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A FAIENCE ARYBALLOS
IN THE COLLECTION
OF THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM
AT WROCLAW

Abstract: In the collection of the University Museum of Wrocław is a spherical faience aryballos of unknown provenance. It belongs to a group of vessels which enjoyed widespread popularity over a vast area of the Mediterranean in the 6th century BC. The analysis clearly shows that the spherical faience aryballos at the University Museum of Wrocław should be classified within section 3 of V. Webb's classification, that containing the most common and crudest type of faience aryballos. Aryballoi classified within this section were made, judging from their distribution, partly or mainly at Naukratis and they belong in date to the second part of the 6th century. It is likely that the Wrocław aryballos is the product of an Egyptian workshop, perhaps of that located at Naukratis. An Eastern Greek workshop cannot be ruled out either.

Keywords: Wrocław aryballos; faience ware; spherical aryballoi; University Museum of Wrocław

Introduction

In Poland there are not many preserved objects of ancient art, the more valuable are therefore those that have survived the turmoil of the Second World War and are at present part of the Polish cultural national heritage. Among them are specimens of high artistic quality as well

as objects betraying oversimplified modelling designed for mass-production. A spherical faience aryballos, inv. no. UW-28, deposited in the University Museum of Wrocław, which is the subject of this article, belongs to the latter category.¹ What makes it worth publishing is the fact that it has not yet been registered in catalogues of ancient Greek ceramics from Polish collections, as is the case of another vessel of this type in Polish museum collections of ancient art, now in Krakow (cf. below). The aim of the article is therefore to provide the essential basic material concerning this still unknown faience vessel for further study of faience objects.

The provenance of the discussed vessel is unknown. We have no information concerning either the place where the aryballos was found or acquired, nor of the circumstances surrounding its acquisition. Even the exact time of its arrival to Wrocław and its original location are not known. However, there are some indications that allow us to draw some assumptions. The vessel in question has no museum inventory number written on its surface and it bears no traces of any museum label once glued to its surface. It is then possible that it belonged to a private collection, one of many existing in Wrocław and in Lower Silesia before World War II. It could also be a part of one of two large museum collections of ancient art known to have existed in Wrocław before World War II.² It is likely that the vessel in question was a part of the collection of the Archaeological Museum at the University of Breslau. Objects kept in this museum have not been assigned inventory numbers.³ If that is the case, the aryballos arrived at this museum not earlier than 1862. In this year the then *Königliches Museum für Kunst und Alterthum* was transferred into the Archaeological Museum at the University of Breslau (Demidziuk 2010, 207). However, the preserved inventory of the collection (Rossbach 1877) does not record such an object. At this stage of research, the findspot and the primary place of storage of the Wrocław aryballos remains indefinite.

During the post-war turmoil, most of the antiquities from both of the abovementioned collections went missing. Immediately after the war

¹ The discussed aryballos as well as other ancient objects deposited in the University Museum at Wrocław are the property of the University of Wrocław Institute of History.

² One of them was a collection of the *Museum Schlesischer Alterthümer*. The second one was kept in the *Königliches Museum für Kunst und Alterthum*, transformed in 1862 into the Archeological Museum at the University of Breslau, now known as the University Museum at Wrocław. It should be noted that the discussed vessel was not brought to Wrocław after World War II.

³ I am very grateful to Mr. Krzysztof Demidziuk from the Archaeological Museum of Wrocław for his help in finding this information.

the quantity of remaining ancient objects, mainly glassware and ceramics, was gathered in a building at 37 Szewska Street, where the University Departments of Classical Archaeology, Prehistory and Art History were then housed (Gębczak 1959, 180). After the liquidation of the Department of Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Wrocław in 1967 (Floryan 1970, 71) some of these antiquities, among them the discussed vessel, became the property of the Wrocław University Institute of History. In 2016 they were transferred to the Wrocław University Museum as deposits.

The vessel

The vessel in question is made of frit of bright yellow colour. According to R. M. Cook and P. Dupont (1998, 140) what is commonly called 'faience' is in fact a glazed frit consisting of natron and silica with a little addition of clay as a binding agent. Its height is 7.7cm and its diameter is 7cm. The diameter of the mouth is 4.5cm. It consists of a wide, flaring mouth with a concave upper surface and high edge, short and narrow neck, and a somewhat irregular spherical body, slightly flattened below the handle. The body is decorated with incised intersecting sets of parallel lines (Pl. 1: 1). The rounded bottom of the vessel bears no decoration. A broad vertical handle is attached to the edge of the mouth and the shoulder of the vessel. The orifice is very narrow (it has a diameter of about 1cm) and is situated not in the middle of the mouth, but slightly shifted. On the mouth, in the upper part of the shoulder and on the handle, remains of greenish-blue glaze are visible. It is possible that in its original state, the whole vessel had been covered with such a coating. On the shoulders a pattern of six tongue-shaped blobs of brown colour is painted. The interior of the discussed aryballos shows clearly visible longitudinal impressions. They were very easy to notice, since the vessel had been discovered broken into several pieces. These impressions are most probably traces of wound stems of grass or reed stalks used in the process of manufacturing the vessel (cf. below).

