Pottery to the people. The production, distribution and consumption of decorated pottery in the Greek world in the Archaic period (650-480 BC)

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Citation for published version (APA):
Stissi, V. V. (2002). Pottery to the people. The production, distribution and consumption of decorated pottery in the Greek world in the Archaic period (650-480 BC).

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XV Pottery and metal vessels in the household: the excavated evidence
XV.1 Introduction: possibilities and problems of domestic pottery archaeology

Excavations of houses can be expected to reveal the clearest evidence for the daily use and practical functions of pottery. Unlike graves or votive deposits, in Greece domestic debris of pottery was not intentionally assembled as special objects, but more or less reflects the varied and recurrent use of vessels in daily life. In an architectural setting, moreover, assemblages of household pottery can tell us something about the social and economic status of its users. Ideally, domestic contexts could produce evidence for the numbers, types and functions of different kinds of vessels employed in Greek households of differing status and give insight into their spatial distribution and, in turn, their use and social differentiation within it. Such ideal circumstances, however, exist only in a place like Pompeii or Akrotiri, sealed by sudden destruction and left largely untouched afterwards. Unfortunately, no comparable site seems to occur in the historical Greek world, apart from a small farmhouse, covered by a volcanic eruption and a mudflow, which has recently been excavated on the island of Pithekoussai (now Ischia), off the coast of Naples (Table XV.19).

Under normal circumstances, household pottery is regularly met in debris that has slowly accumulated, like floor deposits, contents of cesspits or fills of rubbish in wells. In some instances, domestic assemblages remaining after a sudden catastrophe like an earthquake or the capture of a city were left behind in destroyed houses or later dumped with building debris, sometimes also into old wells. As a result of all these different processes, the assemblages of domestic pottery tend to be less closed and self-evident than those from sanctuaries, which were often less tampered with or may even have intentionally been buried. In domestic remains, ceramic vessels of different households, functional contexts and dates have often become mixed together; and they cannot, therefore, always be easily divided into individual, coherent assemblages.

Owing to the different, rather random ways domestic pottery has become buried, it is usually poorly preserved, most often badly shattered, and not only on sites where it has gradually accumulated as refuse. Even where vessels were left behind in ruins or swept away after a destructive event, many bits of them have surprisingly vanished from the record. Apparently, ancient ruins were often accessible, and salvaging, pillaging, squatting or even children’s play has damaged more of the record than we might like to think. In addition, the removal of destruction debris and rubbish would have been less efficient in Antiquity than it is in our day,

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1009 See, however, La Motta and Schiffer 1999.

1010 See Allison 1999b, 5-7; Ault and Nevett 1999, 51-52; Rotroff 1999, 65.


1013 See Allison 1999b, 12; Ault and Nevett 1999, 51-52.

1014 See Vallet and Villard 1964, 10; Shear 1993, 386, 388.

with bulldozers and trash containers. The effects of disturbance and imperfect cleaning are usually relatively obvious in domestic contexts. In the houses at Dema and Vari in Attica, for instance, which were left exposed ever since their abandonment, most pots found are represented by a few sherds only, sometimes only one.

Beside the fragmentation of pots, there is the problem posed by the randomness of survival. Starting with breakage in daily use, the various processes of preservation and deposition need not always result in a representative sample of the original household pottery. Thick-walled and high-quality wares probably had less chance of being damaged, and decorated wares may have been handled with greater care. In contrast, thin-walled drinking vessels which were frequently used and, possibly, cheap and roughly treated transport vessels and cooking wares may have broken more frequently. Presumably, someone cleaning house would overlook the more insignificant sherds and save any fragment that could somehow be reused. And when a house was abandoned or looted, the more costly vessels – plate and perhaps, if removable, large containers (pithoi and the like) – would be taken out first, whereas the simplest wares were most likely to be left behind. As a consequence, plain and black gloss pottery is presumably over-represented in the archaeological record of households, although this, of course, cannot be verified.

Excavation and publication strategies, however, are prone to the opposite bias, leading to the over-representation of decorated wares in find catalogues. Until fairly recently, classical archaeologists in Greece devoted most of their attention to temples, public buildings and graves. Moreover, the rare excavations of residential districts, for example at Olynthos, have concentrated on uncovering architecture and features of urban planning, while showing relatively little interest in the generally fragmented small finds, which are mainly regarded as convenient chronological markers. Even though much of this has changed considerably in the past decades, in most excavations many sherds, especially coarse wares, are still either not collected at all or quickly discarded in the process of counting, selection and attribution. In addition, the aesthetically least attractive section of the kept finds is often hardly looked at. Although the disregard for undecorated wares is diminishing, publications continue to centre on the ‘better’ material, albeit now including selected plain pots, without trying to give a more complete quantitative overview of all the excavated pottery.

The result of such approaches is that even the few ostensibly complete catalogues of pottery finds are often biased by archaeological research interests. Taking account also of the circumstances of deposition and preservation, the reader must realise that the groups of domestic material studied here cannot be considered accurate and detailed representations of ancient material. In the houses at Dema and Vari in Attica, for instance, which were left exposed ever since their abandonment, most pots found are represented by a few sherds only, sometimes only one.

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household assemblages. At most, they probably give only a rough impression of the original quantities of pots and, if we accept that an extremely large number of vessels has not vanished entirely, a somewhat better view of the range of shapes and kinds of decoration available in houses or in groups of houses.1024 The reliability of the percentages of individual types of vessels can be assumed to vary according to the state of preservation and the site’s publication. Nevertheless the overall sample studied presumably supplies sufficiently trustworthy indications.

In contrast to the drawbacks of fragmentation and dispersion, the strong points of domestic assemblages are their size and variety. While more pottery is usually found in votive deposits than in houses, votive deposits are accumulations of separate gifts, often far apart in time, with no connection other than their being offered in the same place. In addition, the selection of types of pots for graves and sanctuaries may be limited by tradition and/or ritual and the wish to offer something distinctive, which impresses other people and the gods. Domestic pottery, on the other hand, comprises vessels not only for entertaining guests and satisfying private decorum (‘best plate’), but also for purely practical purposes like storage, food processing and other backstage household activities. As a consequence, domestic assemblages can give good insights into the breadth of Greek pottery use, including, for instance, the composition of the typical household service, the role of specific shapes and kinds of decoration as well as the way pots were handled in and around the house.

