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## Macroscopic Investigation of Early Iron Age Fine Ware Fabrics from Kalapodi. Pottery Research in Kalapodi, seasons 2024 and 2025

Archäologischer Anzeiger 2. Halbband 2025, S 1–18

<https://doi.org/10.34780/end15p89>

Herausgebende Institution / Publisher:  
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut

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## IMPRESSUM

### Archäologischer Anzeiger

erscheint seit 1889/*published since 1889*

AA 2025/2 • 392 Seiten/*pages mit/with 339 Abbildungen/illustrations*

### Herausgeber/Editors

Friederike Fless • Philipp von Rummel  
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut  
Zentrale  
Podbielskiallee 69–71  
14195 Berlin  
Deutschland  
www.dainst.org

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### Peer Review

Alle für den Archäologischen Anzeiger eingereichten Beiträge werden einem doppelblinden Peer-Review-Verfahren durch internationale Fachgutachterinnen und -gutachter unterzogen./*All articles submitted to the Archäologischer Anzeiger are reviewed by international experts in a double-blind peer review process.*

### Redaktion und Layout/Editing and Typesetting

Gesamtverantwortliche Redaktion/*Publishing editor:*

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Redaktion der Zentralen Wissenschaftlichen Dienste, Berlin  
(<https://www.dainst.org/standort/zentrale/redaktion>), [redaktion.zentrale@dainst.de](mailto:redaktion.zentrale@dainst.de)

Für Manuskripteinreichungen siehe/*For manuscript submission, see:* <https://publications.dainst.org/journals/index.php/aa/about/submissions>

Redaktionelle Bearbeitung/*Editing:* Annika Busching, Berlin ([www.archaiologos.de](http://www.archaiologos.de))

Satz/*Typesetting:* le-tex publishing services GmbH, Leipzig

Corporate Design, Layoutgestaltung/*Layout design:* LMK Büro für Kommunikationsdesign, Berlin

Umschlagfoto/*Cover illustration:* Jenny Schlehofer, 2022 (Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover, Forschungsprojekt Tuna el-Gebel). Gestaltung Catrin Gerlach nach Vorlage von Tanja Lemke-Mahdavi. Alle Rechte vorbehalten

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### Druckausgabe/Printed edition

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Druck und Vertrieb/*Printing and Distribution:* Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, Tauernstraße 11, 65199 Wiesbaden •  
[info@reichert-verlag.de](mailto:info@reichert-verlag.de), [www.reichert-verlag.de](http://www.reichert-verlag.de)

P-ISSN: 0003-8105 – ISBN: 978-3-7520-0908-8

Druck und Bindung in Europa/*Printed and bound in Europe*

### Digitale Ausgabe/Digital edition

© 2026 Deutsches Archäologisches Institut

Webdesign/*Webdesign:* LMK Büro für Kommunikationsdesign, Berlin

XML-Export, Konvertierung/*XML-Export, Conversion:* digital publishing competence, München

Programmiertechnische Anpassung des Viewers/*Viewer Customization:* LEAN BAKERY, München

E-ISSN: 2510-4713 – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34780/wyyqy657>



