

REPORT

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Boni Petrunova

Regarding: Defense of the PhD thesis of Maria Georgieva Pashova, a full-time PhD student at the Section of Medieval Archaeology of NAIM-BAS

Maria Pashova was enrolled as a PhD student on 01.10.2012 with the topic of SGRAFFITO WARE FROM NORTHEASTERN BULGARIA XIII-XV CENTURIES. The territorial and chronological scope of the topic have been discussed in the Section for Medieval Archeology at NAIM at BAS, considering that the subject is dissertable and extremely necessary for the scholarly analysis of luxury vessels, which were used in the Medieval states located during the indicated centuries on the present-day territory of Northeastern Bulgaria.

At the end of the three-year term of the doctoral studies, it was extended by another year until 01.10. 2016. During this period, M. Pashova participated in the exploration of two medieval sites (the Medieval fortress of Urvich next to the village of Kokalyane, Sofia and the Antiquity and Medieval fortress of Kaliakra. The Inner city), and in the rescue archaeological survey of site 20 along the route of the railway line Plovdiv - Svilengrad, which helped to develop her as a field archaeologist, as well as to process materials related to the topic of the PhD thesis. She visited the depots of the museums in Varna, Balchik, Kavarna, Shumen, Targovishte, and Provadia, and has collected a significant number of samples of Medieval vessels decorated with the sgraffito technique, which have not been published. In the relevant part of the dissertation, they are processed and documented for the first time.

As stated in the report with the request for deduction of M. Pashova, she attended the relevant courses, passed the necessary exams, submitted two articles for printing, and participated in conferences, with the total number of credits received being 270 (with the required 250). In this regard, I must note that all formal requirements have been fulfilled more than one hundred percent.

Regarding the preparation and writing of the thesis, there was a delay, mainly due to personal problems of the PhD student. In the period set for completing her doctorate, she was hospitalized three times with a serious diagnosis. However, mainly with the assistance of the SMA, the work on the thesis was refined and directed in the right course.

On 30.09.2016, the SCA discussed the work done on the dissertation by M. Pashova and dismissed her with the right of defense.

The first attempt at an internal discussion, with the aim of directing to defense, was held on 16.11.2021 at a meeting of the SMA at NAIM-BAS. Recommendations were given for structural

changes, for specifying the goals and tasks in the introductory part, presenting arguments for the selection of the chronological and territorial scope, as well as separating the historiographical part into a separate chapter. The PhD student was given a six-month deadline to revise her work.

The presented PhD thesis includes: Introduction, three chapters, Conclusion, Bibliography, Catalogue, tables, appendices and maps. The organized material from large Bulgarian Medieval towns on the territory of Northeastern Bulgaria lies at the basis of the study - Preslav, Targovishte, Provadia, Shumen and Silistra in the interior and Varna, Kavarna, and Kaliakra in the coastal area.

The Catalogue consists of 783 samples. The material is arranged in alphabetical order, with the name of the urban center from which the finds originate being the leading one. Accordingly, the finds from each center are separated into the inferred pottery groups presented in Chapter 3- Classification and Typology.

99 Tables have been prepared for the Catalogue - graphic and with photo materials - where the numbers correspond to the Catalogue number Table 1.1 (No. 1 from the Catalogue). 45 appendices have been added with published samples from the discussed centers and those presented in foreign works. There is also a comparative table of the pottery complex from the urban centers under consideration. The maps supplement the information for the contextual finding of the materials.

The Introduction presents the subject, aims and tasks of the study, as well as the methodology by which the material was analyzed. The subject - sgraffito pottery from the 13th - first half of the 15th c. - is examined in the cultural environment of the Palaiologian Age and the changed commercial and economic international relations. Comments are provided on the specific period from a chronological point of view, spanning the time between two empires that positioned significant territories under unified political authority - the Byzantine Empire (between the late 10th and the late 12th c.) and the Ottoman Empire (which finally established its power in the mid 15th c.). This period was characterized by political disintegration and it is precisely its effects that are posed as problems for discussion by examining sgraffito ware in a spatially small region - Northeastern Bulgaria - a region which, however, to a certain extent can be considered as a sample - although undoubtedly not fully representative - of the world at that time. In the course of two centuries, it was marked by the confrontation of various political forces (Kingdom of Tarnovo, Despotate of Dobruzha, the Golden Horde, the "Empire in exile" regaining Constantinople, etc.) as well as by the competition of various (external) economic players (Venice, Genoa, etc.), in at least some of which politics and economics go hand in hand. No less than two extremely important trade routes passed through this region (one sea route and one some distance west of it) connecting the Mediterranean with the great Eurasian steppe. It is closed from the north by the Danube River - the largest navigable river on the Balkans, providing communication in the east-west direction, and undoubtedly accompanied by parallel land routes, at least one of them, approximately along the line of Tarnovo – Shumen – Provadia – Varna, is

