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Mapping the ceramics: production and distribution of Champlevé Ware in the Aegean (12th-13th c. AD)

Vroom, J.A.C.; IJzendoorn, M.W. van; Ferri, M.; Moine, C.; Sabbionesi, L.

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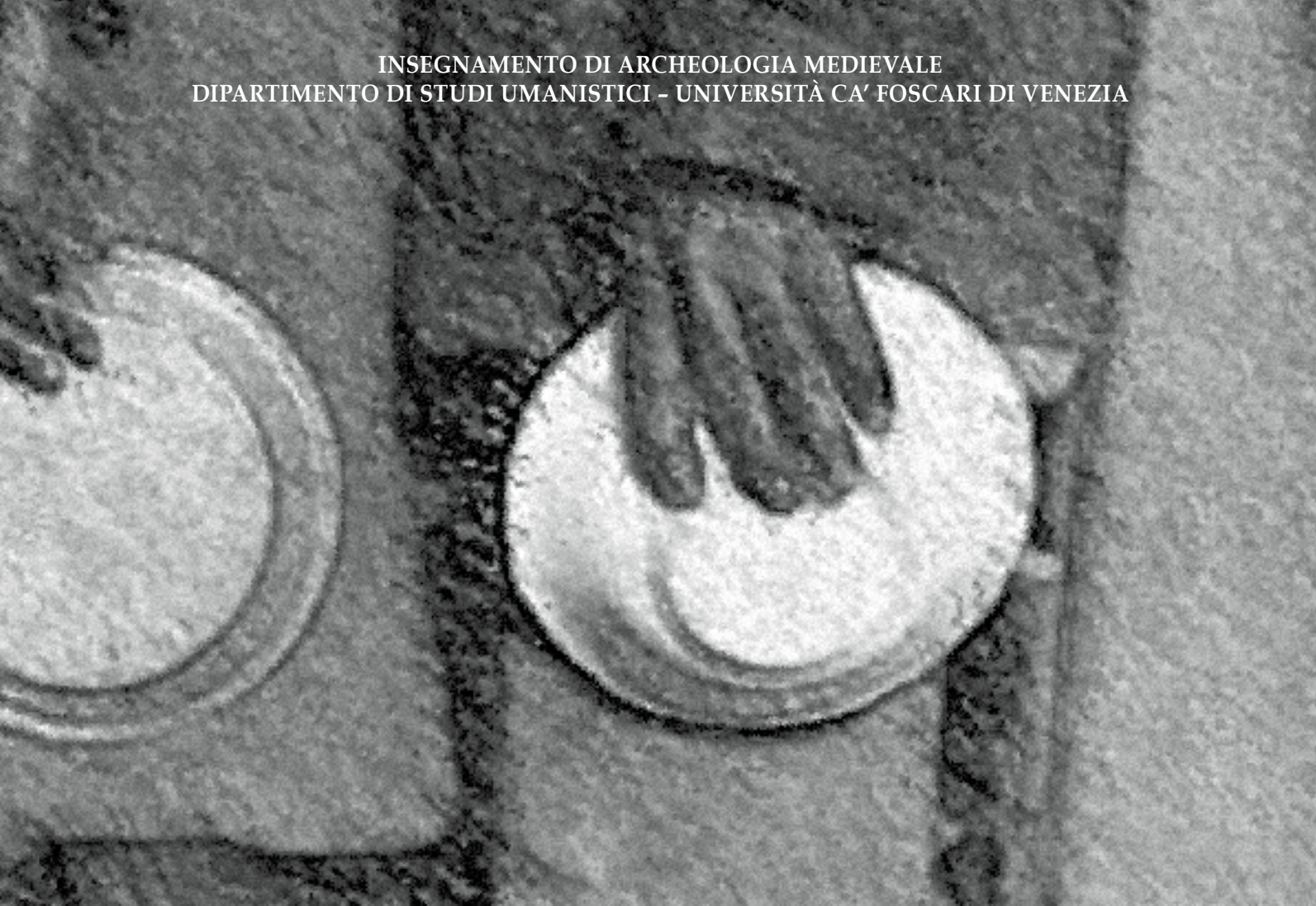
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IN&AROUND

Ceramiche e comunità

Secondo convegno tematico dell'AIECM3

Faenza, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche
17-19 aprile 2015

a cura di

Margherita Ferri, Cecilia Moine, Lara Sabbionesi



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MAPPING THE CERAMICS: PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF CHAMPLEVÉ WARE IN THE AEGEAN (12TH-13TH C. AD)

