

COLLOQUIA ANTIQUA

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# ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL WESTERN ANATOLIA: NEW PERSPECTIVES IN CERAMIC STUDIES

*In Memoriam*

*Prof. Crawford H. Greenewalt Jr*

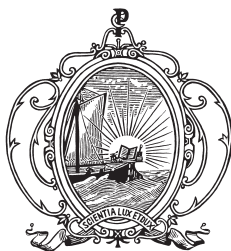
Proceedings of the Second KERAMOS International Conference  
at Ege University, Izmir, 3–5 June, 2015



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PEETERS

LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT

2018

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## THE HAND OF THE POT PAINTER IN EARLY LYDIA

Nancy H. RAMAGE

### *Abstract*

Two 8th- and 7th-century habitation sites at Sardis have provided much painted pottery on which some observations about the techniques of the pot decorators may be offered here. The pottery was found at two sectors, the House of Bronzes (HoB) and Pactolus Cliff (PC), both of which will be published soon in a volume in the Sardis monograph series. This paper will show that we can identify some of the hands of individual pot painters, and recognise the methods used in producing the decoration on their pots. By careful comparison of the manner in which the multiple brush was handled, individual characteristics of the painter may be identified on more than one pot, showing that the same brush was used on different pots. One artist painted his pattern from left to right, and another from right to left. In one case we have two fragments that come from different sectors of the site that were clearly the work of the same decorator. Such observations bring us closer to the individual who spent his time making functional pots more beautiful.

Among the pottery finds at two of the Iron Age habitation sectors at Sardis, a rich array of painted pottery allows us to make some deductions about the painters who decorated the pots found there.<sup>1</sup> One of the sectors, Pactolus Cliff (PC), is named for its location on the cliff by the Pactolus river; it was excavated in 1959 and 1960. The other, the House of Bronzes/Lydian Trench (HoB), got its name from a Late Roman house under which early Lydian remains were first found in 1958. The period under discussion here stretches from the late 8th to the late 7th centuries BC. The pottery found in these two sectors was mostly fragmentary, but nonetheless we can identify some of the

<sup>1</sup> This paper is dedicated to Crawford H. Greenewalt Jr, who knew an enormous amount about the techniques of decorating pottery. I am grateful to the Sardis Expedition, and to Catherine Alexander, Theresa Hunt, Joan R. Mertens and Andrew Ramage for assistance with this article.

individual hands of those who decorated the pots, and recognise their methods of work in producing the painted decoration.

It is well known in Attic pottery that a pot painter would sometimes choose to put his name on the surface of the pot; while others have been identified in modern times by the name of the potter whose name was at times added on by the painter. Such names are often written as if the pot were talking, as in 'So-and-so painted me' (for the pot painter), or 'So-and-so made me' (for the potter himself). And for a great number of pots where no name has been applied, the painters have been given names based on such things such as the characteristics of their style ('Elbows Out'); the place where one of the pots is located (the Berlin Painter); a favourite motif (the Reed Painter); or a collector's name (the Tyszkiewicz Painter). J.D. Beazley underpinned the entire study,<sup>2</sup> but he had predecessors, especially the 19th-century German scholars Wilhelm Klein and Paul Hartwig, and the Italian Giovanni Morelli.<sup>3</sup> Since Beazley, many others have built on his foundations.

But on the pottery from Sardis, the capital of Lydia, we have only one possible painter's name: Lydos, 'the Lydian', who was one of great early pot painters working in Athens around the middle of the 6th century BC.<sup>4</sup> For the local pottery made at Sardis, however, there are no identifying names; nevertheless, the methods used by the painters are worth examining for their own sake.

In both Athenian pottery of the Geometric period, and Lydian black-on-red pottery of the late 8th to mid-6th centuries BC,<sup>5</sup> concentric circles and semicircles are a common decoration. Such motifs can be seen on the shoulder of a Lydian streaked trefoil oinochoe with pendent semicircles from HoB (Fig. 1).<sup>6</sup> These designs are typically drawn with a tool called a multiple brush. It had several brushes attached to a single handle, and in order to make the smooth curves of the circles and semicircles, at one end it would have had a point that served like the pivot of a compass (Fig. 2).<sup>7</sup> This point sometimes left a small indentation in the surface of the clay (Fig. 3a), as seen on a black-on-buff

<sup>2</sup> Beazley 1956 (*ABV*); 1963 (*ARV<sup>2</sup>*); and several other monumental works. See also Elsner 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Klein 1879; Hartwig 1893; Morelli 1874–76.

<sup>4</sup> On Lydos, see Tiverios 1976.

<sup>5</sup> Gürtekin Demir 2011; and Greenewalt 2010.

<sup>6</sup> P63.367:5495.

