



The Imagery of the Athenian Symposium

Kathryn Topper

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The late sixth and early fifth centuries BC were a dynamic time in the history of the symposium, and hundreds of vase paintings from this period show people engaged in sympotic activities. Most scholars have understood these images as illustrations of contemporary Athenian practices, but such an interpretation cannot account for the enormous variety of settings, costumes, and participants in the images, nor is it easily reconciled with recent methodological developments in the study of vase painting. Noting the close link between the symposium and the polis in ancient thought, this book approaches the images not as documents of contemporary sympotic practice but as vehicles for exploring what it meant to be a Greek community. It argues that many of the images depict imagined ancestral symposia and that they thus shed new light on how the Athenians envisioned the history of the symposium and its importance to their city.

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