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doi:[10.1017/S0017383525100533](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383525100533)

SOTADES' AMAZON RHYTON: A CASE STUDY IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONNECTIVITY★

This paper considers the processes that contributed to the creation of an Athenian red-figure rhyton in the form of an Amazon, signed by the potter Sotades, which was excavated in Nubia in 1921. Despite its secure archaeological provenance, the rhyton has not played a significant role in studies of trade or intercultural interaction because its unusual form and iconography – it features images of Persians defeating Greeks in battle – seemingly make it exceptional. Yet these features are best explained as the result of a feedback loop of information between Sotades and his Persian customers, relayed by merchants. This information was distorted, translated, and perhaps even manipulated in the course of transmission, which contributed to the rhyton's unusual appearance. Thus the rhyton does not represent a special circumstance, but rather is the culmination of a sustained period of tenuous yet persistent links between Sotades' workshop in Athens and Persians living in Egypt.

Keywords: Achaemenid, Attic pottery, cultural interaction, Egypt, Nubia, Persian, pottery trade, red-figure, rhyton, Sotades

A well-travelled pot

In 1921, while excavating a pyramid at Meroe in what is today the Republic of the Sudan, George Reisner discovered a singular Greek pottery vessel: a rhyton, bearing the signature of the Athenian potter

*I am very grateful to Alexis Belis, Stephanie Langin-Hooper, Margaret Cool Root, Alan Shapiro, and the anonymous reviewer for *Greece & Rome* for their insightful and constructive feedback on various earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to Susanne Ebbinghaus for our many enlightening discussions of this vessel and of rhyta in general, and to Sharon Herbert, in whose course on Greek pottery at the University of Michigan the ideas presented here first took shape many years ago. Finally, I thank Bryn Mawr College for defraying the costs of reproducing Figures 5 and 8 and of Open Access publishing of this article.

Sotades, in the form of a mounted Amazon decorated with red-figure paintings of Persians defeating Greeks in battle. With its clear provenance some 2,300 km from Athens as the crow flies, the Amazon rhyton seems like an obvious piece of key evidence for studying ancient trade and cultural contacts. Yet its unusual form and iconography have relegated it to the status of a curiosity, worthy of comment for its striking appearance and usually regarded as a special commission for a specific event or purpose. Accordingly, it has played little role in the study of the making or exchange of Greek pottery, or in understanding cross-cultural connections more broadly.

Yet it is the rhyton's unusualness that makes it all the more valuable for the study of such connections. This is because it is unlikely to be the product of mere happenstance; instead, it must be the result of a systemic process of intercultural contact between Athenians and Persians. Moreover, its unusualness further suggests that it is the culmination of that process, and as such it illustrates the greatest possible extent of Athenian–Persian connectivity, at least in the realm of Attic pottery. To understand the nature of this contact, it is necessary, as Christoph Ulf has argued, to consider both the context of production and the context of the reception of material culture, as well as the channel of transmission itself.¹ In the case of the Amazon rhyton, production (how it fits into Sotades' oeuvre and the history of Greek painted pottery more broadly) and reception (that it was seemingly made for a Persian audience) have been the focus of previous discussions. There has been little consideration of transmission, that is, how the vessel travelled from Athens to Egypt, whence it came to Nubia, and, more importantly, how Sotades received information about his Persian customers, which was arguably a necessary prerequisite to the rhyton's creation. This channel of transmission must have consisted of a sequence of merchants stretching from Athens to Memphis who dealt in Attic pottery. These merchants not only provided pottery vessels to Persians (and others) residing in Egypt, but also relayed information about those Persian customers to their suppliers, going back to Sotades himself, thus creating a kind of feedback loop between consumers and producers. Over time, as he learned more about them, Sotades came to adapt his products to match the perceived tastes of his Persian customers, culminating in the strikingly unusual form and decoration of the Amazon rhyton. It thus speaks to a sustained cross-

¹ C. Ulf, 'Rethinking Cultural Contacts', *Ancient West and East* 8 (2009), 81–132.



Figures 1–2. Red-figure rhyton in the form of a mounted Amazon, signed by Sotades, Athenian, c. 450–440 BCE. Ceramic; H. 34.0 cm, Base 28.0 × 10.0 cm. Excavated at Pyramid Beg. S 24 at Meroe South Cemetery, Sudan, in 1921. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 21.2286. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

cultural connection in the form of commercial relations between the potters of Athens and the Persian population in Egypt in the middle of the fifth century BCE.

The Amazon rhyton

The Amazon rhyton (Figures 1–2), which is thirty-four centimetres high and sits on a rectangular base measuring twenty-eight by ten



Figures 1–2. (*Continued*).

centimetres, is essentially a statuette of a mounted Amazon with a red-figure cup emerging from her back.² She wears an Attic helmet, originally painted red, with a white horsehair crest and violet cheek-pieces which have been flipped up, a blue long-sleeved tunic decorated with red dots, and purple trousers, now faded to pink. Over one

² Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 21.2286; Beazley Archive Pottery Database 209548. For full descriptions and previous bibliography, see D. von Bothmer, *Amazons in Greek Art* (Oxford, 1957), 222; H. Hoffmann, *Sotades. Symbols of Immortality on Greek Vases* (Oxford, 1997), 89–96, 158; B. Cohen (ed.), *The Colors of Clay. Special Techniques in Athenian Vases* (Los Angeles, 2006), 284–7; C. Kondoleon and R. A. Grossmann, *Classical Art* (Boston, 2008), 72–3; S. Ebbinghaus, ‘Feasting like the Persian King’, in S. Ebbinghaus (ed.), *Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World. Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 177–81.

shoulder she wears a yellow panther skin with black spots and a red bow case with blue dots hangs from her belt on her right side. Her hands may have originally held the horse's reins; if so, she appears to be pulling down on them, perhaps in order to make a turn. Her skin, and that of the horse, is painted white and her eyes, described in early reports as violent, now appear brown; the horse's eyes are blue. The horse is attached to the base by means of a support beneath its chest, of which its hind legs are a part; its front legs extend in front of the support and are attached to the base at the hooves. Its tail also attaches to the base after extending outwards to form a loop. A boar is depicted on one side of the support and a lion on the other, both against a green background, presumably evoking a verdant landscape. At the front of the base is a hole which may have been fitted with a spout, as is the case on other vessels signed by Sotades. The base also has an incised *stoichedon* signature reading ΣΟΤΑΔΗΣ ΕΠΙΟΙΗΣΕΝ ('Sotades made [me]'), on the side to the Amazon's left.

The red-figure cup has an everted rim and a single handle. It is decorated with two scenes of individual combat between Greeks and Persians. To the Amazon's left a mounted Persian spears a fallen Greek. To the Amazon's right a Greek carrying a shield retreats from a Persian, who is equipped with a spear, bow case, and crescent shield. The Persian's shield is emblazoned with an image of a dog with its tail between its legs. Both Persians on the cup wear striped, long-sleeved tunics and trousers and soft caps with earflaps. The standing Greek wears a *chlamys* and a Phrygian cap, while the fallen one wears a *chiton* and an Attic helmet. According to Beazley, 'the pictures cannot be said to have any connexion with the Sotades Painter', who painted many of the extant vessels signed by Sotades.³

Reisner discovered the rhyton in January, 1921, in the South Cemetery at the base of a pyramid now designated Beg. S 24 (Figure 3). According to Reisner, 'it had been removed by plunderers from the burial chamber of the little prince (or princess) to whom the tomb belonged and left practically on the surface, where it was covered by driftsand containing the missing parts in minute fragments'.⁴ The

³ J. D. Beazley, *Attic Red-Figure Vase Painters*, second edition (Oxford, 1963), 773.

