What, where, when, and why.....
On some dipinti and stamps
from the Pontic region
It is not without some trepidation that I undertake this article for the volume in honor of Zofia Sztetyło, an eminent scholar and expert in the field. I had not realized until I started collecting material for this text what scrupulousness, patience, perseverance and comprehensive knowledge Professor Sztetyło has always represented in her work. To paraphrase words from another sphere and time, hardly ever do objects so small require so Herculean an effort for their secrets to be revealed.

My interest in stamps and dipinti grows from a study of the finds originating from the excavations at Novae, where this category of epigraphical evidence is frequent in the assemblage of pottery sherds belonging to amphorae. Naturally, the inscriptions cannot be studied out of a broader context. The provisional results of various petrographic and other studies have indicated the presence among the finds from Novae of a certain group of pottery containers originating from the Black Sea manufacturing centers (Fig. 1).

Whole and fragmentary amphorae have been found in an area designated as Sector IV, situated in the praetentura of the fortress of the First Italic Legion. They come from two legionary buildings: the baths and a hospital¹ (Fig. 2). The baths were erected in the second half of the 1st century A.D. and dismantled by the end of the age.² The construction of the valetudinarium fell in the early 2nd century A.D. and it was not abandoned until the times of Caracalla.³ The amphorae were gathered in the tabernae of the baths and in the small vestibules preceding the rooms for patients in the hospital, as well as in special

---

¹ P. DYCZEK, Novae – Western Sector (Section IV), 1997–1999, Archeologia 51, 2000, pp. 89–96; ID., Rzymski szpital legionowy w Novae (Mésie Inférieure), Bordeaux 1997, Fig. 1.
³ P. DYCZEK, Remarks on supply of the Roman army from the point of view of the valetudinarium at Novae (Moesia Inferior), Limes XVIII. Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies held in Amman, Jordan (September 2000), BAR IS 1084 (II), 2002, pp. 685–694.
amphorae stores inside the hospital.\textsuperscript{4} Typologically, these vessels are not very varied, representing all of five types: Zeest 64-94/Dyczek 28,\textsuperscript{5} Zeest 75/Dyczek 32,\textsuperscript{6} Zeest 77/Dyczek 33,\textsuperscript{7} Zeest 90/Dyczek 25\textsuperscript{8} and Zeest 93/Dyczek 29\textsuperscript{9} (Fig. 3).

\textsuperscript{4} P. Dyczek, Remarks on the Roman Amphorae at Novae from the first to the third century A.D., \textit{Novensia} 9, 1997, pp. 91–96.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., p. 233.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p. 239.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., pp. 173–176.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 221.
Amphorae of the first type, Dyczek 28, differ considerably in details of the form, while preserving the same principal tectonic features and the general characteristic of the ceramic matrix. The clay used in their manufacture is of a light brown color, hence Zeest’s classification of “svetloglinjenye”. In reality the ceramic matrix can vary from light red to light brown (Munsell soil color chart codes 5YR 7/2, 5YR 7/3, 7.5YR 7/4, 7.5YR 7/6, 7.5YR 8/4, 10YR 7/4). Sand is apparent in quantities in the break, and so are plagioclases, crushed pottery and black pyroxene particles. Repetitive features of shape include a slightly everted rim forming a narrow roll on the outside. The long slender neck tends to bulge a bit at the point of handle attachment. The handles consist of two joined rolls of clay. The plain heart-shaped body terminates in a small cylindrical solid foot.

The multitude of variants encompassed by this amphora type has resulted in the amphorae being classified differently by Russian archaeologists as well as by scholars from other countries.

---

10 I. B. ZEEST, Keramičeskaja tara Bospora, Materialy i issledovaniya po arheologii SSSR 83, 1960, [= Keramičeskaja tara], pp. 118.


