THE RHODES UNIVERSITY VASES

by Bernard C. Dietrich and Ann C. Dietrich

When I arrived at Rhodes University to take up the Chair of Classics in 1963, I was surprised and delighted to note a small museum belonging to the Department, and consisting of a valuable collection of coins (K. D. White, *Historical Roman Coins Illustrating the Period 44 B.C. to A.D. 55. A selection from the Departmental Coin Collection of the Classics Department of Rhodes University, Rhodes University 1958*), as well as a few Greek and Italian vases, statuettes and lamps.

The coins had already been carefully catalogued and published by Professor K. D. White, but there was no information about the second part of our holdings: the vases were on display, indeed, yet they were not arranged in any chronological order or by degree of merit, so that our students could not derive any real benefit from the few genuine examples of classical art in our possession. It therefore seemed to us an important task to discover what we could about the provenance of as many pieces as possible, and to make some attempt at dating the more obviously significant examples. This, of course, was no easy feat with the limited resources at our disposal; also during my first two years at Grahamstown I begrudged the time to a necessary but difficult job which often appeared to fall too readily into the background in the face of more immediate duties.

However, even a superficial survey showed that we own some items of considerable interest, if not of outstanding beauty. Our no. 9, for example, is obviously an instance of Cypriot White Painted Ware whose date, therefore, falls early in the second millennium B.C. Equally interesting is no. 1, probably of Anatolian provenance, and an example perhaps of chalcolithic Cilician Ware, belonging in time to the previous millennium. No. 7, again, a three-handled jar, is pre-Greek, probably Mycenaean of about the fourteenth century B.C., while no. 6 is slightly later, the design suggesting the Submycenaean period at about the end of the second millennium. A black glaze 'tea cup' (no. 5a) gives evidence of the fine fifth century B.C. Attic workmanship.

A small perfume jar (no. 8)—*aryballos*—is representative of sixth century Corinthian Ware, at the time when the superior Athenian product had already captured many of the world export markets. Our finest piece of craftsmanship, alas, is on a sherd (no. 4), showing in part the figure of a sphinx painted in an East-Greek workshop, probably in the Ionian city of Clazomenae. A number of other items, however, evoke interest as examples of Attic (e.g. no. 5), or South Italian (no. 2) Ware, or of Hellenistic and Roman workmanship: to this last group, in particular, belong our little terracotta figurines and statuettes and the lamps.
The importance we attach to our minuscule collection, as a beginning perhaps of a larger museum, is rather out of proportion to its intrinsic value, for it is no easy matter to teach the principles of classical art so many thousands of miles away from where this art was born, unless we have some tangible examples for our students to study and comment on: indeed, even colour transparencies and similar visual aids are no substitute for the real object.

When we began the labour of classification at the end of last year, we had in mind a threefold purpose for this modest publication: first of all, it should prove useful to identify what we could of our holdings, and to make these known to a wider audience outside the Department of Classics. Secondly, we hope that a ready guide, together with a few extremely concise general comments, might fire the interest of our students to continue their studies of the subject at whatever level. Allied with this hope is the very real necessity of not allowing the collection to remain in its present form, but to add to it new items which need not necessarily always be authentic—this process would prove too slow and expensive—but consist of well-produced facsimiles, often equally helpful in the classroom. Therefore, the third purpose of our essay is, properly speaking, in the nature of a plea: it is not inconceivable that publication of what we have and what we should like to acquire will tap one or even several fountains of wealth, to allow us in some small measure to propagate and advance the knowledge of a worthwhile subject.

The most grievous problem in cataloguing our vases lay in the fact that we have very little information about their history and provenance: there is no account of the locality where they had originally been found, or of other finds made at the time on the same site or perhaps in the near vicinity. We, therefore, lack some of the elementary aids so necessary to the archaeologist.

As far as the more recent history of the majority of our pieces is concerned, I can offer the following exciting albeit brief account. I owe this knowledge in main to Mr. H. Hewitt of the University of Natal, who was Senior Lecturer in Classics at Rhodes University when in 1956 a bequest was made, through him, to this University, by Mrs. G. W. Russell of London. This gift constitutes the bulk of our collection. Mrs. Russell's husband had been a distinguished London solicitor of literary and antiquarian tastes (cf. *The Times* obituary column, 11th February 1957), quite well known in the common rooms of Kings and All Souls. It seems that he had been invited to represent the British insurance companies which were involved in the fire in which the Smyrna museum was damaged in the course of the riots of about 1922. The grateful museum authorities presented him with a number of terracottas and vases. Some of these found their way into the British Museum some years later; but I have been unable to trace them beyond this stage.
The remainder—in one box—came to Rhodes through the kind agency of Mrs. Russell. It may reasonably be assumed that Mr. Russell offered the best examples of this gift to the British Museum, although one may suppose that the extent of his archaeological training prevented him from making such a selection. Alternately, Mr. Russell in the first instance might have presented all to the British Museum which rejected those pieces that are now in our possession. However, one interesting item of information speaks against such a supposition. Mr. Hewitt tells me that our portion came in one box still wrapped in the original Arabic newspaper and therefore probably had not been open to view and examination since the Smyrna museum made its original generous gift.

