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THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR BY THE BLACK SEA: A NEW KLEINMEISTERSCHALE FRAGMENT FROM HISTRIA

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Abstract: I offer a description of a little-master lip-cup fragment (540–530 BCE) discovered in Histria in 2024 and illustrating Theseus slaying the Minotaur. Only their heads are preserved, and, highly unusually, they are touching, which is attested on fewer than 20 out of more than 400 painted vases showing the scene. I endeavor herein to find the scene’s stylistic and compositional analogies and compare it to the pyxis lid BM 1859,0301.4 and to vases in the manner of the BMN Painter. Further contrasting this scene with works of the Painter of Vatican 365, the Affecter, Taleides Painter, Antimenes Painter, and the Long-Nose Painter proves it to be part of the dynamic artistic environment in which artists experimented with the ideologically-charged topic in Pisistratid Athens. An overview of Archaic lip-cups and band-cups in Histria indicates that our shard bears the first representation of Theseus in Archaic pottery from the city of Histria. The only Greek heroes identified so far there had been Herakles (twice with the Nemean lion, and once with a Centaur), Peleus (albeit indirectly), and one Homeric hero. However, of these five instances, only one showed the face of the hero (Herakles). Our shard is also the oldest representation of Theseus on pots found in the Black Sea settlements, and testifies to the Pontic Ionian echoes of the Athenian hype surrounding the specifically Attic hero Theseus. The reasons for importing a cup with Theseus in Histria must have been primarily aesthetic, but perhaps a contributing factor was the perception of the Athenian hero as the spearhead of the fight against barbarians and Orientals, in the years leading up to the destruction of the city during Darius’s campaign or its aftermath.

Keywords: *Histria, Theseus, Minotaur, BMN Painter, Athenian pottery in the Black Sea region.*

The shard discussed in the present paper (Fig. 1, also see Figs. 2 and 22)¹ was retrieved by a team from the “Ovidius” University, Constanța (Romania), during our excavations in Histria.² It came to light in the southern end of the Temple sector, the Belvedere sub-sector, while we exposed the Hellenistic city wall, later overlapped by the Early Roman wall with Late Roman repairs. This wall, protecting the city to the East, cut through an Archaic (ca. 520–510 BCE) layer which covered the schist bedrock and consisted of rather tightly packed fragments of Archaic transport amphorae as

¹ Found on Aug. 24, 2024, in trench HIS BEL S1, stratigraphic unit 46, small find 189, Stereo 70 coordinates 345735.7373, 800066.622, 2.7309.

² On Archaic Histria, CONDURACHI 1954, ALEXANDRESCU 1999, OPPERMANN 2007, SUCEVEANU 2005.

well as krater and kylix fragments (to be published in a forthcoming excavation report).

1. DESCRIPTION

The shard belongs to an Athenian black-figure³ *Kleinmeisterschale*, most likely a lip-cup,⁴ datable 540–530 BCE; fine clay, Munsell 2.5YR 5/10, longest side, 5.9 cm. Of the whole tondo, our shard preserves the most important and diagnostic portion, namely the



Fig. 1. Little-master lip-cup fragment from Histria, found in 2024, 540–530 BCE (Photo: Author)

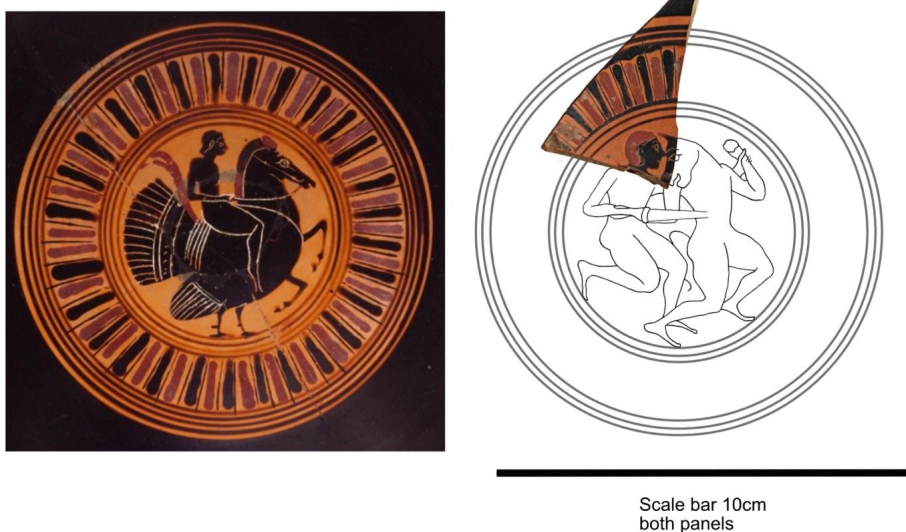


Fig. 2. Hypothetical reconstruction of the Histrian cup tondo and comparison with lip-cup from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 51.11.11, 530–520 BCE, BAPD 905 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/254676> (Drawing: Irina Stoenică)

head of Theseus (beardless,⁵ long hair, no fillet) confronting, and slightly higher than, a bull's head (small horn, hairiness not indicated), surely the Minotaur's. As in almost all black-figure vases, Theseus fights from the left. But the fact that the two heads on our shard are almost at the same height is not the preferred option for Greek artists, while the fact that the two heads are touching is highly unusual, as it is encountered in fewer than 5% of such painted scenes.

