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

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XII Introduction

While Greek pottery production and trade have received relatively much scholarly attention, the use contexts of pots, their status and their role in society have been neglected. For a long time, debate about pottery consumption was limited to whether figured pots were intended for practical use or served only ritual and funerary purposes.[873] Apart from this, it was apparently taken for granted that Greek fine wares were used and appreciated by a large section of the population, including the elites.[874] Although scholars realised that plate was available and was indeed used,[875] figured pottery was generally seen as the favourite tableware of the Greek upper class, cherished by the living and admired as grave gifts for the dead.[876]

All these assumptions, it seems, were based mainly on the 19th-century esteem for Greek fine pottery as a high-quality craft product and on the value given to figured decoration as art. The rise of a commercial fine arts market and the emancipation of archaeology as an independent field of study next to the classics and sciences may have stimulated this appreciation.[877] Yet for the elites and scholars brought up with Chinese and expensive European porcelain, it was probably only natural to consider Attic figured pots as a more sophisticated ancient equivalent of their own tableware.[878]

The continuity of 19th-century views on the ancient Greek use and appreciation of pottery over most of the 20th century was surely maintained, in part, by the restricted knowledge of many aspects of daily life in the ancient world. Of course, scholarly priorities were also influential. For example, it is revealing that, until recently, evidence for the prices of Greek pottery, though known at least since the mid 19th century and subject to some fierce discussions till the 1950s,[879]

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[873] See Abeken 1843, 364-365; Brongniart 1854, 4-8; Jahn 1854a, C-CI; Harrison and MacColl 1894, 28; Pottier 1896, 48; 1906, 607-610; Richter 1904-1905, 224, 228; Walters 1905, I 134-135; Reichhold 1919, 10; Haspels 1946, 14-16, 21-22; Lane 1948, 8; see also, for a later revival of the debate, Langlotz 1967, esp. 474; *Griechische Vasen* 1969, 11-12; Webster 1972, 293-294; Paul 1982, 92-98. For a recent evaluation of the debate see Martens 1992, 134-138.

[874] However, this is rarely made explicit. Notable exceptions are: Birch 1858, II 67; Pottier 1896, 48; 1898, 6; 1906, 607-610, 707; Dugas s.a., 663; Richter 1904-1905, 229-230, 237; Walters 1905, I 43, 136, 147; Richter and Milne 1935, XIV; Haspels 1946, 14-16; Webster 1972, 293-300; see also Jahn 1854a, CCXL; Boulter 1953, 62; Jones, Sackett and Graham 1962, 100; Siebert 1978, 116-117; and for recent summaries with quotes, Gill 1988b, 737-740; 1993.

[875] Lenormant and De Witte 1844, XXI; Brongniart 1854, 7; Walters 1905, I 131, 134; Reichhold 1919, 10; Payne 1931, 211-212; Luschey 1939, 14-17; Lane 1948, 11, and recently Boardman 1987b. See also, with references, Vickers 1985, 108-110; Gill and Vickers 1990, 15-17; Vickers and Gill 1994, 123-126. However, they place too much emphasis on Strong's assertion (1966, 30, 74) that there was no private plate in 5th-century Greece, an opinion which was not as widely accepted as Gill and Vickers suggest.

[876] See e.g. Brongniart 1854, 7; Birch 1858, II 67-72; Richter 1904-1905, 229, 237-238; Walters 1905, I 134-148; Pottier 1906, 607-608; s.a., 27-28; Dugas s.a., 663; Richter and Milne 1935, XIV; and most famously Beazley 1945, 158, quoted by Vickers 1985, 123; 1994, 295; Gill 1988b, 737-738, 740; 1994, 103; Gill and Vickers 1990, 2; Vickers and Gill 1994, 1-4.

[877] Gill and Vickers 1990, 2-3; Gill 1993; Vickers and Gill 1994, 6-27; see also, more generally, Morris 1994, 15-35; Sparkes 1996, 55-63.

[878] See Vickers 1985, 122-124; Vickers and Gill 1994, 19-22, 25, 29, 80-83, with references. See also, for a very explicit example, Pottier 1898; 1926.

