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CERAMICS FROM POTAMIA-AGIOS SOZOMENOS:
NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA ON THE CERAMIC PRODUCTION
AND TRADE IN CYPRUS

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The ceramics presented here have been brought to light in the course of a survey and an archaeological project on the topic *La constitution des paysages en Orient médiéval: Potamia / Agios-Sozomenos* which started in 2000 under the auspices of the Ecole Française d'Athènes, in collaboration with the CNRS-LA3M and the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Cyprus.¹ This multidisciplinary project was supervised by N. Lécuyer, D. Michaelides, A. Nicolaïdes and G. Grivaud. The aim of the project was to explore an area of 10 km square to analyze the chronology and history of occupation and land-use. The programme, which focuses from the Byzantine period to the end of Ottoman rule, started with a general survey of the area and covers many fields of research such as archaeology and art history, anthropology, geomorphology and hydrology. This multidisciplinary project will provide a picture, as complete as possible, of the evolution of the settlement and the landscape through this long period.

The site

The region of Potamia is located about 25 km to the south-east of Nicosia. The survey area lies between the village of Potamia, to the south, and the village of Agios Sozomenos to the north. It is crossed by two rivers, the Gialias and the Alykos. Between these areas, the land was used for the culture of cereals and vegetables. In addition, a large hydraulic medieval infrastructure is well preserved in many respects and it testifies to a sophisticated irrigation system.

1. Concerning the site and its archaeological exploration see: N. Lécuyer, L. Decock, B. Devillers *et al.*, "Potamia-Agios Sozomenos (Chypre). La constitution des paysages dans l'Orient médiéval", *BCH* 125.2, 2001, 655-678; N. Lécuyer *et alii*, "Potamia-Agios Sozomenos", *BCH* 128-129, 2.1, 2004-2005, 1078-1095; N. Lécuyer, "Le territoire de Potamia aux époques médiévale et moderne : acquis récents", *CCEC* 34, 2004, 11-29; *eadem*, "Marqueurs identitaires médiévaux et modernes sur le territoire de Potamia-Agios Sozomenos", in S. Fourrier and G. Grivaud (ed.), *Identités croisées en un milieu méditerranéen : le cas de Chypre (Antiquité – Moyen Âge)*, Mont-Saint-Aignan, 2006, 241-256; N. Lécuyer and D. Michaelides, "Archaeological survey at Potamia-Ayios Sozomenos", in M. Iacovou (ed.), *Archaeological Field Survey in Cyprus. Past History, Future Potentials*, BSA Studies 111, 2004, 139-149.



Fig. 1: Ruins of the Lusignan manor in Potamia

According to historical sources, this very area was highlighted during the period when Cyprus was under the rule of the kings of the French dynasty of Lusignan. One km to the north-west of Potamia lie the ruins of the Lusignan manor (Fig. 1). According to the chroniclers the village of Potamia was founded by King James II or King Peter I, and the manor was constructed subsequently.² Unlike the manor of Kouklia, which was conceived as the administrative center of an agricultural domain, the manor of Potamia was a summer resort for the royal family settled in Nicosia. This residential function is attested by numerous

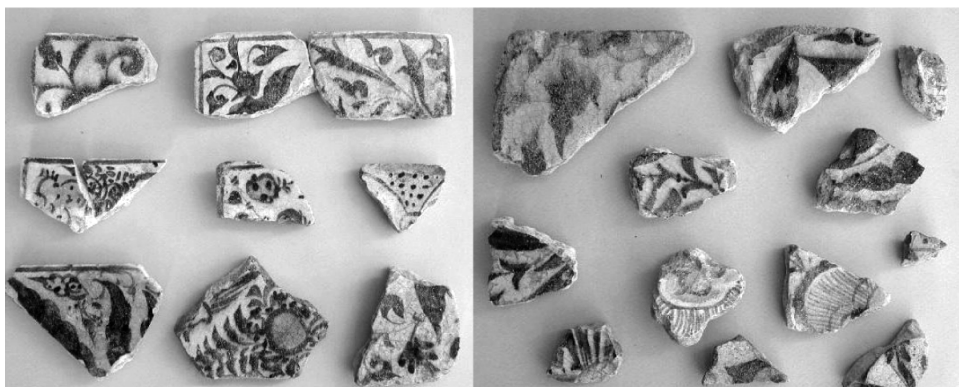


Fig. 2/Colour Pl. Va: Blue Painted tiles from Syrian workshops discovered in the manor

