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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V Depictions of Greek potters and painters at work
V.1 Introduction: the depictions and what to do with them

The study of ancient depictions of potters and painters at work started shortly after the rich finds of Vulci and other Etruscan grave fields had been acquired by the major European museums in the 1830s and 1840s. By the early 1850s pottery production scenes were recognised on Attic pots in Munich, London and Berlin (Appendix II, catalogue numbers A4; A8; A12; Pl. 29; 32c; 34c).\(^{301}\) After several decades that brought few new finds (Appendix II, A13; probably A11; B1; Pl. 33c; 35; 38),\(^{302}\) a first important addition appeared in 1879 when a large dump of votive plaques was discovered directly outside Corinth at Penteskouphia (Appendix II, C1-C90; C102-C104; Pl. 39-48).\(^{303}\) It was immediately obvious that some plaques show potters at the wheel.\(^{304}\) Others, featuring diggers with picks and men at furnaces, caused some discussion; such scenes were initially linked to the mining and smelting of metal ores,\(^{305}\) but soon it became generally accepted that they illustrate digging for clay and firing pottery.

Shortly after the scientific publication of the Penteskouphia plaques in the 1880s,\(^{306}\) the first preliminary reports on the spectacular pottery finds from the Athenian Akropolis appeared.\(^{307}\) Eventually, the site yielded seven pottery production scenes on Attic pots and plaques, more than any other find-place (Appendix II, A2; A3; A5; A9; A10; A14; A16; Pl. 28c-d; 30a; 33a-b; 36a; 37a-b).

The 20th century saw a slow trickle of new finds, mostly Attic, some of which surfaced in private collections (Appendix II, A1; A6; A7; A15; A17; A18; Pl. 28a-b; 30b-32b; 36b; 37c-d). The few Corinthian additions have remained limited to the result of cleaning out the Penteskouphia dump (Appendix II, C91-C101) and two badly preserved fragments of plaques from the Corinthian Potters’ Quarter, which, however, may not even portray potters (Appendix II, C105-C106; Pl. 48d-e).

At this moment, 125 known items bear pottery production scenes: 106 Corinthian plaques or fragments of plaques, all belonging presumably to the late 7th or 6th century (C1-C106; Pl. 39-48),\(^{308}\) 18 Attic pots or fragments, dating from the mid 6th to the late 5th century (A1-A18; Pl. 28-30).

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\(^{301}\) Jahn 1854b offers the first systematic studies of these scenes; see also Gerhard 1841, 8; 1852, 231; Abeken 1843, 358-359; Birch 1858, I 162, 233, 249-250; Jahn 1867, 100.

\(^{302}\) See Jatta 1876; Blümmer 1879, 46-52, 84-87; 1888; 1889; Donner-von Richter 1882.

\(^{303}\) See Furtwängler 1885, I 48; Collignon 1886; Pernice 1897, 9-10; Boardman 1954, 183-189, 193; Von Raits 1964a, 2-4; 1964b; Geagan 1970, 31-32; Zimmer 1986, [1].

\(^{304}\) See esp. Bernabei 1894, Jamot 1896, 1121-1122.

\(^{305}\) Furtwängler 1885, II 70, footnote; Wilisch 1892, 18; Pernice 1897, 19, 38; Brandt 1927, 70-71; see also Rayet 1880, 105-106; Pernice 1898a, 75; Romaios 1908, 181-182; Richter 1923, 76; Hussong 1928, 7; Payne 1931, 117; Ziomecki 1975, 89-90; and sections V.2.a; V.2.f.

\(^{306}\) Rayet 1880; Furtwängler 1885, I 47-105, II 70; Collignon 1886. Illustrations of the plaques in Berlin followed in *Antike Denkmäler* I.1 (1886), Taf. 7-8; II.2 (1893-94), Taf. 23-24; II.3 (1895-98), Taf. 29-30; II.4 (1899-1901), Taf. 39-40 (=Fraenkel 1887; Pernice 1895; 1898b; 1901); see also Bernabei 1894; Pernice 1897; Walters 1905, I 216; Payne 1931, 117.

\(^{307}\) Graef 1893; Mitteilung 1893; Mitteilungen 1893.

\(^{308}\) Dating of the Penteskouphia plaques is problematical owing to the very rough and sketchy character of most of the painting and drawing. See Von Raits 1964a, 6-7.
and one complete Boiotian skyphos, probably made in the late 5th or early 4th century (B1; Pl. 38). But since ten Corinthian plaques (C29?; C62?; C75; C76; C79; C80; C94?; C96; C97; C104) and three Attic pots (A1; A6; A7) have pottery scenes depicted on either side, the total number of representations amounts to 116, 21 and 1, respectively. In addition, there is a remote possibility that some other Corinthian plaques and Attic pottery illustrate additional scenes of production (all included in Appendix II, but without catalogue numbers; see Pl. 34a-b). A few other pots portray a potter's wheel in a context not related to pottery production, (Appendix II, W1-W3; Pl. 49a-d) or figures named as potters who are not shown at work (Appendix II, R1-R15; Pl. 50-52 and chapter VIII).  

The different kinds of pottery production scenes have nearly always been studied selectively. Even though many publications offer illustrations of both Corinthian plaques and Attic pots showing potters at work, no observer since Richter, who wrote nearly 80 years ago, has treated the full range of depictions in any depth. On the other hand, the Attic specimens only were systematically collected and studied first by Beazley and later by Juliusz Ziomecki.  

Recent treatments of the plaques with pottery scenes by
Gerhard Zimmer and Cuomo di Caprio provide new descriptions and photographs, though including only a selection of the relatively best-known plaques.\(^{314}\)

Obviously, the short treatment presented below cannot compensate for the incompleteness of and the biases in the published information. While presenting a full catalogue of plaques with pottery production scenes in Appendix II, I focus my discussion on the themes which form the backbone of this chapter: the scale and organisation of the Archaic and Classical Greek pottery workshop. The easiest way to address these issues seems to be by an examination of all the pictures of the same production stage. This approach has two advantages. It stays closest to the pictorial sources, which usually depict only small excerpts of individual production processes. And the division by subject offers the best opportunity to compare similar scenes and to recognise general patterns or exceptional features.

After presenting an overview of the various stages of pottery production in the representations, I shall try to combine the separate bits and explore some possibilities for broader reconstructions and hypotheses, concentrating on the overall organisation of labour and the workshop. This also allows me to address some points not yet touched upon, like the hierarchy within the workshop, possible indications of the status and self-esteem of potters, and the physical layout of the premises. In the final section I attempt to gather all these points together in order to draw a few general conclusions.

V.2 The various stages of pottery production, as shown on pots and plaques

V.2.a Digging for clay\(^{315}\)

The first stage of ceramic production is, of course, the extraction of clay. Whereas Attic pots offer no illustration of the activity,\(^{316}\) several Penteskouphia plaques (C6; C7?; C34; C35; C42; C61; C70; C71; C80, side B; C96, side A; just possibly C104, side A; Pl. 39e; 41c-d; 43e; 45c; 47b; 48c) show men digging with picks, sometimes collecting the material in bags or baskets catalogued items depict pottery production, only 40 of which are illustrated in Antike Denkmäler or later publications (see Appendix II, C1-C90; Pl. 39-47d). Of the 464 pieces kept in Corinth, 112 are unreadable and un inventoried (see Von Raits 1964a, 2-4). A few others have been rejoined or join fragments in Berlin and/or Paris. Only 14 of these plaques or fragments, including one possible scene of clay gathering (C7; Pl. 39e), are listed and illustrated in Geagan 1970. Geagan-Von Raits’s unpublished thesis catalogues 78 items (Von Raits 1964a, 39-59, 62-67; see also Von Raits 1964b); health problems unfortunately prevented her from publishing all the Penteskouphia plaques. During a study visit to Corinth, I recognised 14 certain or likely pottery production scenes on 11 plaques (Appendix II, C 91-C101). The few (12 according to Rayet and Collignon 1888, 143) well-preserved plaques and fragments in Paris are apparently all published in Rayet 1880 and Collignon 1886. They include three plaques with four pottery scenes (Appendix II, C102-C104; see also C7; Pl. 47e-48c). Four more fragments in Paris, with no pottery scenes, remain unpublished.

