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THE TERRA SIGILLATA TABLE AMPHORAE AMONG NORTH PONTIC BARBARIANS OF ROMAN AGE

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Abstract: The find of the red slip table amphora in a Sarmatian burial near the village of Neterebka¹ in Cherkasy region in 1956, undeservedly forgotten by researchers, is analyzed in the paper. According to the description of circumstances of the find, the vessel was a part of grave goods of the Sarmatian grave, inserted into a Bronze Age barrow and destroyed by the local peasants in the 20th century. Then the artifact was twice briefly mentioned in the literature and had been lost in the store for long time. After its “re-discovery” the vessel was restored, visually examined in detail and described. The parallels from synchronous Sarmatian and Late Scythian burials in Ukraine are presented, and the dating and origin are substantiated.

Keywords: *red slip ware, terra sigillata, Sarmatians, Late Scythians, chronology, North Pontic Region, Crimea.*

Red slip pottery (Terra sigillata) from the late Hellenistic and Roman periods is a common find in Sarmatian burials. It is one of the most reliable chronological indicators, since the dating of this category of artifacts is substantiated in several basic works.² The identification of centers of production of certain types of red slip ware and the parallels from antique sites allow us to reconstruct with a certain degree of probability the trade relations of the North Pontic Sarmatians with the Graeco-Roman world. The careful analysis of the artifacts also sheds light on such purely applied issues as the duration of the use of this category of imports by the barbarians, the predominance of certain types of ware in their environment, the distribution of products from different centers in different areas of Sarmatian culture, etc.

Despite the presence of a representative sample of material (more than 100 intact and fragmented vessels), there is still no published work with a general analysis of red slip ware from Sarmatian graves of the North Pontic Region, and all information about it is limited, except for excavation reports, by several publications and an incomplete catalog of finds.³ A comprehensive study of red slip ware from Sarmatian graves is currently ongoing, and each new find is worthy of attention. The article examines the vessel of a rare type, almost unknown to the most experts – a table amphora.

¹ Due to the mistake of V.V. Kropotkin (KROPOTKIN 1970, 80) shared in other works (SIMONENKO *et alii* 2008, 57, no. 15; SIMONENKO 2011, 197–198; SIMONENKO 2013, 270) this point came to the historiography of Roman imports as “Neterebki”.

² ROBINSON 1959; HAYES 1985; HAYES 2008; for the most complete bibliography see ZHURAVLEV 2010, 180–196.

³ SIMONENKO *et alii* 2008, 54–85; SIMONENKO 2011, 166–244; SIMONENKO 2013, 223–329.