2. Etienne de Lusignan, *Description de toute l'isle de Chypre*, Paris, 1580 [reprinted, Nicosia, 2004], f. 36 ; Florio Bustron, *Chronique de l'île de Chypre*, ed. by R. de Mas-Latrie, Paris, 1886, pp. 367; *Chroniques d'Amadi et de Strambaldi*, ed. by R. de Mas-Latrie, Paris, 1891-1893, vol. II, pp. 251, 254; Léontios Machairas, *Recital Concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus Entitled 'Chronicle'*, ed. by R.M. Dawkins, 2 vols. Oxford, 1932, pp. 597, 620.

sculpted architectural decoration vestiges, similar to those of the cloister of Bel-lapais Abbey in the hinterland of Kyrenia, as well as by fragments of Syrian blue painted tiles which testify that at least one or two rooms of the manor were adorned by a superb decorative programme (Fig. 2). On the other hand, the Lusignan manor was also provided with sumptuous gardens and fountains. Very important guests passed through before reaching the royal court in Nicosia. In 1412 the Royal Manor at Potamia is described by the secretary of the marquis Nicolò III d'Este as a “bellissimo Palazzo” and is also mentioned as “bel vedere”.³ In 1427, the village and the manor were burnt and partly destroyed by the Mamluks on their way to Nicosia. The first restoration of the building dates from the late fifteenth century. During the Venetian rule, the manor was transformed into a comfortable villa, which was perhaps fortified. The village and the manor were the centre of a bailiwick of the royal domain. Partly destroyed in the thirties of the sixteenth century, it was soon rebuilt. A vast cistern on the west side of the manor and a waterwheel were excavated. A large quantity of ceramics has been found in these areas.

Regarding the village of Agios Sozomenos, it has been deserted since 1964 due to the intercommunal conflict that erupted in that year. On the western outskirts of the village, built into a vertical cliff-face, is located the Hermitage of Agios Sozomenos, dated according to its wall paintings, to the ninth-eleventh centuries; furthermore, there is a Post-Byzantine church dedicated to Agios Georgios and to the Virgin Mary, as well as a large Gothic church known as Agios Mamas - a rare example of a Latin building constructed in the Cypriot countryside as opposed to an urban setting. Several indices, including the discovery of a hoard datable between 1368 and 1373, testify the existence of a settlement in this very area in the late fourteenth century (Fig. 3: 1, 2).

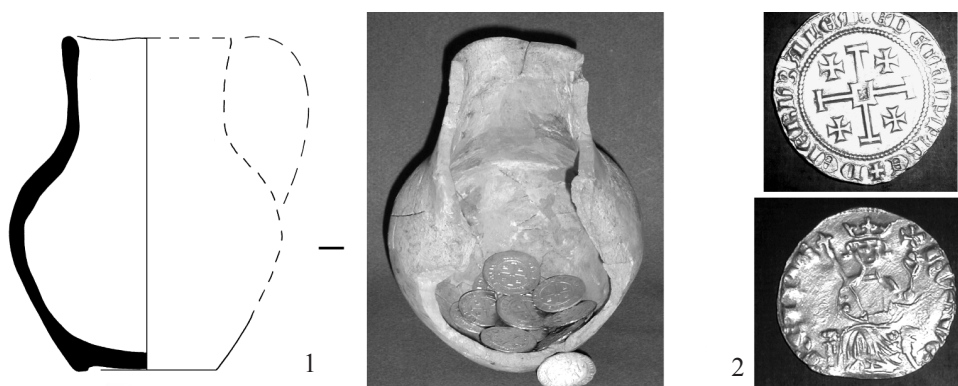


Fig. 3: 1, 2/Colour Pl. Vb: White clay jug which contained a hoard in Agios Sozomenos

