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# Architectural terracotta fragments from Sinope: Aeolian influences on the Archaic Architecture of the city

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**Abstract**
Eight architectural terracotta fragments uncovered during the 2021 excavations at Sinop are the focus of this study. These fragments, comprising lateral simae with revetment plaques and raking simae, are of importance, as they provide new insights into Archaic-period architecture and workshop practices in the city. The painted L-shaped lateral simae, with revetment plaques decorated with triangles, rectangles, bead-and-reel moulding and tongue pattern, and the probably painted raking simae, adorned with triangles and rectangles, exhibit close typological and functional parallels with architectural terracottas from Larisa in the Aeolis region. This suggests that the architectural terracottas used in a building constructed at Sinope may have been produced by a workshop based in the Aeolian region. These fragments, which can be dated to the last quarter of the sixth century BC, make it possible to form an idea of the appearance of the earliest roof of Sinope decorated with architectural terracotta elements identified to date.

**Özet**
Sinop'ta 2021 yılında gerçekleştirilen kazılar sırasında bulunan sekiz pişmiş toprak mimari parça bu çalışmanın konusunu oluşturmaktadır. Levhalı yatay simalar ve eğimli simalara ait olan bu parçalar, kentin Arkaik Dönem mimarisi ve atölye ilişkileri konusunda bilgiler sağlaması bakımından önemlidir. Üzerinde üçgenler, dikdörtgenler, inci-boncuk ve dil dizisi motifleri barındıran boyalı L şekilli kabartma levhalı yatay simalar ile üçgenler ve dikdörtgenler barındıran eğimli simalar hem stilistik ve tipolojik hem de işlevsel olarak Aeolis Bölgesi'nde yer alan Larisa'nın pişmiş toprak mimari örnekleriyle oldukça yakın benzerlikler göstermektedir. Sinope ile Aeolis örneklerinin arasındaki çarpıcı benzerlikler, Sinope'de inşa edilmiş anıtsal nitelikte bir yapının pişmiş toprak mimari malzemelerinin Aeolis Bölgesi'nde faaliyet gösteren bir üretim atölyesi tarafından özel olarak hazırlanmış olabileceğine işaret etmektedir. MÖ 6. yüzyılın son çeyreğine tarihlenebilen bu eserler, Sinope'nin pişmiş toprak mimari elemanlarla süslenmiş ve şimdiye dek tespit edilebilmiş en eski çatısının görünümüne dair bir fikir edinmeyi mümkün kılmaktadır.

Wood was the primary roofing material used in ancient buildings. Although inexpensive and easily available, it posed major challenges due to its limited durability and short lifespan. To protect wooden roofs from weather, rain and fire over long periods, roof tiles and architectural terracottas – such as geison, sima and antefixes – were the most essential materials. Roof tiles made by shaping and firing clay came into common use in Greece from the second quarter of the seventh century BC and in Anatolia from the late seventh century BC. In addition to roof tiles, architectural terracotta plaques were applied to façades in order to shield buildings from rain, fire and other harsh conditions (Åkerström 1973: 319–20; Ateşlier 2010: 225–26).

Beyond their protective role, architectural terracottas gradually took on a decorative and symbolic function. They often served as indicators of prestige in palaces, reception halls of wealthy rulers or temples dedicated to the city's deities. Their wide range of decorative schemes – figurative, animal, vegetal and geometric – functioned as visual propaganda, expressing the power and prosperity of the building's patron or the city itself. It is generally



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accepted that architectural terracottas were produced in workshops based in major urban centres, with craftsmen travelling to other cities on commission rather than exporting finished pieces (Ateşlier 2010: 227). These itinerant workshops were concentrated mainly in western Anatolia, where the practice of decorating roofs with terracotta plaques first emerged in coastal cities, later spreading inland and gaining popularity across the region. Production was particularly intense in Ionia, Aeolis, Phrygia and Lydia (Ateşlier 2010: 226). Typological similarities among architectural terracottas from northwestern Anatolian cities – such as Larisa, Temnos, Phocaea, Neandria, Kebren and Sardis – indicate a shared decorative tradition in the region, especially during the second half of the sixth century BC (Öncü 2013: 253–55). This western Anatolian tradition of decorating monumental roofs with architectural terracottas also had a strong influence in northern Anatolia, with Sinope emerging as a particularly notable centre (Åkerström 1973: 320–21; Billot 2012).

Situated on the southern coast of the Black Sea, Sinope occupies a strategic position on a peninsula (modern Boztepe) that projects into the sea and connects to the mainland. In antiquity, the city's importance derived from its natural harbours, which supported a thriving commercial life and ensured its continuous occupation and prosperity over centuries. The abundance of architectural terracotta fragments decorated with animal, vegetal, geometric and figural motifs attests to Sinope's rich and sophisticated decorative programme. Particularly significant in this regard are the architectural terracottas discovered during excavations conducted by Ekrem Akurgal and Ludwig Budde in the city centre (Akurgal, Budde 1956: 28–29). These include lateral sima fragments with Ionic cyma and bead-and-reel mouldings, antefixes shaped as female heads, and palmettes and lion-headed waterspouts. These terracottas, which can be classified into distinct groups, are generally dated to the Classical and Hellenistic periods. However, their typological and stylistic features imply earlier prototypes, a view supported by archaeological evidence. Among the finds from these excavations, two fragments are especially important: a plaque fragment and an antefix in the form of a gorgon head (Akurgal, Budde 1956: 27–32, taf. VIII–IX; Budde 1956: 5–6). These represent the earliest evidence of Archaic architectural terracotta decoration in Sinope (Akurgal, Budde 1956: 28; Billot 2012: 219–21). Although these examples are the city's earliest known specimens, their small size and fragmentary condition make it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the architecture or the function of the structures to which they belonged.

In this context, the eight architectural terracotta fragments examined in this study offer new and more detailed evidence. All originate from the roof of an ancient building, and have been divided into two analytical groups: Group I, consisting of revetment plaques and lateral sima fragments; and Group II, which most likely represents raking sima fragments. These materials provide the first archaeological dataset to document the earliest architectural terracottas from Sinope. They also offer the clearest information to date on the roof design, technical characteristics and general appearance of an Archaic-period building. The fragments were examined comprehensively from typological and stylistic perspectives. Their form, function, clay fabric, colour, decorative motifs and manufacturing techniques were analysed in detail. Based on this study, a hypothetical reconstruction of the arrangement of the lateral simae along the side façades of the building was produced, relying exclusively on the surviving fragments.

**Excavations and finds**

The architectural terracottas were discovered during excavations conducted by the Sinop Archaeological Museum from 5–12 January 2021, in the Sinop Kefevi (İncedayı) District, Block 88, Parcel 14. The finds came to light during the demolition and clearance of a two-storey house, when two trial trenches were opened. In Trench 1, excavation reached a depth of about 3.5m. At this level, fragments of architectural terracotta were found together with various pottery groups, numerous pan tiles, weights, shells and animal bones, all lying in the same layer and in a mixed context.

The pottery assemblage represents a long chronological sequence extending from the Archaic to the Late Roman period. The main groups include East Greek painted wares, pottery produced in Phrygia and Lydia, as well as Archaic and Classical Attic pottery. Particularly noteworthy are the Phrygian jug fragments, decorated in black or dark brown with single or double wavy lines, although these are few in number. Monochrome-slipped Lydian pottery, in shades ranging from orange-red to brown, is represented mainly by jugs and oinochoai. Among the East Greek painted wares of the Archaic period are plate fragments with meander motifs along the inner rim, while Ionian-style kylixes with fine band decoration on the exterior form another significant group. Locally produced black-slipped wares imitating Attic pottery, dated to the Classical period, are represented by kylixes, kraters, plates and bowls. The Hellenistic assemblage includes band-decorated bowls of Halys Basin origin, black-glazed bowls, fish plates and table amphorae. Glossy black and grey bowls, jugs, outward-curving bowls and plates dated to the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods are also present. Of particular interest is the group of terra sigillata dated to the second and third centuries AD, characterised by thin walls and fabrics ranging in colour from orange to red, appearing in both stamped and plain varieties. Thin-



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walled Roman mugs are also represented. From the Hellenistic to the Early Byzantine periods, numerous cooking, transportation and storage vessels, such as casseroles, pots, jugs, pithoi and amphorae, were in use and are well-represented among the finds. Unfortunately, no group of finds – such as Aeolian pottery – can be directly associated with the architectural terracottas that would allow for further interpretation.

The area where the architectural terracottas were uncovered does not represent the building's original location. Historical evidence and modern observations suggest that this zone was originally a coastal inlet, later transformed into an artificial fill about 2–3m high, created by the dumping of soil and debris from various excavations, particularly during the 1980s (Baki, Ergun 2017: 94–95, the area labelled 'Old Market Place' in fig. 6 and the area to its south). The finds from these deposits, spanning a wide chronological range from the Archaic to the Late Roman periods, suggest that the area was not used in a single phase but saw multiple episodes of activity, more plausibly serving as a refuse deposit. Excavations in nearby areas have yielded scattered and unrelated materials from different periods, further supporting the interpretation that the zone functioned as a dumping ground, both in antiquity and modern times. However, the dense coverage of modern buildings and the absence of systematic excavations make it difficult to determine its precise function.

