

# **Never Simply Nudity**

A Study of the Functions of the Nude Female Figure in Athenian  
Vase-Painting c. 480-420 BCE

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## Abstract

Recent studies regarding the motif of the nude female figure on Athenian red-figure vases of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE have caused much controversy among contemporary scholars. Whereas the nude male figure on Athenian vases is generally perceived by scholars as representative of heroic, ritualistic or civic nudity, the female form's nude state remains ambiguous in comparison. In an attempt to uncover the cultural significance behind the appearance of the nude female figure on Athenian vases, multiple scholars have suggested that her utterly exposed state must surely have been indicative of a 'disreputable' status, especially that of the *hetaira*.

However, this interpretation is problematic as it ultimately restricts the possible function(s) of the nude female figure to being primarily erotic in nature. Consequently, it can be argued that the full context of these vase images is not always taken into consideration when scholars discuss the connotations of the nude female form in Athenian vase-painting. The aim of this thesis is therefore to explore the broad meanings associated with the nude female figure in Greek antiquity, as well as the specific connotations assigned to the nude female form in Athenian vase-painting. Finally, this thesis endeavours to re-analyse a selection of these nude female figures to investigate whether additional functions to that of eroticism could be attributed to them.

To meet this goal, this study utilised the research of various scholars who provided controversial and diverse discussions and interpretations on the motif of the nude female figure on Classical Greek vases. A general framework of function and meaning could then be constructed to aid in this investigation. Next, 649 images of nude female figures on ancient vases were briefly analysed in the online Beazley Archive under the category 'naked'. It was established that, after the initial survey, five main categories of the function of the nude female figure emerged: religion and ritual, apotropaism, violence and vulnerability, eroticism and pornography, as well as female agency. Fifteen images were selected from the online Beazley Archive, three from each of the aforementioned five functions, as the core corpus, based on prevailing interpretations of these images that have been the most extensively discussed among scholars. To read these fifteen vase images, an iconographical analysis was chosen as a rigorous approach to viewing and interpreting the motif of the nude female form. This approach further aided in the re-analysis of these nude female bodies so as to place them in their appropriate categories of function.

It was found that there is indeed a propensity for oversimplifying the cultural significance of the nude female form on Athenian vases by mainly eroticising her due to her lack of clothing. As a result, many of these nude women in ancient Athenian vase-painting are removed from their cultural contexts and their multiple functions in society disregarded or misconstrued. In conclusion, then, the nude female form on Athenian vases does not guarantee an erotic or pornographic setting and, as such, it cannot be said that her nude state discloses a 'disreputable' status.

## Opsomming

Onlangse studies betreffende die motief van die naakte vrouefiguur op Atheense rooifiguur vase van die 5de eeu v.C. het erge polemieë onder kontemporêre vakkundiges veroorsaak. Terwyl die naakte mansfiguur op Atheense vase oor die algemeen deur vakkundiges as verteenwoordigend van heldhaftige, ritualistiese of burgerlike naaktheid beskou word, bly die vroulike vorm se naakte toestand in vergelyking dubbelsinnig. In 'n poging om die kulturele betekenis agter die voorkoms van die naakte vrouefiguur op Atheense vase bloot te lê, het verskeie vakkundiges voorgestel dat haar volkome ontblote toestand sekerlik 'n aanduiding van 'n 'berugte' status, veral dié van die *hetaira*, moes gewees het.

Hierdie interpretasie is egter problematies, aangesien dit uiteindelik die moontlike funksie(s) van die naakte vrouefiguur hoofsaaklik tot 'n erotiese aard beperk. Gevolglik kan betoog word dat die volledige konteks van hierdie vaasbeelde nie altyd in ag geneem word wanneer vakkundiges die konnotasies van die naakte vroulike vorm in Atheense vaaskilderkuns bespreek nie. Daarom is die doel van hierdie tesis om die breë betekenis wat met die naakte vrouefiguur in antieke Griekeland geassosieer is, te ondersoek, asook die spesifieke konnotasies wat aan die naakte vroulike vorm in Atheense vaaskilderkuns toegeken is. Uiteindelik poog hierdie tesis om 'n seleksie van hierdie naakte vrouefigure te heranaliseer om na te speur of bykomende funksies tot dié van erotisisme aan hulle toegeskryf kan word.

Om hierdie doelwit te bereik, het hierdie studie die navorsing van verskeie vakkundiges benut wat omstrede en uiteenlopende besprekings en interpretasies oor die motief van die naakte vrouefiguur op Klassieke Griekse vase gelewer het. Sodoende kon 'n algemene raamwerk van funksie en betekenis gekonstrueer word om hierdie ondersoek te ondersteun. Vervolgens is 649 beelde van naakte vrouefigure op antieke vase kortliks op die aanlyn Beazley Argief onder die kategorie 'naked' ('naak') geanaliseer. Na die aanvanklike opname, is dit bepaal dat vyf hoof funksie-kategorieë van die naakte vrouefiguur opduik: godsdiens en ritueel, apotropaïsme, geweld en kwesbaarheid, erotisisme en pornografie, asook vroulike agentskap. Vyftien beelde is uit die aanlyn Beazley Argief gekies, drie van elk van die bogenoemde vyf funksies, as die kernkorpus, gebaseer op die heersende interpretasies van hierdie beelde wat die breedvoerigste onder vakkundiges bespreek is. Ten einde hierdie vyftien beelde te lees, is 'n ikonografiese ontleding gekies as 'n streng benadering om die motief van die naakte vroulike vorm te bekyk en te interpreteer. Hierdie benadering het verder tot die heranaliserings van hierdie naakte vroulike liggame bygedra sodat hulle in hul toepaslike funksie-kategorieë geplaas kon word.

Daar is bevind dat daar wel 'n neiging is om die kulturele betekenis van die naakte vroulike vorm op Atheense vase te oorvereenvoudig deur haar hoofsaaklik te erotiseer weens haar ontklede toestand. Gevolglik word talle van hierdie naakte vroue in antieke Atheense vaaskilderkuns uit hul kulturele konteks verwyder en hul veelvoudige funksies in die samelewing word verontagsaam of misverstaan. Ten slotte waarborg die naakte vroulike vorm op Atheense vase dus nie 'n erotiese of pornografiese agtergrond nie, en, as sulks, kan daar nie gesê word dat haar naakte toestand 'n 'berugte' status openbaar nie.

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## Dedication

*I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father, Barry Martin, who has taught me that something learnt is never lost.*



## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	xi
List of Tables.....	xii
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research Problem, Research Question and Aim of the Thesis .....	3
1.2 Hypothesis.....	4
1.3 Definition of Terms and Assumptions .....	4
1.3.1 Nudity and Nakedness .....	4
1.3.2 Eroticism and Pornography .....	5
1.4 Theory and Methodology .....	5
1.4.1 Theoretical Framework.....	5
1.4.2 An Iconographic Approach .....	7
1.4.3 Shortcomings in an Iconographic Approach .....	8
1.4.5 Defining a Corpus of Nude Female Images .....	9
1.5 Research Design.....	15
1.6 Conclusion.....	15
<b>Chapter 2: Background to the Study .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Gender Ideology in Ancient Athenian Society .....	17
2.2 Male Nudity in the Archaic and Classical Periods of Greece .....	20
2.3 The Clothed Female Body.....	23
2.4 Undressing the Female Body .....	28
2.5 Female Nudity in Ancient Athens.....	30
2.6 Conclusion.....	46
<b>Chapter 3: Undressing for the Gods .....</b>	<b>47</b>
3.1 Nudity with a Religious and Ritualistic Function .....	47
3.2 Conclusion.....	55
<b>Chapter 4: The Power of Exposure.....</b>	<b>57</b>
4.1 Nudity as an Apotropaic Function .....	57
4.2 Conclusion.....	61
<b>Chapter 5: Violence, Vulnerability and the Naked Female Body .....</b>	<b>62</b>
5.1 Nudity as a Function of Violence and Vulnerability.....	62
5.2 Conclusion.....	73
<b>Chapter 6: Bodies Bound by Eroticism .....</b>	<b>75</b>

6.1 Nudity as a Function of Eroticism and Pornography .....	75
6.2 Conclusion.....	81
<b>Chapter 7: The Heroic and Honourable Female Nude .....</b>	<b>83</b>
7.1 Nudity as a function of female Agency.....	83
7.3 Conclusion.....	89
<b>Chapter 8: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Cited Images .....</b>	<b>100</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Relative distribution of vases in the online Beazley Archive according to the function of the nude female figure.....	10
Figure 2.1 Herakles and the Nemean Lion wrestling, c. 500-400 BCE.....	22
Figure 2.2 Marble statue of Nike of Samothrace, c. 190 BCE. ....	27
Figure 2.3 Centaur attacking Lapith woman, c. 470-457 BCE.....	29
Figure 2.4 The kneeling bather, c. 400-300 BCE. ....	43
Figure 3.1 Eros assisting a maiden in the marriage ritual, c. 450-400 BCE.....	48
Figure 3.2 Women dancing around a large, erected <i>phallos</i> during a religious festival, c. 500-450 BCE.....	50
Figure 3.3 Satyr attacking a sleeping maenad, c. 480 BCE.....	52
Figure 3.4 Satyr and <i>hetaira</i> in a symposium context, c. 480 BCE.....	53
Figure 4.1 Nude woman carrying a large <i>phallos</i> with eyes, c. 500-450 BCE.....	58
Figure 4.2. Nude woman holding <i>phallos</i> bird, c. 500-450 BCE. ....	59
Figure 4.3. Nude Woman with <i>phallos</i> climbing into a basket of <i>phalloi</i> , c. 500-450 BCE...	60
Figure 5.1 Rape of Cassandra, c. 475-425 BCE.....	63
Figure 5.2 Rape of Cassandra (Iliupersis), c. 500-490 BCE. ....	64
Figure 5.3 Ancient Greek warrior about to spear an Amazon with one breast exposed, c. 470-460 BCE.....	65
Figure 5.4 Men forcing women to have violent sexual relations with them, c. 525-475 BCE. ....	67
Figure 5.5 Men forcing women to have violent sexual relations with them, c. 525-475 BCE. ....	68
Figure 5.6 Youth wielding sandal grabs naked woman's hair, c. 500-450. ....	70
Figure 5.7 Men and women partaking in sexual activities, c. 500-450 BCE. ....	72
Figure 6.1 <i>Hetairai</i> entertaining guests at a sympotic event, c. 475-425 BCE.....	76
Figure 6.2 Rear-entry sexual intercourse between man and woman, c. 500-450 BCE. ....	78
Figure 6.3 Man and woman copulating on <i>klinê</i> , c. 500-450 BCE.....	80
Figure 7.1 Two nude women washing at a laver, c. 450-400 BCE. ....	84
Figure 7.2 Nude women getting dressed after bathing, c. 475-425 BCE. ....	85
Figure 7.3 Nude, kneeling bride preparing for her wedding, c. 450-400 BCE.....	86
Figure 7.4 Women tying ribbons to a loutrophoros during a wedding preparation, c. 450-400 BCE.....	87

## List of Tables

Table 1 Corpus of vase images selected from the online Beazley Archive.....	12
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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Until recently classical scholarship has often tended to view ancient Greek art as an unambiguous reflection of the reality and everyday lives of the ancient Greeks. Lewis (2002:1) and Llewellyn-Jones (2002:71) state that images found on Attic vases, for example, are still being used by some historians today as though they are faithful depictions and ‘snap shots’ of realistic moments in ancient life rather than constructions. However, to assume that all scenes on vases are straightforward and realistic depictions of the lives of the ancient Greeks would be to ignore their symbolic level which includes the influence of political, social and cultural norms.

Tanner (2001:260) confronts this oversimplification of ancient Greek art by defining it as a “primary medium through which affect or feeling is culturally shaped and socially controlled”. Sourvinou-Inwood (1987:131) suggests that we must therefore try to read 5<sup>th</sup>-century images through 5<sup>th</sup>-century eyes by reconstructing, as far as possible, the relevant assumptions and expectations as they existed in ancient Greece. Modern historians are thus confronted with the difficult task of separating the potential realities presented by images on Attic vases and their symbolism, including displays of cultural and social ideals, in order to unveil the multiple functions and meanings that vase images could have had in the ancient Greek world.

The motif of the nude Greek figure as it appeared on Attic vases during the Classical period is one such element that has been interpreted in too literal and simplistic a manner. It can be assumed that, in a normally clothed society, the choice to render a figure nude in art is a deliberate one and carries some purpose and function. One of the goals of this thesis is therefore to attempt to understand the purpose of divesting the female figure in particular of its protective garments in a variety of contexts on Greek vases.

According to Bonfante (1989:544) it was the Greeks who introduced to western culture the ideal of the nude male form as the highest kind of beauty: “Greek art and athletics exalted the beauty of the youthful male athlete, whose figure provided the model for the hero or youthful god”. The nude warrior as he appears on Attic vases also suggests a “patriotic readiness to stand up and fight even though one knew one was vulnerable” (Bonfante 1989:556). On the other hand, ancient and modern sources concur that a respectable Athenian woman’s beauty was thought to reside in her ability to conceal her body beneath layers of cloth and modesty rather than in its complete exposure, a cultural phenomenon that nevertheless resulted in

sexualising the female body (Llewellyn-Jones 2002:171). Llewellyn-Jones (2002:171) asserts that clothed women in art were “desirable, beautiful, and sexualised objects of the male gaze and the dress of these women became an instrument in creating that ideal erotic image”.

What then did the nude female figure on Attic vases signify if a clothed female body already functioned as a means to potentially indicate erotic intent? Lewis (2002:116-128) and Kilmer (1993:159-167) point out that the exposed female body has become a means for researchers to identify the status of a female figure on Attic vases due to a scholarly position that presumes that all nude women on pottery were automatically prostitutes. In fact, Llewellyn-Jones (2002:176) claims that our biggest concern with regards to interpreting the meaning and function of the nude female figure is the manner in which we have a tendency to label all women on Attic vases as either respectable or ‘disreputable’, wives or whores, and very little in between is explored. Neils (2000:208) for example, states that “*hetairai* are instantly identifiable in vase painting on account of their nudity...chaste citizen women, when they appear, are always heavily draped and often veiled”.

It is unlikely, however, that the appearance of the nude female figure in painted scenes on Classical vases was as unambiguous as such views suggest. Robertson (1991:28) refutes Neils’ statement by posing the questions: “Was there really no resemblance between the wife and the *hetaira*? Did the wife, unlike the *hetaira*, have no erotic desire?” Lewis (2002:104) asserts that not all forms of exposure is ‘sexualised’ and to refer to all nude women in Athenian vase-painting as *hetairai* is to assume that a nude state alone can function as a means to indicate the profession and setting of the figures, as well as the implied activity in the image. We cannot assume that the nude female form is a consistent and recurring symbol.

Lewis (2002:102) thus warns that not all scenes containing a nude female figure should be restricted to one meaning only and points out that nude women often appeared on Attic vases in a variety of religious and ritualistic contexts. Lewis (2002:102) and Bonfante (1989:560) both argue, for example, that in vase images depicting the rape of Cassandra at the hands of Ajax, her nude state serves to emphasise the princess’ vulnerability and shame in the moment of her capture. Bonfante (1989:544) continues to list other potential functions of the nude female form in ancient Greek art that should also be taken into consideration, such as its means to distinguish social groups (much like clothing does), to mark the contrast between Greeks and non-Greeks, as well as its apotropaic functions (the notion of warding off the negative effects of sorcery and hostile spirits) in ancient Greek society.

There is no doubt that the nude female figure on vases did indeed have an erotic function in specific contexts; however, the appearance of the nude female body on Attic vases should not be restricted to this category of meaning alone. The purpose of this thesis is not to refute the fact that eroticism was a potential (underlying) goal of some nude female figures in ancient Greek art, but to argue that sexuality in itself was not necessarily the primary intention of the artist. I will therefore explore a range of potential functions and meanings of the nude female figure on Athenian vases. Based on these findings, I will also attempt to re-analyse a selection of scenes containing nude female figures in order to (re)categorise their nudity into their appropriate functions.

### **1.1 Research Problem, Research Question and Aim of the Thesis**

Scholars too readily interpret the nude female figure in ancient Greek art as 'erotic' in nature. Attempting to understand the potential functions of the nude female figure on Classical Attic vases is indeed problematic as modern scholars' readings of them have often been viewed through perceptual filters produced by their own cultural environment and biases. It must be considered, then, how we as modern scholars can employ a more nuanced approach to interpreting the images on Attic vases and to try to prevent too literal a reading of the imagery. This approach should thus take into consideration certain cultural and social signifiers that can assist in recovering a more accurate reading of these vases in their context.

The research questions posed in this thesis are therefore the following: What are the general meanings associated with the nude female figure in Greek antiquity and what specific connotations have been assigned to the nude female form on Attic vases of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE? Furthermore, in addition to its erotic function, which additional functions and meanings can be attributed to the nude female figure on Attic red-figure vases of 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens? Finally, how can a more rigorous approach to these vase images allow us to interpret this motif of the nude female body in a more nuanced way?

To address these questions, one must more accurately and actively investigate the nude female figure and approach the image as though it were an ancient text divulging historical, social and political information. Considering the images in their particular social or cultural context will allow the meaning and function of the nude female figure to become more distinct. By taking into consideration a multitude of visual indicators and the manner in which they communicate with one another, one can attempt to understand the nude female figure as the ancient Athenians might have.

## 1.2 Hypothesis

This thesis will therefore argue that the female figure's nudity only gains meaning in a specific context and a change of contextual elements and other cultural indicators may suggest a different visual and actual meaning altogether. I will argue that the appearance of the nude female figure on Attic vases is not as transparent and straightforward as has been suggested. Instead, this artistic motif can be perceived as having several potential meanings and functions depending on a context that is only accessible once relevant factors, such as the social conventions and cultural beliefs of the society that produced the vases, are taken into consideration. Thus, by exploring the multiple functions of the nude female body on ancient Greek pottery, I will challenge the oversimplification of the motif of the nude female form on Classical Attic vases of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

## 1.3 Definition of Terms and Assumptions

In this section I will introduce and define certain key terms that are used during the course of this thesis and which will be applied in particular ways. These key terms include 'nakedness' and 'nudity', as well as 'eroticism' and 'pornography'.

### 1.3.1 Nudity and Nakedness

Since the unclothed female body is the focal point of this thesis, ways of describing this state of not being clothed should be discussed and defined. As Stewart (1997: 25) points out, while German only has one word to describe this state (*nackt*), English uses two key terms: 'nudity' or 'nude' and 'nakedness' or 'naked'. To a large extent these terms are used in the scholarship (and English language in general) interchangeably, and are simply descriptive of the fact that no clothes are worn. However, some scholars use the terms more specifically. Stewart refers to Clarke's (1956:3), distinction between the two:

To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word 'nude', on the other hand, carries in educated usage no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenceless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body re-formed.

Stewart himself opts for the term 'naked' as a general and neutral term to describe the unclothed figure. I, however, for the most part in this thesis have used the term 'nude' to describe the unclothed body in this neutral way. However, where I do wish to distinguish between the



connotation of vulnerability and exposure (nakedness) and a confident, prosperous body ('nude') I will specifically call on Clarke's distinction to make this clear. In these cases I will use the word 'naked' to imply such vulnerability.

### **1.3.2 Eroticism and Pornography**

Since the nude figure on Greek vases has often been interpreted as having sexual connotations, two other words that are used to describe the effect or meaning of these figures are 'erotic' and 'pornographic'. In this thesis I have used the word 'erotic' to describe a scene or figure that alludes to sexuality, and to describe conduct which is titillating and more subtly sexual rather than sexually explicit (Johns 1982:99). 'Pornographic' on the other hand has a stronger connotation of violence and subjugation. I have used this word to describe conduct or scenes that are explicitly violent and seem expressly designed to subjugate and degrade the participants (usually the women in particular). Steinem (1980:37) defines pornography as the kind of sex in which force is undoubtedly exercised to the point that the audience of the image must either identify with a conqueror, or a victim.

## **1.4 Theory and Methodology**

This section will, firstly, provide the theoretical framework of this study, followed by a discussion on the approach that will be utilised to read the ancient imagery and why this approach has been selected as the most appropriate tool for analysis. Next, I will examine any potential shortcomings of this approach, so as to ensure that these limitations are taken into consideration during the analysis process. Finally, an overview of the corpus of images and the rationale for selecting these vase images of this thesis will be provided.

### **1.4.1 Theoretical Framework**

The intricate nature of an image has often been viewed as analogous to the linguistic complexity of a language. It has long been perceived by scholars such as Jakobson (1960:353) that an image 'communicates' much like a language does and similarly allows for exchange to occur between an *addresser* (the artist) and an *addressee* (the viewer). According to this model, a *message* is conveyed through a *channel* (the artefact with its image) that can be perceived as intelligible to both sender and receiver. Jakobson's theory therefore places much emphasis on the importance of the context and the frame of reference in which the message is meant to be exchanged.

Sourvinou-Inwood (1991:3) describes a similar approach to Jakobson's, which she utilises for reading ancient Greek vases and defines as a "wider and more systematically articulated

framework”: that each cultural artefact must be investigated in the context of the society and culture which created and defined it. Meaning is therefore produced when one looks at the image in its full context and once this is achieved one can proceed to recover the potential meanings which the artist may have intended or the ancient audience would probably have perceived in the image (Sourvinou-Inwood 1991:9). “Without such a methodology,” Sourvinou-Inwood claims (1991:10), “we will be (implicitly) wrenching the images from their historical context and reading them as floating pictures by default”.

Ferrari (2002:6), along with Oakley and Sinos (1993:7), concurs that it has been a common practice to “collapse” the image on the vase into the thing it seems to us to represent and thus the image can become freed from the frame of reference in which it was embedded. By alienating the image in this manner we lose its very sense and its purpose, “the background against which it acquires resonance, and in the end, any value it might have as a source, historical or otherwise” (Ferrari 2002:6). This thesis will therefore endeavour to implement an approach that is not distorted in the way that Ferrari describes, but this approach will instead be a useful analytical tool for further developing our understanding of this specific subject of interest.

A core concept of this thesis is the need to reconstruct an ancient image in its full context – social, cultural, economic, political and religious. It is, after all, in this context that it acquired its meaning in the eyes of its contemporary audience (Sourvinou-Inwood 1991:5). Thus, Sourvinou-Inwood (1991:244) has the following to say on selecting an appropriate approach for viewing ancient images:

We must aim at a neutral methodology which does not rely on a priori assumptions and does not deploy culturally determined notions of ‘likelihood’, ‘dramatic embroidery’, and the like; a methodology which makes no assumptions about the nature of the narrative and its relationship to historical events, but attempts to reconstruct that narrative’s conceptual idiom, the conventions, aims, and modes of thought that shaped it, and to read it through the perceptual filters constituted by the ancient assumptions [...] which helped create it.

One can therefore argue that the interpretation of a vase image requires extensive knowledge of its cultural and social background before the signs prevalent within the image can collectively construct, develop and ultimately determine meaning, context and function.

### 1.4.2 An Iconographic Approach

An iconographic<sup>1</sup> approach, as pioneered by Panofsky, has been selected as the most appropriate approach to utilise in this study. Hasenmueller (1978:292) defines this approach as the “decoding of *images*”, *images* functioning much like signs, and thus iconography is, in effect, “the analysis of a particular ‘sign-function’ within the spectrum of artistic meaning”. Stansbury-O’Donnell (1999:92) puts it simply by pointing out that an iconographic analysis serves to identify visual elements as well as their meaning through establishing a correlation between an image and that which it is meant to represent. “In order for this to work”, states Stansbury-O’Donnell (1999:92), “there must be a set of common pictorial forms or motifs shared by artist and viewer, in other words, a visual language”. This approach therefore presumes a canon of correspondence between ‘sign’ and ‘signified’ that is shared by both the artist and the viewer (Stansbury-O’Donnell 1999:92).

The extent to which iconography stresses the significance of signs becomes even more prevalent when this approach is compared to that of semiotics (theory of signs), the concept itself originating from the Greek word *semeiotikos*, or “interpreter of signs” (Hall 2007:5). Hasenmueller (1978:289) therefore refers to Panofsky’s work as “semiotic in character”. The connection between these two approaches to images can be made all the more apparent by Argan’s (1975:299; 303) reference to Panofsky as the “Saussure<sup>2</sup> of art history”, and his system as a “semiotic of art”. Semiotics and iconography, considering how similar their approaches are, could therefore be used together as a merged methodology to assist in reading ancient imagery. Moxey (1991:992) describes this methodology as “semiotic iconography” and defines it as follows:

A semiotic iconography will consist of the study of pictorial conventions used by a particular culture in the process of encoding the values that structure its reality [...] the focus, in other words, would be on the social work performed by these structures of signification, the way in which they intersected with all the other signifying systems that made up social life, rather than upon their ‘intrinsic meaning’.

