

Ceramic Vessels Decorated with Grooves and Palmettes from Grădiștea de Munte-Sarmizegetusa Regia

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Abstract: The ceramic material discovered in pre-Roman Dacia, at Grădiștea de Munte-Sarmizegetusa Regia, is remarkable by its great diversity. If local products enjoyed more attention from the researchers, the same cannot be said about the imports or their imitations. These last categories need special attention. With the exception of painted ceramics, which has been more carefully analyzed, the rest of the products still need in-depth studies. A thorough analysis of “grooved” ceramic vessels, and those decorated with palmettes offers new interpretations of their functionality, provenance and chronology, as well as data on the contexts of their discovery.

Keywords: Sarmizegetusa Regia, ribbed vessels, Dacians, imports, imitations.

Rezumat: Vase ceramice decorate cu caneluri și palmete de la Grădiștea de Munte - Sarmizegetusa Regia. Materialul ceramic descoperit în capitala Daciei preromane, Grădiștea de Munte - Sarmizegetusa Regia, este remarcabil prin marea sa diversitate. Dacă producțiile locale se bucură de mai multă atenție din partea cercetătorilor, nu același lucru se poate afirma despre importuri și imitațiile acestora. Aceste ultime categorii necesită o mai mare atenție. Cu excepția ceramicii dacice pictate, care a fost analizată mult mai atent, restul materialelor încă necesită studii de aprofundare. O analiză atentă a așa-numitelor vase ceramice cu „caneluri”, și a celor decorate cu palmete oferă noi interpretări privind funcționalitatea acestora, proveniența și cronologia, și de asemenea noi informații privind contextele descoperirii lor.

Cuvinte-cheie: Sarmizegetusa Regia, vase cu coaste, daci, importuri, imitații.

One of the characteristics specific to the Dacian capital, Grădiștea de Munte-Sarmizegetusa Regia, consists in the variety of artifacts and their

quality and quantity. Most of these were local products (pottery, tools, glass, precious metal objects etc.), or imitations assimilated in the local production. The present study aims to treat only one category, ceramics, with particular regard to ceramic vessels with “grooves” and palmettes, or their analogies made of glass or metal.

A similar decoration, but with a different technique represented by “ribs” or various kind of grooves on pottery or glass vessels are not unusual for the Dacians. Such finds come from Cetatea Zânelor¹ (Covasna County), Poiana² (Galați County), Răcățău³ (Bacău County), Brad⁴ (Bacău County) etc., but also in the area of the Dacian fortresses from the Orăștie Mountains, at Costești-Laz⁵. Most of them are made of glass, having good analogies because they are widespread in the Graeco-Roman world⁶, dating back to the end of the 1st century BC, but especially to the first half of the 1st century AD⁷. In general, both the ornaments and the shapes of ceramic vessels indicate a certain diversity, either because of the artistic inclinations of the potter or the preference of those who used them. Considering the glass vessels⁸ that are used as models, it is rather to be believed that the user’s choices prevail and the pottery master conforms to the requirements. Sometimes the potter was being so minute in his work that he copied the patterns in detail, as we are going to see further on.

One of these models, rather a variant of the ornamentation under discussion, is found on storage vessels; there is for instance one such vessel discovered at Sarmizegetusa Regia⁹ (Pl. I). It is of medium size and on its neck there is a register, about 11 cm long, with parallel vertical incised grooves. Another vessel from Sarmizegetusa, this time a drinking cup (Pl. II), made of fine fabric fired in a reducing atmosphere, has two registers of

¹ Crișan/Sârbu 2009, 72; in this case it is a fragment of ribbed glass bowl, found on terrace II, dated to the 1st century AD.

² Glodariu 1974, 246, pl. LVIII/S11 - 6, 8, 10, pl. XLIX/S11 - 11, 15; Vulpe/Teodor, 2003, 97, fig. 249-250.

³ Căpitanu/Ursachi/Popescu 2010, 149, fig. 2/4-6.

⁴ Ursachi 1995, 225, pl. 202/1-2, 325/3; Boțan 2014, 251-252, pl. III.

⁵ The specimen was dated on the basis of Eggers’ examples in the period between the second half of the 1st century AD and 106 AD, see: Eggers 1955, 213, pl. 1/12a, b, 2/25a, b; Crișan 1969, 260, pl. LXXXI/5, CLXXXV/1; Glodariu 1974, 224, pl. XLII/IC-17e.

