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# Signatures in Attic Vase-Painting

## Negotiating the Place of the *Banausos* in Classical Greek Society and on the Vase

**Abstract** In this chapter on ancient Greek vase-painting, I undertake a comparative study of the place of the artist in two different spaces: his position in Greek society and the Greek cultural imagination, and 'his' (or rather his signature's) position on the material object of his craft, namely the vase. While the social standing of the potter-painters of Classical Athens seems to have been rather low, some elements help us to carve out a more complex picture. The evidence for wealthy potters, the high esteem given to the products of highly sophisticated, 'artistic' craft, and the very many signatures found on vases from early on all compel us to rethink simplistic ideas about the low esteem of the *baunausos* working with one's own hands. Most puzzling are self-representations of artisans that show off – rather than conceal – the condescending view of the artisan's bodily ugliness. Turning to the signatures' place on the painted vases, I first discuss signatures in the context of other types of inscriptions that we know from Attic vases, namely the frequent name-tags and *kalos*-inscriptions, and the rare cases of inscribed direct speech. Although the overall aesthetics of signatures does not differ dramatically from that of other types of inscriptions, so as to be recognizable as such only upon reading, we may still detect a special affinity of signatures to those parts of a drinking-vessel that define the object's functionality, and that may be concretely touched by the drinker/viewer/reader: the handles and the foot of a vase. The 'embodied terminology' for naming the parts of a Greek vase, which is used in scholarly literature and which is borrowed from ancient Greek texts themselves, reveals the degree to which the body-analogy of the crafted vase was taken seriously. Signatures of the type 'so-and-so made me' therefore define, metaphorically speaking, the vase as the (beautiful and esteemed!) body of the artist, who transfers his own beauty to the product of his craft.

**Keywords** Greek Vase-Painting; Signatures; Material Writing; Image and Text; Embodiment

## The Place of the Artist in Greek Society: Between Disrespect for Craftspeople and Esteem for Their Products

In his *Geschichte der Kunst*, Winckelmann writes that, among the Greeks, artists would have been highly esteemed members of their society.[1] But stated in Winckelmann's exalted terms, this is a highly questionable claim; the opposite may seem more convincing. Yet the issue is complex because, given the material and literary legacy of classical antiquity, we face a contradictory situation. On the one hand, many painters, sculptors, or gem engravers of the past enjoyed great fame and were discussed in Greek and Latin literature, such as Pliny's *naturalis historia.*[2]

1 Winckelmann 2002, 133–137 ("Von der Achtung der Künstler").

2 See DNO (an enlarged and updated version of both Overbeck 1868 [collection of written sources]); and Löwy 1885 (collection of sculptors' signatures, on which see Dietrich/Fouquet/Reinhardt 2020, 8–13 [Dietrich]). On Pliny the Elder's 'art-historical' excursus, see e. g. Isager 1991. The taxonomy of what the *naturalis historia* has to say about artworks

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For example, in his mostly brief descriptions of works of art in Greek cities and sanctuaries, the Imperial Age author Pausanias mentions the name of the artist wherever he can.[3] The great number of materially preserved Greek artist signatures constitute, of course, another witness to the importance of the artist.[4] Yet, on the other hand, we also have overwhelming proof that artists failed to enjoy any special level of social recognition, just like any kind of physical labour was negatively connoted.[5] In Xenophon's Socratic dialogue *oikonomikos* ("on the household", composed ca. 380 BC), we read what seemed to be a generally accepted, pejorative characterisation:

> καὶ γὰρ αἵ γε βαναυσικαὶ καλούμεναι καὶ ἐπίρρητοί εἰσι καὶ εἰκότως μέντοι πάνυ ἀδοξοῦνται πρὸς τῶν πόλεων. καταλυμαίνονται γὰρ τὰ σώματα τῶν τε ἐργαζομένων καὶ τῶν ἐπιμελομένων ἀναγκάζουσαι καθῆσθαι καὶ σκιατραφεῖσθαι, ἔνιαι δὲ καὶ πρὸς πῦρ ἡμερεύειν. τῶν δὲ σωμάτων θηλυνομένων καὶ αἱ ψυχαὶ πολὺ ἀρρωστότεραι γίγνονται.

[…] the so-called banausic occupations are scorned and, naturally enough, held in low regard in our states. For they spoil the bodies of the workmen and the foremen, forcing them to sit still and stay indoors, and in some cases to spend the whole day by the fire. As their bodies become womanish their souls lose strength too (Xen. oik. 4.2–3).[6]

is nevertheless built rather around materials than around artists: see Anguissola/Grüner 2020. For names of gem engravers in ancient literature, see Jörn Lang's chapter in this volume (note 6).

3 On Pausanias' way of describing artworks, see e. g. Kreilinger 1997, 475–477; Pretzler 2007, 105–117.

4 See already Winckelmann 2002, 134–135. On ancient Greek artists' signatures, see the recent general overview Hurwit 2015 (shorter: Hurwit 2017).

5 A majority of scholars agree on the low social status of craftsmen in Ancient Greece. For a concise outline of this view, see Austin/Vidal-Naquet 1972; for further bibliography, see e. g. Neer 2002, 89, note 5, or Seaman 2017b, 12, note 1. Within the renewed interest in the figure of the artist in the field of Greek art (see Seaman 2017a on changing attitudes since the 18th century), some recent publications advocate a partial revision of views: see e. g. Seaman 2017b; Hurwit 2015. That signatures would argue against a marginal status of artists is a *Leitmotiv* in this monograph. Early opposition to the idea of the Greeks' low esteem for artists came from the side of an epigraphist: Guarducci 1958; Guarducci 1962 (criticizing Schweitzer 1925; and Bianchi Bandinelli 1957). On signatures witnessing artists' (self-)esteem, see also Philipp 1968, 77; Himmelmann 1979, 127–128. More skeptical is Osborne 2010. For an illuminating outline of the historiography of (and new ways to proceed in) this debate, which distinguishes a 'modernist' and a 'primitivist' conception of the artist, respectively drawing back to a Winckelmann-inspired neoclassical model and a Jacob Burckhardt inspired idea of the artist as craftsman/*banausos*, see Tanner 2006, 241–204 (or Tanner 1999). Another good general outline of this controversy is Himmelmann 1979, 127–131.

6 Text and translation for Xenophon's *oeconomicus* are taken from Marchant/Todd 1923. This dismissal of handcraft is the beginning of Socrates' answer to his interlocutor

Similar dismissive attitudes towards handcraft are found in Graeco-Roman literature throughout antiquity,[7] alongside and in spite of the esteem in which the products of artful craft were held. This seemingly contradictory attitude towards the figure of the artist and the product of his craft[8] comes across very tellingly in a text of the second century AD author Lucian, in which the narrator recounts the fictive story of a dream that he had in his youth. Two women, one of whom personified the art of sculpture, the other learning (*paideia*), each try to convince him to follow their path. Learning, who would eventually win the contest, seeks to persuade him in the following way:

> εἰ δὲ καὶ Φειδίας ἢ Πολύκλειτος γένοιο καὶ πολλὰ θαυμαστὰ ἐξεργάσαιο. τὴν μὲν τέχνην ἅπαντες ἐπαινέσονται, οὐκ ἔστι δὲ ὅστις τῶν ἰδόντων, εἰ νοῦν ἔχοι, εὔξαιτ᾽ ἂν σοὶ ὅμοιος γενέσθαι: οἷος γὰρ ἂν ᾖς, βάναυσος καὶ χειρῶναξ καὶ ἀποχειροβίωτος νομισθήσῃ.
>
> Even if you should become a Phidias or a Polycleitos and should create many marvellous works, everyone would praise your craftsmanship, to be sure, but none of those who saw you, if he were sensible, would pray to be like you; for no matter what you might be, you would be considered a mechanic, a man who has naught but his hands, a man who lives by his hands (Lucian. somnium. 9).[9]

asking him to advise him which branches of knowledge would be suitable for him to cultivate. On the passage, see Neer 2002, 89–91; Tanner 2006, 149–150; Hurwit 2015, 7–10.

