

## AN EGYPTIAN JAR STAMPED WITH THE CARTOUCHE OF RAMSES II IN BUCHAREST



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**Abstract:** One unexpected artifact lies in the collection of the Museum of National History in Bucharest (inv. no 121.543). It is a fragmented handle of a storage jar stamped with the cartouche of Ramses II, one of the rare known specimens recorded outside Egypt. Belonging to the private collection of engineer Ion Mititelu, the stamped handle was donated to the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest and later transferred in 1976 to the Museum of National History of Bucharest, where it was included in a larger collection of 163 amphora stamps. Its original place of discovery is unknown.

**Rezumat:** În colecțiile Muzeului de Istorie Națională din București se află un obiect neobișnuit (nr. inv. 121.543). Este vorba despre toarta unui vas pentru depozitare având o șampilă cu cartușul lui Ramses al II-lea, unul dintre rarele exemplare cunoscute în afara Egiptului. Piesa a aparținut colecției private a inginerului Ion Mititelu și a fost donată Institutului de Arheologie din București. Ulterior a fost transferată, în anul 1976 la Muzeul Național de Istorie din București și inclusă într-o colecție mai mare care cuprinde 163 de șampilile de amfore. Locul inițial de descoperire al acestei piese este necunoscut.

**Keywords:** Ancient Egypt, New Kingdom Period, 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, Ramses II, amphora, stamp.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Egiptul Antic, Perioada Regatului Nou, Dinastia a XIX-a, Ramses al II-lea, amforă, șampilă.

### PROVENANCE

The stamped Egyptian handle of Bucharest was firstly in a private collection of the engineer Ion Mititelu together with about 163 various Greek amphora stamps. All these stamps have been donated in 1943 to the Museum of Antiquities of the Archaeological Institute “Vasile Pârvan” of Bucharest (IAB), which transferred it in 1976 to the National Historical Museum of Romania (MNIR). After 2000, Nicolae Conovici intended to publish this collection but, unfortunately, his premature death blocked his project in 2006. After his death, I was with the study of this collection in order to publish it. A preliminary presentation was firstly made in 2009 at the 3<sup>rd</sup> PATABS Congress, still unpublished.<sup>1</sup>

The private collection was formed before 1943, being composed of items of various provenance and strength. The collector, I. Mititelu recorded all the stamps, giving totals for each identified variety of them and specific information about the registered pieces that attracted his attention, namely all about the well known centres such as Thasos, Rhodes, Heraclea Pontica, Sinope and others. Concerning most of the Greek amphora stamps,

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<sup>1</sup> It was firstly communicate by myself at the third edition of PATABS (Production and Amphora Trade in the Black Sea) at Constanta in 2009, staying unpublished until now. See, N. Conovici, V. Lungu, *Les timbres amphoriques de la collection Ion Mititelu du Musée National d’Histoire de la Roumanie – Bucarest*, in Buzoianu, L., Lungu, V. & Dupont, P. (eds.): *Production and Trade of Amphorae in the Black Sea (PATABS) III*, Pontica 46, Supplementum II, (Constanța 2013), 350, abstract. At present, I currently share the task of the Greek stamps publication with Thibaut Castelli.

summary information pieces about their places of discovery are preserved in the archives of the Archaeological Institute “Vasile Pârvan” of Bucharest (IAB), except about the Egyptian one. There are no traces of it among the archives of both state institutions about the history of this handle of Egyptian storage jar (amphora) or about the steps undertaken by his initial owner to purchase it.

## DESCRIPTION

The fragmentary handle (Figs. 1a-b) is ascribable to a storage jar made of typical coarse Egyptian clay, dark brown inside, with numerous chalky white pigments and other dark inclusions visible on surface and also in section; the surface is covered with a diluted yellowish white slip.<sup>2</sup>

The stamp impression in the cartouche is located on the visible side of the handle, and close to the upper handle attachment. The cartouche has an ovoid body and a flat stamp face. It was carefully made before firing, except the right side failing to be fully stamped. The relief hieroglyphs are projecting out from the stamped oval frame (overall dim. 3.5 × 1.7 cm). In its preserved state, the outline of the cartouche is not completely visible, but all the signs preserved inside the cartouche are decipherable, showing a raised depiction of specific hieroglyphs.