## ABSTRACT

### Macroscopic Investigation of Early Iron Age Fine Ware Fabrics from Kalapodi

Pottery Research in Kalapodi, Seasons 2024 and 2025

Alexandra Ch. J. von Miller

The Early Iron Age fine ware pottery from excavations at the sanctuary of Kalapodi, Phthiotis, is subjected to an integrated programme of combined macroscopic, petrographic and elemental analyses. The investigation of fabrics is part of the holistic study of Protogeometric and Geometric fine wares and aims to inform questions related to ceramic technology, production, circulation, and consumption. Both fine wares of presumed local or regional provenance and imports are taken into consideration. The present paper gives an introductory account of the systematic macroscopic fabric classification applied during the 2024 and 2025 study seasons on ca. 9700 vessel individuals by visual examination of the fresh breaks with the aid of a  $\times 10$  hand lens. The macroscopic properties of 44 fabrics are presented in the form of a catalogue, which is illustrated by photographs taken from fresh breaks of 321 reference pieces. In addition to fabric features, the catalogue incorporates results from the typo-chronological examination of the vessel assemblage in order to present a preliminary assessment of each fabric's typological and chronological range. A concluding commentary to the catalogue entries highlights noteworthy aspects in the assemblage of each fabric and – where possible – briefly refers to provenance issues. The present catalogue of fabrics is the starting point for further analytical investigations which will be performed on the selection of reference pieces.

## KEYWORDS

Kalapodi, Central Greece, Early Iron Age, Protogeometric pottery, Geometric pottery, fine ware pottery, fabric typology, macroscopic examination

# Macroscopic Investigation of Early Iron Age Fine Ware Fabrics from Kalapodi

Pottery Research in Kalapodi, Seasons 2024 and 2025

## Context

<sup>1</sup> The sanctuary of Kalapodi in ancient Phokis (Phthiotis, Central Greece) is among the most prolific sites for archaeological research on the continuity of religion and ritual practices from the Greek Late Bronze Age through the Early Iron Age (EIA) to the beginning of the historical periods. Since 2023, the crucial Protogeometric and Geometric periods are the focus of a project funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)<sup>1</sup> aiming at the holistic study of the rich and stratified assemblages of Early Iron Age fine ware pottery from the excavations at the sanctuary carried out by the Athens branch of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) under the directorship of R. C. S. Felsch (1973–1982), W.-D. Niemeier (2004–2013), and K. Sporn (2014–2020)<sup>2</sup>.

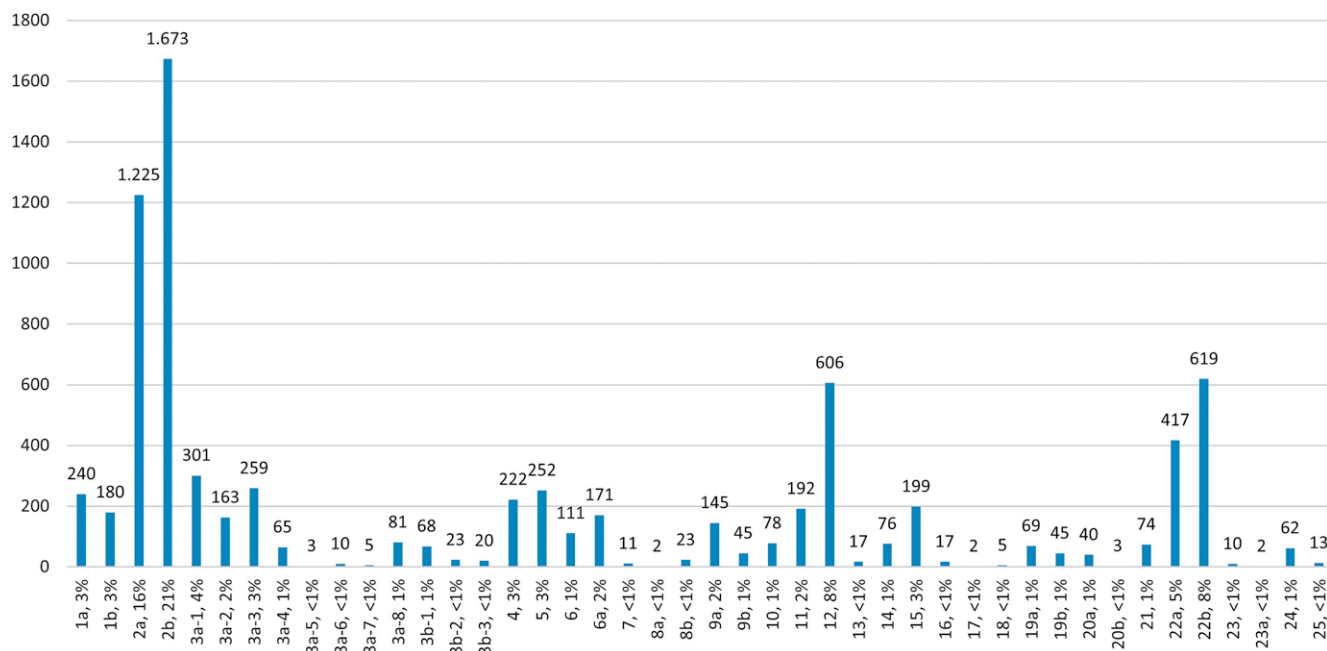
<sup>2</sup> One of the main objectives of documentation work during the 2024 season was the macroscopic examination of fine ware pottery in order to establish a catalogue of fabrics. The visual characterisation of fabrics takes into account all the macroscopic features of vessel sherds, with emphasis on the description of the colour of fresh breaks and surfaces, of texture and inclusions of the clay biscuit as well as of surface treatment. In addition, the standard material typology is considered, including the range of wares and shapes, relative ceramic chronology, and special features within the material body of each fabric. The resulting catalogue, established on macroscopic and archaeological grounds, serves as the backbone for the draft and implementation of a targeted arch-

