

Glazed tablewares at Corinth under the Romans: Technology and supply, 2nd century BC – 1st century AD

Florence Liard (Université Catholique de Louvain), Ayed Ben Amara (Université Bordeaux Montaigne)

Primary topic of interest : Handcraft organization and knowledge transfer

The increased Roman influence on economic exchanges in mainland Greece in the early 2nd century BC impacted various aspects of culture and daily life at Corinth. In pottery craftsmanship, the rapid transition to mouldmade bowls is seen as resulting from this general atmosphere of internationalism, with Athens providing a stylistic reference in this new production.

Archaeological studies consider the destruction of the most part of the urban center by the Roman general Mummius in 146 BC, and the re-foundation of the city as a Roman colony under Cesar in 44BC, as two milestones in the quickly evolving production strategies of ceramic tableware at Corinth. In this paper, we provide an analytical insight into the continuities and changes in clay extraction strategies, decoration styles, and glaze technology between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD. We focus on black-glazed mouldmade bowls of Hellenistic tradition (2nd–1st century BC) and lead-glazed tableware that are believed to reflect a Roman tradition (1st century BC–1st century AD). The study combines petrographic and SEM-EDS analyses of the fabrics and glazes, based on a set of 30 Corinthian samples and Attic comparanda. It aims to explore the provenance of the wares, clay selection strategies, and glazing technology through time at Corinth and in its wider region.

Early types of “Megarian” bowls, which started to be produced before the mid-2nd century BC at Corinth, display two different fabrics, and most of them probably originate from the immediate vicinity of the city center; a few Attic imports have been identified petrographically as well. The local glazing techniques are of uneven quality, with some products displaying shades of dark and red, and others a very worn surface. Other types of “Megarian” bowls with net-pattern, long-petal, and linear-leaf decoration were popular around the time of the destruction of the city by Mummius and even later. Their styles are reminiscent of a contemporary Attic production, and they appear in the same fabrics as early Roman lead-glazed pottery, which relate petrographically to the wider region of Corinth.