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CONTENTS

Forging Movement: The Strigil in Athenian Vase Painting Iconography*

Yael Young

Abstract: The transition from the black to the red-figure technique during the last quarter of the sixth century BCE is bound up with a radical change in the depiction of the human body. Suddenly we begin to see foreshortening, three quarter views, a variety of poses and postures, and a more vivid and realistic image of the body. The purpose of this article is to suggest that objects played a crucial role in this radical change, for it was supported, augmented, and sometimes even generated by the representation of humans engaged with objects. To bolster this claim and bring a leading example of an object playing this crucial role, the article focuses on the case of the strigil, an instrument with a sickle-shaped curved blunt blade, used for scraping off oil, sweat, and dirt after athletic exercise. From the time of the introduction of the strigil into Athenian red-figure vases in the late sixth century BCE, most probably by the painter Euthymides, the number of such depictions rapidly increased. It is apparent that, from the very beginning, the vase painters were interested in exploring the relationship between the strigil and the naked male body, as evidenced in the creation and use of the *apoxyomenos*, an iconographic motif in which the strigil interacts with the entire body and guides its movements. This iconography gave the vase painters the chance, and even the excuse, to represent postures and viewpoints hitherto unknown in vase painting. In these images, the strigil generates the movement and disciplines the body: body and strigil are entities existing in a reciprocal relationship. The motif of the *apoxyomenos* encapsulates the notion that the radical change in the depiction of the human body is entangled with the depiction of objects surrounding it. This notion becomes even more conspicuous when compared to two related iconographical motifs, namely oil rubbing and oil pouring: in these, objects play a minimal role, if any, and they remained marginal in athletic iconography.

Keywords: strigil, red figure vases, athletics, 'the Pioneers', iconography

INTRODUCTION

A truism in the discipline of Greek vase painting is that the transition from the black to the red-figure technique during the last quarter of the sixth century BCE is bound up with a radical change in the depiction of the human body. Every textbook devoted to Greek art in general, and to the art of vase painting in particular, addresses the issue. Suddenly, we begin to witness experiments with foreshortening, three-quarter views, and the rendering of anatomy and diverse poses: in short, a more vivid and 'realistic' image of the body.

The painters Phintias, Euphronios, and Euthymides, in whose works such changes first appear, were called 'the Pioneers'.[1] Writing on these three painters in a book published

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more than a century ago, Sir John Beazley noted that they 'are moved strongly and constantly by an impulse which is weaker and occasional in the others. That impulse is a deepened interest in the human frame and in human movement.' He also observed, that 'Both in Euphronios and in Euthymides the new curiosity about the body is accompanied by a desire to render more kinds of movements than before…'.[2] Every scholar dealing with this group, and with the transition from the black to the red-figure technique, has expressed essentially the same attitude to the issue. A recent observation has been made by Judith M. Barringer, remarking an 'intense interest in depicting details of human anatomy, exploring the effect of movement on the human figure, and rendering the human body in motion in two dimensions.'[3]

The purpose of this article is to suggest that playing a crucial role in this radical change were objects—that the representations of humans engaged with them served to support and augment, and sometimes even generate such a change. Central to this development were representations of athletes engaged with objects. These might include sports gear—such as the discus and the javelin—or other ancillary objects necessary for their craft, such as the strigil. This suggestion tallies with the current trend of 'new materialism', which questions the anthropocentric view presuming a clear hierarchy between humans and objects, and instead draws our attention to the power, vitality, and agency inherent in objects.[4] I will focus here specifically on the strigil (στλεγγίς) as a case study that supports my claim about the importance of objects in the rendering of the body in various postures; but, to further substantiate my argument, I will reference and contrast two related iconographic motifs in which objects are marginal: oil rubbing and oil pouring. The latter motifs never became as popular as oil scraping, perhaps due in part to the painters' preference for the strigil as a highly visible object that, through its scraping action, serves to clearly convey the movements of the human body.

