

## ORNAMENTATION OF MEDIEVAL SERBIAN TABLEWARE - BYZANTINE HERITAGE

Marija BAJALOVIĆ - HADŽI-PEŠIĆ

*RÉSUMÉ : L'importation de produits en céramique décorés byzantins a exercé une forte influence sur le travail des ateliers de céramique locaux serbes à partir du commencement du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle. En se modelant sur les types de récipients, en adoptant les expériences technologiques des céramistes byzantins pour la décoration de la vaisselle, ainsi qu'en prenant pour modèles les ornements du riche répertoire byzantin, particulièrement les spirales, les feuilles de vigne, les cercles et les rosettes – les maîtres-artisans en céramique serbes ont bâti aux XIII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles leur propre style, reconnaissable sur les exemplaires de jattes et de bœux de table des monastères de Studenica, Žiča, Sopoćani, Mileševa, Gradac et Pavlica et d'autres milieux ecclésiastiques, ainsi que des villes fortifiées de Novo Brdo, Kruševac, Stalać, Braničevo, Smederevo et d'autres. D'après les lieux de découvertes de vaisselle décorée, on peut également supposer quels sont les emplacements des ateliers de céramiques possibles, parmi lesquels, jusqu'à présent a été découvert l'atelier de Prilep.*

Byzantine ceramics continuously reached the Serbian lands in the central part of the Balkan peninsula during the period of Byzantine supremacy in the 11th and 12th centuries, and in the ensuing epochs, during the reigns of King Milutin (1282-1321) and Emperor Dušan (1331-1355) from the Nemanjić dynasty, when the borders of the Serbian state were expanded in the central and south and south-east parts of the Balkans (Ostrogorski 1961: 13).

Imported from various imperial centres for the manufacture of pottery, tableware of Byzantine origin was discovered in archaeological excavations of fortified towns and monasteries on the territory of present-day Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. On Serbian soil, finds were made in fortifications erected or renovated during Byzantine rule (Niš, Ras-Gradina, Belgrade and Braničevo), on rare occasions in the ecclesiastical centres in the oldest foundations of the Nemanjić dynasty (Studenica, Žiča monasteries, St Peter's church near Novi Pazar, Hilandar), and only exceptionally were they random.

The most common vessels were bowls of various forms and types of ornamentation. Among the oldest samples of tableware that can be associated with the epoch of the Komnenoi is a rare find of a large plate with a stamped rim. This decorative technique was typical of workshops of Constantinople in that epoch (Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1997: 148, fig. 3.1; Stevenson 1947: 55-56, pl. 26.1) (Fig. 1).

Samples of bowls from the first half of the 12th century display ornaments of convoluted tendrils (Niš) or spirals executed in the fine sgraffito technique (Ras), which may be connected with imports from Corinth (Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1981: 118, fig. 151; Popović 1999: 235, cat. 324, fig. 193.1; Volbach 1930: 194, t. 18 no. 6558, 6563a; Morgan 1942: 120-122, fig. 96, pl. XLl.a, c, d).

The best information about the routes along which

Byzantine ceramics penetrated into the interior of the Balkans in the second half of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century is provided by deep bowls, embellished with a spiral pattern produced by means of the dual, sgraffito and painting technique (Vogt 1993: 101-102, fig. 3c). Widespread, this model can be followed in its variants along the long road leading from the Byzantine capital, via Corinth and Thessaloniki, to Prilep and Skopje, and then further to the north, to Niš and Ras-Gradina (Fig. 2) (Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1978: 64-67, fig. 1-5). According to the closest analogies from Corinth and Thessaloniki, imported items probably originated from workshops in those Greek cities (Morgan 1942: 140-142, pl. XLVI, no. 1374; Bakirtzis 1981: 423, fig. 6; *The Art of Sgraffito* 1999: 19, cat. 21-23, 27).

In this time, some of imported tableware found in fortresses and fortified towns were also decorated in combined techniques of painted sgraffito and champlévé, with zoomorphic compositions of wild animals and birds, or only glazed, imitating marble surface (Braničevo, Ras) (Popović, Ivanišević 1988: 147, fig. 18.6; Popović 1999: 235). Speaking about the ways of transportations, we may also assume that the goods should reach the interior of Serbia by the so-called Constantinople road, one of the old international arteries through the Balkans, who was the main connection between East and West. Transports with Byzantine ceramics used also the way across the Black Sea basin and along the Danube to the northern parts of Serbia.

Scarce fragments of luxurious bowls from ecclesiastical centres are worthy of special attention. By the high quality of their structure, colour and firmness reminiscent of ebony, and motifs rendered by the hand of experienced masters, they surpass the accomplishments of local potters of that time. From famous imperial workshops ar-

