

Deconstructing the ‘Greekness’ of Bactrian pottery. On the Greek-Mediterranean influences on the local pottery production in Bactria during the Hellenistic period

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ABSTRACT

It is often assumed that the Hellenistic pottery production in Bactria was highly influenced by Mediterranean ceramic shapes, a process, which was mainly caused by the settling of Greek immigrants. Nevertheless, the implementation of new pottery shapes is the result of a local transformation process, that had already begun before the Macedonian conquest. The first evidence of Greek-Mediterranean shapes and decoration techniques, which were produced in Bactrian pottery workshops, are dated to the Greco-Bactrian phase, most likely to the 2nd century BC. Since their number is limited in relation to the whole pottery collections, the assumed Greek influence should not have been too significant.

Throughout the early Hellenistic phase (late 4th and 3rd century BC) new pottery shapes and techniques were introduced in Bactria, like the so-called fish-plate, which are thought to mark the Greek-Mediterranean influence on the local pottery production. Because of their morphological differences to Mediterranean types, these shapes cannot be identified as a Greek-Mediterranean vessel. Only with the emergence of the Greco-Bactrian dynasty does a Greek influenced pottery production appear to become observable at a few sites, mainly in Ai Khanoum (2nd century BC). One of these shapes is the mould-made relief bowl, also known as a Megarian bowl. It was produced first in Athens at the end of the 3rd century BC and appears in Bactria probably not earlier than the 2nd century BC. But the most frequent vessels stand in the local tradition, like the so-called Bactrian cup-bowl and attest the actual character of the Bactrian pottery.

Consequently, the assumed strong Greek influence on the Bactrian pottery is in my opinion overstated in scholarly discourse.

KEYWORDS

Pottery; ceramics; Bactria; Greek influence; fish-plate; Megarian bowl; mould-made relief bowl; Bactrian cup-bowl; grey ware.

RESEARCH ON THE GREEK-MEDITERRANEAN INFLUENCED POTTERY FROM BACTRIA

The year 329 BC marked a political turn in Bactria, which had triggered various subsequent events. Alexander the Great moved into Bactria and during the next three years conquered large parts of Central Asia, before he set out to the Hindu Kush. Before leaving Bactria, he set up bases with ‘Greek’ settlers, who would henceforth control the area vicariously (Arrian *Anab.* IV, 22; Diodorus XVIII, 7; RAPIN – GRENET 1983, 315–72; GRENET 1983, 373–381; BERNARD 1996, 104–116; MAIRS 2008, 19–20). This migration event is understood to be the trigger of a transformational process, which became tangible in the material culture (MAIRS 2008, 23–26). Amongst other things it can be attested by architectural elements, sculptures or inscriptions, which show an explicit Greek origin. But can this change also be observed in the pottery of the Hellenistic period? J.-C. Gardin states that ‘le fait le plus étonnant est le caractère éminemment

grec de la céramique fabriquée dans la région pendant toute cette période' (GARDIN 1990, 187).¹ According to him, Bactrian ceramics show a strong Greek influence, which would have been caused by the presence of Greek settlers in Bactria. Over the last few decades this hypothesis has grown to become a fact that has never been discussed to ascertain its correctness and will therefore be proven in this paper.

The first, thorough research of the Hellenistic pottery of Bactria was carried out on the basis of the ceramic finds in Ai Khanoum by P. Bernard in 1965. In addition to technical features, such as the 'régularité du tournage, la finesse des moulures de pied ou de lévre' (SCHLUMBERGER – BERNARD 1965, 604), he already postulated the Greek character of the Hellenistic ceramic shapes.² At the same time, however, he noted that the Bactrian pottery was produced on site and differs from the previous ceramic production by a range of new shapes. This change was due to the Greeks who settled in Bactria from the Alexander the Great times (SCHLUMBERGER – BERNARD 1965, 604). In his opinion, there is no ceramic shape that has no equivalent in the Hellenistic pottery repertoire of the Middle East or Egypt. He then clarified this connection to the non-Greek regions of the Hellenistic world, using selected vessel shapes of the Middle East and concluded that there is no difference between the pottery of Bactria and the other centres of the Middle East (SCHLUMBERGER – BERNARD 1965, 605–606). Further studies of the Bactrian pottery were conducted by J.-C. Gardin and B. Lyonnet during the following decades, but these were mostly limited to Ai Khanoum (southeastern Bactria) (LYONNET 1997; 2013a; GENTELLE 1989; 1990; 1998), with the exception of Lyonnet's comparison of the pottery of Marakanda and Koktepe (LYONNET 2012; 2013b).

In northwestern Bactria, the research interest in Bactrian pottery of the Hellenistic era has developed in recent years. The assumed Greek influence would also be clearly recognizable on the basis of the archaeological material, leading to the definition of the 'Ai Khanoum Ceramic Complex'. This term was established to clarify the similarity of the northern pottery finds to the material from Ai Khanoum (SEDOV 1984, 171–180). Up to the present time, this hypothesis is widely recognized in the research discussion. Sverchkov reports that 'materials from the excavations of all levels in the [Kurganzol] fortress, however, reflect not simply a Mediterranean influence but rather a direct imitation of Greek prototypes' (SVERCHKOV 2008, 164).

Contrary to the generally accepted research opinion, Pidaev determined typological differences in the composition of Termez and Ai Khanoum ceramics and defined the term 'Termez Type Pottery' to contradict Sedov's thesis (PIDAEV 1991, 220–221).

Another problematic thesis is based on the assumption that Greeks who lived in Bactria, pursued their eating and drinking traditions and thus had an influence on the local ceramic production (LYONNET 1997, 133–134, 169–173; GARDIN 1985, 447–460; GARDIN 1990, 190–193; MAIRS 2013, 85–88; MAIRS 2014b, 175–182; HOUAL 2016, 468). Most clearly one can read this research hypothesis in Tikhonov's article: 'Thus, the pottery of Bactria of the Hellenistic era, despite all its tradition, was sufficiently influenced by the Greeks. This was reflected not only in the set and appearance of the dishes (completely new types and morphological details, stamp ornament), but also in the process of pottery production.' And he concludes: 'Their presence in the ceramic complex, apparently indicates that the Greeks settled in the depths of Asia maintained close ties with Hellas' (ТИХОНОВ 2012b, 135).³

1 'The most astonishing fact is the eminently Greek character of the ceramics made in the region during this whole period.'

2 'The regularity of the turning, the fineness of the mouldings of the vessels' foot or lip.'

3 'Таким образом, гончарное дело Бактрии эллинистической эпохи, несмотря на всю свою традиционность, подверглось достаточному влиянию со стороны греков. Это отразилось

In summary, since the 1960s, it has been commonly accepted by researchers that Greek settlers influenced and partly changed the Bactrian ceramic production. In this paper this paradigm is questioned and examined with regard to two arguments. First of all, two types of vessels, the so-called fish-plate and the so-called Megarian cup, are discussed, which are generally regarded as Greek influenced vessel shapes (GARDIN 1990, 189–190; LYONNET 2013, 353–354, 360; TIKHONOV 2011a, 322–324; TIKHONOV 2013, 321–329). Both vessel types are of particular importance to the discussion in terms of their typological characteristics, their distribution and most of all because of their dating (LERNER 2003/2004, 378–380; LERNER 2010, 59–61, 66–68, 71–75; LYONNET 2012, 155–157, 161). Obviously, it would be fruitful to discuss more vessel types, but already these two shapes will serve as a good example as both have continuously been utilized in literature to demonstrate the Greek-Mediterranean character of the Bactrian pottery production during both Hellenistic phases: the early Hellenistic phase with the fish-plate (end 4th–3rd century BC) and the late Hellenistic phase with the mould-made relief bowl (2nd century BC).

In its basic approach, this study demonstrates the differences between the Mediterranean and the Bactrian vessels, leading to a preclusion of some so-called Greek vessels. In contrast, new vessel shapes and decoration techniques should be more likely understood as the result of a local transformational process, which seems to have begun in Bactria even before Hellenism (ABDULLAEV 1976, 124; LITVINSKIY 2000, 218; TIKHONOV 2011a, 211; TIKHONOV 2012a, 314). The vessel shapes that have unambiguous models in the West are relatively low in number and accumulate mainly in Ai Khanoum (TIKHONOV 2011a, 210; TIKHONOV 2013; JUNKER forthcoming). Significantly, shapes of a local tradition/innovation have been documented at all Hellenistic sites in Bactria, and they dominate the ceramic assemblage. These include the so-called Bactrian cup-bowl, which can be interpreted as a multifunctional vessel that is strongly connected to pre-Hellenistic drinking and eating traditions. Unlike in the Mediterranean, where kantharoi and skyphoi were produced until the 3rd century BC, these Greek drinking vessels have not been discovered in Bactria and therefore did not replace the Bactrian cup-bowl (JUNKER forthcoming).

