snatch up discarded drawings to use as models for their own designs. More realistically, it
seems unlikely that common Corinthian or Athenian potters would ever have had the
opportunity to visit the gatherings of wealthy tyrants, whether foreign or domestic, or to
sketch, for later use in their own studios, the designs fashionable thereon (though there may
have been more opportunity for appropriating silver designs after the much wider manufacture
and distribution of silverware in Athens after 470 BCE).

FROM MILTIADES TO ALCIBIADES

Miltiades, however, was the first commoner known to have converted to silverware, and his
example perhaps set a standard for other Athenians. For Athens, beginning in 470 BCE, was
flourishing as no other polis ever had, and the rich socialites there went over en masse to
silverware.

Along with Syracuse, after 470 Athens became the first polis to function as a metropolis—that
is, as a city controlling other cities, a city with a population of more than 100,000. Although
Pheidon may have been the first tyrant, Argos never became a metropolis. Sparta, despite
having perfected the Peloponnesian League by 500 BCE, remained merely an aggregate of five villages and not even a "proper city" itself. By 500 BCE, despite its lack of walls, Sparta had completed the transition to a unified oligarchy, banning luxuries, commerce, and coinage, but retaining iron spits; it was a society that shunned cultural and commercial developments in favor of martial prowess and agricultural abundance. At about this time, Syracuse also became a metropolis; but Corinth, losing control of its colonies while Athens was constructing the Delian League, never really did so, despite the wealth it had gained through extensive mercantile and commercial ventures. This was, in part, because it remained within the Peloponnesian League (hence, somewhat subordinate to Sparta) and, in part, because it was unable to control its colonies. Neither did any of the Anatolian poleis attain the rank of metropolis; even the greatest, Miletus, declined because of Lydian and Persian pressures, all the more abruptly after 500 when the Persians sacked it. Nor did the Euboian cities, which virtually self-destructed during the drawn-out Lelantine Wars of the 7th and 6th centuries, nor Samos, even at its peak under Polycrates, for Samos was simply too small an island to become a metropolis.

After Miltiades came his son, Cimon, grandson of a Thracian king, and married to an Alcmaeonid. A noble family of ancient Athens, the Alcmaeonids claimed descent from the mythological Alcmaeon, great-grandson of Nestor. Cimon was proxenos for Sparta and
Thessaly, a role that entailed hosting foreign ambassadors. After Miltiades died, Cimon had to pay a huge fine of ten talents. He commanded most of the Delian campaigns from 476 to 463, but was ostracized in 461 for leading an army to help Sparta to suppress a Helot revolt, but instead was humiliated by Spartan refusal to accept the Athenian help offered. His greatest victory was at Eurymedon (464). Cimon had a very large villa, like the Academy and the Lyceum, outside the walls where he entertained lavishly. He was the leader of Athenian society until his ostracism, followed shortly afterward by the democratic revolutions of Ephialthes and Pericles.

The explosion of what Aeschylus’s Persian chorus calls the Athenian “fountain of silver” (The Persians, line 238; the play was produced in 472 BCE) also explains why explicitly homoerotic ceramic pots disappeared after 470 BCE: the wealthy, the only class capable of hosting proper symposia where such homoerotic representations would have had their fitting place, had all switched to dining from silver plate, a change made possible by the new abundance of silver. This effectively gutted the market for homoerotic scenes depicted on clay (Percy, Pederasty, 208). This process was, of course, a gradual one, beginning perhaps as early as 482 BCE, but completed, as far it went, by 470.

Some suppose wine cups were made of clay because the clay had been mixed with crushed bones and some may have been made in bronze.
At this point it might be helpful to review the economic history of Athens, from its early poverty to its spectacular wealth in the 5th century. Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff’s *Greece* (Oxford University Press, 1963; originally in Russian) offers short, convenient summaries from his extensive monographs and articles, an account of Athenian economics that illuminates this picture even further.

Prior to the Persian Wars, Athens was not particularly significant among Greek city-states. Both Athens and Sparta were “far poorer and less civilized than Miletus, Ephesus, Samos, and Lesbos in the east, or than Sybaris, Croton, Gela, Acragas, and Syracuse in the West,” according to Rostovtzeff (*Greece*, 131). Athens lacked the agricultural and mercantile power of these cities, and suffered from smaller markets for its goods, except for its pots. However, as a result of its conduct during the Persian Wars, Athens emerged very rapidly as Greece’s leading city-state.