Περίληψη: Η παραγωγή και διάδοση των βυζαντινών Επιπεδόγλυφων (*Champlevé*) εφυαλωμένων κεραμικών αποτελεί το θέμα του παρόντος άρθρου. Η κεραμική αυτή κατηγορία απαντά από τον ύστερο 12^ο έως τα μέσα του 13^{ου} αιώνα. Η παραγωγή της πιθανόν περιοριζόταν στις ελλαδικές περιοχές του Αιγαίου· η αρχαιολογική μαρτυρία υποδεικνύει την ύπαρξη κέντρων παραγωγής στη Χαλκίδα και τη Σπάρτη. Το Αργος, η Αθήνα και ενδεχομένως η Λάρισα είναι επίσης πιθανές θέσεις παραγωγής. Η διάδοση των Επιπεδόγλυφων εφυαλωμένων κεραμικών, ωστόσο, ξεπερνούσε κατά πολύ τα όρια του Αιγαίου. Τα Επιπεδόγλυφα εξαγονταν στην Τουρκία, τη Μαύρη Θάλασσα, την Εγγύς Ανατολή και την Ιταλία. Η εξαγωγή τους μέσω θαλάσσιων δρόμων είχε ως προορισμό κυρίως αστικά κέντρα κατά μήκος των ακτών. Η προκαταρκτική αυτή μελέτη τείνει να καταλήξει στο συμπέρασμα ότι η παραγωγή τους ήταν διαφοροποιημένη και εξειδικευμένη, ενώ η εμπορική τους διάδοση δυναμική και ευρεία.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: μεσοβυζαντινή περίοδος, Αιγαίο, επιπεδόγλυφα, παραγωγή, διάδοση.

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a preliminary overview of recent research on Champlevé Ware¹. This pottery type is a glazed red-bodied earthenware of the Middle Byzantine period that can approximately be dated from the late twelfth to the first half of the thirteenth century. This table ware is mostly characterised by the applied gouging decoration-technique and, to a lesser extent, a rudimentary vessel morphology and fairly coarse fabric composition (ARMSTRONG 1991, pp. 340-342; VROOM 2005², p. 93). The following text presents some primary results concerning the production and distribution of Champlevé pottery in the Aegean and beyond (fig. 1).

Champlevé Ware was part of a longstanding tradition of decorated glazed wares. Of major influence to the Middle Byzantine pottery production and commercialisation, and the entire domestic economy, were pivotal historical developments of the time: increasing regionalisation and, at the same time, growing connectivity. After the Sack of Constantinople in 1204, by members of the Fourth Crusade, Byzantine territories in the Aegean were conquered by the Franks (LAIΟΥ, MORRISON 2007, pp. 115-119, 166-167). This set in motion political and economic fragmentation. Ceramic production and trade were also affected. New production centres emerged, together with innovations in potting and decoration traditions, causing higher diversity as well as downsizing and specialisation of production (PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 1999, p. 18; VROOM 2003, p. 58). Latin occupation also ensured that locals became more imbedded in Western-dominated routes of the sea trade, which allowed increasing (inter)regional traffic (LAIΟΥ, MORRISON 2007; DIMOPOULOS 2009, p. 185). These networks, which were firmly established from the thirteenth century onwards, shaped and intensified long-distant exchange in the Mediterranean. Presumably, this caused pottery to reach distant places and inspiring local producers. At the same time, these networks enhanced personal mobility and

thereby presumably creating 'traveling artisans'. Due to this, potters in different locations became more interconnected resulting in widely shared trends (VROOM 2014, 186). Hence, Aegean communities were more geo-political separated but, at the same time, enjoyed extensive economic and cultural interaction. As we demonstrate here, Champlevé pottery provides an illustrative case of these socio-economic circumstances.

2. PRODUCTION

Champlevé Ware was manufactured, not at a single location, but in multiple places. It was truly an Aegean product since its production can now be confined within the western Aegean Sea region². In fact, the manufacture of Champlevé pottery seems to have taken place in Central Greece, the Peloponnese and on the island of Crete (fig. 1).

Presently, three places provide reliable archaeological evidence indicating local production. These are the cities of Chalkis (Euboea), Sparta (Laconia) and Heraklion (Crete) (SANDERS 1993, pp. 259-261; BAKOIROU *et al.* 2003, pp. 233-234; VROOM 2005², p. 93; DIMOPOULOS 2007, pp. 336-337; WAKSMAN *et al.* 2014, p. 414)³. The productions of Champlevé Ware in Chalkis and Sparta were presumably contemporary.

