

Student Comments on this week's blog post:

1. Anna Soifer says:

February 11, 2015 at 8:22 am

Another wonderful post! I find it extremely interesting that the cups all basically conform to the same set of dimensional ratios. Having taken graphic design and photography classes, I know that there are some ratios that are inherently aesthetically pleasing (including thirds, as found in the proportions of the handles and foot relative to the bowl diameter). It would be interesting to see if any aspects of the cups follow other known aesthetic principles, such as the golden ratio (based on the Fibonacci sequence). From there we might start to think about whether the potters deliberately used those measurements, or whether they ended up that way because they “looked right”.

2. Haley Huang says:

February 11, 2015 at 1:52 pm

Thanks Maddy for the great post!

Picking up those cups for the first time was such a nerve-racking experience that I had to take a moment to calm down, relax, and really take in what I was feeling. Like Maddy mentioned, we were all surprised by how light the cups were compared to their size. The closest comparison I can make to the sensation is picking up a fine china mug and then picking up a bone china mug of the same size. The lightness of the bone china surprises you, since fine china and ceramics are more common. It makes me wonder whether there is a mineral akin to bone that is added to ancient Athenian clay that enables the pottery to achieve a similar affect.

3. Ashley Fallon says:

February 11, 2015 at 3:20 pm

Maddy, I love that you drew attention to how personal these cups were because the proportions were determined by the potter's hands. I think that a lot of people don't realize the relationship between ancient crafters and their objects, especially when there isn't something obvious like a name or fingerprint to draw attention to it. A lot of these cups look similar because of the overall shape and proportions, but they're all different because different people made them and being able to recognize such individuals in the past is always exciting!

4. Travis Schmauss says:

February 11, 2015 at 3:39 pm

Madelena, it was very observant of you to see that our class size was similar to that of a symposium. We were up to similar activities, too: sharing ideas while handling drinking cups — all we were missing was the wine! Speaking of which, I found our discussion of the wine to be fascinating. Drunkenness was common! To the point where there were warnings in the art inlaid in the cups.

Handling these cups was nothing other than thrilling. Time stood still. And then we measured them, but assigning hard numbers to these imperfect works of art felt artificial and forced — often it was, just due to the irregularities in shape.

5. Lauren Aldoroty says:

February 11, 2015 at 3:41 pm

At first, the lightness of the cups is certainly surprising. However, they probably wouldn't be terribly useful if they were as heavy as they looked. They would be difficult to manipulate due to their shape and size. The cups can also hold quite a lot of liquid, which adds a significant amount of weight during use. Because of these factors, a heavy kylix would not have been easy to use (and spilling drinks might have been common). As a result, they might not have gained such popularity.

6. Arthur Zhang says:

February 11, 2015 at 3:49 pm

Thank you Maddy for the post!

There is a subtle variation in the design of one of the cups we examined. It had a vertical rim (concaving slightly outwards) instead of an unbroken (pun unintended) curvature from the pit to the rim that we see in the other cups. It was mentioned in class that this vertical rim design might be intended to catch some of the sediments from the wines that were drunk during a symposium. This goes to show that with changes in drinking culture (e.g. old wines with sediments today are usually decanted first), the design of cups that we drink from (and a multitude of other things) would inevitably change too. While recreating these ancient greek cups, it is therefore important to keep in mind the multi-layered meanings of "recreating" as we would probably discover more than a replica of these ancient drinking vessels.

7. Dane Clark says:

February 11, 2015 at 7:29 pm

Maddy, your post is terrific! It's great that you bring up how well the cups fit in your hands when picking them up. At first glance, these drinking cups look really awkward and rather unwieldy. They have handles, but they are way too fragile to actually serve too much of a purpose beyond aesthetics. However, when we got to finally pick them up and hold them, everything just felt right. The cups are designed to be very shallow and to be generally held from below rather than by the handles. You also brought up a good point, Maddy, about how the handles fit perfectly next to where your thumbs naturally fell! They probably helped offer a bit more control over the cup when it was full of wine.

8. Gianna Puzzo says:

February 11, 2015 at 8:24 pm

Wonderful post, Maddy! The proportions of the cups will be an important factor

which we will need to be considered as we move forward and begin to spin our own kylikes. The extraordinarily thin ceramic of the kylix makes it so light, and as we observed despite their varying size the weight was minimal. In addition to the thin body and hollow stem on which the bowl of the cup sits, these cups are designed to have certain proportions which create a balanced object; this is not only to the eye but for the cup's function. The Greeks were notorious perfectionists in both visual and structural aspects of their architecture, art, sculpture, and as we've seen in their pottery.

9. Elizabeth Winkelhoff says:

February 11, 2015 at 9:52 pm

Oh that's awesome Maddy! I didn't even think to compare us to a symposium. I thought that entire conversation we had about symposiums was so interesting, especially how the men all attending would often bring their own special cups (kylikes) to show off a bit. After holding the cups and experiencing their shape firsthand, it was easy to imagine shopping for them for these symposiums. They were perfect to hold and the images on them were so diverse that it was striking. The cup with the picture of the young man buying a cup was especially interesting. One would think it would be hard to choose the perfect one. Its no wonder why these glossy kylikes were so popular.

10. Kelly McBride says:

February 11, 2015 at 10:23 pm

Travis, you bring up a good point about how drinking culture influenced how important the kylix was to symposiums. It might be interesting to note that one of the most common images depicted on the cups is Dionysus, the god of grapes and wine. Dionysian symbols like satyrs and maenads were also popular. Looking ahead to our own cups, since we will configure modern equivalents to ancient symbols as decoration, maybe the coca-cola sign would be a good idea? Also, Lauren what you said about the weight is extremely valid, but what struck me was how shallow the cups were. Surely in the state that the ancients were in at symposia the wide shallow structure would indeed incur spillage. Perhaps the cup with the lip also helped avoid messes!

11. Gloria You says:

February 11, 2015 at 10:35 pm

Nice job Maddy! Concerning the lightness of the cups, in addition to Haley's comments about the clay possibly containing a material akin to bone matter, Matthew also mentioned that the cups' light weight could be attributed to the manner in which Greek potters shaped the clay on the wheel. The cups begin with a solid, thick base and then slowly become thinner as the potter continues to work the clay towards the top of the vessel.

12. Savannah de Montesquiou says:

February 11, 2015 at 11:58 pm

I cannot stop repeating in my head a comment that Matt made last week: "Imitation drives innovation". Although he was referring to experimentation concerning form and technique that resulted from the competition between potters, it applies to our process of studying these cups as well. Our curiosities are not new, and several hands and minds have touched these cups before us. However, the observations of others fuels our research, encouraging us to engage with fact and mystery. Gisela Richter's account with Ancient Greek ceramics is tremendously encouraging for its dedication to understanding these objects through process. By mimicking others and approaching our own research through their techniques, we too will make original and substantial discoveries.

On a separate note, was I the only one that noticed the fingerprint in the bowl of the unillustrated cup? It was not imbedded in the clay or slip, but appeared to be a result of dirt or residue settling in the print's mark after production. I am looking forward to visiting it again and reacquainting myself with the mystery apprentice, art dealer, archaeologist, scholar, or civilian that encountered the cup long before I did.

13. Hana Chop says:

February 12, 2015 at 8:20 am

These kylikes are deceptive! I was so surprised by the lightness of even the largest kylix we handled. Taking measurements really illuminated the balance of these cups. The ratios were almost exact; keeping in mind that each of these pieces is handmade, this is an incredible feat. I can't wait to try making my own! My question is, how much wine did each of these cups hold, and could the symposium-goers keep the wine balanced in the cups!