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INTRODUCTION

Talking about the symposion

> The *symposion*? It is on the brushes of all the painters, on the lips of all the poets – so they say. Is it that simple?
>
> Schmitt Pantel (1990) 16

With this question, Pauline Schmitt Pantel embarked upon a re-evaluation of the symposion, or 'drinking party', in Archaic Greek culture. Her primary goal was to integrate what scholarship was increasingly defining as a private gathering of elite males into the civic arena, an argument she pursued on a grander scale in her monograph *La cité au banquet* (1992). Recently Oswyn Murray, inspired especially by contemporary anthropology, had established the symposion as a *Männerbund*, a select all-male group bound by mutual obligation and shared activity. The accessibility of sympotic 'conversation' had also been improved by the increasing attribution of monodic poetry to such convivial gatherings. Thanks to these developments, a strong sense was emerging of the symposion as a venue for Greek elites to consolidate their social and political networks at a remove from their wider communities.[1] At the same time, new analyses of the figured decoration on drinking ware that originated especially from Corinth and Athens provided insights into the entertainments and the socio-psychological potency of drinking together.[2] As awareness of the symposion

[1] Murray (1982, 1983a, 1983b). Singing symposiasts were already posited by Reitzenstein (1893) 45–86, who made the banquet the performance venue for elegiac verse; Von der Mühll (1975) 497–504, originally delivered in 1926, throws fragments by Alcaeus, Archilochus, Mimnermus, Xenophanes, Theognis, Pindar, Anacreon, and Euenus of Paros into the mix. Recently, the most influential studies placing such poetry in sympotic contexts include Rösler (1980), Gentili (1981, 1988), Rossi (1983), Vetta (1983), and E. L. Bowie (1986, 1994).

[2] Led particularly by Lissarrague (1990a), following earlier studies of sympotic scenes in art by Fehr (1971) and Dentzer (1982); see n. 9, below. For convergences in scholarly endeavour, see Hobden (2009a) 271–3. Murray (2003) reflects more deeply on the intellectual trends that stimulated the rise in sympotic scholarship.

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as an important cultural institution in Archaic Greece was growing, Schmitt Pantel requested a pause to consider the precise nature of the event envisaged by the poets and painters whose creations were eagerly drawn upon as evidence. Her response to the question 'Is it that simple?' was designed to complicate the picture, to highlight the continuity within allegedly 'public' and 'private' settings for communal drinking by means of image and song, and to make sympotic activity a potentially civic pastime. Two decades later, the scholarly wheel continues to turn. While Murray's work remains foundational, as do the articles in his edited volume *Sympotica*, which features Schmitt Pantel's essay, nuance has been added and critiqued in turn. A civic dimension is not controversial. The scope of who participated in symposia and why has been extended and refined to reflect increased attention to specific contexts for sympotic poetry and artefacts, to take account of ideological influences on earlier work, and to display sensitivity to historical development and circumstance. The symposion as it is perceived today is anything but simple.

Nonetheless, Schmitt Pantel's prefatory query remains pertinent: 'It is on the brushes of all the painters, on the lips of all the poets.' Symposia greet us through items produced by individuals well over two thousand years ago from within the cultures to which the party belonged. They are representations: depictions drawn on figured pottery or sculpted in stone, or oral and written re-imaginings of the event staged in metred verse and prose. If we look to this material for evidence of the symposion, what exactly are we seeing? Today we are attuned to the disjunction between representation and reality. To depict (to paint, to photograph, to describe in writing) an object is to adopt a position towards it: to filtrate it through one's 'lens', to produce a simulacrum, a likeness, an image determined by that position. The photograph, for example, was at first considered an objective snapshot of the world. However, we are now conscious that its contents are carefully shaped by the photographer, who decides what to focus on and what to exclude, and who may deliberately manipulate the lighting, composition and setting, or *mise-en-scène*. These choices may be determined by the photographer's purpose, whether to contribute to a news story, or to record a family event or to produce a provocative piece of art. No representation is created without purpose or intent, and the act of creation imposes shape and generates narratives to fit. Furthermore, at the moment someone looks at, hears or reads a representation, a communication begins. This conversation is determined not only by the shape and contents of the representation, but by the contexts in which it is seen or read, and by the preoccupations of its

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audience.[3] So, newspaper readers might interpret a front-page photograph as illustrative of the headline or article it accompanies, or they may bring to bear their own ideas or experiences to make sense of its apparent contents. As an object of 'reception', to use the theoretical jargon that describes this process of engagement, all representations are animate and active.[4] Hence, the symposia we confront in ancient literature and art are not staid depictions of essential truths, but abstract conceptualizations that come alive in the telling.

