

NARRATIVE FORMULAE IN GREEK VASE PAINTING

ΟΜΙΛΙΑ ΤΟΥ SIR JOHN BOARDMAN

I came to Greece first in 1948 and spent five of the following seven years here, virtually a citizen of Athens. My career has been devoted to Greek archaeology and art in various aspects, trying to teach it, to learn more about it and convey that information to others — hard work and pure pleasure. It is why it gives me especial satisfaction to thank the Athens Academy for the signal honour of my election as a Corresponding Member.

My subject deals with an aspect of ancient Greek iconography, well acknowledged by scholars, but perhaps usefully demonstrated on its own in various different contexts. One of the legacies of classical art to the western world has been its art of narrative. In many respects it goes with the delight in story-telling which is apparent in Greek poetry and theatre, but of course it goes far deeper than mere story-telling, since Greek myth was used by artists and writers to carry messages of considerable importance — religious, social and moral. The way in which the artist did this depended on what we might call a vocabulary of narrative by which figures and actions could be identified, even without the help of inscriptions, although in some media they were freely used. It amounted to a conspiracy with the viewer, who could be expected to understand the conventions and read the message. Both artist and viewer had an advantage over us in that they lived in the society for which such messages were relevant, whereas we can only do our best to achieve some sympathy and understanding of what it must have been like to be a Greek of the 5th century BC, to share his understanding of the visual arts, and thereby his understanding of its messages.

It is not my intention to explore in any great detail this language of narrative and its messages. I want rather to look at one aspect of it. One of the means of ensuring understanding and recognition is the observation of certain rules and formulae: in this case visual formulae, the simple shape and association of figures which can be understood even without detail or any inscription, or which provide a framework on which the story can be hung. Even in the period of the most realistic of the arts from the 5th century on, we are aware

that there are certain stock poses and groups that are used by artists in their narrative. One of the most obvious examples are fighting groups which may be used at will by the artists to help his narrative of battles regardless of whether the participants are Greeks, Persians or Amazons.

One is the group of an attacking warrior with an enemy who is running away, yet turns to fight back. It is a commonplace on 5th-century vases, and it recurs on the Parthenon metopes, for an Amazon, but often elsewhere in Greek art where it signifies an honourable encounter between near-equals. This is very unlike the common eastern and Egyptian account of a duel where the victim is dominated, trampled underfoot and held by the hair: a very direct statement which was perhaps too direct for Greek art, where even fighting scenes include some subtlety of comment and sympathy, especially where the opponent is an honoured one, as were Amazons.

The poses of these figures observe basic iconographic conventions which artists learnt from their masters and repeated. The same can be observed today in the work of cartoonists from Mickey Mouse to Asterix; there are poses and sets of figures and expressions which are repeated time and again to suit different situations, because they come almost without thinking to the artists' pen and brush, but at the same time convey a common and sometimes quite complicated message. It was the same for the vase painter or metal-worker of antiquity, the same even for the sculptor modelling in three dimensions. Anyone who has attempted drawing from life will know what I mean — the way one's hand instinctively comes to fashion a pose or set of muscles and limbs, not always exactly in accord with what we observe on the model.

We start at the beginning of narrative in Greek Iron Age art, to explore some of the formulaic conventions of narrative and how they were used; how even the formulae themselves could sometimes be found to suggest ways of telling stories, and even influence details of the story itself, in this way making their own contribution to the ever-changing agenda of Greek myth.

A great deal of early Greek narrative in art depended on models observed and copied in near eastern art, mainly that of Syria. This is all part of Greece's Orientalizing Revolution which began by the 9th century BC and was in full flood in the later 8th and early 7th centuries. Near eastern art was extremely formulaic in its approach but not much given to sophisticated narrative except on the grand scale of palace walls where the narrative is not mythical. We may draw a contrast between two different formulae which Greeks ob-

served and copied, but which had very different fortunes later, for the simple reason that one of them was found to have no real role in Greek story-telling, while the other did. Lions are the common theme.

The motif of a man being attacked and presumably killed by two lions was one of which the Greeks became aware, probably from or via the art of Cyprus, early in the Iron Age. Representations of its persisted through Geometric art down to around 700 BC. An early example is the lively scene on a Protogeometric vase from Knossos in Crete, where the helpless warrior seems to be fighting back¹. And it recurs on Late Geometric Attic vases, as on the famous kantharos in Copenhagen (Fig. 1)².

