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A UNIQUE FRAGMENT OF A *TERRA SIGILLATA* VESSEL FROM THE POLISH CARPATHIANS

Abstract: This paper discusses a fragment of a *terra sigillata* vessel discovered at site no. 47 in Stronie, Limanowa district, Poland – which constitutes a unique find in the area of northern slopes of the Polish Carpathians. It was found during a field survey conducted within the Beskid Wyspowy Mountains and in the Sącz Basin. The state of preservation of this artefact is probably indicative of a settlement as opposed to a burial context, as it does not bear any traces of burning. The fragment in question probably comes from the beaker of type Drag. 30. The presence of *terra sigillata* finds in the Polish Carpathians, most probably indicates the contacts between the Beskid Mountains zone and the Danubian Roman provinces during the reign of the Severan dynasty.

Keywords: Roman Period, *terra sigillata*, Samian ware, Drag. 30 form beaker, Polish Carpathians, Przeworsk culture

*Terra sigillata*¹ pottery is one of the most important archaeological sources in attempting to reconstruct contacts between the *Imperium Romanum* and the various groups in *Barbaricum*. This is due to the large number of finds of this type from various areas outside the Roman *limes*, the ability to identify the origin and chronology of these products, and the diversity of their audience. Studies of the distribution of *terra sigillata* in *Barbaricum* have also played an important role in the recognition of differing models for the distribution of Roman products in this area. Finds of *terra sigillata* are also essential for the study of the absolute chronology of the development phases of the cultures of "barbaric" Europe.

The recent finding of a fragment of a *terra sigillata* vessel in the Sącz Basin provides new data for the study of the distribution of Roman products within the area dominated by the Przeworsk culture. This artefact was recovered during a surface survey carried out by Krzysztof Tunia, using the Polish Archaeological

¹ The meaning of the term *terra sigillata* was adopted as per H. Comfort (1940).



Record (AZP) method, in the central area of the Dunajec River. It was discovered in 2012 at site no. 47 in Stronie, Limanowa district (Fig. 1, 2)². This survey was part of a broader project studying the prehistory and early medieval period in this region of the Carpathians, which was initiated in 1974 with an archaeological surface survey of the Polish part of the Poprad River basin and the Kamienica Nawojowska River basin. One of the significant results of this research was the discovery in the Beskid Sądecki Mountains and adjacent parts of the Sącz Basin of the remains of intensive settlement in the Late Roman Period and the beginning of the Migration Period (Tunia 1977, 1980, 1985, 1989). These findings were the impetus for a long-term series of excavations, carried out, together with Renata Madyda-Legutko, at several dated sites located on the Poprad River. As a result, the model of settlement of this region within the above mentioned time horizon was defined. The settlement pattern was based on isolated homesteads located on the upper slopes in narrow river valleys or, in the case of wider valleys, these settlements occupied a lower position. Much cultural and chronological information was also obtained, which allowed a completely new picture of Carpathian settlement at the end of antiquity to be created. The findings of this research were summarized in 1993 (Madyda-Legutko, Tunia 1993). As was mentioned above, an extension of the settlement studies in the region in question was the long-term surface survey conducted within the framework of the Polish Archaeological Record (AZP) system. This covered the whole of the Sącz Basin within six so called 'sheets' of the AZP. Sheet no. 112-62, examined in 2005-2013 (Tunia 2016), covers the southern slopes of the Sącz Basin and large parts of the Beskid Wyspowy Mountains. Over 340 sites were discovered in this area, including several dozen dated to the Late Roman Period and the beginning of the Migration Period. The beginnings of the Roman Period, as is the case on other sheets of the AZP in the region, are only traceable in the surface material. The site in Stronie, where the analyzed fragment of *terra sigillata* vessel was discovered, is located on flat terrain, at the foot of a slope descending towards the left bank of the Słomka River (formerly Słonka³), a left-bank tributary to the Dunajec River (Fig. 2). Recovered from within the limits of this site were: one flint flake, one fragment of Neolithic pottery, one fragment of backed clay, two pottery sherds dated to the Late Roman Period/the beginning of the Migration Period, and 25 sherds of modern pottery. Thus, the majority of the finds accompanying the fragment of the *terra sigillata* vessel do not currently contribute to an understanding of the settlement background of this particular find.

