III. RISE AND FALL OF ATHENIAN PAINTED VASES

In Greek art before 530 BC, the human figure is often shown in a static pose that has remained unchanged for centuries, giving the impression of timelessness. The best athletes have been given a tripod as a prize since immemorial (Fig. 279). These vase paintings and sculptures seemed authoritative because they were part of the tradition and unrelated to the changing visual experience. Between 530 and 400 BC, Athenian vase painters introduced a new way of depicting life. Painters began to evoke a visual experience by breaking away from the conventions of Near-Eastern art. In these representations, human figures were representerd in finite postures. Athenian painters stopped combining angles of view for the human figure, head and legs from the side, chest frontally. Instead, they started to depict man from one angle, resulting in infinite postures. This approach required a mastery of human anatomy and proportions. Additionally, Athenian vase paintings began to suggest movement and three-dimensionality through perspective foreshortening. This development was also observed in sculpture, which underwent dramatic changes at the beginning of the fifth century BC.[212]

Figure 279. Black-figure amphora, c. 550 BC.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 56.171.13. BA 310310. Public domain.

The new depiction of life on Athenian vases shifted from the traditional conceptual approach, where the world was depicted according to what was known about it. Vase painters started to depict not only what they knew but what they saw. This perceptual approach began to prevail, and artists began to compete to depict

[212] Stewart 2008; Tanner 2016.

people and things as they appeared to them, aiming to achieve the maximum effect of reality. Unusual points of view served this purpose, as seen in the depiction of a symposiast from behind (Fig. 280). He is half sitting on a couch, leaning his left elbow on a pillow and raising his right hand with a cup. In the background is a cup shown from below and a wine-pouring jug. Next to the couch is a three-legged table, and below is a basket where the feasters bring food. This view did not introduce anything new about the symposium that the audience of the time needed to learn, but the scenes matched the visual experience. The angle of view corresponded to what the symposium participant saw when he entered the andron, where the symposium took place. The coaches were set up along the walls, so the first thing he saw at the door was the back of the couch with a symposiast.

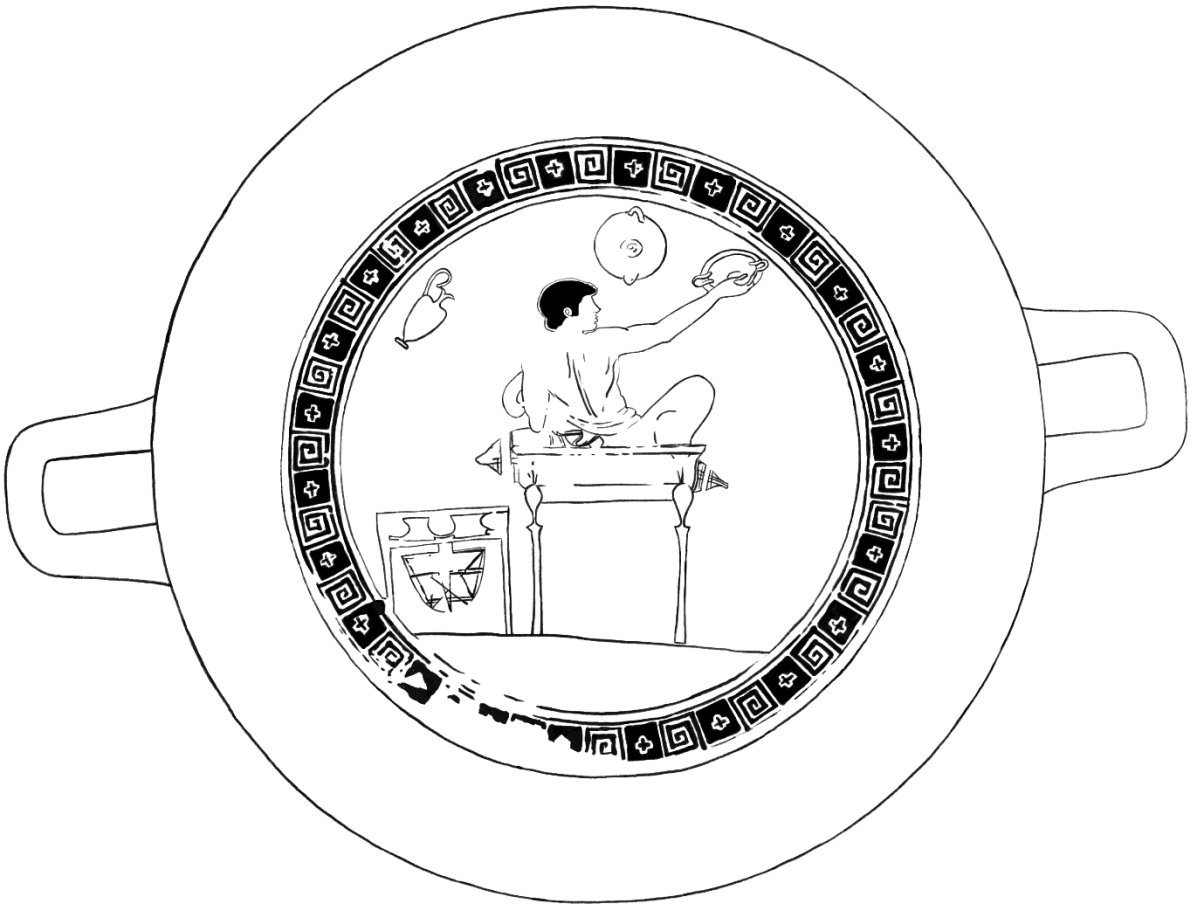

Figure 280. Red-figure cup, 490–480 BC. London, British Museum, inv. no. 1892,0518.1. BA 205273.

In archaic Greek art, viewers formed strong connections with depicted people due to the unchanging nature of pictorial conventions. However, around 500 BC, the new way of portraying human figures emerged, which altered their relationship with the viewer. The figures were now depicted in a relaxed posture, with their legs often pointing in a different direction than their gaze. This new technique made the figures come alive, breaking the connection with the viewer's world and continuing to exist in their own world, absorbed in their environment, stories, and emotions. The new way of representing people captured them in a fleeting moment, making it contingent

and ambiguous, and it could no longer have the binding force of the previous archaic epoch. Jaś Elsner's now-classic article on the 'Greek Revolution' discusses this shift in representation:

> In place of participant observer, whose viewing fulfilled the work of art by creating a temporary bridge across worlds in archaic art, the Classical generated its viewer as voyeur. What we look at in naturalistic art […] is a world in which we might participate but cannot, to which we relate by fantasy, wish-fulfilment and imaginative contextualisation. All the stories we may tell ourselves about such art - fictions generated by the conjunction of the specific moment and gesture in which a naturalistic object appears to have been caught and the desires of the particular viewer - are ways of reading ourselves into its world.[213]

With the change in the display method, what was being displayed also changed. As Robin Osborne pointed out, the 'Greek Revolution' was a revolution in style and content*:*

> The artists of classical Greece saw and represented things differently from the artists of late archaic Greece, but that was part of their seeing different things. We are never going to understand 'the emergence of the classical style' unless we understand the emergence of this style was bound up with the emergence of a new content, a different subject for art. [214]

The two changes in Greek art were not merely shifts in style and themes but significant transformations that reshaped the artistic landscape. The new style of representation revolutionized traditional themes and birthed entirely new characters and themes. This new way of depicting life can be better understood through the vase paintings that rejuvenated traditional themes. The depiction of men feasting and engaging in immoderate drinking was a reflection of a deeply ingrained cultural practice. It was a way for Greek men to assert their privileged social status. However, Athenians could be portrayed in a less flattering light from the late sixth century BC.

The Würzburg cup, for instance, depicts a young man vomiting (Fig. 281). The ivy wreaths on his head, and the girl holding his head symbolize this act. Ivy, a symbol of the worshippers of the god of wine, Dionysos, was also believed to be a hangover reliever, adding another layer of cultural significance to the artwork.[215] However, it did not help the young man, who had already lost complete control of his body, his knees buckling. At the last moment, however, a slave girl held his head so that he vomited only on her legs. Her actions point to her subordinate social status, as indicated by her short-cropped hair. The scene's attractivity was enhanced because it was placed at the bottom of the cup. When the cup was full, only the outer wall of the goblet was visible, with the revellers having a good time and their exuberant procession seemingly endlessly circling. Only after the cup was emptied did the feaster see what awaited those who overdid their drinking.

