

Everyday objects

Introduction

The identification of what constituted ‘everyday’ objects for people in the classical world is not at all self-evident from our distant perspective. We might start with the idea that ‘everyday objects’ were those which were so deeply embedded in daily routines and activities that they became simultaneously indispensable and overlooked, like pens, dishcloths and toothbrushes are for us or rags, knives and nails were in the ancient past; essentially becoming ephemeral, material manifestations of habitus. Hence, they are surprisingly hard to find in our sources. They rarely feature prominently in texts precisely because they were largely unremarkable and the best we can usually hope for are a few off-hand references. In visual and iconographic sources they sometimes helpfully appear, but often, literally, as part of the background. Although some survive as archaeological artefacts, for many reasons I will explore below, even more probably do not, and this skews our perspective on what the ‘everyday’ looked and felt like.

This fleeting, ungraspable quality of everyday objects is made more complicated by the fact that what constituted an assemblage of everyday things was different for different people. Beyond temporal and spatial variations, what things were inextricably entwined with people’s daily lives depended on a range of social factors, especially wealth and status. Hence, objects like painted fineware pottery or silver drinking vessels in antiquity, or designer-brand clothing for us today, that might be ‘everyday’ for some people were not for others, and some people certainly filled their lives with many more ‘everyday’ objects than others. Crudely, it is probable that the majority of people in the ancient world engaged with relatively few everyday objects on a day-to-day basis, while the bulk of the actual objects that we can identify as ‘everyday’ in our evidence were associated most closely with a small, relatively elite sector of the population. However, not all objects which a person might encounter daily necessarily belonged to them or were in some sense directly under their authority. For example, personal slaves regularly handled objects such as fine textiles or silver cups that were ‘everyday’ to their elite owners who used them regularly. But, but these objects played a very different role in the lives of slaves who did not use them personally but instead engaged with them on their owner’s behalf.

Further, some ‘everyday’ objects and the frequency with which they were regularly used (or consumed) varied specifically with, and were indicators of, gender, class, occupation, group identities, age and other aspects of an individual’s social persona that were entangled with, but also reaching beyond, wealth and status. In effect, this means that the assemblage of the ‘everyday’ was different for every individual, and varied over time – over the course of a day, seasonally, and through a person’s life cycle, but while also adapting to collectively changing habits and fashions. Potentially this raises interesting issues around how ‘everyday’ a specific kind of object such as a ceramic vessel might have been for any particular person or type of person, since, though individuality and idiosyncrasy occasionally shine through in our evidence, as archaeologists and historians of the classical world, we are better at identifying types of people than individuals. Moreover, the everyday meanings, values and users of an object might change over the life cycle of the object ([see below, p. xx](#)).

Texts, visual representations, impressions in other materials, and occasional rare finds, reveal many kinds of everyday objects that do not generally survive to be recovered as archaeological artefacts. The

bulk of these were items made in perishable materials, including string, textiles, basketry (see [fig. 4](#)), wood, leather, or which were consumed through use, for example, perfume or make-up. Such items are found reasonably intact only where unusual environmental conditions enhance preservation, such as in waterlogged deposits from shipwrecks or desiccated contexts in Egypt. This is not surprising since, even in our own world of non-degrading plastic, many quotidian items remain perishable. Pottery, of course, survives in abundance, but the disappearance of most of the perishable (or other rarely recovered) items with which pots were used can easily deceive us into overestimating its 'everyday' importance in relation to other kinds of objects. Moreover, 'natural' items such as handy sticks, stones, stumps or trees, appropriated to serve a specific purpose but generic in their morphology, especially when we do not know the use context, can be difficult to recognise as 'everyday' objects in the archaeological record, even when we find them. Such objects might not even have a particular owner, but simply be left available for any user, such as canes for knocking fruit or nuts off trees ([Foxhall 2007: 128, fig. 5.5](#)), a [handy stick for carrying things](#) ([fig. 4](#)), or a rope and bucket at a well, or a rock for holding a gate shut.

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Valuing everyday objects

For interpreting objects as 'everyday' in archaeological contexts, especially settlements and houses, it is critical to consider how people in the past valued them. We value objects for many reasons. Sometimes their economic and/or prestige worth is the key to why we consider them precious. But 'everyday' objects that are comfortable, familiar, have critical practical or sentimental value, or are in some other way so much a part of our lives that we feel we could not possibly do without them, may be treasured just as much even if they are not prestigious or costly.

The substantial number of excavated Greek houses dating to the fifth-fourth centuries BC at the sites of Olynthos (over 100) and Halieis (about 25 houses in part, with five fully excavated), where assemblages of artefactual material can be associated with individual buildings, enables us to compare what we know from visual and written sources about how domestic objects were used with what we find and do not find left behind in houses. For example, Nevett (1999: 43-50) presents a useful analysis of objects depicted with people on a sample of 600 Attic red-figured vases. Items regularly depicted with women include: chairs, stools, footstools, mirrors, small chests, wool baskets, small containers including alabastra and lekythoi, and various cushions, clothing and textiles. Men appear in both gymnastic and bathing scenes with aryballoi and strigils. Symposiastic vases often show a range of dining and drinking vessels both in use and hanging on the walls, and furniture (couches and tables) with textiles and cushions.

Olynthos is interesting, because while the data set is not perfect for a number of reasons, we do know that most inhabitants left over a fairly short period at the time of the invasion and capture of the city by Philip of Macedon in 348 BC (Nevett 1999: 57-9; Cahill 2002: 24-5). For the Roman world, some of the less disturbed houses in Pompeii similarly provide important information about the choices people made to take things or leave them behind at the time of the eruption in AD 79. Allison's (2006) study of the household assemblages associated with individual houses in the insula of the House of Menander provide a useful body of data which is roughly comparable to the Greek assemblages at Olynthos and Halieis. The data for five sample houses are summarised here in [Table 1](#). However, the houses of

Pompeii, like many houses in Roman Italy, were occupied for much longer than the earlier Greek houses of Olynthos and Halieis, so that it can be difficult to ascertain when or for how long over the lifetime of a house an object was in use. Also, the extraordinary circumstances of Pompeii's abandonment may sometimes have distorted the choices about objects that people made. Hence, we must interpret this material with caution.

