

Euboean Pottery, East and West

I

In this paper we shall be exploring one of the more important historical/archaeological dilemmas which has been placed before scholars in the last thirty or forty years. Historically it is important because it involves study of Greek relations with the East and the origins of the orientalising phase of Greek culture, while in the West it faces the problems of the nature of the first Greek settlements in Italy. Historically, there is evidence for what happened in the West, in Italy, from texts, although that evidence is patchy and sometimes contradictory, but there is no such evidence for the East. Archaeologically the important questions and answers have been posed by Italian excavations, under Giorgio Buchner, on Ischia, and by British excavations, at Al Mina in what was then Syria by Sir Leonard Woolley, and more recently in Euboea at Lefkandi, under Mr Popham. My own contribution has been mainly from the armchair, partly from museum storerooms and vitrines, which I have come to find no less rewarding sources of inspiration. So far as the subject of our conference is concerned, pottery analysis has been exercised on finds from all the sites named, in the interests of determining the interrelationships and the provenance of the major wares. Given the geographical spread and the historical relevance of these sites and their pottery, this is a subject where science might most profitably act beside the more traditional approaches, to suggest solutions in areas where the archaeological evidence can only in a limited way be checked by the non-archaeological. The results are on the whole reassuring but there are many problems still.

I want first of all to explain in a little more detail what the archaeological and historical situation amounts to. Mr Popham will deal properly with the eastern aspects of the story ; and then I return to consider the western aspects. A summary of the archaeological evidence, but without knowledge of the latest evidence from Lefkandi, will be found in Boardman (1980, p. 38-46, p. 165-8, *et passim*).

Sixty years ago views of archaeologists and historians on the matters I have mentioned were relatively uncomplicated. So far as the east was concerned there was no particular reason to believe that there was any sort of Greek settlement there at any early date, or indeed any sort of Greek presence of any importance beyond Cyprus, and the orientalising culture of Greece was regarded as something picked up mainly by imitation from the ubiquitous Phoenicians. Woolley changed all that with his excavations at Al Mina in the late 1930s which demonstrated what appeared to be strong Greek presence there perhaps from the 9th century. This led to new speculation about the role of North Syria rather than Phoenicia in Greek orientalising, an attitude which I think wholly justified since subsequent excavation around the Mediterranean may have yielded more of the Phoenicians but not at any significantly early date (a reassessment of Al Mina in Boardman, 1990a). The Al Mina pottery looked roughly « Greek island » in type but was no more closely located. Luckily, exposure to both the pottery of Euboea and the pottery from Al Mina soon after each other led me to make connections which suggested that it was the Euboeans whose pottery was found in greatest quantity in the early levels at Al Mina, and that therefore the new phase of Greek culture owed more to Euboea than, as most had assumed from the available evidence, to Athens or Corinth or Crete. Mr Popham will describe how excavation, at his site in Euboea at Lefkandi, and then chemical analysis of the finds, both helped and complicated this picture. But I think it is clear that the identification of the source of such material must make a profound difference to our view of early Greek history, culture and archaeology.

In the west the story was somewhat different. Texts indicated that it was the Euboeans, again, who led Greek exploration of the shores of Italy, and who settled first on Ischia, at the site of Pithekoussai, then on the mainland. But this was a presence that had never been demonstrated archaeologically. Buchner's excavations on Ischia did this brilliantly, however, demonstrating both those Euboean elements that were to be expected, but also the source of many Greek motives and styles which profoundly influenced nearby Etruria and which had hitherto been attributed to Corinthian influence. The excavations also showed links with the newly revealed eastern associations of those same Euboeans, in much the same years, which had been revealed at Al Mina. It is a neatly balanced story, with texts, archaeology and science each playing their part. (J.B.).

II

One of the most important recent breakthroughs in our understanding of early Greece is the recognition of the leading role played by the islanders of Euboea in the tenth to eighth centuries in the Aegean and East Mediter-

raean. It was already apparent from literary sources, if nothing else, that they had been foremost in establishing overseas settlements in the West, in Italy and Sicily, but the historical record contained no hint of comparable activity in the Near East, and very little about that nearer at home. Knowledge only of their colonization of Chalcidice in N. Greece had survived and the date of that was and remains quite uncertain.

