

George Nuțu, Lucrețiu Mihailescu-Bîrliba &amp; Iuliana Costea

## ROMAN POTTERY FROM AEGYSSUS: THE TABLEWARE\*

The archaeological research undertaken at Tulcea (Dobruja, SE Romania) – the ancient *Aegyssus*<sup>1</sup> – has led to the discovery of vestiges specific to the settlement and they have contributed to partially throwing light on the history and evolution of the city in the early and late Roman period. The excavations of 1959, 1971, 1974–1980 and the subsequent sporadic ones (seldom), in the intramural area, have brought new data on the genesis, on the evolution of the defence system, and on some aspects regarding the topography of the ancient city. During the past years, a series of preventive archaeological researches have provided new data on the *extra muros* area of the settlement<sup>2</sup>, and the presentation of these excavations – often reduced spatially – has contributed to a better understanding of the habitation in this area.

The pottery discovered after the archaeological research was presented only briefly; hence, except for an amphorae deposit<sup>3</sup>, there has been no overall presentation of this material. The situation is the same when it comes to tableware (*vasa escaria*), though there has already been a first synthesis attempt for the fine pottery discovered after the recent research<sup>4</sup>.

The authors have chosen to present the early Roman tableware discovered in the past years, in most cases after salvation archaeological research. We have to underline that this category is still an open question as regards the typological and functional variations of the Roman pottery discovered in this centre. If, for numerous cities situated on the Danubian *limes* or on the Western Black Sea coast, there is synthesis information regarding this category, for the *Aegyssus* discoveries we only have the scantiest data. In accord with the current trends in the presentation of pottery, we have divided the ware by the regions of origin and, within every area, by forms and by technique, respectively.

From the production areas point of view, the fine pottery from *Aegyssus* can be divided into four main categories: the **Pontic types**, including **Pontic sigillata** and **Red slip**, the **Çandarlı ware**, Hayes Form 1 and Form 3, the **African Red slip** and the **Western sigillata**. We hope that the presentation of these forms will contribute to a better understanding of pottery production and circulation and of the economic

exchanges at the Danube *limes* in the first three centuries of the Christian era.

**I. Pontic ware**

The group of Pontic ware comprises **ware “en barbotine”, dishes, oval and rectangular platters**, products of local workshops on the Western and Northern Black Sea coast.

**The ware “en barbotine”.** Frequent in the sites of the province, the ware “en barbotine” constitutes one of the most spectacular types regarding the form and decoration. In the workshops within the city of *Nicopolis ad Istrum* it is well represented, while, in the north-east of *Moesia inferior*, it has been a mystery for a long time. Older or more recent discoveries are mentioned at *Callatis*, *Neptun*, *Tomis*, *Histria*, *Enisala*, *Niculitel*, *Dinogetia*, *Bărboși*, *Troesmis*, and *Carsium*<sup>5</sup>. Recently, new ware from *Arrubium*<sup>6</sup> and *Beroe*<sup>7</sup> has been published. Though the subsequent discoveries will definitely lead to the delimitation of new points, at the moment three certain production centres have been attested: *Durostorum*, *Pavlikeni*, and *Butovo*; the last two are situated in the city of *Nicopolis ad Istrum*. If, in the first centre, the production is limited quantitatively and stylistically, in the last two, the repertory of motifs and pottery amounts are massive<sup>8</sup>. The decorative motifs from the production centres of the city of *Nicopolis* are limited to vegetal forms: ivy leaves, pine-cones, and other stylised elements, produced between the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>9</sup>

As regards the ware discovered at *Aegyssus*, the decoration consists of lanceolate leaves, accurately reproduced. The first shard (**fig. 1,1**) belongs to a bowl with curved walls and ridge below the rim, made of fine orange fabric (Hue 10 YR 8/4), red-orange slip (Hue 10 YR 7/8) applied on both the inside and the outside, specific to the workshops of *Butovo*<sup>10</sup>. The fine, beige-reddish fabric (Hue 7.5 YR 8/3) and light orange slip (Hue 10 YR 8/4) of the bowl shards (**fig. 1,2–3**) are similar to certain products from the centres in the city of *Nicopolis ad Istrum*, but the appliqué tablet that replaces the

\* This paper was published within the context of CNCS-Project no. 217/2011, code 0550.