Further, the Athenians were the first mainland Greeks to understand the threat posed by Persia’s incursion into Hellas, and it was the Athenians who won the dramatic victory against the Persians at Marathon in 490 BCE, supported only by the Plataeans. This victory earned Athens the admiration of the other Greek states, and, with its strong navy, financed by the mines at Laurium, Athens became, after 479 BCE, the natural leader of the Delian League. After the naval battle of Salamis in 480 BCE, followed by another at Mycale the following year (which left the Persian and Phoenician navies in a poor state), Athens, with its strong navy and well-
earned prestige, was poised to assume leadership of the Greek world, pending the conclusion of hostilities with Persia in 461 (Rostovtzeff, *Greece*, 121–32).

Before cessation of major conflicts with Persia, around 462 BCE, Athens became a powerful imperial democracy. Politically stable at home, it was able to use its new mastery of the seas to penetrate new markets. Themistocles, who had led Athenian forces to victory at Salamis, built walls around Athens and its port city Piraeus, which protected it enough from assault by land to free up its navy for lubricating economic expansion. Cimon defeated a Persian force at the River Eurymedon in 461 BCE, further cementing Athenian naval supremacy. Athens also began to exact tribute from its former allies—now more accurately called "subjects"—in the Delian League (Rostovtzeff, *Greece*, 140–44).

In Athens itself, trade and industry flourished. Non-citizen merchants and craftsmen settled in the city, in addition to an influx of refugees and slaves, a usual occurrence after all victories. Other slaves were available along the shores of the Black Sea. This influx was actively encouraged by the Athenian government, since its citizens were too busy with agriculture and politics, and the alien workers directly contributed to Athens' prosperity; and, over time, many of these workers gained citizenship. The city became a focal point for industry. Agriculture turned to grapevines for wine and olive trees for oil, products that require great investments of
time and wealth before they produce. Athenians annexed Euboea and farmed it intensively with slaves. Meanwhile, expanding markets led to expanding demand, and Athenian products, as well as its currency, glutted the Mediterranean. Notably, Athenian pots displaced local and Corinthian pottery, even in Italy and Sicily: “If imports from Athens grew thus, the exports from Italy and Sicily,” writes Rostovtzeff, “would soon pour exclusively into the Piraeus [the port of Athens]; and then Athens would have an ascendency, not merely commercial but political also, in all the north and west of the Peloponnese” (Greece, 144). As if to seal its economic hegemony, “Athens made the use of her silver coins, measures, and weights obligatory in her empire. In this way her dominion became a common trade market” (Greece, 176). Meanwhile, Athens’s colony Sigeum, on the Hellespont, assured its access to the Black Sea, a source of slaves, grain, and furs.

Within this context, Athens—and Hellas more generally—saw an increase in expendable wealth; an increase which, along with the discovery of silver at Laurium, facilitated the transition from earthenware to silverware on the tables of the elites. Also, those of somewhat lower economic standing were becoming able, for the first time, to acquire the decorated earthenware that had formerly been the reserve of the wealthy, though with decorations other than blatantly homoerotic. Purchasing power outside the elite, despite its increase, never

Victor E. Hanson
The People of Black Sea
Hun Impact
reached a level sufficient to foster the sort of domestic conditions conducive to hosting proper symposia or developing its attendant, pederastic, traditions.

Pericles, the most famous of all the Athenian democrats, of whom neither a lover nor a beloved was ever mentioned, entertained less regularly and less spectacularly than Cimon. But the prosperity of Athens reached its peak during his lifetime. It is likely that the most precious silver sympotic wares were made during his *floruit*. He was elected strategos for every year but one after 443 until his death during the plague in 429. Pericles had married the widowed mother of Alcibiades, who became his ward and nephew. It may have been under Alcibiades, Pericles' successor, that Athenians enjoyed their most extravagant symposia, some of which featured the attendance of Socrates, as portrayed by Xenophon and Plato.

