Roman Lamps from Abdera

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Abstract: In the course of sixty-five years of excavations in the ancient city of Abdera, over one thousand three hundred lamps have been found. A large number of them come from the South Enceinte and mainly from the buildings of the last chronological phases. This preliminary study focuses on the basic groups dated from the 1st c. BC to the 4th c. AD. The discussion is subdivided on the basis of typology, date, technique, and the relationship with the production centers, namely Italy, Corinth, Athens, Ephesos, and Knidos. The influence of the famous workshops, as well as the imported and the local products are also examined.

Key words: Abdera, South Enceinte, Roman lamps, local production.

Introduction

Abdera, the Ionian colony on the Thracian coast, evolved to a significant city in the center of marine trading routes in the north Aegean and the rich Thracian inland during the Classical Period. After the Second and the Third Macedonian Wars and the occupation of Macedonia and Thrace by the Romans, Abdera remained a civitas libera. During the following centuries the situation changed. New cities, such as Topeiros, Anastasioupolis and Maximianoupolis, were founded along the Via Egnatia and became important residential, administrative and economic centers. The new orientation of the Roman policy focused on the control of the passages towards the interior of the Balkans (Adams 1997, 135; Chryssanthaki 2004, 317; Λουκοπούλου et al. 2005, 166).

As a result, the Greek city gradually turned into a small settlement. During the reign of Trajan, the northern part of Abdera’s land was granted to Topeiros (Λουκοπούλου et al. 2005, 167, 255, 263; Καλλιντζή 2011, 107). In the late 3rd – early 4th c. AD, after the administrative reforms of Diocletian, the city and the chora of Abdera were incorporated into the province of Rhodope in Dioecesis Thracie (Αβραμέα 2000, 137-138; Λουκοπούλου et al. 2005, 167; Καλλιντζή 2011, 107).

The successive floods of the river Nestos caused geomorphological changes, such as extended marshes to the west of the city and the rising of the ground-level. The city walls were destroyed and the new houses were built outside the walls, off the old town plan, the well-known Hippodamian system. Part of the population moved to the hill of the ancient acropolis (Καλλιντζή et al. 2010, 395; Καλλιντζή 2011, 108). A major catastrophe occurred in the ancient city during the reign of Constantine the Great, and the area of the Western Gate was abandoned and turned into a cemetery.

General Observations

Among the aims of this preliminary study is to present, analyze and classify the characteristic groups of the Roman lamps from Abdera.

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Unfortunately, the publications of similar material found in the area of Aegean Thrace are limited (Καλλιντζή et al. 2010b, 386-401; Κοκκοτάκη et al. 2010, 367-385; Τσόκα 2011, 833-842). This work deals with lamps that come mainly from the buildings of the last chronological phases of the city. Around 1300 lamps have been inventoried in the catalogues of the Archaeological Museum of Abdera. The vast majority, 98 percent of the lamps, come from the city, and only 2 percent from the cemeteries and the *chora*. A large number of them (around 1200) were found in the South Enceinte (fig. 1) and they are dated from the 6th c. BC to the 4th c. AD. Almost exclusively mould-made lamps appear throughout the Roman period, 624 lamps in total (52 percent) (fig. 2). Another huge group is the mould-made Ephesos type lamps (32 percent) dated from the 2nd c. BC to the 1st c. BC.

Complete examples and some characteristic fragments of the material have been included in this presentation. The study focuses on the main groups dating from the 1st c. BC to the 4th c. AD, according to date, shape, size and decoration. The relationship with the famous workshops, their influence on the local production, the imitations, the archetypes and imported lamps are also examined.

