

The Kylix Conundrum: A Study on an Early Red-Figure Symposium Kylix from the David M. Robinson Collection: Abstract

An early red figure kylix in the David M. Robinson Collection at the University of Mississippi is attributed by Beazley to the Manner of Onesimos. Undecorated except for the tondo, this kylix has been associated with a small group of vessels thought to depict the intimate feminine grooming practice of depilation. Yet a closer look at the scene and the modern provenance of this vase raises several questions and some new observations.

This cup is one of a few Attic vessels considered to illustrate the practice of female hair removal using a lighted lamp. It has been associated with other images of women in private boudoir settings often on vessels used by men at symposia. But it has not been analyzed at length since the nineteenth century, and its provenance has gaps.

This paper aims to further explore whether the cup's tondo scene actually depicts hair removal from the bikini area. In addition we shall pose questions regarding how it came into the hands of its apparent first modern owner, the Belgian collector Alphonse van Branteghem, and about its current state of preservation. An early commentator (Hartwig 1893) claimed that the tondo scene illustrated female masturbation with a sex toy rather than depilation. I have revived this interpretation supported with evidence from other ancient painted scenes. Furthermore, nineteenth-century German scholars recorded a *Kalos* inscription on the tondo that is no longer visible. This text is preserved only in a nineteenth-century line drawing of the scene. In addition, careful visual examination of the kylix suggests that it is composed of ancient pieces from various vessels connected with quantities of plaster, possibly the work of a nineteenth-century dealer.

This late Archaic cup not only adds insights to the function of erotic imagery on vessels intended for consumption by male symposiasts, but also has a story to tell about its modern owners and recent history.