

# LATE ROMAN UNGUENTARIA OF DUROSTORUM



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**Abstract.** *Among late antique pottery, there is a particularly interesting type spread throughout the Mediterranean. In scholarly literature, these vessels are mostly known as late Roman unguentaria and early Christian ampullae. They have a characteristic shape, and some of them also have a stamp. The question regarding the purpose of late Roman unguentaria is not fully clarified and two groups of opinions can be distinguished. The first one connects them with the Christian religion, and the second one considers them as trade items for personal use.*

*Until now, on the territory of Bulgaria, late Roman unguentaria have been documented in Odessus (13 items), Aquae Calidae (1 item), and Augusta Traiana (1 item). To them, the seven Durostorum specimens, the subject of this article and found during the study of the Roman villa on Patriarch Euthymius St., were also added. Above the base of six of them, there are stamps known from other sites. Although the function of the Durostorum unguentaria cannot be established with certainty, they extended and completed the picture of their distribution in the Balkan provinces and Moesia Secunda in particular.*

**Keywords:** *Durostorum, late Roman unguentaria, stamp, religion, trade items*

Among late antique pottery, there is a particularly interesting type spread throughout the Mediterranean. In scholarly literature, these vessels are mostly known as late Roman unguentaria and early Christian ampullae, but there are other alternative names, too, such as balsamaria, amphoriskoi, amphorenförmige Pilgerfläschchen (Hayes, 1971, p. 243; Hayes, 1992, pp. 8–9; Vroom, 2005, p. 47)<sup>1</sup>. Metaxas suggested the term *early Byzantine ampullae*, as she believed it best fitted the chronological and geographical framework, the Christian character, and the

nature of monograms (Metaxas, 2005, 70). The term was also previously adopted by Al. Minchev (Minchev, 1992, p. 135).

Unguentaria were made on potter's wheels from well-purified fine clay and have different colours depending on the firing temperature (beige, reddish, brown, and grey). About two thirds of the upper parts of the vessels are covered with reddish or brownish engobe. The vessels have a fusiform body, a tapering neck with a thin sharp edge at the end towards the base, a pointed massive base, and average dimensions of 18-20 cm (Hayes, 1971, p. 243). The vessels were closed with round flat stoppers placed in the mouth and finger pressed, as can be seen in the Perge, Laodikeia, and Myra specimens. Since the clay plugs may not have been sufficient to prevent the contents of unguentaria from leaking, they were probably further sealed

<sup>1</sup> This article uses the term *late Roman unguentaria*. In Late Antiquity, *ampullae* was the name commonly given to vessels associated with pilgrimage. Since it is not clear what their contents were and whether they were used only for religious purposes, it seems more appropriate to use the term *unguentaria* instead of a name ascribing only a limited function (Dundar, 2008, p. 35).

with cloth or other similar material, or additional wooden stoppers may have been placed over them (Firat, 2003, p. 94, pl. LXVII; Türker, 2005, p. 313; Öz, 2022, pp. 69–70, pl. 3, № 3, 6, 7; Şimşek & Duman, 2007, p. 289, fig. 10, 18). Al. Minchev explained the fact that most of the unguentaria were fragmented precisely by their method of closure and suggested that it was done with solid stoppers that were additionally sealed, and the only way to open them was to carefully break off the neck (Minchev, 1992, p. 134).

In some of the unguentaria, in the lower part of the body, at the base, there is a round or rectangular stamp containing a monogram or an inscription, animal motifs, or a small cross. The role of the stamps is not clear and various possibilities are assumed: names of manufacturers, indication of contents, guarantee of authenticity and quality, legitimation and control (Hayes, 1971, p. 245; Baldoni & Franco, 1995, p. 124; Mexatas, 2005, pp. 94–95; Özüdoğru & DüNDAR, 2007, p. 150; Minchev, 1992, pp. 134–135; Martorell, 2023, pp. 184–188). According to G. Semeraro, it is more likely that the stamps were connected to the manufacturers of the contents, who were also the buyers of the vessels since they were made in pottery workshops to their order. Thus, the stamps had an “administrative” function and served as “labels” (Semeraro & Aquilino, 2021, p. 68).