Take one example from the brush of one painter: the symposion that appears on an early sixth-century Corinthian black-figure krater now in the Louvre and attributed to the Athana Painter (Figure 1).[5] Spread around the belly of the krater, its couches and occupants regularly spaced, this sympotic scene is schematized to fit the shape of the pot. It is drafted according to the experience and imagination of a painter working in the Corinthian black-figure tradition; he may work from a standard repertoire or lived memory or hearsay, so that the details of its execution may be determined by preconceptions or realism or fantasy.[6] And it possesses a communicative power, whether the krater sits amidst drinkers as a container for mixed wine or is utilized in the Etruscan funerary rituals at Caere that account for its preservation down into the present day. The balanced distribution of couches around the belly, the interplay between men and women on these couches, the decoration of their fabrics, the positioning of the lyres and the tables and the food and the armour all speak to their viewer. Social relationships, gender relations, and ideologies of luxury and war may be articulated for living symposiasts, or for buriers of the Etruscan dead, who may recognize themselves or the deceased in the depicted action, or observe

[3] The classic study of this triangulated interplay between creator, object and viewer in the visual realm is Berger (1972), although his work is very much a reflection of a developing trend in art history that mirrored contemporary advancements also in literary theory: for these, see Culler (1982).

[4] To quote one exponent of this theory in the realm of Classics, there is a 'construction of meaning at the point of reception': Kennedy (2006) 289. On the development and premises of reader reception theory, see Eagleton (1996) 64–77.

[5] Paris, Musée du Louvre E629 (*CorVP* 235, A1; *BD* 9019327). For the pacing of couches around the krater's belly, see also the Corinthian kraters gathered by Schmitt Pantel (1992) figs. 1–5, 7. Bowls, or phialai, and cups, or kylikes, produced elsewhere similarly accommodate reclining symposiasts to the available surface space in this way: again, see Schmitt Pantel (1992) figs. 8, 11–14, 16–18, 23–5. Note: all dates are BCE unless otherwise stated.

[6] Analysis by Smith (2007) of scenes of revelry on Corinthian and other contemporary figured ware emphasizes the interplay between standard motif and invention in the black-figure tradition. Note that the symposion adorning the Boeotian black-figure tripod-kothon, *c.* 575–560, which she discusses for its revelry (*kōmos*), equally displays formal continuities with contemporary and future imagery (67, fig. 26): this vessel is discussed on p. 13, below.

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Figure 1 Corinthian black-figure krater attributed to the Athana Painter, *c.* 590, side A.

an identity and lifestyle to aspire to, now or in the afterlife.[7] In short, like all representation, this sympotic depiction is rhetorical: it is constructed and constructs; it is communicative and it 'persuades', in the sense that it encourages the viewer to perceive the represented event in ways that gain meaning in the encounter context. This rhetorical engagement, however, is not one-directional, but informed by the preconceptions and ideas that the reader brings to the engagement in particular settings.[8] Situated in their own specific socio-cultural world, a hypothetical Corinthian warrior – who might also find meaning in the cavalrymen painted on the other side of the krater – would receive the projected symposion differently from a hypothetical Etruscan elite, at the table or in the grave. So to answer Schmitt Pantel on the symposia that issue forth from the lips of poets and brushes of painters, it really is not that simple.

These premises about representation and reception are hardly new, and they clearly underpin the work of François Lissarrague and his intellectual followers in their analyses of sympotic scenes on decorated drinking ware as

[7] For the Etruscan consumption of Greek sympotic scenes and their workings within Etruscan social and funerary practice, see Avramidou (2006) esp. 572–7, with Isler-Kerényi (2003).

