

SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE



COLLECTION HAUT MOYEN ÂGE

dirigée par Régine Le Jan

39



Social Inequality in Early Medieval Europe

Local Societies and Beyond

Edited by

JUAN ANTONIO QUIRÓS CASTILLO



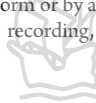
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D/2020/0095/57
ISBN 978-2-503-58565-9
E-ISBN 978-2-503-58566-6
DOI 10.1484/M.HAMA-EB.5.118103

ISSN 1783-8711
E-ISSN 2294-8473

Printed in the EU on acid-free paper.

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Pottery as Inequality?

Systems of Production and Distribution in North Italian Societies During the Early Middle Ages

Introduction

As archaeologists know, pottery is an oversized category of artifacts in the archaeological record. This is bad, because we can overestimate its role in the interpretation of social and economic processes. At the same time, however, always being present, it lends itself better to comparison than other objects. It is right that we consider how best to use it.

In recent years, the approach to studies into ceramics in general, and especially into medieval pottery, has shifted from the historical/artistic or antiquarian aspects to those where more stress has been placed on chronological, distributive and functional/social evidence: what is conventionally called ‘the big three’.¹ In particular, studies into the distribution of pottery have, as is well known, proved very useful in describing and shedding light on trade around the Mediterranean in Classical and Late Antiquity,² although some believe this is not the case for the Middle Ages.³ Nevertheless, many Italian studies were conducted in this regard in the 1980s and 1990s and these have attracted the attention of some historians, including Paolo Delogu and Chris Wickham, who appreciate the value of archeology, using this data in different ways and to varying degrees.⁴ More specifically, Wickham was especially concerned with reflecting on the production of ceramics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle

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- 1 C. Orton, P. Tyers and A. Vince, *Pottery in archaeology*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 23–30.
 - 2 See, for instance: C. Panella, ‘Per lo studio dei contesti e delle merci tardo antiche’, in A. Giardina ed., *Società Romana e Impero Tardoantico, III, Mercì, Insediamenti*, Bari, 1986, pp. 21–449; C. Panella, ‘Mercì e scambi nel Mediterraneo in età tardoantica’, in *Storia di Roma, III, 2*, Torino, 1993, pp. 251–72.
 - 3 P. Davey and R. Hodges, ‘Ceramics and trade: a critique of the archaeological evidence’, in P. Davey and R. Hodges eds, *Ceramics & Trade. The production and distribution of late medieval pottery in North-West Europe*, Sheffield, 1983, pp. 1–14.
 - 4 See, for instance: C. Wickham, ‘Marx, Sherlock Holmes and the Late Roman Commerce’, in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 78, 1988, pp. 183–93; P. Delogu, *Le origini del medioevo. Studi sul settimo secolo*, Roma, 2010, where much use is also made of ceramic indicators.

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Social Inequality in Early Medieval Europe: Local Societies and Beyond, ed. by Juan Antonio QUIRÓS CASTILLO, Turnhout: Brepols, 2020 (HAMA 39), pp. 75–97

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Ages, drawing some sophisticated socio-economic conclusions:⁵ pottery is, after all, a commodity that was easily imitated and mass produced in pre-industrial societies.⁶

The purely procedural approach has been generally criticized by post-processual archeology applied to pottery from the 1990s onwards. As a result of justified dissatisfaction with the analytical/descriptive method for classification purposes, these practices have since been abandoned and distribution studies are now somewhat distrusted, without, at least in Italy, leading to an alternative, innovative interpretation of ceramics in the archaeological record. Moreover, later types of pottery are more suitable for this type of analysis or, put another way, more research and encouraging results have been obtained using more recent types of pottery, perhaps because these better lend themselves to comparison against the written sources.⁷

The current situation, therefore, is that studies of post Antiquity ceramics is no longer as central to research as it was just a couple of decades ago. This is a good thing, from a certain point of view, as the abundance of pottery in the archaeological record had created a kind of ‘monothematic’ approach that did not assist general historical studies or those focusing more specifically on ceramics. The introduction of the concept of ‘context’ led to a shift in focus to relationships and their meaning, thereby slowly taking pottery out of its ‘splendid isolation’ and returning it to within its more pertinent social space. At the same time, however, it has contributed to a loss of valuable specialist skills and has introduced quicker analysis procedures that have often become approximate, with the risk that many researchers are now able to explain relationships between various artifacts, but do not know — or know very little — about the objects they are called upon to analyze. It would be inappropriate and completely impractical to propose that taxonomic studies become once again central in the theoretical and methodological approach to research. Having said that, however, a call for more stringent philology and a more critical consideration of artifacts is not unreasonable, especially as this would help corroborate these more interesting and useful approaches.

I would here like to consider a specific problem, picking up and developing a subject of importance to me over the years. It concerns a clearly defined chronological period within the Middle Ages (eighth–tenth century) and an equally well defined geographic area (North Italy). I would like to do this by drawing on some coherent, sufficiently broad knowledge and using approaches that combine different methods and tools of analysis, while at the same time using the ceramics indicator in its more specific social function.



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- 5 More specifically, in C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–880*, Oxford, 2005, in general on system of exchange pp. 693–824 and on Italy pp. 728–59. See also various comments on this book (including mine) in *Storica*, 34, pp. 121–72.
 - 6 C. Wickham, ‘Overview: production, distribution and demand’, in R. Hodges and W. Bowden eds, *The Sixth Century. Production, Distribution and Demand*, Leiden, 1998, p. 285.
 - 7 See, merely by way of example, the recent book by M. Ferri, C. Moine and L. Sabbionesi eds, *In & Around. Ceramiche e comunità. Secondo Convegno tematico dell’AIECM3* (Faenza 2015), Firenze, 2016.

Pottery in North Italy

Studies on pottery from the early Middle Ages (eighth–tenth centuries) in northern Italy point to a strong apparent homogeneity in ceramics: in terms of their typology, function and form. Over time, this homogeneity has led to a move away from exclusively taxonomic approaches.⁸ As a result, pottery has been viewed as being not a particularly sensitive indicator of social variability between rural and urban communities, within the same topographical context (urban or rural areas) or even within similar social groups. But is this really so? Should we refrain from using ceramics as a possible social marker? How can pottery reflect social diversity, if indeed it can?

In the past, archaeologists relied on a fairly well-defined taxonomy of pottery production in northern Italy.⁹ The situation outlined in the 1980s has not changed much, with just a few modifications (chronological and typological). Societies, whether urban or rural, used a small number of functional and technological types of pottery (fig. 1). This is true in the eighth to tenth centuries, whereas, in the seventh century, the distribution of ARS and Eastern Sigillata shows that some social groups still used this type of artifact as tableware. Some countries in the Mediterranean area continued to produce ceramic tableware (albeit in combination with other forms of tableware).¹⁰ This means that the decline in the production of ARS and Eastern

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- 8 These must not, however, be seen as impediments or obstacles in more sophisticated approaches to the social aspects, as, for instance, certain attempts to interpret even very simple ceramics (such as Anglo Saxon pottery) in terms of what they can tell us about society: P. Blinkhorn, 'Habitus, social identity and Anglo-Saxon pottery', in C. G. Cumberpatch and P. W. Blinkhorn eds, *Not so much a pot, more a way of life. Current approaches to artefact analysis in archaeology*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 113–24. Others are attempting to interpret ceramics from other areas of Europe in a social key, including pottery found in the north of the Iberian Peninsula showing signs of technological and formal simplification: A. Vigil-Escalera Guidaro and J. A. Quiros Castillo eds, *La cerámica de la Alta Edad Media en el Cuadrante Noroeste de la Península Ibérica (siglos V–X). Sistemas de producción, mecanismos de distribución y patrones de consumo*, Bilbao, 2016.
- 9 On a more general note concerning pottery from the North of Italy, see G. P. Brogiolo and S. Gelichi, 'La ceramica grezza medievale nella pianura padana', in *La ceramica medievale nel Mediterraneo Occidentale* (Siena- Faenza 1984), Firenze, 1986, pp. 293–316; G. P. Brogiolo and S. Gelichi, 'Ceramiche, tecnologia e organizzazione della produzione nell'Italia settentrionale tra VI e X secolo', in G. Démians D'Archimbaud ed., *La céramique médiévale en Méditerranée. Actes du VIe Congrès de l'AIECM2* (Aix-en-Provence 1995), Aix-en-Provence, 1997, pp. 139–45; G. P. Brogiolo and S. Gelichi, 'La ceramica comune in Italia settentrionale tra IV e VII secolo', in L. Sagui ed., *La ceramica in Italia: VI–VII secolo, Atti del Convegno in onore di J. W. Hayes* (Roma 1995), Firenze, 1998, pp. 209–26; S. Gelichi and F. Sbarra, 'La tavola di San Gerardo. Ceramica tra X e XI secolo nel nord Italia: importazioni e produzioni locali', in *Rivista di Archeologia*, XXVII, 2003, pp. 119–41.
- 10 There are no good studies on glazed Mediterranean ceramics from the eighth-tenth centuries. Even regional or sub-regional studies are compromised due to the doubtful reliability of the archeological documentation. Of importance here is the correct identification of the age of the artifacts and a precise indication of their origin. The techniques used have often been poorly studied, understood and described. In any case, regarding early lusterware in the Mediterranean area, see R. B. Mason 2004, *Shine like the Sun: Lustre-painted and Associated Pottery from the Medieval Middle East*, Costa Mesa, 2004. Useful information can still be gleaned from the classic book on Egyptian ceramics by

