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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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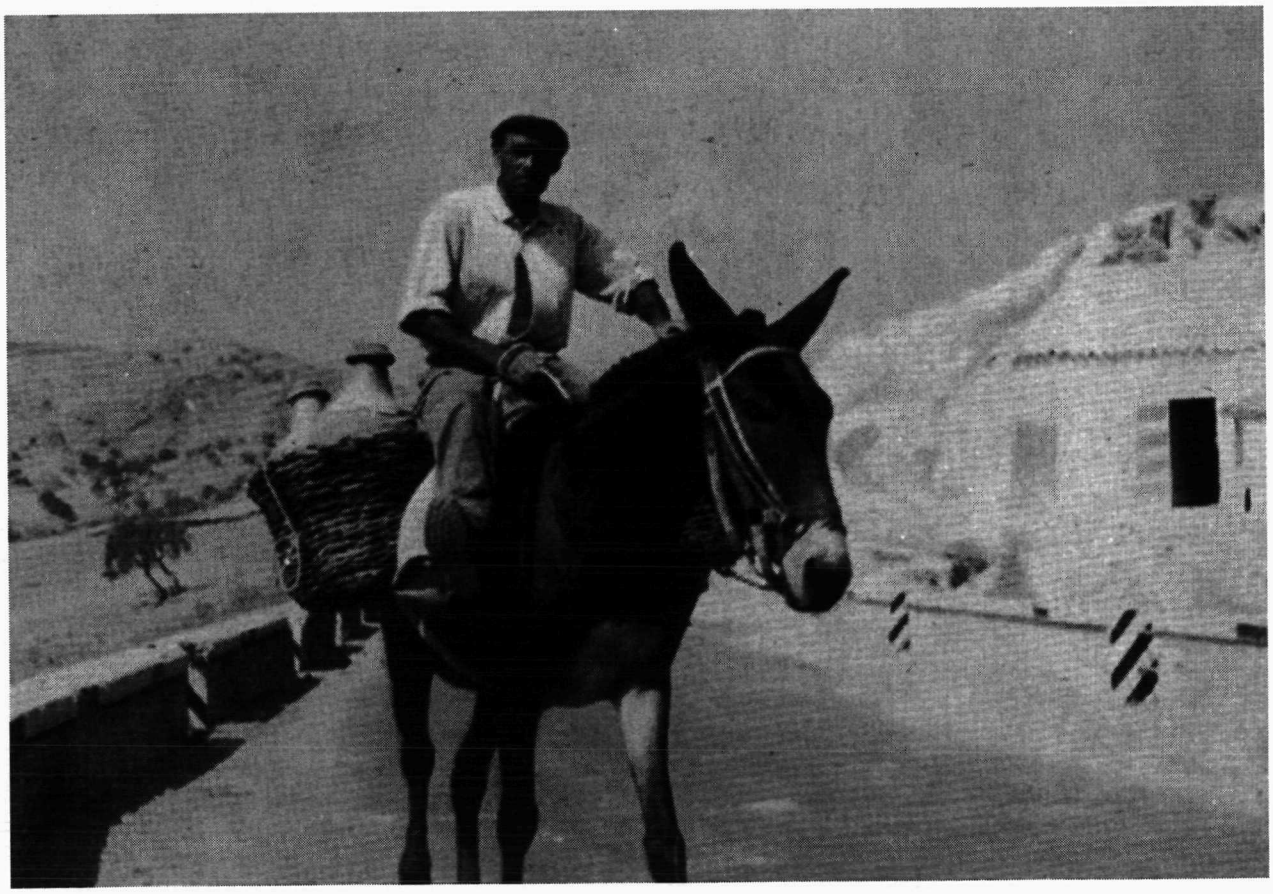
XXII Distribution patterns and distribution systems of Attic figured pottery



Traditionally, studies of pottery exchange and transport have always started from distribution patterns of the finds. For a long time, the studies were largely confined to simple compilations of pots and find-places, leading to rather impressionistic analyses based on few finds.[1473] Only as dating and attribution became less uncertain, from the beginning of the 20th century, more systematic studies of Greek pottery distribution became possible, although the small amounts of pottery that could be taken into consideration continued to limit the value of the results, which remained vague and uncertain.[1474]

