

# UNPUBLISHED GREEK TRANSPORT AMPHORAE DISCOVERED AT TOMIS

Irina NASTASI

**Keywords:** *Tomis, 5<sup>th</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC, imported amphorae, amphora stamps.*

**Abstract:** *This paper focuses on 9 amphorae discovered at Tomis (mod. Constanța) in the 1960's - 1970's, which were not yet included in any publication. Even though they come from disturbed contexts or from rescue excavations and cannot be related to any specific archaeological datable complex or stratum, they fit perfectly to the general image of imported items at Tomis in the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods. This paper contains a morphological approach based on already known typologies, as well as brief comments on two amphora stamps – an incomplete Cnidian and a Sinopean one.*

## *I. Introduction*

In 2011-2012, consolidation works were undertaken at the Museum of National History and Archaeology Constanța (MNHAC). For this reason all the contents of the old deposit were moved to the new one, next to the artifacts that were being kept inside. Therefore, this abundance of material as well as the consolidation works which blocked the entrance to the deposit, have restrained the access to the inventory preserved in it for a long period of time. When artifacts were moved, unpublished material from old excavations has been identified. In a state of uncertainty that access to the deposit will be gained soon after consolidation works start, several amphorae have been selected to be part of a future study on archaeological material that has not been studied so far. Five pieces were chosen. To this batch, four more items were added – three of which on display within the MNHAC permanent exhibition and the 4<sup>th</sup> one exhibited at the Harbor Museum, Constanța.

All the items included in this brief study were discovered at Tomis in the 1960's - 1970's, by chance or by systematic archaeological research in the peninsula of nowadays Constanța (the Cathedral Park lot). The primary sources of information we had access to consist in deposit registers and inventory datasheets. Afterwards, a direct contact with few of the artifacts was possible. Unfortunately, some of the fragmentary items have been restored and some of the added parts were not quite suitable or appropriate for the type of amphora they were attached to. For example, Inv. 15032 was fitted with an unsuitable toe

whereas Inv. 20404 has a different profile from the original one on the added plaster part of its body. Seven of them were restored. These were misleading at once, especially judging by the black and white pictures from the museum's archives. Despite their fragmentary state of preservation (some amphorae were missing either their bottom, handles or even upper parts), similarities with recorded types were noticed. Despite the general heterogeneous look of this group, its components, discovered decades ago, state the necessity of their publication. In addition, even if they do not form an homogenous typological group and only have in common the city they were discovered in, it is necessary to present their main characteristics, as they seem to fit perfectly the general pattern of the imported amphorae recorded at Tomis.

## *II. Tomis in the Classic and Hellenistic periods: excavations and archaeological contexts*

Although modern Constanța lies over the remains of ancient Tomis there were few areas which were not affected by foundations of modern buildings. This was the case of a not so large area situated in the peninsula of Constanța, next to the Cathedral<sup>1</sup>. Since the discoveries presented in this brief study date from the late Classical and Hellenistic periods, some more finds within the chronological sequence, ranging from the late 5<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, should be reported as well. 5<sup>th</sup> century artifacts were recovered during rescue excavations carried on between 1959 and 1960 in the Peninsula of Constanța<sup>2</sup>. Greek materials were also recovered in the area of the Late Roman edifice with mosaic pavement<sup>3</sup>, as well as in several other places on the southwestern flank of the peninsula<sup>4</sup> (*fig. 1*). They usually came from pits or from disturbed strata, and not from clear contexts.

The systematic excavations undertaken at the Cathedral Park brought to light complex urban structures, impressive quantities of archaeological materials and, above all, allowed the first, almost complete stratigraphic study on ancient Tomis. The archaeological campaigns went on during 4 years from 1971 to 1974. Although the layer corresponding to the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC is a thin one and is totally missing in some parts of the excavation profiles, the Hellenistic material is abundant. This shows that the Hellenistic life of the city was not interrupted and that it continued in a nearby area<sup>5</sup>. Another interpretation of the lack of those strata can be related to urban changes undertaken in the Roman period, which mostly consisted of leveling the previous constructions in order to stabilize the ground for newer structures. Furthermore, this layer was thick and well preserved in other parts of the Tomitan peninsula. For example, in the immediate vicinity of the Cathedral park area, towards North, rescue excavations brought to

---

<sup>1</sup> Greek structures were brought to light on a surface only 122 m<sup>2</sup> large, cf. RĂDULESCU & SCORPAN 1975, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> BUZOIANU & BĂRBULESCU 2012, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> BUZOIANU 1980, p. 119-139.

