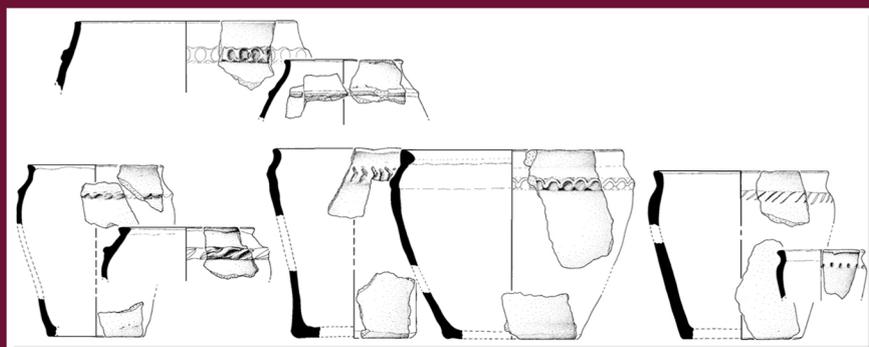
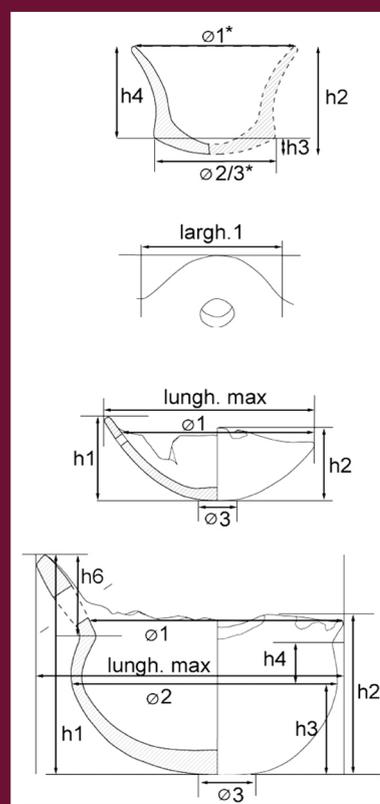
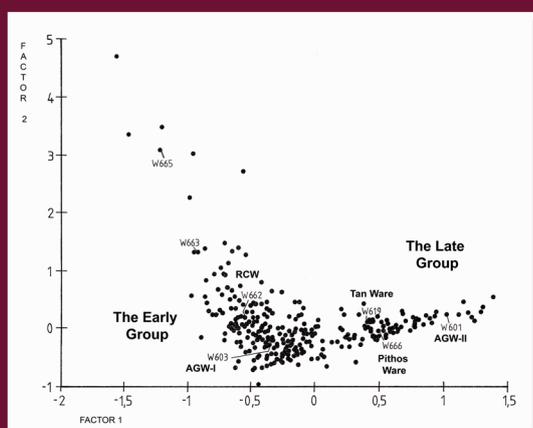


ANALYSING POTTERY

Processing – Classification – Publication



edited by

Barbara Horejs – Reinhard Jung – Peter Pavúk

Bratislava 2010

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Preface

Archaeologists working on ceramic finds from long-term, large-scale excavations all face similar problems: heaps of pottery from hundreds of contexts of diverse quality, more often than not re-deposited in a secondary or even tertiary position. There can be no general approach since each site has its own specific characteristics, be it a flat settlement lasting just a couple of generations or a tell-settlement in use for millennia. Likewise, pottery with simple or no decoration must be viewed from a different perspective than pottery with complex decoration. Hand-made pottery will pose different problems to mass-produced wheel-thrown ceramics and sherds from a settlement must be treated in yet another way than whole pots from a cemetery.

It was, therefore, our intention to produce an edited volume offering fresh insight into modern approaches to processing large amounts of ceramic finds from settlement excavations, going 'back to basics' so to speak. The volume focuses on archaeological practice and more specifically on factors that determine the methodological choices made by researchers under specific working conditions. In other words: which methodological approach is appropriate to which kind of ceramic assemblage and for which type of stratigraphic context, especially if the analysis is supposed to be completed in a reasonable period of time. The choice of a suitable method also depends on the questions for which we seek answers by analysing the material: chronology, pottery production and use, social structures etc.

