TYPES OF ROMAN KAOLIN VESSELS DISCOVERED AT REȘCA – ROMULA

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Abstract: The article presents a batch of kaolin vessels, discovered at Romula, during the archaeological researches from 2015 and 2017. The main purpose is the establishing of a typology for these ceramic vessels and their integration in the repertoire of the provincial Roman pottery shapes from Romula.

From the point of view of their functionality, the kaolin vessels belong to the common kitchen pottery, or for waiting at the table. The presented batch of vessels is chronologically framed between the first half of the 2nd century CE, and the middle of the 3rd century CE.

The physical and chemical investigations indicate a north-Danube origin for the sources of the raw material, a fact also supported by the existence of some similar kaolin vessels, or the semi-fine or coarse common paste, discovered at Romula, and products from this pottery centre.

Key words: kaolin ware, pottery, Romula, Roman Period, archaeological excavation

Introduction

The kaolin clay pottery is part of the common Roman ceramics, but it contains kaolinite, a silicate mineral. This category is evidenced due to its white colour. It represents a small part, but it is a constant presence amongst the pottery discovered in the Roman archaeological sites from the Lower Danube region.

The history of the kaolin ceramics research, in the Lower Danube region, is relatively brief. The first expression of kaolin vessels was used in the year of 1968 by the archaeologist Dumitru Tudor, in his work Oltenia romană (The Roman Oltenia).¹ In 1976, Gheorghe Popilian was inserting a small number of ceramic

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kaolin vessels in his work called *Ceramica romană din Oltenia* (*The Roman Pottery from Oltenia*), which he was introducing as part of the common use Roman pottery.  

In *Dacia Inferior* (*Malvensis*) kaolin vessels were discovered in archaeological sites, as those from Bumbești Jiu⁴, Sucidava⁵, Romula⁶, Drobeta⁷, Ghidici⁸, Slăveni⁹ and Stolniceni-Buridava.¹⁰

A special study was dedicated to the kaolin ceramic vessels discovered in *Moesia Inferior* province, with the mentioning that vessels belonging to this ceramic category had also been discovered in other Roman provinces, as Britannia, Lusitania, Hispania, Gallia, Raetia, Noricum, Italia, Pannonia and others.¹⁰

**The research methodology**

The research methodology consists of stages and a short history of the research, the drawing-up of the discovery typology, general information on the raw-material sources, in the Lower Danube region, the results of the multidisciplinary researches and the conclusions.

Referring to the functionality of the vessels, they could be used both in the kitchen and for waiting at the table. The evidence supporting the secondary burning at the exterior can make the difference between the vessels used in the kitchen and those for waiting at the table.

**Types of kaolin vessels discovered at Romula**

In the present article, it is made a presentation of a study on the kaolin pottery, discovered at *Romula*, in the central area of the Roman city, in the years of 2015 and 2017. The kaolin ceramics includes both vessels used in the kitchen, for preparing the food, and also for waiting at the table.

**Kitchen pottery**

This category includes pottery vessels made of coarse paste, with a lot of sand in it. It contains forms of vessels as: saucepans, pots and lids.

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⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 203.
⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 207.
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I. Pans

Type 1.1. (No. 3771)

Short tronconic body pan, with inwards oriented lip. An item was discovered in a layer dated in the first third of the 3rd century CE.\textsuperscript{11} Other pottery vessels, similar as shape, made of grey coarse paste, were discovered at Romula\textsuperscript{12} and in other Roman archaeological sites from Dacia Inferior (Malvensis) province, where they were dated in the 2nd-3rd centuries CE.\textsuperscript{13}

Type 1.2. (Nos. 3800, 4826)

Tronconic pans, with a slightly curved body, and the brim aligned with the sides. The base is flat. An item was dated in the second half of the 2nd century CE, until the last decade of the 2nd century CE (No. 4826), and another one being dated at the middle of the 3rd century CE (No. 3800).\textsuperscript{14}