<sup>4</sup> In front of entrance no. 1 to the actual Constanța harbour, under the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD level, pits with Early Roman and Hellenistic materials were discovered, cf. POENARU BORDEA 1965, p. 438-439.

<sup>5</sup> RĂDULESCU & SCORPAN 1975, p. 25.

light Hellenistic layers that filled in this gap with materials and archaeological information covering the interval 3<sup>rd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC.<sup>6</sup>

Five amphorae from our lot come from these excavations. They were all found in 1972. We have no other details about the conditions of their discovery, because, as previously noted, inventory datasheets and registers were the only reachable information. In 1972, excavations only reached the early Roman layer and stopped. The Hellenistic layer was reached in 1973. The only place these amphorae could have been found in, was a pit cut through the roman strata, filled with mixed materials from Greek and early Roman times (*fig. 2*).

Even in these conditions, the amphoric material discovered at Tomis (by chance or by systematic or preventive excavations) was well preserved and numerous enough to offer a complex research category to archaeologists. Published studies on this subject<sup>7</sup> led the way to general research trends on trade throughout the Black Sea area and on commercial relations between Tomis and other centers of the Greek world. To these, several other unpublished materials discovered at Tomis could be added. For this reason, this brief study should be regarded as an attempt to provide a new piece of evidence to this jumble of information regarding amphoric trade at Tomis in Classical and Hellenistic times.

### *III. Catalogue*

The Cathedral Park amphorae were in a bad state of preservation upon discovery. They were all fragmentary and have been partially restored. Because of the lack of information regarding the exact context they were found in and because their upper and bottom parts are missing (only one item has its upper part intact) we didn't have any other criteria than clay composition and shape of their body. They are not chronologically presented or grouped by type but by their inventory numbers.

The catalogue consists of brief descriptions for each item, ordered by discovery place and inventory numbers. Therefore the group of five amphorae from the Cathedral Park area is the first described, followed by other chance discoveries, ordered by their inventory numbers.

#### 1. Inv. 20401 - Cnidus, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, *fig. 3/1*

*Place of discovery:* Constanța, Cathedral Park, 1972

*Preservation state:* fragmentary state upon discovery; completely restored at present

*Fabric:* fine, compact fabric; mica particles in its composition; brick-red color; smooth surface

*Shape:* rounded rim; long, splayed neck; rounded, long handles, with elliptical flattened section; angular shoulders; conical shape; spiked toe, applied ring

*Markings:* slightly visible stamp on one of its handles; small rectangular stamp, 1,1 cm wide; left side was broken along with the handle, only the first letter is still visible and possibly the lower part of the second letter

---

<sup>6</sup> CCA 2001, p. 108-110.

<sup>7</sup> IRIMIA 1977, p. 74-75; BUZOIANU 1980, p. 119-139; BUZOIANU 1987, p. 51-59; BUZOIANU 1991, p. 75-96.

GRACE 1986, p. 554, fig. 2/2; MONACHOV 2003a, type II F, tabl. 77, 2 and 3 - mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC; VOGELKOFF – BORGAN & APOSTOLAKOU 2002, p. 423, fig 5/e.

2. Inv. 20402 - Cnidus, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, fig. 3/2

*Place of discovery:* Constanța, Cathedral Park, 1972

*Preservation state:* fragmentary; bottom, upper part and handles are missing

*Fabric:* fine, compact fabric; mica particles in its composition; brick-red color; smooth surface

*Shape:* similar to no. 1 (Inv. 20401)

*Special features:* slightly deformed shoulder, flattened due to improper manipulation before firing, when the clay was not hardened enough to resist to shock.

GRACE 1986, p. 554, fig. 2/2; MONACHOV 2003a, type II F, pl. 77, 2 and 3 - mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC; VOGELKOFF – BORGAN & APOSTOLAKOU 2004, p. 423, fig 5/e.

