

Classical Art Research Centre

2022 International Workshop

Generously supported by Jean-David Cahn and Tony Michaels



Beazley for the 21st Century

Oxford, date to be confirmed in 2022

2020 was the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Professor Sir John Beazley (1885-1970) and the establishment of his personal archive as a research resource at Oxford. For sixty years Beazley devoted himself almost single-mindedly to the study of ancient Athenian pottery and the artists who decorated it between the 6th and 4th centuries BC. Beazley's connoisseurial method involved the closely analysis of individual craftsmen's styles in order to attribute the pots and their figural paintings to particular (usually anonymous) artists, and to hypothesize relationship between those artists as they collaborated, copied, and learned from each other, generation by generation. In the course of his career, Beazley attributed more than 30,000 black-figure and red-figure pots to more than 1,000 artists or groupings of artists, recording his conclusions in published lists which remain the foundation of modern ceramic studies.

A physical legacy of Beazley's work is his huge archive of notes and photographs, preserved today in Oxford's Classical Art Research Centre, which grew out of it. With around 100,000 photographs of vase-paintings it is the world's largest photo archive of Greek ceramics. Since the 1980s the Beazley Archive Pottery Database (BAPD) has been developed out of the Archive. With more than 120,000 records it is the online major resource for the international study of ancient Greek pottery. In CARC's annual workshop (postponed from 2020 because of the covid pandemic) we mark the half century since Beazley's death and the creation of the Beazley Archive as a public resource, by asking which new insights and methods his discoveries and the extraordinary apparatus of his research are able to generate.

In the past, Beazley's attributions and his narrow stylistic focus have often been criticized, as similar methods in other periods of art history have been. Scepticism has more often been directed at the limitations of the exercise and its unintended consequences, than the validity of the method itself. Beazley's attributions have commanded surprisingly wide respect, even among those who doubt the benefits. As a result of his research and work by others following his method, we have vast body of archaeological and historical data. But have we done more than scratch its surface in exploiting its potential for explaining the antiquity?

This workshop addresses the potential value of Beazley's legacy and his method for the next fifty years of ancient world studies – not just ceramic research or even Greek art history, but the history and archaeology of the ancient Greek world broadly defined. At the heart of our discussion is the recognition that this academic inheritance embodies something almost unique in the history of ancient art: a conspectus of an entire craft tradition through three centuries at the level of the individual. The workshop therefore asks what the combination of breadth and fine granularity in the Beazleyan method offers for the understanding of ancient culture and society as much as for art, production, and trade.