The category of faience spherical aryballoi, which the Wrocław vessel belongs to, represents the final phase of production of Archaic East Greek faience. They display both East Greek and Egyptian influences that may indicate the existence of workshops producing this particular type of vessel not only in East Greece but also in Egypt. Establishing of the production in Egypt would be closely linked contacts between the Greeks and Saite Egypt (Webb 2016, 10). An important faience production centre in this

country was most probably Naukratis, the Greek trading port in the Egyptian Nile Delta, inhabited by both Egyptians and Greeks (Meek *et al.* 2016, 95). According to V. Webb (1978, 7; 1987, 72) the distribution of the finer type of spherical aryballoi was centred on Rhodes, while that of the coarser examples was wider, and they were widespread over the entire Mediterranean and their distribution reflected the expansion of Greek colonial and trade activity. Findplaces of the provenanced examples of both types Webb lists in her publication devoted to archaic Greek faience products (1978, 108ff.) contains sites on Rhodes, Samos (see also Webb 2016, 12, n. 79), Paros, Cyprus and Greek colonies in Asia Minor and Italy. Some isolated examples from mainland Greece are also known as findings from Athens (Blinkenberg and Johansen 1928, pl. 80: 2, 12) and Olympia (Webb 1978, 121, no. 809) show.

The faience spherical aryballoi

The small capacity and elaborate form of the spherical aryballoi, and their broad, slightly concave mouths made them very convenient containers for scented oil or unguent used for anointing the skin in Greek gymnasia, private baths, banquets and in particular, funerary ritual (Webb 2013-2015, 2). Provenanced vessels have been found mainly in burials as findings from Samos (Webb 2016, 46), Camirus (Webb 1978, 120, nos. 780-782) and Ampurias (Webb 1978, 121, no. 818) show. Other findspots are sanctuary deposits. In such a context spherical aryballoi have been found in for instance Lindos (Webb 1978, 110, no. 717, 111, no. 719), Ialysus (Webb 1978, 110, no. 718), and Kourion-Episkopi (Webb 1978, 111, no. 722).

Archaeological evidence indicates that faience aryballoi of spherical shape started to be produced towards the end of the 7th century BC,⁴ and their production lasted for over one hundred years, terminating in general at the end of the 6th century BC. Webb (2016, 10) links the end of the production of the faience objects with the Persian conquest of Egypt in 525 BC. According to Cook and Dupont (1998, 140) spherical aryballoi did not appear earlier than the second quarter of the 6th century and by 500 BC, the industry had ceased. These dates consequently determine the general chronological framework for the discussed object.

⁴ One of the earliest examples of this type was found in a grave 472 at Syracuse dated to the end of the third quarter of the 7th century BC (Hencken 1958, 263, Pl. 63, fig. 17b).

Faience spherical aryballoi are typologically dependent on ceramic Corinthian round aryballoi, closely reproducing the broad and concave mouth of these ceramic vessels (Payne 1931, 287, fig. 123). However, the faience aryballoi do not have painted figural decoration. Instead, one may observe a variety of patterns in relief or incision using interlocking diamonds or lozenges. This type of decoration of the body, supplemented by a “tongue” pattern incised on the shoulder and a rosette or star modelled on the base recalls the fruit-shaped form of parallel East Greek aryballoi made of clay (Webb 1987, 72). It was chosen to provide a firm holding surface when the vase was used as Webb (1978, 108) suggests.

The last and crudest type of aryballoi replaces the carefully modelled decoration of the body with shallowly incised cross-hatching. The ‘tongue’ pattern on the shoulder is not incised but painted in dark brown and made carelessly, and separate ‘tongues’ rather resemble dabs of dark glaze. Such a schematic and somewhat careless decoration of the body and shoulder is the case of the vessel under discussion (Pls. 1: 1-2), which makes for a good indication of time and place of its production, as it will be shown below.

