

POTTERY MARKETS IN THE ANCIENT GREEK WORLD

(8th - 1st CENTURIES B.C.)

Proceedings of the International Symposium
held at the Université libre de Bruxelles
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Edited by
Athena Tsingarida and Didier Viviers

ÉTUDES D'ARCHÉOLOGIE 5



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With the contribution of
Zosia Archibald, Alain Bresson, Fabienne Burkhalter, Véronique Chankowski, Franca Cibecchini,
John K. Davies, François de Callataÿ, Martine Denoyelle, Raymond Descat, Pierre Dupont,
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Drawing from P. Hartwig, *Die griechischen Meisterschalen*, Stuttgart, 1893, pl. 17.1, kylix, Baltimore (MD), John Hopkins University D4.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABV = J.D. BEAZLEY, *Attic Black-figure Vase-painters* Oxford, 1956.

Add^P = J.D. BEAZLEY, *Addenda: Second Additional References to ABV, ARV² and Paralipomena* (compiled by T.H. Carpenter) Oxford, 1989.

AGRP = T. Melander and J. Christiansen (eds), *Ancient Greek and Related Pottery*, Copenhagen, 1988.

APP = J.H. OAKLEY, W.D.E. COULSON, O. PALAGIA (eds.), *Athenian Potters and Painters* Oxford, 1997.

APP II = J.H. OAKLEY and O. PALAGIA (eds.), *Athenian Potters and Painters Volume II*, Oxford, 2009.

ARV² = J.D. BEAZLEY, *Attic Red-figure Vase-painters* Oxford, 1963.

The Athenian Agora III = R.E. WYCHERLEY, *Literary and Epigraphical Testimonia*, Princeton (N.J.) 1957 [*The Athenian Agora* III].

The Athenian Agora XII = B.A. SPARKES and L. TALCOTT, *Black and Plain Pottery of the 6th, 5th and 4th Centuries B.C.*, Princeton (N.J.), 1970 [*The Athenian Agora* XII].

The Athenian Agora XIV = H. THOMPSON and R.E. WYCHERLEY, *The Agora of Athens: the history, shape and uses of an ancient city centre*, Princeton, 1972 [*The Athenian Agora* XIV].

The Athenian Agora XIX = G. LALONDE, M. LANGDON, M.B. WALBANK, *Inscriptions*, Princeton (N.J.), 1991 [*The Athenian Agora* XIX].

The Athenian Agora XXIII = M. MOORE, and M.Z. PHILIPPIDES, *Attic Black-Figure Pottery*, Princeton, 1986 [*The Athenian Agora* XXIII].

BRESSON, 2007 = A. BRESSON, *L'économie de la Grèce des cités (fin de Vie-Ier siècle a.C.). I. Les structures et la production*, Paris.

BRESSON, 2008 = A. BRESSON, *L'économie de la Grèce des cités (fin de Vie-Ier siècle a.C.). II. Les espaces de l'échange*, Paris.

JOHNSTON 1979 = A. JOHNSTON *Trademarks on Greek Vases*, Warminster.

JOHNSTON 2006 = A. JOHNSTON *Trademarks on Greek Vases. Addenda*, Oxford.

Le vase grec = P. ROUILLARD, A. VERBANCK-PIERARD (eds), *Le vase grec et ses destins*, Munich, 2003.

Para = J.D. BEAZLEY, *Paralipomena: Additions to Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters and to Attic Red-figure Vase-painters* Oxford, 1971.

TSINGARIDA, 2009 = A. TSINGARIDA (ed.), *Shapes and Uses of Greek Vases (7th – 4th centuries B.C.)*, Brussels.

INTRODUCTION

The Greek Vase Trade: some reflections about scale, value and market

Alain BRESSON & François DE CALLATAÿ

The disenchanted introduction of John Davies is reminiscent of Harold Jones' work in 1956 concerning Roman numismatics.¹ All this tremendous amount of chronological and typological studies (setting aside art history) is, while essential, still only preliminary work for the economist. Authorized or un-authorized excavations have brought to light a gigantic quantity of ceramic evidence, ranging from the ca. 100,000 high-quality vases duly registered in the Beazley Archives to million pieces, often potsherds, of more common ceramics.² Yet quantification is still sadly missing. We may not share the overly pessimistic tone of Davies when he laments for the 95% percent of all South Italian pottery with no secure archaeological context (the remaining 5% might be enough to fix our ideas) or when he deplores the shaky foundations of the survival ratio proposed for Panathenaic amphorae (0.25% = 1/400th),³ the only such calculation ever attempted for Greek vases and dangerously extrapolated elsewhere,⁴ but it remains

true that such an accumulation of evidence has so far resulted in very few quantified demonstrations.