Beazley's extensive lists of attributed Attic figured pots drastically changed the situation. The first to grasp the new opportunities offered by their appearance was François Villard, who expanded his study of the Greek pottery from Marseilles with an analysis of the distribution of all pottery listed by Beazley found along the northern Tyrrhenian coast, including Etruria.[1475] After more than a decade of hesitation, distribution studies based on Beazley's work, occasionally extended with additional data, have continued to appear since the 1970s. Some of them are syntheses which look at the general circulation of specific groups of pottery;[1476] others take the opposite perspective, aiming to collect all imported (Greek) pottery, or all pots of a kind, in a specific area. The latter trend started, as a direct reaction to Villard, with studies on the distribution of Greek (mostly Attic) pottery in Etruria, which sought a better understanding of economical developments and trade in Central Italy.[1477] Southern Italy,[1478] Sicily,[1479] Bulgaria,[1480]

[1473] See e.g. Lenormant and De Witte 1844, VIII-XXVIII; Jahn 1854a, IX-X, XXI-LXXXV; Dumont 1890.

[1474] Richter 1904-1905; Payne 1931, 181-209; Bailey 1940; Dunbabin 1948, 472-482; Roebuck 1959, 77-86.

[1475] Villard 1960.

[1476] Boardman 1979; MacDonald 1979; Giudice 1989; Rosati 1989; see also Cristofani and Martelli 1996; and, for Corinthian, Zimmermann-Munn 1983; Salmon 1984, xxv, 103-116; for Lakonian, Nafissi 1989; Kreuzer 1994, 108-110.

[1477] Tronchetti 1973; 1989; Giudice 1979; 1985; Martelli 1979; 1985; 1989; Meyer 1980; Hannestad 1989; Rendeli 1989; Kracht 1991; see also Thomasen 1999.

[1478] Di Bari 1981; Giudice 1989; Semeraro 1997; 2000.

[1479] Pelagatti 1992; Giudice 1995; 1996.

[1480] Reho 1990.

the Near East (including Cyprus),[1481] Egypt,[1482] Spain,[1483] southern France,[1484] Asia Minor,[1485] and Athens[1486] and Corinth[1487] have been subject to similar, but often simpler treatments. Some monographs on painters, oriented towards attributions according to Beazley's method, also show explicit interest in distribution patterns.[1488] More recently, different approaches have been combined in attempts at a more general analysis of the pottery trade which take the perspective of the producers as their starting point.[1489] Most of this concerns Athenian pots only: the circulation of Corinthian pottery, which may be more abundant than Attic,[1490] and other fabrics[1491] remains largely unexplored.

As already shown (section XIX.1), find-patterns of pottery are frequently used to address broader issues relating to economy and trade, but also to political history. In the following I shall generally leave aside these wider issues and concentrate on the organisation and effectiveness of exchange and transport themselves. Both fields have been neglected in the recent strong focus on production and consumption, even though distribution patterns can only be explained if ways of distribution are taken into account. Nevertheless, producers and consumers continue to play their parts in the discussion: first I shall look shortly at the specific distribution patterns of the work of individual potters and painters; then I shall expand my scope starting with the various consumption patterns in different places, as revealed by the data from most of the just cited distribution studies and by that from the find assemblages treated in part II of this book. However, before I come to all these matters one point remains to be considered: quantity. Perhaps the most notable feature of the distribution and consumption of Greek pottery in the Archaic and Classical periods, even if only fine and decorated wares are considered, is so obvious that it has generally been overlooked: there is so much of it, everywhere. As to the amounts, the evidence presented in chapter IV above and the figures collected in my tables speak for themselves. Households like those of the Dema House or House 7 or House D at Halieis must have numbered in the tens of

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[1481] Clairmont 1955; 1956-1957; Gjerstad 1977; Perreault 1984; 1986, 146-163, 165-169; Sørensen 1988; 1997; see also Waldbaum 1994; 1997; Tuna-Nörling 1995, 134-135; all with references to earlier compilations.