THE STRIGIL (ΣΤΛΕΓΓΙΣ) AND ITS ICONOGRAPHY

The strigil is a personal instrument used for scraping off oil, sweat, and dirt—collectively referred to as the '*gloios*' (γλοῖος)—after athletic exercise or for bathing.[5] Exhibiting almost no apparent changes throughout its production period, it was usually made of base metals such as bronze and iron, and composed of a handle and a sickle-shaped curved blade.[6] Strigils appear throughout the Greek world in many archaeological sites, primarily as grave goods. The earliest specimen to be uncovered by archaeological excavation in

1 The literature dealing with the Pioneers group is vast. The following is a list of the most basic discussions: Boardman (1975), 29−55; Woodford (1986), 57−68; Kurtz (1992); Robertson (1992), 7−42; Keuls (1997), 296−99; Neer (2002), 32−65; Hurwit (2009), 278−81; Mannack (2012), 52−56; Spivey (2019), 46−75.

2 Beazley (1918), 27.

3 Barringer (2014), 171.

4 For example: Bielfeldt (2014), 7−8; Telò and Mueller (2018), 1−11; Gaifman and Platt (2018), 402−19.

5 For more on the *gloios*, see Kennell (2001), 128−33.

6 Dorigny (1908); Boardman (1971), 136; Sansone (1992), 122−31; Kotera-Feyer (1993), 140−41; Golden (2004), 160; Miller (2004), 15−16; Hurschmann (2006); Miller (2012), 218; Kyle (2014), 25.

Greece was found in a tomb at the Ialysos cemetery, Rhodes, and dates to the seventh century BCE.[7] However, the earliest certain visual representation of the strigil in Athenian iconography is much later, dating from 540–530 BCE.[8] In the tondo of a black-figure Little Master lip cup, a youth is shown standing with arms outstretched to either side.[9] Before him hang a strigil and two sponges, apparently a sign of his identity as an athlete. In addition to this representation, the Beazley Archive Pottery Database (=*BAPD*) lists only five representations of the strigil in the black-figure technique. All, however, are rather late (two of them are Panathenaic amphorae dating to the fourth century BCE) and in none is the strigil in actual usage.[10] This fact is rather surprising, as athletes are depicted in early black-figure vases: they portray athletes who are about to throw a discus[11] or javelin,[12] as well as boxers[13] and runners.[14] The absence of the strigil from scenes of athletic activity with multiple participants decorating black-figure vases is notable. Indeed, so marginal is the number of appearances in comparison to those in the red-figure technique (more than thirteen hundred listed in the *BAPD*) that we may say that the strigil was, for all intents and purposes, visually 'given birth to' by the earliest Athenian red-figure painters.

Several scholars have already discussed the iconography of the strigil. Generally speaking, the strigil is an (or perhaps the) emblematic sign of sports activity taking place at the gymnasium, with all the values linked with it, including homoerotic associations.[15] It was introduced into Athenian red-figure vases in the last decade of the sixth century BCE, most probably by the painter Euthymides in a scene decorating a psykter, now housed in Torino.[16] Both sides of the psykter bear his signature with his patronymic,

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7 Kotera-Feyer (1993), 81.

8 Perhaps an earlier example can be found in a courting scene decorating one leg of an unattributed black-figure Athenian tripod pyxis, now at Yale University Art Gallery (1913.122. *BAPD* 9439, https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/1714). In one of the earliest scholarly discussions of this vase and scene, Baur (1922, 83) claimed that the youth is holding both an aryballos suspended by a cord and a strigil. While Moser (1988, 82) followed this opinion in discussing the evolution of the *apoxyomenos* motif, it seems that other scholars do not accept it (Stansbury-O'Donnell 2006, 181; Matheson 2016, 55) and I am inclined to agree with them.

9 Rome, Musei Capitolini, 297. *BAPD* 13738.

10 The *BAPD* numbers are: 7700; 6109; 10639; 332237; 208223.

11 Example: A black-figure Siana cup attributed to the Heidelberg painter (Paris, Cabinet des Medailles, 314. *BAPD* 300584).

12 Example: A black-figure Little Master cup (Richmond, VA., Museum of Fine Arts, 60.20. *BAPD* 5198, website: https://vmfa.museum/piction/6027262-69444105/).