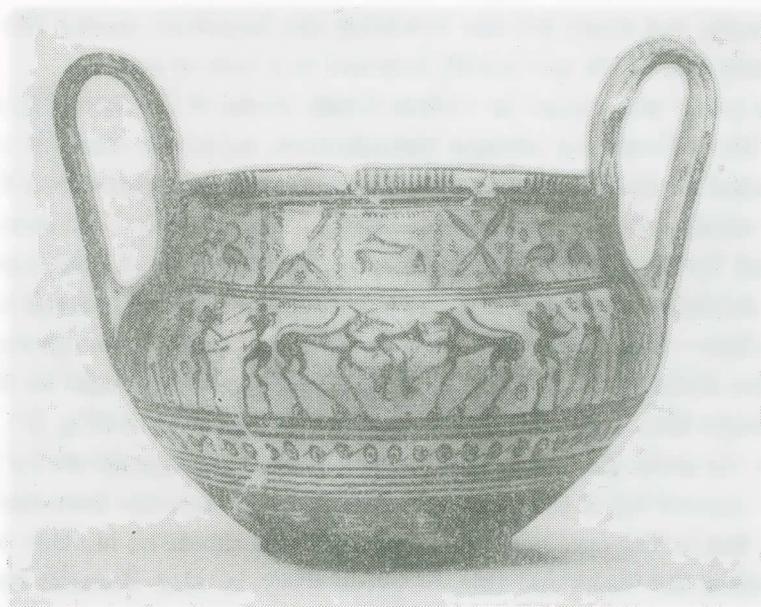


Fig. 1. Copenhagen NM 727. Photo, Hirmer.

This was not a period in which Greek artists could attempt any real myth narrative, because their arts did not allow the sort of detail required to identify figures and actions, and there was no point in adopting any formula, if no one could recognize what it referred to. Where there was action it was generic,

1. *EGVP* fig. 23.

2. Copenhagen NM 727; *ibid.*, fig. 65; Simon/Hirmer, pl. 12.

not specific. By around 700 BC the situation was changing, but there were no Greek stories about a hero being attacked by two lions. This may have been a reality of life in the hills of Anatolia, which is why Homer was to be so good with similes about lions and men, but it had no myth counterpart, and so the group-formula disappeared from the repertory at the same time as real myth narrative in art began.

There was, however, another eastern formula which involved one man fighting a lion, and this was a confrontation in which the man was clearly going to be successful. It was used in the east to denote the power of a god, hero or king, and it continued right into the Achaemenid Persian period. Lions were hunted in the east, though I doubt whether there was often a face-to-face struggle, and surely not one involving any important mortal like a king, but equally one which *was* readily imputed to a hero or god.

The group was copied in various Greek works of the later 9th and 8th century BC without any obvious identification, especially where it was simply repeated in decorative panels. There are several examples from Crete on bronzes which seem to have been inspired by and possibly even executed by immigrant Syrian metalworkers³. However, by the end of the 8th century we see it in Athenian Geometric art. The Greeks had a story of a mortal hero who fought a lion — Heracles. When we look at the scene on a leg of the clay tetrapod in the Kerameikos at Athens we may well think this could be Heracles, and so might the Greek of the period, if he was expecting it (Fig. 2)⁴. That in this case the artist *did* expect this identification is perhaps shown by the fact that, on another leg of the same vessel, he showed the same hero confronting the lion, but in this case holding a sheep over his shoulder; in other words he is protecting the flocks and this, in Greek story, is what Heracles was doing when he faced the lion of Nemea. The artist has taken the eastern formula, and by giving it a context which made sense in terms of Greek myth, made of it a narrative formula for Greek art. It persists throughout antiquity, even to the eastern detail of the lion scratching at the hero's foreleg.

Another formulaic element of eastern art was the symmetrical placing of figures. The general formula was one very readily accepted in Greek art; in-

3. P. Blome, *Die figürliche Bildwelt Kretas* (1982) 11, fig. 3; J. Boardman, *The Cretan Collection in Oxford* (1961) 135, fig. 50.

4. Kerameikos 407; *EGVP* fig. 66; Ahlberg, figs. 19, 20.

deed, if it were not for some telling details, we need hardly have looked to the east for inspiration. There was always something almost mathematical about Greek art. Even when a Geometric scene of burial was presented, as on the great Dipylon amphora, its elements are composed in a strictly symmetrical fashion: the central square is divided horizontally by the bier, the dead man above, mourners below; the verticals at either side are standing mourners; and closer inspection reveals details of mourning gestures, raising the shroud, etc., embedded in the basic geometric scheme⁵. And in later centuries mathematical proportion was as important an element in figure design as it was in architecture.



Fig. 2. Athens, Kerameikos 407. Photo, author.

One basic form of the eastern groups was of a central divine figure flanked by attendants, normally animals; or two figures intent on attacking a central one. There are many eastern examples, for instance the god with animals on pieces of bronze harness taken to Samos and Eretria in Greece⁶. Orientalising versions in Greece show the eastern naked goddess between two lions, on one of the shields from the Idaean Cave in Crete.

5. Simon/Hirmer, pl. 5.

6. J. Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas* (1980) 70, fig. 55.

The eastern formula at its simplest was adopted for the presentation of closely comparable divine figures, such as the Mistress of Animals with lions and birds on a Boeotian vase of the earliest 7th century⁷. Rather more explicit is the Artemis shown as Mistress of Animals, on the Athenian François Vase of about 570 BC (Fig. 3, above)⁸. There are plenty of comparable groups, and there is nothing very subtle here in showing that the central figure dominates the others. But there are more interesting uses of the symmetrical three-figure group in purely narrative contexts. Thus, on a bronze plaque from Olympia we have a very basic composition of two centaurs flanking a warrior, as though the warrior was dominating the monsters⁹. But the artist has used

