

A clay pot with tamga signs discovered at Şiria (Arad county).

Alexandru Berzovan, Eugen D. Pădureanu***

* Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Str. Mihail Kogalniceanu nr. 1, Cluj-Napoca, jud. Cluj, Romania, berzovanalexandru@gmail.com

**Aleea Dezna, nr 16, bl. X 17, ap. 19, Arad, jud. Arad, Romania, padureanu.eugen@yahoo.com

Abstract: A clay pot with tamga signs discovered at Şiria (Arad county). Our interest regarding the ancient Dacian finds from the Arad county has determined us to make a systematization of all the available data and to re-asses the discoveries previously known in the light of the informations available and novative directions of investigations. In this work, we will present an interesting artifact discovered 37 years ago in the village of Şiria (Arad county). In 1973, during a field investigation, professor Florian Dudaş has found, near the outskirts of Şiria, a number of shards from a single large clay pot, having incised signs on them. According to professor Florian Dudaş, the pottery shards were found in a clough located on the southern side of the access road to the summit of Cetatii Hill. In October 2010, we have made an extensive field research near the town of Şiria, at the foothills of Cetatii Hill, in order to locate the exact position of the archaeological objective where Dudaş had found the incised shards. Unfortunately, we were not able to locate the objective. It might be possible that due to the extensive slumping and landsliding which affects this side of the hill, the local micro-topography could have changed significantly in the last three decades. The ceramic fragments discovered are parts of a large, clumsily executed, hand-made vessel used probably to store provisions. Before burning, five distinctive signs have been etched in its surface. Florian Dudaş, who found the vessel, based on ethnographic analogies he conducted, has come to the conclusion that the five signs could represent a commercial tally. We believe, based on the analogies and information we have at our disposal, that the five signs are rather Tamga signs. The origin and functionality of the Tamga signs is quite controversial, with some authors believing them to have had their origin in Central Asia, and others attributing their origin to the Iranian region (Asia Minor and Achaemenian Empire). In the North-Pontic area, the Tamga-type signs are used for the first time by the Sarmatian tribes. Through them, the signs start being used in the second half of the 1st Century B.C. in the Bosphoran Kingdom, and starting with the 1st Century A.D., in pre-Roman Dacia. In the Dacian area, Tamga-type signs are utilized both in during the independent kingdom's period (1st century AD) as well as in the II-IV A.D by some of the „free” Dacian tribes mixed with Sarmatians. The Iaziges Sarmatians from the Pannonian Planes do not seem to have used tamga signs frequently. The lack of archeological context and the relatively common shape of the vessel have not allowed for a precise dating. The vessel could have been made at any point between the 1st and 3rd A.D. Regarding the incised signs, there are numerous similar signs to be found in the North-Pontic area. The significance of these particular signs is difficult to establish at this stage in our research. Our opinion is that they might have had magical functions.

Keywords: Dacians, Sarmatians, Şiria, Arad county, Zarand Mountains, Tamga signs, Magic signs

Foreword

Our interest in Dacian antiquities found on the Arad county territories has determined us to spend the last few years reinterpreting and organizing the already known information in the light of new discoveries and new research

approaches. Therefore, in this study, we have proposed to reinterpret an interesting archeological artifact found close to the village of Şiria 37 years ago.

We find ourselves thanking those who have helped write and research this article.

Especially, we would like to thank Prof. Florian Dudaş for the permission to reissue and reinterpret this find. We also thank Prof. Mihai Sarcozi, the director of Beliu School, for his permission to study the presented artifact up close. Last but not least, we thank senior lecturer Gelu Florea PhD and Vitalie Bârcă PhD, who have helped with advice throughout the whole process of writing this paper.

Finding the Artifact

In 1973, during a field survey conducted close to Şiria, near Cetăţii Hill, Prof. Fl. Dudaş (F. Dudaş 1973; F. Dudaş 1974; F. Dudaş 1981) has discovered, among many other things, several ceramic fragments, parts of a complete vessel of large size, on the surface of which have been etched, before firing, numerous symbols. The vessel, roughly dated by the finder to be from the second century AD and connected with other similar finds from the area, has been partially reconstructed and donated to the Beliu School Museum, Arad County.

In the spring of 2008, while reading one of Prof. Fl. Dudaş' works our attention was caught by the photographs and descriptions of the marked ceramic fragments (F. Dudaş, 1981). Later I have asked and received the author's permission to republish and reinterpret the finds.

On 23rd of October 2010 I have conducted a field survey of the Cetăţii Hill area from Şiria to attempt and locate the archeological site from where the fragments have been recovered. According to the information received from the author, the ceramic fragments have been recovered from a site close to the city, to be precise, from a ravine found south of the road to the television relay. The locals have information according to which clay vessels containing various "metal objects" have been found in the same area (information provided by E. D. Pădureanu). Our field survey, concentrated on the area indicated by Prof. Dudaş (fig.1), has not been as successful as hoped. In many areas, because of the abundant vegetation, we could not conduct a reliable survey. It is also possible that the local micro-relief has been severely altered in the past three decades by the landfalls affecting this side of the Cetăţii Hill.

