

CVA Today. Some Remarks

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The *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* seems to be a quite lively project. Although corpora are sometimes criticized as old-fashioned remains of a positivist 19th century-shaped research agenda, the interest in the *Corpus Vasorum* is definitively growing in recent decades. The complete documentation of the enormous number of extant Greek vases is in great demand, especially since Greek vase-painting is considered a primary source for answering a lot of the questions that arise about cultural history, including customs, rituals, and mentalities. The last decades saw gradual changes in the approaches and methodologies of Ancient history. Pictorial and material evidence have gained more and more importance for the reconstruction of Ancient culture and society, namely with the so-called 'pictorial turn' and recently the 'material turn' in humanities. Painted Greek vases were at the focus of both. Greek vases are, for instance, investigated as one of the most important indicators of cultural exchange in the ancient Mediterranean. Sometimes the images on the vases are even seen as vehicles or media of Hellenic ideas and customs to other parts of the ancient world. All of this and certainly in many other ways this renewed interest in ancient ceramics has caused new efforts to push forward the now more than ninety year old project of the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*. More countries have decided to participate,¹ and some of the long periods of interrupted publishing have been overcome.² The high standard of publication of nearly all known Greek and Italic fine ware ceramics is more than ever an important task, seeing that it serves as a basis for a broad field of research now and in future.

Although there are a great variety of research interests in ancient ceramics, not all of them can be taken into account by the CVA. We have to bear in mind the selectivity of our evidence. Ancient vases in museums and collections were assembled

by means that depended mainly on historic or even personal preferences. So, our evidence mirrors first of all the 18th and 19th century interest in original Greek artworks. Vase-painting was seen to a certain degree as evidence for the appearance of the famous but lost Greek panel and wall paintings, or at least as the product of an exemplary craft and design. These central ideas shaped the assemblages of objects, sometimes of high artistic quality, but mostly without any archaeological context.³ Historical interests played a minor role, and often the focus was only on the content of the vase-paintings, and not on the vessels as a whole in their ancient setting. One can complain about these shortcomings, but we have to deal with the choices that former generations have made.

Content of the Corpus

Therefore, it was a wise decision to omit the prehistoric, oriental, Roman and provincial ceramics from the CVA, even contrary to the original intention of Edmond Pottier.⁴ As with the plain and domestic pottery of the Greeks, the research on the non-Greek potteries went in a totally different direction. Methodology is based primarily on archaeological evidence, stratigraphical and scientific analyses, not on the isolated specimens in the museum showcases. But these approaches do not apply to the great majority of the extant Greek, Italic, and Etruscan vases in museums and collections. From these different methodologies it follows that the appropriate documentation of the different sorts of ceramics requires different sets of data. An inclusion of other ceramics than the painted or glazed fine wares in the CVA and the documentation according to its standards would be therefore useless for both the researcher in plain or non-Greek pottery and the specialist in painted vases.

1 E.g. Australia; Brazil; Finland; Russia; Turkey.

2 E.g. Austria; Denmark; Croatia; Czech Republic; Greece; Norway.

3 Bourgeois, Denoyelle 2013 ; Schmidt, Steinhardt 2014.

4 Dugas 1956, pp. 10-11; Rouet 2001, pp. 130-131; Bentz 2002a, p. 9; Kurtz 2004, p. 279.

The same is true for painted or glazed vases unearthed in modern excavations. For these vessels documentation as part of the archaeological context has the top priority too. Only with complete archaeological data can they be fully utilized as historical sources. This cannot be replaced by a *CVA* entry. Therefore, scientifically excavated new material is not allowed to be published in the *CVA*. Nevertheless, in some cases it might be useful to catalogue the vases again in a *CVA* fascicule when they become part of a museum collection. In recent time we saw some good examples of this policy with the Greek *CVA* volumes on the Museums of Thebes and Rhodes.