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<sup>1</sup> Project-no. 508182668: »Die protogeometrische und geometrische Feinkeramik aus dem Heiligtum von Kalapodi. Chronologie, Ritualcharakter und Konnektivität eines früheisenzeitlichen Kultplatzes in Phokis«, <<https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/508182668>> (11/12/2025). The research is carried out at the Institute of Classical Archaeology of the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, <<https://uni-tuebingen.de/fakultaeten/philosophische-fakultaet/fachbereiche/altertums-und-kunstwissenschaften/institut-fuer-klassische-archaeologie/forschung/aktuelle-projekte/#c2020446>> (11/12/2025) and with the kind support by the Athens branch of the German Archaeological Institute (<<https://www.dainst.org/projekt/-/project-display/25884>> [02/07/2026]), the 14<sup>th</sup> Ephorate of Antiquities in Lamia, and the village of Kalapodi (Phthiotis, Lamia/Atalanti) in the κοινότητα of Kalapodi. Cf. von Miller 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Felsch et al. 1980; Felsch 1987; Felsch 1996; Felsch 2007; Niemeier 2016; Sporn 2016/2017; Niemeier 2017; Sporn 2019; Niemeier 2024; Sporn 2024a.

**Fabric distribution of vessel pottery from Early Iron Age contexts at Kalapodi  
excavation years 2004 - 2013, 2018  
n=7.844**



1

Fig. 1: Distribution of Early Iron Age fabrics, excavation years 2004–2013 and 2018

aeometric (i.e. petrographic and elemental) programme to be applied on the vast corpus of Early Iron Age fine ware pottery from Kalapodi.

3 The fabric classification progresses in tandem with the ongoing analysis of diagnostic pottery fragments. So far, it relies mainly on the Early Iron Age fine wares recovered during the excavation seasons in 2004–2013 and 2018 and is based on 321 reference pieces. These are currently buttressed by a total of 9700 vessels (Typological Number of Individuals/TNI<sup>3</sup>) that to date have been documented individually by catalogue, drawing and photograph during the study seasons in summer 2023, in spring and summer 2024, and in spring 2025 (Fig. 1)<sup>4</sup>. The catalogue of fabrics compiled in 2024 comprises 44 fabrics. Some are narrowly defined by very distinct macroscopic properties (e.g. EIA-fabrics 3b-2, 3b-3, 4, 6, 7, 8a, 8b, 9a, 9b, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 23, 23a), while the features of others are of a more general nature and will probably lead to a further separation into additional fabric groups (e.g. EIA-fabrics 1a, 2a, 2b, 11, 22a, 22b). Others again appear to be variations within supraordinate main fabric groups (e.g. EIA-fabrics 3a-1 and 3b-1, EIA-fabrics 3a-7 and 3b-3, EIA-fabrics 6 and 10). Finally, some fabrics (e.g. EIA-fabric 3a-1, 3a-8, 3b-1, 5, 15, 24) are currently subdivided into two or more subgroups, which differ slightly from one another by usually only one of the designated characteristics, e.g. by their colour. To give as complete an account as possible of the fine ware pottery range involved in Early Iron Age ritual activity on the site, fabrics of both imports and presumed local and/or regional provenance are taken into account. This approach pursues a threefold objective.

