Classifications of Non-Attic Pottery : Style and Analysis

A major theme of this meeting is the exploration of the archaeological application of scientific techniques to the study of ancient pottery. This paper has little to do with science, and is mainly addressed to scientists or students who have had little occasion to consider Greek pottery of the Archaic period. We all realise that science alone will not answer all problems, and that many of the new techniques have been used simply to supplement, confirm or deny hypotheses about pottery provenance which have been based on other, traditional archaeological evidence. It is this other evidence that I wish to consider, to give some idea of the criteria that have hitherto been used to establish, first of all, pottery groups that might be judged the product of a single source, then, to establish what that source might have been in geographical terms.

Greek pottery of the archaic period is a particularly good field in which to make this demonstration. It is numerous, extremely diverse in appearance, and it has been found all round the Mediterranean world and sometimes far beyond it, from south Russia to the Nile Valley, from Spain to Mesopotamia. In these terms we think primarily of material from excavations. But the pottery first became well known to collectors and scholars in a different way, generally from uncontrolled excavations in Mediterranean lands, especially Italy, where indications of original provenance were lacking. There was a natural tendency to believe that pottery was made where it was found, and the many Greek vases from north Italy were confidently called Etruscan. Even when closer study of the inscriptions on them revealed that many of them were Greek, it became difficult to allow for different styles in different periods, and the so-called Geometric pottery, which looked so unlike the later black — and red — figure, was called Phoenician or Egyptian (Cook, 1972, chapter 15, may be used as the prime source for references to the treatment and identifications of the wares discussed below).

It became easy enough to correct such mistakes about Etruscan or Greek, but thereafter the problems of defining source increased. For one thing, it was clear that there was wide distribution of pottery from many different places and that the evidence of findspot was not enough. The historical importance of the pottery also became apparent. It told much more than what was being used in any given city, since much of it was from colonial or native sites and could therefore be seen to hold potential evidence of vital importance for determining the origins of settlers, and their continuing links with their homeland, through trade or other means. Moreover, since there was a recorded history of early Greece in ancient authors, there was the possibility both of checking the record and of correcting it ; while there was also the possibility of confirming from other, non-archaeological sources, deductions drawn from excavated evidence. This is, indeed, one of the most valuable contributions that classical archaeology can make to archaeological studies in general, where such corroborative evidence is usually totally lacking.

We are now reasonably confident that we can judge the source of a large proportion of archaic decorated and very much of the undecorated Greek pottery of the 8th to 6th century BC ; and we feel reasonably confident about its dating, within varying limits. There are still important problems, some of them more than mere detail, where scientific analysis has yielded progress or promises progress, but the operation is very much one of collaboration, and there have been several instances in which traditional methods and knowledge have been able to refine or correct the apparent results of analysis. There is probably no other field in which the closest collaboration of laboratory and archaeologist is required.

We may consider briefly some of the early attempts to classify archaic pottery by findspot, decoration or style alone, dwelling especially on the mistakes and how they came to be corrected ; then go on to one or two subjects of some personal interest to me where analysis has offered clues, if not always answers.

One of the handicaps of early researchers was the then total dependence of classical students on texts for their knowledge of antiquity. The vases were interpreted and understood, and not merely the scenes on them, in terms of texts, and sometimes not even classical texts but biblical ones. This is how the famous cup by Exekias in Munich, showing the god Dionysos in his boat, was associated with Noah in his ark, and the accidental crackling along its rim interpreted as Hebrew.

Even in pottery studies, the prominence given in texts to the importance of some cities tended to blind researchers to other evidence. Some of the commonest early pottery on western colonial sites was what we all recognise now as Corinthian, or « Proto-Corinthian » in its earliest stages. Yet in early days there was a tendency to believe that these early wares were made in

Sicyon. Sicyon is an important town, especially in texts, not far from Corinth. When you look at the evidence for calling the pottery Sicyonian it is extraordinary to see how very weak it was : some supposed and incorrect identifications of the letter forms of inscriptions, and hardly anything more. Even in 1923 an excellent archaeological study of the early pottery called it Sicyonian, although by then no substantial reasons for it could be offered, and the scholar, Friis Johansen, recognised that it was the immediate forerunner of later styles which were unquestionably Corinthian, both for their inscriptions as well as for the plentiful and comprehensive finds in Corinth itself.