⁴ G. Reisner, 'The Pyramids of Meroe and the Candaces of Ethiopia', *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 21 (1923), 12, 25; A. R. Sanborn, 'The Amazon Rhyton by Sotades in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston', in *Festschrift für James Loeb zum sechzigsten Geburtstag gewidmet von seinen archäologischen Freunden in Deutschland und Amerika* (Munich, 1930), 81–2; D. Dunham, *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush, Volume 5. The West and South Cemeteries at Meroë* (Boston, 1963), 383–4.

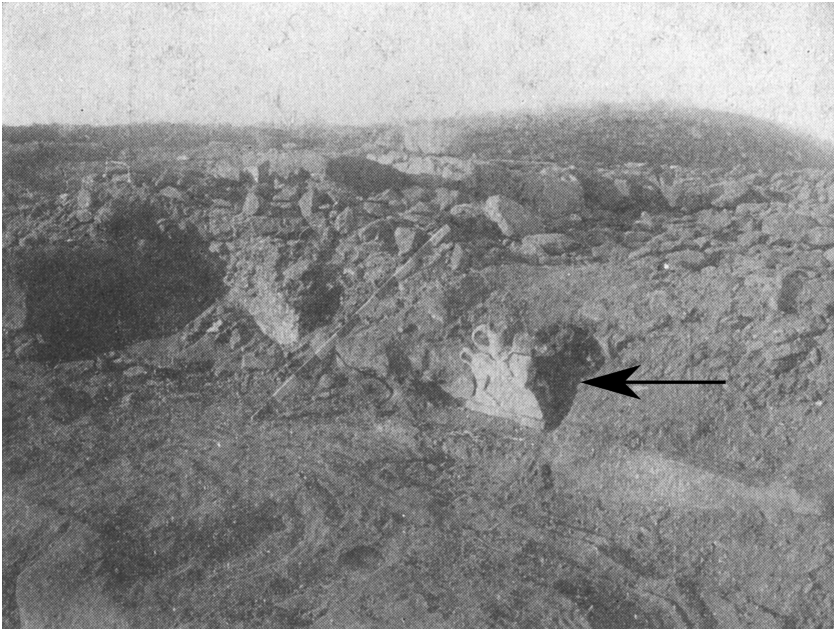


Figure 3. The Amazon rhyton, indicated by the arrow, *in situ* at Beg. S 24, South Cemetery, Meroe, Nubia, 1921. Public domain image from Reisner (n. 4), 12.

pyramid is part of a group of elite tombs built in the generations preceding the first royal burial at Meroe, that of Arkamani I, *c.* 270 BCE.⁵ Based on tomb typology, location, and its relationship to other structures, Beg. S 24 dates to the first half of the fourth century.⁶ Although intact at the time of its discovery, upon removal the rhyton fell apart along its joins and existing breaks. These joins reveal that the lower part of the rhyton, including the base, the body of the horse, and the Amazon's legs, were made in a mould, the seams of which are visible on the horse's chest and rump.⁷ The horse's head and forelegs and the Amazon's torso, head, and arms were made by hand and the cup section was thrown on a wheel.

⁵ J. Yellin, 'The Royal and Elite Cemeteries at Meroe', in G. Emberling and B. B. Williams (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Nubia* (Oxford, 2021), 575.

⁶ Dunham (n. 4), 1–2, 383; L. Török, *Hellenizing Art in Ancient Nubia 300 BC–AD 250 and Its Egyptian Models. A Study in 'Acculturation'* (Leiden, 2011), 102.

⁷ Sanborn (n. 4), 82–3; Cohen (n. 2), 284.

Beginning with the initial study by Ashton Sanborn in 1930, the rhyton is generally dated *c.* 440 BCE.⁸ This date is based primarily on three factors. The first factor is a comparison with the sculptures of the Parthenon depicting horses. These include the team drawing the chariot of Selene on the east pediment, which building inscriptions indicate were carved between 438 and 432 BCE, as well as those ridden in the procession on the frieze, which also probably date to the 430s.⁹ Although sculpting in clay and marble are very different artistic processes, these stylistic parallels nevertheless offer a reasonable basis for a date in the third quarter of the fifth century.

Second, although Beazley did not attribute the decoration of the rhyton to the Sotades Painter, he nevertheless drew some stylistic parallels with other vessels decorated by that painter, specifically the form of the stopped meander.¹⁰ The Sotades Painter, who worked primarily, if not exclusively, with the potters Sotades and Hegesiboulos, clearly belongs to the early Classical period.¹¹ This implies a similar date for the rhyton's painter, who may have been employed in the same workshop as the Sotades Painter.

The third factor is the date of the potter Sotades' floruit in the second quarter of the fifth century BCE. The incised inscription on the rhyton's base is generally understood to mean that Sotades made the vessel himself. However, this evidence is not so straightforward as it may seem. As Beazley himself pointed out, *epoiese* signatures state the name of the potter who fashioned the vessel, but 'that is what the statement *means*: it does not follow that the statement is always *true*'.¹² In the case of Sotades, the nine extant examples of his signature exhibit considerable variations. Six are incised and three are painted, and there are differences in the spelling of Sotades' name, in the form of the verb, and in the shapes of the letters.¹³ If Sotades potted all nine vessels

⁸ Sanborn (n. 4), 89–90. Dunham (n. 4), 383, n. 1, citing Von Bothmer (n. 2), 222, gives a date *c.* 400 BCE. Von Bothmer, however, dates the rhyton to *c.* 440, and it is clear from Dunham's further comments that 400 is a typo for 440. This detail evidently escapes L. Török, 'Kush and the External World', in S. Donadoni and S. Wenig (eds.), *Studia Meroitica 1984. Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference for Meroitic Studies, Rome 1984* (Berlin, 1989), 118, who rejects the date of 400 in favour of *c.* 470, on the basis of a personal communication from J. G. Szilágyi.

⁹ I. Jenkins, *Greek Architecture and Its Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA., 2006), 86–91, 95–100.

¹⁰ Beazley (n. 3), 773.

¹¹ M. Robertson, *The Art of Vase-Painting in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1992), 185–90.

¹² J. D. Beazley, *Greek Vases. Lectures by J. D. Beazley*, ed. D. C. Kurtz (Oxford, 1989), 50 (original emphasis).

¹³ M. Vickers and D. Gill, *Artful Crafts. Ancient Greek Silverware and Pottery* (Oxford, 1994), 166–8.

himself, it seems curious that he would sign his name to them in so many different ways. Rather, this variability implies that multiple people applied these signatures, though this does not exclude Sotades from involvement (perhaps he was illiterate and relied on others to write for him). But it is also possible that not every vessel bearing Sotades' name was made by him. The Amazon rhyton, therefore, may have been created by someone else using a mould made by Sotades. Perhaps this potter worked under Sotades' supervision or under that of the younger Hegesiboulos, who has been identified as Sotades' close collaborator and possible successor in his business.¹⁴ If so, the inclusion of the signature was simply part of the creation of the rhyton; without it, the vessel would have been incomplete.¹⁵ It recognized Sotades' creative input and provided continuity to the product line. But as an indicator of date the signature is not definitive and at best indicates that the rhyton does not date earlier than the middle of the fifth century.

Persian silver and Greek clay

The Amazon rhyton has several unusual features in its form and decoration which relate directly or implicitly to the Persians and to products of Achaemenid imperial tradition. Most prominent are the shape of the vessel, which alludes to Achaemenid metal rhyta, and the red-figure decoration, which depicts Persians defeating Greeks in combat. Other features, including the incised signature and the Amazon, a figure who often stands in for non-Greeks in pottery and sculpture, may also reflect Persian inspiration or an intended Persian audience for the vessel.

