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ARYBALLOS AND HANGER:
AN ICONOGRAPHY OF A UNIFIED ENTITY
IN ATHENIAN VASE PAINTING

Introduction: The Importance of the Hanger

Nearly a century ago, J. D. Beazley and C. H. E. Haspels published two sequential articles in the 29th volume of the journal *The Annual of the British School at Athens*. The first, by Beazley, titled “Aryballos”, discussed the typology, function and scheme of decoration of this vessel, and also included a list of actual Attic aryballoi to supplement those known at the time. The second, by Haspels, titled “How the Aryballos was Suspended”, discussed three methods used for suspending the aryballos and, additionally, the construction of the hangers, presenting a reconstruction of one type of hanger. It would perhaps be a leap to suggest that the editorial decision to juxtapose the two articles represents an acknowledgement that these two items should always be considered together; but at the very least, it created a complete discussion of container and hanger, and served as a reminder that, when discussing the aryballos, we should always have the hanger in our sights. Yet it seems that since then the aryballos’ hanger has been “forgotten”; and in more recent discussions of this type of vase, whether separately or as part of the larger group of perfume vases, the hanger is usually mentioned only briefly.

The purpose of the present article is to return scholarly attention to the hanger – or more specifically, to the fact that the aryballos is almost always depicted with it. This is no trite fact, as it might appear at first. The hanger influenced the handling of the aryballos, transforming it into a movable object. The aryballos and hanger taken together thus become a unified object.¹ One of the key sources revealing this fact is visual representations. To make my point clear, I intend to discuss a handful of representative examples in which we see aryballoi actively handled i.e. excluding cases in which they are depicted as merely hanging in the background. In order to clarify the unique manner in which the aryballos is handled, I will compare it to another small vase with similar formal features and function: the alabastron.

¹ For a similar notion of objects that work together as a unit, see Schiffer 1993, 13.

The Aryballos

Typology, Function and Material of the Vase

The typology, development and function of the aryballos have been discussed in a number of publications, in a clear and detailed fashion.² One of the earliest articles is that by Beazley, mentioned above; and the most recent work is that of A. Boix, discussing the typology, material and context of the aryballos. Boix also includes a catalogue of aryballoi made from various materials. The aryballos was generally a very small spherical or segmental vase, made to contain scented oil. The Corinthian type, which preceded the Attic one, displayed a flat mouth and a vertical handle of varying width that terminated in the body.³ This type of aryballos is represented in Attic ware from the middle of the sixth century BCE for a period of around 30 years, and can be found also in early red-figure vases. In the last quarter of the sixth century BCE, the Corinthian aryballos was replaced by the Attic type. This type may be globular or segmental and features a lekythoid mouth and occasionally one or two small, slim handles. Aryballoi dating from the second half of the fifth century often lack handles altogether.⁴

The aryballos' handle(s), or absence thereof, play an important role in the current discussion. It is the part by means of which humans interact with the vessel, thereby handling, lifting and tilting it.⁵ With regards to the handles of the aryballos in particular, however, those in both the Corinthian and Athenian types are very small and therefore have very low grasp-ability. This fact was undoubtedly part of what prompted the attachment of the hanger to the aryballos, to enable grasping and handling. However, as I will argue below, the absence of handles, or their lack of usefulness, does not suffice to explain the choice to attach a hanger.

The aryballos is amongst the vases most commonly represented in Attic vase painting, and is considered to be mainly employed by men, specifically young athletes,⁶ both in peer relationships and inter-generationally. It is often represented as a part of the athletic kit, along with the strigil and the sponge. However, various scholars suggest that

² Beazley 1927/1928, 193–197; Schreiber 1999, 89–90; Boix 2013; and for the history of the vase, see Alexandridou 2011, 28–29.

³ For a recent discussion on the Corinthian aryballos, see Dvir 2011.

⁴ Boix 2013, 47 Fig. 5.

⁵ For the handle in general, see Simmel 1958, 375–376. For current discussion, see Gaifman 2018, 455–456.

⁶ Algrain – Brisart – Jubier-Galinier 2008, 159–161.

perhaps it was not exclusively used by males. A few aryballoi are decorated with a theme that might appeal to a female audience; and, in addition, there is a very limited amount of visual representation attesting to its usage also by women.

Of the numerous depictions on vases of women bathing and taking care of their body, A. Heinemann enumerates only 14 examples that include aryballoi.⁷ Moreover, of these few instances, in only one do we see a woman actually using the aryballos. This is on a black-figure amphora attributed to the Andokides painter, dating to c. 520 BCE;⁸ on one side, it displays a scene of women swimming, one of whom pours oil into her open palm from an aryballos – a type of handling I will discuss below, typically pertaining only to athletes. Some scholars have suggested that these swimmers might be Amazons,⁹ and perhaps this use of the aryballos in a manner typical of men supports this identification. In the other 13 cases mentioned by Heinemann we see the aryballos, sometimes with a strigil and a sponge, hanging in the background, not in actual use. This exception proves the rule: although perhaps in real life women did use the aryballos, the picture presented by vase painters is almost entirely gender biased.

