

Markets and the Survival of Shapes: the Case of the Column-Krater¹

Winfred Van de Put

“Change of fashion”, “the shape/technique had exhausted its possibilities”, “fell out of favour” are often offered as explanations for the disappearance of certain shapes, techniques, iconographic motives. These expressions describe rather than explain a phenomenon, which may be well worth explaining. There may of course be cases when there is not much more to say, but it also echoes a ‘rise and fall’ kind of historicism. But what then may cause the change of use, the change of destination, of form and technique?

Not the whole answer, but at least a part of the explanation may be found in broader cultural and political movements, which may cause a change in consumption or distribution patterns, or religious changes ending, for instance, the custom of grave-gifts. In this paper I will try to explore the perhaps anachronistic explanation of economy and markets. I will try to follow the fate of a specific shape, the column krater, and specifically its red-figure phase, to see if its distribution and use sheds light on the role of the shape in different contexts and on its eventual disappearance.

The column-krater is a truly Greek shape with a venerable history. Distinguishing marks are the broad rim, the plates connecting the handles to the rim and the offset neck, for which the dinos may have been the inspiration as Payne suggested.² Its genesis in Corinth sometime in the 7th century BC gave rise to the name of ‘Corinthian krater’ for this specific shape variety. Fore-runners however are already present in the Mycenaean repertoire.³ In the run of the 6th century, Attic production takes over, red-figure gets hold of the shape and it continues, with a peak in the early Classical and Classical periods (fig. 1) and in decreasing quantities toward the beginning of the 4th century, when production in Athens ceases. But this is not the end of the shape: it had been taken over by Apulian and Lucanian workshops and continued to be decorated in the red-figure technique until about the mid-fourth century (fig. 2).⁴

To answer the question, I look at dates, technique, artist or workshop, provenance, and a little iconography. As a basis I use the largest repository of painted (predominantly Attic) vases, the Beazley Archive Database.⁵ Biased as it is,⁶ it is still indicative of the distribution and popularity of the shape. The archive lists 386 Attic black-figure examples, 131 of which are of known provenance; of the 1294 red-figure entries, 667 have provenances. In black-figure, only 8 out of 131 vases with a known provenance hail from Athens or Attica (6%); in red-figure, a mere 9 out of 667 remained that close to home (slightly over 1%). From the start of the shape in Athenian vase-painting, it seems to have been an export product.

The fact that kraters were deposited in graves in non-Greek contexts, sometimes as funerary urns,⁷ and hardly ever so in Greek contexts, will surely slant our image of its



Fig. 1: Column krater by the Flying Angel Painter, ca 480 BCE. Amsterdam, Allard Pierson Museum inv. no. 11.068.



Fig. 2: Apulian column krater by the Rueff Painter, ca 375–350 BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 1974.23.

distribution and survival, but the data from more or less domestic contexts may serve to correct this distortion. In a recent survey of Attic imports in the Cyclades, Paleothodoros noted remarkably few, and mostly very early, column kraters.⁸ He also notes their virtual absence from Thessaly.⁹ At Olynthos, there are two column kraters, one from a grave, very untypical for a Greek cultural environment, and one from a fill.¹⁰ The 'public dining place' in Athens yielded about 5 column kraters out of the 87 krater fragments identified.¹¹ The date of this ensemble is around 450 BC, at the very peak of the production of the red-figure column krater. By far the preferred shape is the bell-krater, and this also goes for Olynthos. Finally, the agora symposium-ensemble analysed by Lynch did not contain a single krater. This could be because the krater was metal, retrieved and reused, or pillaged by the Persians, or a more modest plain lekane could have served as a mixing bowl.¹² Anyway, these contexts seem to indicate that the shape was very low on the list of preferred mixing bowls in the Greek world, while it obviously was available to the home public.

Was the Shape then Targeted at a Specific Market?

Workshops explicitly targeting one specific market are quite rare in the Athenian Kerameikos. Nikosthenes is the obvious, and quite unique, exception, deriving shape variants (amphorae, kyathoi, mastoi) from the intended Etruscan market.¹³ Earlier, the Tyrrhenian amphorae are according to Kluiver thoroughly Athenian, yet targeted at the Etruscan market, where they were more readily imitated than at the place of origin.¹⁴ The column krater, although not as exclusively targeted, may well turn out to be a similar case.

