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**TABLE AMPHORAE FROM AUGUSTA TRAIANA (THRACE)**

*Many years of excavation on the territory of Augusta Traiana in the province of Thrace have yielded a significant number of so-called “table amphorae”. Several Roman and Late Roman types are described below. Almost all artifacts are from rescue excavations in the territory of the city and its necropolis. Of seven type recognized, three can be dated to the Roman period and four to the Late Roman. Oats found in some vessels raise questions of cooperative transport and table function of the group. Another question concerns the production on such vessels. Comparanda and dates come from several Roman towns and from other sites in the hills, where table amphorae provide over 50% of the total amphorae.*

The modern town of Stara Zagora (ancient *Augusta Traiana*) with low lands on the south side is situated in the southern foothills of Sarnena Gora, part of the Sredna Gora range<sup>1</sup>. During the Principate *Augusta Traiana* was part of the Roman province of Thrace, and after the reforms of Diocletian it was incorporated in the Thracian diocese within the province of Thrace. Only about one-fifth of the area of the town has been explored despite the rescue and regular archaeological excavations that have been going on for years. Ceramic finds from these excavations are housed in the Stara Zagora Regional Museum of History.

The following types of transport amphoras are represented in the museum’s collection: Dressel 24 – 14.0%; Dressel 24 similis – 14.0%; LRA 1 – 8.0%; LRA 2 – 2.5%. But the most important group is the so-called table amphorae, which are 26.0% of the total number. Seven types were identified and also rims from other two types of amphorae. Their contexts from rescue excavations within the city and from the cemeteries provide grounds for a comprehensive analysis and dating.

Almost all of the identified types belong to the Roman period. Only two of the types can be referred to Late Roman period. The small number of table amphorae from this time can probably be explained with the general study of the ceramic material from *Augusta Traiana* – nearly nothing is known about the ceramics from the 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries, in comparison to the well-published pottery from the Roman period.

**Type I**

These are amphorae with a tall cylindrical neck, a vertically turned rim and twisted handles. It has a cylindrical body and its toe is affixed to a low ring-like stem. The containers were made of orange-red clay, and the exterior is coated with reddish-brownish paint. The type was founded in reliably dated

stratigraphic layers covering the period from the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

**Type II (Plate 1,1)**

Despite certain features of the Type II containers which make the amphorae look similar in shape to pitchers, several of the unearthed amphorae had a stopper which is a clear indicator that these amphorae were used for transport. These containers are made of grey clay; the body is painted in red. This type has a biconical body and a long neck narrowing in the middle. There is a low ring base and a flat bottom, slightly recessed within the base.

This type was localized at a mound burial reliably dated by coins of Trajan. However, here again there is the question whether this container was used to carry liquids for the burial ritual, and the container was afterwards left in the burial facility. K. Kalchev reported a similar situation in the necropolises of *Augusta Traiana*, where ritually broken table amphorae were recovered<sup>2</sup>.

**Type III (Plate 1,2)**

These are amphorae with a broad neck and narrow rim grooved on the exterior. These containers are made of beige-brownish sandy clay. The body is in the shape of an ovoid and is painted in pale light-brown to beige. A low ring-base is recessed with a central button. Average dimensions of the amphorae: neck diameter – 9.0 cm; height – 31.0 cm. The type was localized in the necropolis in the village of Bruchishte, in the Enibersh locality and can be dated roughly to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

<sup>1</sup> IVANOV 2002, 218.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished. The materials and details are kept in Stara Zagora Regional Museum of History.

**Type IV (Plate 1,3)**

These are amphorae made of brown-reddish clay coated with the same colour of paint. The neck is relatively long with profiled rings at top and bottom. The body is ovoid and the base with a ring with concavo-convex underside and recessed center. The average dimensions are neck diameter – 7.5 cm; height – 20.0 cm. The type was found in the necropolises of the town and can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

**Type V (Plate 1,4)**

These are amphorae with elongated necks and a profiled central section. The containers are made of brown sandy clay with some impurities of mica, sand and fine quartz particles. The body is painted with thick brown paint, looking greyish at places. The neck is turned outwards with several ribs at the bottom. The bottom is concave. Average dimensions of the amphorae: neck diameter – 11.0 cm; height – 38.0 cm. Finding the type in insula A in the central part of the town facilitates the dating, i.e., mid- 2<sup>nd</sup>–early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

