10

Approaches to Reading Attic Vases

Kathryn Topper

1 Introduction, or Reading as Metaphor

The painted vases unearthed by the thousands throughout the Mediterranean and neighboring countries are some of our most plentiful, and most problematic, sources for studying ancient Athenian women. Many of these objects lack documented provenances, and ancient authors rarely mention them, yet their shapes suggest that they circulated in contexts as varied as the symposium, the gymnasium, women's quarters, religious festivals, and the tomb. They are decorated with a wide range of scenes: in addition to representing familiar goddesses and heroines, the images show hundreds of women adorning themselves, working wool, caring for children, drinking at symposia, dancing, making music, conversing with men, having sex, preparing food, mourning the dead, engaging in religious worship, fetching water, swimming, and interacting with phallus-birds and other animals. These vases have been objects of intense interest during the last few decades, as the study of ancient women has come into its own as a subfield of Classical scholarship, yet there is little consensus about what they can tell us about ancient Athenian women or the principles that should be brought to bear on their interpretation. Because of the continuing debate over almost every aspect of their interpretation, this essay does not attempt to provide a comprehensive survey of women in vase painting, but rather to examine select methodological issues with the aim of defining some ways in which the vases serve as evidence for understanding ancient Athenian women.

Although vases decorated with figural scenes were produced in the Kerameikos as early as the Geometric period, I focus on the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, a period dominated by the black- and red-figure styles. The corpus is by no means homogeneous, but these vases present a sufficiently unified set of questions to merit consideration as a group. Addressing the central question of what the vases tell us about ancient Athenian women involves confronting several related questions: How do we determine what an image represents? What role should an awareness of audience (or audiences) play in interpretation? What was the relationship between the women on the vases and the women of Archaic and Classical

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Athens? Finally, what do the scenes on the vases have in common with other forms of representation—such as poetry, historical texts, or drama—and to what degree should these other representations enter into interpretations of the imagery? My discussion is organized around three case studies, an *epinetron* and two *kylikes*, whose rich but often problematic imagery bring us face to face with these issues.

Before I turn to the images, however, a word on the title of the essay is necessary. The idea that vases are objects to be "read" has dominated the scholarship on vase painting since the 1980s; this tradition is particularly indebted to scholars from the Paris-Lausanne school, who contributed to the *City of Images* project (Bérard et al. 1989), which was itself heavily influenced by the principles of structural linguistics and anthropology. There is no consensus on precisely how the metaphor of "imagery as language" should be applied to the vases, and this is not the place to rehash that debate (recent discussions may be found in Ferrari 2002; Neer 2002; Steiner 2007; Squire 2009). In the interest of clarity, however, I note two assumptions on which I rely throughout this essay: first, images are analogous to language in the sense that both reveal the conceptual frameworks of the societies in which they operate; second, images, like words, bear a constructed relationship to lived experience, and this relationship is not immediately evident to those observing a culture or its artifacts from the outside.[1] The implications of these principles for the study of the vases will become evident in the following sections.

2 Image as Metaphor, or the Taming of the Bride

I begin with an object from the late fifth century, a red-figure *epinetron* attributed to the Eretria Painter (Figure 10.1). This vessel has been an object of much close study, most recently by Rachel Kousser, who has attempted a comprehensive analysis that considers not only the iconographic program but also the interplay between imagery, shape, and circumstances of use (Kousser 2004). I agree with the fundamentals of Kousser's reading, and my purpose in beginning with this piece is not to offer a substantially different interpretation but rather to use this example to establish what is known about the vases before moving to more problematic examples.

