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FINDS OF HELLENISTIC MOULD-MADE BOWLS FROM POLISH EXCAVATIONS IN TANAIS. SEASONS 2014–2017¹

Abstract: The paper presents a detailed catalogue of mould-made relief bowls (so called Megarian bowls) coming from Polish excavations in trench XXV, located in the western part of the ancient Greek town of Tanais (Russia). Of the nine sherds found between 2014 and 2017, eight have been identified as vessels produced in Asia Minor; three of these probably came from the workshop of the “Monogramist”. Decoration includes both floral and geometrical motifs. Small, drilled holes on four fragments of Megarian bowls suggest that the vessels were repaired in antiquity.

Key words: Megarian bowls, Hellenistic pottery, Tanais, Black Sea, mould-made pottery, relief decoration, repairs

The so-called “Megarian” bowls are one of the most interesting examples of late Hellenistic pottery made in moulds. These hemispherical vessels were used for drinking and as such were a principal piece of the tableware used during *symposia*. Vessels of this kind were a cheaper alternative for similar bowls made of metal or glass. They were richly decorated with a number of different relief motifs: figural, plant, scales and long petals. “Megarian” bowls are fairly common finds with a developed classification and dating, which make them an important late Hellenistic chronological indicator.² Extensive in-depth study of the decoration, fabric, vessel shape, color and kind of slip as well as producer’s signatures allow individual pieces to be attributed to specific workshops. Several production centers have been identified,³ the most important among these being the Attic centers concentrated around Athens,⁴ the centers in Asia Minor, e.g., Delos, Pergamum, Ephesus⁵ and Miletus⁶ and the workshops in the Northern Black Sea littoral [Fig. 1].⁷ The latter are of greatest significance for the material presented in this article, which comes from Polish excavations in Tanais (Russia) carried out by the Institute of Archaeology and the Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe of the University of Warsaw within the

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² ROTROFF 1982, pp. 1–5.

³ PACZYŃSKA 2000, pp. 159–160.

⁴ ROTROFF 1982.

⁵ LAUMONIER 1977.

⁶ KOSSATZ 1986; 1990.

⁷ LOSEVA 1962.



Fig. 1. Black Sea and Aegean Sea

frame of the archaeological mission of the Museum-Reserve Tanais headed by S. M. Iliashenko. In 1996–2014, the Polish project was directed by Dr. Tomasz Scholl;⁸ since 2015 the work has been conducted by Dr. Marcin Matera. The excavation is focused on trench XXV located in the western part of ancient Tanais.

“Megarian” bowls are a common find in the northern Black Sea littoral and are well studied.⁹ Hellenistic mould-made bowls from Tanais have been presented by D. B. Šelov¹⁰ and more recently by K. Paczyńska.¹¹ The material presented in this article consists of nine sherds discovered between 2014 and 2017. Identification of the provenance of these pieces contributes to a reconstruction of ancient commercial networks and potential trade routes.

⁸ SCHOLL 2014, pp. 190–192.

⁹ On finds of “Megarian” bowls in the Northern Black Sea littoral, see: BOUZEK 1990; VNUKOV, KOVALENKO 1998; GRZEGRZÓŁKA 2010.

¹⁰ ŠELOV 1969.

¹¹ PACZYŃSKA 2000; 2005.

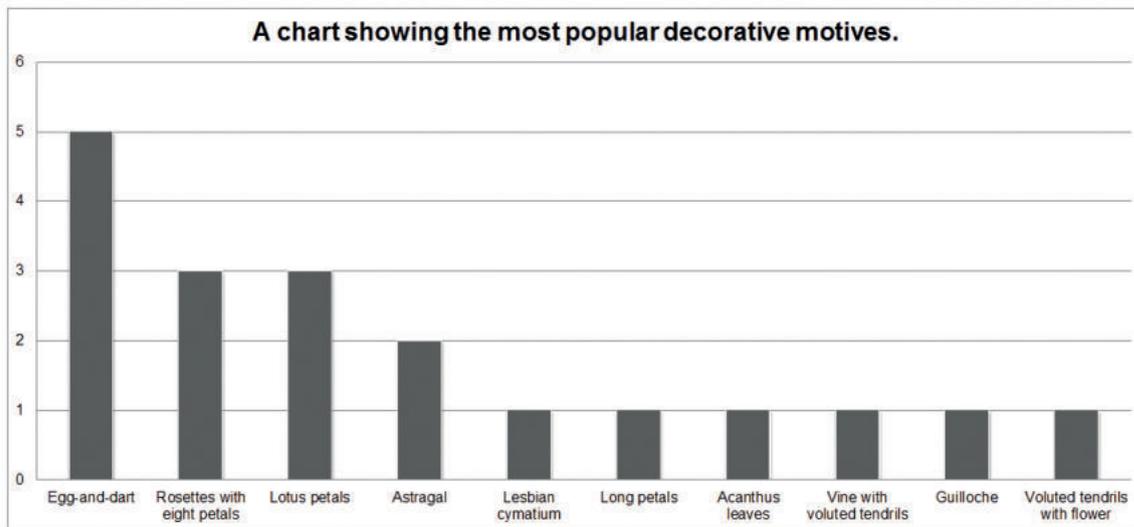


Fig. 2. Selection of the most popular decorative motifs

Quantitatively speaking, imports of bowls from the Asia Minor workshops are clearly superior.¹² Eight of the nine sherds from this collection (89%) were identified as produced in the area of Asia Minor. Of these three came probably from the workshop of the “Monogramist”, which is dated to the third quarter of the second century BC and which is thought to be one of the Ionian (probably Ephesian) centers of production.¹³ Pergamum was another center of production from which “Megarian” bowls came to Tanais. Both of these centers are located on the Aegean coast and are around 1600 km away from Tanais.

