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**Medieval and post-medieval ceramics from the archaeological sites discovered by the Boeotia Project, Central Greece, to the present day**

Vroom, J.

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## 1.1 Introduction

Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery found in Greece has been little studied until now, and is rather seldom displayed in museums, as modern tourists may notice during their visits to the Aegean. As the traditional focus of archaeologists working in Greece has been on the material culture of Antiquity, the pots and pans of the Medieval inhabitants of Greece – such as the Franks, Venetians, Catalans, Albanians and Turks – have not always received the attention they deserve.

In fact, until quite recently Post-Roman ceramics were treated in most excavations and surface surveys in the Aegean as the Cinderella of the project. ‘Digging through the Byz’ was the general device of archaeologists working in Greece – and perhaps it still is in some places.[<sup>1</sup>] This expression means literally what it says: removing as quickly as possible with heavy machinery the layers on top of the vessels and other precious remains of Antiquity or Prehistory. Even today, it still is standard procedure at some excavations in the Aegean to simply throw away all undecorated Medieval pottery which is considered to be in the way of ancient treasures.

It is, therefore, perhaps small wonder that as recently as 1991 the archaeologist Timothy Gregory and the Byzantinist Alexander Kazhdan observed in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* that ‘the study of Byzantine pottery is still well behind that of other periods in the history of the Mediterranean, in part because of a lack of interest and in part because of the paucity of stratigraphically excavated Byzantine sites necessary to the elucidation of ceramic chronologies. Pottery from critical periods, such as the ‘dark age’ of the 7th-8th century and the 14th-15th century, is poorly known and little studied’.[<sup>2</sup>]

However, lately things have started to change, and the awareness has grown that the history of Greece did not grind to a halt at the time of the conquest of Greek lands by the Romans only to emerge out of something like a black hole with the War of Independence in 1821 AD. During the last two decades, new excavations, field

surveys, and groundbreaking new publications have opened up this vast period as a legitimate field of study. However, the growing interest in the Medieval and Post-Medieval archaeology of the Aegean has also underlined once more the relative lack of knowledge about the typochronology of the material culture of this period, as well as the lack of a common terminology to describe and classify it.

In this chapter I will discuss the main problems related to the chronology and terminology of Post-Roman ceramics in the Eastern Mediterranean in general, and in Greece in particular. Attention will be paid to the traditional division of pottery types in conventional historical and/or art-historical periods, which do not always correspond with the time-scales of production and actual use of certain pottery types. I will argue, however, that although these traditional period labels are from an archaeological perspective often ill-fitting and sometimes quite confusing, it may be inescapable to use them in order to provide a chronological structure, especially in the case of a large collection of pottery covering an extensive time span such as discussed here.

## 1.2 Problems in chronology and terminology

### 1.2.1 PROBLEMS OF CHRONOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY FOR THE EARLIER PERIODS

For archaeologists, the problem starts as soon as the term ‘Post-Roman’ is uttered. The knowledge of Post-Roman ceramics in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean has been and still is hampered by the poor knowledge of local (domestic) wares and the lack of published well-stratified contexts. The result is that nobody really knows where and when to begin.

Therefore, one of the basic chronological problems which up to this date remains to be tackled, is the question when in terms of pottery types the Late Roman period ends and the Early Byzantine (or Early Christian) period begins.[<sup>3</sup>] That is to say that we often really do

not quite know how to distinguish with any degree of certainty Late Roman wares from Early Byzantine wares, when all we know is that many 'Roman' pottery techniques and features continued (or recurred) through the Early Medieval period in the Mediterranean.

In addition, the terminology of the chronological phases causes confusion in itself. What is 'Byzantine' or 'Early Christian' supposed to mean in the Eastern Mediterranean area, and in Greece in particular? Pottery from the 4th to 7th century found at excavations in the East is generally labelled 'Byzantine'. Here the term 'Byzantine' is used in relation to the foundation of Constantinople in 330 AD and the split between the Eastern and Western Roman Empire by the end of the 4th century. Elsewhere in the Mediterranean, however, the same wares are normally designated 'Late Roman' by those archaeologists who emphasize the continuity of this pottery with the Roman types. They argue that the term 'Late Roman' should be viewed here in cultural rather than in political terms, and they point to the stylistic influence of Roman Christianity on the pottery decoration. The term 'Byzantine' is usually reserved by these scholars exclusively for the period beginning with the widespread introduction of the lead-glazed wares, which were produced in the Mediterranean and the Near East from the 7th century onwards (see also Dunn 2000, 304 on this categorisation).