3. G. Grivaud, *Excerpta Cypria Nova*, I, *Voyageurs occidentaux à Chypre au XV^e siècle*, Nicosia, 1990, pp. 42, 48.

Below the village, on the east bank of the stream named the Alykos, a hydraulic installation and a water mill was identified by the place-name of Palaiomylos (Fig. 4). The remains of the stone built structures have been excavated by the French team. The water mill was probably built at the end of the fourteenth century and continued to function until the eighteenth century, when it was finally abandoned due to the outbreak of fires.



Fig. 4: The water mill of Palaiomylos

The Pottery

The study of the pottery collected during the survey and the excavations yielded new data on the production of local or regional Cypriot ceramics and trade in ceramics originating from the western and eastern basins of the Mediterranean, dated from the late fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. The very fragmentary state of the documentation is compensated by the large amount of findings and the repetitiveness of different categories of ceramics identified by their typology and chronology.⁴ We have chosen to present three well-dated assemblages.

The first one, dated to the late fourteenth century, was brought to light in the hydraulic construction of the Lusignan manor, i.e. a cistern and a waterwheel. This assemblage contains mainly the following: — jars, manufactured in white calcareous fabric, with two handles and a low ring base, decorated with combed lines on the neck and on the shoulder (Fig. 5: 1-6), sometimes we observe, on the outer wall, an incised Frankish shield (Fig. 5:4); — jugs with a strainer, placed at the base of the neck, and combed decoration; waterwheel pots (Fig. 5:5). One can also associate with the material of the manor the white clay jug discovered in Agios Sozomenos, which contained a hoard dated, as men-

4. V. François and L. Vallauri, “Production et consommation de céramiques à Potamia (Chypre) de l’époque franque à l’époque ottomane”, *BCH* 125. 2, 2001, 523-546; L. Vallauri, “Céramiques en usage à Potamia-Agios Sozomenos de l’époque médiévale à l’époque ottomane”, *CCEC* 34, 2004, 223-235.