<sup>7</sup> On the multiple brush and its use on Greek pots found at Al Mina, see Boardman 1959; and on its use in general, see Boardman 1960. Also Petsas 1964; and Eiteljorg 1980. The drawing by Catherine Alexander shown in Fig. 2 was based on an example made by Eric Hostetter. Hostetter's multiple brush worked extremely well, and showed that the paint had to be of exactly the right consistency.



Fig. 1: A Lydian trefoil streaked oinochoe with pendent semicircles on the shoulder. Manisa Museum 4423. H. with handle 0.355 m. P63.367:5495, from HoB.



Fig. 2: A multiple brush, reconstruction.  
Drawing by C.S. Alexander.



Fig. 3: a) Pendent hooks on a black-on-buff fragment.  
H. 0.07 m. P60.71:2328;  
and b) pendent hooks on a red bichrome fragment.  
H. 11 m. P60.125:2401. Both from PC.

fragment.<sup>8</sup> One painter who decorated a pot with pendent hooks in a red bichrome technique (Fig. 3b) used no fewer than 11 tips in his brush.<sup>9</sup> Whereas he used the multiple brush on a compass for the curved portion, he used it without service of the compass for the vertical part of the pattern. Clearly this artist had remarkable skill and control.

To make his circles or semicircles, the painter moved his tool in a circular motion. But the inner circle is often quite small, and not suitable for this technique because it makes too thick a circle or even a solid blob. Many pottery samples show the solution to this problem: compass-drawn circles for all but the inner one, which is then drawn freehand. This shows, for example, in fragments of a black-on-red plate where the inner circle is irregular; here a single brush had been freshly dipped in the glaze before making the freehand circle in the middle (Fig. 4).<sup>10</sup> Other fragments show the use of the multiple brush to make pendent hooks or semicircles, but without a compass. Such pieces, in other words, were drawn completely freehand (Fig. 5).<sup>11</sup>

With the multiple brush, the outer brush had farther to travel than the inner brushes, and the outer lines are often found to be thicker than the others (Fig. 1). The outer thicker brush would hold more paint, as more would adhere to it than on those smaller brushes on the inside of the curve.

The multiple brush is used, too, to produce decorative patterns of cross-hatched squares and rectangles. On one example (Fig. 6), the decorator painted

<sup>8</sup> P60.71:2328, from PC.

<sup>9</sup> P60.125:2401, from PC. On pendent hooks and their possible origin, see Boardman 1960, 87.

<sup>10</sup> P60.455:2729, from PC.

<sup>11</sup> P61.494:4001, from HoB.





Fig. 4: Concentric circles, the central one hand-drawn.  
Orangey red on white plate fragment.  
H. 0.047 m. P60.455:2729. From PC.



Fig. 5: Black-on-red concentric semicircles  
drawn freehand with a multiple brush but with a compass.  
H. 0.041 m. P61.494:4001. From HoB.



Fig. 6: Black-on-red cross-hatched rectangles and squares.  
H. 0.12 m. P13.25:13363. From PC.

rectangles filled with horizontal lines made with a six-headed multiple brush, but the rectangles were larger than his brush, so he added two additional lines, freehand, at the bottom of each.<sup>12</sup> The vertical lines in the rectangles were also made with the same multiple brush. But when he got to the next band, this time with smaller squares to be filled with hatching, the six-pointer was just the right size, so he didn't need to add any extra lines.

Wavy line patterns were also made with a multiple brush. When the brush was held straight up, the wavy lines never touch each other, but when the painter moved his tool up and down, holding it at a slight angle, the result was rather like a knitting pattern. On a brush with five tips, the upswing of each of the brush lines is distinct, whereas on the downswing, they appear to join into a single line (Fig. 7).<sup>13</sup> Because the painter was again holding his brush at an angle, the middle row of five becomes the top row in the next section; in other words, the rows do not run continuously. A particularly fine example of this pattern (Fig. 8) was found by the first archaeological expedition to Sardis in 1914, and was excavated under the direction of Howard Crosby Butler. Although most of the pottery from that excavation came from the tombs in the necropolis on the west side of the Pactolus river, this sherd and many others were found north-east of the Temple of Artemis.<sup>14</sup> Here, on this pot sherd, seven brushes were handled by an expert painter. The fragment is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was one of the sponsors of that earlier excavation.<sup>15</sup>

In looking for signs of exactly how the paint was applied, one sees that the painter made the wavy lines in sections, some of which have darker paint than others, suggesting that he periodically dipped his brush anew. Another feature of the multiple brush is that in making pendent hooks, the painter had to lift the brush to make the full circle, and the place where the brush came down again is quite clear (Fig. 3a). Sometimes the painter ran out of room to complete his design properly, in which case he had to overlap the semicircles on the last place where he arrived on the pot's decoration (Fig. 9).<sup>16</sup>

On occasion it is clear that different pots were decorated by the same painter. Fragments from two different wide-mouthed bowls, painted by the same hand, with the same multiple brush, came from PC (Fig. 10 shows one of them).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> P13.25:13363, from PC.

