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EARLY GREEK POTTERY ON BLACK SEA SITES?

Summary. Alleged evidence for the presence of eighth-century B.C. Greek pottery on Black Sea sites — Geometric (and Cypriot) at Histria and Berezan — is examined and found wanting.

Greek literature has left historians, probably correctly, with the strong impression that Greeks were well aware of the Black Sea in the Geometric period.¹ Testimony to a double foundation at Sinope, on the south coast, has encouraged the view that colonisation could have begun in the Late Geometric period. The limited excavations at Sinope have yet to support a date earlier than the later seventh century, and for archaeological evidence for this early interest (but not on the south coast) finds at Berezan and Istria have been adduced. John Graham's point that 'it is bad method to prefer an archaeological argumentum *ex silentio* to statements in literary sources'² might be qualified by observation that this should depend on how loud the silence is and how dependable the literary sources are. It is perfectly plausible that some exploration of the Black Sea coast followed Euboean colonisation in the north Aegean, especially given the Euboean record on other distant shores, east and west, by this time. If so, it would probably have been along the Thracian coast rather than the Anatolian, and was abortive since there was no continuing interest, from Euboea or its colonies, and further exploration was done by East Greeks and Megarians who were in the Propontis by 700 B.C. Whether there is any

archaeological evidence for earlier exploration or settlement is another matter, but Graham has pressed claims³ which, as I hope to show, cannot be upheld since the dating of the pottery or its pedigree are either wrong or too dubious to be taken seriously, however tempting they may seem.

The Berezan 'find' is a MGII (early eighth century) hydriske, Attic or Atticising (Euboean?),⁴ acquired in 1909 from a dealer as from Berezan, which was being excavated in those years, and so would seem an acceptable provenance for a Greek vase to a Russian dealer and buyer. The site has also been much excavated since without yielding pottery earlier than the later seventh century. If the hydriske had been part of a batch of other, more plausible vases, with the same alleged findplace, we should still be cautious, but this seems not the case. Its completeness suggests discovery in a tomb, and any very early cemetery at Berezan would have been likely to yield more than one vase to either excavator or dealer. In the circumstances such a dealer's provenance should not be taken seriously.⁵

Arguments about finds at Istria are more substantial. In 1939 Mr Rodewald was given some pottery at the site by its excavator Mme

Lambrino, and he gave these sherds to the Cambridge Museum of Classical Archaeology in about 1950. One fragment now labelled IS 1 is from a Euboean Late Geometric kotyle (Fig. 1).⁶ Excavations have gone on in Istria for over 70 years, conducted with some vigour and skill and with an abundance of pottery finds that have been studied by experts and very fully published, but there is no excavated pottery demonstrably earlier than the late seventh century — a near-deafening silence in the circumstances. Professor Cook had queried



Figure 1

the sherd with its donor⁷ who confirmed that the fragments he gave were from Istria without being able to confirm absolutely that IS 1 was one of them. It seemed to Cook improbable that an excavator who was also a pottery expert would have given away what was obviously the earliest piece from the site. The other fragments of the batch, by contrast, are exactly the type that excavators have given away in more generous times, with nondescript or commonplace decoration, which hardly describes IS 1. The circumstances do not inspire confidence but can, I believe, be explained. I had cast doubt on the value of the evidence but should have explained my reasons which went beyond those just stated. The fragment is typical of finds at Al Mina, and it seems to me highly probable that it is from Al Mina. A batch of pottery from Al Mina was acquired by the Museum of Classical Archaeology in Cambridge, probably in 1956. This pottery and that from Istria were only catalogued, numbered and ink-labelled in 1962. That an unlabelled fragment could move from one tray or box to another, in the course

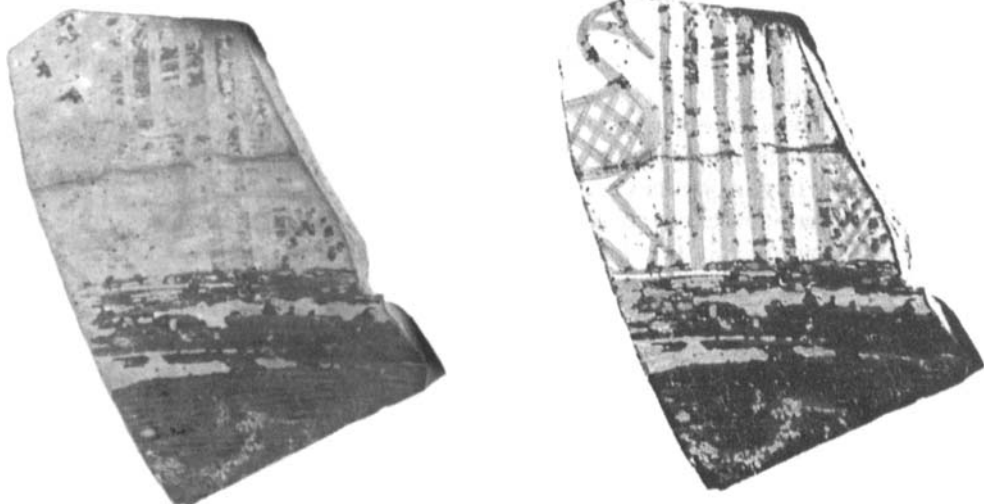


Figure 2

of an exercise in comparison of colonial pottery, seems to me an event almost to be expected. If this is indeed what happened, it must have been before Professor Cook queried IS 1 with Professor Rodewald but after the arrival of the Al Mina pieces (perhaps at the time of the labelling?); and this is a point that cannot now be verified.