Looking at the figures it seems very clear for the Attic red-figured column krater (fig. 3). The north of Italy receives more than a third of the total of 667 provenanced kraters in the Beazley Archive Database (255, mainly Bologna and Spina). Second comes Sicily (156), the rest of Italy follows: Etruria proper (53), Campania (58), Puglia (51), Falerii/Latium (28). Lucania/Southern Italy account for 12 vases, while 13 hail from Central Italy. The total for the present day territory of Italy is 625 out of 667, or 94%. Most of these come not from Greek colonial sites but from indigenous settlements.¹⁵ In contrast, Athens, and everything around and to the east of the city of origin, accounts for 36 items, a mere 5%. Athens and Attica account for only 9 (1 ½%). Again with the danger of economic anachronism, it still seems safe to say that the production of column kraters *without* the Italian component is not economically viable. It would have ceased production as early as Myson at the very beginning of the 5th century.

It is interesting to look at the late Archaic period. In general, the pattern of distribution is already in place, with important amounts going to Apulia, Campania, Etruria, Sicily and northern Italy. The latter is less important than later (14 out of 101), Falerii however relatively more so (8); more significantly, the amounts from Athens (4), Black

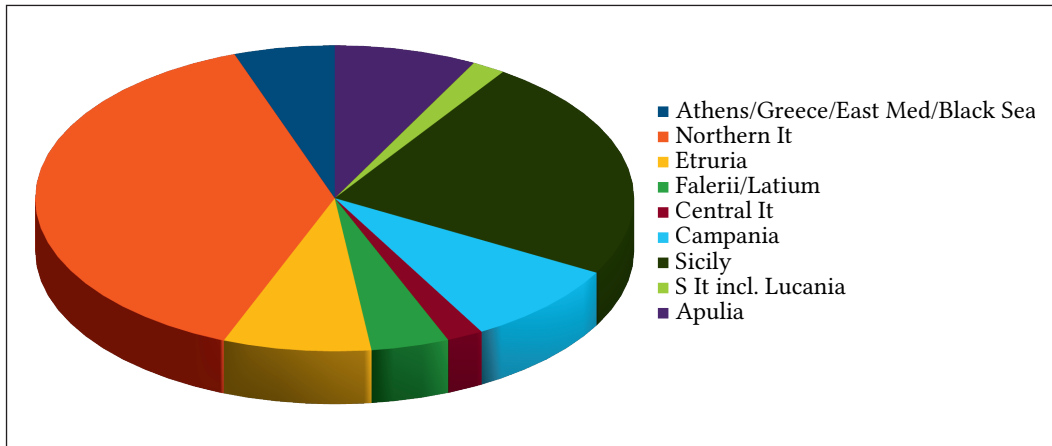


Fig. 3: Distribution of Attic red-figured column kraters. n = 667.

sea (3), eastern Mediterranean (2) and the rest of Greece (2) mean that 11% are not exported to Italy. Still a small segment, but it is clear the market grew ever more dependent on the export to Italy in the run of the 5th century BC.

The iconography of the column krater seems in line with that of Attic red-figure in general. Symposium scenes, not very complicated mythological subjects, fights, warriors departing. The latter may play a special role in indigenous Italic perception, as this theme is taken on in a somewhat different form in later Apulian red-figure vase-painting.

But catering to a market is not always limited to the adaptation of iconography. It may also influence the shape, and the column krater appears to have a slower morphological development in the run of the 5th century than for instance the bell-krater, ignoring the general tendencies toward elongation and concavity. In fact, the mid-4th century Apulian variant is still very close to the original, having found a decoration scheme that seemed to have persisted throughout its existence, with the ivy-berry frieze, reminiscent of the Attic mid-5th century Beldam Painter workshop, on the neck. Until deep in the 5th century, common secondary decorations for the broad rim of the Attic kraters remain friezes of archaic-looking outline animals (fig. 4), not too distant from that of early Archaic vases albeit somewhat sloppier in execution, and black lotuses and rays, also quite Archaic in outlook.

Also painting style may be affected: the ‘mannerist’ group, very well represented in the corpus of column kraters but also decorating other shapes, also seems to have worked almost exclusively for the Italian market, and they may well owe their stylistic reticence to their adaptation to the taste of their clientele.

Paradoxically, the demise of the column krater as a ‘living’, developing shape in the Athenian Kerameikos should be dated around the time when its numeric flourish started, sometime in the late Archaic/early Classical period. A fossilised version was made for a foreign market, and its actual survival was totally dependent on the



Fig. 4: Column krater by the Marlay Painter, ca 430 BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum inv. no. 07.286.65.

continuity of trade with these markets. The sharp decline in the last quarter of the fifth century and the disappearance at the beginning of the fourth century may be seen in conjunction with severed lines of communication and trade during the Peloponnesian War.¹⁶ Trade with Apulia picked up soon after the end of this conflict, witness for instance the magnificent Talos krater in Ruvo and many others, but in the meantime the Apulian production of column kraters had filled the gap with a version very similar in shape, but better adapted in iconography, depicting indigenous warriors instead of the Greek motives of the imported vases.

