

Absolute and Relative Chronology of Scythian Neapolis in the 2nd century BC

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Scythian Neapolis, which is mentioned by Strabon (7.4.7) and the inscriptions (*IOSPE I*², 352), is the largest and certainly the most investigated barbarian fortress of the northern Black Sea region (Fig. 1). Its archaeological history is divided into five periods and covers an interval from the 2nd century BC up to the 3rd century AD.¹ The most glowing and significant time in life of the city falls into the second half of the 2nd century BC, when the fortress was a capital and a residence of the King Skilouros.² The main complex of the fortress in this period was the royal (Southern) Palace with the Mausoleum of Skilouros and Argotas (Fig. 2.1).

The building of the Southern Palace was discovered at the central gate of the fortress and was excavated in three stages: 1945-50, 1955-59 (under direction of P.N. Schulz), and 1989-99 (the last years under direction of the author).

Besides the architectural remains, a special significance in our case has a distinct layer of the Late Hellenistic period. Here were found more than 400 stratified amphora stamps, eight coins, brooches, gold ornaments, beads, and various imported pottery (Figs. 3 and 4). The excavations of 1946 in the Mausoleum of Skilouros³ have revealed an abundance of Hellenistic pottery, weapons, gold ornaments, beads as well as other objects. This range of material is comparable with the similar finds from a cultural layer of the Southern Palace.

The careful examination of all this material has made it possible to construct a general chronological column (Figs. 5 and 6). The basic horizons of the column are designated by the letters of the Latin alphabet – from above downwards, in a retrospective sequence. Here a special attention will be devoted to two of them, namely E and D.

Each horizon corresponds to the large-scale changes in the architectural layout of the Palace, which were accompanied by the changes in the structure of the layers. In turn, each horizon is divided into more detailed “sub-horizons” specified additionally by Arabic numerals (for example, D3). Their accumulation might rather be caused by the smaller-scale events such as reorganization or erection of some individual structures, fires, etc., which have not essentially changed the function or the layout of the architectural complex as a whole.



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All the archaeological material obtained from the layers E and D was strictly divided up according to the stratigraphical data. The majority of the Rhodian amphora stamps in each layer belong to V. Grace's chronological group V (150-108 BC), the stamps of Group III (220/200-180 BC) being the second largest bunch. Third in quantity are the stamps of Group IV (180-150 BC). The factual distribution of the stamps, however, made obvious a certain contradiction with their chronology suggested by Grace.⁴ In spite of this, in 1994 I proposed a detailed "subjective" chronology of the Southern Palace of Neapolis,⁵ which was based on the microstratigraphy of the cultural accumulations and covered the period from the 140s to 112/108 BC. This chronology of the Southern Palace has turned out to be consistent with that of the Rhodian amphora stamps put forward most recently by G. Finkelsztein.⁶ So, the stamps of this assemblage include two out of seven his Group-IVa eponyms, three out of seven Group-IVb eponyms, eleven out of twelve Group-Va officials, ten out of twelve his Group-Vb eponyms, six out of his first seven Group-Vc magistrates dated from 120 to 114 BC, and only four stamps from the later period (See Table 1).

The most indicative is the microstratigraphy of the floor inside the main *megaron* where a layer of a total destruction (D1) buried 23 successive levels of a floor (Fig. 6).

These adobe levels are identical in structure and divided by equally thin inter-layers of dirt. Thus, each new surface of a floor was connected with a new layer of plaster on the walls and of the central hearth. From this it becomes obvious that there was a regularity with which the *megaron* was updated. Such a situation has many ethnographic parallels: in various cultures the annual repairs of cult constructions and dwellings, besides being of practical importance also have a deep sacral meaning.⁷

On the basis of many different criteria destruction layer D1 can be linked to the Diophantos Campaigns against the Scythians, which are dated, based on events, to 114-112 or alternatively to 110-108 BC.⁸ As the destruction of Scythian Neapolis took place at the end of the Diophantos Wars, the date of the destruction could be defined as 112 or 108 BC respectively. This assumption is consistent with two coins found in the same destruction layer – one from Amisos (young male head in crested helmet/sword in sheath)⁹ and one from Pantikapaion (head of Athena in a helmet/prow) (Figs. 3.63 and 3.65).¹⁰

The hypothetical 23 years corresponding to the number of floors subtracted from the year of the final destruction give us 135 or 131 BC as a date of erection of a new *megaron*. This date can also be proved by a stamp of Aristogeitos, an official of Finkelsztein's period 5a. Therefore, the upper and lower dates of the *megaron's* existence should fall within the chronological brackets of the

Fig. 1. Situation plan of the settlement of Scythian Neapolis.

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entire period 5 of the Rhodian stamping (from c. 145 to c. 108 BC). Following this sequence, the first fire, which corresponds to floor 1 of the *megaron* would have happened about 135/131 BC, and the second fire linked to floor 9 would have taken place in 127/123 BC. The stratification of floors inside the *megaron* is consistent with other alterations, which have taken place in the Palace as a whole.

The following description gives a notion about the detailed composition of horizons E and D.

Horizon E is the earliest. It is divided into two sub-horizons: E2 and E1.