[8] See Spivey (1991) 144–5, thinking particularly about transitions into Etruscan culture: 'Decorated vases travel and speak to those who accommodate them. When we look at an image on a Greek vase, what it says may not be what its artist intended it to say – but the discourse goes on, regardless.'

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if they were in circulation at the very event they depict.[9] And although they remain largely unarticulated, they are also fundamental to many readings of sympotic representation within individual literary works or genres. Symposia appear in epic, lyric, tragedy, comedy, history, philosophical dialogues, oratory, letters, biographies and novels – indeed in most textual forms – and many of these have fallen under investigation in their own terms. Yet, although responsive to one another, these studies remain largely fragmented, generally collated in edited collections or dispersed in journals rather than explored in concentrated fashion in monographs (Aristophanic comedy offers one exception). Representations in different genres are rarely brought together in one study, unless an effort is under way to reconstruct the historical symposion from the ancient sources.[10] In this respect, the diversity of the material that depicts sympotic activities is as much a bane as a boon. Because no single person could navigate their way through all the available physical and written evidence, the symposion lends itself more easily to communal endeavour, with analyses developing in tandem but independently within realms of expertise. Thanks to the efforts of earlier pioneers in the field, sympotic studies now bloom. However, understanding the rhetorical force of sympotic representation remains at a micro level: investigation of its varied appearances across a range of cultural products and conversations is curtailed. It is the purpose of this monograph on the symposion in ancient Greek society and thought to begin stitching together representations, to understand their workings on a macro scale. Through this patchwork approach, the symposion emerges not only as a key cultural phenomenon in the socio-political landscape of Archaic and Classical Greece in historical ('real life') terms. It is also a pervasive and active component of the Greek thought world, the discursive space where individuals as part of a shared community conceptualized, debated, understood

[9] The seminal work is Lissarrague (1990a; cf. 1990c, 1990d, 1992). For other treatments of sympotic scenes at symposia see, for example: Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague (1990); Schäfer (1997); Heinemann (2000, 2009); Sutton (2000); Neer (2002) 9–26; R. Osborne (2007); Steiner (2007) 231–64; Topper (2009); and Catoni (2010). Although Kistler (2009) sets out to open up possible 'oppositional' readings of satyric imagery beyond Lissarrague, his analysis of represented satyric sympotics within the symposion is nonetheless framed by his work.

[10] See Murray (1990a), W. J. Slater (1991), Murray and Tecuşan (1995), and Orfanos and Carrière (2003): the contributions in these volumes not only cover a range of socio-political dimensions and literary and artistic representations, but cross over into Near Eastern and Roman cultures. On Aristophanes' symposia, see Pütz (2007), expanding upon shorter studies by W. J. Slater (1981) and A. Bowie (1997). In terms of historical studies, Schmitt Pantel's (1992) remit is extensive as she seeks to identify a reality through representation; see also Corner (2005). In a shorter historicist snapshot of the symposion, W. J. Henderson (2000) also collates a broad range of ancient sources to identify central aspects and functions of the symposion.

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and attempted to find a place for themselves within the world around them, down even into Roman times.

Angus Bowie's work on sympotic elements in Aristophanic comedy and on banqueting in Herodotus' *Histories* particularly hints at the potential of the present study. His Aristophanes article analyses independent scenes from separate plays and knits them together to show how sympotic conduct provides a measure of a character or a community. That 'the symposium thus functions in Aristophanic comedy as the symposium did in Greek society, as an institution where values, political and moral, public and private were tested' will transpire to be equally true across a range of genres, and therefore crucial to sympotic representation more broadly.[11] In addition, the questioning of social issues that he also perceives in staged symposia is concomitant with the interrogation, for example, of the ethics of drinking through the representation of foreign practice (Chapter 2), or of contemporary politics (Chapter 3). Dissecting the banqueting scenes of the *Histories*, A. Bowie (2003) observes a further level of operation: the use of symposia not only to convey the character of individuals and regimes, but to articulate differences between them and explore competing ideologies. The dynamics are similar to those at work in Aristophanic comedy, but an element of debate is introduced by the productive juxtaposition of alternative modes. By starting with depictions of the symposion from the symposion (Chapters 1 and 2), by opening up to examination other representations of the event in poetry and prose (Chapters 2 to 5), and by aligning these according to the conversations to which they contribute, the remit of the present study is wider than any one genre or text. But nonetheless identity construction and the discursivity of sympotic representations will remain central to the analysis.

