

## NEW DISCOVERIES ON THE MIDDLE PRUTH RIVER: A RARE TYPE OF SINOPEAN AMPHORA

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**Keywords:** *amphora, Sinope, Pruth, slavs*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *amforă, Sinope, Prut, slavi*

The lack of rainfall recorded in the summer of 2015, which led to a decrease in the water flow of Pruth, enabled the Border Police of Iași to retrieve a whole amphora from the riverbed (Fig. 1-2). The point where the discovery was made is in the locality of Zaboloteni (commune of Trifești). Furthermore, a field survey was performed in the area, but no other archaeological materials were found. Currently, the vessel is part of the collections of the Moldavian History Museum in Iași, being recorded under the inventory number 23753.

The amphora has the following sizes: height = 52.5 cm; maximum diameter = 20 cm; mouth diameter = 8.5 cm; depth = 50 cm. The item is very well preserved, after being cleaned up and conserved<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 3).

The item discovered features a series of characteristic elements<sup>3</sup>: the rim is slightly thickened and everted, not fully rounded, reason for which it has an irregular shape; the shoulders are slightly wider, and the neck is cylindrical; the handles are oval in section, they attach in the upper part several millimetres from the rim. The body of the amphora is conical because, from the shoulder area, it becomes thinner in the lower part and it ends with a narrow bottom; the foot is shaped like a round dome; the ribs on the shoulders have a flat appearance, and the waves on the upper side of the lower body are slightly windy. These stripes are highlighted by grooves; on the rest of the body, grooves are deeper and more

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth stating that Loredana Solcan, PhD, was among the persons who enabled the introduction of the item within the museum. Furthermore, on this occasion we express our gratitude to restorer Arina Hușleag with the Centre of Restoration and Conservation within the "Moldova" National Museum Complex Iași.

<sup>3</sup> For some bibliographical suggestions and information regarding the typological classification of the container, we wish to send our gratitude to the following researchers: Dorel Paraschiv, PhD (Eco-Museum Research Institute "Gavrilă Simion" Tulcea – History and Archaeology Museum) and Ștefan Honcu, PhD (Romanian Academy, Iași Branch – Institute of Archaeology).

distanced, but in the lower part, they are more apparent<sup>4</sup>. The fabric, of a reddish ochre hue (Munsell: 7.5 6/6-7/6), is dense, with a few intrusions of fine pyroxene and mica particles. The height of this type of container varies between 59 and 67 cm, and the maximum diameter between 19 and 27 cm. The capacity ranges between 6 and 7 litres<sup>5</sup>, but the one of our amphora is 5 litres. In case of amphorae within this category, resin was found inside<sup>6</sup>, which stands to show that they were designed for a certain product, namely wine<sup>7</sup>. Dominique Kassab Tezgör, in the classification made for the amphorae of Sinope, includes this type of the variant *D Snp II*<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 4). Hence, this form of amphora was produced in the workshops of Demirci, a centre situated 13 Km south of Sinope. Archaeological researches performed here have highlighted the industrial area where pottery hearths were concentrated, for the pottery used from the second throughout the seventh century. Usually, in their production centre, these amphorae are dated through coins from Justinian I (AD 527-565), Justin II and Sophia (AD 565-578), which shows that their production took place in the second quarter of the sixth century AD, and even in the early years of the subsequent century<sup>9</sup>.

This type of amphora is extremely rare; there are very few items found even among the materials of the production workshop<sup>10</sup>. At Sinope, they have discovered a few integral items: one of them is in the city museum<sup>11</sup>, while the other in the private collection of Ismail Karakan<sup>12</sup>. Two amphorae of the same type are preserved in the Museum of Amasra, and another one in the museum of Ereğli<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> To describe the amphora, we used as model the study of the researcher D. Kassab Tezgör, *Typologie des amphores sinopéennes entre les II<sup>e</sup>-III<sup>e</sup> s. et le VI<sup>e</sup> s. ap. J.-C.*, in eadem (dir.), *Les fouilles et le matériel de l'atelier amphorique de Demirci près de Sinope*, Varia Anatolica XII, Istanbul-Paris, 2010, p. 135, pl. 20/2, 7.

