CHAPTER 2: GREEK VASES: AN OVERVIEW OF MODERN INTEREST

Collection and analysis of Ancient Greek ceramic vases has, so far, gone through five stages.

The first mainly involved small-scale Italian collections made mostly by Neapolitans before 1760, when such vases were thought to be Etruscan. Anticipating the second stage, the genius Winckelmann suspected some of them were Greek. Sir William Hamilton, who later became a member of the elite British club of aesthetes known as the Dilettanti, tried but failed to obtain the services of Winckelmann, and had to settle for Pierre-François Hugues, the self-dubbed “Baron d’Hancarville.” In 1766–67 Hamilton published a volume of engravings of his collection with the text written by d’Hancarville with contributions by Winckelmann. A further three volumes were produced in 1769–76. Together, they introduced a new paradigm that finally recognized these “Etruscan” vases as actually being Greek. By selling their collection to King George III and his Parliament, they also made collecting such ceramic objects fashionable in Great Britain—in fact, de rigueur for collectors and curators—as reflected in the likes of John
Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” In the third stage, German scholars en masse, with characteristic Teutonic fastidiousness and precision, dominated analysis and scholarship in this and related fields throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, from Eduard Gerhard (1795-1867) to Adolf Furtwängler (1853-1907) and beyond. They integrated the connoisseurship of the aesthetes and antiquarians with the sound judgements of historians, forming a far better synthesis in what they described as Altertumswissenschaft, or the science of antiquity.

As many new finds were being scientifically excavated and documented with photography, the expatriate Bostonian connoisseur and collector Edward “Ned” Perry Warren (1860–1928), with the help of his lover John Marshall, conceived a fourth paradigm. They were joined after 1908 by their protégé, the young Oxford don John Davidson Beazley. He made such analysis “truly scientific” by employing the methods of 19th century Italian art historian Giovanni Morelli, who developed a technique of scholarship based on studying obscure details that revealed stylistic habits of which even the artists themselves may scarcely have been conscious. Thus, where an artwork bore no name he could make an attribution, and when there was a name he could detect forgeries. Bernard Berenson, an American art historian, used Morelli’s methods to dominate the study of Renaissance painting for the next generation. His first trip to Europe was financed by two rival leading ladies of Boston’s cultural elite, Mrs Isabella Gardner and Mrs Susan Warren, Ned’s mother. But just as Hamilton had failed to obtain the service of
Winckelmann and settled instead for the off-color propagandist d'Hancarville, Warren was unable to obtain the services of Berenson, and instead found a lifelong friend in the person of John Beazley, who, though homosexual (but married nonetheless), was finally knighted.

This new paradigm and its accompanying attitude of prizing such “vaaases” (in the English pronunciation) as objets d’art of the highest quality and scientifically analyzed by Morellian standards has continued to predominate in both the museum and the scholarly worlds. Beazley’s acolytes, particularly Sir John Boardman and the late Dietrich von Bothmer, Curator of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the Metropolitan Museum until his death in 2010, still dominate the field. In an attempt to challenge this paradigm, the enfant terrible Michael J. Vickers, Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum, Senior Research Fellow in Classical Studies, and Professor of Archaeology at Jesus College, Oxford, along with his collaborator David Gill, demeaned the ceramics, so prized by Beazley et. al., as “worthless ballast” and “unrecyclable junk.” They dogmatically and discourteously insisted that the elites of antiquity had instead always supped and drunk from vessels of precious metal.

In their bitter quarrel with Beazley’s followers, Vickers et al. asserted that the pottery fetched very low prices in antiquity. True, the undecorated amphora and other cheap ware cost very little. They were exported full of wine and oil and, rather than being sold, did indeed often return empty to Attica, acting as a ballast. The decorated pots, in contrast, never returned and
were clearly too light, in any case, to act as ballast, even on outward-bound voyages when
some contained perfume. But this sale of painted pots to foreigners was far less significant
economically than the export of silver vases, when Athenians began to export after 470 BCE.

Their export of silver bullion fulfilled a demand from cities without their own source of silver to
strike their own coins, which they did for political reasons, not for profits from minting. The
profits the Athenians made from these bullion exports far exceeded what they could have
made from exporting silver vases. On the other hand, with their very own silver mines, the
Athenians profited perhaps even more significantly from minting and exporting silver
dragchas. That came to dominate Greek currency.