<sup>1</sup> NUȚU/COSTEA 2010, 47 footnote 1.

<sup>2</sup> NUȚU 2008, 209.

<sup>3</sup> ОПАИТ 1987, 145–155.

<sup>4</sup> NUȚU/COSTEA 2010, 147–162.

<sup>5</sup> BOUNEGRU 1988–1989, 99–111.

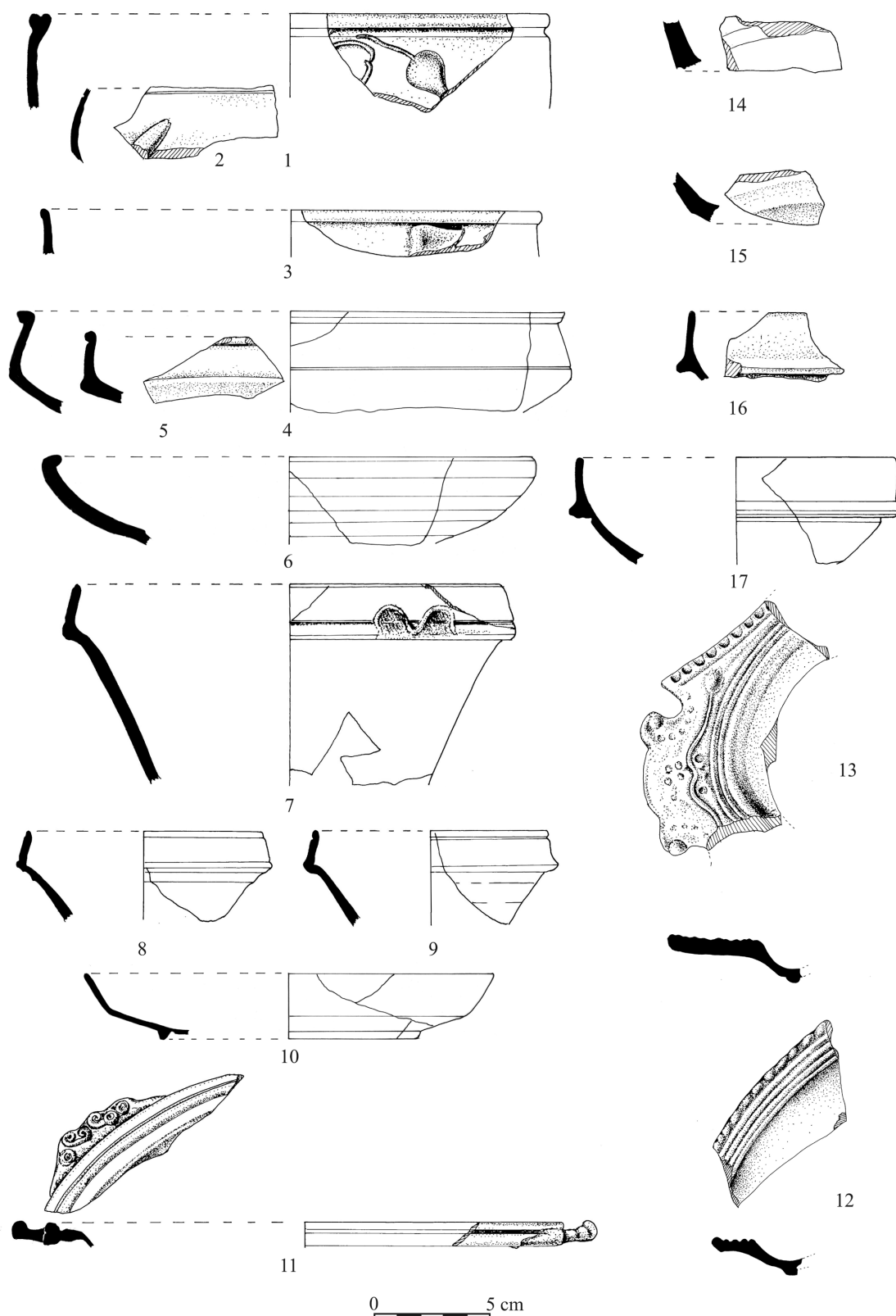
<sup>6</sup> PARASCHIV 1997, 321 pl. 2,13.

