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# An Attic Head Vase

COMBINATIONS OF ARTISTIC TECHNIQUES were often used in Greek art. Thus sculpture was often painted and architecture was enlivened with color. Even in the relatively humble craft of the potter combinations of techniques are occasionally found. The so-called head vase is a case in point, in which the potter, the painter and the coroplast, or modeler, presumably all contributed their talents.

The body of the vase was formed in a mould in the shape of a head, while other parts such as handles, neck and lip, were made separately and then attached to the moulded portion. The heads usually represented women, blacks or satyrs, to mention the most popular types, and occasionally Herakles is depicted. An individual vase could be in the shape of a single head or of two heads, back to back. Depending upon the shape of the neck, mouth and handle, each vase had a special use. Oil or perfume was perhaps stored in the short, squat vessels with small mouths, known as aryballoi, while a large number of vases in the form of heads were used for pouring liquids (oinochoai). Some two-handled drinking cups (kantharoi) are also known; in these the head forms a bowl, and from it spring a vertical neck and lip. These kantharoi are similar to the animal-headed drinking horns, or rhyta, not only in the combination of moulded and wheel-made portions, but also in their use as drinking cups.<sup>1</sup> Sir John Beazley in 1920 first studied the Attic head vases as a group and divided them into some twenty-three classes according to the plastic part of the vessel.<sup>2</sup>

AN EXAMPLE OF THIS TYPE of Attic vase was acquired in 1971 by the Museum of Art and Archaeology of the University of Missouri-Columbia (Figs. 1-2).<sup>3</sup> The moulded portion is

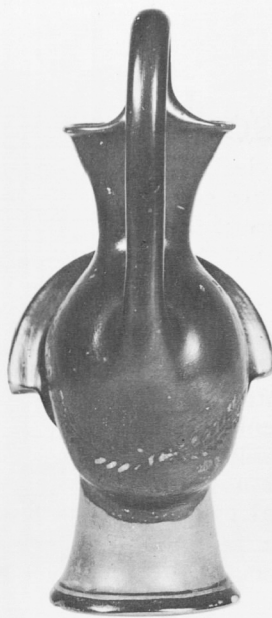


1. Head vase in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia.

in the form of a woman's head and neck; this is surmounted by the slim neck of the vase, a trefoil lip and a high-swung handle, indicating that the vase is to be considered a pouring vessel, or oinochoe.

The vase rests on a flat, slightly flaring base which is emphasized by a thin line of black glaze above a broad stripe at its lower edge. The face was left in the color of the clay, which is now an orange brown. The chin is slight and the mouth indistinctly moulded. The lips are perhaps slightly parted, with a suggestion of an "archaic smile," to be seen rather in the treatment of the cheeks than in the mouth itself. The nose is straight and slightly rounded at the end. The eyes are oval, closed at the inner corners





2. Above: head vase in the Missouri museum: right side, back, left side.

3. Below: head vase in Boston. Left: front view; right: right side. Photograph courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



with a square end which partially follows the side of the nose. The pupils of the eyes are indicated by black dots in reserved circles, the irises are black, the whites of the eyes are covered with a white pigment. The outlines of the eyes and the arching eyebrows are rendered in black glaze, without incision.

The hair is rendered on the forehead as four rows of knobs in relief. Traces of red paint are preserved here; parallels to better preserved examples suggest that probably the lips, nostrils and tear ducts were once also painted red. In fact, a trace of red paint is preserved in the right nostril. The ears are small, indented and pushed forward by the hair behind. Our maiden wears a stephane, a hair ornament resembling a coronet, which is decorated with meanders and boxed, dotted X's. These alternate except in one instance where two meanders are placed together. The back of the head is thought of as being covered with a sakkos, a simple form of hair covering; this is encircled by a wreath of painted leaves originally rendered in white but now much faded. Such wreaths have been variously identified by scholars as being olive, myrtle or laurel. Ivy wreaths also appear on Attic head vases, lending a somewhat more decorative aspect than does the straight-leaved variety. The area of the sakkos, a part of the back of the neck, the neck and lip of the vase, and the handle are covered with a lustrous black glaze which was unevenly applied, showing a thicker coating in a band two centimeters below the lip at the front.

