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Potters in between Nicosia and Lapithos (Cyprus): Preliminary archaeological and archaeometric evidence from the Vitonos street excavations (Nicosia)

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Abstract: Rescue excavations carried out by the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus in Nicosia unearthed evidence of pottery production in Vitonos Street, right outside the Venetian walls. Preliminary archaeometric investigations enabled us to define it chemically and to point out close connections with the workshops of Lapithos.

Keywords: Cyprus, Nicosia, Lapithos, pottery workshop, archaeometry

Resumen: Las excavaciones de rescate del Departamento de Antigüedades de Chipre en Nicosia descubrieron evidencia de producción de cerámica en la calle Vitonos, justo fuera de las murallas venecianas. Las investigaciones arqueométricas preliminares nos permitieron definirlo químicamente y señalar estrechas conexiones con los talleres de Lapithos.

Palabras clave: Chipre, Nicosia, Lapithos, taller de cerámica, arqueometría

Investigation and study of Cypriot glazed pottery began relatively early and by 1951 had already its own classification scheme (du Plat Taylor and Megaw, 1951). Cypriot pottery production has been studied intensively since the early 1990's with two main workshops well identified in the region of Paphos (13th-14th) and in Lapithos (15th-16th) (Papanikola-Bakirtzi, 1996). A third center of glazed pottery production active in the area of Enkomi-Famagusta has been suggested (Papanikola-Bakirtzis, 1989). Furthermore, Cypriot glazed wares were subjected to archaeometric approaches fairly early on, with pioneering studies of Paphos-Lemba and Lapithos wares (Megaw and Jones, 1983).

As regards specifically Nicosia, glazed pottery finds from the medieval walled city were unearthed also as early as 1951 (Megaw, 1951). More recent excavations of the Department of Antiquities have provided additional information about glazed pottery in Nicosia (Flourenzos, 1994; Violaris, 2004; François,

2017). The most interesting finds indicate the activity of glazed pottery workshops in the medieval capital of Cyprus. The finds discovered on Vitonos street near the Podocataro Bastion of the medieval walls are especially significant.

A preliminary archaeometric study of the Vitonos street material was carried out in Lyon laboratory (CNRS UMR 5138 «Archéologie & Archéométrie»), where several other early byzantine to post-byzantine Cypriot pottery workshops had been previously investigated (Waksman, 2014). Unfinished wares, including biscuit-fired plain slipped and sgraffito wares, tripod stilts, and Brown and Green Sgraffito Wares found in the same contexts, were selected for chemical analysis in Lyon, in order to define chemically the production of the Vitonos street workshop and to help identifying its repertoire (Fig.1).