This account should explain that chance alone determined the range of our collection which could not be representative of any one particular field or period. Also, our information about the background of individual items is insufficient for us to be definitive in every case regarding the date and provenance. Thus we have been selective for this guide: we preferred to omit some objects rather than make possibly indictable statements when uncertain. At times our dates perforce fall between uncomfortably wide margins, a practice for which we crave the reader’s indulgence.

A very large share of this work was done by my wife who very kindly undertook the task of detailed description, as well as the general comments about special periods and manufacturing techniques. I owe a great deal to her patient toil in this respect, for errors in classification, however, and in dating I am solely responsible, as well as for possible faulty attribution of certain vessels to definite areas of provenance. Where it was thought useful or expedient, we have referred the reader to standard archaeological works, so that he can readily fill in the gaps which must occur in a publication of this kind.

At this point it is my pleasant duty to record my gratitude for the extremely generous help given us in the task of identification and dating by members of the Institute of Classical Studies in London, and in particular by Professor T. B. L. Webster who most willingly placed his knowledge and experience at our disposal.

Our thanks are also due to Messrs. V. C. Moran and J. L. Minshull for expending much care on the excellent photographs of our vases.

Finally I wish to thank the Classical Association of South Africa and Rhodes University for their generous assistance towards the cost of publication.

Any shortcomings of representation, any errors that still remain, are due to my own oversight.

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The ancient objects in the possession of the Department of Classics at Rhodes University are representative of a long period of time—from the
Proto-Chalcolithic in Anatolia, the Bronze Age in Cyprus and Greece to Hellenistic and Roman times. The material is scanty, however, and consists of isolated pieces.

**CHALCOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE**

**Number 1.**

Black unspouted jug with everted rim and upswinging handle, the only decoration an isolated knob on the handle. The body shape is reminiscent of the gourd and the pottery core is dark grey. The jug appears to be of Anatolian origin, almost certainly belonging to the western, south-western, or central area where plain wares are most common. In the absence of sufficient material on the subject, it is difficult to be precise in the dating or to suggest the site from which this jug came. Suffice it to say that, as it was very likely turned on a slow wheel, it probably belongs to the end of the third millennium B.C. The knob on the handle could, of course, point to its belonging to the culture period known as Kusura B, but the wide-mouthed everted rim suggests the Proto-Chalcolithic period in Cilicia.

**Number 9.**

Small white painted jar decorated in thick red paint on a white ground. The decoration consists of parallel bands and cross-hatched lozenges, while the round base is filled in with a solid mass of red paint.

This jar is obviously an example of Cypriot White Painted Ware, popular from the Early Cypriot period onwards. From the evidence of technique and shape, however, we may place it in a Middle Cypriot context. White Painted II belongs to Middle Cypriot I and White Painted III and IV to Middle Cypriot II. W.P. II and III use similar shapes but W.P. II employs a thicker, more highly polished slip than the later ware and a thicker red paint for its designs. Moreover, W.P. III decoration often fires black and there is a tendency for it to cover the whole pot, whereas in W.P. II the base is either left undecorated or is filled-in with a solid mass of red paint. The designs used in both W.P. II and III are similar—including bands of chequers and hatched lozenges. W.P. IV is a degeneration of III. It is often unslipped and the decoration makes only rare use of hatched lozenges but introduces animal figures.

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1. W. Lamb, 'Excavations at Kusura near Afyon Karahisar' in *Archaeologia* 86 (1937) and 87 (1938).
3. For Middle Cypriot fabrics see *Swedish Cyprus Expedition*, i, pls. i–ii; shapes *ibid*. i, pls. cii–cx.
From the evidence of the hatched lozenges, the thick red paint, and the blob of paint on the base, it would appear, then, that our vase belongs to the Middle Cypriot I phase of the Bronze Age, c. 2000—1600 B.C.

Number 7.

