

THE ART OF SIGNING IN ANCIENT GREECE

ROBIN OSBORNE

I. ANCIENT GREEK ART AND THE ARTIST

Art history turns upon artists.¹ The *catalogue raisonné*, monographs and exhibitions devoted to works by individuals: these are the staples of art history. Scholars have been captivated by the personality of the artist and connoisseurship devoted to recognizing the individual artist's hand. For all the attempts by Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin to move the agenda, scholarly books or papers that concentrate on a particular product are far outnumbered by those that concentrate on a particular producer (even if the producer is a Fabergé), and rare indeed are the works that conceal or ignore artists' names.²

The history of sculpture and painting turned upon artists already in antiquity. The earliest explorations recorded in Greek texts of the problem of art (the relationship of representation to life) come in Xenophon's

1 This paper was written for and delivered at the joint AIA/APA panel at the Philadelphia meeting in January 2009. I am grateful to Michael Squire and Verity Platt for their organization of that panel and for their subsequent comments on the paper, to the anonymous reader for *Arethusa* and Caroline Vout for their critical engagement with my arguments, and to Lucilla Burn, Charles Crowther, Donna Kurtz, and James Watson for their help in procuring illustrations.

2 For some sense of what art history might have become had Riegl and Wölfflin won, see Podro 1982. As with many other aspects of art history, the radical work of the last fifty years in this connection is Berger 1972, with its photo essay without any text. In the history of classical art, for all the recent stress on the viewer, *La cité des images* (Bérard et al. 1984/1989) is more or less unique in its general suppression of the individual artist's identity.

Memorabilia (3.10) where Socrates engages various practitioners in dialogue. Pliny's *Natural History* (Books 34–36) provides us with the earliest extant histories of sculpture and painting as part of his discussion of the use of metals and stones and earth, and the discussion of a succession of sculptors and painters is integral to these histories.

Book 34 of the *Natural History* begins with a discussion of the different uses to which bronze had been put, which culminates in the use of bronze for statues of gods and men. Pliny is interested here as much in when certain types of statues first appeared and where they were placed as he is in sculptors, but as soon as he moves into a catalogue of the most extraordinary achievements in bronze sculpture as support for his claim that “art has made extraordinary progress” (34.38, trans. Jex-Blake), artists' names become regular. To show what is most extraordinary demands a ranking of sculptures in competition with each other, but the sculptures themselves cannot compete, and so sculptors are required to be the competitors. What is more, the extraordinary cannot but be original, and originality, too, demands a unique creator. Almost two-thirds of the book comes to be taken up with a catalogue of *artifices* whose reputation rests on statues (34.49–141). The proportion of Book 35 on painting devoted to a catalogue of painters is even greater (35.53–158), and painters figure larger in the early sections of that book too. In Book 36, the whole of the account of marble sculpture is organized by sculptor.³

But what should we make of this ancient and modern scholarly habit? We can certainly see modern writing on art history as in the tradition of ancient writing on art history. For all that he adds a level of biography strikingly lacking in Pliny's catalogues, Vasari's writings are unthinkable without Pliny's example (as they are also unthinkable without Plutarch's). But that observers came to see the history of sculpture and painting primarily in terms of the succession of practitioners and their remarkable achievements does not in itself show that the practitioners thought of themselves as part of such histories. Indeed, the way that Pliny offers *separate* histories of bronze sculpture, painting, and marble sculpture might be held to point away from the notion that even later observers constructed anything that could be called a “history of *art*.” Yet that he singles out these three

3 On Pliny's discussions of the history of painting and sculpture, see Jex-Blake and Sellers 1986 and Isager 1991.

media, and treats them together, in the end reinforces the notion that they have something essential in common.

There are two bigger issues involved in the question of whether sculptors and painters in Greek antiquity saw themselves as part of the history of art. One is the issue of art versus craft. The desire to dignify what they were studying undoubtedly played a part in encouraging scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to write the history of Greek painted pottery after the model of the history of western painting. Sorting Greek pots according to the name of the painter who signed them may have been, in the first instance, a way of giving some order to the thousands of similar pots that poorly regulated excavation of Etruscan tombs poured into the museums of Europe. But proceeding to divide up unsigned pots according to the hands of painters for whom names had to be invented was also about sorting quality. When Sir John Beazley resorted to the name "The Worst Painter," he was only making explicit what is implied in the language with which he talks of the painter of the Berlin amphora.⁴

In recent years, some scholars have reacted against the invention of artists to whom Greek pots can be attributed, and against the market value that these invented artists give to the products attributed to them. The exaggerated thesis of the dependency upon metal vessels of Athenian black-figure and red-figure pot-painting was inspired not least by the desire to remove Greek painted pottery from the world of high art connoisseurship. And with the emphasis on the low value of the material employed by pot-painters went a move to treat them not as artists but as craftsmen.⁵

The second issue is quite different and concerns whether scholarly analysis should properly proceed by way of observers' or by way of actors' categories. In the second half of the twentieth century, actors' categories had it all their own way. Scholars wrote books on *aidôs* rather than shame, *hybris* rather than violence, and studied *amicitia* rather than friendship in the Roman republic.⁶ More remarkably, they denied that there was such a thing as the ancient economy because there was no word for it. But although the superficial charm of the idea took a long while to wear off, the idea that we could not analyze the exchange of goods in the ancient world using the terms of modern economic analysis because the ancients themselves never

4 Cf. Elsner 1990, Whitley 1997.

5 Compare Vickers 1985, Vickers and Gill 1994.

6 For these examples, see Cairns 1993, Fisher 1992, and Brunt 1965.

explicated economic principles and did not expound the economic virtues of the division of labor, etc. was always absurd.⁷ The claimed absence of explicit ancient conceptualization, analysis, and theorizing of the economy may mean that we should temper our criticism of individuals and governments in antiquity when they undertake economically foolish measures, but it does not mean that those measures had no economic effect. It also does not mean that no one in antiquity perceived that supply and demand, wages and prices, and so on, were linked.

