

Some Hellenistic and late Roman terracotta lamps in the Sinop Archaeological Museum in northern Turkey



Abstract: The paper considers some terracotta lamps from recent rescue excavations by the Sinop Archaeological Museum in ancient Sinope, classifying them by types and chronological groups, from the 2nd century BC to the 7th century AD. The lamps represent part of the local lamp-making tradition, which is underinvestigated although equally important as the amphora production industry in this eastern Paphlagonian city.

Keywords: Hellenistic/Roman period, Sinope, Paphlagonia, northern Anatolia, museum studies

Ancient Sinope [*Fig. 1*] in the middle of the southern coast of the Black Sea, now lying under the modern city of Sinop, was always important as a hub of the trade relations between Asia Minor, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Pontus Euxinus (Xen. 6.1.15; Diod. Sic. 14.31.2; also Strab. 12.545). The city, which has a sheltered harbor west of the mouth of the Halys, was a colony of Miletus (it was apparently colonized twice according to Euseb. *Chron.* 2.88–89). It was the capital of the Pontic kingdom, having been captured by Pharnaces I in 183 BC (Polyb. 23.9, 24.1). Besieged and taken by the Roman general Lucullus in 70 BC, it was established as a Roman colony, *Colonia Julia Felix*, in 47 BC (Strab. 12.3.11).

Agricultural production (especially the production and distribution of olive oil and wine along the Black Sea coast), timber exports and fishing, as well as the

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Fig. 1. The location of the archaeological site of Sinope in northern Turkey (Map S. Pataci, 2018)



Fig. 2. The excavation area in the Gelincik district of Sinop: general view of trenches A-D (Photo E. Aksoy, 2019)

rich silver mines played an important role in shaping the city's economy and social structure (Strab. 12.3; 7.6). Sinope was also associated with *minium*, a lead mineral, used as a natural red pigment in architecture and for medical treatment (Strab. 12.3; also Plin. *NH* 35.6. s. 13; Vitr. 7.7). During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, it led the field in terms of amphora production in the Black Sea region (Maksimova 1956; Arseneva, Kassab Tezgör, and Naumenko 1997; Kassab Tezgör 2010b; Khalvashi and Kakhidze 2014).

It was also probably a lamp production center in Greek and Roman times, a fact that has so far been neglected in studies. The existence of lamp-making workshops in Sinope is attested by mold-made lamps of local make from the late Hellenistic (1st century BC) and late Roman (4th–5th centuries AD) periods, discovered in domestic contexts as well as commercial and funerary ones. Some of the late Hellenistic lamps are important for their connection with Ephesian and other Asia Minor fabrics.

EXCAVATIONS IN THE GELINCIK DISTRICT OF SINOP

The group of clay oil lamps presented here originated from rescue excavations carried out in October 2018 by Eray Aksoy from the Sinop Archaeological Museum in the Gelincik district of the modern city center of Sinop (Block 215, parcel 9), in an area situated within the protected area of a Hellenistic-period necropolis. Four trenches, averaging 4 m by 4 m in size, were excavated with permission from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on the site of a new highrise building to be constructed in place of a demolished house [Fig. 2]. A limited assemblage covering a timespan from

the Hellenistic through the late Roman period came from the trenches, which attained a depth of 1.70 m before reaching bedrock. The finds included some potsherds and 13 coins in trench B and a small number of sherds, 16 coins and 13 terracotta lamps in trench D. The coins were not identified, however, lending no straightforward data for dating the lamps. Moreover, the layers here were disturbed in 1980, local residents from the nearby Incedayı district having dumped soil containing Hellenistic remains from their area in this quarter.

TYOLOGY IN CONTEXT

The lamps from this group have been classified into four different types arranged in chronological progression. The first of these is a set of wheel-made lamps [Cat. 1–10], whereas the other three represent mouldmade examples [Cat. 11–15]. The dating of these lamps is relative,

based on typological considerations, but Hellenistic and Roman/late Roman terracotta lamps from the southern Black Sea region are similar but not identical (for possible *comparanda*, see Laflı and Kan Şahin 2016: 214–221, Pls 39–40, Figs 137–138; Güngör Alper 2019; Temür 2019).