The processes of abandonment of these sites enable us to gain insight into the range of relationships which people had to different elements of portable material culture and everyday things. In these archaeological contexts, the most valued 'everyday' things were generally *not* ones that people disposed of or left behind, so frequently we do not find them, or we do not find them in the numbers that we might expect they were used. This is supported by texts such as the so-called Attic Stelae, an official Athenian inventory of items confiscated from the houses of prominent Athenians prosecuted in 415 BC and auctioned by the state. Here too, it appears that many valuable items had already been removed or disposed of by their owners and other parties before the magistrates arrived to sell the property (Lewis 1997: 65-7). At Olynthos and Pompeii, abandoned in the face of impending disaster, it is probable that the inhabitants took with them things they felt to be most essential. Once a house is abandoned, anything left falls victim to looters. So, with some important exceptions, archaeologists usually only find the things that people considered least important. The logical corollary is that what we *do not* find, especially if it was not economically valuable, is potentially a good indication of what was most meaningful and/or essential – the items that people thought of as 'everyday' objects.

However, there are complications (for Olynthos, see Cahill 2002: 48-61, 67-70). Additional unwanted refuse and trash from elsewhere was often dumped on abandoned house sites. Sometimes settlements were partially reoccupied shortly after large scale abandonment (this happened at Olynthos to some extent). Squatters may also occupy abandoned houses, or buildings that were once houses may be reused for non-domestic purposes. Objects deposited in such post-occupation phases are not always very easy to distinguish from those which were part of the use-life of a house.

Among the objects associated with the use-life of a house, it is unlikely that many obviously costly items such as metal vessels would remain, since those would have been taken or looted. We cannot always guess what perishable objects might have been left behind. We might expect some (though not necessarily all) clothing and household textiles to have been taken, since they were economically valuable and sometimes meaningful. Some items that might have been taken in their whole state, may well have been left behind if broken or incomplete. The effect is that such objects appear occasionally in house assemblages, but not as often as their widespread and regular use would lead us to expect. Some items may have been left because they were either too heavy, awkward or fragile to transport.

The objects we might expect to have been used but do not find fall into two main categories: tools and personal items. Iron and bronze tools, including knives, are rare in Greek house assemblages and less common than might be expected at Pompeii. In the five sample Pompeian household assemblages in [table 1](#), no house has a large number of knives, a small and general tool with a wide range of uses that people would [surely](#) be inclined to take on departure (the largest number is 10 in House I 10, 7). However, two houses (I 10, 4 and I 10, 7) have substantial numbers of specialist carpentry and

agricultural tools that were left behind. At Halieis, a cleaver, a shovel, a pruning knife, two spear heads, a few knife blades and sickle blades are all that appear.

At Olynthos, a range of blades and tools appear as one-offs or in small numbers, but they are relatively rare across the site. The Attic Stelae (IG I³ 422.116-165; 425.4-14; Foxhall 2007: 204-11), show that agricultural and other kinds of tools, sometimes in multiples, were important components of classical Greek household equipment, though these texts suggest that many tools were kept in storage buildings out in the fields, not in domestic houses. This might partially explain their absence in house assemblages, especially in cities. Tools have both economic and practical value, but individuals may also become fond of a particular tool, or attribute sentimental value to it.

Loom weights and spindle whorls, weaving tools used in textile manufacture largely by women, appear in numbers lower than might be expected. Virtually no Greek houses have enough loom weights to operate a warp weighted loom. Most of the loom weights found at Olynthos where they appear to be more or less in primary contexts, seems to have been stored rather than in use on a loom (see Cahill 2002: 171-9, though here the number of weights need for a loom is underestimated, and many of the so-called 'weaving rooms' are storage areas, cf. Foxhall 2011). The five fully-excavated Halieis houses contained between 8 and 25 loom weights, mostly deposited in ones and twos (Ault: 1994: 244). Similarly, in the five sample Pompeian houses in table 1, loom weights and spindles appear only in tiny numbers. I have argued elsewhere (Foxhall 2011, 2012, 2017) that we rarely find the large caches of loom weights and other weaving tools we might expect, because women valued them, even though they were not inherently valuable, and when they abandoned a house they took most of them away.

Personal items are rare in Greek houses, but are somewhat more common at Pompeii where the scale and speed of abandonment was probably much greater (table 1). Some of these may have served medical as well as cosmetic functions, as in House I 10, 7. At Olynthos, several types of small bottles suitable for perfumed oil (guttae, small lekythoi, alabastra) regularly appear, but in contrast, only three turn up in Halieis (miniature lekythos: House 7-HP2686; squat lekythoi: House A-HP2987, House D-HP2587). Items related to personal body care, such as toilet sets, tweezers, ear spoons and cosmetic spatula, do not appear in any Halieis house. At Olynthos cosmetic spatulae are found in small numbers. Sixteen were inventoried, and the eight with a known provenance all come from houses; none appear in graves (Robinson 1941: 352-4). Similarly with tweezers and ear spoons: the seven catalogued examples of tweezers (Robinson 1941: 355-6), and the eight catalogued examples of ear spoons (Robinson 1941: 354-5) were all from houses or streets, not graves.

In contrast, the pattern with strigils and razors, implements that must have been regularly used in domestic setting on an everyday basis, is completely different. These items are rare in houses, even in Pompeii (see table 1). At Halieis two strigils (HM1364, HM1189), one fragmentary, and a razor (HM1377) were found, all in House D. At Olynthos, no razors were recovered. Of the 53 inventoried strigils, only two were found in houses (no. 522 strigil fragment, House A-1; no. 544 strigil House A vii 2, room a (Robinson 1941: 175, 178). The rest had been deposited in graves, both male and female, and occasionally in children's graves (Robinson 1941: 172). Grave 264 is a good example of a female grave containing both a strigil and a loom weight (the latter are quite rare in graves). Strigils are most often associated with men in Athenian visual sources, particularly in the context of the gymnasium and

athletics (Nevett 1999:45), but their use was clearly not restricted to men. Razors too could have been used by both men and women.

