

# Cultural Crossroads in the Corinthian Gulf during the EBA

## Insights into a Ceramic Assemblage from Aigion

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Aigion in Achaea, inhabited throughout the prehistoric period<sup>1</sup>, shows significant evidence of activity during the late EBA period based on the pottery of the Minasian plot, which is indicative of interaction with other contemporary settlements. In this paper, other than the importance of the Anatolianizing influences and its manifestation in this assemblage<sup>2</sup>, the focus is set on the context of the Corinthian Gulf. In this scope, a brief overview of the wider topographical and archaeological context of EBA Aigion, necessary to the comprehension of interaction, is followed by a short presentation of the context of the assemblage and the related methodological decisions. The various ceramic classes and shapes are then presented<sup>3</sup>, followed by a summary of the various changes, which suggest relative synchronisms with other sites and indicate possible networks of interaction, in which Aigion was an active participant.

### The Topographical and Archaeological Context of Aigion

<sup>2</sup> The Corinthian Gulf, between central Greece and the Peloponnese, is delimited to the west by the Rio-Antirrio strait and to the east by the Alkyonides Gulf. Aigialeia along its southern shore occupied the area between the river Sythas (east)<sup>4</sup>, Ziria (west),

<sup>1</sup> Kolia 2005, 363; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1998; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2010; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2015 (especially 314); Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Michalopoulos 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Abbreviations: EBA = Early Bronze Age; EH = Early Helladic. The use of abbreviations in the description of classes, shapes and decoration is limited to the associated figures and only where this is considered necessary. Abbreviations: for classes-surface treatment: DP = Dark-Painted; DonL = Dark on Light; LonD = Light on Dark; NC = Non-classified; PP = Pattern-Painted; Unp = Unpainted; YM = Yellow-Mottled; for macro fabrics: f = fine; m = medium coarse; c = coarse; for shapes: N.A. = non applicable; D. = Diameter; R. Diam. = Rim Diameter; H. = Height; Th. = thickness.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, Aigeira is considered the eastern limit, in accordance with the modern limits of the region.

Mount Helmos and Erymanthos (south) excluding the area of Kalavryta (south)<sup>5</sup>. Along the coast from Lampiri to Krathion are several small bays open to the rest of the Corinthian Gulf, a feature shared with western Corinthia, but contrasting with the more complex shoreline of the rest of the gulf, which features numerous semi-closed and closed bays. The rivers and torrents running through Aigialeia towards the Corinthian Gulf, vital for the development of settlements, connect the coastal and the mountainous inland areas and function as landmarks for possible boundaries of territories, a concept suggested for other EBA mainland sites<sup>6</sup>. Fertile plains can be found across Aigialeia, with the largest extending eastwards from Aigion<sup>7</sup>.

3 Achaia has generally been recognized as an area of non-random EH activity relatively early in the existing bibliography<sup>8</sup>. In western Achaia, recent work confirms this recognition<sup>9</sup> while in Eastern Achaia or Aigialeia, besides some work on EBA sites<sup>10</sup>, most of the settlements, including Aigion, are not fully published and remain relatively unknown. Most of the EBA archaeological evidence comes from rescue and systematic excavations, supported by surveys<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 1).

4 The EBA settlement of Aigion, situated in the northeastern part of the modern town, on an elongated hill, 60 m above sea level is accessible from the south, while to the north, a cliff sets the limits of the settlement and a narrow strip of land separates it from the coast, where the old and modern harbor lie. The location of the site offers views across Aigialeia and the Corinthian Gulf, reaching the mountains of central Greece. Concurrently, the settlement is a landmark visible to outsiders, possibly stating the existence of a territory<sup>12</sup>.

5 The archaeological information published mostly in preliminary reports derives from rescue excavations (Fig. 2), characterized by notable constraints, revealing fragmented remains. However, the EBA settlement, going back to the FN (Fig. 2. 3), seems to have covered an area of fewer than sixteen hectares, most likely between eight to twelve hectares. Given the size of other contemporary southern Greek mainland settlements, it was most likely a small-sized settlement, at least compared to EBA Keryneia, which was larger than twenty hectares<sup>13</sup>, considering the latest evidence<sup>14</sup>.