**Type VI (Plate 2, 5)**

These are massive amphorae with a low, broadly flaring neck and a straight rim grooved on the outside. The containers are made of beige clay with impurities of sand. The surface is covered with thick red paint, spilling on the internal surface of the container as well. The upper half and two handles is the single example that has been found, during rescue archaeological excavations in the central part of *Augusta Traiana*. Two buildings were excavated which were built in the late 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries and which were reconstructed later on<sup>3</sup>. The amphora was found in the earlier habitation layer in one of the buildings, which points to a dating to the late 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

**Type VII (Plate 2,6)**

These are spherical amphorae with a short, broad neck, made of grey sandy clay with impurities of sand and fine quartz particles. The handles are massive with two cross-sectional grooves on the outer edges. The neck is massive, rather thick, slightly turned outwards with a profiled ring at the bottom. The body is spherical and smooth, coated with grey paint. There is a ring base and a markedly convexo-concave underside with a central button. Average dimensions of the vessels: neck diameter – 10.0 cm; height – 32.0 cm. On the grounds of the available data the type can be dated to the period of the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

**Type VIII (Plate 2,7)**

The fabric is grey-beige in colour and sandy in texture, with impurities of quartz particles, sand and mica. The neck is unusually thick-walled and quite prominent; the middle of the neck is narrow. It was found at a mosaic level found during rescue excavation outside the town and reliably dated to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

Similar type are founded in roman vicus near to Charda, Yambol with date II–IV c<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> ILIEV 2012, 345–374.

<sup>4</sup> ALEXANDROVA 2013, 70, 1/3.

**Type IX (Plate 2,8)**

These are globular containers made of beige sandy clay with impurities of quartz particles and mica. The surface is covered with red-brownish thick paint. The neck is low and broad with several grooves at top and bottom. The spherical body is wheel ridged. The bottom is concave, without a base ring. Similar amphorae are known to be found in various places along the Danube. The dating can be referred to the late 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>5</sup>.

**Type ? (Plate 2,9)**

Only a single, cylindrical neck was identified. It has an heavy, outward thickened rim decorated with several grooves. The clay is brown with impurities of quartz particles and sand. The surface is covered in red paint. The fragment is identified as a container belonging to the category of table amphorae on the basis of similar finds. A similar container, identified by the scholar as an amphora-like container, was founded during the exploration of the Late Antique ceramics workshop near the village of Karanovo not far from the town of Nova Zagora<sup>6</sup>. Similar fragments were also found in the Kovachevsko Kale fortress near the town of Popovo. The type can be dated to the 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Currently it is difficult to identify Italic or Greek influence in the table amphorae from *Augusta Traiana*. As there were no Roman legions stationed in this part of the province of Thrace, one can safely postulate Greek influence especially for type I. However, shared technical features were identified among the several types, which indicates a close and isolated area. They were used both for storage and transport.

As far as the production of table amphorae in *Augusta Traiana* and on the present day Bulgarian land is concerned, several significant conclusions can be made, especially about the Late Roman period. In spite of the numerous studies of the ceramics production and the ceramic kilns published by Krassi Kalchev, we have no indication that table amphorae were produced there. Containers for the same purpose were produced on the territory of *Marcianopolis*,<sup>7</sup> where, despite some uncertainties, they can be dated to the late 3<sup>rd</sup>–early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The development of some of the types presents a serious interest, and this is valid also for Late Roman period. Several settlements, predominantly in the mountains, studied recently, provide an enormous share of the entire amphorae. Thus for instance, on the territory of Perperikon in the eastern Rhodopi mountains, table amphorae account for about 70 % of the total number of amphorae. Similarly in the well-known Shishman's Kale, which is not far away from the present day town of Samokov, the share of these containers is about 55%.<sup>8</sup> Such amphorae in the Kovachevo Kale near the town of Popovo account for 17%. Most probably in mountainous and hilly settlements these amphorae served both table and transport functions. The goods were supplied in amphorae to the foothills of the individual settlements; there they were

<sup>5</sup> KUZMANOV, GRUDEV 2013, 363.

<sup>6</sup> BORISOV 2013, 334 t. 9,9.

<sup>7</sup> GEORGIEV/MINČEV 1991, 224.

<sup>8</sup> HRISTOV 2014, 56–57.

re-loaded into table amphorae so that the liquid could be taken to higher places. Traces of wheat, olive oil and wine were found in some of the containers unearthed in Perperikon.