[1482] Clairmont 1955; 1956-1957; Venit 1982; 1985; 1988; Perreault 1986, 163-165; see also Tuna-Nörling 1995, 135.

[1483] Rouillard 1991.

[1484] Jully 1982.

[1485] Tuna-Nörling 1995, with comprehensive references.

[1486] Hannestad 1988; her lists are extended by Tuna-Nörling 1995, 131-134.

[1487] Hannestad 1992, with references; see also Siegel 1978.

[1488] E.g. Brijder 1983; 1991; 2000; forthcoming; Neeft 1987; Nafissi 1989.

[1489] Zimmermann-Munn 1983; Scheffer 1988; Osborne 1991; 1996b; Curry 2000; see also Hannestad 1996, 211-212.

[1490] See Salmon 2000, 246-249. Dehl 1984 is quite incomplete, as shown by Martelli 1989, 783, 796-804; Thomasen 1999 is restricted in its scopes.

[1491] See, however, Zimmermann-Munn 1983; Venit 1985; Nafissi 1989; Pelagatti 1992; Semeraro 2000.

thousands in Attica and some other large poleis, and in the hundreds or thousands in other poleis and ethnoi. Furthermore, each polis had dozens of sanctuaries, many of which presumably contained pottery, and surely only a fraction of ancient Greek cemeteries have been excavated. As a rule, most pottery found on all these kinds of sites was made locally or regionally, but the extent of long-distance imports is impressive.

In a society so full of pottery, traders and salesmen would rarely have had trouble finding buyers for their cargoes of pots. Presumably, consumers would as easily have been able to find someone who was bringing non-local pottery into their town or region. In fact, distinct archaeological traces of a shortage of pottery, that is, of any specific kind of pottery, are visible only during part of the Peloponnesian War, when Attic seems to be replaced by local imitations in the Corinthian North Cemetery and local red figure flourishes.[1492] Otherwise imitations of Corinthian and Attic never seem immediately to replace their models: they either compete directly (like Tarentine aryballoi with Corinthian originals, or South Italian red figure, which takes over only after some time of coexistence with Attic) or occupy a 'lower' section of the market, shared with simple imports. All this suggests that in the Archaic Greek world imitations normally did not compensate for limitations on the availability of some relatively rare pots to certain social groups or areas, as can be seen elsewhere in the Mediterranean or in other periods. The price and the willingness to pay more for status, it would seem, were the main considerations of a consumer choosing between an import and a local imitation.

It would be interesting to expand this suggestion by exploring whether style and maker counted when the pots were bought, but without additional written evidence this remains beyond our reach. Nevertheless it is clear that the products of individual painters and potters often seem to show specific export patterns, as already remarked by Charlotte Scheffer, Osborne, Margaret Curry and others.[1493] The role of the individual consumer seems limited in this respect, however. These specific patterns are surely partly dependent on the shapes of the vessels in question, as importing areas had their own preferences for shapes. But as Siana cups or lekythoi from different workshops, for example, also seem to follow their own specific distribution patterns, shape alone cannot have been the determining factor.[1494]

Further study is needed in the area, if only because the reliability of the available data is often questionable: Brijder's ongoing treatments of the distribution of Siana cups demonstrate that a few new discoveries can drastically alter distribution figures.[1495] As far as individual distribution patterns are concerned, high margins of uncertainty are also suggested by basic (and hypothetical) statistics taking account of the number of known painters, the average size of their oeuvres, and the number of known sites.[1496] Yet the general impression that, in any one period, the spread of the vessels of a particular shape by individual painters is not uniform and not without significance seems well founded.[1497] Evidently, some manufacturers had closer ties with certain markets,

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[1492] See Salmon 2000, 249-250; and also Bentz 1982, 156-160.

[1493] Scheffer 1988, esp. 541-544; Osborne 1996b, esp. 34-37; Curry 2000, esp. 82-86; see also Giudice 1979, 157-158; Brommer 1984, 183-184; Hannestad 1989, 129-130; Salmon 2000, 246.

