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Context Matters

The Graham Geddes Collection and Loans to Museums

David W. J. Gill

The return of antiquities from North American and European collections over recent years has been a reminder that museums need to conduct rigorous due diligence processes before making acquisitions (Gill 2018; Gill 2020, 115–123). These processes need to look at the history of the piece: when it was first known, who had owned or handled it, and the circumstances of its acquisition. (This characteristic is sometimes, though inappropriately, termed “provenance” by some art historians: Gill 2016; Gill 2020, 134–43). Curators need to check the authenticity of the documentation to ensure that misleading information has not been provided in order to divert attention. Such object biographies will be key in reassuring museums and collectors as they seek to make further acquisitions (Hopkins, Costello, and Davis 2021). It is clear from some of the returns to Italy that such histories are not always accurate, and indeed some may have been fabricated (Gill and Chippindale 2007; Gill 2020, 75–84; see also Saunders, Barr, and Budrovich 2021).

Museum processes may deal with acquisitions, whether by purchase, gift or bequest. But how do museums address long or short-term loans? A series of examples highlight how loans made to museums can apparently include archaeological material that has been removed from archaeological contexts by illicit means. For example, an Athenian red-figured krater attributed to the Berlin painter was acquired by the J. Paul Getty Museum in pieces over several years from 1982; an anonymous loan supplied a further 35 pieces in 1989 (Gill 2020, 164–65). The krater has since been returned to Italy (Godart and De Caro 2007, 94–95, no. 18). A bronze volute-krater of Trebenishte type was placed on loan to the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston in 2008 by a New York based collector in 2008 (Gill 2009). Is there a possibility that this was the krater removed from a tomb at Koreschnica in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and said to have entered a North American private collection (Gill 2020, 182)? Why was a Roman bronze, apparently looted from a small rural site in Suffolk, England, placed on short term loan to Harvard University Art Museum (as well as the Toledo Museum of Art and the Tampa Museum of Art) when the ownership of the object is disputed (Browning 1995; Mattusch 1996, 262–63, no. 31; see also Gill 2020, 227–28)? Classical bronzes from a New York private collection were displayed in a loan exhibition at a North American university museum but one of the kraters has now been returned to Greece because it was identified as coming from a looted tomb in Macedonia, Greece (Chi and Gaunt 2005).

These problems relating to loans need to be addressed, not only by museums in North America and Europe, but also by institutions in Australia and New Zealand. The issue was highlighted when Bonham’s attempted to auction part of the classical collection formed by the Melbourne-based collector, Graham Geddes, in London during 2008 (Gill 2009). It was reported that “Geddes is said to have one of the largest private holdings of southern Italian vases in the world” (Erlich 1996); the point is supported by an analysis of the sale of South Italian pottery from private collection from 1956 to 1998 (Nørskov 2002, 275, Table 15). Part of Geddes’ collection had been sold at Christie’s in October 1996, followed by ‘A Melbourne Collector’ at Christie’s, New York, 18 December 1997. The actual sale was unsuccessful ‘with 19 out of 37 lots unsold’ (Nørskov 2002, 289). The issue of looting in cemeteries that contained figure-decorated South Italian pots has been well documented (Elia 2001; see also Graepler and Mazzei 1996; Gill and Chippindale 2008) and this should urge caution for those seeking to accept such material for their collections whether by purchase, gift, bequest or loan.

The name of Geddes was highlighted in an investigation into the operation of the antiquities department at Sotheby's in London; one of the South Italian bell-kraters that had surfaced in the auction house appeared in a catalogue with the annotation of Geddes (Watson 1997, opp. 120). The Lucanian krater, attributed to the Anabates painter, was subsequently placed on loan with Monash University before being sold at Christie's in New York on 12 December 2002 (lot 142). Moreover, a Lucanian nestoris that was returned to Italy from Boston's Museum of Fine Arts had earlier passed through the hands of Geddes (Gill and Chippindale 2006, 320 fig. 4, 325, no. 13; Gill and Chippindale 2008). It has been noted that of the 89 Apulian and 12 Paestan pots recorded in the Geddes collection, 57 were acquired from Sotheby's in London during the 1980s (Nørskov 2002, 288 n. 111). Concerns about material from these sales have been well-documented (Watson 1997; see also Gill and Tsirogiannis 2016).