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[213] Elsner 2006, 85–86

[214] Osborne 2018, 249.

[215] Athen. XV, 17.

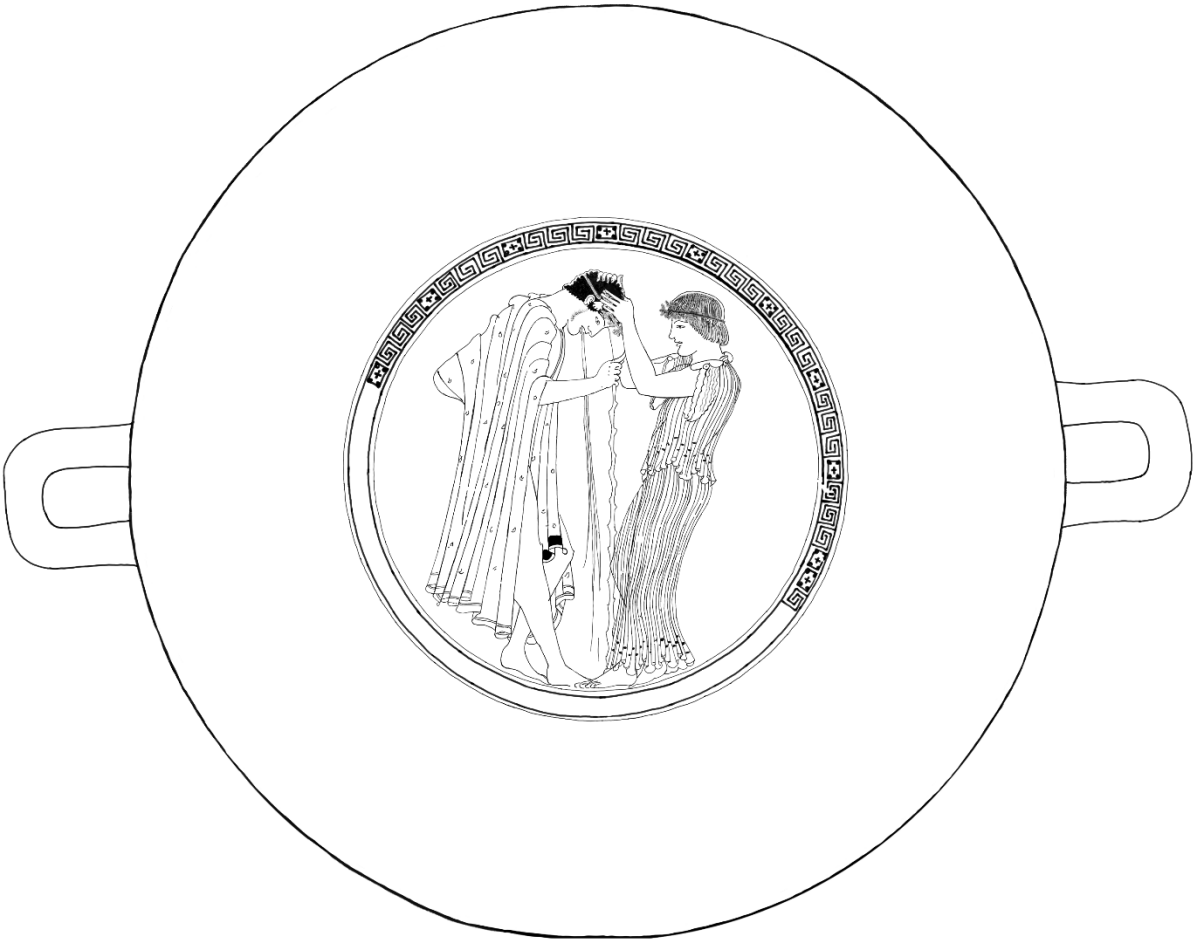

Figure 281. Red-figure cup, *c.* 490 BC. Würzburg, Universität, inv. no. 479. BA 203930.

However, these scenes were not about morality, as evidenced by the scene at the bottom of another cup, which shows a defecting man wiping his bottom with a stone (Fig. 282).[216] He was also apparently at a feast, as indicated by an ivy wreath, walking cane, and cloak hanging around his neck. He is naked, which was an attribute of the komasts, who had ceased caring for their clothes in the wild night revels. The scene takes place on an Athenian street where such a thing could be seen, as Aristophanes' comedy *The Assemblywomen* from around 389 BC shows. Blepyros appears on stage, telling the audience that it is early in the morning and he is looking for a suitable place to relieve himself outside his house. However, a neighbour appears in the window of a nearby house, recognizes him, and calls out to him.[217] As it turns out, he can see him clearly, having noticed that he has worn a woman's dress. Characteristically, the neighbour does not comment on Blepyros defecating in the street.

[216] Aristoph. *Ach.* 1168–73, cf. Papadopousos, 2002.
[217] Aristoph. *Eccl.* 320–28.

Figure 282. Red-figure cup, 510–500 BC. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. RES.08.31b.

Until the sixth century BC, Athenian vases depicted important and laudable events, such as sports competitions, battles, or funeral rituals. When revelling was depicted, the emphasis was on the person having a great time and enjoying his privileged position in society. However, why depict him vomiting and defecating? These events are of no importance; they will have no consequences. The young man will sleep off his hangover, and everyone will soon forget what happened to him at the feast. Of course, the incident did not increase the man's social prestige, but it did not harm it. In the case of the defecating man, the painter did not depict something that Athenians of the time should have done or should have known. This depiction does not hint at a message integral to all previous life scenes. Fighting soldiers, athletes in training, men and women performing religious ceremonies or feasting and all the other depictions of human activity that we find on Athenian vases of previous centuries may have positively motivated those who bought and used the vases. These depictions created patterns to follow. From the late sixth century BC onwards, however, depictions appear alongside these scenes that neither promote nor hinder anything. They do not criticize anyone or anything; they merely state what has happened to someone. They describe something that we have no choice but to accept.

At the bottom of a cup, a symposiast could find a man with a woman at the symposium (Fig. 283). On the left is a barbiton and on the right a basket, in which the symposiasts brought their food. The man is sitting on a stool and holding a cane, so he is not in his home but has just come from outside. He is wearing shoes because he might have stepped in something on the night streets of Athens. The woman is, therefore, not his wife. She is young and exquisitely dressed, wearing an ornate cap on her head, but she is untying a belt of her translucent chiton.[218] She came to the symposium to satisfy men, so she is a prostitute. The man extends his hand to her lap in a gesture that betrays his eagerness. The man is bald, and male baldness was

[218] Lee 2015, 135–136.

associated with sexual activity in Greece, so satyrs were depicted as bald.[219] However, hair loss always signals the loss of youth, a negative fact. The prostitute is well aware of the man's advanced baldness and wrinkled forehead, but she does not lower her head to her hands, which untie the belt; she looks stoically at the man's old, unattractive face.

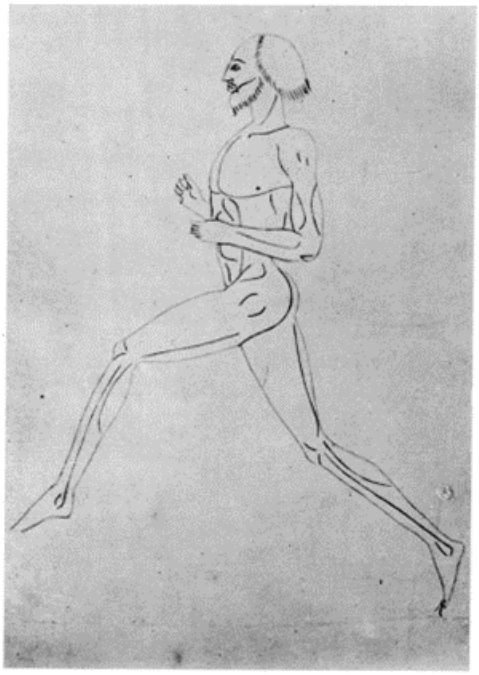

Figure 283 (left). Red-figure cup, the beginning of the fifth century BC.
London, British Museum, inv. no. E 44. After Furtwängler and Reichhold 1904, pl. 23.