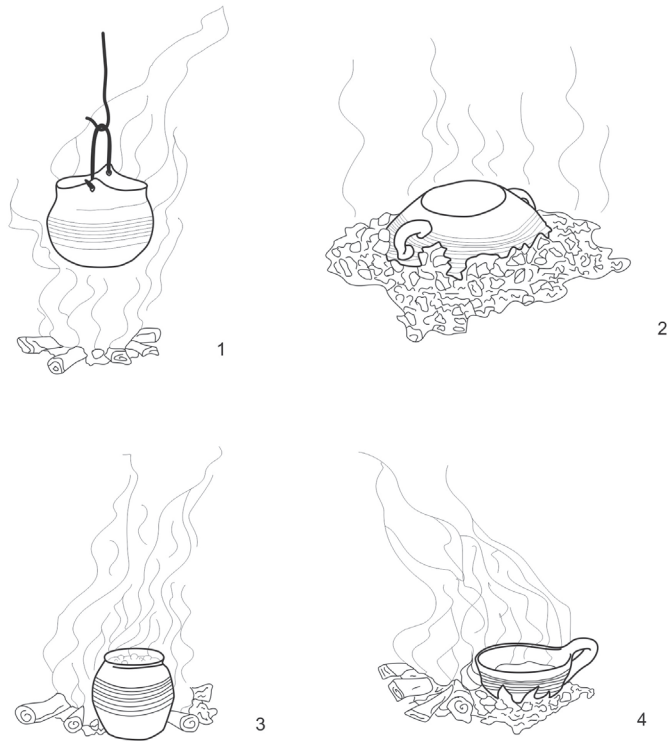


Fig. 1. The main types of pottery kilns in the North Italy during the Early Middle ages (from Gelichi and Sbarra, 'La Tavola', fig. 3).

H. Philon, *Benaki Museum, Athens. Early Islamic Ceramics. Nine to Twelfth Century*, London, 1980 and from the article by G. Scanlon, 'Fustat Fatimid Sgraffito: Less than Lustre', in M. Barrucand ed., *L'Egypte fatimide, son art et son histoire*, Paris, 1999, pp. 265–83. A better source — also because it is based on stratigraphic associations at the Fustat excavation — is the recent book on Egyptian ceramics in the 9th and 10th centuries by R. P. Gayraud and L. Vallauray, *Fustat. II. Fouilles d'Istabl 'Antar. Céramiques d'ensembles des IX^e et X^e siècle*, Le Caire, 2017; for Egyptian 'Fayyumi Ware', see G. Scanlon 'Fayyumi Pottery: a Long-lived Misnomer in Egyptian Islamic Ceramics. Type I', in *Société Archéologique d'Alexandrie* 35, 1993, pp. 295–330 and G. Williams, 'Fayyumi' Ware: Variations, Imitations, and Importations of an Early Islamic Glazed Ceramic Type. Unpublished Thesis American University of Cairo, 2013 (<http://dar.aucegypt.edu/bitstream/handle/10526/3388/Thesis%20Fayyumi.pdf?sequence=1>). For Byzantine 'Glazed White Ware' see J. Vroom, *Byzantine to Modern Pottery. An Introduction Field Guide*, Utrecht, 2005, pp. 72–79. For Byzantine ceramics imported into Italy, see E. D'Amico, 'Byzantine Finewares in Italy (tenth to fourteenth centuries AD): Social and Economic Contexts in the Mediterranean World', in S. Gelichi ed., *Atti del IX Congresso Internazionale sulla Ceramica Medievale nel Mediterraneo* (Venezia, 2009), Firenze, 2012, pp. 473–79. For oriental glazed ceramics and their relations with Syrian production, see M. Tite, O. Watson, T. Pradell, M. Matin, G. Molina, K. Domoney and A. Bouquillon, 'Revisiting the beginnings of tin-opacified glazes', in *Journal of Archaeological Science* 57, 2015, pp. 80–91 and O. Watson, 'Revisiting Samarra: the Rise of Islamic Glazed Pottery', in *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie* 4, 2010, pp. 124–32.

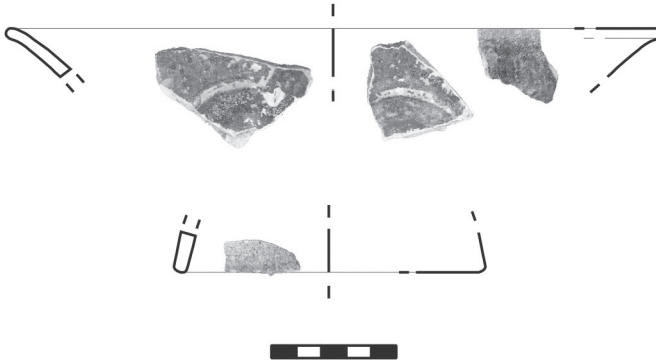


Fig. 2. “Glazed White Ware” (Polychrome type) from Nonantola (archaeological excavations into the Abbey).

Sigillata should not be seen as the underlying reason for a change in behavior in Italic societies (especially in North Italy). We are now certain that the revival in imports from the Mediterranean did not take place before the eleventh or, more probably, the twelfth century.¹¹ Some sherds of pottery dating from before this, would have been from exotic products and the result of occasional exchanges or gifts: e.g. “Glazed White Ware” (Polychrome type) from Nonantola (fig. 2) should be seen in the same light as samite, again from Nonantola;¹² likewise, the Iranian pottery of the same period found in San Vincenzo al Volturno and in Fulda.¹³

In terms of technology, north Italian potters used the following methods and materials: the fast potter’s wheel (rarely, the slow wheel); clays with the addition of inclusions; vessels usually fired in reducing conditions; rarely any coating (slip or glaze); surface treatment sometimes absent. Occasionally they added incisions as decorative features, obtained with pointed instruments or created through impression; many other marks on the surface are most probably linked to the technology used (surface treatment). Very few products made from fine or partially fine clays and fired in oxidizing conditions have been discovered. Glazed pottery was produced,

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- 11 Updated information on these matters can be found in S. Gelichi, ‘Islamic pottery in the neighbourhood of the Venetian lagoon. A contribution on the relationships between Venice and the Eastern Mediterranean during the 11th-12th century’ in T. Nowakiewicz, M. Trzeciecki, D. Błaszczuk, eds, *Animos labor nutrit. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Andrzejowi Buko w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, Warszawa 2018, pp. 115–128.
 - 12 For Samite tissue, see P. Peri, ‘Antiche reliquie tessili dell’Abbazia di Nonantola (secoli VIII–XII)’, in R. Fangarezzi, P. Golinelli and A. M. Orselli eds, *Sant’Anselmo di Nonantola e i santi fondatori nella tradizione monastica tra Oriente e Occidente*, Roma, 2006, pp. 239–59.
 - 13 For the fragments from San Vincenzo al Volturno, see H. Patterson, ‘The Pottery’, in J. Mitchell, I. L. Hansen and C. M. Coats eds, *San Vincenzo al Volturno 3: the Finds from the 1980–86 Excavations*, Spoleto, 2001, pp. 319–20, Fig. 10.134, plates 101–02. Thanks to Thomas Kind for informations on the example from Fulda.

but only in some specific areas in the north.¹⁴ Generally speaking, this means that the production structures must have been very simple, including open fire kilns, indicating very little investment in technology.

The number of kilns excavated in north Italy is still very limited. Despite their small number, these kilns allow us to make some interesting observations.¹⁵

Concerning the technology, all the known production systems are modest in size and relatively simple; complexes with several kilns and other service facilities are rarely documented. Their archaeological visibility, especially in the case of open fire kilns,¹⁶ however, is modest, leaving almost no traces, as they are very similar to those of simple hearths.¹⁷ With regard to the location, however, kilns near or inside Roman villas or rural settlements have been discovered but mainly date back to the beginning of the early Middle Ages. Their presence has been interpreted as the terminal phase of the widely documented use of such structures in Ancient Roman times; or, better still, as the exploitation of ancient abandoned structures.¹⁸ This phenomenon