The lamps in this study are thus compared with data on Hellenistic and late Roman lamps coming from recently excavated Sinopean contexts (for some regional statistics mentioning Sinopean lamps, see Işın 1998; Garlan 2004: 37; Kassab Tezgör 2010a: 9–11; 2010c: 75, Fig. 44; 2010e: 123; Pastutmaz Sevmen 2018; Güngör Alper 2019). The Hellenistic-period lamps have a distinctive fabric and a deteriorating quality of execution. The fabric (also in the case of the late Roman products) resembles Sinopean amphora production of Hellenistic and late Roman times. Many of these lamps were evidently used, the nozzle sooted or missing, hence they highlight everyday life in the ancient city, both in domestic and burial contexts.

Further research will surely help to place these examples within the general framework of Sinopean ceramics and lamp making.

TYPE 1: WHEEL-MADE LAMPS WITH ROUNDED BODY

The wheel-made bodies of this type are rounded or biconical, but the bodies and the discus show much variation [Fig. 3].¹ There is also a difference in size, e.g., base diameters may range from 3.4 cm to 5.5 cm. A high vertical collar around the discus or on the central part of the lamp, frequently concave around the filling hole, is a characteristic feature. The shoulders are narrow and plain. The nozzles and handles appear to have been molded and attached to the body. The nozzles

are long, broad and rounded in profile, narrowing toward the wick hole and with an oval termination (for a similar nozzle profile classified as his type 7, see Heres 1969: 31, Pl. 6, No. 58). They are not decorated, except for some shallow grooving sometimes on the undersides. The base is circular and plain, either smoothed flat or on a slightly raised base. Handles tend to be thick and vertical, and are grooved.

The hard and non-porous fabric of light brown to light red color, with white particles of lime and sand inclusions, suggests local production. A thin very pale brown or pink slip was applied on the exterior.

Overall, the type closely resembles Howland 37 C (Howland 1958: 121, Pls 19 and 45, No. 504). They are dated to the first half of the 2nd century BC, based on a similarity of certain features.

TYPE 2: BICONICAL BODY WITH DECORATED SHOULDERS

The moldmade lamp has a biconical body with sloping shoulders decorated with scrolling tendrils and bunches of grapes (for similarly decorated lamps of Hellenistic date, see Goldman and Jones 1950: 89–90, Group VI, Pl. 95, No. 71; Menzel 1969: 18, Pl. 9, No. 50), placed on either side of the joining of the nozzle and shoulders (Howland 1958: 173, Type 50 C, Pl. 50, Nos 677–678; Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: 18, Fig. 38, No. 38). A small discus surrounded by a vertical collar, concave with a concentric groove around the

¹ A similar body profile considered as originating from southern Anatolia is dated to the 3rd century BC, see Bussière and Wohl 2017: 26, No. 24.

filling hole, is characteristic of this type. The collar is decorated with a row of triangular motifs on the outside. The nozzle is long and the termination is rounded. The relief decoration on the flat top consists of two volutes, dots and a T-pattern. The vertical handle is broken. A low ring base has a rosette impressed in the center (Goldman and Jones 1950: 91–92, Group IX, Pls 95–97, Nos 119; Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: 18, Fig. 38, No. 38).

The fabric is not like the Ephesos lamps, but the form is typical of that class. Closely resembling examples in Antioch-on-the-Orontes and Gözlükule are dated from the mid-2nd to late 1st century BC through the earlier 1st century AD (Waagé 1941: 62, Type 24, Fig. 76, Nos 72–74; Goldman and Jones 1950: 91–92, Group IX, Pls 95–97, Nos 119–120).

TYPE 3: BICONICAL BODY WITH BROAD HANDLE

The moldmade lamp has a long oval biconical body, quite deep, the lower part higher than the upper one. The discus with a very large filling hole is surrounded by a ridge that forms a channel on the nozzle and runs around the wick hole (Waagé 1941: 67, Type 53, Fig. 80, No. 159, Antioch-on-the-Orontes; Bailey 1988: 289, Pl. 61, Q 2344, Judaea/Palaestina and Syria). There is usually a small raised dotted ring on the discus. The handle with three grooves on it is broad and high, forming an integral part with the body (a lion head, a Greek cross or various vegetative or geometric decoration can be seen in this oil lamp type: Topoleanu 2000: 182,

Pls 57–58, Nos 463–472). The base is flat and circular.