Apart from these categories, the rule of the *Corpus* should be to publish all vases belonging to the museums and collections. But there might be one exception. Since the aim of the *CVA* is to make accessible the vases as original remains of antiquity, the preparation for publication requires cleaning of the vessels and, if necessary, removing the distorting modern overpainting or restorations. But as the museum keepers are increasingly sensitized to see the 18th or 19th century restorations or pastiches as artworks in their own right, as evidence for the then prevailing taste, they may decide to leave the vases in their present state. Such pieces are to be omitted from the *CVA*, if it is not possible to make perfectly clear what the vases looked like in antiquity. With this claim I feel in good company, seeing that Sir John Beazley asked for the same policy already in 1956.⁵

Documenting the Vases

As research interests and questions in ancient ceramic become more and more diversified, the need for detailed information about the single vessel increases. Moreover, new technical skills and equipment for measuring and analyzing open up the possibility of creating huge amounts of data. We would be able to fill pages and pages with clay analyses and descriptions of the production, the materiality and the fate of each vase in detail. All this is indeed important information, but for managing the work we have to ask how much and particularly which information is appropriate for the *CVA*. What data is actually useful for most of the researchers consulting the volumes?

The most important part of the documentation is still photography. One cannot overestimate the usefulness of a full and detailed photographic record.

This documentation depends the least on current interests. At best, coming generations will find in the photographs answers to questions hitherto not even asked. Therefore, we should take a lot of care with the photos and the printing. Taking for granted the efforts to achieve the best quality, some further questions may be raised. First, is it necessary to depict the vases in a fixed scale? With the photographic record a fixed scale seems unimportant, if scaled profile drawings are included from which measurements can be taken easily. It may be helpful to give additional plates showing all vases of one shape in comparable size to give an idea of the range of dimensions. On the other hand, details of inscriptions and especially smaller fragments should be depicted in original scale. For the latter this makes it easier to find connecting pieces in other collections.

Second, is there any need for full color documentation of the vases? Modern techniques in digital photography and printing mean that full color printing is within our means. If possible we should make use of these new possibilities, for it is our aim to document the vases in all their original appearance. But to achieve appropriate full color documentation needs even more careful preparation and printing; a good black and white photograph is much better than a bad full color illustration.

Finally, does the presentation of the vases cut off from the background as is done in some volumes reduce the documentary value of the photographs? This is not a new issue – it goes but back to Beazley's review of the first *CVA* volume in 1922.⁶ He condemned silhouetting the vase as it falsifies the shape. But modern techniques of digital image processing weaken his point. It is now possible to cut off pixel by pixel. So, a distortion of the vase outlines is rather improbable. On the other hand we had the experience, especially with full color illustrations, that the original background goes best with the reflections and the surface of the vases. Otherwise the vessels tend to soar or to hang in the air.

New possibilities of documentation came up with computer tomography and three-dimensional scanning. They were used with some volumes from the Netherlands and Austria,⁷ replacing the traditional profile drawing. Data captured by 3D scanning to create profiles may be helpful to avoid high cost manual measuring. But personally I doubt that additional information on the profiles, like cracks or mending, could broaden our knowledge of the original design or the hand of the potter. We have to bear in mind that evidence for Antiquity should

⁵ J.D. Beazley in: Dugas 1956, p. 28.

⁶ Beazley 1923, p. 199; Pottier 1924, pp. 283-284; Rouet 2001, p. 133.

⁷ *CVA* Amsterdam 3. 4. 5; *CVA* Wien 5; Trinkl 2013.

be the focus of our project. A detailed documentation of a random state of preservation may be quite interesting for a restorer, but this is not within the scope of the *CVA* that aims first of all at the intentions of the producer of the vase. Therefore profile drawings should be made big and clear enough – if possible original size – to see the shaping details that help specialists to decide about potter's hands and workshops.⁸

Nevertheless, including other additional data in the *CVA* could be quite useful. The indication of weight and, especially, capacity, together with the measurements, for instance, can give a better idea of a vase's dimensions and use. For example, knowing the capacity of the Meidias hydria in the British Museum leaves no doubt that this vessel was never used for transporting or pouring water, especially not by women. Moreover, listing capacities may provide evidence for standard capacities of certain vase shapes. So, these data should belong to every *CVA* entry.⁹ More specific information, on the other hand, like chemical analyses of the material, seems to be misplaced in the corpus as a standard requirement. Researchers needing comparable data of this kind will capture them anew and not trust in someone else's results. Only in some cases should scientific analyses be included in the *CVA*. As with the Greek Benaki volume and Germany's Berlin 11, answers to questions of origin can be given through the interpretation of such data. In these cases it was the aim to decide whether the vessels are Attic or Boeotian.¹⁰

The text of a *CVA* entry should be by definition only an addition to the photographic and pictorial documentation. Above all it should describe what is not accessible through other documents. But even if the description is extremely careful, every author will decide what is more or less important. So, he will always exclude or miss points some future readers will search for in the text. Therefore, the written documentation can only be approximately complete. Much more depends on the author's interests and the contemporary directions of research in a commentary on a certain vase. So, this is the part of the *CVA* entry that will lose some of its relevance first. Some have therefore claimed that the *CVA* should go without commentaries that give more than the comparanda. But especially for already known vases it is useful to hint at the issues or fields in which they are discussed. This may serve as a starting point for further research. Even for famous pieces a comprehensive commentary could be helpful as a

reference to the great number of older publications of the vase.

