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A GENERAL ASSESSMENT ON THE HELLENISTIC POTTERY OF KURUL FORTRESS

With this paper we provide an overview of the Hellenistic pottery of Kurul fortress on the eastern coast of the Black Sea Region (mainly the north-eastern shores of Turkey). On the basis of some Hellenistic pottery assemblages that have been found during the excavations, we will make an attempt to build up a typology and chronological development. This study represents a part of the results from a larger study of the Hellenistic pottery of Kurul fortress. Therefore, it is not exhaustive in the choice of pottery types. Some of the most characteristic and exemplary finds will be selected for the illustrations. The primary aim of this paper is to investigate the contribution of archaeological researches at Kurul fortress to the archaeology of Hellenistic pottery in the Black Sea region.

Black Sea Region – Hellenistic pottery – Kurul Fortress

1. Introduction

Kurul fortress, located within the borders of Ordu province which is at the intersection of the Central and Eastern parts of the Black Sea region, is a mountaintop settlement with an altitude of 571 meters (**fig. 1**). It is situated on the peak of the Kurul rocks that overlook the Melet (*Melanthios*) valley, the modern city of Ordu and its coastline. Regular excavations at the site have been conducted since 2010 and a number of sections of the fortress have been investigated during this period. There are two sectors on the rocks that gradually rise towards the peak: The *Inner Fortress* and the *North Terrace* (**fig. 2**). The Inner Fortress is composed of a stepped tunnel, a rock reservoir, a rock altar, and other units. The North Terrace has a much wider settlement area with its rooms attached to the inner part of the fortification walls, including two storage rooms. All foundations in these sectors show two architectural phases (1a/b) consisting of repairs and renovations.

Although some coins unearthed from the site date back to the 4th century BC (Şenyurt and Akçay 2017: 180), no architectural layer of that time span has yet been identified in the fortress. The present results of ongoing excavations since 2010, reveal that the open-air cult area on the peak of the rock has a history dating back to the 3rd century BC and was probably used as an area where the locals performed their worship and rituals (Şenyurt and Akçay 2016: 229; Şenyurt and Akçay 2017: 181) (**fig. 3**). The formation of the rock crest into a fortress by including the peak of the rock, which is clear that it has been used until the beginnings of the 2nd century BC (Şenyurt and Akçay 2016: 229), took place during the reign of Mithradates VI Eupator (120-63 BC), probably in the last quarter of the 2nd century BC (Şenyurt and Akçay 2016: 222; Şenyurt and Akçay 2017: 180). Considering the geographical and topographical position of the fortress which was very

suitable for the military policy of the Mithradates VI, it is clear that Kurul fortress was one of the most important military stations around Ordu during this period and apparently served a more important purpose as a cult centre (Şenyurt and Akçay 2017: 180). The archaeological data obtained so far reveal that the fortress was destroyed during the Roman invasion which is thought to have occurred in 65/64 BC (Şenyurt and Akçay 2016: 234, 239) and was abandoned soon after the destruction (Şenyurt and Akçay 2017: 182).

Although it was settled for a short period only, it provides important data for contributing to the archaeology of both the Black Sea and Anatolia with its numerous finds of various types, of which the most common is pottery. It presents a great assemblage of pottery shapes including mostly the table wares with different types of cups, plates, spherical and hemispherical bowls, one- and two-handled jugs etc., as well as other specific group of finds such as transport amphorae, unguentaria and lamps. This paper is a preliminary examination of the typology and chronology of the most common vessel types in the fortress.

2. The Hellenistic Pottery of Kurul Fortress

The storage vessels constitute the largest pottery group in the fortress and about 30 nearly complete storage jars were found *in situ* while more than 90 fragmentary vessels were also unearthed (**figs. 4-5**). The well preserved ones are half-buried in order, reaching 1,20 cm in depth with the rims about 50-60 cm in diameter. Based on the fabric, most of the pieces are local products and the similarity in the fabric shows that they may have been produced of clay from the same or neighbouring beds around Ordu province. Their clay is mostly rough and hard, light red (2.5YR 7/6, 7/8), red (2.5YR 4/6), reddish



Fig. 1. General view of Kurul fortress.