The archeological site, even though it has not been presently localized with precision, can be linked to other sites nearby (fig.1). Thus, from Cetăţii Hill, in the area of the terrace called "La Zoape", have been recovered a significant number of ceramic fragments dating roughly

from the Dacian Kingdom's period (1st century BC to 1st century AD), as well as from centuries 2 – 4 AD (Fl. Dudaş, 1974; S. A. Luca, 1985; E. Pădureanu 1985; E. Pădureanu, 1988). From the top area of the hill, more precisely, from the medieval fortification's ditch, several black, unornamented hand-made ceramic fragments have been recovered and dated roughly between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD (E. Pădureanu, Fl. Dudaş). It is possible that the medieval stronghold has been built over a much older Dacian one, such as in the cases Cladova, Şoimoş, Vărădia de Mures, all sites from the Zărand Mountains (M. Barbu, 1993).

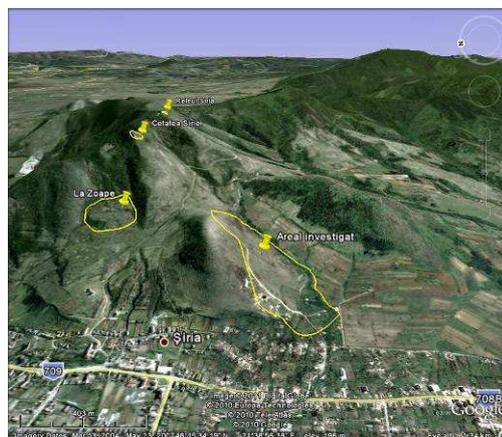


Fig. 1 – Şiria, Dealul Cetăţii, the known archaeological objectives and the investigated area from where it seems that the pot was found (Google earth image, elevation exaggerated two times).

We need to mention the fact that from the walls of the medieval stronghold, Roman bricks have been recovered, some bearing the seal of the XIII Legion Gemina (S. Marki, 1895). Close to the television and radio relay, have been found signs of a so called "Roman" tower, as well as a bronze coin dating from the reign of Antonius Pius (O. Greffner, 1976; M. Barbu, E. Ivanov, 1980). The origin of these items presents a problem, as their presence could indicate a possible Roman observation post. That being said, it is just as possible that the material in question has been brought to the area later, when the medieval stronghold was built. We can however hope that further inquiries will shed light on the issue.

Description and Categorization

The 14 ceramic fragments come; it seems, from the upper part of a storage vessel of

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the “melon” type (fig. 2-3), of local production. It was hand-made. The clay was of low quality, of a brownish-red color, and coarse sand has been used as added agent. The firing is uneven, most likely undertaken in an open-air furnace. Using

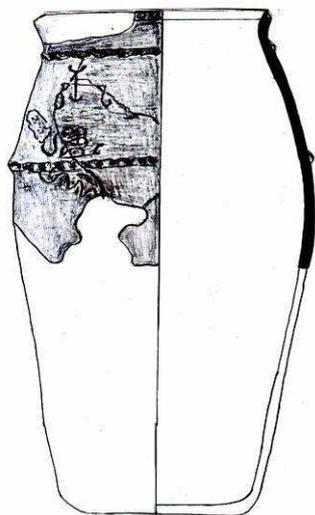


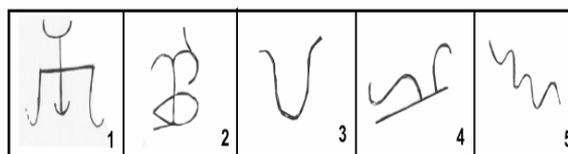
Fig. 2 – The reconstructed pot (drawing)



Fig. 3 – The reconstructed pot

only the found fragments, a full dimensional reconstruction is impossible to undertake, however, the diameter of the mouth of the vessel seems to be somewhere between 22.5 and 25.5 centimeters. Based on the typology of the pot, we have estimated its height at approximately 50 centimeters, the diameter of the bottom part at around 20 centimeters, and a maximum girth

diameter at 29 centimeters. The vessel has been adorned in its upper part with two girdles, measuring about 1 centimeter in height and located at a distance of 10 centimeters one from another. Five distinct tamga-like symbols have been incised in the upper area of the vessel, before the clay hardened, with a sharp object (fig. 4-5). For convenience's sake, we have numbered the symbols (tab. 1).



Tab. 1 –The sings from the pot (without respecting the dimensions)

Based on the fabrication process we have described above, we have made some observations. Thus, based on the low quality of the clay, the uneven diameter of the mouth (and of the vessel in general), but as well as on the lines drawn but never erased which helped apply the girdles (fig. 4-5), we conclude that the vessel is of modest quality, most likely made in a homestead, not in a specialized workshop.