When the architectural terracottas lost their original use, the frieze sections bearing iconographic scenes were likely removed for reuse as decorative elements in other buildings, then deliberately broken and discarded. The consistent breakage patterns and the absence of figurative fragments among the excavated material support this view. The mixed nature of the finds and their broad chronological span indicate that refuse from different periods was deposited together, forming a secondary deposit accumulated through successive phases of disposal.

**Architectural terracottas: Group I**

Four fragments within this group belong to revetment plaques (Fig. 1a-d; cat. nos 1–4). The plaques are adorned with cutout triangles along the top, and immediately below runs a row of tongues (also known as Doric cyma or leaf), featuring a cavetto profile, bordered at the bottom by a torus. Small leaves with pointed tips are positioned between the tongues. All of these fragments are coated with a dusky red slip (10R 3/2).[1] The contours of the triangles and leaves, as well as the wide outer bands of the tongues, measuring 0.5cm in width, are painted in pale brown (2.5Y 8/3). The pale brown paint on the wide bands around the tongues extends downward, creating a reel-like decoration on the torus (Fig. 1b-c). All of the plaques were broken beneath the torus, and no traces of the flat plaque decorated with reliefs were found during the excavations.

Within this group, the terracotta fragment preserved in two pieces belongs to a lateral sima (Fig. 2a-b; cat. no. 5). At the top of the fragment, there is a bead-and-reel moulding consisting of a square-shaped bead followed by two reels, the reels painted in pale brown on the dusky red slip. On the reverse side of the fragment, there is a supporting section extending backwards from the bottom (Fig. 2c). Beneath the bead-and-reel moulding, a round waterspout is located for draining rainwater. The 2.3cm-high flat section (lower fascia) at the bottom is decorated with a row of rectangles painted in pale brown on a dusky red slip, thereby creating a geometric pattern. The background of the fragment is painted in the same brown.

**Architectural terracottas: Group II**

The three terracotta fragments in this group may belong to raking simae (Fig. 3a-c; cat. nos 6–8). The uppermost part of the fragments, which is 2.2cm thick, is decorated with a row of rectangles painted in pale brown (2.5Y 8/3), very dusky red (7.5R 2.5/3) and reddish black (2.5YR 2.5/1) colours. The 5cm-high section at the top of the fragments is further adorned with a row of triangles, painted in the same pale brown, very dusky red and reddish black colours on a dusky red slip. Both the triangles and rectangles are outlined with incised lines. The reverse sides of the fragments have concave profiles of varying depths and widths, and are painted pale brown (Fig. 3a, c).

**Form and function**

All the fragments, which share consistent features in slip, paint, form and decorative technique, once belonged to the roof of an ancient building. The presence of a waterspout on one sima fragment (Fig. 2) confirms its identification as a lateral sima used along the sides of the roof. The revetment plaque fragments (Fig. 1) were probably connected to these lateral simae by friezes extending below the torus, forming wide, flat bands decorated with figurative motifs. The broken lower edges of the plaques (2.6–2.7cm thick) match precisely the thickness of the upper edge of the lateral sima, confirming their structural connection (Fig. 4).

Taken together, this evidence shows that all fragments assigned to Group I are related and initially formed part of an L-shaped lateral sima with revetment plaques, positioned along the lateral sides of the roof (Fig. 5a-b). The Group II fragments, with concave reverse profiles, also appear to have belonged to the same building, as their painting and decoration closely match those of the lateral simae. The varying depth and size of the concave profiles

[1] Munsell Soil Colour Charts, 2015.



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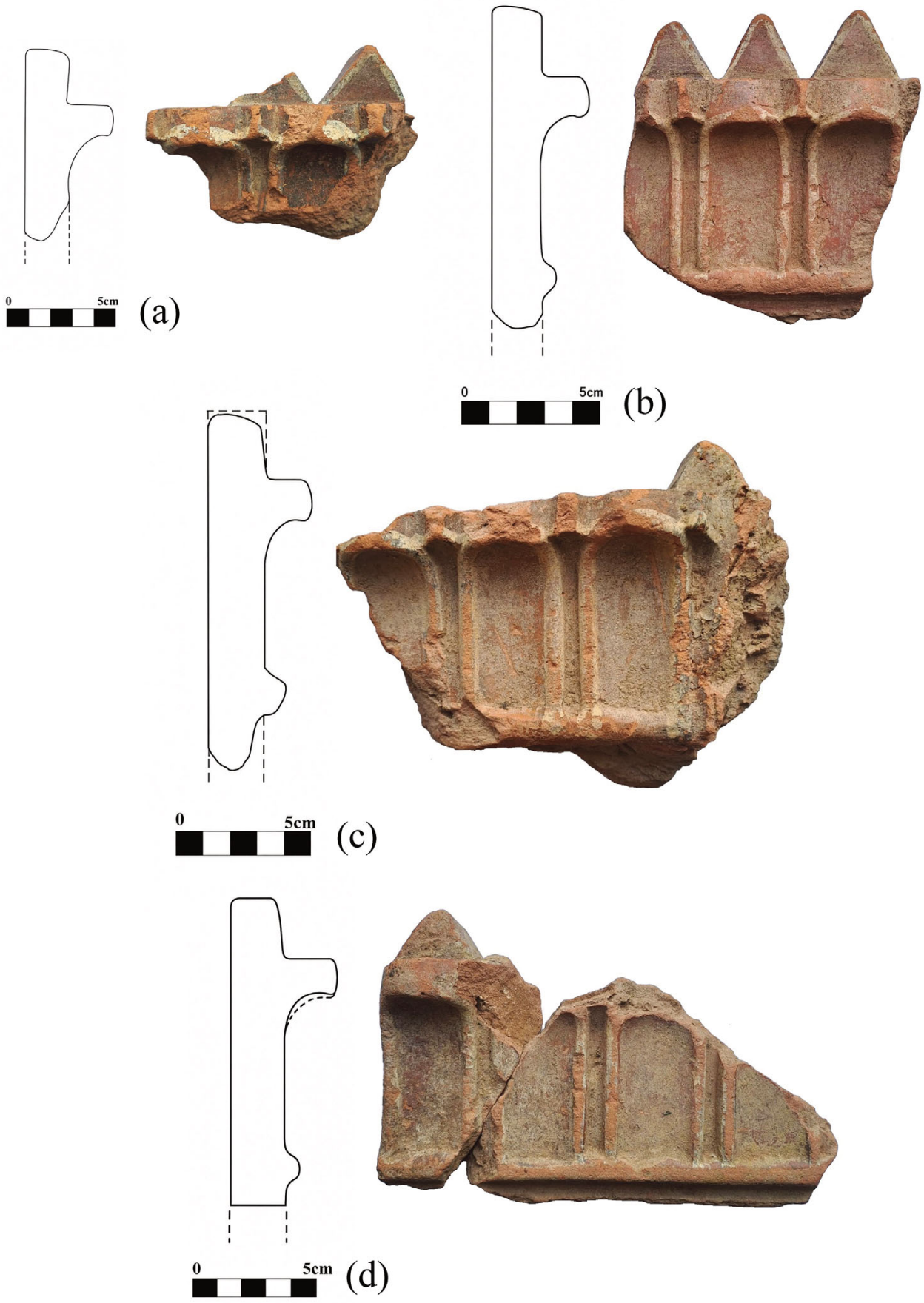


*Figure 1. Fragments of revetment plaques from Sinope (Group I) (photos and drawings by author).*



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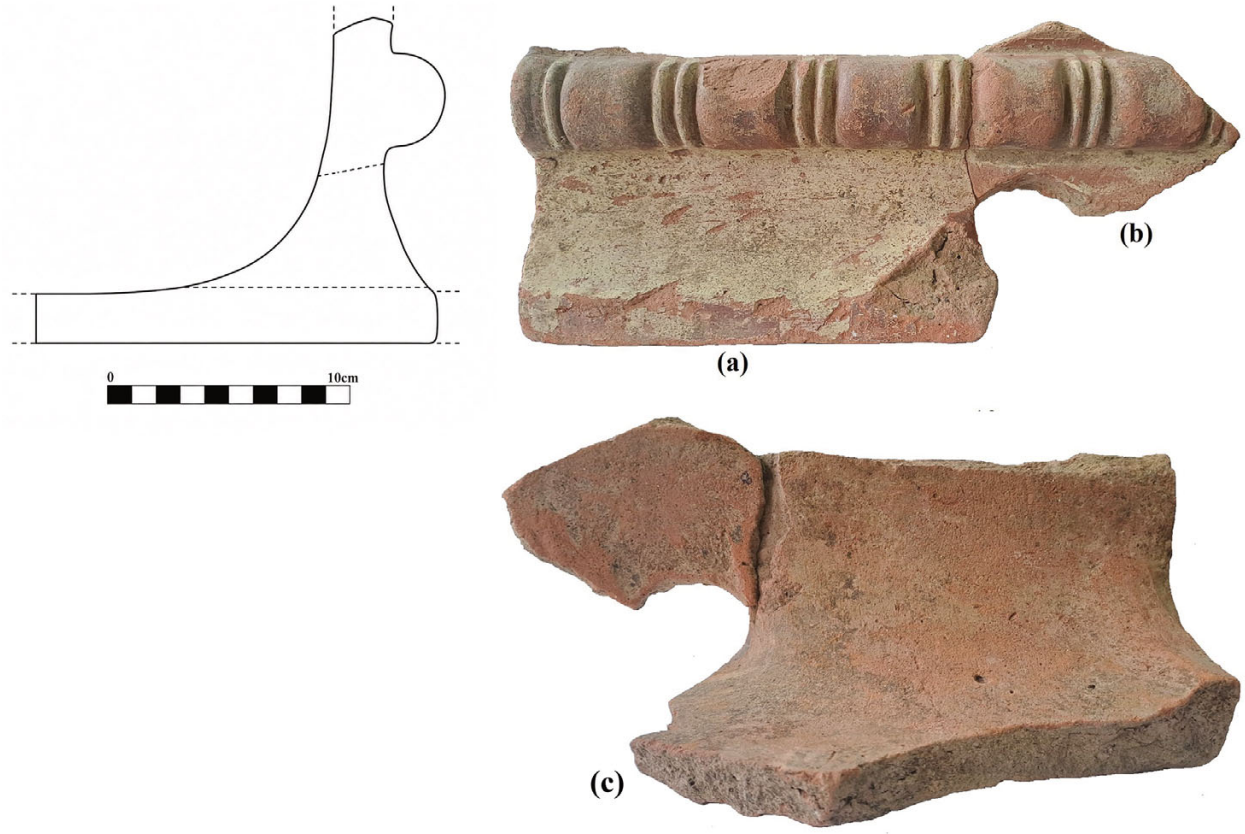


