

Early Helladic II Pottery from Midea in the Argolid: Forms and Fabrics Pointing to Special Use and Import

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Abstract: An area on the Upper Acropolis of Midea, excavated from 2004 to 2006, yielded substantial pottery that indicates the site was in use during the Early Helladic II Developed period. From the pottery forms represented, this area of the site was used for food consumption. A macroscopic examination of the forms and fabrics, based on petrographic analysis, indicates that the majority of the material was produced locally. However, about 10% of the assemblage is identified as imported, most probably from the Corinthia. Since the vast majority of these imports consist of vessels used for consumption, we argue that the Argolid enjoyed close social ties with its northern neighbour.

Keywords: Early Bronze Age, Greece, Argolid, Midea, pottery, petrographic analysis

Introduction

Midea, a well-known citadel of the Mycenaean period, is situated at the Eastern border of the Argive Plain.² Excavations by a joint Greek-Swedish excavation were begun in 1983 under the direction of Katie Demakopoulou and focused mainly on the Mycenaean period. It was only in 2004–2006 that K. Demakopoulou, excavating two adjacent trenches A and Aa at the northwest terrace of the Upper Acropolis, discovered stratified deposits with an abundant concentration of finds dating from the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age (Figs. 1–2).³

The uppermost strata of Trench A, opened in 2004, have already produced more Early Helladic (EH) pottery than has ever been found in any area of the site. However, in this year almost none of the excavation units yielded assemblages that did not contain an admixture of Mycenaean and Middle Helladic (MH) pottery. Therefore, apart from a horizontal-handled jar dated early in the Middle Helladic period,⁴ the entire assemblage of Early Helladic I and II, Early Helladic III / Middle Helladic I, as well as Late and Final Neolithic date seemed not to be in situ.⁵

While the contexts excavated in trench A in 2005 did not feature any Mycenaean material, finds indicate that the area was used during EH II and EH III. Two graves were uncovered. Grave 1, a rock-cut chamber tomb, contained few materials, and most likely dates to EH I/II on the basis of its tomb type, although a Final Neolithic date should not be excluded.⁶ Grave 2, a pit grave, was ¹⁴C dated to the second part of the 5th millennium BC.⁷ In addition, the corner of a thick, strongly built wall set upon bedrock was uncovered. With it was an assemblage of large fragments of pottery vessels.⁸

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² Demakopoulou – Divari-Valakou 2010.

³ Demakopoulou et al. 2005; Demakopoulou et al. 2006–2007; Demakopoulou et al. 2008. A final publication of the pre-Mycenaean finds is in preparation (Demakopoulou – Alram in preparation).

⁴ Demakopoulou et al. 2005, 22, fig. 41.

⁵ Demakopoulou et al. 2005, 21–24. The EH III–MH I pottery will be published by M. Zavadil in Demakopoulou – Alram in preparation.

⁶ Demakopoulou et al. 2006/2007, 21–23, figs. 40–45.

⁷ MAMS 27718: cal 1-sigma 4357–4274, cal 2-sigma 4442–4261.

⁸ Demakopoulou et al. 2006/2007, 22–23, figs. 46–52.

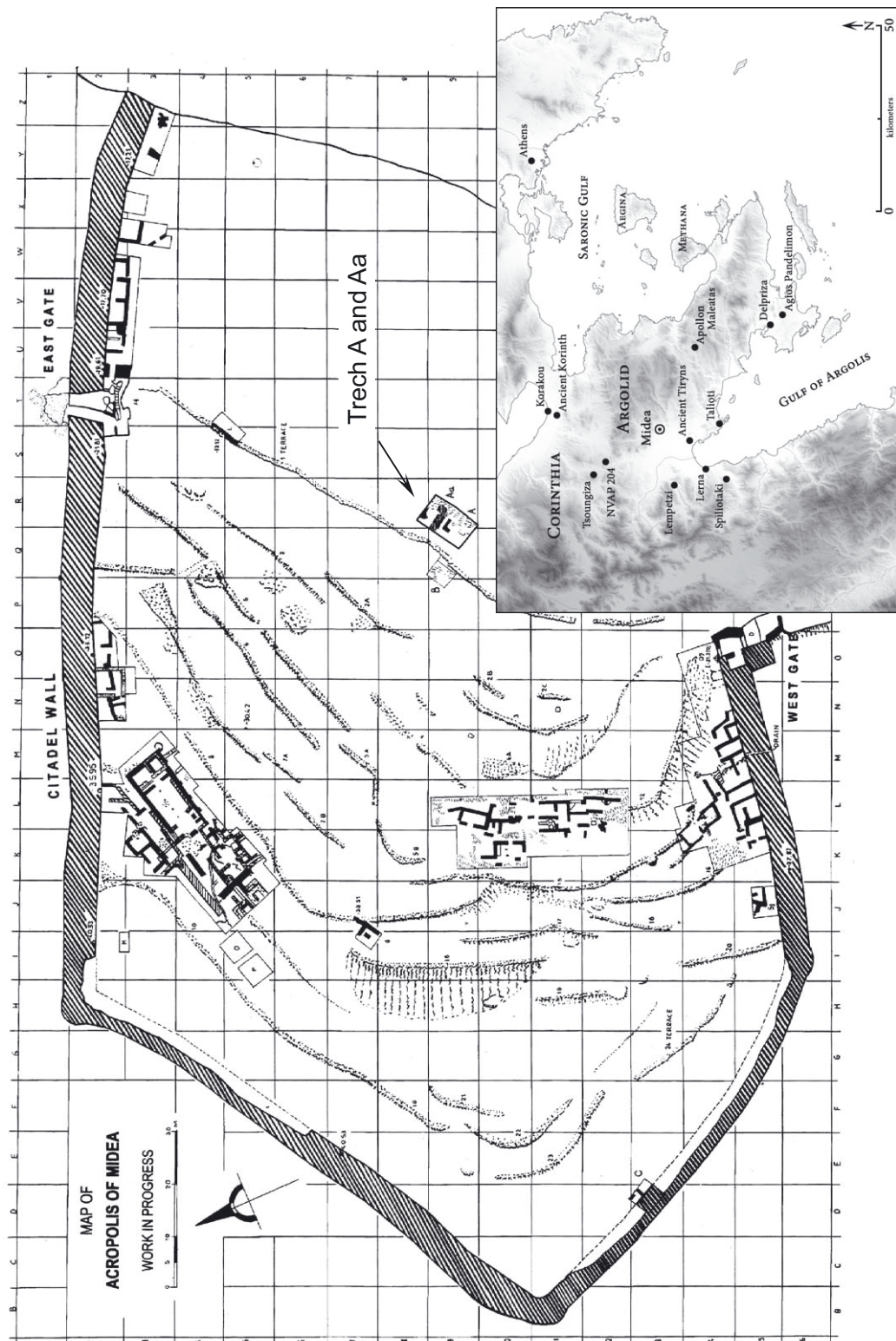
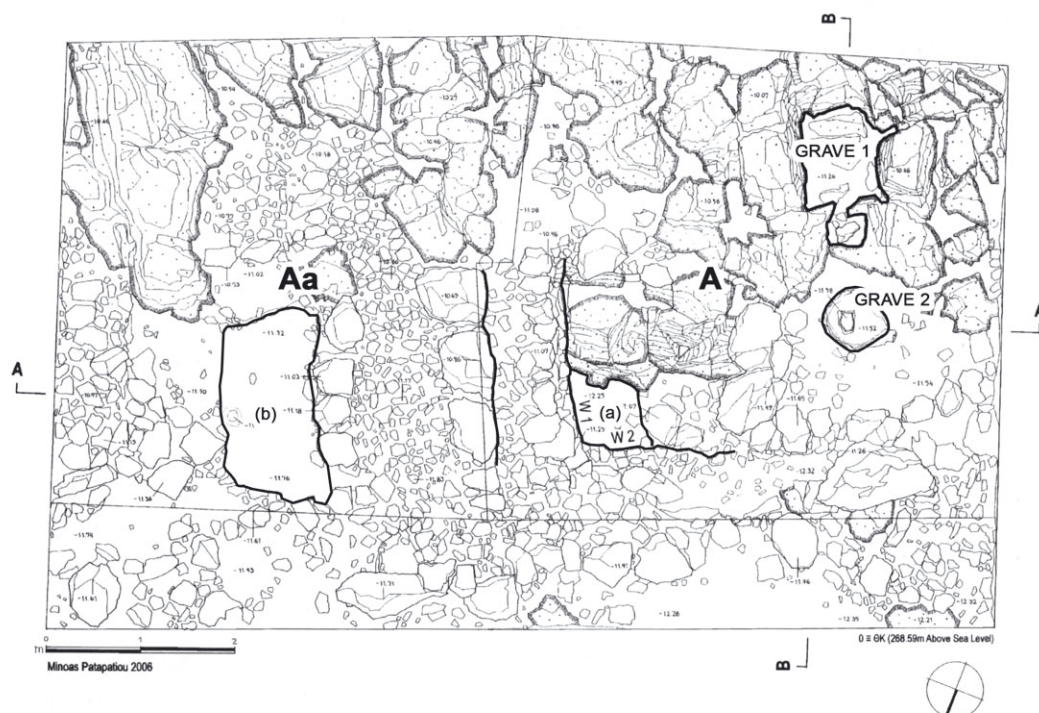