Lastly, a slight shortcoming of the domestic material is that developments cannot so easily be traced in time. Compared to most grave fields and votive deposits, even household debris accumulated through the years covers only limited periods.1025 The combination of data from different sites would offer a solution to the problem, were it not that the best published household material centres on 5th-century Athens, and that few domestic sites are fully published. As a consequence, only some broad lines of development and a few small, perhaps local, changes can be discerned.

Therefore this chapter is mainly descriptive in character, presenting a general impression, largely not bound to chronology, of the role of Greek household pottery as well as more detailed views of the use and place in the household of some specific kinds of pots in the Classical period. The evidence certainly does not allow for full and accurate reconstructions of the typical domestic pottery assemblages of ancient Greece through the ages. Being largely consistent and rather stable, however, the general patterns in the studied material indeed seem to supply a reliable and useful base for broader conclusions, which should also be relevant outside the few large and well-known sites. Fundamental data like the relatively low proportion of figured pottery and the range of shapes and functions represented are almost the same for every site and period. Leaving aside chronological developments, the most important remaining problems regard the individual assemblages. As said, the original amount of pottery per household can only be guessed at. With regard to the employment of pottery in domestic life, my sketch of its function and spatial distribution within single households mainly depends on information from 4th-century Olynthos.

XV.2 The domestic sites with extensively published pottery assemblages

As stated above, an analysis of domestic pottery assemblages depends heavily on the quality of the site’s preservation and of its publication. Ideally, one would like to have material from closed deposits in fully excavated and catalogued houses. In practice, however, one has to be content with rather open, damaged deposits from houses, or with better preserved material removed from

1024 See, for a similar opinion on Van, Jones, Graham and Sackett 1973, 396.

1025 See Ault and Nevett 1999, 52.
its original domestic setting and dumped elsewhere. Most importantly, very few of the relevant sites are published in full, and hardly any of them are Archaic. To dispose over a meaningful amount of data, I decided to extend the period under consideration and to include a bit of late Geometric and much Classical, even some 4th-century, material. In addition, I have studied the publications of some sites, which, though not complete, have exhaustive lists of part of the pottery found, usually the decorated wares and the best black gloss. However, apart from the exceptional case of Megara Hyblaia, I only consider sites whose publication presents either a complete catalogue of all the shapes found in each category of ware, but not of all the amounts of individual vessels, or complete counts of the largest part of the finds and a general impression of the total numbers and percentages. Although this obviously imposes limitations, particularly to quantitative comparisons between and within sites, the alternative of depending on a minimal number of domestic assemblages seemed even less attractive.

Most evidence for domestic pottery assemblages comes from Athens or its direct surroundings. It mainly consists of material from wells excavated in and around the Agora. The largest group consists of ten wells and pits connected with the Persian destruction of the city in 480-479 (Table XV.2a). Then, there is another Agora well closed around 440 (Table XV.3), and two others closed around 425 or slightly earlier (Tables XV.4 and XV.5). Some additional evidence, which clarifies or strengthens points emerging from the main body of evidence, is provided by eleven more wells and pits filled after the Persian destruction, which have not been fully published (Table XV.2b). To these six 7th-century wells, one on the north slope of the Areiopagos and five in the Agora area more to the north (Table XV.6), two more 5th-century wells, one from the west side of the stoa of Attalos (475-450, Table XV.7), and one from the slopes of the Kolonos Agoraı̇s (440-400, Table XV.8), can be added. All these are also published only selectively and most of them, of course, fall outside my chronological range. More supplementary evidence is found in some building fills, which in large part are also related to the Persian destruction (Table XV.1). The mix of finds in these deposits, probably scattered refuse, cannot be regarded as purely domestic, however. The same applies to the material from before ca. 525 in the already mentioned post-479 wells, pits and building fills (Table XV.9b-c). But since they

1026 Shear 1993. The deposits are Agora B 18:6; B 19:10; D 17:2; D 17:10; G 3:1; G 11:8; H 13:5; L 5:2; M 17:4; Q 20:1.

1027 Boulter 1953, Agora well N 7:3; see also Rotroff and Oakley 1992, 51; Rotroff 1999, 67.


1029 Shear 1993. The deposits are Agora D 15:1; E 14:5; E 15:6; F 19:5; G 6:3; G 11:3; H 12:15; Q12:3; Q 21:3; R 12:1; R 12:4.

1030 Young 1938; Brann 1961b. The wells are well ‘D’ and Agora J 15:1; O 12:1; R 8:2; M 11:3; S 17:2 (wells ‘E’-‘H’). In addition, Brann, 1961a, mentions some Late Geometric groups from wells in squares B 18:6, L 18:2, and P 14:1 as well as from the Areiopagos and the Kolonos Agoraı̇s (Table XV.9a).

1031 Talcott 1936, Agora well H 6:5.

1032 Corbett 1949, Agora well B 15:1.


1034 Shear 1993. The wells and pits are Agora B 18:6/1; B 18:6/2; B 19:10; D 17:2; D 17:10; G 3:1; H 13:5; H 5:2/1; H5:2/2; M 17:4; the fills H 10:7; H 10-11:1/1; H 10-11:1/2; H 11:3; H 12:18/1; H 12:18/2.
are the only substantial finds in the Agora area which offer some chronological depth, I occasionally take them into account too.

Even the well-finds which form my main body of evidence are not necessarily fully domestic. Although the development of the Agora before 480 remains a matter of discussion (section IV.2), the area seems to have contained shops, workshops, taverns and the like from an early date. Some of the pottery treated here has indeed been assigned to such establishments.\textsuperscript{1035} The private, small-scale character of the architectural remains in the wells and the fact that the wells yielded animal bones are suggestive, but certainly far from decisive. As I shall argue in more detail below, however, none of the Agora assemblages cited gives a clear indication of a non-domestic character, and all are perfectly comparable to those from sites which are definitely entirely domestic. This even holds for wells G 11:3 and G 11:8, closed in 480, and H 4:5, closed in 425, which are all related to public buildings, presumably places were large numbers of councillors or other public servants dined. The ceramic vessels from these assemblages (Tables XV.2a-b; XV.5) suggest that these public buildings can be equated with large houses as far as the table and kitchen pottery is concerned.

