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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XVII Pottery from graves
XVII.1 Introduction: a special kind of assemblage and its possibilities

Graves usually constitute the clearest kind of excavated context available: a closed find, deposited on purpose. Unlike votive assemblages, which in theory could offer comparable direct evidence, Greek grave contents have normally remained in place, and have not become mixed and scattered over large areas. Each individual grave is a usually small, but complete assemblage, representing a specific and well-defined moment of consumption, i.e. the burial ceremony.\textsuperscript{1270} In addition, the contents of the individual graves combined form large assemblages of finds, covering long periods. Also because preferred grave gifts varied between places and changed in time developments within these assemblages are easily spotted and sites can easily be compared. In the Greek world, cemeteries thus offer the most convenient context for studying pottery assemblages.

In practice, however, the situation is less straightforward. Often the boundaries of cemeteries are not entirely clear, and most cemeteries have been only partly excavated. Furthermore, the loss of contexts in excavated areas is often demonstrated by disturbed, pillaged or reused graves and frequent stray finds. Therefore, the publications of cemeteries inevitably present an incomplete overview of the objects originally deposited, albeit one composed of many intact bits. But in comparison with domestic and sanctuary sites such problems are less pervasive, and the result is a preservation rate which is surely much higher than that of any other archaeological context. In addition, from early on many cemetery sites have been published as complete assemblages, grave by grave with all their contents catalogued, including plain and coarse material – a practice which is otherwise rarely met in Classical Archaeology.

Besides the strong points of graves as primary contexts, a problematic aspect has to be noted: a grave has a very limited, particular purpose, which strictly determines the choice of material. As will be seen (section XVII.3), it is a matter of discussion whether funerary gifts were newly purchased for burial and, if so, to what extent, and whether they were somehow used in ritual or simply placed in the graves or smashed in a cremation fire. In any case, the functional and spatial contexts of funerary assemblages are more restricted than those of domestic material and the non-votive part of sanctuary finds. Votive offerings at sanctuaries, on the other hand, form a closer comparison, although many of them were probably more publicly visible, and they could occasionally be moved around. As a consequence of its role, funerary pottery, of course, can throw only limited light on pottery’s common use and the practices of daily life. In a study of pottery consumption, however, this is not of primary relevance, as long as the special circumstances surrounding pottery’s use in funerary contexts are kept in mind. In fact, one of the issues explored below, as part of my general comparison of the various use contexts, is the particular character of funerary pottery consumption as reflected in the grave assemblages.

A closely related issue, which has recently been fiercely debated, is the status of pottery in graves as compared not only to vessels used in daily life, but also to other, more precious grave gifts. Again, a close look at the cemetery assemblages themselves seems to lead to useful insights. A final point to be addressed below is the specific role of individual pottery shapes in funerary practice. Because of their precise, well-defined contexts – i.e. separate graves – funerary assemblages give unique views of both collective and individual consumption patterns, and perhaps, through them, of the motivation behind the choice of specific pots and shapes for a particular use. In passing, this will also shed some light on the above-mentioned question whether funerary pottery was bought specifically for burial or taken from the household cupboards.

\textsuperscript{1270} Of course, excavation reveals only the material remains of that ceremony, as far as these were left behind. See Morris 1987, 29, 31-37.
The long tradition of fully publishing cemetery excavations, which I refer to above, ensures the ready availability of good quality data for my sample. My selection of sites is therefore guided mainly by a combination of convenience and the wish to present a representative choice of large assemblages of grave pottery, preferably from sites which can meaningfully be compared with those studied in the preceding sections on domestic and sanctuary finds. With regard to convenience, I have avoided older publications, as correcting superseded dating and classification requires much effort; on the other hand, I have taken the liberty to profit from colleagues' analyses by reusing the counts and tables from some synthetic secondary studies of funerary finds. While an examination of yet unpublished sites would doubtless yield useful new data, I hope that my comparative approach supplies equally useful new information related to the conclusions of these previous studies.

The small size of my sample of funerary sites, which I limit to five cases, is not just a matter of convenience, as it mainly stems from the results of my analysis, for I soon concluded that grave pottery adds relatively little information to that already offered by domestic and, particularly, sanctuary pottery. Nevertheless, the precision and reliability of funerary data ensure that meaningful and representative conclusions can be drawn from such a small sample. I have tried to cover both the western colonial world and the Greek mainland, leaving aside the east, the islands and the Black Sea area, which are hardly represented elsewhere in this study. Unfortunately, it was rarely possible to include well-published large cemeteries from the same places treated in the preceding sections. Only the large sites of Athens (Table XVII.1) and, to some extent, Corinth (Table XVII.2) offer this opportunity. Pithekoussai (modern Lacco Ameno on the island of Ischia, near Naples, Table XVII.3) and, especially, Taras (now Taranto, Table XVII.4) in southern Italy figure among the colonies, which may be compared to Selinus, Megara Hyblaea, Poseidonia/Paestum and Tocra. Rhitsona (ancient Mykalessos, Table XVII.5) is a minor city of the Greek homeland, like Halieis, Olynthos or Eretria treated above.