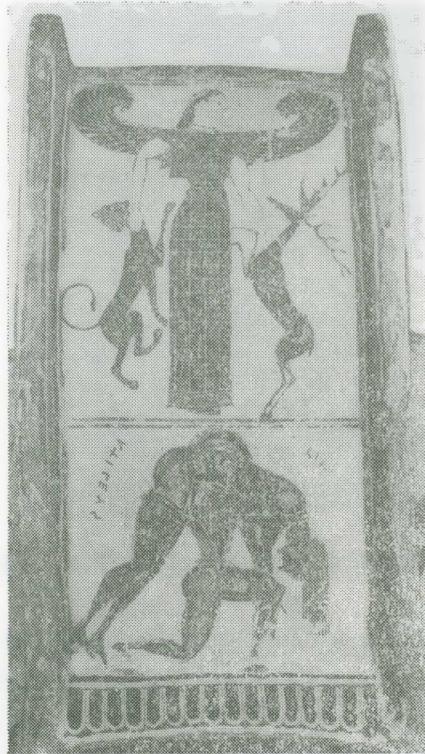


Fig. 3. Florence 4209. Photo, Hirmer.

7. EGVF fig. 102; Simon/Hirmer, pl. 17.

8. Florence 4209; Simon/Hirmer, pl. 51.

9. Olympia BE 11a; *LIMC* V, 'Kaineus' no. 61, pl. 573.

the composition to tell a different and quite explicit story; on close inspection we see that the warrior is half-beaten into the ground, fighting back with a sword in each hand, and that the centaurs are attacking him. The group is made to tell the story of the invulnerable Lapith Kaineus being attacked in the only way possible for his adversaries.

Later, a Spartan vase takes the same basic scheme to show a hero dominating two divine, winged horses (Fig. 4)¹⁰. He has no name but there are



Fig. 4. London B 2. Photo, museum.

other apparently heroic Spartan cavaliers. Another Spartan artist gives the figures of the composition identities, and one creature becomes Pegasus, the other the Chimaera, while the central figure is the hero Bellerophon (Fig. 5)¹¹. The formula has been adjusted here for purely narrative purposes, while the usual way of showing this in Greek art is as direct attack, horseman against monster. By using the symmetrical scheme the artist demonstrates the hero's

10. London, B 2; M. Pipili, *Laconian Iconography of the Sixth Century B.C.* (1987) 38, fig. 52.

11. Malibu 85. AE. 121; Pipili, op. cit., 19, fig. 29; *EGVP* frontispiece.

command of the two animals as much as his victory over the one that is hostile, so the formula in its way also adds something to the basic subject.

Another common eastern group is of two human or divine figures attacking one between them. This too is taken over in Greek art, with many of the gestures and details of poses. A late version with a wholly narrative content, is the scene on an Amasis Painter vase where the central figure is the monster Medusa, just as a monster is often the centre piece in eastern art, while the flanking figures are not anonymous figures but Perseus and Hermes¹².



Fig. 5. Malibu 85. AE. 121. Photo, museum.

Greek artists sometimes had difficulty in creating figures to fit such positions. In the archaic period they could not execute the full range of poses required for a narrative of active human and animal figures. Thus, on another Spartan vase, where Heracles fights a rearing lion, the artist knows only how

12. London B 474; *ABV* 153, 32; *LIMC* VII, 'Perseus' no. 113, pl. 290.

to draw a walking lion, on the level, and has to hoist up one foreleg onto a little support and ignore the other foreleg, to enable him to face the hero in very unrealistic pose¹³. We find the same thing happening elsewhere in archaic art — for instance in the lion-fight on the Sicilian 7th-century vase in Basel, where the walking lion is propped up on a floral (Fig. 6)¹⁴.



Fig. 6. Basel BS 1432. Photo, museum.

I mention this because it affects the next case which involves the problems of how to create a formula for one figure attacking another. When it is a matter of frontal assault, especially with weapons, there is no real problem at all. The east does provide many models, usually emphasizing the strength of the victor by his size or violent attack. But there was probably no real need for foreign inspiration, and very simple juxtaposition of profile figures with

13. Samos K 1189; Pipili, *op. cit.*, 1, fig 1.

14. Basel BS 1432; *EGVP* fig. 277.

basic gestures was enough. When it was matter of attack from behind, indicating stealth or ambush, which was a narrative feature that the eastern artist did not seek to show, there were problems. On a Protoattic vase of around the mid-7th century we have a scene of murder, either Orestes killing Aigisthos, or Aigisthos killing Agamemnon (Fig. 7)¹⁵. The attack is from behind, which suggests that the attack was unlooked for — and to my mind this makes

