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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XIV Domestic use of pottery and metal vessels: prices, wages, wealth and consumption patterns
Remarkably few scholars have ventured to relate the recorded pottery prices to income, wealth and the value of other products, in other words, to discover the place of pottery in the market. Their interest in such implications of the prices of pottery usually does not go beyond simple, though sometimes extensive, statements that it was cheap or expensive; and they rarely specify what they consider cheap or expensive or define the perspective from which they make their evaluation, so that questions about the varied nature and status of the consumers who would have bought pottery for the known pottery prices remain largely unanswered. Unfortunately, the few observers who try to find answers seriously weaken their arguments by the selective application of data and suggestive calculating.

Thus Boardman takes an improbably high-priced lekythos of 1 drachme and a relatively expensive half-obol bolsal as the starting point for his general evaluation of prices. By equating 1 drachme with a day’s wage, which he translates into 25 present-day British pounds, he concludes: ‘a multi-figure volute crater must have cost £100s’. This surely distorts the evidence, for the highest prices in the graffiti refer to hydriai at 2 and 3 drachmai, and kraters ranging from half a drachme (3 obols) to 10 obols, that is, £12.50 to £41.75. Perhaps the figures should be adjusted upwards, since the rather low daily wage of £25 may not be a fair equivalent of the presumably quite good ancient 1 drachme, but that would still not result in prices of hundreds of pounds. Boardman’s conclusion that ‘by the standards of wages and the commodity prices of everyday life in classical Athens, decorated pottery was not cheap at all’ is clearly exaggerated. It comes then as no surprise that a page further he refers to painted pottery as a relatively cheap luxury product.

Overly suggestive calculations, however, are not limited to one side of the debate. Vickers goes even further when he concludes from the price graffiti that painted pottery must have been the tableware of the mass of poor Athenians, with only the really destitute using wooden bowls and coarse, undecorated pots. The foundation of this conclusion is the strange assumption that 1 obol equals 59 modern U.S. dollar cents, calculated on the basis of the 1989 gold price in comparison to the ancient one. Such a calculation is purely academic, as it lacks any reference to the purchasing power of money, and takes no account of the inflation of the price of gold (and silver) due to the steady influx of precious metal into Europe through, for example, the booty of Alexander the Great and, especially, the Spanish conquest of South America. Equating the price of a pot to a few dollars or less, while perhaps mathematically correct, is misleading as long as it is not stated that the price must be placed in a context where common people earned at most the

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935 Boardman 1988b, 31-32. In Boardman 1987b, 293, however, he states that a ‘finely painted clay vase’ cost no more than about two days’ wages. See also Gill 1991, 31; Williams 1996, 228-229.

936 Vickers 1990, 613, 616, 619; see also Gill and Vickers 1990, 4; Vickers 1992, 54; 1994, 297-298; Vickers and Gill 1994, 34-35. In these later publications the modern gold price is continually adjusted, but it does not change drastically.

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equivalent of a few dollars a day and houses could be bought at prices comparable to those in the early 20th century.\footnote{See Boardman 1996a, 124; Williams 1996, 228-229.}

The changes in the relative value of precious metals, which probably occur alongside that of other materials and products, make clear that it can be dangerous to convert ancient monetary units into modern currencies. In addition, consumption patterns have changed too much to calculate meaningful modern equivalents of ancient prices. It is therefore better to leave aside such exercises and to centre the discussion on the relations between ancient prices and wages, based as firmly and objectively as possible on Johnston’s list of prices. As to wages, the figure of a drachme a day, cited by Boardman and many others, is recorded for various Athenian public officials, soldiers and sailors in the fleet, and the sculptors of the Erechtheion, all in the second half of the 5th century; at about the same time jury members received only 3 obols, which became the wage of soldiers and sailors during the last years of the Peloponnesian War.\footnote{Loomis 1998, 9-61, 97-121, 232-239, 257, 261-270, 277-282; see also Gill and Vickers 1990, 4; Vickers 1990, 613, 624; Johnston 1991a, 224; Sparkes 1991, 130; 1996, 143; Scheibler 1995, 144.}

It is likely that the wage for simpler or less-appreciated, privately commissioned labour was 2-3 obols a day; the Athenian dole during the last war years was 2 or even as little as 1 obol a head, which was evidently enough for a single individual to survive. It is not known how all these figures relate to family subsistence.\footnote{Amyx 1958, 306; Gabrielsen 1994, 111-112, 120; Williams 1996, 228; see also Loomis 1998, 222-225, 231.}