Although each part of this sample provides high-quality data, the variation in finds between sites is considerable, just as at the sanctuaries. There seem to be both 'poor' cemeteries with few pots or other objects in individual graves, as in the Corinthian North Cemetery or some areas at Taras, and very 'rich' ones, with dozens or hundreds of objects in many graves, as at Rhitsona. However simplified it may seem to assume automatically that poor graves belonged to poor people or that rich, or rather pottery-rich, graves are those of the elites and aristocrats,
distinctions in wealth and social status doubtless played a role in the choice of grave gifts.\textsuperscript{1278} But local and regional traditions of burial and grave offering were surely influential as well: just as at sanctuaries, the variations in favoured shapes and kinds of decoration can be considerable, and change through time.\textsuperscript{1279} Again, such differences obviously make it more difficult to compare sites.

I have tried to avoid part of potentially distorting variation were possible by combining assemblages found in several cemeteries or burial areas within the same city (Taras, to some extent Athens), or even within the larger area of a polis (Corinth).\textsuperscript{1280} The combined data of these larger assemblages presumably even out some of the differences in status and 'consumer groups' within the burials of one community and improve the coverage of individual periods. Pithekoussai and Rhitsona, on the other hand, offer just bits of single cemeteries, which are thus likely less representative of the average local funerary practices. They, however, provide a good opportunity to explore more detailed patterns of acquisition and deposition of funerary pottery.

XVII.3 Funerary pottery assemblages: the general picture

A salient common feature of assemblages from the selected cemeteries as well as many others is that they range over very long periods of use, often from the Early Iron Age to the Hellenistic or Roman period.\textsuperscript{1281} Despite considerable variations in burial practices,\textsuperscript{1282} cemeteries were apparently more stable centres of ceramic consumption than sanctuaries, where material culture (as reflected in find assemblages) changed continuously and more radically, sometimes leading to the disappearance of pottery votives, or than houses, which each had a relatively short period of use, so that assemblages cannot be followed in time.\textsuperscript{1283} Therefore, grave assemblages offer the best opportunity to trace long term patterns and changes, even better than the finds from sanctuaries.

The most distinctive consistent trait of funerary pottery assemblages is the high proportion of decorated vessels. From the Early Iron Age to the 5th century generally at least half, but sometimes more than three-quarters, of the pots in graves bear some kind of decoration. Until the early Archaic period, abstract and floral patterns prevail. Afterwards, with the increasing popularity of Corinthian and Attic, figured wares are dominant. Most of the non-decorated vessels belong to the category black gloss and banded. Plain and coarse pots are remarkably rare in graves, usually less than 10\% or even 5\% of the total assemblage, or still less if one leaves out


\textsuperscript{1279} See Neeft 1994b, 188; 1995, 374-375.

\textsuperscript{1280} More details about the exact composition of my data sets are given with the tables.

\textsuperscript{1281} See also, in addition to my sample, e.g. the cemeteries of Rhodes (\textit{Clara Rhodos} III and IV; Gates 1983); Thera (Dragendorff 1903); Vitsa (Vokotopoulou 1986); and those recently excavated during the construction of the Athens underground (Parlama and Stampolidis 2000).

\textsuperscript{1282} See Morris 1998, 19, 31-33, 73.

\textsuperscript{1283} The full publication of pottery from all layers of a well-defined domestic area would overcome this problem: like sanctuaries, cities are long-lived, but their pottery assemblages, as presently available, hardly show this.
‘tubs’ used as children’s sarcophagi and second-hand containers (amphorai, jars, chytrai, hydriai, etc.) serving as urns or, again, to bury little children; the remaining plain ware includes quite a few miniatures. The relative amounts of each kind of decoration differ strikingly from those met in pottery from domestic areas and most sanctuaries. Clearly, the vessels deposited in graves, as a whole, form a special selection of the available ceramic repertoire, apparently aimed at creating an effect, making a good show, and not simply taken at random from the cupboards at home.

