A simple aid for pottery drawing

David Frankel & Rudy Frank



Figure 1. *Cathy Carigiet drawing an Early Cypriot Bronze Age jug, Larnaca District Museum, 2009. Inset: the traced outline of the vessel.*

While new technologies increasingly provide more sophisticated methods of measuring and illustrating artefacts there is still no adequate replacement for traditional pottery drawings. The visual documentation of shape and form retains a key place in publication and comparative research. Individual illustrators use a variety of tools and techniques to mark out the profiles of pottery — often combining the skills of a contortionist and a juggler to simultaneously manage set-square, ruler, pencil and the vessel itself. In this brief note we describe a simple, effective tool which has proved fast, efficient and accurate in preparing outline pencil drawings of large assemblages of medium-sized vessels and ground-stone tools, with a considerable saving of time and effort (Figures 1 & 2).

The basic tool is a thin rod, mounted vertically at the end of a short arm extending from a flat base (Figures 3 & 4). A propelling or clutch pencil lead set into the lower end of the rod using a spring mounting ensures constant pressure on the paper as the tool is moved (on its smooth base resting on the drawing surface, see Figures 1 & 2) around the object being drawn, with the higher end of the rod touching its maximum dimension. Even with no compensating offset, the traced line is less than 1mm different from the true outline, depending on the diameter of rod, mounting and lead. This is well within the tolerance or quality control expected of profiles measured by other methods.

In our experience the most efficient approach is to bed the artefact snugly onto a small bean-bag filled with brown lentils. In this way the artefact can be aligned in the correct (normally horizontal) plane and placed appropriately on the drawing paper. Lentil-bags are also, of course, generally convenient rests for round-based vessels or ungainly items for photography or in other circumstances. Calipers and other tools can then be used to measure the vessel wall, base thickness and other features of shape or decoration and these measurements can be added to the basic drawing.

The devices illustrated in Figures 1–3 were constructed using a variety of found objects of the kind cluttering many a handyman's shed. With some ingenuity and creativity similar devices of different sizes or making use of alternative components could readily be put together, making a valuable addition to the illustrator's toolkit.

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Figure 2. *Wei Ming tracing the outline of a quern, Cyprus Museum, 2011.*

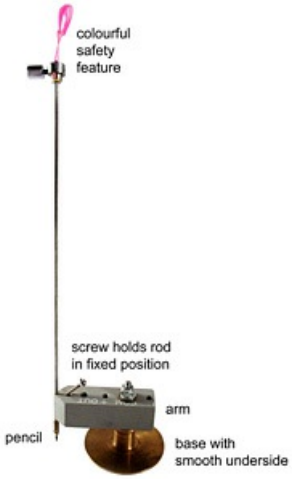


Figure 3. *A device made of a variety of recycled items.*

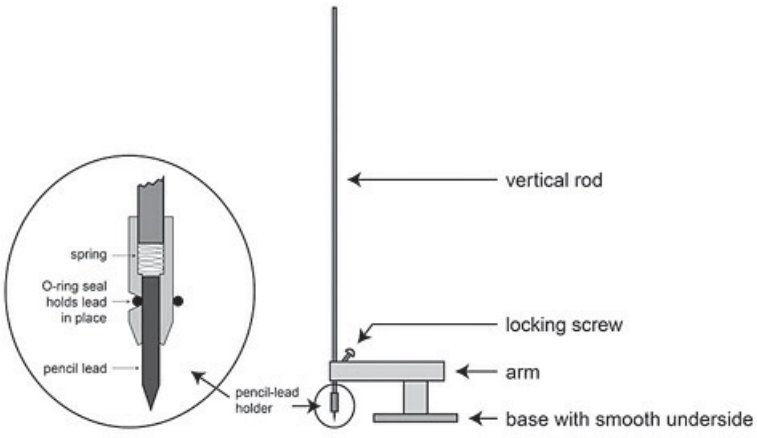


Figure 4. *Schematic diagram of the drawing aid.*

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