Stylistically, the Missouri head vase can be dated to the second quarter of the fifth century B.C. and finds its closest parallels in Beazley's Class N: The Cook Class.<sup>4</sup> This class contains a great number of examples, considered by Beazley to be "unpretentious little works with an archaic alertness of expression."<sup>5</sup> They are practically all oinochoai, with only a few aryballoi known, and the majority are in the form of women's heads.<sup>6</sup> Although a large number of vases belong to the Cook Class, relatively few wear stephanes. Beazley lists only eight examples.<sup>7</sup> At least five of these and the Missouri vase are so like one another that they probably all came from the same mould.<sup>8</sup> All the examples have almost identical heads, the only differences



4. *Head vase in Amsterdam. Photograph courtesy of the Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam.*



being in the painted decoration, such as the arrangement of the pattern on the stephane and the type of wreath worn. One of these vases, a previously unpublished example in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, is illustrated here and shows the close similarity to the Missouri head vase (Fig. 3).<sup>9</sup> The moulded portion of the two vases is almost identical. The neck of the Boston vase, however, is higher proportionally than that on the Missouri example, but this is to be expected since the necks were made separately and then added to the moulded heads. The Boston head also wears a somewhat unusual wreath composed of curving tendrils alternating on either side of a stem. Moreover, the ornament on the stephane is composed of sixteen units of meanders and boxed X's instead of the fourteen of our example. Rather than simply alternating the designs (as was done with one exception on the Missouri vase) the painter preferred a two-to-one arrangement of meanders to boxed X's. This is also the arrangement preferred on the example from Bowdoin, but there in fifteen units.<sup>10</sup> Thirteen units are employed on the stephane of a head vase once in the Collection Scheurleer and now in the Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam (Fig. 4),<sup>11</sup> and on that from the Canellopoulos Collection in Athens.<sup>12</sup> It would appear then that the painter of a head vase was allowed some freedom to vary the painted details of the vase once the basic color scheme was established. The Canellopoulos example apparently even shows some use of incision around the pupils of the eyes. Every head vase, although "mass produced" by means of a mould, was distinct from every other vase even from the same mould, if only in small details. Although this was no doubt advantageous from a commercial point of view, one could interpret it as an attempt to breathe life into a mass-produced product and to give it that individuality so characteristic of Greek civilization.

ALTHOUGH THE VASES of the Cook Class are numerous and perhaps undistinguished, the heads themselves show great charm. As mentioned above, they mostly represent women or girls and, being containers of perfume or an-

other liquid, may have been intended for the dressing table. We do not know, however, if the choice of subject for the vase had, in fact, anything to do with its function, and it is perhaps best to agree with Beazley<sup>13</sup> that "... the fact is that they are simply girls... and as such seldom come amiss."

WILLIAM R. BIERS  
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<sup>1</sup>For rhyta see H. Hoffmann, *Attic Red-Figured Rhyta* (Mainz 1962) and *Tarentine Rhyta* (Mainz 1966).

<sup>2</sup>J.D. Beazley, "Charinos," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 49 (1920) 38-78. For additions and corrections see J.D. Beazley, *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*, 2nd edition (Oxford 1963), henceforth ARV<sup>2</sup>; *Paralipomena: Additions to Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters and to Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters* (Oxford 1971).

<sup>3</sup>Acc. No. 71.9. Height to lip of vase 15.9 cm., to top of handle 18.3 cm., to top of stephane 12 cm. Intact except for a few small chips, especially on the stephane and the lip.

<sup>4</sup>ARV<sup>2</sup> 1539-1544.

<sup>5</sup>Beazley, "Charinos" 63.

<sup>6</sup>A close parallel to the Missouri example is in the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (ARV<sup>2</sup>, no. 149) but the neck of the vase is missing and the top of the head plastered over. This must also have been an oinochoe rather than a "cup," as it is called by K. Herbert, *Ancient Art in Bowdoin College* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1964) 67, no. 181.

<sup>7</sup>ARV<sup>2</sup> 1544, nos. 148-154; Beazley, *Paralipomena* 504, no. 135. ARV<sup>2</sup>, no. 150 from the Canellopoulos Collection has only recently been published: F. Croissant, "Collection Paul Canellopoulos (IV): Vases plastiques en forme de têtes humaines," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 97 (1973) 223, no. 4, figs. 22, 23.

<sup>8</sup>ARV<sup>2</sup> 1544, nos. 148-152. A tentative chronology within the Cook Class itself is attempted in the recent publication of no. 150, the author arriving at a date not later than 480-470 B.C. These moulded vases are notoriously difficult to date stylistically with any accuracy.

<sup>9</sup>Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Acc. No. 80.593. Height to handle 21.9 cm., to top of stephane 12.7 cm. I am indebted to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts for permission to publish this vase.

<sup>10</sup>Herbert, *op.cit.* Apparently twelve units are used on ARV<sup>2</sup> 1544, no. 152, to judge from the sketchy drawing. Only one boxed X is shown.

<sup>11</sup>Inv. No. 344. Height 20.8 cm. Meander on the stephane partially worn off. *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, Musée Scheurleer 2, III K, pl. 1 (Pays Bas, pl. 84) 1 and 4; ARV<sup>2</sup> 1544, no. 151.

<sup>12</sup>For the Canellopoulos vase see note 7.

<sup>13</sup>Beazley, "Charinos" 39.