Ten bronze mirrors were inventoried from Olynthos, but more may have been found. Mirrors or fragments of them appear occasionally in houses at Olynthos (though there are only two for certain, e.g. no. 512, House A iv 9, room g). More often they appear in female graves. (Cahill 2002: 112; Robinson 1941: 163, 171). They are absent from Halieis (there is one fragment of a bronze disc that could by a stretch of the imagination be part of a mirror, but this is not certain (House A-HM1200). Only one appears in the sample Pompeian houses in [table 1](#). These certainly seem to have been personally and economically valuable enough to take away.

In the sample Pompeian house assemblages in [tables 1 and 2](#) it is clear that some of the jewellery found was being worn or was dropped by people attempting to escape. Only two houses have substantial amounts of jewellery, but these provide interesting examples of collections of jewellery that were left behind: a cask stored in a chest in Houses I 10, 4 contained 26 pieces of gold jewellery ([table 2](#)) and three pieces of gold jewellery were found together stored in a cupboard in House I 10, 7. One actual stamp seal with a name on a ring was found, and a several of the bronze and gold rings bore incised images that could have been used as stamp seals.

Bronze jewellery, including fibulae, earrings, pendants, bracelets and rings, and beads in various materials, appears in small quantities in both the Halieis and Olynthos houses. Most of the jewellery found was not costly and items like single earrings or the occasional bracelet might simply have been lost. 23 single earrings or bits of them, were found in and around houses in the North Hill and Villa sections of the city, while 32 earrings (including 13 pairs) were deposited in graves. Interestingly, they turn up only in children's graves positioned just above the shoulders, suggesting they were worn (the excavators assumed these were girls' graves, Robinson 1941: 93-4).

Although there is extensive textual and archaeological evidence for the widespread use of personal stamp seals (Richter 1968: 149; Boardman 2001: 236) which, in the form of bronze rings were not necessarily particularly expensive items of jewellery, comparatively few stamp seals, or rings with stamp seals or engraved as stamps, have been found in houses. At Olynthos only four stamps or seals were discovered, and the only one with a provenance was from House A v 9 room e (Robinson 1941: 347). Engraved finger rings made as stamp seals were more common. These were almost all bronze with only three examples in silver. At least 30 were found in houses or streets, but at least 58 rings came from graves (Robinson 1941: 132-33), though it is not clear that all of these were seal rings. Presumably because these were associated with personal, or even formal, identities (as suggested by their regular deposition in graves), they are not common in house assemblages because inhabitants must usually have taken them away. When found in graves they were always on the left side of the body and in cases when they were still on the body, they were on the third finger of the left hand. In one fourth-century grave, the seal ring dates to the before the 430s, suggesting that it was an heirloom (Riverside cemetery, grave 4, no 468: Robinson 1942: 2; Robinson 1941: 146).

At Halieis, although many other oddments of bronze jewellery appear in houses, seals of any kind are rare. One bronze seal ring was found in House A (HM1360). A circular bronze stamp appears in House E (HC815) and a cylinder seal in House D (HS 517) (Ault 1994:303).

Some categories of objects seem to be regularly left behind when houses were vacated. The first is furniture, for which there is much indirect evidence in both Greek and Roman houses; this is discussed in more detail below (p. xx). Perhaps less portable, it was often clearly considered less essential than other kinds of items when people departed under duress.

The second category consists of terracotta figurines, protomes and decorative plaques and the third is miniature vases. At Olynthos two or more terracotta figurines, protomes or plaques appear regularly in houses, and a few houses have substantial numbers (Robinson and Graham 1938: 348; e.g., Cahill 202: 85, 95, 104-6, 111, 120, 123-4). Similarly miniature pottery is surprisingly common; mostly it appears in one and twos, but in a few cases miniature 'sets' are found. Cahill (2002: 92, 140-1) has interpreted these objects as ritual, but if that were the case one might expect that these would be more valued as meaningful personal or household items, which would then have been removed on abandonment. Figurines and miniature vessels appear regularly in the Halieis houses as well, but in much smaller numbers, and at least one figurine was bronze.

Leaving behind portable stone altars or louteria makes more sense as these are heavy and not easily transported, but if figurines and similar decorative items were profoundly meaningful to their owners, ritually or in any other way why were they not taken when the owners left? Perhaps this pattern suggests that their purpose was largely decorative (and that aesthetic value was less important than other considerations of value when abandoning a house), or that they had some other, non-ritual, function, for examples as toys.

Indeed, portable objects that are unambiguously ritual or 'magical' are largely absent from Greek household assemblages. At Olynthos, two beads in the form of grotesque heads found in the House of the Comedian have been interpreted as possible amulets, but this is not certain (Cahill 2002: 140). Magical objects such as curse tablets that turn up in houses and other buildings mostly seem to have been deposited after they have been abandoned (e.g., Young 1951: 222-3; Rotroff and Ntinou 2013: 82-3; cf. Jordon and Rotroff 1999). However, in fourth and third-century BC Athens, a much-discussed group of sacrificial deposits in houses and buildings, some clearly associated with the presence of craft activities, documents rituals involving animal sacrifice practised both during periods of occupation and occasionally after abandonment. Rotroff has persuasively argued that these were associated with the protection of workers from misfortune or injury and or purification rituals in relation to industrial accidents (Rotroff and Ntinou 2013: 75-85).

The following sections of this chapter will explore in more depth specific functional categories of objects that, in one way or another, people from all walks of life and in all periods must have encountered on a daily basis. The aim is to investigate how and by whom these objects were used, and how the objects themselves and their use might vary in different social, temporal and regional contexts.

