

ÆGINETAN MATT-PAINTED POTTERY IN BOEOTIA

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The Middle Helladic (MH) sites of Boeotia are exceptionally important for understanding cultural developments during the Middle Bronze Age (MBA), as they are for later periods of Greek history. From the Early Helladic (EH) period, Boeotia yields an idiosyncratic style in architecture and site planning, while a broad production of goods indicates a gradual concentration of power in a series of strong administration centers.¹ The EH background seems to predict the subsequent evolution of this region during the Late Bronze Age, when the region became one of the most important centers of the Mycenaean world.

Between these two crucial periods, MH Boeotia presents the same signs of cultural retreat known from other regions of central Greece. However, in the same time period, a high standard of pottery production and export industry is observed, indicating a population increase and economic strength. This period also saw the beginning of long-lasting efforts of the local population to drain Lake Copais.²

The most important remains of MH settlement and of contemporary burials were, in chronological order, those of Orchomenos, Eutresis and Thebes.³ In addition to these three Boeotian “type sites”, a large number of MH sites discovered during extensive⁴ and intensive surveys and collections have confirmed the excavation data, at least regarding the repertory and distribution of ceramic production.

MH POTTERY WARES IN BOEOTIA

The main MH fine pottery class of Boeotia is Minyan ware, which divides into subgroups according to the surface colors: the grey, brown, yellow and red varieties.⁵ Indeed, this ware class seems to be a true prod-

uct of the local workshops and covers all of the period, often surviving beyond the end of the MBA.⁶ In contrast to what might have been expected, the Minyan pottery of Boeotia is not always characterized by excellent quality – usually a key indicator for the identification of “true Minyan” in other areas – but by many and different qualities and varieties.⁷ These subgroups may signify products of short-lived experimentation or the production of smaller workshops, but they could also represent stages of chronological development. This characteristic of the pottery supports the suggestion that variety rather than homogeneity is compatible with long-lasting local production. Another factor that makes it hard to identify Boeotian material in other areas is the absence of potters’ marks in the Boeotian Minyan production.⁸ Thus the trademarks of this pottery remain its manufacturing technique and style. The percentages of Minyan are so high that any other ware group except for coarse wares could be characterized as imported.⁹ An exception is represented by a “semicourse” undecorated group, which is rather grittier than Minyan ware but often borrows Minyan ware shapes.

One of the smaller groups considered as imports to this region is the Aeginetan matt-painted pottery found at all three “type sites” and also at some of the sites known from survey and recent excavation. The main criterion for a macroscopic classification of the Aeginetan ware is its very distinctive fabric: a pale brown, whitish or greenish, light, and porous clay – very often containing the typical biotite inclusions – and the black or dark brown matt decoration, which is thick but brittle. The decorative patterns and the shape repertory – well known from the Aegina publi-

¹ FORSÉN 1992, 125–42.

² KNAUSS 1987, 103–106; KNAUSS 2000, 243–4.

³ GOLDMAN 1931; Bulle 1907; DEMAKOPOULOU-KONSOLA 1975.

⁴ HOPE SIMPSON and DICKINSON 1979; FRENCH 1972; BINTLIFF 1986; BINTLIFF 2003; FOSSEY 1988.

⁵ There are many descriptions of Minyan ware, e.g., CHILDE 1915; FORSDYKE 1914.

⁶ MOUNTJOY 1980, 148.

⁷ This is a common feature observed at sites with large amounts of MH pottery, such as Orchomenos and Medeon.

⁸ J. CROUWEL (1973) has identified some Minyan fragments bearing potters’ marks. These all seem to belong to a north Peloponnesian manufacture.

⁹ The local matt-painted ware can be considered a decorated variant of Minyan.

cations – are also fairly distinctive, vastly different in appearance from those of Boeotian production trends. The matt-painted pottery of Aegina is also different from other matt-painted categories imported to Boeotia, such as Wace and Thompson’s “ΔΙΒ”, a ware group that seems to have its origin in a northern area between the Spercheios valley and Thesaly,¹⁰ and from the so-called “Polychrome Mainland” ware, which seems to be a local version of the light-colored Minyan bearing bichrome decoration.

The identification of Aeginetan pottery in excavation deposits is relatively easy, unlike the situation in survey collections. There, the scarcity of an imported and therefore poorly represented pottery group, combined with the fragile nature of the paint and the bad state of preservation, make it easily confusable with the pottery of other periods. In Boeotia, for example, the undecorated samples of Aeginetan pottery from surface collections are often confused with the porous and light-colored pottery of the Geometric or even the Archaic period. As a result, the evidence provided by imported pottery is often limited, while in other cases it is overestimated.

Identification of other Aeginetan products, such as the so-called “red-slipped Aegina”,¹¹ is difficult if the examples are not well preserved. Some typical examples of this ware are found in Eutresis.¹² Even more difficult to identify are Aeginetan coarse wares, in particular Aeginetan cooking and storage vessels, such as have been found at mainland sites, e.g., at Kiapha Thiti in Attica and at Aspis in the Argolid.¹³ There is still no evidence for such imports in Boeotia, although future study of the Boeotian coarse wares from stratified deposits could well change this picture.

In the following part of this paper we will discuss the distribution of the “Aeginetan-type” pottery at a series of Boeotian MH sites.¹⁴

Orchomenos

For the purposes of historical research, Orchomenos is considered a “type site”, both because it is the

place where “Minyan ware” was first discovered by H. Schliemann and because it was named after the Minyans, the inhabitants of Orchomenos.¹⁵ Detailed study of the old excavation reports, records and notes reveals that it was not Schliemann who gave this name to the pottery, as is usually assumed; in his published works, he uses the simple term “grey ware”.¹⁶ The term “Minyan” should be ascribed, instead, to the Bavarian excavators, who used this name unofficially – as a working term during the excavation seasons – replacing it soon afterward with the term “ältermykenisch” (early Mycenaean) on the grounds that “Minyan” had the potential to develop into a misleading term.¹⁷

The fine Minyan ware of Orchomenos constitutes the most dominant MH pottery group found at the site, making up 80 percent of the diagnostic fine MH examples.¹⁸ Minyan ware is a pottery group of technologically high standard that has attracted a great number of precise descriptions by many scholars during the last century. “True Minyan” is thought to be a very characteristic fabric, wheel-thrown but also handmade, with a hard and smooth feel that results from intense burnishing and highly developed firing techniques. Not all the representatives of this ware group share the superb quality attributed in other regions to “true grey Minyan”. Products of a medium quality of firing, such as pottery with soft surface or with pale reddish biscuit, are fairly common. We were able to distinguish eight subgroups of grey Minyan according to color, burnishing techniques and firing conditions. One of the most typical and numerous subgroups shows a grey-brown striated surface and a dark grey biscuit with a thin light brown outline.

The rich Minyan assemblage of Orchomenos shows that the old division of “true Minyan” into grey, yellow, and red is quite reasonable.¹⁹ All Minyan variants seem to be identically constructed in respect to shape repertory and manufacturing techniques. The only dissimilarity is the color of the surface. As is true of grey Minyan, the groups of brown, yellow

¹⁰ WACE and THOMPSON 1912, 20f; MARAN 1992a, 151. See also Maran’s “Magnesian ware” in the present volume.

¹¹ For the distribution of this ware in Boeotia, see FRENCH 1972, 26.

¹² GOLDMAN 1931, pl. X.

¹³ MARAN 1992b, 179, 190; G. TOUCHAIS in this volume.