The impression that funerary pottery reflects a deliberate choice is confirmed by the occurrence of individual shapes. Grave vessels do not form fully functional sets and although the total range of shapes usually seems to be wide, many kinds of pots appear only occasionally, often just once among hundreds of graves. Thus cemeteries hardly yield eating vessels, nor pottery used in the kitchen and the yard for cooking, food processing or other household activities. Instead, drinking vessels (cups, skyphoi, kantharoi) or small oil containers (alabastra, aryballoi and, later, lekythoi) manifestly prevail, with one category often exceeding half or even three-quarters of an assemblage. Less prominent, but also common, are vessels associated with drinking (kraters, amphorai, jugs, etc.), my ‘luxury household’ category (pyxides, exaleiptra) and ‘ritual’ vessels, mainly miniatures. The amounts of these three categories in an assemblage seem to depend on each other: more of one kind implies less of the other (whereas the proportions of drinking vessels or small oil containers remain unaffected). In fact, often just one of these three categories of secondary importance stands out, like the vessels associated with drinking in Taras.

The sketched general picture of the relative frequency of shapes looks much like an extreme form of the pattern visible at sanctuaries, where the same categories of vessels are prominent, also customarily with one or two particularly notable shapes or clusters of shapes. In contrast, sanctuary assemblages are broader and more diverse, including a wider range of shapes, with less marked peaks and not so much decorated pottery. To a substantial degree, however, this wide range may be due to the practical roles of a section of sanctuary pottery for feasting or performing rituals. Excluding the latter as much as possible, the likely votive vessels seem to show quite the same pattern as those found in graves, as can be seen especially clearly at Thorikos and the Korykian Cave, where almost all the finds appear to be dedications. It seems that, generally votive dedications and funerary offerings called for the same kinds of pottery shapes, with a stronger tendency towards decorated vessels in burials.

An additional similarity between funerary and sanctuary assemblages consists of local preferences for shapes, albeit on a slightly different scale. While particular choices at sanctuaries are largely limited to single shrines, in cemeteries they seem to extend over larger areas: for instance, at Rhitsona (Table XVII.5) the kantharoi and typical Boeotian ‘kylikes’ are a regional phenomenon, and the many Attic cups or the handmade and plain oinochoai found in graves at Taras and Corinth, respectively (Tables XVII.4 and XVII.2), are met in several

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1284 The secondary use of amphorai and pithoi for human remains is, of course, hardly relevant here, as it does not properly concern grave gifts.


1286 See Lippolis 1997, 8, 16.

1287 Another, less secure, indication is offered by the collections of Attic figured pottery from Naukratis and the Samian Heraion (Tables XXII.3 and 9), with their high proportions of cups.

1288 See Neeft 1994b, 188; 1995, 374-375. Shepherd 1995 demonstrates that not only pottery assemblages, but also ways of burial show specific local patterns.
cemeteries elsewhere. Only Corinthian aryballoi and, later, Attic lekythoi appear to have been popular everywhere, in cemeteries even more universally than at sanctuaries.

Although the similarities between dedications and grave gifts in all likelihood indicate some kind of common motivation or ideology regarding the practice of offering, the exact connection is difficult to grasp, all the more so because the confused find circumstances at sanctuaries give little information on individual votive gifts and their original contexts. The precise find circumstances of pots in graves, on the other hand, offer an exceptional possibility to look at the preferences for restricted categories of shapes at the level of the individual consumer.

The cemetery finds seem to show two interplaying tendencies. First, at a majority of sites a traditional local or regional funerary favourite apparently existed, a nearly indispensable vessel or small set of vessels. In each of these places the basic gift occurs in a large majority of the graves ranging over at least several decades. Some of these funerary traditions were very long lasting, like the skyphos in combination with a plain, or later black, oinochoe at Corinth, or the small oil containers in Tarentine graves (Tables XVII.2 and XVII.4). Others, like the popularity of lekythoi at Athens, kantharoi at Rhitsona or oinochoai at Pithekoussai seem somewhat less fixed (Tables XVII.1; XVII.5; XVII.3).

Second, the richness of the grave gifts was, as a rule, increased not by widening the range of shapes, but by adding a larger number of vessels of a few shapes, or even just a single shape. Thus the very impressive graves 49 and 50 at Rhitsona contained 226 and 230 aryballoi and 133 and 105 black kantharoi in total assemblages of 422 and 384 items, respectively (Table XVII.5). Similarly, the somewhat less grandiose assemblage of Tarentine tomb 12 numbers more than 30 cups, mostly Sianas, in a total of at least 42 items (Table XVII.4). Such sets appear to confirm at the level of the individual burial what I have already suggested with regard to the total assemblages of cemeteries: funerary pottery does not form functional combinations, i.e. drinking services, not even symbolically, as is often thought. Instead, it seems that graves were filled with at least a traditional funerary set and then, if possible, a complement of a few popular shapes as well as a lesser amount of other vessels.