From nose to back of head, both figures measure 10 mm (slightly more than half a *daktylos*, or 9.65 mm). Theseus' hair is added in purple. The scene was encircled by a border of rather sloppily executed tongue-pattern, alternately reserved in black and purple, bounded by two sets of three circles each, those in the outer ring being thicker. The diameter of the outermost circle can be accurately calculated to have been 9.75 cm (slightly more than five *daktyloi*, or

9.65 cm). By analogy with a lip-cup from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York 51.11.11 (530–520 BCE, BAPD 905, Fig. 2), whose tondo – decorated with a *hippalektryon* – has exactly the same dimensions, the Histrian cup must have had a height of 13cm and a total diameter of 22.50 cm.⁶

The incisions vary in thickness from 0.4 mm to as little as 0.1 mm at the ear lobe and at the eyebrow's tail end. The eyebrow is executed with superb skill, recalling some of Taleides Painter's best eyebrow work. The ear has an uncommon design.⁷ Unusually, the eye's long axis is aligned vertically with the face, rather than being perpendicular to it, possibly suggesting that Theseus is somewhat bending.⁸ To judge

³ All vases discussed in this article are black-figure, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Cups: BEAZLEY 1932, 167–204, BEAZLEY 1956 (ABV), 159–197 (Chapter XII, "Little-master cups (and Droop cups)", VON BOTHMER 1962, 255–258, HEESSEN 2011.

⁵ Theseus is mostly beardless on Attic pottery after 540 BCE – see BROMMER 1982, 43.

⁶ An Athenian cup from Camiros in Rhodes, Archaeological Museum, 12216, BAPD 14400 (Fig. 3), reconstructed from fragments, with a tondo of the same dimensions as ours, has a height of 13 cm and a total diameter of 22cm.

⁷ This design is to some extent paralleled in an Athenian eye-cup now in New York Metropolitan Museum 09.221.39., 540–530 BCE, BAPD 13329 (Fig. 4), although there the Minotaur's head, negligently executed, is much lower than Theseus'. But see e.g. BORGERS 2004, 189 for difficulties in using ear design in establishing authorship.

⁸ An example of such a situation can be found on an Attic oinochoe from Cerveteri, 510–490 BCE, attributed to the Dot-ivy class, now in Milan, Civico Museo Archeologico A8022, BAPD 351436, where Theseus towers over the kneeling Minotaur (Fig. 5).



Fig. 3. Athenian cup from Camiros in Rhodes, Archaeological Museum, 12216, 550–500 BCE, BAPD 14400
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/29/Attic_black-figure_little-master_lip-cup_-_ABV_extra_-_Theseus_and_the_Minotaur_-_Rhodos_AM_12216_-_01.jpg

from the way the left shoulder is depicted, his left arm must have been raised horizontally – certainly in order to grasp the Minotaur’s neck, or left wrist to prevent him from throw-

the outermost circle of the tondo on the interior.

Given the dimensions of our shard and its location on the



Fig. 4. Athenian eye-cup in New York, Metropolitan Museum 09.221.39., 540–530 BCE, BAPD 13329
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/248177>

ing a stone. The right shoulder is not brought forward, but backward, so Theseus probably used his right hand, as usual, to plunge a sword in his enemy. Incisions also clarify that Theseus is wearing a tunic, with no nebris on top. Minotaur’s muzzle wrinkles aggressively, rather than being shown straight.⁹ On the edge of the shard, by the hero’s neck, was

cup, it would be difficult, in the absence of decoration, to determine whether it belonged to a lip-cup or to a band-cup. Pieter Heesen has offered the most detailed recent description of such shapes.¹² According to him, the interiors of both types of cups are generally black, the inside decoration

⁹ Examples of the swollen muzzle with open mouth are illustrated in our Figs. 6, 7, 9 and 13. Among other examples, an Athenian neck amphora in Naples, MAN 81103, 560–530 BCE, BAPD 13847, and the Athenian *lekythos* in Palermo, Museo Archeologico Regionale, 44, BAPD 390138. This type of wrinkled, swollen muzzle is never seen on vases with horses, but is related to the way wild boars are painted and to boar-shaped *rhyta*.

¹⁰ Other little-master cups with Theseus and the Minotaur are known to present with similar repair holes, e.g. a lip cup in Toledo (Ohio, Museum of Art 1958.70, BAPD 350732, LIMC *Minotaurus* 9), signed by Tleson (550–540 BCE), or BM 1836, 0224.1124 discussed *infra*.

¹¹ HEESSEN 2011, 5, shows CT-scans of band and lip cups. Lip cups seem to have a base/stem angle closer to 90 degrees.

¹² HEESSEN 2011, 6 sqq.



Fig. 5. Attic oinochoe from Cerveteri, 510–490 BCE, attributed to the Dot-ivy class, Milan, Civico Museo Archeologico A8022, BAPD 351436 https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Olp%C3%A8_%28Brocca%29_a_figure_nere_-_ceramica,_produzione_attica_-_fine_VI_inizio_V_sec_a.c._-_Teseo_combatte_contro_il_minotauro_%28Theseus_and_Minotaur%29.JPG

consisting of one or two concentric circles around a dot.¹³ However, certain cups do have a decorated tondo, as clearly is the case with the Histrian fragment. Heesen's database of attributed Athenian little-master cups was first published in 2009 as his PhD dissertation at the University of Amsterdam and, later, in his book, *Athenian Little-Master Cups* (2011),¹⁴ when it included 753 Attic little-master cups with signatures or otherwise attributable. It has, however, been continuously updated by its author since. Extended to include all little-master cups, it comprised, at the end of 2024, as he kindly communicated to me, 1868 lip-cups (25.9 %), 4852 band-cups (67.4 %), and 483 undetermined (6.7%). According to him, the statistics from 2011 should therefore be refined today as follows: figured interior decoration is present on 470 lip-cups (25.2 % of all lip-cups) and 45 band-cups (0.9 % of all band-cups). In other words, a fragment of a decorated little-master tondo, like ours, is 28 times more likely to belong to a lip-cup than to a band-cup. Also, band-cups with interior decoration are also generally later than 530 BCE,¹⁵ and our shard dates, stylistically to 540–530 BCE. It is therefore safe to assume that the Histrian fragment comes from a lip-cup.

¹³ Or not even that: 29 attributed little-master band-cups and lip-cups have a solid black interior – HEESSEN 2011, 45 and n. 277.

¹⁴ HEESSEN 2011.

¹⁵ Pers. comm. Pieter Heesen to the author, Dec. 28 and 31, 2024.