Unlike their numismatic colleagues looking at dies, vase specialists cannot claim to estimate how many items were produced at a certain place and time. It is indeed unlikely that vase production could ever be estimated with any degree of fineness, but much more could be done, and the lack of research along those lines is eloquent testimony to the lack of consideration thus far given to Greek vases from an economic standpoint. We can frame realities through the number of involved workers, their daily production capacities, the number of kilns or the amounts of requested commodities, mainly wood (on this see Williams 25-26);⁵ meanwhile,

signed vases while 300 more are attributed to him. Now 350 surviving vases would imply an original production of 140,000 vases (with a 0.25% survival ratio), which makes nearly 20 vases a day for 30 years, assuming 250 working days per year (and we have to remind ourselves that "in winter most pottery work was almost impossible, as the kiln was threatened by rain and the drying of newly thrown vases was nearly impracticable" – J.M. HEMELRIJK, "A Closer Look at the Potter", in: RASMUSSEN and SPIVEY 1991, *cit.*, 256), a clearly unlikely and much too high rate of productivity.

5 None of this is really dealt with by the papers of this chapter. Estimates have been proposed, however, which await more thorough discussion: for the size of the workshops, see V.V. STISSI, *Pottery to the People. The Production, Distribution and Consumption of Decorated Pottery in the Greek World in the Archaic Period (650-480 BC)*, Amsterdam, 2002 (PhD), 123-144 (VII Signatures, attribution and the size and organization of workshops) or J. WHITLEY, *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece*, Cambridge, 2001, 177-178; see also e.g. M. SHANKS, *Art and the Early Greek State. An Interpretive Archaeology*, Cambridge, 1999, 44-48, proposing the number of ca. 6,700 decorated Corinthian vases produced every year during the seventh century, arguing for a daily production of ca. 200 small *aryballoi* for a skilled thrower (information given by Michael Casson, potter in Ross-

1 A.H.M. JONES, "Numismatics and history", in: R.A.G. CARSON and C.H.V. SUTHERLAND (eds.), *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly*, Oxford, 1956, 13.

2 See also the 18,398 Greek vases sold from 1954 to 1998 coming from 596 auction catalogues (V. NØRSKOV, *Greek Vases in New Contexts. The Collecting and Trading of Greek Vases – An Aspect of the Modern Reception of Antiquity*, Aarhus, 2002, 256-257).

3 See R.M. COOK, "Die Bedeutung der bemalten Keramik für den griechischen Handel", *JdA* 74, 1959, 114-123, and M. BENTZ, *Panathenäische Preisamphoren: eine athenische Vasengattung und ihre Funktion vom 6.-4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, Basel, 1998. Also the critical comments of A. JOHNSTON, "Greek Vases in the Marketplace", in: T. RASMUSSEN and N. SPIVEY (eds.), *Looking at Greek Vases*, Cambridge, 1991, 208-209, 221 and "Panathenaic Amphorae, Again", *ZPE* 161(2007), 101-104.

4 *Ex absurdo*, we may prove that a survival ratio of 1/400th may occasionally be too low by examining the case of the famous Douris, who is survived by ca. 40

