



BECAP 22

Pots as media: Decoration, technology, and message
transmission

Belgrade, May 12-13th 2022

Book of abstracts



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BECAP – Belgrade Conference on Archaeological Pottery

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BECAP 22

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Belgrade Conference on Archaeological Pottery (**BECAP**) is an international biennial conference aiming at gathering specialists from the field of pottery studies, organized by the Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade and the Institute of Archaeology. Pottery is usually the most abundant material found on archaeological sites, and in many cases, it is the only evidence of different phenomena: lifestyle, every-day activities, communal gatherings, food habits, exchange and trade, religious and ritual practices, symbolic behavior, individual and group identities, and many other aspects of social relations, as well as relations between communities and their environment. BECAP meetings are conceived to explore variety of topics through themed conferences, aimed at addressing specifically formulated problems, from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. Published collections of double-blind peer-reviewed papers presented at the conference will be of significant interest to different fields of archaeology and anthropology: material culture studies, studies of technology, social archaeology, archaeometry, archaeological method and theory, and computer applications in archaeology.

BECAP 22 – Pots as media: Decoration, technology and message transmission

Since the beginning of the discipline, decoration on ceramic vessels was considered one of the most important features of pottery; motifs and designs were important in defining archaeological cultures and understanding chronological sequences. With time, the research topics related to decoration broadened and today many potential lines of investigation are possible, making pottery designs still challenging and inspiring. Instead of focusing on typology, BECAP 22 is aimed to address the topics related to pottery decoration through three main themes:

- **Technology:** the procedures and techniques of applying specific designs; artisans' skill and knowledge transfer; organization of production related to decoration; characterization and origin of raw materials needed for applying of the designs; identification and usage of tools used for decoration execution; the relations between pots' function/usage and decoration.
- **Style:** meaning of the motifs; the relations between the decoration and users of the pots, i.e. elite and people of high status vs. others; (dis)continuity of specific motifs and their meaning through time; creativity and (or)

conservatism in decoration techniques and the choices of motifs.

- **Methodology:** methods of processing and quantification of pottery decoration.

The contributors are invited to address some of the following issues:

- case studies of wide chronological and geographical span dealing with pottery decoration: technological aspects, including archaeometry, and style;
- theoretical-methodological contributions related to the research of decoration including quantitative methods;
- ethnoarchaeological case studies and experiments designed and conducted to resolve the issues related to the application of specific decoration techniques.

Message on the pot: Sgraffito pottery decoration and group identities in the medieval Balkans

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In the class of medieval tableware, Byzantine sgraffito pottery holds a prominent place, due to its attractive, complex technique, and various elements which create endless series of decorative patterns. The intertwining of similar technical solutions and motifs of pottery from local workshops of the medieval Balkan states of Bulgaria and Serbia, both inheriting Byzantine culture, is evident in the period from the 13th to the 15th centuries. However, the decorative styles of locally produced glazed vessels somewhat differ, both from the Byzantine pottery of the previous (Middle Byzantine) and contemporary (Late Byzantine) periods.

The presentation aims to explore the differences in decoration between Byzantine sgraffito and these designs and techniques on the pottery originating from regional pottery workshops. The selection of motifs, their combinations, and colors, as well as the application of specific decorations on particular types of vessels, varies according to the chronology, but also depends on the artisans' skill and the closeness and availability to the source model(s). All of the above leads us to a more precise identification of pottery designs and even more, to a deeper understanding of its significance in the social and cultural milieu of the Balkans. In this regard, local sgraffito pottery can be regarded as an indicator of the unique Byzantine - Orthodox cultural identity of the entire Balkan area, but at the same time as a medium revealing peculiarities of regional noblemen and cultural spaces.