*Figure 2. Lateral sima fragment from Sinope, preserved in two pieces (Group I) (photos and drawing by author).*

suggest that these fragments were not placed beneath the simae or used as horizontal geison revetment plaques. Instead, they were most likely mounted on the façade as raking simae, shaped to follow the slope of the roof and fitted at different points along it. Comparable fragments from Sardis, decorated with triangular motifs and featuring a drainage channel on the reverse, were identified by Åkerström as an 'abacus of a plaque crowning' (Fig. 13) (Åkerström 1966: 79, no. 36, abb. 25) and 'part of the profile of a sima' (Åkerström 1966: 78–79, no. 34, abb. 24:2, taf. 51:2). These fragments probably bore wide, flat plaques with figurative decoration similar to those on the lateral sides, although none were recovered during excavation. Due to the limited evidence, however, the precise arrangement of the terracottas on the façade cannot yet be reconstructed.

The building that employed both lateral and raking simae had a gabled roof. Numerous tile fragments were uncovered during the excavations (Fig. 6). Although all pan tiles (stroter or keramis) share a wide, flat form, 2.3–2.8cm thick, they display considerable variation in fabric and flange height. This variation makes it difficult to determine whether they belonged to the terracotta-decorated building and even suggests they may have come from different structures. Nevertheless, the dusky red slip coating the upper surfaces of several fragments indicates that some painted tiles were probably used on the same roof as the architectural terracotta elements (Fig. 6a-d). One fragment has an astragal-profiled edge tab, 0.8cm high (Fig. 6b). No information is available regarding the cover tiles.

These flat, wide tiles suggest that the roof may have been built in either the Corinthian style or in a hybrid form (Åkerström 1966: 119, abb. 64: 1–3). Based on established Greek roofing systems, it can be assumed that the architectural terracottas were used within a timber-framed structure. In such a system, the ridge beam and purlins ran parallel to the building's long axis, forming the framework for the rafters, battens and sheathing. The lateral simae were set on the geison, which supported the rafters along the roof's sides (Fig. 5b). Once nailed to the geison, the simae were firmly fixed in place. The pan tiles were then laid side by side, resting on the rearward-extending support of the lateral simae, while the astragal-profiled edge tabs ensured proper interlocking (Fig. 6b). Similarly, the raking simae were probably attached to the façade rafters and secured with nails.

**Production, clay, colouration and decoration**

The similarity of the cutout triangles and the row of tongues suggests that moulds of the same type were used to produce all the fragments. However, slight dimensional



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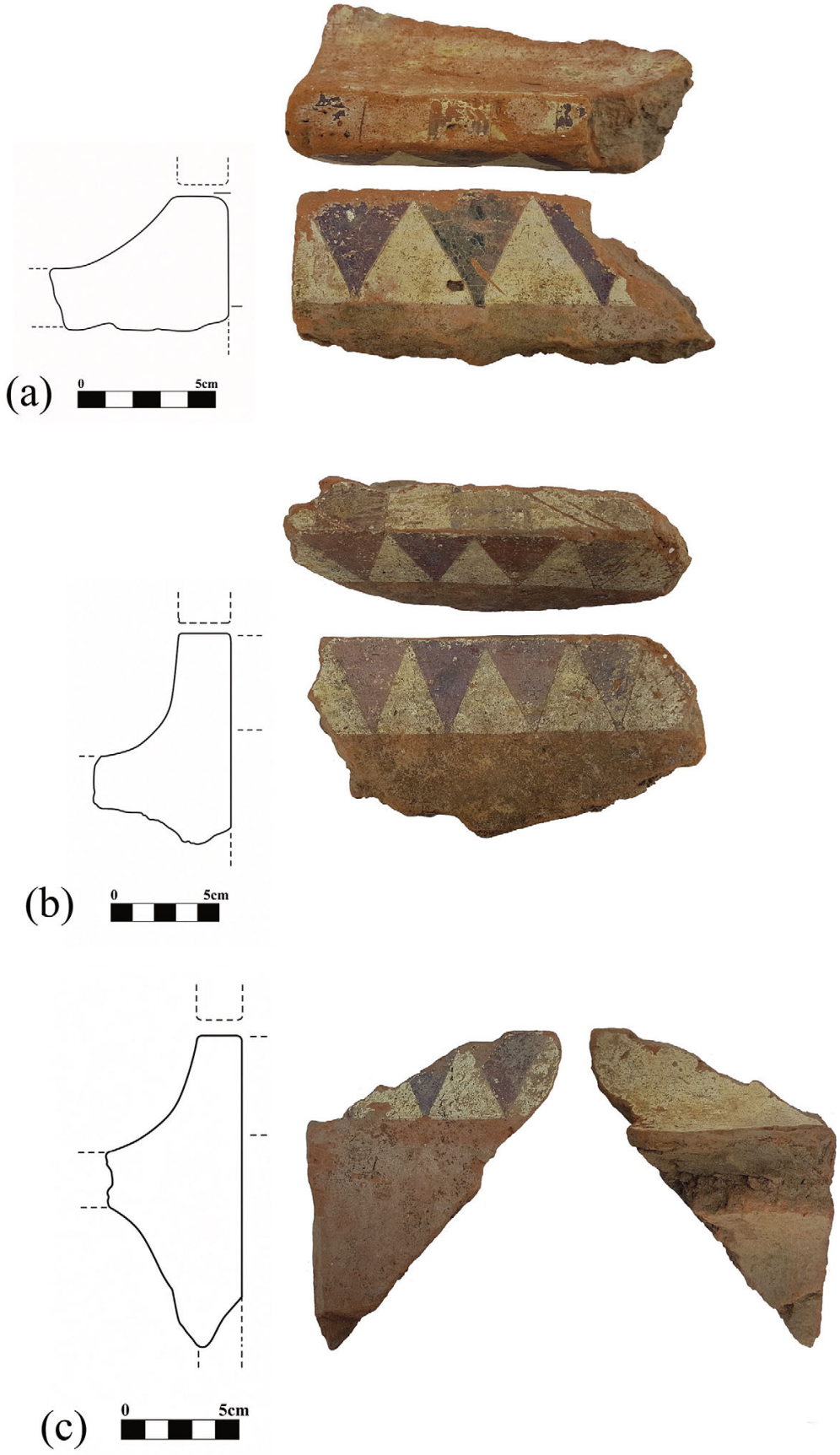


*Figure 3. Architectural terracotta fragments from Sinope, probably belonging to raking simae (Group II) (photos and drawings by author).*