The decoration in this set is varied, including both floral and geometrical motifs (but no figural ones). The most popular plant motifs are rosettes with eight petals, lotus petals and a variety of voluted tendrils. Among geometrical motifs one should mention the egg-and-dart, astragal (round bead-shape form separated by vertical bars), guilloche and Lesbian cymatium [Fig. 2]. A close look at this decoration is crucial for identifying the production center and date of this material.

Four sherds in this set (44%) bear evidence of repairs in the form of round drilled holes, about 0.2 cm in diameter. Paired holes of this kind are usually considered as proof of value, indicating that users were prepared to repair broken luxury pieces of ceramics. Tanais has already yielded many such examples, but without remains of any lead clamps (bars) or other connectors used to join the pieces together. “Megarian” bowls would have been repaired for a variety of reasons: economical, aesthetic, functional and sentimental.¹⁴ The repaired vessels were certainly less useful than unbroken bowls, but were still an alternative for a new purchase. Traces of such repairs may be evidence of prolonged use, impairing the credibility of this kind of pottery as a chronological indicator.¹⁵

¹² PACZYŃSKA 2000, pp. 163–164; ŠELOV 1969.

¹³ GRZEGRZÓŁKA 2010, pp. 26–27.

¹⁴ POLUDNIKIEWICZ 2014, p. 142.

¹⁵ BILDE, HANDBERG 2012, pp. 461–462.

Catalogue

The order of presentation is by inventory number.

T.XXV.14.92p: bowl, body wall fragment [Fig. 3a–b]

Description: h. 5.1 cm, w. 3.1 cm, wall thickness 0.4 cm

Fine-grained, well-levigated clay (Munsell 2.5YR 5/6 red). Remains of a slightly lustrous slip on the inside (Munsell 10R 4/6 red) and outside, fired unevenly to give a range of color (Munsell 10R 5/8 red to 2.5Y 3/2 very dark grayish brown). Mineral inclusions in the form of small, medium dense silvery mica.

Small drilled repair hole (dia. 0.2 cm), on the first band, between the rosettes.

Decoration: Ornaments in three registers. From the top: eight-petal oval rosettes with clearly marked relief dot center; egg-and-dart (evenly arranged); preserved part of a motif, probably a lotus leaf. Registers separated by thin relief lines.

Parallels: LAUMONIER 1977, p. 188, no. 175, pl. 41; p. 138, no. 945, pl. 31; p. 207, no. 5805, pl. 47; p. 94, no. 5914, pl. 20; egg-and-dart decoration: PACZYŃSKA 2000, pp. 162, 166, no. T 63 III – I N 26.

Origin and dating: Ionia/Ephesus, possibly workshop of the “Monogramist”, dating to third quarter of the second century BC based on parallels.



Fig. 3a–b. T.XXV.14.92p: body wall fragment of a bowl (photo P. Lech; drawing N. E. Bespalaja)

T.XXV.15.19p: bowl, body wall fragment [Fig. 4a–b]

Description: h. 2.5 cm, w. 2.8 cm, wall thickness 0.25–0.4 cm

Fine-grained, well-levigated clay (Munsell 2.5Y 6/1 gray). Slightly lustrous slip (Munsell 2.5Y 2.5/1 black) inside and outside. White mineral inclusions, probably limestone (medium size, very low density).

Small drilled hole (dia. 0.25 cm) on the relief line between the first and the second register of decoration; second repair hole (dia. 0.25 cm) on the lower right break.

Decoration: Ornaments in three registers. From the top: eight-petal rosettes, shorter on the vertical and horizontal axis, longer on the diagonal; egg-and-dart (very evenly arranged); narrow band of astragal. Registers separated by thin relief lines.

Parallels: Pattern of rosettes made of eight petals with a point in the center: GRZEGRZÓŁKA 2010, pp. 185, 323, no. 304; arrangement of registers, rosettes and egg-and-dart pattern: LAUMONIER 1977, p. 207, no. 5805, pl. 47. Probably from the same mould as fragment T.XXV.15.20p.

Origin and dating: The scheme of the decoration, the motifs and flat relief suggest an Asia Minor workshop. The light grey clay with lustrous dark black slip may suggest a Pergamum provenance.

