

Mapping Byzantine Amphorae in Bulgaria and in the Black Sea Region (7th-14th c.)

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Mapping is a widely used method in archaeology and was chosen as one of the main methods for the study of the 7th to 14th century amphorae from present-day Bulgaria. Visualizing the geographic distribution of amphora types during different historical periods by plotting every single finding helped not only define amphorae's chronology but also outline the distribution patterns, routes and networks, and the contact zones between different cultures. Mapping the quantities of amphorae found at certain locations led to the identification of primary and secondary consumption and/or distribution centers. It also gave an idea about the volume of the imported agricultural products and the scale of the commercial transactions. Combining all this with the characteristics of the archaeological sites (urban, provincial, monastic, etc.) where amphorae were found allowed for establishing the nature of amphora distribution.

Even though mapping ultimately proved successful, certain shortcomings must be noted and taken in mind when analyzing and interpreting the results. It is never possible to have a complete data set and the way data is collected introduces an inherent bias. External factors such as access to the materials, thoroughness of individual archaeological excavations, information about archaeological contexts, etc., significantly influence the output and may result in a misleading or strongly distorted picture.

Nevertheless, when used with reasonable precaution and with a full understanding of its positives and negatives, the method allowed for successful identification of the distribution patterns of twenty amphora types, several amphora stamps, and a dozen of graffiti from present-day Bulgaria over three well-defined chronological periods. These findings can then be used as starting point for future studies in the field of medieval amphora and trade relations.