Dogs in Everyday Life: Workshops, Butchers, Symposia, and Altars

Dogs behave in multifarious ways in the company of humans. This is well testified in both literature and in art. In the *Iliad*, they are often described as voracious animals, which accompany vultures in devouring corpses on the battlefield (Hom. *Il.* 1.4). On the other hand, Odysseus's dog, Argos, is portrayed as a faithful companion who waited

[71] See Mainoldi 1984: 152–60.

Figure 16. *Caricature of Aesop(?) chatting with a fox.* Attic RF, Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano, 16552; Painter of Bologna 417; 460–430 BC. Vectorised drawing © Alexandre G. Mitchell.

patiently twenty years for his master's return. Other dogs were sheepdogs (Pl. *Resp.* 416a), and others were trained to hunt as we know from Xenophon's *Kynegetikon*. They are also described as wandering in the wilderness or in town.

In vase-paintings, most dogs are shown in hunting scenes[72] (such as the Calydonian Boar hunt) and in connection with warrior departure scenes, warriors on horseback, or at symposia. The presence of dogs is rarely mentioned in vase descriptions, even when their presence is not altogether incidental. Although different species of dogs are in principle distinguishable in vase-painting, only 'Molossian', 'Laconian', and 'Maltese' have been positively identified in vase-painting to date. In the present work, we are particularly

[72] See Hull 1964.

Figure 17. *Side A: Woman holding her nose in the presence of a worker. Side B: dogs breaking everything in a potter's shop.* Pelike, Attic RF, Florence, Museo Archeologico, 72732; 520–490 BC. Vectorised drawing © Alexandre G. Mitchell.

interested in their representations in everyday life scenes where they are often shown as mischievous or gluttonous animals.

A pelike in Florence (fig. 17)[73] shows two large dogs wearing collars, standing on their hind legs fighting inside an oil merchant's shop. Their master, who might have just stood up from the seat behind him, threatens them with a stick. The narrow and rather short stick he is holding resembles the siphon often used by oil merchants to permit their customers to taste their oil, as on a lekythos in Boston.[74] An amphora and four lekythoi are painted between the figures. The dogs have already broken the foot of the second lekythos from the right, while another lekythos is rolling on the floor. The 'unruliness' of domesticated animals is comical in that it reminds us that nature cannot be bound in rules, as society is. Their master is presumably afraid they will devastate the rest of the merchant's store. On the other side of the Florence pelike, an oil merchant dressed in a himation is offering some oil to a woman.

On the first side of the pelike an inscription, starting from the man's chest and ending above the dogs' heads, reads 'KUNA HEMI'. Guarnieri (Razeto 1985: 37) seems to read 'KUNR(AI)EMI' – does the author read *kuon raie me?* – which he then translates as 'Dog, break me!'. But having examined the inscription in person, I cannot corroborate the reading nor the translation. I read 'KUNA HEMI'. Since the letter *heta* is not found as a letter before the turn of the century (Threatte 1980: 42, 493–506; Immerwahr 1990: 141–4), it must be an aspiration 'h'. But, as aspirations are not found in the middle of a word in contemporary inscriptions, these must be two separate words. *Kuna* is 'dog'

[73] Pelike, Attic RF, Florence, Museo Archeologico, 72732; (BA 9458); Esposito and Tommaso 1993: 288–90, figs. 4–5; Scheibler, I. (1993) *Griechische Topferkunst, Herstellung, Handel und Gebrauch der antiken Tongefässe*. Munich: 19, fig. 7; Capecchi, G. et al. (1998) *In Memoria di Enrico Paribeni*. Rome: pl. 36. 520–490 BC. Vectorised drawing © Alexandre G. Mitchell.

[74] Lekythos, Attic BF, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 99.526; (BA 2930), *ABL* 209.81, pl. 24.4; Panvini, R. and Giudice, F. (eds.) (2003) *Ta Attika, Attic Figured Vases from Gela*. Rome: 271.D60. From Sicily, Gela; Gela Painter; 520–500 BC.

in the accusative. I have assumed that the second letter of the second word is '*e*', but because of the bad preservation of this section of the painting this cannot be confirmed. However, on this basis, the possible verbs for the second word starting with an aspiration are: *hemi* ('half-' never found on its own) or *hiēmi* ('I throw', which does not make much sense in this context). One is left with the overall impression that the merchant is trying to get rid of the dogs. It would be reasonable to imagine him saying 'go' or 'stop now' or even insulting them. The accusative could be explained by a popular expression of the time: *(Ma ton) kuna* (Ar. *Wasps* 83; Pl. *Ap.* 21e, *Grg.* 482b) instead of the *(Ma ton) Dia* ('By Zeus!'), something like 'you bloody dog' (Lilja 1976: 74–6). But the accusative could also be explained by the second word, a verb that regretfully I cannot identify.

