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The Decoration of the *Oinochoe* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Theatrical Painting?

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The *oinochoe* displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City is a prime example of the analytical challenges posed by the ceramic iconography that decorates Greek vases. There is currently no agreement about its interpretation, nor is there a defined thematic scope. Even though there are different ways in which ancient iconography is linked with theatre, all of them are circumscribed to the theatrical realm. But what happens when we note theatrical elements in paintings that are also related to other realms? This article aims at providing an alternative interpretation of the artifact's decoration, framing previous analyses within the realm of theatre. We argue that, given its iconographic elements and thematic relations, it is possible to include the scene depicted in the vase within the group of the so-called theatrical paintings.

Examining the ceramic iconography that decorates ancient Greek vases is not easy. Although it is possible to observe repeating patterns and identify certain iconographic conventions, their interpretation—as that of any given painting—is not univocal. This is related to the way these paintings are conceptually understood: a reflection or an image of reality whereby a direct relationship is sought by considering the context in which these paintings were created, or as a result of the work of a painter/artisan. The possibility of artistic freedom is thus acknowledged, either to catch a consumer's attention or to provoke a comic effect, precisely by an inversion of what occurs in reality. According to Bundrick, Athenian vase painters were storytellers, but they were also businessmen who wanted their products to be appealing to both locals and foreigners. This is why it may be erroneous to seek a single definitive interpretation.[1]

A link with other sources of that period, be they images or texts, remains an aspect that may help suggest a specific interpretation. In the case of textual sources, the issue must be addressed with caution, given that it is a different language and an extrapolation of its rules should be avoided. Despite these sources holding

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1. S. D. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous in The Metropolitan Museum of Art', in *Athenian Potters and Painters II*, ed. J. H. Oakley and O. Palagia (Oxford 2009) 33. The author observes that it was the viewer of the piece who determined its meaning. This meaning varied in accordance with social status: it was different for a member of the elite than for a member of the demos. Mitchell argues that 'Greek vase painting is an art of raccourci, it gives few but significant details to understand a scene'. See A. Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting and the Origins of Visual Humour* (Cambridge 2009) 65.

primacy and authority in studies of antiquity, the decoration of Greek vases contradicts and also confronts interpretations from textual evidence.[2] Literary evidence, though highly significant, 'can never substitute for careful attention to the iconographic language vase painters actually employ, which may not agree with what appears in texts, especially those written in prose'.[3] The relation to other kinds of sources certainly enriches this analysis, revealing both common semantics and heterogeneous meanings. Therefore, this relation should not constitute the prime element when analysing a painting; it is necessary to rely on tools specific to the discipline.[4] The link with other sources must enrich the analysis and complement it, both to underscore common semantics and heterogenous meanings, albeit without conditioning it.

The possibility of establishing relations with other paintings is an inevitable methodology that can be applied by identifying iconographic features or thematic subjects, but also by addressing aspects related to the artifacts' shape. Certainly, these relations—when relevant—contribute to their analysis and interpretation, yet they do not amount to an infallible method. As explained above, painters enjoyed freedom to innovate, either creatively or commercially.

The *oinochoe* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (Fig. 1)[5] is

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2. Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 64.

3. For methodological issues regarding the visual language analysis of ancient vases, see R. F. Sutton, 'Family Portraits: Recognizing the "Oikos" on Attic Red-Figure Pottery', *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004) 327–50 (329–30).

4. For different historical interpretations of the link between dramatic literature and ceramic iconography (e.g., philodramatist and iconocentric), see O. Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* (Los Angeles 2007) 22–27.

5. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 37.11.19: *BAPD* 539; G. M. A. Richter, 'Two Athenian Jugs', *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 34 (10) (1939) (231–32), fig. 2; H. R. Immerwahr, 'Choes and Chytroi', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 77 (1946) 247–50; G. van Hoorn, *Choes and Anthesteria* (Leiden 1951), no. 761, fig. 117; G. M. A. Richter, 'The Department of Greek and Roman Art: Triumphs and Tribulations', *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 3 (1970) 73–95 (35), no. 2, fig. 157; M. Maas and J. McIntosh Snyder, *Stringed Instruments of Ancient Greece* (New Haven, 1989) 115, 132, fig. 7; E. Keuls, *The Reigns of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (California 1993), 67, fig. 48; B. Sparkes, *The Red and the Black. Studies in Greek Pottery* (London and New York 1996) 60; J. Neils, 'Others Within the Other: An Intimate Look at Hetairai and Maenads', *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*, ed. B. Cohen (Leiden 2000) 210–11, fig. 8.3; Parisinou, '"Lighting" the World of Women: Lamps and Torches in the Hands of Women in the Late Archaic and Classical Periods', *Greece and Rome* 47 (1) (2000) 19–42 (20–23) fig. 1; Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 3 above) 331–32, fig. 17.3; Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 27–35, fig. 1; Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 65, fig. 20; J. Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life on Athenian Vases* (Madison 2020) 8–9, fig. 1.2. Although it has not been possible to attribute it to any painter, the artifact's

a prime example of the challenges posed by certain paintings when it comes to their analysis. The piece—dated between 430 and 420 BC and unique for various reasons, especially because of its depicted scene—has not been attributed to any specific painter. Domestic scene, gender-based theme, comic or social commentary—there is currently no agreement about its interpretation or a defined thematic scope.

Figure 1. Red-figure oinochoe, unattributed, ca. 430–420 BC. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 37.11.19, Fletcher Fund, 1937

Source: © Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This article aims at offering an alternative interpretation of the painting that decorates the vase. We argue that, based on a variety of iconographic elements and thematic relationships, it is possible to identify this painting with the theatrical realm and, more precisely, to include it among the so-called theatrical paintings. Before delving into our analysis, in the first two sections we will present what is traditionally understood as a theatrical painting and how the *oinochoe*´s decoration has been interpreted.

shape and the painting's style have served to date it back to the last quarter of the fifth century BC.

The 'Theatrical Paintings'

Theatrical paintings represent scenes[6] related to theatre that adorn ceramic artifacts. They are the only visual record of the Classical period that is linked with ancient Greek theatre.[6] Taplin argues that this is an exceptional case of interaction between theatre and visual arts. It should be noted that it is precisely an interaction, not a subordination, that involves an interplay in both senses; that is, these disciplines are on an equal footing. Thus, the appreciation of the paintings is enriched by the theatrical experience in the same way that the reception of a piece is favoured by knowledge of the painting.[7] This may seem evident, but for a long time these interrelations were understood as part of a hierarchy in which literature held primacy. The relation between ceramic iconography and theatre was valid only if it could be linked with a particular theatrical piece and therefore corroborate that relation.

