Kinetography: a methodological framework for reading kinetic motifs in the Greek vase-painting

## Abstract

Making sense of the kinetic motifs depicted in paintings and sculptures from the past is a fundamental but delicate task that, despite its prevalence in the scholarship proper, still lacks a well-defined methodology. The movements that human characters perform on an ancient vase or architectural façade are flat and frozen. They are difficult to decipher independent from written sources and/or visual attributes such as outfits or objects. In the lack of textual and visual references, the task of understanding what a movement stands for falls totally on the viewers’ shoulders. Without a reading method, the viewers would have to translate the movement according to their personal ideas and backgrounds.

My paper proposes kinetography as a methodological framework for reading and making sense of kinetic motifs, i.e. human movements, in the Greek vase-painting. This process begins with reconstruction of a thematic identity for the movement under study through the consecutive application of three approaches: impressionistic, archaeological, and iconographical. They shape the thematic identity of the movement through retrieving its title, nature, structural makeup, contextual attributes, and literary backdrops. These aspects of the movement’s identity, then, contribute in explaining the relevance of the movement to the history of its artistic format and, consequently, to its original time, place, and cultural sphere.

The kinetographic framework proposed here is primarily designed for the reappraisal of ancient dance movements as the most questionable kinetic motifs in the Greek vase-painting. The case I study using this framework is a movement frequently performed by individual female characters on the red-figure vases of the fifth and fourth centuries BC. This movement is predominantly understood as representation of a non-performative conduct such as walking or running. Nevertheless, as I will show here, it is a kinetic pattern conventionally used to illustrate dance – an idea already recognised and indicated by some scholars and yet remained understudied partly due to the lack of a specific reading model in the study of ancient dance and its visual remains.