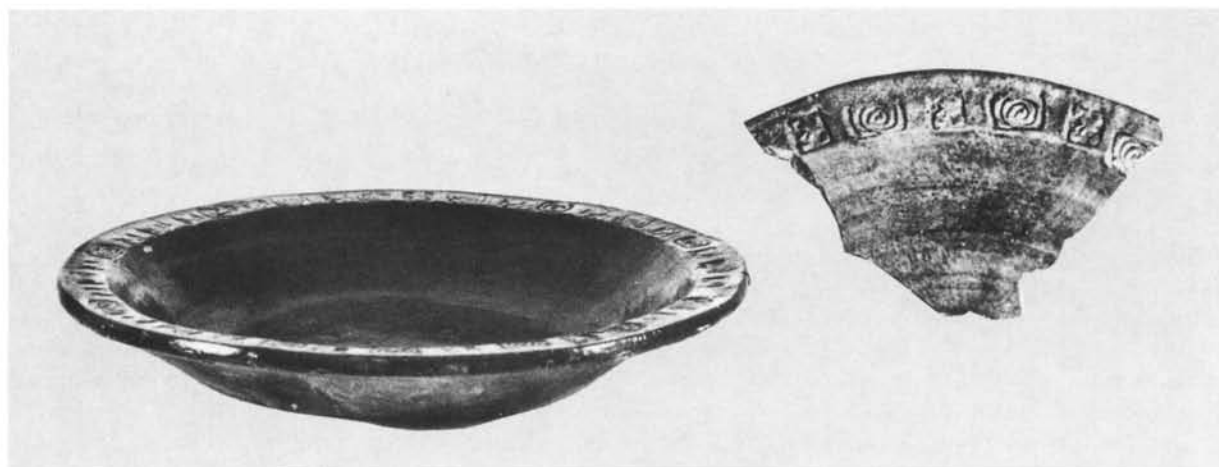


Fig. 1. Plate, Brestovik (r-44 cm).



Fig. 2. Bowls, Corinth, Niš, Ras.

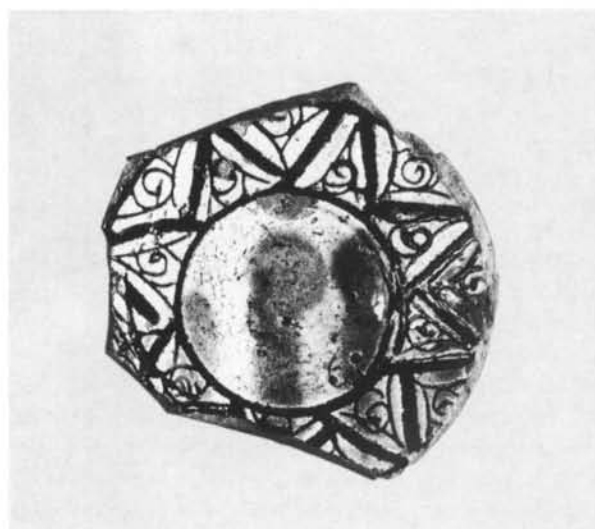


Fig. 3. Centre of bowl, St Peter's church.

rived bowls adorned with interlace or tendrils in the sgraffito technique, executed in the manner typical of Corinthian and Thessalonian workshops (Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1997: 149, fig. 3.4; Minić 1994-1995: 79-80, pl. I. 9, 10) (the church of the Virgin in Studenica and the monastery of Žiča). Fragments of a vessel with a simply decorated rim and a small medallion in the centre belong to a bowl which could be classified as belonging to Zeuxippus vessels from Constantinople (unpublished; Megaw 1968: pl. 14a, c, 15a) (the complex of the Raška diocese near the church of St Peter in the vicinity of Novi Pazar, Fig. 4.1).

A detail from the centre of the bowl with a star-like medallion featuring small spirals originates from a workshop which in the 14th century supplied the church of St Demetrios in Thessaloniki with table vessels (Sotiriou 1952: 243, p. 100) (Fig. 3). In the epoch of the Palaiologoi, workshops of Thessaloniki supplied the largest centre of Serbian Orthodoxy, Hilandar monastery on Mount Athos, with bowls decorated with cross-like quatrefoils, as well as

