

## PICTURING DEATH IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

This is the first in-depth study of the pictures found on Attic white lekythoi. These funerary vases, placed in and on Athenian graves, have long been appreciated for their beautiful polychrome images that evoke the style of lost classical wall and mural paintings. The most important visual source for classical Greek funerary customs, they exhibit a range of subject matter, most of it connected with death. This richly illustrated volume closely examines the four major types of scenes: domestic pictures, the mythological conductors of the soul, the *prothesis* (wake), and visits to the grave. In addition to an analysis of the iconographical development of each type, it places these pictures in their historical, social, cultural, archaeological, and literary contexts, documenting relationships between the “rites of passage,” Athenian history, the changing perceptions of death in fifth-century Athens, and funerary epigrams and laments.

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# PICTURING DEATH IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

 THE EVIDENCE OF THE WHITE LEKYTHOI

JOHN H. OAKLEY

*The College of William and Mary*



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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AA</i>	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
<i>ABL</i>	C. H. E. Haspels, <i>Attic Black-figured Lekythoi</i> (Paris, 1936)
<i>ABV</i>	J. D. Beazley, <i>Attic Black-figure Vase-Painters</i> (Oxford, 1956)
<i>AchillesPt</i>	J. H. Oakley, <i>The Achilles Painter</i> (Mainz, 1997)
<i>AE</i>	Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς
<i>Add<sup>2</sup></i>	T. H. Carpenter, <i>Beazley Addenda</i> , 2d ed. (Oxford, 1989)
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>Alexiou, Lament</i>	M. Alexiou, <i>The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition</i> (Cambridge, 1974)
<i>AM</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung</i>
<i>AntK</i>	<i>Antike Kunst</i>
<i>ArchDelt</i>	Ἀρχαιολογικὸν Δελτίον
<i>ARV<sup>2</sup></i>	J. D. Beazley, <i>Attic Red-figure Vase-Painters</i> , 2d ed. (Oxford, 1963)
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i>
<i>BM</i>	British Museum
<i>BSA</i>	<i>The Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
<i>BWPr</i>	<i>Winckelmannsprogramm der Archäologischen Gesellschaft zu Berlin</i>
<i>CAT</i>	C. W. Clairmont, <i>Classical Attic Tombstones</i> (Kilchberg, 1993)
<i>City Beneath the City</i>	Λ. Πάρλαμα – Ν. Χρ. Σταμπολίδης, <i>Η Πολη κατω απο την Πολη</i> (Athens, 2000)

Clairmont, <i>Patrios Nomos</i>	C. W. Clairmont, <i>Patrios Nomos. Public Burial in Athens during the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.</i> (Oxford, 1983)
CVA	<i>Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum</i>
DAI	Deutsches Archäologisches Institut
DarSag	C. Daremberg and E. Saglio, <i>Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines</i> (Paris, 1875)
Fairbanks	A. Fairbanks, <i>Athenian White Lekythoi</i> , vols. I and II (New York, 1907 and 1914)
Felten, <i>Kerameikos</i>	F. Felten, "Weissgrundige Lekythen aus dem Athener Kerameikos," <i>AM</i> 91 (1976): 77–113
Garland, <i>Death</i>	R. Garland, <i>The Greek Way of Death</i> (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985)
Hame, <i>Nomizomena</i>	J. K. Hame, <i>Ta Nomizomena: Private Greek Death-Ritual in the Historical Sources and Tragedy</i> (Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr, 1999)
Hoffmann, <i>Sotades</i>	H. Hoffmann, <i>Sotades. Symbols of Immortality on Greek Vases</i> (Oxford, 1997)
Holst-Warhaft, <i>Voices</i>	G. Holst-Warhaft, <i>Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature</i> (London and New York, 1992)
JdI	<i>Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
Kavvadias, <i>Sabouroff</i>	G. G. Kavvadias, <i>Ο Ζωγράφος του Sabouroff</i> (Athens, 2000)
<i>Kerameikos</i> VII,2	E. Kunze-Götte et al., <i>Die Nekropole von der Mitte des 6. bis zum Ende des 5. Jahrhunderts. Die Beigaben, Kerameikos VII, 2</i> (Munich, 1999)
Koch-Brinkmann, <i>Polychrome</i>	U. Koch-Brinkmann, <i>Polychrome Bilder auf weissgrundigen Lekythen</i> (Munich, 1999)
Kurtz, <i>AWL</i>	D. C. Kurtz, <i>Athenian White Lekythoi</i> (Oxford, 1975)
Kurtz-Boardman	D. C. Kurtz and J. Boardman, <i>Greek Burial Customs</i> (Ithaca, N.Y., 1971)
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> (Zurich, 1981–99)
MAR	Museo Archeologico Regionale
MFA	Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
MMA	Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York
MN	Museo Nazionale
<i>MonPiot</i>	<i>Monuments et mémoires. Fondation E. Piot</i>
MuM	Münzen und Medaillen
Nakayama	N. Nakayama, <i>Untersuchung der auf weissgrundigen Lekythen dargestellten Grabmaeler</i> (Freiburg, 1982)