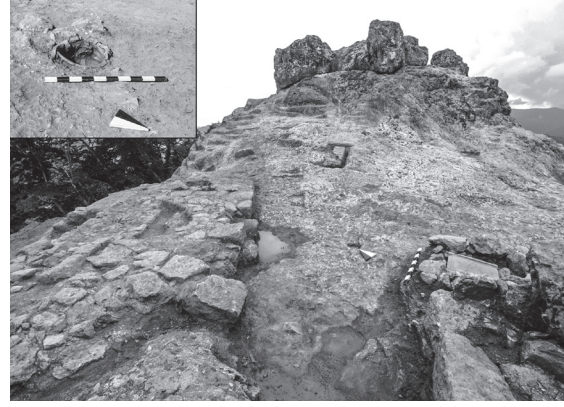


Fig. 3. The rock altar and the open-air cult area in Kurul fortress.



Fig. 2. The excavated sectors in Kurul fortress.



Fig. 4. The half-buried storage jars from KTB-M9 in the North Terrace in Kurul fortress.



Fig. 5. The half-buried storage jars from KTB-M9 in the North Terrace in Kurul fortress.

yellow (5YR 7/6), light reddish-brown (5YR 6/4) or dark grey (10YR 4/1) in colour with the inclusions of some small pebbles, quartz, thin lime and rarely thin mica particles. None of them has a slip.

Among the vessels for liquids the finds of transport amphorae should be noted here as another large group in the pottery assemblage; they are generally found along with the storage jars. Of these amphorae and the fragments, about 48 can be classified as Rhodian, Knidian, Koan, Heracleian, Sinopean, and Colchian products. Rhodian origin is revealed by the eponym and fabricant stamps on the handles while the others are identified by the characteristic of clay, shape of handles and the forms of the rims and toes.

Rhodian amphorae are not numerous in the Kurul fortress. Apart from two handle fragments bearing the stamps of the

eponym 'ΕΠΙΑΣΙΚΡΑΤΕΥΣ' from 200-175 BC (Jöhrens, 1999: 38) and of the fabricant 'ΣΩΚΡΑΤΕΥΣ' from 215-175 BC (Grace 1934: 227, no. 48; Cankardeş-Şenol 1995: 79, no. 26-27) (**fig. 6a-b**), the Rhodian group is represented with mostly toes, one complete but totally broken example and another neck fragment which has been broken at the lower end of the handles (**fig. 7**). They display the same morphological features and dimensions: the handles are always bent at a sharp angle, the toe is large and has clearly defined edges, and the profile looks conical with a soft angle on the shoulder (Monachov 2005: 69-95). Without the stamped amphorae-handles, it is hard to establish more precise chronological connections for these vessels here, but still we have enough evidence to illustrate the shipping of wine from Rhodes to destinations in the eastern Black Sea and its environs.



Fig. 6a-b. Stamped Rhodian amphora handles from Kurul fortress.

