

Context Matters: Fragmented Athenian Cups

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In December 2021 it was announced that the San Antonio Museum of Art would be returning a number of objects to Italy. The overall return formed part of a series of seizures including 180 objects from the collection formed by Michael Steinhardt, and 96 items from the Walsh collection at Fordham University, plus further objects from the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Cleveland Museum of Art. These seizures formed part of a major investigation into the objects handled by the dealer Edoardo Almagià, and were informed by Almagià's 'Green Book' containing some 1700 records.

Some have seen the collection of figure-decorated pottery fragments as marginal and that their value lies in forming part of a study collection that could be used to train the eyes of future art historians and archaeologists. There is a long tradition of such an approach, for example the establishment of the sherd collection as part of the Museum of Classical Archaeology at the University of Cambridge that contains a share of finds from British archaeological excavations such as Phylakopi on Melos or Palaikastro on Crete (for the sources of such material: Gill 2011).

There has been a tradition within classical archaeology of making links for fragmented figure-decorated pottery that has been dispersed among different collections. One of the key groups of material consisted of the Campana fragments (Beazley 1933; Heesen and Iozzo 2019; see also Caskey 1935). This characteristic of collecting fragments has thus been seen as niche and relatively harmless. The fragments are themselves perceived as little more than 'orphans' waiting to be reunited with other parts of the pots from which they have been lost at some point in the distant past.

Investigated Fragments

But have fragments started to be used in a different way in recent years? Scholars should have been alerted to the problem by the police raid on the Rome apartment of Danilo Zicchi in September 1995 as part of a wider investigation into looted antiquities. A search revealed that Zicchi had been posting out antiquities 'almost always' in fragments to avoid detection in case the packages were intercepted (Watson and Todeschini 2006, 15).

The significance of such fragmented pots was explored by Ralph Frammolino and Jason Felch reporting for the *Los Angeles Times* (Frammolino and Felch 2005). They considered the way that these fragments formed part of the contemporary trade in antiquities.

Italian authorities allege that Hecht also conspired with other dealers in a scheme to drive up the price of vase fragments. The dealers would distribute the fragments of an important vase among themselves -- at times by breaking up an intact vase, the Italians say.

After one dealer donated a "seed" fragment to a museum's curator, other dealers would approach the curator with a matching piece, authorities say. Because the curators were desperate to complete objects in their collections, each fragment became more valuable than the last.

True told Italian prosecutors she also had concluded that dealers were working together to extract higher and higher prices for matching fragments.

The fragments she was being sold had sharp edges that fit neatly with other fragments being sold, not the worn edges one would expect from an ancient fracture, she said.

“I came to realize we were being blackmailed,” she said. “Clearly the pieces seemed to be smashed.... It was clear these fragments had been dispersed over a huge market.”

Such comments imply that complete pots were being broken up, and the sherds distributed among a number of individuals who would then be in a position to realise their assets as the museum sought to reconstitute its fragmented pot. Such a strategy had started to be recognised by some museum curators.

Dispersed but Joining Fragments

Let us consider some examples of the phenomenon, though there may be innocent explanations for how the fragments cited emerged on the market. In the early 1980s an Attic red-figured amphora of Panathenaic shape and attributed to the Berlin painter was acquired for the collection formed by the Hunt brothers (Tompkins 1983, 68–69, no. 10). Although the origins of the amphora have not been divulged, it is widely accepted that the Hunt collection was derived from the Summa Galleries, a gallery that was supplied by Robert Hecht (McNall 2003, 70; see also Watson and Todeschini 2006, 129–30). Following the dispersal of the Hunt collection, the amphora was acquired by the Louvre (Louvre inv. MNE1005; Padgett 2017, 238–39, cat. no. 13, 391–92, no. BN5). Two further fragments were then supplied: part of the kithara from the collection of Dietrich von Bothmer, and a fragment of the left foot from the citharode-player from the collection of J. Robert Guy (for Guy’s work on fragments: Williams 2020). Had these fragments been circulating for some decades or had they surfaced with the amphora? How did Bothmer and Guy acquire the fragments? Had the fragments ever been handled by Hecht or by another? It should be remembered that Hecht fragments (‘REH’) appear among the Bothmer collection both in New York (e.g. New York MMA 2011.604.3.2579) and at the Michael C. Carlos Museum (e.g. Carlos Museum inv. 2002.043.56, 57, 60, 81: BAPD 9036441; fragmentary calyx-krater attributed to the Achilles painter), as well as in the sherd collection formed by Joseph V. Noble that was acquired by the Tampa Museum of Art, Florida, in 1986.