7 Another most telling statement on the worthlessness of the artist as opposed to the praise of his works is a well-known passage from Plutarch's *Life of Perikles,* cited e. g. in Frontisi-Ducroux 1975, 24–25, which illustrates the remarkable longevity of this attitude towards artisans in Graeco-Roman Antiquity: "No generous youth, from seeing the Zeus at Pisa or the Hera at Argos, longs to be Pheidias or Polycleitus; nor to be Anacreon or Philetas or Archilochus out of pleasure in their poems. For it does not of necessity follow that, if the work delights you with its grace, the one who wrought it is worthy of your esteem." (Plut. vitae parallelae. 2.1–2: καὶ οὐδεὶς εὐφυὴς νέος ἢ τὸν ἐν Πίσῃ θεασάμενος Δία γενέσθαι Φειδίας ἐπεθύμησεν ἢ τὴν Ἥραν τὴν ἐν Ἄργει Πολύκλειτος, οὐδ᾽ Ἀνακρέων ἢ Φιλητᾶς ἢ Ἀρχίλοχος ἡσθεὶς αὐτῶν τοῖς ποιήμασιν. οὐ γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον, εἰ τέρπει τὸ ἔργον ὡς χάριεν, ἄξιον σπουδῆς εἶναι τὸν εἰργασμένον.) Text and translation for Plutarch's Lives are taken from Perrin 1916. Interestingly, Plutarch includes poets in his dismissal of the figure of the artist. On the passage see recently Hurwit 2015, 7–10; Seaman 2017b, 14. It is cited already by Jacob Burckhardt (Burckhardt 1918, 204 [from his talk "Die Griechen und ihre Künstler", 30.10.1883]), later entering from there the academic discourse: Schweitzer 1925, 55; Bianchi Bandinelli 1957, 5; Guarducci 1958, 140 (with a different reading).

8 See already Burford 1972, 12.

9 Text and translation for Lucian's *Somnium sive Vita Luciani* are taken from Harmon 1921. On the passage see Schweitzer 1925, 30, note 3; Burford 1972, 12; Seaman 2017b, 12–14; Stewart 2019, 79–81.

For Lucian, the glory of an artist's works do not shine upon himself as a person. On the contrary, endowing his sculptural bodies with the best qualities would mean crippling his own body and soul, as Learning points out at the end of her speech:

> […] χιτώνιόν τι πιναρὸν ἐνδύσῃ καὶ σχῆμα δουλοπρεπὲς ἀναλήψῃ καὶ μοχλία καὶ γλυφεῖα καὶ κοπέας καὶ κολαπτῆρας ἐν ταῖν χεροῖν ἕξεις κάτω νενευκὼς εἰς τὸ ἔργον, χαμαιπετὴς καὶ χαμαίζηλος καὶ πάντα τρόπον ταπεινός, ἀνακύπτων δὲ οὐδέποτε οὐδὲ ἀνδρῶδες οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερον οὐδὲν ἐπινοῶν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἔργα ὅπως εὔρυθμα καὶ εὐσχήμονα ἔσται σοι προνοῶν, ὅπως δὲ αὐτὸς εὔρυθμός τε καὶ κόσμιος ἔσῃ, ἥκιστα πεφροντικώς, ἀλλ᾽ ἀτιμότερον ποιῶν σεαυτὸν λίθων.
>
> […] then you will put on a filthy tunic, assume a servile appearance, and hold bars and gravers and sledges and chisels in your hands, with your back bent over your work; you will be a groundling, with groundling ambitions, altogether humble; you will never lift your head, or conceive a single manly or liberal thought, and although you will plan to make your works well-balanced and well-shaped, you will not show any concern to make yourself well-balanced and sightly; on the contrary, you will make yourself a thing of less value than a block of stone. (Lukian. somnium. 13)

This is, of course, a text full of irony and written centuries after the heyday of Attic vase painting, which I will be dealing with in this chapter. Yet, in its combination of recognising highly esteemed works of art and showing disrespect to those who make them, this text captures, in a nutshell, a phenomenon that is found from the very beginning of artistic craftmanship among the Greeks. Already from the earliest sources, the figure of the artist appears in our archaeological record in two seemingly contradictory guises. On the one hand, the artist may be linked, through his written name, to the works of his craft. Indeed, artist signatures count among the earliest uses of Greek alphabetic writing that have come down to us,[10] inviting us to speculate about their possibly high level of literacy, their pride and self-esteem, and perhaps even their high social status.[11] Possibly, voices like Lucian's who show esteem for sophisticated artefacts but disrespect for artists point to an

10 See Hurwit 2015, 71. A crater fragment around 720–700 BC from Pithekoussai bears the earliest known signature (Wachter 2001, 171, cat. no. EUC 1). On signatures in vase painting, see Guarducci 1974, 471–485 (an epigraphist's account); Lissarrague 1994 (on the relation to the image); Cohen 1991 (on Attic incised potter signatures); Hurwit 2015, 71–96 (general overview); Bolmarcich/Muskett 2017 (on the phenomenon from an economic vantage-point with regard to the Etruscan market, in my view unconvincingly). The Basel database *Attic Vase Inscriptions* (AVI), initially based on the fundamental publication of Immerwahr 1990, provides a treasure of information.

11 Cf. above note 1. See, however, Tanner 2006, 153–155, against a straightforward linking of signatures and social status (similar skepticism: Osborne 2010, 236–237). Siebert 1978 points out that the practice of signing is in no way limited to sculpture and vase-painting:

**Fig. 1:** Aristonothos, 'Aristonothos crater', depicted on the crater is the blinding of Polyphemus, and it is signed by Aristonothos in the upper right field, ca. 650 BC, Rome, Musei Capitolini (Castellani collection), 172.

elite discourse that overshadows other attitudes of those subalterns, whose voices have left little traces?[12] Is the artisan the "héros secret de l'histoire grecque",[13] as the French historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet famously put it? Not all early signed vases are outstanding in quality, but some are, such as a famous wine-mixing vessel from the mid-seventh century BC, which features one of the early Greek narrative images (the blinding of Polyphemus) and is known today under the name of the signing artist: the 'Aristonothos crater' (Fig. 1).[14]

it concerns rather the broader category of crafted things than the category of (what we take to be) artworks (see already Winckelmann 2002, 136–137).

12 See Philipp 1968, 100; Lauter 1974, 5–7. Contra: Himmelmann 1979, 129–131.

13 See Vidal-Naquet 1981, 31 (in "Une civilization de la parole politique"), further developed in Vidal-Naquet 1981, 289–316 ("Étude d'une ambiguïté: les artisans dans la cité platonicienne"), taking as a starting point the contrast between the low social status and the high metaphorical status assigned to artisans in the philosophy of Plato. Other works on the figure of the artisan and Greek *techne* in the French tradition of historical anthropology include Detienne/Vernant 1974; Frontisi-Ducroux 1975; Vernant/Vidal-Naquet 1988.

14 Rome, Musei Capitolini (Castellani collection) 172, ca. 650 BC. On the signature (αριστονοθος εποι(ε)σεν: "Aristonothos made [it]"), see Hurwit 2015, 71–73. According to the *communis opinio*, a signature using *epoiesen* ("made [it]") would refer primarily to the potter's work, whereas a signature using *egraphsen* ("painted [it]") would refer specifically to the painter's work (see also below note 60). However, the potter and the painter may have been the same person in many cases, and the making of a vessel (*epoiesen*) may well include its painting. Indeed, the large corpus of signed Attic vases suggests that potting and painting were closely related crafts. Accordingly, we may well refer to these craftspeople as potter-painters.