\(^{314}\) Zimmer 1982; Cuomo di Caprio 1984.

\(^{315}\) See for general treatments of this subject, referring to scenes from plaques: Hussong 1928, 7; Cloché 1931, 41; Ziomecki 1964, 3-4; 1975, 89-90; Mommsen 1975/1998a, [1]; Zimmer 1982, 26; Scheibler 1995, 73-75; Schreiber 1999, 3-8.

\(^{316}\) Ziomecki (1973b, 72; 1975, 89; see also Brandt 1927, 75; Bernhard 1966, 13) argues that two Attic red figure cup tondos in Brussels (R347 and R348, ARV\(^\text{2}\) 334; 328, 132), showing a kneeling man filling a basket by scraping the ground’s surface with a pick, illustrate clay digging. Both scenes, however, belong to a well-defined group of pictures of preparing for sports, showing training exercises and/or giving the finishing touch to the race course. See for these ARV\(^\text{2}\) 323, 48; 367, 102; Vanhove 1992, 207, 209-210; Russell 1994, 79.
(C70; C71; Pl. 45c). Nowadays, it is generally considered unlikely that these scenes illustrate mining, especially metal ore, as argued in the past,\textsuperscript{317} for there are not any reports or traces of mines in the Corinth area,\textsuperscript{318} and the men represented are not, it seems, breaking and collecting rocks. Adolf Furtwängler moreover already admitted that some of the other plaques do show potters, whereas smiths remain invisible.\textsuperscript{319}

An interesting feature of the depictions of clay extraction is that many diggers are seen removing earth from a scarp in front of them (C34; C35; C61; C70; C80; C96; Pl. 41c-d; 43e; 45c; 47b),\textsuperscript{320} as if they stand at some depth or possibly on the steep slope of one of the natural terraces in the area of Corinth. In a few scenes (C35; C61; C70; Pl. 41d; 43e; 45c) the diggers are clearly depicted as working in a deep hole or even a tunnel.\textsuperscript{321} One of these (C70; Pl. 45c) shows a pot (for water?) hanging from the ceiling or a beam,\textsuperscript{322} even though the illustrated pit seems otherwise open to the sky.

The pictures of deep clay pits and perhaps tunnels strongly suggest that clay gathering was not limited to the random digging of holes, but was instead a matter of planned exploitation on a considerable scale. Indeed, the plaque with the hanging pot has four men in the pit: one digging with a pick, one apparently collecting the excavated clay in a basket, and a third passing a full basket to a man outside on the edge of the pit. Another plaque (C71) portrays a digger with one assistant. Apparently, the work was sometimes done in teams, although it needs to be stressed that most digging scenes have only a single labourer. If the latter is not simply an artistic abbreviation of reality, the deep holes dug for clay would result from the same spot being either repeatedly returned to by a lone digger or shared by several diggers who operated individually.

Unfortunately, the plaques cannot answer the essential question whether clay diggers were specialised labourers, either full time or seasonal, or workshop staff who only intermittently went to the clay pits. On the one hand, potters would be expected to concentrate their requests for divine assistance on tasks directly related to the workshop, which form the subjects of the large majority of the votive plaques. The existence of individual votive plaques with scenes of digging clay may therefore reflect the independent nature of the activity, either as a specialist's task or as an exceptional job that fell outside the usual workshop business. On the other hand, it is conceivable that individual potters offered separate votives for several production phases; the isolated depiction of digging could simply parallel the fact that clay was excavated far from the workshop.

\textsuperscript{317} Furtwängler 1885, II 70, footnote; Wilisch 1892, 18; Pernice 1897, 19, 38; Brandt 1927, 70-71; see also Hussong 1928, 7.

\textsuperscript{318} Salmon 1984, 128.

\textsuperscript{319} Furtwängler 1885, II 70, footnote.

\textsuperscript{320} The descriptions of C6, C42 and C71, which have not been illustrated, include no information about the possible surroundings of the diggers; I have not seen these plaques.

\textsuperscript{321} This is one of the reasons for assuming that the diggers work in mines instead of clay pits: see Brandt 1927, 71; Hussong 1928, 7. However, Scheibler 1995, 74, thinks that deep clay pits are perfectly possible and offers Geoponica II.49.3 as ancient (or perhaps medieval) evidence. Payne 1931, 117 does not see a problem either.

\textsuperscript{322} See Scheibler 1995, 74.
Transport of clay and other raw materials

After the clay was dug, it had to be transported. This could be done by pack animals, but in fact, donkeys or carts carrying anything looking like clay are entirely absent from pottery production scenes. Potters or, better, painters, apparently saw no connection between animal transport and their work, perhaps because they hired professionals or because they rarely needed such service. The fact that transport, even more so than clay digging, falls outside the characteristic and essential work of a pottery establishment may have also been influential in the matter.

A possible alternative to animal transport is shown on a plaque depicting a sturdily built man who carries a heavy load on his back (C44; Pl. 42d); since the upper part is missing, the nature of the burden cannot be determined, but potter's clay or firewood for a kiln are likely possibilities. It is in any case certain that workshop staff had sometimes to carry heavy loads apart from pottery itself: a man on the Harvard skyphos by the Theseus Painter (A6; Pl. 30c) holds a basket on his shoulder; he is probably either bringing clay to the pile in front of him or taking some away. And on the Munich hydria (A4; Pl. 29a; 29c) a man walks towards the kiln with a big bag on his shoulders, apparently moving firewood.

Clay preparation

Once at the workshop, the fresh clay had to be cleaned, mixed and prepared for use. Surprisingly few pictures show these crucial and time-consuming processes, maybe partly because they are hard to capture in an attractive, understandable image. The difficulties are well illustrated by the just-mentioned skyphos at Harvard (A6; Pl. 30b-31), also known as ‘Robinson’s kiln skyphos’. As the name indicates, the original owner thought the subject was the building of a kiln. It took some 30 years before observers came to the conclusion that the scenes portray the preparation of clay, as is widely accepted nowadays, although Scheibler has recently maintained that the images have nothing to do with pottery manufacture, but refer instead to preparations for a Dionysian festival. The cursory style of the depictions and the absence of clear, decisive details make it difficult to decide who is right. A recently discovered skyphos of the Theseus Painter on

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323 One fragmentary plaque (F 507-F 729-F739-C 63 181-C 63 199-C 63 225), however, shows a meticulously drawn ox cart carrying a man, perhaps Poseidon; see Geagan 1970, 35, Fig. 5.


325 See for general treatments of this subject, mostly referring to scenes on plaques and pots: Blümner 1879, 35-37; Richter 1923, 2-3; Hussong 1928, 8-9; Cloché 1931, 40-41; Ziomecki 1964, 5-6; Mommsen 1975/1998a, [1]; Winter 1978, 19-22; Zimmer 1982, 29; Scheibler 1986, 790-793; 1995, 74, 76; Schreiber 1999, 9-12.

326 See Hussong 1928, 9.

327 Robinson 1938 (=CVA USA 7, Baltimore 3), 11-12, followed by Beazley in ABV 520, 26; Zanker 1965, 96; Webster 1972, 248.


Thasos (A7; Pl. 32a-b), which is very similar to the one at Harvard, might eventually settle the matter, but the few fragments identified until now offer no new insights.