A further question discussed by a number of scholars is that of the material from which the aryballos is composed. The striking gap between the relatively scant number of actual Attic aryballoi found in archaeological contexts and the pervasiveness of their appearance in visual representations has led scholars to suspect that most aryballoi were made from perishable material, mainly leather.¹⁰ One example offering possible support for this theory is a scene decorating the tondo of a cup attributed to the Kiss painter.¹¹ The cup is housed in Baltimore and dates to c. 500 BCE. In the tondo, we see a dressed adult male holding a long rod in his left hand, gazing at a naked youth, who is possibly even a statue¹² – an ambiguity that Steiner claims is intentional, encapsulating the idea that these young men were objects of desire and gaze, much like statues.¹³

⁷ Heinemann 2009, 171–172, Appendix B; see also Boix 2013, 63 ff.

⁸ Paris, Musée du Louvre, F203. *ABV* 253.3; *ARV* 2.11; *ARV*² 4.13; *Add* 71; *Add*² 150; *BAPD* 200013.

⁹ For example: Cohen 2006, 197–198; Fischer 2007, 163; Mayor 2014, 120–123.

¹⁰ Boix 2013, 55–59.

¹¹ Baltimore, John Hopkins University Museum, JHUAM B5. *ARV* 90.3; *ARV*² 177.3, 1577.15, 1592.28; *Para* 339; *Add* 92; *Add*² 185; *BAPD* 201626. From Chiusi, Italy. Web page: <http://archaeologicalmuseum.jhu.edu/the-collection/object-stories/attic-red-figure-vases-in-the-johns-hopkins-archaeological-museum/test/>

¹² Neer 2010, 50; Kefalidou 2015, 127.

¹³ Steiner 1998, 130.

This youth or statue stands upon a stepped base and, similarly to the other male, holds a long rod, but in his right hand. Two sets of aryballos and sponge are shown: one hangs in the background between the two males, while the other dangles from the youth's left hand. Based on the shape of the aryballoi, Boix has identified the material of the aryballos hanging in the background as leather, and that of the one held by the youth as a hard material, namely clay or metal.

The Hanger

As mentioned above, Haspels' observations, based on a meticulous examination of visual representations, are crucial to the current discussion. Her preliminary statement is that aryballoi, even those bearing handles, were suspended by a hanger tied to their neck. Haspels records three methods of suspension, one simple and two more elaborate, where the two latter are essentially identical save for their material. Her detailed illustrations and reconstruction reveal an important point: the hanger of the aryballos, be it simple or more elaborate, is a sophisticated, carefully designed object, to which the artisan who made it devoted the utmost attention. Two examples well demonstrate this point. The first is a red-figure amphora attributed to the Kleophrades painter, housed in Boston and dating to c. 490 BCE.¹⁴ On one side we see a nude, much-admired athlete loaded down with prizes and gifts. Red ribbons are tied to his limbs, a vegetal wreath adorns his head, and on both forearms he carries objects – a hare and an aryballos respectively. The aryballos is suspended by means of an elaborate hanger: a wide, flat strap of uneven width hangs directly from the arm and is, in its turn, attached to a red string tied to the neck of the aryballos, while double thongs rest upon the body of the vase. A second type of hanger, possibly a version of the first but more elaborate, is depicted on a cup attributed to Douris, dating to c. 500 BCE and housed in New York (Fig. 1).¹⁵ Three aryballoi hang in the background, with their hangers apparently all constructed in the same fashion: strings are attached to the neck, with fringes that rest loosely upon the body of the vessel, while the string in its turn is threaded into a long leather tube (rather than a flat strap).

¹⁴ Boston (MA), Museum of Fine Arts, 10.178. *ARV* 121.7; *ARV*² 183.9, 1632; *Add* 93; *Add*² 186; *BAPD* 201662. Web page: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/153616/twohandled-jar-amphora-depicting-a-victor-in-an-athletic?ctx=f42f0b0b-4e5f-467d-80c4-5e9ed0a64623&idx=0>.

¹⁵ New York (NY), Metropolitan Museum, Kings Point (NY), N. Schimmel, 1986.322.1. *BAPD* 1142. Web page: <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1986.322.1/>



Fig. 1. Red-figure cup, New York (NY), Metropolitan Museum, 1986.322.1. Attributed to Douris, c. 500 BCE. Public domain.

