

---

VLADIMIR I. KAC

## COLCHIAN AND 'PSEUDO-COLCHIAN' AMPHORAE AND STAMPS

---

In the middle of the last century practically simultaneously among the ceramic ware which has been found in the Northern Black Sea area and Western Georgia, the vessels which received the conventional name '*amphorae in brown clay*' were allocated into separate series.

On settlements of the Northern Pontic Coast, in layers from the mid 4th century BC until the early Middle Hellenistic time, fragments of 'brown clay' amphorae make, though rather small, but steady group of ceramic containers. I. B. Zeest presumably attributed them to one of the Southern Black Sea centers<sup>1</sup>. The fabrics of all these vessels have very similar clay matrix and also of profiled parts. The clay of amphorae is rough, with various shades of brown color, plenty of quartz sand and black particles of pyroxene. The earliest vessels of this series are similar to Sinopean amphorae in shape too. To tell the truth, many of them had helicoid curl on an internal surface of a bottom — a detail not characteristic for Sinopean vessels.

'Brown clay' amphorae making a significant percent of the ceramic containers which were found on settlements of Western Georgia and given the similarity (of course, firstly determined only visually) of this ware to the fabric of local pottery, Georgian archeologists stated the assumption of their Colchian origin<sup>2</sup>.

If the hypothesis about manufacture of ceramic ware in Colchis was positively recognized practically by all scholars, the question was disputable on what concrete types of 'brown clay' containers were produced. So, Ju. G. Vinogradov and N. A. Onajko attributed to Colchis only a part of these vessels, while conceding the rest of this ware to Heraclea (without giving arguments)<sup>3</sup>. B. Ju. Mikhlin, who devoted a special research to 'brown clay' amphorae, allocated three types of this containers: he attributed two of them to centers of South Pontus, the third being defined as Colchian<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, the dominant opinion was that all 'brown clay' amphorae were made in Colchis.

Recently this hypothesis was asserted actively by G. R. Tsetskhladze. More than ten articles and notes (some of them written in collaboration) appeared from

---

<sup>1</sup> I. B. Zeest, *Keramičeskaja tara Bospora*, Moscow, 1960, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> R. V. Puturidze, *Kolkhidskie amfory iz Vani*, KSIA 151, 1977, p. 68-71.

<sup>3</sup> Ju. G. Vinogradov and N. A. Onajko, *Ob ekonomičeskikh svjazjakh Geraklei Pontijskoj s Severnym i Severo-Vostočnym Pričernomor'em v ellinističeskoe vremja*, SA, 1975, 1, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> B. Ju. Mikhlin, *Amfory 'koričinevoj' gliny iz Severo-Zapadnogo Kryma*, SA, 1974, 2, p. 60-67.

the beginning of 1990s both in Russian and in foreign journals<sup>5</sup>. Perhaps, the most substantial of these contributions, in which the hypothesis turned for G. R. Tsetskhladze to an axiom, is his paper published in the collection *The Greek amphorae*<sup>6</sup>. The most important argument for him became the results of the comparative petrographic analysis of clay 'brown clay' amphorae published by S. Ju. Vnukov in the same collection<sup>7</sup>.

S. Ju. Vnukov chose for the analysis 28 samples occurring mainly from Western Crimea, and 29 fragments from vessels (21 – from amphorae, 5 – from pithoi, 1 – from a jug and 2 – from kitchen ware), found in three basic regions of Colchis (Abkhazia, Adžarija and the valley of the river Rioni). For comparison, some ten samples from reliably localized amphorae from such Pontic centers as Heraclea, Sinope and Chersonesus were used<sup>8</sup>.

This analysis deserves high estimation, however the conclusions offered by S. Ju. Vnukov are not indisputable. It is possible to agree that the clay fabric of all 'brown clay' vessels has a number of the steady attributes allowing to distinguish it reliably from the clay of Sinope, Heraclea and Chersonesus. However, the conclusion that all of them were made in one extensive region and that this region was therefore Western Georgia<sup>9</sup>, is not proved enough.

Petrologic studies showed that two clear petrologic 'nucleus' (subgroups A and B1) are to be distinguished, in which samples are interconnected very strongly, and communications between 'nucleus' are traced more poorly. Thus, if the subgroup A is rather homogeneous, extensive 'train' of samples of subgroup B2 adjoins to subgroup B1<sup>10</sup>.