Fire

Whatever their position in society, everyone encountered fire in some way on an everyday basis. However, to be useful for heat, light and cooking fire must be domesticated and its use mediated through objects in culturally specific ways. Both wood and charcoal were burned in houses, though they

latter was more expensive and probably more commonly used in urban settings. Although wood produces more smoke, charcoal produces carbon monoxide that could potentially have been an issue in poorly ventilated spaces. Fixed hearths are comparatively rare in Greek houses of the classical and hellenistic periods; there are only seven at Olynthos, one among the houses excavated in proximity to the Athenian Agora (Tsakirgis 2007: 226) and three at Halieis (Ault 2005: 55, n.151). When they appear, it is sometimes in courtyards, as at Kolophon (Holland 1944: 124; cf. Tsakirgis 2007: 226), not in rooms, suggesting their main practical function was as summer-time cooking places.

For heating and cooking, small portable charcoal-burning braziers and similar cooking devices were probably much more common, and were moved around the house as needed with the changing seasons. There were low and generally seem to have been used set on the ground (the significance of this is considered below). However, they are almost never found in their original use contexts in houses. Those we know are almost all ceramic, although it is likely that some metal braziers were used but have not survived. A rare example in bronze from Olynthos (Robinson 1941: 182) was found buried in a corner of a room before the house was abandoned, suggesting that the owner valued it and hoped to return to retrieve it. In classical Athens, 11 of the contexts where braziers were found are wells, which were commonly used as trash dumps when they had dried up, and five are other kinds of fill deposits, mostly associated with building or renovation. The majority of ceramic braziers from Athens were recovered from wells, where they had been tipped after they had been broken and discarded and were no longer in use (Tsakirgis 2007: 228). Of the 16 firmly contextualised deposits in which braziers and similar cooking devices were found in the area around the Athenian Agora, only one is in a house (House K: Young 1951: 244-5; Sparkes and Talcott 1970: 378, 386; table 3). The fragmentary condition of the two braziers found there suggest they are unlikely to have been in the original place where they were used (in a marble workshop). Rather, they were probably part of the fill of trash and marble chippings deposited on the floor when the building changed use in the mid-fourth century.

The patterns of use, find spots and disposal of braziers suggest that people usually removed them when a house was vacated or abandoned unless they were broken or non-functional. It appears that even ceramic braziers were valued, though they were not particularly costly – their owners' attachment to them may well have gone beyond their purely practical function. In Greek culture, the symbolic concept of the hearth (regardless of their physical absence in most houses), was embodied in the name of the goddess of the hearth, Hestia, and was a central element of domestic religious practice (Vernant 1983: 147). The rituals performed at the 'hearth' were specifically associated with the life-cycle of the household and its changing membership. They included the acceptance into the household of a new-born child or a new slave, and elements of wedding ritual focused on the hearths of both the bride's and the groom's houses (Tsakirgis 2007: 230). If, in practice, braziers served as 'the hearth' in both practical and symbolic terms for most classical Greek households, this could have provided an added impetus not to leave them behind. Though the ceramic brazier was among the most banal of everyday objects, it offers a good example of how the ordinary and the religious can become entwined. A house cannot function properly without warmth and cooking, thus it seems fitting that the rituals which attempted to ensure the smooth functioning of the household over time should be focused on this humble object.

In the elite houses of Roman Pompeii (like many other Roman houses), there were specialised 'kitchens' with a fixed cooking platform or hearth, in the form of a substantial rectangular bench. In Allison's (2004: 30, 99) study of 30 houses, 44 kitchen areas were identified. Some of the most opulent houses had more than one hearth, suggesting that they might be used for cooking for different groups of people or at different times of year (for example in the case of hearths located in porticos, as in the Casa del Fabbro, portico 10). Iron braziers also appear in houses and garden areas, which Allison (2004: 102) suggests were used for different types of cooking than the hearths. Such a plethora of kitchens with large fixed hearths and cooking devices also suggests that they might serve as a way of displaying the conspicuous consumption of fuel in wealthy households. While 'kitchen' areas and hearths were occasionally situated in proximity to images or shrines of household gods (for example in House I 10, 18, room 9 where there is a Lararium painting on one wall of a room with a hearth, Allison 2006: 369-70), this is not always the case.

Lamps and lighting

The regular presence of lamps, (generally only one or two) in Pompeian kitchens (Allison 2006: 63, 86-7) is an interesting reminder of how difficult it was to cook at night: a good bed of hot coals gives off very little light, and handling pots of boiling liquid in the dark is lethally dangerous. It seems most likely that in Greek and Roman houses of all periods, most major activities, including cooking operations, were carried out in daylight.

Oil lamps in ceramic and metal and other lighting devices such as torches and lanterns were ubiquitous everyday objects because they were necessary for any movement or activity, however minimal, at night or in dark spaces. Although there are visual representations of torches, and we know something of how and when they were used from texts, our knowledge of the extent of their use is limited. There is much more that we know about lamps and their uses. Greek and Roman ceramic oil lamps produced remarkably little light, about the equivalent of a single candle for a normal, single-spouted lamp or 1 lumen (Griffiths 2016: 168). By comparison a dim modern electric lightbulb of the equivalent of 25 watts produces 200 lumens; a 40 watt-equivalent light bulb produces 400 lumens. Most modern kitchens have far more than one low-powered lightbulb. Indeed, except for dining and entertaining by elites and some religious rituals, most people did not do a great deal in the dark most of the time because artificial lighting was inadequate, and for many, too expensive.

