

ARGOS AND SPARTA: POTTERY OF THE 12th AND 13th CENTURIES

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RÉSUMÉ : La céramique glaçurée des XIIe et XIIIe siècles, mise au jour pendant des fouilles effectuées au cours des deux dernières décennies par la 5e Ephorie des Antiquités Byzantines à Sparte et Argos, villes de la partie est du Péloponnèse donnant sur la mer Egée, offre des indications importantes concernant la vie sociale et économique pendant la période byzantine. Elle comprend toutes les catégories connues trouvées dans d'autres centres de l'empire byzantin. Pour autant que nous le sachions une grande partie de cette céramique doit avoir été produite par des potiers locaux, dont le style a sûrement été déterminé par la vaisselle à glaçure produite dans les grands centres d'artisanat, notamment Corinthe. Locale ou importée, elle représente une preuve de la prospérité économique des deux villes, de l'existence d'un commerce développé avec le reste de l'empire et témoigne des voies d'importation sans doute liées aux circonstances historiques pendant les XIIe et XIIIe siècles.

Argos and Sparta were both wealthy cities of the Byzantine Empire during the 12th and 13th centuries. Their location in the Eastern Peloponnese close to the coast of the Aegean Sea is the common factor which provides motivation for further investigation into their historical links. Ceramics found during excavations reveal information about their history. During the 12th century they were part of the Byzantine province of *Hellas and Peloponnesos*. Their destinies parted after the Frankish conquest and the territorial division of the Byzantine Empire. Argolid fell under the control of the Duke of Athens and Lakedaimon provisionally came under the control of the principality of Achaia. Subsequently, Argolid maintained close ties with the West, whereas shortly after 1262 the city of Lakedaimon was abandoned and the inhabitants moved to Mystras, the future capital of the Byzantine Despotate of Moreas. Ecclesiastically, by the 10th century Argos was combined with Nauplia as a bishopric under the metropolitan See of Corinth, the leading centre of commercial and artisan activity in the Peloponnese during the Byzantine period. In 1083 the See of Lakedaimon was promoted to the status of metropolis. In 1188/9 the See of Argos-Nauplia was also elevated to the status of metropolis (*IEE* 1976; *Oxford Dictionary* 1991).

Excavations

Rescue excavations carried out by the 5th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities on various sites in the cities of Argos

and Sparta, large multi-period urban centres, brought to light remains of the Byzantine era, consisting of dwellings, pits, churches, cemeteries and public buildings. The Byzantine levels produced a considerable volume of Byzantine glazed ceramics dating from the 12th to the 14th centuries, which even so constitute only a small proportion of the overall pottery, as the vast majority of ceramic material is unglazed.

In Sparta, excavations have also been conducted by the British School at Athens on the Spartan Acropolis at the beginning and the end of the 20th century and have brought to light deposits which indicate occupation of the site and have produced a considerable quantity of Byzantine glazed pottery of the 12th and 13th centuries, as well as small deposits dating from the early 14th century (Dawkins 1910-1911; Sanders 1993).

The Spartan and Argos glazed wares show close parallels with contemporary styles elsewhere. Most of the material found to date has not yet been published. Moreover, the lack of regular preliminary reports with references to the context and stratigraphical data makes the Corinth material instrumental in dating the Spartan and Argos pottery (Morgan 1942).

Workshops

The glazed pottery found in Argos and Sparta has prompted questions concerning the provenance of the vessels. Several indications have led to the suggestion that a number of the ceramic objects are indigenous¹.

1. The chemical analysis of Middle Byzantine ceramics found at a kiln site in the city of Argos has been undertaken by the 5th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities in Sparta and the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Oxford. The results of the analysis have established the composition characteristics of an Argos clay. The data obtained will be incorporated into the Oxford Byzantine Ceramics Project (OBCP) and a publication of the results is to be expected.

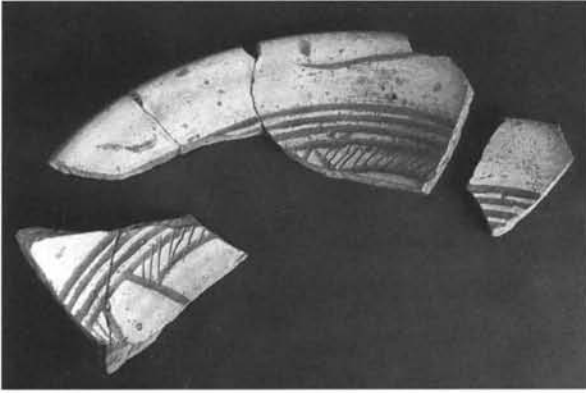


Fig. 1. Unfinished vessels with Sgraffito decoration. Late 12th century. Katsichtis plot, Sparta.



