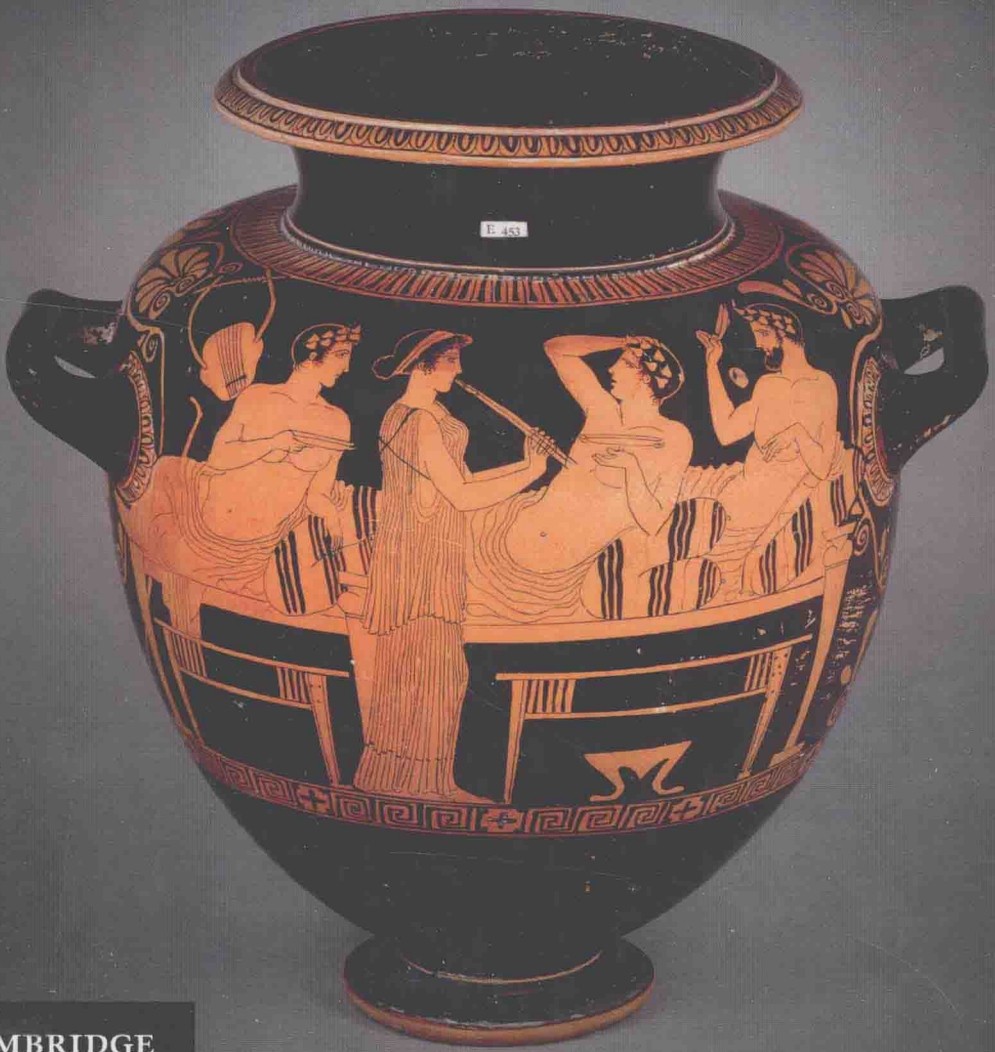
FIONA HOBDEN

The Symposion in Ancient Greek Society and Thought



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THE SYMPOSION IN ANCIENT GREEK SOCIETY AND THOUGHT

The symposion was a key cultural phenomenon in ancient Greece. This book investigates its place in ancient Greek society and thought by exploring the rhetorical dynamics of its representations in literature and art. Across genres, individual Greeks constructed visions of the party and its performances that offered persuasive understandings of the event and its participants. Sympotic representations thus communicated ideas which, set within broader cultural conversations, could possess a discursive edge. Hence, at the symposion, sympotic styles and identities might be promoted, critiqued and challenged. In the public imagination, the ethics of Greeks and foreigners might be interrogated and political attitudes intimated. Symposia might be suborned into historical narratives about struggles for power. And for philosophers, writing a *Symposium* was itself a rhetorical act. Investigating the symposion's discursive potential enhances understanding of how the Greeks experienced and conceptualized the symposion and demonstrates its contribution to the Greek thought world.