Sub-horizon E2 consists of thin layers of loamy soil, adobe surfaces and floors in several dug-outs and surface buildings (Fig. 2.4.E2). Under the *megaron* were revealed the remains of an earlier surface construction (a proto-megaron), which in turn had nine layers of adobe floors. According to the stratigraphy it was completely rebuilt into the new monumental *megaron* discussed above (Fig. 2.4.E2-1).

The sub-horizon E2 is dated by the following finds: several handles of the Rhodian amphoras, fragments of a black-glazed Attic amphora with twisted handles and painted decoration on the upper body, and the mould-made bowls.

Sub-horizon E1. This layer reveals obvious traces of a fierce fire: the scorched clay and plaster of walls, plentiful charcoal, and burned fragments of pottery. This sub-horizon represented by the local layers and thin intercalations found *in situ* inside and near those buildings of the complex we have mentioned. The *megaron* was the only building of the Palace, which after the accident was carefully cleaned from a layer of Fire. Most "of fire debris" from here was displaced 150 meters to the south, where it was uncovered by excavations in 1979-1988.

The dating material from sub-horizon E1 (or Fire 1) is extraordinarily rich and various. First of all there are more than one hundred of the Rhodian amphora stamps. Also found were various beads of glass, a Middle La Tène bronze brooch, hundreds of fragments belonging to several black-glazed and red-slip vessels, large painted fusiform unguentaria and lagynoi (Fig. 4.1-4, 6, 13-16, 18-20, 22-23, 27-29, 37, 39-41), undecorated unguentaria, lamps, small ceramic altars and thymiateria, frying pans and saucepans made of clay, mould-made bowls, etc.

Thus, the finds in the fire layer include the Rhodian stamps of one eponym of Finkielsztejn's Group IVb, stamps of five eponyms of Group Va, and four eponyms of Group Vb (see Table 1).

Found burnt in one of the buildings were: a small Rhodian amphora, a lagynos and a pot with double-barreled handles. Found in another building were a red-slip kantharos and a plate (Fig. 4.15, 29), and several Scythian handmade pots and lamps.

One of the ceramic deposits of Fire 1 is especially indicative, for it can be interpreted as a cargo of the burned down vehicle. Found west of the *mega-*

ron, on the area no more than 10-15 m² were: an amphora presumably of the Samian manufacture, five Rhodian amphoras, a black-glazed bowl with stamped decoration, the bottom part of an unguentarium and a head fragment of a terracotta thymiaterion shaped originally as a half-figure of Demeter with polychrome painting. Particularly interesting are the upper parts of four Rhodian amphoras with rectangular stamps on the handles. Three eponymic stamps with the name of Anaxandros and the month Panamos are made by the same die. Two of them are associated with stamps of a fabricant Damokles, also executed by one and the same die, and the third one – with a fabricant stamp of Komos. The fourth pair – an eponym Pausanias and a fabricant Timo – belongs to the most massive amphora with a graffito on the shoulder. One handle is marked with a fabricant stamp of Midas.

Horizon D is divided into four sub-horizons: D4-D1.

Sub-horizon D4 is represented by several floors of the *megaron*, and also by a pool made of stone blocks and several fencings. Stratigraphically it directly follows fire E1. At the same time was erected a *heroon* of the King Argotas, constructed as a Doric temple with two columns *in antis* (Fig. 2.4.D4).

Sub-horizon D3. This is a layer of a general reconstruction of the complex, an erection of buildings around the *megaron* and the courtyard. Their construction involved an extensive use of regular blocks of limestone – whole and broken (Fig. 2.4.D3-2).

Sub-horizon D2. This layer reflects a reconstruction of some of the components of the Palace, and a local Fire 2, which is stratigraphically connected with floor 9 of the *megaron* (Figs. 2.4.D3-2 and 6).

The architectural remains of sub-horizons D4, D3 and D2 are accompanied by the homogeneous ashes-loamy soil up to 0.6 m thick. In many places it is intersected by a thin layer of Fire 2, which is also seen on the floors of all three buildings. After this fire and up to the moment of destruction of the *megaron* (sub-horizon D1) the floor was renovated sixteen times (Fig. 6).

In these sub-horizons more than 200 stamped handles of the Rhodian amphoras have been found.

Most of the stamps are of Finkielsztejn's periods Va and Vb (see Table 1).

Found on floor 21 of the *megaron* was a bronze coin of Skilouros (Fig. 6.21).¹¹ On the same floor a broad-bellied Sinopean amphora was deposited at the place of the hearth.

There were also plenty of various broken imported vessels, such as plates, cups with figured handles, fish-plates, kantharoi, mould-made bowls, lagynoi, unguentaria. More than half of these items are covered by red slip. One of the lagynoi bears a graffito, line 2 of which reads "XAIPE" (Fig. 4.42). Of a special interest are fragments of several white-slipped vessels with painted decoration, which is very rare for the northern Black Sea region. Sets of Greek cooking-ware are also characteristic. These are: saucepan with lids, frying pans and pots with round bottom. It is the only attested case of usage of Greek cooking vessels on a large scale in Scythia.

Sub-horizon D1. This level is represented by crushed yellow clay with fragments of white plaster, fragments of a tile and mud-bricks, and pieces of painted plaster (Fig. 6.D1). It was formed by simultaneous destruction of the mud-brick walls and tiled roofs of the Palace buildings.