13 Example: A black-figure Little Master cup (London, Market. *BAPD* 7147).

14 Example: A black-figure Siana cup (Berlin, Schloss Charlottenburg, 3755. *BAPD* 177).

15 Kotera-Feyer (1993), 6–7; Kotera-Feyer (1998), 107–30; Scanlon (2002), 236–45; Fischer (2007), 155–59; Lear and Cantarella (2010), 46–48, 76–78, 91–94; Lear (2014), 250–52; Neils (2014), 83–87. On the evolution of sports scenes in general, see the recent discussions by Miller (2004), 11–19; Filser (2017), 278–397; Osborne (2018), 53–86; Oakley (2020), 131–66 (with a reading list).

16 Torino, Museo di Antichità, 4123. *BAPD* 200140. From Vulci, Italy. Photo: Hoppin (1917), Pls. IV−V.

making it one of four vases bearing that signature.[17] One side, which has attracted the lion's share of the scholarly attention, is decorated with a wrestling scene in which the participants are identified by inscription as Theseus and Klytos. But it is the other side that is of more interest for our purpose. It is decorated with a pair of named naked athletes turning to the left, holding strigils in their right hands (Fig. 1): on the right is Phayllos, a famous athlete from Kroton,[18] while on the left—it may be assumed, though some letters are missing—is Orthagoras. Phayllos removes the oil from his left hand, Orthagoras removes the oil from his right leg. The presence of picks in the lower section of the scene clearly points to a gymnastic context.

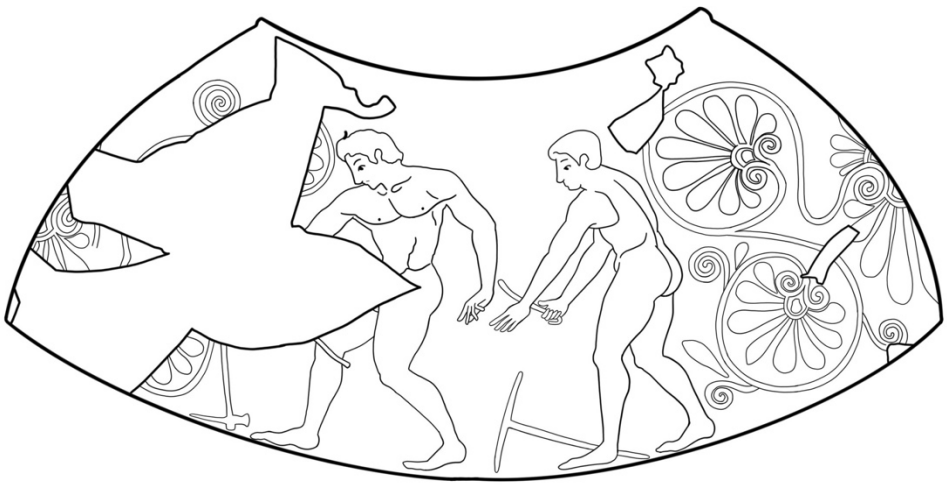

Fig. 1. *Red-figure psykter attributed to Euthymides, 510−500 BCE. Museo di Antichità, 4123, Torino. Illustration: Efrat Young-Ron.*

This scene by Euthymides represents (most probably) not only the first appearance of the strigil in red-figure vase painting but also the earliest appearance of the type known as the *apoxyomenos* ('scraper', from ἀποξύρω = ἀποξυράω = to have oneself clean), meaning an athlete caught in the act of scraping his body with a strigil.[19] Note that the painter does

17 Hurwit (2015), 95; Neils (2017), 26. See also the early publications of Hoppin (1915; 1917, 11–24). Cf. Williams (2005), 273.

18 On Phayllos, see Miller (2004), 68; Williams (2005), 273; Miller (2012), 59–60, Nos. 60a–60f; Filser (2017), 372–74; Neils (2017), 33–34.

