



The History of Greek Vases

By John Boardman

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In this volume, Boardman examines the functions of vases in ancient Greek life and culture, and as messengers of style and subject. He relates the processes of identifying the artists themselves, their methods of manufacture and decoration, the artists' life and conduct in the potters' quarter in Greek towns, and the ways in which their wares were traded beyond the borders of the Greek world, from Morocco to Persia, from Russia to the Sudan. Boardman demonstrates that the scenes figured on the vases reflected not simply on story-telling, but on the politics and social order of the day; moreover, they exercised a style of narrative in art that was to resonate throughout Western culture for centuries to come.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sir John Boardman author of Greek Art, Athenian Black Figure Vases and Early Greek Vase Painting is Mr. Greek Vases, and his masterful and classy explications of what might in other hands seem dry and dusty archeological material are a joy to read. Here Boardman gets down to the nitty-gritty of how and why potters created and decorated the vases, how their artistic quality developed and their influence spread. "The raw material could not be commoner or cheaper," he points out, yet Greek vases still astonish with their ornate elegance. Perhaps most illuminating here, along with the 358 clear and well-placed b&w photo illustrations, are short chapters devoted to aspects of painting and to techniques used to create the vases throwing different pieces on the potter's wheel and then joining them later, as opposed to trying to create them all of a piece. Tricks for studying vases are also included: one amusing example takes note of a vase that can be roughly dated because the names of its young lad models, some of whom grew up to be well-known citizens, are listed on it. ("They were only of interest to their aged fondlers while they were still boys," notes Boardman.) A wise scholar, Boardman concludes with remarks on common sense, itself everywhere evident in this book: "It remains essential in the formulation and execution of any academic exercise and is itself largely the product of experience, though we should take nothing for granted." No one even vaguely interested in ancient art will take this distillation of more than 50 years of study and scholarship for granted.

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From Library Journal

The study of Greek vases is ubiquitous, with new volumes published every year. Lissarrague (l'Ecole des Haute Etudes en Sciences Sociales), who specializes in Attic imagery, here focuses on the meaning behind the images depicted on vases, explaining his work as "a miscellany, an anthology, a bouquet of images." The excellent full-color photographs are crisp in detail and are the main reason to purchase this title. Lissarrague has published "many collective works" and authored The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet. Boardman (emeritus, Oxford), on the other hand, has a virtual lock on the record for most books published on Greek vases, having written four of the five titles on "painted pottery" in the Thames & Hudson "World of Art" series. One of the top scholars in his field, he is also blessed with a talent for writing cogently. He tackles the large view of the subject "to provide a history of the craft that goes beyond the physical appearance of the vessels," explaining what might "be taken for granted or ignored." His illustrations are nowhere near as detailed or flashy as those in Lissarrague's book, but they sufficiently illustrate his comments. Lissarrague's book is recommended where scholars need topnotch illustrations of Greek vases; Boardman's is necessary for any library hoping to maintain a high-quality classical studies or art collection. Mary Morgan Smith, Northland P.L., Pittsburgh

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About the Author

Sir John Boardman is known and respected the world over as an outstanding authority on classical archaeology and art. His prodigious output of books includes some thirty titles, ranging from The Cretan Collection in Oxford (1961) to studies of Greek pottery and sculpture. He has received numerous honours, including a knighthood in 1989 and honorary doctorates from the University of Athens and the Sorbonne.

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