In my opinion, the typological series Zeest 64, 94, 104, 105 and perhaps the small form Zeest 50 constitute a single typological series.\textsuperscript{13}

Various scholars have also pointed out the formal ties of the discussed type with amphorae of the Dressel 28 and Gauloise 3 form.\textsuperscript{14} While such formal ties indeed exist, the different genesis, separate areas of occurrence and the chronology of these types lead one rather to conclude that the similarities are due to an independent quest for an optimal form taking into consideration volume and the mode of transport. These containers are not big, 0.73 m in height at most,\textsuperscript{15} yet thanks to their specific form they had a relatively capacious volume, reaching from 4 to 8 liters of liquid (about 8 choiinices).\textsuperscript{16}

Both Rhodian\textsuperscript{17} and Coan\textsuperscript{18} products have been suggested as the source for this type of amphora. However, physico-chemical analyses carried out on the material from Novae have proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the manufacturing centers for these containers were located at Sinope.\textsuperscript{19} Recently other scholars have begun to share this view.\textsuperscript{20}

The place of manufacture considered, it is hardly surprising that containers of this type are widespread in the Bosporan Kingdom and adjacent territories. Finds have been reported from: Tanais,\textsuperscript{21} Olbia, Scythian Neapolis, Iluraton Kimeryk, Tiritake, Mirmekion, Kerč, Pantikapaion, Fanagoria etc.\textsuperscript{22} Amphorae of this type were especially popular among the Carpes who populated the region of modern Moldavia between the Prut and the Dniester in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.\textsuperscript{23} They are also present on many sites in both the Moesia provinces,\textsuperscript{24}
Lower Moesia in particular, e.g.: Aegyssus, Callatis, Dimum, Dinogetia, Kaliakra, Noviodunum, Odessos, Tomi, Troesmis, Tropeum Traiani. Single examples of the type have been recorded in assemblages from the Athenian Agora, Corinth, Crete, Ostia and Rome.  

The first amphorae of this type are known from 1st century B.C. contexts, but they did not become widely popular until the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. At Novae sherds of these amphorae were discovered in assemblages together with fragments of terra sigillata from southern Gaul from before A.D. 79, a bronze coin of Drusus of A.D. 23 and a denarius of Marc Antony. At Barboşi examples of these amphorae came from contexts dated by coins of Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Severus Alexander, Gordian III, Philip Arab and Gallien, while the vessels discovered at Tanais originated from the first half of the 3rd century A.D.

Stamped inscriptions are seldom found on these amphorae. When they do occur, they constitute the names of producers, e.g.: ΧΚΟ, ΦΕ, ΑΛ, ΧΓΣ, ΘΕΑ, ΡΟΥ, ΝΤΟ, ΠΕ and ΔΙΟΜ – presumably abbreviations of names, either Diomedes or Diomenes. Abbreviations of names were much more frequently rendered in paint on the vessel’s walls, suggesting that they referred to wine manufacturers responsible for the content of these containers. Some are abbreviations of Greek names: ΑΛΕ, ΑΝΤΙΜΑ, ΑΡΔ, ΒΑΓ, ΖΑ, ΜΕΝ, ΟΠ, ΣΑΜ, ΧΑΡ; others like ΑΡΔΑΡ- ΠΑΚ -ος are apparently Iranian in origin, such names being characteristic of the Sarmatian inhabitants of Tanais. To judge from the above, it would appear that the inscriptions refer to the contents, providing data on the specific lot of wine and giving names of the owners presumably.

Wine was the chief product transported in these containers. Most of the inscriptions executed in red paint on the surface of the vessels refer to the contents. The dipinti can be found in one of three positions: under the rim or in the upper part of the neck, in the middle part of the neck and on the shoulders. Statistically speaking, all three positions were equally eligible. Some of these inscriptions record the vessel’s volume, e.g. κ or λ,
75ON SOME DIPINTI

and µν. Others describe the contents. A good example is a dipinti executed in black paint – a rarity with regard to these amphorae – on a vessel from the Athenian Agora: ἐτοὺς ὁ δὲ Ἀδριανοῦ/ενιακεῖατον, which means that “the wine, which had been seasoned in a dolium for a year, was poured into the amphora in the fourteenth year of Hadrian’s reign”, that is, in A.D. 131.33 Another inscription, from Skalistoje in the Crimea, says: γεμωµᾶ [...] πιθοῦ τὸ λαγητ ιβ’, which means “sample from pithos 19, from which 12 jugs have been drawn”34. The following two inscriptions were recorded on amphorae found at Tanais: πιθοῦ α´ λαγυνοί τοί, that is, “(sample) from the first pithos, from which 477 jugs were drawn” and γεµµατηρα πιθοῦ θ´ λαγυνοι τλ’, which means that this was a sample from the ninth pithos, from which 330 jugs were drawn.35