3. Inv. 20403 - Rhodes, 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, fig. 3/3

*Place of discovery:* Constanța, Cathedral Park, 1972

*Preservation state:* fragmentary

*Fabric:* light beige clay; smooth surface

*Shape:* egg-shaped body; rounded shoulders; narrow neck; short, cylindrical toe, with a groove at its upper part

TUROVSKIJ *et alii* 2001, fig. 24/3, late 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. – early 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC; NICOLAU & EMPEREUR 1986, p. 527, fig 12; FINKIELSZTEJN 2001, p. 237, fig. 15; BARKER 2004, p. 76, fig. 4; MONACHOV 2003a, type 2, variant I E 2 - late 3<sup>rd</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, p. 312, pl. 82,3; p. 313, pl. 83,3; MONACHOV 2005, type 2, variant I E 2 - well marked cylindrical foot, specific for the late variant, dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

4. Inv. 20404 – Cos (?), first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, fig. 3/4

*Place of discovery:* Constanța, Cathedral Park, 1972

*Preservation state:* fragmentary, its bottom, upper part and handles are missing

*Fabric:* light yellowish color

*Shape:* the body has ovoid shape with rounded shoulders; the place where a handle used to be fixed is still visible on one side of the broken upper part. This almost visible section of the handle seems to be of elliptical shape. Its body shape and type of clay used for this amphora indicate similarities to Cos items: KANTZIA 1994, Cos type II because the handle seems to have been elliptical in section not at all double, first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC, PAPUCI-WŁADYKA 1997 - 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC; ZEEST 1960, pl. 24/51, 4<sup>th</sup> -2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC.

5. Inv. 20405 – Cos (?), first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, fig. 3/5

*Place of discovery:* Constanța, Cathedral Park, 1972

*Preservation state:* fragmentary; its upper part and handles are missing and the only other part that could indicate the production centre, the bottom, is also broken;

*Fabric:* yellow-whitish color;

*Shape:* similar shape to item no. 4 (Inv. 20404) - they seem to be part of the same typological group. This item brings some counterarguments to the previous statement regarding the place of provenance and the date of this shape. Its toe (what is left of it) seems taller than the usual toe for the indicated analogies, and seems to have been of cylindrical shape.

6. Inv. 1790 - Mende, second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century - 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, *fig. 4/1*

*Place of discovery:* Constanța, *passim*, 1965

*Preservation state:* complete item

*Fabric:* light beige clay; high porosity; red and black particles and mica inclusions.

*Shape:* conical shape with angular shoulders; cylindrical, high neck; slightly splayed rim; circular incision on its neck, under the rim; high splayed toe, slightly rounded underside with a central depression; high rounded elliptical in section handles; a digital impression under each handle; on its lower body a pale trace of red paint.

Although it looks very much like Thasian shapes, the color, composition and porosity of the clay as well as the rim and toe shapes point to Mende as place of origin.

TUROVSKIJ *et alii* 2001, between type 13/4 (h=66, d = 34, dg=7,5) and 13/7 - first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century; BRAŠINSKIJ 1976, fig 1/5, second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC; MONACHOV 2003a, type III, second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century - 4<sup>th</sup> century BC

7. Inv. 15032 - Cos; *fig. 4/2*

*Place of discovery:* Constanta *passim*, 1966.

*Preservation state:* fragmentary; a handle, few fragments of the body and its bottom part are missing; fully reconstructed

*Fabric:* pinkish-beige fabric

*Shape:* conical shape; angular shoulders, narrow, long neck; rolled rim with circular section; two double tall angular handles.

PAPUCI-WŁADYKA 1997, fig. 2/1, p. 51 - 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC; TUROVSKIJ *et alii* 2001, type 24/1 - late 4<sup>th</sup> century BC; BUZOIANU 1999, pl. IV (inv. 16671 - Callatis).

8. Inv. 32177 Chersonesus, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, *fig. 4/3*

*Place of discovery:* Constanța, Hotel Palace area, discovered during a rescue excavation imposed by the work for Constanța drainage system, in 1977.

*Preservation state:* fragmentary – incomplete rim and toe; fully restored.

*Fabric:* brick-red color, smooth; small white particles in its composition.