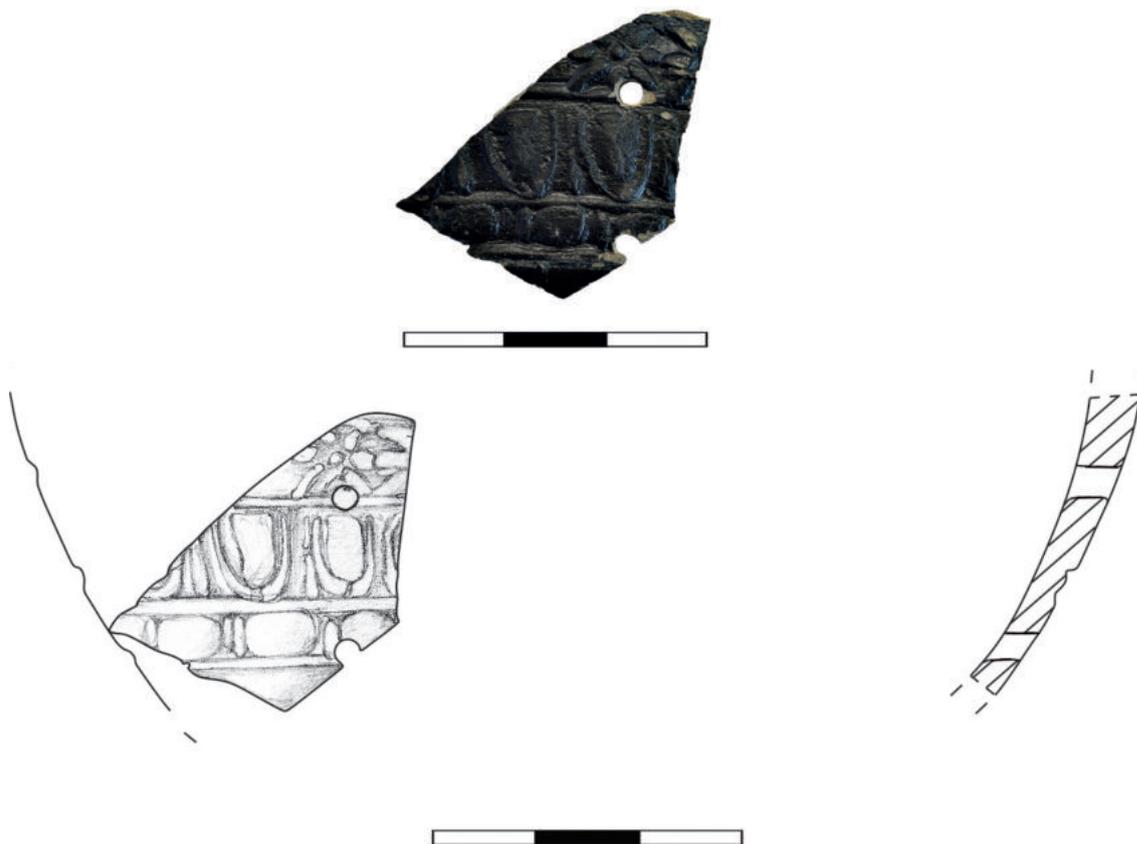


Fig. 4a–b. T.XXV.15.19p: body wall fragment of a bowl (photo P. Lech; drawing A. Miernik)

T.XXV.15.20p: bowl, fragment of the upper half [Fig. 5a–b]

Description: h. 6.9 cm, w. 6.7 cm, wall thickness 0.2–0.5 cm, rim dia. 13.0 cm

Fine-grained, well-levigated clay (Munsell: 2.5Y 5/1 to 6/1 gray). Dull slip (Munsell: 2.5Y 2.5/1 black) on the inside and outside. White mineral inclusions, probably limestone (small size, very low density).

Three drilled holes attesting to repairs made during the use-life of the vessel. One (dia. 0.25 cm) located between the registers of rosettes and egg-and-dart, a second (dia. 0.25 cm) on the lower left break and a third (dia. 0.25 cm) on the lower right break.

Decoration: Ornaments in four registers. From the top: eight-petal rosettes, shorter on the vertical and horizontal axis, longer on the diagonal, placed below the rim; egg-and-dart pattern (very evenly arranged); narrow band of astragal; preserved part of a lotus leaf. Registers separated by thin relief lines, doubled above the eight-petal rosettes.

Parallels: Pattern of rosettes made of eight petals with a point in the center: GRZEGRZÓŁKA 2010, pp. 185, 323, no. 304; arrangement of registers, rosettes and egg-and-dart pattern: LAUMONIER 1977, p. 207, no. 5805, pl. 47. Probably from the same mould as fragment T.XXV.15.19p.

Origin and dating: The scheme of the decoration, the motifs and flat relief suggest an Asia Minor workshop. The light grey clay with lustrous dark black slip may suggest a Pergamum provenance.