Intervention by the Italian government led to 10 pieces being withdrawn from the 2008 Bonham's sale in London including the Attic krater that appeared on the cover of *Bonhams Magazine* in order to give publicity to the sale (Bonhams 2008). Twelve of the Apulian pots that were offered for sale in the auction had been acquired at Sotheby's in London in the period 1981 to 1986, a time known to be problematic with material derived from illicit sources in Italy (Watson 1985; Watson 1997). Such toxic acquisitions had the potential to corrupt the integrity of the Geddes collection, as well as other collections into which they subsequently passed. A number of objects from these very same sales from which the Geddes material was derived have been returned to Italy highlighting the problems with their original sources (Gill 2018). Some of these Geddes pieces have now entered other collections. For example, there are two Attic black-figured pieces in the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid (Cabrera Bonet 2003, 163–65, no. 53; 188–89, no. 62), and two in the Mougins Museum: an Apulian hydria attributed to the Truro painter (Sotheby's 9 December 1985, lot 375; loan to University of Melbourne, March 1988–July 2003; the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities, Monash University, Melbourne, November 2005–April 2008; Bonhams 15 October 2008, lot 18), and a Gnathian volute-krater (Sotheby's 9 December 1985, lot 378; loan to the University of Melbourne, March 1985–February 1994; Bonhams 15 October 2008, lot 23). One of the Attic pieces now in Madrid had surfaced through N. Koutoulakis (see Gill 2019).

One of the significant things about the pieces withdrawn from the London sale was that they had previously been placed on loan with various Australian collections: The National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; the University of Melbourne; the Borchardt Library, La Trobe University, Melbourne; and the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities, Monash University, Melbourne. Among them was an Attic black-figured column-krater attributed to the Swing painter that was originally on loan to the University of Melbourne (March 1988–February 1994) and then the National Gallery of Victoria (April 2005–April 2008) (BAPD 25776; Sotheby's (London) 13–14 July 1987, lot 440; Bonhams 15 October 2008, lot 6).

Among the other institutions that benefited from loans from Geddes was the Antiquities Museum at the University of Queensland, Brisbane. Objects included an Apulian spherical pyxis, attributed to the painter of Berlin F 3383, that had surfaced at Sotheby's in 1985, an Attic black-figured amphora, that had surfaced at Sotheby's in 1986, and an Apulian loutrophoros attributed to the White Saccos painter, that had surfaced at Sotheby's in 1987. It appears that some of the pieces were on loan at these museums until they were withdrawn to be sold. It is unclear if some of the attributions were made during this loan period, and if so, what impact that would have had on the subsequent valuation when they were offered for sale at auction. Should museums require that loans meet the same high standards of documentation as acquisitions? Should museums be declining material offered for loan that cannot be traced back to the period before 1970?

These issues relating to loans raise the important matter that university-associated museums should be setting a higher ethical benchmark than other institutions in the sector (see also Gill 2020, 11, 106–14). Looted material has significant intellectual consequences on the corpus of knowledge and university museums need to distance themselves from such activity or it could be seen that they are endorsing potentially illicit practices.

Sotheby's, London

4 December 1979

Lot 279: Paestan fishplate, attributed to the workshop of the painter of Naples 1778.

13 May 1980

Lot 133: Campanian bell-krater.

Lot 191: Campanian squat lekythos, attributed to the painter of B.M. F 63.

Lot 194: Campanian lebes gamikos.

27 October 1980

Lot 266: Lucanian skyphos, attributed to the Creusa painter.

14–15 April 1981

lot 337: Attic rf cup, attributed to the manner of Oltos.

13–14 July 1981

Lot 214: Lucanian skyphos, attributed to the Creusa painter.

Lot 219: Campanian squat lekythos.

Lot 347: Apulian column-krater, attributed to the Baltimore painter. Said to have been brought to England in the 1920s.

Lot 350: Apulian column-krater, attributed to the Patera painter. Said to have been brought to England in the 1920s.