4 First, to pinpoint the archaeological and in a second step the compositional and technological characterisation of the local/regional pottery production, by tracing variations, peculiarities, and changes in Central Greek craftsmanship and its inspiration from afar. The results obtained will be compared with those from the ongoing investi-

3 Verdan 2011, 168.

4 Documentation work is supported significantly by Christina L. Kolb (Athens; drawings), and by the student assistants Marc Hutai (Tübingen; photographs 2023) and Susanne Lenkl (Tübingen; photographs 2024).

gations of Early Iron Age coarse wares from Kalapodi<sup>5</sup>, and of clay beds in the region of Phokis and East Lokris<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the fabric classification of the Protogeometric and Geometric vessel assemblage is an important step towards a better general understanding of the local/regional pottery production in ancient Phokis and East Lokris through time<sup>7</sup>. In this regard, fragments clearly dating to the Bronze Age (Late Helladic period/LH III) uncovered in Early Iron Age strata as well as vessels from ceramic lots indicating the transition to the Early Archaic period (EA) are incorporated as reference pieces. Even at this small-scale level, these vessels provide a first impression of overlapping technological continuities that put the traditional and periodically divided perception of Antiquity into a more nuanced perspective towards actual historical realities. Ultimately, this investigation will contribute to the identification and characterisation of production sites and/or workshops of the region.

5 Second, the integration of fabrics of certain or presumed foreign origin serves to better trace diachronic continuities and breaks in over-regional networks. In this respect, pottery is – regardless its shortcomings<sup>8</sup> – undisputedly still one of the most reliable material tools at hand. It not only reveals the actual circulation of goods, many of which otherwise often escape archaeological visibility due to their elusive nature, but it also provides an idea of the impact that – as can be seen in the case of imported vessel pottery – these goods had on local productions and styles, and of how local workshops integrated into over-regional stylistic phenomena in pottery production and consumption<sup>9</sup>.

6 Finally, the catalogue echoes the firm conviction that besides archaeometric data the macroscopic evaluation of fabrics offers indispensable information worth sharing. Just as shape and decoration typologies, fabric typologies are an equally important part of any pottery study and provide a no less valuable additional tool to be used during depot work and for the comparative investigation of pottery assemblages<sup>10</sup>. The description of wares and fabrics was introduced as a regular component in Early Iron Age pottery studies in the 1990s, and since then fabric analyses are incorporated in one way or the other into almost every study in the field<sup>11</sup>. Although commonly accepted as a first and necessary step to scientific analyses and thus applied to almost every analytical programme in ceramic studies, even if not always explicitly stated, the classification of macroscopic properties remains somewhat neglected when it comes to its adequate presentation and often comprises of only very general descriptions without suitable illustrations that would allow for any outside assessment of the material in question<sup>12</sup>. Where macroscopic properties are mentioned or referred to in addition

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5 The contemporary coarse wares are under investigation by K. Christodoulou in her PhD thesis at the National Kapodistrian University of Athens.

6 Grigoropoulos – Hein 2019; Grigoropoulos et al. 2024, 86 f. The residues of two kilns from a tile workshop at Kalapodi (Sporn 2016/2017, 217–224; cf. Sporn 2024b, 402 f.; Grigoropoulos 2024) have not been subjected to an analytical study, so far. Clay beds in the region have been analysed with Neutron Activation Analysis (NAA) only recently, cf. Gimatzidis 2024a, 20.

