

Reading Ancient Objects Inside Out



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Greek Figure-Decorated Pottery in Portugal

Edited by

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Cover: Attic black-figure neck amphora in the Manner of the Antimenes Painter. Ca. 510 BC.

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Foreword

More than six decades after the publication of *Greek Vases in Portugal*, by Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira (Coimbra 1962, reprinted 2010), the exhibition ‘Greek Vases in Portugal - Beyond the Columns of Hercules’, curated in 2007 by this distinguished classicist from the University of Coimbra, and the recent edition of the catalogue ‘Myths, Gods and Heroes. Greek Vases in Portugal / Mitos, Deuses e Heróis. Vasos gregos em Portugal’ Vols. I, II (2022) and III (2023), in her honour, we thought we should revisit some vases in public and private collections, particularly those with figurative motifs.

To explore new avenues of research, we propose in this book two complementary approaches: a philological view, *scripta*, and an iconographic view, *eikon*, the latter comprising two parts, one dealing with the figurative vases already included in the catalogue ‘Myths, Gods and Heroes. Greek Vases in Portugal / Mitos, Deuses e Heróis. Vasos gregos em Portugal’, and another covering vases that are not included in this work, but which due to their historical and archaeological importance have been considered here, including those without figural motifs.

The first part, *scripta*, brings together seven collaborations in which an essentially mythological, literary and cultural perspective is explored, suggested by the motifs represented on the vases that make up this project. The first two chapters – O. Taplin, ‘Reflections of theatre in vase-paintings: an overview of their variety’, and B. Kibuuka, ‘The representations of subalternities and asymmetries: theory and practice for the intersectional analysis of Greek vase paintings in Portugal’ – are comprehensive in nature, progressing from a general reference theme - Greek theatre - to a variety of social issues proposed by vases existing in Portugal.

O. Taplin takes up a topic that has gained great interest among scholars in recent decades and to which he himself has frequently contributed: the influence of theatre and its various conventions – of tragedy, satyr plays and comedy – on the decoration of Greek vases. The focus of this analysis is, according to the author, ‘emphasising the differences that have emerged among the iconographic reflections in relation to different kinds (or ‘genres’) of theatrical competition, each with their distinct performance conventions and audience-experiences’. The examples used for an overview come mainly from Magna Graecia, where an outstanding production was established in the 5th-4th centuries BCE. The attention paid to some paradigmatic cases, which

also take into account Greek vases in Portugal, leads to the existence of an undeniable interaction between the two conventions – plastic and dramatic – which are nevertheless highly independent, conditioned by a different reading of their common source – myth – as well as the historical and social universe they share.

B. Kibuuka focuses on the ‘social, political, gender, bodily asymmetries’, as ‘one of the most fundamental peculiarities of collective ways of being and living’, a field in which the sensitivity in reading and interpreting the available testimonies is enormous. The reflection on the vases of these topics is accompanied by a broad consideration of what the author calls ‘subalternities’, of which he makes a diachronic assessment, taking into account modern speculation on this type of socio-political issue, as a way of understanding parallel experiences in the ancient Greek world. This overview clarifies not only the meaning of the iconographic convention, but also the reality that inspires it.

The following two chapters – C. Martins de Jesus, ‘Epic stories in black and red. Narrative techniques and authorial voice in four Attic black-figure vases in Portugal (ABF 02, 03, and 17)’ and M. F. Silva, ‘Heracles, the portrait of the hero in literature and plastic arts. Some testimonies’ – are specifically interested in images that reproduce famous myths associated with heroes noted for their prowess in combat.

C. Martins de Jesus studies the epic heroes and their iconographic representation, taking some Portuguese vases as examples; however, he emphasises the similarities they have with a wider ceramic heritage. On the inevitable relationship to be established with poetry – Homeric and the poems included in the epic cycle in general – the author comments: ‘Literature will no longer serve as a potential source, but rather as a parallel that may help to enlighten the mythical tradition implied in these vase depictions, as well as the pictorial details that support the identification of their painters’ authorial voice’. The perspective that Martins de Jesus adopts in his analysis is that of the user, who, in his daily life, can permanently see what the poets have accustomed him to hearing, confronting two readings of the same myth. In most cases, any subtitling is useless in the face of the clairvoyance imposed by convention. Herakles, Theseus and, of the Homeric heroes, Sarpedon and Achilles, are the inspirers of the iconographic motifs studied here.

