

The Davis Museum Black-Figure Hydria: An Object Biography

I. INTRODUCTION

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College owns a fine example of Attic pottery in its hydria depicting a fountain house scene, attributed to the circle of the Antimenes Painter, accession number 1961.5 (see Figure 4). Here I will analyze several facets of the object, beginning by providing background about its ancient context and its function therein, then unpacking its iconographical program, looking particularly at what it can tell us about ancient attitudes toward gender roles, and finally discussing how it arrived at the Davis Museum and how its installation might be improved by learning from models at comparative institutions. From a thorough study of this hydria we can learn not only about ancient Greek culture but also about the issues surrounding twentieth-century collecting habits and the challenges that museums face in presenting ancient material culture.

II. CREATION: ANCIENT CONTEXT

Historical Context

Athens saw significant cultural and political progress in the sixth century B.C.E., when the hydria in question was produced. Solon became chief magistrate in 594 B.C.E., instituting reforms, like the release of Athenians who had been enslaved for debt, that balanced relations between the poor and the rich and planted the seeds of democracy.¹ Peisistratos took power in 561 B.C.E., establishing a tyranny to be continued by two of his sons until 510 B.C.E. The Peisistratid tyranny presided over several decades of economic prosperity, protodemocracy, and social stability.² Patrons of art and architecture, the Peisistratids encouraged a cultural flourishing which can be observed in the poetry and material remains from the era.³

With such cultural growth came contact with cultures outside of Athens, including Italy, where our hydria was found (Figure 1). Athens engaged in trade with Greek cities in Sicily and southern Italy as well as with the Etruscans in the north.⁴ Since we do not know the region in Italy in which our hydria was found, it is difficult to say whether it was made for a Greek-identifying audience in Italy or, alternatively, for an Etruscan audience whose culture and values, especially regarding gender relations, diverged slightly from what would have been found in Athens.

¹ Thomas R. Martin, "The Reforms of Solon," *An Overview of Classical Greek History from Mycenae to Alexander* (Perseus Digital Library, Tufts University) Accessed April 2016.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0009%3Achapter%3D6%3Asection%3D25#note4>

² Wall text, Gallery 155: Greek Art: Sixth Century B.C., *Athens in the Sixth Century B.C.*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 9 April 2016,

³ Brian M. Lavelle, *Fame, Money, and Power: The Rise of Peisistratos and Democratic Tyranny at Athens* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2010), 2.

⁴ See John Boardman, "The Athenian Pottery Trade." *Expedition Magazine* 21, no. 4 (August 1979): 33-39.



Figure 1: Map of the Mediterranean showing places where Attic pottery has been found. Expedition Magazine 21.4 (1979).

Historical Function

The hydria (Figure 2), with its name deriving from the Greek word for water, is a vessel whose full body and three deliberately placed handles make it ideal for holding, lifting, and pouring water.⁵ Hydriai were most commonly used by women to collect water to be used for domestic purposes or in religious rituals, but they were also used at the symposium to hold water to be mixed with wine. Hydriai could also be used as ballot boxes or cinerary urns, the latter of which function explains the prevalence of hydriai in tombs.⁶



Figure 2: A hydria. The Classical Art Research Centre.

⁵ Gisela Richter and Marjorie Milne, *Shapes and Names of Athenian Vases* (New York: Plantin Press, 1935), 11.

⁶ Colette Hemingway and Seán Hemingway, "Greek Hydriai (Water Jars) and their Artistic Decoration," *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/gkhy/hd_gkhy.htm (July 2007)

Technique: Black-Figure

The black-figure technique used to paint this hydria involved painting silhouettes with paint that turned black during firing, incising linear details into the clay to allow the red clay to show against the black, and adding other details with red and white paint. The technique originated in Corinth around 700 B.C.E. but would dominate the pottery market in Athens beginning around 630 B.C.E.⁷

At the time of creation of this hydria, red-figure had just been invented as a new technique, around 530 B.C.E.⁸ In contrast to black-figure, red-figure decoration features silhouettes that remain the red color of clay set against a black background. Details in the figures are painted in black rather than incised, allowing for far greater flexibility in the application of detail.

The simultaneity of these two techniques in the sixth century B.C.E. meant that black-figure painters could either remain conservative in their painting, as the Antimenes painter tended to do,⁹ or they could adapt their painting to emulate the dynamic, fine detail apparent in the latest red-figure painting style.

Graffito

In the clay of the underside of the hydria's foot is incised a graffito, roughly in the shape of an upsilon but not identifiable as such (Figure 3). Inscriptions such as this could have been trademarks of the potter, indicators of price made by the seller, or marks of ownership.¹⁰

This particular graffito has indeed been studied, but its meaning remains undeciphered. Dr. Alan Johnston of the Greek and Roman Archaeology Department at University College London, scholar of trademarks on Greek vases, was not able to identify the graffito with any existing marks. He published the mark in his 2006 *Trademarks on Greek Vases: Addenda*, grouping it with the 33A category, a non-alphabetic mark, though noting its marked variation, that is, that a semi-circular arc takes the place of a closed circle.¹¹

In a 1996 correspondence with the then-registrar of the Davis Museum, Johnston states that he cannot say whether the graffito was inscribed in Athens, where it was created, or in Etruria, where it eventually ended up.¹² He does, however, use the uniqueness of the graffito as continued evidence that the system of production, trade, and ownership of Greek pottery is

⁷ John Boardman, *Athenian Black Figure Vases* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 9.

