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Publication date
2017
Document Version
Final published version
Published in
Boeotia project. - Volume 2: The city of Thespiai

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Citation for published version (APA):
Stissi, V. (2017). The pottery of the Early Iron Age to the Hellenistic periods. In J. Bintliff, E. Farinetti, B. Slapšak, & A. Snodgrass (Eds.), *Boeotia project. - Volume 2: The city of Thespiai: Survey at a complex urban site* (pp. 287-316). (McDonald Institute monographs). McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

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Chapter 11

The pottery of the Early Iron Age to the Hellenistic periods

Vladimir Stissi

This chapter presents the results of the classification and interpretation of the Early Iron Age to Hellenistic pottery, found during the field survey of the city of Thespiai in 1985 and 1986: that is, of the proportion stored in the collection of finds and recorded in the database produced soon after its collection. This is an assemblage (depending on the inclusion or exclusion of finds at the chronological fringes) of around 4000 to 5000 pieces, from a total collection of more than 14,500 items (see further below and Figs. 11.1–11.3 for more detailed figures).

This collected assemblage, while quite substantial by the prevailing standards of the time – compare, for example, the urban site collections with at most a few hundred pieces in Cherry, Davis and Mantzourani 1991: 282–4 (Koressos: select catalogue of 63 finds) or Mee and Forbes 1996: 122–7, 177–83, 287–96 (Ancient Methana – some hundreds of pieces) – is not necessarily a precise and direct reflection of what was or is on the surface. The collection strategy at Thespiai was to bring in primarily feature-sherds, plus a significant supporting element of body-sherds (see Chapter 3, pp. 39–41). In addition, some material considered to be undiagnostic or redundant was discarded during processing, mostly without recording. Simple logistics also ruled out large quantities of tile being bagged and brought back. The counts (Fig. 11.2) clearly indicate that feature-sherds (rims, bases and handles) are heavily over-represented in the preserved collection; it also seems that decorated pottery, and some distinctive categories of material like black gloss (wall) fragments, large fragments of *pithoi* and certain categories of prehistoric handmade pottery, are relatively more prominent among the kept finds than on the ground; but there is no evidence or documentation to quantify this. As to tile, which can be expected to form at least half the amount of fragments on the surface, the general strategy of leaving it on the ground was not entirely successful, as 165 pieces in total were kept, of which 59 were pre-Roman (Figs. 11.3–11.5).

On the other hand, since it was also an explicit aim to collect samples representative of all categories of finds encountered on surface, a fair but varying amount of less remarkable finds, often plain body-sherds, was kept, even though they must have seemed undiagnostic at the time of collection and during processing; many indeed have remained in this category. All in all, one might tentatively conclude that probably very little of the highly diagnostic material in the paths of the walkers was left on the surface, while very many plain body-sherds were. To what extent the intermediate material, that which is only vaguely diagnostic or could be classified through fabric only, is represented in the retained collection cannot now be established, at least without further field-work; perhaps future comparison with the finds from Hyettos, Tanagra and Koroneia, where relatively more material was picked up, may offer at least an impression.

The new data in the context of previous work

Almost all the finds from Thespiai were first seen and classified by John Hayes and in some cases also by period specialists, notably Oliver Dickinson for prehistoric wares, soon after they were collected. The resulting data-base has been used as the starting point for all further research on the assemblage, which however led to only minor revisions and additions, before the study of the material was taken up again, in 2009 (for the Roman pottery) and 2011 (for Early Iron Age to Hellenistic pottery). I have looked at all the material over several weeks during each of four spring and summer study seasons in 2011 and 2012, with some additional work done afterwards from notes and through the database. The core of the database is now still shaped by the first classifications by

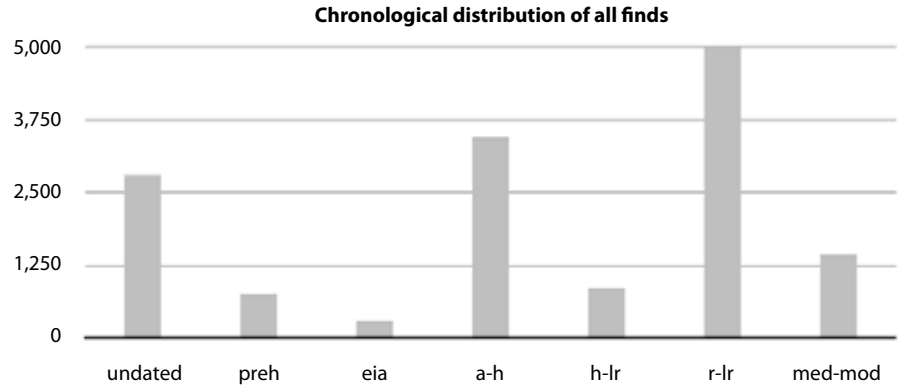


Figure 11.1. *City of Thespiai: the complete find assemblage, by date.*

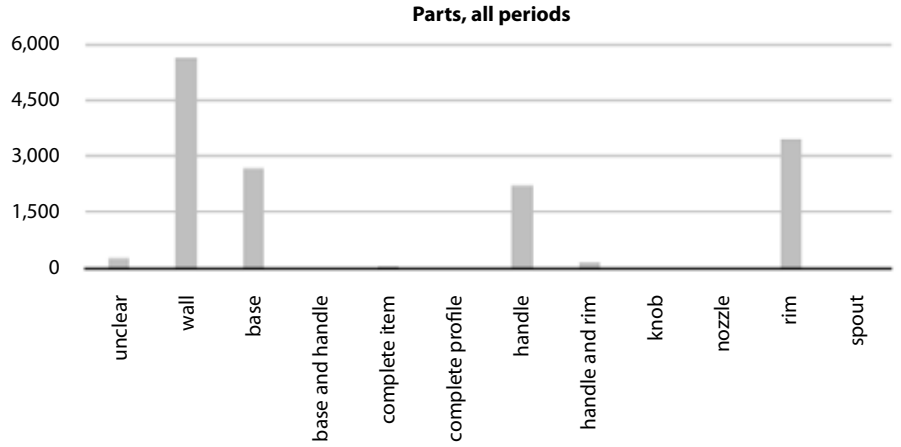
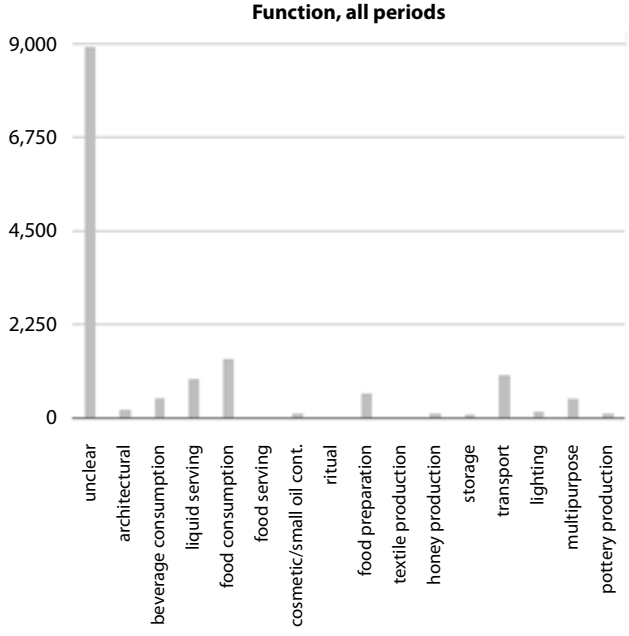


Figure 11.2. *Thespiai: Parts of vessels, represented in the complete find assemblage.*



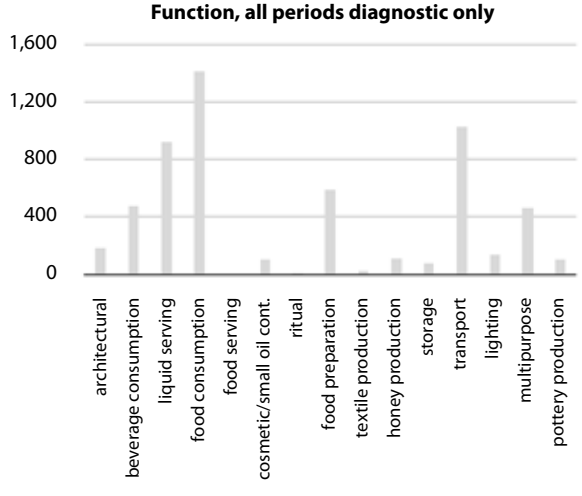
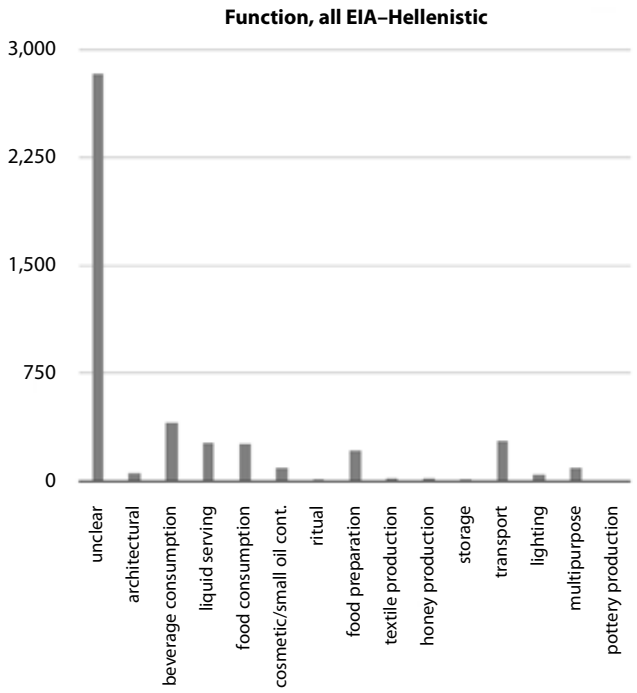


Figure 11.3. *(left and above) The complete find assemblage from the city of Thespiai, divided by functional category (above, excluding items that cannot be assigned to a category).*



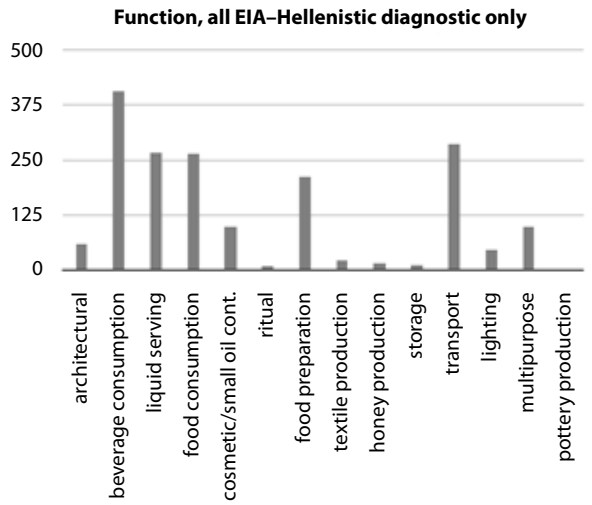


Figure 11.4. *The Early Iron Age to Hellenistic (–Roman) assemblage, similarly divided by functional category (above, excluding items that cannot be assigned to a category).*

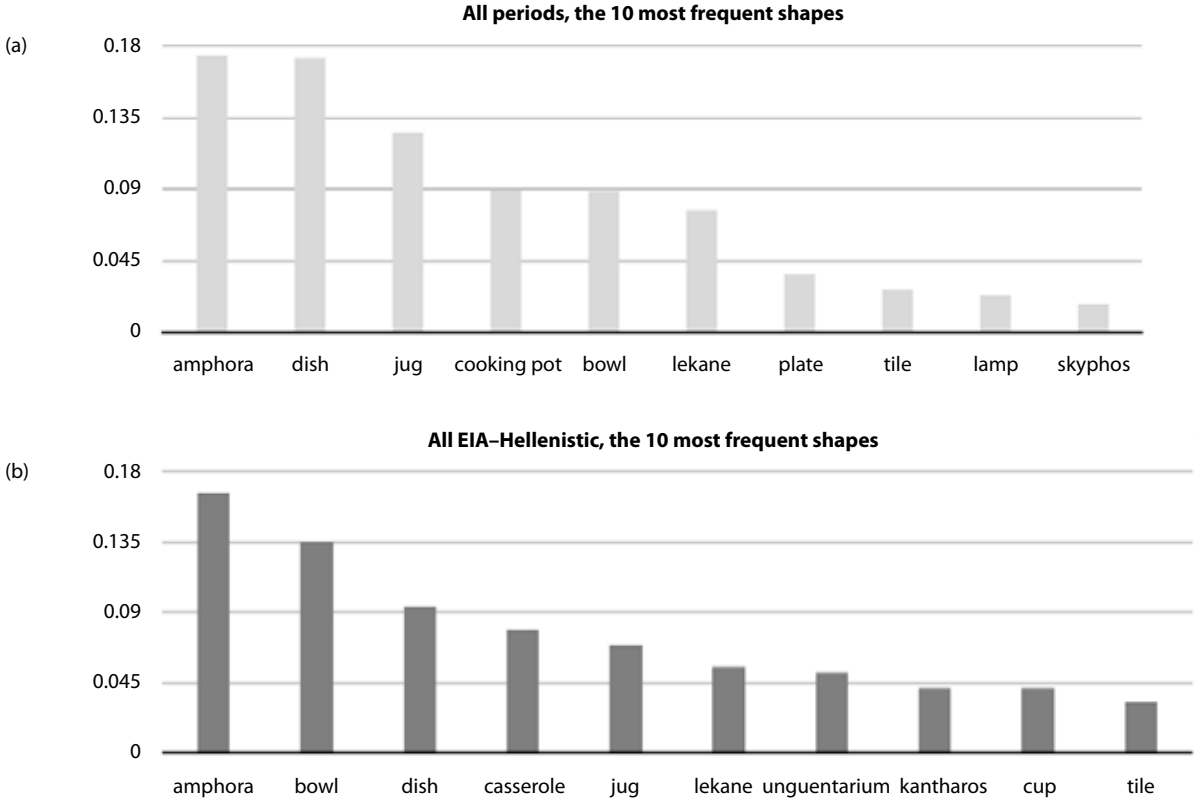


Figure 11.5. *The ten most frequent vase shapes in the complete Thespiai collection (percentages of the total number of items with a shape attribution) (a), and the ten most frequent vase shapes in the Early Iron Age to Hellenistic (–Roman) assemblage, shown on the same basis (b).*

Hayes, but many details have been added and refined, and some dates have been adjusted, deleted or added.

While merely spending more time on the material is always helpful, most of the changes and additions to this data-base are the result of the considerable advances in our general knowledge, especially of 'simpler' kinds of pottery, over the last 25 to 30 years, together with the increasingly specific expertise of the team of pottery specialists, who collectively have now worked on the material of the various surveys of the Boeotia project for 15 years (and who have seen quite a large amount of survey and excavation material from elsewhere in the Greek world too). It must be stressed that in the case of Thespiai, these revisions have had limited effect on our picture of general chronological patterns, at least for Early Iron Age to Hellenistic material, but have concentrated mainly on improving classification in the categories of function and shape and, to a lesser extent, on defining and recognizing some fabric groups. In combination with the work on other areas of the region, a further result has been to embed the finds more strongly in their Boeotian contexts, but also within our wider view of Greek household pottery.

Limitations of the present study

It must be admitted that this chapter is not the place for a fully detailed presentation of the results of this contextualization. On the one hand, this is a result of the limitations of time and budget in the study of the material, which did not allow for the amount of drawing, typological and analytical research needed for a fully thorough presentation of the finds: this would probably have required a volume of its own. On the other hand, the concision of this chapter is also related to the qualities of the material itself, apart from some serious issues regarding diagnosticity (which will be discussed below): the relatively few imports are of little intrinsic interest, and the local material does not offer much which cannot be, or has not been, illustrated better elsewhere. To put it differently, the general ceramic developments seen in the material from Thespiai seem perfectly comparable to what can be seen in major centres like Corinth and Athens, and most diagnostic sherds have good parallels in material from the Agora or Corinth publications series (see mainly, for the Athenian Agora, Sparkes and Talcott 1970; Rotroff 1982; 1997; 2006; for Corinth, Amyx and Lawrence 1975; Edwards 1975; Stillwell and Benson 1984; Risser 2001 and 2003). Some specific Boeotian features, like the prominence of the *kantharos* and the palmette-cup as fine drinking vessels (but found mainly in funerary and sanctuary deposits) are already well documented by publications of excavations in the region (see mainly Ure, P.N. 1913; 1926; 1927; Ure, A.D. 1962; Sparkes 1967; Braun and Havernick 1981; Heimberg 1982; Walker 2004; Heymans 2013). Moreover, typical compositions of domestic assemblages can be studied better at some of the other surveyed Boeotian cities, where relatively more and better preserved material was collected, or at short-lived rural sites which often offer more coherent collections of finds. Finally, unlike the material from some of those cities, the pottery from Thespiai, as will be discussed further below, does not seem to possess any remarkable local features deserving of specific attention.

