

Ada Cohen, *Art in the Era of Alexander the Great. Paradigms of Manhood and Their Cultural Traditions.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. \$95.00. ISBN 978-0-521-76904-4 (hb). Pp. xxiii + 398, figs. 134, pls. 10.

To review this important book in a mere thousand words (or so) is an exercise in futility. And yet, it must be attempted. The material Ada Cohen— hereafter C.— has assembled is not only interesting in its own right, it is also *framed* in such a way that makes this text all but indispensable for students of ancient Greek culture. Cohen’s careful blending of “harder” archaeology (the excavation, collection, and documentation of the ancient physical evidence) with a “softer” set of theoretical queries is an invigorating breath of fresh air. While some more “traditional” archaeologists might find this balancing act problematic, for those interested in a methodologically and theoretically informed approach to ancient material culture, it is a resounding success.

In her Preface and Chapter One, C. introduces the themes and the methodologies that she will employ. The thematic subjects of her study are depictions of warfare, hunting, and abduction (rape) in fourth and earlier third century B.C.E. Macedon. All provide important visual evidence for the social construction of late Classical gender models, specifically models of masculinity. To my mind, these two chapters, taken together, offer one of the more important treatments of archaeological theory and epistemology in the last ten years. Specifically, C. refuses from the outset to be bound by traditional rhetorical categories and happily points to the fact that she will adopt both positivist traditions (in which data is gathered, documented, and described) and more contemporary theoretical approaches (which will allow her to juxtapose the fore-mentioned data in interesting and enlightening ways.) Even more exciting is C.’s refusal to accept unconditionally the contemporary obsession with ancient *différence*, that is, the tendency to view ancient peoples as fundamentally Other. In place of this rather simplistic notion, C.’s sets up a far more fluid model wherein both cultural similarity *and* difference can be seen in both partnership and juxtaposition. In treating themes of warfare, hunting, and abduction, this is a particularly important move, allowing us to think about both the *socially constructed* nature of human experience and the pervasive *continuity* within which some of these constructs seem to be lodged. As a contemporary male reading about ancient models of masculinity, I found it fascinating (and sometimes a bit frightening) to realize how similar the social pressures are that have shaped both contemporary and ancient archetypes of manhood. In other words, like all great history and archaeology, C. allows (indeed, forces) her readers to realize that they themselves have something vested in our pictures of the past. This is both true and profoundly important to the future of archaeology, art history, and ancient history.

Chapter Two sees a move away from theory into practice with the treatment of the three famous mosaic floors from the House of the Abduction in Pella. C.’s discussion of the mosaics begins with a straightforward discussion of the material evidence, noting the specifically gendered space (the *andron*) within (or between) which the images were situated. She then places the preceding discussion within two different frames, one

provided by contemporary (or near contemporary) literature, and another provided by contemporary theoretical views of gender, agency, and identity. Here again, C. strikes an interesting (and delicate) balance between theoretical models. For example, in treating the popular notion of the *male gaze* (made famous by Linda Nochlin, Edward Snow, and Patricia Simmons in the 1970s and 80s) C. creates a shifting lens through which ancient (and modern) viewers might understand the hunters of the Pella deer hunt mosaic as both self-conscious theatrical actors *and* manipulated objects, as figures that both command respect *and* are controlled by both the artist and viewer. In so doing, C. shows how this kind of tension and suspension of categories make these images potent as both “decoration” and “ideology.” Indeed, one wonders if the “power” of an image might actually increase the *less* it is “studied” and the more it is simply assumed as a natural – as a material “given” – a notion perfectly encapsulated in the ancient Greek word *kosmos*.

Following a rigorous treatment of lion hunts and lion hunting in Chapter Three, Chapter Four sees a detailed discussion of the metaphorical connections that existed between predation involved in both hunting and war. Careful to point out that these two spheres overlap in the ancient world in a variety of cultures, C. demonstrates how deep the connection was in ancient Macedonia, pointing out powerful analogies between the hunted/the weak/the enemy and the hunters/the strong/the allied. Of specific importance here is C.’s notion of the reversible metaphor, a rhetorical move with rather strong (and disturbing) ramifications for this most potent of ancient equivalences. (C. is careful not to push too hard here, but I wonder if this might not be exactly where ancient historians might *want* to push, for a number of different reasons.) One of the most compelling moves that C. makes here, and throughout her book as well, is a that there is a frightening consistency with which many of these tropes are used; certainly food for thought.

Connections between the hunt, abduction, rape, and war are explored in Chapters Five and Six and, again, haunting parallels exist between ancient and contemporary worlds, parallels brought to life by C.’s careful treatment of juxtapositions of these four themes in fresco, mosaic, sculpture, and vase painting. The volume concludes with two thematically paired chapters, “Abduction and Femininity” and “Hunt and Masculinity.” It is here that C. pulls everything together, tracking larger notions of gender construction against two painted foci, The Rape of Persephone in Tomb I and the Hunting Frieze in Tomb II, both at Vergina. In both cases, C.’s analyses are insightful, penetrating, and reveal a pair of complimentary ideals that revolved around expectations, images, and the realities of being both a woman and a man in the late Classical world. This is an important book that deserves a wide audience. Indeed, there is far more going on here beside (yet) another treatment of the art of the era of Alexander the Great.

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