The question regarding the purpose of late Roman unguentaria is not fully clarified and two groups of opinions can be distinguished. The first one is that they had a religious function and were associated with liturgy and late antique pilgrimage, and holy water or myrrh was transported in them from the Holy Land. But because of their wide distribution, it is rather believed that they did not just have a liturgical function but were used both in the church and in the homes of the faithful (Hayes, 1968, p. 214; Hayes, 1971, pp. 244–247; Eisenmenger, 2003, p. 195; Brazinski, 2014, 31). The clearest example that Hayes cited in support of the religious association of unguentaria was a stamp on a Rhodes specimen, which had a round shape and an inscription “of Bishop Severianus” (CEYHPIANOY EΠIKKO<ΠOY>), which did not refer to the bishop that ran the pottery workshop, but rather his name was used as a guarantee for the contents of the vessels, which apparently had value to the Church (Hayes, 1971,

pp. 244–245). The same stamps bearing the name of Bishop Severianus were found at other sites, too (Bilgin, 2013, kat. № 228-232; Özüdoğru, 2018, p. 44, fig. 37). The name of another bishop is also known from stamps from Iasos and Hierapolis: EPACINOY EΠIKKO(ΠOY) (Baldoni & Franco, 1995, p. 121, fig. 5, 29; Semeraro & Aquilino, 2021, p. 59, fig. 2, 11). A proof of the connection of late Roman unguentaria with Christianity are some recent-year studies showing that such vessels were also found in places of religious significance: Laodikeia, Hierapolis (Şimşek & Duman, 2007, p. 286; Semeraro & Aquilino, 2021, pp. 59–61). Unguentaria are also associated with the cult of St. Nicholas in Myra and their manufacture was linked to it (Türker, 2005, pp. 319–320; Ötüken, 2003, p. 240). Similar are also the stamps from Tripolis and Cibyra depicting St. Philip, buried in Hierapolis, whose cult was associated with healing practices (D’Andria, 2017, pp. 169–170, fig. 37-39; Akgül-Özarlan, 2015, p. 205, fig. 12a-b; Özüdoğru, 2018, p. 43, fig. 35).

Although it cannot be said with certainty that all the monograms related to the church, the Christian symbols and names of bishops support this view, and it is believed that at least the monogrammed unguentaria with medicinal and healing properties were used to transport religion-associated liquids. It is possible that the stamps contained not only the names of private individuals and bishops, but also the name of the holy water, i.e. the medicine transported in the unguentaria and distributed for therapeutic purposes (Özüdoğru & DüNDAR, 2007, p. 150). Examining the specimens found in the area of the Perge stadium (68 items), the authors noted that almost all of them that had no monograms were broken along the edge at the end of the neck, while the stamped specimens were broken near the stamp. Therefore, they believed the vessels had been broken as part of a possible ritual (Kılınç et al., 2023, p. 136).

According to the other opinion, the vessels were trade items for personal use with a purely utilitarian function, and in them various extracts, perfumes, oils, and spices were transported. Arguments for this can be found in the context of their location – mainly at sites related to civil architecture, as well as in their overall characteristics (crude appearance, unsophisticated make, and

lack of decoration) (Firat, 1999, p. 91; Mexatas 2005, p. 69). For example, Al. Minchev, who published the Odessus ampullae, believed that some volatile, highly aromatic balm or perfume, or even more likely, some famous and highly valued medicine was placed in them. And since it was widely spread, most of the vessels had no stamps, but were of a characteristic shape (Minchev, 1992, pp. 134–135).

The late antique unguentaria were dated to the mid-5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century (Eisenmenger, 2003, p. 195; Dündar, 2008, p. 36; Vroom, 2005, p. 247). Overall, Hayes dated them to around A.D. 500/520–650, with the specimens with stamps belonging, more or less exclusively, to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and by the 7<sup>th</sup> century they were no longer in use, which did not yet automatically mean that the vessels were made later (Hayes, 1971, p. 245). Based on both the archaeological materials and contexts as well as the development of the monograms and the distribution pattern, Metaxas agreed with Hayes's assumption that early Byzantine ampullae, a term she believed to be the most appropriate, were stamped only during a specific period of their manufacture in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. According to her, this also explained the uneven ratio between the stamped and unstamped specimens, the latter belonging to the earlier and later periods of manufacture (Metaxas, 2005, pp. 88–91).