7 Fabric analyses have been a focus in the study of Mycenaean, Roman and Late Antique pottery from Kalapodi; Jones 1996; Grigoropoulos – Hein 2019; cf. Grigoropoulos et al. 2024. The Early Iron Age pottery has so far been described in rather general terms; Nitsche 1987, 37; Jacob-Felsch 1996, 15–17; Kaiser et al. 2011, 30 footnote 5; Luce 2024, 110. As to recent archaeometric studies (NAA) on pottery from Central Greek sites cf. Gimatzidis 2024a, 34 f.

8 Papadopoulos 1997, 198 f.; Papadopoulos 2022, 143; Gimatzidis 2024a, 15.

9 Cf. Kourou 1998, 175; Lemos 2014, 48; Morris 2022, 124. For a recent archaeometric study concerned with these issues in the Early Iron Age see Gimatzidis 2024a.

10 Gimatzidis 2024b, 328.

11 E.g. Catling – Lemos 1990, 9–11; Catling 1998, 366–368; Luce 2008, 129; Verdan et al. 2008, 23–26; Vacek 2012, Appendix B 4–8. Also see Gimatzidis 2010, 88–90 for a critical analysis. Cf. Gauß – Ruppenstein 2020, 434 f.; Gimatzidis 2024a, 15; Kerschner 2024, 382 f.

12 E.g. Aloupi – Kourou 2007; Kerschner – Lemos 2014; Charalambidou et al. 2016; Kordatzaki et al. 2016; Charalambidou et al. 2017; Charalambidou et al. 2018, 985 Tab. 1; Kerschner 2024.

to archaeometric data, they are hardly ever shown<sup>13</sup>. Even exemplary holistic studies with an emphasized interest in macroscopic pottery classification often surprisingly fail to provide an adequate illustration to clarify the systematic description<sup>14</sup>. It is against this background that the present illustrated catalogue of fabrics is meant to meet what during the process of pottery classification at Kalapodi was experienced a desideratum in Greek Early Iron Age pottery studies.

7 The catalogue of macroscopically classified fabrics of Early Iron Age fine ware pottery at Kalapodi marks the first, albeit fundamental step on the path towards the research goals outlined above. Despite its preliminary nature, the collection of reference pieces has proven to be an indispensable, and in fact very representative and reliable tool to be used – and occasionally adjusted – for fabric identification throughout the process of pottery documentation. Not only can almost every vessel be assigned to a fabric, but in most cases it also can be correlated to a specific reference piece. This approach facilitates any corrections that will be necessary for further adjustments to the fabrics' classification. The continuous – and continuing – process is reflected in the currently provisional numerical labelling of the individual EIA-fabrics. Once archaeometric data are integrated to verify and/or further distinguish the current macroscopic definition of fabrics, the blanks contained within the catalogue today will be filled in and a more systemised designation will be taken into consideration<sup>15</sup>. At its present stage, the fabrics' catalogue can be regarded as a preliminary, albeit no less representative, interim result of the documentation works undertaken as part of the ongoing study of the Proto-geometric and Geometric fine wares from Kalapodi since 2023.

## Methodology

8 The present classification of fine ware fabrics from Kalapodi relies on the macroscopic examination of individual pottery sherds. It follows a two-step approach in which the primary characteristics that identify each of the EIA-fabrics are supplemented by secondary observations. The primary characteristics comprise the set of properties that are essential for assigning a fragment to a fabric. The secondary characteristics, on the other hand, are meant to record the framework of additional technological criteria that are gathered within the assemblage of each fabric. The methodological approach to macroscopic pottery classification therefore distinguishes strictly between fabric (i.e. the primary characteristics) and ware (i.e. the secondary characteristics).