Combining these wages with pottery prices shows unequivocally that a large, elaborate pot would have cost the ‘ordinary’ Athenian more than a good day’s wage and, in some cases, probably that of a whole week. The price of a nice set of smaller pots, on the other hand, could be earned within a few days or even less. All this of course applies only to those having some produce to exchange or sell, or those earning wages in money, and not needing everything for subsistence. Moreover, for many small farmers whose income was in kind, it might have been quite difficult or financially unattractive to trade in their surplus for pots, or to convert it into cash first. Altogether, one can only conclude that the price of pottery was neither impressively expensive nor a mere trifle.\footnote{Vickers 1990, 616-618; see also Robertson 1985, 26; Boardman 1987b, 293; 1996a, 124; Gill 1988c, 2-3; Gill and Vickers 1990, 29.}

From the point of view of rich Athenians, however, the cost of painted pottery must indeed have been trivial.\footnote{Gill and Vickers 1990, 11; Vickers 1990, 613, 617-619; see also Vickers 1985, 113-115.} At first sight, plate, which was priced at its bullion value, seems more suited to the budgets of elites. A standard silver phiale (a flat bowl for drinking or making libations) weighed 100 drachmai. Other recorded or preserved vessels include poteria (small drinking vessels) of 25 to 40 drachmai, cups of more than 100 drachmai, oinochoai of more than 200 or 400-600 drachmai, and 1,000 drachme hydriai.\footnote{See Luschey 1939, 20; Lewis 1986, 73; and Tables XIV.1-3. See also section XVI.6.} Gold was worth about 12-15 times as much as silver.\footnote{Eddy 1977, 108; see also Vickers 1984, 90, n. 26; 1985, 116; Vickers and Gill 1994, 34; Johnston 1996, 86.}
The difficulty here is that the prices of silver or gold vessels, in contrast to that of pottery, can be less easily compared to wages, or, more generally, to the purchasing power of the elite. Information about the incomes of the elite is limited to records of the more or less symbolic payments for prestigious public functions and to accounts, probably rather inflated, of famous lawyers, philosophers, teachers, doctors, poets and actors receiving hundreds or thousands of drachmai. Neither source provides a reliable starting point for estimating the proportion of the affluent who could afford to wine and dine from full sets of plate. Although written sources mentioning the use of plate at symposia and in other settings might prove the existence of such luxurious practices, they do not offer reliable clues about its extent and frequency. Nor do excavations offer much help, as very little plate has come to light in the Greek world.

The sole remaining method for filling in the gaps and establishing whether plate could indeed have been the common tableware of the elites is an indirect approach: the examination of our general impression of private wealth, as derived from ancient writings and inscriptions. Although, as said, the connection between wealth and the kind of tableware used in Greek households may not always have been straightforward, some relation inevitably existed. Below a certain level of wealth plate must simply have been unaffordable. In addition, consumption patterns might have been more restricted by class distinctions than they are now. It therefore seems worthwhile to try to determine the proportion of people who could have afforded sets of bronze, silver or gold plate for dining and drinking.

A problem regarding the evidence for the wealth of the Athenian elites is that the first specific accounts of private assets concern the end of the 5th century, with most dating from the early 4th century or even later. These dates are close to those of the price graffiti treated above, but are not within the chronological range of this study. Moreover, most information on private fortunes derives from pleas by famous Athenian orators in the law courts. As a consequence, it is based, without exception, either on hearsay, gossip or guesswork or on the declarations of the affluent defendants themselves. In every case, the given figures are certainly distorted by special interests, the picture the orator tried to sketch of his client or his client’s adversary to influence the jury.

Even if the orators had wished to be more objective, it would have been impossible since independent third-party calculations to check the data on which they based their cases were simply nonexistent. Indeed, taxation by the Athenian state itself relied on the honesty of the assessed, whose declaration could only be checked or challenged by information given by others. There is no reason to suppose that this system produced accurate, independent computations of individual assets, while it is clear that, instead, it encouraged concealment, often successfully. That the declarations or estimates used for taxation or the amounts of wealth mentioned in the orators pleas must have been realistic to some degree is of no help in the matter. At most, they show the levels of wealth that were judged as adequate or realistic by the state or as credible by the juries, which does not, however, offer clues to the reliability of such judgements. For a society in which only individuals knew the extent of their wealth, it does not seem sound to rely on anecdotal evidence. It is therefore safer to limit the discussion to the more general picture, inevitably based partly on these same anecdotal accounts, as we also consider the wider context of Athenian private wealth.

The historical framework for a study of Athenian private wealth is defined by our knowledge of the system of contributions in money or in kind to warfare and religious festivals, for which all


Athenians of some means were obliged to pay. The financially and socially most important of these so-called liturgies was the trierarchy. During the last decades of the 5th century and probably earlier, at least from the beginning of the century, some several hundreds of the wealthiest Athenians were annually selected for this office. Apart from those who were subsequently exempted (one could claim not to be rich enough), they had to assume command of a trireme in the fleet, normally for one season or year, and to supply a part of its equipment and operational costs, including bonuses for the crew, whose normal salaries were paid by the state, which also provided the vessel.