We can take this signed masterpiece of the potter-painter's craft as an attestation of early artists' pride.

Yet, from the same early period, we also know about self-representations of artisans, such as the bronze statuette of an armourer working on a helmet, sitting on the ground in a bent posture and with an oversized phallus (covered by his left arm in the photo; Fig. 2).[15]

This was probably a votive gift placed in a sanctuary by the artisan himself, just like the numerous clay *pinakes* found at the sanctuary of Penteskouphia in the vicinity of the Corinthian potters' quarter. On many of them, the potters depict themselves at work, overtly showing their bodies in inelegant or even indecent postures with oversized genitals (Fig. 3).[16]

These artistic self-portraits seem to confirm the elite discourse on the embodied worthlessness of the artist working with his hands, which was conveyed by Lucian's personification of Learning. However, these images of bodies provided by the artists themselves were hardly meant to be insulting. Rather, it seems that these craftsmen had accepted the idea of the artist who makes beautiful things and who might attach his name to these artefacts through a signature but who would thereby pay for that beauty given to the crafted object by the ugliness of his own body. Hephaistos, the blacksmith of the gods, is even a divine model for this idea of the artist.[17] He is able to produce wondrous artefacts, but, in contrast to all other

15 New York, Metropolitan Museum 1942.11.42, ca. 700 BC; for bibliography, see https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/254480 (accessed 22/09/2022). On this and other comparable self-representations of artisans, see Himmelmann 2001, 25–26, fig. 13; Himmelmann 1994, 6–10 and 23–48; (with the review Giuliani 1998 and the author's answer Himmelmann 2001, 64–66, note 99).

16 Berlin, Antikensammlung F 871, 625–600 BC; see https://smb.museum-digital.de/object/9660 (accessed 22/09/2022). On the *pinakes* of Penteskouphia see the recent monographs Palmieri 2016 and Hasaki 2021. On workshop images in vase-painting, see most recently Hölscher 2022 (with a useful overview of past scholarship on pp. 179–182). The fullest catalogue is given in Chatzidimitriou 2005. Haug 2011 revealed a certain level of differentiation in the depiction of banausic bodies between simple laborers and workshop owners. See also Filser 2017, 105–126. A different approach, more akin to image- (and text-)studies than to socio-historical analysis, is adopted in Neer 2002, 77–85; Squire 2013, 167–169; Hedreen 2016a, 223–232.

17 On Hephaistos, who combines physical infirmity with artistic skill, as a model for the figure of the artist, see the in-depth analysis by Hedreen 2016a, 135–163. Extending the argument to the figure of the poet, too, this monograph shows that the blacksmith-god is far from being the only such model. Two other figures bear particularly clear parallels: (1) Odysseus (Hedreen 2016a, 1–21) combines *metis* ('technical, wily intelligence') in his crafting (cf. the raft [Hom. Od. 5.228–261] or the famous wedding bed [Hom. Od. 23.173–204]) with—at least temporary—bodily ugliness. One may add to this that the identity of Odysseus as a craftsman is inherent in the *pilos* (a conical hat otherwise worn by *banausoi*) which is part of his usual iconography. (2) For the Iambic poet Hipponax (Hedreen 2016a, 101–134), bodily ugliness is also a key feature in his stylized poetic persona. Homer's

**Fig. 2:** Bronze statuette of an armourer with oversized genitals (probably a self-representation as a votive), ca. 700 BC (Late-geometric), New York, Metropolitan Museum, Accession Number 42.11.42.

**Fig. 3:** Corinthian pinax showing workers at a clay pit, which was found together with many other pinakes offered by potters at the sanctuary of Penteskouphia, Clay, 625–600 BC, Berlin, Antikensammlung, F 871.

gods, his own body is consistently described as ugly and lame, and so, within the society of gods, he also faces the same problem as human artists. Indeed, the gods need him, but they do not bestow him due respect.

On top of this, it can be mentioned that, in some instances, artisans could become reasonably wealthy.[18] One such time and place must have been late Archaic Athens, in the high period of the Attic ceramic industry, when Attic products were exported throughout the Mediterranean. Among late-archaic votives on the Athenian Acropolis, we find a couple of lavish marble monuments dedicated by potters,[19] such as a relief showing the portrait of the dedicant himself: a potter (Fig. 4).[20]

Odyssee is cited from Murray 1919. Athena, the other important representation of the artist in the divine sphere, is not discussed in Hedreen 2016a. In contrast with the artful but ugly Hephaistos, she is a goddess of perfect beauty. Cf. the myth of her invention and subsequent throwing away of the flute (*aulos*) after she found out that playing the *auloi* with inflated cheeks harms the beauty of her face (see LIMC VI, 367, with cat. no. 9–17). Apparently, this *female* divine artisan refuses the trade of giving up some of her bodily beauty in return for her inventive craft. On other heroic/divine figures of craftspeople, see e. g. Vernant 1988, 263–273 ("Prométhée et la fonction technique"); Frontisi-Ducroux 1975 and Morris 1992 (on Daidalos).

18 Seaman 2017b, 16–18, gathers numerous literary and epigraphic attestations for the material wealth of Greek artists.

19 The list given in Philipp 1968, 113–114, of probable votives by potters or other *banausoi* on the Athenian Acropolis is: Raubitschek 1949, cat. nos. 31, 44, 70, 150, 178, 196, 197 and 225.

20 Acropolis Museum 1332, ca. 510 BC. See Comella 2002, 191, cat. no. Atene 15; Dietrich 2018a, 217–218 (with further bibliography).


**Fig. 4:** Votive relief dedicated by a potter to Athena on the Athenian Acropolis portraying the dedicant himself, 510 BC, Athens, Acropolis Museum, 1332.

Holding two cups in his hand instead of just one, the man portrayed in this relief identifies himself not as a user of cups but as their producer. This is likely to please Athena, the goddess of handcraft. From the same period, there is also a small group of Attic vases on which we see an impossible scenario, namely potters who mingle with the elite in their leisure time.[21] On a famous crater around 510–500 BC painted by Euphronios, which portrays a luxurious symposium, a beautiful youth with long hair—clearly a *kalos kai agathos* ("a beautiful and worthy man") and not a *banausos*—is given the name of a contemporary painter (Smikros) from the Athenian potters' quarter.[22] Have the economically successful potter-painters of late-archaic Athens really ascended to the rank of their customers? As Richard Neer points out,

21 The list of eight vases with figures bearing the inscriptions of the names of other potters/painters is given in Neer 2002, 133. Among the vast and controversial literature on this issue, the best and most engaging discussion is still Neer 2002, 87–134 (although I am not convinced of the "inevitable" [p. 111] "moment of exclusion" [of the portrayed potters amidst the Athenian leisure class]). See also Giuliani 1991, 14–17 (arguing that potter-portraits gained more social kudos in late-archaic Athens); Filser 2017, 162–168 (arguing against the possibility that these names indeed belong to potters); Dietrich 2018b, 484–487 (interpreting potter/painter-name tags as provocatively playful 'wrong' naming of figures); Hedreen 2016a, 233–279 (seeking instances of creative fictionality in such and other name-tags). For more bibliography, see Dietrich 2020, 50, note 27.