19 For the iconography of the *apoxyomenos*, see Benndorf (1906), 193–204; Moser (1988), 52–110; Moreno (1995), 321–25; Weber (1996), 38–39; Rausa (1998), 196–205. The literary sources mentioning the strigil in general, and the practice of using it to scrape in particular, are scant, and most of them are rather late. See Miller (2012), 20–21, Nos. 14–18. A comparable case, showcasing that this device was also used effectively in sculptural relief, is the statue base housed in the Acropolis Museum, Athens (3176, 5460, 2635; webpage: https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/base-dedication-depicting-athletes). Composed of three fragments, it features on three sides several athletes. On the longest and most well-preserved side, six athletes are shown in the midst of a cleansing action by means of strigils. The base is dated to ca. 350 BCE (for a detailed discussion of the base, see Rausa 1998, 191–

not restrict himself here to one pose but presents the athletes in two different poses.[20] From the very beginning of the iconography of the *apoxyomenos*, Euthymides grasped the potential of the reciprocal relationship between body and object in creating movement, and he expressed this insight on his psykter. Unsurprisingly, Euthymides signed his pioneering iconographical invention with his patronymic, 'son of Pollias', likely referring to a prominent Athenian sculptor.[21] Although there exist ample examples of women depicted with strigils, as this instrument was used by both sexes, women are shown holding the object but not utilising it;[22] alternatively, the kit containing the strigil is merely depicted in the background of the scene.[23] For this reason, it can be argued that the iconography of the *apoxyomenos*, the active scraper, is exclusively masculine, thus making it a gendered iconography.

96; Kosmopoulou (2002), 208–9, no. 42, Fig. 63). This type was also popular in free-standing sculpture, as attested by the famous (lost) statue by Lysippos, and the preserved Roman bronze statues from Ephesos (Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Antikensammlung VI 3168. Webpage: https://www.khm.at/en/objectdb/detail/67188/) and Croatia (The Museum of Apoxyomenos, Mali Lošinj, Croatia. Website: https://www.muzejapoksiomena.hr/en). Each of the two bronze statues probably presents a slightly different type of athlete cleaning his strigil with his finger (Cambi 2006, 22–23), an activity discussed below. These artworks are revolutionary in developing three-dimensionality through the athlete's actions using a strigil; thus the latter continued to be used as a vehicle for innovating posing.

20 The scraping activity is not, of course, the only one that allows artists to show the (athletic) body in various postures. Two Archaic bases housed in the Acropolis Museum, Athens (3476, 3477. Kaltsas (2002), 66–69, nos. 95, 96; Kosmopoulou (2002), 166–71, nos. 9, 10), roughly contemporary to Euthymides, show athletes engaged in various activities such as ball games, and they are seen in various postures, including a rear view.

21 Neils (2017), 26.

22 For example on a red-figure amphora attributed to the Pig painter and housed in Palermo (Museo Archeologico Regionale, 42619. *BAPD* 206469). This is the view of Kotera-Feyer (1993, 6); however, not all scholars are in agreement. One case in dispute is a column crater from Rutigliano, Italy, housed in Bari (Museo Archeologico Provinciale, 8693. *BAPD* 202270), bearing a scene with three figures bathing around a laver, with the leftmost one scraping his or her back with a strigil. While it is rather clear from the context of the discussion that Kotera-Feyer (1993, 6) considers this figure to be a youth, the scene is interpreted by most others as three women bathing (Bérard 1989, 89−92, Fig. 127; Petersen 1997, 54−55, Fig. 8; Dierichs 2008, 21, Fig 13; Vout 2012, 244, Fig. 4; Vout 2015, 616, Fig. 27.9). In C. Vout's earlier discussion of this scene (2012), she argues that while we may mistake this figure who is seen from the back for a youth, the shape of the hair indicates that this is a woman; in her later publication (2015), she adds that the figure's physique is very athletic and that perhaps this is a way to present the muscularity of women who practice sport. U. Kreilinger (2007, 160) mentions this krater alongside several other vases depicting women with a strigil. J. Neils (2012, 156−57) suggests that these scenes of women with strigils at the laver, seen decorating column kraters, are the Athenian attempt to depict Spartan female athletes. However, in all the other examples, the women do not actually use the strigil, they simply hold it. If we accept the view that all three figures are women, then we have here perhaps the only known representation of a woman scraping her body.

23 For example on a red-figure pelike attributed to the Syleus painter, today in St. Petersburg (State Hermitage Museum, ST1591. *BAPD* 202520).