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- 14 For early Medieval glazed ceramics in northern Italy, see Gelichi and Sbarra, 'La tavola di San Gerardo' and (more recently) S. Gelichi, 'Nuove invetrate alto-medievali dalla laguna di Venezia e di Comacchio', in S. Lusuardi Siena, C. Perassi, F. Sacchi and M. Sannazaro eds, *Archeologia classica e post-classica tra Italia e Mediterraneo. Scritti in ricordo di Maria Pia Rossignani*, Milano, 2016, pp. 297–317.
- 15 Cf. The two kilns excavated in the *Capitolium* area of Brescia: see A. Guglielmetti, 'La ceramica comune fra fine VI e X secolo a Brescia nei siti di casa Pallaveri, palazzo Martinengo Cesaresco e piazza Labus', in G. P. Brogiolo and S. Gelichi eds, *La ceramica altomedievale (fine VI–X secolo) in Italia settentrionale: produzione commerci* (Monte Barro — Galbiate 1995), Mantova, 1996, pp. 9–14; A. Guglielmetti, 'Ceramica di età longobarda nell'area del *Capitolium*: analisi di una struttura produttiva', in F. Rossi ed., *Carta Archeologica della Lombardia. V. Brescia, la città*, Modena, 1996, pp. 265–83; A. Guglielmetti, 'Il vasellame in ceramica di età altomedievale', in F. Rossi ed., *Un luogo per gli dei. L'area del Capitolium a Brescia*, Firenze, 2014, pp. 454–56, Fig. 8 (left). One of these two kilns has been dated to roughly 592 (± 160) and was used to produce glazed 'Longobard' ceramics and most common pottery. Another, smaller kiln has been found and excavated (also in Brescia) close to the Basilica di Santa Maria; thermoluminescence dating puts this at 610 ± 110 or 659 ± 150 (two specimens): Guglielmetti, 'Il vasellame', p. 456, note 90, Fig. 8 (right). Another kiln (ninth or tenth century) has been excavated in Libarna (AL): C. Davite and F. Filippi 'Un forno altomedievale per la cottura della ceramica a Libarna', in E. Giannichedda ed., *Archeologia della produzione. Antichi mestieri*, Genova, 1996, pp. 74–76; F. Filippi, G. Gaij and G. Pantò, 'La produzione di una fornace altomedievale per ceramica da Libarna (AL)', in G. Pantò ed., *Produzione e circolazione dei materiali ceramici in Italia settentrionale tra VI e X secolo* (Torino 2002), Mantova, 2004, pp. 57–83.
- 16 T. Mannoni and E. Giannichedda, *Archeologia della produzione*, Torino, 1996, p. 173, Fig. 33.1.
- 17 It is thought that the existence of an open fire kiln in the area of Carlino (UD), in a site close to Aquileia, where glazed waste kiln products have been found, can be dated to the late fourth century / early fifth century (C. Magrini and F. Sbarra, *Le ceramiche invetrate di Carlino. Nuovo contributo allo studio di una produzione tarsoantica*, Firenze, 2005), but there are no clear traces of a kiln: see C. Magrini and F. Sbarra, 'Nuovi dati per un vecchio ritrovamento: le ceramiche grezze e invetrate del 'focolare' nel sito produttivo di Carlino (UD)' in G. Pantò ed., *Produzione e circolazione dei materiali ceramici in Italia settentrionale tra VI e X secolo* (Torino 2002), Mantova, 2004, pp. 247–63.
- 18 The kiln excavated in Libarna (AL) does not provide clear evidence in this sense: the kiln was found in a Roman cemetery, but does not appear to have any association with this, partly due to the time lapse. This area is not very far from the ancient Roman city, but it would appear to be a coincidence: Filippi, Gaij and Pantò, 'La produzione di una fornace' pp. 57–61 and 64 (chronology), Fig. 3 and 6.

might be analogous with a similar documented phenomenon regarding glass kilns from the same period.¹⁹

The second aspect to note is that, contrary to what one might expect, only a small number of workshops belonging to the same period have been unearthed in urban locations (or close to a major town). The urban kilns of Brescia would appear to lie within a fiscal space (a ducal court) where people were engaged in various artisanal activities (archaeologists have found traces of bone and metal working).²⁰

In a broader geographical context (Italy), the third consideration is that most productive structures are either found within villages (or rural areas) or in the vicinity of religious buildings (churches and monasteries) and hence are linked to the exploitation of the properties of the local soil and rock. In some places, one can also assume that these activities were under the direct control of the landowners (San Genesio, near San Miniato, in Tuscany) or the church hierarchy (as in the case of Mola di Monte Gelato in the Roman countryside).²¹

Subsequent studies have slightly modified this reconstruction in two senses: the first concerns the identification of some previously unknown productions using fine, well prepared clays fired in oxidizing conditions; the other regards the production of lead glazed pottery. The first category appears in the context of the eighth century. The second perhaps in the context of the ninth and tenth centuries. These ceramics require more complex kilns, a more sophisticated treatment of the clay and, finally, the use of additional materials, like color and glaze: in other words, greater investment in technology and costs. We will consider this in greater depth later on.

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- 19 M. Ferri, 'Consumo e produzione nella laguna in età tardo-antica: i vetri', in S. Gelichi et al., 'Importare, produrre e consumare nella laguna di Venezia dal IV al XII secolo. Anfore, vetri e ceramiche', in S. Gelichi and C. Negrelli eds, *Adriatico altomedievale (VI–XI secolo). Scambi, porti, produzioni*, Venezia, 2017, pp. 52–57.
- 20 The kiln discovered near the Basilica di Santa Maria, again in Brescia, is, however, considered as being 'dependent or controlled by ecclesiastical institutions': Guglielmetti, 'Il vasellame', p. 456.
- 21 For San Genesio (San Miniato — Pisa), see *below*, but also: F. Cantini, 'Ceramiche dai siti medievali rurali della Toscana (VIII–X secolo): una prima sintesi', in S. Gelichi ed., *Campagne medievali. Strutture materiali, economia e società nell'insediamento rurale dell'Italia settentrionale (VIII–X secolo)* (Nonantola — San Giovanni in Persiceto 2003), Mantova, 2005, pp. 258–76; F. Cantini, 'Forme, dimensioni e logiche della produzione nel medioevo: tendenze generali per l'Italia centrale tra V e XV secolo', in A. Molinari, R. Santangeli Valenzani and L. Spera eds, *L'archeologia della produzione a Roma (secoli V–XV). Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi* (Roma 2014), Roma-Bari, 2015, p. 504. Regarding Motta di Monte Gelato, see F. Marazzi, T. Potter and A. King, 'Mola di Monte Gelato (Mazzano Romano — VT): notizie preliminari sulle campagne di scavo 1986–1988 e considerazioni sulle origini dell'incastellamento in Etruria meridionale alla luce dei nuovi dati archeologici', in *Archeologia Medievale*, XVI, 1989, p. 108, Fig. 4; T. W. Potter and A. C. King, *Excavations at the Mola di Monte Gelato. A Roman and Medieval Settlement in South Etruria*, Rome, 1997, pp. 92–94, Figg. 87–88. Also for Libarna (AL), see *above*; albeit in a rural location, we are unaware of any relationships with the kiln owners.

The Mode of Production

Some time ago, I tried to conceptualize the modes of production system in Italy during the Middle Ages.²² An ambitious project, I do not deny it; a project that had some strengths (the prospect of a comparative and synchronic reading of the processes), but also several negative points (the weakness of the individual cases, the abstractness of the models). Then again, this is a weakness that is inherent in all attempts to understand and contain the processes in a single system.

At the time, a point of reference was Peacock's book on production in the Ancient Roman World.²³ Peacock had used an ethno-anthropological approach and, it was obvious, these recognized models were specifically transferred to the Roman age. In the same manner, we could usefully transfer the same models to other historical pre-capitalistic societies.²⁴

We basically identified three main models for the medieval age in North Italy. The use of these models goes beyond the generic definitions often used by researchers, such as 'home production', 'industrial products', 'handcrafted products' and so on.

Model 1 (Household Production)

This is what is conventionally called 'home production'. It has long been recognized as the basic model for the production of ceramics in northern Italy, but also, for certain periods and for certain areas, also in central and southern Italy. It would be characterized by a low level of investment in technology and a low volume of output. It would be a very simple system where the producers are family members (or, at most, members of the village community: especially women or part-time farmers). The same people would be the consumers.

Despite this being the model has long been postulated for the socio-economic reality of most of the Italian peninsula, there is no direct evidence for its existence relying primarily on such comparisons according to the ethno-anthropological approach. No specific case of this kind has been recognized archaeologically. We could perhaps attribute to this type of model some productions of the tenth–eleventh centuries in southern Tuscany or the Ligurian Apennines (the production of *testelli*).²⁵

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- 22 S. Gelichi, 'Gestione e significato sociale della produzione, della circolazione e dei consumi della ceramica nell'Italia dell'Alto Medioevo', in G. P. Brogiolo and A. Chavarria Arnau eds, *Archeologia e società tra Tardo Antico e Alto medioevo* (Padova 2005), Mantova, 2007, pp. 47–69.
- 23 D. P. S. Peacock, *Pottery in the Roman World: an Ethnoarchaeological approach*, New York, 1983. Before Peacock, van der Leeuw had developed a similar structure of models: S. van der Leeuw, *Studies in the Technology of Ancient Pottery*, Amsterdam, 1976.
- 24 The Peacock model has, obviously, been used by other archeologists and historians in other geographical areas, such as Cora di Tudmir in Spain (S. Gutiérrez, *La Cora di Tudmir. De la Antigüedad Tardía al Mundo Islámico. Poblamiento y Cultura Material*, Madrid — Alicante, 1996), southern Tuscany in Italy (F. Grassi, *La ceramica e le vie del commercio tra VIII e XIV secolo. Il caso della Toscana meridionale*, Oxford, 2010, pp. 20–24) and, more generally, throughout the Mediterranean (Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 704–05).
- 25 T. Mannoni 'Il testo e la sua diffusione nella Liguria di levante', in *Bullettino Ligustico per la Storia e la Cultura Regionale*, 17, 1965, pp. 49–64; Mannoni and Giannichedda, *Archeologia*, pp. 300–01.