Figure 284 (right). Black-figure Panathenaic amphora, 480–470 BC.
Trade Arts Investment. BA 303085. Drawing after Beazley 1929, 14, fig. 7.

While in the preceding and following centuries, men were systematically idealized in Greek art regarding their hair, in classical Athens, we often encounter bald men on vases. Nevertheless, it was not always to make people laugh at such scenes. The Panathenaic amphora was a type of vase that served as a prize in competitions at the Panathenaic games.[220] It always had the goddess Athena on the obverse and an illustration of some discipline in which Greeks competed. A Panathenaic amphora filled with sacred oil was an object of prestige, so it was not appropriate to decorate them with jocular scenes that would diminish their importance. One Panathenaic amphora depicts a cross-country race with the finishing post in front of the first runner, but a bald man lags behind a group of three runners at the head of the peloton (Fig. 284). The painter pointed out that he is still in good physical condition, but it is no longer enough for his younger rivals. John D. Beazley remarked:

> I have drawn the man who is running fourth because on the whole he is the best-preserved of the four, and because his bald forehead is rather touching.

[219] Heinemann 2016, 110–13; Cf. Harlow 2021.
[220] Streicher 2020.

> The race is the dolichodromos and not the sprint: let us hope that this is not the finish but the end of a lap. [221]

These depictions are by no means caricatures, a pictorial genre popular in European art since the eighteenth century, whose name derives from the Italian word 'caricare', meaning to exaggerate. The depicted person is meant to be ridiculed by the caricature, but the authors of the above vase paintings do not exaggerate. A pyxis in Berlin depicts a scene typical of the new iconography, confusion in a cellar (Fig. 285). The environment is characterized by two bowls of food, stacked skyphoi, two bronze stands, and palaestra utensils (bag, sponge, and strigilis) hanging on the wall. Two young men came in with their canes outstretched, presumably because a suspicious rustling was coming from the chamber. The reason for the young men's intervention is small animals that climb on the racks (mice or foxes); cats or dogs entered the chamber with the young men, but instead of chasing away the vermin, they took advantage of the situation and set about eating in the bowls.

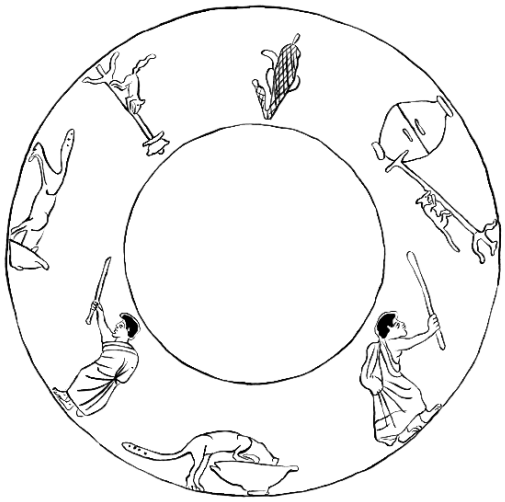

Figure 285. Red-figure pyxis, 460–450 BC. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. no. F2517. BA 211142.

A similarly banal episode is depicted on a pelike in Rome, in which a young man is about to punish a boy standing before him, presumably an enslaved person (Fig. 286). Both the youth and the boy are wearing the ivy wreaths worn by the feasters, so the scene takes place at a feast that the children of free Athenians did not attend. This scene is unlikely to have been painted to make anyone laugh. There is nothing funny about punishing a slave; furthermore, the punishment did not occur. A young man in a himation wrapped around the lower half of his body sat on a chair with a back. Suddenly, he rose from it, grabbed the departing boy's shoulder with his left hand and reached out with his right hand to strike a blow. The next moment, the boy would walk away, and the young man's blow would miss his buttocks. The nature of the boy's transgression is not explicit but related to his erect penis. Whatever preceded the scene depicted, the punishment was not successful. A hydria in Würzburg shows a boy with sandal prints all over his body (Fig. 287). The executor may have been a feaster; above is his basket where he brought food to the symposium. The boy could

[221] Beazley 1929, 13.

just as easily have been beaten by a naked hetaira with a bracelet in the form of a snake on her arm, who kneels before the feaster with her head bowed imploringly. In ancient Greece, the sandal was an attribute of erotic scenes but also an instrument of corporal punishment used to maintain discipline in school.[222]

Figure 286. Red-figure pelike, 510–500 BC.
Rome, Museo nazionale di Villa Giulia, inv. no. 121109. BA 200073.

Figure 287. Red-figure hydria, *c.* 500 BC. Würzburg, Universität, inv. no. 530. BA 2723.

It seems that vase painters were sometimes quite indifferent to what the Athenians thought of the incidents depicted. A frequently reproduced cup depicts a young man being waited on by an old prostitute with a sagging face, two beards, sagging breasts, and fat folds on her belly (Fig. 288). The young man is, therefore, not looking at her; his head is thrown back, and he is only motioning to her with his left hand to keep going. On the other side of this cup is a similar naked couple, the krater they both hold setting the scene on a symposium (Fig. 289). In this depiction, the young man pleasers himself while looking at the hetaira. However, he is not looking at her flaccid body, but at her genitals, which she shows him; her legs spread so that from her left leg, placed on the ground, we see her thigh shown from the side and her foot turned out so that it faces the viewer. That the painter spared the prostitute is not surprising, but that the young man should have settled for such an unattractive partner does not speak flatteringly of him either.

[222] Young 2020.

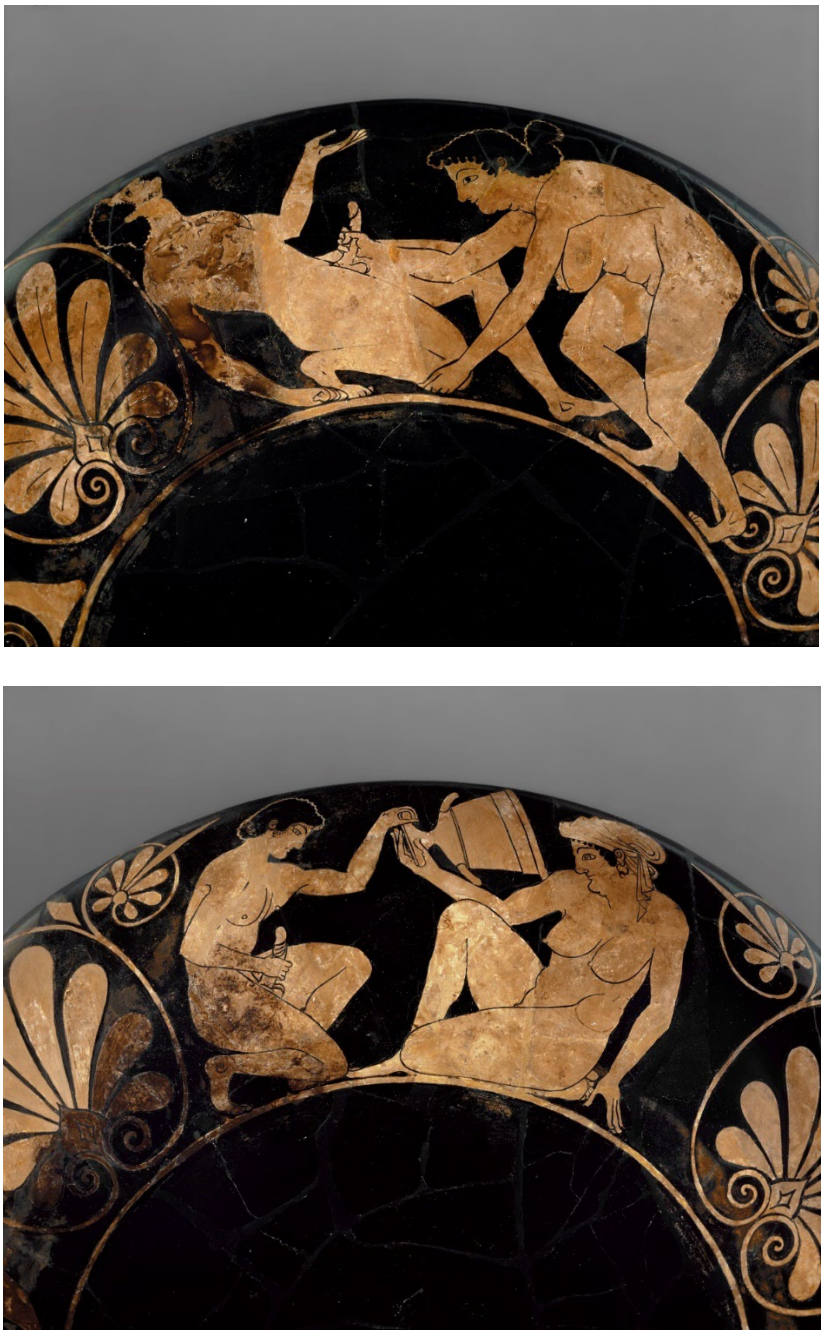

Figure 288–289. Red-figure cup, late sixth century BC.
Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. no. 80.AE 31, A and B. BA 275008. Public domain.