There is no denying, of course, that many grave assemblages, particularly at Taras, are strongly associated with the symposion. But they cannot simply be regarded as symposion sets, since drinking vessels are disproportionately numerous and some of the basic accessory vessels are regularly missing. Once more, an intriguing analogy with sanctuaries exists, as their decorated vessels, too, cannot be combined into meaningful sets – unlike, in some cases, their plain and banded vessels.

The limited nature of any direct or indirect practical significance for funerary pottery is confirmed by the drastic shifts in the popularity of shapes, which show the same developments as

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1290 Lippolis 1997, 12, considers the combination of an amphora and a cup as the typical grave set in Archaic Taras. However, 16 of the 24 assemblages in his sample have no amphora, a circumstance which, as shown in Table XVII.4, is representative.

1291 See Neeft 1994a, 151-152.

1292 See e.g. Hoffmann 1988, 153; Dickey 1992, 65; Lippolis 1997, 8, 12; Masiello 1997, 69-76.

1293 Lippolis 1997, 8. Compare also 7th-century Athens where the apparent remains of funerary meals were found in separate offering trenches which contained pottery shapes other than those in the graves (Houby-Nielsen 1992, 349, 354-357).
those of the sanctuary assemblages, but even more clearly.\textsuperscript{1294} Whereas in the early Archaic period, from Protocorinthian onwards, Corinthian aryballoi and alabastra are by far the most popular grave goods everywhere, except in Corinth itself, the rising preference for Attic pottery towards the mid 6th century coincides with increasing numbers of cups, skyphoi and, at Rhitsona, kantharoi, of both Attic and other manufacture.\textsuperscript{1295} And from the end of the 6th century onwards, perhaps somewhat earlier at Athens, lekythoi take over everywhere for about a century, becoming the single most common grave vessel ever seen.\textsuperscript{1296} Even drinking and associated vessels, which earlier are usually always present in some numbers, disappear from many graves during this period.

If the practices of making libations or the washing and anointing of the dead were among the crucial motives for placing particular kinds of vessels in graves, such shifts in shapes seem odd. Although it cannot a priori be discounted that funerary rites changed as quickly as did favoured pottery shapes – or even precisely because of the availability of newly popular vessels – I prefer to conclude that the choice of ceramic grave goods was largely independent of the burial ceremony in its strictly technical sense, and usually did not have much to do with the needs of the dead either.\textsuperscript{1297} Personal gifts, like baby-feeders, toys or wedding vases are exceptional. Instead, most grave goods seem to convey a generic message of goodwill, love or grief or a confirmation of ostentatious wealth on the part of the living on behalf of themselves. The range of chosen shapes seems to confirm this, as most grave assemblages would not serve very well in the afterlife, except perhaps at the very general level as a memory or as a sign of continuity with the living. A good analogy seems to be offered by votive gifts at temples which imply a donor's message and goodwill, but are of no use to the gods, not even symbolically. Perhaps, grave offering should be seen as a kind of dedication.\textsuperscript{1298}

An additional indication of the dedicatory character of many grave gifts is provided by the large series of vessels of the same shape in many 'rich' graves, mentioned above. For instance, it is hard to imagine that the over 200 aryballoi in some Rhitsona graves (Table XVII.5) contained ointment for the dead, or that the dozens of kantharoi and skyphoi also regularly found in those lavish graves were all used to pour funerary libations.\textsuperscript{1299} Similarly, the four kraters discovered with the famous Nestor kotyle and only two other drinking vessels in grave 168 at Pithekoussai (Table XVII.3) appear surprisingly out of proportion to their context. In these large grave assemblages the prestige of quantity or size is clearly more relevant than any utilitarian or symbolical role, and the combination of vessels has apparently little significance in itself.\textsuperscript{1300}

Just a small part of grave pottery may nevertheless have had a practical or ceremonial function. Particularly the fixed, long-lasting 'basic sets', like the combination of skyphos and oinochoe at

\textsuperscript{1294} I omit the Early Iron Age, for which I have no domestic and sanctuary material. Morris 1987, esp. 103, 182-183; 1992, 25; 1998, 19, 72; Dickey 1992, esp. 135-139, and Houby-Nielsen 1992, however, suggest that the contents of graves show rapid changes from at least as early as the 9th century.