Coins both large and small (but especially the smaller ones that followed in the wake of the larger) greatly facilitated trade and industry; they also served to measure and store accumulations of wealth. A modern parallel would be the substitution of paper money for bullion; or, in more contemporary terms, the economic revolution that has resulted from the vast extension of monetary credit. Thus, the use of coinage was fundamental to "the Greek miracle," and almost as fundamental to it as the alphabet. A quotation from Lysias, the earliest of the ten "Attic Orators," illuminates the relative values that the Greeks attached to precious
metals and to clay. It will be seen that no ceramic item is considered worth so much as a
mention in this itemization of valuable goods plundered in the civil strife before the restoration
of democracy in 403 BCE.:  

They had seven hundred shields of ours, they had all that silver and gold, with copper,
jewellery, furniture and women's apparel beyond what they had ever expected to get;
also a hundred and twenty slaves, of whom they took the ablest, delivering the rest to
the Treasury; and yet to what extremes of insatiable greed for gain did they go, in this
revelation that they made of their personal character! For some twisted gold earrings,
which Polemarchus's wife had in her possession when she first came into his house,
were taken out of her ears by Melobius. And not even in respect of the smallest fraction
of our property did we find any mercy at their hands but our wealth impelled them to
act as injuriously towards us as others might from anger aroused by grievous wrongs.

((Lysias XII, Against Eratosthenes, ca. 400 BCE, sections 19-20)

Alcibiades will serve for us as a symbol of free-flowing silver. Diodorus Siculus (13.3.2), in his
index of sources, testifies that the Athenians had plenty of plate available in the days of
Alcibiades, before the Sicilian Expedition of 415 BC:
And the expedition [to Sicily] was already fully prepared when it came to pass that in a single night the statues of Hermes which stood everywhere throughout the city were mutilated . . . On the next day . . . the triremes lay at anchor over the whole harbor, embellished with their insignia on the bows and the gleam of their armor; and the whole circumference of the harbor was filled with censers and silver mixing-bowls, from which the people poured libations with gold cups, paying honor to the gods and beseeching them to grant success to the expedition.

Even with “Artful Crafts” (1984), his first argument for the importance of metalware in Greek elite society, it is clear that Vickers is as fascinated with metals as Boardman is with clay. Later, in Artful Crafts (1994), he and co-author David Gill cited references from Plato and Plutarch, among others, regarding tableware made of precious metal being used by aristocrats. In particular, he drew attention to the passage in which Plutarch recounts a visit paid by Alcibiades—the very wealthy nephew of the leading statesman Pericles, and the most flamboyant of Athens’ “golden youths”—to the home of Anytus, a wealthy tanner and social climber in love with him. To emulate the customs of the well-born, Anytus (ironically, later one of the prosecutors of Socrates) decided to host a symposium, and, of course, extended an invitation to the young and ravishing aristocrat whose eyes widened at the sight of the
numerous cups made of glistening silver displayed by his host. Becoming even more roguishly drunk after his arrival, Alcibiades ordered his own servants to carry off half the table silver!

Plutarch relates that, when Anytus’s astonished guests complained about this boorish, criminal act, the love-struck Anytus dreamily replied that Alcibiades “had shown great consideration and tenderness in taking only a part, when he might have taken all” (Alcibiades, IX).

Vickers also cited Plato’s Symposium, an ironic dialogue occasioned by Socrates’ attendance at a symposium held for the famous, effeminate dramatist Agathon. All the guests, in turn, elaborate on the theme of Love. Perhaps not surprisingly, Alcibiades—that avid collector of other people’s silverware and hearts—arrives unannounced, uninvited, drunk, and dangerously confessional:

A moment later they heard Alcibiades shouting in the courtyard, very drunk and very loud. He wanted to know where Agathon was, he demanded to see Agathon at once. . . . “Good evening, gentlemen. I’m plastered,” he announced.

(Symposium, §212)

He proceeds to express his admiration for Agathon’s beauty and intelligence, as well as his own annoyance with Socrates, who, like everyone else, is in love with him. In order to reinvigorate
the convivial atmosphere, Alcibiades downs the contents of a large wine cooler and orders it
refilled for Socrates, who is then said to have drunk from a “silver well.” Of this Vickers
observed:

   If Socrates did indeed drink from “a silver well” . . . then it is likely that the rest of
   the sympotic furniture used on that occasion, including the wine-cooler drained
   by Alcibiades at one go, was also of precious metal. (Artful Crafts, 1994, p. 39)

The logic here is spurious. Insofar as Vickers was willing to jump to the conclusion that all the
vessels at the party were made of silver, he becomes a Midas, creating precious metals
everywhere he goes. This assumption contravenes culinary practice: the fact that some dishes
taste better served on ceramics and that they can be served straight from the oven on them.
Vickers is nonetheless convincing that most tableware used in proper symposia was, at this
time, made of silver.