Found in this layer were more than 30 stamps of the Rhodian amphoras with names of eponyms of periods IVb, Va, Vb, and Vc (according to Finkielsztejn 2001, see Table 1).

Also found were fine gold ornaments (earring, various beads and appliques) (Fig. 3.55-60), a Middle La Tène bronze brooch (Fig. 3.66), and three bronze coins, of which two are of Pantikapaion, and one is of Amisos (Fig. 3.63-65).

The imported pottery is comparable in number and variety with finds from earlier horizons of the Palace. Particularly interesting is a set of objects from the "Eastern house" of the Southern Palace. Here were found: an unusual painted jug with double-barrel handle, a tiny painted amphora with fluted body, a terracotta of Aphrodite with Eros, a lead weight and bronze keys from caskets.

Thus, it is obvious, that the horizons D and E of the Southern Palace of Neapolis should be definitely dated to the second half of the 2nd century BC. This is, above all, apparent from the presence of numerous Rhodian stamps of the period 150-108 BC (according to Grace) or Finkielsztejn's groups Va-c (see Table 1).

It is also possible to synchronize with sub-horizons D2 and D1 the majority of burials of the Mausoleum, which was built during the general reconstruction of the Palace (sub-horizon D3).

The main burial, namely that of Skilouros, was accomplished in the Mausoleum in 114/113 BC.¹² Actually, for several years members of his clan were buried there – to be close to the body of a king. Among finds from the burials are: unguentaria, red-slip cups and other vessels, a gold brooch and Middle La Tène bronze brooches, two La Tène swords, an iron helmet, a huge quantity of beads and gold ornaments (Fig. 7).

To my knowledge, it is still a unique case in the archaeology of the northern Black Sea region, that both a residence and the burial of the king have been discovered as two parts of a uniform complex.

Thus I have presented a modern chronological model of Scythian Neapolis in the second century BC. And if it will stand the test of time, the rich material assemblage of the Southern Palace after its final treatment can become a touchstone for the northern Black Sea region of the Late Hellenistic period.

Table 1. Correlation between the Rhodian amphora stamps from Scythian Neapolis and the chronological sequence of the eponyms by Finkielsztejn (2001).

Group	Eponyms	Date, BC	Ash-hills E3-E2 in the south part of Neapolis ¹³	North part of Neapolis, including section D	South-east part of Neapolis ¹⁴	Section excavated in 1926	Southern Palace, horizon E	Southern Palace, horizon D	Other sections of Neapolis ¹⁵
IIIb	Ξενοφάνης	c. 189							
	Πρατοφάνης	c. 188							
	Κρατίδας	c. 187	*		*				*
	Ίέρων I	c. 186							
	Ἀρχοκράτης II	c. 185							
	Τιμασαγόρας	c. 184		*					
	Φιλόδαμος II	c. 183			*				
	Κλεώνυμος II	c. 182							
IIIc	Ἀγέμαχος	c. 181/179		**					
	Ἀρχίδαμος	c. 180/178							
	Αἰνησίδαμος II	c. 179/177							
	Αἰνήτωρ	c. 178/176							
	Καλλικράτης II	c. 177/175							
	Δαμοκλῆς II	c. 176/174							
IIId	Καλλικρατίδας II	c. 175/173							
	Κλευκράτης I	c. 174/172							
	Σύμμαχος	c. 173/171							
	Νικασαγόρας I	c. 172/170							
	Θεαίδητος	c. 171/169							
	Ἀθανόδοτος	c. 170/168							
	IIIe	Ἄρατοφάνης I	c. 169/167				*		
Ἄριστείδας II		c. 168/166							
Ἄριστων II		c. 167/165							
Ἄριστόδαμος II		c. 166/164							
Ἄρχιλαΐδας		c. 165/163							
Ξενοφῶν		c. 164/162							
Ἄγέστρατος II		c. 161							
IVa	Πεισίστρατος	c. 160	**			*			
	Δαμαίνετος	c. 159/158	*						
	Τιμούρροδος	c. 158/157						***	*
	Ἄριστόμαχος I								
	Ἡραγόρας								
	Σωσικλῆς								*
	Γόργων	c. 154/153			*			*	
IVb	Παυσανίας III	c. 152	**		*	*	**	*	*
	Ξενοφάντος II	c. 151	***		*				
	Εὔδαμος				*	*			
	Πυθόδωρος	c. 150	*					*	
	Πυθογένης					*			