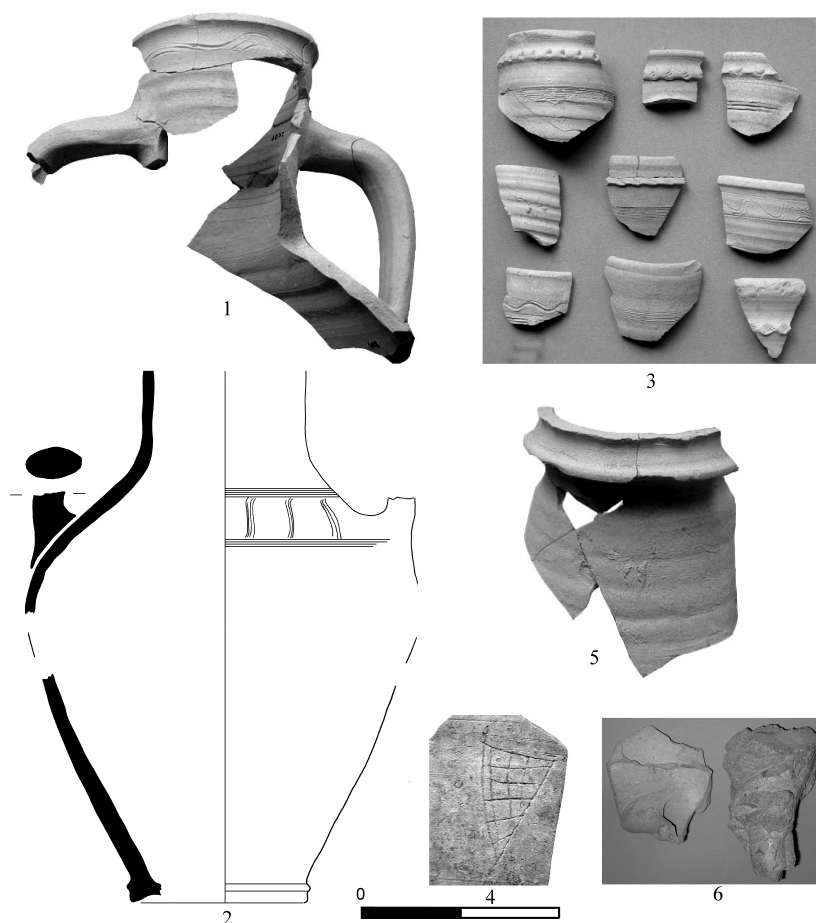


Fig. 5: 1-6/Colour Pl. Vc, d: Assemblage dated from the late 14th c. - (1-3) white calcareous fabric jars; (4) Frankish shield incised on the outer wall; (5) waterwheel pot; (6) over fired fragments

tioned previously, between the years 1368 and 1373 (Fig. 3:1). All these ceramics were probably made in Potamia with calcareous clay, as evidenced by the presence of over fired fragments (Fig. 5:6) on 22 land plots, located on either side of the river Alykos.⁵ Hector Catling had reported the presence of a medieval pottery kiln in 1957 at the toponym of Archangelos, connected with fragments of sugar moulds.⁶ The west bank along the river is no longer visible. But the

5. François and Vallauri, "Production et consommation", *op. cit.*, pp. 524, 525, 528.

6. H. Catling, "The Ancient Topography of the Yalias Valley", *RDAC* 1982, 227-236.

samples of the Gialias survey and the kiln, reconsidered by Marie-Louise von Warburg,⁷ revealed only waterwheel pots wasters and Italian and Cypriot pottery, datable to the late fourteenth century. It is noteworthy that neither the survey nor the excavation provided testimony of any specific sugar moulds or molasses jars used traditionally in the sugar industry.

A beautiful handmade jug with hatches and waves in the form of combed decoration has also been found in these levels (Fig. 6:1). It is made of a ferruginous reddish-brown granular material. This clay is able to resist thermal shocks and so it is used for cooking pots. Through its porous texture it promotes the evaporation of fresh water and the conservation of grain; thus it is used to manufacture very large storage jars, *pitharia*, and small jugs for the transportation of liquids. This type of ceramic may have a Cypriot origin as it is evidenced by the long tradition of clay work in the villages of Kornos and Phini in the Troodos mountains.⁸

Tableware is only represented by bowls with a high, vertical rim and a tall foot, from the Lapithos workshops now well known through the researches of D. Papanikola-Bakirtzis (Fig. 6:2).⁹

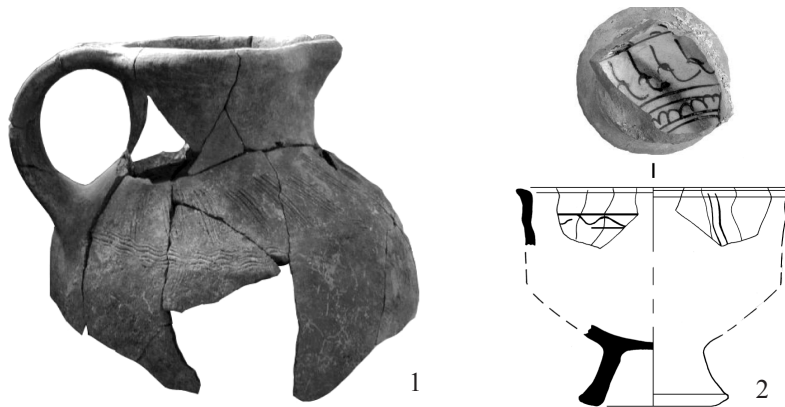


Fig. 6/Colour Pl. Ve: 1. Handmade jug made in a ferruginous reddish-brown granular fabric; 2. tableware from the Lapithos workshops

7. M.-L. von Wartburg, "Cane Sugar Production Sites in Cyprus. Real and Imagined", *RDAC* 2000, 392-395, 398-400.

8. I. Ionas, *Traditional Pottery and Potters in Cyprus. The Disappearance of an Ancient Craft Industry in the 19th and 20th Centuries* [Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 6: Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies University of Birmingham], Burlington USA, Singapore, Sydney, 2000; R.S. Gabrielli, B. McCall and J.R. Green, "Medieval Kitchen Ware from the Theatre Site at Nea Pafos", *RDAC* 2001, 413-426; R.S. Gabrielli, "Towards a Chronology – the Medieval Coarse Ware from the Tomb in Icarus Street, Kato Pafos", *RDAC* 2008, 423-454.