Model 2 (Household Industry)

This type of production is very similar to the previous kind (low investment in technology, artifacts very simple and functional). The difference lies, however, in the volume of production and the distribution facilities; finally, often (but not always) there is centralized production in a single area. There are some aspects worth pointing out here. The first concerns the craftsmen: again, in this case, they are part-time specialists, also engaged in other activities both within and outside the domestic sphere (farmers and breeders). Investment in technology is modest. At the same time, there is a concentration of production in the same place, which could only be partly due to special circumstances regarding the availability of the raw material. The concentration, therefore, can be better explained by looking at the topographical location of the site (in relation to routes of communication) and at its functions, likely to encourage trade.

Many of the workshops known in northern Italy (and Italy in general) could fall into this second category. The existence of this model could explain the movement of pottery within the village community, as part of seasonal markets in the context of rural areas, but also in urban markets.²⁶ The acceptance of this model, obviously, presupposes the existence of some form of exchange, a surplus in ceramic production and also, but not always, of middlemen for its distribution. There must, therefore, have been (more or less consistent) demand for this kind of product. This model may reflect, at least in part, the so called ‘*curtense system*’ in northern Italy: seen as the possible result of a centralized activity managed directly by the *dominicus* or, potentially, specialization built up within rural communities.²⁷ The production in the vicinity of ecclesiastical

26 With reservations, the kiln area excavated in Libarna (AL) — already discussed — and dated to the ninth or tenth century could be associated with this category. Unfortunately, we know very little about the context of the area in which this structure lies — only the excavated section of the kiln still exist, all other data concerning the stages of its activity have been lost. Nevertheless, technological studies into the products — including kiln waste — and the remains of the kiln itself have led to a few interesting observations on the shape of the kiln, the temperatures and product standardization. Based on observations of the professional skills of the artisans, it has even been possible to estimate output: ‘The type of production is qualitatively and technologically high, but not yet industrial. The organization of kiln activities points to output capacity of between 800 and 1500 pots each month, probably sold within a relatively limited local radius of perhaps 50–70 km from the site of production’ (Filippi, Gaj and Pantò, ‘La produzione di una fornace’ p. 64). The social and economic framework within which the structure operated is entirely unknown.

27 This problem is not new. The fact that ceramic production, like other crafts, was the expression of a ‘*curtense industry*’ had already been suggested by Monneret de Villard: U. Monneret de Villard, ‘L’organizzazione industriale nell’Italia longobarda durante l’Alto Medioevo’, in *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, V, XLVI, 1919, p. 20. This theory was partly criticized by Cinzio Violante and, more recently, by Tourbert: C. Violante, *La società milanese in età precomunale*, Bari, 1953; P. Toubert, ‘Il sistema curtense: la produzione e lo scambio interno in Italia nei secoli VIII, IX e X’, in G. Sergi ed., *Curtis e signoria rurale: interferenze fra due strutture medievali*, Torino, 1993, pp. 25–94 (re-issue of an essay dated 1983). I have already discussed these matters, suggesting this possibility, in S. Gelichi, ‘Ceramiche senza rivestimento grezze’, in S. Gelichi and N. Giordani eds, *Il tesoro nel pozzo. Pozzi deposito e tesaurizzazioni nell’antica Emilia*, Modena, 1994, pp. 88–95.

complexes may also reflect such a reality. A parallel could be the production system managed by the Church in the Roman countryside (*domuscultae*).²⁸

Model 3 (Individual Workshop)

In this model, there is far greater investment in technology (needed for the decoration of the pieces and the use of lead glaze). The kilns are also more complex. Circulation is obviously greater and must be through mediation. These products were, therefore, traded in rural and town markets.

Pottery decorated with red-slip (in central and southern Italy), that made from fine clay fired in oxidizing kilns (also in the north) and, finally and most especially, lead glazed pottery could all fall within this category.²⁹

It is possible, but by no means certain, that the production, in this case, was also managed by feudal landowners (see below) or monasteries (there is, however, only indirect evidence of this at present). A few years ago, Paul Arthur and Helen Patterson suggested that the foundation of *domuscultae*, in the Roman countryside, might have created the necessary conditions for the emergence of “independent professional potters”. It is also possible that, early on, the Church played a role in the production and distribution of ceramics, possibly with the presence of “attached specialists”.³⁰ The social category of potters, however, becomes important to distinguish this model from the other two models. In fact, one has to assume that the craftsmen were full-time potters, although their existence is, at present, only indirectly documented by written sources from the tenth century only. For example, Beatrice Annis attributes the first production of lead glazed pottery in Rome to this model.³¹ On the basis of mineral-petrographic analysis, one can reasonably assume that workshops were located in both towns and the countryside. The production of similar pottery (lead glazed pottery), in a part of northern Italy between the ninth and eleventh centuries

28 One such case could be that of Mola di Monte Gelato (Potter and King, *Excavations*) which we have already mentioned, especially if it can be established that the complex belonged to the Papal State.

29 The artisan activities at Serratone near Rispescia (GR) might belong to this category, although only kiln waste has been found during surveys and magnetometry analysis. This would, in any case, only concern good quality ceramics, produced on a fast potter's and sold down the Ombrone and Osa valleys: E. Vaccaro, *Sites and Pots: Settlement and Economy in Southern Tuscany (AD 300–900)*, Oxford, 2011, pp. 202–15; E. Vaccaro, ‘Ceramic Production and Trade in Tuscany (3rd–mid 9th c. AD): new Evidence from the South-West’, in E. Cirelli, F. Diosono and H. Patterson eds, *Le forme della crisi. Produzioni ceramiche e commerci nell’Italia centrale tra Romani e Longobardi (III–VIII sec. d. C.)* (Spoleto- Campello sul Clitumno 2012), Bologna, 2015, p. 222.

30 P. Arthur and H. Patterson, ‘Ceramics and early medieval central and southern Italy: ‘a potted history’, in R. Francovich and G. Noyé eds, *La storia dell’alto medioevo italiano (V–X secolo) alla luce dell’archeologia* (Siena 1992), Firenze, 1994, p. 433.

31 B. Annis, ‘Ceramica altomedievale a vetrina pesante e ceramica medievale a vetrina sparsa dallo scavo di San Sisto Vecchio in Roma: analisi tecnologica e proposta interpretativa’, in L. Paroli ed., *La ceramica invetriata tardo antica in Italia*. (Certosa di Pontignano, Siena 1990), Firenze, 1992, p. 412. See also a few contributions published in a recent book on manufacturing activity in Rome during the Early Middle Ages: A. Molinari, R. Santangeli Valenzani and L. Spera eds, *L’archeologia della produzione a Roma (secoli V–XV)*. *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi* (Roma 2014), Roma- Bari, 2015.

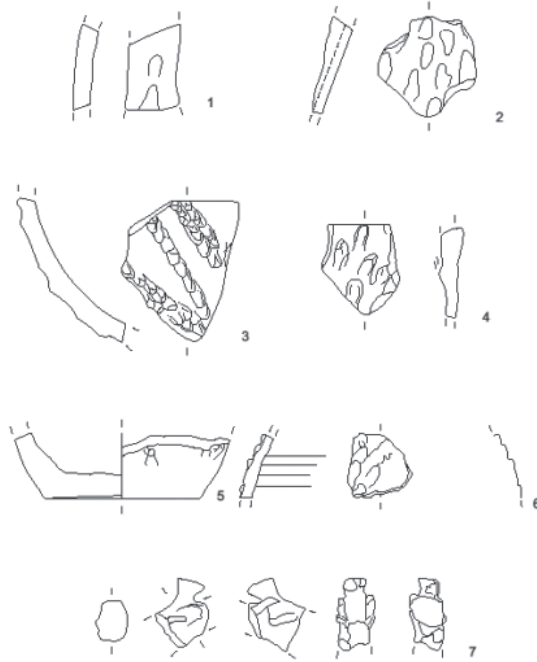


Fig. 3. Lead Glazed Pottery from Venice (nn. 1-2) and from Comacchio (nn. 3-7) (ninth century) (from Gelichi, 'Nuove invetriate', fig. 1).

could be the output of similar workshops. Even the pottery from the Comacchio area could be the result of a similar activity (see below).

These models, however, presuppose a permanence of production, although they do not indicate the duration. We could add a further possibility, which perhaps explains the production of single-fired lead glazed pottery in northern Italy. The existence of this production is testified by archaeological findings and archaeometric data. There are two main groups. The first group (ninth century?) consists of vessels very similar to Roman 'Forum Ware' (fig. 3). The second group (tenth and eleventh centuries), with no applied decoration and few traces of glazing, is similar to 'Roman Sparse Glazed'³² (fig. 4). Minero-petrographical analysis proves that these were not imported from the

32 This type of ceramics has been known (and studied) for some time: S. Gelichi and M. G. Maioli, 'La ceramica invetriata tardo antica e alto-medievale dall'Emilia Romagna', in L. Paroli ed., *La ceramica invetriata tardo antica in Italia*. (Certosa di Pontignano, Siena 1990), Firenze, 1992, pp. 215-78; Gelichi and Sbarra, 'La tavola di San Gerardo' and, more recently, Gelichi, 'Nuove invetriate', containing a summary of and an update on the matter.