clearly attested as an important artery already in the Antiquity. This specific contact zone between the Black Sea coast and the interior of the Northeast undoubtedly offers a potential opportunity to seek answers to essential questions, related to the influence of political events on production traditions and on the structure of the international economic market. In this connection, the main goals of the study have been set - to bring out those characteristic classes of sgraffito pottery that converge or distinguish the two regions in the 13th – first half of the 15th c. and to define the local and imported groups of pottery, which would illuminate questions about the routes of their distribution and the localization of production centers.

Chapter 2. Historiography

A broader view on sgraffito ware in foreign historiography studies is purposefully presented. Some of the examined pottery complex is deeply connected with the Byzantine ceramic traditions and the Capital of Constantinople. The foreign historiographic review relates directly to the topic and seems essential for placing the material under study in the context of the age and the issues, concerning the definition of pottery groups from the point of view of terminology and chronology. The Bulgarian studies are examined in connection with the problems of typology and classification, with the emphasis on the works referring to the territory defined in the present work - Northeastern Bulgaria.

Chapter 3. Classification and Typology

It observes the problems that create difficulties in typology and classification. The classification in the present work is grounded on manufacturing technology - clay, moulding, baking, and surface treatment. Criteria have been drawn up based on the available material. The primary division of classes is based on two main indicators (criteria): 1) the characteristics of the baked clay - composition of the dough, colour (fabric) and moulding technique - thick-walled, thin-walled (texture); 2) surface treatment - characteristics of the slip and the glaze (colour and quality) and incised line technique - fine, shallow, deep, wide, taking away part of the slip.

After this primary classification of the main groups of pottery was done, the secondary characteristics were also evaluated - shape of the vessels and the types of ornaments on the basis of which internal subgroups of pottery can be formed. These subgroups may encompass vessel types - similar in shape, size and profiling details (bell-shaped cups or hemispherical bowls) or series uniting products with the same ornamentation.

Within Northeastern Bulgaria, seven large technological groups of sgraffito pottery are distinguished in the chronological framework of the 13th – first half of the 15th century: 1) Group 1. Zeuxippus Ware Family; 2) Group 2. Glossy brown-yellow/green glaze pottery - New World group or Zeuxippus Class IB, IC after Megaw; 3) Group 3. Standardized sgraffito pottery of the Palaiologian Age – peculiar of the Black Sea zone; 4) Group 4. Monochrome sgraffito pottery (13th – first half of the 15th c.); 5) Group 5. Polychrome sgraffito ceramics (13th – first half of the 15th c.); 6) Group 6. Pottery group of Elaborate Incised Ware (EIW) / Intricately ornamented

exquisitely incised pottery; 7) Group 7. Sgraffito pottery with decoration in the Palaiologian style.

Some of them are already known in the academic literature and the Bulgarian material adds to the map of their distribution. Within each of these pottery groups, the production technology, vessel morphology and typical decoration are described. Issues related to provenance, production, and chronological range are also commented on. These main groups are by no means closed, but on the contrary - they can be supplemented with a view to the continuous refill of materials with new archaeological studies.

Chapter 4. Characteristics and comparative analysis of the pottery complex from the investigated sites

