



Red-Figure Vase Analysis

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Cantor Arts Centre includes a number of exciting exhibitions, which perform the unique examples of ancient art. I decided to investigate the role of ceramic in historical context on the example of red-figure pottery. It has played a crucial role in the development of not only Greek, but also world culture and served both as a piece of art and the thing, which may be applied in practice.

This Red-figure terra cotta amphora was created by Kleophon Painter approximately in century 430 BCE. Since it was discovered in 1970, it is placed in Cantor Arts Center with regards to Dr. Hazel D. Hansen Fund now.



Volute Krater Kleophon Painter, c. 430 BCE

In order to examine the essence and role of Volute Krater amphora, it is necessary to analyze the role of ancient Greek pottery on the whole. Red-figure vase painting was one of the most important styles of vase painting, which manage to overcome previous black-figure vase painting style. The images on the vase painted by red color on a black background included the scenes of mythology, religion rituals, daily life and some important events. The technique of painting is not complicated because it is the reverse of black figure method, when the three-phase technique was

applied. After the firing, the vases were shaped and then fired to near-brittle texture. The images on the vases are red because normal unburned clay had orange or red color. The outlines of the images were drawn with charcoal or blunt scraper. After that the outline was redrawn with the brush, though, sometimes the painters left the outline visible. As a result, sometimes the reliefs were noticed as the major lines were slightly protruded while the minor lines were painted with diluted glossy clay. However, Kleophon's vase was done in traditional way without reliefs. There were the versions, which assumed that the hollow needle might have been applied, but John Boardman called this idea improbable in his book "The History of Greek Vases" (2006, p. 286).

It is worth mentioning the manner and biography of the painter of the given vase. Kleophon Painter is a name given to anonymous red-figure painter. He was named in this way because one of his works contained an inscription in praise to some young person called "Kleophon." The artist primarily worked in the workshop of Polygnotos where Dionis Painter has been taught. Kleophon Painter worked during the fifth century BCE. He was famous for drawing Attic Red-figure vases, which predominantly belonged to Greek mythology genre that implied both the domestic scenes, such as the parades or sacrifices and the images of the warriors. To be precise, Kleophon's twenty-four paintings about warriors and one hundred forty paintings with domestic themes have been discovered. Kleophon painted big vases, especially krater vases that quantitatively dominate over his other works. Also, it is worth taking into account that these vases were very popular and influential, as they were spread not only in Greece, but throughout the world. There is a difficulty in distinguishing Kleophon's paintings from the other vases of the fifth century BCE because he had rather common style of painting. A number of vases have been classified as those, which belong to Kleophon's manner. For example, Dionis Painter and Kleophon had many similarities, which made it complicated for researchers to distinguish some vases. However, Kleophon's vases may be distinguished through the analysis of the location of the given

vase, style and type of vase, characters and some patterns, including chin and the eyes. Kleophon usually painted the eyes of rounded off triangular shape and rounded off or bulbous chin. Unfortunately, these features can not be supported by Volute Krater, but other paintings evidence his specific technique. Kleophon dedicated many of his vases to the issues of mythology and warriors, though sometimes the characters were depicted in daily situations. The given vase may be considered the embodiment of his activity, as it represents the dramatic scene with the warrior and her loved. It can not be called unusual, but it symbolizes his approach and vision of art.

The Kleophon Painter belongs to the painters of Early and Late Classical period. In general, the figures of this period may be characterized as less dynamic paintings that gained pathos and seriousness, as they became more plastic and complicated. The themes of the paintings were concentrated on a certain moment or event with a feeling of dramatics. Furthermore, the vases of the Classical period including Kleophon's vases were under the impact of democracy, tragedy and wall painting. Though almost all wall pictures are destroyed, the contemporaries may view their reflection on vases. The painters paid much attention to the issues of symmetry, harmony and balance that had to be the components of the painting on the vase. Kleophon usually depicted the warriors, who are leaving their families or returning home. The given vase served as a reminder for the women of an upper-class, who placed the vases in their homes so that they could remind of the loved ones, who had left. The volute Krater has a leaf pattern wrapped around the bottom and top of the vase with lines. Along the handles the black drops are chaotically placed on a red background. The warrior is surrounded by other people: a woman and a young man. The woman holds the shield of the warrior while the young man hands the staff. As the whole picture on this vase is destroyed, it is difficult to know for sure the theme of the painting. However, it may be noticed that the man holds something in his hands. Perhaps, the woman gave this object to him in case he is leaving, or he presents something to the woman in case he is coming back. The faces of the men are similar, and they wear the same

clothes. The woman is placed above the ground; she might be rich and famous. Matheson wrote that the Kleophon Painter “has chosen as his central focus not the warrior, but the exchange between the warrior and the woman he leaves behind. The space between these two figures forms the central axis of the composition, space bridged only by the glance between the man and woman and the phial that symbolizes the departure offering. The void both literal and emotional is the picture’s focus” (Matheson, 1995, p. 148).

According to Beazley, the phenomenon of Greek vases may be comprehended in case both minor and major components of the vases are compared. He mentioned that it is important, however, “to realize that the linear perspective on these Late Greek vases is only a partial one. Instead of viewing the whole scene from one point of sight and adopting one vanishing point toward which all receding parallel lines converge, several vanishing points were used with varying points of sight. The space of the picture was not yet realized as a unity. This partial perspective obtained throughout antiquity. Hellenistic, Roman, and mediaeval art utilized but did not carry further the inventions of fifth-century Greece. Though the compositions are often more complex than before, no new knowledge of perspective is introduced. Each object is still viewed separately, not as part of a unified whole” (1963, p. 140). The statements, mentioned above may be applied to Volute Krater as well. It proves that the issue of Greek vases has been studying by different generations of the researchers.

It may be concluded that red-figure bases are important element of the world culture. Done in complicated technique, they symbolize the achievements of ancient craftsmen and painters. This Volute Krater amphora is painted by the Kleophon Painter, who combined in his paintings two major themes. Though they are distinct, some of their details, such as chin and the eyes witness the mastery of Kleophon. The vases were applied in a different way. Essentially, they served as a piece of art and reflected some other events and paintings. Also, some of the vases were used as tanks for wine and water. However, the vases had sacral meaning, as they reflected the problems and principles of life

in ancient Greek society. The given red-figure vase represents the scene of dramatic communication between the man and the woman. The given vase allows analyzing the whole Greek culture as it embodies the excellence of Greek thought.

Reference List

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