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ÇANAK

LATE ANTIQUE AND MEDIEVAL POTTERY AND TILES
IN MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

AKDENİZ ÇEVRESİNDEKİ ARKEOLOJİK KAZILARDA ELE GEÇEN
GEÇ ANTİK VE ORTAÇAĞ SERAMIĞI VE MİMARİ SERAMIĞI



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The early Turkish stratum on the Belgrade Fortress

Vesna Bikić

Abstract

Subject of the communication is the character of pottery which was discovered in units dated in the period after the Ottoman conquest of Belgrade in 1521 or slightly later, in the mid 16th century. Viewed as a whole, the pottery seems homogeneous since vessels are similar from a technical point of view. This pottery is clearly Medieval in character and represents the sublimation of potters' experience collected in the Balkan region in the preceding century.

Content of this settlement level makes, first of all, pottery for everyday use. It is heterogeneous, because, according to origin of the shapes of the vessels and decoration styles, we could recognize characteristics of the Serbian pottery inheritance, then Middle European and Ottoman pottery. It can be assumed that this pottery originated from one of the potters' centres in the Serbian region in which production was renewed under Turkish rule, perhaps Novo Brdo, Kruševac or Smederevo. Fragments of Turkish *faience* were discovered as well.

Özet

Belgrad Kalesinde Erken Türk Tabakaları

Osmanlının 1521 yılında ya da bundan kısa bir süre sonra 16. yüzyılın ortalarında Belgrad'ı fethetmesinden sonraki döneme tarihlenen seramikler karakteristik özelliklere sahiptir. Genel olarak, seramik mallar homojen bir görünüme sahiptir. Bu seramikler açıkça Ortaçağın karakteristik özelliklerini gösterir ve bir önceki yüzyılda Balkan bölgesinde toplanmış çömlekçilerin kazandıkları tecrübeleri gözler önüne sererler.

Yerleşimin kontekstleri seramiklerin günlük ihtiyaçlar için kullanıldığını gösterir. Biz özellikle Sırp seramiğinin karakteristik etkileşmelerini görüyoruz. Bu Orta Avrupa ve Osmanlı seramiğinden daha etkilidir. Orijinal formlar ve dekorasyon stillerine göre farklılıklar bulunmaktadır. Bu farklı seramik türleri içinde biçim ve dekorasyon özellikleri yönünden karakteristik olan Sırp seramiği, Orta Avrupa veya Osmanlı seramiklerinden daha etkilidir. Bu seramik Sırbistan bölgesindeki, Türk gücü altında yeni üretimler yapan mesela Novo Brdo, Kruševac ya da Smederevo gibi seramik üretim merkezlerinin bir tanesinde ortaya çıkmış olduğu önerilebilir.