Champlevé pottery was coated with a whitish or cream slip layer in which decorative motifs were cut out⁴. Afterwards, the vessels were covered with monochrome yellowish lead-glazes, although occasionally green glazes were used alternatively. Very rarely, multi-coloured glazes were used. For the production in both cities no tripod stilts were involved. The most common shapes are deep bowls and shallow dishes (ARMSTRONG 1991, pp. 139-141, figs. 4-6; MEGAW 1975, pp. 36-37, figs. 1-2; VROOM 2005², p. 92).

Engraved decorations were limited to the interior surfaces, however in rare cases vessels were decorated on the exterior. These designs consisted of a main motif in a central tondo,

* Associate Professor, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University (NL) (j.a.c.vroom@arch.leidenuniv.nl; joanitavroom@hotmail.com).

** MA, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University (NL) (minkvanijzendoorn@hotmail.com).

¹ This study is based on the research for an ongoing master thesis by M. van IJzendoorn and supervised by Dr. J. Vroom at the Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University (NL). We would like to thank the organisers of the 2nd *Congrès International Thématique de l'AIEM3*, held at Faenza, to present the first results of our research on Champlevé Ware in a poster at this conference. Furthermore, we are much indebted to Dr. P. Kalamara and G. Vaxevannis of the 23rd Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities in Chalkis (Greece) to allow us to study and publish the ceramic finds from recent excavations in the city centre of Chalkis. Thanks are also due to Dr. E. Tzavella, Dr. N. Kontogiannis, Dr. S. Skartsis and Dr. A. Anastasiadou for their stimulating discussions and help. Finally, we are very thankful to the Netherlands Institute in Athens (NIA) and the Netherlands Organisation of Scientific Research (NWO) for their support.

² Due to the geographical provenance, Peter Megaw introduced the term 'Aegean Ware' to describe Champlevé pottery and several other related wares (1975, pp. 34-35, 43). Although still regularly used, this term is now largely abandoned in favour of techno-stylistic classifications such as 'Champlevé Ware' and 'Incised Sgraffito Ware' etc. (see VROOM 2003, pp. 65-66; 2005², pp. 90-93).

³ Apparently, archaeological research on Crete yielded Champlevé Ware wasters in Heraklion (POULOU-PAPADIMITRIOU *pers. comm.* 2015). Additional information will be published in the future.

⁴ Slip-cut decorations (e.g., *sgraffito*- and *champlevé*-techniques) occurred in the Near East centuries before they made their appearance in Byzantium (DAUTERMAN-MAGUIRE, MAGUIRE 1992, p. 13). Therefore, Byzantine engraved decorations should be considered reproductions of Islamic examples, rather than being Greek inventions. Whether Champlevé pottery was a copy of Islamic wares or if it was a product of a long-standing Byzantine tradition that had initially been inspired by Eastern decorations, is unclear.

often enlivened with secondary decorations in the form of incised and gouged concentric bands or vegetal elements. Animal motifs were mostly used, for instance rabbits, hare, hounds, deer, lions, birds and sometimes mythical creatures like serpents and winged horses. Also floral and geometric motifs did occur, consisting of mainly palmettes. Human figures were infrequently depicted.

Stylistic differences as well as remarkable similarities are seen across areas where Champlévé Ware has been found. The *champlévé*-technique was a broad regional decoration style. There must have been certain levels of artisanal communication between pottery communities, since similar decorations and shapes were duplicated at different workshops. Generating ceramic iconography is an important mode of cultural expression (RICE 2005², pp. 388, 393-394). It is entirely possible that decorations on Byzantine pottery carried symbolic meaning for their creators and consumers (DAUTERMAN-MAGUIRE 1997, p. 255; VROOM 2014, pp. 179, 184-187). Subsequently, such iconography had likely socio-cultural significance since certain designs and themes were excessively repeated. On the other hand, some motifs and forms were unique to a particular workshop, suggesting differentiation. Most designs reflect Medieval folklore and do not seem to have had ideological (religious or political) connotations. Champlévé Ware was used by a large proportion of the public and might have been functional in nature as well as an item of display.