Fig. 1 The situation of the trenches A and Aa on the Upper Acropolis of Midea (after Demakopoulou et al. 2006, E. Markou and M. Patapatiou; small map: C. Burke)



The Early Helladic II Periods of Use at the Site

Since most contexts are mixed and no ^{14}C dates were available, dating is based upon typological comparisons of the pottery with that published from other sites, i.e. Lerna,¹¹ Tsoungiza,¹² and Tiryns.¹³

The initial basis for dating the EH II use of the site is an assemblage of pottery vessels. These were associated with the foundations of the strong wall, and therefore date this architectural feature. The only closed EH II context within trenches A and Aa, the assemblage consisted of complete and large fragments of three normal-sized saucers, five small saucers, one sauceboat, two askoi, as well as one ladle (Fig. 3).

The three saucers are solidly painted, a feature characteristic of phases A and B of Lerna III.¹⁴ They are of the deep and curved carinated type, which is extremely frequent in the material at Midea.¹⁵ According to Wiencke this form first appears in Lerna IIIB Early and decreases in Lerna IIIC Early.¹⁶ According to Pullen this form is dated to EH II Developed phases 1 and 2 at Tsoungiza.¹⁷ The form is equally frequent at Tiryns EH II Early and Developed.¹⁸

Five of the unpainted small saucers, which have a diameter of less than 10cm, a simple rim, and a rounded bottom, were almost entirely preserved. At Lerna this form also appears during Lerna III mid-phase B, but is still in use into the period of the House of the Tiles.¹⁹ This type, well known from other sites, is especially frequent at Midea.²⁰

The only fragment of a monochrome sauceboat has a horizontal handle.²¹ Furthermore, large parts of two unpainted askoi with undecorated strap handles were present. Typologically, they are not easily compared with the stratified material, since their necks are not as well-defined as those of Lerna type 2 dated to phase C, and the handles do not show any incised decoration as is known from type 1 of phase B.²² Quite well-preserved was also the bowl of a solidly-painted ladle that is most frequent during Lerna IIIA Late and IIIB.²³

In summary, according to the typology, all of these vessels have their floruit in the period of Lerna IIIB, which coincides with the climax of solidly-painted saucers. Therefore, the material should be synchronous with the developed phase at Tsoungiza, which in terms of absolute chronology means a date between 2650 and 2450/2350.²⁴

There is also evidence that the site likely was occupied during the earliest stage of EH II. This is indicated by an area that contained EH I pottery and featured – in addition to the EH I material – forms characteristic of Lerna IIIA as well as EH II Initial at Tsoungiza. To this group belong saucers with incurved rims, while carinated rims are missing.²⁵ This context also included a fragment of a jar with vertical strap handle, a type already present at Tsoungiza during the initial phase of EH II (Fig 4).²⁶ Admittedly, this is only a small sample, but it could point to continuity in use of the area from EH I to EH II without any interruption.

¹¹ Wiencke 2000, part II.

¹² Pullen 2011, 160–240, 337–439.

¹³ Weißhaar 1981; Weißhaar 1983.

¹⁴ Wiencke 2000, 325–326.

¹⁵ See below.

¹⁶ Wiencke 2000, 596–597: saucer type B, rim profile j (see fig. II.76).

¹⁷ Pullen 2011, 356: Form 9.

¹⁸ Weißhaar 1983, 340, fig. 9 (type Id).

¹⁹ Wiencke 2000, 603–604.

²⁰ See below; for a collection of analogies from other sites see Wiencke 2000, 604.

²¹ Wiencke 2000, 587 (type 2); Pullen 2011, 351.

²² Wiencke 2000, 531, 530, fig. II.72.

²³ Wiencke 2000, 573.

²⁴ Pullen 2011, 378; for Lerna see Manning 1995, 172–173.

²⁵ Wiencke 2000, 596; Pullen 2011, 177–180 (form 7).

²⁶ Pullen 2011, 186–188.



Fig. 3 The EH II context from the area of the foundations of the strong walls: a.–c. saucers, d.–f. miniature saucers, g. sauceboat, h.–i. askoi, j. ladle (OREA, K. Xenikakis)

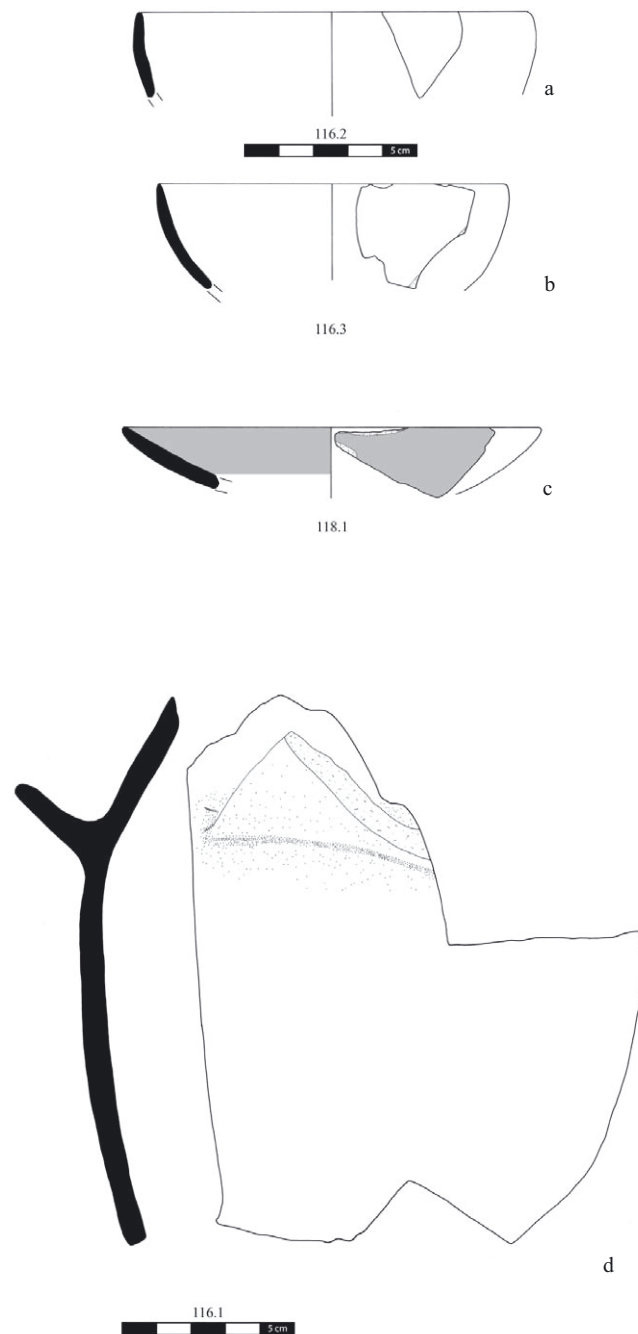


Fig. 4 EH II Initial pottery from mixed EH I/II contexts: a.–c. saucers with tapered/incurving rims, d. jar with vertical strap handle (OREA, A. Avramut, C. Dalhed, M. Kitsati)