A last word about the appreciation of the column krater in Apulia: excellent work has been done in this field by Thomas Carpenter and others, for instance in *The Italic People of Ancient Apulia*; Carpenter's 2003 article already made the most important points.¹⁷ The recent studies benefit from an increased availability of contextual information and aim to treat the indigenous population not as mere derivative of the 'culturally superior' Greek colonies, but as cultural identities in their own right. One insight is that the access to Attic ceramics does not seem to have been mediated by Taranto and Metaponto, but was direct through indigenous Adriatic ports.¹⁸ It is also clear that the iconography of the Apulian column krater, more directly addressing the indigenous market, is remarkably uniform and appealing to the warrior elite (a fact that seems to be confirmed by physical anthropology).¹⁹

Derivation of cultural objects is an extremely complicated process²⁰ and its interpretation is strongly influenced by contemporary bias. For the indigenous cultures of Italy the tone has often been rather dismissive of their cultural achievements.²¹ To counter this notion, I may be allowed to digress to a parallel closer to home (at least, closer to my home): the so-called tulip vase (fig. 5).²² This impressive feat of ceramic ingenuity in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam became prominent at the end of the 17th century. Championed by the then king and queen of Great Britain, William and Mary, it was produced in Delft in a Chinese inspired pagoda like design (although the Chinese did not have similar flower vases; it was possibly inspired by the porcelain tower in Nanking), decorated with mainly Chinese motifs in a Chinese porcelain technique, to display a flower, which has come to epitomise Dutchness, but which arrived at our country from the Ottoman empire only in the early 17th century. What does all this hybridity and derivation mean? Did the 17th century British royal court consider the Chinese culture superior and worthy of imitation? And why did the Dutch embrace the flower, the blue-and-white porcelain, the shape of the vase as indelible aspects of their identity? The answer may lie in the celebration of connectivity and sheer joy in the ability to integrate such disparate elements into their culture rather than in a slavish submission to Ottoman horticulture and Chinese ceramic inventiveness.

I think we should look at the hybrid 'Apulian' column krater of the indigenous people of Italy in a similar way. Of course they were aware that the shape was Greek – they had been importing it for over a century before the Apulian version took over. If the recent publications mentioned above make one thing clear, it is that the Messapians, Peucetians



Fig. 5: Tulip pyramid, ca 1692–1700 CE. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. BK-2004-4-B.

and Daunians had a very thorough grasp of Greek artistic and material culture. Yet they welcomed the adaptation of the iconography of one particular shape to their own material culture. They were as aware of the hybrid nature of the vessel as the Dutch were of the clash of cultures in their exuberant flower vase of choice. It shows simultaneously a conscious adaptation of an element of Greek culture and a conscious assertion of indigenous values, oppositions which were not ignored but rather accentuated.

Notes

¹ First and foremost my thanks goes to Dimitris Paleothodoros, who invited me to his session at the AIAC Conference in Bonn and Cologne, and who advised, guided and goaded the present article. Also thanks to Giada Giudice, Stephanie Kramer and Trifon Bambilis for their kind help and remarks and to Thomas Carpenter for his encouragement.

² Payne 1931, 300 f., a brief outline of the history and spread of the shape.

³ E.g. the amphoroid krater from Maroni, illustrated in Mountjoy 2001, 73 fig. 153 (LH IIIA1-2, ca. 1375 BC).

⁴ Carpenter 2003, 10–20, also on their use, distribution and iconography.

⁵ Consulted 12 July 2017.

⁶ I sketch the extent of the bias in Van de Put 2011, 34 f. It was illustrated in the conference by the intervention of M. Damianov, relating numerous finds Thracian in the hinterland, largely unknown to Beazley.

⁷ De Cesare 2007 for Sicily.

⁸ Paleothodoros 2018.

⁹ Paleothodoros, personal communication.

¹⁰ Cahill 2002, 185

¹¹ Rotroff – Oakley 1992.

¹² Lynch 2011, 130 f.

¹³ Tosto 1999.

¹⁴ Kluiver 2003, 19. 123 f.

¹⁵ Carpenter 2003.

¹⁶ There is abundant scholarship on trading routes and local preferences, especially regarding Etruria and Sicily, which I am unable to incorporate in the present discussion, e.g. Giudice 2007; Giudice et al. 2017; Giudice et al. 2015.

¹⁷ Carpenter et al. 2014; Carpenter 2003.

¹⁸ Carpenter 2003, 3 f.

¹⁹ Carpenter 2003, 16–20.

²⁰ A key issue in anthropology; e.g. Eriksen 2001, 294–311 and elsewhere.

²¹ “In the west the Greeks had nothing to learn, much to teach”, Boardman 1980, 190.

²² The ‘Bloempiramide’ (Flower Pyramid), Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. no. BK-2004-4-B.

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