

Red-figure Pottery in its Ancient Setting

Edited by Stine Schierup &
Bodil Bundgaard Rasmussen



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Red-figure Pottery in its Ancient Setting

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Bodil Bundgaard Rasmussen

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*Amphora attributed to the painter
Syriskos, Athens 500-470 BC,
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VIII 320.*

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Preface

BY PER KRISTIAN MADSEN
DIRECTOR GENERAL
THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF DENMARK

In the early 19th century the Danish Prince Christian Frederik and his wife, Caroline Amalie, undertook a Grand Tour of Europe. In 1820 they settled for a several months in Naples enjoying the rich cultural and social life of the town. The royal couple was soon introduced to Giuseppe Capece Latro, former Archbishop of Taranto and the owner of a fairly large collection of antiquities. The Prince developed a serious interest in the collection and on the advice of P.O. Brøndsted, classicist and 'agent of the Royal Danish Court to the Holy See', he acquired the greater part of it. The acquisition comprised above all vases – a total of around 200 – decorated vases representing the various local styles of Southern Italy, a large group of Gnathia pottery and another large group of black glazed vases and a few Greek vases. The Prince established a Vase Cabinet at the Royal Palace in Copenhagen and spent a lot of time with his collection playing an active role in further acquisitions until his accession to the throne in 1839 as King Christian VIII made this more difficult. Upon the King's death in 1848 the collection was incorporated into the National Museum, where studies into ancient pottery ever since have been a major research field.

In 2008 the research programme "Pots, Potters and Society in Ancient Greece" was launched thanks to a generous grant from The Foundation of Consul General Gösta Enbom. The programme focuses on two main themes: 1) a societal and economic aspect, the production of – and trade in – pottery as a source for understanding the ancient economy, and 2) an ideological/iconographical aspect: vase paintings and other iconographical evidence as a source for understanding the life and thoughts of the ancients. "Pots, Potters and Society in Ancient Greece" seeks to further our knowledge of both themes and if possible to develop new theoretical approaches by combining existing knowledge with fresh ideas. To pursue this goal international thematic colloquia are held at regular intervals and in 2008 a PhD scholarship was launched in collaboration with Aarhus University entitled



*Consul General Gösta Enbom
(1895-1986).*

"Greek Iconography in Southern Italy. Imported Attic and early South Italian red-figure pottery from Lucanian and Apulian sites".

Taking its cue from the theme of the PhD-study the National Museum in November 2009 staged the colloquium "Red-figure Pottery in its Ancient Setting" aimed at highlighting the significance of the various settings and cultural contexts of red-figure pottery be it in Greece or outside Greece.

I wish to thank all contributors to both colloquium and the present publication for accepting our invitation and shedding light on the cultural encounters traceable in the iconography of ancient pottery. My thanks also go to the Foundation of Consul General Gösta Enbom for generous support of both colloquium and publication.

Introduction

BY STINE SCHIERUP &
BODIL BUNDGAARD RASMUSSEN

The study of red-figure pottery is one of the cornerstones of classical archaeology. Thousands and thousands of vessels and potsherds have been excavated throughout the Mediterranean countries, an endless number of publications on the topic have been produced, and scholars have dedicated their lives to the study of figured Greek vases. Yet, we still must face the challenge of trying to understand the meaning of figured Greek pottery through the prism of the present.

Imagery was undoubtedly an important part of ancient Greek society, but ancient written sources remain remarkably silent about pottery, perhaps because figured vases were of a completely different character than other major sources of Attic imagery, including sculpture, wall painting and fine metal ware. First of all the vases were produced in very high quantities and by a great number of different potters, and secondly they were part of everyday life and thus potentially a strong medium for communicating social or political views and messages to a wide audience. Thirdly, they were easily transported far beyond the borders of their place of origin, thus promoting the spread of the iconographical language of Athens and its adaptation in other cultural settings throughout the Mediterranean world. Indeed, in this way they become a means for understanding not only the culture of Athens in the Classical period but also of cultures far beyond the Athenian city-state.

The question presents itself as to how the setting of the pottery, in other words the various contexts in which it appears, can provide criteria for reaching a fuller understanding of its function and iconography, in particular how Attic iconographic themes were altered or absorbed as they entered into new cultural settings.

In the wake of the passionate debate about the study of Greek pottery that dominated the 1990s, in which iconographic, stylistic and socio-anthropological approaches were juxtaposed, especially in the form of connoisseurship versus structuralism, such questions have come increasingly into sharp focus. The more so with

the contextual and anthropological approach to figured pottery now becoming one of the most popular fields within this area of research, combining an iconographic study with that of the vessel shape, the function, and the various cultural contexts of use.¹ This approach has clearly influenced the chosen themes for conferences on Greek pottery held within the last decade.²

The colloquium in Copenhagen aimed at highlighting the interpretative challenges we face when analyzing red-figure pottery and its iconography within various cultural contexts. Participants were invited to present case studies from within their particular areas of research, which would serve as examples for enhancing our understanding of the variability in the character and value of red-figure pottery and its imagery, whether in a Greek, a colonial Greek, an Etruscan or any other indigenous community.

Turning to the content of this volume, the first papers focus on the way red-figure imagery functioned as a medium for expressing socio-political ideas. Martin Langner introduces us to a neglected field in the study of iconography: the mantle-figures seen mainly on the B-sides of kraters and other large vessels. He offers a deeper insight into the meaning of these figures, which have hitherto mostly been overlooked in the iconographic study of red-figure pottery, despite the fact that they appear on the majority of the kraters from the Classical period. Langner suggests that the theme in Attic contexts serves as a symbol of the ideal citizen and that this view of the Athenian citizen is exported to Italy, where it is later adopted in an altered form in the local red-figure pottery of Southern Italy, where, however, the garments and their patterning are different and where, in some cases, the scenes gain a new ritual meaning. Annie Verbanck-Piérard discusses the representation of Herakles in the setting of a four-columned peristyle, usually known as the four-column Herakleion. The motif is particularly popular at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth century BC, that is during the last phase of the Peloponnesian war. It may, therefore,

1 For a discussion of the methodological and theoretical development within the study of figured Greek pottery, see the two recently published articles: Isler-Kerényi 2009; Oakley 2009b.

2 See e.g. the following conference proceedings: Denoyelle *et al.* 2005; De La Genière (ed.) 2006; Nørskov *et al.* 2009; Schmidt & Stähli 2012.



Apulian krater acquired from the collection of Giuseppe Capece Latro, inv.no. CHR VIII 3. From Bari. Copenhagen, The National Museum of Denmark.
(Photo courtesy: The National Museum of Denmark).

be seen as a way of promoting common civic-religious behavior and giving new life to cult practices, probably as part of a general religious revival in the final years of the century. Adrienne Lezzi-Hafter introduces us to the

complex iconography of one of the works by Xenophantos Athenaios: a chous found in the so-called 'Smeni Tumulus' (Snake Tumulus), near Pantikapaion in the Crimea, together with two lekythoi produced in the same workshop. The