Pottery to the people. The production, distribution and consumption of decorated pottery in the Greek world in the Archaic period (650-480 BC)

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II Production studies from the past to the future
II.1 Introduction: scale and organisation

The following chapters deal with the circumstances in which Greek pottery was manufactured, in other words, the first stage in its ‘life cycle’, the making of pots from digging clay through fashioning and firing them, to the moment they are completed and await their purchasers. Obviously, all these aspects will not be discussed in full, nor will I present an overview of production techniques and processes; descriptions of them are available, and I cannot add much. Instead, I shall focus on a few issues which are related to themes explored in the following parts of my study.

The two key issues here are the scale and the organisation of production, both within an individual workshop and for the making of pottery as a whole. The abstract concepts of scale and organisation can be approached by two straightforward questions: ‘how many?’ and ‘how?’ The first applies, on the one hand, to the number of people working in individual potteries and the total numbers of those involved in pottery production and, on the other, to their output, the kinds and numbers of ceramic products. The second involves the activities and working conditions of the people employed in potteries, and so hierarchy, specialisation of tasks within workshops and between them, and practical matters like technology and the locations and layouts of workshops. The investigation of these basic themes allows us also to go into more complicated issues, which are less easily grasped through archaeological data: among others, the status of potters and painters and their work and, more generally, the roles and importance of potters and potteries in the local economies and societies of some Archaic and Classical Greek poleis.

Owing to the character of the evidence, however, it is not always possible to address each of these issues one by one, each point neatly succeeding the other. Instead, most of the chapter is organised according to categories of data: archaeological remains of workshops, depictions of potters and painters on pots and plaques, signatures, potters’ votives, literary references to the potter’s craft, results of scientific analysis of clays and ethnoarchaeological exploration. Each category is examined in a separate section comprising all the various kinds of relevant information supplied by the different types of data. As a consequence, multiple questions and problems, as sketched above, are discussed in each section, arising sometimes more than once. This, it seems, is the best way to deal with the richness and variety of the evidence, and all the apparent and real contradictions that go with that.

A few sections fall outside the series of data-sets, however. First of all, the chapter opens with a historical introduction showing how the current prevailing view of Greek pottery production, which acts as my general starting point, is the outcome of two centuries of scholarly debate. In the next introductory section the current opinions concerning Greek pottery production are discussed in relation to the issues I examine and the manner in which I address them. This is followed by a section on the numbers of pots originally produced and their survival rate, subjects which can hardly be studied on the basis of ‘traditional’ archaeological data and especially not according to the categories treated in the rest of the chapter. Moreover, by beginning with production and survival rates I wish to make clear my general unease with the current view of Archaic and Classical Greek pottery production as a very small-scale, rather primitively organised craft rooted in locally oriented family based workshops: just too many pots seem to be around to allow for such a rigid, primitivist model, a point which returns in the conclusion.

II.2 A short history of the study of Greek pottery production

Aspects of the manufacturing process figured among the issues in the scholarly debate on Greek pottery from its earliest days. Besides stylistic classification, differences in the colour and
composition of clays were considered in distinguishing the various wares. The origins of these wares remained a matter of long lasting debates, which were mostly solved by elementary distribution studies centring on the assumed place of production. Historical sources naming pottery production centres or offering circumstantial evidence of economic or political developments and their chronology also played a role. Even chemical analysis of pots was tried, as early as the mid 18th century, but with little success. Although the available analysis technologies enabled scholars to spot differences between some wares, they were too crude to make positive groupings as well as expensive, time consuming and destructive. For a long time, the eye remained the best means for studying the characteristics of wares.