6 Aigion, despite displaying several aspects of a large-scale EBA settlement, does not seem to have served in this way, even if one considers the evidence from the Mycenaean occupation of the site<sup>15</sup> or the continuous and modern inhabitation of the site, which has played some role in its preservation. Based on the evidence from the rest of Aigialeia, however, the existence of pairs of settlements, one to the hinterland and another closer to the sea is possible. In the case of Helike, it has been suggested that it served as the harbor of the larger settlement of Keryneia<sup>16</sup>, though together they could have formed a larger settlement as well. Kassaneia in southeastern Aigialeia could have been related to the latest ekistics evidence from the coastal site of Platanos<sup>17</sup>. Likewise, at

5 Kolia 2012, 324.

6 Weiberg 2011, 48–54.

7 Gadolou 2008, 45.

8 Åström 1964, 110.

9 See indicatively Gazis 2018; Aktipi 2020.

10 Katsonopoulou – Katsarou 2017; Kolia – Spiroulas 2017; Kolia – Spiroulas 2020; Pontrandolfo 2016.

11 In addition to the surveys depicted in Fig. 1, EBA findings are cited in Petropoulos 1995, 231; Petropoulos 2006, 49 fig. 15, originating from a survey conducted along the west bank of the river Foinix without specific mention of particular newly discovered EBA sites.

12 For a reference in a broader context, see Weiberg – Finné 2013, 17.

13 Kolia 2015, 67.

14 Katsarou forthcoming.

15 Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2015, 314 fig. 1.

16 Kolia 2015, 67.

17 Katsarou forthcoming.



Label	Site/Settlement	Date	Reference
Site 1	Lampiri	EH II	Personal communication with Dr. A. Vordos and N. Petropoulos
Site 2	Kamares – Petropoulos Plot	EBA; EH II	Kolia 2005, 365; Kolia 2012, 325 fig. 645
Site 3	Aigion	FN-EH II	Fig. 2
Site 4	Keryneia	EH II–III	Kolia 2015; Kolia – Spiroulias 2017 and 2020
Site 5	Helike (Rizomylos)	EH II–III	Marinatos 1960 and 1968; Edgerton – Throckmorton 1970; Katsonopoulou 2011; Katsarou 2011; Soter – Katsonopoulou 2011; Katsonopoulou – Katsarou 2017
Site 6	Platanos	EH II	Katsarou (forthcoming)
Site 7a	Krathion	EH II	Mastrokostas 1967
Site 7b	Akrata (coast area)	EH II	Katsarou (forthcoming)
Site 8	Aigeira	FN-EH I; EH III–MH I	Alram Stern 2006, 19–88; Alram Stern 2010, 144
Site 9	Kassaneva	EH II (Lerna IIIB–C)	Pontrandolfo 2016; De Caro et al. 2016; De Feo – Granese 2016
Site 10	Synevro	EH II	Katsarou 2012, 282–286. 425–429
Site a	Kamares-Xeriko	EH II	Åström 1964, 109
Site b	Kamares-Paliomylos	EBA	Papadopoulos 1978/1979, 34; Kolonas 1996/1997, 485
Site c	Ampelokipoi: Agios Ioannis-Sarakinovouni	EH II	De Caro et al. 2016, 123–127
Site d	Chrysanthio: Vlachos	EH II	De Caro et al. 2016, 141–144
Site e	Aiges: Plakopetra	EH II	De Caro et al. 2016, 179 f.
Site f	Oasi: Kampos	EH II	De Caro et al. 2016, 168 f.
Site g	Monastiri: Kouros	EH II	De Caro et al. 2016, 195

Fig. 1: EBA sites in Aigialeia: excavated (1–10); identified during surveys (a–g)

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the western frontier of Aigialeia, Lampiri and Kamares might have developed a similar association. Aigion, accordingly, could have been closely associated with another, possibly larger, settlement that once existed in the hinterland closer to the plain.

