

## CONFERENCE REVIEWS

### **Review of “Formes et Usages des Vases Grecs (VII<sup>e</sup>-IV<sup>e</sup> siècles av.J.-C)” International Conference, Université Libre des Bruxelles, 27<sup>th</sup> -29<sup>th</sup> April 2006**

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The Archaeological Research Centre (CREA) of the University of Brussels (ULB) has set up a five year programme (2004-2009), dedicated to the study of pottery in ancient societies and financed by the French Community of Brussels. As part of this programme, an annual postdoctoral post is offered by the university, a sequence of lectures is organised and a number of publications, dealing with several aspects of Greek and Roman pottery, are in progress. The “Shapes and Uses of Greek Vases” conference, organised by Dr Athena Tsingarida assisted by Isabelle Algrain, is also part of this programme. Twenty three papers were presented by specialists from all around the world. Although the majority focused on different aspects of the ceramic production of Attika, studies of other wares were also treated.

Past scholarship focused mainly on attributions of the vases to specific hands, stylistic analysis and iconography, all influenced by history of art. In contrast this conference, reflecting the entire programme, was aimed at promoting the study of the relationship between ceramic producer and user, an issue neglected in the past by researchers. Some of the aspects of this include the organisation of production and the function of vases in ancient societies, as well as the social and cultural practices of the purchasers.

The morning session of the first day was dedicated to the study of ancient ceramic workshops and their production from the point of view of potters and painters or the nature of the clients. Andrew Clark (Los Angeles) analysed the function and capacity of different variants of the sixth century Attic one-handed jug (*oinochoe*) and suggested that the shape might have been used not only to pour from but also for drinking. Bettina Kreuzer (Freiburg University) and John Oakley (American School in Athens) analysed the iconography and archaeological context of two particular shapes produced by the Attic workshops aiming at defining the vessels' purchasers. The former focused on an early sixth century oil vessel (*exaleiptron*), produced by Attic and Boiotian workshops and connected it with athletes and the *palaistra*, unlike earlier theories associating it with women. Similarly, John Oakley showed convincingly that the fourth century Attic cylindrical lidded boxes (*pyxides*), designed for women's cosmetics, were used also by men.

The afternoon session saw the continuation of the discussion on vessel use, and particularly the role played by capacity. Elke Böhr (Antikenmuseum, Munich) attempted to connect a class of small-sized cups to Athenian youths and an initiation ritual (*Apatouria*). Vessel capacity has not attracted scholars' interest in the past, mainly due to calculation difficulties and the fragmentary state of the ceramic evidence. Therefore the

Centre of Archaeological Research, in collaboration with the Laboratory of Logical and Numeric Systems of the University of Brussels, has created a very useful and promising online program with which the capacity of any vessel can be calculated regardless of type or date of ware. The user of the program needs to provide a profile drawing of the vessel and is given the option to define the level of filling, from which capacity will be measured. This program will be available online to the research community shortly.

During the second day of the conference, a number of rare shapes were discussed. Euridike Kefalidou (Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki) presented a very informative paper on the rarely encountered suction dippers produced in various sites of the Eastern Mediterranean from the third millennium BC to the sixth century AD. The discussion highlighted the use of a number of simple principles of physics that enabled researchers to distinguish their function from that of 'normal' vessels. Two more papers challenged the traditionally attributed functions of some well-known shapes: Viktoria Sabetai (Centre of Research on Antiquity, Academy of Athens) dealt with the ceremonial vessel, known as *loutrophoros* and Athena Tsingarida (University of Brussels) with a special class of early red-figured drinking cups. The afternoon session continued with three papers which dealt with the iconography of Attic vases and their interpretation. For example, François Lissarague (EHESS, Paris) posed questions about depictions on Athenian vases. He questioned the significance of shield devices for the identity of the warriors carrying the shields, their enemies, and what this meant for the purchasers of the vessels and other viewers. Many examples were shown, but specific conclusions were not reached, with most of the ideas being very interesting but hypothetical.

The final day of the conference saw the presentation of a number of papers dealing with the clients of the producers of Greek vases. Based on the distribution of Greek vases in Etruria, Lydia and the Iberian Peninsula, three scholars attempted to trace routes to the inhabitants of these regions. As mentioned above, past scholarship neglected the relationship between producer and purchaser and how this relationship may have affected the organisation of ceramic production. Juliette de la Genière (Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres, Paris) suggested that erotic scenes on the Athenian vases imported to Etruria satisfied mainly the buyers' taste and needs and did not express Athenian preferences, since such vases were not common among the finds from Attika. In this case, it seems that traders, responsible for carrying Greek vessels to Etruria and mainly Vulci, influenced Athenian potters' production towards the needs of their clients.

François Villard summarised the three-day conference. He outlined the questions that pottery studies ought to pose based on the issues addressed by the conference papers. The papers presented demonstrated that pottery should no longer be treated solely as an object of art, as has been the case with some past scholarship. Capacity, iconography and archaeological context should be taken into serious consideration in every ceramic study since these approaches can lead to new, original insights for the function and role of pottery in the everyday life of the ancient world. The participants were introduced to innovative analyses of the function of vessels, and had the

opportunity to attend a number of papers that successfully challenged commonly accepted views.

For the programme and the participants of the conference, as well as the aims of the entire program see: [www.ulb.ac.be/philo.arc\\_ceramique](http://www.ulb.ac.be/philo.arc_ceramique).