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Stamped Amphora Handles from Tel Mikhal (Tel Michal)

Donald T. Ariel

Three stamped amphora handles were retrieved from the excavations at Tel Mikhal.[1] Two are Rhodian, while the third (Cat. No. **C3**) is most likely a handle of a Samian amphora. One other stamped amphora handle, discovered in the Persian-period cemetery at Tel Mikhal in the 1977 season, was previously discussed by Conrad (1989:339–340).

Rhodian Stamped Handles

C1. Reg. No. 1304, L196, IAA 2001–2758. Rectangular stamp

'Αμύντα wreath

This prolific fabricant is dated between c. 190–176 BCE (Ariel 1990:42, **S96–102**). He appears to have been active until c. 150, based upon a connected pair of handles on an amphora of 'Αμύντας that is dated by the eponym Ήραγόρας, who officiated around the mid-second century (*EAD* 27:290, 313, under E 34, 314, under E37).[2] In fact, Börker (1974:40, n. 23) noted that 'Αμύντας made an amphora dated by 'Αριστόμαχος, who officiated one year before Ήραγόρας (see *EAD* 27:290, 315). I know of no attempt at determining an internal chronology for this prolific fabricant, who during his *floruit* employed a number of different devices. The wreath device appears on a stamp of 'Αμύντας found in Jerusalem (Ariel 1990:42, **S96, 99–101**).

C2. Reg. No. 4345, L464, IAA 2001–2760. Rectangular stamp.

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This handle was found in the fill above the floor with which the silver coin hoard has been associated. On the basis of the angularity of the profile of the handle, it may be dated to the second century BCE.

Samian Stamped Handle

C3. Reg. No. 4152, L417, IAA 2001–2759. Leaf-shaped stamp.

(*eta-rho* ligature)

The color of the surface of this handle is reddish yellow (7.5 YR 6/6), while the core is light reddish brown (5 YR 6/3). The ware is micaceous. The profile of the handle is curved. A significant number of stamps with an *eta-rho* ligature have been published. However, these stamps may belong to different groups.

Grace (1971:93, No. 77) described one group of similar—but circular—stamps as Samian, and maintained that the monogram stood for

Hera or her sanctuary. She described the clay as red and highly micaceous. Since 1971 additional stamps have been reported from Callatis (Buzoianu 1979:93, No. 50), Kéramidi in Thasos (Garlan 1986:248, No. 7), Samos (two in Isler 1978:138, Nos. 478–479; and one in Jöhrens 1986:503, No. 20) and Naukratis (Rehard 1996:159, No. 41). Also, a stamp from Pergamon (Schuchhardt 1895:497, No. 1309, noted in Grace 1971:93, No. 77) was republished (Börker 1998:68, No. 599). The shapes of the Kéramidi, Samos and Naukratis stamps are similar to the stamp from Tel Mikhal (Jöhrens described them as heart-shaped, while Rehard described them as heart- or leaf-shaped). An unprovenanced stamp in the Cairo Museum (Milne 1905:127, No. 26108) has the same shape. Several of these stamps have additional symbols (those from Naukratis and Samos), but they are not preserved on the others, if they existed (including the stamp from Tel Mikhal). The Kéramidi and Samos stamps were identified as Samian, while Rehard referred to the Naukratis stamp as unclassified.

Other stamped handles, apparently of this type, have been found in three Levantine coastal settlements: al-Mina (Wooley 1938:164, No. MNN.140); ʻAkko (Bennett and Blakely 1989:213); and Dor (oval stamp; Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1997:198, No. 127). The al-Mina and Dor stamps were not identified as Samian. A fourth stamped handle fragment of this type was found in the region, at Tell el-Ḥesi (Bennett and Blakely 1989:213). That circular fragment is composed of the stamp itself, cut out of the handle, for use as a gaming piece. Two stamped handles not of this type, but identified as Samian, come from the Levantine coastal settlement of Shiqmona (Elgavish 1968:52, Nos. 147–148; identified as Samian by Grace 1979:183). They were found in the same late fourth-century stratum as the four Alexander bronzes noted in Ariel, this volume.

Grace suggested a date for these Samian stamps, based on those found in Sakkara, Egypt, to the second half of the fourth century BCE (Grace 1971:82, n. 77). The appearance of the stamped handle (the shape of the stamp is not noted) in al-Mina Level II (c. 375–312 BCE) may support this date. Jöhrens discussed the three leaf-shaped exemplars found in the Heraion in Samos, and gave them a general fourth-century date, interpreting the *eta-rho* ligature to read ʹΗρα (Jöhrens 1986:503). The stamped handle from Kéramidi has a second quarter of the fourth century BCE date (Garlan 1986:269).

There appears to be another group of such stamps that are Chersonesan. Katz (1994a: 120–121) described them as "unofficial stamps" of Chersonesus. Some are unligatured (Katz 1994b: Pl. CII:1), while others have *eta-rho* ligatures with different arrangements (Katz 1994b: Pl. CII:4–5). Katz described the distribution of one of the subtypes (Katz 1994b:49, Pl. CII:16) and suggested that the *eta-rho* ligature refers to Ηράκλειος, a magistrate of his Chersonesan Group IIB (Katz 1994a:54). Another likely *eta-rho* ligature rectangular stamp was recently published by Barker (1999:121–122, No. 14).

Based upon its leaf shape it is likely that Stamp **C3** from Tel Mikhal is Samian, as may also be the finds from al-Mina, ʻAkko, Dor and Tell el-Ḥesi, which belong within the same area of distribution. However, the combination of *eta* and *rho* is common in Greek, and it may be premature to group all of the *eta-rho* ligatures found on amphora stamps into one or two groups. Empereur, Hesse and Tuna (1999:105) found unligatured *eta* and *rho* stamps in a pottery workshop in the Knidian peninsula, dating between 280 and 240 BCE. Perhaps some of the ligatured *eta-rho* stamps belong to this group.

NOTES

[1] The stamped amphora handles were photographed by Tzila Sagiv (I2AA). Conventions regarding the readings follow Ariel and Finkielsztejn (1994).

[2] The amphora is in the Museum of the Flagellation, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem.

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