



CHRONOLOGIES OF
THE BLACK SEA AREA
IN THE PERIOD c. 400–100 BC

*Edited by
Vladimir Stolba and Lise Hannestad*

BLACK SEA STUDIES

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DANISH NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION'S
CENTRE FOR BLACK SEA STUDIES

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Bosporan bronze coin with a young Dionysos wearing ivy-wreath.

First half of the first century BC

*(The Royal Collection of Coins and Medals. Danish National Museum,
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Introduction

Chronology may not always be considered the most exciting subject by archaeologists and ancient historians, but its importance can hardly be overestimated, and recent years have certainly witnessed a renewed interest in chronological problems. When the Danish Research Foundation's Centre for Black Sea Studies was established in February 2002, it was decided that the Centre's first international conference should have as its theme the chronology of the Black Sea area, with special focus on the period from 400 to 100 BC, a period which has indeed had its share of chronological debates and revisions. Thus the destruction of Olynthos in 348 BC as a chronological fixed point has been challenged; the tentative chronology proposed by H. Thompson for Athenian Hellenistic pottery has in recent years been corrected by S. Rotroff; and the chronologies of Hellenistic transport amphoras originating in Black Sea workshops such as Herakleia Pontike, Sinope and Chersonesos, as well as the precise datings of a number of local coinages, are still hotly debated. It goes without saying that the chronological framework established for the Greek colonies on the shores of the Black Sea is also of crucial importance for the dating of the nomad cultures of the steppes during the first millennium BC.

The purpose of the conference was a closer examination of the elements on which the chronologies used in Black Sea archaeology and history in the relevant period are built – and the overall chronology, if such exists.

The present volume presents 13 contributions from the conference. Broadly speaking, they can be divided into papers presenting the chronological basis on which we currently operate, and papers on specific case studies, where the dating of a site, a group of sites or deposits, and the reasons for the suggested dates are presented. Central issues are coins, amphora stamps and imported fine-ware pottery, together with the written source material.

An important objective of the conference was to bring together researchers working in different disciplines and different fields, i.e. both researchers whose focal point is the Mediterranean, and colleagues whose expertise is concentrated on the Black Sea area itself.

The volume opens with Rotroff's contribution on the chronology of Hellenistic pottery from the Athenian agora. She draws particular attention to

the fact that this chronology has been built up over a long period and has undergone a number of revisions; that there is a danger of circular argumentation, such as the use of the new Athenian coinage, the introduction of which is in itself based on pottery chronology. One cannot but agree that at the moment the Attic chronology provides one example of how a model of diachronic development can be built and maintained, and that Athens currently provides the finest-grained chronology existing for pottery of the 4th to the 1st centuries BC.

Lawall's paper covers much of the same ground, but from a different perspective, and with emphasis on the often overlooked fact that creating chronologies involves negotiating a web of relationships between groups of artefacts. One might consider such efforts as hopelessly circular and subjective. Lawall, however, adopts a more positive approach, offering the reader a brief "state of the art" as to the late Classical and Hellenistic amphora stamps in the Aegean, and goes on to present the present situation as to the chronology of the most important of these, i.e. the Thasian.

Monachov uses a different perspective than the eponym stamps to examine the chronology of Rhodian amphoras by tracing the development of the shape of the Rhodian amphora through time.

The following contribution by Conovici focuses less on the chronology of one or more amphora productions than on fluctuations in the import patterns of the three most securely dated amphora production centres, i.e. Thasos, Sinope, and Rhodos, in some of the cities on the west coast of the Black Sea, in particular Istros, Kallatis, and Tomis. Despite differences in the distribution patterns, coincidences in the peaks reached by the imports to the west Pontic cities, especially Kallatis, may also point to the present chronologies of these three production centres as being correct, at least when considered in decades instead of years.

Callatay's contribution takes us to a different field, i.e. that of numismatics. If one sometimes wonders whether a chronological precision within less than a five-year horizon is worthwhile, Callatay's contribution on the chronology of the Mithridatic bronze coins offers a case for how much can actually be at stake. Callatay proposes considerable changes to the traditionally accepted chronology for both the Mithridatic and Bosporan issues, which gave rise to the historical interpretation that Mithridates Eupator began as a friendly ally of the Bosporan cities and later acted very brutally towards these cities. Callatay offers a very different scenario.