A second problem relating to well deposits is contamination. Most wells contained a so-called use fill of pots which were broken or thrown in when the wells were still functioning as water sources. The upper part of the fill usually contains some intrusive material which fell in from above after the main fill.\textsuperscript{1036} Moreover, even debris dumped after a catastrophe like the Persian destruction or perhaps an earthquake in 426\textsuperscript{1037} rarely consists purely of the remains of destroyed houses. Besides a considerable amount of older material (like that in Table XV.9), which probably results from floor deposits and mudbrick walls, a few sherds may also have intruded during the transport of the debris to the well or in the period between destruction and the clearance of the debris. Obviously I have tried to filter out all these kinds of intrusive material.

In addition to the well deposits from Athens, my sample includes the material from two well-published farmhouses in the Attic countryside, one near the so-called Dema wall northwest of Athens (Dema House, Table XV.10),\textsuperscript{1038} which was probably used between 421 and 413,\textsuperscript{1039} and one at Vari, southeast of the city (Vari house, Table XV.11),\textsuperscript{1040} belonging to the late 4\textsuperscript{th} and perhaps early 3\textsuperscript{rd} centuries.\textsuperscript{1041} Both houses supply somewhat problematic evidence because the circumstances of their abandonment or destruction are unknown. It is therefore possible that part

\textsuperscript{1035} See Thompson 1955, 62-66; Sparkes and Talcott 1970, 397; Thompson and Wycherley 1972, 173-180; Rotroff and Oakley 1992, 3; Shear 1993, 393; Rotroff 1999, 67. Graves in the Agora area are all much earlier than 480, and their contents are unlikely to have got mixed up with the remains of (contents of) buildings from the Archaic period.

\textsuperscript{1036} See Shear 1993, 384, 386-387.

\textsuperscript{1037} See Rotroff and Oakley 1992, 54-56.

\textsuperscript{1038} Jones, Sackett and Graham 1962; see also Rotroff 1999, 67-68. The treatment of the Dema and Vari finds in Morris 1992, 120-121, is superficial and includes tables of the ceramic assemblages which deviate considerably from the catalogues in the excavation reports.

\textsuperscript{1039} Jones, Sackett and Graham 1962, 100-101. I disregard the few 4\textsuperscript{th}-century finds.

\textsuperscript{1040} Jones, Graham and Sackett 1973; see also Rotroff 1999, 67-68.

\textsuperscript{1041} Jones, Graham and Sackett 1973, 363-364, 414; see also Rotroff 1999, 67-68. I disregard the few Roman and Byzantine finds.
of the original pottery was removed before the house fell into disuse or during a subsequent period of decay, so that only the pottery which had been discarded when the house was used has remained. This could explain why neither house has yielded any agricultural implements, while leaving unanswered the question why other less mobile furnishings and structures to be expected in farms are apparently absent too. Above all, Dema House, which seems unusually large and regularly laid out for a farm, might not have been the permanent habitation envisaged by the excavators. Instead, it was perhaps a temporary residence for a rich owner, which otherwise served mainly for seasonal agricultural work leaving rather few traces. Plainly, the state of the evidence precludes any certainty. But whatever their precise status and function the houses at Dema and Vari preserve the best available evidence for domestic pottery in a clearly defined architectural context, so they merit being looked at here.

No other site preserves anything like the amount of evidence uncovered in Athens and its surroundings. The finds at Corinth are limited to three well deposits containing pottery from 600 to 540 (square T-U 2, Table XV.12), the early 5th century (squares I-J 24-25, Table XV.13) and the years 460-420 (squares E-K 30-37, Table XV.14). None of them is fully published, although a rough indication of the uncatalogued material, mostly black gloss and coarse pots and fragments, is available for the first and the last well. More detailed, but still not entirely complete, data are also available for an unpublished well and pit excavated in 1937, containing 4th-century material (Tables XV.15a-b).

Other useful domestic material comes only from less prominent towns. The small colony of Megara Hyblaia in Sicily provides a very large group of over 11,000 pots (Table XV.16) excavated in a substantial part of the Archaic town centre and covering the period from the colony’s founding, traditionally dated to 728, until its destruction in 483. Once again, this pottery may include some pieces from sanctuaries and public buildings, since only the finds from clearly recognisable votive deposits receive separate treatment in the publication. Another drawback is that the pottery is published as a catalogue and cannot be linked to individual buildings or blocks. The most important difficulty, however, is that the publication considers only the imported pottery in full, mainly decorated fine ware, and thus presents a very partial picture. Yet since the published finds are exceptionally numerous and have been studied in much detail, it would seem wasteful to leave Megara Hyblaia out of consideration.

Ancient Halieis, in the northeast of the Peloponnesos, is a very promising site with regard to household pottery. Several Hellenistic houses have been excavated in such a way that a comprehensive study of the ceramic assemblages (pottery and tiles) is possible. But the study is

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1044 Jones, Sackett and Graham 1962, 88, 100-103. Alternatives will be suggested by Lin Foxhall and Bradley Ault in forthcoming publications (personal communication, John Bintliff, July 2000).

1045 Respectively Brann 1956; Campbell 1938; Pease 1937.

1046 Anonymous find catalogue, available at the excavation house in Corinth.

1047 Vallet and Villard 1964.

1048 See Vallet and Villard 1964, 7.
still in progress and only some preliminary data are available (Table XV.17a). In addition, a complete catalogue has appeared of the determinable sherds, ranging from the 7th to the 4th centuries, found in a series of tests held on the acropolis (Table XV.17b). Most of this pottery consists of fragments from secondary deposits in and outside houses, including floors, streetbeds and underlying fills. In view of the number of trenches and strata, the amount of published sherds seems small, though the publication claims to contain all the identifiable material.

A few less completely published discoveries offer some additional evidence. First, the pottery found more or less in situ on the floor levels of two destroyed houses (?) in Delphi, dated ca. 750-725 and ca. 625 (Tables XV.18a-b). Each assemblage is small and probably represents only part of the living quarters, apparently the room used for drinking, dining and perhaps weaving. Storage pots are few, and vessels associated with the preparation of food seem to be missing. The houses nevertheless give unique impressions of domestic pottery in use. Even better evidence should eventually emerge in a house at Punta Chiarito on the island of Pithekoussai, which was covered by a volcanic eruption and a mudflow in the early 6th century, after an earlier destruction (Table XV.19a-b). Unfortunately, this miniature Pompeii, as it were, has, to date, only been partially published. Finally, I devote some attention to Olynthos, the northern Greek city unexpectedly destroyed, though apparently not too heavily pillaged, by Macedonian troops in 348 and not rebuilt afterwards (Table XV.20). In his recent dissertation Nicholas Cahill considers, with some promising results, the spatial distribution of the recorded finds in the houses, including pottery. Since this site, as yet, offers the only substantial opportunity to study Greek domestic pottery in its architectural and functional contexts, it forms the starting point of a complete section below, despite the late date and the state of publication.