\textsuperscript{1295} See Lippolis 1997, 8; Neeft 1994b, 188-189; 1995, 370.

\textsuperscript{1296} See Lippolis 1997, 12.


\textsuperscript{1298} See Hoffmann 1988, 156; Morris 1992, 104-105.

\textsuperscript{1299} See Morris 1992, 104-105; Kees Neeft (pers. comm.).

\textsuperscript{1300} See Morris 1992, 104-105.
Corinth (Table XVII.2), may well be closely linked with traditional funerary rituals, though perhaps just as symbolic tokens.\textsuperscript{1301} The single aryballos in many graves, particularly at Pithekoussai and Taras (Tables XVII.3-4), and lekanides/pyxides in Classical Athens (Table XVII.1) also come to mind. Yet as long as systematic chemical research on the contents of grave vessels is not available, the evidence that these modest gifts filled practical roles remains limited. Besides occasional lidded vessels containing shells, remains of make-up and, more rarely, animal bones, all mainly found in the Classical period, the only definite proof that vessels were filled is supplied by the small flask hidden inside Attic 5th-century ‘false lekythoi’ (which, in turn, might suggest that other large lekythoi were never filled).\textsuperscript{1302}

An apparent difficulty in my conclusion that grave gifts are for the most part dedicatory is that they do not often include numerous identical vessels. Even large assemblages, in which one would expect extended series of newly bought pots, usually contain vessels by many potters and painters, which are sometimes quite far apart in date. Thus the cups in grave 12 at Taras (Table XVII.4) or the aryballoi in graves 49, 50 and 86 at Rhitsona (Table XVII.5) can be divided into several stylistic groups. Particularly in the case of drinking vessels, this might indicate that at least some grave gifts were taken from the donor’s current, that is, most likely domestic, stock, a possibility to which I shall shortly return. In this regard, however, it must be remarked that comparably scattered purchasing patterns also seem to mark pottery in sanctuaries as well as in houses. But in these contexts, of course, it was rarely necessary to acquire large amounts of pottery at short notice. Possibly this consistent pattern in houses, sanctuaries and graves is due, at least in part, to a distribution network that supplied only relatively small batches of products from one craftsman or pottery establishment to individual consumers. With respect to burials, another possibility is that parts of larger sets of pottery were given not only by the deceased’s relatives collectively, but also by several distinct (groups of) relatives or friends. This may also explain why smaller batches of two, three or even six pots quite frequently turn up in the same grave.\textsuperscript{1303}

This, then, leads back to the point of the deposition of pots used in daily life. Wear is problematical as evidence, because traces of use or post-depositional damage might be mistaken for each other, and cherished pots may have been used only rarely. Repaired vessels in graves are even less informative, because they may have been newly acquired in that condition as second-rate products, hardly useable in daily life but good enough for the grave and cheap.\textsuperscript{1304} Wide chronological differences between pots within the same grave offer a better indication. Particularly if the vessels in question greatly differ in style, apparent discrepancies cannot always be explained away as the result of difficulties and inaccuracies of dating.\textsuperscript{1305} Owner’s marks undeniably confirm that some pottery ended up in graves after use.\textsuperscript{1306} Panathenaic amphorai, found in graves at Taras and elsewhere, must also have circulated before burial. Some of these

\textsuperscript{1301} See Neeft 1994a, 154.

\textsuperscript{1302} Dickey 1992, 74-75 offers a slightly different account of the same problem.

\textsuperscript{1303} See Neeft 1994b, 189, 236, n. 17.

\textsuperscript{1304} Johnston 1979, 65, n. 6. See also Hannestad 1989, 123, 125; D’Amicis et al 1997, 189, 210, 212, where the conventional position that repairs are a sign of use and appreciation is maintained.

\textsuperscript{1305} See Hannestad 1989, 123; D’Amicis et al 1997, 166, 189-190, 204, 210, 212, 216, 237-238, 281-282; Masiello 1997, 72.

