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HELLENISTIC RELIEF WARE AT POMPEII. THE EVIDENCE OF THE POMPEII ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT: PORTA STABIA

Fragments of molds for Hellenistic Relief Bowls in a Vesuvian fabric and of relief vessels attributed to Asia Minor (probably Ephesian) production were discovered by the Pompeii Archaeological Research Project: Porta Stabia. The rarity of Hellenistic Relief Bowls among drinking vessels Pompeii compared to the ubiquitous Thin-Walled Ware shows limited interest in them. As vessel fragments were found throughout the Porta Stabia area rather than in a concentration, that interest must, however, have been sustained. There is no sacral or funerary association. Perhaps the bowls served a minority wanting to drink wine in the Greek fashion. The Vesuvian molds show that someone expected to satisfy a demand for locally made relief vessels, while the lack of any known Vesuvian bowls indicates an unsuccessful endeavor. Maybe the Vesuvian products were of too inferior a quality to compete with imports or the demand for such vessels was already waning when they appeared.

Hellenistic Relief Bowls – Molds – Pompeii

Introduction

The finds from the excavations of the Pompeii Archaeological Research Project: Porta Stabia, conducted by the University of Cincinnati under the direction of Steven Ellis (<https://classics.uc.edu/pompeii/>), show some interest in Hellenistic Relief Ware. On the one hand, fragments of four molds were discovered and, on the other, 40 fragments from a maximum of 27 Hellenistic Relief Bowls (one of the largest nuclei of this ware at Pompeii).

Molds

The mold fragments have already been presented elsewhere (Martin 2019) – **fig. 1**. They were found in four stratigraphic units (1028 and 1029 in Trench 1, 6008 in Trench 6 and 24004 in Trench 24), which offer no useful information for determining when the molds were used, as they are fill layers dating to the 1st century CE. The fragments all present a Vesuvian fabric, characterized by particles of black sand, which indicates their local production. Their decorations exclude the molds from the production of Tyrrhenian central Italy (the so-called Italo-Megarian Ware) and suggest that they may be associated with the southern Italian production centers, especially Taranto (Leotta 2019: 51).

Vessels

The vessel fragments were found in 28 stratigraphical units, all fill layers, in 15 trenches. Almost all the pieces must be residual. Two of the units concerned date to the late 1st century BCE or the Augustan period, 14 to the 1st century

CE and five more are modern. Of the remaining seven units, which could date to as early as the late 2nd or early 1st century BCE, two present fragments that belong to a vessel of which other sherds were attested in a 1st-century layer. The widely dispersed nature of the finds makes it unlikely that the Hellenistic Relief Bowls derive from a single event or are to be associated with a particular location within the excavation area.

Fabric and Coating

The vessel fragments from Porta Stabia correspond well in their fabric and coating to the description of Ephesian products (Rogl 2014: 122-126) (**figs. 3 and 4**). The fabrics are characterized by white and micaceous inclusions. Some present also occasional reddish or grayish ones. In color they range from reddish to dark gray. All the fragments are coated, once again with much variation in color, as well as in glossiness. Some are red, some blackish and yet others are two-toned or mottled. Many are rather matt, while some have a glossy sheen.

Typology

The 13 fragments that preserve the rim can be assigned to Rogl Type 2, i.e. to the so-called Delian group (Rogl 2014: 122). Two belong to Rogl Type 2a (**fig. 2, 1**), the others to Rogl Type 2b. Of the latter, four present a more marked articulation between the decorated part and the inturned rim (**fig. 2, 2**), while six have a more rounded transition, and one poorly preserved fragment is uncertain. These profiles were used by the ΠΑΡ-workshop and contemporary, possibly

