

Minor Inscriptions from The Western Pontic Area Between The 1st-3rd Centuries A.D. Re-Gatherings and Discussions on Their Account

Bogdan CHIRILOAIE¹

Abstract. This study deals with a less discussed topic, minor inscriptions, in the literature. It discusses how some minor inscriptions can provide us with information about the economic and commercial situation in the West Pontic area. The results obtained allowed us to identify the economic context of the province and also to observe where these inscriptions are concentrated, mainly in the military environment. It was found once again that the West Pontic towns never formed their own system of distribution of goods and did not benefit from a policy that allowed them to function as an economic system in their own right. We have also attempted to highlight the language and socio-communicative framework in which we arrive at the hypothesis that inscriptions of any kind were a sign of ownership.

Rezumat. Studiul de față tratează un subiect mai puțin discutat, inscripțiile minore, în literatura de specialitate. Este discutat modul în care unele inscripții minore ne pot oferi informații despre situația economică și comercială din spațiul vest-pontică. Rezultatele obținute ne-au permis să identificăm contextul economic al provinciei și totodată să observăm locul unde aceste inscripții se concentrează, cu precădere în mediul militar. S-a constatat încă odată că orașele vest-pontice nu au format niciodată un sistem propriu de distribuție a bunurilor și nu au beneficiat de o politică care să le permită să funcționeze ca un sistem economic de sine stătător. De asemenea, am încercat să evidențiem limbajul și cadrul socio-comunicațional în care ajungem la ipoteză că inscripțiile, de orice fel, erau un semn de proprietate.

Keywords: minor inscriptions, 1st-3rd centuries A.D., Scythia Minor, ownership.

The study of epigraphy, especially the minor one, has seen a secondary approach in the Romanian space, an approach that has not managed to be as developed as in the West. We note that there are several sources, corpora, works or articles dealing with this topic, but we believe that the state of research can be improved. The study, in perspective, of the epigraphic material has the purpose of giving us precise or vague clues regarding the economic, military, but also social situation in the early period of the Empire. The graffiti inscriptions covered in this work come from the Dobrogea area and fall between the I-III centuries A.D.

On the beginning of this paper, we will discuss the first inscription in the catalog discovered during the archaeological excavations at Dinogetia. The first inscription is on a pot with a turn, divided into five grooves, which is kept in a good state of preservation. On the other hand, the inscription is not so well preserved. This was applied to the raw paste, before

¹ MA, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Iași

the engobe was applied, a process that may have been one of the reasons for the poor state of preservation at the time of discovery. A number of three graffiti inscriptions were inscribed on the soft paste, probably rendering a name, of Latin origin, Atila, Au[r]. Sev(erus?), Aur (cat. no. 1). With Latin letters, uppercase and lowercase, the reading is a difficult one in the lower register, given those lines that overlap the letters. Our view of this inscription is that it would render, not only one name, but two. The first name, also provided by the author, is one that does not cause us problems, being intelligible, which would most likely be a *praenomen*. The second name, Au[r], could indicate, the name of the genus, *nomen*, attributed by us to the name *Aurelius*. Related to the third name "Sev", the author re-united it as "Sev(erus?) but our opinion would be different. Given that the last word is also "Aur", which would be the family name, it would make the reunion of the name "Sev(erus)" erroneous, since this is also a family name. Thus, informing ourselves from the list of Latin anthroponyms², we noticed the existence of a cognomen, which would have started with the three letters, this being *Sev(erianus)*. This could indicate that the makers of this vessel were these two brothers, using graffiti to sign their products.

The next point in our analysis brings a series of seven inscriptions with particular importance in terms of the economic report from *Carsium*, which can affirm the role played in local trade, with the possibility of one transiting to the appropriate region, Walachia. The first piece, a fragment of an amphora neck, contains a graffiti (cat. no. 2), which appears to be in a good state of preservation, but which does not appear to be fully preserved. You can see type letters, thin and 5-7 mm high, with Greek characters and the last one is a Latin character. The author's opinion is that the inscription could be the abbreviation of an anthroponym³. In this sense, our idea is one in relation to the author's, it being about the middle part of a name, possibly an abbreviation or the fact that the legend was not preserved in its entirety. The letters are in order: A capital letter, followed by the Greek character Γ, and the last two letters were executed in ligature, and their interpretation is HR, the first character being in the Greek language, the equivalent of the character E. Thus, we can give the following division of the name "AGER", which could be the abbreviation of the name *Meleager(?)*. We know of another mention of this character in Dacia, on a votive altar where his full name is given as "*C(aius) Valerius Mel(e)ager*", an individual with military duties who would have lived during the 1st century AD⁴. In the case of the character from *Carsium* we don't have enough data to be sure about his occupation, but we have two opinions. First, we think it may be the manufacturer's mark. On the other hand, it can be a sign of ownership, the owner of this vessel wanting to mark his personal property.