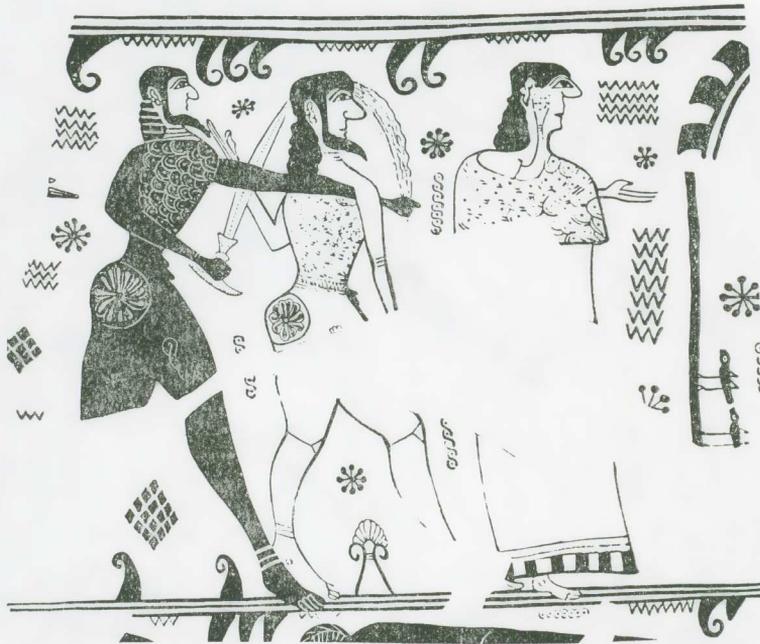


Fig. 7. Berlin A 32. After CVA.

it more probably the death of Agamemnon. The artist can manage two figures moving forward but is not yet sure enough of his draughtsmanship to indicate what was a normal occurrence for such encounters — the attacker immobilising his opponent by seizing his hair — a common eastern motif — while at the same time striking him. It would have been easier if they were facing each other, but then the intimation of surprise is lost. So we have these odd poses for the attacker's arms, one on the hair but in front of the victim's body, the other with a sword. And since it was a natural part of the narrative that, al-

15. Berlin A 32; *EGVP* fig. 209; Ahlberg, fig. 144.

though surprised, the victim would sue for mercy, his hand to the chin of his murderer has to be shown in a very unrealistic backhand gesture. The artist was not yet sure enough of his drawing to express surprise attack and supplication more realistically, yet this is what the story required.

A similar though less bloodthirsty occasion of surprise attack from behind occurs in the story of Peleus and Thetis, in which the hero comes upon the goddess, usually with her companions, and seizes her to ensure that she will become his bride. On typical 6th-century examples the centaur Chiron encourages Peleus, and Thetis' mutations are shown by fire from her shoulders and little lions or a *ketos*¹⁶. In the early scenes we are *not* reminded that one of the reasons for this stealth is that she is capable of turning herself into different things, animals, fire, water, so that Peleus has to grapple with her. In the early scenes he comes on her from behind, and although the examples are a half century or so later than the Protoattic vase, the artist still has some problems.

On a so-called Melian vase at Kavalla of around 600 BC, we have the same problem of the pursuer having to reach round the pursued to catch her arm¹⁷. On a black figure vase, possibly Boeotian, in the Walters Art Gallery, Peleus has rather similar trouble and Thetis, though moving away, is made to twist her body so that he can grab her arm¹⁸. A Corinthian vase painter merely makes an ambush of the scene and attempts no physical contact¹⁹. Later, the matter becomes much simpler once an artist decides to adopt the different scheme in which Peleus seizes Thetis from behind, around her waist, and where the goddess' mutations are also shown. The attack may look like a wrestling move, indeed it is one. But this then becomes a figure formula that can be used elsewhere, and so we find it for Hermes restraining a reluctant Paris, who is terrified at the prospect of having to judge between the three goddesses (Fig. 8)²⁰.

The restraint motif is one that is at any rate better managed in the 6th

16. E.g. *LIMC* VII, 'Peleus' nos. 162-7, pls. 197-8.

17. Kavalla 1068; *ibid.*, no. 61; Ahlberg, fig. 64.

18. *LIMC* VII, no. 108, pl. 192.

19. *LIMC* VI, 'Nereides' no. 271, pl. 491.

20. Berlin 2005; *JdI* 21 (1906) 48, fig. 2; *ABL* 252, 67, Theseus Painter; *LIMC* VII 'Paridis Iudicium' no. 17.

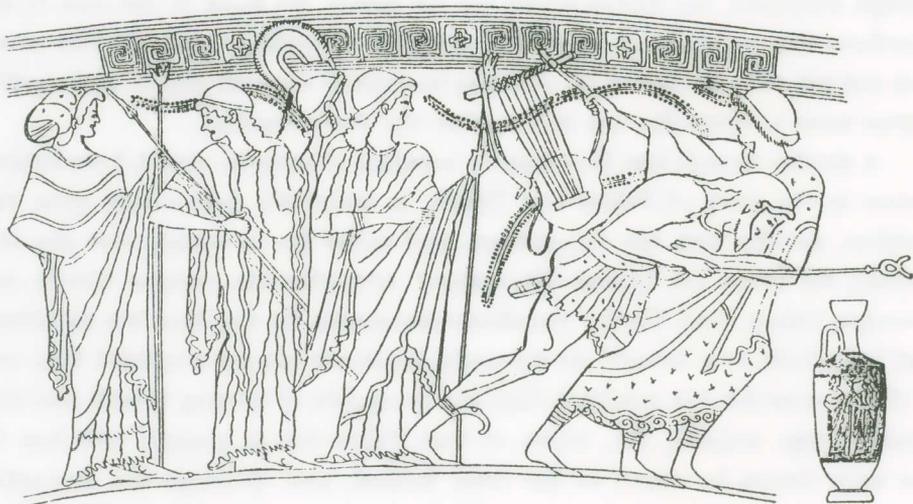


Fig. 8. Berlin 2005. After *JdI*.

