

Ellen Stauder: Representation and Gender in Athenian Vase Painting (Fall 2004)
Reviewer: Ashley Cribbins

Common ground: Though early Greek vase painting showed a clear "male oriented ego centric eroticism", towards the end of the Archaic period there was a shift towards more emotional eroticism aimed at a female audience. Studying such vases is a fairly accurate way to trace a similar change in Greek society (as it became more democratic) and the role and representation of Greek women. Vase painting was a means of social communication. So, as Sutton argues, the apparent appeal to a female audience reflects a more widespread change in society, radical democracy, and a sort of "women's movement."

But: Vases do not necessarily equate to social reality, as they are merely constructs. And as for the "women's movement", other evidence indicates that women's lives were more difficult and constricting during this period. Domestic work was looked down upon and often dismissed as easy, and the emphasis on the power of men (by the democracy) marginalized the role of women in society. The polis itself usurped some of the functions women had in society, such as burying the dead, and Pericles's citizen law made scrutiny of women's behavior higher priority.

So what: Sutton's argument, and Thurston's "romance" theory are both probably misled. There is little to indicate that, with the known repression of women at the time, the 5th century vases represent any kind of new found power for women.

Thesis: More "emotional" vase painting does not indicate an advancement for the status of women but is instead a reflection of a democratic society beginning to focus on the individual. (Ellen states her actual thesis on the handout, but this is what I gathered from her lecture.)