The raw materials of the hangers, as is evident from the visual representations and as pointed out by Haspels, are either textile string, leather strips and straps, or some combination of the two.¹⁶ In any case, the raw materials are flexible and can be easily manipulated. In the case of the Kleophrades amphora, the hanger's elaborate nature stands out in comparison to the very slender, simple string upon which hangs the other object carried by the athlete i.e. the hare. These hangers recur in numerous representations in various degrees of detailing. Thus, it is quite reasonable to assume that it was a product – a commodity designed, manufactured and purchased for this very purpose, namely, carrying a small container that is either handleless or whose handles are impossible to grasp.

¹⁶ Beazley (1916, 124) states that the hanger shown on the Boston amphora is made of leather. On the technological and industrial aspects of textile and leather, see Wild 2008 and van Driel-Murray 2008. The textile industry is also discussed in Harlizius-Klück 2016.

Aryballos Plus Hanger: a Unified Entity

As stated above, aryballoi are made from various materials: clay, metal and leather. Looking at the images, it is apparent that aryballoi were commonly equipped with a hanger, and that this was true regardless of their material. The importance of these hangers is echoed in their careful depiction by the painters. It becomes apparent from these vase scenes that the hangers equaled the aryballos itself in importance, for by means of the hanger this small vase was transformed into a personal object that might be carried for long periods of time.¹⁷ These hangers served to replace the stiff handle characteristic of clay vessels with a soft, flexible ‘handle’ that could be fitted as required. It was an essential component in granting both objects the capacity to be a mobile object, moved easily in space.¹⁸

The Handling of the Aryballos

The earliest representations on Attic ware of the aryballos are to be found on vases attributed to the Heidelberg painter and his contemporaries. In these, we see that the handling is by means of the hanger. The first example is seen on one side of a Siana cup now housed in Amsterdam and dating to c. 560 BCE. There we see a naked youth oiling himself (Fig. 2).¹⁹ Sporting a band on his head, his body turns to the right, as he bends over and raises his left leg, touching it with both hands outstretched. Before him stands another youth dressed in short chiton, holding in his right hand a simple hanger, from which an aryballos is suspended (Fig. 3). This globular object occupies the empty space in between both figures, drawing the viewer’s attention to it. Another early scene depicting the aryballos decorates the tondo of a Siana cup housed in Taranto, dating to c. 560 BCE.²⁰ In a typical courting scene, a bearded adult male is seen on the left with a love gift of a cock in his right hand, while his left hand touches the right hand of a naked youth standing before him. The youth’s right hand clutches the hanger string of an aryballos, while his left hand, pushed slightly forward,

¹⁷ Heinemann 2009, 161.

¹⁸ The third element is the liquid itself; thus, all three components are bound together. For the discussion of the connection between a substance and its container, see Massar – Verbanck-Piérard 2013, 275.

¹⁹ Amsterdam, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam, APM 10000. *BAPD* 12934. Brijder 1991, No. 330, Pls. 105–106.

²⁰ Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 20253. *ABV* 64.13; *Para* 26; *BAPD* 300557. From Taranto, Italy. Brijder (2000, 683, No. 512), attributes the vase to the Red-Black painter.



Fig. 2. Black-figure Siana cup, Amsterdam, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam, APM 10000. Attributed to the Heidelberg painter, c. 560 BCE. © Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam.



Fig. 3. Detail of Fig. 2.

almost touches the aryballos too. Once again, the aryballos occupies the central space in between both male bodies. A third example is a Siana cup fragment, dating to c. 550 BCE, where we see on the left a naked youth, himation draped over his shoulders, holding an aryballos in his raised hand. Facing him we see another male holding a walking stick, a himation draped over his arm, too.²¹ All three cases have in common the role of the aryballos as an object that accompanies a youth in his various interactions with other males in different social contexts. With the hanger grasped in the palm of the hand, the vase dangles in the gap between the two manly bodies and occupies the vacant space, simultaneously separating and connecting the two men. This type of handling recurs repeatedly throughout the second half of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE.

Another type of handling, not seen on the early vases mentioned above, involves suspending the aryballos upon the forearm – once again, using the hanger. A good example is the famous amphora signed by Exekias as both potter and painter, housed in the Vatican, dating to 540–530 BCE (Fig. 4).²² In one scene, depicting Polydeikos and Kastor returning home, a slave boy named Kylaros balances a stool on his head with the aid of his right hand, while an aryballos with hanger hangs from his right forearm. Another example is a neck-amphora from London market, dating to the last quarter of the sixth century BCE,²³ in which a rider on a horseback is seen flanked by two youths, the one on the left touching the horse's mane, while an aryballos is suspended by means of a lengthy hanger from his forearm. A later example is the red-figure amphora attributed to the Kleophrades painter discussed above (in the section titled “The Hanger”) – here, too, the aryballos hangs from the forearm. While both methods outlined so far involved the hanger, the advantage offered by this second type of handling is that the palm remains free for action.