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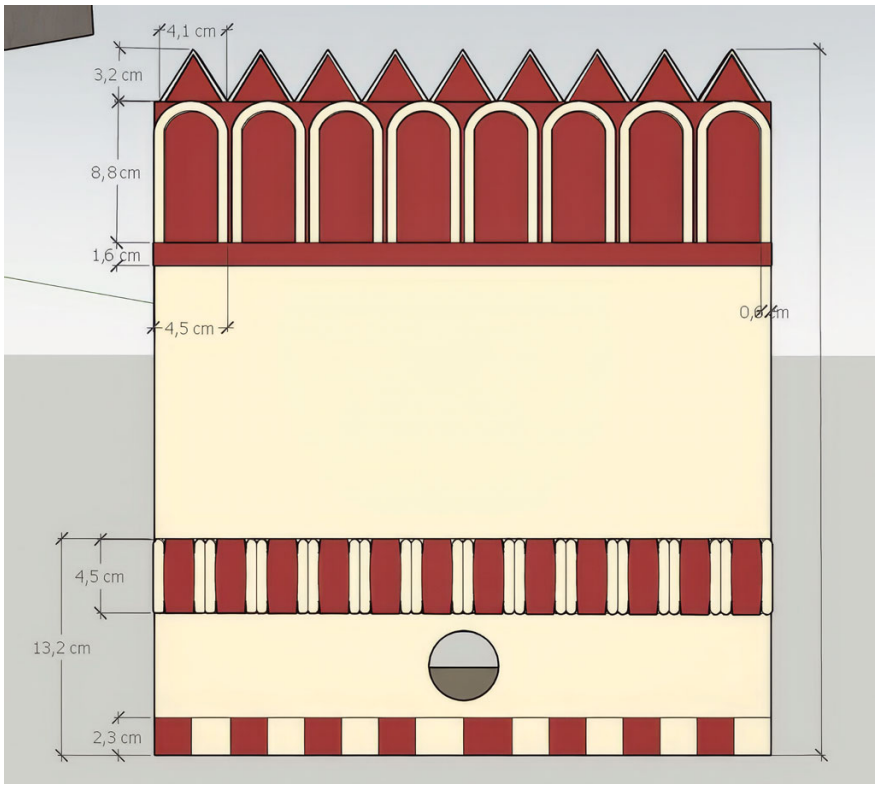


*Figure 4. Possible reconstruction of a lateral sima with revetment plaque (drawing by author, based on fragments in Group I [Fig. 1b] and a lateral sima fragment [Fig. 2]; not to scale, frieze height hypothetical).*

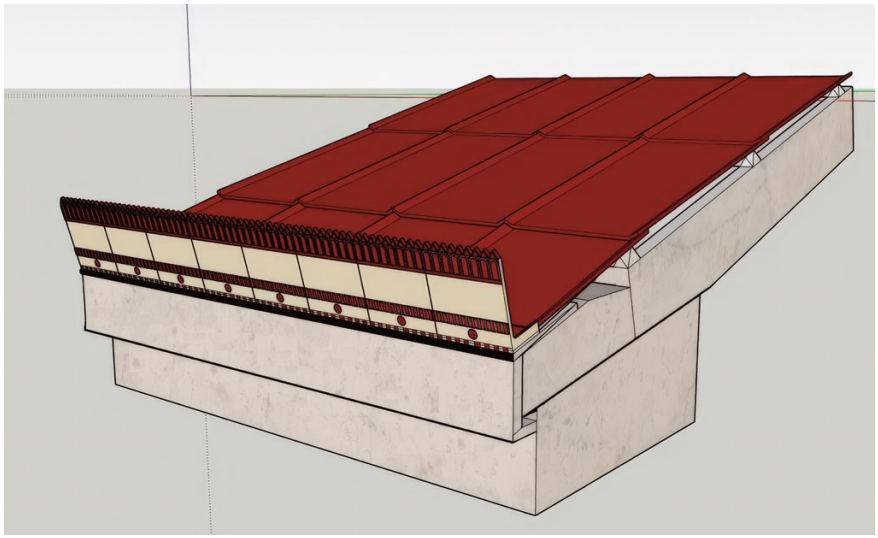

*Figure 5a. Possible reconstruction of the lateral side of the roof decorated with architectural terracottas (drawing by author, based on the L-shaped lateral simae with revetment plaques and coloured pan tiles discussed in this study; roof structure hypothetical and not to scale; design of the supporting elements inspired by A. Rheeder 2019, fig. 2).*

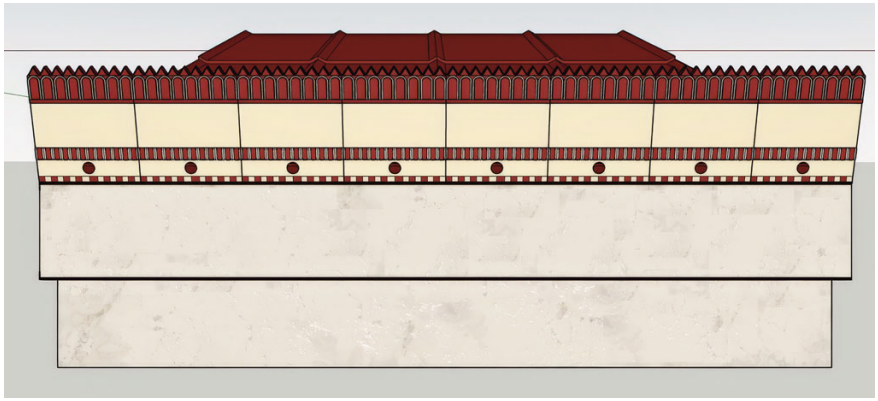

*Figure 5b. Possible reconstruction of the lateral side of the roof decorated with architectural terracottas (drawing by author, based on the material discussed in this study; roof structure hypothetical and not to scale).*



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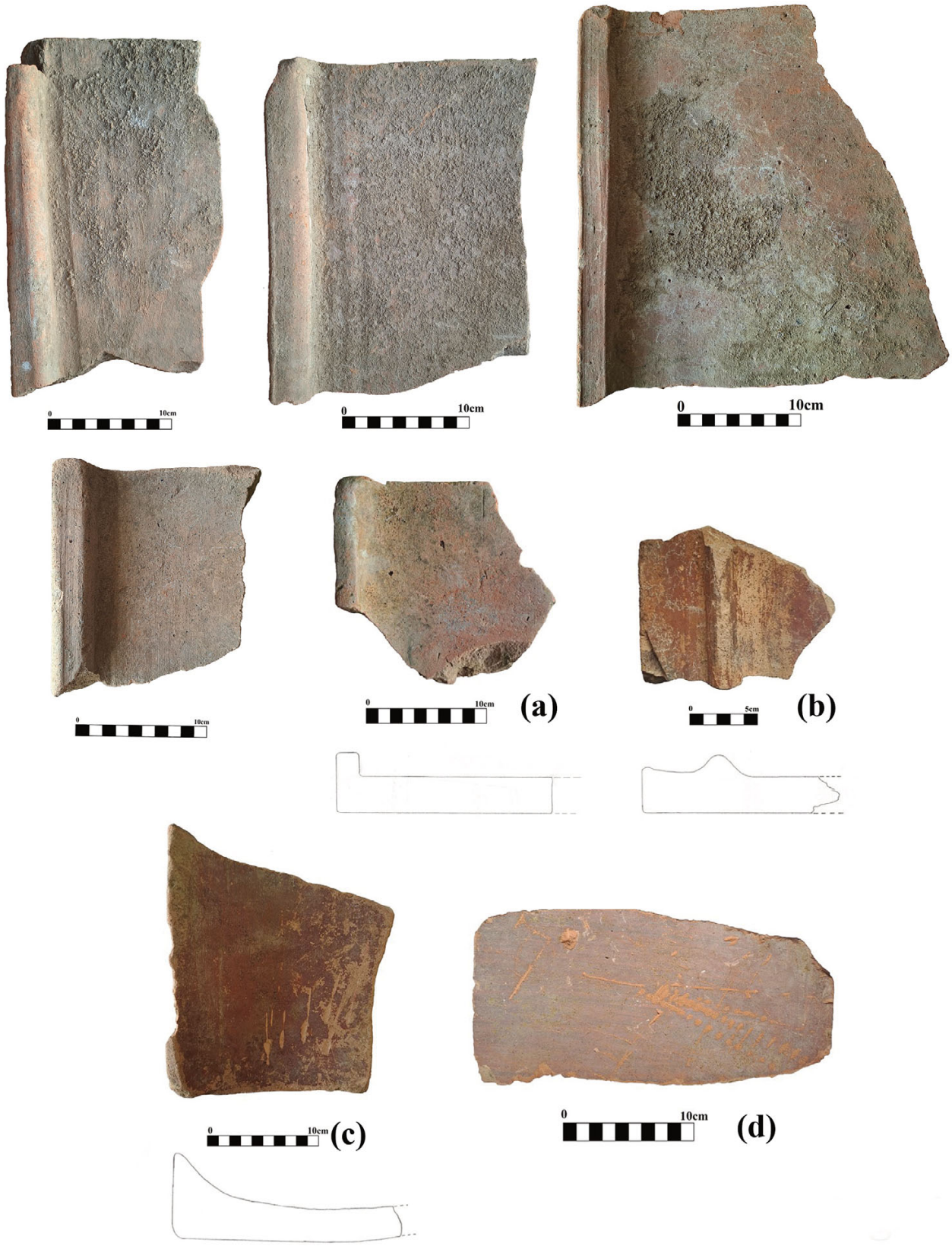


*Figure 6. Fragments of pan tiles from Sinope (photos and drawings by author).*



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and profile differences indicate that moulds of the same type but from different generations were employed simultaneously. For example, in the fourth fragment of Group I, the wide bands around the tongues and the torus lines have sharp, well-defined edges, showing that a first-generation mould taken directly from the prototype was used (Fig. 1d). In contrast, the softer contours on the remaining fragments suggest that they were made using later-generation moulds. The subtle variations in the height of the triangles on the second fragment of Group I (Fig. 1b; cat. no. 2) may also point to the use of multiple moulds during production, perhaps reflecting technical issues encountered during moulding or drying.

