

## RECENSIONI

Oakley, J.H., 2020. *A guide to scenes of daily life on Athenian vases*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Pp. 272, ISBN 9780299327248 (Paper), ISBN 9780299327200 (Cloth).

John Oakley's book under review here is a succinct, remarkably attractive and helpful book. In the *Introduction* the author states clearly his goal, i.e., to write the first ever handbook on scenes of daily life on Athenian vases dated from the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Before doing so, he presents previous literature on scenes of myth or daily life and introduces the reader to the different methodological approaches followed for their interpretation, while proffering his own opinion concerning the origin and nature of these images. After briefly explaining the conceptual basis of his book, he offers an overview of its ten chapters.

In *Chapter One*, the most extensive of all ten chapters, J.O. first introduces the reader to the organization of a typical home in the city of Athens and the countryside respectively. He then proceeds to the discussion of isolated family scenes, with male and female members of the household as protagonists. Female activities are those most frequently depicted on vases; therefore, they are discussed first. Since life at home does not consist only of work but also of play, scenes with men and women playing take up a large part of this chapter. One finds here famous scenes, like the one on the *lekanis* by the Eleusinian Painter in the Hermitage Museum (fig. 1.20; BAPD 230433), but also unknown ones, such as that on the outside of a cup recently in the art market (fig. 1.23a-b). As regards the scenes of women washing and/or dressing, the author raises the question whether they represent real or imaginary scenes. In the part about childcare, both text and figures are touching, e.g. the one on a *pelike* in London (fig. 1.35; BAPD 215016) or on a *lekythos* by the Timokrates Painter in Athens (pl. 4; BAPD 209182). The author dedicates a whole section to men and their amusement in the home (*i.e.* symposium and *komos*): he also includes in his discussion lovemaking scenes,

since this was a favorite subject on drinking vessels, while also taking the opportunity to introduce the intriguing figures of the “booners” and their possible connection with the followers of the poet Anacreon. The chapter concludes with slaves, and their various chores and duties.

*Chapter Two* deals with scenes showing men at work. The images discussed here cover a wide range of professions, both popular and unpopular in Athenian vase painting, namely potters, metalworkers, sculptors, shoemakers, coin makers, fowlers, and butchers. In his discussion of their workshops, J.O. also includes information about the organization of real workshops excavated in the area of the Athenian Agora or nearby. The chapter ends with carefully chosen scenes of commerce; here, the vivid descriptions bring the vase paintings to life, as e.g. the perfume testing scene on one side of a *pelike* in Florence (fig. 2.18a; BAPD 9458).

Having completed the presentation of household and workshop activities, in *Chapter Three* the author proceeds to a brief discussion of scenes taking place in other areas of the city. He first examines scenes with women at the fountain and discusses the possibility of their interpretation either as real scenes or as visual constructs. He then focuses on scenes with young girls in dancing and/or music lessons and chooses to introduce the reader to this topic by discussing the namepiece of the Phiale Painter (fig. 3.2; BAPD 214328), among whose scenes of daily life is a whole series of dancing girls. Scenes connected with the life of boys, and youths involved in activities with horses or out for a ride are presented next. The author concludes this chapter with scenes of young Athenians in various settings (athletic, religious, and in a brothel). His descriptions are again carefully written and lively, as if the reader accompanies a young Athenian to one of his walks around the city.

*Chapter Four* moves the reader's interest “outside the city”, to activities taking place in the countryside, and introduces him to the life of farmers, shepherds, fishermen and hunters. Scenes with or-

chards and women picking fruit are also recorded here; of particular interest is a rare scene on an amphora in London (fig. 4.11; BAPD 4330) showing four males stung by bees.

*Chapter Five* begins with the presentation of the famous cup by Douris in Berlin (fig. 5.1; BAPD 205092), showing boys involved in learning. Scenes of boys going to school (e.g. fig. 5.2; BAPD 209614) are juxtaposed to similar scenes with females as protagonists (e.g. fig. 5.3; BAPD 212067). Women who could be educated were not only courtesans but also citizen daughters who learned to read and write within the confines of their home (as e.g. those on fig. 5.5; BAPD 9032479). This chapter closes with illustrations of boys training and getting punished. Punishment scenes are not frequently illustrated in Athenian vase painting; therefore, the author's decision to include in his discussion not only the famous scene by the Sandal Painter in Bologna (fig. 5.8; BAPD 300643) with a boy being beaten with a sandal but also the scene on a *hydria* in Würzburg (fig. 5.9; BAPD 2723) depicting a boy with sandal marks all over his body after having been beaten, proves to be an excellent one (although one must keep in mind that the setting of the latter scene is that of a symposium with the young boy offering his service to the youthful symposiast shown reclining on the right).