Dipinti often specify the kind of wine, for example: φοίνιξ is red wine and Φάλερνος is the famed Phalernian wine. Of considerably greater interest, however, are the dipinti which refer to contents other than wine. They inform not merely of the products that were the object of trade exchange, but, in an indirect manner, of the economic life of Tanais. The following have been noted: κρίθνος οίνος or barley beer, γάλα or milk, µέλιτα or honey. There are also other special products, like barley flour recorded with the abbreviation ΛΑΦ, presumably ἀλφατα, balsam or βάλσαµον, some sort of dye – βάµµα, and dates – βάλανος.36

An unusual substance, νοψ<θ>α or crude oil, has been recorded on many amphorae.37 This was presumably used as fuel in lighthouses, perhaps also in oil lamps and for domestic use.

Amphorae classified as Zeest 93/Dyczek 29 are occasionally mistaken with the previous form and its variant D in particular, all the more so as they are also commonplace in assemblages of the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. in similarity to the Dyczek 28 type of vessel. The rim is everted and triangular in section. A short conical neck gently turns into the shoulders which join it to the heart-shaped body with shallow ridging. A small, undistinguished, hollow foot has a concave underside. The color of the clay used in the manufacturing of these amphora is identified as 5YR 7/8, 2.5YR 7/8 on the Munsell soil color charts. The maximum height of the vessels is 0.97 m and the volume is 17 liters.

The source of origin of these vessels has yet to be conclusively identified. Some scholars believe they were manufactured in Kos.39 This suggestion appears to be confirmed by the frequent occurrence of grains of pyroxene in the clay matrix of many of these amphorae. Other scholars argue for another location, namely the central part of the Bosporan King-

---

32 BICHIR, Archaeology, p. 81.
33 ROBINSON, Athenian Agora, p. 51, Pl. 59.
35 D. B. ŠELOV, Tanais i Niznyj Don v pervyh vekah našej ery, Moskva 1972 [= Tanais], p. 159; BÖTTGER, ŠELOV, Amphorendipinti, p. 100.
36 BÖTTGER, ŠELOV, Amphorendipinti, pp. 84–90.
39 ŠTAERMAN, Keramičeskije klejma, p. 40; see also: PEACOCK, WILLIAMS, Amphorae, p. 108.
dom, perhaps even Tanais itself.\(^{40}\) Finally, they could have been produced in at least two other centers on the Black Sea, one of these being the coastal area around Dobrudja. Hypotheses abound, but there is still no agreement on where exactly these amphorae could have been produced. The prevalent view nowadays is to localize the manufacturing centers in the southern regions of Pont.\(^{41}\) In similarity to the previously discussed type, these amphorae are also widespread in the northern Black Sea littoral as well as on the lower Danube.\(^{42}\)

Stamped necks are a characteristic feature of these amphorae. Interestingly, among the obviously Greek names: ΓΟΡΔ, ΑΕΗ, ΔΙΟ, ΜΑΓΝ, ΡΟΥ, ΙΔΟΡ, ΘΕΑ, ΠΑ, ΜΑΡΣΕ, ΔΙΜ, ΕΥΤΥ, ΚΙ,\(^{43}\) there also occur Roman ones: ΡΟΥ(φου) – Rufus.

*Dipinti* identifying the volume are rarer, e.g., ie or 15 ksestai; the same is true of red-painted abbreviations of names, both Greek and Roman, just as in the case of the stamps, e.g. ΑΝΤ, ΙΖ, ΩΘ, Ρ, ΧΑΠΒΟ. These may have been the names of negotiatores.