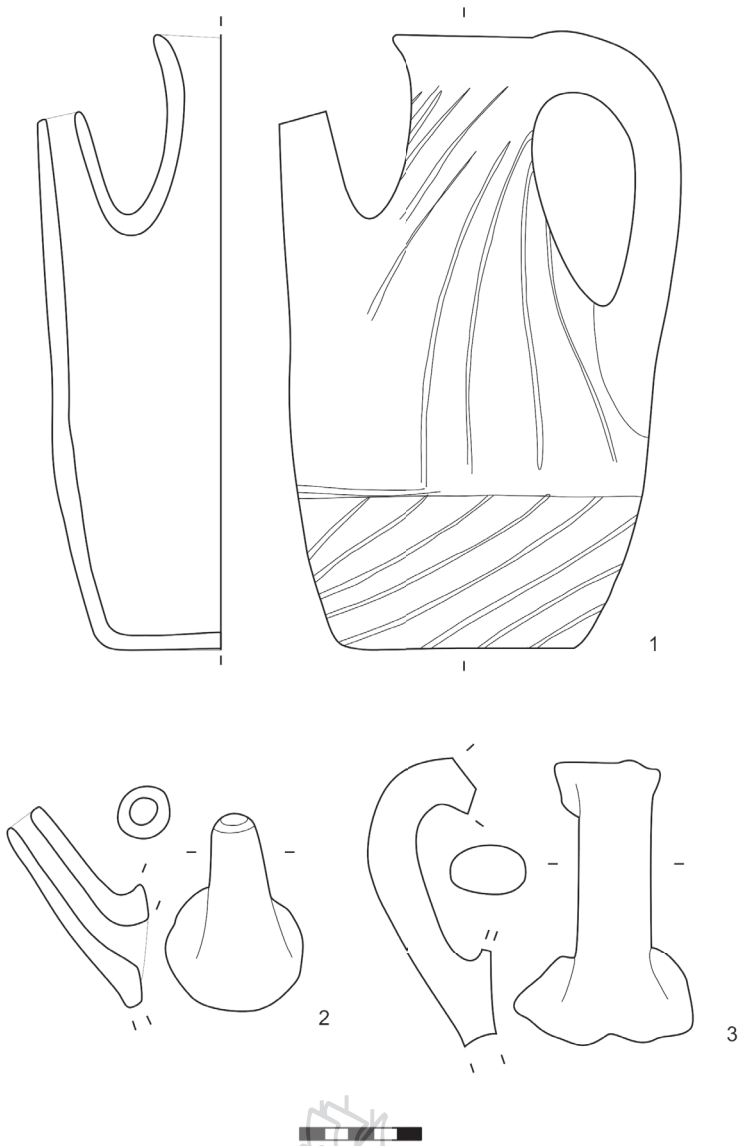


Fig. 4. Lead Glazed Pottery from Ravenna (tenth-eleventh century) from Gelichi, Maioli, 'La ceramica', fig. 19).

Central Italy and were probably produced locally. Very few examples of the first type exist, almost all concentrated in the Comacchio and Ravenna areas, and Venice. Many more examples have been found of the second type, the vessels being distributed across a far wider area. The existence of the first group can be explained by the concept of intermittent production: since specific technical skills are required, different from

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those needed for standard production in northern Italy, one must assume that qualified workers from central and southern Italy travelled north at different times in history.

From the Model to Social Relationship of Production

The adoption of these conceptually functional models, however, poses some problems. The greatest problem lies in the fact that the differences between these models are not always easily recognizable at an archaeological level, especially when faced with contexts like most of those already analyzed: poorly documented and often topographically circumscribed. Moreover, it is not always easy to associate the model and the archaeological data with the political-social structure of reference. Put simply, it is not easy to translate an anthropological model into a historically interpreted framework. For example, the birth of centralized sites in southern Tuscany during the Middle Ages³³ is accompanied by the emergence of “small production sites located in the vicinity of each site” and serving the needs of these new realities. However, those who have supported this approach are unsure whether it is best for model 2 (household industry) or model 3 (individual workshop).³⁴ Furthermore, and always regarding southern Tuscany, a couple of sites — including Roccastrada — have been interpreted as belonging to a higher level (a nucleated workshop), where production was characterized by the use of a fast potter’s wheel, stable equipment, vitreous glaze and, especially, a far wider radius of distribution.³⁵ But even in this case, the social dimension of production is still difficult to establish, both as regards the typology of the artisans (part-time, attached specialists?) and the economic context.

One example that might help us translate the material data into a social context of production is the site of San Genesio (PI), Tuscany. Archaeological studies over many years have uncovered the existence of a production center inside the settlement itself that manufactured good quality ceramics, fired in an oxidizing environment and sometimes decorated with red slip. Work is still ongoing and archaeologists have dated these kilns to the ninth century using archeomagnetism.³⁶ This activity would, most probably, have been conducted within a single feudal area: the lands owned

33 Regarding the question of the concentration of dwellings in medieval Tuscany and its evolution over the years, it is still worth a classic text: R. Francovich and R. Hodges, *Villa to village. The Transformation of the Roman Countryside in Italy c. 400–1000*, London, 2003.

34 Grassi, *La ceramica*, p. 22.

35 Grassi, *La ceramica* p. 23. In reality, the difference between a household industry and a nucleated workshop lies not so much in the complexity and sophistication of the productive structure, but rather in the social organization of the location, especially when one considers the number of workshops to be found in the same place.

36 For the excavations at San Genesio, see note 21 and F. Cantini, ‘Per un’archeologia dei *vici* tra Tarda Antichità e Medioevo. Il caso di *Vicus Wallari-Burgus Sancti Genesi*’, in P. Galetti ed., *Paesaggi, comunità, villaggi medievali* (Bologna 2010), Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, Spoleto, 2012, pp. 511–23. For specific details of the kiln and its products, see F. Cantini, ‘Forme, dimensioni’, p. 505. The kiln here produced pots decorated with red slip and was a large vertical kiln (2.50 × 1.50 m). This kiln was capable of producing anything up to 200 items per firing. Thanks to Federico Cantini for these information.

by the Marquis of *Tuscia* Adalberto ‘il ricco’.³⁷ What is more, the proximity of this site and an olive press lead us to believe that the kiln also produced vessels for the oil obtained from the manorial lord’s lands (the *curtes*).

The relationship between taxable property (money exacted by the king, a marquis or a count) and productive activities in *Tuscia* between the ninth and tenth centuries is now becoming much clearer, thanks also to recent archaeological evidence.³⁸ The different types of ownership (a fiscal *curtes* or a private *curtes*) would influence the way the settlements were structured and whether or not they would include specialized production activities. Furthermore, certain productive activities can be differentiated within a fiscal *curtes*. In the specific case of ceramics, there is another site of interest: as well as San Genesio, Donoratico (LI) was a center of glazed ceramic production in the ninth and tenth centuries.³⁹ However, the pottery produced here would appear to have enjoyed limited distribution (just within the surrounding area), suggesting that the workshops served specific, perhaps even distant, markets. If we were to transfer this archaeological reality to the aforementioned models, the workshops in both Donoratico and, perhaps, San Genesio, could have been individual workshops (or nucleated workshops).

Nevertheless, the examples we have mentioned qualify in a specific way, to the extent that we can place them in a specific area of social and political relationships. If we now return to our original models, we must recognize that most case-histories concern not only the parameters defining each model (as Peacock has already pointed out),⁴⁰ but also the differences in what are called “production relations”.

Even with such reservations, I believe that all these models are still useful, at least as tools. Although they may appear to be schematic (from the simplest to the most complex) and may not be used to explain the way production is organized and has evolved, they still allow us to describe the functional aspects and material structures

37 F. Cantini, ‘La gestione della produzione fra *curtes* fiscali e *curtes* private in età carolingia’, in G. Bianchi, C. La Rocca and T. Lazzari eds, *Spazio pubblico e spazio privato tra storia e archeologia (secoli VI–X)* (Bologna 2014), Turnhout, 2018, pp. 261–291.

38 G. Bianchi, ‘Recenti ricerche nelle colline metallifere ed alcune riflessioni sul modello toscano’, in *Archeologia Medievale*, XLII, 2015, p. 18. For a specific look at this problem and updates, see the forthcoming report by G. Bianchi and S. Collavini, ‘Beni fiscali e strategie economiche nell’Alto medioevo toscano: verso una nuova lettura?’, at the workshop entitled *Origins of new economic union (7th–12th centuries)*, *Resources, landscapes and political strategies in Mediterranean Region*, Siena, 12 April 2017. Firenze 2018, pp. 223–291.

39 Material still under analysis. The results of the first digs have been published in G. Bianchi ed., *Castello di Donoratico. I risultati delle prime campagne di scavo (2000–2002)*, Firenze, 2004. Specific references to ceramics (albeit preliminary) can be found in Grassi, *La ceramica*, pp. 114–17. Local production of these ceramics is likely on the basis of archeological evidence and archeometric analysis, but no kiln has, as yet, been found. Thanks to Giovanna Bianchi for this information. More recently A. Briano and E. Sibilia, ‘Progetto nEU-Med. Nuove analisi archeologiche e archeometriche sulla ceramica a vetrina sparsa dal castello di Donoratico (LI): i risultati della Termoluminescenza (LI)’, in *Archeologia Medievale*, XLV, 2018, pp. 357–365.