On the other hand, pottery that was mixed together with EH II and EH III material could date to a stage of EH II that is later than the assemblage at the corner of the thick wall (Fig. 5). From these contexts were recovered a considerable amount of saucers with partially painted or linear decoration, as well as banded basins and jars with circular decoration. This could indicate a continuation in the use of the site to a later stage of EH II. However, linear painted pottery was also

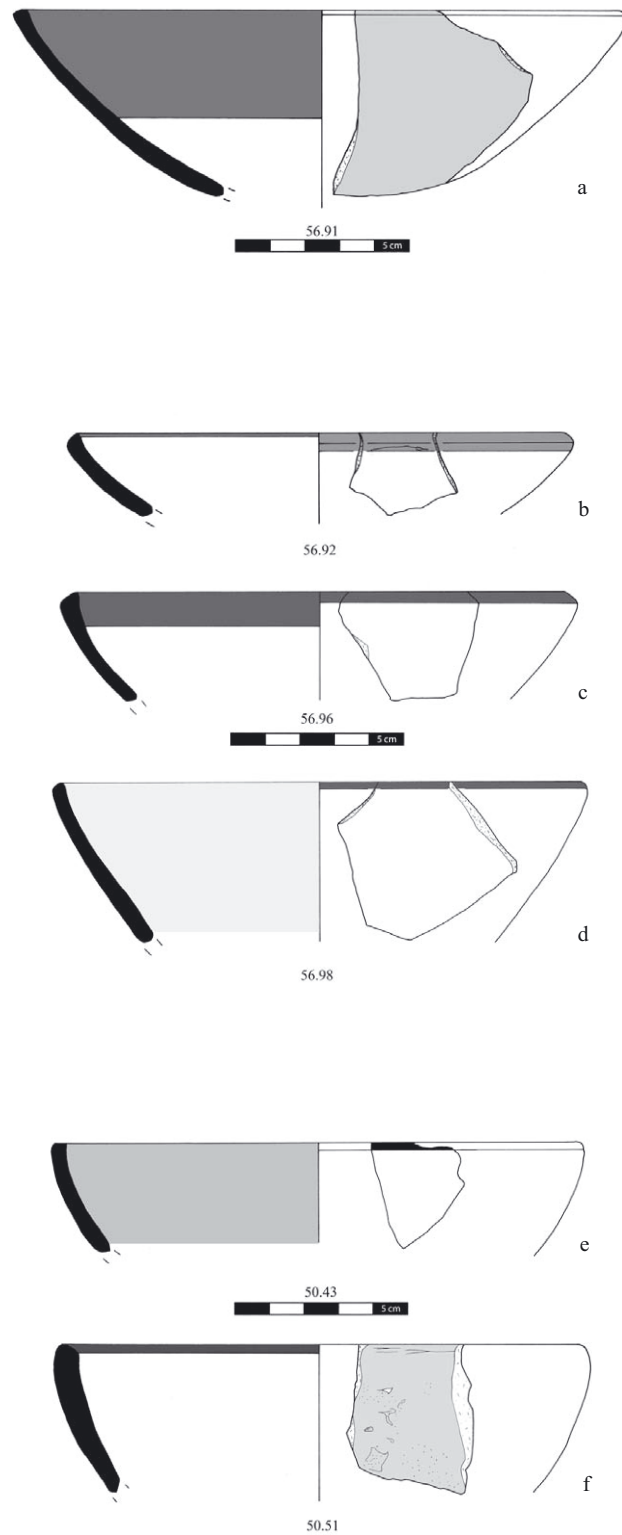


Fig. 5 Saucers from mixed contexts dating to EH II Developed or later: a. thickened, b.–d. hooked, e.–f. flattened rims (OREA, A. Avramut, C. Dalhed, M. Kitsati)

commonly in use during EH II Developed,²⁷ Lerna IIIC Early²⁸ and Tiryns stratum III–VI.²⁹ In any case, saucers and sauceboats typical of Lerna IIIC Late and Lerna IIID are missing.

The Use of the Site During Early Helladic II on the Basis of Vessel Types (Fig. 6)

In the excavated area, only the vessels found on bedrock at the corner of the thick wall can be considered to be *in situ*. We can argue that these vessels were either stored in the basement of a building, or displaced from a floor above. In general, they were part of a collection of vessels for eating and drinking.

The majority of the vessel fragments were not found *in situ* and may originate either from the excavated area, or were eroded from farther up the slope. This material consisted mainly of sherds of vessels used for eating and drinking such as saucers and sauceboats. These fragments complement forms used for serving, such as jars, askoi, basins, and bowls as well as a few ladles. Fragments from vessels connected to cooking activities, such as baking pans and pot stands, are comparatively rare and could derive from a small number of vessels. Fragments of pithoi are also uncommon; these relatively rare items could come from the use of this space for temporary storage. On the other hand, the well-worn fragments of roller-impressed pithos rims³⁰ could have been eroded from adjacent storage rooms. Therefore, we can argue that during the EH II period the excavated area was continuously used for consumption as well as for food preparation.

Local Production and Imported Pottery

This topic is connected to the petrographic analyses, which were carried out by Clare Burke and Peter Day of the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield.³¹

Based on these results and aided by Clare Burke, I divided the material into a number of macroscopic fabric groups. After assigning all diagnostic sherds to their respective vessel forms it was possible to determine which fabrics were used for which type of vessel. I also took into consideration whether the details of specific forms were characteristic of particular fabrics. Such details could point to different production centres, which may have been situated in different areas or regions.

Of course, macroscopic distinctions between the fabrics do not directly correspond to the definition of ware groups by petrographic analysis. The most helpful feature for differentiating wares macroscopically was colour, as with very few exceptions the colour and form of the inclusions were, to the naked eye, similar except for variations in the ratio of materials in their composition. Therefore, the material was classed into: red, pink, and greenish-yellow fabrics as well as a fine fabric with yellow-blue polished surface.

The red fabrics contained white inclusions, mica, and mudstone (Fig. 7a).³² From the number of inclusions visible to the naked eye, the red fabric was divided into fine – medium fine – medium coarse – coarse. According to the petrographic analysis, all red to red-brown and orange-brown EH II fabrics found at Midea were produced in the Argolid. One of these red fabrics, which to the naked eye appeared fine-grained and under the microscope medium coarse, often featured a black core and white inclusions that glint in the sunshine. This fabric is already assigned to the

²⁷ Pullen 2011, 341–344, figs. 5.101–102, 110.

²⁸ Wiencke 2000, 326.

²⁹ Weißhaar 1981, 228, fig. 73.

³⁰ O. Krzyszkowska, in: Demakopoulou – Alram in preparation.

³¹ See Burke et al., this volume.

³² 5YR 7/6 yellowish red to 2.5YR 5/6 red; petrography: Sandstone to low grade metamorphic fabric; see Burke et al., this volume.