We cannot date the vessel precisely due to the lack of the archaeological context and the relatively common shape of the vessel, a shape which has been found both in the Dacian Kingdom's period (see I. H. Crişan, 1978; V. Căpitanu, 1986; V. Ursachi, 1995), as well as in the later centuries (E. Dörner, 1968; I. H. Crişan, 1969; D. Benea, 1996; Gh. Bichir, 1973). Thus, since the only valid guide we have in dating the vessel are the Tamga-type signs themselves which appear in pre-Roman Dacia only in the second part of the 1st century AD (C. Beldiman, 1991), the vessel could have been made at any time between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD.

Discussions

The author of the discovery, Fl. Dudaş, believes the symbols on the vessel to be commercial tallies. Therefore, based on ethnographic analogies, he interpreted symbol nr.1 as a measuring scale, symbol nr.3 as a plough, symbol nr. 4 as a schematic representation of a vessel, and symbol nr. 5 as a shepherd's staff. The interpretation has been correlated to the agro-pastoral occupations of the

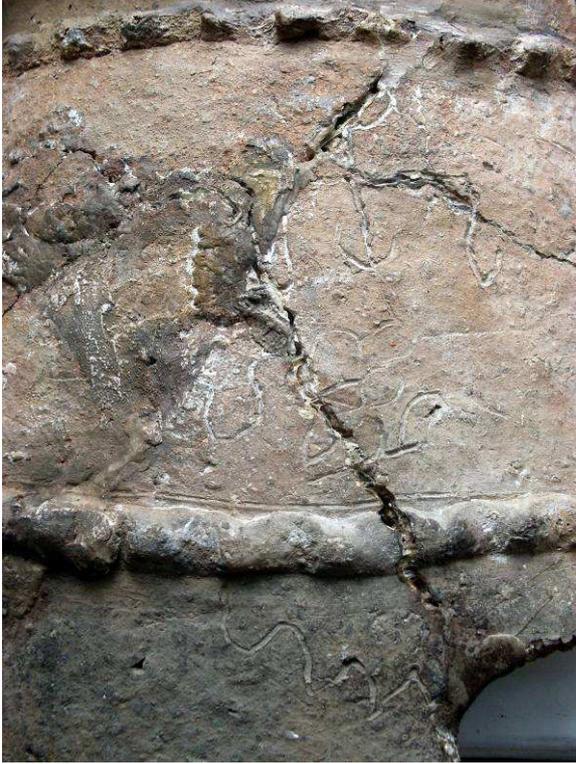


Fig. 4 –A detailed view of the area where the signs were (photo).

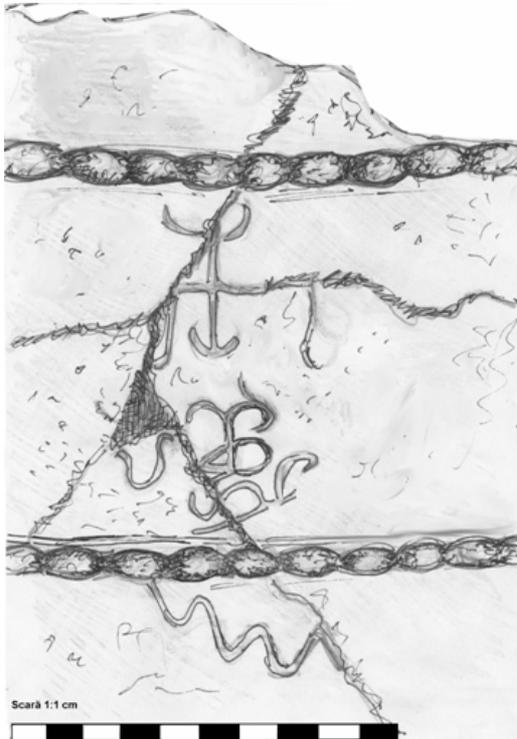


Fig. 5– A detailed view of the area where signs were incised (drawing).

Dacian population (Fl. Dudaș, 1973; Fl. Dudaș, 1981). We believe, based on the analogies we have made and on the information we have at our disposal that the five symbols are in fact Tamgas.



Fig. 6 - The tamga “enciclopedia” from Krivoi Rog, drawing (after S. A. Jacenko, 2001, pl. 12)

The origin and utility of the Tamga-type signs is rather controversial. According to some authors, the origin of the signs is to be found in the Sino-Siberian space (C. Beldiman, 1991) while others believe that their origin lies in the Iranian area (G. Vernadsky, 1956; J. Boardman, 1998; S. A. Jacenko, 2001). In Asia Minor and Achaemenid Iran symbols very similar to the Tamga signs and with a variety of functions such as mason’s signs, personalized markers, monetary checks, or coats of arms belonging to aristocratic clans or rulers, have been in usage since at least the 4th and 5th centuries BC (J. Boardman, 1998; V. S. Ol’hovskij, 2001; A. S. Jacenko, 2001).

