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A “Macedonian Shield” Bowl from Vardarski Rid

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In the course of the 1996 excavations at Vardarski Rid near Gevgelia, one remarkable example of relief-molded bowl decorated with the “Macedonian shield” was discovered.

The bowl is hemispherical, and the wheelmade section of its plain rim, 1.5 cm high, is slightly concave (figs. 1, 2). The bowl is 6.8 cm high with a rim diameter of 12.9 cm. The medallion on the bottom is adorned with strobilos (whirlygig) encircled by one row of beads. Seven concentric ridges, outlined by one row of beads are around the medallion, embracing the calix. On the side wall there are six groups of three concentric semicircles with strobilos in the centers. The concentric semicircles are outlined by one row of beads. Six kantharoi on high foot and band handles surmounting the rim divide each of the semicircles. The area under the kantharoi is filled with beads as well. The decorative band below the rim is adorned with ovules. The bowl is made of fine purified reddish-yellow clay (5YR6/8),¹ covered with a two-coloured glaze: black on the upper half (2.5YR/N2.5), to deep red on the lower half of the bowl (10R5/8).

This type of relief-molded bowls in most classifications is known as a “bowls with concentric semicircles”. Its manufacture is first attested in Corinth and soon the idea was spread to other production centers. In Edwards’ classification of Corinthian moldmade bowls, they belong to the group of linear bowls, which were produced for a very short time between 150-146 BC, a dating confirmed by the context of the discovered examples and limited combination of basic motifs on the discovered examples.² The Athenian examples date between 150 BC and early 1st century BC, which is enough time for the development of various motifs and combinations.³ However, the production of the shield bowls in Athenian workshops was probably limited in quantity, considering the fact that the shapes and fabrics of all discovered examples suggest that they were

¹ Munsell Soil Color Charts, Baltimore, Edition 1975.

² Corinth VII, 183, this type of bowls does not appear in layers that follow the Mummius destruction of the city in 146 BC.

³ Thompson H. A., 1934, *Hesperia* vol. III, 406, E 78; *Agora XXII*, 38-39, Nos. 400-402.



Fig. 1

imported from different centers elsewhere.⁴ Macedonian shield bowls have been discovered in Pergamon,⁵ Tarsus,⁶ Delos,⁷ Sardis,⁸ Tanais,⁹ and Olbia on the Black Sea, Thessaly, Argos, Ephesus, Antioch, Samaria,¹⁰ indicating that they were widespread. Yet it seems that their production never attained the same quantity as the relief-molded bowls with floral or figured motifs, or even the bowls decorated with long petals, which also belong to the class of linear bowls.

⁴ Agora XXII, 39.

⁵ Schäfer J., 1968, Taf. 51, MB 570, MB 119.

⁶ Jones F. F., 1950, Tarsus I, 223, cat. no. 158, fig. 129.

⁷ Bruneau Ph., EAD XXVII, 241, Pl. 40, D 10.

⁸ Rotroff S. I. - Oliver A., 2003, 138, no. 576, Pl. 100.

⁹ Bouzek J., 1990, 114, Fig. 34.4, product of the Ionian workshops also.

¹⁰ Liampi K., 1998, 85-91, Taf. 18-19, with quoted bibliography.



Fig. 2

Many scholars have analyzed the appearance and origin of the motif and find various sources of inspiration: in hanging garlands of West Slope decoration or painted concentric semicircles on the Proto-geometric pots, grave goods that were uncovered during the course of the extensive building operation at the Athenian Agora during the Hellenistic period.¹¹ Baur was first to identify source of inspiration in the actual Macedonian shield, but incorrectly connected their production with Macedonian centers.¹² Edwards suggested that Athenian and Corinthian potters were inspired by

¹¹ Thompson H. A., 1934, *Hesperia* vol. III, 442.

¹² Callaghan P. J., 1978, *AAA* XI, 33-34.

the coinage of Macedonian kings and towns, whose coins have representation of a shield on the obverse.¹³

Following the development and appearance of certain motifs on the shield based on its rear painted representations, representations on sculpture, and the coins as well, Callaghan sought to prove that the inspiration came not from the coins, but from the actual shield. Although the motif is present on the Macedonian shield, he connects the introduction of the bowls not with Macedonian, but with Corinthian workshops. His assumption is based upon an actual historical event: the victory of Achaean League over Andriskos, the supposed son of Perseus, in 150 BC.¹⁴ The comprehensive study of K. Liampi also refers to the problem of the Macedonian shield, where all presentations of the Macedonian shield (known to her) from Egypt, Palestine, and Phrygia to the south and southeast, to the region of the Black Sea to the east and Albania to the west, are thoroughly discussed.¹⁵ Her study contains an overview of the diverse motifs and their combinations, which appear on the shield, including their symbolism.

