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White Wares: An interdisciplinary approach to a group of Medieval Ceramics

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White Wares of the Byzantine Period (7th – 13th century) are a highly distributed medieval ceramic group in Europe, Anatolia, Russia and the Crimea. With a broad scale of motives and elaborately executed ornamentations on tableware, architectural ceramics, icons and plaques, this pottery group seems to be the only exported ceramic good of Byzantium during the Middle Byzantine Period. Despite there being no discovered kiln or related workshop where the White Wares were found, the great number of finds at the excavations of Constantinople have led scholars to consider the city to be the only production centre.

It has already been argued by students of ceramics that Byzantine Archaeology was a neglected branch of Classical Archaeology in the late 19th century, which resulted in the loss of stratigraphical evidence. Subsequent investigations were dominated by the so-called *Art Historical* perspective, which focused on interpretation of the material culture by classifying discoveries with their surface treatments. With the instability created by World War I, the first two decades of the 20th century saw the same general approach to the Constantinopolitan ceramics. Neither the very first evaluations of White Wares, nor the relatively contemporary ones, cover all aspects of an examination of ceramic shards. This not only involves archaeological and art historical assessments, but also chemical analyses to determine production centre(s), and inclusions and changes in glazing technology, which are essential factors that shed light on Middle Byzantine pottery production and consumption.

The aim of this paper is to bring together all art historical and archaeological examinations, and published examples, in order to create a full database of White Wares. Furthermore, this paper will discuss problematic individual approaches to White Wares, and the failure of these approaches to establish a template for this important ceramic group.