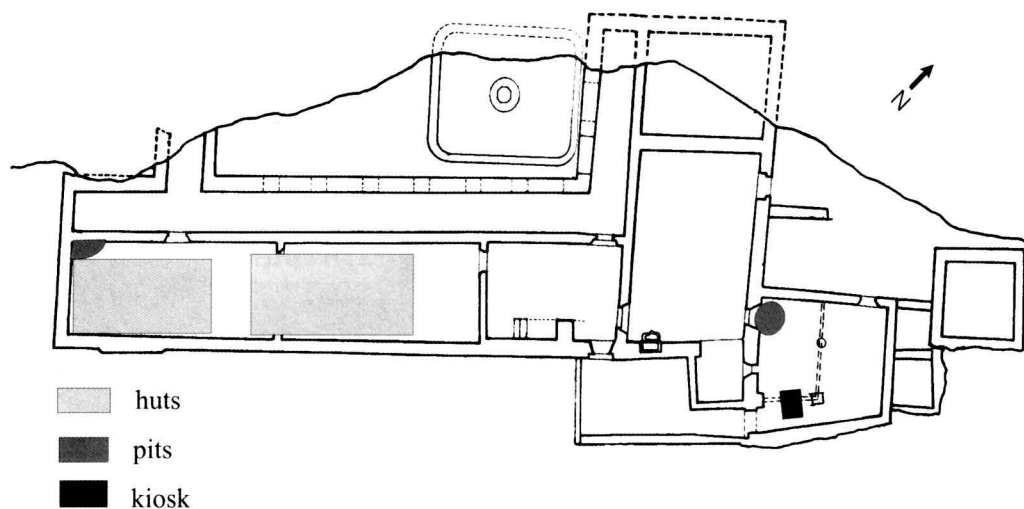


Fig. 1 Base plan of the Metropolitan palace with units of earlier Turkish stratum.

The Belgrade fortress was changed in many ways by the Turkish conquest at the end of August 1521. These changes not only influenced in many ways the character of the settlement within the fortress walls, but also determined the direction in which the whole town would develop further. For the consideration of our topic, there are two important historically documented facts that clearly illustrate the essence of these changes. These concern the events that marked the first year of Turkish rule in the town. The first fact relates to the emigration of the entire Christian population from the fortified part of the town, which was one of the first steps taken after the occupation of Belgrade¹. There followed the demolition of the remnants of old structures and the conversion of any remaining into public buildings. These acts marked a virtually complete break with the pre-existing cultural heritage, to which the contents of the Early Turkish cultural layers clearly offer proof. They reveal exclusively Ottoman material. This is the premise that simplifies research into the character of the material culture of this period, as does the separation of pottery that reached the fortress area directly after the establishment of Turkish rule.

From the existing fortifications, which had an exclusively military function, only the Lower Town continued to be a fortified part of the civilian settlement, with an exclusively Muslim population. The structure of this settlement also changed its appearance, apart from some public buildings, such as the Mosque of Sultan Suleiman and the caravanserai of Pasha Piri Mehmed. Most buildings were constructed of wood, earth and thatch. Among the buildings in the Lower Town there is a partly demolished Metropolitan palace, dating from the 15th century, of which individual parts were used to construct new buildings (fig. 1)². Here, the first residential buildings were lightweight, of ancient construction. In the western part of the former palace the remains of two such dwellings were discovered, which we labelled huts. In the eastern part, within the palace yard, there was a smaller

¹ Samardžić 1961, 164. 193.

² Popović – Bikić 2004, 109-117: in addition to consideration of the stratification, findings from individual sites are mentioned.

square building, probably a kiosk. Nearby there are pits for the disposal of domestic waste – damaged ceramic vessels and other objects. These buildings were all built between the demolished walls of the palace, in a space where rubble and debris had previously been levelled. One of the huts had been joined to an underground passage and the cellar of the former palace. It was thatched, covered with mud, with a floor of wooden boards. The second, better-defined hut was made of wooden beams, with a floor of packed mortar rubble. Similar to this second hut is the kiosk, whose corners are defined with stone bases for wooden posts. These buildings were built in the first decades of Turkish rule or slightly later, in the mid-16th century. They were destroyed by a fire at the end of that century, or at the beginning of the 17th century at the latest, to which clear soot marks, carbonised wood and beams testify.

However, the situation during investigation was not as easy or clear as it seemed from historical data and theoretical assumptions. During excavation it proved especially difficult to separate the layer above the hut floors, since in that space several demolished layers replaced each other in a very short period. The discovered layer shows two phases of the destruction of the palace in close succession. The first phase documents the last period of palace life and its destruction by fire; it consists of soot and ash, pieces of carbonised wood, and demolished parts of the walls.