**Group A. 1st c. BC – 1st c. AD**

**Mould-made glazed Italian lamps and their imitations**

During the Early Roman period the imported lamps in Abdera are of different origins. They are mainly imports from Italy or influenced by Italian workshops. The Early Roman activity in the city was also testified by epigraphic sources from the 2nd c. BC (Chrysanthaki 1995, 147; Malamidou 2000, 3-42; Λουκοπούλου et al. 2005, 200-210, E7-E10). The *negotiatores* and other Italian groups probably transferred and diffused the prototypes of the lamps. Three subgroups are distinguished: mould-made glazed lamps with handle-shields, lamps with volutes on the nozzle and discus relief, and their imitations.

**A1. Lamps with handle-shields (Broneer type XXI)**

The handle-shield lamps are usually a cheap imitation of the metal lamps. This type of handle occurs commonly on lamps with volute-nozzles. It is possible to group two distinct varieties. The unique
crescent-shaped shield from Abdera, MA 1124, is similar to lamps from the Athenian Agora and Corinth (Bronner 1930, type XXI # 396; Perlzweig 1961, # 30; Bailey 1975, Q1142; Χριστοδουλίδου 1998, 259, ΓΑΛ 19). MA 5959 is another handle-shield lamp preserving only the triangular handle attachment with a palmette springing from acanthus rinceaux in relief⁴ (fig. 3).

A2. Volute lamps (Bronner type XXII)

Volute lamps with a decorated discus were very popular in Italy and the other Roman provinces during the 1st c. AD (Zhuravlev 2007, 216). Only two examples preserve big parts of the body, with an angular volute nozzle. Lamp MA 639 has a narrow grooved rim with volutes on the shoulders. On the discus is represented a bear attacking an ox to the right. Lamp MA 4892, is decorated with a crown of myrtle⁵. A large number of fragments, mostly from discus reliefs, increase the significance of this subgroup. Figures such as a gladiator to the right (MA 5965), a naked man (probably Heracles, MA 5303), Victory bearing shield (MA 3923; Perlzweig 1961, # 52), a saddled horse to the right (MA 5465; Bronner 1930, # 446), a rosette of six petals (MA 4632γ), two horses galloping to the left, a circus rider (desultory, MA 11.361)⁶, with similar fabric and glaze must belong to the same imported category. Other fragments preserve only parts of the rim and the volutes (MA 7511α, MA 584, MA 4696α, MA 4735γ). The lamp MA 4995 was made without handle. On the discus there is the rare figure of Heracles to the left with a club in the raised right hand and a bow in the left hand. The part of the discus in front of the figure unfortunately has not been preserved. The same iconographic type appears in a parallel from Chersonesos Taurica with a rounded nozzle, dated to the 1st c. AD (Zhuravlev 2007, fig. 7, # 4, 216-217).

A3. Imitations

The large circulation and fame of volute lamps in the Mediterranean provoked their imitations. Three examples can be named, MA 5506, MA 5973 and MA 612/10.435. The clay is dark grayish brown and the glaze brown to orange. The discus is with a channel to the nozzle and bears a relief: the figure of a man with a big bow, probably Heracles, an ox and a lion, all to the left. The production center of these lamps remains unknown.

Group B. 1st – 2nd c. AD

Tradition of Italian, Eastern Mediterranean and local workshops

This group includes lamps that express the evolution of the famous Italian types by the addition of new small changes. It also testifies to the appearance of Eastern Mediterranean workshops on the market. On the other hand, the present research has given the opportunity to open the discussion about the existence of a local workshop in Abdera.

B1. Tradition of the Italian workshops

From the end of the 1st c. AD to the 2nd c. AD, the decrease of imported Italian lamps is obvious. Only one example (MA 711) is certainly imported from Italy, dated to the second half of the 1st c. AD⁷. There is an ovule pattern on the rim, the discus is plain, the nozzle is with single volutes, and the handle is grooved. The tradition of Italian lamps is continued in a few lamps of the subgroup B1 with the same characteristics (semi-volutes, ovules on rim, short rounded nozzles), but they

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⁴ Similar: Bronner 1930, type XXI, # 400; Perlzweig 1961, # 27.
⁵ Similar decoration can be seen in a double nozzle lamp from Thessaloniki, see Χριστοδουλίδου 1998, 258, ΓΑΛ 15.
⁷ Similar: Bronner 1930, type XXIV, # 463.
are all different in terms of fabric and glaze. The Italian influence appears in the lamps MA 8712, MA 4638a (Hellström 1965, # 61, 51), MA 10.261.