Discussion

We know of numerous spherical faience aryballoi which are very much like the Wrocław example in shape and with lozenge or cruder, cross-hatching patterns on their bodies, and some of them will be cited here as analogies. The discussed vessel demonstrates apparent similarity to a spherical aryballos in the Antikensammlung in Basel, inv. no. BS 1921.317, made of white faience. The aryballos is dated to the first half of the 6th century BC and designated to be the product of a Rhodian workshop with close relations with Egypt (Descoedres 1981, 61, pl. 19). The mouth and a handle of the vessel are covered with greenish-blue glaze. As indicated above, the mouth and the handle of the vessel in question bear remains of a glaze of the same colour (see also Pl. 1: 1). Also apparently similar are the way of making the cross-hatching pattern decorating the body, and the shape of the mouth. However, some differences may also be pointed out, particularly in the shape of the body of the Basel aryballos, which is more regular, and of the shoulders, which are somewhat flattened. The flaring mouth of the Basel aryballos is also significantly broader than the same element of the Wrocław aryballos.

Clear similarities are also observable between the Wrocław aryballos and a vessel of the same type from the Jagiellonian University Museum at Krakow, inv. no. 141 (1108, 158), maintained to be an East Greek product dated to 575-550 BC (Papuci-Władyka 2012, 23-24, pl. 1). The common elements are the shape of body and handle, as well as the kind of decorative pattern. The main observable difference concerns the shape of the mouth, which in the Krakow example is in the form of a broad disc with concave sides, and not flare-shaped as in the discussed Wrocław vessel. Additionally, the decorative elements on the shoulders of the Krakow aryballos are of a different shape, taking the form of lancet leaves.

The spherical faience aryballos in the University of Leipzig Archaeological Institute, inv. no. T 4807, should also be mentioned here. The vessel is described to be a product of an egyptianized Rhodian workshop, dated to the second half of the 6th century BC (Müller 1959, 54, pl. 50: 1-2). In the shape and decoration of the body and shoulders it is very much like the Wrocław aryballos. It also bears traces of turquoise glaze on the mouth, neck, shoulders and handle. Remnants of a glaze of the same colour may be seen on the mouth and handle of the Wrocław vessel.

Other close analogies are to be found in two spherical aryballoi in the Heidelberg University Museum, inv. nos. 14 and 15 (the latter found at Tanagra, cf. Schauenburg 1954, 14, pl. 4: 2-3) which are classified within the group 'Melian and other eastern types' (Schauenburg 1954, 14). Their bodies bear an incised cross-hatching pattern and on the shoulders one can observe oblong shapes painted in brown. Additionally, the shoulders of both vessels are separated from their bodies in the same way as in the discussed aryballos, by means of a groove. Another common element worth mentioning is the yellow colour of the body of one of the Heidelberg aryballoi (inv. no. 14) also observable in the Wrocław example.

The closest analogy for the aryballos under discussion can be found in a spherical aryballos in the National Museum at Copenhagen, inv. no. 271. The vessel, which is said to be from Athens, is covered with a greenish-blue glaze largely abraded (Blinkenberg and Johansen 1928, 59-60, pl. 80, 2). The obvious similarity between these two oil containers is demonstrated not only in the general shape of all their parts, in particular their mouths, which in both cases take the form of a flare, but also in the decoration of the shoulders. Four oblong blobs of black-brown colour painted on the shoulders of the Copenhagen aryballos are almost identically shaped as 'tongues' forming the pattern decorating the shoulders

of the vessel under discussion. An additional common element is the colour of the covering glaze, which is greenish-blue in both cases.

Webb classifies the aryballos from Copenhagen and one of vessels from Heidelberg (inv. no. 15) within section 3 of her division of these particular vessels (Webb 1978, 120, nos. 805 and 808 respectively). In my opinion all the other aryballoi cited above as analogies for the Wrocław vessel seem to belong to the same group, although the author has not included them in her classification.⁵ It should be noted that one of the analogous vessels, the Krakow aryballos, was classified by E. Papuci-Władyka (2012, 23) as belonging to subgroup b of Webb's section I. According to Webb (1978, 119), vessels belonging to section 3 represent the most common and the crudest type of faience aryballos, characterized by poor fabric, undecorated lip and handle, shoulder decorated with blobs of black-brown glaze, incised cross-hatching on the body, and a plain base. The cited Krakow aryballos, as well as the vessel under discussion and the abovementioned analogous objects from Basel and Leipzig, have all these characteristics, which makes their assignment to Webb's section 3 justifiable.

