

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ANCIENT POTTERY

In 2007 a new and innovative research project has started at the Amsterdam Archaeological Centre (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands). The research concerns the ancient pottery of a Dutch excavation in Italy (Satricum) and Dutch excavations and surveys in Greece (Halos and Zakynthos). Pottery from fieldwork in other regions will be included as well. The main aim of the project is to develop new methodologies in archaeological pottery studies that will increase the quality and quantity of the information that can be derived from this basic dataset. Perspectives from a range of traditions in pottery studies will be combined and integrated, such as technological, stylistic and geological approaches. Data from several regions in Greece and Italy will be used and compared. Thus, we expect to increase the proportion of diagnostic material. We plan to apply the results of our material studies to specific research questions regarding the cross-regional production, distribution and use (consumption) of pottery.

Archaeological fieldwork, especially when carried out on the long term, yields hundreds of thousands of pots and sherds, of which usually only a very small proportion is published in excavation reports or in typological studies. Very often, the (large) majority of material is even directly laid aside after a first look. We believe that this is a waste of time, effort and material, which leads to the loss of much useful information. On the other hand, however, it is clear that current ways of processing simply cannot cope with the mass of finds we generate. Besides squeezing out more information, we have to speed up the processing of finds.

Methodology and technology

In order to achieve a more efficient way of finds processing, NPAP aims to:

- Combine different traditions in pottery research.
- Investigate and implement better and faster methods of producing electronic databases of finds.
- Integrate in these data-systems direct possibilities of producing meaningful pottery classifications which go beyond traditional typo-chronology and include as much as possible material traditionally considered 'undiagnostic'.
- Connect this database system to various GIS-environments and storage systems of the involved projects, and, in due time, also to the field recording methods.
- Test and hopefully use new methods of material studies (like ct scanning) besides traditional ones (stylistic analysis; petrography, XRD/XRF etc.), and connect those to the database.
- Explore the possibilities of automated (profile-) drawing and other recording systems, again connecting them to the database and field recording methods.

Research questions

The results of our combined approaches will be applied to some current issues in Mediterranean pottery research. Six case studies will be conducted as PhD-projects. Synthesizing research will be carried out by the senior members of the NPAP. Some of these case studies will also involve general comparisons between regions and periods, so going beyond the site and the traditional divisions between, for example, 'Greece' and 'Italy'. This part of the NPAP project will focus on two interrelated issues:

- 'From far or from nearby?': the relationship between imported and locally produced pottery in different find-contexts and periods.
- 'Does function follow form?': the correlations between different wares, fabrics and shapes and the contexts they were used in.

Ceramic Analysis

One of the great challenges of NPAP is the simultaneous interpretation of ceramic assemblages of a very different nature (from stratified, excavated pottery to severely weathered survey material) from various areas and periods. The methodological problems this poses are tackled by integrating approaches. Morpho-typological analysis of well-known pottery types will be combined with macroscopic and petrographic analysis of representative samples. All this will be supplemented with comparative analysis of modern clay samples taken from the studied areas, small-scale ethnographic work, and possibly at later stage chemical analysis and CT-scanning.

Although fabric analysis has been neglected when dealing with pottery dated to historical periods, we think it is the most appropriate 'tool' in dealing with our combination of complex assemblages full of 'undiagnostic' items. Investigation of production technology can shed light on associations between form and function, on the potters' technological choices and perceptions of the social environment within which pots were produced and consumed. Furthermore, clay analysis can help distinguish 'local' from regional/'imported' items, offering a better understanding of the circulation of pottery.