Fig. 6. Attic lip-cup, 540–530 BCE, from Vulci, British Museum 1836,0224.112 (also identified as B403) (BAPD 302855, BMN Painter. <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/812734001>

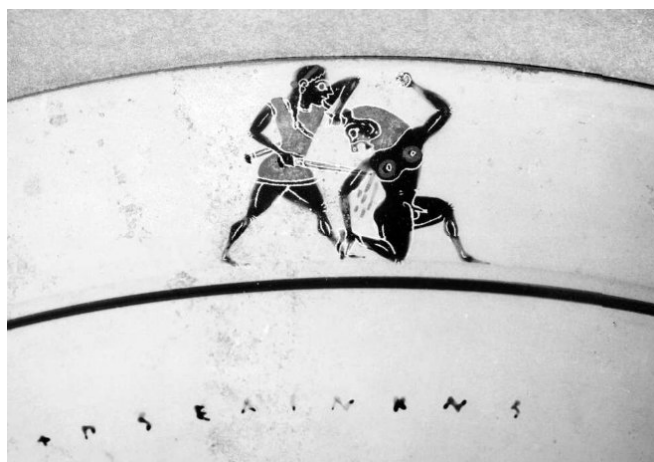


Fig. 7. Attic lip-cup, 540–530 BCE, from Vulci, British Museum 1836,0224.112 (also identified as B403) (BAPD 302855, BMN Painter. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1836-0224-112

Theseus slaying the Minotaur is present in the whole updated database, as the Dutch scholar kindly shared with me, on seven lip-cups (3 times on the exterior, and 4 times on the interior decoration) and 17 band-cups (all on the exterior).

The discovery of yet another painted fragment of the confrontation between Theseus and the Minotaur will not be expected to make headlines. In 1982, Brommer catalogued 400 vases (300 of them, Attic) showing this particular scene, out of the hero's 900 overall.¹⁶ Only Herakles' fight with the Nemean lion is more popular in ancient art. In 2005, Servadei catalogued 690 Attic vases showing Theseus' exploits, of

¹⁶ Theseus in art: WALTERS 1893, 29–30 attempted an early typology. A minimal overview of Theseus in Classical art in SCHEFOLD/JUNG 1988, 253–257. Solid treatments in BROMMER 1982, on the Minotaur particularly 35–64 and on b.-f. Attic pottery 42–44, and in the LIMC entry on the Minotaur, WOODFORD 1992, 574–581. Also see the article on Theseus in LIMC by NEILS/WOODFORD 1994, 922–951, where 940–943 on the Minotaur are also authored by S. Woodford. The best recent discussion is SERVADEI 2005, 95–118; 191–215; generally, HERTER 1973, 1045–1238; CALAME 1996.

which 391 Attic vases with the Cretan episode (of which the vast majority illustrate, of course, the actual showdown). Of these, 136 were amphorae (almost all black-figure, mostly 550–530 BCE), 72 cups (45 b.-f., mostly 550–530 BCE), 54 *lekythoi* (almost all b.-f., mostly 500–490 BCE). Incidentally, this is utterly remarkable for a hero who around 600 BCE was still absent from Athenian art.¹⁷

2. ATTRIBUTION

The BMN Painter and the Master of the BM 1859,0301.4

The fragment can be discussed in comparison with the style

¹⁷ SERVADEI 2005.

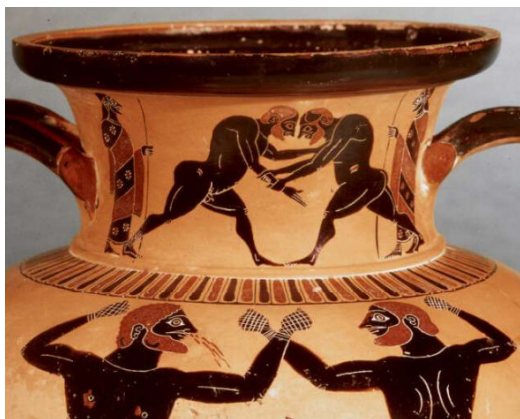


Fig. 8. Neck amphora attributed to the BMN Painter, British Museum B295 BAPD 302838 550–540 BCE https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1867-0508-968



Fig. 9. Athenian *pyxis* lid from Vulci, attributed to the BMN Painter 550–540 BCE, British Museum 1859, 0301.4, also identified as B596; BAPD 7022. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Attic_black-figure_lid_-_ABV_extra_-_Herakles_and_Antaios_-_Theseus_and_Minotauros_-_London_BM_1859-0301-4_-_01.jpg

of the BMN Painter, active 550–510, particularly 540–530 BCE.¹⁸ His Attic lip-cup, 540–530 BCE, discovered in Vulci, now in the British Museum 1836,0224.112 (BAPD 302855, LIMC *Minotauros* 19, HEESEN 2011, cat. 249) was produced in the workshop of Nikosthenes. This was one of the largest workshops in Athens, producing mainly for export, and was very interested in the iconography of Theseus.¹⁹ The fight between Theseus and the Minotaur is represented twice on the lip of the Vulci cup, on opposing sides, with purple accessories and imitation inscriptions below (Figs. 6 and 7). The Minotaur's head is here much lower, as the monster is kneeling, but its muzzle recalls the Histrian cup. Note that the BMN Painter is elsewhere interested in showing heads that are almost touching, e.g., on his name-vase, a neck amphora in the British Museum 1867,0508.968, BAPD 302838, the case of wrestlers in the A area and Neck B area (Fig. 8).