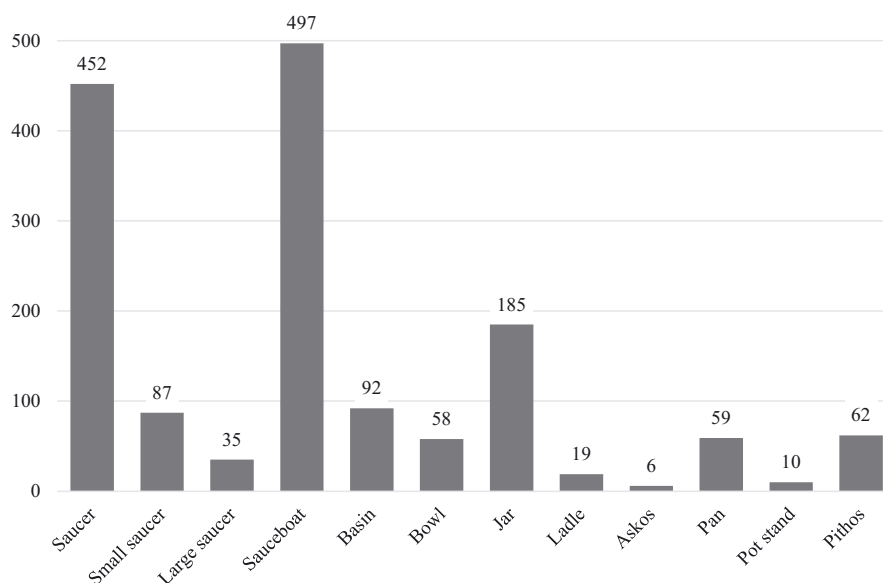


Fig. 6 Pottery forms used in areas A and Aa during EH II (E. Alram-Stern)

Early Helladic I from its use in the production of so-called Talioti pottery.³³ Pinkish (Fig. 7b) and greyish-pink fabrics that feature the same inclusions as the red fabric should probably be associated with them.

A greenish-yellow fabric of mostly fine and sometimes medium fine texture is also observed (Fig. 7c). In contrast to the red fabric, this fabric features black inclusions, although white inclusions also occur.³⁴ From the petrography, this greenish-yellow fabric is not locally produced, and must have been manufactured outside the Argolid, most probably in the Corinthia. This is supported by statistics: the red fabric is much more frequent in the assemblage than the greenish-yellow imports (Fig. 8).

Amongst the coarser fabrics, one reddish or pinkish fabric is characterised by a greater proportion of mudstone inclusions (Fig. 7f).³⁵ Another coarse fabric is characterised by the presence of white calcareous inclusions (Fig. 7g).³⁶ Both belong to the category of fabrics most likely produced using regional clay. However, another yellowish-pink, medium coarse fabric (Fig. 7d),³⁷ characterised by many fine to small, angular black inclusions was likely imported from the Corinthia.

The following will discuss which fabrics were used for which forms. For the saucers, the rim forms can be divided into incurved rims, carinated rims, and straight rims with a flattened, thickened, or hooked lip (Fig. 9).³⁸ For each of these we examined whether certain rim forms were produced in specific fabrics and if other details of shape or of paint could be associated with fabric type.

³³ See Burke et al., this volume.

³⁴ 5–7.5–10YR 8/3–4 very pale brown; petrography: Fine green firing clay mix (high fired); see Burke et al., this volume.

³⁵ Petrography: Mudstone, siltstone, and mudstone breccia fabric; see Burke et al., this volume.

³⁶ Petrography: Calcite fabric; see Burke et al., this volume.

³⁷ 7.5–10YR 8/4 very pale brown – pink; petrography: ‘Mudstone and argillite fabric’; see Burke et al., this volume.

³⁸ Wiencke 2000, 540, fig. II.76a–k.

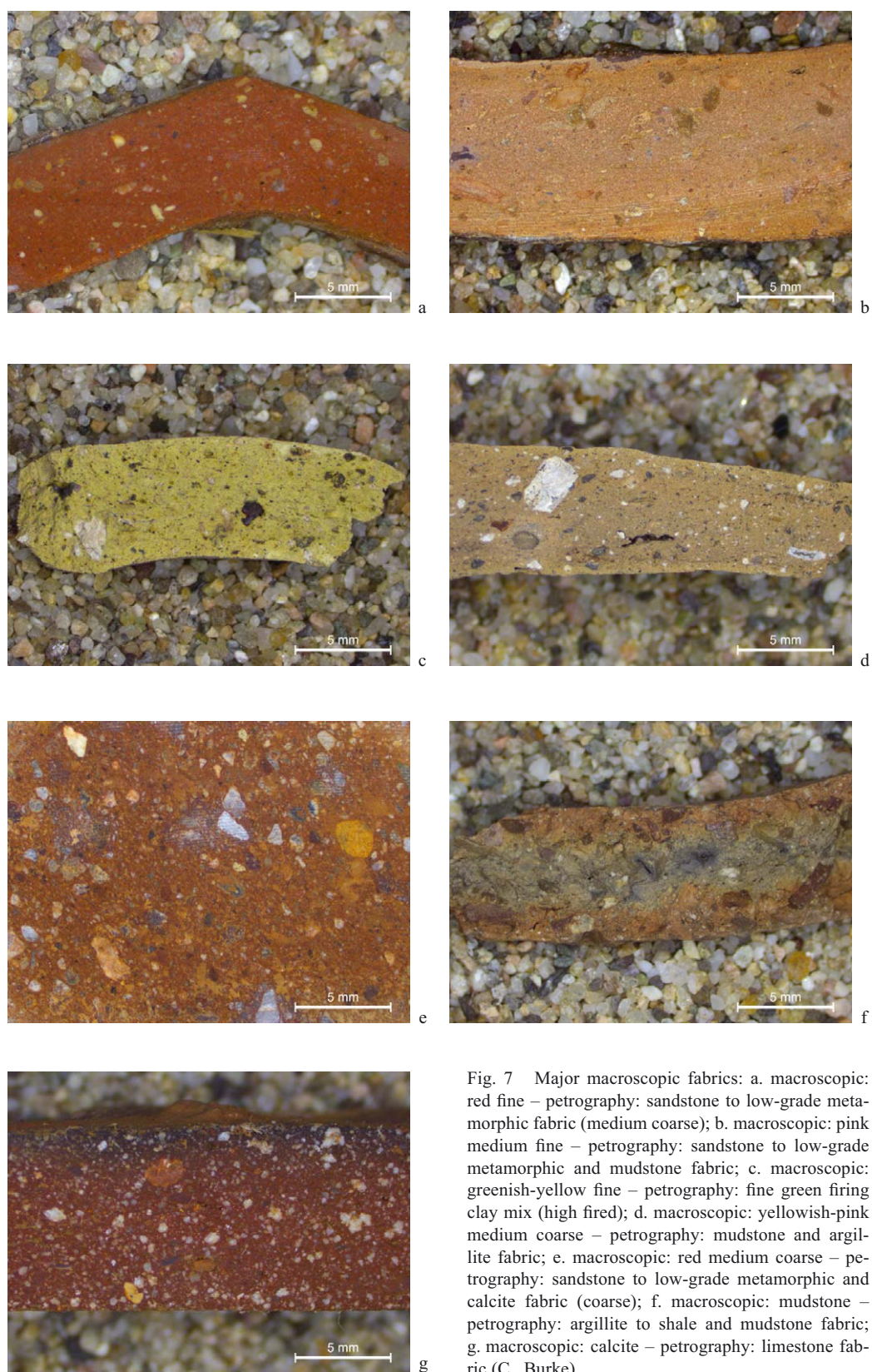


Fig. 7 Major macroscopic fabrics: a. macroscopic: red fine – petrography: sandstone to low-grade metamorphic fabric (medium coarse); b. macroscopic: pink medium fine – petrography: sandstone to low-grade metamorphic and mudstone fabric; c. macroscopic: greenish-yellow fine – petrography: fine green firing clay mix (high fired); d. macroscopic: yellowish-pink medium coarse – petrography: mudstone and argillite fabric; e. macroscopic: red medium coarse – petrography: sandstone to low-grade metamorphic and calcite fabric (coarse); f. macroscopic: mudstone – petrography: argillite to shale and mudstone fabric; g. macroscopic: calcite – petrography: limestone fabric (C. Burke)