This is problematic in several senses. First, because in the case of ancient Greek theatre we should take into account the fact that many theatrical texts of that era have been lost. While sometimes it is possible to learn about some of them through fragments or testimonies, evidence is incomplete. Second, because this mainly involves a logocentric conception of theatre that makes it dependent on literature.[8] Theatre, however, has a convivial quality, as can be witnessed in the unique moment when representations, production, and reception simultaneously converge.[9] It is a performative activity, composed of different signifier systems in which the text is but one of them, although not the most important.

The study of ancient ceramic iconography related to theatre must contemplate its disciplinary specificity and implement tools specific to the discipline in order to engage in its analysis. Its relation to theatrical activity must stem from those meanings created from its specific iconographic processes, and not from the possibility of corroborating such a relation from the existence of a dramatic text.

We will now explain the different ways in which ceramic iconography relates to the realm of theatre of that era. There are different modalities, and the relationship between the two does not always stem from a particular theatrical piece. On the one hand, the link may be established with a particular theatrical

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6. For the significance of ancient ceramic iconography as a visual theatrical record of that era, see J. R. Green, 'On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre in Classical Athens', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 32 (1991) 15–50 (20–21).

7. Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above), specifically refers to ceramic iconography related to particular tragic pieces. On our part, we expand this definition to include links between iconography and theater as a whole.

8. As regards the study of ancient theater, this logocentric conception follows the premise that the theatrical text is one of those elements that last throughout time. This statement is untrue because material evidence is preserved as well and is as important as theatrical texts.

9. This characteristic is typical of all performative arts such as, for example, dance.

play, either a dramatic text or its representation. On the other, it may be related to the theatrical spectacle in general; that is, to the spectacular realm. Last, they may also be connected to the theatrical realm, be it offstage or related matters, as in the case of Dionysus and his entourage.

Difficulties exist in linking paintings with tragedy, not only because of the iconographic convention employed but also because of the plot of the theatrical pieces themselves, although both questions intertwine. The convention in tragic paintings involves a depiction of what the theatrical piece represents; that is, the dramatic illusion (Fig. 2).[10] Therefore, a realistic effect takes place. With the exception of specific cases, no elements related to the theatrical spectacle are present in most of these paintings. According to Csapo and Slater, painters ignored drama's signifiers and underscored what they signified instead.[11] Given that this genre weaves plots from the mythic tradition, the lack of specific elements makes it difficult to define a relationship between theatre and painting.[12] Taplin states that, particularly in the case of Western Greek paintings,[13] there are certain indicators

10. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 82270: *BAPD* 9036827; A. D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, *The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia* (Oxford 1978) 167.13; Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above) 61–62, fig. 7; M. L. Hart, *The Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (Los Angeles 2010), 59–60, fig. 2.1; A. M. S. Karatas, 'Key-Bearers of Greek Temples: The Temple Key as a Symbol of Priestly Authority', *Mythos* 13 (2019) 1–48 (9–10), fig. 4. The base was attributed to the painter Black Fury by Trendall. Although iconography does not exactly match any of the play's scenes, the combination of characters leads Taplin to believe it may be linked with the Delphi scene in Aeschylus's *Eumenides*. See Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above), 61–62.

11. According to the authors, this is what the artifacts connote; that is, the effects of dramatic illusion, not of performance. See E. Csapo and W. J. Salter, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor 2001) 53–57.

12. As an exception, we could mention the case of *Medea*. Filicide is an innovation by Euripides. As a result, paintings linked with this story that include dead children have an unquestionable relation with Euripidean work (Fig. 3). Cleveland, Museum of Art, 1991.1: *BAPD* 1002926; LIMC I 1981, s.v. Agamemnon, p. 260, no. 14a; Tompkins 1983, pp. 76–79, no. 14; LIMC III 1986, s.v. Erinys, p. 837, no. 101; LIMC V 1990, s.v. Iason, p. 635, no. 71; Kozloff 1991, p. 72, Carpenter 1991, fig. 283; Turner 1992, p. 76, no. 1; LIMC VI 1992, s.v. Medeia, no. 36, pl. 199; Taplin 1993, pp. 16–17, 22–23, 26, 37–38, 116–117, nos. 1.101, 1.102; Aellen 1994, p. 39, no. 39; Easterling 1997, p. 79, fig. 12, Revermann 2005, pp. 3–18; Storey and Allan 2005, p. 152, fig. 2.4; Cassimatis 2005, pp. 48–49, fig. 2A–B; Goldhill 2007, p. 22, fig. 4; Taplin 2007, pp. 122–123, fig. 35; Hart 2010, pp. 72–73, fig. 27.

13. Regarding the spatial-temporal source of archeological evidence, in general the origin of these artifacts is divided between Athens and Western Greece. Most paintings related to tragedy date back to the fourth century BC and come from Western Greece, especially southern Italy and Sicily. They belong to a time when theater spread from Athens and reperformance of plays began. In other words, after the apogee of Athenian theater and the early tragic performances. This is significant because, parallel to the development and growth of theater, the red-figure technique also reached its peak during the fifth century in Athens. It is striking to note that there are virtually no traces left of the interrelation between this technique and theater from that place and time. See Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above)

that may allow for such an identification with theatre.[14] In the case of Athenian paintings, however, there is no system of implicit signals of theatricality that may be systematized, mainly because of the insufficient evidence preserved[15] Nevertheless, this lexicon—as the author calls it—does not represent infallible evidence, since many of these elements also belong to other realms (myths, symposia, etc.). In addition, a painting linked with a myth may be influenced by a tragedy without becoming a pictorial representation of that play[16] Likewise—particularly in the case of fourth-century objects, when dramatic plays were reenacted outside Athens—pictorial representations may include elements corresponding to scenic variants from the original plays. It is necessary to consider that, in many cases, the choice was to paint key scenes that summed up the meaning of a specific play and not the situations it portrayed, as is the case with tragedies.[17] In other cases, there are also iconographic elements that are added from the ceramic decoration, without it precluding a link with the theatrical piece.

28–29. Out of the few fifth century Athenian vases we may relate with tragedy, only one shows a theatrical spectacle: a choir and behind-the-scenes representations. In the case of later vases from Western Greece, we find a rich variety and different modalities of pictorial representation.