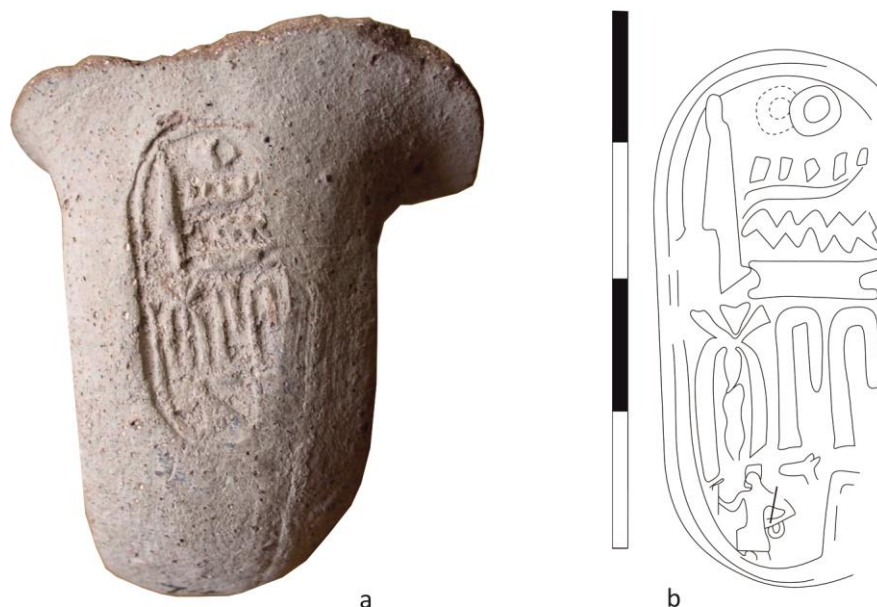


Fig. 1. a. Fragmentary handle of an Egyptian stamped amphora; b. drawing for the cartouche.

## LECTURE OF THE STAMP

Before his death, Nicolae Conovici obtains some personal information from Pierre Tallet and Laurent Coulon, both famous French Egyptologists, giving a first deciphering of the first lines of the stamp. Further evidence for this identification was collected by me in 2006 from Prof. Jean-Claude Goyon by personal letter and completed lastly by Lilian Postel, *via* Pierre Dupont.<sup>3</sup> According to their common opinion, the stamp delivers the following text: *tA Hwt*

<sup>2</sup> About fabrics, see Bourriau 2004, 79, with bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> My gratitude goes to Jean-Claude Goyon (deceased as soon as), Pierre Tallet, Laurent Coulon, Lilian Postel and Pierre Dupont for sharing their experience with us.

*Ra-ms-sw mry-(n)-'Imn = Ramessu mery Amun.* The birth name of the king *Ra-ms-sw* is here associated with Amun's name by the epithet *mry-'Imn*, and the translation of the first lines of this stamp is: *Temple of Ramses loved by Amun/ beloved of Amun.*<sup>4</sup> Lilian Postel help us with the lecture of the last line of the stamp which preserves clearly the beginning of another text - *t3 hwt*, of the consecrated formula - *t3 hwt R'-mss Mry-'Imn*, namely « the foundation of Ramses Meryamon ». This is a common formula, typical for the beginning of the name of several cultural foundations settled by Ramses II, and differentiated by the addition of specific epithets, like deities with epiclesis, toponyms, or geographic and institutional accuracy.

The cartouche itself may be similar to others like one drawn in red, found at the palace site identifying Ramses the Great at Abydos. It appears on 'the stones of the inauguration and the establishment of the temple' inscribed with a sun disk and other symbols related to Ramses II, found recently by the joint American-Egyptian team.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes blue faience plaques with the name of the same pharaoh within a cartouche were also buried in foundation deposits such as the examples found in a foundation deposit at the temple of Ramses II in Western Thebes (the Ramesseum) preserving the name of Ramses II [Acc. Nr.1846a-d].<sup>6</sup>

## CHRONOLOGY

This stamped jar may be attributed to Ancient Egypt and dated from the New Kingdom Period, i.e. the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty or Ramesside Period, in the reign of Ramses II, ca. 1279 to 1213 BC being a useful dating tool.

Generally, the royal names appearing into a cartouche impressed on the handle of jars are common at various periods and for various pharaohs.<sup>7</sup> The New Kingdom would see dozens of kings adorned with this particular title *mry-'Imn*, *loved by Amun* or *beloved of Amun*.<sup>8</sup> Numerous similar finds are published from the Theban region, more precisely from the Ramesseum, essentially dated in the first two decades of Ramses II reign, or from the site of Deir el-Medineh, dating back from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty and of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty<sup>9</sup>. There is a reason to attribute the cartouche to the first years of Ramses II when he builds the Ramesseum, the funerary temple in the Theban area.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Ramesside Inscriptions*, II, 337; the stamp of Bucharest is a combination of two formulae illustrated by Von Beckerath 1984, 236-239: E7 for the first lines, and T15 for the last; see also the second edition of 1999, 154-155, 3:E2.

<sup>5</sup> See, <https://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/ramesses-great-0011681>.

<sup>6</sup> See, <https://egyptmanchester.wordpress.com/tag/ramesses-ii>.

<sup>7</sup> For pottery bearing a stamp impression with the royal name of the Eighteenth Dynasty, usually amphorae: see Nagel 1938, 129 (1922 M), one from Deir el-Medina with the name of Tuthmosis I; amphorae with the names of Hatshepsut, Tuthmosis III, and Amenophis II from Deir el-Medina, cf. Bruyère 1934, 76. For pottery bearing a stamp impression with the royal name of the Nineteenth Dynasty, see Spiegelberg 1898, pl. L, n. 2, 3, and 4.

<sup>8</sup> On ancient royal titulary, see Leprohon 2013, 114-120; on the function of the royal names, see Gaber 2014, 55-82.