XV.3 The presentation of the results: from catalogues to tables and graphs

The rather lamentable level of the available publications of domestic assemblages and indeed of the full treatments of pottery from individual sites in general necessitates a uniform elaboration and presentation of the data which guarantees the best possibilities for comparing sites on an equal footing. Here and in the following sections on pottery from sanctuary and funerary contexts the material is presented at two levels, in tables and graphs. The tables, on a CD-rom, report the complete data, that is, all pottery and other vessels and related items counted by item and divided by type of surface finish or decoration and shape. The possibilities are listed in an Introductory Table. Wherever required and possible, items of different date are separated in columns covering periods of 25 or 50 years. Pots of different manufacture (Attic, Corinthian, etc.) are also


1050 Rudolph 1984.

1051 Lerat 1961, 328-339.


1053 Cahill 1991; see also Nevett 1999, 53-79.

1054 For different, but comparable systems of classification of large excavation pottery assemblages, see Ault and Nevett 1999, 48, 50; Nevett 1999, 179; Rotroff 1999, 66, 70.
listed in separate columns; if there is no indication of the place of manufacture pottery is assumed to be local.

To realise a more easily accessible and probably more trustworthy overview of the large amount of material, the numbers of pots with the same function in each type of ware and in each complete assemblage as a whole have been added up to form functional groups (see Introductory Table). It will be clear that a definition of such groups must be a compromise between a refined division according to specialised functions like mixing, pouring etc. and a cruder one based on drinking, eating, kitchen and the rest. The first option is barely applicable, as the exact function of many shapes is not evident and may not even have been sharply defined. The second, on the other hand, seems too simplistic in view of the possibilities of the material. Therefore I work with the following twelve groups: drinking vessels, those associated with drinking, shapes for eating, those associated with eating, small oil containers (mainly for perfume), ‘luxury’ household items (boxes, perfume dispensers), vessels with a (probable) ritual function, vessels for lighting (i.e. lamps), kitchen pottery for food processing, cooking pottery, vessels for storage and transport, and washing basins and tubs. The few shapes that fail to fit into any of these categories, like generic stands or baby-feeders, are listed as ‘various’, and unidentified sherds as ‘unknown’. 1055

The criteria for counting present a problem in the compilation of tables of fragmented pottery. Complete pots or fragments which because of their shape or decoration cannot belong to the same vessel as any other fragment discovered on the same site can obviously be counted as one item. Many sherds, however, belong to common shapes and show few specific characteristics. Some publications count every fragment as a single piece, others attempt to reconstruct original numbers of items from sherds with distinctive features (rims, bases, handles). 1056 As no method has been generally agreed and as any reconstruction has a degree of unreliability, apparently similar figures may thus refer to quite different find assemblages. In other words, the absolute numbers in my tables for a specific category are not always directly comparable to each other. 1057 Fortunately, the percentages of the categories of items from individual sites would be less influenced by the chosen counting methods and should therefore allow us to compare sites.

A further complication is the impossibility of identifying many sherds, especially non-decorated wall fragments. Some publications explicitly leave them out; many excavations have presumably discarded this kind of material anyway. 1058 In the few sites that are known from complete lists, however, sometimes over half of the sherds can be no more than counted. Many of them, probably most, belong to pots which are identified and catalogued otherwise, whereas the remaining sherds form a disruptive factor in all calculations. The best I could do was, wherever possible, to compile lists with and without unidentified fragments. The variation between the lists can be substantial.

Considering that the difficulties of counting and classifying excavated items only increase the uncertainty surrounding assemblages already affected by the problems of preservation and publication sketched above, it is clear that the figures given in my tables cannot be considered

1055 It will be obvious that the division is also not entirely unambiguous, for which see the explanation at Table XV.1 and also Rotroff 1999, 66.  

1056 E.g. Vallet and Villard 1964, 9-10; Rotroff and Oakley 1992, 131-133; Ault and Nevett 1999; Rotroff 1999, 66.  

1057 Uniform calculations would of course solve the problem, but would require a new study of all the material covered, which is impossible in the scope of a PhD dissertation.  

1058 See Boulter 1953, 62; Rotroff and Oakley 1992, 133, 137; Shear 1993, 393; Ault and Nevett 1999, 45-46.
precise and correct. Therefore the numbers and percentages shown must be regarded not as exact figures but as general indications of magnitude and of relative trends. Moreover, some trends may appear neater than they really were, whereas apparent inconsistencies, on the other hand, may be caused by imperfections in our data sets. I have tried partly to avoid such risks not only by concentrating my discussion as much as possible on general phenomena, broad trends and, at sanctuaries and graves, long term changes, but also by taking some liberty in disregarding variations and exceptions within patterns and developments.

Much of this ‘smoothing out’ occurs at a second level of calculation and presentation of my data. The amounts of vessels in each ware (figured, black gloss, etc.) and each functional group (drinking, associated with drinking, etc.) are added up in collective graphs (Tables XV.1-20; XVI.1-14; XVII.1-5). These do not take account of individual shapes and precise dates, but report only percentages of pottery of each kind of decoration/surface finish, provenance and function in 50 or 25-year blocks. Altogether, the graphs illustrate the main lines of my quantitative discussion, and should make it easier to compare sites, periods and wares. Of course the graphs, while being more legible than the complete data and smoothing out their variations, are also less precise, but the conclusions derived from it can always be checked on the complete dataset in the CD-rom which is enclosed with this study.

**XV.4 Household pottery assemblages: the general picture**

Probably the most striking feature of domestic pottery assemblages is the small amount of decorated items, often merely a few percentage points. After the Late Geometric period, for which the figures are not very clear, decorated pottery exceeds 10% on a few sites only. They all date from the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 5th, which seems to have been an exceptional period, with black figure accounting for as much as 15% in Athens. Red figure remains very rare then and later though, often 1% but never above 6%. It seems that the often sloppily and summarily decorated mass of late black figure occupied a market position between the better pottery with figured decoration (which initially included good black figure) and plain black gloss, just like vessels with floral or patterned decoration. This position is comparable to that of earlier Sub-Geometric pottery and later, possibly, pottery with stamped decoration.

