A chase unfolds across the lustrous black frieze of the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum’s Nolan amphora, painted by Hermonax. Striding from the left, an older bearded man stretches his right arm toward a fleeing youth. The boy turns his head back as he runs, drawing his right arm up in alarm at the pursuer’s proximity. His himation (cloak) has slipped from his shoulders and flares out behind his body. Its folds form neat diagonals, accentuating the spectacle of his nude athletic body. This cloak, framing the youth’s nakedness, underscores his twofold objectification: he endures at once the erotic gaze of his pursuer and that of the viewer outside the scene, whose eyes are drawn to the boy by the calculating line work of the composition. The runners’ nimble feet sprint and skim above a slim pattern painted in Greek key pairs and punctuated by interposing crosses. The pattern encircles the vase, continuously echoing the motion of pursuit and encouraging the viewer to turn the vessel. On the opposite side, the figure of a single youth quotes the galloping stance of the boy being pursued. His arms are thrown open as he turns his head back and his legs fly, right before left, above the ground line. This boy holds a lyre in his hand. Its strap swings in the air, intimating some near escape.

Such scenes of pederastic pursuit were well-known to banqueting elites about the Mediterranean who made use of Athenian pottery in the late 6th and early 5th centuries BCE, and a close reading

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1 An amphora is a ceramic vessel with two handles for carrying on either side. The name derives from the Greek amphi, meaning “on both sides,” and phorein, meaning “to carry.” Large amphoras with pointed bases were used throughout the Mediterranean as shipping containers for oil and wine, while smaller, painted vessels with flat bases fulfilled a variety of ceremonial and social functions. The two main types of amphoras are the neck amphora, where the neck and body conjoin at a sharp angle, and the one-piece amphora, where the neck and body merge in a continuous curve. The Nolan amphora is a distinctive, smaller type of neck amphora, typically no more than 30 cm in height, that features an elongated and narrower neck. The name of these amphoras derives from the town of Nola in Southern Italy, where many such vessels, including this one, have been uncovered. For a general overview of Greek amphora shapes, see R. M. Cook, Greek Painted Pottery (New York: Routledge, 1997), 209–12. The painter of this vase, Hermonax, was a mid-5th-century BCE artisan of solid (if slightly prosaic) skill. Several painters of this period drew stylistic inspiration from archaic precedent; this group is known as the Mannerists. Still others, galvanized by the Greek defeat of the Persians, began to express a new spirit that exemplifies Early Classical style. Hermonax straddled both styles, but his finest works are in the Early Classical mode, expressing at once anticipation of and reflection upon a crisis. For more on this, see Mary B. Moore, “Attic Red-Figure and White-Ground Pottery,” in The Athenian Agora, vol. 30 (Athens: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1997), 103–4.

2 Thank you to Theresa Huntsman, PhD candidate in the Department of Art History & Archaeology at Washington University in St. Louis, who very kindly shared her recent research on this Nolan amphora.
of the Nolan amphora’s iconography reveals much about the culture that produced it. Indeed, the purpose of this essay is to explore aspects of classical Athenian society through the lens of a single vase. Among ancient Greek viewers, the extended right arm of an older male, as on the Nolan vessel, was visual shorthand for an erotic chase. In the intimate setting of the Greek symposium—a highly-choreographed, all-male drinking party where amphoras, embellished by sensual imagery, were routinely used to replenish the wine—this “legibility” implicated the viewer in the scene. It likely titillated and likewise inquired of the guest what his prospects for the evening might be. Such visual provocation probed the viewer’s role: would he, spurred by the spectacle of the Nolan scene, ally himself with Zeus and pursue his Ganymede? Would he exercise restraint, or give himself over to excess? As drinking cups (kylikes and kantharoi) were raised and wine was poured (from oinochoai), painted figures shifted before the eyes of the drinker. Bodies arched with the contours of the vase, flipping head over heel or sidelong with the movements of the vessel. These vibrant images—accompanied by young dancers, the music of flutes, and courtesans (hetairai)—pressed the question.

Such liveliness was augmented by the flourishing of red-figure vase painting in the last quarter of the 6th century BCE, a decorative technique exemplified by the Hermonax painter’s Nolan amphora. The revolutionary aspect of red-figure painting was its ability to convey three-dimensionality, fashioning bodies from the reserved clay and fleshing out their forms with intricate line work. Black-figure vase painting, the precursor to this method, was adopted from Corinthian artisans of the 7th century BCE. Although ideal for pattern work and geometric detail, the earlier method required the painter to render human figures in glaze while the background was reserved in clay. Consequently, all details were incised and anatomy was flattened. In contrast, red-figure vase painting, by embodying ideal physical beauty through dimension, heightened a sense of intimacy between the viewer and the scene. Still, while the modern observer may admire the idealized naturalism of the painted scene, this Nolan vase perhaps conveys far more of ideology than reality.