However, production studies played only a secondary part in the discussions on the classification of wares and styles and the parallel debates on the interpretation of imagery. They were dependent on and subservient to the main issues of art history. The production process itself and its organisation and technology were hardly studied as subjects in themselves. But there was one important exception: for almost two centuries, scholars and amateurs were trying to rediscover the secrets of making black and red figure pottery, especially Attic. From the very first attempts to copy these pots it became apparent that the typical black gloss and shiny orange (or buff) ground of the finest Greek wares could not be repeated with modern techniques, which employ glazing methods of mainly Medieval origin. This enigma, together with the great commercial potential of its solution, captured the imagination of many scholars. Through the chemical analysis of sherds, they slowly discovered the typical compositions of Greek potters’ clays, although they were not yet able to determine the techniques of firing, decorating and finishing which turned these clays into the right glossy pots.

The search for the secrets of ancient Greek ceramic technology, however, did result in some speculation on both the organisation of production and the layout of potteries. In the first ‘modern’ handbooks on Greek pottery, which started to appear in the second half of the 19th century, production studies were secondary

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22 E.g. Abeken 1843, 364; Brongniart 1854, 15-18, 414-418, esp. 549-554; Jahn 1854a, CXL; Brunn 1871, 28-29, 51; Blümmer 1879, 53-77, 80-82, 91-95; Rayet and Collignon 1888, VI; Dumont 1890, 26-77; Robinson 1893, 35; Pottier 1896, 50-56; Walters 1905, I 203, 220.

23 E.g. Abeken 1843, 364-366; Lenormant and De Witte 1844, VIII-XXVII, LXI-LXII; Jahn 1854a, IX-X, XXI-LXXV, CLXX-CLXXII; CXXVIII-CCXVII; Birch 1858, II 139-144; Dumont 1890; Pottier 1896, 52; Walters 1905, I 16-23; see also Brunn 1871 and the recent review of 19th-century scholarship in Von Bothmer 1987, 185-188.

24 E.g. Jahn 1854a, XXII-XXIV, CLXXVIII; Walters 1905, I 46; Pottier 1906, 601-608; see also Lenormant and De Witte 1844, XVIII; Brunn 1871, 51, 62-63.

25 See esp. Duc de Luynes 1832, 142-143; Brongniart 1854, 15-18, 414, and, most extensively, 549-554 (partly referring to earlier work of the Duc de Luynes); Blümmer 1879, 53-72, 75-78, 88-95; and the historical overview in Tonks 1908, 418-420; see also Jahn 1854a, CXL; Rayet and Collignon 1888, VI.

26 But see Brongniart 1854, 18-30, 236-242, 554-566 (part of a general study of ceramic production technology and distribution); Blümmer 1879, 44-97 (part of a handbook on ancient technology); Tonks 1908 (the first specialised study on Greek pottery production technology); and later, more generally, Richter 1923.

27 Duc de Luynes 1832, 142-144; Brongniart 1854, 15-18, 545-546, 549-563; Jahn 1854a, CXL-CXLI; Birch 1858, I 247-250; Blümmer 1879, 44-45, 59, 75-82, 88-96; Rayet and Collignon 1888, XII-XV; Wilisch 1892, 18-19; Robinson 1893, 39-41, 44, 46; Harrison and MacColl 1894, 10; Schreiber 1895, 131; Jamot 1896, 1123, 1125-1126; Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 19, 152-158; Walters 1905, I 212-219, 221; Pottier 1906, 667-668, 673-684; s.a., 41, 42, 43, 44, 50; Tonks 1908; Perrot 1911, 349-353; Pfuhl 1923, 245; Richter 1923, 47-53; Hussong 1928, 26-45, 55-62.
century, production was treated as a complicated, refined and elaborate process, requiring much skill, craftsmanship, time and manpower – almost like contemporaneous industries.28

Writing about pottery production was also stimulated by the scenes of potters at work on newly found pots, votive plaques and fragments. The topic became especially a domain of German scholars, beginning with Otto Jahn in 1854.29 His list of relevant pieces comprised only pots found in Etruria; but later in the 19th century the Germans acquired the most important collections of finds from the Greek producing cities themselves, above all the Pentekouphia plaques, named after their find place just outside Corinth, most of which were bought by the Berlin Museum,30 and the finds from the Athenian Akropolis.31 The French, however, who had also managed to buy a few of the Pentekouphia plaques, followed closely.32

