

## Adorning the Bride: Dress, Gender, and Ritual on Athenian Vases

The most important transitional event in the life of an ancient Athenian woman was the wedding ceremony. Not only was this event the apex of a girl's life, it has been recently suggested that the wedding was where the bride would have been clothed and adorned with the most extravagant items (Llewellyn-Jones 2003, 219). Before the wedding procession, the adornment of the bride and the special garments she wore symbolized her "new identity" as both a bride and a wife (Blundell 2004, 41). Specific garments and certain appropriate gestures operated as a form of "public consumption" (Cavallaro and Warwick 2001, 120-1), and the bride must have been conscious of her role as the "spectacle" or the object of the gaze since "a woman who is adorned is a woman who is to be looked at" (Blundell 2004, 43). As gender itself is a constant performance signified through items of clothing, dress is often regarded as a public statement and can reveal how certain cultures construct gender and identity (Koloski-Ostrow and Lyons (eds.) 1997, 3-4). While most early studies of dress simply describe the types of garments both depicted on Greek vases and found in sculpture, scholars today examine the symbolism behind clothing and its cultural importance.

The proposed paper examines the appearance and behavior of women in wedding scenes using Athenian black- and early red-figure vases, focusing on the bride's dress and gesture. Previous scholars analyzing the ritual iconography of the ancient Greek wedding ceremony have focused on the value and importance of the entire scene (Oakley and Sinos 1993). The present study addresses the involvement of women in rituals, with specific attention to the iconographic categories of dress, attributes, gestures, and setting. The specific questions addressed are: Could the garments worn by women be painterly invention? Did certain painters dress women differently? What is the difference between black- and red-figure female adornment in wedding scenes? Is there a recognizable difference between female dress in myth and genre scenes? If so, without the aid of inscriptions, are we able to differentiate these scenes by "reading" the dress?

After examining the vases, the archaeological evidence shows that the dress and the attributes of the bride appear to have been part of artistic convention and idealization. From the Amasis Painter to Euphronios, painters seem to have made deliberate artistic choices pertaining to the style and decoration of the garments. Such an idealization of the event can be further witnessed by the presence of chariots in the wedding procession and/or by the inclusion of gods and goddesses; the chariots and mythical figures mark and elevate the event to a heroic level (Sutton 1989, 333). Although current scholarly opinion holds that the garments worn by brides were extremely elaborate, one does not find such evidence in their depictions on vases. In addition, dress alone cannot signify a bride nor can the attributes accompanying her (e.g., *stephanoi*, wreaths) since these are found in association with other females in the same scenes. Therefore, in order to determine who the bride is in a wedding scene, one must look carefully at both the setting and context.

### Works Cited:

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