

An Oinophora Type Vessel Discovered at the Noviodunum Necropolis

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Abstract. *Our article refers to a special discovery made at Noviodunum, the headquarters of the Danube fleet Classis Flavia Moesica. It is about an oinophora type vessel, shaped as a ram, which was discovered, by chance, in a cremation grave. Its presence in the necropolis of the city must not come as a surprise to us, because such discoveries come, once again, to show its commercial and economic importance in the province. The Noviodunum market represented a luxury goods consumer from all the provinces of the empire. Regarding the chronological framing of the vessel we support the opinion that it might come from the second half of the 2nd century p.Chr.*

Rezumat. *Articolul nostru discută o descoperire aparte făcută la Noviodunum, sediul flotei dunărene Classis Flavia Moesica. Este vorba despre un vas de tip oinophora, în formă de berbec, care a fost descoperit, în mod întâmplător, într-un mormânt de incinerare. Prezența acestuia în necropola cetății nu trebuie să ne surprindă, deoarece astfel de descoperiri vin să arate, o dată în plus, importanța comercială și economică a acesteia în cadrul provinciei. Piața de la Noviodunum reprezenta un consumator de bunuri de lux provenite din toate provinciile Imperiului. În privința încadrării cronologice a vasului suntem de părere că ulciorul s-ar putea data, eventual, în a doua jumătate a secolului al II-lea p.Chr.*

Keywords: Moesia Inferior, Noviodunum, necropolis, oinophora.

Introduction

The fortress of Noviodunum had an important strategic and economic role before the coming of the Romans, which was accentuated in the following periods, until the medieval epoch³. The first archaeological research on this site were done in the year 1953, as afterwards, a collective made of I. Barnea (responsible), B. Mitrea and N. Anghelescu accomplished the very first rescue digging by the length of the floodable beach of the Danube, by the ruins of the harbor installations of the fortress from the Roman epoch⁴.

Since the annexation of Dobrogea to the Moesia Inferior province, during the reign of emperor Vespasianus, Noviodunum started its economic, military and urban evolution, as a

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³ BARNEA 1977, 103.

⁴ BARNEA, MITREA, ANGELESCU 1957, 156; ȘTEFAN 1973, 5; BARNEA 2000, 204.

main base for the Roman fleet at the Lower Danube – Classis Flavia Moesica – and the headquarters of several other military units over time (the detachments of Legio V Macedonica, I Italica, XI Claudia and the milites primi Constantiniani units). Moreover, the settlement was situated at the end of the military and commercial road which got through Dobrogea, coming from Marcianopolis, and which intersected here with the limes area, that was following the right bank of the river.

The tumular necropolis of the fortress was researched by G. Simion between the years 1958–1992, as 30 barrows were investigated, which represent just half of all the known ones. The pieces of information that resulted from the necropolis research make references to the timeline between the end of the 1st century and the end of the 2nd p.Chr. as they outline the funerary rites and the rituals practiced at Noviodunum in the early Roman period⁵.

Another necropolis, for both cremation and burial, has been identified at the “La Livadă” point, situated in the vicinity of the fortress, at approximately 900 m in the South–South–West direction. Quite recently, one such tomb had been researched, as it was disturbed by maintenance work done to one of the exploit roads. From the inside the following were recovered: a ceramic vessel (jug), a whetstone, six bone tokens, multiple iron nails and some fragments from a bronze object. The authors of the research dated this discovery in the 2nd century p.Chr., mainly based on the ceramic recipient⁶. The field research accomplished in 2012 helped with the identification, on another exploit road from the fruit-growing complex, of at least two cremation tombs.

In the proximity of the tomb which was researched in the year 2011, at approximately 250 m East from it, at the root of a cherry tree, in the year 2013, the zoomorphic vessel shaped as a ram was discovered. We are presenting it in the following rows (Figure 1). It was part, most probably, of the inventory from a cremation tomb, which could not be researched⁷. The vessel had been recovered in its entirety, as it was restored by the experts from the Restauration Laboratory, with the mention that the right eye is missing. As of this moment, the jug is in the deposit of the History and Archaeology Museum that is part of ICEM Tulcea, having been processed with the inventory number 50484. The archaeological preventive researches that were made in the summer of the year 2020⁸, in order to “*modernize the irrigation plot SPP1 from the Isaccea irrigation arrangement, in Tulcea county*”, with the beneficiary OUA I Frunzis, they outlined in the vicinity of the area where the ram jug was discovered several funerary complexes made in brick cist, but also the traces of some cremation tombs, which were previously destroyed by the old pipe to the irrigations system.

