

## Images of Eros

Eros is a familiar figure on the Attic red figure vases. He attends Aphrodite and also women as they prepare for marriage in the women's quarters; he is present at wedding processions (Oakley and Sinos, 1993); and he appears as the pursuer in scenes of erotic pursuit (Grieffenhagen, 1957; Shapiro, 1992; Pellegrini, 2009). Rarely if ever, however, does Eros appear in scenes of homoerotic encounters either at symposia or in the palaistra (*pace* Lear and Cantarella, 2008; cf. Stafford, 2013). In addition to the images of Eros at Athenian weddings, mortal and divine, Eros attends the mythological abduction of Helen by Paris and also her recovery by Menelaos after the fall of Troy. Aeschylus, in the *Oresteia*, presents the abduction of Helen as a wedding of a kind, a perverse wedding in which the carnage at Troy served as a wedding gift (Zeitlin, 1965); Helen is often identified as the model of beauty aspired to by mortal brides (Oakley and Sinos, 1993); and it is not much of a stretch to understand Menelaos' recovery of Helen as a reaffirmation of their nuptial ties, but the absence of Eros in scenes of homoerotic encounters remains somewhat difficult to understand – and that is the focus of this paper.

In conventional wedding, the bride's gaze is strictly regulated because it has a potentially subversive power (Reeder, 1996). In some scenes, Eros pours from a phiale directly into the eye of the pursuer (Sutton 1997-98). In scenes of the recovery of Helen, Menelaos' vengeful intent is conveyed by the sword in his hand, but in some scenes the sword drops to the ground as he gazes upon Helen's face (Sutton, 1997-98). The sight of her has overcome his masculine resolve (Hedreen, 1996). Eros, then is a feeling of desire prompted by the sight of the beloved, but I contend that it is a desire based on physical attraction alone, and that is why it is absent from homoerotic encounters. While the vase paintings leave no doubt that the lover's physical desire

was satisfied in his relationship with his beloved, it is equally clear from the literary sources that their relationship was defined ideally by a higher purpose: the lover was expected to play a mentoring role to his younger beloved, while the beloved must distance himself from any sign of erotic desire lest he be seen as passive, which is to say, unmanly (Shapiro, 1992; cf. Lear and Cantarella, 2008). If Eros marks erotic desire untempered by the ideals that governed homoerotic relationships, it becomes clear why Eros is absent from homoerotic scenes.

In Plato's *Symposium*, Pausanias distinguishes two kinds of eros, a lower sort defined purely by lust and a higher sort that is justified by a nobler purpose. In the vocabulary of vase painting, however, I suggest that Eros marks exclusively the lower sort of eros, the eros of a bride-groom for his bride, of Paris for Helen and she for him – in a word, the eros of any man for any woman. In scenes of Eros in pursuit of a young boy, Eros himself is portrayed as a boy. These scenes are distinct from scenes of heterosexual desire and also from scenes of conventional Athenian pederasty. In some of these scenes Eros exercises force (Shapiro, 1992), something rare in homoerotic scenes – this is an Eros that has no place in conventional homoerotic scenes.

In sum, while Eros of the vases conveys the power of the female gaze that is controlled by the institution of marriage. Conversely, in the case of Helen's abduction, Eros is the force that undermines Menelaos' authority in the oikos, and in the case of the Helen's return, the force that masters the warrior's resolve. As such eros on the vases is antithetical to the ideal relationship between a man and a boy which by definition must avoid any association to the erotic power of or susceptibility to female eroticism.

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