14. Taplin gathers these signals into two groups: those shared with tragedies and those related to the extradramatic. In the first group, we find special outfits—including both highly ornamented clothing and nude characters present in scenes alongside fully clothed ones—and kothurnoi, porches and structures with columns, rocks in the shape of arcs that may correspond to a scenic resource representing the entrance of a cave, "silent witness" characters, pedagogues, Furies and similar creatures, and suppliant scenes. In the extradramatic group, the author includes the presence of tripods—because of their relation to prizes in theatrical contests—and Attic inscriptions. See Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above) 28–43. Green, on the other hand, includes the presence of a double-flute piper as a distinctive feature of Athenian evidence. See Green, 'On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre' (n. 6 above) 22. The double-flute piper accompanied the choir and was the only source of music in theatrical representations. See P. Wilson, 'The Musicians among the Actors', in *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, ed. P. E. Easterling and E. Hall (Cambridge 2002), 39–68.

15. Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above) 32.

16. Taplin, *Pots and Plays* (n. 4 above) 35.

17. Green, 'On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre' (n. 6 above).

Figure 2. Painting related to Eumenides, Apulian Red-figured Volute Crater, attributed to the painter Black Fury, ca. 360 BC. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 82270, acq. date n/a

Source: © National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

Figure 3. Final Scene of Euripides's *Medea*, Red-figure Calyx-krater (mixing vessel) attributed near the Policoro Painter, ca. 400 BC. Cleveland, Museum of Art, 1991.1, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund, 1991

Source: © Cleveland Museum of Art

The situation is different in comedy. That genre's paintings involve an iconographic convention that evinces theatrical representation and scenic materiality. The platform acting as stage (and, in many instances, the steps leading up to it), the doors (which are clearly part of the staging), and other devices are painted over, and characters are represented as actors wearing costumes and masks (Fig. 4).[18] These paintings are easily recognizable, and their relation to theatre, unquestionable. Nevertheless, it is difficult to identify which comic piece is being represented in the artifacts. This genre bases its plots on the everyday life of the audience, is filled with nods to it and its immediate context, and makes use of contemporary events and characters, both anonymous and of renown (Socrates, for instance). Taplin argues that, unlike tragedy, which draws on the mythic tradition, plots in comic plays are inseparable from their staging. Thus, if no inscriptions or specific elements identifying a painting with a comic piece are visible—e.g., a choir—it is not possible to determine which play the painting is related to.[19]

18. London, British Museum, 1849,0620.13; M. Bieber, *History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton 1961) fig. 491; A. D. Trendall and T. B. L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London 1971) IV, 35; Trendall and Cambitoglou, *Red-Figured Vases of Apulia* (n. 10 above) 4/252; O. Taplin, *Comic Angels* (Oxford 1993) 61–62, fig. 12.6; J. R. Green and E. Handley, *Images of the Greek Theater* (Austin 1995) fig. 28; Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above) 116, fig. 53. Reckoned by Trendall to be close to the Choregos Painter's time, although slightly later. Among the group of figures, the young man standing to the right is the only figure not wearing a mask, comic costume, or phallus. It does not have an identifying inscription. See A. D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, *The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia 2* (London 1991).

19. Pictorial representations in comedy date back to the mid-sixth century BC, and they remain unchanged in terms of style, unlike the series of transformations that comic theater experienced from then on. According to Green, this is evidence that comedy is a preexisting genre. This abundance may be associated with the convention in comic paintings, which—unlike tragedy—is fully explicit about its relation to theater and, as a result, easily recognizable. See Green, 'On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre' (n. 6 above) 22.

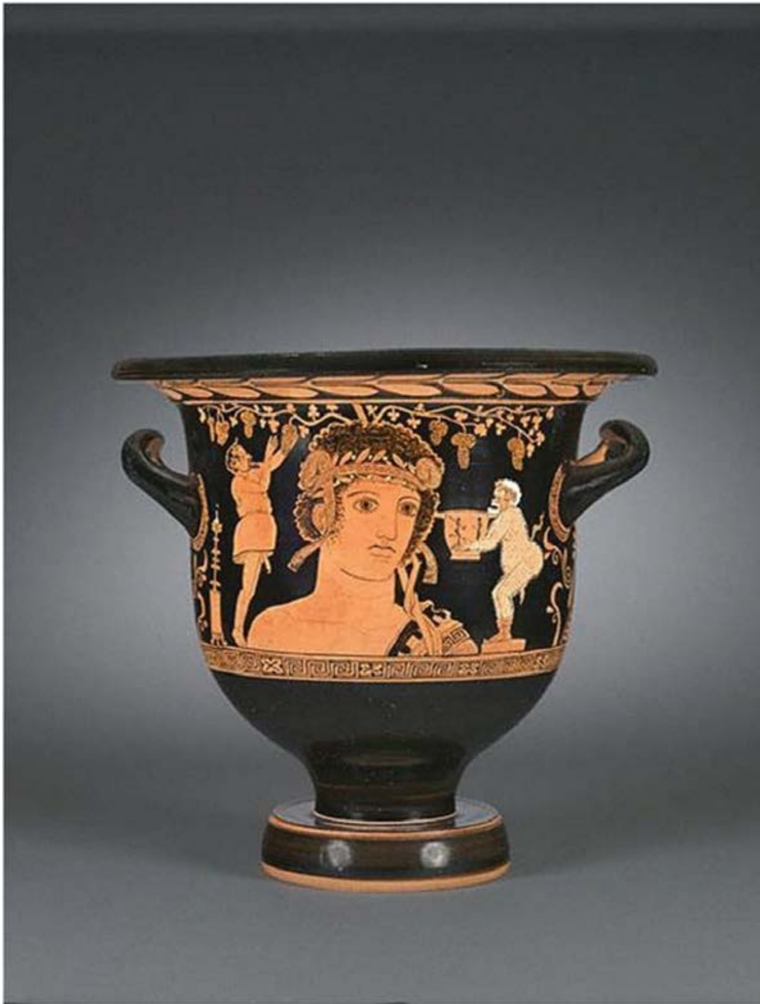
Figure 4. Comic, red-figured wine bowl (bell krater) attributed to the McDaniel Painter, ca. 380–370 BC. London, British Museum, 1849,0620.13, 1849

Source: © Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 5. Actors and members of a choir resting, red-figured vase attributed to the Pronomos Painter, ca. 400 BC. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 3240, acq. date n/a

Source: © National Archaeological Museum of Naples

Figure 6. Dionysus and comic actors (satyrs), red-figured bell krater attributed to the Choregos Painter, ca. 390–380 BC. Cleveland, Museum of Art, 1989.73, John L. Severance Fund, 1989



Source: © Cleveland Museum of Art.