2.1 Chalkis and Sparta

In the Middle and Late Byzantine periods, Chalkis (*Negroponte* or *Euripos*) had a key role in interregional maritime trading routes, especially for Thebes (VROOM 2003, pp. 245-246; JACOBY 2004, pp. 148-149). Its harbour was of great commercial and military importance. The function of Chalkis as a major glazed pottery manufacturer in that time has just recently been recognised (VROOM 2005², p. 93; DIMOPOULOS 2009, pp. 179-181; WAKSMAN *et al.* 2014, pp. 385, 387, 379, 414). Chalkis had a single, main and long-lasting production of an array of glazed wares (the so-called 'Middle Byzantine Production') and Champlévé Ware was one of the pottery types produced there (WAKSMAN *et al.* 2014, pp. 379, 414). Presumably, these Chalkidian potters had a distinct degree of standardisation and specialisation since their rich production was rather large-scale and uniform. The fabrics and potting were quite universal for all table ware types, whereas decorations differed greatly. The *champlévé*-technique was popular in Chalkis, although the local craftsmen also used many other decoration styles. It is important to regard Champlévé Ware not to be in isolation but rather in conjunction with the production and circulation of other Middle Byzantine table wares (particularly Incised Sgraffito Ware) since they have much technical as well as spatio-temporal overlap.

In the ongoing *Chalkis Project* of Joanita Vroom, carried out in cooperation with the 23rd Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities in Chalkis and the Netherlands Institute in Athens (NIA), we have recognised some unglazed biscuit-fired wasters and several examples of over-fired and misfired fragments of Champlévé Ware (*pers. obs.* 2013-15). Generally, Champlévé Ware from recent excavations in Chalkis can be dated from the later twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century (see WAKSMAN *et al.* 2014). The orange fabric (Munsell 2.5YR6/6 to 2.5YR7/5-6) is medium fine to medium coarse, rather soft, and has lime and quartz inclusions and voids.

Now the intensity and diversity of the ceramic production of Medieval Chalkis are better understood, we suggest that this

city was a large-scale manufacturer of Champlévé Ware. In fact, pottery fragments with a similar *champlévé* decoration from many sites throughout the entire diffusion area are reminiscent of the Chalkis-type. Moreover, chemical fabric analysis and archaeometric investigations point to Chalkis as a major producer of Champlévé pottery and other table wares (WAKSMAN, VON WARTBURG 2006, pp. 380, 382, 385; WAKSMAN *et al.* 2014, p. 414).

In addition, Sparta manufactured many types of glazed ceramics including Champlévé Ware until the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century (VROOM 2011, p. 417, table 3). In this city two unglazed biscuit-fired wasters of Champlévé pottery have been found (SANDERS 1993, p. 261, cat nos. 5, 10). The reddish to brownish fabrics (Munsell 5YR 5/6-8 to 6/6) are described as medium hard, fine to coarse with inclusions and voids (SANDERS 1993, p. 255).

Guy Sanders has dated these unfinished vessels to the second quarter of the thirteenth century. Other Spartan Champlévé pottery has been dated from the late twelfth to the early thirteenth century. During this period, the *champlévé*-technique seemed to have been the dominant decoration style; however, Incised Sgraffito Ware was also very prominent (SANDERS 1993, p. 261; PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 1999, pp. 59-60, 66, cat nos. 52, 53, 61; BAKOUREOU *et al.* 2003, p. 234; DIMOPOULOS 2007, p. 337; KATSARA *pers. comm.* 2015).

The Spartan production was likely to be on a more modest scale than the one of Chalkis. Sparta was a small provincial production centre and had presumably a more limited access to interregional trade than the port city of Chalkis. Nonetheless, Sparta was surprisingly well aware of the ceramic trends of the time (DIMOPOULOS 2007, pp. 335, 340, 347; VROOM 2011, p. 416). As for ceramic decoration and shape, the city followed the styles of Athens and Corinth. Perhaps Chalkis was also a source of inspiration and viceversa.