Records, comprising stone inscriptions from much of the 4th century and the speeches of orators, show that a normal trierarchy could cost up to 7,000 drachmai. In exceptional cases, like the loss of a ship, the sum could be larger, but the typical range in this period seems to be 3,000-6,000 drachmai. On the other hand, some men volunteered to spend much more, which of course created goodwill. Other liturgies were generally cheaper, upwards of 300 drachmai for a simple chorechy, the payment of a festival chorus, although these were less numerous, about 97 in an ordinary year and 118 in a year with a Panathenaic festival. After any liturgy, each contributor was exempted for one year (from around 400 onwards, two years), but again one could choose to pay more often than was required. The orators tell of Athenians who were proud to have spent 8,000 drachmai in 3 consecutive years, 6 talents in 7 years, 9 talents and 2,000 drachmai in 7 years and (probably) more than 11 talents in 18 years.

The actual number of trierarchs and thus the total number of liturgy contributors each year as well as the costs they had to meet depended on the size of the fleet put to sea and the duration of the operations of their ships. What we know of the Athenian fleet suggests that, in the last part of the 5th century, at least 200 men had annually to act as trierarchs, with known peaks of ca. 250 ships in action during (probably) the summer of 428 and more than 218 in the spring of 413. The size of the fleet in this period may have reached 300 triremes. Before the Peloponnesian War the numbers were probably lower, but by the time of the Persian Wars the fleet already numbered 200 triremes. Taking account of spare ships, exemptions, disputed payments and the other liturgies, we can assume that, depending on the frequency and duration of exemptions, at least 750-1,000 liturgy contributors were needed to let the system run smoothly while creating some monetary reserves. This group, comprising 1.7-2.9% of the total number of perhaps 35,000-

948 Gabrielsen 1994, 74-75, 78, 111-114.
949 Jones 1957, 56-57; Davies 1971, XXI-XXII; Gabrielsen 1994, 98, 120-125, 139, 152, 215, 222; see also Davies 1984, 9.
951 Jones 1957, 57; Davies 1971, XXI-XXII; Gabrielsen 1994, 2-3, 78, 86, 125.
952 Gomme 1953, 4; Jones 1957, 7-8; Davies 1984, 16, 27; Unz 1985 24-25; Gabrielsen 1994, 74-75, 107, 126-127; see also Kallet-Marx 1993, 130-132. Other known figures are 200 ships at the Eurymedon in 469/8, probably at sea for eight months; a possible maximum of 200 ships in the Egyptian campaign of 459-454, with some staying for almost six years; 200 ships to Cyprus in 450 for a whole season; 160 to Samos in 440-439, 110 at Arginousai in 406; and more than 140 at Aigospotamoi in 405.
953 See Gabrielsen 1994, 176-180, who calculates 1,200-1,500, but counts rather generously, partly because he is working from a 4th-century perspective: from the final years of the Peloponnesian War onwards it became customary to share trierarchies in ‘syntrierarchies’, so that more and, in part, less wealthy people
45,000 citizens in the mid 5th century, was the wealthy core of Athenians, the rich who would have owned most land and larger businesses, while controlling trade, religion, warfare and politics. 954

In both time and money, the total burden of the liturgies on the richest Athenians must have been considerable, particularly in years of war. 955 Gabrielsen calculates an expenditure on trierarchies of 60 to 70 talents annually for the 4th century, when the navy was smaller than before. With 200 ships, say, at 4,500 drachmai, one easily arrives at a sum of 150 talents. To this can be added the some 17 talents of the other liturgies and the irregular payments of eisphora, a capital tax which possibly totalled a few hundred talents at a time, also paid mainly by the affluent. 956

Another financial burden for them was the maintenance of the Athenian cavalry, which consisted of privately owned and kept horses and the grooms with their own mounts. In the years around 400, according to Xenophon, the total cost was 40 talents a year, partly subsidised by the state. 957 One thus can estimate an annual contribution of 120 talents at the very minimum, and probably much more, i.e. in excess of 200 talents or an average of 1,200 to 1,600 drachmai a year paid by 750 to 1,000 men, as well as, in some years, a similar amount of eisphora.

The impact of these sums on the people who paid them is hard to grasp. Judging from a few not very trustworthy sources, the assessed total value of Athenian private property subject to taxation (land, houses, workshops, slaves, precious metal) could be put at about 6,000 talents in the early 4th century. 958 The late 5th-century liturgies and the other contributions would then amount to at least 2% (at 120 talents), more probably over 5% (200 talents plus eisphora), of the properties of the elites. These figures are rather high, however, considering that income on such properties must have been a fraction of their total value. 959 One should take into account, though, that Athenian assets would probably have been much larger in the successful empire of the 5th century. In addition, one has to reckon with the existence of considerable hidden wealth and sources of income which are difficult to tax, like trade or banking, which, moreover could provide relatively high returns on little capital. In any case, it seems that the Athenian rich invested a remarkable amount of wealth in their state.