² Piso 2016, 564.

³ Nicolae 1995-1996, 150, pl. VIII, 1.

⁴ AE 1974, cat. nr. 0543. IDR II, 642.

The second inscription is reproduced on an amphora neck fragment with a good quality paste and a porous appearance⁵. The inscription consists of two letters, the first type letter, "M", and the second one was questioned by the author, with a height between 10-12 mm (cat. no. 3). The opinion is that this inscription may represent the measure of the vessel. In the case of the first letter, its analysis is easier from the point of view of the quantity represented, the letter "M - *mu*" having in the Greek alphabet the measure of 10,000 ml. As for the second letter, this may be the character "δ", which would have the equivalent of 10 l. If this supposition were plausible, then we could notice the double emphasis of the quantity of the vessel, in two distinct units of measure.

The third inscription is on the shoulders of an amphora fragment, rendered in red paint. The height of the letters is 30 mm (cat. no. 4). The inscription features a single character, a letter from the Greek alphabet, Γ, the old spelling of the letter Π (pi). Therefore, this letter can represent a unit of measure, which describes the quantity of the dish⁶. We can suggest that this vessel would have had the amount of 5 l⁷.

The next inscription, discovered on a fragment of a large amphora, shows two parallel lines of approximately 30 mm, which join at the top (cat. no. 5). The author did not provide an explanation for this inscription in this case, but our opinion is that the role of this character was to indicate the volume of the vessel. In this case, the letter, certainly from the Greek alphabet, appears to be "Π", but rendered somewhat clumsily. The weight of this vessel could have been 5 liters⁸.

Another inscription discovered on the fragment of a vessel shows the Greek character "ψ" (cat. no. 6), with a height of 30 mm and a width of 60 mm. The author explained this character as being part of a remnant of the inscription or on the other hand it would have been the measure of the vessel. Most probably this character would have rendered the weight of the vessel, but until the present moment there is no assurance of this supposition.

Another graffiti rendered on a fragment of the neck of an amphora contains a legend that is distributed over three lines⁹. The first part of the inscription is rendered between the turns and contains a single Greek character "Π" (cat. no. 7), with a dot and an inclined bar, probably representing the quantity of the vessel. The Greek character defines, as we have previously established, the number 5, but the dot and slash are new signs. In our opinion, this could be a fraction, and those marks denote half a liter. Thus, the final weight should be 5 and a half liters. The second part of the inscription, also rendered in Greek characters, is in a precarious state of preservation, rendering, according to the author, an anthroponym. We can

⁵ Nicolae 1995-1996, 150, pl. VIII, 2.

⁶ Menninger 2011, 366.

⁷ Menninger 2011, 366.

⁸ Menninger 2011, 366.

⁹ Nicolae 1995-1996, 150, pl. VIII, 6.

note with some certainty and accuracy the first three characters, *A, κ, λ*, which seem most likely to be the abbreviation of a name. In a first phase we tried to identify the name behind this abbreviation (we do not exclude the possibility that the graffiti has degraded with the passage of time, and the name in its initial state has been erased), then discovered two *cognomens* with the different ending: *Ἡρακλείδης*¹⁰ (found in Moesia Inferior 26 times) and *Ἡρακλέων*¹¹ (found in the same region 15 times). There is also the possibility that the name of the individual is not this, there are other possibilities of re-combining the name, *Ἡρακλᾶς*¹², *Ἀράκλῆς*¹³ or *Ἡράκλῆος*¹⁴. We therefore note that this inscription, in addition to suggesting the quantity of the vessel, also suggested the name of the owner or possibly the potter, but less likely.

Another inscription reproduced on a fragment of the neck of an amphora has the incised inscription, reproduced in two lines, preserved only fragmentarily and in a precarious state of preservation, but from which we can still see certain Latin and Greek characters. Thus, the reading of the inscription, *umnef[...]/Caesonia* (cat. no. 8), renders an anthroponym of Italic origin. Our opinion is that the reunion would be: *umni(a) fr(umentaria) Caesonia*, a character who would have been part of the *framentaria* of the *I Italica* legion¹⁵.