These pictures were used to illustrate and support hypotheses on firing technology,33 construction and use of the potter’s wheel,34 shaping techniques35 and, of course, methods of painting.36 At the same time, once again mainly in the huge scholarly handbooks, hypothetical descriptions of the organisation of labour in the workshops were first sketched.37 In addition to the images, especially the elaborate scenes of potters on hydriai in Munich and Milan (see

28 Jahn 1854a, CXL-CXLIII; Birch 1858, II 43-44; Rayet and Collignon 1888, VI, XV; Jamot 1896, 1121; Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 13, 19, 158-160; Walters 1905, I 231-233; Pottier 1906, 687-689; Perrot 1911, 328, 342-344; see also Blümner 1879, 32-33.

29 Jahn 1854b; 1867, 100; Blümner 1879, 46-52, 84-87; 1888; 1889; Donner-von Richter 1882; Hartwig 1899; see also Gerhard 1841, 8; 1852, 231; Abeken 1843, 358-359; Birch 1858, I 162, 233, 249-250; Jatta 1876; Bernabei 1894.

30 See esp. the early catalogues by Furtwängler (1885, I 47-105, II 70) and Pernice (1897); many of the plaques were illustrated in Antike Denkmäler I.1 (1886), Taf. 7-8; II.2 (1893-1894), Taf. 23-24; II.3 (1895-1898), Taf. 29-30; II.4 (1899-1901), Taf. 39-40 (=Fraenkel 1887; Pernice 1895; 1898b; 1901). Early literature on the Pentekouphia plaques in general: Furtwängler 1885, I 147-48; Collignon 1886 (both with references to early find reports); Rayet and Collignon 1888, 143-148; Wilisch 1892, 31-35, 86-102; 159-162; Washburn 1906.

31 See Graef and Langlotz 1925-1933; this final publication was preceded by many preliminary reports, like Graef 1893; Mitteilung 1893; Mitteilungen 1893; see also Von Bothmer 1887, 196, 204, n. 53.

32 Rayet 1880; Collignon 1886.

33 Donner-von Richter 1882, 182-184; Rayet and Collignon 1888, XII-XV; Jamot 1896, 1123; Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 153-158; Walters 1905, I 215-217; Pottier 1906, 678-679; Perrot 1911, 349-351; see also already Birch 1858, I 248-250.

34 Blümner 1888; 1889; Rayet and Collignon 1888, VII-VIII; Bernabei 1894; Jamot 1896, 1121-1122; Walters 1905, I 206-209; Pottier 1906, 655-656; Perrot 1911, 324-325.

35 Blümner 1888; 1889; Rayet and Collignon 1888, VI-IX; Robinson 1893, 35-39; Jamot 1896, 1121-1123; Walters 1905, I 206-209; Pottier 1906, 655-659; Perrot 1911, 324-326.

36 Blümner 1879, 78-87; 1889; Donner-von Richter 1882, 182-183; Von Rohden 1888; Wilisch 1892, 17; Robinson 1893, 41-44; Bernabei 1894, 813-820; Harrison and MacColl 1894, 10-11; Jamot 1896, 1122-1127; Hartwig 1899; Dugas s.a., 664-665; Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 19-23; Walters 1905, I 207-230; Pottier 1906, 660-677; Perrot 1911, 337-347.

37 Jatta 1876; Blümner 1889; Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 158-160; Walters 1905, I 232-237 (owing much to Birch 1858, II 43-44); Pottier 1906, 687-689; s.a., 20, 23-24, 38-40; Perrot 1911, 38-53.
Appendix II, cat. nos. A4; A13), texts were cited. Earlier in the 19th century all the ancient written references to potters and pottery had been systematically collected by Jahn, among others.\textsuperscript{38} The value of these texts, many of which were long known, increased as the archaeological knowledge of ceramics and their production expanded and was refined.\textsuperscript{39} At last, many of the often separate bits of information could be understood and placed in a wider context.