	Άλεξιμαχος	c. 147			*				
	Αυτοκράτης Ι	c. 146	*				*		
Va	Τιμόδικος	c. 145	*						
	Άστουμήδης ΙΙ	c. 144					*		
	Άνάξανδρος	c. 143/142	*			****	***		
	Τεισαγόρας	c. 142/141	*				*		
	Άριστόγειτος				*	**			
	Άναξιβουλος					**			
	Λαφείδης		*			*	*	**	
	Άλεξιάδας		**			***	*****		
	Θέρσανδρος	c. 137/136				**	*	*	
	Άρίστακος			*		*		*	
	Άνδρίας						***		
	Άρχέμβροτος Ι	c. 134/133	**		*	*	**		
Vb	Άνδρόνικος	c. 132	**				*		
	Νικασαγόρας ΙΙ	c. 131				*****	*****		
	Καλλικράτης ΙΙΙ	c. 130				***			
	Άριστογένης	c. 129							
	Τιμόθεος	c. 128	**			*****	***	*	
	Λεοντίδας	c. 127					**		
	Κληνόστρατος	c. 126							
	Πολυάρατος ΙΙ	c. 125			*	*	*****		
	Τεισάμενος						**		
	Άρίστρατος						*		
	Τειμαγόρας Ι						**		
	Ίέρων ΙΙ	c. 121					***		
Vc	Άρχίνος	c. 120					****		
	Ευάνωρ	c. 119					**		
	Άριστόπολις	c. 118		*			*		
	Άριστομβροτίδας	c. 117					**		
	Αισχίνας	c. 116							
	Άρχίβιος	c. 115					**		
	Έστιείος	c. 114					*		
	Ναύσιππος	c. 113					*		
	Άριστάναξ ΙΙ	c. 112					*		
	Άριστείδας ΙΙΙ	c. 111							
	Δάμων	c. 110					*		
	Άρατοφάνης ΙΙ	c. 109					*		
	Άγορᾶναξ	c. 108							
?	Ίερομένης	?					**?		
?	Τιμοκλῆς	?					**		
?	Φαινίλας	?					*		
Illegible stamps			****	*		**	***** ***** **	***** ***** ***	
Number of identified stamps: 155			23	5	8	8	32	70	9
Total number of stamps: 204			27	6	8	10	48	88	17

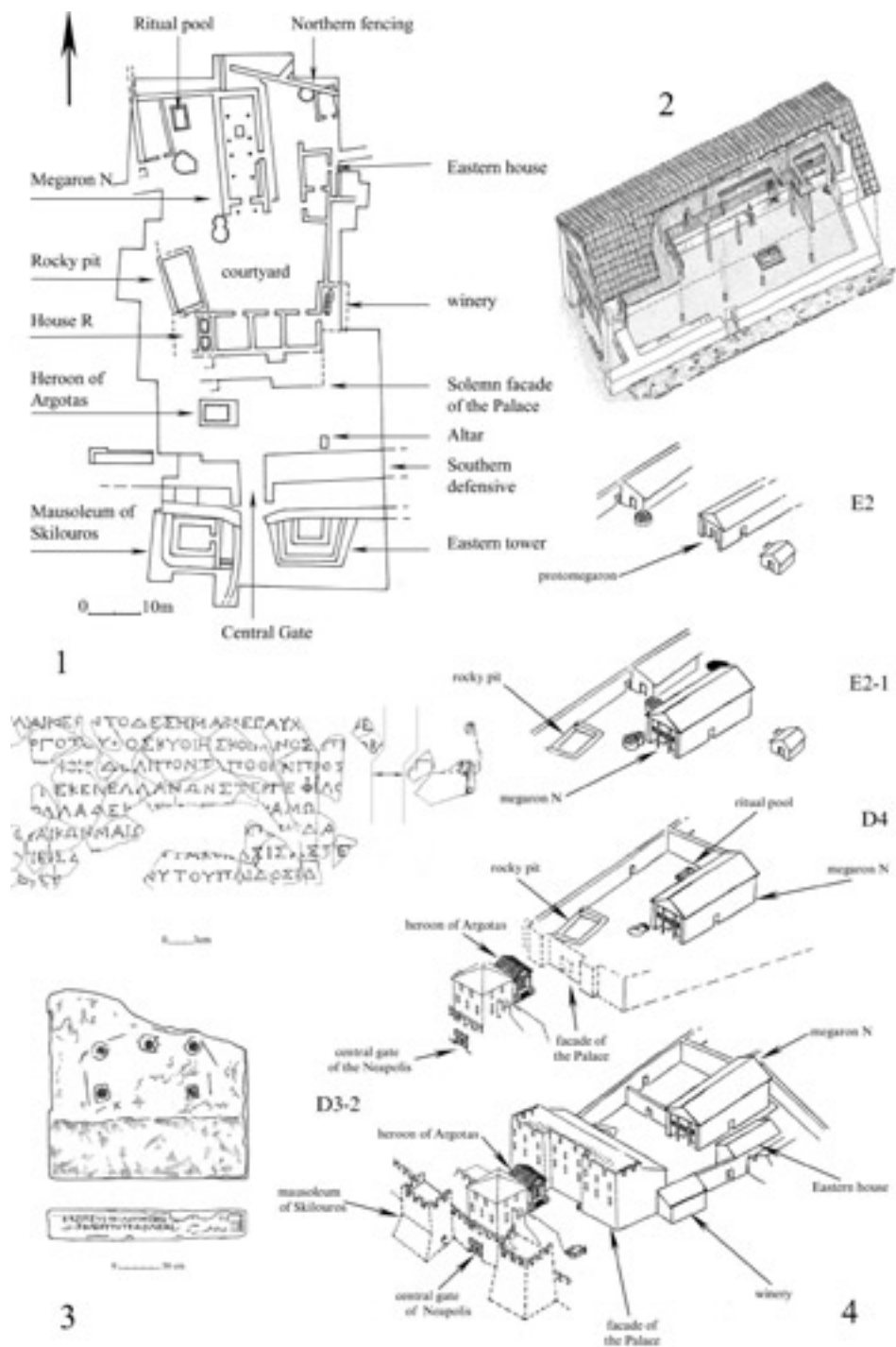


Fig. 2. The Southern Palace of Scythian Neapolis; 1) plan of the Palace; 2) reconstruction of the megaron; 3) the inscriptions mentioning the kings Argotas and Skilouros found at the territory of the Palace; 4) the building horizons of the Palace.