In the transition to the red-figure technique, we begin to see depictions of aryballoi not merely dangling but in actual use. Oltos, among others, is credited with scenes showing an athlete pouring oil from his aryballos into his open palm. For our purposes two examples will suffice, both of them decorating cups dating to the last quarter of the sixth century BCE: one is housed today at the collection of Rhode Island School of Design (Fig. 5),²⁴

²¹ Heidelberg, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, S4. *BAPD* 1054.

²² Rome, Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano, 16757. *ABV* 145.13, 686; *Para* 60; *Add*² 40; *BAPD* 310395. From Vulci, Italy.

²³ London Market. *BAPD* 12976.

²⁴ Providence (RI), Rhode Island School of Design, 25.076. *ARV* 37.35, *CVA* Providence, Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design 1, 23; *BAPD* 200379. Web page: https://rismuseum.org/art-design/collection?search_api_fulltext=oltos



Fig. 4. Black-figure amphora, Rome, Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano, 16757. Signed by Exekias as both potter and painter, 540–530 BCE. Photo: Egisto Sani.



Fig. 5. Red-figure cup, Providence (RI), Rhode Island School of Design, 25.076. Attributed to Oltos, last quarter of the 6th century BCE. Public domain.

while the other is to be found in the museum at Ferrara.²⁵ On one of the outer sides of the cup from Rhode Island we see a nude athlete standing in full profile, facing right, his head is adorned with a wreath. With his right hand positioned above he grasps an aryballos, tilted horizontally to enable pouring; and with his left palm positioned below he catches the oil, which he will rub on his body. The aryballos' simple hanger consists of one string, wrapped around his wrist and lower forearm. A similar iconographic type decorates the tondo of the cup from Ferrara. Although his body proportions differ, this ephēbe is rather similar to the one on the Rhode Island cup: the nudity, the wreath upon the head, the tilted aryballos – and the hanger looped around the forearm. In the tondo there is also a stool piled with a bundle of clothes. The pouring action, whether as a sole figure motif or as part of multiple figure scenes, continues to appear on later vases in the fifth century BCE, and always in the same fashion: an inverted aryballos, with its hanger looped around the user's forearm.

From its very inception, then, the aryballos has (almost) always been attached to a hanger. The need to qualify this statement stems from one possible exception: a scene decorating the tondo of a cup attributed to the Antiphon painter, housed in Ferrara.²⁶ Here, a naked youth stands next to a stool, with a cane and halters also shown within the pictorial field. The youth starches his right arm, grasping an aryballos-like object in his palm and without recourse to a hanger. This might, however, actually be a pomegranate, since all of the other aryballoi depicted by the Antiphon painter are always equipped with a hanger.²⁷ A comparable unattributed scene decorates a cup from a private collection in London (*BAPD* 41875), showing an adult male seated upon a stool, leaning on his cane, and holding a round object identified as a pomegranate, while a youth walks to the right. Between the two males hangs the athletic kit: aryballos, strigil and sponge. Thus, the round object in the Antiphon painter's scene under discussion might similarly be a pomegranate.

Even if we do recognize it as an aryballos, then this type of handling is clearly marginal and exceptional, for the visual evidence overwhelmingly supports the assumption that the hanger was in all probability seldom detached from the aryballos. No doubt the hanger increases the ease of

²⁵ Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia, 269. *ARV* 42.104; *ARV²* 66.128, 1600.35; *Add²* 166; *BAPD* 200566.

²⁶ Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina, T41DVP. *BAPD* 200420.

²⁷ One example is a scene decorating the tondo of a lost cup attributed to this painter, formerly in Berlin (Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, F2314. *BAPD* 203450). It depicts the pouring of oil, where the hanger is clearly apparent, looped around the athlete's wrist.

transportation and movement of its object, the aryballos, as mentioned by Heinemann.²⁸

However, all this is not as straightforward as it might seem. The aryballos is small in its dimensions, making it a very convenient object to grasp, and it would not be at all odd to see it depicted as being grasped by its body, similarly to other small vases, as discussed below. Yet the aryballos is almost always carried by means of the hanger. Even when the aryballos is in active use, the hanger is always wrapped around the wrist of the user. Thus, in sharp contrast to all other ceramic vases that, in their depictions on vase paintings, are handled, carried, and used via direct contact with their handles or bodies, in the case of the aryballos the user is largely seen to be detached from direct contact with the vase's body, instead making contact with the soft and flexible hanger.

What might explain this anomalous and unique handling? I would argue that, while undoubtedly the aryballoi had hangers and the two were used together in ancient Athens of that period, the depiction by the painters of these objects was not, we may assume, simply a faithful imitation of real life. Rather, in consistently painting only male athletes handling aryballoi with their hangers, the painters wished to make visually a tight connection between user and objects and perhaps emphasize their mobility.