To identify the consumer of tablewares, these general figures must be translated into the burden on individual households. This is quite difficult, however, as no data exist that connect taxes to income. The eisphora was levied as a percentage of property, but the actual percentage rate is each paid less. On the other hand, the estimate of 200 to 400 liturgy payers, the canonical view advanced also by Davies 1971, XXVII-XXVIII; 1984, 15-16, 19-20, 27-28, 34, seems too conservative, as it does not allow for exemptions or any other reserve and simply assumes that everyone paid his full due every year. This seems rather optimistic for the relatively quiet years before the Peloponnesian War, when there was no need for such a burden, as well as for the war years, when some breathing space must have been necessary every now and then, as long as possible.

954 See Davies 1984, 27-31, 34, 88-131, who reckoning with a group of 300 liturgy payers, calculates 1%.

955 Davies 1984, 82-84; Gabrielsen 1994, 78, 115, 216-217.

956 Davies 1984, 24.

957 Hipparchikos, I.19; see Jones 1957, 99.

958 Demosthenes XIV.19.27; Polybios II.62.7; see Jones 1957, 23-25. The ultimate source of the figure is unclear, as is the way it could have been calculated.

959 Jones 1957, 29, arrives at much lower figures (0.2%-0.25% per year, not counting liturgies and cavalry) for the 4th century, when state expenditure was much less.

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unknown and may have varied according to circumstances. Even though it was an exceptional measure it does not seem to have had much effect. In contrast, the levels of the liturgies and the moderate\textsuperscript{960} -- costs of the cavalry were not calculated according to the amount of property or income. This is an essential detail, for within the small Athenian elite the wealth of individuals differed considerably.

The lower limits for liability to liturgies, including the trierarchy, apparently varied considerably, depending on the needs of the state and the distribution and amount of private wealth available. The usual minimum, it seems, was 3-4 talents of visible capital, that is, ascertainable or declared,\textsuperscript{961} but it also rose or fell to about 6 or 2 talents. Considering that the annual return on such capital would, presumably, not have normally exceeded 10-15\% (1,200-5,400 drachmai) and was often less, even considerably so, for many Athenians within this range of wealth the burden of a trierarchy must have been heavy, even if it did not recur often.\textsuperscript{962}

On the other hand, the orators speak of very rich men who earned enormous sums in especially silver mines and warfare and who owned more than a hundred talents, even several hundreds. Nikias and Alkibiades are said to have been worth 100 talents, Diphilos 160, Kallias Lakkoploutos 200, and Epikrates even 600 talents; all of these fortunes suspiciously disappeared rapidly after their owners' deaths though, and were probably inflated by gossip, jealousy or greedy adversaries in court. The highest 4\textsuperscript{th}-century asset that can be more or less verified is the banker Pasion's 75 talents.\textsuperscript{963} Earlier, in 481/0, one Kleinius, the great-grandfather of Alkibiades, even sailed to Artemision on his own trireme, manned by a crew he personally paid, which surely represents an expenditure of several talents; he seems, however, to be one of the last in an old tradition of direct aristocratic contributors to navies which originated before the introduction of specialised warships, but which quickly died out in the democratic 5\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{964}

But even if the stories of individual fortunes exceeding a hundred talents are exaggerated or even invented, the cost of a trierarchy or a large silver symposion set cannot have been a large expenditure for the Athenian elites. As far as the written sources can be trusted, they seem to

\textsuperscript{960} Gill and Vickers distort the evidence, citing the 2 talents for Alkibiades's racehorses and the surely mythical 13-16 for Alexander's Boukephalos, and accepting 1,200 drachmai as the 'normal' price for a good horse. (Vickers 1990, 614; 1994, 298-299; Vickers and Gill 1994, 35-37) The book they draw on shows that 1,200 drachmai was a maximum amount in 4\textsuperscript{th}-3\textsuperscript{rd}-century Athens. Most owners paid 300-600 drachmai, and a few as little as 100 drachmai. Average prices in the late 5\textsuperscript{th} century seem to have been even somewhat lower. See Spence 1990, 275-279.

\textsuperscript{961} Gabrielsen 1994, 45, 52, who rightly stresses the absence of any formal and rigid limits. The lowest known asset on which a trierarchy was paid is (said to be) 8,000 drachmai, the highest one not paying a trierarchy 8 talents, 2,000 drachmai. Gabrielsen argues against Davies 1971, XXIV; 1984, 28, who arrives at the more canonical 3-4 talents.