There was, scholars have often agreed, no such thing as “art” in antiquity. The Greek word *technê* and the Latin word *ars* never meant what we mean by “art.” Both were words indicative of learned skill. There might be a history of any number of “arts,” but writing a history of “art” (*ars*, *technê*) would make no sense. P. O. Kristeller’s claim that the art world was an invention of the eighteenth century is fundamentally a claim about the use of the word “art.”⁸ But Kristeller does not think he is telling us about linguistic usage, he thinks he is telling us about how people thought. His slippery argument, which dismisses in an extraordinary manner all evidence that contradicts it, relies, in any case, on an extremely partial survey of ancient evidence.⁹ The Roman collecting of Greek sculpture and painting, which removed works from their original context and redisplayed them as objects of the gaze in their own right, points heavily to a concept of art.¹⁰ Likewise, the selection of objects upon which Pausanias chooses to comment coincides very largely with what the eighteenth century regarded as “fine

7 And most probably, as Meikle 1995 insists, simply wrong: Aristotle is capable of quite sophisticated economic analysis (and he is not the only one).

8 Note the entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. Art, 6 (emphasis in original): “The application of skill to the arts of imitation and design, *Painting, Engraving, Sculpture, Architecture*; the cultivation of these in its principles, practice, and results; the skilful production of the beautiful in visible forms.” This is the most usual modern sense of “art” when used without any qualification. It does not occur in any English dictionary before 1880, and seems to have been chiefly used by painters and writers on painting until the present century. The *OED* entry continues: “1668 J E(VELYN) (*title*) The Idea of the Perfection of Painting demonstrated from the Principles of Art. a1700 DRYDEN *To Kneller* “From hence the rudiments of art began, A coal or chalk first imitated man.”

9 Try, for instance, to justify the following: “When Plato compares the description of his ideal state to a painting and even calls his world-shaping god a demiurge, he no more enhances the importance of the artist than does Aristotle when he uses the statue as the standard example for a product of human art” (Kristeller 1990.171).

10 Miles 2008, and compare Lapatin, this volume.

arts.”¹¹ And already in the fourth century B.C., a single chapter of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* shows not only painting and sculpture being put together, but that beauty was simply assumed to be the measure of good art.¹²

In this paper, I want to investigate further these two bigger questions, which I will refer to as the question of the value of art and the question of what sort of art history can be written of ancient art. And I want to do so from a very particular angle. I am interested in the ways and the circumstances in which painters and sculptors identified themselves. I shall explore the history, and the art, of painters’ and sculptors’ signatures in the ancient Greek world, offering both a quantitative and a qualitative story.

There are three reasons for my choice of focus. The first is that signatures are the graphic trace of the painters and sculptors themselves, and a graphic trace made in a particular way. Since part of the argument with which I wish to take issue is an argument about the embeddedness of art in antiquity, the choice of field and manner for the signature is evidence that needs to be explored: in what contexts do painters and sculptors draw attention to the painting or sculpture as a manufactured object—and one manufactured by a particular individual?

The second reason for my focus is that the decision of the creator of an object to identify himself by the individual inscription of his personal name as the maker of that object is a significant decision. Names can be used as trademarks, and the stamping of names upon bricks, tiles, and lamps that occurs in Greek as well as Roman antiquity should be seen as just that sort of branding.¹³ The tiles or bricks are identified by the stamp as belonging

11 Pausanias’s qualities as an art historian have yet to be properly appreciated (in the meantime, see Arafat 1996, Pretzler 2007.105–17), and should not be obscured by the (proper) emphasis on his religious investment (Elsner 1996).

12 Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.10. Xenophon has Socrates pass directly from getting Parrhasius to agree that art imitates life to the problem of finding models for beauty. But when he moves on to talk to the armorer Pistias, he insists that the criterion for good armor is whether it hurts the wearer or not and has nothing to do with its decoration or the proportions it has as an object in its own right. Kristeller, who never mentions Xenophon, does not explicitly deny that beauty was used in a specifically aesthetic way, but he constructs his argument to imply the contrary as he first asserts that the Greek term *kalon* was never distinguished from moral good and then says that “only in later thinkers [than Cicero] does the speculation about ‘beauty’ assume an increasingly ‘aesthetic’ significance, but without ever leading to a separate system of Aesthetics in the modern sense” (1990.167).

13 See Siebert 1978.119–29 for a discussion of such “signatures.” Howland 1958.4 notes that the earliest maker’s name on a lamp dates to the second century B.C.

to a particular class of tiles or bricks. But the signature is another matter. Signatures mark an object as original, a one-off, different from all other objects. That among all the multifarious objects that came out of craftsmen's workshops, it is sculptures, paintings, and gemstones (along with books), and no other objects on any regular basis, that receive signatures is itself suggestive of an ancient "system of the arts."

Thirdly, I focus on signatures because not only have signatures come to be associated with claims to originality, but there is good reason to think that signatures already conveyed such claims in antiquity. Since the claim to originality has regularly been denied to ancient artists, the signature is a good foundation on which to build.