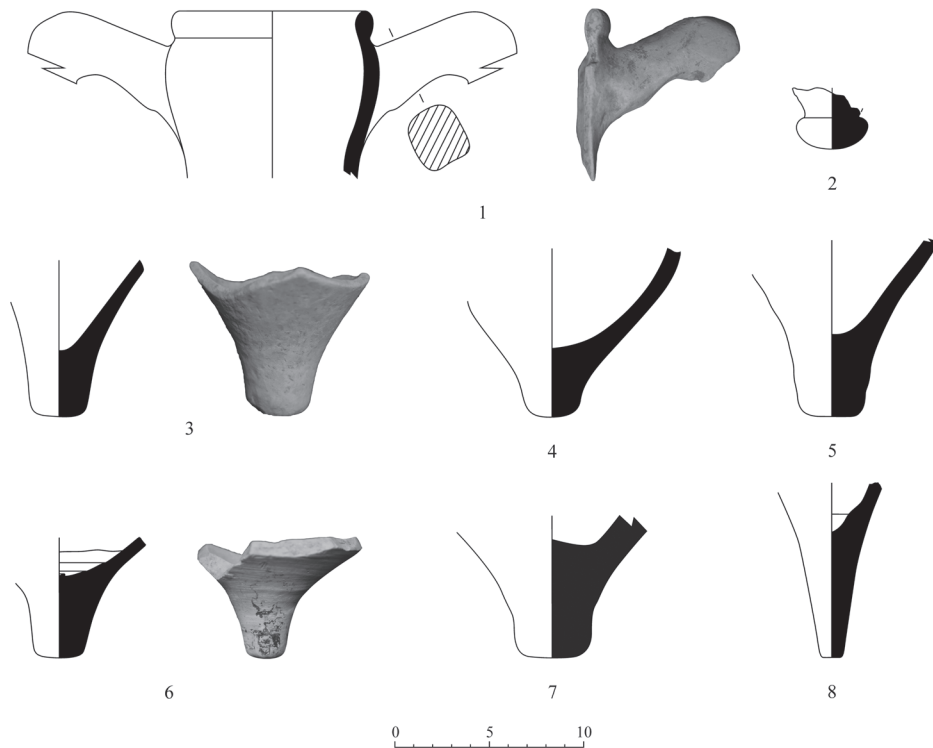


Fig. 7. Rhodian amphorae from Kurul fortress.