This observation makes it clear that despite new impetus in the form of new vessel shapes, food and drink habits in Bactria had not been radically changed (but rather gradually).

In the following, this research result will be amplified on the basis of the above-mentioned vessel shapes.

THE FISH-PLATE

The fish-plate is one of many vessel shapes of the ancient Greek ceramic repertoire and is considered to be a key form of the Hellenistic era, as it was identified at several sites between the Mediterranean and Bactria. Moreover, it is used as an archaeological marker to identify Greek settlers, who were living all across the Hellenistic world, and their influence on local pottery traditions (**Fig. 1**).

не только на наборе и облике посуды (совершенно новые типы и морфологические детали, штамповый орнамент), но и на процессе организации гончарного ремесла (горны с опорным столбом в топочной камере). [...] Их наличие в керамическом комплексе, видимо, свидетельствует о том, что греки, поселенные в глубинах Азии поддерживали тесные связи с Элладой.'

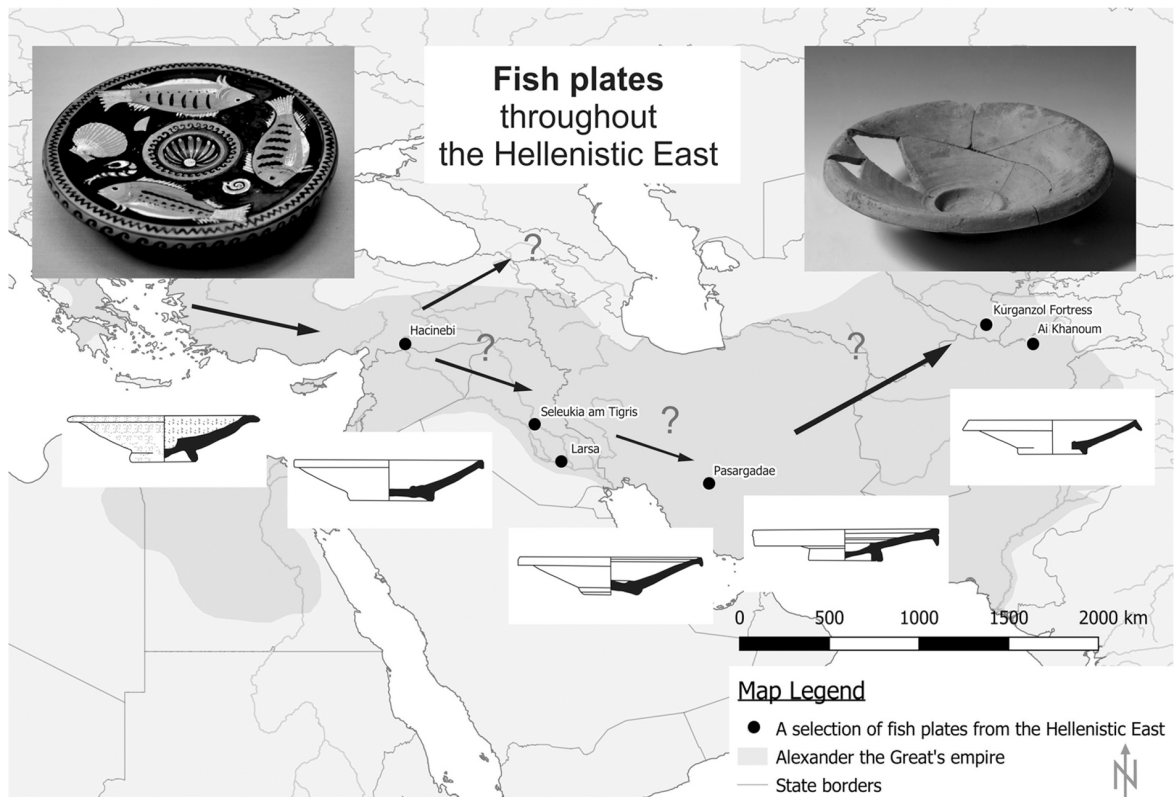


Fig. 1: The different types of so-called fish plates, which differ to some degree significantly from each other. After: Kurganzol – SVERCHKOV 2009; Hacenebi – STEIN *et al.* 1996; Seleucia on the Tigris – VALTZ 2000; Larsa and Pasargadae – HANNESTAD 1990; Ai Khanoum – LYONNET 2013a; Map by K. Junker.

The plate got its name from the motifs, which were painted in Red-figure style and usually represent fishes and other esculent marine animals (ROTROFF 1997, 146–149. In general: MCPHEE – TRENDALL 1987; KUNISCH 1989). Its shape can be characterized as a flat plate with a broad hanging rim and a ring base. Due to its design, this shape was complicated to manufacture and required a certain amount of technical skills on the potter's behalf. A second feature is the central shallow depression on the inside of the plate, in which oil or sauces were held. The fish-plate was invented at the end of the 5th century in Attica and was later mainly produced in southern Italy and Sicily (ROTROFF 1997, 146).

During the Hellenistic period, the fish-plate was produced in great numbers in Athens, but its typical fish motifs were replaced by a black gloss. In the course of the following 200 years, the Attic plate even becomes a bowl with a short hanging rim and smaller diameter of the inner depression, which seems to have lost its original purpose at that time (ROTROFF 1997, 147). In addition, no standardized size (diameter) can be appraised at any time. Therefore, the fish-plate is not a useful shape for dating any archaeological context (ROTROFF 1997, 148).

In other regions of the Hellenistic world the development of the fish-plate is very individual and cannot be summarized in this paper. The vessel's shape, however, is interpreted as a key form of the Hellenistic culture throughout the Hellenistic territories and is therefore also mentioned in many publications of archaeological sites, even if morphological differences

are obviously recognizable (for example: HANNESTAD 1990, 179; VALTZ 1991, 56; ROTROFF 1997, 146; SOUSA 2019, 302).

In Bactria, the fish-plate vessel shape is associated with the campaigns of Alexander and the subsequent settlement of Greeks (TIKHONOV 2010, 96; TIKHONOV 2013, 323).⁴ Although this shape is identified at many, if not all, archaeological sites of the Hellenistic era, the shape of the vessel is usually not defined or described and, for this reason, very different diagnostic fragments are referred to as fish-plates (JUNKER forthcoming): The Attic fish-plate shows a broad hanging rim during the early and middle Hellenistic periods. Such a rim type is previously known only in Ai Khanoum with only a few documented fragments (LYONNET 2013a, fig. 101, 107; LYONNET 2013b, 535). As a rule, however, another rim shape is attributed to the fish-plate, which shows a shortened downturned rim (**Fig. 2**) (LYONNET 2013a, fig. 101, 107; SVERCHKOV 2008, 146, fig. 13:12–13, 14:16–20, 18:18–19, 19:5, 18, 20:4–6; TIKHONOV 2013, 133).

The unique feature, however, is the central depression on the inner surface of the vessel, as known from Mediterranean fish-plates. In contrast, Bactrian fish-plates rarely have such a feature, and if they do, two variants are differentiable: either it can be deepened into a thickened bottom part or it is only indicated by a slight depression/score line (LYONNET 2013a, fig. 101–104; SVERCHKOV 2008, 146, fig. 19:7; MAXWELL-JONES 2015, 99). However, such a diagnostic feature is relatively rarely observable in Bactria and often associated with several rim variants, and sometimes vessel types. Fish-plates from Ai Khanoum and Kurganzol, for example, show different diagnostic depressions and rim shapes (LYONNET 2013a, fig. 101, 107; SVERCHKOV 2008, 146, fig. 19:7; DVURECHENSKAYA 2015, 204).

Moreover, the bottom parts are designed differently too: ring feet, flat and broad bases can show a depression, but they are again rarely found in Bactria (LYONNET 2013a, fig. 101–104; SVERCHKOV 2008, 146, fig. 19:7).⁵

A notable difference can also be determined by the proportion or height of the vessel. In Attica, flat fish-plate shapes can be found until the end of the 3rd century BC, after that time the shape is changed to a more bowl like fish-plate (ROTROFF 1997, 148–149). In Bactria, however, the vessels known as fish-plates are not always characterized as plates and often show a bowl-like shape already during the Hellenistic period, which stand in clear contrast to the Mediterranean models.