A piriform, three-handled jar decorated in reddish-brown on a buff slip. The decoration is simple with the main body area left unadorned, plain bands near the base and cross-hatching on the handle zone. It is a Mycenaean vase dating probably to the fourteenth century B.C. This piriform jar is common and wide spread, many, for example, having been found in Cyprus, and all are wheel made. 4

Number 6.

A two-handled jar decorated in lustrous black on a buff slip. The decoration is simple—upright lines between two thin bands around the rim, a wavy line on the handle zone, two groups of two straight lines below and a thick band round the base. This jar appears to belong to the Submycenaean period, c. 1075—1025 B.C.

The Submycenaean period, also given the name Proto-geometric, marks the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. During the twelfth century B.C. invaders from the north fell upon Mycenaean Greece, breaking down established culture patterns and bringing with them new customs and new decorative motifs in pottery. Vase shapes, for the most part, remain the same and are decorated in lustrous black, but the patterns are purely linear—triangles, straight or wavy lines, circles and semi-circles.

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(b) Cyprus
(c) The Mycenaean Age
  A. J. B. Wace, Mycenae (1949).
(d) Submycenaean—Proto-geometric

4. Annual of the British School at Athens, 47 (1952) 75, no. 479B, pl. 22; Corpus Vasorum in the British Museum, No. 1, II/Cb, pl. 1.
Rhodes University can boast of no piece representative of the Geometric period (c. 10th–8th centuries B.C.) on the mainland of Greece. We have one example of the mass-produced pottery of Corinth, but none of the luxury ware from which the masterpieces of the Attic potter and painter were derived. There are in our collection two examples of black-figure pottery—one a sherd from East Greece, and one lekythos, a poor example of the Attic black-figure technique. Our only other examples of Attic workmanship are a black glazed kotyle and a highly burnished ‘tea-cup’ of the type which we may suppose was in everyday use in the Greek world from the sixth century B.C. onwards. A stemless klyix, probably from one of the Greek cities in South Italy, provides an example of the more developed technique of this black ware. Unfortunately, however, we have no example of the red-figure technique which took over from black-figure about 530 B.C. at Athens and predominated as a luxury ware down to Roman times.

Number 4.

Sherd of a black-figure open vase—either a cup or bowl—showing part of a sphinx, with tail curling over its back, standing against a leathery-buff background. White blobs are used as filling ornaments. The body of the sphinx is painted black with white on the belly, purple-red for highlights and added incision. The wing is painted in the same colours, the white area being marked off from the rest by two black lines and the feathers demarcated by the use of incision. The hair is black and the flesh of the face white as is the convention for females in black-figure pottery. The inside of the sherd is painted in black glaze.

The style is East Greek and suggests Clazomenean pottery of the first half of the sixth century B.C. This sphinx may be compared in particular with that on the neck of an amphora in Pfuhl, Malerei und Zeichnung der Grieche, 5 although the characteristic decorative white dots on the wing are missing in our sherd and we have instead the white blob used as a filling ornament.

Clazomenae was an Ionian city about 20 miles west of Smyrna. It was the largest and commercially most successful of the East Greek black-figure schools. The Clazomenian vase painters use for the most part the normal black-figure technique, occasionally with the addition of white lines. The most popular shapes are neck-amphorae, hydriae, dinoi, and pyxides. The decoration is in bands with a large main band on the body of

5. Band III, pl. 32, no. 142.
the vase. The most popular decoration of this main area is a file of rather lifeless women. These vases die out about 550-530 B.C.

Number 8.

*Aryballos*, or perfume jar, decorated in reddish-brown paint on a buff slip with parallel lines and a central ring of dots, probably to be assigned to an early sixth century context at Corinth.

Corinth is associated with the introduction of the orientalizing influence on to the mainland of Greece and the merging of it with Geometric styles to produce the black-figure technique which was taken over and perfected at Athens in the sixth century B.C., when that city eclipsed Corinth in the trade of the Mediterranean. But alongside this pottery, which was luxury ware, runs the great bulk of pottery (c. 727-5th century B.C.) known as Subgeometric or Linear Geometric. Indeed, by c. 550 B.C. the animal frieze style of black-figure has disappeared at Corinth and succeeding vases are almost all decorated with linear and floral patterns only. A general decline in pottery at Corinth takes place, and early in the fifth century B.C. the fabric comes to an end.  

Number 5.

Black-figure *lekythos* showing a charioteer in his chariot urging on his horses with the goal roughly sketched in behind them. The drawing is poor—for example, the horses's legs do not correspond in number at back and front and the charioteer is no more than a shorthand rendering. It is an example of Attic Ripe Archaic in the manner of the Haimon Painter and to be dated c.480 B.C.

