

Justin St P. Walsh, *Consumerism in the Ancient World: Imports and Identity Construction*. Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies, 17. London; New York: Routledge, 2014. Pp. xx, 218. ISBN 9780415893794. \$125.00.

This book is important for two reasons: it offers a novel example of the use of material culture on a very large scale to explore aspects of ancient identity construction; and its combination of a relatively short print volume with a large data set that informs the interpretations, available through the Routledge web site via a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike license. Although the book is undoubtedly about consumerism, the title is a little broader than the focus of the book. It is about the consumption of Greek pottery in non-Greek areas of the western ancient Mediterranean.

The evidence of ceramics produced in Greece (primarily, but not exclusively, Athens) of the 7th–4th centuries B.C.E. provides a rich complement to written texts and architectural remains for reconstructing the histories of the ancient Mediterranean. Analyzing ancient pottery beyond its utility in establishing or confirming dates can be daunting and unappealing to those outside the narrow sub-discipline of pottery studies. Defined by the work of J.D. Beazley, the study of ancient figural, and to a lesser extent plain black-gloss, pottery was for decades grounded in art historical methodologies that quickly become arcane. Fortunately, in the past half-century the study of vase-painting has broadened the range of questions it asks and has enhanced the applicability of the answers through the use of theory and method from the social sciences. This monograph is an example of a fresh moment. It suggests both a potential broadening of the audience for ceramic studies and the compelling questions that analysis of a very large data set by a variety of statistical methods—including some developed originally for use in geoscience and ecology—can generate. It also provides one model for how print and digital publication can be integrated to make a very large body of material available for other scholars both to replicate Walsh’s results and to try new manipulations of these data.

The author has been working on questions of what Attic pottery meant, and thus how it was “consumed” in Greek and non-Greek contexts for some time. In this focus, he joins others similarly occupied, but he definitely stakes out new ground. Beginning about 20 years ago, a number of studies appeared that posed novel questions of the widespread evidence of Athenian fine ceramics, i.e., black- and red-figure and black-gloss pottery, in the western Mediterranean. Two can be singled out to show this trend: Christoph Reusser carried out a meticulous and influential study of the distribution and contexts of Greek pottery in Etruria to understand its meaning and use for Etruscans; a second, smaller study, by K. Arafat and C. Morgan, analyzed the same type of evidence that appeared much further west, from the Heuneburg, an important Celtic fortified settlement along the Upper Danube in German.¹ Arafat and Morgan looked carefully at

¹ Christoph Reusser, *Vasen für Etrurien. Verbreitung und Funktionen attischer Keramik im Etrurien des 6. und 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* Zürich: Akanthus, 2002. Karim Arafat and Catherine Morgan, “Athens, Etruria, and

how useful Attic pottery is as a proxy for trade and local consumption. They note, importantly, its relatively small quantity within the Heuneburg to question the claim that it served as an essential marker of elite status and even inspired the development of an elite within the local society. Both Reusser and Arafat and Morgan document the relationship of Attic wares to local productions, concluding that they (Etruscans or Hallstatt cultures) were far from uncritical consumers of “anything Greek.” Rather than Attic imports acting as novel stimuli for social change, they were desirable because of their “affinity” to existing cultural norms. Feasting and drinking were commonplace before the period when Attic imports arrived; the appearance of shapes for serving and consuming wine fit into established customs rather than engendering them.

Walsh certainly acknowledges these earlier studies, but he cites as primarily influential his own work at the Sicilian site of Morgantina and the scholarship of Michael Dietler on social drinking and feasting. Walsh anticipates a very broad audience, which his title will surely invite. The core data for the study come from 233 excavated sites in Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, and Switzerland, all of which are identified and located on seven maps in the Introduction. The author aims to examine “the values, meanings, and relationships associated with Greek pottery as a luxury good,” using theories of consumption to see if “traces of consumer choice exist, and whether the role of Greek pottery in different communities can be discerned.”

The author assembled the data set by combing through excavation reports and accepting the excavators’ identifications of pottery as Greek. While such identifications are relatively straightforward for Attic figural pottery, there is much more uncertainty with black-gloss wares, which make up a large percentage of the evidence and are produced, at least in Italy and Greece, in a number of different centers. Because there are many fewer such local manufacturing centers further west, Walsh can be more confident that the pottery he analyzes is certainly Greek but he is ultimately relying on the expertise of excavators for the attribution.

Most of the text of the book is devoted to surveys of relevant background material and is fairly general. This strategy is a reasonable one because the author appears to want to engage a very broad group of scholars as his audience, all of whom are likely to be specialists in only one or two slices of both subject matter and methodology. It does, however, keep the discourse at a very general level. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the history of Greek trade and colonization in the west, making clear the greater success in colonization in Sicily and South Italy in relation to areas further west. Trade, based on the evidence of ceramics, is much more extensive than colonization in far-west areas. Anticipating that most readers are unfamiliar with the sites from which ceramic evidence is studied, the author gives in Chapter 3 a general summary of the nature and extent of a tiny subsection of the corpus, the best explored and most significant Greek (3); South Halstatt (1) North Halstatt (4); and Iberian (4) sites. While the presentation is very

the Heuneburg: mutual misconceptions in the study of Greek-barbarian relations,” in *Classical Greece: Ancient Histories and Modern Archaeologies* (ed. Ian Morris) Cambridge, 1994.

general, the main conclusion that the author articulates is significant: settlements, including plans of fortifications, cemeteries, religious and civic areas, where Greek “products” appear suggest that local cultures remained immune to Greekness overall despite their willingness to consume Greek things.