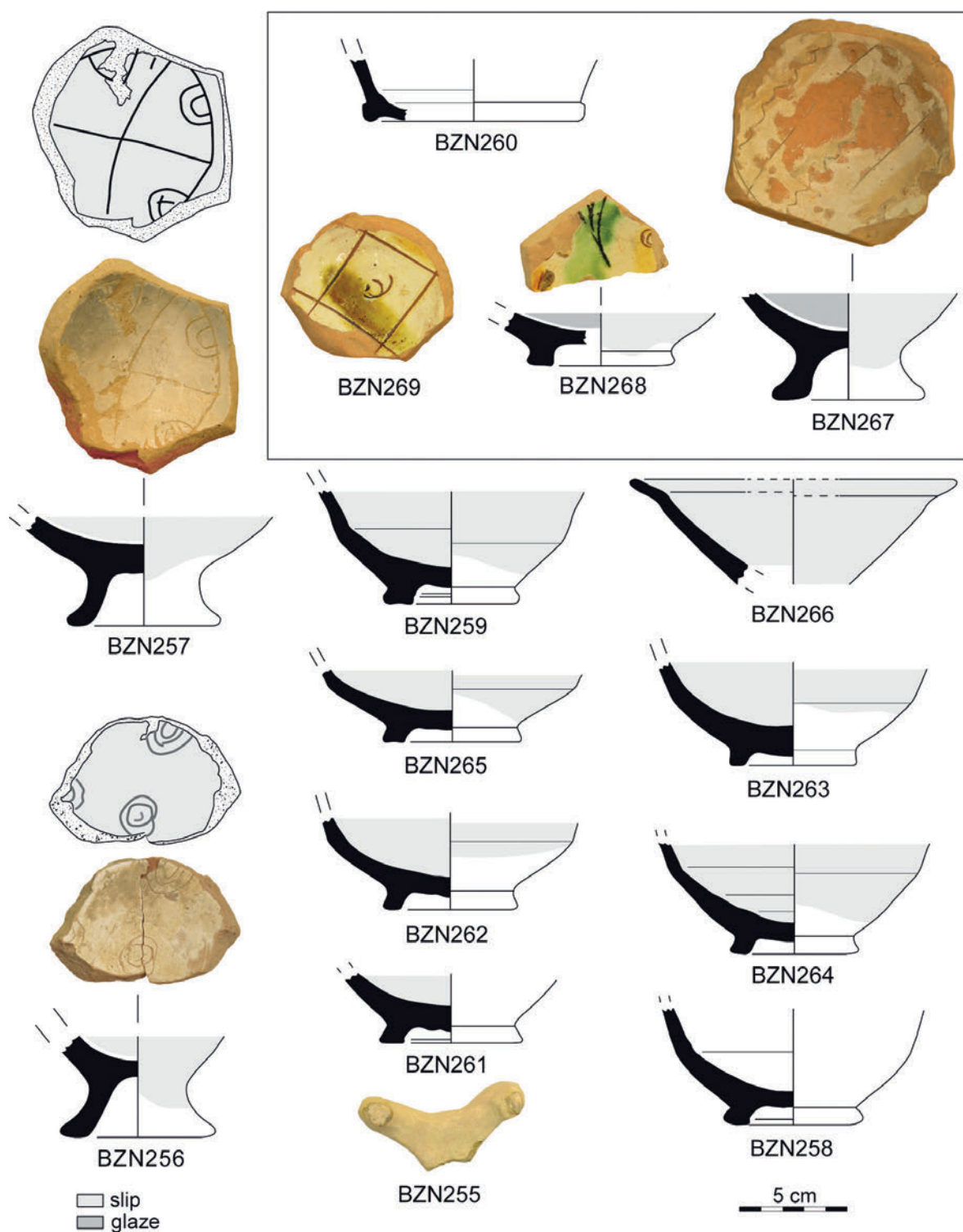


Figure 1. Representative examples of the sherds from Vitonos street excavations, Nicosia, analyzed in Lyon laboratory. The four sherds in the top right corner, including the three glazed ones, are shown to be imports from Lapithos and possibly Enkomi (Lyon id. numbers are indicated, drawings and photos S.Y. Waksman, CAD F. Truxa).

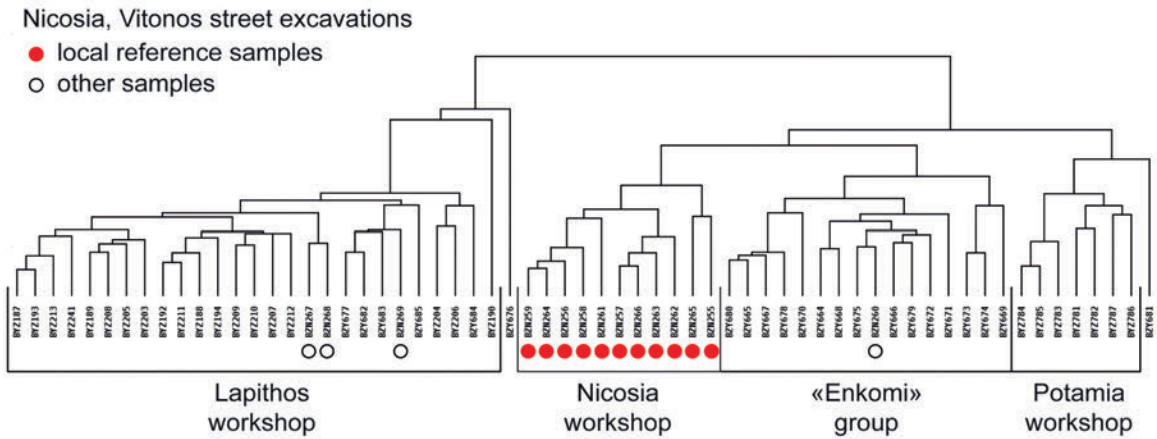


Figure 2. Classification according to their chemical composition of ceramics from Vitonos street, Nicosia, together with other Cypriot productions (data from Waksman, 2014). The sherds from Nicosia are indicated by symbols, the main chemical groups are underlined.