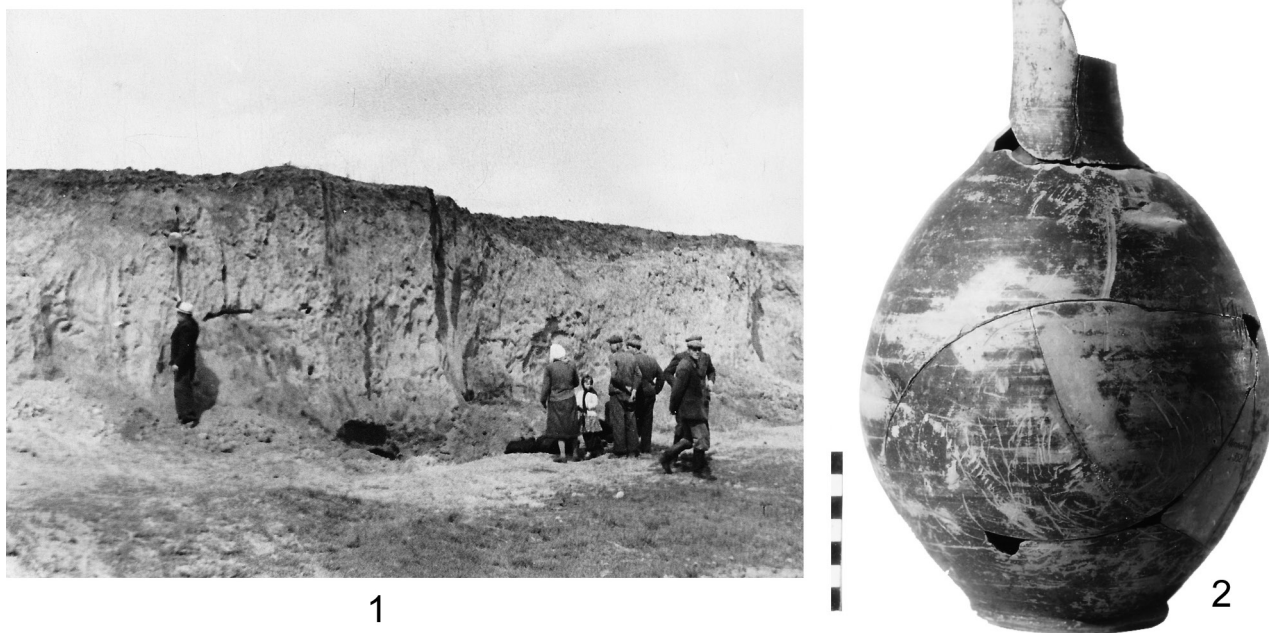


Fig. 1. The finding from Neterebka (after BEREZOVETS 1956). 1. The location of the Sarmatian grave. 2. The vessel from the grave.

The vessel was found during the survey of D.T. Berezovets along the Ros' River (Fig. 1/1,2). The find is described in the report as follows: "Near the sugar factory in the village of Nabutovo, on the road to Sakhnivka village, on the northern outskirts of the village of Neterebka, above the road itself, opposite the estate of collective farmer Rak Serhiy Ilyich, on the left native bank of the Ros River, on May 12, 1956, while digging clay at a depth of 0.8 m from the present surface, the skeleton was discovered lying with the skull to the southwest. Near the skeleton (near the skull) a very thin-walled clay jug on a ring leg with a high neck and two handles have been stood. The full vessel is covered with poor red varnish, which has come off in many places. The finders broke the jug and threw it away. We managed to collect almost all the fragments, except for the handles".⁴

The vessel was mentioned for the second (and last) time by V.V. Kropotkin in his *Corpus of Roman Finds*: "No. 701. Neterebki,⁵ 1956. During the survey of D.T. Berezovets in the inserted Sarmatian burial, destroyed during irregular digging, a thin-walled two-handled jug with a swollen body on a ring foot, long neck and flat bent rim; the varnish is light brown, spotted, of poor quality (Fig. 40.7). Dimensions: height 35 cm, neck diameter 6.7 cm, foot diameter 9 cm. Collection of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, inv. No. 352. References: material is not published, report by D.T. Berezovets".⁶

The vessel could not be found in the store for a long time (it was wrongly kept in the absolutely unexpected place, instead where it was supposed to be), so in the catalogs of Roman imports from Sarmatian burials of the North Pontic

region it was described with inaccuracies based on data by V. V. Kropotkin.⁷

When the artifact and D.T. Berezovets' report were finally found, there was an opportunity and a need to restore the vessel, provide a modern description and analyze of it.

The term "two-handled jug" was not quite correctly used to call the red slip wheel-made table amphora (Fig. 2/1). The rim is inverted, flattened, cut obliquely on the outside and underlined from below with a cutter. The neck is long, cylindrical, slightly widened downwards. The body is oval, on the ring foot. The varnish is dark orange, covers the entire vessel and foot on the outside and the neck on the inside. Somewhere it has worn away from the long use of the vessel. The remains of the attaches of two handles are visible on the shoulders and neck. The diameter of the rim is 6.7 cm, the diameter of the foot is 9 cm, the height of the vessel is 35 cm.

The vessel is kept in the Scientific store of the Institute of Archaeology, National Academy of Sciences of the Ukraine, collection 337, inv. No. 352.

Visual analysis of the vessel revealed some interesting details. First of all, the remains of the attaches of handles on the body and neck are significantly worn away (Fig. 2/2, 3), which shows that the amphora was used for a certain period without them. It is not surprising that D.T. Berezovets was unable to find the handles – the amphora had lost them still in antiquity and they were most likely absent in the grave, and have been added to the description "logically".

V. V. Kropotkin was right identifying the site of the find as a destroyed barrow. Most likely, the low mound disappeared over time, and in 1956 this place was no longer perceived as a barrow. But, judging by the two Bronze Age burials found nearby, the amphora was in the inserted Sarmatian burial.

⁴ BEREZOVETS 1956, 8. Here and further translation in English by the author.