22 Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen 9400, ca. 510–500 BC; ARV 1619.3bis, 1705, 1699; Para. 322; BAPD 275007; AVI 5363. See Neer 2002, 111–117; Dietrich 2017, 484–487.

we cannot rule out the possibility that potters and aristocrats feasted together. But even if this actually did occasionally happen, still "such mingling was *ideologically* impossible".[23]

The main points that have emerged in the first part of this paper are the following. (1) Esteem for artfully crafted objects in Greek culture went hand in hand with disrespect for their makers. (2) Nevertheless, there are numerous attestations of artist signatures on painted pottery from very early on. (3) The low social status of *banausoi* did not necessarily prevent their economic success, as was made visible through, among other things, lavish dedications in the sanctuary. (4) Ideas on the ugly bodies of artisans were not confined to a mere élite discourse; potters and other artisans sometimes portray themselves with ugly bodies and indecent postures. (5) Through the example of Hephaistos, corporeal ugliness associated with wondrous technical skills even has a divine prototype.

All these points raise the question of which pre-modern ideas of personhood underpin and hold together these seemingly contradictory aspects of the figure of the artist. I do not wish to deliver any definite answers to that question in this paper. However, I would like to show in the following analysis of a few signed Attic vases the fundamental importance of the material bond of the artist's name to the product of his craft. By being inscribed literally and metaphorically into the object, the identity of the artist is extended to the beautiful vase, thereby becoming a kind of balancing counterpart of his own bodily ugliness. These vases play an essential role in the identity of their wealthy users, too: as instruments of the symposium, they enable them to better embody the refined lifestyle of the Athenian leisure class. From the wealthy individual's point of view, the vase's bond with the inscribed artist's name fulfils the function of highlighting the artful craft that ennobles their fine drinking vessels.

## The Place of the Artist's Name on the Vase

On the famous Athenian black-figure amphora by Exekias in the Vatican,[24] which portrays two warriors dressed in ornate armour confronting each other in a board game,[25] we see several inscriptions running in different directions through the

23 Neer 2002, 91.

24 Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco 16757 (344), ca. 540 BC; ABV 145.13, 672.3, 686; Para. 60; BAPD 310395; AVI 7234. The latest detailed discussions are Sannibale 2018 (with good, detailed photographs) and Mackay 2010, 327–351. Here and for the following Attic vases, extensive bibliographies are to be found in the *Beazley Archive Pottery Database* (BAPD). For a short list of the most significant discussions, see Mackay 2010, 331, note 30.

25 Earlier attempts at interpretation based on a (lost) epic narrative or in relation to Athenian contemporary politics (for a short overview: Moignard 2015, 20–21) have rightly been dismissed. See Mackay 2010, 334–339.

empty field between the figures (Figs. 5 a–b).[26] This amphora, which exemplifies all common types of Attic vase inscription, will serve as our chief example for exploring the specific place of the artist's signature on Athenian luxury ceramics.

As a first remark in dealing with both painted and inscribed vases, it can be noted that the drawing and the writing not only share the same field on the vase but would also be called by the same name in ancient Greek, namely via the verb *graphein* which refers to both drawing and writing.[27] Of course, it would have been as easy for the Greeks as it is for us to distinguish between the two. Yet, while we tend to emphasize the fundamental difference that separates drawing and writing, the Greeks would rather have conceptualized them as two alternative modes of graphic design of a surface. With this general remark in mind, we can turn now to a couple of aspects which nevertheless distinguish these two modes of the same act.

While the picture would basically function without the inscriptions, the inscriptions do not have such an autarchy. If there is any need for proof of this, one may point to a simple fact: the participants of a drinking party assembled around such a wine amphora would not be able to read any of its inscriptions. Indeed, the single letters of the inscriptions are small and can only be read on close inspection. But the same does not hold true for the figures. Although the symposiasts would not be able to make out every single detail of the densely decorated cloaks of the two figures, they would still recognise them as warriors playing a board game. An initial glance may well have triggered the viewers' curiosity, compelling them to want to know more about it and, in particular, to read the inscriptions. But this is not strictly necessary in order to make basic sense of the picture and to experience visual pleasure. We may say that the figure drawing comes first, whereas the inscriptions come second. This is true in multiple ways: insofar as the figures are visually more prominent and semantically more important, insofar as they would be seen first by the viewers, and also insofar as they come first within the production process. It is only after painting the figures that the painter would add the inscriptions.

In turning to the individual inscriptions, we are taking a second, closer look at the vase that only those ancient viewers would have experienced who actively followed the vase's invitation to do so. Over the heads of the two warriors, we read two names in the genitive case: Αχιλ<λ>εος (*Achilleos*) and Αιαντος (*Aiantos*), understood as "figure of Achilles" and "figure of Aias". Reading these names aloud does something to the picture: we pass from generic warriors in heroic guise to individual heroes, namely the two most powerful Greeks of the Trojan War. In front of the mouth of each of the heroes, we read τεσ<σ>αρα (*tessara*), "four", and τρια (*tria*), "three". Obviously, this is the score that each of them just threw with the dice.

26 On the inscriptions, see AVI 7234 (with bibliography); Sannibale 2018, 116–118; Mackay 2010, 327–328 and 333; Kilmer 1993, 177–181. The following analysis of the inscriptions of this vase further develops some thoughts I had in Dietrich 2017.

27 See Lissarrague 1992.


5a

5b

**Figs. 5a–b:** Exekias, Attic black-figure amphora depicting Achilles and Ajax playing a board game with several inscriptions in the image field, 540 BC, Rome, Vatican City Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, 16757.

The fortune of the dice seems to confirm what everybody knows: both heroes are strong, but Achilles indisputably holds the first place.[28] Although an existing hierarchy is only being reinforced, these inscriptions nevertheless do something to the picture; they add sound and action to what we see since we do more than simply *see* the heroes talk. We would actually even *hear* them talk if someone in the drinking party would make an effort to read the tiny inscriptions—because, as a general rule in antiquity, inscriptions and texts would have been read out aloud.[29] The same holds true for the inscribed names: these would have been read out aloud, turning the mere information on names into an acclamation.[30]

Behind the back of Ajax, we see another inscription oriented vertically reading Ονεṭοριδες ḳαλος (*Onetorides kalos*), meaning "Onetorides is beautiful!". This inscription does not refer to any specific figure in the picture or to a figure known from Trojan mythology.[31] From the very many similar *kalos*-inscriptions that we know from Attic vase painting,[32] we have to assume that Onetorides was a young man from the Athenian 'jeunesse dorée' who was particularly renowned for his beauty at the time when this vase was painted.[33] Although we do not know anything

28 Many graphic details reinforce the hierarchy between these two heroes appearing in strict symmetry. See Sannibale 2018, 119–121; Mackay 2010, 332–333 and 337–339.

29 On reading inscriptions aloud in general, see Svenbro 1988, esp. 53–73 and 178–193. For a few corrections to the communis opinio on reading aloud in antiquity, see Gavrilov 1997.

30 On reading out aloud inscriptions on vases, see Lissarrague 1987, 129; Slater 1999, esp. 154–157. On the 'soundscape' of inscribed Attic vases, see Yatromanolakis 2016.

31 Jan-Matthias Müller terms such inscriptions (with reference to the narratology of Gérard Genette) as "extra-diegetic", differentiating them from "diegetic" inscriptions that refer in a straightforward way to the picture and its narrative content, such as the aforementioned name inscriptions. The signature by Exekias (see below) would be another example of an extra-diegetic inscription. See Müller 2016, 102–104 and 113–115.

32 On *kalos*-inscriptions in Attic vase-painting in general, see: Wernicke 1890 (with earlier interpretative attempts commented on pp. 1–3); Klein 1898; Robinson/Fluck 1937; Shapiro 1983 and 2004; Lissarrague 1999; Slater 1999; Müller 2016; Mannack 2014 and 2016; Pevnick 2021, 651–656.