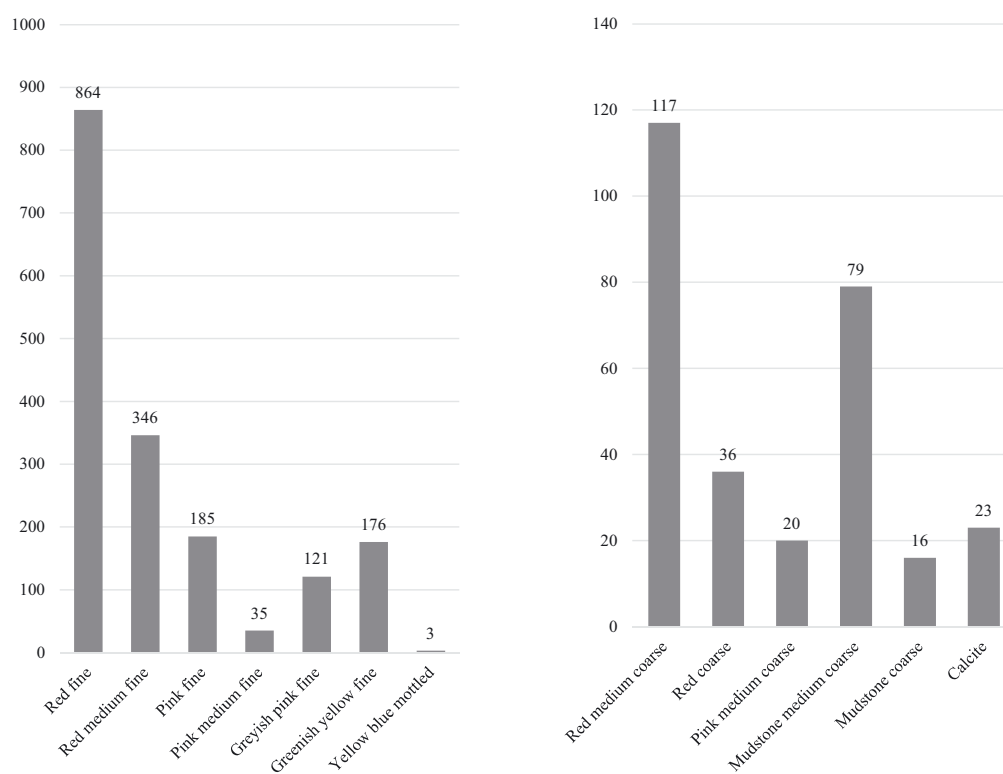


Fig. 8 Frequency of fine fabrics in areas A and Aa during EH II (E. Alram-Stern)

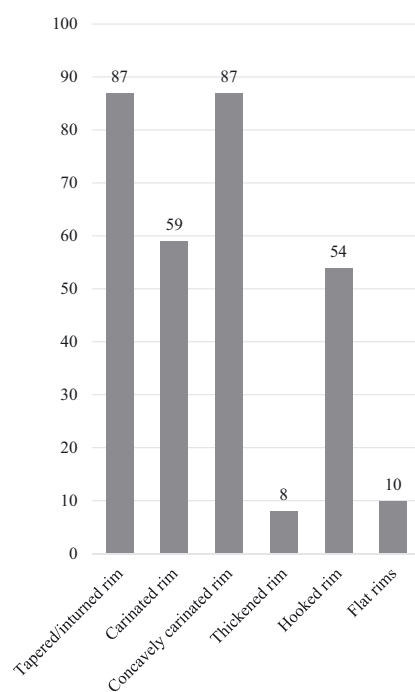


Fig. 9 Frequency of rim shapes of saucers in areas A and Aa during EH II (E. Alram-Stern)

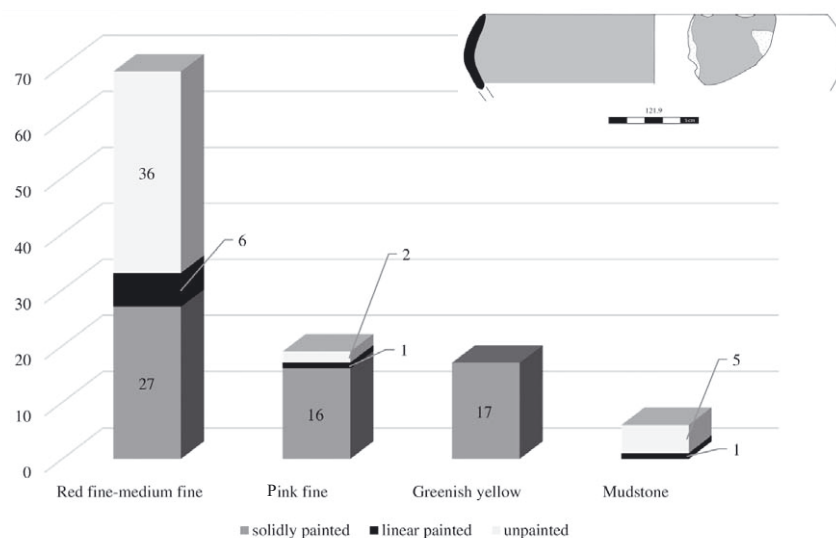


Fig. 10 Frequency of fabrics of saucers with tapered/incurved rim (E. Alram-Stern)

Saucers with an incurved rim already appear in the EH II Initial stage and continue into EH II Developed (Fig. 10).³⁹ Like all other forms, red and pink fabrics outnumber those of greenish-yellow. However, the greenish-yellow saucers are always solidly painted in black, while amongst the red pieces, those solidly painted in red to brown are nearly identical in frequency to those left unpainted. A few of the latter are linear painted, which could point to a longer life span of this type of red ware but also to a greater variability in production.

For the carinated deep saucer with ring base, two subtypes are distinguished. For the relatively frequent saucers with concave carinated rims,⁴⁰ no greenish-yellow pieces were collected, and therefore it seems that the shape was only produced in the local fabric (Fig. 11). Saucers with straight carinated rims⁴¹ are less common overall, but some examples made with greenish-yellow fabric were recovered. With few exceptions, these saucers were solidly painted, although amongst saucers produced in the red fabric a few linear painted or unpainted pieces are known (Fig. 12).

The more shallow saucers with flattened, thickened, or hooked rims might be later in date (Fig. 13).⁴² Only a few pieces, including an especially shallow saucer (Fig. 13d), are of greenish-yellow fabric, while another is produced in the fine yellow-blue polished ware. Vessels of this form were more often linear painted than solidly painted.

From this analysis it appears that the red fabric, which is widely distributed, dominates all categories of saucers. The greenish-yellow fabric, by contrast, is much rarer. This fits its identification as an import. In addition, saucers made in this fabric were almost exclusively produced as solidly painted vessels. This implies that imports were more frequent during the earlier and developed phases of EH II, and may serve as a chronological marker. This is supported by the rarity of greenish-yellow fabrics amongst the later shapes with thickened or hooked rims. At the same

³⁹ Wiencke 2000, 540, fig. II.76a–d. For EH II Initial: Pullen 2011, 180 (form 7); for EH II Developed: Pullen 2011, 356–356 (form 7 incurved); Phase I: 379 no. 375, 382 no. 389. Lempetzi: Demakopoulou 1998, 60 nos. 4–5, figs. 8–9.

⁴⁰ Wiencke 2000, 540, fig. II.76j; Pullen 2011, 356 (form 9).

⁴¹ Wiencke 2000, 540, fig. II.76i; Pullen 2011, 354–356 (form 7, inturned).

⁴² Wiencke 2000, 540, fig. II.76e–f; Pullen 2011, 353–354 (form 5).