Undoubtedly, we may attribute to Colchis only the samples of subgroup B2. Their basic mass belongs to vessels (to amphorae, pithoi and kitchen ware) found in this region. Certain doubts are caused by attributing the amphorae belonging to subgroup B1 to Colchis. First of all, from 11 analysed samples only 2 were found in Western Georgia. Secondly, and this is more important, the clay of samples of this subgroup is practically similar to the clay of the vessels included in the subgroup A. The distinction between them consists in the less careful fabric of the vessels of subgroup B1. As S. Ju. Vnukov quite reasonable assumes, distinctions between subgroups A and B1 could be connected to work of different workshops

---

<sup>5</sup> V. V. Soznik and G.R. Tsetskhladze, *Kolkhidskie amfory ellinističeskogo perioda v Khersonese*, VDI, 1991, 2 ; S.Ju. Vnukov and G. R. Tsetskhladze, *Kolkhidskie amfory Severo-Zapadnogo Kryma*, in *Pamjatniki železnogo veka v okrestnostjakh Eypatorii*, Moscow, 1991 ; G. R. Cecchladze, *Die kolchischen Stempel*, Klio 73, 1991 ; G. R. Tsetskhladze, *Organization of ceramic production in Colchis during the Hellenistic period*, Eirene 27, 1991 ; G. R. Cecchladze, *Colchian amphorae : typology, chronology and aspects of production*, ABSA 87, 1992 ; G. R. Tsetskhladze and S. Ju. Vnukov, *Les amphores colchidiennes*, Anatolia antiqua 2, 1993 ; G. R. Tsetskhladze, *Grečeskoe proniknovenie v Vostočnoe Pričernomor'e : nekotorye itogi i perspektivy*, SA, 1998, 3.

<sup>6</sup> G. R. Tsetskhladze, *Proizvodstvo amfornoj tary v Kolkhide*, in *Grečeskie amfory*, Saratov, 1992, p. 90-110.

<sup>7</sup> S. Ju. Vnukov, *K voprosu o meste proizvodstva koričnevoglinjanykh amfor Severnogo Pričernomor'ja*, in *Grečeskie amfory*, Saratov, 1992, p. 68-89.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 70-71.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 74-75.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78-79.

of one region<sup>11</sup>. And this region, judging by the characteristic attributes of the clay of the samples of subgroup A, should be searched outside Western Georgia.

As quality admixture for the clay of subgroup A was used pyroxen-basalt sand. A similar temper was used in Sinope. However the clay matrix of Sinopean and 'brown clay' amphorae of a subgroup A considerably differs. Thus, the question of a common origin of both series of vessels from one center (Sinope) is removed, but this rather high factor of similarity needs an interpretation.

It is hardly possible to accept as indisputable the explanation given by S.Ju. Vnukov to these facts. He believes that vessels of subgroup A were made in Colchis by Sinopean masters using their own technology but the local clay and considers that the admixture for such manufacture was imported from Sinope<sup>12</sup>. As analogy, he refers to a similar practice in Chersonesus<sup>13</sup>. Such explanation and analogies are apparently quite reasonable. However, one circumstance does not seem reliable, i.e. that in Colchis the vessels included in subgroup A represented apparently a small percent among all the finds of 'brown clay' containers. In fact, all the samples of this subgroup which were submitted to analysis belong to vessels which were found in the Northern Black Sea area. In S. Ju. Vnukov's and G. R. Tsetsckhladze's opinion, it testifies that almost all the amphorae production of Greek masters who worked in the territory of Western Georgia was made for export<sup>14</sup>. It is a fantastic explanation which does not find analogies in other Greek centers which exported ceramic containers. In particular, it concerns Chersonesian amphorae made by 'Sinopean technologies'. The most part of such vessels was found during the excavations in Chersonesus itself.