In the North-Pontic steppe, the Tamga-type signs are introduced for the first time by the Sarmatians (C. Beldiman, 1991; S. A. Jacenko, 2001). Through the migrations of the nomadic Sarmatians, the signs are carried, at the start of the second half of the 1st century BC in the Bosphoran Kingdom (V. S. Dračuk, 1975), and in the second half of the 1st century AD in the territory of the Dacian Kingdom (C. Beldiman,

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1991). The Tamga signs have been applied on a large array of objects: clay pots, mirrors, coins, finery, etc. The collections of Tamga signs (and other glyphs) incised on different stone monuments are known in archeological circles as “encyclopedies” (V. S. Ol’hovskij, 2001; S. A. Yatsenko, 2001). Such “encyclopedias” can also be found in Romania at Ditrău (information received from Gh. Lazarovici), and in the area of the Stânişoarei Mountains (information received from L. Măruia).

The purpose of the Tamga-type signs varies and it seems to be most diverse: personalization markers, tribal and aristocratic symbols, markings signaling the acquiring of a territory by a certain group, magical and religious symbols, ornaments (V. S. Dračuk, 1975; C. Beldiman, 1991; V. S. Ol’hovskij, 2001) and in some cases they have been applied without any specific purpose (V. S. Dračuk, 1975).

In the case of the symbols found on the vessel at hand, we will first clarify a few aspects with regard to the analogies made. Thus, the Tamga-type signs can be “read” from different angles, and the multitude of ways in which the graphic elements making them up can be combined (S. A. Jacenko, 2001) forces us to bring into discussion, when analyzing their meaning, “indelicate” analogies. That being said, we have considered only those analogies that chronologically fit in the timeframe of the discovery at hand (1st to 3rd centuries AD). We have to take into account that the similarities between Tamga-type signs used by different cultures at different time periods and in different areas cannot be always accounted by “loans”, but rather independent evolutions starting from of a few basic prototypes available (V. S. Dračuk, 1972; V. S. Dračuk, 1975; V. S. Ol’hovskij, 2001).

Symbol nr. 1 (tab. 1/1) has numerous analogies in the North-Pontic area. Thus, a similar symbol has been incised in the “encyclopedia” found on the marble lion nr.1 from Olbia (tab. 2/4, 5, 6). Another similar symbol (fig. 6; tab. 2/14) can be found on the “encyclopedia”-type stella from Krivoi Rog, in the Dniepropetrovsk area, dated roughly from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD (S. A. Jacenko, 2001). We can consider as an “indelicate” analogy for our symbol, the symbol incised on an “encyclopedia” limestone bloc discovered at Pantikapaion (tab. 2/13), and another one incised in a “encyclopedia” granite bloc found at Obuhov

(tab. 2/16) and dated roughly at 3rd century AD (S. A. Jacenko, 2001). In the pre-Roman Dacian environment, a symbol incised after firing on a locally made gray vessel fragment discovered in the *dava*-type settlement of Răcătău (tab. 3/30) and dated at the end of the 1st century AD (C. Beldiman, 1991) bears some resemblance to our symbol. Considering the fact that quite often a number of complex Tamga signs are created by combining several simpler “models” we cannot exclude the possibility that symbol nr.1 might have been in fact created by combining two simpler and more common elements (for example, by superimposing tab. 3/3 and tab 3/17, etc).

Symbol nr.2 (tab. 1/2) has close analogies in the North-Pontic area at Pantikapaion (tab. 2/15), where a similar symbol can be found in an “encyclopedia” etched in a limestone plaque. A similar symbol has been etched in the “encyclopedia” type stella from Krivoi Rog, in the Dnpropetrovsk area (fig. 6, tab. 2/17), dated roughly at 1st and 2nd centuries AD (S. A. Jacenko, 2001). A symbol found on an artifact discovered at Mărunței (tab 4/29), in Daco-Carpic area, has as a central “piece” a symbol somewhat similar to our own.

Symbol nr. 3 (tab. 1/3) represents a simple, relatively common shape. Similar – and even exact replicas – symbols can be found in the Northern part of the Black Sea on two limestone “encyclopedias”, discovered on the territory of the former Bosphoran Kingdom (tab. 2/8, 9) as well as in a number of other places.

Symbol nr. 4 (tab. 1/4) also has analogies in the North-Pontic area. A similar symbol has been incised in a fresco discovered in Scythian Neapolis (tab. 2/11). Another one, similar in form (tab. 2/11), can be found incised in an “encyclopedia” on the walls of a barrow tomb from Kerçi, and dated roughly in the 1st century AD (H. Nickel, 1973). In the Daco-Carpic area, at Butnăreşti, a grey vessel, discovered in a pottery workshop, bears incised several Tamga-type signs, one of them strikingly similar to symbol nr.4 from our vessel (tab. 4/7).