Even if we accept that the Theseus Painter’s skyphoi do relate to pottery production, their scenes still remain partly unclear. On one side of the Harvard skyphos a man is bent forward, presumably kneading a pile of clay, while the basket-carrier, mentioned above, is adding or removing clay from the pile (Pl. 30c; 31c-d). The scene on the opposite side is similar, but the pile is differently drawn and might instead be a huge basket, the basket-carrier is replaced with a gesturing man (Pl. 30b; 31a-b). The Thasos skyphos features, on both sides, a kneader seated at the pile, which is drawn in the same way on each side; behind him there is again an upright figure, who seems to be walking towards the pile on one side and away from it on the other (pl. 32a-b). The differences between the sides, especially on the Harvard skyphos, suggest that two successive stages of clay preparation are represented, perhaps carried out by the same men on each side.330

However, such slight variation is a recurrent trait of the Theseus Painter’s work, who rarely employed it to differentiate the contents of the scenes on opposite sides: he apparently only wished to avoid exact repetition.331

In each of the four scenes of the skyphoi A6 and A7 the pairs of almost naked clay workers are accompanied by a man, more elaborately dressed and bearded, who stands near a herm to the right of the pile (see Pl. 30b-c; 31d; 32a-b). He appears to be supervising,332 although it is hardly likely that the preparation of clay would require the help of an experienced eye, and the ratio of one overseer to two workers seems odd. I shall return to this problem below when looking at workshop hierarchy in general (sections V.3-4) The activity on the two Penteskouphia plaques illustrating clay preparation (C36; C79, side A; Pl. 41e; 46e) is on a smaller scale than that of the Theseus Painter’s scenes. One very battered plaque (C36; Pl. 41e) preserves a man treading clay, apparently also kneading some of it by hand. He is part of a larger workshop scene with two more men, one painting and one at the wheel, which suggests that clay preparation was not always carried out in a separate space in Corinthian workshops, but took place beside other tasks, perhaps assigned to an assistant.333 The other plaque bears a radically different image of an old man supporting himself by grasping bands hanging from the ceiling (C79, side A; Pl. 46e).334 Although the lower part is missing, the man is presumably treading slippery, wet clay. Next to the old man there is a seated (?) woman, possibly his wife, who kneads a ball of clay with both hands. This resembles more a small family enterprise which fully employed everyone available and lacked the option of pushing off chores onto assistants, not to mention specialists.335


331 I here follow the opinion of Olaf Borgers, who is preparing a dissertation on the Theseus Painter.

332 Thus Padgett 1992; Maffre 1999, 272-273. Russell 1994, 13-14, accepts that, on one side, the man is worshipping the herm and, on the other side, supervising; Eisman and Turnbull 1978, 398, suggest that the ‘worshipper’ is a coroplast working on the herm. The new skyphos A7 obviously has a supervisor on each side.


334 On the Boiotian skyphos B1 (Pl. 38) the ropes from which the man hangs from the ceiling probably form some kind of equipment, though put to different use.

When his clay was ready, the potter could start turning the wheel and shape his pots. Although this activity is at the core of pottery production, no more than 7 of the over 100 pottery production scenes on Corinthian plaques represent a potter at the wheel (C36; C56; C57; C68; C69; C76, side A?; C103; Pl. 41e; 45b; 48a), and one other (C75, side B; Pl. 46b) shows a potter shaping a pot (?) without a wheel or perhaps standing at a wheel portrayed in some kind of bird’s-eye view. In addition, one man at the wheel is apparently seen painting (C67; Pl. 45a). In ancient Corinth the work at the wheel was evidently not considered so worthy of illustration, or was not seen as the phase which required the most divine assistance.

In Athens the situation is sharply different: in a total of only 21 pottery production scenes, 11 or 12 are of potters at the wheel (A1 twice; A2; A3(?); A4; A8; A10; A14; A15; A16; A18; perhaps also A9; Pl. 28-29b; 32c; 33b; 36a-37b; 37d). Counting A9, these include six of the seven pottery scenes found on the Akropolis, the seventh being A5 (Pl. 30a) which has a painter at the wheel. The special preference for the wheel among the production scenes of the Akropolis pots, which are very likely also to be potters’ votives, is in striking contrast to the Corinthian votive plaques. Attic potters seem to have had different priorities in addressing their gods or the public visiting the Akropolis.

Another notable phenomenon is that quite a few potters depicted working at the wheel are not actually shaping a pot but finishing (A1, side B; A8?; A18?; C103; possibly A3 and A14; Pl. 28b; 28d; 32c; 36a; 37d; 48a) or painting one (A5; C67; see also B1; Pl. 30a; 38a; 45a) or perhaps adding handles (A8; A18; Pl. 32c; 37d). One may therefore conclude that the painters preferred to feature recognisable, finished products. Incidentally, these scenes also elucidate an aspect of the division of labour: all four Attic scenes with a potter actually forming a pot include a young assistant spinning the wheel (A1, side A; A4; A15?; A16; Pl. 28a; 29a-b; 36b; 37a-b), whereas in the three scenes illustrating the finishing stage the potter works unassisted (A1, side B; A8; A18; the painting on A5 could be added; Pl. 28b; 30a; 32e; 37d). The contrast is especially


337 See Ziolecki 1975, 93-94. In addition, A4, A6 and possibly A12 show other stages in fashioning of pots (Pl. 29a; 31e-f; 34c).

338 According to Beazley 1944, 15-16, who quotes Richter and Milne in support, the potter in this picture cannot be shaping, but must be doing some finishing work. This is possible, although one can wonder which state of finishing the pot has reached: it is even unclear whether it is meant to be a stamnos (Richter) or a column-krater (Beazley). Possibly, the scene is less realistic than it looks.

339 Although many have maintained that Archaic-Classical Greek potters must have used kick-wheels (e.g. Blümner 1879, 37-40; Rayet and Collignon 1888, VIII; Bernabei 1894; Paul 1982, 47; see also, more cautiously Richter 1923, 5; 1946, 25), there is no evidence for them before well into the Hellenistic period. See Chapot s.a., 372; Hussong 1928, 11-15; Rieth 1960, 44; Ziolecki 1964, 7-12; Hampe 1967-1968; Metzler 1969, 143-146; Sparkes 1991, 14-15; Scheibler 1995, 77.

340 See Richter 1946, 25; Ziolecki 1964, 12; Scheibler 1995, 794-795. The impression of Jamot 1896, 1122, and Rieth 1960, 42, that the employment of a wheel-spinner relates to the size of the thrown pot seems to be invalidated by A1, side A (Pl. 28a; small pot, wheel-spinner), and A18 (Pl. 37d; large pot, no wheel-
clear on the cup in Karlsruhe (A1; Pl. 28a-b), which has a shaper and his wheel-boy on one side, and a finisher and an onlooker on the other.\textsuperscript{341} The single possible exception is A10 (pl. 33b), where a wheel-boy is not included; perhaps the indistinct remains of the object on the wheel are a lump of clay before the actual turning has begun.\textsuperscript{342} The Penteskouphia plaques with men at the wheel present a more ambiguous picture. The plaques with a potter or a painter finishing a pot (C67; CI03; Pl. 45a; 48a) show no assistant, while two plaques with a potter throwing (C36; C68; Pl. 41e; 45b) have gaps precisely where an assistant could have been sitting, although at least some hands or feet should be visible if one had been there, which is not the case. Four other scenes with a potter or possibly a painter at the wheel have not been illustrated (C56; C57; C69; C76, side A), but wheel-spinners are not among the additional staff Furtwängler mentions in his descriptions of the plaques. The tantalising scene of C75, side B (pl. 46b) also shows a single man, not surely at the wheel, who is probably shaping a vessel. Perhaps Corinthian potters could sometimes manage without the assistance of someone who spun the wheel, although this would cause technical difficulties, as throwing, of course, involves both hands.\textsuperscript{343} One might argue that the relatively small pots which formed a large proportion of the Corinthian production allowed for some leeway;\textsuperscript{344} on the other hand, the plaques in question seem to portray larger kinds of pots (C36; C68; see also C67; Pl. 41e; 45a-b).