II. A HISTORY OF PAINTERS' AND SCULPTORS' SIGNATURES

I shall return to the questions of exactly what is signed and where it is signed, but I start my analysis with *when* sculptors and painters signed. Making an historical story out of the distribution of artists' signatures across time has proved both impossible and irresistible to earlier scholars. The classic proposition is that of Dieter Metzler: "The number of signatures and the way in which they are expressed themselves give clear indication of the role of the artists in their society."¹⁴ For an artist to sign a work, the thought goes, is to assert his individual importance: an artist's signature implies his status. The more signatures we find in any period, the more common we can reckon it to have been to self-identify as an artist. Even Gérard Siebert, who in his 1978 study of signatures insisted that craft objects and not merely art objects were signed in antiquity, refusing the distinction I have drawn between signatures and stamps, nevertheless espoused the correlation between signatures and status: "It is very natural that [signatures] appear in centuries and countries where the individual affirms himself."¹⁵ And

14 Metzler 1971.54: "Schon die Zahl der Signaturen und der Tenor ihrer Formulierungen sind ein deutlicher Hinweis auf die Funktion der Künstler in ihrer Gesellschaft," continuing: "der Individualismus ihrer Auftraggeber und Abnehmer spiegelt sich wider im Selbstbewußtsein der Künstler und wirkt von hier aus reflektierter und gelegentlich auch exaltierter zurück."

15 Siebert 1978.113. The full sentence reads: "Si les signatures sont l'affirmation de la personnalité, avec toutes les connotations idéologiques et affectives que cela implique (refus de dépossession de soi-même et de son travail par l'anonymat dans une collectivité), leur apparition est très naturelle dans les siècles et dans les pays où s'affirment l'individu." When signatures become less frequent in classical Athenian pottery, Siebert sees this as

Jeremy Tanner, having insisted that “the practice of signing, however, has no intrinsic meaning but must rather be embedded in a broader context of social relations,” nevertheless deduces from the size and placing of sculptors’ signatures in fourth-century Greece, “the relatively small importance attributed to the artist in the communicative process accomplished in setting up a work of art.”¹⁶ The signature might, in this version, communicate the artist’s contribution to a greater or a lesser degree, but it still communicates that contribution.

There are two things we need to know to assess these claims. The first is what the significance of a signature is, and the second is what the practice of signing was—in short, who signed what, when.

The significance of a signature is best assessed by looking to literature. As is demonstrated by the desire from a very early date to identify hexameter epics and hexameter hymns with Homer, Greeks expected to be able to attribute texts to individual authors. And when there was no direct internal evidence for the author, a life was invented.¹⁷ But poets equally wished to lay claim to their words: hence the *sphragis* or “seal,” the riddle that identified an author to the connoisseurs by whom he wished to be recognized.¹⁸ Poems were performed not simply by the poet but by others, by rhapsodes at festivals or by private individuals at symposia. The lines of one poet got taken up and incorporated in performance with the lines of other poets, and “original” authorship may be forgotten, but far from that

a mark of the loss of pride of the artists: “Qu’un Nearchos . . . ait put recourir pour la confection de son ex-voto aux services d’Antenor . . . indique suffisamment à quelle rang social certain artisans ou propriétaires d’atelier pouvaient alors s’élever. De cette ascension témoignent aussi les signatures de potiers et de peintres et les inscriptions vasculaires . . . Nul doute non plus que des modes et une mentalité nouvelles (et notamment, vers la fin du ve siècle, la découverte de l’espace pictural, plus difficile à créer dans le champ d’un vase) aient précipité un déclin que marque la raréfaction des signatures et des acclamations de *kaloi*” (1978.116–17). So, too, the increase in signatures in the Hellenistic period is seen as having socio-cultural significance: “L’inflation de signatures d’artisans et de fabricants à partir de l’époque hellénistique est un phénomène socio-culturel qu’il faut rapprocher de celui qui était caractérisé, deux siècles plus tôt, par la ‘naissance de l’art.’ La désacralisation des images avait conduit les sculpteurs et les peintres à faire reconnaître leurs techniques et à faire connaître leurs noms” (1978.129).

16 Tanner 1999.136, 161; cf. Tanner 2006.153–54.

17 See Graziosi 2002 for Homer and, more generally and less satisfactorily, Lefkowitz 1981.

18 The “original” *sphragis* is to be found in Theognis 19–23, but the phenomenon both antedates Theognis (cf. Hesiod *Theogony*) and continues through antiquity. See Kranz 1961.

meaning that authorship did not matter, the very interrelationship of texts draws attention to issues of authorship.¹⁹

Art shares with literature that it is an act of communication. Furniture or buildings are services provided to individuals. The furniture they use and buildings they inhabit may be the means by which those who avail themselves of these services communicate with others, but the furniture and buildings themselves are not communications: they need bodies to signify. Art exists to be a sign; what exactly that sign comes to mean will be affected by the other signs with which it is put into contact. But there is nowhere that a statue or painted pot can be placed that will render them insignificant. And those who interpret a sign need to know who gave it its significance, not just who is now employing it. It is not by chance that pots and sculptures are signed in ancient Greece, but buildings and furniture are not.