B2. Various workshops from the Eastern Mediterranean

During the 1st c. AD, products of main workshops, such as Corinth, Ephesos and Knidos, also appeared in the city of Abdera. They belong to Broneer types XXIV and XXV. These lamps preserve some characteristics of the Italian lamps (the ovule pattern on the rim, plain or discus relief), but they form new types (heart-shaped or U-shaped nozzles). The glazed lamp MA 8045 with a plain discus, ovule pattern on the rim and a heart-shaped nozzle, is probably a provincial workshop's imitation of the well-known type. The glazed lamp MA 3260, with an ovule pattern on the rim, a figure of Eros on the discus, and a U-shaped nozzle belongs to a similar type. Two examples are unglazed, with ovules on the rim: the impressed rosette-patterned lamp MA 4209 with a heart-shaped nozzle, and lamp MA 5462 with a bird biting a snake on the discus. They are probably both early imitations of the Italian types by a Corinthian workshop.

One more innovative step are the lamps with a plain rim, a rosette on the discus and a U-shaped nozzle (MA 12.243, MA 9623, MA 7510). The lamps MA 4797β and MA 4613α are the only fragments of "red on white" lamps found at Abdera. This rare kind of coating has been attributed to the workshops of Ephesos (Perlzweig 1961, ## 155-204, 5-6; Hellström 1965, # 63, 51). Another peculiar type is the heart-shaped discus lamp (MA 3032, fig. 4), with a volute on the nozzle, a columned base and an Ionic capital, dated to the mid-1st c. AD.

The mould-made head used as a filling-hole cover (MA 5975)12, and lamp MA 5437, with a rosette-patterned discus, flat narrow rim and a large voluted nozzle, are also unique13. They probably come from the Eastern Aegean.

B3. Local workshop (?)

The lamps made of similar fabric, with a plain sloping rim, a heart-shaped nozzle, a loop handle and a plain or relief discus, constitute the largest subgroup of the Roman period. Most of them have been found intact. They are probably all local products, as we can infer from the poor quality of the clay and glaze, the similarities in shape and size, and the repetition of the same pattern. A few examples were made by a much used mould. Traces of fire have not been observed on seven lamps. The rich repertory of patterns on the discus features a rosette (MA 7501), a sea shell (MA 11.649, MA 8086, MA 6788, MA 4624, MA 4219), a man walking to the right (MA 7503), an eagle (MA 9424), a cluster (MA 7550, MA 7507), and a kantharos or a krater (MA 8441, MA 630). A plain discus appears in lamps MA 5970, MA 3029, MA 7500 (Kalviņš et al. 2010, 394, 401), MA 7692 (Kalviņš et al. 2010, 394, 401), MA 9622 and MA 2127ε) (fig. 5)14. The subgroup can be dated generally to the 2nd c. AD.

We can identify fourteen imported lamps related to the local subgroup. They present better quality of the glaze and the clay. Two spiral-leaves spring from the center of the clear heart-shaped nozzle in some cases. The handle is pierced, grooved at the front and at the back. The size is slightly bigger. Lamps MA 727, MA 4612, MA 8712, MA 4638a (Hellström 1965, # 61, 51), MA 10.261.

