

JORGE BRAVO : **Boys, Herms, and the Objectification of Desire on Athenian Symptotic Vases**

In depicting scenes of youths in the company of a herm, the painters of Athenian sympotic pottery ostensibly portray a scene of daily life. Some, however, construct these scenes for viewing through an erotic lens, drawing on the fact that the two key iconographic elements of the stone herm, the bearded male head and the erect phallus, recall the iconography of the ἐραστής, the older male lover in traditional Greek pederasty. Representing herms in the company of young males thus allows the artists to play on the iconographic schemes of pederastic courtship while implicating the symposiast's gaze, which becomes equated with the herm's.

The fact that the erotic interplay in the scenes takes place between a living ἐρώμενος (the desirable boy) and inanimate ἐραστής (the herm) is also significant, for it consciously inverts another interplay of person and object: the adult male symposiast who views and handles the symptotic vase. In the latter relationship, the roles are reversed, for now the lover is alive, and the vase, with its painted youth, is the object of the erotic gaze. In light of this allusive power, the herm serves as one of a series of signs through which vase painters show an awareness of their own power to manipulate desire for the symposiasts who engage with their work.

Mots-clés :

Herms – Vase Painting – Pederasty – Courtship – Desire – Gaze – Touch – Humor –
Facture – Symposium