40 Peacock, *Pottery*, p. 8: ‘However, it must be remembered that we are attempting to impose a conceptual framework upon a situation that in practice may be almost infinitely variable, with many examples falling between rather than within the modes here defined, but it is only when the rules have been made that the exceptions can be recognized’.

of a given productive reality. However, as has been rightly observed and as we have already noted, these models basically define the concept of mode of production in technological and behavioral terms, while the social aspects are merely implied. The modes of production should, however, be redefined as “a configuration of relationships which link the social and economic sphere”.⁴¹ I therefore find it extremely useful to introduce at this point some other parameters, within these conceptual categories, that let us better define the modes of production. In other words, those elements that make up each mode of production and which, according to Andrews, would be the following: Raw material; Labour; Technology; Output. These components are key to all modes of production because, without any one of these, production simply cannot take place. Certain variables will also affect these components, such as the division and intensity of work, or the time needed to obtain and process the raw material. As a result, our models can also be re-formulated and re-conceptualized⁴² and once again become applicable.

Consumption: Use and Distinction

Some time ago I noticed that the quality of ceramic production was worse in the north of the Italian peninsula compared to that from central and southern Italy. Once again, this finding seemed unrelated to any relationship with the city's elite, since the phenomenon of urbanism appeared to be stronger in the north than in the south or center of Italy.⁴³ I deduced, therefore, that there was not always a direct relation between pottery consumption and the urban elite, either on account of the different wealth of the elite in the north, center and south, or because they had different attitudes to such objects. There is a rather different situation in Tuscany, where the quality of ceramics produced along the Arno valley is far is better than in the south of this region.⁴⁴ Here, one should note that ‘the city’ survived quite well in the north (Lucca, Pisa and Florence), but not so in the south of the region; it could, therefore, be argued that this difference can be associated with the wealth of the city's elite, for whom these products were intended.

However, this approach (processualistic in theory) is not truly satisfactory. Specific realities are more complex. Other tools and other conceptual means are needed in order to analyze this phenomenon better and so avoid a very general but unsatisfactory interpretation.

Coarse ware, at the moment, is not subject to this kind of analysis: in fact, the situation depends on the way this kind of ceramics is studied. Archaeologists have, until now, adopted traditional methods and theories. They generally describe the form of the vessel, the color of the fabric. Chronology is their main topic. Some years ago

41 See K. Andrews, ‘From ceramic finishes to modes of production: Iron Age finewares from central France’, in C. G. Cumberpatch and P. W. Blinkhorn eds, *Not so much a pot, more a way of life. Current approaches to artefact analysis in archaeology*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 60–61.

42 Andrews, ‘From ceramic’, pp. 61–62, Table 1 and 2.

43 S. Gelichi, ‘Ceramic production and distribution in the early medieval Mediterranean basin (seventh to tenth centuries AD): between town and countryside’, in G. P. Brogiolo, N. Gauthier and N. Christie eds, *Towns and their Territories between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, TRW 9, Leiden, pp. 115–39.

44 F. Cantini, ‘Ceramiche’, pp. 258–76.

Tiziano Mannoni in Italy, and more recently Alan Vince in England, have independently demonstrated the value of adopting some other specific archaeological approaches, such as the analysis, for example, of easily visible characteristics, like the form of base type, the decoration or the surface treatment (combined with detailed analysis of the material components).⁴⁵ This could lead, at a micro local level, to the presence of different pottery traditions (there have recently been some good applications: for example, in a recent issue of the 'Medieval Archaeology' journal regarding Anglo-Saxon pottery in Torksey, Lincolnshire, by Gareth Perry).⁴⁶ But no area of Italy (north or south) has been subject to such indepth analysis involving the same number of examples (whether places of production or places of consumption).⁴⁷ So, our ability to understand the levels of the production and consumption of ceramics on a local scale in order to highlight typology and diversity in the social consumption is not yet possible.

However, I would like to attempt social consumption analysis using the data currently available to us. In line with the guiding idea of this publication, here are a few reflections on two phenomena typically found in northern Italy.

The first phenomenon concerns the production of ceramics without lead glaze, but with fine, well prepared clay, usually fired in oxidizing conditions. Its presence was recently noted into two types of context linked to different forms of settlement: the first are specialized centers that we could call 'emporia' (like Venice and Comacchio); the second are ancient cities (like Ravenna, Rimini and Cesena). These offer two different perspectives of interpretation.

Since the pottery found in Comacchio (and maybe even in Venice) was not imported from outside (central and southern Italy, the Mediterranean), it must be inferred that it may have been produced locally.⁴⁸ Minero-petrographic analysis does not exclude

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- 45 A. Vince, 'Forms, functions, and manufacturing techniques of late 9th- and 10th century wheel thrown pottery in England and their origins', in D. Piton ed., *Travaux de Groupe de Recherches et D'études sur la céramique dans le Nord-Pas-De-Calais*, Groupe de Recherches et d'études sur la céramique dans le Nord/Pas-de-Calais, Saint-Josse-sur-Mer, 1993, pp. 151–64. A. Vince, 'Ceramic petrology and the study of Anglo-Saxon and later medieval ceramics', in *Medieval Archaeology*, 49, 2005, pp. 219–45. See Mannoni, for his ground-breaking research into clays and traces of working: T. Mannoni, 'Analisi mineralogiche e tecnologiche delle ceramiche medievali. Nota II', in *Atti del V Convegno Internazionale della Ceramica*, Albisola, 1972, pp. 107–28; T. Mannoni, *La ceramica medievale a Genova e nella Liguria*, Bordighera, 1975; M. G. Magi, T. Mannoni, 'Analisi mineralogiche di ceramiche mediterranee. Nota IV', in *Atti dell'VIII Convegno Internazionale della Ceramica*, Albisola, 1975, pp. 155–66.
- 46 G. Perry, 'Pottery Production in Anglo-Scandinavian Torksey (Lincolnshire): Reconstructing and Contextualising the *Chaîme Opérateur*', in *Medieval Archaeology*, 60, 2016, pp. 72–114.
- 47 The site excavated in Loc. Crocetta, Possessione Canale, near Sant'Agata Bolognese (BO) could be an exception here. This settlement (tenth–eleventh century) produced a considerable amount of ceramics, with some theories as to its consumption: F. Sbarra, 'La ceramica di un villaggio di X secolo nell'area padana: produzione e circolazione', in R. Curina and C. Negrelli eds, *1° Incontro di Studio sulle Ceramiche Tardoantiche e Alto medievali Cer.Am.Is* (Manerba 1998), Mantova, 2002, pp. 95–95-124, Tav. 11. The weakness of this interpretation, however, lies in the empirical division of the material, in turn based on the distance of diffusion of given types.
- 48 Regarding this category of products, see C. Negrelli, 'Produzione, circolazione e consumo tra VI e IX secolo: dal territorio del Padovetere a Comacchio', in F. Berti, M. Bollini, S. Gelichi and J. Ortalli eds, *Genti nel Delta da Spina a Comacchio. Uomini, territorio e culto dall'Antichità all'Alto medioevo*,

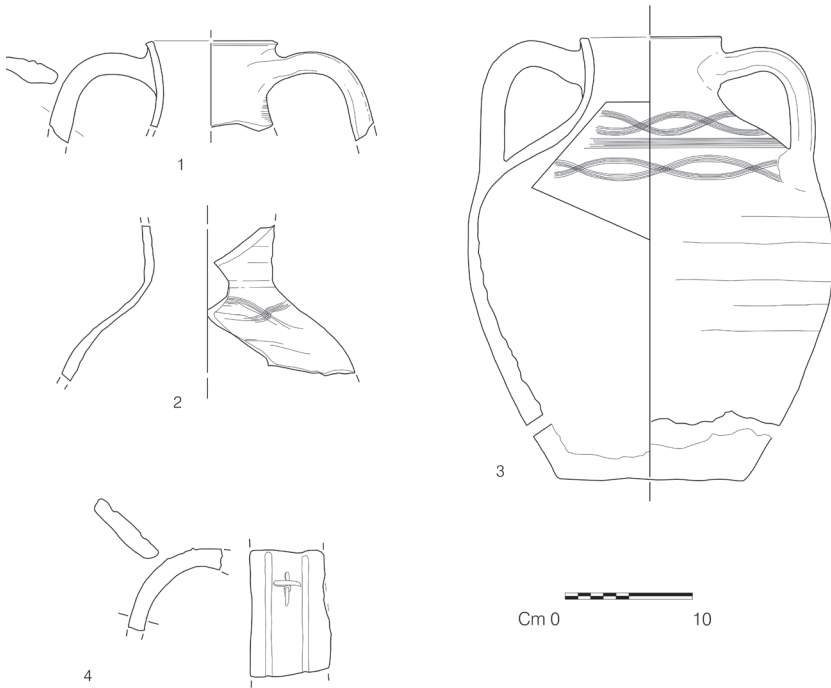


Fig. 5. Pottery without glaze with two handles from Comacchio (small local amphora?) (eight–ninth century) (courtesy Claudio Negrelli).

this hypothesis.⁴⁹ The variety of shape of the pottery — very standardized types and decorations — is extremely limited: only closed forms with a flat bottom and almost always with two handles are currently documented (fig. 5). It is logical to think that these were products with a specific function (perhaps small amphorae). They might also have been used to divide the contents of the globular amphora and transfer them into smaller containers that were perhaps more functional when transporting goods on the lagoons and rivers where a different type of craft was needed⁵⁰ (fig. 6).