9. D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi, *Μεσαιωνική εφραλωμένη κεραμική της Κύπρου: τα εργαστήρια*

The excavation in the manor has provided a beautiful set of 43 fragments of frit tiles which reveal without doubt the execution of a luxurious decorative program.¹⁰ These Blue Painted tiles originate from Syrian workshops (Fig. 2). They have a quadrangular shape of 13.7 cm square. They all have a well marked beveled edge, a thickness of 0.9 to 1.4 cm and the back is always engraved by four to five lines diagonally intersecting in more or less regular lozenges. The decoration, painted in a blue frame, is composed of plant and floral ornaments finely executed in cobalt blue. The oldest models of Blue Painted tiles attributed to Syria and Turkey are known from public and private collections. But for the most part they have a hexagonal shape and are associated with small triangles painted in turquoise blue. The most beautiful ones are preserved in the mosque and the tomb of the Mamluk Ghars al-Din Khalil al-Tawrizi in Damascus (constructed after the death of the vizier in 1430) and in the mosque of Murad II in Edirne (1435-1436).¹¹ In the current state of research, Blue Painted tiles of the Royal Manor in Potamia are exceptional on account of their small module. Therefore, for the time being the latter represent the oldest production of Syrian frit tiles. In Potamia these tiles constitute the only testimonies of a luxurious decoration, made for this purpose in the context of the construction of the Manor probably in the late fourteenth century.

The other two assemblages originate from the archaeological levels dated from the mid-fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. excavated in the water mill and in the manor.

They contain white clay jars with incised comb decoration. The combed and printed decoration is now richer and more varied. Thus one may observe in the sixteenth century an evolution of the necks of the waterwheel pots. They become thinner and flared but the pots' size and volume are comparable to those of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which means that they contain about 5 litres of water (Fig. 7:1, 2).

The handmade cooking pots manufactured in a reddish-brown clay are varied in their forms. The frying pans are provided with horizontal handles while the cooking bowls have a pouring spout and a lid (Fig. 7:3, 4). They are completely covered with glaze on their inside. The pots for liquids or cooking, of

Πάφου και Λαπήθου [Medieval Glazed Pottery of Cyprus: Paphos and Lapithos Ware], Thessaloniki, 1996, pp. 138-212.

10. Vallauri, "Céramiques en usage", *op. cit.*, pp. 223-235.

11. J. Carswell, *Some fifteenth-century Hexagonal Tiles from the Near East*, Victoria and Albert Museum, Yearbook, 3, London, 1972, pp. 59-75; E. J. Grube, *Islamic Pottery of the eight to the fifteenth century in the Keir Collection*, London, 1976, pp. 292-296; V. Porter, *Islamic Tiles*, London, 1995, pp. 94-98; G. DeGeorge and Y. Porter, *The Art of Islamic Tile*, Flammarion, 2001, pp. 188-193, 196, 197.

