

Review of “Second International Conference on Late Roman Coarse Wares, Cooking Wares and Amphorae in the Mediterranean: Archaeology and Archaeometry”, Aix-en-Provence, France, 13th-16th April 2005

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Following the success of the “First International Conference on Late Roman Coarse Wares, Cooking Wares and Amphorae in the Mediterranean: Archaeology and Archaeometry” organised in Barcelona in March 2002, a second conference was held in Aix-en-Provence, France, 13th-16th April 2005. This triennial conference was organised by the Centre Camille Jullian and the Laboratoire d’Archéologie Médiévale Méditerranéenne (CNRS-Université de Provence). Approximately 180 participants, essentially European lecturers, students, museum curators and pottery specialists from archaeological units, attended the conference. The main focus of the meeting was the presentation and discussion of recent developments in Late-Roman coarse ware, cooking ware and amphora studies from the fifth century AD to the end of Antiquity. This four-day conference was divided into eight main sessions chaired by relevant speakers, and in total 42 papers (consisting of 15-minute presentations in English, French or Italian) and 45 posters were presented. Due to the high number of oral presentations, only a few can be mentioned here.

The first day of the conference featured the inaugural paper by Dr John W. Hayes (University of Oxford) in which he gave an overview of the aims and objectives of the conference. His keynote address preceded the first session on *Recent Research on Production Centres*. Six papers were given on topics ranging from amphora production in Crete to Byzantine cooking-ware production in Syria to coarse-ware production in Late Roman Tunisia. The afternoon sessions included 13 speakers whose papers related to two themes: *Archaeometry and Origin of the Mediterranean Ceramics: New Perspectives*, and *Typology, Chronology and Contents of Mediterranean Amphorae*. Dr Claudio Capelli (University of Genova) gave a very interesting paper on “The Integrated Archaeometric and Archaeological Approach in the Study of Late Roman African Productions”, in which he discussed the challenge of analysing the various fabrics of Late Roman African wares. Due to their similar petrographic compositions it is difficult to distinguish the fabrics, making it quite challenging to determine the provenance of the various wares. He therefore stressed the importance of studying kiln wasters, the textural features of the fabrics and technical features of the wares, and concluded that archaeometric and typological analyses should be used for the classification of Late Roman African wares.

The three sessions which took place on the morning of 14th April revolved around the theme of *Regional Contexts: Mediterranean and Southern Gaul*. The 10 speakers presented interesting papers, including Prof. Paul Arthur (University of Lecce), who dis-

cussed the relationships between typology and culinary habits. His paper, entitled “Pots and Boundaries: on Cultural and Economic Areas between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages” highlighted how factors such as function, economics, culture and culinary trends affect typology. To emphasise his point, he discussed how closed cooking forms were used in the north of the Roman Empire, reflecting the culinary practices of cooler climates, while in the south open forms such as casseroles were more prevalent. The afternoon programme consisted of visits to the Roman theatre of Aix-en-Provence, the Historical Museum of Marseille and the Municipal Archaeological Depot of Marseille, including a hands-on presentation of the pottery collections from excavations and a reception at the town hall of Marseille.

The morning programme on Friday consisted of seven papers on *Shapes and Function of Mediterranean Cooking Wares, 5th-7th Centuries*, while the afternoon session consisted of six papers on *Late Roman Pottery and Economic History*. Prof. Simon Loseby (University of Sheffield) discussed in his paper “Pottery and the Economic History of Late Antiquity” the relationship between ceramic data and textual evidence from late-antique exchange networks. He explicitly stressed how important ceramic studies are to our understanding of late antique exchange since they indicate the economic implications as well as the wider social and cultural changes taking place in Late Antiquity (fifth-seventh centuries AD). In his closing remarks, Prof. Josep Gurt (University of Barcelona) highlighted how the results of the first conference complemented the results of the second. The first conference focused on production centres, and the papers thus tended to emphasise the strong regionalism of pottery production and the need for additional research on locating new production centres. This second conference featured more scientific analyses, stressing the need for increased cross-specialist communication amongst European archaeologists and the sharing of archaeometric data. There is a growing complexity in dealing with the ever-increasing quantity of data, and Prof. Gurt emphasised the necessity of a standardised online data bank for pottery fabrics.

The conference was successful and informative. The papers proposed new research questions and strategies for the future, and the themes discussed were useful in indicating in which direction recent developments in Roman pottery studies are moving. A recurrent theme was the importance of increasing collaboration between archaeologists and researchers from different European countries as further research needs to be done on fabric identification, pottery provenance and the functional properties of the wares. The use of a similar approach to presenting data in all European countries is critical. One criticism would be that due to the tight schedule and the very high number of papers, there was not sufficient time for discussion amongst the participants. The forthcoming conference proceedings scheduled to be published by January 2006 are eagerly awaited. The third international conference will take place in Italy in April 2008, and I am already looking forward to attending it.

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