I turn now to my second question of who signed what when, and tackle it by simple-minded counting. I count signatures on two different regional productions of pots—briefly Boiotian and then at length Athenian—and in three corpora of sculpture. The analysis covers pots of the archaic and classical periods, sculpture of the archaic to Hellenistic periods (avoiding Roman practice, which is certainly in some ways distinct), and archaic to Hellenistic gems. Other places of pot production or sites of sculpture could be added, but this is enough to show that the practice is not regionally limited, either with regard to sculpture or to painted pottery. The chief focus is on how the number of signatures varies across time, both absolutely and, where this is easy to determine, as a proportion of total production. In the case of pottery, some attention is paid to how changing numbers correlate with the production of particular shapes, but no exhaustive analysis is made of any correlations between shape and signature. I do not here relate signatures to particular iconographies. Some non-random patterns certainly exist with regard to signatures and iconography, but for the purposes of addressing the question of what it was to be an “artist” in antiquity, such detailed analysis is not required or helpful. I note whether signatures record the “making” or the “painting” of a pot, but treat both as equivalent communications (see below note 21).

First, Boiotian pots. Boiotian pottery is not well known, but survives

19 On the lines of Theognis that also appear in the poems attributed to Solon, see Nagy 1983, esp. 88–89, and Irwin 2005.217–18, 226–30.

in significant quantities at least from the sixth century.²⁰ From the first half of the sixth century and perhaps just into the second half, we have a spate of signed pots. Seven different potters sign their work: Grypon (2), Menaidas (4), Epikhe (1), Mnasalkes (3), Phithadas (2), Polon (5; figure 8), and Gamades (2 or 3; the third is certainly a signature, but may not be Gamades).²¹ These constitute twenty out of a total corpus of forty-four Boiotian pots with writing, but twenty out of twenty-two pots with writing dated to the first three quarters of the sixth century. That is, it is with signatures that writing on Boiotian pots begins. And with signatures on a variety of pot shapes: these twenty include aryballoi (11) of various shapes, plastic vases (5), an alabastron (1), a cup (1), a jar (1), and an oinochoe (1).²²

Athenian black-figure pots first bear signatures at more or less the same time as do those from Boiotia, even if these make up a far smaller proportion of the total. The first nine chapters of Beazley's 1956 *Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters* (*ABV*) (table 1), which roughly cover the period to 550, include four potters, together signing fourteen pots, and five painters, also together signing fourteen pots. The next twenty-five years (*ABV* chapters 10–14) yields two painters signing sixteen pots, but thirty-three potters signing 209 pots. Little Master cups, to which I shall return, are the main contributor to this dramatic change. The last quarter of the sixth century (*ABV* chapters 15–26) yields five painters signing six pots, and twenty potters signing 141 pots.

In the same last quarter of the sixth century, Athenian red-figure pots (according to Beazley's 1963 *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters* [*ARV*] chapters 1–13) (table 1) yield thirteen painters signing seventy-six pots,

20 The earliest signature is not on a Boiotian pot but on a pot of eighth-century date from Pithekoussai (Osborne and Pappas 2007.135–36). Signatures are also common on Etruscan bucchero pottery from the seventh century onwards (Siebert 1978.120).

21 These are all “potters’ signatures,” that is, signatures using the “x made me” formula, rather than pots using the “x drew me” formula of what I shall, using conventional terminology, refer to as “painters’ signatures.” In the current context, it is worth observing that “painters’ signatures” occur only on pots with figurative decoration—i.e., there is a distinction between figurative and non-figurative decoration in terms of these claims to responsibility. What exactly is implied by the “x made me” formula (does it indicate the particular hand that threw the pot, or does it identify the master in charge of the particular potter’s workshop?) has been much discussed: see, e.g., Cook 1971 and Robertson 1972.

22 Wachter 2001.9–17; cf. Osborne and Pappas 2007.147–51. There have been questions about the genuineness of a number of Boiotian signatures, including (especially) the signature illustrated in fig. 8, but Wachter mounts strong arguments in favor of their being genuine.

Table 1. Signatures on Athenian black-figure and red-figure pottery (from Beazley 1956 and 1963).

<i>Beazley 1956</i>		<i>Number of</i>			
<i>Notional date</i>	<i>Chapters</i>	<i>painters</i>	<i>pots</i>	<i>potters</i>	<i>pots</i>
600–550	1–9	5	14	4	14
550–525	10–14	2	16	33	209
525–500	15–26	5	6	20	141
<i>Beazley 1963</i>		<i>Number of</i>			
<i>Notional date</i>	<i>Chapters</i>	<i>painters</i>	<i>pots</i>	<i>potters</i>	<i>pots</i>
525–500	1–13	13	76	28	159
500–475	14–29	5	43	10	70
475–450	30–49	2	12	5	9
450–425	50–69	4	8	3	3
425–400	70–76	0	0	5	8
After 400	77–90	0	0	1	2

and twenty-eight potters signing 159. The numbers then drop, so that in the first quarter of the fifth century (*ARV* chs. 14–29) there are five painters (forty-three pots), and ten potters (seventy pots); in 475–50 (*ARV* chs. 30–49) there are two painters (twelve pots) and five potters (nine pots), in 450–25 (*ARV* chs. 50–69) there are four painters (eight pots) and three potters (three pots); after that there are no painter signatures, but in 425–400 (*ARV* chs. 70–76), five potters (eight pots), and in the fourth century (*ARV* chs. 77–90), one potter (two pots).