Amphorae classified as Zeest 75/Dyczek 32,\(^{44}\) were made of well-kneaded clay of a reddish-orange color, 5YR 7/8, 2.5YR 7/8 according to the Munsell soil color charts. Since they also occur on the Lower Danube, they have been recorded in Opait’s, Scorpan’s and Kuzmanov’s typologies.\(^{45}\) The rim has a triangular section and characteristic undercut at the base. The widening neck is finely ridged, the oval body also covered with dense ribbing. Unlike the previously described type, Dyczek 32 vessels attain a height of 1.38 m and a volume up to 60 l.

The centers of the northern Black Sea littoral and of the southern littoral perhaps, too, have been indicated by some scholars as the place of manufacture of this type of containers. Pantikapaion, Fanagoria and the European part of the Kimmerian Bosporus have been suggested.\(^{46}\) Nonetheless, one should keep in mind V. Grace’s theory about the production of these vessels on the islands of Samos or Kos.\(^{47}\) These amphorae can be found in the Black Sea littoral and in Moesia, and apart from that they occur singularly in Athens and Rome.\(^{48}\)

Red-painted *dipinti* occur occasionally on the surface of these vessels. On the grounds of paleographic studies, most of these inscriptions appear to have been executed by the owners of the amphorae. Two kinds of painted inscriptions can be distinguished. The first identifies in ksestai the mass/volume of the product transported in these vessels, e.g. ξ νδ\(^{4}\)

\(^{40}\) T. N. KNIPOVIC, Tanais, Moskva-Leningrad 1949, pp. 73, 136, draw. 28, 29; ARSENIEVA, NAUMENKO, Kompleks nahodok, pp. 70–71, Fig. 13, 2, 4.

\(^{41}\) BÖTTGER, ŠELOV, Amphorendipinti, p. 30.

\(^{42}\) DYCZEK, Roman Amphorae, p. 223.

\(^{43}\) ŠELOV, Les amphores, p. 142; ZEEST, Keramičeskaja tara, Pl. XXXVII, 91; ŠELOV, Tanais, p. 121; BÖTTGER, ŠELOV, Amphorendipinti, p. 30.

\(^{44}\) DYCZEK, Roman Amphorae, pp. 233 f.

\(^{45}\) SCORPAN, Contribution, p. 272; OPAIT, Consideratii, p. 308, G. KUZMANOV, Rannovizantijska keramika ot Trakija i Dakija (IV – načaloto na VII v.), Razkopki i Proučvania XII, 1985, pp. 11–12.

\(^{46}\) BÖTTGER, ŠELOV, Amphorendipinti, p. 43.

\(^{47}\) V. GRACE, Stamped Wine Jar Fragments, Hesperia 10, 1956, p. 70; OPAIT, Consideratii, p. 308.

\(^{48}\) KNIGGE et al., Die Ausgrabungen im Kerameikos 1988/89, Archäologischer Anzeiger 3, 1991, pp. 385–386, Fig. 23.
or *ksestai* 54. A schematic branch is drawn next to some of the *dipinti*. The other type of painted inscription consists of abbreviations of Greek names: ΑΛΕ - ΑΛΕ[ξενδρος], ΝΑΥ - ΝΑΥ[ακος] or ΝΑΥ[τικος], ΣΑΜ - ΣΑΜ[βατιον] or ΣΑΜ[βιον].49

The said branch motif appears to be of particular interest. It is believed to be a sketched image of a grapevine or olive branch.50 To my mind, it is rather a pictograph signifying herbs/spices, most likely marjoram. There are two observations in favor of this idea. Firstly, the Greek measure recorded on the amphorae surface is too small with respect to the volume of these vessels. It could mean that the product filling the container had little mass even though it occupied substantial space. Secondly, the *dipinto* CAM also occasionally includes an identical branch motif incorporated into the letters. Similarly, the *dipinto* CAMΨ has the final letter treated as a branch. And this abbreviation, I strongly believe, should be read as σαμψυχον, meaning marjoram. The spice is known to have been imported from the southern regions of Pont.51 Amphorae with the branch pictograph could have been used in the transport of herbs and spices, while the abbreviation served to inform the buyer which kind exactly was packed inside. On the whole, however, these amphorae were used for the transport of olive or other oil,52 although there are some who would defend the idea that wine was the transported commodity in this case.53