id.	CaO	Fe ₂ O ₃	TiO ₂	K ₂ O	SiO ₂	Al ₂ O ₃	MgO	MnO	(Na ₂ O)	(P ₂ O ₅)	Zr	Sr	Rb	Zn	Cr	Ni	Ba	V	Ce
Nicosia, Vitonos street workshop																			
BZN259	25.16	7.33	0.708	2.00	45.60	12.07	5.32	0.1155	1.29	0.18	105	554	48	106	206	139	166	260	34
BZN264	25.14	7.40	0.725	2.03	45.24	12.39	5.20	0.1237	1.37	0.18	105	586	52	104	198	133	184	268	34
BZN256	26.04	7.39	0.712	1.91	44.74	12.19	5.23	0.1203	1.27	0.17	105	535	57	106	233	136	176	280	42
BZN258	27.12	7.18	0.709	1.90	44.44	12.13	4.76	0.1200	1.26	0.18	104	569	54	98	225	139	164	241	42
BZN261	24.09	7.69	0.745	2.02	46.17	12.81	4.62	0.1311	1.35	0.16	103	594	46	126	206	137	193	256	47
BZN257	27.67	7.62	0.684	1.81	43.26	11.75	5.25	0.1308	1.43	0.17	92	545	43	108	173	117	275	218	35
BZN266	26.92	7.51	0.692	1.98	43.91	11.86	5.14	0.1399	1.43	0.18	97	598	39	104	169	116	213	227	37
BZN263	26.97	7.58	0.678	1.80	43.43	11.67	5.95	0.1358	1.44	0.16	91	528	41	104	165	116	287	231	33
BZN262	26.86	7.58	0.703	1.94	44.25	12.07	4.68	0.1301	1.32	0.17	100	586	42	107	200	122	207	197	40
BZN265	24.39	7.93	0.740	1.24	44.58	12.66	6.31	0.1390	1.65	0.17	100	579	39	98	198	125	233	215	34
BZN255	24.65	7.44	0.756	*0.50	45.68	12.76	5.58	0.1417	*2.08	0.16	105	544	*33	100	238	145	206	207	35
m	25.91	7.51	0.714	1.86	44.66	12.21	5.28	0.1298	1.38	0.17	101	565	46	106	201	130	209	236	38
σ	1.26	0.20	0.025	0.23	0.94	0.40	0.52	0.0089	0.12	0.01	5	25	6	8	25	11	41	27	5
imports from Lapithos																			
BZN267	13.34	7.80	0.778	3.47	50.97	16.99	5.22	0.1137	0.91	0.20	162	289	141	121	166	141	544	162	85
BZN268	12.13	7.58	0.811	3.41	51.91	16.88	5.63	0.1198	1.02	0.20	173	285	133	121	172	131	532	135	81
BZN269	12.20	7.73	0.792	3.19	53.05	16.37	5.13	0.1059	1.00	0.22	169	251	134	126	190	168	506	125	82
"Enkomi" group																			
BZN260	26.14	6.72	0.702	2.29	45.42	12.15	4.68	0.1412	1.19	0.35	132	727	65	96	284	166	329	140	55

Figure 3. Chemical composition of the samples from Vitonos street excavations, Nicosia (major and minor elements in oxides weight pourcent, trace elements in ppm; m: mean, σ: standard deviation; data marked with an asterisk were not taken into account in the calculation of m and σ).

The classification¹ of the 15 selected samples according to their chemical composition, together with related Cypriot productions² (Fig.2):

1 Hierarchical clustering analysis was applied to the standardized concentrations of 17 chemical elements, using Euclidean distances and average linkage (for further details on the statistical procedure and on the protocol of chemical analysis, see e.g. Waksman, 2014: 276-277).

2 chemical data not in Fig.3 may be found in Waksman, 2014.

- Enables us to define a new chemical reference group in the Lyon database, corresponding to the Vitonos street workshop in Nicosia (Fig.3);
- Shows that this Nicosia group may be well differentiated chemically from other medieval and post-medieval Cypriot ones (including those in the Paphos area, not represented);³

3 see also Charalambous, 2014.

- Indicates that imported wares, from Lapithos and possibly from Enkomi, were present in the same contexts together with the workshop evidence;
- Shows that sherds initially interpreted as finished products of the Vitonos street workshop in Nicosia, due to their similarity with unfinished sgraffito examples (Fig.1: BZN256, BZN257), were actually imports from Lapithos, and not local wares influenced by Lapithos as was previously thought (Violaris, 2004 ; François, 2017).

The repertoire of the Vitonos street workshop is thus not well identified yet. However, the profiles and designs of biscuit-fired sgraffito examples point to typological and stylistical connections with Lapithos wares (see also Violaris, 2004 ; François, 2017), while actual imports from Lapithos are found in the workshop site. The present preliminary study shows the close connections between the two workshops, through the circulation of wares, models, and possibly craftsmen.

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