⁵ SIMION 1977, 123–148; SIMION 1984, 75–96; SIMION 2007, 307–338.

⁶ RADU, DINU, STĂNICĂ, 2011, 57.

⁷ The shareholders of the company that manages the fruit complex did not allow the research team to carry out a rescue intervention.

⁸ The research was accomplished by A.D. Stănică, M. Mocanu and R. Stănescu from ICEM Tulcea.

Description: a whole zoomorphic vessel (Figure 3). Dimensions: H = 20,4 cm; L = 20,5 cm; l = 9,1 cm; Socle: L = 14,3 cm; l = 7,6 cm. Mouth/ Opening: D_{ext} = 3,3 cm; D_{int} = 1,6 cm; Thickness of handle = 3,70. The paste is fine, light brick in colour (5YR/7.8 orange), with yellowish-brown coating on the outside, slightly exfoliated in some points, yellowish on the inside (2.5YR/4.8, 5.8, reddish brown, bright brown). The lip is cut straight, the neck is slim, stylish and small. The handle is lamellar, with three grooved decorations longitudinally arranged over it (with the ones on the margins being more pronounced) and is fixed by the base of the neck and by the back of the ram. The jug was made by printing it in a pattern with two halves that were glued to the side parts afterwards. The inferior part is rectangular, in the shape of a socle. The superior part of the piece represents a ram in a standing position on the socle. The head is elegantly made, as the left eye, the only one that was maintained, is big, elongated, with the eyebrow harmoniously accentuated. The mouth of the animal is big, and its nostrils are



Figure 1. A. Cremation tomb researched in 2011, B. The discovery location of the zoomorphic vessel