Similar kaolin vessels were discovered in Moesia Inferior, at Durostorum, where they were dated in the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd century CE.\textsuperscript{15}

Similar shape vessels, made of red semi-fine common paste were discovered in the previous archaeological campaigns from Romula, being dated in the 2nd century CE.\textsuperscript{16} Similar brick-red coarse paste vessels were discovered in Dacia Superior (Apulensis) at Napoca, where they were dated in the second half of the 2nd century CE.\textsuperscript{17}

Type 1.3. (No. 1885)

Short tronconic pan with a wide brim. The lip is slightly splayed, on the horizontal edge having grooves along it. The base is flat. The vessel was discovered in an archaeological context, dated in the 2nd-3rd centuries CE.\textsuperscript{18}

This vessel is similar to the one made of kaolin, discovered in the anterior archaeological digs from Romula, dated in the 2nd century CE.\textsuperscript{19} A vessel

\textsuperscript{12} G. Popilian, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 125, 214, Pl. LXIX: 850–851, 854;
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibidem}, pp. 125.
\textsuperscript{14} M. Negru, A. Streinu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 51, Pl. 50: 3800.
\textsuperscript{15} Crișan Mușețeanu (collaboration with Dan Elefterescu), Ateliere ceramice romane de la Durostorum, Monografii IV, National History Museum of, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 106–107, 113, Pl. 39: 66, 67.
\textsuperscript{16} G. Popilian, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 126–127, 219, Pl. LXXI: 891–893,
\textsuperscript{18} M. Negru, A. Streinu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 52, Pl. 50: 1885
\textsuperscript{19} G. Popilian, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 124, 214, Pl. LXIX: 845.
similar in shape, but made of coarse ceramics, specific for the kitchen pottery, was also discovered at Romula, where it was dated in the first third of the 3rd century CE.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Type 1.4. (Nos. 4827, 5373)}

Tronconic pans with grooved wide horizontal brim. The base is flat. One of the vessels was dated in the second half, until the last but one decade of the 2nd century CE (No. 4827), and the other in the last decade of the 2nd century CE and the first third of the 3rd century CE (No. 5373).

Similar kaolin vessels were discovered in Moesia Inferior, at Durostorum, being dated in the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd century CE.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Type 1.5. (No. 2494, 6707)}

Deep tronconic pans with wide brim and outwards-oriented lip. The base is flat. The both vessels were discovered in archaeological contexts, dated in the last decade of the 2nd century CE, and the first third of the 3rd century CE.

A similar vessel, made of grey coarse paste, was discovered in the anterior archaeological campaigns from Romula, where it was dated in the first third of the 3rd century CE.\textsuperscript{22}

Similar kaolin vessels were discovered in Moesia Inferior, where they were dated in the 2nd-3rd centuries CE.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Type 2. Saucepans}

\textbf{Type 2.1. (Nos. 3506, 3548)}

Arched and deep body vessels. The lip is oriented inwards, having a horizontal brim and an inside groove, for the lid. These vessels had two grooved lamellar handles. The presented vessels were discovered in archaeological contexts, dated in the second quarter of the 2nd century CE (No. 3548), respectively the middle of the 3rd century CE (No. 3506).\textsuperscript{24}

Similar kaolin vessels were discovered in Moesia Inferior, where they were dated in the 2nd-3rd centuries CE.\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{Type 2.2. (No. 5018)}

Arched and deep body vessels with outwards arched lip and rounded brim. This vessel can be dated in the last decade of the 2nd century CE and the first third of the 3rd century CE.