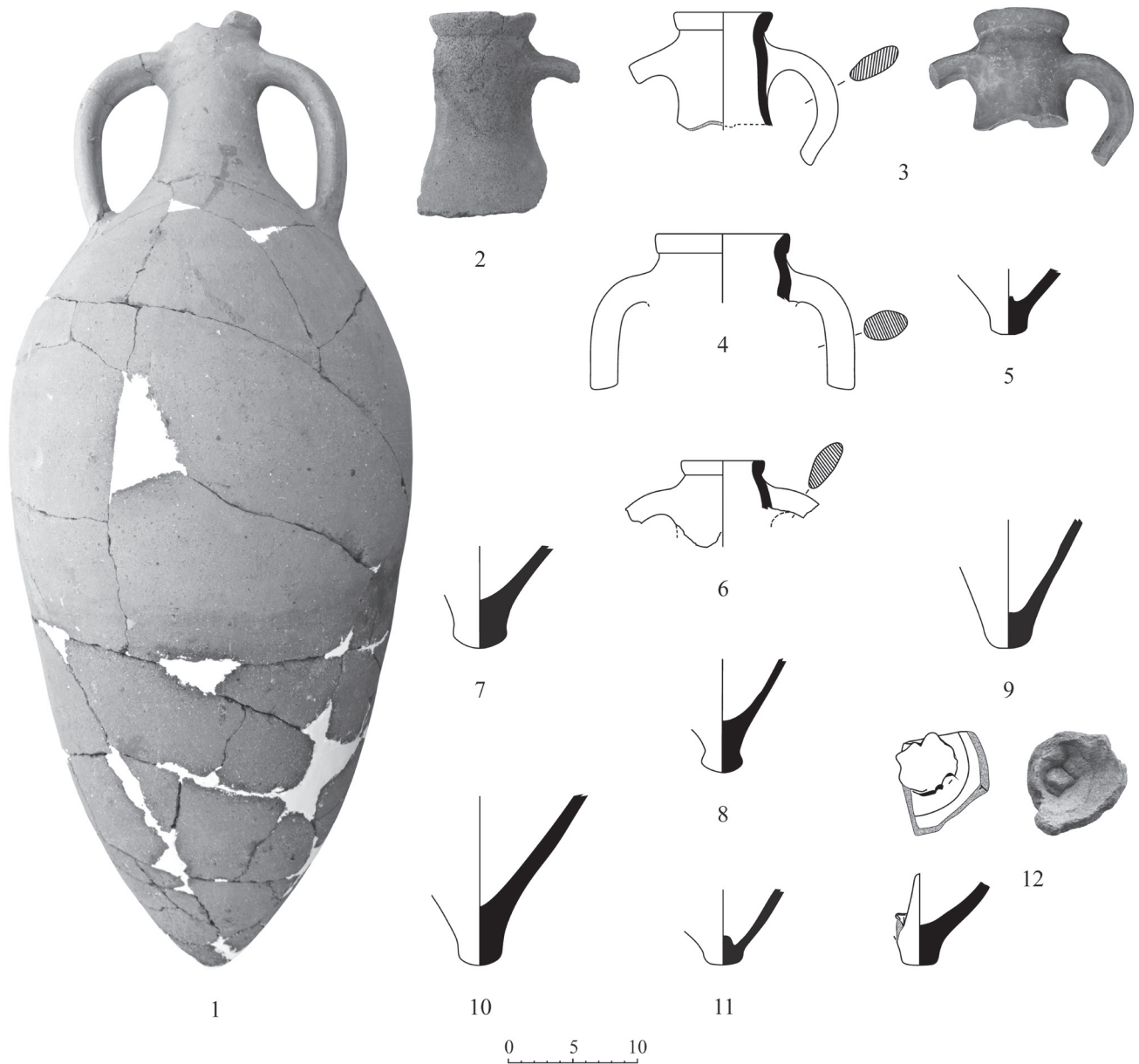


Fig. 8. Colchian amphorae from Kurul fortress.

The brown clay amphorae, which are considered to be of Colchian origin, constitute the majority of the amphorae fragments at Kurul (**fig. 8**). Colchian amphorae were in manufacture for a very long period from the 4th century BC until the 5th century AD (Monachov 2009: 23-24; Vnukov 2009: 29). Therefore, all Hellenistic and Roman brown clay amphorae compose one big variable morphological type CH 1 with some common significant features in general shape, form of toes, handles, and rims and technology as well, which were not invariable over the course of time (Tsetskhladze and Vnukov 1992: 372; Vnukov 2001: 149, 2003: 160-173, 193-194; Vnukov 2009: 29). For instance, some examples of brown clay amphorae found at Kurul have a specific protuberance inside the toe attributed to Colchian origin (**fig. 8, 12**). All of them have brown clays with the inclusions of small black and red pebbles (aggregates), lime and mica grains. Also some examples

have a distinctive deliberate inclusion of black sparkling grains of pyroxene in the clay, which can be easily mistaken with the Sinopean ones. But the typological and morphological features show that they are clearly separate groups. Considering their morphological features, we can state that almost all brown clay amphorae from Kurul are of type CH 1B and date back to the end of the second or the first half of the 1st century BC.

Unlike the transport vessels, the few pieces of fine ware discovered at Kurul are local products (**fig. 9**). The similarity in fabric shows that local ones from the Late Hellenistic period mostly imitate Eastern Sigillata A forms or other red-slipped wares. The clay is fine and hard, and there are some small thin lime and few mica particles in the clay. The slip is mostly thin and applied by dipping.

Besides the local fine wares, a great number of imported fine wares have been discovered at Kurul fortress. Among

