Athenian little-master cups
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Citation for published version (APA):
ENGLISH SUMMARY

This study deals with Athenian little-master cups, a type of drinking cup which was made over a fairly long period by a large number of potters and painters in sixth century BC Athens. Whereas their production extended between c. 560 and 480 BC, they were primarily made between c. 550 and 510 BC. The present author has information about more than 5,100 cups and fragments of this type of cups. Since they are too numerous to be considered in their entirety in this study, a selection had to be made.

Earlier research by the present author has shown that signatures, mainly of potters, but also from painters, are especially common on little-masters of the first generations, c. 560-535/30 BC. As a result, these signed cups and the unsigned ones from the same workshops are pre-eminently suitable for examining the origins and early developments of this Athenian vessel. Moreover, these cups are an excellent source for the further study of the meaning(s) of ἐποiesen-signatures as well as other kinds of inscriptions.

The selection taken from the author’s database of 5,107 specimens comprises 689 cups which were examined systematically and catalogued: cups with signatures, unsigned cups by the same craftsmen or by possible associates from the same workshops. Another 49 cups with signatures of craftsmen with very small preserved oeuvres or fragments with partial signatures have been listed in the appendix to the catalogue.

In the ‘Introduction’ the history of scholarship is being discussed first. The term ‘little-master cups’ is in fact a poor translation of the German term ‘Kleinmeisterschalen’ which was introduced by W. Klein in the 19th century, when he distinguished between painters of miniature paintings, the ‘Kleinmeistern’, and painters of larger images, the ‘Grossmeistern’. Early in the 20th century another German scholar, E. Buschor, introduced the terms ‘Randschale’ and ‘Bandschale’ for the two main types of little-master cups with a reference to the placement of the figure work, that is, either on the lip or in the handle-zone of the cup.

In 1932 J.D. Beazley wrote a leading article on little-master cups, in which he classified the cups based on their decorative schemes and listed the cups from potters and painters known by signature. Following publications by other scholars were limited to cups from defined collections or excavations, or cups with special characteristics. Occasionally cups from one potter or painter were treated. Recently, the inscriptions received more attention. Since Beazley’s article, the dissertation of J.T. Haldenstein, from 1982, is as yet the only systematic overview of Athenian little-master cups discussing the cups according to workshop, treating their shape, iconography and chronology, whereas distribution is largely neglected.

The ‘Introduction’ continues to discuss the characteristic features of little-master cups of which lip-cups and band-cups are the main types. Related are the Cassel and Droop cups which receive a general introduction. A different class are the Type A Gordion cups of which the descendants, the Type B Gordion cups, take over the Type A decorational scheme but share their shape with the early lip-cups and may therefore be treated as related to little-master cups.

The lip-cup is characterized by a straight or slightly concave lip which is set off distinctly from the lower bowl; inside, there is a sharp jog. The foot consists of a high stem and wide base; underneath, the standing surface meets the inner wall of the stem at a sharp angle, forming, as it were, a heel. In contrast, the feet of quite a few early lip-cups are more trumpet-shaped; the contour of the inside curves parallel to the outside. The outer edge of the base is, on the earliest cups, thin and rounded; and, on the later ones, thicker and oblique, with a straight or slightly concave contour.

In shape, the band-cup differs hardly from the lip-cup. However, the lip is not as clearly marked off and the transition to the lower bowl is more gradual. A lesser difference is the occasional fillet marking the junction of stem and bowl.

The usual scheme of both kinds of little-master, especially the lip-cup, is marked by a modest use of decoration. Generally, the exterior decoration of the lip-cup is largely limited, on either side, to one or two figures in the centre of the lip. The band-cup, on the other hand, has frieze-like decoration in the handle-zone; the lip is black. Both types are often adorned with handle-palmettes, connected to the handles by stems. Additional common traits include black outer handles and stem as well as a black lower bowl, interrupted by a narrow, reserved band; the edge of the foot’s base is reserved. Primarily on lip-cups, the inscriptions in the handle-zone act often as essential parts of the decoration.
Basically, the interiors of both kinds of cup are black, except for a reserved line at the inner rim and a reserved central tondo marked with one or two concentric circles around a dot. However, quite a few lip-cups show a figured medallion in the tondo, most often surrounded by a border of tongues. Band-cups with figured medallions inside are rather rare.

