

Ancient Pottery on the Web

Professor Donna Kurtz, *Beazley Archivist and Professor of Classical Art at the University of Oxford*, describes the digitisation of *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, the oldest research project of the *Union Académique Internationale*.

THE *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* project was adopted by the Union Académique Internationale (UAI) in 1922 on the proposal of Edmund Pottier (figure 1), curator of antiquities in the Louvre. The first volume appeared in 1923, and the first British volume in 1925. By now more than 300 have been published by over 100 museums in 26 different countries, offering a unique resource for classics, archaeology, and the history of art. Not surprisingly, the majority are by now out of print, and the International Committee looked for ways of making such important reference material readily available again. The Beazley Archive in Oxford was invited to propose a programme of placing the whole material on line. The three-year project began in 2001, funded in part by the Getty Grant Program, with contributions from national academies in Britain, Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland and Italy. The British Academy awarded a three-year Larger Research Grant for the project in 2001.

The Beazley Archive had established a reputation since 1979 for electronic documentation of Athenian black- and red-figure pottery with a database that now has more than 101,000 records and 122,000 images. This was accepted as a British Academy Research Project in 1982. The Archive's electronic assets are now in excess of five

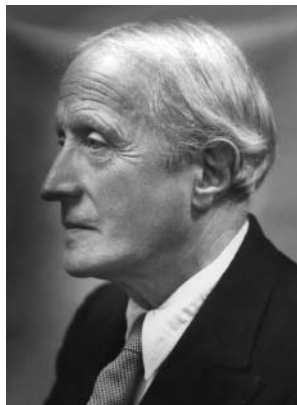
terabytes. All except the uncompressed images are available on www.beazley.ox.ac.uk, which receives more than 200,000 hits per day.

In autumn 2004 approximately 100,000 illustrations and data from more than 250 out-of-print fascicules of CVA were made available on the the web, for scholars and the general public, free of charge. The dedicated web site, www.cvaonline.org (figure 5), is a mirror of the project on www.beazley.ox.ac.uk. This new enterprise realises for the twenty-first century ideals for the scholarly presentation of archaeological material first expressed almost one hundred years ago. The foundation of the UAI in 1919 had offered an ideal opportunity, but there was also a French national precedent from the eighteenth century, in works such as Montfaucon's *L'Antiquité expliquée* (from 1719) and the Comte de Caylus' *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques et romaines* (1752). When Pottier presented his proposal to the UAI six countries attended – England, Belgium, Denmark, France, Holland and Italy. His plan of work was clear: each museum was responsible for its own publication; each fascicule might have 300 objects and each should be photographed. The material would come from Asia, Africa and Europe. Undecorated pottery should have minimal illustration, even one example

to represent many; the finer decorated should have many. The plan of publication was to follow that used by the Egypt Exploration Fund, and the short texts were to follow a carefully defined rubric.

J.D. Beazley (figure 2), who would become Lincoln Professor of Classical Archaeology and Art at Oxford in 1925, objected to the inclusion of Proto-Elamite pottery (figure 3) in the first volume – one of Pottier's chief interests – and to the complicated rubrics, cropping of photographs, and restorations. The pre-historian V. Gordon Childe praised the inclusion of Proto-Elamite, but deplored the exclusion of German scholars. The German contribution to CVA, now one of the most distinguished in the series, began in 1938.

A world war did not halt publication, but it did affect the ability of scholars to discuss the project. In 1956, when they met in Lyons, they took the decision to focus the series on Greek (figure 4) and related pottery, contrary to the wishes of the founder. This was a direct result of the prominence of Beazley's method for the study of one large group of ancient pottery. He had assigned tens of thousands of Athenian black- and red-figure vases (c. 625–300 BC) to many hundreds of painters and groups. This achievement had



Left to right

1. Edmond Pottier (1855–1934), curator in the Louvre and founder of CVA. Daguerreotype by Manuel Brothers, after P. Rouet, *Approaches to the Study of Attic Vases* (Oxford, 2001), pl. 21.