Symbol nr. 5 (tab. 1/5) could be taken at first glance as an ornament or a randomly made incision. However, its location near the other incised symbols as well as the analogies found elsewhere (for example, tab. 2/1, 2, 3, 10) seem to show that this symbol might be in its turn a Tamga-type sign or even a symbolical and simplistic representation of a snake, similar to those found on certain miniature rectangular vessels or Sarmatian

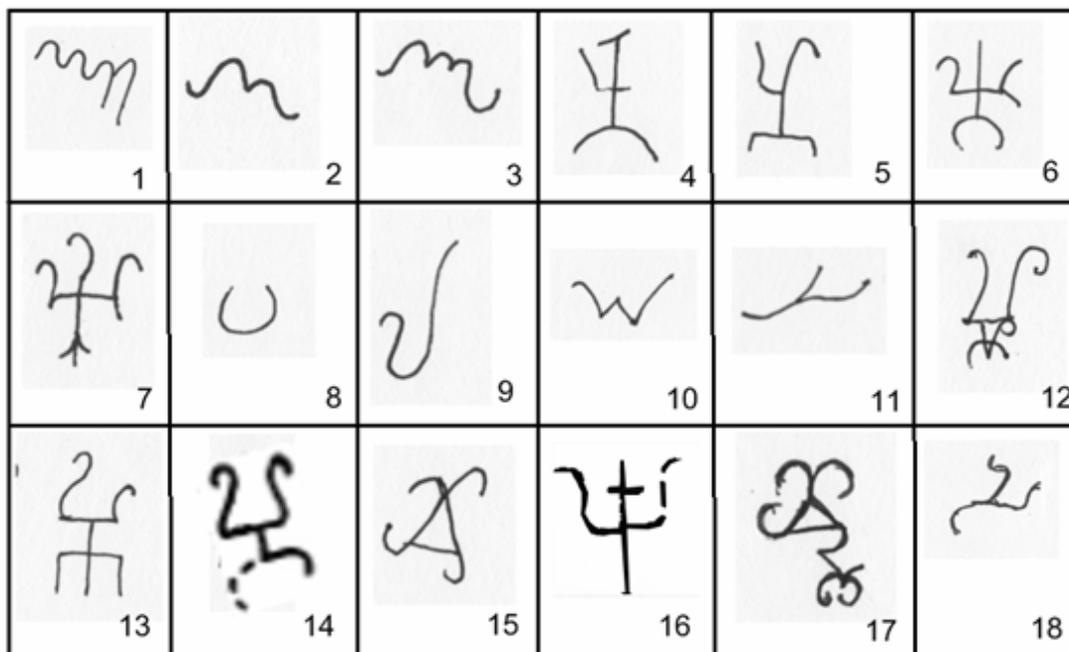


Table 2 –Tamga signs in the north-pontic area, 1st century B.C. – 3rd century A.D. (without respecting the dimensions):

1, 2, 3 - Pictograms and tamga-typse signs (V. S. Dračuk, 1975, p. 110 și tab. II/106, 107, 108); 4, 5, 6 - Signs incised on the marble lion nr. 1 from Olbia, Ermitaj Museum (V. S. Dračuk, 1975, p. 115 and tab. IV/219, 220 and p. 119 and Tab. V/338); 7 - Sign incised on a bronze mirror found on the territory of the Bosphoran Kingdom, Ermitaj Museum (V. S. Dračuk, 1975, p. 119 and tab. VI/359); 8 - Sign incised on a limestone plate – “encyclopedia” found on the territory of the Bosphoran Kingdom, The Museum of History and Archaeology from Kerch (V. S. Dračuk, 1975, p. 120 and tab. VI/403); 9 - Sing incised on a limestone plate found on the territory of the Bosphoran Kingdom, Museum of Novocerkassk (V. S. Dračuk. 1975, p. 120 and Tab. VI/405); 10 - Sing incised on the walls of the cave Ak Kaia I from Belogorsk, Crimeea (Dračuk 1975, p. 123, tab. VII/509); 11 - Sign incised on a fragment of fresco discovered in Scythian Neapolis, (V. S. Dračuk, 1975, p. 122 and tab. VII/456); 12 - Sign incised on a clay pot discovered at Tanaias (V. S. Dračuk, 1975, p. 131 and tab. X/795); 13 - Sign incised on a tomb limestone plate discovered at Pantikapaion, Museum of History and Archaeology from Kerki (V. S. Dračuk, 1975, p. 135 and tab. XII/895); 14 - Sign incised on a stela from Krivoi Rog, Dniepropietrovsck region (S. A. Jacenko, 2001, pl.12); 15 - Sign incised on a limestone plate discovered at Pantikapaion, Museum of History and Archaeology from Kerki (V. S. Dračuk, 1975, p. 137 and tab. XIII/43); 16 - Tamga sign incised on a granite boulder discovered at Obuhov, Kiev region (S. A. Jacenko, 2001, pl. 6/123); 17 - Sign incised on a stela from Krivoi Rog, Dniepropietrovsck region (S. A. Jacenko, 2001, pl.12); 18 - Sign incised on the walls of the chamber of a tumular grave at Kerki dated in the Ist century AD.(H. Nickel, 1973, fig.3 and fig. 4).