The Haimon Painter was of a group including the Diosophos Painter, the Sappho Painter, the Athena Painter, the Theseus Painter and others who decorated a great number of *lekythoi* and small vases in the black-figure technique already discarded by the great painters. Better examples of the work of this group do, however, show the influence of the advanced technique of line drawing.

Number 5a.

Black glaze ‘tea-cup’ with horizontal handle. This cup is of exceedingly fine workmanship; the core is pinkish-red and the varnish a lustrous black.

6. *ibid.* pls. 32, 141 and 33, 144.
8. J. D. Beazley, *Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters* (1956), 543.
It probably belongs to the fifth century B.C. (c. 460–440 B.C.). We see in this cup, perhaps, the Attic development of the Corinthian 'tea-cup' with vertical handle and conical foot.\(^{10}\) Although no identical pot has been found among the material available to us, the Rhodes 'tea-cup' should be compared with two flat-based cups with horizontal handles published by Miss Lucy Talcott in *Hesperia*, vol. 4, 1935.\(^{11}\)

**Number 3.**

Black glaze *kotyle* merging to red towards the rim, possibly because of mis-firing. It is interesting to note that round the handle zone run two parallel incised lines intended as a rudimentary decoration no doubt. It is possibly Attic in origin and may be dated to the late fourth century B.C. The basic shape originated at Corinth and remains common into the Hellenistic period when it dies out. At Athens the *kotyle* does not come into popular use until the fifth century B.C. The Corinthian type varies little from its original shape but curves in at the top in Classical times: the Attic shape curves outward at the rim and has a rather heavy foot.\(^{12}\)

**Number 2.**

Black glaze stemless *kylix* with upswinging handles and fluted decoration around the handle zone, standing on a ring base. This vase is possibly South Italian and may be dated 4th-3rd century B.C. when stemless cups become common.\(^ {13}\)

**Techniques**

The technique used by potters and painters from the sixth and fifth centuries onwards was essentially uniform—the red-figure style being simply a reversal of the black-figure technique—but potters outside Athens never achieved the vital pinkish-red of Attic potters or the brilliant black glaze of the Attic painter.

The pots were thrown and turned on a wheel, whole or in sections, according to their size. The sections of the larger vases were joined by coils of clay which were levelled off on the outside at least. Handles of Athenian vases were always handmade and therefore often not symmetrical (cf. our *kotyle* no. 3). The finished pot was allowed partially to dry and was then covered with a wash of diluted clay to strengthen the reddish colour on

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11. 'Attic Black-Glazed Stamped Ware and other Pottery from a Fifth Century Well.'
firing. In black-figure the design was painted in black against the clay background, with incised details, and white and dark red as accessory colours. In red-figure, the scheme was reversed—the figures were reserved in the colour of the clay against the glazed background, with details drawn in glaze and often standing out in slight relief. Once the pots had been decorated and allowed to dry, they were fired in the kiln at a temperature between 950 and 1000 degrees centigrade. In the first stage of the firing the body of the vase turned red by oxidization; in the second reducing stage the body and the glaze became black; and in the third re-oxidizing stage the clay of the vase turned red again, while the glaze remained black, as it was not sufficiently porous to admit more oxygen.

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FOURTH CENTURY TO THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD
TERRACOTTAS, LAMPS, ETC.

Rhodes University possesses no large works of sculpture, but we do have small objects in terracotta belonging to the fourth century and to the Hellenistic period (c. 320—80 B.C.).

Fourth Century

The fourth century or Late Classical period still maintains the restraint in design and execution of the fifth century with the addition of humanism. It was not until the fourth century that the entity of the state gave way to the individual, and humanism could be combined with divinity. The greatest example of the art of the fourth century is, of course, the Hermes of Praxiteles. In this statue the majesty of the fifth century has given way to a more intimate and appealing conception of divinity.
The Hellenistic Period

With the death of Alexander the Great and the spread of Hellenism through the eastern Mediterranean area, a new spirit comes into Greek sculpture—sensationalism and display replacing the older restraint and simplicity. Hellenistic art shows no falling-off in technique or vitality, though old fashions are imitated without being improved in the process; and little of real artistic significance was produced, despite complete mastery of sculptural technique.

The examples we possess of these two periods, being small impersonal ornaments or offerings, give little evidence of the general character of the larger works of art, however.

Numbers 20—22.

Terracotta statuettes of two women and a man which may be dated between 350 and 300 B.C.

Number 12.

Terracotta mask of a leading slave belonging to the third century B.C. 14

Number 11.

A slightly damaged terracotta donkey carrying filled paniers. A delightful piece, almost a caricature, belonging to the Hellenistic period.