Unguentaria were widespread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea region: Constantinople, Assos, Ephesus, Antioch, Cybira, Patara, Limira, Myra, Perge, Hierapolis, Tripolis, Laodikeia, Sagalassos, Nikaea, Athens, Cartagena, Tarragona, Odessus, Crimea, etc. (Hayes, 1971, pp. 243–248; Hayes, 1992, pp. 8–9; Baldoni & Franco, 1995, pp. 121–128; Baldoni, 1999, pp. 131–137; Metaxas, 2005, pp. 67–123; Arslan, 2004, pp. 224–226, fig. 6, 64–69; Özüdoğru & Dündar, 2007, pp. 145–177; Dündar, 2008, pp. 33–37, kat. № U205–U209; Eisenmenger, 2003, pp. 193–196; Türker, 2005, pp. 311–327; Öz, 2022, pp. 59–89; Bilgin, 2013; Bilgin, 2018, pp. 117–122; Kılınç, 2023, pp. 135–156; Semeraro & Aquilino, 2021, pp. 57–73; D'Andria, 2017, pp. 168–170; Duman, 2018, pp. 352–354; Şimşek & Duman, 2007, pp. 285–307; Degeest et al., 1999, pp. 247–262; Meriç, 2018, p. 75; Sánchez & Martín, 2008, pp. 151–176; Martorell, 2023, pp. 173–196; Minchev, 1992, pp.

127–136). This spoke of manufacture in very large quantities, which was an indication of mass demand and extensive trade connections.

The place of manufacture of the type was not clear, but the Greek monograms indicated an eastern Mediterranean origin. Based on the uniformity of the clay, Hayes believed there was a single source of manufacture, possibly Palestine (Hayes, 1971, p. 246). Firat suggested Anatolia because of the large number of specimens found there (Firat, 1999, p. 93), and according to Eisenmenger, their origin might have been Cyprus, Palestine, or Jordan (Eisenmenger, 2003, p. 195). Other possible centres might have been Northern Syria, Cilicia, and Southern Asia Minor with Rhodes (Metaxas, 2005, pp. 93–94). Based on the number of vessels found in Constantinople and other areas, Minchev believed that the capital of the empire was the more likely place of manufacture, from where vessels were distributed by sea to the port cities and then to the interior (Minchev, 1992, p. 135). At Hierapolis, eight different clay mixtures were found, which suggested the existence of multiple manufacture centres (Cottica, 2000, pp. 999–1008), and the unguentaria found in the area of the Perge stadium were divided into four groups depending on the clay (Kılınç et al., 2023, p. 136). The Cibyra data showed manufacture rejects as well as three different colours after firing, which suggested that this type of pottery may not have been manufactured in every city, but in some central settlements in regions such as Cibyra or Ephesus (Özüdoğru & Dündar, 2007, p. 153).

In Laodikeia, a chemical analysis of the contents of some of the unguentaria was made and they were found to be organic in nature. Therefore, regardless of the vegetable liquid contained in the religious vessels, it was believed to have healing properties (Şimşek & Duman, 2007, p. 296). Baldoni believed that the presence of “hardened resin” in identical specimens from Syracuse supported the hypothesis that they were primarily used as vessels for holy oil, possibly for transporting holy water, too, since in the Iasos unguentaria there were no remains of the contents (Baldoni & Franco, 1995, pp. 121–122). An analysis was also made of the resin contained in an unguentarium from the Küçükçekmece Lake (Bathonea). The substances *methanone* and *phenanthrene*, having psychoactive, anti-inflammatory, disin-

fectant, and immune-strengthening properties, were found, which made it clear that unguentaria were used as containers for storing and transporting medicines. In addition, the context where the specimen was found also contained various-sized mortars and pestles used in the pharmaceutical process (Kaya, 2018, p. 41). Research in Hierapolis showed the presence of traces of vegetable and animal origin, with part of the biomarkers extracted from various vegetable remains pointing to plants characteristic of the Mediterranean and the southwestern coasts of Turkey. The research data suggested that the contents of late Roman unguentaria had two formulas: a quite liquid ointment and a thicker balm or pomade, with the resins found having recognized pharmacological properties (Semeraro & Aquilino, 2021, pp. 62–67).

Late Roman unguentaria are relatively rare for Bulgaria. So far, such were found in Varna (13 items), *Aquae Calidae* (1 item), and *Stara Zagora* (1 item), but it is fully expected that there are some among the pottery from other Bulgarian sites (Minchev, 1992, pp. 127–136; Nikolov, 2016, pp. 395–397; Nikolov & Kalchev, 1986, pp. 39–66). With the limited number of unguentaria found on the territory of Bulgaria, the seven *Durostorum* specimens<sup>2</sup> extended and completed the picture of their distribution in the Balkan provinces and *Moesia Secunda* in particular.