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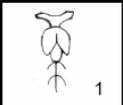
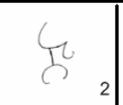
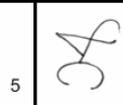
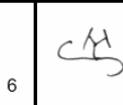
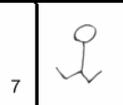
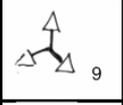
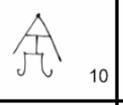
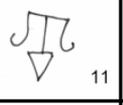
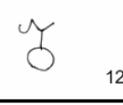
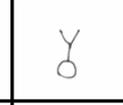
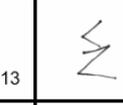
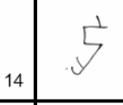
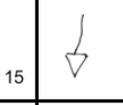
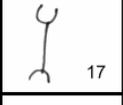
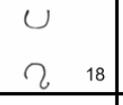
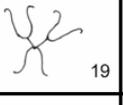
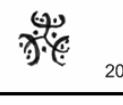
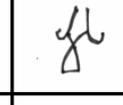
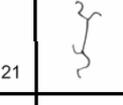
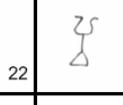
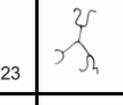
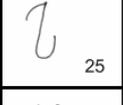
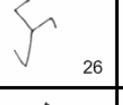
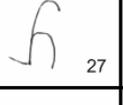
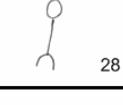
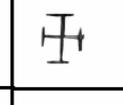
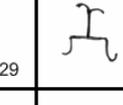
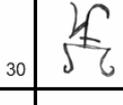
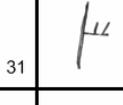
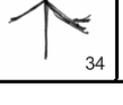
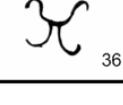
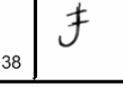
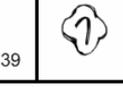
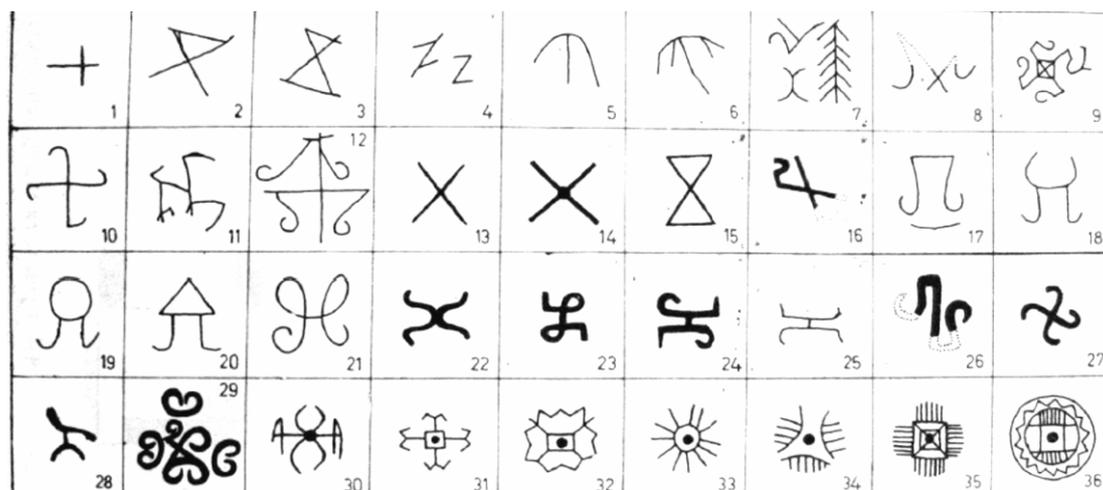
 1	 2	 3	 4	 5	 6	 7	 8
 9	 10	 11	 12	 13	 14	 15	 16
 17	 18	 19	 20	 21	 22	 23	 24
 25	 26	 27	 28	 29	 30	 31	 32
 33	 34	 35	 36	 37	 38	 39	 40

Table 3 – Tamga signs and Tamga-like signs in Dacia before the Roman conquest, Ist century A.D. – 2nd century A.D. (without respecting the dimensions):