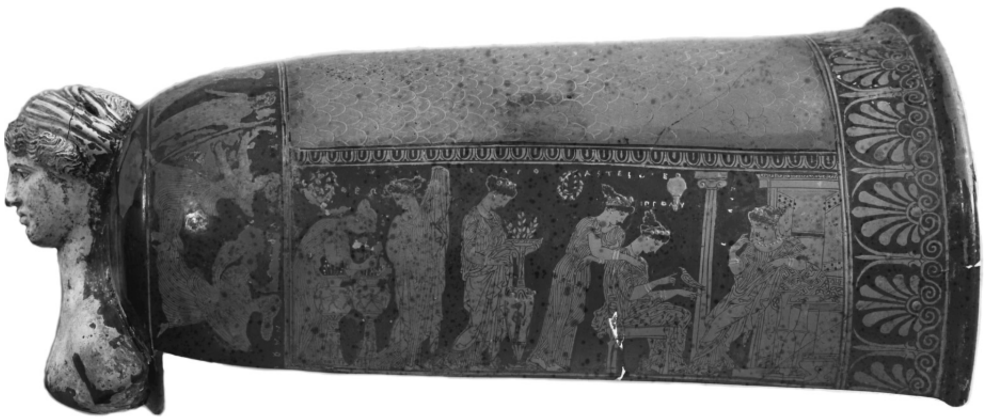

Figure 10.1 Red-figure *epinetron*, Eretria Painter. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1629; *ARV*^{2} 1250.34, 1688; *Paralipomena* 469; *Beazley Addenda*^{2} 354. Photo: Eva-Maria Czakó, DAI-ATH-NM 5126.

The *epinetron* (also called *onos*, although the original name is uncertain) was a semi-cylindrical object that was closed at one end and designed to fit over the thigh to aid in the production of wool. Elaborate examples are embellished with a sculpted female head or bust; on the Eretria Painter's *epinetron*, this takes the form of a nude bust that resembles the votive figurines dedicated in sanctuaries to celebrate girls' successful transitions to maturity (Kousser 2004). The theme of female transitions unites the bust with the painted scenes, which show successive stages of the bride's progress from *parthenos* to married woman. Vignettes from mythological weddings appear on the long sides: one side is decorated with a scene of Harmonia's adornment, while the other shows the *epaulia* (wedding gifts) of Alcestis, who rests against the nuptial bed while receiving visitors (Figure 10.1). The two scenes are connected visually and thematically by a panel that runs behind the sculpted head and shows the abduction of Thetis, who struggles with Peleus amid fleeing Nereids.

This *epinetron* is unusual for the extent to which it combines imagery, form, and function in a manner comprehensible to modern viewers. Frequently the connection between two or more of these elements is unclear. On a black-figure hydria in London (Figure 10.2), for example, it is obvious that the scene of women at a fountain house is connected to the function of the vessel, but it is harder to see how the image of Herakles on the shoulder fits into this scheme (although see Steiner 2004 for Herakles on black-figure hydriae). On the *epinetron*, by contrast, the painted panels are clearly united by the theme of marriage, and they are arranged so that when the vessel is worn on the right leg the sexually charged image of doors opening onto the marriage bed corresponds with the most intimate area of the body. Although this vessel seems to have been a grave gift, its emphasis on female transitions

Figure 10.2 Black-figure hydria, showing women at a fountain house. London, British Museum B 329; *ABV* 334.1, 678; *Paralipomena* 147; *Beazley Addenda*^{2} 91. Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum.

would suit any of the uses to which *epinetra* were typically put, including wool working, dedication to a goddess, and deposition in a grave (Kousser 2004).

Our relatively solid understanding of this piece makes it a good starting point for considering what the vases can tell us about ancient women. *Epinetra* were used primarily by women and, while it is far from clear whether or how the decoration was tailored to this audience, its obvious similarity to the large, repetitive corpus of Athenian nuptial imagery suggests that the scenes on the *epinetra* show deeply ingrained clichés that were critical to Athenian constructions of femininity. Particularly prominent is the idea of the maiden as a creature to be tamed. This metaphor, which cast the maiden as dangerously wild but also appealing and potentially productive, is well documented in Greek literature, art, and ritual (Reeder 1995: 299–300; Calame 1997: 238–44; Kousser 2004: 107) and it is a major element in the story of Thetis' marriage to Peleus. The metaphor of domestication is explicit in the Homeric account of their wedding: "me, out of all the other daughters of the sea, *he yoked to a man*, to Peleus son of Aeacus, and I endured a mortal's bed, though resisting greatly" (*Iliad* 18.432–34). The verb δαμάζω can refer to the taming of a woman or of an animal, and on the *epinetron* Thetis is both—as Peleus grabs her human form, a sea creature attacks him from behind. Kousser notes that, when the scenes on the *epinetron* are read in narrative progression from adornment to *epaulia*, the abduction appears in the place of a more traditional wedding procession, with which it shares key features, such as the groom's assertion of dominance over the bride (who is normally grabbed by the wrist or lifted into a chariot) and the presence of the bride's father and companions. The theme of domestication continues in the image of Alcestis' *epaulia*, where the newly tamed bride is juxtaposed with a small bird resting on her companion's hand (Kousser 2004: 108).

