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THE SPROTIA EXPEDITION II ENVIRONMENT AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS



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Cover: Megalo Karvounari seen from the northeast. Courtesy of the 32nd Ephorate for
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The Sevasto House: Architecture and Finds

Tommi Turmo

The Sevasto house lies in the vicinity of the Kokytos river and ancient Elea, the principal city in the valley during the Hellenistic period. The research of the house has been a close collaboration of the local archaeological authorities and the Thesprotia Expedition. The house was documented as a site during the survey in 2004 and subsequently excavated by the Greek archaeological service as a rescue excavation. The excavation revealed a well-preserved ground plan of a house with rich archaeological finds (Fig. 1).¹

The house is situated on the western edge of the modern village of Sevasto, some 5 km southwest from Paramythia. It lies at the foot of Mt. Megalovouni which shelters the site from northern winds. Immediately in the east and southeast spreads the flat Kokytos valley with arable farmland. To the west the hills rise gently up forming a current olive grove. 50 m south from the house there is a well, which has also given the Greek name Pano Pigadi ("Upper well") to the archaeological site. The house is located inside a fenced area forming a small olive grove, but which remains otherwise uncultivated. As a common practice in the region, the olive grove is occasionally used as grazing ground for animals, sheep particularly. Similar small patches of fenced areas form the immediate neighbourhood for the site.

Several important routes of communication and trade exist in the close vicinity of the house. The most important route from Fanari (ancient Glykys Limen) to Paramythia connects the northern part of the valley with the broad plain of Acheron. Another important route runs from the northeast to the southwest and connects Sevasto with the plain of Margariti up the valley of a stream which runs from the southwest.² The location of the house close to the crossing place of these two routes must be seen as clearly beneficial.

It comes therefore as no surprise that the immediate surroundings of the excavated house has revealed several places of archaeological interest, which speak directly of diverse activity in the area of Sevasto village. Immediately north from the Sevasto house, on the other side of the dirt road, a similar patch of area yielded several pieces of roof-tiles on the surface. As the area is situated clearly on the higher ground of the hill, it is likely that these finds belong to another building complex separate from the excavated house.³ Further, the northern outskirts of the Sevasto village itself have revealed graves including various finds like an iron sword, and between the village and the Liminari hill in the south, on another smaller isolated hill, fragments of polygonal walls have been

¹ This article is based on my MA thesis submitted to the University of Helsinki (Turmo 2010). I owe my sincere gratitude to the members of the 32nd Ephorate for Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities for their kind co-operation, in particular to G. Riginos, O. Palli and P. Petsios, as well as to B. Forsén, J. Forsén, A. Patteri, M. Suha and E. Tikkala for their advice, corrections and assistance. Finally, I would like to thank Jon van Leuven for correcting the language. Fig. 1 and the photograph of the lamp no. 22 were taken by the Greek Archaeological Service. The pottery profile drawings nos. 13, 23 and 25 were made by A. Patteri, no. 30 again by J. Forsén. Unless otherwise stated all other illustrations are by the author.

² Hammond 1967, 69-70; Svana 2009, 93.

³ See B. Forsén *et al.*, this volume (PS 15 Site description).



Fig. 1. The Sevasto house uncovered. View towards the southeast.

documented.⁴ Together these finds add colour to the history of the surrounding area. They also suggest the possibility that the Sevasto house is hardly an isolated farmstead, but rather a part of a small village or hamlet. This conclusion could be in accordance with the settlement pattern observed elsewhere in the Kokytos valley.⁵

The House – architectural details

The Sevasto house appears to have been saved by the most drastic effects of formation processes due to its location at the foot of the hill. In fact, the location has turned out to be beneficial as over the years the house was covered by a thick accumulation of soil from uphill. This layer of soil has contributed to preserve both the house structures and the find assemblage. In more recent times the site has been included in an olive grove, and thus the disturbance has continued to be minimal. The actual process of site abandonment appears to be permanent, and after the collapse of the building no later constructions were discerned. The structural remains therefore represent one period of habitation.

The Greek rescue excavation provided a short excavation report, which outlines the basic information concerning the progress of the work.⁶ On the basis of these notes the following three-layer stratigraphy could be reconstructed. A layer of topsoil covered the building down to 0.30-0.40 m. As the results of the survey walk gave reason to expect, plenty of finds were collected already in this first documented layer. The following layer

⁴ Dakaris 1972, 139-140.

⁵ See B. Forsén, this volume.

⁶ Petsios 2005. A shortened version of the report will be published in ArchDelt 60B (2005), in press.

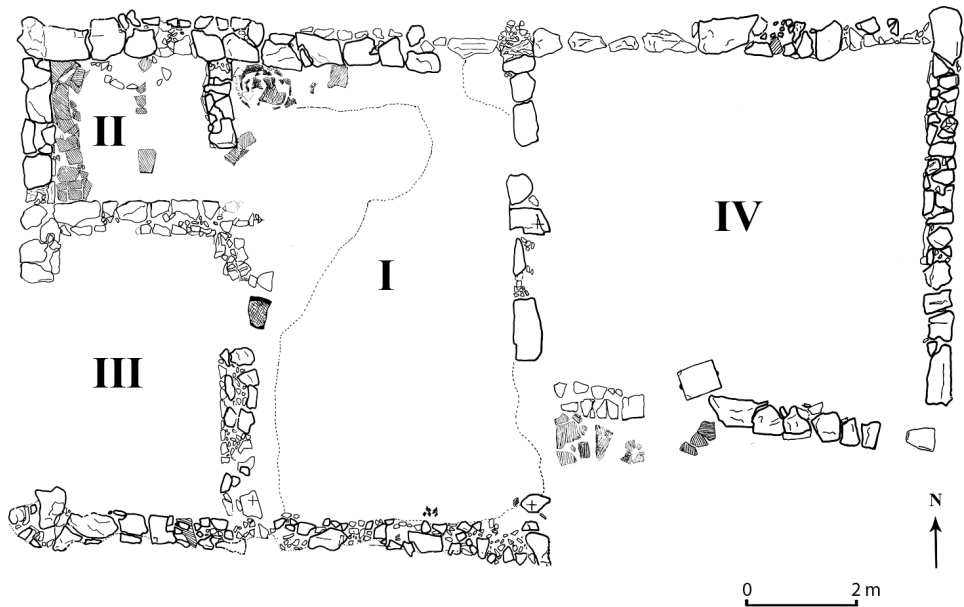


Fig. 2. Ground plan of the Sevasto house. After the map made by T. Konstantinos and K. Stamatia in 2005.

was horizontally divided by the emerging wall structure, which cut the space into the four individual sections or rooms. This unit was finished roughly at 0.60 m when a dense layer of collapsed roof tiles was detected. Finally, below the tiles, a continuous destruction level extended over most of the whole building. Apart from the roof-tiles, this third layer included small stones and soil with dark brown spots of burned material together with the great majority of the finds. Right below the destruction level the floor formation was discovered. The floor consisted of beaten reddish earth as is common in Hellenistic structures, the excavated houses in Agia Paraskevi offering a close parallel located only ca. 1.5 km to the southeast of the Sevasto village.⁷ It seems therefore, that most of the finds were situated either directly on, or integrated into, the floor of the house.

The floor formation was detected only sporadically. It is most distinctive in room III, where the destruction level above had been largely ruined by illegal excavations. This damage was evident in several parts of the building, where traces of the destruction level were difficult to find. It remains uncertain whether these operations damaged the building structure itself.