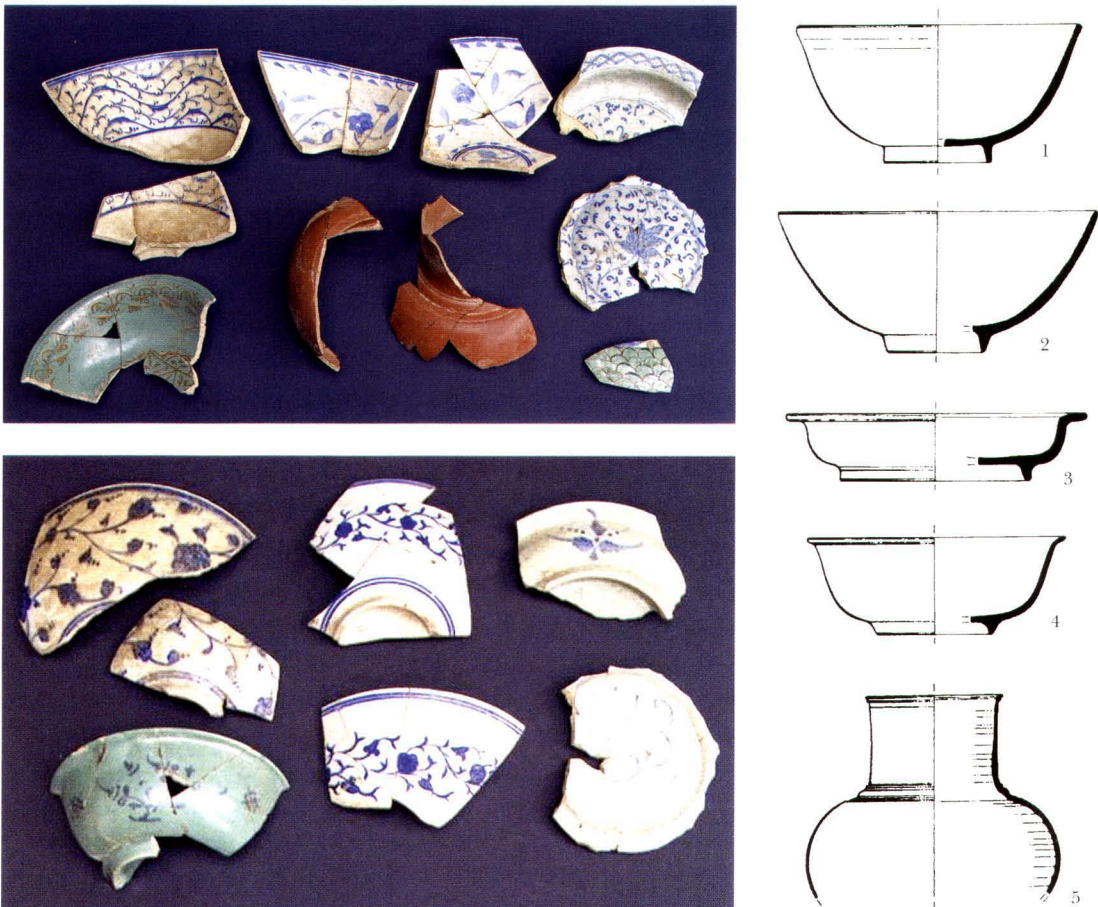


Fig. 2 Pottery from huts level – Turkish faience.