Macroscopic observation of the fabric, showing traces of a red slip, suggests similarities with clay used for local pottery production. Lamps of this type, which were probably made in Syria, spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean (see Rey-Coquais 1964: 161, Pl. 10, No. 44; Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: 121, No. 503; Topoleanu 2000: 182, Pls 57–58, Nos 463–472). This type was massively produced in Antioch where it is dated to the 5th and 6th centuries AD (Waagé 1941: 67, Type 53, Fig. 80, No. 159, Antioch-on-the-Orontes).

TYPE 4: BICONICAL BODY OF OVAL SHAPE

This boat-shaped type has a moldmade biconical body of oval shape without a discus of any kind (Waagé 1941: 67–68, Type 56, Pl. 81, Nos 175–176). A large filling hole has a relief ring around the rim. The shoulder begins immediately around this ring and is decorated with geometric motifs in relief. The handle slants upward and has a rounded top. The nozzle has a short profile. Oval-shaped grooves mark the bases sometimes.

Lamps of this kind were produced mostly in the hinterlands of Syria, Palestine and Antioch (Oziol 1977: 272–273, Pl. 45, No. 825; Bailey 1988: 290, Pl. 61, Q 2347, Judaea/Palaestina and Syria). The closest parallels come from Antioch, but the Sinopean pieces are longer and more oval (Waagé 1941: 67–68, Type 56, Pl. 81, Nos 175–176). Lamps from this group are dated to the 6th and 7th centuries AD.

