

Craftsmanship of big storage pithoi from the Early Helladic settlement of Helike, Achaia

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Abstract

Excavations at the Early Helladic II-III settlement of Helike, Achaia, have brought to light solid evidence on the architecture of particular corridor areas inside the buildings, constructed on the basis of a predetermined plan to host the placement of an adequate number of big pithoids, specifically manufactured to serve the settlement's large-scale storage needs and practices. In terms of morphology, the pithoi from Helike are of standardized profile, decorative motifs and size implying their capacity to hold many tens of litres each. In terms of clay technology, characterisation of the mineral, petrographic and chemical composition of the pithoi carried out at the Research Laboratory of Minerals and Rocks of the University of Patras, have demonstrated the use of standardized recipes for clay tempering and mixing which varies significantly from the technological identity of their contemporary cooking ceramic containers and tableware used inside the same buildings.

The present paper aims at reconstructing all possible stages of manufacture of the big pithoi including tempering and mixing choices, forming techniques and firing. One of the major aims is to also challenge discussion on the possible overlap between the final location of the pithoi and their location of workmanship, as well as on the involvement of specialised craftsmen; parallels will be drawn from ethnological data.