In turn, paintings related to the theatrical realm present a broader and less problematic scenario. These paintings include offstage representations as well as mythic or related aspects. The former depict actors warming up before or resting after acting and show individual or group scenes (Fig. 5).[20] The latter portray the

20. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 3240: *BAPD* 217500, ARV2 1336.1; N. Heydemann, *Die Vasensammlungen des Museo Nazionale zu Neapel* (Berlin 1872) 546–50, no. 3240; W. Hahland, *Vasen um Meidias* (Berlin 1930); P. Arias, B. Shefton, and M. Hirmer, *A History of Greek Vase Painting* (London 1962) 377–80; J. D. Beazley, *Paralipomena, Additions to Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters and to Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*, 2nd edition (Oxford 1971) 480; J. Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases: The Classical Period* (London 1989) fig. 323; *Greek Tragedy*, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge 1997) 73, fig. 7; F. Lissarrague, *Greek Vases: The Athenians and Their Images* (New York 2001) 217, 219–20, figs. 177–179; J. P. Small, *The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text* (Cambridge 2003) 62, figs. 34–35; S. D. Bundrick, *Music and Image in Classical Athens* (Cambridge

mythic tradition linked with theatre, in particular with Dionysus and his entourage of satyrs (Fig. 6),[21] represented as satyr actors and mythological creatures.

Thus far, we have briefly explained the ways in which the links between ceramic iconography and ancient Greek theatre are conventionally understood. We will now focus on the decoration of the *oinochoe* First, we will delve into how this artifact has been traditionally examined, and then we will put forth an alternative analysis. We will see that a link with the realm of theatre is possible from certain specific elements. In this regard, we ponder if said links correspond to those commonly suggested or whether it will be necessary to establish a new category altogether.

2005) 177, fig. 102; A. C. Montanaro, *Ruvo di Puglia e il suo territorio, le necropoli: i corredi funerari tra la documentazione del xix secolo e gli scavi moderni* (Rome 2007) 51, fig. 17; *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*, eds. O. Taplin and R. Wyles (Oxford 2010), figs. 0.0, 0.1–0.2, 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3–6, 10.1, 12.1, 13.1, 13.3; E. Csapo, *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theater* (Malden 2010) 18, fig. 1.9; Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above) 94–95, fig. 44; *A Companion to Greek Art*, eds. T J. Smith and D. Plantzos (Malden 2012) II, 559, fig. 28.7; T. Mannack, *Griechische Vasenmalerei, Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt 2012) 156, fig. 104; I. C. Storey and A. Allan, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama*, 2nd edition (Chichester 2014) 161, fig. 3.1; R. Osborne, *The Transformation of Athens Painted Pottery and the Creation of Classical Greece* (Princeton and Oxford 2018) 44, fig. 2.8. Attributed to the Pronomos Painter by Hahland. Scholars agree that the Pronomos Vase is the most important and complex artifact available to date that is directly related to ancient Greek theater and, more specifically, to an offstage setting. See Taplin and Wyles, *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*. Decoration depicts a play's full staff: actors, choir members, musician, his assistant, and the choregos. It is striking to see the aulos player, Pronomos. See P. Wilson, 'The Man and the Music (and the Choregos?)', in Taplin and Wyles, *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*. Likewise, the presence of a playwright, easily identifiable by the papyrus rolls, is peculiar for that time. His name is also visible. See E. Hall, 'Tragic Theatre: Demetrios' Rolls and Dionysos' Other Woman', in Taplin and Wyles, *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*.

21. Cleveland, Museum of Art, 1989.73: *BAPD* 1002927; E. H. Turner et al., 'Notable Acquisitions', *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 78 (3) (1991) 63–147 (73); *The Burlington Magazine* 133 (1054) (1991), 65, II; Trendall and Cambitoglou, *Red-Figured Vases of Apulia 2* (n. 18 above) no. 1/125; Trendall, 'Selected Acquisitions', *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 79 (2) (1992) 63–147 (63–83) no. 1; J. R. Green, *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society* (London and New York 1994) 86–91, 95, figs. 3.23, 3.24; O. Taplin, 'The Beauty of the Ugly: Reflections of Comedy in the Fleischman Collection', in *A Passion for Antiquities: Ancient Art from the Collection of Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman* (Malibu 1994) 15–27 (25), fig. 5; J. Neils and G. Walberg, *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* (Cleveland 2000) 50–51, pl. 92–93; P. E. Easterling and E. Hall, *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession* (Cambridge 2002) vii; M. Revermann, 'The "Cleveland Medea" Calyx Crater and the Iconography of Ancient Greek Theatre', *Theatre Research International* 30 (2005) 3–18, notes; Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above) 16–17, 107, fig. 3. A. D. Trendall, *Myth, Drama and Style in South Italian Vase-Painting: Selected Papers* (Uppsala 2016) 113, 115–17, figs. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 11. Attributed by Trendall to the Choregos Painter. It is unclear whether the Dionysus bust actually represents a prop used on stage or whether it is symbolic of his relation to theater. In this case, the typical satyr entourage accompanying Dionysus is one composed of satyr actors.

Some Interpretations of the *Oinochoe*

The *oinochoe* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is an artifact painted using the red- figure technique against a background of black gloss. Its iconography represents a man and a woman separated by a door. With the exception of the door, the roof tiles at the top, and what appears to be a step at the bottom, the scene is empty. Their attitudes show that the man is standing outside, pounding on the door with an unlit torch, while the woman is indoors, holding a lamp, looking scared.[22] Their clothes reveal some additional information: she seems to be a respectable woman,[23] whereas he—virtually nude—may be returning from a procession, celebration, or symposium, and is drunk. He is also holding a *barbitos* in his hand and wears a crown on his head and a shroud over his shoulder—all characteristic elements of these types of activities.

Despite its apparent simplicity, the scene has sparked numerous and diverse interpretations. The represented scene is at an inflection point, neither static nor resolved, which raises all possibilities. An analysis of the scene must be centred on the represented figures alone, given the lack of other identifiable elements—with the exception of the door, the roof tiles, and the step—that could provide a more substantial interpretation of the backdrop of the scene itself. The scene has been described as domestic, as specifically linked with life in the *οἶκος*, as related to gender issues, or as a sort of social commentary. Nevertheless, all of these interpretations have limitations. To carry out and support these analyses, attempts were made at establishing links with other pieces of that period, but these yielded no positive results, for the represented scene is unique among preserved vases.[24] In the same vein, literary sources have been used to corroborate this interpretation, and these have shown a dependence on logocentric approaches over iconographic ones.

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22. In many cases, the woman's presence by the door does not clearly indicate whether she is inside or outside. It is therefore necessary to rely on other elements such as furniture or the characters' attitudes. See Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 65–66.

