

Art and Archaeology

It was in January 2008 that the Italian Republic welcomed ‘home’ a large Attic red-figured krater signed by Euphronios as painter, and once known as the ‘Million-dollar vase’, after its acquisition – for a record-breaking sum – by the New York Metropolitan Museum in 1972. That it came from an Etruscan tomb was always probable and, once proven, the process of restitution followed almost with alacrity. The modern movements of the vase, however, are less obscure than its ancient vicissitudes – at least putting a query over the invocation of a *nostos*. We only presume that it was made for a symposium at Athens c. 515 BC; and we can only speculate on how and why it joined the grave goods in a burial beneath the plateau of the city of Cerveteri. And yet the object is fairly typical of its sort: that is, the majority of surviving Greek painted vases have been found in a context beyond their original function. So the modern project of comprehending their decoration is difficult. Does it help if we conceive of them like texts? That much is implied by the title of Joan Mertens’ *How to Read Greek Vases*.⁷⁷ But the author begins by stating that the study of Greek vases is a ‘contemplative pursuit, comparable perhaps to fishing or gardening’. I can’t say that this comparison matches my experience of either activity – and doubt that vases share much with texts, even when they are sprinkled with inscriptions. The point is taken, nonetheless, that attention to detail is here rewarded. By virtue of adroit selection (from early Cycladic to ripe Centuripae), outstanding photography, and clear commentary, the book – entirely reliant upon the Metropolitan Museum’s surviving collection – makes a fine introduction to Greek painted pottery.

A pair of more specialized vase-painting studies deserve notice. The first is *The Pronomos Vase*.⁷⁸ This volume assembles expertise of various sorts to illuminate a single large volute krater in Naples Archaeological Museum. Recovered from Ruvo in Puglia in 1835, it was produced in Athens c. 400 BC and has long been admired, if not for its style (veering towards the ‘Ornate’), then for its visual information about ancient theatre. An *aulos*-player named Pronomos, probably the celebrated musician from Thebes who taught the pipes to Alcibiades, sits surrounded by a ‘cast’ of posing Thespians (including Dionysos), twenty-strong. The exposition of this scene devolves to a synod of fourteen scholars, with fruitful results (and credit due to signally careful editing). They are not unanimous – but the reader learns that this vase cannot hold a mirror to some actual company of players or production at the end of the fifth century. The painter was clearly not bound by Aristotelian Unities: he juggles with time, place, action, and identity, and even blurs the boundaries between satyr-play and tragedy. Did he know that this piece was destined to furnish a tomb in Magna Graecia? In any case, he created a talking point; a ceramic souvenir of the threefold transferable gifts of Dionysos – wine, drama, and the mysteries.

Something similar might be said of the Codrus Painter, whose production of drinking-cups, so far as they have survived, was bound for Etruscan use. This artist, too, shows himself as an Athenian, and not only by choosing to depict the Attic hero-king and proto-*archon* Codrus. In her monograph *The Codrus*

⁷⁷ *How To Read Greek Vases*. By Joan R. Mertens. New York and New Haven, CT, Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2010. Pp. 176. 214 colour illustrations, 4 maps. Paperback £16.99, ISBN: 978-0-30015-523-5.

⁷⁸ *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*. Edited by Oliver Taplin and Rosie Wyles. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv + 299. 58 illustrations. Hardback £85, ISBN: 978-0-19-958259-4.

Painter,⁷⁹ Amalia Avramidou explores a trait already noticed in the painter's output – his penchant for borrowing from the body language of sculptures on public display in fifth-century Athens. A well-known *kylix* in the British Museum, showing multiple deeds of Theseus, patently redeploys the attitudes of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, as cast in the Tyrannicides group in the Agora. Avramidou argues for further references to other monuments – certain grave *stelai*, and various monumental reliefs, including the Parthenon Frieze and the base of the Nemesis figure at Rhamnous. Though it is not suggested that the Codrus Painter set out deliberately to evoke particular monuments of Athens, the author speculates that he was, as it were, capitalizing on the city's cultural kudos: creating pots 'that would have been perceived as typically Athenian, typically phidianizing, and thus highly appropriate for export' (84).

Whether or not we concur with the connective logic of that citation, we will acknowledge the peculiar power of Athens as a cityscape: perceived by Thucydides (1.10), but barely described before Pausanias. A chronological survey of ancient topography by John Camp (*The Archaeology of Athens* [2001]) updated the work of John Travlos and others; this, however, has not deterred Emanuele Greco and colleagues at the Italian School of Athens from embarking upon a projected eight-volume survey of Athenian topography. The first volume of *Topografia di Atene*⁸⁰ has appeared, covering the Acropolis and Areopagus hills and the area between the Acropolis and Pnyx excavated at the end of the nineteenth century by Dörpfeld. The arrangement of material is by place, not chronology, but this is not a practical guide as such; rather, it is an annotated compendium of our present understanding of the ancient urban environment from the Bronze Age to the Herulian incursions of AD 267. Maps and axonometric drawings are mostly taken or adapted from previous publications, supplemented by a few fresh photographs; the text is crisp and clear, giving summaries of the excavated record and present state of consensus. Boxed supplementary essays – on topics such as 'The Elgin Marbles', 'The Monumental Politics of the Attalids at Athens', 'St Paul and Athens' – give the book extra value as a work of reference.