9 The primary characteristics of each EIA-fabric are established by the visual examination and description of the clay biscuit of fresh breaks with the naked eye and the aid of a ×10 hand lens under depot conditions. They consist of the colour and hardness of the sherd, the texture of the clay matrix, and the assortment and distribution of inclusions<sup>16</sup>. The description of colour of both break and surface relies on the Munsell Soil Color Charts (2009 revised, 2021) and rather than a single value it usually records a variable range of colour shades that can be observed within the material body of a fabric. Both the numerical codes (hue and values) and colour (chroma) are indicated. Sherd colour is used to identify whether a vessel underwent an oxidising or reducing firing

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13 Exceptions to this trend are e.g. an integrated study of Early Iron Age pottery from Thronos Kephala, Crete, by d'Agata – Boileau 2009 or a recent study concerned with the macroscopic appearance of Euboean fabrics by Whitbread 2014; cf. databases like FACEM <<https://facem.at/>> (11/12/2025) or The Levantine Ceramics Project <<https://www.levantineceramics.org/>> (11/12/2025).

14 E.g. Jacob-Felsch 1996, 106–120; Jung 2002, 42–64; Papadopoulos 2005, 519–524; Blanas 2006, 46–73; Gimatzidis 2010, 88–108. An exception is the study of Sieverling 2018, 137–155 pl. 47–49.

15 In the best-case scenario, an integrative system of labelling that is open to fabrics from different time periods and ceramic classes from Kalapodi will be achieved.

16 Orton – Hughes 2013, 71. 155–160.

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process<sup>17</sup>. The hardness of the sherd is determined as recommended by the »Projektgruppe Keramik des Arbeitskreises Archäometrie der Fachgruppe Analytische Chemie der Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker«<sup>18</sup>. Most of the Protogeometric and Geometric fine wares from Kalapodi have a rating of »hard«, a few rate as »very hard«, which means that the sherd can be scratched more or less easily by a sharp blade<sup>19</sup>. The texture of the clay matrix describes the general visual appearance of the fresh break, its fracture, and porosity<sup>20</sup>; the record of these features follows a descriptive approach. The pottery assemblage under investigation can be subdivided into very fine, fine, and semi-fine fabrics, though distinctions are sometimes fluid; coarser fabrics (EIA-fabrics 8a, 17, 18, 19b) are restricted to a very small number of vessels and obviously were not commonly applied on painted fine ware production. The clay biscuit of the very fine fabrics is dense or very finely porous (i.e. no pores are visible with the naked eye) and smooth, very fine-grained or slightly slaty, while the fine fabrics are finely porous (i.e. only few pores visible with the naked eye), fine-grained and sometimes slightly slaty. The semi-fine fabrics have a finely porous and gritty matrix. In some of the EIA-fabrics (EIA-fabrics 1a, 1b, 6, 6a, 10, 21) the clay biscuit is densely interspersed with small white and occasionally hollow particles of rounded shape, which are the most characteristic feature of these fabrics. These »carbonate pseudomorphoses« are considered an inherent part of the fabrics' matrix. Other inclusions are listed separately in a descriptive manner focusing on colour, frequency, size, and shape; sorting of inclusions has proven to be a less useful criterion, since to a considerable part of the highly fragmentary material, which could not provide adequately sizeable fresh breaks, it was not applicable in an adequate way and could therefore not be used for fabric assignment on a regular basis. A terminological distinction was made between »inclusions« – clayey nodules of ovoid or elongated shape and various (yellowish, brownish or reddish) colour embedded in the clay biscuit – and »particles/grits« – actual mineral particles. A clear distinction between natural inclusions of the raw clay material and added tempers is usually not possible on macroscopic grounds.