Another center of particular importance in this article is the fortress of Histria. At this point, we describe some inscriptions with graffiti, with equal importance in terms of the contribution of knowledge brought to the completion of an image from that period, I- III AD. We are also trying to piece together certain inscriptions that were left at a starting point. The first graffiti inscription under discussion, a fragment from the lip of a plate, shows only two Latin characters "...VE..." (cat. no. 10), located in the ligature, but about which we cannot pronounce in any way, because it does not provide enough detail to be able to place it in any category. We can suggest, however, that this graffiti could denote the abbreviation of an anthroponym, *Vettius*¹⁶, *Verus*¹⁷, *Vettienius*¹⁸, *Iuventius*¹⁹ or other such examples from the Moesia Inferior area.

The second inscription is a brick fragment, preserved in a precarious condition, containing four letters rendered with graffiti with a nail, 4-10 cm high. The letters are appropriately spaced, clear, without ligatures, and can be easily drawn, in the following order

¹⁰ ISM I, cat. nr. 1, 124, 196, 211. ISM II, cat. nr. 23, 83, 403. ISM III, cat. nr. 74.

¹¹ ISM I, cat. nr. 193, 219. ISM III, cat. nr. 68a, 72, 74, 38, 186.

¹² ISM II, cat. nr. 31.

¹³ Zahariade, Alexandrescu 2011, 38.

¹⁴ ISM III, cat. nr. 72.

¹⁵ Rankov 1990, 176.

¹⁶ ISM II, 160, cat. nr. 129.

¹⁷ ISM IV, 304, cat. nr. 175.

¹⁸ AE 1997, cat. nr. 1334.

¹⁹ ISM V, 223, cat. nr. 191.

from left to right: Γ Ε Ζ Ι²⁰. The author's opinion is that it may be the end of a name. In this sense, we wanted to affirm or challenge this statement. In our opinion, the letter Z can rather be replaced by the Greek letter lambda λ, which would provide a larger search area for this part of a name. Thus, replacing the two letters, we were able to discover two honorary inscriptions in Dacia, of a certain character with the *cognomen Euangelianus*, from the gens Iulia, possibly a military officer in *Legio V Macedonica*²¹ or *praefectus* of Micia²².

The third inscription considered shows a stamp applied to a fragment of the lip of a vessel belonging to the *terra sigillata* category. The processing technique is modest, and the fragment contains vegetal ornaments, ending near an eagle's head. The stamp is reproduced on two lines, partially preserved, with Greek characters, "Ηνὸδ[οτος]/ΥΛΗ..." (cat. no. 11). The name of this producer is no longer found in other areas of Danube or in the vicinity of Dacia, a fact that can place this craftsman as only a local one, within the settlement of Durostorum, which seems to have imitated the *terra sigillata* products from the northern coast between the II-III centuries A.D.²³ His name also appears in two other areas, in Istanbul²⁴ and in Balchik²⁵, an argument that can support the previously mentioned assumption.

The first object discussed from Tomis is a mug with a globular body with a beige engobe. The lip is flared and has only one tip. The state of preservation is very good, but also for dipinti that is legible and easy to read. The text is written with white paint, and the letters are cursive with sizes between 2.2 - 2.6 cm. In the vicinity of the writing, close to the bottom of the vessel, there is a dotted line of the same color, with a decorative role. This vessel is specific to the early Roman period, whose chronological framework is included in the time interval related to the II-III centuries A.D. The reading of this dipinti is as follows: τῆ καλῆ τὸ δωρον, (cat. no. 13). which translates as: "*Beautiful, the present*", a formula frequently found, especially on mirrors. The editors of this dipinti believe that the vessel in question could be a container for storing cosmetic products²⁶. We believe that this hypothesis cannot be a plausible one, because in order to store cosmetic products there were specially made vessels - *pixides* - which were much more common at Tomis. We believe that this formula found on this vessel refers to a formula used during the serving of alcoholic beverages. Evidence in support of our claim is provided by the inscriptions on glass cups discovered during that period, such as: ΛΑΒΕ ΤΗΝ ΝΕΙΗΚΝ (*Get victory!*), ΚΑΤΑΧΑΙΡΕ ΚΑΙ ΕΥΦΡΑΙΝΟΥ (*Rejoice and be happy!*), ΕΥΦΡΑΙΝΟΥ ΕΦΗΠΑΡΕΙ (*Be happy you're here!*)²⁷. A similar sample was also discovered during the excavations at

²⁰ Tudor 1980, 242, fig. 1/9.