This, then, is a book about imagined symposia, events conjured in the minds, mouths, eyes and ears of ancient Greeks. The primary goal is not to provide detailed explication of the historical event, although because some of our representations operated within convivial settings further light will be shed on aspects of sympotic performance dynamics and socio-psychological processes. Nor will the study be exhaustive: provisos regarding the sheer volume of visual and textual representations still stand. Instead, by identifying prominent discursive strands, it accumulates relevant material to examine ways in which 'talking about' the symposion – representing a drinking party, including its participants' antics – generated ideas about

[11] Indeed, A. Bowie (1997) 1–2 recognizes an inherent connection with Archaic lyric, Plato's *Laws*, and historians, building on studies by Levine (1985), Tecuşan (1990) and Paul (1991), respectively.

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sympotic, ethnic and ethical, socio-political, and philosophical identities, or provided a structural framework for envisaging political upheavals or facilitated educational deliberations on moral issues. Literary texts dominate the analysis, but vase painting has a role to play in earlier chapters which kick off at the symposion. When we move on from lyric and epic poetry towards historical and ethnographical writing, philosophy, biography, Attic drama and oratory, we progress variously into civic arenas and the realm of intellectual endeavour, sifting through the communal imagination of sympotic groups and citizen bodies to the educated members of philosophical schools and elite salons. It was here that the symposion came alive in the interrogation of identity, the reconstruction of the past and the pursuit of wisdom and authority. For Greeks in diverse settings, the symposion provided a stable, if fluid and malleable, reference point by which they could talk about or construct themselves and the world around them. However, before embarking upon our travel through this discursive terrain, we need to pose our own opening question: what was the symposion?

SYMPOSION OR MIRAGE?

Broken down into its constituent parts of *sun*, 'with', and *posis*, 'drink', the word symposion means literally 'drinking together'. When it first appears in poetry from the late seventh and early sixth centuries, this aspect of shared endeavour is apparent.[12] In a fragmentary verse that encourages listeners to put aside their strife against Pittacus, Alcaeus of Lesbos observes that 'the lyre plays, sharing in the symposion, feasting with idle braggarts' (ἀθύρει πεδέχων συμποσίω | βάρμος, φιλώνων πεδ' ἀλεμ[άτων] | εὐχήμενος, 70.3–5 LP). Another Alcaean couplet demands an invitation for the delightful (χαρίεντα) Menon, 'if I am to enjoy the symposion' (αἰ χρῆ συμποσίας ἐπόνασιν ἔμοιγε γένεσθαι, 368 LP). The tone of these two poems is quite distinct, with the former implicitly criticizing the tyrant Pittacus through its characterization of his drinking group and the latter setting out good company as the requirement for a good time.[13] But in each a communal gathering is clearly imagined, and music and pleasure are the order of the day. Companionship and pleasure are implicitly on the agenda again when Theognis of Megara comments that it is only under

[12] Note that while W. J. Slater (1990) and Węcowski (2002a) identify aspects of the symposion, its values and forms, in epic banquets, the emphasis on drinking, embedded in the word itself, appears in the first instance in monody. On similarities and differences between Homeric feasts – described to me by Laura Mawhinney as 'proto-symposia' – and symposia as historical phenomena, see van Wees (1995).

[13] See Kurke (1994) 73–5 for the political thrust of Alcaeus 70 LP.

