

## When a (Canine) Gesture Was Expected

Alan Boegehold's *When a Gesture Was Expected: A Selection of Examples from Archaic and Classical Greek Literature* was a landmark in the study of gesture in the ancient world. A search for the keyword "gesture" in *L'année philologique* shows 59 titles concerning gesture. Vases and grave stelae are excellent sources for ancient Greek gesture, but the gestures exhibited by dogs in these same media have been overlooked.

Dogs are commonly depicted in ancient Greek art, being especially prevalent on vases and grave stelai. They are the second most depicted animal in Greek art, second only to the horse. Dogs have been studied, to be sure, as in the works of Johnson (1919), Hull (1964) and others. Yet such works commonly focus on such things as metaphor and breed identification. Dogs are often ignored and poorly or inaccurately described in vase descriptions. As Pevnick (2014, 156) has recently stated, "canine iconography still awaits a comprehensive study." Pevnick deals with several "good dog" and "bad dog" behaviors himself, but his study is necessarily limited.

The proposed illustrated paper seeks to broaden the study of canines in Greek art, specifically focusing on the lifelike ways in which they are depicted on vases and stelai. The majority of examples will be taken from Athenian art of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It is the author's contention that the behaviors, actions, and especially the body language of many depictions of dogs arise from close observation of the animal in its various relationships with humans rather than from a casual acquaintance with the animal or mere sketching from memory.

As both Cristiana Franco (2014) and Kitchell (2004) have argued, the dog was viewed both positively and negatively in Greek society and literature, ranging from Odysseus' faithful Argos to the 150 dogs callously tossed into a well in the Athenian Agora. The work of Calder

(2011) on cruelty to animals will form the backdrop of this latter example. Dogs served various functions as work dogs (hunting, guarding) and pets, and even served as ways to flaunt one's social status and wealth. Artistic representations tend to reflect this, as the dog was a constant companion at the gymnasium, symposia, and male homoerotic encounters.

The paper will first sketch out these manifold associations with humans and will then move on to show, by comparison with modern studies on canine body language and behavior, that Greek artists faithfully represented a wide spectrum of canine behaviors: fawning, curiosity, fear, aggression, play, and more. Citations from Greek literature will also be adduced to demonstrate that reading canine body language was important for the Greeks. In describing Odysseus' Argos, for example, Homer describes the various positions of his ears, reflecting in turn attentiveness and dejection. Xenophon, in his *Cynogeticus*, a treatise on training hunting dogs, describes at length the body language of various types of dogs and how to read it. Ancient examples of canine gestures will be compared with examples of modern dogs' postures and attitudes.

It has become a commonplace that it is important to pay attention to human non-verbal communication from Greek antiquity. The same can be said for Greek dogs, who were, perforce, non-verbal.

### Bibliography

- Boegehold, Alan L. *When a Gesture Was Expected: A Selection of Examples from Archaic and Classical Greek Literature*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Calder, Louise. *Cruelty and Sentimentality: Greek Attitudes to Animals, 600-300 BC*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011.

Cristiana Franco. *Shameless: The Canine and the Feminine in Ancient Greece: With a New Preface and Appendix*. University of California Press: Oakland, CA, 2014.

Hull, Denison B. *Hounds and Hunting in Ancient Greece*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

Johnson, Helen M. "The Portrayal of the Dog on Greek Vases." *The Classical Weekly*. 12.27 (1919): 209-213.

Kitchell, Kenneth. "Man's Best Friend? The Changing Role of the Dog in Greek Society," in Barbro Santillo Frizell, ed., *PECUS. Man and Animal in Antiquity, Proceedings of the Conference at the Swedish Institute in Rome, Sept. 9-12, 2002*. Rome: Swedish Institute in Rome, 2004, 181-86.

Pevnick, Seth D. "Good Dog, Bad Dog: A Cup by the Triptolemos Painter and Aspects of Canine Behavior on Athenian Vases," in Oakley, John H., ed. *Athenian Potters and Painters: Volume III*. Oxbow Books: 2014, 155-66.