23. Boardman claims the "respectable woman" to be a cliche. In ancient iconography, women are usually represented indoors, sitting, spinning or holding perfumes, wearing long dresses, and with their hair up under a *sakkos*. See J. Boardman, 'The Phallos-Bird in Archaic and Classical Greek Art', *Revue Archéologique* (2) (1992) 227–42 (240). This image is conveyed by Xenophon (*Oec*. 7.30). However, there are also iconographic representations of women out in public spaces. For the role of women and their statuses, see S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1975); S. Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (London 1995); L. O'Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece* (Cambridge 2003). For women and iconography, see E. Keuls, 'Attic Vase-Painting and the Home Textile Industry', in *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography: Fourth Burdick-Vary Symposium of the Institute for Research in the Humanities*, ed. W. G. Moon (Madison 1993); F. Lissarrague, 'Intrusions au Gynécée", in *Les mystères du gynécée*, ed. P. Veyne (Paris 1998) 155–98; S. Lewis, *The Athenian Woman: An Iconographic Handbook* (London 2002).

24. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 27.

Those analyses arguing the painting on the *oinochoe* represents a domestic scene are based solely on the presence of the door. According to Bundrick, when a door is depicted on fifth-century Greek ceramics, it is always within a domestic setting with references to life in the *οἶκος*. Its presence in the painting is accentuated by the roof tiles at the top. In addition to the marriage bed, there is no more powerful a symbol of the *οἶκος* than the door, denoting the boundary between the inside and outside worlds.[25] Although it is uncommon to see a full household represented,[26] it is worth noting that both elements—door and roof tiles—are depicted with an 'unusual perspective', which may have possibly been inspired by a stage production.[27] The way these elements are rendered leads us to describe this painting as theatrical. We will delve deeper into this question in the following section.

Sutton has some reservations about identifying the painting with an *οἶκος* setting and clarifies that the domestic setting has far wider implications than the narrowly identified *οἶκος*. He claims that, owing to a lack of a clear connection with a funerary or nuptial ritual, representations that are traditionally linked with the *οἶκος* tend to include some of these features: a domestic setting, defined by architectural elements; furniture or other household equipment; the presence of women engaged in domestic activities, usually spinning; or the presence of children.[28]

The analysis of the human figures has given way to interpretations that suggest that the scene is a sort of social commentary or is concerned with gender issues—both closely related matters. Some of these interpretations point out that the man is a *κωμαστής* (reveller): he is nude, holds a musical instrument in his hand, and wears a crown on his head.[29] The fact that he is wielding a torch, though unlit, indicates—along with the lamp the woman is holding—that the scene takes place at night, which would imply the man is returning from some sort of celebration. Some scholars have also stated that the shape of the *chous* reveals the man is a participant in the Anthesterias, a festival celebrated in Athens honouring Dionysus. Yet the *choes* used in these festivals are rather small, and the one analysed in this

25. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 32. Doors appear mainly in nuptial scenes or scenes depicting women performing domestic chores.

26. Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life* (n. 5 above) 8.

27. Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 3 above), 331.

28. Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 3 above) 330–31. Scenes depicting women involved in childcare, and even those showing both parents with a child, are rare (see also 337–38). For nuptial scenes, see J. H. Oakley and R. H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison 1993); R. F. Sutton, 'Nuptial Eros: The Visual Discourse of Marriage in Classical Athens', *JWalt* 55–56 (1997–1998) 27–48; and V. Sabetai, 'The Transformation of the Bride in Attic Vase-Painting', in *The Ancient Art of Transformation: Case Studies from Mediterranean Contexts*, eds. R. M. Gondek and C. L. Sulosky Weaver (Oxford 2019) 33–51. For funerary issues, see H. A. Shapiro, 'The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art', *American Journal of Archaeology* 95 (4) (1991) 629–56; J. Oakley *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Lekythoi* (Cambridge 2004).

29. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 27–28.

article is larger in size. It does not bear any iconographic elements that could be attributed to these festivals—as is usually the case with other artifacts—such as the depiction of a pitcher or a food basket.[30] It has also been argued that the man is Dionysus himself,[31] but the fact that he is holding a musical instrument is an argument against this claim, since it is usually the members of his entourage who do so.[32]

It is interesting to observe that the man's body features—especially his overweight—may suggest he is not the typical *κωμαστής*, a 'lithe, elegant figure'.[33] The contrast between his lack of physical fitness and his infibulated genitalia is notable: the latter is typical of a sort of social status, because it alludes to the *gymnasion*, whereas the former would mean excess or lack of moderation, incompatible with said status.[34] Similarly, his face is depicted in a sort of grimace that sets him apart from the ideal of the aristocratic man. In line with it, an attitude of *hybris* can be observed in him, pounding a door, likely drunk, in the middle of the night.[35]

These particularities in the male figure suggest a critique—or at least the evincing—of certain social and gender stereotypes. The scene has been linked with Aristophanes's *The Wasps*,[36] precisely because of the reference to certain aristocratic

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30. See R. Hamilton, *Choes and Anthesteria: Athenian Iconography and Ritual* (Michigan 1992) 83–121.

31. E. Simon, 'Ein Anthesterien Skyphos des Polygnotos', *AntK* 8 (1963) 6–22 (16–17).

32. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 28. There are some exceptions in ancient iconography: for example, Cup by the Brygos Painter, Cab. Méd. 576 (ARV2 371,14). See also Bundrick, *Music and Image* (n. 20 above) 108, fig. 62.

33. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 28. Overweight figures are uncommon in Athenian vase paintings.

34. For infibulation as a practice related to athletes, see W. E. Sweet, 'Protection of the Genitals in Greek Athletics', *AncW* 11 (1985) 43–52; R. Osborne, 'Men Without Clothes: Heroic Nakedness and Greek Art', *Gender and History* 9 (1997) 504–28 (515–17). For infibulated satyrs, see *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds. J. Winkler, F. Zeitlin, and D. M. Halperin (New Jersey 1990) 59–61. For gluttony, see D. Steiner, 'Indecorous Dining, Indecorous Speech; Pindar's First Olympian and the Poetics of Consumption', *Arethusa* 35 (2) (2002) 297–314.

35. According to Bundrick, 'even the komast's barbitos could be read as a sign of immoderation. An instrument linked with amateur performance, the barbitos recalls the importance of musical training in the traditional aristocratic education, and thus establishes the komast's social class'. See Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 28.