Heesen (2011) catalogues seven more cups (his nos. 248, 250, 250bis–254) by the BMN Painter, other than the aforementioned 1836,0224.112 (his 249). Five of those are band-cups, one is a lip-cup and the seventh is too fragmentary to be assigned to either category. No other Minotaur is featured on them, but their decoration remains consistent with an interest in heroes (Achilleus and Memnon; Herakles and the lion), as well as in bulls. A further band-cup, in the manner of BMP, also displays bulls. It is unlikely though that the Histrian fragment can be attributed to the BMN Painter, despite certain similarities. It is somewhat coarser than his work, and such an attribution would make it his only cup to not have been discovered in Italy. None of the rest of his works, not belonging in the little-master category, that is

amphorae, hydriai, oinochoai, have findspots east of Greece. Finally, the Histrian fragment would also be BMN Painter's first Minotaur on a cup tondo. On the other hand, as seen *supra*, he did paint the Minotaur twice on the exterior of the lip-cup BM 1836,0224.112. His interest in the topic is further shown by the Minotaur and Theseus on an Athenian belly amphora in Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 60.1 (BAPD 340413), where the Minotaur has a hairy head (unlike in our shard) and a hairless body (it sometimes is depicted the other way around), and by the scene on his Athenian neck amphora in the Charles Ede sale catalogue, BAPD 19760.

¹⁸ For the BMN Painter, BEAZLEY 1956 (ABV), 226–227, BOARDMAN 1974, 64–65, and particularly HEESEN 2011, 152 and 165–168.

¹⁹ See e.g. a cup exported by this workshop to Vulci, now in Rouen, Musée des Antiquités 450B, 530–520 BCE, BAPD 301243. The Minotaur's open mouth and heads in proximity recall our shard. Unusually, Theseus' head is wreathed.

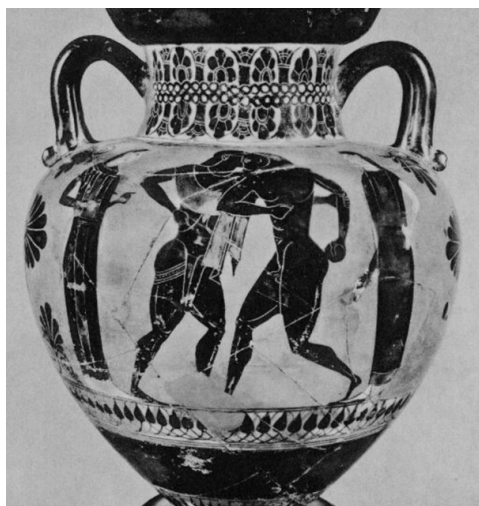


Fig. 10. Athenian neck amphora from Altenburg, Staatliches Lindenau-Museum, 550–525 BCE, attributed to the Painter of Vatican 365, BAPD 301605 FROM *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* Altenburg, Staatliches Lindenau-Museum 1, 20–22, Tafel 21, 2.



Fig. 11. Fragment of an amphora in New York, Metropolitan Museum 20.259, BAPD 301609, 540–530 BCE, connected to the Painter of Vatican 365 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/251007>

Connected to the manner of the BMN Painter is another artefact important in terms of style and composition to our analysis. This is an Athenian *pyxis* lid, also from Vulci, dated around 550–540 BCE, now in the British Museum,

Theseus, with only the head turned toward him. The classical publication of the *pyxis* lid in Walter's *Catalogue* (1893) indicates “purple and white accessories, designs in a frieze with inner border of tongue-pattern” and describes its



Fig. 12. An Athenian neck amphora by the Affecter in Kassel, Antikensammlung T679, BAPD 340429, 540 BCE. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Affecter_-_ABV_241_25bis_-_man_pursuing_youth_-_Theseus_and_the_Minotaur_-_horseman_-_Kassel_AS_T_679_-_02.jpg

1859,0301.4; BAPD 7022, Fig. 9. This lid has been known for two centuries, as it was formerly in the collections of Lucien Bonaparte, Prince of Canino, and of count Jacques-Claude Beugnot, but has received surprisingly modest scholarly attention. Just as both representations on BM 1836,0224.112 discussed above, the one on BM 1859, 0301.4 shows the Minotaur attempting to run away from



Fig. 13. Athenian belly amphora by the Affecter, Munich, Antikensammlungen 1405, 550–530 BCE (BAPD 301349) (after *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* Munich, Museum Antiker Kleinkunst 1, 25, Tafel 34.2).

side B as: “Theseus slaying the Minotaur: Theseus to r., beardless, with long hair, short chiton and skin over it, *endromides*, sheath at side, seizes the Minotaur’s head with l. hand, and with r. plunges sword into his body. The Minotaur retreats to r. looking back, l. hand raised, holding a stone”.²⁰ Behind Theseus, Walters further identified Ariadne, and behind her, three bearded figures with spears; on the right, a woman and two men, most of whom are probably Athenian victims. In her catalogue of Nikosthenic-type *pyxides*, Lyons (2009) opts to drop the reference to Ariadne, simply mentioning that the protagonists are flanked by five draped men and two so-called

²⁰ WALTERS 1893, 265.

“penguin”-women; she does not comment on Walters’ hypothesis that these must be Athenian victims.²¹ In any case, onlookers would surely have been absent from the small tondo of our Histrian, and any other, cups.²²

BM 1859, 0301.4 is an important reference to us in that the Minotaur has a wrinkled muzzle, the long hair reserved in red, and the protagonists’ heads are at a similar height. We have seen that the Histrian cup takes this further: the two heads are actually touching, which is attested on fewer than 20 vases out of more than 400 showing the Athenian hero slaying the bull-headed monster.

Further discussion: Painter of Vatican 365, the Affecter, Taleides Painter, Antimenes, Long-Nose Painter

It is also useful to consider our fragment in the context



Fig. 14. Athenian belly amphora attributed to the Taleides Painter, New York, Metropolitan Museum 47.11.5, 540–530 BCE BAPD 301120 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/254578>

²¹ LYONS 2005, 175 (no. 4).