²¹ IDR III, 3, 47.

²² IDR III, 3, 211.

²³ Tudor 1980, 243, fig. 2/15.

²⁴ SEG 28.562.

²⁵ SEG 60.772.

²⁶ Avram, Hălmagi, Streinu 2021, 178, cat. nr. 18760, pl. IV/8.

²⁷ Boțan 2015, 123.

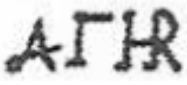



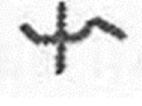
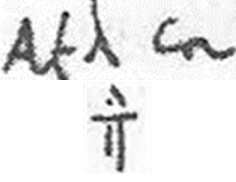
Dinogetia. A fragment of a glass bottom, measuring about 5 x 4 cm and 0.3 cm thick. On this fragment, two letters in relief ἦς are preserved, which can be reassembled as: "[Ζής]ἦς". The reunion could be translated by the formula "Long live!"²⁸.

The purpose of this study was to identify minor inscriptions from the 1st-3rd centuries A.D., reproduced on ceramics, glass or other types of materials, from the area of Roman Dobrogea. I considered only those inscriptions that had no prior description or those that I thought would require re-evaluation. We managed to analyze 13 minor inscriptions, dealing with their rendering, the quality of the inscription, as well as its degree of preservation. The graphic shows us the degree of literacy of the producers, the way the characters were rendered, as well as the norms used. After observing the way in which the writing appears, the next level shows us the degree of acculturation, to what extent the native population would accept the Latin or Greek script, as well as the perception of style. Based on what has been discussed, we notice a slight increase in Latin script, towards the II-III centuries A.D., and the Greek script begins to lose its importance, the main reason being the military occupation of the area. The most important social analysis is why the locals felt the need to express themselves in writing and why it was necessary for a certain individual to feel the need to inscribe his name on a certain object. In this case, we can talk about an individual with a social status and a high degree of literacy, who would have felt the need to print his name on an object, because through this process he would have marked his respective product and thus, those around him would know the belonging of the object. We also notice on certain pottery vessels forms of incantation or exhortation, with an entirely Greek script: τῆ καλῆ τὸ δωρον (*Beautiful, the present*); Ἐρ μῆν ὁ κερδοποιόσ / Φιλίσκος ἐπεὶ λείπεται ἔξ ἔτους, (*May Hermes, creator of gains, be merciful to Philiskos throughout the year*)²⁹; ΕΥΦΑΙΝΟΥ ΕΦΗΠΑΕΙ (*Be happy you're here!*). The role of these inscriptions was, and still is to this day, to give the owner a sign by which he recognizes his ownership.

Nr. Crt .	Place of discovery	Object type	Legend	Characteristics	Size	Dating	Bibliography
1	Dinogetia	Mug	<i>Atila, Au[r]. Sev(erus?), Aur</i>	Pot with five grooves. It features a black-grey	Î=7,9 cm	II-III p.Chr .	ISM V, 278, cat. nr. 266.

²⁸ Barnea 1977, 280.

²⁹ Avram, Chera, Lungu 2016, 28, fig. 1/2.

				engobe and a series of three inscriptions.			
2	Hârșova , punct „La Moară”	Amphora neck fragment		Beige paste	Î=5-7 mm	I-II p.Chr .	Nicolae 1995-1996, 150, Pl. VIII, fig. 1.
3	Hârșova , punct „La Moară”	Amphora neck fragment		Light beige paste, pink on the inside, with a porous appearance in the crack.	Î=10-12 mm	I-II p.Chr .	Nicolae 1995-1996, 150, Pl. VIII, fig. 2.
4	Hârșova , punct „La Moară”	Amphora neck fragment		Brick paste.	Î=30 mm	I-II p.Chr .	Nicolae 1995-1996, 150, Pl. VIII, fig. 3.
5	Hârșova , punct „La Moară”	Amphora neck fragment		Beige paste, pink inside.	Î=30 mm	I-II p.Chr .	Nicolae 1995-1996, 150, Pl. VIII, fig. 4.
6	Hârșova , punct „La Moară”	Amphora neck fragment		Beige paste.	Î=30 mm L=60 mm	I-II p.Chr .	Nicolae 1995-1996, 150, Pl. VIII, fig. 5.
7	Hârșova , punct „La Moară”	Amphora neck fragment		Light-colored paste on the outside and dark on the inside, with a porous appearance and crushed remains.	-	I-II p.Chr .	Nicolae 1995-1996, 150, Pl. VIII, fig. 6.