Achaemenid rhyta generally consist of a cylindrical or horn-shaped beaker terminating in a *protome* in the form of an animal or mythical creature.¹⁶ In this instance, the Amazon is in effect the *protome*, while the cup emerging from her back is the beaker. The potter has not only enlarged the *protome* to make it the dominant element, but has also added a flat base and a support beneath the horse, neither of which is a

¹⁴ D. Williams, 'Sotades: Plastic and White', in S. Kraay and S. Moser (eds.), *Greek Art in View. Studies in Honour of Brian Sparkes* (Oxford, 2004), 113.

¹⁵ D. Viviers, 'Signer une oeuvre en Grèce ancienne: pourquoi? Pour qui?', in J. de La Genière (ed.), *Les clients de la céramique grecque. Actes du colloque de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Paris, 30–31 janvier 2004* (Paris, 2006), 141–54; R. Osborne, 'The Art of Signing in Ancient Greece', *Arethusa* 43 (2010), 231–51.

¹⁶ K. Tuchelt, *Tiergefäße in Kopf- und Protomengestalt. Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte tierförmiger Gießgefäße* (Berlin, 1962), 78–89; Ebbinghaus (n. 2), 136–64.



Figure 4. Rhyton terminating in a horse and rider, Achaemenid, fifth–fourth century BCE. Silver; H. of beaker 32.0 cm, H. of rider 20.5 cm. Excavated at Erebuni, 1968. Yerevan, Erebuni Historical and Archaeological Museum 20. Photograph by Evgeny Genkin reproduced under a Creative Commons licence (CC BY-SA 3.0).

feature of Achaemenid rhyta. The handle is another addition that does not occur in Achaemenid examples. The spout fitted to the hole at the front of the base also implies that the rhyton could have truly functioned as such, though it would have been unwieldy to use, especially when filled with wine. Finally, the potter has replaced the *protome* in the form of an animal or mythical creature with a form from the Greek iconographic repertoire, namely an Amazon.

The closest metal parallel for the Amazon rhyton is a silver horn-shaped rhyton discovered in 1968 at Erebuni (modern Yerevan) in Armenia featuring a *protome* in the form of a horse and rider (Figure 4).¹⁷ The rider wears the short tunic, trousers, and rounded cap that constitute the Iranian riding costume as depicted in reliefs from

¹⁷ Yerevan, Erebuni Historical and Archaeology Museum 20; M. Yu. Treister, 'A Hoard Silver Rhyta of the Achaemenid Circle from Erebuni', *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 21 (2015), 39–64; Ebbinghaus (n. 2), 153–5.

Persepolis.¹⁸ He wears a short sword on his right side and on his left a loop hanging from his belt is for a bow case. His clothing is richly decorated, including eagles on his hat, and he has a pointed beard; the saddle blanket is also decorated with recumbent ibexes. Despite its resonances with Achaemenid art, the rhyton also exhibits some telling differences. Notably, the proportions of both the rider and the horse differ from those seen in sculpture from Persepolis: both have very large bodies in relation to their limbs. And while the horse's pose is also found in Achaemenid column capitals and on other rhyta, the motif of a rider on a recumbent horse is not. The rhyton, therefore, is probably a local version of an Achaemenid drinking vessel, perhaps made in a workshop in the Armenian satrapy. But it is illustrative nevertheless of the sort of vessel that could have inspired the Amazon rhyton.

A second potential parallel is a bronze and copper rhyton acquired by Sir Aurel Stein in the Gilgit Agency of the British Raj, now Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan (Figure 5).¹⁹ The *protome* of the rhyton is in the form of a creature with the head, arms, and torso of a human man and the body and legs of a bull. The creature is usually identified as a centaur, on the assumption that it must date to the Hellenistic period when Greek iconography first becomes prominent in Central Asia. However, centaurs typically have the body of a horse, not a bull, and composite creatures are a well-known feature of the art of ancient Iran, and of the Near East more broadly. The introduction of the rhyton form to this region also makes better sense in an Achaemenid context, as this period also saw the introduction of other Persian drinking vessels. Like the rhyton from Erebuni, it is a local version of an Achaemenid form, and like the Amazon rhyton it has been adapted to allow it to rest upright on a flat surface. Since it was probably made in or around ancient Gandhara, it is unlikely to have influenced the form of the Amazon rhyton; indeed, the Erebuni, Gilgit, and Amazon rhyta were all seemingly inspired on some level by Achaemenid metalwork.

¹⁸ These garments are described and discussed in D. Stronach, 'Court Dress and Riding Dress at Persepolis: New Approaches to Old Questions', in J. Álvarez-Mon and M. B. Garrison (eds.), *Elam and Persia* (Winona Lake, 2011), 478–81; M. C. Root, 'Medes and Iranian Identity in the Achaemenid Social Imaginary: the Persepolis Apadana', in M. B. Garrison and W. F. M. Henkelman (eds.), *The Persian World and Beyond. Achaemenid and Arsacid Studies in Honour of Bruno Jacobs* (Münster, 2023), 107–9, 115–18.

¹⁹ Oxford, Ashmolean Museum EA1963.28; H. P. Colburn, 'On the Date and Cultural Context of Sir Aurel Stein's Gilgit Rhyton', in H. P. Colburn, B. Hensellek, and J. A. Lerner (eds.), *In Search of Cultural Identities in Western and Central Asia. A Festschrift for Prudence Oliver Harper* (Turnhout, 2023), 233–45.



Figure 5. Rhyton acquired by Sir Aurel Stein in Gilgit in 1942, fifth–first century BCE. Copper, bronze; H. 26.9 cm; W. 21.0 cm. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum EA1963.28. Photograph © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

In an important study of interaction between Persian and Athenian material culture, Margaret Miller distinguishes between imitations, adaptations, and derivations.²⁰ Imitations copy their prototypes as closely as the differences in media will allow. Adaptations modify their prototypes to accommodate differences in use or social environments; they involve both mimicry and interpretation. Derivations involve the incorporation of foreign elements into existing local forms, generally as a result of sustained contact. According to this terminology, the Amazon

²⁰ M. C. Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century BC. A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge, 1997), 136.

vessel is an adaptation of an Achaemenid metal rhyton, as it builds on an Achaemenid prototype and adapts it to Greek conventions and expectations rather than simply reproducing the rhyton form in a different material. The adaptation of Achaemenid rhyta and other Near Eastern vessels by Greek potters had already begun in the second half of the sixth century BCE, though the capture of Persian drinking paraphernalia following the battle of Plataea in 479 (Hdt. 9.80) surely encouraged it further.²¹ The spoils of Plataea would also have fixed in the minds of many Greeks an explicit connection between plastic vessels and stereotypical Persian luxury.

The use of an incised rather than a painted inscription may also allude to a metal prototype. Both Greek and Persian metalware bear incised inscriptions, usually indicating ownership or dedication in a sanctuary. On pottery, however, they are characteristic of the Archaic period, and Sotades is unusual among Classical potters in reviving their use.²² It is true that incision is an easy way to make an inscription without a brush, but this can hardly explain Sotades' preference for this method, especially when his contemporaries do not employ it. Indeed, all of his incised signatures are on vessel forms with metal prototypes, namely rhyta and *phialai*, such as a black-gloss and polychrome example in the British Museum (Figure 6), and the main prototypes for these two shapes are clearly Persian. Although the term is used to describe a range of vessels, in this case *phiale* refers to a bowl with a carinated shoulder and an everted rim.²³ Its model is the 'Achaemenid bowl' depicted in the reliefs of the Apadana at Persepolis; indeed, the shape is often called the 'Achaemenid *phiale*' in Mediterranean contexts (though this can cause confusion with the broad, shallow Persian metal vessel of the same name). Like Achaemenid rhyta, metal *phialai* must have circulated in Athens as the spoils of the Persian Wars, as well as through trade and diplomatic contacts. Most ceramic *phialai* are decorated with black gloss that mimics the shine of a metallic surface, although those signed by Sotades employ other colours as well. The combination of black gloss, metal prototype, and incised signature evokes a decidedly metallic impression.