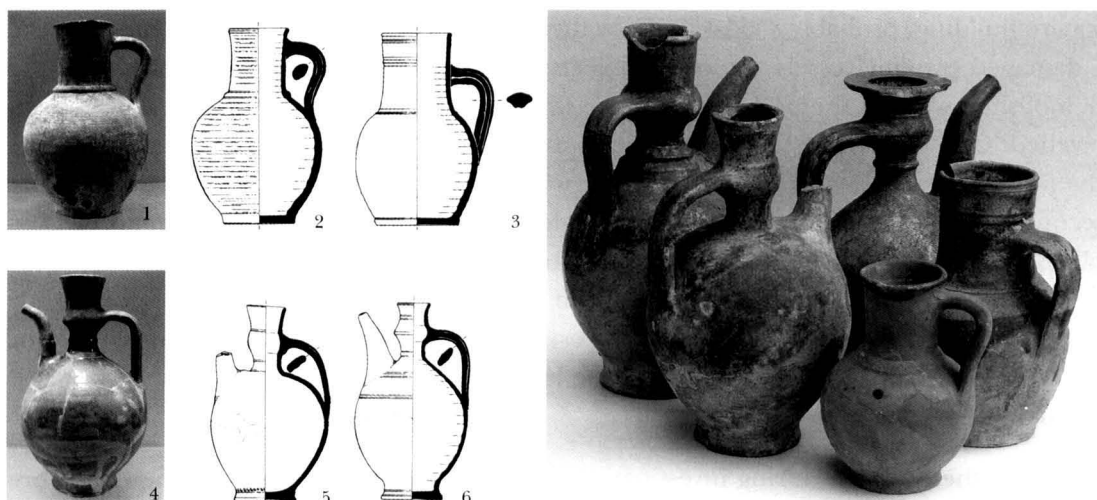


Fig. 3 Pottery from huts level – the most common jugs.

The second phase is defined by the partial demolition of the remaining walls, the removal of stone suitable for building, and levelling of the space. This is evidenced by the thick layers of mortar rubble and fine stones, as well as brick parts. Above these layers of destruction, huts were quickly built whose floors are very rough. The short duration of the huts ended in the fire, and shortly after that the same area was flattened once again.

There are numerous and various findings that are reliably linked to this period of life in the buildings³. In this presentation we will focus on pottery which was the most interesting to interpret. In this collection, the most luxurious goods comprise Turkish *faience*, of mostly blue-white style with floral decoration (fig. 2). Among the *faience* there is a vessel of jade colour with painted decoration, red within and blue outside. Other than the fact that examples of this basic colour are rare and the decoration is not of classical *faience* style, we already find it in majolica ware from Faence, from the first half of the 16th century (fig. 2, 3). Judging by the exceptional quality of the collection of luxurious vessels, there also belongs to it a jug of specific dark red colour, or rather a nuance of Armenian clay, which was often used as a pigment in painted vessels (fig. 2, 5).

The remaining findings are from a collection of vessels for everyday use. These were goods which, after the arrival of the Turks, suppressed all previously known kinds by quantity. They are vessels of solid quality and uniform characteristics, serially produced, according to a standard of volumes. In the collections that are the focus of our attention, most of the vessels are for water – ewers and jugs. Among these, of special importance are two groups of vessels, or rather, two types (fig. 3). The first type comprises six spouted jugs, which all have a similar profile and capacity (fig. 3, 4-6). This is basically an oriental shape which was first seen in early Ottoman pottery, and it is recognizable in the Balkans from the end of the 14th century. During the period of Ottoman rule a great number of several

³ Pottery considered briefly in the text, but it is described in detail in the catalogue of findings: Popović – Bikić 2004, 140-145.