¹⁴ I am very grateful to the following institutions, colleagues and friends for providing permission to study material discussed here and for giving valuable advice over many years of work: Archaeological Ephoreia of Thebes, DAI Athens, Bavarian Academy, V. ARAVANTINOS, J. BINTLIFF, O. DICK-

INSON, S. DIETZ, H. HALL, H. HAUPTMANN, S. JALKOTZY, A. KONENCY, J. MARAN, G. NORDQUIST, SIEDENTOPF, T. TARTARON, I. WHITBREAD.

¹⁵ SCHLIEMANN 1881.

¹⁶ SCHLIEMANN 1881, 41–4.

¹⁷ BULLE 1907, 53; WACE and THOMPSON 1912, 194.

¹⁸ Because almost all the material comes from unstratified deposits, the statistics refer only to diagnostic MH fine pottery and do not include the coarse or semicoarse wares.

¹⁹ GOLDMAN 1931, 124.

and red Minyan can be also divided into subcategories according to minor fabric differences. There is also a distinctive and quite large class of gritty grey Minyan, always handmade and with no reddish biscuit, similar in these respects to its Argive Minyan counterpart but with a light grey core. This variety appears to be a characteristic local version of coarse Minyan.

The shape repertory of Minyan ware is rather limited; the most typical shapes are open table wares for the consumption of beverages or cooked food, namely ring-stemmed goblets, two-handled bowls and kantharoi.²⁰ These three key shapes show many variations in a gradual development from sharply carinated to globular forms. They often bear decorations of grooved, ribbed or incised bands, placed primarily on the shoulder of the vases. Closed vessels were not preferred, at least for the greater part of the period, a preference perhaps imposed by contemporary drinking customs or by a technical difficulty in throwing such vessels on the wheel. The function of pouring vessels was perhaps fulfilled by coarseware pottery.²¹ In the latest phase of the Minyan tradition, early Mycenaean shapes such as small-sized cups, Vapheio cups and amphoriskoi appear, showing an ongoing adoption of new traditions.²²

It seems clear that the local pottery production is characterized by a persistent tendency to construct well-burnished monochrome pottery, sometimes ornamented with relief decoration. Therefore it is worthwhile to calculate the amount of matt-painted pottery at the “center” of the Minyan production. A remarkable number of yellow and red Minyan vases decorated with simple black or dark brown matt-painted ornaments seems to be locally produced, as it is not technically differentiated from the rest of the Minyan pottery. This ware group appears to derive from a combination of Minyan manufacture with matt-painted traditions brought to the mainland from Aegina and the Cyclades. It appears in fully

developed Minyan shapes, which indicates a later date (MH II–III). An even later variant of this ware, sometimes decorated with very elaborate ornaments in purple and black, is known as “Polychrome Mainland” ware. In Orchomenos this ware is very well represented, strongly supporting its Boeotian origin.²³

Apart from this locally made matt-painted version of Minyan, several examples of the northern matt-painted pottery “ΔΙβ”²⁴ and a few matt-painted sherds indicating Cycladic origin, the rest of the matt-painted examples belong to the Aeginetan style.²⁵ This class reaches approximately 2 percent of the total of diagnostic MH wares, a very small amount, strongly supporting the case for import. A group of 17 examples, including both fine and coarse wares, preserve painted patterns, very well known from the Aeginetan pottery production of towns VII–IX (Fig. 1). Most of them are body sherds decorated with simple band ornaments such as cross-hatches and hatched triangles, but there are also free-standing motifs such as butterflies, dots, stars, concentric circles and groups of chevrons.²⁶

Orchomenos also yielded two well-preserved matt-painted pithoi, which are exhibited at the Athens National Museum (Fig. 1, 9–10).²⁷ One of them comes from an exceptional “closed” deposit of the site – the so-called burnt house revealed in trench K to the east of the Treasury of Minyas – where it was found in situ on a clay slab, as part of the permanent equipment of this house (Fig. 1, 9).²⁸ The surface of this vessel is decorated with alternating vertical panels with concentric circles, series of saltires and zigzag bands. The lower part of the body is plain. On the surface there are visible marks of secondary firing. This find can be attributed to Aeginetan pottery production, as the fabric, the shape and the decoration correspond with the material found in town IX.²⁹ As some ring-stemmed goblets from the same deposit indicate, the house belongs to the “classical Minyan MH II” phase. The

²⁰ Two classical Minyan examples from SCHLIEMANN’s excavations are kept in the National Museum, inv. nos. 3271 and 3273. RONTIRI 1990, 383–4, nos. 378 and 379.

²¹ The deficiency of the stratigraphic evidence from the site makes it impossible to distinguish the greatest part of the MH coarse wares.

²² See a grey Minyan “Vapheio type” cup, from Schliemann’s excavations, exhibited in the National Museum, inv. no. 3274; RONTIRI 1990, 383, no. 377.

²³ DIETZ 1990, 217.

²⁴ WACE and THOMSON 1912, 20, 180. For the distribution of this ware in Boeotia, see FRENCH 1971, 38, fig. 15.

²⁵ SARRI 1998.

²⁶ Compare fig. 1, 5,8 with SIEDENTOPF 1991, 66, 319–21; fig. 1, 6 with SIEDENTOPF 1991, fig. 76, 388.

²⁷ NMA nos. 5875 and 5876.

²⁸ For the description of the “burnt house” see BULLE 1907, 58, 110–1, fig. 19. The location of the pithos is reported from the excavation records kept in the archives of the Bavarian Academy in Munich.

²⁹ SIEDENTOPF 1991, fig. 22, 104–106. See also two similar fragments from floor XXXII–1 and from the fill layer in Q3, both belonging to phase 6. GAUB and SMETANA 2004.