NM	National Museum
ÖJh	<i>Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien</i>
<i>Pandora</i>	E. D. Reeder, <i>Pandora: Women in Classical Greece</i> (Princeton, N.J., 1995)
<i>Para</i>	J. D. Beazley, <i>Paralipomena</i> (Oxford, 1971)
<i>PhialePt</i>	J. H. Oakley, <i>The Phiale Painter</i> (Mainz, 1990)
Pottier, <i>Étude</i>	E. Pottier, <i>Étude sur les lécythes blancs attiques</i> (Paris, 1883)
RE	Pauly-Wissowa, <i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
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<i>Thanatos-Kleophon</i>	F. Felten, <i>Thanatos- und Kleophonmaler</i> (Munich, 1971)
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Vermeule, <i>Aspects</i>	E. Vermeule, <i>Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry</i> (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979)
Waser, <i>Charon</i>	O. Waser, <i>Charon, Charun, Charos</i> (Berlin, 1898)
Wehgartner, <i>AWK</i>	I. Wehgartner, <i>Attisch weissgrundige Keramik</i> (Mainz, 1983)

## FOREWORD

Attic white lekythoi with polychrome decoration are very special vessels. Not only are some of the most beautiful of all Greek vase-paintings among their number, but more is known about them than perhaps any other major class of pottery from antiquity, with the possible exception of Panathenaic amphorae. For the most part, we know how the lekythoi were made, that they were oil containers, that they were called lekythoi in ancient Athens, that their function was primarily funerary, and that they were mainly produced and used in one region of the ancient world, Athens/Attica, for a limited period of time, ca. 470–400 B.C. Nevertheless, although scholars have paid considerable attention to them, no thorough study of the scenes decorating them exists. This book aims to remedy the situation by providing a detailed analysis of their pictures, while also seeking to find the reasons why these specific images were chosen and deemed suitable by ancient Athenians for their funerary rites – a basic question that has never been fully addressed.

The Introduction surveys the history of scholarship about these vessels and places them in their broad archaeological, artistic, cultural, and historical settings. Each of the four following chapters is devoted to a major category of scene: domestic, the *prothesis*, mythological, and visit to the grave. The primary approach in these four chapters is a traditional, iconographical one that looks at the images chronologically, observing how compositions continue or change over time and their relationship to each other, although readers will observe that I often look beyond these basic tenets. Special attention has been paid to individual vase-painters, pointing out their role in this process, a factor all too often forgotten in iconographical studies. The final chapter is iconological and seeks to place the images in their precise contexts. The reasons for the start and end of the white-ground lekythoi, as well as the social, cultural, and artistic reasons for the choice of the images depicted on them are explored. A variety of methodologies

is incorporated, including anthropological theory and semiotics. In addition, parallels between the images' compositional structure and the attitudes toward death displayed by them, and those exhibited in Greek literature, are used to support the interpretations presented.

I have attempted to write a book that is of use to both student and scholar, hoping that the former will forgive places where I have not given extensive background information, and the latter where I have given too much. For this reason I have kept the endnotes short, normally referring only to the most recent and important discussions, which in turn refer back to earlier bibliography. No compromise is ever really completely satisfactory to all, but my goal of making the study useful to a broad audience is, I hope, an acceptable reason for any perceived defect. As the reader will discover, the range of subjects and the amount of variety in depicting any one subject on the lekythoi are greater than most scholars have realized in the past, for which reason I have also tried to illustrate a good number of the vessels I talk about. In this way this study may also serve as a form of handbook.

Lists of lekythoi with specific subjects are given for Chapters 2, 3, and 4 to facilitate easy reference and for the reader quickly to obtain an idea of just how popular a specific scene was with a particular artist. These lists are not meant to be complete, for too many lekythoi remain unpublished and in storerooms inaccessible to scholars to make this feasible. When the header for a list starts with "some," this indicates that the list represents only a selection and is less complete than others. No overall list is provided for Chapter 5, as the vast majority of the more than two thousand known lekythoi show scenes at the grave, the subject of that chapter, which makes such a list not only cumbersome but also logistically impractical. The references to the individual vases are not complete, although I provide one to an illustration whenever possible. The reader should consult the references given for additional bibliography, particularly for vases cited in Beazley's lists.

The Bibliography lists only those works directly concerned with white-ground lekythoi, so that it may serve as a research tool for those interested in the subject. These studies are referred to in the Notes by the author's last name and year of publication, unless they are abbreviated. Other references are given in full, with the exception of those found in the List of Abbreviations at the start of the book. Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. "White" and "white-ground" are used interchangeably according to convention.



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