Højte re-examines the dating of the inscription from Chersonesos with Pharnakes' decree, carefully reviewing the evidence, or rather lack of evidence, for the date traditionally accepted as to this decree. He concludes that at present no definite proof exists for the two proposed dates, but that the Seleucid calendar is the most probable for determining the date of the inscription, in which case the history of Chersonesos during the first half of the second century BC needs to be reconsidered.

The Pharnakes decree and its date is also at the centre of Stolba's contribution, which presents a new chronology for Chersonesean amphora stamps. Having reconsidered the anchoring points of the local stamp chronology, he proposes a long break in the production during the third century BC.

The contributions of Hannestad, Zolotarev, Bylkova, Krapivina, Mordvinceva, and Zajcev present case studies from Olbia and Chersonesos, their *chorai* and the inner Crimea, discussing the means by which a deposit, a site, or a cluster of sites have been dated.

In her contribution Hannestad re-examines the elements on which the dating of the so-called Monumental Building U6 have been built up, and demonstrates how the end date c. 270 BC is based on Kac's chronology for Chersonesean amphoras, whereas the date of the erection relies on Rotroff's dating of the black-glazed Athenian pottery of the early Hellenistic period, together with Stolba's chronology for Chersonesean bronze coins.

Zolotarev presents a recently excavated deposit found in Chersonesos, which offers us an impression of the affluence which characterized the city in the third century BC.

Krapivina carefully examines all the evidence that has so far been brought to light concerning the city of Olbia in the Late Hellenistic period, which is one of the least known periods in the history of the city. The material presented includes a recently found inscription (2002), which provides evidence for a *strategos* of Mithridates Eupator and his governor-general in Olbia building a defensive wall in the year 220 of the Pontic era (78/77 BC). The available evidence also clearly confirms that by the middle of the 1st century BC, life ceased to exist in the city for several decades, due to the invasion of the Getae.

Archaeological field work, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, has enabled Valeria Bylkova to draw up the settlement development on the lower Dnieper in the period from c. 400-100 BC. Amphora and tile stamps together with imported pottery are the most important elements for establishing an overall chronology for changes in settlement patterns in both the Greek and the Scythian settlements.

During the conference the revised chronology of Rhodian amphoras recently proposed by G. Finkielsztejn was an often-discussed subject, and the participants were convinced of its validity. Perhaps Zajcev's contribution on the chronology of Scythian Neapolis in the second century BC most clearly shows how this chronology fits in with evidence from a combination of the stratigraphy of a site and the written evidence concerning this monument.

The volume ends with a presentation by Mordvinceva of the chronology of the richest Sarmatian barrow - Nogajčik - in the Crimea. The barrow contained a female burial with a large number of luxury grave goods. Among the pieces are a "millefiori" (mosaic) glass cup that provides a *terminus post quem* to the first century BC, and a fusiform unguentarium that suggests that the burial can hardly be later than the middle of the first century BC.

It is our hope that the contributions in this volume will prove useful for reopening discussions on dates and chronologies which may long have been taken for granted, and ultimately contribute to establishing a firmer chronological framework for the Black Sea region in the last centuries before our era.

Lise Hannestad
Aarhus, August 2004

Vladimir Stolba

Four Centuries of Athenian Pottery

Susan I. Rotroff

INTRODUCTION

The four centuries of ceramic development that are the topic of this paper (400 BC to the beginning of the Common Era) fall into no less than three of the standard chronological divisions of antiquity: the Classical, the Hellenistic, and the Roman periods. These have traditionally been the preserves of different scholars, and it is for this reason that the ceramic chronology is rooted in three different works of scholarship: for the fourth century, Brian Sparkes' and Lucy Talcott's analysis, published in 1970 in volume XII of the *Agora* series; for the ensuing Hellenistic period, Homer Thompson's 1934 *Hesperia* article, "Two Centuries of Hellenistic Pottery"; and, for the 1st century, Henry Robinson's 1959 publication of Group F, in *Agora V*.¹ Not surprisingly, the points at which these three great fabrics join are not seamless; there are gaps and overlaps that would not have been there had the weaving been in the hands of a single craftsman. Furthermore, significant new evidence has come to light since the publication of these authoritative studies, now making it possible to refine some of their conclusions. I would like to contribute below some thoughts about the methodology used in the construction of the *Agora* chronology, along with a review of the chronology itself as I now see it, in light of the most recent discoveries (both archaeological and intellectual) in the field of Greek ceramics. Overstepping the boundaries set by the organizers of the conference, I carry my summary down to the end of the 1st century because, as I will make clear below, the Hellenistic ceramic tradition survived at least that long.

