

# *Review Essay*

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## **A Review of the 7th International Congress on Mediaeval Ceramics in the Mediterranean**

(Thessaloniki, 11-16 October 1999)

The 7th International Congress on Mediaeval Ceramics in the Mediterranean was held in Thessaloniki from 11 to 16 October 1999, organized, under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, by the European Centre for Byzantine and Post Byzantine Monuments, the Museum of Byzantine Culture, and the Thessaloniki Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, in collaboration with the *Association internationale pour l'étude des céramiques médiévales méditerranéennes*.

The congress was the seventh in a series of scientific meetings which have been held in cities of the western Mediterranean (Sophia Antipolis 1978, Toledo 1981, Sienna 1984, Lisbon 1987, Rabat 1991, and Aix-en-Provence 1995) and have helped in the last two decades to promote research into the mediaeval ceramics of the western Mediterranean.

The study of the mediaeval ceramics of the western Mediterranean over a number of meetings revealed the need for the congress to shift its focus onto issues relating to the mediaeval ceramics of the eastern Mediterranean, the Byzantine world, and its adjacent areas in an effort to promote research into the production of mediaeval ceramics in these areas in relation to pottery production in the western Mediterranean and investigation of the relations between the various areas of the Mediterranean, their commercial and cultural exchanges, and the mutual influences in the technology and decoration of ceramics which these exchanges engendered.

From this point of view, the Byzantine past of Thessaloniki, a major centre of pottery production and trade in the Byzantine period, made a very appropriate background for the 7th Congress.

A total of four reports, fifty-one communications, and thirty posters were presented, and the programme was distinguished by the excellently

processed information given in the communications and the systematic presentation of the conclusions under five general themes:

1. Between East and West: Byzantine ceramics from the 10th to the 15th century.
2. Production and distribution of mediaeval ceramics in the Mediterranean.
3. From Rome to Byzantium, from Fostat to Cordoba: 5th-9th centuries.
4. Northern Africa, the Orient, and the Occident.
5. Recent finds.

A considerable part of the congress —two reports, eighteen communications, and eleven posters— was devoted to the first theme, a discussion of Byzantine pottery from the tenth to the fifteenth century between East and West. Through a presentation of ceramic finds from various areas, the communications gave a global picture of the commercial and cultural relations in the eastern and the western Mediterranean as they were shaped by contemporary political developments. The study of the ceramics of the Byzantine world is something of an innovation introduced by the 7th Congress, for it opens up new prospects for the unification of the study of the mediaeval ceramics of the eastern and western Mediterranean.

Excavational finds and archaeological data were presented and examined, raising numerous questions about mediaeval centres of pottery production in the eastern Mediterranean and the Byzantine world from the point of view of their commercial and other cultural exchanges with centres in the rest of Byzantine territory and areas of the western Mediterranean, and thereby helping to locate new centres of Byzantine pottery production in the eastern Mediterranean and to explore the relations between them.

An examination of all the communications relating to the first and the second theme reveals that the study of pottery as a product of light industrial activity, an object of commercial exchange, and ware for everyday use is an important source of information about the day-to-day life and the domestic and professional activity of its producers and users, as also about the economic and commercial activities and

economic, sociopolitical, and cultural relations of the various centres of production, trade, and use of ceramic products.

It was also revealed that archaeometry has made a significant contribution to the systematic study of mediaeval pottery, since it deciphers much important information about the manufacturing technology, the geographical provenance, and the dating of the ceramic finds. A combination of new technology and traditional methods of studying the material leads to a more certain identification of the workshops and the production centres; while the discovery of similar categories of wares in widely separated areas indicates and throws light on the commercial, economic, sociopolitical, and by extension cultural relations that developed in a given historical period.

A primary position in the geographical and chronological context of the first theme was held by the expensive glazed pottery that was distributed in large quantities along the commercial networks of the Mediterranean basin throughout the late Byzantine period. An iconographical examination points up the importance of studying Byzantine glazed pottery as a source of information about everyday life and historical, sociopolitical, and cultural developments in the period under investigation.