While figured pottery is rare, black gloss is surprisingly abundant. It generally forms about half or more of the total assemblage, i.e. five to ten times the amount of decorated pottery, and more than the coarse and plain wares. The proportion of coarse and plain pottery seems, however, exceptionally low, as one often has the feeling that only such wares turn up in excavations of domestic sites. Possible explanations are that the large sizes of these coarse pots and sherds cause some confusion, by offering large volumes and small numbers, or that most of my tables give figures for Athens, a major manufacturer of black gloss ware. Moreover, these low figures for coarse ware may, at least in part, result from the bias of excavators who neglect simple pottery in the field and in their final reports. Indeed, some – but not all – publications that explicitly present all the excavated pottery note relatively higher figures (Tables XV.2; XV.5; XV.10-11; XV.17).

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1059 See also Rotroff 1999, 68, based on part of the evidence used here as well.

1060 See Rotroff 1999, 68.

1061 See Shear 1993, 393.
Regarding function, drinking vessels like skyphoi and cups are by far the most frequent in domestic contexts. Alongside vessels associated with drinking, particularly for wine, like kraters, oinochoai and amphorai, they generally make up at least half of the total and even a larger proportion of the finer wares. 1062 Next in line is pottery for eating, which accounts for a tenth to a quarter, but apparently only from the 6th century onwards. Vessels for food processing or cooking and storage pots often show similar percentages, but their amounts can vary quite considerably, probably resulting partly from the circumstances of excavation and publication. The last two functional groups of some importance are small oil containers, which may not be entirely strictly domestic, 1063 and lamps, 1064 each of which hardly exceeds 5%. Other categories of vessels, including household storage boxes, perfume dispensers, incense burners, pots with a ritual connotation (miniature votives and libation bowls) and washing basins, turn up only sporadically in domestic settings.

Some of the functional groups show considerable development in time; for instance, the dominance of vessels for drinking and associated with drinking in the Late Geometric period (Tables XV.9; XV.18a; XV.19a), when they form three-quarters or more of the total, diminishes in later periods. As pointed out, vessels for eating and associated with eating appear to be rare before the end of the 6th century, but become quite abundant afterwards. 1065 Sometimes not the function but the type changes: the category ‘small oil container’, at first, comprises mainly Corinthian aryballoi and, later, Attic lekythoi which, as can perhaps be expected, are more frequent at Athens, which supplies the most 5th-century data. In general, from the late 8th century till the first half of the 5th, the development seems to be towards a greater variety of shapes which become functionally more specialised and differentiated; from the first half of the 5th century, on the other hand, the number of shapes seems to stabilise if not decrease.

If one considers function and shape in combination with the type of finish and decoration, it appears that, as can be expected, fine and coarse wares played different roles. Fine wares are found in the rooms for the family and guests, that is, where they would be more openly enjoyed and appreciated; coarse wares are confined to the kitchen and storerooms or employed in transport, manufacturing and agriculture. 1066 The overlap in function and shape between fine and coarse wares is slight and mainly concerns some basic types which could be useful in various settings, like jugs and bowls, or which may have had different functions according to the level of refinement, like hydriai or lekanai.

The distinctions between decorated wares and black gloss are less clear, however. While black gloss is met much more frequently, most decorated pots have their plain counterparts and vice versa. In addition, black gloss shows a wider range of shapes, but this is mainly due to refinements and variations of common types, with little functional differentiation. Apart from lamps and – rare – miniature vessels, which have little surface for decoration (but do occur in late black figure), the sole important exception to the usual overlap of black gloss and decorated shapes concerns pottery for serving food or eating. Leaving aside a few plates with figured or

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1062 See Rotroff 1999, 68.
1063 See Thompson 1955, 62; Shear 1993, 393.
1064 See Rotroff 1999, 68.
1065 In earlier periods, cups, skyphoi and other bowl-like vessels were probably used for eating non-solid food.
1066 See Nevett 1999, 132.
ornamental decoration, which may have had a mainly decorative or ritual function, we see that all pottery related to food is simply black gloss or banded fine ware. The many different kinds of small bowls and covered dishes seem, as it were, to be prohibited to pottery painters until the late red figure period. On the other hand, the groups of decorated pottery are dominated by drinking vessels and those associated with drinking; small oil containers are occasionally runners-up. Moreover, especially in red figure, the manufacturers seem to have concentrated on large, more prestigious types like hydria, krater, amphora and, usually less large, cups.\footnote{1067}

Interestingly, the differences between plain and decorated wares seem to fluctuate in time according to a regular pattern. In the 8th and early 7th centuries many of the large symposion vessels at Megara Hyblaia and Delphi turn out to be decorated Corinthian imports.\footnote{1068} In due time, the range of Corinthian imports at Megara Hyblaia and Athens widens considerably and becomes dominated by large numbers of simply decorated kotylai, which also seem relatively frequent around 600 at Pithekoussai (Tables XV.1-2; XV.6; XV.16; XV.18; XV.19). Among the earliest Attic black figure found in domestic areas, from about 600, large vessels (krater, dinos) also seem to be most common, afterwards supplemented by other – often smaller – shapes related to drinking. Simultaneously, the remaining imported Corinthian pottery becomes differentiated according to function and ends up supplying a few niche markets: small kotylai and household storage boxes.

In late Attic black figure a similar sequence occurs: first an explosion of shapes, then a final concentration on simply decorated lekythoi and cups. And the pattern of starting with ‘up-market’ products is repeated in Attic red figure, which begins with large amforai, kraters and elaborate cups and later dwindles down to a wider range of usually smaller shapes, but less extensively and less rapidly than Corinthian or Attic black figure. Red figure never exceeds 6%, of the total amount of pottery in domestic assemblages and remains largely symposion ware.\footnote{1069} Apparently, not red figure but black gloss takes over the role of late black figure. Finally, in the late 5th-century Dema House (Table XV.10) and in mid 4th-century Olynthos (Table XV.20), red figure has become quite rare. The different impression given by the Corinth 1937 well and drain (Table XV.15) is probably related to selective recording. The relative frequency of decorated kraters at all these sites looks like a return to the concentration on prestigious shapes seen in the early days of red figure. But in the late 4th-century Vari House (Table XV.11) figured pottery has almost disappeared and finds no obvious replacement. Metalware, presumably bronze, perhaps had pride of place, first drinking cups and then larger vessels too.\footnote{1070} Unfortunately, proof of such developments would have disappeared into the melting pot.

