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The Research Center for the Archaeology of Western Anatolia – EKVAM

Colloquia Anatolica et Aegaea  
Congressus internationales Smyrnenses XI

**Ancient terracotta lamps  
from Anatolia and the eastern Mediterranean  
to Dacia, the Black Sea and beyond.**  
Comparative lychnological studies in the Eastern parts  
of the Roman Empire and peripheral areas.  
An international symposium

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**ABSTRACTS**



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Logo illustration:  
An early Byzantine terracotta lamp from Alata in Cilicia;  
museum of Mersin (B. Gürlü, 2004).

*This symposium is dedicated to Professor Hugo Thoen (Gent / Deinze)  
who contributed to Anatolian archaeology with his excavations in Pessinus.*

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## The return of Phersephone: image of a mythological scene on a fragment of an oil lamp from Tauric Chersonese, Russia

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A fragment of a red glazed oil lamp of unusual shape with a relief image on a plate occurs from the archaeological excavations of M.I. Zolotarev in 1984 in the VI district of Tauric Chersonesos. The pictured plot undoubtedly reflects the final events from the myth of Persephone, complementing our knowledge of the iconography and the place of the cult of Demeter and Cora in the life of the population of the ancient city.

The State Museum-Preserve “Tauric Chersonese” funds contain a rather interesting fragment of an imported lamp (accession number 37084/37) depicting a mythological scene on a plate. It comes from the excavation of M. I. Zolotarev in 1984 in the VI quarter of Chersonese, where it is jointed to VI cross street (northeast district of the settlement).

In Room 1, beneath the rubble stone of the eleventh-12th century A.D. laying, separating it from the adjacent room with a well, there was a pit with loose soil filled with mostly burnt fragments of ceramic pieces dated to the tenth century A.D. According to the researcher’s suggestion, the filling of the pit was made in a rather short term, and the garbage was burned immediately on the spot. However, in addition to the medieval materials dating back to the time when the pit was filled, random fragments of earlier objects were found in it. These are fragments of an architectural cornice, relief tile and honorary decree of the second century A.D., as well as the Hellenistic era fragment of black glaze vessel with graffiti and the handle of the Parossian amphora with the retrograde stamp of the end of the third and beginning of the second century B.C. (Kats, 2007: 176–177; Monachov, 2017: 106; Zolotarev, 1984: 4–6). After removing the pit in the room, layers of Roman time were examined, with materials lying *in situ*: several oil lamps and red glazed pottery are dated to the second and third centuries A.D. Also seven more oil lamps were found on the floor: with the image of an eagle, gladiatorial combat, two without images and two luminaires with radial ornamentation. All of them are dated to the third and fourth centuries A.D. (Zolotarev, 1984: 6–7). The seventh oil lamp, which is actually the subject of our attention, is distinctly out of this chronological line. However, the layer directly overlaying the floor of the room contained a large number of fragments of terra sigillata, among which the plate dated to the first century A.D. stands out, and even a few fragments of late Hellenistic ceramics — black glazed *kylix* and a jug. The datings of the layer were confirmed by the findings of Chersonesus coins in it (Zolotarev, 1984: 7). Let us consider it more closely: it is a red glaze oil lamp (d 7.5; h 3.3; 19.0 cm) with three holes (d 0.5 and 0.3 cm). Red clay (2.5YR 5/8) has the inclusion of pyroxenes and fine particles of mica, covered with reddish yellow (5YR 6/8) glaze. Indistinct traces of papillary lines remained on the plate, on top of the image.

Only a part of the complete profile of the oil lamp has survived: a round, recessed panel with a relief image framed by three rings, and with two narrow lugs at the sides. The stretched volute nozzle as well as the handle is lost. We can only assume that it was very raised, judging from the remaining ledge, perhaps even decorated with volute or had a figured shape. The bottom is on a low circular pallet. The poor condition of the fragment does not give us confident morphological features to determine the typology of this lamp. But this is definitely some rare transitional form between lamps with narrow lugs at the sides of the end of the first century B.C. (Perlzweig, 1961: 72, No. 3.5) and volute lamps (Bailey, 1975: 344, pl. 134, No. Q 726; Bailey, 1980: No. Q 996;

Christa, 1977: 32–37; Hayes, 1980: 47, 179; Heres, 1972: 12, pl. 2, 3–4; Menzel, 1954: 26, No. 80; Perlzweig, 1961: pl. 1, 14; Waagé, 1941: 63, No. 87). Drawing on the materials of the archaeological context and the morphological characteristics of the shape of the product, we date the time of manufacture of this lamp from the turn of the first century B.C. and first century A.D., or the beginning of the first century A.D.

The pictured plot presented on the relief plate illustrates the final episode from the Elevsian myth of the abduction of Kore (Alderink, 1982: 1–16), in which she, having tried several pomegranate grains, is forced to spend forever one third of the year in the realm of the dead, and only the remaining two thirds on Olympus (Hom. Hymn. V: 15–21; 371–374, 385–411) (Giuseppetti, 2012: 106; Myres, 1938: 51–52; Rayor, 1998: 66–83; Rohde, 1907: 241; Skrzhinskaja, 2012: 107) [M.I. Zolotarev interpreted the image on the plate as belonging to the circle of Dionysian scenes (Zolotarev, 1984: 6–7)]. The lower border of the image is defined by a wide band of the “earth” surface on which there are two figures: on the right there is a large figure of Demeter in the image of a bent old woman completely wrapped in himation, with a stick and a broom on her left forearm, in the right, stretched forward hand she holds a garnet fetus. On the left - a naked male figure, his back turned to us, apparently - Hades. In both hands: the left - lowered - and the right - raised up - he holds rounded objects of not quite accurate outlines, but probably also pomegranate fruits. Behind him there is a sprouting young plant [judging by the shape of the lanceolate leaves, can it be a sprout of *Vitex* (or the chaste-tree), one of the sacred plants in the Demeter and Kore cult (Nixon, 1995: 85)?]. A figure of a young girl, Persephone, is holding the trunk of the spout with both hands. The details of her figure are not so clearly worked out, the lower part of the legs is closed from us by the extended hand of Hades. In general, the image of the perspective is created: Persephone seems to be a little away. Thus, we see before us the scene of the return of Persephone to her mother and the rebirth of life, the beginning of a new natural cycle in the change of seasons. The cult of Demeter in Tauric Chersonese was official, in city calendar it was associated with the month *ἑύκλειος* (IOSPE. I<sup>2</sup>: no. 361), corresponding to modern March (Kadeev, 1996: 141, 146; Skrzhinskaja, 2010: 384). Thus, it is possible to assume that the lamp with a similar image was closely associated with the Elevsian Mysteries and the holidays of the beginning of the year (Patera, 2010: 254–260).

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**Fig. 1:** A *discus* fragment of an oil lamp from Tauric Chersonese, Russia.