The primary inclusions in the clay are calcite, sand and a few small grits. None of the fragments contains pyroxene, which was commonly used as a temper in Sinope's terracottas, or mica. The clay of all fragments is red (2.5YR 5/6), though some display clear variations in composition, particularly in firing quality. The fabrics of the Group II fragments are generally unevenly fired, displaying distinct colour variations (2.5YR 5/6 red and 2.5YR 5/4 reddish brown) and irregular colour distribution, resulting from uneven heat exposure during firing. Temperature variations appear to have led to distortions and asymmetries in the size, shape and profiles of the fragments. For example, technical issues during firing appear to have caused deformations in Group I, fragment 3, resulting in its uneven firing, increased thickness and slight variations in overall appearance and measurements (Fig. 1c). These technological problems likely stemmed from factors such as the clay's origin and preparation, the duration of firing, and temperature control. In the Group II fragments (Fig. 3c), a high proportion of calcite temper (1–2mm particles) suggests deliberate tempering to improve workability and minimise cracking (Rice 1987: 97–98, 229).

Both relief and painting techniques were used to create the decorations. The vegetal (tongues and leaves) and geometric motifs (bead-and-reels, triangles and rectangles) are visually well-balanced. For example, the cutout triangles at the top of the Group I fragments correspond visually with the painted triangles on the Group II fragments. Similarly, the painted rectangles complement each other in their arrangement. All fragments are coated with a dusky red slip (10R 3/2), and the upper surfaces of some pan tiles show the same colouring (Fig. 6a-d). Pale brown (2.5Y 8/3) was used to emphasise and highlight the decoration, for example, in outlining the triangles and leaves, and in the wide outer bands of the tongues in Group I. The reels were also painted in pale brown. The same tone was used for geometric motifs, such as the rectangles along the flat section at the bottom of the lateral sima (Fig. 2). In Group II, triangles and rectangles were painted in the same brown, together with shades of red, including very dusky red and reddish black (Fig. 3). The background of the lateral sima and the reverse sides of all raking simae were also painted in pale brown. Given this consistency, it is highly likely that the backgrounds of the revetment plaques were painted in the same colour. The geometric motifs were outlined with incised lines.

All of the plaques were broken beneath the torus, and no traces of the flat plaques decorated with reliefs were found during the excavations. Similarly, no evidence survives for the form of the spouts.

**Typology**

The typologies of the architectural terracotta fragments in Groups I and II offer valuable insight into Sinope's architectural production and the cultural influences that shaped it. Typological and functional parallels, particularly the revetment plaques decorated with triangles and tongues, can be seen at Larisa, while comparable decorative schemes are also known from Temnos and Phocaea in Aeolis.

The terracotta revetment plaques unearthed at Larisa during the 1902–1904 and 1932–1934 excavations represent key examples of Aeolian architectural decoration. Some are now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, while others are kept in the Medelhavs Museum in Stockholm. The plaques depicting a chariot race scene are closely related in both decoration and typology. This group has been studied by Kjellberg (1940: 33–53, frieze II–IV), Åkerström (1966: 48–50, group 3: frieze II–III), and Öncü (2013: 112–15, type SA-Y-III). These plaques, pierced with holes for attachment to the geison, feature cutout triangles along the top, concave tongues bordered by wide bands, and bead-and-reel mouldings at the bottom (Winter 1993: 245).[2] They are typologically identical to the Group I fragments from Sinope (Kjellberg 1940: taf. 5, frieze II; taf. 8–10, frieze III; Åkerström 1966: taf. 22:1, 23:1, 33, 34:1; Öncü 2013: pls XXXVII–XXXVIII). In these examples, coated in cream-coloured paint, the triangles were painted black, while the tongues alternated between black and reddish black, or black and cream. The cream-coloured paint in the wide bands surrounding the tongues continued downwards to the torus, creating a reel-like decoration – a feature also visible in the Sinope examples (Kjellberg 1940: abb. 8, frieze II; Öncü 2013: SA-Y-IIIb, pl. XXXVIII).[3] Kjellberg dated this group to 600–560 BC, Åkerström to 530–520 BC and Öncü to 540–520 BC (Kjellberg 1940: 148; Åkerström 1966: 54–61; Öncü 2013: 115). Although the Larisa and Sinope fragments are typo-

[2] For an illustration, see Kjellberg 1940: 35, abb. 8, frieze II.

[3] For an illustration, see Öncü 2013: 384, SA30, SA-Y-III-b, pl. XXXVIII.



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| Comparative example | Documentation (references/ illustrations) | Triangle height (colour) | Tongue height (colour) | Torus height | Plaque background colour |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Larisa example 1<br>Revetment plaque fragment from Larisa with cut-out triangles and a row of tongues, decorated with a chariot-race scene. | -Kjellberg 1940: taf. 2.<br>-Öncü 2013: SA-Y-IIIa, pl. XXXVII. | 4.4cm (black) | 7.6cm (black-reddish black) | 1.4cm | light |
| Larisa example 2<br>Revetment plaque fragment from Larisa with cut-out triangles and a row of tongues, decorated with a chariot-race scene. | -Kjellberg 1940: frieze II, taf. 5.<br>-Åkerström 1966: taf. 22: 1.<br>-Öncü 2013: SA-Y-IIIb, pl. XXXVIII. | 4.1cm (black) | 6.9cm (black-cream) | 1.1cm | light |
| Larisa example 3<br>Revetment plaque from Larisa with cut-out triangles, decorated with a chariot-race scene | -Åkerström 1966: taf. 33:1, 2; 34:1.<br>-Öncü 2013: SA-Y-V, pl. XLIII. | (black) | 7.7cm (black-yellowish red) | - | dark |
| Sinope 1<br>(Fig. 1a) | | 3.2cm (dusky red) | - (dusky red) | | light* |
| Sinope 2<br>(Fig. 1b) | | 3.2cm, 3.4cm, 3.6cm (dusky red) | 8.8cm (dusky red) | 1.6cm | light* |
| Sinope 3<br>(Fig. 1c) | | 3.1cm (dusky red) | 8.6cm (dusky red) | 1. 8cm | light* |
| Sinope 4<br>(Fig. 1d) | | 2.8cm (dusky red) | 8.7cm (dusky red) | 1.4cm | light* |

*Table 1. Comparison of size and colour in architectural terracotta fragments from Larisa and Sinope (*based on the pale brown background colour of the lateral sima fragments).*

logically similar, they differ in dimensions and colouring (see Tab. 1, Larisa examples 1–2).

Functionally comparable examples of lateral simae with revetment plaques are also known from Larisa. Åkerström classified this group as 'Group 4', describing it as technically advanced, elaborate and artistically refined (Åkerström 1966: 50, 61–63, taf. 33:1–2, 34:1).[4] The same group was later discussed by Winter as 'Type I, variant 2' (Winter 1993: 244) and by Öncü as 'Type V' (Öncü 2013: 116–23, SA-Y-V, pls. XLII–XLIII). These L-shaped lateral simae consist of a flat plaque decorated in relief with a chariot race scene set against a dark background, crowned by cutout triangles and tongues painted alternately in black and yellowish red. Although they share the same theme as other Larisa plaques, they differ in moulding, being distinguished by the addition of simae beneath the plaques.[5] This section, framed by a torus above and below, includes waterspouts in the form of lion or seal heads. The plaques measure about 49cm in width and 43cm in height (Öncü 2013: 122). Åkerström dated this group to the last quarter of the sixth century BC, while Öncü proposed 525–500

[4] For illustrations, see Öncü 2013: SA-Y-V, pl. XLIII; 393, SA42, SA-Y-V-c, pl. XLIII.

[5] For an illustration, see Åkerström 1966: taf. 34: 1.



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BC (Åkerström 1966: 61–63; Öncü 2013: 123). Winter, following a reevaluation of the associated pottery from the megaron where the fragments were found, dated the building to the early fifth century BC (ca 490/480 BC) (Winter 1993: 244).

Although functionally similar, the Sinope examples differ from those of Larisa in profile, dimensions, fabric, clay, and colouring (Tab. 1, Larisa example 3). For instance, while the Larisa plaques end with a torus (Öncü 2013: taf. XLIII), the Sinope fragment terminates with a fascia decorated with painted rectangles (Fig. 2). The relative heights of the triangles and tongues also differ between the two groups.

Further parallels can be found in Temnos in Aeolis, where examples feature cutout triangles at the top and a row of tongues, as well as a reel-like decoration along the torus (Åkerström 1966: 37–41, taf. 13:1, 14:6, 15:1, 3, 5).[6] The flat plaques are decorated with Anatolian panthers, gorgon heads, lotus and palmettes, either in relief or painted, and date to the late sixth century BC (Åkerström 1966: 40–41). Additional parallels are found at Phocaea, where architectural terracotta fragments linked to the Temple of Athena display similar tongues (Akkurnaz 2013: 52, pl. 9, fig. 4). These similarities have been interpreted as evidence that the lateral simae of Larisa and Phocaea were produced from the same or closely related moulds (Öncü 2013: 249).