Ferrara, 2007, pp. 444–54; C. Negrelli, 'Towards a definition of early medieval pottery: amphorae and other vessels in the northern Adriatic between the 7th and the 8th centuries', in S. Gelichi and R. Hodges eds, *From one Sea to Another. Trading Places in the European and Mediterranean Early Middle Ages* (Comacchio 2009), Turnhout, 2012, pp. 49–413.

49 For a preliminary report, see C. Capelli, '6. Analisi archeometriche', in S. Gelichi et al., 'I materiali da Comacchio', in F. Berti, M. Bollini, S. Gelichi and J. Ortalli eds, *Genti nel Delta da Spina a Comacchio. Uomini, territorio e culto dall'Antichità all'Alto medioevo*, Ferrara, 2007, p. 643.

50 S. Gelichi, 'Societies at the edge: new Cities in the Adriatic Sea during the Early Middle Ages (8th–9th centuries)', in S. Gelichi and R. Hodges, *New Directions in Early Medieval European Archaeology: Spain and Italy compared. Essays for Riccardo Francovich*, Turnhout, 2015, pp. 293–97, Figg. 5–7.

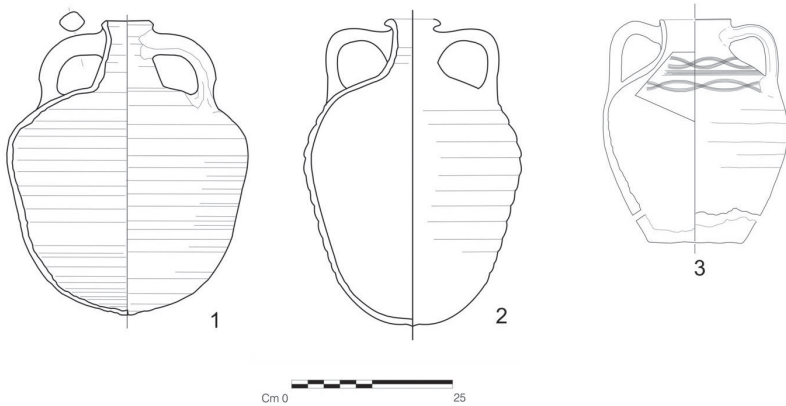


Fig. 6. Example of small local amphora (n. 3) from Comacchio in comparison with imported amphorae (eighth–ninth century) (nn. 1–2).

The presence of this type of object in contemporary monastic or urban contexts inland⁵¹ could support this interpretation. This pottery was, therefore, an element of distinction, but not necessarily one of inequality: its presence is closely related to the functions of the places where it was produced. Indeed, it might represent an element of differentiation, not in terms of the ceramic objects themselves, but their contents.

In recent years, however, in some urban contexts during the seventh and eighth centuries (and, in some cases, also the ninth–tenth centuries) pottery made using fine, well-prepared clay would not necessarily survive. We refer, in particular, a series of urban contexts of Ravenna (such as Piazza Traversari, Via Cavour and Piazza Anita Garibaldi)⁵² (fig. 7). Some significant examples of this type of pottery have, however, been found here: both similar to that coming from Comacchio (i.e., the small jar with two handles) and also other types of closed or open shapes (for example, single-handled bottles and basins) (fig. 8). However, a kiln producing this type of ceramics has recently been discovered in Classe, in the suburbs of Ravenna, on the site of the Petriana Basilica.⁵³ This might point to a readily identifiable consumer, whereas the case of early medieval deposits of accumulation discovered on Via Cavour could be related to a proper commercial workshop. One may suppose that the local economy was vibrant, at least until the eighth century, perhaps indirectly related, through *flumisellum Padennae*, to

51 For example, ceramics of this type have been found during excavation of the monastery of Nonantola (Modena) from the late eighth century: see anticipated details in Gelichi 'Societies', Fig. 7.

52 An anticipation of the results of these excavations with an accurate analysis of the ceramics so far discovered can be found in the recently published C. Guarnieri, G. Montevecchi and C. Negrelli, 'Ravenna, una città in declino? Contesti altomedievali in ambito urbano', in S. Gelichi and C. Negrelli eds, *Adriatico altomedievale (VI–XI secolo). Scambi, porti, produzioni*, Venezia, 2017, pp. 115–58.

53 E. Cirelli, 'Material culture in Ravenna and its hinterland between the 8th and the 10th century', in V. West-Harling ed., *Three Empires, three Cities: Identity, Material Culture and Legitimacy in Venice, Ravenna and Rome, 750–1000*, Turnhout, 2015, pp. 116–19, Figg. 12–13.

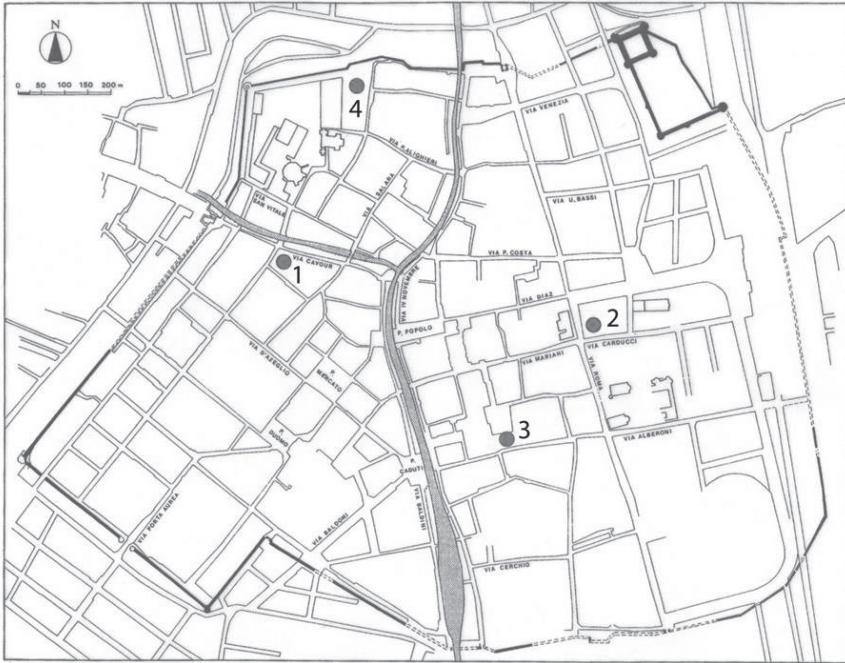


Fig. 7. Urban context from Ravenna discussed in the paper 1. Via Cavour 60. 2. Piazza Anita Garibaldi. 3. Via Guaccimanni, via G. Boccaccio, largo Firenze. 4. Via P. Traversari (from Guarnieri, Montevecchi, Negrelli, 'Ravenna una città in declino?', fig. 1).

the River Po, one of the most important infrastructures of the medieval city. In the case of the excavation of Piazza Anita Garibaldi (in the east of the city), a *domus* — of imperial Roman tradition — continued to exist until the seventh century, when the whole area was converted and, perhaps, a building (a small chapel?) was built near the *Plateia Maior*. Piazza Anita Garibaldi sat in an important position within the city during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages: close the church of San Giovanni Evangelista and the imperial palace. Finally, also the site of Piazza Traversari, in the north west of Ravenna, is of great importance. In this case, a series of houses from the seventh to the ninth century is well preserved. Not particularly large, they are rectangular in shape, divided into various rooms and built in bricks on strong foundations. This context must still be attributed to the new type of medium and high standard buildings that were constructed in many cities in the Carolingian and post-Carolingian eras, especially in central Italy.

From a more general economic point of view, Ravenna at this time would have been undergoing a shift from a redistribution center to a center of consumption. These contexts are not only of the urban type, but also characterized by medium and high social content, both in terms of the quality of the residential structures and their topographical position within the urban context. These contexts are significant

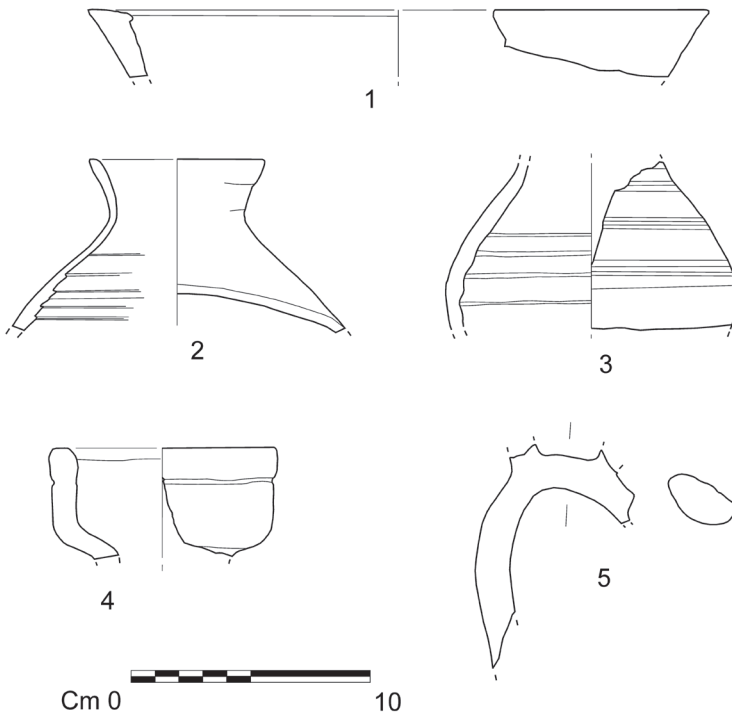


Fig. 8. Pottery without glaze from Ravenna, via Traversari (courtesy C. Negrelli).

not only for the presence of these ceramics, but also for the overall composition of household products: special imports (the globular amphorae with their valuable content) and items of particular value, such as some glazed or lead glazed pottery.