From this point on, the number of such depictions rapidly increases. One such example is a neck-amphora attributed to the Kleophrades Painter, most likely a pupil of Euthymides, dating to the end of the sixth century, today housed in Vienna.[24] On one side we see a naked athlete, a wreath crowning his head, standing frontally, his shoulders and head slightly bent. With the strigil in his right hand he removes the oil from his torso. On the other side of the amphora, a boxer ties the *himantes* (ἱμάντες = protective leather straps) to his palm. While these two youths mirror each other in their poses, their iconography marks the conclusion and the start of sporting activity respectively. Another depiction—on an Attic aryballos in the Archaeological Museum of Naples—is a representative manifestation of diverse physical movements resulting from the changing interplay between body and strigil.[25] It is attributed to Kleomelos and dates to ca. 500 BCE (Figs. 2a−2c). Images of six athletes encircle the body of the aryballos, each holding a strigil in his right or left hand. They remove the dusty oil from various parts of their bodies: the torso, the thigh, the shin, the back, and the left arm. One of them even seems to remove the *gloios* from the strigil with his fingers.[26] Previous discussion of the vase has emphasised the diversity of the movements:[27] the handling of the strigil, along with the need to scrape the entire body, necessitated depictions of athletes in motion as they adopted diverse and complex poses. The fact that this series of *apoxyomenoi* encircles an Attic aryballos further tightens the connection between the physical vase and the image upon it: the substance kept inside the aryballos marks the beginning of the activity, the scene depicts its ending.

Fig. 2a

24 Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, IV 3723. *BAPD* 201795. Website: https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/56710/. Photo: Vanhove (1992), 351–52, No. 219.

25 Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, RC177. *BAPD* 200996. From Cumae, Italy.

26 The positioning of this strigil adjacent to the pelvis (Fig. 2c) frames it as a substitute for a phallus; this might be a kind of visual pun.

27 Gàbrici (1913–1914), 514–15; Moreno (1995), 321.

Fig. 2b

Fig. 2c

Fig. 2a–2c. *Red-figure aryballos attributed to Kleomelos, 510–500 BCE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 86055, Naples. © Archivio dell'arte, Pedicini fotografi.*

From the very beginning, the motif of the strigil was also embedded in multi-figured scenes, where the figures are engaged in various activities. This is the case for a psykter housed in the Getty Museum (Fig. 3).[28] The psykter, attributed to Smikros and dating to ca. 510 BCE,[29] is decorated with four pairs of named courting males, along with two other named youths who are engaged in other activities: Euthydikos, who is folding his himation, and Ambrosios, who is scraping off oil. Seen from the back, Ambrosios raises his right arm, while with the left he scrapes the oil from his left thigh. The position is an awkward one, so much so that it is even taken to be a conscious parody of the 'new drawing' of the Pioneers.[30] This image of an athlete is a superb exemplification of the potential range and diversity of possible (or perhaps impossible?) poses that may apply when a painter depicts the scraping action: since the strigil may touch any part of the body, the painter is not constricted to a single pose.

Fig. 3. *Red-figure psykter attributed to Smikros, 510−500 BCE. The J. Paul Getty Museum, 82.AE.53., Malibu. © Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.*

28 Malibu, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 82.AE.53. *BAPD* 30685. Website: https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103VAB

29 Recently, the attribution of the psykter to Smikros was questioned by Guy Hedreen who, in various publications has advanced the idea that Smikros is an alter ego—a 'fictitious artistic persona'—of Euphronios (Hedreen 2014, 49–55; 2016, 42–50). This radical assumption has been contested by various scholars (for example: Neils 2018; Williams 2019, 179).

