

Ceramic production of Late Byzantine and Ottoman Thessaloniki: the long continuity and diversity of urban workshops

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Research objective

The Ottoman conquest of Byzantine Thessaloniki in 1430 was a turning point in the history of this city positioned at the intersection of Balkan and Mediterranean networks. The conquest initiated the gradual process of Ottomanisation, defined by the changes of urban fabric and population structure. *Selânik* emerged as the largest city in the Ottoman Balkans and a dynamic production centre. This interdisciplinary study combined archaeology, materials science and history to shed a new light on the ceramic production in Thessaloniki between the 13th and 19th century. It aimed to investigate the transfer of technological knowledge during the Byzantine-Ottoman transition in the city and potting traditions of Ottoman Thessaloniki in context of social diversity.

Archaeological site of Hamza Bey Mosque

Ceramics of this study were unearthed at Hamza Bey Mosque (*Alkazar*), located in the centre of historical Thessaloniki (Fig. 1). Built ex novo in 1467/8 close to an inn and market, this mosque was part of an early Ottoman phase of urban transformation. Archaeological excavations included 23 small-scale trenches, set to investigate the foundations of three main structural phases, revealing ceramics of Late Byzantine (the 13th-14th centuries) and Ottoman (the 15th-19th centuries) periods.

Methodology

130 samples of common pottery and tobacco pipes were studied with ceramic petrography, wavelength dispersive X-ray fluorescence (WD-XRF) analysis and scanning electron microscopy with energy dispersive spectrometry (SEM-EDS) analysis for the technological characterisation of ceramic bodies, slips and glazes as well as provenance determination. Analyses were conducted at the Cyprus Institute (ceramic petrography and SEM-EDS) and the Fitch Laboratory of the British School at Athens (WD-XRF).