²² On side A, Walters recognized the “contest of Heracles and Antaios”, a view corroborated by VIAN 1952, 43 (catalogue letter *n*), and retained as plausible, but held as uncertain by LYONS 2009, 175. In LIMC I.1 *s.v.* *Antaios* 1, catalogue no. 70, OLMOS/BALMASEDA 1981, 808, admit that the presence of the fighting Minotaur and Theseus on side B is the only clue that the fighters on the other side could in fact be Heracles and Antaeus. They illustrated the wrestlers on Pl. 656, where, although the Minotaur does not appear, we can note a detail absent in other illustrations, an imperfection in the tongue pattern, namely the presence of two consecutive black tongues. Such negligence is sometimes at odds with the quality of execution of the primary scene, just like in our case.

of the work of other artists of the time. First of all, the Painter of Vatican 365.²³ On an Athenian neck amphora from Altenburg, Staatliches Lindenau-Museum, 550–525 BCE, attributed to this painter (BAPD 301605), Fig. 10, the hero’s profile is completely covered by the Minotaur’s head, which is a rather unique situation, and they are just as tall. The Painter of Vatican 365 had also experimented with the Cerberus’ open-mouthed heads hurled right into Heracles’ face, although not actually touching it, on a neck amphora, 540–530 BCE, in Edinburgh, National Museums of Scotland, 1881.44.27 (BAPD 301604); also see an amphora fragment in New York, Metropolitan Museum 20.259, BAPD 301609, 540–530 BCE, Fig. 11, connected by Beazley to the Painter of Vatican 365, with a youth steadying horses in order to harness them, whereupon his nose touches (affectionately?) the horse’s forehead. However, this painter specializes in amphorae and has no interest in *kylikes*.



Fig. 15. Antimenes Painter, Athenian neck amphora 530–520 BCE in Frankfurt, Historisches Mus. 11505, BAPD 320093 (after *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* Frankfurt, Frankfurt Am Main 1, 28–29, Tafel 27.1).

The work of the Affecter supplies further alluring, if imperfect, comparanda.²⁴ BM 1859,0301.4 and the Histrian cup fragment can thus be compared compositionally to his Athenian neck amphora in Kassel, Antikensammlung T679, 540 BCE, BAPD 340429, Fig. 12. Here, Theseus and the Minotaur are of the same height, the latter’s muzzle is open (tongue visible) as it flees the hero, head turned back; compare with the one in the Getty Museum, 530 BCE, 86.AE.75 (BAPD 340428). One of his Athenian belly amphorae, Munich, Antikensammlungen 1405, 550–530 BCE (BAPD 301349) exhibits the same design with fewer mannerisms (Fig. 13); compare a similar one in Paris, private collection Stavros S. Niarchos A033, 550–530 BCE (BAPD 340436). It remains highly unlikely that we could find a *kylix* by the Affecter in Histria, as he focused almost exclusively on amphorae, and those were found in Etruscan tombs. In any case, regardless of composition, nothing of the Affecter’s style is felt in the Histrian cup. The fact that he had an idiosyncratic approach to the topic is seen also in the fact that

²³ BEAZLEY 1956 (ABV), 311–312.

²⁴ BEAZLEY 1956 (ABV), 238–248, BOARDMAN 1974, 65.

he, as opposed to all other painters working in Athens, did not show the Minotaur fully naked, but with some garment (short chiton?) draped around his arm.²⁵

We have already mentioned here the Taleides Painter,²⁶ who around 550–530 BCE used to resort repeatedly to a design where the Minotaur kneels and faces Theseus, although he lowered the bull's head, as on two Athenian *hydriai* from Louvre, CP10655 (BAPD 301125) and F39 (BAPD 301124), as well as on an Athenian belly amphora in New York, Metropolitan Museum 47.11.5, 540–530 BCE (BAPD 301120, Fig. 14). The same composition is favored by the Wraith Painter,²⁷ on an Athenian *lekythos* in Athens, National Museum, CC672, 550–525 BCE (BAPD 302578). Taleides Painter, and particularly the Wraith Painter, have painted a few cups each, but never using Theseus as a subject, or any other particular hero for that matter. In turn, Antimenes Painter's theatrical compositions²⁸ can show the Minotaur almost falling over backwards, whether towards Theseus or away from him, as on two Athenian neck amphorae from 530–520 BCE in Hannover, Kestner Museum 752, BAPD 3255, and in Frankfurt, Historisches Mus. 11505, BAPD 320093 (Fig. 15). On yet another, in Middlebury (Vermont, USA), Museum of Art, BAPD 340477, the composition is less daring, but, unusually, Theseus' hair fillet has been removed before the fight and is shown suspended (Fig. 16). In any case, Antimenes has not painted cups, focusing on *amphorae* and *hydriai*.

As a rule of thumb, it seems that compositions on cups were less innovative than those on larger vases, and this makes it all the more surprising that the heads on the Histrian fragment are touching. Innovative are, for example, two Athenian neck amphorae in Würzburg, Martin von Wagner Museum L182 and L200, 520 BCE (BAPD 301750 and 301748), by the Long-Nose Painter, where the Minotaur's face crosses over to the left of Theseus's face, even hiding, in the case of the former, the hero's chin from view. Granted, this painter's Minotaurs do not resemble ours, and in fact he had no interest in cups. But it is worth mentioning that he is one of the few interested in both the Minotaur and in Acheloos, who is, after all, the Minotaur's morphological permutation. The Long-Nose Painter is also the only one to have represented this scene with the "touching-heads" abnormality twice.

Athenian little-master lip-cups can also be strange, as the one in Berkeley, Phoebe Hearst Mus. of Anthropology, 8.358, 550–525 BCE (BAPD 9084): to us, it is of great interest that



Fig. 16. Antimenes Painter, Athenian neck amphora in Middlebury (USA), Museum of Art, BAPD 340477, 530–520 BCE

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amphora_with_Theseus_and_the_Minotaur,_Circle_of_the_Antimenes_Painter,_Greek,_Attic,_Archaic_period,_c._520-520_BC,_terracotta_-_Middlebury_College_Museum_of_Art_-_Middlebury,_VT_-_DSC08026.jpg

the faces of the two antagonists appear to be touching, to increase the dramatic effect, although there is plenty of empty space available on the cup's lip. But the painter also gave the Minotaur, rather than Theseus, a nebris. Even more remarkably, he showed the Athenian hero beardless in area A, but bearded on B.²⁹

It goes without saying that various reconstructions of the Histrian cup tondo are possible (Figs. 2 and 22). The Minotaur may well be standing and fully facing Theseus in fight; but the standing Minotaur might also be trying to escape, with only his head turned towards the hero, as on an Athenian *lekythos* in Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden 98.5.12, attributed to the Cock Group, 500–490 BCE, BAPD 330510, one of a handful of examples in Greek art where Theseus charges from the right.³⁰ By the same token, it is entirely possible that the Minotaur is in fact kneeling and fulling

²⁵ BROMMER 1982, 43.