FIONA HOBDEN is a Senior Lecturer in Greek Culture at the University of Liverpool, where she teaches courses on various aspects of ancient Greek cultural history, including politics, gender and religion. Her current research focuses primarily on the symposion, but she is also interested in representations of the past and the present in Classical Athens, in ancient and modern responses to the Athenian cityscape and in history represented on television.

To family and friends

Here's tae us!
Wha's like us?
Damn few,
And they're a' deid.
Mair's the pity.

A Scots toast

Illustrations

Photograph and line drawings are by the author.

Acknowledgements

The impetus to examine the symposion through the constructive and persuasive workings of its representations in ancient Greek society and thought arose from my doctoral work on Plato's and Xenophon's *Symposia*, examined in November 2003. I have thus been working on the project for over a decade, and I have accrued many debts of gratitude. A Ronald Morton Smith Scholarship from the University of St Andrews and a Major Scottish Studentship from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (administered in my final year by the Arts and Humanities Research Board) funded that initial doctoral research. My thesis was examined by Paul Cartledge and Stephen Halliwell, and I am indebted to them for comments and encouragement at this early stage, and beyond. The book moved towards its current shape during a Visiting Fellowship at the Institute of Classical Studies in London in Spring 2006. Chapters 3 and 4 were drafted in spring 2009 during my spell as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Sydney, based at the Centre for Classical and Near Eastern Studies of Australia. I am grateful to Mike Edwards and Olga Krzyszkowska at the former, and Julia Kindt, Kathryn Welch and Peter Wilson at the latter, for their warm welcomes. My residencies were made possible by awards from the University of Liverpool Research Development Fund, and from the British Council Research Exchange Programme and J. P. Postgate Trust, respectively.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations for ancient sources follow Liddell, Scott and Jones, *A Greek–English Lexicon*. Journal titles in the bibliography are abbreviated in line with *L'Année philologique*.

ABV	Beazley, J. D. (1956) *Attic Black-figure Vase-painters*, Oxford.
Add.	Carpenter, T. H. (1989) *Beazley Addenda: Additional References to ABV, ARV*^{2} *and Paralipomena*, 2nd edition, Oxford.
ANET	Pritchard, J. B. (1969) *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd edition, Princeton, NJ.
ARV	Beazley, J. D. (1942) *Attic Red-figure Vase-painters*, Oxford.
ARV^2	Beazley, J. D. (1963) *Attic Red-figure Vase-painters*, 2nd edition, Oxford.
BD	The Beazley Archive Pottery Database (www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/databases/pottery.htm).
Bergk	Bergk, T. (1878–82) *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, Lipsiae.
Caizzi	Caizzi, F. (1966) *Antisthenis Fragmenta*, Milan.
Campbell	Campbell, D. A. (1988–93) *Greek Lyric*, Cambridge, MA and London.
CorVP	Amyx, D. A. (1988) *Corinthian Vase-painting of the Archaic Period*, London.
CTH	Laroche, E. (1997) *Catalogue des textes hittites*, Paris.
Davies	Davies, M. (1991) *Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Oxford.
DK	Diels, H. A. and Kranz, W. (1951–2) *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und Deutsch*, 6th edition, Berlin.
FGrH	Jacoby, F. (1923–64) *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Leiden.
Guardasole	Guardasole, A. (1997) *Eraclide di Tarento: Frammenti*, Naples.