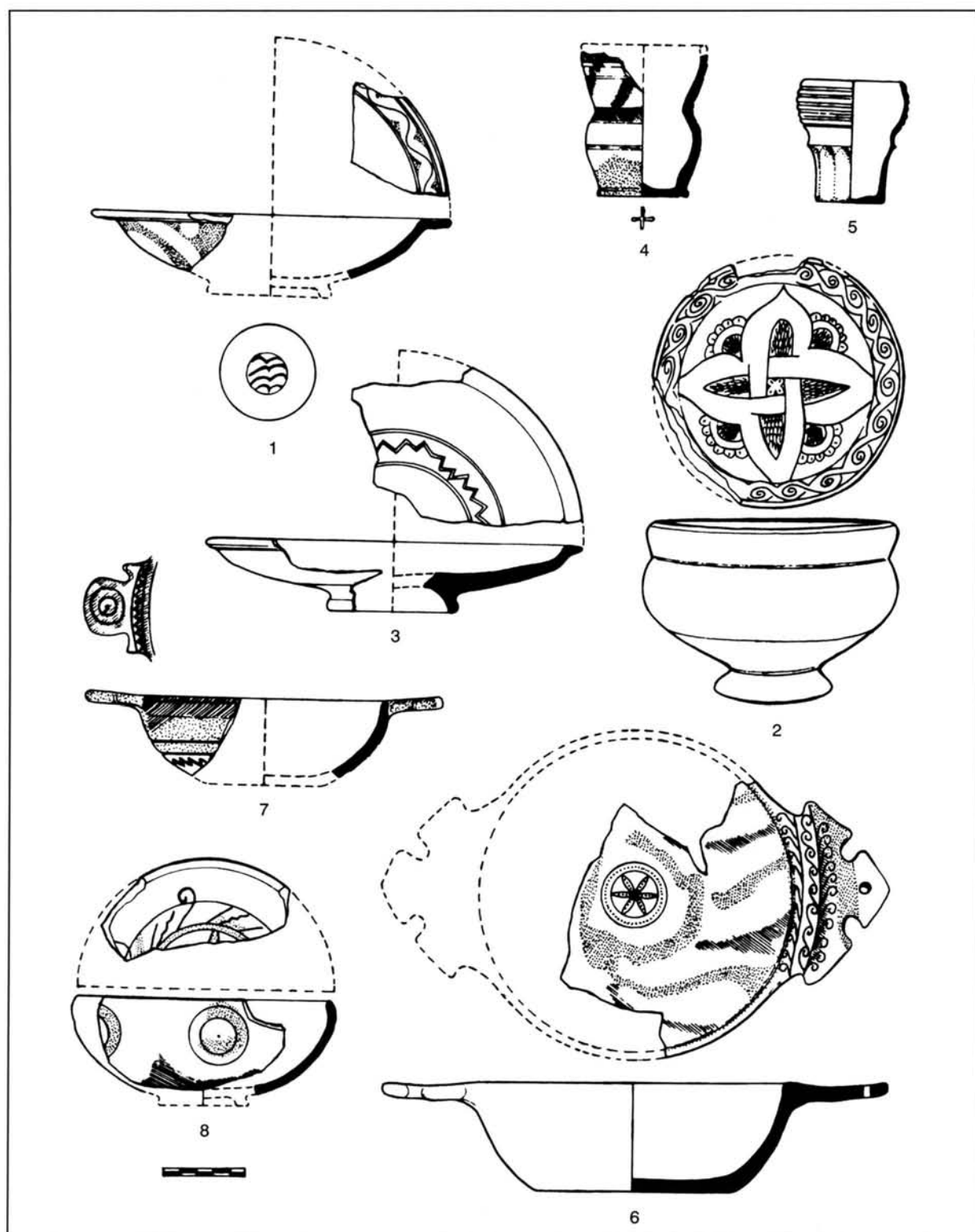


Fig. 4. 1. Bowl, St Peter's church; 2. Bowl, Hilandar monastery; 3. Plate, Studenica monastery; 4, 5. Glasses, Studenica monastery; 6, 7. Bowls with horizontal handles, St Peter's church and Studenica monastery; 8. Bowl, St Peter's church.



Fig. 5. Bowl, Prilep (r-12 cm).



Fig. 6. Plate, Prilep (r-18 cm).

interlace in the form of a cross, supplemented by floral ornaments in the sgraffito technique (Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić, in print: 11, fig. 1, 2) (Fig. 4.2).

On the territory of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, pieces of decorative Byzantine ceramics have been found in Prilep, Skopje and the fortress of Črnče. Bowls imported at the end of the 12th and the first decades of the 13th century mostly display zoomorphic compositions in combined techniques of painted sgraffito and champlévé (Skopje) (Babić 1971: 45-53, pl. I-III, V, cat. 1-6, 14).

Places in which some bowls with the motifs of birds were produced can be determined with great certainty on the basis of decorative elements. Thus, the appearance of an ornament in the form of a heart on the outside of the small bowl with a pigeon (Fig. 5) can be followed from Constantinople, to Bulgaria, and to Thessaloniki (Tatić-Djurić 1960-1961: 27-44, fig. 1, 2; Bakirtzis, Papanikola-Bakirtzis 1981: 433-434, fig. 18; Stančeva, Dončeva-Petkova 1979: 131, fig. 38), while the bowl with an eagle from Prilep, classified among 13th-century pieces from Serres (Babić 1986: 83, photo 2; Papanikola-Bakirtzis, Dauterman-Maguire, Maguire 1992: 33) (Fig. 6) points to the influences coming from Constantinople workshops (Megaw 1968: 68, 72-86, pl. 14a, 21d).

Data about commercial ties of Serres with Skopje and Prilep are yielded by individual compositions with floral and geometric motifs. In the 13th century, they made an impact on local manufacture in Prilep (Babić 1986: 257-261, T. III/3) (Fig. 7). All aforementioned samples of bowls were decorated in the sgraffito technique, with all innovations which this process experienced with the passage of time. Of them, a bowl of a cruder structure stands apart, ornamented with casual painting in green. It is a unique

example of Aegean glazed ceramics of the early 13th century discovered in the interior of the Balkans (Babić 1971: 47, cat. 7; Megaw 1975: 37, pl. 15.5) (Fig. 9).

Rare finds of closed vessels were ornamented with a polychrome glaze, in vertical bands.

The improvement of the ornamentation of tableware in Serbia can be followed from the very beginning of the 13th century. Apart from import, other conditions favourable for the acceptance of ceramic expertise developed in Byzantium in this epoch can be associated with the construction of the foundations of the first rulers from the Nemanjić dynasty. In that epoch, according to written sources, famous master-masons, marble-masters, painters and craftsmen were summoned from Constantinople and other regions in Greece, and they probably transferred their knowledge to local masters. Although no reference to potters is made, indirect evidence of their presence was discovered in archaeological excavations in the Studenica monastery. It has been established that soon after the erection of the magnificent church of the Virgin and the monumental refectory, the manufacture of tableware was started. The remains of a kiln with fragments of shallow plates were found within the monastery complex. The shape of plates and scarce ornamentation, different from contemporary samples discovered in other localities, point to the Byzantine style (Janković 1986: 18-19, fig. 7.1; *Blago manastira Studenice* 1988: 64, fig. 30.2, 3) (Fig. 4.3).