Couples in sexual intercourse were often depicted on Athenian vases between 520–470 BC.[223] They do, however, appear rarely later, as on an oinochoe in Berlin (Fig. 290). On the chair sits a young man with long hair, whose himation has been brought down to his knees so that his erect penis is visible. In front of him stands a naked girl with her hair carefully groomed, who has placed her right foot on the chair, grabbed the back of the chair with both hands and is about to swing herself into the young man's lap. The young man prepared himself for this by holding tightly to the edge of the seat with his hand so that he would not slide down. The attitudes and

[223] Paleothodoros 2012, 24; Lear and Cantarella 2008, 174–81.

gestures of the two figures are so logical that this was an action that the painter had seen, experienced, or imagined in every detail. This feature has the scene in common with the depiction on the Malibu cup described above. However, it differs fundamentally from it in depicting the relationship between the protagonists. On the cup, their gazes do not meet on either side, but on the oinochoe, by contrast, eye contact is an essential motif in the scene.[224] The young man and the girl are touching head-on, so they must look upwards. The intense eye contact between the acting characters also invites the viewer to empathize with them, just as the two empathize with each other.

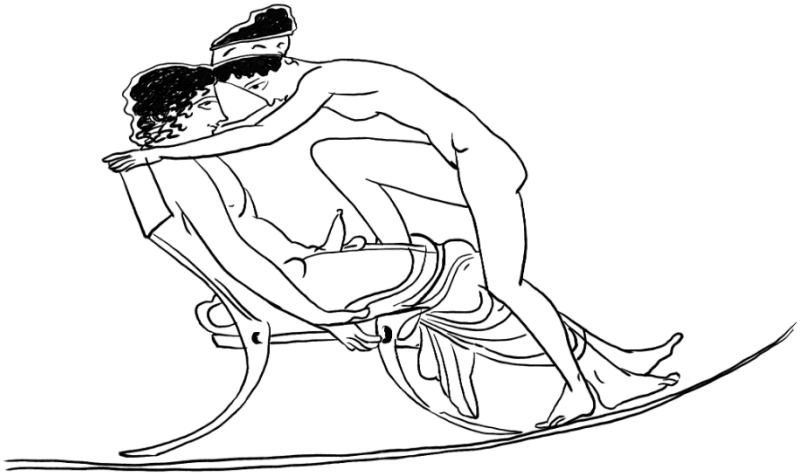

Figure 290. Red-figure oinochoe, *c.* 430 BC. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. no. F2412. BA 216500.

The scene on the Berlin oinochoe is very similar to the scene on the roughly contemporary painting on a bell krater in London, which deliberately excludes identification with the figures depicted (Fig. 291). On the left, we see an almost identical couple to the oinochoe in Berlin, but it is a homosexual encounter. The naked young man sits on a chair on which his cloak is draped, his right arm bent at the elbow, comfortably draped over the back of the chair. His mental state is betrayed by his left arm raised and bent at the elbow, a conventional gesture of trance. There is no doubt about what has aroused him: he has a firm erection, and a young man is about to sit on his lap, looking into his eyes. This action is not some improvisation but a deliberate action. The standing young man's right hand grips the shoulder of the seated one, his left hand rests on the cane, his left leg is raised, and his foot rests on the edge of the chair. In the next moment, he performs a final acrobatic act and coitus, apparently anal, occurs. The standing young man is not acting instinctively, as indicated by the absence of an erection. Both young men are wearing crowns of thorns on their heads, and on the right is a house with a door and a column suggesting a colonnade. Inside the colonnade stands a bearded man in a himation and with a taenia on his head. His stance suggests that he has not stopped here by chance but has been watching the scene from the beginning. The woman in the doorway is equally mysterious, the lower half of the door closed and the upper half ajar. The woman is wrapped in a himation and looks at the young men having sex. Scholars cannot explain the scene; it has also been

[224] Osborne 2018, 141.

associated with the Anthesteria, but there is no convincing reason.[225] It is not a scene inspired by a theatrical performance, as theatrical costumes are not indicated. It is also certainly not something that would have been seen on an Athenian street at the time.

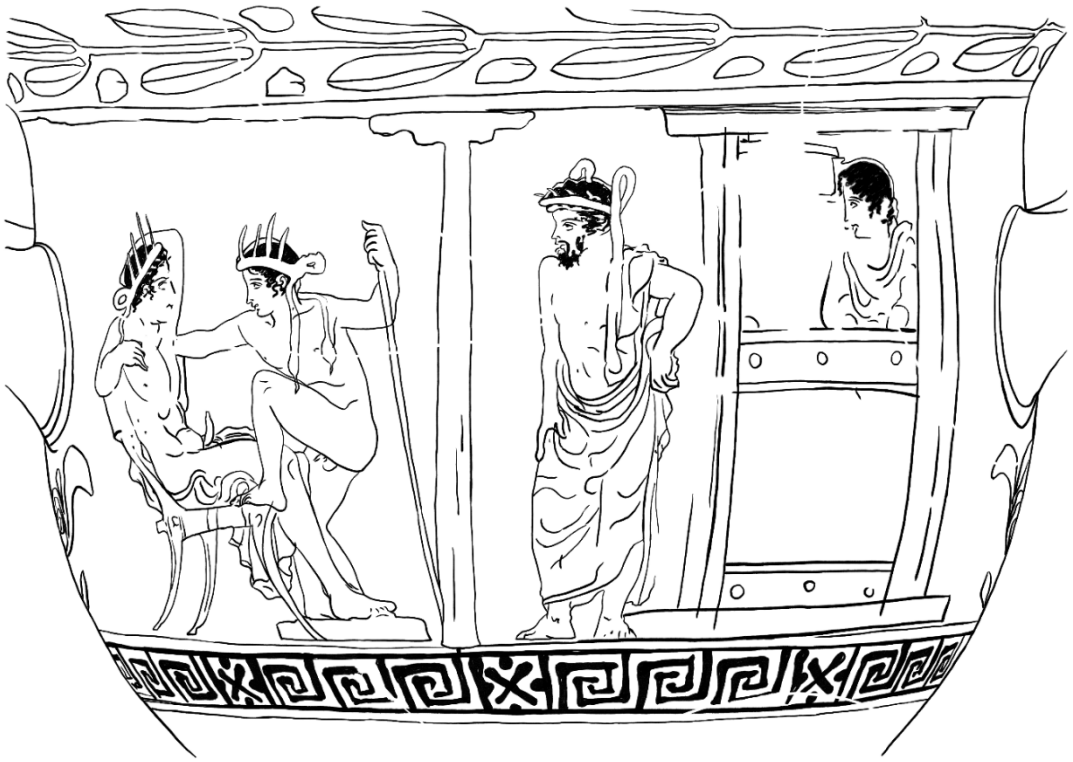

Figure 291. Red-figure bell krater, *c.* 420 BC. London, British Museum, inv. no. F65. BA 215288.

Whatever the scene depicts, it is clear that it is of the same type as the Malibu cup scene. Again, the viewer cannot identify with either protagonist. The seated young man is the only one who experiences anything pleasurable, as suggested by his relaxed posture, hand gestures, and erection. However, his pleasure can have unpleasant consequences. The cane on which the standing young man is leaning is covered by a column so that everything takes place right in front of the man standing in the colonnade. The man has a severe expression, as does the woman in the doorway, neither amused by what they see. So, they are watching the coitus, most likely because they disapprove of it.