The focus of this chapter is therefore less on the pottery as such, as might perhaps have been expected, than on general developments, partly as to preferences within the ceramic assemblage, partly as to the chronological and spatial development of Thespiai as a city, from its presumed pre-urban beginnings in the Early Iron Age, until the transition to the Roman period, which saw its entry into a very different realm of pottery consumption. For more specific information about single items, including a wider selection of profile drawings, we hope to offer more detailed information, after some further study, in a separate publication on the internet. One should not however expect too much of the finds of these periods from the urban area of Thespiai, as an exemplary ceramic assemblage.

Data quality, possibilities and difficulties

Pottery from urban survey in Boeotia: not an easy starting point

Pottery from a survey is never the easiest archaeological material to deal with; pottery from an urban survey is even more complex. The long life of most cities, in Boeotia usually of at least a thousand years of occupation in antiquity alone, resulted not only in the continuous burial of previous habitation remains, with associated damage through digging and re-use, but also in the mingling of materials belonging to different functional and chronological contexts. While this may not be problematic for highly distinctive categories of pottery, such as most fine wares, local and imported, and certain specific types of mostly non-local vessels such as transport amphorae, it is very troublesome for the bulk of locally or regionally made coarse and other plain pots that form the overwhelming majority of surface finds. Even though some of these may show chronologically or functionally specific details, many base, rim and handle forms are common to several shapes and last for centuries, or else recur in more than one period. Clay sources, and the recipes

and firing techniques used by potters, can be equally stable, resulting in fabrics used in more than one archaeological phase, even for millennia on end.

Classification and dating by fabric alone can thus be quite difficult in urban survey, especially when the excavation data available are limited or non-existent – as is the case with most Boeotian cities – or when there are limited possibilities of comparison with single-period assemblages surveyed nearby. In the case of Thespiai, there appears to be a particular additional problem: compared with most of the other *poleis* surveyed in Boeotia, the Archaic to Hellenistic pottery of Thespiai appears to have few remarkable or specific features; one might even call it bland. This seems to be connected, at least in part, with the qualities of the main local plain ware fabrics, which are soft, powdery and apparently low-fired, and thus prone to wear. A combination of the heavy agricultural use of the site in later times, the presence of streams, and the long occupational history of the city, further contribute to the bad preservation of the Early Iron Age to Hellenistic pottery from Thespiai. Even by the low standards that can be expected of (urban) survey pottery, the dating and classification of the finds from Thespiai present unusual challenges.

The way in which the finds were studied in the preparation of this chapter also plays a role here. In most other areas covered by the Boeotia project, the study of finds from urban sites can, or will, proceed in step with that of those from the surrounding countryside, including many short-lived small sites. Since the research on part of this rural area had already been published (in *Testing the Hinterland*) and the material has not been re-studied, while the rest of the city's territory has still to be treated, a fully integrated view was not possible at Thespiai, making it more difficult to recognize types with a specific chronology or functional association. Furthermore, limitations of time and budget did not allow a thorough microscopic and analytical study of fabrics, nor the inclusion of systematic comparisons with potentially relevant assemblages from surveys (including our own) or, where available, excavations elsewhere in the region. While several fabric groups do seem recognisable, even among the soft and powdery worn fragments just described, there is a lack of solid starting points for a systematic macroscopic fabric classification, or even a grouping into local and regional fabrics, such as has been possible with the Roman material (Chapter 12). Again, down to Hellenistic times there seems to be a relatively high degree of variation in fabrics, in relation both to later periods and to those of some of the other Boeotian cities, notably Tanagra and Hyettos. For the Early Iron Age and the Archaic period, at any rate, the number of securely dated items is also too low for reliable grouping. Thus, for now, a more systematic and thorough look at the fabrics of the pre-Roman pottery must remain a desideratum, which we plan and hope to fulfil in the coming years.

Some problems that remain to be studied

The limitations just described leave us with some major unsolved issues, which may be listed in chronological order. First, there is an apparent absence of pre-Classical coarse pottery (see Figs. 11.8c, 11.12c and 11.18c) – a problematic feature of most other urban assemblages in our project as well. In the light of the finds from several rural assemblages in the other surveyed areas (notably Askra and the Valley of the Muses, the surroundings of Haliartos and the Tanagra countryside (see Stissi 2011 for the latter area), it seems likely that at least some items belonging in this category of material have been included among those coarse hand-made finds which are now mostly (but not exclusively) classified as 'prehistoric', if only because there are no clear potential parallels from other periods. Only further close study of these find-categories, which offer very few feature-sherds and many crumbs (jokingly labelled as 'dog food' by the specialists) can offer a solution here; and it cannot be an easy one, because only a portion comes from assemblages with associated and dateable material. For the present, it is certain only that there are several clearly differentiated groups of coarse hand-made pottery in Thespiai and its surroundings, not all of which are securely connected to prehistoric assemblages.

A second, entirely different and perhaps less acute problem relates to the local and regional fine wares of the Archaic to Hellenistic periods: not only those from our survey, but also finds from previous excavations and in museum collections. Even though several fabrics and even decorative styles can be distinguished, both within Boeotia and in the Thespiai collections, few of these can as yet be assigned to a specific place of production. Research on the intra-regional connections of Boeotia in general, as well as those generated by our survey material, potentially including fabric analysis, is severely hampered by this (see e.g. Heymans 2013, with references). This is a defect that cannot be solved through our urban survey assemblages alone, even if these do provide some indications. What is needed here is further research starting from excavated assemblages; this could be relatively straightforward, assuming that each city had its own fine ware production which is locally dominant – as the survey finds till now indeed strongly suggest. But here, 'straightforward' need by no means necessarily be equated with 'simple': the

very pure, often soft orange fine ware fabrics that one finds in much of Boeotia and adjacent regions can look all too similar to the naked eye.

Possible biases in the data

The problems sketched above may not be so apparent when one looks at the data: both for the city overall, and for the period treated in this chapter, about 40 per cent of the finds in the database can be assigned to a functional category or attributed to a more or less specific vase shape (Figs. 11.3–11.5). This is quite a creditable proportion for a Greek survey, so far as can be judged in the absence of full, published survey data-bases of comparable size. Again, the proportion of over 80 per cent of datable items (Fig. 11.1) at first looks strikingly high. In part, this surely reflects the selective approach to the collection and retention of material, described at the beginning of this chapter. This figure of 80 per cent is, however, somewhat misleading, in that about 40 per cent of the dated finds are assigned to *combined* periods of some 500 years or more, with a further 16 per cent belonging to the single phase of the Late Roman, *c.* AD 300–600; so that, again, the amount of usefully datable material is more limited than it may seem; while about half of the dated material is in any case, broadly speaking, Roman.

Parallel problems arise with shapes and functional categories (Figs. 11.3–11.5), which are dominated by a few shapes: transport amphorae (about 17 per cent of the classified material, both overall and for the period treated here), dishes and jugs (about 17 per cent and 13 per cent overall, most of them Roman) and simple bowls (around 9 per cent overall and 13 per cent Early Iron Age to Hellenistic). Here again, the data probably reflect the selectivity of the processing: the figures suggest that cooking pottery (and therefore probably other vessels in so-called cooking wares) and plain household pottery are under-represented; while, as already stated, tiles were not systematically collected. All in all, most of the data derive from a series of very small chronological and functional groups, particularly for the pre-Roman periods (see further below).

When one brings together chronology and function, some more specific biases in the assemblage can be suggested. The combination of a high degree of wear with selectivity in collection has probably also affected the chronological distribution of particular categories of finds: for instance, earlier coarse, cooking and plain wares are likely to have been more vulnerable; while some types of pots, especially cooking and storage vessels but probably also water jugs, started out as very simple shapes with few specific, characteristic features: many lack a base ring and have only very basic, straight rims. On the other hand, attractive-looking and relatively durable decorated Early Iron Age and Archaic decorated sherds, some of them in specific shapes and fabrics (mainly pale buff Corinthian or Corinthianizing) that stand out even when worn, are probably over-represented in the collection – just as are Black Gloss pottery and some recognisable types of household cooking pots with specific rim and handle types (as will emerge from Figs. 11.8c, 11.12c, 11.18c, 11.21c, 11.25c, 11.41c and 11.49c).

Finally, the strong Roman and Late Roman presence in the central area of the site around the *Kastro* on the one hand, and the relatively short duration of intensive use of the more peripheral areas of the city in the (late-)Classical and Hellenistic periods on the other, also appear to have had significant effects on the general distribution patterns. This combination, for example, would explain the somewhat ring-shaped pattern in the concentration of Early Iron Age to Hellenistic materials (see Chapter 3, especially pp. 46–8, with Figs. 3.59–3.62, 3.66 and 3.71–3.74). It is, in all probability, justified to assume that the concentration of Roman to Late Roman finds in the centre of the urban area has obscured much of the core of the earlier city. The relatively higher presence of Early Iron Age and Archaic material in certain areas of the *Kastro* and along its now removed walls, which have been intensively disturbed over the last century, seems to confirm this (see Figs. 3.57–3.59).

Chronological overview

Introduction

Depending on how the sherds with a multiple-period dating are placed, between 4000 and 5000 out of a total of 11,782 dated sherds from Thespiai may be assigned to the period from the Early Iron Age to the end of Hellenistic (Fig. 11.1). This figure is slightly lower than that for the Roman assemblage, which covers a few centuries less, but considerably higher than the post-Roman, let alone the prehistoric material. As will be seen below, the quantities of finds seem to grow through time (Figs. 11.6 and 11.7b): very few Early Iron Age sherds, mostly belonging to the end of the period (Fig. 11.8d); probably a little more Archaic material, when finds with a longer dating range including Archaic are included: see Figs. 11.12, 11.18 and 11.21); then much more Classical – or potentially Classical, since there is much here which is dated 'Archaic–Hellenistic' (Fig. 11.21d) or, more frequently, 'Classical–Hellenistic' (Figs. 11.21d and 11.25). Even were most of this strictly, single-period Classical, the quantity of finds with a single-period Hellenistic dating (Fig. 11.41a–d) seems enough to suggest that the surface

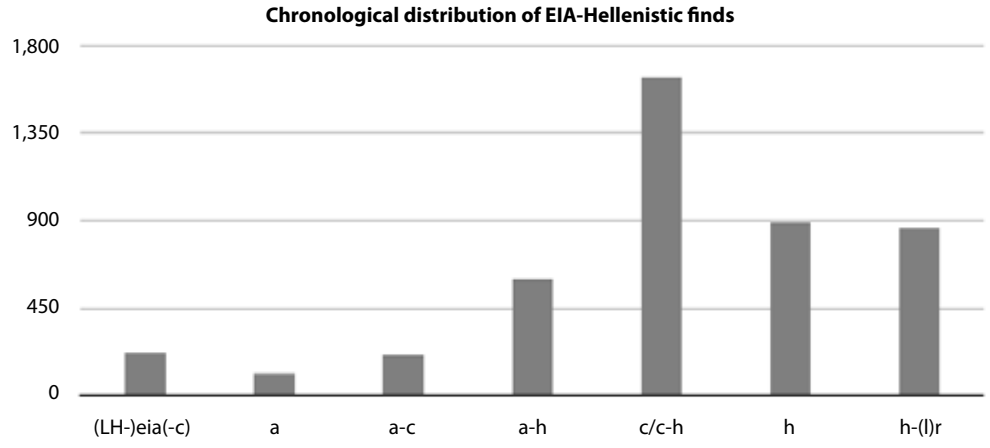


Figure 11.6. *Thespiai: the early Iron Age to Hellenistic (–Roman) find assemblage by date.*

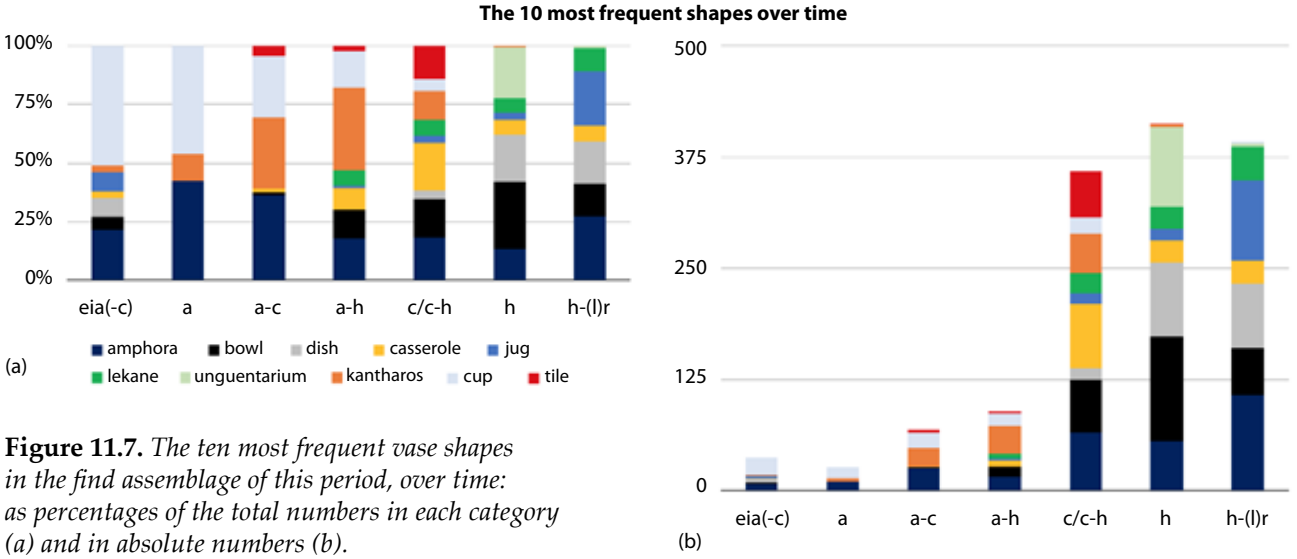


Figure 11.7. *The ten most frequent vase shapes in the find assemblage of this period, over time: as percentages of the total numbers in each category (a) and in absolute numbers (b).*

assemblage actually contains more Hellenistic than Classical material (see further below). This apparent Hellenistic peak – even if relatively low (compare Fig. 11.21d with 11.41d) – seems unusual when compared with other survey results (compare, e.g. Wagstaff and Cherry 1982, 143 (Melos); Mee and Forbes 1997, 68–9; 73–5 (Methana); Cavanagh *et al*. 2002, 175; 233–4 (Laconia); Cavanagh, Mee and James 2005, 7–10 (Laconia); Forsen and Forsen 2005, 265–6, 270 (Asea Valley).

Those projects, however, mostly relate to rural areas and do not always have a clear quantitative foundation. Below, I shall try to offer a more specific explanation of the phenomenon, which seems to find at least partial parallels in Hyettos and Tanagra. Unfortunately, tracing shapes and functional categories through time does not reveal much: while the assemblages appear to be, in functional terms, roughly balanced on the whole (Figs. 11.4, 11.8b, 11.12b, 11.18b, 11.21b, 11.25b, 11.41b and 11.49b), they are clearly affected by selection biases in processing (as already explained) and by typological classification, which probably dates relatively many finds, whether to specific periods or generically, when the reality may be less straightforward. In this context, I have already mentioned the problem of the missing early cooking wares, which clearly affects the visible Early Iron Age and Archaic functional range. More generally, clearly recognisable shapes with a short life span, like the Archaic *aryballos* or Hellenistic mould-made bowl, seem over-represented in their period assemblages, while less distinctive shapes, such as plain bowls, *lekanai*, cooking pots and some types of transport amphorae, often have multi-period dates that mask their presence. Nevertheless, it does appear that pottery related to drinking, and particularly social wine-drinking, is somewhat more prominent in the

