

How far do you think that the Kleophrades Painter's use of red figure gave him an advantage over the Amasis Painter who worked in black figure?

The full black figure style emerged by the mid-7th century and the red figure technique emerged around 530 BC. The Amasis Painter worked in the black figure style, using a red background and black figures, and the Kleophrades Painter in the red style, using a black background and red figures. The differences in techniques afforded differences in quality between the two painters. It is true to say that the Kleophrades Painter's works are superior to that of the Amasis Painter's, however, whilst the advantage granted through the use of the red figure technique is evident, it is not the only reason for the Kleophrades Painter's superiority. The black figure technique, as noted above, used a red background and black figures. Details were cut (incised) into the black slip, and the vase was then fired. The Amasis painter mainly portrayed real life on vases, as opposed to mythological scenes, which are often undramatic and difficult to interpret, due to the lack of written inscriptions. His works show a trend towards a central figure/ object around which the scene is organised. There is little or no physical contact between the figures and little overlapping. Gesture is the most important feature of the Amasis Painter's work. The red figure technique which the Kleophrades Painter used was an Athenian invention and was effectively the reverse of black figure, i.e. red on black, achieved by painting the background rather than the figures, and painting details with a brush, as opposed to incising. The Kleophrades painter was one of the great painters of the early 5th century and painted mainly mythological scenes with large figures that overlapped and interacted greatly.

Red figure offered many advantages over the black figure style. There was greater freedom as a brush was used instead of an incisor. This meant that the thickness of line could vary and flow, allowing realism in facial features, musculature and drapery. This combined with the nearer flesh tone of red, created figures which were far more life-like. Secondly, the contrast between red on black as opposed to black on red, meant that the figures stood out more than in the traditional style. Also, the dimensions of the figures could now be more realistically portrayed. In black figure, characters were flat and two-dimensional, with frontal and profile body parts placed adjacent to each other. Red figure used more three-dimensional figures in three-quarter views, again adding to realism. Lastly, the characteristic frontal eye used by the black figure painters such as the Amasis Painter became more almond shaped and less pronounced. Although still placed frontally, it became far less unrealistic.

This example of the Kleophrades Painter's work - the fall of Troy (fig. 1) - demonstrates the advantages that red figure had over the black figure technique and is arguably the zenith of his pieces. Firstly, there is huge variation between the tones and

thickness of lines. Musculature, as seen on Ajax's sword arm is delicately finished in thin, light brushstrokes, whilst items such as his sword are painted darkly and thickly enough to be raised from the surface of the vase. This broad range of line thicknesses allows a far more detailed scene, without it being overpowering or crowded and busy, as some lines recede into the background and others thrust themselves forward towards the viewer. This was impossible in the black figure style, as shown in figure 2, an amphora depicting an after-hunt scene attributed to the Amasis painter. In this example, there is little differentiation in line breadth and darkness, as can be seen in the depiction of musculature such as the calves and pectorals. The thickness of the outline is the same as that used for muscle definition. The composition of the fall of Troy is complicated, the artist placing figures so the scene is busy, yet not crammed with detail to look cramped. There is an apparent movement throughout the work, the figures interacting with each other as can be seen with Cassandra's pleading to Ajax, one hand outstretched. She has been placed carefully by the Kleophrades Painter, clinging to Athene's legs for safety, with her body in a mainly frontal view, bare, showing a hint of eroticism, yet also narrating the story of the next scene, Cassandra's rape and perhaps Ajax's death at the hand of Athene, hence the spear aimed at his head. The Kleophrades Painter is far more dynamic than the Amasis Painter, and this work is a prime example of that, with figures strewn about the scene as they would in reality. The skill in portraying action and movement held by the Kleophrades Painter is far superior to that of the Amasis Painter whose figures are quite static and whose focus is less on realism and more on detail of pattern etc.