In the case of the Berlin pyxis (fig. 11),[75] men were overrun by mischievous foxes and dogs. The mechanism is the same here: the scene is amusing because the man cannot stop his dogs from wrecking the shop. He is threatening them with a stick and shouting (regardless of how the inscription is understood) but remains powerless to prevent further damage.

Foxes and cats appear to be greedy animals in vase-painting. They climb up poles or sticks when dogs are more likely to pounce. On a chous at Harvard University,[76] a child holds high a bunch of grapes (or some meat), forcing a Maltese dog to stand on its hind legs and leap for the food. Dogs jump too when playing with their master, as on a cup in Brussels.[77] This scene was so common in the everyday life of Athens that it is used as a comical analogy in Aristophanes (*Clouds* 489–91):

> Socrates: Right, whatever wise bit of cosmology I toss you, try to snap it up at once!
> Strepsiades: What? Must I eat science like a dog?

On a black-figure olpe in Heidelberg,[78] a man is holding firmly a string of meat while another is chopping it with his *machaira*. In Greek, the word for butcher and sacrificer is the same: *mageiros*.[79] Although the Heidelberg olpe probably shows sacrificers and not butchers, butchers in other pictures may be nothing more than what they appear to be. A butcher on a pelike in Munich (fig. 14)[80] wears a loincloth and slices meat with his *machaira*. The association of certain details enables the viewer to identify a ritual scene of sacrifice: a sacrificer's long robe, wreaths in the hair, and an altar. On the Heidelberg olpe, one element could indicate ritual. Although both men are wearing loincloths and there is no altar, they both seem to have wreaths in their hair, which could indicate that they are sacrificers and not butchers. At the sacrificers' feet, a dog is stretching out under a stool, which is covered with slices of meat, and chewing a piece it must have snatched

[75] Berlin, F2517.
[76] Chous, Attic RF, Cambridge, Harvard University, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, 24.1908; (BA 13419); van Hoorn 1951: fig. 324, no. 438. 430–410 BC.
[77] Cup, Attic RF, Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, R350; (BA 3997), *ARV*² 377.99; *CVA*, Bruxelles, Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire 1, III.I.C.2, pl. 4.4. Brygos Painter; 480–470 BC.
[78] Olpe, BF, Heidelberg, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, 253; (BA 10598); *CVA*, Deutschland 10, Heidelberg 1, pl. 39.3. 520–480 BC. See also pelike, Attic RF, Erlangen, Friederich-Alexander-Universität, 486; (BA 202524), *ARV*² 250.21, 1639; van Straten 1995: fig. 155. Syleus Painter; 500–480 BC.
[79] On the *mageiros*, see both Berthiaume 1982 and van Straten 1995.
[80] Munich, 2347.

from the stool. Another dog, standing on all fours with its head turned towards the man holding the *machaira*, is hoping that some pieces will fall or be thrown in its direction. This was a common occurrence, as we know from Aesop in 'The dog and the butcher' (Chambry 1985: Fab. 254): 'A dog ran into a butchery; as the butcher was occupied elsewhere, it grabbed a heart and darted off'.

An amphora in Basel[80] shows a scene comparable to the dogs and foxes in the pantry. On one side, two men are performing a sacrifice at an altar (one is making a libation and the other holds a spit), on the other side, a pack of dogs wreaks havoc, leaping in all directions around another altar. They have dislodged the grill on the altar to get to the meat, which was probably roasting as embers are flying about. In this scene, the humour lies in the men's apparent lack of awareness of the danger. They are concentrating on their task and have no notion that their other altar is being plundered; the one they are working at is probably about to be plundered too.

Many dogs are shown indoors, in symposium scenes. On a cup in Munich,[81] two young men are reclining. Below them is a table covered with bread loaves and slices of meat. A dog, biting a piece, is strolling to the right. He is one of many 'table dogs' (*kunes trapezēes*) that masters care about only to show off (Hom. *Od.* 17.309–10).[82] Although these dogs were probably well fed, they still had a reputation for thievery. The dog on this vase may have stolen the slice of meat from the table. Two delightful comic allegories in Aristophanes (*Knights* 1030–4) may confirm such an interpretation:

> Sausage seller: 'Beware, son of Erechtheus, of the dog Kerberos, the trafficker in bodies, who wags his tail at you during your dinner and watches, and when you happen to look in another direction, eats up your entrée, and at night steals into your kitchen all unseen, and doglike licks clean the plates and the islands.

In *Wasps* (Ar. *Wasps* 836–8), Labes ('thief' in Greek) the dog is on trial: he has stolen and devoured a Sicilian cheese. There is a pun on the name of the strategos, or general, Laches of Aixone who conducted the first expedition to Sicily in 427: 'As if that dog Labes didn't run into the kitchen just now and gobble up a wheel of Sicilian cheese!'