Spectators at the sides of narrative vase paintings have long been at the margins of scholarship, but a study of their appearance shows that they provide a model for the ancient viewing experience. They also reflect social and gender roles in archaic Athens. This study explores the phenomenon of spectators through a database built from a census of the Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum, which reveals that the figures flourished in Athenian vase painting during the last two-thirds of the sixth century B.C.E. Using models developed from psychoanalysis and the theory of the gaze, ritual studies, and gender studies, Stansbury-O’Donnell shows how these “spectators” emerge as models for social and gender identification in the archaic city, encoding in their gestures and behavior archaic attitudes about gender and status.

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VASE PAINTING, GENDER, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY IN ARCHAIC ATHENS

MARK D. STANSBURY-O’DONNELL

University of St. Thomas
To Wendy
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This project grew out of some unanswered questions regarding spectators in narrative images that lingered from my earlier study of narrative art. It was not clear in the beginning where these questions would lead, and I am thankful for the help and guidance of a number of people as my work has developed and changed over the past five years. Most particularly, I would like to thank Jerry Pollitt and Alan Shapiro, who have supported the project from its early stages with their comments and letters and who have provided models for me to follow. I am deeply grateful.

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