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<sup>1</sup>Panofsky has been widely known as the scholar who “set out the fundamentals” of iconography after he published his essay *Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the study of Renaissance Art* (Stansbury-O’Donnell 2011:58). Panofsky’s research on iconography, according to Hasenmueller (1978:297), finds its origin in the scholar’s concern for deep meaning within cultural products and the belief that it is indeed accessible to analysis. <sup>2</sup>Saussure, according to Copley (2010:3), was one of the leading figures in the development of semiotics, which became highly popular in Western intellectual circles from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.

Hasenmueller (1978:290) therefore points out that, although Panofsky did not make use of the concept 'sign', he did, however, set up the parallel association of a 'signifying' gesture and its 'signified' message in his work.

Moxey (1991:989) approves of such an approach in which signs play a significant role in establishing context, claiming that our very perception of the signs within an image is conditioned by the ways in which our society has taught us to recognise them. It is thus imperative that the signs prevalent in ancient images be perceived in their own cultural and historical contexts or "historical horizon" (Moxey 1991:991) and that a system be used that allows the historian to "see through the work into the mental landscape of the culture that produced it" (Moxey 1991:992).

What is important to note, however, is the manner in which the concept of context has often been oversimplified when scholars attempt to view ancient art. Yet, it should be understood that context is not given, but produced (Culler 1989: xiv). Simply put, "what art historians are bound to examine, whether they like it or not, is the work as effect and affect, not only as a neatly remote product of an age long gone" (Bal and Bryson 1991:175). It is therefore not simply a case of recognising context, but determining and developing the signifying systems and interpretive strategies that divulge context. Consequently, considering the importance iconography places on interpreting images by identifying the cultural signs prevalent in such images, it will make for a suitable approach for analysing the nude female figure on Classical Attic vases.

### **1.4.3 Shortcomings in an Iconographic Approach**

As much as an iconographic approach can assist in the interpretation of the nude female figure on Classical pottery, there are also certain limitations or shortcomings attributed to this approach that must be taken into consideration. One of the most significant shortcomings is the issue that iconography is limited to a cultural framework based on a database of recurring pictorial elements, which, in turn, is dependent on certain themes and concepts from literary sources (Hasenmueller 1978:290). As such, images are not always recognised for the integral messages they might carry in their own right as unique works of art. The aim should therefore be to significantly curb the tendency scholars have of forcing ancient Greek images into some form of literary recognition.

### 1.4.5 Defining a Corpus of Nude Female Images

This study into the multiple functions and meanings of the nude female figure on ancient Athenian vases is limited to the period ranging from 480 BCE to 420 BCE. The reason for the selection of this time period above the others is primarily due to this specific era seeing a rather significant increase in the number of nude female bodies painted on Athenian ceramics. This increase was likely mainly due to the advent of the red-figure technique in the early Classical period that allowed for a greater exploration of unconventional topics, such as the female nude, in Classical vase-painting.<sup>3</sup> As such, this study only comprises of red-figure vases of ancient Athenian provenance as amassed in the online Beazley Archive. This online archive, which has a significant number of ancient Greek vases from a great number of museums across the globe, is a useful source of material for this thesis as it has, to date, documented 649 vases containing scenes of male and female nudity in a variety of contexts.

Of these 649 vases, more than half could not be utilised for this study due to the fact that they were not of the time period selected for this study or because they were not of the red-figure technique. Images containing only nude male figures were also excluded as the focus of this study is on female nudity. Furthermore, if a vase was too badly damaged or fragmentary to be useful in this study of nude female figures, it was also excluded from the body of suitable imagery, as well as any vase which had not been fully documented and thus lacked certain crucial information (such as date and provenance). Entries for vases that did not include photographs were still considered for the corpus of images, as the online Beazley Archive provides a concise description of all documented ceramics and it was possible to extrapolate useful information about the scene's composition, etc.

With all the unrelated or incomplete vases excluded from the online Beazley Archive, 218 remained. A preliminary analysis of these vase scenes was done in order to attempt to categorise the potential function(s) of the nude female figure in each scene. This process was aided by utilising the descriptions of the vase images provided by the online Beazley Archive and taking into consideration the vase shape of the vases on which the images make an appearance. Robertson (1991:26) places emphasis on the significance of the vase shape in determining an image's function by, for example, distinguishing the respectable wife from the *hetaira* not simply on the terms of the latter's lack of clothing, but more so on the fact that the female figures he discusses appear on the kylix, a typical drinking cup connected to the

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<sup>3</sup>In Chapter 2, more information will be provided by Cohen (1993) and Skinner (2005) on the red-figure technique as an indication of artistic and social change in Classical Athens.

symposium. Moreover, by utilising the research of various scholars (Johns 1982; Keuls 1985; Bonfante 1989; Sutton 1992; Cohen 1993; Kilmer 1993; Lewis 2002; Skinner 2005 and Kreilinger 2006), who provide controversial and diverse discussions and interpretations on the motif of the nude female figure on Classical Greek vases, a general framework of function and meaning could be constructed to aid in this process.

It was established that, after the initial survey, five main categories of the function of the nude female figure emerge. They are the following: 1. Religion and ritual: 45 vases suggest a religious and ritualistic function associated with the nudity depicted; primarily nude women participate in the *komos* festival, for example, or satyrs and maenads embody religious ecstasy or nude maidens appear on funerary vases. 2. Apotropaism: nine vases suggested an apotropaic function and mainly depict nude woman carrying or holding male genitalia or *phallos* birds. 3. Violence and vulnerability: blatant violence towards nude female figures did not make much of an appearance, with only six vases clearly illustrating this function. 4. Eroticism and pornography: 98 vases suggest a ‘discreetly erotic’ function, either in the form of nude women managing domestic tasks (such as putting on a pair of sandals or carrying cloth), or in the form of bathing, dancing or simply in conveying a mythological scene in which mythical female figures appeared in a state of undress, or completely nude (e.g. Helen, Ariadne and Aphrodite). A further 30 vases can be described as portraying symposium scenes and yet another 28 vases clearly illustrate nude women engaging in some form of blatant sexual conduct (e.g. copulation between heterosexual couples). Of the 156 vases illustrating what seems, on the surface, to be

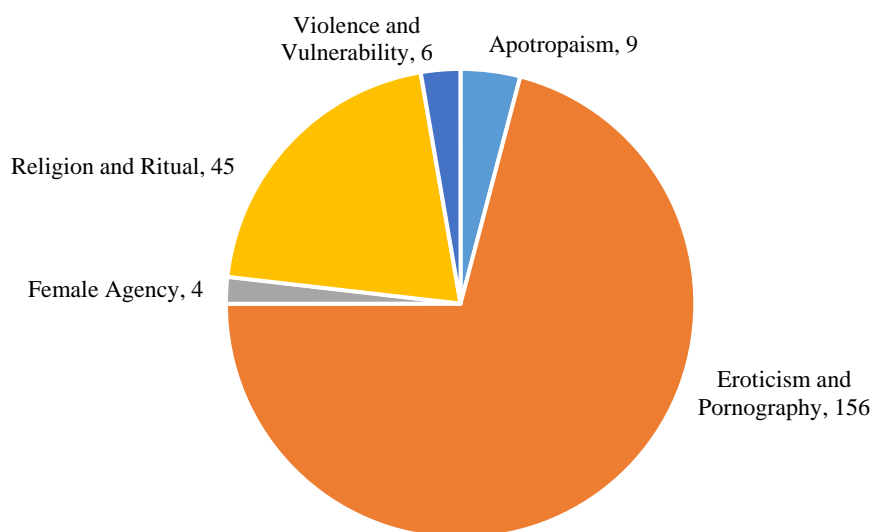


Figure 1.1 Relative distribution of vases in the online Beazley Archive according to the function of the nude female figure

erotic imagery, then, only 58 could be labelled as having an explicitly sexual or pornographic intent and function. 5. Female agency: only four vases contained the motif of the nude, kneeling bather (which scholars argue is a positive association of the female nude which denotes female agency), as this motif only became popular c. 400-300 BCE.

As the online Beazley Archive is hesitant to use the word ‘erotic’ when describing a scene containing female nudity – and even then a question mark is placed in brackets after – it is safe to say a sense of caution is practiced when approaching the function and context of the nude female figure as she appears on Classical Attic vases. Scholars in general do not, however, practice this sense of caution, typically labelling the function of the nudity without, in my view, due consideration of the iconography in context.

As such, in this study I have selected fifteen images, three from each of the five functions outlined above, as my core corpus based on prevailing interpretations of these images. Since one of the primary aims of this thesis is to challenge the oversimplified scholarly interpretations of these vases, I have selected from the online Beazley Archive the images that have been the most extensively discussed among these scholars. By re-examining this richly discussed corpus of imagery, one can best investigate and ultimately demonstrate the extent to which the nude female figure’s function in ancient Athenian vase-painting has been oversimplified in scholarship.

Table 1 Corpus of vase images selected from the online Beazley Archive

Vase number	Figure number	Beazley vase number	Vase shape	Beazley Description of vase	List of scholars per image or images of similar themes	General consensus on function of female nudity
1	3.1	214916	Pelike	Eros flying with sandal on box, naked <sup>4</sup> woman tying sandal, rock.	Sutton (1992) Oakley and Sinos (1993) Lewis (2002) Lee (2012)	Eroticism and pornography
2	3.2	901771 8	Kylix	Women, one naked, erecting <i>phallos</i> .	Johns (1982) Keuls (1985) Kilmer (1993) Lewis (2002)	Religion and ritual
3	3.3(a)  3.4(b)	5969	Cup	a. Erotic, satyr and naked maenad reclining on rock, <i>thyrsos</i> , object suspended. b. Symposium, satyr and naked maenad reclining, sponge suspended.	Neils (2000) Johns (1982) Keuls (1985) Skinner (2005)	Eroticism and pornography
4	4.1	206285	Column Krater	Naked woman carrying <i>phallos</i> with eye	Kilmer (1993) Keuls (1985) Johns (1982) Lewis (2002)	Apotropaism
5	4.2	202706	Amphora	Naked woman with <i>phallos</i> bird unwrapping basket with <i>phalloi</i> with eyes.	Johns (1982) Keuls (1985) Boardman (1992) Kilmer (1993) Lewis (2002)	Eroticism and pornography/ Apotropaism
6	4.3	202175	Pelike	Erotic, naked woman with <i>phallos</i> climbing into basket with <i>phalloi</i> , stool.	Dover (1978) Keuls (1985)	Eroticism and pornography

<sup>4</sup>The Beazley archive descriptions use the word 'naked' consistently in a neutral fashion to describe the unclothed state.



<b>7</b>	5.1	207783	Amphora	Ajax and Kassandra (naked) at statue of Athena, woman at idol of Athena, shield device, mule.	Bonfante (1989) Cohen (1993) Kilmer (1993; 1997) Lewis (2002)	Violence and vulnerability
<b>8</b>	5.4(a) 5.5(b)	200694	Cup	a and b: Erotic, youths, one with trident or stand (?), one with <i>phallos</i> , one with drinking horn, men, one with shoe, women, some kneeling, one on <i>klinê</i> .	Johns (1982) Keuls (1985) Kilmer (1993) Stewart (1997) Skinner (2005) Corner (2014)	Eroticism and pornography/ Violence and vulnerability
<b>9</b>	5.6	275962	Cup	Erotic, youth attacking naked woman with sandal.	Kilmer (1993) Lewis (2002)	Eroticism and pornography/ Violence and vulnerability
<b>10</b>	6.1	211438	Cup	Symposium, draped men and youth, one with cup, one with sprig, naked women reclining, one with sprig and skyphos, one playing <i>kottabos</i> , baskets, sash and covered shield, all suspended.	Reeder (1995) Boardman (1989) Spivey and Rasmussen (1991) Lewis (2002) Keuls (1985)	Eroticism and pornography
<b>11</b>	6.2	205288	Cup	Erotic, man and naked woman, <i>klinê</i> , cushion, stool, cloth, sponge.	Johns (1982) Keuls (1985) Sutton (1992) Kilmer (1993) Stewart (1997) Skinner (2005)	Eroticism and Pornography/ Violence and vulnerability
<b>12</b>	6.3	203885	Cup	Erotic, man and naked woman on <i>klinê</i> , staff, cushion.	Johns (1982) Kilmer (1993) Lewis (2002) Boardman (1978)	Eroticism and pornography
<b>13</b>	7.1	214966	Hydria	Naked women, one with cloth at laver, <i>kalathos</i> , bag and sash suspended.	Williams (1983) Keuls (1985) Kreilinger (2006)	Eroticism and pornography/Female agency

					Sutton (2009)	
<b>14</b>	7.2	210165	Cup	Women washing, some naked, some with boots, holding chitons, column, tree.	Kilmer (1993) Sutton (2009) Kreilinger (2006)	Eroticism and pornography/Female agency
<b>15</b>	7.3(a) 7.4(c)	44750	Pyxis	a, b and c: Domestic, wedding, women, one naked, squatting, washing at laver, Eros pouring water from hydria, some with sashes, some with fillets, some seated on chair and on stool, one with crown, <i>Erotas</i> , one with hydria, one with box, one seated on woman (Aphrodite?), lekythos and alabastron suspended, loutrophoros with sashes, stool, building.	Oakley and Sinos (1993) Hackworth Petersen (1997) Kreilinger (2006) Sutton (2009)	Eroticism and pornography/Female agency/Religion and ritual

## 1.5 Research Design

Chapter 1 has provided a brief introduction to the thesis, including the aims and research objectives of this study. Chapter 2 presents the background to the study, which includes a brief discussion on gender ideology in ancient Athenian society and art, as well as a consideration of male nudity as a point of comparison for reading female nudity in its cultural context. This chapter further assesses the role of the clothed and unclothed female form generally in ancient Greece, in order to better understand the motif of the nude female figure on Classical Athenian vases, followed by an overview of the multiple functions of the nude female figure on red-figure Attic vases as established by various scholars.

The following five chapters individually explore the five functions of female nudity selected for this study. By making use of an iconographic analysis, each of the three images within a function, as determined by the dominant thoughts of scholars, will be critically analysed and discussed in order to investigate whether they have indeed been placed within their appropriate context and function. Chapter 3 will investigate the three images that suggest a religious and ritualistic function; Chapter 4 will analyse the three images that represent an apotropaic function; Chapter 5 will make use of an iconographic approach to analyse the three images that have been selected for the function of violence and vulnerability; Chapter six will accomplish the same aim by exploring the iconographic signifiers that indicate an erotic and pornographic function; and Chapter 7 will study the three images that have been selected to convey a sense of female agency within Classical Athenian vase-painting. The concluding chapter will assess the results of the study concerning the topic of the multiple functions of the nude female figure on Classical Attic vases.

## 1.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to place emphasis on the manner in which the arguments of modern scholars on the motif of the nude female form on Classical Attic vases have resulted in these ambivalent female figures' status being limited to either reputable or 'disreputable'. While little had been done to conduct a comprehensive study on the nature of female nudity in ancient Greek art, scholars have now realised that the ambiguous motif of the nude female figure needs further investigation. It therefore becomes crucial to analyse this recurring, yet polysemic motif as a means to explore the purpose or social functions behind the occurrence of the nude female figure and the multiple contexts in which it makes its appearance so as not to simply label all nude women on Attic vases wives or prostitutes.

This chapter concludes that, to accomplish this feat, a more nuanced approach to reading these ambiguous ancient images is required, one that is less inclined to make use of modern cultural and social perceptions to interpret these images. Rather, this approach should aim to make use of the cultural codes and signifiers prevalent within the ancient images in order to ensure that a more complete and thorough reading of these images is done. As a result, a wider range of functions of the nude female figure within Greek art can be identified, functions that do not simply paint these women as eroticised or sexualised objects of the ancient Greek patriarchy.

## Chapter 2: Background to the Study

Chapter 2 provides a background on the history of the nude form in ancient Greek art, focusing specifically on the connotations and functions attributed to the clothed and nude female figure in Classical Greek vase-painting. This chapter commences with a brief discussion on gender ideology in ancient Athens as a means to better understand the cultural platform on which the conceptions of Greek nudity was constructed. Secondly, this chapter will attempt to broadly investigate the meanings and functions of ancient Greek male nudity in order to highlight the vast, contrasting differences between this nudity and the manner in which the nude female form was perceived in light of it.

Next, before an attempt can be made to wholly comprehend the social and cultural meanings attributed to the nude female figure in ancient Greece, it is necessary to first discuss the clothed body. From basic human necessity to social and cultural identity, clothing has never been as straightforward as providing a protective barrier against the elements, but more often functioned as a social tool that reflected gender expectations and cultural ideology. Thus, the role of ‘dress’, followed by the role of ‘undress’ in ancient Greek society, will briefly be explored in this chapter, especially pertaining to the female body. Chapter 2 concludes with a review of the research conducted by scholars that largely contributed to the study of the nude female figure on classical Greek pottery.

### 2.1 Gender Ideology in Ancient Athenian Society

To better differentiate between the multiple functions of nude female figures on Classical Athenian pottery, an investigation into gender ideology in Classical Athens must first be undertaken. In general a woman’s nature was identified as the antithesis of masculine nature. Whereas men were identified as beings of self-control and rationality, women, as the “penetrated partner” (Reeder 1995:300) were viewed as creatures who could not control their own biological responses, and, consequently, were seen as lacking in sexual and moral self-mastery. Women, thus containing the characteristics of a feral animal, could only be tamed and controlled through domestic institutions, such as marriage, and the domestic tasks that are associated with them (Reeder 1995:300; Sourvinou-Inwood 1988:128-129).

In addition to the perception of women as wild animals, there was also the belief that a woman’s body and mind were ‘wet’, whereas a man’s overall countenance was described as ‘dry’. Hippokrates (*Vict.* 27) distinguishes the male body from the female body as follows:

The female flourishes more in the environment of water, from things cold and wet and soft, whether food or drink or activities. The male flourishes more in an environment of fire, from dry, hot foods and mode of life (Carson 1990:137).

From Heraklitos' (B118 VS) assertion that "a dry soul is wisest and best" (Carson 1990:137) and Homer's (*Il.* 14.165) reference to Zeus' efficient mind as 'dry', it can be deduced that, according to the male-dominated sources, the preferred state of the body and mind was that of 'dryness', while a 'wet' body or mind was deficient (Carson 1990:137). According to Carson (1990:139), a woman's 'wetness' makes her vulnerable to the onslaughts of Eros, while simultaneously functioning as a weapon against excessive heat and dryness, which men do not possess: Aristotle claims in his *Problemata* (4.25.879a31-35) that hot natures have a tendency to collapse in summer due to excess of heat, while cold ones will only flourish (Carson 1990:137). Thus, during summer a man's power is diminished, but a woman's power is at its peak because it is balanced by its contrary. In Hesiod's *Works and Days* (700-750), the ancient writer similarly reflects on the voracious woman's unrelenting sexual demands, which "roasts her man' in the unquenchable fire of her appetite, drains his manly strength and delivers him to the 'raw old age' of premature impotence" (Carson 1990:141). According to Reeder (1995:300) the demeaning manner in which the female body was perceived, was potentially due to a woman's sexuality being regarded by men with not only wonder and respect, but also with suspicion, anxiety and fear.

These extreme gender stereotypes, as offered in the texts, assist in painting a portrait of ancient Athenian women's nature as viewed in ancient Greek society. This gender ideology would, hence, have an impact on their representation in ancient Greek art. After all, vase-painting, as a socially constructed medium of communication, presented the people with a collection of varying self-images through which they could define themselves as individuals, as well as in a group setting (Sutton 1992:3).

Stewart (1997:12) addresses the correlation between nudity and reality when he argues that signs that are intensely ideological are the ones that attempt to "pass culture off as nature, illusion as reality and fiction as truth". Nudity in ancient Greek art can be seen to be just such an artistic 'sign' considering the fact that nudity on Athenian vases was hardly a true reflection of reality. Stewart (1997:12) reminds us that, not only did the ancient Greeks not attempt warfare in the nude or walk about the city without clothing, but they also did not resemble the

ideal physique as it was fashioned in Classical vase-painting and sculpture. In fact, the image that one attains from osteoarchaeological evidence does not coincide with the idealised representation obtained in ancient art; rather, the inhabitants of Greek civilisation were thickset and sturdy, with relatively short lower limbs (Stewart 1997:12). The clothed and unclothed figures on Athenian vases have therefore been perceived by French scholars as a construct, not a carbon copy, or better yet, “a work of culture, the creation of a language that like all other languages contains an essential element of arbitrariness” (Stewart 1997:12).

With reference to ancient Athenian women specifically, feminist readings inform us that modern perceptions and interpretations of the nude female figure in ancient art, as well as contemporary art, should be viewed as female victimisation and male domination. As the dominant stereotype goes, Nead (1992:57) states that the male artist is rendered a productive, active and controlling entity, a “man whose sexuality is channelled through his brush”, resulting in the famous metaphor of the ‘penis-as-paintbrush’ (Nead 1992:56). As for the surface on which the nude female body is created, Nead (1992:57) makes the following statement:

Metaphorical language constitutes the receptive surface as bare, resistant, without meaning until it is inscribed with the signs of style. But this structure is then repeated; for woman’s body is itself a metaphorical blank surface which is given meaning through the values of the dominant culture.

In essence, Nead’s suggestion seems to imply that the female form, especially the nude female body, represents a multitude of cultural dimensions that reflect societal values and ideologies without ascribing meaning and worth to the female individual herself. This view assists in cultivating an image of the nude female figure as a multi-faceted object that reflects the many principle layers of a culture (ritualistic, ideological, political) without being an active partner in its operations. As highly probable as this observation might be, it does not take into account how women might have observed these images of nude women and what possible functions (and underlying messages) of female value could have been inscribed in the artwork by a male artist and overlooked by academics.<sup>5</sup> In Greek literature, for example, a sense of female degradation and subjugation has often been proposed as an integral part of mythology, which,

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<sup>5</sup>The thesis will discuss in Chapter 7 the invention of the kneeling bather as the female version of the ideal masculine nude.

according to Keuls (1985:1), is only to be expected of a society known for its “reign of the phallus” and “mythology of rape”. In contrast, Lefkowitz (1986:186) suggests that Greek myth is often a portrayal of marriage and motherhood and all the complications and difficulties associated with them, labelling them the best conditions women in ancient Greece desired in order to experience happiness and earn the respect of society. It is possible that we might have misread the social messages inherent in ancient artwork as well, as was no doubt the case in ancient literature.

Lefkowitz’s thoughts succeed in shedding light on how modern principles concerning gender roles today play a significant role in obscuring past perspectives, whether referring to the way in which Greek women perceived their culture, or the way in which their culture perceived them. Lefkowitz might be correct in assuming that gender ideology in ancient Greece might not have been so focused on repressing women as protecting them. It would thus be wrong to simply assume that ancient Greek (gender) ideology, in all its equivocation, never functioned as a means to socially satisfy and cater to the female sex to some extent as well.

The ideologies surrounding the nude female figure on Attic vases were therefore perhaps not as misogynistic and exploitative as modern literature suggests and this should be taken into account when the various functions of the nude woman in ancient Athenian art are addressed. Ancient Athenian women most probably accepted, even willingly embraced, their place in society and, thus, not all images of the nude female body in Greek art were recognised as a means to enforce the objectification, restriction or degradation of women in some form or another. Once this is understood, the female body can finally be viewed as a fellow subject of depth and distinction.

## 2.2 Male Nudity in the Archaic and Classical Periods of Greece

Homer’s poems (*Il.* 22. 74-76) suggest that lack of clothing, i.e. nakedness in Clarke’s (1956:3), distinction, could represent shame, vulnerability, death and dishonour, as can be deduced from Priam’s reference to his own death and degradation as “pitiful” in an attempt to dissuade his son from facing Achilles in the Trojan battle:

When an old man is dead and down, and the dogs mutilate the grey head  
and the grey beard and the parts that are shameful (*aidō*), this, for all sad  
mortality is the sight most pitiful (Bonfante 1989:547).



In addition to male nakedness as a representation of vulnerability, is the function of apotropaism. This manifests in the 'erect *phallos*' that can be seen in various ways in visual culture, including herms and satyrs in ancient Greek art (Bonfante 1989:550). In addition to this, strong emphasis was also placed on the nude masculine athlete in Greek vase-painting, whose sex organ has been noted to be significantly smaller than that of the herms and satyrs (Bonfante 1989:550). It has been proposed by Bonfante (1989:551-552) that, whereas the small *phallos* characterised male youth and beauty, the appearance of the longer *phallos* was attributed to older men or slaves in ancient Greek art, with the large *phallos* having apotropaic and other magical properties (Bonfante 1989:551-552).

The best example of the nude male youth is that of the *kouros* statue (6<sup>th</sup> century BC), which has been defined by Jenkins (2015:20), Elsner (2006:76) and Ferrari (2002:8) as the encapsulation of manly virtue. According to Jenkins (2015:20), this statue of a male youth was formulaically composed to present the essential elements of ideal manhood: strong, even features, long and groomed hair, broad shoulders, with developed biceps and pectoral muscles, with a wasp waist and a flat stomach, as well as a clear division of torso and pelvis, and powerful buttocks and thighs. An example of the extent to which the ideal male physique was appreciated, can be found in Plato's dialogue, *Charmides* (154d), in which the young man's countenance is described as καλός καί αγαθός (beautiful and good): Chaerephon makes the declaration that, were Charmides to remove all his clothes, so beautiful would the young man's body be as to render the youth faceless.