Cat. No. 1 (Old Inventory No. 1970; Roman villa, north-east of the exedra of room no. 4, depth 1.10 m) (Fig. 1, 1; Fig. 2, 1<sup>3</sup>). Of fusiform shape, made of well-purified clay without impurities that acquired a brick-red colour after firing, with a three-parted core of grey colour in the middle. On the inside, there are wide cannelures and distinct furrows left by the potter's wheel when shaping the vessel. On the outside, there are bumps and furrows. The base slightly expands, but is uneven and not well shaped, which does not allow the vessel to stand upright. The upper part is covered with brown-red and grey-

black engobe that oozed unevenly down the body. In the lower part of the vessel, a little bit above the base, there is a round stamp with a diameter of 1.1 cm and an embossed monogram (Fig. 1, 1a). The mouth and part of the neck are missing. Preserved height 17.7 cm, diameter 4.4 cm, base 1.5 cm. A stamp with the letters X, A, M, Δ, A was found in Constantinople, Cibyra, Perge, and the Küçükçekmece Lake (Hayes, 1992, pl. 16, 11; Özüdoğru & Dündar, 2007, pp. 157–158, fig. 13–14, 16, U5; Bilgin, 2013, kat. № 77; Kaya, 2019, fig. XCVII, fig. 1a, b). The stamp shares characteristics with another found at significantly more sites, for which the reading *Μηχαλες* (Meksales) was suggested (Gassner, 1997, no. 711; Hayes, 2008, pl. 90, № 1810; Metaxas, 2005, p. 79, № 6; Özüdoğru & Dündar, 2007, fig. 16, U4; Şimşek & Duman 2007, fig. 22, 03.08).

Cat. No. 2 (Old Inventory No. 1972; Roman villa, north-east of the exedra of room no. 4, depth 1.10 m) (Fig. 1, 2; Fig. 2, 2). Made of well-purified clay without impurities that acquired a brick-red colour after firing, with a three-parted core of grey colour in the middle. On the inside, there are distinct furrows left by the potter's wheel when shaping the vessel. The base is pointed, uneven. Traces of red-brown engobe. A little bit above the base, there is a stamp with a diameter of 1.1 cm and an embossed monogram identical to Cat. No. 1 (Fig. 1, 2a). The upper part of the vessel is missing. Preserved height 10.2 cm, preserved diameter 4.1 cm, base 1.4 cm.

Cat. No. 3 (no inventory number) (Fig. 1, 3; Fig. 2, 3). Made of well-purified clay without impurities that acquired a grey colour after firing. On the inside, there are wide cannelures. The base is pointed, uneven, which does not allow the vessel to stand upright. Traces of red-brown engobe. A little bit above the base, there is a stamp with a diameter of 1.2 cm and an embossed monogram identical to Cat. No. 1 and 2 (Fig. 1, 3a). The upper part of the vessel is missing. Preserved height 8.5 cm, preserved diameter 3.8 cm, base 1.5 cm.

Cat. No. 4 (Old Inventory No. 1971; Roman villa, north-east of the exedra of room no. 4, depth 1.10 m) (Fig. 1, 4; Fig. 2, 4). Of fusiform shape, made of well-purified clay without impurities that acquired a brick-red colour after firing, with a three-parted core of grey colour in the middle. On the inside, there are wide can-

<sup>2</sup> The field diary of the Roman Villa site on Patriarch Euthymius Street from 7-8 March 1975 reads: "Five fusiform little amphorae have been found, with preserved dimensions of 10 to 17 cm. They were made of well-purified clay fired to grey-red or red. Some of them have monograms on them."

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Kristian Mihaylov for the graphic presentation of the late antique unguentaria.

nelures and furrows left by the potter's wheel when shaping the vessel. On the outside, there are some bumps. The base is pointed, uneven, which does not allow the vessel to stand upright. The upper part is covered with brown-red engobe that oozed unevenly down the body. In the lower part of the vessel, a little bit above the base, there is a round stamp with a diameter of 1.1 cm and an embossed monogram (Fig. 1, 4a). The mouth and part of the neck are missing. Preserved height 16.8 cm, diameter 4.5 cm, base 1.2 cm. Stamp: a monogram with a centred cross and the letters E, O and Υ in ligature, Γ and Λ, reading Εύλογίου. The same stamp, though with very small differences in some of the specimens, was found at several other sites such as Cibyra, Constantinople, Perge, Ephesus, and the Küçükçekmece Lake (Hayes, 1992, pl. 16, № 44; Metaxas, 2005, 84, № 30; Özüdoğru & Dündar, 2007, 158, fig. 13-14, 16, U7; Bilgin, 2013, kat. 16, № 166-168, 171, 173, 203; Kaya, 2019, XCIII, fig. 2a, b).