shipwrecks can also deliver essential messages.⁶ Of course, John Davies is deliberately provocative in writing that the “CVA is totally useless and Beazley’s catalogues scarcely less so” (Davies, 3). But the fact is that to put Greek vases in economic perspective is largely to make them fall down from the pedestal art historians have built in their historical quest to find a substitute for the lost great Greek paintings. Greek vases – even decorated vases – seem to have been frequently sold in lots for low prices. Basketry was slightly more expensive. Véronique Chankowski is doing very well to find her way among the scanty and equivocal evidence for prices on vases (almost exclusively fine Attic wares). Using the convenient standard estimate of one drachma as the daily wage of an unskilled worker, she concludes that even a common storage amphora would have required a full day’s wages (Chankowski, 28). The reverse is possibly more impressive: with not even the wages of a single day, a simple mason could afford to buy several oinochoes or two Panathenaic amphorae (between 2.4 and 3.7 obols each), which are by definition large decorated vases nowadays exhibited with great care and pride in our museums. The gap with silver ware looks indicative of how little labour counted for. In other words, and as nearly everyone is now convinced after the demonstration of Gill and Vickers, Greek ceramic vases can be of paramount interest in looking at economic networks and use (primary, secondary, tertiary), but it is doubtful that, considering their strictly economic value, they could have represented more than a tiny share of the total trade.⁷ As firmly put by Salmon for the Corinthian vase industry: “The conclusion

on-Wye) and commenting on R.M. COOK (1959: ca. 500 workers at Athens involved in pottery production for the fifth century, half that number at Corinth) and J.B. SALMON (*Wealthy Corinth: a History of the City to 338 BC*, Oxford, 1984, 105: ca. 30-40,000 Corinthian vases found at Megara Hyblaea).

6 On what can be done with shipwrecks, see D. GIBBINS, “Shipwrecks and Hellenistic trade”, in: Z. ARCHIBALD *et al.* (eds.), *Hellenistic economies*, London and New York, 2001, 273-312. Supposing an average cargo of 1,500 amphorae, the ca. 55 million Iberic amphorae of the Monte Testaccio make some 36,500 arrivals in Rome, or ca. 250 cargoes every year for 150 years, a clearly impressive estimate even if we divide it by two by assuming an average cargo of 3,000 amphorae, see Cibecchini in this volume, 237-249.

7 M. VICKERS and D. GILL, *Artful Crafts: Ancient Greek Silverware and Pottery*, Oxford, 1994.

is inevitable that pottery production was an almost insignificant sector of the Corinthian economy even though many Greeks used the ware”.⁸ On the other hand, to re-qualify them as mere “space fillers” or “saleable ballast” is to go too far in the opposite direction, as already argued by one of us (BRESSON 2008, 167-172).⁹

Many of the papers presented in this section are devoted to commercial strategies or, even better in terms of economic rationalism, to deliberate marketing. Working with shapes and images, or with the alleged ethnicity of traders and consumers, hypotheses are developed; these are generally convincing, although they may be over-subtle and the fact that authors are constantly referring to the same cases may undercut much of what is argued (for the Etrurian imitations of Nikosthenes, see Davies 15, Williams 45-46, Langridge-Noti 64, and Villing 48; for the large and standardized cargo [ca. 1,800 fine drinking cups] of the Pointe Lequin 1A wreck = Parker nr. 846, see Williams 32, Langridge-Noti 64, and Villing 86).

Lying beneath and not explicitly discussed is the tension between two opposite models: a dynamic one, hence modernist, characterized by a high level of exchanges, driven by producers quick to adapt themselves to emerging fashions located at considerable distances, which implies many movements of ships, cargoes and merchants; and another one, far more static, where ships were rare and one single cargo may exercise a lasting influence on the type of objects used in the area. This kind of opposition is reminiscent of the famous debate between Keith Hopkins and Richard Duncan-Jones concerning Roman coins.¹¹ The Greek numismatic

8 SALMON, 1984, 101.

9 A. BRESSON, *L'économie de la Grèce et des cités*, vol. 2, *Les espaces de l'échange*, Paris, 2008, 167-172. D.W.J. GILL, “Pots and Trade: Spacefillers or Objets d’Art?”, *JHS* 111 (1991), 29-47, remains essential reading and one of the few attempts to propose a quantified table for Attic imports in Etruria.

10 Nikosthenes’ workshop (ca. 550-510 BC) is reputed to have been one of the largest in Athens, with perhaps as many as 30-40 workers. No fewer than 133 vases are signed with his name as a potter, see V. TOSTO, *The black-figure pottery signed Nikosthenese-poiēsēs*, Amsterdam, 1999 [*Allard Pierson Series* 11].