7 The relationship between such possible pairs of settlements, or even wider and more complex associations, remains open. Accordingly, a hierarchical relationship cannot yet be proven, though a two-level hierarchy, as has been proposed before for the EH II settlements of the region of Hermionid<sup>18</sup>, remains worthy of consideration. Any

18 Pullen 1985, 357.





Label	Plot/Road	Description	Bibliography
1	Minasian Plot (Dodekanison 18)	EH II walls and findings	Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1984, 95. 98; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1998, 19; Michalopoulos 2019; 2022
2	Dodekanison 16 plot	EH II walls and findings	Personal communication with excavator Evgenia Poulimenou.
3	Panagopoulos plot (Dodekanison 12)	Superimposed walls and pottery of EBA date. Possible FN remains	Kolia 2005, 363
4	Diamantopoulos plot (Dodekanison 6)	Possible EH sherds	Vordos 1998, 276
5	Plastira 7	Possible EH wall and findings	Petropoulos 1990, 137
6	Tsinoukas plot (Aristeidou 2)	EH II architecture, pottery, a bone seal and other findings	Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1984, 94 f; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1998, 19
7	Ermou Road + Metzelopoulos plot	Possible EH pottery	Mastrokostas 1967, 214–216
8	K. Palaiologou Road	Possible EH pottery	Mastrokostas 1968, 136

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Fig. 2: Plots and roads in Aigion with EBA material

further remarks in this direction, however, remain risky and demand the integration of far more information from other sites.

### The Minasian Plot

8 The rescue excavation in the Minasian plot was conducted in a limited area and uncovered poorly-preserved remains; some contamination is observable, especially in the upper layers. Moreover, the continuous habitation during the EH II period, as several superimposed layers indicate, affects the preservation of the lower and older habitation levels.

9 Several layers and contexts identified during the excavation, including destruction layers, parts of floors and associated floor deposits, pits, fills and a fixed hearth, have been interrelated, with many of them linked to specific walls<sup>19</sup>, resulting in the formation of ten stratigraphic stages<sup>20</sup>. Observations on the stratigraphy and architecture of these stages align with the distinction of two separate architectural periods (A and B), marked by a destruction<sup>21</sup>.

10 More specifically, the walls associated with Period A (Stages 1–5) are highly fragmented and their paths cannot be defined. Notably, a curvilinear wall identified during Stage 5 is associated with a building or house of apsidal form<sup>22</sup>. Following the destruction in Stage 5, from Stage 6 onwards (Period B), walls are generally stronger compared to those of Period A. They are associated with buildings or rooms that follow approximately the same orientation concurrently pointing to a possible plan repetition, a trend not observed during Stages 1–5<sup>23</sup>.

11 Unfortunately, there are no intact buildings or rooms, as many layers consist of deposits, and artifacts are rarely preserved *in situ*. With regard to the EBA pottery, only a handful of cases were largely intact or restorable, while post-excavation preservation work was affected by issues such as poor storage conditions. Consequently, the study of the assemblage was mainly based on sherds, several of them highly fragmented, making it a challenge to identify the exact shapes or whether several sherds belong to the same vessel.

12 Despite the problems, stratigraphic preservation is generally better than other cases on the site. The identification of several superimposed layers played a crucial role in the construction of a chronological framework for the assemblage. Furthermore, the systematic collection of all the sherds during the excavation process, contrary to the usual excavation practices of the time, is considered a good case for the first systematic study of a generally unknown ceramic group. Consequently, this assemblage is valuable evidence in the effort to explore the EH II pottery of Aigion.

13 At this point, it is important to notice that any remarks concerning the chronological divisions proposed here are related to the material from the Minasian plot: it does not necessarily apply to the settlement of Aigion as a whole and it is not in contrast with the prehistoric phases that Papazoglou-Manioudaki has proposed for the prehistoric settlement of Aigion<sup>24</sup>.

## Classification System and Methodology

14 The Minasian assemblage has been studied and presented through a ware-based classification system<sup>25</sup>; considering the technological orientation of this approach<sup>26</sup>, sherds were assigned into categories based on two or more common features (surface treatment and macro-fabric composition) and the existence of limited information about shapes. Experience, however, has indicated that this system can be rigid under certain circumstances, including the interconnection of ceramic attributes, future

19 For an analysis of the architecture and the stratigraphy of the site, see: Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1984, 95. 98; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1998, 19. 22. 25; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2010, 131; Michalopoulos 2019, 58–92 figs. 1–16; illustrations 1–6. For a synoptic reference, see Michalopoulos 2022, 45 f.

