

CONSTRUCTING A CERAMIC WORLD: EVIDENCE FOR PRODUCTION, EXCHANGE AND CONSUMPTION IN AN EARLY MINOAN VILLAGE

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The site of Myrto Fournou Korifi (MFK) lies on the south coast of Crete, atop a low-lying hill overlooking the Libyan Sea. Destroyed suddenly during Early Minoan IIB (the mid-third Millennium BC), it provides unrivalled insight into the Early Bronze Age of Crete, having hundreds of vessels found in the destruction horizon associated with architecture which has been interpreted variously as comprising some sort of communal building or – perhaps more realistically – an agglomeration of household units.

The pottery assemblage has been studied according to a methodology that integrates physico-chemical analyses with detailed morphological and stylistic data, along with macroscopic accounts of fabric and evidence of forming. A number of questions regarding provenance and technology have been answered, producing a detailed breakdown of the ceramics present in the settlement upon its destruction. The analytical approach combines thin section petrography, neutron activation analysis and scanning electron microscopy to gain information from raw material sources, through function-specific raw material recipes, to microscopic evidence for slip and paint composition and firing practice. A total of 225 samples were examined for these purposes.

From this we are able to re-assess the postulated workshop on the site, identify three main source areas for the pottery and identify the proportions of pottery from each. Detailed technological reconstruction has allowed the comparison of different products from the same centre of production, and of similar pottery products from different production locations. While the former enables us to examine function-specific clay recipes and possible site specialization in production, the latter allows us to enter the realm of competence, skill and reputation of ceramic products and potters, perhaps even to address questions of itinerant craftspeople.

Finally, the distribution of these vessels across the site allows us to make comments about differential consumption of ceramic products, as well as re-assessing aspects of function. On a broader scale, comparison of the pottery

at MFK with that of surrounding sites gives insight into regional consumption patterns.

We will demonstrate that MFK comprises a classic example of an integrated provenance and technology project, whose conclusions have a far-reaching for our understanding of Early Minoan society, as well as showing the rich potential of such an embedded analytical project.