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A NEW VASE OF THE BIRDSEED PAINTER: THE ST. LOUIS PITCHER

BIRDSEED RESSAMI'NIN YENİ BİR VAZOSU: ST. LOUIS SÜRAHİSİ

Cenker ATİLA*

Abstract

In the Late Geometric II phase of Greek vase painting, the number of both painters and painted vases increased. Many painters and vases from this period have been able to be identified by scientists. The “Bird Row Frieze” is depicted in over a thousand vases from this period. One group has a distinct style of bird figures. Cook mentioned this group as the “Bird and Birdseed Workshop.” Davison grouped sixteen vases together under the name of the “Birdseed Workshop,” and determined the stylistic features of the group. Coldstream identified twenty-nine vases belonging to that workshop. In addition to these vases, a pitcher in the Saint Louis Art Museum, has the characteristics of an individual from the Birdseed Workshop named the Birdseed Painter. In this article, the St. Louis pitcher is evaluated to determine whether or not it could be the work of the Birdseed Painter.

Keywords: Birdseed Painter, Geometric Period, Pitcher, Ancient Greek Vase, Greek Painted Vase

Özet

Yunan vazo ressamlığında Geç Geometrik Dönem II evresinde resimli vazoların ve ressamların sayısı artmıştır. Bilim insanları tarafından bu döneme ait bir çok ressam tespit edilmiştir. Bu dönemde binden fazla vazo üzerinde “Kuş Dizisi Frizi” resmedilmiştir. Bu kuş dizilerinden bir grup, kendine özgü belirgin bir karakter sergiler. Cook bu gruptan, “Kuş ve Kuşyemi Atölyesi” olarak bahsetmiştir. Davison bu grubu “Kuş Yemi Atölyesi” adı altında toplamış, gruba ait on altı vazo tespit etmiş ve grubun stilistik özelliklerini belirlemiştir. Daha sonra Coldstream aruba ait yirmi dokuz eser belirlemiştir. Bu vazolara ek olarak, St. Louis Sanat Müzesi’nde bulunan bir pitcher Birdseed Ressamı’nın karakteristik özelliklerini göstermektedir. Bu makalede, bu pitcherin Birdseed Ressamı’na ait olup olmadığı tartışılmıştır.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Kuşyemi Ressamı, Geometrik Dönem, Sürahi, Antik Yunan Vazosu, Yunan Boyalı Seramiği

A. Introduction

Ancient Greek Geometric vase painting exhibits a slow development and adherence to strict rules. Since painted vases were often associated with the cult of the dead, the painters were bound by tradition and the variety of motifs was minimal. Vases had an average height and were probably used as grave gifts. As a result of commercial relations with Eastern civilizations in the first half of the 8th century BC, human and animal figures began to be used in vase decoration along with the geometric motifs. With the use of figures and individual styles, the workshops and painters began to be identified. During the Late Geometric I phase, Greek vase decoration reached its peak with the Dipylon Painter and the Hirschfeld Painter, and these two painters influenced painters who came after them. In the Late Geometric II phase, the number of painters and painted vases increased. Many painters and vases from this period have also been identified by scientists. The “Bird Row Frieze” is depicted in over a thousand vases from this period. One group has a distinct style of these bird figures. Cook mentioned this group as the “Bird and Birdseed Workshop,” and stated that the rows of birds on the vases belonging to this group had emerged with the Corinthian influence and continued to be used for a short time. Davison¹ grouped sixteen vases together under the name of the “Birdseed Workshop,” identified two different painters within that workshop, and determined the stylistic features of the group. Davison pointed out that this group belonged to a large and important workshop. Coldstream² identified a total of twenty-nine vases belonging to the Birdseed Workshop, with twelve of them decorated by an individual named the Birdseed Painter and the other seventeen by the workshop group. These vases include five amphorae (Boston 98.894; Erlangen 1458; London 1914.4131; Berlin 31046; Oxford 1914), one hydria (from Myrrhinous), three oinochoes (Hobart 31; Athens 18472; London 1977, 1207.8), ten skyphoi (Athens 13038; Munich 6220³; Kerameikos 788; Edinburgh L 364; Edinburgh L 363; Manchester Cook 1947, Fig. 5; London 1950.1109.1; Athens 15284; British School at Athens A 343; Thera II, Fig. 510), one krater (Munich 6234), three high-rimmed bowls (Leiden I.98/6.18; Leiden I.98/6.17; London 1977, 1207.26 = Oxford 1927.4447), and six pitchers (Hamburg 1919.363; Toronto C 201; New York 41.11.4; London 1977, 1211.3; Athens 18477;

¹ Davison 1961, 55-62, 72-84.