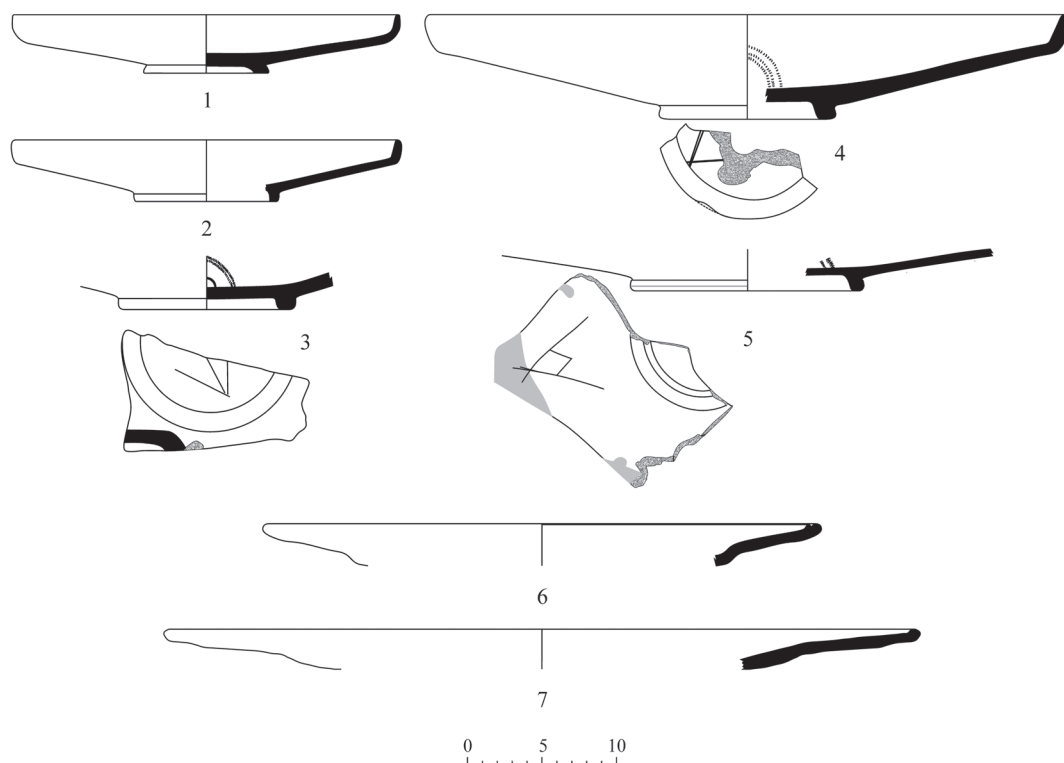


Fig. 9. Some examples of local pottery from Kurul fortress.

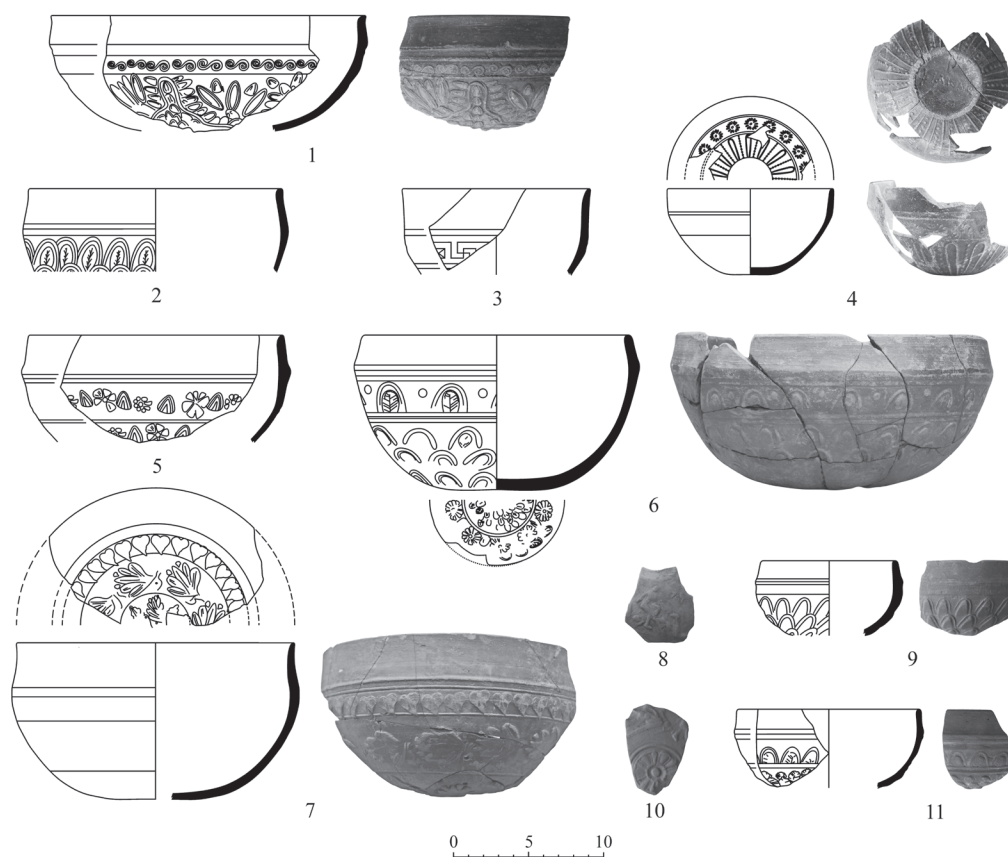


Fig. 10. The Mould-made relief bowls from Kurul fortress.