We believe that there is no general answer to these questions and that a methodological pluralism is justified by the specific problems which arise from the nature of the material and its archaeological contexts. Nevertheless, by concentrating on practical case studies it should be possible to assemble a list of conditions that determine which methods of analysis – and especially which statistical methods – can be employed in order to analyse most effectively certain kinds of pottery from certain types of contexts.

At this stage the volume can look back at a history of its own. Initially, a group of young archaeologists working in Slovakia, Austria and the Czech Republic met for a two-day workshop in Bratislava on 28th-29th November 2003, funded by the Österreichisches Ost- und Südosteuropa-Institut. We then attempted to bring the topic to a pan-European level and organised a session at the XII. Annual Conference of the European Association of Archaeologists in Cracow held on 22nd September 2006. Finally, to round off the issue thematically and geographically, other colleagues were invited to contribute to the volume, along with the participants at the two meetings. We are now pleased to offer perspectives ranging chronologically from the Bronze Age down to the Early Middle Ages and geographically covering the Aegean, Anatolia, the Levant, Egypt, as well as Central Europe. It was decided to arrange the volume by subject, which in the end proved a daunting task since many contributions covered several aspects and were not easy to categorise.

Even if a specific model developed for a particular site cannot be applied en bloc to other sites, there is always something inspirational about other people's models. We therefore humbly hope to offer some inspiration with the contributions collected in this volume.

Bratislava, Salzburg and Vienna, 20.11.2009

Cooking Pottery in the Late Bronze Age Aegean – an Attempt at a Methodological Approach

BARTŁOMIEJ LIS

Introduction

Until recently, cooking pottery has been a rather neglected part of the Late Bronze Age ceramic assemblages unearthed in the Aegean¹. Recent years have brought to light some interesting and inspiring contributions on this subject, especially with regard to Crete. They featured issues such as the social aspects of food preparation and consumption, the identification of cooking sets and the contents of cooking pots as well as the differences between Mycenaean and Minoan cooking practices or the problem of *haute cuisine*². Articles covering the issues of cooking pottery and its social and even its historical implications, referring directly or indirectly to Greek archaeology, appear regularly in the *American Journal of Archaeology* and *Hesperia*, which attests to the growing popularity of this subject³. Nevertheless, a comprehensive study of this functional group with a broader chronological and geographical scope is still lacking. The main reason for this situation is, in my opinion, the fact that the attention of pottery experts has concentrated on the study of fine decorated pottery. Such an approach is understandable for many reasons. As a pottery category subject to changing fashions, decorated vessels constitute highly sensitive chronological indicators, whereas cooking pottery is much more conservative, determined by utilitarian considerations, and therefore changing more slowly. Moreover, decorated pottery was a means of expressing, or even reinforcing the social status of its users. Painted vessels for mixing, pouring and drinking were an indispensable part of wine consumption, which was an important area of social and political life in the Late Bronze Age (LBA) Aegean. In addition, painted vessels were a commodity very often exchanged on a regional and interregional scale. These are only some of the reasons that render decorated pottery an efficient tool for establishing chronology and dealing with social and economic questions, which partly justifies the neglect not only of cooking pots but also of the usually largest group in most of the Mycenaean ceramic assemblages – fine undecorated pottery.

There should be no doubt, however, as to how promising a study of cooking pottery might be. With regard to chronology, it may supplement conclusions derived from the study of fine pottery. In contexts that contain very little diagnostic decorated pottery or none at all, for example storage spaces

¹ I would like to thank Aleydis Van de Moortel and Eleni Zachou for inviting me to take part in the Mitrou project and giving me the permission to study the cooking pottery recovered in the excavation. I am very grateful to Jeremy Rutter for inspiring discussions and helpful guidelines, and Salvatore Vitale for his comments on this text. Finally, my thanks and appreciation go to the organisers of this conference, Barbara Horejs, Reinhard Jung and Peter Pavúk, for their great work in bringing us all together and creating a friendly atmosphere of cooperation during and after the session.

² Borgna 1995; Hruby 2006; Isaakidou 2007; Rutter 2004; Tzedakis – Martlew 1999; Yassur-Landau 2006 (2003–2004).