<sup>7</sup> NUȚU/PARASCHIV 2009, 180–181 no. 5 pl. 2,5.

<sup>8</sup> SULTOV 1985, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 51–52.

<sup>10</sup> SULTOV 1985, 66 type 1c fig. 29,1; SUCEVEANU 2000, 82–84 type XXII pl. 32,8.



**Fig. 1. Aegyssus.** 1–3 Pontic ware with barbotine decoration; 4–13 Pontic sigillata; 14–17 Çandarli ware.

handle of bowl no. 3 (**fig. 1,3**) is encountered on the Danube *limes* only in the case of a find discovered at *Arrubium*<sup>11</sup>.

**Pontic sigillata and Pontic Red slip.** The specific feature of this group is a series of **bowls, dishes, and platters**.

**Bowls** – The bowls are small- or medium-sized with oblique walls, vertical rim, decorated with incised lines, and a flat?, concave base, or with a ring-foot?. The fabric is fine, tile-coloured (Hue 5YR 6/8) or beige (Hue 5YR 6/4; Hue 2.5YR 7/3), while the slip is either orange, or brown with reddish hues (Hue 2.5YR 5/4; Hue 5YR 8/3).

<sup>11</sup> HARTUCHE/ANASTASIU 1976, 249 no. 517 fig. 517.

Within the repertory of the province, there is a great variety of types, while the number of items is highlighted within the pottery discoveries from various early Roman sites.

The finds discovered at *Aegyssus* do not allow a more precise chronological frame because of the archaeological context affected by subsequent interventions, particularly since the post-Mediaeval period. Hence, for the bowls (fig. 1,8–9) we propose the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, based on the analogies provided by the similar products discovered at *Histria*<sup>12</sup>, *Noviodunum*<sup>13</sup>, *Novae*<sup>14</sup>, and Pavlikeni, in the area of *Nicopolis ad Istrum*<sup>15</sup>. Another bowl (fig. 1,7) is worth mentioning because of the larger size than those of the previous finds and of the two impressions situated on the rim bent back towards the inside. As concerns the origin area of this version, with the fabric in various hues of tile-colour and brown-reddish slip with metallic shine, we can consider that it comes from somewhere in the North-Pontic regions (Pontic Sigillata A)<sup>16</sup>. The chronology – for which a series of discoveries from *Histria* provides close parallels<sup>17</sup> – belongs to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, with the mention that there are also a series of later items, from the following century, at *Olbia*<sup>18</sup>, *Tyras*<sup>19</sup>, *Tomis*<sup>20</sup>, and *Mirmekion*<sup>21</sup>. The curved walls, the rim bent back towards the inside, and the average-quality fabric specific to the bowls (fig. 1,4–6) indicate local forms, specific to the workshops from the north of the province of *Moesia inferior*, and, generally, to the area of *Noviodunum*.

**Dishes** – Three shards belong to this group and they can be included in the category of Pontic Red Slip Ware. A dish with thin walls, of fine fabric, orange-reddish slip (Hue 7.5YR 5/8), is encountered in the workshops within the city of *Nicopolis ad Istrum* (fig. 1,10). The shard fig. 1,11 belongs to an oval dish with applied handles belonging to the category of *Pontic sigillata A* with analogies at *Troesmis*<sup>22</sup>, in the North-Pontic area<sup>23</sup> and the Middle Danube<sup>24</sup>. It is made of dark-red fabric (Hue 5YR 7/4), red-brown slip with metallic shine (Hue 2.5YR 4/6), and the circulation period of the form corresponds to the 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. *Sultov type 6*, a form that corresponds to the dish analyzed, is a later type and its production is ascribed to the workshops from Butovo, since the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>25</sup> The last shard included in this group (fig. 1,12) belongs to an orange circular dish, with fine, dense fabric (Hue 7.5YR 8/4), light red slip with metallic shine (Hue 10YR 6/6), similar to the two finds from *Neapolis* in Crimea, dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the beginning of the following<sup>26</sup>.