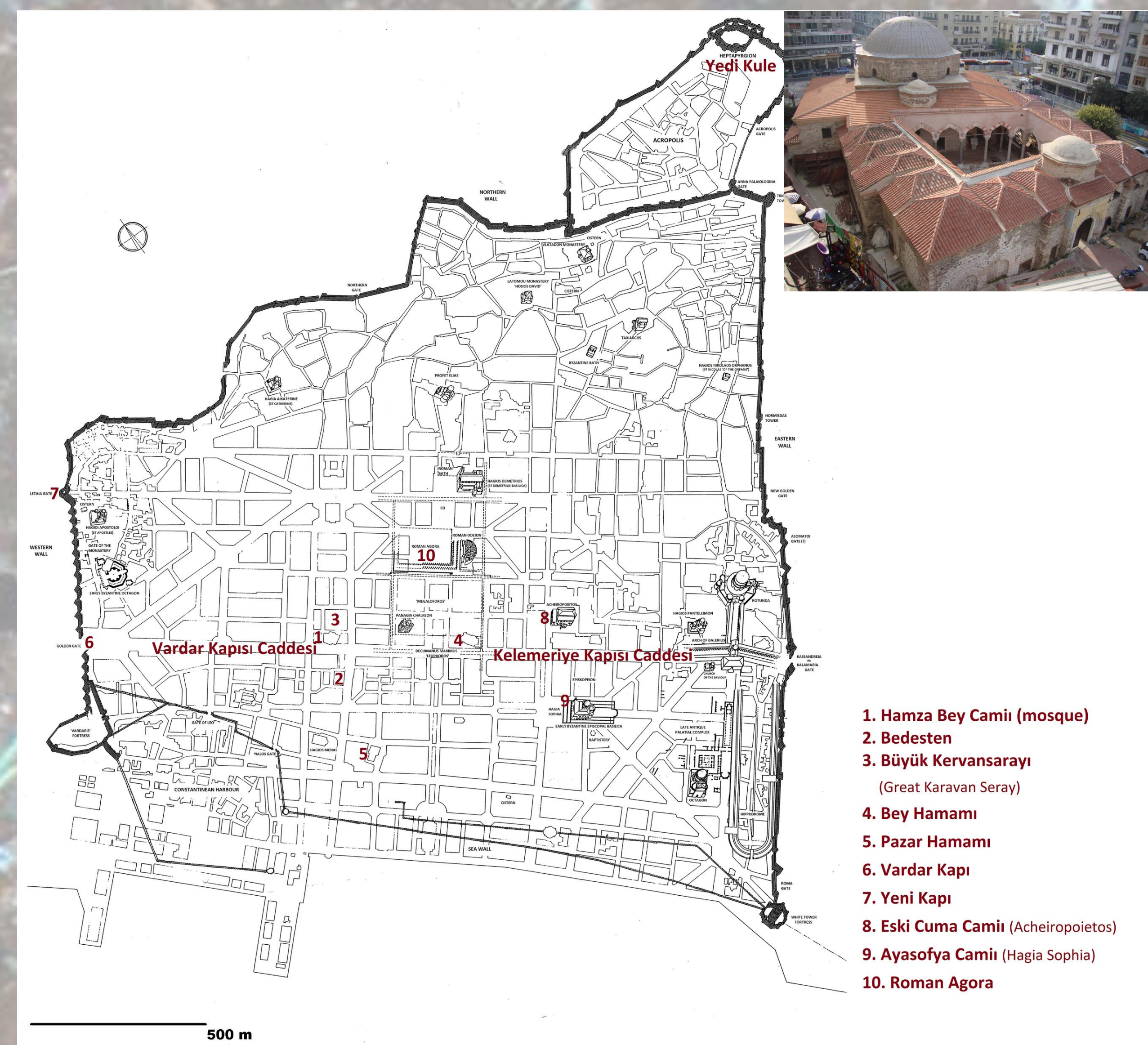


Figure 1 Map of Thessaloniki and photo of Hamza Bey Mosque

The long continuity of glazed tableware production (the 13th-19th centuries)

The results of petrographic and chemical analyses showed the continuity in the production of glazed tableware between the Late Byzantine and Late Ottoman periods (Fig. 2). Ceramics of Fabric 1 were prepared from locally available raw materials, double-fired and decorate with white non-calcareous slips and high-lead glazes (Figs 3-5).

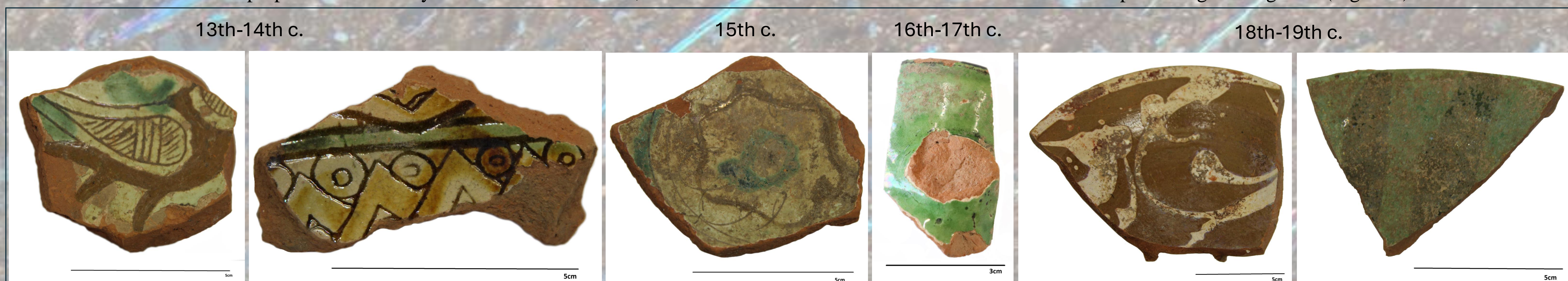


Figure 2 Glazed wares of Thessaloniki, classified as Fabric 1 (F1)

