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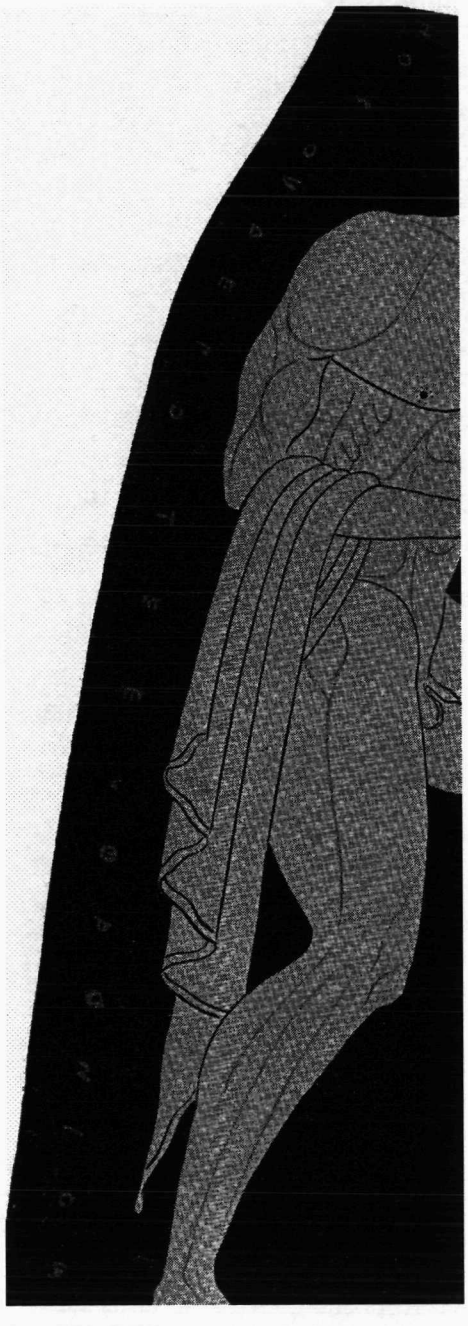
VIII The magic mirror of the workshop: painted and written references of potters and painters to themselves and their colleagues



Signatures and pictures of workshops are not the only direct references to themselves which Greek potters and pot-painters have left us. A small group of pots depicts men labelled as off-duty potters or pot-painters, and some other pots bear inscriptions which apparently refer to a colleague of the painter/writer (Appendix II, section R; Pl. 50-52). Intriguingly, all these fifteeen pictorial and written records date from the last decades of the 6th century, and all but three occur on pots of the early red figure 'Pioneers', namely the circle of Smikros, Euphronios, Euthymides and Phintias, which is also quite well documented by signatures.[711] This group of painters, who refer to each other in inscriptions, constitute a special group, and cannot therefore be considered a representative sample.

The references to potters and painters outside the context of their work, as has long been recognised, furnish interesting information on the social organisation and position of at least some Athenian potters and pot-painters, which, in turn, has led to an enormous amount of study and speculation.[712] Indeed, it is startling how many conclusions and hypotheses, often far-reaching, have been based on so few pictures and inscriptions. In order to review them and to add some fresh vantage points, we begin with the scenes and inscriptions themselves.

Probably the most famous and certainly the most frequently cited reference of one painter to another is the statement 'hOΣ OΥΔΕΠΟΤΕ ΕΥΦΡΟΝΙΟΣ' ('as never Euphronios') on an amphora by Euthymides (Appendix II, R10; Pl. 52d). Traditionally, it has been linked to Euthymides's signature on the other side of the pot (Pl. 52c) and interpreted as a comment on Euphronios's capacity as a draughtsman.[713] Recently, however, the text has been coupled with the komos or scene of revellers beside it (Pl. 52f).[714] In this interpretation, Euphronios's capacity as a leader of the komasts is at stake, and the words are seen as spoken by one of the revellers. Unfortunately, these words are inscribed on the edge of the image, more or less separately, and may not directly belong to it (see Pl. 52d; 52f). Yet, the supposed link with the signature in the middle of the image on the other side of the pot (Pl. 52c; 52e) is even more tenuous, and the interpretation of the text as an artistic claim rests on a modern conception of art and artistic rivalry not supported

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[711] See Williams 1995, 149.