What story should we tell? A story of competition between potters and painters, so that a new technique of painting brings a jump in painters signing? Or a story about the place of the individual in the politics of Athens at the end of the sixth century (cf. Neer 2002)? One might think something like that if one puts these figures side by side with statistics for signed sculpture derived from A. E. Raubitschek's 1949 corpus, *Dedications from the Athenian Acropolis* (*DAA*) (table 2). Raubitschek records one signed basin from 625–575 and one signed altar from 575–25. But he records fifty-eight signatures on bases for sculpture from 525–475, twelve on bases from 475–25, and just one from 425–375. Should we think of paint-

Table 2. Sculptors' signatures on dedications from the Athenian Acropolis (after Raubitschek 1949).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of signatures</i>
625–575	1 (basin)
575–525	1 (altar)
525–475	58 (bases + 2, altar and basin)
475–425	12 (bases)
425–375	1 (base)

ers responding rapidly to the change of *Zeitgeist*, but sculptors responding only after delay?

Data collected in Jean Marcadé's two volumes of *Recueil des signatures de sculpteurs grecs* (table 3) rubbish such explanations.²³ Marcadé collects all the evidence for signatures of artists who are, respectively, represented at Delphi (vol. 1) and Delos (vol. 2). The Persian wars provide no sort of turning point here. The number of signatures at Delphi increases steadily from one in the middle of the sixth century to thirty-three in the period 325–275, before falling off, with secondary peaks in the periods 225–175 and 125–75. At Delos, by contrast, only trivial numbers of signatures are known before the fourth century, and a golden age begins in the second quarter of the third century and lasts through to a major peak at the end of the second century, when in the years 125–75 some sixty-seven signatures are recorded.

The organization of Marcadé's lists means that what is being counted here is a bit odd. We are not simply counting signatures at Delphi and Delos. Not only do both volumes include artists not represented at the sanctuary in question, but if an artist appears at either sanctuary, Marcadé then lists all other known signatures by that artist. The effect of this is to multiply the local trends. The complementarity of the two patterns is remarkable but meaningless: it stems from the sanctuaries having such different

23 Marcadé 1953, 1957. Loewy's 1885 collection is too out of date to be useful. For what it is worth, the following statistics can be derived from the summary tables in Loewy 1885. vii–ix: C6 4 + 2, C5 10 + 1, C4 36 + 8, Hellenistic 77 + 17, Bis zum Ende der römischen Republik 37 + 4, Kaiserzeit 13 + 1.

Table 3. Sculptors' signatures catalogued in Marcadé 1953 and 1957.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of</i>	
	<i>Delphic artists (vol. 1)</i>	<i>Delian artists (vol. 2)</i>
625–575	0	1
575–525	1	2
525–475	9	3
475–425	13	0
425–375	17	1
375–325	18	10
325–275	33	4
275–225	9	28
225–175	14	30
175–125	5	26
125–75	17	67
75–25	3	2
25–A.D. 25	0	0
A.D. 25–75	0	1
A.D. 75–125	0	0
A.D. 125–175	1	0

histories that no artist signs work at both Delos and Delphi. What we see above all from both Marcadé's data and Raubitschek's is that when most bases survive, most signatures survive.

This picture is largely confirmed by the evidence of gems. It is not always easy to tell whether a name on a gem indicates the cutter of the gem or the person for whom the gem was made. There are a number of archaic gems that explicitly record the owner (using a formula with the name in the genitive combined, sometimes, with *sêma*, "sign" or "seal").²⁴ A minimalist approach would limit "signatures" to those that expressly credit the named individual with the manufacture of the gem. Scholars have

24 Ownership inscriptions share with signatures that they are indicators of the status of the object.

generally extended signatures further than that, but without encompassing all names on gems as names of gem-cutters. Peter Zazoff lists five certain archaic gem-cutter signatures, six classical signatures, and fourteen Hellenistic signatures.²⁵

This rough-and-ready statistical analysis demonstrates pretty clearly that there is no *history* of signing as such, that is, no story of the straightforward development of a practice over time. The changing frequency of signatures at one place or another or in one artistic medium rather than another is not plausibly a product of some local *Zeitgeist* favoring declarations of identity. But if this suggests that signing is embedded in some broader context, what is that context? Is there is any reason, with Tanner, to privilege a broader context of *social* relations?

III. MAKING SIGNATURES COUNT

To understand something of the broader context in which the practice of signing pots and sculptures was embedded, we need to get beyond simply counting signatures. I make two observations. In material from classical and Hellenistic Greece, sculptors' signatures never appear alone, but always in the context of other writing (the situation will be a little different at Rome, but that will have to be another story). On pots, writing similarly attracts writing: potters/painters who write other things are more likely to sign than potters and painters who do not write other things.

Beazley noted sixty-five years ago, in what is still the fullest discussion, that there was no correlation between signatures and the quality of the product: "Many of the best are unsigned, and some of the worst are signed" (1989.54). It is true that Beazley is not quite fair here. Were the pots painted by the Worst Painter signed, then there would be no Worst Painter (*ARV* 1353–54). A significantly larger proportion of fine painters both write on and sign their pots than of poor painters, particularly if one counts those decorating pots by a named potter (Amasis, the Brygos Painter). And the potters who write on and sign pots are more often than not fine potters. Beazley suggested that the determining factors were not quality but fashion, the artist's temperament, the artist's mood at the moment,

25 Zazoff 1983.101–02 for archaic (with three names in the genitive that might be of cutters and four further "stray" names in the nominative); 132–41 for classical (all Zazoff's classical artists date from the years 440–360); 205–08 for Hellenistic.

and, finally, the relationship of the signature to the vase. Neither fashion nor the artist's temperament are much help as explanations, for a reason that Beazley goes on to expound: on his count, forty-two of ninety-seven potter names and seventeen out of forty-three painter names depend on a single pot. No one always signs, and there are no black-figure painters and only five black-figure potters who sign more than five times, six red-figure painters and eleven red-figure potters who do so. This doesn't look like the sort of pattern that either waves of fashion for signing or determinedly demonstrative temperaments will account for. Signatures do not so much enhance the person who signs as enhance the pot signed.