The work portrays immense pathos. The scene is a fall of a city, the end of an era for Troy. The piece shows this in a number of ways. Firstly, inanimate objects seem subject to the suffering, the palm tree in the background behind Priam bends, its foliage mournfully stretching towards the ground. Underneath the palm to the left, the women of Troy cower pathetically under the statue of Athene as the naked Cassandra is taken away by Ajax to be raped. On the right of the palm in a near-symmetry, Priam cradles his head in his hands, seated on an altar, with one of his children, sprawled dead in his lap. Neoptolomus stands above the old man, his mouth curled up at the edges, ready to bring down his sword on the terrified king. This concentration of three powerful images brings home the feelings in this scene. Fear is at a paramount, both in the women and Priam, whilst the two warriors that complete the symmetry show no sense of moral, killing the defenceless at the altar. The dead strewn about the floor are another indicator to the poignancy in this scene. There is a definite sense of loss in this scene, and this is partially brought about by the individuality and realism of each warrior. One lies on his back, his head raised to the heavens in a profilier manner, whilst another, more daring attempt has the warrior, his face turned to the floor and the body turned to face the viewer, with the left leg twisted at a three-quarter angle. Also in this scene, another advance of technique is witnessed. A warrior crouched under the blow of a large wooden paddle behind Neoptolomus holds his shield at an angle to the viewer. The interior of the shield can clearly be viewed and the curve of the shield is obvious, although the ellipse is not smooth, and has a kink where the painter has joined the two lines demonstrating a lack of practice/ understanding of the perspective of circles at angles. The woman who is bringing the blow down on the warrior has her head down-turned, looking at him. Whilst

this is not completely believable of the pose, it is a good attempt at its conveyance and it, again, is another step forward. The level of detail and effort placed into the vase is also evident. In portraying the aged King Priam, the Kleophrades Painter has not been content with merely adding a beard as in the Amasis Painter's fig.2, but has created a balding man, with a stubbly receding hairline and stubbly beard area.

However, there were areas in which black figure was the more effective and successful technique. Figure 3 demonstrates many of the areas in which black figure super-seeded red figure. It depicts two maenads dancing together for their patron god, Dionysus, who holds a wine cup. The females hold thursi and offerings of a hare and a fawn. Firstly, the old style allowed sexes to be easily contrasted, as the skin of females were left the colour of the pot or were whited out, making up for any lacking of the artist to distinguish between male and female anatomy etc. and making the scene easier to understand. This could not be done in red figure. Also, as shown beautifully in figure 3, is the superiority of black figure in the depiction of pattern and ornamental detail, especially that of the maenad's elaborate tunics. The incisor had an evident advantage over the brush in this, as it was easier to scrape out an intricate pattern than it was to paint it with a brush.

Another advantage black figure had over red was the ability to use colour. As can be seen from figure 2, there is a very powerful use of colour, especially red, in conjunction with white, which is used to highlight the central images in the scene, i.e. the hare and to bring out clothing. Red figure artists such as the Kleophrades Painter did not make use of colours, and if this scene was redone in red figure, it would undoubtedly lose much of its character. An additional disadvantage to the lack of colour in red figure is that there is difficulty in displaying depth. With a coloured background, such as that seen in figure 1, the figures extend from the background due to their stark contrast i.e. black on yellow, yet on a black background with red figures, the figures are less apparent and almost recede into the background.

There were other problems with the red figure style. As can be seen from figure 5, another piece by the Kleophrades Painter, depicting a warrior leaving home, the figures can look thin and emaciated. This was due to the artists painting the relief lines around the figure too thickly and when the background was blacked in, the relief would disappear, leaving a thinner figure than originally intended. Of note in this piece is the drapery, especially that of the woman on the right. There were also problems in creating depth.

Also, individual lines do not vary in thickness as they run, unlike those in figure 1, another limitation of the incisor. This restricted artists such as the Amasis Painter, from creating a realistic character. With a brush, differences in line thickness allow flow throughout the piece, for example, drapery in the 7th century would appear heavy and doughy as seen in figure 3 on Dionysus' tunic which appears very solid and immovable, much like the drapery of early Kore statues. Replacing the incisor with the brush allowed greater freedom of line and movement, causing characters to become more realistic, for example, the Kleophrades Painter's (attributed by Robertson) Sosias cup, where Achilles

