

Theme 6

New Discoveries

BYZANTINE GLAZED POTTERY IN SPARTA (12TH TO 13TH CENTURIES A.D.) : OBSERVATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

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The proposed presentation originates from a research on byzantine glazed tableware from the city of Sparta. The glazed pottery under discussion derives from rescue excavations carried out at twelve plots in the urban city. The ceramic material has been recovered from well-stratified and datable contexts, which allow a systematic and comprehensive study. The main study area (nine plots) is a part of the city to the south of the fortified Acropolis, where a great concentration of public buildings, dwellings, churches, a cemetery and workshop installations, constituting a whole district of Byzantine Sparta, -named Lakedaimonia at that time- have been yielded. The rest of the studied material (three plots) has derived from different sites within the city, chosen due to interesting archaeological evidences.

METHODOLOGY

At a first level, the classification of the glazed tableware is based on the system introduced by Ch. Morgan, A. H. Megaw, Guy Sanders and Demetra Papanikola-Bakirtzis.

At a second level, a macroscopic examination of the fabric is based on Peacock' s criteria, whereas the suggestions regarding the color and the texture of the Spartan clay relied on visual description, is based on the fabric groups of Spartan byzantine pottery, introduced by Guy Sanders. An attempt of a comparison to the Corinth and the Argos material, on those grounds is at the present stage of the study of great importation for the understanding of the Spartan pottery.

At a third level, a quantitative ratio of each category is about to provide evidence of the mostly occurring decorative types of wares, either locally produced or imported from foreign lands or Aegean centers or the capital of the empire, Constantinople,. (see an example of percentage in FIG.5) in connection to their date.

At a fourth level, the provenance issue of the vessels, given the lack of pottery workshop emerged in Sparta, must be based on the working hypothesis that they were locally produced, due to the abundance of a diversity of types and, in many cases, the quality of the execution. Despite the extended excavation research in the urban city, no kiln site has ever been yielded. Only at the periphery, nearby the Eurotas river, a kiln site of building material production has recently been discovered (2012-2013).

Subsequently, at a fifth level, the discussion of the distribution of ceramic material in Sparta should reconsider some “certainties”, concerning the commercial links of the city demonstrated by the imported glazed ware and the possibility to clarify the issues of distribution in the Aegean World relied also to the Spartan ceramic material. In fact, Sparta had immediate access to the Aegean Sea, through the ports of Gytheio and Monemvasia as well as the eastern rocky coasts, where, in several bays, the remains of settlements indicate that they were used as landing places. But the collected archaeological evidence from such sites implies that their use has to be evaluated, principally, as for the exchange of goods (wine, olive-oil).

At a sixth level, the ceramic evidences of other sites within Laconia will be presented, together with observations concerning similarities with the Spartan material or, instead, some local discriminating particularities, and finally, some comments concerning the Spartan glazed pottery in comparison with the recently published material from the Akronauplia castle at Nauplion, from the Chlemoutsi castle and from Argos, will be exposed.