The external measurements of the house are 16.9 x 9.3 m.⁸ The foundation walls, standing in places about 0.50 m high, are built of roughly fitted stones and rubble. The width of the wall is very uniform, 0.60 m over the whole building, except for the eastern wall where it narrows to 0.50 m. Plain soil served as binding material between the stones, which formed the foundation or socle supporting subsequent mud-brick walls of upper courses. Yet, because of the complete disintegration not even a single brick is preserved. Neither is any trace of plaster visible on the walls.

⁷ Preka 1997, 610.

⁸ The building measurements are based on the ground plan of the house. Petsios' report gives slightly different measurements.

The ground plan of the house consists of four rooms (Fig. 2). They are clearly not arranged around any central court or space, but rather form a tight entity of adjacent rooms. The orientation of the house is towards the south.

Even a preliminary study of the ground plan indicates, that the Sevasto house does not belong to the conventional typology of *pastas*, *prostas* or *peristyle* buildings with familiar characteristics of central courtyard and porticos. Here, it is the characteristic of large rooms which connects the house with local Epirotic building traditions, and thereby with the house type of the *Herdraumhaus*.

The earliest known such houses were excavated in the Vitsa region, some 25 km north from Ioannina. These rural structures consist of a single large room (6 x 7 m) with a central fire place.⁹ Yet it is two Epirote towns, Orraon and Cassope, which have turned out to be essential for a more profound understanding of the building type. The *Herdraumhaus* as a typological concept was created after the excavations in the ancient Molossian town of Orraon, where exceptionally well-preserved houses made it possible to observe the architectural elements from foundation to roof top.¹⁰ Cassope, in turn, provided a large bulk of material extending to several centuries permitting a closer investigation on the architectural development of the house type. From these studies originated the concept of the domestic core unit of the *Herdraumhaus*, which consists of a large central room, two floors high, flanked by two smaller chambers both up- and downstairs. Such an arrangement of the space formed the basis of room structures at several fourth century houses in Cassope. Interestingly, this basic core unit was noticed only in the earliest building phase and the unity was to disintegrate during the following centuries of the Hellenistic period, when the house plans were renovated and restructured.¹¹

This domestic core of the *Herdraumhaus* becomes evident in the Sevasto ground plan as a tight three-room complex including rooms I, II and III. Room IV, on the other hand, possesses several characteristics which indicate that it may well be a separate unit or later addition. No doorway is discernible from room I to IV, the overall depth of the room is clearly shorter than the rest of the building, and both the northern and southern walls of room IV appear to have a structural break in the western half of the wall.¹²

The three rooms of the core form a perfect square of 9.3 m side (internal length 8.1 m). This is hardly a coincidence and even without the central hearth construction uncovered, the complex is instantly recognized as a domestic core unit of the typical *Herdraumhaus* as found in urban houses of Orraon and Cassope. The prime distinction remains that this building is not a town house, but a structure located in the countryside, adding an interesting aspect to the architectural evolution of the house type previously found in this stage of evolution only in the urban environment.

Throughout the study, it becomes evident that Orraon house A resembles the Sevasto house in a number of respects, providing an interesting reference point for comparison of architecture and possible room functions (Fig. 3). The core unit is somewhat bigger in Sevasto concerning both the long and the short sides (Sevasto 9.3 x 9.3 m and Orraon 7.5 x 8 m). Still, in basic architectural terms the core unit is equally divided in both houses.

⁹ Hoepfner and Schwandner 1986, 108-112, 269.

¹⁰ Hoepfner 1999, 337; Angeli 2005, 16.

¹¹ Hoepfner and Schwandner 1986, 108-112.

¹² An example of a similar late addition to the core unit in Orraon house A (Hoepfner 1999, 410).

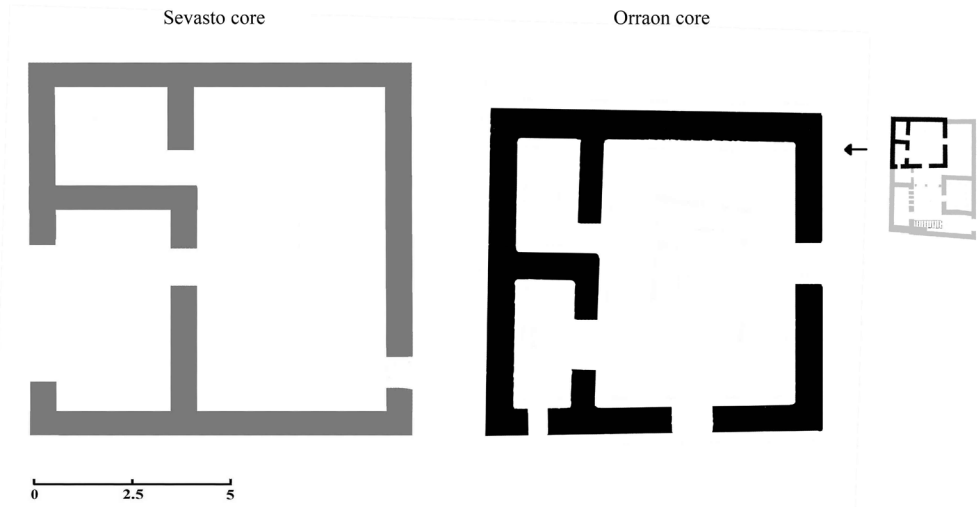


Fig. 3. Core unit comparison. Reconstructed ground plan of house A in Orraon. After Hoepfner 1999, 401-402.

Once the hearth-room is entered the line of two chambers is located on the left. Even the doorways to those two rooms are set identically. The small corner room in both houses includes a clearly identified bench or work plane. It is tempting to outline a very similar function for both of these rooms.

The current research concerning the known examples of the *Herdraumhaus* has so far concentrated on the architectural study, and the recovered find material has been applied only to confirm the possible observations detected from fixed structures. With the rich find material from the Sevasto house we now have a real possibility to make a more balanced inquiry into this Epirote house type, including not only the investigation of the room functions, but also the material culture in general.

Pottery and other finds

The Sevasto excavation provided finds of a great variety. It includes a ceramic assemblage consisting of the common Greek vessel shapes, combined with lamps, loom-weights and roof-tiles. The ceramics are supplemented by metal finds (coins, blades, nails), stone artefacts and bones. The pottery assemblage itself consists of 781 sherds, which provided 75 individual vessels after applying the MNV (Minimum Number of Vessels) methodology.¹³

¹³ MNV refers to a methodology determining the principles behind the pottery count. The method here includes only the standard features of rim and base in the process of determining the number of vessels. The total of rim and base sherds is combined with vessels that survived as near- complete or as profiles. This sum is taken as the best quantifiable indicator of vessel frequency (Ault 2005, 8-9; Orton *et al.* 1993, 172). A small number of the vessels, although identified, were left outside the study due to the methodological restrictions of MNV. They comprised the vessels identified only by body sherds or handle fragments.

House total: 75 vessels (MNV)

Fine wares	MNV	%	Plain wares	MNV	%	Cooking wares	MNV	%
Drinking:			Storing:			Cooking:		
Kantharoi	7		Amphorae	5		Chytrai	5	
One-handlers	1		Hydriae	2		Lopades	2	
	8	10.7	Pithoi	11			7	9.3
Serving and eating:				18	24			
Bowls	11		Preparing:					
Plates	8		Lekanai	7				
Choes	1		Mortaria	4				
Craters	1			11	14.7			
Jugs	5							
	26	34.7						
Other forms:								
Lids	3							
Miniature vessels	1							
Unguentaria	1							
	5	6.7						
Total	39	52		29	38.7		7	9.3

Fig. 4. Sevasto vessel categories by function and shape, based on the MNV.