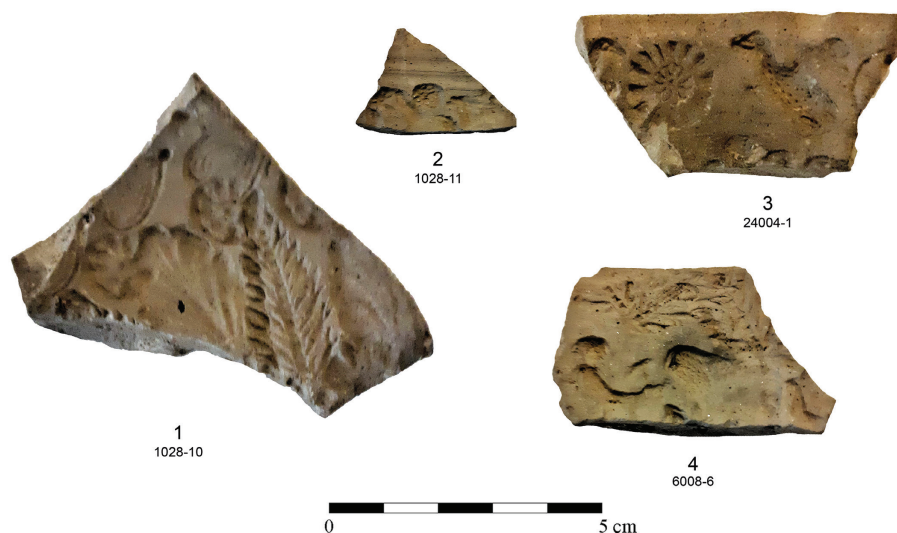


Fig. 1. Mold fragments.

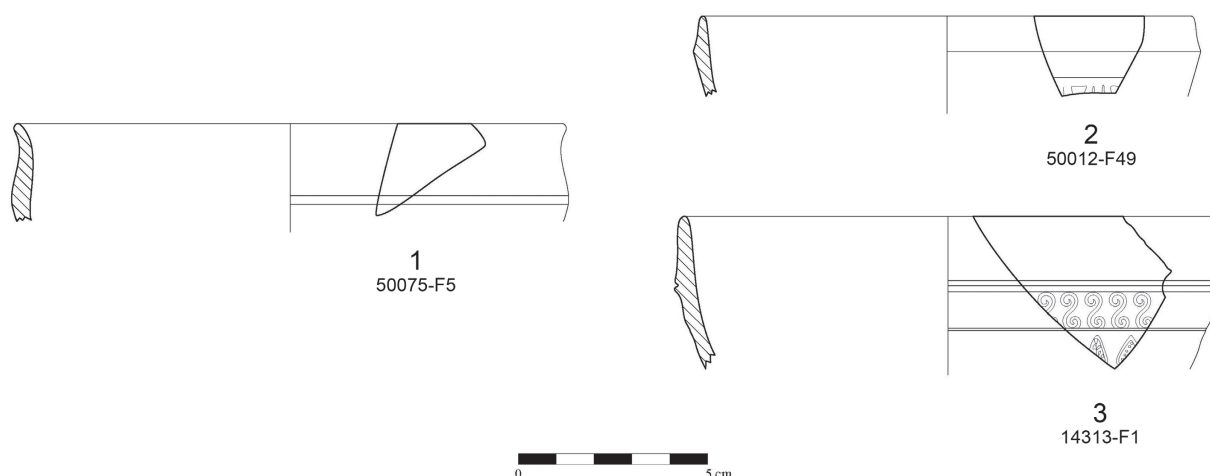


Fig. 2. Typology of the vessels (Rogl 2a – no.1; Rogl 2b – nos. 2 and 3).

related workshops, as well as by succeeding ones, with Type 2a being earlier than Type 2b. The ΠΑΡ-workshop may have started production shortly after 166 BCE and lasted to the end of the 2nd century BCE (Rogl 2014: 133), while the succeeding workshops produced apparently between the end of the 2nd century or the beginning of the 1st (Rogl 2014: 133-134).