The proceedings of the congress opened with a general report, in which the history and development of research into Byzantine ceramics were presented and some questions of methodology were investigated (Ch. Bakirtzis).

In the geographical area of the Byzantine world, the output of the Middle Byzantine glazed pottery workshops in Constantinople and Corinth and the Late Byzantine workshops in Thessaloniki, Serres, Pergamon, Cherson, Cyprus, Thebes, and Lemnos was looked at (D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi) while glazed pottery from Cretan workshops of the Middle Byzantine period was presented (N. Poulou).

The development of the network of trade in Byzantine pottery within the Empire is attested by new data relating to Middle Byzantine White Ware from excavations in building plots in Thessaloniki (I. Kanonidis), by Middle Byzantine glazed ceramic finds from the archaeological site of Byzantine Brea (A. Tsanana), by ceramic finds from the 12th and 13th centuries from Argos and Sparta (A. Bakourou, P. Kalamara, and E. Katsara), and by the cargo of the ship that was wrecked off

Kastellorizo (M. Mihailidou), which latter represented a considerable proportion of the field of research into trade in mediaeval ceramics.

From the wider area of the Balkans, mediaeval ceramic finds from Albania were presented (A. Hoti), as well as glazed pottery from towns and fortresses in Epirus, which attests the extensive trade in ceramic products among the great Byzantine centres on the Adriatic and the Ionian (D. Kommatas), ceramics from Dobrudja (A. Kuzev). Another issue also discussed was the output of workshops and trade in glazed ceramics in Serbia, which developed out of the political, economic, and cultural relations between the Serbian state and such Byzantine centres of glazed pottery production as Thessaloniki and Serres (M. Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić and V. Bikić).

The discovery of Byzantine pottery in the western Mediterranean opened up a new chapter in the study of Byzantine ceramics in the course of the 7th Congress. The development of a network of trade in ceramic products between various production centres in the Byzantine world and the western Mediterranean is attested by the discovery of shipwrecks and by excavations in various parts of both the eastern and the western Mediterranean.

Commercial relations between the various Byzantine centres and parts of the western Mediterranean are revealed by the output of the late Roman amphora workshops of Ganos (N. Günsenin), as also by the production of pottery in the Middle and Late Byzantine period on the Crimean peninsula (A. Romancuk). The extensive importation and distribution of wares from Byzantine workshops in the western Mediterranean is demonstrated by the pottery from Byzantine workshops turned up by excavations in Provence (G. Démians D'Archimbaud and L. Vallauri).

The variety and quantity of the material testifies to a wide circulation of the products —mainly glazed pottery— of Byzantine workshops in the western Mediterranean during the period under consideration, as also to the role played by the various Crusader centres in the development of commercial relations between East and West.

The commercial relations between the various Crusader centres on the basis of three types of glazed pottery from the Crusader period were discussed (P. Armstrong), while the example of Cyprus was analysed in depth through a presentation of Cypriot glazed pottery from the exca-

vations at Palaipafos (M. L. von Wartburg-Majer), a small group of Cypriot glazed wares from the Hermitage collection (N. Venevtseva), and the Zeuxippus Ware from the excavation in the Saranda Kolones Castle at Paphos (A. H. S. Megaw, P. Armstrong, and H. J. B. Hatcher). Acre presents a similar case, because the recent excavations in the city have yielded imported pottery that is striking in its variety, since specialized products streamed into the market of this Crusader centre from all the Mediterranean production centres (E. J. Stern and S. Y. Waksman).

From the area of the east coasts of the Mediterranean basin conclusions arising out of the pottery finds from the excavation in Kumkale Castle near Adana in Cilicia were presented (A. Toydemir).

Among the communications that focused on the production, provenance, and distribution of Byzantine ceramics, there were also papers that discussed dating. The revision of the dating of Corinthian pottery (G. D. Sanders) has marked a turning point in the dating of Byzantine ceramics, because for decades Corinth ware has been the constant for dating similar ceramic groups from various areas.