The assemblage represents 17 different vessel shapes (Fig. 4), which, in turn, were divided into general ceramic categories (fine, plain and cooking wares). For the aim of the research, the vessels have been categorized according to their function rather than their shape or form. This approach is essential, since the following analysis relies on ceramic assemblages found functionally together in ancient households.

The general picture emerging from the find assemblage speaks of relatively wealthy inhabitants, with fine wares constituting the majority of the pottery finds and including rare shapes like the thymiaterion or the miniature skyphos. The character and function of the house, on the other hand, remains much harder to determine. Despite being located in the countryside next to the fertile plain, nothing in the assemblage unambiguously refers to agricultural operations. The grinding stones, louters or mortars, belong to the household assemblage of any Greek house in antiquity regardless of where it was situated.¹⁴

Catalogue

The Catalogue intends to describe in detail only the most representative and well-preserved items in the find assemblage. Apart from pottery (Fig. 4), the assemblage consists of 11 loom-weights, five lamps, a thymiaterion, two stands, eight coins, several fragments of iron and bronze items, lead clamps (both incorporated into the pithos rims and found as separate items.), mill stones and bones. Due to the unsettled chronology of Epirote ceramics, all dates suggested are to be understood as approximate. The best-preserved vessels of the assemblage were catalogued by the Greek Archaeological Service. They are identified by the catalogue number starting with ΘΕ or ΑΣ at the end of the description.

¹⁴ Cahill 2002, 238.

Fine wares

1. Cyma kantharos. Foot diameter 4 cm. Outer diameter 8 cm. Spreading ring foot. Prominent stem. Strap handle with thumb-rest. Mended from six fragments. Black glazed. Munsell 7.5YR 8/4.

Cf. Edwards 1975, 76-82; Pemberton 1989, 34-36.

Date: Third century BC.

2. One-handler. Outer diameter 12 cm. Strong inward curve of the wall. Handle round in section. Mended from 10 fragments. Black glazed. Munsell 10YR 8/2.

Cf. De Maria *et al.* 2005, 137; Rotroff 1997, 155-156.

Date: 325-275 BC.

3. Echinus bowl. Foot diameter 4.6 cm. Outer diameter 11 cm. Height 5.6 cm. Rim is formed by a strong inward curve of the wall. Angular, flat resting surface. Nipple underside. Complete profile, mended from 14 fragments. Black glazed. Munsell 10YR 8/4.

Cf. Rotroff 1997, 162-163, no. 1000-1010; Sparkes and Talcott 1970, 131-133; Edwards 1975, 29-33; Romano 1994, 69, no. 19, fig. 3; Haagsma 2003, 92.

Date: 300-175 BC.

4. Bowl. Foot diameter 5.7 cm. Outer diameter 12.5 cm. Height 5.7 cm. Slightly inturning rim. False ring foot. Complete profile, mended from 11 fragments. Plain, no glaze preserved. Munsell 7.5YR 7/6. OE 3517.

Cf. Rotroff 1997, 161, no. 1005.

Date: Third to second century BC.

5. Fish plate. Foot diameter 7.1 cm. Outer diameter 22 cm. Height 5.2 cm. Rim slope down to outside. Flat resting surface. Complete profile, mended from seven fragments. Black glazed. Munsell 10YR 7/4. OE 7675.

Cf. Edwards 1975, 41-42.

Date: Third to mid-second century BC.

6. Crater. Outer diameter 24.5 cm. Preserved height 6.6 cm. Projecting rim with horizontal groove on outer edge of top. Lug handle placed below. Preserved in three fragments from rim down to lower body. Black glazed. Munsell 7.5YR 8/6. OE 7676.

Cf. Rotroff 1997, 137-138, pl. 42, no. 590-594.

Date: 250-200 BC.

7. Chous. Trefoil mouth. Rope handle. Preserved in very fragmentary (19 fragments) condition. Plain, no glaze discernible. Munsell 10YR 8/6.

Cf. Rotroff 1997, 125-126.

Date: Early Hellenistic.

8. Jug. Outer diameter 8 cm. Preserved height 3.7 cm. Rim outward thickened. Preserved in five fragments. Plain and black glazed. Munsell 10YR 8/4.

9. Unguentarium. Foot diameter 3.8 cm. Preserved height 8.3 cm. Pieced together up to middle height. Preserved in 24 fragments. Black glazed on the exterior. Munsell 10YR 8/3.

Cf. Chrisostomou 1991, 119-125; Lilimbaki-Akamati 1991, 110-114; Riginos 1997, 108, pl. 76, no. 2828.

Date: Third to second century BC.