**Platters** – The form of the shard fig. 1,13, made of light-tile coloured, fine, dense fabric (Hue 2.5YR 8/4), with brown-yellowish slip with metallic shine (Hue 10YR 6/6), included in this category – is difficult to define. It probably belongs to a large oval platter, with analogies in the items dated to the end of the second century and the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, discovered at *Olbia*<sup>27</sup>, *Noviodunum*, and *Niculitel*<sup>28</sup>, *Durostorum*<sup>29</sup>, southern Dacia<sup>30</sup>, and in the entire North-Pontic area<sup>31</sup>.

## II. Çandarlı ware

Within the Pergamenian ware, we have included four items belonging to Hayes Form 1 (fig. 1,14–15) and Hayes Form 3 (fig. 1,16–17). Both forms are spread mainly in the Oriental areas of the Empire. In the West- and North-Pontic area, there have been more discoveries, mainly on the coast and on the Danube line. The first form is rarer, compared to the second form, and it dates to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century – the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. At *Halmyris*, a shard item was discovered on N III, dated towards the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Hayes Form 3 is attested in *Moesia inferior* at *Odessos*<sup>32</sup>, *Histria*<sup>33</sup>, *Troesmis*, where it was imitated in the local workshops<sup>34</sup>, *Noviodunum*<sup>35</sup>, *Halmyris*<sup>36</sup>, *Olbia*<sup>37</sup>, as well as in other North-Pontic sites<sup>38</sup>. The shard fig. 1,16 is made of the same fabric (Hue 10YR 7/4) as the bowl fig. 1,17, but the slip (Hue 2.5YR 4/8) has a lower quality and is different; it is a local form, an imitation of the Pergamenian products.

## III. African Red slip

The fine walls, in an obtuse angle, the high quality fabric (Hue 5YR 6/6), the plain rim and the low profile characterize the dish shard fig. 2,18 – for which there is an analogy at *Troesmis*<sup>39</sup>, but with thickened rim. Hayes Form 50B is dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century – the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>40</sup>. For analogies we also mention a series of finds discovered at *Arrubium*<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> SUCEVEANU 2000, 73–77 type XVIII/B pl. 27,20–34; 28,35–51.

<sup>13</sup> TOPOLEANU 1984, 192 no. 23 pl. 4,1.

<sup>14</sup> KLENINA 2006, 97 type 5.

<sup>15</sup> SULTOV 1985, 68 type 3 pl. 31,2.

<sup>16</sup> ZHURAVLEV 2002, 256; 260 fig. 15,11.

<sup>17</sup> SUCEVEANU 2000, 80–81 type XX pl. 30,1–5; 31,6–7.

<sup>18</sup> KRAPIVINA 1993, 51 fig. 54/1, 8.

<sup>19</sup> NICORESCU 1927–1932, 583 fig. 72.

<sup>20</sup> BUCOVALĂ 1970, 195 no. 3; 193 fig. 2,c.

<sup>21</sup> GAIDUKEVICI 1952, 158 fig. 40; KNIPOVICI 1952, 301 fig. 3/2.

<sup>22</sup> OPAIT 1980, 339, 350 pl. 16,1–2.

<sup>23</sup> ZHURAVLEV 2002, 256, fig. 12,7.

<sup>24</sup> NIKOLIĆ-ĐORĐEVIĆ 2000, 102 type III,17.

<sup>25</sup> SULTOV 1985, 64–65 pl. 28,3.

<sup>26</sup> ZHURAVLEV 2002, 276–277 fig. 24,1–2; for *Olbia* see KRAPIVINA 1993, 50 fig. 53,6–7.

<sup>27</sup> KRAPIVINA 1993, 50 fig. 53.

<sup>28</sup> BAUMANN 2008, 217; 228–229, catalogue no. 61–66 pl. 12.

<sup>29</sup> MUȘETEANU/ELEFTERESCU 2003, 33–42 pl. 8–10.

<sup>30</sup> POPILIAN 1976, pl. 24–26.

<sup>31</sup> ZHURAVLEV 2002, 276; 285 fig. 30.