In 1985 New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired a red-figured amphora showing a citharist, also attributed to the Berlin painter, that had surfaced at Sotheby’s (London) on December 13–14 1982 (lot 220: inv. 1985.11.5, Bothmer and Anderson 1985/6, 9; Godart and De Caro 2007, 90–91, no. 16; Padgett 2017, 391, no. BN3 [ill.]). Guy was able to supply 19 further fragments to mark the centenary of Sir John Beazley’s birth (Gill 2018, 291; Padgett 2020). The amphora itself was subsequently identified from images in the Medici Dossier, and returned to Italy (Gill 2020c, 2). It is unclear when and how Guy had acquired the 19 fragments. When had the fragments become separated from the rest of the amphora?

In 1984 Bothmer supplied eight fragments for a fragmentary Attic red-figured calyx-krater attributed to the Berlin painter that was returned to Italy from the J. Paul Getty Museum (Godart and De Caro 2007, 94–95, no. 18; Padgett 2017, 395, no.

BN29; Saunders 2017, 116, fig. 11). These Bothmer fragments joined pieces that had first been donated to the museum by Herbert L. Lucas in 1977. Other pieces from the krater were derived from Frederick H. Schultz, Jr., and Robin Symes; 35 fragments are reported to have been placed on loan to the Getty by Giacomo Medici (Watson and Todeschini 2006, 96, 225). The origin of the krater was revealed when a fragment was found during archaeological excavations in the Etruscan sanctuary of Vigna Turiani at Cerveteri (Eneì 1987, 41, pl. 30, 10). Fragments of another calyx-krater, also attributed to the Berlin painter (by Guy), were acquired by the Getty in 1977 from Lucas (Malibu inv. 77.AE.6, 86.AE.698.55: Robertson 1981, 28, fig. 12 [attributed to Euphronios]; Padgett 2017, 395, no. BN30). The Getty acquired a further fragment of the krater from the Summa Galleries in 1986; another piece from the same krater resided in the Robin Symes collection. These two kraters acquired by the Getty hint at possible networks between different dealers in Europe and North America, as well as individual collectors. Bothmer clearly acquired some of his other pieces from the Summa Galleries such as cup fragments attributed to the Ambrosios painter (e.g. Carlos Museum 2005.058.006A/C).

The Getty's acquisition of pot fragments raises other issues. In 1981 Werner Nussberger donated over 6,000 pottery fragments to the Getty (Gill 2020b). Fragments from the same pots were then sold to the Getty by Galerie Nefer in 1985 (and subsequent years). It should be noted that Nussberger was married to Frida Tschachos the owner of Galerie Nefer. It has been observed that some of the breaks were fresh suggesting that they had been made after the pots had left from ground.

Edoardo Almagià and Fragments

Some of these pot fragments appear to have passed through the hands of Almagià. For example, Princeton University returned four fragments of a red-figured calyx-krater attributed to Euphronios showing Ajax and Achilles that had been purchased from him in 1997 (inv. 1997-488a–d: Princeton University Art Museum 1998, 194, 197 [ill.]; Padgett 2001; Eakin and Povoledo 2010; Gill 2020a, 110–11). In 1986 the Getty acquired an Attic red-figured stemless cup showing a man with a spear, reconstructed from fragments, and attributed to the Marlay painter from Almagià ('New York market') (inv. 86.AE.479: Walsh 1987, 163, no. 13; BAPD 41037). A spokesperson for the Getty claimed that it had originally been purchased in Switzerland and that it had been found in southern Italy (Felch 2012). In 2021 it was returned to Italy along with other items acquired from Almagià. In 1987 Dietrich von Bothmer gave the Getty a fragment of a cup that he had purchased from Almagià in the same year (inv. 87.AE.154: Walsh 1988, 143, no. 6; BAPD 28756). This formed part of a cup, attributed to the Triptolemos painter by Guy (see Williams 2020), that showed on the outside the vote on Achilles' armour, and the capture of Dolon on the tondo. This fragment formed part of a gift of 189 pot fragments presented by Bothmer and Guy in that same year. 103 further fragments of the same cup were purchased from Galerie Nefer in 1990 (inv. 90.AE.35: Walsh 1991, 140, no. 23; BAPD 43899); the gallery was reported to have acquired the fragments in 1986. Did Almagià's fragment come from the same source as the ones from Switzerland?