From the 13th century onwards, motifs undertaken from the Byzantine repertoire were continuously rendered in different variants on bowls, pitchers and jugs, which were discovered in fortified towns and sacral complexes.

On luxury vessels, ornamental compositions were plac-

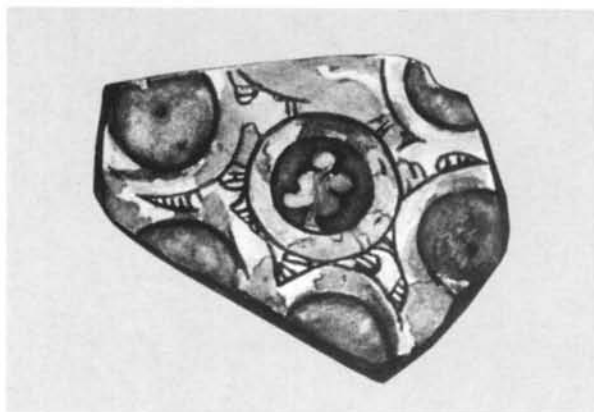


Fig. 7. Fragment of bowl, Prilep.

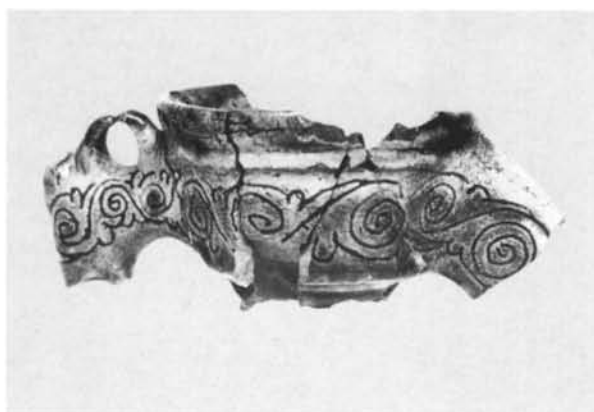


Fig. 8. Fragment of pitcher, Kruševac.

ed on surfaces in the late sgraffito technique, combined with painting in green and brown, covered afterwards with a colourless or polychrome glaze. The stamping technique is very rarely encountered (Ćorović-Ljubinković 1962: 180, t. IX) (Novo Brdo). The most frequently rendered 13th- and 14th-century Byzantine motifs were spirals, tendrils, circles, rosettes and shaded fields, representing, it could be said, universal ornaments in the local manufacture of all lands under Byzantine influence (Bajalović-Hadžić-Pešić 1981: 75-100, t. XXX-XLIV; 1975: 75-79, fig. 1, 2) (Fig. 8, 10). There are some differences in compositional designs, characteristic of a particular region. Serbian masters placed these ornaments on bowls in either a circular or ray-like fashion around the central rosette, not disregarding exterior surfaces (Fig. 11). They decorated the bodies of pitchers and jugs, including handles, with bands, rosettes or floral ornaments (Fig. 13).

Outstanding samples of glasses from the 14th century were embellished with horizontal or slanting painted bands, or the model of a glass made was successfully imitated in ceramics (*Blago manastira Studenice* 1988: cat. 38, 40, fig. 31.2, 4) (Fig. 4.4, 5). The attention which potters paid to almost all parts of vessels is reflected in the best manner in scarce finds of bowls with full horizontal handles, on which ornaments, especially concentric circles, are skillfully adjusted to the shape of the handle. This phenomenon, characteristic of the Serbian milieu, can be followed on bowls, primarily originating from ecclesiastical centres, from the end of the 13th until the end of the 14th century (Bajalović-Hadžić-Pešić 1981: 81-82, t. XXXV-XXXVI; Ćorović-Ljubinković 1970: 202, t. VI/5, 7, 8) (Fig. 4.6-7).

In giving a list of motifs the origin of which can be brought into connection with workshops in Constantinople, it is not possible to disregard the motif of concentric circles because of characteristic variations appearing on bowls, rarely encountered in other regions (Bajalović-Hadžić-Pešić 1979: 469-475). Precisely incised with com-

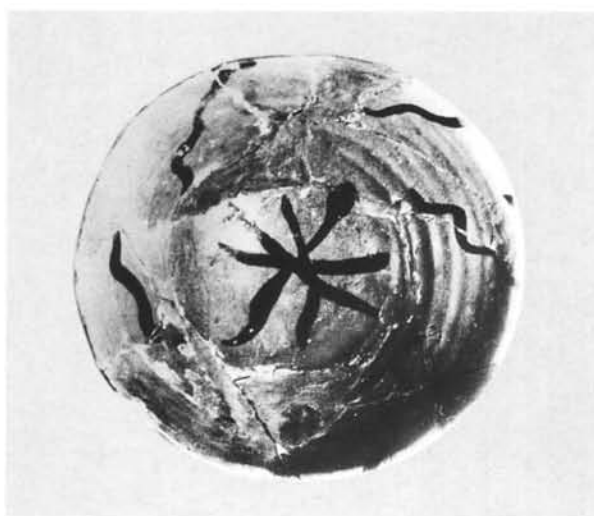


Fig. 9. Bowl, Skopje (r-20,5 cm).