Although lamps are regularly found in Greek and Roman houses, there are fewer than one might expect, and the find spots are significant since they suggest that generally the lamps we recover were not in use at the time of abandonment. In the Greek urban houses at Olynthos, ceramic lamps turn up in small numbers in cooking and storage areas (including in the pastas, a roofed area in the courtyard) and occasionally in a dining room (Robinson and Graham 1938: 347). Of the 41 houses in which lamps were found, over half of them (23) had one to three lamps (Robinson and Graham 1938: 347). Only two houses had over 8 lamps, both of which seem to have served as commercial premises: A iv 9 (16 lamps), includes three shops (Robinson and Graham 1938: 85-8; Cahill 2002: 108-13) and A v 7 (20 lamps), consisting of irregular rooms off a large courtyard where a substantial number of coins (61) were found (Robinson and Graham 1938: 95; Cahill 2002: 268, 272). It is possible that some activities, perhaps connected with business,

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may have been carried on after dark, or needed extra light (see below). This may also be the case with the one house with 8 lamps (A v 10, with two shops; Cahill 2002: 113-18; Robinson and Graham 1938: 97-8). In rural Attica, the Vari House had two lamps with small fragments of two or three others, (Jones et al 1973: 381) and the more elaborate Dema House had two lamps with fragments of six others (Jones et al. 1962: 93, 100). It is likely that the lamps represented only by small fragments were not in use in the final period of occupation.

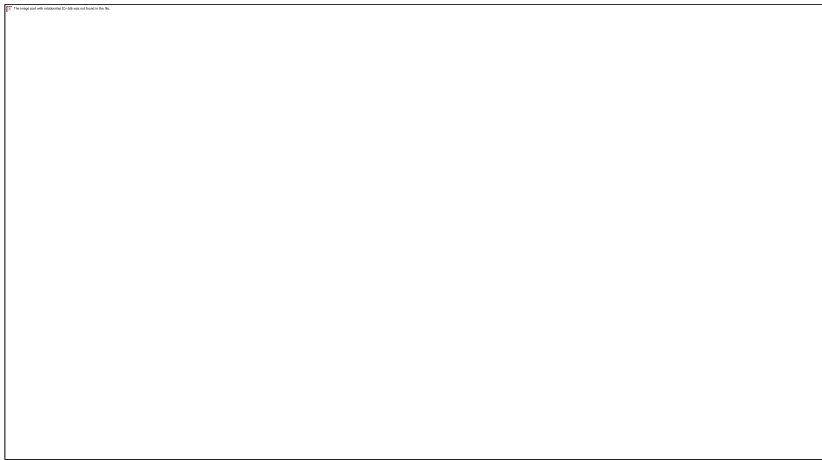


Figure 2 Table 4: Lamps found in houses in Olynthos

The pattern is similar with Roman houses. At Cosa, the House of Quintus Fulvius was destroyed in a destruction event around 70-60 BCE, datable from a hoard of 2004 denarii buried in a jar under the floor. The house had been adapted from previous structures on the site not long before this destruction event, and was probably inhabited by one of the most elite families in the town (Bruno and Scott 1993: 94-7; Fitch and Goldman 1994:13). However, only nine ceramic lamps which were possibly associated with the occupation phase of this house were recovered, only one of which was nearly complete. Most are very worn and fragmentary. Three of these fragments were found in a cistern, one in a cesspit (dropped in by accident during a night-time toilet visit?), and three in the street outside the house. While this could be the result of the destruction event, it is also possible that some of these lamps broke and went out of use earlier in the life of the house and had already been discarded as rubbish. However, it also seems possible in a house of this status that metal lamps and other lighting devices less likely to survive in the archaeological record had also been in use.

The evidence for lighting in Pompeii is complex and has been analysed and discussed in depth by Griffiths (2016; cf Allison 2006). The material from Casa del Chirugo, occupied in five phases from the mid-second century BCE to the eruption in 79 AD presents an opportunity to see changes in the numbers of lamps used in different phases before the abandonment of the town with the eruption. Fifty lamps were recovered from the pre-eruption occupation phases of the house, but the numbers

recovered from any one phase were small: 4 in the period c.150-100 BCE; 0 from c.100-25 BCE; 23 from c.25 BCE-15/25 AD; 13; 13 from c.15/25-62 AD; 10 from c.62-79 AD (Griffiths 2016:84).

At the time of the eruption, in Pompeian houses where the positioning of lamps could be fairly accurately ascertained, the pattern of finds is reminiscent of Olynthos, even across houses of different sizes, perhaps because both towns were abandoned over a short time. For example, the Casa della Ara Massima (200 m²) had a large number of lamps for its size: 27 ceramic lamps and 3 bronze one, but 20 of the ceramic lamps were in storage in a single room (Griffiths 2016: 107-8). House I 10.8 (265 m²) had 10 lamps and a bronze lampstand, but 7 of the lamps were in one storeroom (Griffiths 2016: 110). The Casa del Fabbro (I 10.7; 320 m²) had 12 ceramic and 5 bronze lighting devices, most of them in a dining room that may have been in use as a dining room (Griffiths 2016: 119). The Casa del Efebo (I 7.10-12; 650m²) contained 35 ceramic lamps, all but one of which were in storage in two rooms (Griffiths 2016: 119-20). It is interesting that the large majority of lamps and lighting devices even in the wealthiest Pompeian houses were ceramic, and that most of them were in storage (though in some cases that could be an outcome of the abandonment process). Nonetheless, it seems likely that, as at Olynthos much earlier, not all lamps were in use at the same time. It is probable that some lamps and other lights went with the fleeing inhabitants. The bodies of ten people attempting to escape from the House of Menander were found with ceramic lamps and one or two bronze lanterns to help them find a way out (Griffiths 2016: 131).

