COPIES OF POTTERY: BY AND FOR WHOM?

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My subject indulges speculation in several interests shared with our honorand, who has been a close friend since student days in Greece over fifty years ago. It is one which perforce takes us east as well as west, since the phenomenon of copying pottery shapes and decoration is not an exclusively western one in the early period that is our concern, and very similar circumstances may be involved in widely separated places. I have no intention to propose a theory of copying; far from it, since it will appear that every case has to be treated on its merits, and the different factors involved may suggest different plausible explanations, or sometimes none at all. This is very much a problem for close analysis of the material surviving, and adequate assessment of the circumstances, historical, cultural and material, in which it arises; but some patterns may emerge.

There is a tendency nowadays to dissociate pots from people, a reaction against former assumptions that pottery could explain everything, but a reaction that has gone too far. Pottery is the most functional of all artefacts still available for an archaeologist to study. Most was in daily use and not tied to specific trades or social classes. Its forms and decoration are wholly determined by and for the society for which it was made, and differences in shapes indicate differences in the needs of the people using it. So, in our context, it would be fair to suppose that you do not copy forms and decoration in pottery unless you want to use them, or can sell them to people who want to use them; nor do you copy forms and decoration which are useless or positively undesirable to potential users. There are no serious problems, for example, in understanding the readiness of Euboeans to copy certain Corinthian shapes, with their decoration, at an early date, given their ubiquity in the Greek world. The problem for the archaeologist, where there is one, resolves itself largely into a matter of identifying motivation.

Why copy? Not, usually, because the model is prettier than any more familiar product, though this will operate in periods later than
that with which we are dealing, which is mainly the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. But even at an early date decorators, and to a lesser degree potters, may be inspired by the products of others. Copies may serve a new need which has been generated by familiarity with and use of their models; if the models had not been useful they would not have been copied, and I take it as axiomatic that one did not copy anything that was meaningless, useless or positively alien to current usage. Commercial competition could be a motive, though perhaps not a strong one for the early period, and only effective if there was access to both the market and, if it was involved, the product being marketed in or with the pottery. It would be possible to prolong such speculation about appropriate circumstances for copying, but I prefer to turn to examples, and this prologue serves mainly to insist that pottery was neither used nor made mindlessly in antiquity, and that it remains a very important indicator of the people by whom it was made, and for whom it was made, or who came to use it. 'Pots are for People' should be the slogan. The makers' intentions and the users' expectations are more important even than the activity of any traders, carriers or other middlemen. After all, there would be no trade if there was no one to produce and no one to buy.

The most interesting instances occur not between ethnically related neighbours, like Greek states, but between the ethnically and sometimes socially unrelated. In our case this means Greeks on the one hand, at home or in colonies, and non-Greeks—either the populations of colonized regions, or more often, the Levantine colleagues or competitors, Phoenician or other.

I start in the east with three examples which are not without relevance in the west as well. There are in Cyprus and on the Levant coast opposite examples of Euboean dishes (or plates), decorated with pendant semicircles, which are not very conspicuous among finds in Euboea itself, but which copy closely a Cypriot shape (Fig. 1). This seems a clear case of production to satisfy a particular market in Cyprus which had taken note of Euboean sub-Protogeometric decoration and fancied it enough to use it. But the shape would not have been useless in Greece itself, where flat dishes of very similar proportions were known. Coldstream takes them to be rare early examples of pottery for eating rather than drinking, and that such usage was eastern only in early days. This may be so; I am not sure; not sure either about any pottery for eating from, rather than dis-