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A NEW MOLDMADE BOWL FROM ATHENS

Abstract: *A recently found Hellenistic moldmade bowl from the Athenian Agora displays a number of unusual features, but is most likely an Athenian product of the Workshop of Bion, a potter who produced moldmade bowls from the last quarter of the 3rd century until at least 175 BC. One of its stamps, a bull's head, is closely paralleled on bowls made in Argos, and adds to previous evidence for a close relationship between the two producers.*

Keywords: *Moldmade bowl; Megarian bowl; Hellenistic pottery; Athenian Agora*

The application of the technology of molding to ordinary tableware that resulted in the invention of the moldmade bowl in the latter part of the 3rd century BC opened up the possibility of new and almost endlessly varied decoration for the potters who produced these vessels. For those of us who study them, however, the mechanical production process poses a challenge, for it enormously complicates the relationships among producers. Alfred Laumonier (1973, 256), reflecting on his experience of the thousands of moldmade bowls found on Delos, famously summed up the strategies now available to the potters: *‘on s’imitait, on se copiait, on se surmoulait, on s’empruntait des poinçons, ou on se les achetait, ou même sans doute on se les volait.’* The extent to which this is true, and its impact on the study of moldmade bowls, has emerged with increasing clarity since he wrote. For example, the late Charles Edwards (1981; 1986) studied minutely the stamped motifs that reveal interconnections between Corinthian potters, the Argive Monogram Workshop, and Attic bowls; Morella Massa

(1992, 243-244) has demonstrated the dependence of Lemnian workshops on Attic products; and I myself have posited business connections between Athenian, Argive, and Lemnian workshops (Lawall *et al.* 2002, 428-430; Rotroff 2013). The present paper examines a moldmade bowl recently found at the Athenian Agora that constitutes a puzzling hybrid of Attic and Argive features, another piece that must, somehow, fit into the jigsaw puzzle of the relationship between these two major producers of moldmade bowls.

The bowl

(Inv. no.: Agora P 35440; Pl. 1: 1-3 and Pl. 2: 1)

Findspot: Section BZ, grid J/19-1/18, elev. 52.47-52.69 masl. Pottery lot BZ 1631.

Dimensions: Ht. 8.5cm; diam. 14.2cm.

State of preservation: Four joining fragments; about one third of upper wall and rim missing.

Description: Parabolic profile with flattened bottom. Low, slightly outturned wheelmade rim extending only 0.5cm above moldmade section. Medallion: 16-rayed motif with poorly defined center (circle and dot?), each of the rays thickened at the end. The motif rests on a raised field within a deep concave one, surrounded by a row of double spirals, all within two closely spaced ridges. Calyx: five to six rows of small, pointed, ribbed leaves with slightly rounded tops. Stamps applied in a spiral rather than in concentric rows. Wall: lower register of large stamps, alternating bulls' heads and long-necked birds flying right, five of each preserved of a probable original six pairs; upper register of smaller stamps just below rim pattern, alternating old man and *kore* masks. Rim pattern: large false guilloche, with points facing left, between ridges; row of double spirals above. The area above the decoration and below the wheelmade rim is very rough. Except for the old man mask, where much detail is missing, the images were impressed with fresh stamps.

Fabric: Fine red clay (5YR 6/6) with many tiny sparkling inclusions and two large pieces of lime, causing spalls. Shiny gloss, uniformly red on body, slightly darker on rim; some darker areas inside (2.5YR 4/6-5/6).

Excavation

The bowl was found in a Hellenistic stratum east of the Classical Commercial Building, a structure consisting of a series of rooms, side by side, along the north-south street that leaves the Agora at the west end of the *Stoa Poikile*, the northern boundary of the Athenian Agora (Rotroff 2006, pl. 98). That building faced west onto the street, but our bowl was found to the east of its probably blank back wall, an area where pre-Roman levels have been explored only piecemeal, in sondages between Roman and Byzantine walls. Any notion of the plan of the area in the Hellenistic period has yet to emerge, but it can be said, in general, that it seems to have been largely given over to commercial and industrial activities. The stratum in which P 35440 was found probably dates to the 2nd century BC; the presence of a fragment of a brazier suggests a terminal date no earlier than the second quarter of the century (Rotroff 2006, 203), consistent with the date of the bowl itself (see below).

Attic or Argive?