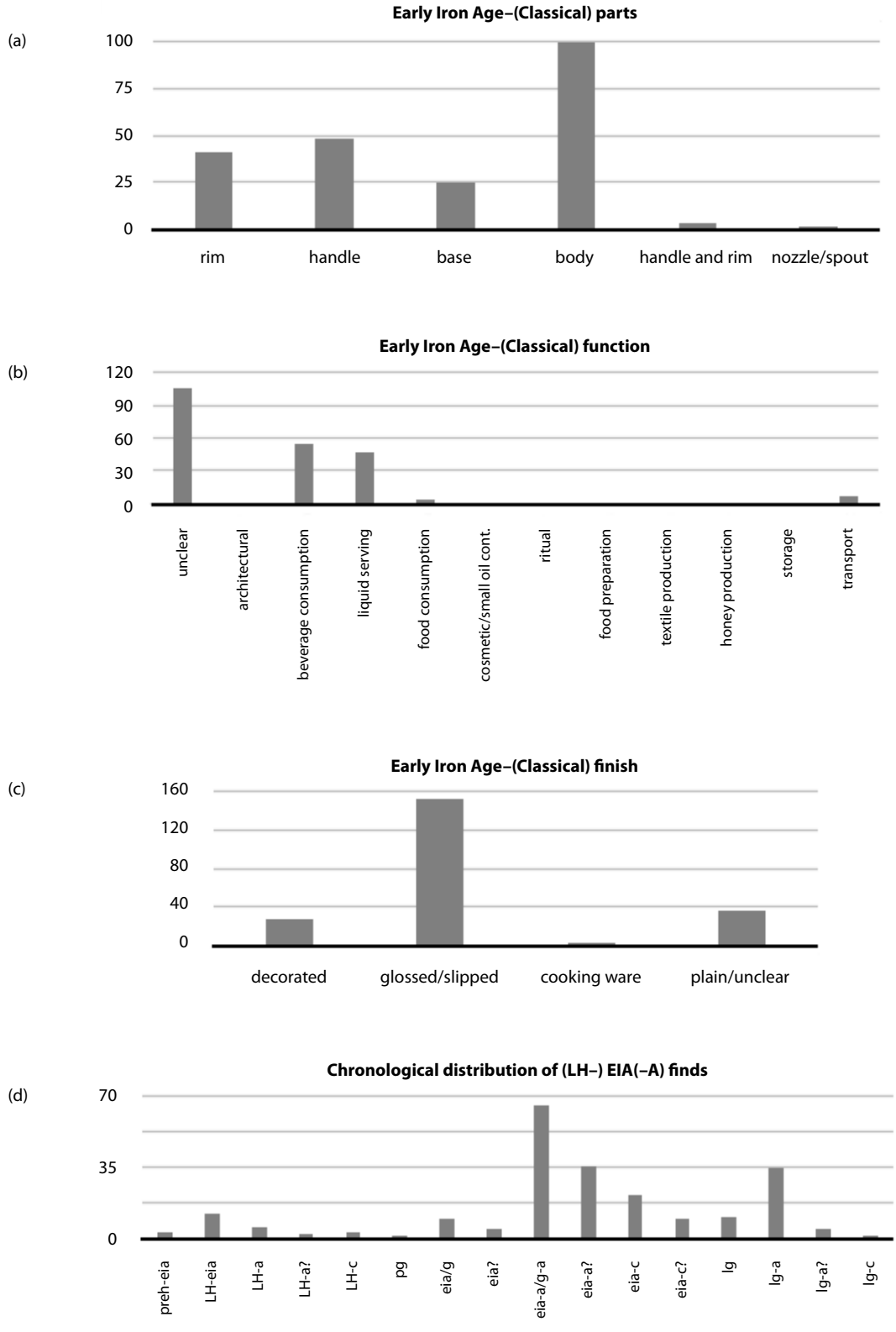


Figure 11.8. *The find assemblage of this period (including finds dated within the wider ranges shown in Chapter 3, Figs. 3.57 and 3.58, and listed here in Fig. 11.8d). The breakdowns show the parts of vessels represented (a), functional categories (b), types of finish (c) and chronological categories with numerical counts (d).*

earlier periods (see Figs. 11.9–11.11 for examples), down to Classical, whereas simple small jugs and dishes and transport amphorae grow in popularity from the Classical period onwards, as part of generally less representative and more utilitarian assemblages (as shown in Figs. 11.7, 11.8b, 11.12b, 11.18b, 11.21b, 11.25b, 11.41b and 11.49b).

At every stage in the period considered here, the shortage of loom-weights (19 in total), spindle whorls (none), beehives (15), *pithoi* (6, out of just 36 in the complete assemblage) and other items related to processing and large-scale storage, is remarkable. This is probably in part a result of preservation and collection biases, but it might also reflect a more narrowly domestic character of habitation at Thespiai – Hyettos and Koroneia appear to be different in this sphere. The low counts of miniatures and statuettes (just 2 and 6 respectively), on the other hand, follow the pattern seen elsewhere in the cities and countryside of Boeotia, except for some concentrations clearly related to funerary or sanctuary contexts. Religious practice is clearly difficult to trace through urban survey.

The spatial patterns in the Thespiai finds are in fact even more problematic than the functional ones. One cannot even clearly detect the growth in the size of the city through time, since the Early Iron Age material is already widely spread (see Chapter 3, Figs. 3.57 and 3.58); while the rapid rise in the amount of finds in the Classical period, by definition, fills the city area, eventually showing a clear urban core from the Archaic period onwards, amidst the cemeteries which seem to go back even further (Figs. 3.60 and 3.62). This last feature, however, is never entirely unambiguous: in various periods, the shapes that one would wish to associate with funerary or ritual contexts, such as Corinthian fine wares, black gloss *kantharoi* or Hellenistic *unguentaria*, are found not only in clearly funerary areas, but all over the rest of the surveyed area. While this is not entirely surprising, considering that all these shapes had a domestic use as well, it may also indicate that our surface assemblage is not as undisturbed or stable as we might hope. There are nevertheless some clear concentrations of likely funerary material, which will be indicated in the chronological overview below. Other functional zones, however, can hardly be traced from the ceramic assemblage alone, which is strongly domestic in character all over the probable urban area.

The finds of the Early Iron Age

The number of sherds certainly dated within the Early Iron Age is very small (see Fig. 11.8a–d, with Chapter 3, Figs. 3.57 and 3.58: one definite Protogeometric fragment from the actual city survey, ten Late Geometric items (including those illustrated in Figs. 11.9 and 11.10), between 9 and 13 with a generic Early Iron Age dating, including a few possible Sub-Protogeometric sherds. If one were to include sherds with a date range extending into the Archaic period (few of which would be later than 600), then that would add another 100–140 sherds (Fig. 11.8d). Almost all of these are either drinking cups or vessels of associated use (*kraters*, amphorae, *oinochoai*) and most are decorated or banded, or have the stripey gloss typical of the period (see again Figs. 11.9 and 11.10). The plain and coarse wares of the period, as explained, are difficult to recognize in survey. It is only when the sherds whose date range extends into the Archaic and Classical period are taken into account, that some possibly early transport amphorae and a very few cooking vessels start to appear (as Fig. 11.11). Finally, there are about 20 sherds (glossed fine wares, mostly cups) with a date range that begins in the Mycenaean period, but also covers the Early Iron Age, and in some cases goes beyond (Fig. 11.8d), and 81 with an Early Iron Age to Hellenistic date – the latter a barely diagnostic group, which I have from now on disregarded. Altogether, the entirely hypothetical total of around 300 sherds (about 3 per cent of the dated finds of the survey as a whole) that could conceivably belong to the Early Iron Age would be out of line when compared with other surveys (Renfrew and Wagstaff 1982, 143 (Melos); Wright *et al*. 1990, 616–17, 645 (Nemea Valley); Cherry, Davis and Mantzourani 1991, 245–6 (Keos); Jameson, Runnels and Van Andel 1994, 372–4 (Southern Argolid); Runnels, Pullen and Langdon 1995, 57–73 (Southern Argolid); Wells and Runnels 1996, 177–9 (Berbati); Mee and Forbes 1997, 57–60 (Methana); Cavanagh *et al*. 2002, 153–4 (Laconia); Forsen and Forsen 2003, 199 (Asea Valley): see already MacDonald and Rapp 1972, 143–4 on Messenia), whereas the approximately 20 more certainly dated within the period are more in line with results elsewhere.

The relatively high proportion of decorated fine ware fragments in the Early Iron Age assemblage, often stemming from large vessels like *kraters* or amphorae, may suggest that some at least some of them are remains of funerary or ceremonial objects. The spatial distribution of the sherds, however, does not seem to support such a hypothesis: apart from the rather empty western part of the surveyed area, the Early Iron Age (and EIA to Archaic) material is widely and very thinly spread, with rarely more than one or two sherds per survey transect. Except for a small but dense concentration around Transects 5–8 and 11–12 at the eastern edge of the surveyed areas, and a slighter concentration in Transects 2001–2004

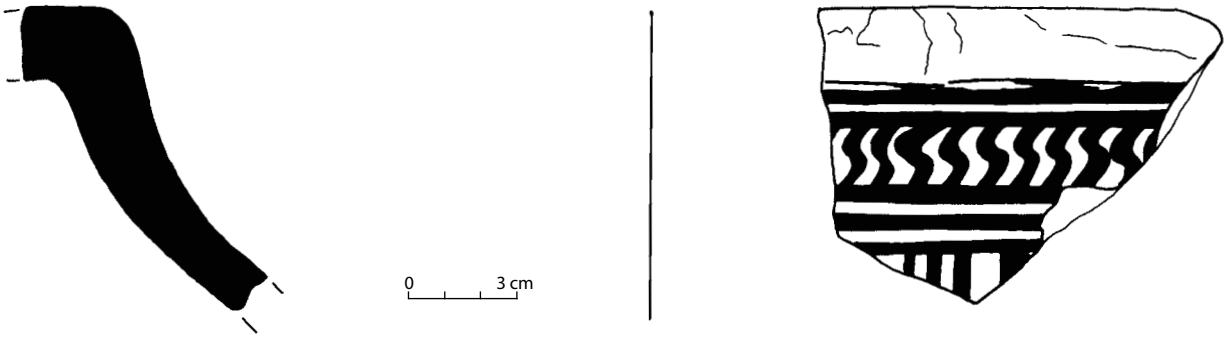


Figure 11.9. *Fragment from the upper wall of a decorated (probably Corinthian) Late Geometric* krater *(85 TH Tr. 84.1).*

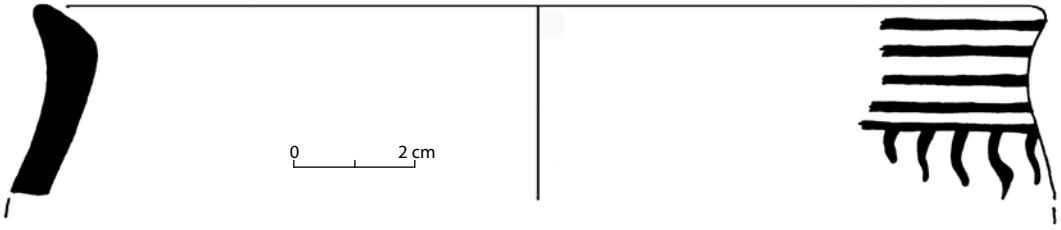


Figure 11.10. *Rim fragment from a decorated Corinthianizing, perhaps Corinthian, Late Geometric cup-*krater *or large cup (85 TH Sa. 73.3).*

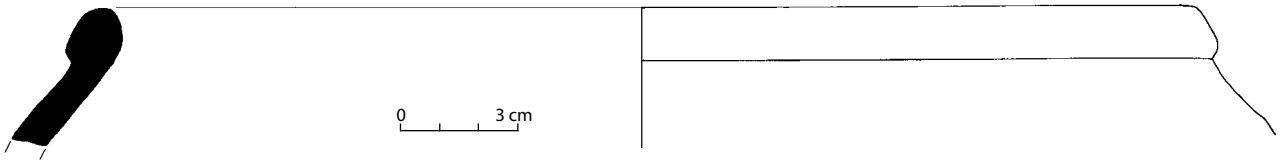


Figure 11.11. *Rim-fragment of a large, plain open shape, Early Iron Age to Classical (86 TH Sa. 93.1).*

of 1986 in the north-eastern extremity (for locations, see Fig. 3.13), there is no clear spatial patterning: finds appear all over the core of the survey area, without either obvious gaps or other concentrations.

While these two concentrations could represent cemetery areas, the thin but general spread of the other finds hardly seems compatible with that; while sanctuary areas of any period remain unidentifiable. Again, the evidence of some excavation finds from houses (Gialanella 1994; Whitley and Boileau 2015, 81) suggests that a considerable proportion of the large decorated Early Iron Age items may, after all, represent domestic refuse. Retrieval may also be part of the problem: coarse and cooking pottery apart, there is the possibiity of even many finer plain ware sherds ending up among the finds assigned to later dates. Such problems, together with the factor of later occupation refuse obscuring items from earlier layers, could partly explain the low density of Early Iron Age material. All in all, the thinness of the Early Iron Age spread, and indeed of the Archaic, could well disguise a more intensive use of the area than we can see. But what kind of use?

A continuous city of such wide extent, besides being hardly compatible with the low finds density, seems unlikely at this early period; a settlement consisting of clusters of houses forming separate hamlets, surrounded by their own little cemetery plots, is perhaps easier to envisage, and would fit the currently prevailing image of proto- and early historical Athens and Corinth (e.g. Snodgrass 1980: 156; Kolb 1984: 67, 77; Crielaard 2009: 361, 365; Bintliff 2012: 221, 240). As I have argued elsewhere however (Stissi 2016), the archaeological evidence for such a form of urbanism

is in fact limited, ambiguous and problematic. In the case of Thespiai, moreover, the thin spread of finds is, as already noted, rather even and does not show the combination of concentrations and rather empty areas that one might expect in a grouping of loose hamlets. Perhaps we should envisage a less intense and less clustered form of habitation, with widely separated houses, on rather large plots, spread over a relatively large area. While it remains possible that cemetery plots were situated between the houses, the survey results can neither prove nor disprove this.

The finds of the Archaic period

Perhaps surprisingly, the numbers of sherds dated within the Archaic period, though higher than those for the preceding phases, are not impressive: 71 definite and 42 possible finds (Figs. 11.12a–c, 11.13–11.17, with the map, Chapter 3, Fig. 3.60). Given that most of these belong within a single century (the sixth), however, whereas the Early Iron Age and the Classical periods each cover roughly two centuries, the quantity of Archaic material is relatively more substantial than may appear at first sight. Next, some of the 200-odd

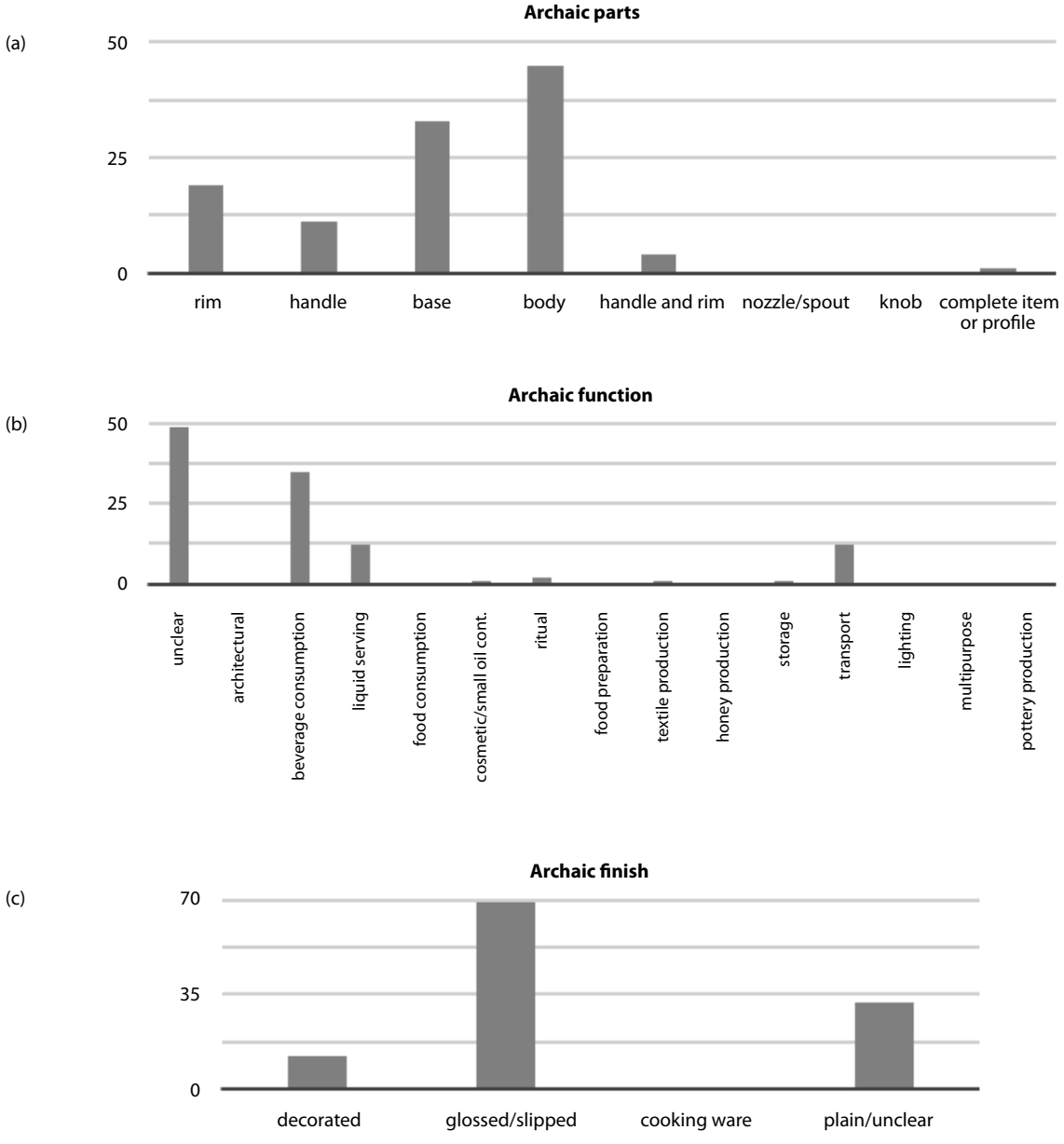


Figure 11.12. *Thespiai: the assemblage of finds dated as Archaic or 'Archaic?'. The breakdowns show the parts of vessels represented (a), functional categories (b) and types of finish (c).*

Figure 11.13. *Fragment of tall rim of cup or* kalyx, *decorated with silhouetted birds, Sub-Geometric to Archaic (85 TH Tr.71.5).*