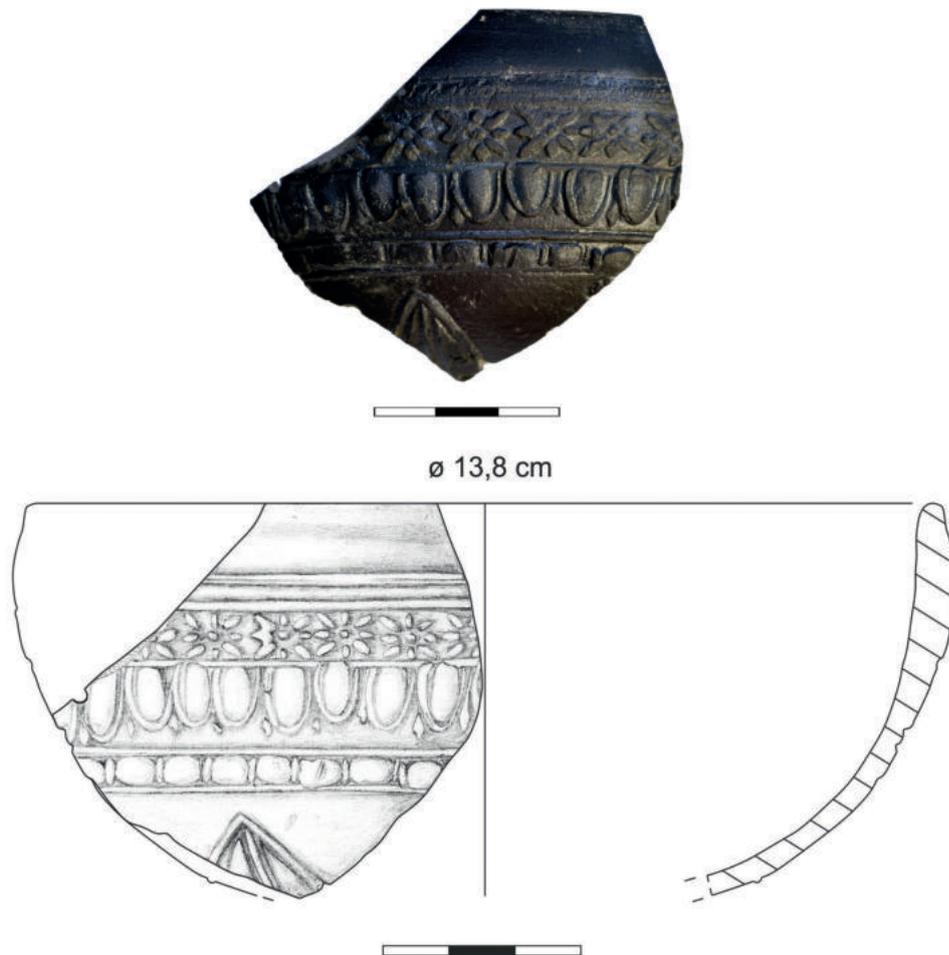


Fig. 5a–b. T.XXV.15.20p: fragment of the upper half of a bowl (photo P. Lech; drawing A. Miernik)

T.XXV.15.46p: bowl, body wall fragment [Fig. 6a–b]

Description: h. 2.6 cm, w. 3.6 cm, wall thickness 0.3 cm

Fine-grained, well-levigated clay (Munsell: 2.5YR 6/8 light red). On both surfaces there are visible traces of a slightly lustrous and unevenly fired slip inside (Munsell 10R 4/6 red) and outside (Munsell 2.5YR 4/6 red to 2.5Y 3/1 very dark gray). White mineral inclusions, probably limestone (small size, medium density).

Decoration: One register of ornament: a vegetal calyx formed of two acanthus leaves alternating with a lotus petal, the tip of one acanthus leaf flopping down to the right.

Parallels: LAUMONIER 1977, p. 137, no. 664, pl. 31; p. 134, no. 375, pl. 30; p. 134, no. 917, pl. 30; GRZEGRZÓŁKA 2010, pp. 35, 241, no. 1; pp. 97, 280, no. 108; pp. 134–135, 300, no. 191b.

Origin and dating: Ionia/Ephesus, possibly workshop of the “Monogramist”, dating to third quarter of the second century BC based on parallels.

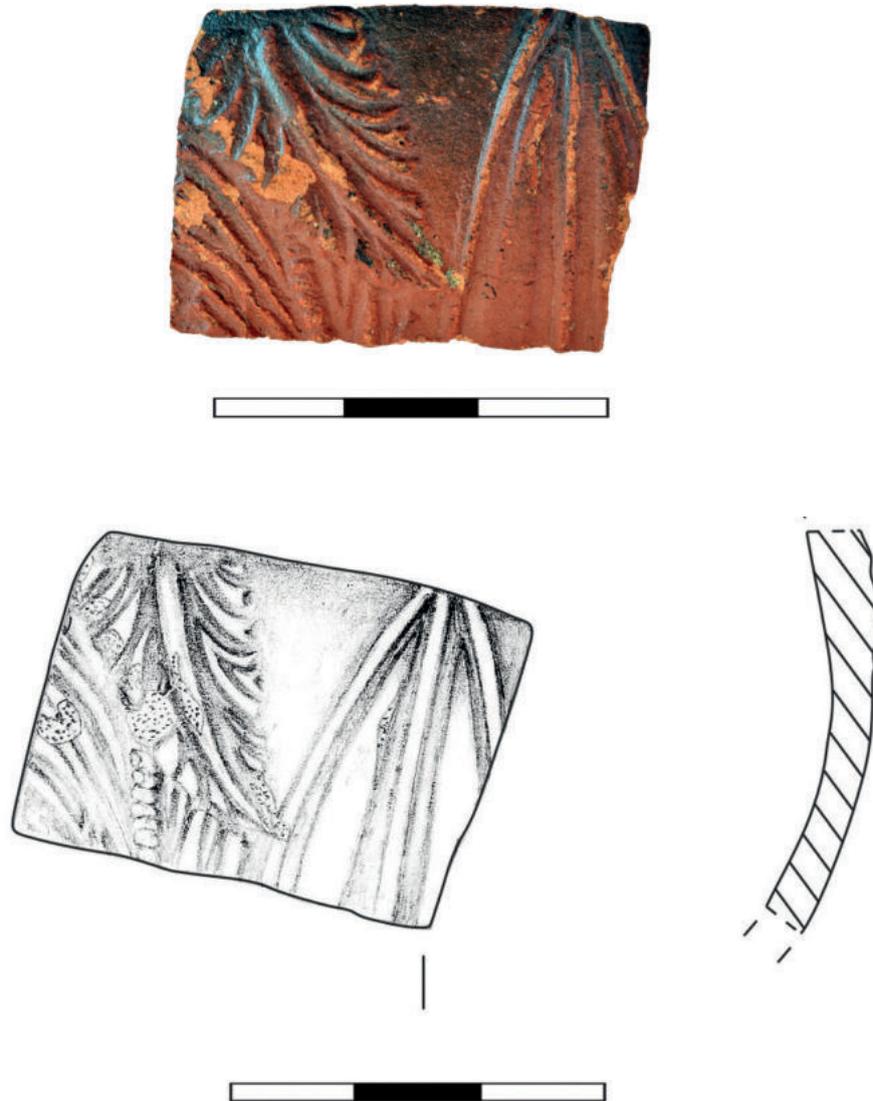


Fig. 6a–b. T.XXV.15.46p: body wall fragment of a bowl (photo P. Lech; drawing A. Miernik)

T.XXV.15.68p: bowl, fragment of the bottom and lower part of the body [Fig. 7a–b]

Description: h. 4.8 cm, w. 5.4 cm, wall thickness 0.4–0.6 cm, bottom dia. 8.0 cm

Fine-grained, well-levigated clay (Munsell 5YR 6/6 reddish yellow). Lustrous, metallic slip inside and outside (Munsell 10R 2.5/1 reddish black). White mineral inclusions, probably limestone (small size and low density). Bottom flat, round, without base ring.