The man cranes his neck to get a better view of the pair; he has one hand on his hip and the other resting on the thigh of his forward leg, which is bent at the knee. The woman also has her head tilted forward, but at the same time, she is distancing herself from the coitus couple, not only standing hidden behind a half-closed door but also wrapped in a himation so that her hands are invisible. However, the man and woman are passive, as is the young man sitting in the chair facing them but ostentatiously ignoring them. The only one active in this scene is the young man who is about to satisfy the young man in the chair sexually. He is facing the same direction as the man and woman but is doing the opposite of what the two would like him to do. Whereas

[225] Interpretation of the scene as a parody of a sacred wedding: Blanckenhagen 1976. Against this interpretation: Parker 2015, 66.

in previous centuries, the depiction of life was based on clarity, in the fifth century BC, ambiguity prevailed and gradually gained intensity.

Erotic scenes, however, were only one aspect of a new way of depicting a life characterized by its disregard for established conventions. The Malibu cup features komasts with long beards, who, at first glance, are distinguished from the others by their feminine dresses, chitons and himatia, earrings on their ears, and hair hidden beneath a scarf (Fig. 292). These feasters, sometimes called booners, are distinguished by their exquisite elegance, their passion for music and dancing, and their attitude to wine and women, which was, on the contrary, much more reserved than that known to the other komasts.[226] Below the cup's handle is a column krater festooned with ivy tendrils; next to it stands a booner with a kotyle in one hand that likens him to Dionysos. In his other hand is a cane, so he has his hands full, yet he is depicted in a wild dancing figure, his left leg extended far forward, his right bent at the knee with the foot raised high. His himation nevertheless remained perfectly arranged.

The ordinary komasts were characterized by sloppy dress, often wholly discarded. The booner next to him also dances while opening his himation wide in an elegant gesture. In the scene's centre is a woman playing the diaulos, whom the vase painter has depicted in the same clothes as the booners so that she could be a young man. Another booner walks in front of the flute player, again with an elegant dance step, his hand hidden under the himation raised high. Beside him walked a figure with a parasol, another attribute of the booners.

Figure 292. Red-figure cup, *c.* 480 BC. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. no. 86.AE.293. BA 275963. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

Scholars cannot agree on whom the booners represent, whether they are Greeks, foreigners, or Greeks imitating foreigners from the Near East or merely a figment of

[226] Kurtz and Boardman 1984; Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague 1990.

the imagination of the vase painters.[227] Whether they stirred laughter or scandal, the themes adorning Athenian vases were genuinely one-of-a-kind. These captivating motifs graced Athenian vases for a significant period, from 520–460 BC, and there was no parallel in Greek art before or after. These vases served as a testament to the elite members of Athenian society, showcasing their opulent attire, refined manners, and a touch of effeminate decadence.

Figure 293. Red-figure cup, *c.* 500 BC.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 07.286.47. BA 201603. Public domain.

Simultaneously, starting in the late sixth century BC, the vase painters focused on the underrepresented figures of Athenian society, such as women, children, and even foreigners. A prime example of this shift is the depiction of an old man with a Maltese dog on the bottom of a cup in New York (Fig. 293).[228] The man's strikingly non-Greek physiognomy, elongated skull, distinctly hooked nose, and fleshy lips indicate ancestry from the Near East. He is wealthy, as indicated by his ornate cloak studded with crosses and dots, but he is ugly, and his hair and beard are grey, with prominent corners. The stranger is hunched over, his face is wrinkled, and he rests his right hand on his cane as he walks so that he might have looked ridiculous to some. Others may have been sad, for the stranger's dog is as haggard and ugly as his master.

[227] Osborne 2018, 178.
[228] Moore 2008; Kitchell 2020.

Both bowed their heads because they knew nothing good awaited them anymore; the man and his dog had grown old together, which had inextricably linked them.

Figure 294. Red-figure hydria, *c.* 470 BC. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. CA 2587. BA 205691.

Equally atypical but without comic potential is the scene on a hydria in Paris where the Thracian women draw water (Fig. 294). The hydria was a vase for water, so the Athenian women depicted on it were often at the fountain, but in this case, all three women were slaves. They are dressed in simple tunics and have short hair, and their slave status is primarily indicated by their Thracian origins, which are revealed by the distinctive tattoos on their arms and necks.[229] The scene is not set in the city; the women have not come to the fountain in the square but to the rock on which vegetation is indicated. They are in the wild but not free; they are slaves, foreigners who cannot return to their homeland.

[229] Tsiaphaki 2000; Lee 2015, 84..

In addition to foreigners and enslaved people, other figures on Athenian vases were the opposite of the ideal Athenian citizen. A pelike in Boston depicts a young man draped in a himation, followed by a bearded dwarf leading a large dog (Fig. 295). Moreover, the dwarf may be a foreigner because of his African physiognomic features. Dwarfs are encountered in scenes of gymnasia or banquets and are depicted as komasts on either side of a vase at Yale (Fig. 296–297). They are bald, with blunt noses, and are wholly engaged in dancing, having laid aside their clothing. The scene is on skyphos, a vase designed for drinking wine, and just such a vase is on the ground in front of the dancing dwarfs. At the same time, we find on choes representations of children dancing with choes set on the ground. Of course, choes were closely associated with the essential Athenian festival, the Anthesteria, and children played an infinitely more important role in Athenian life than dwarves. Indeed, the Athenians loved their children, something that can in no way be said of the dwarfs. However, the reason why dancing children were depicted on vases was similar. It was amusing.

Figure 295. Red-figure pelike, *c.* 440 BC. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 76.45. BA 214151.

Figure 296–297. Red-figure skyphos, *c.* 450–440 BC. New Haven (CT), Yale University, inv. no. 1913.160. BA 21361. Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery.

Starting around 500 BC, Athenian vase painters began to depict the outside world without any bias for the first time. They portrayed everyday events such as visiting a tomb, a warrior bidding farewell to his family, or an Anthesteria celebration. However, only some paintings conveyed an important message. This innovation was a significant departure from the previous era. Post-500 BC, vase painters did not always have to follow the traditional pictorial tradition. Their paintings often turned inward, focusing more on what was happening within the depiction while completely ignoring the outside world. The characters in the scenes did not have to care about the established norms; the key was always to engage the viewers. What mattered most was to surprise them with something new, never before captured in a painting. It was even better if the viewers could relate to the scene based on their life experiences, no matter what is or is not to be done.

The famous pelike in St. Petersburg, which shows a first swallow, is typical for the new way of narrating stories (Fig. 298).[230] A man and a youth are sitting opposite each other on stools, obviously outdoors somewhere, as they look up at a swallow flying over their heads. Inscriptions come out of the mouths of each figure, reproducing their speech. The young man on the left points to the swallow and speaks first: 'ἰδοῦ, χελιδόν' (look! swallow). The inscription ends at the bird's tail to clarify what he is talking about. The man sitting opposite him turned around, pointed upwards, and said: 'νὲ τὸν ηερακλέα' (indeed, by Heracles!). A boy standing to the right interjected into the adults' conversation, holding his hand to the swallow and exclaiming with childlike directness, 'ηαυτεῖ' (there it is). All gestures and inscriptions point to the subject of the conversation, the swallow flying in the sky.