Next, the origin of the little-master cup or, more precisely, the lip-cup and subsequently the band-cup is being treated. Since in Ionia around the same time as in Athens very similar lip-cups were made, the question arises whether the shape was imported from Ionia or an Athenian invention. After a discussion of individual characteristic features of little-master cups such as, e.g., the high-stemmed foot with flat, disk-like base, offset lip, miniature style, handle-palmettes and decorative scheme, it is concluded that all these individual features were already in use by potters and painters in Athens before the lip-cup was introduced.

Furthermore, it is clear that several potters from different workshops experimented with new shapes of drinking cups. A number of experimental cups have been preserved; the example which comes closest to the standard lip-cup, but still without the characteristic offset lip, is a cup, now kept in Oxford, by the C Painter, an innovative potter-painter of mainly Siana cups. It can be dated to c. 565 BC.

Amongst the earliest standard Athenian lip-cups are two cups signed by the potter Eucheiros (1–2), one by the potter Gageos (700), dating from c. 560/55 BC. One of the earliest band-cups dates from c. 555 BC.

Considering the open question whether the Athenian lip-cup was modeled on the Ionian lip-cup or vice versa, we can only conclude that an indigenous Athenian development seems most likely, which began with a period of experimentation. Whereas the Ionian production of lip-cups was short and limited, the Athenian pottery establishments have a well-documented record of continuing innovation. The evidence is insufficient to determine conclusively which Athenian pottery workshop began to manufacture little-master cups. The contacts and reciprocal influences of craftsmen in the Kerameikos quarter of Athens would be especially strong and therefore all the more difficult to recognize and disentangle.

The first ten chapters treat the work of related groups of potters and painters, who possibly, but not necessarily, worked in the same pottery workshops.

Chapter one discusses Eucheiros, who signed as son of Ergotimos, a son of Eucheiros, a painter near Kleitias as well as Sondros and Sokles. As in the following chapters their work is being discussed according to shape, inscriptions, iconography and style, ornaments, provenance and chronology. Remarkable are the pars pro toto depictions. Other characteristics are the unrelated scenes on either side of the cups and occasional horizontal palmettes. The cups have early features resulting in a dating of the work of Eucheiros between c. 560 and 545 BC, Sondros between c. 560 and 540 BC, and Sokles between c. 555 and 535 BC. It seems likely that Eucheiros, Sondros and Sokles not only potted their cups, but also painted them. Such potter-painters will often be met in the following chapters as well.

In chapter two the history of a workshop will be reconstructed in which the potter-painter Xenokles was the main employee and possibly the owner. His work can be recognized over a period of c. 15 years. His earliest cups date from c. 555/50 BC, his latest around 540 BC. Apart from two lip-cups which were made in the earliest phase of the workshop, around 555/50 BC, and were decorated by a companion who has been named the Male Painter, all other cups bear the epoiesen-signature of Xenokles. In the same period, or shortly after, a now lost lip-cup with Xenokles’ signature was decorated by a painter who is dubbed the Painter of the Deepdene Cup, after the last know residence of the cup.

After c. 550 BC no work of the latter two painters can be recognized. A new potter-painter enters the workshop, the Potter and Painter of London B 425. He produced larger cups than Xenokles himself. Apart from the mentioned craftsmen, the hands of a small number of assistants may be recognized in the painting of ornaments as well as possibly in a signature in very different handwriting.

The next chapter treats the work of the potter Phrynos, whose name is known from signatures on three lip-cups. Two of these have been painted by the so-called Phrynos Painter, who may be
identified as the same person as the potter. The hand of this painter can also be recognized on unsigned lip-cups and band-cups as well as other vase shapes, mainly amphoras. A special shape of amphoras, the Botkin Class, receive extra attention. It is argued that five of these, but probably nine, have been painted by the Phrynos Painter. In a later phase of his career Phrynos worked together with a painter whose only preserved lip-cup is being kept in Torgiano; hence his name Torgiano Painter. The work of Phrynos and the Phrynos Painter can be dated between c. 560 and 545 BC; the cup in Torgiano dates from c. 545/40 BC.