⁶ Weinberg 1961, 181-182, fig. 1; Cool/Price 1995, 15-26, fig. 2.2-2.7; Jennings 1997, 29, fig. 2; Marianne Stern 1999, 450, fig. 13; Mandruzzato 2006, fig. 1-3; Boțan 2014, 250; Mazanek 2014, 294-295, fig. 4; Can/Can 2016, 164, fig. 7-8.

⁷ Jackson-Tal 2016, 35-36, fig. 5/1.

⁸ Data regarding the glass making process of glass and how these vessels were formed: Marianne Stern 2015, 83-84, fig. 7.11.

⁹ Gheorghiu 2005, 140, fig. 102.

grooves, with distorted ornamentation. Probably this is due to the inattention of the potter, although the paste and its firing (specific to the Dacian ceramic) are of very good quality. The shape of this cup seems to be inspired by glass vessels. The cup has been published¹⁰, but the find spot was not mentioned; however, it is known, based on my own research in the archive of the archaeological site and on the ceramic material, that this vessel originates from the 1955 archaeological campaign on terrace III, inside the fortress. The place does not seem accidental, especially on the third terrace, considering my personal research on ceramic material; there are relatively large numbers of amphorae, tableware and drinking cups in the vicinity of the “acropolis”.

Two other special vessels, considered to be decorated with ribs, were also found at Grădiștea de Munte, only one being published (Pl. III) for the first time in Glodariu's work in 1974¹¹, who noted correctly that it must be an imitation; it was then mentioned in two other publications¹². The place of its discovery was uncertain; it is known only that it comes from “Grădiștea Hill” during the 1951 campaign, but later, in connection with the next vessel, we were able to locate the place with more precision. In the collections of the National Museum of Transylvanian History in Cluj, a second specimen of this kind of vessel was discovered during my personal research. It has to be mentioned from the beginning that the groove decoration consists of thin palmettes, arranged vertically, starting from the bottom of the vessel towards its rim, covering the entire body, their width progressively increasing from the bottom to the top. The published vessel is made of a very good quality fabric, with a brownish-gray clay slip covering entirely its outer surface. Initially, its proposed dating was the 1st century BC¹³ (with uncertainty), afterwards with more probability it was attributed to the next century¹⁴. Its place of origin was attributed, not on the basis of the analogies of its shape and ornamentation, but due to some technical aspects of the ceramic paste and the way of its firing, to the Greek cities of the Pontus Euxinus¹⁵. Besides, as we will see, this attribution is correct.

The second palmette-shaped vessel is an unpublished specimen (Pl. IV), morphologically identical to the last one; the difference is only the color of the clay slip, in this case a reddish one (Pl. IV.2). An additional clue

¹⁰ Glodariu 1974, 225, pl. XXIX/IC27-14; Cristescu 2014, 124, fig. 6/1.

¹¹ Glodariu 1974, 225, pl. XXIX/IC27-13.

¹² Gheorghiu 2005, 140, fig. 138/2; Cristescu 2014, 124, fig. 6/2.

¹³ Glodariu 1974, 225.

¹⁴ Cristescu 2014, 124.

¹⁵ Gheorghiu 2005, 140; Cristescu 2014a, 17, 19, pl. 3/2.

that distinguishes the two vessels, without leaving the probability of believing that all fragments are actually from the same vessel, is the painted décor represented by a horizontal white stripe placed immediately below its rim (on the short neck) (Pl. IV.3). On the first vessel mentioned, this stripe does not appear at all. Of course, in this case, the historical and archaeological data and interpretations of both specimens are identical. It was discovered on the inner face of the fortification wall on the previous vessel, found 15 years before this one, as they have uncertain discovery places, I suggest as a possibility that both of them may come from the same context. In neither case does the context seem to be accidental, as they were found, among other things, along with fragments of amphora, mugs and a pitcher. However, it is very likely that the material originates entirely from another part of Sarmizegetusa, being carried together with the fillings used for ample earthworks back in antiquity. Nevertheless, based on the context I incline to believe that they are part of a service for drinking wine, and these vessels, which can rightfully be considered luxury items, have been used in one way or another in banquets¹⁶. Of course, at this moment it is hard to say for sure.