The breakthrough came, as so often in archaeology, from a combination of chance and archaeological observation. Chance began when in the 1930's Sir Leonard Woolley looking for the Bronze Age harbour which had served the inland city of Atchana, which he had been excavating, chose the site of Al Mina at the mouth of the Orontes in N. Syria. Unexpectedly he discovered a harbour town of the Iron Age which in its later stages at least had clearly been a trading centre with warehouses for the storage of imported goods, principally decorated pottery from various regions of Greece. The earliest buildings of the port were poorly preserved and their stratigraphy must have been more confused than Woolley thought. Even so, it was clear that as well as Cypriot and local pottery, they contained a considerable quantity of pottery from Greece, though its origin was uncertain. Chance again intervened — followed by expertise — when John Boardman decided to study pottery on Euboea, which survived from earlier excavations at Eretria and surface sherding at Chalcis. In the course of that study he recognized that, although the amount of Late Geometric and earlier pottery from these cities was small and fragmentary, it was identical in several stylistic features with some of the earliest material at Al Mina.

To anticipate later events, we subsequently excavated at the site of Xeropolis at Lefkandi on Euboea in part to try to obtain a larger representative body of material. Good fortune produced a destruction deposit of Late Geometric date, around 700 BC, which conclusively confirmed John Boardman's identification of the Al Mina sherds. Two of the distinctive types were two handled bowls (or skyphoi) the one with an unusual and distinctive profile decorated with motives (largely diamonds) filled with an applied white paint, — like the one at Fig. A, from Lefkandi. The other, again distinctively, favoured a row of concentric circles around the rim with a less unusual metope pattern on the body; an example at Fig. B, from Lefkandi. But our story does not end here. In the lowest levels at Al Mina was another type of bowl decorated with compass drawn semicircles hanging down from the lip — the so-called pendant semicircle skyphos (Fig. C). These had been identified as Cycladic largely because of the several examples found at Delos. It was at this point that a bold suggestion turned out to be prophetic. Having shown in his early study of the material that some of the Late Geometric at Al Mina was Euboean, John Boardman went on further in his argumentation. «At the risk», he said, «of seeming too enthusiastic in arrogating early Greek wares for Euboea, I would further submit that the island should

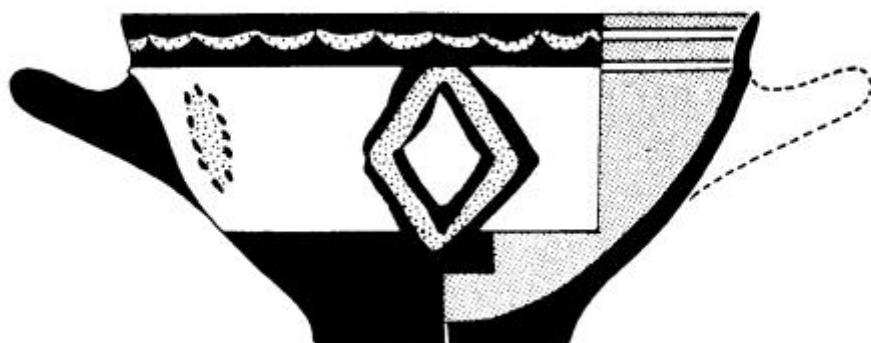


Fig. 1. Euboean late geometric skyphos from Lefkandi.