²¹ Miller (n. 20), 141–7; S. Ebbinghaus, 'Of Rams, Women, and Orientals: a Brief History of Attic Plastic Vases', in K. Lapatin (ed.), *Papers on Special Techniques in Athenian Vases* (Los Angeles, 2008), 147–56; Ebbinghaus (n. 2), 175–85.

²² B. Cohen, 'The Literate Potter: a Tradition of Incised Signatures on Attic Vases', *MMJ* 26 (1991), 49–95.

²³ Miller (n. 20), 136–41.



Figure 6. Black-gloss and polychrome *phiale mesomphalos*, signed by Sotades, Athenian, c. 460–450 BCE. Ceramic; H. 5.1 cm; Diam. 17.0 cm. London, British Museum 1894,0719.2. Photograph © Trustees of the British Museum.

The incised signatures on these vessels may be inspired, at least in part, by the inscriptions on Persian metalwork. While they certainly served to identify the vessel's maker, the lack of a clear pattern in the use of signatures on Greek pottery suggests that they were added for a variety of reasons. Whatever the specific reason for a signature, its inclusion was a deliberate contribution to the overall appearance of the vessel.²⁴ Certainly this is the case for Sotades' incised signatures. As Beth Cohen notes, Sotades' signature 'is marked by a special formality not seen heretofore'.²⁵ This formality, which includes carefully spaced letters in horizontal rows, suggests that the potter did not simply take Archaic incised signatures as his model. One possibility is that he mimicked the *stoichedon* style of contemporary Attic inscriptions, which shared certain formal elements with Sotades' signatures, such as the

²⁴ Viviers (n. 15); Osborne (n. 15); J. M. Hurwit, *Artists and Signatures in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 2015), 85–91.

²⁵ Cohen (n. 22), 82.

even spacing of letters in horizontal rows.²⁶ But the similarity is limited, as *stoichedon* inscriptions typically split words across lines, whereas Sotades' signature usually breaks between words. Instead, he may have sought to evoke the inscriptions on metalwork. Greek inscriptions on metal vessels are attested from the seventh century onwards.²⁷ By Sotades' day, however, Persian metal vessels were known in Athens. For example, in a lawcourt speech written by Lysias (19.25) and delivered between 388 and 386 BCE, the unnamed defendant states that Demus, son of Pyrilampes (and the stepbrother of Plato), had received a gold *phiale* from the Persian king. The circumstances of this gift are not mentioned, but it was probably during an embassy to the king.²⁸ The text does not mention an inscription, but many Persian bowls have cuneiform inscriptions naming the king (Figure 7), serving to identify the gift's donor. Moreover, Demus subsequently attempted to use the *phiale* as collateral for a loan, which illustrates how such vessels could circulate within Athens. Several other Athenian embassies to the Persian king are attested in textual sources, beginning as early as the mid-fifth century; surely these also entailed the receipt of Persian gifts, including metalware, which were then carried home.²⁹ Such gifts, along with the spoils of Plataea (and perhaps subsequent battles as well), would have ensured not only that there were examples of inscribed Persian vessels in Athens, but also that they were prestigious objects worthy of emulation.

The Amazon rhyton's red-figure decoration is strikingly unusual, too. Images of non-Greeks defeating Greeks on Attic pottery are quite rare and only two examples of victorious Persians are known.³⁰ The other

²⁶ For an overview of the *stoichedon* epigraphic style, see P. A. Butz, *The Art of the Hekatompedon Inscription and the Birth of the Stoichedon Style* (Leiden, 2010), 77–116.

²⁷ See examples in L. H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece. A Study of the Origin of the Greek Alphabet and Its Development from the Eighth to the Fifth Centuries B.C.*, revised edition (Oxford, 1990), pls. 7–8, 17, 19, 21–2, 26, 29, 34–5, 39–42, 47, 49.

²⁸ S. von Reden, 'Demus' *phialē* and the Rhetoric of Money in Fourth-century Athens', in P. Cartledge, E. E. Cohen, and L. Foxhall (eds.), *Money, Labour and Land. Approaches to the Economy of Ancient Greece* (London, 2002), 58–61; H. P. Colburn, 'Achaemenid Silver: an Essay on the Fungibility of Meaning', in St J. Simpson (ed.), *Gold, Silver and Glass. Power Networks, Cultural Identities, Technology Transfer and Agency across the Old World (7th Century BC–1st Century AD)* (Oxford, forthcoming).

²⁹ Miller (n. 20), 109–14; E. Rung, 'War, Peace and Diplomacy in Graeco-Persian Relations from the Sixth to the Fourth Century BC', in P. de Souza and J. France (eds.), *War and Peace in Ancient and Medieval History* (New York, 2008), 28–50; D. Lenfant, 'Cities and Diplomatic Gifts in the Classical Period', in E. Sánchez Moreno and E. García Riaza (eds.), *The Materiality of Diplomacy in the Hellenistic-Roman Mediterranean. Gifts, Bribes, Offerings* (Edinburgh, 2024), 34–56.

³⁰ T. Hölscher, *Griechische Historienbilder des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Würzburg, 1973), 47; K. Schauenburg, 'Siegreiche Barbaren', *MDAI(A)* 92 (1977), 91–100; W. Raeck, *Zum Barbarenbild in der Kunst Athens im 6. und 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Bonn, 1981), 124–47; M. C. Miller, 'Imagining Persians in the Age of Herodotus', in R. Rollinger, B. Truschnegg, and



Figure 7. Gold bowl with trilingual cuneiform inscription naming Darius, Achaemenid, c. 515–486 BCE. Gold; H. 11.4 cm; Diam. 19.6 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 54.3.1. Public domain image from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

example is a fragmentary rhyton, now in the Louvre, in the form of a camel led by a Persian driver (Figure 8), dated c. 460–450 BCE on the basis of comparisons to the work of the Boreas and Niobid Painters.³¹ Like the Amazon rhyton, it has a rectangular base with an incised signature reading ΣΟΤΑΔΕΣ ΕΠΟΙΕ (with the imperfect rather than the aorist form of the verb), although there is no indication of a hole for a spout. The surviving fragments also include the head of a black African youth, who may have walked beside the camel, and several sherds of a red-figure cup which joins to the driver's head. Three pairs of

R. Bichler (eds.), *Herodot und das Persische Weltreich = Herodotus and the Persian Empire. Akten des 3. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema 'Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen'*, Innsbruck, 24.–28. November 2008 (Wiesbaden, 2011), 134.

³¹ Paris, Louvre CA 3825; Beazley Archive Pottery Database 275887; J. D. Beazley, *Paralipomena. Additions to Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters and to Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*, second edition (Oxford, 1971), 416; L. Kahil, 'Un nouveau vase plastique du potier Sotadès au Musée du Louvre', *RA* (1972), 271–84; Raeck (n. 30), 125; Hoffmann (n. 2), 158–9; W.-D. Heilmeyer (ed.), *Die griechische Klassik. Idee oder Wirklichkeit* (Mainz am Rhein, 2002), 174–5; H. Beck, P. C. Bol and M. Bückling (eds.), *Ägypten, Griechenland, Rom. Abwehr und Berührung* (Tübingen, 2005), 475–7; J. Borchhardt, 'Der exotische Charme des Schwarzafrikaners auf griechischen Vasen', in E. Czerny, I. Hein, H. Hunger, D. Melman, and A. Schwab (eds.), *Timelines. Studies in Honour of Manfred Bietak*, Volume 3 (Leuven, 2006), 170–4; H. P. Colburn, 'Contact Points: Memphis, Naukratis and the Greek East', in J. Spier, T. Potts, and S. E. Cole (eds.), *Beyond the Nile. Egypt and the Classical World* (Los Angeles, 2018), 83–4. In their initial publications of it, Beazley and Kahil both asserted that the rhyton came from Memphis, a provenance which other scholars have subsequently repeated. However, they offered no documentation or details to support this provenance, so it cannot be accepted uncritically, however likely it may be.