<sup>32</sup> GEORGIEVA 1992, 79 fig. 9a–b.

<sup>33</sup> SUCEVEANU 1982, 100 no. 11 pl. 5,11; id. 2000, 60–62 type XVI pl. 22.

<sup>34</sup> OPAIT 1980, 336, 357 no. 51–52 pl. 10,4–5.

<sup>35</sup> BARNEA/MITREA/ANGHELESCU 1957, 167 fig. 14,3.

<sup>36</sup> TOPOLEANU 2000, 43 no. 6 pl. 1/6.

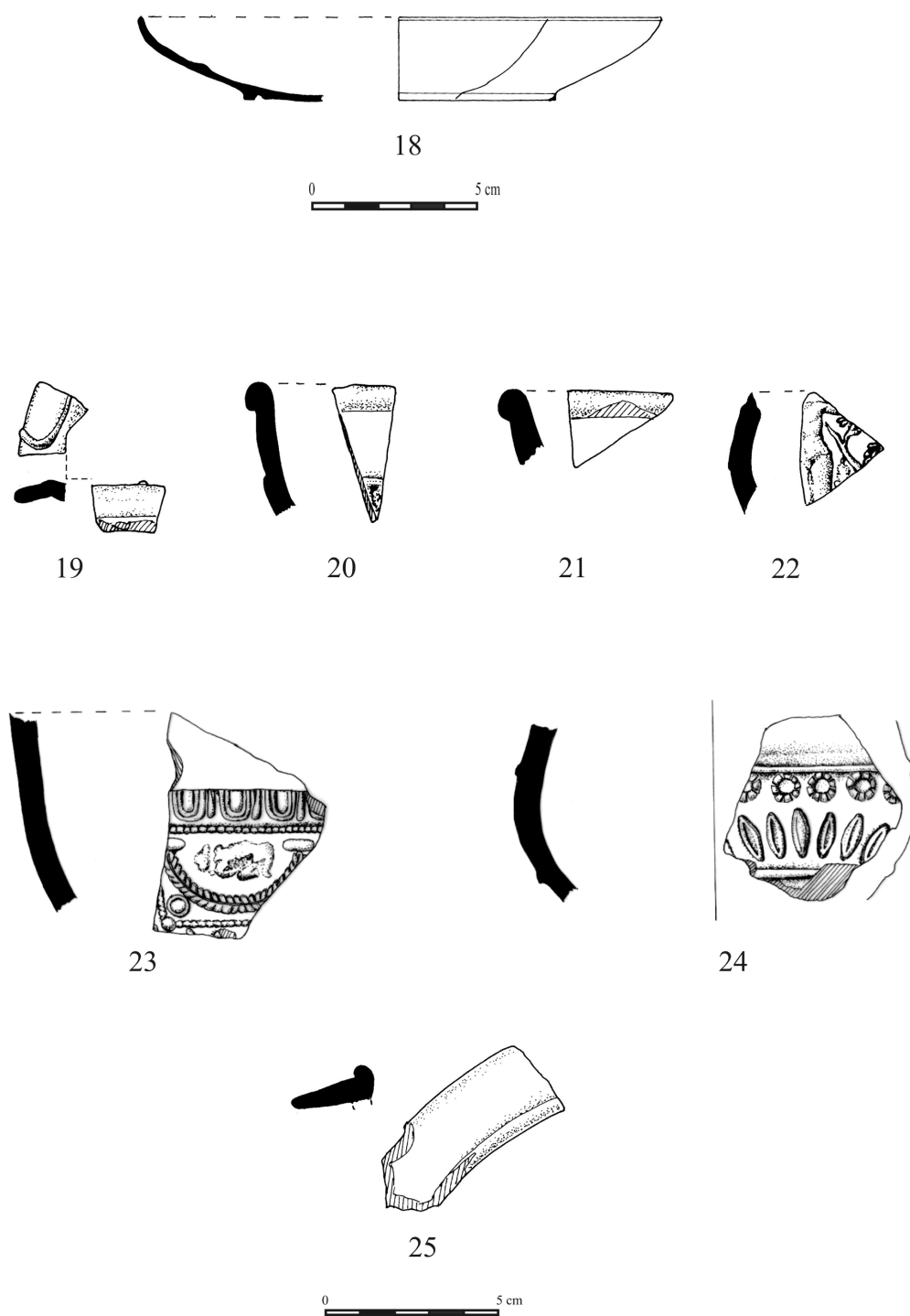
<sup>37</sup> KRAPIVINA 1993, 52 fig. 55,7.