33 This is correct, however, only in broad terms. Detailed analysis has shown that the same beautiful young Athenian's name is sometimes praised on vases spreading over several decades, i. e. for a much longer period of time than the named individual actually enjoyed the age of youthful desirability (see most recently Pevnick 2021, 651–652; Mannack 2022, 5). Some particularly popular *kalos*-names thus developed a kind of metonymic status, standing in for young male beauty per se, but still referring to that beauty per se by way of a concrete reference to a real person and to a (potentially) lived experience. Onetorides himself is a case in point: his name was used by Exekias for *kalos*-inscriptions for about two decades (see Technau 1936, 8–11). The flexibility inherent to the *kalos*-names on vases opens up to the vase-painters a field for more playful, teasing or provocative uses of *kalos*-inscriptions—a field that has rightly become much explored in recent scholarly literature, even though not every single interpretation might be completely convincing (see e. g. Shapiro 2004; Hedreen 2016a, 254–274; Hedreen 2016b; Russenberger 2017; Pevnick 2021).

about any Onetorides from historical sources, the rich Athenians gathering around this amphora during a symposium would probably have known him from personal experience.

Would these aristocrats also have known the person whose name we read on the last remaining inscription on this picture, namely the Exekias whose signature we see to the left of Achilles and inscribed horizontally? The inscription reads Εχσεκιας εποιεσεν (*Echsekias epoiesen:* "Exekias made [it]").[34] In the face-to-face society of late archaic Athens, we might assume that at least some of the city's aristocrats would have known Exekias—not as a peer or even as a close friend, but in a way that would allow them to recognise him when crossing the street. But out of the two real persons whose names appear in this picture, rich Athenian symposiasts would have cared much more about the beautiful Onetorides than about the craftsman Exekias. The fairly parallel position of their written names within this pictorial field is thus all the more noteworthy.[35] Given the rather marginal position that simple potters and painters enjoyed in Athenian society, how should we explain that, within the space of the vase, their names appear in such close vicinity to the heroes of Greek mythology and the praised youths of the upper class? To address this question, let us look more closely at how the single inscriptions enumerated so far relate to the figures and the picture, the amphora as an object used for luxurious drinking parties, and the wider cultural context of the symposium.[36]

Of the six inscriptions on this picture field, the two name inscriptions and the two spoken inscriptions are directly bound to the figures, both semantically and spatially. The names are positioned close enough to the heads of the named figures to imply identification. The inscribed words reporting their speech even come out of their mouths. The neat way in which these inscriptions are integrated into the picture is not only shown by their static position in the field but also in what may be called their directional impulse.[37] For the single inscriptions also differ in their direction of writing. Although by this time, writing from the left to the right

34 On the signatures of Exekias, see Mommsen 1998; Stähler 1968–1971, 79–81 and 96–98.

35 Noted already in Müller 2016, 113. The symmetrical positioning of the vertical signature and *kalos*-inscription 'framing' a figure scene from both sides is typical on vases by Exekias (see e. g. the amphora London B210; BAPD 310389) and by the so-called E-group: Mommsen 1998, 43–44. The parallel position of signature and *kalos*-inscription on vase-paintings may in some cases go further. On the famous Sarpedon Crater by Euphronios around 510 BC (ex-New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1972.11.10, now returned to Cervetri, Italy: BAPD 187; AVI 5948), a *kalos*-inscription (*leagros kalos*) and a painter's signature (*euphronios egraphsen*) are placed in neat symmetry, both starting from the head of the central figure of Hermes and running horizontally to the opposite sides. Accordingly, the *kalos*-inscription on the left side is written retrograde.

36 On the positioning of different types of vase inscriptions and the underlying rationale, see Müller 2016; Lissarrague 2013a. Fundamental insights on this matter are to be expected in Gerleigner (in press).

37 On such directional impulses of inscriptions, see more in detail Dietrich (forthcoming).

was already asserting itself as a general standard, the painter chose to invert the writing direction for the name of Achilles and the spoken word by Ajax. This went along, as always in such cases, with a mirroring of the individual letters. Inverting the writing direction was, therefore, not merely a matter of switching the sequence of decoding, but represented a concrete turning-around of the inscription, as if the single letters were three-dimensional objects that may be moved and flipped at one's will.[38] Just as a figure's face may appear either in the left or right profile, so a single letter or a whole inscription faces either left or right. Obviously, the rationale behind this choice of writing direction is to adjust the inscription to the orientation of the corresponding figure: the spoken words follow the direction of speech, making the letters literally come out of the speaker's mouth; the name inscriptions start over the corresponding figure's head and follow backward the contour of their bodies.[39] The same rules for the arrangement of name inscriptions and spoken inscriptions are followed almost without exception in Attic vase painting. The layout of these inscriptions is not dictated by the abstract geometry of a written text as we know it but follows compositional rules of a rather pictorial kind. The inscriptions thus take part in the movement and life of the figures.[40]

But this does not hold true for all the inscriptions in the picture field. In the *kalos*-inscription and the painter's signature, there is no such close graphic link with the figures, nor do they immediately relate to them on a semantic level. Indeed, these inscriptions were positioned simply where there was some free space available. With their horizontal and vertical orientation,[41] they do not follow the oblique presentation of the pictorial elements. They rather adopt the orientation of the vase's own architecture and its decorative scheme, namely the horizontal and vertical borders of the picture field and, on a higher level, the axes that define the tectonic structure of the vase as an object. Thus, unlike the name inscriptions and the spoken inscriptions, these two inscriptions referring to the potter Exekias and the beautiful young Onetorides have their place rather *on the vase* than *in the picture*. This makes sense, for these two people have nothing to do with heroes playing games but much to do, each in his own way, with the vase as a wine amphora used for the symposium: Exekias as the potter-painter who produced it and Onetorides as a reference to the culture of male beauty and pederasty, which is, in turn, central to the culture of the symposium.

38 For more detail on this phenomenon and with a focus on stone inscriptions, see Dietrich/Fouquet/Reinhardt 2020, 150–160 [Dietrich].

39 As shown in Wachter 2001, § 104, 228 ("starting point principle") and § 105, 228 ("direction principle").

40 See already Lissarrague 1985, 76–77. The author elaborates this fundamental insight in many later publications on inscriptions in Attic vase painting: Lissarrague 1992; 1994; 1999; and 2013a.

41 Horizontal or vertical disposition is typical of all painted Exekias signatures: Cohen 1991, 57.

**Fig. 6:** Attic black-figure little-master cup showing potters at work, ca. 540 BC, Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum, 67/90.

Indeed, being served by handsome young boys was obviously one of the pleasures of an Athenian drinking party, and pictures of the symposium are full of beautiful naked servants. Praise of young boys' erotic appeal is also a recurrent theme in sympotic poetry.[42] The inscription praising beautiful Onetorides may thus seem irrelevant in the picture of Achilles and Ajax playing a board game, but it is clearly on topic for a vase which naturally belonged in the symposium. What about Exekias? While Attic vases are full of beautiful bodies like the one of Onetorides, pictures of craftsmen like Exekias are much less numerous. However, what seems most noteworthy is that they exist at all. An early example around 540 BC is a cup in Karlsruhe (Fig. 6).[43]

On both sides of this little-master cup, we see potters at work. Moreover, it is precisely on this type of cup[44] that we find potter-signatures more regularly than on

42 The inner picture of a cup dated to around 500 BC in Athens explicitly creates the link with sympotic poetry by citing, in a 'spoken' inscription sung by a symposiast, the beginning of a famous poem by Theognis (*o paidon kalliste:* "You, most beautiful of all boys!", said to Kyrnos, the fictive young male addressee of Theognis' love poems): National Museum CC 1158; BAPD 9534; AVI 892. On the inscription, see Lissarrague 1987, 126–127.

43 Badisches Landesmuseum 67.90; BAPD 355; AVI 4225. See *Kunst der Schale* 1990, 58–59 [Kaeser]. On other workshop-images in vase-painting, see supra note 16. This *image* of the potters' work provides a pictorial equivalent of what is *very* regularly found on cups of the same type, namely a potter's signature in the stripe below (see below Figs. 7a, b)—a place occupied here by a nonsense-inscription composed of a row of unclear letters, which may be more than a mere coincidence and indicate some playful intent on the side of the painter.