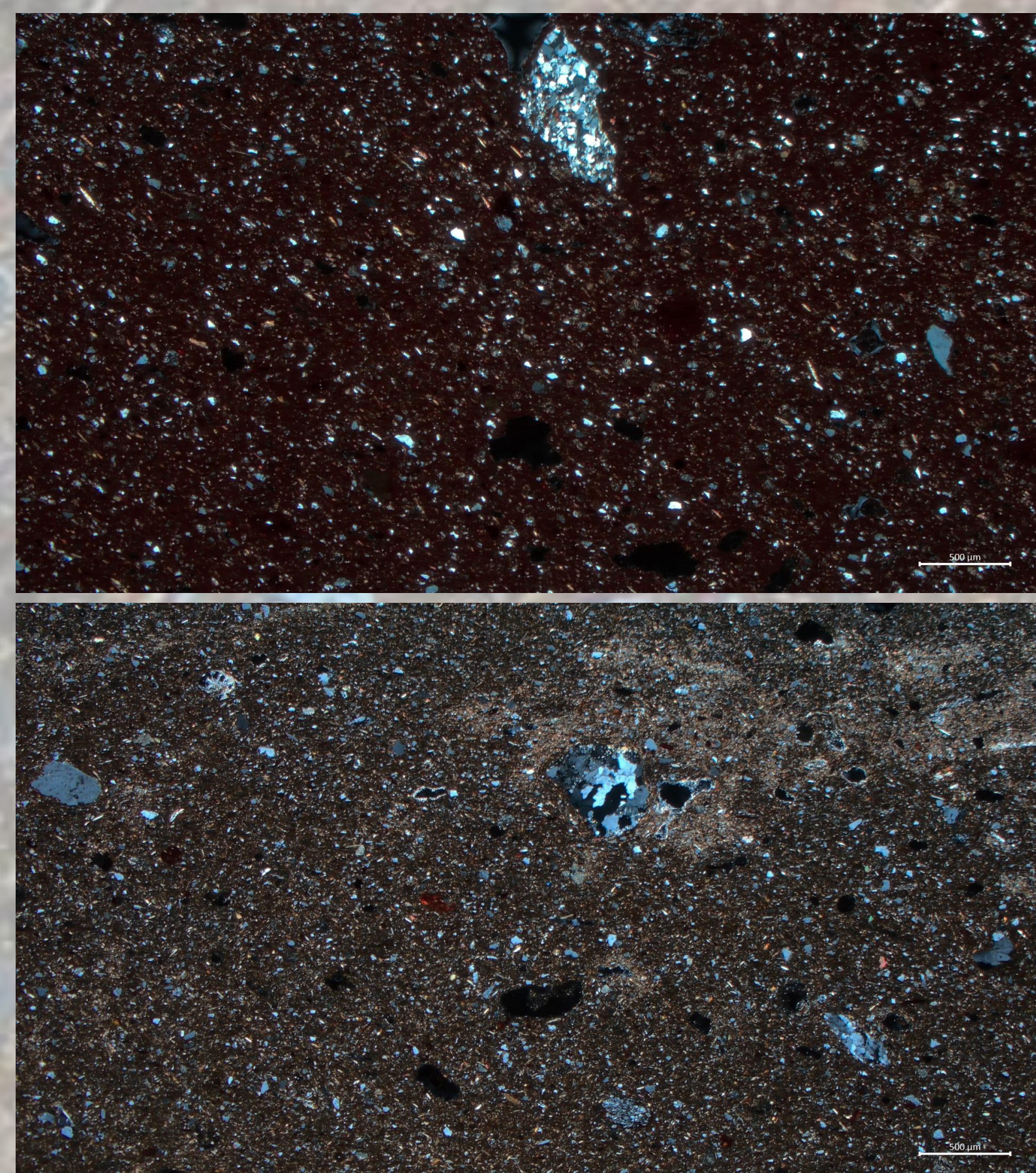


Figure 3 Petrographic photomicrographs of Fabric 1

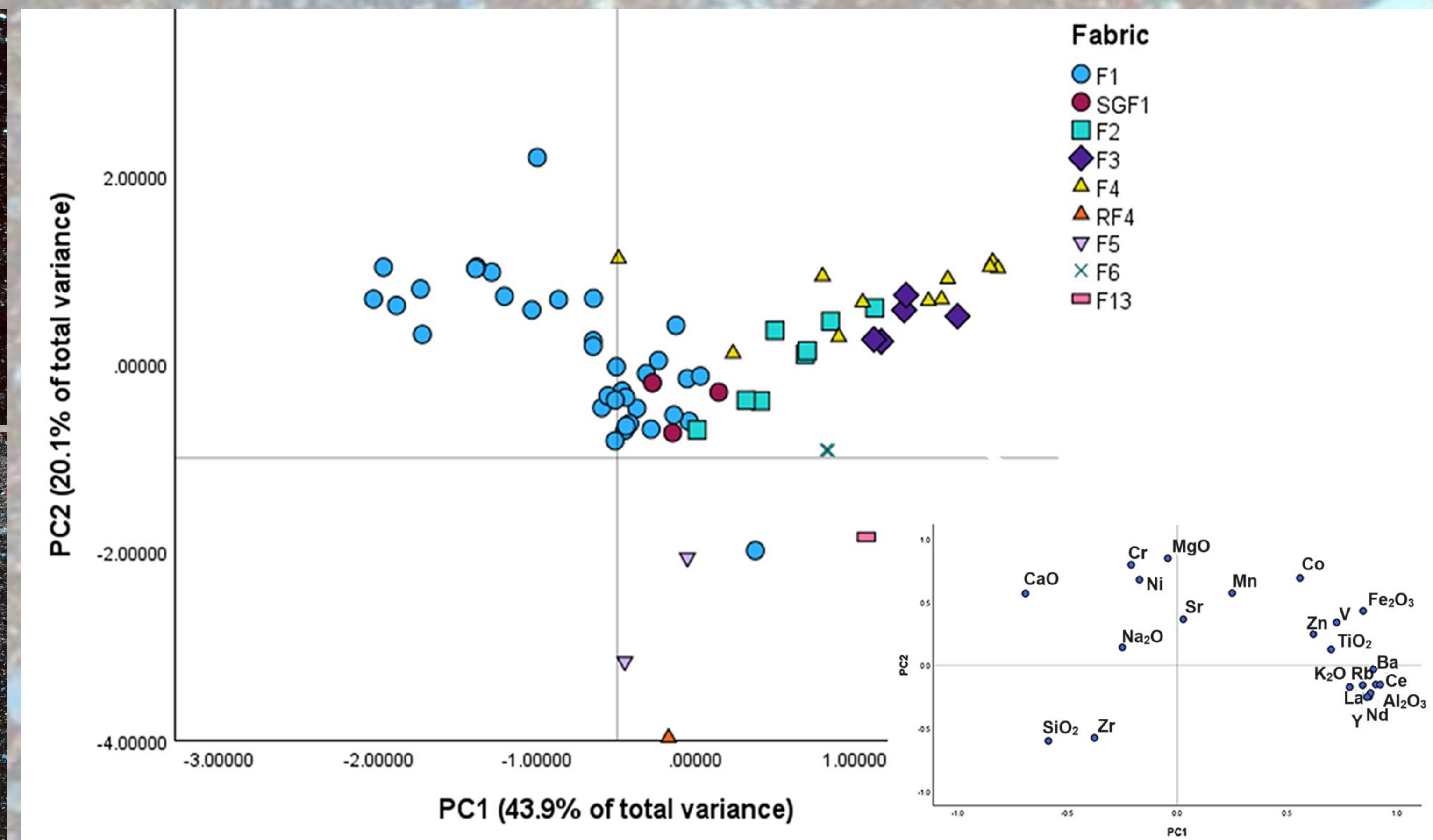


Figure 4 Scatter plot of first two principal components derived from WD-XRF analysis of ceramic bodies, excluding P₂O₅, Cu, Pb and Th.