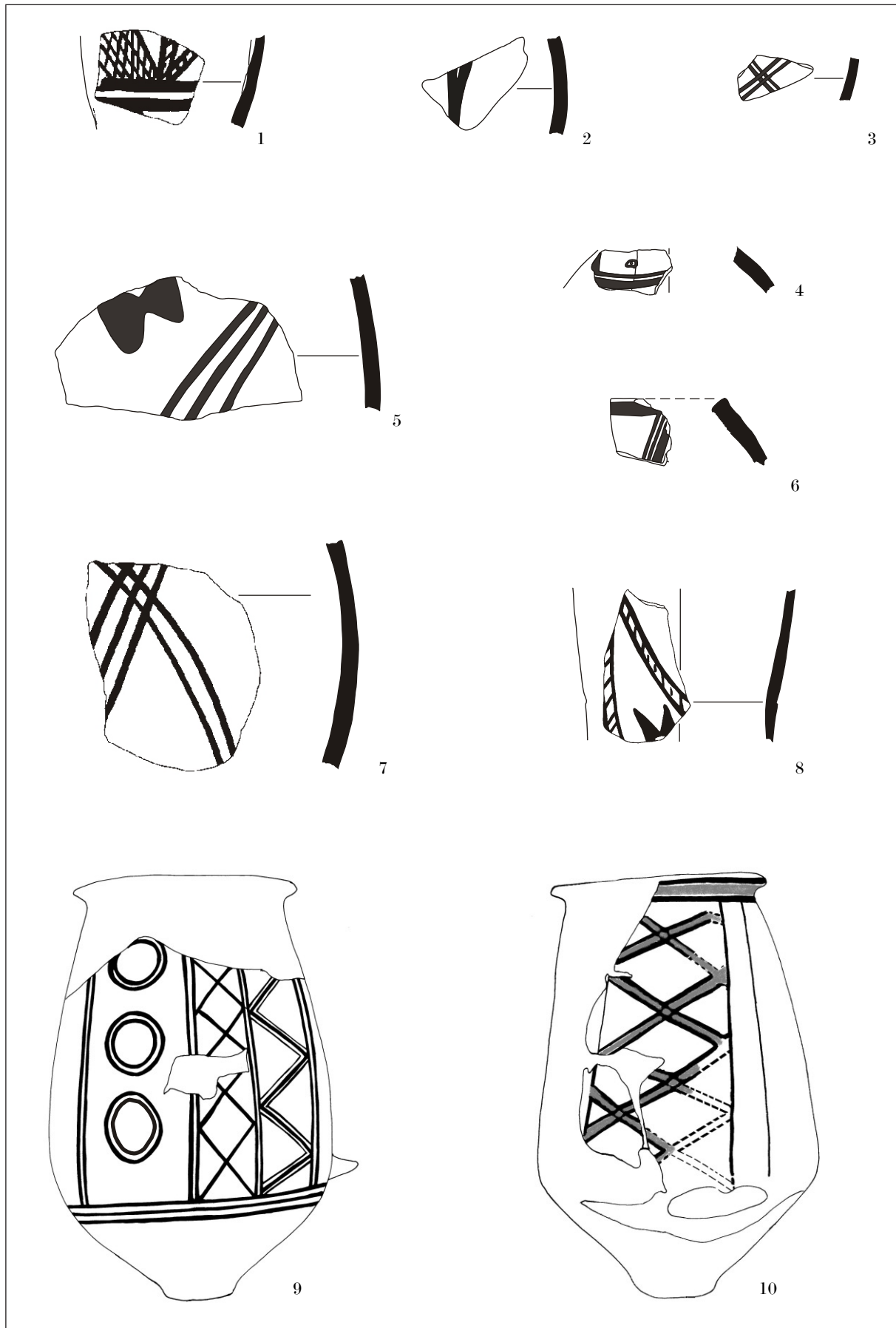


Fig. 1 Orchomenos. Matt-painted pottery, 1-8: scale 1:3

second pithos was found in trench ABC, which is located on the hilltop and for which there is no stratigraphic data (Fig. 1, 10). This pithos is only half-preserved, has a low-carinated body and bears an oblique check decoration, in black and light red, which is placed on a thick buff slip. This style of decoration seems not to be very common on Aegina but similar examples have been found on Keos.³⁰

The matt-painted pottery of “Aegina type” found in Orchomenos represents a pottery group which, by its low representation and by its texture, shows a clear distinction from local pottery production. In order to clarify similar assessments of imports or foreign influences at a site with such a solid pottery production, a petrographic study project has been undertaken by MIT and the Fitch laboratories under the direction of T. Tartaron, I. Whitbread and E. Kyriatzi. The study addresses the local and imported pottery groups of Orchomenos, focusing primarily on the Minyan wares and using a broad array of comparative data from other regions.³¹ The first preliminary results of this study have already demonstrated that a range of the samples attributed to Aeginetan production by means of macroscopic criteria contain the characteristic volcanic and microfossil assemblage of Aeginetan pottery.³²

Eutresis

The next major Boeotian MH site, Eutresis, is the first at which MH fabrics were classified.³³ Goldman’s classifications of the rich MH pottery material from three building layers continue to appear accurate and representative of the entire geographical region, on the evidence of similar material subsequently found in similar quantities at many other Boeotian sites. Among “enormous quantities” of grey, yellow and red Minyan – according to Goldman – were identified many examples of matt-painted and some of “red-

slipped Aegina”.³⁴ Goldman used the term “yellow minyan with matt decoration”,³⁵ a very useful and precise term for Boeotia, since it distinguishes the local matt-painted production from the industries of Aegina and the Argolid (Fig. 2, 3).

A part of the decorated pottery certainly belongs to the Aeginetan type (Fig. 2,1–2, 5–6). The quantities cannot be accurately estimated, but the illustrated material presents 44 examples, both fine and coarse, a number that comes very close to the amount of the comparable Orchomenos group.³⁶ One of the most famous finds from Eutresis, the large pithos exhibited in the Museum of Thebes, belongs to the Aeginetan type (Fig. 2,5).³⁷ Its best parallels are in the early “close style” of Aegina VII.³⁸ To the same period should belong another Aeginetan-like pithos decorated with hatched lozenges (Fig. 2, 2)³⁹ and a pithos with friezes filled with hatched zigzag bands and wheel ornaments (Fig. 2,6).⁴⁰ Some more typical Aeginetan shapes represented in Eutresis are wide bowls with T-rim and pithos fragments with lid rim (Fig. 2,1).⁴¹

The quantity of Aeginetan imports in Eutresis seems to be higher than at any other Boeotian site. They show, moreover, sometimes elaborate shapes, such as a well-known bird-shaped askos and two basket-handled deep bowls,⁴² and they tend to be much better preserved than at other sites.

Thebes

Unlike the MH finds of the two sites discussed above, those from Thebes are very difficult to treat within a single study. Thanks to D. Konsolas’s study of pre-Mycenaean Thebes, we know that MH Thebes was a very large settlement, covering almost the entire area of the Kadmeia.⁴³ The most detailed report on MH settlement layers is that of the “Papageorgiou-Panagiotopoulou” plot on the southwest edge of the Kadmeia, which we believe provides a representative

³⁰ The use of a thick pale yellow slip over coarse red clay is met often in the Cyclades. OVERBECK 1989, fig. 52, 6; 59, 20; 81,18. See also OVERBECK, in the present volume.

³¹ For some preliminary results, see WHITBREAD *et al.* 2002, 123.

³² I owe this information to I. WHITBREAD and T. TARTARON.

³³ GOLDMAN 1931, 124–86.

³⁴ The term “red-slipped Aegina” was introduced by FRENCH (1972, 26).

³⁵ GOLDMAN 1931, 167.

³⁶ GOLDMAN 1931, figs. 200–3, 205–25. Comparison between the material from Orchomenos and Eutresis can be given only in rough percentages. Both sites are, however, exten-

sively excavated, with a yield of some thousands of MH ceramic examples.

³⁷ GOLDMAN 1931 Table XIII; DEMAKOPOULOU and KONSOLA 1981, fig. 11.

³⁸ SIEDENTOPF 1991, figs. 30, 136, 137.

³⁹ Compare GOLDMAN 1931, fig. 201 with SIEDENTOPF 1991, figs. 3, 4.

⁴⁰ SIEDENTOPF 1991, 44, figs. 5, 15.

⁴¹ Compare GOLDMAN 1931, fig. 208 with SIEDENTOPF 1991, figs. 79–86.

⁴² GOLDMAN 1931, 223, 224, 218–9.

⁴³ KONSOLA 1981, Map 6, 111, 186. Compare with KILIAN 1997, 112.