⁸ Department of Greek and Roman Art, "Athenian Vase Painting: Black- and Red-Figure Techniques," *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vase/hd_vase.htm (October 2002)

⁹ "Antimenes Painter," in *The Grove Encyclopedia of Classical Art and Architecture*, edited by Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45.

¹⁰ "Inscriptions," *Classical Art Research Centre* (University of Oxford), last modified October 22, 2012, <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/tools/pottery/inscriptions/>.

¹¹ Alan W. Johnston, *Greek Vases: Addenda* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2006), 64.

¹² Alan William Johnston, e-mail message to Lisa McDermott, 25 November 1996, in Davis Museum object file 1961.5.

wonderfully complex, “not neatly wrapped up in a few Greek traders and a few Etruscan owners.”¹³

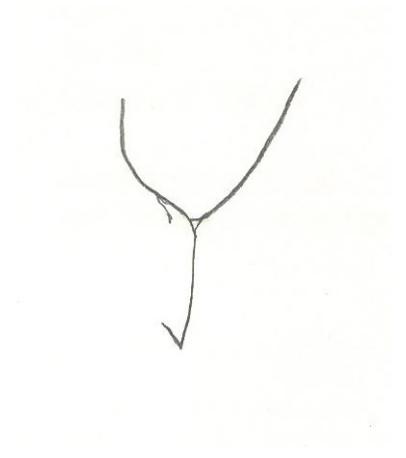


Figure 3: A drawing of the graffito on the underside of the hydria's foot. Davis Museum object file.

III. IMAGERY

Description

In the main scene (Figure 4), seven women, six of whom carry water jugs, animatedly socialize as they come and go from a fountain house, indicated at left by a white Doric column, a lion's head spout, and a base on which a hydria rests. While waiting for her jug to fill, the woman at the far left calmly smells a flower blossom. Three women approach the fountain with empty hydriai resting horizontally on their heads. Alternating with them and with their backs to the fountain, three women take leave with filled hydriai on their heads; their hydriai are vertical and the women appear slightly shorter to indicate the weight of the jugs that are now full of water. The women's flesh is painted white. All of them wear peploi richly decorated with incised designs of stars, nets, and circles, painted white rosettes, and/or painted red ornamentation. The four women in the center also don himatia.

On the shoulder, two warriors attack a third in the center. All three wear crested Corinthian helmets and carry javelins and shields; the shield of the rightmost warrior bears the design of a bird, potentially a raven. On either side, two women, with their heads turned back, flee the battle, their arms flailing dramatically.

The hunting scene on the predella (below the main scene) echoes the fight scene above with pleasing symmetry. Four javelin-wielding young (unbearded and naked) hunters on horseback attack a deer, at center, which has already been pierced by a spear.

Double rows of ivy vertically flank the main scene. A border of alternating red and black tongues hangs between the hydria's neck and the shoulder scene. Where the vessel tapers to meet its foot appears a continuous design of black rays against a red ground.

¹³ Ibid.



Figure 4: Antimenes Painter (circle of) Black-Figure Hydria. Davis Museum, Wellesley College. 1965.1.

IV. INTERPRETATION

At the Fountain House

Scenes of women fetching water from a fountain house, like that featured on this water jug, are often represented on hydriai, not surprisingly since these were the very vessels that women would have used to complete the exhibited task. Such self-referentiality—a hydria painted on a hydria—is useful for our modern purposes as it reveals how historic people would have used the vessel in its ancient context.

Political Propaganda

The subject of women at the fountain house was popular with Attic vase painters between 525 and 490 B.C.E. (see Figure 5).¹⁴ This flourishing of fountain-related imagery coincides with the improvement of the Athenian water supply and the construction of a nine-spouted fountain house called the Enneakrounos,¹⁵ both projects undertaken by the ruling Peisistratid tyrants in the sixth century BCE. It is possible, then, to read the imagery on this hydria as political propaganda, promoting the infrastructural accomplishments of Peisistratos and his sons and celebrating Athens at a high point in its technological development.



Figure 5: A hydria showing the structure of a sixth-century BCE fountain house. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Representing Women: Scenes of Daily Life

Another primary point of entry into this hydria is to consider the way that it represents women. How does it depict women behaving, engaging with space, and interacting with other women? What can we glean from it about the role and status of Greek women in the sixth century?