It is interesting to note the continuity, established through the strong tradition, of the typology of Byzantine ceramics right through until the end of the nineteenth century, as is shown by the question of the dating and provenance—from the island of Djerba in Tunisia—of a group of amphoras with incised Arabic inscriptions found on Cyprus (D. Miha'ilidis and Ch. Bakirtzis), as also of a pilgrim flacon with relief representations of biblical scenes found in the Holy Land (F. Teichner).

The multifaceted study of Byzantine ceramics was rounded off by two communications concerning the decoration and iconography of glazed pottery. Interestingly, the iconographical features were examined as vehicles of the ideology and the aesthetic perceptions of the period, in the first one (H. Maguire), while in the latter they were looked at as a medium for the study of cultural exchanges and mutual influences, thus showing that the intense commercial activity and the distribution of products resulted in influences at the level of decoration too, even when the manufacturing techniques and typology were completely different (E. Dauterman-Maguire).

This overview of the first theme, concerning Byzantine ceramics between East and West from the tenth to the fifteenth century, clearly shows, both through the typological and iconographical examination of

the material and through the tracing of the provenance of the ceramic finds using new archaeometrical methods, that the various areas of the Mediterranean basin shared significant commercial, social, sociopolitical, and by extension cultural relations in this period of history.

The second theme of the congress concerned the modes of production and the means of distribution of mediaeval ceramics in the Mediterranean, questions that were discussed in one report, eighteen communications, and three posters. Through a presentation of the output of pottery workshops in various areas, the methods employed at different stages of the production of ceramic wares and the ways in which they were distributed were investigated and added to the information arising out of the examination of the first theme with regard to the development of the trade routes in the eastern and western Mediterranean as they were shaped by contemporary sociopolitical and economic developments.

Most of the communications covering the second theme focused on the pottery workshops and the technology of pottery production.

With regard to Greece, the organization and operation of the Proto-byzantine pottery workshops at Delphi were discussed, and the architecture and the mode of operation of the kilns that have been located were investigated (Pl. Petrides), while an Early Christian workshop producing Late Roman amphoras at Kardamaina on Kos was looked at (S. Didioumi).

At Lemba, near Paphos, Cyprus, the discovery of a large number of glazed sherds, tripod stilts, and wasters helped investigators to locate an already known glazed pottery workshop of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, despite the fact that the architectural remains survive only at foundation level and it is impossible to identify the various areas (Ch. Bakirtzis and D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi).

A glazed pottery workshop whose archaeological findings date to the thirteenth century has been located in Thrace. Examples of the workshop's output were presented together with a large number of wheel-made firing tripod stilts, which offer important evidence for the study of firing techniques for glazed pottery in the Late Byzantine period (N. Zikos).

From the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, the architecture of the barred kilns located during excavations at Beirut were examined

together with typical examples of the pottery produced by the local workshops in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (P. Arnaud, C. Aubert, V. François, A. Nicolaides, and L. Vallauri).

Painted decorative wall tiles and everyday wares from the area of the Euphrates, which indicate cultural exchanges in terms of decoration, were looked at (V. François).

A presentation of the output of the pottery workshops in Italy gave an idea of how ceramics were produced and distributed on the Italian peninsula, and a bid was made to map out the Mediterranean trade routes to central Italy by examining the phenomenon of the importation of pottery from distant places.

Ceramics from Byzantine provinces on the Italian peninsula were discussed (E. Zanini), along with ceramic finds from the area of Latium (N. Lecuyer), ceramics from Noricum (S. Ladstatter), and ceramic finds imported into Venice from centres in southern Italy and the eastern Mediterranean (F. Saccardo, L. Lazzarini and M. Munarini) while the particular phenomenon of the self-consumption of the ceramic output of Rome was examined (P. Güll).

A large number of the communications covering this theme focused on the pottery of the Iberian Peninsula. Thoughts were offered on the production and distribution centres of Castilian (M. Retuerce-Velasco and A. Turina-Gomez), Catalanian (J. M. Vila i Carabasa), Andalusian (J. Zozaya and A. Aparicio), and Islamic (J. Perez-Arantegui and M. P. Lapuente) pottery in Spain. The presentation of the pottery of the Iberian peninsula at a congress taking place in a city of the Byzantine world constitutes a major step towards the unification of the study of mediaeval ceramics through an initial approach to some very interesting material about which eastern scholars know very little.