The next type of amphora, Zeest 77/Dyczek 33, in use from the 1st to the middle of the 4th century A.D., is of interest in view of an unique stamp – *Faustina* – found on the handle of one of the vessels. In a few cases, branches are also sketched on the body of the vessels. These amphorae have everted hooked rims and a cylindrical neck. Ridges are found below the rim and on the collar. The clay used for the manufacture of these containers was an orange-red or pink color, identified by the Munsell soil color chart codes 10R 7/8, 2.5YR 7/8. The vessels were produced in an unspecified center in the Pont region and its occurrence is limited to virtually the Pont region alone, mainly in rural settlements.

The Zeest 90/Dyczek 25 amphora type belongs among the most frequent finds from the middle54 and lower Danube, among others, Dinogetia, Durostorum, Histria, Murighiol, Novae, Sexaginta Prista, Săcîdava, Tomi, Buridava, Corabia, Drobeta, Mătăsaru, Slăveni, Stolniceni, Săcîdava, Orlea, Romula.55 They are also known from the Black Sea

50 BÖTTGER, ŠELOV, *Amphorendipinti*, p. 86.
littoral and from many Mediterranean sites, such as Ostia, Malta, Athens, Kenchreai, Knossos, Paphos, Berenice and Mellieha. This state of affairs results in the amphora appearing in various classifications under different designations. These vessels have four distinctive formal features: distinctly profiled rim, massive handles bent at a sharp angle in the upper part, conical neck and egg-shaped body. They were made of clay occurring in various shades of red to light brown, corresponding to the Munsell soil color chart codes: 2,5Y 8/4, 2,5YR 5/6, 6/4, 6/6, 6/8, 5YR 7/4, 7/6, 7,5YR 7/4, 10R 6/8.

Although the height of these vessels reaches merely 1.0 m, the maximum volume could reach even 60 liters of liquid.

As to the origins of the group agreement is lacking. Some scholars have suggested Kos as a possible place of manufacture on the grounds of stamps, primarily with the Greek name of a producer, XΩΖΩΝ, who is said to have worked in the island. A Dalmatian origin has also been considered. In my belief, the amphorae were made in Asia Minor. Most archaeologists, however, favor a Pontic source for this type.

The said amphorae are interesting to archaeologists mainly because of the stamps and dipinti. The stamps were impressed usually on the upper part of the handle, less often under the rim. Although written in Greek letters, the names can sometimes be Roman as well: ΠΑΥΑΟΥ, ΗΡΑΚΛΑ, ΚΤΡΑΤΟΝΙΟΥ, [ΦΙΛΙΠΠΙΟΥ, ΗΡΑΚΛΑ, ΜΑΝΤΕΙΟΥ, ΕΡΜΙΠΠΙΟΥ, ΜΑΡΚΟΥ, ΣΩΖΩΝ, ΤΑΤΙΑΝΟΥ, ΕΦΙΘΙΟΥ, ΚΟΡΟΥ, ΚΑΒΕΙΝΟΧ, ΣΟΖΩΝ, ΚΟΛΑΡΤΟΥ, ΑΓΑΘΙΑ[ΝΟΥ], ΚΥΝΦΟΥ, [ΕΠΙΜΙΠΠΙΟΥ, ΔΙΟΝΥΚΟΓΈ/ΝΟΥ, ΑΤΤΙΚΟΥ, ΕΠΟΑΧΟΥ.

Data on the volume, given in sextarii, appears merely on a few of these containers, although there are some examples bearing Greek measures of volume. A red-painted dipinti on an amphora from Corabia, reading ΔΡΧΙΩΝ, corresponds to 82 sextarii, that is, 44-45 liters.