In addition to articulating certain ideas about marriage and the sexes, the *epinetron* alerts us to an important point about how images on the vases function within a larger system of representation. The scenes take their meaning not only from their relationship to other images but also from a larger network of associations that extended to literature (or oral performances that have survived as literature) and ritual. Even the most conventional aspects of imagery may participate in this network. For example, the black-figure distinction between white female skin and dark male skin has echoes in the *Ecclesiazousae*, where standing outdoors to darken the skin is critical to the women's cross-dressing strategy (Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazousae* 62–64); in both cases, the message is that women are creatures best suited to the indoors. This point has several implications, but for the present purposes I note only two: first, visual images cannot be adequately understood in isolation from other contemporary forms of representation (and vice versa); second, the relationship between the images and literature (or images and ritual) is more complex than a simple matter of one medium illustrating the other. These observations may seem unproblematic when applied to the *epinetron*, but the following examples will make some of the difficulties clearer.

3 What Kind of Women?

My next example, a kylix by the Ashby Painter from around 500 BCE, is decorated on the exterior with images of men and women at a symposium. Each side shows a young man reclining with a female partner: on one side a reclining woman plays the aulos (Figure 10.3) while on the other a nude woman kneels before her partner and binds her head with a fillet.

Figure 10.3 Red-figure kylix with symposium scene. Attributed to the Ashby Painter. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1993.11.5; *ARV*[2] 455.8; *Beazley Addenda*[2] 242. Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.

How these pictures relate to the one in the tondo, which shows a warrior blowing a trumpet, is unclear. They may be connected by their general association with masculine activities, but we do not know whether an Athenian viewer would see a more precise connection. Because this essay is concerned with ancient women, I limit my discussion to the sympotic scenes, acknowledging that I sacrifice some nuance by not considering the warrior on the interior.

The kylix takes us some distance from the discussion of the *epinetron*, and not only because its shape and imagery both locate it firmly in the masculine world of the symposium. The differences extend to matters of interpretive method, for, while we readily understand both the subject matter and the overall decorative program of the *epinetron*, neither is immediately evident on the kylix, so this piece forces us to consider how we determine what an image on a vase represents. The apparently mundane nature of the sympotic scenes has encouraged their identification as vignettes from contemporary life, and the women are understood as *hetairai* (Peschel 1987), the only women who regularly attended symposia in this period. As courtesans whose activities were discreetly presented as the exchange of favors between companions, *hetairai* were conceptually opposed to *pornai*, common prostitutes (Kurke 1999: 175–219). The indirect quality of many of the literary references has left significant gaps in our understanding of *hetairai*, and scholars have looked to vase painting to fill them in (Keuls 1985: 153–203; Peschel 1987; Kurke 1999: 199–219).

The vases present numerous difficulties, however, particularly because the defining visual characteristics of the *hetaira* have never been well established (Kilmer 1993: 159–67; Lewis 2002: 101–12). Even if we limit ourselves to a consideration of the sympotic scenes—as I will do in order to keep the focus on the example at hand—the women who are classified as *hetairai* are an extremely diverse crowd. They may be nude or clothed, sexually aggressive or modest, sober or rowdy. Some sit quietly at the foot of their

klinai (couches), while others recline and still others have sex with the men. They recline on couches and on the floor, and their partners are by turns Greek men, foreign men, and women. Apart from their femininity, the only feature that unites these women is their presence at symposia, and it is this that, in modern eyes, earns them their status as courtesans. As François Lissarrague (1990: 33–4) observes, their status "is difficult to define . . . the texts reveal that they are never wives, but rather women whose services are hired: *hetairai* (courtesans), musicians, or just companions for the evening who join in the pleasures of the krater." The identification of the female symposiasts as *hetairai*, in other words, is a consequence of expectations that the images will correspond to the texts in a particular way, yet we have seen that literature and vase painting may have a more complex relationship than this formulation implies.