2.2 Other production places?

It has been proven problematic to relate a specific workshop to particular pottery types (DIMOPOULOS 2007, p. 340; RICE 2005², pp. 337-342). Therefore, presumably, these three centres mentioned above were not the only production loci of Champlévé Ware (WAKSMAN, VON WARTBURG 2006, p. 380). Some sites lack the irrefutable evidence of the localised producers, but do however give some indications of separate productions. In these cases, we are dependent upon indirect data found on consumer-sites rather than direct proof (production waste, kiln furniture etc.) obtained from producer-sites. Indirect evidence does include trends in fabric composition, vessel morphology and decoration style. Such data can provide indications for the existence of workshops without pinpointing to specific sites. Consequently, this results in the identification of what Yona Waksman calls 'unlocalised productions' (*pers. comm.* 2015). Champlévé Ware from certain places seem to have quirks in their assemblages, unique for these areas, suggesting local production. We identify Argos, Athens and Larissa as such places⁵. These Byzantine cities are known for local glazed pottery production (PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 1999, p. 158; BAKOUREOU *et al.* 2003, pp. 233-234; LAIOU, MORRISON 2007, pp. 187-188; VASSILIOU 2013, p. 220; VROOM 2013 pp. 102-104). For example, some Champlévé Ware from Argos (Argolis) and Larissa (Thessaly) have certain very distinct localised features.

⁵ Research led by Vroom in Athens will, in the future, provide more information about this local production.

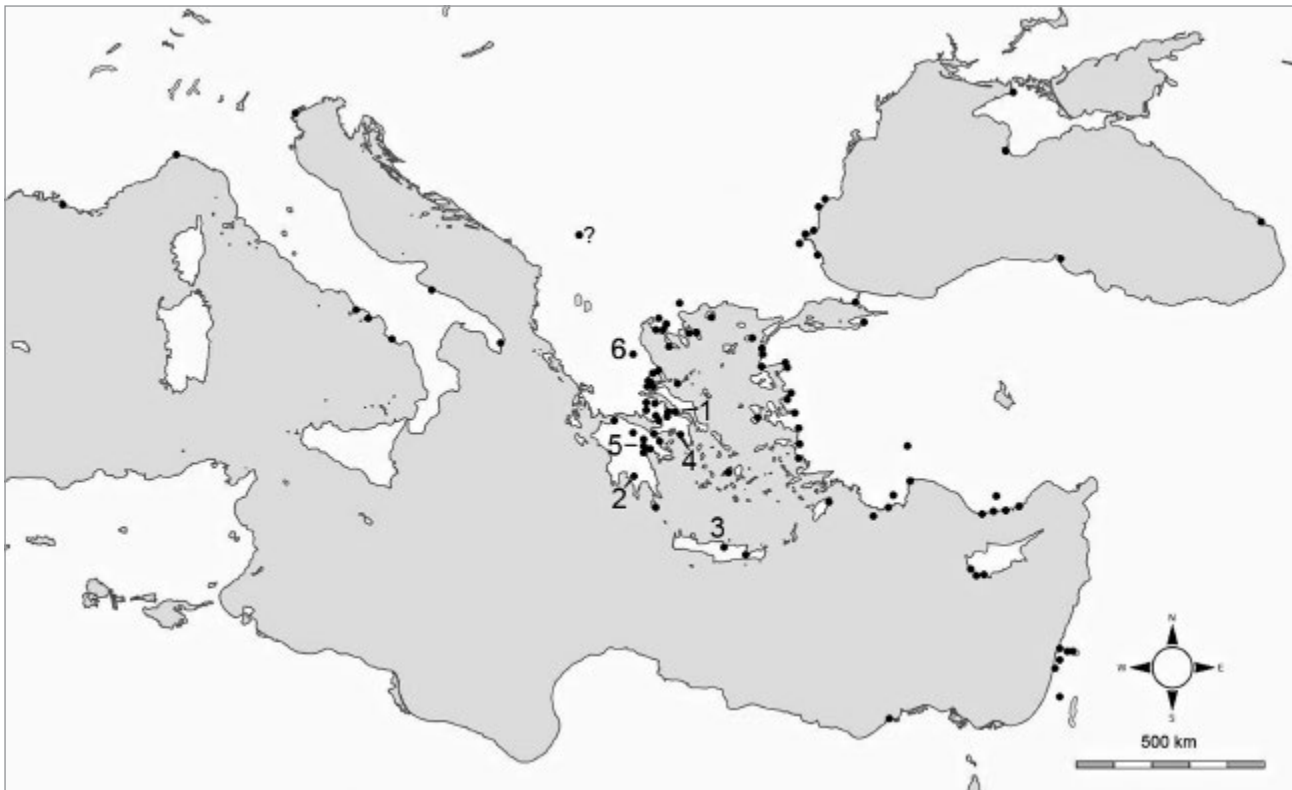


fig. 1 – Geographic distribution of Champlevé Ware in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Near East. Production centres: 1= Chalkis, 2= Sparta, 3= Heraklion. Presumed production centres: 4= Athens, 5= Argos, 6= Larissa.