V.2.e \textit{Decorating}\textsuperscript{345}

The application of the decoration, usually painting, is the last stage in the completion of decorated pottery. Yet, remarkably, there are no more than three Corinthian scenes of painters (C36?; C67; possibly C55; C103 seems unlikely; Pl. 41e; 43b; 45a; 48a) against a less surprising six from...
Athens (A5; A9; A11; A13; A16; A17; see also possibly A12; Pl. 33a; 33c; 34c-35; 37a-c). This contrast seems comparable to that regarding scenes of potters at the wheel and may have a similar explanation, about which more below (section V.6).

Some time necessarily elapsed between the fashioning and painting of pots, while they dried. The scenes of pots being painted on the wheel, therefore, would illustrate a distinct stage in the production process, when the dried pot was put back on the wheel as a means of painting banded decoration or ornamental friezes (A5; C67; see also B1 and, just possibly, C103; Pl. 30a; 38; 45a; 48a). The slow turning in this phase could obviously happen without an assistant spinning the wheel. Other scenes show freehand, so figure or ornament painting, with seated craftsmen who hold a pot upright on their thighs or in their laps (A11; A13; A16; A17; see also A4 and A12; Pl. 29a; 33c; 34c-35; 37a-c), or have a pot placed in front of them on a low platform (A13; probably C36; possibly B1; Pl. 35; 38; 41e) or on the floor (A13, twice; probably, but with some clay or cloth underneath, A9; Pl. 33a; 35). Apart from the wheel, there were evidently no installations or supports which assisted painters.

In all these scenes, painting is represented as an individual task: two painters are never seen working together on the same pot. Nevertheless, painters were not always alone: the famous hydria of the Leningrad Painter (A13; Pl. 35) depicts four painters, including a woman, seated side by side in (presumably) one workshop, each decorating one pot. Some scholars have inferred from this picture that the Athenian potters’ quarter had separate painting establishments or workshops which employed groups of specialised ornament painters. However, the Leningrad Painter’s picture is without parallel in its concentration on painters alone. Several Corinthian and Attic depictions, on the other hand, present single painters in the presence of other workshop staff performing different tasks (C36; A9; A16; A17; probably C67; possibly A5; see also B1; Pl. 30a; 33a; 37a-c; 38; 41e; 45a). These strongly suggest that pot-painting was (sometimes?) carried out next to other activities or was at least not considered a distinctly isolated activity within the workshop, although we must remember that the mixture of craftsmen may be more an artistic device than a reflection of reality. Nevertheless, even when painters worked beside other staff, inside the potters’ workshops, the mixed scenes indicate division of labour or even specialisation and a certain degree of organisation and efficiency.

346 The Boiotian skyphos B1 (Pl. 38) shows a paint-pot containing a brush on the wheel, but painting is not being performed.


349 See Houssay 1912; Sparkes 1991, 13-19; Martens 1992, 183-221. The action of C55 (Pl. 43b) is unclear and may not be painting at all.

350 Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 13, 19 cannot accept that additional equipment was not used. Their opinion seems to be conditioned by an idealistic view of pot-painting as a kind of academic art directly comparable to panel-painting; they cannot imagine that good drawing is also possible in awkward conditions and positions, and without the assistance of elaborate equipment.

351 See Philipp 1968, 84; Paul 1982, 47-48; and, with some doubts, Hussong 1928, 63-65. Scheibler 1995, 112 argues against this hypothesis.

352 See Blümmer 1879, 86-87; Rayet and Collignon 1888, XVI; Jamot 1896, 1127; Hussong 1928, 53.

It is tempting to correlate the depictions of solitary painters (A11; perhaps A5 and A12; Pl. 30a; 33c; 34c) with a simpler mode of production. But since none of them shows an installation, tool or other indicator of a workshop context (apart from the wheel of A5; see Pl. 30a) they may well reflect nothing more than the painter’s focus on his or her own profession, without any concern for the surroundings in which it was practised. Another possibility is that these scenes (except for A5 with its wheel) are of painters who indeed worked outside potters’ establishments. However unlikely in my opinion such a hypothesis is, it cannot be disproved. In any event, the representations of solitary painters are in the minority, two or three at most (including A5), whereas six or seven pictures situate painters in potters’ workshops beside two to five fellow artisans (C36; C55?; C67; A9; A13; A16; A17; Pl. 33a; 35; 37a-c; 41e; 43b; 45a).

V.2.f  

Firing

After painting, another drying period was required, then the kiln was loaded – an operation which is not seen in the painted illustrations – and, finally, firing could begin. Its crucial nature is clearly reflected by the fact that over half the Penteskouphia plaques represent men firing kilns and another quarter of them kilns or fragments of kilns by themselves. It would thus seem that the help of the gods was especially sought in relation to the kiln and its operation. But it is also just possible that the potter firing his kiln acted as a characteristic and easily recognisable icon of pottery production in general, one, moreover, that stressed the role of the master in this risky, difficult process. Again, however, the Corinthian plaques contrast markedly with the Attic scenes, only one of which includes a kiln in part of a larger picture of a workshop (A4, not from the Akropolis; Pl. 29a; 29c). The majority of firing scenes show a single stoker, but some include a second (C9; C33; C48; C58; C59; C72; C75, side B?; C76, side B?; and possibly C16; C18; C29, side A; C39; Pl. 39f; 40d-f; 41b; 42a; 43c-d; 46a; 46c-d), or even a third man at the kiln (C49; C53; C54; Pl. 42f-43a). Many of the more complicated firing scenes have a stoker at the channel to the fire chamber and a ‘controller’ on the top of the channel (C9; C58; C59; C72; possibly C18; C29, side A; the stoker on C54 is apparently resting; Pl. 39f; 40e-f; 43a; 43c-d; 46a). Most ‘controllers’ appear to be

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355 C2-C5; C9-C20; C26; C29, side A; C33; C38; C397; C40-C41; C43; C45?; C467; C47-C49; C53; C54; C56; C58; C59; C607; C64-C66; C72; C75, side B; C76, side B; C77; C78; C80, side A; C83-C85; C87; C88; C90; C93; C94, side A; C97, side B; C98; C100; C102; C104, side B; C1067 (Pl. 39b-d; 39f-40; 41b; 42a-c; 42e-43a; 43c-d; 44c-e; 46a; 46c-d; 47e-f; 48b; 48e). Cuomo di Caprio’s (1984, 77) lower total of 17 firing scenes is apparently based on previously illustrated, well-preserved plaques only. As mentioned in section V.1, Furtwängler 1885, I 70 (footnote); Wilisch 1892, 18; and Brandt 1927, 71 maintain that these plaques illustrate metal furnaces.

356 C1; C8; C21-C25; C27; C28; C30-C32; C50-C52; C62; C63; C81; C82; C86; C89; C91; C92; C94, side B; C95; C97, side A; C99; C101 (Pl. 39a; 44a; 47c). Many of these are small fragments of which some may belong to the same plaque or to firing scenes listed in the preceding note.


manipulating the smoke vent at the top of the kiln (C9; C18; C58; C72; perhaps C59; Pl. 39f; 40e; 43c-d; 46a). On a few plaques a stoker is accompanied by one or two assistants carrying bowls which presumably contain water or some other liquid used to regulate firing (C53; C54; possibly C16; C33; Pl. 40d; 41b; 42f-43a).

The more complicated firing scenes presumably illustrate specific and difficult moments in the final phases of firing, as opposed to the pictures of solitary stokers which usually seem to have a generic character. This contrast possibly indicates that the popular one-figure portrayals are adapted to the limited focus of a votive offering, whereas the rarer teams of two and three men at the kiln may be closer to reality. Therefore, even though we cannot rule out the chance that some of the more elaborate scenes are synoptic illustrations of a sequence of events, they generally reinforce the recurring impression that at least a section of ancient Greek workshops needed more than one or two men to operate.