In addition, the inscriptions on pots received attention: many of them were understood and systematically collected and grouped for the first time during the last decades of the 19th century.\textsuperscript{40} Especially the signatures with names, helping to identify individual oeuvres, were revealing to those interested in pottery production and its organisation. The apparently important role of the maker of the object itself as suggested by the signatures seemed odd in a world focused on artists as basically the makers of images and led to speculation about the position and role of the ‘master-potter’ - a debate which remains open today.\textsuperscript{41}

More generally, the rediscovery of the craftsman and his handiwork in this period of industrialisation and mechanical reproduction, which, it must be said, greatly benefited ceramic archaeology as a whole, was a further source of prestige and inspiration for the study of ancient Greek potters and pot-painters. Scholarly status and contemporary preoccupations with industrial society seem often to have been linked directly, though rarely explicitly, to the ancient evidence. Thus, the excavation on the Athenian Akropolis of votive pottery and bases of sculpture evidently dedicated to Athena by potters and pot-painters immediately led to speculation about their position as craftsmen in Athens.\textsuperscript{42} These expensive and prominently placed stone votives were thought to confirm the then-current notion of the potters’ and painters’ professional pride, high social status and substantial wealth, as also suggested by the painters depicting themselves or associates taking part in luxurious symposia\textsuperscript{43} and, for instance, by the painter Euthymides labelling one of his pots with the teasing and (apparently) proud statement ‘as never

\textsuperscript{38} Jahn 1854b. See also Jahn 1854a, XXII-XXIV, LXXXV-LXXXVI, CXL; Birch 1858, I 220, 241; II 42, 47-48, 59; Blümmer 1879, 1-8, 33-45.

\textsuperscript{39} See esp. Jamot 1896, 1118, 1121-1124; Walters 1905, I 46, 148, 204-205, 212, 215, 232; Pottier 1906, 653-654, 689-691, 694; Chapot s.a., 372; Hauser 1909; Perrot 1911, 295, 310, 322; 348, 368.

\textsuperscript{40} The handbooks are Klein 1887 (first edition 1882); 1898 (first edition 1890); Wernicke 1890; Kretschmer 1894; see also already Jahn 1854a, CV-CVIII; Birch 1858, II 27-41, 45-65; see also Helbig 1868; Nicole 1916 and parts of later general works, e.g. Dumont 1890; Robinson 1893, 47-50; Pottier 1906, 713-714.

\textsuperscript{41} See Birch 1858, II 28; Rayet and Collignon 1888, XV-XVI; Jamot 1896, 1124; Pottier 1899, 26; 1906, 697-704, 715; Perrot 1911, 326, 359-360; Frucht 1914, 4-5; Hoppin 1917, 26-28; Reichhold 1919, 12-13; Pfuhl 1923, 33, 240-241; Richter 1923, XII; see also the discussion below, section VI.3.

\textsuperscript{42} Studniczka 1887; Harrison and MacColl 1894, 21; Kretschmer 1894, 73; Jamot 1896, 1119; Gaspar 1902, 39-41; Pottier 1906, 692-693; s.a., 31; Perrot 1911, 370-371 and later Glotz 1920, 171; Pfuhl 1923, 34-35; Richter 1923, 103; see also the discussion below, chapter IX.

\textsuperscript{43} Gaspar 1902; Pottier 1906, 693-694; s.a., 32; Perrot 1911, 373; and later Pfuhl 1923, 34-35, 444-445, 454. See also Birch 1858, I 397, who only briefly mentions the scenes then known, noting their immorality, and the discussion below, chapter VIII.
Euphronios'. Besides being considered 'real' artists, worth studying, these Athenian craftsmen seemed exemplary models who offered ideal solutions for contemporary problems.

By the beginning of the 20th century all the major art historians of Greek pottery, like Pottier, Dugas, Pfuhl, Richter and, slightly later, Beazley, dedicated at least a part of their studies to the potters and the painters as working people, and many issues regarding manufacture became the subject of lively debate, as will be seen in the following sections. Unfortunately, several basic problems hampered further progress.

First of all, research into pottery-making technology developed very slowly. Although the chemical compositions of clay and gloss had become more or less clear by 1908, the actual production process remained a mystery. Many observers kept supposing that various stages of painting and varnishing were involved, and almost everyone was convinced that painted pots, like modern porcelain, were fired twice.

Secondly, most scholars coupled this alleged, complicated process almost automatically (and understandably) with a 'modernising' view of the organisation of production, and envisaged large workshops with an extensive division of labour. The signing 'makers' were regarded as master potter-painters, entrepreneurs assisted by a few painters and many labourers. In most cases, the Greek pottery workshop largely resembles a mix of a small 19th-century factory and the atelier of a Renaissance painter. Only a handful of scholars instead envisaged smaller establishments.

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44 There are innumerable references to this pot, see Appendix II, cat. no. R10 and chapter VIII. Most relevant here are: Pottier 1899, 17; s.a., 63; Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 63; Walters 1905, I 232; Perrot 1911, 374-375 and later Hoppin 1917, 34-35; Glotz 1920, 172; Pfuhl 1923, 26. See also Birch 1858, II 30, 63, again much briefer than later comments.

45 This is very explicitly argued in Pottier 1898 and its revised edition Pottier 1926, both pamphlet-like, popularising booklets aiming at a large market; see also Harrison and MacColl 1894, 5; Pottier 1896, 21-25; s.a. (another popularising account), 23, 36-37; Walters 1905, I 231-233; Reichhold 1919, 1-2, 12-13; Buschor 1925, 9; Richter and Milne 1935, XI-XIV and still, much later, Lane 1946, 14-17.

46 Pottier 1898; 1899, 17, 26; 1906, 690-707; 1926; 1927-1928, 186-192; s.a., 15-63; Beazley 1908; 1944; Hoppin 1917, 20-37; Reichhold 1919; Pfuhl 1923, 33-35, 44-46, 240-245; Richter 1923; Dugas s.a.; 1960. See also Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 12-14, 19-26, 146-160; Furtwängler, Reichhold and Hauser 1909, 199-200; Hauser 1909.

47 Tonks 1908, followed by Richter 1923, 47-53; Binns and Fraser 1929; and partly by Hussong 1928, 44-45. It should be noted that Brongniart 1854, 545-554 already came close.

48 E.g. Blümmer 1879, 86; Perrot 1911, 341-353; Hussong 1928, 31-45, 55-62. Walters 1905, I 212-221 even proposes three firings. Pottier 1906, 673-681; s.a., 60-61 seems to waver between one or two. Only Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 45, 152 and later Pfühl 1923, 245 assume a single firing; Richter 1923, 37-44 offers a more elaborated argument for this view.

49 Pottier 1896, 16-17; 1906, 687-689; s.a., 20-24, 38-40; 1927-1928, 187-190; Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 19, 158-160; Walters 1905, I 231-233 (owing much to Birch 1858, II 43-44); Perrot 1911, 328-329, 342-344, 352-353; Frucht 1914, 4-6; Hoppin 1917, 20-21, 26-29, 31-37; Reichhold 1919, 10-13; Hussong 1928, 62-65; Cloché 1931, 49-50.

50 Glotz 1920, 169-170; Pfuhl 1923, 240-241; Richter 1923.
any event, all of them seem to be influenced to some extent by the idealised view of traditional crafts which the Arts and Crafts Movement generated in the late 19th century.\(^{51}\)

A fundamental difficulty remained the speculative character of any such interpretation, that is, at least until additional archaeological evidence would become available. Although some Roman kilns had been found and studied,\(^{52}\) and scholars started to recognise wasters and test pieces as such,\(^{53}\) the basic archaeological corpus of sites and material related to pottery production hardly increased from the end of the 19th century until the 1930s. The only important new developments involved the slow growth of the use of contemporaneous evidence of the manufacture of pottery according to ‘traditional’ and ‘primitive’ methods,\(^{54}\) and the first serious, practical experiments in making ‘Greek pots’ by Gisela Richter in New York.\(^{55}\)

