Terra Sigillata and Red Slip Pottery in the North Pontic Region (A Short Bibliographical Survey)

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Terra sigillata¹ which became widespread throughout the whole territory of Mediterranean and Black Sea region in the Roman period constitutes the most important historical source. Unfortunately, however, the terra sigillata of the North Pontic region has not been the subject of any serious or detailed study during the Soviet period. Far less attention has been devoted to the historiography of this question in Russia and the Ukraine than in the West. This is mainly linked with the fact that in the territory of the North Pontic region the few examples manufactured in the West which were found complete with stamps or richly decorated, which had attracted the attention of scholars from all over the world, while the unexceptional fragments of undecorated pottery making up the bulk of the finds at the sites of the North Pontic region constituted a limited source of information. In addition not very much attention used to be paid to the painstaking and labour-intensive work with mass-scale archaeological material in the former Soviet Union (with the exception of amphorae and hand-made pottery, in the study of which a good deal of success was achieved). What was, without doubt, a major contributing factor here was the fact that for any serious study of table-ware, in particular terra sigillata, knowledge of at least the material from excavations in the Eastern Mediterranean (for purposes of comparison) was essential that presented major problems in most countries of Eastern Europe for a number of reasons as recently as ten years ago. Moreover, there was a major shortage of academic literature, which meant that most of the general surveys from 1950-1990 regarding this subject were not to be found in the libraries of the former Soviet Union.

The aim of this article, which makes no claim to be an exhaustive study of the subject, is to provide a short analysis of the main groups of terra sigillata found within the North Pontic region and also a literature-survey of Russian and Ukrainian publications on this group of Roman pottery articles.

¹ There is only one term in Russia for all the terra sigillata and red slip vessels — ‘krasnolakovaya’ (red slip or red-glazed).
The first publications on *terra cotta* from the North Pontic region appeared in Germany. The foundations for the study of *terra cotta* were laid by H. Dragendorff, who, after examining the collections housed in Bonn,\(^2\) travelled to the Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire including the North Pontic region. The outcome of this work was the first article devoted to *terra cotta* of the East.\(^3\) Some red slip vessels from this region also found their way into catalogues of various collections.\(^4\)

Despite the fact that some individual vessels had been published as far back as the end of the 19\(^{th}\) or beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century in the Bulletins and Reports of the Imperial Archaeological Commission and certain other Russian publications, the first scholars to pave the way for a study of red slip pottery in Russia was T.N. Knipovich. In 1929 her book appeared on the red slip pottery of Olbia in the collection of the Hermitage Museum.\(^5\) There she singled out several groups of red slip pottery items, linking them, as R. Zhan had done previously with the main production centres: first and foremost Arezzo, as well as Samos and Pergamum. Another local group was singled out — that of articles produced in Olbia. The importance of this work is self-evident: it gave the academic community access to first-class material, which was being analysed and interpreted for the first time. It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of this work: it laid the foundations for the study of *terra cotta* in the North Pontic region. In accordance with the concepts, which held sway in her day, T.N. Knipovich re-dated some groups of pottery items too early: for example, the so-called early “Samos” group, dating it — under the influence of R. Zhan to the first half of the 1\(^{st}\) century BC. Later she revised her opinion and dated the group in question to the first half of the 1\(^{st}\) century AD.\(^6\) Until recently this study was the only publication on these materials from the North Pontic region, generally known in the West.

In 1952 T.N. Knipovich published the red slip pottery from the excavations at Myrmekion and Tyritake. Despite the fact that both (as regards quantity and variety of shapes) this material was definitely inferior to the one from Olbia, this detailed article was an important contribution to the study of the subject. The main principles used for this article were the same as those developed earlier for the Olbia publication: pottery from the same Asia Minor centres was identified, 

\(^2\) Dragendorff 1895, 34-37.
\(^3\) Dragendorff 1897, 140-152.
\(^4\) See, for example: Cramer 1908, 47-53.
\(^5\) Knipowitsch 1929.
\(^6\) Knipovich 1952, 292.