



***Panathenaic Amphorae* of Hellenistic and Roman Times**

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Vases play a very significant role in understanding ancient cultures because they were associated with all areas of life in antiquity. This is especially true for the amphorae, which were awarded as prizes at the Panathenaic games in Athens. These *Panathenaic amphorae* are commonly found at different places across the Mediterranean region from around 560 BCE into the Roman period. They are characterized by a standardized iconographic scheme, which shows Athena on the front and the depiction of a sport's competition on the reverse.

After the decline of black-figured vase painting, Panathenaic amphorae had remained the only Athenian representative executed in this technique. These vessels' close relationship with specific sporting competitions and officials results in a series of exact dates for these prize vessels.

But unfortunately, only some of the periods during which Panathenaic amphora were produced, have been analysed in depth. The reason is that archaeologists concentrated on the prize vessels from the Archaic and Classical periods (for a comprehensive study, see BENTZ 1998). Hence, the interesting aspects, which arise from the changing social and political conditions during the Hellenistic period, were neglected.

A beginning with such studies had been made, however, in 1957, when George Roger Edwards published an article with an illustrated catalogue that incorporated the Hellenistic and Roman Panathenaic amphorae from the Athenian Agora and other archaeological sites (EDWARDS 1957). He – for the first time – was able to prove their continued production into the Roman period. Till this day, his article remains the only work summarizing the context of Hellenistic and Roman Panathenaic amphorae. But a detailed, in-depth study is completely missing. Other publications mainly concentrate on the presentation of new findings, and a treatment of fundamental questions is absent.

The state of research shows that mostly outdated publications form the sources for the study of Hellenistic and Roman Panathenaic amphorae. To fill this gap, given that numerous discoveries were made over the last couple of years, the goal of my PhD thesis is a comprehensive analysis and study of Hellenistic and Roman Panathenaic amphorae. For an advanced interpretation of these vases, questions about chronology, development of shape and iconography, as well as the find and use contexts – which are closely related to distribution and trade – should to be addressed. Moreover, the historical and symbolic function of the amphorae and their imitations needs to be included.

The turn from the Classical to the Hellenistic period (4th–3rd centuries BCE) caused a change in political and social conditions which are also generally visible in the Greek sporting contests, and particularly in the Panathenaic games. Not only was the environment changing, but the amphora itself, too, seemed to have undergone alterations. This phenomenon becomes



Fig. 1

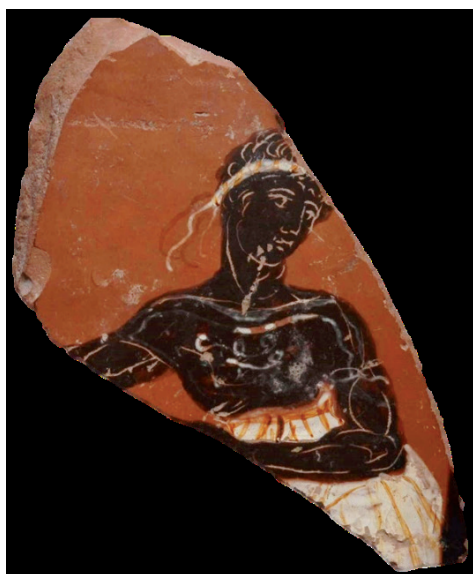


Fig. 2

Figs. 1–2: 1. Athena (ASCSA, Athens Agora P 120); 2. Apobatic Race (ASCSA, Athens Agora P 1893) (Photos: Martin Streicher).

visible both in the inscriptions on the amphorae, and in their altered iconographies and shapes as well.

The *iconography* of Hellenistic Panathenaic amphorae constitutes a central aspect of my research. Particularly, changes in a scheme of decoration which had remained mostly unmodified over hundreds of years have to be set centre-stage. Which were the reasons that led to this development? Till now, there has not been an adequate answer to this question. That is why it should be scrutinized with the available, dateable materials.

Two examples show that different aspects have to be considered for this purpose: 1. The reasons for the modifications of the inscriptions are related to changes in the organization of the Panathenaia, notably the alteration in officialdom. 2. The thus far singular appearance of a Roman general on the front of a Panathenaic amphora (second half of the 1st century BCE) has to be seen in political and historical contexts (Tsoouklidou 2008).

The *quantity* of preserved Hellenistic Panathenaic amphorae as well as their chronological distribution deviates significantly from the Classical period. The production of the amphorae decreased in the 3rd century BCE. An interesting fact in this context is that it was not a consistent decline to a new level, but the quantity of amphorae produced rather showed strong variations. In the course of the 2nd century BCE, the number of Panathenaic amphorae reached the highest level in Hellenistic times.

Panathenaic amphorae on which officials are named form absolute *chronologically* fixed points. The increasing amount of amphorae found over the last several years facilitates to verify and to give a more precise time-frame by means of such dated fragments. The relative chronology is methodologically based on the analysis of ornamentation, shape and iconography.

A sizeable portion of Hellenistic Panathenaic amphorae from the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE were not produced in black figure but in white-ground technique, and they require a more in-depth analysis. That they were awarded on the occasion of musical competitions can be presumed because of partially preserved presentations of these disciplines. Nevertheless, several questions concerning the reasons of their appearance remain: their quick disappearance, and a possible continued awarding of prizes known from the classical period in the form of gold and crowns.

Hellenistic Panathenaic amphorae were not only found in Athens (the main spot of discovery), but had also been *distributed* in the Aegean, Cyprus, Egypt, Libya and Italy. That the Panathenaic amphorae represented a form of merchandise as well can be gleaned by hints from the Classical period. An important aspect for linking Panathenaic amphorae with trade is the fact that they also appeared in regions whose inhabitants were not allowed to participate in the games, such as Etruria in the Classical period and Gabii as well as Rome in the Hellenistic period. Bentz has shown that the distribution of Panathenaic amphorae in the Classical period typically corresponded to the dispersion of Athenian ceramics. But does such a statement also hold true in the context of Hellenism? Another urgent task in this regard is the re-examination of economic activities beyond the borders of Attica.

It is also necessary to examine the reasons for the *disappearance* of Panathenaic amphorae, which probably took place after the middle of the 1st century BCE. Was it that the amphorae and oil did not offer enough incentives to participate in the Panathenaic games in Athens during a period, when the number of such competitive venues was increasing constantly? Is it possible to doubt the Panathenaic amphorae as being appropriate prizes, when their representations were still being used in other art forms in the 2nd century CE? This shows that there was a demand for those representations of Panathenaic amphorae. My study also investigates the extent that this demand assumed and the symbolic character of these vases. To achieve this goal and with it a better understanding of their relevance as well, *imitations* (in silver, glass, marble) and *depictions* of Panathenaic amphorae in other art forms (e.g. on coins, wall paintings, reliefs) have to be included in the study (e.g. VALAVANIS 2001). These not only appear in areas where contemporaneous Panathenaic amphorae are known, but also, for example, in the region of the Black Sea and modern-day Israel. As a result, the territory with known vases and the research framework as well are expanded. Furthermore, the symbolic character of Panathenaic amphorae is enhanced beyond the competitions because of their use in sacral and sepulchral contexts.

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