After firing

The final work at the pottery is not documented by images on pots or plaques, which comes as no surprise, as unloading a kiln, storing pots or displaying them for sale are prosaic activities, hard to depict clearly. More remarkably, the selling of pottery, whether in or outside the workshop, is very rarely illustrated (Appendix II, T1-T3; Pl. 54).

Pottery production scenes as evidence for workshop scale and organisation

Viewed together, the 138 production scenes form a small but valuable body of evidence that yields some basic statistics and contributes to a general discussion of issues of organisation and scale which are elucidated by neither single scenes nor an evaluation of individual production phases. The special religious purpose of many items bearing production scenes, their small size and Greek iconographical and compositional traditions pose some limitations on interpretation. Nevertheless, a cautious approach is possible.

The problems and possibilities posed by the nature of pottery production scenes are well illustrated by the first issue to be treated here: scale. At first sight, it might seem that the number of people shown in each scene is somehow related to the size of the workshop portrayed. One could therefore conclude that many ancient Greek potteries were very small, as more than half of

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359 See for various detailed technical interpretations of the firing scenes Zimmer 1982, 30; Cuomo di Caprio 1984, 81; Scheibler 1995, 104. All agree that the plaques generally show a late phase of firing.

360 Exceptions are C2, C4 and perhaps C66 (Pl. 39c-d; 44e), each featuring a man on the stoking channel, and C47 (Pl. 42e), with a man climbing the kiln with a ladder; all these seem to show solitary ‘controllers’. C16 (Pl. 40d), with a man possibly stepping onto the stoking channel and a bowl (?) may also belong with them, that is, if there was not a second man on the left side.

361 See Zimmer 1982, 32; 1986, [2]; see also Hussong 1928, 30.

362 See Hussong 1928, 35, who suggests that C53 (Pl. 42f) depicts the unloading of a kiln. Although there are the remains of two men handling (passing?) a bowl in the upper part, it can be classified with the firing scenes (as they are explained above), owing to the presence of a stoker at the bottom.
the Corinthian production scenes\textsuperscript{363} and up to a third of the Athenian ones (A8; A11; A12; A18; perhaps A3; A15;\textsuperscript{364} Pl. 28d; 32c; 33c; 34c; 36b; 37d) feature only a single craftsman. But it soon becomes apparent that things are not so straightforward, and that we cannot take the scenes with a single man at face value.\textsuperscript{365}

To start, it is difficult to envisage a strictly one-man operation, with a potter-painter doing everything alone, including throwing and firing. At least his children or his wife could be expected to assist him, as is indeed seen in more elaborate depictions like C54 or C79 (side A) (Pl. 43a; 46e), about which more below. In some cases, the compositional setting is another indication that the picture is far from complete. The painter shown on the Boston cup (A11; Pl. 33c), for example, or his polishing colleague now in Berlin (A12; Pl. 34c) can be seen as tondo figures that the painter conveniently removed from their settings and either adopted to the composition or chose as self-contained images celebrating the maker, in this instance the painter. Similarly, the small size of the Penteskouphia plaques may have forced the illustrators to be selective, although some detailed and elaborated scenes, like C36 and C54 (Pl. 41c; 43a), demonstrate that the notion should not be pushed too far.

Perhaps more decisive than limitations of composition and size is that all the Corinthian plaques and many of the Athenian fragments with production scenes are almost doubtless the personal votive offerings of potters. As remarked, such a votive would naturally focus strongly on its dedicator and probably tend to overemphasise his professional role, possibly to the extent that staff members of lesser status were omitted, for instance stoking assistants.\textsuperscript{366} One might object that some dedicators showed themselves beside colleagues (employees or relatives?) or perhaps complete teams of workers, but this does not necessarily mean that those who did not, really worked entirely alone.

One could further complicate matters by assuming that the one-figure production scenes refer not to independent craftsmen, i.e. potters owning a workshop, but their employees or even specialists who worked on their own behalf. Especially the second hypothesis has some attraction, for it is the only model that would account for the strict separation between the manufacturing stages which characterises most production scenes (i.e. digging, shaping/finishing, decorating and firing). But although the existence of independent clay diggers seems somewhat plausible, any further separation of the stages becomes problematical from an organisational point of view; furthermore, it goes against current notions of traditional workshop practice and is not supported by other evidence from either Antiquity or ethnographic parallels. If one assumes that the solitary artisans in production scenes were simply workshop employees, it would not only be impossible to distinguish them from their masters, but one would also have to consider the possibility that, for instance, two stokers who worked together each dedicated a plaque showing a single man firing the kiln, which seems somewhat odd. In any event, the few larger, mixed scenes which

\textsuperscript{363} C1-C7; C10-C20; C26; C29, side B, and possibly side A; C34-C35; C38; C40-C47; C60?; C61; C62, side A?; C64-C66; C68; C73; C75, side A; C76, side A; C77-C78; C80 (twice); C83-C85; C87-C88; C90; C93; C94, side A; C96 (twice); C97, side B; C98; C100; C102-C103; C104 (twice); C106 (Pl. 39a-e; 40-41a; 41c-d; 42b-e; 43e; 44c-e; 45b; 46b; 46d; 47b; 47e-48c; 48e).

\textsuperscript{364} A2 (Pl. 28c) must have included more than only the preserved wheel-spinner; A5 (Pl. 30a) is a difficult case, as the single preserved cup-painter is surrounded by other craftsmen, none of whom is recognisable as a potter.

\textsuperscript{365} See Ziomecki 1975, 120-123.

portray several workers and occasionally different workshop activities in the same picture make clear that focus on individual craftsmen and specialisation had its limits.

The more elaborate workshop scenes are especially frequent on Attic pots and plaques, about half of which depict three or more people or very probably did so when complete (A4; A6, twice; A7, twice; A9; A10; A13; A16; A17; Pl. 29; 30b-32b; 33a-b; 35; 37a-c). Several others are so fragmentary (A2; A3; A14; A18; Pl. 28c-d; 36a; 37d) that it is impossible to estimate the number of figures, but each of them likely had more than one. Of the Corinthian plaques, just five portray three or four craftsmen (C36; C49; C53-C54; C70; Pl. 41e; 42f-43a; 45c) and the fragments offer little scope for a greater number (except perhaps C37; C39; C55; C69; C79, twice; C105; Pl. 42a; 43b; 46c-47a; 48d). The conclusion that relatively large workshops were fairly common in Athens but much less so in Corinth is obvious; however, as in regard to the one man-depictions, complications arise.

First, one must realise that even the most elaborate pictures usually seem to illustrate a workshop of rather moderate size. Most large production scenes include only three (A16; A17; C36; C49; C53; C54; perhaps A9, A10; Pl. 33a-b; 37a-c; 41e; 42f-43a) or four people (A6, twice; A7, twice; A13; C70; Pl. 30b-32b; 35; 45c). The five-man team on the Boiotian skyphos (B1; Pl. 38) and especially the eight artisans of the Munich hydria (A4; Pl. 29), being exceptional, cannot be accepted as representative.

A second complication is that it is almost as difficult as in the case of the one-man scenes to relate the more elaborate representations to workshop organisation. Most of the 16 specimens listed above are exceptional in their composition and iconography. Some even have peculiar features, like the Athena and the crowning Nikai of the Milan hydria (A13; Pl. 35) or the beating of a worker on the Boiotian skyphos (B1; Pl. 38), exactly the two scenes which happen to be among the most extensive available. This alone makes one doubt whether the pictures are representative or reliable.

The selective character of even this group of relatively extensive scenes presents yet more difficulties. The diggers of C70 (Pl. 45c), the teams firing a kiln on C49, C53 and C54 (Pl. 42f-43a), and the men preparing clay on the Theseus Painter’s skyphoi (A6; A7; Pl. 30b-32b) may represent a full workshop staff who also shaped and decorated or, on the other hand, only part of the staff. The same applies to the four people on the Milan hydria (A13; Pl. 35), all of whom are painting. If they are not specialists, as some have argued, we can only guess at their other tasks. The Oxford krater (A17; Pl. 37c) features a painter, a man carrying a finished pot and another man fetching a paint-pot, but it is unclear how these men and their tasks may be linked, if at all. Explaining the scene within the overall organisational context of the workshop would be even more difficult.