36. Aristophanes, *The Wasps*. The play was performed in 422 BC at the Lenaia festival and was awarded the first prize. The plot is about Bdelycleon's father, Philocleon, who is addicted to participating in Athenian trials as a jury member to enjoy the attention and favors granted by the aristocracy in their bid to reach a favorable verdict. To help him overcome his addiction, his son decides to stage a tribunal in his own home for his father to participate as a jury member.

vices, such as drunkenness.[37] Sutton has qualified the scene as comic, claiming it plays with gender stereotypes opposition, clearly articulated in Xenophon's work, although 'the precise nature of their interaction and of the joke is not now obvious'.[38] Likewise, if his attitude were to imply the prospective rape of the woman, his infibulated genitalia would make the scene comic or at least ironic.

The female figure seems less polysemic, but the key question is whether she is a respectable wife or a prostitute.[39] Bundrick argues that her social status is harder to define than that of her male counterpart. Yet her clothes leave no room for doubt that she is a respectable wife: she is neither nude nor scantily dressed. The setting against which she is represented is also typical of said social status: the inside of a household.[40] Mitchell identifies her with the image of a discreet wife portrayed by Xenophon.[41]

As regards the possible relation—if any—between the two figures, there is no element in the scene that may suggest such a link with any certainty. The scene has been traditionally described as a domestic dispute, assuming this is a situation related to life in the *οἶκος*. Yet, given the woman's attitude of fear, it could be argued that the man is someone unknown to her and, in that case, we would be witnessing a 'potential criminal act'.[42] If the possibility that the woman is a prostitute who is not at work at the time—and hence not dressed as such— is accepted, then it could be claimed that the man is a client coming out of hours.

So far, we have succinctly exposed how this piece has been traditionally analysed. Disagreement over its interpretation or the variety of interpretations should not come as a surprise because the painting is multivalent. Multiple meanings suggested by ceramic iconography should not be seen as an obstacle either; rather, because of them, its reception and the understanding of the culture that produced it are enhanced. Moreover, in matters of antiquity, new evidence could always be found to reframe preexisting interpretations.

We will now propose an alternative approach, which does not necessarily exclude the aforementioned analyses but rather frames them within the theatrical realm.

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37. Bundrick specifically relates this to vv. 79–80, referring to the excess of drinking and its association with the well-born. See Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 31; Mitchell, however, mentions the play but in relation to the female figure. See Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above). Bažant suggests a connection with comedy in general. See J. Bažant, *Les citoyens sur les vases athéniens du 6e au 4e siècle av. J.-C.* (Prague 1985) 52.

38. R. F. Sutton, 'Family Portraits: Recognizing the 'Oikos' on Attic Red-Figure Pottery', *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004) 327–50 (331–32).

39. There are two main types of female prostitutes, the *pornai* and the *hetairai*. See Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 63–67; L. Kurke, 'Inventing the "Hetaira": Sex, Politics, and Discursive Conflict in Archaic Greece', *Classical Antiquity* 16 (1) (1997) 106–50. For women and social status, see fn. 23 above.

40. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 31–32.

41. Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 64.

42. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 32.

The *Oinochoe*: A 'Theatrical Painting'

The relationship between a painting and theatre may respond to either thematic issues or iconographic features and, in many cases, they both lead to such an interplay. In the case of the scene decorating the *oinochoe* displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, both characteristics serve as a link with the world of theatre. Nevertheless, the way the door and the roof tiles are portrayed strengthens the semantics of the whole and directs it toward that realm.

When observing the scene, it is striking to see the use of two different iconographic conventions.[43] On the one hand, human figures are represented using a realistic convention, which copies an external referent. The objects—door and roof tiles—are depicted using a convention that evinces their character as representations, and therefore they are not presented as a continuity of reality. This is neither a minor nor an accessory matter, for it highlights the objects thus represented, turns the gaze toward them, and conditions the semantics of the whole. In other words, a lack of harmony in the representation of the elements in the scene does not create a rupture. Instead, that very interaction determines the overall meaning.

The door and roof tiles are positioned at the centre, dominating the scene, and are the only nonhuman figures visible. They are represented in a way that reveals their artificiality, which therefore highlights these elements. It is possible to identify these iconographic characteristics with those of comic paintings.[44] These features allow for a possible identification with a theatrical performance. As mentioned above, Sutton argues that the scene is likely inspired by a stage production.[45] This is the main reason, however, to support a description of the *oinochoe* painting as 'theatrical'—both because of the way these objects are portrayed and because this type of representation makes the whole acquire a semantics with clear connections to theatre.

Of all the ways in which ceramic iconography may be related to theatre, we believe that those elements referring to scenic materiality are the most powerful because they permeate the whole with a kind of artificiality. Furthermore, they are the most accurate, since theme-based relations, with no specific iconographic signs, run the risk of being confounded with mythic tales that were also staged. The fact that no theatre-related pieces have been preserved, whose existence would aid in establishing a link with the painting we are analysing, cannot be used as an argument against this interpretation because the evidence preserved is incomplete and an iconographic analysis cannot be contingent on a logocentric one. This is not

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43. The combination of different conventions in "theatrical paintings" is not rare; cf. fig. 7, Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 248778: Trendall and Cambitoglou, *Red-Figured Vases of Apulia 2* (n. 18 above) 7–8, 1/124, pl.1. 3–4, 67; Taplin, *Comic Angels*, 55–63, fig. 9.1; D. Guilula, 'The Choregoi Vase: Comic Yes, but Angels?', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 109 (1995) 5–10; Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above) 107, fig. 3.3.

44. See p. 5 of this article.

45. Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 38 above) 331.

to say that this painting may be related to a lost piece, but rather that an analysis should not be disregarded on such grounds.

If we compare the way in which the door and the roof tiles are depicted on the *oinochoe* with other artifacts unrelated to theatre, it is possible to observe that it bears artificial features or at least features of an 'unusual perspective' that liken it to a stage production.[46] Even though it is uncommon to see a full household represented,[47] in paintings related to the domestic realm, the door is depicted through the use of different techniques that confer it perspective and depth, making it more realistic. In the *pyxis* of red figures, representing women weaving and performing domestic chores (Fig. 8),[48] the open door reveals a bed with cushions. The fact that we are able to see the inside of the house—and some of its furniture—grants the scene and, more precisely, the door, a sense of perspective and depth. As a result, the scene is identified with the corresponding external referent and the door acquires volume. Moreover, while the section of the roof coincides with the edge of the artifact's mouth, it is attached to the door, creating a solid and unified effect.

46. Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 38 above) 331.

47. Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life* (n. 5 above) 8.