The wide range of subjects covered by the second theme of the congress was rounded off by communications concerning written sources relating to the ceramic output of the western Mediterranean. The information about technology and production contained in a twelfth-century Arabic manuscript (Y. Porter) and the data furnished by texts written in the late Middle Ages regarding the terms under which the pottery workshops operated and the legal and economic relations between potters and state (H. Amouric and J. L. Vayssettes) illustrate the wealth of information contained in the western written sources compared with the

paucity of the Byzantine sources.

A socioanthropological and linguistic analysis of a multilingual vocabulary relating to the description of pottery kilns raised the question of a common terminology, which is essential for the unification of the study of mediaeval ceramics in the eastern and western Mediterranean (J. Thiriot).

The importance of using archaeometrical methods alongside traditional research methods with regard to the technology and production of mediaeval ceramics became apparent in a number of related communications from all over the Mediterranean.

The results of using archaeometry on pottery of late antiquity from Braga in Portugal (A. Lino-Gaspar and I. Prudêncio), on ceramic finds from Italy and Spain (H. Blake and M. Hugues), and on mediaeval kilns in Bulgaria and bricks from buildings of the Late Byzantine and Postbyzantine period in Greece (M. Kovacheva, V. Spataras, and I. Lyrizis) were presented justifying the use of the new methods in the study of the Medieval pottery.

Using examples from many parts of the Mediterranean, speakers discussed pottery workshops and how they operated on the basis of the archaeological finds, the parallel use of archaeometry, and the abundant written sources of the western Mediterranean. Progress was also noted on the question of the distribution of ceramics over short and long distances, as scholars traced the corresponding commercial routes.

The third theme, titled "From Rome to Byzantium, from Fostat to Cordoba: 5th-9th centuries", included four communications and six posters on the pottery of the Early Christian and Early Byzantine and mediaeval period from various parts of the Mediterranean basin, examining the transition from the Roman to the Byzantine period in association with the changes effected in the western Mediterranean by the emergence of the Arabs and their domination of northern Africa and the Iberian peninsula.

In the communications of the third theme, early Christian and proto-byzantine centres that produced and distributed ceramic products in Greece, Cyprus, and parts of the eastern Mediterranean were investigated, and the glazed ceramics of the early Middle Ages on the Italian peninsula and their connections with Byzantine ceramics and the western Mediterranean, which indicate the commercial and artistic re-

lations between these regions were also examined.

With regard to Greece, a group of lamps that were found during the excavation of a cemetery of late antiquity on Thera was presented (E. Geroussi), along with the ceramic finds from the excavations at Gortyn on Crete, which present a wide overview of Protobyzantine pottery with painted decoration (E. Vitale).

Regarding the wider area of the Byzantine world, the production of Late Roman amphoras in the workshops on the south-west coast of Cyprus was examined (S. Demesticha), while in the Middle East, the production of Brittle Ware at Dehes and Qual'at Sem'an, which was widely distributed throughout the south-eastern Mediterranean and in the interior of the Middle East was discussed (D. Orssaud and J.-P. Sodini).

The glazed pottery produced on the Italian peninsula in the early Middle Ages was examined and its connections with Byzantine ceramics were discussed (L. Paroli), while glazed pottery from Catagna was presented (P. Marchese) along with ceramic finds from the mid-Adriatic (A. L. Ermeti), and amphoras and kitchenware from Kaukana on Sicily, where there was a strong Byzantine presence from the fourth to the seventh century (G. Di Stefano).

Lastly, on the basis of archaeological finds and a study of contemporary texts, a picture of the Balearics from when they became part of the Byzantine Empire in 534 until they were conquered by Islam in 903 was sought to be sketched (research team from the Majorca Museum, headed by G. Rossello-Bordoy).

The communications covering the third theme were supplemented by a round table of experts who examined the evolving profile of Mediterranean pottery from the fifth to the ninth century with the principal aim of locating the production centres and their mutual influences.