\textsuperscript{1306} See particularly Rhitsona graves 26; 31; 49; 80; 102; 110; 113-114; 121; 123; 126-127; 133; 135 (Ure 1913; 1927).
prize vases may be part of the deceased’s possessions (won or bought), others may have been
given at the funeral or just before by relatives or friends, possibly as second-hand purchases
especially for the grave. Purchase, not athletic victory, for example, would seem the best
explanation for the four Panathenaics celebrating different sports in grave 98 at Taras.\textsuperscript{1307}

On the other hand, as argument against the possible importance of second-hand pottery in
graves, one can cite the very high proportion of decorated wares discovered in cemeteries.
Households, which had mainly black and plain pots, could hardly have provided the amounts of
figured ware needed for burial in some places. The kinds of shapes in the two contexts are equally
mismatched: the relative proportions of functional categories greatly differ, and many of the
shapes favoured for graves – aryballos, alabastron, kothion, larger figured cup – are rarely found
in domestic settings. In contrast, the general similarities between sanctuary and funerary pottery
assemblages might point to a basically similar practice of acquisition: purchase shortly before
placement seems the most obvious explanation.

Finally, one more piece of evidence for the pre-burial source of grave pottery can be noted:
although the total range of pottery shapes at most cemeteries is impressive, the actual number of
shapes in individual graves is usually limited. In fact, a high proportion of the vessels in cemeteries
as a whole is not only confined to a few functional categories, but also to very few different
shapes. As already said, the other shapes are frequently represented by only one or two items, in
samples of thousands of pots. Many such exceptional pieces are likely to have been in use before
burial. Not surprisingly, sanctuaries, especially those with relatively many ‘true’ votives like
Thorikos and the Korykian cave, show a similar pattern. In houses, on the other hand, the total
variety of shapes is less, but the range of shapes occurring in relatively large numbers is wider,
obviously for functional reasons.

The more restricted selection of pots in graves corresponds well with a purchasing practice
focused on single shapes, precisely as has been suggested above on stylistic grounds for domestic
pottery. In fact, the batches of similar vessels, apparently made by the same workshop, found in
individual graves generally consist of a single shape, precisely like those in houses and sanctuaries,
and not of more extensive drinking services.\textsuperscript{1308} Although the number of recognised batches is, of
course, limited, if funerary assemblages contained many used pots, the overall selection of shapes
would most likely be less consistent, with fewer extremely popular shapes and more kinds of
vessels recurring in moderate numbers.

Altogether, the pots interred with the dead that were taken from household stocks (whether
from the house of the deceased or from someone else’s) must have been at most a small selection.
Most funerary pottery, in particular that in larger assemblages, seems to have been acquired
expressly for deposition in graves. The choice of shapes suggests that the role and meaning of the
vessels was comparable to that of votives at sanctuaries, and the strong preference for decorated
ware indicates that display was a relatively important feature of funerary ceremony and grave
gifts.

\textsuperscript{1307} D’Amicis et al 1997, 314-316; Bentz 1998, 97-98. See also Taranto grave 13, which contained 4
‘ordinary’ amphorai, placed on the corners of the grave just like the Panathenaics in grave 98 (D’Amicis et al
1997, 172, 175).

\textsuperscript{1308} See Bentz 1982, 60-61; Neeft 1994a, 153, n. 32; 1994b, 189, 236, n. 17. Examples of sets can be found
in graves 11-14, 22, 34-35, 39, 41-42, 44, 59, 61, 69-70, 81 at Taras (D’Amicis et al. 1997, 158-177, 184-190,
The consumption patterns of funerary pottery and its roles in graves, as sketched above, have several implications for some important ongoing debates regarding the use and status of pottery and its place in funerary traditions and in society generally. Since some of these issues are relevant here and have indeed already been touched on, a synthetic treatment of them follows.

Easiest to tackle is the matter of the general use and meaning of figured pottery. Since the 19th century a (shrinking) minority of scholars have continued to maintain that figured pottery, particularly from Athens, was primarily, almost exclusively, made for funerary purposes. Most recently, the view was defended by Ernst Langlotz and Herbert Hoffmann, each of whom based far-reaching iconographic analyses on it. Moreover, Hoffmann linked his position to the theories of Gill and Vickers, discussed above, on the low status of pottery, about which more at the end of this section. But however much the relatively large amount of figured pottery in Greek graves may seem to support the idea that it was mainly made for graves, such a conclusion is untenable. The smaller proportion of figured pottery in non-funerary contexts adds up to very considerable numbers, including, moreover, shapes rarely found in graves as well as those that regularly are, like lekythoi. In addition, the general similarities between sanctuary and funerary assemblages, examined above, appear to confirm that no large category of pottery was destined specifically for graves, although some niche products for the funerary market existed, like Attic white-ground lekythoi.