[712] The literature on these self-portrayals is very extensive. See for the individual pots Appendix II, section R, and more generally Birch 1858, I 397; Gaspar 1902; Pottier 1906, 693-694; s.a., 32; Pfuhl 1923, 34, 444-445; Beazley 1944, 19-20; Richter 1946, 55-56; Rieth 1960, 39; Philipp 1968, 97; Webster 1972, 42-44, 299; Rosati 1973-1974, 193-196; Boardman 1975a, 30; Linfert 1977, 20-21; Siebert 1978, 117-118; Scheibler 1979, 13, 17; 1992, 108-109, 111, n. 20-24; 1995, 128-132; Paul 1982, 71-72; Boegehold 1985, 30; Ridgway 1987, 85; Von Bothmer 1990, 17; Pasquier 1990, 12-13; Villard 1990, 26-28; Williams 1990, 37; 1992, 87-88, 91-92; 1995, 149-151; Denoyelle 1992, 58; Eder 1992, 24, 35; Immerwahr 1992, 49-50; Mark 1995, 29, 31, 34-35; Laurens 1995, 174-177; Angiolillo 1997, 106-109.

[713] Welcker 1833, 323; Birch 1858, II 30, 63; Pottier 1896, 17; s.a., 63; Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, 63; Walters 1905, I 232; Perrot 1911, 374-375; Hoppin 1917, 34-35; Glotz 1920, 172; Pfuhl 1923, 26, 433; Beazley 1944, 20; Richter 1946, 55-56 ; Rieth 1960, 39; *ARV*², 26, 1; Bernhard 1966, 25; Rosati 1973-1974, 195; 1976-1977, 56, 62; Boardman 1975a, 30; Boegehold 1985, 30-31; Von Bothmer 1987, 203, n. 33; Robertson 1987, 20, 27-28, n. 9; Villard 1990, 56; Phoca and Valavanis 1992, 18; Scheibler 1992, 108-109, 111, n. 20; 1995, 114, 127-128; Frel 1994; Williams 1995, 150; Angiolillo 1997, 106-109. See also Engelmann 1987, 129-130, who cites Welcker 1833 as the first to link both inscriptions, and Von Bothmer 1987, 191, referring to an early interpretation by Gerhard.

[714] Linfert 1977, 20-21; Neumann in Linfert 1977; Engelmann 1987, followed by Laurens 1995, 165-166, 175. Critical: Von Bothmer 1987, 303, n. 33; Robertson 1987, 27-28, n. 9; Scheibler 1992, 111, n. 20; Williams 1995, 150, n. 48. See also Arafat and Morgan 1989, 320; Gill and Vickers 1990, 10, who seem to conclude from Linfert, Neumann and Engelmann that the komos refers not to the potter Euphronios, which, although a possibility, is not what the authors argue.

by ancient evidence. A final complication, which further clouds the issue, is that Euthymides's claim, if indeed commenting on Euphronios's drawing, looks unjustified from our perspective.[715] Clearly, the exact meaning of the 'as never...' lies beyond our grasp. It does seem to imply, however, a spirit of – perhaps not artistic – competition between colleagues, either seriously or jokingly.[716]

A similar, but perhaps less friendly, attitude may mark the inscriptions on two of Exekias's pots: the mythical (white) king of Ethiopia Memnon is accompanied by a negroid attendant labelled Amasis or Amasos (Appendix II, R1-2; Pl. 50a-b). Possibly the reference is to the potter (and painter?) of the same Egyptian name, who, as explained (section VI.4), might have been of Egyptian descent. Even so, it does not seem likely he was black, so that the possible portrait of the potter Amasis can only be seen as a caricature. Whether this was meant as a joke amongst friends or as a jealous insult is, however, impossible to judge.[717]

Decidedly more friendly are a few drinking scenes of figures labelled with the names of pot-painters. If the 'artistic' interpretation of the famous 'as never Euphronios' (R10; Pl. 52c-f) can be abandoned, the remark could suitably be transferred to these pictures of revellers. Almost as well-known as Euthymides's masterpiece is a stamnos signed by Smikros, showing a symposion with the painter's own name attached to the fancily attired central figure (R6; Pl. 51a-b). Smikros is again highlighted in a similar scene on a krater by Euphronios (R5; Pl. 50e-f). In turn, Smikros decorated a psykter with a courting Euphronios (R7; Pl. 51c-d).[718] A hydria by Phintias shows Eut[h]ymides playing the lyre,[719] and in its shoulder-picture a girl toasts Euthymides (R9, Pl. 52a-b). A hydria by the Dikaios Painter is inscribed with a greeting to, again, Euthymides, but this time without any connection to a figured scene (R14). A second greeting, on an unattributed pot, (R15) mentions only 'ΕΥΘΥ', which is presumably another reference to Euthymides. In the

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[715] Klein 1887, 21; Richter 1946, 55-56; Frel 1994, 19-20.