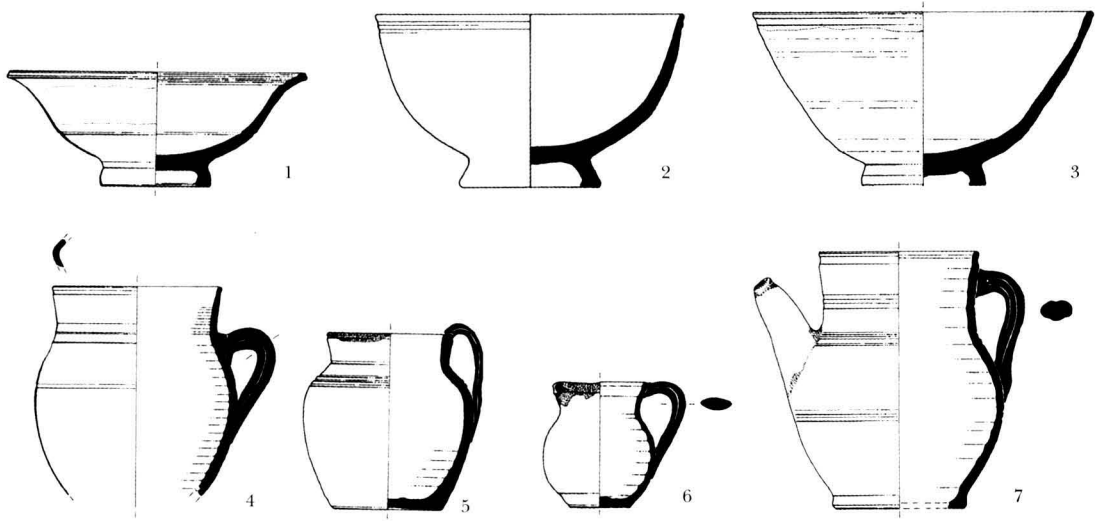


Fig. 4 Pottery from huts level – less frequent types.

similar variants also appear in the same territory⁴. In Belgrade, all these jugs have identical technological properties: purified clay, which after firing acquires approximately the same shade of red colour; and a green (exclusively dark brown) glaze with a leaded shine. The second type comprises four jugs, the smallest of which could be possibly labelled as drinking vessel-goblet rather than jug (fig. 3, 1-3). Their technological properties are similar to the jugs mentioned above, except that the glaze is transparent, colourless or ochre-yellow in colour. In contrast to the spouted jug such vessels were not unknown before the Turkish conquest. In the production of the later Middle Ages in the Balkans they were viewed as products that represented a fusion of Byzantine and Oriental traditions. Such jugs and goblets were very popular in the territory of Bulgaria, where they were produced in all important regional ceramic centres during the 14th century⁵. This type of vessel is also one of the basic serial products within Ottoman production of the 16th to 17th centuries.⁶

The remaining types of jugs and goblets, only represented by one example, are important, above all, for a wider view of the total character of production of this period, although their appearance in Belgrade is less frequent (fig. 4, 4-7)⁷. There is also a relatively small number of bowls and dishes (fig. 4, 1-3). However, the excavated types are considered to fall basically within 16th to 17th century Ottoman production, and appear in great numbers throughout this period. Generally, ceramic vessels have unified properties, especially in their structure, basic colour and glaze. Also, these vessels have a large specific weight, while their glaze in individual cases has flaked, which indicates that during first firing the necessary quantity of water had not been freed from the clay.

The appearance of a few specific pottery types makes this collection significant. The first of these is a large pot, used to store small quantities of supplies (fig. 5, 3). It is made of

⁴ Bikić 2003, Types III/2. III/20. III/24 p. 132-134; Pletnjov 2004, 151-152 tabl. 113-114 with literature.

⁵ Georgieva 1974, 12/2-4. 53. 56; Bikić 1994, 85 fig. 32, 9-10.

⁶ Bikić 2003, 126-127 fig. 20; Pletnjov 2004, 63-64 tabl. 16-17 with literature.

⁷ Bikić 2003, 101-102.