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3 For more about the imagery of pursuit in ancient Greek society, see Judith M. Barringer, *The Hunt in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 73.
4 Amphoras were used to bring wine to large mixing bowls known as kraters, where the wine was mixed with water. The ancient Greeks did not drink their wine neat; the drinking of undiluted wine was, rather, the mark of a Barbaros, or non-Greek foreigner.
5 In Greek mythology, Ganymede was a Trojan youth of great beauty whom Zeus abducted to serve as his cupbearer and lover. According to various tellings of the myth, Zeus either assumed the form of an eagle himself or sent an eagle to steal the boy from the high pastures of Mount Ida, where he was tending sheep. The myth is related or referred in the following sources, among others: Homer, *Iliad* 5.265ff; 20.215–35; *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 202ff.; Sophocles, *The Colchian Women*; Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*; Apollodorus, *Library and Epitome* iii.12.2; Diodorus Siculus, *Histories* 4.75.3; Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.252–60; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.155ff.; and Lucian, *Dialogues of the Gods*.
6 Kylikes and kantharoi are common Greek terms for two-handled ceramic cups (a kylix is a shallow cup, often with a stem and foot; a kantharos is a cup typically stemmed and with distinctive high handles); oinochoe is a jug designed for serving wine, often with a trefoil mouth and looped handle (its name derives from the Greek oinos, meaning wine). For a good overview of Greek oinochoe shapes, see Cook, *Greek Painted Pottery*, 214–16.
8 For more on reading scenes such as depicted on this Nolan vase, see Andrew Stewart, *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8.
As with many states both ancient and modern, gender was a principal organizing factor of Athenian society. Political citizenship was confined to adult males alone, and, thus, those outside of this qualification—women, children, and slaves—existed merely as subjects in the community. Male citizens of democratic Athens were self-conceived equals and sexually dominant. This political segregation extended in its most conspicuous social form to the symposium—the consummate activity of Athenian male society. The artists who decorated the pottery used to serve, mix, and adulterate the wine of these gatherings purposefully affirmed the social asymmetry in their designs. In addition to the common theme of homoerotic pursuit, the scenes on their symposiast vases, among other distinctly Dionysiac depictions, frequently represented the sexual submission of women, slaves, and boys on the cusp of maturity. As Andrew Stewart has written, painted scenes of pederasty reaffirmed the solidarity of adult men in their complete dominance; even male minors were subject to the citizens’ desires.9

Boys, of course, citizens in the making, however, and such relations were formalized socially as a type of mentoring, a liminal training period in the development of moral excellence, or arete. Consequently, participation in pederastic courtship was itself a feature of the Athenian ideology of masculinity. On one hand, it was the mode by which a young Athenian man gained access into political society and ultimately attained adulthood. On the other hand, it gave the mature man an opportunity to compete for and gain the favors of a young, admiring lover. Indeed, the imagery of the hunt seeps into representations of pederastic courtship and entwines the two pursuits as emblems of exalted status.10 The reclining Athenian, admiring the scene upon the Nolan amphora, surely would have reveled in his rank.

Still, interpretation of this imagery was opened up to distant audiences by a burgeoning trade economy that carried such vessels all about the Mediterranean. Most ancient Athenian pottery was manufactured for export, and it is difficult to know with any certainty how such imagery was received in distinctly non-Greek, or, more narrowly, non-Athenian cities. In Etruria, for instance, a major trade destination for pottery from Athens, Etruscan women were known to enjoy an evening symposium, ensconced on couches and drinking alongside their spouses. Nola was an Etruscan city, either in its origins or by seizure, and the singular masculinity of this amphora’s imagery would likely have been at odds with prevailing social and cultural mores. Indeed, we come to this vase much like the ancient Nolans with eyes unattuned to Athenian ideology. We admire the scene’s celebration of the human form—the diminished distance between gods and men—and can comprehend its appeal despite our remove. It is surely such cosmopolitan appeal that fueled the success of the Athenian ceramics industry. In this, then, the Nolan vase offers us a twofold glimpse into Athenian society, documenting at once a vibrant example of its economy and the distinctive mores of the ancient city that produced it.

9 Ibid., 10.
10 See Barringer, The Hunt, 71.