Fig. 2. Fragments with Incised-Sgraffito decoration of warriors. Late 12th century. Acropolis of Sparta.

The discovery of a kiln site, tripods stilts and remnants of unused clay indicate that Argos must have been a prolific production centre of high quality Byzantine glazed ceramics closely related to the Corinth centre. Among the quantity of Byzantine glazed pottery found in Sparta are tripods stilts and a few pieces of unfinished vessels (Fig. 1) discarded during production, with slip and Sgraffito decoration on their internal surface, but no overglaze. This seems to indicate the existence of an as yet undiscovered workshop (Dawkins 1910-1911; Sanders 1993).

Types of ware - Production centres - Commercial links

The earlier identifiable glazed ware is the imported Constantinopolitan White Ware also found at a number of sites in the Eastern Mediterranean. In Sparta and Argos it occurs in small quantities and indicates connections with the capital of the Empire in the 10th and 11th centuries (Hayes 1992; Armstrong 2001).

The well-known Middle Byzantine Red-bodied Glazed Ware of the 12th and 13th centuries occurs in a much larger proportion than the Glazed White Ware and as has already been shown most of it could be considered as local-

ly produced (Megaw 1983). According to the classification adopted by Morgan (Morgan 1942) and Sanders (Sanders 1993), the Spartan and Argos Byzantine ceramics consist of a wide variety of groups of pottery. In Sgraffito Ware dating from the late 11th and 12th centuries the designs cover a large number of themes. In Sparta there is a marked preference for the representation of warriors or hunters (Fig. 2), whereas, surprisingly, such representations have not yet been recorded in Argos. In addition to that, Late Sgraffito Ware of the second half of the 12th and the early 13th centuries, Green and Brown Painted Ware of the first half and middle 13th century, Incised and Plain Glazed Ware dating from the early 13th century and Late Slip Painted Ware of the 13th century compose the bulk of ceramic glazed vessels found in both cities.

Besides Sgraffito, Champlévé decoration seems to have been the rule in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, especially in Sparta, where the appearance of Champlévé Ware with linear decoration resembling Aegean Ware strengthens the suggestion that both types represent a contemporary development (Megaw 1975; Armstrong 1991; Sanders 1993) and that the later ware, found in the Eastern Mediterranean, could also have been produced in Sparta.

Measles Ware dating from the middle 12th century is also found in quantity in Sparta (Fig. 3). It could be imported from Corinth, which is a confirmed production centre, or could equally well be locally produced in Sparta as this type of glazed ware has always been considered as Peloponnesian (Morgan 1942; Sanders 1993). Excavation finds confirm that the ware is common enough in Argos to be considered locally manufactured there too (Fig. 4). Differences in decoration techniques might be an indication of different production centres of this type of ware.

Imported ceramics, which verify the existence of developed commerce within the Empire as well as with Italy, occur in both cities; in Sparta imported ware include Zeuxippus Ware (Class II), while Zeuxippus Derivative Bowls, in some cases immured in churches such as Agios Theodoros at Mystras and Agios Demetrios in Krokeai (Laconia), indicate a local tradition in the 13th-century Zeuxippus style (Armstrong 1992). It is interesting to note the presence of the 14th-century Serres Ware in Argos. Other imported ceramics such as Protomaïolica, dating from the early 13th century and sometimes immured in churches – as in the case of Merbaka –, Rouletted Ware (Veneto Ware) and the 14th-century Archaic Maiolica jugs (Fig. 5), bear witness to the close ties the city had with the West and its commercial links with Italy, in particular in the late 13th and the 14th centuries (Oikonomou-Laniado 1993). On the other hand, there are Italian imports in Sparta, where few Protomaïolica bowl and Archaic Maiolica jug sherds have been reported (Morgan 1942; Sanders 1993).



Fig. 3. Measles Ware. Late 12th century. Theodosopoulos-Karydes plot, Sparta.



Fig. 4. Measles Ware. Late 12th century. Greek Telecommunications Organisation plot, Argos.