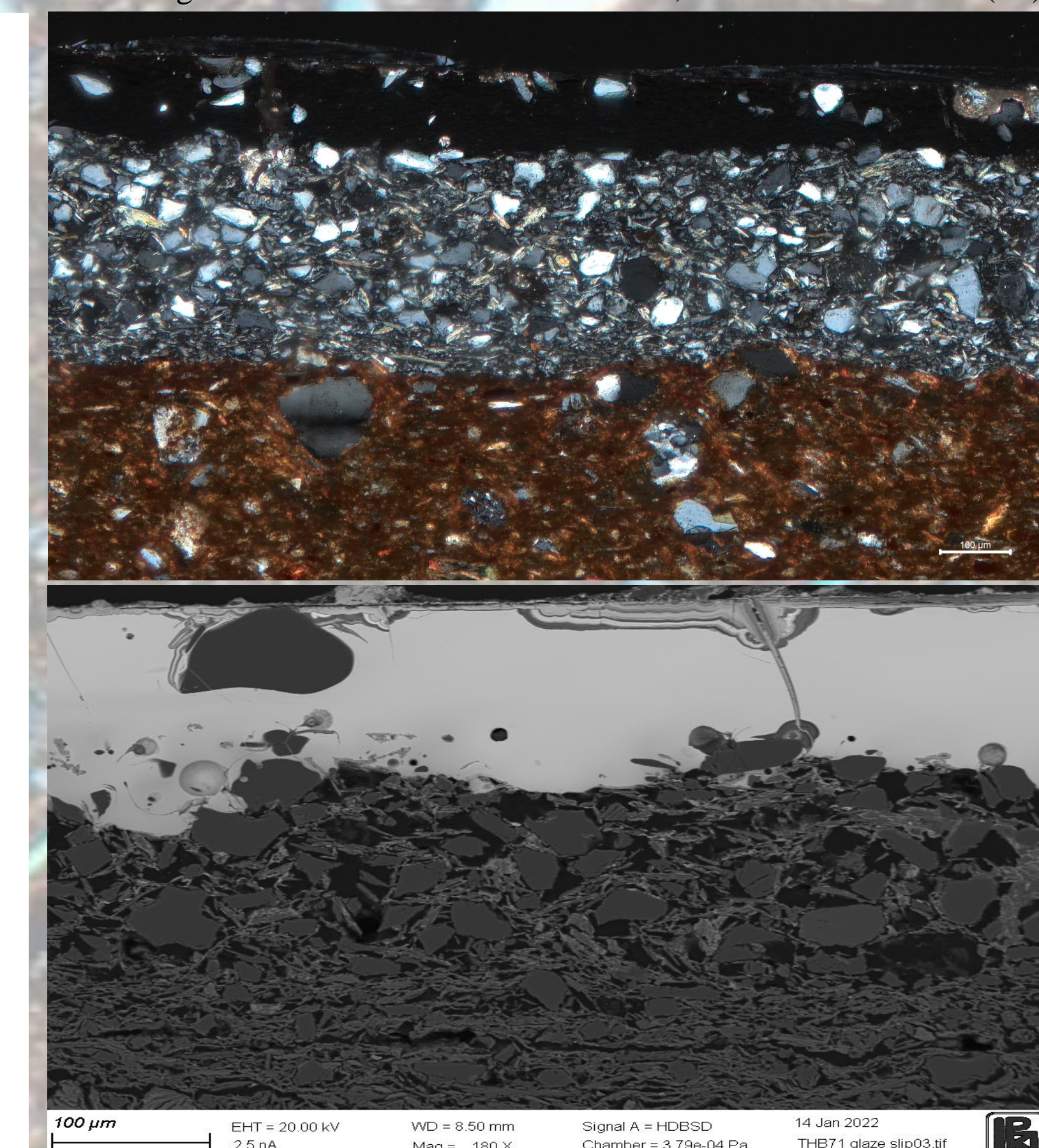


Figure 5 Petrographic and SEM photomicrographs of slips and glazes

Diversity of urban potting traditions in Ottoman Thessaloniki

In addition to the production of glazed tableware of Fabric 1, two other potting traditions of the Ottoman period were defined. The first was specialised in the production of coarse cooking and storage vessels between the 15th-17th centuries, characterised