Decoration: One register of long petals on the body. One of the petals with an evident semicircular attachment. Plain flat bottom.

Parallels: Shape of long petals: BOUZEK, JANSOVA 1974, p. 67, no. 91; KÜNZL 2002, pp. 61–62, no. B 53; LAUMONIER 1977, p. 118, no. 4682, pl. 27; p. 364, no. 4704, pl. 88.

Origin and dating: Mould-made bowls with long petals as decoration were produced from 150 BC.¹⁶ This kind of decoration is characteristic of the Ionian workshops as well as the workshops in the Northern Black Sea littoral (LOSEVA 1962, p. 205; ŠURGAJA 1962, pp. 118–120). The provenance in the case of this vessel cannot be determined for lack of exact parallels.

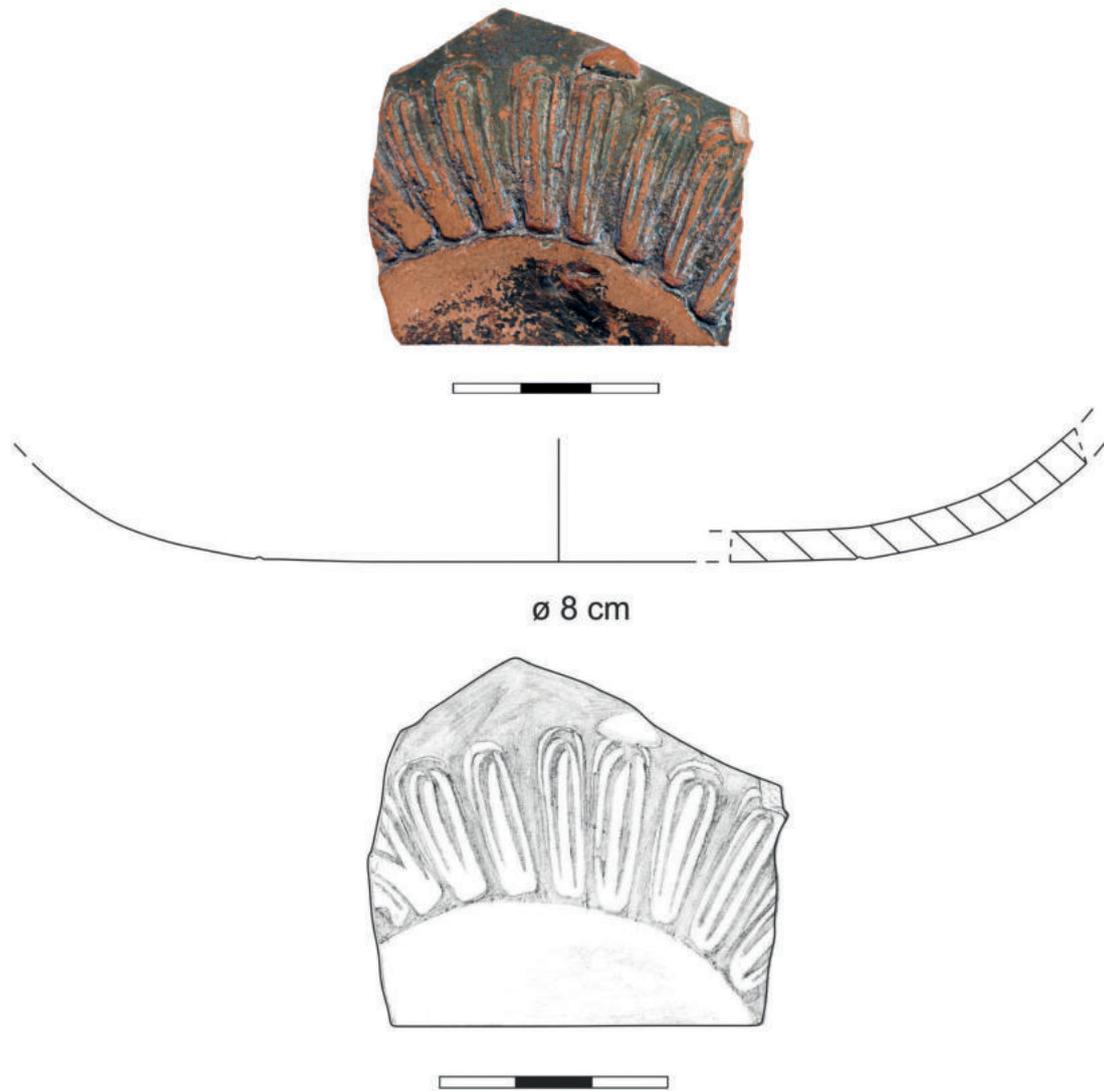


Fig. 7a–b. T.XXV.15.68p: fragment of the lower part of a bowl (photo P. Lech; drawing A. Miernik)

¹⁶ HELLSTROM 1965, p. 21.