Hiller	Hiller, E. (1879) 'Hieronymi Rhodii Peripatetici Fragmenta' in H. Sauppe (ed.), *Satura Philologa* 8.
K	Kinkel, G. (1877) *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Lipsiae.
KA	Kassel, R. and Austin, C. (1986–) *Poetae Comici Graeci (PCG)*, Berlin.
Kern	Kern, O. (1922) *Orphicum Fragmenta*, Berlin.
Kind	Kindstrand, J. F. (1981) *Anacharsis: the Legend and the Apophthegmata*, Uppsala.
Köpke	Köpke, E. (1956) *De Chamaeleontis Heracleotae Vita Librorumque Reliquiis Disputavit*, Berolini.
Lenfant	Lenfant, D. (2004) *Ctésias de Cnide: La Perse; L'Inde; autres fragments*, Paris.
Lesher	Lesher, J. H. (1992) *Xenophanes of Colophon: Fragments*, Toronto.
LP	Lobel, E. and Page, D. L. (1955) *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*, Oxford.
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., Scott, R. and Jones, H. S. (1996) *A Greek–English Lexicon*, 9th edition with a revised supplement, Oxford.
MW	Merkelbach, R. and West, M. L. (1967) *Fragmenta Hesiodea*, Oxford.
N	Nauck, A. (1889) *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 2nd edition, Lipsiae.
Page	Page, D. L. (1962) *Poetae Melici Graeci*, Oxford.
Para.	Beazley, J. D. (1971) *Paralipomena: Additions to Attic Black-figure Vase-painters and to Attic Red-figure Vase-Painters*, Oxford.
SH	Lloyd-Jones, H. and Parsons, P. (1983) *Supplementum Hellenisticum*, Berlin and New York.
W	West, M. L. (1989–92) *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum Cantati*, 2nd edition, Oxford.
Wehrli	Wehrli, F. (1969) *Die Schule des Aristoteles: Text und Kommentar*, Basel.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Talking about the symposion

> The *symposion*? It is on the brushes of all the painters, on the lips of all the poets – so they say. Is it that simple?
>
> Schmitt Pantel (1990) 16

With this question, Pauline Schmitt Pantel embarked upon a re-evaluation of the symposion, or 'drinking party', in Archaic Greek culture. Her primary goal was to integrate what scholarship was increasingly defining as a private gathering of elite males into the civic arena, an argument she pursued on a grander scale in her monograph *La cité au banquet* (1992). Recently Oswyn Murray, inspired especially by contemporary anthropology, had established the symposion as a *Männerbund*, a select all-male group bound by mutual obligation and shared activity. The accessibility of sympotic 'conversation' had also been improved by the increasing attribution of monodic poetry to such convivial gatherings. Thanks to these developments, a strong sense was emerging of the symposion as a venue for Greek elites to consolidate their social and political networks at a remove from their wider communities.[1] At the same time, new analyses of the figured decoration on drinking ware that originated especially from Corinth and Athens provided insights into the entertainments and the socio-psychological potency of drinking together.[2] As awareness of the symposion

[1] Murray (1982, 1983a, 1983b). Singing symposiasts were already posited by Reitzenstein (1893) 45–86, who made the banquet the performance venue for elegiac verse; Von der Mühll (1975) 497–504, originally delivered in 1926, throws fragments by Alcaeus, Archilochus, Mimnermus, Xenophanes, Theognis, Pindar, Anacreon, and Euenus of Paros into the mix. Recently, the most influential studies placing such poetry in sympotic contexts include Rösler (1980), Gentili (1981, 1988), Rossi (1983), Vetta (1983), and E. L. Bowie (1986, 1994).

[2] Led particularly by Lissarrague (1990a), following earlier studies of sympotic scenes in art by Fehr (1971) and Dentzer (1982); see n. 9, below. For convergences in scholarly endeavour, see Hobden (2009a) 271–3. Murray (2003) reflects more deeply on the intellectual trends that stimulated the rise in sympotic scholarship.

as an important cultural institution in Archaic Greece was growing, Schmitt Pantel requested a pause to consider the precise nature of the event envisaged by the poets and painters whose creations were eagerly drawn upon as evidence. Her response to the question 'Is it that simple?' was designed to complicate the picture, to highlight the continuity within allegedly 'public' and 'private' settings for communal drinking by means of image and song, and to make sympotic activity a potentially civic pastime. Two decades later, the scholarly wheel continues to turn. While Murray's work remains foundational, as do the articles in his edited volume *Sympotica*, which features Schmitt Pantel's essay, nuance has been added and critiqued in turn. A civic dimension is not controversial. The scope of who participated in symposia and why has been extended and refined to reflect increased attention to specific contexts for sympotic poetry and artefacts, to take account of ideological influences on earlier work, and to display sensitivity to historical development and circumstance. The symposion as it is perceived today is anything but simple.