<sup>38</sup> ZHURAVLEV 2002, 245 fig. 4,1.3.5.

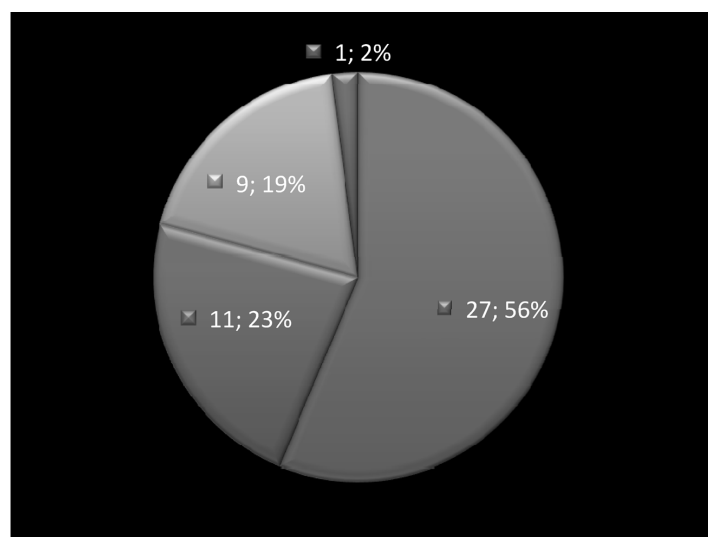
<sup>39</sup> OPAIT 1980, 339, 359 pl. 15,3.11.

<sup>40</sup> HAYES 1972, 69–73 fig. 12,56.60–61: AD 350–400.

<sup>41</sup> PARASCHIV 1997, 318–319 pl. 1,6–7.



**Fig. 2.** *Aegyssus*. 18 African Red slip. 19–25 Western terra sigillata.



**Graphic 1.** The ratio of the tableware types discovered at *Aegyssus*. Pontic ware 56% (n=27); Candarli ware 23% (N=11); Western terra sigillata 19% (n=9); African Red Slip 2% (n=1).

#### IV. Western *terra sigillata*

The attested forms belong to the types Dragendorff 35/36 and Dragendorff 37 and they represent the majority in the repertory of Moesian discoveries<sup>42</sup>. A shard (**fig. 2,25**) belongs to a bowl with rim and ridge, within the category of terra sigillata, and ledge with a south-Gallic origin. The light tile-coloured dense and fine fabric (Hue 2.5YR 6/6), the red-orange slip (Hue 2.5YR 5/8) are specific. The fact that only shards were found did not allow a clear categorisation; however, at *Novae*, they have been dated to the Flavian period<sup>43</sup>. The form Dragendorff 35/36 (**fig. 2,19**) is attested in *Moesia inferior* at *Novae*, *Oescus*, *Augustae*<sup>44</sup>, *Noviodunum*<sup>45</sup>, *Beroe*<sup>46</sup>, and at *Aegyssus*, within the old research. The Dragendorff 37 bowls (**fig. 2,20–24**) have a fine, tile-coloured fabric (Hue 2.5YR 4/6), red slip with metallic shine (Hue 2.5YR 3/6) or orange lacquer (**fig. 2,24**). Within this form, a bowl (**fig. 2,22**) is made of dense, tile-coloured fabric (Hue 2.5YR 4/6), red slip with metallic shine (Hue 2.5YR 3/6), for which reason the workshop should be sought somewhere in central *Gallia*. The preserved decoration reproduces a nude male figure, the left arm outstretched; to his left, vegetal elements are reproduced, such as branches and leaves. The bowl **fig. 2,23** produced in central *Gallia* is decorated with a pearled motif, ovuli in the

upper register and a metope representing an elephant lying down. The origin of the second shard (**fig. 2,24**) – decorated with lozenges and rosettes – is, probably, in *Moesia superior*.