44 Namely the sub-category of so-called lip-cups among the little-master cups.

any other vase type (see below). Here, the reference to the potter's work has been established through an image instead: an image showing distinctively 'banausic' bodies, one of which sits in an indecent way. But just as in other pictorial media (cf. above Fig. 4), artisans in vase painting do not all have 'banausic' bodies. The inside of a later cup in Boston shows a painter painting a cup, this time without any signs of bodily ugliness.[45]

What makes the low-ranking figure of a *banausos* and his work a suitable iconographic choice for the decoration of fine drinking vessels in the eyes of the Athenian leisure class, who did not value physical labour in itself? There are many ways to address this question. One is to highlight the general importance of envisioning (what may be called) 'counterworlds'[46] on Athenian luxury ceramics. Among the most popular themes, we find images of drunken satyrs who lack all sense of decency and are unable to control their impulses,[47] images of aggressive, half-animal centaurs fighting Greeks with trees and rocks,[48] or images of giants challenging the gods.[49] Such figures are not honourable at all, but apparently very welcome on fine drinking vessels. Another less popular but still recurrent 'counterworld' found on Attic vases is that of shepherds or fishermen.[50] A drinking vessel imitating the form of a cow's hoof shows a simple herdsman in his natural environment: animals and plants instead of humans, a cave instead of a house. Obviously, this contributed to the amusement of symposiasts to put such a drinking vessel on the table, as if a cow had stepped into the room.[51] Pictures showing craftspeople at work constitute a somehow similar category of aesthetically attractive 'otherness'.

But there is another factor which contributes to the attractiveness of craftspeople at work as decoration on luxury ceramics, namely the products of their craft. As Tonio Hölscher has pointed out, such images usually do not show the fabrication of everyday products, but rather that of prestigious goods. It is the esteem for finely crafted luxury goods that prompts the pictures of those making them.[52] Depicting the fabrication and painting of a cup on a cup creates the effect of a *mise en abyme.* More

45 Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 01.8073; ARV 342.19, 1646; Para. 362; BAPD 203543; AVI 2864.

46 Translating the German *Gegenwelt.* The productivity of this concept comes out well in Hölscher 2000.

47 See Lissarrague 2013b.

48 See e. g. Muth 2008, 413–518 (with further bibliography in note 1); Dietrich 2010, 311–320.

49 See e. g. Giuliani 2000; Muth 2008, 268–328; Dietrich 2018a, 82–85 (with further bibliography in note 79).

50 See e. g. Himmelmann 1980, 52–70; Dietrich 2010, 436–439 (with further bibliography in n. 225).

51 New York, Metropolitan Museum 38.11.2, ca. 480 BC; BAPD 5968. See https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/253555 (accessed 26/09/2022) and Dietrich 2010, 437–438, fig. 364.

52 Hölscher 2022. On the discussion whether painted Athenian pottery may at all count as luxury goods if compared to much more costly silver vessels, and how Attic vases nevertheless assert themselves as luxury goods, see my comments in Dietrich 2020, 51–58.

frequently, this effect is created by the depiction of a symposium, and thereby the use of a cup on a cup (see e. g. below Figs. 9a–b).[53] These two kinds of *mise en abyme* address different aspects of the same object: the cup as an object of use, which participates in the symposium, and the cup as an artefact of sophisticated craftsmanship. Translated into modern terms, these two kinds of *mise en abyme* would address the functional object on the one hand, and the artwork on the other. But while these modern categories are fundamentally opposed to one another, the object of use and the sophisticated artefact work to each other's benefit in the context of fine Athenian drinking vessels. The outstanding social and cultural importance of the symposium in the Greek city-state explains the great decorative expenditure invested in the pots and cups used for that purpose. At the same time, these sophisticated artefacts themselves add new cultural value to the symposium. The mutually reinforcing performative, material, and visual culture of the symposium fostered competition among workshops for ever more technically accomplished pottery and visually attractive and engaging paintings.[54] As a result, Attic vase painting shows exactly the kind of dynamic evolution of forms, iconographies, and styles that make it an ideal playground for art-historical scholarship, not least by making personal styles recognisable and showcasing the agency of individual, often highly innovative painters in the development of different iconographies, themes and pictorial strategies.[55] Even without the modern idea of autonomous artwork, we therefore have many components that define the modern figure of the artist. It fits well into this general picture that potters and painters would occasionally sign their works.

Whatever we make of ancient potter-painters as *faux-semblants* of modern artists, when it comes to painting and inscribing fine tableware for the symposium with pictures and inscriptions, decorative strategies aim both at the vase as an object of élite use and at the vase as the product of sophisticated craftsmanship. This is most clearly evidenced by the already mentioned little-master cups (popular between 560–530 BC). The vast majority of these cups contain a minimalistic decoration, with an inscription (mostly repeated on both sides) being the main decorative feature; this is either a signature (in 364 out of a total of 545 inscriptions) or an invitation to drink and enjoy (in 132 out of a total of 545 inscriptions).[56] On a little-master cup in Copenhagen, the signature (Επιτιμος εποιεσεν: *Epitimos epoiesen* "Epitimos made [it]") referring to the 'banausic' making of the cup and the invitation

53 Among the many publications on the depiction of the symposium on vases, most engaging is still Lissarrague 1987.

54 Such a dynamic of competing artisans may gain a certain independence from the élite discourse. See Dietrich 2020, 48–51.

55 Searching for the agency of individual artists—and not only for the driving force of socio-political change and the agency of patrons—in artistic innovations has lately been subject to renewed interest among scholars of Greek art. For Exekias, see e. g. Mackay 2010 and 2018; Mommsen 2018.

56 See Heesen 2011, 233 (numbers referring to the sub-category of lip-cups only).


7a


7b

**Figs. 7a–b:** Attic black-figure little-master cup with the two typical inscriptions of such cups combined: (a) a signature and (b) an invitation to drink, ca. 550 BC, Copenhagen, National Museum, 13966.

to drink (χαιρε και πιει σ[υ]: *chaire kai piei su* "Enjoy and drink, you!") referring to the élite use of the cup are even combined on its two sides (Figs. 7a, b).[57]

However, given that it was not the prestige of the craftspeople themselves but that of their products that made craftsmen at work a conceivable theme on a vase, the signatures of potters and painters keep a low profile. They do not make the vase an attribute of the artist, but add the maker's name as an attribute of the vase. As with all other inscriptions, their letters are small. These inscriptions are addressed to viewers who took pleasure in looking more closely at the vase in a second, interested or even admiring gaze. Signatures need to be looked for and discovered like other interesting details before being deciphered. As Robin Osborne has rightly explained, "signatures do not so much enhance the person who signs as enhance the pot signed".[58] The identity included in the painter's name somehow fuses itself with the vase whose decoration it serves.[59]

In cases where the signature appears within the picture field, the signature's 'fusion' with the vase may come across through rather subtle compositional means. As I have discussed, the signature on the Vatican amphora orients itself in its horizontal disposition towards the axes of the body of the vase, not towards the oblique figures. The object carries the signature, not the picture. Accordingly, the signature in this case uses the verb *epoiesen* ("made [it]"), referring to the vase as a whole and the work of the potter, instead of *egraphsen* ("painted [it]"), referring to the painting specifically.[60] In cases where the signature appears outside a vase's picture field(s),[61]

57 Copenhagen, National Museum 13966, ca. 550 BC; BAPD 350369; AVI 3257. See Heesen 2011, cat. no. 236, 287–288, pl. 67a–b. This combination occurs on two other little-master cups: Heesen 2011, 234 (with note 1401), cat. no. 6 and 95. On inscriptions/signatures on little-master cups, see Osborne 2010, 244–246; Heesen 2011, 233–241.