Chapter four first discusses the potter-painter Archikles whose work dates between c. 560 and 550 BC. Around 550 BC a band-cup is being made bearing the ἐποίησις-signatures of both Archikles and Glaukytes. It is argued that ἐποίησις in the case of Glaukytes means that he shaped it with his own hands, whereas the signature of Archikles in this case means that he was the supervisor, probably as owner of the workshop. The painter of this cup is otherwise unknown and is dubbed the Painter of Munich 2243. It remains unclear whether the potter Glaukytes painted as well. Apart from the Painter of Munich 2243 another painter can be recognized on his cups; the Painter of Louvre F 51, who is otherwise known as painter of large vases. Since these large vases are contemporary to the cups by Glaukytes and partly show the same scenes, it is very likely that they were made in the same workshop. Whether or not Glaukytes also shaped these large vases remains undetermined. The cups date between c. 550 and 540 BC.

The next chapter discusses the lip-cups with ἐποίησις-signatures of Exekias, who may be the same as the renowned potter-painter with that name. If this is true, the lip-cups are amongst his earliest preserved potterwork, made shortly after a Siana cup, which was decorated by the same painter and dates from c. 560/55 BC. This painter is not Exekias, who later in his career starts to paint as well, but a painter who is dubbed the Painter of Louvre F 54, after the earliest lip-cup. A band-cup can also be attributed to this painter. The lip-cups date between c. 555 and 550 BC, the band-cup around 550 BC.

The potter Taleides, who probably also painted his cups, is treated in chapter six. His work dates between c. 555 and 540/35 BC, and comprises other shapes as well, mainly lekythoi. He painted a few hydriae for the potter Timagoras at the end of his career. Another painter, the Zurich Painter, whose work on hydriae closely resembles that of the Taleides Painter, probably worked in his vicinity, possibly in the same workshop.

Chapter seven discusses a large number of potters and painters who partly collaborated, as shown by signatures, or whose cups have been attributed in the past to the discussed craftsmen. The earliest cups date from c. 555/50 BC and are signed by the potter-painter Hermogenes. He preferred to make lip-cup with female heads in outline or band-cups with chariots followed by a warrior or (dis)mounted by one. These cups may show scenes from (the aftermath of) the ἀποβάτας-race. A possible innovation by Hermogenes was the handle-palmette with a black central leaf, instead of a red one. Other painters in this chapter also used it. The work of Hermogenes dates from c. 555/50 to 540/35 BC.

Sakonides is one of the painters who occasionally used palmettes with black central leaf. His ἐγραφήσεως-signature occurs on three lip-cups, one of which is also signed by the potter Tlepolemos, and on a band-cup, also signed by the potter Kaulos. Like Hermogenes, Sakonides often painted female heads on his lip-cups. His band-cups show arming scenes; the one by Kaulos possibly a scene from shortly before the birth of Athena. The work of Sakonides dates between c. 545/40 and 530 BC. The band-cup by the potter Kaulos belongs to the later work. Two lip-cups (195-96), attributed in the past to Hermogenes and Sakonides, are here attributed to the Group of Berlin 1803. Palmettes with black central leaf also appear on band-cups with ἐποίησις-signatures by Thrax and Hischylos. These cups have scenes with chariots and have been decorated by the so-called Stroibos Painter, named after unsigned lip-cups by his hand, some with female heads, with inscriptions praising the youth Stroibos. His work dates from c. 535 to 525 BC.

In chapter eight we meet the potter-painter Neandros, whose cups date between c. 555/50 and 540 BC. He collaborated with the Amasis Painter on at least two band-cups. More band-cups are known by the Amasis Painter, of which at least two have been signed by the potter Amasis. This potter-painter has a large oeuvre mainly consisting of amphoras, but also lekythoi. The band-cups by the Amasis Painter show a clear development in the composition: whereas on the earliest ones the central figures are surrounded by side-figures who are not involved in the action, on the later ones all
the figures take part in the scene. For the first time on little-master cups we encounter Dionysiac scenes on his cups, which date between c. 550 and 540 BC.

A painter who is clearly influenced by the Amasis Painter, but also by Neandros, in style as well as in subject choice, is the Oakeshott Painter. Like Neandros he decorated a band-cup with animal fights, like Amasis he painted Dionysiac scenes. His work dates between c. 545/40 and 530 BC.