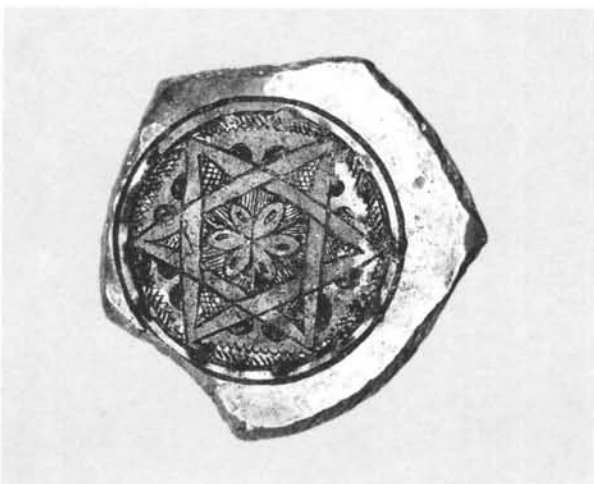


Fig. 10. Centre of bowl, Stalać.





Fig. 11. Bowl, Kruševac (r-18 cm).

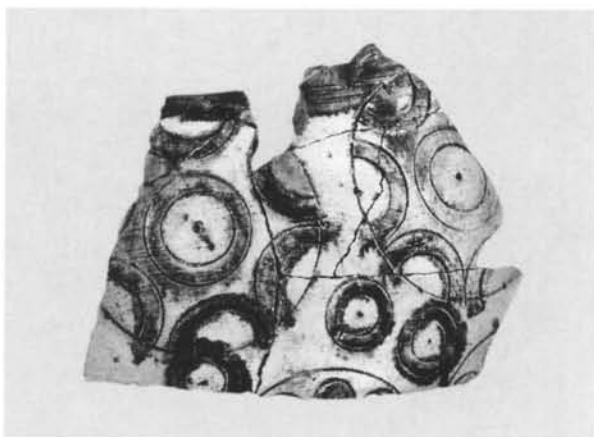


Fig. 12. Fragment of closed vase, Djurdjevi stupovi monastery.



Fig. 14. Jug, Inner fortification, Belgrade (h-23 cm).

Fig. 13. Pitcher, Novo Brdo (h-20 cm).

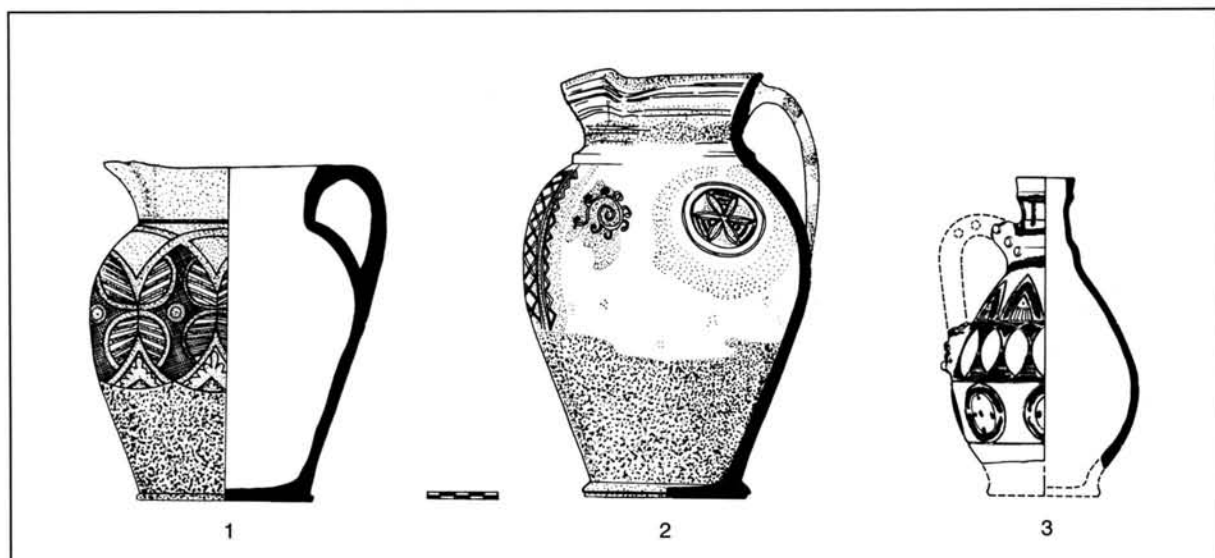


Fig. 15. 1. Pitcher, Gradac monastery; 2. Pitcher, Studenica monastery; 3. Jug, Inner fortification, Belgrade.

passes, it appears either as the only motif or in a succession (Fig. 4.8). The adroit use of compasses was clearly distinct in compositions with numerous circles of various size and mutual relations, covering almost the entire surface of closed vessels (Fig. 12). The most beautiful example of this ornament, in the style of the so-called plaited circles are encountered on rare finds of jugs and pitchers from court circles (Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1981: 62, t.

XXI/1) (Fig. 14, 15.3). The most elaborate specimen of this type is found on a luxury pitcher from the second half of the 13th century, also decorated with a gold wire, which adorned the refectory of the Gradac monastery – the foundation of Queen Helen of Anjou, mother of kings Dragutin and Milutin Nemanjić (Jurišić 1989: 37, fig. 39) (Fig. 15.1).