Any pot could offer a showcase for a signature. The potter-signatures of Hieron appear on the insides of handles—a position available on almost every pot shape except the phiale and the psykter. Exekias signs a neck amphora on its rim (Immerwahr 1990, no. 132), Andokides copies him (Immerwahr 1990, no. 307; figure 9), and every black-figure amphora could have been signed there. The space between the eyes on an eye cup could have been used every time, as it is by Amasis (Immerwahr 1990, no. 161), copied by Psiax (Immerwahr 1990, no. 318).

From the beginning, when Sophilos put his signature next to the title "Games of Patroklos" (figure 10) to enhance the sense of the busy excitement of the crowd, the signature gets incorporated into the overall scheme of decoration.²⁶ Other writing could be used, and, where a signature is used on one pot, name inscriptions or a *kalos* inscription will be used on another: so where Oltos uses a *kalos* inscription to surround a single figure in a tondo, Epiktetos will, more tidily and in a more interesting way, use his signature (Immerwahr 1990, nos. 335 and 351). Or a signature could balance an inscription of a different type, as Euphronios's potter-signature balances the naming of Herakles on a cup interior (or Herakles balances Euphronios?) (Immerwahr 1990, no. 504), or Douris uses his signature and that of the potter Kalliades as part of a whole bevy of balancing inscriptions on the interior of a cup showing Eos and the dead Memnon (Immerwahr 1990, no. 536; figure 11).

Although pots of a wide range of shapes are sometimes signed, a

26 This is a particularly witty signature since it both appropriates the games of Patroklos for Sophilos (these are Sophilos's games of Patroklos, rather than Homer's), and it exploits the ambiguity of the verb *graphein* to suggest that Sophilos does to the games of Patroklos exactly what Homer does to them—except that Homer was an oral poet who never "wrote."

very high proportion of signed pots are drinking cups (kylikes). To understand this phenomenon, it helps to start with the single class of pot that is most frequently signed, the Little Master cup (figure 12).²⁷ Beazley reported that three-quarters of all signed black-figure vases are cups of this type, and accounted for it by noting that the inscription “is not, as elsewhere, an adjunct, but is an integral part of the decoration; and the most obvious sort of inscription is either a greeting to the user—*khaire kai piei eu*—or a statement about the cup and its maker—*Tlēson epoiesen*” (1989.54).

Beazley’s point can be reinforced: the striking feature is not simply the number of signed Little Master cups (182 in *ABV*), but the number of different potters signing them (30). Still only one *painter* of Little Master cups signs (five cups) as painter. It can hardly be the case, as Beazley implies, that the design of the pot created a requirement for writing, and all that the manufacturers could think of to satisfy that requirement was a potter’s signature. Rather, on Little Master cups, the writing does not frame the picture, but the picture (if any) punctuates the writing, and both picture and writing draw attention to the cup not as decorated surface but as drinking vessel. The writing encourages the drinker to see the pot’s world as his world, drawing the pictures into this world rather than having the pictures draw the drinker into another world.

These cups, much finer products than the kylikes that preceded them, showcase the potter rather than the painter. The signatures alert the drinker to the contribution that the cup has made—its balance and weight, the way it sits in the hand and on the lip—to the experience of drinking well. The cup itself is integral to the performance of drinking, just as the images on the cup become integral to the verbal pyrotechnics without which no symposium is complete. You could not come to perform at the symposium without the equipment that potter and painter provided. Sympotic performance was an act in which painter and potter were complicit—and which both could enhance or undermine as the symposiast proved unable to handle the vessel (cf. the trick vessels) or had his performance undermined by the image revealed on the back of the cup or in its tondo.²⁸

Writing on pots attracts writing.²⁹ Even among the precocious

27 The drinking inscriptions on Little Master cups are catalogued by Wachter 2004.

28 On all of this, see Lissarrague 1990.

29 On writing on pots more generally, see Lissarrague 1985 and Snodgrass 2000a; for writing and performance, see Lissarrague 1999.

Boiotian potters, two add their own name to the name of the person for whom the pot is destined, thereby turning the pot into an active party in a transaction. The history of the signature broadly maps onto the history of other writing on Attic pottery. Only on white-ground lekythoi where the writing evokes the lettering on a stele and on later red-figure vases when names come to mark abstract personifications do painters who write other things refrain from adding signatures.³⁰ In both cases, there is a performative relationship between user and writing: it is the writing on the white-ground lekythoi that takes the viewer from the world of the dead to the world of, e.g., the celebration of pretty boys (in the writing of *kalos* inscriptions) or the world of the Muses (when figures are labelled as residents of Helikon); so, too, it is the writing on late fifth-century red-figure pots that reveals the young maidens as not individuals but qualities.³¹ The absence of signatures on these two groups of pots suggests that when two worlds are already meeting, the presence of representatives of yet a third world would be gooseberries, unwanted intruders at a meeting too personal for the painter or potter to join their company. The world of the dead and the world of living painters have to remain apart—neither can be drawn into the other.

