

A “globalization” of glazed pottery trade and production across the late medieval Mediterranean? An integrated approach to Zeuxippus wares found at Corinth and Thebes, mainland Greece

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The Fourth Crusade (1204 AD) brought about significant disruptions across the Byzantine Empire. In Greece, the arrival of Frankish lords and Italian rulers contributed to shape new demands for a variety of goods and commodities. This eventually led to cross-cultural adaptations of culinary traditions, dining practices and artistic tastes. The development of new pan-Mediterranean networks of commercial and artistic exchanges is notably documented by the widespread diffusion of glazed tablewares in the Late Byzantine “Zeuxippus Ware class I” across Turkey, Greece and northern Italy.

It remains unclear, however, whether these exchanges were purely commercial and artistic in nature, or also involved some technological transfers and thus some learning and regular contacts between producers. This paper aims to shed light on this question through a combined analysis of style, provenance, production and decoration techniques of 25 glazed bowls with incised patterns and yellow glaze, including 18 samples of Zeuxippus wares. The archaeometric methods involved are petrography, WD-XRF and SEM-EDS. The material under study is dated to the 14th century and comes from stratified contexts at the city of Corinth, then under Florentine rule, and from the Frankish-controlled city of Thebes, which was one of the main economic ally of the Venetian colony of Negroponte in central Greece.

Our results provide further evidence for the production of yellow-glazed bowls with incised spiral and concentric circles at Thebes during the 14th century [1]. Corinth received similar productions from Byzantine Anatolia, Byzantine Thrace and the Veneto, but it might not have produced any Zeuxippus ware itself. The Genoese, who were the main rivals of Venice for trade in the East, exported glazed bowls with distinct decoration to the Peloponnese. As for decorative techniques, slipping materials were specific to each region of production, but kaolinitic clays were used in at least three Greek workshops of Byzantine tradition. Several clay selection strategies, pot forming techniques, glazing and colouring methods were shared between Frankish Greek and Venetian workshops. This raises the question of a mobility of craftsmen and provides insights into the complex production and trade strategies of glazed tablewares, which were not only dependent on economic alliances of the time, but also on the access to certain technical knowledge and primary materials for glaze and pigment preparation.

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[1] Waksman Y. et al., “The Main ‘Middle Byzantine Production’ and Pottery Manufacture in Thebes and Chalkis”, *ABSA* 109 (2014), 379-422.

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