1 - Sign incised on a limestone block found on the XIth terrace at Sarmizegetusa Regia (G. Gheorghiu 2005, fig. 246/a); 2 - Sign incised on an object made out of bone found at Brad (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/1; V. Ursachi, 1995, pl.29/1); 3 - Sign incised on a sarmatian sifter found at Dumbrava (S. Sanie, Ş. Sanie, 1973, fig. 12/11; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/2); 4 - Sign incised on a sarmatian clay pot found at Dumbrava (S. Sanie, Ş. Sanie, 1973, fig. 13, C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/3); 5 - Sign incised five times on a clay jar, of local production, discovered at Moigrad (M. Macrea, D. Protase, M. Rusu, 1961, fig. 8/4; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/4); 6, 7 - Signs incised after firing on a local amphora discovered at Poiana (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/5, și fig. 1/6); 8 - Sign in relief made on a locally produced pot discovered at Poiana (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/7); 9 - Sign incised before firing on a *patera* type vessel, imported from the north-pontic area, found at Poiana (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/8); 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 - Signs incised on a bone object discovered at Poiana (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/9, 1/10, 1/11, 1/12, 1/13, 1/14, 1/15); 17, 18 - Signs incised on a bone object discovered at Poiana (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/16 și 1/17); 19 - Sign incised on a bone artifact discovered at Poiana (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.1/18); 20 - Sign incised on a *pixida* discovered at Poiana, imported from the north-pontic area (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 1/19); 21 - Sign incised before firing on a locally produced jar discovered at Răcătău. (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 1/20); 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 - Signs incised after firing on a grey pottery shard, part of a locally produced pot, discovered at Răcătău (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 1/21, 1/22, 1/23, 1/24, 1/25, 1/26, 1/27, 1/28); 30. Sign incised after firing on a grey pottery shard, part of a locally produced pot, discovered at Răcătău (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 1/29); 31 - Sign incised after firing on a *kantharos* discovered at Sânsimion (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 1/30); 32 - Sign incised after firing on a pottery shard, part of a locally produced amphora, discovered at Sânsimion (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 1/31); 33, 34 - Signs incised after firing on a bowl discovered at Cernat (V. Crişan, 2000, pl. 68); 35 - Sign incised on a clay object found at Brad (V. Ursachi, 1995, pl. 213/4); 36 - Sign incised on a pottery shard discovered at Brad (V. Ursachi, 1995, pl. 201/7); 37 - Sign incised on a pottery shard discovered at Brad (V. Ursachi, 1995, pl. 199/7); 38, 39, 40 - Signs incised after firing on a pottery shard discovered at Cetățeni (D. Măndescu, 2006, pl. 16/17).



Tabel 4 –Tamga signs and Tamga-like signs in Dacia, 2nd century AD - to 3rd century A.D. (after C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5):

1 - Sign incised after firing on a clay pot discovered at Poiana-Dulcești - Varnița (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CL/3, C. Beldiman 1991, fig. 5/1); 2 - Sign incised after firing on a clay pot discovered at Poiana-Dulcești, Varnița (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CLIII/5, C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/2); 3 - Sign incised after firing on a clay pot discovered at Poiana – Dulcești, Varnița, (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CLI/1, C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/3); 4 - Sign incised after firing on a clay pot discovered at Poiana Dulcești, Siliște (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CXXIII/5-6, C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/4) 5 - Sign incised on a firedog discovered at Poiana-Dulcești, Transformator (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CLII/5, C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.5/5) 6 - Sign incised on a clay pot discovered at Poiana Dulcești, Varnița (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CLI/2; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.5/6) 7 - Signs incised on a grey pot discovered at Butnărești in a potters workshop (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl.LXIV/3, C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.5/7) 8 - Sign incised on a pot discovered at Poiana-Dulcești, Varnița (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl.CLI/2, C. Beldiman 1991, fig.5/8). 9 - Sign incised on a pot discovered at Poiana-Dulcești, Siliște (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CLI/3, C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.5/9) 10 - Sign incised on a pot discovered at Homiceni (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/10) 11 - Sign incised after firing on a pot discovered at Homiceni (E. Petrișor, 1987, fig.3/2; C. Beldiman 1991, fig. 5/11) 12 - Found at Vlădiceni (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/12) 13 - Sign applied on a mirror template found at descoperit la Buriăș-Periș (C. Preda, 1986, fig.1, C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.5/13) 14 - Found at Oncești (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.5/14) 15 - Found at Dulceanca (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.5/15) 16 - Found at Dumitreștii Gălății (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/16) 17 - Found at Holboca (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/17) 18 - Sign incised on clay a pot found at București Militari (Gh. Bichir, 1984, pl. LIV/1; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/18) 19 - Sign incised on a Sarmatian- ype mirror found at Focșani (Gh. Untaru, S. Morintz, 1962, fig. 2/11; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/19) 20 - Found at Unțești (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/20) 21 - Sign incised on a Sarmatian type mirror found Sebeș - Alba (Al. Aldea, 1971, fig. 1; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/21) 22, 23 - Signs applied on two Sarmatian type mirrors discovered at Vârteșcoiu (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CLXXIII/3; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/22, 23) 24 - Sign applied on a sarmatian mirror found at Pădureni (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CLXXIII/3; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/24) 25 - Found at Târgșor (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.5/25) 26 - Found at Gălănești - Bărboasa (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/26) 27 - Sign applied on a Sarmatian type mirror found at Pădureni (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CXXIV/4; C. Beldiman 1991, fig.5/27) 28 - Found at Dridu-Movilă (C. Beldiman 1991, fig. 5/28) 29 - Found at Mărunței (Gh. Bichir, M. Butoi, 1975, fig. 1-2; C. Beldiman 1991, fig.5/29) 30 - Sign applied on a Sarmatian type mirror found at Pădureni (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CLXXIII/5; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig.5/30) 31 - Found at Mitoc (E. Zaharia, 1959, fig. 3d; C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/31) 32 - Found at Oltenița - Ulmeni (C. Beldiman, fig. 5/32) 33 - Sign applied on a Sarmatian type mirror found at Pădureni (Gh. Bichir, 1973, pl. CLXXIV/2, C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/33) 34 - Found at Târgșor (C. Beldiman, 1991, fig. 5/34) 35 - Found at Balintești-Cioinagi (E. Zaharia, 1959, fig. 3/2, C. Beldiman 1991, fig. 5/35) 36 - Found at Ghermănești (C. Beldiman 1991, fig. 5/36).

