

The pottery is the most numerous category of the movable archaeological material recorded during excavations, reflecting daily life and human activity in ancient times. The ceramic vessels were used for many purposes, including preparing and serving of food. The morphological changes of vessels are good chronological indicator, very helpful in dating of archaeological layers. Moreover, the pottery was a crucial element in the distribution of goods as the food container or imported commodity itself. The latter situation concerned the fine and semi-fine ware pottery, the most luxurious category of ceramic vessels, including table ware, ceramic vessels and oil lamps, often imported on long distances.

In order to properly interpret the ceramic material, it is necessary to implement an integrated methodological approach, involving different research methods. Detailed macroscopic characteristics of vessels (by naked eye or under magnifying glass), allows to classify vessels, determine their types and chronology, describe the fabric, and thus define the basic technological features and speculate on provenance of the vessels based on published analogies. More precise scientific methods make it possible to look deep into the ceramics under analysis and characterise the mineralogical (petrographic analysis) and chemical composition, which, being characteristic of the geographical region, due to their specific geology, provide information on the production technology and provenance of the ceramics.

The integrated methodology, combining all kinds of methods, will be applied in the proposed project, focused on fine and semi-fine ware pottery, excavated in the areas of two harbour cities in Cyprus, the important island situated on the crossroads of the main sea routes. Nea Paphos and Kourion, two cities located in the south-western Cyprus, around 60km from each other, performed an important role in the Hellenistic-Roman period (late 4th c. BCE – 4th c. CE). In case of Nea Paphos we can even talk about the functions of the island's capital since about 200 B.C. Due to the key role of this city, it has been investigated by the archaeologists since years, but there is still a lack of complete picture of its material culture, especially in terms of imports. The information published so far, based on macroscopic analysis, suggest the existence of variety of imported materials from all over the Mediterranean, reflecting the high position of the city and its inhabitants. Even less is known about Hellenistic and Early Roman Kourion where work focuses on the Late Roman period and the moment when the city was destroyed by a major earthquake in 365 A.D. Therefore, the aim of the proposed project is to fill a research gap and to recreate the patterns of supply in both cities, the actual role of Kourion in period under study, and the relations between the cities through the detailed analysis and comparative studies of the fine and semi-fine ware pottery ceramics found in both cities, with an emphasis on long-distance imports.

These actions will allow for a better understanding of the functioning of both cities in terms of ceramic distribution, reflecting consumer preferences and their social position. Comparative studies of imported fine wares found in Nea Paphos, the capital city, and Kurion, whose position is not well recognized, are innovative, also in terms of integrated methodology, combining archaeological and laboratory methods. Ultimately, the results of the project will be interpreted in the wider context of the role of fine and semi-fine ceramics in trade relations in the Eastern Mediterranean and, more broadly, in ancient economics.