11 K. HOPKINS, “Taxes and Trade in the Roman

world too can occasionally offer striking examples of unchanging patterns, as with the coin circulation of ancient Cabyle (modern Jambol, in Bulgaria): the Seleucid garrison stayed there for about one generation, but the bronze coins of Antiochus II they brought at that time continued to form the bulk of local coinage for two centuries.¹²

With powerful arguments, Alan Johnston (*infra* 102-106) replies here to Peter Thonemann, who has made the daring proposal that the Laconian material found in Naukratis may well have been brought by one single ship.¹³ Again general quantification is necessary in order to keep things proportionate and to avoid being seduced by what may look impressive at first sight. Of the ca. 120,000 stamped amphora handles recovered to date, ca. 86,000 have been found in Alexandria, and, out of these ca. 86,000, no fewer than 80,000 come from Rhodian amphorae, which were stamped on both handles. In terms of the percentage of stamped amphorae, it is certainly spectacular; in terms of the percentage of amphorae as a whole, it is (notwithstanding the limited extent of our knowledge) clearly less so. But if, as Whitbread did,¹⁴ we try to figure out what these 40,000 Rhodian amphorae could have represented as a yearly average over a span of time of ca. 150 years, “it equates to one modest cargo of 300-400 amphorae per year, or one larger cargo of 3,000 amphorae every five or six years – hardly enough to warrant special notice by ancient commentators” (GIBBINS 2001, 218). However, the question of course remains open of the representativeness of the aggregate of “40,000” Rhodian amphorae. We have no idea of the ratio of the amphorae revealed by the Rhodian amphora stamp found in Egypt to the quantity of amphorae actually imported to Egypt. Few would now believe however that only 40,000 Rhodian amphorae were exported to Alexandria

over 150 years. In the future, basic quantitative estimates based on the ever better known stamping practices (the heart of the matter), on the number of active workshops, and finally on comparisons with productions of similar wares from more recent periods, will help us to provide less despairing views – if not for the exports to a specific direction, then at least for Rhodian amphora production as a whole.

Beyond a purely quantitative approach, the contributions of this dossier lead to more positive conclusions. The flexibility of production to suit the desires of a potentially varied customer base is now beyond doubt, as shown by E. Langridge-Noti. D. Williams insists on the unequivocal evidence for the existence of a directed trade for ceramics as early as the end of the sixth century. With the papers of D. Williams, A. Villing and A. Johnston, the outlines of the trading networks, with traders originating from various but often “specialized trading cities”, like Aegina and Samos in the Late Archaic period, are once again perfectly established. This illustrates the differentiation between the production and circulation processes. As studied by A. Villing, the special case of Egypt in the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods determines the contours and limits of the “Egyptian market”, where local indigenous customers (*viz.* the mass of the population) played only a very limited role.

These analyses invite us to reopen the question of the market. The ancient world saw two main modes of transfer of value: constraint (which meant various forms of direct extraction of value without equivalent compensation, like war booty removal, tribute, tax-payment, *corvée* and slavery) and the market (which presupposes a “free decision” to produce and sell and obtaining a tangible counterpart in value for the good transferred). The specific institutional articulation between constraint and the market is the key to making sense of the ancient world’s economic organization. The ambiguity of the ancient economy in this respect is perfectly exemplified by the existence of massive recourse to slaves, who worked under constraint, but very frequently also in farms or workshops where the production was oriented towards a market. The uniqueness of the case of ceramics production and trade is that, from the clay pit to the final customer (if we put aside the certainly frequent slave status of workers employed in the ceramics workshops), it belonged almost wholly to the second category

Empire, 200 BC-AD 400”, *JRS* 70 (1980), 101-125 and R. DUNCAN-JONES, *Money and Government in the Roman Empire*, Cambridge, 1994. See also C. HOWGEGO, “Coin Circulation and the Integration of the Roman Empire,” *JRA* 7 (1994), 5-21.

12 D. DRAGANOV, *The Coinage of Cabyle*, Sofia, 1993, 136-144.

13 P. THONEMANN, “Neilomandros. A Contribution to the History of Greek Personal Names”, *Chiron* 36 (2006), 11-43 (see 11).