Such is the anecdotal quality of much of Vickers’ literary evidence, to which he added citations
from Aristophanes, Aeschylus, and Pindar, among others. In discussing Athenian income,
however, he cited specific economic considerations, with the disparity between the rich and
the poor summarized by the coinage they generally used, the rich using talents and minae (1
talent = 60 minae); the poor, drachmae and obols (1 drachma = 1/100 of a mina; 1 obol = 1/6 of a drachma, about 500). For example, after Miltiades failed to retake the Cyclades, he was convicted of “deceiving the people”; however, “in view of [his] past services,” instead of the death penalty he was fined 300,000 drachmas, or 50 talents. One talent equals 6,000 drachmae (Burn, Greece, 163). Because a comic character in Aristophanes recommends settling a 200 drachma debt with a silver cup, Vickers made the reasonable claim that a silver cup could be valued for as much as 2 minae (about $600, as calculated). At the other end of the scale, cheap pots were valued at 3½ obols for 4 items (a bit less than 50¢ apiece); and for some pots sold in quantity, the prices were even less. “The highest recorded price for any Athenian painted pot is 3 drachmas: the equivalent of [$9]. But not only is this price exceptionally high, but the two pots which are thus inscribed are rather large . . .” (Artful Crafts, 1994 pp. 85–86). The 600-fold ratio between the prices of a 1-obol clay cup and a 200-drachmai silver cup suggests the vast difference in economic and cultural significance that existed between the materials used.

Skilled laborers earned only 1 drachma a day; in comparison, “the sources show that the rich at Athens conducted their business in minae (1 mina = 100 drachmas), and that among the really rich, a drachma was considered a ‘trifling sum’” (Artful Crafts, 1994 p.33). Implied here is the assertion that the wealthy would hardly have bothered with ceramics—“the detritus of antiquity,” as Vickers quipped—since they counted their money in silver minae and even
talents. In a social context where a generous aristocrat could easily bestow an expensive silver cup on his young male favorite—to express his affection, to honor the boy, to affirm and acknowledge the boy as a member of his own social class—giving such a boy a cheap clay cup would be interpreted, by the boy and by others, as an insult, an insult that would likely reduce his self-worth and social worth in the eyes of others, implying that he was essentially made of, worthless, common materials, that is, born of common parents and unlikely to amount to much in the future (see Artful Crafts, 1994, pp. 33–45).

Further evidence of the low regard in which clay was held is taken from Aristophanes’ portrayal of the troublesome character Nicarchos, an informer (a class of individual especially despised during the Peloponnesian War) who is, for comic effect, packed up in excelsior\(^24\), like a fragile ceramic vase ready to be shipped. The commonness, fragility, and worthlessness of clay are repeatedly emphasized here (Acharnians, pp. 900–940):

**Dicaepolis:** Shut his mouth. Give me some hay; I am going to pack him up like a vase, that he may not get broken on the road.

**Chorus:** Pack up your goods carefully, friend; that the stranger may not break it when taking it away.

\(^{24}\) Softwood shavings used for packing fragile goods or stuffing furniture.
Dicaepolis: I shall take great care with it, for one would say he is cracked already; he rings with a false note, which the gods abhor!

Chorus: But what good is . . . this vase?

Dicaepolis: This is a vase good for all purposes; it will be used as a vessel for holding all foul things, a mortar for pounding together law-suits, a lamp for spying upon accounts, and as a cup for the mixing up and poisoning of everything.

Chorus: None could ever trust a vessel for domestic use that has such a ring about it.

Dicaepolis: Oh! it is strong, my friend, and will never get broken, if care is taken to hang it head-downwards.

Chorus: There! It is well packed now!

Boeotian: Marry, I will proceed to carry off my bundle.

Chorus: Farewell, worthiest of strangers, take this informer, good for anything, and fling him where you like.

Boardman vs. Vickers