In fact, assuming that all the women in sympotic scenes are the *hetairai* we know from the texts requires us to overlook empirical as well as methodological difficulties. Many images of "*hetairai*" on the vases correspond poorly with our understanding of life in Archaic and Classical Athens. For example, the Ashby Painter's symposiasts recline on the ground, rather than using the more standard couches, and one male symposiast holds a drinking horn (*keras*), a vessel whose associations with the primitive and barbaric (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 476a) make it an incongruous presence in a scene of contemporary life (Figure 10.3). There are a few ways we might explain these discrepancies: (1) accept the images as evidence that symposiasts in this period sometimes drank on the ground from rustic vessels, (2) understand the incongruous details as symbolic or conventional elements that do not alter the basic identification of the scene, or (3) consider the possibility that the painter has depicted something other than the sort of symposium that was practiced in Athens at the time. I will suggest that the third option holds the most promise.

The first possibility has occasionally been considered, but our only independent evidence for a late Archaic practice of banqueting on the ground relates to religious festivals, and images of symposia without furniture do not seem restricted to scenes of ritual, nor would a ritual context explain such elements as the drinking horn (Topper 2009: 10–12). The second option is the most common explanation for such discrepancies, and it has become a commonplace in iconographic studies to point out that painters were less interested in creating photorealistic depictions of their surroundings than in interpreting them in ways that highlighted their most important elements (Vernant 1989: 7–8; Beard 1991: 19–21; Osborne 2007: 34; Bundrick 2008: 283–4). Mary Beard's comment that a scene on a vase "is not a *picture of*, but a *statement about*" the subject it represents encapsulates this view nicely (Beard 1991: 20). While scholars who favor this approach have shown, often in painstaking detail, the various ways in which images function as constructs, they have been less persuasive in justifying the assumption that contemporary life is the basis for images without obvious mythological content. In fact, it has recently been observed that the category we call "scenes of contemporary life" is defined not by knowledge of what Athenian life looked like but by the modern inability to connect the scenes to myth. A more productive approach, according to the third view, then, is to ask not what Athenian practice or institution a picture illustrates but to what type of discourse—defined as a "collective process of articulating a set of communal values or beliefs" (Hedreen 2009: 125)—it belongs (Ferrari 2002: 11–60, 2003; Peirce 2004).

For the scenes on the Ashby Painter's kylix, then, the question is not whether the image can be attached to a known myth (it cannot) or how closely the scene matches our understanding of Archaic sympotic practices (not closely) but under what circumstances the various elements in the scene came together in the Athenian imagination. The *keras*, it

has already been noted, was widely associated with primitive customs, and a variety of evidence from art, literature, and ritual suggests that banquets without furniture were also popularly attributed to primitive or uncivilized societies (Topper 2009; cf. Hedreen 2009). Within this context, the presence of women makes sense not as a statement about Archaic prostitution but as a marker of the symposiasts' distance from civilization, the stability of which depended on the recognition and enforcement of proper gender roles. Societies such as Sparta and Etruria were regularly lampooned for their failure to regulate the behavior of their women, and traces of this tradition have been detected on vases such as Euphronios' psykter, where the female symposiasts speak a Doric dialect (St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum B 1650; *ARV*[2] 16.15, 1619), and on the stamnoi of the Perizoma Group, which show women in the traditionally masculine roles of symposiasts, a scenario paralleled in Greek descriptions of the Etruscans (Shapiro 2000; Ferrari 2002: 19–20; see also Neils, this volume, Chapter 11).

Ignorance of proper gender roles also figures in accounts of Athens' own prehistory—stories about the age of Kekrops describe the early polis as an anarchic state where the free and public mingling of the sexes produced disordered lines of inheritance and women abused their political power (Zeitlin 1999). Since the symposium was often envisioned as a microcosm of the polis itself (Levine 1985), the notion of a primitive, disorderly state was effectively conveyed by an image of a symposium in which women participate like men. If this reading is correct, then the images on the Ashby Painter's kylix become valuable not as documents pertaining to Archaic prostitution but as fragments of a popular discourse about how society should manage its women.

Returning to our earlier question of how literary evidence helps us interpret the imagery, we can see that, while the scenes on the kylix are not simple visual counterparts of texts documenting the presence of *hetairai* at symposia, they are related to the texts insofar as both employ similar topoi to describe societies understood to be primitive or barbarian. Like the maiden-as-animal metaphor, the topos of the woman who participates in traditional male activities forged conceptual links between people—in this case, the Spartans, the Etruscans, and the earliest Athenians—who bore no narrative or real-world connection to one another, and, like the maiden-as-animal metaphor, it encoded certain ideas about those whom it described. In fact, both the metaphor of the maiden as an animal and the topos of the uncivilized female symposiast are rooted in ideas about the need to control women's natural wildness, but, while the scenes on the *epinetron* depict the civilizing process in action (Figure 10.1), the images on the kylix show the consequences of leaving that wildness unchecked (Figure 10.3).