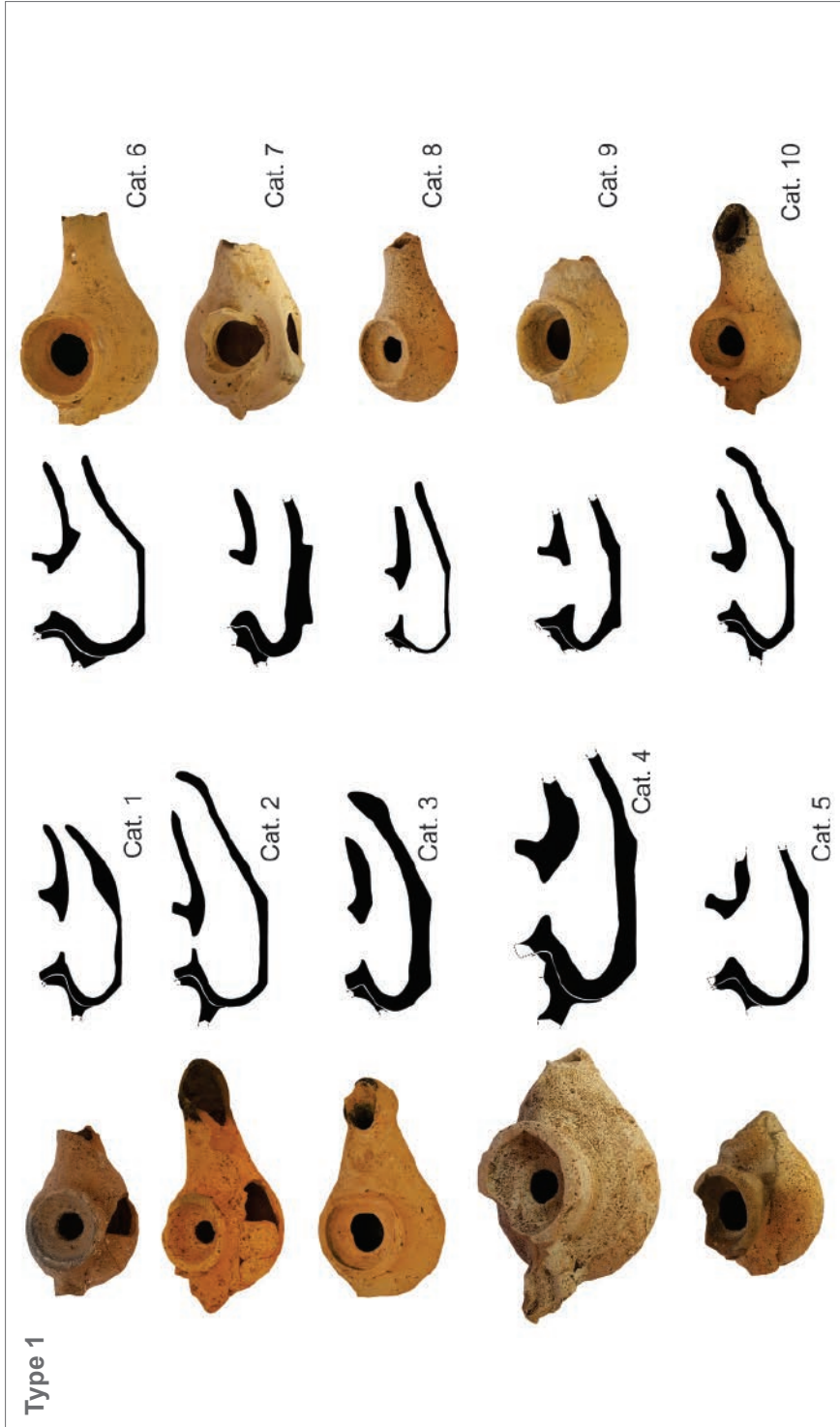


Fig. 3. Clay oil lamps Cat. 1 – 10 representing wheel-made lamps with rounded bodies (Type 1) from the first half of the 2nd century BC (Photos and drawing G. Kan Şahin, 2019)

CATALOG

All the lamps come from trench D excavated in the Gelincik district of modern Sinop (Block 215, parcel 9). They are now deposited in the Sinop Archaeological Museum.

TYPE 1: WHEEL-MADE LAMPS WITH ROUNDED BODY

| | |
|--|---|
| Cat. 1–10 | Accession No. 1) ERK-18-22 6) ERK-18-14 2) ERK-18-19 7) ERK-18-28 3) ERK-18-15 8) ERK-18-26 4) ERK-18-21 9) ERK-18-25 5) ERK-18-23 10) ERK-18-36 |
| Type Howland 37 C (1958) | Dating First half of 2nd century BC |
| Dimensions 1) H. 3.5; L. 8.1; W. 6.1; Dia. base 2.8, filling hole 1.3 cm 2) H. 4.9; L. 12.8; W. 6.9; Dia. base 4.2, filling hole 0.7, wick hole 1.8 cm 3) H. 4.0; L. 10.5; W. 6.5; Dia. base 4.1, filling hole 1.8, wick hole 2.1 cm 4) H. 5.8; L. 13.0; W. 9.2; Dia. base 5.8, filling hole 1.5 cm 5) H. 5.0; L. 7.7; W. 6.5; Dia. base 3.5, filling hole 1.8 cm 6) H. 5.3; L. 10.0; W. 6.3; Dia. base 4.0, filling hole 1.8 cm 7) H. 4.0; L. 8.3; W. 6.3; Dia. base 3.5, filling hole 2.1 cm 8) H. 3.0; L. 8.0; W. 5.2; Dia. base 3.3, filling hole 1.2 cm 9) H. 4.0; L. 7.1; W. 6.0; Dia. base 3.5, filling hole 2.0 cm 10) H. 3.9; L. 10.2; W. 5.9; Dia. base 3.8, filling hole 1.3, wick hole 1.6 cm | Fabric 1–5) Fine, hard, non-porous fabric with white particles of lime, sand and mica inclusions 1) 5YR 5/4 reddish brown 2) 2.5YR 6/6 light red 3) 10YR 7/3 very pale brown 4) 5YR 6/4 light reddish brown 5) 5YR 6/4 light reddish brown 6–8, 10) Fine, hard, non-porous fabric with white particles of lime and sand inclusions 6) 2.5YR 6/6 light red 7) 7.5YR 7/3 pink 8) 7.5YR 6/4 light brown 10) 7.5YR 6/4 light brown 9) Fine, hard, non-porous fabric with sand inclusions 7.5YR 6/4 light brown Slip Thin and worn 3 and 4) 10YR 7/3 very pale brown 5) 10YR 8/2 very pale brown 6) 7.5YR 7/4 pink |
| Description/state of preservation Body round (<i>Cat. 1–9</i> ; deep in <i>Cat. 2</i>) or biconical (<i>Cat. 10</i>), thick-walled; small discus separated from a plain narrow shoulder by a high collar (concave in <i>Cat. 6</i>); flat circular base. Vertical looped handle and nozzle broken. Undecorated. | |
| References Broneer 1930: 55–56, Type XV, Pl. 5, No. 195; Howland 1958: Type 37 C, 121, Pls 19 and 45, No. 504 | |