century. We see it in a very formulaic scene in which two quarrelling heroes are restrained by their companions. They simply hold them back by their waists. Such episodes are not uncommon in Greek myth. So far as we know the formula for it in art was devised for an episode during the story of the Seven against Thebes, because it appears on a Peloponnesian bronze shield band relief, where the identification depends on the inscriptions, since it is Adrastus who intervenes²¹. The holding-back is done by simply holding wrists. Later, however, the same scheme is used far more vigorously for the dispute between Odysseus and Ajax for possession of Achilles' armour²². This seems a case of a formula being adopted for one story, borrowed by another, and becoming so well known that any other interpretation was forgotten.

There is another, rather more complicated, case which involves a similar problem of identification, eventually solved through familiarity. Already by the end of the 8th century Greek artists were showing a warrior bearing the body of another off the battlefield. It appears on seal impressions on clay from Samos and Ischia²³. The dead body looks a giant but this is surely not intended

21. *LIMC* I, 'Amphiaraos' no. 33, fig.

22. *LIMC* I, 'Aias I' nos. 71-78, pls. 240-2.

23. Ahlberg, figs. 44, 45.

— we are not in a period in which logic rather than space determines the height of figures. With hindsight, we say this is Ajax with the body of Achilles, but without inscriptions we have no way of knowing whether this early group was so identified. In fact, the first group of this sort that we have with inscriptions, again a shield band relief, suggests that in this case it is not Ajax and Achilles, but Ajax and someone called Aristadamos²⁴. Soon, however, in Athens the identification of Ajax and Achilles is made explicit by inscriptions on the François Vase (Fig. 3), again with a pseudo-giant Achilles, and we may take it that from this point on the identification was automatic, whether there are inscriptions or not.

But there is still a problem. It is a common feature to show battlefield dead as naked, the implication being that they are pathetic, defenceless, and probably stripped of their armour²⁵. This is true of the early scenes I mentioned, and Achilles is naked here on the François Vase. But a major point of the story was that his armour was saved with him, to be fought over by Ajax and Odysseus, so it looks as though the formula and convention of nakedness for the battlefield dead, which was perhaps generic or for a different situation, could have been more potent than the details of the story. Most later representations show the Achilles still with his armour. My examples have been of relatively simple groups and stories and we should look for something more sophisticated. Chariots are a clear indication of the heroic in any warlike setting, though they were used in life in archaic Greece, for racing and ceremonial. This is not a usage that depends at all on the east, and is established already in Geometric art. A formula for the depiction of a warrior departing for battle by chariot was devised in which the necessary elements were generally the warrior mounting his chariot, his wife, and sometimes his child. These are the essential elements which transform the chariot, which is simply a signal for the heroic or divine, into part of a formula for a specific event: specific, but not necessarily identified, unless there are inscriptions or details such as the necklace clutched by the guilty wife Eriphyle at the departure of Amphiaraos, of

24. LIMC I, 'Aias I', nos. 26-29; Ahlberg, fig. 50. There is a complication here since a shieldband relief in Malibu names 'Aristodamos the Argive' as the artist (*Journal of the J. Paul Getty Museum* 13 (1985) 166-7) but the identity on the other reliefs seems sure.

25. Cf. on this J. Boardman in *Eumousia* (Studies in honour of Alexander Cambitoglou, 1990, ed. J.-P. Descoeudres) 60.

which the most explicit scene is on the lost Corinthian crater once in Berlin, where we also see the despairing seer at the right, and the child behind the warrior²⁶. But the formula can become generic, with or without the identifying details, and 'warrior departing' becomes a formula like any other, though of wider application.

When we use the word 'formulaic' in this period Homer comes to mind, and his use of lines and phrases which are appropriate in different contexts, but which say the same thing about the dawn or feasting or death. In art 'formulaic' has not quite the same meaning, but there is a slight Homeric association to explore in the terms of my subject. We accept the idea that a given story was treated in much the same way in most oral performances in early Greece, even to the admission of detail, and that this was no doubt helped by formulaic presentation of epic poetry recited from memory. We only get to know about this because Homer took some of these stories, and their formulae, and created something far more sophisticated, something that was more than a mere chronicle, which is what the rest of the epic cycle of poems seems to have been. Homer is far closer to classical tragedy, in that his main themes are mortal dilemmas and reactions, within which is threaded the traditional story-telling.