³ Ben-Shlomo et al. 2008; Birney 2008; Joyner 2007.

or kitchens, cooking pottery may provide the only possibility of placing such contexts in a chronological sequence. It may also greatly improve the accuracy of the dating of the survey material, since surface pottery comprises fair amounts of coarse wares and considerably less well-preserved diagnostic painted pottery than an ordinary excavation unit. This observation refers to the study of coarse wares and their fabrics in general. Some case studies carried out in Crete proved the usefulness of such an approach for dating of the survey material, if combined with the results from settlement excavations⁴.

In terms of socio-economic questions, the study of cooking pottery may shed new light on the problems already mentioned and offer some new perspectives. Examples to illustrate this may be a new approach to communal feasting from the perspective of food preparation and consumption⁵, a fresh look at trade in heavy and sturdy pots over long distances⁶, or a new way of evaluating the ancient diet by analysing the contents of cooking pots⁷. Ironically, the conservative nature of cooking pottery may be of great advantage – thorough changes in the assemblage, the technology, and the forms of cooking pots are usually signs of a substantial transformation in the economy or society. These, in turn, may be related to political developments, population movements or changes in the agriculture. Last but not least, cooking pots provide us with insight into food preparation – one of the basic components of every-day human life – an aspect sometimes overlooked in the course of pottery processing.

Bearing these observations in mind, I decided to carry out a study of the Late Bronze Age cooking pottery from the Greek mainland. The scarcity of published material led me to base my research on the pottery from the site of Mitrou, which is currently being excavated, a choice that further narrowed my main study area to East-Central Greece, where this settlement is located (Fig. 1). Before starting the traditional analysis, I had two main reasons for developing my own approach to the study of cooking pottery. Firstly, there were no other studies devoted solely to this subject that I could follow or refer to. Secondly, as cooking pottery differs from fine decorated wares in many respects, no direct transfer of methods should be undertaken. In the course of such preparatory study, I identified and had to overcome the following problems:

- nature and limitations of the site,
- definition and identification of cooking pottery,
- classification,
- appropriate recording and presentation methods

The following discussion will be structured according to these points.

Nature of the site

The site of Mitrou is located on a small islet off the coast of East Lokris, a region in East-Central Greece. The surface survey conducted by the Cornell Halai and East Lokris Project (CHELP) in 1988-89 established that the settlement was occupied throughout the entire Bronze and Early Iron Ages⁸. This pottery-based chronology was not only confirmed, but extended back to the Neolithic period by the results from the excavations that started in 2004 as part of a five-year project. Settlement deposits excavated by the end of the 2008 season ranged from Early Helladic II to the Late Protogeometric period, which corresponds to c. 2650 – 900 BC. Therefore, Mitrou is one of a limited number of sites where an apparently uninterrupted sequence spanning the entire Late Bronze Age is preserved, including preceding and following phases. Therefore, two major turning points in Greek prehistory connected with the emergence and decline of the Mycenaean culture, rarely attested in settlements, are well documented there. Because of the centuries-long building activity, extensive levelling, terracing and filling, the stratigraphy in the central area of the site is highly complicated. It will suffice to say that the buildings A, B, C and D uncovered to date in Mitrou were partially built on top of each other, with continuous reuse of earlier walls. More than 600 years (from Late Helladic I until the Middle Protogeometric period) are represented by a sequence of

⁴ Haggis – Mook 1993; Moody et al. 2003.

⁵ Attempted by Hruby 2006; Lis 2008.

⁶ For Aeginetan cooking pottery, see Lindblom 2001.

⁷ Tzedakis – Martlew 1999.

⁸ Kramer-Hajos – O'Neill 2008.