*Chapter Six* studies scenes connected with Athenian sanctuaries and the different activities that took place there (i.e. processions, sacrifices and libations). Since the author addresses this book to a broad audience, he chooses first to carefully introduce the basic elements of ancient Greek religion, as well as the many related ancient Greek terms. The first illustrations represent cult activities associated with specific gods. These are followed by scenes showing animals being led to sacrifice. Next, the author includes in his discussion a very uncommon scene on an amphora in Viterbo (fig. 6.6) depicting the actual killing of the sacrificial animal; scenes of post-kill activities are discussed after that. The chapter ends with the discussion of dramatic performances that took place in sanctuaries, and musical contests that were part of religious festivals.

*Chapters Seven* and *Eight* are devoted to male activities. *Chapter Seven* concentrates on training, competing and winning scenes. As one might expect, a great part of this chapter is devoted to the athletic events included in the Games of the Greater Panathenaia, as attested by the large number of prize amphorae that have come to light. Here again the author introduces the reader

step by step to the terminology of the different elements and details depicted in athletic scenes, while carefully choosing the accompanying images. This chapter closes with a separate section on pederasty, since older men had the opportunity to meet and court young boys in the *palaistra*.

*Chapter Eight* focuses on activities related to war. Of particular interest are the scenes with horsemen inspecting their horses. Then follow scenes with warriors arming; here again, the vase paintings are carefully chosen and discussed by the author in order to familiarize the reader with all types of weapons and armor and the corresponding terminology. Departure scenes could not be left unmentioned, and no other scene could be more appropriate than the one painted on a *stamnos* by the Kleophon Painter in Munich (fig. 8.6; BAPD 215142). Subsequently, the author turns to actual battle scenes, and grasps the opportunity to present young Athenian warriors and their foreign allies fighting, and/or retreating from the battle ground. Two particularly rare vase scenes are worth mentioning here, a city siege on the tondo of a cup in Malibu (pl. 29; BAPD 16319) and the depiction of *stelai* with casualty lists on a *loutrophoros* fragment in Amsterdam (fig. 8.24; BAPD 42150). The latter gives the author the opportunity to close his discussion with a reference to the war dead brought home and buried in the Demosion Sema.

*Chapters Nine* and *Ten* examine the wedding and the funeral, two topics to the discussion of which J.O. has already devoted two books. *Chapter Nine* deals with a wide range of themes connected to the wedding ceremony, starting with the preparations made on the first day, continuing with the events that took place on the second day and concluding with the third and last day of the wedding. *Chapter Ten* discusses scenes connected with the end of life. In this chapter the author initiates the reader slowly but surely to the funerary practices that took place first at home, then during the procession to the grave and, finally, at the grave itself. In both these chapters, the technical vocabulary is again carefully explained and integrated within the text, while the figured vases are discussed in much detail but, still, in an exceptionally clear way, since the author is also writing for the non-specialist.

At the end of each chapter J.O. provides updated bibliography for every topic discussed. This is a very helpful addition for those seeking further study material. One finds here not only bibliographical references but also comments on different interpretations of scenes. In this way, although

the author's intention was to target a broad audience with this book, Archaeology students and scholars will principally benefit from it. For the ease of the reader the author incorporates in his book a useful glossary of terms and two indexes, one with the names of Athenian potters and painters and a general one.

The book is well-edited (with the exception of a vase that is illustrated twice, as fig. 1.35 and fig. 5.6) and amply illustrated. Along with 215 b/w illustrations integrated in the body of each chapter, there are also 33 color plates. For a book with so many photographs, it is certainly well worth its price. The images are drawn not only from large vase collections (like those of the British Museum, the Louvre, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art) but also from museums not as popular or famous, as *e.g.* the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (Brunswick, ME), the Museum of Art (Toledo) or the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond), which nevertheless possess vases that serve as key works

for the author's masterly discussion. Noticeable is the ample use of photos of vases housed in the Getty Museum, whose exemplary Open Content Program will hopefully be followed also by other museums and institutions in the near future. One should also note here the author's choice to incorporate drawings from old publications (as *e.g.* Pfuhl's, *Malerei und Zeichnung der Griechen* [Munich, 1923]) as well as Beazley's original drawings, thus paying tribute to scholars who were pioneers in the study of ancient Greek vases. It is in this sense that J.O. decided to dedicate his book to the memory of Erika Simon.

Overall, this book certainly fulfills its goal. Its text is well and carefully written, stirring the readers' emotions but at the same time it is also thought-provoking, as it brings together vase paintings with archaeological and literary evidence. Oakley's book allows us to view Athenian vase painting and especially daily-life scenes from a new and enlightening point of view and encourages further reading.

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