A relatively similar situation also seems to be emerging from other areas in the Po Valley: particularly the cases of Rimini (the excavation of Piazza Ferrari) and, perhaps, Cesena (the Garampo hill). In the case of Rimini, the plausible, but by no means certain, reconstruction of the passages of ownership of the urban space between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages — namely, from the aristocracy (sixth century) to monasteries (seventh century) and then back to the nobles (eighth century) — represents reasonably well social levels of consumption and can, therefore, explain the quality of the artifacts and the nature of the associations.⁵⁴ In the case of Cesena, however, the most likely context is that of military use — the materials come from an environment up against fortified walls built during Late Antiquity — and so

54 C. Negrelli, *Rimini Capitale. Strutture insediative, sociali ed economiche tra V e VIII secolo*, Firenze, 2008, pp. 48–102.

it would be the specific social category that determined the nature of the contexts and, in this case, the associations.⁵⁵

In these cases, one might, therefore, be faced with a situation whereby pottery (distributed in a different manner within the same context, in this case urban) may constitute an element of distinction. This could mean that the elite used certain goods, but also objects, as a mark of distinction. Within a framework of apparent homogenization, even a glazed jug or simply a fine ceramic bowl might have made a difference. This is true for two main reasons. Firstly, the rarity or difficulty of access of an item would entail a higher cost, thus creating inequality by its very acquisition. Its use may also indicate a different degree of sophistication in daily life, with diverse consequences: both in the type of diet and style of conviviality. But there is another aspect which I think it is interesting to note. Distinction is not created so much (or only) by individual types of pottery, but by the character of the associations of these objects. In essence, it is the type of combinations that characterize the domestic environment and so constitutes a factor of inequality. So, one should analyze the recurrence of these associations, rather than the individual types. For me, the examples discovered in Ravenna seem to point in this direction and so should help orientate future research.

Lastly, on a more general level, it should be noted that such associations are currently being documented in both new emerging centers (such as Venice and Comacchio) and in ancient centers with a strong and established aristocracy. It might be tempting to use the old distinction of Lombard/Byzantine areas, but this might prove to be a weak heuristic tool. Yet it is very likely that such an affinity, if any, should be sought in what has been termed 'Italic Byzantium': a much more promising concept and one that could be linked to a different form of access to property (at least until the eighth century) and a different system of political relationships, all within the sphere of Italian power in the Carolingian and post-Carolingian ages. However, generalizations are always dangerous, especially during a stage of research that has yet to construct good contexts for comparison. If a city/countryside comparison produces unsatisfactory overall results in terms of the social context that these represent, a city/city comparison is also likely to be disappointing at present, in that we currently only have modest representative urban social nuclei. Furthermore, instead of comparing 'Lombard' and 'Byzantine' cities, why should we not compare cities along rivers and those along the ancient Roman consular roads? Perhaps such a novel comparison could give rise to new insights into ceramic consumption.

Conclusion: The Value of Pottery Over Time

A few words in conclusion. Peter Davey and Richard Hodges published (during the processual era), a table of the values of imported objects⁵⁶ (fig. 9). But now, in

55 C. Negrelli, F. Bracci and A. A. Rucco, '1.2.2 I materiali ceramici dalla tarda Antichità alla prima età altomedievale', in M. Miari and C. Negrelli eds, *Ritmi di transizione. Dal Garampo al Foro Annonario: ricerche archeologiche 2009–2013*, Firenze, 2016, pp. 93–130.

56 Davey and Hodges, 'Ceramics and Trade', pp. 6–11.



HIGH-VALUE IMPORTS
 Coins
 Textiles
 Glasses
 Ceramics
 Certain building materials
 Exotica

LOW-VALUE IMPORTS
 Ceramics
 Stone mortars
 Honestones
 Quernstones
 Certain building materials

Fig. 9. Value of pottery in comparison with other typology of commodities according to a processualistic (from Davey, Hodges, *Ceramics and trade*, p. 7).

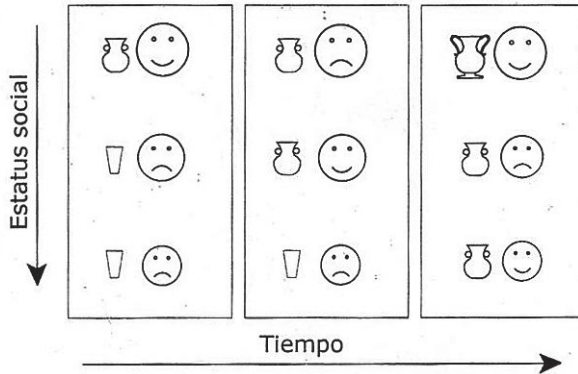


Fig. 10. Value of pottery according to a post-processualist point of view (Gutierrez, *Mediterranean*, Fig. 1.2).

this post-processual era awaiting new Positivism, we are well aware that the value of pottery can be defined as ‘unstable’⁵⁷ (fig. 10). Therefore, in this contribution, we have tried to find instances of such instability within apparent homogeneity. We have tested the value of this instability and translated it, when possible, as a social value. It is not easy to measure this instability or translate it, when and where possible, in terms of social disparity: firstly, it presupposes the conceptual reconstruction of the modes of production and the mechanisms of redistribution and exchange, plus an association and comparison with the variability of social contexts. Results of some historical significance are only possible by working within these parameters. Not only must we conceptualize our heuristic approaches better — all too often theoretically weak, if not generic — but also, and above all, must we return to rigorous philological approaches to the contexts, from the analysis of an individual artifact to an understanding of how they were formed.

I believe that there is much to do in the future, mainly in two directions. The first concerns the creation of targeted archaeometric projects, without which any

57 A. Gutierrez, *Mediterranean pottery in Wessex households (13th to 17th centuries)*, Oxford, 2000, fig. 1.2.

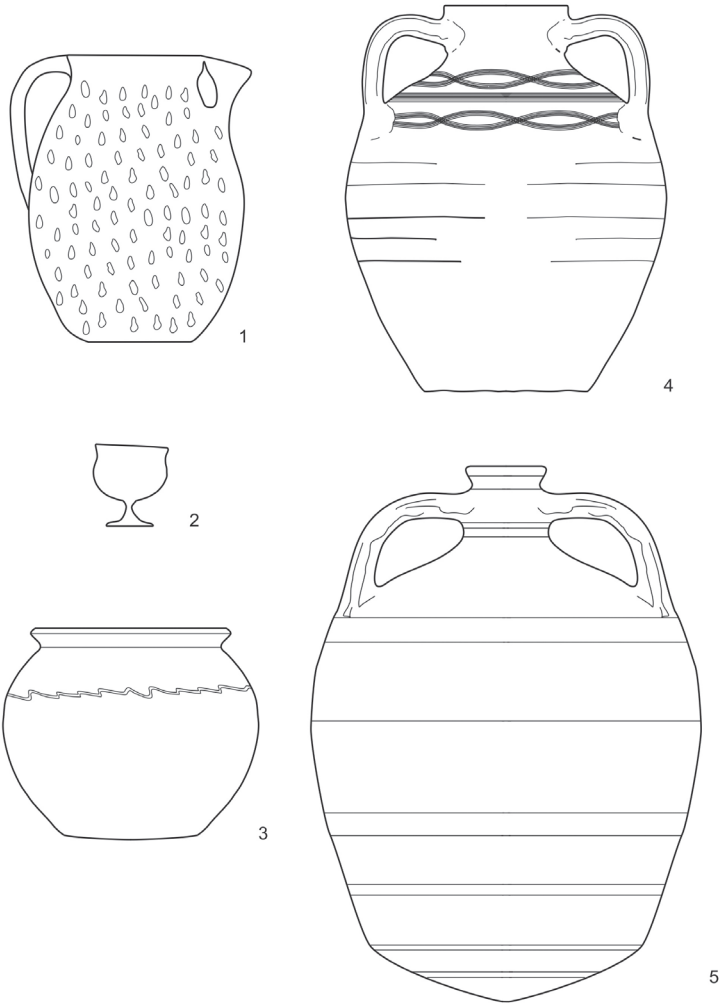


Fig. 11. Example of combinations of objects in some coastal settlements in North-Eastern Italy (eight–ninth century), like Venice, Comacchio, Ravenna: imported amphorae, coarse pottery, local refined pottery, lead glazed pottery, glasses.

interpretation of production and distribution systems will continue to be merely generic. The second regards consumption: here, we should focus more on comparing the associations and various combinations of objects in different contexts, rather than on the presence of any single type of pottery (fig. 11). On a more general note, it is important that any project should be carefully planned and have clearly defined targets.