Greek society is typically thought to have been organized along clear dichotomies: female vs. male, oikos vs. polis, private vs. public. Women are posited never to have left the confines of their homes, where they lived in secluded areas (*gynaikonitis*), while men ambled freely about in open civic spaces.¹⁶ This rigid view of gender-space dynamics is now, however, commonly accepted as an ideal concept advanced by the elite male authors of literary texts whose ideological writing did not reflect lived reality.¹⁷ A different, more flexible picture of gender roles emerges when we expand our scrutiny outward to include material culture.

¹⁴ Monika Trümper, "Gender and Space, 'Public' and 'Private,'" in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, eds. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 288.

¹⁵ See E.J. Owens, "The Enneakrounos Fountain-House," *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 102 (1982): 222-225.

¹⁶ Trümper, 292.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

This hydria, in its depiction of women in a space outside of the home, undermines such oversimplified binaries. It was not uncommon for women to be portrayed in images as the dutiful housewife completing a chore within a controlled setting, as the virtuous woman worshipping or participating in a ritual, as goddess or mythological heroine elevated above the mundane world, or as slave, prostitute, or courtesan serving the needs of others as individuals low on the social hierarchy. This scene from “daily life” is thus intriguing in the way that it permits the real, respectable Athenian women a greater degree of freedom than seen elsewhere. That the women wear such ornately decorated garments, indicative of aristocratic membership, suggests that it was not just slaves, household servants, and low-class non-citizen women who performed the laborious chore of fetching water, but elite women who participated as well.¹⁸

Record of Real Life or Projection of Ideal Roles?

We must be wary, however, of reading this fountain house image as an unbiased record of reality. Much recent opinion postulates that even genre scenes depicting what seem like actual events actually veer into the territory of myth.¹⁹ Just as male-authored literary texts promote an idealized femininity, presumably so too do vase paintings, being themselves constructions of the male painter. The question we must ask about this hydria's imagery, then, shifts from whom and what it represents to what larger discourse it aims to engage with.

We might suggest that the painter of this particular vase concerns himself primarily with his society's management of women. Constructing a picture of a desired Athenian society, the hydria portrays an idealized version of female productivity that, in its day, would have encouraged the dutiful toil displayed in the action of the women at the fountain. The scene, therefore, is not so much a rendering of real Athenian women enjoying free social interaction in a public (male) space than it is a display of desired female behavior and a tool for the reinforcement of feminine virtues.

Repetition and Message Transmission

The repetition of forms is perhaps one hint to the rhetorical agenda of the hydria's visual program. The relatively even spacing and consistent verticality of the figures results in a composition that is aesthetically pleasing but that also capitalizes on repetition as a mode of clear message transmission. In information theory, redundancy helps to eliminate noise in order to get a message to its receiver with the least interference of noise.²⁰ Applying this concept to our interpretation of the hydria, we notice that the women are nearly all mirrors of each other such that a clear message emerges from seeing seven women behaving in the same lively yet well-mannered way. If we compare our scene to another fountain house scene on a hydria at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 6), the effectiveness of the reiterated figures becomes evident. The asymmetrical composition of the Met's hydria, the inconsistency in the angles of the women's arms, and the overlapping figures in the center force the viewer's eye to bounce around the scene in search of the most important detail, rendering its supposed message difficult to read.

¹⁸ Ibid., 288.

¹⁹ Kathryn Topper, “Approaches to Reading Attic Vases,” in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, edited by Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 146.

²⁰ Ann Steiner, “New Approaches to Greek Vases: Repetition, Aesthetics, and Meaning,” in *Greek Vase Painting: Form, Figure, and Narrative: Treasures of the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid*, ed. Gregory P. Warden (Dallas: Meadows Museum at SMU, 2004), 38.

In contrast, the compartmentalized verticality and similarity of the figures on our hydria immediately communicate a sense of an underlying guiding principle of behavior to which all of the women are conforming.



Figure 6: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Terracotta hydria. Attributed to the Class of Hamburg, c. 510-500 B.C.E. Accession number 06.1021.77.

Variations on the Fountain House Scene



Figure 7: Skyphos. Athens, National Archaeological Museum.

It might be helpful to compare our hydria's imagery once more to more diverse iterations of the fountain house theme. A skyphos at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (Figure 7), for example, shows two women fetching water at a fountain house indicated by two Doric columns. One woman stands with an empty hydria balancing horizontally on her head while her companion, who has rested her hydria on the fountain's pedestal to be filled, jumps up into a vigorous dance move typically performed by young men.²¹ The woman's exuberant, gender-defying behavior starkly contrasts with the monotony of relatively self-controlled gestures adopted by the women on our hydria, the difference illustrating that not all painters intended to advance the same messages through comparable imagery. In fact, the skyphos' fountain house scene has more to do with preparations for a festival in honor of Hermes and Dionysus called Hydrophoria than it does with the everyday chore of collecting water; the women fetch water to use in a specific ritual, and the dance move, associated with the Dionysian cult, foreshadows the dancing to occur at later festivities.²²

²¹ Elisavet Stasinopoulou-Kakarouga, *Worshipping Women: Ritual and Reality in Classical Athens*, eds. Nikolaos Kaltsas and Alan Shapiro (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2008), 234.