M. F. Silva bases on various literary testimonies the evolution of the figure of Heracles between epic and

tragedy, which is paralleled by the variety of profiles shown in iconographic representations. Firstly, the predestination of the civilising hero to confront terrible monsters, putting his exceptional vigour and warrior skills to the test. As Greece evolved politically and culturally, the hero was remodelled according to a different symbolism and integrated into a new civic universe. In the end, he fights the hardest battle of all, that of overcoming his own human limitations and difficulties. This is the time of Heracles' socialisation and humanisation, which turns him into a benefactor of humankind and the city, an accomplice to different companions and a survivor of the contingencies of fate. Poetry, public space and the private domain, in harmony, have contributed, each in their own way, to defining the lines of an image that is always suggestive and innovative.

The chapters of Nuno Simões Rodrigues, 'Sphinxes, Sirens, Satyrs, Tritons, and Gorgons: Representations of hybrid beings on Greek vases in Portugal', and Carmen Morenilla, 'Animals on Greek vases from Portugal' have in common a focus on non-humans that take us from the world of myth to that of reality.

Simões Rodrigues stresses the debt that the Greco-Roman universe owed to other civilisations – Egyptian, Mesopotamian – in terms of the imagery of hybrid creatures, which spread throughout the Mediterranean carrying an enormous symbolism. In the author's words, 'these beings are primarily symbols of otherness and inversion, liminality and *ataxia*, the unknown and deregulation'. Greek literature and visual arts drank abundantly from this source. Hybridity can result from the combination of animals, or between human and animal creatures. But regardless of the choice made, there seems to be a deeper aim behind them: to constitute 'a reminder of the possibility of existence and the continuous threat of undesirable *ataxia* in the order known to humans. (...) in these representations, the nature/culture dichotomy is omnipresent'. The chapter then goes on to make a detailed analysis of the convention in the representation of the most popular hybrids in Greek iconography, also considering their presence on existing vases in Portugal.

C. Morenilla studies the visibility of animals in everyday life, their presence being a constant factor throughout human history. Their influence is inescapable in everything that concerns humans, in health and illness, utility and pleasure, practices and emotions. This reality is projected from a very early age in its plastic representation in all forms and, in Greek ceramics, from its most archaic patterns. The use of animals progresses in scope, appearing in religious contexts – in sacrifices or in the materialisation of the divine –, socio-political contexts – when it comes to, for example, the exoticism

of imported species of different ecosystems –, military or sporting contexts – where the horse is prominent – or in funeral ceremonies and cults. It can therefore be concluded that the iconographic representation of animals is not just a matter of decoration. In fact, it conceals a great diversity of meanings capable of expressing the identity of a society, beyond the overall experience of the human being.

D. Leão's, 'Men and Women at the Symposium: Insights from Greek Vases in Portugal', focuses his reflection on the social reality of the banquet, where multiple objectives and different hierarchies converge: that of the aristocrats over the citizens of humbler origin and lesser means, and the predominance of male interests over the subordinate and socially frowned upon role of entertainers assumed by the woman. Although this is the convention that iconography also reflects, there is some diversity committed to the universe of different users, which can allow for some balance of status between the two genres involved in the scene, in a tradition that goes back as far as Plutarch. On the other hand, the existence of a dominant pattern does not imply that it was universally applicable across all regions influenced by ancient Greek culture. The analysis of four existing vases in Portugal (although not necessarily found in this region) depicting symposiac scenes are analyzed against this background.

Like the first part, the second part includes, *eikon*, as mentioned above, the iconographic study of some vases made possible thanks to the contributions of various specialists. In the first part we had ten studies dealing with figurative vases with a wide variety of themes.

The first study, conceived by Marcel Danner discusses an alabastron and a Corinthian aryballos in Portuguese collections decorated with sphinxes, which, along with the representation of other fantastic and hybrid animals particularly represented in the Orientalising period, including on the same vases, go back to Near Eastern imagery. Following recent research, the author suggests that there seems to be a correlation between decoration and use: the orientalist motifs illustrated would be present on vases known for carrying perfumed oils and creams, aromatic substances, and beauty products also of oriental origin and inspiration.