58 Osborne 2010, 244.

59 On craftsmen's identification with their products and *techne,* see Burford 1972, 207–218.

60 Despite critical discussion in scholarship, the reference of *epoiesen* distinctively to the potter's work is correct at least in the vast majority of cases, as shown in Cohen 1991 (with bibliography in note 6).

61 The best overview on the placing of signatures outside picture fields is Cohen 1991.

its 'fusion' with the vase is often much more obvious. Just as we would expect from 'good ornament', the placing and layout of the letters tend to follow the decorated object's main compositional lines and thereby underscore its structure. This is exemplified by signatures on little-master cups (Figs. 7a, b). The tiny letters run from left to right in a frieze-like middle zone, which lies between the cup's lip (the upper frieze often carrying a pictorial decoration, as in the present case) and the black-glazed base of the cup's bowl. The signature is thus neatly integrated into the architecture of such cups structured in super-imposed friezes. While so-called band cups (another category of little-master cups) with a figural frieze composition decorate this middle zone, on lip-cups such as the given example the same task of decoration is fulfilled by letters—which, upon reading, very often turn out to be signatures.[62]

Other popular placements of signatures on cups include the foot, as on the famous Exekias-cup in Munich (Fig. 8),[63] and (later) the handle, as on many cups potted by Hieron, such as a cup painted by Makron in New York (Figs. 9a, b).[64]

For the cup understood merely as a beautiful object to look at, such placements seem marginal. For the cup seen as an object of festive use, however, these same

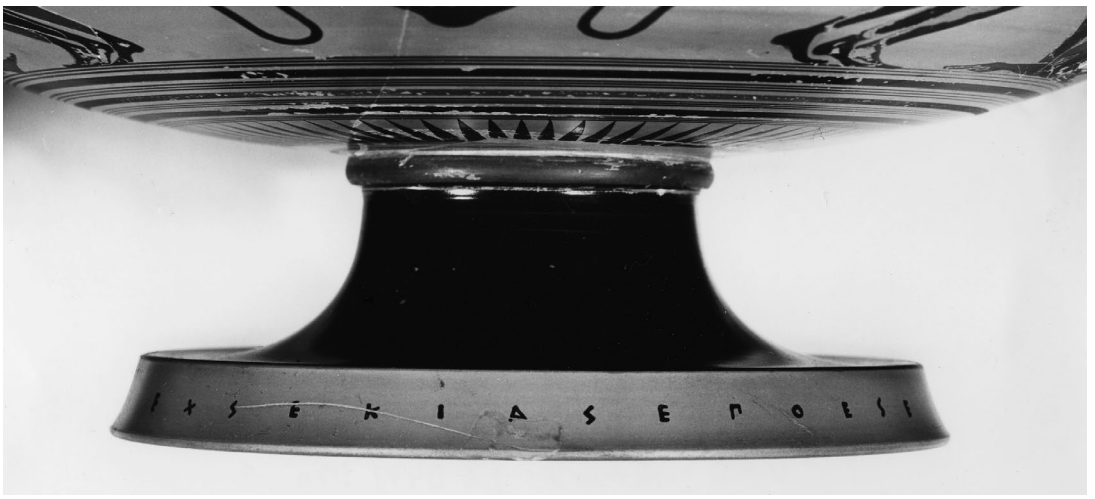


**Fig. 8:** Exekias, Foot of the famous Attic black-figure eye-cup with Exekias' signature as potter, ca. 540 BC, Munich, Antikensammlung, 8729.

62 On the structural parallels between inscriptions ('letter friezes') and figural friezes, see Dietrich/Fouquet/Reinhardt 2020, 171–175 [Dietrich].

63 Munich, Antikensammlungen 8729, ca. 540 BC; BAPD 310403; AVI 5206. On signatures on the foot of cups, see Bothmer 1982, 46; Cohen 1991, 56–57 and 64–65, figs. 8 and 12–13. For signatures on the feet of amphorai, see Cohen 1991, figs. 16–20, 22–23.

64 New York, Metropolitan Museum 20.246, ca. 480 BC; BAPD 204800; AVI 5842. 47. Signatures by Hieron on cup-handles are recorded in the AVI database. On signing cups or *skyphoi* on the handle, esp. by Hieron, see Bothmer 1982, 45–48; Cohen 1991, 58–59 and 66–75, figs. 14–15, 28–41 and 43–47 (on Hieron signatures: 69–75).

places are of key importance. Indeed, these areas constitute the parts of the cup that banqueters would concretely touch. When still standing on the side table, the symposiasts would pick up the cup by the handle. Then, they would hold it by the foot and elegantly balance the cup in one hand. After drinking from it, the banqueters may pass it to their peers, this time gripping it by its handle. Finally, when the cup is almost empty, the handle may be used for the popular *kottabos*-game: throwing the last drops across the room by swirling the cup around one finger tucked in the handle. All these ways of using a cup are often depicted on Attic vases.[65] Such placements of signatures highlight the status of the cup as an interactive object, addressing banqueters who are bodily engaged with their drinking vessels. Such signatures claim the beautiful object *with* its affordances.


9a

9b

**Figs. 9a–b:** Makron – Hieron, Attic red-figure cup depicting a scene of the symposium with signature by the potter Hieron on the handle, ca. 480 BC, New York, Metropolitan Museum, Accession Number 20.246.

65 On ways of handling a cup, see Lissarrague 1987, 49–65; *Vom Trinken und Bechern* 2015, 18–33 [Heinemann]; Dietrich 2020, 45–46.

## The Body of the Artist and the Body of the Vase: Concluding Remarks

The placement of an additional signature on the Vatican Exekias amphora follows a similar logic. On the top side of the mouth, we read [Εχσε]κιας εγραφσε καποιεσε με (*Echsekias egraphse ka'poiese me:* "Exekias painted and made me"),[66] if and only if the amphora's lid is taken off (Fig. 10). The reading of this signature is thus inextricably bound up with the amphora's time of use: it is only upon opening it that both this signature and the amphora's capacity to hold wine inside will appear. But there is more to this signature than this, for it says "Exekias painted and made *me!*". The amphora itself is thus imagined as 'talking'. This is not in itself too surprising. In most signatures, the personal pronoun "me" is omitted, making the typical "[potter's name] + *epoiese*"-formula a grammatically incomplete sentence.