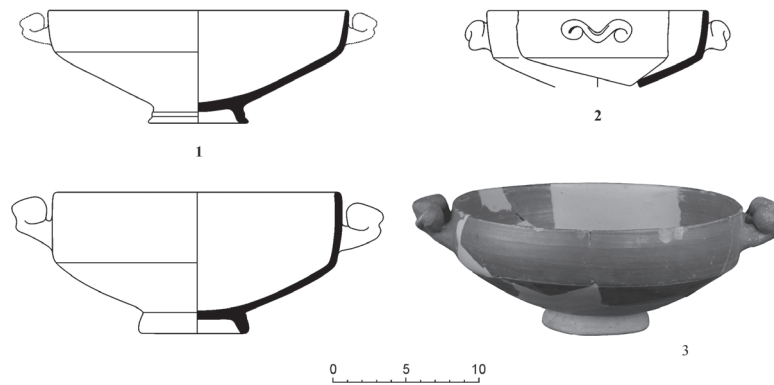


Fig. 11. The carinated cups with II-formed handle from Kurul fortress.

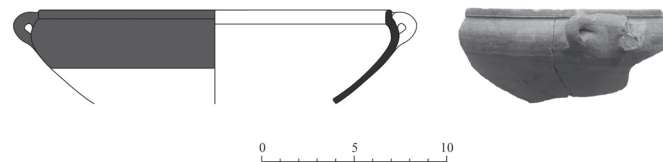


Fig. 12. A skyphos with double-loop handle from Kurul fortress.

them, the most numerous group comprises grey wares represented with 3 sub-groups: Ephesian grey ware, micaceous fabric and Knidian grey ware. We can clearly distinguish a large group of Ephesian production with the variety of shapes at Kurul, but the most common types are mould-made relief bowls (**fig. 10**). These bowls comprise one of the main groups of the Hellenistic fine ware imports at Kurul fortress with ca. 65 fragments which have been found so far. The main types are deep bowls with slightly concave or vertical rim and relatively flat bowls with visibly concave rim, which match up well with the typology of the Ephesian bowls defined by Rogl (2014: 122). The average diameter of the bowls varies between 12 and 16 cm. The clay is hard and thick, grey (10YR 6/1, 2/1), dark grey (GLE Y1 3/N, 2.5/N), brown or brownish grey (5YR 7/6, 6/6; 7.5YR 7/4) in colour with the inclusions of small thin lime particles and small flakes of mica. The slip is thin and mostly dark grey or black (GLE Y1 3/N, 2.5/N; 10YR 2/1) in colour with a few red or reddish brown ones (2.5YR 5/6; 10 R 4/4). The decoration on these vessels is the repetition of well-known floral and geometric motifs of the Mediterranean, which mainly consist of imbricate leaves, long petals, long petals alternating with rows of raised dots, leaves of acanthus and palms, and long petals and relief dots with overlapping triangular leaves, etc. Most of the bowls from these workshops look very similar to each other and slightly change in decoration. They are mostly the products of Ephesian workshops manufactured within a chronological time frame dating from the end of the 2nd to the first decades of the 1st century BC (Rogl 2014: 134). For this chronology, especially a product of the Philon workshop which was found at Kurul stands in the forefront (Şenyurt and Akçay 2016: 233-234).

It is a hemispherical bowl with grey clay and dark grey slip, bearing the potter's signature on the bottom medallion (**fig. 10, 4**). Since the production of Philon's workshop is proven for the first decades of the 1st century BC in Ephesos (Rogl 2014: 134), it matches up with the other finds of Kurul belonging to the last settlement phase of the fortress (65/64 BC).