Another possibility that must be considered in this context, however, is the existence of specifically funerary iconography which goes beyond simple representations of farewell, mourning and offering. It is conceivable that other subjects which are not obviously linked with funerary practice were regarded as particularly fit for that purpose and thus painted with it in mind. Similarly, consumers may have preferred pottery showing certain kinds of scenes outside the funerary sphere, for example symposia, horses and other impressions of aristocratic life. Although some scholars have already presented case studies along these lines, it seems too early yet to arrive at convincing general hypotheses. The main difficulty is that we have no central database correlating figured scenes with their find spots and find contexts that could be for the subject what Beazley’s lists have been for stylistic studies. In the absence of a systematic overview suggestions that a particular assemblage of, for example, grave pottery shows iconographic

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1309 See the discussion in Abeken 1843, 364-365; Brongniart 1854, 4-8; Jahn 1854a, C-CI; Richter 1904-1905, 224, 228; Pottier 1906, 607-610. I deliberately ignore the role of Greek pottery in the Etruscan world, and especially graves, here. This may have been quite different from Greek use. See Hannestad 1989, 123-125.


1313 Beazley’s descriptions of scenes are extremely brief, and attempts to collect and classify them (Brommer 1973; 1980; 1984) have barely taken account of find-contexts, which are moreover not directly retrievable from Beazley’s lists.
preferences cannot be tested. Nevertheless, some small groups of finds seem to convey clear iconographic messages, suggesting that this line of research is worth pursuing. 1314

Another problematic issue is the relation between grave pottery and the deceased’s gender and age. Although the general age can often be quite easily deduced from the size of bone remains or the grave itself, or from gifts obviously intended for children like feeders, toys and knucklebones, the determination of gender is often more difficult, as the preserved bone is rarely adequate for the purpose and the number of unambiguously female or male grave goods is limited during the Archaic period. 1315 Armour and weapons are rare after Late Geometric times, strigils appear in the second half of the 5th century, and typically female attributes like loomweights, bronze mirrors and painted “female” iconography (marriage and boudoir scenes) become popular only from the end of the 5th century. Especially in Italy (represented in this study by Pithekoussai and Taras, Tables XVII.3-4) the gender of the buried is often determined by the presence of different kinds of fibulai and other jewellery, 1316 but these distinctions are not always secure; references to pottery shapes like hydria (perhaps “female’) or drinking cup (perhaps ‘male’) are even more precarious 1317 and easily lead to circular reasoning. Only a thorough statistical survey starting from completely reliable evidence may help solve these problems, but this lies far beyond my scope.

For the time being, I thus limit myself to the general impression that the clearest indicators of gender in graves cannot be found among the pots, although accessory pieces (as defined above) possibly conceal a few clues: as seen above, the basic funerary sets seem uniform, regardless of age or gender. This phenomenon, combined with the fact that the most obvious indicators of gender – jewellery and other metal objects – are usually worn or carried by the dead, whereas pots are often placed more or less separately from them in the grave, might be another sign that funerary pottery, and particularly the traditional basic funerary set, was largely impersonal.

This leads to another important issue regarding grave goods and social status. The highest numbers of non-ceramic objects, particularly the more costly ones like stone, glass and metalware, are met either in graves from the earlier Archaic period (before 575-550) 1318 or in those from the later Classical period (about 450-425 onwards); silver vessels, which are always very rare, reappear yet later. Moreover, looking further backwards and forwards, we see that graves of the Geometric period, on the average, have even more metal objects and that the Hellenistic period shows an increase in rich graves with gold and silver jewellery. As noted by Morris, the greater part of the Archaic and Classical periods is marked by funerary restraint, a tendency to limit

1314 Two cases that come to mind here are the famous ‘Brygos tomb’ (Beazley 1945; Williams 1992a) and Whitley’s statistical analysis of Protoattic pottery (Whitley 1991; 1994). The vessels in the ‘Brygos tomb’ seem to form a consciously composed iconographic set with clear funerary connotations. It is however from Capua, so a non-Greek place. Whitley’s work seems to show that decorated Protoattic pots were not randomly placed in graves, but too little is known of Protoattic from other contexts to conclude whether this involves a special production for the graves, as Whitley argues (see also Houby-Nielsen 1992). In any case, Protoattic is relatively rare, and too exceptional to draw general conclusions from it.


1316 See Lippolis 1997, 16; Neeft 1994a, 153, n. 32; see also Dickey 1992, 84-86.


1318 See Neeft 1994a, 149-153. I do not observe the reappearance of rich graves in the second half of the 6th century as stated by Morris 1998, 31-33.
personal display which peaks during most of the 5th century. A reduction of the individual character of the selection of grave goods by concentrating on pottery would fit in well with such a tendency.