Cat. No. 5 (Field Inventory No. 17; Roman villa) (Fig. 1, 5; Fig. 2, 5). Of fusiform shape, made of well-purified clay without impurities that acquired a brick-red colour after firing, with a core of brown/grey colour in places. On the inside, there are wide cannelures and furrows left by the potter's wheel when shaping the vessel. On the outside, there are some bumps. The base is pointed, which does not allow the vessel to stand upright. Part of the body is covered with dark grey engobe that oozed unevenly down the body. In the lower part of the vessel, a little bit above the base, there is a round stamp with a diameter of 1.2 cm and an obscure monogram (Fig. 1, 5a). The mouth, neck, and part of the body are missing. Preserved height 13.1 cm, diameter 4.5 cm, base 1 cm.

Cat. No. 6 (no inventory number; Roman villa) (Fig. 1, 6; Fig. 2, 6). Of fusiform shape, made of well-purified clay without impurities that acquired a brown colour after firing, with a core of red brown/dark grey colour. On the inside, there are cannelures and furrows left by the potter's wheel when shaping the vessel. The base is pointed, uneven. Part of the body is covered with brown-black engobe. No stamp. The mouth, neck, and part of the body are missing. Preserved height 13.2 cm, diameter 4.1 cm, base 1.3 cm.

Cat. No. 7 (missing; Field Inventory No. 4; Roman villa, north-east of the exedra of room No. 4, depth 1.10 m)<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 2, 7). Clay fired to grey. The neck, bottom, and part of the belly are missing. Stamp: a round stamp with an embossed monogram. Preserved height 15.5 cm. Represented in this way in the field inventory book, the monogram bears a resemblance to a stamp found at the Küçükçekmece Lake. The block monogram is developed around the letter Π, and the reading EPAPKOU is suggested, interpreted as the title of a local administrator (Aydingün et al., 2013, p. 42, fig. 1, a-b; Kaya 2019, CII, fig. 6, kat. № 451)

In the case of the Roman villa (specimen No. 8), where the late Roman unguentaria of Durostorum were found, two construction periods and architectural plans can be clearly distinguished. The construction of the early building is dated to the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century; the late antique building with the apse and its adjacent bath building are dated to the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and its abandonment – to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. (Donevski, 2006, p. 214). Based on the vertical stratigraphy of the basilica discovered 80 m from it, G. Atanasov suggested a later dating in relation to the late antique period of construction. According to him, the ancient villa was destroyed during the Second Gothic War of Emperor Valens, and the building with the apse was erected only at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century or during the restoration of Dorostol after the Hun invasion in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and represented the episcopal residence from the 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century. (Atanasov, 2005, p. 104)<sup>5</sup>.

There is no information about the context in which the unguentaria were found, as well as about the lifting material, and the only information is related to their location, i.e. north-east of the exedra of room No. 4 (4 items), Roman villa (3 items). This makes it difficult to date them, and

<sup>4</sup> The description provided and the form of the stamp and the monogram are according to the field inventory book of the site (Field Inventory No. 4).

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the available information does not allow specifying the individual construction periods and the development of the complex as a whole. The field documentation only contains a field diary of 17 handwritten pages, the number of finds is very limited (44 items), a large part of the ceramic material is missing, and what is stored as mass material in most cases has no context of location.

what can be indicated is only the *terminus post quem* – the time of Constantine I (A.D. 306–337), the possible time of erection of the late antique building judging by a coin found in the hypocaust of one of the smaller rooms to the west of the hall with the apse, and the *terminus ante quem* – the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, when Durostorum was captured and destroyed during one of the Avaro-Slavic invasions. But considering the time of manufacture and distribution of the vessels, the lower limit must be at least a century later, i.e. the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Durostorum unguentaria, the clay is uniform: well purified and sifted, with, at first glance and without a chemical analysis, a difference only in the colour acquired after firing, as well as in the colour of the engobe. Six of the seven specimens have round, embossed stamps (three identical, one obscure), i.e. there are three different monograms (Fig. 1,2). It cannot be said whether the stamps indicated that the unguentaria contained different substances, or that they referred to the persons responsible for authenticity or manufacture, as the question as to their function is still open.