Connected with nudity as a representation of youth and the masculine ideal is its crucial role in male athleticism. Mouratidis (1985:213) states that nudity in male athleticism had its roots in prehistoric Greece where the male was viewed as a warrior-athlete whose competition in the games was simultaneously seen as his preparation for war. Bonfante (1989:553), although in full agreement with Mouratidis, points out that the scholar does, however, neglect to address the religious importance of this cultural phenomenon. Nude male athleticism was, she argues, strongly connected to initiation ceremonies, funeral games and cultic practices in general, and was not merely perceived as a range of competitive sports and military exercises (Bonfante 1989:553). Nude athletic prowess could thus be viewed as 'ritual nudity' in the sense that it represented the movement from childhood to manhood and the gradual development of male courage.

Nudity in the Classical period changes from the naked male body as a sign of vulnerability, shame and dishonour towards it indicating military valour or the willingness to risk one's life regardless of being completely exposed to the enemy (Bonfante 1989:556). In this view, the 'ritual nudity' of the Classical era gave way to 'civic nudity', which marked the clear distinction between the barbarian and the Greek citizen. The former achieved a sense of authority and sophistication through luxurious clothing (Bonfante 1989:557), and the latter accomplished the very same while nude and deprived of lavish adornments.<sup>6</sup>

Strongly connected to civic nudity as an indication of courage and military valour was that of 'heroic nudity', the beginnings of which we can see in the art of the Archaic era and which reached its peak in the Classical period. Hurwit (2007:46) has differentiated two types of heroic nudity in the Classical era. The first kind of heroic nudity was an attribute of mythological heroes, such as Herakles and Theseus (fig. 2.1), and was a fundamental aspect of their heroic personas. The second kind of heroic nudity was "worn" by nude mortals in order to mimic these mythological heroes or claim generalised heroic status (2007:46). In both of Hurwit's types of nudity, the nudity reveals the ideal, youthful and powerful body as the source of *arete*, which heroes possess (Hurwit 2007:46). Hurwit (2007:50) points out that it will also take the courage and transcendent fearlessness of a hero to enter combat completely naked and exposed. Nudity, in this context, not only reveals the idealised body of the archetypical hero, but communicates visually the warrior's readiness to risk all and shed all, and to sacrifice his own



Figure 2.1 Herakles and the Nemean Lion wrestling, c. 500-400 BCE.

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<sup>6</sup>Hurwit (2007:50) suggests that the reasoning for this sudden increase in artistic preference was due to the fact that Classical painters and sculptors were far more interested in exploring the human body and its "anatomical correctness" within three-dimensional space than the artists of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE were inclined to be.

life for the survival of the *polis* (Hurwit 2007:51). Heroic nudity and ‘democratic nudity’, the latter being an expression of complete loyalty and sacrifice to the city-state (Hurwit 2007:51), therefore strongly intersected with athletic nudity and civic nudity, as a correlation of societal and religious beliefs, ideals and expectations conveyed in bare flesh.

### 2.3 The Clothed Female Body

Of the many cultural elements that assist in disclosing identity, clothing is possibly the most essential of them all. “The individuals socialised within the ancient Greek ‘dress code’,” states Lee (2012:181), “would have easily understood the social messages of dress”. Lee (2012:179) has identified various social functions of dress in antiquity and claims that, in Archaic and Classical Greece, dress was fundamental to the construction of individual and group identities, in particular gender, age, status, and ethnicity.

Dress probably played an important role in pregnancy and childbirth when one takes into consideration the garments dedicated to Artemis<sup>7</sup> at the goddess’ sanctuary in Brauron (Lee 2012:187). The garments were said to belong to those young women who died during childbirth (Eur. *IT*. 1465-1467). Burial was another social function in which clothing played a crucial part. Lee (2012:188) asserts that the deceased would have been dressed for burial in their finest garments and accessories in order for the family members to show their respect towards their departed loved ones, but also to create an impressive display for those individuals who would attend the funeral.

In addition to clothing as a ‘dress code’, it was also a means to protect oneself against the cold, to distinguish members of a tribe or class or to protect individuals from a sense of shame (Bonfante 1989:544). Apotropaism was yet another fundamental function of dress in which the garments would protect a woman from the evil eye (Bonfante 1989:544; 559), as much as the shocking nature of the naked human body was also meant to repel it.

Gender-differentiation was another function of dress, especially female dress, and was deeply rooted in gender stereotypes that have been incorporated into ancient Greek art in the form of two artistic themes (Stewart 1997:40). The first theme made an appearance in the Pre-Archaic era, in which both men and women were portrayed nude, while in the second theme, from the

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<sup>7</sup>As patron of women and children, Artemis (Lady of the Beasts) presided over women’s mysteries and over the initiation of young girls (Harris and Platzner 2008:203). Above all, the huntress goddess carried with her a quiver of arrows, with which she was known to inflict the pains of childbirth, or even death (Harris and Platzner 2008:202). It comes as no surprise, then, that the garments of the mortally inflicted would be dedicated to this specific goddess above the others.

Archaic period onward, only the men were depicted nude and the women were fully concealed in garments (Stewart 1997:40). In the case of the former it has been proposed that the Pre-Archaic artists adopted this motif when sculpting nude Cretan figurines in order to convey in their artwork the belief that humanity came first, gender was but a secondary attribute of the individual (Stewart 1997:40). Little or no emphasis was placed on the sex organs that would identify the gender of the figure as it was of no importance to the artist. Thus, when both genders were displayed nude, the artist made a conscious decision to define the figurine in terms of his or her entire body due to the fact that it was not merely the sex organs that constituted the person (Stewart 1997:40). It was only later in Greek society, asserts Stewart (1997:40), that gender-differentiation became the paramount intention of the artist, as can be noted from the careful display of the figures' genitals in later art, whether the male penis in sculpture, or the female breasts in painting.

By the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and onwards, gender-differentiation was more efficiently conveyed in art by the appearance of women as fully clothed to the male's nude state (Stewart 1997:40). Stewart (1997:40) has suggested that ancient Greek artists made use of this differentiating device in order to establish an image of the nude male as the 'natural' gender and the clothed female as the 'constructed' gender. The artists therefore declared in their artwork that a "real man is man in his natural state, acting freely in the world, a whole and bounded subject just as the gods created him, but a 'real' woman is first and foremost a product of culture, of male shaping and looking" (Stewart 1997:40). Hence, whereas clothing was once just supplementary to the female body, it now predominantly functioned as a cultural and social construction which 'contained' the female body as much as it was meant to 'conceal' it.

Clothing was also used for aesthetic purposes, as a means to decorate the body, emphasise beauty, and to attract the opposite sex, asserts Bonfante (1989:544). Stieber (2004:43) concurs, claiming that, through dress, a woman can enhance her natural endowments, such as her youth and robust good health, which, for example, signalled her capabilities for childbirth. Stieber (2004:43) further claims that dress could also reveal the expendable wealth and status of the male relative who acted as the female wearer's guardian and protector. Clothing did therefore not simply provide protection against the harsher elements, nor did it merely reflect social convention, gender-differentiation, culture and identity. Essentially, it also functioned as a means to eroticise the clothed figure in Greek art and to provide visual stimulation, especially with reference to the clothed female form, both in art, as well as in life.

Llewellyn-Jones (2002:171) asserts that this eroticised portrayal of the clothed female form in Greek art has provided scholars with insight into the ideology of Greek gender, as these images were created by men and (largely) for a male audience. In Archaic and Classical Athens, the clothed woman in art was an artistic tool to render the female form an erotic, sexualised object of the male gaze. Llewellyn-Jones (2002:171), is therefore of the opinion that dress in Greek art was a cultural manifestation that assisted in creating the ideal erotic image of the woman in ancient Greek society.

This can especially be noted in Lee's investigation into the style of clothing in Greek art and how it changed over the centuries, gradually indicating a desire in ancient Greek society to place emphasis on the female body, to accentuate female beauty and shape, and to highlight the sexual potential of the female individual. Lee (2012:182) states that, in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, the *peplos* was a garment worn by women which was neither cut, nor sewn, but was merely draped around the body and fastened at the shoulders with pins. Lee (2012:182) further asserts that this style of clothing did not allow for much emphasis to be placed on the female form as it obscured the contours of the female body under thick layers of wool. The *peplos* therefore played a highly significant role in the Greek construction of gender as its heavy drapery enveloped and concealed the "lustful, irrational, [and] immoderate female body, effectively negating feminine sexuality" (Lee 2005:62). At the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the *peplos* was replaced with the *chiton* that Lee (2012:182) describes as a voluminous garment of fine linen that carried with it undertones of luxury and high status. It is this style of clothing that Lee (2012:182) recognises in vase-painting and sculpture as the high quality fabric that reveals the form of the female body underneath.<sup>8</sup>

As for the *himation*, Lee (2012:182) describes it as a type of over-garment that could be arranged in a variety of ways according to the needs of the wearer, but was primarily used as a sort of veil that a 'respectable' woman would pull over her head as a means to shield herself from the male gaze. Llewellyn-Jones (2002:173) elaborates on this description when he refers to the wearer of the *himation* as a veiled and modest female figure who reveals the dual purpose of clothing, or the "two pulses running throughout almost the entire corpus of pre-Hellenistic Greek art". On this point Llewellyn-Jones (2002:178) states that popular taste in vase-painting

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<sup>8</sup>Lee does not, however, clarify that the diaphanous drapery of dress prevalent in Greek art was not always indicative of reality. Stieber (2004:69) points out that when researching the garments worn by women in ancient Greece, "it is important to keep in mind that these are representations of garments, not real garments; thus, a certain degree of artistic license or, less often, representational inadequacy must be accepted when assessing the styles of dress."

demanded the ideal, which prompted artists to invent a variety of devices that alluded to and reflected reality while simultaneously functioning on a meta-level by inventing a “visual language of representation” that regularly utilised the erotic and the idealising.

In this sense, the veil can therefore be seen to have a contradictory function in the sense that it was meant to wrap the *parthenos* and wife in *aidos*, while at the same time eroticising her. Llewellyn-Jones (2003:122) suggests that, ideally speaking, veiling was one of the ways in which female respectability and male honour could be preserved as veiled women leaving the private space of the house could be rendered socially and sexually invisible. At the same time, erotically speaking, a young woman is veiled in recognition of her budding sexuality and this act itself served as a means to highlight her sexual ripeness (Llewellyn-Jones 2003:215). As much as sexual maturity was a prerequisite of the *parthenos*, it was also a concern that needed to be addressed and resolved. As previously discussed, while men were viewed as rational, women were portrayed as wild and passionate, thus threatening the stability of (male) society and, consequently, resulting in the covering, containing and controlling of the female body (Jenkins 2015:127). Dress, then, as expressed through Greek art (not necessarily Greek reality), functioned as a cultural and ideological barrier through which to restrain the overtly sexual and eroticised body of the ancient Greek woman.

Llewellyn-Jones (2002:182) further points out that, of all the parts of the female body that have been eroticised, the female breasts are by far the most accentuated and eroticised in Greek art and literature, with clothing further emphasising their sexual appeal. In fact, Graeco-Roman poets would often draw on the long-established literary motif of the erotic clothed breast. In Nonnus’ epic poem (*D.* 6.605), Zeus ogles Persephone’s breasts beneath her modest garments, Typhon’s enjoyment of Cadmus’ music is compared to the “circle of the blushing breast pressed by a dress” (*D.* 1.529-530) and Chalconedus’ sexual allure is highlighted by her “delicate round breast stretching the robe from within” (*D.* 14.277-280)<sup>9</sup>. It can be assumed that the same male attitude towards the clothed female breast also made its appearance in ancient Greek art as can be deduced from the clinging and transparent ‘wet’ look that became prominent in Classical sculpture, and to a lesser extent, on Attic vases as well. Jenkins (2015:134) refers to this as the “power of drapery”, suggesting that it can reveal as much as it

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<sup>9</sup>Llewellyn-Jones, 2002: 182.



Figure 2.2 Marble statue of Nike of Samothrace, c. 190 BCE.

conceals, often to establish an erotic effect (fig. 2.2). Not only does this form of drapery “transform [...] cold marble into living flesh”, but it also invested the female form with sexual feeling, to the extent that it was often more erotic than nudity itself (Jenkins 2015:19).

Unsurprisingly, little is known about how the respectable housewife would have perceived these artistic representations. Women on ancient Greek vases were often exquisitely dressed, perfect and desirable, with slim figures and full breasts beneath their clothing. Not many women depicted on Attic vases appeared overweight or old, nor do they appear underfed or deformed in any way (Llewellyn-Jones 2002:177). Clark (1972:7) concurs, stating that “we are immediately disturbed by wrinkles, pouches, and other small imperfections, which, in the classical theme, are eliminated”. Llewellyn-Jones (2002:175) proposes that it would have thus been natural for any female viewer or user of these vases to see herself as this ideal female figure of male desire and male ideology as it appeared on Athenian vases. In this respect a woman may very well have identified with her fellow male viewer as she could actively partake in the eroticising and idealising myth that was perpetuated on the vases, if only as a means of coping with what could otherwise be a highly unsatisfactory existence (Llewellyn-Jones 2002:175).

It seems fair then to make the deduction that it is not merely a lack of clothing that eroticised the female body in ancient Greek art. *Hetairai* are appropriate examples of how the strategic



use of dress as an artistic device could more sufficiently eroticise the female body. Dalby (2002:112) argues that it would seem logical to assume that *hetairai* would wear as little as possible to draw a potential client's attention. Yet, it has instead been noted in ancient texts that these 'disreputable' women would wear more expensive and finer clothes than their 'respectable' counterparts in order to enhance their appearance to its full sexual potential (Dalby 2002:112). It can thus be assumed that the nude female figure in ancient Greek art was not simply utilised as a means to eroticise, as this could have easily been accomplished through clothing.

## 2.4 Undressing the Female Body

Undress can be viewed as the transitional phase from being clothed (and protected), to being naked (and vulnerable) and the symbolic implications involved in this (willing or unwilling) transformation. Undress, like dress, is highly important in trying to understand the cultural significance behind the nude female figure in ancient Greek society and art. Sourvinou-Inwood's (1988:123) research on the Brauronian Festival provides a useful example of this as both dress and undress together aid in constructing a ritualistic representation of maidenhood and marriage. The *krokotos* was a garment affiliated with the *Arkteia* that was said to characterise the segregation period between child and woman, wild and socialised and untouchable and marriageable. Simply put, "this short chiton belonged to, and symbolised, the childhood which was ritually being abandoned with the girl's induction into the *Arkteia*" (Sourvinou-Inwood 1988:123) and, subsequently, her shift into marriageable status. Thus, while the young girl is dressed in the *krokotos* (dress) she is still perceived as wild and 'unsocialised', but through the shedding of the *krokotos* (undress), her status as a 'tamed', marriageable young woman is clearly demonstrated.

Lee (2012:188) distinguishes between the various gender-orientated interpretations of undress, stating that, whereas the nude male body carried positive connotations such as heroism and idealism, female undress conveyed themes of sexual violence or other forms of victimisation. It was especially this state of undress in ancient Greek vase-painting that depicted the sexual violence women experienced in antiquity. In both the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, partial undress, i.e. nakedness, could communicate a sense of shock, vulnerability and shame; for example, in certain mythological scenes the sexual defencelessness of a woman can be highlighted by her naked state. During the fall of Troy, for example, Helen reveals her breasts in an attempt to persuade Menelaus against killing her for her passionate elopement with Paris (Eur. *Andr.* 629-630). Iphigenia similarly discards her garments in supplication in the hopes of swaying her





Figure 2.3 Centaur attacking Lapith woman, c. 470-457 BCE.

father and his men against sacrificing her for fair winds to Troy (Aesch. *Ag.* 227-247). An illustration of this motif of the exposure of the breast can also be found on the west pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia where the Lapith women are portrayed with their garments rent (fig. 2.3) by their attackers (Cohen 1997:72).

In specific cases, the undress of women and girls was accepted in ancient Greece, such as in athletic games and festivals. Fisher (2014:257) points out that, during the Games of Hera in which virgins were meant to compete, females often partook with one breast exposed, but otherwise wearing a tunic.<sup>10</sup> Lee (2012:188) also states that young, unmarried girls would often run partially unclothed during the *Arkteia*.<sup>11</sup>

Fisher (2014:259) concludes that, while it is uncertain how many races existed at the Heraean Games, or how girls were chosen to participate, athletic training was likely an essential part of girls' preparations for marriage and childbearing. Nevertheless, female undress in this context was extremely limited, as well as age restricted (up to thirteen years of age) and did not occur as regularly as it did for men who often exercised in the *palaistra* fully nude. Ferrari (2002:169) makes use of an excerpt from Plato's *Republic* (5.451E6-452B5) to point out how the "unclad" female form in athleticism would have been observed in ancient Athens as obscure, even "laughable", especially with regards to elderly women:

<sup>10</sup>See the bronze figure of a young female athlete participating in the *Heraia*, c. 530 BCE. Currently in the British Museum, museum number: 1876, 0510.1.

<sup>11</sup>See online Beazley Archive, vase number: 2457.

“If, then, we are to use women for the same things as the men, we must also teach them the same things”. “Yes”. “Now music together with gymnastic was the training we gave the men”. “Yes”. “Then we must assign these two arts to the women also and the offices of war and employ them in the same way”... “perhaps then,” said I, “the contrast with present custom would make much in our proposals look ridiculous if our words are to be realised in fact.” “Yes, indeed,” he said. “What then,” said I, “is the funniest thing you note in them? Is it not obviously the women exercising unclad in the palestra together with the men, not only the young, but even the older, like old men in gymnasiums, when, though wrinkled and unpleasant to look at, they still persist in exercising?” “Yes, on my word,” he replied, “it would seem ridiculous under present conditions” (Ferrari 2002:169).

From the multiple functions of female undress discussed in this section, it becomes apparent that the partially uncovered female figure is metamorphic (it can indicate victim, bride, athlete). The undressed or fully nude female figures on Athenian vases should then preferably be treated as a context-specific nexus of images pertaining to a larger framework of social and cultural reference.

## 2.5 Female Nudity in Ancient Athens

With a general investigation into the history of ancient Greek nudity concluded, as well as female dress and undress, I will now focus attention on the scholarly explanations for the meaning(s) of the nude female figure in ancient Greek art. In 1982 Johns published a book called *Sex or Symbol: Erotic Images of Greece and Rome*, in which she studied a variety of nude art, from ancient Greek vases to sculptures, terracotta figurines and mirrors. Johns (1982:9) describes the manner in which ancient erotic art used to be locked away in the recent past, especially the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in special collections where only the most dedicated of scholars could approach the artefacts as a means to study them. She adds that “even their motives were regarded as more than a little suspect”, mostly because of this artistic theme being regarded as unacceptable, even taboo in polite 19<sup>th</sup> century society.

Ultimately Johns attempts to expose the misconceptions about erotic art in recent centuries that have shaped peoples’ reception of erotic art in modern day society as well. Even though the separation of erotic art in museums had started to break down by the early 1980s, scholars still

had a propensity to study this ‘questionable’ material in isolation, rather than treating it as one of the many aspects of the culture which produced it (Johns 1982:11).

Johns proceeded to distinguish between images of nude figures in ancient Greek art that at first glance appeared erotic, but served a different (or additional) purpose in society and those images that were purely intended to be erotic or sexually alluring. An example of this, according to Johns (1982:66-67), is the appearance of the *phallos* carried by nude female figures on ancient pottery that was meant to be apotropaic in nature, and images of satyrs assaulting maenads that, she argues, promoted fertility in a religious context and were not created for a purely erotic response. Johns (1982:75) argues that these images did therefore not have any erotic purpose, i.e. they were not connected with sexual feelings as such. In fact, it is a wholly inappropriate reaction to regard these images as obscene, never mind as sexual, as it is clear that eroticism was not the primary intent of the artist in these specific cases, nor would the ancient Greek audience have observed it as such. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this thesis will discuss the religious and apotropaic functions of the nude female figure, respectively, considering the significant roles that these functions played in Athenian vase-painting.

On the other hand, images on Attic vases that depicted couples courting or having sex were, she argues, meant to be highly eroticised (Johns 1982:99). Johns’ suggestion that nude art carries a cultural function instead of demanding a purely biological response, allows for the polysemic nature of the nude female figure to emerge from the restrictions of her identity as a wholly sexualised object of male desire and little else. Johns thus introduces in her book the highly important notion of ancient Greek erotic art as a theme that should be approached with the same amount of scholarly dedication and given the same cultural significance as art depicting a ‘respectable’ woman going about her domestic tasks in the *gynaikeion*, or a mythical scene from one of Homer’s epics.

Contrary to Johns, Keuls’ *The Reign of the Phallus* (1985) can be viewed as a narrow investigation into Greek sexuality based primarily on the scholar’s strongly feminist interpretation of ancient Greek society: that it is characterised by an overwhelming male dominance over women in the public sphere (1985:2). According to Keuls (1985:1), Classical Athens can be described as a “society dominated by men who sequester their wives and daughters, denigrate the female role in reproduction, erect monuments to the male genitalia, have sex with the sons of their peers, sponsor public whorehouses, create a mythology of rape, and engage in rampant saber-rattling”. As such, Keuls (1985:1) refers to Classical Athens as a

‘phallocracy’, a space in which the *phallos* is perceived as a kind of weapon, such as a spear or war club, of which the result is often rape, the disregard of mutual sexual gratification between the sexes, and the easy access of prostitutes whom Keuls (1985:2) describes as enslaved or simply not provided with any alternative means of support.

Regardless of this male dominance over women, Keuls (1985:3-4) still perceives Classical Athens as a space dominated by men’s obsessive fear of women, as noted by the manner in which the Amazons are defined as “The Universal Male Nightmare” for battling men and excluding them from their society. Amazons, states Keuls (1985:4), seem to infer that women have the ability to threaten the ancient Greek male’s manhood and should therefore be controlled and subjugated in order to avoid a female uprising against civilised male society.

Keuls (1985:2) bases her views on research accumulated from vase-painting, stating that she relies heavily on pictorial evidence primarily due to the fact that these ceramics come directly from their periods, unlike literary texts, which passed through centuries of copying, selection and censorship. Yet, this form of pictorial evidence seems to be largely limited to the interpretation of naked women as either products of sexual violence, manifestations of male fantasies forced upon women, or prostitutes either abused by the patriarchy, or forced into this ‘disreputable’ position due to a lack of alternative options.

In scenes depicting nude men and woman copulating, for example, the women are almost always viewed by Keuls (1985:177-178) as *hetairai*. Nude women washing at basins or grooming themselves while looking into mirrors are also labelled as *hetairai* who are busy primping themselves for a night out (Keuls 1985:170). Should a couple be indulging in sexual activities and the nude woman appears fairly aged or ‘unattractive’, she must be a *hetaira* (Keuls 1985:176). If a couple is having intercourse from the rear, the woman is likely a *hetaira* as this position is viewed as humiliating to the recipient and thus added to the dominant male behaviour characteristic of the symposium (Keuls 1985:176). Should a nude woman in the presence of a man act affectionately towards her partner, she is not a wife or a lover, but is simply branded “The Affectionate Prostitute” (Keuls 1985:188-191) who must pretend to be in love, for if one is in love, one will think of one’s lover before oneself (Pl. *Cist.* 93-95) and thus improve one’s sexual performance. Women in Keuls’ work are therefore hardly ever made nude, according to Clark’s definition, but remain consistently pitiful and *naked*, vulnerable and victims of violence. Violence and female vulnerability as a function of female nakedness will be further investigated in Chapter 5.

In 1989 Bonfante published an article named *Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art*, which added to Johns' and Keuls' various functions of the nude figure in ancient Greek art. According to Bonfante (1989:544) a nude body in ancient Greece was a means to distinguish social groups from one another in life, as well as in art. In addition, the nude form as a "costume" marked the cultural contrast between Greeks and non-Greeks, as well as distinguished men from women in society (Bonfante 1989:544). In fact, Bonfante (1989:544) asserts that women are connected to the most basic connotation of nakedness – the sense of shame, vulnerability and exposure that nakedness arouses or provokes in an individual. Bonfante (1989:546-558) approaches nudity from multiple cultural perspectives in order to place emphasis on the unique perception the ancient Greeks had in comparison to their neighbours when divested of one's clothing. Bonfante also explores how this perception changed from one period to the next as ancient Greek society and culture developed over time.