Concerning the distribution of this specific group in the old civil centers from the period of the principate, it is rather poorly represented, except for several settlements along the Lower Danube limes. Here again comes the issue of the distribution of table amphorae on the territory of *Augusta Traiana*. Almost certainly in the Roman period some of the containers were used in ritual practices during funeral processions. In respect of the containers from Late Roman period, they are a much smaller number. It is worth noting that the containers from this period have a much more rounded body in comparison to the ones from the Roman period. The share of the amphorae on the territory of the antique town is rela-

tively small, however, the table amphorae cover a significant percentage, similarly to the situation in the mountainous and hilly settlements in Late Roman period. The fact that there are no big navigable rivers in the region of Stara Zagora and the apparently greater isolation of *Augusta Traiana* in comparison with Philippopolis for example, make one assume that the goods were delivered to a certain point, and were then reloaded into table amphorae to be transported to the territory of the town. If so, this specific group of containers was also used to re-export goods. Certainly, not all types of amphorae, but just a few of them, could be used for this purpose, especially the ones which were widely spread during Late Antiquity and which gave rise to numerous local forms and variances.

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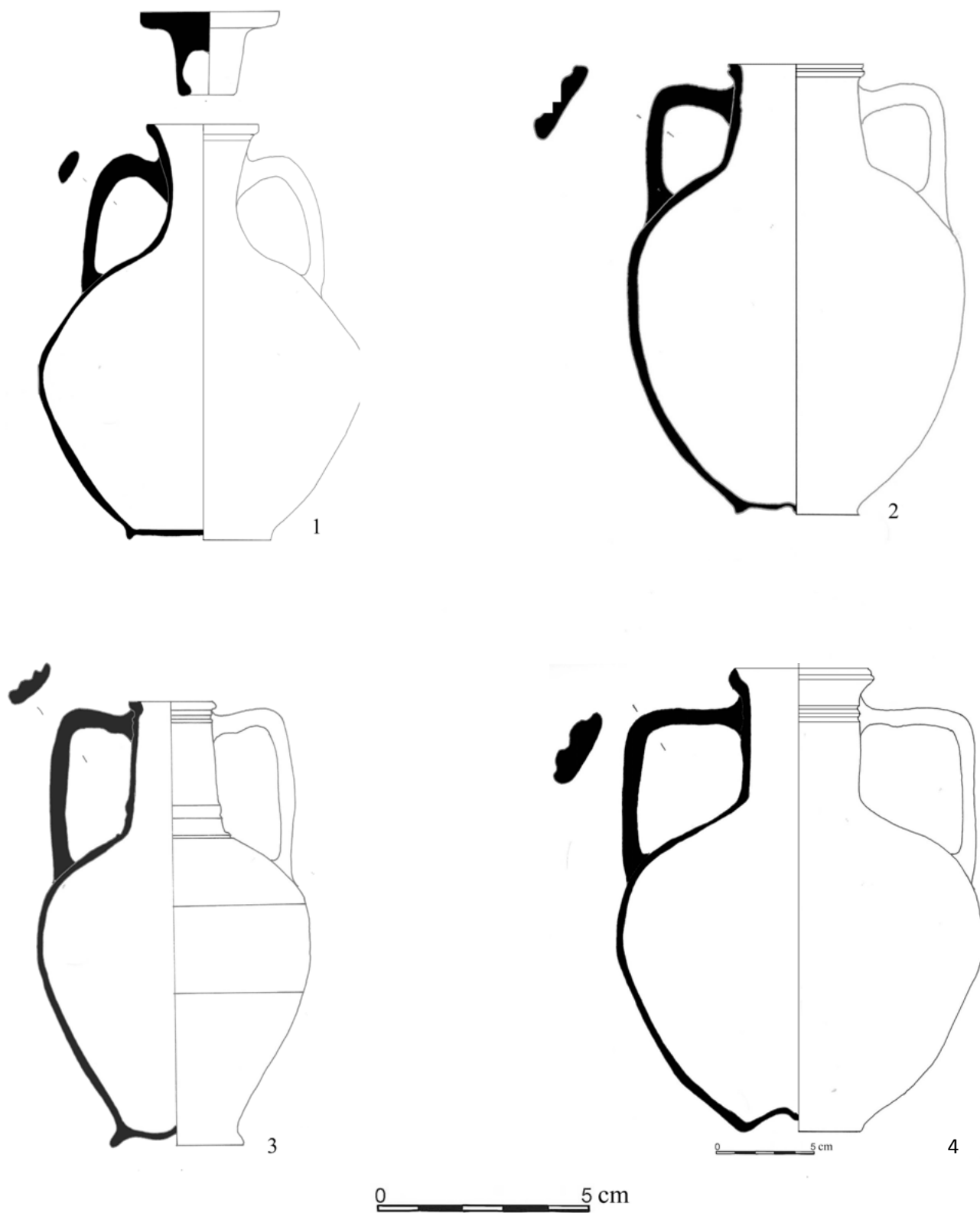
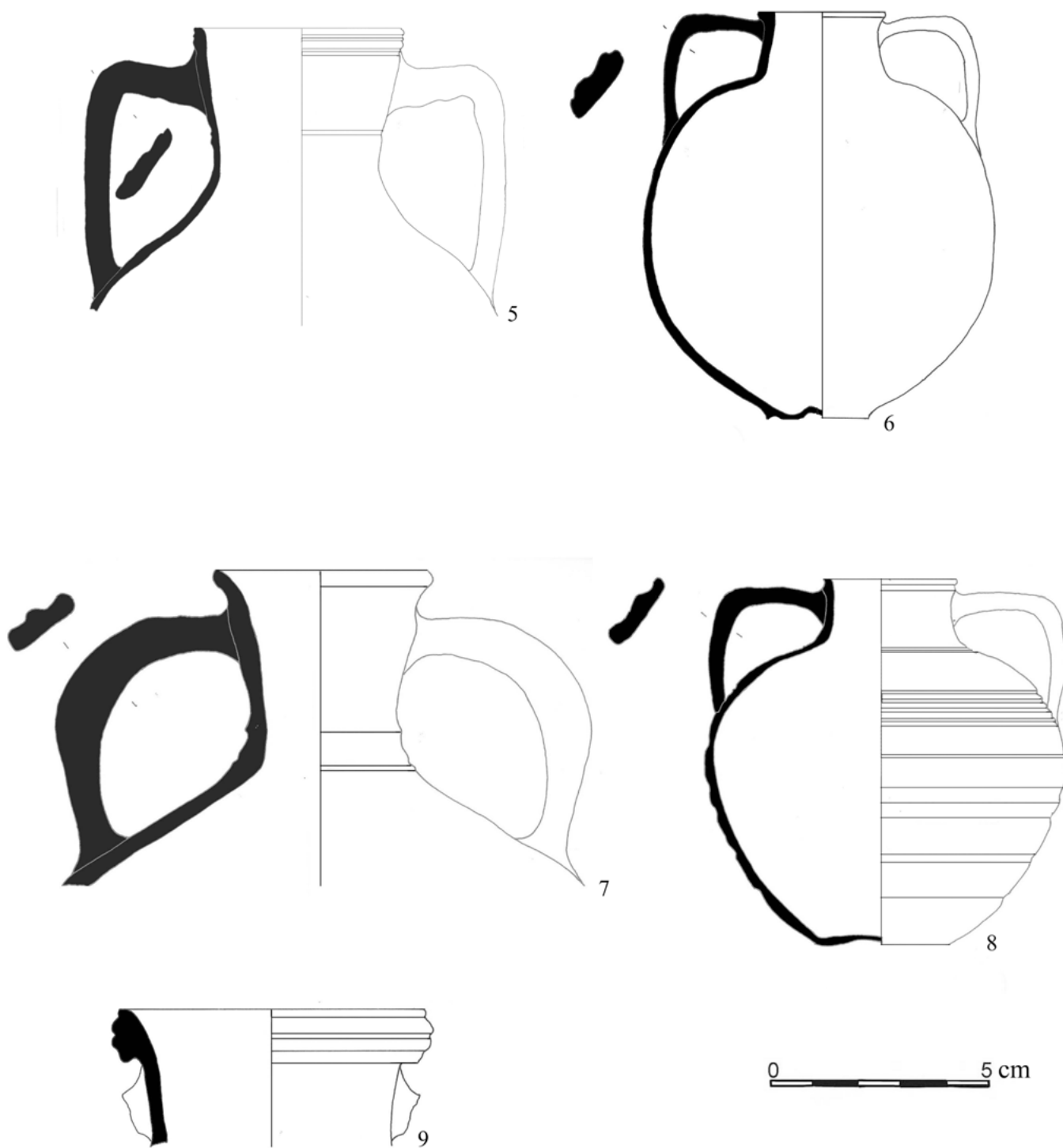


Plate 1. 1 Type II; 2 Type III; 3 Type IV; 4 Type V.



**Plate 2.** 5 Type VI; 6 Type VII; 7. Type VIII; 8 Type IX; 9 Type X.