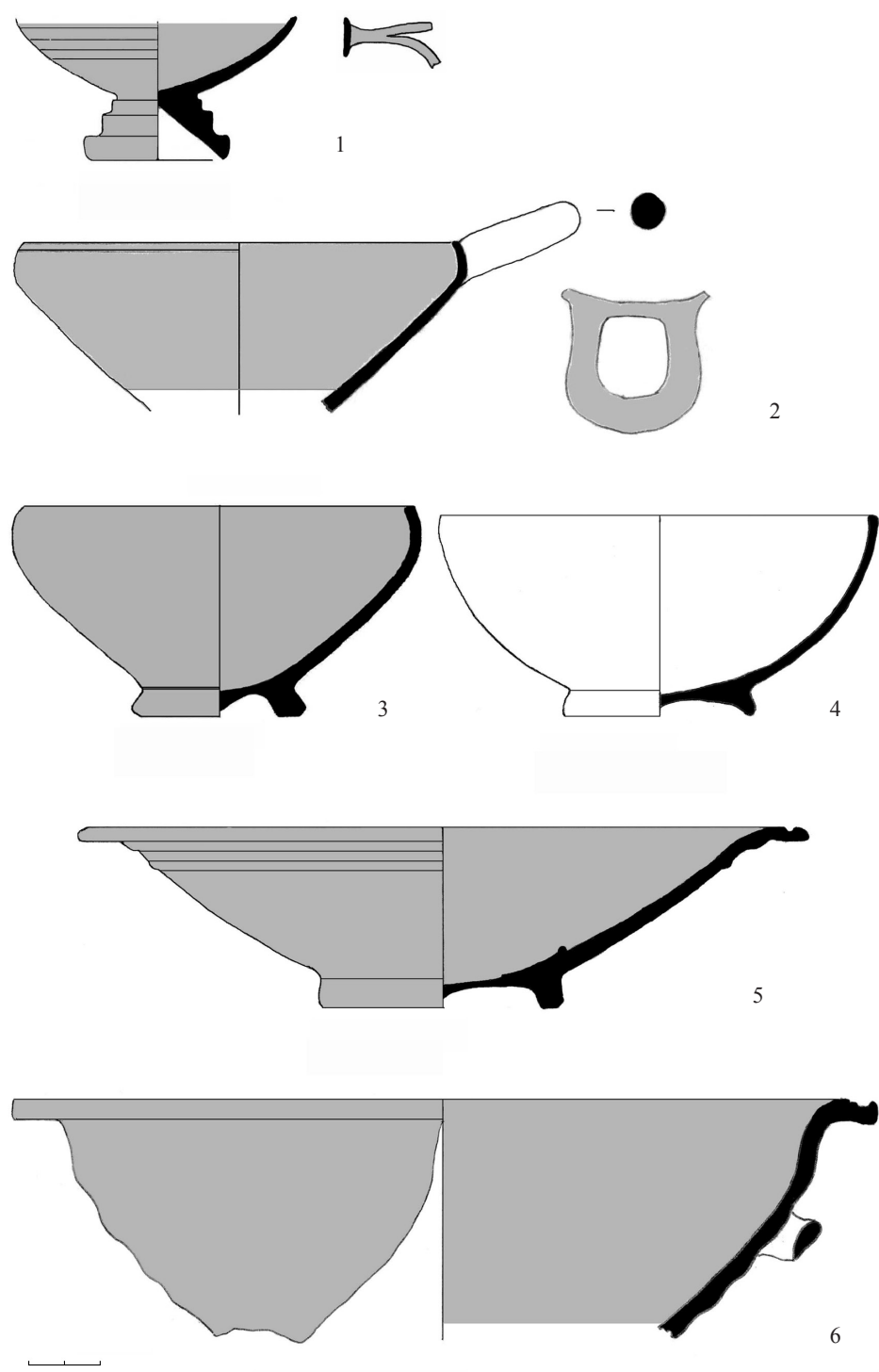


Fig. 5. Fine wares (Nos. 1-6). Scale 1:2.

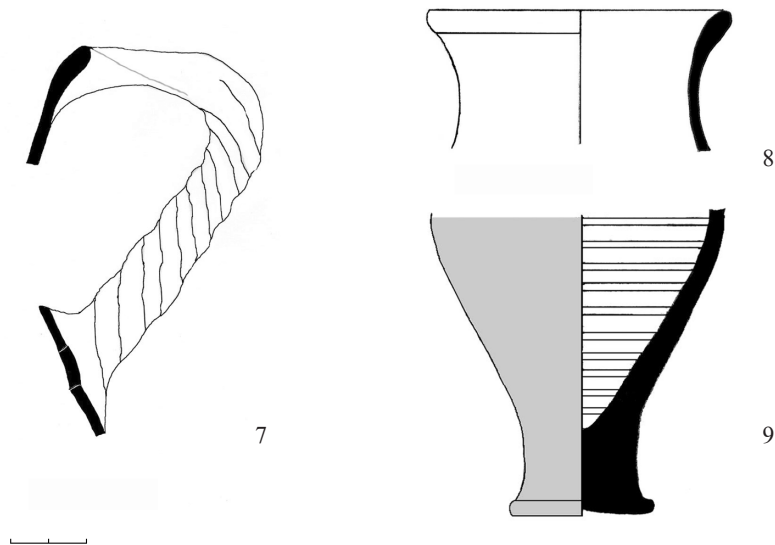


Fig. 6. Fine wares (Nos. 7-9). Scale 1:2.

Plain wares

10-12. Pithoi. The find material consists of 154 fragments and roughly 118 kg of pithos sherds. As the number of sherds constitutes 20 % of all the sherds in the assemblage, the weight comprises nearly 95 % of the total weight of the ceramic assemblage. They were estimated to come from 11 different vessels. The rim measurement showed a great variety of shape as the largest encountered diameter was 116 cm and the smallest only 27 cm. Moreover, some included lead clamps attached into the upper lip and one has a wavy decoration on the lip of the rim. 5YR 6/8-7.5YR 6/6.

13. Amphora. Outer diameter 9.2 cm. Preserved height 13 cm. Overhanging rim. Oval handles with ridge. Preserved in seven fragments. Plain. Munsell 7.5YR 8/4. ΑΣ 3220.
Cf. Koci 1987, 147, pl. I, no. 1; Mano and Dautaj 1997, 132, pl. III, no. 23; Lepore and Gamberini 2003, 80, no. 3240.
Date: 275-175 BC.

14. Lekane. Rim diameter 32 cm. Preserved height 3.0 cm. Plain with traces of reddish slip on the exterior, Munsell 2.5YR 5/6. Munsell 5YR 7/8. The Lekane presents a problem of classification as a rim fragment without a handle attached cannot be classified with confidence (Rotroff 2006, 108), which is exactly the case with the Lekanai in the Sevasto assemblage.

15. Lekane. Rim diameter 26 cm. Preserved height 8.6 cm. Horizontal, projecting rim. Preserved in nine fragments. Plain. Munsell 5YR 6/6.

16. Mortar. Base diameter 12 cm. Preserved height 5.4 cm. Coarse. Munsell 5YR 6/1.

17. Mortar. Inner diameter 27 cm. Preserved height 5.4 cm. Plain. Munsell 10YR 8/4.
Cf. Villing and Pemberton 2010, 590-594; von Hesberg and Eck 2008, 34-35, 79; Tréziny 1989, 63-65.
Date: Late fifth to third century BC.

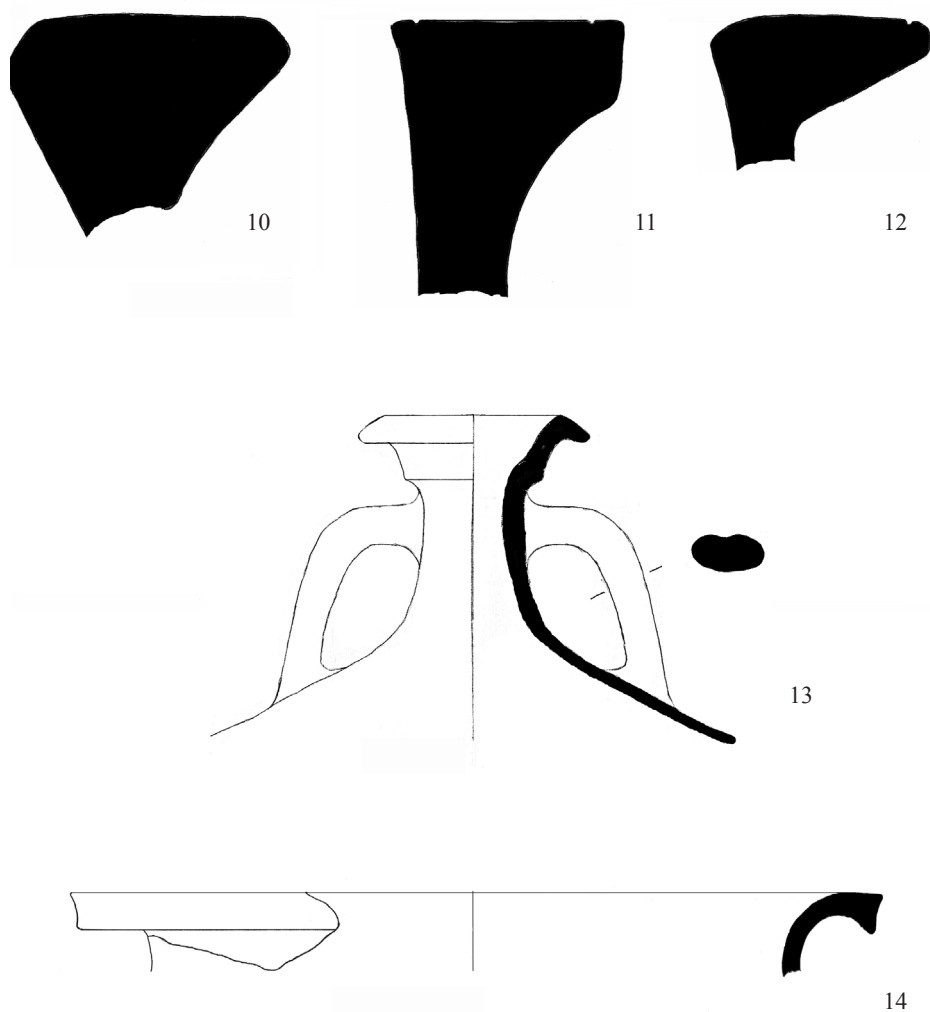


Fig. 7. Plain wares (Nos. 10-14). Scale 1:3.