Nonetheless, Schmitt Pantel's prefatory query remains pertinent: 'It is on the brushes of all the painters, on the lips of all the poets.' Symposia greet us through items produced by individuals well over two thousand years ago from within the cultures to which the party belonged. They are representations: depictions drawn on figured pottery or sculpted in stone, or oral and written re-imaginings of the event staged in metred verse and prose. If we look to this material for evidence of the symposion, what exactly are we seeing? Today we are attuned to the disjunction between representation and reality. To depict (to paint, to photograph, to describe in writing) an object is to adopt a position towards it: to filtrate it through one's 'lens', to produce a simulacrum, a likeness, an image determined by that position. The photograph, for example, was at first considered an objective snapshot of the world. However, we are now conscious that its contents are carefully shaped by the photographer, who decides what to focus on and what to exclude, and who may deliberately manipulate the lighting, composition and setting, or *mise-en-scène*. These choices may be determined by the photographer's purpose, whether to contribute to a news story, or to record a family event or to produce a provocative piece of art. No representation is created without purpose or intent, and the act of creation imposes shape and generates narratives to fit. Furthermore, at the moment someone looks at, hears or reads a representation, a communication begins. This conversation is determined not only by the shape and contents of the representation, but by the contexts in which it is seen or read, and by the preoccupations of its

audience.[3] So, newspaper readers might interpret a front-page photograph as illustrative of the headline or article it accompanies, or they may bring to bear their own ideas or experiences to make sense of its apparent contents. As an object of 'reception', to use the theoretical jargon that describes this process of engagement, all representations are animate and active.[4] Hence, the symposia we confront in ancient literature and art are not staid depictions of essential truths, but abstract conceptualizations that come alive in the telling.

Take one example from the brush of one painter: the symposion that appears on an early sixth-century Corinthian black-figure krater now in the Louvre and attributed to the Athana Painter (Figure 1).[5] Spread around the belly of the krater, its couches and occupants regularly spaced, this sympotic scene is schematized to fit the shape of the pot. It is drafted according to the experience and imagination of a painter working in the Corinthian black-figure tradition; he may work from a standard repertoire or lived memory or hearsay, so that the details of its execution may be determined by preconceptions or realism or fantasy.[6] And it possesses a communicative power, whether the krater sits amidst drinkers as a container for mixed wine or is utilized in the Etruscan funerary rituals at Caere that account for its preservation down into the present day. The balanced distribution of couches around the belly, the interplay between men and women on these couches, the decoration of their fabrics, the positioning of the lyres and the tables and the food and the armour all speak to their viewer. Social relationships, gender relations, and ideologies of luxury and war may be articulated for living symposiasts, or for buriers of the Etruscan dead, who may recognize themselves or the deceased in the depicted action, or observe

[3] The classic study of this triangulated interplay between creator, object and viewer in the visual realm is Berger (1972), although his work is very much a reflection of a developing trend in art history that mirrored contemporary advancements also in literary theory: for these, see Culler (1982).

[4] To quote one exponent of this theory in the realm of Classics, there is a 'construction of meaning at the point of reception': Kennedy (2006) 289. On the development and premises of reader reception theory, see Eagleton (1996) 64–77.

[5] Paris, Musée du Louvre E629 (*CorVP* 235, A1; *BD* 9019327). For the pacing of couches around the krater's belly, see also the Corinthian kraters gathered by Schmitt Pantel (1992) figs. 1–5, 7. Bowls, or phialai, and cups, or kylikes, produced elsewhere similarly accommodate reclining symposiasts to the available surface space in this way: again, see Schmitt Pantel (1992) figs. 8, 11–14, 16–18, 23–5. Note: all dates are BCE unless otherwise stated.

[6] Analysis by Smith (2007) of scenes of revelry on Corinthian and other contemporary figured ware emphasizes the interplay between standard motif and invention in the black-figure tradition. Note that the symposion adorning the Boeotian black-figure tripod-kothon, *c.* 575–560, which she discusses for its revelry (*kōmos*), equally displays formal continuities with contemporary and future imagery (67, fig. 26): this vessel is discussed on p. 13, below.

