
4-2014

Review of "Vessels and Variety: New Aspects of Ancient Pottery"

Justin St. P. Walsh

Chapman University, jstpwalsh@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/art_articles



Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#), and the [Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Walsh, Justin St. P. (2014, April). "Review of Vessels and Variety: New Aspects of Ancient Pottery." *American Journal of Archaeology*, 118.2. doi: 10.3764/ajaonline1182.Walsh

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Art at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art Faculty Articles and Research by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact laughtin@chapman.edu.

Review of "Vessels and Variety: New Aspects of Ancient Pottery"

Comments

This article was originally published in *American Journal of Archaeology*, volume 118, issue 2, in April 2014. DOI: [10.3764/ajaonline1182.Walsh](https://doi.org/10.3764/ajaonline1182.Walsh)

Copyright

Archaeological Institute of America

Vessels and Variety: New Aspects of Ancient Pottery

Edited by Hanne Thomasen, Annette Rathje, and Kristen Bøggild Johannsen (Danish Studies in Classical Archaeology, *Acta Hyperborea* 13). Pp. xii + 320, figs. 99, b&w pls. 6, tables 3. Collegium Hyperboreum and Museum Tusculanum Press, Copenhagen 2013. \$52. ISBN 978-87-635-3751-3 (paper).

Reviewed by Justin St. P. Walsh

It is difficult to know exactly how the reader should approach a new volume of *Acta Hyperborea*. It includes both articles and book reviews, so one might see it as a journal. But it is not published on a regular basis, with just 13 volumes appearing since 1988; each volume is devoted to a different topic in art or archaeology; and each one is curated by a different group of editors. In the case of the most recent volume, “for the most part . . . given as papers in a workshop in Crotona, Italy in 2010” (ix), the overarching topic is “vessels and variety,” although, as will be seen, that relatively vague phrase is interpreted fairly loosely—much more “vessels” than “variety.” Yet one paper on archaic Peloponnesian terracotta figurines has hardly any vessels in it at all, and a few others focus largely on nonpottery kinds of evidence, too. The papers are divided by theme into four groups: production and distribution, iconography, regional studies, and museum collections. In general, they can be characterized as traditional in their approach, nontheoretical, and reliant on anecdotal descriptions of the evidence rather than quantitative analysis.

The first section includes three papers on the relationship between Greek and locally produced pottery in the Sibaritide at the beginning of colonization (Kindberg Jacobsen); the significance of Protocorinthian globular aryballois as a product for export rather than consumption in the home market (Thomasen); and the variable consumption patterns of Campana A Ware in different foreign markets (Handberg, Stone, and Petersen). By attributing agency to consumers, each of these articles implicitly reflects the impact of postcolonialism for studies of imported goods far from home. The last of these three articles makes particularly effective use of a comparative approach in order to subtly elucidate the trade networks that served markets with goods over long distances, identifying Delos as a hub for the further distribution of Italian pottery to

points east (though not in the same way to all places). I would only suggest that deployment of the increasingly important term “consumption” to describe the acquisition of goods in the article by Handberg et al. probably merits some greater discussion and clarification.

The four papers that form the section on iconography concern difficulties associated with identifying figures depicted on vases (or, in one case, in clay). In each study—the identity of seated goddesses (Barfoed), molded figures on Etruscan vases (Rathje), depictions of Iphigenia in Greek vase painting (Salskov Roberts), and images of heads or faces on Cypriot vases (Sørensen)—there are few firm answers. Rathje examines a figure of obscure gender on an Etruscan ring askos in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek. She compares it to similar vases known to come from tombs, ultimately identifying it as a female goddess such as Artemis. The lack of a known findspot for the Copenhagen example (a fact only mentioned on the 11th page of the article; the vase was apparently received by the museum as a gift in 1963) raises questions in this reader’s mind about the lack of a fully contextual discussion of all the vases with these figures: what other kinds of objects were they found with? What kinds of tombs did they come from? These kinds of data could be useful for determining the figures’ identities, but Rathje does not describe them.