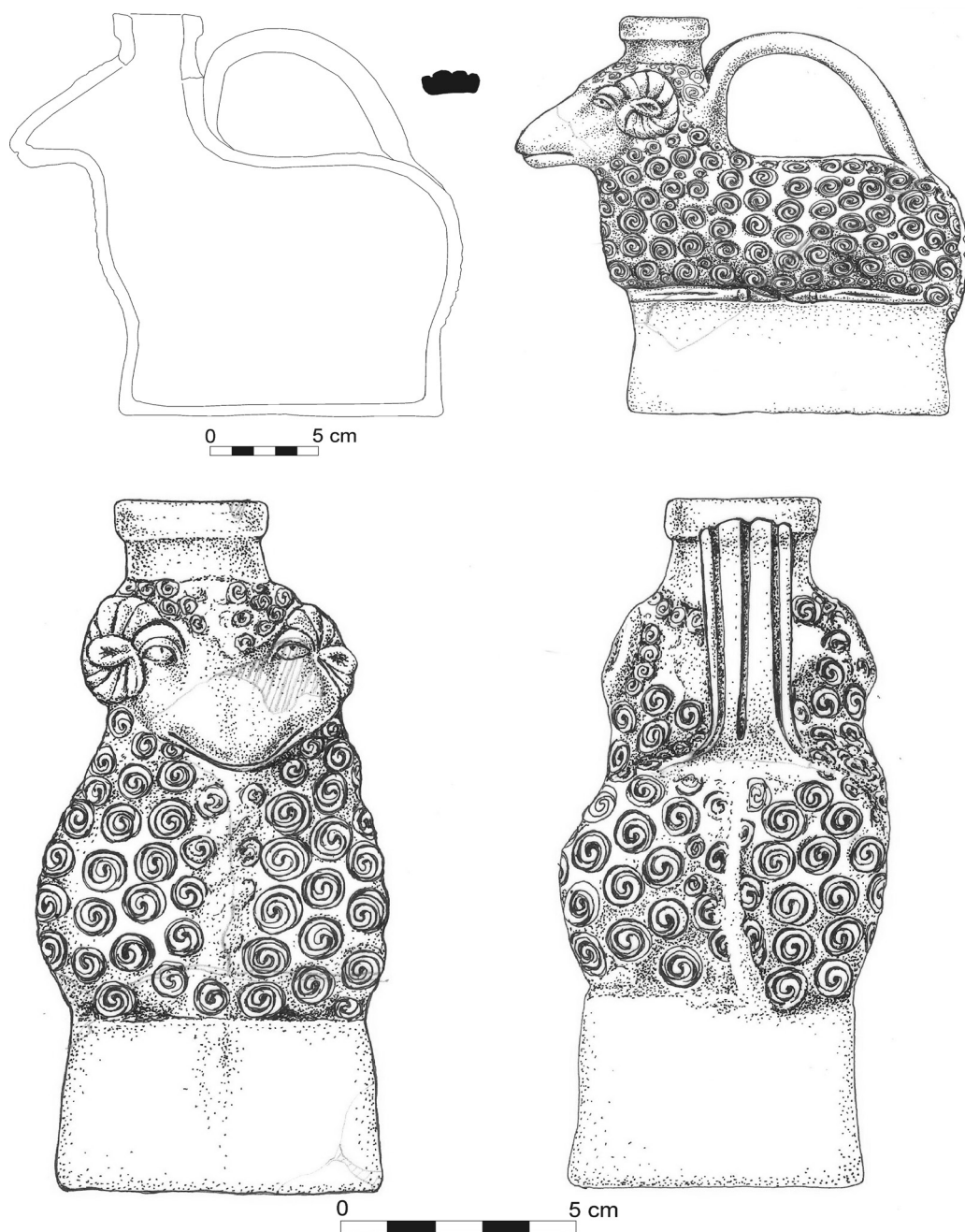


Figure 2. The drawing of the zoomorphic vessel discovered at the Noviodunum necropolis, at the “La Livadă” point



Figure 3. Photo of the zoomorphic jug, in the shape of a ram

marked through two small lines situated above. The horns, which are engraved in a spiral form, help fix the ears in their cores. The fleece was suggested through spiralled protruding motifs, which was obtained by printing it in the pattern. The legs are presented on the side parts of the sitting animal. The tail is suggested through a nervure in protrusion, obtained from the fusion of the two parts of the vessel (Figure 2). The item discovered at Noviodunum can be classified as a Type II, according to Simonenko's typology⁹.

The usage of this type of vessels in different contexts and for a long period of time shows us the popularity they enjoyed, back in the days. These kinds of recipients were discovered in the Western area of the Empire, in the ceramics production centre from Brigetio¹⁰. A matrix with the representation of the ram was found in the potters' quarter, but the way the fleece is outlined is different from the vessel we are discussing about¹¹. In Italy, the ram-shaped jugs are dated quite largely, in the 2nd-3rd centuries p.Chr.¹².

⁹ SIMONENKO 2011, type 2, 139–140, fig. 83. For more discussions, please check SIMONENKO 1998.

¹⁰ BORNIS 1977, 122, 124, Abb. 11, 1 a–b.

¹¹ BONIS 1977, 122, 124, Abb. 11, 1 a–b.

¹² ATLANTE I, 235, pl. 120.4.

In the eastern part of it, at Pergamum, seven fragments of patterns in which such vessels were made had been discovered¹³. Similar vessels appear in quite a high frequency, in tombs, in the northern part of the Black Sea¹⁴. Furthermore, this type of jugs was also identified near Chersonesos, in the necropolis from Sohvoz no. 103¹⁵. Such jugs also appear on the territory of the fortification from Chersonesos in the 2nd century p.Chr., Olbia etc.¹⁶, while they can rarely be found in the Bosporan Kingdom¹⁷. In this Pontic region, this type of vessel was frequently discovered in Sarmatian tombs¹⁸ where, according to morphological characteristics, Al. Simonenko classifies them in three types. Type II, which encompasses our item as well, is dated in the chronological segment belonging to the 2nd–3rd centuries p.Chr.¹⁹.

Up to the present moment there have been attempts made by researchers from the northern part of the Black Sea to relate the presence of this type of vessel with the religious beliefs of the populations from this area, especially in relationship with the Sarmatians. Despite the fact that this kind of recipients was manufactured in the Mediterranean area, only later also spreading into the area of our research, the hypothesis was issued that those were made because of the religious beliefs of the Sarmatians, given the frequent discoveries in the necropolis that belonged to this population²⁰.