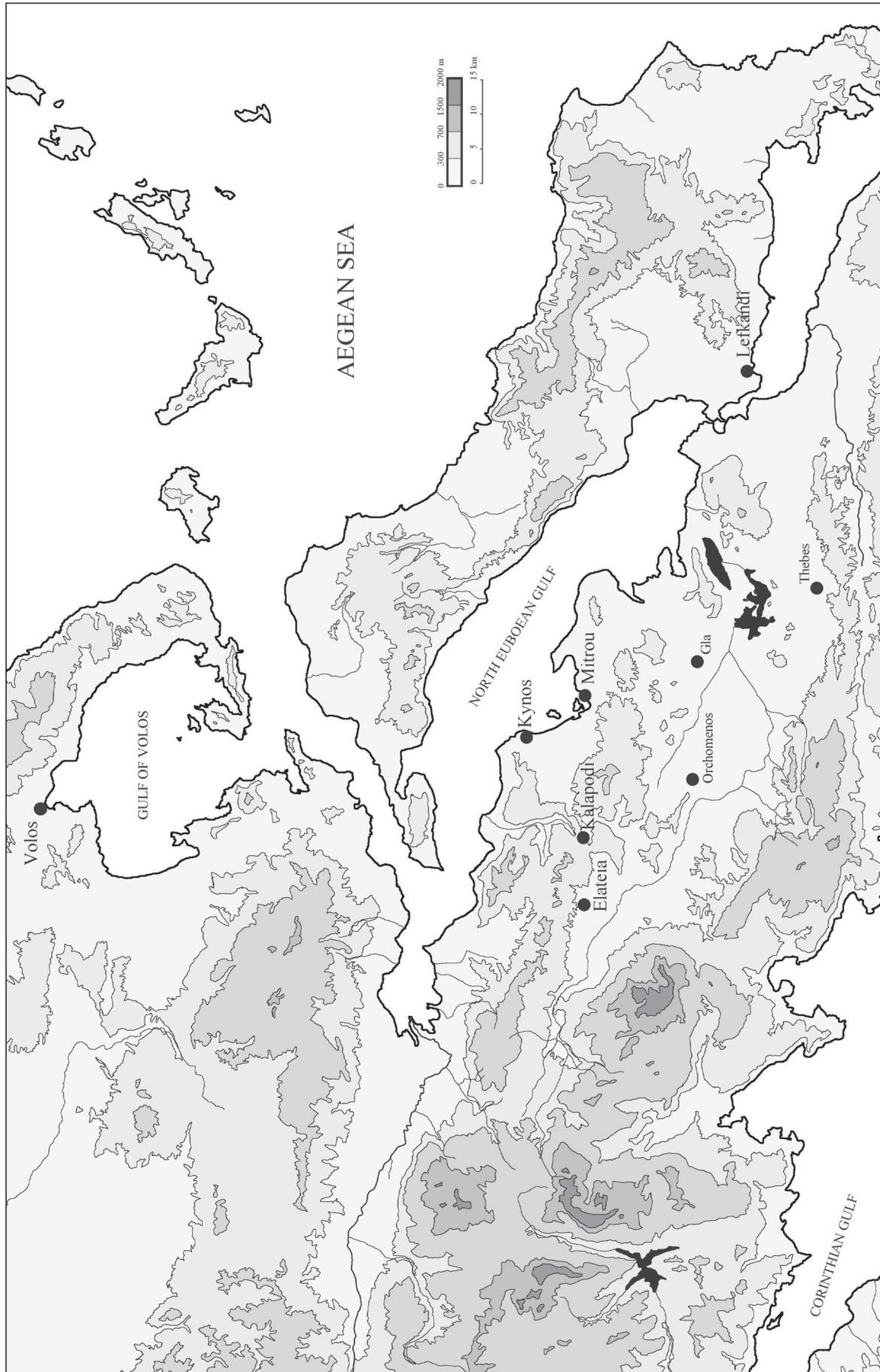


Fig. 1. Map of East-Central Greece showing the location of Mitrou and neighbouring sites

deposits of altogether no more than 1.5 m thickness. Extensive grave-digging in the final stages of the settlement history brought about additional disturbance of the Late Bronze Age strata. As a result, the homogeneous deposits are limited in number and usually contain small amounts of mostly fragmented material. For similar reasons, sealed floor deposits are rarely preserved.

