

NB – UNEDITED CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

A local group of mouldmade bowls from Mesambria Pontica

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The excavations on the north shore of the Old Town of Nessebar (ancient Mesambria) conducted by Anelia Bozkova uncovered various remains dating from Early Iron to the Middle Ages. Among the pottery from Hellenistic period were the fragments of 102 mouldmade bowls. In the following paper a specific group with characteristic fabric, shape and decoration is studied.

Technology

The texture of the clay is fine, hard, occasionally with traces of mica. The colour is grey, usually darker (almost black) on the lower part of the vessel. Double coloured rim has a light grey streak towards exterior. The bowls are covered with glaze – thick and good adhered inside the bowl and on the rim, and thinner on the body. The decorated zones are uneven and mat glazed. The glaze inside is lustrous, generally black, with some varieties of colour on the border between rim and body. The surface outside is dark grey or black on the walls and mottled brown or brownish grey upwards. Limited number of the bowls is entirely grey glazed.

Some bowls are made in moulds with careless stamped motifs and a characteristic double outlines could be seen on their decoration

Shape

The bowls have quite uniform shape, resembling some metal *phialai*. Their rims are high, abruptly outturned and clearly distinct from the body. The lip is usually pointed; the diameter varies between 11,6 and 14 cm. The widest part of the body is some millimeters smaller. The bodies are hemispherical or squarish. The ridges surrounding medallion serve as a bottom of the vessels (2,4 – 3 cm).

Decoration

Characteristic of the group are scraped groove below the lip, as well as the grooves on the border between rim and body. This place is usually decorated with a row of beads, exceptionally a row of circles, surrounded by two ridges. Sometimes this decoration is careless made or rather imitated after the joining of the rim with the mouldmade body and could be hardly distinguished. Additional rows of mouldings were stamped on some bowls: tendrils, lesbian leaf and eggs-and-darts, the latter surrounded by two rows of beads.

The fragmentary state and limited number of the finds make difficult to outline some generalizations about the wall decoration. Judging from the known examples, the figured, vegetal and long-petal bowls were preferred. Human figures appeared independently (dancing girls) or combined with plants, birds and different objects. Figured compositions, especially erotic scenes could be seen, but the little Eros, going right with lifted right leg and arm, probably was the favourite.

Occasionally animals were represented: lions, dolphins and birds. The last complement the bowls with Erotes and vine tendrils on the vegetal bowls.

Vegetal patterns, such as trefoil ivy garland, different kinds of palmettes and hanging garlands with flowers decorate some of the walls. Possibly favorite motifs are ivy and vine tendrils, the latter with flying birds and flowers. Different kinds of long petals (convex, single or double outlined) were used as independent decoration or combined with acanthus leaves and tendrils or vine motifs. Calyx covers entire walls or is limited to the bottom of the bowl. The common leaf is acanthus alternating with flowers, nelumbo and lotus petals. Small calyxes could also be composed by palmettes or small ferns.

The medallions are decorated with two kinds of rosettes: ten-petaled triple rosette and twelve-petaled rosette with rounded and pike-like petals. They are surrounded by one or two ridges.

A direct influence on the decoration from the major manufacturing centres could be hardly observed. Furthermore, some characteristics are close to the production typical for different areas (for example the beads to Argive workshop of Demetrios-Iason; the rim-grooves to Asia Minor producers such as Antiochia and Tarsus; the scrapped groove under the rim to Athenian bowls, etc.). Probably the most obvious similarities could be found in Pergamene pottery – mouldmade and so-called *Applikenkeramik*, where similar ivy leaves and erotic scenes were preferred.

Distribution

All distinguished bowls from researched group are found in the Pontic area, in particular in its western and northern part. The majority of the finds come from Mesambria, where they are 18% of all known mouldmade bowls. Many of them are found fragmentary preserved in the city but unfortunately out of their initial context in later layers and pits (Late Roman and Medieval). Some vessels in a good state of preservation are unearthed in the cemetery. Several pieces are found in Apollonia, one of them in a late Hellenistic room, another in a deposit with materials (roof tiles and vessels) from the first half of the 2nd century. The rest of the finds are published but unfortunately, only with photos. Several examples (three illustrated) are mentioned from 2nd century layer in Panticapaeum (ca. 3%). Single finds are known from the cemeteries of Odessos, Tomis and Olbia.

Date

Published bowls from the graves, as well as the layer in Panticapaeum are generally dated in the 2nd century. Better datable are the finds from Apollonia. The Rhodian amphora stamp of eponym Kleukrates I, found among the fragments from second Apollonian deposit gives 174/172 B.C. as *terminus post quem* for the group. First deposit from Apollonia contains 45 fragmentary preserved moulded bowls, mainly East Greek. Approximately a half of them are surely attributed to Monogram workshop, whose main activity period was recently set in second and third quarter of the 2nd century. Presented group is small, probably short-lived and the second quarter or mid 2nd century could be supposed for its production.

Origin

Publisher of Panticapaeian fragments suggested their Pergamenian origin, despite the lack of parallels (as fabric, shape and decoration) between them and Pergamenian materials. The limited area of distribution of these vessels suggests their Pontic origin. In the publications of the bowls from Odessos and Olbia was supposed that they are locally produced, what is doubtful because they are single finds there. More acceptable candidate is Mesambria where the grey bowls from presented group present 18% of all finds of mouldmade bowls. A piece of mould found there, though with no correspondence with the vessels, suggests that here were produced mouldmade bowls. The gray wares are preferred in the local workshops during the Classical period and continue

to be produced later. It has to be noticed that among the finds from Mesambria are two fragments, probably made in the same mould. The decoration variety here is greatest, while elsewhere the motifs are limited to long petals. Some exclusion present the pieces found in the neighbour city Apollonia.

Conclusion

Presented group of mouldmade bowls has specific technology of manufacturing and decoration, shape, and decorative motifs. It was distributed in the second quarter or mid 2nd century in the area of western and northern Black sea, where probably they were produced. Some arguments were adduced on behalf of its Mesambrian origin.