binds Patroklos' wounds (fig. 4). The drapery of the garment beneath Achilles' armour is extremely light and is also transparent, adding to its breezy quality. The cloth also follows the shape of Achilles' legs, and looks as it would if it were really worn, with gravity pulling it down at the back where it hangs loose and lifted at the front by his upper leg being raised, allowing the cloth to drape and unfurl between these two points. The same is for Patroklos' garment, especially noticeable on his shield arm, where it has rucked up, following the lean of the body to the right, whilst the garment over the sword arm falls away gently. Also of note are the eyes. There is a definite move away from the traditional diamond frontal eye, here shown as an eye it would be if in profile in real life, although somewhat enlarged. Figure 4, is demonstrative of another advantage that red had over black. The character Patroklos is quite obviously not at right angles to the viewer as in pieces such as figure 2, where the figures are all directly profile, rather at a three-quarter view, allowing us to see the profile of his left leg and head/neck but also the frontal view of his torso and right leg. Also, the piece looks far more 3-dimensional, real and solid than black figure pieces such as figure 2. The work has a sense of the dynamic, it is possible to believe that this is a snapshot of real-life, Achilles wrapping a bandage around Patroklos, however, with the earlier style, the figures are much more static, as if in a set pose.

To understand the advantages red figure had over black, closer comparison of similar works by the Kleophrades Painter and the Amasis Painter reveal the superiority of the new. Take figure 5, a piece by the Kleophrades Painter depicting a warrior leaving home and figure 2, by the Amasis Painter depicting the handing over of a hare. Both rely heavily on gesture with little physical contact or overlapping of the stiff, static figures. The superiority of the new style can clearly be seen when two examples relate so closely. The drapery in the older piece looks extremely heavy, clinging to the skin, as if wet. There is no free-flow or floating in the depiction of the drapes and it is very blocky. The newer piece in comparison has none of these faults, the drapery is far more realistic, the cloth beneath the warrior's armour is transparent so that the warrior's legs can be seen from beneath the cloth, removing the feeling of blockiness. Also, the drapery has folds and curls in it, making the cloth seem light and airy (aided by the transparency) in the case of the warrior and although heavier on the female to the right, this illustrates the ability of artists to now differentiate between density of materials. The positioning of the figures is quite similar, two characters facing inwards on both vases and both involve dogs, however, as can be seen from the newer piece, the Kleophrades Painter has been more ambitious in his depiction of the dog, attempting to draw it from behind with its head up, whilst in the older style, the Amasis painter has merely painted a profile view of the beast. As can be seen from this piece, the new style, even when portraying similar scenes, was far superior to the black figure style. On the other side of the vase that figure 5 comes from, is a very different scene. Although on the same vase, figure 7 is far more dynamic and realistic. The work relies less heavily on gesture and is far freer and more intimate. Musculature on the men is still patterned, however there is physical contact between the central male and the female on the right with both men appearing shocked at the action the female is undertaking. Also, the female and male cross-over at various points, such as the foot and the hand, different to figure 5 where each character is a separate entity. The difference can be seen as a progression, the Amasis Painter perhaps

being the Kleophrades Painter's father. It is nice to think that this vase is a transitional piece, where the Kleophrades Painter pays homage to his father and then on the flip-side supersedes him and takes his work one step further.

