

The Past in Red-figure: An Oinochoai Series found near the Panathenaic Way

Under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, excavations on the North Slope of the Acropolis in 1939 yielded a series of eighteen red-figure oinochoai of unusual shape (Shear, 1940; Green, 1962; Moore, 1997). The oinochoai, dated ca. 415-390 BCE, exhibit unparalleled combinations of iconography, profiles, and decorative techniques, such as the incorporation of the Athena from Panathenaic Prize Amphorae, *mastoi*, gilding and added white, and refined profile features from metalware produced generations earlier. This paper, which stems from research in the Athenian Agora archives and storerooms during the winter and spring months of 2019, re-contextualizes the set of oinochoai in pottery trends of the late-fifth century and in their physical site of deposition. In so doing, the paper evaluates the material qualities of the oinochoai, their original function as pouring vessels, and their significant location of their find-spot along the Panthenaic Way.

Previous publications cite the oinochoai as curious oddities (Green, 1962; Robertson, 1997), while others analyze their details for clues of sequential connections between workshops (Beazley, 1967; Lezzi-Hafter, 1976; Moore, 1992), and still other publications highlight stylistic anachronisms found in the drapery and hairstyles of the figures (Harrison, 1965; Moore, 1992). Talcott proposes in a letter to Beazley that the oinochoai were produced in 402 following the expulsion of the Spartan Thirty Tyrants (Agora Archives, May 1939). With Talcott as an exception, previous publications only allude to associations of the oinochoai with specific religious events of the Athenian calendar or history; never do such studies consider the pouring function of the oinochoai.

However, the proximity of the deposition to the Klepsydra Forecourt, which is situated at the junction between the peripatos and Panathenaic Way, offers strong evidence of an association

with a major Athenian religious festival and demands a reconsideration of their function as pouring vessels. Building upon Talcott's initial association of the oinochoai with the expulsion of the Thirty, the paper proposes that the archaistic visual qualities of the oinochoai celebrate notions of a pre-Spartan Athens through the inclusion of key references to the Athenian visual tradition.

The combinations of vase profiles and iconography draw from a variety of sources, resulting in an eclecticism that simultaneously deviates from expectations and unites through cohesive variation. The eclecticism of the oinochoai simultaneously catches the eye, and offers the user the rare opportunity to hold the past in miniature. Moreover, the sound of the water-wine mixture pouring from the differently shaped lips of the oinochoai would create an eclectic aural experience that blended with the age-old babbling Klepsydra spring nearby. The delicate and unique features of the oinochoai, as well as their function as pouring vessels, are suggestive of communal drinking within an elite group. Breakage patterns, repairs, and accompanying depositional material point to continued use over centuries.

Bibliography

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