

Humanities 110  
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The Aesthetics of Urn Burial

## I. Introduction

- A. The modern C/cultural ritual of experiencing “art”
  - 1. Art and property
  - 2. The “properties” of art
    - a. art as creator of shared identities
    - b. art and Culture
    - c. art and culture

## II. Urns found in graves

- A. A conceptual and material space both particular and universal
- B. Speechless urns
  - 1. Contrasts with Homer and with Greek sculpture
    - a. 80, 000 everyday objects
- C. Kerameikos
  - 1. Monumental urns (Athens 804; Metropolitan Krater 14.130.14)

## III. Form, Function, Networks of Meaning (Description and Narrative)

- A. Amphora, Kraters, and gender
  - 1. Functional connections
  - 2. Iconic connections
  - 3. Metonymic connections
- B. Formal and representational properties
  - 1. Focus of analysis
    - a. *mentalité*
    - b. The “classical” and the “canon”
  - 2. Formal analysis
    - a. structure and decoration
    - b. connection of forms with “world” (abstract vs. pictorial)
  - 3. Iconography
    - a. subject matter, scene, narrative, relation to viewer, paradoxes
- C. Formal analysis of Athens 804
  - 1. Like formulae in Homer (Hurwit)
  - 2. Proportional relation of parts
    - a. 36 units; 1/3: 2/3
    - b. torso 1/2:1:1:1
  - 3. New York 14.130.14? (Questions of “beauty” and “taste”)
- D. Analysis (formal and iconographic) of *loutrophoros*
  - 1. Naturalism? (an issue of how an object engages and involves the viewer?)
- E. Analysis (formal and iconographic) of Polyphemos amphora

**Names and Terms:**

Aspasia	Dipylon Master
Browne, Thomas	<i>hetera</i>
Bruce, Thomas (7 <sup>th</sup> Earl of Elgin)	iconic
Geertz, Clifford	<i>Iliad latina</i>
Gell, Alfred	Kerameikos
Hamilton, William	meander
Keats, John	metonym
Mauss, Marcel	morphology
Polykleitos (Doryphoros)	prosthetic
Struth, Thomas	prothesis
canon	semiotic
classic	signifier
dipylon gate	symposium

**Quotations:**

1) Thomas Browne: ““sad and sepulchral Pitchers, which have no joyfull voices; silently expressing old Mortality, the Ruines of forgotten times, and can onely speak with life, how long in this corruptible frame some parts may be uncorrupted; yet able to out-last Bones long unborn, and the noblest Pyle among us.” (3) “proper figure, making our last Bed like our first, nor much unlike the Urns of our Nativity, while we lay in the neather part of the earth, and inward vault of our Microcosm” (11)

2) Jeffrey Hurwit: “The simplest formula is a band of three (sometimes two) thin horizontal lines: it is so common (on the front of the vase it appears nearly fifty times, if the vertical strips between the handles are counted) that it binds together the larger building blocks of the surface like geometric mortar (or to mix metaphors, stitching). The triple-line band is combined with other patterns to form more complex formulae: the formula triple-line band/dotted lozenge frieze/triple-line band, for instance, occurs eleven times. This formula in turn frames single meanders and double meanders twice each. Still other formulae can be discerned in this fabric, which increases in complexity as it nears the handle zone of the vase--the most important zone--and then contracts again. It is clear that the surface is ordered through the elaborate, rhythmic repetition of distinct parts--that it is, in short, tectonically and formulaically composed.” (97)

“ . . . the figure has been broken down into separate abstract shapes, and like the amphora itself has been subjected to the ordering force of a proportional canon. The head is a tiny circle with a large lump for a chin, but the height of the head and shaftlike neck together is one-half the height of the torso. The torso (shown frontally) is a tall and precise triangle precisely extrapolated by the muscleless sticks that serve for arms. The body is nearly cut in thirds at the waist (or at least at the spot where the waist should be) and at the knees: the distances between waist and knee and between knee and foot are virtually identical, and so are the curves of thigh and calf. All in all, the Dipylon silhouette, whose joints do not so much connect as exaggerate divisions, is the sum of distinct but mathematically related parts. It is structured according to a 1/2:1:1:1 ratio: the head (and neck) is one-seventh the height of the entire figure--a precociously Classical scheme. The unity of the figure is at any rate of a special sort: it is structural or tectonic, not organic, and the segment matters as much as the synthesis.” (99-100)

**Further Reading:**

John Boardman, *The History of Greek Vases* (2001)

Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998)

Jeffrey Hurwit, *The Art and Culture of Early Greece* (1985) [Lecture at Reed, 7 PM, Monday, October 27]

François Lissarrague, *Greek Vases: The Athenians and their Images* (2001)

Richard T. Neer, *Style and Politics in Athenian Vase Painting* (2002)

Tom Rasmussen and Nigel Spivey, eds., *Looking at Greek Vases* (1991)