20 The architectural subphases discerned by Papazoglou-Manioudaki have been modified and reorganized into stratigraphic stages in Michalopoulos 2019, 59. 67–86.

21 Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1998, 19. 25; Michalopoulos 2019, 77; Michalopoulos 2022, 46 tab. 1.

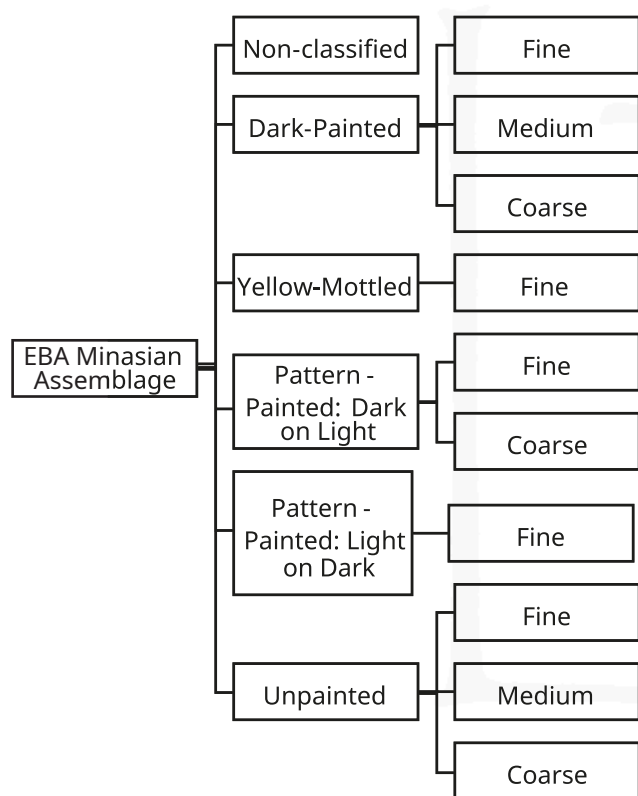
22 Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1998, 25; Michalopoulos 2019, 73–77.

23 Michalopoulos 2019, 89–91.

24 Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1998, 22.

25 Michalopoulos 2019 and Michalopoulos 2022.

26 Wilson – Day 1994, 2.



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Fig. 3: The division of the EBA pottery of the Minasian assemblage into classes

accession of new assemblages, incorporation of information from microscopic fabric and cross-referencing with other assemblages.

15 For such reasons, and related to the ambiguities and the uniformity characterizing this method, Rutter proposed a class-based approach that is clear and easily replicated, based on the existence/absence and type of painted decoration, basic macroscopic fabric features, surface finish and color<sup>27</sup>, applied in important EBA materials<sup>28</sup>. Accordingly, the Minasian assemblage will be presented and reorganized according to a class-based system (Fig. 3)<sup>29</sup>. However, one of the issues that this approach could not consider is a large amount of poorly preserved sherds labeled as non-classified units. This matter might raise some questions about the importance and validity of the unit counts but, given that counts are based both on diagnostic and non-diagnostic sherds, as will be further explained below, and the low number of non-classified sherds in the body of diagnostics, any result can be cross-checked.

16 According to the particularities of this assemblage and the adaptation of a class-based taxonomy, specific methodological decisions proved necessary, including the broad distinction of surface treatments due to the inherent variation of the associated terms<sup>30</sup>,

the application of varied techniques in the same vessel or surface and the similar effect of different techniques as the result of several stages of manufacture. Procedures like paddling and paring described by Rutter<sup>31</sup>, the stage of drying<sup>32</sup>, the application of a slip and the stage of firing can affect the appearance of the finish. The macroscopic fabric (macro-fabric) is classified into broad macro-fabric groups based on size, shape, color and density of inclusions. A broad distinction into fine, medium and coarse fabrics has been applied according to other assemblages, including that of Lerna<sup>33</sup>. The color of the surface, fracture and core are described in general terms. Furthermore, counts include both diagnostic and non-diagnostic units<sup>34</sup>. Rim sherds are mainly considered diagnostic for shapes, but in underrepresented cases, other form accessories closely assigned to a shape are included.