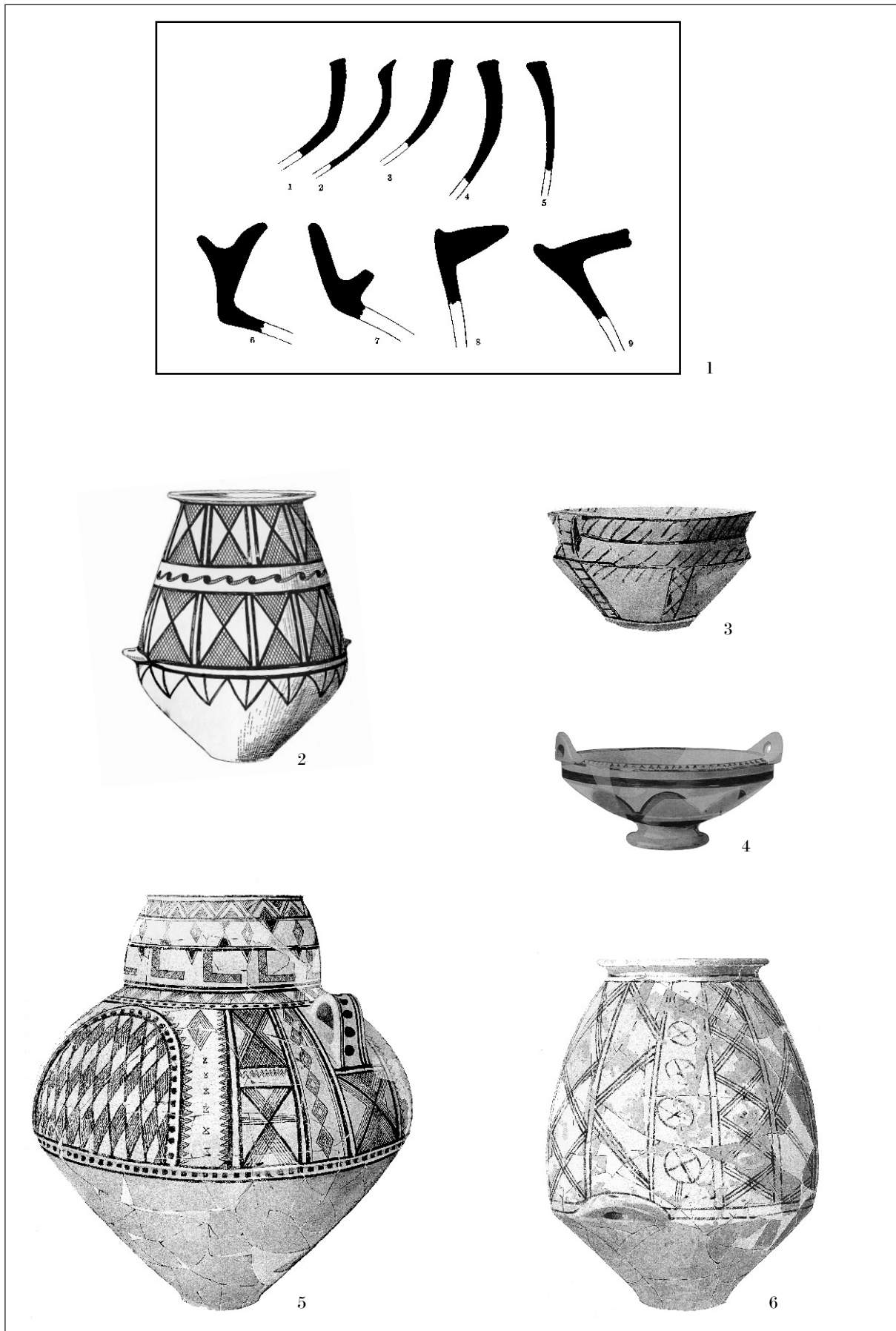


Fig. 2 Eutresis. Matt-painted pottery

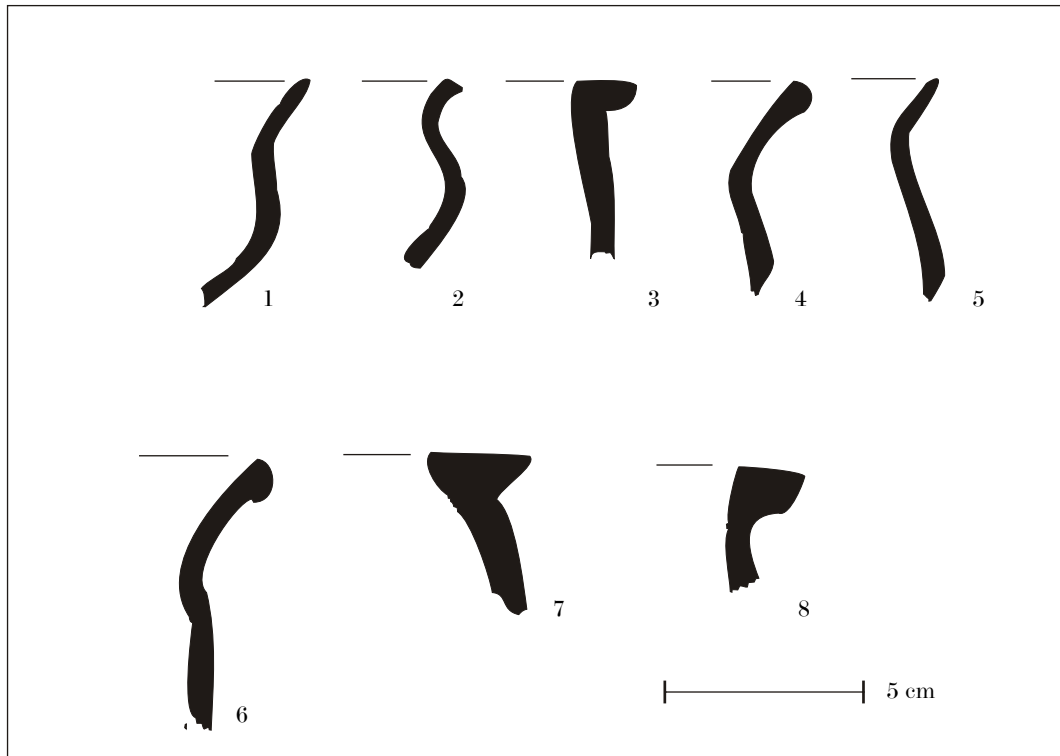


Fig. 3 Thebes. Minyan ware (after DEMAKOPOULOU-KONSOLA 1975)