Bonfante's work provides a general cultural background pertaining to nudity in the ancient world. The author undertakes a basic, yet detailed approach to the functions of nudity in ancient Greece as it applied to both the men and women of ancient Greek society, respectively. However, although the author makes use of ancient art as pictorial aid, an in-depth, iconographic approach to these images is not provided as more emphasis is placed on literature as the primary source of information. This potentially results in a contaminated interpretation of the image as ancient texts often restricted prospective insights into the meaning and function of ancient artwork, especially vase-painting. Bonfante (1989:559), for example, states in her work that, "in Classical Greek art, particularly in Attic vase-painting, naked women are usually prostitutes. Respectable women did not go out much, they did not attend male symposia, and they certainly did not undress in public".

Yet, such a statement, substantiated by ancient literary sources that often perpetuated such ideological beliefs<sup>12</sup>, has been generally accepted in the field to be highly improbable, if not downright impractical. In poorer families especially, women were forced to leave the safety of their homes in order to sell bread and vegetables in the market (Dover 2002:29) and to collect water as well as tend the graves of family members. Moreover, Dover (2002:29) suggests that there must have been plenty of Athenian citizen women in the demes of the Attic countryside who participated in working the land and driving animals to the market. In essence, although

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<sup>12</sup>According to Stewart (1997:41), patriarchal ideology as understood from ancient literature, stated the following concerning the clothed female body: "a woman's body must be contained by clothes, constricted by a girdle, capped by a veil, and controlled by a man – and it's still dangerous even then".

ancient literature and art often ran parallel with one another, the latter should not be seen as an auxiliary justification of the former, but should rather be viewed as a primary medium in its own right, not a source of literary legitimisation.

In contrast to Bonfante's surface assessment of these images, Cohen's research delved deeply into the artistic elements that determined form and function of the nude female figure on Attic red-figure vases. Cohen's article, *The Anatomy of Cassandra's Rape: Female Nudity Comes of Age in Greek Art* (1993) predominantly focuses on how the very perception of the nude female body as reflected in Greek art changed drastically as the Archaic period gave way to the Classical period. It was during this time, Cohen (1993:41) points out, that polite society first allowed and openly accepted the consistent exploration of the female nude in Classical vase-painting with the advent of the red-figure technique, ultimately known for its enhancement of the human body, and thus also one's awareness of it. The red-figure technique, in essence, allows the painter to enrich the human body with details of anatomy and characteristics of feeling and emotion, through the use of facial expression (to an extent) and the careful study of posture and gesture (Stewart 1997:59). In addition, the black-figure technique's use of white for women's skin tended to polarise the sexes; however, red-figure eliminated this distinction, "signalling their common humanity instead" (Stewart 1997:59) and potentially aided in creating a new awareness of the female body as something to admire, much as the male body was, for its ideal beauty and desirability.

Cohen makes use of multiple vase images depicting Cassandra's rape to emphasise the change that occurred when artists moved from the Archaic black-figure technique to the early Classical red-figure technique. Cohen (1993:37-41) comes to the conclusion that, whereas in the Archaic period Cassandra's rape emphasised her vulnerability and the physical violence that was the mythical princess' fate, the recurring scene had an erotic connotation in the Classical period as could be deduced by the slight changes in the artwork (Cohen 1993:37-41) and notably society itself.

Cohen's (1993:41) iconographic investigation includes the examining of what she terms 'prostitutes' and other figures existing outside of the scope of polite society, as they started appearing on red-figure vases in Early Classical Greek art. Cohen (1993:41) identifies these nude female figures as prostitutes based on their appearance on red-figure drinking cups in which they are depicted entertaining a male audience. She argues that the painters of these 'disreputable' female figures were no doubt also responsible for the nude representation of



Kassandra around the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Onesimos, the painter of an early 5<sup>th</sup> century red-figure vase depicting the rape of Kassandra had, according to Cohen (1993:41), “applied unashamedly to the princess what he had learned from drawing prostitutes and slave girls”. Kassandra therefore becomes a desirable nude woman who has reached physical maturity, “a newly ripe femininity, delicately exposed in profile” (Cohen 1993:41) when compared to her previous state in which she was represented as a pitiful naked victim of sexual violence.

Cohen’s study therefore not only assesses the manner in which the ancient Athenians’ use of nudity in art altered as society shifted into an era of female bodily consciousness around the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, but also the manner in which this cultural phenomenon was strongly reflected in Classical Athenian vase-painting. The nude female form, then, undergoes a transformation of function and meaning depending on the period in which the image was produced, an occurrence that should at all times be taken into account when approaching the nude female form on Athenian pottery.

Kilmer also focuses on Attic red-figure pottery of the late Archaic period in his work, *Greek Erotica* (1993), especially those vases that may be designated ‘erotic’ in one form or another. Kilmer (1993: vii) approaches these erotic scenes with the understanding that there has been no previous attempt to accumulate the corpus of red-figure erotica with the aim of examining it as a whole. Kilmer’s (1993: vii) primary aim is to arrange the evidence by combining illustration and description, with interpretation being the secondary goal of the study. Through this approach, Kilmer (1993: vii) hopes to reveal certain sexual attitudes among the ancient Athenians regarding their sexual customs in the late 6<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.

From heterosexual copulation to female depilation, Kilmer views a large collection of erotic images in which the nude female form makes an appearance in a number of different settings, activities, positions, contexts and functions. Contrary to Keuls, Kilmer’s (1993:214) approach is more balanced in that he views these diverse images with the acknowledgement that these vase scenes range from depicting the common, to the impossible. The general view of Kilmer (1993:170) is that it is particularly difficult to extrapolate from vase images the everyday lives and activities of real people, especially with reference to erotic imagery. Kilmer (1993:170) further argues that the sexual activities portrayed on Classical Attic vases depict fantasy as much as they represent ordinary life. Moreover, Kilmer (1993:170) points out that further issues arise when one attempts to disclose the intentions of the artists who depict such sexual scenes on Attic vases – was their aim to amuse, or simply to inform?

Either way, Kilmer's (1993:213) conclusion points towards the nude female figure on Attic pottery being predominantly a representation of fantasy, rather than being a forthright representation of the daily sexual habits of the ancient Athenians. If one were to assume that Greek erotic art is primarily a record of daily life, the question should have to be raised as to why such a record is necessary in a society that would hardly need the reminder (Kilmer 1993:213) as the ancient Greeks would have been familiar with the everyday cultural cues of their society. Likewise, if these erotic vases were meant to inform foreign societies of ancient Greek sexuality, surely the ancient Athenians would have attempted to make more of a concerted effort to provide as complete an account as possible, which Kilmer (1993:213) finds not to be the case at all. However, it should be noted that the vase record to date is fragmentary and incomplete; it is thus difficult to say whether the ancient Greeks did indeed provide (or not provide) a thorough representation of their societal beliefs and ideas in Archaic and Classical vase-painting. Seeing as eroticism is yet another noteworthy function of the nude female figure in Greek vase-painting, it will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Stewart's *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece* (1997), on the other hand, discusses gender and the body in the Greek *polis*, but covers a range of topics from art and ideology to the gaze and audience of the image. Stewart (1997:156-171) investigates the erotic male world of the symposium as illustrated on Greek vases, as well as a type of eroticism that he argues was meant for a female audience, as depicted in vase images containing the molestation of nude females at the hands of Pan and a number of 'unreconstructed' rape scenes (1997:171-181). Stewart (1997:162) makes the observation that red-figure erotica comprises of over sixty vases featuring actual copulation, stripping, foreplay, masturbation and urination. Above all, the rear-entry position remained a favourite of the symposiasts, accounting for at least half of all the known examples (Stewart 1997:162). Stewart (1997:164) points out that the reasoning for this is due to the reduction of sex as nothing more than a means to control women, especially in a culture known for its belief that a woman's sexuality was always threatening to get out of hand. This was especially relevant for the *parthenoi*, who, according to common stereotype, were thought to be particularly licentious (Stewart 1997:164). Sourvinou-Inwood (1988:129) is of a similar view, stating that the *parthenos* was regarded by society as possessing an



“unbridled sexuality”, which could easily take the form of unrestrained “animality” if not properly tamed and controlled.<sup>13</sup>

The very function of these particular vases meant for the symposium, was therefore not simply ‘erotic’, but had, according to Stewart (1997) and Sourvinou-Inwood (1988), an underlying, culturally significant purpose as well, a need to re-enforce male control of the female. This explains the sexual violence often depicted on these vases; vases that ultimately reflect a sense of ‘homosocial’ companionship that forms among male citizens when they act dominantly towards their female counterparts (Stewart 1997:165).

Stewart (1997:174) then continues to investigate the possible reasoning behind women finding scenes of rape acceptable, even potentially erotic, and comes to the following conclusions: these images<sup>14</sup> could function as a means to praise the security and tranquility of marriage in comparison to the sexual dangers found outside of marriage; it could also function as an assertion of male potency, ultimately resulting in the producing of healthy sons; and finally, these images could perhaps convey a sense of the fantasy of escape from the restrictions of the *gynaikeion*.

Although Stewart manages to effectively point out that eroticism in ancient Greek art has no meaning in itself unless one first investigates the cultural and ideological components that shape its very definition, the suggestion that *hetairai* are merely willing victims of sexual violence, or that the *parthenos*’ inherent erotic responses were completely manipulated by male ideology, seems somehow far-fetched. It appears illogical to presume that symposiasts gathered together to have violent sexual intercourse with prostitutes in order to bond with one another as fellow citizens of Athens. Nor should it be assumed that women responded to an erotic image because they have been culturally trained to do so when it seems reasonable to assume that women had an active sex drive much like men did. Attic comedies such as Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* gain much humour through the uncurbed sexual appetites of the female characters – something which would only make sense if the audience identified with such an idea. For the nude female figure on Attic vases to be viewed as accurately as possible, it should be

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<sup>13</sup>In Aristotle’s *History of Animals*, for example, the ancient philosopher points out how girls at puberty require surveillance (581b, 10-15 cited in Reeder 1995:300). Plato Comicus (18K cited in Reeder 1995:300) similarly claims that, if a husband relaxes his guard too much, his wife will get out of control.

<sup>14</sup>Stewart (1997:156-171) refers to the blatant sexual conduct depicted on ancient Greek vases to illustrate eroticism for men. Eroticism for women, on the other hand, is illustrated through the recurring imagery of rape scenes found predominantly on mirrors, such as a bronze case mirror from Elis, c. 330 BCE, in which Herakles is about to rape Auge. Another bronze case mirror, c. 350-300 BCE, currently in the British Museum, depicts Hermes attempting to rape an unidentified female figure (Stewart 1997:172; 176).

considered that women were also, like men, subject to sexual desire, not always sexual humiliation. It is unlikely, after all, that women would view these convoluted images on the vases they used, washed and stored daily with complete detachment, practicality and disinterest.

In 2003 Moraw published a paper called *Beauty and Sophrosyne: Female Nakedness in Relation to Civic Status*. The paper touched heavily on the possible meanings ascribed to the nude female body in ancient Greek art in an attempt to understand how ancient artists would render an ideal woman of civic status. By selecting vases from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE that contained scenes of nude women, and approaching them in an iconographic manner, Moraw (2003) came to the conclusion that these nude female figures only appeared in the private genre of vase-painting, prompting the author to make the connection that a woman's nude state had to be legitimised through the action depicted on the vase (e.g. bathing) as the presentation of the female genitalia was – very unlike the presentation of the male genitalia – highly objectionable. Consequently, to Moraw (2003), the nude male body was perceived as both beautiful *and* virtuous, whereas the nude female body could only connote beauty, not virtue.

Lewis similarly touches on the various interpretations of the nude female form on the ancient Greek vase in her book *The Athenian Woman: an Iconographic Handbook*; however, to Lewis (2002:104), the element of nudity did not define the action depicted on the vase. In other words, contrary to Moraw's view, the nude female figure does not bathe as a means to legitimise her nude state, but is nude as a means to advance the bathing scene. To Lewis it is no doubt important to be mindful of the setting in which the nude female figure is anchored, but the context should not be restricted to her nude state. Rather the context should be enhanced or further developed by her nudity which assists in expanding the scope of the potential meaning(s) of the vase instead of reducing it to the point of defining it. Nor, Lewis (2002:102) asserts, is a woman's nude state in pottery restricted to the private sphere only, as Moraw suggests, since this state was documented on vases depicting a ritualistic, yet public festival during the Brauronian initiation, where young girls ran about nude in the forest.

Lewis also addresses a key concern in the field when she elaborates on Bérard's (1989:89) observation concerning the biased perception of scholars when it comes to the nude female figure in ancient Greek art. Bérard (1989:89) states in his *Order of Women* that it has become a pattern of sorts for scholars to automatically assume that images that do not correspond to the

“housewife and mother” model must surely be of low social status, such as that of slaves or *hetairai*, or perhaps even elevating them to the divine instead, such as heroines, muses or goddesses. Bérard (1989:89) had therefore begun to ask the highly significant question “must we say then that there were no respectable women... that this imagery shows only the ideal world of male fantasies?” Lewis (2002:102) similarly points out that it has become a habit for scholars to state categorically that all nude women on Greek vases are prostitutes. Lewis (2002:102) makes it clear in her work that the motif of nudity could take on many different meanings, some of which were not meant to be eroticised or sexualised at all, but could, for example, be an integral part of the bride’s wedding preparations or make an appearance in mythical scenes where female characters often appeared nude (or naked in Clarke’s 1956:3 distinction) as a means to emphasise their vulnerability (2002:102).

Consequently, Lewis (2002:129) places much needed emphasis on the manner in which literature has influenced our interpretations of the nude female figure on Athenian pottery, as the desire to classify every woman as ‘wife’ or ‘*hetaira*’ has resulted in the forced readings of symbols and thus a ‘decontextualised’ view of the artist’s aims and intentions. Lewis (2006:33) elaborates on this statement:

The difficulty with accepting [scenes of female nudity] as realistic scenes comes from the contention of literary sources, that a citizen woman would never appear in public unclothed, indeed, that women were expected to stay inside the house away from the public gaze, and if they did go out, to be covered at all times. The women we see on the pots have therefore prompted much debate; some accommodate the scenes to expectation by declaring the women nymphs, others by seeing them as prostitutes, and some by assuming illustrations of a fantasy world.

Nevertheless, Lewis (2002:149) does not refute that eroticism is inevitably an undeniable connotation of the nude female figure on Attic vases as she ponders, “is it possible to paint a nude which is not eroticised?”, but asserts that eroticism should be perceived as a contextual ingredient rather than constituting the product. After all, “nudity in art has different meanings in different contexts – it can be signalled as explicitly erotic, but is not so of itself” (Lewis 2002:149).

Ultimately, Lewis’ view that, although it would be easier to view nudity as the ‘constant’ when comparing the image of a nude *hetaira* to that of the nude mythical princess, Cassandra, it is

perhaps more accurate to perceive nudity as the ‘constituent’ that assists in interpreting meaning. Lewis thus succeeds in looking at the image on Greek vases in a more holistic manner that allows for certain interpretations of the image to be considered that would otherwise have been overlooked. By making use of an iconographic analysis and looking at the image through 5<sup>th</sup>-century eyes, as much as is possible for a contemporary scholar, Lewis has managed to uncover multiple potential functions and meanings associated with the nude female figure on Classical Attic vases.

Ferrari likewise investigates those situations in ancient Greek life when nudity was present, but shame was not; moments which, to the men, had a predominantly ritualistic significance. In Ferrari’s (2002:162) chapter on “Fugitive Nudes” the scholar states that, “while for men nudity remains a characteristic feature of the representation of manhood, for females it is confined to the brief period in which they are likened to boys...female nudity is a fugitive, temporary feature, a privilege to which girls, not women are entitled”. This statement has more relevance to the Spartans, however, where Ferrari (2002:169) points out that female nudity had a separate, yet equal status to that of men, but this status was confined to an ‘ungendered’ stage that would not progress past the age of approximately thirteen years.

In contrast to the Spartans, the nude female body in Athens was viewed as something only admitted somewhere else, “a place removed in space and culture”, a culture such as Sparta, and a time, such as the future (Ferrari 2002:169), or perhaps even a long forgotten past. Ferrari (2002:170-176) thus refutes the claim of scholars such as Sourvinou-Inwood (1988) and Reeder (1995) concerning the nude performance of young Athenian girls during the *Arkteia* in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Ferrari (2002:170) makes use of an excerpt from Herodotus’ *Histories* that talks about the ancient Pelasgians kidnapping young maidens participating in the Brauronian Festival (6.137-138) to further her own claim, stating that the *krateriskoi*<sup>15</sup> represented this legendary state or time, not the “here and now” of Athenian 5<sup>th</sup>-century life, but rather the Athenians of a faraway past.

Ferrari (2002:170-175) continues her claim on grounds of three 5<sup>th</sup>-century red-figure vases conveying scenes connected to the Brauronian Festival, concluding that these three vases also referred to an earlier period, the beginning stages of the *Arkteia*. According to Ferrari

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<sup>15</sup>The vase fragments found in Brauron by Lilly Kahil, who published these 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>-century black-figure fragments in 1963 and 1965, were referred to as *krateriskoi* (in Hamilton 1989:449) and contain scenes from what can be deduced as glimpses of female initiation rites for young, unmarried girls.

(2002:175), the pottery shards collected and published, as well as these three red-figure vases, do not, therefore, represent the 5<sup>th</sup>-century *Arkteia*, but attempted only to capture the landscape and figures of the sanctuary of Artemis at a time at which the incident that determined the institution of the *Arkteia* took place. “In no way”, asserts Ferrari (2002:175), “do the images allow the conclusion that in 5<sup>th</sup>-century Athens girls underwent initiations that included nudity, only that the daughters of ancestors *may be represented* doing so”.

Ferrari makes a compelling case concerning the legends of the *Arkteia*. However, if female nudity was so obscure in ancient Athens, to the extent that Sparta was seen as a “quaint, upside down world” (Ferrari 2002:164) for even momentarily permitting it, why did such a significant amount of 5<sup>th</sup>-century Athenian vases depict nude women? Due to the fact that a very small number of vases have been found to date in comparison to the large amount that was no doubt produced, it is all but impossible to deduce which extant pottery more accurately represents the collective whole of Attic vases in theme, function or quantity. Nevertheless, enough Athenian pottery contains highly diverse and intricate scenes of female nudity to comfortably make the presumption that female nudity in ancient Athenian art (and perhaps life) was not as limited, unvaried or incomprehensible as scholars tend to maintain. In fact, a total of 155 Attic vases depicting nude females bathing and dressing alone have been found since 2009 (Sutton 2009:270). Of these 155 scenes depicting the bathing and dressing of nude females, it cannot be said with complete accuracy which ones were represented doing so in a ritualistic context or simply for domestic purposes, or which were meant to occur in a private, or public space.

The public appearance of the nude female form in a ritualistic setting, as has been depicted on the *krateriskoi*, should thus not be so impossible to consider, nor be so easily rejected as representing nothing more than myth or legend. After all, it is possible that Sourvinou-Inwood is correct in her assumption that female nudity during the *Arkteia* did indeed take place as it had a social function in society so essential that the nude female form was temporarily allowed in order for the social message it conveyed to take root permanently. Sourvinou-Inwood (1988:133) summarises this social message as follows: “[shedding the *krokotos*] marked the moment of passage out of the *Arkteia*, and the beginning of the transition into the new state. It symbolised the [young girls’] transition from sexually ambivalent childhood to fully female status”. Female nudity would therefore have been a fundamental aspect of this specific female initiation rite and would not have represented a legendary state of a bygone era, but a crucial ritual event that acknowledged the nude female form as a transformative tool of function, not fiction.

As for the nude female bathers mentioned above, both Kreilinger (2006) and Sutton (2009) did extensive work on this recurring artistic theme in order to determine which possible cultural meanings could be attributed to it. Kreilinger (2006:229) states in the beginning of her work, *To be or not to be a Hetaira: Female Nudity in Classical Athens*, that it is claimed again and again that the majority of women depicted nude in art could only be prostitutes and not normal citizens, because women of reputable status, if appearing in the public sphere at all, would only risk doing so while properly attired. It is here that Kreilinger's (2006:230) criticism starts, suggesting rather that one should take a closer look at nude women on Attic vases for the purpose of reinterpreting them, especially, nude women washing themselves. According to Kreilinger (2006:230), approximately 130 images of women washing themselves appear on Attic vases dating between 530-400 BCE. The fact that such a large number containing this motif has survived suggests that it was perhaps a rather fashionable and aesthetically pleasing theme in ancient Athenian vase-painting. Kreilinger (2006:230) further investigates how every period had its own unique way of depicting and interpreting this specific topic.

Kreilinger proceeds to list a number of reasons as to why these nude female bathers would not have been interpreted by the ancient audience as *hetairai* or supernatural beings, but rather as honourable Attic citizens. She states, for example, that nude women wearing special ribbons around the thigh, with or without the apotropaic amulet, does not ensure 'disreputable' character and status, since children and men were also depicted wearing them (Kreilinger 2006:231-232). If these ribbons were regularly used for a variety of functions in ancient Greece, it would not make sense to treat them as though they were a guaranteed indicator of the 'immodest' female figure on ancient Athenian pottery.

Kreilinger (2006:234) argues that the nude, bathing woman of the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE should, in fact, be seen positively, not only as a prostitute or goddess, but as a beautiful and attractive young woman, her social status no longer being of interest. She disagrees with Sutton (1992:22) when he defines these scenes as "peephole pornography aimed at an audience of males". Instead, Kreilinger (2006:236) defines these scenes as denoting female beauty and agency, depicting an aesthetically pleasing woman who should be perceived in a positive light, as has always been the case with the nude male body. This function of female agency will be explored in Chapter 7, as the final function of female nudity on Classical Greek vases.

Sutton's *Female Bathers and the Emergence of the Female Nude in Greek Art* places more emphasis on the appearance of the 'kneeling bather' (fig. 2.4) around 430 BCE. Sutton

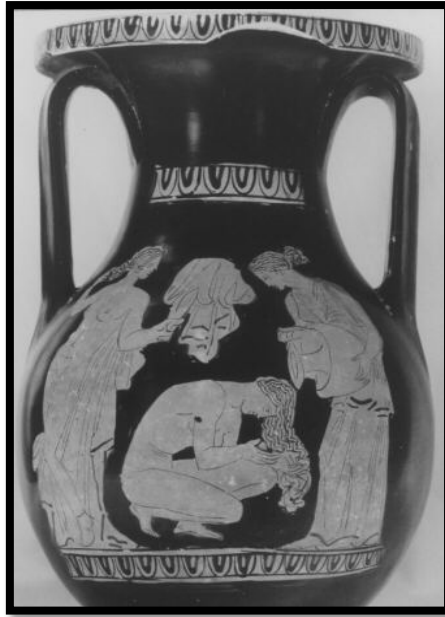


Figure 2.4 The kneeling bather,  
c. 400-300 BCE.

(2009:61) suggests that it was this very artistic invention that established the female nude as an “acceptable and noble convention in Greek art” well before the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. He points out that, whereas Athenian pottery of the Archaic and Early Classical periods often tended to include scenes of lovemaking, the symposium, as well as violent mythical rapes, they are all illustrations in which the woman’s nudity is secondary (Sutton 2009:61). It is only with the creation of the female bather, asserts Sutton (2009:61), that the nude female form becomes the primary focus. Sutton (2009:63) suggests that the female bather is essentially erotic in nature, which prompts his question, “how are we to understand the social content and wider cultural meaning of these scenes, once we recognise them as ‘erotic’?”

Sutton (2009:63) attempts to answer this question by suggesting that the erotic had a respectable place in the ancient world, more so than with contemporary societies, and thus recognising the erotic nature of these vase images did not necessarily automatically indicate ‘disreputable’ status. Sutton (2009:63), in agreement with Kreilinger (2006:229-230), also argues that the nude females on these vases should not be perceived as prostitutes, as earlier scholars have claimed, but rather as respectable women. In fact, Sutton (2009:68) points out that the poets of ancient Greece usually treated bathing as a characteristic activity associated with respectable women of both moral and divine status and could take place indoors, as well as outside. It is imperative, then, that the motif of the bathing female be approached in the



cultural framework in which it was created and viewed from the ancient perspective for which it was produced.

Sutton (2009:67) also makes the important observation that, although the nude female bather is for all intents and purposes erotic in nature, it does not mean that all of these images are meant to be pornographic, in other words, meant to directly elicit sexual arousal in the viewer, as a number of these vases were aimed at a female audience. As support for his argument, Sutton examines the various vase shapes on which the motif of the nude female bather most often makes an appearance. It was determined that the most popular vase shapes for this motif are the alabastron, amphora, hydria, krater, lekythos, oinochoe, pelike, pyxis and stamnos, which Sutton (2009:274) describes as vessels mostly intended for women's use. In addition, Sutton (2009:67) argues that these female bathers should not be viewed as prostitutes even *if* they are pornographic, as some of these women were often “respectably eroticised brides” and thus still perfectly modest and irreproachable in the eyes of ancient Greek society. Sutton makes use of Ferrari and Lewis' research to reinforce this argument as Ferrari (2002:51) similarly views these nude female bathers as *parthenoi*, and, on the basis of literary evidence, points out that “the primary connotation of the bath is *partheneia*, maidenhood”. Lewis (2002:145-149) in agreement with Ferrari, states that it would be erroneous to view nude female bathers as *hetairai*, or even as pornographic representations.

