

THE GLAZED POTTERY OF BYZANTINE VRYA (VREA)

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ: Στα ιστορικά χρόνια η Βρέα εμφανίζεται ως οικισμός της δυτικής ακτής της Χαλκιδικής από την ελληνιστική εποχή. Η γεωγραφική της θέση ήταν εξαιρετικά προνομιούχος. Κοντά στη θάλασσα και με αποδοτικές καλλιέργειες γης συγκέντρωνε όλες τις προϋποθέσεις ανάπτυξης. Μεγάλη ακμή γνώρισε στην παλαιοχριστιανική (3ος-6ος αι.) και στη μεσοβυζαντινή περίοδο (10ος-αρχές 13ου αι.). Αντικείμενο της μελέτης μας αποτελεί η εφραλωμένη κεραμική των μεσοβυζαντινών χρόνων, που συνελέγη κατά τη διάρκεια οκτώ σωστικών ανασκαφών από το 1988 έως το 1997 στον εν λόγω αρχαιολογικό χώρο. Το σύνολο των ευρημάτων χρονολογείται από τον 11ο έως τις αρχές του 13ου αιώνα. Πρόκειται για εισηγμένη εφραλωμένη κεραμική από λευκό και κόκκινο πηλό, δηλωτική των εμπορικών σχέσεων της πόλης-κάστρου των Βρονών με τις υπόλοιπες ακμάζουσες περιοχές της βυζαντινής επικράτειας. Τα αγγεία της πρωιμότερης κατηγορίας – εφραλωμένη κεραμική από λευκό πηλό – είναι ολιγάριθμα και προέρχονται από την παραγωγή εργαστηρίων της περιοχής της Κωνσταντινούπολης. Σε αυτή περιλαμβάνονται κεραμικά με χαρακτηριστικά σχήματα και διακοσμήσεις της κατηγορίας αυτής. Τα αγγεία της δεύτερης κατηγορίας (εφραλωμένη κεραμική από κόκκινο πηλό) είναι περισσότερα, αλλά επί του παρόντος έχουν ανεξακριβωτή προέλευση. Σε αυτή περιλαμβάνονται κυρίως κούπες και πινάκια. Εκτός από τα ακόσμητα εφραλωμένα αγγεία διακρίνονται οι εξής γενικές ομάδες: λεπτεγγάρακτα, αδρεγγάρακτα, επιπεδόγλυφα, εγγάρακτα εμπλουτισμένα με καστανό και πράσινο χρώμα, γραπτά με καστανό και πράσινο χρώμα, διακοσμημένα με λευκό επίχρισμα και πιτσιλωτά. Η χρονολόγηση της κεραμικής και των δύο κατηγοριών έγινε με βάση τα νομίσματα από τις ανασκαφές. Η ταξινόμηση του υλικού της καθεμιάς κατηγορίας, καθώς και τα ποσοστιαία μεγέθη τους επί του συνόλου της κεραμικής, βασίστηκαν στο προστάδιο της συντήρησης, που ήταν η καταγραφή και η στατιστική επεξεργασία των οστράκων.

Vrya is already mentioned in the Hellenistic period as a settlement in the western coast of Chalkidike. In the Early Christian period (3rd-6th century AD) as well as in the Middle Byzantine period (10th-early 13th century AD) Vrya is a prospering city. The historical facts which shaped the course of Macedonia, and particularly of Thes-

saloniki (at a distance of 40 km from Vrya), played a major part in the life of the city.

The excavatory research in Vrya, which began twenty years ago, as well as some information from Athonite documents, revealed the existence of typical Medieval city-fortress¹. In the 10th century, Vrya is a thriving city, and