*Shape:* rolled rim; high neck; conical, elongated body shape; rounded shoulders; oval section, rounded handles almost oblique implanted on the shoulders; large circular toe with depression on the underside

*Special features:* fabrication flaw - deformed shoulder under one of the handles

ZEEST 1960, p.157, pl. 21/40; MONACHOV 1989, type I-B, last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC - first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC

9. Inv. 38551 Sinope, fig. 4/4

*Place of discovery:* Constanța, *passim*

*Preservation state:* complete item

*Fabric:* light orange clay with black particles in its composition

*Shape:* rolled rim; rounded, oval section handles; rounded shoulders; cylindrical toe

*Markings:* stamped on one of its handles; GARLAN 2004a, gr. VI C1

[ἄστ]υνόμου

Ἀν[θ]εστηρίου

[το]ῦ Νουμηνίου

[Ἀπατ]ούριος [acrostyle]

MONACHOV 1992, type III B, second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC; MONACHOV 2003a, type III-B, second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

#### IV. Observations and conclusions

For lack of any petrographical and chemical fabric studies, the fragmentary items were identified with amphora types by their morphological features as well as by a primary visual study of their fabric instead. For that reason, the attribution to Cos of Inv. 20403 and Inv. 20404 is still given tentatively, since no clear evidence tracing them to this island is preserved (upper parts, handles and toes).

Mendeian amphorae did not previously appear in the archaeological inventory of Tomis, or at least not as a complete shape like this one, hence its importance.

As far as the Rhodes amphora is concerned, its shape is very similar to the category dated by Ino Nicolau and Jean-Yves Empereur 1986 between the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. and the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC. This chronology is supported by one of its main characteristics: rounded shoulders and the globular aspect of its body are usual for the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BC. This feature went on until the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. B.C, when the shoulders became angular again<sup>8</sup>. Similar Rhodian shapes previously occurred in Tomis, but still remain unpublished.

The Chersonesian amphora joins the relatively small group of such discoveries at Tomis, mostly dated to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century – beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, on the basis of their stamped handles<sup>9</sup>. In the same area where it was found, a group of eight amphorae, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century was also discovered<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> FINKIELSZTEJN 2001, p.50

<sup>9</sup> BUZOIANU 1992, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> BUZOIANU 1991, p. 88.

Amphora imports from Rhodes and Sinope prevail at Tomis during the Classical and Hellenistic periods, whereas Thasian and Cnidian amphorae were found in smaller quantities. Although only a small part of the Greek city was explored so far, these frequency data, which put Rhodes and Sinope on top, followed by Thasos and Cnidus, compared to the scarce finds from Cos or Chersonesus for example, seem to be valid enough to provide a general view on the imported materials and on the marked preferences the Tomitans had for specific varieties of products.

Measurements Table\*

Cat. no.	Inv.	Pr.	St.	H	H <sub>0</sub>	H <sub>1</sub>	H <sub>2</sub>	H <sub>3</sub>	H <sub>4</sub>	D	D <sub>2</sub>	D <sub>3</sub>	L <sub>1</sub>	L <sub>2</sub>	Depth
1	20401	Cnidus	x	870		360	70	270	260	376	120		25	1510	745
2	20402	Cnidus	-		630					420					
3	20403	Rhodes	-		650		35			400					
4	20404	Cos (?)	-		520					380					
5	20405	Cos (?)	-		520					410					
6	1790	Mende	-	650		240	110	190	170	310	110	60	20	15	550
7	15032	Cos	-												
8	32177	Chersonesos	-	740		210	30	170	160	312	115	60	30	15	655
9	38551	Sinope	x	540			25		144	267	95	35	22	10	480

\* Abbreviations: **Pr.** = provenance; **St.** = stamped amphora; **H** = total height; **H<sub>0</sub>** = preserved height; **H<sub>1</sub>** = height of the upper part; **H<sub>2</sub>** = foot height; **H<sub>3</sub>** = neck height; **H<sub>4</sub>** = handles height; **D** = maximum diameter; **D<sub>2</sub>** = rim opening diameter; **D<sub>3</sub>** = foot diameter **L<sub>1</sub>** = handle thickness; **L<sub>2</sub>** = rim thickness.