by clay mixing and tempering (Fig. 6). The second focused on the production of coarse pottery, glazed wares and tobacco pipes during the 18th-19th centuries and it was characterised by the clay refinement (Fig.7). In both cases, locally available non-calcareous clays were used.

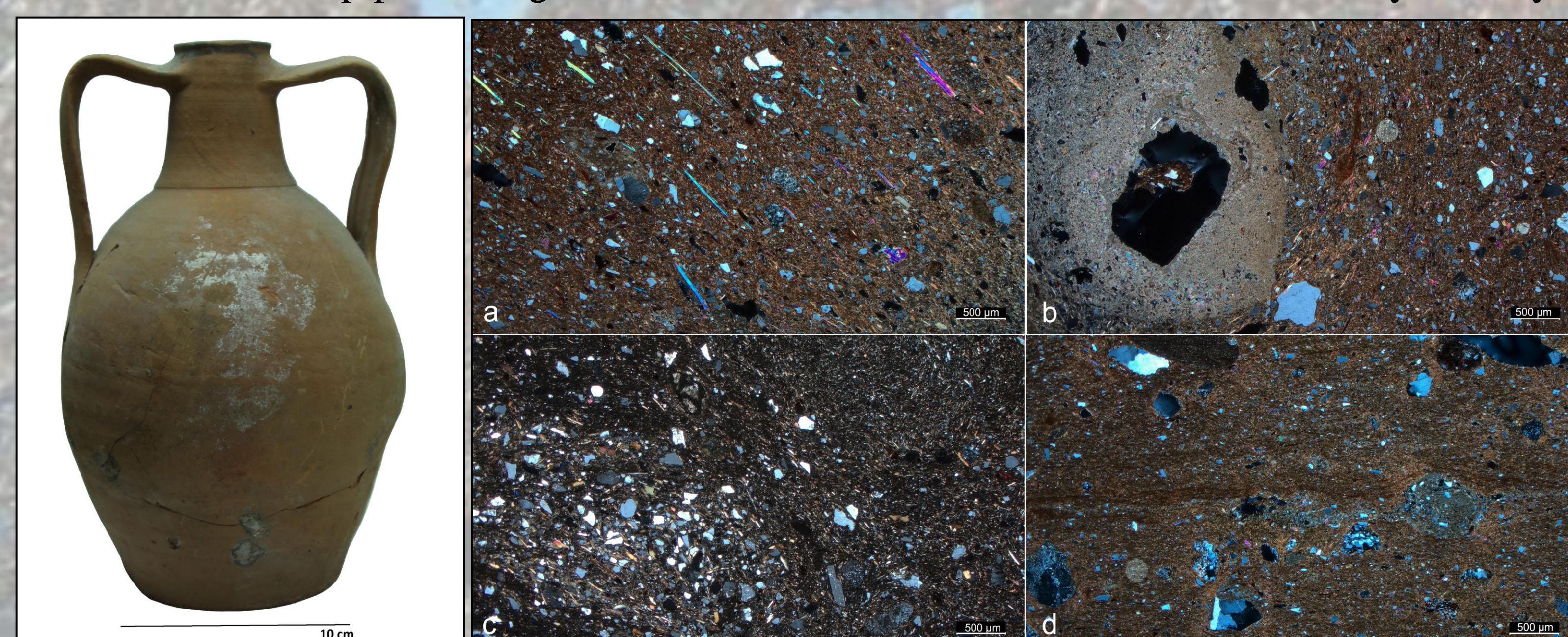


Figure 6 Coarse pottery of Fabric 2; photo of a jug (left) and petrographic photomicrographs (right)