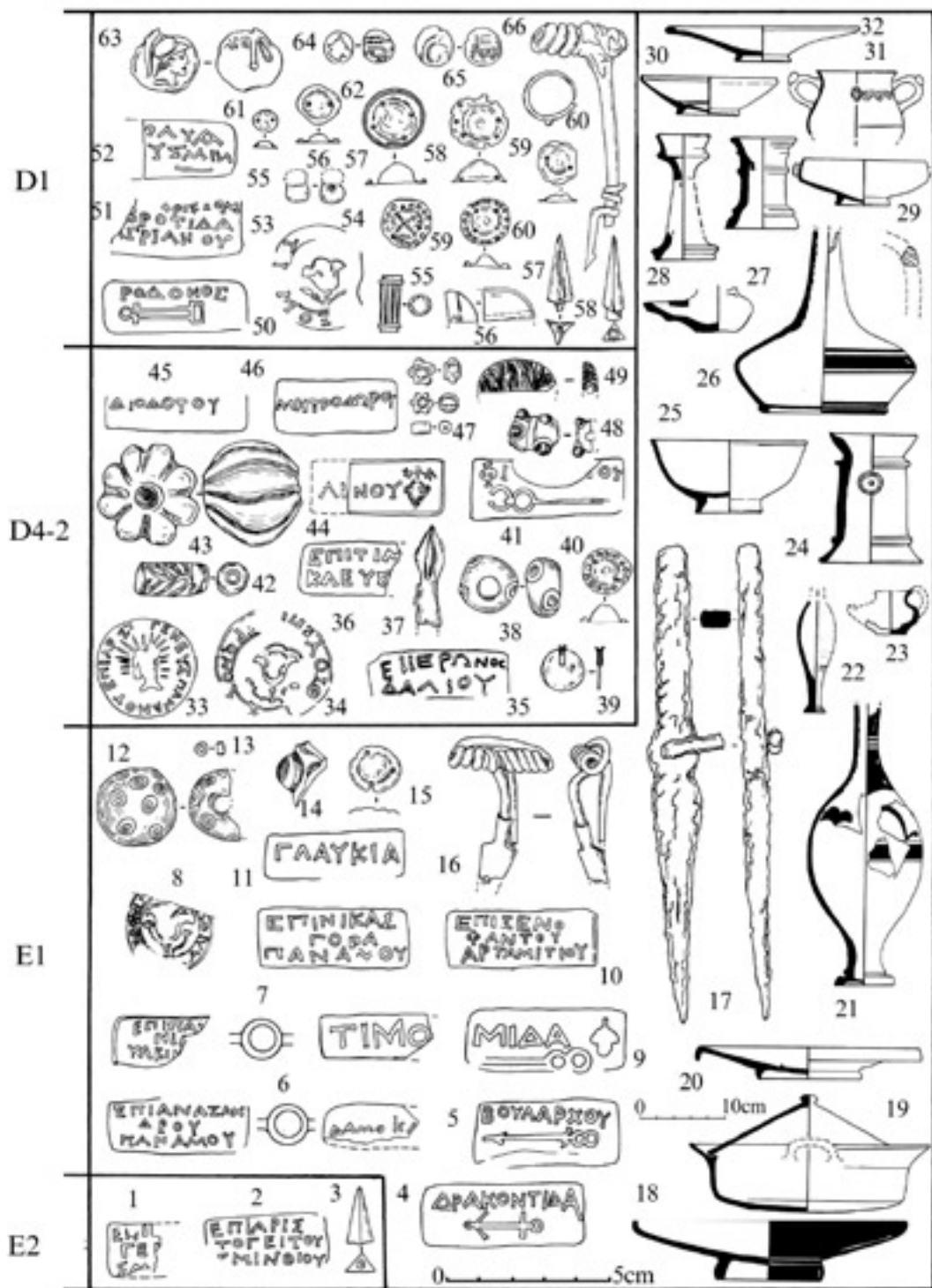


Fig. 3. Some of the finds from the Southern Palace. Horizons D-E.