It is indicative that in the Colchis 'brown clay' amphorae of the first centuries AD are represented poorly<sup>15</sup>. An explanation to this fact is seen in the destruction of the settlements of this region in the middle of Ist century BC and its desolation during several centuries<sup>16</sup>. Meanwhile, for example, on the investigated monuments of Northwest Crimea the layers dated to Ist century BC – Ist century AD produce the majority of fragments of so-called 'Colchian amphorae'<sup>17</sup>. In Gorgippia cellars of houses of the first centuries AD are literally hammered with fragments of 'brown clay' containers. These data are additional acknowledgement of the fact that the great mass of the given vessels came to Northern Black Sea area not from Western Georgia, but from another region located somewhere on the Southern Black Sea coast.

Therefore, it is quite legitimate that the publishers of 'brown clay' amphorae from the museum of Samsun designated them as 'pseudo-Colchian'<sup>18</sup>. Practically

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> S. Ju. Monakhov, *Amfory Khersonesa Tavričeskogo IV-II vv. do n.e. Opyt sistemnogo analiza*, Saratov, 1989, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> S. Ju. Vnukov, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 86 ; G. R. Tsetsckhladze, *Grečeskoe proniknovenie...*, p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> G. R. Tsetsckhladze, *Proizvodstvo amfornoj tary...*, p. 101-104.

<sup>16</sup> O. D. Lordkipanidze, *Drevnaja Kolkhida*, Tbilisi, 1978, p. 214-215.

<sup>17</sup> S. Ju. Vnukov et G. R. Tsetsckhladze, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 177.

<sup>18</sup> D. Kassab Tezgor et M. Akkaya, *Les amphores « pseudo-colchidiennes » du musée de Samsun*, Anatolia Antiqua 8, 2000.

simultaneously, I stated the assumption that the great part of 'brown clay' amphorae from the Northern Black Sea area could have been made in Trapezus<sup>19</sup>.

Probably, these ideas forced S. Ju. Vnukov to change essentially his earlier conclusions about the place of manufacture of these ceramic containers. In the summary of his report on the round table in Batumi and Trabzon (April, 2006)<sup>20</sup> he admits that it is now possible to explain the 'brown clay' amphorae only hypothetically. Probably, the manufacture of similar vessels was initially organized by Sinopean potters in a Pontic centre which had close connections with Sinope and whose geological features were similar, on the one hand, with Sinope, and, on the other hand, with Colchis. The most suitable place for similar manufacture area is Trapezus (?), the Greek city which lies on the Southern borders of 'the land Colchis' (Xen., *Anab.* 4.8.22).

When we accept such hypothesis, it becomes clear why in native areas of Colchis amphorae of the first kind of clay (variant A), used for import of wine in this region, occur from the middle of 4th century BC and why the local manufacture of ceramic ware of the second kind of clay (variant B) is located in the same area. The prototypes for local amphorae were, therefore, the imported vessels.

Colchian origin of all 'brown clay' amphorae is in contradiction with the stamps, which were impressed sometimes on these vessels. The most extensive report of these stamps has been produced by G. R. Tsetskhladze<sup>21</sup>. Among these stamps, there are doubtless Colchian 9 marks engraved on vessels before firing (see Fig. 1.1 - 9) and two unepigraphic stamps (see Fig. 1.10 - 11). All of them were found in inland areas of Colchis.

To the production of workshops of this region now unconditionally belong also the amphorae containing reversed two-lower stamps **DIOS/KOU** (see Fig. 1.12). There are rather strong reasons for this localization. From 15 known stamps of this series only 5 have been found outside Colchis, i.e. in Panticapaion and Nymphaion. Other stamps were found in the area of Suhumi: one in Eshera and nine in a complex discovered in the settlement Gvandra<sup>22</sup>. To tell the truth, the complex is not estimated unequivocally. Ju.N. Voronov characterizes it as 'a potter kiln'<sup>23</sup>, A. N. Ščeglov and N. B. Selivanova as a residual pit of a ceramic workshop<sup>24</sup>, and S.Ju. Vnukov as an usual garbage pit<sup>25</sup>. Anyway, it is not an indisputable argument for local manufacture of amphorae bearing the stamps **DIOS/KOU** and it does not allow seeing in this legend the abbreviated name of the

---

<sup>19</sup> V. I. Kac, *Amfory Kolkhidy ; mih i dejstvitel'nost'*, in *Meždunarodne otnošenija v bassejne Černogo mor'ja v drevnosti i srednie veka*, Rostov on Don, 2001, p. 50-53.