But this is not the end of the story. IS 2 (Fig. 2), also 'given by Mr Rodewald, from Istria', is yet another Euboean Late Geometric fragment so typical of Al Mina that certain Al Mina fragments in Cambridge and London might even be from the same vessel. It has escaped notice because of its abraded surface, but it is clearly from a large kantharos, fired red, with a geometric bird in a 'metope'. It is, of course, possible that the only two Late Geometric, and Euboean, sherds found at Istria in over 70 years were both given away by the excavator, but this strains at least my credence, and should that of any careful scholar. Enthusiasm for Euboeans, which I naturally share, and for early Greek exploration, must not cloud judgement.⁸

Next, some Cypriot pottery from Istria. Graham⁹ draws attention to the fragments of 'Cypriot "White-Painted IV" ware from the Cypro-Archaic I period', which, he observes, is now given a terminal date of about 660 B.C. They were published, with comment by Gerald Cadogan, in *Histria IV* no. 256. But the comment included the observation that the ware 'continues into Cypro-Archaic II (mainly IIA)', which can bring them well down, into the sixth century. Appeal to the Swedish classification, on which the typology (but not

the chronology) depends, shows that fabric and decoration are the same for White-Painted IV throughout. Here I have the benefit of the expertise of Dr H. Meyza of Warsaw, who has made a detailed study of Cypriot pottery of this period, and who tells me that the later White-Painted IV wares are characterised by somewhat denser decoration, and that for this reason he would place the fragments in Cypro-Archaic II rather than I. Not surprisingly, similar pottery has been found in Berezan, although evidently not in any context demonstrably earlier than other finds at the site (later seventh-century), and there was an early flow of Cypriot products to East Greek cities.

Finally, there is the amphora in which Alexandrescu saw similarities with the G 2-3 ware of the north-east Aegean, a ware which Graham rightly places no later than the early seventh century on current evidence. But the vase is not itself of this ware, and lacks its characteristic spaced decoration, being no more than broadly subgeometric in decor, its added red lines and heavy lip bringing it closer to the sixth century, and to the pre-Persian pottery of Olynthus, as its publisher, Alexandrescu, properly observed.¹⁰

Archaeologists will welcome secure evidence for the discovery of Geometric Greek material on Black Sea shores and will join historians in speculation about how it arrived there, in the hands of Greeks or of others. But we are still waiting, and patience is no lesser archaeological virtue than discretion.

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NOTES

1. The matter is put succinctly by A.J. Graham in *CAH III*², 3 123. But note I. Malkin and N. Shmueli, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 3 (1988) 24: 'a serious

question regarding the authenticity of the particular texts remains.' The main texts are: *Iliad* 2 853-5, naming towns on the Paphlagonian (south Black Sea) coast, on which Kirk (1985), ad loc., comments 'taking all things

together these verses do look like a learned interpolation of the post-Homeric era of Black-Sea colonization' since, *inter alia* the lines seem unknown to Apollodoros and 'the listing of so many as five towns is unparalleled for a single contingent in this Trojan list.' Eumelos F 3A (Davies) on Aeetes and Colchis; F 7, on the name Sinope, daughter of Asopos; and Dubia 3, naming Borysthenis. Hesiod *Theogony* 337–45, naming rivers (see West ad loc. and 41–2; note p. 41 n. 4 mentioning the Eumelos fr. 'if genuine'). The Jason adventure and perhaps details of topography seem to have been known in 'Geometric times'. The fullest defence of the testimonia was by R. Drews, *JHS* 96 (1976) 18–31.

2. Loc. cit.

3. In *Greek Colonies and Native Populations* (ed. J.-P. Descoedres, 1990) 52–4. This is hereafter referred to as *GCNP*.

4. Graham in *GCNP* 53 for references, and his pl. 4.1. Archaeologists (Cook, Coldstream, Alexandrescu) have been unwilling or cautious about accepting the provenance.

5. We might compare the far more plausible but no better authenticated 'finds' of Late Geometric Greek pottery in the south of France: J. Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas* (1980) 279 n. 211 refers. These Graham now ignores.

6. Graham in *GCNP* 53 and his pl. 4.2. I am indebted to Professor Snodgrass for access to the pottery in Cambridge, photographs and discussion about it.

7. This was recorded in the Cambridge catalogue in 1962. See also *Histria* IV 21 n. 15; and now, P. Alexandrescu, *Studii Clasice* 26 (1989) 111–6, quoting various correspondence with Mr Rodewald; this article will appear in translation in a forthcoming volume of *Mélanges P. Lèveque*.

8. I am indebted to Mr Rodewald for comment on my 'solution': 'I find it hard to imagine that, as an experienced ceramist, she [Mme Lambrino] would have included in her gift two that were and remain quite unparalleled.'

9. In *GCNP* 53–4.

10. In *Histria* IV no. 253.