

Ann Steiner, **Reading Greek Vases**. Cambridge University Press 2007. xvii and 346 pages, 158 illustrations.

This is one of the most thought-provoking books on Greek vase-painting of the Archaic and Classical periods to be published in the last decade, and it is one of the few studies employing theoretical approaches that clearly and consistently explain these theories and how they relate to the images on the vases throughout the book without turning to the use of incomprehensive theoretical jargon. Steiner's basic premise is that repeti-

tion and symmetry are underlying principles in the decoration of Athenian vases from the Archaic period and conveyed meaning to the ancient viewer – a code of sorts which she unravels for her modern reader. Fortunately, her analyses are based mostly on solid, accurate readings of the pictures with only the occasional mistake (for example, the central youth holds a kylix [cup], not a skyphos in fig. 9.4, p. 201f.), a characteristic not always found in books on vase-painting employing theoretical models to explain images.

In chapter one Steiner starts her inquiry with a pelike (a type of amphora) in Boston by the early red-figure vase-painter of about 510, Euthymides, that shows on each side two boy dancers jumping in mid-air to the music of an aulos player. What is striking about the vase is that the boys are shown in a frontal view on one side and a back view on the other, thereby compelling the viewer to compare the two sides. Inscriptions add to this, for that on one side is answered by another on the other side: »Leagros is handsome – yes indeed, Leagros is handsome«. It is the meaning behind this and other types of repetition in the imagery that Steiner seeks to explain. The rest of the chapter reviews earlier explanations for repetition and surveys various theories for explaining how it helps in the transmission of information in various media. These include information theory, semiotics, and narratology. In general, the author points out that repetition creates texts that can supply various types of information, including narrative and paradigm.

Chapter two examines the use of repetition in the works of one vase-painter, Exekias, the greatest master of black-figure vase-painting, and a careful and intelligent artist, so as to establish the range of meanings that repetition can create. The author demonstrates by a careful analysis of Exekias' compositions and use of inscriptions that repetition helps give a cohesive and, therefore, enhanced message by connecting the two sides of the vase and can create parody and aid narration. Synonymy, homonymy, antonymy and ellipsis are sometimes used by the artist to further engage the viewer. The chapter closes with a look at bilingual vases by followers of Exekias, the black-figure Lysippides Painter and the red-figure Andokides Painter, both active around 520 to 510, and the author concludes that their use of repetition was influenced by and taken from Exekias.

The next chapter examines groups of vases sharing nearly identical figural decoration on both sides. Many of these vessels have the same shape and decoration and are labeled as »types« by the author. These include Horsehead amphorai and Komast-dancer cups, created before the middle of the sixth century, and Glaukskyphoi primarily from the fifth with the characteristic painted owl. They indicate that Athenian artists understood the communicative value of repetition which could be used for the quick identification of a »type«, so that the viewer need not spend time and energy comparing.

Chapters four and five turn to the elements of metadiscourse, namely written inscriptions on the vases which sometimes provide firm evidence, as with the Boston pelike, that the viewer is expected to look at both sides of a vase when considering it, and images of repeated spectators whose reactions to the action help the viewer understand and interpret the scene. Steiner's investigation begins with the work of the Heidelberg Painter, who decorated almost exclusively cups in the black-figure technique shortly before the middle of the sixth century, and in whose oeuvre these spectators first proliferate. She points out that their presence on both sides of the cup guides the viewer to consider the relationship of the two. This is in the subsequent decades followed by works of the Amasis Painter, Lydos and the painters of Group E who also liked to use repeated spectators as links between scenes.

Inscriptions, she concludes were probably intended to be read by the viewer (they are not just purely decorative), sometimes aloud at a symposium, thereby serving as prompts for conversation which could include aspects of the vase-paintings in which they occur. Various categories of repeated inscriptions are then discussed individually: (1) inscriptions continued from one side of the vase to the other, (2) inscriptions continued from one side of the vase to the other but with added words, (3) inscriptions repeating sounds to create parody, (4) repeated kalos inscriptions or those spread over two sides of the cup, (5) inscriptions naming spectators-narratees, (6) inscriptions commenting about the action on a vase, and (7) repeated labels. Inscriptions, as repeated figures, invite the viewer to consider both sides of the vase and help create various levels of meaning.