² Coldstream 1968, 67-70, Pl. 12. d, e, f.

³ Boardman 2016, 27, Fig. 73.

Athens 16022). In addition to those detected by Coldstream, the pitcher numbered 66.10 in the inventory of the Indiana University Art Museum, in the United States, belongs to the Birdseed Painter⁴. The Birdseed Painter decorated thirteen vases and only one small cup (skyphos), suggesting that the painter probably specialized in large vases. The other seventeen vases belong to the Birdseed Workshop.

In addition to these 30 vases, a pitcher in the Saint Louis Art Museum, has the same characteristics of the Birdseed Painter. The Inventory number of the Saint Louis pitcher is 172.1987 and it was purchased in 1987; its height is 45.6 cm. The purpose of this article is to evaluate this pitcher and determine whether or not it is, indeed, the work of the Birdseed Painter.

B. Decoration Features of the Birdseed Painter

The most important distinguishing feature of the Birdseed Painter is the bird rows fashioned using the silhouette technique. The characteristics of these birds include long beaks, arched necks, and bulbous heads. Their body is formed by a blob of paint with a distinct downward curve toward the tail. The legs start just below the breastbone and are long, thin, straight, and have no joints⁵. The birds are connected to each other by a series of dots starting below the neck of the bird in the back and extending to the back of the bird in front of it (Fig. 1a). In most of these vases, the birds are also connected to each other by a series of dots from their feet.

Motifs often used by the Birdseed Painter include the complicated/double meander (Fig. 1b), wolftooth (Fig. 1c), dotted lozenge row (Fig. 1d), simple meander (Fig. 1e), dotted tangential circle row (Fig. 1f), hatched triangle row (Fig. 1g), checkerboard (Fig. 1h), and floating chevron (Pl. 1i). Davison⁶ indicated that the complicated/double meander and wolftooth motifs were characteristic patterns of the Birdseed Painter. Coldstream⁷ identified two more artist-specific motifs: the plastic snake extending from the handle around part of the rim and the triglyph-metope system on the neck and middle of the body (Fig. 6a).

⁴ Langdon- Mastronarde 1977, 6-13.

⁵ Davison 1961, 56.

⁶ Davison 1961, 57.

⁷ Coldstream 1968, 68.

In addition to birds and geometric motifs, the Birdseed Painter depicted mourners⁸, horses⁹, and bulls which is the earliest example of such motifs in Greek vase painting¹⁰.

C. Decoration System of the Birdseed Painter's Pitchers

The neck, shoulder, and body of the pitchers were designed to be the main decoration areas. On the neck; a wolftooth motif or a checkerboard motif is displayed on the upper part of the neck, just below the rim. One or two main friezes are found in the middle of the neck. These main friezes consist of a meander motif or a bird row. The bird row is used on the shoulders of the Toronto, London, and Hamburg pitchers¹¹, while a hatched-triangular row is seen on the New York pitcher. On the body, there is a triglyph-metope system on the Toronto and New York pitchers and swastika, horse, and lozenge-star motifs are found inside the metopes. The lower part of the vase bodies are divided into thin friezes and filled with geometric motifs¹².

This system was also applied on other closed vases such as oinochoes, amphorae, and hydriai. On the lower part of the closed vases, there are wide bands of checkerboard motifs. All pitchers have a plastic snake figure at the junction of the handle and rim¹³.

D. St. Louis Pitcher and Discussion

Form: The St. Louis pitcher has a slightly widening neck, an ovoid body narrowing towards the base, and a low ring base (Fig. 2). The general structure of the vase is similar to the London, New York, and Toronto pitchers¹⁴. The plastic snake figure at the junction of the handle and lip in these pitchers is also found in the St. Louis pitcher. As Coldstream points out¹⁵, this snake figure is a defining feature of the Birdseed Workshop.

Decoration: The St. Louis pitcher has six friezes on the neck (Fig. 3). There is a wide checkerboard frieze at the top of the neck and a simple lozenge row just below it. There is a triglyph-metope system on the main decoration area of the neck with a swastika motif in the metopes. The zigzags between the arms of the swastika are similar to those on the Toronto pitcher¹⁶. The triglyph-metope system and the hatched vertical panels were executed in the same

⁸ Coldstream 1968, Pl. 12. d; Hood 1967, Pls. 31-32.

⁹ Davison 1961, Fig. 76.

¹⁰ Davison 1961, Fig. 80; Coldstream 1968, 68.

¹¹ In addition to the line of birds, there is also a line of grazing horses on the Hamburg pitcher.

¹² Davison 1961, Figs. 72-75.

¹³ Coldstream 1968, 68.

¹⁴ Davison 1961, Fig. 72 (Toronto C 201), Fig. 73 (New York 41.11.4), Fig. 75 (London 1977, 1211.3).