The terminological indetermination does not contribute to a clear picture. For instance, for archaeologists working in the West the 'Early Byzantine' period starts only in the 6th century, whereas for their colleagues working in Palestine and Jordan the 'Late Byzantine' period already ends in the 6th century (with the loss of these Byzantine territories to the Persians and Arabs). However, these pottery date ranges as used in the Near East and in the West imply a perspective based mainly on political history. The actual styles and shapes in pottery tend to lag behind political changes, reacting more to the creation or extinction of markets (which are affected not only by political developments, but both by long-term socio-economic changes and by natural events in general such as plagues and earthquakes).

Therefore, it is perhaps not particularly surprising that the most recent view of pottery developments in the East is that Roman-derived wares continued to be produced in the Near East through the Early Islamic/Umayyad period (661-750 AD), and that

Egyptian Red Slip Ware even continued well into the 9th century.[4]

#### 1.2.2 PROBLEMS OF CHRONOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY FOR THE LATER PERIODS

As far as the later periods under study (Middle Byzantine up to Modern period) are concerned, the standard period labels and use of terminology for ceramics has also created problems. For instance, the chronologies used by archaeologists, art-historians and historians for the later periods differ widely. For some, the Late Roman period (4th-7th century) already counts as 'Medieval', for others the Greek Middle Ages do not start until Ottoman times. In addition, there are those who wonder whether 'Medieval' is not a term defined from the perspective of the Western-European Renaissance and Reformation, and has less meaning in the Greek Orthodox world.[5]

To add to the confusion, the designation 'Byzantine' is itself not without problematic cultural and political connotations. The British specialist in Byzantine art, Robin Cormack was perhaps not far off the mark when he stated: 'The term may have caused more problems than it solved and may actually have marginalised the period in historical studies' (Cormack 1997, 34).

Another example is the term 'Frankish'. Archaeologists have often used this term for 13th to 15th century pottery found in Greece. But one may wonder what does the term 'Frankish pottery' really mean? Is it pottery used and/or produced by Franks, who came as 'Crusaders' to Greek lands, or only a chronological definition for the material culture of the 13th to 15th century? Could it even be possible that the designation 'Frankish', so often used in the Greek context, creates in this respect as much clarity as confusion? The term 'Frankish' for 13th-15th century wares certainly causes confusion among Medieval archaeologists working with 5th-9th century Merovingian and Carolingian material from North-Western Europe, who are used to calling their finds 'Frankish'. And they are not the only ones left wondering. The leading expert on Frankish Greece, Peter Lock, flatly states that the standard term 'Frankish' as a chronological synonym for Late Byzantine wares 'may be diagnostically misleading in the field and not helpful in discussion of the penetration of either Greek markets or Greek minds by Medieval Western Europeans' (Lock 1997, 309).[6]

Similar questions may even be raised in relation to the term 'Roman'. The point is that, in general, archaeologists do not seem to have taken much notice from the confusion between 1) political regimes (Roman, Frankish, Ottoman) that do not relate to ethnicity, and 2) groups (Greeks, Albanians, Jews, Catalans, Sarakatsanoi, Vlachs etc.) living under these regimes that do relate to ethnicity, 3) the continuum of time that respects neither regime or ethnicity, and the pottery that can relate to all three.

All these problems may leave the archaeologist working with Post-Roman pottery in Greece quite empty-handed as far as terminology is concerned. But it perhaps also serves as a reminder of the fact that pottery in certain regions has its own rhythm of change, and does not necessarily obey the chronological schemes and schedules of historians and archaeologists. Historical events such as the fall of Constantinople in 1204 AD and the creation of Latin states in Greece did not neatly coincide with the appearance in the Aegean of pottery types such as 'Latin', 'Venetian', 'Genoese', or a century later 'Catalan', even though these groups were appearing in Greek territory.

### 1.2.3 POST-ROMAN CHRONOLOGY: A NEW PROPOSAL FOR THE CERAMICS FROM BOEOTIA

As stated above, there exists at this moment no standard terminology or chronology for the Post-Roman pottery in the Aegean area. The chronological divisions used here (Late Roman-Early Byzantine; Middle Byzantine; Late Byzantine/Frankish; Turkish; Early Modern; Modern) reflect an effort to classify ceramic groups with clear stylistic and technological similarities under more or less conventional period labels.