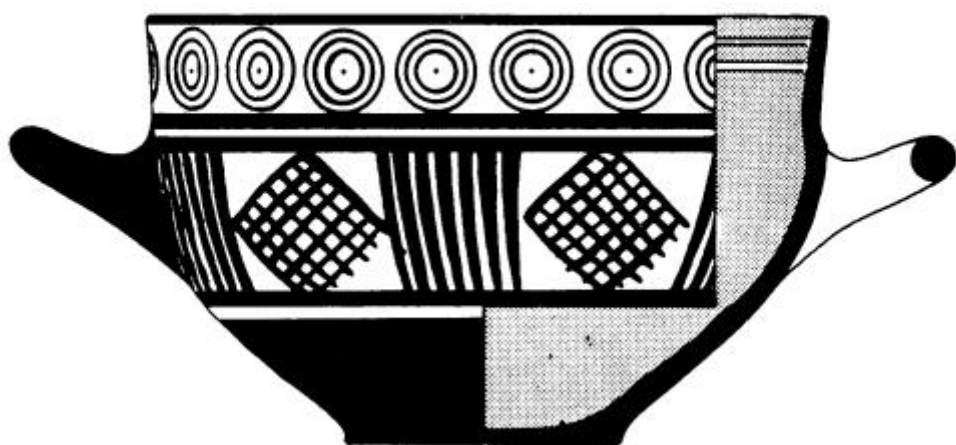


Fig. 2. Euboean late geometric skyphos from Lefkandi.



Fig. 3. Euboean Sub-protogeometric skyphos from Lefkandi.

be considered a major source for the manufacture and distribution of the skyphoi decorated with pendant semicircles which are found at Al Mina and are widely distributed around the Aegean. So far as Al Mina is concerned, it would simply involve an extension backwards in time of the appearance of Euboean interests there, in fact in the earliest days of the Greek settlement » (1957, 7). He concluded, I quote, « the presence of these (and the later certain) Euboean vases at Al Mina and other eastern sites suggest that the Euboeans and islanders looked to the riches of the east before they sought the cornlands of Italy and Sicily ».

Subsequent excavation on Euboea, and at Lefkandi in particular, have shown beyond doubt that the island was a major production region for the pendant semicircle skyphos. It might be thought that this would have been conclusive especially since ample evidence of yet earlier contacts with the Near East, such as seals, faience vases, bronze vessels and other orientalia, have been found in the cemeteries of Lefkandi in contexts dated between 900 and 850 BC.

But previous views are slow to change and some scholars did not follow this lead. Even my colleague and friend, Nicolas Coldstream in *Geometric Greece*, his great book on the period, still, at that time (1977), thought of the Al Mina pendant semicircle skyphoi that « Taken as a whole these vessels are mainly from the Cyclades, though probably from several different islands » and concluded of trade in the Near East in the ninth to early eighth centuries that « In this period, these Cycladic traders were at first taking the initiative » (p. 93).

It was at this stage that clay analysis could be expected to make an important and decisive contribution. My scientific colleagues at the Oxford Research Laboratory, Helen Hatcher and Mark Pollard, and I decided to sample 10 pendant semicircle skyphoi from Lefkandi, 3 from Chalcis and 10 from Al Mina. In fact the clay characteristic of the Lefkandian pottery was already well known from previous analyses but it seemed best to confirm this. Rather as a last minute thought, we included as well, for comparative purposes, three Late Geometric sherds from Al Mina, the Euboean origin of which seemed stylistically certain. Unfortunately though a considerable general similarity in composition was shown, the small discrepancies were enough to inhibit my scientific colleagues from a conclusive assessment. Part of the problem seemed to lie both in the statistical methods they employed and in the smallness of the Late Geometric sample. However it was clear that one of the pendant semicircle skyphos sherds was not from central Euboea and it remained a potential candidate for a Cycladic origin (Popham *et al.*, 1980, p.151-161). We returned to the problem a few years later adding a further 10 Late Geometric sherds in the Al Mina sample and increasing the Lefkandian sample. At the same time, we sampled 12 vases from Cyprus and Crete,

which were thought likely to be Euboean imports, as well as a large sample of Eretrian material.

This time, using new standards and analytical methods, the results were much more decisive.

My colleagues concluded that, with a few exceptions, all the sherds from Al Mina, and all the suspected imports in Crete and Cyprus, I quote, «are indistinguishable from the old Central Euboean control group and the new Lefkandian control group, and may be assumed to be from the same source, the Lelantine Plain (assuming of course that another ancient clay source does not exist with the same characteristics)» (Popham *et al.*, 1988, 288). Interestingly, too, Eretria appears to have used generally, but not exclusively, the same clay source.

At Al Mina, the only exceptions were the «rogue» from the earlier programme and two of the new Late Geometric sherds. It may now be possible with the computerized data bank to suggest a possible alternative source for these. A secondary Eretrian clay source is at present a possibility.