<sup>5</sup> A. Opaït, D. Paraschiv, *Rare amphora finds in the city and territory of (L)Ibida (1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD)*, in *Rei Cretarie Romanae Fauctorum*, Acta 42, Bonn, 2012, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> D. Kassab Tezgör, S. Lemaitre, D. Pieri, *La collection d'amphores d'Ismail Karakan à Sinop*, in *Anatolia Antiqua*, XI, 2003, p. 178.

<sup>7</sup> A. Opaït, D. Paraschiv, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> D. Kassab Tezgör, *op. cit.*, pl. 20/2, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Eadem, *Le réseau commercial des amphores sinopéennes entre les II<sup>e</sup>-III<sup>e</sup> s. et le VI<sup>e</sup> s. de notre ère*, in D. Kassab Tezgör, N. Inaishvili (eds.), *PATABS I. Production and trade of amphorae in the Black Sea. Actes de la Table Ronde internationale de Batoumi et Trabzon, 27-29 Avril 2006*, Varia Anatolica XXI, Paris, 2009, p. 171.

<sup>10</sup> Eadem, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 135.

<sup>11</sup> Eadem, *La production sinopéenne et ses relations avec la Colchide à l'époque romaine*, in M. Faudot, A. Frayse, E. Geny (eds.), *Pont Euxin et commerce: la genèse de la "route de la soie". Actes du IX<sup>e</sup> Symposium de Vani (Colchide)-1999*, Institut des Sciences et Technique de l'Antiquité (Besançon), Presses Universitaires Franc-Comtoises, Paris, 2002, p. 203, fig. 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> D. Kassab Tezgör, S. Lemaitre, D. Pieri, *op. cit.*, p. 178, nr. 19, pl. IV/19, pl. 10/19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*; eadem, *op. cit.*, 2010, pl. 20/2, 7.

Most whole amphorae preserved in the museum collections on the Turkish Black Sea coast were discovered by accident, mainly within shipwrecks.

Such items are also well known on the northern Black Sea coast. At Chersonessus, a whole item with resin traces on the inside was retrieved from the gulf waters, and another one was discovered in complex no. 26 within the premises of the city (area VIII)<sup>14</sup>. In the east-Pontic area, Sinopean containers are known through the discoveries of Gudava<sup>15</sup>, Petra-Tsikhisdziri and Gonio-Apsaros (Georgia); in the last site, the amphorae were identified in layers dated through coins of Justinian I<sup>16</sup>. In Roman Dobrudja, the amphora type in question is illustrated through the discovery of a neck fragment at (*L*)*İbida* (Slava Rusă, county of Tulcea)<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 5).

It is worth mentioning that, north from the Danube, archaeological researches failed to find this type of amphora, which makes the item retrieved from the riverbed very important. Around 4 km north-west from the point where the vessel emerged, field surveys performed in 1983 by Vasile Chirica and Tamilia Marin in the commune of Bivolari, on the left slope (north-eastern) of the Trajan II pond, led to the discovery of a settlement pertaining to Late Antiquity. Six habitations were identified, where the predominant one was the local pottery material to which we add a series of amphora fragments “with deep, horizontal grooves”, of each those who discovered them said they “may also be dated after the fifth century AD”<sup>18</sup>. For the Middle Pruth area, we underline the discoveries of Iași - *Crucea lui Ferent*, where a semi-hut habitation was discovered<sup>19</sup>, which comprised a handmade pottery item and an open-hand fibula belonging to Werner class I D, dated in the second half of the sixth century AD<sup>20</sup>. Along the Pruth River (Manta

<sup>14</sup> L. A. Golofast, *Steklo rannevizantiiskogo Hersonesas*, in *Materiali po Arheologii, Istorii i Etnografii Tavrii/Materials in Archaeology, History and Ethnography of Tauria*, VIII, Simferopol, 2001, p. 120, fig. 79/1.