Cooking wares

18. Chytra. Rim diameter 17.5 cm. Preserved height 3.7 cm. Flaring rim. Preserved in three fragments. Plain. Munsell 10YR 6/1.

19. Lopas. Rim diameter 20 cm. Preserved height 4.2 cm. Horizontal rim. Preserved in seven fragments. Plain. Munsell 2.5YR 7/8.

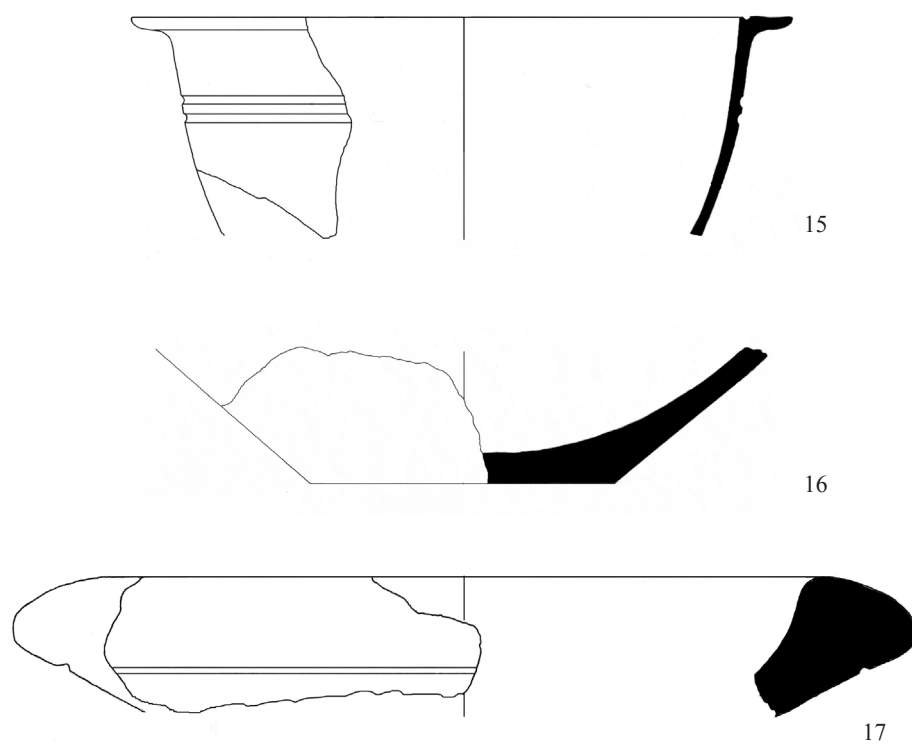


Fig. 8. Plain wares (Nos. 15-17). Scale 1:3.

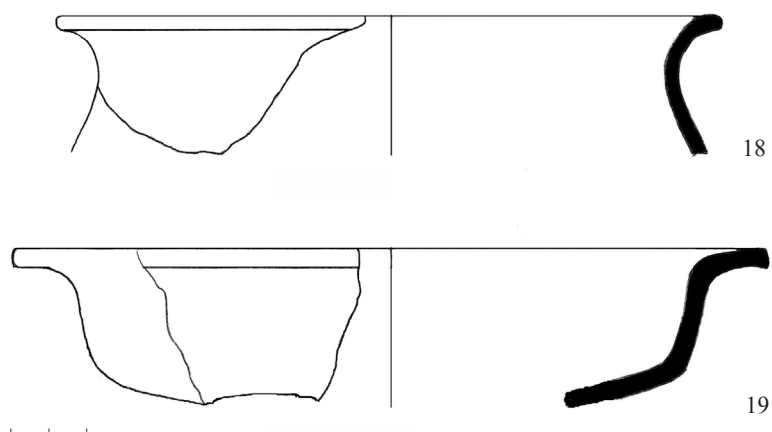


Fig. 9. Cooking wares (Nos. 18-19). Scale 1:2.

Miscellaneous finds

20. Miniature skyphos. Foot diameter 3.3 cm. Preserved height 2.2 cm. Black glazed. Munsell 7.5YR 8/6.

21. Conical loom-weight with one suspension hole. Circular base. Pear-formed profile. Top rounded. Height 8.5 cm. Width 5.3 cm. Weight 130 g. Munsell 5YR 6/6. ΘE 7671.
Cf. Tzouvara-Souli 1983, 29-30; Davidson 1952, 147-172.
Date: Hellenistic.

22. Lamp. Outer diameter 9.1 cm. Height 5.6 cm. Preserved length 13.3 cm. Double sprouts with central rod. Plain. Munsell 7.5YR 7/6. ΘE 6814.
Cf. Broneer 1977, 215, pl. 38; Dakaris 1961, 113, pl. 70.
Date: 300-225 BC.

23. Lamp. Preserved height 3.5 cm. Preserved length 7.6 cm. Only sprout and part of the body preserved. Black glazed. Munsell 7.5YR 7/6. ΘE 7672.
Cf. Broneer 1977, pl. 18, no. 225; Howland 1958, pl. 41, no. 419; Rotroff 1997, 500-501; Braun 1970, 149, pl. 58.
Date: 325-150 BC.

24. Lamp. Outer diameter 6 cm. Preserved height 2.6 cm. Preserved length 6.0 cm. Mended from eight fragments. Black glazed. Munsell 7.5YR 7/6. ΘE 7673.
Cf. Broneer 1977, pl. 17, no. 138-139; Howland 1958, pl. 41, no. 398; Rotroff 1997, 499.
Date: 250-190 BC.

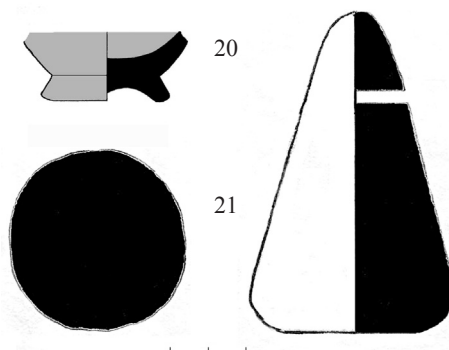


Fig. 10. Miscellaneous finds (Nos. 20-21).
Scale 1:2.

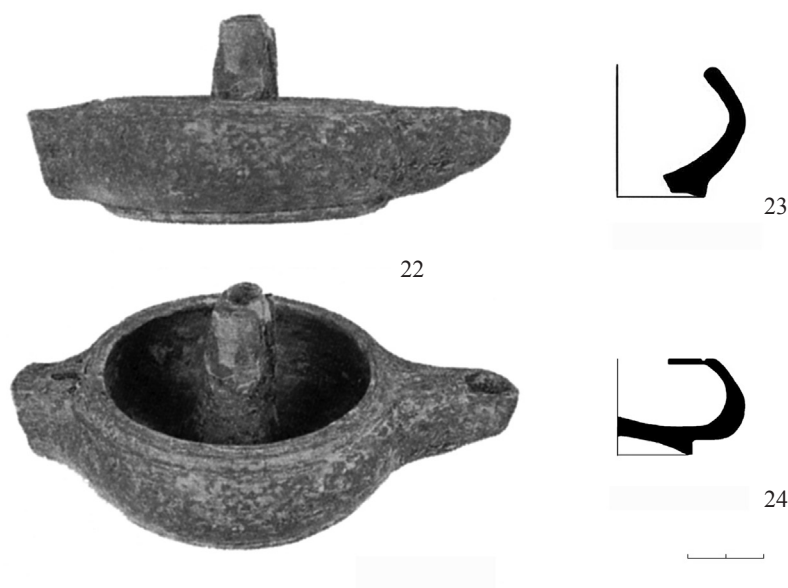


Fig. 11. Miscellaneous finds (Nos. 22-24). Scale 1:2.