Sutton and Kreilinger, although having a number of contradictory thoughts on the matter of the nude female bather, both share the similar view that the nude female form should not so easily be condemned to the ‘disreputable’ side of the social boundary, but should be considered quite simply as representing a beautiful, young woman whose body can be just as ideal as her masculine counterpart, regardless of her civic status or lack thereof. If these vases had a female audience as well, as Sutton has argued, then this is not too surprising, especially when one considers the positive image of the nude female body that the bathing scene tends to promote. In this regard both Kreilinger and Sutton succeed in furthering a more nuanced interpretation of the nude female body, one that does not allow modern biases to distort the various potential interpretations of these images, but rather assists in broadening our scope of understanding this socially intricate imagery. This novel approach has rendered the nude female bather in Classical vase-painting not as a sexual object of the male gaze, but as the mutual acknowledgement among the sexes that the nude female form was just as ideal, attractive, virtuous and desirable as the nude male body was represented to be.



Kreilinger and Sutton do not, however, give a satisfactory explanation as to *why* this new female bodily consciousness eventually developed at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, a time period known for its suppression of women, possibly due to the threat of the Persian Wars (490-479 BCE) on ancient Greek cultural stability in the previous decades. Cohen (1993:41) similarly does not provide a theory as to why this interest in the nude female form would manifest itself in ancient Greek art at this specific time; nor does Moraw (2003), who concurs with the ‘positive’ transformation of the nude female body, especially with the invention of the bathing scene in Late Classical Greece. Elshtain (1987:3) provides a possible answer to this question, stating that it is in wartime that women become the “collective other to the male warrior”. Women transform into custodians of culture, “embodying ethical aspirations, but [denied] a place in the corridors of power” (Elshtain 1987:141). It could consequently be assumed that the idealising of the nude female body as a vessel of purity and modesty attempted to “[recapitulate] aesthetic visions of the lady unbesmirched” (Elshtain 1987:141) in a time in which the eradication of cultural norms was threatened by militant outsiders. Ultimately, since men were construed as violent and women as compassionate, the images of the nude female figure in Classical times could also have reinforced the social identities of the two sexes in moments of chaos, “thus [these social identities] re-create and secure women’s location as noncombatants and men’s as warriors” (Elshtain 1987:4).

Any further discussions on the topic of nudity in ancient Greek art more often tilted towards heroic male nudity in ancient Greece in which the brief depiction of nude female figures often became problematic. More often than not, states Hurwit (2012), female nudity was highly unacceptable, even shocking, and somewhat revolutionary as women were generally only depicted nude as slave girls or courtesans.

Therefore, when compared to masculine nudity as an expression of power, beauty, courage and virtue, for the most part scholars argue that the appearance of female nudity in art was not only sparse and (often) negative in comparison, but also had a delayed start in Greek art as a symbol of modesty and pride. Nevertheless, from apotropaism to prostitution, eroticised bride to ritual nudity and female agency, a variety of functions have been ascribed to the nude female form in Greek art. There is still some ambiguity, however, whether due to a lack of archaeological evidence or simply because of our strong hold on modern biases surrounding these images.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive study of the motif of the nude female figure in ancient Athenian art and its development. Furthermore, the discussion of scholars on the topic of the ideal masculine nude allowed for a comparative study to be done, through which it became clear that the nude female figure did not share its ambiguous nature with that of its male counterpart.

Scholars' research into the social function of female dress and undress in ancient Athenian art and society also assisted in further revealing and identifying the shocking nature of the nude female form in ancient Greek art, as well as the possible functions behind creating such a provocative, socially taboo motif within the ancient Greek world. Yet, when compared to the motif of the ideal masculine nude, the nude female form remains, to a large extent, inferior in significance.

Further research is required to expand on the knowledge already accumulated on the topic of the nude female figure in Greek vase-painting, or that a new approach to viewing these images be considered, one that does not immediately equate female nudity with immodesty. Of all the scholars who have investigated the nude female form, it seems apparent that those who adopted an iconographic approach accomplished an in-depth analysis of these images and, as such, this approach has been selected for this study.

As discussed in the methodology section of Chapter 1, an iconographic analysis makes for an appropriate investigative tool for interpreting, as accurately as possible, the various cultural indicators necessary in advancing the meaning and functions behind nude female figures on 5<sup>th</sup>-century Attic vases. From the research done in this chapter, it is clear that the most significant functions of female nudity in Greek vase-painting are the following: ritual and religion, apotropaism, violence and vulnerability, eroticism and pornography, as well as female agency. The following chapter will thus explore how an iconographic approach can be utilised to further understand these multiple cultural functions of the nude female form in ancient Athenian vase-painting, starting with the first function of female nudity, ritualistic nudity.

## Chapter 3: Undressing for the Gods

‘Divine’ or ‘ritual’ nudity is one of the explanations commonly used by scholars to explain the lack of clothing of a female figure in vase scenes. This chapter will explore the images on three vases by means of an iconographic analysis, investigating whether a ritualistic and religious function of the nude female on these vessels is feasible or whether one should re-categorise these images into a more appropriate category of function.

### 3.1 Nudity with a Religious and Ritualistic Function

Bonfante (1989:560) proposes that the nude female figure, which makes a brief appearance in the art of the Archaic period as a religious fertility motif, probably has its roots in the Ancient Near Eastern model of the nude mother goddess. This ‘divine nudity’ attributed to the goddesses Ishtar, Aphrodite and Venus was meant to signify fecundity in the ancient world (Bonfante 1989:545). Strongly connected to this function is ‘ritual nudity’, described by Bonfante (1989:546) as a “special mode of dressing”. These initiations and rituals in which ritual nudity is used, included both boys and girls. Jenkins (2015:16) agrees with this notion, claiming that, in keeping with other ancient civilisations, the nude female form in early Greece could be a sign of religious cults connected with ensuring fertility in both childbearing, as well as in the productivity of the earth. The nude female form as it often appeared on Attic vases, also made an appearance as a young bride preparing for her wedding day. Lee (2012:188-189) argues that nudity in this context could possibly illustrate the young woman’s readiness for marriage, the sexual desirability of her body for her husband, as well as her potential fertility.

Figure 3.1 is just such an example of a young, nude maiden potentially preparing for her wedding. This image appears on a pelike, a vase shape typically used in the female toilette and bath (Sutton 2009:74) and thus appropriate for depicting the motif of the bride’s nuptial preparations. The young woman is nude except for a *sakkos*, a head-scarf loosely attributed to the *hetaira* by some scholars (Neils 2000:204-205). She is tying a sandal onto her right foot, while a large, winged Eros hovers in front of her, holding a box. Lee (2012:184) argues that brides fasten sandals as part of their wedding preparations; however, it should also be noted that *hetairai* likewise put sandals on, but in anticipation of their clients (Lee 2012:184).



Figure 3.1 Eros assisting a maiden in the marriage ritual, c. 450-400 BCE.

According to Sutton (1992:24), this scene should be viewed in light of the former, conveying the religious importance of this nuptial ritual due to Eros' presence in the iconography of marriage. Oakley and Sinos (1993:64-67)<sup>16</sup> agree with this observation, pointing out that Eros functions not only as the bride's companion, but also guarantees her loveliness. As such, the sensuous, erotic connotations of this image have not been abandoned, claims Sutton (1992:24), for Eros, the personification of love in the sense of sexual desire, appears in the scene as the maiden's helper. The function of the nudity of a bride on an Attic vase is therefore representative of her sensuality, which has been domesticated and functions as a kind of Peitho to persuade the Athenian bride, and her groom, of her proper sexuality (Sutton 1992:24).

Skinner (2005:109) agrees with Sutton, stating that the nudity of young brides preparing for their wedding is meant to represent their transition from maidenhood to motherhood and transform this alteration into a pleasant fantasy. This "ceremonial dressing of the bride", as Skinner (2005:2007) puts it, therefore has a ritualistic function, which aims to ensure the fecundity of the *oikos* and thus the stability of the *polis*. Eros now becomes an artistic motif modified to satisfy the bride's sentimental needs (Skinner 2005:109), thoroughly demonstrating the significant part this god played in female acculturation, in which the young

<sup>16</sup> See figures 20 to 31 in Oakley and Sinos (1993:62-67), in which multiple images are provided of Eros assisting young women with their wedding preparations.

bride, out of desire for her husband, surrenders and “agrees to receive the ‘yoke’” (Skinner 2005:108). Keuls (1985:122-123) places more emphasis on the box in Eros’ possession than Eros himself. She proposes that the box can be read as a symbol of marital sex within such domestic scenes. Keuls (1985:122-123) and Reeder (1995:195) argue that boxes and chests in domestic scenes signify, to some extent, the “uterine boxiness of Greek architecture” and these were therefore symbolic of marriage and motherhood.<sup>17</sup> The attendance of Eros, then, serves to further the symbolic implication of forthcoming marriage and motherhood (Keuls 1985:123). The nude female figure thus makes an appearance in this context without having her respectable status challenged for it. The respectable female form in figure 3.1, then, is safeguarded by her status as a bride and her nudity as ritualistic; this does not, however, detract from her sensuality, but merely makes this sensuality noble.

Lewis (2002:142), on the other hand, perceives the nude bride as but one of countless depictions of women at their toilette, putting on jewellery, looking into mirrors, dressing their hair, putting on sandals or being waited on by maidens, friends or *erotes*. To Lewis (2002:142), these women are no longer individualised, nor do they vary much in their activities, resulting in the young woman, with or without Eros as her companion, developing into nothing more than an abstract pattern or a repetitive motif that ultimately reveals the limited perspectives male artists had of women. In Lewis’ (2002:142) words, this repetitive use of the motif “reduces female activity to a completely secluded and self-centred pastime”. This notion comes through rather noticeably in the depiction of the nude bride as, Lewis argues (2002:142), one can clearly observe the complete leisure the young bride was seen to aspire to, not only in her lack of work, but also in her desire for jewellery, fine clothes and slaves (Lewis 2002:142). These images, then, indicate a shift from women being perceived as family members, or figures of religious authority within the *polis*, to simple creatures of passive adornment (Lewis 2002:142). Here Lewis seems to imply that the bride’s nudity furthers the female passivity of the scene by stressing her erotic properties and, subsequently, the potency of the male gaze. Thus, instead of signifying greater interest in the lives and activities of women, states Lewis (2002:142), this motif merely accomplishes the complete opposite.

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<sup>17</sup>Lissarrague (1995:99) points out that, although these ritual vases for wedding ceremonies share similar iconographical schemes, there are no two vases that are the same; yet, baskets, caskets and boxes make an appearance in all these scenes. According to Lissarrague (1995:99), these objects form part of the goods the bride will take with her that resemble in some way the “portable part of the *oikos*”, which the woman controls as much as she is detained and concealed in it.

However, considering the prominent role women did indeed play in the religious domain, it would perhaps be erroneous to view such a ritualistic scene, and, subsequently, the ritualistic nudity of the young bride, merely as indicative of female passivity and objectification. In fact, in Satyrus' *Life of Euripides* (fr. 494. 9-22 TGrF), Melanippe, a female character of Euripides, has the following to say about women's roles in the religious sphere of the *polis*:

Consider [women's] role in religion, for that, in my opinion, comes first. We women play the most important part, because women prophesy the will of Loxias in the oracles of Phoebus. And at the holy site of Dodona near the sacred oak, females convey the will of Zeus to enquirers from Greece. As for the sacred rituals for the fates and the Nameless goddesses, all these would not be holy if performed by men, but prosper in women's hands. In this way women have a rightful share (*dike*) in the service of the gods (Lefkowitz 1986:95).

Women's significant roles in the religious sphere of the *polis* can be clearly noted in figure 3.2 where two women, one nude but for wearing a *sakkos* on her head, erect a large *phallos* presumably during a fertility festival. According to Johns (1982:42), these two women are participating in the *Haloa* festival, which was celebrated in Athens in the month of December to ensure the germination and growth of seeds. The proceedings of this festival were primarily carried out by women and might have featured orgiastic activities (Johns 1982:42). Not only



Figure 3.2 Women dancing around a large, erected *phallos* during a religious festival, c. 500-450 BCE.

was food in the form of *phalloi* consumed during this festival, but it was also standard for *hetairai* to attend, considering the uninhibited nature of the festival. Johns (1982:42) suggests that the women dancing around the large, erected *phallos* are of this ‘disreputable’ status; yet, no information is provided as to why such an assumption is made, other than their acknowledged participation in this festival, their head gear and the one woman’s nudity. Johns, then, interprets the female figure’s nudity as part of the iconography of the *hetaira*.

Keuls (1985:83; 85), on the other hand, interprets this image as nothing more than ancient Athens’ erotic obsession with the dildo through which male fantasies were projected onto women and the result of penis-envy among ancient Athenian women. On this matter, Keuls (1985:82) argues that ancient Athens “had promoted the male organ as the symbol of fertility, parenthood, creativity, and self-defence, [therefore] it is only natural that Athenian men could not conceive of women otherwise than as obsessed with insatiable lust to fill up their vaginal void with penises, real, or artificial”. Keuls (1985:85) further notes that images like these which represent “penis fever” are often painted on kylikes, flat drinking cups utilised by men and *hetairai* at symposia, and therefore similarly connects the nude woman in figure 3.2 with prostitution and pornography. Yet, this view of these scenes again does not take into consideration the religious authority women had in the ancient Greek world.

Lewis (2002: 128) is in accordance with Johns on grounds of phallic imagery playing a significant role in various Athenian religious rites, but is less inclined to refer to the nude woman appearing in this imagery as a *hetaira*. Lewis (2002:128) argues that, even when women are portrayed in the nude, it would be problematic to interpret the images as sexualised as these nude female figures are more closely connected with fertility. When holding or nurturing the *phalloi* in scenes on Greek vases, these nude women are merely fulfilling their religious role, regardless of their status. This argument clearly complicates the view that all women who appear nude on Classical Attic vases must surely be *hetairai*.

The third example for this section demonstrates another scene type in which female figures appear nude on Attic vases within a potentially religious context. In this type a maenad is often being accosted by a satyr in one form or another (fig. 3.3). In scenes such as these, the sexual and the religious cannot easily be separated. Johns (1982:42) refers to these types of scenes as representative of “basic fertility cults” which form a part of Dionysus’ area of influence and thus cannot be disregarded as blatantly religious in function. At the same time, these satyrs are often depicted as ithyphallic and can therefore also be seen as sexualised to some extent (Johns



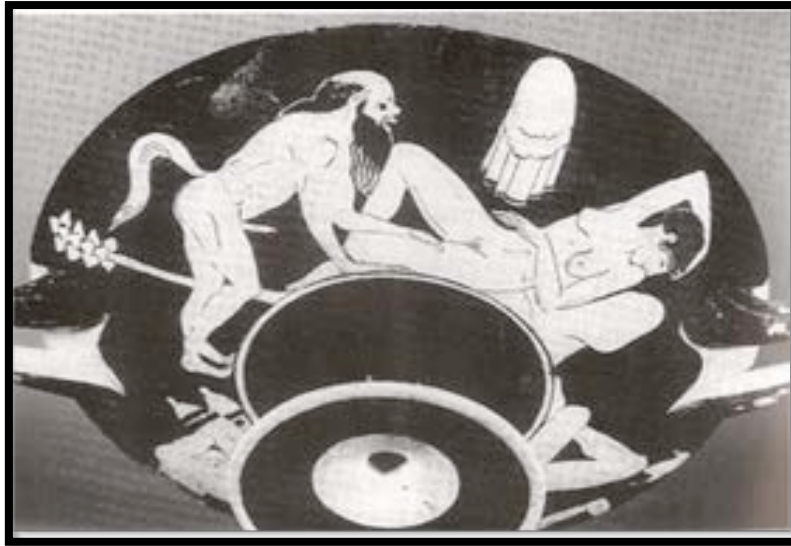


Figure 3.3 Satyr attacking a sleeping maenad, c. 480 BCE.

1982:42). However, Johns (1982:42) argues that the purpose and intention of these images are predominantly religious in nature and to classify them as licentious and indecent would be to entirely disregard their meaning within their ancient context.

Skinner (2005:81-82) and the online Beazley Archive follow the more obvious interpretation, perceiving these scenes as largely erotic in function and stating that erotic scenes fall into three main subject categories, of which the sexual practices of satyrs as often depicted on ancient Greek vases is one. “With his insatiable appetite for wine and sex” claims Skinner (2005:83), “[the satyr] embodies the bestial element in humanity”. The satyr therefore partakes in sexual activities rarely, if ever, performed by humans in scenes on vases, such as masturbation, same-sex oral and anal coitus, and sexual encounters with deer and donkeys (Skinner 2005:83).

As for the nude (or naked in Clarke’s [1956:3] definition) maenad who is sleeping in the presence of such a sexual predator in figure 3.3, Neils (2000:203-226) asserts that, considering the sexual nature of her male counterpart, the scene is meant to be blatantly sexual and, consequently, draws a clear comparison between the maenad and the *hetaira*. On this point, Neils (2000:208) asserts that a nude woman on Athenian vases was not the norm and often implied some form of sexual activity, restricting the significance of the maenad’s ritualistic appearance to nothing more than a sort of ‘mythical *hetaira*’. This connection does, however, make more sense on the opposite side of the vase (fig. 3.4), in which the satyr and maenad now find themselves in a symposium setting, the *thyrsos*, a symbol of Dionysiac ritual, cast aside to





Figure 3.4 Satyr and *hetaira* in a symposium context, c. 480 BCE.

be replaced by iconographic indicators typically attributed to the sympotic scene. One such iconographic indicator is the striped pillows on which the now *hetaira* is lounging and another is the nude woman's head-scarf, the *sakkos* (Neils 2000:204-205).

What possibly identifies her as a *hetaira*, according to Neils (2000:205), is the woman's lack of animosity towards her male counterpart, typically observed in the behaviour between maenads and satyrs in other Attic red-figure vases. The woman's intentional nudity and the directness of her gaze when she looks at the satyr, according to Neils (2000:205), further reveals her status as a *hetaira*. Noteworthy here, then, is the concept of gaze: we are not only confronted with the male gaze of the symposiast, but also that of the *hetaira*. Berger (1972:47) interprets the male gaze on the nude female form in art as typically empowering to the male surveyor and objectifying to the female surveyed:

Men *act* and women *appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

Yet, there is also the female gaze in figure 3.4 to contend with. Neils might have a valid point in perceiving the nude woman's gaze not only as blatantly direct, but also as powerful enough to tame the satyr in some way – through her sexuality, but more importantly, through a single,

unwavering look. Neils (2000:205) points out that, because of the context now encompassing the polis-symposium of the Greek male, the satyr no longer appears aggressive, nor does he retain his ithyphallic state, but has in some sense been ‘tamed’, more, I suggest, by the powerful gaze of the nude female reclining next to him, than by the institutionalised space of the symposium. The maenad in figure 3.3, then, being once an object of female passivity, is transformed in figure 3.4 into a subject of active female desire, an erotic figure in her own right. The nude woman in figure 3.3 thus changes from maenad to *hetaira* in figure 3.4, her nudity moving from religious and ritualistic in function to that of eroticism. As can be noted, this shift in context was effectively conveyed through a change of multiple iconographic signifiers prevalent in the two images, thus once more illustrating the efficiency of this approach in establishing meaning and context.

Considering the vase shape (kylix), as well as the appearance of the satyr and the *hetaira* in figure 3.4, this vase and its images may very well have been created for sympotic events. Nevertheless, the religious and ritualistic function of the female nude in figure 3.3 should not be so easily discarded, as these two functions of female nudity (erotic and religious/ritualistic) are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Ancient Greek ritual is, after all, often viewed as uninhibited in nature due to its focus on fertility and procreation, and no function should be viewed in seclusion as though it can be wholly and cleanly separated from the others. After all, the satyr in figure 3.3 remains a satyr in figure 3.4, indicating that the two spheres of the public and the religious, have melded together, perhaps to portray the significance of religion and ritual in every-day activities or perhaps simply to create a sort of comic paradox in which the mythical might invade reality.

As for figure 3.3, Keuls (1985:366), in accordance with Neils and Skinner, conversely views this recurring scene as erotic and argues that the significance of the satyr molesting the maenad in her sleep, lies in its likeness to Dionysus approaching the sleeping Ariadne on the island of Naxos. Dionysus then proceeds to introduce Ariadne to new sexual experiences, an act which the satyrs then attempt to recreate with the maenads (Keuls 1985:366). Either way, the role of religion and the prominence of the gods cannot be denied as the fundamental driving force behind the conception of this image.

From other vases with the same recurring theme of the satyr attempting to accost a sleeping maenad, the logical assumption has also been drawn that the latter will awaken and fend off the former (Neils 2000:203; Skinner 2005:83). Taking this into consideration, Osborne

(1996:74-75) suggests that an element of male violence towards women comes into play in this particular artistic theme. Osborne (1996:74-75) finds evidence of this in the mythological “rapes” that occur during religious festivals which produce the offspring whose fates are often explored in New Comedy. From these mythological “rapes” it has been suggested that ancient Athenian men had no moral concerns with assuming that young women participating in these religious festivals were sexually available (Osborne 1996:75). Whether the violation of young girls within the ritualistic sphere of ancient Athens inspired these mythological “rape” scenes, or vice versa, is, however, difficult to ascertain. The notion of female nakedness functioning as an indicator of sexual violence, will be revisited in more depth in Chapter 5.

### 3.2 Conclusion

The nudity of the woman in figure 3.1 has predominantly been viewed as having a religious and ritualistic function as the context itself appears to be that of a young bride preparing for her wedding. Iconographic indicators, such as Eros assisting in the preparations, the tying of the sandals and the box carried by the winged god, all contribute as iconographic signifiers to further suggest the bridal context of the image. At the same time, Eros’ presence also suggests an erotic element: the young bride who, preparing for marriage and motherhood, must convince her future husband of her fertility and female desire for him, or the bride who needs persuading that the erotic experience will be a good one. Figure 3.2, to all intents and purposes, illustrates two women, one of which is nude. They are very likely partaking in a ritualistic event (possibly the *Haloa* Festival), and, as such, the woman’s nudity should be viewed as furthering the religious and ritualistic context of the vase image. The women’s handling of the large *phallos* should also not be seen as primarily erotic, as these large *phalloi* were erected as part of the festivities in which women generally played more significant roles. The nude woman on the right should thus not be perceived as a *hetaira* simply because of her nude state, nor because of the *sakkos* wrapped around her head or her management of the religious items utilised in these ritualistic activities.

As for the dual images of figures 3.3 and 3.4, they clearly illustrate the manner in which certain iconographic indicators establish one context, in which female nudity functions in a certain way, and how a change of these indicators can completely alter the context of the image, and thus also the function of the female nudity in the scene. The nude woman in figure 3.3 has been identified as a sleeping maenad who would soon have to awaken to fend off the licentious intentions of a satyr. Although the setting itself indicates a religious and ritualistic context, it is also worth noting that the maenad appears here as a passive agent in the image and an object

of the male gaze of the symposiast, for which this vase was likely produced. Figure 3.4, however, indicates a dramatic turn of events. No longer is the maenad sleeping and unaware, but she now finds herself in the erotic setting of the symposium. Here, instead of being presented as a passive agent, she becomes an active agent of female desire who has captured the suddenly demure satyr in her direct gaze. From maenad to *hetaira*, then, these two altered women thoroughly convey the polysemic nature of the nude female form and the need to thoroughly investigate the context in which she makes an appearance before determining the function and meaning behind her nude state.

## Chapter 4: The Power of Exposure

As in Chapter 3, this chapter will draw on prominent scholars' interpretations on the meaning and function(s) of female nudity, especially with reference to the function of apotropaism. Making use of an iconographical analysis, the three selected images for this chapter will be re-analysed to ascertain whether the nude female forms prevalent in these images have been placed within their appropriate categories of function.

### 4.1 Nudity as an Apotropaic Function

Strongly connected to the function of ritual and fecundity, is that of apotropaism. The *phallos* had protective powers as much as it had properties of fertility, and to a lesser extent, so did the female body. Johns (1982:72) comments that, according to psychologists, female nudity receives its apotropaic power due to its connotations with female power and mystery, which can appear dangerous, even threatening to the opposite sex. This power lies in the shocking and shameful emotions aroused by the exposed human body, which Bonfante (2008:2) refers to as the “powerful taboo of nudity” or *anasyrma*. This “indecent or obscure uncovering” (Bonfante 2008:2) can especially be found in the myth of Demeter, in which the goddess mourns the loss of her daughter, Persephone. Baubo, Demeter's attendant, lifts her skirt, exposing her sex organs, in an attempt to distract the goddess from her sorrow by shocking her instead: “the apotropaic power of laughter resulting from the shocking obscenity of the unexpected, nightmarish, and incongruous sight of the sex organs [...] released the goddess from her mourning and her fast” (Bonfante 2008:2). Johns (1982:75) strongly negates the notion that apotropaic images are sexual, however, whether they are depictions of male or female genitals.