Salskov Roberts’ analysis of images of Iphigenia in Greece and Magna Graecia is also problematic. She begins by asking questions whose answers are probably self-evidently in the affirmative (was there a wide array of oral traditions that underlay the literary versions of myths that survive today? Is there evidence for nonliterary versions in visual arts?). She then describes a wide array of depictions of Iphigenia, but many of these are of Roman Imperial date rather than Greek (e.g., Pompeian wall paintings). The fact that South Italian depictions of Iphigenia do not match Euripides’ version of the story does not tell us much new. The

analysis by Sørensen suggests that images of faces on Iron Age Cypriot vases had a multiplicity of meanings, which is probably true. Another possibility, though, is that they were merely decorative—on the basis of present evidence, this interpretation cannot be discarded, at least for lone disembodied heads.

The third section, “Regional Studies,” concerns only southern Italy. The first article, by Saxkjær, describes a seventh-century figured plate discovered at the sanctuary at Timpone della Motta, and in the process provides useful comments about the limited appearance of plates in the Greek repertoire, as well as about the ways in which tablewares might be used for purposes other than eating and drinking. A second article is a preliminary publication of excavations undertaken in 2009 by the Soprintendenza della Calabria at Crotona under the direction of Domenico Marino. The area excavated, close to one of the city’s gates (no longer extant), was the site of an industrial zone in the 20th century, and many modern pipes intruded on the stratigraphy. Despite the difficulties, the archaeologists were able to determine that they had likely found a street and curb belonging to the city’s Late Archaic plan. A thorough typological publication of the pottery—almost all various kinds of Greek fine ware—concludes the study.

The last group of papers discusses collections held in Danish museums, specifically the so-called Arretine Ware in the Thorvaldsen Museum (Johannsen) and pottery found at Al Mina, Syria, in the excavations of the 1930s, now in the National Museum (Schierup). These articles seek to do justice to material that has largely been forgotten. In both cases—perhaps especially the Al Mina pottery—the sherds have had complicated histories since the time of their discovery. Schierup uses 58 pieces from Al Mina to help understand the site’s chronology; unfortunately, because the ceramics are now scattered across at least 10 different institutions in four nations, it is hard to imagine that questions more complex than just the origins of vases and their production dates can ever be properly answered by this material.

It may seem just a bit too meta-referential to discuss book reviews in a book review, but doing so in fact highlights how the volume begins to take on the ap-

pearance of a closed system, like a Möbius strip. For example, Horsnæs considers a volume on Greek pottery from Timpone della Motta, which was written by authors of two other papers in this book, Jacobsen and Handberg. Immediately following Horsnæs’s review is another one by Bjerg of Horsnæs’s own book about Roman coins found in Denmark. Likewise, *Vessels and Variety* was offered in honor of Rathje, who is one of the editors (the dedication was evidently kept secret from her during the production process) (v).

The papers in this volume are written in a form of international English (with the exception of the article on Crotona, which is in Italian) that is of variable quality, depending on the author. Awkward word choices are frequent, occasionally leading to problems of clarity. The editors would have been well served by employing a native English speaker to copyedit the submissions. At the same time, the production quality of this volume must be lauded, especially for its price—it is clearly organized with copious illustrations, many in full color.

In the end, the common thread linking the various editions of the *Acta Hyperborea* series is of course that it tends to showcase Danish scholarship (although some earlier volumes were dominated by foreign authors), especially junior scholars, in Italy, Greece, and elsewhere. Because of the very wide range of pottery types and types of questions about pottery under consideration here, it is difficult to imagine that any one researcher (apart from those working on southern Italy in the Iron Age) will find multiple papers from the volume to be relevant to their interests. At the same time, it could be useful as a textbook for those wanting a wide range of case studies for an advanced undergraduate or graduate course in pottery studies. In that case, I would recommend that it be paired with a book that covers scientific and quantitative issues relating to research on pottery (e.g., C. Orton, P. Tyers, and A.G. Vince, *Pottery in Archaeology* [Cambridge 1993]).

Justin St. P. Walsh
Department of Art
Chapman University
Orange, California 92866
jstpwalsh@chapman.edu