

Sirma Alexandrova, *Typology and chronology of the hand-made pottery of the Roman and Early Byzantine period (1st – 6th c.) on the territory of Bulgaria (Dissertations, volume 7)*, Sofia, NIAM-BAS, 2013, 443 p., 41 figs., 136 pl.

In 2013, in the series *Dissertations* issued by the Institute of Archaeology of the Bulgarian Academy of Science, the work entitled *Typology and chronology of the hand-made pottery of the roman and early byzantine period (1st–6th c.) on the territory of Bulgaria* was published. The book represents the doctoral paper of Sirma Alexandrova, prepared under the supervision of Prof. Lyudmil Vagalinski.

The work is structured in the following chapters: Introduction (p. 7–9), Historiographical review (p. 10–34), Characteristics of the sites (p. 35–61), Typology and chronology (p. 62–71), Conclusion (p. 72–78), Bibliography (p. 79–81), Catalogue (p. 83–288), Captions (p. 289–290), Figures (p. 291–306), Drawings (p. 307–443).

The publication is bilingual – Bulgarian and English – which makes it accessible for a wider range of researchers.

According to the author's opinion, the topic of hand-made pottery is completely undeveloped and the chronological value of this ceramic category is strongly underestimated (p. 7).

In the *Introduction*, the arguments for the choice of the research topic, the chronological and geographic frames, the methods used and basic sources are presented. Two observations need to be made. The first observation concerns the geographical framework. The author analyses the ceramic material from the territory of Bulgaria, which, during the chronological interval the work is focused on, was divided between different Roman provinces, including areas from neighbouring countries: Greece, Turkey and Romania. The author made reference to them only in the chapter dedicated to the *Historiographical review*, and even then they are very short and incomplete, especially if we are taking into account the Romanian scientific literature on the subject. The second observation regards the basic sources used by author. About 80% from the analysed ceramic material is unpublished. The category of hand-made pottery was not – until now – in the attention of the specialists and this is the first time when a huge quantity of hand-made pottery is examined.

In the *Historiographical review*, the author gives a chronological overview of the subject, pointing out the main authors and publications, and sets the following stages: the period up to WWI, the interwar period,

the interval from the end of WWII until 1972 (when the Institute of Thracology was founded), 1972–1989, and after the changes from 1989 until present days. The author points out the difficulties encountered during scientific research from the absence of mentions on hand-made pottery, to the incomplete publication of the ceramic material, which often lacked description, photos or drawings. At the same time, she draws attention to the works presenting the results of the excavations at various archaeological sites, especially burial mounds necropolises. One such example is D. Ovtcharov (*Trako-rimski nekropol do Targovishte*, *ArheologijaSofia* 7, 1, 1965, p. 34–37), who was the first one to mention the hand-made pottery used in burial rites when publishing the results of the excavation of a Roman-Thracian necropolis, near Targovishte. Another example is S. Mashov (*Trakijski nekropol ot rimskata epoha pri s. Drashan, Vrachanski okrag*, *ArheologijaSofia* 17, 1, 1975, p. 41–50), who, when publishing the necropolis from Drashan (Roman period, dated 2nd–4th c. AD), also made a classification of the hand-made pottery, in two categories: vessels especially made for the burial rites and vessels for everyday life. Yet another example is Ts. Dremiszova-Nelchinova (*Trakijski mogilen nekropol (II–III v.) kraj c. Vishegrad, Kardžaliski okrag*, *ArheologijaSofia* 22, 1, 1980, p. 18–27), who used the shape of the vessels as a criterion to classify ceramics when publishing the materials from the mound near Vishegrad. A special mention is dedicated to the work of G. Kabakchieva (*Keramika ot vilata pri Ivailovgrad II–IV v., Razkopki i prouchvania* 15, Sofia, 1986) on the *villa rustica* from Ivaylovgrad, where the hand-made pottery was included for the first time in a comprehensive catalogue.

Among the papers published after 1989, the most important were those presenting the results of archaeological researches from *Nicopolis ad Istrum* and *Iatrus* made by foreign teams, in collaboration with Bulgarian archaeologists. The established chronology for those sites gave the author the possibility to date more precisely the ceramic materials, otherwise very difficult to date considering the conservative character of the forms of the analysed ceramic category.