To add to the *phallos* as an apotropaic ‘tool’, are a pair of eyes, which assists the apotropaic *phallos* in overpowering the evil eye and ensuring luck and safety for its owner (Johns 1982:66). After all, the apotropaic *phallos* is as likely to be as hostile to enemies as it is meant to be defensive (Keuls 1985:75). Important to note is the way in which men are excluded from these images but for the apotropaic *phalloi* present in the scenes. With only the women left behind in the imagery, the question is raised, what purpose do the women in figure 4.1 to 4.3 serve, especially when illustrated in the nude? Does this lack of clothing perhaps more strongly

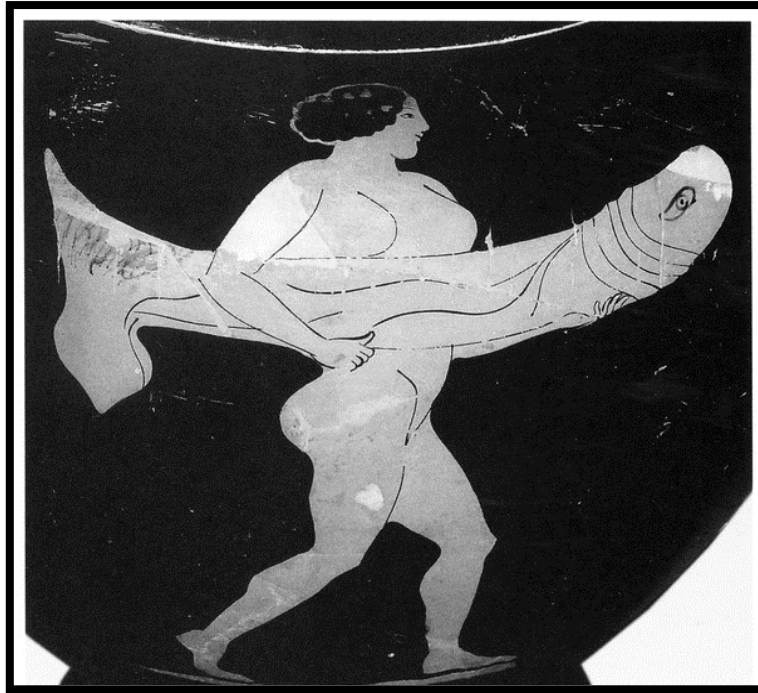


Figure 4.1 Nude woman carrying a large *phallos* with eyes, c. 500-450 BCE.

emphasise the woman's vulnerability and thus her greater need for protection? A look into these three images could perhaps provide us with answers to these questions.

In figure 4.1 a nude woman is carrying a large *phallos* with a pair of eyes, which has been labelled by the Beazley Archive as ritualistic, especially with reference to the *Haloa* festival. Kilmer (1993:192-193) similarly perceives the image as predominantly ritualistic due to its connection with the *Haloa* festival in which large artificial *phalloi* were erected to ensure fertility (as in figure 3.2). Johns (1982:143) acknowledges the close link between the *phallos* and fecundity, for which it becomes a ritualistic symbol. He adds that the significance of the idea of the *phallos* as a construct of apotropaism most likely finds its roots in fertility cults. Yet, Johns (1982:143; 146) reminds the reader that their development should be seen more as a superstitious practice than a seriously religious one and thus rather perceives this image, and, hence, the woman's nudity, as primarily apotropaic in function, regardless of its connection with religious festivals.

The *phallos* bird is yet another form of phallic apotropaism, but has in addition to a pair of eyes a set of wings and talons. Figure 4.2 depicts a nude woman holding a *phallos* bird in her left hand while unwrapping a basket full of *phalloi* with eyes. Boardman (1992:231) similarly lists



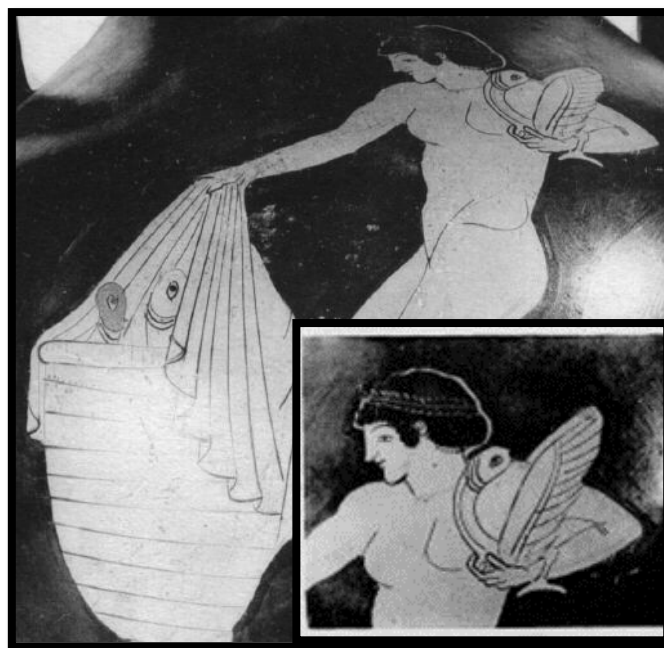


Figure 4.2. Nude woman holding *phallos* bird, c. 500-450 BCE.

this particular image among his collection of apotropaic images on Graeco-Roman ceramics. Yet, to Kilmer (1993:193) the *phallos* bird is not as much a charm to ward off the evil eye, as it was a creative product of the male imagination. Kilmer (1993:193) states that, not only are “*phallos*-birds [...] a way of expressing the feeling that the erect penis has a life – at any rate a will – of its own”, but also a means to “express the erect penis’s apparent defiance of gravity”. Furthermore, Kilmer (1993:197) points out that the affectionate manner in which women, nude or dressed, respond to the *phallos* bird, suggests a degree of fondness for the penis, which seems to represent male ideas of what women’s fantasies ought to entail more so than what women themselves would have perceived them to be.

With the removal of the *phallos*’ eyes, wings or talons, it becomes more challenging to identify the *phallos* as a symbol of protection against hostile forces. Instead, it is often perceived as a sign of fecundity, as well as eroticism and pornography. In figure 4.3, for example, a nude woman climbs into a basket full of *phalloi* and, regardless of the apotropaic functions attributed to the *phallos*, the image is automatically labelled by the online Beazley Archive as erotic, whereas figures 4.1 and 4.2 were not. Keuls (1985:84) refers to the woman in figure 4.3 as a *hetaira* and interprets the *phallos* in her hand not as a symbol of apotropaism, but merely as a



Figure 4.3. Nude woman with *phallos* climbing into a basket of *phalloi*, c. 500-450 BCE.

tool for sexual self-satisfaction: the dildo (*olisbos*)<sup>18</sup>. Keuls' (1985:82) identification of the nude woman's status as 'disreputable', is not only due to her association with the dildo, but also her nude state; if not a prostitute, states Keuls (1985:82), then surely she is simply a figure of the imagination. To Keuls (1985:82), both figures 4.2 and 4.3 depict scenes in which women are "sporting with baskets full of *olisboi*", but only in figure 4.3 is the woman specifically labelled a *hetaira*, perhaps due to her nudity grouped with the wearing of the *sakkos*, which the nude woman in figure 4.2 is lacking.

From this section, it seems apparent that the functions of the nude female body in figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 rely heavily on the manner in which the function of the *phallos* is interpreted by scholars, with female nudity being merely an extension of the *phallos*' symbolic importance. This becomes clear when, in the absence of obvious apotropaic components (fig. 4.3), such as the eyes and talons of the *phallos* bird, the ambiguity of the phallic imagery merely reverts the nude woman in the scene back to her status as a prostitute in an attempt to force clarity upon the setting.

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<sup>18</sup>*Olisboi*, a word which derives from the Greek verb meaning "to glide" or "to slip" (Keuls 1985:82), are dildos made of leather and, according to Keuls (1985:82), are often referred to in comedy as a tool used for sexual self-gratification by the respectable class.



## 4.2 Conclusion

With the apotropaic nature of figures 4.1 to 4.3 being determined by the presence of the *phallos* or *phalloi*, it becomes problematic to ascertain the function(s) of the nude female form as the former is often shrouded in mystery herself. On the one hand, the nude state of these female figures has been perceived as a means to develop the erotic intentions of the male artist and the *phallos* as evidence of the ‘phallocracy’ of ancient Athenian society. On the other hand, it has been suggested that these women are nude due to the ritualistic properties of the *phallos*, from which apotropaism stems.

The latter interpretation seems more fitting as it is simply not enough to assume these women’s nudity is erotic merely because it is mainly the female form, rather than the male form, that makes an appearance as carriers of these phallic items. Instead, it would be more appropriate to make the deduction that, due to the origins of apotropaism being submerged in religion and ritual, women might be more suitable to handle these phallic objects. Moreover, due to the focus of ritual on fecundity and procreation, it would then not be too surprising to find these women in a nude state.

## Chapter 5: Violence, Vulnerability and the Naked Female Body

Chapter 5 will re-examine the three images selected from the corpus where the women's naked state have predominantly been described by scholars as indicative of violence and female vulnerability. Two further images (fig. 5.2 and 5.3) will be used as comparanda since they form part of the discourse surrounding the three vase images specifically selected for this particular function of the nude female figure on Athenian vases.

### 5.1 Nakedness as a Function of Violence and Vulnerability

In a patriarchal society such as Athens, in which male citizens are known to be sexually active with both male and female partners, some of whom were slaves, it has been assumed that sexual abuse and the erotic debasement of both genders were generally the case (Cohen 2014:185). This carnal exploitation by the upper class did not, however, go unchecked. Cohen (2014:187) points out that certain social structures and laws were put in place to try and curb these sexual exploitations of masters towards their 'property'.

These social interventions included structures such as early marriage for women which resulted in early social maturation, or perhaps even early widowhood, considering the low longevity associated with the ancient world (Cohen: 2014:187). Regardless of these laws, blatant sexual abuse or carnal violence against another, especially slaves or prostitutes, occurred often enough, as can be noted from the popular Greek term, *hubris*<sup>19</sup> (exploitation or abuse), of which eroticised misconduct was one of the most fundamental and frequent forms it took in ancient Athenian society (Cohen 2014:187).

As for ancient Athenian art, Bonfante (1989:561) asserts that a naked woman could be interpreted as a slave for hire, one who was about to be violated in this way. To some extent Jenkins (2015:19) concurs with Bonfante when he refers to the female figure's exposed skin in ancient Greek art as "violated flesh [which] is frequently exposed as the fruit of sexual plunder". However, this did not always take the form of sexual or physical violence. Jenkins (2015:17) claims that erotic depictions on Athenian vases could also include domestic scenes, such as females dressing or bathing, which were meant to draw the viewer into the role of the voyeur who is exercising a forbidden gaze and violating the privacy of the targeted women.

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<sup>19</sup>Note that *hubris* is a complex term with multiple meanings attached to it, such as "pride", "self-importance" and "egotism".



Figure 5.1 Rape of Cassandra, c. 475-425 BCE.

To a certain degree Cohen (1993:37) agrees with Bonfante, claiming that, in art, female nakedness for mortal women in the Archaic period usually denoted physical violence or vulnerability, of which the recurring theme of Cassandra's rape in ancient Greek art is a good example (fig. 5.1 and 5.2). In figure 5.1, Cassandra is depicted clinging to a statue of Athena in desperation, both arms clinging to the goddess, while Ajax attempts to haul her away from her only form of refuge. However, although this scene appears patently violent, Cohen also regards it as erotic due to the increasing naturalism of Attic red-figure painted pottery<sup>20</sup> in the Classical period.

This increase led to multiple workshops in Athens more closely exploring themes such the symposium, where blatant erotic contact was depicted among heterosexual couples through art. In addition to this, erotic scenes featuring satyrs and maenads were also depicted, which ultimately projected mortal male heterosexual lust into the Dionysiac realm (Cohen 1993:39). Moreover, the increase in the representation of *hetairai* also assisted ancient Greek artists with their investigation into the nude female body in the Classical period, states Cohen (1993:41), all resulting in the eroticisation of the nude female body, even in moments of rape. Hence, whereas this scene once suggested Cassandra's vulnerability and the sexual violence she was to face, according to Cohen, it later became a manifestation of male desire. Cassandra's mature

<sup>20</sup>Skinner (2005:80) is of a similar viewpoint on the significance of the shift from the black-figure technique to the red-figure technique, stating that, although both techniques were utilised to depict erotic scenes, the former was more often used to convey a sense of comedy, whereas the latter involved the viewer psychologically in the proceedings of the artwork.

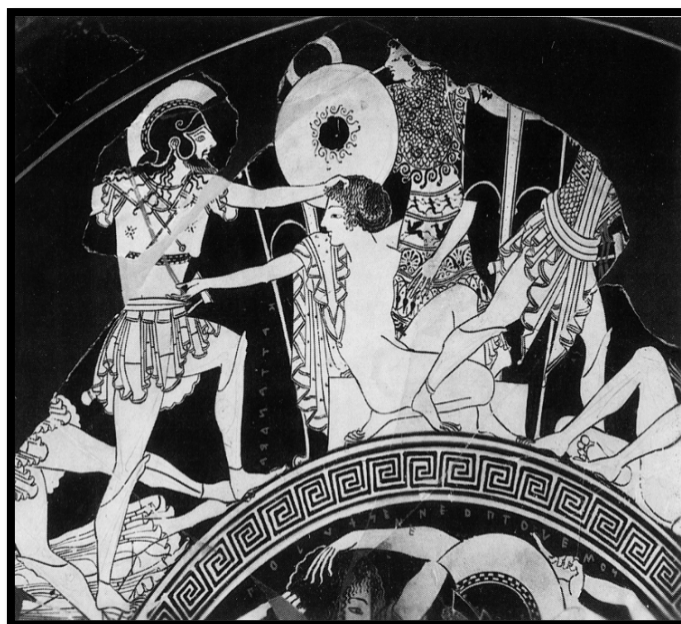


Figure 5.2 Rape of Cassandra (Iliupersis), c. 500-490 BCE.

female nudity, then, certainly carried over erotic associations into the scene of violent rape and the beauty of her nudity ultimately marked a sharp change from the depictions of Cassandra in earlier Archaic art to that of Classical art, argues Cohen (1993:42).

Kilmer (1993:158) avoids this quick and customary movement (or collapse) back to the erotic and pornographic in intricate scenes depicting female nudity, placing more emphasis on the image as a depiction of sexual violence and vulnerability when the scholar describes the mythical maiden as young, naked and utterly defenceless. “We are sympathetic to her”, comments Kilmer (1993:158), “she is young, helpless and innocent, and she is to be the victim of violent crime [...] I believe that a Greek seeing this depiction of the myth would have felt the same revulsion at Ajax’s act as we do.” We can also observe from the iconographic motif of a woman holding out an arm to her attacker in supplication (fig. 5.2) that this image was meant to convey an impending violent act. Kilmer therefore does not perceive Cassandra’s nudity as an attempt at fuelling male desire, but rather as a brutal illustration of those sexual improprieties that for all intents and purposes were not to be tolerated.

This notion is further supported by a section in Homer’s *Odyssey* (4.499-511) in which Ajax, “hated of Athena” (4.503), is drowned for ultimately desecrating the goddess’ temple and committing a religious taboo by raping Cassandra in a sacred space. Furthermore, Lefkowitz (1986:67) reminds us of Cassandra’s previous near sexual experience with Apollo, noting the significance of the powerful god asking for the young woman’s consent first and thereafter

honouring her right to refuse him when she does so. It should also be noted that figure 5.1 appears on an amphora and not a drinking cup, suggesting that this vase was likely regularly used by women and thus less likely to be viewed by a male audience.

Furthermore, Kilmer (1993:158-159) makes use of Cassandra's nakedness as a product of sexual violence and vulnerability as a means to reflect on the issue of nude women too readily being labelled *hetairai*. Kilmer (1993:158-159) raises the question: if there truly were an absolute restriction on female nudity with reference to respectable women only, how could Cassandra's fate have such a substantial effect on the viewer of the artwork? Kilmer (1993:159) puts it simply when he states, "if the Greek's first reaction to a picture of a naked woman was to say, 'Aha! *Hetaira!*' as modern critics, suggest, [...] Cassandra could hardly be effective". This, according to Kilmer (1993:159), is mainly due to *hetairai* not usually appearing as characters that would inspire sympathy from others.

The image of Cassandra being forcefully pulled away from her only form of sanctuary in figures 5.1 and 5.2 also calls into question the notion that ancient Athenian society as a collective whole approved of violence against women, especially to the point of regarding it as normal (Kilmer 1993:159). Kilmer (1993:159) thus proposes that the manner in which Cassandra's naked vulnerability was looked upon with outright condemnation therefore suggests that sexual violence was frowned upon, and most certainly disapproved of.

In a similar instance of violence and vulnerability at the hands of a Greek man, an Amazon is depicted mere seconds before her brutal death (fig. 5.3). These unusual women were known to embody every female trait which was perceived as aberrant and undesirable in ancient Greek



Figure 5.3 Ancient Greek warrior about to spear an Amazon with one breast exposed, c. 470-460 BCE.

society and thus had to be eradicated. Notably, all the Amazons participating in the battle are fully clothed but for one female warrior who is about to be speared through the chest by her enemy (fig. 5.3). In images of battles between the Greeks and the Amazons, the latter would wear short *chitons* that covered both shoulders, and thus both breasts; however, defeated Amazons would, in contrast, be depicted with their garments torn, exposing a breast to the viewer (Cohen 1997:74). In this particular vase scene Cohen (1997:74) describes the setting as follows:

As the fleeing Amazon, burdened by her now-useless shield, twists round stretching to swing her axe, her short *chiton* bursts open at the right shoulder and, flying downward, exposes her right breast and part of her left. In but an instant the hero's spear will hit home. And the fleeing Amazon's fate is suggested by the frontal Amazon fallen in an anguished pose under the cradle's handle [...].

This vase, then, is but another example of Classical artists' use of the bared breast as a "potent visual convention" (Cohen 1997:77). This exposure of the female body functions to denote violence and vulnerability, whether a princess from a foreign land or powerful warrior in her own right.

A vase by the Pedieus Painter, which has been extensively researched by scholars (Keuls 1985:180-181; Kilmer 1993:108; 117-118; 127-128; Skinner 2005: 103-104 and Stewart 1997:165), depicts a multitude of scenes that, although explicitly sexual, can also be described as violent in nature (fig. 5.4 and 5.5). Stewart (1997:165) acknowledges the function of female nakedness here as a tool to connote sexual violence against women, but rejects the possibility of ancient Athenian society responding to it with distaste. Stewart (1997:165) describes these busy sympotic scenes as men beating naked women or forcing oral sex on them: one woman, who is performing oral sex with a man while simultaneously being penetrated by another, apparently does so under threat of being beaten with a sandal (fig. 5.4). Another scene depicts a naked woman attempting to escape from an 'orgy' (fig. 5.5), ultimately resulting in Stewart's (1997:165) conclusion that all of these women were reluctant to submit to sex, and therefore needed coercion. In addition, Stewart (1997:165) asserts that oral sex was regarded as highly degrading to the partner performing it and that spanking and oral sex ultimately became ways



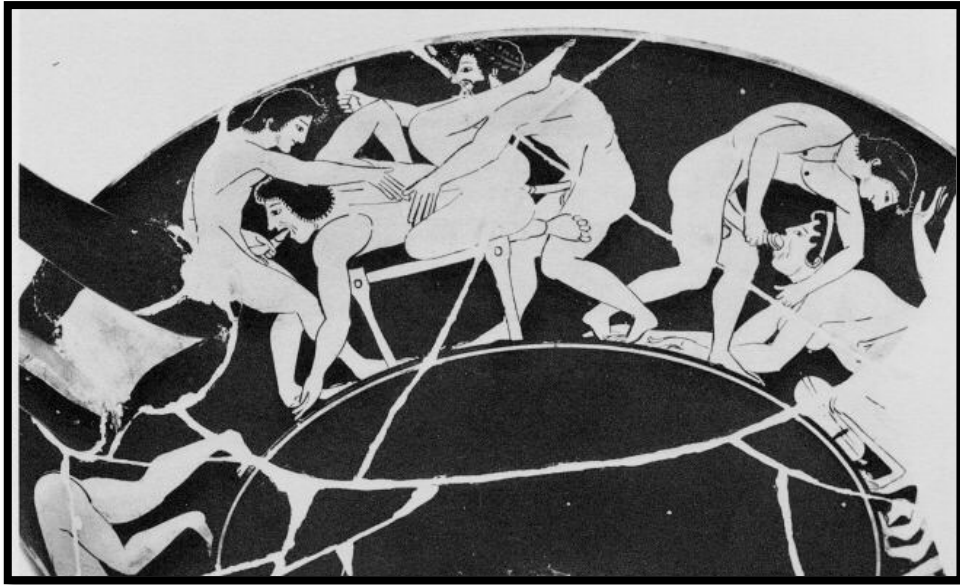


Figure 5.4 Men forcing women to have violent sexual relations with them, c. 525-475 BCE.

in which a structured asymmetry of social and sexual roles could be reinforced – unsurprising considering the gender ideologies surrounding women in the ancient Greek world.

Stewart (1997:165) concludes that, “in these contexts women should be submissive or must be disciplined into submission; they should either shut up voluntarily or have their mouths stoppered up, in this case (appropriately) by the phallus.” Simply put, Stewart (1997:165) interprets the sexual violence illustrated in figures 5.4 and 5.5 as a visual demonstration of gender and class supremacy, as well as a means to promote ‘homosocial’ male bonding through the degradation of the ‘other’. Kurke (1999:208-213) and Skinner (2005:104) agree with Stewart’s interpretation of figures 5.4 and 5.5, arguing that female nakedness in this context was a means to denote sexual violence against women, and in turn, utilise this violence as a way in which to strengthen the bond between the members of a sympotic group. Sutton (1992:11-12) perceives these naked women in a similar light to Stewart and Kurke, arguing that these women are portrayed as middle-aged and overweight, suggesting that the power expressed in this particular vase image, is not just male over female, but also young over old, free over slave and employer over employee. These authors thus draw two problematic conclusions: nude woman + violence = symposium and, subsequently, symposium + violence = *hetaira*. Yet, can we really say that is it only the *hetaira* who makes an appearance in scenes

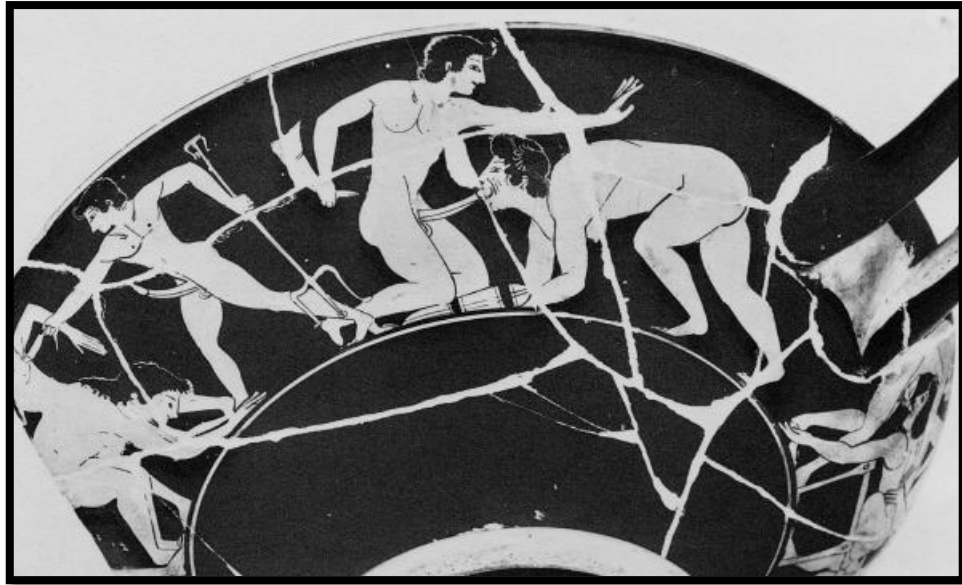


Figure 5.5 Men forcing women to have violent sexual relations with them, c. 525-475 BCE.

rife with violence? Could a lover or wife not also experience violence at the hands of her male counterpart?

Skinner (2005:104) also understands these scenes as illustrating a sympotic space and perceives these women as *hetairai*. To Skinner (2005:104) these scenes, although most certainly containing elements of sexual violence, were not meant to chronicle the pitiful life story of the prostitute, but rather uses her as a tool for reaffirming the values and aspirations attributed to the symposium, especially in times of class conflict. To Skinner, then, these naked female figures functioned as a means to signify sexual violence against women, which also carried a deeper social significance regarding the concerns of social status and class differences in ancient Athens, more so than trepidations concerning gender. As for the Beazley Archive, it simply labels these scenes as ‘erotic’.