The earliest story that was told both by artists and by Homer in some detail is that of Odysseus and Polyphemos, how the hero and his companions blinded the one-eyed giant and then escaped from his cave by travelling under the bellies of the giant's flock. There is never any shortage of studies about Homer and his date, so I should admit that I feel very strongly that his compositions could not easily have happened without the prior poetic innovations of Greek lyric and elegiac poetry, and that he created the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* not before the middle of the 7th century BC. This is still a minority view, but I fancy it will not be for long²⁷. It would be unwise at any rate to base any study of Greek art or life on the assumption that Homer must be an 8th-century poet. That the Greeks learned how to write primarily so that they could write down Homer is a theory that is being much aired again these days, but it seems to me implausible and somewhat old-fashioned. There are several

26. Berlin F 1655; *EGVP* fig. 401.

27. M. L. West's arguments in *Museum Helveticum* 52 (1995) 203-219 are impressive.

Polyphemos scenes clustering around the mid-7th century²⁸. The dating is not easy and scholars may be wrong to want to spread them out over a longer period. Is this a case where a stock story, best known to us from Homer, is answered by a set formulaic treatment by artists? The answer, perhaps surprisingly, is no; and this can provide a useful example of a case where the story seems to have been the overriding inspiration, rather than the dissemination of any precise artistic formula to be copied. Examples in the 7th century range in vase painting from Athens to Argos to Italy, while it appears also on bronzes from East Greece, found in Samos and at Olympia, where it may be somewhat later. They are all familiar; I just want to recall the ways in which they do *not* seem to adopt any strict formula. First, in the scenes on a bronze and the Athenian vase, the famous vase from Eleusis²⁹, the Greeks move from left to right, but on the others from right to left, as on the fragmentary bronzes³⁰. In the Italian scene the pole blinding Polyphemos is carried underarm, on the others overarm. The Italian example was made by a Greek called Aristonothos somewhere in Italy and deposited at Cerveteri in Etruria (Fig. 9)³¹. Here, and in Athens, the giant sits on the ground; at Argos he reclines on rocks (Fig. 10)³². On the bronzes the heroes are dressed. In Italy there is the circumstan-



Fig. 9. Rome, Conservatori. Photo, Hirmer.

28. Ahlberg, 94-5, figs. 150-4.

29. Ahlberg, fig. 150; *EGVP* fig. 208. 2.

30. Ahlberg, figs. 153-4.

31. Rome, Conservatori; Ahlberg, fig. 76; *EGVP* fig. 282. 2.

32. Argos C 149; Ahlberg, fig. 151; *EGVP* fig. 216.

tial detail of no doubt rustic equipment at the right. Moreover, from Athens at the same date, there is the scene from a different part of the story, with the heroes escaping the giant under his sheep, on the vase found in Aegina³³. Etruscans pick up the story very early, on a vase in the Fleischman collection, with the underarm action of the Aristonothos scene, but with the giant on a stool (Fig. 11)³⁴, and other Polyphemos scenes appear in Etruria soon after, including the escape from the cave³⁵. All this sets a pattern for the future, but in far later periods artists seldom dwell on more than one element of a story and it is surprising to meet such variety so early. Table 1 summarizes the variety in treatment of the story in the scenes discussed.



Fig. 10. Argos C 149. Photo, French School, Athens.

Why should the Polyphemos story rather than any other so catch the attention of artists across the Greek world with *no* very obvious borrowing of iconography or establishment of set formulae? I like to imagine an itinerant rhapsode repeating the usual well-known themes. His favourite party-piece

33. Aegina 566; Ahlberg, fig. 155; *EGVP* fig. 206.

34. Now Malibu; *A Passion for Antiquities; Ancient art from the Collection of Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman* (Malibu 1994) 182-7, no. 86.

35. *LIMC* VI, 'Odysseus/Uthuze' nos. 60, 61.

was Odysseus and Polyphemos. He was well-travelled and visited the west via Ithaca, as far as the Greeks in Italy, and could have picked up much local colour to add to his narratives. If he was doing this in the second quarter of the 7th century, and came from East Greece, he would have been well aware of the lyric and elegiac poetry of Archilochus of Paros and Callinus of Ephesus, artists who were exploring personal relations as well as drawing on the stuff of epic recitation. If our wandering rhapsode were also a poet of genius — dare

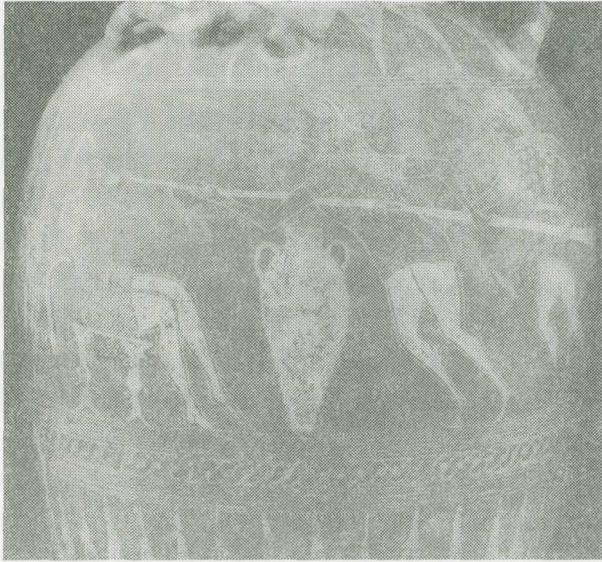


Fig. 11. Malibu, ex Fleischman. After *A Passion for Antiquities*.