¹⁵ Coldstream 1968, 68.

¹⁶ Davison 1961, Fig. 72.

arrangement as on the Toronto¹⁷ and New York¹⁸ pitchers. There is a dotted cross-hatched lozenge motif below the main decoration belt. This motif was the creation of the Hirschfeld Painter¹⁹ but it was not favored much by the painters who came after him. After the Hirschfeld Painter, the dotted-center lozenge motif became very popular, and this motif is found on the body of the St. Louis pitcher.

There is a bird row on the lowest frieze of the neck. The birds here are depicted in a style that is completely different from that of the Birdseed Painter. The birds are drawn with their short beaks frequently touching and displaying extremely long, arched necks, virtually upright bodies, and one long leg (Fig. 3, lowest frieze). This type of bird figure is not found in any of the works by the Birdseed Painter and is unique to the Soldier-Bird Workshop, which was an early contemporary²⁰ (Fig. 4).²¹ In ancient times, potters in Attica were working in a neighborhood called Kerameikos and all painters and potters likely knew each other. Some notable painters, such as the Dipylon Painter and the Hirschfeld Painter, influenced their contemporaries and their successors, and their painting styles were passed down from generation to generation. Although the styles of these painters were sometimes directly imitated, some of the painters working during the same period helped each other or changed workshops. These bizarre birds on the neck of the St. Louis pitcher must have been made by a different workshop painter, most likely from the Soldier-Bird Workshop²².

On the upper part of the shoulder of the St. Louis pitcher (Fig. 5) is a checkerboard frieze frequently used by the Birdseed Painter. Under this frieze, there is a row of birds for which the artist is named (Fig. 5, lowest frieze). The birds here were drawn more meticulously and carefully, compared to the birds on other vases by the Birdseed Painter.

Below the bird frieze there is a dotted-lozenge row on the body. There is a triglyph-metope system in the middle of the body which is the widest part of vase. The metopes depict the swastika motif on the neck and the arrangement is the same as on the New York pitcher (Fig. 6a, St. Louis; Fig. 6b, New York). The lower body of the St. Louis pitcher also has the same decoration system as the New York pitcher (Fig. 7a, St. Louis; Pl. 7b, New York).

¹⁷ Davison 1961, Fig. 72.

¹⁸ Richter 1953, Pl. 15b; Davison 1961, Fig. 73.

¹⁹ Coldstream 1968, 43.

²⁰ Coldstream 1968, 64-65.

²¹ Soldier-Bird Painter, detail of Munich Pitcher, CVA Munich III, Pl. 114.1,2.

²² Compare Plates 4 (Soldier-Bird Workshop's birds) and 5 (The Birdseed Painter's birds).

E. Dating

Coldstream cites the working years of the Birdseed Painter as roughly the Late Geometric IIA phase (735-720 BC) and states that his earliest work is the Boston amphora²³. This amphora resembles the work of the Hirschfeld Painter with its meticulous and elaborate motifs and figures. Unlike other bird figures, the bodies of the birds on the Boston amphora are hatched, there is no line of dots connecting their feet, and their tails are noticeably drooping. The same type of bird figure is replicated in the metope on the New York pitcher²⁴. All bird figures on the other vases were fashioned using the silhouette technique. Coldstream also considered the New York pitcher among one of the early works of the Birdseed Painter²⁵.

Although the birds on the St. Louis pitcher were made using the silhouette technique, their meticulous workmanship and distinctive tail form resemble more closely the birds on the Boston amphora. In the late works of the Birdseed Painter (the London pitcher and London oinochoe)²⁶, the birds are more carelessly drawn and their bodies are elliptical in form. The dotted cross-hatched lozenge chain (Fig. 3) unique to the Hirschfeld Painter was used on the St. Louis pitcher. The St. Louis pitcher could be considered one of the early works of the Birdseed Painter because its birds resemble those on the Boston amphora, the dotted hatched-lozenge chain motif (from the Hirschfeld Painter) was used, and the decoration system resembles that of the New York pitcher.

F. Conclusion

The form, decoration system, and character of the figures and motifs of the St. Louis pitcher indicate that this work was decorated by the Birdseed Painter. The meticulous drawing of the birds on the vase, the influence of the Hirschfeld Painter, and its close resemblance to the New York pitcher suggest that this vase was possibly one of his early works. This pitcher was likely painted between the end of the Late Geometric Ib phase and the beginning of the Late Geometric IIA phase. The fact that the bird figures on the neck were made in a completely different style, indicates that a second painter was probably also working on this vase. Consequently, this vase could be the thirteenth work of the Birdseed Painter and the thirty-first vase of the Birdseed Workshop.