This may, I think, be reasonably claimed as a success story. An outstanding example of fruitful cooperation between archaeologist and scientist in helping to solve a specific problem. And confirmation of the views made by John Boardman at a time when early Euboean trade in the Near East was a daring, almost revolutionary, proposal. Successful, too, in convincing my friend, Nicolas Coldstream, who has now himself become an ardent supporter of Euboean enterprise at Al Mina and with Cyprus.

I wish my story could end here but it cannot. A comprehensive study of the pendant semicircle skyphos and its distribution has just been published, by Dr. R. Kearsley (*The Pendant Semi-Circle Skyphos*, London, 1989). In it she maintains her view, formed before these analyses were made, that the pendant semicircle skyphoi at Al Mina are late in date (Late Geometric), and more radically that they and others in the Near East and Cyprus are likely to be the products of local manufacture. She dismisses the analytical results, I have been outlining, as inconclusive, on the grounds that all possible alternative sources to Euboea have not been pursued (p. 195). The distribution of these vases in the Aegean, and the E. Mediterranean, including a few, admittedly late, examples in Sicily and Italy, is now known to be very extensive, while the typical Euboean plate with pendant semicircles is beginning to join the skyphos as another likely Euboean export, Fig. D. To me the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of Euboea as the near exclusive exporting centre. In fact I am not in doubt. But this is the stage at which I hand over further comment to my scientific colleagues who have made such a great contribution to the problem, adding as I do so that a further 8 suspected Euboean imports in Cyprus have just been analysed at Oxford as part of a further programme by my colleague, Irene Lemos. The results, shortly to be

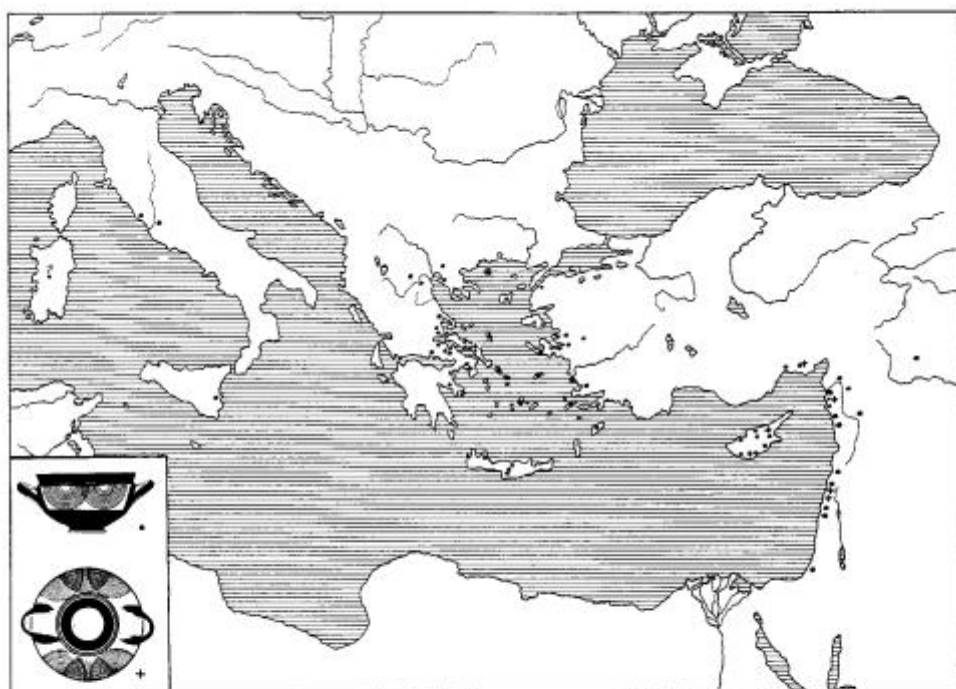


Fig. 4. Distribution of Euboian pendant-semicircle skyphoi and dishes

published, again show that the clay of all these vases, which include 2 pendant semicircle skyphoi, corresponds to that in central Euboea (see now Lemos and Hatcher 1991). (M.P.).