Regarding the origin of these last two examples, the hypotheses mentioned before are most likely to be correct, namely the Greek *poleis* on the western Black Sea. From a morphological and technological point of view, some examples can be found in a Greek milieu¹⁷. In this area, we find one of the most suitable analogies at Noviodunum¹⁸ (Isaccea, Tulcea County). This is a ceramic fragment, misidentified by the author of the publication as a local *terra sigillata* imitating the shape Dragendorff 33 (although morphologically there is no resemblance), with similarities of the varnish in ceramics of Germania Inferior. We will notice, however, that the issues of form and origin are very different. To solve this discussion, the source of these vessels in the Pontic area must also be identified. The best analogies in this sense are found at Tel Anafa¹⁹, where we have an impressive number of them, and at Tel Maresha²⁰, both in Israel. At Tel Anafa, all vessels are made of glass, three of which²¹ (Pl. V) are evidenced

¹⁶ For details on the general characteristics of the banquet in the Dacian milieu, see: Florea 2004, 517-522.

¹⁷ Suceaveanu 2000, 83-84, pl 32/5, 7. In this case, it is a bowl from Histria, decorated with vertical ribs, dated to the end of the 1st century AD and the beginning of the next century.

¹⁸ Baumann 2008, 230, pl. 13/73.

¹⁹ Grose 2012, 27-29, pl. 3, 17.

²⁰ Jackson-Tal 2004, 19-20, fig. 10.

²¹ Copyright©2012, the Regents of the University of Michigan. I especially thank the editors A. Berlin (Boston University), S. Herber (University of Michigan), and Mrs. L. Sterner

by the similarity in detail with the specimens from Sarmizegetusa and Noviodunum, although the chronological dates indicate their earliest occurrences at the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st century BC²². However, it should be taken into account that this decorative motif is widespread; examples can be found at Athens²³, Delos²⁴ and Corinth²⁵, usually in Hellenistic contexts, but sometimes also in Roman ones.

The aspect of their origin is clearer when considering the mould-made technique used to realize these palmette decorated vessels. Such moulds are found in the Hellenistic world between the 2nd and 1st centuries BC²⁶. This type of vessels of the Hellenistic period is generically known as Megarian bowls. Analogies for them are numerous in the Hellenistic milieu, many examples can be found at Athens²⁷. For the western Pontic Megarian bowls, there is a monography by C. Domăneanțu²⁸. In the mentioned area, these bowls decorated with various palmettes and vegetal motifs are well known²⁹.

Furthermore, it is known that glass specimens used metal vessels as prototype³⁰. Generally speaking, three phases of evolution of this palmette pattern can be discussed: they first occur on metal vessels, then on glass ones and lastly on pottery. We notice that in some cases, such as craters, we cannot find specimens of glass, only metallic and ceramic ones³¹. Thus, this evolution is not based on the shapes or types of vessels, but strictly on the ornament's characteristics. The metal vessels with this decorative motif are the earliest in this phase of evolution, also due to the fact that we can find such specimens in a Greek environment since the 5th century BC³². In an area closer to that of the Dacians, in the northern Pontic area, we also find imports of metallic vessels (including silver) that are decorated in the same style³³. In the Thracian world we also find such analogies, for example the

(Kelsey Museum, Michigan) for their kindness and help and also consenting that I use the plates.

²² Grose 2012, 25, 27, pl. 3, G 36A, G 37 and G 38.

²³ Weinberg/Marianne Stern 2009, 28-31, pl. 2/16 (G253); based on the context these were dated to the 1st century BC, also see pl. 4, 5, fig. 3-4.

²⁴ Grose 1989, 193-194.

²⁵ Davidson 1952, 93, no. 545-585, fig. 6, pl. 54/596, 608.

²⁶ Rotroff 1982, 85-86, pl. 63, no. 347-350.

²⁷ Rotroff 1982, 83, 85, pl.58-62, no. 321-346.

²⁸ Domăneanțu 2000.

²⁹ Ocheșeanu 1969, 237, fig. 35, 36.

³⁰ Eggers 1955, 1/12a, b, 2/25a, b; Triantafyllidis 2006, 152-153; Grose 2012, 25.

³¹ Lamboglia 1952, 185-186, B-C; Guerrini/Mancini 2007, fig. 114.

³² von Bothmer 1955, 195.

³³ Treister 2010, 19-20, fig. 6/5, 7/1, 4, 24/4, 6, 25/4.

phiale from Mogilanska mound³⁴ (Vrasta), or in some cases even on rhyta³⁵. So we notice that early on, whether it is metal, glass or ceramic vessels, this palmette pattern is geographically widespread on a large variety of ware types. Moreover, the fact that the shape and details of these palmettes were preserved over more than four centuries is further proof that the preferences and requirements of different peoples and cultures for this ornamentation have been maintained.