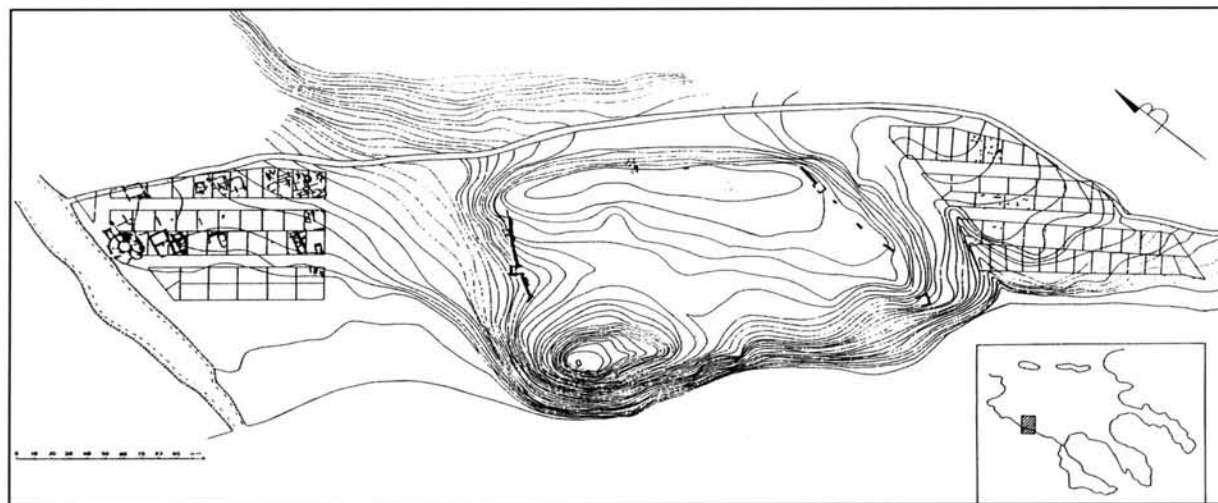


Fig. 1. The archaeological site of Vrya.

1. For more details about the Vrya excavations see: Tavlakis 1984; Pazaras, Tsanana 1990; 1991; 1992; Pazaras 1996.



Fig. 2. Ceramic furnace of 6th century under a Middle Byzantine house.

despite the severe blow from the Bulgarian invasion, at the end of the century, not only recovers, but becomes also the See of “Kassandria and Vryon”.

The plan of Medieval Vrya (Fig. 1), with its thronging, poorly built houses, was based on that of the late 12th and early 13th century. The city, outside of the fortress, is gradually abandoned, and the place is further used as a cemetery, a fact possibly due to the Norman invasion at 1185 or even the Frankish conquest at 1204 and the subsequent Bulgarian raids. The last mention of Vrya is found in a document of 1302, which refers to the place as “Palaiokastron” (=old fortress).

The excavatory research confirmed the production of pottery in Vrya, in the Late Antiquity, as well as the import of pottery from various places of the Aegean (Fig. 2).

There are clues of non-glazed ware production in the late 11th-early 12th century². Among other finds there were wasters from a workshop, as well as misshaped and misfired vases, which were however used by the inhabitants of Vrya.

The glazed pottery of Middle Byzantine period, collected during the excavations at Vrya, is dated from the 11th till the early 13th century AD. It is an imported glazed pottery, made of white and red clay, and proves the commercial links of the city-fortress of Vrya with other thriving communities of the Byzantine empire.

Glazed White Wares

Polychrome Ware. The particular circumstances of the excavations at Vrya did not permit the regular research to proceed to layers older than those of 12th century. Only in one particular case there were found sherds of this type. Few sherds of the second type (according to Hayes 1992: 35-37) have been found in a layer along with anonymous folles (class A2) and also a couple of sherds of the 3rd type in a layer along with coins of Alexios I.

Other White Wares. During the excavations, in the 11th century, mainly in late 11th and early 12th century layers, there was found a limited number of Glazed White Ware