Having mastered all technological processes in the crea-

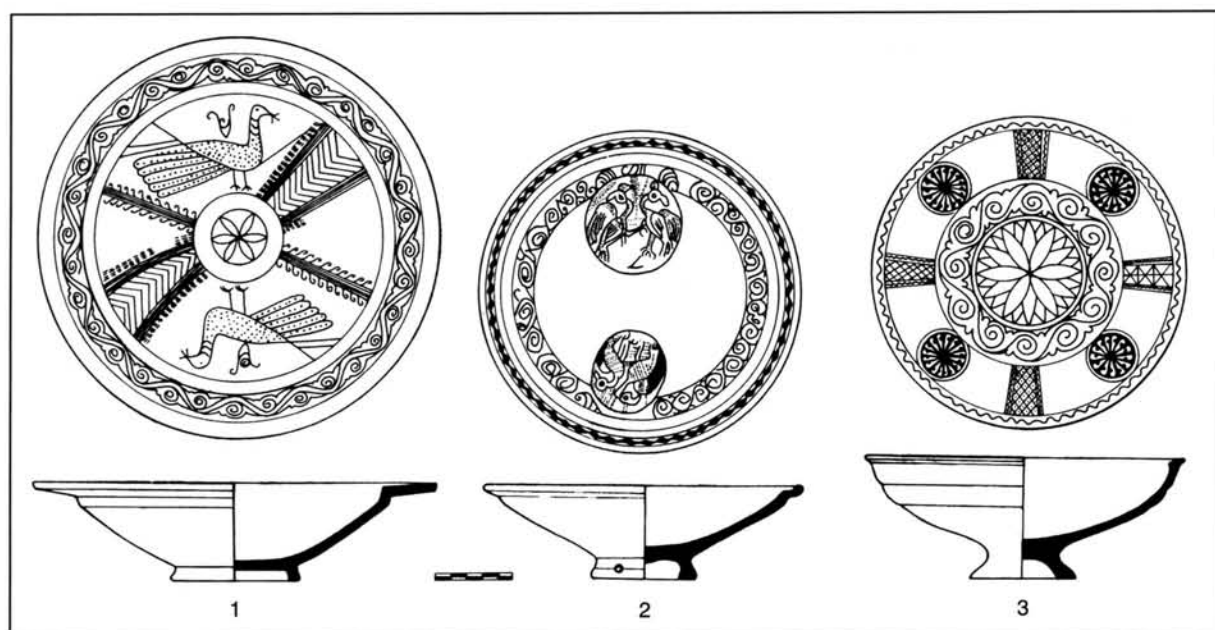


Fig. 16. 1. Bowl, The Annunciation monastery in Kablar; 2-3. Bowls, Stalač.

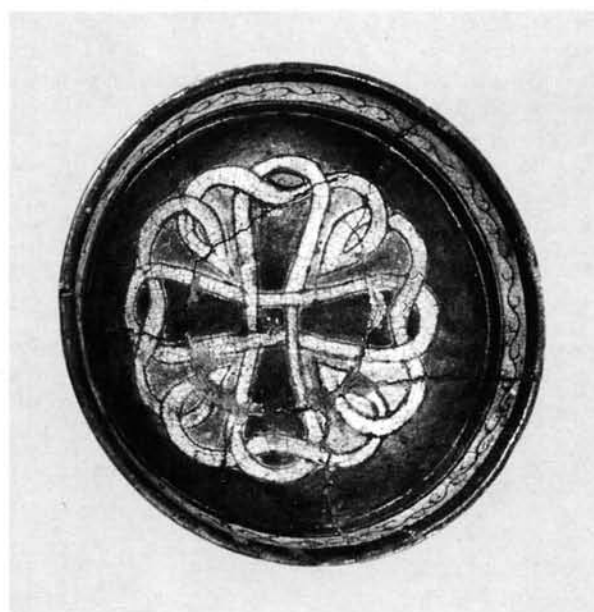


Fig. 17. Bowl, The Patriarchate of Peć (r-14,3 cm).

tion of inventive compositions, Serbian masters of ceramics reached their zenith in the 14th century, according to rapid economical and commercial prosperity of Serbian State in this time. This is attested by rare surviving vessels from church complexes of that epoch, for example "krasovol", a pitcher from Studenica (Janković 1986: 14, fig. 6.4) (Fig. 15.2), a bowl from the Patriarchate of Peć adorned with a remarkably stylized cross-like interlace (*Srednjovekovna umetnost u Srbiji* 1969: 93, cat. 168) (Fig. 17) and a bowl with the figures of a peacock, skillfully incorporated into the decorative composition of the geometric type (Cunjak 1988: 37, fig. 9, 10) (Fig. 16.1).

More modest examples of this period include only glazed table vessels or those featuring circles painted in different variations by free hand by means of white engobe, before glazing. Bowls and pitchers decorated in such a manner from the monasteries of Banjska and Žiča, the fortification of Braničevo, and the localities along the Danube, are new proofs of the diffuse of this type of decoration, known after Byzantine ceramics from Constantinople and the basin of the Black Sea, the Aegean islands and Northern Greece (Serres) (Minić 1998: 229-236, fig. 1, 2).