[879] See Jahn 1854a, CXXX-CXXXI; Birch 1858, II 38-41; Walters 1905, I 43, II 239-241; Pottier 1906, 689; Hackl 1909, 95-98; Perrot 1911, 368-370; Dugas s.a., 663; Jongkees 1942; 1951; Richter 1946, 20; Amyx

was hardly regarded as an indicator of the status of Greek pottery or as a means of linking it to specific groups of consumers. At the same time, the traditional scholarly focus on style and iconography continued to stress Greek pottery's elite associations: in the highly influential classifications and attributions by Beazley and Humfry Payne the potters and, more especially, the painters become true artists,[880] while the classy character of much imagery on pots is almost automatically extended both to the makers and – even more so – to the users.[881]

It would be a simplification, however, to see scholarly bias as the only explanation for the survival of old assumptions about the Greeks' use and appreciation of pottery. The limitations of the archaeological and historical sources certainly play a role as well. Many data on pottery's consumption and contexts cannot be recovered, particularly regarding details of social and economic developments or subjective matters like appreciation. More direct and concrete evidence from excavations on the use contexts of objects remains hidden in storerooms or has intentionally been omitted from publications which, presenting objects selected mainly for their intrinsic worth, barely offer a comprehensive overview of find assemblages. Only a combination of new approaches to the publication of excavations and the 'traditional' archaeology of art historical character may help overcome these limitations.

In the study of pottery production and trade such new approaches, combining several categories of archaeological and historical evidence, while often including quantified data, are gradually gaining ground.[882] With regard to 'consumption studies', on the other hand, the situation is as yet less promising. Apart from some case studies on single sites or limited issues,[883] the controversial work of Vickers and Gill, culminating in *Artful Crafts,*[884] is the only substantial attempt to redefine our picture of the role and status of pottery in the Greek world. While pottery production and trade figure prominently in their discussion, their main thesis that (decorated) pottery was a cheap imitation of precious metalware implies, among other things, that it was a mass-produced article which lacked any status and importance. In their opinion, plate remains the typical, quite common tableware of the upper classes.[885]

1958; see also, quite fancifully, Brongniart 1854, 6-7.

[880] Beazley 1951; 1956 (=*ABV*); 1963 (=*ARV*^{2}); 1971 (=*Para*); Payne 1931; see also Beazley 1913; 1918; 1925; 1932; 1944 and, for recent evaluations, Sparkes 1996, 90-102; Williams 1996, 241-242, 250-251; Whitley 1997; Oakley 1998; 1999.

[881] See Gill 1988b, 740-741; 1993; 1994, 102-103; Vickers and Gill 1994, 1-16.

[882] See Arafat and Morgan 1989; Morgan and Whitelaw 1991; Dehl-Von Kaenel 1994; 1995b; Kreuzer 1994; Morgan 1995; 1999b; Osborne 1996b; Lawall 1998; Snodgrass 1999; Curry 2000.

[883] See Hannestad 1988; 1989; 1992; 1996; 1999; Arafat and Morgan 1994; Neeft 1994a; 1994b; 1995; Small 1994; Whitley 1994; Kreuzer 1998, 32-41.

[884] Vickers and Gill 1994, preceded by, or rather mostly compiled from, Vickers 1982; 1984; 1985; 1986; 1990; 1992; 1994; Gill 1988b; 1988c; 1988d; 1991; 1993; 1994; Gill and Vickers 1989; 1990; many of these references are highly repetitive.

[885] Vickers 1984, 88; 1985, 113-117; 1986, 140-141; 1990, 613-619; 1992, 53, 57; Gill 1988b, 740-741; 1988c, 3; Gill and Vickers 1990, 4-5, 11-12.

Although most of Gill and Vickers's arguments concerning the stylistic predominance of plate over pottery have been thoroughly rejected,[886] their suggestion that pottery was a cheap surrogate which the rich barely touched has received much less comment and resistance. A few critical remarks by Boardman, Robertson and Cook, who argue that only a very small elite would have used vessels of precious metal and that even these people would also have had at least some pottery, seem to represent current common opinion.[887] Such a line of reasoning, however, little alters the traditional views sketched above and, like them, is hardly based on evidence. Moreover, it fails to take account of Gill and Vickers's suggestion that decorated pottery was not a luxury product in the sense of a prestige article for the affluent.[888] Nor have they addressed Gill and Vickers's point that the direct association of figured pottery with the leading families and the financial and social position that this entails may well be dubious to say the least.[889] Since precisely status is one of the main issues in the study of the Greeks' use and appreciation of decorated pottery, its social context will be an important theme in the following sections.