⁵ See reference no. 1.

⁶ KROPOTKIN 1970, 80, Fig. 40/7.

⁷ SIMONENKO *et alii* 2008, 57, no. 15; SIMONENKO 2011, 197–198; SIMONENKO 2013, 270.



Fig. 2. The red-slip table amphora from the burial of Neterebka (picture by the author). 1. The current look. 2,3. The remains of handle attaches.

The grave, inserted into the earlier mound, is the most common type of Sarmatian burial site in the North Pontic region during the 2nd century BC – the mid-2nd century AD. During the period of the second half of the 1st – early 2nd centuries AD on the Dnipro Left Bank territory (Oril-Samara interfluvium, Dnipro Rapids region, Sea of Azov area, Donbas), simultaneously with the dominant massif of inserted burials oriented in the northern hemisphere, the cultural and chronological horizon of the “Eastern wave” existed.⁸ There were the graves of migrants from the Volga and Don regions featured by the primary graves oriented in the southern hemisphere.

The grave in Neterebka is located in the area of inserted burials domination. The uncharacteristic for them orientation in the southern hemisphere, although rare, is occurred in this massif.⁹ It is possible that inserted burials with orientation in the southern hemisphere were left by the Yazygs or Aorsas.¹⁰

In the Sarmatian graves of the North Pontic region terra sigillata is quite diverse. The most common are cups, bowls and plates, jugs of various types (among them lagynoi and pelikae), mugs, dishes, kanthari, toilet flasks, and there are even guttuses. But the table amphora has been discovered for the first time

According to its characteristics (type of the rim, body, dimensions), the amphora from Neterebka can be classified to the Pontic sigillata A group, form 1.1 according to Dr.

Zhuravlev scheme¹¹ or close to the A2a form of the E. Kühnelt typology.¹² The fine ware group Pontic Sigillata was classified by J. Hayes on the basis of special forms found mainly in the antique and barbarian sites of the North Pontic region. There is no confident identification of the centers of production of this ware: presumably these were workshops on the territory of the Circumpontic states. Earlier in our literature this pottery was called “Pergamene” or “Asia Minor”.

It is customary to consider that Pontic sigillata has appeared no later than the second quarter of the 1st century AD under the influence of the Italian sigillata, Italian thin-walled ceramics, as well as red slip pottery of eastern production, in particular, the Eastern sigillata B. This ware is not the product of one production center, and was made in different cities, probably according to a single standard. Since mid-1st until mid-3rd century AD Pontic sigillata dominated in the cities of the North Pontic region.¹³

Such vessels were popular among the relatives and southern neighbors of the Sarmatians – the Late Scythians of Crimea. In the burial grounds Belbek IV (graves 6, 8, 62, 68, 145), Zavitne (grave 305), Ust-Alma (grave 763) red slip table amphorae were found which are very close in shape and dimensions to the vessel from Neterebka. The height of amphorae of the Zhuravlev 1.1 form is from 20 to 27.6 cm,¹⁴ thus, the vessel from Neterebka is somewhat higher than these parallels (Figs. 3; 4). The contours of the body of these amphorae vary from oval to ovoid but the flat oblique rim

⁸ SIMONENKO 2004, 157.

⁹ SIMONENKO 2004, 142.

¹⁰ SYMONENKO 1994, 37–38; BÂRCĂ 2006, 174–175; BÂRCĂ/SYMONENKO 2009.

¹¹ ZHURAVLEV 2010, 70, Pl. 36, cat. nos. 267–275.

¹² KÜHNELT 2008, 397.

¹³ ZHURAVLEV 2013, 683.

¹⁴ ZHURAVLEV 2010, 70–71.