The prime example of mistake through naive association with findspot is with Athenian pottery found in Etruria, where the character of the inscriptions eventually provided the answer. This should have been warning enough that, especially for as long as there had been no major excavations in Greece itself (still under Turkish rule for the most part), it was unwise to make any assumptions at all about homeland Greek sources. But there were other possible sources of error which derive from the fact that much Archaic Greek pottery is elaborately decorated with figure scenes. These naturally attracted much attention, and the elucidation of the scenes through appeal to ancient texts was a major preoccupation of many scholars. It remains so today, and rightly so, for the study now goes far beyond any simplistic expectation that a pot picture might illustrate a text, to the realisation that the pictures are texts in themselves and may hold valuable evidence about the life, thought, politics and society of their age. But in early days scholars were overingenious.

Here are some examples of early error and solutions in identification of source :

A distinctive series of black figure cups was believed to be of north African « Cyrenaic » origin, because on one a figure named Arkesilas was shown supervising the weighing of what was taken to be (perhaps wrongly) the local product, *silphion*, while he bore the name of a Cyrenaic king of the right period. On another cup a woman was a wrestling with a lion, a subject readily identified as an exploit of the nymph Cyrene. The north African connection was real enough, but the cups were made in Sparta, and this was shown by the finds there, once proper excavations were undertaken. Findspot, of course, is not necessarily enough, but it is when the total sequence of a ware is represented, with predecessors and successors and all stages of development demonstrated, in shapes and decoration, and where there is virtually no other important ware in use.

A group of black figure vases, of various shapes, was identified in the Etruscan finds at a time when the non-Etruscan origin of many of the vases was becoming clear. Some showed the distinctive Scythian horsemen with

their pointed caps, and since such figures were, it was argued, only familiar to Greeks living on the Black Sea shores, the ware was labelled « Pontic » (of the Black Sea) and assumed to be imported. Once it was realised that the vases were *only* to be found in Etruria, and that the Scythian subjects had, by the date of manufacture, become virtually commonplaces on Greek wares, their origin from a heavily hellenising studio in Etruria itself was acknowledged. The name sticks because « it is too absurd to be misleading » (Cook).

A larger and more ambitious group of black figure vases came to light in Etruria, but also on more southerly sites in Italy. They were finely potted and painted, sometimes with inscribed scenes. The letter forms of the inscriptions were as those of the city of Chalcis, on the central Greek island of Euboea, and the class thought to be imported thence. None, or only doubtful specimens were found in Greece, however, although Chalcis was (and largely remains) undug. This lack, with recognition that the letter forms were equally appropriate to the Chalcidian colonies founded in Italy and Sicily, led to their proper attribution to some western centre, still to be identified.

All these examples of error corrected are fairly straightforward, and for the Pontic and Chalcidian at least we might expect further definition of source from clay analysis. For the Pontic, parallels with analyses from Veii in Etruria can be drawn, and these make good archaeological sense. With the Chalcidian there are more problems but at least it can be said that the sub-group of so-called « pseudo-Chalcidian » vases is from a source other than that of the main group ; and that the pseudo-Chalcidian may have something in common with the Pontic is not altogether surprising (Jones, 1986, p. 348, p. 686-8). This is a period and area in which there was much movement of potters and painters in the ancient world, from east to west and when small and isolated potteries seem to have flourished, perhaps only for single generations, without much reflection of the existing tastes of the local market, but with strong reminiscences of the homeland of their makers. This already throws into relief the historical and social importance of such studies.

We turn to some specific instances. One is related to the last subject, being an isolated production of a distinctive ware, possibly far from the birthplace of the potters. It is the so-called « Northampton Group ». A very small number of fine vases are stylistically very closely related — in other words, to be associated on the basis of studies dependent on observation of shape and details of decoration, even painters' hands. They have been found in Etruria, in Egypt (where one seems, from the scene on it, to have been specially chosen for dedication at the Egyptian temple site of Karnak), in East Greece and on the Black Sea. The name vase, from Etruria, is shown by analysis (Jones, 1986, p. 689) to differ from examples from East Greece

and Egypt, and likely to have been made in Etruria itself (probably with others of the class found there). The stylistically determined unity of the whole group remains substantial, and the phenomenon, which can be readily matched in media other than pottery at this date, explained by the diaspora of potters and painters from the East Greek world at a time of threat (the encroaching Persian empire). The name vase, for example, presents an analysis which can be related to that of the even more closely-knit group of « Caeretan hydriae », which seem certainly to have been made by immigrant East Greek artists in Etruria (at Caere).