\section{XV.5 The place of pottery in the individual household}

Whereas the general features and trends of domestic pottery are relatively easy to discover and appear consistently in the studied sites, it is difficult to reduce the scale of inquiry to pottery

\footnote{1067 See Shear 1993, 396.}

\footnote{1068 Compare the fragments of Attic Late Geometric kraters found in later Agora wells and fills (Tables XV.2c-e).}

\footnote{1069 See Shear 1993, 396.}

\footnote{1070 See Rotroff 1999, 67-69. She notes the sudden disappearance of decorated pottery kraters in the 4th-century finds from the Athenian Agora as another possible indication of replacement by metalware.}

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assemblages at the level of the individual household. The pottery from the Athenian and Corinthian wells mentioned above (Tables 1-9) and from the samples at Halieis (Table XV.17b) cannot be connected to single households. The finds from Megara Hyblaia (Table XV. 16) concern a whole neighbourhood, those from Delphi and Pithekoussai (Tables XV.18-19) just parts of houses. Only the data from urban houses in Olynthos, the farmhouses at Dema and Vari and some cesspits at Halieis offer some clues (Tables XV.20; XV.10-11; XV.17a), which can be supplemented by information obtained from the stelai with the sales list of the possessions of the Hermakopidai. But as none of these sources includes a more or less intact household inventory the following cannot be more than an impressionistic sketch, which needs to be expanded by further research.

A fundamental issue is the approximate amount of pots kept in each house. Of course the actual number must have varied widely, for example, according to the wealth of the occupants, their profession, the size and composition of the household and local and family traditions of pottery use. Next, as discussed, different conditions of deposition and conservation blur the general picture which emerges from excavations even further. Therefore the totals in my tables should probably be considered minimum amounts. The houses at Dema and Vari, with 224-277 and 176-183 pots, respectively (Tables XV.10-11), yielded similar assemblages, each of which seems functionally quite complete and practical. Another comparable household may be the House of the Many Colours in Olynthos (Table XV.20), which contained 101 pots, without some of the black gloss and most of the coarse and kitchen wares, which were discarded at the excavation. Despite the gaps, this is the only house highlighted by Cahill which contained a more or less functional combination of pots. None of the other highlighted houses had reportedly more than about 50 pieces, usually a disparate collection, since the excavators seem to have been very selective in recording and keeping undecorated pottery. In Halieis, on the other hand, all the pottery in three Hellenistic houses was counted (Table XV.17a). House 7 yielded 6,230 fragments (including tile) from an estimated minimum of 824 vessels, House D 4,536 fragments, or 601 vessels, House E almost 7,500 fragments, or at least 580 vessels. These assemblages, which probably represent a long period of use, must yet be published in detail. The figures include the material from the cesspits which Bradley Ault has recently treated in more detail. Apparently, each cesspit contained a normal domestic assemblage, of 939 and 1,572 fragments, respectively, representing a minimum of 230 and 144 vessels.

Judging from the scatter of evidence it seems safe to conclude that a fairly well-to-do Classical Greek household had at least some 200 pots, but possibly often a few hundred more. That the range of types was considerable is shown by the figures for the houses at Halieis, which diverge not only in their totals, but also in their percentages of various types. Similarly fluctuating patterns mark the numbers of pithoi and storage amphorai on different sites. The recorded storage vessels from the Olynthian houses highlighted by Cahill range from only a few to more than 15.

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1071 See Jones, Graham and Sackett 1962, 100; Jones, Sackett and Graham 1973, 396-397.
1074 Ault 1999, 552-554; Nevett and Ault 1999, 47-50 (each offering slightly different figures).
whereas Dema House had at least 23, but probably many more, Vari House 32, the two Halieis cesspits 18 and 19 and the partially excavated house at Punta Chiarito 11 (Tables XV.10; XV.11; XV.17; XV.19; XV.20). The Hermakopidai sales list records groups, each probably owned by a single household, of 21 empty coarse amphorai, at least 102 (but probably about 140) empty Panathenaic amphorai, 20 phidaknai (small pithoi, two sets) and around 170 stamnoi (in this case probably small storage vessels). These very high figures can most likely be explained, at least partly, by the Hermakopidai being among the richest Athenians, who had large landholdings. However, salvaging of the relatively expensive large storage vessels from abandoned houses may also be a factor which must be taken into account interpreting the excavated assemblages.\textsuperscript{1077}

Although the Hermakopidai sales list might suggest otherwise, it seems that in a single household, as a rule, only a few kinds of pots numbered in double-digit figures. The notable variation in the pot shapes and the types of decoration, viewed in combination with the suggested typical figure of a few hundred pots per household, would greatly limit the possibility that a household had large batches of similar pots. Moreover, the most common kinds of vessels found in houses, like skyphoi, one-handlers and amphorai, show much variation in fabric, shape and decoration or finish. The sporadic sets or series that do occur generally consist of pots of only one shape, and form a negligible part of the total assemblage. Even among the remains of the decorated pottery of an Athenian public dining place, where pottery was provided by the state and large groups might be expected and would therefore be easily recognisable, only a few can be discerned, some of which could accidentally result from the separate acquisition of limited numbers of comparable pieces from the same shop.\textsuperscript{1078}

In household assemblages, stylistic and functional links between different shapes of vessels of comparable manufacture, that is, sets or services of pots of the same manufacture, are also very rare. Of course, archaeologists may overlook connections which are not evident, especially regarding undecorated ware. Nevertheless, the overall variation in household assemblages is so extensive that such composite sets could not have been very large: if services existed, each household would have had many of them.

Possibly, the variation in the kinds of excavated pots is partly due to the different processes of deposition, mentioned above. Especially on sites like the houses at Dema and Vari, where the finds are fragmentary and part of the original inventory may be missing, large parts of sets may simply have disappeared.\textsuperscript{1079} Moreover, pottery does not break or get discarded as a complete set at a time; in most instances, the scatter of pottery retrieved in excavations would result from a gradual process of replacement and house cleaning. Leaving aside that such a process would hardly obliterate every trace of larger groups of vessels, particularly elaborate services, we are left wondering what happened to the missing pottery and sherds. In a world without regular rubbish collection and in which houses had large unpaved areas, pottery sherds would generally have not been moved very far. If the existence of small numbers of similar pots in individual households reflects larger sets, the amount of pottery in use in Greek households and the rates of replacement must have been extremely high indeed.\textsuperscript{1080} Finally, the fact that the variation in the pottery from Pithekoussai, the Agora wells and Olynthos, which include the debris of sudden destruction, is

\textsuperscript{1077} Cahill 1991, 261.