The early Roman tableware discovered at *Aegyssus* attests, once again, the diversity and connections of this Moesian centre with the North-Pontic area, the Aegean region, and the Occidental provinces of the Empire. The Pontic pottery is dominant within the discoveries, with a total of 27 shards out of 48 selected finds, followed by the Pergamenian pottery (11 shards), a situation characteristic for other Moesian sites, too (**graphic 1**). In this sense, we would mention the discoveries at *Argamum* where, on the *Extra muros* sector, within the early Roman tableware, the Pontic pottery is dominant, followed by the Oriental pottery<sup>47</sup>. Within a larger sample than ours, the Pontic pottery is the first with 318 items, followed by the Oriental pottery with 31 items. The important percentage of Occidental *terra sigillata* within the discoveries at *Aegyssus* reflects – though to a lower scale – the itinerary of the commerce connections of the Lower Danube cities during the Principate<sup>48</sup>.

nutugrg@yahoo.com  
blucretiu@yahoo.com  
costeaiuiiana@yahoo.com

<sup>42</sup> DIMITROVA-MILČEVA 2000, 14; 56 no. 209 (Drag. 37); this form was imitated in the workshops from Butovo, cf. SULTOV 1976 pl. 37; for the similar finds in the North Pontic area see ZHURAVLEV 2008, 113–114.

<sup>43</sup> DIMITROVA-MILČEVA 2000, 52 no. 150.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 131–137 pl. 7–8.

<sup>45</sup> BAUMANN 2008, 219–220 no. 6; 9 pl. 1–2.

<sup>46</sup> NUȚU/PARASCHIV 2009, 179–180 no. 1–2 pl. 2,1–2.

<sup>47</sup> PARASCHIV/NUȚU/IACOB 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Acknowledgements: the drawings were made by C. Geanbai from the Institute for Eco Museum Research in Tulcea. The authors would like to thank M. Mocanu from the same Institute for his advice in preparing this study.



