

BOOK REVIEW

The Greek Vase: Art of the Storyteller. By JOHN H. OAKLEY. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2013. Pp. 156. Hardcover, \$29.95. ISBN 978-1-60606-147-3.

Greek vases are a recognizable object from the ancient world, but the meanings behind the decorative figured scenes can often be difficult to understand. This volume, described as a primer for general readership, aims to discuss how figures and scenes can be identified and interpreted, and how they relate to the world and people who created them.

The volume opens with a brief overview of the process of pottery manufacture and general history, detailing the chronological evolution of painting styles (with the emphasis firmly placed on figured scenes—understandable given the nature of the topic, although other styles are acknowledged). This is followed by a descriptive catalogue of vase forms, subdivided by function: symposium/dining, storage, oil/perfume, ritual and some notes on export goods. The opening chapter concludes with some brief notes on the trade in figured vessels and a reprise of the key periods (with dates) covered within the volume. This segues nicely into Chapter 2, which considers both the potters and painters which produced the vases—with reference to workshops, origins of the craftsmen (including teacher-student lineages), production techniques, artistic advancements, respective social standing and their own appearances on the pieces they produced.

The next topic addressed is the identification of mythological and divine figures and the inherent difficulties presented by this, with reference to the conventions used when depicting humanoid figures of both genders on vases. The developments in the theories used to interpret the scenes are summarized neatly and clearly. When considering the gods themselves, the discussion covers the main contexts in which they feature on figured vases, with specific deities used as examples: as stand-alone figures (Aphrodite, Hermes), their birth/childhood (Athena, Aphrodite, Dionysus), their romances (Zeus, Eos, Boreas, Apollo), their struggles (the Giants, Hephaistos, Ares, Tityos, Artemis & Aktaion, Zeus & Ixion) and their followers (Dionysus with specific reference to Satyrs, Personifica-

tions, Triptolemos). Moving on from the divine, the heroes (or the 'Myth Makers' as the volume presents them) are the subject of the following chapter. The labours of Herakles, Theseus and the Trojan Wars (especially Odysseus) form the focus of this section, although Bellerophon, Perseus, the Seven against Thebes and Jason and the Argonauts are also included. The chapter provides a good overview of the more common scenes associated with these figures, as well as including examples of more atypical appearances.

Moving from the mythological to the mundane, the frequent appearance of the legendary and the divine in all-too human contexts means that identifying the figures depicted can be a complicated affair. How would an ancient viewer interpret such scenes? Despite the difficulties of interpretation, certain stages of the life cycle can be discerned, along with a number of ambiguous, more general scenes. For the former, childhood, men working (including pastoral and naval settings), women at home/domestic scenes, marriage, funerals/mourning, theatre, sport and religious activities. For the latter, scenes such as men leaving for war and women at the fountain are both discussed.

Continuing with the human sphere (though with mythological figures popping up all too frequently), the final chapter focuses on the Symposia and drinking. Since drinking wares form a significant proportion of Greek pottery, it is therefore unsurprising that these scenes appear with such regularity. The appearance of heterosexual sex scenes are more uncommon and a very brief, but interesting discussion is included as to the purpose of these scenes and their popularity in the export market. Courting and bathing conclude this chapter.

The narration of the topic is clearly structured and easy to follow, with a healthy dose of caution when it comes to interpreting the images supplied within the volume. The illustrations are frequent, all in color and are, on the whole, well chosen to support the topic discussed. The vases featured are predominantly Attic, but Boeotian, Chalcidian, Corinthian, Laconian and Southern Italian (Apulian, Campanian, Gnathian, Lucanian, Paestan) also feature, albeit in limited numbers. Although references are made to export markets and vase use, there is little attempt to link many of these vases with this context. Obviously, for a significant number, this information is no longer available; in which case, perhaps reference to the lack of said context could have been included. This, however, is a minor criticism and does not detract from the overall value of the volume. Given the aim to appeal to general readership, the bibliography is understandably restricted to a few select references. All images have brief descriptions covering description of scene, fabric (if known), style, vase type, painter/potter (if known),

date, height, museum and museum catalogue number, and are of a very high quality.

The volume achieves its original aims admirably and provides an extremely useful introduction to the key aspects of figured vase scenes from the Greek world as well as highlighting some of the issues associated with their interpretation.

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