Halos Project - Greece

Surveys/excavations 1975-2008

The town of Halos, located close to the Pagasitic Gulf near modern Almyros in Southern Thessaly, has a history going back at least to the Early Iron Age (10th century BC). The impressive present-day archaeological site, where the University of Groningen and the Greek Archaeological service have excavated since 1977, was probably founded around 302 BC, but already mostly deserted around 265 BC, presumably after an earthquake. In addition to the excavations in the Hellenistic city, which comprise houses, two city gates (one of which was reused as a large farm till at least ca. 220 BC), parts of the city wall and a small sanctuary, Greek and Dutch fieldwork also includes excavations in the extensive necropoleis around the city (Late Bronze Age-Hellenistic) and a survey of the surrounding Almyros and Sourpi plains, yielding finds from Neolithic to modern. The latter also covered the rather small pre-Hellenistic town, destroyed in 349 BC, and Medieval Almyros, then the major harbor of the area. Halos offers the unique opportunity for a comparative study of ceramic material from a town and its surroundings, including its cemeteries and the rural 'hinterland', over a long period involving drastic changes in its political, social, economical and geographical organization and settings. Both central questions of the New Perspectives on Ancient Pottery project thus find a perfect place here.

Satricum Project - Italy

Excavations 1977-2008

One of the best preserved sites in Central Italy, ancient Satricum (modern Le Ferriere, province of Latina) has a long research history, starting in the nineteenth century with Italian excavations, and followed in the 1970s by Dutch excavations executed by the Dutch Institute in Rome, The University of Groningen and the University of Amsterdam. Satricum contains archaeological remains from at least the 9th century BC until the 1st century AD, including a road network, two necropoleis, a small sanctuary and a Roman villa, but the site is mainly known for the major Archaic sanctuary of Mater Matuta, goddess of dawn, on the 'acropolis' hill, along the river Astura. Three votive deposits indicate offering practices over a long period, and rectangular structures around the temple may be related to the sanctuary. These stone buildings are preceded by huts, small votive pits and child burials (9th-7th centuries BC); during the 5th century people were buried in the area, and around 200 BC a small farmstead was built nearby. The large chronological time-span and the diversity of find contexts and materials (from coarse hand made impasto to decorated Greek imports) make Satricum an ideal candidate for the NPAP research questions concerning ceramic production technology and organization, and perception and use of pottery of different traditions and provenances in various functional and cultural contexts over time.

Zakynthos Archaeology Project - Greece

Surveys 2005-2008

Zakynthos is situated off the western coast of Greece in the Ionian Gulf. Due to its location next to a major tectonic fault line, the island has been subject to frequent earthquakes. The archaeological record on the island is very much destroyed and the pottery of Zakynthos is characterized by a very high degree of fragmentation. Since 2005, the Netherlands Institute in Athens, in cooperation with the regional Greek archaeological service, has been conducting an archaeological survey on the island. The aim of the project is to relate the material remains on the island to the dynamic landscape. Within the project different researches are integrated, such as intensive archaeological survey, geological research, analysis of aerial photographs and limited excavation. Already it has become clear that Zakynthos had a rich material culture in various periods, which is now dispersed in fragments in the landscape. The high degree of weathering and fragmentation of the pottery of Zakynthos and the lack of stratigraphic excavations nearby, present us with great difficulties while interpreting the survey results. The integrated approach to pottery studies adopted by the New Perspectives on Ancient Pottery project will greatly help us to understand the archaeology on Zakynthos.

NPAP builds on a long history of pottery studies at the University of Amsterdam, starting with Jan Six in the late 19th century. At the Amsterdam Archaeological Centre, traditional stylistic and iconographic approaches are now being combined with analysis of excavation and survey finds, providing a natural background for the project. Directed by Professor Vladimir Stissi, NPAP includes regular AAC staff (Professor Marijke Gnade, Dr. Gert Jan van Wijngaarden, Dr. Elissavet Hitsiou) but also aims to bring forward a new generation of researchers. These include one postdoc, 6 PhD-students (of whom Colette Beestman has already started), an archaeologist/ict-specialist (Jitte Waagen) and a series of research-assistants (of whom Jeltsje Stobbe and Heleen Knikman are present here).

Secretary project Tel.: +31205258775/+31205255830 Em: NPAP@uva.nl
Address: Amsterdam Archaeological Centre, University of Amsterdam, Turfdragsterpad 9, 1012 XT Amsterdam