Figure 8. Fragmentary red-figure rhyton signed by Sotades, Athenian, c. 460–450 BCE. Ceramic; H. of fragments 16.0 cm. Paris, Louvre CA 3825. Photograph © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

combatants are preserved on the cup, the painting of which, according to Beazley, ‘recalls Sotadean’.³² In one pair, a Persian attacks a Greek who defends himself with a shield; a black African youth clutches the Greek’s leg. In another, a Persian attacks a wounded Greek who stumbles backwards. In the third, a Persian attacks a now-missing opponent.

Lastly, the Amazon herself alludes to the Persians. Images of Persians first appear on Athenian pottery in the late sixth century. Around the middle of the fifth century they begin to be replaced, especially in combat scenes, by Amazons, a trend which extends to other media as

³² Beazley (n. 31), 416.

well.³³ On pottery Amazons are often depicted wearing Persian clothing, such as trousers and tiaras, and carrying Persian weapons, such as bows. For the Athenians, Amazons were a fitting mythological alternative to the Persians for many reasons: they were an enemy from the general region of the East, they were known for their savagery, they fought with bows rather than spears, and they suited the Greek stereotype of the Persians as effeminate. Within the products of the Sotades workshop this connection is implied by the names of the Amazons, Gygamis and Oigme, that appear on a fragmentary rhyton excavated at Susa.³⁴ These names are clearly foreign, and may be intended to sound Persian. On the Amazon rhyton the link with the Persians is made explicit by the Amazon's long-sleeved tunic and trousers, both typical features of Persians in Greek art. As with the red-figure painting on the rhyton's cup, the form of the rhyton itself seems to be a deliberate allusion to the Persians, albeit in visual terms that make sense only in a Greek context.

The making of a commodity

The combination of features of the Amazon and camel rhyta – the forms of the rhyta themselves and especially the depiction of Persians defeating Greeks – has led many scholars to suggest that these vessels were made specifically for export to the Achaemenid empire.³⁵ This argument is

³³ P. Devambez, 'Les Amazones et l'Orient', *RA* (1976), 265–80; D. Castriota, *Myth, Ethos, and Actuality. Official Art in Fifth-Century B.C. Athens* (Madison, 1992), 43–58; A. Stewart, 'Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens', *Poetics Today* 16 (1995), 571–97; Miller (n. 30), 137–9; B. Cohen, 'The Non-Greek in Greek Art', in T. J. Smith and D. Plantzos (eds.), *A Companion to Greek Art* (Malden, 2012), 475–8; T. Hölscher, *Krieg und Kunst im antiken Griechenland und Rom* (Berlin, 2019), 111–14.

³⁴ Paris, Louvre SB 4143, SB 4145, and SB 4154; Beazley Archive Pottery Database 209476, 209510; see Von Bothmer (n. 2), 194–5; A. Mayor, J. Colarusso, and D. Saunders, 'Making Sense of Nonsense Inscriptions Associated with Amazons and Scythians on Athenian Vases', *Hesperia* 83 (2014), 476–7, 484.

³⁵ Kahil (n. 31), 280–4; Hölscher (n. 30), 47–8; K. Schauenburg, 'Ευρυμέδων εἰμί', *MDAI(A)* 90 (1975), 120–1; K. DeVries 'Attic Pottery in the Achaemenid Empire', *AJA* 81 (1977), 546; Raeck (n. 30), 126; Hoffmann (n. 2), 159; A. Hermay 'Rhytons de l'atelier de Sotades dans l'empire Achéménide, de Palaepaphos à Suse', *MedArch* 17 (2004), 46; Cohen (n. 2), 286; H. A. Shapiro, 'The Invention of Persia in Classical Athens', in M. Eliav-Feldon, B. Isaac, and J. Ziegler (eds.), *The Origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge, 2009), 72–4; B. Sparkes, *Greek Art*, second edition (Cambridge, 2011), 121; S. Weber, 'Egypt and North Africa', in T. J. Smith and D. Plantzos (eds.), *A Companion to Greek Art* (Malden, 2012), 305. The dissenters to this view include H. Metzger, 'Bulletin archéologique', *REG* 86 (1973), 363, who curtly dismisses it outright, and M. Giuman, 'Pecunia non olet? Riflessioni a margine di due rhyta della bottega di Sotades', *Otium. Archeologia e cultura del mondo antico* 5.2 (2018), 1–47, in a paper marred by unfortunate errors of fact and detail. S. Muth, *Gewalt im Bild. Das Phänomen der medialen Gewalt im*

bolstered by the distribution of rhyta attributed to Sotades: they have been excavated at Gordion, Babylon, Susa, and Paphos on Cyprus, all within the empire.³⁶ While Meroe was not ruled by the Persians directly, the inclusion of Kush in Achaemenid inscriptions and the presence of Kushites in the reliefs of the Persepolis Apadana and on the façades of the royal tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis, suggests that the Persians regarded the kingdom of Kush, which was based in Nubia, as part of its ambit.³⁷ Moreover, the Amazon rhyton must have come to Meroe by way of Egypt, which was an Achaemenid satrapy between 526 and 404 BCE. Some scholars further suggest that the imagery of these rhyta, in particular the inclusion of black Africans in both red-figure decoration and in the plastic form of the rhyton in the Louvre, was inspired by specific events, such as the Persian defeat of the Athenian expedition to Egypt in support of the revolt of Inarus mentioned by Thucydides (1.109–10).³⁸ Finally, some even assert that these vessels must have been special commissions, with the Amazon rhyton specifically being a diplomatic gift from the Persian satrap of Egypt to the king of Kush.³⁹

Although the evidence that Sotades' Amazon and camel rhyta were intended for a Persian audience is quite strong, such interpretations face two significant difficulties. The first is simply how Sotades could have known about his Persian customers or conversely how anyone in Egypt could have commissioned a vessel from him. The evidence for commissioning Athenian pottery is equivocal at best and usually a matter of conjecture. As Robin Osborne observes:

Athen des 6. und 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. (Berlin, 2008), 263–4, accepts the possibility of production for the Persian market, but sees the decoration of these vessels as part of a larger pattern of combat scenes on Athenian pottery rather than being specifically for export.

³⁶ Hermery (n. 35).

³⁷ H. P. Colburn, "'The Spear of the Persian Man Has Gone Forth Far': the Achaemenid Empire and its African Periphery", in T. Daryaee and R. Rollinger (eds.), *Iran and Its Histories: From the Beginnings Through the Achaemenid Empire. Proceedings of the First and Second Payravi Lectures on Ancient Iranian History, UC Irvine, March 23rd, 2018, and March 11th–12th, 2019* (Wiesbaden, 2021), 275–320; A. Lohwasser, 'Nubia', in B. Jacobs and R. Rollinger (eds.), *A Companion to the Achaemenid Persian Empire* (Hoboken, 2021), 570–1.

³⁸ Kahil (n. 31), 281–2; S. Barresi, 'Xenikon astikon: Atene e la discendenza "africana" di Io', in F. Giudice and R. Panvini (eds.), *Il greco, il barbaro e la ceramica attica. Immaginario del diverso, processi di scambio e autorappresentazione degli indigeni*, Volume 4 (Rome, 2007), 82–3.