A remarkable papyrus document of the third century BCE can provide further insight into where and how artificial lighting was used. This papyrus probably belongs with the archive of Zenon, who managed the accounts for the estate of Apollonios, an important official under King Ptolemy II (Westermann 1924). It documents the daily allowance of lamp oil allocated to particular individuals for carrying out specific duties. In Egypt, this was castor and sesame oil, not usually olive oil as in the Mediterranean. The key recipients of this allocation were the accountants and scribes, the baker, the man who polished and guarded the silver, the steward, the stable hands, a bath attendant, and various sanctuary attendants with special duties in religious festivals (including keeping the sanctuaries lit), and especially to those cooking for these festivals. One of the allocations is specified as going to 'the man cooking food by night destined for the Serapeum' (Westermann 1924:243), again suggesting that large-scale cooking after dark was out of the ordinary. A number of the recipients are indicated as working at night, and some of the others may well have been working in dark environments such as bakeries and storerooms. Nonetheless, the amount of light some of these allocations would have provided was quite limited as is evident from [table 5](#). A minimum allocation of one eighth of a kotyle would have kept a single lamp lit about two hours, so most of these allocations of lamp oil would have provided only a few hours of light at the most.

Containers and ceramic items

Pottery was ubiquitous in classical antiquity in all periods, and is probably what most people think of as 'everyday' in the ancient world. Dio Chrysostom, writing in the first century AD, represents the poor farmer/hunter he encountered in a remote part of Euboea as listing his few tools and possessions one by one, but not bothering with an inventory of the pottery because, 'why would anyone talk about the

ceramic items?' (Dio Chrysostom 7.47). Many things other than pots were made of fired and unfired clay, including tiles, architectural elements, spindle whorls, loom weights and decorative/votive figurines and toys, and it was commonly used as a building material and for plaster.

The kinds of fine ware and decorated vases most often illustrated are not the kinds of pottery that were necessarily the most used. Most classical Greek table wares were plain black slipped, and most of the pottery in everyday use was unslipped and undecorated. Romans perfected the art of mass-producing beautiful decorated table wares, such as the mould-made red-slipped products of Lezoux and La Graufesenque in Gaul and the African red-slipped pottery of late antiquity testify. Nonetheless, throughout classical antiquity utilitarian wares were more important in everyday life, and potters were adept at formulating clay recipes by choosing and refining clay from particular sources and mixing it with other ingredients such as sand, mica and other crushed rocks, ground fired pottery or organic matter to produce clearly defined fabrics suited to specific purposes producing a range of vessels and wares that were highly standardised in most times and places. They could make cooking pots in tough fabrics that were resistant to thermal shock and water jars that were soft and porous, allowing evaporation through the walls to keep the water a bit cooler. Large, thick-walled storage vessels (pithoi/dolia), and smaller, more portable amphorae were used to contain a wide range of foodstuffs, and were sometimes coated with resin or other substances to improve preservation. Manufacturing very large vessels such as pithoi or highly effective cooking pots is technically more challenging and in some cases demands more specialist materials than making basic fine wares for table use. It may well have been the case that many of the utilitarian vessels that have traditionally been overlooked were more valuable and valued than some of the tablewares.

It is easy to forget that pottery and ceramic items were designed to be used in conjunction with other kinds of common objects and materials that no longer survive. Table ware for the wealthy included metal items, or in some cases metal probably replaced ceramics altogether. The Greek word for the object on which large pieces of meat or other elaborate dishes were served is a *pinax*. This literally means a board, and leaves open the possibility that wooden boards or (in elite circles) metal 'platters' were used which no longer survive. Although we do have examples of ceramic plates in most Greek and Roman pottery repertoires and assemblages they are relatively rare in comparison with the number of bowls and cups. Some cooking pots and pans were bronze and many implements such as tripods, spits, graters, ladles, and knives were made in metal, although comparatively few survive (Cahill 2002: 187-90). Numerous baskets, wooden, leather/skin and textile implements such as baskets, paddles, skin containers, sieves, sacks, nets and mats [were also commonly used with pottery \(fig. 7\)](#). The use of some ceramic vessels depended on elements made in other materials that we no longer have. For example, many of the less robust ceramic mortars that survive would have broken had a stone or ceramic pestle been used with them, so it seems probable that with these wooden pestles or pounders were used. Pots were regularly hung from walls by their handles, or suspended with string, while rounded everted rims are perfect for tying a cloth over the top and bottles with narrow necks suggest stoppers in organic materials (cork, wood, cloth). Lids were sometimes ceramic but could also be made of wood or metal. So, what made pottery such an important 'everyday' object in the classical world was not simply its durability and ubiquity on its own, which is what we see in the archaeological record, but rather its versatility and utility in combination with objects made in other materials.

Fired clay is a resilient material so broken pots and tiles were regularly and spontaneously repurposed. Amphorae were recycled to make drain pipes (Allison 2006: 353) and stands for round-bottomed cooking vessels (Allison 2004: 101). Broken pottery was reused for other purposes including filling holes in roads and as ostraca, the ancient equivalent of Post-It notes. Both pithoi/dolia and amphorae were recycled as containers for corpses or cremated ashes in burials across a range of periods. Fragments of roof tile were sometimes shaped for other purposes such as lids or weights.

The reuse of ceramic loom weights is regularly documented. A good example is provided by two sites in the Metaponto countryside. At Sant'Angelo Vecchio in the fourth century BC, discarded loom weights from a house were reused as separators in a kiln on the same site, serving to ensure that pots were not touching each other during the firing process (Foxhall and Quercia 2016). At the Pantanello sanctuary, loom weights dedicated as votives by women in the sixth-fourth centuries BC were recycled as kiln separators in a second-first century BC kiln built on the site after the sanctuary had gone out of use (Foxhall 2018). Along the same lines, it seems likely that the small numbers of odd loom weights sometimes found in Pompeian kitchens (Allison 2006: 87) and in shipwrecks (Panvini 2001, 62, 95) were used for purposes other than weaving. These offer a particularly interesting case of where we can be fairly certain that the change of use indicates different users and new and different meanings associated with the objects themselves. Loom weights in use for weaving had strong symbolic and ideological associations with women in the classical world (Foxhall 2011; 2017; Nevett 1999: 40). So, while men might not be keen to be seen using them for weaving (though we know that some did, especially in Roman times), secondary users in kilns and on ships seem more likely to have been men, repurposing them in completely different ways.