48. Paris, Musée du Louvre, CA 587: *ARV2* 104; G. M. Richter, *The Furniture of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans* (London 1966) 135, fig. 640; Beazley, *Paralipomena* (n. 20 above) 449; L. Clark, 'Notes on Small Textile Frames Pictured on Greek Vases', *American Journal of Archaeology* 1 (87) (1983) 91–96 (95, pl. 16, fig. 8); Keuls, 'Attic Vase-Painting' (n. 23 above) 222, fig. 14.31; A. Kauffmann-Samaras, 'Deux vases de mariage du V siècle av. J.-C.', *Revue du Louvre: la revue des musées de France* 2 (2001) 33–44 (40, fig. 16); F. Lissarrague, 'Réflexions sur l'image dans la céramique de Grande Grèce', in *Vasi, immagini, collezionismo: la collezione di vasi di Intesa Sanpaolo e i nuovi indirizzi di ricerca sulla ceramica greca e magnogreca. Giornate di studio*, ed. S. Ch. Gemma (Milan 2007) 278, fig. 9; G. Hoffmann, *Naître et devenir Grec dans les cités antiques: VIIIe-IIIe siècles avant notre ère* (Paris 2017) 312–13, 406, fig. 106. Attributed to the Painter of the Louvre Centauromachy by Beazley.

Figure 7. Aegisthus alongside comic choregoi and Pyrrhias, Apulian bell-krater, ca. 400–380 BC. Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 248778, acq. date n/a

Source: © National Archaeological Museum of Naples

Figure 8. Women engaged in weaving and other household activities, attic red-figured pyxis attributed to the Painter of the Louvre Centauromachy, ca. 460–440 BC. Paris, Musée du Louvre, CA 587, 1983

Source: © María Daniels.

The door depicted on the *oinochoe*, however, is completely flat, without perspective or depth, which gives artificiality and simplicity to the structure and reminds us of a

stage device. Likewise, the tiles representing the roof are not connected to the structure of the door and, as a result, the construction seems fragmentary. In addition, the interior space bears no elements identifiable with a domestic setting. This feature increases the fragmentary and artificial effect of the iconographic representation of the door, which presents itself as an isolated element disconnected from the house.

The method of giving depth to the door—and, therefore, an increased realism—from the portrayal of interior elements is also present in nuptial scenes,[49] one of the traditional themes in the iconography related to the *οἶκος*, a realm that has been associated with the painting we are examining. In Figs. 9[50] and 10,[51] the open door offers a glimpse of a section of furniture and half of a female figure peering out, respectively.

49. Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 3 above) 330–31. For nuptial paintings, see fn. 30 above.

50. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 03.802: *BAPD* 15815; R. F. Sutton, *Daidalikon, Studies in Memory of Raymond V. Schoder, S. J.* (Wauconda 1989) 335–36, 338, 340–42, fig. 1, pls. 29–33; *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. A. Richlin (Oxford 1992) 27, fig. 1.10; Oakley and Sinos, *Wedding in Ancient Athens* (n. 28 above) 51, 109-1-111, figs. 1, 105–7; *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*, ed. E. Reeder (Baltimore 1995) 165–68, no. 24; Sutton, 'Nuptial Eros' (n. 28 above) 34, n. 53; Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 3 above) 329, fig. 17.1; Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life* (n. 5 above), 190, fig. 9.1. This wedding scene portrays the groom as a young immature man and the bride as a mature woman. While it was usually the groom who was older than the bride, in this case, the representation corresponds to the classic ideal of a young and beautiful couple. Sutton relates the scene to the abduction of Helen by Paris. The vase's decoration is damaged, and it is not possible to see the interior of the house through the open door. Nevertheless, this can be appreciated more clearly in the Beazley Archive drawing. We were able to access the drawing through a reproduction in Sutton, 'Family Portraits' (n. 3 above) 329.

51. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 56.11.1: *BAPD* 350478; Richter, 'The Department of Greek and Roman Art' (n. 5 above) 84, 86–87, fig. 29; Beazley, *Paralipomena* (n. 20 above) 66; D. von Bothmer, 'Greek Vase Painting: An Introduction', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 31 (1) (1972) 4, 22–23, 69; D. von Bothner and A. L. Boegehold, *The Amasis Painter and His World: Vase- Painting in Sixth-Century B.C. Athens* (Malibu 1985) 40, 182–84, 201, pl. 4; S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* (Oxford 1998) 42; J. M. Padgett, 'The Stable Hands of Dionysos: Satyrs and Donkeys as Symbols of Social Marginalization in Attic Vase Painting', in *Not the Classical Ideal*, ed. B. Cohen (Leiden 2000) 43–70 (50–51); *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past*, eds. J. Neils, J. H. Oakley, and K. Hart (New Haven 2003) 128, fig. 19; Bundrick, *Music and Image* (n. 20 above) figs. 104–5; L. Bodiou, 'Le Mariage: le flamboiement des sens', in *Rituels grecs: une expérience sensible*, eds. Evelyne Ugaglia and Adeline Grand-Clément (Toulouse 2017) 20–21, 34–35, fig. 6; Oakley, *A Guide to Scenes of Daily Life* (n. 5 above) 202, fig. 9.13a–b. Attributed to the Amasis Painter by Beazley, this is the earliest and most complete known representation of an Attic wedding. The scene portrays the nuptial procession from the bride's home to the groom's, which represented the transition from life as a couple to life as husband and wife. The woman peering out the door is the groom's mother, who welcomes the bride and her parents. Although this painting dates back to a previous century than the one we are examining, the same device is used: the open door offers a glimpse of a human figure inside a house.

Figure 9. Attic red-figured loutrophoros depicting a bridal procession, unattributed, ca. 440–430 BC. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 03.802, Francis Bartlett donation, 1903

Source: © Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Figure 10. Attic black-figured lekythos, country wedding procession employing carts, attributed to the Amasis Painter, ca. 550–530 BC. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 56.11.1, Purchase, Walter C. Baker Gift, 1956

Source: © Metropolitan Museum of Art

If we focus on the thematic dimension of ceramic decoration, it is possible to describe the scene as comic from the identification of specific social stereotypes. As mentioned above, this has led some scholars[52] to establish a relation between the painting and Aristophanes's *The Wasps*, the interplay between the risk of rape and its impossibility because of the male figure's infibulated genitalia aims at creating a comic effect, corresponding to the imaginary of that genre.