²² *Ibid.*



Figure 8: Hydria. Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco.

Another enlightening scene of comparison can be found on a hydria at the Vatican's Museo Gregoriano Etrusco (Figure 8). Depicted are two women at a fountain house; a man in the center, identified as a slave, reaches out to touch the breast of the woman at right who, in the midst of filling her jug, raises her right arm in protest of the assault. A scene like this is wildly different from our calm, benign scene, yet one might argue that they both comment on the same idea of the management of women in Athenian society. "Ambush" scenes like that on the Vatican's hydria warned women of the dangers of leaving the safety of the domestic sphere to fetch water; to avoid such molestations, virtuous women were to attend the fountain house with a cohort of female companions, as our hydria's imagery encourages.²³ Both scenes thus possess an element of social monitoring of the female by the male. The preoccupation of the Athenian citizen with the legitimacy of his offspring finds expression in both vases as one blatantly warns of the threat of contact with male outsiders and the other advertises the resplendent safety of female-to-female contact.²⁴

²³ Lauren Hackworth Petersen, "Divided Consciousness and Female Companionship: Reconstructing Female Subjectivity on Greek Vases," *Arethusa* 30, no. 1 (1997): 41.

²⁴ Trümper, 292.

Secondary Imagery: Male meets Female

The minor scenes on the shoulder (Figure 9) and predella (Figure 10) provide further proof of this hydria's status as a tool used by a male-dominated society to enforce gender norms. One scholar has expressed puzzlement over the concurrence of such themes since scenes of women at the fountain house seem clearly unrelated to the world of the aristocratic Athenian male youth signified by hunting and battle.²⁵ Another scholar, however, probes further and suggests that the three scenes are all part of a unified program representing the social and mental life of the ephebes, the young.²⁶ It is clear that the fighting and hunting scenes express solidified martial values as well as the high valuation of toil. Read in conjunction with the scene of women at work, the whole picture presents an idea about the dutiful fulfillment of expected roles for both genders. In this sense, the freedom of the women as they appear outside of the home recedes as the primary subject, the locus of attention shifting instead to the greater concept of desired social norms. Women, interestingly, also appear in the battle scene of the shoulder. They figure here as spectators, and, more particularly, one scholar would categorize them as “very active spectators” given their flailing arms and backward-looking glances.²⁷ In his systematized study of spectator types in Greek vase paintings, Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell found that the “very active” category appears with high frequency relative to other types of female spectatorship as well as to depictions of male and youth spectators. He concludes that such a preference for decidedly emotional responses from women at the sight of typically male activity furthers the agenda of the male painter to emphasize women's helplessness and lack of self-control and courage, especially as compared to the bravery and discipline of the battling men.²⁸ That the painter of our hydria has included these overtly emotive women in the scene rather than replacing them with two more male warriors provides strong evidence that his objective was to solidify ideal gender norms through his image.

²⁵ Judith M. Barringer, *The Hunt in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 41.

²⁶ Claude Bérard, et al., *A City of Images: Iconography and Society in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 62.

²⁷ Mark D. Stansbury-O'Donnell, *Vase Painting, Gender, and Social Identity in Archaic Athens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 203.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 227.



Figure 9: Battle scene on the shoulder of the Davis Museum hydria. On either side, two women flee in horror.

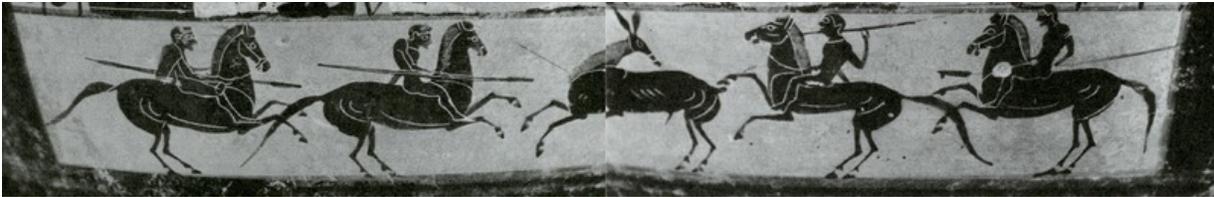


Figure 10: The predella of the Davis Museum hydria features a hunting scene.

Female Reception

This is not to say that historical women would have actively experienced the oppression of a patriarchal agenda when viewing the hydria. It seems dubious that women would have surrounded themselves with images of virtuous women at work if they did not find some enjoyment in the activity depicted or if they could not identify with the women represented.²⁹ Seeing a visual reminder (if not an accurate record) of their own experience, historical women likely would have felt empowered and consoled by such a picture of female sociability and companionship.³⁰ Thus, although the male painter may have intended the vase to reinforce his dominant patriarchal ideology, a woman would have had the option not only to internalize this message but also to find satisfaction in reading her own subjectivity in the image.