³⁹ Török (n. 8), 58, 69; L. Török, *Between Two Worlds. The Frontier Region Between Ancient Nubia and Egypt 3700 BC–AD 500* (Leiden, 2009), 365; Török (n. 6), 101–2; Shapiro (n. 35), 74; D. Williams, 'Greek Potters and Painters: Marketing and Movement', in A. Tsingarida and D. Viviers (eds.), *Pottery Markets in the Ancient Greek World (8th–1st Centuries B.C.). Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at the Université libre de Bruxelles 19–21 June 2008* (Brussels, 2013), 49–50; Lohwasser (n. 37), 569–70.

It is always possible that the picture painted on a pot was painted for a customer or agent who came into the workshop and dictated what he wanted shown. But equally, there is no need to invoke unique patrons in order to explain unique scenes, since painters had little reason to constrain their subject matter to subjects they knew from past experience would sell, given that the downside risk of painting on a single pot a scene that no one liked was too small to cause concern.⁴⁰

Perhaps the best evidence for the commissioning, or at least customization, comes from the *kalos* inscriptions and trademarks that were painted on certain pots before firing. These indicate that the commissioning took place in Athens. Although there were Persians and Egyptians in Athens in the fifth century, they were doubtless few in number, and while it is possible one of them commissioned a rhyton from Sotades, the likelihood is vanishingly small. Absent such commissions, the Sotades workshop must have produced the Amazon rhyton with the expectation of selling it in the Achaemenid empire. This is arguably a risky proposition, especially given that Sotades could probably expect to sell most of his products to Athenian consumers. Indeed, vessels bearing Sotades' signature have been excavated in Athens, implying that there was local demand for his wares.⁴¹ Thus something must have prompted him to tailor some of his output for a Persian audience.

The second difficulty is that the depictions of Persians on the Amazon and camel rhyta are heavily stereotyped. Despite representing some identifiable garments or weapons, they have relatively little basis in Persian practices or material culture. As Keith DeVries notes:

An ironic aspect of the Persianizing that was done in the vase painting is that the depictions of Eastern life are generally so bizarre or so naive that it is doubtful that when the pieces were bought up in the East the scenes would have meant much more than the usual Greek ones.⁴²

Similarly, the use of the Amazon and the camel to allude to the Persians was meaningful only to a Greek audience.⁴³ Moreover, the derivation of

⁴⁰ R. Osborne, *The Transformation of Athens. Painted Pottery and the Creation of Classical Greece* (Princeton, 2018), 41–2.

⁴¹ In the so-called Sotades Tomb northeast of the Agora, discovered in 1890; see D. Williams, 'The Sotades Tomb', in Cohen (n. 2), 292–316.

⁴² DeVries (n. 35), 548.

⁴³ On the association between camels and the Persians in Greek thought, see K. Schauenburg, 'Die Cameliden in Altertum', *Bj* 155–6 (1955–6), 64–6, 69–72; M. C. Miller, 'Persians in the Greek Imagination', *MedArch* 19–20 (2006–7), 121–2. H. Hoffmann and D. Metzler, 'Audiatur et altera pars: zur Doppeldeutigkeit einer griechischen Amazone aus dem Sudan', *Visible Religion* 7 (1990), 183, make the curious argument that the Persians would have interpreted the Amazon as

the form of these rhyta from Persian drinking vessels was sufficiently removed from their prototypes that the Persians may not have recognized it.

Both of these difficulties can be explained through a consideration of the role played by merchants in the Attic pottery trade. In a recent paper, Osborne has argued that merchants played a major role in shaping the distribution of Attic pottery beyond the Greek mainland.⁴⁴ In his view, because the demand for Attic pottery was voracious, potters had no incentive to cater to any specific market. Rather, it was primarily the merchants who traded in pottery that met the particular needs of specific foreign markets. Based on past experience, merchants would learn which shapes sold where and this in turn informed from whom they purchased pottery in the future. They would return regularly to the same markets with the same types of vessels, which over time influenced those markets by effectively constraining the choices available to consumers. In these conditions it was the merchants, and to a lesser extent the consumers, who shaped the overseas trade in Attic pottery.

Osborne's approach offers an explanation both for how Sotades came to produce for a Persian audience and for the 'bizarreness' of his products: the merchants involved in the pottery trade created an informational feedback loop between Sotades and Persian consumers. When selling Attic pottery, these merchants also presumably provided information about its origin, function, and meaning. This information, however, was of uneven quality. Some merchants certainly were knowledgeable about Attic pottery, since they dealt directly with the workshops. This is suggested by the presence of 'trademarks' – notations that were painted on vessels prior to firing – which are taken to indicate that such vessels were designated in advance for sale to specific merchants.⁴⁵ Many other trademarks, however, were incised

the soul (*fravashi*) of a deceased warrior conceptualized as a female rider. This argument is problematic for several reasons. First, it assumes that Persians in the Achaemenid period were Zoroastrians whose beliefs were fundamentally the same as those of later Zoroastrians, an assumption which is not supported by the available evidence. Second, it fails to address the fact that the only evidence for rhyta in a funerary context comes from Nubia, not Persia.

⁴⁴ R. Osborne, 'Modelling Trade in Athenian Pottery in the Archaic and Classical Periods', in S. Gimatzidis and R. Jung (eds.), *The Critique of Archaeological Economy* (Cham, 2021), 223–34; see also A. J. Domínguez-Monedero, 'Classical Attic Pottery in Non-Greek Environments: Transport, Distribution, Uses', in A. Garés-Molero, D. Rodríguez-Pérez, and A. A. Díez-Castillo (eds.), *Over Land and Sea. The Long-Distance Trade, Distribution and Consumption of Ancient Greek Pottery* (Oxford, 2025), 17–25.

⁴⁵ J. Boardman, *The History of Greek Vases* (London, 2001), 153–5; Williams (n. 39), 43; S. D. Bundrick, *Athens, Etruria, and the Many Lives of Greek Figured Pottery* (Madison, 2019), 39.

after firing and provide no firm evidence for interactions between workshops and merchants. They also occur primarily on vessels found in Etruria and may reflect different practices than in eastern-Mediterranean commerce, especially given the apparently high volume of westward pottery trade, though of course there is a strong preservation bias in Italy as well.⁴⁶ Also, the majority of the trademarks were not written in the Attic script, implying that many of the merchants involved were not Athenian.⁴⁷ The bottomry loans preserved in forensic oratory show that merchants from a wide range of places, including Euboea, Rhodes, Byzantium, Phaselis, Massalia, and Phoenicia, were involved in Athenian trade.⁴⁸

More importantly, merchants who dealt in Attic pottery did not necessarily specialize in it. The Pointe Lequin 1A shipwreck near Massalia, which carried at least 1,700 identical black-slipped drinking cups probably made in southern Italy or Sicily, does show that some cargoes could consist chiefly of pottery.⁴⁹ But it is an exceptional case. Rather, as shown by both shipwrecks and bottomry loans, merchants usually carried mixed cargoes, of which pottery was only a part.⁵⁰ Thus, most merchants did not specialize in pottery, and many would have received their stock – and the information about it – from other merchants rather than the potters themselves. Therefore, this information could be transformed through misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or translation. Furthermore, merchants did not transmit this information disinterestedly; rather, they sought to protect their own interests and develop the tastes of their customers in certain directions.⁵¹ Similarly, pottery workshops must have relied on merchants for information about the foreign purchasers of their pottery;

⁴⁶ E. Langridge-Noti, “‘To Market, to Market’: Pottery, the Individual, and Trade in Athens”, in K. F. Daly and L. A. Riccardi (eds.), *Cities Called Athens. Studies Honoring John McK. Camp II Presented by His Students* (Lewisburg, 2015), 180; Bundrick (n. 45), 38.

⁴⁷ Boardman (n. 45), 154; Williams (n. 39), 47–8; Bundrick (n. 45), 38–9.

⁴⁸ Langridge-Noti (n. 46), 177–8; Domínguez-Monedero (n. 44), 20; cf. A. Bresson, *The Making of the Ancient Greek Economy. Institutions, Markets, and Growth in the City-States*, trans. S. Rendall (Princeton, 2016), 376–9.

⁴⁹ U. Krotscheck, ‘Pointe Lequin 1A: Wine Cups and Economic Networks in the Western Mediterranean’, *Ancient West and East* 14 (2015), 169–89; Bundrick (n. 45), 47–9.

⁵⁰ Langridge-Noti (n. 46), 178, 180; Bresson (n. 48), 371; Domínguez-Monedero (n. 44), 20.

⁵¹ This idea was inspired by Brian Spooner’s classic study of the commodification of the Afghan carpet trade: B. Spooner, ‘Weavers and Dealers: the Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet’, in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), 195–235, especially 214–15. On the manipulation of information by Greek merchants, admittedly in a slightly different context, see M. Leese, ‘*Kapêloi* and Economic Rationality in Fourth-century B.C. Athens’, *ICS* 42 (2017), 43–50.

this information also had to travel via a chain of merchants, whose knowledge was inexact and whose chief interests were not to provide foreign market research for Athenian potters.

The evidence for the trade in Greek pottery to Egypt, whence the Amazon rhyton surely went to Meroe, is limited to be sure, but it broadly fits the general picture presented above. Perhaps the best evidence is an Aramaic document found at Elephantine which lists the arrivals and departures of Greek and Levantine ships at an unnamed Egyptian port in 475 BCE (or possibly 454).⁵² The document also lists their cargoes and the duties charged on them. The incoming ships carry cargoes of wine, oil, bronze, iron, tin, wood (both fresh timber and reclaimed wood), wool, and even clay. They also carry empty jars, some of which are further described as ‘uncoated’, implying that the rest are coated. The nature of this coating is not clear. It could refer to pitch, used to coat the interior of storage vessels to prevent seepage. A small sample of Greek pottery excavated at Naukratis does contain traces of pitch and, since it had to be imported into Egypt for this purpose, it is reasonable to distinguish between coated and uncoated vessels in this context.⁵³ However, according to this logic there would be little point in importing uncoated jars. Rather, these jars must have some intrinsic value, which was related in part to the presence or absence of a ‘coating’. One possibility is that this coating is in fact decoration, such as a slip.⁵⁴ The Aramaic term (*sp*) used for these jars can refer to a drinking cup or libation bowl in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew, although it is also used for oil containers. If these are indeed cups, the ‘coated jars’ may in fact be Greek pottery with black-gloss or even red-figure decoration. And regardless of what type of vessel is meant, the document clearly shows the importation of pottery to Egypt by Greeks as part of mixed cargoes.

Another important feature of this document is that it lists the import duties paid on these cargoes. The details of these duties remain

⁵² B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, Volume 3. *Literature, Accounts, Lists* (Jerusalem, 1993), no. C3.7; for the date, see P. Briant and R. Descat, ‘Une registre douanier de la satrapie d’Égypte à l’époque achéménide (TAD C3.7)’, in N. Grimal and B. Menu (eds.), *Le commerce en Égypte ancienne* (Cairo, 1998), 60–2.

⁵³ R. Stacey, C. Cartwright, S. Tanimoto, and A. Villing, ‘Coatings and Contents: Investigations of Residues on Four Fragmentary Sixth-century BC Vessels from Naukratis (Egypt)’, *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin* 4 (2010), 19–26; on the import of pitch, see P. Mayerson, ‘Pitch (πίσσα) for Egyptian Wine Jars: an Imported Commodity’, *ZPE* 147 (2004), 201–4.

⁵⁴ E. Lipiński, ‘Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt’, *OLP* 25 (1994), 63–4; Briant and Descat (n. 52), 70–1.

uncertain, but they are payable in gold and silver, and for Greek captains this entailed coinage.⁵⁵ Indeed, as implied by Xenophon (*Vect.* 3.2), during the fifth century Athens' main export was silver from the Laureion mines in the form of coinage.⁵⁶ Egypt, on the other hand, which had few natural sources of silver, had to import Greek coins in order to pay the tribute imposed by the Persians (700 talents per year, according to Hdt. 3.91.2). This was accomplished through the sale of grain, which Egypt produced in abundance, to the Greeks, especially Athens, which at the height of its power certainly had to acquire grain from abroad.⁵⁷ Merchants sailing from Athens to Egypt, therefore, carried high-value, low-density cargo, namely silver, meaning that on outbound voyages they had ample space in their holds for other products, such as pottery. This quirk of the balance of trade between Egypt and Athens facilitated the export of Attic pottery to Egypt, but the pottery itself did not motivate the trade; it was what Alain Bresson calls a 'free rider'.⁵⁸

It is very likely that these merchants sold their cargo, including pottery, in ports such as Naucratis, Heracleion-Thonis, or Pelusium, since seagoing ships probably did not typically travel further upstream. There it was purchased by local merchants who distributed it further within Egypt. During Achaemenid rule there were Greek communities in both Naucratis and Memphis whose members certainly purchased pottery for themselves and also would have been well suited to acting as dealers of Attic ceramics.⁵⁹ Most Persian customers probably lived in

⁵⁵ Briant and Descat (n. 52), 73–9; P. van Alfen, 'The Role of Coinage in Archaic Aegean-Egyptian Overseas Trade: Another Look at TAD C.3.7', in T. Faucher (ed.), *Money Rules! The Monetary Economy of Egypt, from Persians Until the Beginning of Islam* (Cairo, 2020), 50–9.

⁵⁶ P. van Alfen, 'Xenophon *Poroi* 3.2 and Athenian "Owls" in Aegean-Near Eastern Long Distance Trade', in M. Asolati and G. Gorini (eds.), *I ritrovamenti monetali e i processi storico-economici nel mondo antico* (Padua, 2012), 11–32; Bresson (n. 48), 372–3.

⁵⁷ H. P. Colburn, *Archaeology of Empire in Achaemenid Egypt* (Edinburgh, 2020), 226–32. Other specifically Egyptian products, such as papyrus, linen, and natron, as well as products transhipped through Egypt, such as South Arabian aromatics, were also in demand among the Greeks; see A. Sofia, 'Prodotti egizi ad Atene: testimonianze nella commedia antica e di mezzo', *Aegyptus* 87 (2007), 143–80.

⁵⁸ Bresson (n. 48), 368–74; see also Domínguez-Monedero (n. 44), 20. A similar pattern of trade resulting in the export of Athenian pottery must have prevailed in the Black Sea region as well, since this too was a major source of grain for Athens. Indeed, Attic imports are found in Hellespontine Phrygia, including even another rhyton attributed to Sotades' workshop; see K. Lynch and S. Matter, 'Trade of Athenian Figured Pottery and the Effects of Connectivity', in J. H. Oakley (ed.), *Athenian Potters and Painters*, Volume 3 (Oxford, 2014), 111–12, fig. 5. The rhyton was excavated at Gordion, where it probably came via Cyzicus and Dascylium, and the preserved fragments depict an Amazonomachy.

⁵⁹ For a recent overview, see Colburn (n. 31); for the importation of Greek pottery to Naucratis and its subsequent use there, see A. Villing, 'Egypt as a "Market" for Greek Pottery: Some

Memphis, the seat of the Achaemenid satrap and the administrative centre of the province. In fact, Attic red-figure sherds have been excavated in the enclosure surrounding the Palace of Apries, the headquarters of the satrap.⁶⁰ This area is usually described as a mercenary camp, but it was probably the main Persian military base in Memphis. Other black- and red-figure sherds have been found elsewhere in the city and in the cemeteries at Saqqara and Abusir.⁶¹ In most cases it is impossible to determine who owned this pottery, or how it was used. But not only was Memphis the most likely place in Egypt where Persians would acquire Athenian pottery, it was also the most likely source of information about Persian drinking practices. The presence of Persian drinking vessels, namely *rhyta*, *phialai*, and Achaemenid bowls, in a range of materials, including silver, bronze, faience, and ceramic, suggests that the Persians introduced their drinking practices to Egypt. These practices in turn were adopted and adapted by Egyptians, resulting in the production of local versions of Persian vessels.⁶² The Persian community in Memphis, with its proximity to the satrapal court, would have played a central role in the dissemination of these practices.