TABLE 1

	Dress	Over / Underarm	Direction	Seat	Cup
Attic	no	O	>	ground	yes
Argive	no	O	<	rocks	no
Aristonothos	no	U	>	ground	no
Etruscan	yes	U	<	chair	jar
Bronzes	yes	O	<	?	?

Comparison of principal elements in the Polyphemos scenes

we call him Homer? — then the reworking of epic recitation into works such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* would have come easily in an Ionian environment. But this is little better than wishful thinking, and is the closest I can put Homer to the other arts of his day, which I do not regard at all as being that of 8th-century Greece.

After this Homeric interlude I revert to formulaic scenes of fighting. One common one of the archaic period is of a duel watched, from either side, by two women. There is an early example on a 'Melian' vase in Athens³⁶, and there are many later examples. Where there are no inscriptions the identities are unknown, but several times one of the women is Athena and this narrows the field to one of her protégés, Achilles or Diomedes, on her side. If Achilles is involved his second might be his mother Thetis rather than Athena, and if his foe is Memnon, his supporter will be Eos, watching the killing of her son, to which she sometimes properly responds with distress. On the Gorgos Painter's name vase, the woman at the left of Achilles is not Athena, but his mother Thetis. He has already disabled Memnon, who has lost his spear by sticking it through Achilles' shield; and Memnon's mother Eos shows signs of distress, tearing her dress and hair³⁷. When the Berlin Painter uses the formula for the fight of Achilles and Hector he has Athena at the left, but in place of a woman supporting Hector he has Apollo deserting him, so he is using the symmetrical narrative formula to a different end, showing abandonment rather than help³⁸.

There is a subtle variant on this formula, however, used twice on the same vase by the greatest of the late archaic vase painters, the Kleophrades Painter (Fig. 12)³⁹. The artist is making a deliberate comparison between two different scenes which, with different personnel, perhaps convey the same overall message, and the congruity is demonstrated wholly by the use of the same narrative formula. On both sides the supporting woman at the left is Athena.

36. Athens 3961; Ahlberg, fig. 106; *EGVP* fig. 250.

37. Agora P 24113; *ARV* 213, 242; J. Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases. Archaic Period* (1975) fig. 48; *LIMC* I, 'Achilleus' no. 830, pl. 138.

38. London E 468; *ARV* 206, 132; *LIMC* I, 'Achilleus' no. 565, pl. 114.

39. I studied this years ago in a Festschrift for Bernard Ashmole (*Journal of the J. Paul Getty Museum* 1 (1975) 7-13), and alluded to it in an article on the Kleophrades Painter at Troy (*Antike Kunst* 19 (1976) 3-5). The cup is London E 73; *ARV* 192, 106; most fully published now by D. J. R. Williams in *CVA* London 9 (1993) pls. 81-3.

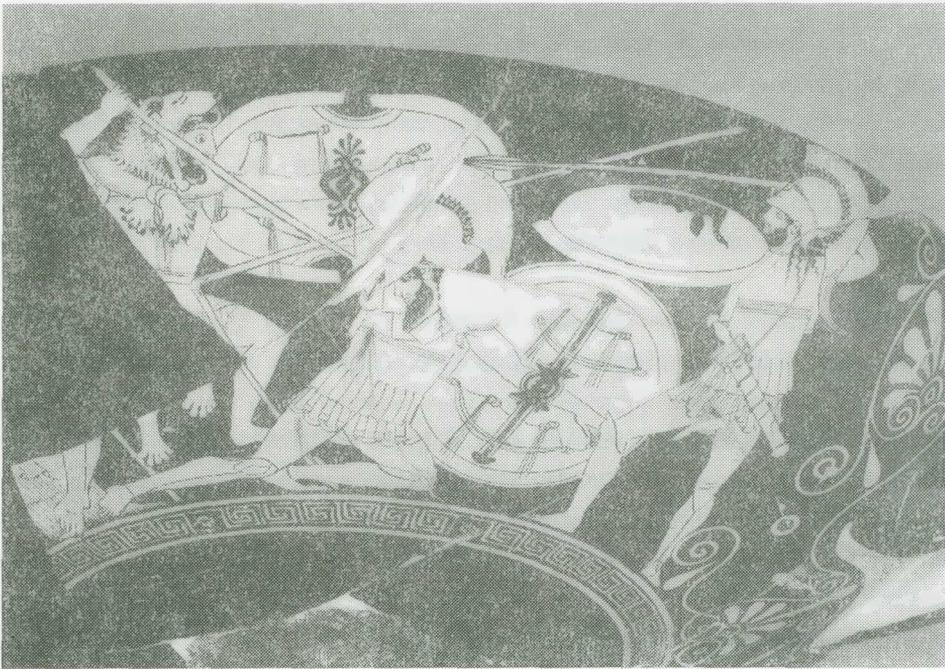
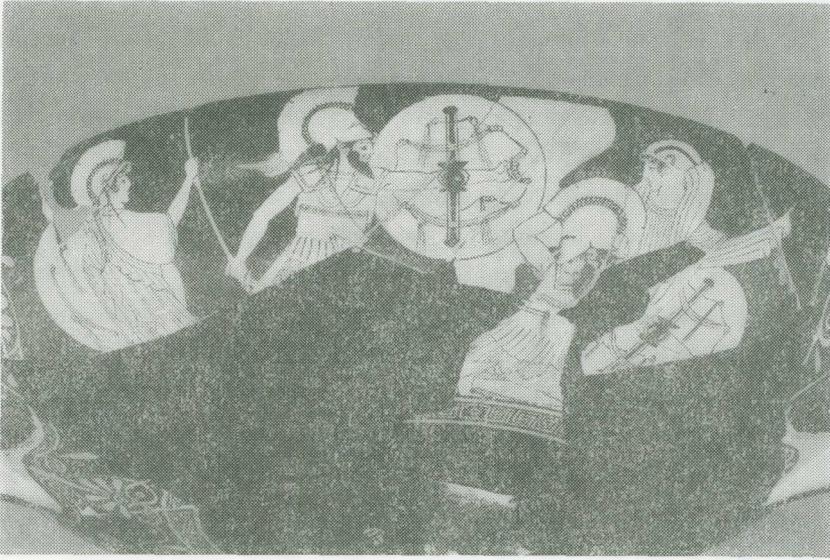