30 Robertson (1992), 26–27; Spivey (2019), 48.

Slightly later on, the motif of the *apoxyomenos* is found once again embedded in a multi-figured scene. This cup is attributed to Onesimos, dating to ca. 490 BCE and today housed in the Louvre Museum.[31] On one side, two youths scrape themselves next to a laver. The one to the right stretches his right arm forward, holding a strigil. The one to the left is seen from the back as he scrapes the back of his right thigh. The image of a third figure is partially damaged, but it can be assumed that he is lifting a hydria to fill the laver with water. The other side depicts an equivalent scene, this time taking place around a well (Fig. 4). Two youths are seen from the back. The one to the right holds the strigil in his right hand and scrapes his left upper arm, while the one to the left adopts a posture closely mirroring the first as he scrapes his right upper arm using the strigil in his left hand. In the centre, another youth is shown from the back, lifting a hydria and pulling a rope. The tondo of the cup presents a related action where a frontal-facing youth squeezes a sponge with both palms into a low basin, a *podaniter*. On this cup, whose entire iconography Onesimos has devoted to the subject of bathing, the strigil plays a central role in the depiction of the various poses of the body while performing the scraping action.

Fig. 4. *Red-figure cup attributed to Onesimos, ca. 490 BCE. Musée du Louvre, Paris, G291. © 1995 GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.*

We conclude this section with a red-figure chous dating from ca. 440 BCE, attributed to the Achilles painter and housed today in Basel (Fig. 5).[32] Two young athletes flank a small child, most likely a slave, who handles an aryballos.[33] The one to the right is quite

31 Paris, Musée du Louvre, G291. *BAPD* 203286. Website: https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010270171 Photos: Filser (2017), 322–23, Abb. 178a–c.

32 Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, BS485. *BAPD* 275428.

33 Oakley (2013), 158, Fig. 7.7.

standard—he cleans his left forearm with a strigil. However, the one to the left presents a rather new iconography of human−object relations: he cleans his strigil with his thumb, which makes him not strictly an *apoxyomenos* but rather a strigil cleaner.

Fig. 5. *Red-figure chous attributed to the Achilles painter, ca. 440 BCE. Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, Basel, BS485. © ArchaiOptix. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International.*

OIL RUBBING AND OIL POURING: RELATED MOTIFS SERVING AS CONTRAST

Now we come to the contrasting cases we mentioned above. For a better understanding of the place of the object—for our purpose, the strigil—within the image, and, in particular, of the notion that Athenian vase painters were highly interested in action involving a direct engagement with designated objects, it is valuable to compare the *apoxyomenos* iconography with two other related (but non-object focused) iconographies connected to athletic activity in general and oil in particular: oil rubbing and oil pouring. Both appear, like oil scraping, in Athenian vase painting at the end of the sixth century; but, despite the similar beginnings, their evolution ultimately ends up differing from that of the *apoxyomenos*.

We start with oil rubbing. The Heidelberg Painter is responsible for the introduction of the visual motif of athletes oiling themselves, a subject seemingly totally absent from the work of earlier painters. The earliest example is a cup housed in Amsterdam, dating to ca. 560 BCE.[34] On the outer side of the cup a group of men are assembled. Watched by some onlookers, in the centre stands a naked youth, a band on his head, turning to the right. He bends over and raises his left leg while touching it with both outstretched hands, apparently oiling himself. In front of him stands another youth dressed in a short chiton, holding in his right hand an aryballos suspended from a cord. A few further depictions of oil rubbing are attributed to this painter; generally speaking, however, the motif of oil rubbing was not embraced by other black-figure painters. Nor was it a popular choice for red-figure vase depictions. One good example, however, is seen in a scene decorating the tondo of a cup signed by the potter Kachrylion and attributed to the painter of Louvre G38 (Fig. 6).[35] A standing youth is seen from the back, looking to the left; with his right hand he seems to be rubbing his upper left arm with oil.[36] The painter has twisted the body of the athlete to depict the rubbing action. This image highlights the hidden potential for the exploration of movement inherent in that particular action—and simultaneously serves to emphasise the fact that the vase painters largely do not choose to utilise this potential when it comes to scenes of oil rubbing.

Fig. 6. *Red-figure cup, signed by the potter Kachrylion and attributed to the painter of Louvre G38. Musée du Louvre, Paris, G38. Illustration: Efrat Young-Ron.*

34 Amsterdam, Allard Pierson, University of Amsterdam, APM 10,000. *BAPD* 12934. From Taranto, Italy?. Brijder (1991), No. 330, Pls. 105−6. Photo: Young (2020), 11, Figs. 2, 3.