² Geographical coordinates of the site: N 49°36'31.23" E 20°31'18.55"

³ The name comes from the word „salt” (cf. *Kodeks...* 1876-1887, II, 132, III, 191; Z. Szewczyk 2009, 45).



Fig. 1. Stronie, Limanowa distr. Location of the site no. 47 against the background of the part of the Sącz Basin and the Beskid Wyspowy Mountains

The state of preservation of this piece of pottery implies a settlement context, as it does not bear any traces of burning on a cremation pile, which is usually observed in the case of *terra sigillata* found on cemeteries of the Przeworsk culture (Fig. 3: 1).

The discussed fragment probably comes from a beaker of the Drag. 30 form (Dragendorff 1896) of an indefinite diameter, probably a fragment of the foot of a vessel. Assuming that we are actually dealing with the foot of the above mentioned form, this would have been one of the largest specimens of this type of beaker (cf. Fig. 3: 2). The presumption that this is a fragment from the foot of a vessel is primarily based on markings visible above the edge which result from careless finishing on the potter's wheel. A relatively thin layer of slightly glossy orange slip is present on the surface of the potsherd (Fig. 3: 1). In section it can be observed that the vessel was made of very fine, dusty clay of orange color.

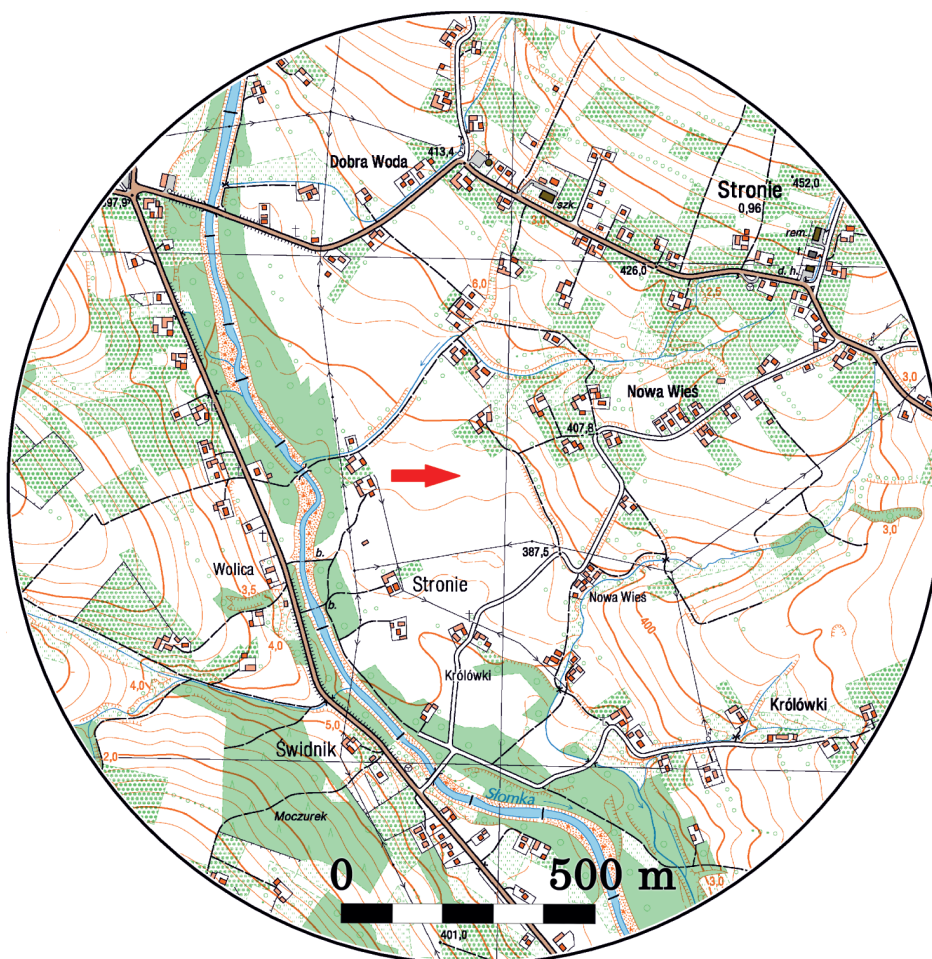


Fig. 2. Stronie, Limanowa distr. Location of the site no. 47

Unfortunately, a determination of the age and provenance of this artefact has been met with some difficulty. The morphological characteristics of the *terra sigillata* fragment (color of the slip and clay) could indicate that this is a fragment of a product from the Pfaffenhofen workshop. However, the material used to make the vessel does not have the characteristic trait of this workshop – soft and chalky structure. This is not, however, a determining feature of the origin; perhaps the vessel from Stronie was fired exceptionally well in comparison to other products from Pfaffenhofen, known from the Polish lands. This is confirmed by the good adherence of the slip to the shard and its even, delicate shine.



Fig. 3. 1 – Stronie, Limanowa distr., site no. 47. Fragment of the *terra sigillata* vessel (drawing U. Potyrała, photo K. Mazur); 2 – Drag. 30 form after H. Dragendorff; 3 – an example of a vessel of this kind from the Rheinzabern workshop, from the collections of the Museum of Saint Germain (photo C. Wszyński)