[1494] Giudice 1979, 157-158; Scheffer 1988, 540-544; Osborne 1996b, 34-37; Brijder forthcoming.

[1495] Brijder forthcoming; see also Hannestad 1988, 224-225; 1989, 114-115, 129; 1996, 212; Stissi 1999b.

[1496] Arcelin 1999, 341-342; Stissi 1999b.

[1497] See Boardman 1979, 36-39; Scheffer 1988; Giudice 1989; Rendeli 1989, 568-573; Hannestad 1996, 213; Osborne 1996b; Sparkes 1996, 164-166; Curry 2000.

probably through long-term business relations with distributors who concentrated their activities on limited overseas areas.[1498] A similar pattern can indeed be discerned in the distribution of trademarks (section XX.2.c). Whether the consumer had the possibility or the wish to choose his or her favourites can perhaps be established at a more detailed level by comparing funerary and domestic assemblages from a small area over a short time span.

More generally, the geographical spread of pottery consumption patterns presents a slightly less uncertain picture, as the relevant data are somewhat more firmly based, especially if large-scale excavations are included in the distribution figures. In the case of Attic figured pottery some of the cited distribution studies even sketch extensive general views of the imports over large areas.[1499] Even if the use contexts and the chronology are not always specified, and the collections are likely to be selective or incomplete, these studies should furnish a good general impression of not only regional preferences, but also of the most important local patterns at sites with many imports.[1500] However, a more detailed interpretation would again be rather dangerous, especially if it concerns pottery taken mainly from Beazley's lists which are (necessarily) incomplete, have been influenced by personal preferences, and are now partly outdated.[1501] I shall therefore limit myself to looking at broad patterns and marked developments.

Another uncertainty is that figures can be influenced by differences in the nature of the find-places. In some areas pottery has mainly been found in cemeteries, in others at sanctuaries (domestic sites are rarely quantitatively important). Since different contexts to some extent required different shapes, a part of the apparent variation in the find patterns of areas may actually depend more on functional requirements than on local preferences.[1502] But since, as shown above, sanctuaries and cemeteries received comparable ranges of shapes, and domestic figured pottery was mainly limited to small amounts of symposion gear, the context of use cannot be very important for explaining variations of the popularity of groups of pottery in my tables. Furthermore, in addition to actual consumption patterns, the selection of explored sites, which reflects the preferences of excavators, may also influence the impression given by the collected find assemblages.

However, some find patterns, like the concentration of imports in graves in Etruria, are so consistent that they are likely to correspond with actual ancient practice. At any rate, from the point of view of the distributors, who interest me here, the final destination of their wares in cemetery, sanctuary or household is of secondary importance, as they would be simply concerned with supplying, as much as possible, any kind of shapes or pottery for which demand existed in their main export markets. Moreover, it are not the individual patterns, but rather the general implications of the dispersion of the finds for the organisation of distribution that I am exploring.

My general picture of the spread of Attic figured pottery (Tables XXII.1-10) holds few surprises. Many of the features seen in the more detailed analyses of find assemblages from different categories of sites presented above recur. We again see broad, universal developments

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[1498] See Eisman 1974b; Boardman 1979, 36-39; Scheffer 1988; Rendeli 1989, 568-573; Hannestad 1996, 213; Osborne 1996b; Sparkes 1996, 164-166; Curry 2000. For a critical view see also Arafat and Morgan 1994, 114-116.

[1499] Venit 1982; Reho 1990; Tuna-Nörling 1995.

[1500] Hannestad 1996, 213-215.

[1501] Hannestad 1988, 224-225; 1989, 114-115, 125; 1996, 212-213, 216; Brijder, forthcoming; see also chapter III.

[1502] See Hannestad 1996, 213-214; Curry 2000, 86-87.

and patterns beside specifically local features. As to the latter, for example, 6th-century Etruria shows a very high proportion of large vessels associated with drinking (Table XXII.5), whereas the contemporary Near East apparently preferred drinking vessels themselves (Table XXII.8).[1503] Within the Greek world variation is comparatively limited, and often related to the find contexts: lekythoi, wherever they occur in significant numbers at all, are met in graves, whereas high proportions of large vessels associated with drinking often signal the prominence of sanctuary deposits among the find spots (see chapters XVII and XVI with their Tables). Cups occur in quantity almost everywhere.