At Durostorum, similar kaolin vessels were dated in the 2nd century CE and at the beginning of the 3rd century CE.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{20} M. Negru, A. Streinu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 52, Pl. 52: 3446
\bibitem{22} M. Negru, A. Streinu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 53, Pl. 52: 2667
\bibitem{23} P. Dyczek, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 157, Fig. 4: 11.
\bibitem{24} M. Negru, A. Streinu, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 52, Pl. 51: 3506, 3548.
\bibitem{25} P. Dyczek, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 157, Fig. 4: 8, 9.
\bibitem{26} C. Mușețeanu, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 105, 112, Pl. 38: 54.
\end{thebibliography}
The vessel has analogies with some made of grey coarse paste, discovered at Stolninceni-Buridava\(^{27}\), respectively brick-red ones at Romula\(^{26}\). At Romula, these vessels were dated in the second half of the 2\(^{nd}\) century CE and the first decades of the 2\(^{nd}\) century CE, and in Dacia Inferior (Malvensis), in the 2\(^{nd}\) century CE, and the first half of the 3\(^{rd}\) century CE\(^{29}\).

**Type 2.3.1. (No. 3004)**

Deep saucepan, with bulging body and cylindrical neck. The mouth is wide, and the lip is turned back horizontally, with rounded brim. This vessel was discovered in an archaeological context, dated at the middle of the 3\(^{rd}\) century CE\(^{30}\).

Similar kaolin vessels were discovered in Moesia Inferior, where they were dated in the 2\(^{nd}\)–3\(^{rd}\) centuries CE\(^{31}\).

**Type 2.3.2. (No. 2816)**

Short-neck saucepan, with horizontally turned-back lip, having an inside groove, for the lid. The mentioned vessel was discovered in an archaeological context from the middle of the 3\(^{rd}\) century CE\(^{32}\).

Similar kaolin vessels were discovered in Moesia Inferior, where they were dated in the 2\(^{nd}\)–3\(^{rd}\) century CE\(^{33}\).

Similarly shaped vessels, made of grey coarse ceramics were discovered in Dacia Inferior (Malvensis) at Romula\(^{34}\), where they were dated in the middle of the 3\(^{rd}\) century, respectively at Stolnici-Buridava\(^{35}\), in the first part of the 3\(^{rd}\) century CE.

**Type 3. (No. 5404)**

Tronconic saucepans, with cylindrical superior side. The long lip is turned back, almost horizontally. This vessel was discovered in an archaeological context, dated in the middle of the 3\(^{rd}\) century CE.

A similar kaolin vessel was discovered at Durostorum in Moesia Inferior, where it was dated in the second half of the 2\(^{nd}\) century and the first half of the 3\(^{rd}\) century CE\(^{36}\).

Similar vessels made of red coarse paste were discovered at Romula, in Dacia Inferior (Malvensis), where they were dated in the first half of the 3\(^{rd}\) century CE\(^{37}\).

\(^{27}\) G. Popilian, *op. cit.*, p. 121, Pl. LXV: 791.

\(^{28}\) *Ibidem*, pp. 121, 210, Pl. LXV: 789.

\(^{29}\) *Ibidem*, p. 121.

\(^{30}\) M. Negru, A. Streinu, *op. cit.*, p. 52, Pl. 52: 3004.

\(^{31}\) P. Dyczek, *op. cit.*, p. 157, Fig. 4: 9.

\(^{32}\) M. Negru, A. Streinu, *op. cit.*, p. 52, Pl. 51: 2816.

\(^{33}\) P. Dyczek, *op. cit.*, p. 157, Fig. 4: 1.

\(^{34}\) M. Negru, A. Streinu, *op. cit.*, p. 54, Pl. 53: 2074.


\(^{37}\) G. Popilian, *op. cit.*, pp. 121, 211, Pl. LXV: 792.
II. Pots

Type 1

Type 1.1. (Nos. 3937, 3733, 7691)

Pots with bulged body, two flat handles, and the brim having an inside groove for the lid. They were dated in the last decade of the 2nd century and the first third of the 3rd century CE (No. 7691), respectively in the middle of the 3rd century CE (Nos. 3937, 3733).38

Similar kaolin vessels were discovered at Durostorum, where they were dated in the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century CE39, respectively in archaeological sites from Moesia Inferior, where they were dated in the 2nd–3rd centuries CE40.