[716] Pottier 1896, 17; Perrot 1911, 374-375; Hoppin 1917, 34-35; Pfuhl 1923, 26; Richter 1923, 103-105; Beazley 1944, 20; Richter 1946, 55-56; Rosati 1973-1974, 195; 1976-1977, 56; Scheller 1981, 226-227; Frel 1994, 19-20; Scheibler 1995, 127-128. Laurens 1995, 165-166, 175, is ambiguous on this point. Only Linfert 1977, 21, sees just joking friends. As Arafat and Morgan 1989, 320 and Gill and Vickers 1990, 10 regard the Euphronios of the inscription as different from the potter, they see no intended joke or rivality.

[717] Dugas 1960, 13-14; Boardman 1980, 152; Boegehold 1985, 31; Williams 1995, 145. Some scholars (Von Bothmer 1985a, 221-222; Boardman 1987a, 148-149; Arafat and Morgan 1989, 320-321) also include in this category a cup by the Amasis Painter which looks like a parody of the typically Exekean eye-cup, with one eye converted into a male siren, one replaced by masturbating men, and defecating dogs below the handles. Although a conscious reference to the recently invented eye-cup seems likely, I think it is too speculative to see a humorous attack on Exekias, for we do not know whether the eye-cup was considered specifically Exekean, and I am not convinced about the humorous or satirical meaning of an eye-siren; the masturbating men and defecating dogs are more likely to be jokes, but we have no clue as to the attitude of contemporaries to such representations: simply humorous or also insulting, for example. And if the Amasis Painter intended a parody, what was its target: the decorative scheme or the painter?

[718] The object of desire might be Leagros, if the inscription 'ΛΕΑΓΡΟΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ' really refers to the figure closest to it (Rosati 1973-1974, 199, n. 103; Boardman 1975a, 30; Eder 1992, 24; Angiolillo 1997, 106). Unfortunately, the association is uncertain, as such 'ΚΑΛΟΣ' inscriptions usually stand on their own (see Laurens 1995, 176-177). If this is an exception, it is the only direct association of a pot-painter with an identifiable member of the Athenian elite which can been recognised.

[719] The singing Tlempolemos, next to Euthymides, could be a relative of the homonymous, earlier potter of Little Master cups.

fashion of the Dikaios Painter's isolated inscription, Euthymides and Phintias greet their less renowned colleague Sosias (R11-R12, R8).

Another apparent reference to Sosias (R13) on an unattributed pot consists of his name only. Suggestive, but hard to understand is the phrase 'ΔΟΚΕΙ ΣΜΙΚΟΙ ΙΝΑΙ' on an amphora in the Manner of Euphronios (R4; Pl. 50c-d), which must mean something like '...seems to Smik(r?)os to be...', or 'he seems to be Smik(r?)os' while not providing a clue as to the sense.[720] For our purposes, however, the probability that it refers to the pot-painter is more relevant than any possible meaning. An even shakier case is presented by the inscription 'ΑΝΔΟΚΙΔΕΣ ΚΑΛΟΣ ΔΟΚΕΙ ΤΙΜΑΓΟΡΑ' ('Andokides seems beautiful to Timagoras') on a hydria by the Taleides Painter (R3). Although Andokides could refer to the potter known from signatures and an Akropolis dedication,[721] it seems more likely that the homonymous aristocrat is intended. Some observers, however, think that both are the same person, who would have been an absentee aristocratic workshop owner.[722] If so, the business arrangement, so far as can be judged, would be unique for ancient Athens, and as such seems unlikely: unless Andokides indeed formed an exception, more recognisable aristocratic 'makers' could be expected to appear in pottery signatures.

The rather fancy feasting scenes showing pot-painters have generally been taken at face value, and they are still often cited as evidence of the good life some craftsmen or entrepreneurs of the Kerameikos supposedly led.[723] However, there is no decisive proof that the scenes are indeed realistic depictions of daily pastimes or even exceptional events in the lifes of potters and painters. Equally possibly, they represent a dream world, the high society the artisans would have liked to belong to, but which they could only realise in their drawn images. It may well be that just as Amasis was (possibly) caricaturally downgraded in a friendly, ironical gibe, so others were visually transported to the upper ranks of society they could only dream about.[724]

The non-realistic and less serious interpretation of 'feasting potter scenes' might also explain their limited number. If potters or pot-painters regularly attended luxurious symposia, the phenomenon and its illustration would hardly be restricted to these few 'Pioneers', who do not

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[720] See Williams 1992b, 91-92; Laurens 1995, 172-173.

[721] See Rosati 1973-1974, 199, n. 103. For other 'ΚΑΛΟΣ' inscriptions possibly refering to potters and pot-painters see the lists in Folsom 1975, 149-153; 1976, 196-205.

[722] See esp. Shapiro 1989, 72; Laurens 1995, 169-170.

