

Ceramics between Change and Challenge, between Past and Present

From Baroque until Today



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Organisation by
Museum of Applied Art,
Belgrade, Serbia



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Early Modern Period Pottery from Belgrade: Production and Consumption Models

Abstract: Pottery from the Baroque-style Belgrade will be analyzed, both cooking and table vessels, as well as their production characteristics and standards related to size and shape. The occurrence of the pottery is associated with Austrian rule. The material is a telling example of the use of pottery as 'military ceramics', showing a specific consumer choice. Contrary to the completely uniform cooking pots, based on the Central European ceramic tradition, table vessels illustrate the style of the time, represented with several decorative (painted) groups, including the Anabaptist (Haban) pottery.

Key words: Austrian-period pottery, military consumers, uniformity, craft specialization

After almost two centuries under Ottoman government, Belgrade was returned to the European framework with the Austrian conquest in 1717. With this act, its transformation into a European fortified city of the Baroque epoch began. To Christian Europe and Austria, especially in the following few decades, until 1739, it became the most significant strongpoint of defense against the Ottoman Empire and a base for further conquests. Also, it was earmarked as a political, economic and cultural center, and a strategic point for Catholic expansion and German colonization. To this end, a comprehensive reconstruction was planned, of both the fortress and the town (Popović 2006: 211–248).

Among other things, the integration into the Habsburg Monarchy meant a shift towards the Central European cultural and craft circle, and this was fully reflected in ceramics. I will briefly remind that features of medieval pottery include a combination of several elements – mainly Balkan and Byzantine – which are all incorporated into the Ottoman-period pottery; thus, one can speak of similar pottery traditions, and especially of the similar visual appearance of pottery in a rather long period (Bikić 2003: 95–150). Compared to the features of previous periods, the pottery classes introduced by Austrians, both formal and decorative, are quite different, reflecting the pre-industrial craftsmanship and the Baroque-style pottery art. Having regard to the focus of this module and the related Symposium, i.e. “the role and use of ceramics in various contexts from the Baroque up to now in all social spheres”, to quote from *The Ceramics and Its Dimensions Brochure*, this article will discuss a production line of 18th-century pottery and, at the same time, a specific model of consumption – military pottery.

Pottery from the Belgrade Fortress provides an abundance of relevant data regarding reliable dating of archaeological contexts and, consequently, of numerous and various pottery assemblages. Beside the large stone barracks, powder arsenals and economic buildings, one of the most illustrative

assemblages was discovered within the defensive structure called the Blockhouse, embedded in the south-eastern curtain wall of the Upper Town. It had a rectangular ground floor and an underground chamber with a small opening in the curtain wall at the level of the ditch floor. The Blockhouse was built between 1718 and 1721, but it remained unfinished because of the changes of construction plans. A filling layer within the underground chamber is the actual archaeological context (Bikić 2012: 210–211). Beside other items, it contained approximately 1,000 pottery vessels. Since two large barracks were in the close vicinity, these must have been vessels used by Austrian army in a relatively short period, around the third decade of the 18th century. Therefore, this can be considered as a reference assemblage in establishing technological, formal and decorative landmarks in the 18th-century pottery.

Cooking pots make 70% of the total amount of vessels (Fig. 1). They occur in several forms resulting from the corresponding technologies, including sand-tempered clay paste and yellow, green or brown glazed interiors. The same standards can be observed in deep-footed pans. In all of them, thin walls are one of the main characteristics. Also, both pots and footed pans were manufactured in three or four sizes, mostly from one to seven liters in volume. All cooking vessels, even the smallest examples which measured up to half a liter, have gentle marks on the outside, opposite from the handle.

The percentage of tableware – approximately 300 vessels – is quite high. Table vessels occur in four main classes in terms of finishing techniques and decorations (Fig. 2). Also, one can observe the same uniformity as in the cooking ware group – there are just a few forms of bowls, plates and jugs. Monochrome – green and brown – glazed class includes mostly jugs.

The same nuances of green and brown glazes were used in the white painted decoration style.