Intolerant of the mystique of clay, which seems to have begun with d’Hancarville’s beguiling
volumes, and reached its apogee in Boardman’s coffee-table book (Vases, 2001), Vickers has
tried to devalue and belittle all Greek ceramics. He abjured the rather precious term “vaases,”
and the attitude of high-aesthetic esteem it implies. Instead, he claimed that the clay “pots,” as
he called them, however beautifully shaped and decorated, were always merely “cheap
knockoffs” (copies of gold and silver masterpieces), made for a mass market of
undiscriminating customers—a judgment he applied even to the high-point of such ceramic
production, from 630 to 470 BCE.
In what follows, I establish a fifth stage, characterized by a nuanced awareness that only
monarchs and tyrants had begun to dine on precious metals around 630; and not even they
before that during the Dark Ages and in the very early Archaic period. I maintain that after 470,
the Athenian elite, newly enriched by the silver mines at Laurium, by Persian booty, by tribute
from their Delian allies, and, most of all, by their virtual monopoly of trade in the northern
Mediterranean, could afford silver sympotic ware, sometimes even gilded. Thus, for the very
first time, the potters and painters of the Kerameikos, as that quarter of Athens devoted to
them was called, had the opportunity to see the far more precious sympotic ware, now
produced in significant quantities in Athens for the first time. Thenceforth, they could—and
from then on, very often did—model their pottery and even its painted designs on metallic
originals. They did not copy explicit homosexual scenes for their now exclusively middle-class
market. Before then, Athenian ceramicists would have had no access to the precious metalware
that was then only available to monarchs and tyrants. Their tableware was presumably made
for their court by silversmiths on location or imported from Lydia or Phoenicia. Who then
would have had any way to inspire humble clay workers in Athens or Corinth with designs of
precious metals?

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8 The Delian League, founded in 478 BCE, was an alliance of Greek city-states under the leadership of Athens. Its
purpose was to continue fighting the Persian Empire after the Greek victory in the Battle of Plataea at the end of
the second Persian invasion of Greece. The name derives from its meeting place, the island of Delos, where
congresses were held until Pericles changed the venue to Athens in 454 BCE. Athens soon began to use the league's
navy for its own purposes, leading to conflict with the less powerful members. By 431 BCE, Athens' domineering
control of the Delian League prompted the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War; when the conflict ended in 404
BCE the league was dissolved.
Rita Oswald dismissed the quarrel between Vickers and Boardman about the price of Greek ceramics with: “fine pottery is unlikely to have formed of itself a complete cargo of any vessel, even those will admit who have championed a high value for it” (p. 285, Ch. 10, “Archaic Greece” CEHGRW, 2007). The export of silver sympotic ware after 470 could, however, clearly bring in much more money and, though occupying even less space than pottery, could, and I think did, seriously affect the balance of trade and payments—to the great advantage of Athens. Unlike painted pots, silver vases mattered enormously for the total value of exports, although to a far lesser extent than the export of drachmas.

Sitta von Redden continues the confusion:

Despite restrictions put on individuals, per capita consumption of wine was probably significantly higher than, for example, in mediaeval times. To judge from the numbers of drinking cups and transport amphoras found in excavations, the wine trade and wine consumption reached an unprecedented scale in the late archaic and early classical period. Most wine was marketed and consumed locally, but for connoisseurs it was shipped over long distances.... Two explanations have been proposed for the increase in consumption. The first is that increasing democratization changed the symposium from an exclusive
aristocratic gathering to a form of hospitality practiced by a wider group of citizens. Painted pottery replaced silver and gold containers, and its mass production in Athens in the late sixth and fifth centuries reflected the opening of the symposium and gymnasium to poorer people who emulated the former elite’s symbolic behavior. The second is that the symposium remained largely aristocratic, while ordinary people frequented public taverns (kapeleia) that seem to have been abundant in cities and villages. Whatever theory is more valid, by the fifth century there was an extensive drinking culture supplied by shops, local markets, and foreign trade. It is worth noting that ordinary wine was called after the measure in which it was sold, so it was largely regarded as a commodity rather than a subsistence food. (Sitta von Redden, chapter 14, “Classical Greek Consumption,” The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World, pp. 393–94)

Von Redden’s first hypothesis, derived from Vickers’s extreme theories, is the more absurd of her two. In fact, “the Greeks” in general, and the Athenians in particular, after 480 grew much richer, especially in silver, than ever before. The elite first went over to the use of silver at symposia after that date. Before then, only tyrants had used it, and not even very many of them could afford it before about 580 BCE, roughly the midpoint of the Greek Renaissance.
References to the use of gold in Homer and finds from before 1200 are very rare indeed; they are rarer still from the Greek Dark Ages (1200-800) and still very rare before 630.