²⁶ BEAZLEY 1956 (ABV), 174–176.

²⁷ BEAZLEY 1956 (ABV), 199–201.

²⁸ BEAZLEY 1956 (ABV), 266–276. BOARDMAN 1974, 109–110.

²⁹ This is usually explained as a contamination with Herakles, e.g. BROMMER 1982, 42 and 43, who mentions a similar double-standard on an amphora by the Affecter.

³⁰ BROMMER 1982, 41.



Fig. 17. Athenian little-master lip-cup in Louvre, F83, 550–525 BCE, BAPD 11274 https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/25/Kylix_Theseus_Minotauros_Louvre_F83.jpg

facing Theseus, see e.g. a fragmentary little-master cup in Amsterdam, Allard Pierson Museum 2147, BAPD 302557, where Theseus is an ephebe like ours, and the Minotaur's lowered head would easily reach his antagonist's height if raised. The head of a kneeling Minotaur can, occasionally, rise close in height to the head of a standing Theseus, as on an Athenian *Kleinmeister* lip-cup in Louvre, F83, 550–525 BCE, BAPD 11274 (Fig. 17), or on the Athenian *hydria* from Vulci, 560–550 BCE in Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, PC47 (BAPD 310125; LIMC *Minotauros* 18; attributed to the Tyrrhenian Group, where the heads in fact touch). But the kneeling Minotaur might as well be shown attempting to flee, with only his head turned, as on an Athenian cup in Rome, Villa Giulia 26037 (BAPD 302537), cup attributed to the group of Rhodes 12264, a group also attested in Histria. In any case, little-master cup tondos might benefit from a crouching scheme, similar to the one on the already mentioned Athenian cup from Camiros in Rhodes, BAPD 14400, where not just the Minotaur, but also Theseus, are kneeling (Fig. 3).³¹ The obvious technical advantage is that this allows the scale to be somewhat larger, and consequently the heads to be more detailed.

To sum up, painter of our cup cannot be identified by mere connoisseurship, although his work appears redolent of the manner of the BMN Painter and of that of the Master of the BM 1859,0301.4, with limited affinities with the way the Painter of Vatican 365, the Affecter, Taleides Painter,

³¹ Unusual about this cup is that Theseus is unarmed: BROMMER 1982, 42.

Antimenes and the Long-Nose Painter approach the topic.

3. HISTRIAN CERAMIC CONTEXT

Archaic cups are rather well understood in Histria. To become familiar with the local ceramic landscape, the reader is referred to the few relatively complete Athenian little-master cups from Histria. To begin with, a band-cup attributed to the Group of Rhodes 12264, 530–520 BCE (BAPD 350764),³² another dated 540–530 BCE (BAPD 9017709),³³ and another one attributed to the Elbows Out Painter, 550–525 BCE.³⁴ Also see a band-cup published by Alexandrescu³⁵ (1978, Fig. 394) and fragments of another (inside and outside decoration) at Fig. 403³⁶; a shard with a few figures from a cup A in Alexandrescu (1978, Pl. 47–438)³⁷, 500–490 BCE, attributed to the Leafless group (BAPD 5070); and, finally, a lip-cup, also Attic, 550–500 BCE published by Condurachi (1954, Fig. 283³⁸). A

quick overview offers ALEXANDRESCU 1978.³⁹

While Archaic painted pottery found in Histria can illustrate mythological or divine beings (satyrs, sirens, sphinxes, Amazons; Pegasus and Medusa; Athena, Dionysos, and Hermes), recognizable Greek heroes are scarce. It can be argued that the absence of more context can, at times, hamper the identification of certain heroes on a particular shard, and result in them looking like mere athletes, hoplites and so on. For instance, could not the “warrior” confronting an Amazon on the Attic *olpe* fragment no. 759 (legs and torsos), 490 BCE,⁴⁰ actually be one of the Greek heroes? (The absence of the lion skin does not exclude Herakles; see neck amphora from the Metropolitan Museum, New York, 21.88.92, 500

³² ALEXANDRESCU 1978, Pl. 45–404.

³³ DIMITRIU 1966, Pl. 47–814, ALEXANDRESCU 1978, Pl. 43–402, sgraffito IEPH, our Fig. 18.

³⁴ ALEXANDRESCU 2005, 345, Pl. 63–C89, our Fig. 19.

³⁵ ALEXANDRESCU 1978, Fig. 394.

³⁶ DIMITRIU 1966, Pl. 43–813.

³⁷ ALEXANDRESCU 1978, Pl. 47–438.

³⁸ CONDURACHI 1954, Fig. 283.

³⁹ He discusses cups at 72–76, lip-cups being nos. 378–383 and band-cups nos. 384–410. Key here for the corpus of Archaic Attic pottery found in Histria are CONDURACHI 1954, 408–431, with Figs. 283–322 (written with V. Zirra), DIMITRIU 1966, 120 sqq., cups at 122–125, with Pl. 41–46, ALEXANDRESCU 1978, particularly 66–76, with Figs. 291–438, ALEXANDRESCU 2005, particularly 329–346, Pl. 59–63. Add the important fragments in DOMĂNEANȚU 1988, 21–25, as well as LAMBRINO 1938, for other Archaic vases not directly relevant here.

⁴⁰ DIMITRIU 1966, 120, Pl. 41.



Fig. 18. Band-cup discovered in Histria (local Museum), 540–530 BCE (BAPD 9017709, sgraffito IEPH, (Photo: Author).