Consumption is not exclusively a matter of status, ideology and social context, however. The economic value of pots, their practical use and the ways people handled them are also relevant matters which will be examined below. Moreover, the use and appreciation of pottery should not be seen only in contrast to that of metal vessels, but can be considered together with them, within the general ideological and practical contexts of drinking and dining sets, household utensils, votive offerings and funerary ritual. In addition, a closer look at the consumers themselves might be profitable, regarding not only their ideology and social desires, but also their economic possibilities. All this, finally, should also take account of differences in the use and appreciation of the same vessels in varying circumstances, different areas and diverse use contexts. A minor urban sanctuary in Archaic Selinus, 6th-century graves of the Corinthian North Cemetery or houses in the Attic countryside in the Classical period cannot be expected to reveal the same patterns of use and appreciation, guided by the same traditions. Similarly, the Athenian aristocracy's ideas about the value and status of vessels of precious metal probably differed from those of poor citizens who would have been very lucky to own even a single bronze vessel.

The complications stemming from the extremely varied backgrounds of Greek pottery consumption are matched by the fragmentation and diversity of our evidence. Whereas the production processes leave relatively direct traces in the form of workshops and pottery itself, consumption is more difficult to grasp archaeologically as long as 'frozen moments' are not available, as occur to some extent on sites sealed by volcanic eruptions like Thera and Pompeii. Instead, one has to deal with objects more or less removed from their immediate context of use, or with descriptions or depictions of them filtered by ideology, tradition and rules of composition.

These problems are well illustrated by what seems to be our most straightforward evidence for the use of pottery and plate: written descriptions of the handling of tableware and other kinds of vessels. Although these descriptions offer clear illustrations of use, and even sometimes reveal what people thought about these vessels and their roles, they form an ambiguous source of

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[886] Robertson 1985; Boardman 1987b; Cook 1987a; Johnston 1987a, 138, n. 20; Williams 1996; see also Arafat and Morgan 1989, 335-336; Sparkes 1991, 70-71; 1996, 145-151; Boardman 1996a, 125.

[887] Boardman 1987b, 289; 1996a, 126; Cook 1987a, 170; Robertson 1991, 5-8.

[888] Gill and Vickers 1990, 4-5; Vickers 1992, 53-54, 57; Vickers and Gill 1994, 92-93, 102; see also Boardman 1988a, 28, 32-33; Gill 1988c, 3; Arafat and Morgan 1989, 335; Vickers 1990, 618-619.

[889] Vickers 1984, 88-90; 1986, 144; 1990, 618-619; 1992, 53-54, see also 57-58; Gill 1988b, 740-741; 1988c, 3; Gill and Vickers 1990, 11-12; Vickers and Gill 1994, 33-54, 101-103; and also Arafat and Morgan 1989, 335-336, who, however, continue with some iconographic analyses from a traditional perspective.

information. Indeed, scholars who regard pottery as a high status product and Gill and Vickers all quote the ancients to support their respective cases. Most of these quotations are not very helpful, however, as they usually confirm the obvious: plate and sometimes bronze vessels are the tableware of the happy few, whereas pottery is associated with the poor. The few references to pottery in a context of wealth or esteem can either be regarded as exceptions that prove the rule or as indications that even the rich and powerful sometimes handled and liked pottery. But even if we leave out of consideration the possible unreliability of individual texts, their chronological problems and the like (section X.4), all of these sources are obviously coloured by the elitist vision of the world which was unavoidable among ancient writers, who always came from the upper levels of society.[890] Moreover, the mention of pottery and metal vessels is usually accessory to an argument or story, a contextual detail enhancing the main line, and not a subject of interest in itself.[891] Full descriptions of the contents of cupboards or even dining or drinking sets are simply lacking, let alone more extensive treatments of tableware. All in all, therefore, the written sources for the use of vessels can largely be left aside in the following.