17 Regarding ceramic periodization, an attempt to trace possible remarkable changes in pottery production involved examining several stratigraphic stages as potential chronological turning points. This investigation included Stage 6, marking the beginning of architectural Period B. In this instance, some variations are observed in ceramic classes, though those related to shapes are not particularly pronounced. However, from Stage 7 onward, variations in ceramic classes become more evident,

27 Rutter 1995, 11–14.

28 Wiencke 2000; Pullen 2011.

29 In each class references to the previous ware-based categories aim to eliminate issues of inconsistency.

30 However, efforts for the systematic description do exist: Berger 2010; Rutter 1995, 55–58; Spencer 2007, 95 f. fig. 3, 17; Wiencke 2000, 319 f.

31 Rutter 1995, 55 f.

32 Martineau 2010.

33 Wiencke 2000, 317.

34 Not all the catalogued units are diagnostic of shapes. Shape accessories not closely assigned to specific shapes, catalogued and uncatalogued body sherds comprise the non-diagnostic units.



accompanied by several notable changes in shapes<sup>35</sup>, as will be further developed. Consequently, two distinct ceramic phases are identified, Phase I (Stages 1–6) and Phase II (Stages 7–10), independent of the architectural periods, but interconnected through the stratigraphic stages<sup>36</sup>. It must be noted that several units could not be securely assigned to any stratigraphic stage and, as such, they are not included in the associated tables (Fig. 6. 7. 9. 10. 17). Additionally, Anatolianizing and hybrid shapes (Helladic tankards) have already been discussed and their significance from a chrono-cultural perspective has been raised<sup>37</sup>. Here, those are included only in the related charts, without any further analysis.

18 The main point of reference is Lerna III because of the good preservation of the pottery, the comprehensive presentation, and the systematic documentation of parallels from other sites, along with comments on their variations<sup>38</sup>. References to other contemporary sites are restricted, not due to lack of similarities, but for a synoptic presentation.

## Analysis of the Minasian Assemblage

### The EBA Ceramic Classes

(Fig. 4. 5. 6. 7)

19 *Fine: dark-painted* is the most common class in this assemblage, with two main variations: one with black-dark gray colored slips and another with brown-red colored slips. The latter is often roughly applied, thin and diluted, in lighter hues, similar to later Lerna III<sup>39</sup>, at Romanos<sup>40</sup> and Nafpaktos<sup>41</sup>.

20 In the *fine: yellow-mottled* class, gray blots on the surface are typical. The term ›yellow-mottled‹ is preferred to ›light-painted‹ and to ›yellow blue slipped and polished‹. The former does not truly indicate the most striking features of the associated sherds at Aigion, while the latter includes a specific finish. Sherds associated with this class can be misidentified as unpainted, but in such cases, the existence of a grey core with clear limits in the fracture is a yellow-mottled feature. The slip is usually ›warm‹, a feature related to Lerna IIIC–D<sup>42</sup>.

21 In the *fine: unpainted* class, the application of a self-slip is not excluded. A slip different from the clay of the vessel has, however, not been identified. Non-diagnostic sherds should be considered carefully when reading the counts of this class as unpainted surfaces from poorly preserved sherds could belong to other classes as well. Both diagnostic and non-diagnostic sherds, however, indicate a significant rise in the numbers of this class, as at other mainland sites.

22 The *fine: pattern-painted: dark-on-light* class is represented by only a few extremely fragmented sherds, while the *fine: pattern-painted: light-on-dark* class is identified only in a tiny sherd with such decoration, dated to Phase I, but its excavation group suffered from some contamination.

23 The *medium: dark-painted* class consists of a very small group whose macro-fabric is varied. On the contrary, the *medium: unpainted class*, the outcome of merging

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35 Michalopoulos 2019, 293; Michalopoulos 2022, 46.

36 Michalopoulos 2022, tab. 1.

37 Michalopoulos 2022, 46.

38 Wiencke 2000.

39 Wiencke 2000, 326.

40 Rambach 2018, 226.

41 Saranti 2018, 65.

42 Wiencke 2000, 321.