EVIDENCE FOR THE AGORA CHRONOLOGY

The *Agora* ceramic chronology rests on two main props: fixed chronological points, i.e. deposits that contain a large amount of ordinary Attic pottery, which also can be associated with a dated historical event; and "closed" deposits, stratigraphically isolated groups of material with a limited range of date, most commonly the contents of wells and cisterns. A third form of evidence – material from physically superimposed layers – has traditionally been cru-

cial in the formation of ceramic chronologies. Few such sequences, however, have been recovered at the Agora and consequently this kind of evidence has played almost no part in the development of the Agora chronology.

Historical fixed points

In evaluating the Agora chronology, an obvious question to ask is, how sturdy are these two props? First let us consider the historical anchors. There are only a handful: the destruction of Olynthos; the foundation of Alexandria; the occupation of Koroni; the destruction of Corinth; and finally, the attack of Sulla on the city of Athens. We might add the purification pit on Rheneia for, although it falls before our period, it provides the only mooring until we reach the middle of the 4th century. The date emerges from Thucydides' account (3.104) of the purification of the sanctuary at Delos undertaken by the Athenians in 426/425. The association of the pit – rich in both figured and black gloss pottery as well as much earlier material – with the purification has not been challenged, but the presence of some indubitably later material urges that it be used with caution.¹

The large collection of pottery at Olynthos, destroyed by Philip II in 348, is the linchpin of 4th century ceramic chronology.² The presence of later 4th century coins on the site, and the fact that, according to Diodoros Sikulos (19.52.2), much of the population of the new foundation at Kassandreia in 316 was drawn from among the Olynthians, have prompted some scholars to challenge 348 as a reliable *terminus ante quem* for pottery from this site, and to suggest that the mass of ceramics there should be dated well down in the 4th century, rather than in its second quarter.³ It is certainly true that the city was not completely deserted after 348, but Nicholas Cahill's recent analysis of the distribution of the post-348 coins demonstrates that most of the re-habitation was in the northwestern section of the North Hill.⁴ In this part of the excavation, Robinson contented himself for the most part with tracing walls; few floors were excavated, and almost none of the published pottery comes from this part of the site. We can still, I believe, rely on the bulk of the pottery from the remainder of the site for a view into the mid-4th century cupboard.⁵ Just how much of that pottery is Attic, however, remains open to question. David Robinson thought that most of the black and plain wares and lamps were of local manufacture,⁶ while Peter Corbett and Lucy Talcott felt confident that much of the fine pottery was Attic.⁷ The issue remains unresolved. If the pottery is not Attic, we may well ask how useful it is for framing an Attic chronology, for it is quite likely that the products of different centers of production, even if heavily Atticizing in character, would follow somewhat different developmental paths.

Alexandria provides a likely *terminus post quem* of 331, the date of its foundation, for deposits excavated there – although we cannot affirm that no one was living there earlier. Even if we discard the notion of earlier settlers or

visitors, it is difficult to evaluate the pottery found in the earliest cemeteries. We can say that it was buried after 331, but we cannot tell how long after. Nor can we be certain that any single object was not an heirloom brought from abroad, decades old at the time of its inhumation. It is problematical as well that much of this material was excavated early in the 20th century and is not published to a standard that makes it easy to use for the investigation of fine chronological questions. Fortunately, Alexandrian archaeology is undergoing a revival, and new excavations have brought to light more material from the early years of the city. Even so, we are again plagued by the question of the origin of the pottery: is it Attic, or not? Some scholars are convinced that much of it is; others have expressed doubts.¹¹ In any event, the site, no matter how meticulously excavated, is unlikely to be as useful as contained sites with a *terminus ante quem*.