14 I.K. WHITBREARD, *Greek Transport Amphorae. A Petrological and Archaeological Study*, Athens, 1995, 26.

of value transfer, that of the market. Interestingly, this proves to be true outside of the world of the cities, even in Ptolemaic Egypt.¹⁵ The existence of a multiplicity of specialized ceramics markets (for common or luxury wares, for local or international clients, for customers of specific ethnic, religious and other traditional backgrounds, or for partners connected by enduring or short-term political links) should not conceal the basic economic facts for ceramics: they were goods produced at a certain cost and for profit; in specialized workshops, not in a home production system or violently extracted by constraint; inevitably mobilizing a certain amount of capital; needing intermediary traders to sell them. Indeed, the local production cost had to pay the investors and producers and leave them a minimal, or even sometimes more comfortable profit, as can be proved for some Attic potters of the Late Archaic period (as D. Williams usefully reminds us). In some ways, this anticipated the relative affluence of their successors of the Late Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods.¹⁶ The same rule applied for traders.

The price for the final customer, possibly in a very distant market, could sharply differ from the original price of the good bought at the workshop, as we are once again helpfully reminded by Véronique Chankowski. Anthropological parallels from the medieval and early modern periods indeed are also useful to imagine the existence of small, rather autonomous potters and resilient potters' communities, which could (modestly) thrive provided they became part of broader regional or international networks. But from the beginning to the end it was the principle of capital and the market that operated, a reality that the inevitable uncertainties regarding the quantities produced should no longer conceal. In that sense, ceramics production and distribution were certainly no different from the organization of production and distribution of other marketed goods like weapons, furniture or perfumes, which in that respect happen to be better documented in the world of the Greek cities, but have left far fewer archaeological traces.

15 See F. Burkhalter's paper in the second section of this volume.

16 E.E. MAYER, *The Ancient Middle Classes: Urban Life and Aesthetics in the Roman Empire, 100 BCE-250 CE*, Cambridge, Ma., 2012.

To conclude on an optimistic note, it is clear that scholarship devoted to ancient Greek ceramics has made considerable progress in less than one generation. Thus, despite the conditions limiting our recourse to modern methods of investigation in many countries of the Eastern Mediterranean zone, some progress (albeit still too limited) has been made on the investigation of ancient pottery kilns. This is helping to reduce the yawning gap with the investigations concerning Western Europe in the Imperial period and (above all) the medieval and early modern periods. But a renewal of research inspiration has begun. In parallel, it is certainly worth mentioning the recent development of fruitful debates on medieval and early modern British pottery production and consumption.¹⁷ They have concerned the evolution of the relationship between pottery and other classes of material culture, the link between social changes and changes in material culture, and the role of imported pottery as a stimulus for innovation or as a threat to the "balance of trade". Some of these issues have already been dealt with in the scholarly literature concerning the ancient Greek world.¹⁸ To give two more examples, this is the case also with the relationship between metal ware and earthenware.¹⁹ A study of the use of common ceramics (in which there is now fortunately a growing interest) in the small town of Olbia in southern Gaul, of course as usual mostly local productions, has revealed local culinary practices and cultural habits and their evolution.²⁰ It is now time for a broader and more systematic approach. If specialization is a prerequisite for empirical studies, it is only by re-contextualizing the ceramics industry within the wider context of ancient Greek craftsmanship and its institutional background as well as that of social consumption preferences that further progress will be made.

17 J. THIRSK, *Economic Policy and Projects*, Oxford, 1978; D. GAIMSTER and P. STAMPER (eds.), *The Age of Transition: the Archaeology of English Culture 1400-1600*, Oxford, 1997 [*Oxbow Monograph* 98]; C.G. CUMBERPATCH and P. W. BLINKHORN (eds.), *Not so Much a Pot, More a Way of Life*, Oxford, 1997 [*Oxbow Monograph* 83].

18 See already the works cited in n. 5.

19 See above n. 7, VICKERS and GILL 1994.

20 M. BATS, *Vaisselle et alimentation à Olbia de Provence: v. 350-v. 50 av. J.-C.: modèles culturels et catégories céramiques*, Paris, 1988 [*Revue archéologique de Narbonnaise Supplément* 18].