Cutlery and eating habits

When it comes to eating and drinking, surviving vessels, mostly ceramic, and visual representations of dining are informative, but in addition numerous literary texts survive which reveal how people used objects in dining. Many of these textual references are preserved in the early third-century [CE-AD](#) work by Athenaeus, the *Deipnosophistai* (*Wise Men Dining*). Written in the form of conversations among a group of intellectuals over dinner, it presents the various courses and elements of a Greco-Roman banquet through a pastiche of short quotations ('fragments') from earlier literary works, many of which are now otherwise lost to us. Although immensely valuable, it must be used with caution since we lack the original socio-political and textual contexts for these literary fragments, and they have been recontextualised by Athenaeus from the perspective of his own, much later, time period.

Greeks and Romans mostly ate with their hands (Athenaeus 4.134f; 4.135b-c), so forks, spoons and table knives were not actually everyday objects. Bread, served in baskets (made of metal and other luxury materials in elite settings), was used to mop up bits, sauces, juices and broth (e.g., Athenaeus 4.149.a-b). However, the rarity of surviving spoons is particularly interesting since many Greek and Roman dishes, especially those eaten by the poor, consisted of boiled ingredients and seem to have been the consistency of soup. This is confirmed not only by textual evidence, but also by the shapes and types of surviving cooking pots which are designed for preparing foods boiled in liquid. Cooking pots were also sometimes put directly on the table as serving vessels, even in elite settings (e.g. Athenaeus 4.147a). The

special mention of the gold spoons handed out to guests at the wedding of the Macedonian king Karanos (Athenaeus 4.129c) so that guests could eat from a centrally placed communal vessel, though legendary, suggests that such a practice was unusual in elite settings in historic times. It could signal the serving of a luxury version of a particular (perhaps 'traditional') dish normally associated with non-elites, and the usual manner of eating it was simultaneously 'gentrified' in the story by the spoons of gold.

It seems almost unimaginable that in non-elite settings boiled foods were prepared or eaten without using spoons. One possible solution to the normally invisible spoons could lie in the very large numbers of small ceramic bowls (fig. 2) that appear in even quite modest classical pottery assemblages. Hypothetically these could have been used to scoop liquid food out of a cooking or serving vessel and consume it, though this sounds messy. However, the most likely solution is that spoons were normally made of wood. A few ceramic ladles survive, but most of these must also have been made in wood.

Spoons appear more regularly in a range of contexts in Roman times. For example, a collection of 19 silver spoons for dining carefully stored in chest was recovered in House I 10, 4 at Pompeii (table 1). They are normally made in metal, often silver, so are an item that would have been used by wealthier people. The ends of these small, long-handled spoons are often pointed (fig. 3) and this feature has led to the suggestion that their primary purpose was for removing the ends from and eating eggs. In Petronius' description of Trimalchio's extravagant dinner party egg spoons were handed out for one of the courses (Petronius, *Satyricon* 33). However, observation of the wear patterns on spoons indicates that they may have been used for a wider range of purposes (Swift 2014).

Hard surfaces and soft furnishings

The remains of ancient buildings always look hard and cold because we are missing the soft elements that made them comfortable. Although we think of textiles primarily as clothing, in various forms they surrounded everyone in daily life. Even poorer homes were sparsely and simply equipped with textiles and furniture. However, the houses of the wealthy, which are for the most part the ones we know and recover, were full of cushions, spreads, throws, rugs and mats as well as wooden and metal furniture.

Most classical Greek furniture, even in opulent settings, was comparatively light and portable, as for example in fig. 4 [Oxford RF pelike, Ashmolean 282, Pan Painter, Richter fig 299] where a young man is shown carrying a couch and a table. This is consistent with the tendency for many elements of Greek material culture to be easily moveable and sometimes modular, that is, easily disassembled and reassembled. This is probably related to the lack of specialisation of built space: in houses and elsewhere spaces often did not have a single fixed function and were used for a number of different activities at different times over the course of a day or seasonally. Furniture and other equipment such as looms that can be readily moved and/or dismantled make it easier to use space flexibly in this way, but also add a transitory feel to the way in which everyday space may be constructed and shaped by the changing flow of everyday things.

Common items of furniture in Greek urban houses appear to be boxes and chests, along with seats of various kinds and couches and a few low tables. This reflected in the Attic Stelae, where a variety of tables, chests, stools, couches and the occasional bed are listed. These are accompanied by numerous

throws, spreads, curtains, cushions and other textiles to be used with and on these items of furniture (e.g., IG I³ 421 col. 4.160-209).

Visual representations of furniture from all over the Greek world similarly depict couches and simple seats. The latter include small, easily stored folding stools, stools with rush seating and wicker chairs, all light and portable. Seating and workspace could also be provided by the stone benches built along walls in Greek and Roman houses of all periods. Couches and seats are regularly shown in visual images as covered with textiles and cushions (fig. 5 and 6 Richter fig 294 [Symp EC Krater Louvre E635], 296 [Symp Laconian cup Musée Cinquanteenaire, Brussels], 297 [Antikensammlungen 2618, Munich], 303 [Louvre Myrina 268], 642 [frag Apulian krater MMA NY 10.210.17A]). Furniture was never upholstered in classical antiquity (Richter 1966: 117); textile items are always placed on the basic stone, wooden or metal frame (see Richter 1966: fig. 179). This also made moveable items of furniture more portable [Richter fig 179, woman placing cushion on a hair, cf calyx krater, Leningrad, Hermitage]. Compared to modern or even Roman furniture, most Greek seats and tables, beds, and even high-status couches for dining were low, compared to modern, or even Roman practice, although a few more elaborate chairs with backs are sometimes represented as higher (for example in depictions of seated deities or important people such as the deceased on funerary stelae).