\textsuperscript{1078} Rotroff and Oakley 1992, 12-13.

\textsuperscript{1079} See Jones, Graham and Sackett 1973, 372-373.

\textsuperscript{1080} Cahill 1991, 261-264, 276, 322.
comparable to that from other domestic sites where pots were discarded and replaced gradually, seems to confirm that these large sets did not exist.

The only possible exceptions to this pattern of strong variation in excavated assemblages are the groups of late black figure lekythoi attributed to the same class, group or painter which form part of the unusually large series of this type found in some of the Agora wells filled after 480. It has been argued that the lekythoi are the remains of workshop or shop inventories, although apart from their numbers and possibly their find-spot there is no evidence for this. If we take into account that the producers of this kind of pottery were few and that many, if not most, of them are represented in the Agora wells, it seems quite possible that the lekythoi come from houses, and just represent the range of such products available to consumers. In fact, some of these apparently similar and often sloppily decorated vessels, which have hardly been studied, may reveal significant variation in the details of shape and decoration when looked at more closely.

All in all, the variation within domestic pottery assemblages and the apparent absence of large batches of identical vessels and recognisable table services would reflect characteristic ancient patterns of acquiring and using pottery. In other words, Classical Greek households, or, more precisely, Athenians and even their state, acquired pottery not as complete services but in small batches, probably often shape by shape. By implication, the users, for example at a dinner or a symposion, would not have minded eating and drinking from an array of vessels which were not perfectly matched.

XV.6 Spatial distribution and the appreciation of pottery in the houses of Olynthos

The apparently general lack of strict uniformity in details of the shape and decoration in pottery sets does not necessarily mean that the variation was a matter of indifference to the users and went unnoticed. We simply have no idea, for example, whether table settings for symposia or simply private meals consisted of similar-looking vessels after all. Likewise, it is uncertain whether aesthetic considerations determined the use of certain kinds of pottery, or even whether pots with different kinds of finish were stored apart and used separately for other than strictly functional reasons. Are we to imagine that red figure, black figure and black gloss were mixed at symposia in late 6th-century Athens, or was this unthinkable? The first suggestion seems most probable, although apart from the possible exception of the indirect evidence of mixed grave goods, we have no clue.

In fact, it is almost impossible to discern the domestic role of pottery beyond the purely practical use of vessels as such, let alone the ways it was handled and appreciated. Perhaps the very detailed excavation of well-preserved and relatively undisturbed houses may one day prove helpful, but little evidence of the kind is available at present. The best we have is from Olynthos: several houses studied by Cahill provide at least some indication of the place and use of different kinds of objects in the household. Especially the spatial distribution of the excavated pots offers some insight into the relative appreciation of different kinds of vessels and wares.

In addition, for the better kinds of tableware a vague clue is offered by a passage in Xenophon’s Oikonomikos, in which newlyweds are arranging their house, storing things for daily use, apparently including pottery, separately from those for special occasions. Although nothing is

1081 Thompson 1955, 62; Shear 1993, 393.

1082 Cahill 1991. Evidence from Halieis is also coming up: see already Ault and Nevett 1999, 47-52.

1083 Xenophon, Oikonomikos, IX.2-11; see Cahill 1991, 258-259; Rotroff 1999, 63.
said about the actual qualities of the individual objects, one can assume that the more special ones received greater care. One can also imagine that plate and possibly figured pottery belonged among these special items and were placed in such a way that they could be displayed or accessed on special occasions in the presence of guests. However, the only relevant archaeological evidence gives a different picture: red figure, black gloss and coarse wares were apparently stored together in the houses of Olynthos.1084 Hardly any metal vessels remained, perhaps because of looting, a point to which I shall return. Of course, storage and use are not the same, but the absence of any hierarchy in the distribution of the pottery in the Olynthian houses suggests that they, at least, contained no special tableware, of a kind which might be referred to in Xenophon's description.

Nevertheless, the finds from Olynthos (Table XV.20) show some interesting patterns. First of all, pots seem to have generally been kept on shelves or put away in two or three specific areas of the house.1085 Apart from occasional vessels like a container of cement in a room which was being refurbished and some (non-storage) pottery placed in storage rooms containing miscellaneous objects,1086 most domestic pottery was either kept in the so-called flue, that is, a small room where food was probably cooked,1087 or along the wall or in the corners of the pastas, that is, the enclosed part of the central court.1088 The pastas was an obvious place to keep pottery: it was the central area of the house, which probably acted as its main living and working area during summer, when Olynthos was destroyed.1089 In the pastas, pottery, whether coarse or fine, was thus close at hand. In addition, it was a convenient place for outdoor storage, while still being protected, and it had enough space for shelves and boxes.1090 Although the flue seems an equally obvious choice, it turns out to be less suitable for the storage of pottery: the room was narrow, some two metres wide, with a large part of the floor often occupied by the cooking hearth.1091 The pottery stored here, which included fine ware, was possibly put on shelves high up,1092 which must have been a dirty place, and difficult to reach, especially right after cooking, although the vessels were, of course, precisely where most needed. Perhaps the conditions in the flue were not as bad as they appear, or the arrangement had hidden advantages.1093

1089 Cahill 1991, 333.
1090 Cahill 1991, 284, 291, 296; see Nevett 1999, 65. The courts in Halieis have also yielded relatively much pottery; see Nevett 1999, 98-99, 101.
1093 Nevett 1999, 66, suggests that the very mixed contents of Olynthian flues reflect their use as a place to dump refuse. However, Cahill mentions no indication that, as one would expect to see in a dump, the material from the flues was more scattered and more poorly preserved than that discovered elsewhere in the houses.
The third household area which yielded much pottery, but only in some instances, is one of the so-called North Rooms,\textsuperscript{1094} which probably form the main living quarters for the winter and would therefore be less intensively used during the summer.\textsuperscript{1095} It is unclear, however, whether the pots were kept there all year round or conveniently stored away for the summer season or only between times of use. In reverse, it is possible that pottery kept in the pastas during the summer was placed inside during the winter, provided the house had enough available space.