The best pottery was made for symposia between 630 and 480 BCE. After this period, the elite supped and dined from silver. By then, however, many of the not so rich, being richer than before, were newly able to afford painted pots. For this large class, painted pots were produced in much greater quantities than ever before, but henceforth to please a bourgeoisie dining *en famille* with wives and daughters. The elite thereafter bought silverware, which I believe was often homoerotic. Von Redden’s second theory is probably partially true, but hardly explains the huge amount of painted pots produced after 480. Some were doubtless for taverns, but most must have been for middle-class homes, which could thereafter have first afforded such luxuries on a large scale.

Another co-author of the same book, John K. Davis, did better. He maintained that silver became plentiful after 480. In the days of Pericles, Nicias, and Alcibiades, the Athenians actually controlled or sought to control not only the mines at Laurium and Attica, but also those near Amphipolis and in the hinterland of Apollonia, the former colony of Cocyra, all of which brought about “a steep change in the quantity of accessible bullion.” He noted that, “the Athenian attempt in the 420’s to impose the use of Athenian coins, weights, and measures throughout
the [Delian] empire.” soon followed. (John K. Davies, chapter 12, "Classical Greek Production,"


Forgetting as the Old Oligarch⁹ had so rightly insisted that Athens made far more from trade than from any and all of its richest mines put together, Davies added:

However, we can also identify ways in which the classical period saw increases in money supply. One was via plunder from warfare out of region, the most substantial being the gains made at the expense of the Persian empire between 480 and 450. A second source was mercenary service out of region. This was an old custom on a small scale, but grew in importance from the late fifth century when both the Persian empire and its adversaries resorted to hiring Greek soldiers. A third comprised spasmodic, politically motivated consignments from non-Greek rulers, such as the payments made by Persia to one side or another for a century from the 420s till Alexander’s conquest. Yet the impact of these three sources on the money supply was minor compared to new bullion from the silver mines. The main sources exploited in the classical period after the flooding of the workings on Siphnos were Laurium in south-east Attica, the Pangaion

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⁹ The "Old Oligarch" is the name assigned to the unknown author of a treatise hostile to Athenian democracy. The piece, included in the shorter works of Xenophon (c.430–354 BCE), is also known also known as Pseudo-Xenophon. The author, who appears to be an Athenian, regards democracy as undesirable on the ground that it gives the mob an undue voice in the state. Once thought to have been written by Xenophon himself, this is now considered unlikely because the style is not his. G.W. Bowersock, editor of the Loeb text, argues for a date of c.443 BCE, hence probably before Xenophon was born.
range by Amphipolis in the north Aegean coast, Thasos, and the hinterland of Apollonia. Unfortunately, the rate of bullion flow into the Greek economy cannot be reliably quantified, and certainly experienced high annual variation, while the routes by which it entered circulation changed during the period under review. (p. 356).

Astrid Möller dodges the antitheses of Boardman and Vickers, trying some sort of weak avoidance, alleging that some of the amphorae were reused in Egypt “for bringing water into the desert—certainly not the only occasion for reuse.” However, she refuted Johannes Hasebroek’s “picture of the Greek trader” as poor, foreign, and illiterate, and also “that at Athens, metics\(^{10}\) and foreigners exercised trade while Athenians financed it.” She got it right that: “Under Pericles, state revenues were no less than 1,000 talents a year (roughly 600 from the allies and 400 from Athenians sources). At its height, (probably in the 430’s B.C.) Athens had a reserve of 9,700 talents of coined silver deposited on the Acropolis.” (Chapter 13 of CEHGRW, “Classical Greece: Distribution,” pp. 362–84)

The first to recognize that homosexually oriented pornographic silverware might have been plentiful in 5th-century Athens at roughly the time when such scenes were disappearing from painted ceramics (after 470 BCE) was perhaps Ned Warren, who intuited it. Alan Shapiro first