8 This lamp from Abdera must be an imitation of the Italian lamp of the type Athenian Agora # 36 (Perlzweig 1961).

9 Only part of the discus is preserved with Athena to the left, armed with a shield.

10 Broneer 1930, # 463 type XXIV; similar lamp with a different nozzle in Perlzweig 1961, # 134; Hellström 1965, # 66.

11 Perlzweig 1961, # 90 is a similar example without a stand.

12 A filling-hole cover in the shape of a mask of a comic actor can be seen in Perlzweig 1961, # 15.

13 Similar lamp with two nozzles: Broneer 1930, ## 383, 409, type XXI, 167, pl. VIII and XXX; Perlzweig 1961, # 16.

14 For a similar local production at Istria see Rusu-Bolindeț 2010, 401-410.
(plain discus), MA 2559α, MA 9630 (rosette pattern) MA 9428, MA 4219, MA 6601y (sea shell), MA 953β, MA 5441, MA 12.133, MA 10.414 (eagle) and MA 5614 (kantharos) must have inspired the local lampmakers. They present similarities with the Loeschcke type VIII (Loeschcke 1919, 237), Broneer type XXV15 and the lamps from the Athenian Agora16. Lamp MA 587, with a Dionysiac head facing, crowned with a wreath of ivy leaves and berries (Perlzweig 1961, # 160), and lamp MA 2127τ, with a facing head of Selene crowned with a crescent17, belong to the same subgroup dated from the late 1st c. to the 2nd c. AD.

At the present stage of research we cannot testify with certainty the existence of a lamp workshop in Abdera. No pottery kiln has been discovered in the excavated area. A petrographic analysis could offer precious information to the study. Finally, the integrated examination of the archaeological data will enlighten the matter.

**Group C. 2nd – 3rd c. AD**

**Greek workshops and local imitations**

At the end of the 1st to the early 2nd c. AD began the production of Corinthian lamps. There are only two examples that can be related to the famous workshops with certainty. The Attic lampmakers also revived the old industry from the beginning of the 3rd c. AD (Slane 1990, 17). Some of the lamps found in Abdera can be identified as Attic and others as their imitations.

**C1. Corinthian lamps (Broneer type XXVII)**

The fragments of lamps MA 9632 and MA 9423 belong to the second subgroup of Broneer type XXVII (Broneer 1930, # 570; Slane 1990, ## 21-24) with the well-known vine-and-ray pattern and Corinthian fabric18. This famous pattern appears in Abdera and later in the 3rd – 4th c. AD in glazed lamps with incised decoration (group D1).

**C2. Attic lamps (Broneer type XXVIII)**

Five parts of lamps present the characteristic features of the unglazed Attic lamps under the influence of Corinthian models (Perlzweig 1961, 18; Slane 1990, 18): two framing rings around the relief discus and relief rim patterns (dot rosettes, herringbone, spiral). The reliefs on the discus vary: an old man observing an erotic symplegma (MA 5438; Perlzweig 1961, # 808, dated to the second half of the 3rd c. AD), a cock pecking at a lizard (?), above right, a cat (MA 5439; Perlzweig 1961, # 921, dated from the late 3rd to the early 4th c. AD), and a bull to the left (MA 5463; Perlzweig 1961, # 908)19. The discuses of lamps MA 6993 and MA 4810 are not preserved. Two more fragments (MA 9627 and MA 12.336) glazed with spiral patterns on the rim must be attributed to provincial secondary workshops.

**C3. Globule lamps**

A series of unidentified lamps from Abdera is the MA 7651 (fig. 5), MA 4814a and MA 4796α (Κάλλιντζη et al. 2010, 393-394, 401) with globules on the rim only and discus framed by three rings. They are similar with lamps ## 427, 418 and 433 of the Athenian Agora (Perlzweig 1961, to Alpha globule lamps, 15, 107) dated to the late 1st and early 2nd c. AD. Nevertheless, the lamps from Abdera do not have an alpha in relief on the base, and their nozzle is kite-shaped – elements that reveal a different origin and a later date.
Group D. 3rd—4th c. AD

