

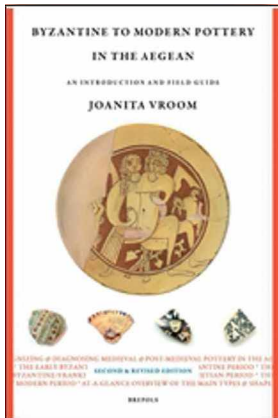
Joanita Vroom

Byzantine to modern pottery in the Aegean

An introduction and field guide

Second edition

2014 . Turnhout . Brepols



At a time when many members of MPRG are increasingly discussing the development of online type series and digital resources, a printed field guide describing pottery types might appear somewhat anachronistic. However, anybody who has ever worked on an isolated site in south-eastern Europe, with no internet access or local type

series, will immediately recognise the value of this volume. This is not a work of interpretation, indeed it should be considered very much as a partner volume to the author's other excellent and innovative work on the pottery of the medieval and post-medieval Aegean (particularly Vroom 2003). It is, however, an invaluable starting point for anybody seeking to get to grips with medieval and modern pottery in the Byzantine and Ottoman worlds.

The volume is clearly structured, with its purpose, to provide an 'at-a-glance overview of the types of Post-Classical ceramics most commonly encountered' and to create a common classification system, being clearly stated. It is worth pointing out that this is a second edition, but it is unclear whether there have been any revisions to the 2005 edition (reviewed by George Haggarty in *Medieval Ceramics* 28). The methodology used to describe the wares is clearly summarised, with the author highlighting the use of established methodologies, such as the 'Peacock method' of fabric description and the use, as much as is possible for this region, of the MPRG's *Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms*. Specialist terms are clearly defined both here, and in a glossary, which is important given that the book is likely to be of most use to those starting out in the analysis of medieval pottery. In such a wide area, where historical events continue to be used in the definition of chronology, Vroom's pragmatic approach to defining phases, based on changes in ceramic styles and production, is refreshing. It is, in itself, an important contribution if we are to allow the archaeological material to tell its own story, rather than illustrating that of the documents. Illustrations, taken from the MPRG classification and other publications, are used to define the terms used to describe forms and maps of the places mentioned in the text both support the reader in navigating their way around the volume and the pottery that it describes. A particularly useful

element of the book is Vroom's attempt at creating a decision tree to guide the reader to likely types of pottery based on the most obvious characteristics of a sherd, reducing the need to flick through the entire volume – the whole book is set up to be as user friendly as possible.

The bulk of the volume consists of descriptions of wares under standardised categories of alternative names (especially useful in an area with multiple traditions of research), fabric, surface treatment, decoration, shape (using standardised terminology), origin, distribution, dating range (including useful cues for determining whether sherds are likely to be early or late within a chronological range) and details of any associated variants. Colour photographs of vessels and line drawings of common forms are provided to assist identification. The standardised nature of these descriptions adds to the usability of the volume and the colour images throughout give the volume a clear advantage over other books which attempt to cover similar ground (eg Dark 2001). Whilst references feature in each description, it might have been useful to include a summary bibliography for each type (the bibliography at the end of the volume is helpfully structured by ceramic phase) and images of fabric breaks would also have been desirable, however it must be remembered that some wares cover a variety of fabrics from different production centres.

Indeed, the definition of wares is perhaps the most contentious part of the volume. A variety of different characteristics – production centre (eg Sgraffito Ware from Corinth), form (eg ceramic beehives) and tradition (eg Slavic Ware) are used to describe wares. Coming from a tradition in which fabric is the principal means of defining wares this is challenging, but it must be remembered that the terms used here are general ware types, to be more closely defined through subsequent analysis. This is a necessary result of the history of study, in which decoration has been the principal means of distinguishing types and, perhaps, what is most important is the laying out of a standard, pragmatic, terminology for initial identification, rather than a detailed sub-division of types based on the peculiarities of fabrics. Vroom herself highlights that the volume is an initial tool for identification and that specialist analysis must follow to allow an assemblage to be defined in more absolute terms. However, some ware types – 'Maiolica from Italy' and 'Transfer Printed Wares from Europe' do, perhaps, seem a little too vague to be particularly useful. But it is not these wares that this book is focussed upon, its treatment of the principal types of pottery found in the region is exemplary, providing a firm basis upon

which research can build and, crucially, from which individual researchers can develop their knowledge and understanding. In conclusion, therefore, this is a pragmatic volume focussed on the end user and it is highly recommended for anybody stepping into the world of Byzantine ceramics for the first time, or for those who require a first point of reference for these pottery types.

References

- Dark, K 2001, *Byzantine Pottery*. Stroud, Tempus.
Haggarty, G 2007 *Medieval Ceramics* 28, 147.
Vroom, J 2003, *After Antiquity. Ceramics and Society in the Aegean from the 7th to the 20th century*. Leiden.

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