

Book presentation, May 23rd, 2003, at the Villa Spelman, Florence

Christoph Reusser, *Vasen für Etrurien. Verbreitung und Funktionen attischer Keramik im Etrurien des 6. und 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.*

Christoph Reusser's book appeared last year, and I suspect that any in this audience have had a look at it before today, may even have worked more closely with it than I have, so that in commending the book to you, I am probably preaching to the converted. In the best tradition of the *Habilitationsschrift*, the book is long, exhaustively documented, comprehensive, and sets the study of an important aspect of classical archaeology on an entirely new footing. It will forever change the way that we, as students of Greek pottery, talk about one of the most important phenomena of our discipline, the export of Attic black- and red-figure vases to Etruria. To take only the most obvious example, the casual observation that virtually all Attic vases sent to Etruria were destined for the tomb (and I am cited as one of the many perpetrators) can no longer be maintained. For Christoph Reusser has been able to document such extensive finds of Attic vases in both domestic and sanctuary contexts as to show that all three functions – funerary, domestic, and cult – must be studied side-by-side and of equal importance, when we consider the question. What use did the Etruscans make of the tens of thousands of vases they imported from Athens. For me, this central core of the book culminates in an illuminating discussion of the symposium, as a social institution, in Greece and in Etruria, and the insight that for the Etruscans, much more so than for the Greeks, there was an unbroken continuity of the symposium in all three contexts: in daily life, in cult, and at the tomb.

Other chapters provide invaluable syntheses of what little is known of the mechanisms of trade in figured pottery between Attika and the various regions of Etruria, as well as the most extensive study to date of the distribution of Attic vase shapes throughout Etruria, in comparison with the distribution at other sites in Italy, in mainland Greece, and beyond.

But I would like to focus on the one section that to me, as an iconographer, is of greatest interest in the book. The chapter is aptly titled "*Zur Gewichtung der Bildthemen*," and expresses the question that has preoccupied a large body of recent scholarship and continues to provoke sharp disagreement among scholars: How much weight should we attach to the choice of subject matter depicted on Attic vases as a factor in the trading relationship between Athenian workshops and Etruscan buyers? Did the Etruscan client have any input, direct or indirect, on the subjects that would decorate the vases he was buying, or did the Athenian painter simply paint what interested him and his immediate circle of fellow Athenians, not knowing, or caring, what the eventual destination of the vases would be? There is a further set of related questions that I think should nonetheless be

kept separate from these, concerning the Etruscan resection of Attic imagery. Did the Etruscans understand the images and inscriptions on Attic vases and, assuming they did, did these images perhaps, at least in some cases, mean something different to them from what the painter intended, or from what a Greek viewer would have understood?

Christoph Reusser quickly sets up an opposition of two extreme views, and it is evident that to a great extent these reflect a deeper predisposition on the part of the individual scholar in his or her attitude toward the Etruscans. In the one, we might say hellenocentric, view, the Etruscans are wealthy but uncultivated *barbaroi* who imported large shipments of Attic vases as prestige items, but were no more able to understand their imagery and inscriptions than most eighteenth-century European buyers of oriental porcelains caught up in the craze for *chinoiserie*. In the opposing view, the Etruscan buyers were a highly cultivated and hellenized *élite* who were *connoisseurs* of Greek myth, admirers of Athenian aristocratic culture, and even had a special affinity for certain myths, cults, and genre scenes that spoke to them directly. As Reusser makes clear, it is partly the absence of any hard evidence for how the choice of subject was determined that has fuelled such widely divergent speculations, and we are not likely to learn anything new that would settle the question once and for all.

Christoph Reusser charts a course of great caution in evaluating a number of recent claims on behalf of an Etruscan role in determining of favoring certain subjects – in my view, perhaps too cautious. He is sympathetic to the proposition (first made by Schauenburg in 1960 and in a way the Ur-paradigm of more recent such arguments) that the scene of Aeneas carrying his father Anchises from burning Troy was favored by the Etruscans because of the hero's connection to Italy. But in Attic black – and early red-figure, the scene of Aeneas and Anchises is a fully integral part of the Iliupersis cycle, along with the Rape of Cassandra, deaths of Priam and Astyanax, and so on, and I would question whether any of those scenes, alone or in a cycle, is any less frequent on the vases found in Etruria. I share Reusser's scepticism of the suggestion by Juliette de la Genière that the popularity of Triptolemos on vases found in Etruria can be explained by a fragment of Sophokles that says he visited the land of Liguria on his mission to spread the grain. In the end, the evidence for any Etruscan input in the choice of subject matter is extremely limited. I am prepared to believe that a number of Athenian workshops produced shapes tailor-made for the Etruscan market, but I believe that one, and only one workshop decorated these Etruscanizing shapes with subjects tailored to the Etruscan client, namely the workshop that produced the stamnoi of the Perizoma Group and the one-handed kantharoi in the years about 520 to 500. In a recent paper, published too late to be cited in Reusser's book, I have tried to make the case that the subjects of these vases really do reflect Etruscan tastes and

practises, not in the mythological sphere, but in daily life: stocky athletes wearing the characteristic loincloth, or *perizoma*, mixed-sex banquets and symposia, and funerary rituals unlike those practised in Greece. This workshop is, then, the one exception that proves the rule, and the rule, for me, is that the Athenian painter chose the themes that interested him, that were in the air in Athens. He may have counted on the Etruscans' appreciation of all things Greek, but was not responding to special requests conveyed through the market.

I would like to commend a recent paper by Robin Osborne. It appeared in the journal *World Archaeology*, 2001, under the title, "Why did Athenian pots appeal to the Etruscans?" In this paper, Osborne attempts, for the first time to my knowledge, a comparative statistical analysis of the subjects of Attic vases found in Etruria and in mainland Greece, mainly in the Athenian Agora, alongside those on locally made Etruscan vases. Now it could be argued that no site in Greece has yielded the broad, representative sample of Attic vases that we have from the major Etruscan sites, but the Agora may come as close as any. The result, crudely put, is that the subjects most popular on the vases that went to Etruria are the same subjects most popular on those that stayed behind in Athens, and there is no evidence for specific myths or genre scenes being overly represented on the vases from Etruria. Osborne's comparative analysis of subjects is analogous to Christoph Reusser's comparative analysis of the distribution of shapes from Etruscan and Greek sites, but Reusser had not extended this approach to the study of iconography. Thus I think Osborne has pointed us in a fruitful new direction that will support the view that, as he puts it, "although the Etruscans were voracious consumers of Athenian pottery, their demand did not generally determine the iconography of the figure scenes, and Athenian pottery provided the Etruscans with a lexicon of scenes from which they selected when producing for themselves artefacts for particular contexts of use."

Christoph Reusser boldly concludes his book with a set of "*Thesen zu einem neuen Denkmodell*." Martin Luther needed 95 theses to promote his new *Denkmodell* for the church; Reusser comes in at eleven. But the result is a convincing new framework for understanding the trade in Athenian pottery in particular from the Etruscan side. And this is perhaps Christoph Reusser's greatest accomplishment, to shift the focus for once away from the Athenian potters and painters of figured pottery and on to those men and women in Etruria who used and admired and valued it so highly. Here, in the heart of Tuscany, surrounded by the ghosts of those ancient Etruscans, we can be thankful that with this book they are starting to get their due.

H. Alan Shapiro, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore