

Undoing the Past

Changing Attitudes Towards the Restoration of Greek Pots

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When we first started working on the publication of The University Museum's Attic red-figure pottery for the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, Dr. Roger Edwards, then Curator of the Mediterranean Section, showed us a large, heavily restored vessel of a type called a *stamnos* by Classical archaeologists. After our initial examination of the pot, it was sent to the conservation department for cleaning and restoration using modern techniques and materials. When next we saw the *stamnos* it was in a transition stage, stripped of its overpaint, and exposed as an undressed pastiche made up of pieces from eight different pots, including an "alien" neck and foot.

Relegated to the storage shelves in The University Museum for half a century, this pot is an excellent example of certain appalling 19th century techniques and attitudes towards restoration. In contrast to the present-day desire for archaeological "purity," the previous restorer labored to create a complete pot, with all its figures fleshed out, to be treated as a prized decorative object. This article documents a shift in attitude, and hence in restoration methods, as seen in this one pot—a pot now cleaned of overpainting, relieved of its foreign parts, and rebuilt so that it is worthy of gallery display (Fig. 1).

The First Restoration

To study what the initial restorer had created, we turned to old



1
Detail of the *stamnos* (Side A), after its recent restoration. (Photograph by H. Frederick Schoch and John Taggart)

photographs of the overpainted pot, which showed it with its 19th-century accretions (Figs. 2, 4-5). On Side A (the best-preserved side of the painted vessel), an armed warrior extends a *phiale mesomphalos* or shallow bowl to receive ritual wine, which he will later pour out in libation. The wine is being poured by a woman at the left who holds a pitcher. At the right is a partially preserved figure, restored as a woman. On Side B, the center is dominated by a standing bearded male who holds a staff; he is flanked by two women.

The restorer had fleshed out the scene, making it appear complete

from a normal viewing distance. We suspect that cracks and minor blemishes visible on the early photographs were also painted over at one time, but we have no photographic evidence to prove this. Even in its overpainted state, some specific aspects of the restoration were visible:

Side A: The woman at the left (figure 1) is complete. On the central warrior (figure 2) the lower legs and feet, the lower portion of his cloak, and part of the shield were added. The restorer even cut in the (missing) compass incised lines on the shield's border. The figure at the right (figure 3) is the most extensive-

The Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum

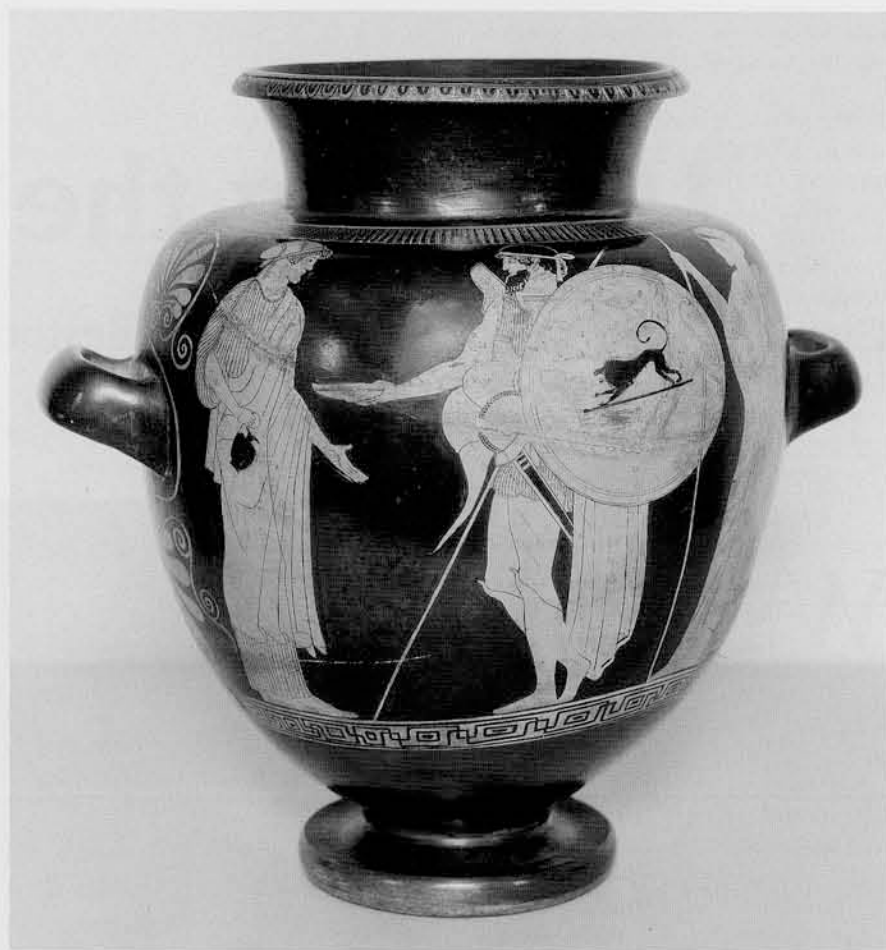
The University Museum has one of the largest and most diverse collections of Classical pottery in this country. Of the more than 2000 vases in the collection, there are examples from the Bronze Age through the Hellenistic period. Only a small percentage of these vases have ever been on display and only a quarter of them have ever been published in any way. In order to make these pieces accessible to scholars for study, the Museum has begun the publication of the collection through the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* (CVA).

