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## Eretrian ceramic production through time: Geometric to Hellenistic periods

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## ABSTRACT

Eretria, in the centre of the Aegean (Greece), has been the focus of an interdisciplinary programme that combines macroscopic, petrographic and elemental analysis in a diachronic investigation of pottery production and supply on the site from the early third millennium (Early Bronze Age) to the end of the first millennium BCE (Hellenistic period). This paper reviews the preliminary results of the analyses of the pottery of historical times, mainly from the Geometric to the Hellenistic periods (phase II of the Eretria pottery project). It presents the compositional and technological characteristics of the local fabrics and offers examples of how continuity and innovation characterise different aspects of Eretria's pottery production. In addition, different categories of imported vessels that arrived in Eretria are investigated in order to recognize the origin of these specific products.

1. Archaeological context<sup>1</sup>

Eretria, a coastal site on Euboea in the centre of the Aegean (Greece) (Fig. 1), has been the focus of an interdisciplinary programme that combines macroscopic, petrographic and elemental (chemical) analysis to a diachronic investigation of pottery production and supply at the site from the early third millennium (Early Bronze Age) to the end of the first millennium BCE (Hellenistic period).

The main objective is to characterise, both compositionally and technologically, local production, tracing variations and changes in local craftsmanship over time. Moreover, in order to define better the characteristics of local tradition(s) in relation to those of neighbouring areas (in Euboea, Boeotia and Attica), pottery samples of possible regional style were included.

The current research has begun to shed light on many phases of Eretria's past. During the third millennium BCE, and mainly in Early Bronze II, Eretria represents a key area for understanding cultural transmission between the Aegean and Anatolia but also between the islands and the mainland (see Charalambidou et al., 2016). During the Mycenaean period archaeological evidence is scarce. The first centuries of the Early Iron Age are hardly known at Eretria with some exceptions,

such as the 9th-century BCE (Subprotogeometric II) warrior burial in the vicinity of the later sanctuary of Apollo Daphnephoros (Blandin, 2007, vol. II, 91–92, pls. 163–166; Verdan, 2013, vol. II, 8, pl. 58). On the other hand, there is rich evidence for occupation in the 8th century BCE from domestic buildings (Mazarakis Ainian, 1987), burial grounds (Blandin, 2007) and cult sites, most importantly the Apollo Daphnephoros sanctuary (Verdan, 2013) and the Northern Sacrificial area (Huber, 2003) (more recently a synopsis of Early Iron Age-Early Archaic evidence: Charalambidou, in press). In the 8th century BCE, Eretria becomes one of the major actors in Greek colonisation in northern Greece and southern Italy (Descoedres, 2006–2007; Charalambidou, in press; Malkin, in press).

During the 7th century BC, at some Euboean sites, there is noticeable shrinkage (such as in Eretria: evidence from the settlement and burials is less than in the 8th century BCE) or even abandonment (in Lefkandi, which is reported to have been abandoned c. 700 BCE, see e.g. Lemos, 2012, 159). The phenomenon is often attributed to repercussions from the so-called Lelantine war (Hall, 2006, 1–8). In the 6th century BCE Eretria expands all over the *intra muros* area and the city flourishes until its partial destruction by the Persian army in 490 BCE. The 5th century BCE was marked by a fluctuating relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used in this article. *Chronological abbreviations*: G: Geometric; MG: Middle Geometric; LG: Late Geometric; A: Archaic; EA: Early Archaic; LA: Late Archaic; Cl: Classical; H: Hellenistic; R: Roman. *Other*: HaM: handmade; WhM: wheel-made; FG: Fabric Group; ESAG: Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece; CNRS: Centre national de la recherche scientifique/French National Centre for Scientific Research.

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Fig. 1. Map of Euboea with Eretria among other important sites on the island. Courtesy of the Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece.

with the nearby metropolis of Athens, with conflicts and treaties succeeding each other. It is difficult to estimate the effect these events may have had on commerce and artisanship; importation of Athenian pottery does not seem to have abated at any point. The prosperity Eretria enjoyed in the Classical and early Hellenistic periods is reflected in its art and architecture, as evidenced, for example, by the Hellenistic House of the Mosaics (Ducrey et al., 1993). During the late Hellenistic period (2nd and 1st centuries BCE), Eretria declined slowly (Ducrey et al., 2004; Martin-Pruvot et al., 2010).

## 2. Aims and objectives

The current research is part of an ongoing collaboration between the Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece, the Fitch Laboratory of the British School at Athens and the French National Centre for Scientific Research, that has been set up and coordinated by S. Müller Celka and that started with the characterisation of the Bronze Age pottery from Eretria (Charalambidou et al., in press; Müller Celka et al., in press). It aims to investigate diachronically pottery production and supply in Eretria, in the Bronze Age and in historical times—from the Geometric to the Hellenistic period—and to explore Eretria's connectivity in the context of local and regional networks. Our interdisciplinary approach integrates the traditional archaeological study of ceramics with petrographic and elemental analysis, refiring tests, investigation of local resources and processing of sediments from the vicinity of the site, so as to understand the development of the urban landscape of Eretria through its pottery

production in different periods of the site's history. The diachronic study of ceramic landscapes is an approach that has been followed in many of the Fitch Laboratory's recent projects (Kiriati, 2003; Gauss and Kiriati, 2011; Kiriati et al., 2012).

Research has focused on:

- the identification, sampling and characterisation of potential raw materials in the vicinity of the site, and
- the examination of the ceramic fabrics stylistically defined as local in order to confirm and further characterise, compositionally and technologically, assumed local Eretrian ceramic production and trace continuity and changes in local craftsmanship over time. The development of local pottery tradition is examined in relation to the attested continuities and breaks in the history of the site during these centuries, which in turn mark changes in the role Eretria played in socio-economic processes in the Aegean and the Mediterranean.

On top of the 164 pottery samples already analysed from the Bronze Age phases (Charalambidou et al., 2016), a total of 170 ceramic samples were selected from stratified domestic, ritual and funerary deposits dated mainly from the Geometric to the Hellenistic periods. Pottery samples are compared to samples of geological materials, including both hard rock samples and loose sediments, as well as to samples associated with direct evidence for pottery production (i.e. lining of EIA potter's kiln, Roman kiln supports). The current article summarises the preliminary results of the analyses of the pottery from Geometric to

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