<sup>10</sup> The secondary characteristics of each EIA-fabric take the colour of surface (see above), surface treatment, and forming techniques – wheel- or handmade – as additional technological aspects into account<sup>21</sup>. Unsurprisingly, the wheel-made vessels comprise by far the largest part of the material under investigation. Handmade specimens appear only sporadically and are restricted to very specific types of vessels (e.g. kantharoi of Red Slip Ware<sup>22</sup>, burnished aryballoi with applied mastoi, small closed shapes with incised decoration<sup>23</sup>). The surface treatment of Early Iron Age fine ware pottery from Kalapodi yields a variety of different scales of smoothing that in the catalogue are classified as »rough« (i.e. a wiped surface with a rough touch), »smooth« (i.e. an evenly polished surface, frequently with a shiny self-slip), or »burnished« (i.e. an unevenly polished and shiny surface with tool marks)<sup>24</sup>. The sometimes rather poor state of surface preservation does not always allow for safely verifying the occurrence of a self-slip. Self-slipped surfaces can occasionally have a very particular dull and soapy touch, which proved to be a preferred feature amongst specific EIA-fabrics (EIA-fabrics 5, 13, 14, 15). Most surfaces are painted solid monochrome or ornamental, specimens

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<sup>17</sup> Orton – Hughes 2013, 151–154.

<sup>18</sup> Schneider 1989, 11.

<sup>19</sup> The hardness of the material is therefore comparable with the points 3–6 in the Mohs scale of hardness; cf. Schneider 1989, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Schneider 1989, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Orton – Hughes 2013, 125–134.

<sup>22</sup> Desborough 1980, 346 f. fig. 21 I; Lemos 2002, 94; Papadopoulos 2005, 482. 484 f.

<sup>23</sup> Lemos 2002, 94–96; Papadopoulos – Smithson 2017, 863–875.

<sup>24</sup> Schneider 1989, 13.

whose surface is covered with a creamy slip<sup>25</sup> are rare. In contrast to the aforementioned primary characteristics, these secondary features are not inherent to the definition of fabrics but rather demonstrate the range of wares and pottery classes that are related to each fabric. As is shown in the catalogue, a fabric can comprise different types of ceramic wares and typological pottery classes, while ceramic wares and typological pottery classes are usually spread across more than only one fabric<sup>26</sup>.

## Data Quality and Uncertainty

11 To a certain degree, the classification of fabrics is subject to a set of environmental factors that affect its representativeness. These factors are partly inherent to the work process applied when collecting macroscopic data whose quality is highly dependent on the coherence of visual observations and their description. The fabric classification was carried out under depot condition and is therefore affected by changing light conditions that can impair the reading of colours and inclusions. For instance, the distinction of silver and gold mica in the matrix proved to be difficult on rainy or cloudy days when depending on artificial light only. The choice to use a  $\times 10$  hand lens instead of a microscope to support the material examination imposes limits to the taxonomy<sup>27</sup>, but guarantees a general comparability with macroscopic pottery descriptions in scholarly literature, and permits the reading of the total number of 16 000 diagnostics<sup>28</sup> relevant to the study within a reasonable time. A certain amount of the highly fragmentary pottery sherds in the assemblage allows only small fresh breaks to be made and used for fabric assignments which affects the comparability with the well-defined reference pieces. Finally, the development of a fabric typology that evolves in tandem with pottery documentation is in the best of cases subject to a process of increasing experience and understanding of the repertoire under investigation. Growing acquaintance had a positive effect on the taxonomy but also led to refinements that occasionally demanded for a review of designations. Because the human eye is an imperfect and limited instrument, macroscopic fabric classifications to some extent have a rather bad reputation as a highly error-prone method. This notion is justified when studies focusing on provenance issues rely on macroscopic examination alone. However, macroscopic fabric classifications constitute an important if not necessary part in integrated approaches to holistic studies of large pottery assemblages<sup>29</sup> where the sheer quantity of the material under investigation calls for feasible solutions in the processing of finds.