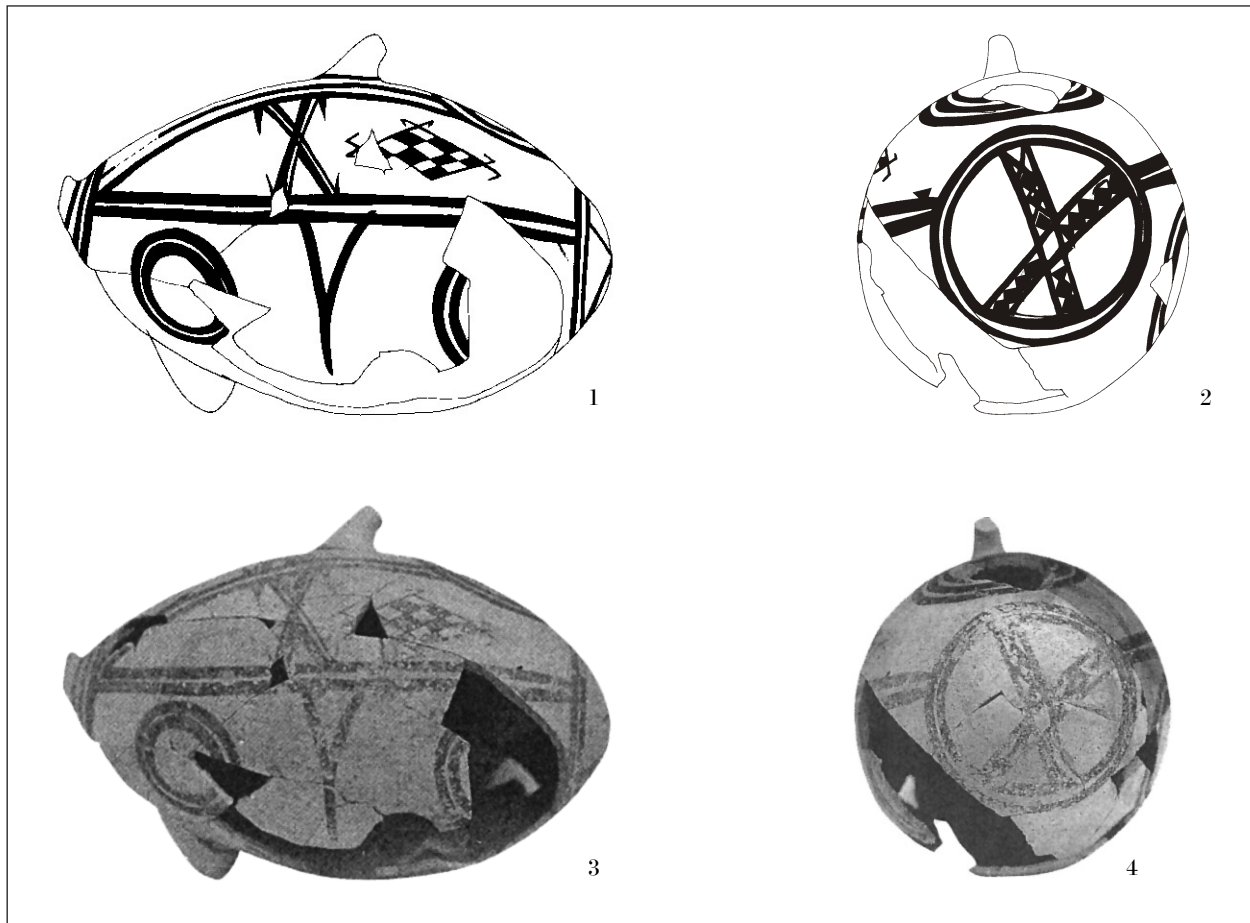


Fig. 4 Thebes. Matt-painted bird-shaped askos (after DELIYIANNI 2003)

sample.⁴⁴ The report refers to “large quantities” of matt-painted pottery found in Thebes, making up the second largest group after Minyan (Fig. 3).⁴⁵ This information, combined with the long-established view of the coexistence of the two categories on the mainland, leads to a reasonable assumption that there is also a local matt-painted version here.

A more detailed description of the proportions, however, allows for a second reading. Most of the matt-painted fragments belong to the coarse wares, represented mainly by large pithoid vessels. The “good quality” finds are few, of which a handful can be classified as “matt-painted Minyan”.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the polychrome variant seems to be quite numerous. If we read between the lines, then, it appears that the quantitative contrast between matt-painted and Minyan is fairly pronounced. This discrepancy becomes even clearer if we consider that large pithoi break into many pieces. Consequently, the Aeginetan-type pottery found in Thebes could be considered to have been imported from Aegina, nearly approaching its percentage at Orchomenos.

A remarkable recent find from Thebes well fits the present discussion. It is a matt-painted bird-shaped askos (BE 26989) found during the 2000 rescue excavations in the Municipal Conference Centre of Thebes, which is located in the northwest section of the Kadmeia (Fig. 4, 1–4).⁴⁷ This vessel was found in an intramural burial pithos, together with large fragments of grey Minyan stemmed goblets.⁴⁸ Although the deposit was mixed up by later intrusion, these pottery finds are considered to be offerings from the same burial.

The body of this exceptional vase, missing the spout and parts of the body, is an elongated ovoid. On the back side, one leg is preserved. There is not any directly comparable MH shape, excepting perhaps a very similar vase found at Eutresis that is also decorated with matt-painted patterns.⁴⁹ The fabric is pale yellow, the clay very porous and soft, containing many nonplastic inclusions. These features, and the

lack of a highly burnished surface, seem to differ widely from those of the local pottery production, while strongly resembling the characteristic Aeginetan matt-painted ware.

Moreover, the general arrangement of the decoration, such as a series of ornaments, refer to the “mature style” of Aeginetan matt-painted pottery, preferred in town IX.⁵⁰ The main parts of the vessel, such as the spout, the handles and the foot, are emphasized by means of single or double circles. The body of the vessel is separated into frames containing free-standing ornaments such as concentric circles, hatched lozenges and triangles. Some of the most distinctive motifs of Aeginetan MH pottery appear here. The double vertical bands alternating with concentric circles are a very common decoration on the pithoi of town IX.⁵¹ A similarly characteristic decorative element of the same phase is the long-drawn-out lines on hatched triangles⁵² or lozenges.⁵³ In the middle of both sides, triangles are appended from the horizontal frame as “dropping” lines toward the lower part of the body, a decoration often used on Aeginetan jugs of the same period.⁵⁴ The front side of the vase, below the missing spout where the framing bands meet, is decorated with a large crossed medallion, an ornament often used on bases of Aeginetan pithos lids and cups.⁵⁵

The occurrence of so many Aeginetan features on this vessel provides strong evidence that the bird-shaped askos from Thebes is an imported product from Aegina. Since there is no exact parallel from the island or from adjacent areas, this unique find from Thebes expands the original Aeginetan repertory to include an unusual shape that seems to incorporate Cycladic and Minoan influences.⁵⁶ The finding of an Aeginetan matt-painted vessel together with grey Minyan goblets recalls the comparable finds from the burnt house of Orchomenos, discussed above.⁵⁷ Consequently, both the evidence from the settlement of Orchomenos and this burial find from Thebes suggest

⁴⁴ DEMAKOPOULOU and KONSOLA 1975, 44–89.

⁴⁵ DEMAKOPOULOU and KONSOLA 1975, 73.

⁴⁶ DEMAKOPOULOU and KONSOLA 1975, 75.

⁴⁷ DELIYANNI 2003, 599.

⁴⁸ ANDRIKOU 2000, 290–4.

⁴⁹ GOLDMAN 1931, 160, fig. 223.

⁵⁰ For a description of the Aeginetan “mature style”, see SIEDENTOPF 1991, 45–6. Compare also a ring-shaped bird jug, standing on legs, attributed to the same period: SIEDENTOPF 1991, figs. 71, 351.

⁵¹ SIEDENTOPF 1991, pls. 22, 104–6.

⁵² SIEDENTOPF 1991, pls. 8–9, 33–6a.

⁵³ SIEDENTOPF 1991, pl. 40, 175a, 176.

⁵⁴ SIEDENTOPF 1991, pl. 64, 302.

⁵⁵ SIEDENTOPF 1991, pl. 56, 260, 261; pl. 57, 267 and pl. 118, 789.

⁵⁶ Matt-painted bird-shaped jugs are found also in previous phases in Aegina. Compare two fragments from pottery phases 4 and 5, GAUSS and SMETANA 2004, Pottery Phase 4, 3, FG 19/48, 12a–09–6 and Pottery Phase 5, 14, FG XXVIII–8.

⁵⁷ The decoration of the two matt-painted vessels with alternating concentric circles and vertical frames is similar. Compare fig. 1, 9 with fig. 4, 1.

the coexistence of Aeginetan pottery of town IX (phase 6) with classical Boeotian Minyan pottery, offering a first useful chronological synchronism between MH Aegina and Boeotia.

Apart from the scanty MH pottery data from Thebes, we should consider the very interesting feature shared by Thebes and Aegina during the MH II period, namely the “rich warrior graves”.⁵⁸ KILIAN-DIRLMEIER, in her comparative study on the Aegean warrior graves, comments that the most common features appear in centers with weak evidence of pottery imports.⁵⁹ This seems to correspond absolutely with the case of Aegina and Thebes, where the shared imports are sometimes exceptional but low in number. Consequently, both the pottery evidence and the social affinities indicate close relations between two large urban centers, and also a common development on the level of politics, taking place long before the Mycenaean establishment.