The CVA is an international series that serves as a vital research aid in the study of Greek pottery. The volumes provide scholars with detailed commentary and comparanda for each vase, descriptions of shape and decoration, and comprehensive illustrations of each item. The first fascicule appeared in 1923; since that time more than 235 fascicules have been published in 25 different countries.

In 1986 The University Museum published the first of its CVA fascicules, *The South Italian Pottery*, Part I, by J.R. Green. About 15 more volumes are planned, including a fascicule written by Kyle M. Phillips and Ann Ashmead.

ly restored. Here were added the head, right shoulder, and upper body; on the lower body, the forward drapery and foot were painted in.

Side B: The woman on the left (figure 4) is restored from neck to knee. Her real fingers were ignored, and a new hand was painted farther down the vase. The top of the central man's (figure 5) head and the rear portion of his body, from his left elbow (thrust outward to the rear) to a point just below his right knee, is entirely filled in. The woman at the right (figure 6) is preserved except for the top of her cloth headdress.



2

The stamnos after its first restoration.

ACCESSION NUMBER: MS 48-30-3 (formerly L-3-3)

PAINTER: *The Oreithyia Painter* (Dohan), confirmed by Beazley

SOURCE: Bequest in 1948 of Miss Annie May Hegeman, who lent the vase in 1930. Purchased by Miss Hegeman's mother in Rome about 1870

DIMENSIONS (as restored): Height, 0.40 m; diameter of body, 0.325 m; diameter at rim, 0.218 m; diameter of foot, 0.161 m

CONDITION: Extensively restored, with entirely modern neck; "missing portions of the pictures have been supplied by pieces of unpainted pottery cut to the right size, covered with fine plaster and painted; the foot is ancient but does not belong" (Dohan 1932).

The *handle zones* (Fig. 5): These are nearly intact: only the leaf tips and tendrils of the upper right palmette of the A/B handle needed retouching. The tongue pattern on the shoulder and the base meander were heavily overpainted.

First Publication and a Misleading Drawing

In 1932, Edith Hall Dohan gave the vase its initial scholarly publication. Since the vase was a loan from a

Miss Hegeman, Dohan was faced with a dilemma. Had the vase been owned by The University Museum, she would have removed all extraneous restoration before presenting it, as she stated in a letter to John Beazley, a noted Classical archaeologist and expert on Greek vase painting (12 Dec. 1930; Archives of The University Museum). Her solution was to provide a *Museum Journal* article (1932) with two fine drawings by M. Louise Baker, illustrating what she considered to be the original painted lines (Fig. 6a,b). Baker's drawings



3

The stamnos by the Oreithyia Painter as now restored.

SHAPE: This stamnos has a full body, flat shoulder, and sturdy handles which tip upwards slightly

DIMENSIONS: Present height, from lower body to shoulder, 0.040 m; diameter of body, 0.325 m

CONDITION: Incomplete; foot, neck, and large segments of lower body missing. Two panels, separated by palmette patterns at the handles, decorate the stamnos. Side A is better preserved than B, which has lost much of its surface.

are an essential complement to the old photographs, and succeed in conveying the style of the artist. Nevertheless, they must be used with caution since Dohan was deceived by the extensive overpainting.