The problem here is of course that one cannot escape the connotations attached to these conventional designations. It should be emphasized therefore that much more important than these period labels, are the actual datings per pot type. I have contemplated whether to use only centuries in discussing the chronology of the ceramics from Boeotia without the larger period labels (as dates lack the historical and cultural connotations attached to traditional chronological terms), but I decided that because this study covers such an extensive time span, it was unavoidable to use some sort of overall chronological structure for the sake of clarity. However, it should be underlined once more that the chronology of ceramics does not stop or begin at historical or

political boundaries: the relation between changes in pottery on the one hand and the events and long-term developments of history on the other hand is much more complicated than that.

Also, it should perhaps be noted that some of the preliminary period labels used by John Hayes during his initial dating of the pottery found by the Boeotia Project (e.g. 'Middle-Late Byzantine', '(Late) Frankish-(Early) Turkish'), will not be used here – as Hayes himself did not use these terms in any of his publications. The detailed study of the pottery from Boeotia – which was immensely helped by Hayes' initial dating – has enabled me to establish a more detailed typo-chronology of the wares, so that they can be assigned with more certainty to more clearly defined stylistic groups.

This study covers the period from ca. the 7th to the mid 20th century. I will use the term 'Medieval' whenever I refer to the time span from the 7th to the mid-15th centuries. This designation seems fitted to cover this fragmented period in Greek history and is also intended to put the discussion of the pottery in the wider context of Medieval Europe. The term 'Post-Medieval' is used here as a general designation for the period of Ottoman rule and the Early Modern era in Greece (i.e. from the mid 15th up to the mid 20th century).

This research into the ceramic finds from Boeotia starts with the 7th century for the simple reason that John Hayes has ended his catalogue of the Roman ceramics in the 6th century. He suggests that the major break in Roman pottery tradition occurred in Greece in the 7th century, when the first lead-glazed wares produced in Constantinople started to appear (J. Hayes, pers. comm.; see also Hayes 1993). Furthermore, the Arab invasions of the Near East (e.g. the fall of Cyprus in 653/4 AD) and of Northern Africa (e.g. the fall of Carthage in 698 AD) caused clear breaks in the production and circulation of pottery in the Eastern Mediterranean.

So the term 'Early Byzantine' refers to pottery produced and used in the period between approximately the 7th and 9th centuries. After the 9th century, major changes in pottery types occurred in Boeotia. The term 'Middle Byzantine' refers to these new styles of pottery produced and used between circa the 10th and the late 12th/early 13th centuries.

Notwithstanding its shortcomings as an archaeolog-

Late Roman period	= ca. 250 – 600 AD
Early Byzantine period	= ca. 7th – 9th centuries A.C.
Middle Byzantine period	= ca. 10th – late 12th/early 13th centuries A.C.
Late Byzantine/Frankish period	= ca. 13th – mid 15th centuries A.C.
Turkish period	= ca. late 15th – 18th centuries A.C.
Early Modern period	= ca. 19th – mid 20th centuries A.C.
Modern period	= ca. mid 20th century A.C. – .....

Table 1.1 Chronological division of the Post-Roman ceramics of the Boeotia Project.

ical designation for pottery types, I will use for practical reasons the combined term ‘Late Byzantine/Frankish’ as a typo-chronological term. The word ‘Frankish’ refers to the period of Frankish and Catalan domination in Central Greece (ca. 1204-1460 AD); whereas the term ‘Late Byzantine’ is rather an art-historical term for the material culture in Greece (especially Northern Greece) during the same period, although it is not always appropriate for Boeotia. I will use the combined term ‘Late Byzantine/Frankish’ as a general label for pottery produced and used from ca. the 13th up to the mid 15th century, which is stylistically different from ‘Middle Byzantine’ wares.

The designation ‘Turkish’ refers to pottery dating from approximately the late 15th century to the 18th century. The subdivisions ‘Early Turkish’ (ca. late 15th-16th centuries) and ‘Late Turkish’ (ca. 17th-18th centuries) are sporadically used in historical contexts.

Finally, the designation ‘Early Modern’ refers to pottery roughly dating from the Greek War of Independence until the end of the Civil War (ca. 19th-mid 20th centuries). This designation ‘Early Modern’ for an archaeological period has its specific problems. Most field projects dealing with the Early Modern period focus their attention mainly on agricultural features and industrial remains, and less on the pots and pans used in the recent past (see Vroom 1998b, 132 for references). In addition, there seems to be no general agreement over the precise meaning of ‘Early Modern’ and ‘Modern’, or over the chronological boundaries involved.

In general, the archaeologist Jack Davis, discussing survey data from the Cyclades in Ottoman times, touched the sore spot of much archaeological research in Greek lands when he correctly stated that ‘artefacts of later periods – if systematically collected and described – are often assigned the vaguest dates (e.g. Post-Byzantine; Medieval to Modern), and their distributions are subsequently ignored or subjected only to cursory analysis’ (Davis 1991, 133). Many field projects in Greece in fact use the designation ‘Early Modern’ or ‘Turkish and Modern’ for the period from the mid 15th to the late 20th century, a span of over 500 years. This rather unspecific ‘archaeological period’ seems often to be the result of the limited amount of archaeological material from this period which is collected (or recognized) during surveys and the lack of excavations conducted on sites of this period. If any sub-division of this period is made, this more often than not is based on the availability of historical sources and not on artefacts, a fundamental shift in argumentation in archaeological projects which is not always sufficiently recognized (Davis 1991).

However, the use of the term ‘Early Modern’ (and not ‘Modern’) for the period between the beginning of Greek Independence in 1821 AD and roughly the Second World War is to be preferred for a couple of reasons. In Boeotia, the quantity and quality of the surface pottery recorded by the Durham/Cambridge Project – which is studied in combination with excavation material from Thebes – make it possible to divide

the Post-Medieval pottery into well-documented subdivisions such as ‘Early Turkish’ (ca. late 15th-16th centuries), ‘Late Turkish’ (ca. 17th-18th centuries) and ‘Early Modern’ (ca. 19th-mid 20th centuries). After ca. 1950 AD the influx of Modern Western goods (such as plastic containers) resulted in a shift in the material culture in Boeotia, which justifies the reservation of the term ‘Modern’ for this period only.

### 1.3 Summary

In order to offer an overall chronological structure for the time span under discussion here (ca. 7th to 20th centuries), the following division of the Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramics from the Boeotia Project will be used (see Table 1.1). I have to underline, however, that this division is based in the first place on the stylistic and technological changes of the pottery and not on historical or political events (although the period labels do have obvious historical connotations).

That is not to say that changes in pottery are completely independent of historical developments, but it can hardly be stressed enough that this relation is complex and that the boundaries between archaeological phases may be much fuzzier than chronological divisions may suggest.

#### NOTES

1. The reference is from the Dutch-American art-historian and expert on Rembrandt, Gary Schwartz, in the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* (1.11.1996), who quotes his former professor of archaeology in America, John Young.

2. Kazhdan et al. (1991, 400). The term ‘Byzantine’ is used conventionally to designate the predominant artistic styles developed in Constantinople between its establishment as Imperial capital in 330 AD and its fall in 1453 AD (after: *The Penguin Dictionary of Decorative Arts*, 140).

3. Sometimes archaeologists also use the term ‘Early Christian’ for this period, concentrating on the study of architectural styles of churches, their mosaic or fresco decoration and sculptural ornaments. However, the term suggests that a majority of the population is Christian.

4. Another instance of in clarity in terminology seems to me the designation ‘Coptic’ for pottery. The religious term Coptic is often used to designate painted table wares produced in Egypt and Nubia in the Late Roman – Early Byzantine periods, although the same pottery manufacture tradition can be traced in Nubia all the way up to the 14th century.

5. Although the designation ‘Medieval’ is thus undoubtedly problematic, the term is, however, certainly to be preferred to the term ‘Byzantine’, if only to put this chronology relating to the Greek world more clearly in a wider European and Mediterranean context.

6. A discussion of the terms ‘Frank’ and ‘Frankish’ and of the related problems in using this kind of terminology is given by Peter Lock in his book *The Franks in the Aegean, 1204-1500* (Lock 1995, 8-9 and 271). Cf. also Peter Lock and Guy Sanders’ preface in *The Archaeology of Medieval Greece* (Lock & Sanders 1996; see also Vroom 1999b).