\textsuperscript{962} See Gabrielsen 1994, 51-52; see also Jones 1957, 29.


\textsuperscript{964} Herodotos, VIII.17; see Davies 1971, 7, 15; Gabrielsen 1994, 1-3, 26. Herodotos (V.47, VIII.47) notes two other examples of the same practice: one Philippos, son of Boutakides, from Kroton, joined the expedition of the Spartan Dorieus in the 550s with his own trireme; and one Phayllos, also from Kroton, took his trireme to fight at Salamis; see Gabrielsen 1994, 229, n. 4. A similar example of aristocratic philanthropy with political aims is found in the story about the Alkmaionidae support of the completion of the temple of Apollo at Delphi (Herodotos, V.62).
show that plate was indeed mostly used by precisely these people. However, Athenians who possessed dozens or perhaps hundreds of talents would have formed an extremely small group, maybe a few handfuls of families in the prosperous years of the middle of the 5th century, against probably hundreds of households close to the lower property limit. The general, albeit not very well-founded, impression is that even during the 5th century few Athenians were worth more than 5-10 talents, most of which would consist of land and houses. Moreover, it seems telling that some of the reputedly richest political leaders, who were among Athens most conspicuous consumers, were forced to incur large debts. For example, a possibly fantastic report tells that Alkibiades used not his own monetary resources but the silverware of the Athenian state delegation to treat all the spectators at the Olympic games. Nevertheless, he was heavily indebted shortly thereafter. It may well be that in order to remain rich one could not be too lavish.

Looking more closely at the matter, we notice that the financial management of Alkibiades and other very affluent Athenians calls to mind the patterns of saving, borrowing and spending of the Athenian state itself. Although the exact details and dates are often disputed, inscriptions indicate that at least from the 440s onwards, despite the large tributes from the allies and the collected booty of more than thirty years, Athens regularly borrowed large amounts of money from the goddess Athena and other gods to finance military campaigns. For the 430s and 420s, furthermore, several unclear inscriptions and a papyrus fragment mention large payments by the Athenian state and the Delian League which, though defying explanation, probably lie within that same orbit, including occasional repayments of debts. In the final years of the Peloponnesian War much of the money needed to finance the running of the Athenian state continued to be taken


966 Jones 1957, 86-89; Davies 1984, 34, 99-103. Vickers 1984, 88; 1985, 113; 1990, 614 and Vickers and Gill (1994, 37-38), accept the number of 300 wealthy families and assume that all of them were extremely rich, but that is not what their source, Jones, says.

967 Jones 1957, 79-86, 89; see also Davies 1984, 37.


970 See Davies 1971, 199-202; 1984, 84-85.

971 IG I3, nos. 363-382, ranging from 441/0 or 440/39 to 404/3; Meiggs and Lewis 1988, 149-151, no. 55; 167-168, no. 61; 205-217, no. 72; 229-236, no. 77; 250-251, no. 81; 255-260, no. 84. See also Kallet-Marx 1989, 259; Giovannini 1990, 135-137, 142-143. The most impressive and best-preserved records cover the period 433/2 to 423/2 (IG I3, 369 = Meiggs and Lewis, no. 72, inscribed from 426/5 to 423/2), when Athena lent almost 4,750 talents of silver to the Athenian state. In the same decade, Athena Nike contributed more than 28.5 talents and the other gods collectively contributed more than 821 talents, bringing the total to almost 5,600 talents. See IG I3, 369; Linders 1975, 34-35; Meiggs and Lewis 1988, 214; Kallet-Marx 1993, 194-198.


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from Athena’s treasuries or even directly from her income. One gains the impression that Athens (and the Delian League with it) could save or collect enough cash to build up a surplus in quiet years, only to spend it all the more quickly in time of war, paying for the extra expenses with loans or pseudo-loans from the rich sanctuaries.

The sacred treasuries themselves also offer some possible parallels to private financial management. To start, it can be noted that the precious objects on the Akropolis, however impressive they seem to us, contained only a fraction of the wealth of the gods. Even the gold and ivory statue of Athena in the Parthenon, which contained about 44 talents of gold (each worth about 12-15 silver talents), pales in comparison to the thousands of talents provided by the goddess to the Athenian state. Apparently, most of the temples’ reserves were kept in the form of silver ingots or coinage, as illustrated by the fragmentary inventories of the so-called Treasury of the Other Gods, a collective savings deposit for many, if not (almost) all, of the minor sanctuaries of any importance in Attica; they record mainly coins and scrap metal alongside a small number of precious objects. Moreover, the objects of precious metal in Athena’s treasuries were not tapped until the final years of the Peloponnesian War, after all cash had been spent: clearly they were a last resort.

