

## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

OAKLEY (J.H.) **A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life on Athenian Vases** (Wisconsin Studies in Classics). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020. Pp. xxi + 248, plates, illus. \$99.95. 9780299327200.  
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This *Guide* fills a helpful and surprising lacuna in Classics pedagogy, yet is a useful sourcebook also for scholars. As John H. Oakley notes in his quick summary of studies of Athenian vases illustrating ‘daily life’, scholars as early as Theodor Panofka, in his *Bilder Antiken Lebens* (Berlin 1843), separated them from ‘scenes of myth’. With the rise of theoretical approaches, especially semiotics and structuralism, for example Claude Bérard et al.’s *A City of Images* (Princeton 1989), it became fashionable to read Athenian vase images as constructs of various elements rather than renditions of reality (4). Oakley himself takes a median perspective on the ‘origin and nature of these pictures’ so that he includes here both images that are constructs as well as those that might closely reflect reality (5). This is of course a subjective judgement, but it is one that Oakley is well placed to make, having focused his attentions on Athenian pottery images throughout his long and distinguished career.

Oakley is perhaps overly reluctant to consider mythic presentations of daily life activities that might helpfully inform us. He barely mentions satyrs who, neither mythic nor human, re-enact both myth and daily life (for instance, making wine) on Athenian vases, as on stage. Exceptionally, Oakley includes Polion’s image of satyr kitharists in front of a youthful aulist, with nary a discussion of how to distinguish a satyr from a man dressed as a satyr (pl. 21: NY, MMA25.78.66). This vase is important insofar as we find, above the players, an inscription identifying them as ‘singers at the Panathenaia’ (126). Thus the satyrs playing *kitharai* are kitharodes (singers who accompany themselves on the kithara), which term Oakley avoids using for them; nor does he call them kitharists (kithara players), although helpfully providing both definitions in the glossary. Despite a plethora of images of kitharists and kitharodes on Athenian pots, alas, the only other kitharode in this book is Alkimachos, a champion surrounded by four Nikai (Victories) of the various games on the Epimedes Painter’s pelike (fig. 7.25: Plovdiv 1812). The presence of winged personifications in this image again warns us that the division between ‘daily life’ and myth or fiction is perhaps a greater concern to us moderns than to the ancient makers and users of these vases.

The two musical images noted above pertain to chapters ‘At the Sanctuary’ and ‘Sport: At the Gymnasium and the Hippodrome’ (6 and 7, respectively), while other musical images are considered in chapter 5 (‘Education at School and Elsewhere’). The modern emphasis on the built environment evoked in these and other chapters (‘At Home’ and ‘In the Workshop’, chapters 1 and 2, respectively) might obscure for the uninitiated the simple truth that music was an essential part of Athenian daily life that one found everywhere. Two other chapters take us essentially to the outdoors: ‘Around Town’ (chapter 3) and ‘In the Countryside’ (chapter 4). These are grab-bags for scenes of animals, water and herms; Oakley does not provide the evidence for ‘Dancing Schools’ to which he devotes three pages in chapter 3. Conversely, I looked in vain for the *komos* or carouse about town in chapter 3, but found it rather alongside the symposium in chapter 1, ‘At Home’. The last three chapters, ‘The Battleground’ (chapter 8), ‘The Wedding’ (chapter 9) and ‘The End of Life: At the Funeral’ (chapter 10), are more specific yet not quite ‘daily life’. So the effort to

squeeze Athenian life into ten neat chapters is anachronistic, confusing and somewhat misleading.

There is a problem moreover with sex, which Oakley locates ‘At Home’ (chapter 1), with the exception of pederasty, which he squeezes into ‘Sport’ (chapter 7, despite the note on p. 41 that directs the reader mistakenly to chapter 6). The discussion of images of sex, couples and orgies, homo- and heterosexual, misleadingly fills most of the section entitled ‘Symposium and Komos’ and concludes with a disclaimer that such images reflect ‘humour and the types of things that happen in ancient Greek comedy, but they should not be classified as pornographic’. Such a generalization, let alone the inference that sex was not a daily occurrence in ancient Athens, cannot stand and should not minimize the importance of such images to the study of sex and gender in antiquity.

The volume is excellently illustrated, with ample colour and grey-scale images, and even some line drawings. Spelling errors are restricted to Greek terms, yet disappointingly so because they spread to the glossary (‘astragoloi’ for *astragaloi*, ‘chyrta’ for *chytra*, ‘krotola’ for *krotala*, ‘lagabolon’ for *lagobolon*, ‘thyrosos’ for *thyroros*). Here as elsewhere it is not made clear which special terms are transliterated from the Greek and which peculiarly crept into academic verbiage over the last several centuries. How many readers would know, for example, that ‘booners’ was an Oxford shortening of ‘boon companions’ put into print by Donna Kurtz and John Boardman in 1986 to refer to symposiasts (‘Booners’, *Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum* 3.35–70)? A final archaism is the absence of references to the Beazley Archive Pottery Database numbers, which have become essential for scholarship in our digitally assisted era.

There is a relative absence also of historical context, which is, however, understandable in a volume that presents and interprets such a large body of evidence, up to 200,000 Athenian pots spanning 300 years (750–350 BCE), in so few pages (230). Yet readers should be made aware that much of Oakley’s knowledge comes from contextualizing historical sources, textual and otherwise: references to a selection of them are presented at the end of each chapter. In sum, Oakley has successfully synthesized the vast scholarship on Athenian painted vases, our most complex treasure trove of images from antiquity, into an easily readable and accessible sourcebook.

AMY C. SMITH  
University of Reading  
Email: [a.c.smith@reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.c.smith@reading.ac.uk)