In the light of our knowledge of the cleaned painting, inaccuracies in Baker's drawings become clear. On Side A, there are errors in the depiction of all three figures. Although a segment of the warrior's shield (lying between 1 and 3 o'clock) is actually restoration, Dohan was misled by the compass drawn lines of the res-

torer into believing that the entire shield and upper portion of the staff were original. A black palmette frond on an inserted fragment was interpreted as a female hairdo on the figure (3) at the right; this probably led Baker to interpret the entire figure as female. The folds of this figure's cloak from knees to head were obscured by extensive overpainting.

On Side B, details in the original painting of the woman at the left (figure 4) were obscured by paint added in restoration, so in Baker's drawing part of her neck, chin and

upper cloak folds are missing; near her knee, a long vertical fold was eliminated but two (overpainted) arcs were added. The fingers of her outstretched hand, held behind the head of the central male (figure 5), had been painted out and of course are not in Baker's drawing. As for the central male, the restorer covered up his eye, the left-most lines of his shoulder, small drapery folds at his waist, and the long line of internal drapery crossing the body from below the shoulder fold to the lower stomach. This unnecessary obscuring of original internal drapery folds by the restorer strikes us as peculiar.

Dohan could see that most of the tongue pattern on the shoulder of the vase was not original. The restorer had overpainted this area to cover plaster, which had been applied in order to force the curve of the vessel between the shoulder and the neck (the latter supplied from another pot; see Fig. 7a). The underlying, original tongue pattern was visible only in one or two small segments. (Recently a ray pattern near the base of the world-famous Francois Vase in Florence was discovered to be a similar overplastering and painting.)

There are omissions too on Baker's drawing. On Side A, for example, she left out the dotted decorative band on the lower skirt of the woman at the left. Perhaps because of the considerable overpaint, Baker chose to draw only the central panel with figures, omitting the bands of pattern that provide a frame for the central scenes, as well as a drawing of the pot's contour. As a result, the drawings produce an impression of flat panel paintings, lacking any indication of how the figures relate to the vase's curved shape.

The Vase Comes Apart

As stated above, the entire pot surface was recently cleaned of all overpaint, and of the fine plaster which was used to fill out the contours of the stamnos. Revealed to us was an intriguing conglomerate. The neck, which Dohan had believed modern, proved instead to be an-



4 An early photograph of Side B of the stamnos as originally restored. 5 Early photograph showing the B/A handle of the stamnos.

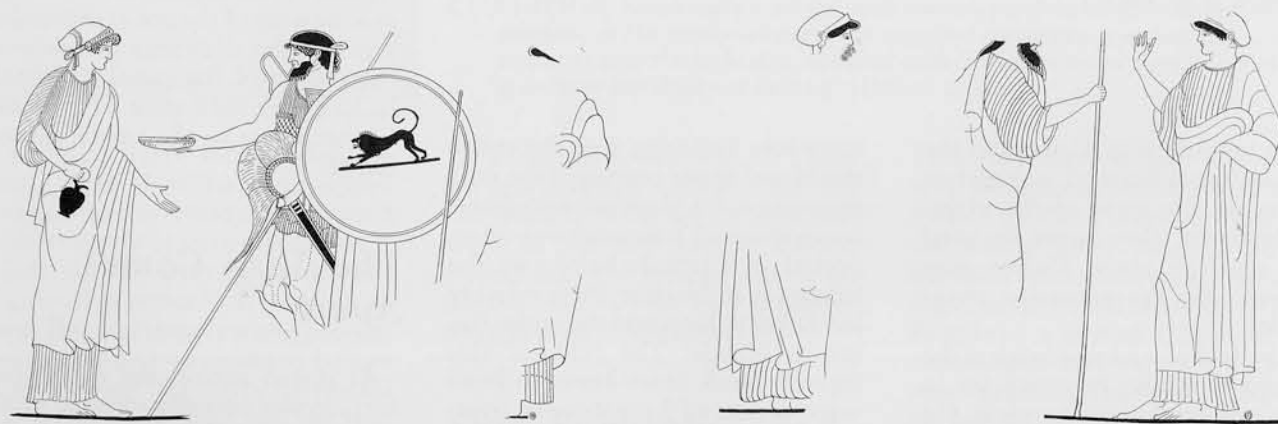
cient and probably Etruscan rather than Greek, based on its shoulder decoration of applied red tongues (Fig. 7a). The foot was also ancient (Fig. 7b); it is perhaps from a large amphora, or possibly from the same vessel type as the body (a stamnos), or from another form, such as a krater. Just as the curvature at the juncture between shoulder and neck was forced, the profile of the lower

body was also altered so that it could continue into the alien foot.