A Comparative Case: the Alabastron

The uniqueness of the aryballos and its handling most clearly emerges when we compare it to another small vase that, lacking any handles whatsoever, ought to be just as likely, if not more so, to be carried and handled while using a hanger: the alabastron.²⁹

Typology, Function and Material of the Vase

The typology, development and function of the Athenian alabastron has been dealt with in a number of publications, in discussions that are fairly clear, with the most thorough being those by Panayota Badinou (2003) and Isabelle

²⁸ Heinemann 2009, 163–165.

²⁹ Two other types of vases similarly served for containing perfumes and oils: the lekythos and the exaleiptron. But both differ from the alabastron and the aryballos in featuring a base, which enables them to stand independently. The lekythos is handled by means of its vertical handle or by its base, and the exaleiptron by means of its long foot. See Badinou 2003, 56; Algrain 2014, 207–215; and see Algrain – Brisart – Jubier-Galinier 2008, 145–164 for a discussion of perfume vases as a group.

Algrain (2014).³⁰ The alabastron is a container for precious liquids such as perfume and scented oil. It features an oblong vertical shape and a round bottom without a base, while its neck is short and terminates in a broad, flat, thin rim.³¹ In most cases, the alabastron is handleless. When handles are present and attached to the body, they usually come in the form of small lugs, with or without holes. While there is some measure of variety, the basic features of the vase essentially remain the same across all these vessels.

The alabastron has traditionally been understood as a vase connected to women, be they *hetaerae*, maidens, brides or respectable women.³² It makes its appearance in body-care, domestic and wedding scenes, either suspended in the background or held in the hand. In the wedding context, it can signify the erotic aspect of the engagement between the sexes. Moreover, it is found in funerary scenes, particularly those dating to the second half of the fifth century, in which women are, again, seen handling the alabastra while visiting a tomb.

More recently, however, Algrain questioned this long-standing assumption, claiming that alabastra, in reality, might well be in use by men too. Firstly, Algrain maintained, many scenes decorating the alabastra themselves are those that would appeal to a masculine audience. She further argued that alabastra became a popular item within the visual repertoire during a period characterized by a general inclination towards scenes revolving around the feminine sphere; hence, we should not be surprised to see alabastra showing up in feminine contexts. For further support to her claim, Algrain discussed two alabastra decorated with scenes depicting the sale of perfumed oils in the presence of naked athletes, concluding that this implies that athletes also used this product.³³

Her claims notwithstanding, the fact remains that, dating from the alabastron's earliest appearance in Attic vase painting, the painters unanimously chose to depict this vase in the hands of women – whether in all-feminine scenes, or in scenes where women engage with men, regardless of the context – with but one exception: a scene decorating a pelike housed in the Warsaw National Museum.³⁴ And even here, the youth holding the alabastron

³⁰ Both publications were preceded by an unpublished PhD dissertation (Mauermeyer 1985). For a concise discussion of the alabastron, see Amyx 1958, 213–217.

³¹ Schreiber 1999, 69–70; Badinou 2003, 52–53. The first part of Algrain 2014, 1–150 is a detailed study of the development of the Attic alabastra.

³² Fischer 2007, 162–163; Algrain 2014, 163 ff. Both Badinou 2003, 65 ff. and Algrain 2014, 153 ff. dedicated a great deal of their research to discussion of the various usages of the alabastron.

³³ Algrain 2014, 192–193. See also Hatzivassilou 2009, 232–233.

³⁴ Warsaw, National Museum, 147219. *BAPD* 275517.

is, most probably, in the act of handing it over to a woman. Thus, as is the case for the aryballos, the picture presented by vase painters is gender biased.

In terms of materials, alabastra were made of clay, glass, stone and metal. It is possible to identify several of the alabastra depicted on vases as being made of glass, due to their zigzag decoration,³⁵ while the rest would have been made of the other materials. The first clay Athenian alabastron was potted by Amasis around 540 BCE,³⁶ and today hundreds of Athenian alabastra are housed in museum and private collections and continue to be excavated.³⁷

The Hanger

Visual representations prove that the alabastron's hanger is the same as that used for the aryballos and is tied in identical fashion.³⁸ The most detailed examples are the hangers falling into the category of Haspels' method II and III, i.e. elaborate hangers made of either leather and string or only leather. On a lekythos attributed to the Tithonos painter, dating to c. 480 BCE and housed in Boston, we see a standing woman checking her reflection in her mirror.³⁹ Next to her, on the floor, stands an exaleipteron, and behind her an alabastron is suspended in the background. A careful examination of the hanger reveals that it is constructed from a wide strap and a thin string attached to the vessel's neck, while two or three fringes rest loosely upon its body. As with the aryballoi, not all the alabastra hangers are detailed; they may be rendered as a simple string. The fact that a similar hanger may be attached to both aryballoi and alabastra reinforces the assumption that the hanger was a general consumer commodity, designed and manufactured to be attached to vases of varying types, and probably available for purchase separately from them.