Lot 353: Apulian skyphos, attributed to the Fogg group.

Lot 354: Apulian volute-krater, attributed to the Tenri painter.

14–15 December 1981

Lot 254: Gnathian pelike.

Lot 336: Attic bf neck-amphora, attributed to the circle of the Antimenes painter.

13–14 December 1982

Lot 201: Etruscan bf neck-amphora, attributed to the Michali painter.

Lot 255: Attic bf amphora, attributed to the painter of Vatican 365.

Lot 291: Apulian calyx-krater, attributed to the Darius painter.

Lot 298: Lucanian nestoris.

12 July 1983

Lot 604: Apulian amphora, attributed to the Baltimore and Stoke-on-Trent painters.

12–13 December 1983

Lot 329: Attic bf amphora, attributed to the painter of London B174. Nørskov 2002, 358 (£32,200).

Lot 410: Apulian bell-krater, attributed to the Tarporley painter.

Lot 534a: Apulian bell-krater. Trendall and Cambitoglou 1991, 52, no. 240c.

Lot 534b: Apulian bell-krater, attributed to the painter of the Long Overfalls.

21 May 1984

Lot 222: Apulian hydria, attributed to the Patera painter.

Lot 372: Paestan lebes gamikos, attributed to the Asteas/Python workshop.

Lot 384: Apulian hydria, attributed to the painter of the Berlin Dancing Girl.

Lot 408: Apulian volute-krater, attributed to the group of Copenhagen 4223.

10–11 December 1984

Lot 364: Apulian bell-krater attributed to the Truro painter.

Lot 365: Apulian calyx-krater, attributed to the Underworld painter.

Lot 368: Apulian hydria, attributed to the Baltimore painter.

Lot 597: Apulian skyphos, attributed to the Anabates painter.

Lot 599: Apulian volute-krater, attributed to the painter of Copenhagen 4223.

Lot 600: Apulian volute-krater, attributed to the painter of Berlin F 3383.

20 May 1985

Lot 383: Attic rf bell-krater, attributed to the Retorted painter.

9 December 1985

Lot 173: Apulian calyx-krater.

Lot 367: Paestan amphora, attributed to the painter of Würzburg H 5379.

Lot 371: Apulian spherical pyxis, attributed to the painter of Berlin F 3383.

Lot 375: Apulian hydria, attributed to the Truro painter.

Lot 378: Gnathian volute-krater.

19 May 1986

Lot 159: Apulian skyphos, attributed to the Liverpool painter.

Lot 236: Attic bf cup-skyphos.

Lot 279: Paestan fishplate, attributed to the workshop of the painter of Naples 1778.

Lot 316: Apulian volute-krater, attributed to the painter of Taranto 7013.

8 December 1986

Lot 185: Apulian oinochoe.

Lot 188: Apulian bell-krater, attributed to the Perrone-Phryxos group.

Lot 228: Attic bf amphora.

Lot 229: Attic bf oinochoe.

Lot 327: Attic bf amphora, attributed to the painter of Vatican 365.

13–14 July 1987

Lot 309: Apulian loutrophoros, attributed to the White Saccos painter.

Lot 385: Attic bf neck-amphora, attributed to the Antimenes painter.

Lot 408: Attic bf Panathenaic amphora.

Lot 440: Attic bf column-krater, attributed to the Swing painter.

23 May 1988

Lot 191: Apulian fishplate, attributed to the Frog painter.

Lot 216: Apulian volute-krater, attributed to the painter of British Museum F281.

Lot 220: Lucanian bell-krater, attributed to the Anabates painter.

11 July 1988

Lot 184: Apulian volute-krater, attributed to the Baltimore painter.

Lot 178: Campanian neck-amphora, attributed to the Pilos Head group.

9 December 1988

Lot 171: Apulian pelike, attributed to the Siren Citharist.

12 December 1988

Lot 165: Apulian volute-krater, attributed to the De Schulthess painter.

22 May 1989

Lot 199: Campanian bell-krater, attributed to the Danaid painter.

31 May 1990

Lot 376: Attic rf bell-krater, attributed to the painter of Montesarchio T.121.

8 December 1994

Lot 304: Apulian skyphos, attributed to the Fogg group.