The closest analogues to the Group II fragments are likewise from Larisa and Sardis. The raking sima fragments from Larisa, arranged as revetment plaques and decorated with triangles, tongues and chariot race scenes, offer a particularly useful comparison (Öncü 2013: 126–38). In some examples, the triangular motifs were also rendered in paint (Kjellberg 1940: 31–33, taf. 1–2, frieze I; Åkerström 1966: taf. 25:3, 28:2; Öncü 2013: 132, cat. no. SA60, pl. L).[7] Further parallels occur at Sardis, where one fragment identified by Åkerström as the 'abacus of a plaque crowning' features triangles painted in purple-red and brown-black on a light background (Åkerström 1966: 79, no. 36, abb. 25).[8] Another, decorated in the same colours, was identified as 'part of the profile of a sima' (Åkerström 1966: 78–79, no. 34, abb. 24:2, taf. 51:2). Both fragments most likely belonged to raking simae.

Additionally, painted rectangles were a common geometric motif applied along the upper or lower edge profiles of architectural terracottas. This type of decoration is found on comparable examples from Miletus (Åkerström 1966: taf. 54:1), Sardis (Åkerström 1966: 74–75, abb. 23:a), Düver (Buzzi 2000: abb. 4–6) and Lampsacus (Åkerström 1966: 5, abb. 2–3).

**Dating**

The Group I fragments, defined as 'L-shaped lateral simae with revetment plaques', can be dated based on the typological features of their cutout triangles, tongues, and bead-and-reel mouldings. The triangles, frequently used in ancient architectural terracottas, appear in both relief and paint on lateral and raking simae, as well as on antefixes. Comparable examples occur in buildings from Thasos (Winter 1993: fig. 102, 103, 115), Neandria (Åkerström 1966: taf. 3, 4:1–2), Kebren (Ay 2021: cat. no. 81), Temnos (Åkerström 1966: taf. 15), Larisa (Åkerström 1966: taf. 19:1, 20:1, 22, 23, 26:1, 32:2, 33, 34:1), Sardis (Åkerström 1966: abb. 24:2, 25, taf. 51:2; Ramage 1978: fig. 34, 55, 56), and Akalan (Åkerström 1966: taf. 61).

Tongues with a cavetto profile are particularly significant. Simae with a forward-curving upper section form a cavetto profile, a design that originated in different parts of the Mediterranean. The earliest known examples appeared in northwestern Greece and later spread to southern Italy, Sicily, Etruria, Rome and Corinth (Winter 2022: 82–84). One of the earliest instances comes from the Temple of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, where a roof dated between 650 and 620 BC displays this feature (Winter 1993: 98–100). The example is crowned with a cutout triangular border, and the cavetto is decorated with incised and painted tongues alternating in black and purple-red, outlined in black (Winter 1993: 99, fig. 11a-b).

Examples with a cavetto profile, representing the earliest form of raking sima in Corinthian roof systems, are dated to around 580–570 BC. In these examples, the plaque features a cavetto, or, more rarely, a hawksbeak profile with a fascia, and sometimes a torus at the top. Below the cavetto, the decoration usually consists of painted tongues or guilloche patterns (Winter 1993: 33–34, fig. 5). Although regional variations exist, the use of tongues to decorate the cavetto is a consistent feature (Winter 2022: 83). This motif, executed in both paint and relief, was particularly common in the lateral and raking simae or geison revetment plaques of Archaic buildings in cities such as Athens (Winter 1993: figs 88–90), Delphi (Winter 1993: fig. 128), Olympia (Winter 1993: fig. 131) and Corcyra (Eran 2019: fig. III.96).

Combinations of triangles and tongues at the top of revetment plaques, as in the Sinope fragments, are also known elsewhere. Unlike the regional styles of mainland Greece, the lateral and raking simae with revetment plaques decorated with horsemen or chariot race scenes – both in form and ornamentation – derive mainly from East Greek traditions (Winter 1990: 30). Such plaques were widespread in the Aeolian region, and in nearby

[6] For an illustration, see Åkerström 1966: taf. 15: 1.

[7] For an illustration, see Öncü 2013: 406, SA60, SA-E-II, pl. L

[8] For an illustration, see Åkerström 1966: 79, no. 36, abb. 25.



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cities such as Neandria, Kebren, Phocaea and Sardis, and are generally dated to the last quarter of the sixth century BC. The lateral simae with revetment plaques from Larisa, decorated with horsemen or chariot races, provide the closest typological and functional parallels to the Sinope examples. Åkerström dated these to the last quarter of the sixth century BC, comparing them with Attic red-figure vase painting. He noted that the charioteer's posture recalls the stooped figures – such as athletes, comasts and hetaerae – depicted in the tondi of early red-figure bowls, and that the artists were influenced by early red-figure techniques and style (Åkerström 1966: 62–63). Similarly, Öncü dated this group to 525–500 BC, citing the realistic expression and use of perspective in the depictions of the charioteer and horses (Öncü 2013: 122–23). Although no figurative fragments have been recovered from the Sinope lateral simae with revetment plaques, the analogies with Larisa remain significant. The triangles and tongues on the Sinope fragments are typologically consistent with those from Larisa, and both groups share the same L-shaped form and dual function as revetment plaques and lateral simae. It is therefore likely that the Sinope examples were produced within the same period.

The square-shaped beads in the bead-and-reel moulding of the lateral sima fragment also support an Archaic date. Comparable mouldings with square beads occur in buildings at Assos (Åkerström 1966: taf. 5:2), Larisa (Åkerström 1966: taf. 31:1, 32:1–2) and Sardis (Åkerström 1966: taf. 51:1; Ramage 1978: fig. 51), all belonging to the Archaic period.

Considering the dating of these comparative examples, the Sinope architectural terracotta fragments, which belong to the same building, can be securely dated to the last quarter of the sixth century BC.

**Discussion**

The painted architectural terracotta fragments examined in this study provide crucial insights into architectural activity at Sinope and its connections with other workshops during the Archaic period. Before their discovery, only limited evidence for such materials had been documented. For example, an antefix in the form of a gorgon head and a fragment of a revetment plaque were unearthed by Akurgal and Budde (1956: 28). The antefix, characterised by a purplish hue and dark red slip (Akurgal, Budde 1956: 28, taf. X:b; Åkerström 1966: 119, taf. 60: 6; Billot 2012: 295–301, cat. 43, fig. 48), was dated to the mid-sixth century BC by Akurgal, Budde and Åkerström, while Billot reassigned it to the fourth century BC–Hellenistic period (Akurgal, Budde 1956: 28; Åkerström 1966: 118–19; Billot 2012: 295–301).

The revetment plaque fragment is especially significant. While it shares several features with the Group I fragments, such as tongues and small pointed leaves between them, it lacks the cutout triangles along the top edge.[9] Both Åkerström and Billot highlighted its resemblance to terracottas from Aeolis, northern Ionia and the northern Aegean (Åkerström 1966: 119; Billot 2012: 220–21). Åkerström dated it broadly to the sixth century BC based on parallels from Larisa and Miletus, whereas Billot suggested a more precise range of 560–530 BC. Although the fragment may be related to the examples analysed in this article, the available archaeological evidence remains insufficient to confirm a direct association.

As discussed under 'Typology', the Group I fragments exhibit strong typological and functional affinities with examples from Aeolis, particularly those from Larisa. This draws attention to the production activities of Aeolian workshops. Excavations at Larisa have revealed a major centre for architectural terracotta manufacture, with three distinct roof types constructed between 550 and 500 BC – each associated with monumental buildings on the Larisa Acropolis (Öncü 2013: 235–36). These buildings, possibly in-antis, prostylos or peripteros in plan, and all with gabled roofs, shared megaron-derived designs (Öncü 2013: 213). Their decorative repertoire included mythological scenes, symposia, chariot races and centauromachies, as well as animal, vegetal and geometric motifs. Lateral simae featured lion or seal-head spouts (Öncü 2013: 153–63). These buildings, interpreted as a Ruler's Palace, a Temple and a Reception Hall, are generally believed to have been connected with rulers under Persian influence (Lauter 1975: figs 2, 4; Öncü 2013: 211–14; Heinle 2015: 104; Öncü 2018: 189).

The Larisa workshop, active during the later sixth century BC, is thought to have produced terracottas for nearby centres such as Neandria, Kebren, Phocaea, Temnos and Sardis. Similarities between Phocaean examples (Akurgal 1962: 379, figs 24–25; Åkerström 1966: 34; Özyiğit 2003: 99; 2010: 72, fig. 2), and those from Larisa suggest that the same or related moulds were used (Öncü 2013: 254–55). Although Larisa yielded numerous finds, debate continues over its precise role within the regional manufacturing network. Some scholars propose Phocaea – a wealthy commercial hub – as the main production centre (Åkerström 1966: 200, 240; Ateşlier 2010: 226), though archaeological evidence for this remains inconclusive. Comparable parallels exist between Larisa and finds from Neandria (Åkerström 1966: 8–13) and Kebren (Åkerström 1966: 7–8; Öncü 2013: 49–51, 203, 249, pl. XCI), while chariot-race scenes from Sardis also mirror Larisa's iconography (Åkerström 1966: 70–72, taf. 39; Ramage 1978: 17–18, fig. 38; Öncü 2013: 139). Because

[9] For an illustration, see Akurgal, Budde 1956: pl. X: a.