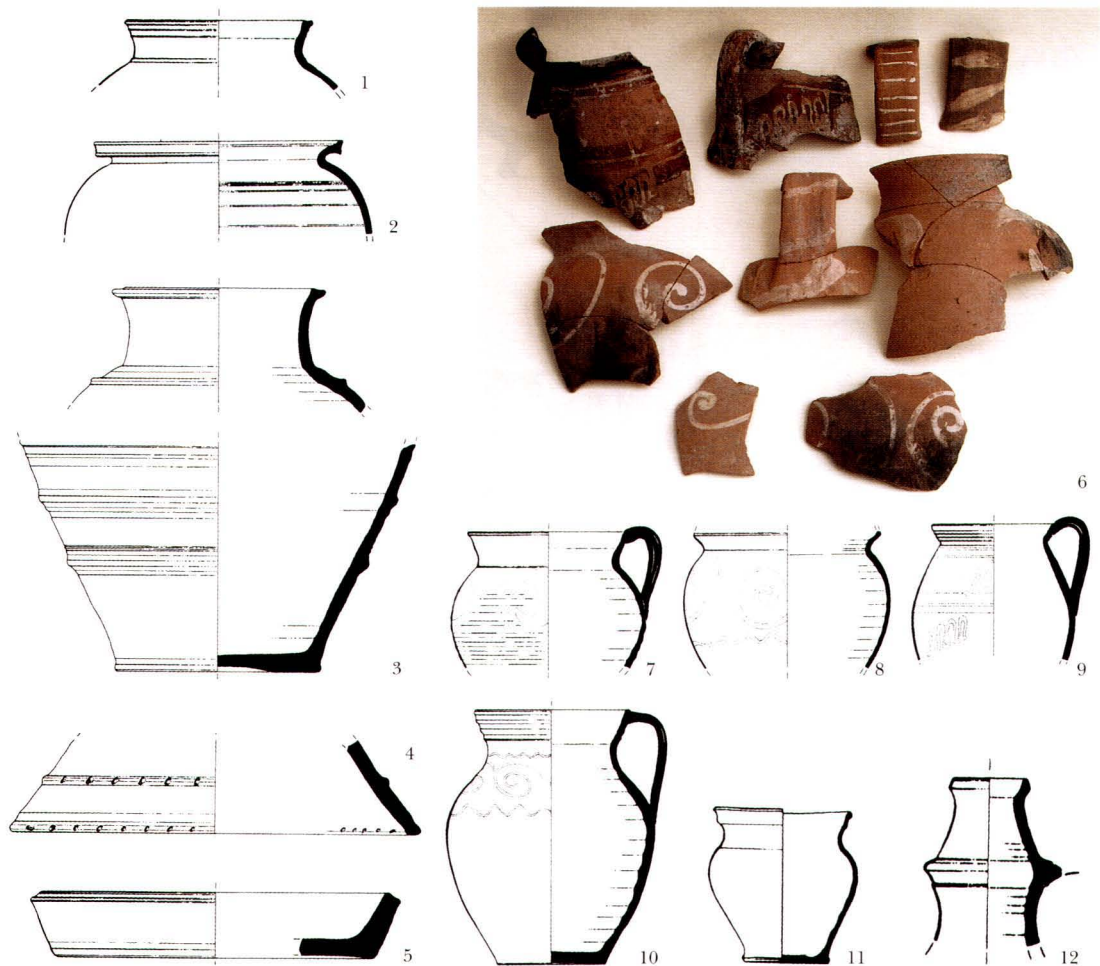


Fig. 5 Pottery from huts level – specific pottery types.

clay mixed with sand, brown in colour, while along its body thin strips have been applied at approximately equal intervals⁸. Then, there are large dishes and covers used for baking bread, pies or meat (fig. 5, 4-5). Although characteristic for the Medieval period, these vessels were practically non-existent in Belgrade during the period of Hungarian rule, that is, for the whole century which preceded the Turkish conquest⁹. They not only appear in Ottoman pottery in large numbers, but also have certain features, such as vessel profile and type of decoration, which connect them with the pottery heritage of Serbian territories.

In that sense, more eloquent examples are perhaps pots with decoration painted in white (fig. 5, 6-10). The appearance of those vessels as a whole clearly indicates a model adopted for pottery of the later Medieval period. On Serbian territory, there was painted pottery in a completely defined style in the 14th and early 15th centuries, similar to that found

⁸ Another, practically identical, example was discovered on the area of the Smederevo fortress. It has nail indentations along the applied band

⁹ Bikić 2003, 98-101.

in neighbouring areas, which also belonged to the earlier Byzantine cultural circle¹⁰. In late Medieval production, painting in white was widely applied on vessels for everyday use (pots, lids, jugs and ewers). Products from the Novo Brdo (today in Kosovo) workshop were especially well known. However, on these vessels from the early Turkish layer, simplified older painted motifs are noticeable, although spirally intertwined lines remain the basic decoration, in combination with wavy and horizontal lines.