The most distressing restoration technique to 20th-century eyes was the use of scraped, sanded, and cut-down fragments from five black- and red-figure pots. These had been used as filler with no regard for their archaeological value, inserted into gaps where a part of the primary (red-figure) stamnos was

missing. The filler sherds include fragments of a small cup, a black-figure stamnos, a red-figure amphora(?), and two other large pots.

These pieces were placed randomly, at a diagonal or upside-down. Two decorated sherds show upside-down black palmettes. One, placed as the head of figure 3, confused Dohan who interpreted it as a woman's hair (see above). The



6a,b Drawings of the painted scenes from Sides A and B by M. Louise Baker. The warrior on Side A wears elaborate armor, including a crested helmet. The crest is divided into four segments (three uprights and a long tail) that spring from a double row of dots along the top; all are internally marked with rows of dilute glaze strokes for hairs. The bowl held by the warrior is ornamented with a double band of repoussé patterns, the lower a Lesbian leaf and the upper indicated by a wavy design. (From Dohan 1932:68-69)



7a,b The stamnos with the overpainting and plaster filling of the original restoration removed. a) A filler sherd with black palmette was substituted for the missing head of the male figure in the middle (above). b) Missing portions of figure 3 were replaced with black-figure drapery.

other palmette was substituted for a male head (figure 5; see Fig. 7a). The same two fragmentary figures had filler sherds in their lower body: a sherd with black-figure legs filled the space where the legs of figure 5 ought to have been, and black-figure drapery was placed where the drapery of figure 3 was missing (see Fig. 7b). One filler sherd has traces of a *guilloche* (braid) pattern.

The New Restoration

Once we had studied the cleaned pot minus all overpaint and overplaster, we asked that the pot be taken totally apart in order to document its component vessels. This has now been accomplished under the skillful hands of conservator Stephen Koob, and the primary stamnos pieces rejoined (Figs. 3, 9, 10). What has emerged is a handsome vase, the creation of a man known to Classical archaeologists as the Oreithyia Painter. Secondary or filler sherds come from at least seven vases (see box).

The Oreithyia Painter stamnos dates to the 2nd quarter of the 5th century B.C., and takes its place within the period that produced similar restrained monumental works in sculpture, for example, the masterpieces from the Zeus temple at Olympia. This vase is an excellent

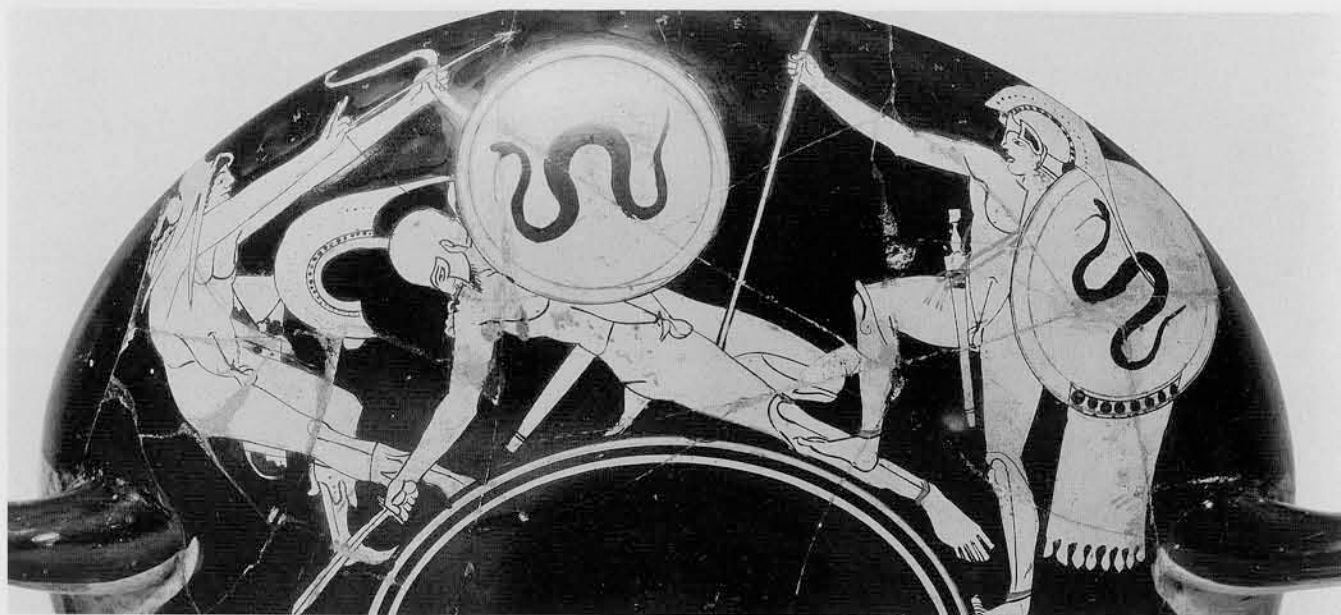
The Pieces Used by the 19th-Century Restorer

