AFTER ANTIQUITY

CERAMICS AND SOCIETY IN THE AEGEAN
FROM THE 7TH TO THE 20TH CENTURY A.C.

A CASE STUDY FROM BOEOTIA,
CENTRAL GREECE

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The aim of this book is to present and discuss a substantial collection of Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramics from Boeotia in Central Greece. This collection was sampled in the course of the Boeotia Project under the direction of Prof. Anthony Snodgrass (University of Cambridge) and Prof. John Bintliff (University of Bradford, University of Durham; now University of Leiden). The Boeotia Project started in 1978 and yielded in the two following decades of fieldwork seasons of intensive survey a vast ceramic collection, of which 74 samples of pottery dating from ca. the 7th up to the 20th centuries after Christ make up only a relatively small part. These 74 Boeotian samples contain a total of some 12,000 Post-Roman sherd.

The samples under discussion were selected from the field collection (and provisionally dated by Prof. John Hayes during his visits to the Boeotia Project in the 1980s). Not all samples were the result of intensive survey, as on some Post-Roman sites outside the core areas of research only ‘diagnostic judgement’ sampling (collecting of grab samples) was undertaken. Although all 12,000 Post-Roman fragments have been handled by me, only the diagnostic sherds (ca. 2800, or 23% of the total amount of Post-Roman fragments) are discussed and presented in this book.

In most archaeological projects in the Mediterranean, the awareness of the importance of ceramic finds from the Medieval and Post-Medieval periods has increased dramatically over the last ten years, but the diagnosis of this Post-Roman pottery is still severely hampered by a lack of knowledge and of up-to-date publications. This book sets out to make a contribution to our understanding of Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramics in the Aegean area by presenting a typo-chronological catalogue of the finds in Boeotia, and by discussing various archaeological, as well as socio-economic, cultural and historical problems related to these ceramics.

In the first part of this book, the ‘Post-Roman Ceramics in the Aegean: Problems and Possibilities’, three subjects will be treated. First, I will sketch the main problems related to chronology and terminology of Post-Roman ceramics in the Eastern Mediterranean in general, and in the Aegean in particular.

Secondly, a general survey of earlier publications on Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery in the Aegean will be presented. Here I will discuss questions such as: what is the history of research of Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramics in the Aegean area? In doing so, I will focus my attention mainly on those publications which have been crucial for methodological advances or the opening-up of new material.

Thirdly, an attempt will be made to construct on the basis of the existing literature the current typo-chronological state of knowledge per period, beginning in chronological order with the Early Byzantine period (ca. 7th-9th centuries) and ending in Early Modern times (ca. 19th-mid 20th centuries). In particular, I will look at the question of how the Post-Roman ceramics, found in a stratigraphical context on large excavations in the Aegean, have been characterized, described and dated in earlier publications. That is to say: in publications prior to 1996, the year I started my research on the Boeotian material.

In the second part of this book, ‘The Ceramics Found in Boeotia: the Typo-chronological Perspective’, the focus will switch to the Boeotian situation. Here I will address questions such as: what has been published on Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery in Boeotia? Are these publications of relevance for the classification of the survey ceramics collected by the Boeotia Project? I will discuss here also the well-known problems relating to working with surface ceramics in field surveys, and in particular the problem of visibility of the wares. The final section of this part is dedicated to the formulation of a perspective to overcome these problems, or: the proposal for a ‘horizontal chronology’ of the ceramics.

Next in this second part of the book is a presentation of the diagnostic ceramic finds from a selection of Post-Roman sites in Boeotia. It concerns a catalogue of 30 of
the most important site-samples of the total of 74 sites on which Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery was found during the field survey of the Boeotia Project. The site-samples discussed here are the ones containing the diagnostic wares used for the assembling of the ‘horizontal chronology’ of Post-Roman ceramics in Boeotia from circa the 7th to the mid 20th century. The discussion will be restricted, however, to the analysis of the diagnostic surface ceramics; I will not engage in discussions about the definition of sites or the nature of sites in archaeological field research (the designation ‘site’ here merely signifies ‘find spot’ of ceramic material).