A delicate issue the author is trying to deal with is the ethnic attribution of the hand-made ceramics. In her opinion, the possibility to

identify ethnic groups starting from hand-made pottery is exaggerated. There is no information on the ethnic origin of hand-made ceramics and no attempt to single out hand-made ceramics of different ethnic groups – Thracians, Greeks, Romans –, although ethnic origin plays an important role in the creation of forms and, as a consequence, in the typological analysis of hand-made ceramics. Therefore, the author is only quoting the opinion of the other authors that chose to discuss the ethnic character of the hand-made ceramics. Even so, the majority of them assumed without any hesitation that the hand-made pottery was a proof of the presence of Thracians, and of their still alive traditions even during the Roman or Late Roman times, with the exception of some of them: Vagalinski (*Izaskana keramika ot I – nachalo na VII v. iuzno ot Dolen Dunav (Balgarija, 2002)*, Sofia, who suggested that the simultaneous emergence of polished and hand-made pottery was a sign of a *foederati* presence; Kabakchieva (*Oescus. Castra Oescensia. Rannorimski voen lager pri ustieto na Isker*, Sofia, 2000), according to whom the hand-made ceramics could be seen both in the settlements and necropolis and had the characteristics of domestic pottery coming from a region inhabited by different tribes having a similar culture and, as a consequence could not be ethnically assigned; or Gencheva (*Parviat voen lager v Novae, provintsija Mizjia (Severna Balgarija)*, Warszawa-Sofia, 2002) who wrote that the cups' ethnic definition as "Dacian" was relative.

Examining the recently published books dedicated to the hand-made pottery on the Balkan Peninsula, the author noticed that the Greek authors were not interested in it and avoided ethnic interpretation, and the early Slav necropolis in Olympia, for example, was published by foreign specialists.

In the *Characteristics of the sites*, 43 archaeological sites (where the analysed ceramics is coming from) are presented, from North to South and from West to East. The following data are provided for each of them: type of the site (settlement, sanctuary, necropolis), chronology, description of the pottery, place and level of discovery; information about publications when necessary, and dating are also included.

Next chapter is dedicated to *Typology and chronology*. The main types the author singles out are: pots, bowls, cups, jugs, bases, lids and handles. Every type has several variants/subtypes. For each category, the description is based on the characteristics of the paste composition, degree of firing and type of decoration. Some combinatory analysis for every type were also made, and the results are included in the figures at the end of the book (figs. 9–41). Only 17% of the materials included in

the catalogue have already been published. Very few of them are complete vessels. Most of them are rims, and the pots are the most frequent pottery type.

In the *Conclusion*, the author tries to synthesize information and opinions regarding the chronology, territorial distribution, technological, functional and ethnic characteristics of this particular ceramic category. In brief, the hand-made pottery decreases dramatically after the 4th c. AD; most of the vessels are pots; 20% of the analysed vessels are decorated; the hand-made pottery was produced until the end of Antiquity, and in southern Bulgaria is more frequent and varied. The data for the paste composition are scarce and unevenly distributed. It was noticed that, between the 1st and the 4th c. AD, the quality of the paste used has not been improved and, generally speaking, more than 50% are inclusions, such as quartz, sand or sand with pebbles. More than half of the pots were unevenly fired. Most of the vessels come from the settlements. In other words, author denies the hypothesis that the hand-made pottery had a predominantly cult function during the first centuries AD.

Although in the *Introduction* the author is sceptic about the ethnic attribution of this pottery, in the *Conclusion* she states that her work supports the idea that the presence of the hand-made pottery proves the presence of the Thracians!

In the *Catalogue*, there are 1,398 entries (p. 83–288) and 136 plates comprising drawings of the vessels (p. 308–443). The format of each entry is organized as follows: entry number (type number, variant and number of the ceramic vessel), description, dimensions, date, bibliography, place, level and depth of discovery, museum. Some of those characteristics are synthetically represented in the graphics placed at the end of the volume.

This volume represents a very useful work instrument for the specialists and, as the author states it, is a "continuation" of V. Handžiska's PhD thesis "Traditions and trends in the production of hand-made pottery in present-day southeastern Bulgaria during the 6th c. BC – 1st c. BC", since both of them are drawing attention to a specific category of ceramic vessels, whose study can offer important information not only about techniques and materials they were produced of, but also about their producers.

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