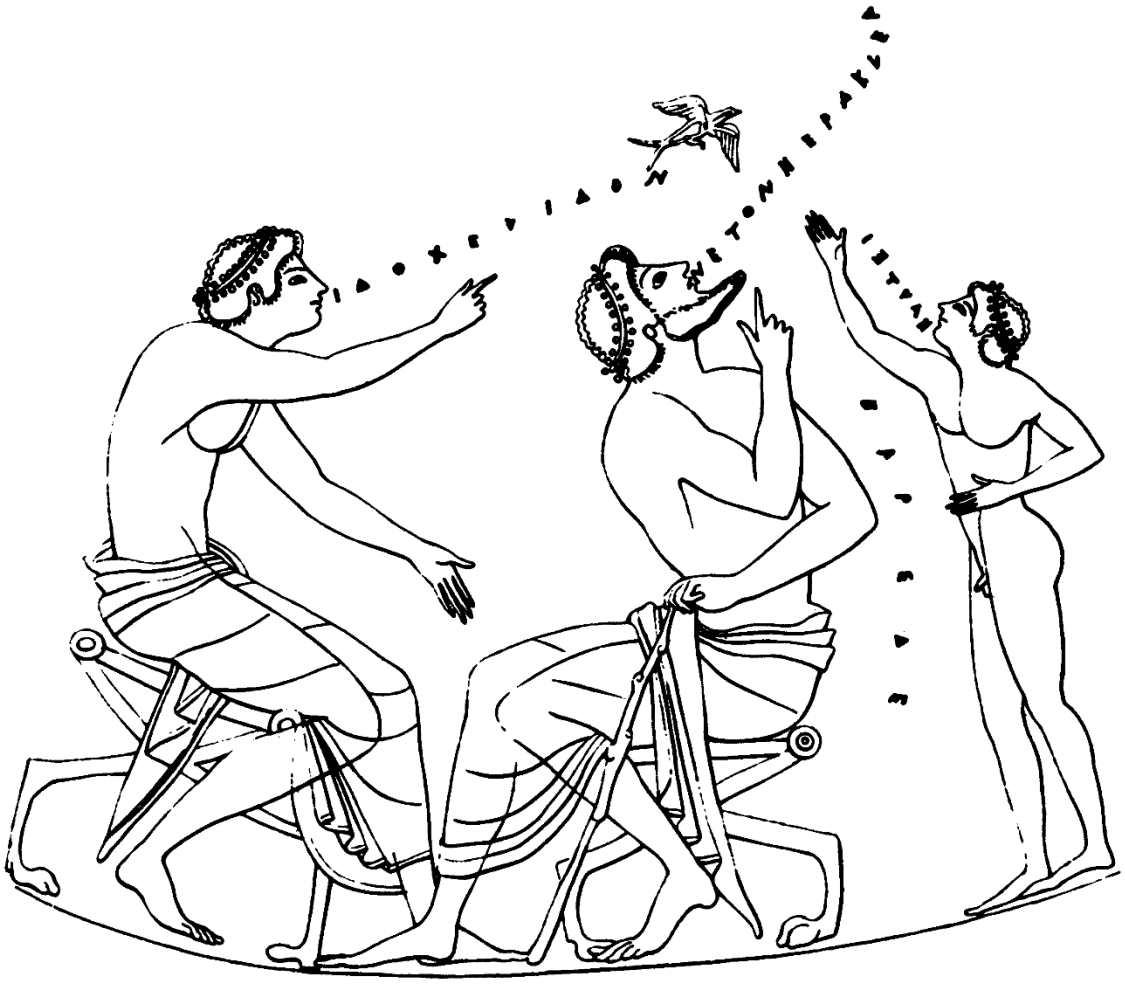

Figure 298. Red-figure pelike, *c.* 510 BC. St. Petersburg, Hermitage, inv. no. 615. BA 275006. After Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Monumenti inediti, Monuments inédits, vol. 2, Rome 1835, pl. 24.

The fourth inscription, 'ἔαρ ἔδε' (it is spring already), is placed vertically between the man and the boy. This inscription points not upward but downward toward the ground; in this way, the painter made it clear that these words were not spoken by anyone represented in this scene. It is a comment by the vase painter who

[230] Panofka 1843, pl. 17,6.

has thus entered into the depicted action. However, it may equally be the viewer's assumed reaction, who similarly evaluated the situation with which he or she was confronted. In this statement, the action's temporal determination refers to the depicted action and the time of the one who painted, is looking at, or will look at the painting. Internal and external time have merged in this representation, so that even today, millennia later, it is 'right now.'[231] We, too, are participants in the coming of spring and all the joys it brings.

The participation of the vase painter connects all the scenes mentioned above because what is depicted is not part of the pictorial tradition. It is an individual statement that invites the viewer to enter the scene. Previously, vase painters were merely renewing what viewers already knew or could know. The painters referred to their colleagues and predecessors, who, in this way, confirmed the importance of the themes and motifs depicted. On the other hand, the author of the scene with the first swallow based the depiction's significance on its uniqueness, and all of the other examples mentioned above are also unique. It is not a tradition that guarantees the importance of a representation but rather a uniqueness. The vase painter is sharing his personal experience with the viewer; maybe he has seen something like this or imagined it; it does not matter, and the viewer may not care. What matters is that it is a personal statement, which always carries more weight than the anonymous source of information.

The meaninglessness, randomness and ambiguity guarantee the authenticity of this testimony. Athenian depictions of life since the turn of the sixth and fifth centuries BC do not come close to how Athenians lived then, but neither do they deviate from it. Only the source from which artists draw inspiration changes, which also changes the content of these representations. The vase painters depart from collective memory, which they replace with individual memory. Instead of universally shared and, therefore, anonymous attitudes, they offer the viewer individual memories and personal experiences.[232]

The social dimension of memory was first nalysed by Maurice Halbwachs in 1925.[233] In the 1980s, Jan Assmann distinguished two components in social memory: cultural and communicative memory in which recollections dominate. [234] Recollections are unique because they are tied to the person who recalls them. Unlike art based on cultural memory, which is conservative and tends towards clearly defined messages and highly polished forms, the depiction of recollections is constantly changing. Cultural memory is passed down from generation to generation, while recollections are random and non-binding. They can never be fixed and are recalled only to disappear, making their essence ephemeral and elusive. Therefore, recollections are a unique and personal way of depicting life, different from the traditional depictions of cultural memory in art.

The fundamental difference between cultural memory and recollection is that only the former can be learned. Recollections cannot be learned; Philip K. Diks used this feature in his short story 'Blade Runner,' which was made famous by the film of

[231] Kim 2017.
[232] Bažant 2004.
[233] Halbwachs 1925.
[234] Assman and Assmann 1988; Assmann and Czaplicka 1995; Assmann 2008; Fragoulaki 2020.

the same name. In this story, the escaped androids are indistinguishable from humans at first glance but can be easily identified by a test that proves they have no memories of their own. The representation of life in Greece up to the sixth century BC was based on cultural memory, and this artistic tradition was characterized by continuity and stability. In contrast, the art inspired by recollections is essentially discontinuous. This incoherence makes it fundamentally different from an artistic tradition based on cultural tradition and myth. However, there is no polarity between collective memory and individual recollections because memory is always a collective phenomenon, regardless of how we define it.

The foundation of recollections is, undoubtedly, personal experience. However, our perception is always shaped by the attitudes of those we interact with and to whom we recount our experiences. As time passes since the event, our interactions with others increasingly color our memory of it. The communicative memory type is always shaped by cultural context, leading individuals to see and remember what is expected of them. Unspoken recollections are subject to societal taboos and are eventually forgotten. Conversely, sharing a memory alters it, as the retelling is based on the narrative rather than the original experience. Each iteration may change the memory and become embellished with fictional elements. However, the resultant communicative memory is fundamentally distinct from cultural memory. The former is always informal, shaped solely through everyday interactions, lacking fixed boundaries and evolving without constraints. The latter, in contrast, is always codified in some manner, and its formalisation can reach an extreme where no part of it can be altered. This extreme is exemplified by sacred texts or icons, where no omission or addition is permissible.

Art inspired by communicative memory does not negate art based on cultural memory. The vomiting feaster, for instance, was a part of communicative memory. Athenians often encountered it at feasts, yet without the figure assuming any universally binding form in literature. The vomiting feaster could have coexisted with the feasters depicted on the seventh-sixth centuries BC vases, revelling in earthly pleasures. Whether the feaster was enjoying himself or suffering the consequences of excessive drinking, he remained a member of the elite. His privileged status could not be undermined by such a triviality as an upset stomach. He, too, was part of the collective memory celebrating the Athenian citizen, even if he was confined to its communicative dimension. This interplay of communicative and cultural memory is a hallmark of vase paintings inspired by recollections.

The pictorial tradition could be supplemented or entirely replaced by the recollection of what the vase painter saw with his own eyes and what he heard, dreaded, or only dreamed about. One can think of something that happened but also something that did not and could not happen. The unreality probably characterizes the scene with bathing girls (Fig. 299). On the trees, they hung their dresses, which they took off, and also the aryballos they brought to the water the oil the Greeks used after bathing. One girl is swimming in the water; two are standing on a high block that serves as a diving board; one of the girls is leaning over to jump down. Trees and rocks outline the bathing area on the sides, and water springs from the right, above one of the girls who washes her hair. Behind her, a girl holds a comb, and another girl with a comb is on the left side.