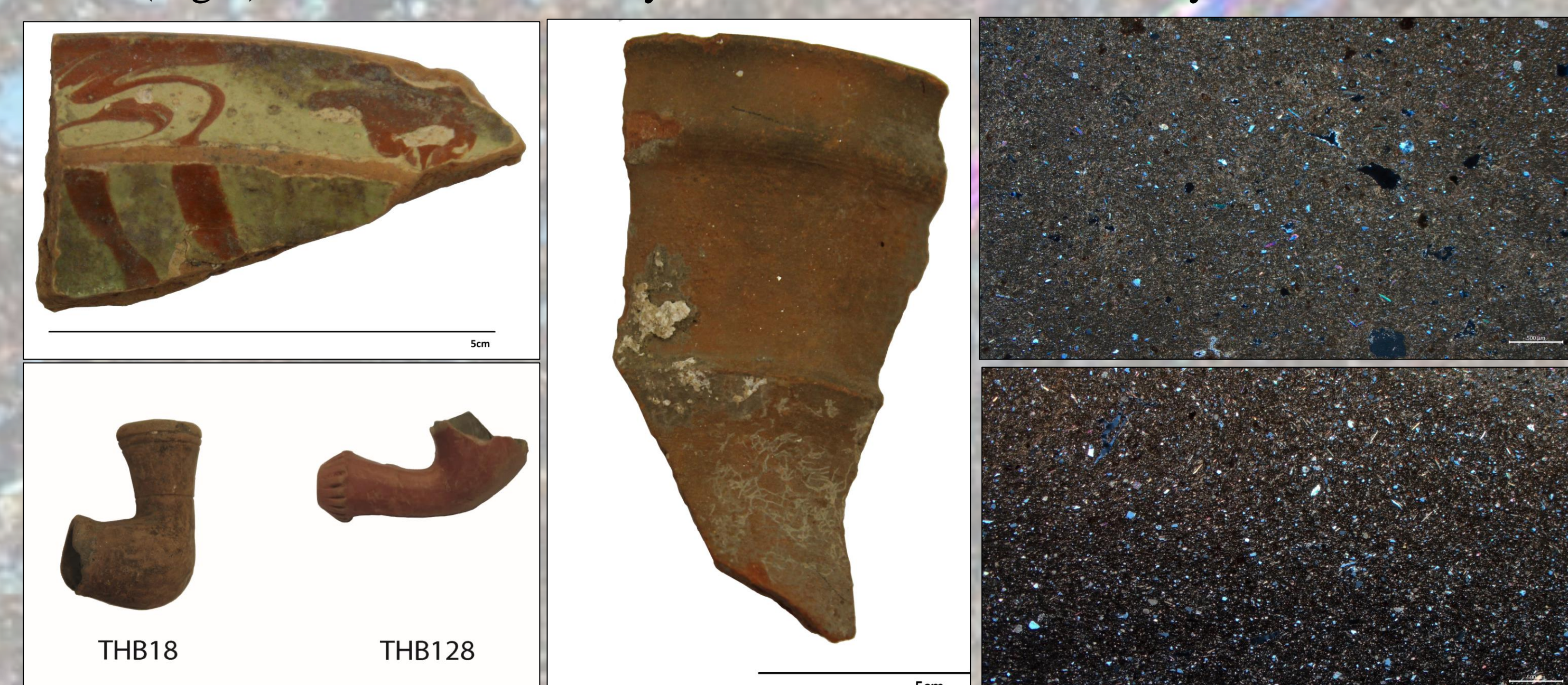


Figure 7 Ceramics of Fabric 4; photos of pottery and tobacco pipes (left) and petrographic photomicrographs (right)

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Bibliography

Živković, J., Raptis, K.T. & Slambeas, P. From Thessaloniki to Selânik: the long continuity of urban ceramic production in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. *Archaeol Anthropol Sci* 16, 146 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12520-024-02055-9>