²⁹ Petersen, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

V. STYLE: THE ANTIMENES PAINTER

The hydria has been attributed to “the circle of the Antimenes Painter,” meaning that the style of its painting resembles that of other known vase paintings that share certain stylistic characteristics. It is difficult to say whether there was in reality a single painter behind the Antimenes name and whether this individual had a hand in creating all of the vases that are now attributed to him, but it is useful to contextualize this hydria in the painter’s larger body of work so as to understand the artistic environment in which it was likely created.

The Antimenes Painter was identified by the influential scholar J.D. Beazley based on a vase now at the Rijksmuseum in Leiden which contains a kalos inscription of the word *Antimenes*. Beazley examined the figures in various vase paintings, using similarities in the lines on their ankles, legs, knees, belly, arms, elbows, collar-bones, etc., as the basis for attributing certain vases to the Antimenes Painter.

Some 150 vases have been attributed to the Antimenes Painter. From this collection, scholars have noted that he took among his favorite shapes the neck-amphora and the hydria,³¹ and among his favorite subjects, Herakles and the fountain scene.³² His paintings tend to follow the same decorative schema, which can be seen on the Davis Museum's hydria: tongues above the shoulder picture, ivy beside the principle picture, a predella picture below, and rays at the base.³³ Another scholar, John Boardman, characterizes the Antimenes Painter’s compositions as being “neatly observed and simple, rarely with overlapping figures,” also noting that “his drawing is not over-precise, but it is never incompetent.”³⁴

It is significant that the Antimenes Painter was active during the first generation of the red-figure technique, invented around 530 B.C.E. For continuing to paint well in black-figure, Boardman calls the Antimenes Painter a “reliable conservative,” noting that, “he succeeds in demonstrating that, despite new developments, black figure can still effectively serve the needs of simple narrative.”³⁵ The Antimenes Painter did adapt his style with the advent of the new technique, as Beazley observes, exchanging single folds for double folds in his drapery in response to the fluidity in red-figure design.³⁶

Figures 11 and 12 show samples of work by the Antimenes Painter that help to illustrate the stylistic threads that run through the vase paintings associated with his hand.

³¹ J. D. Beazley, "The Antimenes Painter," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 47, no. 1 (1927): 82.

³² John Boardman, *Athenian Black Figure Vases* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 109.

³³ Beazley, 86.

³⁴ Boardman, 109.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Beazley, 82.

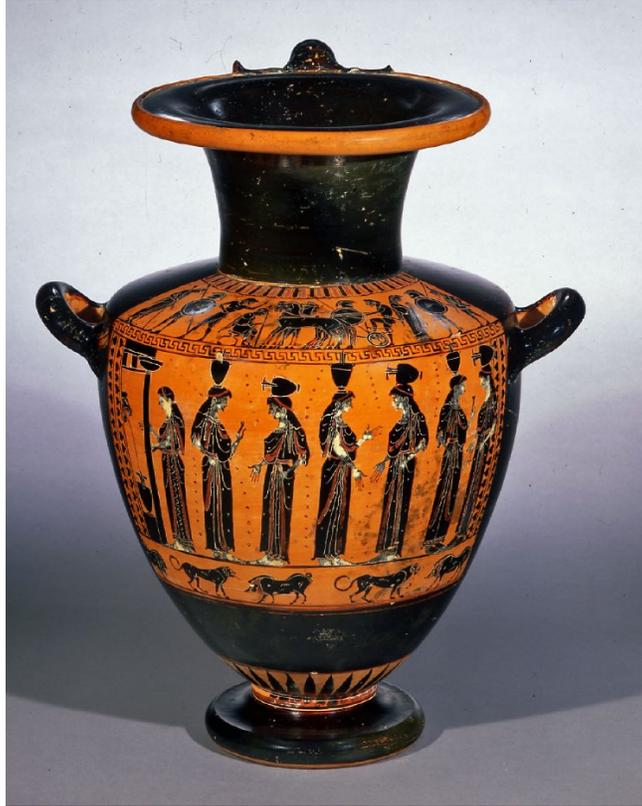


Figure 11: A similar fountain house scene attributed to the Antimenes Painter. British Museum B336.



Figure 12: A similar shoulder design of a fighting scene attributed to the Antimenes Painter.

VI. ACQUISITION

How did the hydria get to the Davis Museum?

