

## The Lenaia vases revisited Image, ritual and Dionysian women

Akademisk avhandling som för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen  
vid Göteborgs universitet offentligens försvaras i sal T 307,  
Olof Wijksgatan 6, lördagen den 30 september 2006 kl. 13.15.

av

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### *Abstract*

Olsson, V., *The Lenaia vases revisited. Image, ritual and Dionysian women*. 252 pp. 50 pls.

Written in English.

This study deals with the so-called Lenaia vases, a group of fifty vases which were painted with similar imagery in Attica during 490-420 BC. The motifs of these vases depict "Dionysian" women, drinking wine and sacrificing bloody and bloodless offerings before a cult image of Dionysos. The aim is to understand how the motifs were conceived in the contemporary society and what phenomenon the iconography refers to. The investigation focuses on the role and function of the women and the ritual components in the scenes. The depicted actions and items are identified and their function in the illustrated ritual is examined. Based on these findings, a hypothetical reconstruction of the ritual procedure is made. From the ritual elements of the scenes a mythical background can be discerned, connected with Dionysos' birth and death, related to the changing of seasons. It is proposed that the depicted procedure was based on a religious practice in Greek society in the form of a calendar ritual.

The results of the examination suggest that the illustrated ritual originated in Delphi, performed by the Thyiades, a female cultic society that existed there. It also indicates that the vases' imagery had an informative purpose and that the vases themselves could have had a ritual function. Many of the motifs are exceptionally detailed and descriptive, even illustrating a ritual use of ceramic vessels of the same type as the vases they are depicted on. The Lenaia vases have been found in tombs in Greece, in Greek colonies and in Etruria, which may attest a widespread knowledge of the illustrated ritual. Since the vessels illustrate a ritual closely connected with death and rebirth, this is a plausible explanation for why they were considered suitable gifts for the deceased in both Greek and Etruscan tombs. Archaeological evidence and literary testimony such as Euripides' *Bacchae* are discussed in the thesis to confirm these aspects of the vases and explore their implications for religious activities and gender relationships in the context of cultures like that of classical Athens.

*Keywords:* Attic pottery, black figure vases, red figure vases, Lenaia vases, stamnos, iconography, Dionysus, Dionysian women, maenads, Delphi, Thyiades, Greek cult, cult image, ritual, Etruria.