

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Codrus Painter: Iconography and Reception of Athenian Vases in the Age of Pericles.* By AMALIA AVRAMIDOU. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. Pp. xiii + 237. Hardcover, \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-299-24780-5.

The Codrus Painter (fl. c. 440–420 BC) takes his name from one of the 106 painted vessels, mostly kylikes, assigned to his hand or to that of one of his circle. The vase paintings are less noteworthy for their technical skill than for their often unusual subject matter, which, together with their mostly non-Attic provenance (when known), makes them remarkable. Avramidou addresses all these topics—style, subject, and provenance—in this volume derived from her doctoral dissertation. Like most dissertations, this is a book for specialists—graduate students and scholars. This monograph devoted to a single vase painter follows a long tradition although there has been markedly less of this type of study in recent years. Avramidou’s text offers a model of its kind.

The text begins with a review of the history of the “creation” or the “recognition” of the Codrus Painter and his oeuvre and the establishment of a chronology of his works. In this (perhaps overly) detailed treatment, every step in the process is articulated as one scholar after another recognized one set of works by the same hand, then refined the group. Avramidou then takes up precisely this issue, establishing the oeuvre, as—in true Beazley spirit—she offers a meticulous study and definition of the painter’s style and that of painters similar to him (“Near the Codrus Painter”). The author may be a fan of John Beazley, but to her credit she is not shy about challenging some of his attributions, as well as those made by other notable scholars. There follows a chronological ordering of the painter’s output; changes over time in shape, composition, and subject matter; and a comparison of the products of the Codrus Painter to that his contemporaries—the Eretria Painter, Aison, the Meidias Painter, and the workshop of Polygnotos—with regard to subjects, shapes, markets. The subsequent consideration of subjects is thorough, considering literary versions of mythological subjects, earlier and contemporary visual examples, changes in iconography, provenance, social and historical context, as well as the impact of current political events, drama and other visual media, such as public sculpture and wall painting. Avramidou seeks

meaning from a unified reading of all images on any given vase, which is successful in most cases. Finally, the author devotes an entire chapter to the leitmotif throughout the text, the relationship between the Codrus Painter and the “Etruscan market.”

This last subject has become an overriding concern of scholars working on vase painting iconography and especially iconology in the last few decades. How did all those Athenian vases end up in Etruscan graves? Were they made for Attic “consumption” or solely for export to the Etruscan “market” and therefore for Etruscan tastes? Vase shape and subject matter are key matters in this debate. Avramidou ties the Codrus Painter’s choice of subject matter to current Athenian events so, for example, warriors’ departures are painted because of the frequency and familiarity of this event in contemporary Athenian life. Accordingly, such images served as models and exhortations for the Athenians as they prepared for war. Elsewhere, she explains the Codrus Painter’s choice of mythological themes as having connections with current politics: the appearance of Medea and Aigeus on the exterior of the “Codrus cup” (32; pl. 1c) refers to tension between Athens and Corinth prior to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. Likewise, the presentation of Aias to his father Telamon on another cup refers to Athens’ appropriation of Aias “as a figure proving the legitimacy of the Athenian claim over Salamis,” where Telamon had settled after his exile from Aigina (41–2). Such political readings of Attic vase paintings are problematic because of the provenance of the vessels (usually *not* Athens) and, more critically, the complexity of the interpretations and erudition required to decipher them. What is the chain of thinking required of an ancient viewer to get from Telamon’s reception of the baby Aias to Aias as a vehicle to justify Athens’ political claims to the island where his father was resettled? Some of Avramidou’s proposals stretch credibility: the images on the Cassandra cup “... invoke parallels with the upcoming Peloponnesian War and remind the viewer of the wrongdoings that occur in such conflicts” (49). If the war hasn’t happened yet, how can it invoke parallels? Here, the zealous interpreter seems blind to implausibility.

With such proposals in mind, one must question the intended viewers of the vase paintings when the vessels were found outside of Attika. Avramidou adopts a “polyvalent” approach: the vases and their decoration were intended for an Athenian audience, but were also legible in a different way to Etruscans who purchased them in Etruria. According to the author, the vases were produced so as “to evoke an Etruscan interpretation” (69) of Greek themes. The link between the Codrus Painter’s depiction of Themis’ augury and Etruscan recognition of

the augury scene because of Etruscan practices works well (40) but other themes, such as the story of Erichthonios, are less convincing.

Likewise, claims about the Theseus cup—“The owner ... advertised his own knowledge of Athenian culture and his potential connection to the Greek city” (39)—are hard to square with an Etruscan owner. To whom was such cultural sophistication advertised, and would it be recognizable? It is possible, even plausible, as some scholars suggest, that the Etruscans could not read the dipinti on Attic vases, and did not know the Greek myths, but simply wanted Attic products. On the other hand, if the vessels were intended for an Athenian owner, one must question how many people saw these images, which were (presumably) designed for use in the symposion.

A catalogue and numerous b/w plates follow the text. Most images are of good quality but there are some poor ones that do not help the author’s argument (e.g., pl. 17, 28a, 70, 72). Unfortunately, the numerous comparanda are rarely illustrated, making it difficult to follow the author’s points. The text is elegantly written although the organization sometimes is illogical, and some chapters, e.g., Chap. 11, could have been abbreviated (or presented as a table or chart) without losing anything. Nonetheless, this thought-provoking study raises the right questions and endeavors to answer them in intriguing, if not always convincing, ways.

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