The acquisition history of this hydria is a bit more complex than its credit line—“Gift of Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr.”—suggests. Kaufmann, of the Pittsburgh-based Kaufmann’s Department Store fortune, was good friends with John McAndrew, the Director of the Davis Museum from 1947 to 1959. Both architectural historians, McAndrew and Kaufmann worked together at the Museum of Modern Art in New York beginning in 1938. During his directorship, McAndrew drew often on the support of friends and colleagues to enrich the Davis Museum’s collection. Kaufmann, in particular, was a notable donor of modern paintings. In fact, his original gift in 1961 was a painting by abstract artist Irene Rice Pereira, but when the work was “destroyed,” the then-director Curtis Shell decided to put the \$3000 given by Kaufmann towards the purchase of this black-figure hydria.³⁷

Shell purchased the hydria from John J. Klejman, owner of Madison Avenue gallery J.J. Klejman Works of Art and father of a Wellesley alumna, Susanne [Klejman] Bennet (Class of 1959). Aside from donating a large collection of African artifacts to the Davis Museum, the Polish-born dealer worked with several other big-name buyers, most notably the Metropolitan Museum of Art, eventually becoming notorious for having a hand in a smuggling controversy. Klejman’s infamy derives from his involvement in selling the Lydian Hoard to The Met in the late 1960s, a collection of golden treasures proven to have been looted from a Turkish tomb in 1965.³⁸ Thomas Hoving, a former director of The Met, remembers Klejman, albeit not without bias, as “another of my favorite dealer-smugglers.”³⁹

Klejman’s documented dealing in smuggled goods⁴⁰ is relevant to our hydria in that the hydria’s lack of provenance prior to its 1961 purchase raises a red flag as to its means of acquisition. That Klejman fails to list a specific archaeological findspot for the hydria could potentially suggest that the people from whom he bought the object had reason for less than complete transparency. These were the decades when museums and collectors adhered to a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy regarding unprovenanced objects,⁴¹ helping to sustain an unfortunate system of looting and smuggling. It is important that the Davis Museum acknowledge this moment in its own collecting history. Although the hydria serves as a valuable asset to the Wellesley community by informing us about Classical visual culture, the Davis Museum’s tolerance in 1961 of incomplete provenance information from its dealer places a limit on what our own scholarship can uncover.

³⁷ J.J. Klejman Works of Art note (20 April 1961) regarding gift of Edgar Kaufmann Jr., in object file for Antimenes Painter Hydria 1961.5, Davis Museum, Wellesley College. Accessed March 2016.

³⁸ Sharon Waxman, *Loot: The Battle over Stolen Treasures of the Ancient World* (London: Old Street, 2009), 148.

³⁹ Thomas Hoving, “Artful Tom, A Memoir. Chapter 24: Getting Restless.” Artnet Worldwide. 2009. Accessed April 13, 2016.

⁴⁰ Waxman, 148. Waxman relays how Turkish journalist Özgen Acar uncovered the story of how looters excavated tumuli outside Usak and sold the treasure to Turkish smuggler Ali Bayırlar who then sold it to Klejman in New York and George Zacos, a Swiss dealer.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

VII. INSTALLATION

The large number of black-figure vessels in American collections means that the Davis Museum may consult the curatorial decisions of other institutions in the process of crafting the installation for this particular hydria. In this section you will find a discussion of comparable installations at the Yale University Art Gallery, the Harvard Art Museums, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as thoughts on how the Davis Museum can heed the successes and failures of these precedents.

Yale

The Yale University Art Gallery houses its ancient collection immediately accessible from the main lobby in the beautiful sculpture hall of its Old building. Its collection of Greek vases is one of the first presentations to greet visitors as they enter. Grouped in free-standing display cases, the vessels, most of which hail from the Rebecca Darlington Stoddard study collection gifted in 1913, are arranged thematically.



Figure 13: Greek vase display, Yale University Art Gallery. March 2016.

I looked particularly at a black-figure hydria from the early sixth century B.C.E. by the Tyrrhenian Group that depicts Greek warriors fighting. In its display case (Figure 13) were about eight other vessels of different shapes, mostly black-figure, that centered around the theme of battle. A lekythos depicted Herakles fighting an Amazon, for example, and a skyphos featured a painting of an owl, the symbol of Athena, goddess of war.

The thematic grouping of the objects would have been more successful had the Museum provided an additional label to introduce and summarize the contents of the case. Especially from afar, it was not immediately apparent what united these vessels of disparate shape, and perhaps a label at the top of the vitrine or in larger text at the same level of the other labels could have helpfully announced the theme of war and thus drawn in interested parties.

The free-standing nature of the display case was a success, allowing the visitor to circumambulate and see the vessels from nearly all sides, which was especially important for those vessels with interesting detail on their backsides.

Harvard

The ancient art collection at the Harvard Art Museums resides on the building's third floor, where the museum has dedicated an entire room to terracotta vessels, titled "Ancient Greece in Black and Orange." Here I looked at a hydria dated to the same time as the Davis Museum hydria (510 B.C.E.) that depicted Herakles as a musician.

Like Yale, Harvard chose to display their vessels thematically (Figure 14). They grouped their hydria with other vessels representing scenes of theatre and musical performance. Only four other vessels and one fragment accompanied the hydria in its display case, allowing for close consideration of each object as an individual, in contrast to Yale's more clustered display that seemed to encourage viewing the objects as one cohort, dwarfing them as individuals. The display case pushed up against the wall prevented viewing the backside of the vessels, a detriment for those with panoramic images.