Fig. 19. Band-cup discovered in Histria (local Museum) attributed to the Elbows Out Painter, 550–525 BCE (ALEXANDRESCU 2005, 345, Pl. 63–C89) (Photo: Author).

BCE (BAPD 303401). The first hero on Histrian pottery comes from a fragment of a neck amphora, showing the legs of Herakles and the legs of a centaur (575–550 BCE)⁴¹. A little-master lip-cup fragment (550–530 BCE) preserves the heads of Herakles and the Nemean lion, facing in the same direction, and a nonsense inscription (BAPD 28204)⁴². Just like on our fragment, this tondo is surrounded by circular lines and a tongue pattern decoration, with added red on the hero's hair (as well as his beard and the lion's mane), and white on the lion's teeth. A Homeric hero was also spotted by Condurachi and Zirra on a fine oinochoe fragment (550–530 BCE)⁴³. An amphora fragment (mid 6th c. BCE) shows the heads of Thetis

⁴¹ ALEXANDRESCU 1978, 67 with Fig. 296.

⁴² DOMĂNEANȚU 1988, 23 with her Fig. 2–6; our Fig. 20. Compare the scene on the complete Athenian belly amphora, 575–550 BCE, in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1929.462, BAPD 11821, Fig. 21

⁴³ CONDURACHI 1954, p. 426 and Fig. 313.

and of her lion-transformation, and Condurachi and Zirra again recognized that Peleus must have also been represented on that vase.⁴⁴ Finally, a band-cup fragment (550–500 BCE) shows the legs of Herakles (crouching) and those of the lion.⁴⁵

All of these five fragments come from Athenian vases imported in Histria over half a century. Three of them represent Herakles (once, his head, and twice, his legs), one of them may show some Homeric hero, and yet another comes with a high degree of probability from a vase that also showed Peleus (who is, however, not preserved). Of these five instances, only one showed the face of the hero (Herakles). In any case, this makes our cup fragment from 2024 to be the first, and so far the only, Archaic representation of Theseus on pottery discovered in Histria.

4. PONTIC CERAMIC CONTEXT

Suzana Dimitriu has analyzed Attic pottery in Pontic settlements, and although her article is now half a century old, the picture has remained sub-

stantially the same.⁴⁶ She noted that Histria was the first to import such pots on the Black Sea coasts, starting around 620–600 BCE. Until around 550 BCE, these imports remain relatively few and consist of high quality products. Then they take off, but their quality is relatively low, although, for the local markets, they still count as luxury products. In numbers as well as in quality, they are still nowhere near similar imports in Etruria. While *Kleinmeister*, Droop, and Cassel cups are indeed abundantly imported in Pontic settlements around 550–525 BCE, they do not stem from major workshops or artists. The imbalance is striking in the case of the top painters of the day, like Antimenes. Dimitriu noted that

⁴⁴ CONDURACHI 1954, 424 with Fig. 307, ALEXANDRESCU 1978, Fig. 304.

⁴⁵ CONDURACHI 1954, 414 with Fig. 289.

⁴⁶ DIMITRIU/ALEXANDRESCU 1972, 361–374.



Fig. 20. Cup fragment (550–530 BCE) from Histria with the heads of Herakles and the lion, and nonsense inscription, BAPD 28204 (after DOMĂNEANȚU 1988 23, Fig. 2–6).



Fig. 21. Athenian belly amphora, 575–550 BCE in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1929.462, BAPD 11821. [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fi%C8%99ier:Athenian_black-figure_amphora,_6th_century_BC,_Heracles_wrestling_with_the_Nemean_lion,_Ashmolean_Museum_\(8401769980\).jpg](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fi%C8%99ier:Athenian_black-figure_amphora,_6th_century_BC,_Heracles_wrestling_with_the_Nemean_lion,_Ashmolean_Museum_(8401769980).jpg)

pottery authored by Nikosthenes was, in 1972, represented by 110 pots in Etruria, and by only one vase in the Black Sea region, namely in Olbia.⁴⁷ To this, in fact, she could have added the r.-f. *kantharos* fragment from the Snake Island, 525–500 BCE, signed by the potter Nikosthenes (Odessa, Museum of Western and Eastern Art, 26.338, BAPD 200614).

To judge from the Beazley Archive Pottery Database (more than 130,000 ancient pots), there is only one representation of the Minotaur on vases discovered in the Black Sea settlements – namely, on a *lekythos* from Kerch, St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum П1912, around 500 BCE, BAPD 360945, where the monster is forced to kneel, head at the same level as Theseus’ and turned to him, while his body faces the opposite direction. (I do not take into account here an Athenian Siana cup fragment with Theseus and the Minotaur (?) from the Hermitage, Б–204, BAPD 9026257, due to significant doubts as to both its interpretation and its provenance). Only a few other painted vases found in the Black Sea settlements show Theseus, of which the oldest example also dates from around 500 BCE, showing the hero with the bull of Marathon, namely an oinochoe frg. from Berezan island (St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum Б–320, BAPD 9023394). In later instances, we see him mount with Helen in a chariot on a r.-f. volute krater frg. from Sozopol (Sofia, National Museum 6278, BAPD 202477), 500–450 BCE, pursuing her on a r.-f. calyx-krater from Kobouleti Pichvnari in Georgia, Batumi Museum, mid 5th c. BCE (BAPD 3004), and in the underworld, on a 4th c.

⁴⁷ DIMITRIU/ALEXANDRESCU 1972, 366 with n. 25.

BCE r.-f. *pelike* from Kerch (Kerch Museum K9358.1, BAPD 4483). All of these five vases are Athenian; one was imported into an indigenous settlement (Pichvnari) and the other four, into Greek colonies, all of which are Milesian. The fact that they range from the very late 6th c. to the 4th c. BCE, makes the Histrian cup fragment presented here the oldest witness recorded so far to the Pontic Ionian echoes of the Athenian hype surrounding the specifically Attic hero Theseus. In less than a generation from the beginning of the new ideologically-fueled fashion in Athens, we are now able to document it in the Black Sea area.