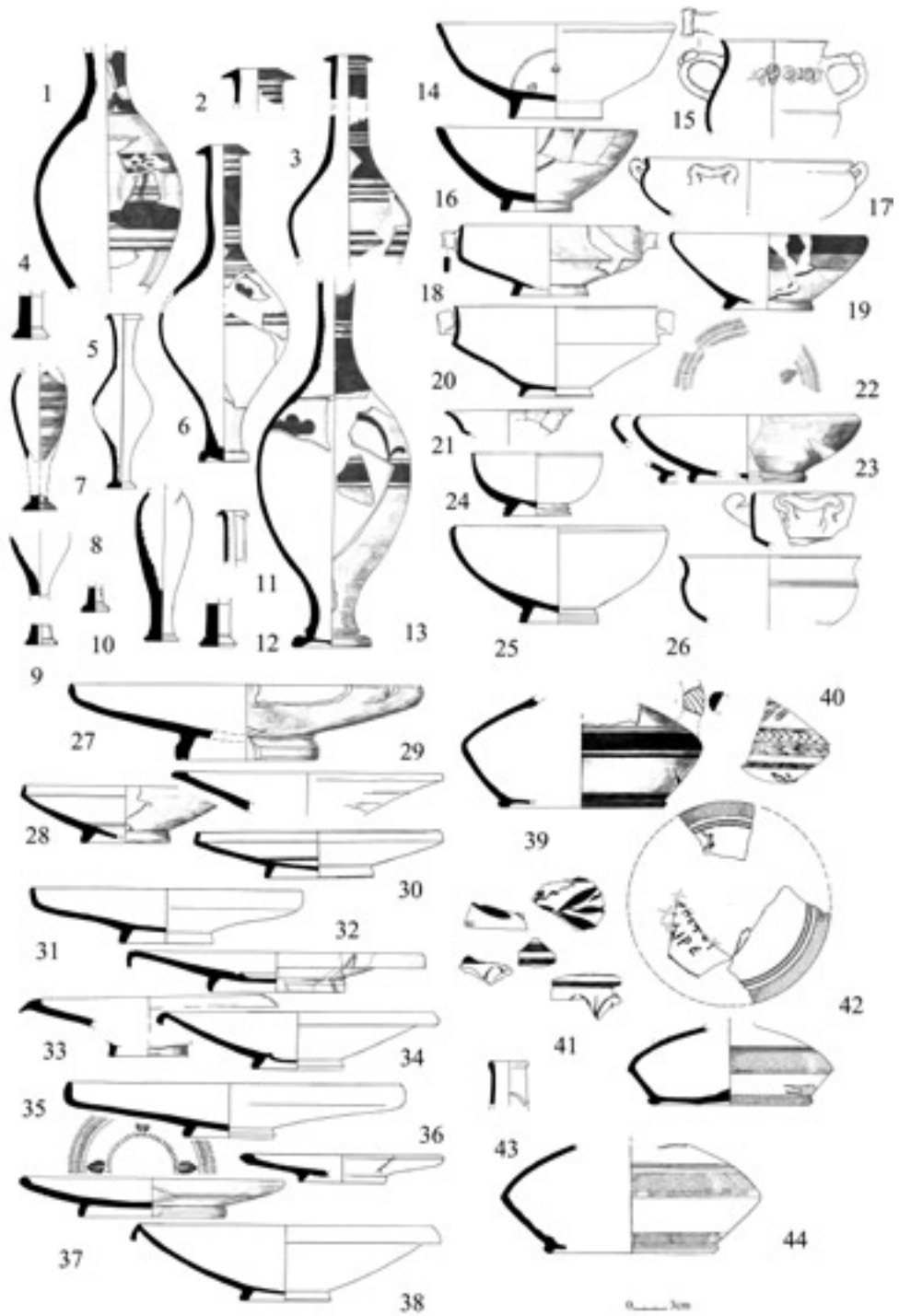


Fig. 4. Samples of imported pottery from the Southern Palace.