Figure 14: Vessels in a thematic display about music and performance in the “Ancient Greece in Black and Orange” gallery at the Harvard Art Museums. March 2016.

A great success of this installation was the amount of didactic information available. Each object was accompanied not only by its tombstone information but also by a brief discussion of its iconography, historical significance, or context. The selectiveness of the display—that the Museum was not trying to crowd in as many objects as possible—certainly made this possible.

Another success was the variation of the height of the objects, some standing on neutral pedestals of different heights that created visual intrigue from afar and highlighted once again the fact that these objects deserved individual attention.

MFA

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston owns a plethora of Greek vessels, most split between a chronological display on Level 1 and a thematic display on Level 2. The comparandum I looked at, an amphora attributed to the Antimenes Painter, was installed outside of these two major areas, instead in the Michael C. Ruettgers Gallery for Ancient Coins (Figure 16).



Figure 16: An amphora displayed as an aid for coins at the MFA, Boston.

The amphora, depicting Herakles wrestling the Nemean Lion on one side, was used to supplement a display of coins illustrating the heroic Herakles in a display case dedicated to mythology. The case also held a bronze statuette and a votive relief, which complemented the amphora in providing a visual break from the presentation of neatly arranged coins.

That the vessel functioned as a didactic supplement for other objects means that the curators had to have decided to suppress all other discourses possible for the amphora in order to focus on the iconographic one. That is, rather than tell us the story of the object's historical function, or its painter, or even the image of Dionysos on its backside, the curators have indicated that the amphora's painting of Herakles is what makes it useful for modern-day audiences. Given the MFA's large collection of black-figure vessels, they can afford to do this, to remove an amphora from the traditional chronological or thematic vessel installation and instead give it a narrow, secondary position in a coin display.

The Met

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of Greek vessels is equally as large, if not larger than the MFA's, and they have opted for a traditional chronological discourse. I examined the display of a work most similar to the Davis Museum's hydria in both form and content: a black-figure hydria from the late sixth century B.C.E. depicting a fountain house scene.

Within the gallery of sixth-century B.C.E. vases, this particular hydria was installed in a case devoted to “Bronze and Attic Black-Figure Hydriai” (Figure 17). I found this installation especially successful because keeping the technique and the vessel type constant meant that the viewer could appreciate more deeply the differences in imagery choices. Since all were made within the same century and would have served the same function in their ancient context, it was interesting to wonder why their makers made the decisions they made; what could explain the slight variation in shape and iconography among the seven hydriai? In addition to the fountain house scene, other vessels depicted, for example, Herakles wrestling a Triton, Achilles and Ajax playing a board game, and Dionysus with Hermes and nine women.

One unsuccessful attribute of the installation was the height at which the hydriai were displayed. While the upper level of the case placed the vessels roughly at eye height, the vessels on the bottom level were difficult to view from a standing position. I crouched in order to study the detail of the lowermost hydriai as well as to read the labels, all lining the bottom of the case as well.



Figure 17: A case of only black-figure hydriai from the sixth century BCE at The Met.

VIII. DAVIS MUSEUM

Looking at other institutions' presentations of comparable objects is a fruitful exercise that can help the Davis Museum reconsider its own presentation of its black-figure hydria.

Why is this hydria appropriate for the Davis Museum?

It is important first to consider why this particular hydria is appropriate in the collection of the Davis Museum. As a singular gift, it entered Wellesley's collection in a manner quite different from the way in which other collections were assembled. At the Yale University Art Gallery, for example, the bulk of the ancient vases comes from one survey collection amassed especially for a university museum and donated by Rebecca Darlington Stoddard.⁴² At the Met, the Rogers Fund of the early 1900s allowed the museum to collect ancient artifacts systematically, crafting a coherent collection by purchasing to complement existing pieces and to fill gaps. Such is not the story for this hydria, which came unaccompanied, adding to a piecemeal collection that Emily and Cornelius Vermeule characterized as having "no discernible stamp of taste or pattern of collecting" in 1972.⁴³

That is not to say that the hydria is an anomaly in the collection. Quite to the contrary, it adds much, especially with regards to its decoration. At the time of the object's accession, the Museum—then still the Wellesley College Art Museum, closely linked with the College's Art Department—was arguably more of a teaching museum than it is now, oriented mainly toward students. As such, its decision to purchase this hydria, which is associated with a specific, well-studied Greek vase painter and depicts a scene from daily life in ancient Athens, makes sense since the object offers much to the student of Art History or Classical Civilizations. Wellesley's identity as a women's college could also help explain why this particular hydria resides in its collection. The College's commitment since its origin to providing women a space out of the traditional domestic sphere finds its apt echo in the iconography of the hydria. Similarly, ideas about cultivating women of virtue find pronouncement in the vase, affording the Wellesley students who would have studied it the opportunity, perhaps, to identify with the ancient women.