Snodgrass has also argued that the disappearance of highly prestigious elite graves during the Late Geometric period is related to rising expenditures on votive gifts and, later, temple building, which can be regarded as a shift from individual to public display. My closer look at sanctuary and funerary assemblages, however, suggests that details of this very general, long-term change need to be refined somewhat. Apart from the shift of focus from one to another, the two kinds of assemblages show many common developments. As said, not only the patterns of preferred pottery shapes are comparable, but also the decline in metal gifts during the 7th and 6th centuries. In the 5th century the correspondences seem weaker, however. The sharp dip in pottery at sanctuaries is not repeated in cemeteries, although the amount of pottery there does seem to decline; and the extreme popularity of the lekythos for burials is not paralleled among sanctuary votives. On the other hand, the increasing amount of metal objects in graves towards the end of the 5th century is possibly repeated in the temples, if we can trust the Athenian inscriptions in this respect. Once again, more detailed study relating developments in pottery assemblages to those in other materials would be welcome.

But by now it has become clear that the common traits and developments marking sanctuary and funerary assemblages are hardly visible at domestic sites, where find patterns appear to be more stable and pottery assemblages (with the possible exception of drinking vessels) change only in details. The distinctive characterisations that, on the one hand, can be applied to most pottery from graves and sanctuaries as well as possibly from the domestic andron and, on the other, to pottery from the rest of the household are evidently ritual and dedication versus practicality, status and display versus functionality. Pottery for everyday use is mainly plain and black, fills a broad range of functions, and remains more or less the same over long periods; pottery for show is preferably decorated, covers a selective functional range, and is being continuously replaced by newly popular shapes or even by objects in other materials.

This brings me to my last point. As part of their general downgrading of the role of pottery in Antiquity, Gill and Vickers suggest that funerary pottery should be regarded as a cheap surrogate for metallic vessels found among the household goods which were considered too costly for burial. In view of much of the preceding discussion, however, it can readily be concluded that their proposal is highly unlikely, at least for the Greek world, even if domestic plate was less rare than I argue above: the selection of pottery vessels in graves excludes a direct or symbolic link with daily usage, and instead links them with ritual traditions.

In this regard, the metal grave vessels themselves, which are less rare than Gill and Vickers assume, supply notable evidence as well. The simple fact of their presence in graves shows not only that precious objects were obviously among the objects considered appropriate for burial, but also that not all grave goods could possibly be mere surrogates (as perhaps most strikingly

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1319 Morris 1987, esp. 21-22, 103-109, 129-138, 141, 188; 1992, 25-26; 1998, 19-20, 32-33. It should be noted that the use of expensive grave monuments and cists or sarcophagi, which is not well studied, does not seem to be taken into account here. As far as I can see, these would only confirm the sketched tendencies. See for this subject also Shepherd 1995.


1321 See sections XVI.4-5, and also Hodkinson 1998.

demonstrated by the jewellery worn by the dead anyway). Moreover, exactly as in the case of pottery, the kinds of metal vessels in graves are also among the most prominent at sanctuaries, mainly phialai. The limited range of shapes of vessels in metalware from graves further highlights their exceptional character as prestigious objects, just as in the sanctuaries.

Finally, the funerary contexts of metallic vessels are revealing too. Greeks apparently had no reservations about placing objects of both (precious) metal and pottery in the same grave. It even seems that many graves with precious non-ceramic vessels or other relatively costly gifts contained also rather large amounts of pottery, as can be seen at Rhitsona, grave 49, and to some extent graves 36 and 80 (Table XVII.5) and at Taras, graves 70 and 180 (Table XVII.4). This would suggest that the extensive complementary pottery sets containing many more or less identical vessels cannot be regarded as a replacement for metalware, but were themselves part of the more prestigious grave gifts. In addition, the fact that quantity clearly counted in most cemeteries shows that expenditure was an important factor in funerary display, even during periods of general restraint.

All this seems to show once more that objects offered at sanctuaries and graves operated within their own spheres, independently of practical needs and domestic considerations, but embedded in social life. Most were acquired intentionally for the sanctuary or the cemetery, with a keen eye for the appropriate status, but also in accordance with traditions and fashions within their particular spheres, which may be generally described as 'ritual' or 'dedicatory'.

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1323 See Dickey 1992, 64-65; Neeft 1994a, 150-152. Morris 1992, 108-118, shows that, in late 5th-century Athens, white-ground pottery, considered an ivory surrogate by Vickers 1984, is found in the 'richest' graves, that is, those with the most pots.