In chapter nine we encounter yet again a potter, who also paints his own cups, Epitimos. In the past his painting has been attributed to the painter Lydos, but here it is argued that he was a separate individual who was related to Lydos, who himself also decorated band-cups. One of his band-cups was signed by the potter Nikosthenes, who also collaborated with the BMN Painter and the Anakles Painter, who decorated the cups of the potter Anakles and may be identified with him. The collaboration between Anakles and Nikosthenes is confirmed by the presence of the epoiesen-signatures of both on a lost band-cup. Here, epoiesen in the case of Anakles means that he painted the cup. The cups by Lydos, Epitimos and Anakles date between c. 550 and 540 BC, those by Nikosthenes and the BMN Painter between 545 and 530 BC.

Chapter ten discusses the family business of Nearchos and his sons Tleson and Ergoteles. Nearchos and Tleson painted their own cups, those by Ergoteles were painted by Tleson. Little work of Ergoteles remains and it is argued that around 545 BC he is being replaced by the so-called Centaur Painter, who made his own, mainly small cups. The cups by Nearchos, who earlier made and decorated other shapes, date between c. 555 and 550 BC. His son Tleson started around 555/50 BC and his vast preserved oeuvre can be traced till c. 530 BC.

The relative chronology for Tleson’s cups earlier put forward by B. Fellmann is not taken over and a new chronology is being proposed. Apart from a pyxis, only cups are known from Tleson. Numerous agreements with the Centaur Painter in shape, subject treatment and details of painting, make a close working relationship between the two craftsmen very likely. The work of the Centaur Painter can be followed till the 520s BC.

Finally, chapter eleven examines more general matters and trends, often with reference to cups from the database which were not incorporated in the corpus, i.e. the catalogue and appendix.

As to shape, earlier statements have been reconfirmed: the foot develops the most out of an originally rather trumpet-shape to a high-stemmed foot with disk-like base, the bowls become shallower and the lips more vertical. As to form-specialization, the image is rather diverse. Some seem to have made cups only, others also related shapes (e.g., skyphoi), yet again others made large vessels as well.

The inscriptions offer much information. A workshop preference for certain chaire-formulas, noted earlier by the present author, also exists for epoiesen-signatures. The same applies to repetition (or not) of the same inscription on either side of the cup. It is shown that writers of meaningful inscriptions, rarely write nonsense inscriptions (other than often thought). The two paired epoiesen-signatures each have a different meaning. As for the decision to apply a signature or not, the argument put forward by B. Fellmann for Tleson is confirmed: his small cups simply do not have enough space for his long epoiesen-signature. Three Tleson-signatures are being uncovered as examples of ‘brand-copying’.

As for interior decoration, old statements are confirmed. The relative size of the medallions diminishes over time and the ornamental borders lose their dotted bands, resulting in simple tongue borders. Only few painters use ring borders. Most subjects stand in a long tradition, although a few –as yet– unique scenes have been recognized. Subjects which are especially chosen for a special market, such as Etruria, don’t seem to occur (with one possible exception). The different workshops clearly show preferences for certain subjects, repetition or a continuing story over both sides of the cup.

Other than often thought the presence or absence of handle-ornaments are no criteria for dating. Agreements between palmettes may help attribute cups, but differences not always indicate that we are dealing with a different painter. Some painters, e.g., Hermogenes, experimented with different palmettes throughout their career. In general, the shape changes from semicircular to rather triangular with an elongated central leaf.

With the help of development of shape, style and script, as well as decorative schemes and relative dimensions, a relative chronology per potter and painter can be reconstructed. Unfortunately, of only few cups trustworthy and useful excavation data are known.
The trading patterns of the little-masters listed in the corpus seem to confirm the findings of several scholars that most workshops, though concentrating on central Italy for a period of time, produced for markets throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea region, and that they had contact with one or more traders who bought painted pottery from different workshops for export.

In general, lip-cups and band-cups have been found in the same places and the same contexts. Differences between cups from different contexts can be discerned, however. Remarkably, 92% of the cups without figured decoration have been found in graves, whereas just 3% comes from sanctuaries. Cups that were repaired in antiquity are not found in sanctuaries.