Although its Athenian provenience and general appearance suggest that P 35440 is Attic, a number of unusual features of its shape and decoration set it apart from the bulk of Athenian products. The bowl's upper wall spreads widely, producing a parabolic profile slightly flattened at the bottom, in contrast to the flattened hemisphere with a steeper wall typical of Attic bowls. At least one Attic parallel can be cited (Rotroff 1982, 52, no. 69, pl. 12), but the profile is undeniably odd. Also unusual, but again not without parallel (e.g. Rotroff 1982, nos 100, 117, 191, 249), is the form of the wheel-made rim, low and gently concave, in contrast to the most common Attic rim profile, high and rather straight, then sharply outturned at the lip. Furthermore, P 35440 lacks the wheel-run groove scraped through the glaze just below the lip, an ornament that appears almost without exception on Attic bowls.¹ The clay is much like that of Attic bowls in terms of color and texture, though large pieces of lime are unusual. While Attic bowls are most frequently glazed black or brown, a shiny red gloss like that on P 35440 is found occasionally, and more frequently as time went

¹ I know of only a few instances at the Agora where it is lacking: Rotroff 1982, nos 14, 341, 342, and 346, the last three long-petal bowls probably dating c. 150 BC or later, and an uninventoried fragment in deposit B 18:13.

on (e.g. Rotroff 1982, 62, no. 154, pls 28, 78, signed Βίοβοϛ; 57, no. 109, pl. 19, M Monogram Class).

A crescent-shaped area of darker glaze positioned diagonally on the inner wall of P 35440 suggests that the bowl may have been glazed by double dipping, a practice that has not been observed on Attic Hellenistic pottery. This detail may, however, have some other etiology, for an answering area of darker gloss does not appear on the outer wall, as it normally does in these cases. Instead, the inner darkening is mirrored by a crescent-shaped area of glaze loss, clearly visible in Pl. 1: 2-3. Whatever caused this phenomenon, it is also found on at least one Attic bowl: a figured bowl perhaps from the Workshop of Bion and, like P 35440, also largely fired red (Townsend 1995, 190, no. 175, pl. 46).

Other production details can also be paralleled in the Attic corpus. The interior wall of P 35440, instead of being perfectly smooth, displays hard-edged facets, the traces of a tool used to work the surface when it was in a leather-hard state. This procedure has also produced a hard-edged spiral pattern on the floor of the bowl, formed by a tool working from the center outwards while the wheel turned in a counter-clockwise direction. While uncommon, precisely the same tooling marks can be found on a number of unquestionably Attic products: a figured bowl perhaps produced in Workshop A (Retroff 1982, 61, no. 147, pls 27, 78); an unpublished fragment bearing the gorgoneion medallion common on Attic bowls (P 20950); and an unpublished red-glazed pine cone bowl (P 34093). Faceting is also visible on the inner walls of at least two other bowls of unquestioned Attic manufacture (Retroff 1982, nos 158 and 256). Thus, while some features of shape and production vary from the Athenian norm, none precludes Attic manufacture.

The stamped motifs present a similar mixture of the familiar and the unusual. The theatrical masks of old man and maiden (*kore*) just below the rim pattern on P 35440 are frequently found on Athenian moldmade bowls. Although they are shared by several workshops, the closest parallels for the details of these masks and for their alternating arrangement are found within the Workshop of Bion; for example, on a bowl where the *kore* and old man masks are joined by a bird flying right, positioned just below the rim pattern (Pl. 2: 2).² While the old man mask of P 35440 is smaller than those

² For other examples, see the motif index of Rotroff 1982, under masks (127). Other close comparanda from the Workshop of Bion are Rotroff 1982, 56, no. 101, pls 17, 75 (alternating old man masks and lozenges), no. 102, pl. 17 (alternating slave and old man masks), and 58, no. 120 (repeating old man mask, slave mask, and bird). For a good drawing of the old man mask, see Thompson 1934, 356, no. C 22, fig. 40.

Motif	Dimension	P 35440	Workshop of Bion (Athens)	Monogram Workshop (Argos)	Lemnos
Bull's head	horn span	2.15cm		c. 1.65cm	c. 1.8-1.9cm
	ear tip to ear tip	1.7cm		c. 1.25cm	c. 1.55cm
Large right-flying bird	wing span	2.1cm			
	tail to beak	2.2cm	c. 2.25cm		
Old man mask	Height	0.95cm	1.2cm		
Kore mask	Height	1cm	1.05cm		

