

BYZANTINE CERAMICS IN THE MUSEUM OF BURSA

BY

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Abstract:

The Archaeological Museum of Bursa in Bithynia houses seven pieces of Byzantine ceramics, originating mostly from Bithynia in northern part of western Turkey. In order to give an updated insight into the material a detailed catalogue of these objects will be presented here. This is also a brief contribution to the valorisation of museums in western Turkey and aims to broadening of our knowledge about Byzantine ceramics of Asia Minor.

Keywords: *Western Asia Minor, Bursa, Bithynia, Middle Byzantine period, Early Byzantine period, coloured sgraffito ware, ampulla.*

The full potential for the study of pottery as a source for the economic history of Byzantine Asia Minor has yet to be realised¹. In the last two decades Byzantine pottery studies became a new and promising area in the archaeology of Asia Minor (Pl. I). In Turkey the scholars of Byzantine ceramics have devoted themselves primarily to production sites. Current Byzantine ceramic researches in Turkey are mostly concentrated on glazed ware. Ceramic workshops specializing in glazed ware for domestic use were located in entire of Asia Minor (Pl. I). Turkish local museums keep, on display or in warehouses, outstanding examples of pottery from this period. As it was done for the Roman and Early Byzantine periods, a general survey of the pottery examples of the Middle Byzantine period in Turkish museums is required. Former Byzantine ceramic reports of excavated sites, such as Istanbul (especially Saraçhane), Anaia-Kadikalesi, Sagalassus and Limyra etc. could thus be confirmed with the pieces kept in local museums (Pl. I).

Bursa, Prousa in Byzantine period, is located in Bithynia in northern part of western Anatolia. After the inauguration of the Byzantine silk industry under the Emperor Justinian I, it became a centre of silk production and trade. This city was the first major and second overall capital of the Ottoman State between A.D. 1335 and 1363. During the entire of Byzantine period Bithynia appears to have attracted so much attention because of its roads and its strategic position. The landscape around Prousa was known through monasteries and their archaeological heritage.² The region around Nicaea (Turkish İznik) and Prousa treasured a clay of high quality, very adequate for pottery because of its quartz abundance. During the Early Byzantine period the pottery of Nicaea was similar to that made in other parts of Asia Minor, but soon after the Turkish conquest İznik ware developed a distinctive style.³ Ceramic productions in Nicaea and rest of Bithynia during the Byzantine period were analyzed in great extension neither archaeologically,⁴ nor archaeometrically.

The Archaeological Museum of Bursa has one of the richest collection in Turkey. As the third oldest archaeological museum in Turkey after Istanbul and Konya, it was founded in 1904 and re-opened in its new building on October 29, 1973. Not much is known, however, about the archaeological finds from Bursa. A

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¹ CROW 2008: 56.

² For a possible Middle Byzantine *amphora* stamp from an ecclesiastical context in Bithynia: LAFLI, BUORA 2016.

³ On the ceramic production and finds from Nicaea-İznik: ÖZKUL FINDIK 2014; ÖZKUL FINDIK 2007; KAPUR *et al.* 1998; TITE 1989; and ASLANAPA, YETKIN, ALTUN 1989.

⁴ A recent attempt: DOĞER, ARMAĞAN 2014.

small collection of Early to Middle Byzantine pottery, seven almost intact pieces, consisting of two unglazed and five glazed vessels, is being exhibited in a showcase and originates locally from Bithynia. A second large pottery collection, mostly based on Medieval and Post-Medieval Turkish-Islamic vessels, is kept at the Bursa Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts. The aim of this brief paper is to present Byzantine ceramic collection of the Museum of Bursa.

CATALOGUE

EARLY BYZANTINE UNGLAZED EXAMPLES⁵

1. *Ampulla* of Asia Minor type (Pl. II.1)

Measures: H. c. 3,5 cm, w. c. 2.6 cm.

Condition: Intact.

Provenance: Bithynia. Its conservation status as an intact object suggests that it might be coming from a tomb rather than from a house.