<sup>15</sup> D. Kassab Tezgör, N. Kebuladze, D. Lomitashvili, M. Zamtaradze, *Les sites de Gudava et d'İlari (Colchide): amphores de Sinope et amphores locales de l'époque romaine*, in *Anatolia Antiqua*, 15, 2007, p. 204, cat. 22, fig. 30.

<sup>16</sup> N. Inaishvili, M. Khalvashi, *Sinopean Imports on the Black Sea Littoral of South-West Georgia*, in D. Kassab Tezgör (ed.), *Sinope. The Results of Fifteen Years of Research. Proceedings of the International Symposium 7-9 May 2009*, Ancient civilizations from Scythia to Siberia 16, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2012, p. 502, fig. 8/3-5, 10/2-4.

<sup>17</sup> A. Opaîţ, D. Paraschiv, *op. cit.*, p. 117, fig. 19.

<sup>18</sup> V. Chirica, M. Tanasachi, *Repertoriul arheologic al judeţului Iaşi*, Iaşi, 1984, VI.5.C., p. 59, fig. 23/10.

<sup>19</sup> D. Gh. Teodor, *Descoperiri din secolele VI-VII e. n. la Iaşi. Crucea lui Ferent*, in *CI*, II, 1971, p. 119-124, fig. 1, 3/1-2.

<sup>20</sup> F. Curta, “Slavic” *Bow fibula: Twenty Years of Research*, in *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission*, 93, 2012, p. 39, table 2; idem, *Apariţia slavilor*, Târgovişte, 2006, p. 224-226, fig. 46.

and Colibași – the Republic of Moldova; Cârja, Sărățeni and Huși – county of Vaslui), and in the lower areas of the Bahlui River (Uricani and Popești – county of Iași), Jijia (Dumitreștii Gălății – county of Iași) and Elan (Horga – county of Vaslui), we have noted the presence of Byzantine bronze coins and of golden items (Oțeleni – county of Vaslui, Iași and Borolea – county of Botoșani), all from the time of Justinian I<sup>21</sup>. On the same path used for the circulation of Roman merchandises, several monetary items dating to Justin II were discovered, at Horga, Fălciu and Huși – county of Vaslui<sup>22</sup>. A similar situation to the one identified on the Pruth River is the one on Middle Dnieper where, in the area of the cities of Vyshgorod<sup>23</sup> and Kiev (Kiselivka, Podil)<sup>24</sup> a series of Pontic amphorae were discovered – through archaeological researches or retrievals from the river waters – such as the type Opaïț B Id/ Antonova XV/ Kuzmanov XVI. There were also unknown variants discovered, dated in the second half of the sixth century AD<sup>25</sup>. On the Kiselivka hilltop, bronze coins were discovered pertaining to the reigns of Anastasius I and Justinian I<sup>26</sup>.

The amphorae discovered at long distance from the production centres indicate the presence of remote commerce. Merchandises were transported along internal rivers<sup>27</sup>, upstream, using nautical hauling equipment<sup>28</sup>, from where they were subsequently distributed on land. It is worth highlighting that this type of small Sinopean amphora was very easy to transport. The discovery of a Byzantine amphora in the Lower Dnieper area, at Hortiția<sup>29</sup>, confirms the upstream

<sup>21</sup> C. Preda, *Circulația monedelor bizantine în regiunea carpato-dunăreană*, in *SCIV*, 23, 1972, 3, p. 379-388, fig. 1; V. M. Butnariu, *Răspândirea monedelor bizantine din secolele VI-VII în teritoriile carpato-dunărene*, in *BSNR*, 77-79, 1983-1985 (1986), pl. II; S. Musteață, *Moneda bizantină în regiunile carpato-nistrene în secolele VI-X*, Chișinău, 2014, p. 35-38, map 6; F. Curta, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 155, fig. 10, 11.

