

MARKS AND MAKERS: APPEARANCE, DISTRIBUTION AND FUNCTION OF MIDDLE AND LATE HELLADIC MANUFACTURERS' MARKS ON AEGINETAN POTTERY

BY MICHAEL LINDBLOM (SIMA 128). PP. 153, FIGS. 28, PLS. 64, TABLES 22. PAUL ÅSTRÖMS FÖRLAG, JONSERED 2001. \$28.50. ISBN 91-7081-179-2 (PAPER).

In 1891, Petrie noted “strange signs” scratched on “Aegean” pottery recovered from 12th Dynasty rubbish heaps at Kahun (Egypt). Within the same decade, the excavators at Phylakopi uncovered several hundred marked vases. Their 1904 publication briefly commented upon the vessels and the location of the marks, but the focus of discussion was on their possible function(s) and their linguistic significance, based solely on an analysis of the marks themselves. Comparison of the Melian potmarks with the symbols in Minoan writing led to a theory of a pan-Aegean racial and language continuity from the Neolithic period through Minoan Crete. Another half century passed before potmark assemblages of sufficient quantity were again discovered. By then, archaeological inquiry had broadened to allow a more contextual approach to the study of pot-marking practices in the pre- and protohistoric Aegean. Among others, Vitelli, Döhl, and Bikaki’s publications of the marked pottery from Franchthi Cave and Lerna (1977), Tiryns (1978, 1979), and Ayia Irini (1984) not only set high standards of presentation but also illustrated how a contextual approach—consideration of a mark’s method of application, where and on what kind(s) of vases it appears, and the functional, chronological, and geographical importance of its findspot(s)—might contribute to understanding the purpose(s) of marking. The possible connection between marking and writing remained an important avenue of inquiry, but attention turned, too, to the possibility of potmarks as indicators of production and distribution processes. In the

volume under review, Lindblom develops this trajectory of investigation, noting “we should therefore ask, ‘What activities do the marks reflect?’, before ‘What do they mean?’” (7).

This publication is a study of more than 1,100 marks incised, cut, impressed, and/or applied before firing to ceramic vases produced on Aegina over the nine centuries spanning the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. Marks are found on every kind of pottery (though not on all vases) produced on the island, but Lindblom identifies definite patterns in the types, applications, and distributions of the marks. These patterns are the basis for any interpretation of function.

The marks consist of simple and limited combinations of lines, cuts, wedges, ovals, dots, pellets, or strings of clay that the author classifies into 316 types (figs. 13–16). Most are inconspicuously located on the resting surface or close to the edge of the base, and 86% are found under the bases of wide-mouthed cooking jars and plain vases. The most probable explanation for pre-firing marks is that they had some role in the production process. Lindblom argues that ethnographic analogy and the technological, spatial, and chronological contexts of the marks on Aeginetan pottery suggest that they identified potter or workshop in situations where work spaces or facilities were shared. Lindblom proposes that the marks may have been used to differentiate products for internal (among potters) and/or external (elite administration of production) purposes. He also posits a link between (most) Aeginetan potmarks and a ceramic export

industry. This thesis rests heavily on the chronological and geographical distribution of marked Aeginetan pottery. The systematic and widespread use of pre-firing marks coincides with the beginnings of external exchange, and is most extensive during the height of Aeginetan ceramic export, during the Shaft Grave period. A paucity of evidence precludes discussion of the circumstances under which the practice of marking pottery ended. Although Lindblom argues that the marking of vases was closely tied to increased production for purposes of export, the signs evidently had meaning only on Aegina. While more than half of the marked vases were found outside the location of their production, there are no correlations between marks or marked pottery and their places of export/discovery.

In terms of basic information, this volume presents a template for any publication of potmarks. The complete catalogue includes a description of each mark, comparanda, fabric, and shape of vase on which it occurs; its findspot, context, and/or stylistic date(s) where possible; and line drawings that clearly depict not only the mark but also its position on the vase. Two judiciously chosen color plates adequately illustrate the range of marks, fabrics, and shapes. Especially commendable is the inclusion of discussion (45–7) of (1) specific criteria for defining “pre-firing,” (2) how partially preserved marks are categorized and the implications of including them, and (3) the chosen viewpoint for representing marks. Numerous tables, figures, and diagrams illustrate the data.

The catalogue is organized by mark type. It would have been interesting to see the corpus arranged by fabric or shape, especially in light of the thesis that these marks are related to workshop production. Printed catalogues, of course, force the author to decide on a hierarchy of variables. This presentation influences, at least initially, how the reader perceives the material. One value of electronic databases is the ability to sidestep those decisions (though defining the variables still remains subjective). This author is in no way at fault for presenting a printed catalogue in a volume published in

2001, but this is a fitting opportunity to plea that electronic databases (whether as a CD-ROM accompanying the text or directly on the Internet) are now desiderata in the presentation of archaeological catalogues, certainly as supplements.

Lindblom’s foremost contribution is his exploration of potmarks in the context of ceramic production. The connection between the two is set up early in the volume, in an extensive survey of production in Aegina. Here, the dissertation origin of the manuscript reveals itself, as the author demonstrates his familiarity with all aspects of the topic. The reader would have been better served by a streamlined discussion highlighting the features of this industry that are significant for understanding the marks. However, Lindblom’s discussion of ethnographic parallels and the possible roles of potmarks within traditional pottery production is much too cursory. Finally, the meat of Lindblom’s analysis lies in chapter 5 (“From Marks to Makers”), where he examines the quantities and variations in the potmarking tradition as indicators of the scale and (changes in) the organization of production. Here, the author presents an elegant explanation of method and selected examples of that system in practice.

Vases were marked for specific purposes. Lindblom’s study is an exemplar of how consideration of the many aspects of potmarks can lead to an understanding of those purposes and of the cultural contexts in which they functioned—even without knowing their meaning.

This volume will be of interest to anyone studying the economic history of Aegina, island interactions, the administration of (ceramic) production, and writing and marking systems.

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