How can the Davis best present the hydria?

Over fifty years after its acquisition, the hydria might still resonate in this way with Wellesley students, as well as allow them to think critically about ancient Greek culture. There are a number of discourses from which the Davis Museum curators can choose to highlight when installing this object in a gallery. While I enjoyed the Met's juxtaposition of hydriai with varying imagery which allowed for an immersive experience in the subtleties of a single vessel type, such a presentation is not feasible for the Davis Museum, which owns only one other water jug. It would seem logical, then, to group the hydria with other vessels that respond to a central theme, as Harvard and Yale have done. The hydria would fit well into displays about daily life or gender relations in ancient Athens.

It could also be provocative to present the hydria alongside objects depicting mythical scenes,

⁴² Susan B. Matheson, *Art for Yale: A History of the Yale University Art Gallery* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 2001), 63.

⁴³ Emily Vermeule and Cornelius C. Vermeule. "Antiquities at Wellesley." *Archaeology* 25.4 (1972): 276.

the goal being to illustrate that such a scene of “daily life” was likely more of an imagined ideal dreamed up by the painter than it was an accurate record of reality. It could also be paired with other vessels attached to named painters in a discussion about the hand of the Greek painter and observable differences in style. Zooming out from the context of ancient civilization, the Davis might also consider pairing the hydria with other objects from different time periods, geographical locations, and mediums that all address the interaction between gender and space. This sort of presentation might be most similar to the MFA's presentation of their Antimenes amphora in which they focus only on what they object's imagery communicates and downplay other potential discourses about the vessel's function or technique.

In terms of installation, the other institutions adhered to a fairly standard display that would also make sense for the Davis Museum (assuming they present the hydria alongside other vessels). Since the hydria does not have decoration on its backside, a display case set against a wall would be appropriate, although it could be nice to set the hydria in a corner position within the case so that viewers could still have the option to peer around its side to get a sense of the shape of the back handle and to see the burial accretions. Generally, displays that were at eye height and that were less crowded with objects were most successful as they allowed for careful examination of the objects as individuals.

Expanded wall labeling would advance the Museum's commitment to didacticism and would allow viewers with limited familiarity with Greek vessels and vase painting to get the most from their visit. The Davis Museum could follow Harvard's example by providing brief analyses for all items on wall labels; in the case of this hydria, a nuanced discussion of its imagery would be welcome. It would also be great to incorporate into the presentation some mention and a photo of the hydria's graffiti, as such an inscription is extremely unique and underscores the object's previous life as a product that was manufactured, traded, and used as more than just a pretty art piece.

IX. CONSERVATION

The hydria has not been recently conserved, but neither is it in desperate need of conservation intervention. One handle neck and rim appear broken into six pieces that were mended before purchase by the Davis Museum, as noted in J.J. Klejman's invoice from April 14, 1961.⁴⁴ Other conservation issues include joins that are slightly misaligned, poorly textured and inadequate fills, and irregular cleaning marks (Figure 18).

⁴⁴ Object File for Antimenes Painter Hydria 1961.5, Davis Museum, Wellesley College. Accessed March 2016.

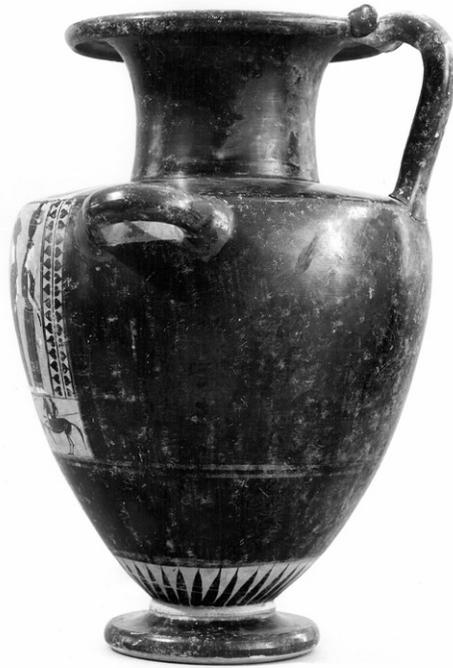


Figure 18: Uneven cleaning of burial accretions and the restored handle are visible at the backside of the hydria.

While the hydria is not in pristine condition, its conservation issues do not detract from viewers' ability to appreciate its iconography. In 1994, the Tampa Museum of Art opted not to conserve the hydria before display in a special exhibition, apparently concluding that any condition issues would not be distracting for the viewer.⁴⁵ Indeed, in 1991 the Center for Conservation and Technical Studies at the Harvard University Art Museums conducted a survey of objects in the Wellesley collection and gave the hydria a relatively low ranking of priority for treatment. They recommended that inappropriate fills and inpainting be removed and re-executed, that losses be sealed, and that cleaning marks be evened out without interfering with remnant burial accretions.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

X. PUBLICATION AND EXHIBITION HISTORY

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