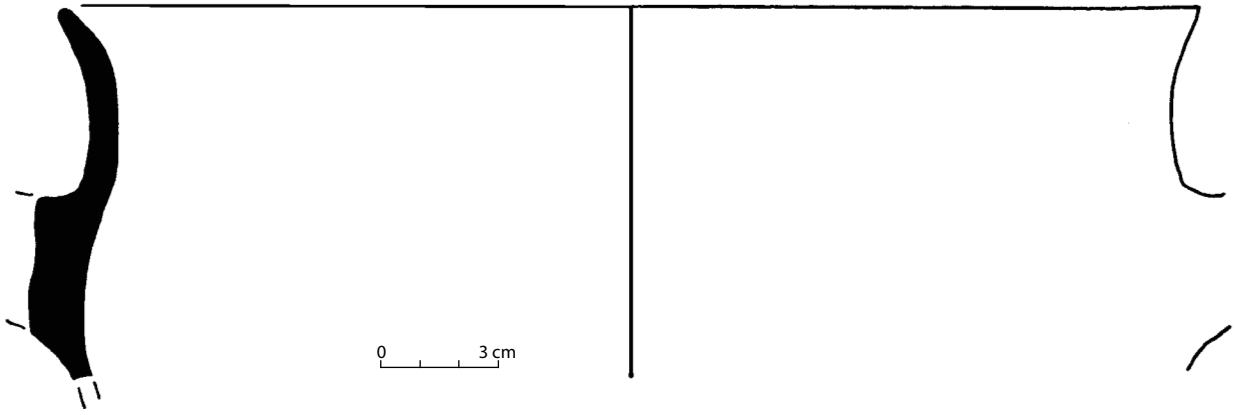


Figure 11.14. *Rim, upper wall and handle stumps of tall black-gloss cup with bands on the lip, probably Sub-Geometric to Archaic, perhaps earlier (85 TH Sa.7.2).*

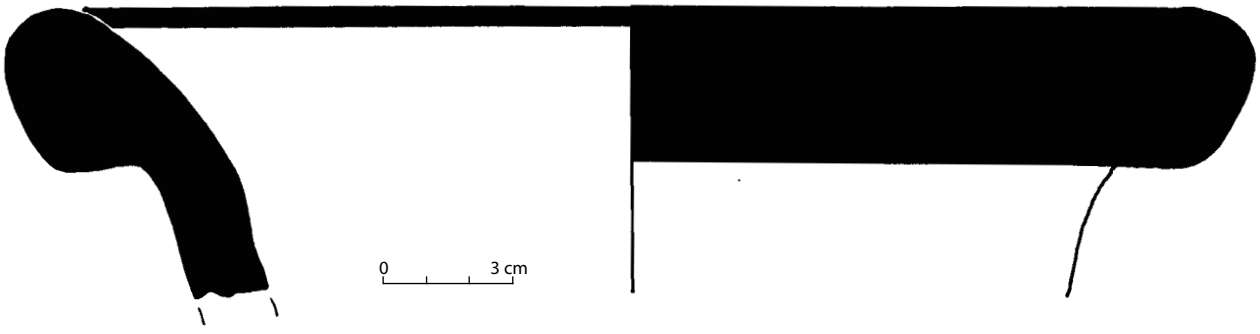


Figure 11.15. *Painted rim fragment of large Archaic transport amphora (86 TH Sa. 215.2).*

sherds with a multi-period date range starting in the Early Iron Age might belong in the Archaic period (Fig. 11.8a–d); and to these may be added a share of the further 200 sherds less closely dated as 'Archaic–Classical', shown together in Fig. 3.59 of Chapter 3, here presented separately (Fig. 11.18a–c and the drawings Figs. 11.19 and 11.20).

Then there are the 600 sherds dated, definitely or provisionally, as 'Archaic–Hellenistic' (Fig. 11.21a–e and the drawings Figs. 11.22–11.24, and shown on Fig. 3.62 of Chapter 3), mostly rather undiagnostic and often small black gloss fragments; of these, only a few are likely to be pre-Classical, but even a small proportion of this large group would be a significant addition to the total quantity of Archaic.

Of the single-period Archaic sherds, more than a third (44) belong to Corinthian or Corinthianizing fine ware vessels. Almost half of these (21) and an even

Figure 11.16. *Handle-plate of Boeotian Black-figure column-*krater, *Late Archaic (85 TH Sa. 8.22).*

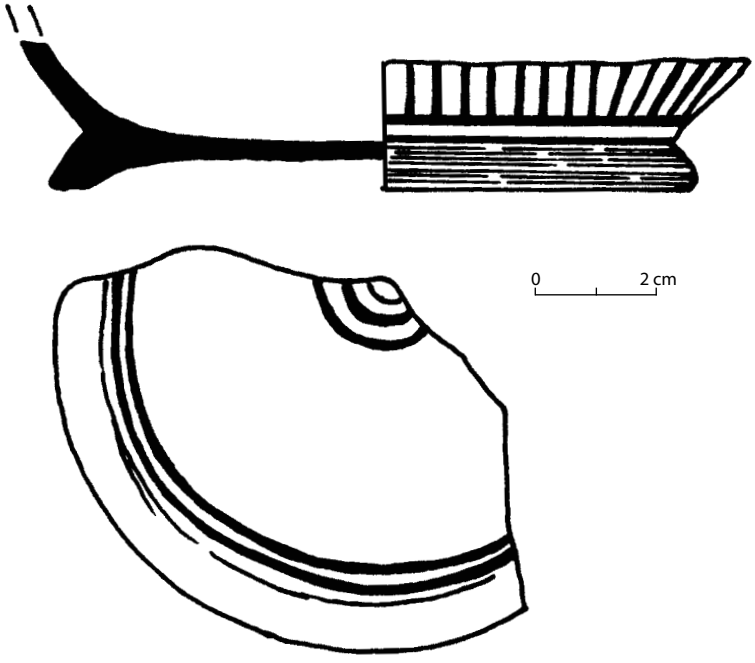


Figure 11.17. *Base fragment of Corinthian Late Archaic* kotyle *or similar drinking vessel, with rays on the lower wall (85 TH Tr.123.14).*

larger proportion of the remaining items (48 out of 69) have a black or red gloss finish, and a further 16 (of which 6 Corinthian or Corinthianizing) are decorated with a painted pattern or figural scene (see Fig. 11.12c, with Figs. 11.14, 11.16 and 11.17). The great majority of the fine ware fragments seem to belong to drinking vessels (cups, *kotylai*, *skyphoi*, *kantharoi*), while serving vessels (*oinochoai* and *kraters*) are rare by comparison with the previous period (compare Fig. 11.7a–b with Fig. 11.12b). Transport amphorae (as Fig. 11.15) now make up at least 10 per cent of the total assemblage. The composition of the Archaic–Classical find group (Fig. 11.18a–c) is very similar to that of the definite Archaic in respect of provenance and shapes, but shows a still higher proportion of black gloss vessels (compare Fig. 11.12b–c with Fig. 11.18b–c). Coarse wares, cooking and household vessels remain rare, or at least have not been detected.

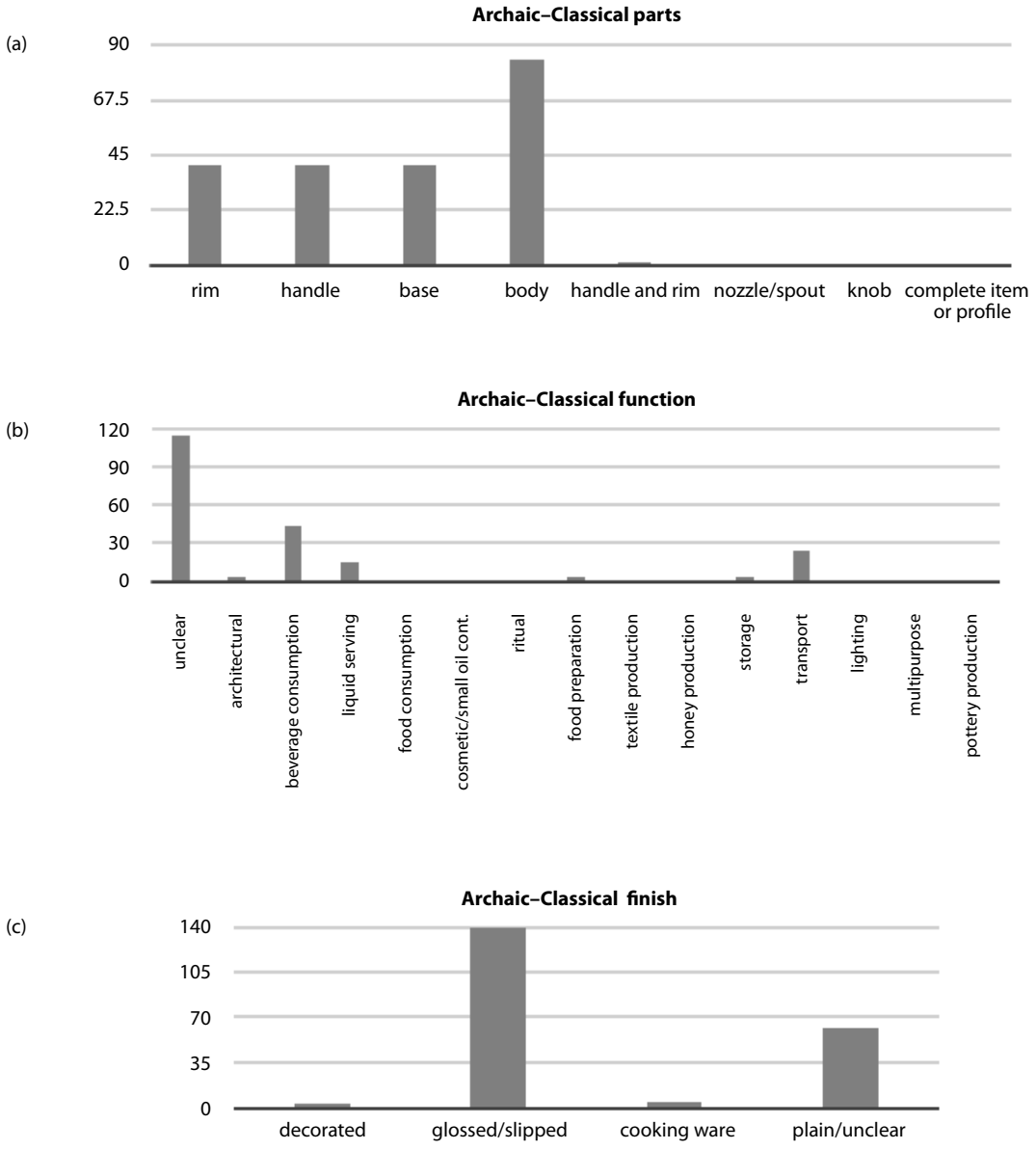


Figure 11.18. *Thespiai: the finds assemblage dated as 'Archaic–Classical'. The breakdowns show the parts of vessels represented (a), functional categories (b) and types of finish (c).*

Even though the amount of closely dateable Archaic and (Early) Classical material is relatively limited, the sixth and fifth centuries, as Fig. 3.59 of Chapter 3 suggests, seem to show a tendency towards concentration of habitation in a more clearly defined and continuous core area, surrounded by a ring of cemeteries or funerary zones, which are now becoming more clearly visible in the west (around Transects 29–32 and 237–45), south (Transects 215–19 and 255–69) – see again p. 28, Fig. 3.13 – and in the north along the modern tarmac road, where decorated and/or imported fine wares are concentrated. Besides these zones, the area at the eastern extremity around Transects 6 and 12 also seems to continue its funerary use from the Early Iron Age, perhaps indicating that the extent of habitation, at least on this side, did not change much. The material from the core of the site is less distinctive, and thus offers less specific information.

The finds of the Classical (–Hellenistic) period

While the quantity of sherds dated precisely to the Classical period (129 certain and 7 possible) exceeds that of the Archaic ones only slightly and remains

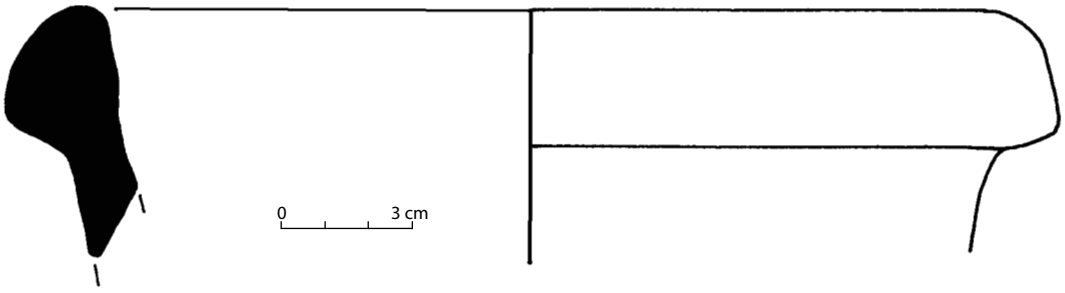


Figure 11.19. *Rim fragment of a thinly glossed Archaic–Classical transport amphora (86 TH Sa.185.5).*

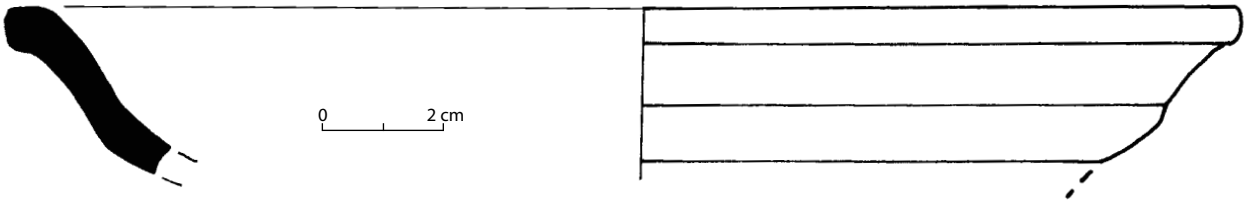


Figure 11.20. *Rim fragment of a black gloss, slightly carinated shallow bowl or cup, probably Archaic–Classical (86 TH Sa.209.2).*

relatively small, the categories 'Classical–Hellenistic' (almost 1500 sherds) and 'Archaic–Hellenistic' (almost 600) are very much more substantial (see again Fig. 11.21d). Altogether, when the 'Archaic–Classical' and several smaller categories mentioned earlier are added, more than 2500 items are involved, or over 20 per cent of the dated sherds (Figs. 11.18a–c, 11.21a–e and 11.25a–c, with the drawings Figs. 11.19, 11.20, 11.22–11.24 and 11.26–11.40; and Figs. 3.59–3.62 of Chapter 3). These make it the next largest cluster after the Roman and Hellenistic periods (the latter being of similar length), though of course it remains unclear how many of the 'Archaic–Hellenistic' or 'Classical–Hellenistic' sherds actually belong in each component period. Taking into account that the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods each cover more or less two centuries (perhaps a little longer for Hellenistic), a simplistic mathematical division giving each an equal proportion would yield about 1300 Classical sherds. On the one hand, the likelihood that the Archaic period would contribute relatively little to the total would lead to a higher number for Classical; on the other, the large amount of securely dated Hellenistic sherds could imply a lower proportion of Classical finds.

While it might seem depressing that perhaps only around 10 per cent of the material really belonging to the Classical period should have a precise dating within that period (examples below Figs. 11.26–11.30, 11.32), the numbers from the clustered periods have now finally become so substantial that they begin to form a workable sample. The Classical period, or at any rate (in view of the problems of chronological specification) the Classical–Hellenistic period – roughly the fifth to second centuries BC in practice – is the first to yield something that seems to approach a full functional assemblage, comprising not only decorated and plainer fine wares mainly used for drinking dining and cosmetics (Figs. 11.27–11.31, 11.33 and 11.38), but also cooking pottery (Figs. 11.36 and 11.37), coarse domestic pots (water jars, jugs, bowls and buckets, Figs. 11.20–11.22, 11.34, 11.35, 11.38 and 11.39), a few storage pots (*pithoi*) and also transport *amphorae* (Fig. 11.19), which are likely to have been reused as domestic storage pots in large numbers (see Fig. 11.21e, in addition to Figs. 11.18c, 11.21c and 11.25c). Since the material of this period comprises a large majority of all the Early Iron Age to Hellenistic finds, this fuller assemblage is of course less surprising.