One type of Plain Ware, which has been very popular in Sparta (Dawkins 1910-1911; Sanders 1993) and Argos (Sanders 1993) is the so-called "protogeometric" small jugs with matt brown painted decoration of pendent concentric semicircles beneath cross-hatched triangles on their shoulder, dating from the second half of the 12th and early 13th centuries, also found on various sites in the Peloponnese such as Corinth (MacKay 1967), Tegea (Dawkins 1910-1911), Elis (Coleman 1986), Agios Stephanos near Skala

(Laconia) (Sanders 1993). It has been noticed that the fabric of the Spartan examples (Fig. 6), is similar to contemporary glazed pottery, which implies that they are indigenous, while in Argos (Fig. 7) they are also common enough to be considered locally manufactured. Chemical analysis of their clay has confirmed that they constitute a group. Surprisingly their clay proved to be quite different in composition from the established Argos clay, indicating the possible exploitation of a hitherto unknown clay bed. Considering that these unprovenanced wares have been associated with both Sparta and Argos, it remains open to question as to exactly where they were produced; Sparta and Argos both being possible sites of manufacture. Even though any conclusions are provisional as the study is still in progress, evidence implies a Peloponnesian provenance of this type of ware.



Fig. 5. Archaic Maiolica jug. 14th century. Xixi-Xakousti plot, Argos.

CONCLUSIONS

Byzantine ceramics from these two major cities of the Peloponnese, Sparta and Argos, provide us with important indications and evidence of the social and financial situation during the Middle Byzantine period. The material wealth and the prosperity of the 12th century, which continued into the Late Byzantine period, is reflected in the quality, quantity and variety of the locally produced glazed pottery. Imported wares testify to commercial links within the Empire and with Italy and as little is known about the geographical distribution of Byzantine wares, they add to our as yet incomplete knowledge concerning the complex network of production centres.

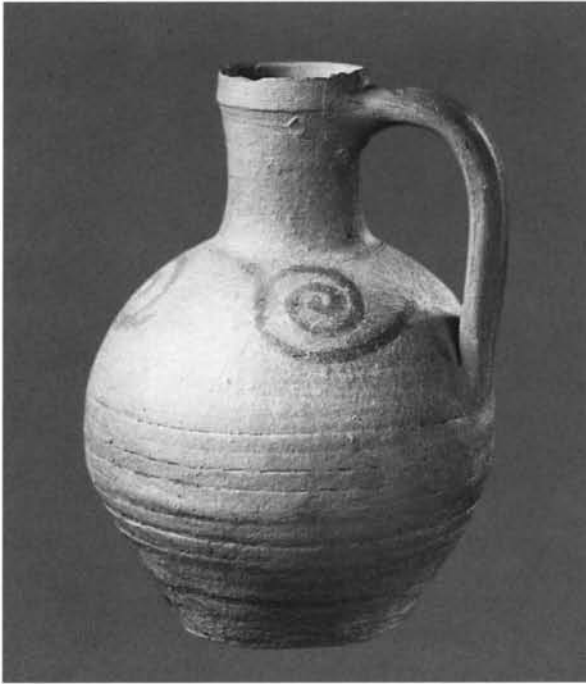


Fig. 6. Matt-painted jug. Late 12th-early 13th century. Theodossopoulos-Karydes plot, Sparta.

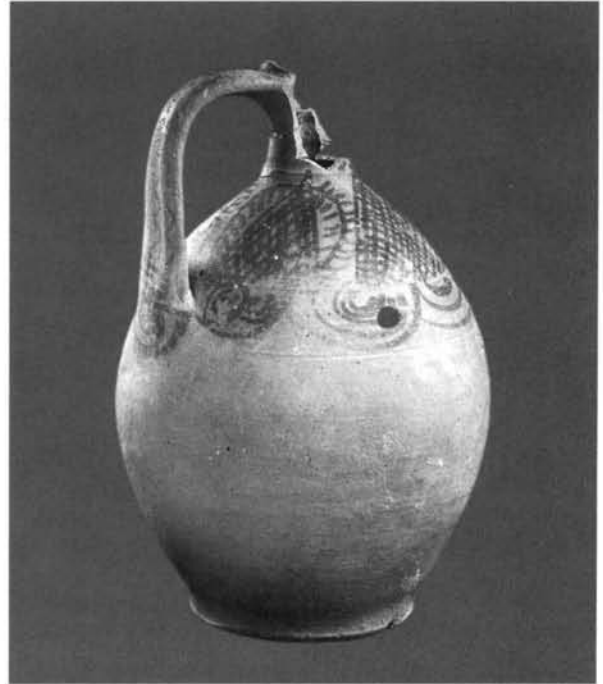


Fig. 7. Matt-painted jug with the so-called "protogeometric" decoration. Late 12th-early 13th century. Greek Telecommunications Organisation plot, Argos.

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