The production of *terra sigillata* in the *Pons Aeni* settlement on the Inn River in Upper Bavaria (now Pfaffenhofen am Inn, Ortsteil der Gemeinde Schechen, Landkreis Rosenheim), located close to the Westerndorf workshop (cf. Kellner 1964, 80) and the relatively wide distribution of Pfaffenhofen products appear to attest to a favorable economic situation for the production of this type of vessel during the Severan dynasty. The first detailed information on this production site is due to the separation of HELENIUS materials from Pfaffenhofen by H. J. Kellner (1964). Earlier, however, attention was drawn to the presence of the DICANUS style in *terra sigillata* from the Roman provinces and Central European *Barbaricum* (Karnitsch 1955; 1959; Rutkowski 1963). The products of these areas were originally assigned to *Lauriacum* (now Lorch Enns, Linz-Land district) on the Enns River in Upper Austria or the Westerndorf area. However, excavations

carried out at the Pfaffenhofen workshop site in 1967 and 1969-74 (Christlein, Kellner 1969; Christlein *et al.* 1976) made it possible to determine the actual location of the HELENIUS and DICANUS workshops and the production period - from the beginning of the third century AD to the 60s and 70s of that century. It is therefore assumed that the production of vessels in Pfaffenhofen began after the start of production at Westerndorf workshop and that production was resumed after the invasion of Allemani in 233 AD. At present, the characteristics of this site, both its chronology and the diagnostic features of the pottery produced there, are also based on the analysis of products discovered in remote areas - mainly the Hungarian Lowlands (Gabler, Vaday 1986, 40-42).

The raw material criterion is helpful in the identification of Pfaffenhofen products, as the vessels in this site were made of clay with a characteristic orange color and dusty, generally soft and chalky structure (Kellner 1964, 83; Gabler 1978, 79). These products are characterized by less careful workmanship due to the above mentioned features of the raw material, and the use of ornamentation based in part on decorative prints copied from vessels produced in other workshops, sometimes in a highly degraded form. With the fragment of the vessel from Stronie coming from its unornamented part, a connection to Pfaffenhofen can only be made on the basis of the raw material. It should be noted, however, that the determination could be verified on the basis of technical or chemical analysis (cf. Kaczanowski, Sztwiertnia 1982; Daszkiewicz, Schneider 1998).