<sup>20</sup> S. Ju. Vnukov, *Problems of 'Brown clay' (Colchian) Amphora Studies. Typology, Chronology, Production Centers, Distribution*, in *Production and trade of amphorae in the Black Sea*. Internet: [www.patabs.org](http://www.patabs.org).

<sup>21</sup> G. R. Cecchladze, *Die kolchischen Stempel...*; idem, *Proizvodstvo amfornoj tary...*, p. 104, fig 8.

<sup>22</sup> G. K. Šamba, *Amfornye klejma Dioskurii*, *Izvestija Abkhazskogo Instituta jazyka, literatury, istorii (Sukhumi)* 5, 1976, p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> Ju. N. Voronov, *K izučeniju keramičeskogo proizvodstva Dioskuriady*, SA, 1977, 2, p. 163.

<sup>24</sup> A. N. Ščeglov and N. B. Selivanova, *Optiko-petrografičeskoe issledovanie klejmenykh amfor IV-III vv. do n.e.*, in *Grečeskie amfory*, Saratov, 1992, p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> S. Ju. Vnukov, *O vydelekhih raznovidnostej koričnevoglinjanykh amfor*, in *Problemy istorii, filologii, kul'tury* (Moskva - Magnitogorsk) 10, 2001, p. 161.

Greek city of Dioskurias lying on the place of modern Sukhumi. We cannot rule out the possibility that these stamps mention the personal name Dioskos in the genitive. Thus, the suggested localization of this series of stamps is not indisputable, while the whole forms of vessels are not yet known. Anyway, their clay considerably differs from the 'brown clay' amphorae and represents a quite independent petrographic type which does not have analogies<sup>26</sup>.

We note a completely different view concerning the epigraphic stamps on amphorae of this type. G. R. Tsetschladze knew only one series of such stamps with the name of Timarchos, represented by thirty samples which were found in the settlements of the Northern and Western Black Sea coast<sup>27</sup>. Thus, the common opinion was that these stamps belonged to Heraclea Pontica. However, the finding of a neck of a typical 'brown clay' amphora with such stamp (see Fig. 2.1) is a decisive argument denying such localization.

Already now the list of stamps on 'brown clay' amphorae can be essentially completed. It is strange that in G. R. Tsetschladze's and V. V. Soznik's special work devoted to Colchian amphorae from Chersonesus<sup>28</sup> there is no mention of stamps of two other types, kept in funds of a museum, which are on fragments of 'brown clay' amphorae. To tell the truth, a round monogram (see Fig. 2.5) is on the neck of a vessel of the first centuries AD, but other three rectangular two-lower stamps, impressed by different dies and containing two names, one of which being Myrsilos (see Fig. 2.2 - 4), undoubtedly belong to the Hellenistic period.

The last series represents special interest, for similar stamps executed by the same and other dies are also met in other settlements of the Northern Black Sea regions. One of them was seen by E. M. Pridik who, wrongly restoring in the second line the title of an eponym, added Myrsilos to the list of Chersonesian astynomes<sup>29</sup>. Similarly, E. I. Štaerman attributed to Chersonesus a stamp of the same type found in Tiritaki<sup>30</sup>. Because these stamps differ from the usual Chersonesian ones, scholars never believed that there are serious reasons to attribute them to Chersonesus, where only three samples of this kind were found. In the manuscript of IOSPE III, stamps bearing the name Myrsilos are placed under the heading 'Cnidian'<sup>31</sup>.

In a rather recent paper, N. F. Jefremov analysed this series of stamps and compiled the catalogue of all the dies containing the name Myrsilos we know today<sup>32</sup>. Though the quantity of the stamps is rather insignificant — only 14 samples —, the distribution of the finds is wide enough and covers all the regions of the Northern and Western Black Sea Coast in which stamps of Timarchos are also met. The name of Myrsilos almost always stands in the genitive case, while

---

<sup>26</sup> A. N. Ščeglov and N.B. Selivanova, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> G. R. Tsetschladze, *Proizvodstvo amfornoj tary...*, p. 107-109.

<sup>28</sup> V. V. Soznik and G.R. Tsetschladze, *op. cit.* (note 5).