Examples of Champlevé pottery found in Argos with a pinkish slip and added green glaze paint are unknown from other find spots (PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 1999, p. 70, cat nos. 68, 69; PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI *et al.* 1999, p. 110, cat no. 225). These features are largely typical of the finds in Argos, as this sort of duochrome decoration is extremely exceptional for Champlevé Ware and unfamiliar from vessels produced in other places. The crude potting and *champlevé*-technique does, however, show parallels with other workshops. We know that Argos was a glazed ware producer in the Middle Byzantine period, primarily from the end of the twelfth century onwards (BAKOUROU *et al.* 2003, p. 233; VASSILIOU 2013, p. 220). Champlevé Ware found in this city has been dated to the first half of the thirteenth century (PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 1999, p. 70).

Somewhere in north-eastern Greece, another production of a distinctive Champlevé pottery type, may have existed. It was perhaps located in or near Larissa since most of the finds have been found there⁶. This interpretation is based on macroscopic analysis of the fabrics and a detailed study of the surface treatment of one group of Champlevé Ware collected in the Almyros area (Thessaly), in comparison to published vessels found in Larissa dated to the late twelfth to the early thirteenth century (PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 1999, pp. 62-63, cat nos. 55, 56, 57; 2013, p. 238, cat no. 108; GIALOURI 2009, pp. 498-499, fig. 5).

The fabric, as well as the vessels' morphology, of this Larissa-group is atypical for most Champlevé pottery. The pale reddish-brown fabric (Munsell 2.5YR6/6 to 5/8) is fine and hard. The glazes are thick, ranging from glossy to matt, with hardly any impurities. They have dull monochrome colours, varying between pale olive green, ochre yellow and yellow.

⁶ Possibly, also other places in north-eastern Greece or eastern Thrace could be potential origins (SANDERS 2013, p. 240).

The fabric, as well as the glazes, are of a much higher quality than the ones from the other producers.

The *champlevé*-technique is carefully executed and the motifs are very detailed, much more so than the decorations known from the potters operating in southern Greece. Similarly, the skilled potting-technique is remarkably fine and precise. The Larissa-type vessels are much more thin-walled than the vessels from other workshops. This production is quite elegant and resembles more the somewhat later 'Late Sgraffito Ware'-family than the rudimentary pottery of the Middle Byzantine traditions of Central Greece and the Peloponnese (SANDERS 1993, p. 257; PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 2013, p. 238)⁷. The export of this Champlevé Ware seems quite limited since it has only been recognised in Almyros, Chalkis, Larissa, NeaSilata and possibly Constantinople (HERRIN 1982, p. 234; PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 1999, pp. 61-63).

We assume that more minor productions across the Aegean still await discovery. Nevertheless, this does not invalidate Chalkis' role as principal manufacturer. Unfortunately, Champlevé pottery from many places has been poorly documented and is often unpublished which hinders more detailed study. Hopefully, more Champlevé Ware will be (re-)investigated and published to further support these hypotheses.

3. DISTRIBUTION

Champlevé Ware circulated mainly within the Aegean Sea (fig. 1). Its diffusion was, however, more widespread throughout

⁷ The excellent Larissa-type glaze and fabric reminisce the ones of the Late Sgraffito Wares and especially animal designs of Elaborate Incised Ware bear much resemblances (RICE 1930, pp. 61-64, fig. 4; FRANÇOIS 2003, pp. 158-159, fig. 5).

the Byzantine world and further away, reaching parts of Anatolia, the Black Sea, the Near East and the western Mediterranean. The largest quantities are found amongst the Aegean coastlines of Greece and Turkey (see PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 1999; BÖHLENDORF-ARSLAN 2004). Its diffusion, especially in the peripheries of the Empire and beyond, was restricted to urban centres connected to maritime trade routes. Only within inland areas, in the proximity of production places or in the hinterlands of urban redistribution centres, is Champlévé pottery documented at rural settlements, such as farmsteads, monasteries and fortified towns (ARMSTRONG 1989, pp. 45-46; VROOM 2003, pp. 164, 274; REINDERS, AALDERS 2007, pp. 48, 53; GIALOURI 2009, pp. 498-499; ANASTASIADOU 2015, pp. 443, 446). Interestingly, even in the direct outlet areas of the production centres, Champlévé pottery from other places was imported. For instance, in Chalkis, small numbers of sherds of Spartan and Larissa-type Champlévé Ware have been documented (*pers. obs.* 2014-15).