Similar difficulties regard the representations on figured pots of the use of vessels, whether pottery or plate.[892] These are descriptive and incidental, showing the vessel as part of a larger image or story. Apart from some obvious depictions of the practical uses of different vessels, one can never be sure how 'real' an apparently realistic scene, in fact, is,[893] and one should certainly allow for flattering imagery, portraying the world richer and more luxurious than it really was. Moreover, one must also deal with artistic convention and tradition,[894] limitations of pictorial space and problems of interpretation concerning scenes and vessels – for instance, it is often unclear whether metalware or pottery is shown. Though very useful for identifying the practical uses of specific shapes, painted images offer little concrete evidence for less straightforward issues.

A third potential source of evidence for pottery consumption is technical research on the vessels themselves, focusing on functional characteristics and traces of wear and contents; this may be supplemented by comparative studies on the uses of different kinds of vessels in the recent past or in traditional cultures nowadays. These approaches have very rarely been applied to the kind of archaeological material under discussion.[895] Probably they would mainly provide practical information about the role of pottery in graves and votive deposits. For example, if it could be shown that small oil flasks were offered without any contents, it would give an interesting indication of their intrinsic value and their appreciation per se. Otherwise, however, technical research can offer little insight into the status and appreciation of pots.

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[890] See Nevett 1999, 10-11; Rotroff 1999, 63; see also Alroth 1988, 195.

[891] See Richter and Milne 1935, XIII-XIV; Rotroff 1999, 63. The exception that proves the rule is provided by Athenaios, XI, an encyclopedic treatment of all types of vessels, which, however, is mainly a compilation of quotations, often from Hellenistic and Roman writers.

[892] See for these Gericke 1970. A more extensive update of her work would be welcome. See also Richter and Milne 1935, who are not so systematic but often more informative, and Rotroff 1999, 64-65, who offers a few examples, and references to recent studies of specific groups of images of pots.

[893] See Nevett 1999, 11-12; Rotroff 1999, 65.

[894] See Nevett 1999, 11-12.

[895] Gerhardt, Searles and Biers 1990; Rotroff 1999, 68, interestingly compares the Greek preference for drinking vessels with typical ranges of pottery shapes in various parts of the world.

More relevant evidence is supplied by excavated assemblages of finds, which invariably contain pottery. Once again, one has to reckon with some bias in the evidence, related to the predominance of pottery in the archaeological record owing to the material's physical nature: it breaks easily, leaving almost indestructible, hardly usable and presumably worthless sherds, whereas metal objects are not only more valuable, but can also be easily recycled, so that they were rarely left behind to end up underground. With few exceptions, the only metalware that had a chance of survival to the present day comprises grave gifts and votive offerings which were intentionally interred and which have not suffered the effect of corrosion. In addition, household and sanctuary finds tend to have been shattered and displaced from their original positions, thus hindering the interpretation of functional assemblages. But despite such general problems of survival and representativity excavations present a relatively full picture, based on large assemblages of material whose use context can at least be vaguely discerned.

The resulting general 'ceramic context' provides important clues to the specific uses of decorated pottery, revealing in what circumstances and to what purposes it was and was not used and in part, possibly, even by whom. The uses of different decorated wares can then be compared to each other and to other kinds of fine and coarse fabrics. By comparing sites of different categories and in different regions, we may even possibly detect larger and more specific patterns of consumption, trade and production. In the following, I shall therefore rely heavily on excavation data, referring to other categories of evidence to supply additional information or to supplement the gaps in the archaeological record.

One important category of supplementary evidence comprises inscriptions mentioning metal or pottery vessels: temple inventories, descriptions of dedications, and a sales list of the confiscated property of the Hermakopidai.[896] These, too, have their limitations though. Temple inventories give an impression of the gold and silver holdings of a few large, rich sanctuaries only, and are moreover limited to the last third of the 5th century onwards.[897] Dedicatory inscriptions referring to vessels are few and note merely small sets.[898] They can be supplemented by Herodotean descriptions of famous dedications which extend over a wide area for much of the Archaic period; but these, it seems, also focus mainly on the upper ranges of gifts in terms of costliness and status.[899] The surviving sales list of the possessions of the Hermakopidai[900] is far from complete, and some curious omissions occur in the preserved bits. Strikingly, plate is missing, perhaps because it was not sold as such but first melted down, or because it was rescued by the owners before confiscation.[901] Yet, if one would assume the existence of unrecorded full plate dinner and drinking sets, the selection of bronze and ceramic vessels that was sold makes little sense. These

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[896] That is, a group of Athenian young men, including Alkibiades, convicted of damaging statues of Hermes and profaning the Eleusinian mysteries in 415.