<sup>22</sup> S. Musteață, *op. cit.*, p. 42-45.

<sup>23</sup> O. M. Prihodniuk, *Arheologični pamjatki Serednogo Pridniprovija VI-IX st. n. e.*, Kiev, 1980, p. 54, 130, fig. 44/9.

<sup>24</sup> A. M. Șovkopljas, *Keramicieskie kompleksi s gori Kiselevki v Kieve*, in *KSLA*, 1957, p. 101, fig. 1; O. M. Prihodniuk, p. 54, 133-134, fig. 44/7 (for Podil); p. 133, fig. 44/8 (for Kiselivka); see also F. Curta, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 213-214, note 24, fig. 37, especially the distribution of other types of amphorae, other than Late Roman 1 and Late Roman 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 213-214, note 24.

<sup>26</sup> O. M. Prihodniuk, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>27</sup> Strategikon XI, 4, 32 (*Fontes Historiae Dacoromane*, II, published by H. Mihăilescu, Gh. Șefan, R. Hâncu, Vl. Iliescu, V. C. Popescu, Bucharest, 1970, p. 561): “their rivers discharge into the Danube and transport is easy using ships”.

<sup>28</sup> C. I. Munteanu, *Transportul de mărfuri pe căile navigabile din provinciile romane renane și dunărene (secolele I-III p. Chr.)*, Bibliotheca Brukenthal LXX, Sibiu, 2015, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> G. I. Șapovalov, *Jakir V-VII st. z Dnipra bilja ostrova Hortiția*, in *Arheologhija*, 1, 1990, p. 120-121.

navigation of heavy vessels on these fluvial routes. Furthermore, Slavs were renowned for their sailing skills; according to literary sources, they used light dugout boats<sup>30</sup>, which allowed the merchandises to be transported faster. Beyond any doubt, in this point or near this point, there was a traditional outlet for various products. The presence of local elite<sup>31</sup> – with the financial resources required for purchasing such items, without excluding barter, of course – made possible the existence of demand for luxury merchandises brought from long distance and traded by certain itinerant merchants. Some periods of relative peace<sup>32</sup> allowed the unfolding of commercial transactions where Roman goods – high quality wines included – constituted the main merchandises requested by the north-Danubian communities<sup>33</sup>. This is highlighted by the circulation of small coins in the first part of the reign of Justinian I; however, in the period 545-565, given the implementation of the strategic programme for the Danubian *limes*, the monetary circulation was interrupted. A profound crisis of exchanges between the local north-Danubian population and the empire led to a decreased flow of Roman goods in the *barbaricum*. Roman amphorae were mainly present in the settlements dated in the second half of the sixth century AD north of the Danube, when an economic boost was recorded during the reign of Justin II, marked by an even distribution of bronze coins with *folles* value east from the Carpathians<sup>34</sup>.

The unpublished material retrieved from the Pruth also allows an observation regarding the diversity of Sinopean amphorae identified north of the Danube. This discovery should not be considered a singular case and, beyond the attribution of a quite clear temporal space, namely the second half of the sixth century AD, it should be related to a series of previous economic realities. For the Pontic merchandises, comprising especially agricultural products (wine and olive oil), the eastern Carpathian area was a traditional outlet.

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<sup>30</sup> *Miracula Sancti Demetrii* (Paul Lemerle, *Le plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint Démétrius et la pénétration des slaves dans les Balkans*, I, *Le texte*, Paris, 1979): II, 1, 179-180 (p. 169-170 (175)); II, 4, 253 (p. 203 (214)); idem, *Le plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint Démétrius et la pénétration des slaves dans les Balkans*, II, *Commentaire*, Paris, 1981, p. 88, 121.