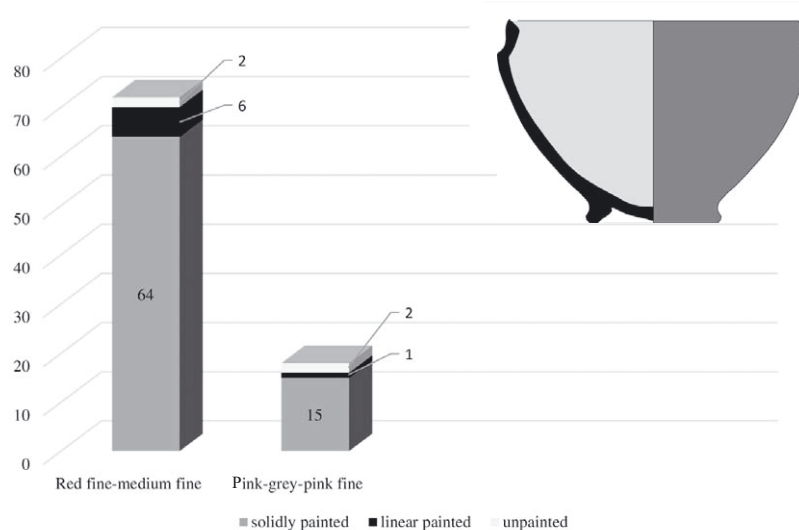


Fig. 11 Frequency of fabrics of saucers with concavely carinated rim (E. Alram-Stern)

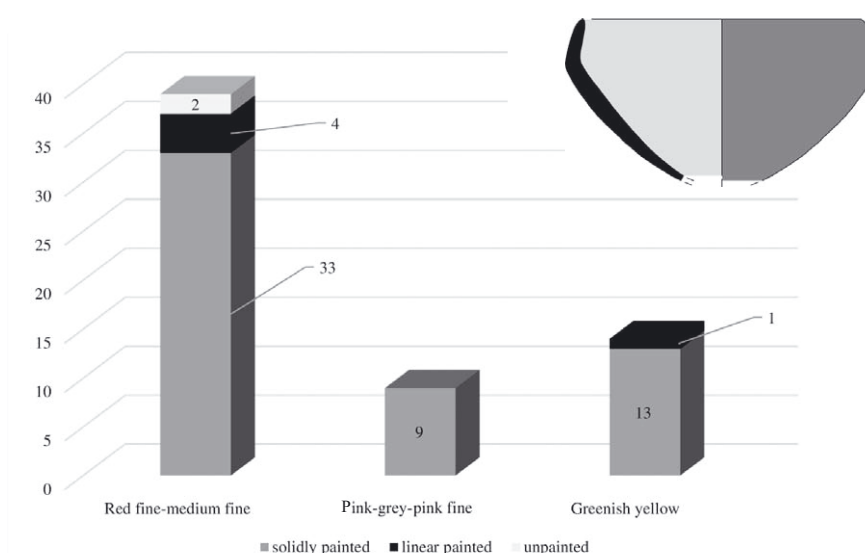


Fig. 12 Frequency of fabrics of saucers with carinated rim (E. Alram-Stern)

time the preference for solid paint could also mean that the workshops producing these vessels preferred solidly painted to unpainted saucers.

Small saucers with a slightly incurving rim and measuring less than 10cm in diameter comprise a significant proportion of the material (Fig. 14). Nearly all were produced of fine red fabric and were unpainted. Both the interior of the vessels as well as the upper sections of their exterior were well-wiped, while the undersides of their exterior were rounded and unfinished.⁴³ From

⁴³ Wiencke 2000, 603–604, with parallels.

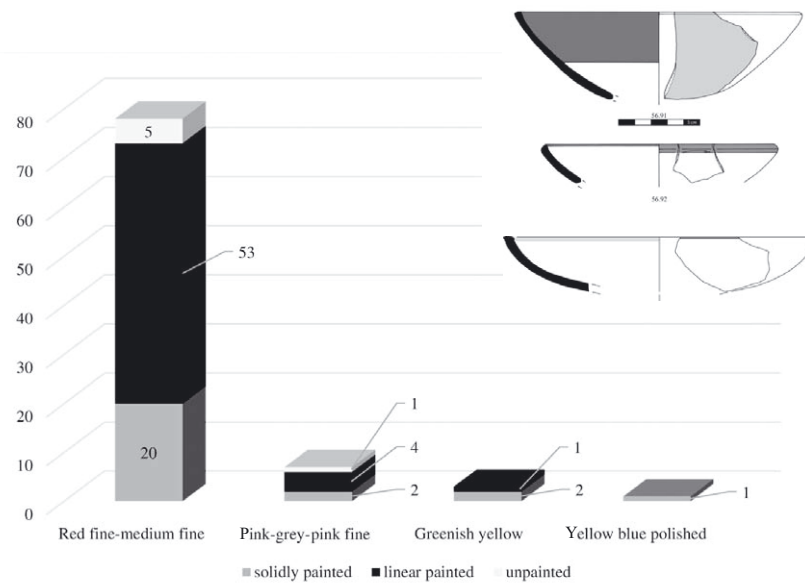


Fig. 13 Frequency of fabrics of saucers with thickened, hooked or flattened rims (E. Alram-Stern)

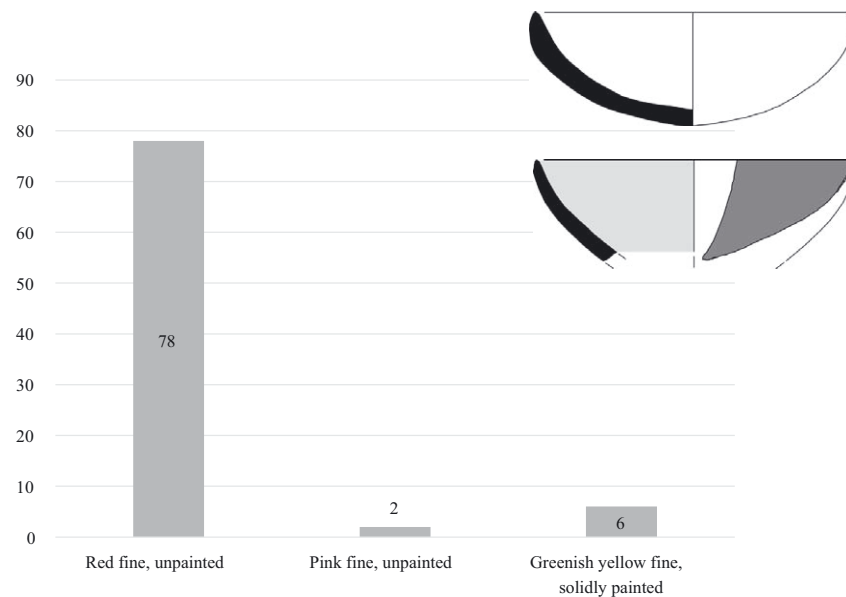


Fig. 14 Frequency of fabrics of small unpainted and monochrome saucers (E. Alram-Stern)

their mostly uniform appearance, these vessels should be of local production. As this unpainted type appears in Lerna mid-Phase B, its date fits perfectly with the locally-produced saucers with concavely carinated rims, and from this form a standardised local production may be identified at Midea.

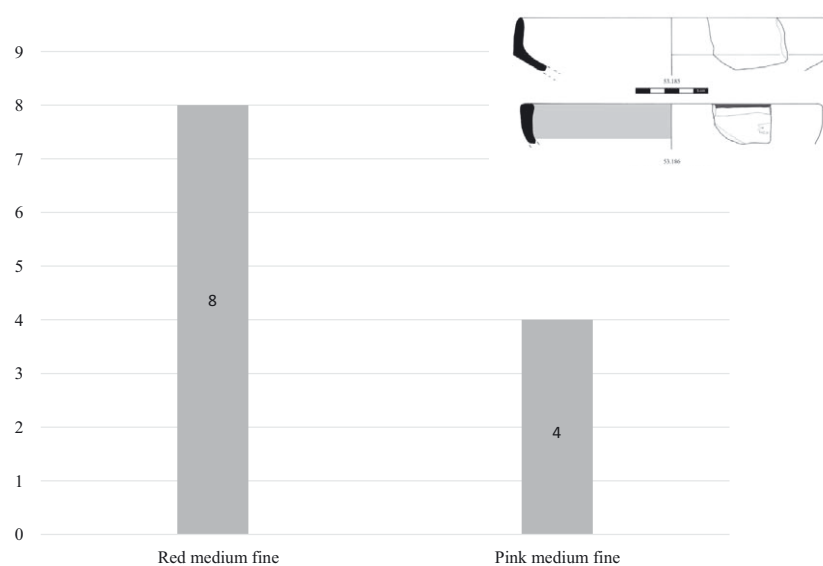


Fig. 15 Frequency of fabrics of large carinated saucers (E. Alram-Stern)

Five rims of small saucers of greenish-yellow fabric were also collected. Unlike the small saucers mentioned above, these are solidly painted and should probably be connected to the saucers with incurving rims. Several of these have a thin, incised line under the rim, a detail that is not observed amongst the red fine fabrics (Fig. 14). Small monochrome saucers of this type are frequent in EH II Developed contexts at Tsoungiza.⁴⁴ These pieces, then, point to imports from outside the Argolid.