Returning to Sarmizegetusa Regia's "ribbed" vessels, we notice the fact that they are found especially inside the fortification, although in some cases they are likely to have been in a secondary position. However, regarding their functionality, certainly the first specimen was used as a supply or storage vessel, and the cup was used for drinking, but it remains uncertain what exactly the palmette-decorated jars were used for. Nevertheless, the considerable dimensions, the maximum body diameter of about 25 cm and the height of over 20 cm (Pl. IV.1), and also the context of the discovery, indicate that they were more than just tureen or bowls. Also, the way in which their analogies were used is uncertain, although most of them are of glass. On the other hand, even though they have a certain functionality in the Greek-Roman milieu, it is very likely that they might be used by the Dacians in their own way, changing their initial usage.

Chronologically, it is hard to indicate with certainty the period during which they were used. Most likely, it is somewhere between the middle of the 1st century BC and the first half of the 1st century AD. Taking into account similar examples from the Pontic area, especially considering the analogies presented, the origin of these vessels are the West-Pontic Greek cities. Although the best analogies are found at Tel Anafa, the chronological differences (over a century) are great, and they are not believed to be contemporary. However, it seems quite certain that the examples of Tel Anafa are part of a widespread decorative motif, which eventually reached the Dacian milieu as well.

Finally, the fact that these luxury products were found at Sarmizegetusa Regia indicates more and more that the variety of ceramics here is remarkable. It also testifies to the commercial and trade relations with luxury goods, in this case ceramic vessels, although the presence of imports of other categories of objects is well known (different kind of instruments, bronze tableware and objects, glass, etc.)³⁶, which provides a

³⁴ Venedikov 1977, 63, fig. 44, pl. 5.

³⁵ Venedikov 1977, plates 2 and 5.

³⁶ Glodariu 1974, 58-60; Mateescu-Suciu 2017, 149-150.

wider picture of the Dacian Kingdom's trade links with the surrounding, sometimes even distant areas.

Illustrations

Pl. I. Supply and/or storage vessel from Sarmizegetusa Regia (after Gheorghiu 2005).

Pl. II. Ribbed drinking cup from Sarmizegetusa Regia.

Pl. III. Brownish-gray clay slip vessel with palmettes from Sarmizegetusa Regia (after Glodariu 1974).

Pl. IV. Reddish clay slip vessel with palmettes from Sarmizegetusa Regia.

Pl. V. Tel Anafa glass vessels decorated with palmettes (after Grose 2012).