Fig. 1. Comparative dimensions of motifs on Athenian, Argive, and Lemnian bowls. Measurements marked 'c.' have been estimated from drawings and photographs

on the Attic bowls, the *kore* mask is nearly identical both in details and size (see Fig. 1),³ a hint that it may have been made in that workshop; at least, the motif comes from a stamp that was the twin of one used there. The large, long-necked bird that flies right in the main frieze of the wall may be the same as the bird in a blurred stamp on an Attic bowl of the Workshop of Bion (Pl. 3: 1). Both have the same contour, are the same size, and are distinguished by the peculiarity of a pair of stubby feet protruding from the belly (marked by arrows on Pl. 3: 1), incongruous on a bird in flight. Other features, however, distinguish P 35440 from the bulk of that workshop's products. The heavy simplified guilloche of the rim pattern is larger and more crudely drawn than that associated with Bion's workshop where, in addition, the points of the guilloche are usually oriented to the right rather than the left (as on the bowls illustrated in Pl. 2: 2 and Pl. 3: 1). I have not come across an exact parallel in the Agora corpus, although a similarly heavy guilloche with point to the right is found on several products of the second quarter of the 2nd century BC (e.g. Rotroff 1982, 61, nos 143, 145, pls 26-27; Thompson 1934, 378-379, no. D 34, fig. 65), figured bowls of Class 1 and perhaps the late output of the Workshop of Bion (Rotroff 1982,

³ Because of the nature of the material and the imprecision of the stamping process, measurements are only approximate; but the difference in size between the old man masks is unquestionable.

30). The medallion, made up of 16 spokes, is highly unusual, but might ultimately derive from a stamp on the bottom of an unattributed pine-cone bowl of the late 3rd century BC (Rotroff 1982, 45, no. 3, pl. 1), significantly larger than the medallion of P 35440.

The most intriguing stamp, however, is the large bull's head that alternates with the flying bird in the main frieze of the wall. It represents a fully fleshed head, not a boukranion, with an impressive set of horns emerging from a woolly poll, large projecting ears that droop slightly from the horizontal, outsized staring eyes, and a bulging nose set off by a horizontal ridge and marked by nostrils. It does not appear on any Athenian bowl known to me, but a similar stamp is conspicuous within a small group of bowls made in Argos and attributed to the Argive Monogram Shop, so called from the ligature signing the medallion of some of its products (Pl. 3: 2) (Siebert 1978, nos M.1, M.14, M.19, M.34, M.41, M.50, pls 22, 24-26, 28, 67: 4 and probably M.44, M.51, and M.54, which are not illustrated). Although none of the preserved Argive stamps is clear in all its details, the Argive bull displays the long horns, projecting and slightly dipped ears, and the bulging eyes; the published photographs indicate that there are enough shared details to suggest that one of the stamps was patterned after the other.

Is it possible, then, that P 35440 is an Argive import? While this cannot be discounted altogether, it is unlikely on several counts. None of its other stamps is documented on Argive products, the imbricate calyx is rare there, and a low concave rim is as foreign to routine Argive practice as it is to Athenian. My personal experience of Argive bowls is small, but the fabric of P 35440 is unlike the fabric of Argive bowls found at Corinth and described by Charles Edwards (1981, 201, Fabric B) as coarse, with small black inclusions and voids, some mica, reddish brown in color (5YR 5/6, 7.5YR 5/6), and with a thin, matt glaze. It is more likely, therefore, that P 35440 is Attic and, on the basis of the stamps discussed above, probably a product of the Workshop of Bion. The large simplified guilloche and the relatively careless execution of the calyx – with stamps applied in a spiral rather than the meticulous concentric rings usually found on products of the workshop – suggest either that it was made by an inexperienced artisan or, more likely, that it dates later than the main, recognizable output of that shop, which flourished from *c.* 225 to 175 BC. The size of the old man mask, smaller than the image on most bowls of Bion's shop, and parallels for the heavy guilloche in the second quarter of the 2nd century BC reinforce

the latter alternative. Along with bowls assigned to Class 1, it may represent the later output of the shop.

Athens, Argos, and Lemnos

If P 35440 does indeed come from Bion's workshop, the appearance of the bull is highly significant, for it adds another reason to associate the Athenian workshop with the Argive one. In his study of the moldmade bowls of Argos, Gérard Siebert identified four workshops, clearly distinguished from one another on the basis of stamps, signatures, and compositional preferences. The Monograph Workshop, probably the earliest of the four, stands out for the similarity of its products to Athenian bowls (Siebert 1978, 50-63, 170, 349-361). To date, the most significant indicator of its relationship to Athens is a small bird flying left that frequently appears on the Argive Monogram bowls as a filling motif. It alternates with the bull's head on the fragment in Pl. 3: 2 and the two stamps also appear together on two other fragments published by Siebert (1978, 351, nos M.14, M.19, pl. 24). The bird is identical in every detail to a bird used in the same capacity in the Athenian Workshop of Bion, except that it is slightly smaller (Edwards 1986, 397-398, fig. 1 illustrates the relationship between the stamps). This smaller size is explained by the shrinkage of the clay in the process of mechanical reproduction, and it indicates that the Argive stamp is derivative from the Attic one. We can now add the long-horned bull as another instance of an Argive stamp that was probably copied from an Athenian model. The signature Ἀργείου on a bowl of the Workshop of Bion further hints at a relationship between the two shops (Lawall *et al.* 2002, 428-430). I have argued elsewhere that the Argive shop began either as a branch of the Athenian one, or that its products were made in direct imitation of Athenian bowls imported to Argos (Rotroff 2013, 18-19).