These circumstances have influenced the nature of my study to a great extent. It is obvious that research confined to a single period has no good prospects. To exploit the full potential of the site and neutralise the limitations of small deposits from some of the periods, a diachronic study seemed the most sensible approach. In addition, the fragmentary state of preservation of the material determined to a great extent how it would be classified. The complicated stratigraphy rendered the selection of reliable deposits and units a meticulous but crucial procedure. This selection was based on the pottery notes recorded for each excavation unit⁹, on the analysis of the stratigraphy with the help of Harris matrices developed for each trench, on the director's report for each season and on the collaboration with scientists responsible for particular periods. Naturally, my first choice was clearly defined closed deposits and homogeneous excavation units. Fortunately, they span the entire sequence of the LBA and thus form the core of my study. Nevertheless, their number and size is limited, which is why there is a need to also include units of lower quality in order to increase the size of the sample. These units are not homogeneous, since they contain sherds dating from different periods, yet the majority of diagnostics fall into a single period. To increase the body of material even further, it was decided to include not only feature sherds, such as rims or bases, but also the ordinary body sherds. Such a choice also determines the nature of the study, especially with regard to the classification (see below). The fact that deposits and single units of different quality will be analysed together poses a serious methodological problem – how to render them comparable, especially for the sake of establishing the chronological position of certain shapes or fabrics? A solution to this problem is a ranking of deposits and units which will take into consideration variables such as the percentages of earlier and later sherds, the presence of restorable vessels and their position within the stratigraphy as determined by the analysis of Harris matrices. Each unit will be given a certain percentage index, ranging from 50 to 100 % that will subsequently be used in any kind of calculation or assessment of the chronological longevity of shapes or fabrics.

Cooking pottery – definition and identification

The starting point in the analysis of cooking pottery is the definition of this functional class. For the benefit of this study, I defined the category of cooking pottery as including all ceramic objects used for food transformation with the use of heat. As is the case with every definition, it is not flawless and has several consequences that have to be recognised and accounted for before beginning the study. Not only ordinary wide-mouthed flat-based and tripod cooking pots will be included, but also a range of shapes for baking and grilling (baking trays, souvlaki dishes, spit supports), together with accessories (not primary cooking vessels) such as braziers, dippers, ladles or lids. At the same time, objects used for food preparation methods that do not involve heat (such as trays, vats, basins), will be omitted. Such vessels are usually very difficult to identify beyond doubt in terms of their actual function. Moreover, such methods of food processing cannot be termed *cooking*. There are also vessels that will be placed in this functional group only due to the imperfect definition. Lamps, coarse kraters used in the perfumed oil industry¹⁰ or pots used for the production of purple dye may serve as examples. Naturally, similar or even identical vessels were often also used for cooking. The issue of the multi-purpose use of pots, blurring any sharp definition of functional subsets, will not be elaborated upon; without proper analyses carried out on the original contents, such issues cannot be dealt with in a meaningful manner.

Any definition of cooking pottery determines the choice of criteria used to identify a cooking pot in the sherd material. Such criteria should be universal and unambiguous. Since the use of heat forms the basis of the proposed definition, there are two self-evident criteria: burning marks and heat-resistant and

⁹ The excavations are being conducted by separate stratigraphical units (SU), whose outlines are defined by differences in soil texture and colour as well as visible architectural and other features.

¹⁰ Thomas 1992.

-conducting fabrics. However, determining which fabric may have been suitable for making cooking pots constitutes a very subjective process, also depending on one's experience. Obvious examples of cooking pots are sometimes executed in either unusually fine or unusually coarse fabric. Only general features such as the presence of mineral inclusions in some density and darker colours should be accepted here. A two-stage approach can be suggested for the identification of cooking pots. Burning marks¹¹ would be the primary criterion, supported by general observations with regard to the fabric and shape and, in lucky instances, meaningful find contexts (e.g. pots around a hearth). Morphological features helpful for the identification of cooking pots include wide, yet restricted mouths, substantial handles, a lack of sharp edges, the presence of legs, stable bases, etc. Having said that, these criteria are undoubtedly far from universal. Based on the material selected in the first stage, a range of cooking pot fabrics will be defined (both macroscopically and with the use of petrography) that will be used to identify fragments of cooking pots among the rest of the material. The main advantage of a fabric analysis is that this criterion may be applied to every individual body sherd, thus following the postulate of also including these *undiagnostic* fragments in the study.

Classification

The classification of pottery is one of the major issues in pottery processing and publishing, and its history with regard to Mycenaean pottery was presented during the conference¹². Apart from a critical approach to solutions proposed by scholars working on various kinds of pottery from the Aegean, two basic considerations shaped the classificatory system developed for cooking pottery. First and foremost, the proposed system must reflect the main features of the pottery analysed. Since cooking pottery is a functionally defined subset of the whole assemblage, the basic classification should be based on features related to its function. These are, in my opinion, the fabric, the surface treatment and the shape. As such, they also reflect potters' considerations as to the vessel and its intended function. Secondly, the classification should be applicable to most of the selected material, if possible also to body sherds¹³. The classification by shape must stop at the level of complete or reconstructable forms, while the classification by features is also selective as this does not include the body sherds. However, both fabric and surface treatment fulfil this criterion. Based on these conclusions, I developed a classificatory system based on two independent groupings into classes (for all the material studied) and features/shapes (applied only to a fraction of the material).