Numbers 14—19.

Fragments of Hellenistic terracotta figurines. No. 16 is of particular interest as it appears to be a grotesque of, for example, a mime actor; and no. 19 is possibly a head broken off a moulded lekythos rather than a figurine.

Numbers 23—25.

More fragments of Hellenistic terracotta statuettes.

Numbers 10 and 13.

No. 10 is a flask and no. 13 a jug of orange clay representing Hellenistic plain ware and providing a strong contrast to the heavily ornamented painted vases of the period.

14. Pollux, no. 27.
LAMPS

In ancient times only poor means of lighting were available—hence the practice of going to bed early and rising with the sun. The streets at night were not lit and the nocturnal traveller depended upon his own torch or lantern or the lamp light issuing from the interiors of shops along the way. The practice, too, of leaving lamps burning in cemeteries on the outskirts of a town helped men to find their way, and all street shrines were lit by small lamps. Olive oil was burned in these lamps with a wick of flax and when more light was required, lamps were attached to a tall stand (candelabrum).

The Hellenistic and Roman lamps which we have in our collection are descendants of Greek lamps used from the sixth to the fifth centuries B.C. Hand-modelled lamps were in use at Athens as early as the seventh century B.C., but because wheel-turned or moulded lamps were more easily produced, they take over at an early stage. The wheel-made lamps, which came into common use in Greece in the sixth century B.C., were small round receptacles with a large hole in the middle for pouring in oil and with a spout for the wick. No figured decoration was used on them; the technique employed was the same as for the pottery. They were thrown and turned on a wheel and areas were decorated with black glaze while others were reserved in the red of the clay. In the third century B.C. in Greece moulded lamps come into common use. Their ease of production secured their popularity in Hellenistic and Roman times and all the Rhodes examples are of this type.

For moulded lamps a matrix model was first made from clay or carved from wood but these gave way later to plaster moulds which, of course, did not need to be fired and would not shrink in the process. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Roman times these plaster moulds were most commonly used. Wet clay was pressed into each half of the mould and the two pressed together and allowed to dry sufficiently for the mould to be removed and the required holes made for the pouring of oil and insertion of the wick. The pieces were then secured together (luted), the handle was attached, the lamp allowed to dry out thoroughly, treated with glaze and fired.

Numbers 29, 30, 32, 34—39.

A group of Hellenistic lamps. No. 29 belongs to the first century B.C. as
do nos. 30, 32, and 34. Lamps 35 and 36 belong to the period 1—50 A.D. and nos. 37 and 38 to the second century A.D.; no. 39 to the first century A.D.

Numbers 26 and 28.
Handles of elaborate lamps belonging to the first century A.D.

Numbers 31 and 33.
Two Roman lamps, no. 33 belonging to the first century A.D. and no. 33 to the period 1—50 A.D.

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**ROMAN GLASS AND ORNAMENTS**

The Romans used glass mainly for small objects, such as tear and perfume bottles. Larger vessels were made of silver or bronze or more commonly of their inexpensive substitute, *terra sigillata*. Much of the plain Roman glass which we still have has become iridescent owing to exposure to damp in graves or to the action of the soil (cf. no. 27). Coloured glassware of the kind known as *millefiori* has been better preserved, but complete vessels in this technique are very rare and must have been extremely expensive. The best-known specimen of a large object in Roman glass is, of course, the Portland Vase in the British Museum. The blue glass was covered with an opaque white glass paste, which was then cut away to leave the design in white against the background of blue.

Number 27.
A piece of Roman glass probably the stopper of a perfume bottle, but resembling in design the central medallion of a Roman lamp of the third century A.D.

**Ornament**

Roman objects for personal adornment were commonly made of bronze (cf. no. 40), gold or even mere leather according to the affluence of the family. Both men and women wore finger-rings but the principal female
ornaments were ear-rings, armlets, necklaces, and brooches (fibulae), while ivory pins were popular for the hair. The fibula was used to help fasten garments. It has a long history and was originally made from the small bone of an animal's leg from which it derived its name. Later it was made in metal and ornamented; and finally took on the shape of the modern 'safety-pin'. This so-called 'safety-pin' had a plain wire bow with a bent catch and coiled spring, but it was soon made ornamental by varying the curve, coiling the wire, enlarging the surface and decorating it with incised patterns or attaching to it small ivory plates.

Number 40.

A group of metal objects for adornment, consisting of a fibula, buckle, coils (probably armlets, armillae), etc. These bronze objects are difficult to date but the fibula could be as early as 8th century B.C. from Italy, an ancestor of the Roman type. The other objects are almost certainly Roman.

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