Following the presentation of the diagnostic site-samples an effort is made to combine the ceramic data from all the studied sites in a regional typo-chronological classification, and to present the diagnostic types of Post-Roman pottery found on the Boeotian sites. To that purpose I use a classification system for the entire period under study (ca. 7th century to mid 20th century) which encompasses 48 different wares. This classification system is designed especially for the presentation of the wares found in Boeotia under study, and is an effort to incorporate the latest views on the 48 wares discussed in this part of the book. As the system is based on the Boeotian samples only, it does not encompass, however, all the Post-Roman wares known from the Aegean area.

In addition, attention will be given in this part of the book to the changes in shapes and decoration of the ceramics found in Boeotia (especially the tablewares) through time. I will try to explain these changes and how they are related. Here a more detailed analysis of the pottery itself is attempted in an effort to establish a relationship between changing pottery vessel shapes and changing pottery vessel function from Late Roman times onwards.

In the third part of this book, ‘The Ceramics Found in Boeotia: The Socio-Economic Perspective’, I will consider questions that go beyond the typo-chronological approach of the Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramics in Boeotia. In this part I will explore the socio-economic and technological aspects of the pottery found in Boeotia.

First, I will try, for instance, to establish whether it is possible to sketch the outlines of the socio-economic background in which the manufacture and distribution of ceramics in Medieval and Post-Medieval Boeotia took place. For that purpose, I will mainly use the secondary literature, in which written sources on this subject are collected, discussed or summarized.

Secondly, I will concentrate upon the local perspective of the production and distribution of pottery in Medieval and Post-Medieval Boeotia. This will be done on the basis of archaeological evidence, but also on the basis of textual sources as well as ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological information of traditional pottery production in Early Modern Greece and Cyprus.

Thirdly, I will discuss the Boeotian material in a wider socio-economic perspective. I will try to discern the distribution patterns in which both locally produced and imported vessels were used within Boeotia. To this end, I will first discuss two main views of long-term changes in the technology of Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramics in general. Furthermore, I will discuss the question whether it is possible to examine Boeotia as a ‘receiving centre’ for certain wares from internal and external sources in a wider Mediterranean perspective. I will focus on the processes of production, import and distribution of the tin-glazed wares in Boeotia from the 16th to the 18th century (e.g. Maiolica from Italy, Iznik and Kütahya Wares from Turkey) in an emerging ‘world-economy’.

In the fourth part of this book, ‘The Cultural Perspective on Changing Vessel Shapes: A First Survey of the Evidence’, I will present a preliminary discussion of the use of table equipment (pottery and cutlery) from Late Roman to Early Modern times from the point of view of the Boeotian finds. In doing so, I will use two additional sources of information: pictorial representations of dining scenes and textual sources on pottery and pottery related subjects from ca. the 5th to the mid 20th centuries.

In addition, I will try to integrate the information derived from the pictorial evidence and the written sources in an effort to shed some light on the cultural history of eating and drinking in Medieval and Post-Medieval Greece. Specifically, I will look at the possible relationship between the archaeological artefacts and the history of food and dining habits in Central Greece during this period, in an attempt to begin to understand the interaction between long-term changes in shapes and technology on the one hand, and historical as well as cultural changes on the other hand.
Finally, in the fifth part of this book I will present a synthesis of the typo-chronological and functional analysis of the ceramics found in Boeotia and the socio-economic and cultural approaches. Here, the question will be addressed whether a combination of these data permits some general observations regarding the Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery of Boeotia in particular, and of the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean in general.

NOTES

1. All the dates refer to the period after Christ, unless otherwise stated. In this text, I will therefore not use A.C. (‘After Christ’) after centuries, only after a specific historical date I will use AD (‘Anno Domini’) in order to avoid misunderstandings (e.g. 1204 AD), except for the 20th century and later.

2. With ‘diagnostic’ I mean that the sherd allows a more precise typo-chronological interpretation than ‘Post-Roman’ or ‘Medieval’ or ‘Post-Medieval’ in general.