

Student Comments on this week's blog post:

1. Maddy Brancati says:

April 28, 2015 at 11:55 pm

Great post! The aspect of Dr. Sapirstein's research I found most interesting was the fact that he was able to chart the years of activity of each identified potter, painter, and potter-painter used in his study. His results showed that before 550 BCE most potters were also painters, and that specialist painters didn't emerge until ca. 530 BCE. This corresponds with the invention of the red-figure technique (which is much harder to execute than the black-figure technique), and would explain the sudden need for specialists. I wonder what kind of impact this division could have had on the pottery production craft. What kind of implications could it have on the relationship between potter and painter? Could the increased level of skill needed for painting in red-figure have given painters a higher status over the potter?

2. Lauren Aldoroty says:

April 28, 2015 at 11:56 pm

I am glad we used the XRF. I agree with Travis; it was exciting to see concepts I've learned about in class in action!

A topic that kept coming up was the completeness of the archaeological record. We don't know what we've lost, so we may never have a complete picture of the Ancient Greek ceramics industry. I thought that an interesting insight into this problem was the collector who aggressively sought out Makron's work, and as a result, the number of sherds and wares attributed to Makron is significantly larger than works attributed to other individual painters. No conclusive statements can be made about this, but based on the huge number of Makron attributions, we may be able to fill more holes in our knowledge about the Ancient Greek ceramics industry than we think.

3. Anna Soifer says:

April 29, 2015 at 8:24 am

I was interested by Dr. Sapirstein's emphasis on the mobility of the specialist painters versus the stationary life of potter-painters for its effects on ideas of workshop organization. Specifically, since specialist painters were mobile, Dr. Sapirstein suggests that they might not have had assistants, but rather would have painted entire vessels themselves. If this is true, how could one have apprenticed to be a specialist painter? Did only potter-painters take apprentices? It would be interesting to examine the pottery attributed to Dr. Sapirstein's specialist painters to see if any of the flaws that are commonly linked to the work of apprentices, such as un-vitrified backgrounds resulting from the use of a different slip, can be seen on those pieces. A study like this could help us more thoroughly characterize the work habits of people in the Greek pottery industry.

Travis Schmauss says:

April 29, 2015 at 11:41 am

Perhaps specialist painters were more likely to take their sons as offspring? That would allow them to be equally mobile as they'd be moving as a family. I'm not sure if there are any known family ties between painters or even for potters.

Travis Schmauss says:

April 29, 2015 at 11:41 am

Sorry, as apprentices* not as offspring.

Arthur Zhang says:

April 29, 2015 at 11:29 pm

Maybe there were vase painting schools? If specialist vase painters are of the same status as painters/artists today, they might not have had apprentices.

4. Savannah de Montesquiou says:

April 29, 2015 at 12:55 pm

I was particularly interested this week in the individuals who had influence over the potters and painters of ancient Greece. We view these objects now as precious art pieces, but in their time, they served a primarily functional purpose. These objects were made with specific customers in mind, both local and foreign. Ancient "art dealers" would have been aware of the different preferences of customers, and expressed these preferences to the artists. It is also possible that painters in residence would adapt their images based on the preferences of potters.

5. Elizabeth Winkelhoff says:

April 29, 2015 at 1:25 pm

Great post!

The lecture from Dr. Sapirstein was really interesting and thought provoking, since he was talking about the craftspeople behind the craft instead of the craft itself. Using his logic, we could tie the craftsmen to an economic model of supply and demand, which was something we hadn't really discussed. Because these people were making the cups to sell (as well as making lasting ancient artwork).

And I was also glad we got to use the XRF, it was just like we had talked about in class. It also showed that our tiles can and will be used for further research, which is what we were hoping for from the beginning.

6. Haley Huang says:

April 29, 2015 at 3:47 pm

Thanks Travis! The details you added to the pictures made me laugh. Great post! :)

I think it's important for us to remember exactly how our cups would have gotten from the potter's hand to the customer's hand. Nowadays, it's either a purely industrial process where people buy ceramics by the pack, a shopping experience where people don't even go close to the makings of the pots, or a very artistic experience where people still select out individual pots from master potters. However, the lattermost is the rarest occasion, whereas in the past, it was the only occasion. Yet, I believe the status of the potter has improved tremendously over time and has changed from a physical laborer into an artistic professional whose own studio is a wondrous, fantastical place rather than the side of a dirt road.

7. Dane Clark says:

April 29, 2015 at 9:50 pm

Great post, Travis! Something that Dr. Sapirstein brought up that I found very interesting was the relationship between the painter Makron and his apparently preferred potter Hieron. Dr. Sapirstein said that, unlike many other painters, it seems that Makron worked almost exclusively with a single potter, Hieron. He said that it is quite common to find painters that are attributed with working with a rather large number of potters, and that it is not quite clear as to why Makron had this apparent preference towards a single one. I wonder what kind of implications such a painter-potter partnership would have in terms of the social dynamics of ceramic production as a whole during the 5th century BCE as well as during other times.

8. Arthur Zhang says:

April 29, 2015 at 11:40 pm

Great post! I was initially skeptical about the statistical analysis on the vases that survived today (Dr. Sapirstein's presentation) because it was intuitive to wonder whether the majority of the vases that did not survive could affect the data. However, later on I realized that the analysis was actually very valid and a wonderful case in point of the Law of Large Numbers that is the central tenet in the field of probability and statistics! The vast number of sherds and pottery that did survive were themselves sufficient for the kind of analysis (e.g. average production per painter per year) that was presented. Very inspiring!

9. Kelly McBride says:

April 29, 2015 at 11:59 pm

Great post! I found it most interesting this week the idea that painters and potters were ostracized by society. Their workshops were by or in graveyards, outside of the city. We think of these works of art as masterpieces that transcend time, and yet the people of the time did not celebrate the people that crafted these works. Considering the fame that other artists have achieved, it is sad to think that they were ridiculed.

10. Ashley Fallon says:

April 30, 2015 at 11:19 am

To add to what Kelly said, it amazes me that elites looked down upon potters and painters due to their social status despite their skills. However, I don't think they were ostracized so much as put in the laborer category and therefore possibly in a lower class than their customers, and they probably worked outside the city because of the kilns. As far as the location of workshops, their location outside the city where people would pass them on the road is interesting when considering how the visibility would encourage specific performativity, especially under the watchful eyes of potential customers.

11. Hana Chop says:

April 30, 2015 at 11:45 am

I was very skeptical of Saperstein's presentation because he drew some very broad conclusions from a seemingly small sample of evidence. However, he tackled many questions that we, as modern archaeologists and researchers, have: such as how productive were these workshops, and how many painters were there actually? Thus, his research is a good starting point, but there is much left to learn, and we may not be able to ever understand the entire picture.

The XRF was what I was most anticipating in class! Not only were we able to see the machine in action, but I think our analysis of our own tiles is really important to understand how today's archaeology works in concert with material science especially when we read so many sources on material science analysis.

12. Gianna Puzzo says:

May 1, 2015 at 1:14 pm

This class brought the focus on the workshops again and scholars' attempts to create statistical analyses for productivity and number of craftspeople. As Hana has just said, while Saperstein's conclusions could be challenged he was thinking of some important questions and using rather useful methods. One of the main issues for scholars trying to collect information about specific craftspeople is one's ability to identify. I can understand how a painting or drawing style would be more easily distinguished from a potter's style simply because scholars have trained their eyes to recognize those differences. If more pottery-based scholars could have a similar eye maybe there is a change to recognize different hands of potters and analyze their productivity rather than the painters.