The production of decorated table vessels, identified on the basis of local characteristics of vessels, their shapes or manner of decoration, or the finds of auxiliary tools in the manufacture of vessels, as well as deformed and discarded vessels, were discovered in Novo Brdo, Niš, Kruševac, Stalać, Belgrade and Smederevo, and also on estates of the monasteries of Studenica, Žiča, Mileševa and Sopo-

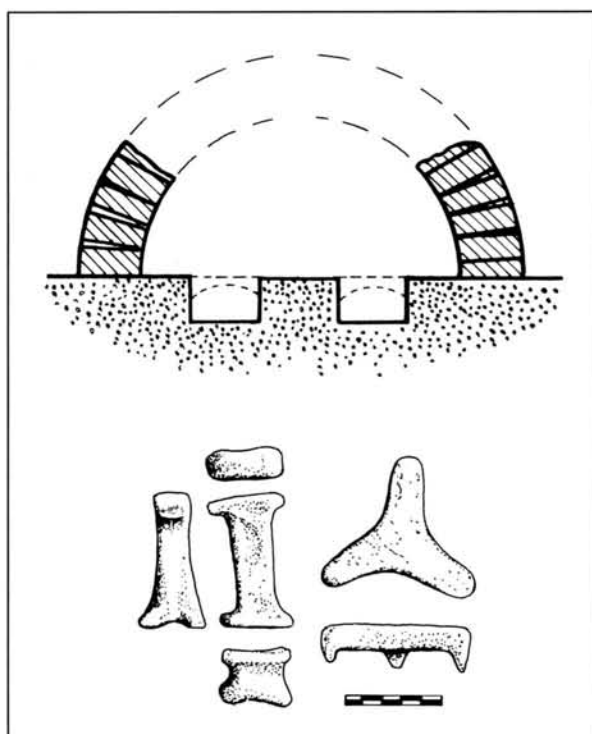


Fig. 18. Kiln and tripod-stilts, Prilep.

ćani. Apart from the remains in the Studenica monastery, kilns were discovered only in Prilep (Fig. 18), in the city centre near the church of St Athanasios (Babić 1986: 257-261, fig. 42-43, t. I-III).

Among centres for ceramics manufacture in Serbia in the Late Middle Ages, special place belongs to still undiscovered workshops from the suburb of Stalać because of the imaginative and perfect quality of its products. In the epoch of Morava Serbia, they supplied the fortified towns of Stalać, Kruševac and nearby monasteries with luxury ceramics. Aesthetically harmonious compositions embellished deep bowls, which, apart from being used as table dishes, also adorned the walls of refectories. Motifs on bowls, jugs and pitchers include vines, deeply incised and specifically formed rosettes and bands of shaded fields or floral ornaments (Minić, Vukadin, Djordjević 1975: 187-192; *Srednjovekovni Stalać* 1979: 9-10) (Fig. 16.3; 19). Very rare examples of back-to-back birds in medallions were inspired by stone relief of the Lazarica monastery (Fig. 16.2).

This renaissance of ceramic skill fits into the general ascent of all branches of art in Serbia in that epoch, and also raises the question of the origin of these adroit masters. Didn't they, as fresco-painters and writers, also escape from the southern parts of the Balkans before the Turkish





Fig. 19. Jug, Stalać (h=22 cm).

invasion? In view of the skillfulness by which ornaments were incised and the quality of glaze, it is possible that the experience of painting and firing luxury vessels from Byzantine centres with a long tradition may have been transferred to potters in the valley of the Morava river.

Manufactured in the troubled times of the Turkish penetration in the Balkans, when the territory of the Serbian Despotate quickly shrank as its southern frontiers shifted towards the north, products of Serbian masters from the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century at the same time contain last reflections of distant Byzantine models.

At the end it ought to be mentioned that local tableware in Serbia, due to the usage of ornaments of the same origin, resemble tableware from Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. However, having accepted the same prototypes, Serbian potters applied them in a specific manner, so that the manufacture and decoration of table vessels on the territory of Medieval Serbia make up a special group within the manufacture of ceramics in the Balkans as a whole.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Babić 1971** : BABIĆ (B.). – Trouvaille scellée de poterie de table byzantine à Skopsko Kale, *Archaeologia Jugoslavica* XII (1971), 45-53.

**Babić 1986** : BABIĆ (B.). – *Materijalnata kultura na makedonskite Sloveni vo svetlina na arheološkite istražuvanja vo Prilep*, Institut za istražuvanje na staroslovenskata kultura, Prilep 1986.  
**Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1975** : BAJALOVIĆ - HADŽI-PEŠIĆ (M.). – Influence de Byzance sur la céramique en Serbie médiévale, *Faenza* LXI (1975), n. 4-5, 75-79.

**Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1978** : BAJALOVIĆ - HADŽI-PEŠIĆ (M.). – Roads and Time of Import of Byzantine Pottery with Spiral Motifs into the Balkans, *Archaeologia Jugoslavica* XIX (1978), 64-67.

**Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1979** : BAJALOVIĆ - HADŽI-PEŠIĆ (M.). – O jednom omiljenom motivu srpskih srednjovekovnih grnčara, *Zbornik radova Narodnog Muzeja IX-X* (1979), 469-475.

**Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1981** : BAJALOVIĆ - HADŽI-PEŠIĆ (M.). – *Keramika u Srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, Beograd, Savez arheoloških društava Jugoslavije, Muzej grada Beograda, Beograd 1981.

**Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić 1997** : BAJALOVIĆ - HADŽI-PEŠIĆ (M.). – Nalazi vizantijske keramike XI-XIII veka na području Srbije, *ZRVI XXXVI* (1997), 139-154.