Fig. 12. London E 73. Photo, museum.

Her champion on one side is Diomedes at Troy, on the other it is Heracles. Their victims are, for Diomedes the Trojan prince Aineias, for Heracles the hero Kyknos. The Aineias scene has a Homeric touch in the rock which falls on him and which is mentioned by Homer as thrown by Diomedes (*Iliad* 5, 302-310), although the conventions of this fighting scene do not leave him a hand free. The two episodes come from quite different corpora of Greek myth, the Troy story and the exploits of Heracles, but there is a common factor, brought out by the visual formula. Thus, Aineias is the son of the goddess Aphrodite, and so the woman at the right of this scene is Aphrodite rescuing her son. And Kyknos was the son of Ares, so the figure at the right, not a woman this time, is Ares rushing forward to protect his son, though to no avail. Both tell the story of a goddess, Athena, supporting a hero who is killing the son of a god. Moreover, those who know the stories know also that Athena's hero will go on to attack the divine parent — with Diomedes wounding Aphrodite, who then drops her son for Apollo to look after while she runs off crying to Zeus, and with Heracles going on to challenge the god Ares until Zeus intervenes and stops the contest. It would not have been impossible to work out the scenes without inscriptions, since Heracles has his lionskin and the formula for the fight with Kyknos is well attested, while on the other side the goddess supporting her son as well as the dropping rock would probably have helped us to the solution. But the comparable messages, of circumstances in which, with divine support, a hero may overcome the child of a god and then go on to attack the parent, is driven home by their appearance on the same vase, and their shared formula of narration in the placing and poses of the figures⁴⁰.

I have tried to describe how formulae for figures and groups could be used in Greek art, sometimes imaginatively, sometimes with banal repetition. We have noticed how some of them were derived from observation of near eastern art, where they generally served quite different purposes, often not of narrative at all. Should we also ask how they survived? Greece was a small place and there were concentrations of works of art at places like Athens and Olympia and Delphi, while many of the works of art on which figurative scenes appear were highly portable, not least the painted vases. Within a studio an apprentice would learn the conventions of his craft, including the signals and

40. The interior of the cup has another hero attacking a deity, Peleus and Thetis.

formulae by which narrative was rendered recognizable. Some scholars have thought that in the Greek archaic and classical periods there were something like pattern books which revealed these formulae for depiction, but this seems to me an unnecessary assumption. Most were apparent from other means, and there was nothing abstruse about Greek iconography and identification of scenes and figures, as there was to be in periods of Christian art, with its even more formulaic narrative scenes and a plethora of often obscure saints and their attributes. Moreover, then it was often a matter of non-metropolitan artists having to create work for which they had no training, often far from Constantinople or Rome. In Greek art we are truly dealing with a relatively small-scale though highly influential phenomenon, and of no great complexity, however subtly it was exercised. Greek art was a popular art, readily accessible to all classes, and its formulae could be taken for granted and easily read without instruction.

I hope it does not seem undignified to seem to reduce so much Greek story-telling in art to such formulae. In fact this is its strength. In the arts of all peoples artists rely on such formulae of figures or groups for identification; indeed it is only in Greek art that we sometimes have inscriptions to help us also. But the Greek artist managed to bend the formulae to different purposes, in ways that I have shown, expressing nuances of narrative or action within the set patterns. It teaches us to take care in interpretation, and not to assume too readily that the convenience of formula in narrative may disguise lack of originality, any more than it does in Homer, when so often it can be seen to contribute to narrative variety and even the greatest subtlety.

ABBREVIATIONS

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| Ahlberg | G. Ahlberg-Cornell, <i>Myth and Epos in Early Greek Art</i> (Jonsered, 1992) |
| <i>EGVP</i> | J. Boardman, <i>Early Greek Vase Painting</i> (London, 1998). |
| <i>LIMC</i> | <i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> I-VIII (Zürich, 1981-1997). |
| Simon/Hirmer | E. Simon and M. & A. Hirmer, <i>Die griechischen Vasen</i> (Munich, 1976) |