A similarly shaped vessel, made of grey coarse paste, was discovered at Romula. This type was dated at Romula in the 2nd century CE, and the first half of the 3rd century at Romula as well41.

Type 1.2. (Nos. 6882, 5706, 4988, 5367, 7804, 2712, 3507)

Two-handled pots, with bulged body, band handle and flat base. The lip is almost vertical, and has an inside groove for the lid.

They can be dated in the second half of the 2nd century CE (No. 6882), the last in the second half of the 2nd century CE, until the last but one decade of the 2nd century CE (Nos. 5706, 4988), the last decade of the 2nd century CE and the first third of the 3rd century CE (Nos. 7804, 2712) and the middle of the 3rd century CE (Nos. 5367, 3507)42.

Similar kaolin vessels were discovered at Durostorum, where they were dated in the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century CE43. Generally, in Moesia Inferior, they were dated in the 2nd-3rd centuries CE44.

Similarly shaped vessels made of grey coarse paste, previously discovered at Romula, were dated in the first half of the 2nd century CE45 and the first half of the 3rd century CE46.

Type 2. (Nos. 3828, 5226)

Two-handled pots, with bulged body, band handle and flat base. The lip is almost vertical, and has an inside groove for the lid. These vessels were dated in the last decade of the 2nd century CE and the first third of the 3rd century CE (No. 3828)47, respectively, the middle of the 3rd century CE (No. 5226).

38 M. Negru, A. Streinu, op. cit., p. 52, Pl. 51: 3937, 2718, 3733.
39 C. Muşeteanu, op. cit., type 1, pp. 102, 109, Pl. 36: 10–12.
40 P. Dyczek, op. cit., p. 159, Fig. 5: 3, 6.
42 M. Negru, A. Streinu, op. cit., p. 52, Pl. 51: 2712, 3507.
43 C. Muşeteanu, op. cit., pp. 102, 109, Pl. 36: 18–19.
44 P. Dyczek, op. cit., pp. 159–162, 165, Fig. 5: 4, 5
45 M. Negru, A. Streinu, op. cit., p. 54, Pl. 55: 3614.
46 G. Popilian, op.cit., pp. 90, 182, Pl. XXXVII: 372,
47 M. Negru, A. Streinu, op. cit., p. 52, Pl. 51: 3828.
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Similar vessels were dated at Durostorum, in the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century, and in Moesia Inferior, generally in the 2nd–3rd centuries CE.

Some similarly shaped vessels made of grey coarse paste, found at Romula, were dated the first half of the 3rd century CE.

**Type 3. (Nos. 5947)**

Two-handled pot, with slightly bulged body, back-tuned slanting brim, with an inside groove for the lid. The vessel was discovered in a context that can be dated from the 2nd century to the first half of the 3rd century CE.

Similarly shaped vessels were discovered at Sucidava, in Dacia Inferior (Malvensis), where it was dated in the first half of the 3rd century.

In Moesia Inferior, this type of vessels was generally dated in the 2nd–3rd centuries CE, the vessels from Durostorum being dated in the 2nd century CE, and the first half of the 3rd century CE.

**Type 3. (No. 3878)**

Bulged body pot with the maximum diameter in the superior part of the body. It has a short neck, with the turned-back lip. On the shoulder, the vessel has two incised horizontal lines. This vessel was dated in the middle of the 3rd century CE.

The presented vessel has analogies with grey coarse ceramics, discovered at Romula, dated at the beginning of the 3rd century CE, the first half of the 3rd century CE, and the middle of the 3rd century CE.

**III. Lids**

**Type 1. (No. 2574)**

Concave tronconic lid having a wide opening range. The lip is turned inwards. The vessel was discovered in an archaeological context, dated in the middle of the 3rd century CE.

Similar kaolin lids, discovered in Moesia Inferior, were dated in the 2nd–3rd centuries CE.