Differences in chronological precision do nevertheless play some tricks. Of the 136 items with a certain or possible Classical date, 112 are black gloss vessels, and 8 show figured decoration: about 90 per cent of the items thus have a painted finish (for examples, see Figs. 11.26–11.33). This is very much higher figure than

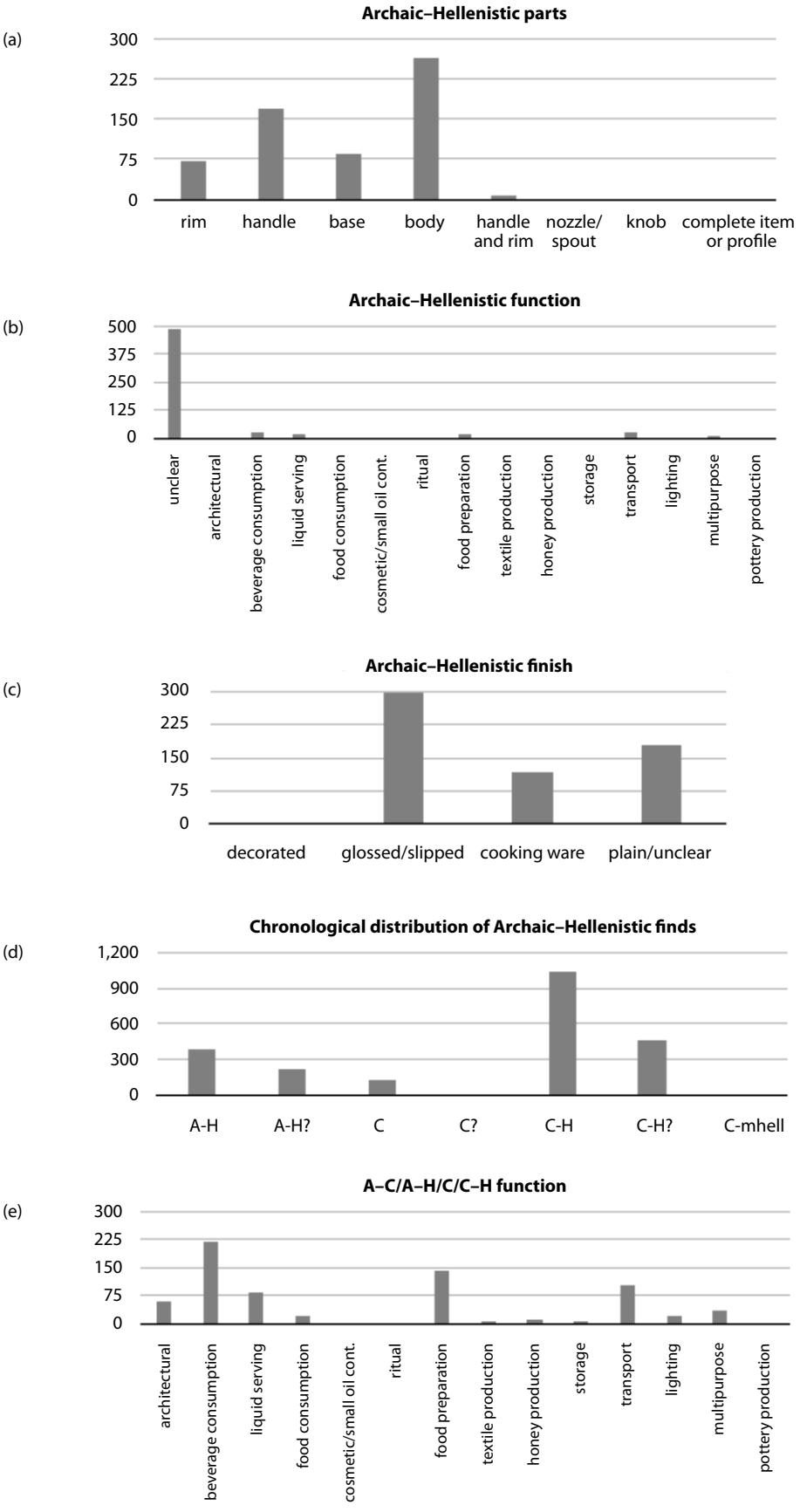


Figure 11.21. *Thespiai: the finds assemblage dated as 'Archaic–Hellenistic'. The breakdowns show, first, the parts of vessels represented (a), functional categories (b) and types of finish (c); (d) combines the entirety of the Archaic to Classical to Hellenistic finds, as shown in Figs. 11.18, 11.19 and 11.25, with the numbers of items that they comprise; while (e) gives the breakdown of all these assemblages by functional category, excluding the items which cannot be assigned to a category.*

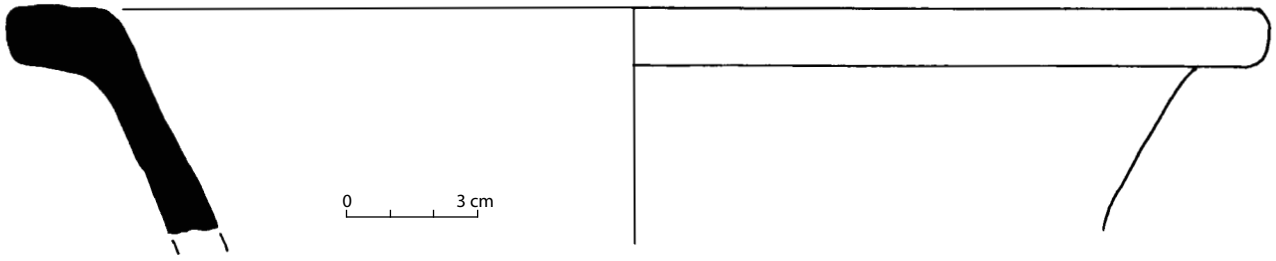


Figure 11.22. *Rim fragment of black gloss vessel of uncertain shape, Archaic–Hellenistic (86 TH Sa.215.3).*

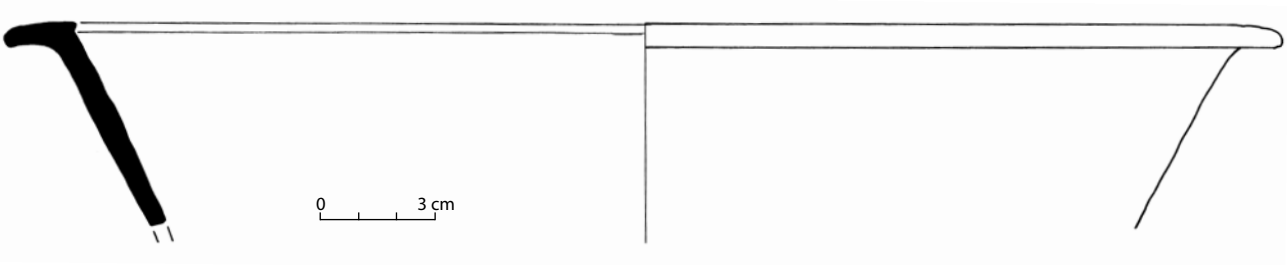


Figure 11.23. *Rim fragment of thin-walled 'cooking ware'* lekane, *Archaic–Hellenistic (85 TH Tr.2131.4).*

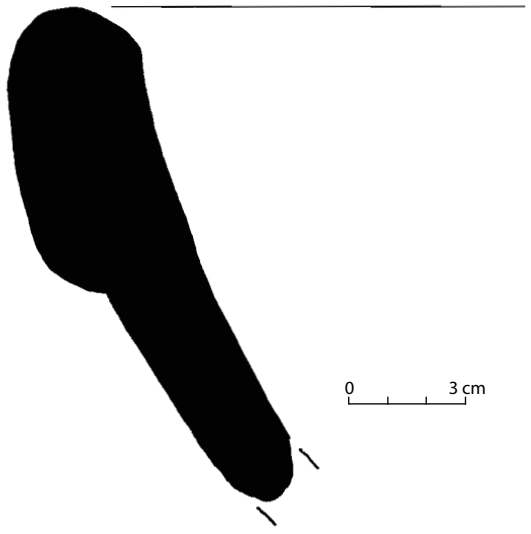


Figure 11.24. *Rim fragment of large plain basin, possibly Archaic–Hellenistic (85 TH Tr.8.2).*

for the items with a broader date range, and seems closely related with the high proportion of drinking vessels dated to the Classical period. These form about half the assemblage, and are mainly *kantharoi* (30 items); there are also around 10 *kraters*, bringing the total to over 80 for drinking and associated vessels: this, from about 100 items which can be classified by function or shape. On the other hand, almost all of the household and cooking pottery (examples, Figs. 11.34–11.39), plus most loom-weights (Fig. 11.40) and lamps (Fig. 11.32), are dated as 'Classical–Hellenistic', while transport amphora and *lekane* fragments are found alike in 'Archaic–Classical', 'Archaic–Hellenistic' and 'Classical–Hellenistic' (see in part Fig. 11.7 a–b, and Figs. 11.19 and 11.22–11.24). Clearly, the more accurate dating that fine table wares allow acts as a filter, placing them in the 'Classical' category, while utilitarian pottery ends up in the wider date ranges (especially the relatively later ones); the chronological divisions may at the same time reflect conventional dating solutions. In any case, taken together, the functional division seems to make more sense as a reflection of (mainly) domestic assemblages, from the fifth century into the Hellenistic period (Figs. 11.21c, 11.21e, 11.25c, 11.41c and 11.49c; compare Rotroff 1999: 68–70 and Stissi 2002: 220–9).

Perhaps because of the high density of finds, there seems to be little spatial differentiation between the chronological groups (see Figs. 3.59–3.62 in Chapter 3). Even though pottery was certainly being produced in Early Iron Age–Hellenistic Thespiai, virtually all the wasters found during the survey seem to be Roman. At Thespiai, unlike Hyettos and Koroneia, no concentration of votive material to indicate the presence of a sanctuary has been found. Although the occasional figurine is present, and some of the very

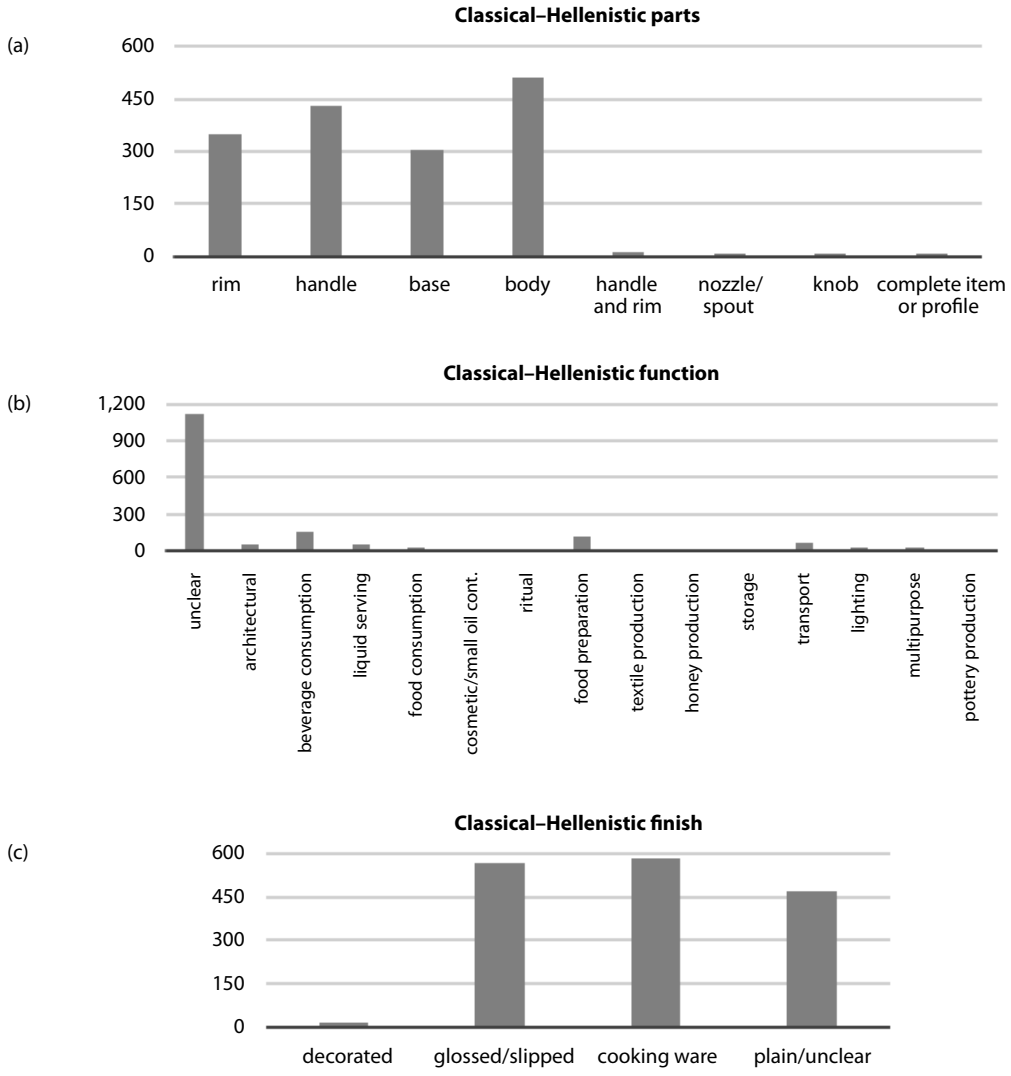


Figure 11.25. *Thespiai: the Classical–Hellenistic finds assemblage. The breakdowns show the parts of vessels represented (a), functional categories (b) and types of finish (c).*

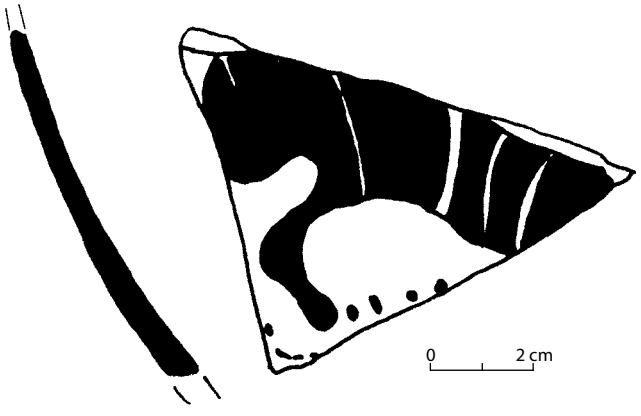


Figure 11.26. *Wall fragment of Boeotian Black-figured vessel of uncertain shape, Classical (85 TH Sa.2018-12).*

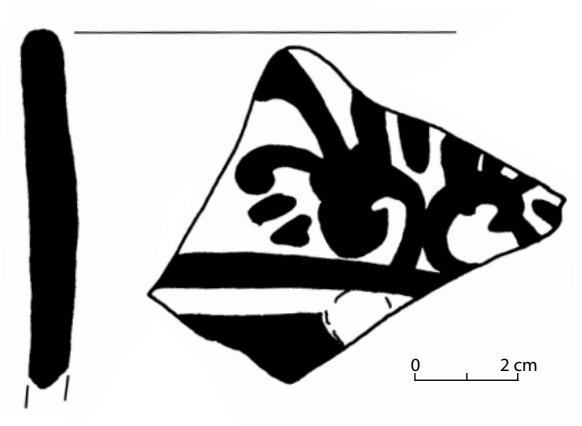


Figure 11.27. *Wall fragment of Boeotian palmette cup, Classical (86 TH Sa.102.7).*

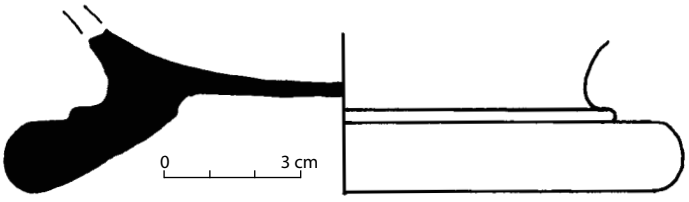


Figure 11.28. *Black gloss low foot of stemmed vessel, (Early) Classical (85 HT Tr.2004.2).*

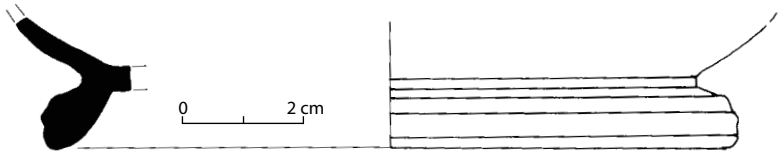


Figure 11.29. *Fragment of elaborate ring base of black gloss cup, Classical (late fifth or early fourth century* BC*) (86 TH Sa.86.1).*

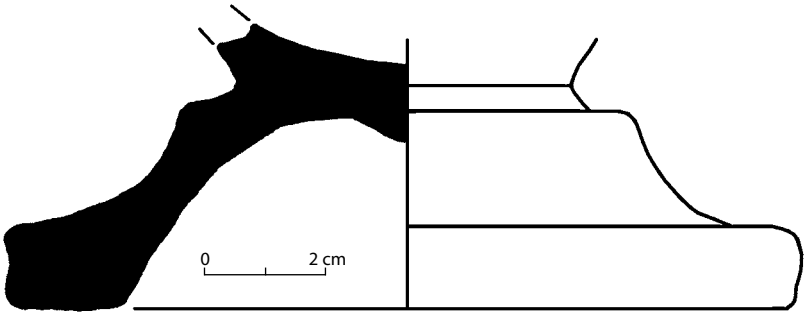


Figure 11.30. *Elaborate black gloss foot of stemmed vessel, Late Classical or slightly later (*c. *350–310* BC*) (85 TH Tr.110.28).*