These morphological differences clearly prevent the identification of a Greek-Mediterranean influence. Consequently, one of the most frequently cited Greek-Mediterranean or Greek inspired Bactrian shapes cannot surely be designated as such.

A similar phenomenon can also be observed in the Mesopotamian pottery production. In Dura Europos, besides two imported fish plate fragments, numerous locally produced fish plates were documented (in the red slip ware) (COX 1949, 24; HANNESTAD 1990, 181).⁶ In south-

4 'Les périodes I–III étaient caractérisées par une céramique essentiellement de couleur claire poursuivant la tradition locale précédente, mais parfois à engobe rouge; d'emblée y étaient attestées des formes typiquement grecques comme les assiettes à poisson, les bols à lèvre rentrante [linked to the echinus bowl] ou les cratères.' (LYONNET 2013, 353). 'Another shape that is typically considered a marker of Greekness, although not as elite as mould-made bowls, is the fishplate.' (MAXWELL-JONES 2015, 492).

5 The central depression is not always attested as a diagnostic feature or is not mentioned at all, probably due to the relatively low number of fragments with a depression in Bactria.

6 Interestingly, some shapes, as well as the fish plate, were not only produced in the local red slip ware of Dura Europos, but also in the so-called grey ware, which is also linked to shapes of Greek inspiration. This observation could allow the interpretation of workshops that were specialized in Greek inspired pottery shapes.

ern Mesopotamia fish plates are covered with a green glaze, a characteristic of the regional pottery production (HANNESTAD 1983, 13–16; HANNESTAD 1990, 183). Their morphological features include a short hanging rim and a depression, following no uniform design. But unlike in Bactria, the Mesopotamian fish plates usually have a ring bottom.

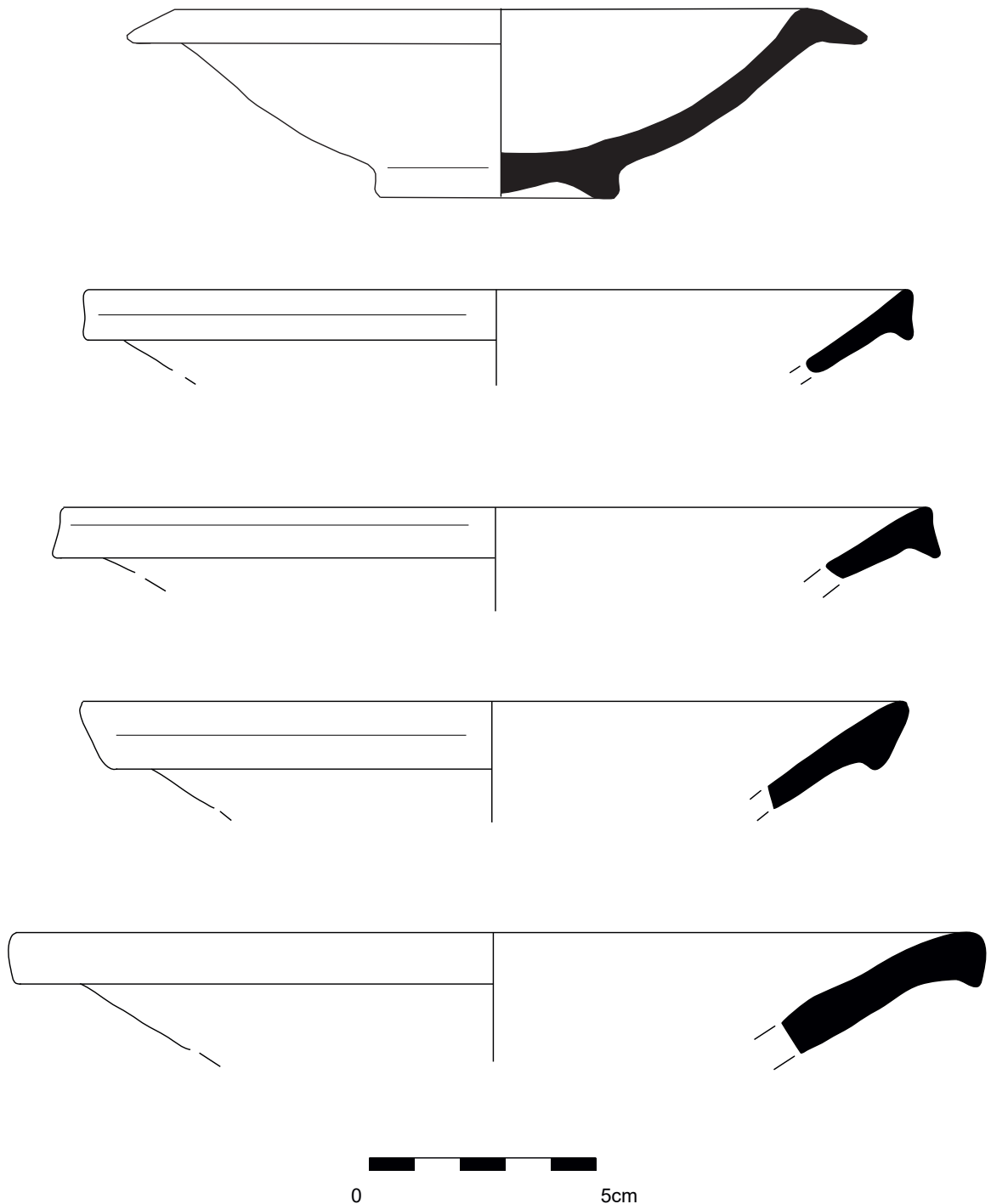


Fig. 2: The two Bactrian rim types that are generally associated with the Mediterranean fish plate. Torbulok. Drawing by K. Junker.

In general, the Greek vessel shapes were produced according to local traditions and enriched the already known range of shapes in Mesopotamia. However, two aspects need to be taken into consideration: on the one hand these vessels are not found in the same quantity in all regions and on the other hand their shapes were 'simplified' to varying degrees (HANNESTAD 1990, 186). Because of these factors it is highly important to clearly define each shape which one wants to name Greek or Greek inspired. Only with such an explicit definition, can the real influence sphere be cleared up. But up to now, there is no single distinct definition of a fish-plate, neither in Mesopotamia nor in Bactria. Therefore, one should be careful when using terminology which indicates a certain cultural affiliation.

To sum up, during the early Hellenistic period the local ceramic repertoire of numerous sites in the Hellenistic East was enriched by the new shapes like various rim shapes of bowls and plates, ring foots and broad bases, containers with handles and transport flasks, as well as the red coated vessels (LYONNET 2013b, 353; TIKHONOV 2012b, 138). On the basis of the morphological peculiarities, however, it has been demonstrated that the assumed Mediterranean vessel shape of the fish plate was determined on the basis of different characteristics, following no uniform definition: a short hanging or downturned rim shape, and/or an inner depression. Therefore, these vessels do not equate to the Mediterranean fish-plate (TIKHONOV 2010, 98; JUNKER forthcoming). The depression on the vessel's inner surface can finally be interpreted as a variant, connected to more than one rim type. It is therefore not recommended to use the term fish-plate, but instead define the various rim types individually.

Interestingly enough, no commentary has yet been made concerning the missing type shapes of the Hellenistic Mediterranean pottery repertoire: Greek drinking vessels, such as *kantharoi* or *skyphoi*. These shapes were produced in Attica only until the second third of the 3rd century BC (ROTROFF 1997, 84–119). With a few exceptions, they have not been found in the Hellenistic east (HANNESTAD 1990, 181). In Bactria these shapes are completely missing (JUNKER forthcoming). Apparently, the Bactrian population had their own local vessel shape, better adapted to their own (eating and) drinking customs: One of these local shapes is referred to as the Bactrian cup-bowl (GARDIN 1990, 190; JUNKER forthcoming).