Spherical aryballoi classified by Webb within section 3 are close in style and fabric as well as in the use of incised cross-hatching for the main decoration of the hedgehog faience aryballoi, the commonest and most widespread type of figured aryballoi (Webb 1987, 72). They are also crudely modelled and thick-walled, with a wide range of width and blobs of dark glaze for subsidiary details (Webb 1978, 122, pl. XXI, fig. 905; Webb 2013-2015, figs. 1 and 5). Moreover, the concave mouth and the simple handle are elements in common with spherical aryballoi (cf. Webb 1978, Pl. XII, figs. 934 and 937).

The hedgehog aryballoi closely related to the spherical aryballoi of section 3 are a 6th century phenomenon and are of Egyptian derivation (Webb 1978, 119). The sub-species of hedgehog represented in these vessels is found in Egypt (Webb 2013-2015, 3). Moreover, their Egyptian origin may be also confirmed by other types of faience aryballoi, for instance in the form of a tilapia fish (Webb 1978, 134-135, nos. 941-949) or a grasshopper (Webb 1978, 135, nos. 950-953), made in the same style and in closely related workshops.

The distribution of faience hedgehog aryballoi is similar to that of their spherical counterparts, and examples with known provenance come mainly from Egypt, Rhodes, East Greece and the western Mediterranean (Webb 1987, 72). The first objects of this kind had appeared in the Rhodian vase

⁵ Cited here as Webb 1978.

series in the second quarter of the 6th century BC. However, most finds of these particular vessels with known provenance come from contexts belonging to the second half of the 6th century (Webb 1978, 133). They are very likely to have been manufactured in Egypt, in an area under East Greek influence.

According to Cook and Dupont (1998, 140) the first workshops manufacturing East Greek faience were most probably located on Rhodes, but after Greeks became established in Egypt, production of faience wares flourished there. A faience workshop was discovered at Naukratis and some faience hedgehog aryballoi cited by Webb (1978, 133, nos. 905-906 and 916) were found there. Other known examples also have an Egyptian provenance (Webb 1978, 133, nos. 907-911; Mayence and Verhoogen 1929, 6, no. 5, pl. 5). Webb (1978, 132) suggested the same workshop for the crudest type of spherical aryballos (section 3) and the hedgehog aryballoi based on obvious similarities in the quality of fabric, thickness of walls and the decoration of the body. The author also pointed out that aryballoi classified within section 3 were made, judging from their distribution, partly or mainly at Naukratis and they most likely belong in date to the third quarter of the 6th century (Webb 1978, 119; Webb 2013-2015, 5).

Both hedgehog and spherical aryballoi seem to belong to an industry which produced a variety of types of aryballos. Some of them were modelled on Egyptian prototypes, while others took their form from Greek types of clay vases for scented oils (Webb 1978, 108ff.), although it is obvious that producers of the faience vessels often mixed different artistic influences. It is impossible to say in the present state of research if they were Greeks or Egyptians or whether the production in the 6th century BC was actually centred at Naukratis, or if there was a number of manufacturing centres located in Lower Egypt and on Rhodes. The analysis of the excavated material from Naukratis and Kamiros on Rhodes has revealed many interesting similarities and differences between the chemical composition of faience objects from these two sites (Meek *et al.* 2016, 99). The results of the study may provide a means of characterising and differentiating products of the two production centres.

However, there is another premise which allows us to assume Naukratis, or more broadly, Egypt, as a probable place of production of the vessel in question. Longitudinal impressions inside, very easy to notice since the vessel had been discovered broken (cf. above), are remnants of the specific method of its production, employing a tightly bound wad of straw or reeds. The technique of forming the body of the aryballos by hand

around a wad of grassy plants is known to have been used in Egypt. A good example is the interior of the fragmentary preserved aryballos in the form of a hedgehog found at Naukratis, now in the British Museum (inv. no. EA 68829), showing marks of wound grass or reed packing (Webb 1978, 133, no. 905, pl. XXI, 905). The technique of using grass packing is also seen in other faience vessels made in Egypt (Webb 1978, 144, no. C2, pl. II). The abovementioned fragment of the hedgehog aryballos from the British Museum also shows other similarities to the Wrocław aryballos. These are the colour of the fabric and the varied thickness of the body wall.