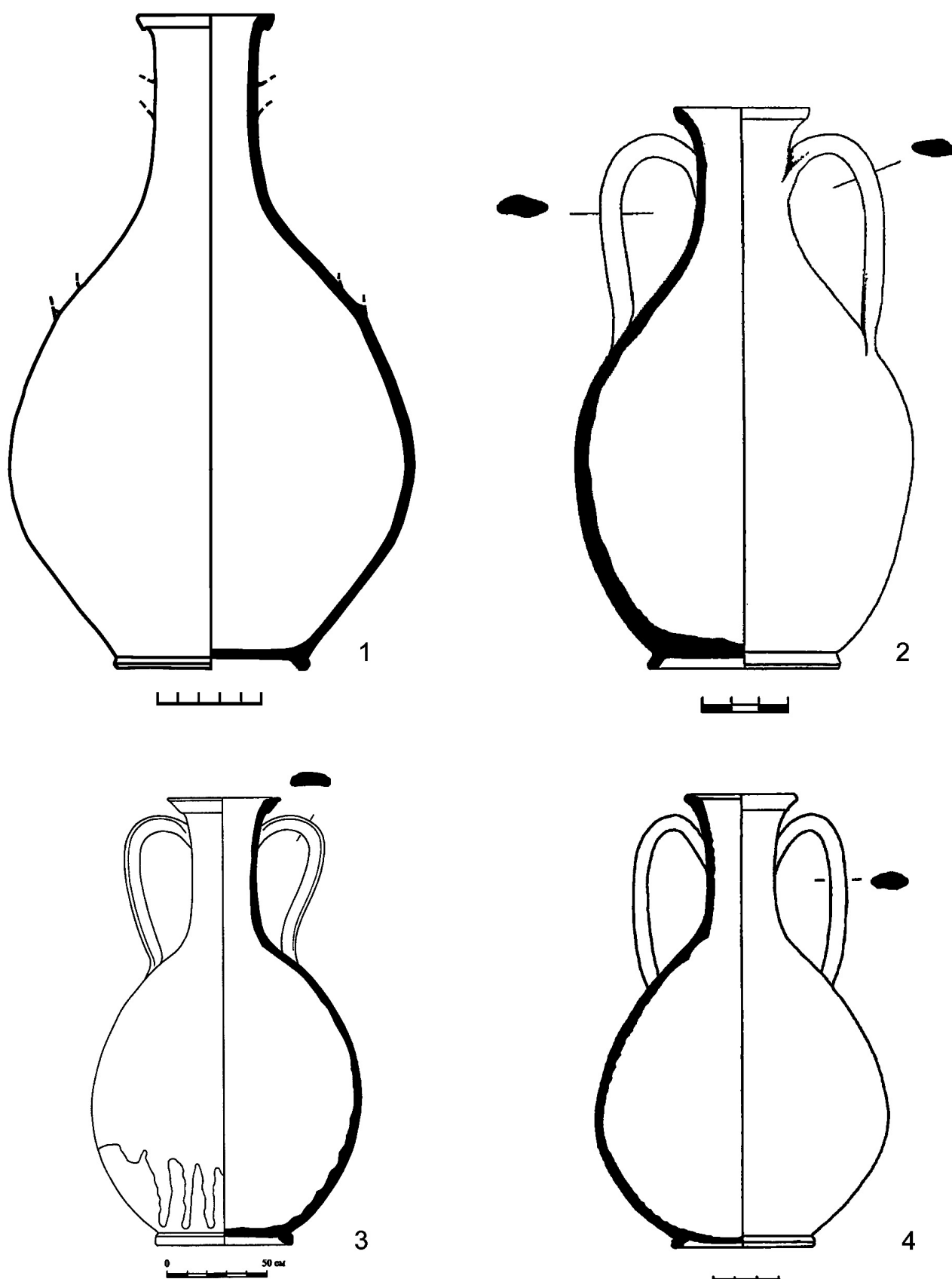


Fig. 3. Red-slip table amphorae 1. Neterebka (drawing by D.V. Karavaiko). 2. Bel'bek IV, grave 62 (after GUSHCHINA/ZHURAVLEV 2016). 3. Ust'-Alma burial ground, crypt 763, burial 1 (after PUZDROVSKI/TRUFANOV 2017). 4. Zavitne, grave 305 (after ZAJTSEV *et alii* 2007).



1



2



3



4

Fig. 4. Red-slip table amphorae. 1 – photo by the author; 2 – after GUSHCHINA/ZHURAVLEV 2016; 3 – after PUZDROVSKI/TRUFANOV 2017; 4 – public domain.



Fig. 5. Distribution of the red slip table amphorae in the North Pontic barbarian sites. 1. Neterebka. 2. Ust'-Alma. 3. Zavitne. 4. Neizatz. 5. Novopylypivka.

in combination with such a body are characteristic of form 1.1.¹⁵ These vessels appear in the graves of the Late Scythians of Crimea in the second half of the 1st century AD.¹⁶ Later red slip table amphorae (Zhuravlev forms 2–4 of the 2nd century AD) were found in the burial grounds Belbek IV,¹⁷ Neizatz,¹⁸ and Zavitne¹⁹ (Fig. 5).