If we consider Atanasov's opinion that the building was erected as a palace of the bishops of Durostorum, then the religious function of the unguentaria seems completely logical, and the dating between the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century fits into the chronological framework accepted for this type of vessels. And vice versa, based on their presumed function related to liturgy and pilgrimage, the late Roman unguentaria may be evidence, albeit uncertain, of the character of the late antique complex in question.

The location of the unguentaria on the territory of Bulgaria points rather to items used in everyday life and related to hygiene and health.

Seven of the thirteen Varna specimens were found in baths (Cat. No. 2 – the Roman bath on Primorski Blvd., No. 8-13 – Roman *thermae*) (Minchev, 1992, pp. 131–132). Similar to them, the *Aquae Calidae unguentarium* was found in excavations in the late antique bath area, which was believed to be indirect evidence that its contents (fragrant oil, perfume, scented water) were used during or immediately after bathing (Nikolov 2016, p. 397). The Stara Zagora vessel orig-

inates from one of the seven studied dwellings, i.e. No. 3, built on the ruins of the earlier buildings A and B. During the study, many finds were discovered, and the latest coins were of Maurice Tiberius (582–602). (Nikolov & Kalchev, 1986, pp. 50–51, Cat. No. 13, fig. 15, 1). The location of the Silistra unguentaria does not exclude their connection to the bath located immediately next to the great hall with the apse and the possibility that their contents were used precisely for hygienic or therapeutic purposes.

The examined late Roman unguentaria of Durostorum were found with the so-called by Metaxas "Ephesian" early Byzantine amphoriskoi found in Ephesus in contexts of the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries. (Metaxas, 2005, pp. 97–101, fig. 9) or unguentarium? Agora M 369 (Robinson, 1959, p. 118, pl. 34). These characteristically shaped vessels are common in the Mediterranean region and are believed to have been manufactured in western Asia Minor as the clay used contained mica. Metaxas noted that there was only one assumption about their contents: oils and perfumes (Metaxas, 2005, pp. 97–98 and literature cited therein). In Ephesus, such amphoriskoi were mostly found near or at the very harbour, which suggests that they were intended not only for local use but also for export. They are thought to have been manufactured in the Ephesus area and shipped from there. During the mineralogical-petrographic analysis, it was found that there was a resin coating on their inner surface, which led to the assumption that they were used for storing and transporting wine (Sauer & Ladstätter, 2005, p. 133). Metaxas noted the resin was a local one, i.e. colophony, but ruled out the possibility of it being the contents of the amphoriskoi because of its solid state. In this case, resin was used to seal the originally water-permeable ceramic vessels – a procedure for storing wine used since ancient times. But their function as wine vessels is somewhat unacceptable because of the small size of some of the amphoriskoi, at least as far as sizes I and II are concerned. The possibility that they contained oils was also excluded, as oils dissolve resin (Metaxas, 2005, pp. 100-103).

The three Durostorum amphoriskoi (Fig. 3) belong to the category of medium-sized vessels, i.e. have a capacity of about 150-220 ml (accord-



ing to Metaxas, 2005, p. 100)<sup>6</sup>. If they were used for storing and transporting wine, considering their small capacity, they could have been used in more special cases, e.g. in contexts of religion and possibly liturgical practice (on ancient liturgy, see Hammond & Brightman, 2006). Should this be accepted, then their discovery together with the late Roman unguentaria could be evidence for the function of the latter. But still, in no case can we exclude that the amphoriskoi were used in everyday life, and that wine, if indeed this was their content, was highly valued and sought after, and despite the small capacity of the amphoriskoi was the object of trade at greater distances, as in the case of Durostorum.

Although the question of the function of late Roman unguentaria is still open as both assumptions about their religious or utilitarian role are well backed with arguments, the Silistra specimens provided important information about the distribution of the vessels by adding another destination city on the map. It is not clear whether they were distributed through the large shopping centre Odessus which according to Al. Minchev supplied the interior of the Balkans or at least Moesia Secunda with unguentaria (Minchev, 1992, p. 136) or whether their route to the said areas was different, but their discovery shows that their contents, whatever they were, were known and valued for their qualities.

