

Identifying and recording stamps on Italian terra sigillata

Philip Kenrick, November 2022

The following notes have been composed as a result of both enquiries and my comments at the RCRF Congress in Athens in September 2022. I am actively adding to the OCK database, while an on-line version of the database published in 2000 is also in preparation.

Recording ITS stamps

There are certain textual data which should accompany any listing of the stamps. These are

- Catalogue no. (dependent on form of publication)
- OCK ref. where possible: Potter + type (qualified if necessary by ‘probably’, ‘perhaps’ etc.)
- Reading of stamp
- Form of vessel (according to *Conspectus*)
- Position of stamp (radial, central, external)
- Origin of vessel (if indicated by analysis or visual characteristics)
- Findspot, potentially with alternative name, Pleiades no. if it exists (from <https://pleiades.stoa.org/>) or geographical co-ordinates
- Context (sub-set of findspot, if any)
- Repository of find
- Inventory no.

Illustrating the stamps

It is my firm opinion now that the ‘best’ format in which to illustrate the stamps is a drawing at life size, accompanied by a photograph at 2:1. (Photos at 1:1 just do not show enough detail.) My own practice (using Adobe Photoshop Elements to create TIF files: you will have to use some sort of image-editing software to crop and resize images) is to generate drawings which will be at life size when scanned or drawn at 600 dpi, and photos which will be at 2:1 when at 300 dpi (which is actually exactly the same resolution). The TIF format is preferable to JPEG (the natural output from a camera), since it has a specific scale embedded in each file.

There are two typical styles for drawing (shown below), both of which have been practiced more-or-less from the beginning: the shaded outline drawing and what might be described as the ‘inverted rubbing’, in which depressed areas are rendered in solid black.



My own preference is for the former, since it is capable of a more nuanced rendering of features which are unclear, but what you choose to do will depend on your own skill.

Ensuring that photos are at the right scale is not easy, since the stamps are often on a non-flat surface and it is very difficult to place a scale in the same plane. A simple solution is to make a rubbing at the same time. It does not have to be a good rubbing: it is necessary only that you should be able to measure the over-all size of the stamp and to use this figure when resizing the photograph.

Whether you are providing data for a printed publication or for a pdf, the considerations above are the same. A word of caution, born of experience: if you are not doing the layout

yourself, do be quite certain that any photos will be reproduced at the size that you specify. I have seen publications where a scale is stated in the caption at the bottom of the page but the designer has quite clearly changed the size of individual images to make the page look tidier! (A solution to the question of size – not always very elegant – is to incorporate a drawn scale into each page of drawings or photographic image. That way the designer has less freedom to alter it, and it is immediately apparent if he/she has.)

Providing data for the OCK database

I shall be pleased to receive new data for inclusion in the database, particularly if it is possible to supply a high-resolution digital copy of any publication. It is, however, very important not to run the risk of duplicate entries. Therefore, the data should, if possible, be accompanied by inventory nos. of some sort. This is less important if the report is a definitive catalogue of the material, which will itself become the source of reference, but is vital if a full publication is to be anticipated later. I have often been offered exciting new discoveries, but hesitate to include these immediately for the reason indicated above. If anything is offered for inclusion before a 'definitive' publication has appeared, it can only be accepted if I have permission to make use in the database of any drawing or photograph provided.

Seeking advice

The above need not preclude anyone from sending me (philip.kenrick@tiscali.co.uk) images and asking for help with identifications. I shall do what I can, and while I may keep a record of the correspondence, I shall not make any use of material provided in this way unless you wish me to do so and the conditions described above are also met.