The scene takes place in the countryside but not far from the city, as indicated by an architectural element - a high block with a cornice and a broad base. The girls may be Nymphs because on the opposite side of the vase is Dionysos sitting in the middle of a vineyard where satyrs, seven in number, are harvesting grapes, the same number as the bathing girls. However, nothing in the bathing scene rules out the possibility that these are mortal maidens. Every man wants to watch women undress and bathe; it does not make a difference whether they are Nymphs or mortal girls. The dreamlike nature of the scene is suggested by the vantage point from which we observe the girls; we are, as it were, in the depths of a dark cave. In any case, what this scene has in common with the previous ones is that it is unique; no other vase painter has painted anything like it.

Figure 299. Black-figure amphora, *c.* 520 BC.
Rome, Museo nazionale di Villa Giulia, inv. no. 106463 (B). BA 351080.

In the late sixth and fifth centuries BC, the artist's recollection could inspire the Athenian vase paintings, resulting in unique scenes that existed only in a single specimen. This innovation tempted researchers to interpret vase paintings as personal accounts. A banquet depicted by one of the best Athenian vase painters is a good example (Fig. 300). Young feasters holding cups of wine sit on three couches, in front of which are tables with food. However, they are occupied by elegant prostitutes wearing chitons and himations adorned with earrings and bracelets. The prostitute on the left couch removes her headscarf and begins to undress, and the eager young man extends his arm to her bosom; on the right couch, the prostitute and the young man embrace. The prostitute stands and vigorously plays the diaulos by the middle couch, as indicated by her upraised chin. The play carries the young man away, as indicates his hand on the top of his head tilted back.

The scene differs in no way from a thousand similar scenes from the lives of the Athenian elite, except that names are attributed to each character. According to the attached inscription, the middle young man is named Smikros, which in Greek means Little One. The young man's name is placed so that everyone will notice that it is a continuation of the inscription identifying the author of the painting: 'Σμικρος εγραφσεν' (Smikros painted). According to some scholars, the inscriptions on the vase represent the first self-portrait of an artist. However, this interpretation may have seemed amusing to an Athenian who saw the vase at the symposium. Vase painters were considered craftsmen at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Working with their hands, they were considered closer to enslaved persons. Smikros depicted slaves on the back of this vase and distinguished them from the feasters by representing them with loincloths. Therefore, the idea of a vase painter being present at a symposium was so absurd that it was ridiculous.[235]

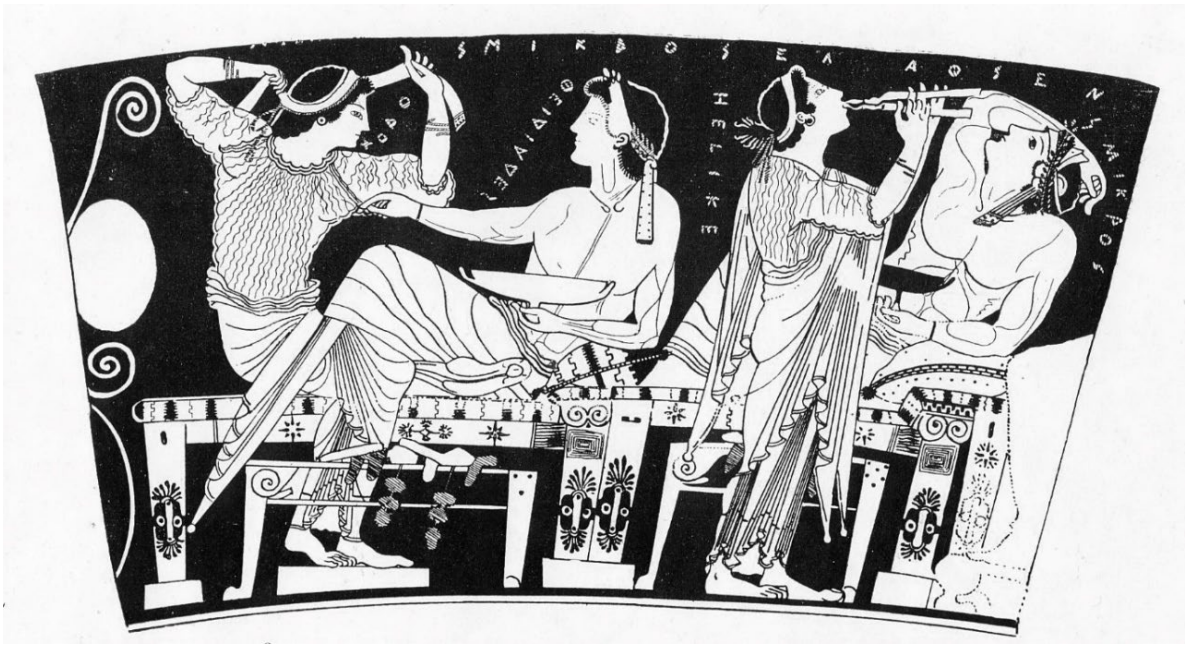

Figure 300. Red-figure stamnos, 510–500 BC. Brussels, Musées Royaux, inv. no. A 717. BA 200102. After Pottier 1904, fig. 3.

[235] Hedreen 2016.

Various forms of memory inspired the depiction of life on Athenian vases, but in many cases, it was also fiction, intended to amuse with apparent impossibility. These scenes did not depict reality but a comic alternative to it. The myth of the Athenian warrior, the hoplite, was a deadly serious matter because the power and prosperity of the Athenian state were based on it. Nevertheless, Athenians in the fifth century BC allowed permutations of this myth in which the exemplary Athenian citizen was replaced by his true opposite. On a pelike, we see a naked satyr with a helmet on his head, putting on knemides and shin guards (Fig. 301). In front of him stands a maenad. The scene reverses similar scenes with hoplites and their wives. On an oinochoe, a naked bearded man also puts on knemides, his helmet resting on the ground beneath him (Fig. 302). Behind the hoplite stands a Scythian archer; in front of the hoplite stands a woman, perhaps his wife, holding his two spears, with a hoplite shield leaning behind her. In the scene with satyr, maenad parodies the citizen's armament by holding a Dionysian attribute, the thyrsus, in her hand outstretched towards the satyr. With thyrsus he will threaten no one. The scene is part of a group of similar scenes with impossible warriors, satyrs.[236]

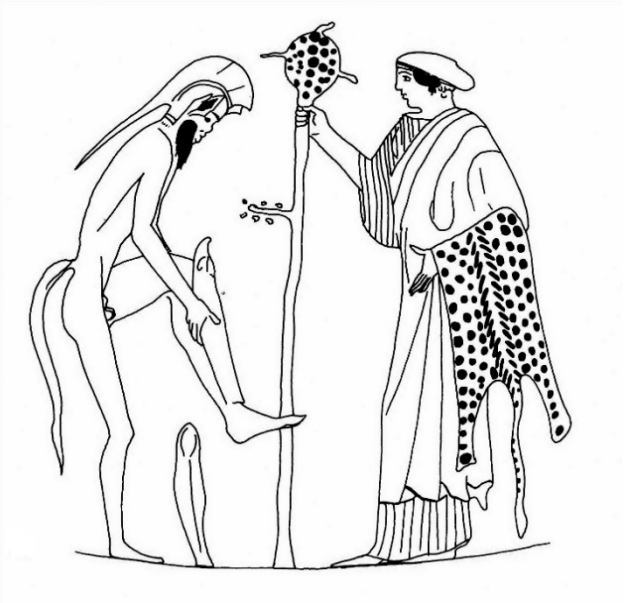

Figure 301 (left). Red-figure pelike, 460–450 BC.
London, British Museum, inv. no. 1865,0103.16 (E377). BA 205622. After Lissarrague 2013, fig. 154..

Figure 302 (right). Black-figure oinochoe, *c.* 500 BC. Ruvo, Museum Jatta, inv. no. 1605. BA 305654.

Their absurd weaponry can emphasize the comicality of the warrior satyrs. At the turn of the sixth and fifth centuries BC, Athenians knew from vase paintings of a warrior running with a light shield called a pelta and a spear in his hand (Fig. 303). At the same time, however, on vases, one could encounter satyr covering himself with animal skin and attacking with a spear in the form of a penis (Fig. 304).