At the level of the huts, several more fragments were discovered. These have characteristics of Central European – Hungarian pottery. One of these is a drinking vessel which, judging by its profile and grain sandy structure, is completely parallel with vessels from the 15th century (fig. 5, 11). Since this is the only example found to date in the context of the Turkish stratum of the Belgrade fortress, the possibility remains that it originates from the late 15th century layer (that is, from the time before the destruction of the palace), but was mixed with material from the huts during the later levelling works. In contrast to the drinking vessel, the fragment of a jug has features similar to other Ottoman pottery in this collection (fig. 5, 12). The appearance of Orientalized shapes, especially among jugs/ewers, which clearly leant on the profile of earthenware water jugs, illustrates a new tendency within Hungarian pottery (or we could say separate production line)¹¹, purposefully made for new customers. The general features of these products are their pale red colour, thick walls, and a greater specific weight of vessel, as well as the wide use of ochre-yellow and green glaze. Vessels made in this new style appeared in the Belgrade area in the last decades of the 15th century, while in the following century this new pottery was completely formed.

The presented example of the ceramic content of the Early Turkish stratum is one of the most illustrative in the Belgrade fortress. This very good sample comprises material relevant for the detailed analysis of the character of pottery from the whole area, as well as the chronological classification of each kind. In that sense, we have data about the earliest kinds of Faience, which provides an excellent chronological benchmark in the event of future research and analysis of luxurious Ottoman pottery. On the other hand, pottery for everyday use is very specific in comparison to material from other units, above all that from the waste pits from a somewhat later period. In these units there are no Middle European-Hungarian types of vessels, and absolutely no pottery which has features of that craft circle (such as pots with handles or bowls with handles on three legs, made of cream or yellowish-white sandy clay). Viewed as a whole, the pottery seems homogeneous since vessels are similar from a technical point of view. Having in mind that these are vessels that the conquerors brought with them (together with other necessary items for household use), these findings offer indicators of the basic character of 16th century Ottoman pottery in the Balkans.

Above all, this pottery is clearly Medieval in character and represents the sublimation of potters' experience collected in the Balkan region in the preceding century. The ceramic heritage of regional Balkan workshops, especially Bulgarian and Serbian, was built very

¹⁰ Antonova 1995, fig. 89, 4. 6. 8. 10. 28. 30; Bikić 2003, 102-104 with cited literature; Pletnjov 2004, 45-49 T. 1-4 with cited literature.

¹¹ Bikić 2003, 111-112 with cited literature.

easily and skilfully into Ottoman pottery, since inspiration and models flowed from practically the same sources, that are Asia Minor (mostly Persian) and Chinese pottery. Thus the eclectic Byzantine heritage was built into the eclectic Ottoman pottery of the 16th century, but in a much more natural way than was the case, for example, with Italian or Western Mediterranean pottery.

Among the guardians and carriers of old models and ideas, alongside emigrants and the assimilated population in the Balkans, there were certainly converts. These were educated people, artists, potters, who with the change to a new faith, Islam, entered into a new business circle. Having in mind, in addition, that the Ottoman practice was to use the services of domestic craftsmanship in occupied areas, interpretation of the origin of the sample of heterogeneous pottery has a stronger confirmation. For this reason it can be assumed that this pottery originated from one of the potters' centres in the Serbian region in which production was renewed under Turkish rule, perhaps Novo Brdo, Kruševac or Smederevo. Likewise, the presence of jugs belonging to the Ottoman series on the territory of southern Hungary in the case of Belgrade shows a tight mutual connection between these two markets, established long before the Ottoman Turks arrived. As early as the first decade of Turkish rule, and especially after the conquest of Buda in 1526, the permeation of Oriental-Balkan and Middle European pottery set the course for the whole region. In that sense, stylistic heterogeneity is the essential characteristic of the Early Turkish pottery in Belgrade, which demonstrates the true value of this material.

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