Further comparisons between the two artists work can be made between figure 3 by the Amasis painter showing two maenads dancing for Dionysus and figure 6 by the Kleophrades Painter, depicting Dionysus and maenads and satyrs. Here, the difference in styles, in both character positioning and composition of the whole piece is evident, the latter being far more dynamic and effective in depicting the manicism of the scene, one of the maenads in particular with her head to the sky and her arms pushed out, holding a large thyrus. The tilt of the body forwards and the position of the feet also suggests a further action of the figure. The drapery too in the scenes contrasts starkly. In figure 3, the drapery is coloured with beautiful patterns being scratched into the black slip, although little feeling of movement is given as the garments seem stiff and doughy and cling to the dancers, yet in figure 6, the garment has moved on, the shape of the leg being transferred through the dress, unlike that seen in figure 2 by the Amasis Painter. However, the drapery in figure 6 is far lighter and airy. Parts of the anatomy are revealed from underneath the garment, increasing the sense of transparency and flow of the cloth. Folds are less patterned in this example, becoming more life-like, less static and doughy. The two maenads in figure 3 are draped around each other, although anatomically incorrect, the intertwining works well, the figures appearing to converge. In figure 6, the opposite is true. The figures are separate, as if in a procession, with little physical contact and figures moving toward Dionysus. The attention to detail is great in the Amasis Painter's work, the patterning on the drapes made easier with the artist's ability to incise. The maenads also wear subtle items of jewelry, bracelets, necklaces, earrings and vine tiaras. However, figure 3 has an absence of trinkets apart from the tiaras. The thyrsi are different in the scenes as well, in figure 3, they are merely vines whilst some in figure 6 resemble huge artichokes on branches and others the more classic form as seen in fig. 3. The eyes in figure 3 are archaically shaped, profilier and diamond shaped, whilst those in figure 6 are more realistic and almond-like. The sex of the figures is easily distinguishable in both, although for different reasons. The skin of the maenads is whited out whilst Dionysus is left in the original black slip in figure 3 whilst in figure 6, the anatomical detail picks out the males and females, breasts are visible from beneath the cloth. The god himself in figure 3 holds his left arm up in a theatrical fashion, one of the Amasis Painter's traits being gesture. The beard and hair of the god is, again, scratched into the black slip, as are the wavy patterns on his robes. The arms are done well in all the figures, although the fingers of Dionysus' left hand are abnormally elongated. In figure 6, the hair and beard are painted on. Dionysus holds a kantharos here too but also a thyrus and he has twisted his head and torso to look behind him whilst in figure 3, both the god and maenads are purely profilier.

Figure 8 can also be compared with figure 3 and figure 6. As in 6, it depicts a group of three maenads and a satyr with Dionysus. The poses in this piece are innovative. The maenads dance around with their arms held out and legs flailing as if spinning wildly. This depiction, whilst not anatomically accurate is extremely effective in conveying the manic nature of the dance, the maenads appearing in their own world.

Whilst the drapery looks as if it would on other vases by Kleophrades, it is more transparent, revealing far more of the leg and the right-most dancers have fawn skins draped on them, as in figures 3 and 6, demonstrating Dionysus and his followers' power over nature. Unusually, one of the maenads faces the viewer straight on, so that the face can be seen from the front rather than in profile and although not well represented, it does show innovation. The other females are twisted with their legs and head in profile but their upper torso turned toward the viewer. Dionysus holds his typical objects, the kantharos and thyrus, his pose not very adventurous, although there is a turn of the head in relation to the torso which is facing the viewer. The manic dancing of the maenads is somewhat countered by the serene pose of the satyr who lolls on the ground, supported by two cushions, playing the music. His tail whisks out over the border, as does the toe of the maenad with her head raised in figure 6 and the helmet and spear of the warrior in figure 5, suggesting that the Kleophrades Painter is playing with the work space he has created. The hair of the maenads is very straggly and unkempt, accompanying the wild twists and twirls of the bodies. Dionysus himself has short hair in this depiction, unlike that in figure 3 and 6 yet his beard is typical, although his moustache is unusually thin.

However, whilst it is true that the Kleophrades Painter's work is superior to the Amasis Painter's and that this is undoubtedly aided immensely by his use of red figure, there are additional reasons for the former's strength over the latter's that do not concern the difference in style. Firstly, the content of the works are different. The Amasis Painter's works are mainly of real life scenes, whilst the Kleophrades Painter's works depict myths and legends. Here, there is obvious scope for the pieces to be more entertaining and enthralling, as seen in figure 1, the fall of Troy, with action filling the whole piece as opposed to figure 2, where little is happening, action being merely hinted at subtly with gesture, with no real physical interaction between the parties, except for the handing over of the hare and apparent conversation. Also, the ability of the artists, again seen in figure 1, to add pathos and hidden messages to the viewer should not be overlooked. Whilst red figure enabled the artist to depict the scene more realistically, and this adds to the overall effect, the artist himself is the creator of feeling in scenes such as the fall of Troy, making links with the Persian wars and the sense of human loss involved in war.

Thus, it can be said that the Kleophrades Painter's use of red figure gave him an immense advantage over the Amasis Painter, however, other factors do come into play when comparing the two. Also, the advantages that black figure held over the red figure, for example the effectiveness and ease of creating ornamental decoration, and the disadvantages of using red figure, such as depiction of depth should not be underestimated.