Such a site is the Ptolemaic encampment on the headland at Koroni, on the east coast of Attica, excavated in a short, three-week season in 1960.¹⁰ The modest ambition of the project was to determine the date and nature of ruins long visible on the surface. The results, however, were an archaeological bombshell. Coins found on the site enabled the excavators to date its occupation to the reign of Ptolemy II, and furthermore to associate it with the presence of Ptolemaic troops in Attica at the time of the Chremonidean War, between 267 and 262/261 BC. This conclusion led to another and far more wide-reaching one: that the ceramic chronology outlined by Thompson for the first sixty years of the Hellenistic period was too high by about a generation. After a series of initial challenges,¹¹ the dating of the site has achieved widespread acceptance, and Virginia Grace's 1974 downward revision of her Rhodian amphora chronology on the basis of evidence unrelated to Koroni¹² lent important support to the new, lower chronology. It did not, however, resolve the discrepancy altogether, for it gave a date in the late 270's for the amphoras,¹³ which had therefore to be regarded as serving a secondary use as water containers in the latter half of the 260's. Now, however, Gerald Finkielsztein's further revision of the Rhodian chronology places the three eponyms documented at Koroni – Chrysostratos, Agrios, and Antileon – in the years 267-265.¹⁴ This solves the problem neatly and allows us to imagine that the amphoras were brought to the site fresh from the vintner when the troops occupied the site. Although it has been suggested that there may have been some earlier habitation at Koroni,¹⁵ nothing has happened in the forty and more years since the excavation to undermine c. 261 as a terminal date.

The next fixed point, the destruction of Corinth by Roman soldiers under Mummius in 146, is of only limited usefulness for the Attic chronology. First of all, evidence has been growing over the years that there was substantial squatter activity on the site during the 100 years between its destruction and the establishment of the Roman colony. This is most clearly documented by stamped amphora handles, but imported fine ceramics of the intervening period have been identified as well.¹⁶ Most of the Mummian destruction debris

is in secondary deposits, representing clean-up at the time of resettlement a century later, in the course of which later material may have entered the archaeological record. And, finally, the Attic pottery from Corinth remains largely unpublished, further limiting the utility of the site for the purposes of Attic chronology-building. Potentially more useful for the mid-2nd century is the construction fill of the Stoa of Attalos, which, if the foot-high inscription on its facade means anything, must have been constructed during the reign of Attalos II, from 159 to 138. Here, however, we have quite a wide range for *a terminus ante quem*: the fill could have been dumped within the foundations during any one of the twenty-one years of Attalos' reign. In any event, it has never received systematic study and remains unpublished; it is clear, however, that, like many building fills, it covers a very long range of date and is largely composed of very fragmentary material.

Our final fixed point is the sack of Athens in 86 BC by the Roman general Sulla. Several deposits may be associated with this event on the basis of the coins and amphora handles that they contain. The coins are the final issue of the Fulminating Zeus series, marked with Mithradates' star between crescents on the reverse.¹⁷ The Knidian amphoras are those of the latter part of the *duoviri* period, which probably ended in 88 BC. Twenty-three deposits at the Agora contain one or both of these markers, and one has been fully published from elsewhere in the city.¹⁸ None, however, is lying where it fell on the fateful first of March in 86 BC. Like the destruction debris at Corinth, these are secondary deposits, cleared away when the area in question was rebuilt or renovated, often decades after the event. Hence, most of these deposits contain some identifiably later material – be it a coin, an amphora handle, or a fragment of Roman sigillata – and one must remain alive to the possibility that some contain material that is not identifiably later, but is later nonetheless.

“Closed” deposits

No one of the fixed points discussed above – except perhaps Koroni – presents a perfect case, but they are nonetheless indispensable landmarks along the course of Attic ceramic development. The next challenge is to chart the unknown territory between them. For the Agora chronology, these gaps have been elucidated by creating what amount to a secondary series of fixed points, in the form of the so-called “closed” deposits. This approach was a bold innovation by Homer Thompson,¹⁹ the first scholar, as far as I am aware, to use deposits other than graves in this manner. The fine tuning of the Agora chronology of the 4th to the 1st century depends on some 300 “closed” deposits of this sort. Valuable as they are, however, they present significant difficulties.