4 Trading in Sex?

The problem of how we determine what an image represents remains central to my next example, a red-figure kylix by the Briseis Painter (Figure 10.4), although different circumstances prompt the question. Like many Athenian vases with known provenances, this vase was discovered in Etruria, and the combination of its Etruscan find-spot and sexually explicit imagery places it in a class of vases whose relevance to Athenian culture has recently been questioned (Lewis 2002: 116–28). The scene in question appears in the tondo of the cup and shows a man penetrating a woman from behind, placing his hands on her upper back as she bends forward. Aside from a cushion, a staff, and a cast-off garment, there are no details to establish the setting; the absence of clear sympotic paraphernalia

Figure 10.4 Red-figure kylix, Briseis Painter; tondo with erotic scene. Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale; *ARV*[2] 408.36; *Beazley Addenda*[2] 232. Photo: Hermann Wagner, DAI-ATH-Diversa 133.

makes it difficult to be certain that the coupling occurs at a symposium, although the wreaths worn by both figures would be appropriate to such a context. "Erotic" scenes such as this one experienced a surge of popularity in the late Archaic period; the women are most often identified as *hetairai* (Keuls 1985: 174–80), but not everyone has been satisfied with this explanation. In fact, Sian Lewis has proposed that, since approximately seventy percent of erotic scenes with known provenances come from Etruscan tombs, they must have been painted to meet the demands of an Etruscan market. She suggests that in Etruria, where women seem to have enjoyed a decidedly different social status from their Athenian counterparts (see, contra, Izzet, this volume, Chapter 5), women in heterosexual pairings would be understood as wives; more radically, she argues that, since so few of these vases were found in Athenian contexts, they tell us more about the Etruscans than about the Athenians (Lewis 2002: 116–28, *passim*).

Central to this hypothesis is the belief that the images on the vases were tailored to the preferences of an export market, but finding compelling evidence to support this idea has proven difficult. A major problem is the lack of provenance for so many vases, a consequence of years of illegal excavation and unethical collecting practices; even when we know that a vase was discovered in Etruria, associating it with a particular tomb or tomb group can be difficult. In other words, although we know that the vases were made in Athens, and that many ended up in Etruscan tombs, what happened between production and deposition is largely unclear, and most comments regarding the principles by which vases were selected for export are speculative at best. The limited available information about find-spots, however, does not generally support the hypothesis that painters had foreign markets in mind when they selected themes for their vases (Shapiro 2000: 318;

Steiner 2007: 234–6; Bundrick 2008: 292–4), and one recent trend has been to approach the vases as objects with complex "lives" whose perceptions by both the producing culture and the receiving culture merit consideration (Appadurai 1986; Marconi 2004b; Osborne 2004a; Avramidou 2006; Lyons 2008).

What this means for the Briseis Painter's kylix is that, while Lewis is not wrong to note that the Etruscans would have understood the imagery in a manner consistent with their own culture, erotic images do have something to tell us about the Athenians, and we would do well to ask what the latter would have made of such a scene. Both Lewis and Martin Kilmer have persuasively argued that the identification of women in erotic scenes as *hetairai* depends on an overly simplistic equation between graphic sexuality and prostitution (Kilmer 1993: 159–67; Lewis 2002: 116–28, *passim*), and this equation seems even more problematic when we recognize that sex workers were not the only women whom Athenians represented in an overtly sexualized manner. The remains of Old Comedy attest to a popular stereotype of *all* women as sex-obsessed, and Sarah Stroup has observed some remarkable similarities between the "*hetairai*" of the erotic scenes and the sex-crazed wives of the comic stage (Stroup 2004: 49–56). Although most erotic images predate Aristophanic comedy by several decades, Eva Keuls has noticed considerable overlap between early red-figure and Old Comedy, including a proclivity "towards scatological and genital humor, and [a focus] . . . on aspects of male-female sex relations and sex-role stereotyping" (Keuls 1988: 300). It is thus possible that, instead of presenting us with serious portraits of courtesans, the erotic images portray comic stereotypes about women in general, in the same spirit as a famous skyphos in

Figure 10.5 Attic red-figure skyphos, showing a woman drinking from a skyphos followed by a small maid. Date: 470–460 BCE. J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. no. 86. AE. 265. Photo: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu California.

