

A Lydian Silver Amphora with Zoomorphic Handles

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*To Iva Ondřejová,
A small token of profound esteem and affection*

ABSTRACT

The paper presents an unpublished silver amphora with zoomorphic handles shaped as winged horses. It explores the entire class of similar metal amphorae with zoomorphic handles (including isolated handles) from the Achaemenid domain and its neighbouring areas, as well as their clay parallels, and their iconographic occurrences. Some possible Greek bronze parallels are also discussed. The vase weight is understood as following the Achaemenid monetary standard. Finally, the vase is attributed to a Lydian workshop and dated ca. 500 BC.

KEYWORDS

Toreutics; Lydian; Achaemenid; silverware; Greek; amphora; zoomorphic.

THE VBC SILVER AMPHORA

An unpublished silver amphora with zoomorphic handles is kept in the Vassil Bojkov Collection (hereafter VBC), in Sofia (inv. 2379). Its provenance is unknown.¹ The vase belongs to a well-known class of 'Achaemenid' amphorae with zoomorphic handles.²

The body is shaped as a floral calyx with a cylindrical neck, flaring to an outturned rim, and an ovoid body narrowing to a flat bottom (**Pl. 2/1–2**). Soldered around the junction of neck and shoulder is a thick fillet of rounded profile, chiselled with eight evenly spaced groups of four vertical lines. Just under the fillet there is a range of double contour chiselled tongues (**Pl. 2/3**). The underside is decorated with chiselled rosette, consisting of two concentric circles around the central dot and fourteen petals (**Pl. 2/4**). The handles are hollow cylinders in the form of winged horses, which seem to stand on plastic rings with vertical incisions. The part of the handles under the plastic ring is octagonal in cross-section. The horses have their heads turned back, their foreparts in the round and kneeling on the rim, and their hindquarters in relief along the tubular handle. Their eyes and lips are disproportionately large, the front flock of their mane is higher, and the ears are turned back. Three long locks of the mane fall on each side of their neck. The chiselled wings, rooted on the shoulders, have rounded lower

1 A picture of the vase without any mention in the text has been published by MARAZOV 2014, 232.

2 General discussion of the shape in metal in: AMANDRY 1959; PFROMMER 1990; BOARDMAN 2000, 187–189; PASPALAS 2000, 140–142, 147.

edges and they are filled with multiple rows of small incisions (**Pl. 2/5**). The tails of the animals are braided in a motif with a drop-like loop and two lateral curls or ribbons (**Pl. 2/6**). The horse of one handle has on its back a tubular spout of “U” cross-section (**Pl. 2/7**). The vase wall underneath the base of this handle is perforated to allow the liquid to pour through the handle tube and the spout.

The vase height to the rim is 15.9 cm, its total height to the top of the handles is 17.6 cm, the rim diameter 8.7 cm, and the rim thickness 0.8 mm. The width with handles is 19.5 cm, while each handle is 10.8 cm high. The neck height is 5.3 cm, and the diameter at the base of the neck 6 cm. The maximum body diameter is situated under the shoulder and measures 9.6 cm. The base diameter is 3.3 cm. The weight of the vase is 380.23 grams. The body is raised and the handles hollow cast. A central dot is visible on the underside, showing that it has been finished on a lathe. There are chiselled details on the body and the handles, which have been put together by soldering. The vase enjoys a very good state of preservation, with only minor restorations of damaged areas on the body. The body surface is shiny metallic grey/white, while on the handles it is mat and slightly darker.

This Achaemenid amphora-rhyton shares the same basic body shape as a series of high calyx cups and some oinochoae, known in silver, bronze and pottery (**Pl. 2/8**).³ Paspalas actually considers some of the exemplars without a spout, as drinking cantharoid cups and compares them with some similar clay cups and amphorae.⁴ He does not include in his study of metal exemplars the isolated handles, which he thinks could also come from other vase shapes. To this day, however, no other shapes with such tubular handles are known among the actual finds.⁵