First: How truly “closed” are these deposits? None is protected by an impervious sealing, such as a cement floor – although some approach that situation, lying at the bottoms of wells, beneath sterile layers of mud or col-

lapsed bedrock. In almost all cases, however, it would have been possible for later objects to enter the cistern or well some time after it was originally filled with debris, or to have sifted down to lower levels from higher ones – in the course of time or during excavation – or to have fallen in from the surface at the time of excavation. Connecting tunnels in cistern systems also offer avenues for contamination. In addition, many of these deposits presented difficult excavation problems: in some cases, partial collapse confounded the contents; danger of collapse made stratigraphic excavation difficult or impossible in others. In cisterns, particularly, it was not easy to sort out the typically cone-shaped layers of accumulation when digging underground, in the dark and in the damp. Direct observation of excavation in progress was difficult, and workmen were often left on their own for long stretches as the cistern was cleared. And of course the possibilities for intrusion in the construction fill of a dirt-floored building are legion. A prime difficulty in the use of this evidence, then, is distinguishing between the original deposit and intrusions of later date. A single fragment some hundreds of years later than the bulk of the material can easily be dismissed; material seemingly only a decade or a generation later than the whole poses a more challenging question. Is it an intrusion, or is it evidence that the deposit was closed later, and that other material within that deposit may also date later? Paradoxically, this problem becomes more acute as the chronology becomes finer.

A closely related problem is the estimation of the terminal date of the deposit. The first step, of course, is an evaluation of the most closely datable objects: figured pottery in the first fifty years of our span, stamped amphora handles and coins thereafter. These are a godsend, but their utility is nonetheless limited, as Figure 1 illustrates. Over half (58%) of the c. 225 Hellenistic deposits included in *Agora XXIX* contain amphora handles, although it is in

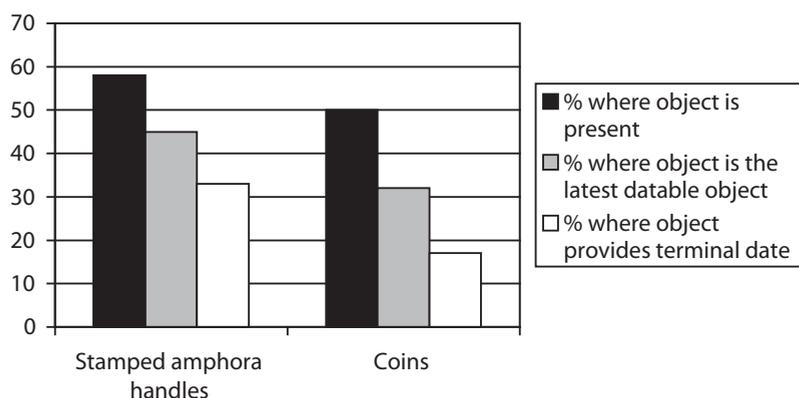


Fig. 1. Percentage of Hellenistic deposits in *Agora XXIX* containing stamped amphora handles or coins.

only 45% of the deposits that an amphora handle is the latest datable object. Even in those cases, other evidence (usually the pottery itself) may indicate that the terminal date must be substantially later. When this is taken into consideration, it turns out that amphora handles are useful in determining the date of deposit in only about one third of the cases. Coins, as it develops, are considerably less useful. Half of the deposits contain coins, largely bronzes, usually badly corroded, and only rarely closely dated. They constitute the latest datable objects in one third of the deposits, but they are instrumental in suggesting a terminal date in only 15% of the cases.

The latest datable object (assuming that we do not reject it as intrusive) tells us only the earliest possible date at which the material could have been discarded. Although the lapse between manufacture and discard is, ultimately, not recoverable, it is essential to scrutinize the state of preservation of the dating object, which may provide some hints. Worn coins must have circulated for some time, and fragmentary and battered objects are likely to be older than whole ones in a given deposit. I have generally assumed ten year lapse after the latest amphora handle – considering that the amphora had to be imported, discarded, smashed to bits, and then thrown away. Complete amphoras must be regarded differently from fragments of handles, but there is ample evidence of long-term reuse of amphoras as storage jars, and we can never assume they were new when discarded.