Knidian grey ware imports in the fortress are represented with the carinated cups with II-formed handle which are dated between the end of the 2nd century BC and early 1st century BC (Doksanaltı 2006: 136; Kögler 2014: 157) (**fig. 11**). They demonstrate the principal features of Knidian shapes with a conical body, straight or slightly convex walls and a clear contour without interrupting grooves. An essential element of this shape is the more or less sharp carination of the body. The clay is hard and thick, grey (5YR 5/1), greyish brown (10 YR 5/2), light reddish brown (5YR 6/4) or reddish yellow (5YR 6/6; 7.5YR 7/6, 6/6) in colour with the inclusions of small thin lime particles. In some cases small flakes of silvery and golden mica are also visible within the inclusions of the clay. The slip is thin and applied by dipping. On some vessels the slip is matt or semi-matt while it is dark and vivid on others and varies in colour and texture from red to brown and grey to black.

The fine ware imports of Kurul fortress are represented with another group that the archaeologists working in the Mediterranean call Hellenistic Colour-Coated Ware A. It is suggested that the distribution of this group might have been connected with the trade activities of Rhodes (Domžalski 2007: 166, 176). The most characteristic vessels belonging to this group are the skyphoi with conical body and double-loop handles (two handles pressed in the middle to

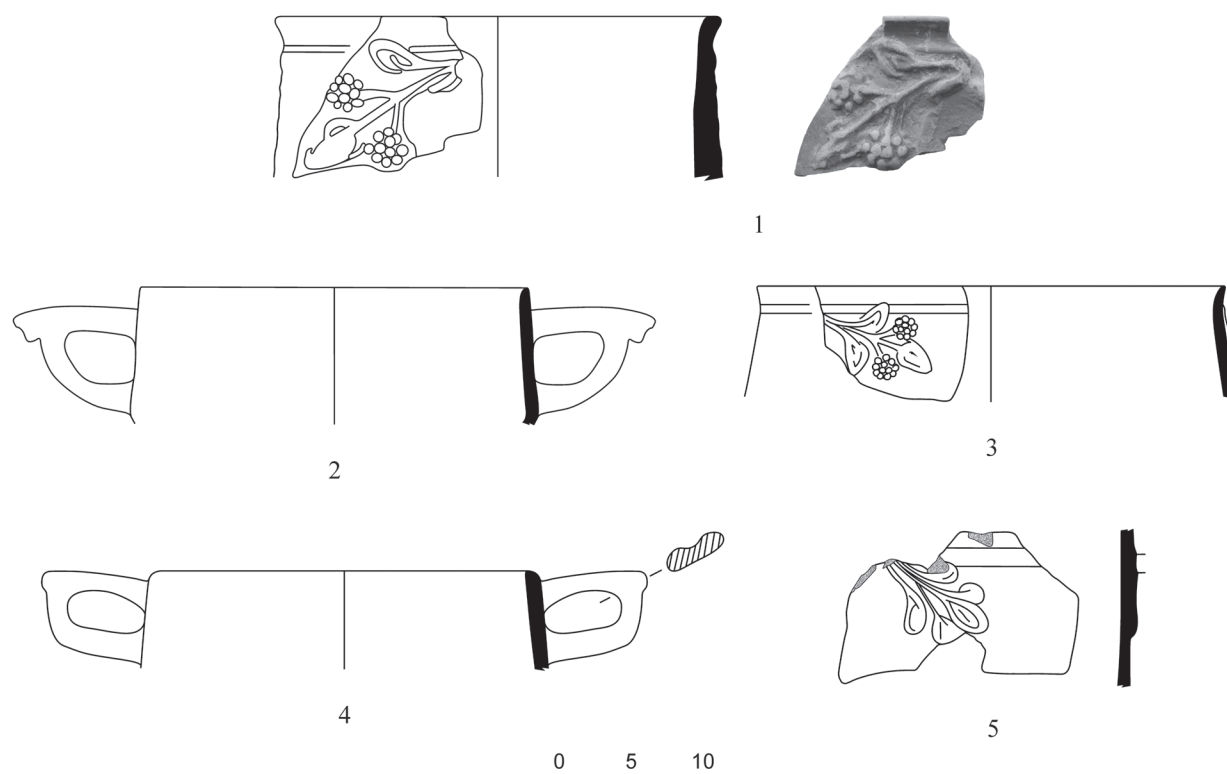


Fig. 13. The skyphoi ornamented with ivy leaves from Kurul fortress.