T.XXV.16.5p: bowl, fragment of the upper part [Fig. 8a–b]

Description: h. 3.7 cm, w. 3.75 cm, wall thickness 0.3–0.4 cm, rim dia. 11.0 cm

Fine-grained, well-levigated clay (Munsell 2.5 YR 5/4 reddish brown). Slightly lustrous slip on the inside (Munsell 7.5 YR 2.5/1 black) and outside (Munsell 7.5 YR 3/1 very dark gray). White mineral inclusions, probably limestone (small size and density).

Decoration: Ornament in two registers. Upper register decorated with a band of guilloche (*chevrons œillés*) pointing to the left. Below it, sandwiched between relief lines, a slightly wider band of a scrolling vine with voluted tendrils.

Parallels: Guilloche: LAUMONIER 1977, p. 156, no. 175, pl. 35; guilloche and clay color: LAUMONIER 1977, p. 153, no. 1088, pl. 34; scrolling vine with voluted tendrils: LAUMONIER 1977, p. 160, no. 1281, pls. 36 and 125; PACZYŃSKA 2009, p. 123, no. 12 T.05.XXV.42p; guilloche and clay color, slip color: PACZYŃSKA 2000, p. 167, no. T 57 VI N357; scrolling vine with voluted tendrils and slip color: GRZEGRZÓŁKA 2010, pp. 177, 320, no. 285.

Origin and dating: Ionia/Ephesus, possibly workshop of the “Monogramist”, dating to the middle and second half of the second century BC based on parallels (all the parallels in LAUMONIER 1977 come from this workshop).

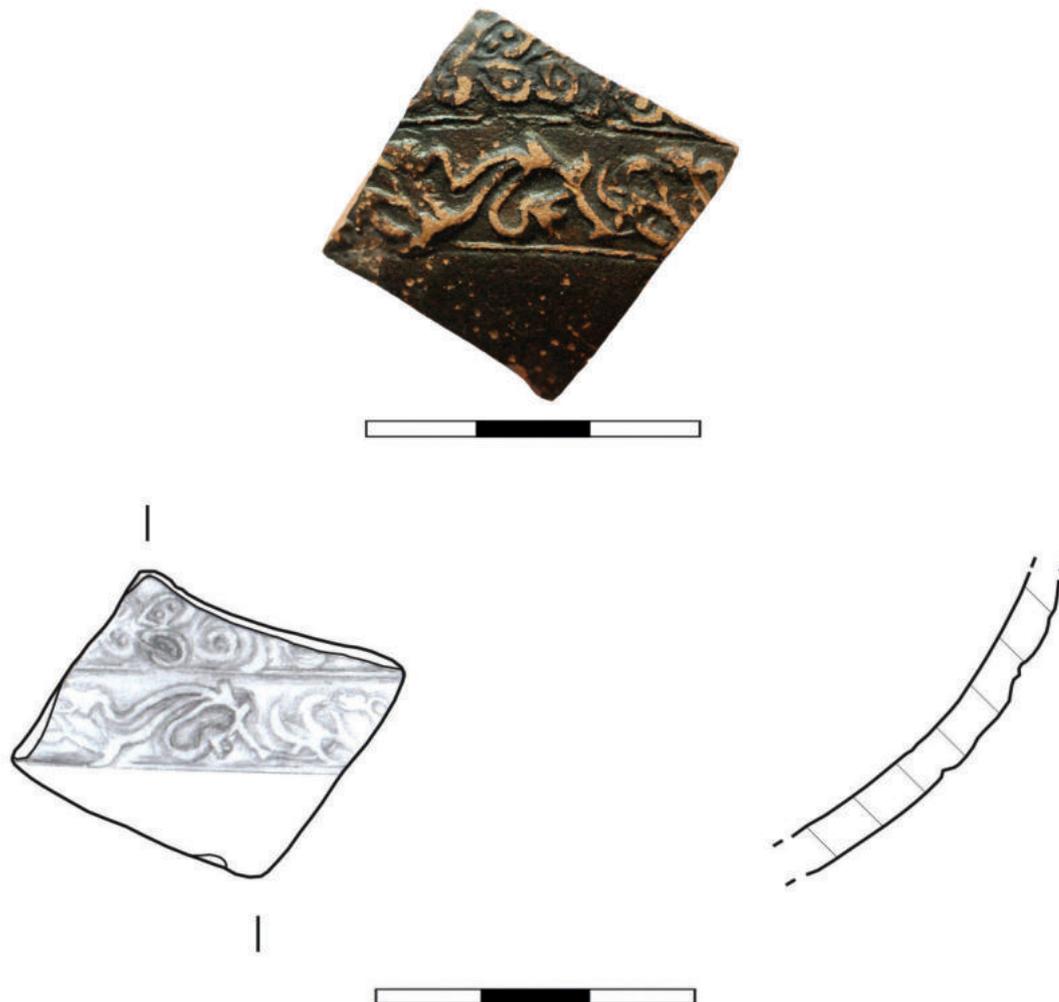


Fig. 8a–b. T.XXV.16.5p: body wall fragment of a bowl (photo P. Lech; drawing A. Miernik)

T.XXV.16.25p: bowl, fragment of the upper part [Fig. 9a–b]

Description: h. 3.4 cm, w. 3.2 cm, wall thickness 0.35–0.5 cm, rim dia. 17.0 cm

Fine-grained, well-levigated clay (Munsell 2.5Y 5/1 gray). Slightly lustrous slip inside and outside (Munsell: 2.5Y 2.5/1 black). White mineral inclusions, probably limestone (small size and density). A convex, oval unslipped surface observed centrally in the top section is interesting technological evidence of the firing process. The vessel was stacked too close to another vessel or the kiln wall.

