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CERAMICS, PEOPLE AND PLACES - THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CERAMICS FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE AGES



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CERAMICS, PEOPLE AND PLACES: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CERAMICS FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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Ceramic finds from Vrbovec Castle, Croatia (photo by H. Jambrek)

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FOREWORD

During the last two decades, Croatian medieval archaeology has faced a large influx of information about sites from the Early, High and Late Middle Ages, which were obtained by protective archaeological excavations on highways and roads throughout the country. However, due to inadequate infrastructure and organizational challenges, the abundance of ceramic finds remained unpublished. Moreover, many systematic archaeological excavations have also not resulted in comprehensive publications. As a result, we are deprived of access to valuable basic data, without which further comprehensive and specialist research into various aspects of medieval society is not possible.

Since pottery is one of the most common types of archaeological finds, and often the only material evidence, its study is of exceptional importance for understanding the everyday life of people from the past. Therefore, by organizing the meeting at the 9th International Scientific Conference on Mediaeval Archaeology, entitled *Ceramics, People and Places: the Significance of Ceramics for the Study of Social Relations in the Middle Ages* (Zagreb 6–7 June 2024), the Institute of Archaeology wanted to offer a platform for exchanging knowledge and presenting the results of research into pottery and ceramics in general.

The conference and this publication were carried out within the framework of the Institute's research project *Transformation of Identities through the Past* (TIPS), funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU. Accordingly, we also sought to provide a platform for discussions addressing various social identities through the study of ceramics.

Participants were invited to present individual case studies of well-dated assemblages

from a clear archaeological context from the area of Croatia and neighbouring countries. They were encouraged to explore how ceramics can be used not only as archaeological artefacts but also as sources for understanding broader social, cultural, and technological processes. Of particular interest were studies that interpret everyday practices and wider social relations through the analysis of pottery, with a focus on its role in shaping and reflecting the lives of past communities.

The Conference has gathered experts and professionals from Croatia and neighbouring countries, who have presented their research, discussed the topic and exchanged their knowledge. As many as 59 participants took part in the conference, coming from Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Hungary, Romania, Italy and Poland. The presenters contributed a total of 26 presentations by lectures and 6 posters.

This volume contains 21 peer-reviewed papers, developed from conference presentations and adapted into scholarly articles by the authors. By publishing the most of papers in English, we have tried to provide the widest visibility in the international scientific community. Each contribution was reviewed by at least two independent experts. The reviewers are distinguished specialists from across Europe, representing countries such as Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Italy, Serbia, Romania, Switzerland, Poland, Turkey and Croatia. Furthermore, the entire volume underwent review by esteemed medievalists and ceramic specialists, Prof. Dr. Miklós Takács and Dr. Daša Pavlović. The quality of the volume was further enhanced by the valuable input of the Editorial Advisory Board members, including Dr. Vesna Bikic, Prof. Dr. Umberto Moscatelli, Dr. Adrian Andrei Rusu and Prof. Dr. Katarina Katja Predovnik.

The conference, and consequently this proceedings volume, was focused on the broad time span of the Middle Ages (c. 500–1500), while also encompassing earlier and later periods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of technological and functional development, use and cultural significance of ceramics in past societies. Several papers address topics related to ceramics from the Modern period. Although ceramics from these later centuries have long been overlooked in Croatian archaeological scholarship, by this volume we seek to promote their systematic study and greater academic recognition. By examining ceramic material from both medieval and post-medieval contexts, the aim is to encourage fresh insights into the complex interplay between material culture and social dynamics throughout these transformative historical periods. Specific research questions related to ceramics from different archaeological settlement and cemetery contexts are approached from various theoretical and interdisciplinary methodological perspectives, ranging from traditional archaeological approaches to modern archaeometric research.

The contributions in this volume address a variety of interrelated themes. Household ceramics, particularly kitchenware, are analysed in relation to domestic life, revealing insights into daily routines and household organization in medieval contexts. The relationship between technological innovation and tradition is also considered, especially in relation to broader societal transformations. Several studies explore the organization of ceramic production and its distribution networks, shedding light on the dynamics between local manufacturing and regional or transregional trade. Furthermore, the

presence and use of tableware is discussed as a reflection of social status and identity, pointing to distinctions in wealth, taste, and cultural affiliation.

Through these diverse perspectives, the volume not only highlights the potential of ceramic analysis as a tool for archaeological interpretation but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of medieval and Early Modern societies. By fostering dialogue between empirical research and theoretical reflection, the Institute of archaeology in Zagreb, by this volume, aims to support the continued development of ceramic studies and their integration into broader archaeological narratives.

And finally, in closing these introductory remarks, I would like to once again thank all the participants of the Conference for their valuable cooperation, and especially the authors of the papers for their insightful contributions. I also wish to express my gratitude to my colleagues from the Institute of Archaeology for their dedicated support in organizing the conference and preparing this publication. I am sincerely thankful to the individual reviewers of each paper, as well as to the reviewers of the entire volume, for their expert feedback and constructive assistance in enhancing both the individual texts and the proceedings as a whole.

We genuinely hope that the papers gathered in this volume will inspire archaeologists in their further research on ceramics not only from the Middle Ages, but also from other archaeological and historical periods.

Tatjana Tkalčec

