

A Boy's Best Friend? Dogs and the Transition to Manhood on Classical Athenian Vases

Greek artists make a distinction between two main breeds of dog on Classical Period vase images: the sleek, hunting hound and smaller 'lap dog'. In the context of non-mythological scenes, these two breeds largely appear in specific iconographic contexts. Hunting dogs most frequently feature in masculine settings such as under couches at the symposium, in homoerotic scenes, at the gymnasium, participating in the hunt and at warrior departures. In contrast, small dogs have strong associations with women and children indicated by their presence in domestic scenes. This paper seeks to explore the ways in which these two types of dog are represented with males from infancy through to adulthood during the Classical Period. This will be tackled on two broad fronts. Firstly, how the type of dog behaves as an age-appropriate companion for male children and secondly, the way in which the dog functions symbolically as a marker of the transition from boyhood to manhood.

I will use Beaumont's methodology for identifying children's ages from infancy to adulthood on Classical Period Greek vases combined with literary sources which trace the specific stages elite boys undertook in order to reach full manhood in Classical Athens. I will argue that artists use the two different breeds of dogs to parallel this development and in particular, use the smaller dog to signal a boy's transitional phase of moving from out from the oikos into the polis. I will also consider canine body language and how it similarly reflects boys' movement away from the world of women and boyish concerns. Finally, I examine the small but significant number of scenes which show single adult men with small dogs and what these might reveal to us about the man's perceived relationship to an otherwise 'non-masculine' breed of dog.

Beaumont, Leslie A. *Childhood in Ancient Athens: Iconography and Social History*. Oxon :
Routledge, 2012.