[723] See Gaspar 1902, 20-24; Perrot 1911, 373; Pottier s.a., 32; Pfuhl 1923, 34; Beazley 1944, 19-20; Webster 1972, 42-44, 299; Rosati 1973-1974, 193-194; Boardman 1975a, 30; Linfert 1977, 21; Siebert 1978, 117-118; Paul 1982, 71-72; Engelmann 1987, 133; Ridgway 1987, 85; Pasquier 1990; Villard 1990, 27; Eder 1992, 24, 35; Mark 1995, 31-35; Angiolillo 1997, 106-109; see also Pottier 1906, 693-694, who allows for some flattering, as well as Boegehold 1985, 29, and Scheibler 1995, 130-132, who notwithstanding an open eye for alternatives, still seem to believe in realism. In theory, it is even possible that the scenes refer not to potters and pot-painters at all, but to homonymous members of the elites (as Birch 1858, I 397, apparently thought, and as has been suggested for the 'as never Euphronios'). This would however require the existence of a number of otherwise unknown aristocrats who would coincidentally (or perhaps not?) have shared their names precisely with a stylistically closely related group of artisans in the Kerameikos: a scenario which is surely too good to be true.

[724] See Williams 1992b, 87-88; 1995, 150; Laurens 1995, 174-176.

otherwise seem a socially exceptional category (if we may judge ex silentio).[725] Moreover, if the feasts really took place, one could reasonably expect more references to revelling potters and painters on pots, as well as probably some in literature, and perhaps also clearer and more direct links with the elites who are usually associated with the symposion. Wishful thinking, on the other hand, easily results from a few people talking and joking and sharing dreams for a short while.

In addition, practical arguments can be advanced against the participation of potters and painters in luxury symposia. One may wonder, for example, how, when and where they found the time and especially the money for such events. Wine, women and entertainment were not cheap, and a spacious accommodation was needed, not to mention a circle of friends with lots of spare time. All this seems incompatible with the little we know about the financial position and social status of craftsmen in Archaic and (Early) Classical Greece, with the possible exception of some renowned sculptors who may be seen as the first 'artists'.[726] A solution could be that the makers and painters known from signatures are to a large extent 'absentee' workshop supervisors or, as mentioned above in reference to Andokides, owners, but this, in turn, is incompatible with the current interpretation of signatures as defined above.

However, some circular reasoning lies in the argument that if something is not found in the historical record, it could not have happened. The amount of available data on the living conditions of successful ancient craftsmen is very limited, and one could argue that the clear depictions on pots are worth as much as the more general and rather vague historical knowledge we have. Furthermore, as discussed in the next section, some of the sculptural dedications on the Akropolis, apparently erected by potters (and/or workshop owners), including Andokides and Euphronios, possibly represent a level of wealth which is compatible with the expenses of symposia. But social status may well be another matter.

Apart from all such doubts, a relatively definite circumstance emerges from the pictorial and textual references of painters to each other, independently of their exact meanings: the rather many specimens by the early red figure 'Pioneers' suggest they formed a close group of painters who knew each other and, presumably, each other's work. Perhaps they worked in a single workshop or in the same block; but even if not, they were probably not located especially far from each other in the different parts of the quite extensive Athenian potters' quarter.[727] Moreover, they appear to have operated in an atmosphere which allowed for a degree of common spirit, and probably even reciprocal jokes, flattery and some sense of competition.[728] The possible representations of Amasis by Exekias, though apparently rather negatively intended, suit well an attitude of relative freedom and ease. At least, it seems, these painters were not bullied slaves or simple, numb, hard-working men without any time for relaxation and reflection.

Moreover, the inscribed references to people they knew indicate that at least some pot-painters were quite free to decide the details of their pots, if not the overall decoration. It would then seem to follow that they were not (or not overly) bothered by strict superiors or demanding purchasers who thoroughly determined the character of their wares. Everything considered, the inscriptions

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[725] Admittedly, Euphronios and Andokides placed a costly dedication on the Akropolis (see the next chapter). This is not only a 'Pioneer' affair, however: Andokides, who is moreover only indirectly linked to the fancy symposion scenes treated here, shares his Akropolis dedication with the older potter Mnesiades, and there are also dedications by an otherwise unknown potter Peikon and one whose name ended in '...ΑΙΟΣ', perhaps Pamphaios (chapter IX).

[726] See Stewart 1990, 65-72; Williams 1992b, 87-88; Laurens 1995, 177.

[727] See Linfert 1977, 21.

[728] See Immerwahr 1992, 49-50; Laurens 1995, 175; Williams 1995, 150.

confirm the impression given by the very existence of the signatures themselves, that many, though perhaps not all, craftsmen producing decorated pottery exercised some freedom of thought and action in their work. In other words, many Athenian potters and painters should not be viewed as the anonymous executors of industrial processes, totally controlled and directed by others, but rather as largely autonomous and intellectually more or less independent craftsmen.