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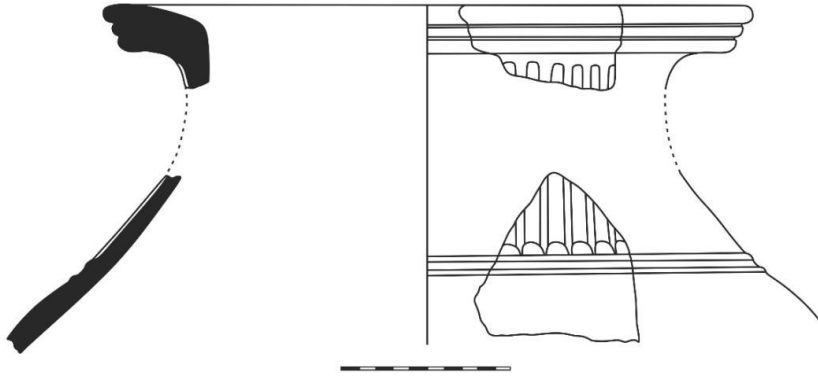
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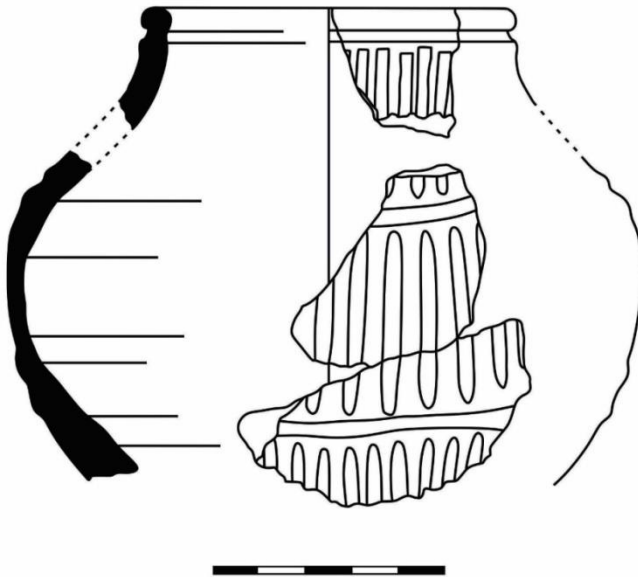
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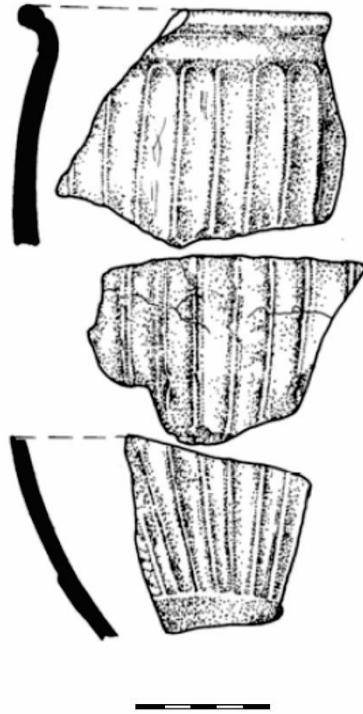
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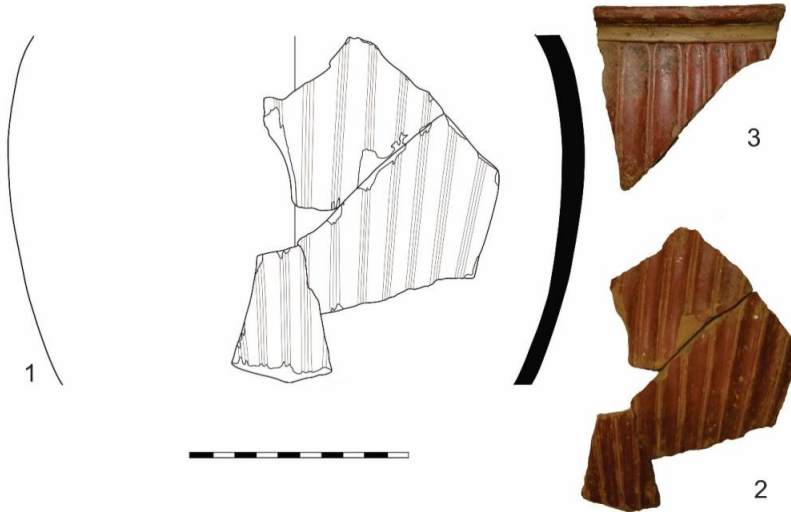
Pl. I



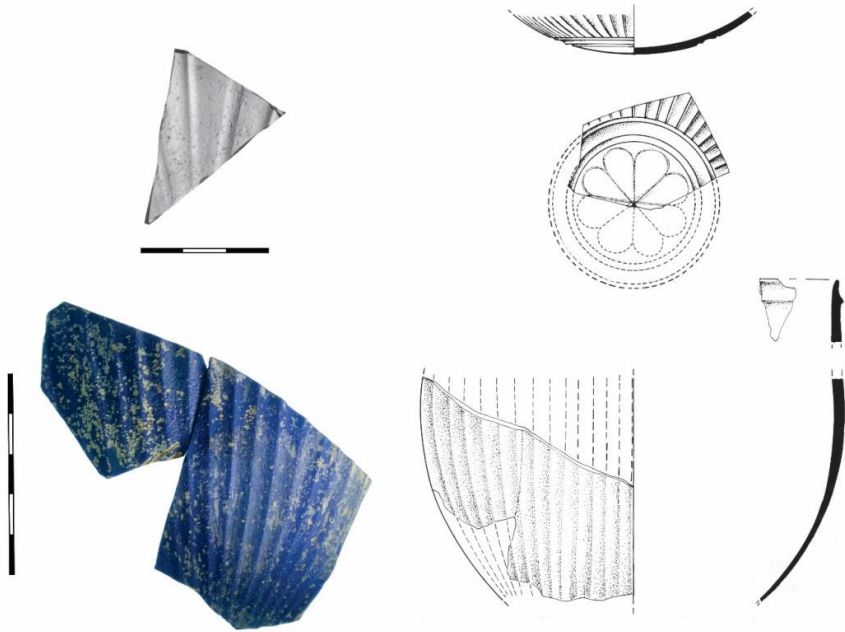
Pl. II



Pl. III



Pl. IV



Pl. V