

GEOMETRIC POTTERY FROM ERETRIA

Abstract

Euboean pottery of the Geometric period is well-known thanks to studies by J. Boardman, J. N. Coldstream and A. Andreiomenou. Its evolution has been essentially defined by comparing it with contemporary Attic and Corinthian styles. This stylistic approach is completed here with data from excavations. The pottery presented in this book was uncovered in several well-defined contexts: nine pits and a well, excavated by the Swiss School of Archaeology in two distinct areas of ancient Eretria, the Sanctuary of Apollo Daphnephoros and the West Quarter. The chronological range under study spans the period from the Middle Geometric (MG) to the end of the Late Geometric (LG). This new insight into Euboean pottery does not question traditional periodization, but contributes to situating more accurate benchmarks.

Chapter I presents general information on Eretrian Geometric pottery, its methods of study and presentation. The main categories are reviewed: fine painted ware, fine handmade pottery, semi-fine and coarse ware. The same applies to shapes where naming conventions require little comment since most are familiar. The fine ware repertoire is the most extensive: plate, lekanis, cup, skyphos, kantharos, kotyle, kalathos and krater for the open shapes; pyxis, aryballos, lekythos, jug with circular mouth, with cut-away neck or with trefoil mouth, hydria and amphora for the closed shapes. The repertoire of the coarse ware is more limited: small dish, bowl, basin, tray, cauldron, pot and pithos.

Typology is described in detail as its use in Geometric pottery is not straightforward, owing to lack of standardization. Some shapes are indeed easier to sort by type than others. Nevertheless, typology is first and foremost a tool to facilitate the description of large assemblages.

Finally, the periodization of the Geometric period in Euboea is also discussed in detail. The first phase accounted for in Eretria is labelled «MGII», which links up with Attic chronology, and not «Subprotogeometric III», as in Lefkandi. The reason for this is the predominance of the Attic style in Eretrian pottery of this period. For the Late Geometric, however, the tight chronological sequence of Attic productions does not apply to Euboean pottery where two phases only can be identified. The appearance of the «flaring skyphos» (SK5) and patterns highlighted in white paint is taken here as evidence for the transition between the LGI and LGII.

Chapter II describes the assemblages of pottery and places them in a local sequence. Although only a selection of the typical vases is presented in the catalogue (about 10% of the total figure), thorough descriptions together with statistical tables (pl. 76–86) aim at offering a complete overview of each assemblage.

Among the six pits in the sanctuary of Apollo examined here, two cover the MGII and the very early LGI (197 and 221). Pit 25, with mainly LGI pottery, follows. Pits 211, 190 and 254 contained LGI vases as well as LGII markers; several elements reveal that the third pit was filled slightly later than the other two.

In the West Quarter the earliest assemblage comes from pit 68 and dates from LGI. The content of well 10 shows certain inconsistencies from a chronological point of view. Some vases date back to MGII, others to LGI and, for the upper layers, LGII. Pit 9 also spans quite a long timeline, but LGII pottery predominates. Finally pit 53 is the latest assemblage of all, although no finds later than the Geometric period could be identified.

Chapter III describes the development of each shape, taking into account morphology as well as decoration. Only the most significant elements are summarized here.

The lekanis, a typical vessel produced by Euboean workshops, has attracted little attention among researchers so far. The earliest examples are decorated with horizontal bands, as already attested at Lefkandi. Vertical lines, already present in MGII, become the most common in LG.

It is difficult to establish a chronology for the cup as its decoration is relatively plain. Nevertheless, observation has shown that its body tends to flare out increasingly with time. The monochrome version is predominant throughout all periods, while vertical lines appear from LGI on. A late type of cup imitates an Attic prototype, called «Phaleron cup» (TA5).

Skyphoi in MGII are mostly Attic style. They are either monochrome or adorned with a meander or chevrons. These patterns are still common in LG. The bird motif makes an early appearance in LG and is used as a transition benchmark. Contrary to certain scholarly assertions, evidence shows that the bird-skyphos does not date back to MGII. The pendent semi-circle skyphos, of Euboean tradition, is well attested in

MGII, but also common in LG assemblages. The LGII is characterized by the appearance of a new type of skyphos with a flaring body (SK5, which later develops into SK7), which has close parallels in Attic pottery. A new decoration is associated with it, showing floating patterns in open spaces, highlighted in most cases with white paint. The association of this type of skyphos with the «bichrome» decoration is a hallmark of LGII Euboean pottery.

The kantharos, a relatively rare shape, follows the stylistic development of the skyphos. Morphologically, a new type with a globular body and a very short lip (KA1) makes an appearance in LGII.

Originally from Corinth, the kotyle is difficult to date. It is not attested in our LGI assemblages, whereas it appears at the beginning of this period in Corinth. The same applies to the soldier-bird type kotyle, dated from the Early Protocorinthian period, which is nowhere to be found in our contexts, even the latest. These observations indicate that Euboean imitations of kotylai appeared some time after the Corinthian prototypes. Regarding the morphology of these vases, it is worth noting that Euboean kotylai long exhibited a tiny lip, resembling the Corinthian «protokotylai».

Within the krater class we note the existence of two distinct groups of decoration. The first is from the Euboean tradition and includes pieces adorned with a linear pattern. The second is influenced by Attic workshops, with a central meander and, from LG on, various motifs organised in panels or metopes. Kraters offer the best examples of a typical Euboean figurative style, usually associated with the emblematic work of the Cesnola Painter. During LGII a new type of krater appears with a very short, everted lip (KR1). The decoration of these vases attests to a Corinthian influence and shares some features with the «Thapsos» style.

Closed shapes are far rarer than the above-mentioned open ones, and are thus more difficult to discuss in general terms. Worth mentioning however are the cut-away neck jugs, a firm favourite with the Euboeans, of which two variations are known: one richly decorated and the other monochrome. And finally, the existence of monumental amphorae, probably for funerary purposes, is attested as early as the beginning of the LG.

Chapter IV presents a reappraisal of the Geometric chronology in Euboea and its connections with the Attic and Corinthian sequences. First of all, we highlight how Eretrian pottery in MGII shows strong Attic influences that contrast with contemporary finds from nearby Lefkandi. This discrepancy might stem from a short interval in the chronology between the two contexts, but it could also be explained by Eretrian potters being more open to Attic style. This receptivity indeed meant that LG style, also originally from Attica, made an early appearance in Eretria. Several stages of its development there can be studied in our assemblages.

The appearance of the skyphos with a flaring body and «bichrome» decoration constitutes the benchmark for the transition between LGI and LGII. Both features appear relatively early in Eretria. Considering the close relationship between this new type of skyphos in Euboea and its parallel in Attica, we must assume that the beginning of LGII in Euboea is almost contemporary with the beginning of Attic LGII. The LGI hence appears as a relatively short-lived period, whereas the LGII displays a long sequence which might require further refining.

No contexts under study allow for the transition between the Geometric and Archaic periods to be analyzed. This evolution, characterized in particular by the degeneration of geometric patterns and the appearance of decoration influenced by the Protoattic and the Protocorinthian styles, calls for a separate study.