Medeon

The puzzle of the Boeotian MH sites has recently been clarified slightly by the evidence from Boeotian Medeon, a hill site located on the southeast edge of the Copais plain.⁶⁰ The Archaeological Ephoreia of Thebes carried out rescue excavations here during 1995 and 1996.⁶¹ These two excavating seasons revealed the remains of a MH settlement, with three succeeding building layers and five intramural cist graves, in the southeast part of the upper plateau of the hill.⁶²

The MH layers were uncovered just below the surface. As they were mostly undisturbed, Medeon became the first excavated site in Boeotia to provide secure statistical pottery data from intact settlement layers. One extensive modern intrusion and the surface finds showed that the site was first occupied during the Neolithic period and that it has remarkable EH remains.⁶³ The habitation, at least in the investigated area, ends during the MH III phase. The closing of the excavation inhibited the screening of the earlier MH layers and the transition from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age.

The site is a typical Copaic settlement, where grey Minyan pottery of excellent quality predominates as 55 percent of the fine pottery.⁶⁴ The analogies between the variants of the Minyan subgroups correspond entirely with those observed in Eutresis and Orchomenos. The quantities of yellow and red Minyan wares are abundant in every stratigraphic layer, always lower than those of the grey Minyan group. It should be borne in mind, however, that the preliminary statistics do not concern the total amount of the pottery, but only the material bearing shape-diagnostic features. We were also able to observe an undecorated “semicoarse red ware”, which is likely to play a great role in future pottery studies for the area – especially for petrographic studies – as it is a still unknown local pottery group.

Among the sherds were identified some small-sized drinking and pouring vessels of Argive or Aeginetan matt-painted wares (Fig. 5). A very distinctive find of excavation layer 5 is a small matt-painted pithos with globular body and collar neck (Fig. 5.10). It was found leaning against an apsidal wall, together with a ribbed foot of a Minyan goblet, near the north edge of trench Q12.⁶⁵ Although no human bones were found, the deposit looks like a disturbed pithos burial in the floor of a house. This pithos shape has parallels in Aegina towns XII and XIII, but the spacing of the decoration refers to the later town IX.⁶⁶ A fragment of a wide bowl with T-rim and hatched decoration over the shoulder is comparable with a whole series of similar decorated matt-painted vessels in Aegina (Fig. 5.11).⁶⁷ The Aeginetan decorating tradition can be recognized also in smaller vases such as goblets and cups (Fig. 5.2, 9).⁶⁸ Parallel chevrons (Fig. 5.3), other free-standing motifs placed in friezes (Fig. 5.1) and groups of lines on the handle, which are very common in Aegina, decorate the shoulder of some matt-painted kantharoi and one-handled bowls from Medeon.⁶⁹

At Medeon, the presence of bichrome matt-painted pottery is very sparse, which is rather significant for the chronology of the MH settlement. Due to this

⁵⁸ KASIMI-SOUTOU 1986; KILIAN 1997, 83, 112. For the parallel development of the elite during the MBA, see KILIAN-DIRLMEIER 1997, 120–2.

⁵⁹ KILIAN-DIRLMEIER 1997, 177.

⁶⁰ Topographic information is given by LAUFFER 1989, 34.

⁶¹ ARAVANTINOS 2002, 353; SARRI 2000, 224–41.

⁶² SARRI 2000, figs. 3–4.

⁶³ SARRI 2000, fig. 5, 1–6.

⁶⁴ SARRI 2000, fig. 5: 7–12, 6: 3–9, 13–8.

⁶⁵ SARRI 2000, fig. 3, location 5.

⁶⁶ SIEDENTOPF 1991, fig. 34, 156–7.

⁶⁷ SIEDENTOPF 1991, fig. 79–84.

⁶⁸ Compare fig. 5, 11 with SIEDENTOPF 1991, 1, 5 and fig. 5.2 with SIEDENTOPF 1991, figs. 116, 763–8, 117, 773.

⁶⁹ Compare, respectively, with SIEDENTOPF 1991, fig. 116, 761; fig. 104 and fig. 102, 627–8.

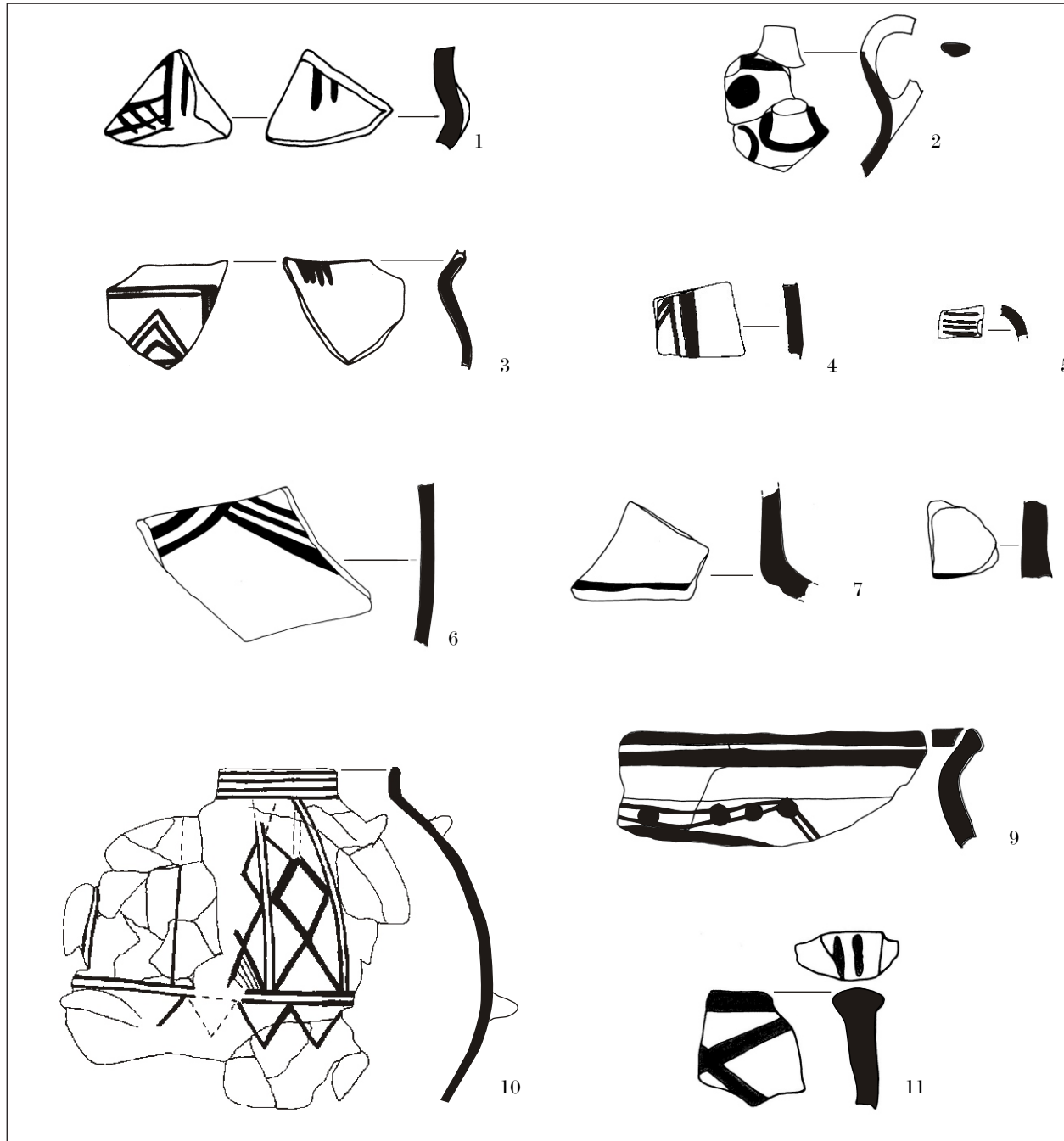


Fig. 5 Medeon. Matt-painted pottery, 1–9, 11: 1:3; 10: 1:10

fact, as due to the lack of a real change in the ceramic development – as all MH examples belong to the “mature Minyan” period – the habitation levels of Medeon are dated to the MH II–III phase and might not reach the very end of the latter. Furthermore, the evidence from Medeon reflects the contrast between older “type sites” and recently investigated sites,

proving that even a short excavation season can sometimes upstage a century of difficult and often vague research of long-known sites.