2. Sir John Beazley (1885–1970), Lincoln Professor of Classical Archaeology and Art, Oxford (1925–1956). Photograph by Cecil Beaton in the Beazley Archive.

3. Proto-Elamite beaker (h. 20.3cm., c. 3500 BC) given by the Louvre (on behalf of Pottier) to the Ashmolean Museum in 1921 on permanent loan. Photograph courtesy of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.

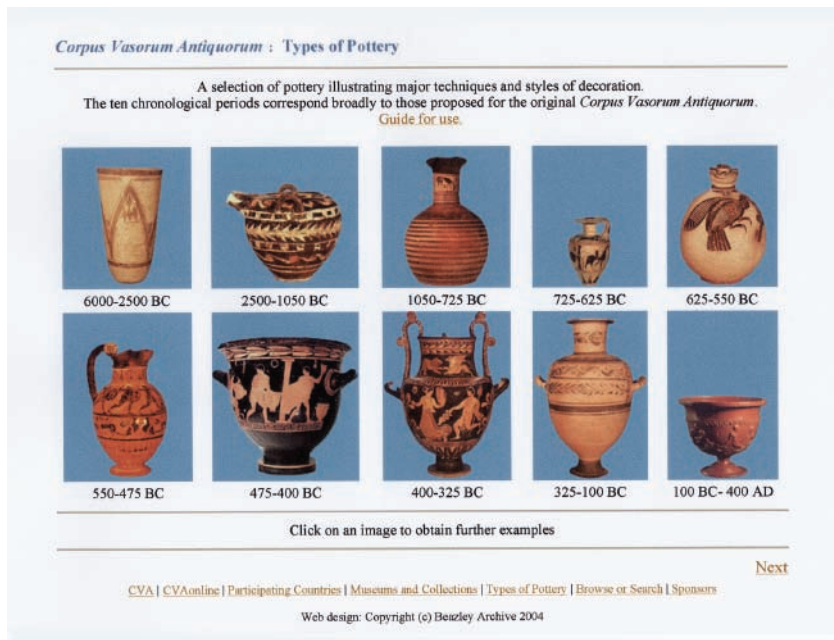




4. Athenian red-figure vase (h. 35cm., c.460 BC) in the Ashmolean Museum (G 287/V 526) with a scene of men making and decorating pottery. Photograph courtesy of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.

a profound effect on his contemporaries. Artists' names (although not those of vase-painters) had been recorded in ancient texts, and from the mid-nineteenth century formed the basis of 'an archaeology of style' used by scholars of classical sculpture. This emphasis on the individual also affected studies in the history of art by the end of the century. The prestige of classical archaeology, established as a discipline before the history of art, even in Germany, was enormous.

Over the past two hundred years the classical antiquities that have been examined most extensively, beside sculpture and coinage, is Greek painted pottery. Its associations with fine art and connoisseurship have often been misunderstood and misrepresented. Placing it, as we have, on a website with prehistoric and late antique pottery, allows users to interpret material as they choose. The electronic CVA (figures 5–8) is, therefore, a research tool for prehistorians, classicists, and historians of art. They can browse page by page or search by country, museum, ware, etc. in five languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish). The CVA database has also been merged with the Archive's twenty-five year old pottery database. This means that the Athenian pottery can be searched in all its fields. Other types of pottery have basic cataloguing information (collection, type, shape), and scholars with datasets about them can link their data to the website, following the Beazley Archive's example. Each contributor's name and copyright will appear on web pages with his data. This is a service for scholars, potentially an on-line database of ancient pottery on the lines envisaged by Pottier. The site also offers services to museums. A database of their material has been created which they may adapt for their collection, if they wish. They may also access their own material in the CVA database held in Oxford, to make additions and corrections, of text and image, through a protected password access system.



Centre: 5. CVAonline Home Page. Design and copyright, Beazley Archive.