Moreover, Richter was the first to combine such experimentation with a study of the images of Greek potters and of the ancient written sources on ceramics and potters, as found in her *The Craft of Athenian Pottery*, which remains a useful introduction to Greek pottery production.\(^{56}\) As the title suggests, Richter abandoned the then-current notion of Greek pottery production as an artistic industry, regarding it instead as a small-scale craft. This new view clearly formed the point of departure for her relatively simple experiments in turning and firing pots, which were soon combined with chemical analysis; it also permeates her interpretation of the images of potters and the other ancient evidence. For example, she was one of the first who had an open eye for the mainly literary evidence for the low status of ancient Greek potters, although she counterbalanced this by stressing, as many scholars had done before, the pride of the ancient craftsman in his work.\(^{57}\) In any event, Richter’s pioneering combination of approaches to Greek pottery as a craft was an important breakthrough, which came at the right moment.

From about 1930 onwards, the developments in pottery production studies suddenly accelerated. In 1931 the first preliminary report of the large-scale excavations of the Corinthian Potters’ Quarter appeared.\(^{58}\) In 1936, after a few minor discoveries of kilns elsewhere in the Greek world,\(^{59}\) the first (pre-Roman) Athenian kiln complex was excavated in the Kerameikos, the

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51 See esp. Pottier 1898; 1926; Richter 1923, XI-XII, 63, 105; and also Walters 1905, I 231-232; Pottier 1906, 697-698; s.a., 27, 36-37.

52 Brongniart 1854, 26, 426-431; Blümmer 1879, 23-29; Donner-von Richter 1882, 182-183; Kretschmer 1894, 217; Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 154, 156; Walters 1905, I 215; Pottier 1906, 678; Richter 1923, 78; Hussong 1928, 26-27, 43. There are also some early reports of non-scientific finds of kilns and workshop remains: see Appendix I and Birch 1858, I 170 (referring to finds in Gela as far back as 1792); Kretschmer 1894, 217 (referring to finds in Ruvo).

53 See Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 152-154; Richter 1923, 41-47.

54 Hussong 1928, 34; Rieth 1939; see also Walters 1905, I 215.

55 Richter 1923, XI-XII, 1-63.

56 Richter 1923.

57 Richter 1923, 86-105; see also Pottier 1906, 690-691; Perrot 1911, 370-376.


59 In Agios Petros and Thermon: Rhomaios 1908; 1916 (Appendix I, cat. nos. G69; G75). See also Kavvadias and Kawerau 1906, 12 (probably a lime kiln on the Athenian Akropolis, but published as a potter’s kiln; see Appendix I, G? above G7) and very summary reports of finds in Athens, Sparta, Sikyon and Gela.
ancient cemetery and potters’ quarter. More finds of similar installations soon followed in the Kerameikos as well as in Olympia and Corinth. Unfortunately, none of them has satisfactorily been published, although the preliminary reports gave at least an initial impression, while also demonstrating that Greek kilns were similar to previously known Roman examples. It was now possible to begin considering the representations of Greek workshops and the archaeological remains from the same time in combination.

Perhaps the most important breakthrough was Theodor Schumann’s rediscovery, after years of thorough scientific research and practical experimentation, of the ancient production process of Attic pottery, which he made public in 1942. Even though some details have since been corrected or added, and others are still open to debate, Schumann’s basic conclusions have not been challenged: black gloss, red gloss and figured pottery was made in a single, three-stage firing process, involving reduction between (usually) two oxidising phases. The paint, ‘varnish’, and ‘glaze’ simply consisted of diluted, possibly specially selected, clay, with perhaps an added binding agent or ‘colloid’. As a result, it became clear that, from an organisational point of view, shaping, decorating and firing Greek pottery are rather simple processes. Generally, all the painting can be executed at one stage, and a single firing is enough. Moreover, the level of the required technology is relatively low, although of course clay and ‘paint’ processing and firing are delicate matters requiring great skill, sufficient knowledge and much experience. With Schumann the Greek pottery ‘industry’ indeed turned out to be a craft, technically at least.

