

Classical Pottery from Sikyon

The fine wares

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The PhD study '*Classical fine ware pottery from Sikyon*' has started in June 2016, is funded by the project "Finding Old Sikyon" and is housed by the University of Crete. Any firm conclusions would not be appropriate at this initial stage; therefore the following represents an introduction to the project.

The history of scholarship on pottery from Sikyon is brief. Some progress has been made in the research of Hellenistic and Roman pottery from the plateau, in which a local production has been verified for the period between the 2nd c. BC and the 3rd c. AD. These studies illustrate the similarity of the Sikyonian fabrics with the Corinthian and subsequently suggest their distinction as a key methodological issue. Our knowledge of the pre-Hellenistic Sikyonian assemblage is rather scanty, especially since there is not even one study on primary material that has been excavated on the plain. Since this will be the first ever study on Classical pottery from Sikyon, it must include as wide a range of contexts as possible. Therefore, the dataset consist of a cemetery excavated at the site Syriona, at the southwest corner of the Sikyonian plain, a votive deposit from the same site, and a domestic deposit for which the final choice has not yet been made.

The cemetery at Syriona is located directly north of the Asopos river, only 60 m south of the residential area. 92 graves were investigated at this site, the majority of which date from around 525 to the early 3rd cent. BC. The ceramic assemblage of the cemetery consists of around 250 vases distributed into drinking, serving, pouring and covered vessels, as well as oil containers, lamps and miniature vessels. A popular category among the burial offerings is the covered vessels, in the form of plain lekanides with stepped lid or conventionalizing lekanides and pyxides. Nonetheless, the most abundant type of offering is the oil container due to various types of imported Attic lekythoi, namely black figure, red figure, white ground, black glazed or decorated with floral patterns (*Fig. 1*).

The votive deposit was excavated approximately at the centre of the Syriona district, in an area defined by two Classical periboloi. The deposit consists of 291 kilos of pottery and 9 kilos of terracotta figurines, while the rest of the finds account of approximately 4 kilos. From the 291 kilos, 75.1 % are fine wares, 19.3 % are coarse wares, and 5.6 % are cooking wares. The homogeneity of the soil in the deposit and the fact that joins have already occurred between different levels, suggest that the material was discarded in a single episode at this spot. The main body of the ceramics dates from 450 to 375 BC.

At this stage only some preliminary observations about the typology, decoration and fabrics can be presented. It appears that the most popular drinking vessel of the deposit is the goblet. Usually it is fully black-glazed, although there are

fragments decorated with added white and red bands, and floral motifs. Another distinctive group among the deposit is the black-glazed ribbed vessels, in particular the ribbed oinochoai, chous and mugs. It is noteworthy that there are no Attic pieces among the thousands of fragments belonging to this group. Furthermore, it appears that a significant portion consists of red figure pottery, primarily of bell kraters, hydriai and plates. Attic fragments are scant, as the vast majority appears in a pale brown or pale yellow fabric (*Fig. 2*).

In case that there was a local production, the fundamental challenge of the study is to define the identity of the Classical assemblage, both in terms of production and consumption. In reality, we do not even know if there was an independent Sikyonian production of fine wares in the Classical period. The starting point towards this direction is the definition of the local fabrics and especially their distinction from the Corinthian production. Comparative microscopic and chemical analyses will be applied to pottery from Sikyon, the Potters' Quarter of Corinth and fired clay samples from both territories.

At a second level, the study will explore the Sikyonian assemblage in terms of typology, decorative techniques and imports in order to offer insight into a series of matters apart from pottery, such as trade networks with Athens, Corinth and other poleis of the Corinthian Gulf, the economic position of Classical Sikyon and the social status of its citizens. Finally, pottery will serve as a methodological approach in answering the question of 303 BC and the abandonment of Old Sikyon by mapping the absence or presence of late 4th-early 3rd c. BC ceramics in the different zones of the Sikyonian plain.



Fig. 1: Conventionalizing convex pyxis, 525-500 BC



Fig. 2: Red-figure hydria, Nike and Eros, Late 5th – Early 4th cent. BC