²³ Coldstream 1968, 67.

²⁴ Coldstream 1968, p. 69

²⁵ Coldstream has identified twenty-nine painter's vases and listed them all in chronological order. The New York pitcher ranks fourth in this order, Coldstream 1968, p. 67

²⁶ Davison 1961, Figs. 75,79

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Figure Captions

Fig. 1. Motifs often used by the Birdseed Painter.

Fig. 2. St. Louis pitcher.

Fig. 3. Neck decoration of the St. Louis pitcher.

Fig. 4. Bird figures of the Soldier-Bird Workshop.

Fig. 5. Shoulder decoration of the St. Louis pitcher.

Fig. 6.a. Trygliph-metop system of the St. Louis pitcher. b. Trygliph-metop system of the New York pitcher

Fig. 7.a. Lower body decoration of the St. Louis pitcher. b. Lower body decoration of the New York pitcher.

FIGURE

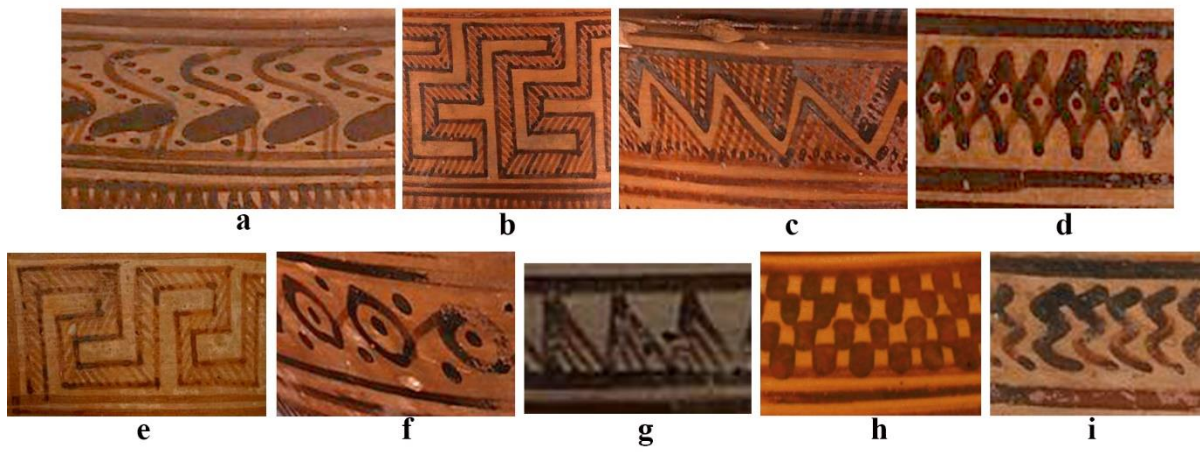


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

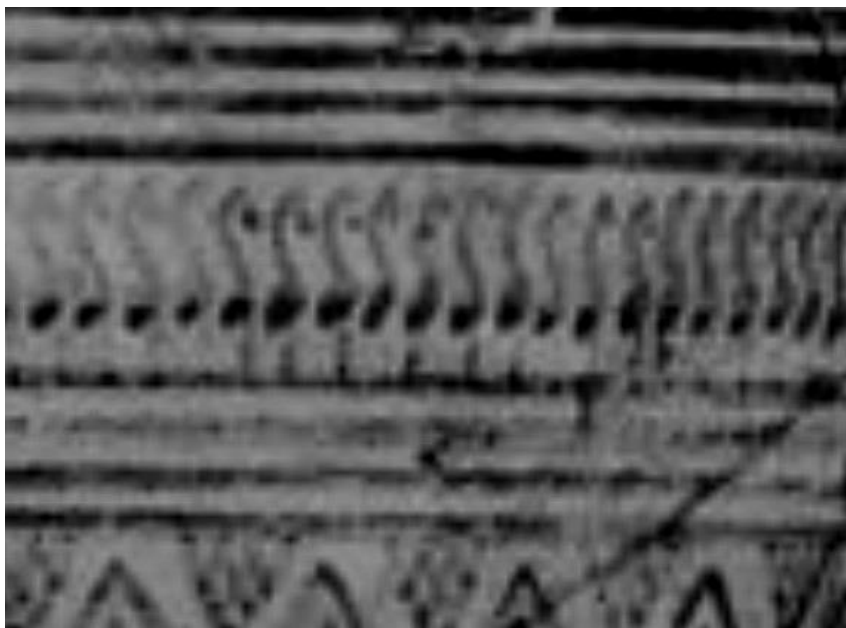


Fig. 4



Fig. 5



a



b

Fig. 6



a



b

Fig. 7