The Macedonian shield bowl from Vardarski Rid is an unique example from the Republic of Macedonia, so far.¹⁶ Although a large portion of the production of relief-molded wares from Vardarski Rid is connected with the Pella workshop or some other, yet unknown center in Upper Macedonia,¹⁷ there are a few elements that suggests that the origin of this example should be sought in the Asia Minor workshops. Those elements are: the profile of the bowl, and the plain, slightly concave rim, which points to the "Delian bowls", instead of flaring rim with out-turned lip of the bowls from Pella, or out-turned rim of the ones from Athenian workshops.¹⁸ The most characteristic motifs on the Pella moulds are the long petals, the lotus corolla, and figured representations, but the Macedonian shield is completely unknown.¹⁹

Fragments of a shield bowl dated around 100 BC, have been discovered in Ephesos which in many details resemble our example: in profile, manner of manufacture, and the choice of the basic motifs.²⁰ This bowl is made in the well-known PAR-workshop in Ephesos, whose products usually, but not always, bear the monogram PAR (IIAP). The only difference between this bowl and the one from Vardarski Rid, is the motif on the decorative band. Our bowl has ovules instead of the meanders on the Ephesian example. On the other hand, the ovules on the decorative band are identical to other

¹³ Corinth VII, 183, footnote 49.

¹⁴ Callaghan P. J., 1978, AAA XI, 34.

¹⁵ Liampi K., 1998.

¹⁶ In the course of the 2001 excavations at the Samuil Fortress in Ohrid, relief molded bowls were discovered, which have a 16 rayed star in the medallion, one of the common motifs in the shield episema. Nevertheless, the decorative scheme on the sidewalls puts them in the class of floral bowls. See the article of Pasko Kuzman in this volume.

¹⁷ This is the conclusion deduced in the Master's thesis of the author: "The Pottery from Vardarski Rid - middle of the 4th - end of the 1st century BC", approved at the Institute for History of Art and Archaeology at the Skopje University in June 2006.

¹⁸ Bitrakova Grozdanova V., 1987.

¹⁹ Akamatis I., 1993.

²⁰ Rogl C., 2003, FiE, Band VIII/4, K 46, Taf. 5, 155.

examples produced in the same workshop in Ephesos.²¹ The other unique feature of the bowl from Vardarski Rid are the six high-footed kantharoi which fill the area between the concentric semicircles. I am not familiar with the similar examples.

The variations of the motifs on the molded ware from the PAR-workshop in Ephesos are well-known. The main characteristics are: carefully rednered designs using individual stamps, sharpness and rhythmicall arrangement of the decorative elements, thin walls, and two contrasting colors of the glaze.²² These characteristics which are obvious on our example points to its eastern origin, most probably to the Ephesos' workshop.

The choise and combination of the decorative elements on the shield bowl from Vardarski Rid point towards the later type of shield representations, according to Callaghan. The shallow, bow-like concentric semicircles of the earlier type are here replaced with deeper semicircles, and the strobilos on the medallion is outlined with beads. The decorative scheme perfectly matches both the representation of a Macedonian shield painted in the tomb of Lyson and Kallikles at Lefkadia, dated to the 2nd century BC, and on the Macedonian shield on the obverse of the coins issued in Amphaxitis on the occasion of the accession of Perseus.²³

The Macedonian shield bowl from Vardarski Rid dates to the late 2nd and early 1st century BC, based on the choise of the motifs and their combinations, on the analogies to the Ephesian examples, and its stratigraphic context, in the so-called Room C of the Central Complex on the Acropolis.²⁴

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²¹ Rogl C., 2003, FiE, Band VIII/4, K 50, K 53, Taf. 6, 156.

²² Rogl C., 2003, FiE, Band VIII/4, 27; Anlağan T., 2000, 46, cat. no. 28, the bowl belongs to the Sadberk Hanım Museum collection in Istanbul; it dates to the second half of the 2nd century BC, but it is more coarsely made.

²³ Callaghan P. J., 1978, AAA XI, 34; Liampi K., 1998.

²⁴ Blaževska S., 2005, 225-226.

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