The bull also joins a long list of motifs shared by Athenian bowls and bowls produced on the island of Lemnos, by a shop that Morella Massa long ago suggested may have been founded by an Athenian *émigré* potter. The Lemnian shop, the products of which are preserved in extensive potters' debris excavated at Hephaistia, used erotes, a Nike, *kore* masks, a griffin, and medallion stamps well attested on Athenian bowls, mostly bowls of the Workshop of Bion (Rotroff 2013, 20-22). A long-horned bull shows up there in a single example of rim decoration (Massa 1992, 186, C 471, pls 73, 100). This stamp is smaller and differently proportioned than

the Attic one, and it appears not to be a direct mechanical copy; but the combination of wide horns, projecting ears, and bulging eyes produced a distinctive profile that both versions share and that, I would submit, is more than coincidental.

If I am correct, the long-horned bull's head is the first motif to be shared by all three shops: the Workshop of Bion, the Argive Monogram Shop, and the Lemnian pottery. Its appearance on the new bowl from the Athenian Agora thus strengthens the case for a direct relationship between producers of moldmade bowls in Athens, Argos, and Lemnos.

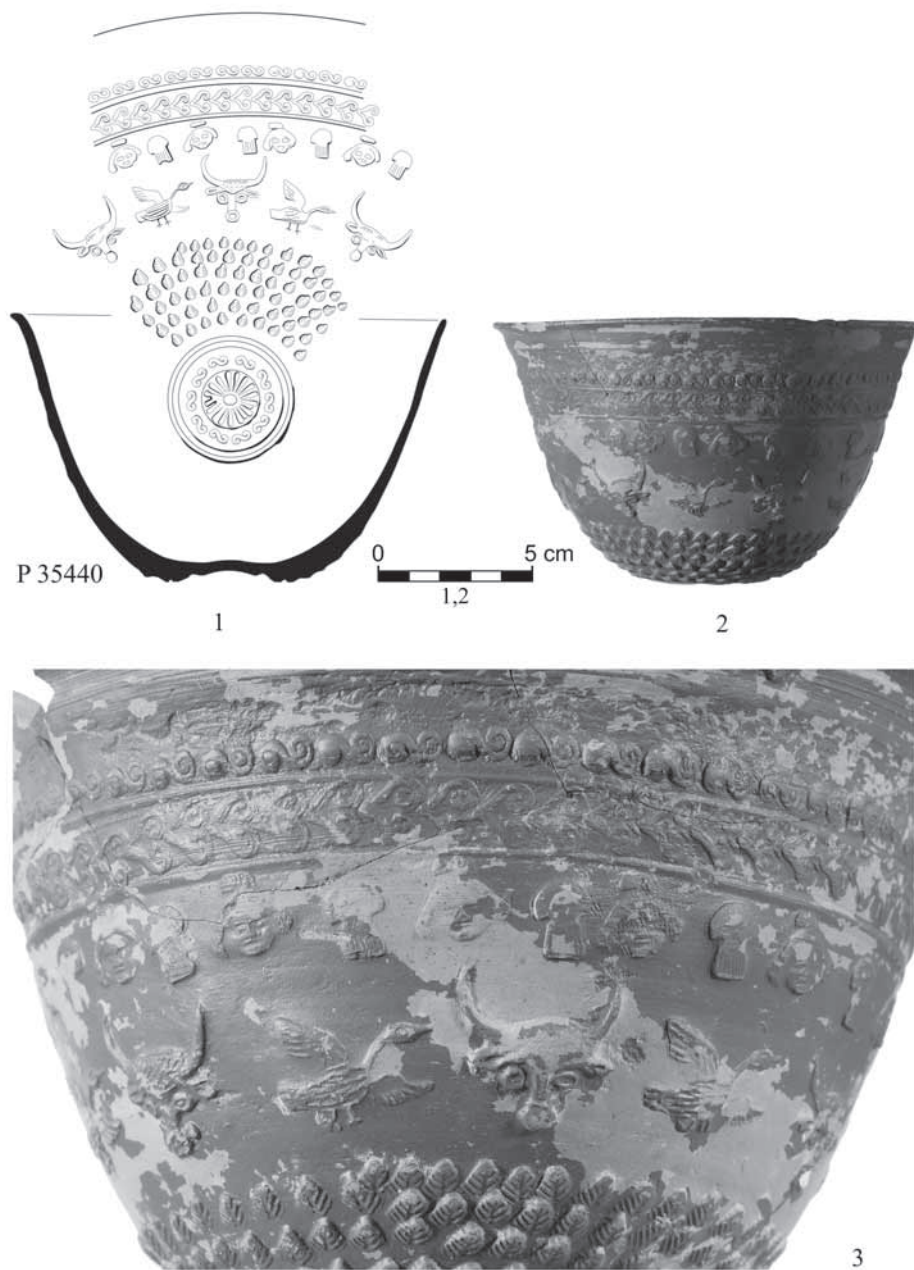
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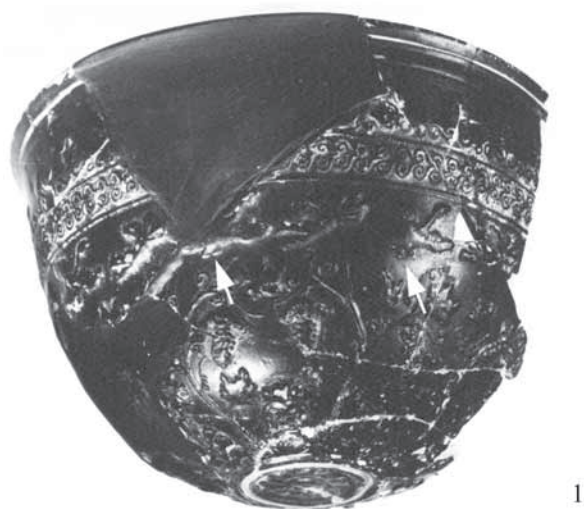
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Pl. 1. 1 – Inv. no. Agora P 35440. Drawing by A. Hooton
 2 – Inv. no. Agora P 35440. Photo by A. Sideris
 3 – Inv. no. Agora P 35440. Detail of wall. Photo by C. Mauzy