Decoration

The decorated parts of Hellenistic Relief Bowls in general consist of a rim zone (a decorative band of one or more registers), a main decoration on the wall (often in more than one zone) and a medallion at the center of the bottom of the bowl (Rotroff 1982: 3). Ephesian bowls tend to have more zones of decoration than those from other centers (Rogl 2014: 126). The medallion is occupied by a rosette from a limited range (Rogl 2014: 122). In the rim section, especially

in the ΠΑΡ-workshop, the Ionian kymation predominates, followed by the meander, the eight-petaled rosette and the Lesbian kymation, as well as the guilloche, the wave motif, the bead and reel and the S motif, while the main decoration is dominated by floral motifs (e.g. seven-petaled rosettes) (Rogl 2014: 126-127).

The Porta Stabia material preserves decoration on one rim fragment of Type 2a. Otherwise, decoration appears on pieces with rims of Type 2b or on body sherds. Most of the surviving decorations belong to rim zones. There are also fragments from the main decoration but none from the medallion.

The Ionian kymation is the most frequent motif among the Porta Stabia material in the rim zone, mostly in the uppermost or only register (fig. 2, 2; fig. 3, 1). Other common motifs in the rim zone are the meander (fig. 3, 2); eight-petaled rosettes (fig. 3, 3); guilloches (fig. 4, 1); S motifs, upright and recumbent (fig. 2, 3; fig. 3, 2; fig. 4, 2 and 3).



Fig. 3. Decorations on the vessels (rim zones).

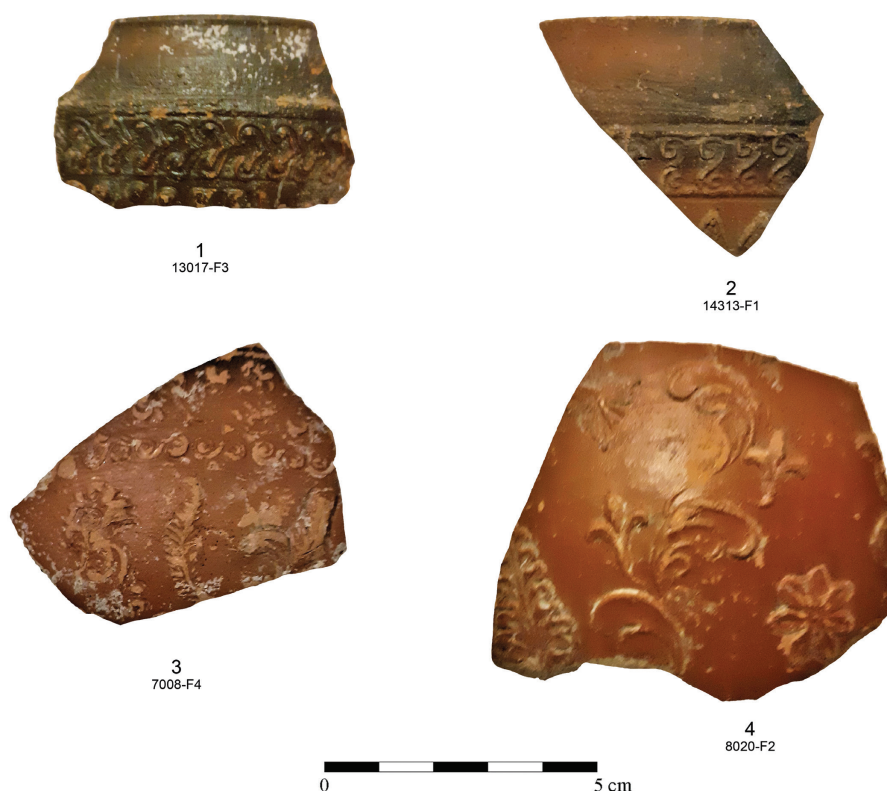


Fig. 4. Decorations on the vessels (main zones).

There are also a Lesbian kymation, scrolls (fig. 4, 3), upright leaves and a bead-and-reel motif.