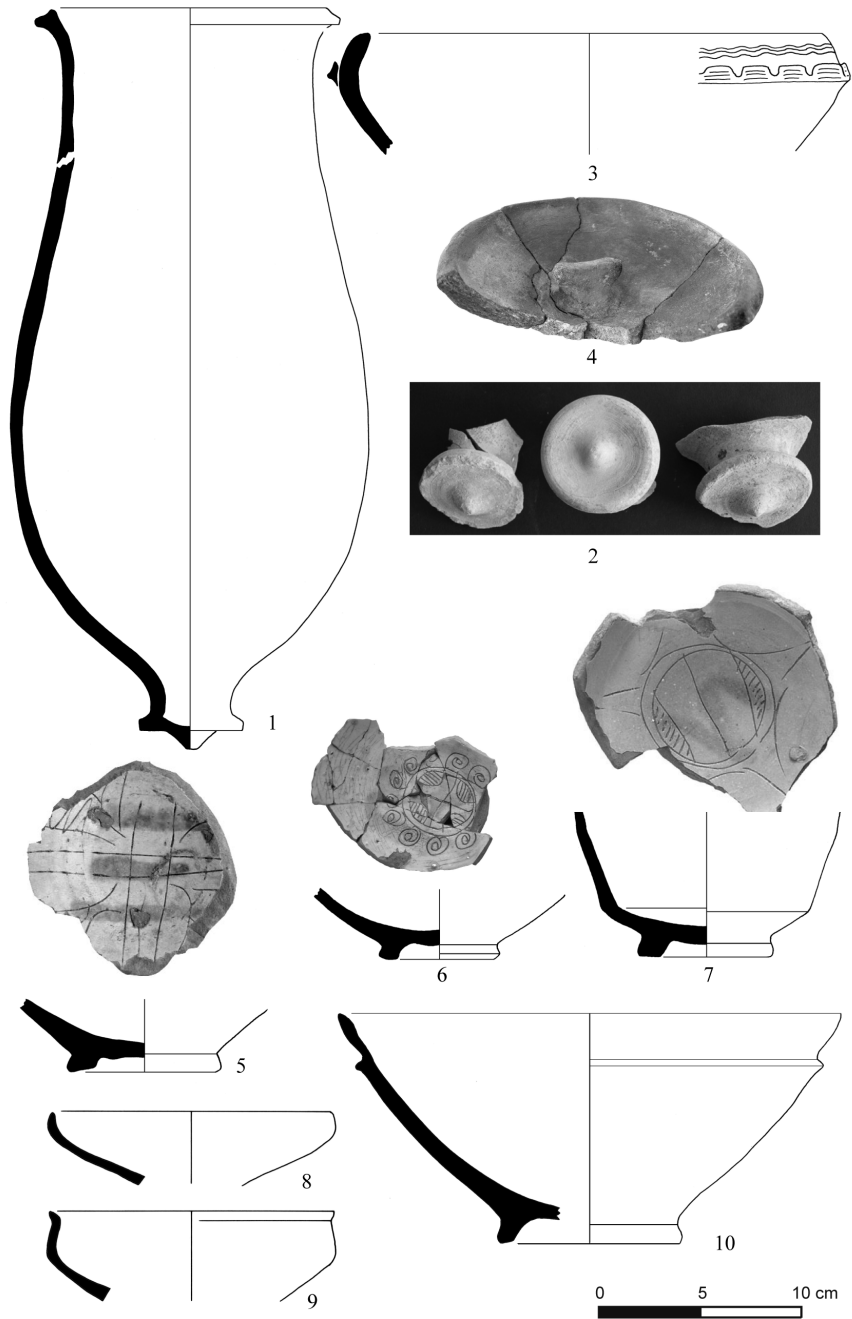


Fig. 7/Colour Pl. VIa-c: 1-9 Assemblage dated from mid 15th c. to the early 16th c. - (1, 2) water-wheel pots; (3, 4) frying pan and lid manufactured in a reddish-brown clay; (5-9) Lapithos wares; (10) Famagusta ware

varying sizes, are provided with vertical handles directly applied to the lip of the neck. This production, especially typical, is decorated with great care with fingered or cut cords, with impressed roulette decoration or combed wave, line or hatch compositions of great complexity.