\(^{10}\) A metic was an alien having some rights of citizenship in the city in which he lived (from Greek “metoikos”, which combines “meta”, indicating change, and “oikos”, dwelling).
tried to explain the disappearance of homoerotic sympotic ware as the upper classes becoming more discreet over their pederastic vices in an era when they were becoming less acceptable. Democracy was on the rise, and popular sentiment did not favor elite practices in which the masses could not take part: hoplites were normally excluded from gymnasia, and oarsmen, from a yet lower class, were even further removed from this elite cultural scene. Thomas Hubbard has claimed the oarsmen envied rather than disapproved of their betters having trophy boys. That may be so. Homophobia was not endemic, as it has been in our own times, until recently, and there is no reason to suppose oarsmen would have been hostile by instinct.

In my view, though, neither hatred nor envy would have intimidated the aristocracy. Rather, they would have been driven by the allure of silver for their sympotic ware after 470 when it became much more readily available to those with the wealth to pay for it.

Almost all such silverware was probably melted down during the last years of the great Peloponnesian War and the depredations that followed the surrender of Athens. The rule of the Thirty Tyrants would have seen silver confiscated by them and, following their overthrow, from them. Some of these losses of erotic silverware were replaced with the return of prosperity in the 4th century, but further destruction followed in the struggles against Philip,
Alexander and the Diadochi\textsuperscript{11}. Even Boardman admitted that sympotic ware was made of silver after Alexander’s conquest. (See also Eleni Zimi, Late Classical and Hellenistic Silver Plate from Macedonia, Oxford Monographs on Classical Archaeology, OUP, 2011)

In his survey of collectors in Greek Painted Pottery (1960), Robert Manuel Cook astonishingly omitted both Warren and his lover Marshall. The damnatio memoriae\textsuperscript{12} suffered by these two openly homosexual geniuses has not been properly corrected. Warren’s apparent hunch about the existence of silver sympotic ware was confirmed, in his mind, by the acquisition of the cup that now bears his name. It was authenticated by the British Museum and acquired by them in 1999 for £1.8 million. It is a skyphos\textsuperscript{13} that is probably not a 1st-century CE imitation of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century BCE Athenian pornographic sympotic silverware. (See “The Warren Cup,” Figures 1 and 2). It seems less and less likely that it was a forgery, as a few, including Vickers, still claim, and as will be considered further below.

\textsuperscript{11} From the Greek word for "successors", the Diadochi were the Macedonian generals and administrators who succeeded Alexander the Great, whose empire disintegrated in the course of a bloody power struggle among his successors.

\textsuperscript{12} The literal meaning of this Latin phrase, "condemnation of memory," expresses a judgment that a person must not be remembered. It was a form of dishonor that could be passed by the Roman Senate upon traitors or others who brought discredit to the state. The intent was to erase someone from history, a task somewhat easier in ancient times when documentation was much sparser.

\textsuperscript{13} A cup characterized by a deep bowl, two handles projecting horizontally near the rim, and either a flat base or a foot.
Cook cannot be faulted exclusively for such an omission: Warren has long been ignored. His masterpiece, the three-volume polemic *A Defence of Uranian Love*, privately printed in a tiny edition of 100 copies around the time of his death, was never recognized or quoted in any serious way after that and is still overlooked, as is J. A. Symonds's magnificent *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883). Neither work was mentioned by G.W. Bowersock in his review in the *New York Review of Books* (September 2009) of two books dealing with Greek pederasty, *The Greeks and Greek Love*, by James Davidson and *Images of Ancient Greek Pederasty*, by Andrew Lear and Eva Cantarella. The *Defence* was not even listed in the catalog of any American library until I gave a xeroxed copy to the Boston Athenaeum in 2004. Warren's apologia has only now been formally published for general distribution, in what Thomas K. Hubbard refers to as a "magnificent scholarly edition," with a discerning introduction by Michael Matthew Kaylor, translations by Mark Robert Miner and a preface by me (Valancourt Books, 2009).

The Warren Cup cannot stand as a symbol for the lost body of Athenian homoerotic silver that the elites came to prefer to ceramics after plentiful silver was discovered at Laurium in the early 5th century, much less the silverware used before that time by kings and tyrants. It was not, as Miner imagined, an object granting some degree of visual access to the vanished sympotic customs of the past but only to those of the 1st century patron who commissioned it.
The Warren Cup (below, figures 1 & 2): Gracious skyphos or kiddie porn?

Figure 1