Malibu (Figure 10.5) that shows a woman gulping wine from an oversized cup with an urgency that recalls the wine-loving women of Aristophanes (Mitchell 2009: 67, 75–7). Scholars are only beginning to grasp the pervasiveness of humor in vase painting, but recent studies have made clear just how much the painters delighted in comic inversions and other humorous distortions (Walsh 2008; Mitchell 2009), and these considerations will need to be central to future studies of the images.

5 Looking Forward

The vases examined in this essay do not give us anything resembling a straightforward picture of ancient women's lives, but they offer a wealth of information—often paralleled in other realms of representation—in the form of metaphors, artistic conventions, and stereotypes regarding the construction of femininity in ancient Athens. They also provide a sense of the work that remains to be done. Examination of the Eretria Painter's *epinetron* (Figure 10.1), for example, points to the need for more comprehensive investigation into the connection between shape and imagery. At the moment, the principles underlying both the pairing of images and the association of particular themes and shapes are poorly understood, and, until this changes, most attempts to explain the decorative program of individual vessels will have to remain speculative. Along slightly different lines, it has also become apparent that determining what pictures represent remains a pressing matter. The study of painted vases continues to reap tremendous benefits from the principles laid out in *A City of Images*, but an arguably less salutary effect of that project was the devaluing of specific content in the interpretation of pictures. The elevation of what Jean-Pierre Vernant called "major anthropological themes" (Vernant 1989: 7) over specific points of identification was perhaps a necessary step in advancing scholarly understanding of the images—but the suggestion that knowing the protagonists' identities "do[es] not seem indispensable to an understanding of [an] image" (Bérard and Durand 1989: 29) has solidified into a tendency to treat images as ambiguous documents whose precise content is unimportant, since they can represent whatever viewers wish to see (Beard 1991: 20–1; Osborne 2007: 45–6; Bundrick 2008: 297–8). Viewers undoubtedly play a role in the creation of meaning—for example, a bride and a groom are likely to have had different individual responses to the Eretria Painter's mythological scenes (Figure 10.1)—but the fact that an image has no fixed meaning does not imply that a community with a shared visual idiom should be unable to agree about what that image represents. To claim that identities of anonymous figures on the vases are fundamentally ambiguous is most often to conflate modern ignorance with ancient ambiguity, and sidestepping the question of whom or what is represented implicitly denies that the identities of the participants matter to our interpretation of the scene. Yet it makes a difference, as we have seen, whether a symposiast is an Athenian courtesan or an inhabitant of a world whose sexual roles would seem foreign to an Athenian (Figure 10.3), since the latter was a more suitable vehicle for conveying ideas about the need to keep women under control in a civilized society. The images on the vases will be of limited use to the study of ancient women unless we concede that knowledge of specifics *is* indispensable to understanding, even if it by no means exhausts it (Ferrari 2003 discusses this point in detail).

In this vein, another subject on which more detailed work is needed is the study of inscriptions on vases, particularly the "labels" that may accompany individual figures and

have traditionally been interpreted as names of ancient Athenians (Peschel (1987: 469) lists names of "*hetairai*"). Recent scholarship has suggested that it is unlikely that labels operate in so simple a manner. It is hard to imagine, for instance, that the Eretria Painter's image of Thetis' abduction would be unidentifiable without the inscriptions, and even the best-understood names sometimes appear in puzzling situations, such as when the name of Leagros, a well-known aristocratic youth, accompanies a woman or satyr (Shapiro 2004). In at least some cases, moreover, names seem to serve a descriptive function, a phenomenon that is familiar from comedy; for example, it has been shown that in images of women at a fountain house (such as the one illustrated in Figure 10.2), names such as Kallipe, Elanthis, Rhodon, and Gluke are more likely meant to evoke pleasing girlish images of horses, flowers, and other sweet things than to identify historical women (Manfrini-Aragno 1992; Ferrari 2003: 45). Yet, although we understand how writing works on individual vases, a comprehensive grasp of the issue still eludes us, and we may hope that further research into the inscriptions will create a more nuanced understanding of how the vases and their images may serve as evidence for ancient women.