TYPE 2: BICONICAL BODY WITH DECORATED SHOULDERS

| | |
|---|--|
| Cat. 11 | Accession No. ERK-18-27 |
| Dimensions H. 4.1; L. 11.8; W. 7.1; Dia. base 3.9, filling hole 1.5, wick hole 1.6 cm | Fabric Fine, hard, non-porous fabric, 10YR 7/3 very pale brown, with white particles of lime, mica and quartz inclusions |
| Type Waagé 24 (1941), groups II and III of Antioch I | Dating Mid-2nd to late 1st century BC |
| Description/state of preservation Biconical body; plain discus surrounded by a circular rim; ring base; long straight nozzle. Vertical looped handle broken. Decorated with a row of beading below the discus rim; remains of floral scrolls immediately below. | |
| References Waagé 1941: 62, Type 24, Fig. 76, Nos 72–74; Goldman and Jones 1950: 91–92, Group IX, Pls 95–97, Nos 119–120 | |

TYPE 3: BICONICAL BODY WITH BROAD HANDLE

| | |
|---|---|
| Cat. 12 | Accession No. ERK-18-16 |
| Dimensions H. 5.0; L. 7.8; W. 5.8; Dia. base 3.2, filling hole 2.0, wick hole 1.1 cm | Fabric/slip Fine, hard, non-porous fabric, 7.5YR 7/4 pink, with white particles of lime and sand inclusions Slip 2.5YR 5/6 red, thin |
| Type Dobbins 21 (1977) | Dating 5th–6th centuries AD |
| Description/state of preservation Biconical body; plain discus; flat circular base; short straight nozzle. Large spur handle rising vertically from the flat body. Prominent ridge around the discus and wick hole; channel between filling hole and nozzle. Nozzle broken. | |
| References Waagé 1941: 77, Fig. 80, No. 159; Dobbins 1977: 281, Fig. 354; Oziol 1977: 271, Pl. 45, No. 822; Bailey 1988: 289, Pl. 64, Q 2344 | |