In 2009 New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art received the potsherd collection of some 10,000 fragments from Dietrich von Bothmer. In 2012 some 40 fragments from this substantial collection were returned to Italy apparently to assist with the investigations against Almagià (Gill 2020a, 164). It was also reported that some of the returned Bothmer fragments fitted the Onesimos cup (and with the inscription Euphronios *epoiesen*) that had been returned from the Getty (BAPD 13363: Sgubini

1999; Godart and De Caro 2007, 78–79, no. 10). Furthermore, it has been possible to make connections with fragments in other collections (Tsirogiannis and Gill 2014). The Bothmer fragments remaining in New York appear to include other Almagià material ('EA') such as a column-krater or stamnos fragment that Bothmer attributed to the Berlin painter (New York MMA inv. 2011.604.2.219).¹ It is perhaps significant that the sources for such fragments that are stated on the attached labels are not transcribed and placed on the public facing records.

The Harvard Fragments

Bothmer was not the only owner of an extensive collection of fragments. In 1995 Harvard University acquired the collection formed by J. Robert Guy from Peter Sharrer (Paul 1997; see Williams 2020, 2). Guy subsequently became Curator of the Herbert A. Cahn collection in Basel that includes both Athenian and South Italian fragments (e.g. Cambitoglou and Chamay 1997; see Cahn 2020). Indeed, Cahn fragments ('CAH') appear among the Bothmer collection, a reminder how these fragments can move between collections (see also Gaunt 2020). James Cuno justified the Harvard acquisition by suggesting that such material 'by their small, fragmentary nature, have been exchanged frequently and informally for centuries' (Cuno 2008, 22–23). Indeed, he claimed that Guy had obtained the fragments 'from friends, including dealers, over several decades': the identities of the friends and dealers have not been disclosed. The acquisition raised concerns and Cuno fielded criticism from the *Boston Globe* shortly afterwards (cited in Robinson and Yemma 1998).

The decision I took was, I thought, a very ethical one and I would stand by it and do it again ... If we hadn't acquired them, they might be in some private collection lord knows where. No one would know about them; no one would learn from them. Then what service would I have done?

The origin of one of the Harvard fragments is revealed by the Etruscan graffito cut onto the base (Paul 1997, no. 180). At least three fragments once in Guy's collection now reside in the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University: both were acquired by Sharrer and then sold at Sotheby's (New York) in June 2005 (lots 24, 25). One is a Little Master cup attributed to the Tleson painter that was acquired in London in 1976 (Carlos Museum inv. 2005.026.002: BAPD 9021693); the second is a cup fragment attributed to the Triptolemos painter and acquired by Guy on the European art market in the early 1990s (Carlos Museum inv. 2005.026.003: BAPD 9021694); the third forms part of an amphora attributed to Euphronios that was acquired from an English private collection prior to 1984 (Carlos Museum inv. 2005.026.005: BAPD 9021695; Exhibition Catalogue 1990, 149, no. 25). The third piece comes from the same amphora as a fragment, once owned by Ariel Herrmann (see Herrmann 2020), now in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. 2001.563: BAPD 9017837; Exhibition Catalogue 1990, 149, no. 24): both were placed on loan to Princeton University Art Gallery in 1984. Dyfri Williams reflected on Guy's work on fragments (Williams 2020, 2):

The ethics of major dealers was yet to be seriously questioned, while the role of the academic in assessing antiquities on the market, whether for authenticity or attribution, had a perfectly respectable history, although the world was

¹ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.27331917>, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.27419566>

changing fast. The unacknowledged but vital importance of this element of Guy's work was the way that it enabled him to make connections and joins between old Campana vases and the newly merged fragments that were the result of illegal "gleanings" around tombs excavated for Campana on his property at Cerveteri in the early 19th century. For in this way Guy was actually giving back to innocent material something of its context and history.

Such a view overlooks the way that such work was taking place subsequent to the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, as well as the Archaeological Institute of America's 1973 Resolution on the Acquisition of Antiquities by Museums. Indeed, it reminds us that some scholars were ignoring the consequences of looting, and presenting newly surfaced material as 'innocent'.

The Fragments from Barbarano Romano

Now we turn to the return of the 192 pottery fragments from the San Antonio Museum of Art. The material consists of a series of fragmentary black-figured, red-figured and black-glossed Athenian cups. The details relating to the fragments are sketchy, but the items were acquired in 1986 as the gift of Gilbert M. Denman, Jr. along with other objects for the museum (see Shapiro, Picón, and Scott 1995). The pieces include a fragmentary Attic black-figured Little Master cup with nonsense inscriptions (inv. 86.134.196a; Shapiro, Picón, and Scott 1995, 267, no. 178; BAPD 20266), at least seven fragmentary Attic red-figured cups, and further fragments from other red-figured and black-glossed cups (inv. 86.134.196). All of the 192 fragments were reported (in the deaccessioning statement) to have been found at Barbarano Romano, and were stated to have been sold to Gilbert M. Denman, Jr. by Almagià in 1985. The cemeteries of Barbarano Romano have been the subject of archaeological investigation (Steingräber 1992; see also Cristofani 1985, 294, no. 11.9; Steingräber 1997).