Another interesting point is that the enormous reserves of Athena seem exceptionally large in comparison to other documented temple treasuries of the period, which are much smaller. On
the average, each of the at least ca. 30 gods contributing to the Treasury of the Other Gods lent only about 27 talents to the state at a time when Athena’s loan figured in the thousands. In line with this, the partially preserved inventory list of the treasury for the year 429/8 mentions no more than about 1,700 foreign gold and silver coins and about 15 talents of silver (bullion and plate), which makes the source of all the money for the loans a mystery. Moreover, the accounts of both the loans and the inventory present a very heterogeneous picture: some gods contribute sums of only a few hundred drachmai and save even tinier amounts, which are all duly registered. This fragmentation, which is paralleled by the variety in types, material and provenances of the coin, must have been very impractical and can only be explained by the fact that the Athenian gods made their contributions bit by bit.

In 408/7 Demeter of Eleusis possessed more than 23,000 drachmai (almost 4 talents), and then lent 20,000 drachmai to the city in 407/6, keeping (including new income) about 10,000 to 13,000 drachmai. In addition, she had a treasure of more than 4 talents in coin and plate kept in Eleusis and on the Akropolis. Apollo of Delos was somewhat richer. His treasury received slightly more than 55,410 drachmai in 434/3 or 433/2, probably as repayment for a loan, and subsequently lent nearly that entire amount: 54,020 drachmai. Whether this inscription covers Apollo’s whole fortune, is not known. A comparable situation is revealed by the accounts of Nemesis of Rhamnous, who during five years in the 440s lent 37,000-51,400 drachmai yearly of her total capital, which grew from 49,729 drachmai to 56,606 (almost 9.5 talents) in this period. Interestingly, the loans were in standard small portions of 200 and 300 drachmai.

Despite such considerable reserves of wealth, these sanctuaries of the lesser gods, in contrast to that of Athena, could not have paid the expense of large and prestigious buildings like marble temples from their usual savings and cash flow from rents on temple property and gifts. Even a relatively small temple like that of Nemesis at Rhamnous could hardly have cost much less than a few dozen talents, and must therefore have been financed, at least partly, by loans, ad hoc gifts and perhaps some public money. Exactly like the Athenian state, many sanctuaries seem to have had a steady income which, though good enough in normal times, was insufficient for exceptional expenditures.

If individual Athenians behaved in the same way as their institutions, most personal savings would be kept in coin and bullion and, except in times of more than average prosperity, expenditure would be on about the same level as income so that exceptional expenses usually had to be met by loans. In fact, the speeches of the orators mention remarkably many loans and


984 IG I3, no. 248; Meiggs and Lewis 1988, 144-146, no. 53.


986 Giovannini 1990, 134, 142-144; see also Boardman 1987b, 289.
inordinately large amounts of savings. Although their statements may of course be biased by the financial nature of the lawsuits in question, which could easily lead to exaggeration, the general patterns of their clients’ financial management should be credible. Moreover, it is interesting that some of the cited loans were made to meet the requirements of a liturgy or the payment of taxes. The liturgic and taxation systems, based on ‘visible’ wealth and generally entailing the urgent payment of often unpredictable but large amounts of money, further encouraged the kind of financial management described above. Cash savings and lending or borrowing were the easiest means of having the necessary funds at one’s disposal and the best method of concealing one’s wealth from the state.

Such a pattern of borrowing and saving would have left little financial leeway for plate at the table, even in the more affluent households. However, as suggested by a few ancient sources, some savings were perhaps held in plate, although money or even ingots would be more practical when fortunes shifted quickly. In any case, one can wonder how often an individual’s savings in plate were enough to equal an entire table setting. An imaginary aristocratic symposium set of silver plate consisting of one hydria of 1,000 drachmai, one krater of 1,000, four oinochoai of 500, ten phialai of 100 and thirty poteria (small drinking vessels) of 33 amounts in itself to a talent, to which kyathoi for serving and a wine amphora must be added, not to mention coolers, strainers, dishes for snacks and the like. A quite modest one-talent plate set then equals one good year of 10% net output from a 10-talent estate, which is a rather large property. To avoid heavy taxation, moreover, some of those who could spare such sums might have preferred to spend their money less conspicuously or to reserve their plate for private dinners or symposia attended only by the most discreet guests. In practice, only those who wanted to show off and who were rich enough to bear the consequences, acting perhaps under pressure to maintain political status, would really have wished to own full sets of plate.