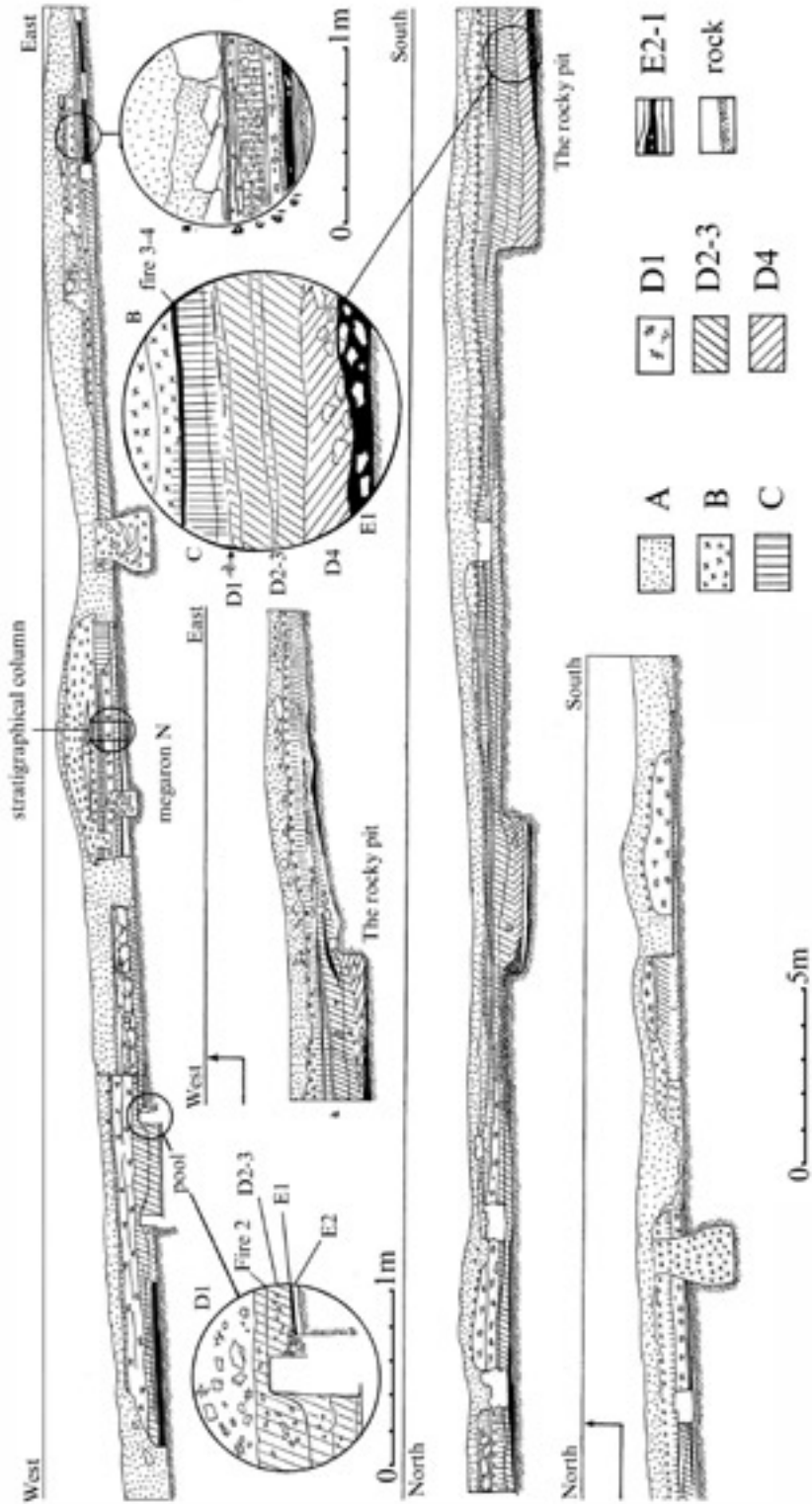


Fig. 5. Basic stratigraphy of the Southern Palace. Horizons E-A.

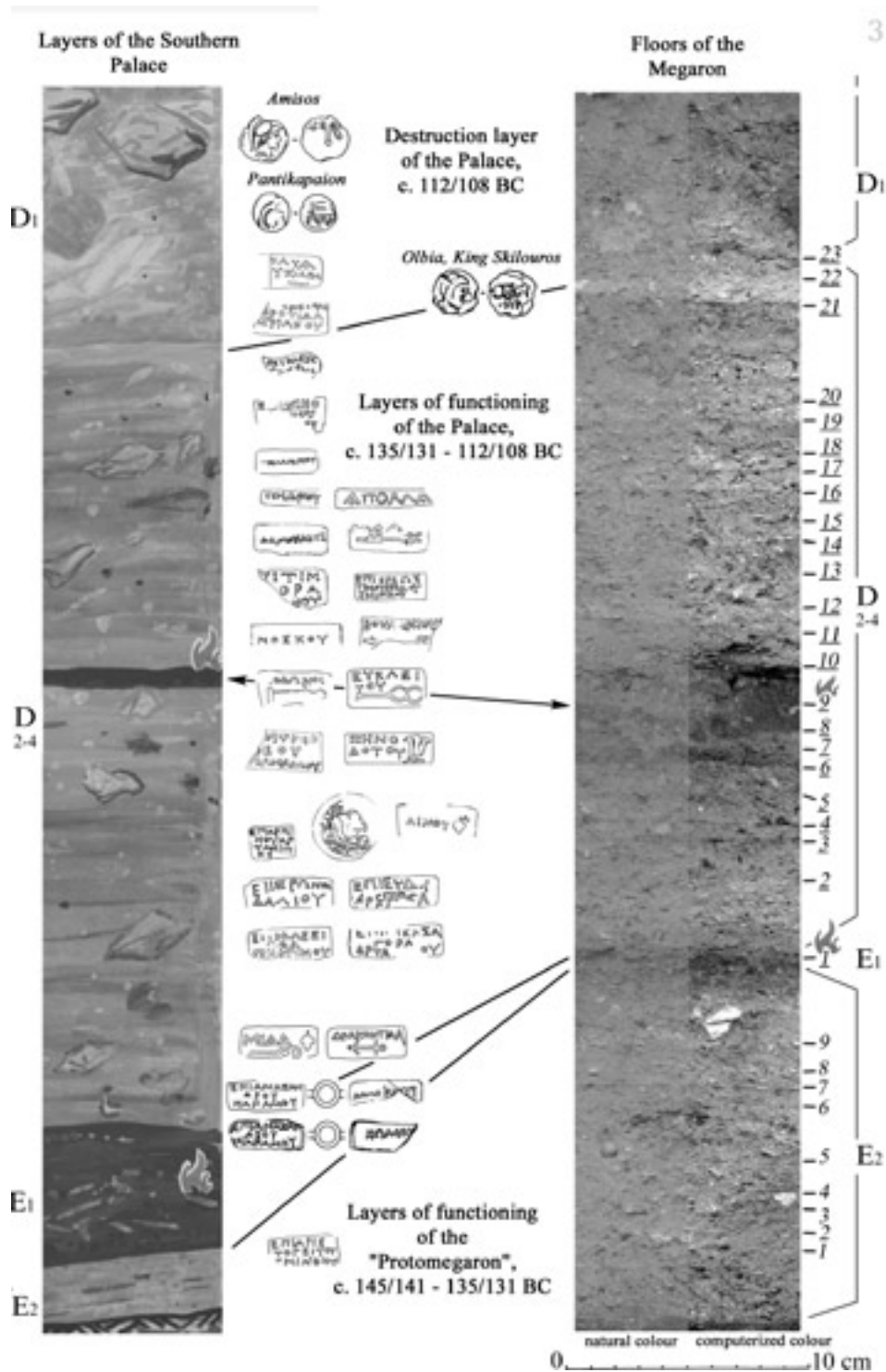


Fig. 6. Comparative view of the stratigraphical columns of the *megaron* floors and the layers of the Southern Palace.