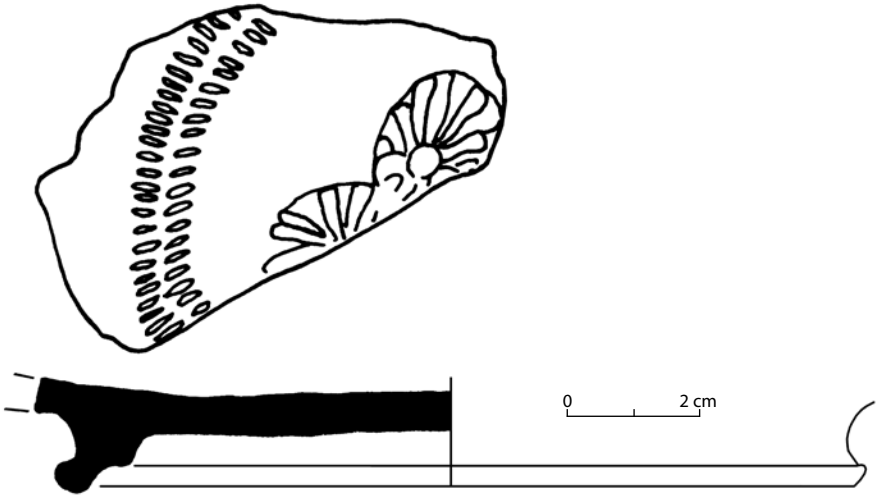


Figure 11.31. *Base fragment of Late Classical or Early Hellenistic black gloss bowl with stamped palmettes inside (86 TH Tr.73.6).*

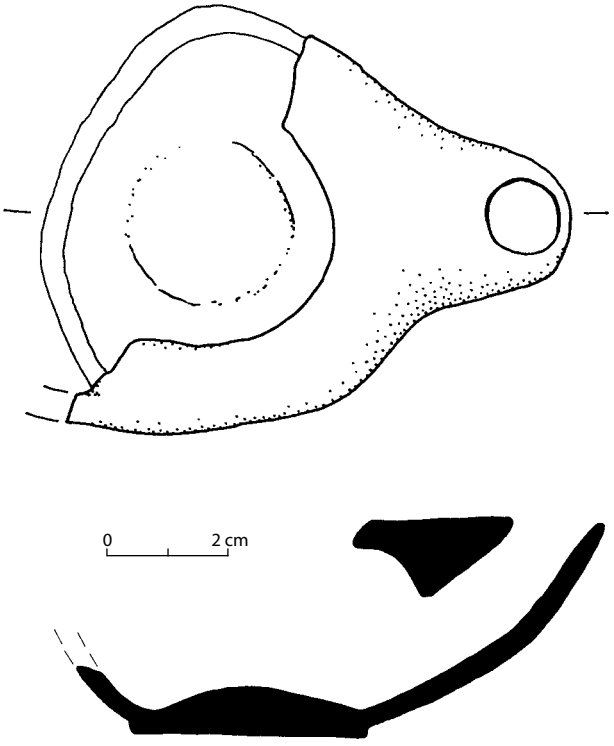


Figure 11.32. *Large piece of possibly Corinthian, Late Classical black gloss lamp (86 TH Sa.14.1a).*

rare decorated pottery from outside the likely cemetery areas may have a ritual origin, there is nothing to connect any of these finds to areas of religious activity. Just as in the preceding centuries, some of the cemetery areas which must have surrounded the urban core of Thespiai seem to be visible, actually in more or less the same areas as before: at the south-western, southern and western edges of the survey area, and along the modern road in the north-east), but the find patterns are not very clear. The problem seems to be that black and red figure pottery is extremely rare, that most of the black gloss pottery which now dominates funerary assemblages is not exclusive to graves, and that even the spread of palmette cups (as Fig. 11.27), which are so typical of Classical Boeotian graves, is not limited to funerary areas.

Another remarkable 'invisibility phenomenon' in the Classical–Hellenistic assemblage is that the

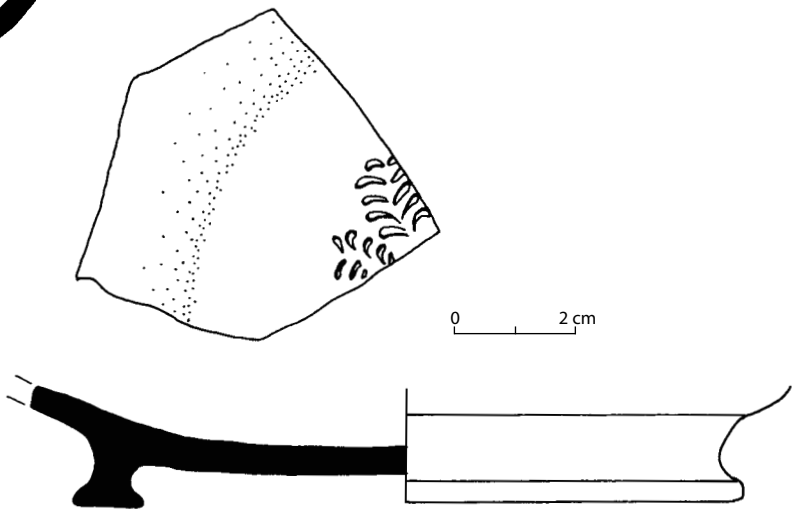


Figure 11.33. *Base fragment of Late Classical (or Early Hellenistic?) Hellenistic black gloss bowl with stamped palmettes inside (86 TH Sa.14.28).*

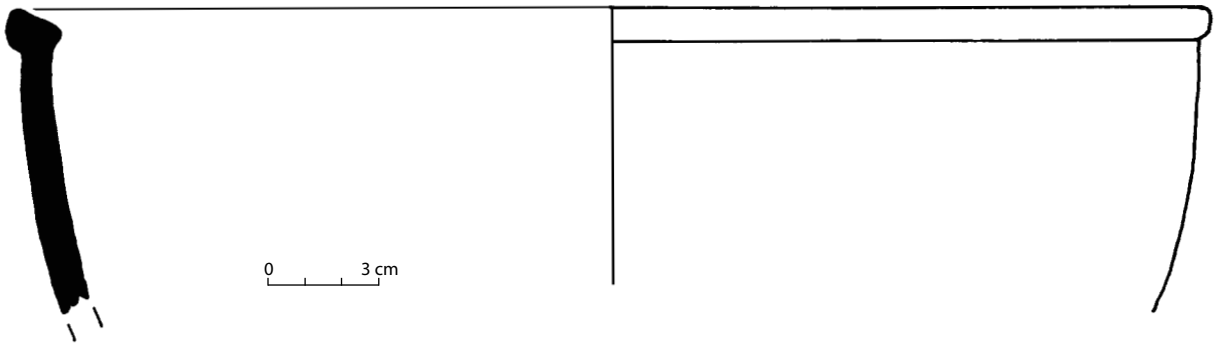


Figure 11.34. *Two joining rim fragments of plain Classical–Hellenistic deep bowl (86 TH Sa.14.7 and .14).*

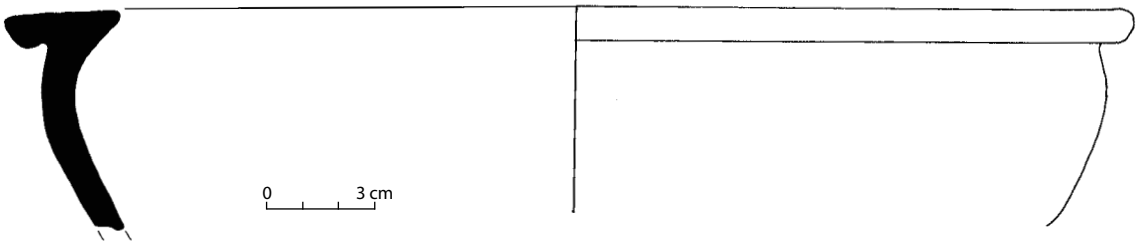


Figure 11.35. *Rim fragment of plain, probably Classical–Hellenistic deep bowl (86 TH Sa. 14.22).*

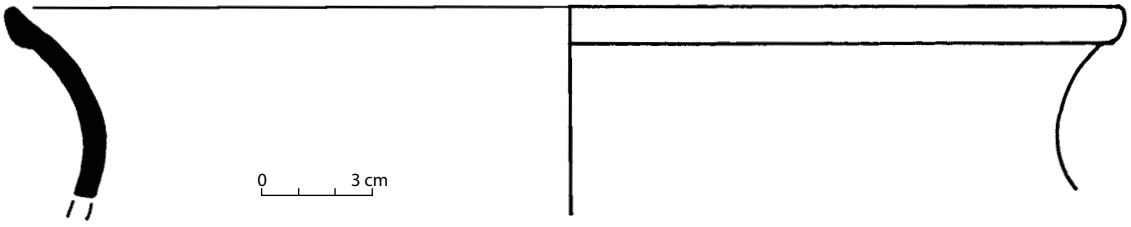


Figure 11.36. *Rim fragment of Classical–Hellenistic* chytra *(small cooking pot) (86 TH Sa. 48.6).*

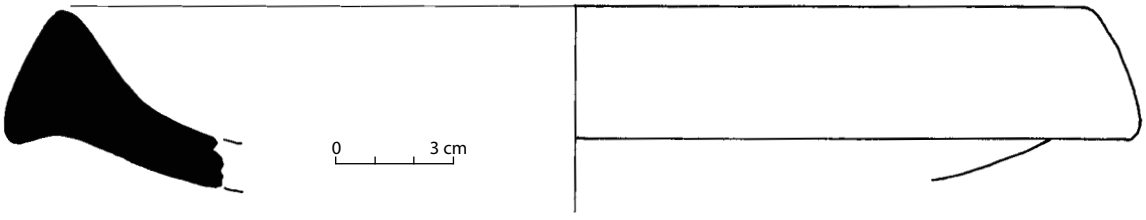


Figure 11.37. *Rim fragment of large, plain, probably Classical–Hellenistic flat bowl, possibly a* mortarium *(86 TH Sa. 14.12).*

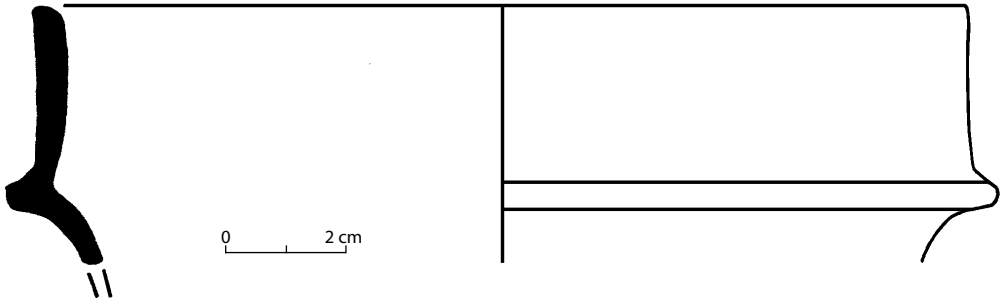


Figure 11.38. *Rim fragment of black gloss* pyxis*, Classical–(Early) Hellenistic (86 TH Tr.184.11).*

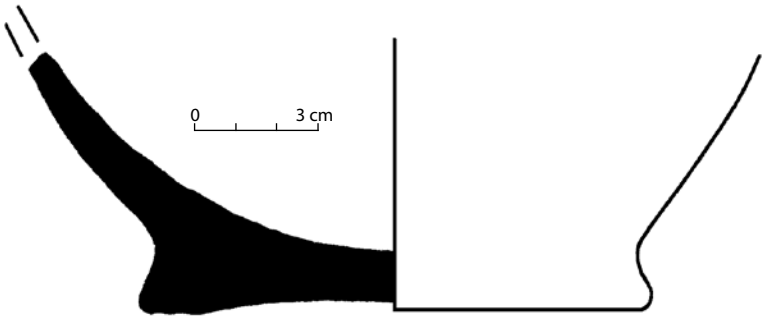


Figure 11.39. *Base fragment of possibly Classical–Hellenistic closed vessel, showing possible traces of black gloss (86 TH Tr.6.4).*

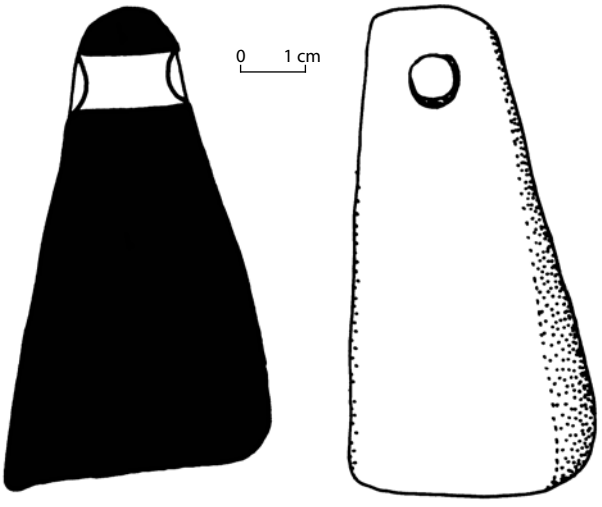


Figure 11.40. *Complete plain pyramidal loom-weight, probably Classical–Hellenistic (85 TH Sa.2024.8).*

dynamic historical events marking the history of Thespiai during the fifth and fourth centuries BC, including destruction, depopulation and rebuilding, do not seem to be reflected in the survey finds. Phases of short-term abandonment, contraction or expansion cannot be traced. This probably merely reflects the generally low chronological resolution offered by the material, and the almost complete lack of very precisely dateable finds. Nevertheless, the finds that do offer relatively good dating seem to leave little space for periods of abandonment, or moments of strong discontinuity, in the Classical and Hellenistic periods (compare Chapter 5, p. 212).

The finds of the Hellenistic period

Remarkably, the quantity of sherds with an exclusively Hellenistic dating is much higher than that of any single earlier period: 890 items, or about 8 per cent of the total collection of dated finds, definite or possible (Fig. 11.41a–d, with the drawings Figs. 11.42–11.49, and Figs. 3.66 and 3.71 of Chapter 3). Furthermore, up to about one-third of these (294 sherds) belong to a more precise category within the Hellenistic period (Fig. 11.41d) – although many of these phases cover a fairly long part of the period. In addition, we have to consider the likelihood that a large proportion of the 'Archaic–Hellenistic' and 'Classical–Hellenistic' finds considered earlier, and a probably smaller fraction of those with an earlier starting date, is likely to contain material that is indeed Hellenistic. At the other chronological end, there are also 859 sherds with a date range covering at least the last part of the Hellenistic period in combination with at least a part of the Roman period (see below, Figs. 11.49a–c and 11.49). Together, all this would create a potential Hellenistic collection of over 4000 sherds – the biggest after the Roman assemblage studied below (Chapter 12). The real figure is surely much lower, but in all likelihood the Thespiai assemblage still contains more Hellenistic than Classical sherds.

Part of this strong presence can surely be explained by stratigraphy and taphonomy: on the one hand, these items were deposited above the Archaic and Classical strata; on the other, there seem to be sectors of the urban area that were no longer settled after the Hellenistic period; while the areas with the strongest Roman presence, especially the core of the Roman city at the *Kastro* and directly east of it, show relatively fewer pre-Roman finds of any period, the Hellenistic material included (see Figs. 3.57–3.62, 3.66, 3.71 and 3.73 from Chapter 3, with Figs. 11.50–11.52).