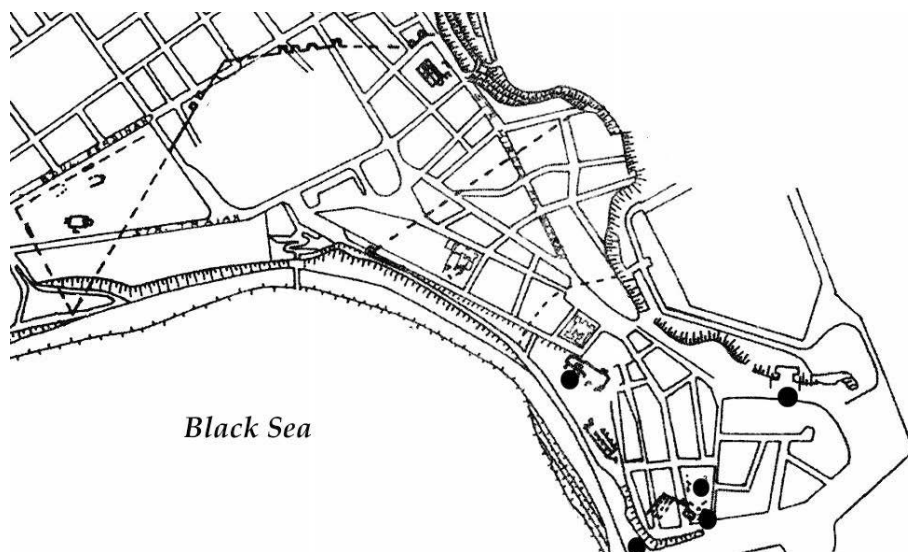


Fig. 1 – Tomis - areas where Greek items were discovered

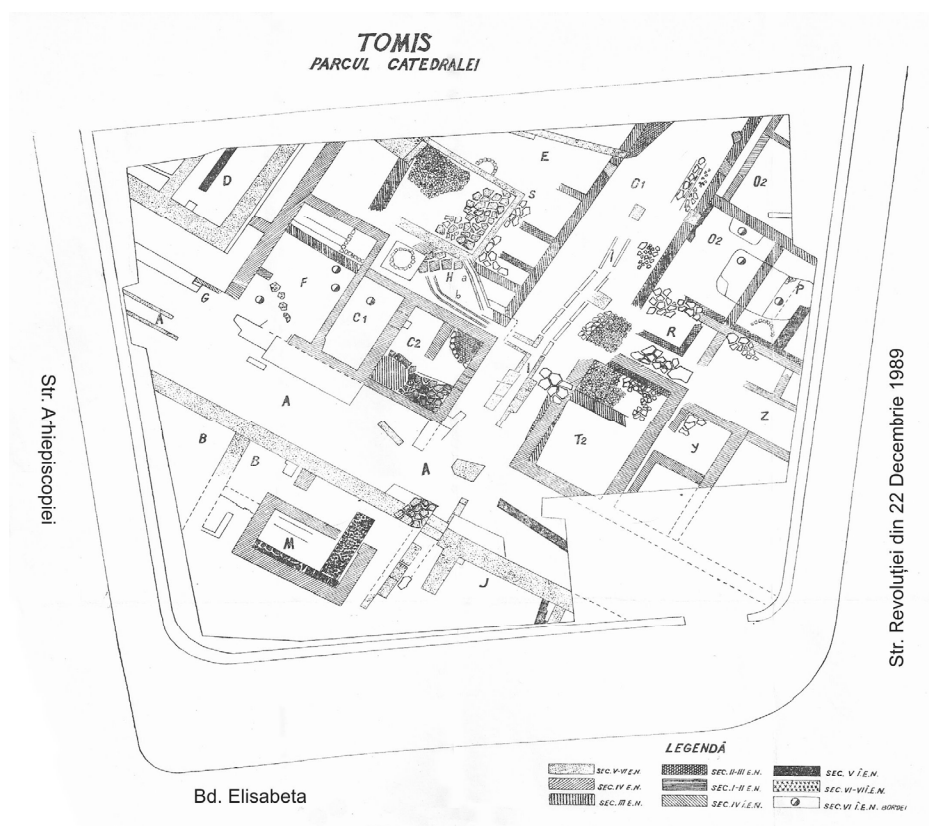
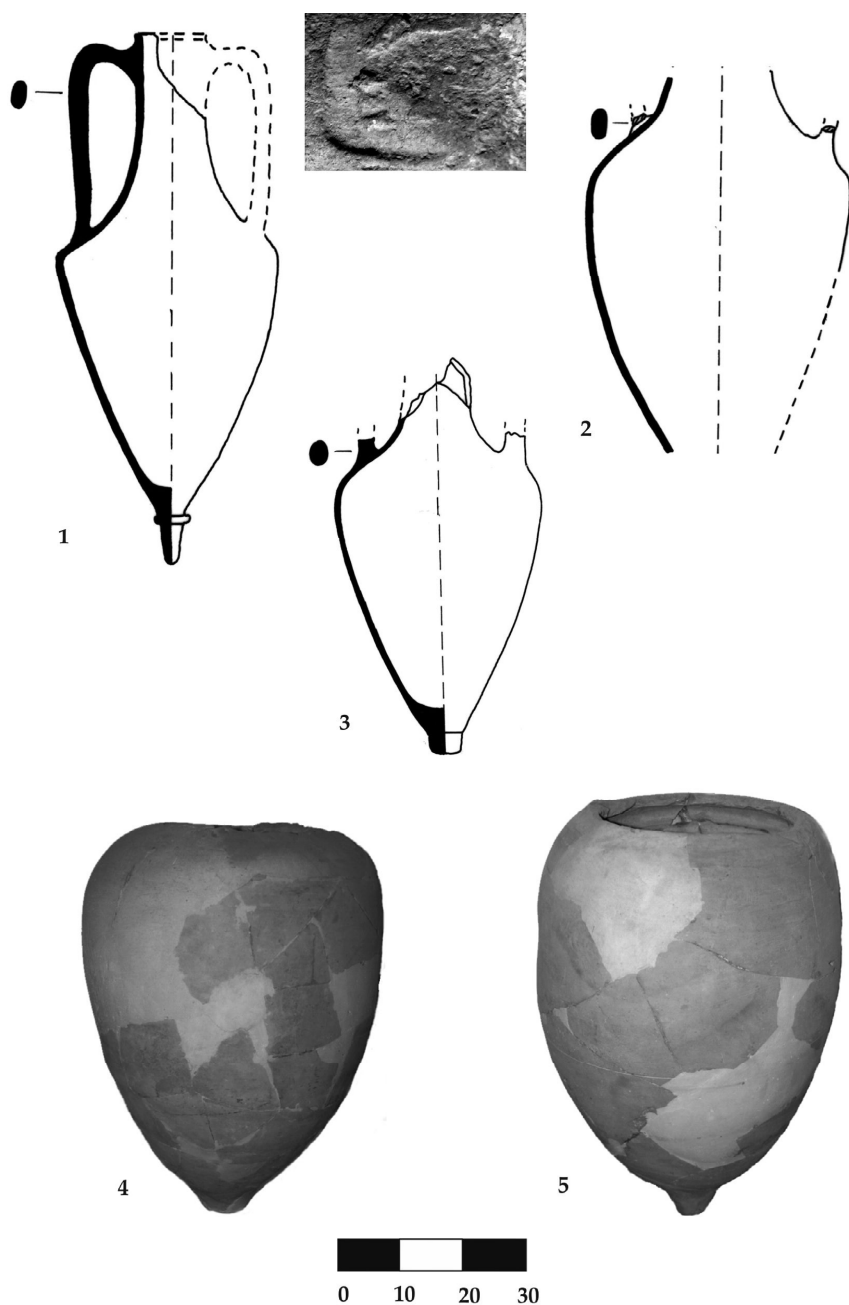
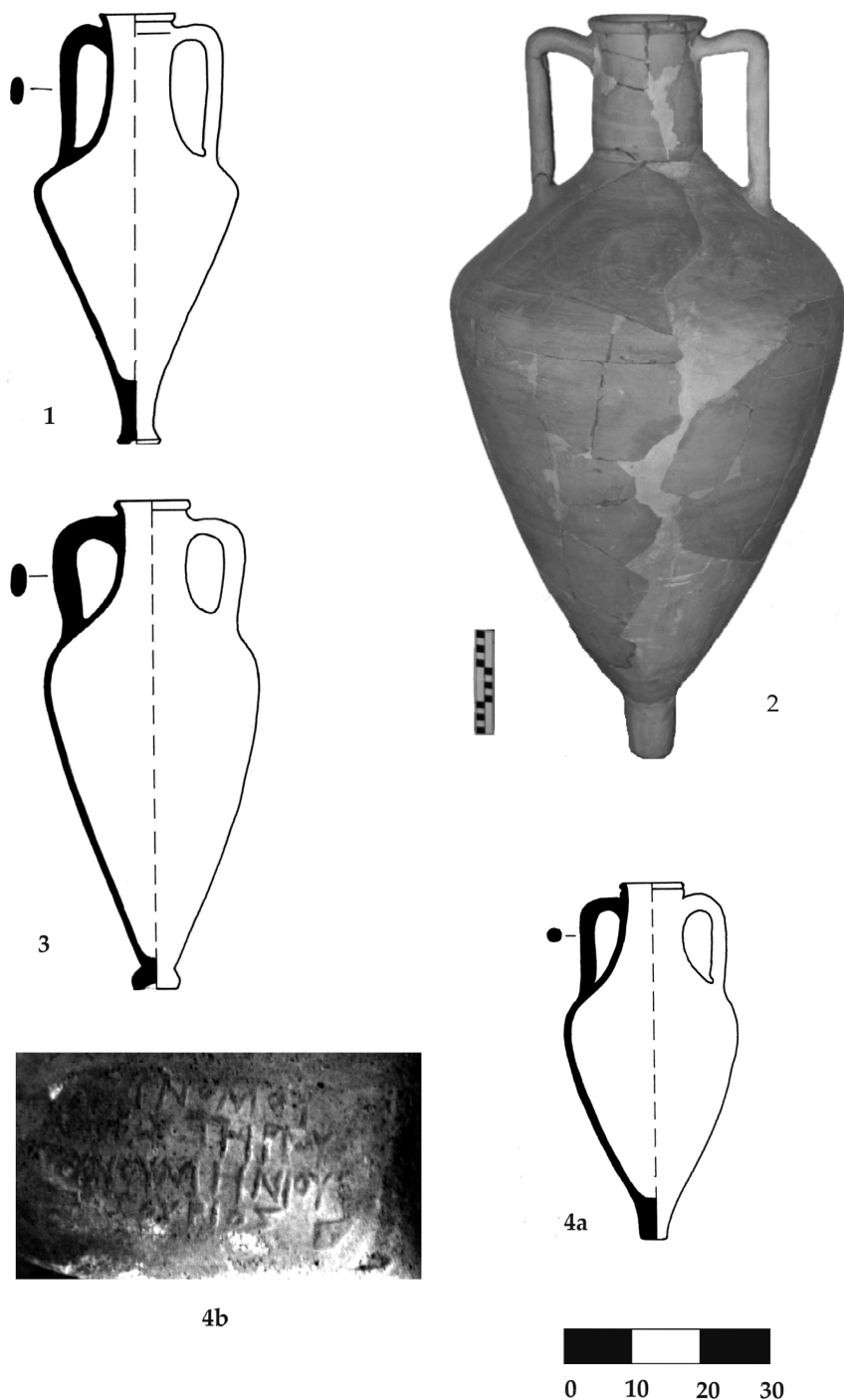


Fig. 2 – Cathedral Park area, apud Rădulescu & Scorpan 1975.



**Fig. 3 – Transport amphorae discovered at Tomis, Cathedral Park area:**  
 1. Inv. 20401 Cnidus amphora and stamp (scale 2:1); 2. Inv. 20402 Cnidus;  
 3. Inv. 20403 Rhodes; 4. Inv. 20404 Cos (?); 5. Inv. 20405 Cos (?)



**Fig. 4 – Transport amphorae discovered in Tomis:**  
 1. Inv. 1790 Mende; 2. Inv. 15032 Cos; 3. Inv. 32177 Chersonesos;  
 4. Inv. 38551 Sinope (scale 1:10) and 4b stamp (scale 1:1)