That said, the differences between the find patterns of Greek and non-Greek areas are not very marked. Despite some regional preferences, like the rarity of lekythoi in Etruria[1504] and the absence of oinochoai in the Near East (Tables XXII.5; XXII.8), as well as those noted above, the percentages of vessels of each functional category in non-Greek areas (Tables XXII.5-8; XXII.10) rarely fall far outside the ranges seen at Greek sites of the same period (Tables XXII.1-4; most of Table XXII.9); in some cases, like the developments in the popularity of symposion gear, they are even quite comparable.[1505] Just the farthest extremes in the distribution network, like inland Spain and Bulgaria (Tables XXII.7; XXII.10), which are reached only in the late Classical period, show a remarkably small range of vessel types, even at sites with much Attic ware. It seems that only at such places supply was reduced to a small selection of popular shapes owing to the limitations of the distribution system. Nevertheless, even in these instances, the assemblages of imports consisted not simply of whatever happened to be available or of arbitrary surplus, but they are consistent, integral parts of their general ceramic context. Thus both the total pottery supply and imports from afar, it seems, were supplied by an efficient and controlled network of distribution in which production, exchange, transport and consumption were closely interconnected.

Variations in the find patterns of different areas are not so marked over time, at least not after the initial expansion of Attic beyond the Aegean from the late 7th century onwards. At first, the distribution of Attic is rather haphazard, and confined to a few sites only, but by the second quarter of the 6th century it increases to quite considerable numbers almost everywhere along the central Mediterranean coasts, and starts penetrating into the non-Greek east and west, and further inland into Italy and Asia Minor as well (Tables XXII.1-10). Until the Peloponnesian Wars, nothing seems to interrupt its universal success.[1506] Even the battles of Alalia (540) and particularly Kymai (474), which are often thought to have led to the closing of the Tyrrhenian coasts to Greek traders and thus Greek imports,[1507] had little or no impact on the distribution of Attic in that area (Tables XXII.5-7). Although the amount of imported vessels in most Etruscan places decreases, the change is gradual and evolves differently in each city – initially some places even show rising numbers of Attic red figure, and Attic black gloss continues to be imported in substantial numbers (Table XXII.5).[1508] A steady decrease in Etruscan demand for Attic pottery

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[1503] See already De Vries 1977, 544; Scheffer 1988, 537; Hannestad 1989, 126-129; 1996, 213.

[1504] See Boardman 1979, 38-39; Hannestad 1989, 126, 129-130.

[1505] Contra De Vries 1977, 544-545.

[1506] See Curry 2000, esp. 80-81, 85-86; see also Bailey 1940.

[1507] See e.g. Pottier 1906, 605; Meyer 1980, 62-66; Martelli 1985, 180; 1989, 791; Giudice 1989, 60.

[1508] See Meyer 1980, 152-154; Small 1994, 53-58.

would be a more likely explanation for such processes rather than a sudden disruption of the system of supply. In fact, when the imports of Attic pottery into Etruria shrink to minimal levels, from the late 5th century onwards, the amounts of Attic in the peripheral areas Spain and Bulgaria peak (Tables XXII.5; XXII.7; XXII.10).[1509]

Interestingly, as seen in the assemblages studied in detail above, the clearest variation between the larger export areas over time concerns preferences for vessels of particular shape and is visible everywhere. The earliest exported black figure includes relatively many large shapes, like amphorai, kraters and dinoi. Only in the second quarter of the 6th century the range widens and more local variation between the importing areas begins to emerge; but the disappearance of some shapes, like dinoi, and the growing popularity of others, particularly cups and, later, lekythoi, is a general tendency, precisely as happens during the 'replacement' of black figure by red figure, although the latter seems to have progressed more quickly in wealthy central Etruria than in faraway Spain or in some relatively poor assemblages (Tables XXII.5; XXII.10).[1510] Finally, towards the end of the 5th century the range of shapes narrows again, until, as far as Attic red figure is concerned, the import assemblages consist almost exclusively of bell kraters and squat lekythoi. As seen above (sections XV.4 and XVI.5), the change from large and elaborate shapes to a wider range of products and then to vessels for niche markets is the typical sequence at the pottery producing centres, and occurs independently of local factors in the importing areas. Only the pace at which these developments took place varied somewhat between places.