BRONZE AND SILVER PARALLELS

We already know at least eight more entire silver amphorae with zoomorphic handles, plus three in bronze and two in gold. One comes from the Kukova tumulus in Duvanli, Bulgaria. It is richly decorated with palmette and lotus chains,⁶ and seems to come from the same workshop as another one in the Ortiz Collection.⁷ One bronze exemplar comes from the Massyaf hoard in Northern Syria, and a silver one from Iran (**Pl. 2/9**).⁸ A silver amphora-rhyton, of the variant with double spout on the bottom and with solid ibex-shaped handles, is said to originate in the area between Sinope and Trabzon, in Turkey (**Pl. 2/10**).⁹ One gold and one silver exem-

3 ÖZGEN – ÖZTÜRK 1996, nos. 65–66; STOYANOV 2005, 235–236, Figs. 1–2, 7. A bronze calyx and a bronze oinochoe of this shape are kept in the National Historical Museum, Sofia.

4 PASPALAS 2000, 144–146. For an additional clay example for his Group 3 see KNAUSS 2006, 85–86, Fig. 6.

5 For a related, but solid and differently shaped, zoomorphic handle on a bronze oinochoe once in the Norbert Schimmel Collection, see *Christie's New York*, 7 December 2000, sale 9540, lot 723.

6 For comparison of such chains, see VAŠKANINOVÁ 2006, Figs. 1–5.

7 FILOW 1934, 46–51, Figs. 55–59, Pl. 3; AMANDRY 1959, 39–43, Pls. 20:3, 21:1; MUSCARELLA 1980, 25, Fig. 1, PFROMMER 1990, 193, notes 13–14; ORTIZ 1996, no. 205; ARCHIBALD 1998, 193, 327; MARAZOV 1998, no. 117; PASPALAS 2000, 141–142, nos. 5–6; MARTINEZ *et al.* eds. 2015, 234–235, no. 195.

8 AMANDRY 1959, 43–46, Pls. 21:2, 22:1, 23:1–3; MUSCARELLA 1977, 197, Fig. 2; PFROMMER 1990, 192, notes 7, 10; PELTENBURG 1991, no. 91; PASPALAS 2000, 141, nos. 3–4, Fig. 2. They are now kept respectively in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, and in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.

9 AMANDRY 1959, 48–50, Pls. 24–25; PFROMMER 1990, 196, 199–200; PASPALAS 2000, 142, no. 10; SUMMERER 2003, 32, Fig. 10.

plar have been found in different tumuli in Philippovka, south Urals, Russia (**Pl. 2/11**).¹⁰ One silver piece, said to be from Iraq, was in the Pomerance Collection, New York.¹¹ For two more silver exemplars the provenance is unknown; the first is in the Getty Museum (**Pl. 2/12**), and the other appeared in the London art market.¹² A bronze amphora-rhyton with each handle differently shaped is in the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York,¹³ and another one (also made of bronze) surfaced recently in the European art market (**Pl. 2/13**).¹⁴ Finally, the gold amphora from the Panagyurishte treasure, usually associated with this series, represents a rather distant and much more elaborate Greek adaptation of the shape.¹⁵

Several isolated handles are also preserved from various sites (Afghanistan, Oxus, Babylon, Amisos, Boukhtarma in south Russia, Pithom in Egypt).¹⁶ A singleton in bronze, without many details, comes from Gordion: it may represent one of the earliest exemplars.¹⁷ Amandry suggested that some isolated bronze ibex figures from Greece may belong to locally made amphorae imitating the Achaemenid originals.¹⁸ The idea seems plausible and I have suggested elsewhere that two Pegasus figures from Dodona, could also fit well on a similarly shaped amphora (**Pl. 2/14**).¹⁹ Furthermore, two bronze deer figures dating to the first half of the 5th century BC, from Dodona and Kirrha respectively, may also pertain to analogous amphorae (**Pl. 2/15-16**).²⁰

The group is far from being homogenous and one may observe important variations in the functionality, the design, the style, and the decoration. The animals represented on the handles, most of which are winged, include ibices (**Pl. 2/10**), bulls (**Pl. 2/11**), horned lions (**Pl. 2/12**), rams and horses (**Pl. 2/9**, the handle with spout). The secondary orifice on some exemplars is a “U” section spout on the back of one animal handle, while on others the handle figures are solid cast (**Pl. 2/10**), or hollow but closed, and the secondary orifice is one or two round section spouts fixed on the rounded bottom of the vase (**Pl. 2/10** and **2/12**).²¹ This variation