5. THESEUS, PAINTED POTTERY, AND POLITICS IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

The presence of Athenian pottery in the Black Sea region, even at its climax in 550–525 BCE, is at odds with the absence of literary sources mentioning an Athenian presence in the Pontic area before the Persian wars. Alexandrescu 1999, in his discussion of Attic imports in this area, has argued that the Athenian state did not interfere with trade patterns, except in the case of sensitive commodities, like grains. Political games had, to him, no impact on the trade routes of Attic pottery and on the substantial increase in imports in the Black Sea region of Attic pottery in the third quarter of the 6th c. BCE.⁴⁸ From a different angle, von den Hoff argued that the ideological content of vase painting is not on a par with that of architectural sculpture. For the German

⁴⁸ ALEXANDRESCU 1999.



Fig. 22. Alternative hypothetical reconstruction of 2024 Histrian cup tondo (compare with Fig. 2). (Drawing: Irina Stoenică)

archaeologist, the latter can be cast as part and parcel of a Panhellenic discourse, while the former, rather as a medium of debate within the *polis*.⁴⁹ But it is no less true that the immense popularity of Theseus in Athens, at the time when our cup is imported in Histria, is in many ways connected with the ideological program of Pisistratus' tyranny.⁵⁰ Why Histrian oligarchs should be interested in acquiring cups showing the fight of Theseus against the Minotaur can only remain a matter of speculation. Did the Pisistratid Theseus, the hero who puts an end to *stasis*, defeats the barbarians, and brings peace, have a particular appeal to them? They already enjoyed, as we have seen, vases with Herakles – was it time for a more human, and more political, hero?

The facts is that, perhaps as few as 15 years after the import of our cup, the geopolitical world of Histria was shattered by Darius' campaign against the Scythians (513 BCE).⁵¹ The archaeological signs of destruction are there, but cannot clarify why this happened. The campaign may have entailed an immediate destruction of the city at the hands of the Persians, if Histria was allied with the Getae and the Scythians,⁵² but it is just as possible that the city was devastated in the aftermath of Darius's campaign, around 500 BCE, likely by the Scythians.⁵³ A fact is, also, that

⁴⁹ VON DEN HOFF 2010, 179.

⁵⁰ SERVADEI 2005 204–207, WALKER 1995, 35–46.

⁵¹ CONDURACHI 1954, 20 *sqq.* and *passim*

⁵² SUCEVEANU 2005, 21 argues that just as likely is a destruction by the Persians during Darius' campaign.

⁵³ ALEXANDRESCU 1999a, 102 *sqq.*, who dates Darius' campaign to

the fight of Theseus against the bull-headed monster had, at the very least occasionally, political connotations. Slaying the Minotaur is a political act to begin with, as it is the pre-requirement for, and proleptic allusion to, Theseus' crucial role in Attic synoecism, and Athens' pivotal role in the Greek world.⁵⁴ But more specifically, Theseus encapsulated the resistance against the Orient on Myson's r.-f. amphora (Louvre G197, BAPD 202176), on which he abducts Antiope while, on the other side, Croesus is shown burning on his pyre – at the very moment when the rebellion of Ionian cities led to the burning of the Lydian capital, Sardis. The same scene was featured in the Amazonomachy on the marble pediment of the temple of Apollo Daphnephoros in Eretria, a city allied to Athens against the Persians.⁵⁵ Certainly, the Greeks in the Black Sea area also came to perceive Theseus to some extent as a “constituent element of Greece's “intentional” and imagined history and cultural memory”.⁵⁶

It is, however, more cautious to assume, that the cup ended up in Histria strictly for its aesthetic appeal, a novelty fresh from the oven, or, rather, from the kilns of perhaps the largest pottery workshop in Pisistratid Athens, where Theseus was all the rage.⁵⁷

6. CONCLUSION

The little-master lip-cup fragment (540–530 BCE) discovered in Histria in 2024 and discussed in the present paper illustrates Theseus slaying the Minotaur. Only their heads are preserved and, highly unusually, they are touching, which happens on fewer than 5% of such painted scenes. The author of the Histrian cup is difficult to equate with any of the painters that we know, by signature or by conventional name. As seen above, it is compositionally related to the *pyxis* lid BM 1859,0301.4. It can also be compared to the manner of the BMN Painter; but this would make it his only cup to have been found outside of Italy, and the only one of his known pots to have been discovered east of Greece. By contrasting the design of the Histrian cup with works of the Painter of Vatican 365, the Affecter, Taleides Painter, Antimenes Painter, and the Long-Nose Painter, we proved it to be part of a dynamic artistic environment in which painters experimented with the increasingly ideologically-charged topic in Pisistratid Athens. An overview of Archaic lip-cups and band-cups in Histria indicated that our shard bears the first representation of Theseus in Archaic pottery from there. Indeed, the only Greek heroes identified so far in Histria had been Herakles (twice with the Nemean lion, and

519 BCE.

⁵⁴ STUMPF 1978; political monsters, PAVEL 2022a, 67–80.

⁵⁵ PAVEL 2022, 133–136; 312–314.

⁵⁶ VON DEN HOFF 2010, 161.

⁵⁷ Attic production of Theseus pots started around 570–560 BCE, but the two decades 550–530 BCE were the acme of enthusiasm for his exploits. SERVADEI 2005; WOODFORD 1992, 574–581.

once with a Centaur), Peleus (indirectly), and one Homeric hero, but of these five instances, only one showed the face of the hero (Herakles). To judge from the Beazley Database, our shard also bears the oldest representation of Theseus on pots found in the Black Sea settlements and testifies to the Pontic Ionian echoes of the Athenian hype surrounding the specifically Attic hero Theseus. The reasons for importing a cup with Theseus in Histria must have been primarily aesthetic, but perhaps a contributing factor was the perception of the Athenian hero as the spearhead of the fight against barbarians and Orientals, in the years leading up to the destruction of the city during Darius' campaign or its aftermath.

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