The varied range of sherds which the restorer used suggests that he had access to a large supply of Etruscan and Greek pottery, both large and small pots, painted with black- and red-figure scenes. It therefore seems probable that the vessel was restored in Italy, where such a selection would have been available.

The two major pieces used to complete the stamnos of the Oreithyia Painter are the neck, shoulder, and rim of an Etruscan stamnos which has typical Etruscan clay and overpaint, and a foot from another large Attic pot. In addition, fragments from at least five other Attic pots were pressed into service; identifiable are a cup and red-figure closed pots. A large black-figure closed pot provided the greatest number of fragments, ranging in size from large shoulder pieces with

palmettes to good-sized body fragments with human legs, drapery, and a fawn skin, to a tiny fragment with a red *lambda*. In all, 55 individual fragments from this pot were built into the stamnos of the Oreithyia Painter, many of them rasped down to fit the contours of the new composite vessel. We will never know more about this fine but fragmentary black-figure pot.

One problem remains, the possible source for these filler sherds. Many of these pieces show gouges made by trowels, traces of hasty excavation. Although we cannot prove that the pieces all came from the same tomb, such a possibility must be held open. The types of sherds suggest an Etruscan site as their source, and the range of dates that they represent suggests that this hypothetical tomb was laid down in the 2nd quarter of the 5th century B.C., with some of the pottery pieces placed within it as grave goods dating as early as the late 6th century.



8
Battle scene from an Attic red-figure kylix by the Foundry Painter. (UM no. 31-19-2)

example of a painter who was content to work with a restricted subject matter because it so perfectly expressed his sentiments. (A stamnos in Edinburgh by the Oreithyia Painter, No. 81.44.24, depicts very

similar scenes; see Dohan 1932:64-74, Figs. 6-9; Beazley 1963:496, no. 3). Understated elegance and pathos of the moment were important to the Oreithyia Painter rather than the lively experimentation of

the late archaic craftsmen (for example, the work of the Foundry Painter, Fig. 8).

Using the new restoration, we can now give an accurate description of the vase and an interpretation of the scenes portrayed. In the center of Side A, a middle-aged, heavily armed warrior (figure 2) is about to receive wine for a farewell libation from a finely dressed woman (figure 1), either his wife or mother. Behind the warrior stands a draped figure (3) who can be identified as a male (see below).

The two best preserved figures (1 and 2) are drawn neatly and in great detail. The warrior, identified as a mature man rather than a youth because of his dark beard, stands calmly, burdened by elaborate and obviously expensive armor which tells us that he is a man of property. The archaic-looking black lion shield-blazon, small in proportion to the overall size of the shield, is especially detailed, with full bushy mane, open roaring mouth with tongue and teeth indicated, and high curled tail. This archaic device may indicate that the shield was a family piece, perhaps from the late 6th century or early 5th century B.C. The warrior has not yet finished arming, as his scaled corselet (which he wears over a closely pleated tunic, a *chitoniskos*) is open, its right flap projecting above his shoulder. His articulated scabbard should hang



9
Side B of the newly restored stamnos. The missing portions were filled in with plaster of paris and then painted a matte black or orange (see Koob, this issue).

from a baldric, but none is visible across his chest; he holds his helmet and long spear in his concealed left hand. The helmet (a *pilos* type) is elaborate. The warrior wears greaves, which mold to the knees and terminate in projections. His knee and thigh muscles are very completely rendered in dilute glaze, best seen in a slanting light. His hair is bound in a fillet.

The warrior holds a shallow bowl (*phiale mesomphalos*) with central boss, a form frequently made of metal by the Greeks. He carries his cloak bunched over his concealed left arm and waits to make a farewell libation. The painter has captured a calm, monumental scene in this panel. In the warrior's preparations for departure there is a moving poignancy, for this man is in such haste to be off that he makes his farewell libation with his corselet still unsecured. The warrior seems heedless of his fate, which may be to fight and die.