Similarly, with sculpture, signatures almost never appear alone.³² Virtually all non-architectural sculpture had to include writing. In the case of gravestones, the writing marked the identity of the deceased, and here, too, after the archaic period, identifying the sculptor seems to have been taken to be inappropriate: the communication invited between mourner and deceased evidently became too intense for the role of the sculptor in bringing the dead to life to be itself signalled.³³ There seems to be an exact parallel with the absence of signatures on white-ground lekythoi that were destined

30 Lissarrague 1988 (on white-ground lekythoi), Shapiro 1993 and Osborne 2000 on personifications.

31 Thirty-eight out of the ninety-four white lekythoi attributed by Beazley to the Achilles Painter in *ARV* have *kalos* inscriptions. For their form, see Immerwahr 1990.109. Helikon is named in *ARV* 997.155, though this is not recorded by Beazley.

32 Occasionally only the signature survives, but rarely is it even probable that there was no other inscription. A selection of signatures on sculpture are presented and illustrated in Guarducci 1974.397–423.

33 In the archaic period, signatures appear both on statues erected to mark graves (cf. *IG* i³ 1218, the memorial for Xenophantos, signed by Aristokles, which seems to have belonged to an equestrian statue, Eaverly 1995, no. 5), and on grave stelai (e.g., the stele of Aristion also signed by Aristokles, *IG* i³ 1256; Richter 1961, no. 67), or the various stelai signed by Phaidimos (*IG* i³ 1196, 1251; Richter 1961.156–57, no. 34).

for the grave. In the case of sculptural dedications, the writing recorded, for the benefit, at least in part, of the gods, who and what had occasioned the gift; here recognition was at all periods regularly afforded to the sculptor, who had provided the medium of communication.

The way in which sculptors are recognized in sculpture is worth close observation. In the archaic period, in particular, it is not uncommon for dedicatory inscriptions to be written upon the body of a statue, but such inscriptions rarely include the signature of the sculptor.³⁴ Sculptors' signatures are regularly placed on the separate base (and hence survive when the statue itself is lost). This emphasizes the way in which the signature belongs with the other writing (normally a dedicatory formula) rather than adhering to the statue itself.

Several Acropolis column dedications feature the sculptor's signature before the name of the dedicator, and in the same size of script. (*DAA* 3 [figures 13a and b], 4, 7, 9, 12), but flat bases quickly develop a convention of putting the sculptor's name last. In due course, it becomes usual for the sculptor's name to be separated and smaller (figure 14). As we have seen, Tanner sees "vanishingly small" signatures as reflecting status in the communication process. I doubt this. From as early as the last quarter of the sixth century, there is a sense of balance between the longer dedicatory inscription and the shorter signature, and the placing apart works with the size of the signature to ensure that no reader neglects to register the sculptor's part. Separation of signature makes the sculptor more than just an adjunct to the patron, but it also turns the inscribed base from merely a utilitarian text to being itself a work of art: the reader is made to think about the place and size of the words, not just about their content. The "balance" of sculptor and dedicator raises the question of their relative part in the communication that is signalled, and ensures that in these presentations to the gods, representation—of dedicator, of man, god, or hero portrayed, and sculptor—is always at issue.

34 So the long inscription on Mantiklos's Apollo does not mention the sculptor; no *kouros* that bears an inscription mentions the sculptor. One *kore*, only, from the Ptoion sanctuary (Richter 1968, no. 2), has a signature as part of the inscription on the hem of her skirts, and the seated figure of the Geneleos group from the Samian Heraion has its signature on the hem of the himation.

IV. SIGNS OF ARTISTS?

It is vain to look to signatures to signal the rise of the artist. What looking at signatures tells us is that the artist never rose: there was never a question about the potential status of the artist. The artist's name was always an element in which the viewer is presumed to be interested—as interested as he was in who was being portrayed in a picture or who had made a dedication.³⁵ Signing marks out pots, sculptures, and gems—as it surely also marked out wall paintings and panel-pictures, given the anecdotal material about the artists of such works—as sharing something with poems and letters that they did not share with buildings or furniture. What they all share is the sense that there is an “author,” that the identity of the creator of these works is something worth knowing—and worth knowing because these are works that demand, and establish a relationship with, “readers.” If we want an indication that there was a notion of “fine arts” in antiquity, signatures might be held to provide such an indication.

Not that the signature itself distinguished the artist from the craftsman in our terms. There is no reason to think that those who signed wished to assert that they belonged to a different category from other producers of useful or attractive objects. Painters do not distinguish themselves from potters by signing; indeed potters' signatures outnumber painters' signatures. Potters and painters appear together virtually from the beginning in the team of Kleitias and Ergotimos. If it is figurative art that triggers the interest in the identity of the producer, it does not limit that interest to the painter. Once the user of a pot gets drawn into a relationship to the vessel because of what is painted upon it, that relationship is nevertheless with all the features of the vessel, with its form as well as with its decoration. The

35 This is nowhere better shown than in the phenomenon of fake signatures. We find “signatures” of Douris on cups not painted by him. In one case at least, Douris himself seems to have written the signature on a cup perhaps potted by a potter (Python) with whom he worked, but certainly painted by a painter other than Douris himself, a painter known to us as the Triptolemos Painter. In five other cases, an imitation Douris signature is written on lekythoi by the painter known as the Cartellino Painter. For discussion of these cases, see Immerwahr 1990.86. Although Immerwahr thinks Douris signed the Triptolemos painter cup by accident, the lekythoi must certainly have been deliberately signed with a name that did not belong to the painter responsible. Douris' was evidently a name to conjure with. So, too, in a different sense may have been the name Polygnotos, a name used by more than one pot-painter in the middle of the fifth century (see Matheson 1995), surely with some allusion to Polygnotos the mural painter.

decision to dignify those who sign with the name “artists” will always be our decision, but what the evidence of signatures shows is that it is a decision that makes sense of an ancient grouping, provided we are willing to reckon the whole pot to be a work of art, and not merely the scenes upon it.