III

We turn now to problems nearer home, nearer Ravello. Buchner's excavations in the cemeteries and on the acropolis of ancient Pithekoussai on Ischia, in the Bay of Naples, have provided richer evidence for the 8th century archaeology of the early site than is available probably for any other western colonial settlement. No definitive publication has yet appeared, but much has been revealed in articles and reports, and Ridgway (1984) gives a full and well-informed account.

First I want to say something about the general complexion of the finds on Ischia, particularly in the way they relate to eastern as well as Euboian problems; then to consider the pottery and its Euboian character, as diagnosed by the archaeologist, and the problems it poses both for the Ischia finds and for related material from Etruria; and finally to see what clay analysis has contributed to the question.

The main source of information has been the cemeteries. Here, apart from the pottery to which we turn later, the specifically Euboean elements are not so easy to define. There are indeed burial styles for cremations not at all unlike those found in the Swiss excavations at Eretria in Euboea. This is an area in which we would expect homeland customs to be repeated. Otherwise the most remarkable finds reflect more strongly on the eastern connections. These we have to judge both in terms of the now proved Euboean connections with the East from an early date, which have already been discussed, and in terms of direct eastern intervention in Ischia, which is a very different matter. Most if not all of the imported objects from the East, and to a far lesser degree from Egypt, could easily have arrived with that same current of trade encouraged by the Euboeans themselves from their island home; they might be regarded as simply an extension westwards of what had already become familiar at home. The most obvious examples are the many so-called Lyre Player seals for which a place of origin in North Syria seems now certain (Boardman, 1990b). These are extremely plentiful in Ischia, indeed this is the major source, but that is probably in part the accident of excavation, and in part the result of the Ischian habit (I do not see it as an exclusively eastern one) of wearing the seals as amulets, and burying them with the dead — always children, it seems, which is itself odd for a cemetery of this period. Other eastern objects include material from Cyprus, from North Syria (not seals), and Egypt — a scarab naming the Egyptian Pharaoh Bocchoris, which is important for chronology.

Of more potential interest is the presence of Levantine pottery, which might of course have been brought by anyone, but there are also inscriptions in eastern script, for which it is possible to argue that some at least may have been inscribed in Ischia itself. The possibility of an eastern presence in Ischia has certainly to be admitted. At present the evidence for it is far weaker than the evidence for a Greek presence at Al Mina, and it is hard to say what it might amount to. We are in a period in which positive trade rivalries in the western Mediterranean were barely beginning to develop: witness the quantity of Euboean pottery, possibly of Ischian manufacture, found in the Phoenician city at Carthage, of the later part of the eighth century. Philologists seem uncertain about whether the Ischia inscriptions are Phoenician or Aramaic; it seems to depend a lot on what is expected. On the whole they seem Aramaic, in other words inscribed by folk from North Syria rather than Phoenicia. The new fashion for seeing Phoenicians everywhere is probably heavily overstated and still archaeologically very obscure.

We turn now to the pottery. It was clear that a high proportion was of Corinthian manufacture, as is the case with the finds in most of the western colonies. It was equally clear that much of the pottery of Corinthian appearance was basically Euboean, since in Euboea itself there had been a brisk production of shapes and decoration which owed a great deal to

Corinth. Beside these Corinthianising wares there were others which were equally clearly of Euboean Geometric type. The identification of the cultural affinities of this Euboean pottery at Ischia led to a reappraisal of pottery finds in Etruria, where exactly similar wares were to be found — that is to say, pottery which was influenced by Corinth, whether via Euboea or not, and pottery of Geometric style which owed much to Euboean products. The British excavations at Veii since the war provided much new material and important dating evidence which could be brought to bear on these problems.

All this seems very satisfactory but there are some obvious questions which have to be asked. How much of the so-called Euboean pottery on Ischia and in Etruria had been imported from Greece; how much of it may have been made locally in Euboea, by Greeks, and then perhaps taken to Etruria; how much might have been made by Greeks working in Etruria, which is a phenomenon well-attested in later years; and how much is of local manufacture in Etruria by potters/painters deeply influenced by Euboean styles? The last question is one that has to be left to the archaeologist to determine on grounds of style, and some would say that the question is meaningless at any rate. But all the other questions are highly important, and where stylistic considerations could prove ambiguous, we might hope for more reassurance from science and from analysis of the vessels themselves.