However, it is the male figure, along with its description as *κωμαστής*, that offers the most interesting, albeit slightly veiled, key element. The noun *κωμαστής* refers specifically to a participant in the *κῶμος*, a procession that may have its origins in a rural celebration linked with Dionysus. Moreover, the same term is used as an epithet for Dionysus in Aristophanes's *The Clouds*.[53] Although it is not altogether clear, it is possible to assume from several literary and iconographic testimonies that this procession was accompanied by music and dance.[54] Therefore, this may be considered a pre-dramatic or early dramatic celebration related to the origins of Athenian theatre.[55]

This interrelation also encompasses the linguistic sphere. The word *κῶμος*, besides referring to processions linked with the origins of theatre, is the etymological origin of the noun *κωμῳδία*—comedy. This term may have two possible etymological

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52. Bundrick, 'Inside/Outside: Revisiting a Chous' (n. 1 above) 31; Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting* (n. 1 above) 68.

53. Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, vv. 606. The play was first performed in the City Dionysia in 423 BC and tells the story of Pheidippides, son of Strepsiades, who is a horse enthusiast and acquires large debts on behalf of his father. To avoid paying them, Strepsiades attempts to make his son go study with Socrates to learn about the art of argument. Pheidippides refuses, and his father attends in his stead.

54. E. Csapo, 'The Earliest Phase of "Comic" Choral Entertainments in Athens: The Dionysian Pompe and the 'Birth' of Comedy', in *Fragmentary History of Greek Comedy*, eds. S. Chronopoulos and C. Ort (Heidelberg 2015) 66–108 (73–74).

55. For κῶμος and κωμασταί, and their relation to the origin of theater, see E. Csapo, 'Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconology, Ritual, and Gender-Role De/Construction', *Phoenix* 51 (3/4) (1997) 253–95 (262–64); J. Rusten, 'Who "Invented" Comedy? The Ancient Candidates for the Origins of Comedy and the Visual Evidence', *American Journal of Philology* 127 (1) (2006) 33–66 (41–55); K. Rothwell, *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy: A Study of Animal Choruses* (Cambridge 2007); Csapo, 'The Earliest Phase of "Comic" Choral Entertainments' (n. 54 above) 83–91. Artifacts depicting processions linked with the origins of theater are called "Komast vases," which date back to the period between the seventh and early fifth centuries and represent padded dancers or mask-wearing figures. See T. J. Smith, 'The Corpus of Komast Vases: From Identity to Exegesis', in *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama*, eds. E. Csapo and M. C. Miller (Cambridge 2007) 48–76; C. Isler-Kerényi, 'Komasts, Mythic Imaginary, and Ritual', in Csapo and Miller, *Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond*, 77–95; J. R. Green, 'Let's Hear it for the Fat Man: Padded Dancers and the Prehistory of Drama' in Csapo and Miller, *Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond*, 96–107; and Hart, *Art of Ancient Greek Theater* (n. 10 above), 19–27.

origins: either the union of *κῶμος* and *ᾠδή* or that of *κώμη* and *ᾠδή*.[56] Moreover, the interpretation of the heading of *IG* II^2 2318[57] has led some scholars to claim that the word *κῶμος* refers to the theatrical choruses of all ancient dramatic genres (comedy, tragedy, and satyr drama).[58]

As we have seen thus far, the analysis of the iconography that decorates the *oinochoe* displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art evinces a polysemic interplay with the theatrical realm that comprises iconographic, thematic, and philological aspects. It is, however, the way the door is depicted that conditions one's gaze and directs the reception of the painting toward the theatrical realm. This creates a strangeness effect, both because of its difference with the human figures and specifically because of its artificial character, which makes the receiver wonder if it indeed is a scene inspired by daily life, spontaneous as any other. When we delve into the thematic aspects, we are able to confirm the scene is an episode with multiple and rather uncommon meanings connected to the realm of theatre.

Final Considerations

The decoration on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *oinochoe* hints at the theatrical realm based on specific iconographic features as well as thematic and philological links. This does not mean it cannot be related to other realms as well. Ceramic decoration is traditionally classified as belonging to a single thematic realm. Therefore, once a painting is catalogued as belonging to a particular realm—and this is accepted and legitimized—new perspectives are challenged and resisted. Nevertheless, we believe that in some cases certain elements exist that hint at different realms, without this representing a contradiction. In other words, a painting is polysemic, and it is always open to multiple meanings that complement each other.

Even though there are different ways in which ancient iconography is linked with theatre, all of them are circumscribed to the theatrical realm. But what happens when we note theatrical elements in paintings that are also related to other

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56. Aristotle refers to this in *Poetics* III, mentioning also the verbal form *κωμάζω*, which means "[to] revel, make merry," "[to] go in festal procession." See H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, With a Revised Supplement* (Oxford 1996) *s.v.* For etymological issues, see P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots* (Paris 1968) *s.v.*

57. Called the *Fasti*, these are twelve white marble fragments found in the vicinity of the Agora in Athens, bearing inscriptions that refer to records of yearly dithyrambic and dramatic contest results from the City Dionysia, likely near the late sixth century BC. See E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor 2001) 40–41; B. W. Millis and S. D. Olson, *Inscriptional Records for the Dramatic Festivals in Athens* (Leiden and Boston 2012) 5–58.

58. A. Wilhelm *Urkunden dramatischer Aufführungen in Athens* (Vienna 1906) 12; F. Rodríguez Adradós, *Fiesta, comedia y tragedia* (Madrid 1983) 79.

realms, as we have seen with the analysis of the *oinochoe*? Limiting the possibilities of establishing such a relation only to paintings strictly belonging to the theatrical realm involves negating the possibility of establishing crossovers or common grounds between the different realms of ordinary life and culture of that era. Ancient Greek theatre was not a private activity attended individually; rather, it was an event that took place in civic and religious festivals that were attended by the whole city.[59] Consequently, it is to be expected that the theatrical would pour into realms that were not strictly its own and that the decoration of ceramic artifacts would reflect such an interaction. The presence of such elements by no means rules out previous analyses or involves the exclusion of painting from a specific realm, nor does the painted scene correspond to a theatrical spectacle or a lost piece; rather, this presence complements and enriches existing analyses and underscores new meanings.

We believe it is necessary to open up the ways in which the links between ancient ceramic iconography and theatre are understood and thus accept the emergence of elements that refer to theatre in painted scenes that are not specifically theatrical. Here we refer to inherently iconographic issues in terms of procedures and ways of representing certain (human and nonhuman) figures as well as semantic ones, and not to the narrative aspects of a painted scene. Certainly, it will be necessary to broaden the analysis and delve into the question of whether it is possible to note such an emergence in other artifacts or whether it is simply an isolated case.

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59. We offer a generalization to substantiate the present argument. We have not considered debates surrounding the composition of the audience in ancient Greek theater. Cf. D. K. Roselli, *Theater Of The People. Spectators and society in Ancient Athens* (Austin 2011).

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