THE BACTRIAN CUP-BOWL

The Bactrian cup-bowl is a deep open vessel with a flat base, a bulbous body and an incurved lip. This cup-bowl was already made during the Bronze Age, and from the Iron Age on its outside surface shows a bright 'pseudo slip', which can also be observed on other vessel shapes (GARDIN 1990, 190; BOLELOV 2001, 18; TIKHONOV 2011b, 53–54; JUNKER forthcoming).⁷ In the course of the Hellenistic era, such cup-bowls continued to be made with some variations (**Fig. 3**): in addition to flat bottom parts, the cups can also stand on a ring foot. The body can show a stepped wall at the maximum diameter of the vessel and a red or occasionally a dark slip. After the Hellenistic era, and especially during the Kushan period, the once-wide cup shapes were modified, providing a probable typological link to the high cups with pedestal foots of the Kushan period (GARDIN 1990, 318–319).

7 The term 'pseudo slip' stands for a fire technique with the result of a partly whitish surface colour. During the firing process in the pottery kiln and due to the stacking of the vessels, the upper vessel part, which is not covered by the lower vessel, turns white. Therefore, this technique cannot be referred to as a real slip.

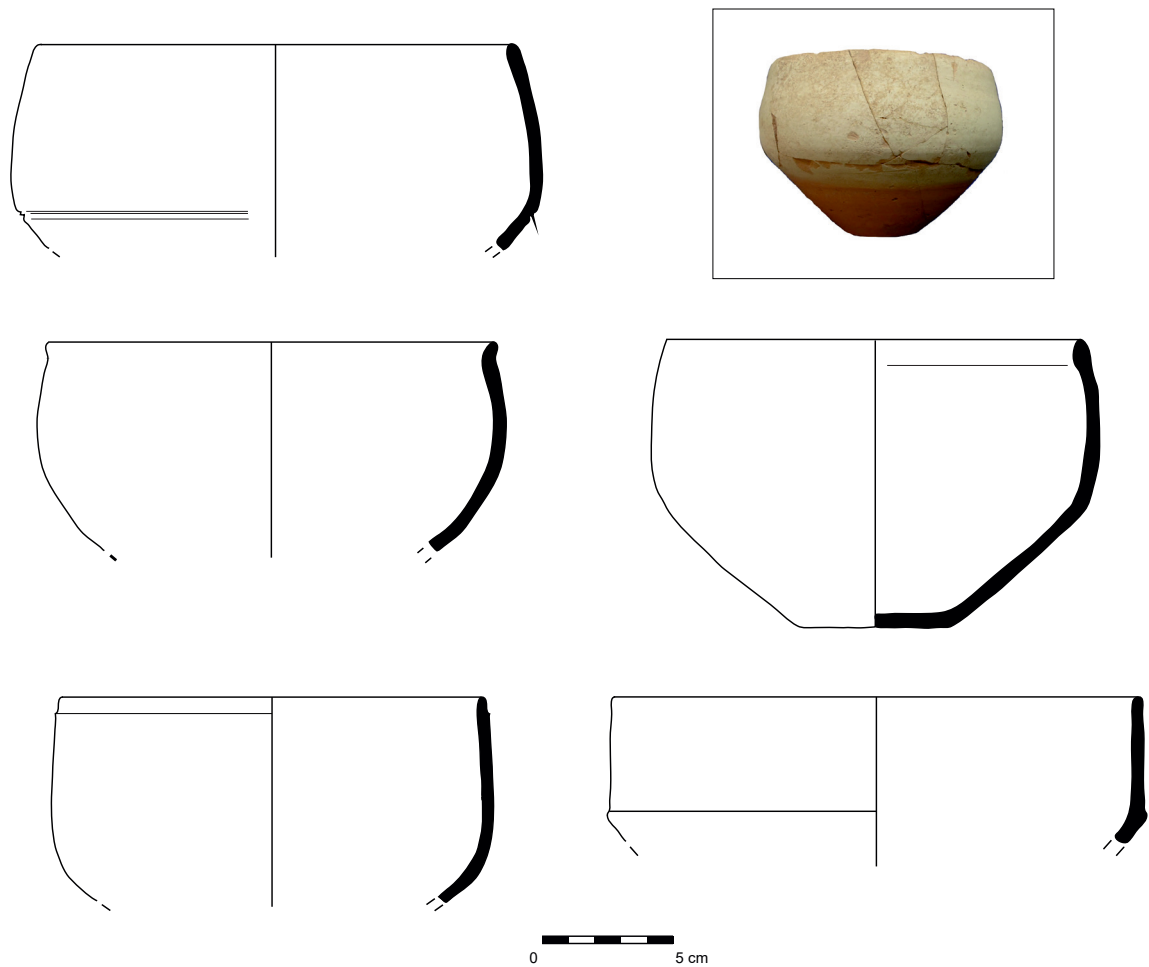


Fig. 3: The Bactrian cup-bowl and its various types and variants. Fragments found in Torbulok.
Drawing by K. Junker.

The Bactrian cup-bowl has been discovered in various shapes, at many archaeological sites and even beyond the borders of Bactria (ТИХОНОВ 2010, 93–96; JUNKER forthcoming). Although it is not a complex vessel shape, its special manufacturing technique, high number, and traditional design might indicate that the Bactrian wheel made pottery production was generally dominated by this local vessel shape throughout the Hellenistic period. But besides the Bactrian cup-bowls with its ‘pseudo slip’, also various types of storage vessels and cooking pots (Fig. 4, Pl. 2/1) continued to be produced and used, amplifying the hypothesis that the local people adhered to existing indigenous traditions (ТИХОНОВ 2011c, 98).

A similar development can also be observed in southern Mesopotamia. There, the local tradition of green glazed pottery and Egg-Shell-Ware continued to exist during the Hellenistic period. Unlike the green glaze that covered some Greek vessel shapes, the Egg-Shell-Ware was exclusively used for the production of traditional, local tableware shapes (HANNESTAD 1990, 183; HANNESTAD 1983, 23–38). It is worth noting, however, that along with local cooking pot shapes *lopades* were also produced in local workshops. This fact could indicate that the population living in the Hellenistic centres of southern Mesopotamia was to some degree composed of Greeks, who maintained their cooking traditions. In contrast, no Greek cooking pots are up to now known in Bactria. But why? One can assume, that the populations of Bactria and of

