

## INTRODUCTION

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Athenian vases painted between the sixth and fourth centuries BC are unique in their aesthetically perfect shapes and attractive painted decoration. The figurative scenes on these vases tell stories about Greek gods, mythical heroes and Athenians.<sup>1</sup> However, scholars have recently disputed the interpretation of the scenes on Athenian vases and what they reveal about Athenian life and thought.<sup>2</sup> This book revolves around a specific vase shape and theme - the choes and illustrations of children that adorn them. The main emphasis is on the period from the latter half of the 5th century BC to the first quarter of the next century, which witnessed a significant rise in the number of Athenian choes. Although the iconography of these vases is varied, the depiction of children was the most prominent.<sup>3</sup> Children are rarely seen on other Athenian vase types and at other times, so it appears that choes and children were closely related.

To understand the meaning of individual scenes depicted in vase paintings, it is best to take a holistic approach. Although each scene on a vase conveyed only what was depicted, Athenians of that time did not interpret them individually. Instead, they saw them as part of a larger whole that included all the vase representations. As a result, the context in which these scenes were viewed determined how they were associated with and interpreted. Therefore, to grasp the meaning of individual scenes in vase paintings, one must always consider the series to which they belong. Scenes with children on choes must be seen in the context of overall development. Before the end of the sixth century BC, Athenian vases predominantly featured scenes from men's lives, focusing on war-related themes.<sup>4</sup> However, in the 5th century BC, new themes emerged on Athenian vases. In them dominated scenes from women's lives, which broke away from traditional pictorial representations.<sup>5</sup> Within this framework, scenes with children on choes emerged and developed.

The book is divided into three parts. The first and last parts talk about vase paintings in general. In the first chapter, 'Athenians and Painted Vases', the author outlines principles for analysing the iconography of these vases that will be used throughout the book. The second and longest chapter focuses on choes. It provides a detailed analysis of their decoration, which children dominate. Other subjects depicted on choes include mythical creatures, Dionysos, satyrs and maenads, adult feasters, athletes, musicians, and actors.

The author argues that only by systematically analysing all the themes depicted on choes and their interrelationships can we understand how the depictions of children may have been perceived by Athenians of the time. In the book, the author

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<sup>1</sup> The Beazley Archive in Oxford now records around 130,000 vases dating, with a few exceptions, from the sixth–fourth centuries BC, three-quarters of which were made in Athens.

<https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/carc/pottery> [accessed 24 March 2024].

<sup>2</sup> The titles of the most recently published syntheses testify to this: Lissarrague 2001; Neer 2002; Schmidt 2005; Oakley 2013; Osborne 2018. Cf. earlier contributions by the author of this book: Bažant 1975, 1980, 1981, 1985, 1987, and 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Beazley Archive Pottery database

<https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/xdb/ASP/testSearch.asp?searchBy=Date+Range>: 35 choes (575–475 BC) 132 choes (500–425 BC), 476 choes (450–400 BC), 119 choes (400–300 BC) [accessed 24 March 2024].

<sup>4</sup> Stansbury-O'Donnell 2006; Filser 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Bažant 1985; Schmidt 2005.

does not proceed chronologically but starts with the most frequently occurring scenes from the second half of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth century BC 'Children'. The interpretation of these scenes is subsequently refined by analysing the less frequent ones. First, the author discusses the roots of iconography on choes, going back to around 500 BC, 'Children's Feast' and 'Dionysos'. He concludes by discussing scenes where the protagonists are adults and slaves appear, 'Athenian Citizens' and 'Slave Children'. The third chapter, 'Rise and Fall of Athenian Painted Vases', returns to the relationship between iconography and Athenians. It places the conclusions about children and choes in a broader context.