Apart from those who chose not to keep their wealth in plate or to display it openly, especially not at the table, a substantial group of the relatively well-off must have existed who lacked sufficiently large funds in cash or unminted silver to acquire a silver drinking or dining set. In view

987 A nice example is found in Lysias, XII.11, cited by Vickers 1985, 115, and Vickers and Gill 1994, 40. The orator’s property, confiscated in 403, includes 3 talents of silver, 400 Kyzikene staters (electrum coins), 100 Darics (Persian coins) and only four silver phialai. Many of the other references to plate in ancient texts cited by Vickers and Gill also relate to loans: see Vickers 1990, 616-617, 621; 1992, 58; Vickers and Gill 1994, 40-43, 47. For other large fortunes including little or no plate see Davies 1971, 87, 126-127, 151-153 (based on Lysias, XXXII.5-6, 15), 431-434.

988 Davies 1984, 61; see Gabrielsen 1994, 51-52, 57.

989 Davies 1984, 82-84; Gabrielsen 1994, 51-52, 57.

990 Gabrielsen 1994, 51-52, 57; see also Davies 1984, 61-64; Linders 1992, 11.


992 See Boardman 1987b, 289.

993 Compare the silver finds from the Roman villa at Boscoreale, 100 pieces, and the Casa del Menandro at Pompeii, 118 pieces (figures from Strong 1966, 18).

994 Davies 1984, 90-94; see also Boardman 1996a, 124-125.
of unavoidable expenses like trierarchies, the necessity of keeping monetary reserves and occasional setbacks, it becomes clear that even the wealthier among the elite had to be lucky and had to save for a quite a while (or inherit many heirlooms) before acquiring a nice symposion drinking set of silver. A trierarchy, as said, could cost 3,000-7,000 drachmai; a house or a daughter’s dowry fell in the same range. If we also take into account the likelihood that it was customary to keep thousands of drachmai in cash savings to meet emergencies, few Athenians presumably had much surplus wealth which could be put aside in the form of plate. After all, at the moderate income rate of 5% a year – which is probably more realistic than the 10% mentioned above – a 5 talent estate yields 1,500 drachmai a year, if all the proceeds are turned into liquid assets. Furthermore, many men in the lowest range of those liable for a trierarchy, with possessions valued at 2-4 talents, would probably have not even earned much more than some craftsmen working on the temples or the ‘ordinary’ hoplite. In fact, there might have been some overlap between them and men in such professions. Although one can envisage that even this ‘poor’ section of the elite lived quite decently in large houses with sufficient food, clothing and entertainment and even some luxury, it is hard to see how they could afford more than occasional pieces or small sets of silver vessels.

On the other hand, bronze, which cost only about a hundredth of the silver price, is another matter. Bronze vessels are regularly found in the excavations of temples and, less frequently, cemeteries and, occasionally, houses (see chapters XV-XVII, and the accompanying data on the CD-rom). Specimens also turn up in the art market, presumably mostly removed from graves. Beside the extant material, consisting mainly of hydriai, jugs, phialai and some drinking vessels, a few dedicatory inscriptions refer to donations of bronze vessels. In addition, the Hermakopidai list mentions a few bronze or possibly bronze vessels, including two kettles (Table XIII.2), whereas plate tableware is not included. Although literary sources partly compensate for the omission of bronze in the Hermakopidai list, it supplies little information about the use and appreciation of the bronze votive and drinking vessels it mentions, which receive less attention than their more precious counterparts of gold and silver.

The scatter of evidence makes it appear reasonably certain that bronze drinking gear was not uncommon, but unfortunately it cannot be determined whether it filled the tables in at least some rich households. The limited range of preserved forms and the fact that they were mostly discovered amidst a greater number of ceramic vessels may suggest that bronze rarely replaced

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995 See for the prices of houses Pritchett 1956, 261-276; Cahill 1991, 379-381; Kiderlen 1995, 119-124, offering a range from 100 to 6,600 drachmai for the Classical period. As to dowries, Gabrielsen 1994, 50, cites examples of 10,000 and 11,000 drachmai, even one of 3 talents, but these are high figures. Vickers and Gill 1994, 51, take 8,000 drachmai from Demosthenes.

996 See Jones 1957, 81-86; Davies 1984, 28; the hoplite census may have been as low as 2,000 drachmai (Davies 1984, 9).


999 See Lewis 1986, 71.

pottery completely. The range of bronze vessels mentioned in the Hermakopidai list and the frequency of preserved hydriai might also indicate that functional aspects played a determining role in the use of bronze: a metal kettle and a cooking pot heat more quickly and rarely crack, a bronze hydria will not break when let down a well. Possibly the risk of corrosion and the probable effect of bronze on the taste of wine\textsuperscript{1001} were influential as well and made pottery preferable for drinking. Finally, the very cheapness of pottery may have had its attraction, even to those who were relatively well-off: if precious metal was beyond reach or not desired, the difference in status between bronze and pottery might not have seemed worth the difference in price. More generally, one might speculate that precisely because bronze lacked the prestige of precious metal, it did not differ enough in status from pottery to replace it entirely. For those who were less well-off, moreover, a complete set of bronze tableware was perhaps unaffordable.\textsuperscript{1002} The alternative was either a few metal vessels or none whatsoever.