The woman standing before him is, as one would expect from this period, timeless in her beauty. Her curly hair is rendered by close dots; the tie of her elaborate cloth head-dress or *sakkos* is also dotted. The broad folds of her cloak imply that it was woven from fine wool. These heavy folds contrast with the finer folds, perhaps linen, of her full-length *chiton*. The thin, tall handle of the *oinochoe* she carries suggests that this pitcher was also metal. The woman gestures with open palm.

Unfortunately, the third figure standing quietly behind the warrior cannot be precisely identified. The heavy cloak and fine, long undergarment could be worn either by a man or a woman; however, the staff held at a vertical is only appropriate for a male or a goddess. We consider the figure a male, quite possibly the warrior's father.

Two areas of side A have inscriptions: the word *kalos*, or "beautiful" (reading from right to left), extends between the faces of the woman and the warrior. Two letters of another inscription are preserved above the shield, to the right of the staff. The word may be [*kal*]os, or a name, reading from right to left.

On Side B a bearded man holding a staff (figure 5) may be returning from or departing on a trip. He faces



10a,b
a) The A/B handle area after restoration (top); b) the B/A handle (bottom).

a woman (figure 6), who greets him with a standard greeting gesture of upraised hand, palm towards him. A second female figure (4) stands to his rear, at the far left. Two of her fingers project behind the man's shoulder, showing that she is gesturing to the right.

Many of the refined technical features of red-figure drawing are present on this pot despite its worn state. On Side A are visible the *contour strips* and delicate *relief lines* that originally outlined the figures; fortunately those of the faces are well preserved. The preliminary sketch (impressed guide lines laid down by the artist for his original design) is difficult to see because of wear, but the lines are present. Details painted with dilute and thinned black glaze, such as those on the helmet crest and the corselet, are especially fine.

The geometric patterns that surround the painted scenes were carefully executed. Motifs within the handle zone were placed so as to accent the sturdy handles: a single large palmette between handle and base counterbalances the pair of smaller palmettes between handle and neck; each palmette is crisply outlined with relief lines. A tongue

pattern accents the shoulder. Below the picture field is an elaborate double interlocking meander alternating with filled rectangles; this band is edged above and below by lines. The artist started painting the meander border under the A/B handle where the center rectangle is lacking.

Conclusions

We have documented the restoration techniques used in the 19th century on a single Greek pot. Some of these techniques are totally unacceptable to modern archaeologists and conservators. The question then raised is To what extent do these restoration techniques relate to 19th century attitudes?

When the 19th century restorer, whether working for a dealer, a scholar, or a museum, wanted to complete a pot, he frequently used spare sherds for which he had little regard; he had access to a varied supply of Etruscan and Greek fragments and used them to build up the pot's shape or just fill in its gaps. He did not hesitate to mutilate these pieces by cutting them down to size, and by scraping and sanding away

entire painted surfaces. Such sherds were common then, but today these same sherds would be respected items of value in collections of ancient pottery. (One such group is in the Ella Riegel Memorial Museum at Bryn Mawr College, which we published in the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* many years ago).

Subsequently the restorer applied fine plaster—generously, to mask the uneven surface and to smooth over and hide blemishes and fractures. Lastly, he wanted a complete scene. To achieve this the entire decoration was repainted; missing figures, limbs, and drapery were completed, and fractures and other defects were then touched up with paint. So thorough were these efforts that only the most well preserved sections of the pot showed the original work of the ancient potter and painter. In contrast, the 20th-century restorer attempts to conserve what actually remains and to present only actual fragments of the pot, incomplete as the resulting design and shape may be. Fractures, gaps, and even minor chips and abrasions are left as they are, documents of the final stage of the artifact's existence. **2**

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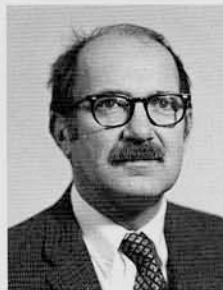
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(Princeton 1971); the
*Catalogue of the
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Museum of Art, Rhode
Island School of Design*
(Providence 1976); and
various articles. She and
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catalogue of the Attic
red-figure vases held at
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for the *Corpus Vasorum
Antiquorum*; volume
one, on the cups, was
completed, and the two
volumes on the large
and small pots were
partially complete at the
time of Phillips' death.