The next four chapters take a detailed look at figural scenes. The first examines how repetition plays a role in story-telling. After a review of the various names used in previous scholarship to label various types of visual narration, Steiner focuses on repetition used to connect two or more different scenes. She considers these by types: (1) unified narration when one subject is extended over two fields on a vase, (2) cyclic narration where two or more non-simultaneous events involving the same individual are rendered, (3) phased and causally linked mythological narration, (4) linked generic events, and (5) civic as well as religious rituals. Her analysis demonstrates that repetition was used to link fields in order to aid in story-telling, and what is repeated can be used to emphasize certain parts of the story. All these types appeared ubiquitously from about 550 to 475.

The seventh chapter examines how artists use repetition to create paradigms – visual similes. Steiner notes that other scholars have noticed this phenomenon before (Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell, Thomas Bertram Lonsdale Webster, Ingeborg Schiebler, and Rebecca H. Sinos) but presents a fuller overview, defining more exactly how the artists achieved this goal. Examples she presents include mortals acting like heroes in combat, in selecting a bride, and in hunting. In other cases rep-

etition creates links between heroes and male symposiasts, and figures with divine or heroic attributes are mixed with mortals, thereby serving to equate the two, with repetition sometimes acting to create paradigms for the mortals.

Repetition used in narrative to contrast different aspects of a character or to show the same element in two or more different views is the subject of the eighth chapter. Steiner presents various examples on vases dating between 575 and the first quarter of the fifth century that focus on Athena, Herakles, and the social experiences of the elite in courtship, symposium and various other activities including school, battle, and the palaestra. Repetition of elements between the various decorative fields on many vases is the key device used to create a complex picture of a divinity or mortal.

The ninth chapter looks at vases on which repetition appears to create parody either by inscription or image. After reviewing parody from a theoretical perspective, the author considers parody in Athenian comedy and satyr-plays, and observes that parody in vase-painting is created by using repetition to reference a figural text used elsewhere on the vase. Because we cannot be certain of the relationship between maker and viewer of the vase and in what setting the vase was viewed, it can be difficult to be certain that parody is present. In the case of inscriptions, which the author imagines as being read aloud at a symposium, we are on firmer footing for there is a clear play on words on a number of the elegant black-figure Little Master cups from 540 to 520, and the inscriptions on some red-figure vases by the Pioneers of the following decade suggest that certain social groups, such as women and foreigners, are the objects of amusement.

After having looked at individual types of repetition in the earlier chapters, in chapter ten the author examines six individual vases in detail for the use of various types of repetition on the same vessel. These include some very famous vases: Euphronios' volute-krater in Arezzo and the Berlin Painter's name-piece, two red-figure masterpieces from the end of the sixth century. In the case of the latter, for example, she concludes that the repetition of inscriptions, characters and attributes engage the viewer and allow him to consider the satyr-aspects of Hermes and the Hermes-aspect of the satyrs (but see now M. B. Moore, *Ant. Kunst* 49, 2006, 17–28 for other reasons).

The final chapter looks at how repetition on the vases is reflected in the environment where they were used, namely in the symposium. First the author establishes from archaeological evidence that painted pottery was used at symposia and concludes that the shapes of many Attic black- and red-figure vases indicate they were for use at a symposium. Next she explores the role of Etruscans as purchasers of the painted vases and concludes that subjects on Attic pottery were meant for Athenian viewers and not Etruscan. Succeeding sections explore how various types of repetition on the vases, such as paradigm and parody, would resonate in a

symposium setting. Ample use of literary sources provides parallels for the messages provided by repetition in the vase-paintings and indicate that the vases reflect much of the experience of an Athenian symposium and thereby an elite world-view.

