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OBSERVATIONS ON POTTERY FINDS FROM THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN IN *VIMINACIUM* (SERBIA): THE CAMULODUNUM 189 AMPHORAE

This paper presents the find of amphorae of the type Camulodunum 189, discovered during recent research activities conducted around the castrum, in Viminacium. New examples of this form of amphorae have supplemented the knowledge of their presence in this part of the empire and indicated considerably more developed trade connections between distant provinces within the empire. Archaeological units in which pieces of amphorae, as well as a whole one, were discovered were dated into the period of the founding of the legionary camp, in the final decades of the 1st and the 2nd century.

Camulodunum 189 – “carrot” amphora – castrum – Viminacium

Introduction

During the Roman period, Viminacium was located within the province of Moesia Superior, in its northernmost part, while nowadays it is in the vicinity of the village of Stari Kostolac, in eastern Serbia (**fig. 1**). The city was founded on the right bank of the river Mlava during the 1st century, when a military camp was formed, with a settlement surrounding it. At the end of the same century, it became the permanent residence of the Legio VII Claudia, as well as the capital of the province of Moesia Superior. It gained the status of municipium during the reign of the emperor Hadrian, and it reached the rank of colony during the times of the emperor Gordian. In the 3rd century, it reached its peak of progress, as with most cities in the empire. In the meantime, it became the centre of political and military power in the province of Moesia Superior, and the geographic position of the city contributed to its economic and cultural development. It was destroyed in the first half of the 5th century, during the invasion of the Huns.

Numerous activities were present in the territory of Viminacium, as witnessed by a large amount of archaeological material discovered during the research of the necropolises, the urban and the rural milieu, as well as the military camp. Judging by the large number of items made of clay, such as vessels, bricks, terracotta etc., it can be concluded that the ceramic craft was one of the most developed. A complex of 13 ceramic and brick kilns, which was researched around the southern necropolis, indicates intensive production of ceramic items in the period of the 2nd and the 3rd centuries (Raičković 2007). Workshop activities also indicate a high level of expertise of the potters, as confirmed by numerous fragments of vessels with relief decorations and finds of moulds for their production (Bjelajac 1990: 143-147). Aside from products from local workshops, the ceramic material also displayed an impressive number of imported forms,

especially types of terra sigillata, as well as vessels made especially for transporting goods – amphorae. They also represent one reliable indicator of the existence of intensive trade between the capital of Moesia Superior and other provincial cities. Specific shapes of amphorae were used for food supply, most prominently for the army, but also for the civilian population, from different parts of the empire. Among the amphorae discovered in the wider area of Viminacium, the most numerous specimens belonged to the forms used for the import of oil and wine from the Western Mediterranean and Pontic area (Bjelajac 1996: 13-27).

Some specimens of amphorae of eastern origin were found in the province of Upper Moesia, mainly in the wider area of Viminacium. These vessels originated from the cen-



Fig. 1. Map of roman provinces and Viminacium site.

tres of the Greek islands – Kos, Rhodes, Crete, Thassos and others, with a long tradition in production, from the time of classical Greece, through the Hellenistic period and further through the Roman era (Bjelajac 1996: 37). The time of the most intensive import at Viminacium is related to the period from the middle of the 2nd century to the middle of the 3rd century, when trade between the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean areas increased due to more favourable conditions for transport. When it comes to the territory of the ancient Near East, there are only sporadic finds of imported amphorae on the entire territory of the province of Upper Moesia. The number of specimens found occurs equally throughout the entire period of Roman domination, as well as through the late Roman period, and even later, even up to the 6th century (Bjelajac 1996: 45-52).

Pottery context

For this paper, the fragments, as well as the whole specimen of the amphora type Camulodunum 189, from the area of the Viminacium military camp and canabae were selected. According to research conducted in certain areas of the north-western and western ramparts, the time of construction of the castrum was placed in the last decades of the 1st and the beginning of the 2nd century (Nikolić et al. 2018; 2021). The ceramic material that originates from these cultural horizons is very important for the study of pottery in the earliest stages of the formation of the capital of Upper Moesia (Nikolić and Raičković Savić 2023). The vessels are divided into several different groups, including kitchenware, tableware, as well as ceramic for storage and transportation. There are also miniature vessels, which imitate existing forms among the bowls. Apart from the vessels produced in local workshops, the representation of imported forms is not negligible, especially in the form of terra sigillata vessels and marbled pottery. Storage pottery includes large-sized vessels, pithoi, represented exclusively in the oldest horizons at Viminacium. For now, we cannot say anything more about their provenance but, based on analogies from Pannonia, we can assume that they are imported specimens (Brukner 1981: 42; 110; T. 128/14, 19). A specimen from the settlement was found during the research of the older horizons at the thermae. The ceramic material from these layers was determined in the 2nd to the middle of the 3rd century, according to the represented forms and based on the found coins of the emperors Alexander Severus and Aurelian. In this case, we must take the dating of the amphora itself with a grain of salt, at least until additional analyses are carried out to establish the exact origin and period of use of this specimen.

