

Typological and technological classification may be boring but useful

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On many coasts of the Mediterranean, you may encounter Mycenaean pottery when excavating a settlement stratum or a tomb of the later 2nd millennium BCE. Often one could take such a find and bring it to a colleague on the opposite shore of that semi-enclosed sea, and she would not be able to tell, it was not found in her region. Yet sometimes a Mycenaean pot found outside Greece resembles its counterpart from within the Aegean area as much as bird resembles a dinosaur – even though one derives from the other. This causes problems for archaeologists working on Mycenaean ceramics in different countries, but it also makes Mycenaean pottery studies an interesting field for methodological debates.

My proposal is to use “Mycenaean pottery” in a strictly typological sense. The term should designate any ceramic product generally adhering to the repertoire of vessel types, linear decorations and motifs that were manufactured and used on the Greek mainland between Thessaly in the north and Laconia in the south, as well as on many Aegean and Ionian Islands. This means the term should include all regional Mycenaean products meeting those criteria, even when they were produced far away from Greece. However, outside the mentioned Mycenaean core area, one should distinguish between two categories, (1) *local Mycenaean* vessels closely adhering to the typological traits produced in the Mycenaean core area and (2) other wheelmade pots that, while clearly betraying Mycenaean technological and stylistic inspiration, diverge considerably from the Aegean repertoire in shape and/or decorative syntax. The latter can be classed as *Mycenaeanizing* ceramics.

The fabrics, in which Mycenaean pots were produced, may transcend the borders of that ceramic class. Vice versa, Mycenaean vessel types can make an appearance in non-Mycenaean pottery classes. We can properly understand such phenomena only, if we perform fabric analysis, i.e., pottery classification according to technological criteria, independently of typological categorization. As many Mycenaean fabrics are very fine, exhibiting only few and very small inclusions, chemical analysis – preferably Neutron Activation Analysis – must supplement fabric classification in order to achieve reliable provenance determination.