The Handling of the Alabastron

Alabastra enter the visual repertoire at the end of the sixth century BCE, which is the point at which we first begin to see how they are

³⁵ Algrain 2014, 159.

³⁶ Athens, Agora Museum, P12628. *BAPD* 310493. Algrain 2014, 36–41.

³⁷ 592 Athenian alabastra are recorded in the *BAPD* (search terms: fabric: Athenian; shape: alabastron). Algrain's catalogue includes 659 alabastra. For a recent publication of an alabastron found at the Necropolis of Antandros at 2008, see Yağız 2019.

³⁸ Badinou 200, 53 n. 13; Algrain 2014, 220 n. 913.

³⁹ Boston (MA), Museum of Fine Arts, 00.340. *BAPD* 203180. Web page: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/153776/oil-flask-lekythos-with-woman-beautifying-herself?ctx=470029e8-4868-4739-8b42-ee1bbc7f7613&idx=0>

handled.⁴⁰ They do appear on a handful of black-figure vases, but all of these seem to belong to the later phase of this technique's production, namely the first quarter of the fifth century BCE. In fact, the very earliest depictions of alabastra in Attic ware appear in the early phase of red-figure technique – though not that commonly, either. Six red-figure vases alone, dating to the last quarter of the sixth century BCE, include a depiction of alabastra and in only two of these is the alabastron seen actually being handled.

The first of these is found decorating the tondo of a cup attributed to the circle of the Nikosthenes painter. The cup is housed in the Villa Giulia museum (Fig. 6).⁴¹ Here, a naked woman with a kerchief on her head runs to her left while her head is turned back in the other direction. In her right hand she clutches a basket, while her left grasps an alabastron suspended from a thin string. A more elaborate scene decorates the second example, the tondo of a cup attributed to the Pezzino group and housed in Naples.⁴² A naked woman sits on a block and polishes her boot with a sponge. Next to her stands a smaller naked woman, probably a servant.⁴³ A cloth is draped over the latter's left forearm, while in her right palm she holds a hanger from which is suspended an alabastron, where the hanger's fringes rest upon the body of the vessel. Both cases demonstrate the same type of handling: by the hanger, which is grasped in the palm of the hand. This handling, which is like that of the aryballos discussed above, recurs in many other depictions, both contemporaneous and later.

Putting this type of handling aside, however, we see that, in the majority of cases, the alabastron is handled very differently, involving direct contact to its body. The more common method of handling is by grasping the vase's round bottom. A good example is a scene decorating the tondo of a cup attributed to the Antiphon painter, dating to c. 480 BCE and housed in a private collection in Cannes (Fig. 7).⁴⁴

⁴⁰ A depiction of an alabastron possibly dating earlier can be found on an Athenian black-figure alabastron housed in Berlin (Berlin, Antikensammlung, F2029. *BAPD* 9035103). There, in an altar scene we see a man carrying a long rod loaded with various objects, where the one on the left might be an alabastron. See *CVA Berlin, Antikensammlung* 16: 18. Pl. 1.

⁴¹ Rome, Mus. Naz. Etrusco di Villa Giulia, 50385. *ARV* 106.6; *ARV*² 134.7, 1628; *Add* 88; *Add*² 177; *BAPD* 201122. From Cerveteri, Italy.

⁴² Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, STG5. *ARV* 81.7; *ARV*² 32.4; *Add*² 157; *BAPD* 200173. From Etruria, Italy.

⁴³ Kilmer (1993, 26–27) finds lesbian overtones in the scene, and identifies the standing female as a “serving girl”. However, Keuls (1985, 170) identifies both women as *hetaerae* preparing for their job.

⁴⁴ Cannes, private. *ARV*² 1646.25TER; *BAPD* 275185.

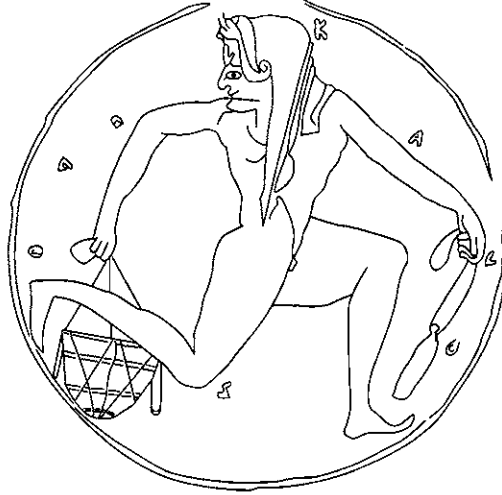


Fig. 6. Red-figure cup, Rome, Mus. Naz. Etrusco di Villa Giulia, 50385. Attributed to the circle of the Nikosthenes painter, last quarter of the 6th century BCE. Illustration: Nurit Young.