<sup>13</sup> P13.31:13369, from PC.

<sup>14</sup> Butler 1922, 150–51; Chase 1915.

<sup>15</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art inv. no. 26.199.232.

<sup>16</sup> P60.191:2490, from PC.

<sup>17</sup> The two fragments are P13.37:13375, and an uninventoried fragment from 1960. Both are from PC.

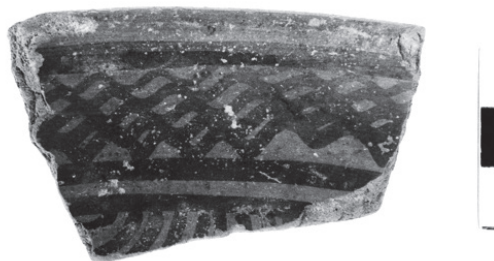


Fig. 7: 'Knitting pattern' made with a five-tipped multiple brush. W. 0.068 m. P13.31:13369. From PC.



Fig. 8: A black-on-red fragment made with a seven-tipped multiple brush. MMA inv. no. 26.199.232. From Sardis. Found in 1914. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Fig. 9: Black-on-red overlapping pendent semicircles from a fragment of a shallow bowl. Diam. 0.36 m. P60.191:2490. From PC.



Fig. 10: Fragment of a black-on-red wide-mouthed bowl. Vertical wiggly lines in squares, alternating with undecorated squares, by the 'Vertical Wiggle Painter A'. P13.37: 13375. H. 0.67 m. From PC.

On both, six vertical wavy lines were placed within squares, alternating with unpainted squares, thus making a large checkerboard pattern. The top row in each is narrower than the second. The man, whom we shall call the Vertical Wiggle Painter A, always started his wiggles to the left, and he used his six-pointed multiple brush to make straight lines on the top ledge of the rim.

Another painter made the two white bichrome fragments that are so similar that they were catalogued as one pot; but in fact one is from a jug and the other, a krater. Their decoration is virtually identical, as seen in Fig. 11: below the rim is a wide white band with vertical wiggle patterns, six multiple brush heads at a time, with horizontal bands above and below the white band.<sup>18</sup> This painter, unlike the other, always starts his wiggles to the right. We shall call him the Vertical Wiggle Painter B.

The centres of two different plates, one with the beginning of an omphalos, the other with a quite different profile, were decorated with thick double circles with connecting blobs between them (Fig. 12 shows one of them).<sup>19</sup> These two examples, both with the same unusual decoration, were almost certainly made by the same painter.

<sup>18</sup> P60.52a:2305a and P60.52b:2305b. Both are from PC.

<sup>19</sup> The two fragments are P13.20:13358 and the second one (not shown) is P13.23:13361, both from PC.



Fig. 11: Fragment of a white bichrome painted jug by the 'Vertical Wiggle Painter B'. a) H. 0.067 m. P60.52a:2305a; and b) Fragment of a krater. P60.52b 2305b. H. 0.085 m. The jug fragment is on the left and the krater on the right. Both from PC.



Fig. 12: Fragment of a plate. H. 0.045 m. P13.20:13358. From PC.

Finally, the fragment of a large white bichrome jar found at Pactolus Cliff is so similar to a piece from the House of Bronzes that we must have, again, the work of the same painter (Fig. 13).<sup>20</sup> This is especially interesting in that this painter's wares were being used in two quite separate parts of the ancient town.

<sup>20</sup> The large fragment from a jar is P60.207:2511, from PC, and the smaller fragment, P13.21:13359, is from HoB.



Fig. 13: Two white bichrome fragments by the same painter, the larger fragment a) H. 0.31 m. from PC. P60.207:2511; and the other b) H. 0.068 m. P13.21:13359. From HoB.

It is quite clear that the painting of Lydian pottery (as well as the making of the pots themselves) was a specialised art that took practice and skill, and called for craftsmen who knew how to handle their tools. The individual identity of pot decorators seen here indicates that consumers would go to an expert rather than attempting to do the job themselves. This indicates a step on the way to retail trade.

These various observations, made simply by looking carefully for signs of a pot painter's techniques, help the modern student of ancient pottery to get closer to the maker and to understand just how the decoration was applied. There are numerous other such observations to be made, and it is hoped that this essay will prompt others to offer their own conclusions on ancient methods of decorating pottery.

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