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compulsion that one mingles at the symposion hosted by a chatterbox, hated for talking unstintingly (295–8 W). Good conversation is apparently preferred and, in the process, negatively defined. None of these lines provide a recipe for the symposion, generating as they do their own images of symposia. Yet, they intimate some recurrent features in later allusions and representations: music, conversation and enjoyment set against a backdrop of communal drinking and festivity. One might recall the near-contemporary Corinthian krater introduced above, on which men and women sharing couches face each other, cups or drinking horn in hand, and lyres either brandished or within easy reach. Moreover, in the style of the fragments that Alcaeus and Theognis compose, there are further indications of the character a symposion might have. Both poets are attributed with songs that work best in sympotic contexts: they invite others to drink up or insinuate themselves into the musical fray (we shall look at some of these in Chapter 1). If their entire repertoires are cast as a result into the symposion, then the political sentiments expressed by Alcaeus and the pronouncement by Theognis above become (amongst other things) indicative of a politicized group and one in which recommendations for living are put forward, respectively.[14] Conversations through song make the symposion politically and socially involved; equally, their purveyors adopt political and social stances. An abundance of studies have pursued the interests and dynamics of sympotic performers and their audiences across the full range of surviving monodic poetry, primarily from the Archaic period. Through martial exhortation to historical reminiscence to iambic insult, political explication, advisory pronouncement, and praise, symposiasts spoke about and orientated themselves in relation to past and present, to the world outside, and to the community within.[15] Quite how and why varied from *polis* to *polis*, group to group, poet to poet, singer to singer, verse to verse.

The term 'symposion' thus describes an activity of shared consumption, of commensality in anthropological terms. Poetry that utilizes this terminology points to a wider range of activities beyond drinking; and from its contents

[14] Alcaeus' group of political dissidents was important in developing Murray's (1983a, 1983b) model of the elite, anti-*polis hetaireia*, or friendship group (although note that *hetaireia* is not used by Alcaeus of his drinking group): cf. Kurke (1992, 1994) and Morris (1996). Social and political concerns expressed in the *Theognidea* are explored in a series of articles in Figueira and Nagy (1985): Donlan (1985) and Levine (1985) particularly pay attention to the sympotic setting. On Theognis' politics and their potential resonances within drinking groups, see also Lane Fox (2000).

[15] For discussion of these see, for example: on martial exhortation, E. L. Bowie (1990); historical reminiscence, Rösler (1990); *iambos*, R. Rosen (2003); political explication and exhortation, Irwin (2005) 35–62; praise, E. L. Bowie (2002).

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various social and political dimensions can be inferred. Alongside this sits the archaeological evidence, which similarly picks up – or has in part been identified because of correspondences between – poetic allusions and scenes of symposia on painted pots. From the seventh century onwards, square rooms of regular dimensions characterized by raised borders and an off-centre door appear in temple and then domestic architecture. This is known in scholarship as the *andrōn*, as Herodotus (3.121) labels the 'men's room' where the tyrant Polycrates of Samos and poet Anacreon recline together. Its architectural features facilitate the accommodation of seven or eleven couches dispersed around the walls, just as they are distributed around the belly of our Corinthian krater.[16] This is the furniture mentioned by the Sparta-based, late-seventh-century poet Alcman, who describes seven couches each accompanied by a table heaving with small foods (F19 Davies; quoted in Chapter 1, below). It is also a hallmark of the Judaic *marzeah*, the feast whose celebrants are condemned by the eighth-century prophet Amos (Amos 6.4–7) for stretching themselves upon couches, eating meat, singing to the harp, drinking wine from bowls and anointing themselves with unguents instead of lamenting the fate of Israel.[17] And it mimics the dining motif on a series of silver Phoenician or Phoenician-inspired Cypriot bowls, redated recently on stylistic grounds to the eighth or seventh centuries.[18] This incorporation of the couch (*klinē*) – and perhaps other aspects of the dining form – plugs Greek drinking culture into Near Eastern commensal practice.[19] The physical set-up witnessed in the archaeology and iconography also suggests a distinctive spatio-psychological dynamic. Distributed in pairs on couches around the walls of the *andrōn*, the individuals directed their attention inwards to companions across the room and on neighbouring couches. This could have accentuated the immediacy and communality of the drinking party and promoted a level of equality as well as exclusivity amongst guests who were sequestered away from the world beyond the dining-room walls.[20] It could only have added an edge to the kinds of conversations identified above through the poetry and the effects of drinking mixtures of wine.