It is impossible to say how and when this chain of merchants linking Sotades to his Persian customers in Egypt was created. Once established, however, it was probably repeated over and over again, since, as Osborne suggests, merchants would have returned to the same pottery markets time and again.⁶³ In each reiteration, information about the products was passed from one merchant to another and finally to the customer, and at the same time information about the customers was passed from merchant to merchant until it reached Sotades himself. He was, therefore, at least two or three steps removed from his Persian customers in Egypt. Any information he received about them had been transmitted multiple times, and probably also translated (from Old Persian, Egyptian, Aramaic, Phoenician, or Carian to Greek, for

Thoughts on Production, Consumption, and Distribution in an Intercultural Environment', in A. Tsingarida and D. Viviers (eds.), *Pottery Markets in the Ancient Greek World (8th–1st Centuries B.C.)*. *Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at the Université libre de Bruxelles 19–21 June 2008* (Brussels, 2013), 73–101.

⁶⁰ M. H. Trindade Lopes and S. Fonseca Braga, 'The Apries Palace, Memphis/Kôm Tumân: the First Portuguese Mission in Egypt', *JARCE* 47 (2011), 253, 255, fig. 3c; for the Palace of Apries, see Colburn (n. 57), 38–74.

⁶¹ K. Smoláriková, *Abusir*, Volume 7. *Greek Imports in Egypt: Graeco-Egyptian Relations During the First Millennium B.C.* (Prague, 2002), 32–42.

⁶² Colburn (n. 57), 205–15.

⁶³ Osborne (n. 44), 228–9.

example). Over time (probably a matter of years, given the seasonal nature of Mediterranean navigation) he came to develop a picture of his Persian customers and accordingly began to modify some of his wares in ways that he believed would appeal to them, encouraged perhaps by the merchants engaged in the Egyptian trade. These modifications would have been minor at first, but eventually Sotades became more ambitious. He was clearly an innovative and dynamic potter with a penchant for plastic forms, which may have predisposed him towards adapting the Persian rhyton to clay.

The unusual features of the Amazon rhyton are best explained as the culmination of this process. Confident of finding Persian buyers, he created a vessel that he considered to be Persian in both form (the rhyton shape) and decoration (Persians defeating Greeks and the Amazon as a mythological stand-in for the Persians). The result, however, as DeVries observes, is quite bizarre from a Persian perspective. This is because Sotades actually knew very little about the Persians. His information about them was doubtless sketchy, vague, and inconsistent, and he filled in the gaps in his knowledge with the various stereotypes of the Persians current in Athens in the mid-fifth century. Yet, evidently the rhyton was still a success, in that it was purchased by someone, most likely Persian, in Egypt.

This reconstruction of the creation of the Amazon rhyton also has a bearing on the understanding of its subsequent journey to Nubia. As noted above, it is sometimes suggested that the vessel was a diplomatic gift from the Persians to the Kushite king.⁶⁴ This is already unlikely for two main reasons. First, the tomb where the rhyton was found, Beg. S 24, dates to the first half of the fourth century BCE, but the first royal burial at Meroe is that of Arkamani I (Beg. S 6), dating *c.* 270 BCE, about a century later.⁶⁵ Thus Beg. S 24 can hardly be considered a royal tomb. Second, ceramic is a very unlikely material for a Persian royal gift. According to Ctesias (*FGrHist* 688 F 40), 'among the Persians, whoever the King holds in low esteem uses cups of pottery'.⁶⁶ Although Ctesias' value as a historical source is uneven, the implication of this statement, that those people whom the Persian king favoured used gold and silver vessels, is borne out by the many extant examples of Achaemenid

⁶⁴ Török (n. 8), 58, 69; Török (n. 39), 365; Török (n. 6), 101–2; followed by Williams (n. 39), 49; Lohwasser (n. 37), 569–70.

⁶⁵ Yellin (n. 5), 575.

⁶⁶ Trans. L. Llewellyn-Jones and J. Robson, *Ctesias' History of Persia. Tales of the Orient* (London, 2010), 218.

precious metal tableware, some of which were certainly royal gifts.⁶⁷ Now, in addition to these two reasons, the argument presented here gives agency for the rhyton's creation to Sotades, albeit operating under the influence of information from merchants trading with Egypt and informed by Persian metalware. In other words, it is a product of the network of economic and social connections in which Athens was entangled in the fifth century BCE.

Athenian-Persian connectivity

To argue that Sotades' Amazon rhyton is an accident of history fails to recognize the connectivity between Athenians and Persians that it implies. A sustained period of contact, transmitted through a tenuous sequence of merchants, best accounts for the rhyton's unusual form and decoration. Indeed, the tenuousness of this connection is evident from the apparent disconnect between the rhyton and its intended audience: while the rhyton shape, the Amazon, and the images of Persians defeating Greeks reflect what an Athenian might think a Persian would like, they bear little resemblance to any actual Persian material culture. But in order to reach a point where Sotades would introduce such elements into his vessels, an extended period of connection – no doubt over many years – was needed. In other words, the link between Sotades and his Persian customers in Egypt was weak yet persistent.

In some respects, this conclusion is hardly surprising. Athenian commerce with Egypt in the fifth century BCE is certainly well known and well documented by the proliferation of Attic tetradrachms found there, among other evidence. But it is also significant because it illustrates a mechanism for long-distance interaction between Athenians and Persians, even in a period when they were at odds with one another over Egypt, one that both shaped the consumption of Attic pottery abroad and informed its production at home.⁶⁸ This mechanism is potentially relevant as well to other instances of Attic pottery seemingly produced for foreign markets, such as the output of Nikosthenes' workshop, the

⁶⁷ E. Kistler, 'Achämenidische Becher und die Logik kommensaler Politik im Reich der Achämeniden', in B. Jacobs and R. Rollinger (eds.), *Der Achämenidenhof = The Achaemenid Court. Akten des 2. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema 'Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen'*, Landgut Castelen bei Basel, 23.–25. Mai 2007 (Wiesbaden, 2010), 411–58; M. C. Miller 'Luxury Toreutic in the Western Satrapies: Court-inspired Gift-exchange Diffusion', *ibid.*, 853–97; Colburn (n. 28).

⁶⁸ See S. Ruzicka, *Trouble in the West. Egypt and the Persian Empire, 525–332 BCE* (Oxford, 2012), 29–34, for the historical context.

Perizoma Group, or, to take a recently published example, oversized drinking vessels that may have played a role in Etruscan religious rituals.⁶⁹ The role played by merchants in shaping both the production and consumption of this pottery must have been important, but at the same time the information they provided – both to their customers and to their suppliers – was of uneven quality. These merchants were not experts on Attic pottery by any means, since they were not necessarily Athenians themselves and because they primarily dealt in other goods, but as they frequented the same markets and probably worked with the same people recurrently, they created personal networks that linked Athens to Memphis (or Gordion, Vulci, Spina, etc.). The information transmitted along these networks was subject to distortion and misunderstanding, and it was intended only to promote the interests of the merchants themselves. Nevertheless, such networks were a source of connectivity in the ancient Mediterranean world that supported cross-cultural interaction, sometimes with unusual results.

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⁶⁹ A. Tsingarida, 'Oversized Athenian Drinking Vessels in Context: Their Role in Etruscan Ritual Performances', *AA* 124 (2020), 245–74.