<sup>29</sup> E. M. Pridik, *Die Astynomennamen auf Amphoren und Ziegelstempeln aus Südrussland*, Berlin, 1926, p. 168, no. 89.

<sup>30</sup> E. I. Štaerman, *Keramičeskie klejma iz raskopok Mirmekija i Tiritaki v 1935-1940 gg.*, MIA 25, 1952, p. 394.

<sup>31</sup> IOSPE III, 1579-1586.

<sup>32</sup> N. F. Jefremow, *Die Amphorenstempel des Myrsilos*, Klio 76, 1994.

the second occurs both in genitive and in nominative. After having analysed dialectal and onomastic features of the inscriptions of this series, N. F. Jefremov came to the conclusion that not Chersonesus, but one of the Southern Black Sea centres is the most probable place of manufacturing 'brown clay' vessels with these stamps. Heraclea Pontica could be in his opinion the best candidate, because it manufactured similar amphorae in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC<sup>33</sup>.

However, it is not clear what late Heraclea amphorae are meant: the amphorae made here in the second half of the 3rd century BC, are not known. The vessels of the first half of this century bearing stamps of the 'late Fabricant's Group'<sup>34</sup> do not have anything in common with the stamps of the Myrsilos group. At least, the big percent of the second name of Myrsilos series coincides with the names occurring on Sinopean stamps<sup>35</sup>.

In this connection, the series of Myrsilos can be an additional though indirect argument that the possible centre of manufacture of 'brown clay' amphorae was Trapezus, situated on the Eastern frontiers of the Sinopean Peraia. This city, though included in the Sinopean state, had a significant autonomy which is attested by its coinage<sup>36</sup>. Thus, the manufacture of ceramic containers which imitated the form of Sinopean amphorae about the middle of the IVth century BC and the export of a part of this production are quite probable.

The practice of stamping amphorae in this centre had no constant character. It reached a relatively wide circulation only for the workshop of Timarchos. During a short interval (possibly, only one year, under the magistrate Myrsilos) this workshop was practically identical with all the ceramic production of city. It is hardly possible to doubt that Myrsilos was an eponym and the second names in of this series belonged to the owners of workshops. Judging by the palaeographic features of the stamps, they cannot be earlier than the end of the 3rd or the beginning of the 2nd century BC. It is possible that they occurred after the beginning of the 2nd century BC, when Sinope was seized by Pharnaces I. Trapezus became independent, an attempt was made to establish the control over ceramic manufacture like in Sinope, but this attempt obviously failed: further, like in Chersonesus, where monograms have been stamped, stamps (probably, of fabricants) appear extremely seldom.

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 268-269.

<sup>34</sup> V. I. Kac, *A New Chronology for the Ceramic Stamps of Herakleia Pontike*, in P. Guldager Bilde, J. M. Højte et V.F. Stolba (ed.), *The Cauldron of Ariantas. Studies presented to A.N. Ščeglov on the occasion of his 70th birthday*, Aarhus, 2003, p. 270, 277.

<sup>35</sup> N. F. Jefremow, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

<sup>36</sup> V. E. Maksimova, *Antičnie goroda Jugo-Vostočnogo Pričernomor'ja. Sinopa, Amis, Trapezund*, Moscow, 1956, p. 220.