The third pivotal contribution to the study of the manufacture of Greek pottery was made by Sir John Beazley in his 1944 lecture Potter and Painter in Ancient Athens, which remains one of the most sensible treatments of the subject. Starting traditionally with the ancient images of potters and painters, he went on to explore the information on the organisation of pottery workshops which his newly developed framework of classification and attribution offered. More successfully than any of his predecessors, who always had to limit themselves to signed pots, Beazley was able to show how some potters and painters worked together for longer or shorter periods. At this point, art history and social history became firmly coupled. We once again see how Beazley’s approach also emphasised the character of the work of the ancient potters and painters as a craft or even an art but not as an industry.

(Appendix I, cat. nos. G79; G36; G93; S36).

60 Gebauer and Johannes 1937; Gebauer 1938 (Appendix I, cat. nos. G7; G50).

61 Athens: Gebauer 1940; 1942; Thompson 1940 (Appendix I, cat. nos. G49-G50; G5); Olympia: Kunze and Schleif 1941; Schleif 1944; Schleif and Eilmann 1944 (G29-G31; G66); Corinth: Roebuck 1940b (still not published); Walter 1940; 1942; Stillwell 1948 (G22-G24).

62 Schumann 1942; 1943; see also the summary report in Weickert 1942, which is more accessible.


64 Beazley 1944.

65 See esp. the comparisons with Renaissance and later European painting: Beazley 1944, 33, 38-39, 41-42. See also Whitley 1997, 41-42.
II.3 From a scholarly tradition to the starting point for the present investigation

The contributions of Richter, Schumann and Beazley have laid a firm foundation for any study of Greek pottery production after the middle of the 20th century. Details have, of course, changed: specialised studies have refined our knowledge of clay preparation, firing and decorating (section X.2); a growing interest in ethnographic research and experimentation offers some new insights into the technology and organisation of ‘primitive’ workshops (section X.5). Yet, their basic views have remained largely unmodified for more than fifty years. One might even say that the primitivist approach and the growing attention to social life and everyday matters, which have so dramatically changed ancient history and classical archaeology since the late 1960s, have only reinforced the existing tendency to look at Greek pottery production as a craft. Indeed, the modernists arguing for large pottery factories were mostly ousted in the 1970s by those favouring simply organised, small-scale operations.

The currently prevailing view has been presented most recently and elaborately, although perhaps somewhat radically, by Arafat and Morgan. They see all (or most) Archaic Greek pottery workshops as small, independent units, possibly working on a seasonal basis only. According to them, the workshops probably centred on a master potter, who may have been the main painter as well, and his family. The staff would have numbered two to six, at most ten, other people, ranging from the wheel boy to painters. The estimated production figures are not so clear, but low. Furthermore, the discussion about the manufacturer’s rewards for all this work continues: at least a few of the Akropolis votives undeniably seem to be potters’ dedications (chapter IX), whereas most references to the craft in ancient texts (section X.4) indicate poverty and low status. The existence of signatures (chapters VI and VII) and the above-mentioned texts on pots indicating pride and rivalry among potters and painters (chapter VIII) are additional complicating factors. The generally accepted overall picture which has come out of all this is a rather intricate compromise: potting and painting are largely characterised as hard work for little reward, with a few relatively wealthy owners standing out from the poor majority; but despite these circumstances, the individual potter or painter is regarded as a self-confident, independent craftsman.

It is precisely this common view of Greek pottery production as a small-scale, simply organised craft of minor economic importance that I take as my starting point for this chapter. At first sight,

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66 Well-known examples are Hampe and Winter 1962; 1965; Winter 1978; Blitzer 1990; see also Cuomo di Caprio 1982; Jones 1986, 849-880 (with many references); Schreiber 1999 and section X.5.