25. Thymiaterion. Height 37 cm. Foot diameter 15 cm. A fairly thin stem, circled by six rings, rises from a broad disk base, which is hollow underneath. Of the six rings, five include decoration of evenly pressed thumb impressions. The hollow interior shows horizontal grooves from the base to the top. Munsell 5YR 7/4. ΘΕ 7736.

Cf. Zaccagnino 1998, 68-69; Rotroff 1997, 212, no. 1442; Reinders 1988, 270, 301, no. 54.

Date: 350-200 BC.

26. Stand. Preserved height 9.5 cm. Identification is difficult due to its fragmentary condition. It is possible that originally it was the neck of a large vessel like a hydria or an amphora, which was subsequently reused. Preserved in 13 fragments. Black glazed on the exterior. Munsell 10YR 8/2. ΑΣ 4136.

27. Stand. Diameter 6.0 cm. Diameter of pierced hole 3.5 cm. Height 1.2 cm. Originally interpreted as a rim of vessel. Nevertheless, somewhat similar clay rings were found in the Nekyomanteion and interpreted as supports or bases “στηρίγματα” (Dakaris 1961, 113, pl. 69b). This view is shared with Sparkes and Talcott, who see them possibly as stands for small-footed jars and think they should be distinguished from larger rings, which refer to pottery making (Sparkes and Talcott 1970, 180; Rotroff 2006, 139). I would suggest yet another possible function as a spindle whorl or loom-weight. Plain. Munsell 7.5YR 7/6. ΘΕ 7674.

Cf. Dakaris 1961, 113, pl. 69b; Sparkes and Talcott 1970, 180, pl. 43.

Date: Fourth to second century BC.

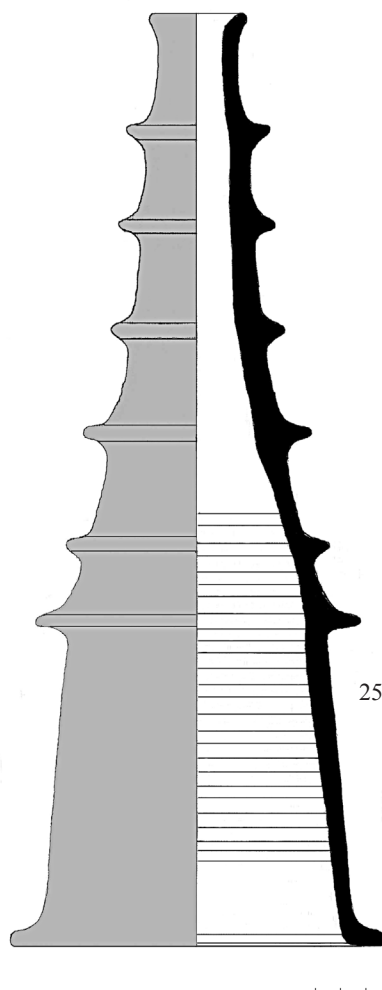


Fig. 12. Miscellaneous finds (No. 25).
Scale 1:3.

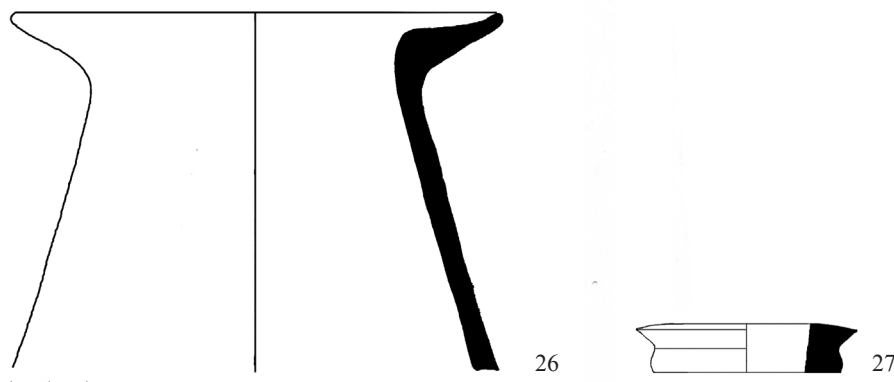


Fig. 13. Miscellaneous finds (Nos. 26-27). Scale 1:2.

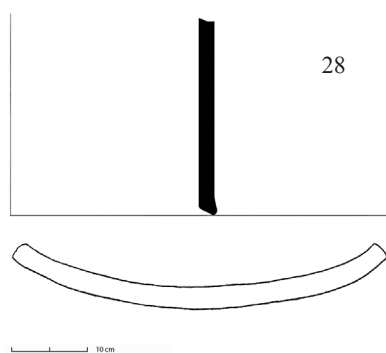


Fig. 14. Miscellaneous finds (No. 28).
Scale 1:10.

28. Roof-tile. Laconian pan-tile. Width 50.5 cm. Thickness from 2.5 cm in corners to 3 cm in middle. Several plain pan-tile fragments as well as fragments with black slip on the upper surface were found scattered around the site. No fragment of cover tiles was found. Plain. Munsell 2.5YR 8/6.

29. Bronze handle. Length 6.3 cm. Diameter 0.9-1.0 cm. One end of cross section round, another end flattened. Vertical groove decoration.

30. Iron knife. Length 14.5 cm. Height 1.0-1.4 cm. Straight spine with curved end. Knob for handle attachment.

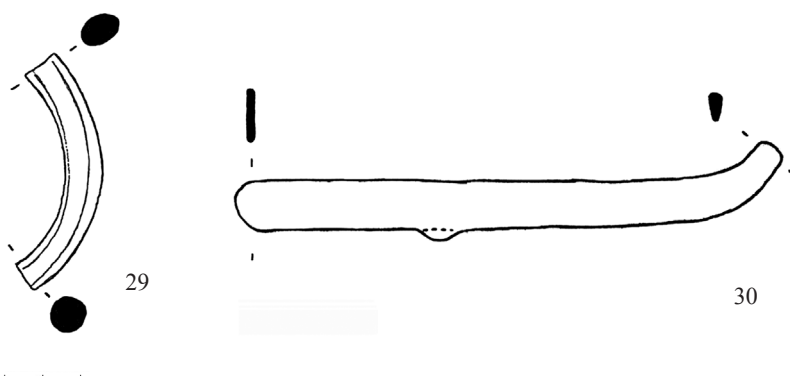


Fig. 15. Miscellaneous finds (Nos. 29-30). Scale 1:2.

Room functions

Here, the finds of each room are set in relation to the total assemblage of the house in order to determine functional assemblages, which help to illustrate the activities of the rooms. These results are reflected against the architectural study, which already related three rooms of the house to the core unit of the *Herdraumhaus*. Of 75 identified vessels, 64 can be attached to one of the four rooms. The small number of ceramic finds (MNV 2) in room IV does not enable any meaningful analysis, which, in this case, must rely mostly on architectural features.