The fourth theme, "Northern Africa, the Orient, and the Occident", was covered by one report, nine communications, and five posters, which presented various types of mainly North African and Islamic pottery and outlined their connections with the pottery of the rest of the mediaeval world.

A detailed analysis of the oriental tradition of multicoloured Sgraffito Ware from the tenth to the fifteenth century, including examples of Mameluke ceramics introduced the fourth theme of the congress (R. P. Gayraud).

Various aspects of the multicoloured Sgraffito Ware of the Islamic period in the eastern Mediterranean were discussed (C. Tonghini), as well as pottery production in three Moroccan villages in the late Middle Ages (M. Acien-Almansa, P. Cressier, L. Erbat, and M. Picon) and the pottery produced at Tamoukhakht in southern Morocco (A. Hanif); while the proprietorial status of the pottery workshops was presented as revealed by Arabic texts (A. Fili).

Pottery from Ifriqiya dating from the ninth to the eleventh century was discussed on the basis of an unpublished collection from Susan (A. Louhichi).

A presentation of motifs on pottery from the Iberian Peninsula, where the influence of Arabic art is strong, rounded off the investigation of the fourth theme. The development of mediaeval ceramics from Cordoba was discussed along with a presentation of the pottery from the Palacio de Orive in that city (M. del Camino-Fuertes-Sandos, J. F. Murillo-Redondo and M. D. Luna-Osuna).

With regard to Portugal, Islamic pottery was discussed in general (J. Bugalhao, D. Folgado, and T. Judice-Gamito) whereas more specifically the decoration of the Islamic pottery of Palmela was examined (I. C. Ferreira-Fernandes), together with the production of Islamic pottery at Mértola (S. Gomez-Martinez), and the ceramics from the excavations in the Islamic city in Lisbon (A. Gomes and I. Prudêncio).

The detailed presentation of the ceramics from northern Africa and the Islamic Iberian peninsula, which was under Arab domination from the tenth century, introduced this wealth of material to scholars from the eastern Mediterranean and underscored the need to research it more systematically.

Lastly, in the framework of the fifth theme, speakers presented the latest finds from excavations in various parts of the Mediterranean basin.

With regard to Greece, ceramic finds of the latter part of the Early Christian period from Pieria were discussed (E. Marke and M. Cheimonopoulou), glazed Sgraffito Ware of the Middle Byzantine period from excavations in the mediaeval city of Iraklio (L. Starida), ceramic finds from the excavation of cemeteries in the basilica of Stamata and in Palaia Fokia near Anavyssos in Attica (E. Guini-Tsofopoulou and E. Chalkia), ceramic finds from Boeotia (J. Vroom), and data relating to

pottery for everyday use from an Early Christian house on Thasos (F. Blondé, A. Müller, and D. Mulliez).

From the Middle East, ceramics of the Omayyad era that were found in the imperial baths at Beirut were presented (P. Reynolds).

From Italy, Byzantine and Islamic pottery finds from excavations in the Venice area were discussed (V. Gobbo and F. Saccardo). With regard to the Iberian Peninsula, kitchenware of late antiquity from eastern Catalonia and tenth- and eleventh-century ceramics from the Castellar Vell in Barcelona were presented (J. M. Coll Riera and J. Roig Buxó), decorative features of Catalanian glazed pottery of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (C. Riu de Martin), and ceramic finds from Terreiro da Erva in Portugal (M. Almeida-Ferreira).

The proceedings of the 7th International Congress on Mediaeval Ceramics in the Mediterranean covered a variety of subjects relating to various types of pottery of the Mediterranean basin, focusing more closely on the centres and methods of production, the distribution of and trade in ceramic products in the eastern and western Mediterranean, and methodological practices. The coherence of the communications and their frequently overlapping subject matter, together with the fact that they were delivered by scholars from different regions—which reveals both the close connection between widely separated parts of the Mediterranean and the unity of the field of mediaeval ceramics—clearly revealed the future need to unify the study of mediaeval Mediterranean ceramics.