two workshops were contemporary. It is possible that Possis migrated from Kyme to the Black Sea region, or he may have worked there for a period before moving on to the Black Sea. At any rate, there was a contemporary, parallel development amongst the two workshops, and though they have some similarities, they are at the same time very different.

#### *Kirbeis in context: chronology*

As mentioned earlier, Kirbeis' production must have been rather short-lived (one year?), because the same stamp for the central medallion was used on all moulds with the exception of one, and because the production of the three other mould makers can be tied to the Kirbeis production, they must have been more or less contemporary. I believe that the Olbia deposits, where more than 50% of the vessels known to me were found, can be used to date his production. I will not here repeat the arguments for our conclusions, which will be folded out tomorrow. In the paper of tomorrow we hope to be able to show that the majority of the 2nd century pottery dates in the central decades of the century, and I think this is when we must date the workshop of the Meter Medallion too.

#### *Place(s?) of production*

Before we end, we must consider where the bowls of the Meter Medallion workshop were produced. As already mentioned there is an interesting dichotomy between Eastern and Western scholars over this question. Western scholars viewing this question from the 'outside' tend to acknowledge that distribution patterns mirror the place of production. Thus, because the vessels were predominantly found in the Black Sea region they are of the opinion that they were almost certainly produced there too. Eastern scholars, on the other hand, mainly argue the case of a Mediterranean origin due to the presence of mica in the fabric. Mica is a misleading argument, because we find mica in Black Sea pottery of known production too. Kovalenko has added an iconographic argument suggesting that the origin of the workshop of Kirbeis is to be found in Smyrna, because a few pieces can (possibly!) be ascribed to that city, and because that city also minted coins with a turreted deity resembling the medallion stamp of the Meter Medallion Group.

The aesthetic argument brought forward by J. Bouzek, that *The Kirbei bowls...were apparently made somewhere in Northwest Anatolia: they are too fine for any North and West Pontic Greek city, but perhaps not too fine for the South Pontic colonies* (Bouzek 1990, 65) cannot be taken seriously, but it points to a – perhaps unconscious – desire among the researchers preferring the Mediterranean origins of the bowls of portraying the region as more Mediterranean Greek than it perhaps were.

In order to determine where the vessels were produced, we may employ a number of scientific analyses. Unfortunately, no such analyses exist. In the lack of more 'objective' analysis, we must therefore resort to more indirect types of analysis such as distribution pattern analysis.

As mentioned several times, bowls of the Meter Medallion workshop are very uncommon outside the Black Sea region. Only six vessels signed by Kirbeis are known to me: one from 'Asia Minor' in Louvre, one from Kyme in Bruxelles, two from Delos, and two from Abdera. In addition to these six vessels, only three vessels signed by Possis demonstrably came from the Mediterranean: one found in Thasos, one deriving from the 'vicinity of Smyrna' and one probably from Asia Minor last-mentioned two both in the Louvre. When one takes into account the eagerness to publish objects featuring writing, the lack of published bowls belonging to the Meter Medallion workshop is striking. This extreme scarcity is in complete contrast to the pattern we find in the Black Sea region.

Bowls of the Meter Medallion workshop were found throughout the north- and west coast of the Black Sea region. The fact that none are recorded from the south and the east coast alone reflects the fact that next to no Mouldmade bowls have been published from that part of the Pontic region. If distribution patterns may be accepted as reflecting patterns of production and circulation, the workshop must have been located somewhere in the northwestern corner of the Black Sea region between Istros and Olbia where 90% of the Black Sea finds were made.

Can we determine more precisely, where the bowls were produced? Already Courby in 1922 wrote that *Ce Kirbeis est évidemment un potier olbiopolitain* (1922, 411). It is certainly attractive to ascribe the workshop to Olbia, because it is here the largest number and the greatest variety in terms of shapes and decoration were found, and Meter Theon, in addition, played a significant role in the city's pantheon of the 2nd century BC. But a methodological *caveat* is necessary: it is possible that the workshop is overrepresented in Olbia, because the deposits, as we shall hear tomorrow, by and large were closed some time in the 140s/130s BC. In Istros, fragments pertaining to the Meter Medallion Group constitute only c. 2.5% of the big corpus of 711 fragments published by Domaneantu (2000), whereas they make up 11.5% of the vessels found in Olbia's Sector NGS. Also in Tyras, located mid-way between Istros and Olbia, the proportion of Meter Medallion Group vessels is high and, though I do not have the exact percentage, seems closer to the Olbia pattern. This may strengthen the case of an Olbiopolitan production, because Tyras was a city within Olbia's sphere of influence.

To my mind the Meter Medallion workshop contributes to paint a picture of the local culture in the northwestern part of the Black Sea region not just in terms of objects, but also in terms of habits or attitudes. To my knowledge this is the only workshop, Pontic or Mediterranean, where apparently 100% of the vessels were signed. Even the Demetrios production of the Bosphoran Kingdom was only partially signed (c. 75% of the bases, but still a high number compared with the Mediterranean). One may wonder, whether this epigraphic habit reflects a negotiation of cultural identity. To hammer my nail into the argument, I should like to draw your attention to two unpublished bowls from Olbia. As you see their decoration belongs to known Kirbeis decoration: one with Eros freeing a bird as filler in the vegetation and the other one with suspended wreaths tied with a bow over a vegetal calyx. However, both of the bowls also feature the same stamp of a very detailed *gorytos*. The *gorytos*, the Scythian bow case, already from the 4th century BC obtained in the northern Black Sea region an almost iconic status. The depiction on the two bowls epitomizes a continuity of this iconic representation. Surely the mould maker had seen a *gorytos* before. After all, the workshop had at its head a man of Thracian descent.