Lot 328: Apulian pelike, attributed to the Siren Citharist painter.

10 December 1996

lot 167: Attic red cup, attributed to the manner of Oltos.

lot 196: Apulian volute-krater attributed to the Samarcande group.

Table 1. Selection of pots once in the Geddes collection that had passed through Sotheby's, London.

Black-figured

- BAPD 8510: Athenian bf amphora (Type B), attributed to the painter of London B174. Sotheby's 12–13 December 1983, lot 329; Bonhams 21 October 1999, lot 129.
- BAPD 7087: Athenian bf neck-amphora, attributed to the circle of Antimenes painter or manner of group E. Sotheby's 14–15 December 1981, lot 336; Bonhams 15 October 2008, lot 3. Loan to the Borchardt Library, La Trobe University, Melbourne; Melbourne University.
- BAPD 7462: Athenian bf neck-amphora, attributed to the painter of Vatican 365. Sotheby's 13–14 December 1982, lot 255; 8 December 1986, lot 327; Madrid inv. 1999.99.61. Bibl. Cabrera Bonet 2003, no. 53.
- BAPD 16657. Athenian bf neck-amphora, attributed to the manner of the Princeton painter. Rossie Priory, Lord Kinnaid; Sotheby's 8 December 1986, lot 225; Christie's (Melbourne) 15 October 1996, lot 230.
- BAPD 16660. Athenian bf belly amphora. Sotheby's 8 December 1986, lot 228; Bonhams 15 October 2008, lot 5. Loan to Brisbane, University of Queensland, Antiquities Museum.
- BAPD 16661. Athenian bf oinochoe. Sotheby's 8 December 1986, lot 229; Bonhams 15 October 2008, lot 2. Loan to Monash University, Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities.
- BAPD 21546: Athenian bf Panathenaic amphora. Sotheby's 13–14 July 1987, lot 408. University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, L. Logie Memorial Collection. Bibl. Cohen, Trendall, and Shapiro 1995, 2–3, no. 1.
- BAPD 24969: Athenian bf neck-amphora, attributed to the Antimenes painter. Sotheby's 13–14 July 1987, lot 385. Loan to Melbourne University. Bibl. Jackson 1996/97.
- BAPD 351256. Athenian bf neck-amphora, attributed to the manner of the Acheloos painter. N. Koutoulakis, Paris market; Madrid inv. 1999.99.56. Bibl. Jackson 1992/93; Cabrera Bonet 2003, no. 62.
- BAPD 9021960. Athenian bf psykter. Zurich, Leo Mildenberg; European private collection; Christie's (London) 28 April 2004, lot 452; Bonhams 15 October 2008, lot 4. Loan to Monash University, Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities.

Red-figured

- BAPD 7086: Athenian rf cup, attributed to the manner of Oltos. Sotheby's 14–15 April 1981, lot 337; 10 December 1996, lot 167.
- BAPD 8508: Athenian rf bell-krater, attributed to the Kadmos painter. Sotheby's 12–13 December 1983, lot 411. University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, L. Logie Memorial Collection 177.94. Bibl. Cohen, Trendall, and Shapiro 1995, 16–17, no. 9.
- BAPD 10363: Athenian rf column-krater, attributed to the Harrow painter. Basel, Münzen und Medaillen 29 June 1983, no. 43; University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, L. Logie Memorial Collection. Bibl. Cohen, Trendall, and Shapiro 1995, 10–11, no. 6.

BAPD 13401. Athenian rf bell-krater, attributed to the Retorted painter or the painter of the Oxford Grypomachy. Sotheby's 12–13 December 1983, lot 396; 20 May 1985, lot 383; Bonhams 10 October 2008, lot 9. Loan to Borchardt Library, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

BAPD 28062: Athenian rf bell-krater, attributed to the painter of Montesarchio T.121. Sotheby's 31 May 1990, lot 376; Bonhams 15 October 2008, lot 8; Bonhams 29 April 2009, lot 17. Loan Borchardt Library, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Table 1. Selection of Athenian pots that had once formed part of the Geddes collection.

BAPD = Beazley Archive Pottery Database.

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