For the above-mentioned reasons, the reference to a *CVA* entry is traditionally given by the plate numbers in the particular volume. Since the text seems to be of minor importance, the name of the author is normally not mentioned. Recently it has been suggested to refer additionally to the author's name and to the year of publication, thus better acknowledging the author's achievements. Instead of taking this as an overall standard, I would like to propose a dual method. If the reference is to the commentary, or results of the author's research or his opinion, it would be fair to mention the name. For instance: J.D. Beazley in: *CVA* Oxford 2, p. 21. If the reference is only to the catalogue entry, to identify the specific vase and to find general information, it would be sufficient to give the volume and the plate numbers for economy of space.

For the same reason it has been suggested to identify every vase mentioned in the *CVA* additionally with the Beazley Archive database number, if possible. It was a good old practice to refer first to Beazley's catalogue or to Trendall and Cambitoglou's volumes, respectively. Since the Beazley Archive continues and enlarges the listing of known Greek vases, its records are the best place to find basic information about almost every single piece. So, it will be extremely helpful to find as many references to database numbers as possible in the future *CVA*'s. But, on the other hand, we should bear in mind situations with limited or lacking access to the internet for the reader. Therefore we should not go completely without references to Beazley's works. In recent *CVA* volumes there was some confusion about how to abbreviate the Beazley Archive records. In agreement with Peter Stewart and Thomas Mannack, I would like to propose BAPD for Beazley Archive Pottery Database as standard abbreviation.

CVAonline

Finally, some points about the CVAonline: Making accessible all extant *CVA* volumes in the internet is one of the most important tasks for the future. Since it is always difficult to find a complete set of *CVA* volumes to work with in libraries, the CVAonline gives the opportunity to consult as many volumes as possible from nearly every place of the world. This seems the best way to serve the *CVA*'s purpose of providing researchers with sources about Anti-

8 See Mommsen 2002.

9 Cf. Bentz 2002b; Bentz 2009.

10 *CVA* Athens, Benaki Museum 1, pp. 75-79; *CVA* Berlin 11, pp. 83-90. Cf. Seifert 2002.

quity. One may ask, why then should we continue to publish printed books? Wouldn't it be sufficient to publish online directly? No, it would not! Since the most important part is the photographic documentation – as mentioned above – a controlled, high quality printing of the photographic record is still indispensable. Consulting CVAonline can only be the first step at present. Everyone who needs detailed visual information will consult the printed plate. Especially comparing closely pieces from different museums which cannot be put side by side on the table will be feasible only with the help of several CVA volumes.

On the other hand, CVAonline has made possible a general index of the Corpus in its current state. The database opens up the chance for searching most of the extant volumes by many different criteria. This wonderful feature could never have been foreseen by the founders of the Corpus. Ironically, John Beazley called the idea of a general index to the CVA a monstrosity.¹¹ Moreover, an old problem of the CVA could be solved, at least partially, by the database. Since the first volumes appeared as early as 1922, their entries are by no means state of the art. The database gives the possibility of updating

at least the basic information and bibliography of all these early entries.

The CVAonline was inaugurated in 2004 with the financial support of the participating academies. Since then scanning of new CVA fascicules by the Classical Art Research Centre in Oxford has continued gradually. At present fascicules up to 2002 can be found in the database according a moratorium on putting online any fascicules published in the last ten years. Recently published fascicules will be available step by step. Considering the importance of the CVAonline, a shorter period between appearance and putting online should be considered. Desirable would be a gap of four or five years. This should be subject to agreements between the editing academies and their respective publisher. Additionally, all those responsible should think about supporting the efforts made in Oxford with all capabilities and resources. We have to help completing the records of especially the non-Attic pottery and to add the steadily growing literature to keep the CVAonline as successful as it has been. It needs further personal and financial support to optimize this most important feature of the *Corpus Vasorum*.

11 J.D. Beazley in: Dugas 1957, p. 30.

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