Technological classification

The classes constitute the primary classification of cooking pottery based on a single major variable – the fabric, with surface treatment as an auxiliary variable. According to these classes one can unambiguously categorise all of the material, including the body sherds. The accepted classification also clearly separates the Aeginetan cooking pottery, as it is best defined by its fabric, which contains sparkling platelets of golden mica (biotite) and black grits of hornblende, and its wiped surfaces. It is of considerable importance, since for centuries cooking pottery produced on the island of Aegina was in use throughout many regions of the Aegean coastline, thus conclusions drawn from its study may automatically be transferred to or compared with other sites. The prominent position of fabrics in this classificatory system is a reflection on the usefulness of the study of fabrics in researching cooking pottery. It has already been stated that the fabric considerably affects the utilitarian features of a cooking pot. The coarser nature

¹¹ Burning marks are also not as straightforward an indicator one might hope. They can result from the destruction in a conflagration or accidental contact with fire. Nevertheless, the general inspection of the whole ceramic assemblage in search of burnt sherds will help to establish the likelihood of such a situation.

¹² Jung, this volume.

¹³ In contrast to fine pottery, consisting mostly of small shapes that usually break into a small number of pieces, cooking pots are on average considerably bigger and break into many more fragments, most of which are undiagnostic body sherds. By including only feature sherds in the analysis, one would introduce a strong bias into the study.

of most cooking fabrics renders them readily classifiable according to type and density of the non-plastic inclusions. Furthermore, fabrics seem to change not only as a reflection of a desired use (i.e. different fabrics were used for tripods than for dippers or flat-based jars) but they also change diachronically. The study of coarse wares from the Kavousi region in Crete has shown this quite clearly¹⁴. Therefore, one of the advantages of assigning even body sherds to separate classes was the ability to trace changes in fabrics and their interplay throughout the entire Late Bronze Age. Moreover, preliminary observations of cooking pottery from Mitrou suggest that certain shapes, surface treatments and also modes of production¹⁵ (wheel-thrown or handmade) were interdependent and restricted to certain fabrics. If this is confirmed by further studies, better insight into production processes will be gained, again thanks to a more detailed analysis of the fabrics.

The division into classes, as proposed above, has some limitations. It certainly cannot be transferred in detail to cooking pottery from other sites, since one should not expect the same or even a similar range of fabrics to have been used elsewhere. Yet, this limitation is inherent in any fabric study and the proposed general scheme may well be applicable to other sites. Moreover, the amount of imported Aeginetan cooking pots suggests that the interregional exchange of this type of vessel may have included a wider range of fabrics and production sites. A fabric-centred approach undoubtedly has the best odds of identifying such instances.

There are also two constraints concerning the identification of fabrics and surface treatments. Firstly, the accuracy of the identification is determined by one's experience and specific knowledge. Therefore, in order to avoid additional biases, it should be done by the same person. Secondly, dark-coloured fabrics may turn out to be harder to identify correctly. I will try to overcome both problems with the help of petrographic analyses. This will also allow me to assign an accurate scientific name to each of the fabric groups distinguished, as was done in the case of Lerna V pottery¹⁶. The fabrics will be described and classified using a standard method – according to their coarseness (defined by both the size and density of the inclusions), colour, hardness, porosity and types of inclusions.