Keuls (1985:180) shares the presumption that the function of female nakedness in these scenes was to signify the sexual violence these women experienced at the hands of the male symposiasts and lists this vase under the heading, *The Battering of Prostitutes with Sticks and Sandals*. Underneath the image is written, “man coerces older prostitutes to practice fellatio and submit to anal sex at the same time” (Keuls 1985:184). Keuls (1985:180) further describes figure 5.4 as follows:

On the right a plump hetaera is kneeling on the floor. The youth in front of her is thrusting his huge penis into her mouth, wrinkling her cheeks.



Another man is copulating with her from behind, as is indicated by a hand shown on her back. The copulator's other hand, perhaps, is meant to be propped against a wall. In the centre a woman is lying crosswise over a couch. She is obediently doing service to the penis of the youth in front of her, while a bearded man penetrates her anally from the rear. He is brandishing a shoe or sandal in his right hand to make sure the woman will not interfere with the consummation of this uncomfortable scene.

From this description, Keuls' (1985:180) view is made undeniably clear – these images are meant to illustrate “with brutal realism” the forceful nature of men's coercion of *hetairai* who might wish to resist the violent sexual demands of the ancient Athenian patriarchy.

Kilmer (1993:157) is somewhat more indulgent of the scene, suggesting that the man wielding the sandal (fig. 5.4) does so more in an attempt to encourage the woman to continue than as a means to force her compliance. In addition, what appears to Keuls to be a scene rife with brutality and malice, is described by Kilmer (1993:157) as near satirical. The men have *phalloi* that are highly exaggerated in size, an artistic phenomenon attributed mainly to slaves, barbarians or satyrs and hardly ever to male citizens (Bonfante 1989:550; Kilmer 1993:157; Clarke 2014:510). The men depicted on this vase were therefore likely not meant to be perceived in a positive or attractive light, but instead should be viewed, in appearance as well as in action, with disapproval. Kilmer (1993:157) therefore concludes that, although these women appear naked on the vase as a means to further the milieu of sexual violence, its purpose does not lie in reinforcing ‘homosocial’ tendencies as Keuls proposes, but rather in rejecting these sexual violations for the deplorable behaviour it was.

Although Kilmer's argument has merit, it does not question the reasoning behind why symposiasts would wish to view vase scenes they would ultimately find unattractive and look upon with disapproval, unless it was produced to teach these young men the social conventions, values and expectations of their time. It is therefore not enough to simply identify these women's nakedness as indicative of violence and vulnerability, but to attempt to understand the reason(s) behind such displays of violence against women in ancient Athenian society.

Perhaps the least ambiguous of these violent vase scenes is that of the Foundry Painter's cup, currently located in Milan (fig. 5.6). The image displayed on the vase is that of a young man grabbing hold of a naked and kneeling woman's hair with his left hand while clutching a sandal

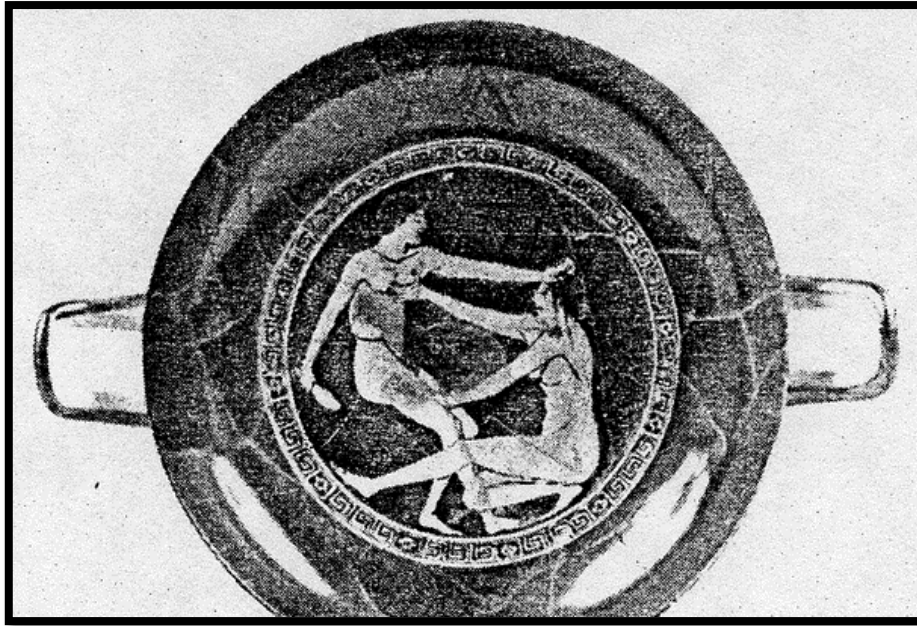


Figure 5.6 Youth wielding sandal grabs naked woman's hair, c. 500-450.

in his right. Kilmer (1993:126) refers to this scene as one of the very rare cases to his knowledge in which the receiver of a violent act clearly appears unwilling.

The Beazley Archive perceives the setting of this image as erotic and apparently so does the young man participating in this scene, considering his ithyphallic state (Kilmer 1993:113). Nevertheless, Kilmer is yet again of the opinion that this scene is meant to denote sexual violence perpetrated by men against their female counterparts, only with no form of satire to speak of to detract from the unmistakable brutality of the artwork. The downward curve of her mouth, states Kilmer (1993:113), can be viewed as a highly intentional move on the part of the artist to indicate the immense discomfort the woman is experiencing. Furthermore, Kilmer (1993:113) claims that the gesture of her outstretched right arm and open hand is a common one that suggests pleading with her assailant. The woman's hair is also in a state of disarray, indicating the violent nature of the hair-pulling and the pain that no doubt accompanied it (Kilmer 1993:155).

To make matters worse is the observation that the youth is throwing his weight into the hair-pulling, as if in an attempt to haul her forcibly towards him, resulting in the possibility of the young man's goal being fellation, claims Kilmer (1993:114). This pose emphasises the function of the female's unclothed state as indicative of sexual violence against women. Greek erotic painting, Kilmer (1993:114) argues, suggests that women were not expected to enjoy this sexual act; in fact, only under active physical compulsion or threat of violence would a woman

engage in this carnal activity. To substantiate this argument, Kilmer (1993:114) refers to two vases in which women are forced to perform fellation: the cup from the Pedieus Painter (R156), previously discussed in this chapter (fig.5.4 and 5.5), and a kantharos from the Nikosthenes Painter (online Beazley Archive number: 201063)<sup>21</sup>. On the former vase, three scenes of fellation make an appearance, of which only one does not seem to depict physical compulsion (Kilmer 1993:114-115). On the latter vase a woman who is about to perform oral sex on the youth in front of her, is soon to be penetrated by a dildo from the rear, after which, Kilmer (1993:117) suggests, she might experience considerable pain to the point of momentarily putting off the young man in front of her who might eye her clenching teeth with some consternation.

To Kilmer (1993:113) this is the only example known to him of hair-pulling as an erotic expression within the Greek repertory, and one of the rare examples in which there is no doubt that the person who is being injured is most certainly not enjoying it. Kilmer (1993:114) raises a valid point when he concludes his commentary on the vase image as follows: “the image of the dominant, even domineering, male, with the female submitting willy-nilly, is clear here. What is not so clear is the expected reaction of the viewer.” Thus, whether the viewer was meant to interpret it as predominantly erotic, or a crime of sexual violence, is difficult to say.

Lewis (2002:124) proposes that images like figure 5.6 are not necessarily representative of ancient Greek reality. In fact, according to Lewis (2002:124), these images are hardly numerous at all, with five images at most depicting such brutality. Yet, they are given undue importance in scholarship concerning ancient attitudes towards women mainly because they fuel modern perceptions and biases regarding male-female relationships in the ancient Greek world (Lewis 2002:124). Toscano (2013:12) concurs with this viewpoint, claiming that violence against women on Greek vases is not the prevailing picture. Rather, Toscano’s (2013:12) study of the 52 every-day heterosexual scenes illustrated in Kilmer’s book reveals that only seven are clearly negative towards women; twenty-four, on the other hand, appears positive towards women (of which fifteen indicates eye-to-eye contact) and twenty-one images are ambiguous in nature.

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<sup>21</sup>R223 (Kilmer 1993:116).



Figure 5.7 Men and women partaking in sexual activities, c. 500-450 BCE.

Lewis (2002:124) further argues that women who appear on vases such as figure 5.6, are often viewed as old, fat or prosaic in appearance and were ultimately depicted as “symptotic furniture” rather than participants. Lewis (2002:124) refers to these artistic cases as reinforcing and reflecting the modern beliefs that ancient Greek men supposedly only had contempt for the women within their society regardless of vases depicting scenes of affection between the two sexes.<sup>22</sup>

Regardless of this, the assumption that has been drawn from these violent scenes, is that, when women are being objectified by men, they are deliberately portrayed as unappealing (Lewis 2002:124-125). Yet, such assumptions, according to Lewis (2002:125), arise from scholars viewing these scenes in isolation, rather than as a whole. In fact, Lewis (2002:125) claims that these women should not be seen as fat or disproportionate, but rather as accurate depictions, for example, of flesh being doubled over due to the awkward postures these women often appear in.

Moreover, there is no strong division between degradation and violence on the one hand, and affection on the other. Here Lewis (2002:125) refers to a scene on the Byrgos cup in Florence (fig. 5.7) to get her point across, claiming that, among images of beatings and forced fellatio, there is a couple in “athletic copulation”, who make eye-contact while the woman affectionately touches the man’s head. Lewis (2002:126) furthermore states that figure 5.6 specifically has been interpreted by Kilmer as pertaining to ‘erotica’, even though there is little,

<sup>22</sup>Lewis (2002:124-125) makes use of an image from an Attic red-figure cup attributed to the Kiss Painter to argue this point, in which a couple embraces lovingly and lean in to kiss one another (Beazley vase number: 201624).

if any, indication that this scene should be viewed as explicitly erotic. Lewis (2002:126) elaborates on this point, arguing that there is no setting in the tondo, nor any decoration on the outside of the cup to imply or reveal the context of the image; in fact, despite the appearance of the sandal, there are no indicators to make the image erotic. As such, Lewis (2002:126) makes the following statement: “the images raise very sharply the question of meaning within context: taken from an assumed sympotic context, what is there in violence to make us think of the erotic?”

Lewis (2002:126) acknowledges that casual violence towards women was not irregular, especially in comedy in which violence against women and slaves was observed with a sense of normality. Nevertheless, Lewis (2002:126) is adamant that there is no particular reason to confine it to attitudes towards *hetairai* within symposia, nor any reason to read vases similar to figure 5.6 as a group. Simply put, the formula eroticism + violence = *hetaira* is highly problematic, yet often utilised, in an attempt to ‘unpack’ an image that might appear abstruse in nature. Subsequently, it also does not allow for the possible reality of eroticism + violence = wife/lover/slave.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The depiction of Cassandra’s rape (fig 5.1 and 5.2) is a good example of a young nude woman being perceived by scholars as an erotic figure primarily due to her nudity when little else in the setting suggests such a function. Here, the context is fairly straightforward: a young woman clings to a statue of Athena to avoid being raped by a foreign invader. Kilmer thus makes a valid observation when he refers to the vase image as violent and Cassandra as vulnerable. Yet, Kilmer draws the very same conclusion as these scholars in figure 5.6, arguing that the kneeling woman’s nakedness is pornographic when there is also hardly anything in the setting to warrant such an interpretation. The noticeable difference between the two female figures is that of status; whereas Cassandra’s status is known to the viewer, as well as her royal position, the woman in figure 5.6 is unknown and does not appear to be of a high status. In light of her ambiguous and naked status, the abused woman is more easily rendered an erotic or pornographic figure, once more indicating the common practice among scholarship to revert ambiguous nude women into *hetairai*, or even as eroticised figures in general, when that is not necessarily the case.

As for figures 5.4 and 5.5, it is important to note that, although the scene appears pornographic, there are certain signs in the image that signpost an underlying intent of the artist: an almost

satirical approach to clearly convey his disapproval of the violent behaviour of the symposiasts. This is especially accomplished by depicting the men's genitals as abnormally large, which in ancient Greek art was generally attributed to male slaves or mischievous satyrs and, hence, had unattractive properties attached to it. Female nakedness in this context did therefore not function as a means to demarcate an erotic setting, but to illustrate the displeasure one should feel at witnessing such brutish behaviour from young, possibly elite men.



## Chapter 6: Bodies Bound by Eroticism

As previously discussed, when attempting to interpret an ancient image pertaining towards the sexual, it is crucial to first establish whether the image was meant to be patently pornographic (i.e. violent or expressly designed to degrade and subjugate) or merely erotic (i.e. alluding to sexuality, titillating but not excessively explicit). In this chapter it should be further noted that identifying the status of a nude woman as ‘disreputable’, does not automatically divulge the context of the image, nor the function of her nudity. Often, by determining the status of a nude female figure on Attic vases as ‘disreputable’, the possible meaning(s) of the image can be better understood, but cannot always guarantee clarity of the context since it cannot be said that all nude prostitutes appear on vases in an erotic or pornographic setting. With this kept in mind, Chapter 6 aims to further investigate whether the three images selected for this function of nudity were indeed placed in their right categories by once more making use of an iconographic approach.

### 6.1 Nudity as a Function of Eroticism and Pornography

Stewart (1997:165) argues that the symposium should be seen as undeniably pornographic considering the fact that sympotic scenes on Classical Attic vases “represent the lowest common denominator of Athenian attitudes toward women”. Stewart (1997:165) further links pornography with the context of the symposium, suggesting that these scenes, in which men sexually abuse prostitutes or flute-girls (such as beating them with sandals and forcing them to perform oral sex), such as figures 5.4 and 5.5, are the closest one gets to modern pornography among all Greek erotica.

In figure 6.1, Skinner (1997:101) identifies the nude women in the vase image as *hetairai*, claiming that they are “securely identified” as such by the fact that respectable women by definition did not attend sympotic events. Furthermore, Robertson (1991:26) perceives these nude women as *hetairai* based the fact that they appear on a kylix, a vase shape which belonged to the symposium, for when symposiasts drank from this specific vase, they could see their own world displayed on the outside of the cup. According to Robertson (1991:26), it is not only the image painted on this particular vase that alludes to these women as *hetairai*, but also the shape, and therefore the function of the vase itself, designed for the male pursuits of drinking, partying, play and pleasure.

Within the context of the symposium, then, it is relatively safe to say that the nude women reclining with their male partners in figure 6.1 are likely to be imagined as *hetairai*. Lewis' interpretation of this vase image, however, shifts interest in ascertaining the women's status, but more to the implication of their nudity, which the scholar views as sexual, but not necessarily pornographic (thus, not indicative of female subjugation, submission, abuse or degradation). Lewis (2002:113) describes figure 6.1 as a sympotic scene in which the nude women were far from mere passive objects. In fact, although these nude women were no doubt objects of male desire meant to provide sexual entertainment for their male partners, it is evident that a sense of reciprocal affection can be found among the eight partakers (four men and four women). She describes the scene thus:

...on each side two men and two women recline among cushions; all but one woman wear fillets (the other woman wears a band for her hair), and both women and men hold cups or branches. This is a vision of the symposium with songs and games in which all join together (Lewis 2002:113).

Lewis (2002:113) continues to point out that these women will spend the night drinking, telling jokes and playing with their partners; this image and images like it, according to Lewis (2002:113), "bring home the fact that *hetairai* were not simply women paid as prostitutes; some



Figure 6.1 *Hetairai* entertaining guests at a sympotic event, c. 475-425 BCE.



images offer the idea of the *hetairai* as equal, her role in the entertainment as subject, not object”.

Corner (2014:201) likewise points out that the *hetaira* could be seen as an “honorary man” who could be bought exclusively for one male guest, or could even become the object of competitive courtship among the male symposiasts (Corner 2014:202). In this sense the *hetaira* differs fundamentally from the ‘respectable’ wife, who belongs to her husband for the primary purpose of producing legitimate children and managing important domestic matters (Corner 2014:202). Moreover, the *hetaira* was no cheap whore to be paid for her sexual favours, but could even be compensated for a night of entertainment without providing any sexual deeds at all (Skinner 2005:98). In fact, because the *hetaira* is perceived as the equal of her admirer, she is compensated with gifts rather than with money and this, in turn, removes the *hetaira* from the commercial realm and thus distinguishes her from common prostitutes who are known for their monetary transactions with clients (Skinner 2005:100). Hence, as the counterpart of an aristocratic lover, claims Skinner (2005:100), the *hetaira* functions as an ideological stereotype in the sense that she is witty, dainty and aesthetically pleasing to look upon, unlike the *pornē* (common prostitute), who is viewed as filthy in comparison. Considering this high status, the former was thus regarded as having both feminine and masculine traits, as she is beautiful, but also independent. Should she be freeborn or freed, states McClure (2003:68), she is not under the protection of a *kyrios* (master), but is rather “her own mistress” in the sense that, like a man, she can manage property, have a public presence and even be mentioned in gatherings of men.

Keuls (1985:168), however, oversimplifies the function of the nude female figure again, interpreting the image, in fact, the very notion of the symposium, as the sexual indoctrination of young men. As such, Keuls (1985:168) places emphasis on the three older men finding pleasure in the company of three young, boyish-looking girls, whereas the fourth youthful male interacts with a mature woman of a more “opulent” shape, whose hair is bound up in a “matronly snood”. In this scene, therefore, Keuls (1985:168) argues that the nudity of the *hetairai*, especially that of the more mature, plush *hetaira*, serves to “liberate [the male youth] from any vestige of awe of his mother and the other female authority figures of his childhood, which he might still be carrying around from his early years in the women’s quarters”. However, Keuls’ argument that, within the context of the symposium, the nude female figure not only remains a victim of her male counterpart’s pornographic desires, but also actively



Figure 6.2 Rear-entry sexual intercourse between man and woman, c. 500-450 BCE.

plays a part in creating a dynasty of misogynist men bent on female abuse and subjugation, does seem rather far-fetched. As a result, Keuls' interpretation restricts and confines the function of female nudity in this context to male pornographic desire rather than viewing it as a mutual expression of erotic autonomy.

The status and function of nude female figures on Attic vases become more complicated with the removal of the straightforward setting of the symposium, especially when what remains is the erotic or pornographic scene of a couple copulating. In figure 6.2 above a nude woman is bent forward, supporting herself on a foot-stool while a man penetrates her from behind. Whereas the online Beazley Archive simply describes this vase image as 'erotic', Stewart (1997:162) typically confines it to a sympotic scene, stating that a shift in emphasis from group sex to couples having intercourse occurred on these sympotic vases. These types of sexual scenes can then be seen as extensions of the more typical sympotic imagery in which Stewart (1997:162) claims that more tenderness towards the *hetairai* are shown, as well as a "disturbing" propensity towards sexual violence.

Figure 6.2 is a good example of the latter more than the former, claims Stewart 1997:162), depicting the rear-entry position which makes an appearance in nearly half of all known examples. To Stewart (1997:164) this image reflects the cultural perception that the ancient Athenian male should at all times be in sexual control of his partner. Stewart (1997:164)

concludes his study on this image by stating that it is not surprising to see sex here as nothing more than an act of control as ancient Athenian men often viewed women's sexuality as a force that could easily get out of hand if not contained and controlled.

Sutton (1992:11) views this image in a similar fashion to Stewart, claiming that the rear-entrance stance allows for the painter to depict the nude woman in figure 6.2 as a mere sexual tool to be used impersonally by the man, who should see any emotional reaction from her as of no concern to him. Sutton (1992:11) states that, what adds to the impersonal nature of this position, is the couple's stiff and awkward posture, lack of eye-contact and, most importantly, the man's detached words, "HEXEHEΣYXOΣ" ("*heche hêsychos*", "keep still"). Keuls (1985:174-179) simply views nude women who appear in such scenes as *hetairai*, who were seen as too unattractive for frontal copulation and, as such, only experienced anal sex, which was seen as less considerate and more degrading.

To Keuls, then, the function of the nude female form in figure 6.2 is without a doubt pornographic. Dover (2002:26), however, suggests that this overabundance of the rear-entry position in erotic imagery is due to the homosexual *ethos* of that time, in which the nude female form in art could often be described as "a young man's body plus breasts and minus external genitals". Johns (1982:133) disagrees with this common theory, suggesting that it is all but impossible to even determine whether vaginal or anal intercourse is displayed in figure 6.2. Nevertheless, Johns (1982:133) argues that the woman in this scene is a *hetaira* and as such, Kilmer (1993:33-34) might have a point in arguing that she (and women like her) chose this position since anal intercourse prevented unwanted pregnancies. However, Johns (1982:134) points out that *hetairai* are shown participating in vaginal intercourse often enough to assume that they do, in fact, have a means of avoiding pregnancy, and so this theory carries little weight.

For Kilmer (1993:83) it is the aryballos (oil-jar) that provides the fundamental clue to the image depicting anal sex, along with the man's exclamation for the woman to hold still and the "spurned bed" to the left. With this admonition, claims Kilmer (1993:83) the artist of the vase image aimed to indicate that something out of the ordinary was occurring in the scene, not a typical vaginal copulation, for which the man's words would have been inappropriate, but for anal copulation, suitable especially in the situation in which the woman had not tried it before. To Kilmer copulation *a tergo* does not, however, seem to guarantee a pornographic setting, nor a naked rather than a nude woman in the image, according to Clark's (1956:3) definition. It can

be argued that the oil-jar to the right likely provided lubrication and, with the discomfort of the woman and the indifference of the man potentially removed from the setting, can we still view the nude woman as a passive, unattractive prostitute? There is, after all, no reason not to view this nude woman as a wife or lover of the man behind her.

Johns (1982:131-132) simply attributes the popularity of this position to its unambiguity and artistic clarity. Through facial expressions and nuances of posture, states Johns (1982:131), the nature of the activity in figure 6.2 can effectively be understood by the viewer, but to be truly unambiguous, the artist simply limits his artwork to positions in which sexual intercourse, whether vaginal or anal, is difficult to misconstrue, i.e. the rear-entry position. The function of female nudity in this image, according to Johns, is therefore simply to convey and further develop the sexual nature of the image and the erotic intent of the artist mainly through the woman's status as a fully naked and passive prostitute.

In figure 6.3 below the viewers are once more confronted with a couple copulating. Due to the sexual nature of the image, the online Beazley Archive has labelled the scene as 'erotic'. Sutton (1992:8) investigates vases with erotic scenes found in Etruria, such as figure 6.3, and refers to such scenes as belonging to a special class of vases in which Attic painters introduced explicit



Figure 6.3 Man and woman copulating on *klinê*, c. 500-450 BCE.

sexual subjects produced specifically for export to the west. Sutton (1992:8) therefore views figure 6.3 as the Athenian production of pornography for the Etruscan market. On this topic Skinner (2005:81) points out that aristocratic Etruscan women were more visible in a public sense, and that in Etruscan art, the painters had no qualms with clearly depicting affection between husbands and wives, not clients and prostitutes.

Skinner (2005:81) further comments that, according to some scholars, these cultural factors prevalent in Etruscan art were well known by the Athenian artists, who would then implement them in their own artwork. This does not, however, sit well with Skinner (2005:81), who argues that there are simply too many Greek cultural elements to suggest these images were solely produced for export, such as the presence of painted slogans on these vases that express the admiration of young men who were prominent historical figures well established in Athenian contemporaries (e.g. “Leagros is *kalos*” [beautiful]). It is for this reason that Skinner (2005:81) disagrees with this theory, asserting that such slogans would be meaningless to Etruscan consumers, but would be relevant to the Greeks, for which such scenes were created. The function of this nude female in figure 6.3 should therefore be viewed and interpreted in the context of Classical Athens, not Etruscan art.

With the woman in figure 6.3 now placed within her appropriate cultural context, we can once more attempt to unveil the meaning and function behind her nude state. Sutton (1992:9) claims that, although female pleasure is often portrayed in Classical art, it serves only as a stimulus for male pleasure and is therefore not treated as a subject of interest for its own sake. To Sutton, then, this woman is naked, not nude (in Clarke’s [1956:3] distinction) and is depicted as such in order to render her an object, rather than a subject of desire in her own right. However, I am in agreement with Kilmer (1993:47), who diligently describes the lovers’ position and movements as generally affectionate and mutual, which suggests that this scholar views the image in a similar light – as erotic, not pornographic. Kilmer (1993:47) places emphasis on the nude woman’s right hand affectionately placed on the man’s head, her legs thrown casually over her partner’s shoulders and the man’s right hand sensually brushing the woman’s left breast to make his point. It should also be noted that the nude couple is both making eye contact, further indicating mutual affection between the lovers/spouses.