In Constantinople, noticeable amounts of Champlévé Ware have been recorded (HAYES 1992, p. 48; BÖHLENDORF-ARSLAN 2004, pp. 175-177, tables 68-71). This pottery type has been found in numerous other Byzantine cities in the eastern Mediterranean, for example Corinth, Ephesus, Pergamum and Thessaloniki. Furthermore, many of these vessels were exported to cities located on the coast of the Black Sea, including for instance, places in Bulgaria, the Crimea and Georgia (RICE 1930, p. 115, pl. XIXb; MEGAW 1975, pp. 38-39; YAKOBSON 1979, p. 132, fig. 82; DIMOPOULOS 2009, p. 182; MANOLOVA-VOYKOVA 2013, pp. 356-357). Important urban trade centres such as Anchialos, Chersonesos, Sinope and Varna received imports of Champlévé pottery together with many other Byzantine ceramics.

The transportation of Champlévé pottery tends to have been strongly maritime-based. This view is supported by many finds of this ware noticeably found in coastal areas and the multiple shipwrecks discovered carrying this pottery as bulk goods, likely as saleable ballast or personal belongings (ARMSTRONG 1991, p. 335; PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI 1999, pp. 143-144; FRANÇOIS, SPIESER 2002, pp. 602-606). Presumably, European merchants (mostly Italians) were largely responsible for its commercialisation overseas. This is seen through the diffusion pattern in the Near East, Cyprus and the Italian peninsula. Its occurrence in Cyprus and the Levant can be correlated to the Frankish presence, since Champlévé pottery has been found in some urban centres of the Crusaders like Acre, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Kouklia and Paphos (AVISSAR, STERN 2005, pp. 43-45; WAKSMAN, VON WARTBURG 2006; ARNON 2008, pp. 49, 55; TATCHER 2009, pp. 157-158; STERN 2012, p. 71). In Italy, the ware is found in trade cities near or at the sea as, for instance, in Genoa, Naples, Otranto, Trani and Venice (GARDINI 1993; PEDUTO 1993, pp. 93-98; SACCARDO *et al.* 2003; ARTHUR 2007, p. 246, *pers. obs.* 2015). Champlévé Ware has also been found in the French trading port of Marseille (AMOURIC *et al.* 1999, pp. 19-22).

The export of Champlévé pottery was not always able to successfully penetrate foreign markets. In such places it had to rival with other kinds of glazed table ware. This was the case in Egypt and other parts of the Arabic world, where Islamic pottery was produced and wares from other regions were imported. Nevertheless, Champlévé pottery, and other Middle Byzantine glazed wares alike, were exported to Alexandria (KUBAIK 1969, pp. 11-15, 25; FRANÇOIS 1999, pp. 111-112, 121-124, cat nos. 294, 295, 314, 315). Local glazed pottery productions in some Italian regions and the Black Sea however were absent during the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries (ARTHUR 2007, p. 250; LAIOU, MORRISON 2007, pp. 185-187; MANOLOVA-VOYKOVA 2013, pp. 353, 359). Therefore, in these areas the influx of Aegean ceramics like Champlévé Ware was appreciated.

4. CONCLUSION

Champlévé pottery is merely one of the various Byzantine glazed wares which deserve a close study. A broader synthesis on the ceramic activities of the Aegean region during the Middle Ages should be built on a framework including a wider spectrum of ware types. Many aspects of the organisation of production and the logistics of distribution are still unclear. Nonetheless, this initial overview shows, despite its shortcomings, the richness and diversity of a part of glazed pottery production in the Aegean and indicates how dynamic and widespread its distribution would have been. Its manufacture was more dispersed than the preceding large productions. This decentralisation and downscaling of production is a general trend which manifested during the transition of the Middle and Late Byzantine periods. Champlévé Ware vessels reveal signs of craft specialisation and a level of stylistic uniformity between workshops. The distribution pattern sheds light on the wide reaches of the commercial contacts the Byzantines had with distant regions within and outside of the Empire. The distribution of Champlévé pottery is also a parameter for the increasing connectivity between distant places through the maritime trade systems. Hopefully, this study will contribute to a better understanding of the socio-economic situation of the Medieval Mediterranean world in general and of Byzantium in particular.

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