Another more or less general characteristic of the import assemblages of decorated Attic pottery, at least from the second quarter of the 6th century until the end of the 5th, is the high proportion of cups, sometimes accompanied by many other drinking vessels (skyphoi and cup-skyphoi) or larger pots associated with drinking (amphorai, kraters).[1511] To a large extent, this must be due to the absence of black gloss and coarse pottery in the regional statistics. As explained, shapes for eating and common household purposes are barely represented among decorated wares, which were evidently aimed mainly at more prestigious functions like drinking and the storage of cosmetics and trinkets. Yet within the typical range of decorated vessels, drinking vessels and toilet boxes, as well as, from the late 6th century onwards and in some areas only, lekythoi, appear to be Attic specialities. Among them, cups quickly become the leading Attic vessel in any functional or geographical context, as aryballoi were earlier most characteristic of find assemblages of Corinthian pottery. Apparently, despite local preferences, the distributors could always count on customers for such best-selling vessels.

Furthermore, it can be noted that the regional assemblages are somewhat more akin to each other, and each show fewer individual peculiarities than the single-site assemblages studied above. In part, this may stem from the fact that local preferences are clearest in the locally or regionally produced sections of the pottery assemblage and, sometimes, in 'minor' imports, whereas the assemblages of Attic and Corinthian are more widely uniform at a given time. Perhaps, the differences between the functional requirements of individual sites which form the regional assemblages also play a role, since sites of each functional category (i.e. cemetery, sanctuary, household) occur in various proportions in different areas. Yet the specific demands of individual sites seem somehow to iron each other out, possibly because, despite variation and regional particularities, the customs of funerary offering and the preferences in ritual and votives at sanctuaries rarely diverged much from an average pattern.

[1509] See Small 1994, 58.

[1510] See Hannestad 1988, 229; 1992, 161-162; see also Boardman 1979, 37.

[1511] See Hannestad 1988, 226; 1989, 127-129; 1992, 158, 160-161.

All this has implications for the organisation of the distribution network. Assuming that most international distributors sold their pottery not in or near a sanctuary or cemetery, but in more general local or regional markets, their task must have been less difficult than the variation between excavation assemblages of individual sites suggests. Many of the potential complications inherent in the very specific demands of individual groups of consumers could have been avoided by the workings of local or perhaps regional distribution networks in the importing areas. In their simplest form, the networks would consist of nothing more than consumers buying their preferred, required pots from the broad range on sale at the local or regional market and bringing them to their favourite deity or to the grave of a loved one. Then retailers at sanctuaries and cemeteries who supplied themselves in comparable fashion would, in effect, fill the same role by dividing the rather general range of shapes available in the markets over a number of particular locations.

The limitations of our data hamper closer specification of this hypothesis. Strictly speaking, the general similarities between import assemblages can today be observed only at the level of a region and not at that of one site: the extent that various use-contexts have been excavated on single sites is still too limited for that purpose. Although I am unaware of very specific finds of Attic pottery characterising the excavations in a single town, it is quite possible that the assemblages from towns within a region show considerable variations between themselves, and can differ substantially from the total assemblage of the same region as a whole. The Tyrrhenian and Nikosthenic amphorai, with their distinct export patterns focused on very few places, make abundantly clear that well-defined local demand indeed existed and that it could be met. Moreover, as stated, the rather uniform regional patterns still do exhibit some particular features. Possibly, though, overseas pottery traders, especially if they supplied not entire stretches of coastline but only one or a restricted range of harbours, had to cope with more local preferences than the regional figures would indicate. On the other hand, the relative similarity of regional patterns suggests that traders could simply move on to another market if demand at their planned destinations was weaker than expected.