[16] As summarized by Bergquist (1990).
[17] See Burkert (1991) 10. Compare the sentiments expressed here with Thgn. 825–30 W, discussed in Chapter 2, below.
[18] As proposed by Matthaüs (1999) 256. The material is collected by Dentzer (1982) figs. 100–2.
[19] It is not simply ornate *klinai* that make their way west into Hellenic dining rooms, but also certain drinking paraphernalia and elements of costume: Boardman (1990) 129–30. On the infiltration of Near Eastern drinking paraphernalia and practices into Greece via trading centres in the West, see Oswyn Murray's article on 'The symposion between east and west', forthcoming in proceedings from 'Sympotic Poetry: a Colloquium', University of Oxford, 31 March – 2 April 2011.
[20] A dynamic extrapolated by Lissarrague (1990a) 19.

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Yet, the *andrōn* was not only variable in size, allowing for variations in intimacy and intensity, but also neither constant in its location, nor even a prerequisite for a party. It entered the domestic repertoire in the middle of the fifth century, when it was noticeable especially at Olynthus, where excavations of the ancient city have been extensive, in the Greek cities of Sicily and, on a more restricted scale, at Athens.[21] Whilst the distinctive room appeared in Greek homes, it continued to be built at sanctuaries, indicating a diversity in venues – and therefore, presumably, occasions – for drinking in company.[22] Outside events were also a possibility, in cult and at home. A number of sympotic scenes on figured pots from Laconia and Athens portray men reclining without couches on the ground, apparently outdoors – as indeed, does the earliest sculpted symposion in a Greek city, on the temple of Athena at Assos in the Troad, *c.* 540–520.[23] One recent study suggests that such images on fifth-century Attic pottery reference the past, a period that Burkert (1991, 18) also imagines when he proposes that Greek symposia may have developed in part out of indigenous feasting practices enjoyed on beds of twigs (*stibades*).[24] Of course an imagined past implies a difference from the present; but a series of Laconian plates, or *phialai*, adorned with on-the-ground symposiasts, could reflect contemporary cult practice at Samos, or so the pottery's findspots at the sanctuary of Hera there would suggest.[25] Finally, new analyses of spatial occupation in domestic complexes emphasize how single rooms had multiple uses at different stages of the day and, more importantly for our purposes, activities like symposia could have taken place outdoors in courtyards.[26] The result of this varied discussion is to situate drinking practices on occasion outside the confines of the *andrōn*, and to

[21] For the *andrōn* in Olynthian architecture, see Cahill (2002) 180–93. The evidence for drinking culture in Sicilian cities is traced in detail through the distribution of kraters in domestic and other settings by Rabinowitz (2009) 142–58. Evidence for *andrōnes* in 'middling' homes at Athens is cited by Fisher (2000) 360. Implications for understanding the symposion through the evidence of the *andrōn* are drawn out by Nevett (2010) 43–62.

[22] Bergquist (1990) 38, Table 1.

[23] See Wescoat (1995), who postulates resonances with civic religious feasting at Assos. A sculpted symposion scene also appears on a partially preserved pediment from Corfu featuring a youth with drinking cup and a bearded Dionysus, who holds a drinking horn. The date is probably slightly later, *c.* 500, and the figures recline upon a couch.

[24] Topper (2009). [25] Pipili (1998).

[26] See Lynch (2007) on the symposion specifically. The question of spatial use arises particularly through attempts to overturn the belief that Greek households were strictly divided into 'male' and 'female' domains: for example, see Jameson (1990), Nevett (1995) and Antonaccio (2000). Flexibility in usage does not suggest that anything could take place anywhere, nor that a space like the *andrōn*, the 'men's room' which may equally have been used by other family members or on other social occasions, did not retain a special function: see Jameson (1990) 188–91 and Nevett (1999) 71. I am grateful to Matthew Fitzjohn for direction on this issue. He emphasizes to me the difficulty in reconstructing everyday activity through the archaeological record, when many tasks left no trace and

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