## 6.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, the status of the nude female form in figure 6.1 was recognised as ‘disreputable’; further investigation suggested that the female nudity of the *hetairai* was more likely

functioning as a means to indicate an erotic setting than a pornographic one. This is due to these nude women not appearing to be victimised or objectified, as various scholars had suggested. Instead, figure 6.1 illustrates a group of women openly celebrating their sexuality and female desires. The nude woman in figure 6.2 is also perceived by scholars as a victim of sexual violence mainly because of the impersonal nature of the sexual position and the common belief that sex in this position strongly illustrated the cultural expectation that men must at all times control their women during and through sex. Other interpretations, such as this sexual position illustrating anal copulation, have resulted in this nude woman's status being questioned, as anal sex was viewed as one of the ways in which pregnancy could be avoided. Yet, as the discarded oil jar to the right of the image suggests, this image could simply be depicting a couple enjoying mutual, though perhaps unconventional sex in which the man's warning for the woman to hold still could be due to his concern for her comfort.

Finally, figure 6.3 is a valuable example of erotic vases being misread due to scholars' beliefs that they were created for the export market, especially that of Etruria. Yet, just because they have been excavated in Etruria, does not mean that these erotic vases were created for this specific ancient society. In fact, in assuming such, the function of the female nudity in figure 6.3 becomes detached from the cultural context in which it is embedded.

It was found that there is no need to view the nude woman as a passive partner to the man above her; instead, this vase image should be seen to depict mutual affection and desire between a couple, clearly illustrated by the woman's caring touch to the back of the man's head, the warm look shared by them and the man's gentle graze of the woman's left breast. This affection shared by the couple should not be overlooked simply because the woman appears in the nude. Moreover, it should be noted that the nude woman in figure 6.2 has been viewed as a victim of violence due to the subdued sexual position she appears in; yet, the nude woman in figure 6.3 is similarly merely reduced to an object of victimisation, even though she appears in a more intimate position with her partner.



## Chapter 7: The Heroic and Honourable Female Nude

The final function of the nude female body that will be addressed in this thesis is nudity associated with bathing, the function of which scholars disagree on: it is labelled as ‘disreputable’ on the one hand, or ‘heroic’ and indicative of ‘female agency’ on the other. This chapter will discuss the iconography of three images of female bathers in order to better understand the meaning of nudity in the context of bathing. Here the connotation of the word ‘nudity’ is mostly that called on by Clarke (1956:3): that of the body on display, a confident, prosperous body.

### 7.1 Nudity as a function of female Agency

According to Kreilinger (2006:230), approximately 130 depictions of women washing themselves appear on nearly all sorts of vase shapes, dating from the period between 530 BCE and 400 BCE. Kreilinger (2006:231) further points out that these women appearing nude almost always resulted in the conclusion that they were not respectable Attic citizens, but either *hetairai* or supernatural creatures of fantasy. Keuls (1985:259-64) and Davidson (1997:86-89), for example, interpret these female bathers as ‘disreputable’ because, they argue, citizen wives would never be portrayed in the nude. Williams (1983:99) similarly views a hydria in the British Museum depicting two women washing (London E. 202) as two *hetairai* preparing to wash: “respectable women, like goddesses, should not be seen naked nor shown naked”. Kilmer (1993:163) responds to this interpretation by claiming that it would be unreasonable to assume that respectable nude women never washed, or that they did not remove their clothes in order to do so. Therefore, in Kilmer’s (1993:163) view, “nudity alone is never enough to identify a woman clearly as a *hetaira* or prostitute...that identity must come from other clues in the scene”.

Kreilinger (2006:233), sharing Kilmer’s viewpoint, argues that images of men washing were interpreted by scholars as young athletes from noble families indulging in washing after their strenuous exercises. Yet, depictions of nude women in near identical images are simply interpreted as prostitutes. In figure 7.1, for instance, the two nude female bathers would easily be mistaken for prostitutes based on the women’s short hair, especially the woman to the right. Short hair has been loosely attributed to female slaves and prostitutes; however, Kilmer (1993:160) and Kreilinger (2006:232) both agree that the length of the woman’s hair should

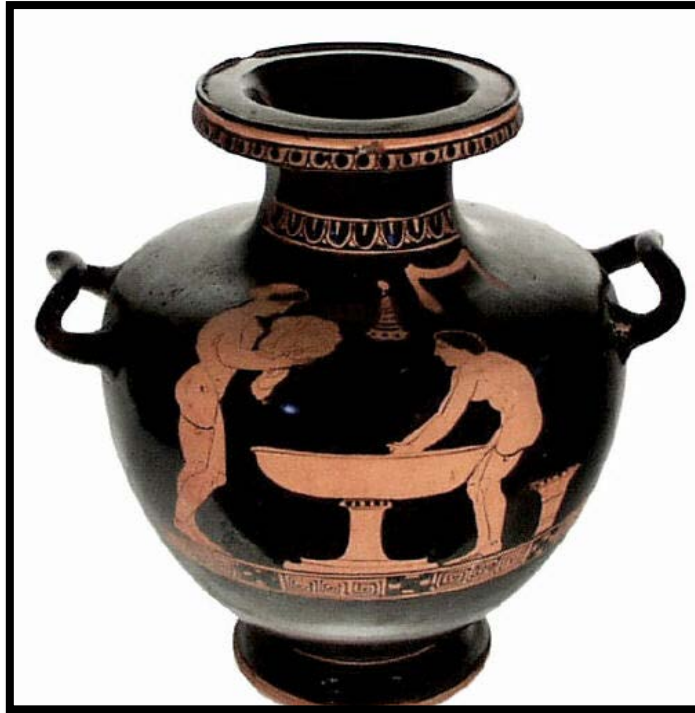


Figure 7.1 Two nude women washing at a laver, c. 450-400 BCE.

not be viewed as a legitimate indicator of a woman's status as various respectable female figures, such as the goddess Persephone, have been painted with this hairstyle.

Likewise, apotropaic amulets, worn around the upper thigh of both women, have also been viewed as a means to identify the *hetaira*; once more Kilmer (1993:160) and Kreilinger (2006:231-232) discard this connection. The former does so on grounds of the logical point that only nude women would display such jewellery as it was worn against the skin and thus beneath clothing. Clothed and respectable women alike could therefore also have worn these amulets without them being exposed to the naked eye the way they would have been when divested of clothing. Kreilinger (2006:231-232) simply points out that men and children were also depicted in vase-painting wearing these ribbons.

Furthermore, Kreilinger (2006:234-235) suggests that nobody was intended to watch activities in scenes such as figure 7.1, which she describes as depicting not prostitutes or goddesses washing, but instead "beautiful, attractive, young [women], [their] status no longer being of interest". Kreilinger (2006:236) therefore concludes that the two nude women washing at the laver in figure 7.1 should be viewed in a completely positive light, as has always been the case with the nude male body. Sutton (2009:272) likewise makes it very clear that these nude female bathers should be viewed as undeniably respectable figures, referring to ancient literary evidence to sustain his argument in which Hesiod's *Theogony* (5-6) speaks of muses bathing



their soft skin in multiple springs and rivers outside. In Hesiod's *Works and Days* (519-524) the poet refers to a female bather washing indoors, where the cold north wind, "does not pierce the soft-skinned girl (*pathenike*) who stays indoors at home, with mother, innocent of golden Aphrodite's works. She bathes her tender skin, anoints herself with oil, and going to an inner room at home, she takes a nap upon a winter day".<sup>23</sup> Thus, in Archaic literature, bathing appears to be both the norm, as well as a luxurious aspect of feminine *charis* (grace), a concept that strongly carries over into vase-painting, whether practiced indoors or outside by goddesses or simply mortal women (Sutton 2009:68).

Havelock (1995:23) agrees with Sutton, pointing out that all forms of water (spring, river and sea) were regarded by the ancient Greeks as both purifying and rejuvenating. Oakley and Sinos (1993:15) concur and refer to rivers especially when discussing the fertile power of water, pointing out how iconography would often represent them with the body of a bull, a symbol of male virility. Consequently, young women who would enter the water, would symbolically be cleansed of their maidenhood (Oakley and Sinos 1993:15).

A significant shift in the motif of the nude female bather, is that of the 'kneeling bather' (fig. 7.2 and 7.3), which Sutton (2009:272) claims made an appearance around approximately 430 BCE, but gained popularity in the years to follow, occurring on 21 extant Attic vases in total. Sutton (2009:273) argues that, although the nude female bather "represents the transformation of the bather into a noble heroic and divine nude", she still remains irrefutably erotic, referring to the powerful male gaze when he describes these scenes as "peephole pornography".



Figure 7.2 Nude women getting dressed after bathing, c. 475-425 BCE.

<sup>23</sup>Translated by Wender (Sutton 2009:68).

However, in contrast to the eroticised nude female bather, the nude and kneeling female bather, argues Sutton (2009:79), has an elevated social status to that of the former, and is thus not meant to be eroticised at all. “This new figural type,” claims Sutton (2009:79), is clearly marked as respectable, a noble figure, for it is used initially and primarily to represent brides, nymphs, select goddesses, and Helen”. Vases containing such ‘noble’ scenes, according to Sutton (1992:22-24), were designed for female use within the *oikos* and the nude female bather therefore went from functioning as “soft porn” (Skinner 2005:105) to a motif of domestication – the kneeling bather.

One of the most prominent appearances of the kneeling bather as a respectable figure, is her connection with pre-nuptial bathing. Figure 7.3 depicts a young, nude bride kneeling while being prepared for her wedding night with the assistance of Eros, once more illustrating the dual function of the bride’s nudity as erotic and ritualistic. Emphasising the bride’s nudity as ritualistic is the vase shape on which she appears, the pyxis, regarded as one of various vase shapes more commonly used for tasks attributed to women and thus described by Sutton (2009:83) as a “female shape”.<sup>24</sup> The vase shape appearing in the vase image itself further delineates the setting of the scene as ritualistic. Young women are depicted tying fillets around



Figure 7.3 Nude, kneeling bride preparing for her wedding, c. 450-400 BCE.

<sup>24</sup> Sutton’s (2009:83) research into the Attic vase shapes which depict the kneeling bather has revealed that 5% of the vases on which this respectable young woman makes an appearance, occurs on the pyxis, with the pelike and lekythos both at 23%.



Figure 7.4 Women tying ribbons to a loutrophoros during a wedding preparation, c. 450-400 BCE.

a nuptial loutrophoros, a vase shape connected to ritualistic events (fig. 7.4). This specific vase shape, also known as the ‘bath-carrier’, was used in ancient Greece to carry water to the bride and has been described by Oakley and Sinos (1993:15) as a “conspicuous sign” in vase-painting that a wedding was soon to take place, thus augmenting the ritualistic scenery of this vase image.

Lewis (2002:146-149) is not convinced of Sutton’s theory regarding the distinction between the nude female bather, whom he describes as eroticised, and the nude, kneeling bather, whom he perceives as a more heroic and honourable version of the former. Lewis (2002:149) poses a valid question when she asks, “is it possible to paint a nude which is not eroticised?” After all, asserts Lewis (2002:149), it is all but impossible to paint a respectable nude considering the fact that the response of the viewer, whether male or female, can never truly be anticipated or controlled. Nor would it be logical to assume that men only viewed nude women of ‘disreputable’ status on vases with lust and not nude women of the more ‘respectable’ kind.

Thus, Lewis (2002:149) concludes that, whether the artist depicted a nymph, athlete or bride, the image of the nude female figure can always be eroticised. Lewis (2002:149) therefore makes it clear that viewing earlier scenes of nude female bathers as erotic and later nude female

bathers as respectable, is pointless. Although Lewis makes a valuable point in her argument, it can also not be denied that water and washing did indeed play a significant social and ritualistic role in ancient Greek society, as indicated through a vast amount of ancient literature consisting of various rituals and mythical tales of ancient Greece. An example of such rituals is shown at the sanctuary of Demeter where women had to wash their hands in basins as a purification ritual, after which they would then enter the sea as a rite of initiation and to ensure the young women's fecundity (Havelock 1995:23).

In myth, the mythic baths of Hera would regularly restore her virginity; as for virginal goddesses such as Artemis and Athena, their baths would function as rituals of purification or "of renewed empowerment and youthfulness" (Havelock 1995:24). In Greek and Roman antiquity, then, states Havelock (1995:25), bathing would be viewed as restorative pleasures enjoyed specifically by women, including goddesses: "religious purification, fecundity, and well-being and renewal after sex were benefits bestowed by washing the whole parts of the body in the sea, in a fresh water pool, or in a basin set up in the house or court". Water and washing thus represented purification, not pornography; as such, it would not be too inappropriate to refer to these nude women as respectfully eroticised women, desirable due to their virtuous state.

Other theories on the function of the nude female bather include Hackworth Petersen's (1997:44) proposal that the erotic images of nude women bathing were meant to serve the *polis* by providing the users of pottery with appropriate constructions concerning their sexuality: "[...] scenes of industrious and virtuous females also helped to reinforce the ideological framework of patriarchy. In other words, the pleasurable images of female toil work well with patriarchal propaganda and notions of female virtue". This theory would, of course, only hold up to scrutiny if nude women were indeed viewed as ideal female figures in the first place; and so one can argue that Hackworth Petersen agrees with Sutton and Kreilinger that these nude female figures may well have represented the female version of the virtuous and the heroic nude man.

Skinner (2005:105), on the other hand, interprets these images as a combination of ritual and vulnerability and sees the nuptial bath not only as the girl's preparation for her wedding, but also as her exposure to the viewer's eye, which, in turn, is a reminder of her vulnerability during this crucial phase of transition. Skinner (2005:105) clarifies her point by referring to Greek

myth and ritual, in which the association between marriage and death – especially for maidens – is well established.

### 7.3 Conclusion

Figure 7.1 is a valuable example of respectable nude female figures being labelled *hetairai* due to iconographic indicators that have most likely been erroneously attributed to the ‘disreputable’ female form on Attic vases. Amulets, for instance, were also worn by men and children, and short hair has similarly appeared on highly respectable female deities in Greek vase-painting. Furthermore, the amount of ancient literature that discusses the purification and ritualistic properties of water is too high to simply perceive nude women participating in these events as prostitutes.

Moreover, the motif of the nude, kneeling female bather (fig. 7.2-7.3) as the highest form of female virtue and honour could very well be possible as these figures often make an appearance on vases meant for female use and were therefore less likely to function as pornographic material for the male gaze. Consequently, the female bather’s role as a representation and constant reminder of female grace, virtue and behaviour should also be considered. At the same time, Lewis’ viewpoint that the kneeling bather could well have been eroticised based on the fact that the viewer’s response to the woman’s nudity could simply never be controlled, suggests that an element of the erotic in these vase images is unavoidable. This does not mean, however, that Kreilinger and Sutton’s theories are necessarily flawed, as there is nothing that says the erotic and the virtuous cannot co-exist together as a manifestation of the heroic and honourable female nude.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

The nude female figure has been represented in art for millennia, and this form or motif of being nude has intrigued and captivated viewers and scholars alike. The aim of this thesis was to consider the potential functions of the nude female figure on red-figure Athenian vases of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE since it is my view that these functions, as discussed by a variety of scholars, have been oversimplified. My survey of the scholarship reveals three primary viewpoints regarding the function of the nude female figure on Attic vases: 1) the widespread assumption that her nude state is automatically indicative of a ‘disreputable’ status (i.e. it means that she is a prostitute or *hetaira*); 2) that the nude female form evokes eroticism (an eroticised interpretation of the figure and/or an erotic response in the viewer); and 3) the less frequent argument that various other – potentially non-sexualised – functions can be attributed to these figures on Athenian vases.

The popularity of the first two viewpoints can be ascribed to the manner in which scholars, perhaps looking through a modern western ‘lens’, closely align the female figure’s lack of clothing with eroticism and pornography and assume that respectable citizen women and wives would not be depicted this way, nor would they identify with these depictions. In this way, the scholars make the close link between female nudity and the social status of *hetairai*. Making this link in such a simplistic way means that the other potential functions of the nude female form are often overlooked. It is for this reason that other scholars have raised the point that there is a need to view these nude female figures through the ‘cultural lens’ which produced and viewed these images. Looking through this lens would ensure that the social, cultural, religious, political or ideological signs prevalent in the image would be taken into consideration; as a result, modern biases associated with these seemingly ‘provocative’ images, could more easily be avoided.

To this end, an iconographical analysis was chosen as the most appropriate approach to viewing the fifteen images selected for the corpus of this study. Through this approach, then, this study could re-assess these images in an attempt to place them within more appropriate categories of function. The results of the study confirmed that, while eroticism was certainly one of the potential functions of a nude female figure, there are indeed other possible functions of this form on red-figure vases of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. In addition to the function of eroticism and pornography, four other primary functions were identified. These are: religion and ritual, apotropaism, violence and vulnerability, and female agency. A further result was that these



functions were found not to be exclusive, in other words one function did not necessarily preclude other functions from also operating in the same image. The appropriate function(s) of the nude female figure were determined based on the iconographic indicators that were identified in the vase images, which also assisted in divulging the context of the image.

In light of these emerging functions, it can be said with relative confidence that the nude female figure on Athenian vases has indeed been oversimplified in contemporary scholarship. This was likely due to the manner in which her nudity was generally perceived as merely representative of *hetairai*. It can thus be suggested that, by not properly contextualising these female figures, scholars are inadvertently perpetuating a discourse of female stereotyping by continuously relegating them to the function of eroticism and pornography, without taking into consideration her prominence in other functions, such as religion and ritual, as well as female agency. In conclusion then, it appears crucial that scholarship ‘repaints’ these polysemic, female bodies in a manner that would more comprehensively and constructively demonstrate their multiple functions in Athenian vase-painting.

Through an iconographic analysis of these vase images, a deeper understanding of the society which created them could perhaps also be accomplished. Although these vase images do not represent ancient Greek reality, it can nevertheless assist with our investigation into the cultural norms and expectations of ancient Athens. For instance, an in-depth assessment of these vases indicates that ancient Athenian women were possibly not as contained and controlled as modern literature tends to suggest. Rather, these women played crucial roles in religion and ritual, and thus in society in general. Furthermore, from these nude female figures, the possibility of the heroic female nude has emerged; these virginal maidens represent the ideal of ancient Greek femininity, but also illustrate that women, like men, could be viewed in vase-painting not only as aesthetically pleasing, but also as morally pleasing and agents of honour.

A study into the functions of the nude female form in Athenian vase-painting has also revealed the probability that scenes containing violence against women are not always as straightforward as the image might suggest. There is the possibility that these nude female figures exposed the contempt ancient Greek men felt at abuse against women in the ancient Greek world, or that the violence we read in the image is due to predisposed interpretations, based on previous misperceptions and underlying modern biases, when there is little in these images to indicate violent intent. A lack of eye contact, for example, though perhaps impersonal, does not dictate a violent setting. We must therefore consider the way in which our

incomplete interpretations of these images might render these nude women as constant victims of violence and vulnerability, or abused prostitutes, when a deeper investigation into these images might simply illustrate unconventional sex between lovers or spouses. From prostitute to priestess, whether vulnerable or powerful, virginal or eroticised, the nude female figure should thus be recognised, even celebrated, for its multifunctional and multifarious nature on Athenian red-figure vases.



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Fig. 1: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Herakles and the Nemean Lion wrestling*, c. 500-400 BCE. Athenian red-figure cup attributed to the Oltos Painter. Currently residing in Musee Archeologique, Aleria (fig. 2.1). Beazley Database Vase Number: 9445.

Fig. 2: Louvre Museum [Online]. 2016. *Marble statue of Nike of Samothrace*, c. 190 BCE. Currently residing in the Louvre, Paris, MA 2369 (fig. 2.2).

[http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/victoiredesamothrace/victoiredesamothrace\\_acc\\_en.html](http://musee.louvre.fr/oal/victoiredesamothrace/victoiredesamothrace_acc_en.html)

Fig. 3: *Centaur attacking a Lapith woman*, c. 470-457 BCE. West pediment of the Temple of Zeus. Currently residing in the Archaeology Museum of Olympia, Greece. (Cohen 1997: 73; fig. 2.3).

Fig. 4: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *The kneeling bather*, c. 400-300 BCE. Athenian red-figure pelike. Currently residing in the National Museum of Athens, Greece (fig. 2.4). Beazley Database Vase Number: 230434.

Fig. 5: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Eros assisting a maiden in the marriage ritual*, c. 450-400 BCE. Athenian red-figure pelike attributed to the Washing Painter. Currently residing in Havana, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (fig. 3.1). Beazley Database Vase Number: 214916.

Fig. 6: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Women dancing around a large, erected phallos during a religious festival*, c. 500-450 BCE. Athenian red-figure kylix. Currently residing in Rome, National Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia (fig. 3.2). Beazley Database Vase Number: 9017718.

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Fig.7: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Satyr attacking a sleeping maenad*, c. 480 BCE. Attic red-figure kylix attributed to Onesimos. Currently residing in the Zimmerman Collection, Berlin (fig. 3.3). Beazley Database Vase Number: 5969.

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(image)

- Fig. 8: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Satyr and hetaira in a symposium context*, c. 480 BCE. Attic red-figure kylix attributed to Onesimos. Currently residing in the Zimmerman Collection, Berlin (fig. 3.4). Beazley Database Vase Number: 5969  
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(image)
- Fig. 9: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Nude woman carrying a large phallos with eyes*, c. 500-450 BCE. Athenian red-figure column krater attributed to the Pan Painter. Currently residing in Pergamonmuseum, Berlin (fig. 4.1). Beazley Database Vase Number: 206285.
- Fig. 10: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Nude woman holding phallos bird*, c. 500-450 BCE. Attic red-figure amphora attributed to the Flying-Angel Painter. Currently residing in Musee du Petit Palais, Paris (fig. 4.2). Beazley Database Vase Number: 202706.
- Fig. 11: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Nude Woman with phallos climbing into a basket full of phalloi*, c. 500-450 BCE. Red-figure Pelike Currently residing in the Museo Arch. Regionale Paolo Orsi, Syracuse (fig. 4.3). Beazley Database Vase Number: 202175
- Fig. 12: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Rape of Cassandra*, c. 475-425 BCE. Athenian red-figure Nolan amphora attributed to the Ethiop Painter. Currently residing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (fig. 5.1). Beazley Database Vase Number: 207783.
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- Fig. 14. *Ancient Greek warrior about to spear an Amazonian woman with one breast exposed*, c. 470-460 BCE. Attic red-figure volute krater attributed to the Painter of the Woolly Satyrs. Currently residing in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Cohen 1997:75; fig. 5.3).
- Fig. 15: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Men forcing women to have violent sexual relations with them*, c. 525-475 BCE. Athenian red-figure cup attributed to the Pedieus Painter.

Currently residing in the Louvre Museum, Paris (fig. 5.4). Beazley Database Vase Number: 200694.

Fig. 16: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Men forcing women to have violent sexual relations with them*, c. 525-475 BCE. Athenian red-figure cup attributed to the Pedieus Painter. Currently residing in the Louvre Museum, Paris (fig. 5.5). Beazley Database Vase Number: 200694.

Fig. 17. Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Youth wielding sandal grabs naked woman's hair*, c. 500-450. Athenian red-figure cup attributed to the Foundry Painter. Currently residing in Civico Museo Archeologico, Milan (fig. 5.6). Beazley Database Vase Number: 275962.

Fig. 18. *Men and women partaking in sexual activities*, c. 500-450 BCE. Athenian red-figure cup attributed to the Byrgos Painter. Currently residing in the Museo Archeologico, Florence (Keuls 1985:185; fig. 5.7).

Fig. 19: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Hetairai entertaining guests at a sympotic event*, c. 475-425 BCE. Athenian red-figure kylix attributed to the Tarquinia Painter. Currently residing in the Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, Basel (fig. 6.1). Beazley Database Vase Number: 211438.

Fig. 20: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Rear-entry sexual intercourse between man and woman*, c. 500-450 BCE. Attic red-figure cup attributed to Douris. Currently residing in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 6.2). Beazley Database Vase Number: 205288.

Fig. 21: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Man and women copulating on klinê*, c. 500-450 BCE. Athenian red-figure cup attributed to the Triptolemos Painter. Currently located in the Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Tarquinia (fig. 6.3). Beazley Database Vase Number: 203885.

Fig. 22: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Two nude women washing at a laver*, c. 450-400 BCE. Athenian red-figure hydria attributed to the Washing Painter. Currently residing in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (fig. 7.1). Beazley Database Vase Number: 214966.

Fig. 23: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Nude women getting dressed after bathing*, c. 475-425 BCE. Athenian red-figure cup attributed to the Boot Painter. Currently residing in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 7.2). Beazley Database Vase Number: 210165.

Fig. 24: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Nude, kneeling bride preparing for her wedding*, c. 450-400 BCE. Athenian red-figure pyxis. Currently residing in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (fig. 7.3). Beazley Database Vase Number: 44750.

Fig. 25: Beazley Archive [Online]. 2012. *Women tying ribbons to a loutrophoros during a wedding preparation*, c. 450-400 BCE. Athenian red-figure pyxis. Currently residing in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (fig. 7.4). Beazley Database Vase Number: 44750.

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