Le roi est mort, vive le roi... the peculiar sense of that slogan, originally intended to celebrate royal succession, occurred to me while perusing Ada Cohen's *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great*.⁸¹ The study originated, she says, 'from the standpoint of a profound admiration for Macedonian monuments of the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods' (xix). The reasons for this profound admiration are not divulged: we can only presume that they belong with the technical virtuosity of execution evident in the pebble mosaics of Pella, the paintings at Vergina, the relief-work on the Derveni krater, and so forth – because Cohen's analysis of the imagery sponsored by the court of Philip and Alexander is tantamount to moral disgust. Glorified violence – violence chiefly visited upon foreigners, animals, and women –

⁷⁹ *The Codrus Painter. Iconography and Reception of Athenian Vases in the Age of Pericles*. By Amalia Avramidou. Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. Pp. xiii + 256. 250 b/w illustrations. Hardback £56.50, ISBN: 978-0-299-24780-5.

⁸⁰ *Topografia di Atene. Sviluppo urbano e monumenti dale origin al III secolo d.C.. Tomo 1: Acropoli-Areopago-Tra Acropoli e Pnice*. By Emanuele Greco, with the collaboration of Fausto Longo and Maria Chiara Monaco. Athens and Paestum, Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene/Pandemos, 2010. Pp. 304. Hardback €90, ISBN: 978-88-87744-34-7.

⁸¹ *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great. Paradigms of Manhood and Their Cultural Tradition*. By Ada Cohen. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xxiii + 398. 145 b/w illustrations. Hardback £65, ISBN: 978-0-521-76904-4.

dominates the repertoire. Although Nietzsche is one modern theorist who does not get a mention here, Cohen's characterization of Macedonian monarchy fits almost seamlessly the profile of Nietzsche's pitiless Superman. She concedes that 'a preference for the iconography of rape does not entail a proliferation of rapists' (301). But her exploration of royal patronage certainly adds to the ancient stereotype, furthered by Demosthenes, of Macedonia as a semi-barbaric state. There is explicit violence, too, on Roman imperial monuments: how far this was intended to invite sympathy for the victims is debatable. Martin Beckmann, in his monograph on *The Column of Marcus Aurelius*⁸² – the first book-length study of the Column in English – argues that the ferocity evident on the Marcus Column (ostentatious decapitation, punitive harrying of civilians) was there by the emperor's own wish: he regarded his tribal opponents beyond the Danube as unworthy of *clementia*. Some commentators, noting how figures of women and children on the Column's reliefs turn as if in appeal to the viewer, would rather see a measure of Stoic commiseration here. Beckmann resists that speculation; and he wants to resist, too, the sort of judgement on the monument pronounced by Ian Richmond: that, by contrast to Trajan's Column, it is an impressionistic and rather careless scroll, devoid of historical accuracy. Undoubtedly the sculptors' ingenuity was tested by particular episodes of the Danubian campaigns – most famously, the miraculous downpour in the land of the Quadi that at once slaked the thirst of the Romans and deluged the enemy, represented by a Blake-like personification of divine inundation. The line taken by Beckmann is that verisimilitude was not a priority for the artists. This was an honorific frieze, and what mattered most was that the honorific message be visible and legible: hence a style marked by the imperative of preferred simplicity. A century or so later, however, tribes of the Danube area remained far from settled within the empire. In AD 270 an army commander called Lucius Aurelianus, himself from Dacia, became emperor, and signalled the danger from Goths and Vandals by immediately ordering a circuit of new defensive walls for Rome. His decision, and its consequences for the city, are examined in Hendrik Dey's *The Aurelian Wall and the Refashioning of Imperial Rome*.⁸³ Ian Richmond, again, had his view on this monument, claiming it to be deliberately inconspicuous (as if to obscure the admission that distant frontiers had become untenable). Interim studies of the Aurelian Wall's various architectural features and phases, by the late Lucos Cozza et al., justify a fresh evaluation. In a pleasantly readable manner, Dey assesses the purpose and function of the twelve-mile enclosure, observing that it served as much to keep people in the city as to repel marauders. Its defensive utility was never extensive – it was not built to withstand a siege – while problems with the urban plebs, and the necessity of regularizing customs dues, gave the wall a social and economic *raison d'être*. Its very construction, involving an estimated 10% of Rome's adult male inhabitants, may have been born of political expediency. Then, over time, a peculiar process took place: as the city itself became dilapidated and depopulated, early medieval pontiffs took care to maintain and restore

⁸² *The Column of Marcus Aurelius. The Genesis and Meaning of a Roman Imperial Monument*. By Martin Beckmann. Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press 2011. Pp. ix + 248. 10 drawings, 59 illustrations, 1 map. Hardback £56.50, ISBN: 978-0-8078-3461-9.

⁸³ *The Aurelian Wall and the Refashioning of Imperial Rome AD 271–855*. By Hendrik W. Dey. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xv + 360. 63 b/w illustrations. Hardback £65, ISBN: 978-0-521-76365-3.

the Aurelian Wall – even though it did not encompass the *ager Vaticanus*. By the papacy of Adrian I (772–95), it was already becoming symbolic of Rome’s independence from Constantinople: ‘a fitting frame’, as Dey concludes, ‘for the earthly seat of the successors of Peter, the self-proclaimed regents of a universal Church centred on Rome’ (282).

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