Decoration: One register of ornament. A band of egg-and-dart (evenly arranged) with a thin relief line above.

Parallels: Egg-and-dart as the first register just below the rim, colors of clay and slip: GRZEGRZÓŁKA 2010, pp. 170, 315, no. 269; egg-and-dart as the first register just below the rim: LAUMONIER 1977, p. 208, nos. 1828, 8368, 8390, 8411, pl. 47 (workshop of the “Monogramist”); LAUMONIER 1977, p. 216, nos. 3015, 8559, pl. 47 (workshop of PRSPIR); LAUMONIER 1977, p. 218, no. 5909, pl. 48 (workshop of PRSPIR).

Origin and dating: Ionia, dated to the middle and second half of the second century BC based on parallels.

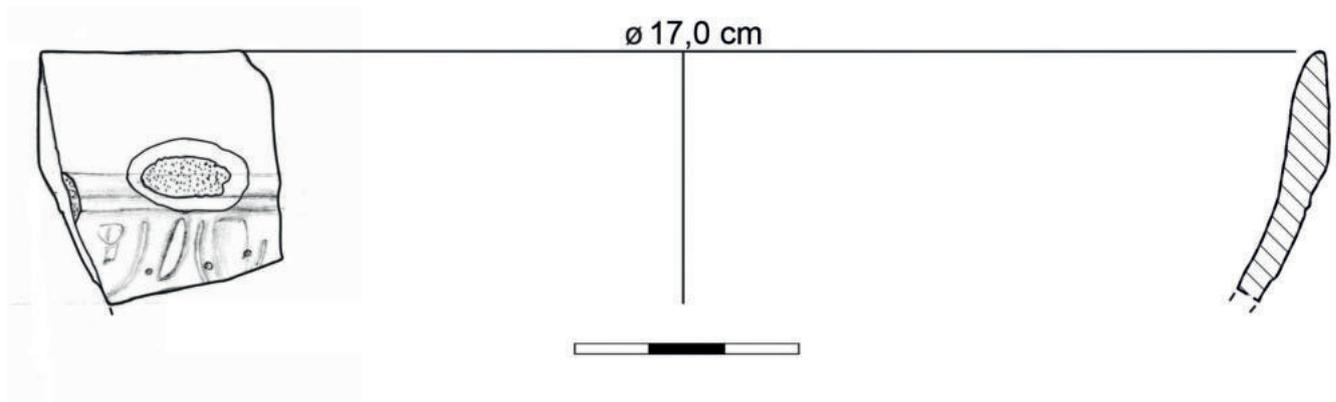


Fig. 9a–b. T.XXV.16.25p: fragment of the upper part of a bowl (photo P. Lech; drawing A. Miernik)

T.XXV.17.12: bowl, fragment of the upper part [Fig. 10a–b]

Description: h. 4.33 cm, w. 4.0 cm, wall thickness 0.3–0.4 cm, rim dia. 17.0 cm

Fine-grained, well-levigated clay (Munsell 2.5Y 6/6 light red in the center and Munsell 7.5YR 7/4 pink to 7/6 reddish yellow closer to the surface). A dull weathered slip on the outside (Munsell 2.5Y 2.5/1 black), slightly more glossy on the inside (Munsell 2.5Y 4/6 red). White mineral inclusions, probably limestone (small size and density), and fine-grained mica (small size, big density). A small drilled repair hole (dia. 0.25 cm) close to the rim edge; another drilled hole (dia. 0.3 cm) on the lower break. Both holes were drilled from the inside.

Decoration: Ornament in two registers. A twisted-cord impression at the top, above a wide band of Lesbian cymatium, diagonally articulated, sandwiched between relief lines.

Parallels: Lesbian cymatium and clay: GRZEGRZÓŁKA 2010, pp. 119, 292, no. 156; Lesbian cymatium: ROGL 2014, p. 117, fig. 3.

Origin and dating: Micaceous orange-beige clay is characteristic of Ephesian workshops. Parallels are generally connected with the Ionian/Ephesus workshops. The estimated date based on parallels is the second century BC.