Another form of red medium fine ware is the large saucer, more than 20cm in diameter, that is always carinated and unpainted.⁴⁵ These were most likely produced within the region (Fig. 15). By contrast, pedestalled saucers or sauceboats⁴⁶ are more frequent in greenish-yellow fabric (Fig. 18a),⁴⁷ and aside from the red and pink pieces there is a single piece in yellow-blue polished ware.

Another form to be discussed is the sauceboat: in the Midea material the red fine fabric and its medium fine variants outnumber the greenish-yellow sauceboats (Fig. 16). All red sauceboats are monochrome and have a horizontal handle.⁴⁸ However, vertical handles on sauceboats only occur in greenish-yellow fabric, and one of these is divided (Fig. 18b).⁴⁹ The only divided horizontal handle of a sauceboat is also produced in yellowish-green fabric (Fig. 18c).⁵⁰ This demonstrates that the regional production of sauceboats supplying Midea was quite uniform, while imports exhibited greater variation in the specific details of vessel form.

⁴⁴ Pullen 2011, 353.

⁴⁵ Large saucers: Wiencke 2000, 601–603; comparable form: Weißhaar 1981, 231, fig. 77.10 from stratum VIIIc.

⁴⁶ Wiencke 2000, 604–605, 385 P 440.

⁴⁷ Pullen 2011, 407 no. 499, 408 no. 504, 419 no. 551 (EH II Developed Phase 2).

⁴⁸ Wiencke 2000, 584–587, Types 1 and 2.

⁴⁹ Wiencke 2000, 587, Type 3, 364–365, P285 (Lerna Phase III B Mid); Pullen 2011, 384–352, type 3a, divided handle: 403 no. 485 (EH II Developed Phase 2).

⁵⁰ Pullen 2011, 417 no. 539 (EH II Developed Phase 2).

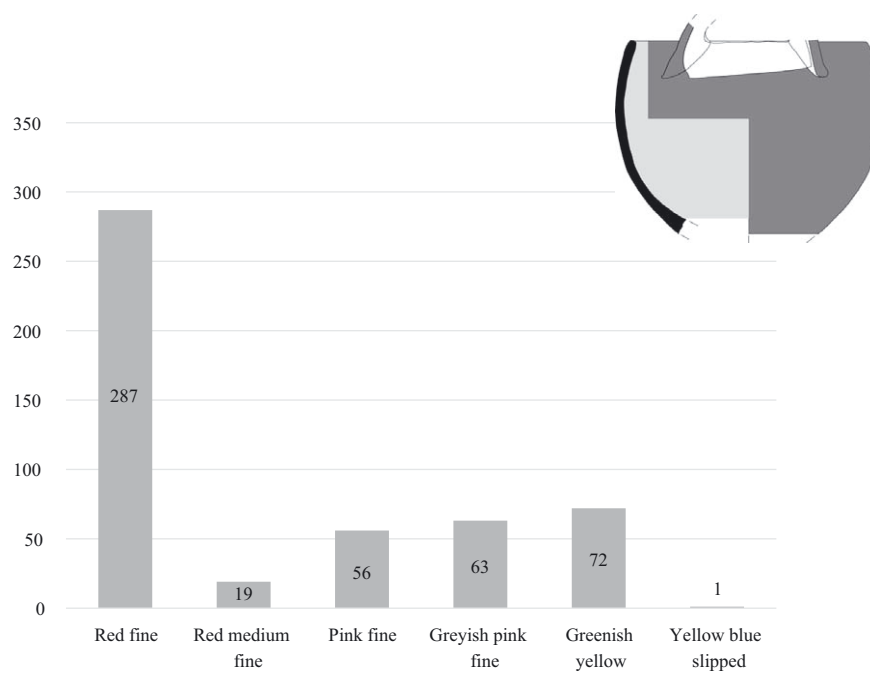


Fig. 16 Frequency of fabrics of sauceboats (E. Alram-Stern)

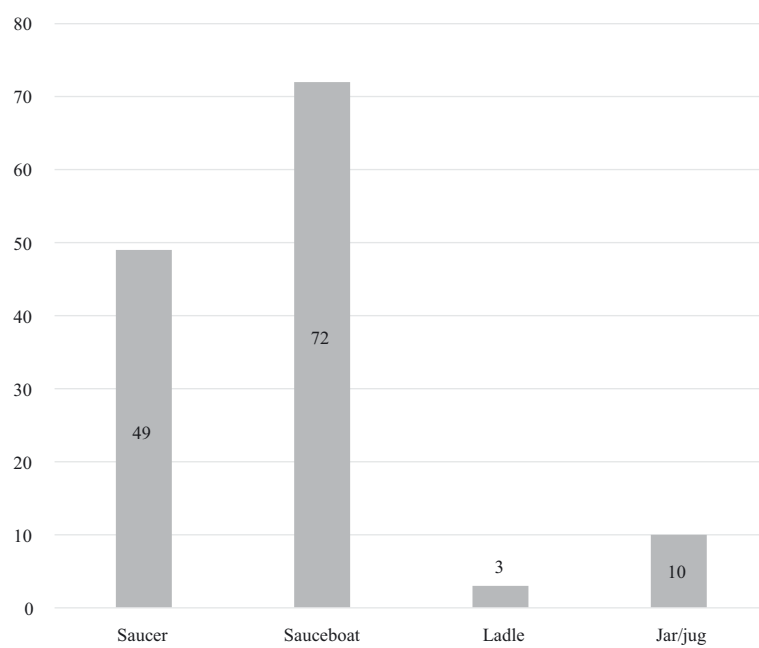


Fig. 17 Frequency of forms of 'greenish-yellow fabric' in areas A and Aa during EH II (E. Alram-Stern)



Fig. 18 Form details of vessels of 'greenish-yellow fabric': a. pedestal base of a saucer or sauceboat, b. vertical handle of a sauceboat, c. horizontal, divided handle of a sauceboat, d. strap handle with applied pellet of a jug, e. strap handle with incisions of a jug, f. twisted handle, g. plastic ridge on the handle of a ladle (OREA, K. Xenikakis)

The greenish-yellow fabric is not limited to saucers and sauceboats but is also observed amongst ladles, jugs, and jars. As with the sauceboats, in some cases this fabric is associated with special details not seen in the red fabric such as incisions on the handle,⁵¹ a twisted handle,⁵² a pellet on the strap handle of a jug,⁵³ or a plastic ridge on the handle of a ladle.

Finally we arrive at the forms made in some of the coarser fabrics. As noted above, amongst the red coarser fabrics can be distinguished a reddish fabric with many mudstone inclusions (Fig. 19).⁵⁴ In general, this fabric is considered to be characteristic of specific forms, namely basins. Yet a closer look at the material shows that it was used equally for a number of other, larger forms, in particular jars, baking pans, stands, and pithoi (Fig. 20). Furthermore, the fabric was used for saucers, nearly all of which feature incurving rims. Therefore, we have to consider this rather coarse fabric to have been used at all opportunities: if the potter decided to produce small items such as saucers, he was as likely to use this clay.

One, final fabric, much more rare, is characterised macroscopically by a very pale-brown to pink colour and a larger number of small angular, black inclusions mixed with red-rounded and white inclusions.⁵⁵ A microscopic examination of the material reveals that this ware can be further subdivided into various fabrics, one of which may be imported from the Corinthia.⁵⁶ When looking at the forms it becomes clear that this fabric is frequently used for transport jars with vertical strap handles and everted necks. It seems, then, that some of these jars were imported to Midea from outside of the Argolid, namely from the Corinthia (Fig. 21). This demonstrates that the vessels that were introduced from the Corinthia were not only vessels for consumption, but probably also vessels for the transport of liquids.