Description: Oval shaped, mould made small *ampulla* with a reduced neck directly on the top centre; instead of attached handles there are two holes near the mouth. The holes pass through the frame formed by oblique dashes in relief. In the central tondo a Greek cross within a rib in relief. The cross reminds those of sculpture in stone: each arm has a wide edge so that it seems to be divided into two, while the ends enlarge. Pale brown fabric. It is probable that the *ampulla* of Bursa was a product of the workshops in Smyrna or Laodicea on the Lycus.

Comparanda: Among the Asia Minor *ampullae*, the representation of the cross is not unknown, as it is well attested by several finds in various archaeological sites in Turkey: A considerable number of examples originate from Ephesus;⁶ others were found in Laodicea. A further generic find spot is Smyrna by its active antique market in 19th cent.

A very similar *ampulla* is housed in the Hermitage Museum, but with a different frame⁷. Other similar examples are preserved in the Museum of Marmaris⁸ and in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.⁹

Date: For those with a decoration formed by a cross Şimşek and Duman propose a dating from the beginning of the 6th and early 7th cent. A.D. The *ampulla* of Bursa should be dated to A.D. 570-620.

Reference: Buora, Laflı, Kan Şahin 2015: 280, no. 10, 290, fig. I, no. 12.

2. A clay lamp (Pl. II.2)

Measures: D. c. 11.2 cm, h. c. 7.3 cm.

Condition: Broken fragments repaired, restored and joined. Missing fragments on the fissure.

Provenance: Nicaea (?).

Description: Circular body with rounded shoulder and raised above to the disc, not separated, formed by a recess, surrounding the large *infundibulum*. In the front two large protruding spouts with large traces of burning, on top of a sort of vertical tube. The trapezoidal handle stands on two feet at the center of the body with two opposing triangles incised.

Brown fabric. Traces of reddish brown, matt slip.

The high spout on the back reminds some lamps bronze lamps, traditionally dated to the Late Antiquity. The model reminds some late Antique lamps characterized by rounded shoulder.

Comparanda: No parallel has been found to this lamp.

Date: 5th-6th cent. A.D.

⁵ Abbreviations in alphabetic order: Cent.: century; d.: diameter; fig.: figure; h.: height; and pl.: plate. The study of these objects was granted by an authorization, issued by the Directorate of the Museum of Bursa in 2016, numbered as B.16.0.KVM.200.11.03.16.14.01.222.11, for which we would like to express our gratitudes. The documentation has been done in June 2016. Photos were taken by Dr Sami Patacı (Ardahan) in 2016, who has also done the map; we would like to thank him sincerely.

⁶ GASSNER 1997: Pl. 56, 89.

⁷ Inv. no. W-246; measures 3.1 x 3.1 x 2 cm. BUORA, LAFLI, KAN ŞAHIN 2015: 290, Fig. I, No. 13

⁸ BUORA, LAFLI, KAN ŞAHIN 2015: 280, note 42, with a dating to the 6th and 7th cent. A.D.

⁹ Inv. no. IV 4434: Noll 1974: 38, No. 26, Fig. 27 (from Ephesus).

COLOURED SGRAFFITO WARE OF 13TH-14TH CENT. A.D.

3. A glazed bowl with a sgraffito representation of a bird (Pl. II.3)

Measures: D. c. 17.7 cm, h. c. 9.2 cm.

Condition: Broken fragments repaired, joined and filled with gypsum.

Provenance: Nicaea (?).

Description: Restored and integrated bowl, with rounded edge, straight wall and concave bottom. Within the yellow field bird on the right, body of which is covered with a grate. Behind it three vegetal elements in brown depart. Green lanceolate leaves and other engraved patterns protrude from the edge. The shape of this kind of *sgraffito* ware is usually open: mainly hemispherical bowls with a simple rim¹⁰. Bowls are incised and later covered with a transparent lead glaze. In the eastern Aegean and Asia Minor depiction of birds, widely disseminated, are known since the 12th cent. A.D. and continue until the 19th cent. In our case the head surrounded at the top by a sort of dark hood and the brown body's outline recall the production of Thessaloniki, attested since the late 13th cent. A.D. Its ware has been identified in other parts of Macedonia, and also in Bulgaria, Constantinople and Venice.¹¹ Here, however, in addition to green and brown under the cover, trace of a plant pattern in three stylized leaves can be seen on the edge.