Camulodunum 189 / “Carrot” amphora

The specific shape of this type of amphora, as the name itself suggests, resembles a carrot and comprehends a wider rim, with a diameter of between 5.5 and 7 cm, smaller handles with a circular cross-section, a ribbed receptacle and a pointed bottom, ca. 50 cm high. The average volume of the examples from Viminacium was ca. 1.3 l, while the examples from the

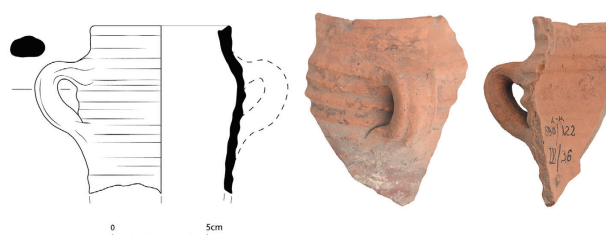


Fig. 2. Camulodunum 189 (drawing and photo).

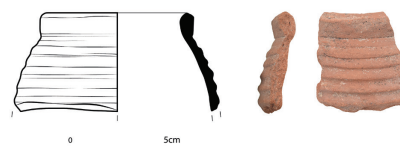


Fig. 3. Camulodunum 189 (drawing and photo).

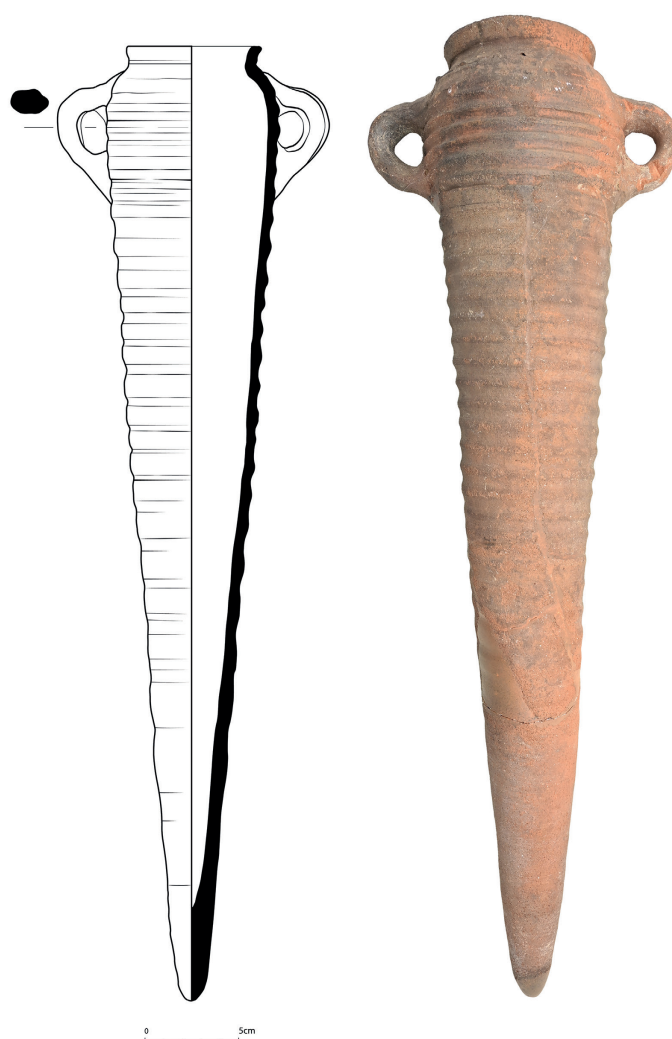


Fig. 4. Camulodunum 189 (drawing and photo).

western provinces tend to be somewhat larger, with volume between 2 and 3 l (Carreras Monfort and Williams 2002: 133).