Similarly shaped vessels, made of grey or brick-red coarse paste, were discovered at Romula and in other archaeological sites from Dacia Inferior (Malvensis) province, where they were dated in the 2nd–3rd centuries CE.

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48 C. Musuțeanu, op. cit., pp. 102, 109, Pl. 36: 18, 20.
49 P. Dyczek, op.cit., p. 159, Fig. 5: 9.
51 Ibidem, pp. 92–93, Pl. XL: 408.
52 P. Dyczek, op.cit., p. 157, Fig. 3: 12.
53 C. Musuțeanu, op. cit., pp. 102, 109, Pl. 36: 15–17, 27.
54 M. Negru, A. Streinu, op. cit., p. 52, Pl. 51: 3878.
56 M. Negru, A. Streinu, op. cit., p. 55, Pl. 56: 3104, 3891.
57 Ibidem, p. 51, Pl. 50: 2574.
58 P. Dyczek, op.cit., p. 165, Fig. 8: 1, 3.
60 Ibidem, 125.
Type 2. (Nos. 6023, 5128)

Tronconic lids with short knob and the lip continuing the sides. These items were dated in the first half of the 2
nd century CE and the last but one decade of the 2
nd century CE (Nos. 6023, 5128).

At Durostorum, similarly shaped vessels were dated in the 2
nd century and the first half of the 3
nd century CE61.

Similarly shaped vessels, made of common brick-red paste, were discovered at Romula, where they were dated in the 2
nd–3
rd centuries CE62, respectively of grey coarse paste, in the middle of the 3
rd century CE63.

Type 3. (Nos. 6747, 6763)

Tronconic lids and short knob. The lip continues the sides, but slightly turned back. These vessels were dated in the second half of the 2
nd century, until the last but one decade of the 2
nd century CE (Nos. 6747, 6763).

Brick-red coarse vessels, having a similar shape, were discovered at Romula, where they were dated in the 2
nd century and the fist decades of the 3
rd century CE64.

Type 4. (No. 4917)

Tronconic lid, with the lid continuing the sides, arched outwards. Small conical lid fragment. The vessel can be dated in the last decade of the 2
nd century CE and the first third of the 3
rd century CE.

A similar vessel was discovered at Durostorum, where it was dated in the first half of the 2
nd century CE.65

Brick-red fine ceramic vessels, similar in shape, were discovered at Romula, where they were dated in the 2
nd century, and the first half of the 3
rd century CE66.

Table waiting pottery

In this category, there were included the fine or semi-fine paste vessels, which, owing to their mug or cup shape, were used for waiting at the table and do not present burning traces, and were used for preparing the food.

63 M. Negru, A. Streinu, op. cit., p. 56, Pl. 59: 2866.
IV. Mugs

Type 1. (No. 1520)

Small ovoidal mug. The lip is slightly turned back. The base is flat. This item was dated in the first half of the 3rd century CE67.

Within the previous discoveries from Romula, a similar brick-red common paste vessel was dated in the first half and the middle of the 2nd century CE68.

Type 2. (No. 6710)

The base of a small mug, with bulged body and flat base. The inferior side has exterior grooves.

Similarly shaped mugs, dated in the 2nd-3rd centuries CE, were discovered in Dacia Inferior (Malvensis) province, at Romula69, Sucidava70, Drobeta71 and Ghidici72.

Similar vessels were discovered in Moesia Inferior at Durostorum, where they were dated in the 2nd century CE, and the first half of the 3rd century CE73.

V. Cups

Type 1. (No. 1492)

Pear shaped cup. The lip is vertical. On the shoulder, it has few incised lines. The vessel was discovered in an archaeological context, dated in the first third of the 3rd century CE.

Similarly shaped vessels, but made of brick-red coarse ceramics, were discovered at Romula and Slăveni, where they were dated in the 2nd century CE74.

Type 2. (No. 8163)

Small cup with approximately cylindrical body. It has a spout for pouring liquids. The vessel was discovered in an archaeological context from the middle of the 3rd century CE.

