

Book Review

Greek Vase-Painting and the Origins of Visual Humour

by Mitchell, Alexandre



CHOICE

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Poking fun at revered institutions and the gods is no joking matter. Breaking the norms of established conventions through the agency of humor is an effective means of counteracting repression. This excellent book by Mitchell (Oxford) covers a wide range of themes of visual representation that, taken together, reveal the use of humor as a subversive strategy of indirect resistance, providing both release and safety. Caricature, parody, overt sexual imagery, drunkenness, gender stereotyping, and the deconstruction of myths are investigated, categorized, and interpreted with exemplary thoroughness and psychological subtlety. But why restrict this study to vase painting in mainland Greece and neglect the contemporary productions of Magna Graecia, whose bawdiness and comedic inventions were so pervasive and well received? Why emphasize the plays of Aristophanes and the "Old Comedy" when Euripides was an even stronger antiestablishment figure (if not as humorous) and far more popular in the fourth century? Why ignore the potentially different reception of Attic humor in the Italian and Etruscan markets, where so much of this pottery has been found? A second volume answering these questions and proceeding well into the Hellenistic period would be very welcome. Summing Up: Highly recommended. Upper-level undergraduates through faculty/researchers. R. Brilliant emeritus, Columbia University

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