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*Figure 7. Map showing cities where architectural terracottas have been discovered, illustrating their regional distribution (map adapted by author from Google Earth).*

terracotta is considerably more fragile than stone or marble, long-distance transport posed high risks. Therefore, craftsmen likely worked as itinerant artisans, travelling to construction sites and producing architectural elements locally (Ateşlier 2010: 227–28). Öncü (2013: 255–57) emphasised that the heavyweight and fragile nature of Larisa's terracottas would have made on-site production far more practical than transport. These itinerant artisans could thus have travelled not only within Aeolis but also to more distant areas.

The major western Anatolian cities, particularly Miletus and Phocaea, exerted substantial influence over the colonies they founded during the Archaic period. Motivated by exploration, trade, and the pursuit of natural resources – especially those of the Black Sea such as fish, grain, timber and metals – these cities established numerous colonies from the eighth century BC onwards (Greaves 2002: 104–09; Arslan 2006: 75–78; Tsetskhladze 2006: XXIII–XXXIII). These colonial foundations facilitated the establishment of new trade routes and patronage networks, thereby enhancing the region's economic and social development. Consequently, itinerant craftsmen from Ionia and Aeolis found opportunities for architectural work in cities along both the northern and southern coasts of the Black Sea.

In the northwestern colonies, Olbia Pontica (Bujskikh 2021), Borysthenes (Bujskikh, Chistov 2018), Leuke Island (Rusyaeva 2003), Histria (Zimmermann 1990) and Apollonia Pontica (Damyanov, Stoyanova 2019a), substantial numbers of terracottas have been found (Fig. 7). These include painted gorgon and palmette antefixes, geison slabs with Ionic cyma, frieze fragments, eaves and pan tiles. Their discovery in sanctuaries such as temples and altars has been interpreted both as evidence of shared architectural traditions among Milesian sister colonies and as possible imports from southern Ionian centres such as Miletus and Samos (Zimmermann 1990: 231; Rusyaeva 2003: 11; Bujskikh, Chistov 2018: 9–11; Damyanov, Stoyanova 2019a: 58; Bujskikh 2021: 62–4).

Finds from St Kirik (Cyricus) Island, probably dedicated to Apollo Ietros, protector of Miletus and Apollonia Pontica, are particularly instructive. They include gorgon antefixes, roof tiles resembling examples from Miletus and Didyma, and 19 frieze fragments depicting horsemen and hoplites. These friezes closely echo the chariot-race scenes from Larisa and the multi-figured compositions of the Clazomenae sarcophagi (Damyanov, Stoyanova 2019b: 64). From the late sixth to early fifth century BC, these colonies adopted comparable decorative styles for their sacred buildings, implying that many terracottas were imported from metropolitan centres or produced locally by relocated craftsmen (Åkerström 1966: 215). Locally made imitations inspired by imported examples are also likely to appear (Zimmermann 1990: 232). Similar mobility is observed in stone sculpture: Archaic statues from Olbia and Histria align with major workshops at Miletus, Samos and Rhodes, suggesting that sculptors themselves travelled to execute commissions (Vianu 2000: 35–36).

Parallel developments are visible in pottery production. Recent research indicates that the Black Sea's colonisation was not exclusively Milesian but multi-centred, involving diverse ethnic groups. Locally produced 'grey ware' found



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at Borysthenes, Histria, Olbia and Apollonia Pontica is linked to Aeolian traditions (Handberg 2013). Chemical analyses and workshop evidence support the idea that Aeolian potters participated directly in colonisation. Handberg (2013: 3, 10–11) dates their arrival to the late seventh–early sixth century BC, possibly from Lesbos to Histria, where they established grey ware production. The influence of Lydian expansion in prompting this movement remains uncertain.

Furthermore, during the mid-sixth century BC, Persian expansion under Cyrus the Great compelled many Ionian artisans – especially Phocaeans – to migrate westward (Herodotus I.163–167; Morel 2006: 409). Their technical knowledge of terracotta roofing systems profoundly shaped Etruscan architecture, as craftsmen transmitted design and decorative innovations from Phocaea, Larisa and Sardis to Italy (Winter 2017: 137–38; Graffeo, Lulof 2019: 61; Winter 2023: 129–41). One Caeretan hydria, for instance, is generally attributed to an Ionian craftsman who settled at Caere after fleeing the Persians (Anderson 1955: 6).

Based on this evidence, it seems plausible that similar interaction and itinerancy of craftsmen also occurred along the southern coast of the Black Sea. Archaeological evidence supports this interpretation. Åkerström (1973: 320–21) argued that Greek craftsmen transmitted terracotta-roofing practices via maritime routes connecting the northern and southern shores, which he termed the 'Pontic–Anatolian route' or 'sea route'. The most compelling evidence for this comes from Sinope and the Halys Basin settlements to its east, including Akalan, Köyiçi and Pazarlı.

At Akalan Citadel, 16km west of Samsun, excavations have revealed roof tiles, lateral simae and revetment plaques dating back to the late sixth century BC. Lateral simae show lions and panthers flanking a central spout, with painted torus and abacus (Åkerström 1966: 122–23, taf. 61: 1–2); comparable motifs occur at Miletus and on Fikellura vases (Summerer 2008: 265). Another group depicts the 'Pholos adventure of Heracles', rendered across at least four plaques using different moulds, a unique narrative composition within the corpus (Åkerström 1966: 123–24, 234–35, taf. 64–65, abb. 37). Summerer (2008: 266) argued that such mythological scenes were inspired by imported Greek pottery and reflected the owner's desire to distinguish himself and demonstrate familiarity with Greek culture. Other Akalan plaques include hunting friezes and guilloche–palmette, guilloche–chevron and guilloche-and-button band motifs (Åkerström 1966: 122–23; Yılmaz 2024). Åkerström attributed these to Ionian importation (Åkerström 1966: 121–33, 191–94), though others compare them to examples from Midas, Gordion and Pazarlı (Dönmez 2004: 69–71). At Köyiçi Tepesi, on Lake Ladik's northwestern shore, a rich assemblage of tiles, simae and painted plaques has been found. One shows two goats flanking a 'tree of life', a Near Eastern motif (Summerer 2008: fig. 7). This composition – seen in Karatepe-Karataş reliefs and Phrygian pottery – appears in terracottas only at inland sites like Pazarlı and Gordion (Åkerström 1966: taf. 84:4, 85:3, 88). Summerer (2008: 266–68) demonstrated that the Köyiçi plaque was made without a mould; its figures were modelled freehand, adapting an Oriental motif into a western Anatolian artistic idiom. At Pazarlı, about 150km inland, extensive painted terracottas were discovered in 1938 (Koşay 1939). The finds include roof tiles, gryphon antefixes and numerous plaques with diverse imagery – goats and 'tree of life' (Åkerström 1966: taf. 88), bulls and lions (Åkerström 1966: taf. 89), lozenge friezes (Åkerström 1966: taf. 93: 2), gryphons and centaurs (Åkerström 1966: taf. 94), and warriors (Åkerström 1966: taf. 90, 93: 1, 95–96). The larger plaques depict facing warriors with Ionian-type helmets resembling those from Samos and Rhodes; smaller plaques show two walking warriors rendered in a provincial style. These compositions merge East Greek hoplite iconography with local Anatolian order, reflecting a hybrid style that combines Ionian and Phrygian–Gordion traditions (Åkerström 1966: 161–89, 232; Summerer 2008: 268–73). Archaeological evidence from these Halys Basin sites thus reveals a blend of Greek–Ionian and Anatolian traditions. At Akalan, friezes were produced using multiple moulds; at Köyiçi, animal motifs were adapted to Oriental themes; and at Pazarlı, Ionian helmets merged with local compositional symmetry. These variations demonstrate that Ionian models were reinterpreted through local craftsmanship (Åkerström 1966: 230–39; Summerer 2008: 273–74).

Completely distinct from all other known examples in the Black Sea region, the architectural terracottas of Sinope constitute a unique and unparalleled group, illuminating the development of architectural decoration along the southern coast of the Pontic world. When all the available evidence is considered together, the following main points emerge regarding the architectural terracottas of Sinope:

First, the striking resemblance to the Larisa examples suggests that the moulds or prototypes used for the Sinope fragments were derived from Aeolian workshops. Nevertheless, there are marked differences in profile, fabric, and colour (Tab. 1). For instance, the Sinopean triangles are shorter and the tongues taller than those from Larisa, and the lower fascia terminates with painted rectangles instead of a plain torus. Moreover, while Larisa's colour scheme features contrasting black, reddish-black, yellowish-red and cream tones, the Sinope examples are uniformly coated with a dusky red slip. Fabric analysis further supports this distinction. The Sinope fragments exhibit a



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coarse, heavily tempered clay with uneven firing, in contrast to the finely levigated, homogeneous texture of the Larisa products. In Group II, a higher calcite content is evident. These differences likely result from variations in clay sources, firing conditions and technological control, pointing to flexible production practices adapted to available resources rather than a fixed formula. It should be emphasised, however, that this interpretation is based on macroscopic visual observation rather than archaeometric analysis.

