

The Symposiast's Best Friend: Images of the Symptotic Dog on Athenian Vases

This paper argues both that dogs physically attended the Athenian *symposion* in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. and that they were understood as active participants in the ceremony. The identities of attendees at the Athenian *symposion* have received much scholarly attention, principally driven by analysis of ancient texts and vase imagery (Burkert-1995, Fehr-1999, Murray-2013, Smith-2000, Topper-2012, Wecowski-2014). While the presence of dogs at the *symposion* is largely unmentioned in ancient writings about the event, the image of the dog maintains a popular role in symptotic vase iconography. Some previous studies have noted the prominence of dogs in these vase scenes (Boardman-1999, Topper-2012), but a study of the social and political meaning behind their position at such an exclusive event is lacking in current scholarship. Building on this earlier work, this paper demonstrates how the iconography of the symptotic dog from Athenian vases of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. contributes to our understanding of the dog's role at the *symposion*.

Despite their sometimes statue-like appearance, the dogs of symptotic vase imagery are in fact active participants in the ceremony. Vase painters highlight the animate nature of these dogs both by expressing them in varied poses and by grouping them thematically with the human symposiasts rather than with the furniture. Moreover, the dogs are not limited to scenes of the *symposion* proper, but are found in depictions of pre- and post-*symposion* activities as well. The dog's apparent connection to the relationships and processes surrounding the social ritual is complicated further as some vase scenes render the dog in a manner clearly related to a specific human. In doing so, the imagery portrays the dog as the extension of the symposiast's identity or the reflection of his actions. Amidst the introduction of non-aristocratic *akletoi*, *hetaireai*, and other entertainers, the dog thus maintains a special connection with the male aristocratic

symposiast—it sits beneath him, moves as he does, and at times even resembles him. The grouping of dog and man suggests that the symposiast brought his own dog to the ceremony; the sympotic actions of the dog suggest that it was not understood merely as decoration, but as a contributor to the event, straddling the line between animal and man. The dog's importance at this exclusive social ritual has implications for the broader study of the role of the dog in the masculine Athenian realm.

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