Several other depictions, including quite a few of the incompletely preserved scenes from the Akropolis (A9; A10; A16, possibly also A2; A3; A14; perhaps A5; see also the marble relief S2; Pl. 28c-d; 30a; 33a-b; 36a; 37a-b; 53a), clearly attempt to give a representative picture of workshop activities; nevertheless, they offer only a selection concentrating on potting and painting, the heart of ceramic production. The maker of the Boiotian skyphos B1 (Pl. 38) may have had similar intentions, although the beating distracts the observer from the workshop’s operation. In fact, there are only two fairly complete larger scenes: the Munich hydria (A4; Pl. 29), covering production from shaping to firing, and the Corinthian plaque C36 (Pl. 41e),


368 More limited, less clear combinations are seen on the plaques C56 (a man at the wheel and one at a kiln); C69 and C79, side B (Pl. 46a, two men); C 105 (Pl. 48d, possibly a man at the wheel and a worker). See Ziomecki 1973b, 73; 1975, 120.
showing clay preparation to painting. Although these exceptional scenes might well picture the workshop in a daily situation, they again offer a combination of easily recognisable, characteristic activities, that is, treading, potting at the wheel, painting and firing, which, except for the first, are precisely the themes that figure so prominently in the one-man scenes. The preference for clear, synoptic combinations, which is a common trait of Greek pot-painting, should make us wary of expecting much realism.\footnote{See Metzler 1969, 148-149; Ziomecki 1975, 76, 120-122; Robertson 1992, 133; Scheibler 1995, 110; and also Hussong 1928, 63; Webster 1972, 8.}

Moreover, the synoptic approach poses a third difficulty in reconstructing workshop size and organisation from the production scenes. As each synopsis may or may not combine several successive activities in one image, it is impossible to make out which parts are meant to be simultaneous.\footnote{See Zimmer 1982, 29, 32; Scheibler 1986, 784.} It is moreover conceivable that some scenes overdo the variety of activities in an attempt to offer maximum clarity by giving a complete overview,\footnote{See Beazley 1944, 17; Metzler 1969, 152.} which probably explains, for example, the odd combination of events on the Oxford krater (A17; Pl. 37c).

The scenes themselves, unfortunately, supply few clues which help to disentangle events. A possible starting point is that the Boiotian skyphos (B1; Pl. 38), the Munich hydria (A4; Pl. 29) and probably also the Oxford krater (A17; Pl. 37c) seem to portray clearly defined individual artisans.\footnote{See Scheibler 1986, 794; the smaller scenes on the Karlsruhe cup Al (Pl. 28a-b) may be added. Each of the Theseus Painter’s skyphoi (A6; A7; Pl. 30b-32b), on the other hand, seems to show the same men on either side, but as argued in section V.2.c, this probably indicates that the scenes are simply repeated on both sides.} So, assuming we are not simply dealing with painters’ inventions, it could be argued that the individuality indicates that each staff member had one specific task which was performed simultaneously with others, as opposed to the more ‘specialised’ scenes treated above which show teams of workers concentrating on a single activity. At this point, however, problems multiply. If the ‘specialised’ teams are presumed to represent part of a larger staff, they complement the more elaborate scenes because they suggest that potteries were relatively large units in which the work was divided among groups of specialists. On the other hand, if one regards the ‘specialised’ teams as entire staffs of small workshops who performed all the necessary tasks sequentially, as would seem the most likely practice in fact, the more varied workshop scenes can less easily be fitted into the overall picture, even if one accepts that they represent somewhat larger workshops.

In view of all this, it may be concluded that small-scale production was probably less common and less limited than the scenes with solitary artisans suggest. In actuality, many men depicted alone were likely to have one or more associates or assistants.\footnote{See Hussong 1928, 63; Scheibler 1995, 110.} The most elaborate pottery production scenes presumably give a somewhat exaggerated impression of the variety and scale of activities taking place on a typical working day in an Athenian or Corinthian workshop. By extension, the scale of production and the physical size of the establishments could also have been less than these images of pottery manufacturers might lead us to suppose.\footnote{Scholars have usually concluded the opposite. See Pottier s.a., 39-40; Ziomecki 1975, 120-122; Scheibler 1984, 130; 1986, 799; 1995, 110; Robertson 1992, 133.}
By now it has probably become evident that the precise implications of all this for the organisation of work in an ancient Greek pottery remain unclear. It may well be that some potters who owned relatively large establishments efficiently employed their staff by working on several production phases simultaneously. On the other hand, especially in Corinth, many potters in all likelihood operated on a smaller scale, preferring the simpler but probably less efficient arrangement of going through each stage with the entire staff. Whatever the exact procedure, the number of people in some production scenes, especially the Munich and Milan hydriai (A4; A13) and the Boiotian skyphos (B1; Pl. 38), seems incompatible with a family business in the narrowest sense of the word. Workshops employing at least three adult males must presumably have drawn on more than one nuclear family, if they were indeed family based. In addition, it is quite likely that at least some of the larger workshops employed slave labour or engaged paid artisans from outside the family circle.

V.4 Pottery production scenes indicating status and hierarchy within the workshop

In addition to information on scale and organisation, the way painters portrayed themselves and their associates throws some light on status and hierarchy in the potteries. Although most men on the Corinthian plaques have a quite generic appearance, anatomical details are often carefully shown (see C4; C7; C35; C39; C44; C54; C70; C79; Pl. 39c-d; 39e; 41d; 42a; 42d; 43a; 45c; 46e-47a); age and overweight are not always concealed (C79; C44; see also C39; C54; C70; Pl. 42a; 42d; 43a; 45c; 46e-47a) and one stoker even seems to have a lame foot (C40; Pl. 42b-c). The presence of a working woman (C79, side A; Pl. 46e) should probably not be regarded as flattering either. Apparently, Corinthian painters did not consider their class refined or in need of flattery. This view may, however, have been conditioned by the religious function of the plaques as individual dedications, which probably encouraged a degree of realism and specific characterisation of the human figures.

The almost caricatural picture on the Boiotian skyphos (B1; Pl. 38), in which two craftsmen are beaten and one punished by being suspended from the ceiling with his penis bound to a rope attached to the ground, cannot be placed in any recognisable context, which makes interpretation of its intentions difficult. It is positively unflattering and represents a world of hard work under harsh conditions. Perhaps the severe punishment points to the use of slave labour.

The Athenian painters approached the matter differently. In conformity with general practice for depicting humans on Attic pottery, the figures of the potters and painters are generic, idealised. Differences in age are indicated almost symbolically by giving older men beards and making

\[375\] See Zimmer 1986, [2].

\[376\] Pottier s.a., 20; on this point, I disagree with Zimmer 1982, 32.

\[377\] See Pottier 1906, 696-697.

\[378\] See Wilisch 1892, 86-87; Scheibler 1979b, 17.

\[379\] As argued by Zimmer 1982, 31; 1986, [2].

\[380\] See Rieth 1960, 40.

\[381\] The detailed interpretations of individual figures of A4 in Scheibler 1986, 794-796 seem too fanciful in view of the sketchy and loose drawing of this rather small picture.
youths smaller. The settings share in this idealising symbolism. The painter on the Boston cup (A11; Pl. 33c) is equipped with a walking stick, a strygilis and an aryballos, all belonging to the leisurely and sporty life of wealthy youth. Although one can question the realism of his accoutrements and their exact message remains unclear, the allusion is definitely complimentary. The unlooking Athenas on A15 (Pl. 36b) and, probably, if not a statue, A5 (Pl. 30a) and their crowning counterpart accompanied by Nikai on A13 (Pl. 35) even bring a divine element into the potters' world; unlike the Poseidons on C61 and C63 (Pl. 43e; 44a), the goddesses are integrated into the space of the artisans. Even though the painters' intentions are again unclear, the contrast with the direct realism of the Corinthian plaques and the Boiotian skyphos seems significant. Athenian painters clearly wanted to convey a much more attractive image of themselves and their world than their counterparts in Corinth and Boiotia. It remains open to discussion, however, whether the difference also reflects better living and working conditions or should instead be seen merely as a matter of religious attitudes or a higher sense of self-esteem and/or self-advertisement, if it is not just a matter of artistic convention.

