

THE CONSUMERS' CHOICE

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The Consumers' Choice:
Uses of Greek Figure-Decorated Pottery

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USES OF GREEK FIGURE-DECORATED POTTERY

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Archaeological Institute of America

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USES OF GREEK FIGURE-DECORATED POTTERY

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PREFACE

The papers in this volume are elaborations of talks presented at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of American in New Orleans. Five were part of a colloquium, “Consumers’ Choice: Uses of Greek Figure-Decorated Pottery,” which was sponsored by the Pottery in Context Research Network. This group, formed in 2011–2012 and sponsored by the Institute of Classical Studies at the University of London, supports research on figure-decorated and associated pottery, with particular focus on shape, iconography, and material contexts in the Mediterranean basin of the eleventh to fourth centuries B.C.E. Two additional papers on painted pottery from other AIA sessions are included in this volume. These papers addressed similar themes to that of the colloquium and supplemented the themes of how one might consider a consumer’s choice.

INTRODUCTION

AS PUBLISHED EXCAVATED CONTEXTS BECOME MORE PLENTIFUL and as older contexts are reexamined, it has become increasingly possible to discuss Greek figure-decorated pottery from the perspective of its use, and to move from there to the possible meanings images had for the individuals who obtained the objects on which they appear. Each of the papers in this volume explores the relationship between image and use in different contexts with a focus on the consumer rather than on the producer. They pose questions concerning why a consumer might choose a particular pot, why it might be part of an assemblage, or why a particular set of pots might have moved in a particular direction. By looking at pottery found in specific types of contexts, we can consider whether shape or function is more important than subject matter to a consumer, consider the appeal and meaning for unusual subject matter or compositions, and consider alternative functions for some shapes. This framing of purpose incorporates two terms that need to be explored in order to set the stage for the papers within this volume: context and consumer. Both terms can generate a number of possible understandings that lead to different types of interpretive direction.

Defining Context

Webster's defines "context" as "the setting in which something occurs." This setting, when examined with respect to figured pottery, has been defined broadly in practice to include not just the physical findspot, but also the stylistic or iconographic environment of the painter. More recently, however, scholars have recognized the need to be more precise about which types of context or contexts are under consideration. More interest has been taken in the physical aspects of context so that any given figured pot is not seen solely as a member of a disparate and disconnected assemblage of pots disassociated from the physical world. Rather, focus is now being given to the physical and social aspects of "setting" for any given pot and the nuances of interpretation that can result from this study.

Explicit in all of the papers in this volume is the physical context of production; a firm grounding for the fabric from

which the pots were made acts as a foundation for each of the papers. However, while this links pot production to a physical place, it can only serve as a starting point in a volume on consumers and consumption. Today figured pottery from careful, well-recorded excavations often has a detailed physical context and an associated assemblage that can provide evidence for the selection of objects in a setting. For older material, assemblages can sometimes be recovered, as can physical context through research into archives. The placement of a painted pot within a specific building or grave or the association with a specific space and perhaps deity within a sanctuary means that interpretations of both shape and iconography can be grounded much more closely on context than was possible in older publications. This is also true in examining assemblages in which both local and imported, plain and figured pottery are placed together. Sets of equipment can be made up of pieces from more than one origin and made out of more than one material, with each individual geographical place or find context demonstrating, perhaps, a preference for what that combination should be.

Four of the papers included here (Bundrick, Peruzzi, Sarapanidi, Vlachou) consider a figured vase from a specific excavated tomb. Each contained Attic pottery that had been transported some distance before being placed in a grave in Marathon, Sindos, Rutigliano, and Spina, respectively. These papers consider the specific assemblage within the physical context of the site where they were found, which helps to provide a pattern for the use of decorated pottery and suggests whether a specific assemblage is normal or special in its selection of objects. In all four cases, pottery has been imported from Athens but is being utilized in non-Athenian or non-Greek cultures.

This same juxtaposition of Attic pottery in a non-Greek context is seen in a fifth paper (Lynch) that examines Attic pottery found in various civic contexts in a non-Greek city, Gordion in Anatolia. This introduces a diachronic element to context by noting changes in the shape and subject matter on imported Attic pottery and shifts in the specific contexts where it is found.

The relationship of workshops and markets can be glimpsed in a sixth paper (Trahey) that tracks the provenances of an ambiguous scene found on numerous black-figure pots and considers the possibility that subject matter reflects an aware-

ness of consumer interests, perhaps through the mediation of traders whose marks are found on some of the objects. At this broader level of context, one can also include religious and ritual practice as the basis for interpreting a scene, and the remaining paper (Jiang), with a focus on a Laconian cup, reminds us that not all figural pottery is Attic.

Defining the Consumer

As interpretations of the archaeological record become progressively more refined, the other term that needs definition is the consumer(s). Although related to, and perhaps strengthened by a focus on physical context, the context and consumer do not entirely overlap. What an emphasis on physical context has given scholars, however, is the opportunity to recognize more clearly the variety of possible consumers for any individual pot, and to reveal ways in which those different consumers can be teased out of the evidence that does exist. Is it the person who buys the pot in Athens, or the person who obtains it at the final destination? Is it the person who chooses the pot to be placed into a grave, sanctuary, or home where it enters the archaeological record? Or is it any one of the various individuals who view the pot somewhere along the path between its production and its placement, perhaps as a participant in a ritual? All of these are possibilities and all are addressed in the papers that follow.

In fact, the idea of a discerning consumer has been recognized in earlier scholarship. Among the most obvious examples are specific shapes such as the Tyrrhenian and Nikosthenic amphorae that have long been recognized as being directed towards or desired by Etruria. The indication that many of these imported forms have local roots, suggests that the import should perhaps be seen as an exotic alternative to a local form, but it also shows that a dialogue existed between producer and consumer for the creation of acceptable products. Recognition of a “home” Athenian market has also long existed for shapes such as the small Brauronian krateriskoi and Athenian white-ground, outline lekythoi among others, forms that can intimately be tied to specific local Athenian ritual and, thus, to a local Athenian consumer. Other figured wares, like Laconian or various southern Italian wares, show restricted movement that implies a desire for these particular wares in specific places or for particular purposes, sometimes in combination with imported wares.

The emphasis on physical context permits scholars to zoom in more closely on specific consumers when considering the life-history/biography of a particular pot. Vlachou, Saripanidi, Bundrick, and Peruzzi focus on material from single graves, permitting speculation about the individual consumer and why a particular vessel might have been deemed appropriate for a specific grave. All, however, also speculate on the possibility of other interpretations for the vases before their placement in the grave and the likelihood, in Saripanidi's and Bundrick's cases, that the scenes on the vases meant something different to the final viewers on the consumption end in Sindos and Spina, respectively, from those on the production end in Athens. This flexibility in the interpretation of the figured scenes from the perspectives of different viewers creates possibilities for a broader approach in how to read/understand any given scene within a specific context.

The other three papers take a wider-angle view of the consumer. Both Lynch and Trahey examine consumer trends and the trade that supplied these by expanding geographically, chronologically, and methodologically our understanding of how and why figured pottery may have moved around the Mediterranean. They use the contextual data that in the first case comes from recorded excavations and in the second from reexamining both archival and trademark data. Jiang considers the broad context of Spartan ritual as the language for a Laconian cup, reminding us of the challenge of reading a specialized visual image and considering the production and consumption of non-Attic pottery, a point also addressed by Peruzzi.