The tableware is divided between Cypriot production and Italian imports. Lapithos wares are well represented by Brown and Green Sgraffito bowls decorated with knights, geometric and floral motifs, by Green-Painted Sgraffito wares, Green-Painted wares and finally by Plain colourless or pale yellow Glazed wares (Fig. 7:5-9). In these levels another category of tableware, not listed so far, has also been found. The green, yellow or brown glazed wares of this group are made from a fine rose fabric, and the most common shape is a carinated bowl with an extending ridge at the shoulder (Fig. 7:10). They are probably attributable to the Famagusta workshops. We have recently observed the remains of a pottery workshop located between the Armenian Church and St George's Church in Famagusta.¹² Tripod stilts, biscuits, over fired pieces, nodules of copper and a vitrified brick coming from the wall of the kiln show evidence of a production activity in this area. The Famagusta workshop was active from the late fifteenth century to the sixteenth century and there the potters produced glazed tableware in the spirit of contemporary Venetian-Po Valley productions. Imported fine tableware in these archaeological levels is as follows: a large bowl with a wide ledge rim covered with incised chevrons on the body, incised leaves are highlighted by moulded depressions and the central motif is missing, although it is probably a human face (Fig. 8:1). It can be compared to a bowl seen in the Museum of Padua¹³ and dated from the first half of the sixteenth century. One bowl decorated with an incised daisy could be attributed to Padua¹⁴ (Fig. 8:2). Another fragment from Lombardy or Veneto is decorated with a male face with a turban (Fig. 9:3). A bowl and a jug of *graffita monochroma*, made of orange clay, covered with slip and green glaze were imported from the northern Italian workshops, probably Venice or Padua (Fig. 9:4). A plate of polychrome faience originates from Tuscany, from the Montelupo workshops (Fig. 9:5).¹⁵ Fragments of faience, decorated with floral decoration in fine oriental style, named *calligrafico a volute tipo C* are painted in dark blue on a white or light blue background (Fig. 8:6, 7). They are examples from the Liguria

12. V. François and L. Vallauri, "Famagouste : indices d'une production de vaisselle à l'époque vénitienne", *CCEC* 40, 2010, 295-310.

13. G. Ericani and P. Marini, *La ceramica nel Veneto. La Terraferma dal XIII al XVIII secolo*, Verona, 1990, pp. 88.

14. Ericani, Marini, "La ceramica", *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 69 ; S. Nepoti, *Ceramiche graffite della donazione Donini Baer*, Faenza, 1991, p. 238, fig. 115.

15. F. Berti, *Storia della ceramica di Montelupo. Uomini e fornaci in un centro di produzione dal XIV al XVIII secolo*, Vol. I, Montelupo, 1997.