This is followed by a second one attributed to Rui Morais, Matthias Steinhart, Giada Giudice and Elvia Giudice, that deals with the interesting phenomenon of the sharing of artistic influences between motifs present in sculptural reliefs, in this case the internal frieze of the Parthenon, and minor art, represented here by Attic vases with red figures, in particular column kraters, attributed to different artists and illustrating epebes on horseback, identified as the Dioscoros. According to

the authors, the epiphanic character of these heroes and the idea of virtue associated with them may explain their representation as paradigmatic models of the youth of the 5th century BC and not exactly their multiplication on the frieze.

The study presented by Elvia Giudice on the attic relief *lekythos* brings us some novelties about the relationship between figurative ceramics and votive reliefs. According to her the scene represents 'a very rare wedding scene', only compared to two very similar examples, in the State Museum. in Moscow, and in the Antikensammlung, in Berlin. From the semantic point of view the representation of the *thalamus*, already present in black figure pottery production, becomes the focal point of the representation, here – as in the Berlin parallel – emphasised with the nudity of the bride, the goddess Aphrodite herself...

Alan Shapiro's contribution centres on an exceptional Apulian volute krater scrolls attributed to the Underworld Painter and which illustrates one of Hercules' most famous fights, the confrontation with the Bull of Crete. As the author says, this copy 'adds a fifth example to the corpus of depictions of this Labour in South Italian vase-painting and by far the most detailed and interesting'. In this study, the reader can learn about the affinities and differences between this magnificent vase and the other examples mentioned and see that it illustrates one of the most complete and original representations of this hero's saga, particularly in the context of Apulian productions.

Frank Hildebrandt's study, entitled Greek vase productions and the changing iconography. A brief overview focusing on 'Greek vases from Portuguese museums and collections', goes through practically the entire catalogue, giving us a summary of the different productions. Within the complexity and problems analysed about these productions, the author gives a simplified overview of the evolution of the motifs represented, the preferences of the production centres and the changes and peculiarities adopted, focusing, whenever possible, on the vases listed in the catalogue. In this study, the reader will find a summary of all the productions covered.

This is followed by one attributed to Matthias Steinhart, who proposes that we look at animals on Greek vases in Portugal as a great journey through the art and cultural history of ancient Greece, from Geometric Art to the end of vase painting at the end of the 4th century BC. As the author emphasises, the representation of animals is a theme worthy of its own, and it is not necessary for them to be associated with a myth or scenes from everyday life. Demonstrating the correlation between the two sections of this book, the author has used

different ancient literary genres to better understand images depicting animals, demonstrating the unequivocal and intrinsic relationship between their representation and human and divine themes.

Florian Leitmeir's study focuses on how the importance of music in ancient Mediterranean culture is reflected in many images of musicians on ancient vases. These pictures provide an important insight in technical aspects of the soundtools themselves and the connection with deities like Apollo and Dionysos.

The David Vendrell Cabanillas' study deals with a little explored issue in the field of Greek vase iconography, the representation of the theme of baths between the end of the 6th century BC and the end of the 4th century BC. It takes as its point of reference two vases from our catalogue, an Attic red-figure kylix attributed to the Villa Giulia Painter and an Apulian red-figure oinochoe (form 1) attributed by A. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou to the workshop of the Baltimore Painter, found with two other oinochoai in a tomb at Canosa.

The last study in this first part by Daniela Ferreira looks at vases found in archaeological contexts in present-day Portugal. The subject of this study are red-figure bell kraters dating from the first half of the 4th century BC, belonging to a restricted group of painters and with decorative themes preferably associated with the Dionysian *thiasos*. As the author points out, these are products of lesser artistic quality, but ingenious in their ability to withstand adversity, discussing, among other things, their reinterpretation in the uses and customs of local populations, encompassing different phenomena of cultural transfer.

Dominik Lengyel and Catherine Toulouse examine the difficulties that arise when sculptural paintings, such as those on vases, are reproduced through photographs or drawings, as if this were possible without considerable geometric distortion. After an introduction to the basics and limitations of transforming curved surfaces into two-dimensional unfoldings, the authors use case studies to analyse the effects of the usual auxiliary techniques on the interpretation of the motifs. As a result, it is essential to actively counter the danger of misinterpretation through explanation or to reproduce painted vases as sculptural replicas rather than as misleading drawings or photographs.