Figure 1 Corinthian black-figure krater attributed to the Athana Painter, *c.* 590, side A.

an identity and lifestyle to aspire to, now or in the afterlife.[7] In short, like all representation, this sympotic depiction is rhetorical: it is constructed and constructs; it is communicative and it 'persuades', in the sense that it encourages the viewer to perceive the represented event in ways that gain meaning in the encounter context. This rhetorical engagement, however, is not one-directional, but informed by the preconceptions and ideas that the reader brings to the engagement in particular settings.[8] Situated in their own specific socio-cultural world, a hypothetical Corinthian warrior – who might also find meaning in the cavalrymen painted on the other side of the krater – would receive the projected symposion differently from a hypothetical Etruscan elite, at the table or in the grave. So to answer Schmitt Pantel on the symposia that issue forth from the lips of poets and brushes of painters, it really is not that simple.

These premises about representation and reception are hardly new, and they clearly underpin the work of François Lissarrague and his intellectual followers in their analyses of sympotic scenes on decorated drinking ware as

[7] For the Etruscan consumption of Greek sympotic scenes and their workings within Etruscan social and funerary practice, see Avramidou (2006) esp. 572–7, with Isler-Kerényi (2003).

[8] See Spivey (1991) 144–5, thinking particularly about transitions into Etruscan culture: 'Decorated vases travel and speak to those who accommodate them. When we look at an image on a Greek vase, what it says may not be what its artist intended it to say – but the discourse goes on, regardless.'

if they were in circulation at the very event they depict.[9] And although they remain largely unarticulated, they are also fundamental to many readings of sympotic representation within individual literary works or genres. Symposia appear in epic, lyric, tragedy, comedy, history, philosophical dialogues, oratory, letters, biographies and novels – indeed in most textual forms – and many of these have fallen under investigation in their own terms. Yet, although responsive to one another, these studies remain largely fragmented, generally collated in edited collections or dispersed in journals rather than explored in concentrated fashion in monographs (Aristophanic comedy offers one exception). Representations in different genres are rarely brought together in one study, unless an effort is under way to reconstruct the historical symposion from the ancient sources.[10] In this respect, the diversity of the material that depicts sympotic activities is as much a bane as a boon. Because no single person could navigate their way through all the available physical and written evidence, the symposion lends itself more easily to communal endeavour, with analyses developing in tandem but independently within realms of expertise. Thanks to the efforts of earlier pioneers in the field, sympotic studies now bloom. However, understanding the rhetorical force of sympotic representation remains at a micro level: investigation of its varied appearances across a range of cultural products and conversations is curtailed. It is the purpose of this monograph on the symposion in ancient Greek society and thought to begin stitching together representations, to understand their workings on a macro scale. Through this patchwork approach, the symposion emerges not only as a key cultural phenomenon in the socio-political landscape of Archaic and Classical Greece in historical ('real life') terms. It is also a pervasive and active component of the Greek thought world, the discursive space where individuals as part of a shared community conceptualized, debated, understood

[9] The seminal work is Lissarrague (1990a; cf. 1990c, 1990d, 1992). For other treatments of sympotic scenes at symposia see, for example: Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague (1990); Schäfer (1997); Heinemann (2000, 2009); Sutton (2000); Neer (2002) 9–26; R. Osborne (2007); Steiner (2007) 231–64; Topper (2009); and Catoni (2010). Although Kistler (2009) sets out to open up possible 'oppositional' readings of satyric imagery beyond Lissarrague, his analysis of represented satyric sympotics within the symposion is nonetheless framed by his work.

[10] See Murray (1990a), W. J. Slater (1991), Murray and Tecuşan (1995), and Orfanos and Carrière (2003): the contributions in these volumes not only cover a range of socio-political dimensions and literary and artistic representations, but cross over into Near Eastern and Roman cultures. On Aristophanes' symposia, see Pütz (2007), expanding upon shorter studies by W. J. Slater (1981) and A. Bowie (1997). In terms of historical studies, Schmitt Pantel's (1992) remit is extensive as she seeks to identify a reality through representation; see also Corner (2005). In a shorter historicist snapshot of the symposion, W. J. Henderson (2000) also collates a broad range of ancient sources to identify central aspects and functions of the symposion.