Lastly, ubiquitous pottery. Now that it seems clear that vessels of precious metal are unlikely to have figured prominently in all but a few Athenian households, and that the role of bronze vessels was probably quite limited as well, something more can be said about ceramic tableware. First of all, it should be stressed that because of its moderate price and widespread use, decorated pottery could not be a luxury in the sense of a cherished and desirable elite product.\textsuperscript{1003} Such esteem was reserved, of course, for truly valuable objects like plate and perhaps some bronzeware.\textsuperscript{1004} On the other hand, it is equally obvious that a large section of the Athenian population, probably including the less affluent members of the elites, could afford only pottery and an occasional bronze vessel.\textsuperscript{1005} In addition, it seems highly probable that many prosperous Athenians who had relatively more limited reserves would not convert them into plate. Furthermore, in the light of the apparently not very prominent role played by bronze vessels, pottery may well have been a more up-market product than its monetary value might imply. Outside Athens, moreover, where presumably imported ware was more expensive than at the place of manufacture and wealth more limited, the esteem for Attic pottery was probably higher than 'at home'.\textsuperscript{1006}

A remaining issue is whether the more affluent consumers of Attic pottery regarded it merely as a practical product of convenience or also appreciated it for its qualities like form and decoration. Its sophisticated iconography and placement in graves, do supply clues,\textsuperscript{1007} but cannot possibly yield conclusive, unequivocal evidence until systematic data about possible relations between the

\textsuperscript{1001} See Kreuzer 1998, 34, n. 296; Rotroff 1999, 69.

\textsuperscript{1002} Contra Vickers 1986, 141; 1990, 618-619; 1994, 302, who assumes on unclear grounds that bronze was cheap.

\textsuperscript{1003} Robertson 1985, 26; Vickers 1986, 162; 1990, 618; Boardman 1987b, 293; 1988a, 31-32 (rather unwillingly); Arafat and Morgan 1989, 335-336; Gill 1994, 103; Vickers and Gill 1994, 92-93; see also Gill and Vickers 1990, 3-5, 11. Boardman 1987b, 293-294, argues that pottery was nevertheless appreciated. However, the ancient texts quoted in support hardly contain relevant evidence.

\textsuperscript{1004} Vickers 1984, 88-90, 97; Arafat and Morgan 1989, 335-336; Gill and Vickers 1990, 4-5; see also Salmon 1984, 113; Scheibler 1995, 46-47.


\textsuperscript{1007} See Boardman 1996a, 124-126; Sparkes 1996, 143-144.
two matters become available. However that may be, many of the rich obviously turned instead to precious metal, bronze and sculpture for votive offerings and the adornment of family graves.

At the lower end of the market for decorated pottery, the situation is equally unclear. The prices and appreciation of decorated pottery compared to that of plain and coarse wares would have played a significant role in determining the consumption patterns of poorer consumers, but it is extremely difficult to fill in any details. Although it is obvious from the recorded prices that the poorest could hardly have spared the sums needed for new and complete sets of decorated pottery or probably even fine ware in general, all but the most destitute could probably permit themselves at least a few painted pots, in the worst circumstances second-hand or flawed pieces. On the other hand, as will come as no surprise to anyone who has excavated or surveyed in the Greek world, painted pottery was definitely not the common tableware of the masses to the extent that Gill and Vickers maintain. For as the next chapters will show, domestic contexts yield limited proportions of decorated pottery and the relative amounts found in votive deposits and graves, while varying, are never overwhelming. The variations in relative amounts of decorated pottery, at any rate, do suggest that decoration indeed influenced the appreciation of pottery and the selection of pots for specific functions. For many Athenians of lesser means, painted fine pottery, though affordable, may have been their relatively expensive ‘best plate’ for display and special occasions. But whether all Athenians who were able to buy painted fine pottery indeed did so, is another question, which can hardly be answered: this would depend on its practical use, value and appreciation in the eyes of the ‘ordinary’ people and, possibly, of the elites as well.

1008 The diffusion of second hand pottery, which can, of course, hardly be traced archaeologically, remains an intriguing issue. Similarly problematic are the use of misfired pieces, which has never been looked into, and the purpose of repairing pots. The frequency of mended vessels implies they somehow retained value, but it remains to be seen whether this was only a matter of appreciation, the difficulty of getting a replacement, or simply the difference between a handful of sherds and a slightly more than worthless piece of mended pottery. Further study of flawed and repaired pottery would certainly be useful.