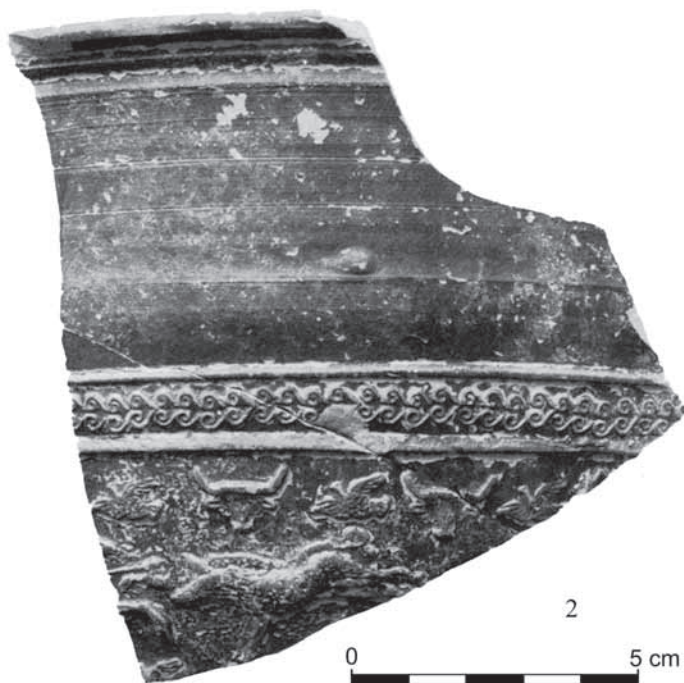


Pl. 2. 1 – Inv. no. Agora P 35440. Medallion and calyx. Photo by A. Sideris
2 – Inv. no. Agora P 18665, Workshop of Bion (Rotroff 1982, 56, no. 103, pl. 18).
Archives of the Agora Excavations



1

0 5 cm



2

0 5 cm

Pl. 3. 1 – Inv. no. Agora P 28614, Workshop of Bion (Rostroff 1982, 55, no. 96, pl. 16).
Archives of the Agora Excavations

2 – Inv. no. Nauplion 11.367, 54.522 A, a remarkably large bowl (krater?) of the Argive Monogram Workshop (Siebert 1978, 355-356, no. M.50, pl. 28). Reproduced from Siebert 1978, with the kind permission of Gérard Siebert