

Review of the workshop “Tracing pottery making recipes in the Balkans, 6th – 4th millennium BC”

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On the 19th-20th of September 2014 the international workshop “Tracing pottery making recipes in the Balkans, 6th-4th millennium BC” was held in Belgrade (Serbia). The event was organised as a collaboration between the Institute of Archaeology, University College London (UCL), and the Institute of Balkans Studies (Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts) and was supported by the Institute for Archaeo-Metallurgical Studies (IAMS) to promote the understanding of high temperature ceramic technologies at the time of the rise of metallurgy in this part of the world.

This international workshop brought together archaeologists and archaeometrists working in the field of Neolithic and Chalcolithic pottery technology studies from the Balkans, and beyond. The main aim of the event was to exchange ideas and investigate the current state of art in the field in order to facilitate communication among scholars with an active interest in this topic. To this end, the emphasis of this international event was on gathering emerging scholars (PhD students and junior researchers) with a selected number of senior colleagues, in order to exchange ideas and discuss prospects of future cooperation on pottery research in the area. Numerous scholars and PhD students from Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, the United Kingdom and France participated, contributing with an exceptional range of papers and ideas that offered the opportunity to share current research on the development of pottery technological traditions in the Balkans from ca. 6500-4000 BC.

Although to date, pottery studies in the Balkans are mostly dominated by extensive typological classifications, recent years have seen an increase in the number of technological studies shedding new light on early pottery production in this area. In particular, the application of interdisciplinary methods to the study of pottery production has highlighted the necessity to explore more thoroughly the potential of archaeometric studies of pottery technology in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Balkans.

The workshop was opened by Professor Dušan Bataković, director of the Institute of Balkans Studies. The first part of the workshop was devoted to discussing advances in methodological approaches to pottery technology. The presentations mainly focused on technology and function, manufacture (e.g. forming, decorating, firing, colour, painting, surface treatment etc.), ethno-archaeology and experimental reconstructions; furthermore the application of archaeometric methods to pottery technological studies, including ceramic petrography and portable X-ray fluorescence was discussed. The second part saw the delivery of an exceptional range of contributions spanning chronologically from the Early Neolithic to the Chalcolithic, and covering a vast area of the Balkans. For example, the presentations by Dr Attila Kreiter (Hungarian National Museum), Dr György Szakmány (Lóránd Eötvös University, Hungary), Dr Laure Salanova (CNRS, France) and Dr Michela Spataro (British Museum, UK) proposed a very broad and diachronic vision of the development of technological traditions of pottery making in Hungary, Bulgaria, the Adriatic region and the central Balkans, and offered models for future studies in other areas.

Particularly interesting was the final round-table discussion moderated by Dr Michela Spataro, Dr Patrick Quinn (UCL) and Dr Jasna Vuković (Belgrade University, Serbia). During this round-table, a variety of cutting-edge research issues were debated. Among them, the participants tackled the intriguing topic of the transmission and diffusion of technological traditions and social boundaries. In this regard, particularly interesting were the considerations made by Dr Sébastien Manem (UCL) who interprets innovation and knowledge transfers according to an evolutionary and phylogenetic approach that aims to understand and model the origin and evolution of techno-diversity.

Another key point of discussion was the investigation of pottery technological advancement coinciding with and following the appearance of metallurgy in the Balkans. The technological developments taking place between ca. 6500-4000 BC blend into the Chalcolithic period that was characterised by very high standards of pottery firing and decoration techniques. In this regard, the talks of colleagues from Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania, especially the ones by Professor Petya Georgieva (Sofia University, Bulgaria), Dr Ina Miloglav (University of Zagreb, Croatia) and Dr Cristian Eduard Ștefan (Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy), discussed

pottery technology in the Chalcolithic period. Furthermore, the transitional period between the Neolithic and the Chalcolithic was discussed in the presentations by Dr Miljana Radivojević (UCL) and Silvia Amicone (UCL), who carried out a comparative study of domestic pottery and ceramic objects used in one of the earliest documented copper smelting regions in the world, from the site of Belovode (Serbia), and investigated the relationship between pottery and metal pyrotechnologies at this key site for the development of metallurgy in Eurasia. In this regard, the participation of an archaeologist expert in archaeometallurgy like Dr Radivojević was particularly beneficial, because her knowledge on early metallurgy contributed to broaden the final debate by considering other technologies.

Finally, particular emphasis was placed on the importance of archaeometric analysis in archaeology and the value of ethno-archaeological studies for the understanding of ancient technologies. Regarding the first point, the issue of the necessity to improve communication between archaeologists and archaeometrists was raised. The former should have a clear understanding of both the potential and limits of archaeometry. The latter, on the other hand, need to understand how to apply more fruitfully different analytical methods to archaeological research. For what concerns ethnographic researches, the importance of this field of investigation in the Balkans was widely discussed. Indeed, ethnography may offer very interesting case studies such as the one presented by Biljana Djordjević (National Museum in Belgrade, Serbia) about present-day bread-baking pans, which gave insights into the interpretation of the skills of pottery fabrication techniques, as well as the use, breaking and reuse of Neolithic bread-baking pans. Overall, the need to merge these different scientific trajectories in order to understand better both technology itself and its place within broader social and environmental issues was emphasised. This crucial point will be at the core of future interdisciplinary research in the Balkans.

The event will be published in an edited volume and there is hope that this workshop is the starting point for future collaborative research between the participants, and beyond. In particular, the aim is to establish a long-term network of scholars from different countries who share a common interest in the study of pottery technology and the mechanisms of transmission of knowledge and technological traditions in the Prehistoric Balkans during this important period in the history of domestic ceramic

development; furthermore, the network's scope is to promote research about the requirement for high temperature ceramic applications in the emerging metallurgy field, an area of investigation which is currently at the forefront of research in this area.



Group photo of the delegates attending the workshop "Tracing pottery making recipes in the Balkans".

Web link:

http://www.academia.edu/8629431/Tracing_pottery_making_recipes_in_the_Balkans_6th_4th_millennium_BC

NEWS

The last *Ceramic Petrology Group* (CPG) annual meeting was held on the 7th November 2014 at UCL Institute of Archaeology (London), and ten papers were presented. The next CPG annual meeting will be held in Durham in 2015 (date to be confirmed).

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