Nevertheless, these do not seem to be the only relevant factors. A closer look at the Hellenistic assemblage shows that its composition may be more strongly affected by classification biases than those of earlier periods. 93 items, about one-third of the total for the narrower period to which they belong (Middle – Late Hellenistic, separately and as a combination) are *unguentaria* (as Fig. 11.47) , and all 28 mould-made bowls (Fig. 11.48) are also placed in the same timespan. Together, these shapes account for almost the entire bridge category of 'Middle – Late Hellenistic'

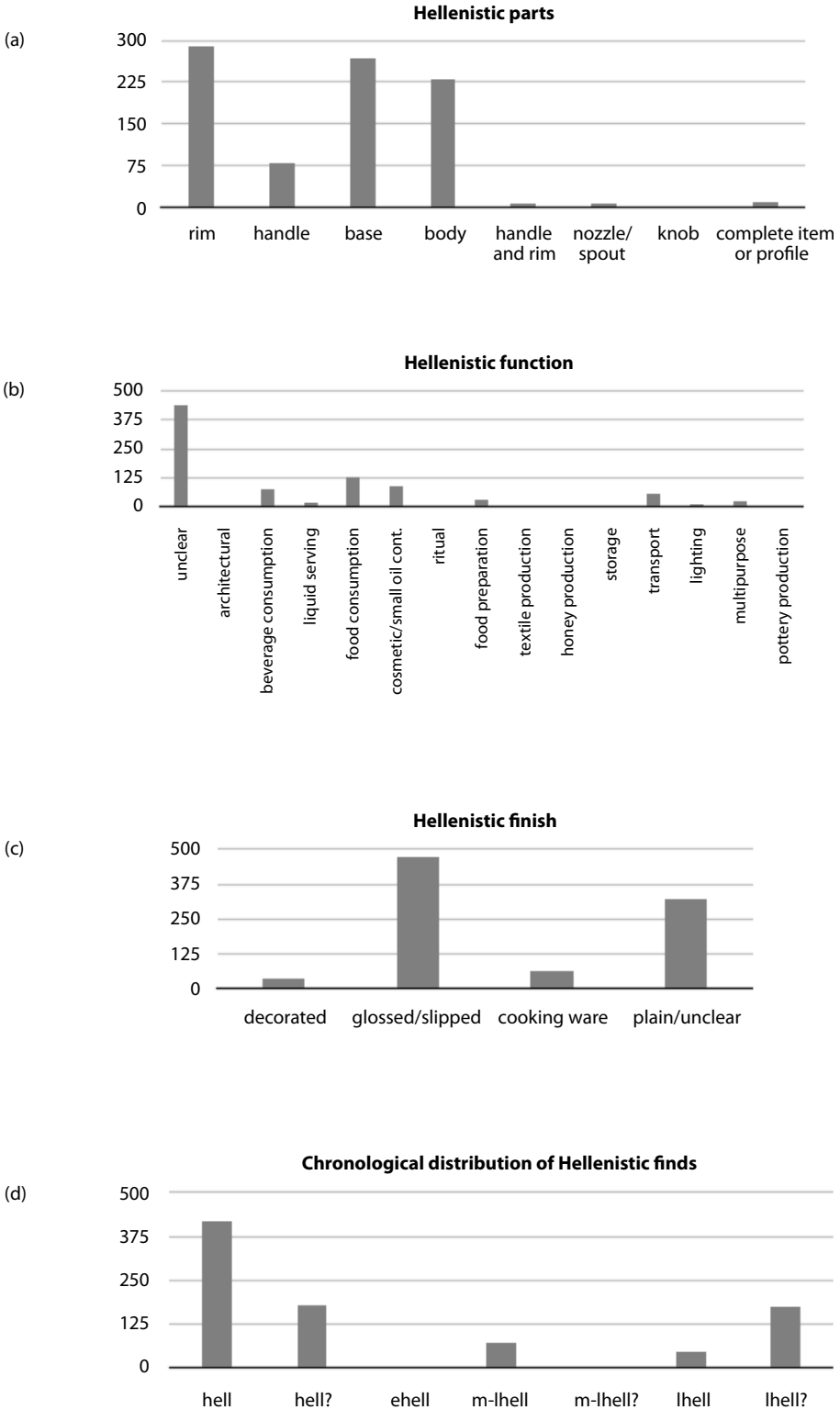


Figure 11.41. *Thespiai: the Hellenistic finds assemblage, including all finds dated to the period as a whole and in the sub-categories listed in (d). The breakdowns show the parts of vessels represented (a), functional categories (b) and types of finish (c), while (d) shows the chronological sub-categories that make up this assemblage, with the numbers of items that they comprise.*

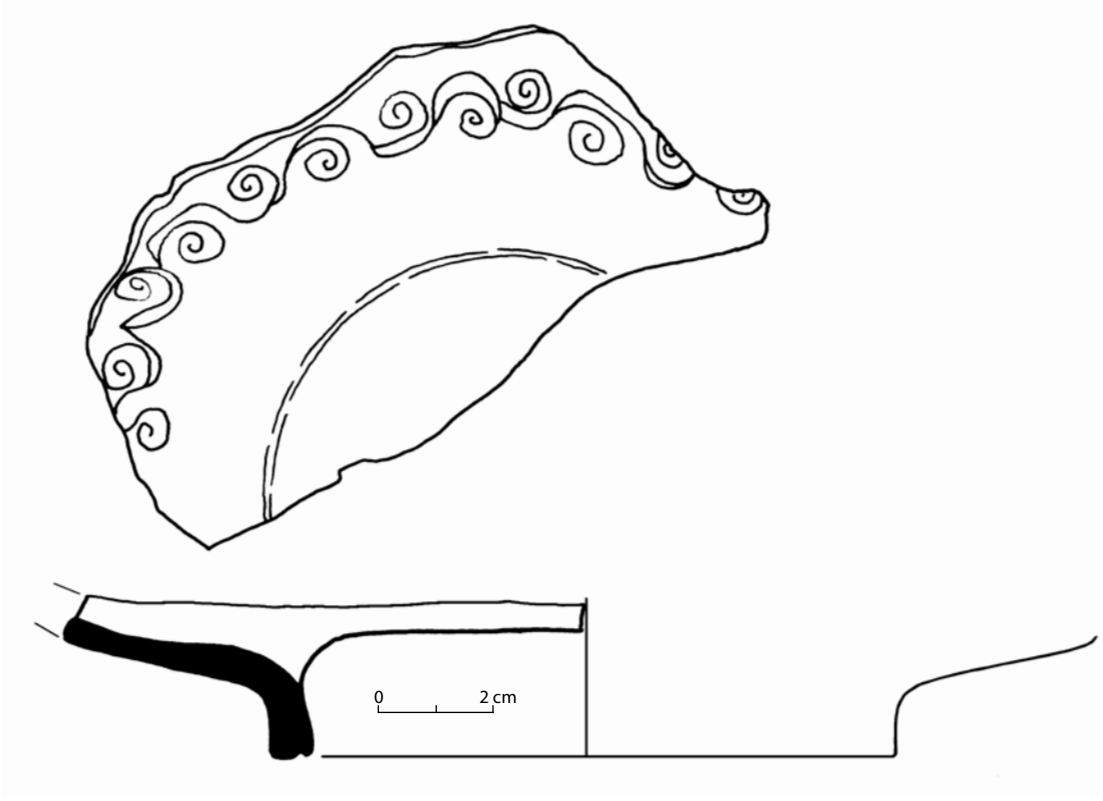


Figure 11.42. *Base fragment of Hellenistic black gloss dish or plate with incised 'West Slope' decoration (probably third century* BC*) (86TH Sa 13-19).*

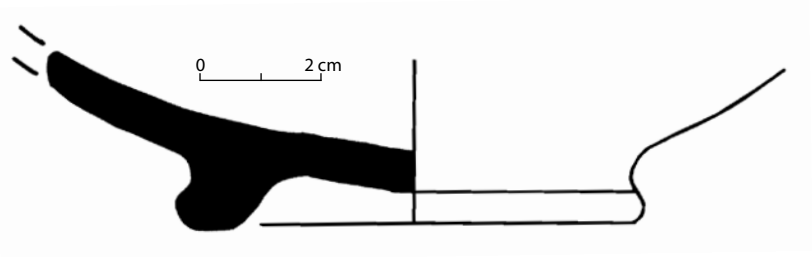


Figure 11.43. *Base of Hellenistic black gloss bowl, painted by dipping (85 TH Tr.2040.2).*

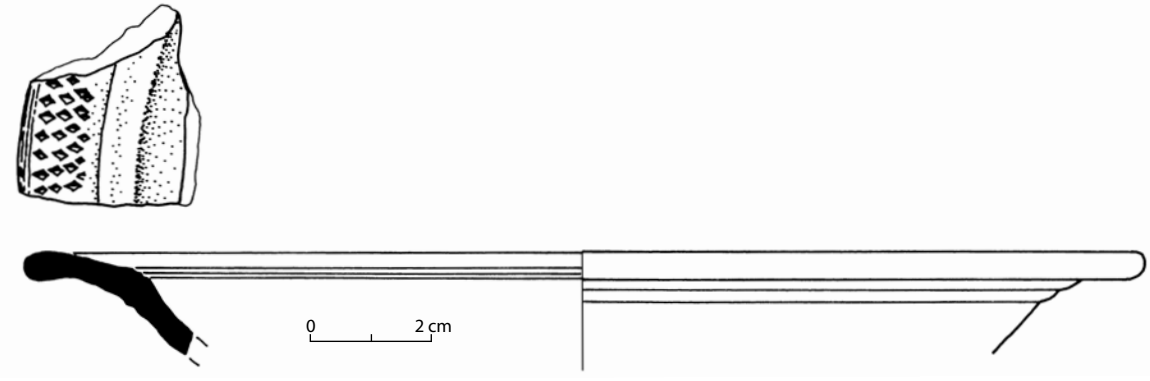


Figure 11.44. *Rim fragment of Hellenistic black gloss dish, with rouletted and incised 'West Slope' decoration (85 TH Tr.2064.5).*

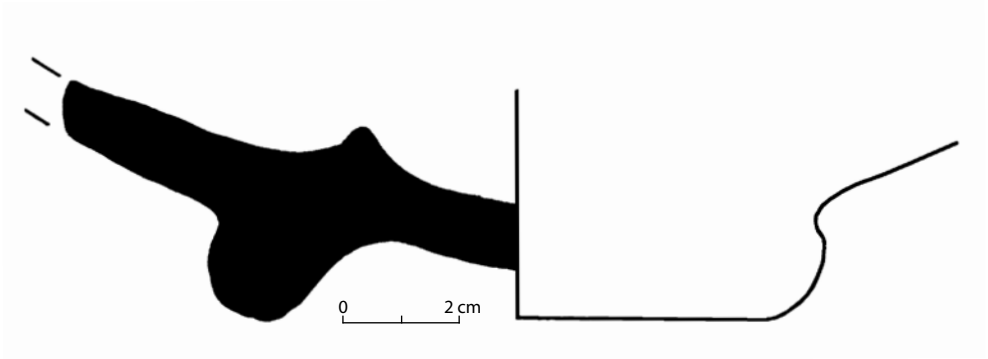


Figure 11.45. *Base of Hellenistic black gloss fish plate, painted by dipping (85 TH Tr.2131.26).*

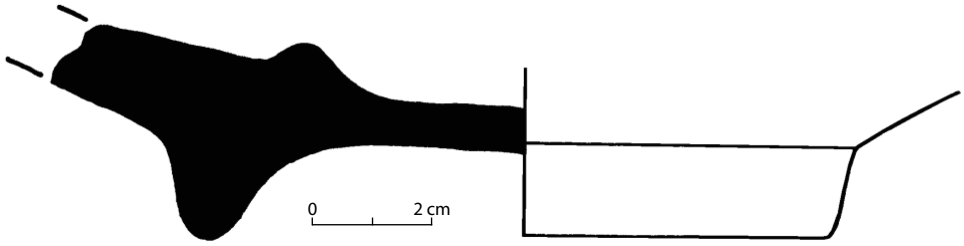
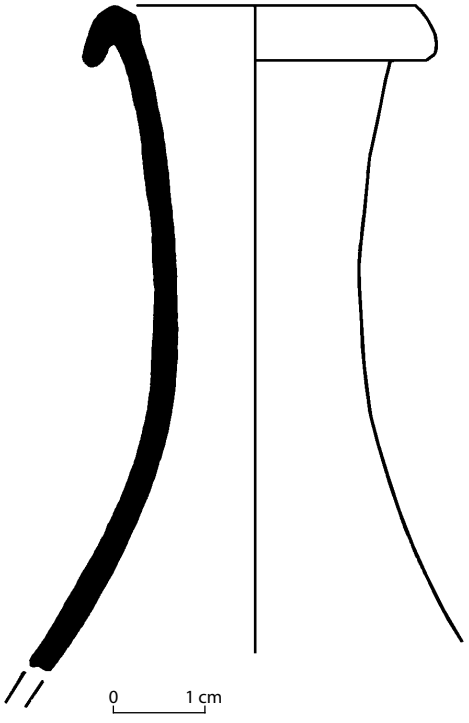


Figure 11.46. *Base of (probably) Late Hellenistic black gloss fish plate with plain exterior (85 TH Tr.18.6).*



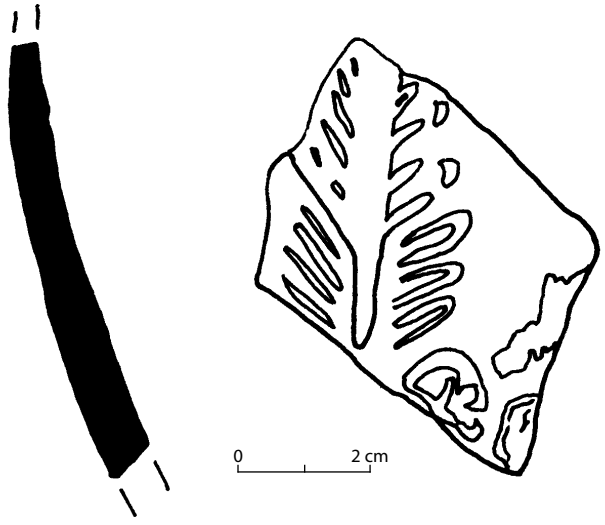


Figure 11.48. *(above) Small wall fragment of (Mid-) Late Hellenistic red gloss mould-made bowl, showing floral relief decoration (86TH Sa 201-14).*

Figure 11.47. *(left) Neck of rather large Hellenistic plain* unguentarium *or other small closed vessel (85TH Tr 81-14).*

(70 of 74 items), besides forming about a quarter of the Late Hellenistic items with a recognisable shape. Further, the proportions of jugs, dishes (Figs. 11.42 and 11.44) and fish plates (Figs. 11.45 and 11.46) with a date range falling within Hellenistic are stunning, with respectively 122 out of 125, 168 out of 171 and 17 out of 17 pre-Roman specimens at least potentially assigned to Hellenistic; within that, there is a preponderance of later Hellenistic and Hellenistic–Roman items. Similarly, a few clearly recognisable types of transport amphorae (mainly Knidian and Koan), with a specific chronological focus in the last centuries BC and the early Roman period, appear to have strongly raised the proportion of these vessels in the Hellenistic assemblage. Altogether, the six 'type fossils' just listed account for some 55 per cent of the definite Hellenistic finds which could be assigned to a specific shape (285 out of 514; see again Fig. 11.7). Such recognisable and easily dateable types will naturally be over-represented in the collected and retained finds. There are of course comparable type fossils in earlier periods too – one could think of Archaic Corinthian *aryballoi*, and Classical–Hellenistic *kantharoi* and palmette cups – but they seem relatively less prominent.

When taken together with the accompanying vessels, however, this somewhat odd combination of Hellenistic 'favourite pots' (to which simple bowls and some types of lamp and loom-weight could also be added) still forms a more or less convincing functional assemblage (Fig. 11.41b), though evidently a less balanced and complete one than those of the Classical and Classical–Hellenistic periods. The imbalance, mainly in respect of fine pottery (Fig. 11.41c), may even be strengthened by the relatively high proportion, already mentioned, of black gloss table wares within the prolific chronological categories of 'Archaic–Hellenistic' and 'Classical–Hellenistic'. In other words, we are probably missing a larger proportion of the coarse and plain wares of the strictly Hellenistic assemblage than for those directly preceding, wider phases. Besides this, I wonder to what extent the less clearly dateable sherds of rather generic shapes, such as simple bowls and dishes, have been 'funneled' by our classification biases into the Hellenistic (and the Roman) periods.

It does seem clear, however, that the range of pot shapes and their sub-types starts to decrease from the Classical period onwards, and that throughout the Hellenistic period, pottery generally grows simpler (see once again Fig. 11.7). Thus, by the second century BC, the very wide range of Archaic and Classical drinking vessel types is reduced to little more than roughly hemispherical bowls, while serving vessels are concentrated into basic *lekanai* and jugs, instead of the former array of *kraters*, table ware *hydriai* and amphorae and different kinds of *oinochoai*. In domestic contexts, pottery with painted decoration all but disappears (see also Hayes 1991: 187–90; Rotroff 1999: 68–70). The decorated *lekythoi* are at first replaced by simpler and smaller versions, and then by the even more basic *unguentaria*. The only domestic functional category which enjoys growth is food consumption, in the form of plates and dishes, whose numbers surge. Many of these developments culminate in the Roman period, when the range of shapes and types was to be reduced yet further, but the general trend towards simplification clearly already starts in the beginning of the Hellenistic period – if not somewhat earlier, should the slow demise of figure-decorated pottery be treated as part of the same process. The dominant trend seems to be that pottery becomes more and more utilitarian, and less and less suitable for representative uses – a role probably taken over by metal vessels, and in part also (mainly in funerary and sanctuary contexts) by terracotta figurines and stone sculpture (on this phenomenon see Hayes 1991: 183–4; Rotroff 1999: 68–70; Stissi 2002: 222, 247–8, 255–8).

It could be further speculated that some reduction in the wealth and/or the spending power of consumers might have played a role. Against such a hypothesis, however, is the fact that the simplification of household pottery assemblages goes hand in hand with an apparently steadily increasing proportion of transport amphorae. Not only the numbers of sherds, but the quantity of imports and the distances that they cover seem to increase. While both the easy recognisability of certain new shapes and fabrics appearing in the Hellenistic period is likely to contribute to our survey results, the scale of production and distribution of amphorae also seems to grow during the Classical and Hellenistic periods, leading to a higher consumption and discard rate, and perhaps less intensive reuse. It is difficult, however, especially in a survey assemblage, to distinguish the possible effects of the growth of an 'international' commercial economy from those of changing strategies in transport, storage and discard – or indeed from even more general use and consumption patterns involving amphora contents,. An alternative explanation would simply be in terms of more frequent food importation in this period, in amphorae, whether by a small élite or to feed the poor. Comparison between assemblages, including those found in excavations, may help to disentangle some relevant issues, but this procedure is only in its infancy. In any case, the low proportion of contemporary fine table-wares does not suggest that this was a prosperous time for those outside the élite, nor for the city in general. The developments just sketched are of course not exclusive to Thespiai: indeed, very similar trends can

be seen in other Greek survey assemblages (compare e.g. Wright *et al*. 1990: 616–17 (for the Nemea Valley); Cherry, Davis and Mantzourani 1991: 245–6 (Keos); Penttinen 1996 (Berbati); Mee and Forbes 1997, 62–3; 68–9; 73–5 (Methana); Cavanagh *et al*. 2002, 153–4; 175; 233–4 (Laconia); Cavanagh Mee and James 2005, 7–10 (Laconia again); Forsen and Forsen 2005, 249, 265–71 (Asea Valley)).