2. For the ceramic workshops of Vrya see: Theocharidou 1985-1986.

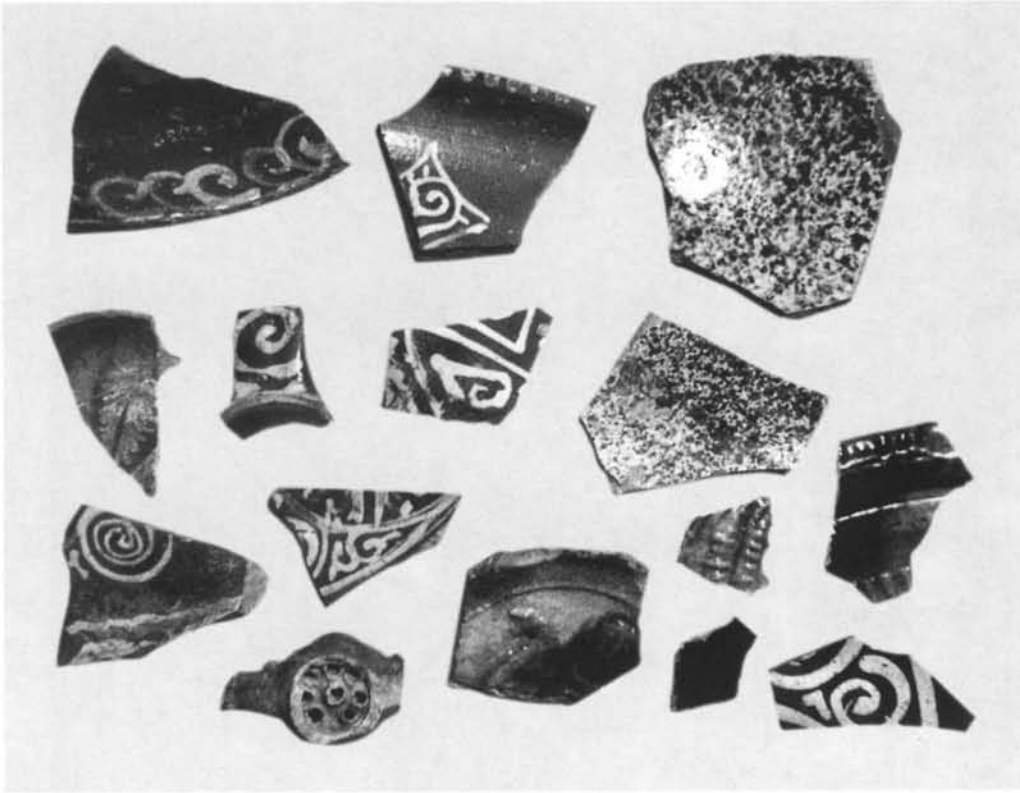


Fig. 3. Samples of Glazed White Ware, Spatter Ware, and Slip Painted Ware.

sherds. They become rare till the middle 12th century and most of them belong to the type of Glazed White Ware II (Hayes 1992: 18-27) with the familiar variety of shapes and decorative motifs of this particular type.

Glazed Red Wares³

Spatter Ware (Fig. 3). It appears rarely in Vrya, mostly in early 12th-century layers, and even more seldom in middle 12th-century layers. The usual shapes are plates and bowls. (There was found only one sherd of White Spatter Ware.)

Slip Painted Ware (Fig. 3). Also rare in Vrya, found mostly in layers of the first half of 12th century. They are mostly plates.

Green and Brown Painted Ware (Fig. 4). They appear at Vrya often from the end of 11th till the middle 12th century. The shapes are plates and bowls. There are very few samples of closed vases.

*Types of Sgraffito Ware*⁴ (Fig. 5). Sgraffito Ware is common at Vrya. It appeared firstly in early 12th-century layers and it continues to appear till the first two decades of the 13th century. Plates and bowls with geometrical patterns in bands around the central medallion with similar decorative motifs, belong to the earlier types of Fine Sgraffito Ware.

The free-style Sgraffito Ware appears in the middle 12th century. The interior of the vases is decorated freely with plant motifs, figures of birds, fishes, animals and rarely human figures.

The Green and Brown Sgraffito Ware (Fig. 4) appears during all the 12th century. They are very few samples of this type. The shapes are bowls and plates.

The incised Sgraffito Ware appears in the second half of the 12th century. The usual decorative motifs are human figures as well as animals and birds.

At the same time it appears the Champlévé Ware, the most common type of Sgraffito Ware at Vrya. The most favorite decorative motifs are animals (Fig. 6).

3. The types of Glazed Red Ware are based mostly on Ch. Morgan (1942). The dating was based entirely on excavatory data.

4. Complete glazed ceramics vases from Vrya have been published in: *The Art of Sgraffito* 1999: 48, 52, 61, 66, 67, 69.



Fig. 4. Sherds of Green and Brown Painted and Green and Brown Painted Sgraffito Ware.