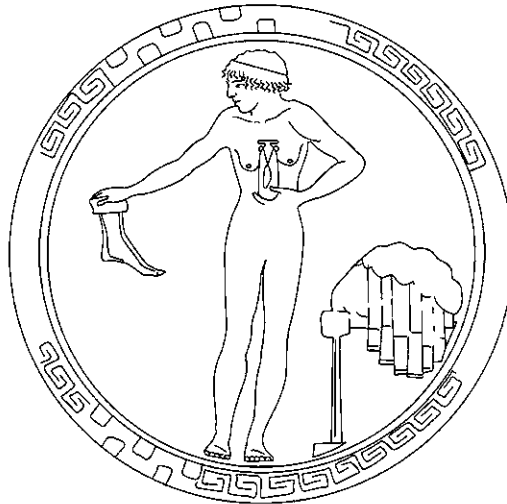


Fig. 7. Red-figure cup, Cannes, private. Attributed to the Antiphon painter, c. 480 BCE. Illustration: Nurit Young.

A naked woman stands facing us frontally, and next to her is a stool piled with clothes. In her right hand she holds a pair of boots, while her upturned left palm cups an alabastron's round bottom. Its hanger is clearly visible, dangling from its neck and resting upon its body. This image serves as

a fine illustration of the point we are making for, despite the presence of the hanger, the vase is carried via direct grasp. A second example is a hydria attributed to the Yale Oinochoe painter, dating to 470–460 BCE and housed in Houston (Fig. 8).⁴⁵ In the center of the scene, we see a woman about to place a bundle of wool into a kalathos. She is flanked by two other women. The one standing behind her is touching a suspended alabastron with her upturned left palm while cupping the bottom of another one in her upturned right palm, with her fingers curled up to grip it well. Thus neither alabastron is actually handled by its hanger. Handling by cupping in the palm is very common, and can be found in not only domestic but also funerary scenes, in which we might see a woman approaching a tomb holding an alabastron in such a fashion.⁴⁶ An oinochoe attributed to the painter of Ferrara T28 and dating the end of the fifth century BCE exemplifies a slightly different handling. Here, three women hold an alabastron each, one hand grasping its body directly, close to its round bottom, though not quite at the bottom itself as was the case in the previous example.⁴⁷

Another, and somewhat rarer, type of handling is the method of grasping the alabastron by its flat rim. An example decorates a cup in the manner of Douris, dating to 480–470 BCE and housed in the British museum (Fig. 9).⁴⁸ Both sides feature an identical composition: a courting scene in which three males engage with two women, one of whom grasps the flat rim of an alabastron with her left palm. Another example is a scene decorating a hydria attributed to the Chicago painter, dating to c. 450 BCE and belonging to a private collection in Zurich.⁴⁹ We see a kalathos on the ground next to three dressed women, the central of whom – apparently a young maiden – grasps the flat rim of an alabastron in her right palm. All these examples point to the fact that in many, if not most, cases, the alabastron is handled through direct contact with its body, without hanger.

⁴⁵ Houston (TX), Museum of Fine Arts, 80.95. *BAPD* 7704. Web page: <https://emuseum.mfah.org/objects/5341/hydria-water-jar-with-domestic-scene?ctx=aca6ed33d2b573f0f489311496a0f50be089b9de&idx=0>

⁴⁶ An example of this is found in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 545. *BAPD* 213986.

⁴⁷ Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina. *ARV*² 1355.9; *Para* 483; *BAPD* 240105. From Spina, Italy.

⁴⁸ London, British Museum, E51. *ARV*² 449.4, 1653; *Para* 376; *BAPD* 205338. From Vulci, Italy. Web page: https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=22646001&objectId=399214&partId=1#more-views

⁴⁹ Zurich, private, Prof. Mikro Ros. *ARV*² 630.35; *BAPD* 207318. From Campania, Italy.



Fig. 8. Red-figure hydria, Houston (TX), Museum of Fine Arts, 80.95. Attributed to the Yale Oinochoe painter, 470–460 BCE. Public domain.



Fig. 9. Red-figure cup, London, British Museum, E51. Attributed to a painter in the manner of Douris, 480–470 BCE. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Alabastron and Hanger: a Unified Object?

