

IMAGES OF ANCIENT GREEK PEDERASTY: BOYS WERE THEIR GODS

BY ANDREW LEAR AND EVA CANTARELLA. PP. XVII + 262, B&W FIGS. 111. ROUTLEDGE, NEW YORK 2008. \$115. ISBN 978-0-415-22367-6 (CLOTH).

While sex may never go out of fashion, at certain times it does seem to attract more attention than others. We are currently going through a boom time in the study of ancient sexuality unparalleled since the late 1980s–early 1990s, yet few recent works promise to have the longevity of this lively and intelligent study of the iconography of Greek pederasty. This extremely likable and well-presented book, whose focus is sixth- and fifth-century vase painting, will prove essential reading for anyone working in the field of ancient sexuality and/or classical Greek iconography.

This book attempts the difficult task of appealing to both scholars and a wider, non-specialist audience who may know little or nothing about the subject. This requires some deft handling on the part of the authors, and while some may find the pace a little slow moving at times, or the tone just a little too avuncular, most readers will undoubtedly find the clarity with which the information is presented somewhat refreshing. The authors explain their terminology clearly and are careful to articulate any assumptions underlying their discussions in such a way as to open up, rather than close down, debate. Another major strength of the book is the assured way in which the authors introduce the readers to previous scholarship in this area while also providing a clear route through, and tools to make sense of, the ancient evidence. Significant here is the huge number of high-quality images (111 in total). The overall result is that the reader gains a comprehensive overview of the subject matter on which the authors then build their insights into Greek pederasty and its iconography. The chapters deal with courtship, ideals/idealization, consummation, pederasty and the gods, *kalos* inscriptions, vase dating,

and fragments (plus an appendix of images based on the work of Keith DeVries).

The introduction is a survey of the literary evidence (Cantarella's main contribution to the book, the bulk of which is credited to Lear), followed by a first look at vase painting, during which Lear outlines his approach; namely, that an image may be broken down into its constituent parts (e.g., scene type, figure, gesture, prop), the sum total of which allows it to be read and understood. In practice, this means that images can be grouped together into useful (often overlapping) categories and subcategories (e.g., different kinds of courtship scenes), with some vases patently providing exceptions to the general rules. And so we have the presence of different kinds of gifts in courtship scenes, for example, most of which tend to be associated with either hunting or athletics (but with notable exceptions). But as well as these familiar categories, we find some bold readings, such as Lear's intriguing analysis of the much-discussed "up-and-down" hand gestures of *erastai* (114–15), and surprising data, such as the prevalence of youth-youth and youth-boy (as opposed to adult-boy and adult-youth) pairings.

The central aim of the book is also its unique strength: not to get inside the social practice that the iconography represents (although, naturally, this is discussed) but rather to understand the iconographic language itself. This approach means that many stale arguments can be left behind. So, for example, the portrayal of boys as impassive during sex is seen as a way of representing their self-control (a virtue also reflected in their small penises); certain gifts and the paraphernalia of the gymnasium or symposium are seen as shorthand ways of evoking a pederastic, erotic context;

and so on. Some of these visual symbols undoubtedly do reflect some form of social reality (e.g., the gymnasium as an arena for courtship), whereas others probably do not (e.g., one wonders just how successful the tactic of thrusting a plant frond in a boy's face would have been for a man trying to gain sexual favors). What Lear's patient and unforced analysis of the evidence reveals, however, is a common-sense way of reading the individual elements of the imagery.

Indeed, it is common sense that characterizes the analyses in this book. Multiple meanings and competing readings are discussed (and sometimes left open, sometimes not), but what the authors essentially do is build up a grammar of pederastic imagery. The book is (pleasingly) short on radical theories, but (equally pleasingly) full of enlightening aperçus. And the authors are not afraid to leave the odd loose end dangling for others to pick up; some imagery does, after all, resist easy interpretation (e.g., scenes of male-male anal sex in nonorgiastic/comic settings or the much-discussed Eurymedon vase).

If there are two headline conclusions in this book (or, to put it another way, if there are two large-scale findings capable of raising some scholars' blood pressure), they are these: The clue to the first is in the book's subtitle ("boys are our gods," adapted from a remark attributed to Anacreon). The authors constantly stress

the respect afforded to, and the idealization of, the *eromenos* in images of pederasty. Subtly distancing themselves from the Dover/Halperin idea of sex as a zero-sum competition, they counter claims that the *eromenos* is degraded (e.g., even the few slave *eromenoi* depicted are treated with respect, it is claimed; the popular idea that the *eromenos* is to be viewed as the hunted hare so often given as a courting gift is also rejected). Second, pederastic imagery is far more common in the fifth century than is generally admitted and, important to note, develops in a way analogous to heterosexual erotic imagery (i.e., with a tendency to prudishness). Again, here is a subtle attack on views (espoused most vociferously by Hubbard) that pederasty became an object of derision under Athens' democracy. However, Lear and Cantarella's criticisms of other scholars' work are always scrupulously polite, and they are evidently not interested in courting controversy for its own sake. This is a well-balanced and superbly written book—and one that is no doubt destined for classic status.

JAMES ROBSON

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICAL STUDIES
OPEN UNIVERSITY
MILTON KEYNES MK7 6AA
UNITED KINGDOM
J.E.ROBSON@OPEN.AC.UK