35 Paris, Musée du Louvre, G38. *BAPD* 200971.

36 Hartwig (1893, 24−26) and Hoppin (1919, 166) refer to him as an *apoxyomenos*.

As mentioned, the iconography of oil pouring also appears in Athenian vase painting at the end of the sixth century, when, for the first time, athletes are represented as pouring oil into their palms.[37] One of the leading painters in the shaping of this novel iconography is Oltos, who is credited with two such examples, both decorating cups. On the outer side of the cup from Providence we see a nude athlete standing in full profile facing right, sporting a wreath on his head.[38] He uses his right hand to tilt an aryballos, catching the oil that spills out of it in his left palm. The same iconography decorates an Athenian red-figure alabastron, signed by Hilinos as potter and Psiax as painter (Fig. 7).[39] The alabastron is dated to ca. 520 BCE. One side shows a naked athlete standing next to a stool piled with cloth and facing to the right. With his right hand he tilts an aryballos, pouring oil from it into his open left palm.

Fig. 7. *Red-figure alabastron, signed by Hilinos as potter and Psiax as painter, ca. 520 BCE. Badisches Landesmuseum, B120, Karlsruhe. © ArchaiOptix. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International.*

37 For a recent discussion on this iconography, see Young (2020), 12−13.

38 Providence (RI), Rhode Island School of Design, 25.076. *BAPD* 200379. Website: https://risdmuseum.org/art-design/collection/drinking-cup-kylix-25076?return=%2Fart-design%2Fcollection%3Fsearch_api_fulltext%3Doltos%26field_type%3DAll%26op%3D

39 Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum, B120. *BAPD* 200024. From Athens, Greece.

Both motifs (rubbing and pouring) arguably appear together on the famous calyx krater attributed to Euphronios, housed in Berlin.[40] The vase is dated to ca. 510 BCE. Both sides of the vase are decorated with gymnasium scenes taking place in the dressing room, the *apodyterion*.[41] In the centre of one side we see an athlete labelled Egesias pouring oil from an aryballos into his left palm. The oil is clearly visible, rendered as a zigzag line. To the left of the composition is another youth, seen from the back, who balances himself by means of a cane and a hand on a young slave's head. He raises his left leg, while the slave holds the ankle and foot, though precisely for what purpose has been the subject of much debate. A few scholars have suggested that the slave is massaging the ankle, perhaps with oil.[42] Under such an interpretation, this scene too exemplifies the potential hidden in the oiling action—again, notably, a potential left largely unfulfilled.

The point here is that painters had a wide variety of oiling postures at their disposal, should they choose to use them. However, both oil rubbing and oil pouring, though they do not disappear entirely from Athenian iconography, never became a popular motif, unlike the *apoxyomenos*.[43] For our purpose, oil rubbing is of greater interest (and proves our claim even more convincingly), since oil rubbing and oil scraping are essentially mirror reflexive actions: the purpose of the former is to oil the entire body prior to the gymnastic exercise, while the purpose of the latter is to remove the *gloios* from the entire body after that exercise. By depicting both, vase painters could maximise the variety of movements and foreshortenings and bestow a more realistic rendering of the body. Expression of the two actions is apparently found (depending on interpretation) on a 430 BCE cup known as the *Apodyterion* cup, attributed to the Codrus painter, now in London.[44] The tondo shows a couple of naked youths, whose action—either rubbing[45] or scraping oil[46]—is not entirely clear (Fig. 8a). One places the palm of his right hand on his upper left arm; the other stands frontally while raising his left hand and bending it toward his back. Both might arguably be taken to be rubbing oil. One of the outer sides displays a group of five youths cleaning themselves before taking a bath (Fig. 8b). The youth to the left scrapes his left arm with the strigil held in his right hand, watched as he does so by a second youth. In the centre, a third youth removes the *gloios* from his strigil. Next to him stands a fourth youth shown from the back, who scrapes his right shoulder blade with a strigil. A fifth youth stands, holding a strigil. The two active scrapers shown here mirror the poses of the two youths depicted in the tondo. If indeed the youths in the tondo are

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40 Berlin, Antikensammlung, F2180. *BAPD* 200063. From Capua, Italy. Website: https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/686435/attischer-kelchkrater-athleten-bei-der-vorbereitung-zum-wettkampf?language=de&question=F+2180&limit=15&sort=relevance&controls=none&collectionKey=ANT*&objIdx=0 Photo: Vanhove (1992), 61, ill. 5

41 Gardiner (1930), 476−478; Vanhove (1992), 61; Filser (2017), 339.

42 Yalouris (1977), 119, Fig. 48; Filser (2017), 694, note 215. By contrast, Hoppin (1917, 69) and Gardiner (1930, 478) suggest that the action is thorn pulling.