<sup>31</sup> For the presence of amphorae in graves belonging to the Avar elites of Pannonia, see G. Csiky, *Wine for the Avar elite? Amphorae from Avar period burials in the Carpathian Basin*, in G. R. Tsatskheladze, A. Avram, J. Hargrave (eds.), *The Danubian Lands between the Black, Aegean and Adriatic Seas (7<sup>th</sup> century BC-10<sup>th</sup> century AD). Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress on Black Sea Antiquities (Belgrade – 17-21 September 2013)*, Oxford, 2015, p. 175-182.

<sup>32</sup> C. Chiriac, *Expediția avară din 578-579 și evidența numismatică*, in *ArhMold*, XVI, 1993, p. 203; V. M. Butnariu, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>33</sup> D. Gh. Teodor, *Romanitatea carpato-dunăreană și Bizanțul în veacurile V-XI e.n.*, Iași, 1981, p. 28-29.

<sup>34</sup> F. Curta, *op. cit.*, 2006, p. 297; V. M. Butnariu, *op. cit.*, p. 207, pl. V.

This Late Roman amphora is evidence of “trade and continuity” in the Lower Danube area, but the most important aspect is the fact that it belongs to the barbarian area, hence at a considerable distance from the *limes*. Furthermore, it belongs to a period often characterized by instability; this phenomenon was generated by the numerous uprisings in the areas of modern day Moldavia and Walachia, determined, in their turn, by the invasions in the Empire, followed by replies from Romans or from their allies. The amphora of Zaboloteni completes the map of finds for the second half of the sixth century AD, thus confirming the existence of Roman imports in the north of modern day Moldavia, too. Future systematic or field surveys focusing of the commercial axis of the Pruth Valley will definitely provide new information on this period.

### NOI DESCOPERIRI PE PRUTUL MIJLOCIU:

#### UN TIP RAR DE AMFORĂ SINOPEANĂ

#### (Rezumat)

*Scăderea debitului de apă în râul Prut a dus la recuperarea, de către Poliția de Frontieră Iași, a unei amfore întregi din albia râului. Punctul unde s-a făcut descoperirea se află pe raza localității Zaboloteni, comuna Trifesti, județul Iași. Vasul, foarte bine conservat, se află în colecțiile Muzeului de Istorie a Moldovei Iași, fiind înregistrat la nr. de inventar 23753. Amfora, cu capacitatea de 5 l, are următoarele dimensiuni: înălțimea = 52,5 cm; diametrul maxim = 20 cm; diametrul gurii = 8,5 cm; adâncimea = 50 cm. Recipientul prezintă o serie de caracteristici, cum ar fi: buza are o formă neregulată, fiind ușor îngroșată și îndoită spre exterior; umerii sunt ușor mai largi, iar gâtul este cilindric; ansele, ovale în secțiune, se atașează în partea superioară la câțiva milimetri de buză; corpul amforei are o formă conică și se termină cu un fund îngust; piciorul este în formă de calotă rotundă; nervurile de pe umeri au un aspect plat, iar ondulațiile de pe partea superioară a burții sunt ușor curbate; aceste striuri sunt evidențiate de șanțuiri; pe restul corpului, onduleurile sunt mai pronunțate și distanțate, însă în partea inferioară acestea sunt mai puțin evidente. Pasta, de un ocră roșiatic (Munsell: 7.5 6/6-7/6), prezintă puține intruziuni de particule fine de piroxen și mică. Această amforă produsă la Sinope, aparținând tipului D Snp II (în clasificarea realizată de Dominique Kassab Tezgör), era destinată transportării vinului. Piesa se datează în a doua jumătate a secolului al VI-lea p. Chr. Descoperirea certifică existența unui comerț dinamic pentru arealul est-carpatic, mărfurile pătrunzând pe culoarul Prutului, fapt evidențiat și de circulația monedei mărunte de bronz din timpul împăraților Iustinian I și Iustin al II-lea.*

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*Așadar, această piesă inedită apare la distanță considerabilă de limes, într-o perioadă marcată deseori de instabilitate determinată de invaziile slavilor în Imperiu, urmată de replicile romanilor sau ai aliaților acestora.*

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- Fig. 5. Distribuția amforelor sinopeene de tip *D Snp II* (Suport hartă: Google Earth).

