



Overview

Pottery is one of the most important classes of artefacts for helping us to interpret many aspects of the ancient world. Pottery was such a common, everyday commodity that it is almost always the most numerous artefacts at a site (at least in the Mediterranean). Also, after firing, pottery is almost indestructible and as a result has a much higher survival rate than most other artefacts.

The aims of this seminar are:

- 1) To familiarise you with the main archaeological/art historical uses of pottery.
- 2) To familiarise you with the main approaches to archaeological pottery.
- 3) To provide you with an idea about how pottery is identified/interpreted.

Key Points

1) Why is pottery so important to Archaeological research?

- After firing, pottery is almost indestructible and as a result has a much higher survival rate than most other artefacts.
- Pottery was such a common, everyday commodity that it is almost always the amongst the most numerous artefacts found at a site.

2) Chronology

- Great point of comparison across different sites. Absolute chronology (Specific Dates) and Relative chronology (Early, Middle, Late) – Siphnian Treasury/Acropolis Destruction) Vs. Mycenae and Troy.

3) Pottery can help to inform us about:

- Diet/Identity
- Transport and Trade
- Manufacture/Production/Technology
- Economy
- Worship and Ritual
- Cosmetics and Aesthetics
- Relative dates (Absolute dates are quite rare)
- Artistic Style

4) Basic types of pottery:

- Stone / Wood / Metal / Ceramic (handmade/Wheel made and Mould Made)

5) Three main methods for the study of pottery

- **Typological Analysis [Shape studies]** is the primary method of analysing pottery. It is done by identifying **diagnostic sherds**, which are sherds with identifiable features on them and are therefore potentially *diagnostic* for chronological and typological purposes. These include decorated sherds, a lot of fine wares, lips, bases, rims, necks, feet and handles (in some cases).
- **Characterisation Studies** (incl. **Fabric Analysis; Elemental Analysis; Structural Analysis**). Characterization studies generally focus on the construction and composition of a vessel, the sourcing of clay used in it, and related to these, the mechanical properties of a vessel.
- **Connoisseurship Studies ('eyebrow studies'!).** The study of decoration, especially of fine ware pottery.

6) Classes of Pottery:

The vast majority of pottery from most sites will be **coarse ware** as opposed to **fine ware**, the latter is usually quite typologically diagnostic and is the archaeological equivalent of your parent's good china while the former, is utilitarian, mundane pottery (think of your Ikea coffee mugs). Both categories are usually subdivided by function during the analysis process which allows for more refined hypotheses for the functions of areas where the pottery was found, some examples (and some common Greek shapes are listed as examples) are as follows, in most cases these categories would be further broken down into more specific categories:

Coarse Wares

- Transport Vessels - Amphorae
- Cooking Vessels - Casserole dishes, pots.
- Dining Vessels - Bowls, plates, cups.
- Storage Vessels – Pithoi

Fine Wares

- Wedding Vessels- Loutrophoroi
- Votive Vessels - Lekythoi
- Luxury Vessels – Aryballoi
- Wine/Drinking Vessels – Oinochoi,

7) Recording:

When pottery is *excavated* or collected on a *surface survey* the first step is to label it to ensure it stays with other pottery from the same context/area. There are usually too many sherds to label them individually, so they are usually put in bags or in buckets which are labelled with the area, the date, the level, the amount and the name of the excavator/surveyor.

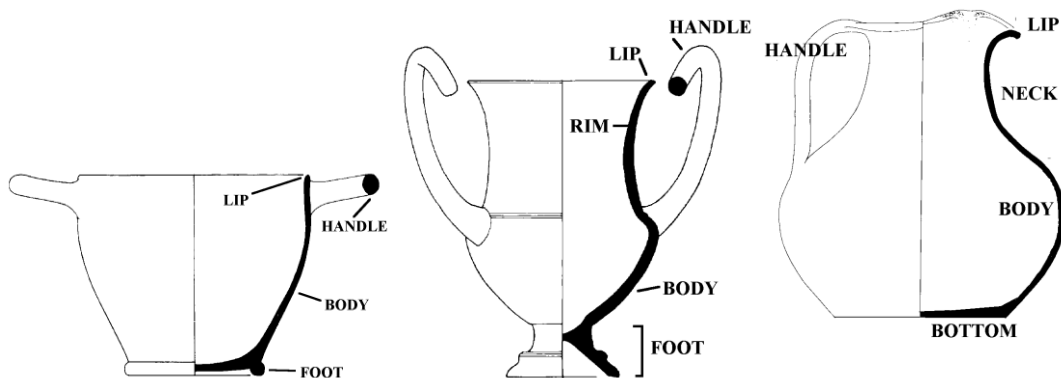
- The reason for photographing and drawing sherds is to provide as much as record of them as possible. While photographs provide a good surface image, the drawing must be done as well as it will show both a flattened surface image AND a shape profile of a piece found.
- After this, if any pots are particularly complete or interesting they may be conserved and reconstructed and maybe even displayed in a museum.

Identifying Pottery

*When trying to identify pottery, you are trying to determine if this piece is *diagnostic*. So-called diagnostic sherds of pottery will enable you to identify a piece and connect it with a known type. Particularly diagnostic fragments of pots tend to include those with some decoration, or part of a lip, rim, neck, base, foot, or handle. *Non-diagnostic* sherds are generally referred to as body sherds, as most often these come from the body of a vessel and tend to be very hard, if not impossible to identify.