## Structure of the Catalogue

12 The catalogue merges the macroscopic fabric classification (see above) with archaeological observations. It follows the present numerical labelling of EIA-fabrics from Kalapodi and begins with a list of reference pieces, sometimes subdivided into subgroups, which is followed by the description of the primary and secondary characteristics of each fabric. A short comment makes note of visual similarities and hence possible relations between different fabrics. Each catalogue entry is complemented by

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25 Cf. Aloupi – Kourou 2007.

26 Cf. Gimatzidis 2010, 92 f.

27 Gimatzidis 2010, 89.

28 Verdan 2011, 168.

29 Gimatzidis 2024b, 328.

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an overview of the repertoire of shapes and decoration types<sup>30</sup> as well as of special features (graffiti, impressed marks, production defects, traces of modification, repair or secondary use, ceramic objects other than vessel pottery) in the assemblage that have been documented so far, and which apprise the chronological and to a lesser extent geographical assessment of the fabric. Also, if applicable, the catalogue entry gives reference to specific fabrics, pottery wares or pottery classes which can be identified with the present EIA-fabrics on safe grounds. The catalogue entries close with a brief commentary on general observations and specific details which differentiate between presumed local or regional and import productions and sometimes suggests a possible region or place of provenance. Since pottery documentation is still in progress, and further analytical study is required, at the present stage these comments are not more than preliminary thoughts based on macroscopic and archaeological observations<sup>31</sup>.

13 Each catalogue entry is illustrated by close-up photographs of the reference pieces' fresh breaks taken with a digital SLR camera using a macro lens and with a digital USB microscope.

14 All fragments included to the catalogue are presently stored in the excavation depot at Kalapodi.

## Dataset Description

- Object name: Kalapodi\_catalogue of Early Iron Age fine ware fabrics
- Data type: primary data, interpretation of data
- Format names and versions: csv, tiff
- Creation dates: August 2023 – June 2025
- Dataset Creators: Alexandra Ch. J. von Miller
- Languages: English
- License: CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)
- Repository location: <https://doi.org/10.34780/wsps2qgm>
- Repository name: iDAI.repo
- Publication date: 05.05.2026



## Ethical Considerations

15 None

## Reuse Potential

16 Further analysis

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30 Abbreviations used in the catalogue: CC: concentric circles; PSC: pendant semi-circles; SSC: standing semi-circles.

31 Information regarding other ceramic groups is owed to Annika Busching (Berlin/Athens; roof tiles) and Dimitris Grigoropoulos (Athens; pottery of the Imperial period).

## Acknowledgements

<sup>17</sup> I thankfully acknowledge the support of the Athens branch of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), of the 14<sup>th</sup> Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Lamia, and of the Institute of Classical Archaeology of Tübingen University. In addition, I would like to thank Anno Hein and Kyriaki Christodoulou (National Centre of Scientific Research DEMOKRITOS, Athens) for working with me on the development of the study of fabrics and for taking responsibility for the scientific analyses to come. Information regarding other ceramic groups is owed to Annika Busching (Berlin/Athens; roof tiles) and Dimitris Grigoropoulos (DAI Athens; pottery of the Imperial period). To my illustrator Christina L. Kolb (Athens) I am indebted for her invaluable contribution to the documentation process. Finally, the study benefits in many respects from the welcoming attitude we have experienced during our long depot seasons at the village of Kalapodi.

## Funding Statement

<sup>18</sup> The overarching project »Die protogeometrische und geometrische Feinkeramik aus dem Heiligtum von Kalapodi: Chronologie, Ritualcharakter und Konnektivität eines früheisenzeitlichen Kultplatzes in Phokis« is funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG; project-no. 508182668).

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## METADATA

*Title/Title:* Macroscopic Investigation of Early Iron Age Fine Ware Fabrics from Kalapodi. Pottery Research in Kalapodi, Seasons 2024 and 2025

*Band/Issue:* 2025/2

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34780/end15p89>