We might have expected that the alabastron would be handled in the same fashion as the aryballos, both of them being footless and featuring either no handles or ones impossible to grasp. Yet the above discussion demonstrates that this is not the case and that alabastra are handled very differently. Not only are they handled mostly by direct contact to the body, but when held in the hand, we only rarely see a hanger attached. These types of handling, featuring direct contact between the hand and the vase, serve in practice to keep the hands occupied, thus depriving the alabastron of the independent pendulum movement it would have enjoyed when handled using a hanger. In stark contrast to the aryballos, hangers and alabastra are not a unified entity. It therefore seems that, contrary to the aryballos, the alabastron was probably not intended to be a personal object – and certainly not to be comfortably and conveniently carried for long periods of time. Indeed, alabastra were sometimes kept and carried in a special box, ἀλαβαστροθήκη.⁵⁰ More support for this conclusion can be found in the realization that one type of handling typical of the aryballos and yet (as far as we know) absent from the visual representations of the alabastron's handling is the suspension of the vase from the forearm or wrist.

Bearing in mind this lack of easy transportation and movement, and the fact of the alabastron's depiction as being primarily or solely handled by women, we may suggest that a correlation between gender and handling has once again been made by our vase painters – this time, in the opposite direction.⁵¹

Conclusion

In its representation in Athenian vase painting, the uniqueness of the aryballos in being always attached to a hanger stands out when comparing it to other perfume vessels (or vessels in general) represented in this medium. This becomes especially apparent in the comparison to the alabastron, a vase bearing similar formal characteristics to the aryballos. The depiction of the hanger in both cases appears, therefore, to have been a deliberate choice, not a preliminary requirement for its handling.

Research has shown that visual representations are very decisive about the connection between gender and vase type; or as phrased by Massar

⁵⁰ Badinou 2003, 52–53, Pl. 126.1.

⁵¹ Reeder 1995, 21–25.

and Verbanck-Piérard, “Attic vase painters have ‘gendered’ the world of perfume, visually associating the aryballos with men and the alabastron with women”.⁵² The present study suggests that not only the type of vase was gendered by vase painters, but also its handling. While suspended on a wall, both vases were kept in the same fashion, as attested to by the visual representations of these objects hanging in the background by means of a similar hanger – in some cases, actually side by side.⁵³ It is only when taken down from the wall that divergence in their handling begins to occur, for while the aryballos is always handled with its hanger, the alabastron is not. Indeed, the two types of vase, with their respective types of handling, were conceived very differently by both the vase painters and their audience.

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⁵² Massar – Verbanck-Piérard 2013, 278.

⁵³ An example of the two adjacent vases hanging in the background can be seen in a scene of a departing warriors decorating a cup attributed to Douris and housed in Boston (Museum of Fine Arts, 00.343. *BAPD* 205187. Web page: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/153692/drinking-cup-kylix?ctx=cc038f06-be07-48c1-8372-6489931951e9&idx=12>). Another example is a hydria attributed to the Harrow painter and housed in Tampa, Florida (Museum of Art 86.70. *BAPD* 202666). In a scene commonly interpreted as brothel scene, an aryballos and an alabastron are shown hanging adjacent to each other on the wall. The vase is discussed by Fischer 2007.

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This work examines visual representations of aryballoi and their hangers. Both items are always depicted together, thus creating a unified entity, that is, separate objects that operate as a unit. Although the aryballos – a small vase primarily employed in a masculine context – is quite conveniently designed for carrying directly in the hand, it is nevertheless always depicted attached to its hanger, and this affects its handling. A comparative case is brought: the alabastron, a vase primarily employed in feminine contexts. Though bearing formal features similar to the aryballos, in visual representations we see the alabastron being handled very differently, mostly through direct contact and not with a hanger. This leads to the conclusion that vase painters actively gendered vases not only according to type, but even by handling. The combination of aryballos and hanger enables more freedom of movement than the alabastron alone, symbolizing the greater freedom enjoyed by men of the time; while the association of alabastron with women perhaps points to their corresponding lack of freedom. These paintings thus encapsulate and symbolize the differences between the sexes.

В статье исследуются изображения арибаллов и устройств для их подвешивания в вазовой живописи. Оба предмета постоянно изображаются вместе, создавая неразрывное единство. Арибалл – небольшой сосуд, которым пользовались в первую очередь мужчины, – достаточно удобно держать прямо в руке, однако он постоянно изображается подвешенным, что сказывается на его применении. Для сравнения рассматриваются алабастры – сосуды, предназначенные преимущественно для женщин. Формально они мало чем отличаются от арибаллов, но в изобразительном искусстве с ними обращаются иначе – в основном держат прямо в руке. Отсюда следует, что мужская или женская среда активно подчеркивалась художниками не только с помощью изображения одного или другого сосуда, но и способа его держать. Подвешенный арибалл позволял двигаться более активно, чем алабастр в руках, поэтому первый символизировал свободный образ жизни мужчин, а второй – отсутствие такой свободы у женщин. Это различие, как в капле янтаря, запечатлелось в вазовой живописи.