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- 10 PASPALAS 2000, 140, no. 1; YABLONSKI 2010, 138–139, Fig. 18; TREISTER 2010, 236–238, Figs. 9–10; TREISTER *et al.* 2012, 95, 110–111, Figs. 64:2, 82:1, Pls. 11:2, 26:1.
- 11 TERRACE 1966, 52–53, no. 59; MUSCARELLA 1980, 30; PFROMMER 1990, 195, Pl. 41:1; PASPALAS 2000, 142, no. 9. Another, more squat silver amphora with zoomorphic handles in the same collection is of doubtful authenticity: TERRACE 1966, no. 57.
- 12 PFROMMER 1990, 191, Pls. 36–39:2, 44; SHEFTON 1993, 184–185, Fig. 13; BOARDMAN 2000, Fig. 5:72; PASPALAS 2000, 140, 142, nos. 2, 8.
- 13 Unknown provenance: SCHMANDT-BESSERAT 1980, 77, no. 93, Fig. 3; PASPALAS 2000, 142, no. 7, Fig. 3.
- 14 *Pierre Bergé et associés. Archéologie. Vente aux enchères*, 26 Novembre 2013, Drouot-Richelieu, Paris, 174–175, no. 186 (h. 22.4 cm). It probably dates from the second half of the 5th century BC. Both Brooklyn and Paris exemplars are undecorated, and have one handle solid and the other tubular with a spout.
- 15 MARAZOV ed. 1998, no. 71; MARTINEZ *et al.* eds. 2015, 222–223, no. 185.
- 16 COONEY – BOTHMER 1956, 43–44, no. 50, Pl. 74a; AMANDRY 1959, 41, 46–47, 50–51, Pls. 21:4–5, 23:4–5, 26:2, 27–28; 7000 Years, no. 447; MUSCARELLA 1974, no. 159; CURTIS – TALLIS 2005, 125, no. 127–129.
- 17 VASSILEVA 2012, 330, Fig. 12, from the Citadel Mound, Gordion Museum inv. B479.
- 18 AMANDRY 1959, 51–52, Pl. 26. 3. See also the goat in the Metropolitan Museum, inv. 20.181: RICHTER 1953, 51, 196, Pl. 36h.
- 19 SIDERIS 2008, 344, Fig. 9. The digital “restoration” shown in Fig. 14 is only tentative; the original vase could have had slightly more pronounced shoulder or/and less flaring rim.
- 20 The Dodona deer is kept in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. Kar. 52. Carapanos (1878, 37, Pl. 20:9; KARUSU 1979, 79, Pl. 14:3) suggested that it could come from the side of the handle of a volute crater; in such case, however, the crater should be larger than the one from Vix. The Kirrha deer is kept in the Amphissa Archaeological Museum: ROLLEY 1969, 190, no. 247, Pl. 56.
- 21 AMANDRY 1959, Pls. 24, 30:3–4; BOARDMAN 2000, Fig. 5:72. See also CURTIS – TALLIS 2005, 124, no. 126, a silver amphora-rhyton with non-zoomorphic handles.

appears on the chronologically later exemplars. The shoulder and body decoration varies from elaborated palmettes and lotus chains or *nymphaea* leaves (Pl. 2/12), to simple tongues (Pl. 2/1), vertical flutes (Pl. 2/9–11), or nothing (Pl. 2/13).²²

ICONOGRAPHY AND WORKSHOPS

This general type of vase is represented three times on the main Apadana relief sculptures,²³ and two more times on the stairways of Artaxerxes I and Artaxerxes III,²⁴ brought as tribute to the king, in the hands of variously ethnically identified people, most probably a Lydian, an Armenian, a Median and a Thracian. Only the vases carried by the Lydian and the Armenian have zoomorphic handles. The “Thracian” is thought to be a representative of the *Skudra* satrapy, which is usually identified with Thrace and Macedonia or more strictly with coastal Thrace.²⁵ This type of amphora also appears in a banquet context on a tomb painting from Karaburun, Lycia, which was at that time part of the Lydian satrapy.²⁶ The association to various peoples of the empire has been explained by the hypothesis of a “universal Achaemenid shape”, produced in many workshops all around the satrapies, a fact in favour of which the stylistic and other differences of the artefacts speak already for themselves.²⁷

