Ergün Lafli, Maurizio Buora
(Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, İzmir; Museum of Udine)

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE AEGEAN WARE AND
FINE GRAFFITO WARE IN WESTERN ASIA MINOR

Aegean ware

The so-called “Aegean ware” is easily recognizable among the pieces preserved in the archaeological museums of Turkey. Since the identification of this class of material by Arthur Hubert Stanley Megaw in 1975, their recognition is now quite clear, although we do not know the location of the center or, more likely, centers of production; moreover its dating is still being discussed.

Of great interest for the knowledge of this class of material is an excellent book by Lale Doğer, published first in 2000, with a second edition in 2012, on the Aegean ware preserved in the Archaeological Museum of İzmir, unfortunately only in Turkish. Their findspots are unknown for almost all vessels, but many show calcareous deposits and it reveals that they were in sea water for a long time. Clearly all the pieces come from one or more wrecks, as surface traces and the scientific analyzes of marine deposits confirm. All these can perhaps could come from a shipwreck north of the Dodecanese islands: three bowls belong possibly to the same wreck, found at the end of the sixties until 1967 and now in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, MD.


bought in Izmir, now kept at the Detroit Institute of Arts, were said to be from a shipwreck near Izmir at the time of acquisition. It is very interesting to note that the first examples of the Aegean ware in the Museum of Izmir date back to 1968 as well.

Doğer analyzed 114 examples of the Aegean ware among the 227 Medieval ceramic vessels of the Museum of Izmir; they were purchased, donated or confiscated to the museum. This fact in itself makes the museum’s collection one of the most important for the study of this type of ceramic. Pamela Armstrong emphasizes that both the form - derived from silver bowls - and decoration of these vessels are inspired by the Islamic models. The accurate publication of the Aegean ware from Izmir allows us to recognize various aspects of the gradual abstraction in the decoration. This fits well in a very fast manufacturing with poor quality and suitable for the mass production.


A progressive simplification

As an example we choose the decoration with the central bird, indicated conventionally as waterbird. About 30% of the whole Aegean ware examples in the Izmir collections are containers with this representation which is a relatively homogenous group. Within the Aegean ware we know forms with high or low feet differently shaped, with various profiles and above all variable decoration (pl. I, nos. 1-3). Approaching some of the dish images from the Museum of Izmir we clearly see how the curved elements become increasingly more stylized until reduced to simple curved signs. These elements may be three or four in number which are initially similar to the flower buds of long stem. On the other hand the bird gradually loses its natural character and reduced to a pure sign.

The yield of the subject in the vessels from Izmir is very different from a shallow bowl from Skopelos at the Ashmolean Museum (pl. I, no. 1), where the profile is especially different. Also birds differ each other and lozenges appear which are absent among the material in Izmir.

The same phenomenon is also recorded in the same period on albeit of a vessel with different shape from Sagalassus (pl. I, no. 3), which are interpreted as “snakes” by Athanasios K. Vionis et al. 7

A very enhanced form of stylization occurs, when the figure of a waterbird is reduced to one head (pl. II, nos. 3-4). We believe that it was erroneously interpreted as a fish 8. Indeed it is a well known phenomenon to reduce the figure to the head alone: this is also present in pottery finds from Greece. But it is easy here to see the two lines forming the body, as the extreme stylization of a bird. 10 examples of this type are preserved in innumerable variants. So far the collection of Izmir constitutes the largest group with over 25 examples. Additional attestations to be found in Crimea, in Istanbul, in the Museums of Marmaris (six examples) and Bodrum (five examples). For this group, at present, it seems clear that its distribution was concentrated to the western coast of Asia Minor and Byzantine colony in Crimea. We can also classify numerous pieces from the Museum of Izmir under this group, interpreted by Pamela Armstrong as “the roughness of execution and simplicity of form of all these vessels are indicative of mass production” 9 or of a productive and commercial feature that occurs from the last decades of the twelfth century A.D. onwards.

**Thering of circles**

Also the ring of the circles presents several variations. No. 1 on pl. III, an unpublished bowl from the Museum of Aydın, has wide circles, spaced close to the edge. Between the one and the other a graphic sign was formed by a triangle with a kind of φ, similar to the sign that appears at the center of another example of the Aegean ware (see pl. II, no. 6). Inside the circles, in the center, a partis spared, probable track of the compass. A specimen from Israel on pl. III (no. 2) is similar to the cup of Aydın. At Panagia we find circles more closely spaced and distant from the edge, with smaller elements interspersed (pl. III, no. 3). Also the profile of both of the straight walls of the reduced foot is different.

On Cyprus there are two variants. One (pl. III, no. 4) with quadririptate patterns inside the circles, almost pseudo-lozenges; the other with eight circles, smaller and separated from the edge by a decorated band (pl. III, no. 5). A fourth type, in two variants, appear on Skopelos (pl. III, no. 6) and in Izmir (pl. III, no. 7). In the first variety the circles are only four in number, but larger, separated by small lozenges and the a graphic pattern, placed in the center. In Izmir we find a similar decoration (pl. III, no. 7), with smaller circles, without trace of the compass that indicates that the circles were etched in a different way and geometric decoration in the central medallion.