Chapter 4 establishes the theoretical springboard for both earlier studies of Greeks and the west and the current project undertaken by the author. It is a very general but still useful overview, beginning with Colonialism in the 18th and 19th centuries and emphasizing theory that most informs the project: Michael Dietler’s work on consumption; Bordieu’s *habitus* as it is manifest in consumption; consumer behavior and its relationship to identity formation as articulated by several sociologists, and the binding together of these approaches through appreciation of the life history of objects as articulated in André Leroi-Gourhan’s concept of the *chaîne opératoire*. It is clear the theoretical complex that governs this study is both about how luxury items play a role in both social competition and self-perception.

Chapter 5 covers material most familiar to this reviewer, the history of the ceramic industry in Greece, and a very brief overview of the most significant trends in the study of Greek pottery, including connoisseurship. It is pitched at a very introductory level, but is not without merit. Most interesting are the sections on characterizing the material under study (“The Dataset” and “Quantifying Pottery”), both essential for the non-expert to appreciate the basic methodologies implemented in this study. The discussion of how to address the fragmentary nature or “brokenness” of pottery—reconstructing the number or whole vessels by means of fragments—is laid out clearly. Both for reasons of changing computer technology and because publications typically do not include the percentage preserved of feet and rims of vessels, the dataset is comprised of simple sherd counts. There are 23,928 whole vessels or sherds from 233 sites; nearly 25% are from a single site, 4,771 from Saint-Blaise in France. Walsh is apologetic about the absence of a large quantity of data from Lattara in southern France, but makes the point that when the data do become available, they can be added easily to the database. A short section in this chapter (99–103) lays out the rationale for using a statistical method developed for determining ecological diversity, Simpson’s Index of Diversity; pottery shapes are equivalent to species and sherds and whole vessels are equivalent to individuals. The combination of the distribution of types present at a site, sherd counts, and Simpson’s Index of Diversity nuanced by contexts within—tombs, settlement, religious center—forms the basis for Walsh’s assessment of consumer choice in the purchase and use of Greek ceramics. A second important section in this chapter (116–122) records what ancient authors, admittedly biased, tell us about communal eating and drinking in the areas represented in the dataset. Indeed, Celtic and Iberian banquets appeared to ancient writers to have been substantially different from the Greek *symposion*.

The author should be commended for the clarity with which he articulates his findings, supplemented with pie charts drawn from the database, in a list of 12 characteristics that begin Chapter 6. The major takeaways are clear: most of the evidence (nearly 60%) comes from four sites, from tomb or settlement contexts. Most striking,

88% of the finds shapes are for eating or drinking (as opposed to storage, transport, or cooking) and 74% for drinking. The text is linked to maps created through ArchGIS accessed electronically through Routledge. Maps showing the distribution of shapes were produced through kriging, a geostatistical method that the author thoroughly explains in the text. Interestingly, kriging not only depicts the actual distribution of material, it predicts the distribution for sites not sampled. The maps and spreadsheets are easy to access, although the absence of site names in the e-maps is an inconvenience.

The files download easily. It is indeed impressive to see the spreadsheet with each of 23,929 vessels or fragments entered individually along with key information, including publication. There are limits, however, and the subjects, if they are even known, of scenes on figural pottery are not included. Still, scholars who may wish to pursue the kinds of questions that have intrigued many who examine patterns in Etruscan consumption of Athenian painted pottery—what did the imagery on an Athenian pot *mean* to different groups of non-Greeks—will have a much easier time, thanks to this extensive preliminary work by Walsh.

The file names do not appear to be identical in the text and in the downloadable material from the Routledge web site, although it is possible by searching through them to correlate text and files. This problem seems as though it would be easy to remedy, simply by changing the file names on the web site, and it would be immensely helpful.

The fact that such a large percentage of the Greeks vessels found in the far west are drinking cups inspires us to ask if this means they functioned in Greek-style symposia. The small number of kraters, a vessel essential for the mixing of water and wine and a key feature of Greek symposia, suggest “no.” Although the author categorizes the household lekane as a vessel for eating (p. 149), it also served in symposia a function very like the krater as demonstrated in a number of Athenian vase images. However, it seem unlikely that even if the few lekanai preserved were categorized with the kraters that it could change the general picture that drinking was not in a sympotic context.

The conclusions, in Chapter 7, are succinctly articulated. Walsh observes many non-random patterns in the distribution of Greek pottery, indicating that consumers in a single region but at different sites made many varied specific choices from a wide array of available stock. While Greek colonies remain Hellenized, no non-Greek group appears to have been “converted” to a Greek way of consuming wine; where there is evidence for commensality, it is not *symposion*. To Dietler’s contention that Greek drinking ware may have initiated community wide status competitions via feasts, Walsh adds detail. He posits that Greek pottery found in contexts not directly related to feasting, such as in burials and sanctuaries, may be better explained as evidence for “wasteful advertising (178–180) were also aided by the purchase and use of Greek pottery as luxury items that allowed the purchaser to achieve a personal and public identity as an elite. Walsh gives a very broad overview of how the patterns in Greek imports throughout the regions he covers in the monograph might be more accurately

understood with the addition of interpreting it through this lens of “wasteful advertising.”

In sum, this is an ambitious project that succeeds in setting out some novel statistical methodology for reconstructing social history from ceramic evidence. The results are interesting and provocative. Perhaps best of all, scholars will be able to confirm or question results and go further with the data as a result of the combination of print and electronic publication, and both author and publisher are to be congratulated on it.

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