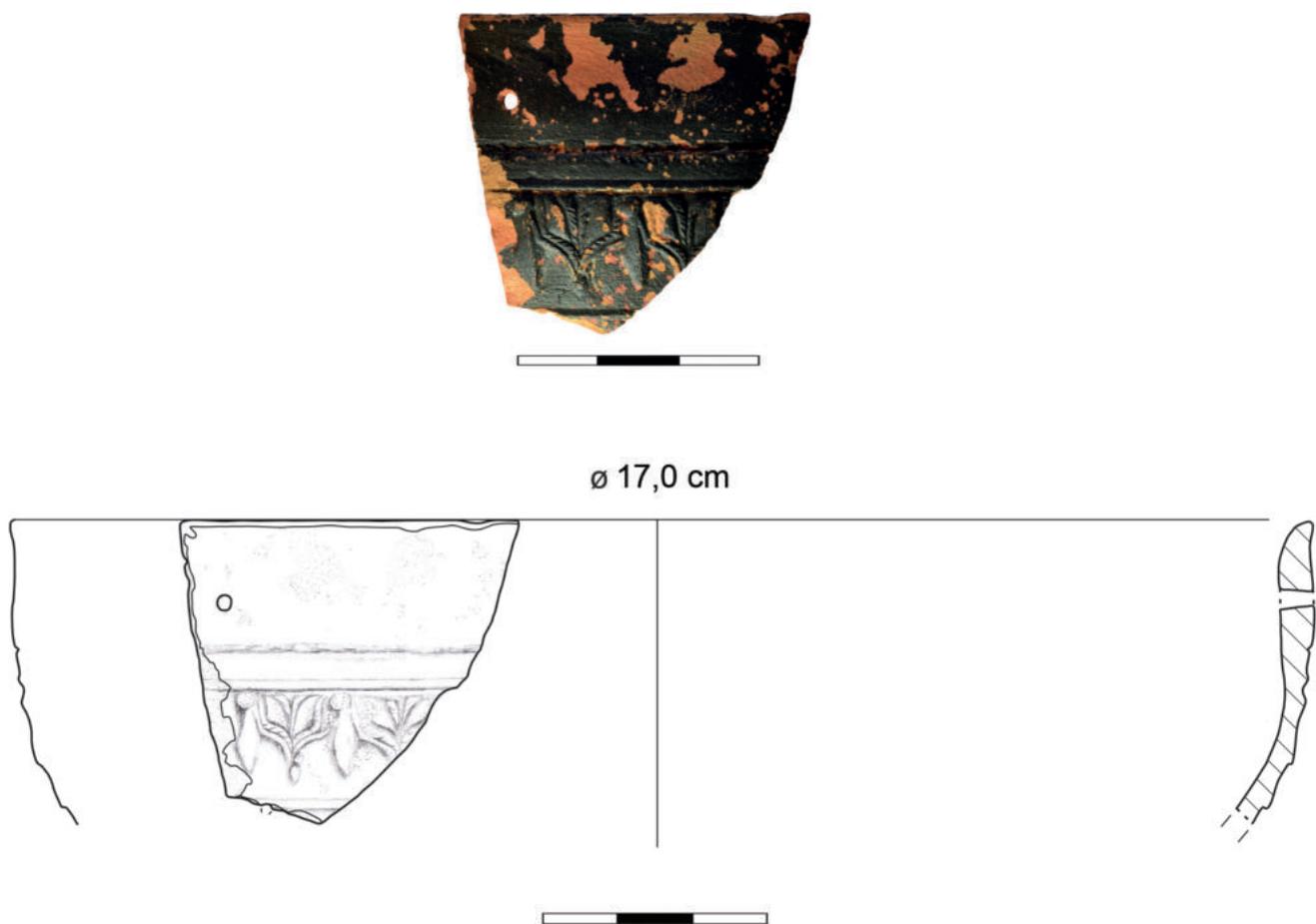


Fig. 10a–b. T.XXV.17.12: fragment of the upper part of a bowl (photo P. Lech; drawing A. Miernik)

T.XXV.17.125p: bowl, fragment of the upper part [Fig. 11a–b]

Description: h. 3.9 cm, w. 2.3 cm, wall thickness 0.2–0.4 cm, rim dia. 12.0 cm

Fine-grained, well-levigated clay (range from Munsell 2.5YR 7/6 light red to 2.5YR 6/4 light reddish brown). Slightly lustrous slip, uneven on the inside (ranging from Munsell 2.5YR 7/4 light reddish brown in the lower part to 2.5Y 4/6 red in the upper part) as well as on the outside (from Munsell 2.5Y 3/1 very dark gray in the upper part to 2.5Y 4/6 red, the closest color, in the lower part). White mineral inclusions, probably limestone (small size and very small density), and fine-grained mica (small size and very small density).

Decoration: Ornament in two registers. At the top, a band of egg-and-dart (unevenly arranged) with a thin relief line above. Below, a floral motif preserving the upper part of a flower with four petals and another unidentifiable motif to the right.

Parallels: Egg-and-dart pattern, rim shape, clay, slightly lustrous slip in two colors on the outer surface (red in the lower part and black in the upper): GRZEGRZÓŁKA 2010, pp. 50–51, 258, no. 19; floral decoration: COURBY 1922, figs. 87, 3 and 88; rim shape: VNUKOV, KOVALENKO 1998, p. 68, figs. 5 and 6.

Origin and dating: Estimated dating based on parallels in the second half of the second century BC. An identified parallel is connected with the Ionian workshops.



Fig. 11a–b. T.XXV.17.125p: fragment the of upper part of a bowl (photo P. Lech; drawing A. Miernik)

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Streszczenie

Znaleziska czarek megaryjskich z polskich wykopalisk w Tanais — sezony 2014–2017

Artykuł stanowi katalog fragmentów tzw. czarek megaryjskich, pochodzących z wykopalisk prowadzonych przez polską misję archeologiczną w Tanais w latach 2014–2017. W trakcie czterech sezonów odkryto łącznie dziewięć fragmentów naczyń odciskanych w formach, z czego osiem to czarki megaryjskie, a przynależność jednego fragmentu (T.XXV.15.68p) trudno określić ze względu na brak dokładnej analogii, jakkolwiek zdobiący go motyw podłużnych płatków (ang. *long petal*) jest typowy również dla czarek. Większość znalezisk pochodzi z warsztatów z Azji Mniejszej (Jonia/Efez), trzy fragmenty mogły powstać w pracowni tzw. „Monogramisty”. Cztery fragmenty noszą ślady późniejszej obróbki — nawiercono w nich niewielkie otwory (0,2–0,25 cm średnicy), prawdopodobnie w celu naprawy.

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