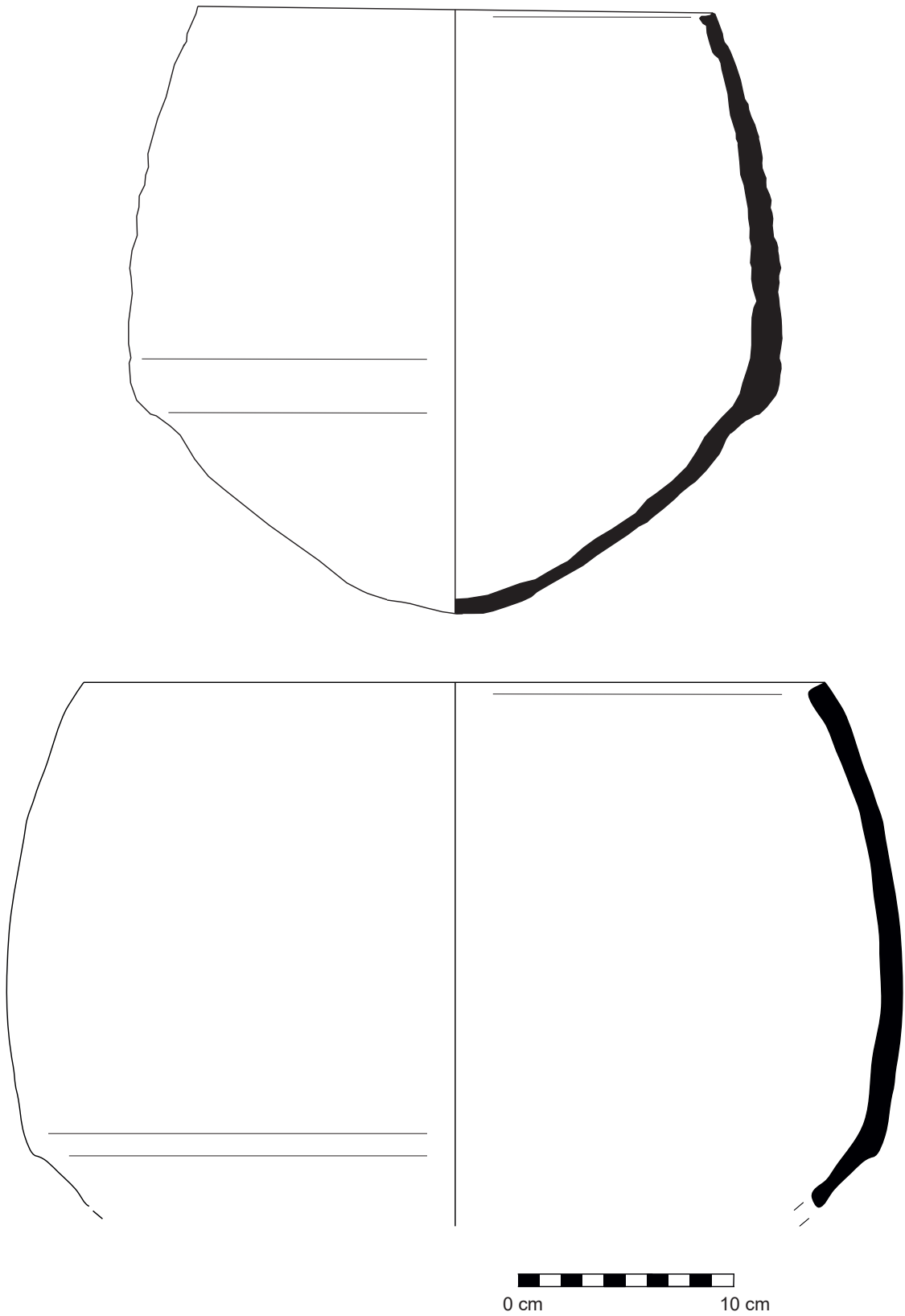


Fig. 4: Cooking pot type found in Torbulok, linked to Iron Age traditions. Drawing by K. Junker.

southern Mesopotamia were either differently composed or the Bactrian Greeks simply had no influence on the local production of cooking vessels (JUNKER forthcoming).

Hence, it is very unlikely to prove that Alexander's campaign caused a Greek-Mediterranean influence (process) on the local ceramic production. Beginning already in the Iron Age, new vessel shapes had been incorporated into the existing ceramic repertoire, such as plate and bowl shapes, as well as new techniques, such as the red coating (TIKHONOV 2010, 97; TIKHONOV 2011b, 135–140; TIKHONOV 2012b, 138; SVERCHKOV – BOROFFKA 2013; SVERCHKOV – BOROFFKA 2016; JUNKER forthcoming).⁸ Some of these innovations were therefore already partly developed during the early Hellenistic period. With the settlement of Greek newcomers, the development of the local production was further diversified.

But in spite of these change processes, the ceramic repertoire of the Bactrian potters was still mostly formed by vessel shapes and techniques that stand in local, pre-Hellenistic traditions (TIKHONOV 2011b, 137–139; JUNKER forthcoming). In addition to the storage vessels and cooking pots, these include, in particular, the Bactrian cup, which was produced in the course of the Hellenistic period in various types and variants and was thus adapted to the contemporary taste. Consequently, the intensity of the settlers' influence did not lead to major changes either in the pottery production nor in the eating and drinking habits of the Bactrian people during the whole Hellenistic period.

However, some vessel shapes are attested, whose origins are evidently found in the Mediterranean pottery production.

THE MOULD-MADE RELIEF BOWL ('MEGARIAN BOWLS')

The so-called Megarian bowl is one of these Greek vessel shapes (ROTROFF 1982a, 2–5; ROTROFF 2006, 357–359, 373–376). Because of its special manufacturing technique, a mould with a sunken relief décor, the vessel (bowl, crater or jug) bears a raised relief, similar to relieved silver vessels, which most likely served as a model for the clay adaptation (ROTROFF 1982a, 6–9; ROTROFF 1982b, 329–337; PFROMMER 1993, 38). Besides floral ornaments, figurative motifs have been used to pattern the outside surface of the vessels. Their production began in Athens from about the last quarter of the 3rd century BC (ROTROFF 1997, 38–43, 72–73; ROTROFF 2003, 91–92; ROTROFF 2005, 24; ROTROFF 2006, 7–8). In the course of the following decades, production sites were first established in Greece, later in Asia Minor and the Levant (GULDAGER-BILDE 1993, 195–206; GULDAGER-BILDE 2008, 187–188; LERNER 2010, 66).

In Ai Khanoum, a fragment of a mould was discovered along with a series of fragments that all show floral motifs. Other fragments of mould-made relief bowls are known from Tepai Deniston, Tacht-i Sangin, Uzundara, Bashtepa (Bukhara), and from Kampyr Tepe (**Fig. 5; Pl. 2/2**). The cups from Kampyr Tepe were lastly discussed by Lerner, who, however, did not consider their shape and design (SVERCHKOV 2006, 107, figs. 2:30–34, 3:14–16; SVERCHKOV – VOSKOVSKIY 2006, 25, fig. 8:18; LERNER 2010, 73). In fact, they are not comparable to Megarian cups from Ai Khanoum or to any vessel from the Mediterranean and are therefore referred to as 'Pseudo-Megarian cups / Псевдомегарские чаши' (TIKHONOV 2010, 93; JUNKER forthcoming). The Bashtepa fragment shows two wavy lines (STARK 2016, 137). The fragmented cup from Tepai Deniston is preserved to a greater extent and shows a floral motif (DENISOV 1980, 104). Both are dated to the post-Hellenistic period.

8 For example, at Kyzyl Tepe with vessels of the Iron Age type, like cooking pots, Bactrian bowl cup etc. WU – SVERCHKOV – BOROFFKA 2017, 297, 307–308, 311, 314–316.

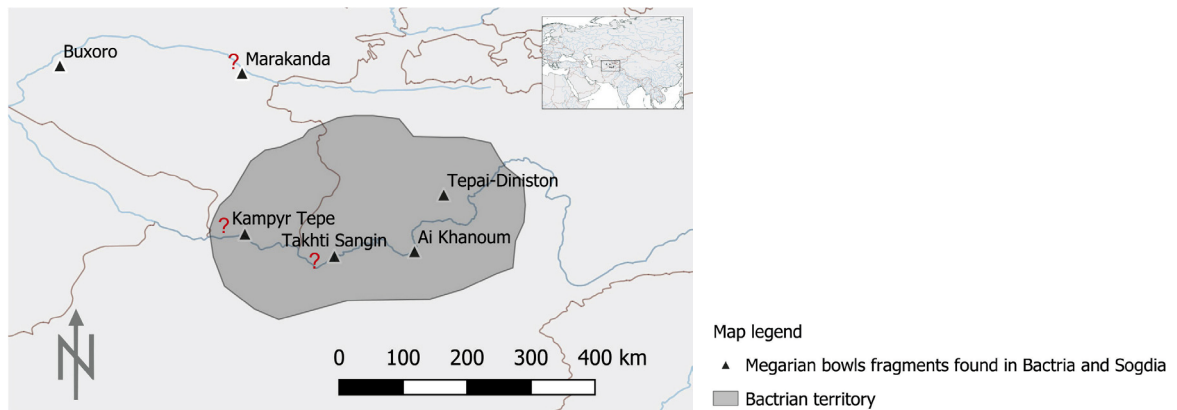


Fig. 5: Map showing the Bactrian and Sogdian sites, where fragments of Megarian bowls were found. Three fragments found at Uzundara are not considered. Map by K. Junker.

Based on these few fragments, only limited conclusions can be drawn regarding a general development in the entire Bactrian territory. Nevertheless, some observations are to be deduced: a large number of cup fragments and a mould are known from Ai Khanoum (GARDIN 1985, 453–454; GARDIN 1990, 189; LYONNET 2013a, pl. XLVII–XLVIII). This circumstance could be used as an argument to locate one (or even the only) production site for Megarian cups in Bactria. But how did a local production of this vessel shape come about?

Between the Mediterranean and Bactria, apart from Asia Minor, Megarian bowls are attested at only a few sites. No fragments of the Megarian bowls have been found in Seleucia on the Tigris and Susa to date. In contrast, several imported fragments have been documented in Dura Europos, as was a mould fragment in Babylon, probably indicating a local production (HANNESTAD 1990, 182).

Even though the Athenian production starts as early as 225 BC, they were only produced in large quantities – or at least found in larger quantities in archaeological contexts – from the first quarter of the 2nd century on (ROTROFF 1982; ROTROFF 2006, 360–376). According to Susan Rotroff, production in Asia Minor and the Levant began around 180/170 BC, so that the eastern vessels can certainly only be dated after this time. Therefore, all Bactrian fragments date not earlier than the second quarter of the 2nd century BC, shortly before the end of the Greco-Bactrian rule in Bactria (LERNER 2010, 70–71; JUNKER forthcoming).