Notably, none of the fragments contains pyroxene – a tempering material typically used in terracotta products manufactured by local workshops in Sinope during the Hellenistic and later periods (Demirci et al. 1999: 143–44). This absence may suggest that pyroxene was either not yet known or not commonly employed in the region at the time, or that the craftsmen consciously avoided its use. However, the craftsmen evidently faced challenges in regulating firing temperatures and managing clay behaviour under local production conditions. Observations also indicate that the fragments were produced using several generations of moulds. Aeolian models, designed initially for standardised buildings, may not have matched the dimensions of the structure at Sinope, prompting craftsmen to create new moulds.

Given the technical precision required to adapt architectural terracotta elements to the proportions of a specific roof, it is likely that Aeolian craftsmen travelled to Sinope and worked alongside local builders throughout the construction process. This hypothesis accords with evidence from other sites, particularly Phocaea and Kebren, where Aeolian artisans may have operated as itinerant workshops and produced architectural terracottas on site (Öncü 2013: 254–56; 2019: 46). Such itinerancy likely reduced both the costs and the risks associated with transporting fragile architectural elements.

Furthermore, the deformations resulting from firing irregularities and the slight dimensional inconsistencies observed in the profiles suggest that these architectural terracottas were not produced in the main Aeolian workshops, as such technical characteristics fall short of the high-quality fabrication standards typically associated with exported products. A plausible explanation is that Aeolian craftsmen came to Sinope on commission, producing architectural terracottas specifically adapted to local requirements and employing regionally available clay sources. Distinct painting conventions further corroborate their presence. The pale brown paint encircling the tongues extends downward onto the torus below, creating a reel-like decorative effect – a practice attested at Larisa and Temnos. This subtle decorative convention, clearly rooted in Aeolian craftsmanship, was likewise applied to the Sinope products (Fig. 1b-c).

Nevertheless, the available evidence does not fully clarify how craftsmen from Aeolis reached Sinope. Although examples from Etruria and the northern Black Sea have provided grounds for interpretations suggesting that craftsmen may have arrived either as settlers during the colonial movements or as refugees fleeing from the Persians, these possibilities do not appear convincing in the case of Sinope. While Aeolian participation in colonial enterprises is theoretically possible, no archaeological evidence supports the permanent settlement of such craftsmen in Sinope – no local ceramic group comparable to Aeolian pottery or grey ware, architectural elements, or any distinct workshop debris has been identified. There is likewise no indication that Aeolian craftsmen sought refuge in Sinope to escape Persian domination. It appears far more plausible that those fleeing Persian control migrated collectively to regions beyond its reach – such as the Mediterranean or the northern shores of the Black Sea – rather than resettling in Paphlagonia or Pontus, which themselves remained under Persian authority (Summerer 2005: 141–42). In this context, the most plausible interpretation is that craftsmen from the Aegean islands may have been invited to Sinope for the construction of the building, and may have stayed there temporarily.

For whom and for what purpose was such a richly ornamented building constructed? Parallels with Aeolian examples suggest a date in the late sixth century BC, when Anatolia was under Persian dominion. Paphlagonia's political status at that time was semi-autonomous; its rulers paid tribute to the Great King but retained local authority (Demir, Aydoğan-Demir 2024: 82–83). Xenophon notes that Cyrus II required only tribute from the Paphlagonians, not direct control through a satrap (Cyropaedia 8.6.8). Because their settlements were widely scattered, the Paphlagonians could not establish a centralised state. They were governed by local tyrants or dynasts who paid tribute and provided troops to the Persian army but remained autonomous in internal affairs (Summerer, von Kienlin 2010: 195–96). Sinope, too, probably retained a degree of independence under a local ruler. The reliefs on the façades of regional rock-cut tombs offer iconographic evidence for such rulers operating under Persian authority (Summerer, von Kienlin 2010: 195–221). The monumental character of the architectural terracottas suggests that the building was a deliberate statement of wealth and prestige. Its decoration, unique among Black Sea coastal cities, was likely commissioned by a local ruler seeking to project power through Aeolian stylistic choices. The building may have been a ruler's palace or audience hall, comparable to that at Larisa, or perhaps a building combining religious and political functions, as most architectural terracottas in Anatolia and the northern Black Sea are associated with



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temples and altars. Either interpretation underscores the city's prosperity and the presence of a strong local authority.

The building's location is also an important issue; however, no direct archaeological or epigraphic evidence has yet clarified its precise location. The area of İç Kale, corresponding to the site of the present-day Sinop Historical Prison and its surroundings, is generally regarded as the location of the ancient acropolis. Excavations conducted in and around the fortress have yielded Archaic remains, including fortification walls, a house and continuous occupation layers extending from the mid-first millennium BC to Late Antiquity (Barat 2012: 45, fig. 5:1; Doonan et al. 2018: 198; Kaba, Vural 2018: 445–47). Although these findings confirm early urban activity, they cannot be directly linked to the structure discussed here. In the city centre, excavations by Akurgal and Budde uncovered a sanctuary complex featuring a temple (15 × 8.6m) and an altar, whose Hellenistic–Roman remains overlay earlier levels containing architectural debris, terracotta objects and fragments of painted revetments. These suggest that the area served as Sinope's civic and sacred core throughout antiquity (Akurgal, Budde 1956: 27–33; Budde 1956: 5–6). It is plausible that the building adorned with the discussed terracottas once stood within this complex. The discovery of a revetment plaque fragment decorated with tongues and pointed leaves supports this possibility. Future excavations may clarify this connection.

The absence of figurative fragments, together with the consistent breakage pattern of all pieces, suggests that the decorated plaques were deliberately removed when the building fell out of use, likely for reuse. Future excavations may therefore yield further examples. The iconographic content of the lost plaques remains unknown; however, it may have included popular Archaic themes such as symposia, chariot races, hunts, centauromachies, hoplites or other mythological scenes, reflecting contemporary tastes and elite ideology. Similarly, although no evidence survives for the form of the spouts, lion-head examples – the most common type in antiquity – were probably used.

## Conclusion

The eight fragments examined in this study are of particular significance, representing the earliest known examples of architectural terracottas from Sinope. Group I, comprising plaques decorated with cutout triangles and rows of tongues, together with a lateral sima fragment featuring bead-and-reel moulding and painted rectangles, formed part of the roof decoration of a monumental building. The rounded spout and the supporting section extending backward from the lateral sima clarify its function – directing rainwater away from the roof – and indicate its placement along the building's side façades. The discovery that this lateral sima was directly attached to revetment plaques makes it possible to reconstruct the side façades, and to identify the fragments as belonging to the earliest known roof decorated with architectural terracottas in Sinope (Fig. 5a-b). On the basis of typological comparisons with examples from Aeolis, it seems reasonable to date this construction programme, and therefore the associated architectural terracotta fragments, to the last quarter of the sixth century BC.

Group II, painted in pale brown, dusky red and reddish-black tones, and decorated with rows of triangles and rectangles, may belong to raking simae. Although typologically comparable to examples from Larisa and Sardis, the absence of conclusive evidence prevents a secure reconstruction. Nevertheless, both the decorative repertoire and technical characteristics of this group correspond closely to those of the lateral sima. The concave profiles on the reverse, with variable depths, suggest differences in placement along a sloping roof.

These two groups demonstrate close stylistic, typological and functional parallels with Aeolian architectural terracottas, particularly those from Larisa. Their decorative motifs are otherwise unknown in the northern or southern Black Sea cities, or in nearby inland settlements such as Akalan, Köyiçi and Pazarlı. This strongly implies that the architectural terracotta tradition in Sinope was introduced through external transmission from Aeolis. For this reason, these fragments may be regarded as belonging to an 'Aeolian-influenced group' within the broader Black Sea terracotta tradition. In this context, the most plausible interpretation is that craftsmen from Aeolis may have been invited to Sinope for the construction of the building and may have stayed there temporarily. These findings provide new evidence for the transmission of architectural and technological practices from western Anatolia to the southern Black Sea during the Archaic period.

The monumental character and elaborate decoration of the architectural terracottas strongly suggest that the building belonged to a structure of considerable prestige within the urban landscape of Sinope. It is therefore likely that it was commissioned by a wealthy local ruler or elite patron as a deliberate statement of power, status and authority. The adoption of Aeolian stylistic elements, combined with the scale and quality of the decoration, points to a conscious engagement with broader artistic traditions in visual representation. Although no relief fragments have been recovered and the iconographic programme of the terracotta plaques therefore remains unknown, themes comparable to those known from Aeolian examples were likely preferred. Accordingly, they may have included scenes of elite display and ideology, reflecting contemporary tastes and the ambitions of their



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patron. The original location of this monumental structure cannot be determined on the basis of the available evidence; however, the character and quality of the fragments suggest that it was most likely situated in a central area of the city.

Until further evidence emerges, interpretations of the building's iconography, form and function must remain hypothetical. Nevertheless, even in their fragmentary state, the architectural terracottas of Sinope provide important evidence for the transmission of Aeolian artistic and technological traditions to the southern Black Sea, and for the city's prominent role within the broader network of Archaic Anatolian cultural exchange.

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**Supplementary materials**

Supplementary material may be found online at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0066154626100738 and consists of the following: *Catalogue*

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