

Natascha Sojc, **Trauer auf attischen Grabreliefs. Frauendarstellungen zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit.** Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin 2005. 189 pages, 25 black-and-white photos, 8 colour photos.

The study of Attic funerary monuments goes back a long time, starting with Alexander Conze and his »Die attischen Grabreliefs« in four volumes, published between 1893 and 1922. At first, the reliefs were mostly analysed and classified from a stylistic point of view. Also, the main interest was on the inscriptions, the pictures being of lesser importance. One of the first who took an interest into the iconography was the Danish scholar Knud Friis Johansen, who published »The Attic grave-reliefs of the Classical period« in 1951. His method was to look at the reliefs not as a pieces of art, but using the iconography as a source for interpreting the social and moral values and attitudes of the Athenian society.

Every student of Classical Attic burial monuments will have great help from the late Christoph W. Clairmont's impressive corpus from 1993, »Classical Attic Tombstones«, consisting of a detailed catalogue in six volumes and a Plate Volume with photographs of about two thousand reliefs. Also the inscriptions are published and commented on in the Catalogue Volumes.

A socio-political aspect, based on the iconological message of the reliefs, was presented in 1997 by Johannes Bergemann in his magnificent work »Demos und Thanatos. Untersuchungen zum Wertsystem der Polis im Spiegel der attischen Grabreliefs des 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. und zur Funktion der gleichzeitigen Grabbauten«. Among other things, Bergemann argues that the primary function of the burial reliefs was not to express grief and loss, but to point out the social norms and systems that formed the basis of society. This is in particular visible in motifs showing married couples, women, and children, as well as in family scenes. The reliefs are demonstrating members of a family as strongly united (clasping hands in the so called dexiosis-gesture), expressing succession and continuance (children born in a legitimate marriage), and not to forget, exposing beautiful women as faithful wives and mothers. By referring to these norms in public, the citizens would demonstrate their affiliation and loyalty to the state, and that they thus rightfully deserve their political status as members of the city-state. This could easily work in a very practical sense. The burials were placed in public outside the city walls on terraces along the roads leading to and from the city. All passers by could stay and watch the monuments, and after receiving the iconological message, the point was taken!

In recent years, in monographs and articles, the reliefs have been approached from a gender perspective. The images, no doubt, tell us a lot about gender values, male and female attitudes and family structures in the Athenian society of the Classical period. Citizen-women in real life, as we know it, were not to be found in the public area, except for religious occasions. But within the iconographic framework of the burial relief it was considered appropriate, in order to demonstrate the values of being a legitimate wife and mother of children – sons being favoured as the heirs and future pillars of society. The iconographic message would be that

husband and wife work for the same goal; the unity of the family, the success of the household and, ultimately, the confirmation of citizenship. Motherhood would be demonstrated by letting infants and older children accompany the respectable lady of the house.

Yet, another contributor to the study of iconography and gender on the burial monuments is Natascha Sojc, in her very solid and most interesting book. This is a revised version of her dissertation for a Ph.D.-degree in 1999, concerning women depicted on Greek Classical burial reliefs.

In this new book Sojc investigates the Attic funerary reliefs with the aim to, based on iconographical methods, interpret the motives of women in, as she puts it, a »kulturhistorischen« context. This means that she is analysing the different kinds of roles of women in the Athenian society, both real ones and those idealised, in order to point out how women were to be commemorated on the burial monuments. The period covered is about 440 to 300 B. C. Obviously, it was not personal abilities of the individual, but rather the deep rooted traditional idealisation of femininity and female virtue, that was applied. And this idealisation reflected the attitudes of society as a whole, concerning male and female gender roles.

The book contains nine thematic chapters. I will not go into detail and give an account on every one of them, but rather focus on some aspects that especially caught my interest. In her introduction, Sojc demonstrates a broad knowledge concerning basic ideas on different theories applied to Gender studies. Michel Foucault and Jacques M. Lacan are referred to, as well as Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood and her methods on a semi-otic »reading« of images.

