During the late Archaic and Classical periods, Athens was a metropolis seeking to expand its hegemonic control over the Greek world and was in constant conflict with others. While this tumultuous history is well-known, it is not often connected with Athenian vase-painting and its popularity in domestic and foreign markets; in fact, the political activity of Athens is intensely tangled with changes in the marketing of Athenian figure-painted pottery. During the fifth century BCE, women are increasingly prominent in Athenian vase-painting and the types of scenes in which they appear expands. These inventive scene types include representations of food preparation and serving, agricultural work, wool-working, and childcare, all of which were simple chores that were previously considered too ordinary to be the regular spotlight of figural decoration. This lecture proposes that these changes may denote an expanded marketability of vases to female viewers as a greater share of the market was influenced by women, either directly or indirectly, and successful artists carefully crafted targeted advertisements on their wares to attract that group. As targeted imagery, the vase-paintings give perceptible recognition to the increased valuation of women’s work and lives at a time when their roles in Athenian society were essential for the continued success of the city-state. I advocate for a revitalization of how we look at Athenian vase-painting using digital humanities and of how we consider targeted advertising in the ancient world.

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