The picture as a whole that the author presents of the use of repetition and the meanings derived from it is mostly convincing, and is an aspect that all will have to consider more closely when interpreting the pictures on Archaic Attic vases. But having said this, I, as some other scholars, will find it difficult to believe that repetition was always a factor purposefully employed by the vase-painter in his compositions and decoration. A characteristic of Archaic art is the use and repetition of schemes, and most Archaic vase-painters had a limited set of types of figures they used and repeated, so that one can well envision the artist simply using a set figure-type from his limited repertoire because it fits the situation best, not because he wanted to employ repetition to create a deeper level of meaning. Study of workshop deposits have shown that each vase is not a single, unique creation, but that the vase-painters in many cases produced multiple versions of the same scene. In Steiner's defense, though, she has analyzed primarily top quality pieces, some of which were probably unique creations by the vase-painters and not part of a similar batch, so that her view that the repetition was purposefully planned is in some cases more likely. Still, there are a number of vases where she sees repetition that others may not. For example, she considers Achilles in the Troilos scene on one side of Lydos' black-figure amphora in Berlin, created about 540, to repeat the figure of Neoptolemos on the other (p. 108 f., figs. 6.8 and 6.9), but Achilles runs with feet off the ground and Neoptolemos strides right with both feet on the ground, and Achilles holds a spear up by his chest and Neoptolemos the boy Astynax down by his buttocks. In other cases her interpretation is questionable or pressed too far, as on a red-figure cup by Epiktetos in London where she believes a viewer would equate the youth drawing wine from a krater with Theseus slaying the Minotaur on the other side (p. 200–202, figs. 9.3–9.5), or a cup by the Heidelberg Painter where she believes the figure wrestling a lion on the exterior is a mortal, not Heracles (p. 134, fig. 7.4). The basic question of how similar does a figure have to be in order to be considered as an example of repetition is never fully addressed.

As a whole, the book is well produced with excellent illustrations presented at a scale that allows the reader to see most of the details, although on occasion the pictures could have been placed more closely to the text associated with it. The book could have also undergone one more proof reading to remove several obvious typos. On occasion an earlier interpretation of a particular vase (or vases) is not mentioned or taken into account by the author. Such is the case with Elfriede Knauer's convincing proposition that a red-figure cup in the Louvre (G 138) by the early classical Triptolemos Painter (p. 162–164, figs. 7.30–7.32) depicts a procession

of fathers and sons going to the celebration of the *κουρσεῖον* on the third day of the *Apatouria* (Arch. Anz. 1996, 221–239). At other times Steiner's work dovetails nicely with that of other scholars. I think here of her comments on spectator figures (p. 57–65) and Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell's recent book about them, *Vase Painting, Gender, and Social Identity in Archaic Athens* (Cambridge 2006). I find it odd that she insists that most Athenian figured vases were meant for the symposion when she herself lists a range of other shapes which had other uses (p. 231–234). There are thousands of late black-figure *lekythoi* mainly made for funerary purposes. Repetition on them is never considered. Some minor quibbles I have include: (1) the cup potted by Exekias in figs. 2.1–2.2 is not a plain lip cup (p. 75) but a cup of special shape with the body of a lip cup and the foot of a *Siana* cup, (2) I cannot see any sword being plunged into the lion by Herakles in fig. 4.8 as the author claims, (3) the turning posts surrounding the deer hunt in the predella of Psiax's *hydria* in Würzburg (fig. 7.20) are not mentioned or considered in the author's interpretation of the vase, (4) the updated list of vases inscribed with the name *Paidikos* in CVA Walters Art Gallery 1, USA 28, p. 50, should have been mentioned in her n. 20 on p. 296,5) the boy on a *psykter* in New York by Oltos is not receiving pederastic gifts (p. 219, fig. 10.6) but is being annointed victor (see E. Kefalidou, *Νίκητις. Εικονογραφική μελέτη του αρχαίου ελληνικού αθλητισμού* [Thessaloniki 1996] 188 f. no. G 37).

This book is laudable and noteworthy. Although there are sections and conclusions that will not be universally accepted, parts, such as those displaying Steiner's careful analysis of the role that inscriptions can play on the vases in respect to the viewer and the figural scenes decorating them, are groundbreaking. Readers of this book will come away looking at vases in a new way.

Williamsburg, Virginia

John H. Oakley