To date, three vessels classified into this type of amphorae have been registered in the territory of the province of Moesia Superior. The first published example from the mentioned province comes from the city centre of Viminacium, from the area of the *canabae* (fig. 2a, 2b). Due to the lack of a more precise archaeological context, the fragment of the amphora was broadly dated from the end of the 2nd to the beginning of the 3rd century (Bjelajac 1996: 28-29). It was made from well-sifted clay, with a red firing colour (2.5YR 6/8), and has a rim diameter of 7 cm. One fragmented find (fig. 3a, 3b), found during the excavation of the *castrum*, a partially preserved rim and the belly, has a rim diameter of 7 cm, while the other was preserved whole with rim diameter 7.5 cm and height 52 cm (fig. 4a, 4b). Both examples (Nikolić et al. 2023: 28, 290) were made from clay with admixtures of fine-grained quartz sand, with a red firing colour (10R 6/8).

Origin

In the past, there were several conflicting opinions about the possible origin of these amphorae. Certain authors believed that centres of production were located in the Western Mediterranean part of the empire, while others assumed that they were located in the Levant region or even in Egypt (Hayes 1983: 158; Peacock, Williams 1986: 109-110). Finds of amphorae of this specific shape have been registered across a wide territory of the Roman Empire, with a considerably higher concentration in its north-western part (Berg 2012: 221, fig. 5) than in the provinces in the Balkans (Brukner 1981: 124; Bjelajac 1996: 28-29; Ožanić 2005: 139) or provinces in the east (Carreras Monfort and Williams 2002: 136). In recent decades, research has been focused on determining origins and discovering production centres. Archaeological research conducted around Beirut resulted in the discovery of pottery kilns on the eastern ramparts of the ancient city. Ceramic material dated to the 1st century was also found inside the kiln, among which were amphorae with ribbed receptacles and pointed bottoms. The vessels found in workshops and kilns in Beirut were analysed, as well as specimens from Gallic sites, to determine a possible common origin (Waksman et al. 2003: 96). The results indicated an existing connection between vessels found in different parts of the empire and led to the confirmation of the production of the Camulodunum 189 type amphora in present-day Lebanon (Kouwalti et al. 2008). Apart from the mentioned amphorae, other types, such as Beyrouth I and Beyrouth II, were found on the territory of the Gallic province, whose production was also confirmed on the Beirut site (Waksman et al. 2003: 99).

Contents of the amphorae

As for the contents of the amphorae, authors mostly concur – these were vessels used for the transport of tropical, exotic fruit. Confirmation for this can be found in several places, starting with literary sources. Martialis, a Roman poet known for his epigrams, described in his work a vessel with a pointy

bottom used for transporting plums and figs (Martialis 13.28) from eastern provinces. Representations of these amphorae can be found in Pompeii, where a wall painting depicts a vessel similar to a “carrot” amphora. The most significant material is archaeological finds. During the archaeological research of the province of Helvetia, in the city of Aventicum, carbonised dates were discovered inside this type of amphorae, which represent a direct confirmation of the mentioned supposition (Vipard 1995: 65; Carreras Monfort and Williams 2002: 141).

Distribution

The distribution of the amphorae across the Roman provinces began during the reign of the emperor Augustus and lasted up to the Late Antonine period and into the early 3rd century. They reached their peak of production and distribution in the 1st century, as confirmed by finds discovered on most sites in the empire. Interestingly, these amphorae have been found quite sporadically in locations in Beirut. Only 10-12 specimens of this type of amphorae were found during the excavation of the cistern deposit, which are dated to the late 1st century. Since material from the layers of the middle of the 1st century and the beginning of the 3rd century on researched locations is missing, it leads authors to new assumptions. A new hypothesis indicates that these were forms used exclusively for the export of dates from the eastern provinces, i.e., Beirut, to other parts of the empire (Reynolds et al. 2010: 77).

Conclusion

The new finds of the “carrot” amphorae contributed to the improvement of the already existing knowledge of their presence in Viminacium. Since it was not possible to determine the period of use, nor to establish the possible provenance of the existing example, due to the lack of more precise data on the find itself, this new fragment, as well as the whole vessel that was discovered during the recent research of the *castrum*, significantly contribute to the ceramic repertoire from Viminacium. We can assume that there will be a larger amount of finds in decades to come since research of the oldest horizons within the city and the camp is yet to be undertaken. The Camulodunum 189 type of amphorae also suggests the existence of developed networks of trading routes between cities and provinces, in this case, between Viminacium and the Phoenician region. The import of exotic goods from distant eastern provinces certainly represents a significant element in the study of the economic situation in the province of Moesia Superior. Individual examples discovered in Viminacium also bear witness to the important position that this city occupied in the entire Roman Empire.

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