67 Scott 1954, 408-409 (up to 70 employees); Philipp 1968, 85; Webster 1972, 2-41; Eisman 1971, 48-49; 1974b, 48-52 (up to 30); however, Harrison 1979, 5, 32, though seeing 10 as the usual number of employees, sees up to 100 as possible, Boegehold 1985, 28 still envisages ‘large’ workshops of 8-20 workers and Immerwahr 1984, 345-347 suggests that in the late 6th century a few, exceptionally large workshops existed besides the usual smaller ones.

68 Arafat and Morgan 1989; see also Morgan 1995, 1999b.


it seems a well-based construction, stemming from a long tradition of research and a wide range of evidence: excavated remains of workshops, depictions of potters and painters at work, votives possibly or probably ordered by potters, signatures, references in ancient texts, and a knowledge of historical and economic developments in the ancient world.

Looking at these areas of research individually and more closely, however, one soon discovers that the traditional and generally accepted picture of pottery production has somehow lost contact with much of its base of evidence, which has grown rapidly recently and is subject to continuing discussion. Arafat, Morgan, Scheibler and Sparkes, for example, hardly take into account the many recent finds of kilns and workshops (see the list in Appendix I and chapter IV) or the latest studies which relate signatures to the organisation of production (chapter VII). In addition, other areas of interest have stagnated lately, even though a fresh look is overdue and possible. This applies especially to the study of the workshop scenes on pots (chapter V), which has stuck too much to a purely descriptive approach. Many authors repeat each other, describing and explaining what is visible, while few have tried to reconstruct the activities behind the scenes, that is, the invisible which is implied.

Finally, it seems that the primitivist view of the ancient economy and society, in vogue since the 1970s, is losing much of its force these days, while less monolithic or even alternative visions are gaining ground. In pottery studies, the work of David Peacock on Roman ceramic production has shown that there were many ways of organising a workshop, dependent on its social and geographical context and the character of its output. By using not only ethnological parallels, but also analogies with pre-modern and early modern Britain, he convincingly argues that simple, primitivist models will not do for much of the Roman production. Instead, dynamically interacting and sophisticated interregional or ‘international’ large-scale production and smaller workshops with (basically) a more local, regional orientation together catered for a demanding and varying market.  

A similar standpoint is implied by a stream of more or less occasional remarks, partly referring to Peacock, in a series of articles on Greek Early Iron Age potters and pottery by John Papadopoulos. Although he has not yet published a full-scale elaboration of his arguments, one of his chief points is that Greek pottery production was also a large-scale phenomenon that should be seen as part of a complex system of interaction between producers, distributors and consumers, even from a very early period. A comparable attitude can be found in Osborne’s study of trade in Archaic Greek decorated pottery, to which I shall return below (chapter XXII). Osborne maintains that as early as the Archaic period goods, including pottery, were moved on a large scale, over long distances. He especially notes examples of apparently close links between producers and consumers, which must have had an impact on the organisation of production.

The revisionist views of Peacock and, more radically, Papadopoulos and Osborne form an interesting basis for a renewed debate on the scale and organisation of Archaic and Classical Greek pottery production. They indicate that it may be fruitful to abandon some old prejudices, and that even a more general shift in the communis opinio on pottery production might be called for. Obviously, once the fundamental assumptions start shifting, many related issues, like the status of producers and their products, are drawn in their wake.

All this makes a fresh investigation worthwhile, but also necessary, as hardly any detailed evidence from the side of the Greek producers has yet been put forward in the light of this revised

71 Peacock 1982.
73 Osborne 1996b.
point of view. Only Papadopoulos has cited a little evidence from the relevant potteries. Moreover, to achieve a shift in scholarly perspectives Arafat and Morgan's reinterpretation of the 'traditional' small workshop as a seasonal, sometimes part-time, family affair clearly needs to be addressed. At the other extreme, one has to take into account the earlier idea of large-scale pottery factories, which may suddenly seem attractive again, despite more than fifty years of well-founded opposition. Finally, of course, much territory lies between the family workshop and a large enterprise, which must also receive due attention. But however varied the possibilities, only a close scrutiny of the evidence itself will indicate the direction for the future.