But there is a further sense in which we might hold that signatures identify artists. From the beginning, when potters, painters, and sculptors made themselves visible, they did so not merely to convey their identity but to contribute to the appearance of the object. To come to know the potter, painter, or sculptor is to come to confront their decision to make this object, and to confront this object as an object. Signatures are placed in relationship to the scenes painted or to particular aspects of the form of the pot; they draw attention to the human agency crucial in enabling this pot to be used in this way. Whether on sculpture or on pots, signatures reveal artists to be engaged always in collaboration—collaboration with the figures they themselves create but also with the viewers without whom the objects make no sense.

Pots and sculptures did things—other than just look beautiful—for those who commissioned and purchased them. In this pots and sculpture were like all works of art, dependent on interaction with those who engage with them. It makes no sense for the artist to absent him- or herself from this interaction; indeed, it is hard to see how the artist can be absent from this interaction. The excesses of New Criticism reveal precisely the impossibility of reducing the work of art to the “words on the page” or “lines on the surface” or three-dimensional forms. Artworks are necessarily embedded (as, despite what Finley says, the economy, modern as well as ancient, is always embedded). The Greek artist’s role in making the sculpture or pot do things is never hidden—Beazley and the connoisseurs are right to think that artists’ individuality manifests itself in graphic traces and formal choices—but may be made more richly present by the addition of a signature.

Pots contributed to the symposion by the appropriateness of their figurative scenes and of their acclamations of pretty boys: signatures drew attention to the potter and/or painter’s agency. The bases of sculptures match the work of dedication to the work of sculpting. Announcing the work of dedication to the god takes first and largest place, but the sculptor’s contribution is easiest to spot and identify. Artists are continually born in the collaboration of artist and patron, but they achieve their ends in so far as they meet aesthetic demands.

The artist’s signature may seem a puny weapon with which to tackle the big questions that I flagged in the first part of this paper. Can the

signing of a name contribute to the debate as to whether historical analysis should be in our terms or theirs? Can the signing of a name determine the proper status of an object or the object's maker? I hope to have shown that artists' signatures indeed have nothing to contribute to conventional histories and sociologies of art, concerned with tracing a (never) changing status for those who make what we call works of art: there is no period of Greek sculpture or pot-painting when the maker might have signed his work but didn't, and changing frequency is not sensibly interpreted to indicate changing status. But along with this negative finding, I hope also to have shown that artists' signatures draw attention to what works of art are in such a way as to transcend both big questions.

As far as the question of whether "art" and "artist" are anachronistic categories is concerned, the choice of objects that bear signatures establishes that we are talking about a common categorization. Signatures mark out the range of objects that involve communication between producer and consumer, where who the producer is changes the product (consider the difference between an anonymous and a signed letter). That such objects are called works of art in modern times is not accidental. Whether or not they were identified by any single term in antiquity does not change the fact that the ancient practice of signing picks out these signed objects as a group. Once we cease to fixate on terminology, we can see that art existed in antiquity, just as the economy also existed.

We can see also that denying that ceramic vessels are or can be works of art makes no sense. Once the identity of the maker is bound up in the consumer's enjoyment of the work of art, that identity is going to produce differential demand. Whether or not Douris' works attracted higher prices from fifth-century Greeks is not the issue: differential demand may not be reflected in price differential. What is important is that it mattered to consumers whether it was Douris with whom they were in communication or not. Signatures were not the only means by which artists identified themselves—there is no reason not to believe that Athenian connoisseurs could distinguish the Berlin Painter's works as well as Beazley could—but they are indisputably a means of conveying identity (even false identity), and that is enough to show that identity mattered.

I want to finish with a point about aesthetics. Field archaeologists have for some time been uncomfortable about the invocation of notions of beauty by art historians, and art historians have, in response, beaten something of a retreat over aesthetic assessments. But aesthetics is about catching the eye, about getting noticed. Tables and chairs are things that people

look for in order to use them, and the way in which they are used is in many circumstances not going to be affected by whether or not they catch the eye. But statues are different, and so, despite their utilitarian functions, are pots. Statues can be overlooked, and if they are overlooked, they fail to perform the communication for which they have been created. When they are noticed, they are noticed as statues of a particular appearance. Gravestones need to delay the passerby if he or she is to take note of the achievements of the deceased, and when they delay the passerby, it is their appearance that leaves him or her with a particular impression about the deceased. Dedications need to attract the worshipper, and having attracted him or her, it is their appearance that serves to encourage proper attitudes of devotion to the gods (and proper respect for those who made the dedication). The symposion has a much better chance of becoming a jolly party, marked by engagement with story and song and by self-reflexive party tricks, if the pots succeed in drawing attention to how people behave and to the sorts of communications that make or ruin human life. In all cases, the work of art in question achieves its effects through the attractiveness of its particular form and decoration—and also through drawing attention to its own artifice. The appearance of the artificer plays an important role in this—a role that is nothing other than the role of artist.

University of Cambridge