Plataia

New evidence about the MH period in southwest Boeotia is provided by recent research in Plataia.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ ARAVANTINOS, KONECNY and MARCHESE 2003, 313.

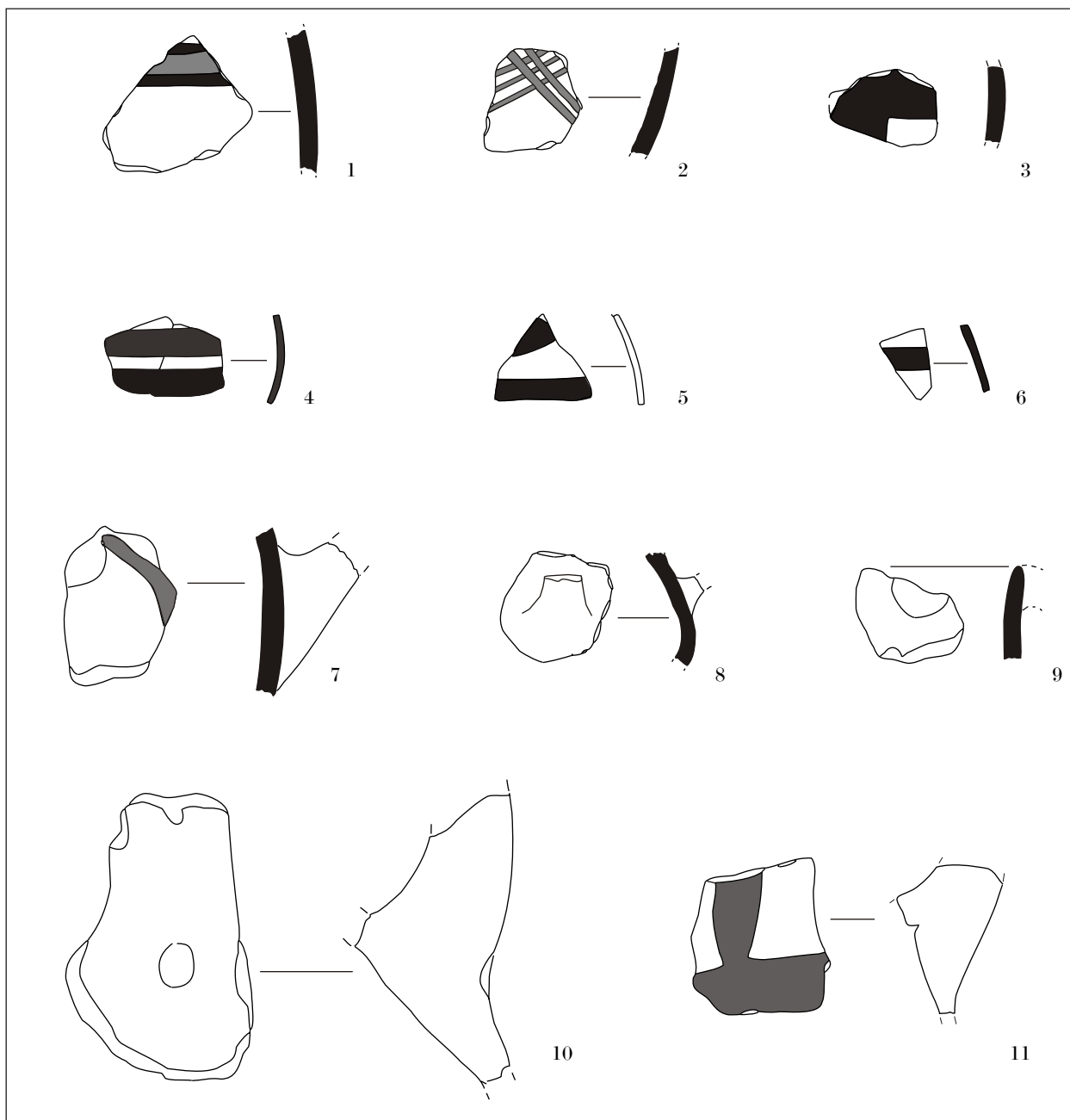


Fig. 6 Plataia. MH matt-painted pottery, 1:3

Two small trial trenches near the west acropolis wall yielded a considerable amount of prehistoric pottery, dated from the Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age, which was unfortunately found in disturbed layers. The proportion of the MH pottery here makes up ca. 23 percent of the diagnostic prehistoric sherds and, compared to proportions from the other prehistoric periods, appears to be relatively high. In this deposit, grey Minyan was dominant, but some matt-painted sherds of probable Aeginetan origin were also observed (Fig. 6,3–11). One of them perhaps bears a potter's mark on the handle (Fig. 6,10). The local matt-painted variants are rep-

resented by some body fragments with monochrome or bichrome decoration (Fig. 6,1–2).

The ongoing study of the surface finds may clarify the location and the extent of the MH site, which up to now seems to be limited to the upper plateau of the acropolis. MH material at Plataia offers a very useful comparison to that at Eutresis, as the sites are located just a few kilometers apart. Although it would be unwise to compare the results of an extended excavation with the material from two small trial trenches, it can be assumed that Plataia was less important than Eutresis during the MBA, forming perhaps a smaller satellite site.