- 1) Is this a complete vessel or a fragment of a vessel?
- 2) Is this an open vessel (ie. a plate) or a closed vessel (ie. a jug)?
- 3) Is this fineware (ie. fine china) or coarse ware (can you see impurities in the clay)?
- 4) Describe the colour of the piece you have.
- 5) Does this piece of pottery have any decoration (paint/slip/glaze)? If so, how would you describe it?
- 6) If not a complete vessel, can you identify which piece of a vessel that you might have?
- 7) Can you identify the height and/or rim diameter of the piece you have?

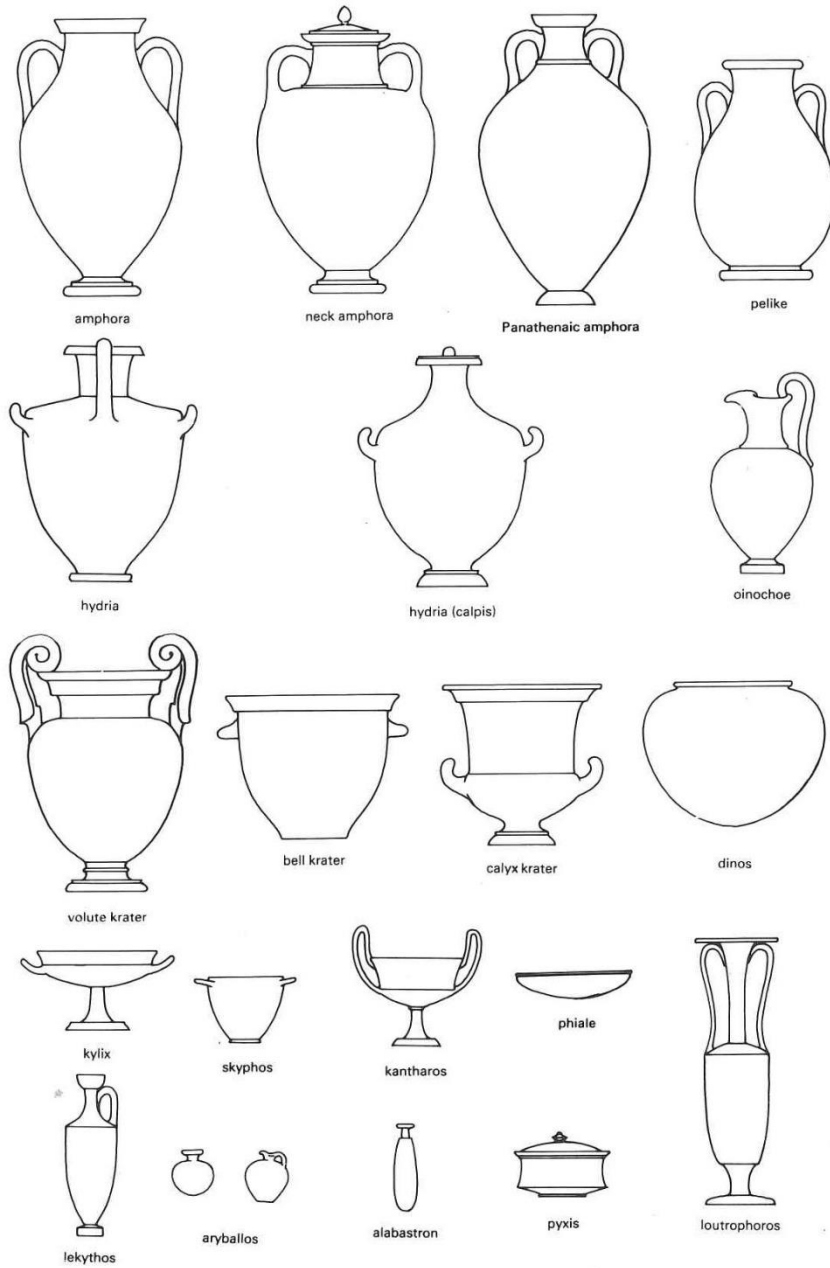
The Anatomy of Vases



An Introductory Bibliography

- Greene, K. 1992. *Roman Pottery*, London
 - Hayes, J. 1997. *Handbook of Mediterranean Roman Pottery*. London
 - Noble, J. 1966. *The techniques of Attic painted pottery*. New York.
 - Pena, T. 2007. *Roman Pottery in the Archaeological Record*. Cambridge.
 - Sparkes, B. *Greek Pottery: An Introduction*. Manchester.
 - Renfrew, C. and P. Bahn. 1991. *Archaeology: Theories, Methods, and Practice*. London. Chapters 4, 8 & 9 (Typology; Firing; Trade & Exchange)
 - + Rice, P. 1987. *Pottery Analysis. A Sourcebook*. Chicago.
 - Orton, C., P. Tyers, A Vince. 1993. *Pottery in Archaeology*, Cambridge.
- + This is the *gold-standard* introduction to pottery studies. Unavailable in the library, but worth listing in case of further interest in the topic/area.

Major Shapes of Greek Late Archaic and Classical Fineware Ceramics



11. Shapes of vases