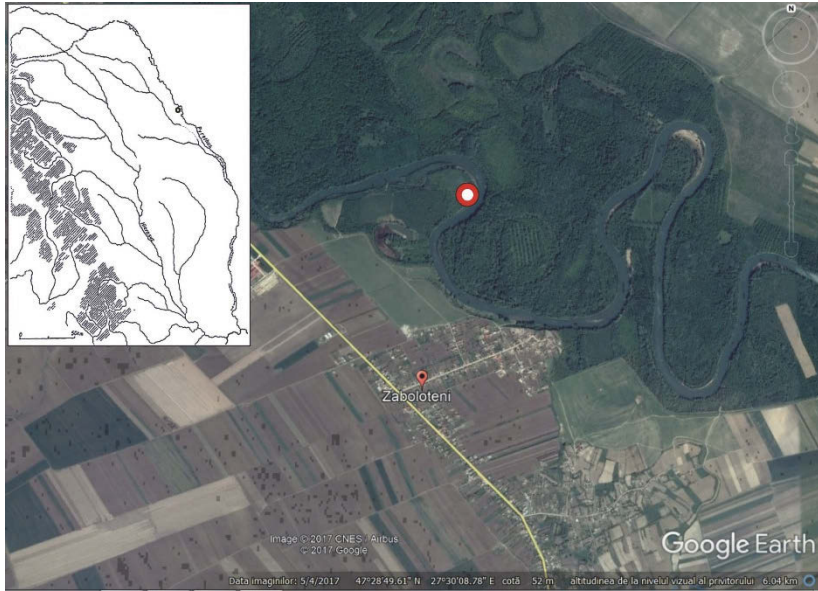


Fig. 1. Map location of the discovery (Map support: Google Earth)



Fig. 2. The channel of the Prut and the point where the vessel was retrieved (photo taken by the authors)





Fig. 3. The amphora discovered at Zaboloteni (drawing and photo)

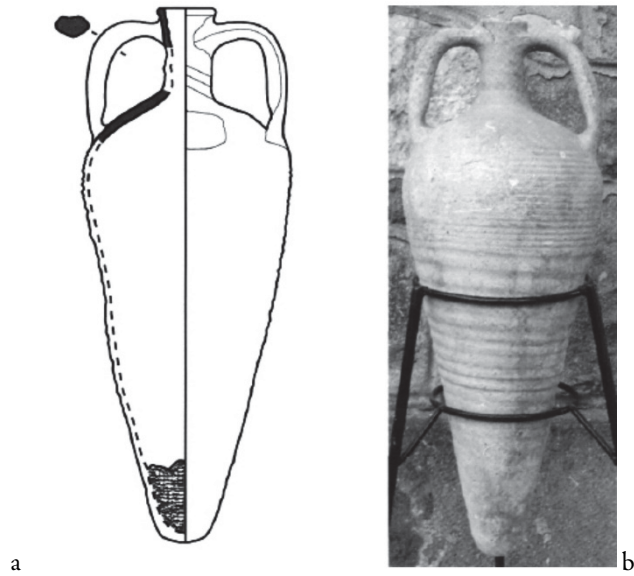


Fig. 4. Amphora type *D Snp II*: a. according to D. Kassab Tezgör, *op. cit.*, 2003, pl. X/19;  
b. according to D. Kassab Tezgör, *op. cit.*, 2009, pl. 99/4



Fig. 5. The geographical distribution of Type *D Snp II* Sinopean amphoras  
(Map support: Google Earth)