

## BOOK REVIEW

*Komast Dancers in Archaic Greek Art*. By Tyler Jo SMITH. Oxford Monographs on Classical Archaeology. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xxx + 357. Hardcover, £92.00/\$120.00. ISBN 978-0-19-957865-8.

The playful and dancing image of the Komast figure is a frequent theme in Greek vase painting. It is clear that a re-evaluation of the relevant material is required, given the relative antiquity of many of the current publications which attempt to analyze their iconography.<sup>1</sup> Smith aims to conduct a comprehensive study of the Komast in selected regions of the Greek world with the purpose of achieving an updated and revised interpretation of the material. The vases are not considered merely from an art historical perspective, and literary sources and other relevant archaeological evidence are incorporated as a supplement to the main discussion.

The introduction presents an overview of the identification and spread of the Komast through the Greek world. Chapters are divided by region and their material is assessed under three main categories: dress and other attributes; poses and gestures; and contexts. The analysis of the Komast begins with the Corinthian evidence in Chapter 2; Smith refers frequently to the earlier research conducted by Seeberg (and Payne), and believes that it is unnecessary to update and revise these conclusions.<sup>2</sup> Observations concerning the origins of the style are presented, though Smith notes that many of the theories are largely conjectural.

Chapters 3 and 4 summarize the Athenian evidence, dividing it chronologically. In the first period three groups of the early sixth-century BC ceramics (the Komast and Tyrrhenian groups and the Siana cups) are all presented individually and the distinctions and attributes relevant to each collection are analyzed. The second period concerns the Athenian material following the decline of the Corin-

<sup>1</sup> For main studies on the Komast, see Adolf Greifenhagen, *Eine attische schwarzfigurige Vasengattung und die Darstellung des Komos im VI. Jahrhundert* (Königsberg, 1929); Axel Seeberg, *Corinthian Komos Vases* (London, 1971). Other volumes also address the Komast from more specialized perspectives.

<sup>2</sup> See Axel Seeberg, *Corinthian Komos Vases* (London, 1971); Humfry Payne, *Necrocorinthia: A Study of Corinthian Art in the Archaic Period* (Oxford, 1931).

thian Komast in the later sixth century BC. Again discussion concentrates on a few key painters and groups, and highlights the break in Komast traditions, with new clothing forms, dances and contexts featuring prominently.

Other non-ceramic material is introduced in Chapter 5, illustrating the Laconian tradition of adopting styles and motifs from different regions before applying them to a variety of different objects. Chapter 6 summarizes the Boeotian use of the Komast and highlights the humor and debased nature of Komos scenes from this region. Smith notes the significant degree of originality in the Boeotian representations, in both the form of the figures and the vessels themselves. This originality and independence can also be seen in the East Greek wares (Chapter 7) which retained their own local traditions. As with the Laconian material, depictions of Komasts in many different fabrics are noted. The chapter summarizes the sometimes limited evidence by subdividing by production centre (Chian, Fikellura, Clazomenian and other related Black Figure). The penultimate chapter details the extremely rare evidence from the Western Greek sites. No uniform models are seen and evidence for local influence, primarily Etruscan, is strong. Again the vases are considered by production areas (Etruscan, Sicilian, Caretan, Campanian, Chalcidian).

Chapter 9 offers the conclusion that Komos scenes in the Greek world show some familiar iconographic patterns. However, a degree of independence and originality in each of the Komast-producing areas persists. The basic model is modified by local traditions and motifs to suit their specific markets.

Smith approaches her study with the aim of analyzing a broad range of Greek ceramics (and other artifacts) to determine their variations in the depiction of Komast dancers. This is not, however, an attempt to dismiss or dismantle earlier theories but merely to consider the evidence from alternative perspectives. This volume follows earlier conventions of considering the ceramics as discrete examples, separated into distinct hands and groups.

Smith writes well and engages the reader in what can be a relatively prosaic subject matter. Each chapter is clearly constructed, and comparisons and observations are incorporated into the main discussion. Supplementary tables of the statistical analysis are included at the end of the text, though sadly these do not include the summaries of the Corinthian vases. Those regions omitted from the study due to the scarcity of evidence, notably Euboea and Northern Greece, are briefly mentioned in passing in the introduction. The text is well illustrated, though these are primarily restricted to plates at the end of the volume, which

does hinder use of the text when one wishes to consult the appropriate image whilst reading.

Smith's study offers an important contribution to the interpretation of the Komast and their place in the corpus of Greek vases. The wide range of material assessed, and the concise and logical manner of interpretation permits the reader to draw his or her own conclusions on the nature and function of the vases, whilst offering a clear understanding of the Komast figures and their many variations.

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