Room I

Room I is located in the middle of the building measuring 4.7 x 8 m. Due to its central position, it has doorways to the west into rooms II and III, and to the east, where the central doorway presumably existed. In the northwestern corner of the room a round feature, built of small stones and enclosing an area of 90 cm in diameter, was detected. The construction was found filled with fragments of pithoi and functioned probably as a storage area. Given the high probability that the main entrance to room I was situated

in the south side of the room, the stairs run most probably along the northern wall, in much the same way as presented in the Orraon reconstruction of house A.¹⁵ For a large and valuable vessel, this sheltered position can only be considered as both a practical and natural solution. The stairs provided certain protection at the same time as the large vessels occupied as little valuable space as possible in the room, which was the centre of domestic activity.

The short architectural analysis previously suggested that the large central room could have served as a hearth room in the building complex. The pottery and small finds appear to support this hypothesis. Particularly interesting is the fact that, among the vessel shapes, the sole examples of a crater and a chous were found here together with the best preserved example of a fine table amphora. Together they form a set of classic table ware, suggesting that this is the place where the wine was mixed, served and consumed. In the absence of an andron, the central hearth room seems to be the most suitable space for this activity as it was also the place where the family got together. Moreover, apart from the ceramic vessels, the inclusion of the fine thymiaterion in this assemblage fits particularly well.

The shortage of time and financial resources limited the excavation of room I and only roughly half of this central room was thoroughly excavated. A large section in the middle of the room was left untouched as the excavators apparently followed the walls and concentrated on revealing the total extent of the structure. This is reflected in the number of vessel finds (MNV 12), which must be considered rather low.

Room II

The small rectangular corner room II measuring 2.8 x 2.6 m is entered from the previous central room through a doorway of 1 m width. Along the western wall, a line of slab stones was set stretching across the room from north to south. The width of the construction is 0.45 m and it is built of slab stones of medium size. The largest piece is a well-formed triangular corner slab 0.60 x 0.45 x 0.45 m in the northwestern corner. It is still attached to the wall, remaining roughly 15 cm higher than the other slates. Together they formed a bench or work plane extending along the full length of the western wall. Excavation notes made a further mention of a semicircular construction in the middle against the northern wall. Built against the niche in the wall with a diameter of 0.90 m, it had another slab stone laid in the middle.

Room II indicates a strong emphasis on fine wares with 60% of all the vessels attributed to the room (Fig. 16). Among the shapes for serving and eating, the bowls (MNV 6) dominate, constituting over half of the examples found in the total house. The kantharoi (MNV 3) and the plates (MNV 2) are other common shapes whereas the one-handler, the unguentarium and the miniature skyphos are represented by only one vessel each.

The pottery finds and the architectural features give plenty of references to the function of the room. As noted, the great majority of all the pottery finds belong to the black glazed fine ware. In this small room they make sense only as placed in a cup board. The vessels were kept safe in storage, when not used during the meals or other social occasions.

¹⁵ Hoepfner 1999, 401-402.

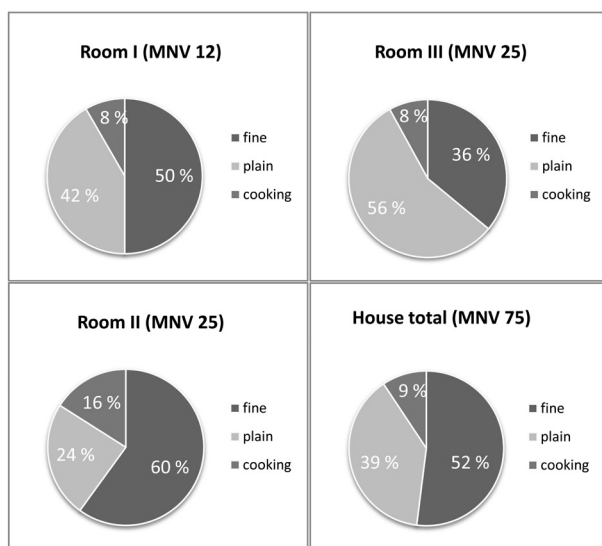


Fig. 16. Distribution of ceramic finds across the house; fine, plain and cooking ware.

The number is over half of what was found in the whole building complex. It is notable that house A at Orraon provided a large number of loom-weights both inside and right outside of the similar corner chamber next to the hearth room. This has led Hoepfner and Schwander to propose the function of this room as *isteon*, a place where the loom was situated, whereas the actual weaving could be performed either inside the room or outside, if preferred.¹⁷

Room III

The third room in the southwestern corner of the building encloses an area of 2.8 x 5 m. Like room II it is entered from the central room through a doorway (1.1 m) in the east. Yet the room also seems to have a wide opening of 3.6 m leading outside to the west, serving probably as an open doorway or including a double-door. Such a large doorway could have facilitated wheeled traffic, and is commonly associated with houses where agricultural products were processed or stored.¹⁸

The ceramic assemblage has again a clearly distinctive character apart from rooms I and II, indicating a very different function (Fig. 16). Over half of the vessels (56%) are composed of plain wares attributed to the category of storing in particular. A high number of pithoi (MNV 6) together with an amphora appears significant.¹⁹ These numbers refer to the room's special function of storage. Against this background it increasingly makes sense, that the large opening in the western wall was indeed intentional.

However, the room provides further evidence, which cannot be understood exclusively by looking at the ceramic data. The find assemblage includes several fragments of grindstones together with an architectural feature of stone bench or plane. The investigation of the domestic material has shown that in the ancient world that particular combination was in fact common, the permanent grinding benches raising the grindstones off the ground for more comfortable use.¹⁶

Yet another aspect of the room's functionality is shown by six loom-weights.

¹⁶ Cahill 2002, 164-166.

¹⁷ Hoepfner and Schwander 1999, 408-410; Angeli 2005, 39.

¹⁸ Cahill 2002, 115. For Orraon, see Hoepfner *et al.* 1999b, 395-409; Angeli 2005, 35-41, where a room of similar size was provided with a large doorway, which was blocked in a later reconstruction.

¹⁹ These numbers involve some uncertainty, which needs to be pointed out. As the finds in general were assigned very unambiguously to certain rooms, most of the pithoi constitutes an exception. They were stored in four plastic crates one upon the other with only one tag attached, stating that they come from room III.

Apart from storage, the ceramic finds of room III further indicate a function of preparing food. Two mortars and four lekanai were documented here, providing a clear majority of both shapes in the building complex. It is somewhat surprising to find four fine-ware bowls and three kantharoi in this room, with such a strong character of storage and preparing. One may speculate on the possible collapse of the cupboard in room II spreading sherds into the room next door, when the house was destroyed.²⁰

Room IV

The largest undivided space of the building is room IV. It is also the easternmost in the complex and has a roughly square plan measuring 7 x 7 m. The southern wall has lost some of its stonework and it is slightly twisted from the principal east to west axis of the house. Several slab stones were found outside the southwestern corner of the room. They probably belonged to a corridor leading to the main entry of the building. Further, a worked stone block (47 x 60 cm) with notched cuttings in the corners and equipped with lifting bosses lies close to the south wall inside room IV.²¹ It appears to be removed from its original location and I am inclined to interpret the block as a base for a flight of stairs, which ascended to the second floor from room I.²²

The excavation memorandum makes a short remark on stratigraphy of the room, noting that here the continuous destruction level with a carpet of tiles could only be found tentatively in the northwestern corner of the room. The absence of a destruction level with roof-tiles may indicate that room IV was not covered, at least not as properly as the rest of the building, and a lighter make-shift construction would have left only faint traces in the archaeological record. It is tempting to suggest the function of a stable for this architectural addition to the house complex in Sevasto.²³

In general, the observed stratigraphy of the Sevasto house gives no indication of two separate layers, which would distinguish any second-floor assemblages. Yet the thickness of the foundation walls is exceptionally great, 60 cm, and they would clearly allow the construction of a second floor. The existence of the stair base further strengthens the high probability that a second floor also existed in the house, in much the same way testified by the typical *Herdraumhäuser* of Orraon and Cassope.