Morphological classification

With regard to the classification of features and shapes, it is essential to discuss methods applied in preceding studies. Most of the existing typologies are based on complete pots (Furumark for Mycenaean pottery, Rutter for EH III pottery), yet this is not a luxury one can afford at Mitrou and many other sites. The basic classification of Mycenaean pottery established by Arne Furumark¹⁷, which also includes cooking vessels, relies upon complete pots and their decoration (where present). Although already 60 years old, this classificatory system (after some amendments) works very well for the decorated pottery. However, its unsuitability for the current study may be illustrated by an example of a rim sherd with a handle of an Aeginetan cooking pot (Fig. 2). According to Furumark's typology, it could be classified as a cooking jug FS 65, an amphora FS 66 or a tripod FS 320. Moreover, in contrast to the flat-based jars, his classification does not differentiate between one- and two-handled tripods, not to mention the variability of tripod feet and, to a lesser extent, their bases. A more useful classification, again comprising also cooking pottery, was proposed by Michael Lindblom in his study of potters' marks on Aeginetan pottery¹⁸. It consists, in fact, of two typologies – one for complete shapes¹⁹ and one for feature sherds (rims, handles and bases). It seems that both his typologies work almost independently, i.e. complete shapes are not split further according to feature types and individual features that might be ascribed to distinct shapes are only rarely assigned the *reconstructed* type of shape. Lindblom's typology was developed only for Aeginetan pottery and as such does not cover the whole range of shapes used for cooking, which limits its use for my purposes.

¹⁴ Haggis – Mook 1993.

¹⁵ The mode of production could have been defined as a second auxiliary variable (after surface treatment); however, it is often difficult to make any definite statements regarding large fragments of pots, and even more so with respect to individual body sherds.

¹⁶ Rutter 1995, 666–710.

¹⁷ Furumark 1972.

¹⁸ Lindblom 2001, fig. 4–8.

Although neither typology is fully transferable on the material studied, their critical assessment can provide valuable suggestions for the construction of a typology of the cooking pottery from Mitrou. The fragmented nature of this material makes it necessary to create a typology based on feature sherds. It will include standard rims, handles and bases, but also legs and spouts. Complete or almost complete shapes will be described according to their features – type of rim, handle, base etc. (Fig. 3). There are several reasons for also establishing a typology of complete shapes following Lindblom’s example: the desire to include cooking pots from other mainland sites in the study; the presence of complete vessels, albeit in small amounts, in the local material and, above all, the fact that some rim, base, handle or leg types are easily attributable to particular vessel types (such as braziers, dippers, tripods etc.). A list of feature types corresponding to the main typology of features will be provided for each shape in order to establish a further connection between the two classifications as their correlation will be one of the major concerns. Another concern is connected with the compatibility of the system proposed with the two classificatory schemes mentioned. As far as Furumark’s division is concerned, his shape numbers will be used in unambiguous situations, especially in the case of less frequent shapes such as braziers and dippers. It would be preferable to avoid descriptions such as *jug/amphora* in favour of *one-/two-handled jar*, as the latter are less subjective and suggestive.