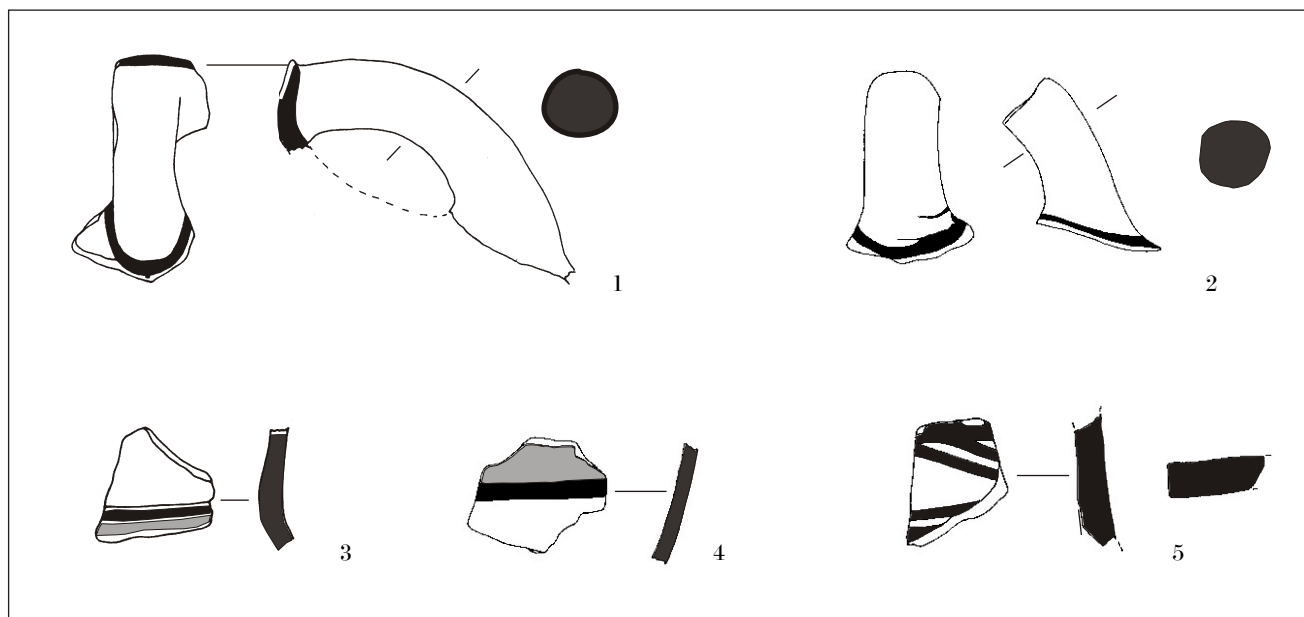


Fig. 7 Agios Konstantinos. Matt-painted pottery, 1:3

Surveys

It would be useful to introduce also the evidence from older and modern surveys into this discussion. Here, we usually come across the problem of a rough definition of the matt-painted classes, since the reports are often focused on the dating of the collected material.⁷¹ As a result, we cannot often clarify whether the matt-painted pottery group belongs to the Aeginetan type or to another local or imported variety. Subsequent to R. Buck's and D. French's work,⁷² the literature usually refers to the presence of particular matt-painted classes, but we are still ignorant of the percentages.

The Cambridge-Durham survey in northwest Boeotia revealed a new series of MH sites.⁷³ At some of them – such as Haliki, Mauromati plains, Palaiopangia, the Valley of the Muses, site 4 and Hyettos – matt-painted pottery of Aeginetan type has been found among larger quantities of Minyan wares.⁷⁴

Tanagra

The most recent intensive survey in Boeotia, conducted by the Universities of Leiden and Ljubljana, focuses on the area of ancient Tanagra.⁷⁵ The first

three seasons of fieldwork in the city and the offsite area brought to light some prehistoric finds. Within the city walls, the prehistoric finds – covered by a thick deposit of Greco-Roman remains – were very few, but extended across a long chronological span, from the Neolithic to LBA. Among a handful of MH finds, only one matt-painted sherd was located, probably of Aeginetan origin.

During the 2003 season, in the southwest extension of the investigation area toward the area of Ayios Thomas, samples were collected on the site of Ayios Konstantinos, which is a naturally fortified hill in the Asopos valley.⁷⁶ The prehistoric site was inhabited from the Neolithic to the end of the LBA and yielded a large amount of well-preserved prehistoric sherds. Unlike MH finds at the city of Tanagra, those at Ayios Konstantinos were numerous, strongly resembling those at the three major Boeotian sites: the best quality Minyan wares, some matt-painted sherds belonging to the Aeginetan class (Fig. 7, 1–2; 5) and only a few matt-painted sherds belonging to the local polychrome mainland class (Fig. 7, 3–4). The Aeginetan-type examples are some handles of jugs or jars with a band decoration

⁷¹ HOPE SIMPSON and DICKINSON (1979, 235–71) name 40 MH sites in Boeotia.

⁷² BUCK 1964, FRENCH 1972, 30.

⁷³ BINTLIFF 1986.

⁷⁴ I am grateful to J. Bintliff and O. Dickinson for their permission to view the prehistoric material.

⁷⁵ BINTLIFF *et al.* 2000.

⁷⁶ HOPE SIMPSON and DICKINSON 1979, 222. FOSSEY 1988, 52–3, fig. 6. BINTLIFF *et al.* (forthcoming).

around the handle base. A band-handle fragment is ornamented with “closed style” decoration of oblique lines.

Ayios Konstantinos represents a major Bronze Age site and it seems that it had been more important than the prehistoric site below the site of ancient Tanagra. The location of the site, and the amounts and the high quality of the finds, indicate also that the Tanagraike had strong local pre-Mycenaean centers that ruled the coastal area of the Euboean gulf and that these – in contradiction to what is usually assumed – must have been independent of the control of Thebes.⁷⁷

CONCLUSIONS

Comparing the available information, it is possible to suggest that Boeotia does not have its own production of matt-painted pottery prior to a very developed stage of the MH II period. The main production in the area at this time is still devoted to Minyan, as this was the main product competing with the Aeginetan wares and was also exported to many, sometimes very distant, regions.

Although the present stage of research does not permit any final conclusions, it allows the observation of some tendencies regarding style and trading itineraries. Even within the close geographical borders of Boeotia, the distribution of Aeginetan pottery seems to depend on the distance from Aegina and the Argolid. In Eutresis, which is the Boeotian settlement nearest to Aegina, and in easy communication with Aegina through the Corinthian gulf, the best-preserved and most elaborate Aeginetan examples were found. These gradually reduce, the more northward and the further away from the coast one looks.⁷⁸ This is, of course, a generalized, working pattern, which does not exclude other factors such as the significance of the site and its position in a comparable inland trading network.

The distribution of Aeginetan pottery in the mainland – where it is represented by a low but constant percentage throughout the MH period – unsurprisingly suggests that goods were usually transport-

ed by ships to harbors. In all investigated areas of MH activity, there is at least one Aeginetan matt-painted pithos, indicating that in Boeotia the importing of small matt-painted vessels was not markedly important but that the possession of an Aeginetan decorated pithos was very desirable for the most prominent households.

The richness, the variety and the increased artistic character of the matt-painted pottery, which reached the mainland through Aeginetan and Cycladic pottery styles, is likely to have led to a new aesthetic pursuit quite different from the monochrome of traditional Minyan. This new trend, probably associated with socio-economical and/or political events between the mainland and the islands, was very much preferred by consumers during the MH II period and was finally able to radically influence local production. The native potters made a major effort to combine the two mainstream styles of their period, the Minyan and the matt-painted, and the two categories coincide in the creation of “yellow and red Minyan matt-painted”. The features of this pottery class follow the Minyan tradition, but with the addition of black or dark brown decoration. Later, in the final stage of MBA, in the MH III period, this trend apparently leads to the occurrence of “polychrome mainland”, a ware dominating the burial assemblages of the shaft graves.⁷⁹

In conclusion, we can observe that in Boeotia no attempt to imitate the Aeginetan pottery in terms of style and manufacturing techniques took place. On the contrary, great efforts were made to select diverse stylistic elements and to combine their advantages in order to build new pottery styles. The perception of Aeginetan matt-painted pottery in Boeotia offers a further indication that during the MH III period, the pronounced regionalism of MH production was retreating markedly. The old traditional goods were gradually replaced by products of a fruitful exchange of ideas, reflecting a more intensive phase in commercial and political contacts and perhaps a first confrontation of power among the later Mycenaean centers.

⁷⁷ KONSOLA 1981, 66.

⁷⁸ A typical mainland example is represented by the MH material of Elateia, where some matt-painted vases were found: SOTERIADES 1908, 63–95.

⁷⁹ MYLONAS did not distinguish between Aeginetan and main-

land matt-painted wares. This division was made by French and then used broadly by a series of scholars. MYLONAS 1973, 305–310. FRENCH 1971, 30–7. DIETZ 1991, 32, 218–22, fig. 90.

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