However, little pottery has turned up in most North Rooms, just as in the so-called kitchens which were probably not used as such. Conceivably, the North Rooms replaced the pastas as the main working and (informal) living areas in winter, and were kept more or less closed in summer.\textsuperscript{1096} Presumably, the parts of the house that were not in use at the time of the city’s sack were normally left empty in the summer. Another possible explanation is that the most important living rooms were found empty because their furnishings had been carried off by the fleeing inhabitants or subsequent pillagers. The latter seems less likely though, as we would expect to find in the rooms at least some scraps and broken pieces of the objects.

More strikingly, the andron and anteroom, the more well-appointed parts of the home where the men could receive friends for a symposium, were also usually bare of pottery.\textsuperscript{1097} The rarity of finds in these rooms of the Olynthian houses, viewed in combination with the apparently low numbers of drinking vessels and those associated with drinking generally found in the city, led Cahill to conclude that the tableware used for symposia in the andron, and possibly stored there, was made of metal, mainly bronze, and consequently looted.\textsuperscript{1098}

However likely this proposal, the situation is not entirely straightforward. As said, none of the houses studied by Cahill yielded a completely representative pottery assemblage, either because some pots were never there or because the excavators failed to record them. In most houses, therefore, more than only symposion pottery is missing. As a matter of fact, the most complete assemblage published by Cahill, that of the House of the Many Colours, contained a reasonable, though not very large, number of pots associated with drinking generally found in the city, led Cahill to conclude that the tableware used for symposia in the andron, and possibly stored there, was made of metal, mainly bronze, and consequently looted.\textsuperscript{1098}

Nevertheless, the documented assemblages of pottery make it appear highly improbable that the Olynthian houses ever contained the amounts of symposion pottery discovered on the other domestic sites considered in this study. The drinking vessels and related forms that are largely missing in Olynthos usually make up close to half of the pottery finds elsewhere, including the

Anyway, it would be odd to have a dump inside; an uncovered outside space is more suitable for the purpose.


\textsuperscript{1099} Cahill 1991, 267, 281.
finest items, which could hardly have disappeared at Olynthos without a trace. It can therefore be supposed that besides some pottery, the symposion gear of the Olynthian houses included metalware. In fact, a few bronze vessels, including two phialai and the remains, mainly handles, of many different shapes, have came to light.\footnote{See Cahill 1991, 284, 290, 303-304, 310-311, 313, 319, 346-350.} They show not only that metalware was not confined to the symposion, but also that not all of it was looted. Interestingly, the find-spots of the bronzeware generally overlap those of the pottery,\footnote{Cahill 1991, 284, 290, 310-311, 319.} suggesting that the andron was not the place were symposion gear was normally kept, and confirming the mixed character of vessel storage.

To sum up, it seems that in Olynthian andra more ceramic vessels were employed than the recorded finds in this part of the houses suggest, and that bronze vessels, largely cups and phialai, presumably carried away or looted, played a part as well. Silver and gold plate, on the other hand, remains entirely out of view, either because it was removed or because it had never been there in the first place.

XV.7 Conclusions on the use and appreciation of the various kinds of pottery and metalware in the household

The general picture which emerges from the different bits of archaeological data on the roles of various kinds of pottery in the household suggests that differentiation in status and use was limited and based mainly on function. Although decorated pottery seems to have been relatively exclusive, some turns up in all excavations of residences in the Greek world: houses or districts with exclusively coarse and plain wares are not known. It thus seems that every household with enough means to leave archaeological traces had, simultaneously, plain wares, black gloss and decorated pots, at least in Athens during the 6th and 5th centuries, and apparently in other towns as well. The evidence from Olynthos, moreover, suggests that some of these different kinds of pottery were stored and, presumably, used together. The generally haphazard and heterogeneous composition of domestic pottery assemblages conforms well to this impression.

Within each household, however, the different kinds of pottery show some differentiation. Especially the division between coarse and plain wares (also some large banded vessels) and black gloss, on the one hand, and, on the other, decorated pottery, that is, fine ware, is very clear.\footnote{See Nevett 1999, 67, 132, presenting a comparable conclusion starting from slightly different categories of vessels.} The former belong to the domain of domestic and agricultural work: storage, food processing, cooking and the like, namely the domain of women, slaves and labourers. Fine wares are linked with traits and activities denoting higher status, from simple luxuries like oil flasks and boxes for trinkets to family life, including eating and drinking, and the outward-looking exclusively male world of the symposion.\footnote{See Nevett 1999, 15-19, 71.} The slight overlap between the two divisions is limited to general purpose vessels like bowls and jugs, which could find a place anywhere in the house.

In contrast, the division, between black gloss and decorated, especially figured, pottery is less marked and is clearly of another calibre. Most black gloss shapes find decorated counterparts and vice versa. The decorated specimens are rarer, however, and where they occur, the numbers of...
black pots of comparable form tend to be low. In addition, painted decoration is mainly associated with more prestigious pottery, usually symposion vessels like cups and kraters. Although the archaeological evidence does not let us correlate the wealth of a site with the frequency of decorated pottery, the foregoing obviously implies a difference in status and appreciation, probably matched by a difference in price, between the various fine wares. It may not be accidental that first Corinthian pottery and then Attic black and red figure started to break through in this 'upper' section of the market.

The position of metal vessels in this general impression of the different functions and status levels of various kinds of domestic pottery is not entirely clear. The direct archaeological evidence is limited to the few bronze finds at Olynthos. These and the written sources (historical and epigraphical) seem to suggest that the range of metalware in the household was largely confined to drinking vessels, mainly phialai,\(^{1104}\) a few containers and buckets, and furnishings like lampstands and incense burners. Indirectly, the completeness of the range of shapes in the pottery assemblages would seem to confirm that the role of metal vessels was rather marginal, at least during the 5th century. In contrast, the 4th-century assemblages of Vari House and Olynthos show some gaps which may have been filled by metalware, but these sites are still far removed from the world of households full of silver plate or even bronzeware. Instead, bronze seems mainly to replace the smaller red figure vessels (cups and skyphoi) in the circle of the symposion.

It must be remarked, however, that none of the excavated sites dealt with here take us into the realm of the very rich, the few people who could truly afford silver tableware. Their houses might one day yield a different range of finds, but in view of the generally mixed character of the pottery of the less-well-off, one should not be surprised if even the wealthiest domestic furnishings included a considerable amount of coarse, plain and decorated pottery, as perhaps visible in the Hermakopidai sales list.

\(^{1104}\) See Nevett 1999, 178, and chapter XIV.