Returning to more tangible matters, we note that both Corinthian and Attic production scenes show people of different ages working side by side as if forming a family enterprise, although this is not necessarily the explanation for these differences. At any rate, the older men in workshop depictions are most often in charge. This is especially clear on the Munich hydria (A4; Pl. 29a; 29c) where the (once?) grey, bearded old man, who is not visibly doing anything except looking on while holding a staff, is the only fully dressed participant. A comparable picture may have appeared on the fragmentary plaque C39 (Pl. 42a) showing a bearded man named Phuskon holding a stick, apparently supervising his employees. Another fully dressed, bearded man without evident occupation accompanies the workers on the skyphoi by the Theseus Painter (A6; A7; Pl. 30b-c; 31d; 32a-b); in one instance, he also holds a stick. The

382 See Brandt 1927, 85; Beazley 1944, 11; Ziomecki 1975, 131, 142-143; Scheibler 1995, 130.

383 See Ziomecki 1975, 142-143. According to Furtwängler 1885, I 85, C46 shows an Athena on the stoking channel. As I have not seen the plaque, I cannot judge the observation, but one would expect a 'controller' with a stick rather than Athena. Since the plaque, which has not been illustrated, is presumably in poor condition, Furtwängler's interpretation is conceivably mistaken.

384 See Pottier 1891, 11; s.a., 62; Jamot 1896, 1127; Beazley 1944, 12-13; Philipp 1968, 64-65; Arafat and Morgan 1989, 317-318. In A13, interestingly, the girl on the right is not receiving a crown as are the males; although she sits above them on a platform, the lack of a crown must denote her inferior social position: see Brandt 1927, 85-86; Kehrberg 1982, 28-31; Papadopoulos 1997, 453. Oddly, Paul 1982, 48-50, suggests that the girl could be in charge of the workshop, as she sits on a platform, higher than the other painters.


386 See Zimmer 1982, 32.

387 I.e. in Reichhold's drawing: the man is now bald and beardless.

388 See Jahn 1867, 45; Hussong 1928, 64-65; Beazley 1944, 6; Metzler 1969, 149-150; Ziomecki 1975, 131; Arafat and Morgan 1989, 317; Scheibler 1986, 795-796; 1995, 111; Robertson 1992, 133.

389 See section V.2.c and Ziomecki 1975, 131; Scheibler 1986, 791-793; Russell 1994, 14; Maffre 1999, 270, 272-273. Eisman and Turnbull 1978, 398 suggest that, on one side of A6, the bearded man is a coroplast finishing the herm beside him; but although he touches the statue, he has no tools, as would a coroplast. The hypothesis, moreover, fails to explain the man's attitude on the opposite sides of A6 and on A7 where he has the herm at his back.
prominence of these non-working senior figures with a staff or stick, common signs of authority, suggests they are not merely supervisory employees or retired masters who look on but the actual owners of the workshops.390

The hierarchy is less evident in two kiln-stoking scenes with three craftsmen (C53; C54; Pl. 42f-43a) and among the four clay diggers of C70 (Pl. 45c). In each instance, the ‘specialists’, i.e. the stokers and the diggers, respectively, are bearded, whereas one of the assistants is a young boy. It is tempting to identify the bearded men as the masters, especially in the stoking scenes,391 But unlike the ‘idle men’ described above these possible masters take part in the work. Less ambiguous are the scenes showing potters at the wheels spun by assistants. The potters on the Karlsruhe cup (A1, side A; Pl. 28a) and the Munich hydria (A4; Pl. 29a-b) are both bearded, whereas the one on the Caltagirone krater (A15; Pl. 36b) is not. The wheel-spinners are mostly boys,392 so the hierarchy is clear.

In other, smaller workshop scenes, like side B of the Karlsruhe cup (A1; Pl. 28b) and a few Penteskouphia plaques (C57; C69; possibly C56), ‘onlookers’ play an unclear role. Perhaps they are visitors or customers,393 managers and/or workshop owners. But as already remarked in regard to the Theseus Painter’s skyphoi (section V.2.c), it seems to make little sense for a supervisor to oversee only one or two workers. Most likely, we should regard these depictions as further evidence for the selective character of pottery production scenes, and the role of artistic convention: Attic pots often show unclear additional figures. An alternative is that workshop directors are not to be counted among the craftsmen, that is, they were not, as a rule, present in the working space, and have been added by the painters, so to speak, as ‘visible absentees’ in order to please their ‘bosses’.

Whatever each man’s exact position and role, the probable hierarchical relationship between the ‘master potter’ and ‘his’ craftsmen in most scenes implies a certain scale of production and level of organisation. Most depictions suggest something larger than a nuclear-family business.394

V.5 The physical context of the work shown on pottery production scenes.

A final category of information offered by the pottery production scenes concerns the spatial and physical scale and layout of the workshop. Unfortunately pottery production scenes show surprisingly little of the workshops’ installations and tools. The only part that features prominently is the kiln, which appears conspicuously on many Penteskouphia plaques.395 The sketchy drawings, however, reveal little of the kiln’s construction, including only the most

390 See Pottier s.a., 20; Ziomecki 1975, 131; Scheibler 1986, 792-793, 799; Russell 1994, 14.

391 See Zimmer 1986, [2].

392 See Hussong 1928, 13; Metzler 1969, 143; Ziomecki 1975, 124; Scheibler 1986, 794-795; 799. They suggest that all ‘wheel boys’ are young, but they are not on A1 and probably A2 (Pl. 28a; 28c).

393 See Metzler 1969, 149-151; Scheibler 1986, 792-793.

394 See Pottier s.a., 20; Scheibler 1986, 797.

395 See esp. Hussong 1928, 27-32; Cuomo di Caprio 1984, 77-82; and section III.6.b.
obvious typological features; neither are they very informative about the sizes of the kilns depicted.  

Most kilns on the plaques seem to be quite small, about as tall as the stoker or somewhat less C3; C9; C11; C15?; C16; C40; C64; C65; C102; C104, side B; Pl. 39b; 39f-40a; 40c-d; 42b-c; 44c-d; 47e-f; 48b). Men standing on the stoking channel (see C2; C4; C9; C18; C29; C59; C66; Pl. 39c-d; 39f; 40e-f; 43d; 44e) confirm this general impression, but also suggest that quite some kilns were higher than the stoker. One man even climbs up onto a kiln with a ladder (C47; Pl. 42e). In many pictures of firing, however, the proportions of both the people and the kilns are clearly adapted to the space available on the plaque, so that the images cannot be considered too reliable in regard to scale. The most one can conclude is that depictions roughly confirm data from excavated kilns, which often fall within the range of 1-2 metres in diameter. In addition, the depictions indicate that the kilns were usually higher than wide, even if the height of the fire chamber is excluded, as still seen in present-day traditional kilns.

Apart from the kilns and the equally inevitable potters’ wheels, which I have treated above, neither plaques nor pots provide further indication of workshop installations. Presumably for aesthetic and compositional reasons, which are understandable, settling basins, drying sheds and specialised storage spaces are not illustrated. As to tools, a few scrapers and brushes, some paint-pots and stools or simple chairs appear to be all the gear needed to keep a pottery establishment going. In this respect, too, the depictions may be selective, but since no essentials appear to be missing, the general impression of simplicity seems trustworthy.