[897] *IG* I^3, nos. 248, 292-362, 383, 385, 402; Meiggs and Lewis 1988, 144-146, no. 53; 169-171, no. 62; 227-229, no. 76. Further, esp. Linders 1975; 1992; 1996; 1997-1998; Lewis 1986; Harris 1995; Hamilton 1999; and section XVI.6.

[898] See Lewis 1986, 71.

[899] Herodotos, I.14, 25, 50-52, 54, 69, 92.

[900] *IG* I^3, nos. 421, 426; Meiggs and Lewis 1988, 240-247, no. 79. Further: Pritchett 1953; 1956; 1961; Amyx 1958.

[901] Amyx 1958, 208; Vickers 1990, 614-615, n. 29; Cahill 1991, 260; Gabrielsen 1994, 57; Vickers and Gill 1994, 51-52.

vessels do not seem to represent the remains of a meaningful assemblage, but rather look like random bits from house contents comprising complementary sets of items in various materials. Although offering first-hand evidence, inscriptions naming vessels evidently contain only a selection of the kinds of vessels which would be available when they were written.

Inscriptions also give some insight into the general financial accounts of especially Athenian temples and official bodies.[902] Combined with information on private wealth and accounting found in written sources – mainly 4th-century orators like Demosthenes and Lysias – they form a second category of additional relevant evidence. Wealth, including the ways it is spent and saved, is a fundamental factor in consumption patterns and may also determine one's appreciation of objects like vessels of clay or precious metals. But wealth is only one side of the matter, which also comprises the value of the objects in question. Fortunately, a few literary sources and a small number of graffiti incised or painted underneath pots report prices for pottery; plate, on the other hand, was simply valued by its weight.

Viewed together, the categories of supplementary evidence provide a rather complete background for financial aspects in particular as well as for the status of plate and tablewares. By integrating the different kinds of supplementary evidence with the information about excavated find assemblages, we can partly compensate for the limitations of the scattered data. In combination, the scraps of evidence add up to a more or less complete overview, to which each category makes its own contribution: wealth and prices centre largely on personal use and appreciation; inscriptions, on temples and votive offerings. Excavation data, while being of course available for all categories of sites, are least ambiguous with regard to graves and relatively more plentiful at sanctuaries. Only an approach incorporating all the diverse evidence can counter the rather one-sided emphasis on value and status permeating the work of Gill and Vickers, replacing it with an evaluation of the relative statuses of types of vessels, based not solely on the material they are made of, but also on their find contexts and roles in assemblages. In addition, by using detailed excavation evidence, practical matters like use and function can be taken into account besides a purely 'financial' ideology of pottery consumption.

Moreover, combined data referring to a variety of periods and contexts and including some multi-period excavated assemblages result in a dynamic view covering a long time span and revealing developments in the use and even the appreciation of shapes and materials. Such developments, while possibly related to supply, are also probably linked, at least in part, to changes of ideology and fashion among consumers, other considerations which Gill and Vickers neglect in their search for single all-embracing explanations.

Finally, a picture composed of different categories of evidence from separate archaeological contexts ranging over a long period offers the best opportunities for linking issues of consumption to the other main themes of this study: scale and organisation of production and distribution. After all, the producers and distributors (traders) were the ones who had to cope with, or steer, the various consumers with their diverse wishes at each place and moment. Many results of this part of the study will therefore point forward to its final part.

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[902] *IG* I^3, nos. 52, 99, 363-383; see Meiggs and Lewis 1988, 149-151, no. 55; 154-161, no. 58; 167-168, no. 61; 205-217, no. 72; 229-236, no. 77; 250-251, no. 81; 255-260, no. 84. Further Gomme 1953; 1954; Meritt 1954; Linders 1975; Eddy 1977; Unz 1985; Kallet-Marx 1989; 1993, 104-107, 194-204; Giovannini 1990; Samons 1993; 1996; Gabrielsen 1994, and chapter XIV and section XVI.6.