In addition to the mould-made relief bowls other locally made vessel shapes of a Greek-Mediterranean origin like amphorae, *lagynoi*, net-pattern cups, stamped open vessel shapes, moulded figurine handle attachments, and so-called Pergamenian bowls, are almost exclusively found in Ai Khanoum (LYONNET 2001, 142–143; LYONNET 2012, 147, 155; TIKHONOV 2010, 93–100; TIKHONOV 2012b, 133–135; JUNKER forthcoming). This site was undoubtedly the place where various products of the Hellenistic world were not only made but also demanded by certain groups who maintained a (kind of) Hellenized lifestyle, which was also known in other places in the Hellenistic East, like in neighbouring Parthia (FRUMKIN 1970, 152).⁹ But the situation is apparently different at other Bactrian sites, such as at Old Termez (PIDAEV 1991, 210–224), Kamyryr Tepe (BOLELOV 2011, 48–79), Djiga Tepe (PIDAEV 1984, 112–124), Bactra

9 Clay shapes of a Greek type could have been inspired by Megarian bowls made of clay, glass and metal (ROTROFF 2006, 371). Along with the act of drinking wine out of ‘Greek’ vessels, its storage in amphorae could be understood as an expression of the exclusive character of that small group of Bactrians, who could afford this kind of lifestyle.

(HOVAL 2016, 471–475), or the rural sanctuary of Torbulok (JUNKER 2020). Although similar Greek inspired shapes were discovered there, their number is relatively low compared to Ai Khanoum (TIKHONOV 2013, 321–329; JUNKER forthcoming). This situation can be due to several reasons:

1. Trade relations between the Bactrian sites were not always equally pronounced, so that at one site more, and at another site fewer Greek inspired shapes were negotiated and used. It can be assumed that there were several pottery workshops that picked up on innovations and introduced those new vessel types to an exclusive Bactrian audience. (This implies that products that had to be imported could not have been affordable to everyone at all times).

2. There being many sites that differ in some aspects from Ai Khanoum – both in architectural design (theatre, gymnasium) and in material culture (Greek type sculpture, mosaics, Greek inscription). The same can be applied to the Greek influenced pottery shapes of each site's ceramic repertoire. Regarding these observations one could conclude that the population outside Ai Khanoum was probably composed differently and therefore could have made other claims to their tableware. Maybe there were simply no people who wanted Greek-Mediterranean inspired products. Whereas in Ai Khanoum, a group of affluent people, such as the royal family, had a major impact on the local workshops and their manufactured goods. They most likely demanded Greek-Mediterranean cultural objects and integrated them into their everyday lives.

3. A further explanation could emerge from chronological reasons. Greek-Mediterranean influenced vessel shapes seem to have been first produced in the last decades of the Greco-Bactrian period (2nd century BC), so that their absence at other sites could be explained by changing political or economic conditions, which were responsible for the interruption of the local pottery innovations and its distribution.

In the end, it is even possible that a combination of reasons had led to the composition of the archaeological record.

THE GREY WARE

As mentioned earlier, the Greek-influenced shapes include mould-made relief bowls, net-pattern cups, craters, amphorae, *lagynoi*, *askoi*, Pergamenian bowls, figurative handle attachments, and stamped open vessel shapes. These vessel shapes also include aryballoi, alabastra and rhyta (TIKHONOV 2010, 98; TIKHONOV 2012b, 134–135). Although stamp decoration is known throughout the Hellenistic world, only a small number of such fragments have been found in Bactria. It accounts for only a small proportion of the entire ceramic repertoire and is not present at some sites (HANNESTAD 1990, 181–183, 186; TIKHONOV 2011c, 96; LYONNET 2013a, pl. XLIV–XLVI; JUNKER forthcoming).

In addition, another innovation of the Bactrian ceramic production is known from sherds with a greyish color, often called grey ware (LYONNET 2013b, 353, 360–362; JUNKER forthcoming). It is connected almost exclusively with plate and bowl shapes, but some fragments of closed vessel shapes, like pitchers or jugs, are also documented at several Bactrian sites (**Fig. 6; Pl. 2/3**; JUNKER forthcoming). In general, the right side of open shape vessels could have been either polished or coated with a blackish slip.

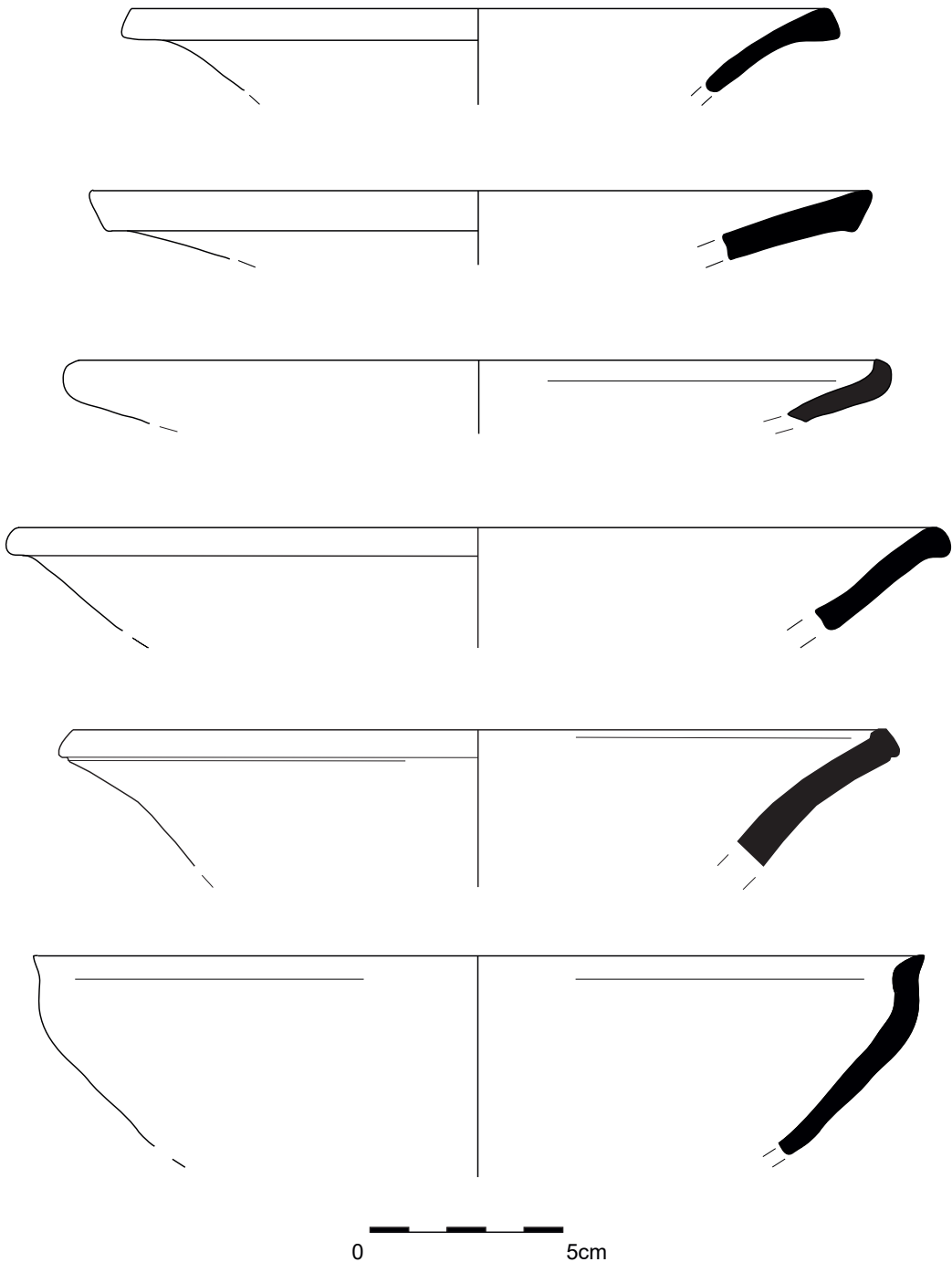


Fig. 6: Grey ware fragments found in the rural sanctuary of Torbulok and its surrounding settlement. Drawings illustrate the various shapes connected to the grey ware. Drawing by K. Junker.