**Bajalović - Hadži-Pešić, in print** : BAJALOVIĆ - HADŽI-PEŠIĆ (M.). – Nalaz dekorisanih posuda u Hilandararu – nova saznanja o keramici poznog srednjeg veka, *Srpsko arheološko društvo, Zbornik posvećen prof. J. Kovačeviću, Beograd 2000* (in print).

**Bakirtzis, Papanikola-Bakirtzis 1981** : BAKIRTZIS (CH.), PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZIS (D.). – De la céramique byzantine en glaçure à Thessalonique, *Byzantinobulgarica* VII (1981), 421-436.

**Blago manastira Studenice 1988** : *Blago manastira Studenice*. – Exhibition Catalogue, Galerija Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti, Beograd 1988.

**Ćorović-Ljubinković 1962** : ĆOROVIĆ-LJUBINKOVIĆ (M.). – Srpska srednjovekovna gledjosana keramika, *Zbornik radova Narodnog Muzeja III* (1962), 165-186.

**Ćorović-Ljubinković 1970** : ĆOROVIĆ-LJUBINKOVIĆ (M.). – Nekropola crkve sv. Petra kod Novog Pazara, *Zbornik radova Narodnog Muzeja VI* (1970), 169-229.

**Cunjak 1988** : CUNJAK (M.). – Arheološka istraživanja kompleksa manastira Blagoveštenja, *Viminacium* 3 (1988), 25-44.

**Janković 1986** : JANKOVIĆ (M.). – Zatvorene arheološke celine manastira Studenice, *Saopštenja XVIII* (1986), 7-21.

**Jurišić 1989** : JURIŠIĆ (A.). – *Gradac, rezultati arheoloških radova*, Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, posebna izdanja 7, Beograd 1989.

**Megaw 1968** : MEGAW (A.H.S.). – Zeuxippus Ware, *BSA* 63 (1968), 67-88.

**Megaw 1975** : MEGAW (A.H.S.). – An Early Thirteenth-Century Aegean Glazed Ware, in: *Studies in Memory of David Talbot Rice*, Edinburgh 1975, 35-45.

**Minić, Vukadin, Djordjević 1975** : MINIĆ (D.), VUKADIN (O.), DJORDJEVIĆ (S.). – *Srednjovekovni grad Stalać. Raška baština I*, Kraljevo 1975, 185-198.

**Minić 1994-1995** : MINIĆ (D.). – Painting Vessels from Žiča, *Starinar XLV-XLVI* (1994-1995), 77-82.

**Minić 1998** : MINIĆ (D.). – The Circles Painted with White Slip on Medieval Pottery in Serbia, *Starinar XLIX* (1998), 229-236.

**Morgan 1942** : MORGAN (C.H.). – *The Byzantine Pottery, Corinth IX*, Cambridge, Mass. 1942.

- Ostrogorski 1961** : OSTROGORSKI (G.). – *Vizantija u južni Sloveni. Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis* 1, Beograd 1961, 9-13.
- Papanikola-Bakirtzis, Dauterman-Maguire, Maguire 1992** : PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZIS (D.), DAUTERMAN-MAGUIRE (E.), MAGUIRE (H.). – *Ceramic Art from Byzantine Serres*, Urbana-Chicago 1992, 73 (Illinois Byzantine Studies III).
- Popović, Ivanišević 1988** : POPOVIĆ (M.), IVANIŠEVIĆ (V.). – Grad Braničevo u srednjem veku, *Starinar* XXXIX (1988), 125-176.
- Popović 1999** : POPOVIĆ (M.). – *The Fortress of Ras, Tvrdjava Ras*, Arheološki Institut, Beograd 1999.
- Sotiriou 1952** : SOTIRIOU (G. and M.). – *Η βασιλική του Αγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης*, Athens 1952, 237-243.
- Srednjovekovni Stalač 1979** : *Srednjovekovni Stalač*. – Exhibition Catalogue, Narodni muzej Kruševac, 1979, Kruševac 1979.
- Srednjovkovna umetnost u Srbiji 1969** : *Srednjovkovna umetnost u Srbiji*. – Exhibition Catalogue, Narodni muzej Beograd 1969.
- Stančeva, Dončeva-Petkova 1979** : STANČEVA (M.), DONČEVA-PETKOVA (LJ.). – Sur la surface habitée de Sredec au IXe-XIVe s., Culture et art en Bulgarie médiévale (VIIIe-XIVe s.), *Arheologičeskija Institut* XXX (1979), 111-133.
- Stevenson 1947** : STEVENSON (R.B.K.). – *The Pottery, 1936-1937, The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors*, Oxford 1947, 31-63.
- Tatić-Djurić 1960-1961** : TATIĆ-DJURIĆ (M.). – Tri vizantijske posude iz Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu, Muzej primenjene umetnosti, *Zbornik* 6-7 (1960-1961), 27-44.
- The Art of Sgraffito 1999** : *Byzantine Glazed Ceramics. The Art of Sgraffito* (ed. D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi), Athens 1999, 270.
- Vogt 1993** : VOGT (CH.). – Technologie des céramiques byzantines à glaçure d'époque Comnène, Les décors incisés : les outils et leurs traces, *CArch* 41 (1993), 99-110.
- Volbach 1930** : VOLBACH (W.P.). – *Mittelalterliche Bildwerke aus Italien und Byzanz*, Berlin - Leipzig 1930.