The difficulties of locating the various toreutic workshops within the Achaemenid empire, faced in connection not only with the amphorae-rhyta, but also with the phialae, beakers, oinochoe, situlae and other shapes,²⁸ are all the more emphasized by the frequent lack of context, since many of these vases come from illicit or undocumented excavations.²⁹ An additional difficulty arises from the chronological span of the series, which covers almost two centuries (late 6th to late 4th century BC), and during which, understandably, the series assimilated influences and adopted traditions of the peripheral cultures (Greek, Egyptian, Scythian), especially by the workshops in closer contact to them.

It seems that a late 6th century Iranian (Luristan?) workshop existed, which produced the Filippovka gold exemplar and probably the bronze one from Massyaf. Another more important workshop (“court” or north-western Anatolian workshop?),³⁰ produced in the early 5th century BC the Kukova and Ortiz exemplars, as well as the Afghanistan and Babylon handles. The Filippovka silver exemplar seems to be later, from the middle or the third quarter of the same century. A regional Pontic workshop, active from about the late 5th to the late 4th century,

22 The Panagyurishte gold exemplar remains exceptional in this aspect too; it shows a variously interpreted mythological (?) figural scene with armed men, executed in relief.

23 SCHMIDT 1953, 85, Pls. 27 b, 29 b, 32 b.

24 CALMEYER 1993, 152–154, Fig. 2, Pls. 43:1–2, 44:1, 46:1.

25 JACOBS 2006, par. 3. 1. 5; REHM 2010a, 147–149, 152. There are however diverging views: VASSILEVA 2015, 322–323. On tribute, gifts, and exchange: ZOURNATZI 2000, 695–698; MILLER 2010, 853–856, 875–878.

26 MELLINK 1972, 254, Pl. 59, Fig. 19. For more representations, though less relevant to our discussion, see PASPALAS 2000, 153, nos. VI–VII, IX, Figs. 8, 10.

27 AMANDRY 1959, 40, 54–55; CALMEYER 1993, 160; SIDERIS 2008, 346–348; REHM 2010b, 168–179.

28 On workshops: SIDERIS 2008, 342–346; MILLER 2010, 868–875.

29 From the fourteen entire vases discussed here (including the VBC exemplar) only four come from documented excavations, and none of the handles. There have also been a large number of fakes and pastiche circulating since the 1970s. Discussion of fakes: MUSCARELLA 1977, nos. 102–104, 152–153; MUSCARELLA 1979, no. 5; PASPALAS 2000, 140–141, note 16; more fakes presented as genuine in MAHBOUBIAN 1995, no. 16 and in subsequent publications, MAHBOUBIAN 1997 and 2002. On the Mahboubian case, see MUHLI 2004. See also the Los Angeles County Museum of Art fake, inv. M.76.174.276.

30 BOUZEK – ONDŘEJOVÁ 1988, 87.

must be the creator of the Sinope amphora-rhyton and the solid ibex handles in Paris and Berlin.³¹ The Greek bronze Pegasoi, goats, and deer, possibly belonging to similar vases, are rather issued from Corinthian or Corinthianizing workshops.³²

METRICS AND ATTRIBUTION

The VBC exemplar shows some typical Achaemenid conventions of horse rendering, like the triple locks of the mane and the tail with the loop and the ribbons (**Pl. 2/5-7**), well known both on monumental and minor arts from Persia.³³ But the fillet with vertical lines on the neck of the vase, and the arrangement of the tongues below it, are to this day exclusively found on Lydian turettics (**Pl. 2/3** and **2/17**).³⁴

There is a general consensus that the weight of ancient plate often conformed to the monetary weight standards valid for the given period and cultural domain.³⁵ The relation between silver or gold vases' weights and the monetary standards is not, however, simple or consistently applicable.³⁶ The weight of our vase (380.23 g) is equivalent to 70 Achaemenid *sigloi*, yielding a *siglos* of 5.43 g. It is established that the Achaemenid *siglos* was based on a half Lydian *siglos/shekel* (full unit 10.9 g) adopted already by Croesus. The *siglos* of approximately 5.40 g (Carradice types I, II and IIIa) was abandoned sometime between 485 and 480 BC and replaced by an increased weight version, weighing approximately 5.60 g (Carradice type IIIb).³⁷ This date may serve as a very probable *terminus ante quem* for our vase, especially if one takes into account the related Massyaf exemplar.