By now, it does seem possible that useful answers are being obtained, but it has not always been so and the story of clay analysis and Euboea is a complicated one, part of which has been explained already. There have been moments, for instance, in which it was declared that it was not possible to distinguish local Ischian or Italian from homeland Euboean clays, and one whole programme of analysis was abandoned, despite the mass of evidence accumulated, through despair at inconclusive results. This was, in fact, rather the result of inadequate attention to detail and to proper archaeological assessment of the material being analysed, but by now that is ancient history.

The first attempts at elucidating these problems was mounted by David Ridgway and was based on fairly generous samples of material from Ischia, as well as from mainland sites at Cumae (the first of the mainland Greek colonies) and Veii in Etruria, and with comparative material from Chalcis in homeland Euboea and from Corinth. The analyses, at Oxford, were disappointing at first sight and resulted in no close study and publication. This, it seems, was largely because the pieces sampled, though numerous, were not all easy to diagnose in traditional archaeological terms, so there were some very mixed batches which gave no clear results, and where there were results, the analysed material was not distinctive enough to argue from. The fault was a common one in early analytical studies, probably the result of a misguided attempt to be totally objective and scientific while all that happened was that results were confused or incapable of being applied beyond the

analysed material. Later analysis of Ridgway's samples by Richard Jones, with the help of some stylistic grouping of what could be archaeologically determined and so related to other finds, was more rewarding (Jones, 1986, p. 673-80). The most important conclusion was that on Ischia, as on the mainland sites, there was local production of pottery that looked strongly Euboean. This is not particularly surprising, but it did sound a warning against over-confidence about what was imported, and what was made by Greeks either still in Greek settlements or by potters working for non-Greeks. There remained, however, sore problems about distinguishing the imported pottery with certainty and the comment made that «the evidence points towards Ischia and Chalcis (in Euboea) being an unfortunate example of two centres having very similar compositions». This, of course, was not so much a misfortune as a disaster, given the historical and archaeological links between the two areas.

There the matter rested for some years, but Ridgway fortunately persisted in the hope that other analytical methods might provide the clues. One was by inspection of thin sections, which, so far as I know, is not yet reported — nor would I expect it to be of notable value with such fine wares. The other was by Mössbauer analysis, from which it is reported that a distinction between the imported Euboean pottery and that made locally in Ischia *could* now be made, and indeed that production techniques were so similar that immigrant potters from Euboea could reasonably be assumed. And further analysis by the same method of pottery from Veii in Etruria, notably the so-called chevron skyphoi which represent the most important early class of import, demonstrates that this class too was being manufactured locally, in Etruria, perhaps by immigrant Greeks (Ridgway, 1985).

Is this a happy ending after all? Much of the pottery being examined is not highly sophisticated in its manufacture and decoration, and certainty about a few analysed specimens does not automatically lead to an ability to attribute the many others which have been found, or to produce reliable statistics about them, unless they are all analysed, which is an unlikely thing to happen on grounds of cost if nothing else. And there are still a number of crucial and important individual pieces, such as fine pottery of Euboean style from Etruria, to be placed. For some of these finer vases it has even been alleged that the hand of a Euboean painter can be recognised, that is to say of a painter whose work is known in the homeland. This would carry intimations of emigration by one of the masters, if true, but could only be confirmed by analysis since this is decidedly *not* a case in which import of potters clay can be considered at all plausible.

The questions raised by all this material, from the shores of Syria through Greece to Italy, are of crucial importance to many aspects of early Greek history and archaeology. The contribution that chemical analysis can make

therefore goes much further than the rather conventional recognition exercises of what is local, what imported, which have become fashionable in most excavation reports but which may not often go much beyond what could have been deduced on other grounds. This is much more a matter of fundamental reassessment of archaeological data leading to conclusions of broad historical value, and demonstrating a method by which archaeology, with science, can indeed begin to write history, an ability which some of our historian friends may still doubt (J.B.).

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