Similar kaolin vessels were discovered at la Sucidava at Slăveni, close to Romula, where they were dated in the first half of the 3rd century CE75.

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67 M. Negru, A. Streinu, op. cit., p. 52, Pl. 51: 1520
Conclusions

In the 2\textsuperscript{nd}–3\textsuperscript{rd} centuries CE, Romula was the biggest urban, economic and trade centre from Dacia Inferior (Malvensis) province, and a relevant one amongst the Roman provinces by the Danube.

The pottery items production was necessary for the economy of any Roman city. In the Northern Sector from Romula, there were discovered 25 brick burning kilns, different pottery objects, nonetheless, the majority of them was used for burning the clay vessels that were used in the quotidian life\textsuperscript{76}. They used to be organised within eight pottery workshops\textsuperscript{77}.

The ceramic vessels represent, typically, the archaeological material most frequently discovered after the researches from Romula. Related to it, the kaolin vessels represent only approximately 1\% of the total vessel manifestations, discovered in 2015 and 2017.

The kaolin ceramics is part of the wider category of common use pottery. The composition of the paste, and especially the presence or the absence of some kitchen usage traces, indicate their use as vessels for preparing the food, respectively for waiting at the table.

The coarse kitchen pottery includes forms as the pan, the saucepan, the pot and the lid, while the table waiting ceramics, made of fine and semi-fine paste, without traces that would indicate their placement on the kitchen fire, including forms as the mug and the cup.

From the chronological point of view, the presented kaolin vessels can be dated from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century until the middle of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century CE.

The problems related to the origin of these kaolin vessels, discovered at Romula, display two aspects: the raw material sources and the manufacturing place.

The most important kaolin clay resources, from the Lower Danube region, used in the Roman age, were identified in Moesia Inferior (north of Bulgaria and the today Dobruja)\textsuperscript{78}.

\textsuperscript{76} Popilian 1997.
\textsuperscript{78} Malgorzata Daszkiewicz, Eduard Bobryk, Gerwulf Schneider, Simion Rădan, Composition and technology of Lower Danube Kaolin Ware (LDKW). Examples from Novae, Bulgaria. RCRF Acta 41, 2010, pp. 37–49.
The investigations regarding the physical and chemical composition of the kaolin clay sources, identified until presently in the north and the south of the Lower Danube, notice differences on addressing the known sources of kaolin from the south of the Danube, and some similitudes with the north-Danube clay composition, a fact that indicates a north-Danube origin of the raw material source, from which there was shaped the batch of kaolin vessels, discovered at Romula.

Most of the kaolin vessel types are similar as shape and material with other similar vessels discovered in the Roman provinces of Moesia Inferior and Dacia Inferior (Malvensis). As exceptions, in the actual stage of the research, there ought to be noticed a miniature cup with spout (No. 8163), which has analogies only at Romula and Sucidava, respectively the type 3 lids (Nos. 6763, 6747), which have analogies only with at Dacia Inferior (Malvensis).

An important aspect that ought to be mentioned, is the fact that most of the presented kaolin vessels have analogies amongst the shapes of the vessels, discovered and produced at Romula, made of semi-fine paste, especially the kitchen coarse paste.

Under these circumstances, based on the laboratory investigations, which indicate the north-Danube origin of the kaolin clay sources, in the case of some vessels, and the presence of some vessel shapes that have analogies only at Romula and in sites from Dacia Inferior (Malvensis), we consider that the hypothesis on kaolin vessel production in the north of the Lower Danube, including Romula, is a reasonable one, at this stage of the researches.

**Plates explanation**

Plate 1. Kaolin vessels discovered at Reșca–Romula
Plate 2. Kaolin vessels discovered at Reșca–Romula
Plate 3. Kaolin vessels discovered at Reșca–Romula

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Plate 1. Kaolin vessels discovered at Reșca–Romula.
Plate 2. Kaolin vessels discovered at Reşca–Romula.