Date: Early 13th cent. A.D.

4. A dish with an oblique brim and hollow bottom (Pl. II.4)

Measures: D. c. 24.3 cm, h. c. 8.1 cm.

Condition: Broken fragments repaired, joined and filled with gypsum.

Provenance: Nicaea (?).

Description: In the center a medallion with an interlace against an imbricate background, alternately green and brown. The central hexagon, with concave minor sides, is within another hexagon, formed by the intertwining of a ribbon which is green and brown and arranged to form regular designs. The twisted ribbons remind the elaborate incised ware and some fragments of the Constantinopolitan production in Sirkeci.¹²

Date: 13th cent. A.D.

5. A restored and integrated bowl (Pl. II.5)

Measures: D. c. 14.8 cm, h. c. 8.7 cm.

Condition: Broken fragments repaired, joined and filled with gypsum.

Provenance: Nicaea (?).

Description: Incised decoration and brown slip under transparent glaze. At the center there is a medallion with a Greek cross within two concentric circles and V-patterns in the four quarters. Four traditional divisions are formed by two perpendicular lines, flanked by engraved dashes and palms among them. A similar decoration appears in Egypt during the 14th cent. and remains in use in the northern Aegean pottery until the 15th cent. A.D.

Date: 14th cent. A.D.

6. A restored and integrated bowl (Pl. II.6)

Measures: D. c. 17.4 cm, h. c. 9.6 cm.

Condition: Broken fragments repaired, joined and filled with gypsum.

Provenance: Nicaea (?).

Description: Incised decoration (*sgraffito*) on brown slip under transparent glaze. A bird in front, with long legs and a long neck, twisted, and open wings. These details are reminiscent of the pottery production in Serres in Central Macedonia, which is also linked to the yield of the body and wings with thick dots and hatch.

Date: End of 13th-early 14th cent. A.D.

¹⁰ VROOM 2005: 29.

¹¹ SACCARDO 1998: 50.

¹² WAKSMAN 2012: 148, Fig. 2, No. 53.

7. A restored and integrated two-handled jar (Pl. II.7)

Measures: D. c. 7.1 cm, h. c. 11.7 cm.

Condition: Broken fragments repaired, joined and filled with gypsum. Both handles are missing.

Provenance: Nicaea (?).

Description: A glazed jar with a flat body, two vertical handles and four small feet. A layer of white slip covers the outer surface and it has been incised with decoration in geometric forms in a central medallion on its flat belly. The decoration is otherwise enlivened with touches of white and green. In this particular form it was perhaps used as a vessel for the serving drinks at table and was also in widespread use in the Post-Byzantine period.

Date: End of 13th-early 14th cent. A.D.

CONCLUSION

These Early and Middle Byzantine ceramic examples could likely be associated with monastic life in Nicaea or Bithynia. Apart from the pottery found during excavations in the theater of Nicaea which are well-published,¹³ we know only a few brief references to locally produced pottery as well as such imports to Bithynia.¹⁴ For this reason we think that even this short notice can contribute to a better understanding of the material culture of the Bursa region during the Middle Byzantine period which was certainly much more complex than we are currently able to say.

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¹³ ÖZKUL FINDİK 2007; ÖZKUL FINDİK 2014.

¹⁴ Cf. DOĞER, ARMAĞAN 2014.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. I. Map of Byzantine Bithynia with the quoted places in the text. Underlined places indicate cities with the local museums (S. Pataci, 2016).
- Pl. II. Byzantine ceramic examples from the Museum of Bursa in Bithynia, Turkey (S. Pataci, 2016).



Pl. I. Map of Byzantine Bithynia with the quoted places in the text.
Underlined places indicate cities with the local museums (PATACI 2016).



Pl. II. 1-7. Byzantine ceramic examples from the Museum of Bursa in Bithynia, Turkey (PATACI 2016).