The only analogies from the Moesia Inferior province are at Beroe, where the neck and a piece from the head of a zoomorphic jug, in the shape of a ram, were found. The respective fragments were found in an archaeological context dated at the end of the 2nd century p.Chr.²¹. Other two fragments of zoomorphic vessels come from the Roman camp from Barboși, where they are included in the category of *Tiergefässe* type recipients, which appear mainly in the zone of Asia Minor, the Black Sea and northern Greece, but also northern Africa²². The fragments discovered at Barboși present the ram in a standing position, on its legs, as the pieces were discovered in contexts dated at the end of the 2nd century²³.

In the province of Dacia, a similar item was discovered in the camp from Cioroiul Nou, whose neck and handle are missing. The jug was dated to the middle of the 3rd century or in the second half of the same timeline²⁴.

¹³ POPESCU 2018, 11.

¹⁴ POPA 2010 with the cited bibliography, please check the more recent SIMONENKO 2011.

¹⁵ STRŽELECKIJ et al. 2003–2004, 105, pl. 15/75.

¹⁶ POPA 2010, 61 – who supports the thesis that such vessels could have been manufactured even at the center of Olbia. KLENINA 2003, 227.

¹⁷ KLENINA 2003, 227, fig. 6/1–2.

¹⁸ SIMONENKO 2011, 135–142.

¹⁹ SIMONENKO 2011, type 2, 140, fig. 83.

²⁰ BONDOC, POPA 2010, 204.

²¹ NUȚU, PARASCHIV 2009, 181, cat. no. 6, pl. II/6.

²² HAYES 1972, 411–412.

²³ SANIE 2007, 298, fig. 4/2, fig. 6/1, 1a, 1b.

²⁴ BONDOC, POPA 2010, 204, pl. II/2.

These vessels have their typological origin in jugs with a degree of similarity to the previous periods, in the 2nd–1st centuries a.Chr., which were used to filter oil, to keep it and pour it in earthen lamps²⁵. This fact is furtherly confirmed also by the discovery of a zoomorphic jug in the shape of a ram, in the dava from Răcățău, which had a colander²⁶.

In the Roman epoch it is probable that these very vessels were used for other purposes as well, not only to strain and pour the oil. If the Răcățău vessel is made with a colander, the same cannot be said about recipients manufactured in the first centuries of the Christian era. According to our knowledge, none of the ram-shaped vessels, known among the discoveries, was provided with a strainer. It is also possible that such recipients were also used for the pouring of wine²⁷.

The ram-shaped vessel discovered at Noviodunum could be interpreted in various manners. He could have been used for ordinary activities, for the pouring of oil and wine. Simultaneously, it could also be considered as an object of cult, used in processions, and linked with the cults practiced in the Hellenistic and Roman world, at certain holydays, but also as offerings deposited in tombs. The ram appears to be associated with the cult of the Anatolian goddess Cybele, where it was sacrificed during the ceremony called *criobolium* and with the god Mercury, where it is considered to be a sacred animal, most likely as a symbol of fertility, as the god was frequently represented alongside a ram or a goat²⁸. No matter the functionality of those vessels, until the present moment no chemical analyses have been made, through which we could determine a certain usage. Thus, the discussion remains open, until further pieces of information are found, in order to unequivocally attest for a hypothesis or another.

Regarding the chronological framing, we agree that the jug could eventually be dated in the second half of the 2nd century p.Chr., by way of analogy with similar discoveries made in the province.

The discovery of such a zoomorphic jug in the Noviodunum necropolis shows us that the practice of the ritual deposit of such an object in the tombs of the deceased was a frequent practice²⁹. Thus, in most of the researched tombs, offerings were discovered, which were meant to accompany the dead in the afterlife, or to indicate the activity he/she had during his/her lifetime³⁰. The cremation tomb, in which the zoomorphic jug was found makes no exception from the existing general situation of the Noviodunum necropolis discoveries, from the end of the 1st century p.Chr. and the next hundred years.

²⁵ BONDOC, POPA 2010, 204.

²⁶ CĂPITANU 1986–1987, 77, fig. 2/1, 89. For more information check POPESCU 2018, 13–14, 17, fig. III/1a–d.

²⁷ BONDOC, POPA 2010, 204.

²⁸ TAYLOR 1993.

²⁹ SIMION 1994, 94.

³⁰ SIMION 1994, 94.

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