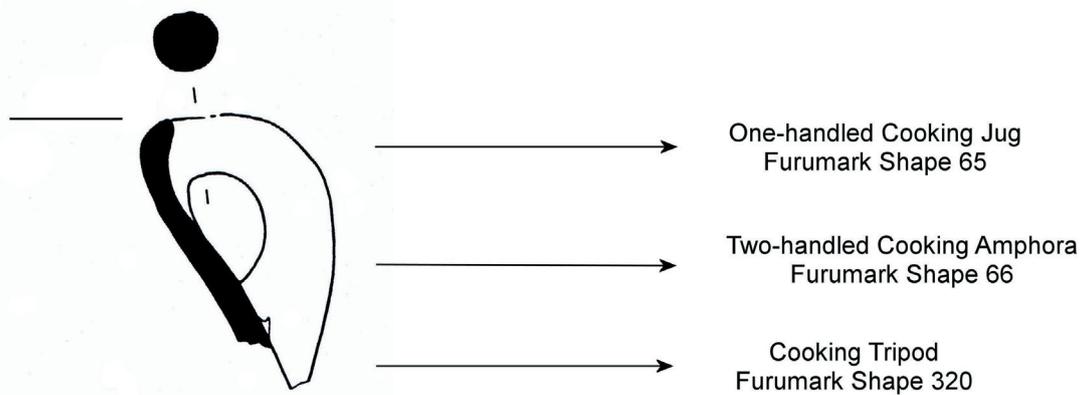


Fig. 2. Furumark's typology applied to a cooking pot fragment

Wide mouthed handled jar type W.2.0

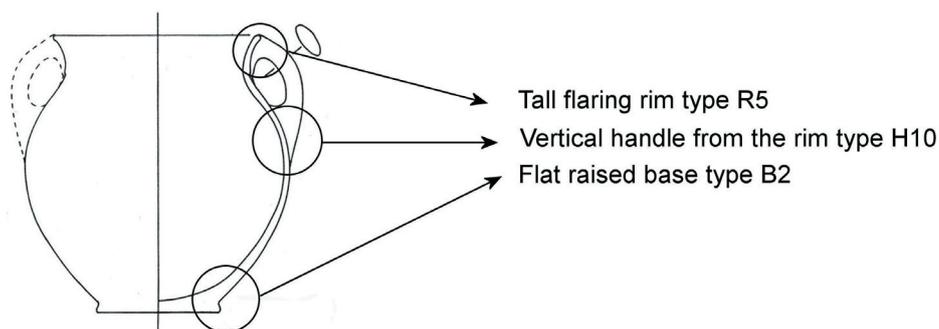


Fig. 3. Example showing the correlation between feature and shape typologies (type codes are hypothetical)

The shape typology devised by Lindblom will be used only with reference to the Aeginetan pottery. It is already clear that a number of Aeginetan cooking pottery forms were not accounted for in his analysis and, as was mentioned, his typology does not differentiate between one- and two-handled forms. I will attempt to treat Lindblom’s typology as an extendable platform. After consultations with M. Lindblom and other experts studying Aeginetan pottery, an appropriate extension of his typology for cooking pottery will be suggested so that it remains a useful tool and keeps up with the growing body of Aeginetan pottery.

Recording and presenting the material

I do not intend to elaborate here on the standard procedures of recording and presenting, but would like to make a few comments on points that diverge from or develop further the procedures established in the specialist literature pertaining to Aegean ceramics.

Fabrics

No detailed descriptions of fabrics will be given for individual artefacts. This may seem to contradict the importance ascribed to fabrics in this study, yet there are good reasons. First of all, non-professional macroscopic fabric descriptions of each fragment, while very time consuming, is not very informative and may even introduce some confusion if compared with descriptions of material from other sites. Secondly, as regards material comparisons, the direct inspection of the fabric is still the best method and an indispensable tool. Instead, each fragment inventoried will only be assigned to a specific macroscopic fabric group, for which a detailed description, together with its range of variation, will be provided²⁰. In favourable conditions, petrographic descriptions of these groups will also be given. All non-inventoried body sherds will also be classified according to these groups and their numbers will be given in charts for each deposit and chronological period.

Colours

Similarly, a dependence on Munsell colour readings will largely be avoided. Providing detailed Munsell readings for sherds whose surfaces are usually altered by fire does not seem to be very profitable. Moreover, even for those sherds that were not burnt, the theoretical usefulness of such readings does not match the labour intensity. Instead, high-quality colour photographs, with a colour scale attached, will be provided for all the fragments inventoried. They will also allow readers to assess burning marks and the surface treatments.

Dimensions

Apart from standard measurements given for each fragment, I will, where possible, provide a calculation of the capacity of the vessel from its line drawing. Results obtained from complete or near-complete profiles will enable an estimation of capacity of the poorly preserved artefacts. Especially for Aeginetan pottery this may prove a successful procedure as one may use published examples from other sites for the estimation, thus substantially expanding the size of the sample.

The identification of the centre of gravity will be a further calculation attempted. It will help to assess the stability of the vessel and therefore may give an indication as to the possible function of certain forms.

Presentation

The addition of a CD-ROM, which helps to reduce the physical size of a publication and allows one to add much more and better quality data, is slowly becoming standard. What varies among such publications is the quality and type of data provided. My intension is to provide the database containing all the data collected which may be queried in several ways. The database will also serve as an extensive catalogue, considerably reducing the size of the book. All the colour pictures will be available there. In order to avoid the usual problems in reproducing drawings (low quality scans, improper scale), each drawing in this publication will also be available on the CD-ROM with a centimetre scale attached.

Final note

By presenting this paper I wanted to share my initial ideas regarding the methodological approach to the analysis of a group of pottery defined by function. These ideas will be verified and enhanced in years to come. Hopefully, the final result will constitute a study that may encourage archaeologists to dedicate the amount of attention and publication space that cooking pottery really deserves.

¹⁹ The shape typology is rather cursory as it does not differentiate between one- and two-handled forms.

²⁰ Of course this approach is not new but it is still far from being a standard procedure. It was successfully applied for example by M. Jacob-Felsch (1996).

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