The urban centers are arranged in alphabetical order. Their location and historical development are described and an overview of the archaeological research is given. A brief sketch of the pottery complex is also added - what groups of pottery are found at this center and is there any production data. The fact that the comparative analysis is largely subject to subjective conclusions is emphasized, because with the topic thus set in the present work, it is not possible to review all the materials from the studied archaeological structures of the respective town center. Issues related to the museum depots base and the condition of the documentation are noted, which require separate work to establish their finding context. From this point of view, the conclusions about the presence/absence of certain groups of pottery can always be revised in the future during more detailed developments and scholarly research. The main conclusions were drawn from the analysis and comparison of the pottery complexes at the regional and supra-regional level. The centers of production and distribution routes are also commented on. A chronological difference between the groups has been established, with group 1 (Zeuxippus) and group 2 (the pottery with a glossy brown-yellow/green glaze) being characteristic of the 13th and the second half of the 13th – the second half of the 14th c., and the rest found their greatest spread in the 14th c. and continued to be discovered in the first half of the 15th c. Defining the import and local groups, as well as marking the routes of their distribution, shows that political fragmentation was not an obstacle to the existence of a common market. However, this market, instead of through the centralized organization of the unified political power, was united in the large-scale commercial-colonial empire of the town-republics - Venice, Genoa, Pisa, etc. building up a complex system of economic ties with local authorities. The analysis of the classified sgraffito groups shows that there was a hierarchical construction of the economy in the 13th – first half of the 15th c. On the one hand, a common market was available in which groups 1 (Zeuxippus), 2 (glossy brown-yellow/green glaze), 6 (EIW) and 7 (the Palaiologian style) were traded and distributed over a large geographical area, with manufacturing centers and commercial agents being economic factors of prime importance. On the other hand, local groups were produced within individual regions, such as Northeastern Bulgaria - polychrome and monochrome ones - which in turn represented smaller economic players, such as the Bulgarian Capital of Tarnovo, supplying production within the territory of its own political boundaries. At

the micro-regional level, there were also local productions such as Silistra region operating in the immediate vicinity.

The conclusions of the PhD student are as follows:

- The politically decentralized world was connected at the economic level in a continuous flow of trade with the active participation of the Latins and merchants of Venice, Genoa, Pisa, etc. They created numerous colonies on the shores of the Levant, Asia Minor, the Balkans and the Black Sea area. Imported goods entered through these points in exchange for grain, honey, wax and other raw materials. Within this common market, the individual centers also developed their own internal trade network at the micro-regional level.

- The production of sgraffito ware adapted to the new political and economic conditions, but also followed the natural course of its own development. It marked a real boom and massiveness related to the purely technological features of development. From the second half of the 13th c. onwards, the three-legged grills for baking glazed vessels were widely distributed, changing fundamentally the scale of production and leading to the creation of many workshops with their own potentials to satisfy the domestic market needs. These possibilities are well reflected by the variety in the decoration and the general appearance of the vessels. The pottery ateliers continued to work in the first half of the 15th c., regardless of the political events related to the gradual establishment of the Ottoman power on the Balkans.

Academic contributions of the PhD thesis:

- As a result of the arrangement, systematization and dating of the collected empirical material, the main technological sgraffito groups have been differentiated, characteristic of the 13th – first half of the 15th c. in the given territorial scope. Ceramic classes have been pointed out, which bring together or distinguish the Black Sea area and the interior of Northeastern Bulgaria. Some of the groups are defined at the international level and the Bulgarian material is terminologically referred to them;

- A distinction is made between productions characteristic of large foreign trade markets and those that cover local, regional productions. These local groups mark the boundaries and the degree of economic and cultural differentiation of the individual political formations during the period under discussion.

- The routes of distribution of the groups at the regional and supra-regional level have been established. Production centers are located within Northeastern Bulgaria;

- A basis has been laid for discussion regarding terminology and classification, which is an ongoing process that over time poses specific problems and sets guidelines for their resolution.

- The materials presented in this topic and those already published, show clearly that the modern borders of Bulgaria offer the full palette of diverse regional productions and groups

within the framework of sgraffito ware. The PhD thesis sets a model for future developments and the deepening of knowledge regarding the different classes of pottery. Increasing the possibilities to verify their adequacy and functionality by promulgating more and more (and better dated) samples and complexes would go a long way towards painting an ever more detailed picture of this era, which is undoubtedly interesting and dynamic in every aspect - be it political, economic, cultural or social.

The PhD thesis solves several basic scholarly problems:

- A unified classification and typology of the considered ceramics has been created, which until now was made separately for each studied site.
- The main characteristics of sgraffito pottery during the 13th – first half of the 15th c. have been distinguished.
- Technological groups of the examined vessels have been distinguished according to the clay, glaze, decoration technique, type of ornamentation and shape.
- Special attention has been paid to centers of production and distribution routes, which are represented in maps.

These are just some of the results achieved.

I think that Maria Pashova has done a very good job of developing the topic and after the discussion in the Section of Medieval Archaeology at NAIM - BAS, I recommend that she be awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor.

September 5th 2022

Signature:

Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Boni Petrunova