57 Panella, Oriente e Occidente, pp. 624–625, Figs. 22, 24; J. A. Riley, Coarse Pottery, Excavations at Sidi Khrebish Benghazi (Berenece) II, LibyaAnt V, 1979, p. 206; Robinson, Athenian Agora, pp. J 50, M 235, P 16074, 56, Pl. 11; p. 106, Pl. 28; Slane, Deposit, p. 298, Fig. 18, p. 125; Hayes, Villa Dionisos, p. 147, Figs. 22, 46, 49.
59 Staerman, Keramičeskije klejma, p. 42.
61 Dyczek, Roman Amphorae, pp. 182 f.
62 V. Nukov, Pričernomorski amfory, pp. 128 f.
63 D. Tudor, Oltenia Romana, Bucureşti 1968 [= Oltenia Romana], p. 161, Nos. 76, 77; C. C. Petrelescu, Note epigrafice (VII), Studii şi Cercetări de Istorie Veche 35, 1984, pp. 196–197; I. I. Rusu, Inscriturile Grecesti din Dacia, Studii şi Comunicari 12, 1965, p. 63; Popilian, Ceramica Romana, p. 141; Arsenieva, Naumienko, Kompleks nahodok, p. 191, Fig. 28, 4, No. 154; pp. 153–154, Fig. 32, 2, No. 103; Užencev, Juročkin, Amfory, p. 105; Bielajac, Amfore, p. 58; V. Effimie-Andronescu, Stampila pe o amfore de productie locala cu imitarea literelor grecesti, Studii şi Cercetări de Istorie Veche 18, 1967, pp. 401–421.
64 TUDOR, Oltenia Romana, p. 467.
There also occur names of alleged producers of the products inside the containers or the Greek and Roman negotiatores, e.g.: Sex. Cor. Ta., read as Sex(tus) Cor(nelius) Ta(urus). Other names include: Ta(tianus), Ant(onius) (sextarii), P(ublius), Athe(naeus) or Athe(odotus), or Athe(nodoros).

Few of the dipinti actually refer to the contents. It is clear that olive oil was the most frequent commodity. An inscription in Latin has even been preserved: OLEVM.

From Novae we have a Greek inscription, of which the only word to be legible is ΠΟΝΤΙΚΟ [...], (Fig. 4) identifying the source of the product. On another amphora from the valetudinarium the text reads: ΆΛΜΟΣΤΡΑ (Fig. 5); this is a combination of two Greek words: αλμί - derived from almh, meaning “salt, brine”, and ὀστρέον/οστρετόν, meaning “oyster”. Thus, we have proof from Novae that amphorae of Dyczek 25 type contained a kind of salsamenta or to be more precise, garum made from oysters.

Amphorae of this type also provide the sole examples of what I firmly believe are dipinti giving the intended vessel recipient. The set of letters: LE V M, LVMPF, LVMANT, LVMVAL surely stands for Legion V Macedonian. And the inscriptions: LEG I ITAL, G I IT presumably refer to the First Italic Legion (Fig. 6).

This review of amphora types and stamps and dipinti found on the vessel surface testifies to the intensity of the trade exchange in the Pontic region under Roman domination. The old trade contacts not only had not been interrupted, but continued to prosper in their own right. Three legions stationed along the lower Danube, a harbor of the Danubian fleet and Roman garrisons in the Crimea were all excellent pretexts for trading, both by the Greeks and by the Romans, who supplied the army with olive oil, wine and salsamenta manufactured in the Black Sea and Azov Sea littoral. The predominance of inscriptions in Greek clearly indicates who played an overbearing role in this trade.

---

The questions posed in the title can be answered briefly as follows:

What? – Basic commodities, but also some luxury goods.

Where? – From the Pontic region to the Roman garrisons on the lower and middle Danube, but also to important centers around the Mediterranean.

When? – Mainly from the 1st to the 3rd century A.D.

Why? – Because haulage of goods on a massive scale was cheap by ship; because the prices of the goods were not exorbitant compared to quality, because Greek and Roman negotiatores cooperated to achieve the highest profit and the presence of the military legions ensured a capacious market, which led in turn to growing production and the enrichment of the entire region.

P. Dyczek
Institut d'Archéologie,
Université de Varsovie