Whereas Lyonnet dates the beginning of its production to the middle of the 3rd century BC, grey ware sherds are known at sites in Uzbekistan like Kurganzol, where they were found in contexts of the first building phase, which is dated to the end of the 4th (and beginning of the 3rd) century (SVERCHKOV 2013, 41; LYONNET 2013a, 186, 191). How do such contradictory statements come about? And how can they be solved so as to lead to comprehensible dating?

The Bactrian potters could have had many sources of inspiration: One possibility for the knowledge and style transformation could have been caused by Western potter production centres. In Dura Europos, first grey ware vessels were made presumably during the middle of the third century, which according to Hannestad are exclusively connected with Greek shapes, such as bowls with an incurving rim, fish-plates, plates with thickened interior rim, deep bowls or craters with an outturned lip, and other shapes (HANNESTAD 1990, 181–182).¹⁰ Hannestad argues further that this ware type was produced to imitate Attic black-gloss ceramics, as the surface appears to be polished and shiny just like the surface of Mediterranean vessels (Cf. ROTROFF 1997, 10–12).¹¹ This adaptation process was probably triggered by the political actions between the Seleucids and the Parthians, which could have led to a halting of the trading networks (with the west) and of the import of western black-gloss vessels (HANNESTAD 1990, 183). However, up to now it is unclear where grey ware shapes were actually produced, as it is unlikely that we shall locate a production centre in Dura Europos due to the low number of grey ware vessels.

Locating the production centre of grey ware in Bactria is problematic for the same reason. A possible place of production seems to have been located in the eastern regions of Bactria, as fragments of the grey ware were found in almost all sites and in larger quantities compared to western Bactria.¹²

The grey ware repertoire is composed of plate and bowl shapes as well as closed vessel shapes, some of which are decorated with mould-made figural attachments. Because of their special design (polish, stamp decoration, ring bases) they differ significantly from the other (not grey ware) vessels. Like in Mesopotamia, grey ware is understood to be an imitation of Attic pottery imitating its black gloss (ТИХОНОВ 2011c, 98). But how should its relatively low number be interpreted in regard to the influence from Attic workshops? And were these grey vessels in fact produced to imitate black-gloss pottery?

If Hannestad's interpretation is right, that the production of grey ware is to be understood as a by-product of the political conflicts during the 3rd century and the halting of the trading networks with the west, the same should apply to Bactrian grey ware production.

10 'In her publication of the Greek and Roman pottery from Dura, Cox assumes that the production of grey ware at Dura started later than the production of the red painted ware, not for stratigraphical reasons, but because the Greek shapes imitated seem generally to belong to the late Hellenistic period. However, it seems strange that a local production of a ware imitating black-glaze should only have started at a period in which the popularity of black-glaze was clearly on the decline.' (HANNESTAD 1990, 181–182. Cf. COX 1949, 24).

11 From the end of the 4th century, the black gloss had replaced red figure painting in Attica. Aside from the West Slope decor, the Hellenistic vessels were undecorated, probably mimicking the shiny surface of metal vessels. At the end of the 3rd century, however, the quality of the glaze changed and in the course of the 2nd century only some vessels in Attica were only partially slipped (ROTRUFF 1997, 11–14).

12 In addition to Ai Khanoum (ca. 3300 frags.), grey ware is known from eastern Bactrian sites: Kulob, Saksanokhur, Tamosho-Tepe, Dushanbe, Kara-Bura, Tup-Kala, Tacht-Sangin, Torbulok (89 frags.), Kalai Mir, and Kej-Kobad-Shakh (D'YAKONOV 1953, 283–286; ZEYMAL 1961, 15; ZEYMAL 1959, 84; ABDULLAEV – BUBNOVA – P'YANKOVA 1975, 261; SEDOV 1984, 17). During a survey of a supposedly small Hellenistic settlement west of Hulbuk, fragments of a grey ware have also been discovered (JUNKER forthcoming). In western Bactria, grey ware pottery is known in Bactra (2% and 7/9% of total volume of finds), Kurganzol (34 frags.), Kampyr Tepe (4% and 16.5%), and Old Termez (1%) (PIDAEV 1991, 218, 223; MKRZYCHEV – BOLELOV 2006, 49; SVERCHKOV 2013, 39, 49, 97; DVURECHENSKAYA 2015, 203; HOVAL 2016, 467, 471–472).

But contrary to Mesopotamia, where Mediterranean imports were found at sites with early Hellenistic layers, up to now only a few imports – and maybe no imports of tableware at all – are known from Bactrian sites. Even though, researchers speak of rare finds of ‘céramique importée en pâte claire ou rougeâtre recouverte d’un engobe noir poli et brillant (dite « céramique attique »)’, none of these have ever been published, resulting in a lack of evidence (LYONNET 2013a, 190).

Therefore, it is highly unlikely that grey ware vessels should have been produced to fill that (non-existing) gap of imports. Especially if one considers the fact that the production of Bactrian grey ware is dated – at the majority of the sites – to the end of the 3rd and mainly to the 2nd century BC.¹³

But should the origin of grey ware be interpreted as an attempt to imitate black gloss vessels made at the Mediterranean production centres? Interestingly, greyish vessels are known in India during the Iron Age as Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), which is said to be mainly produced in the Ganga plains (HAQUE – RAHMAN – AHSAN 2001, 11–40; SHARMIN – OKADA 2012, 49). With the rise of the Mauryan Empire – along with the spread of Buddhism and the growth of the trading networks – vessels of NBPW became a common type of wheel made tableware, whose clay was fine-grained and tempered with only small and few particles (HEDGE 1978, 154). Because of its easy recognizable shiny surface, grey ware vessels had probably been made to imitate metal objects. At Taxila, grey ware sherds were found in a cultural layer that predates Alexander’s arrival. At the same time, these finds prove its widespread dissemination already during the 4th century BC (YOUNG 1946, 27). Along with the more elaborate vessels of the NBPW there are also other fragments without a blackish surface known, which are called grey ware by archaeologists. They are quite similar to the Bactrian grey ware vessels in their shape and colour range, but based on the current state of research it is not possible to define NBPW as a source of inspiration for the Bactrian production. The same applies to a conceivable Mesopotamian origin. In my opinion, a local (Iranian/Central Asian) origin of greyish burnt tableware that dates back to the Bronze Age is more likely.

These interpretive approaches offer convincing alternatives to the established opinion that grey ware vessels were only a failed attempt to imitate Greek black-gloss wares.

DISCUSSION

According to the established research opinion, the Bactrian pottery production of the Hellenistic period was highly influenced by Greek ceramic trends that led to the inclusion of new shapes and techniques, beginning with Alexander and lasting long after the downfall of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom (GARDIN 1990, 187; LYONNET 2013b, 353). The hypothesis, however, has to be questioned for several reasons.

During the early Hellenistic period, innovations can be observed that become tangible with the production of new shapes and techniques, like different plate and bowl shapes, or tableware vessels covered with a red slip (LYONNET 2013b, 353). As archaeologists have stated, this process of transformation began even before the triumph of Alexander the Great

13 About the date of the beginning of grey ware in Bactria: Lyonnet proposed a date in the second half of the 3rd century BC, but Sverchkov found such sherds already in layers of the early Hellenistic phase. There are several reasons why his date should be excluded for now. One of these reasons is the circumstance that only ca. 34 sherds of grey ware were found, which in my opinion cannot be used to justify a ‘production start’ of grey ware vessels.

and was probably connected to a much more complex cultural process (ABDULLAEV 1976, 124; LITVINSKIJ 2000, 218; GAIBOV 2004, 606; TIKHONOV 2011a, 211; TIKHONOV 2012a, 314). Even if new impulses seem to have been set in motion within this process, it still cannot be clearly equated with Greek inspired shapes. The Attic fish-plate, for example, finds no direct parallels in the Bactrian repertoires, but is one of the most mentioned shapes regarding the identification of a Greek influence (MAXWELL-JONES 2015, 492). As a rule, these supposedly Greek inspired shapes of the early Hellenistic phase do not follow strict Greek models, but should be understood as the result of a local adaptation of a few foreign vessel shapes. Some of the Hellenistic key shapes were therefore not included in the Bactrian repertoire, as they were not needed.

In Mesopotamia more vessel types of the Mediterranean repertoire are known during the early Hellenistic phase, but even there some key Mediterranean shapes are ‘missing’ too. So far, only in rare cases, Attic drinking vessels, unguentaria, and kitchen vessels have been discovered. The latter, in particular, serve as a strong ethnic marker, which could be used to differentiate between local and foreign cooking traditions within the archaeological contexts (BUNIMOVITZ – YASUR-LANDAU 1996, 89–93). It is striking that these shapes are up to now completely missing in the Bactrian material. With that in mind, the early Hellenistic pottery is clearly different from other regional production centres in the East, which seem to have been more extensively engaged in trade activities with the centres in the Hellenistic Mediterranean.