The second section of *Eikos* comprise vases that are not included in the recently published catalogue *Myths, Gods and Heroes. Greek Vases in Portugal* - but which due to their historical and archaeological importance have been considered here.

It begins with another study by Matthias Steinhart, who introduces us to three vases, an Attic Black-glazed

cup and two Corinthian kotylai, which were part of the collection of the famous British archaeologist Humfry Gilbert Garth Payne. This is a study imbued with intense symbolic significance, as these vases will be donated - in the author's words - as a 'tribute to the potential of actual vase research in Portugal'. One of the kotyle, found on the island of Paros, is of added importance as it was considered in Humfry Payne's seminal work *Necrocorinthia*, and was regarded there as a typical example for the shape. It is studies of this nature that make it possible to differentiate this work, not only for its scientific character, but above all for its human side, giving meaning to the Greek expression *καλοκάγαθος* (*kalokágathos*).

This is followed by another study, attributed to Jesús Salas Álvarez and Rui Morais, which uses an Attic lekythos with floral motifs as its theme. This characteristic example from the Beldam painter's workshops has a unique history that deserves to be highlighted. Recently acquired, it belonged to the private collection of Swedish archaeologist and researcher Jean Eric Sjöberg (1937-2008), who was curator of the *Göteborgs Arkeologiska Museum* and was awarded the silver medal in the Antiquarian category in 2006 by the *Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities* (Vitterhetsakademin). This background would be enough to justify making this specimen known, but it turns out that the presence of a label on the external foot alluding to its discovery in 1909 in the agora of Athens, gives it another dimension, allowing us to frame the history of archaeology in the city of Athens at the beginning of the 20th century, in particular the intense archaeological interventions that took place in the agora area a few decades after Greek independence, carried out by the *Athens Archaeological Society* (between 1859 and 1912) and the *German Archaeological Institute* (between 1896 and 1897).

Another Attic lekythos was part of the same collection, although unfortunately with no known provenance. The study of this vase, by David Vendrell Cabanillas, allowed it to be placed in the Group of London E 614, which can be dated to around 430-420 BC. The attribution to this group of painters is complex and required the author to carry out a detailed and comparative study with other specimens. After this analysis, it was possible to see that the lekythos offers a new decorative sub-type that has not yet been recorded.

One of the most emblematic pieces to date in Portugal corresponds to the only example of 'Chalcidic' production, a neck amphora attributed to the Group of the Phineus Cup, named after the famous Kylix in Würzburg, decorated in the interior with the saga of the King of Salmydessos alongside the scene of nymphs bathing as they are spied on by satyrs with erect phalluses ready to assault them. This study, by Mario Iozzo and Rui Morais, made it possible to return to the question of the provenance of these productions, a theme explored and problematised in an exemplary way by the first author, attributing, in all probability, an origin in *Rhegion* and its district, owing to the high proportion of finds that came from both sanctuary and funerary contexts.

This volume ends with a study presented by Louise Detrez, Rui Morais and Rosa Pesce on a small gnathia krateriskos from the Group of the Painter of Zurich 2692, a transitional artist towards the Volcani and Alexandria Groups, who would dominate the panorama of the final production of Gnathia ceramics, even after the Roman conquest of Taranto. Like others already highlighted here, this specimen is of the utmost importance in the study of collecting. It has the particularity of bearing on one side a label with the number '199', one of the specimens that once belonged to the famous collection of Louis-Gabriel Bellon, 'one of the most competent collectors of [his] day'. Of extreme interest is the drawing of the krateriskos recorded in the Bellon register (A2), illustrated here with the kind permission of the current owner, and thanks to Georges Dilly, and which shows that it comes from the shop, located place Louvois, of the multi-generation business-partners Rollin and Feuardent: '199 Petit cratère à anses nouées. La partie inférieure est godronnée. Fond noir fleurs jaune clair. H. 0.105 R[ollin] et F[euardent] fabrique de Gnathia (sic)'. The study also mentions that this group of vessels is strongly associated with the cult of Dionysus and the symposium rituals, like so many other vases considered here from a formal and decorative point of view.

The editors

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and David Wallace-Hare