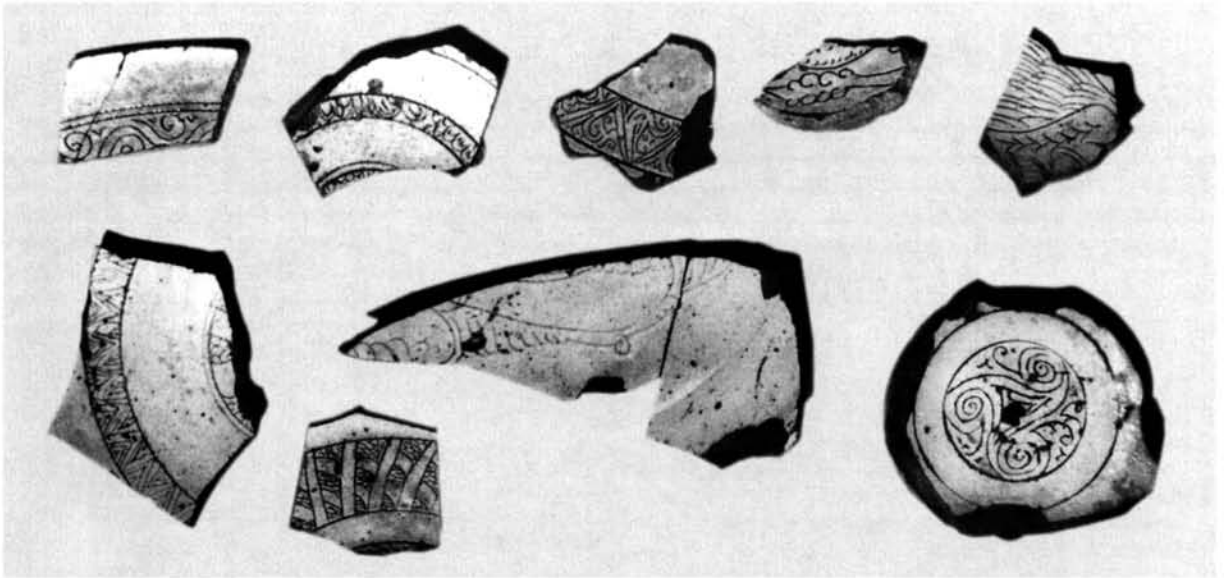


Fig. 5. Various types of Sgraffito Ware.

These last three types of Sgraffito Ware coexist at Vrya till the first two decades of the 13th century. The latest type of Sgraffito Ware at Vrya (end of 12th-early 13th century) is the Incised Sgraffito Ware with extremely plain and formalized decoration (Fig. 7).

Along with the decorated Glazed Red Ware, there was also found undecorated Glazed Ware. We cannot estimate the exact numbers of these two types of pottery before the conservation of the finds. For the moment, all we can say is that in the second half of the 12th century the



Fig. 6. Samples of Champlévé Ware.

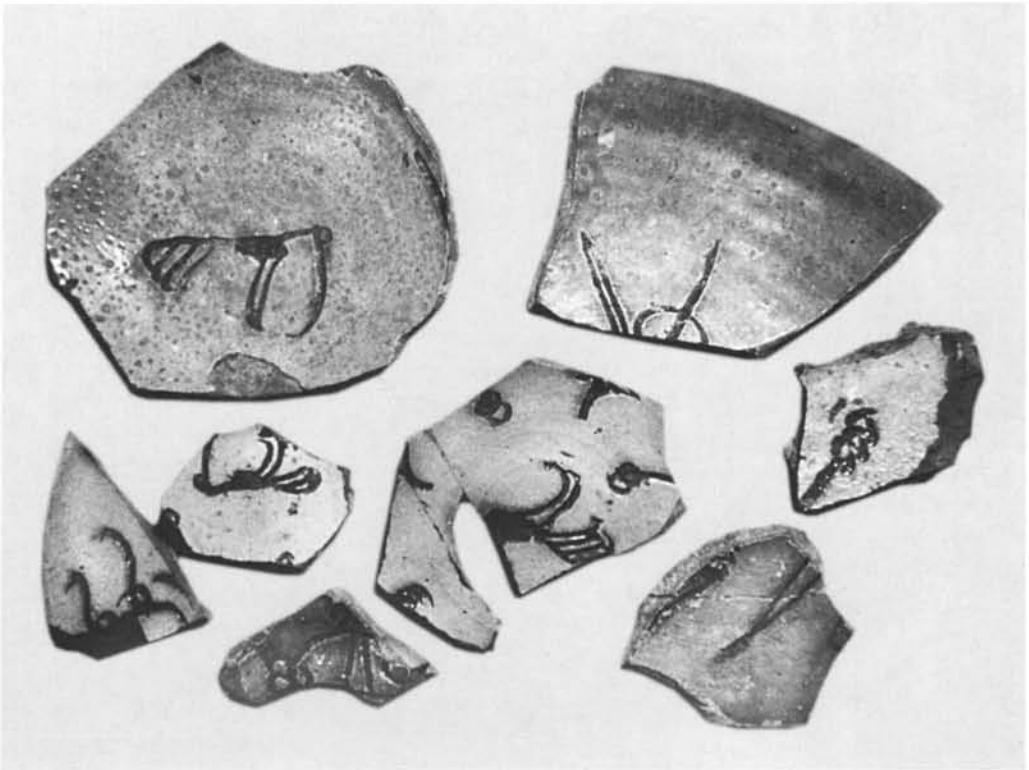


Fig. 7. Sherds of late Incised Sgraffito Ware.

rate of glazed ware in relation to that of non-glazed ware is 20%. The material of each type was classified after scrupulous counting of the sherds. The inventory and the statistical study of the finds, as well as that of the coins, remains as yet incomplete.

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