Composition in Athenian Black-Figure Vase-Painting: The 'Chariot in Profile'
Type Scene
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All Athenian vases painted using the black-figure technique reflect the conventions of Athenian *pictorial language*. These were familiar to Athenians in the 6\(^{th}\) century BCE, but we – after 2,500 years – can discover them only by studying and analysing the surviving images. Because large numbers provide vital statistical evidence, this study focuses on mass-produced vases, many of which are preserved. After a introductory case study of the *type scene* ‘Fighting men separated’ demonstrates the methodology, this dissertation examines the imagery of more than 1,200 Athenian black-figure vase-paintings of the *type scene* ‘Chariot in profile’. Three *subtypes* are distinguished: ‘Hoplites and other men leaving’, ‘Wedding Procession’, and ‘Apotheosis of Heracles and divine departures’.

The investigation reveals that vase-painters were free to make variations, but they did not randomly add or omit figures or details. When innovative vase-painters created a new *typical composition*, they built upon existing compositions with related meanings, because new images had to be quickly and easily understood by the public. Since the painters composed the paintings according to a commonly understood system of *pictorial language*, knowledge of this system will help the modern viewer to understand the deeper meanings of paintings that at first sight are hard to grasp. The visual artists’ use of pictorial language resembles the way in which a singer tells a story in oral poetry, so this dissertation applies semiotic methods for the study of literary texts to the imagery in order to help the modern viewer approach the intuitive knowledge of the ancient viewer.