It would be possible to continue at length about questions that need further investigation, but, so as not to stray too far from the issues raised in this essay, I will stop here. It should be evident, however, that our ability to make advances in understanding ancient women from the evidence of painted vases will depend on continued openness to engaging with materials and methods that have typically been the province of other areas of the discipline, or of other disciplines altogether. The interpretations offered in this essay rely heavily on analogies between images and literature, and I have proceeded in this way because studies highlighting the relationships between words and images have been among the most rigorous work produced in the field of vase painting in recent years. Literature, however, is not the only field that can contribute to our understanding of this topic, and there are some questions that literary models are not equipped to address (a concern raised most recently by Squire 2009). For example, several studies have attempted to understand vase paintings in light of the contexts in which the vases were used or deposited (Lissarrague 1990; Lewis 2002; Neer 2002; Marconi 2004b; Steiner 2007; Bundrick 2008), and knowing how ancient women interacted with the images is certainly desirable. Yet we do not, on the whole, have a clear sense of which vases women typically used, or how they used them, or under what circumstances, and, while it may seem relatively unproblematic to suggest that women carried white-ground lekythoi to graves, shapes such as kylikes present more difficult questions. Does the fact that a kylix was designed for the symposium mean that it was off-limits to all women but *hetairai*, or does this scenario not sufficiently account for the complexities of ancient domestic life or the individual "lives" of objects (Beard 1991: 19)? Although the latter alternative seems more likely, our inability to answer such questions with certainty results from our limited information regarding the archaeological contexts of so many extant vases. As new material emerges from better-documented contexts, we can hope that some questions will become easier to answer, although an expectation that material will emerge in sufficient quantities to provide definitive answers may be overly optimistic. Advances in the field of domestic archaeology, however, may provide a better understanding of sites that have already been excavated and give us a clearer picture of the spaces that women frequented and the types of objects to which they had access. Finally, continued attention to the studies of gender

and sexuality that are being carried out in non-Classical disciplines will be essential as we attempt to gain further insights into familiar material.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

The subject of a number of studies in its own right, the representation of women on Athenian vases has also become a mainstay of more general treatments of women and gender in ancient Greece. Most discussions focus on the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, the heyday of black- and red-figure styles; an important recent exception is Langdon (2008). Although the size of the corpus makes it impossible for any study to offer a comprehensive overview of women in vase painting, representative samples of the extant material (as well as a variety of methodological orientations) may be found in Reeder (1995), Keuls (1985), and Lewis (2002). Two influential studies of the body in ancient art—Bonfante (1989c) and Stewart (1997)—also make extensive use of vase painting.

Issues of interpretive method continue to be actively debated by scholars of vase painting, and images of women frequently assume prominent roles in these discussions. The collection edited by Bérard et al. (1989) played a critical role in shaping current approaches to the evidence; more recently, Ferrari (2002) has critiqued and expanded upon the methods advanced by Bérard and his collaborators. Both studies rely to varying degrees on metaphors of imagery as language, an approach that also informs Sourvinou-Inwood (1991), whose early chapters concern visual constructions of maidenhood. A broader variety of approaches may be found in the collection of Marconi (2004a).

The representation of heterosexual desire is discussed in Kilmer (1993) and Frontisi-Ducroux (1996). Scholars interested in ancient prostitution have often looked to vase paintings, especially sympotic scenes (Peschel 1987), although others urge caution in the interpretation of such images (e.g., Schmitt Pantel 2003). In contrast to scenes of heterosexual love, depictions of female homoeroticism have proven difficult to identify; Rabinowitz (2002) discusses the problems and possible approaches.

Women's ritual is a popular subject in vase painting; several scenes are discussed and illustrated in Kaltsas and Shapiro (2008). The representation of female religious activity is also a major focus of Sourvinou-Inwood (1988) and Connelly (2007). As these studies attest, the interpretation of ritual scenes is frequently hindered by gaps in our knowledge about the rituals themselves. Vases showing female Bacchic activities have proven especially difficult to understand; Hedreen (1994) and Peirce (1998) offer methodologically sensitive treatments of these images and point to larger issues involved in their interpretation.

Women are frequently represented on wedding and funerary vessels; on these objects, see Oakley and Sinos (1993), Oakley (2004), and Reilly (1989).

NOTES

1. The arbitrary connection between signifier and signified is a central principle of structural linguistics; see de Saussure et al. (1959: 67–70). Saussure dealt primarily with linguistic signs; although some argue that visual images are "natural" (as opposed to arbitrary or conventional) signs, this view has proven untenable (Mitchell 1986: 75–94).