Other case studies can be taken from the excavations at Tocra in north Africa, published by myself with John Hayes. One small group of vases appeared to declare itself Cretan for the shapes and decoration although no examples of the ware of the appropriate date had been found in Crete itself, and parallels were with earlier fashions in the island. Comparison of analyses with what was known of Central Cretan clays suggested that the archaeological analysis of the material was probably correct (Jones, 1986, p. 703-6 for all Tocra analyses). Another small group of fine cups, apparently attributable to a single hand (the « Tocra Painter »), was analysed. No home was apparent, but the extremely close analyses confirmed the archaeological observation of the close unity of the group. Hayes, by eye, observed some likeness to Boeotian clays, which at the time seemed improbable, but subsequent results from Boeotian pots (demonstrating the value of building a databank of samples) makes this more plausible. Archaeological reconsideration of the pieces concurs, and shows the vases as a rare example of an otherwise attested phenomenon of immigrant potter/painters to Boeotia in this period, generally from Attica, and here with a touch of Corinth in their painting style. Finally, the so-called « Melian » pottery found at Tocra was analysed. This ware has long been known in the Aegean and attributed to Melos because in early days the finest, largest and most complete examples had been found there. By now both analysis and archaeological deductions from finds and distribution have made it highly probable that the vases were made on the island of Paros. The only complicating factor is the appearance in the Parian north Aegean colony of Thasos of closely related ware, which seems likely to be from a local, daughter workshop.

Most of these provenance problems have been satisfactorily resolved either by traditional archaeological methods, or by composition analysis, or by both. They deal with the traditional preoccupations of the archaeologist-historian and there is of course much more, answering other interests, in production or trade, which analysis might serve. Of the traditional interests, though, there are three areas in which more than simple provenance identity seems to be at stake and where the archaeologist looks for guidance. One is the question of daughter workshops in colonies working in styles and shapes virtually indistinguishable from the home product (cf. Melian/Parian,

above, and Dr Dupont's studies in East Greek wares in the Black Sea) ; a second is the question of close imitation far from home, where the possibility has even to be admitted of the emigration of a potter/painter whose work can be recognised from two widely distant centres ; the third, the question of the movement of potters' clay in antiquity, normally, we must assume, when it had special qualities for special usage, or where there was no adequate clay available for pottery of the quality required, yet there was a local market worth serving.

Finally. If we know when our pottery was made and if we know where it was made, with or without the aid of science, you might imagine that this is as far as we can go, or need to go with the vases or fragments themselves. With Greek pottery, however, and to some degree therefore with any decorated pottery, it may be possible to go further and search out the individual potter or painter. You might imagine this to be a thoroughly unscientific process, but in fact it is not, indeed much of it could be virtually mechanised. It is this, ultimate degree of classification, requiring « science » but generally no instruments other than the trained and experienced human brain, memory and powers of comparative analysis with proper weighting of essentials, that is the subject of Dr Kurtz's paper.

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REFERENCES

COOK, R.M., 1972, *Greek Painted Pottery*, London.

JONES, R.E., 1986, *Greek and Cypriot Pottery*, Athens.

COMMENTS

An intervention in the course of a later discussion in which Dr Picon had commented on the style of presenting analyses by graphs rather than dendrograms.

A prime necessity for the presentation of analysis results by the scientist to the archaeologist is that they should be immediately intelligible, and that the archaeologist should be able to exercise his own judgement about their likely validity and meaning. The rather old fashioned graphs (or histograms) regularly used in early days of these studies (as at Tocra in the 1960s) had the great advantage that they displayed the primary evidence clearly and enabled the viewer to make up his own mind about the validity of comparisons, margins of error or variation, etc. This is important to the archaeologist. The dendrogram is far more sophisticated, but it does not present the primary evidence in an intelligible form ; it presents an interpretation and conceals what the principles of selection or analysis may have been. It is very much a « take it or leave it » document, and the archaeologist is at the mercy of decisions that he may have good reason to suspect and cannot either either detect or control.