**Distribution and dating**

The gradual publication of the Aegean ware allow us to identify dish types of products and their distribution. We find similar plates with waterbirds’ decoration along the western Anatolian coast (Museums of Izmir and Bodrum) and at Chersonesus in Crimea; other presences are reported in the same peninsula. A fragment with the waterbird depiction was found in the excavations in the Agora of Izmir. This pottery type also reaches the hinterland. An unpublished dish (pl. II) is kept in the Museum of Aydın, which is located on the site of ancient Tralleis.

---


11 As probably in Israel (pl. III, no. 2), Kuşadası (pl. III, no. 8) and perhaps at Smixi in Macedonia, Greece (pl. III, no. 9).


Aegean ware seemed to appear in few numbers in the Nový Svět shipwreck near Chersonesus, where they are residual finds. It is not present in the west, for instance on the island of Andros. We can distinguish another way of depiction, in which the central image is surrounded by a decorative crown towards the edge. Such products have been identified in Paphos, Thebes, Boeotia and Corinth. We believe that they must be products of two different workshops, one of which supported the western and the other to the eastern market. The distribution of these “oriental” products roughly corresponds to the territory of the Empire of Nicaea, as it was founded after the Fourth Crusade in A.D. 1202-1204. The presence on Cyprus can probably go back to the period of Guy of Lusignan (post A.D. 1194).

The Aegean pottery was dated before the earthquake of 1222 in Paphos, but Megaw believes that the floruit took place before the year 1204. Marie-Louise von Wartburg proposes a later date for the destruction of Saranta Kolones Castle in Paphos. At Sagalassus the mentioned bowl is dated to the second half of the 12th or the first half of the 13th century A.D.

**Animals in fine sgraffito**

The ceramics normally designated as fine sgraffito are very different, but probably contemporary. Some bowls that were decorated with sgraffito technique and preserved in the Museum of Izmir originate perhaps from the same or similar wrecks. Although the representations are well known, von Wartburg writes about such ceramic containers: “It seems useful to publish as many as possible of these objects widely scattered…. They will help us to form a better idea of the scope and variety of the repertoire of this class of pottery.” We can also add here other examples of sgraffito ware with animal depictions from archaeological collections of western Turkey, namely from Izmir and Aydn. Although the animal depictions can be copied from “Skizzenbücher”, we believe that some marks “possibly indicating styles of individual workshops”.

---


19 P. Armstrong, Byzantine glazed ceramic table ware in the collection of the Detroit
The bird with turned back head

The depiction belongs to a rather widespread group, in which one can recognize some variants, for example in the wing or yield of the leaves. Even minute details like the collar between the head and the plumage differ in some examples. Characteristic feature of some of these vessels is a bird with head back which apparently different from typical examples (pl. IV). For Maria Brouskari it would be the “tête d’un animal indéterminé” and for von Wartburg a “mammal-like head”. This is not strange. According to Armstrong the band around its neck would signify that it is a domesticated wild bird. The potter could vary the foliage and the bird so that many vessels became similar but not identical. A group of vessels from Corinth presents the same depiction, however, with some different details.

Regarding some bowls in the Museum of Izmir (pl. IV, nos. 1-2), the first is different from the others, reproduced in the same table. Especially the foliage drawing is otherwise straight, as it is formed by more numerous parallel elements, while also the upper part of the wing is rather summary. The design of the eye differs than the rendering of the foliage. The second (pl. IV, no. 2) is, however, very close to an example at the Metropolitan Museum of Arts, especially in the regards of the tail (pl. IV, no. 5), although the yield of the plumage differs.

The bowl of the Museum of Aydın (pl. V, no. 5) makes out another subgroup, as it has a yellow glaze and completely different design, compared to examples reported above.

It is generally believed that all are depicting a falcon, with reference to the Western habit of hunting with falcons, endorsed by the Byzantine nobility at the time of the Crusades.

The pigeons

According to von Wartburg two other bowls of Izmir represent pigeons, (pl. V, nos. 1-2). In no. 12.418 the collar is missing, but it is present in another example (pl. V, no. 2). If this collar really indicates a falcon, then the interpretation as a pigeon is not correct. The design of the upper part of the wing is different. Common to both is the large number of elements that form the leaves.

Undefinable bird

The bowl of pl. IV, no. 4, from Izmir is similar to one of the example at the Canellopoulos Collection. It appears as a small short-legged bird, walking...
to the right, encircled by five chevrons. Concentric bands filled with delicate geometric patterns are encircling the bird. The middle, smaller band appears in a bowl from Corinth. Other similar examples in Swiss collections and Malcove Collection have different profiles. The influence of metal originals can also be seen in the decoration. The yield of the plumage, the long beak and yet the same decoration on the larger band appear in another container from Corinth. The design is schematic, above all in the rendering of the plumage.