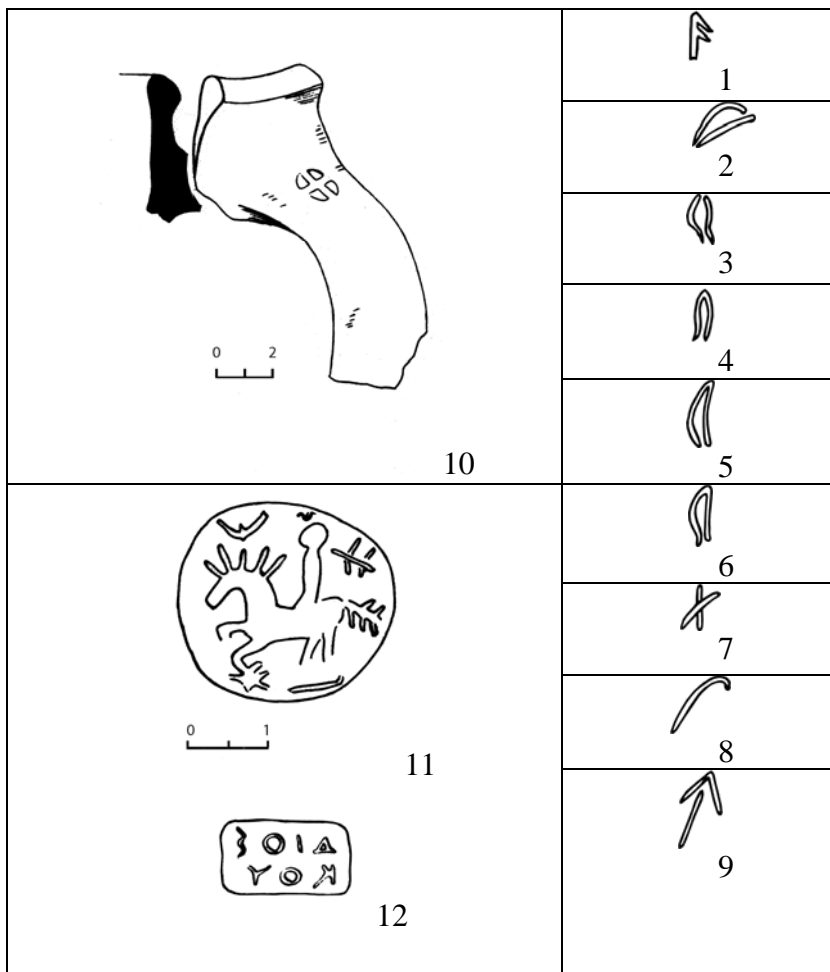


Fig. 1. The marks and the stamps on Colchian amphorae: 1–9 – marks engraved on the vessels before the firing; 10–11 – unepigraphic stamps; 12 – stamp of Dioskurias (?) (G. R. Tsetskhladze 1992, fig. 8).

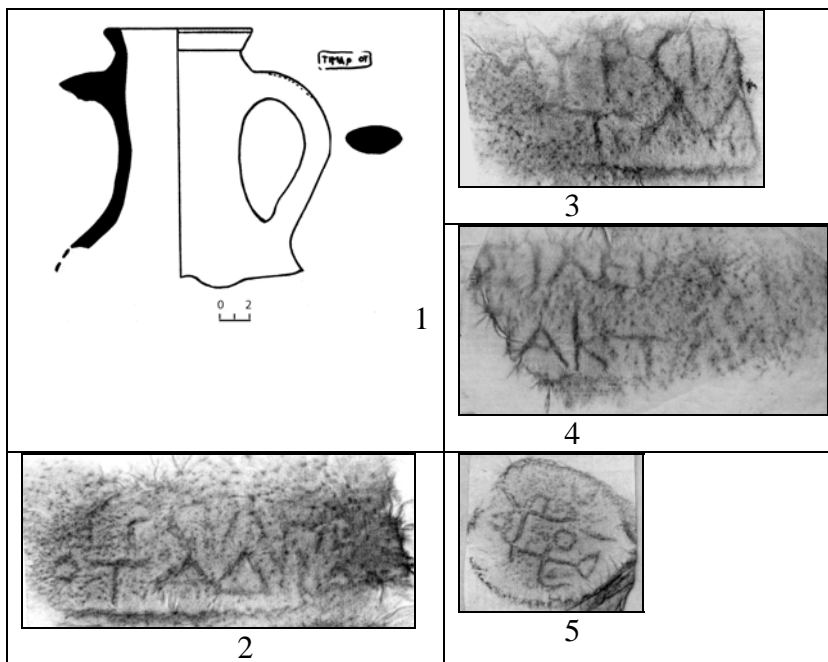


Fig. 2. The stamps on 'Pseudo - Colchian' amphorae: 1 - throat of an amphora with the stamp of *Timarchos* (G. R. Tsetskhladze 1992, fig. 8, 1); 2 - 4 - stamps of the series of *Myrsilos* from Chersonesos (2-3 - potter *Sotades*; 4 - potter *Hiarax*); 5 - monogram from Chersonesos.