

Multi-Cultural Contacts in Medieval Polychrome Sgraffiato Ware in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 13th and 14th Centuries

This lecture will examine the multi-cultural factors that influenced the production and distribution of polychrome sgraffiato pottery in the eastern Mediterranean in the 13th and 14th centuries. Attention will focus primarily on Port St. Symeon and its related wares, produced in the Kingdom of Cilician Armenia, the Principality of Antioch, and the Islamic world in this period. In the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, polychrome sgraffiato pottery became widely popular and was produced throughout the Mediterranean and beyond even into Central Asia. Despite the farflung nature of this type of medieval pottery, it is interesting to see that certain aspects of polychrome sgraffiato remained fairly constant. The choice of green, yellow-brown, and occasionally purple, under light yellow or light green glaze was popular amongst potters and consumers throughout the Mediterranean.

Where one can see signs of different cultural influences, however, is in the decoration of the pottery. While polychrome sgraffiato pottery is often decorated with geometric or floral decoration, figural motifs do appear. The lecture will primarily concentrate on the different cultural factors that influenced the different choices made in the figural motifs selected by the potters and the sites where these figural motifs are found. One can see signs of influences that have been seen as traditionally “Islamic” although the evidence from pottery and other types of material culture indicates that they were popular amongst various groups, including not only Muslims themselves, but also Armenians, Crusaders, Copts, and Syriac speaking Christians. In addition, there is limited evidence for Crusader influence, which is in contrast to Cypriot polychrome sgraffiato ware, which has a much stronger western European element in it. The reasons for the contrast between these two regions will be discussed. Further, the presence of Christian motifs on the pottery could argue that the pottery was produced for Christians in some instances, but in most cases, it is difficult to know.

In addition to discussing the motifs on the pottery, a particular case study on the users of this pottery will be discussed. In general, there is very little information about the potters themselves or about the individuals who actually used the pottery. Evidence from a cave excavated in Lebanon, however, reveals new information about the individuals who used this pottery as well as providing important evidence for the dating of the pottery itself.

Select Bibliography

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Tasha Vorderstrasse is a Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO) in Leiden. She received her Phd. in Byzantine and Islamic archaeology at the University of Chicago in 2004. Her dissertation on the Late Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, and Crusader material culture of the site of al-Mina, one of the ports of Antioch, was published in 2005 as *Al-Mina: A Port of Antioch from Late Antiquity to End of the Ottomans*. She is particularly interested in the interaction between different forms of archaeological material culture (particularly pottery, glass, and coins), manuscript illumination, and texts in the Near East and Egypt. She has published various articles on coinage, including "Coin Circulation in Some Syrian Villages (5th-11th Centuries)." In *Les Villages dans l'Empire byzantin, IVe-XVe siècle*, ed. J. Lefort, C. Morrisson, and J.-P. Sodini, 495-510. Réalités Byzantines 11. Paris: Lethielleux (2005), "A Countermarked Coin of Heraclius from the Site of Tell Kurdu." *Numismatic Chronicle* (2006): 433-438, and "Ptolemaic Coinage in Roman Egypt." *Dutch Studies* (published by Near Eastern Languages and Literatures) (in press) and pottery, "The Iconography of the Wine Drinker in Port St. Symeon Ware from the Crusader Era." *Eastern Christian Art* 2 (2005), 59-72, and "Multi-Cultural Aspects of Pottery: A Christian Bowl found in Mamluk Egypt in its Cultural Context." *Eastern Christian Art* 4 (2007), in press. She has worked on various archaeological projects in the Near East, most recently at the site of Ziyaret Tepe, near Diyarbakir in eastern Turkey. She is currently completing a publication on polychrome sgraffiato pottery, entitled *From Aghkand to Port St. Symeon and Beyond: Polychrome sgraffiato pottery in the Eastern Mediterranean* and a publication on the Achaemenid-Late Islamic coins of the University of Chicago excavations in the Plain of Antioch in the 1930s.