Combining all the above-mentioned information, the following room functions or activity areas are suggested for the Sevasto house (Fig. 17). It goes without saying that the identification of the stable remains very tentative and clearly requires further archaeological research to confirm. The domestic core of the building with the functions of the three ground floor rooms, nevertheless, can be proposed on a much more secure basis.

²⁰ For Haliéis, see Ault and Nevett 1999, 48; Ault 2005, 46. For Orraon, see Hoepfner 1999, 408. Alternatively, they could even be seen to form a part of the possible assemblage of the collapsed second floor.

²¹ For an example of a similar rectangular block in Haliéis, see Ault 2005, 14. The cuttings in the corners were interpreted to hold and brace the wooden structure of the stairs.

²² The excavation report refers to the block as a stepping stone of the door (Petsios 2005).

²³ In their respective interpretations, both Dakaris and Hoepfner and Schwandner have reserved a stable for animals in one of the rooms in house A, adding that the character of the Orraon houses was seen as largely rural (Angeli 2005, 41).

²⁴ Rotroff 1997, 94-95; Rotroff 2006b, 357.

²⁵ See T. Talvio, this volume. One of the coins, dated to the Late Hellenistic period, speaks against this general picture of coherence but the coin may be considered intrusive as it was found above the destruction layer.

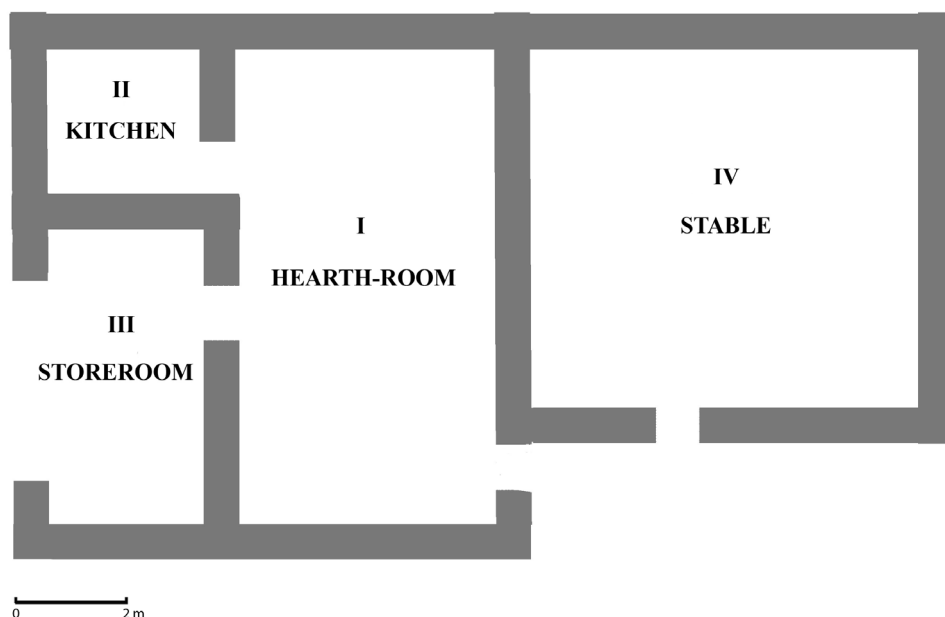


Fig. 17. Suggested room functions of the Sevasto house.

Historical context and conclusion

The overview of the finds points to a relatively narrow period of time during the Early Hellenistic period. The more closely dated finds of the ceramic assemblage fall into a period of some 150 years, indicating 325-175 BC. This result is confirmed and refined by the investigation on the shapes of drinking vessels. In the absence of the common shapes of the Classical and Late Hellenistic times, i.e., the skyphos and the Megarian bowl, it is the distinctive shape of the Hellenistic kantharos which clearly dominates the Sevasto assemblage of drinking vessels. This evident lack of skyphoi and mould-made vessels narrows the time frame to roughly 275-200 BC.²⁴ The coins, while offering yet another reference point, suggest only a rather wide and general period from the third to the first century BC, which, nevertheless, is in line with the dating of the ceramics.²⁵

The end of the third century fits well with the troubled times experienced in Epirus. During the last decades of the third century Epirus was ravaged from the north by the Illyrians and from the south by the Aetolians. While the Illyrian attacks were felt hard in Northern Epirus, the plundering of the Aetolian forces must have been potentially most devastating in the south and, in particular, for the population living in the insecure countryside of the Kokytos valley. The Aetolian activities relate to the Social War, which was waged during 220-217. The threat was finally checked only in the 209 peace treaty.²⁶

Although the infamous year of 167 BC in Epirus is commonly associated with the majority of the detected destruction layers in the Hellenistic period, I consider it more likely that the Sevasto house was abandoned and destroyed some time before that, possibly as early as 220 BC. The period from 275 to 220 BC corresponds to a habitation

²⁶ Hammond 1967, 595-612; Sakellariou 1997, 79-81.

of only two or three generations and is supported by the rather low number of finds (MNV 75) for a house of this size.²⁷ The abandonment of the house appears to have been a relatively sudden process and only the most valuable and portable items have been moved to the new destination. What was left behind, notably the roof-tiles and the heavy vessels like pithoi, still covers in fragments the unexcavated areas of the building. Although they clearly had a reasonable value for the owners, they were abandoned due to their large size or weight. The walls of Elea were never far away and chances to escape the hostile force plundering the countryside must have been high, given the fact that the approaching enemy could be spotted well ahead from the chain of fortresses in the valley. The owners apparently never returned to the house and it was not inhabited again. This may speak for the continued unsettled political situation after the Aetolian threat was checked. The fertile valley bottom may not have been considered a secure place for permanent inhabitation in times of political turmoil – instead the population gathered inside the walls of Elea.

The Sevasto house remains a fine example of the wealthy Early Hellenistic period in the Kokytos valley. The prosperity which came along with the successful conquests of the Aiakid dynasty spread across Epirus, and is apparent in the archaeological record of the Kokytos valley. Yet it is not only the material culture which makes the Sevasto house a site of particular interest. The architectural structures represent the traditional building type of the *Herdraumhaus* in the very basic form before the general architectural diffusion of the house structures testified all over Greece during the Hellenistic period. It serves as a rare example of the rural house type in its non-urban environment. In connection with the urbanization in Epirus, the traditional building unit of a large hearth-room with chambers was fit into the urban grid plan. Once set into an urban environment the house type soon started an architectural evolution, which saw the traditional building unit vanishing in favour of more sophisticated solutions such as those apparent in the ground plans of the Hellenistic cities like Cassope. The Sevasto house provides the missing link between the one-room shelters of Vitsa and the sophisticated urban houses of Hellenistic Epirote towns. Furthermore, the house speaks of the troubling times in the end of the third century with severe political turmoil followed by frequent conflicts.

²⁷ Despite the fact that the house was not excavated in its entirety.

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