<sup>9</sup> Spiegelberg 1898, pl. L, n. 2, 3, and 4; Guichard 1995, 81, fig. 2. The pharaoh Ramses II was also known as Ramesses II, or Rameses the Great.

<sup>10</sup> For the history of Ramesseum, see Leblanc 2019.

## TYPE OF JAR

The stamped handle belongs to a storage jar, interpreted as a transport amphora. It is a neck container, with ovoid body, fitted with two opposite vertical handles on either side, attached at the starting point of the shoulder. A new type was promoted in Ramses II time and testified by examples from Ramesseum.<sup>11</sup> It is characterised by a wider body than previously and by a distinctive carinated base<sup>12</sup>, thus suggesting the continuity of this lineage of wine and other liquids (olive oil or honey, for example) containers.<sup>13</sup> It seems to be the type which corresponds to the discussed stamp of Bucharest. But, these amphorae were not all stamped. Recent studies on these storage and transport jars have generated new ideas about stamped handle-impressions. It is generally assumed that the royal cartouche identifies the manufacture under royal control of Egyptian amphorae production.<sup>14</sup>

The wine was commonly intended to be carried in these amphorae, the Ramessid specific identification marks of which were often discussed in relation with a highly productive period during the extremely long reign of this king.<sup>15</sup> Typologically, this Egyptian jar may be assimilated to other examples of the New Kingdom Egyptian amphorae intended for wine content<sup>16</sup>. The earliest known examples belongs to the period ranging from the mid-13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty to the early Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1700-1070), including an important production sequence all along the New Kingdom.<sup>17</sup> It is explained by the fact that “the King’s offering of wine to the gods becomes a significant part of the royal ritual”.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the ceremonial of wine drinking in Egypt was performed using jars and amphorae which sometimes bore the royal impressed cartouches. Ranging from the time of the Eighteenth Dynasty down to the time of Ramses II, these stamped jars are the best evidence for the adoption of the banquet practices. Ugarit, in the Levantine kingdom, where the largest number of such inscribed jars has been found, is the best example of the wine practice and the adoption of Egyptian banquet practices using jars and amphorae.<sup>19</sup> But, the content of wine is not exclusive, and such amphorae served also to store and transport other liquids as oil and honey.

## SOME CONSIDERATIONS

The attribution of the stamp of Bucharest to king Ramses II of the Nineteenth Dynasty is as certain as its attribution to the Theban region. The royal mark stamped on this fragmentary handle is similar to other specimens found elsewhere, suggesting that they are issued from a common royal workshop of manufacture.<sup>20</sup>

However, it is difficult to interpret the presence of an Egyptian collected jar handle without information on the original context, considering the general lack of contacts

<sup>11</sup> Lecuyot 2012, 115, fig. 2/1-3.

<sup>12</sup> Aston 2004, 191, and fig. 8a.

<sup>13</sup> On the wine and oil productions in Pharaonic Egypte, see Meeks 1993; Tallet 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Bourriau 2004, 80, with bibliography.

<sup>15</sup> See Aston 1998, 56-57 and 354-355; Hope 2001, 26-27 and 43-44. For the amphorae of the new Kingdom, see particularly Hope 1989; Aston 2004; Budka 2015.

<sup>16</sup> For Rhamses II amphora type, see also Aston 2004, 179, fig. 2, 182, fig. 3, c. early, and 13, d, late.

<sup>17</sup> Bourriau 2004, 80, with bibliography.

<sup>18</sup> Bourriau 2004, 90, with bibliography. For other rituals, see, for example, Poo 1995, 71-85, with summary studies on the wine function in funerary practices.

<sup>19</sup> Caubet 2013, 231.

<sup>20</sup> See, note 9.

between the Black Sea and Pharaonic Egypt. As I know, no other similar stamps from the New Kingdom are published from archaeological contexts or private collections in Romania. The lack of Egyptian material from this area is less surprising given the distance and the absence of contacts before the Hellenistic period when the Egyptian objects appear only sporadically in various maritime sites records, but they are attested in terms of indirect exchanges, *via* middlemen from Crete and Rhodes, especially when compared to the large amounts of Rhodian amphorae found on the western and northern Pontic coasts. This view is mainly based on the relative scarcity of Egyptian pottery finds made in Pontic settlements. The earliest references made on the western littoral are dating back to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>21</sup> Presumably, this intercourse between Egypt and the western Black Sea was of indirect, diplomatic nature, and might have been connected with various official steps all along the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, when the first two Ptolemies were involved in the area. The first Egyptian objects which appear only sporadically in the Pontic record at this time can be related to this period.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, I suppose that the jar bearing such a stamp can only be issued from an Egyptian (or Levantine?) context, either from an unidentified tomb, jar's workshop or palatial space, a hypothesis supported by the identification of the royal name of Rameses II on this stamp, although impossible to confirm by further evidence as yet. Presumably, this stamped handle might have been bought on the antiquities market by its first owner or received as a gesture of friendship, or in exchange for other objects from other collectors.

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<sup>21</sup> Lungu 2007.

<sup>22</sup> See, Avram 2003.

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