Sojc's investigation starts in the second chapter with a short summary of the common opinion on women in the Athenian society. The conceptions of public and private spheres are being discussed and here Sojc argues that the dichotomy that we experience today in our society perhaps was not at value in the ancient Greek world. She also refers to earlier research that, in her opinion, wrongly has placed women in seclusion in the houses in a harem-like fashion. In order to demonstrate the free word spoken out by ancient women in connection to their status as married to citizens or prominent men of the state, Sojc also reflects on the Attic drama. In this case Iphigenia in Aulis by Euripides is referred to in order to demonstrate that women (here Clytemnestra addressing Achilles) would be able to communicate with men and even demonstrate a certain authority. However, I am somewhat hesitant to the method of using Greek tragedy as an example of ordinary behaviour. Women (and men) in Greek drama are not ordinary people, their characters and acting being moulded on the myths. As a source of normal female behaviour in Classical Athens, this example, to me, is a bit over the edge.

In the third chapter Sojc makes a comparison between the iconography of white ground grave lekythoi

and that of the burial reliefs. An important argument for the comparison is the overlap in time between the lekythoi and burial monuments in the middle of the fifth century. Sojc demonstrates that on the lekythoi, women are being pictured occupied with tasks that often are connected with the burial monument, or with preparations of the funeral – tasks that in the ancient Greek society were women's jobs. This would be an iconographic tradition passed over from the lekythoi to the burial monuments.

One of the most interesting parts in the book is when Sojc turns to the scenes on the burial reliefs labelled »Frauengemachszenen«, or, in English, »scenes from the women's quarters«. These scenes normally depict a seated or rather, in my opinion, enthroned lady of the house together with a standing female servant or a female relative. There would also often be a jewellery box as well as an infant or small child present. The methods that Sojc uses are analyses of the body-language and how this is being expressed in gestures and poses, and also in dressing and veiling. Sojc demonstrates, in a convincing way, that women are being depicted according to a standard frame which in particular is noticeable in the »Frauengemachszenen«. The position of the deceased woman is easy to recognise in almost every scene. She is sitting on a chair with her back slightly bent, she is often beautifully dressed, the clothes being transparent as to reveal her body shape, and she is also wearing jewellery. The so called pudicitia-gesture is present, with her right hand kept to the chin, the left arm in position to support the right elbow, and the head slightly bowed. All of this reflects sorrow, but even more female modesty, restraint and beauty. It also demonstrates the idea of female virtue: women as legitimate wives and mothers, which was high priority on the political agenda, not only to husbands, but to society as a whole.

Sojc also notices that when women are depicted on so called »family scenes«, no infants can be detected, the children present being a bit older. Here, the woman, being a γυναίκα, wife and also a mother, is seated on a chair, placed in the centre and surrounded by members of the household. Mothers and daughters are often united in the dexiosis-gesture. The handshake could also be seen among husbands and wives. The meaning of the gesture has been interpreted as a sign of farewell, or a reunion in the underworld, but is still much debated. In my opinion, the dexiosis would be a sign of union and strength within the family, an alliance that will not break, even in times of death and separation.

Occasionally, tenderness in gesture and pose between mother and daughter is clearly visible. Sojc sees parallels in mythological, when an affectionate relationship between mother and daughter, especially Demeter and Kore (Persephone), is being expressed. This myth would in particular create a solid feeling of consolation to people and could easily be transformed to the pictorial expression of female affection and consolation on the reliefs.

Sojc also discusses the young girls on the reliefs, with their body shapes, hairstyles and dresses. Obviously, there was a conscious intention of demonstrating different age levels of the girls by focusing on the physical development from childhood to puberty. Even quite young girls participated in ritual events of the city-state, as arkttoi in the cult of Artemis Brauronia, and as arphoroi and kanephoroi in the state cult of Athena. This, clearly, seems to have been important tasks to refer to in images of young girls on the reliefs.