Occasionally datable objects and other information can be combined to turn one of these deposits into an historically “fixed” point. Such is the case with the debris from abandoned water sources around the Tholos.²⁰ It contains abundant material of a public nature: fragments of official measures, clay and lead seals, fragments of inscriptions, and rooftiles labeled *demosion*. For this reason it had been conjectured ever since its excavation in 1934 that the debris resulted from some event in the chaotic history of Athens in the late 4th or early 3rd century. A somewhat worn coin of the owl-left issue, which John Kroll now dates beginning in 307,²¹ provides a *terminus post quem*, and it seems likely that the damage took place during the brief reign of the tyrant Lachares in 294. The material from these deposits, then, can be placed in the latter years of the 4th century and the earliest years of the 3rd, providing a useful checkpoint between Olynthos and Koroni.

Finally, how homogeneous – in terms of date – can we expect any one deposit to be? The amphoras often cover many decades, and figured pottery in well deposits of the last half of the 5th and first half of the 4th century frequently documents a range of thirty to fifty years, at least for fragments; even wider spans are not unheard-of (see Fig. 2). We can assume, then, that a range of fifty years within a dumped deposit is not unusual – though of course there will be wide variability in the degree of chronological homogeneity.

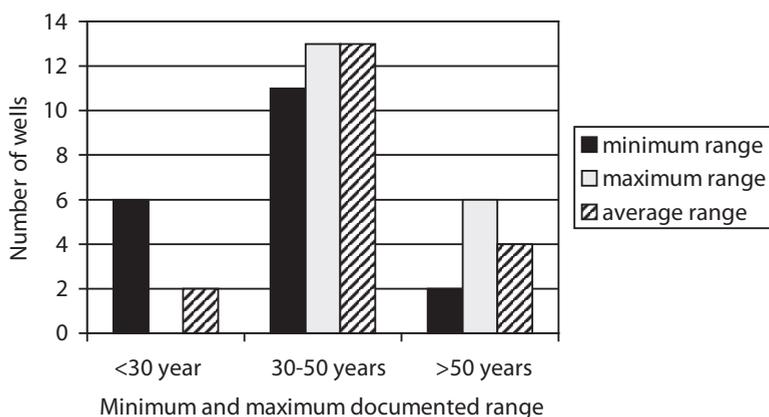


Fig. 2. Range of red-figure in Agora wells containing five or more red-figure fragments (450-350 BC).

Note: absolute ranges cannot be calculated because individual fragments of red-figure are themselves dated within a range (e.g., 410-400, or last quarter of 5th century). Three figures are used here to give a realistic impression of the data. The minimum range is the smallest possible range documented by the fragments. The maximum range is the largest possible range documented by the fragments. The average range for a deposit is the average of the minimum and maximum range figures for that deposit. Data and dates are taken from Moore 1997.

The Komos Cistern

A chronology is like any other structure: once it has been built, it requires maintenance if it is to continue to function effectively; and our chronological evaluation of the deposits must frequently be adjusted to take account of new evidence. The Komos Cistern (deposit M 21:1), excavated by Eugene Vanderpool in 1947, provides a good example of the evolution of scholarly interpretation of a single deposit. Whatever Hellenistic house or workshop it served has left no trace; the cistern itself had collapsed in antiquity, and the resultant hole had been filled with a pottery-rich debris. The physical situation made it impossible to excavate the cistern stratigraphically: instead, a circle something over 1.00 m in diameter was dug through this fill to a depth of 4.00 m and then expanded outwards. Below the pottery-rich fill lay a sterile layer of broken bedrock about 2.00 m thick – the remnants of the collapsed cistern wall – and below it a layer of mud, 40-50 cm thick, that rested on the bottom of the chamber, representing sediment that had accumulated while the cistern was in use. Unfortunately these tidy householders had dropped no significant trash into their water source; the silt contained only a few sherds. (See Fig. 3 for a schematic reconstruction of the excavation situation and the various interpretations that have been proposed).