Apparently, the chequered history of their *polis* did not prevent the Thespians from following the example reflected in wider ceramic consumption patterns, seen for example at Athens and Corinth. The suggestion of continuous growth in the networks of exchange for food and wine, reflected in the amphora material from the later Classical and on into the Roman period, seems to go along with a stronger Aegean (and less Boeotian or Peloponnesian) focus of the exchange networks, as far as the pottery can indicate.

How closely the developments in Thespiai compare with those in the other surveyed Boeotian cities is still difficult to gauge, with the study of most assemblages still under way. Nevertheless, it already seems clear that not only the general prominence of Hellenistic finds in the Thespian survey assemblage, but also the overall trends in frequency of certain shapes and types, may be more pronounced than in other Boeotian cities – some of which, like Haliartos or Koroneia, were of course much more dramatically affected by the Roman expansion in the second and first centuries BC. On the other hand, the city of Tanagra and several rural survey areas do also show growth in the quantity of material through the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods.

The spatial distribution of the Hellenistic pottery, again (Figs. 3.66, 3.71 and 3.73 of Chapter 3), cannot be very informative, first of all because it is unclear to what extent the massive amounts of Classical–Hellenistic (and Archaic–Hellenistic) material, which fill the whole surveyed area (Figs. 3.61 and 3.62), actually represent Hellenistic finds. But in any case, the clearly Hellenistic material, mainly belonging to the third and second centuries BC, is also spread widely, suggesting that Thespiai remained active on quite a large scale throughout this period. This may be confirmed by the spread of *unguentaria* which, though clearly present in habitation areas as well, show some clear concentrations in the eastern and southern funerary areas which have been in use since the Archaic period, and seem also to be present in some numbers in the western and other peripheries (Fig. 3.67). It is only the late Hellenistic period (Fig. 3.66) that apparently shows a spatial contraction and concentration in the spread of finds, but this seems in part related to the relatively low number of items involved (which of course might be an indication of decline in itself). It should be noted, too, that the problematic categories of 'Hellenistic–Roman' and 'Hellenistic–Late Roman', about which more shortly, have a rather wider spread (Figs 3.73 and 3.74). While some contraction of the city from the first century BC onwards is more than likely (see Chapter 3, pp. 110–14, for a slightly different view on the chronology of this development), as is also indicated by the Roman finds, the process may have been less straightforward than it appears at first sight. It cannot be excluded that the picture of urban decline sketched by the historical sources (see Müller 2013) is at least partly exaggerated. An alternative would be that we are perhaps looking at the wrong things, and should envisage a process starting with abandonment or lower density of use of certain areas within the city, before contraction of the city as a whole.

Looking beyond the Hellenistic period

It should, finally, be stressed that the chronology of the first centuries BC and AD material, as found in the Boeotian surveys, remains partly obscure, and that there are also large groups of finds which can only be dated within a period spanning from the second or first centuries BC into the Roman or even Late Roman periods, so up to 800 years later (Fig. 11.49a–d, with Figs. 11.51 and 11.52 and Figs. 3.66, 3.73 and 3.74 of Chapter 3). This means that, in Greek pottery assemblages like that at Thespiai, the transition to the Roman period must remain problematic, as material produced in the Hellenistic tradition of pottery making, using pre-Roman shapes and fabrics, probably continued to be used into the Imperial period, with Roman types and shapes only slowly taking over; while, in the other direction, some categories of finds associated with the Roman expansion (but often produced in the Aegean area) may possibly start to appear in the assemblages decades before the actual Roman take-over. Hence the prevalence of chronological categories like 'Hellenistic–Roman' or 'Late Hellenistic–Roman' which (so the general statistics suggest) would probably comprise much material produced in the Roman imperial period, with a smaller number of earlier items. In survey assemblages, it is simply impossible even to guess at the real proportions in such groups of finds. Similarly some, or even much, of the later Hellenistic pottery may be hidden among the sherds which are generically dated to the Classical–Hellenistic or Hellenistic periods, but which cannot be recognized as belonging to a separate phase.

One should perhaps also take into account the possibility that some of the less precise chronological categories represent the relatively basic, more utilitarian parts of assemblages. If this is the case, then the somewhat confusing distribution patterns of Late Hellenistic

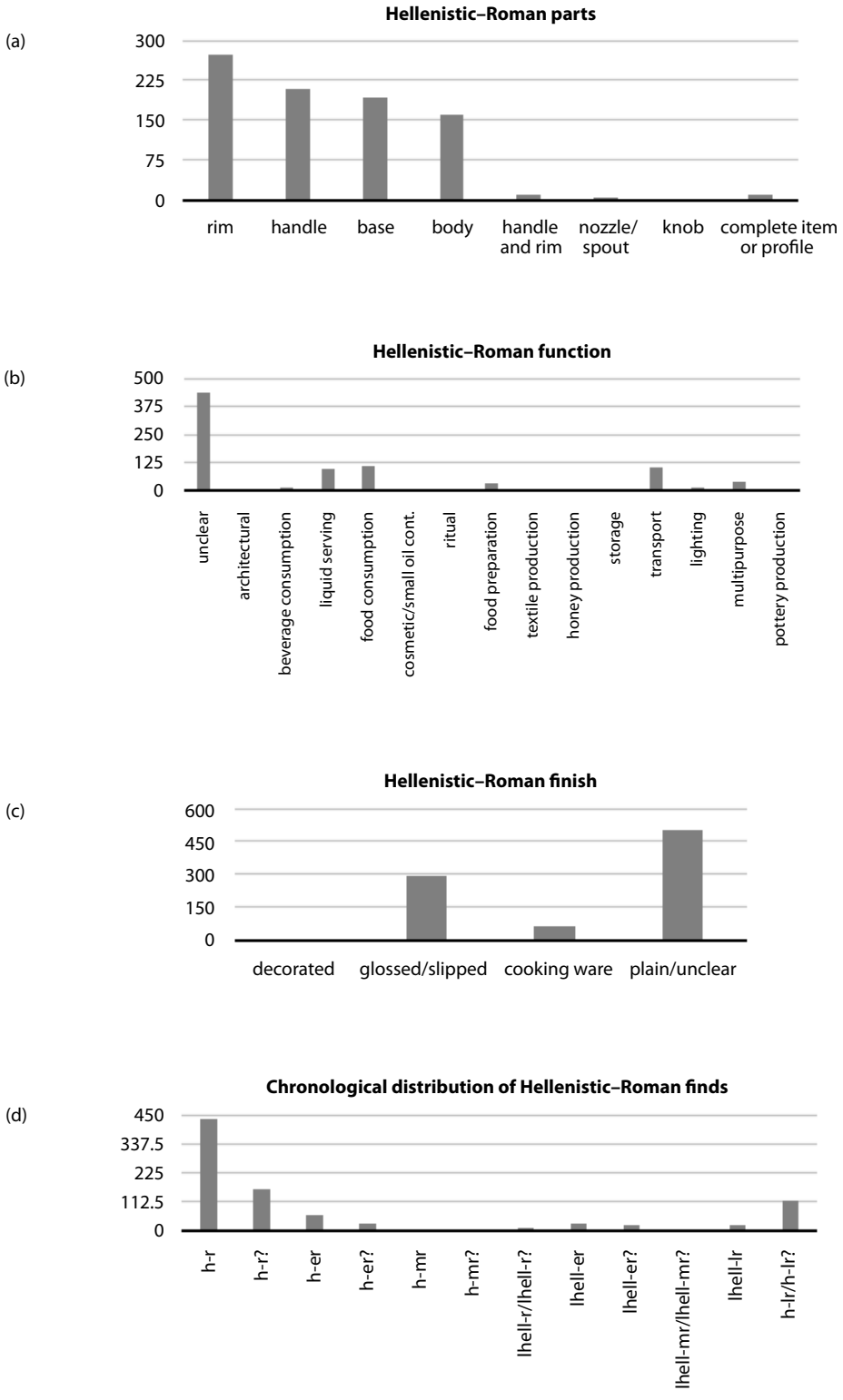


Figure 11.49. *Thespiai: the Hellenistic–Roman assemblage, including all finds dated within the range of the chronological units listed in (d) to the period as a whole, and to the sub-categories listed in (d). The breakdowns show the parts of vessels represented (a), functional categories (b) and types of finish (c), while (d) shows the chronological categories that make up this assemblage, with the numbers of items that they comprise.*

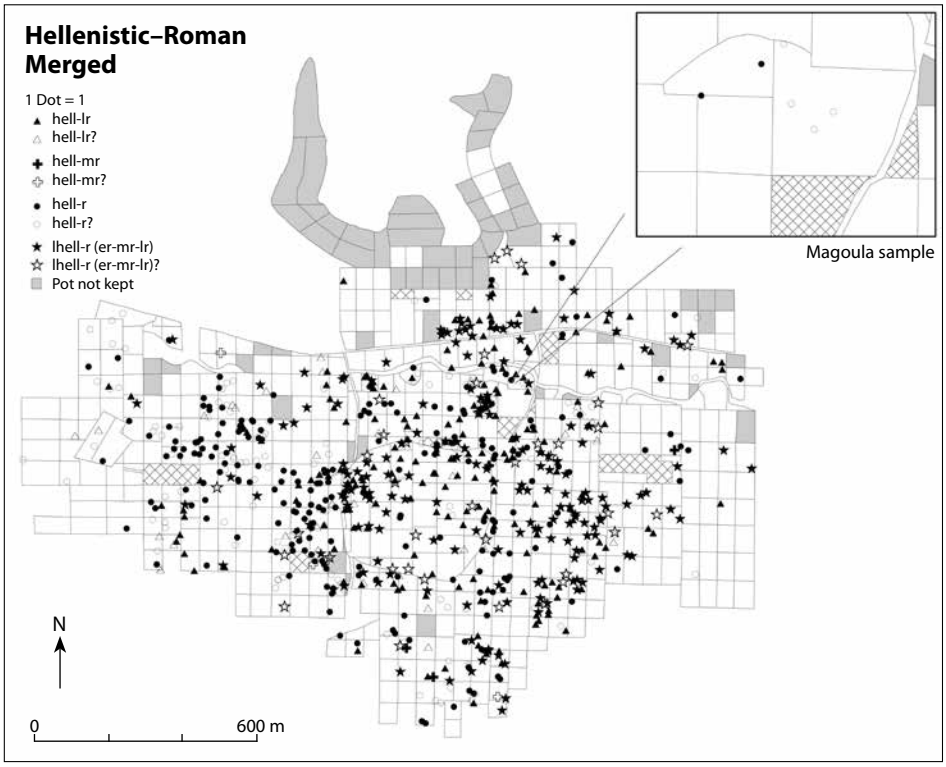


Figure 11.50. *In this map, the ceramic data shown in the earlier 'Hellenistic–Late Roman' Figures 3.73 and 3.74 (p.113) have been extended to include the material classed as 'Late Hellenistic–Late Roman' and 'Late Hellenistic–Late Roman(?) (see also Figure 11.49d).*

and 'Hellenistic–(Late) Roman' finds, mentioned above, might also hide functional developments – such as a continuing non-domestic use of formerly inhabited areas which were now outside the core area of the town.

A more specific problem is that the apparent small peak of Late Hellenistic–Early Roman finds (Fig. 11.49d), mainly generated by some of the very distinctive amphora types typical of the second and first centuries BC, may not be entirely 'real' after all. Most of the types of amphorae in question start gradually to be exported in the third and even the fourth century BC, then continue to be produced into the Imperial period. In so far as there is any chronological development in the typology, it is often difficult to trace this from survey sherds. Moreover, although the amphora finds at Thespiai certainly indicate intensive exchange, as already indicated, a flourishing trade involving Knidian, Koan and Rhodian-type amphorae may not necessarily reflect the general prosperity of an agrarian city like Thespiai.

Conclusions

Despite the difficulties caused by the low diagnosticity of the Thespiai material, which is simple, uniform and worn, even by the low standards characteristic of urban survey material, the developments seen in the overall assemblage offer a good impression of the general trends in the use of pottery over time, as well as the spread of the habitation of Thespiai, particularly between the fifth and second centuries BC. In respect of the Early Iron Age and the Archaic period, the much lower numbers of diagnostic finds, their limited typological and functional range and their thin spread produce a more hazy picture; yet they still seem to show an ultimately substantial settlement and later a town, not limited to a single small core, which seems to have grown by in-filling rather than by expanding. At the other end of this era, the transition from the Hellenistic to the Roman period in the first century BC seems very blurred: while the final result is certainly a contracted city, the chronological and spatial developments remain obscure, mainly because so much of the relevant pottery is both difficult to date and functionally rather generic.

During the intervening period, throughout the Classical and Hellenistic periods, the assemblage appears to be remarkably stable, both in its spread over the surveyed area, which is almost completely

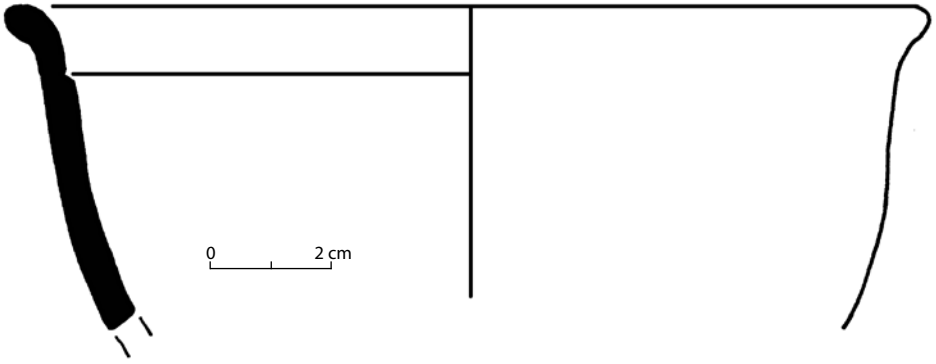


Figure 11.51. *Rim fragment of red gloss deep bowl, Hellenistic–Roman (85 TH Tr.51.2).*

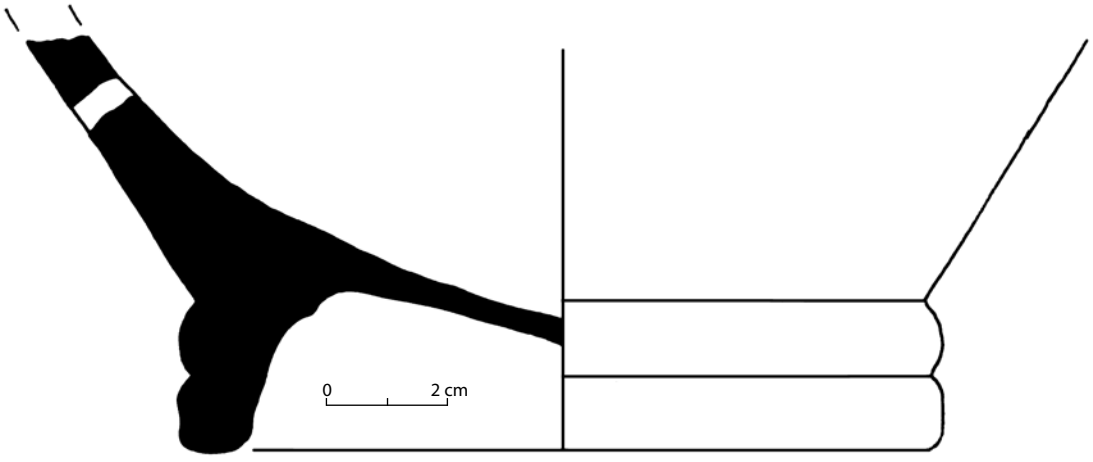


Figure 11.52. *Base fragment of uncertain open shape, black gloss inside, one perforation in lower wall, Hellenistic–Roman (85 TH Tr.2035.6).*

filled with pottery, and in its chronological developments, which are slow and limited. The chequered, even dramatic, history of Thespiai remains invisible in its surface pottery assemblage, which simply follows the general patterns that one sees elsewhere in the Greek world, both on the level of the appearance and disappearance of specific pot shapes and typical imports, and on the more general level of the functional range of the ceramic assemblage.

The problems in dating and classification, inevitable in the interpretation of survey pottery, naturally obscure or blur many of the details, yet the general lines are clear enough. Elaborate and refined drinking vessels gradually disappear from the fourth century onwards, as the pottery becomes simpler and more utilitarian. While fine ware imports disappear, however, the quantities of imported transport amphorae, and the distances that they travel, increase. Even before the arrival of the Romans, Thespiai is linked into an expanding world. In spatial terms, however, these changes mean that the funerary areas, most of which seem to have been in continuous use since the Late Geometric period or even earlier, become less identifiable and the boundaries of the urban area revert to the same vagueness that they showed in the Early Iron Age.