I suggest, thus, attributing the VBC amphora-rhyton to a Lydian workshop, active at least from the end of the 6th century and situated probably in the satrapal capital, Sardis, to which the amphora-rhyton with horse and bull from Iran also seems indirectly related. Our vase should be dated ca. 500 BC, in the earlier phase of the series. The shape had a ceremonial banquet use and it was adopted and adapted in the various cultural spheres under direct Achaemenid dominance. Through the intercultural contacts it also found analogies in some Greek products during the late Archaic to early Classical, and the early Hellenistic periods.

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31 AMANDRY 1959, 50-51, Pls. 26:2, 27:2-3, 28:4; BOARDMAN 2000, Figs. on pages 188-189, Fig. 5:70 is right in identifying the masks of the lower attachments with the Greek satyr, not the Egyptian Bes.

32 AMANDRY 1963, 98-99, no. 33, Pl. 13 (entry by Cl. Rolley); KARUSU 1979, 79; Karydi (1981, 20, 27-28, nos. 13-14, 27) favours an Epirotan Corinthianizing workshop.

33 CURTIS - TALLIS 2005, 65-66, 220-221, 230, nos. 20 (Apadana reliefs), 396 (silver disk), 409 (bronze figurine), 416-420, 422 (seals); BOARDMAN 2000, Figs. 5:9, 5:39, 5:46 (seals), 5:86 (carpet).

34 ÖZGEN - ÖZTÜRK 1996, nos. 22, 46-49, 65-66. On all other amphorae-rhyta the tongues are always placed on the fillet itself.

35 VICKERS 1989, 101-103; VICKERS 1992; VICKERS - GILL 1994, 33-54, esp. 46-52; GILL 2008, 337-341.

36 For a critical approach of the issue, see SIDERIS 2000, 21-23 and SIDERIS 2015, 59.

37 CARRADICE 1987, 77-84; TYE 2009, 121-123.

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Pl. 2/1: The VBC silver amphora-rhyton, side A. Photo author.



Pl. 2/2: The VBC silver amphora-rhyton, side B. Photo author.



Pl. 2/3: The VBC silver amphora-rhyton, detail of the neck fillet. Photo author.



Pl. 2/4: The VBC silver amphora-rhyton, detail of the rosette underneath bottom. Photo author.



Pl. 2/5: The VBC silver amphora-rhyton, the zoomorphic handle. Photo author.



Pl. 2/6: The VBC silver amphora-rhyton, detail of the horse tail. Photo author.



Pl. 2/7: The VBC silver amphora-rhyton, the zoomorphic handle with spout. Photo author.



Pl. 2/8: Lydian silver calyx from İkiiztepe, Uşak Museum. After ÖZGEN - ÖZTÜRK 1996.



Pl. 2/9: Silver amphora-rhyton from Iran, Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin. Photo author.



Pl. 2/10: Silver amphora-rhyton from the area between Sinope and Trabzon, unknown current location. After AMANDRY 1963.



Pl. 2/11: Silver amphora-rhyton from Filippovka, Orenburg Governor's Regional History Museum. Photo A. Mirzakanov, after YABLONSKI 2010.



Pl. 2/12: Silver amphora-rhyton of unknown provenance, Getty Museum. Photo author.



Pl. 2/13: Bronze amphora-rhyton, unknown current location. After Pierre Bergé Auction 26. 11. 2013.



Pl. 2/14: Tentative digital restoration of the two bronze Pegasoi from Dodona on a calyx shaped amphora, National Archaeological Museum, Athens, and the Louvre. Photo author.



Pl. 2/15: Bronze deer from Dodona, National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Photo author.



Pl. 2/16: Bronze deer from Kirrha, Amphissa Museum. Photo author.



Pl. 2/17: Lydian silver jug from İkiiztepe, Uşak Museum. After ÖZGEN - ÖZTÜRK 1996.