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8	Hârșova , punct „La Moară”	Amphor a neck fragme nt	<i>umnef</i> [...]/ <i>Caesonia</i>	-	-	I-II p.Chr .	Bounegru, Hașotti, Murat 1989, 280, fig. 9/16.
9	Histria	Brick fragme nt	<i>ΓΕΖΙ</i>	-	L=4 cm Î=10 cm	I p.Chr	Tudor 1980, 242, fig. 1/9.
10	Histria	Fragme nt of the lip of a plate	...VE...	-	-	I p.Chr	Tudor 1980, 243, fig. 1/11.
11	Histria	Fragme nt <i>Terra sigilata</i>	<i>Ἡνὸδ[οτος]</i> <i>ΥΛΗ</i>	Modest technique, vegetable ornaments, with eagle head motif.	-	II-III p.Chr .	Tudor 1980, 243, fig. 2/15.
12	Tomis	Glass bowl	<i>ΕΥΦΡΑ[IN]ΟΥΕ[Φ]</i> <i>Ω Π[A]ΡΕΙ</i>	Cup with a hemispheric al shape, with a high lip, slightly flared and the body divided into two registers, each by two rounded stripes.	L=6,9 cm Î=8,5c m	I-II p.Chr .	Lungu, Chera 1992, 276, fig. 3.
13	Tomis	Mug with a globula r body	<i>τῆ καλῆ τὸ δωρον</i>	Globular body, beige engobe, flared lip	L=2,2 cm Î=2,6 cm	II-III p.Chr .	Avram, Hălmagi, Streinu 2021, 178,

				and single- turned.			cat. nr. 18760, pl. IV/8.
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ABBREVIATIONS

AE = L'année épigraphique, Paris.

IDR = *Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae*, ed. I.I. Russu, 1980.

ISM I = *Inscripțiile din Scythia Minor grecești și latine, Histria și împrejurimile*, ed. Dionisie M. Pippidi, București, 1983.

ISM II = *Inscripțiile din Scythia Minor grecești și latine, Tomis și teritoriul său*, ed. I. Stoian, București, 1987.

ISM III = *Inscriptions grecques et latines de Scythie Mineure, Callatis et son territoire*, ed. Alexandru Avram, București/Paris, 1999.

ISM IV = *Inscriptions de Scythie Mineure, Tropaeum – Dvrorstorum – Axiopolis*, ed. Emilian Popescu, București/Paris, 2015.

ISM V = *Inscripțiile din Scythia Minor grecești și latine, Capidava-Trosmis-Noviodunum*, ed. E. Doruțiu-Boilă, București, 1980.

SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Leida.

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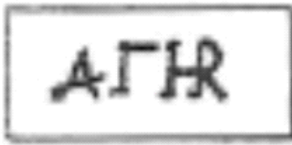
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FIGURES

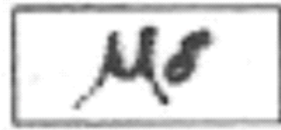


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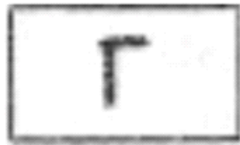
Figure 1 = Mug with inscription



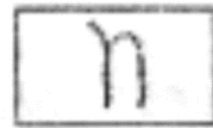
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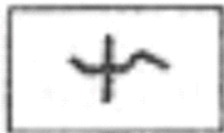
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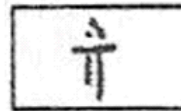
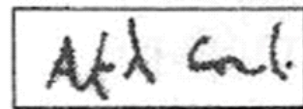
Cat. nr. 4



Cat. nr. 5



Cat. nr. 6



Cat. nr. 7

Figure 2 = Amphora neck fragments with inscriptions



Cat. nr. 8

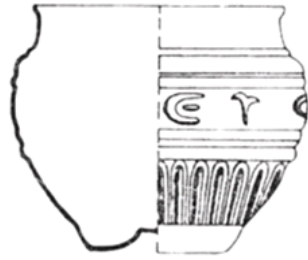


Cat. nr. 9



Cat. nr. 11

Figure 3 = cat. nr. 8 (Amphora neck fragment with inscription); cat. nr. 9 (Brick fragment with inscription), cat. nr. 11 (Fragment of *Terra sigilata* with inscription)



Cat. nr. 12



Cat. nr. 13

Figure 4 = cat. nr. 12 (Glass bowl with inscription); cat. nr. 13(mug with inscription)



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