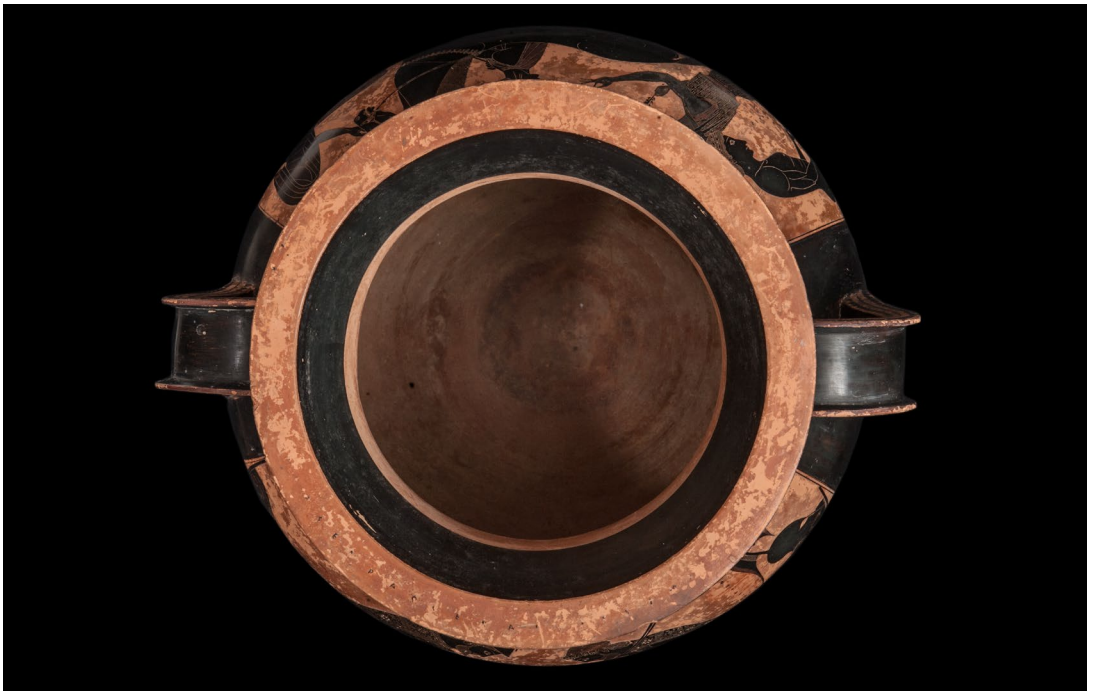

**Fig. 10:** Exekias, Topside of the mouth of the amphora Figs. 5a–b with a metric potter-and-painter signature by Exekias written on top of the vessels lid—appearing when the amphora's lid is opened, 540–530 BC, Rome, Vatican City Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, 16757.

66 Compare the amphora by Exekias in Berlin with the same signature on the top side of the mouth (Antikensammlung F 1720; BAPD 310383; see Reusser/Bürge 2018, 165–171, cat. 6 [Mommsen], with figs. 105–109). See Mommsen 1998, 39–41. Signatures on the mouth also appear on *dinoi.* See e. g. a dinos signed by Exekias in Rome (Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia 50599; BAPD 310402; see Reusser/Bürge 2018, 215–221, cat. 11 [Rocca], with figs. 145–152), or the *gigantomachy-dinos* signed by Lydos from the Athenian Acropolis (Acr. 1.607; BAPD 310147; AVI 1090; see Tiverios 1976, 15–16, pl. 1a).

However, since the grammatical object is simply the vase, it is already implied in the signature's material bond to the inscribed artefact.[67] If the pronoun "me" had not been omitted in this case, the most obvious reason would be that this signature was composed in metric form (iambic trimeter), which invites its being read aloud[68] and makes the reader lend his or her voice to the amphora. Is it a coincidence, then, that this speaking inscription is placed on the vessel's opening, or its 'mouth'?[69] The pun works only when using the traditional 'embodied' terminology to name the different parts of a vase like a body, composed of a 'foot', a 'belly', a 'neck', a 'mouth', and 'lips'. This terminology happens to be well grounded in ancient Greek ways of 'addressing' a vessel: the handles are called 'ears' (*ota*), its opening is called the 'mouth' (*stoma*), the 'mouth's' rim are the 'lips' (*cheila*), a vase may have a 'neck' (*trachelos*), a 'belly' (*gaster*) and 'shoulders' (*omoi*).[70] In short, the vase is a body.[71]

This brings the discussion back to its starting point, namely the cited passage from Lucian's *somnium.* Earlier I noted that Learning's ultimate argument against becoming a sculptor, namely that endowing sculptural bodies with the best qualities would coincide with crippling one's own body, testified to the longevity of pejorative Greek views on artisans and their supposedly ugly 'banausic' bodies. Now, we may say that, if the vase is a body, then the potter-painters and their vases become somewhat commensurable, and the idea of beauty and worthiness transferred from the maker to the product—ending up with a beautiful vase and an ugly potter—becomes in principle conceivable. Within an anthropology that draws a less clear-cut line between humans and things as agents and subjects,[72] the line between becoming a good and worthy person and crafting a good and worthy thing is correspondingly less sharp. As Jesper Svenbro has shown, the praise of illustrious aristocrats and winners of athletic games in late-archaic Greek poetry—the making

67 See Dietrich/Lieb/Schneidereit 2023, 215 Conventionally, we supplement such incomplete sentences in translation by the pronoun '[it]', although arguably, it would be more correct to supplement it by the pronoun '[me]'.

68 As suggested in Mommsen 1998, 40.

69 Cf. Mackay 2018, 48 (suggesting that the placement of this signature on the *mouth* of the vase underscores the ventriloquist quality of this inscription). One may be reminded of the title of Slater 1999 (*The Vase as Ventriloquist*), even though it is used there for a different argument.

70 On the 'anatomy' of the vase in ancient Greek terminology, see Froehner 1876, 7–20; Lissarrague 1987, 56 (with note 17).

71 See Lissarrague 1987, 49–57; Frontisi-Ducroux 1995, 100–103. See also Martens 1992, 284–359 ("animation anthropomorphique"). More generally on embodied objects in Graeco-Roman antiquity, see Bielfeldt 2014 and Gaifman/Platt/Squire 2018 (with an introduction to this growing field of scholarship on p. 404–408).

72 See Dietrich 2018a, 33–35 (which is mainly informed by the fundamental essay of Vernant 1986, but does not consider the vast anthropological bibliography beyond classical Antiquity in the wake of Bruno Latour and others).

of a *kalos kai agathos* ("a good and worthy man") through words—often draws on the vocabulary of crafting and sculpture.[73]

There is no need to push the idea of the vase as a body in a misleadingly animistic direction for it to shed light on the noted contradiction, which has been fundamental throughout this discussion, between the marginalisation of potter-painters in society and their relative prominence on their vases, sometimes through images of craftsmen at work, and often through signatures. Indeed, within a context in which identity was easily extended to things, instead of taking the 'banausic' bodies with which potter-painters often represent themselves simply as a sign of their societal marginalisation, we might also couple this surprising (because seemingly pejorative) self-fashioning with another, complementary self-fashioning: potter-painters as envisioned *in the body* of their crafted, beautiful, and worthy things. By inscribing their names on the vases, not as external, advertising labels but as fused into their decorative *and* practical design, the potter-painters reserved themselves a permanent place on these beautiful and worthy objects even after they had passed into the possession of their 'non-banausic' users. In the body of the vase, the artisan partakes in the drinking party of the rich,[74] albeit only in the lower status of an instrument on others' behalf—a lower status that is strikingly similar to the place given to artisans in Plato's ideal state, which itself is also conceived as a body.

Finally, we may ask: whose attribute is the vase? Does it indicate and embody the potter-painter's beauty invested in the crafted object, or does it serve—as an indispensable instrument of any drinking party—the needs of its buyer who would not embody the 'beautiful and good citizen' without the refined leisure of the symposium? In different senses, both answers can be considered correct. In the short term—within the emic perspective of Athenian elite discourse—it was clearly the Athenian aristocrat who had the upper hand over this object disputed between its producer and its user. But this was not an absolute victory: at least if bearing a signature, the potter-painter's name remains related to it, seemingly with the full consent of the buyers happily taking on themselves the credit to the artist. Yet in the long run—from the etic perspective of classical archaeology and art history—the artisan potter-painters, whom reception transformed into artists, took back their crafted objects and the renown which they bestowed upon them. After all, many know the name of Exekias today, while those whose superior lifestyle and being his vases served have faded away into anonymity.

73 Svenbro 2021, 146–150 (commenting on Simonides). R. Neer first pointed to this illuminating parallel to early Greek poetry. See Neer 2002, 105, note 84.

74 This participation of the artist in the symposium through the crafted and signed vase may be paralleled with the medieval artist's participation in religious services through his signed artworks. See in the chapter by Mandy Telle p. 113–114, 116–117 and 122.

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**ARV** Beazley, John Davidson, *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters,* Oxford 1963.

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