Left: 6. CVAonline Types of Pottery – an image-driven search of major types of pottery that can be found in *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*. Design and copyright, Beazley Archive. S. CVAonline Home Page. Design and copyright, Beazley Archive.

Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum : Types of Pottery

6000-2500 BC

<p>Egyptian Predynastic beaker from Naqada. H. 25.3cm. Desert sheep and African goats in pink on a red ground About 4500-4000 BC Ashmolean Museum 1895.482 Gift of Flinders Petrie</p>		Egypt
<p>Proto-Elamite beaker from Susa. H. 20.3 cm. Geometric patterns in brown on a light ground. About 3500 BC Ashmolean Museum. Loan From Musée du Louvre, thanks to Edmond Pottier</p>		East
<p>Aegean spherical pyxis from the Cycladic island of Melos. H. 10.2 cm. Incised herringbone patterns. Ashmolean Museum AE 435 Gift of Arthur Evans</p>		Aegean
<p>European (Otomani, Hungary) one-handed drinking cup with ridges on body. H. 10 cm. to handle. About 2500 BC Ashmolean Museum 1951.499a. From the excavations of Gordon Childie</p>		Europe





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Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum : Types of Pottery

475-400 BC

<p>Athenian red-figure bell-crater. H. 35 cm. Potters and painters at work. About 460 BC. Ashmolean Museum G287 (V 526)</p>		Athens
<p>Etruscan red-figure stamnos with inter-twined sea-creatures as handles. Ganymede holding a lyre is confronted by Zeus behind a rock; Eros flies above. H. 36.9 cm. About 400-350 BC (Painter of the Oxford Ganymede) Ashmolean Museum 1917.54 Gift of Edward Perry Warren Lucanian red-figure hydria. H.24.9 cm. Pisticci Painter. 5th century BC. Ashmolean Museum 1879.169 (V 263) Henderson bequest</p>	 	Etruria South Italy
<p>Boeotian (Cabrion) black-figure skyphos (drinking cup) from Thebes. H. 15.4 cm. Odysseus at sea. His name and that of the North Wind (Boreas) are painted in the field. Late 5th century BC Ashmolean Museum G 249 (V 262)</p>		Boeotia

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7. CVAonline *Types of Pottery*, second page for the period c. 6000–2500 BC. Design and copyright, Beazley Archive

8. CVAonline *Types of Pottery*, second page for the period c. 475–400 BC. Design and copyright, Beazley Archive

This electronic CVA is an on-going research project that will be maintained by the Beazley Archive, and financial support for this service should be provided by those national academies sponsoring CVA. As recent and new volumes go out of print they will be put on the web, and unless national academies or designated publishing houses inform us to the contrary, volumes will be deemed to be out of print ten years from the date of publication. While the traditional paper volumes continue to be published with the emphasis on Greek and related pottery, the electronic *corpus* on the web can develop into a collaborative research network, with institutes or individual scholars adding their own databases – a vision the project's

founder, Edmond Pottier, would surely have welcomed.

Since few libraries have a complete set of *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* an electronic version on the web is a major contribution to scholarship. It also offers an opportunity to make this resource available to a wider public through image-driven search facilities (figures 6–8) linked to other programs on the Beazley Archive website and to its illustrated dictionary. CVA is, then, only the latest of the many projects undertaken by the Beazley Archive. The web site www.beazley.ox.ac.uk now also embraces classical sculpture, iconography, engraved gems and cameos, and the reception of classical art.

The *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* has been supported by the British Academy since its inception in the 1920s. The first fascicule published by the Academy appeared in 1954, and the British arm of the CVA was formally adopted as an Academy Research Project in 1962. The CVA has also received support through a number of research grants from the British Academy. The Beazley Archive Pottery database became an Academy Research Project in 1982.

The British Academy publishes many of the British fascicules in the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*. Details can be found on the web site at www.britac.ac.uk/pubs/