In order to find out how memory and identity of a deceased woman was expressed, Sojc turns once more to the written sources, this time Xenophon. In his *Oikonomikos*, the norms and attitudes of a perfect wife comes to expression. A husband speaks to his wife on different matters that have to do with how to run a perfect household, and also how to become a perfect wife. In short, the norms of society – and of the Athenian family – prescribed that a woman should be beautiful, but in that natural way which comes out of a healthy life with activities and duties performed in the household. Control of appetite is of importance and no artificial make up needed. Also, the woman ought to be seductive and attracted to her husband, but to him only! No flirtations with other men are accepted. Dutiful, but modest participation in religious festivals of the city-state is requested – but not to take into drinking during the religious banquets. Now, *Oikonomikos* is a satire on morality concerning the Athenian family and demonstrates what good happens to your economy and household if you, as a husband, train your wife to be an expert on how to run the *oikos* – and what disaster that will come if you fail to do so. The married couple in *Oikonomikos* speaks freely to each other and it is understood that husband and wife work for the same goal, the success of the *oikos*. But, still, there is not much equality here between the sexes. Even if the wife is aloud to express her opinion, everything is on the terms of the husband.

Sojc's main results concerning commemoration and identity of the women would, if I have correctly understood it, be as follows: The same norms that were considered ideal for women in life, would be used for commemorating them when they have died. They are being commemorated on the reliefs according to standard measures – not to any real or personal ones. Gestures, dress, attitudes, and relations between women and other persons express and expose these norms and attitudes connected to the idealised construction of female gender roles.

The pictures of the dead women also create comfort for those left behind. By watching the imagery of the reliefs the mourners would be assured, over and over again, of women as being immaculate. The pictorial composition, both in the scenes with the women's quarters and in the family scenes, focus on the expected ideal virtues of a wife: beauty and sexual attraction – yet, modesty; sorrow – yet, restraint. And not to forget: consolation and strength. With all these qualities ascer-

tained consolation, as well as strength are being brought to those left behind.

One could add that this also constructs a collective memory of the society. Parallels of how disturbing death is and how a common remembrance is created can be observed in our own modern society. Just read the necrologies in the newspapers of deceased persons and note what is being focused on from their lives. Sojc gives a remarkable example from the death and memorial of a famous American female editor of a fashion journal and how her death was tackled in public. Among other things beauty, calmness, strength and a feeling of »eternity« were the features that were used in a symbolic way for the commemoration of this woman, in order to create consolation and a way to handle the trauma that her premature death caused.

To conclude, I find Natascha Sojc's book very refreshing since it introduces new ways of approaching women and their status in the Athenian society, both in their real life and in the idealised shape of the burial reliefs. I have not focused on the word »Trauer« (grief) very much. Sojc's argument, as I understand it, is that grief is present, but in a very subtle way. Intense sorrow and mourning immediately connected with the death of a loved one is not at stake here, but rather consolation, offered in cases of loss of a wife, mother or daughter. The way in which women were depicted, with all the ideal virtues like femininity, fertility, chastity, beauty, eternal faithfulness, and strength, served to comfort those left behind. The commemoration of the deceased is also transformed into a collective memory which could be applied to every woman. This is the only way a female could be commemorated on in public. Not for her own identity, or personal qualities, but for the collective memory of the ideal identity, the icon that is Woman.

Sojc puts a lot of effort in her study of the burial reliefs and convincingly argues that what earlier was considered as a piece of art, turns out to be a very complex source for gender structures and attitudes towards women and femininity in Classical Athens. The method used is splendid, the argumentation solid, the results interesting. The author masters her subject well and delivers her thesis in a convincing manner.

I also wish to pay my complements to the Dietrich Reimer Verlag on the volume. The book is beautiful, with an attractive layout and good quality of the photographs. This study deserves to be read by everyone working on gender, iconography and burial reliefs (not necessarily Attic ones).