Attic lamps and local imitations

D1. Vine-and-ray lamps

The vine-and-ray lamps were very popular on the markets of the 3rd and 4th c. AD. This pattern was known from the Corinthian workshops (Abdera group C1, Broneer type XXVII) and their Attic imitations (Broneer type XXVIII). The appearance of this type in Abdera is probably related to a local production. Six lamps, MA 623 (Καλλιντζή et al. 2010, 393, 400), MA 8157, MA 8145, MA 4696β, MA 10644, one from Sector L, belong to this subgroup. The remarkable features among the lamps are the rim with an incised pattern of three circles between the vine leaves, the ray-patterned small discus, the double groove on the side of nozzle, the impressed circles on the base, and the traces of red glaze in some cases. Glazed vine-and-ray lamps appear in the Athenian Agora (Perlzweig 1961, ## 1512, 1516) and Corinth (Broneer 1930, 108, # 925; Slane 1990, # 54, 19-20, 34).

D2. Plain rim and discus, U-shaped nozzle

Another series of lamps have a plain rim and a plain discus with three framing rings, and a U-shaped nozzle (Perlzweig 1961, ## 1145-1146, 1166, dated in the late 3rd c.): MA 5436, MA 3031, MA 596 (Καλλιντζή et al. 2010, 393, 400-401). They have the same feature on the base as the vine-and-ray lamps: seven impressed circles with dots inside, around a central similar circle. This element usually is linked to the workshop. The lamps of the Athenian Agora (## 1145, 1146) have two or three rings with a central boss and are dated in the first half of the 3rd c. AD.

It is possible that the two subgroups (D1 and D2) were produced by a local workshop, in the 3rd c. AD.
D3. Lamps of the 4th c.
There are only a few lamps dated with certainty to the 4th c. AD. Two fragments are imported from Athens and are dated to the first half of the 4th c. AD: the fragment of a discus with a boat, MA 7029 (Perlzweig 1961, # 1029, 132), and the part of a discus and rim MA 12.136 with one framing ring and decoration of eight leaves (Perlzweig 1961, ## 1641-1642).

Conclusions
As we can see from the present preliminary study, during the Early Roman period the civitas libera of Abdera became part of a great international market. The famous Italian products dominated in the Eastern Mediterranean world and influenced the local workshops while Italy was the new political power. From the end of the 1st c. AD to the 2nd c. AD we observe an increase in the provincial lamp production. Some characteristics of the Italian lamps survived. The Ephesos, Knidos and Corinth ateliers also appeared. The activity of a local workshop probably began in the 2nd c. AD and continued in the 3rd c. AD. The lampmakers used the well-known lamps from Athens and Knidos as an archetype or they formed new similar moulds. During the 3rd and the 4th c. AD the imported Italian lamps almost disappeared. New forms, patterns and shapes replaced the old ones. The presence of Attic and Eastern Aegean workshops indicates close contacts with Abdera. Although the quantity of the lamps shows clearly the decrease of population in the area of the Western Gate of the ancient city.

Another issue related to this subject is the connection of the assemblages with the architectural finds, pottery, coins, artifacts and generally the archaeological contexts. The study of Roman pottery from the same area has proved that the most important source for fine pottery was Asia Minor (Malamidou 2005). Italian sigillata wares did not seem to be very popular. The presence of Eastern sigillata A and B, and mainly Çandarlı wares later, indicates the domination of the Eastern workshops over the local market. The monetary history of the city during the Roman period starts with the provincial coinage under Tiberius (AD 14-37) and stops in the reign of Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161) (Chryssanthaki 2004, 317; Chryssanthaki-Naggle 2007, 325). The griffin, the old emblem of the city, is completely abandoned. Only the legend of the ethnic Abderitai exists. During the end of the 2nd and the 3rd c. AD we observe the establishment in Thrace of a common monetary system. The decline of the monetary circulation provoked probably the development of the local workshops.

The study of the lamps indicates the commercial and economic activity of Abdera and the relations with the neighboring cities during the Roman period. It also confirms the presence of an active population around the area of the Western Gate while Abdera was a civitas libera.
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