form two small loops) (Domžalski 2007: 166, fig. 4a-c, 5-7) which are represented with only 8 profile fragments in the fortress (**fig. 12**). The skyphoi are rather massive with sharply cut feet with a small diameter. The clay is medium to hard-fired and buff, pink or reddish yellow (7.5 YR 7/4, 7/6) in colour, sometimes with a slightly pinkish hue (5 YR 7/4, 7/6 or 6/4, 6/6) and there are no visible inclusions except for very small lime particles and rarely seen small flakes of silvery mica. Some vessels are entirely covered with slip on the inner surface while only the upper part of some others is covered on the exterior. The slip is usually bi-coloured: brownish-red or reddish-brown on the interior, dark grey or greyish-brown on the upper part of the exterior and red or brown on the lower part of the exterior.

Since the mid-2nd century BC, Pergamene appliqué ware has become very popular in the Black Sea region. Most of these vessels are skyphoi of the Forms S3 and S8 (Meyer-Schlichtmann 1988: pls. 7-8), dating back to the last quarter of the 2nd and the first quarter of the 1st centuries BC (Zhuravlev and Zhuravleva 2014: 262). Among the finds from Kurul fortress we have distinguished many profile fragments of these skyphoi with the ornaments of ivy leaves that are typical for the vessels found in the Black Sea region (Zhuravlev 2002: fig. 35, 3; Zhuravlev and Zhuravleva 2014: 262) (**fig. 13**). The clay is medium to hard-fired and yellowish red (5 YR 5/6), reddish yellow (7.5 YR 6/6, 6/4) or reddish brown (5 YR 5/8) in colour. There are no visible inclusions except for very small lime particles and rarely seen small flakes of golden mica. The slip is usually yellowish red, reddish brown or red in colour but is not preserved on the most of the fragments.

3. Conclusion

This paper is a preliminary examination of the typology and chronology of the most common vessel types in Kurul fortress, which comprise mostly the well-known Late Hellenistic pottery of the eastern Mediterranean. Considering the vessel types, it presents an assemblage that consists mostly of drinking cups, table wares and storage vessels. The limited number of vessels for cooking and preparation discovered in the fortress as well as no room apt for a kitchen suggest that the fortress served for military and cultic life rather than a civil one. A great number of votive objects and offerings found in the fortress, along with the military finds, support this suggestion.

Up to now very little was known about the potteries in the Black Sea region although there is plenty of information about the pottery types and their domestic and ritual context compared to other parts of Anatolia. With the recent researches conducted within the region, it is now known that the Hellenistic vessels of the Eastern Mediterranean from the late 2nd and 1st centuries BC were exported in large quantities to the Black Sea region and the imitations of the popular types were produced in local workshops. Especially the Ephesian and Pergamene wares are very easy to recognise for archaeologists working in the Black Sea region, even though only their decorated version was preferred.

The search for the origin of imported vessels based on their typological and morphological features provides us to identify the local elements of the pottery of Kurul fortress and of Ordu province (ancient Kotyora) in a wider scope. As in the case of Kurul, there is no pottery kiln or a Late Hellenistic

workshop which has yet been discovered in the area, except for the well-known amphora workshops from Colchis, Sinope and Heraclea Pontica. Therefore, in order to identify the local pottery groups of the Black Sea we need further information, which needs to be supported by the archaeometric analysis of the clay as well. In this respect, the examples of Kurul Fortress, which become prominent with a large variety of finds with

well-preserved conditions, will serve as an important source to shed light on the Hellenistic pottery of the eastern Black Sea Region. We hope that, with the new publications to appear in the near future, we will get much more knowledge about the distribution of imported wares as well as local groups of pottery. Thus the pottery of the Black Sea region can find the place it deserves in the pottery studies of the Hellenistic Anatolia.

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