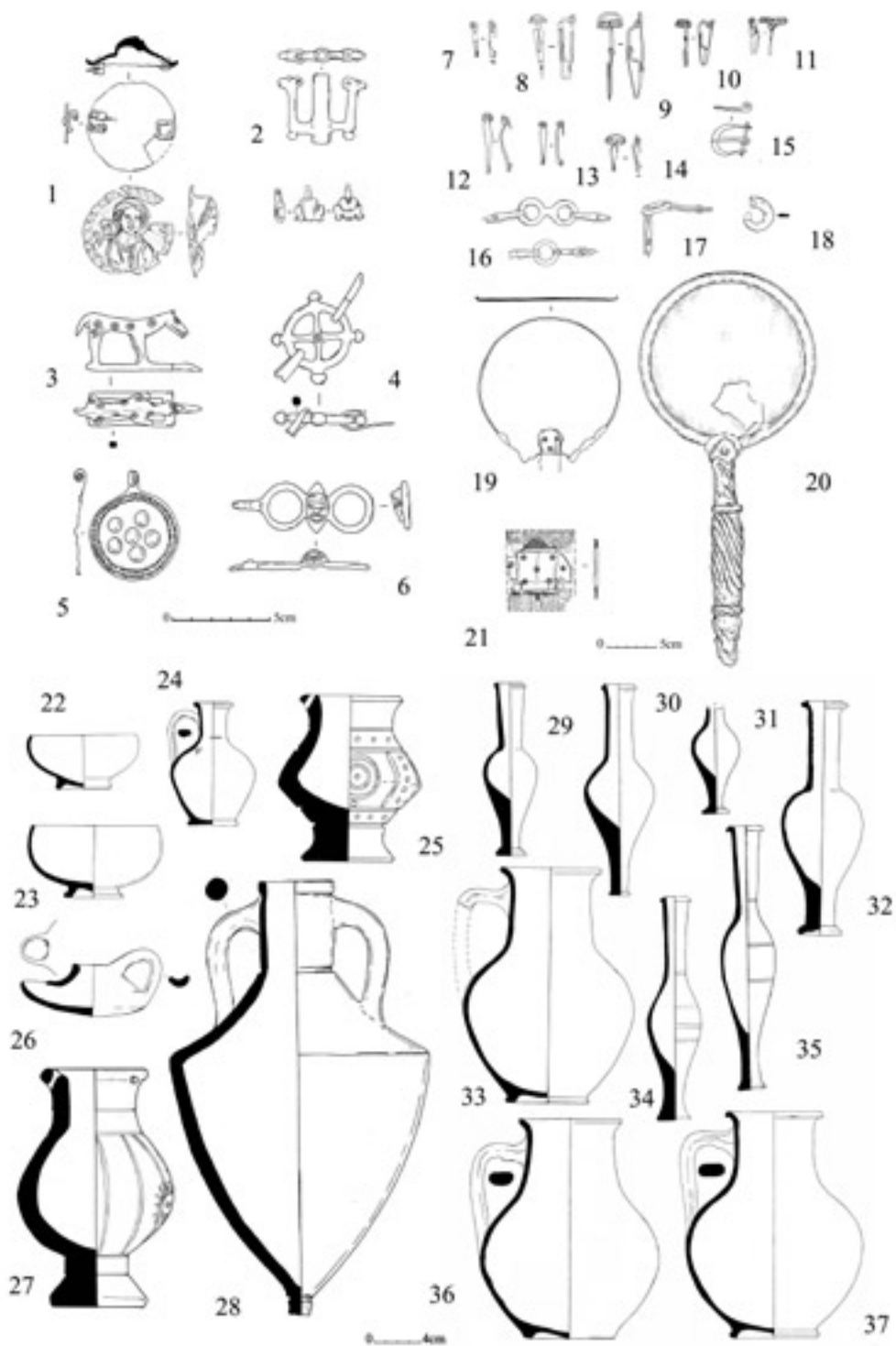


Fig. 7. Some of the finds from the Mausoleum of Skilouros.

Notes

- 1 Zajcev 2003.
- 2 Zaytsev 2002; 2002a.
- 3 Schulz 1953.
- 4 Grace 1952; 1953.
- 5 Zajcev 1994.
- 6 Finkielsztein 2001.
- 7 Džarylgasinova & Krjukov (eds.) 1989, 126 (China), 217 (Japan).
- 8 Vinogradov 1987, 70, 74-75. Cf. Stolba (in this volume), note 75, and Callataÿ (in this volume).
- 9 Imhoof-Blumer 1912, 169-184.
- 10 Anochin 1986, 144, no. 183.
- 11 Frolova 1964.
- 12 Zajcev, 2001.
- 13 To this group belong the ash-hill below the Mausoleum of Skilouros and the ash-hill under the western part of the ash-hill no. 3.
- 14 Sections 6, 7, 7a-b-v.
- 15 Section 1, section E, chance finds on the territory of the Eastern necropolis.