This reported findspot becomes all the more significant as it is mentioned in the legal paperwork relating to the seizure of Michael Steinhardt's collection in New York. The statement records details of a letter from Almagià to an unspecified individual (Manhattan DA 2021, 44):

Enclosed you will find the invoice for the fragments you bought for me ... They come from a place near Viterbo called Barbarano Romano. A first batch reached Switzerland sometime ago. It was soon followed by another group of them. At that point, since enough fragments were available, most of them were cleaned and the work of mounting them began. I myself did some of the work in N.Y., partly with the help of Robert Guy's remarkably sharp eye. I know from him you have in Texas a very good restorer, but please be patient. I know for sure that more fragments have been found, although I do not know how many and of which pieces. I am trying to get them, and I will. As soon as I shall have them, I will forward them to you ...

The letter is clearly addressed to an individual in Texas and is about material found at Barbarano Romano. It would not be unreasonable to infer that the material mentioned in the letter relates to the San Antonio fragments. What was the source in Switzerland for these fragments from Barbarano Romano? A second letter from Almagià to the redacted individual provides further information (Manhattan DA 2021, 45):

... Allow me now to tell you what is the situation with your fragments. They are still in Italy and my source refuses to take them for he does not want to create a precedent by paying them the price asked, which he considers outrageous. As a result I came empty handed but with the assurance that the fragments are [sic.] still available. I am afraid there is little else to do but to wait and hope ... There is one small thing, however, I have been able to do. The two persons that have been making the excavation not [sic.] seeing it eye to eye about the fragments are in a sort of quarrel. The friendlier of the two has a rather charming stemless kylix with Nike and Youth that comes from the same dig and that he can fully dispose of because it is his share of the "booty." I have now been about to get that piece, which is practically complete, and it could thus be soon added to the group of your fragments waiting, as I hope, that you soon will be able to have the remaining part of what they have found ... As you can see not all has gone so bad since, should you want it, another artifact from that dig can be added to what you already have.

It should be noted that San Antonio also acquired from Denman a series of black-figured and red-figured fragments attributed to a series of pot-decorators by Guy: they include the Triptolemos painter (Shapiro, Picón, and Scott 1995, 263, nos. 163–65), the Kleophrades painter (no. 164), the Colmar painter (no. 167), the Brygos painter (no. 168), and the Euaion painter (nos. 172–74). What is the origin of these fragments? Could they, too, have come from a location in Italy? When did Guy make the attributions? What was Denman's source for these fragments?

Conclusion

While James Cuno has suggested that the acquisition of such pot fragments is 'very ethical', the examples that have been cited suggest that the opposite could well be true. In other words, complete Athenian and South Italian pots that have survived relatively intact as part of a funeral assemblage for some 2500 years were being broken up deliberately as a way of seeding the market. This process of creating 'orphans' has been recognised as a way of disguising the way that pots can enter the market (Watson and Todeschini 2006, 77). The emergence of a pot brought together from fragments over several years does not make the same impact as a high profile piece that suddenly appears intact (or nearly intact) in a museum gallery without previous history. Was this method adopted in the wake of the outcry over the acquisition of the near complete the Sarpedon (Euphronios) krater by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1972 (Gill 2012)? The strategy of using fragments to develop a collection has been described with astuteness (Watson and Todeschini 2006, 78; see also Gill and Chippindale 2007, 572):

By slowly building up the vase, the appetite of the collector or museum is whetted, and this is another area where triangulation comes into play. To prevent naïve trustees from spotting what is actually happening, the fragments arrive in the museum over several years but also via several different routes.

The cross checking of fragments against those in other collections will take time, as will the triangulation of information associated with them. Some of these connections may have been made in time by the very owners of these fragments but this work was left unaddressed in order to avoid drawing attention to how these fragments were acquired, especially after the scale of looting in Italy became public knowledge

(e.g. Watson 1997). Yet it is all the more scandalous if some of these pots were intact until they had the misfortune of falling into the hands of dealers who had no qualms about breaking them apart in order to conceal how they surfaced on the market. Pot fragments shed additional light on the unethical nature of parts of the trade in classical antiquities, and remind museum curators of the need to be alert to such practices.

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