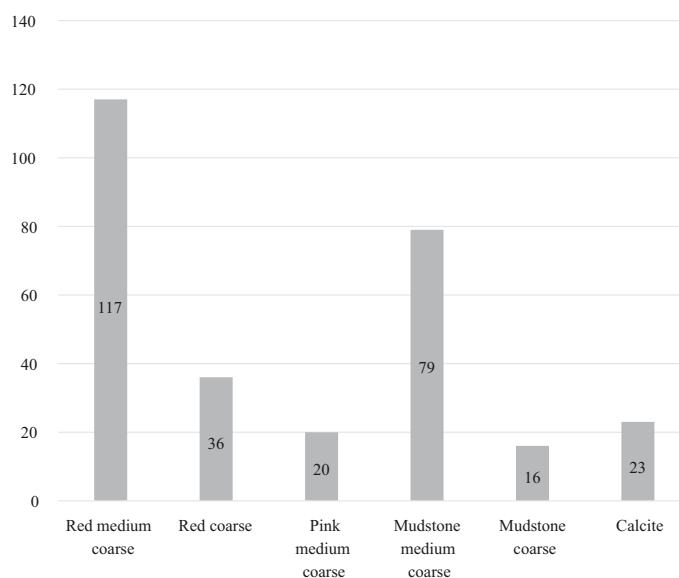


Fig. 19 Frequency of coarse fabrics in areas A and Aa during EH II (E. Alram-Stern)

⁵¹ Wiencke 2000, 363 P275 (Lerna Phase B Early).

⁵² Weißhaar 1983, fig. 19.12.

⁵³ Pullen 2011, 395, no. 454, Form 19.

⁵⁴ Petrography: Mudstone, siltstone, and mudstone breccia fabric; see Burke et al., this volume.

⁵⁵ 7.5–10YR 8/4 very pale brown – pink. Macroscopic fabric: ‘yellowish-pink medium coarse’.

⁵⁶ ‘Mudstone and argillite fabric’; see Burke et al., this volume.

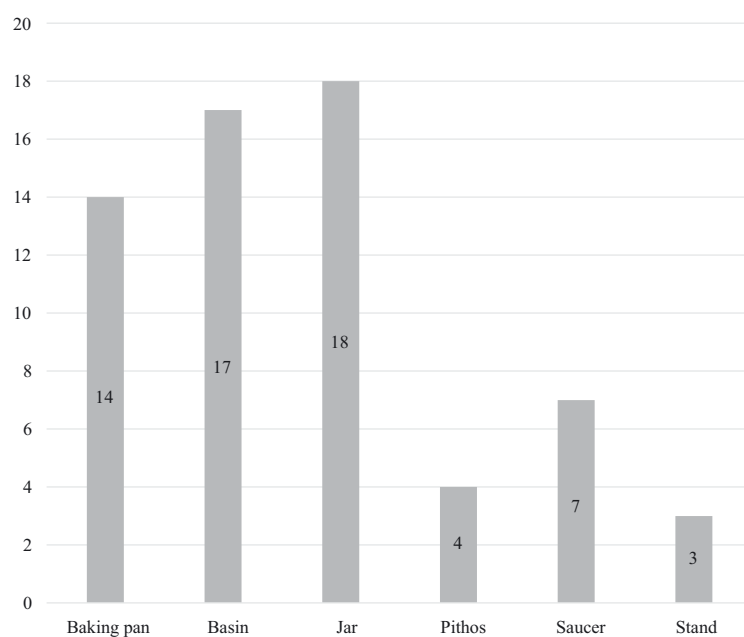


Fig. 20 Frequency of vessels in 'mudstone fabric' in areas A and Aa during EH II (E. Alram-Stern)

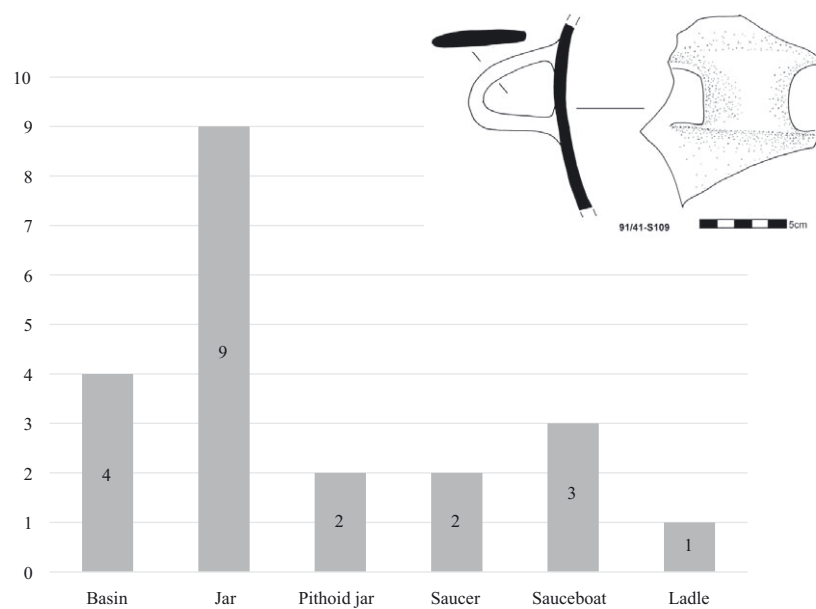


Fig. 21 Frequency of vessels in 'pink medium coarse fabric' in areas A and Aa during EH II (E. Alram-Stern)

Summary

Macroscopic and statistical analyses of the diagnostic ceramic material indicate that a predominately local production supplied the EH II settlement of Midea, with some vessel types such as small saucers and concave carinated saucers having been exclusively locally produced. However, around 10% of the material was imported, most likely from Corinthia (Fig. 22). This contrasts with the EH I material at Midea, which consists almost exclusively of locally-produced pottery, with only a single sherd, from a bowl with andesite inclusions, produced on Aegina.⁵⁷

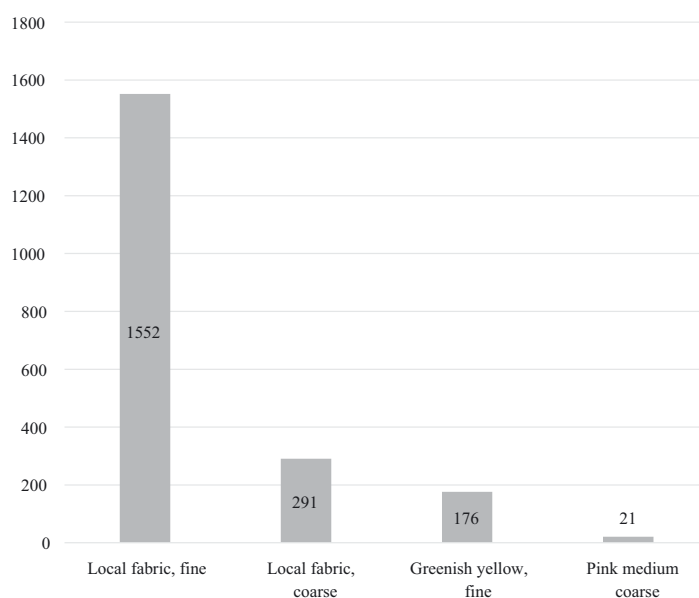


Fig. 22 Frequency of 'local fabrics' versus 'Corinthian fabrics' in areas A and Aa during EH II (E. Alram-Stern)

The higher proportion of imports from Corinthia during EH II betrays a rather intensive contact with this neighbouring region. As we can see from the forms, this contact was not limited to the transport of subsistence products, demonstrated by the presence of imported transport jars, but also involved the circulation of vessels for consumption, such as saucers and sauceboats. This clearly shows that during EH II, the period of the Early Bronze Age *koiné*, both regions were connected not only economically, but also socially – and in a way that they had not been before.

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⁵⁷ Burke et al., this volume.

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