Chests, boxes and other items of furniture are directly documented at urban sites such as Olynthos, largely abandoned before Philip's invasion in 348 BC, and Halieis, also abandoned in the fourth century BC, by finds of pieces of metal sheet, bone, ivory and metal fittings, handles, plates, feet, and nails, sometimes found in clusters which are all that remain (Andrianou 2009: 63-81, Cahill 2002: 102; 124; fig. 3). Many of these chests and boxes served as containers for other kinds of objects such as stored textiles (fig. 36, see also Richter 1966: fig. 386), TC plaque Locri, Reggio Museum). In rural Greek houses, by contrast, even rather grand ones (Jones et al 1962: 83; Jones et al 1973: 372), evidence of such purpose-built furniture is virtually never found. In more elegant dwellings such as the Dema house the owners may have removed all the furniture when the house was abandoned. However, in more modest rural dwellings it seems more likely that the inhabitants never used the kind of crafted furniture which was 'everyday' to wealthier urban residents.

Many items of Roman furniture were similar to those of the Greeks. However, to judge from the visual representations and the few surviving pieces, including the household assemblages from Pompeii, well-off households used crammed more pieces of furniture into their homes (see Richter 1966: fig. 586 [Marble sarcophagus from Simpelveld, Museum of Leiden], which were also often more ornate, and sometimes higher (e.g., some in the case of couches). As in earlier Greek houses, many metal fittings from items of furniture which no longer survive were found in the houses of Pompeii (Allison 2006) Perhaps because Romans surrounded themselves with more things, an important Roman invention was the free-standing store cupboard (Cova 2013: 385) (*armarium*) which by late antiquity also seems to be adapted to serve and as a book/scroll store and desk (fig. 9) 7-Ostia examples Richter 585 [Shoemaker, Ostia relief, National Museum of the Terme 184, photo DAI Rome], 587/88 [marble sarcophagus found near Ostia MMA NY 48.76.1]).

In all periods, furniture and furnishings in the houses of the poor, though much less well documented, are likely to have been quite different in character from those which surrounded the occupants of well-

off urban households. The poor, like slaves in urban households, probably spent much of their time squatting, kneeling or sitting on very low seats just off the ground when they were working indoors. To some extent a preference for low seats when working seems to have been common to all classes in classical Greece. This is probably because the most commonly used work surface was the floor, even in better-off households, and tables were comparatively rare and not so regularly used as work surfaces. Stone benches, a feature that appears regularly against the interior walls of ancient houses, could, of course, have served as both seats and, from a seated or kneeling position on the floor, as work surfaces. Depictions on Attic pottery of individuals working at various tasks show clearly this preference for low seating, such as the armourer working on a helmet in [fig. 108](#), [\(Boardman ARF archaic fig 91\)](#), [the carpenter working on the ground in fig. 9](#), [the shoemaker in fig. 10](#), and [Ajax and Achilles playing a game \(fig. 11\)](#), [who sit on what appear to be chunks of columns or cut logs – the latter could be the kind of seats that might be found in poor households.](#) [the vase painter in fig. 11](#) [Richter fig. 232 RF hydria Leningrad painter from Caputi Collection, Collection of G. Torno], [the shoemakers in fig. 12](#) [Richter 362 neck amphora Boston MFA 01.8035 or the woman sorting out her spinning in [fig. 13](#) [Richter 227/Athens NM 1584]. [Ajax and Achilles playing a game \(fig. 14\)](#) [Richter 259 BF side of Andokides Painter amphora, Boston MFA 01.8037] [sit on what appear to be chunks of columns or cut logs – the latter could be the kind of seats that might be found in poor households.](#) Similarly, [the butcher's block in fig. 15](#) [Erlangen 486], [like some that can still occasionally be seen in the Mediterranean today, appears to be simply a log with three legs added to make it a stable working surface at the right height for working from a standing position.](#)

Textiles were expensive to make in time and materials, so it is unlikely that poor households enjoyed the number or quality of cushions and throws that adorned the furniture of wealthier people. In the elite households documented on the Attic Stelae rags were kept (IG I³ 421 col. 4.163), and they appear to have been worth selling. Rags were important in a world with no specialist towels, bandages, diapers, and sanitary products, and, like string, had a plethora of additional possible uses. For the poor, clothing may have doubled as blanket and bedding; Greeks and Romans had no equivalent of pyjamas, or as far as we know, underwear. Although the well-off who owned dining couches also sometimes used them as beds, the rarity of dedicated beds suggests that many inhabitants of even comparatively well-off households slept on bedding on the floor that could be rolled up and stored during the day when the space was needed for other purposes. It therefore seems highly unlikely that the poor regularly had access to couches or beds. Even in Roman times, the orator Dio Chrysostom (7.65) claims that when he stayed in the remote house of a Euboean farmer/hunter, the bed (*stibas*), also used for seating, was made of a pile of leaves covered in skins. The description of similar Spartan 'beds' said to have been used for the festive dinner known as the '*kopis*' (Athenaeus 4.138f) suggests that Dio Chrysostom's account is not entirely imaginary. The likelihood, as suggested by the archaeological and visual evidence is that the everyday environment of the poor, especially the rural poor, was very sparsely furnished.

Conclusions

As in all times and places, everyday things entangled in people's lives also partially shaped and defined the spaces they inhabited. By investigating a selection of sites in detail, we can show that conceptions of

the everyday were very different from anything we experience, and experiences varied radically, especially along the lines of wealth and status. Nonetheless, it is still possible for us to get some sense of what it felt like to inhabit that world, although this small samples provides only a glimpse of range of everyday experiences in the classical past. While some everyday objects, especially for elites, were valued for their costliness or for the prestige they were felt to confer, many more everyday objects were taken for granted for their practical utility: if they worked, no one thought too much about them. However, this does not mean that some kinds of mundane objects were not valued beyond their functionality. Some plainly acquired sentimental, religious or symbolic significance in particular contexts. However difficult it is to access 'the everyday' in classical antiquity, the objects associated with it can tell us much about who people thought they were, what they valued, and how they lived.

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