Conclusions

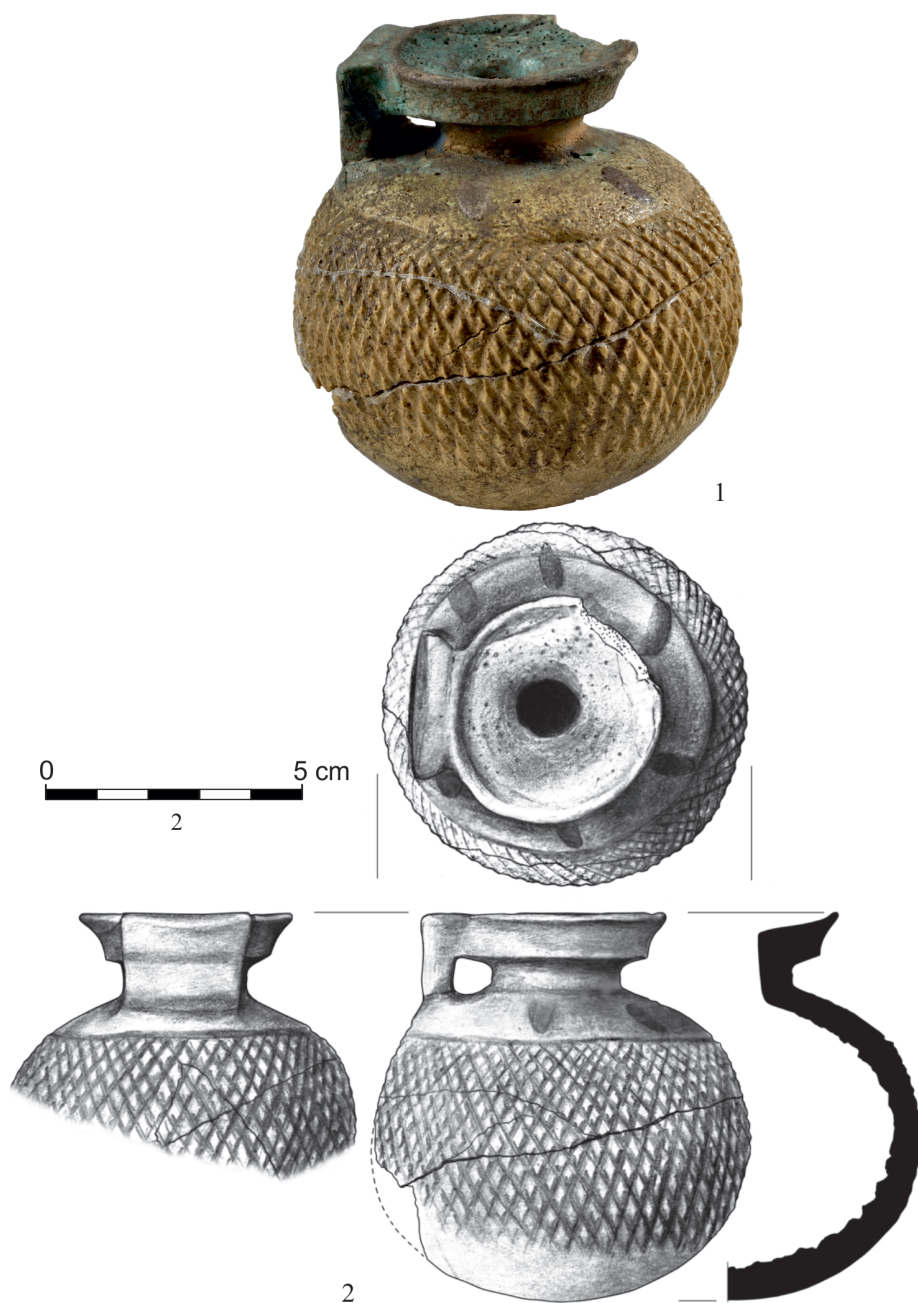
The analysis above clearly shows that the spherical faience aryballos kept at present in the University Museum of Wrocław should be classified within section 3 of Webb's classification, and thus it may date back to the third quarter of the 6th century BC. It is also very likely that the Wrocław aryballos is a product of an Egyptian workshop, perhaps of that at Naukratis. To repeat, however, it is currently impossible to establish the findspot of the vessel in question. The shape and the decoration of the Wrocław aryballos as well as the material it is made of clearly confirm its place within a very popular kind of vessel widespread over a vast area of the Mediterranean. Faience products of East Greek and Egyptian workshops were exported widely (Cook and Dupont 1998, 141). War destruction of documentation of pre-war Wrocław museums as well as the possibility, which cannot be ruled out, that it belonged to a private collection makes it impossible to answer the question as to where the discussed vessel was found or acquired.

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Pl. 1: 1 – Spherical faience aryballos, height 7.7cm, diameter 7cm, inv. no. UW-28, second half of the 6th century BC (?). Courtesy of the University Museum at Wrocław, view of the vessel. Photo by Wojciech Małkiewicz

Pl. 1: 2 – Spherical faience aryballos, inv. no. UW-28. Courtesy of the University Museum at Wrocław. Drawing by Nicole Lenkow