Indications of a workshop’s layout are equally limited. The Theseus Painter’s depictions of clay preparation (A6; A7; Pl. 30b-32b) are situated outside, as can be expected. The supporting gear hanging from the ceiling on side A of C79 (Pl. 46e) makes clear that the setting is indoors, in contrast to the earlier phases of clay preparation illustrated on A6 and A7. The bands hanging from the ceiling on the Boiotian skyphos B1 (Pl. 38) place the scene inside as well, as would also apply to the plaques C36 (Pl. 41e), with its shelf of pots, and C103 (Pl. 48a), with hanging aryballoi. B1 and C36, with a few other scenes showing small batches of pots apparently just standing around (C73?; C74; perhaps C16; C103; Pl. 40d; 48a) also suggest that drying and storage took place, at least in part, within the covered working area. Attic workshop representations with pots on the floor or on shelves confirm this impression (A4; A8; A10; A12; A17?; Pl. 29a; 32c; 33b; 34c; 37c).

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396 See, however, Hussong 1928, 27-32; Zimmer 1982, 29; Cuomo di Caprio 1984, 81.
397 See Cuomo di Caprio 1984, 77; Scheibler 1995, 99, who estimates a usual total height of 2-3 m.
398 See Cuomo di Caprio 1984, 77, who tentatively concludes that this kiln must be 2-3m high.
400 See Hussong 1928, 30; Villard and Vallet 1953, 16, section IV.6 and Appendix I.
401 See Rieth 1960, 38-44; Ziomecki 1975, 73; Cuomo di Caprio 1995; and sections V.2.d and f.
402 See Hussong 1928, 64; Beazley 1944, 14-15; Ziomecki 1975, 73-74; Scheibler 1995, 84.
404 See Hussong 1928, 64, who, however, also suggests that the standing pots, esp. on A12 (Pl. 34c), are displayed for sale. This is possible, but there is no sign of selling.
The single columns of the Caltagirone and Oxford kraters (A15; A17; Pl. 36b; 37c) tell us that the turning and painting took place indoors or perhaps in a roofed, open area. A similar column and a stretch of ceiling on the Munich hydria (A4; Pl. 29a-b) also make clear that the pots were fashioned and painted in a roofed space or hall, while the kiln stands outside, on the right. With the exception of a few unintelligible lines on C16 and a possible tree on C47 (Pl. 40d; 42e), the Penteskouphia plaques offer no information on the setting of firing scenes. Apart from the ambiguous picture on C16, kilns are always free-standing and seem to be located outdoors, as the tree on C47 suggests.

Piecing together all the bits of evidence, one may conclude that firing and probably the first stages of clay preparation usually took place in the open air, whereas the actual making of the pots and some storage were done in roofed spaces. Even if we make allowances for simplification, the limited portrayal of the physical and technical facilities generally confirms the impression gained from excavated workshop sites that Greek pottery production was technically a relatively simple affair requiring little investment in tools and installations, with the possible exception of the kilns and basins, which never appear in pottery production scenes. As the central position of the craftsmen themselves in pottery production scenes suggests, human resources were more important.

V.6 Conclusion: production scenes and the scale, organisation and status of potting

Certainly the most striking general characteristic of the evidence derived from pottery production scenes is the variety they reveal. Many stages and moments in the process are illustrated, often in more than one way: a kiln can be fired by one to three men, pots can be painted on the wheel or in the painter’s lap, etc. It seems that the work was not organised according to strict lines either: in addition to many solitary workers, we meet workshops with up to eight men. Some of the depictions give no hint of a clear hierarchy, whereas others show men supervising staff or people being violently forced to obey.

It is impossible to draw one all-embracing conclusion from such varied images. They not only cover a period of more than 150 years and come from three different places, but are surely sometimes coloured by their religious character, while traditions of iconography and composition must have left their marks as well. Nevertheless, with some degree of probability one can discern that relatively small and simple workshops existed beside larger, better organised ones, the first kind being apparently more frequent at Corinth, the second at Athens. One can also suppose that the smallest of these workshops — but only these — were (nucleated) family enterprises, where the master potter carried out all kinds of tasks, including painting, probably occasionally with the assistance of his wife and children (see especially C54; C79; perhaps also A15; Pl. 36b; 43a; 46e).

At the opposite pole, the largest establishments appear to have employed four to six specialists and some assistants, managed by a senior owner (see A4; A13; B1, and possibly A6; A7; Pl. 29;
Such enterprises, which must have drawn on hired or slave labour, were most likely exceptional, however. The apparently more common form – the ‘large’ workshop, which is probably better described as ‘medium sized’ – could have had a staff of three to four men, presumably largely with diverse abilities (see C36; A10; A16; A17; and possibly A9; the more specialised teams on A6; A7; C49; C53; C54; C70 may also belong here; Pl. 30b-32b; 33a-b; 37a; 37c; 41e; 42a; 42f-43a; 45c). It can be further speculated that such workshops drew their help from the extended family, although they might just as well have been nuclear-family businesses which attracted outside manpower, perhaps including slaves.

Notwithstanding the limited focus of most depictions, the more varied scenes (especially A4; B1; C36; but also A9; A10; A16; C105 and perhaps C79; Pl. 29; 33a-b; 37a; 38; 41e; 46e; 48d) let us suppose that workshops were most often all-round operations, handling the production processes from clay preparation to firing. Digging for clay might be added to the list, although the job could easily have been carried out by specialists who operated independently, as would hold for the provision and transport of fuel.

As to the planning of the work, it is obvious that the smaller workshops were able to cope with only one stage of production at a time. Larger ones, on the other hand, probably executed several stages in the production process simultaneously, resulting in more continuous and thus presumably more efficient production (see A4, A16; C36; perhaps A9; A10; C105; Pl. 29; 33a-b; 37a; 48d). In view of the numbers of people shown in pottery production scenes, however, one can doubt whether the system was ever so finely tuned that it can correctly be described as ‘industrial’ or, more correctly, ‘manufactory’, with each craftsman always responsible for a single, specialised task, as A13 (Pl. 35) might seem to suggest. However that may be, these possible modes of production cannot be specified in precise terms of staff size and hierarchy, especially when medium-sized workshops are involved.

Lastly, the intriguing differences in the choice of subjects between the Corinthian and the Attic representations. While the Penteskouphia plaques mainly show men firing kilns, Attic painters concentrated more on shaping and decorating pottery. No straightforward explanation for the contrast is at hand. One could point to differences in local artistic tradition or in chronology, but the problem would hardly be solved. Perhaps the professional worries or religious considerations of the Athenian potters differed from those of their Corinthian counterparts. This is not much of an explanation either, though, unless one supposes that the dedicators at Penteskouphia regularly made plain or banded pottery and therefore had less reason to depict themselves as painters – but that still does not explain the rarity of scenes showing potters at their wheels.

A more abstract, entirely speculative interpretation might be that the Corinthian potter-painters saw themselves more directly as producers and ‘technicians’, whereas their Attic counterparts preferred to stress their roles as creative craftsmen and decorators. Differences in attitude and self-esteem may also be reflected by the presentation of pottery staff as either rough or more idealised figures in Athens and Corinth, respectively. Perhaps this pair of contrasts is related to differences in the position of the potter and social values at Athens and Corinth, matters about which we know hardly anything.

A complicating factor is, of course, that the contrasting characterisation of potters may refer not only to reality, but also to the self-image they wanted to convey of themselves, either to the gods or to people who looked at their wares. It is impossible to separate this social or perhaps ideological ‘filter’ from the psychological, religious, social, political and economic factors which could lie behind it. Even so, it is tempting to link the apparently more self-confident and flattering image the Athenian painters evidently had of themselves and their craft to the social and political developments in their city which allowed free working people relatively much freedom and influence.