43 The *BAPD* lists only six scenes labelled 'athlete pouring oil into his hand', while the subject of oil rubbing is even rarer.

44 London, The British Museum, E83. *BAPD* 217228. From Vulci, Italy. Website: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1869-0205-3.

45 Gardiner (1930, 80−81, Fig. 47) identifies the subject as 'youths massaging themselves'.

46 Avramidou (2011), 62, 89, No. 24, where the subject is identified as 'athletes, one with strigil'.

rubbing oil on themselves, we may say that they show a complementary image. If they are scraping, however, their act is merely a repetition of scraping postures.

Fig. 8a.

Fig. 8b.

Figs. 8a–8b. *Red-figure cup attributed to the Codrus painter, 510–500 BCE. The British Museum, E83, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

Thus, it may be postulated that the rubbing action did not disappear altogether; nevertheless, unlike oil scraping, it is not a very frequent image among red-figure painters. What might explain this contrast between two ostensibly similar actions? I propose, in line with my argument here, that this might be because oil scraping is conducted with a

designated object, while oil rubbing is not. Oil does have substance and is indeed rendered in pouring scenes as a zigzag line, as noted above; but in rubbing scenes, it becomes 'invisible', a transparent coat. The overwhelming partiality evinced by vase painters for depicting the *apoxyomenos* lies perhaps in the usage of a mediating object, an unequivocal visual sign when performing the action.

True, one object does make a regular appearance in scenes of oil rubbing and oil pouring—the aryballos, which is an important object in itself. Its very ubiquity in vase paintings supports the point that painters depicted objects as signifiers of meaning in the visual scene. However, the aryballos falls short of the strigil in one crucial aspect: since it is mostly held not in the hand but rather by means of a cord, and since its sole function is to contain a liquid, it does not lend itself to the wide range of poses that so captivated the red-figure painters. Where the aryballos failed to satisfy the artistic desire to depict the body in new ways, the strigil succeeded.

CONCLUSION

In ending, it is important to make two points. Firstly, as was said at the outset, the strigil is just one case study. The Pioneers, along with their contemporaries and followers, are responsible for creating new iconographic motifs, many of which involve objects and the actions these generate in the course of human engagement with them. Moreover, objects that were previously depicted by black-figure painters are shown in red-figure painting in a wide range of types of engagement with the body, thus creating new poses.[47] Secondly, I do not wish to claim that objects were the only catalyst for the pictorial changes ensuing in the red-figure technique—the general characteristics of the technique were certainly crucial to this process, too. With this, it seems to me that the role of objects is significant nonetheless. Without action, there is no movement, and many, perhaps even most, actions involve the presence of objects. To ignore them is to ignore a seminal building block in the image, one that undoubtedly contributed greatly to the radical changes mentioned above.

In examining the strigil as it exemplifies this role played by objects, it becomes apparent that, from the very beginning, the vase painters were interested in exploring the relationship between the strigil and the naked male body. In inventing the iconographic motif of the *apoxyomenos*, in which the strigil interacts with the entire body and guides its movements, they gave themselves the opportunity—and even the excuse—to represent postures and angles of view hitherto unknown in vase painting. In these images, the strigil generates the movement and also disciplines the body into various postures that will enable successful scraping. Body and strigil are entities bearing a reciprocal relationship. Thus, the motif of the *apoxyomenos* encapsulates the notion that the radical change in the depiction of the human body in Athenian vase painting is entangled with the depiction of objects in its vicinity.

The Open University of Israel

47 The iconography of the discobolus, for example, has been thoroughly discussed by Hara Thliveri (2013, 49−56), where she presents a similar development. Interestingly, one of the painters she mentions is Kleomolos, discussed above.

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