The characteristic repetitiveness of the Pfaffenhofen ornamental motifs, with their random, often disorderly arrangement, used exclusively to fill the decorative field on the belly of the vessels, may indicate that the products of this center were intended for less demanding customers. This could confirm the thesis that the vessels from Pfaffenhofen were intentionally directed to barbaric territories (Gabler, Vaday 1986, 46). Like the Westerndorf products, the Pfaffenhofen vessels were exported to the east, as evidenced by the lack of findings from this workshop in Raetia and the western provinces of the Empire. The inflow of vessels from this site to the area occupied by the Przeworsk culture is the last significant "wave" of *terra sigillata* imports, represented by products made from around 200 to 260 AD. The products of the Pfaffenhofen workshop arrived in contemporary Polish territories with a small number of later products from Rheinzabern, and before 233 at the same time as the products of the Westerndorf site. Individual vessels from Pfaffenhofen reached the community of the Wielbark culture, presumably through the territory of the Przeworsk culture, as evidenced by the recorded scattering of finds (cf. Andrzejowski, Przychodni 2008). The vessels from this production site are not known in Scandinavia (cf. Lund-Hansen 1982; idem 1992). In Moravia, in Klentnice, Břeclav district, one fragment of a HELENIUS vessel from Pfaffenhofen was found (Droberjar 1991, 12:20/8, 33, Table 4:9). There is no information about the finds from the discussed workshop in the Czech Republic

(cf. Halama 2011). Two finds of *terra sigillata* from eastern Germany may also have come from this workshop (Laser 1998, 11).

The number of fragments of vessels produced in Pfaffenhofen and found in Lesser Poland (SE Poland) is surprising considerable, as reflected in the recently published *Corpus* of imports from this area (Kaczanowski *et al.* 2017). Similarity to the distribution of Pfaffenhofen ware in SE Poland could be observed in the percentage share of *terra sigillata* finds from the *Barbaricum* area in eastern Slovakia according to the results of the analysis carried out by K. Kuzmová and P. Roth (1988, 148: Table XIII). However, the finds from this production site were not known from the Polish Carpathians until recent years (cf. Przychodni 2010, Annex 2). Apart from the find from Stronie discussed here, another, not yet published, fragment of a Pfaffenhofen vessel, discovered by the team headed by Paweł Valde-Nowak at site no. 4 in Skawce, Wadowice district, on the Skawa River can be mentioned (Valde-Nowak 2014, p. 484-486)⁴.

The uniqueness of the find from Stronie results primarily from the fact that it is not a fragment of a hemispherical bowl of type Dragendorff 37, a form most frequently found both in the environment of Wielbark and Przeworsk cultures (cf. Przychodni 2010, 80: Abb. 3). If we are actually dealing with a fragment of a Dragendorff 30 cup, we can presume that it was rather not a subject of "standard" trade. The only Polish analogy for the vessel discussed here is a fragment of a Drag. 30 beaker foot from Drochlin, Kłobuck district (cf. Przychodni 2010, 129).

The presence of *terra sigillata* finds in the Polish Carpathians, whose dating can be synchronized with the end of phase C1a and phase C1b of the Roman Period, most probably indicates contact between the Beskid Mountains zone and the Roman provinces during the reign of the Severan dynasty. The finding of the fragment of such a vessel at Stronie in the Beskid Wyspowy Mountains. seems to confirm the use of the depressions of the Carpathian chain to maintain the above-mentioned contacts. Unfortunately, the fact that this artefact was recovered from a secondary, disturbed context did not allow for a detailed analysis of the nature of these contacts. It is hoped that further research in this area will enable more precise conclusions to be drawn.

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⁴ We would like to express our gratitude for kindly making the potsherd available for identification.

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