The main decoration is vegetal wherever it is preserved. The most complete presents a row with an acanthus leaf, a stylized plant, a seven-petaled rosette and the remains of another probable stylized plant (fig. 4, 4). Another fairly large piece preserves a scroll. There are also parts of a palmette and

a frond, a nymphaea lotus, an acanthus, a frond and imbricated fern leaves, as well as various vegetal elements (fig. 4, 3).

In their decoration, these pieces fit the Ephesian repertoire well. The motifs attested in the registers on the rims and their frequency correspond to the description of the products of Ephesos, as does the vegetal decoration of the main zone.

Discussion

The presence of fragments of Hellenistic Relief Bowls at Pompeii and all the more so of molds for them indicates some interest there in the ware. Admittedly, it was limited. It has rightly been pointed out that the Italic merchants at Delos, who must have been familiar with such bowls, could have promoted their export to Italy but did not do so on any large scale (Crawford 1981: 279). What the interest was at Pompeii remains to determine. In the Greek world, Hellenistic Relief Bowls count as the usual drinking vessels of the Hellenistic period (Rotroff 1982: 1; Rogl 2014: 113), which certainly was not the case at Pompeii and more widely in the West, where they are greatly outnumbered by Thin-Walled Ware. Hellenistic Relief Bowls have been associated with drinking wine at symposia (Rotroff 1982: 1; Rogl 2010: 657; Rogl 2014: 114, 133-134), although it has been noted that they came simply to form a part of the tableware repertoire (Rogl 2010: 650). Perhaps Hellenistic Relief Bowls served a minority at Pompeii, including perhaps merchants active between Pompeii and the East, that wished to consume Greek wine in the Greek manner (Laumonier 1977: 12-13). The discovery at Porta Stabia of widely dispersed fragments of vessels accords well with this hypothesis. The suggestion has been advanced that Hellenistic Relief Bowls were used by specific socio-cultural groups in religious, funerary and commemorative ceremonies, in Greece and the East as well as in Italy (Leotta 2005: 51; Leotta 2017: 81-82; Leotta 2019: 45-46). Their lack of concentration and of association with anything of a sacral nature speaks against this.

By all indications, the vessels found at Porta Stabia were imported from western Asia Minor, probably most if not all from Ephesos. The fabric, typology and decoration all point toward Ephesos. That is, in fact, the origin of most of the Ionian bowls found at Delos (Rogl 2014: 131). Although other production centers more or less associated with Ephesos are known, for example on Samos (Rogl 2014: 136-137), at Kyme Aeolica (Landi 2012: 75-77), at Priene (Fenn 2014),

at Knidos (Kögler 2000, especially 194; Kögler 2005: 51, 54; Kögler 2014: 166-167), their exportation seems to have been limited, and they did not even necessarily dominate their home markets. A western Asia Minor origin is no surprise in that such material has already been attested at Pompeii (Bonghi Jovino 1984; Laidlaw and Martin 2014: 163, 197, 199; Russo 2015 – *contra* the author's opinion Martin 2019: 33; Morsiani 2017).

Nevertheless, the exclusive attestation of imported vessels poses a problem. As molds for Hellenistic Relief Ware were discovered in a Vesuvian fabric at Porta Stabia, one might expect that some of the vessel fragments found there and elsewhere at Pompeii would be Vesuvian. Turning to local products would find a parallel in the tendency in many places for locally produced bowls, often with simplified decorations, to replace imported ones during the second half of the 2nd century BC (Rogl 2010: 658-659). Perhaps the Vesuvian vessels, which to judge from the molds must have been of inferior quality, could not compete with the imports, and therefore few of them were ever made. It is also possible that the attempt to launch the production of Hellenistic Relief Ware in the Vesuvian region occurred toward the end of such bowls' popularity and was unsuccessful for that reason.

Conclusion

The finds of fragments of Hellenistic Relief Bowls and molds for them raise certain questions. Why were locally made molds discovered but only imported vessels? What purpose did the few Hellenistic Relief Bowls attested serve? At the same time, some considerations in answer to the questions can be advanced.

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