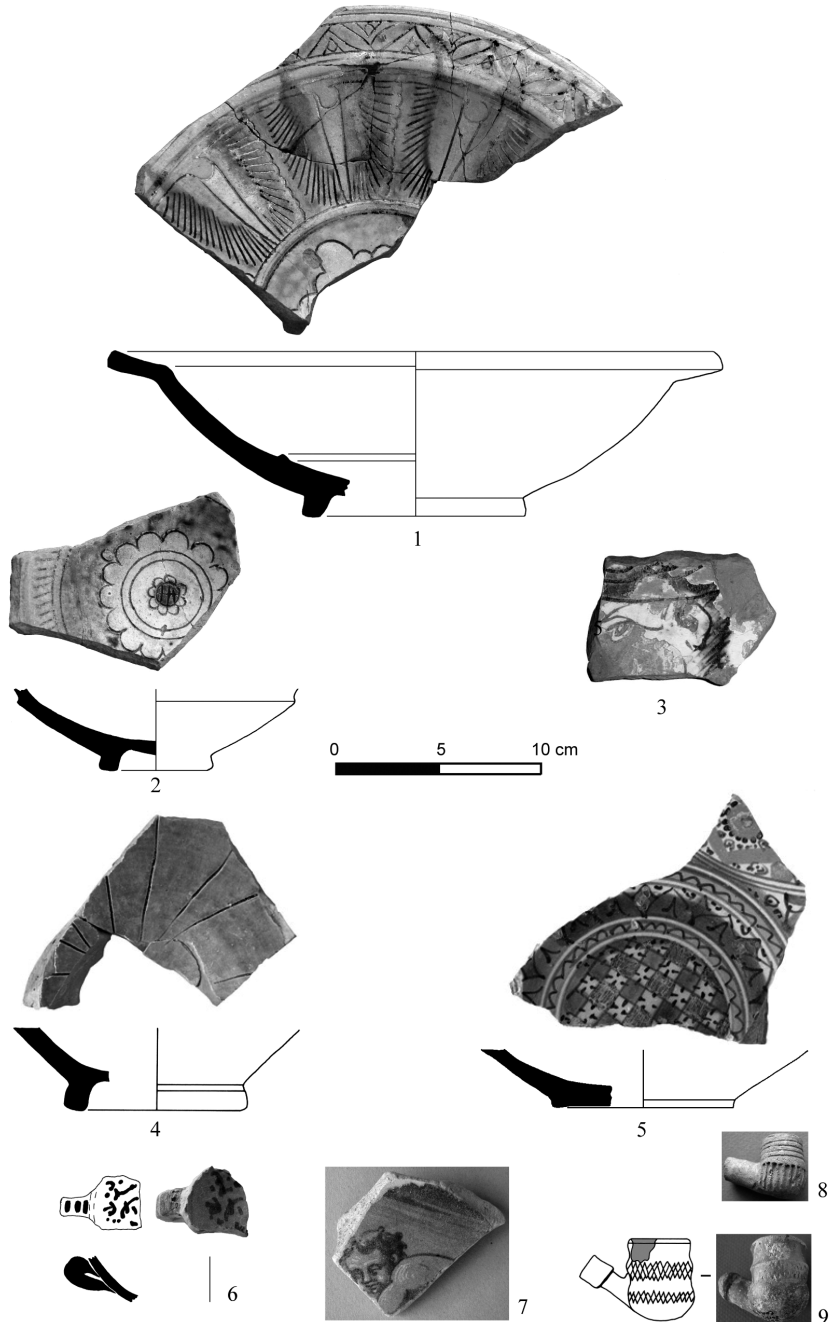


Fig. 8/Colour Pl. VI d-g: 1-9. (1, 2) *graffita* from Padua; (3) *graffita* from Lombardy or Veneto; (4) *graffita monochroma* from Venice or Padua; (5) faience from Tuscany; (6, 7) *calligrafico a volute tipo C* from Liguria workshops; (8, 9) clay pipes

workshops.¹⁶ Finally but not least, two clay pipes, one of which is stained with glaze, must have been used in the water mill (Fig. 8:8, 9).

The findings mentioned above underline the existence of a local production of jars, jugs and waterwheel pots, made with calcareous clay, from the late fourteenth century until at least the sixteenth century. This production in Potamia is comparable to pottery found in a well in Androcleous Street to the southeast of the medieval city of Nicosia.¹⁷ Glazed cooking pots, frying pans, jars and jugs, all handmade and manufactured in dark reddish-brown fabric, are abundant on the Potamia and Agios Sozomenos site, both in the excavations and in the survey. They illustrate the evolution of the production and the shape of Cypriot coarse ware which is now familiar to us on account of the articles of S. Gabrielli on the material of Paphos - the excavations of Icarus Street and Fabrika Hill. Italian imports of the sixteenth century are well documented on other well known Cypriot sites and museums, for instance in Kouklia, Paphos, Limassol, Larnaca and Famagusta. The assemblages presented here contribute to our understanding of the chronological sequence of the medieval occupation of the Potamia-Agios Sozomenos region, while they additionally reveal what could be the supply of coarse wares and tableware in a Royal Manor and in a rural settlement organized around it. They only represent a small percentage of the ceramics collected during the survey and the excavations. The final publication of the totality of the pottery of Potamia dated from late fourteenth century to the nineteenth century is currently in preparation.

16. G. Farris and V.A. Ferranese, "Contributo alla conoscenza della maiolica ligure del XVI° secolo", *Atti del II convegno internazionale della ceramica*, Albisola, 1986, pp. 13-45.

17. P. Flourentzos, *A Hoard of Medieval Antiquities from Nicosia*, Nicosia, 1994.