## Bibliography

- BARNEA/MITREA/ANGHELESCU 1957 I. BARNEA/B. MITREA/N. ANGHELESCU, Săpăturile de salvare de la Noviodunum. *Mat. și Cercetări de Ist. Veche și Arh.* 4, 1957, 155–173.
- BAUMANN 2008 V. H. BAUMANN, Ceramica de tip terra sigillata de la Noviodunum. *Peuce S. N.* 6, 2008, 207–250.
- BOUNEGRU 1988–1989 O. BOUNEGRU, Contribuții privind răspândirea și cronologia ceramicii decorate în tehnica barbotinei din Dobrogea. *Pontica* 21–22, 1988–1989, 99–111.
- BUCOVALĂ 1970 M. BUCOVALĂ, Descoperiri noi în zona suburbană a Tomisului. *Pontica* 3, 1970, 189–209.
- DRAGENDORFF 1980 H. DRAGENDORFF, La sigillée. Contribution à l'étude de l'histoire de la céramique grecque et romaine. *Rev. Arch. Sites, hors-série* 7 (Paris 1980).
- DIMITROVA-MILČEVA 2000 AL. DIMITROVA-MILČEVA, Terra sigillata und dünnwandige Keramik aus Moesia Inferior (Nordbulgarien) (Sofia 2000).
- GAIDUKEVICI 1952 V. F. GAIDUKEVICI, Raszkopki Mirmekija v 1935–1938 gg. *Mat. i Issled. Arh. SSSR* 25, 1952, 135–220.
- GEORGIEVA 1992 M. GEORGIEVA, Grobni nahodki ot okolnostite Varna. *Izv. Arh. Muz. Varna* 28 (43), 1992, 73–80.
- HARTUCHE/ANASTASIU 1976 N. HARTUCHE/FL. ANASTASIU, Catalogul selectiv al colecției de arheologie a Muzeului Brăilei (Brăila 1976).
- HAYES 1972 J.W. HAYES, *Late Roman Pottery* (London 1972).
- KLENINA 2006 E. KLENINA, Stolovaja i kuhonijska keramika III–VI vekov ze Nov (Severnaja Bălgarija)/Ceramic Tableware and Kitchenware of the 3<sup>rd</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century from Novae (Northern Bulgaria). *Novae. Studies and Materials* 2 (Poznań/Sevastopol 2006).
- KNIPOVICI 1952 T. N. KNIPOVICI, Krasnolakovaia keramika pervâh vekov n.e. iz razkopok Bosporskoj ekspedicii 1935–1940 gg. *Mat. i Issled. Arh. SSSR* 25, 1952, 289–326.
- KRAPIVINA 1993 V. V. KRAPIVINA, Ol'via. Material'naia kultura I–IV vv. n.e. (Kiev 1993).
- MUȘȚEANU/ELEFTERESCU 2003 C. MUȘȚEANU/D. ELEFTERESCU, *Ateliere ceramice romane de la Durostorum*. *Muz. Naț. Ist. a României Monogr.* 4 (Bucharest 2003).
- NICORESCU 1927–1932. P. NICORESCU, Fouilles de Tyras, Dacia 3–4 (Bucharest 1927–1932) 557–601.
- NIKOLIĆ-ĐORDEVIĆ 2000 S. NIKOLIĆ-ĐORDEVIĆ, Antička keramika Singidunuma. *Oblici Posuda. Singidunum* 2, 2000, 11–244.
- NUȚU 2008 G. NUȚU, Mars from Aegyssus. In: S. Ailincăi/C. Micu/F. Mihail (eds.), *Omagiu lui Gavrilă Simion la a 80-a aniversare* (Tulcea 2008) 209–218.
- NUȚU/PARASCHIV 2009 G. NUȚU/D. PARASCHIV, Descoperiri romane în nivelurile medievale de la Beroe. *Pontica* 42, 2009, 177–192.
- NUȚU/COSTEA 2010 G. NUȚU/G. COSTEA, Ceramică fină descoperită la Aegyssus. *Peuce S. N.* 8, 2010, 147–162.
- OPAIȚ 1980 A. OPAIȚ, Considerații preliminare asupra ceramicii romane timpurii de la Troesmis. *Peuce* 8, 1980, 328–366.
- OPAIȚ 1987 ID., Un dépôt d'amphores découvert à Aegyssus. *Dacia N. S.* 31, 1987, 145–155.
- PARASCHIV 1997 D. PARASCHIV, Descoperiri arheologice de epocă romană la Măcin. *Pontica* 30, 1997, 317–330.
- PARASCHIV/NUȚU/IACOB 2010 D. PARASCHIV/G. NUȚU/M. IACOB, La céramique romaine d'Argamum. Paper at the 27<sup>th</sup> RCRF Congress, Belgrade, September 2010 (unpublished manuscript).
- POPILIAN 1976 GH. POPILIAN, *Ceramica romană din Oltenia* (Craiova 1976).
- SUCEVEANU 1982 AL. SUCEVEANU, Les thermes romaines. *Histria* 6 (Bucarest/Paris 1982).
- SUCEVEANU 2000 ID., La céramique romaine des I<sup>er</sup>–III<sup>es</sup> siècles ap. J.-C. *Histria* 10 (Bucarest 2000).
- SULTOV 1976 B. SULTOV, *Antike Zentren der Töpferei in Untermösien* (Sofia 1976).
- SULTOV 1985 ID., Ceramic production on the territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum (2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century). *Terra Ant. Balcanica* 1 (Sofia 1985).
- TOPOLEANU 1984 FL. TOPOLEANU, Noi descoperiri arheologice la Isaccea (I). *Peuce* 9, 1984, 187–205; 585–596.
- TOPOLEANU 2000 ID., *Ceramica romană și romano-bizantină de la Halmyris (sec. I–VII p.Chr.)* (Tulcea 2000).
- ZHURAVLEV 2002 D. V. ZHURAVLEV, Terra Sigillata and Red Slip Pottery in the North Pontic Region (A Short Bibliographical Survey). *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 8/3–4, 2003, 237–309.
- ZHURAVLEV 2008 ID., Western Sigillata in the Northern Pontic Region. *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 14, 2008, 85–121.