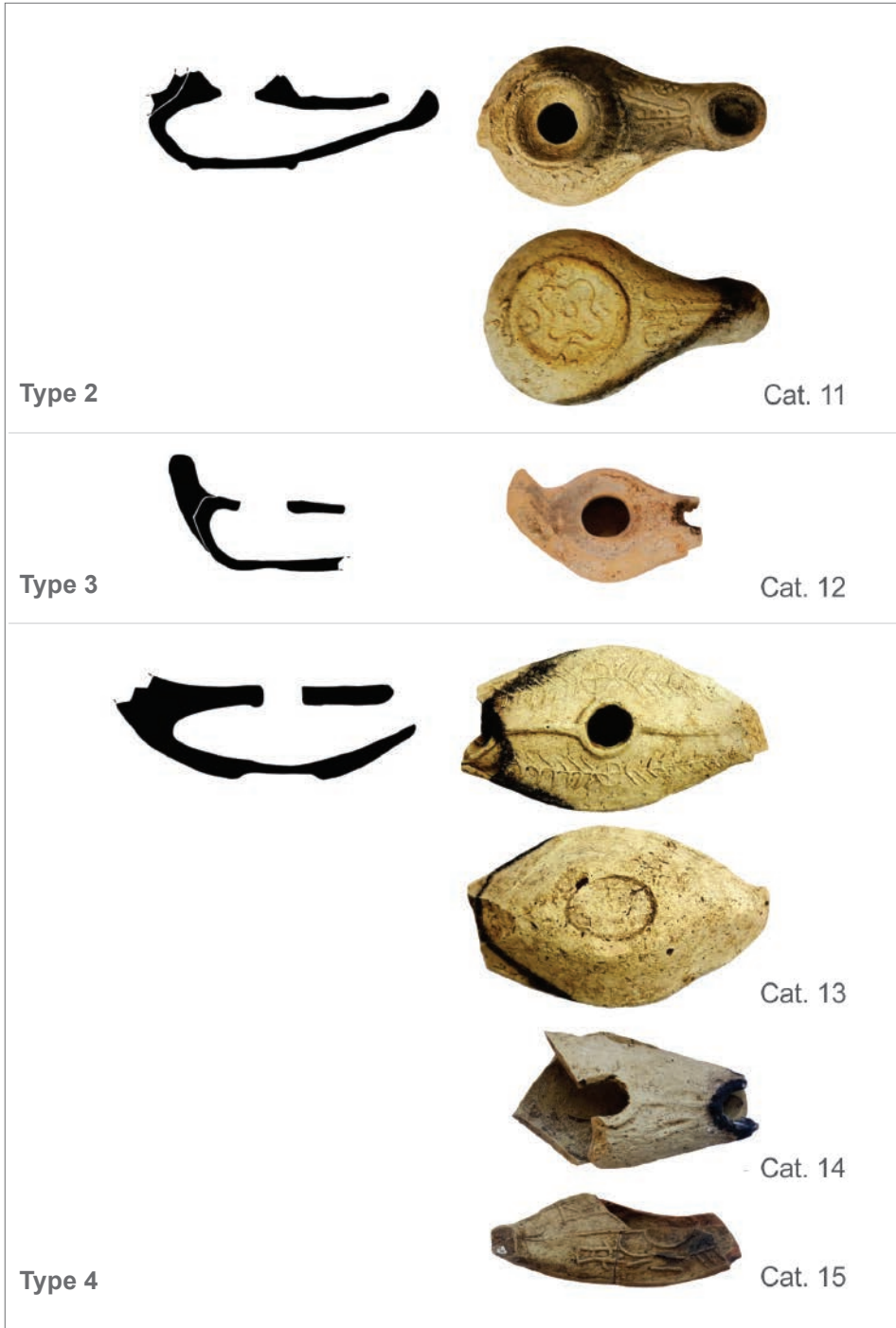


Fig. 4. Clay oil lamps representing Types 2, mid 2nd to late 1st century BC (Cat. 11), 3, 5th–6th centuries AD (Cat. 12) and 4, 6th–7th centuries AD (Cat. 13–15) (Photos and drawing G. Kan Şahin, 2019)

TYPE 4: BICONICAL BODY OF OVAL SHAPE

| | |
|---|---|
| Cat. 13–15 | Accession No. 13) ERK-18-17 14) ERK-18-17-2 15) ERK-18-17-1 |
| Type Waagé 56 (1941) | Dating 6th–7th centuries AD |
| Dimensions 13) H. 4.0; L. 12.1; W. 6.0; Dia. base 3.6, filling hole 1.8 cm 14) H. 3.6; L. 10.0; W. 5.7 cm 15) H. 3.1; L. 10.2; W. 4.3 cm | Fabric/slip 13) Fine, hard, non-porous fabric, 2.5Y 8/2 pale brown, with white particles of lime and quartz inclusions 14) Medium fine, hard, porous fabric, 2.5Y 6/3 light yellowish brown, with white particles of lime and sand inclusions; slip 2.5Y 7/3 pale yellow, thin 15) Fine, hard, non-porous fabric, 2.5YR 5/6 red, with white particles of lime and sand inclusions |
| Description and state of preservation 13) Oval lamp with rectangular stub handle; raised rim around the filling hole; oval ring base. Palm branch motif on either side of the rim on top. Line in relief joining the wick hole to the filling hole and the handle. Handle and nozzle broken. Decoration on the shoulder worn. 14) Oval lamp with rectangular stub handle; raised rim around filling hole; flat base. Relief line joining wick hole to ring around filling hole and handle. Handle and nozzle broken. Decoration on the shoulder worn. 15) Oval lamp with rectangular stub handle; raised rim around filling hole; flat base. Line in relief joining wick hole to filling hole and handle. Handle and nozzle broken. Decoration on the shoulder worn. | |
| References Waagé 1941: 67–68, Type 56, Pl. 81, Nos 175–176 | |

CONCLUSIONS

The lamps discussed here come from a disturbed context, which places limits on the interpretation of their role. However, Sinopean lamps of characteristic shape and rich relief decoration are very rare. Their presence in ancient Sinope supplies new data on distribution patterns of Eastern Mediterranean lamps, especially those attributed to workshops. The study revealed that most of the

lamps were produced locally, contributing to our knowledge of the characteristics of Sinopean lamp production. At the same time, commercial ties of Sinope with other regions of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea in Hellenistic times and late antiquity are reflected to an extent in the lamp assemblage, highlighting trends in economic and cultural activities.

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