Not until the end of the 3rd century BC – or even later – were the first shapes produced in Bactria that are comparable with vessels of the Hellenistic Mediterranean. These include, in particular, the mould-made relief bowls, which were produced in Asia Minor, the Levant, and probably also in southern Mesopotamia from at least the first half of the 2nd century BC. Thus, this vessel cannot be assigned to any identity. At that time Greek-Mediterranean vessel types are to be rather interpreted as an expression of a philhellene life style, which was lived only by certain groups of the population. This interpretation could clarify the relatively low find incidence of these shapes throughout the Bactrian territories.

But how did the Bactrian potters gain their inspiration to produce ‘identical’ copies of Mediterranean shapes, like the mould-made bowls? Precious metal vessels probably served as a model.¹⁴ Therefore, only a few Mediterranean shapes were adapted in Bactria.

On the basis of the published results, the dating of the introduction of Greek inspired pottery shapes is challenging. Nevertheless, the appearance of Greek inspired shapes dates more likely to the Greco-Bactrian period or even more precisely to the 2nd century BC (LERNER 2010, 70–71). This development was probably triggered by the political and economic events following the peace treaty between Euthydemus I and Antiochus III. In subsequent decades, the expansion of Ai Khanoum took place, which led to its unique character of an urban site with Western and Eastern features (MAIRS 2014a, 1–4; MARTINEZ-SÈVE 2014, 267).

On the basis of the ceramic studies, the production start of Greek-Mediterranean vessel types in Bactria cannot be argued (JUNKER forthcoming). One must note that the settlement policy of Alexander the Great is not comparable with the founding of colonies in the Black Sea area in the first half of the 1st millennium BC (TSETSKHLADZE 1998, 15–44). In that case, the Greeks who settled down in that area did not abandon their own traditions and habits,

14 Assuming that these types of vessels and techniques were only produced at a few sites in Bactria, and that potters did not follow only ceramic examples which came to Bactria via (sea) trade routes (JUNKER forthcoming).

were in constant contact with their homeland, and partly did not assimilate themselves in their new environment.

Due to the early death of Alexander the Great and the great distance to the Greek core land, the Greeks who settled in Bactria would hardly have been able to maintain a remarkable cultural connection with the West, at least regarding the pottery changes. On the other hand, one is not even aware of what kind of Greeks settled in Bactria, what traditions they brought with them, and how the assimilation process took place (depending on both sides). Although a certain affinity to Greek culture in the Greco-Bactrian kingdom is ascertainable, there seems to have been no overall cultural change – at least it is not reflected in the archaeological record. Ai Khanoum stands out alone and, for this reason, is not representative of other Hellenistic sites in Bactria and their pottery collections.

The ceramic repertoire of each site and region is composed differently and so far, cannot be dated due to the state of research, especially regarding a relative chronology. As long as the Bactrian pottery of the Hellenistic period has not been finally defined and classified, no research results can be formulated that concern, for example, external influences or identity assignments (JUNKER forthcoming).

CONCLUSION

‘Le fait le plus étonnant est le caractère éminemment grec de la céramique fabriquée dans la région pendant toute cette période’ (GARDIN 1990, 187).¹⁵ According to his hypothesis, the Bactrian pottery shows a strong Greek influence, which could be explained by the presence of Greek settlers in Bactria. This assumption has grown over the last decades into a fact that has never been questioned for its correctness.

In the early Hellenistic period, research initially identified a few shapes, such as the crater, bowls with incurved rims and fish-plates, as indicators of a change process in pottery production, which was triggered by the settlement of Greeks. However, these new shapes are more likely to be a local interpretation of different vessels, whose origin could be derived from different models. The hypothesis of a Greek origin does not have to be ruled out, but at the same time cannot be verified on the basis of a purely typological comparison either – since the Bactrian potters do not seem to have followed a strict (Mediterranean or other regional) paradigm.

However, assuming that these shapes should nevertheless be interpreted as markers of a Greek identity, some difficulties arise. For example, one could assume that the new shapes should have enriched the entire Bactrian ceramic repertoire, such as drinking vessels or cooking ware. The latter are generally considered to be unique identifiers as foreign cooking practices often differ from local traditions, especially during the first generation of settlers (BUNIMOVITZ – YASUR-LANDAU 1996, 89–93). Since neither *kantharoi* nor *skyphoi* or *lopades* can be found in the pottery material of Bactria, the hypothesis of the influence on the ceramic production in Bactria by the Greek settlers cannot be confirmed on the basis of the ceramic finds. Thus, during the early Hellenistic period, when most Greek immigrants were settled in Bactria, no introduction of standard Mediterranean pottery shapes can be determined. Therefore, the idea of Mediterranean-like eating and drinking customs needs to be excluded. But it can still be assumed that the process of the introduction of new shapes like plates and

15 ‘The most astonishing fact is the eminently Greek character of the ceramics made in the region during this whole period.’

bowls was enlarged by the new settlers from the West as well as by local population who (together) created a new material culture, that is now named the Hellenistic culture of Bactria.

Only in the course of the 2nd century BC were imitations of decidedly Greek-Mediterranean vessel shapes produced: mould-made relief bowls, net-pattern cups, stamped open vessel shapes, moulded figurine handle attachments, and the so-called Pergamenian bowls. However, these vessels should not be interpreted as proof of direct and strong contact with the Mediterranean world, as was assumed by Gardin and Lyonnet: '[Gardin] had noticed the great speed with which innovations and fashions diffused from the Mediterranean to Central Asia' (LYONNET 2012, 157, after: GARDIN 1985, 447–460; GARDIN 1990, 192–193). On the one hand, shapes of a clear Mediterranean origin are scarcely found throughout the Bactrian territories and should consequently be linked to a certain group of Bactrian people. On the other hand, it may be assumed that these vessel shapes were not produced to relate to the 'Greekness' of their users, but were probably used to demonstrate a philhellenic lifestyle and an affinity to the Hellenistic Mediterranean world. Similar processes can be observed for example in the Parthian kingdom, where to some degree the Greek style was part of the higher 'class' lifestyle (FRUMKIN 1970, 152). Consequently, these shapes should not be interpreted as evidence of a Greek population in Bactria.

On the basis of this study, a strong Mediterranean influence on Bactrian pottery production must therefore be rejected. However, it applies in certain aspects to the ceramic material of Ai Khanoum, a site of mainly the 2nd century BC that, due to its layout, architecture and finds, differs significantly from other sites. Its outstanding position compared to other Bactrian sites of the Hellenistic period is also observable in the ceramic repertoire, which consists of significantly more Greek inspired vessel shapes compared to other Bactrian sites (JUNKER forthcoming). However, the ceramic repertoire of Ai Khanoum did not define the Bactrian production as a whole: each site (with its different function) was differently tied to the trading network and its people (composed of different groups) had a special interest in vessel shapes that fitted their needs. This assumption can be proven by the fact that not all shapes known in Ai Khanoum can be found at all Bactrian sites, a condition that probably highlights the different Bactrian groups as well as the variable contacts between the settlements that were spread throughout the Bactrian territory. Consequently, terms such as 'ceramic complex of the type Ai Khanoum' are misleading and the assumed strong Greek influence on the Bactrian pottery should be moderated. In contrast, the Bactrian pottery production was characterized by local traditions and innovations throughout the Hellenistic period.

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Pl. 2/1.: A cooking pot found in Torbulok. Photo by K. Junker.



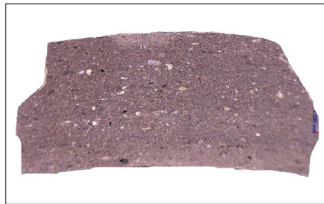
Pl. 2/2.: The Megarian bowl found in Tepai Diniston, southern Tajikistan. Photo by K. Junker, For the drawing see DENISOV 1980, 105, fig. 4.



Ware groupe III (Grey ware)



Tb14.2-12-01-020



Tb14.1-7-01-002



Tb14.2-13-21-001

Pl. 2/3.: Fragment of a molded figurine handle attachment. Pictures of the fresh break of grey ware fragments. Photo by K. Junker.