It was already noted that red slip table amphorae are unknown in the Sarmatian burial sites of the North Pontic region, the sample from Neterebka is still a single one. There are no such vessels also among the Late Scythians of the Lower Dnipro.²⁰ However, among the unpublished materials of the excavations of Michailo Rudynskiy in 1951 in the Molochanski burial ground (Novopylypivka, barrow 2) there is an interesting vessel, which, due to its size, can also be recognized as a table amphora.

This is a red clay wheel-made vessel; the rim is flattened, cuff-shaped, with an undercut at the bottom. The neck is cylindrical, short; its base is underlined by a recessed line. The body is ovoid, with a ring foot. On the shoulders are two high loop-shaped handles of a flat cross-section. The surface is covered with orange engobe, has rotational traces. The diameter of the rim is 6 cm, the foot is 9 cm, the maximum width of the body is 16 cm, the height is



Fig. 6. The table amphorae of another type from North Pontic barbarian graves. 1. Novopylypivka, barrow 2. 2,3. Zolote burial ground, grave 8 (1,2 – picture by the author; 3 – after Korpusova 1983).

¹⁵ ZHURAVLEV 2010, 232, Tab. 36/269.

¹⁶ ZHURAVLEV 2010, 73

¹⁷ ZHURAVLEV 2010, Pl. 37; 38.

¹⁸ NESSEL 2022, 118.

¹⁹ ZAITSEV *et alii* 2007, Figs. 9/37; 19/19; 21/1; 23/4.

²⁰ SYMONENKO 2023, 87–112.



Fig. 7. Red slip table amphora from grave 720 of Ust'-Alma burial ground (drawing after PUZDROVSKIJ/ZAJCEV 2004; photo after SKARBY 2024).

22.5 cm, the width of the handle is 2.5 cm (Fig. 6/1). The assemblage is dated by the bronze fibula with returned foot of the 2 variant of II series according to V.V. Kropotov to the second half of the 1st – early 2nd century AD.²¹

The vessel from Novopylivka is of a rather rare type. A similar-shaped red slip table amphora of smaller size but with handles of similar design (Fig. 6/2, 3) comes from the Zolotea burial ground.²² V. N. Korpusova considers this vessel to be a Bosporean product and dates it to the 1st – 2nd centuries AD.²³

Splendid red slip table amphora of some another type has been discovered in the grave 720, dated to the mid-1st century AD, of the Late Scythian burial ground Ust'-Alma in Crimea.²⁴ It is a bit higher than the type under discussion (44 cm high), with a drop-shaped body decorated en barbotine (Fig. 7). The center of production of the amphora, like most of the Pontic sigillata vessels, is difficult to be identified

(supposedly, Pergamum).²⁵ It is interesting, that grave goods of this Late Scythian burial have a strike Sarmatian tint – tree-trunk coffin, golden “royal” bracelet, profiled censer, Chinese lacquer box and alabaster ritual flask.

Though no one item of the accompanied grave goods except amphora survived, the parallels to the funeral rite and to the vessel permit us to date the Sarmatian grave in Neterebka to the late 1st – early 2nd century AD.

Thus, it should be concluded that, unlike cups and plates, table amphorae were a rarity for the Sarmatians, because such vessels are not found in the eastern Sarmatian territories as well. Apparently, in nomadic life they were not practical and were not in demand. Or, on the contrary, they were rare and therefore expensive and not accessible to everyone. There is one else explanation – the typological variety of terra sigillata in Crimean Late Scythian milieu was reasoned of the closeness of Chersonesos and Bosporean kingdom. Actually, the circumstances of the use of imported pottery by the Sarmatians have been practically unexplored and are an interesting direction for future scientific research.

²¹ KROPOTOV 2010, 131.

²² KORPUSOVA 1983, Fig. 10/15; Tab. XVI/10.

²³ KORPUSOVA 1983, 39, 99.

²⁴ PUZDROVSKIJ/ZAJCEV 2004, 237, Abb. 5/3.

²⁵ PUZDROVSKIJ 2007, 171.

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