[236] Lissarrague 1990b, 174–75; Osborne 2000, 34–40.

Figure 303 (left). Red-figure cup, c. 500 BC.
Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. MNC736. BA 200940. After Hoppin 1919, 69.

Figure 304 (right). Red-figure skyphos fragment, c. 480 BC.
Thebes, museum. BA 204074. After Lissarague 1990, 155, fig. 88a.

Similarly, a satyr was depicted as a warrior with a pelta at this time, holding a drinking horn in his other hand instead of a spear (Fig. 305). On the other side of the same cup is depicted another satyr with a pelta, blowing an attack on a military trumpet but holding a wine vase in the other hand (Fig. 306). These satyrs also have a penis erect, their primary weapon. A cup with satyrs armed with light shields is decorated on the outside with the new red-figure technique, while the bottom of the bowl is painted in the traditional black-figure, a young warrior with two spears on horseback (Fig. 307). The traditional theme was combined with its parody on the same vase. These inversions of the relationships between Athenian warriors and Dionysos worshippers, men and women, Greeks and barbarians were later never formalized. We often encounter armed satyrs on Athenian vases but find no myth of satyr hoplites. These amusing inversions remained in communicative memory and did not enter cultural memory.[237]

The emergence of communicative memory in vase painting, which draws on personal memories, coincided with the most significant expansion of Athenian vase painting in quantity and quality. Even today, we are captivated by the vase paintings that date back to the end of the sixth and fifth centuries BC, as they were a revelation in their time, constantly surprising with their novelty. Unlike cultural memory, which has limits and constraints, the organic memory that supports communicative memory is limitless and free. It has no taboos or boundaries, and its potential is endless. However, these creations appear effortless, as if sketched in passing. They seem unexplored yet familiar, linked to a shared communicative memory that includes personal memories. The lightly sketched drawings of children playing on small choes are fascinating to scholars and the general public, and they depict the first anatomically correct representations of children's anatomy and psychology in European art.

[237] Osbore 2018, 188.

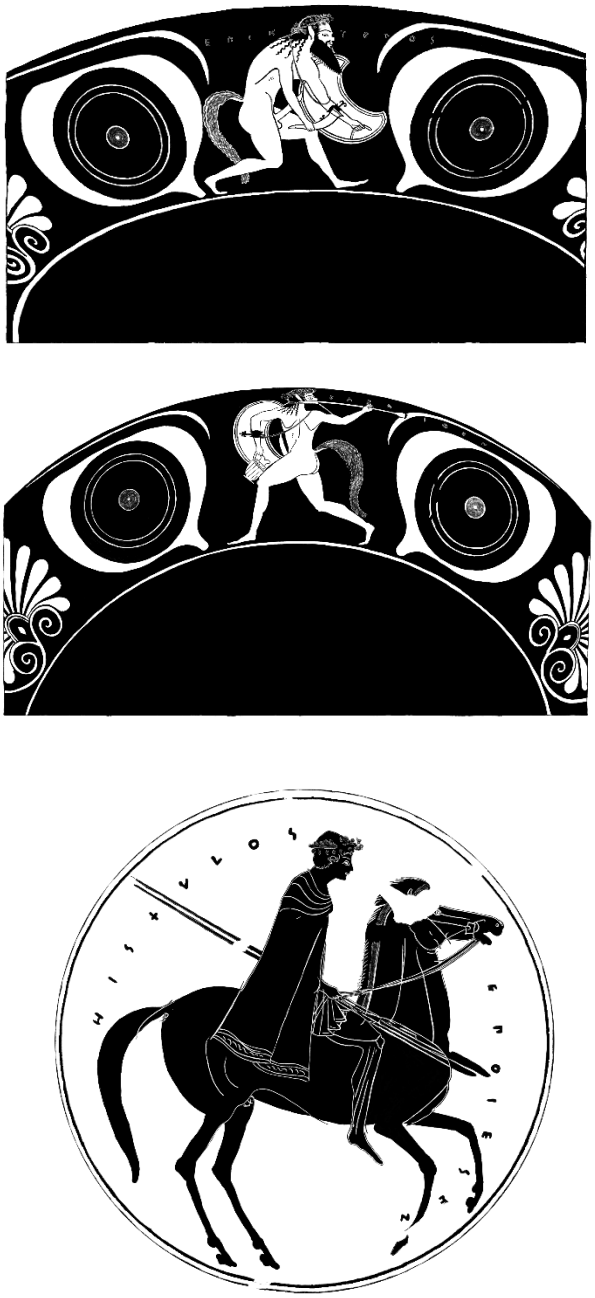

Figure 305–307. Red-figure cup with the black-figure tondo, 520–510 BC.
London, British Museum, inv. no. 1842,0407.23. BA 200309.

Cultural and communicative memories, like the written and spoken word, are distinct. They operate on different codes associated with unique contexts. Cultural memory tends towards unification, its refinement indicating a selection process and reaching perfection over generations. In contrast, communicative memory is egalitarian, lacking specialists or hierarchies that could impede its two-way flow. In everyday communication, we are all equally competent, fostering a diversity of perspectives. Representations of life inspired by communicative memory are informal, aiming for a close connection between experience and its depiction. Authenticity is ensured by naturalness and spontaneity, avoiding established schemes, orthodoxy, and uniformity.

Nevertheless, art inspired by communicative memory cannot exist without art inspired by cultural memory, which it deconstructs. If communicative memory becomes the predominant source of inspiration in some artistic genres, it will erode them sooner or later. From the seventh century BC onwards, the number of Athenian painted vases gradually increased until it peaked in the first half of the fifth century BC and then declined sharply at its end.[238] The evolution of quality follows a similar curve. At the end of the sixth century BC, there was a dramatic rise towards naturalism, and in the following century, vase painters perfected this new style. However, no further innovations were made from the beginning of the fourth century BC, and by the end of that century, the production of painted vases ended altogether. The fall of Greek vase painting was not the result of a crisis of form but of the representation's content.

The revolution in depicting life caused an unprecedented flowering of Athenian painted vases. However, at the same time, it caused their decline, which began in the early fourth century BC and ended at the end of this century, when this millennial tradition came to an end. The scenes that sold painted vases in the previous epoch were integral to tradition. They were handed down from father to son, from generation to generation, so their roots can be traced back to ancient times. The fighting soldiers, training athletes or feasters who dominated Athenian vases up to the sixth century BC had a clear message that could be articulated and conveyed because its meaning was understandable. They were calls to action that benefited society and those who made them. Vase paintings urged men not to be afraid to fight, to prepare for battle by doing sports, and to enjoy food, drink and sex. In the fifth century BC, cultural memory continued to influence the themes depicted in the visual arts. Traditional subjects were often portrayed, sometimes with alterations due to the influence of communicative memory. Nevertheless, the depictions inspired by the communicative memory prevailed.

The vases inspired by communicative memory are deliberately ambiguous. The painter does not identify with the figures depicted, but he does not criticize them. His attitude towards what he depicts cannot be formulated, so it cannot be passed on either. Scenes on Athenian vases drawing on communicative memory have always necessarily crossed the unwritten boundaries of cultural memory. Scenes from life that had become a universally shared norm over the centuries were revived and updated by personal memories precisely because they did not respect this norm. Traditional themes and motifs continued to be depicted, but they lost their binding force, eventually emptying their content. They turned into stereotypically repeated platitudes that no one cared about anymore. The deconstruction of the traditional iconography of the depiction of life was much more interesting because, on the contrary, it constantly brought something new; each such depiction was a sensation.

Deconstruction is a process of breaking down established norms or traditions. However, this process cannot continue indefinitely because once a norm is dismantled, there is nothing left to deconstruct. The more successful the deconstruction process is, the quicker it progresses towards its end. It is also important to note that deconstruction requires a norm to exist, without which it loses all significance. The depiction of life on Athenian vases was a cultural tradition that eventually lost its

[238] Bažant 1990, 106.

justification. Recollections faded from these representations around 400 BC, and although scenes from life still appeared in the fourth century BC, their content was no longer fundamentally innovative. This made them only a faint shadow of the depictions that adorned Athenian vases in previous centuries.