The wading bird

Two bowls (pl. V, nos. 5-6) show a crown of chevrons with two birds of larger dimensions inside. Both have very high legs and well developed body. The first (pl. V, no. 5), standing at right, has the wing like that of falcons of pl. IV. The second, perhaps a wading bird, has a totally different wing. We can see here that the collar has nothing to do with the hawk domesticated, but it is a simple expedient to separate the head from the neck and thus is perhaps typical of a specific workshop.

The fish

A bowl with the representation of a fish was framed always in a foliage (pl. VI, no. 1), also belongs to a well-known group. The fish is swimming to the right, framed above and accompanied below by almost symmetrically arranged scrolling tendrils with stylized feathered leaves. There is a certain similarity with the depiction of a bowl in the Metropolitan (pl. VI, no. 2), although the rim and design above are different: here the fish swims within double chevrons crown and not among the leaves.

Conclusions

The collection of Byzantine glazed pottery of the Museum of Izmir is very important and would require a complete edition. We have reanalysed some samples of the Aegean ware and present new bowls of fine sgrafitto, from the

---


Museum of Izmir and twoof Aydin. From the comparisons we have carried out, it is clear that according to the shape and to the decoration within the so-called Aegean ware it existed products of different workshops, as already noticed by some scholars. It seems possible that each had markets in different areas. As in the Pelagonnisos near Alonessos in Northern Sporades and Castellorizo shipwrecks, also the supposed wreck near Izmir was carrying both fine sgraffito and coarsely ware on a single cargo. Based on our current knowledge, it would confirm the same dating of the two types of pottery from the late 12th to the early decades of the 13th century A.D.

Notes and acknowledgements

Abbreviations in alphabetic order: A.o.: among others; fig.: figure; inv. no.: inventory number; mid.: middle; and vol.: volume. For the study of these objects at the Museums of Izmir and Aydin two authorizations were issued by the Museums of Izmir and Aydin in 2016, numbered as B.16.0.K VM.200.11.03.16.14.01.222.11. The documentation has been done in June 2016. Photos were taken by Dr Sami Pataci (Ardahan) in 2016 who has also done the map. We would like to thank him sincerely.
Nos. 1-3: Examples of the Aegean ware with a waterbird depiction; no. 1 from the Ashmolean Museum (from Armstrong 1991: 336, fig. 1, 2); no. 2: from Museum of Izmir (from Doğer 2012: 69, no. 1); no. 3: from Sagalassus (from Vionis, Poblome, Waelkens 2009: 212, fig. 5c).

Nos. 4-9: Examples of the Aegean ware with a waterbird depiction from the Museum of Izmir (from Doğer 2012: no. 4= no. 1; no. 5= no. 13; no. 6= no. 14; no. 7= no. 5; no. 8= no. 2; and no. 9= no. 18).
Plate II: Examples of the Aegean ware with a waterbird or snake depiction from western Asia Minor. No. 1: From the Museum of Aydın; nos. 2-6: From the Museum of Izmir (inv. no. 2: 14682; no. 5: 12407; and no. 6: 14700; S. Pataci, 2016).

Пла̀т. II: Примери егејских посуда са привидом водене птице или змије из Западне Мале Азије.

Бр. 1 из Музеја у Ајдину; бројеви 2 до 6: Из Музеја у Измиру (инв. бр. 2: 14682; бр. 5: 12407; и бр. 6: 14700; С. Патачи, 2016).
Pl. IV: Examples of the Aegean ware. Nos. 1-2: From the Museum of Izmir (S. Patacl, 2016); no. 3: from a private collection in Switzerland [from M.-L. von Warburg, Some middle Byzantine glazed bowls from Swiss private collections, British School at Athens studies 8, (2001), (=Mosaic: Festschrift for A. H. S. Megaw), 118, fig. 12, 6]; no. 4: from the Canellopoulos Collection [from E. Brouskari, Collection Paul Canellopoulos (XVIII), Bulletin de correspondance hellénique 112/1, (1988), 505, fig. 2 <http://www.persee.fr/doc/bch_0007-4217_1988_num_112_1_1759> (01/01/2017)]; no. 5: from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. no. 1984.302); no. 6: from the Detroit Institute of Arts, MI (from Armstrong 1997: 14, fig. 12).

Pl. V: Examples of Aegean ware. Nos. 1-2 and 4-6: From the Museum of Izmir; no. 3: from the Museum of Aydin (inv. no. 2: 12418; and no. 4: 12371; S. Pataci, 2016).

Табла. V: Примери егејских посуда. бројеви. 1-2 и 4-6: из Музеја у Измиру; бр. 3: из Музеја у Ајдину (инв.бр. 2: 12418; и бр. 4: 12371; С. Патачи, 2016).
Plate VI

Pl. VI: Examples of the Aegean ware with a fish depiction. No. 1: From the Museum of Izmir (S. Pataci, 2016); no. 2: from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. no. 2000.322).

Табла. VI: Примери егејских посуда са представом рибе. Бр. 1: Из Музеја у Иџмиру (С. Патачи, 2016); бр. 2: из Музеја Метрополитен (инв. бр. 2000.322).