

Theme 3

Kilns, Workshops and Productions

DID THE BYZANTINE POTTERS USE TO FIRE THE GLAZED WARES UPRIGHT OR UPSIDE DOWN?

-SOME REMARKS ON THE FIRING PROCEDURE OF THE BYZANTINE GLAZED WARES-

Konstantinos T. Raptis

Archaeologist / Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki City

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raptis.constantinos@gmail.com

The (proposed) poster attempts to point out some—occasionally ignored—features of the firing procedure of the Byzantine glazed wares: a. examines different, Middle and Late Byzantine, innovations in the glazed pottery production, b. approaches the application of one-story kilns with rods and two-story kilns with eschara for the firing of Byzantine glazed wares and c. discusses whether the Byzantine potters used to fire the glazed wares upright or upside-down. It has been generally stated that the Byzantine glazed wares were probably being fired in two-story updraft kilns that did not differentiate from the kilns used during the same period for plain wares. During the stage of the second firing (during which the lead-based glaze was stabilized on the surface of the pre-fired, usually decorated, wares), the glazed wares were stacked upside down inside these pottery kilns; they were separated between each other by—hand-made, mould-made, or wheel-made—tripod stilts, which, even though they were leaving a triple mark on the inner surface of the glazed bowls or plates, prevented the adherence of the products. However, the aforementioned statement corresponds only to the period after the early decades of the thirteenth century, when the tripod stilt seems to have been invented as firing device, in order to facilitate the production of Late-Byzantine glazed-wares in great quantities, since—probably due to the extreme urbanization of the Late-Byzantine community—the glazed table-wares became a mass-consumed trend.

What has been happening before the invention of the tripod stilt?

New evidence, which have been brought to light during the last decade, showcase the use of kilns with clay rods for the second firing of the Byzantine glazed wares as early as the eleventh century. Even though the archaeological evidence of Byzantine kilns with rods is still rare, the fact that it was not possible to fire successfully a decent quantity of glazed wares in a regular

Byzantine kiln without the interference of any kind of firing devices that would prevent the adherence of the final products, points out that the Middle-Byzantine glazed wares were generally fired in kilns with rods. In this, common from the tenth century in the potteries of the Islamic world, kiln type, the glazed wares were placed upright on clay-rod shelves—or sometimes hanging from sigmoid hangers that were applied on the clay rods.

Evidence of both these firing techniques seem to have been carried out by the glazed wares themselves, since apart of the existence of tripod-stilt marks, usually preserved on intact bowls or plates, the way the liquid glaze flowed on the surface of the ware before its final stabilization—information that is usually drawn even from a shred—shows if the product was fired upright or upside down, and consequently gives away the firing method and the kiln type.