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<sup>6</sup> In one of the amphoriskoi, part of the neck is preserved, and in the others, it is missing, so their exact dimensions cannot be given, but the diameter at the widest part of the body is 7.3, 6, and 5.9 cm respectively.

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## APPENDIX



Fig. 1. 1-6. Late roman unguentaria from Durostorum and stamps.

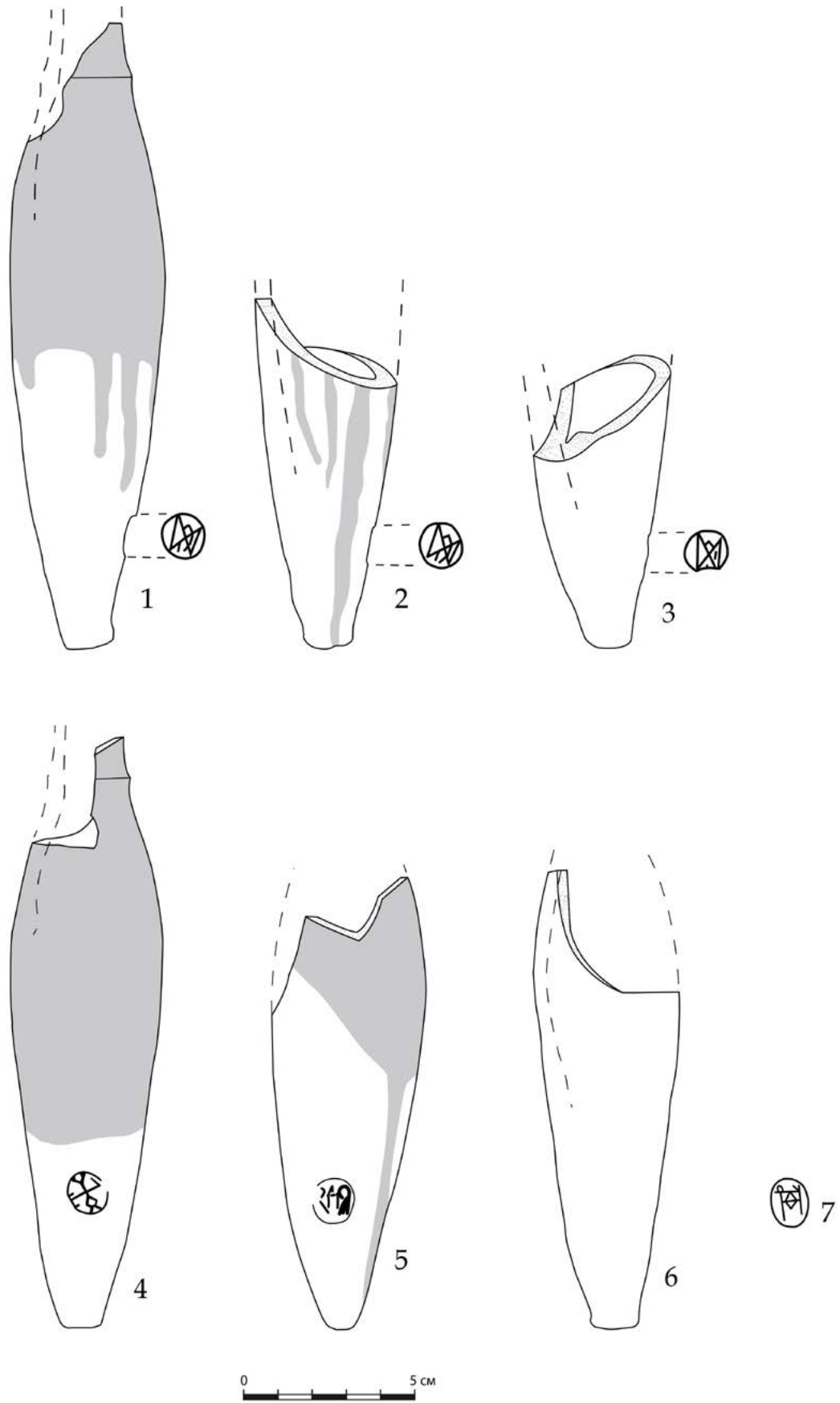


Fig. . 2. 1-7. Late roman unguentaria from Durostorum (after K. Mihaylov)..



Fig. . 3. So-called “Ephesian” early Byzantine amphoriskoi from Durostorum..