In contrast to the simple decoration of the white painted group, the *Malhornware* (the name is given after a device for decoration in the form of a horn: Kaltenberger 1996) show a rather elaborate design based on the contrast between background colors and mostly floral painted motifs; the decoration process was finished with a transparent tin glaze (Fig. 3).

The Anabaptist (Haban) pottery is marked by distinctive technological and decorative characteristics (Horvat and Krisztinkovich 2005; Pajer 2011; Bikić 2012). The class is named after its makers, members of the Anabaptist reform movement. It is also tin-glazed, just like most artistic pottery classes of the time. The Haban pottery assemblage from the Blockhouse (Fig. 4) reflects the organization of production as it



Fig. 1. Cooking pottery from the Blockhouse at Belgrade Fortress. Photo: Institute of Archaeology.

Fig. 2. Table pottery from the Blockhouse at the Belgrade Fortress: monochrome and white painted decoration style. Photo: Institute of Archaeology.



was in this later period, starting with the late 17th and the 18th century (Bikić 2012: 214, Fig. 5). A change in the style of decoration, namely the simple, large patterns and dull colours, resulting from the change undergone by the Anabaptist communities, especially after their closer association with other pottery makers organized into guilds. As one can see, there are batches of very similar vessels, with some custom made examples, such as jugs with emblems of several guilds, tailors', coopers', blacksmiths', and butchers' (Bikić 2012: 217–220, Figs. 13–15). Accordingly, they confirm the presence of the master-craftsman in the fortress.

Archaeological analyses of the assemblage from the Belgrade fortress clearly show the main production and stylistic characteristics of the Austrian-period pottery and, in a broader sense, of the Central European pottery at the beginning of the 18th century (Krenn et al. 2007; Kaltenbeeger 2007a; 2007b; Pacher and Sabeditsch 2011). Although there are certain differences among classes – due to the function of vessels and the existence or non-existence of glaze or applied decoration – we can speak about uniformity in every aspect of production, including raw materials, technology, form and decoration. One gets a clear impression of craft specialization and mass production, which is eloquently confirmed by a series of vessels of various sizes and volumes, and quite a large amount of uniform vessels. All mentioned features are associated with the modernization of production, particularly with the establishment of manufactories beginning with the time of Emperor Leopold I in the second half of the 17th century (Веселиновић 1970: 163–166). The introduction of manufactories was supposed to ensure the development and improvement of trade, and to provide the money needed for the functioning of a state based on bureaucracy. In such a context,

the production of ceramics should be regarded as an integral part of the policy of mercantilism, imposed by Austria in newly conquered regions, along with political, cultural and religious programs.

Although pottery was basically similar throughout the territory of the Habsburg monarchy, pottery from southern areas, along the Danube, Drava, and Sava rivers, shows a greater degree of similarity (Mészáros 1968; Kovács 2001; Gaál 2010; Horvat and Biondić 2007). Similarity applies equally to production characteristics and the repertoire of vessels, which clearly illustrates the model of pottery consumption for military purposes. In case of the Belgrade Fortress one can observe only a few functional groups of a uniform appearance, with very decorative tableware. Although this pottery reflects the production of the time, by archaeological analysis one can determine certain consumption patterns in each case in the region, as we established for the Belgrade Fortress. In that sense, the Anabaptist pottery represents a rather eloquent example, because of the vessels with guild emblems.

In all of the above-mentioned facts lays the potential for further studies, regarding not only archaeological matters but also archaeometric. The scientific analysis of pottery, including mineralogical and chemical characterization of different sample groups, has started recently and has already given promising outcomes (Sauer 2007; Trojek et al. 2010). Therefore, I believe that future research projects should be more strongly focused on issues of technology and the identification of workshops, with the aim of establishing parameters and eventually defining a model of Early Modern pottery production and its spatial organization.



Fig. 3. *Malhornware* from the Blockhouse at the Belgrade Fortress. Photo: Institute of Archaeology.

Fig. 4. Anabaptist pottery from the Blockhouse at the Belgrade Fortress. Photo: Institute of Archaeology.



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