

This is the first page only. On how to acquire the full article please click this link.

# Scholars, Etruscans, and Attic painted vases

Jocelyn Penny Small<sup>1</sup>

Tableware, necessary for every household, tends to be mundane and of a quality that interests only the specialist. Attic painted pottery is an exception. In modern times it has been revered as art and collected sometimes at great price. Art historians and connoisseurs appreciate its style. Classical scholars examine it for the information its depictions give about archaic and classical Athens. Because of its ability to survive, not just locally where it is made but globally where it was traded, historians and archaeologists use it for making relative chronologies, for studying relations between peoples, and even for charting the economic status of both its producers and its purchasers. Against today's reception of Attic pottery should be placed that of antiquity. Some modern uses, such as for chronologies, did not exist then. Others, however, are clearly possible. Was Attic pottery found all over the ancient Mediterranean because painted plates made for pretty dinner services? Or was it also valued as art, and, if so, always or just at certain times, or just certain pieces?

M. Vickers and D. W. Gill have undertaken a major reconsideration of the rôle of Attic vases in a stream of articles that address the question of the two disparate groups of users, ancient and modern.<sup>2</sup> According to them, Greek vases were not *objets d'art* but saleable ballast. No one living in antiquity rated highly these objects we so revere. Instead they reveled in, or rather with, vessels made of metal. In fact, metal-working provided the inspiration for the change from black- to red-figure vase painting, for silver is black. That Vickers and Gill have justifiably reopened long and seemingly settled issues is praiseworthy; that they have often not done the job well, however, has led to a proliferation of responses that successfully shores up the traditional approach without advancing our understanding of either how scholars work or how Attic painted vases functioned in antiquity.

Here I examine the use of Attic vases by two kinds of foreigners, Etruscans and scholars. My investigation begins with two related aspects repeatedly raised by Vickers and Gill: tableware made of precious metals and the color of silver. While they have alluded to Etruscan tomb-paintings as a source of information, no one has made a formal study of this evidence. The conclusions I draw from the paintings open the broader question of ancient marketing practices, which, in turn, leads back to the Etruscan use of Attic vases and finally to the scholars' use of the same vases for reconstructing Etruscan history. To keep the discussion within reasonable bounds, I have limited my focus primarily to economic factors; obviously others not only apply but need to be considered in depth.

- 
- 1 I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to K. M. Phillips, Jr. for years of forbearance and exceedingly astute comments during those years. I would like to thank the following for discussing various matters with me and reading the manuscript in its various permutations: A. A. Donohue, I. Edlund-Berry, C. Koehler, S. Leach, C. Lyons, G. Pinney, K. Raaflaub, and M. Toher. R. Sawyer generously provided statistical enlightenment. All translations are from the Loeb Classical Library.
  - 2 R. M. Cook, "The Francis-Vickers chronology," *JHS* 109 (1989) 164 lists 15 articles, 9 not then in print. Others have since appeared, with still more announced. I have cited only those that pertain to the current study; those not included focus mainly on Beazley's methods and their redating of monuments in the late Archaic through high Classical periods. For discussions of the other aspects of their arguments, see M. Robertson, *The art of vase-painting in classical Athens* (Cambridge 1992) 2-6 (on Attic vases as art) and 7-9 (on the invention of black- and red-figure) with D. W. J. Gill, "Art and vases vs. craft and pots," *Antiquity* 67 (1992) 452-55, a response as a review of Robertson. I. Morris, *Death-ritual and social structure in classical antiquity* (Cambridge 1992) 108-27 summarizes much of their arguments.