A clay pot with tamga signs discovered at Şiria (Arad county).

origin (A. Vaday, P. Megyesi, 1993; A. Vaday, 2000), discovered in the Pannonian Planes and dated roughly at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th centuries AD (A. Vaday, P. Megyesi, 1993).

The interpretation of these symbols and the “message” they want to convey is much is limited by the absence of archeological context and of a clear dating. The categorization of the vessel, based on type, within the Dacian material culture, is not necessarily relevant considering the fact that during the 2nd through 4th centuries AD, in the Arad Plains, one finds the Dacians and Sarmatians living together (E. Dörner, 1971; E. Dörner, 1974; P. Hügel, M. Barbu, 1996; P. Hügel, 1999).

We believe that the marking of the vessel before it was fired indicates that both the vessel and the symbols have been made according to a single plan. As far as the symbols on the vessel are concerned, they could show ownership, be tribal emblems, or have a religious and/or mystical signification. We, for our part, lean toward the latter possibility, as symbols showing ownership appear on more “significant” objects usually discovered in and around tombs (S.A. Jacenko, 2010), and we have no knowledge of similar symbols found on objects in the area which would signal that the incised Tamga signs could be the emblems of a Sarmatian or Dacian tribe settled in the area.

Based on the discoveries made so far, we have observed that Tamga-type signs, both in pre-Roman Dacia, as well as 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, are concentrated mostly in the South and East of the Carpathian mountain range, and only rarely appear in the center and North-Western Transylvania (C. Beldiman, 1991). In Arad County, no Tamga-type vessels have been found thus far, although it is quite possible that the symbols applied on a Dacian clay vessel discovered at Zăbrani and dating roughly from the 1st century BC, 2nd century AD, might represent, in their turn, Tamga-type symbols. We do not discount the possibility that the signs resembling letters, incised on a miniature vessel discovered in the *dava*-type settlement from Pecica - Şanţul Mare, also dating from the Dacian Kingdom period, might represent in fact Tamga-type signs, even though initially we have considered them to be Greek letters (A. Berzovan, S. Olteanu, E. Pădureanu, 2009).

It bears mentioning that the Iazigi Sarmatians from the Pannonic Plains seem to have used infrequently Tamga-type signs (A. Vaday, P. Megyesi, 1993), thus, in the early

Iazigi period (1st to 2nd centuries AD) we are aware of only one Tamga-type symbol applied on a golden jewel of North-Pontic origin, discovered at Dunaharaszti (A. Vaday, 1989). Only starting with the 4th century AD, in the context of new groups arriving from the North-Pontic area – a fact which had deep cultural impact – will Tamga-type signs appear, albeit rarely (A. Vaday, P. Megyesi, 1993).

Conclusions

The issue of cultural and spiritual exchanges between Dacians and Sarmatians has not yet been clearly covered.

For now, it is not at all certain whether the Dacian people really adopted the usage of Tamga signs, or they were simply copying infrequently such patterns from their Sarmatian neighbors. Anyway, the presence of artifacts with Tamga signs in the Western Plains of Romania might be a proof of cultural connections of the Dacians and Sarmatians from the western Romanian plain with other areas of Dacia, as well as with the more distant North-Pontic steppes.

As far as our discovery is concerned, the absence of a clear archeological context, the rough dating and the generally “problematic” character of the symbols themselves, have not allowed for pertinent conclusions to arise. We are left hoping that future investigations will increase our knowledge and will permit new and perhaps clearer conclusions to be drawn.

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